The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) is home to the Wisconsin Partnership Program, a grantmaking program within the SMPH established as the result of a generous endowment gift from Blue Cross Blue Shield United of Wisconsin’s conversion to a stock insurance corporation. The Wisconsin Partnership Program expresses its continued gratitude for this gift to benefit the people of Wisconsin.
The mission of the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) is to bring about lasting improvements in health and well-being and advance health equity in Wisconsin through investments in community partnerships, education and research.

This document serves as an overview of the impact and achievements of the work funded by the Wisconsin Partnership Program during the 2019-2024 five-year plan period. The 2019-2024 plan period brought unprecedented challenges, yet the work funded by WPP continued on, with grantees nimbly responding to the unique health challenges presented by a global pandemic. They navigated and overcame obstacles that COVID-19 presented in their laboratories, campus classrooms and communities, and actively responded to the pandemic’s urgent health challenges through new research and community projects.

Together WPP and our grantees are actualizing the Wisconsin Idea, improving health and lives beyond the boundaries of our university to ensure a healthier Wisconsin for all. This report summarizes key achievements and puts the spotlight where it belongs: on the tremendous work accomplished by Wisconsin Partnership Program grant recipients.

ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

Four main goals comprise the foundation of the Wisconsin Partnership Program’s 2019-2024 Five-Year Plan. Our grant programs and investments in community partnerships, education and research each support efforts to achieve one or more of these goals:

• Promote Innovation
• Catalyze System Change
• Advance Health Equity
• Build Capacity and Leadership

Two committees guide the implementation of WPP’s grant programs and grantmaking activities. The Oversight and Advisory Committee (OAC) and Partnership Education Committee (PERC) are responsible for the governance, oversight and grantmaking activities of the Wisconsin Partnership Program.

• The OAC is responsible for directing and approving funds for public health initiatives and community grants.
• The PERC directs and approves funds for faculty-initiated education and research initiatives that advance health.
During the 2019–2024 five-year plan period, the Wisconsin Partnership Program awarded $84.9 MILLION for 159 GRANTS.

The following selected examples are a small sample of what the Wisconsin Partnership Program and grant recipients have accomplished during this period.

See how the Wisconsin Partnership Program worked towards its goals through the following grant examples: To learn more about these and many other active grants and outcomes, visit our Funded Projects webpage.

KEY:  ● OAC Grant ● PERC Grant

GOAL: PROMOTE INNOVATION

Complex health challenges require investment in new and evolving ideas which have the potential to positively impact health. From researchers working on treatment and care for illness and disease to community organizations responding in real-time to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, here are some selected examples of innovation funded during the 2019–2024 Five-Year Plan.

● Improving Health Care for Persons Experiencing Homelessness—Men’s Emergency Shelter – Virtual Health Assessments

COVID-19 presented a host of challenges for vulnerable populations across Wisconsin. For unhoused individuals, the spread of COVID-19 through shelters was a major concern. To solve this problem at Porchlight, Inc., a homeless shelter in Madison, partnered with Nurse Disrupted, an innovative virtual nursing program, to assemble a team of volunteer nurses to provide telehealth screenings safely and accurately for all guests prior to admission to the shelter each day. The team conducted more than 2600 detailed COVID-19 screenings. This solution was effective in limiting the spread of COVID-19 at the site, and both shelter staff and shelter guests were satisfied with the care provided. The program expanded to also offer needed health services through
the telehealth infrastructure. Nurse Disrupted has leveraged their successful care model to expand their operations to additional shelters in Dane County and Milwaukee — moving rapidly towards sustainability and opportunities to improve health care access for other hard to reach populations. Watch founder Bre Loughlin’s November 2022 appearance on this Today Show segment.

Research to Improve Care for Patients with Diabetes: Defining Host-Microbiome Interactions in Diabetic Wound Healing

In Wisconsin, more than 500,000 people live with diabetes, and 25 percent of those individuals will develop a diabetic foot ulcer, a common complication of this disease. SMPH Assistant Professor Lindsay Kalan was awarded a New Investigator Program grant to study treatment options for this common, yet potentially fatal, complication. Preliminary data were useful for identifying potential biomarkers for predicting wound healing rates. The data generated by this project were used as preliminary data for a $26,000 Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) Technology Accelerator Grant and a $2 million National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases grant. These awards will support Dr. Kalan and her research team in developing a novel assay to measure biomarkers of diabetic wound healing. Read the outcome report.

Research to Develop New Cancer Therapies: Defining and Targeting Novel Anti-Viral and Anti-Cancer T Cell Immunity

T cells are a type of white blood cell that are part of the body’s immune response to infection and disease, yet little is known about how they might be harnessed to fight cancer. Drs. Shigeki Miyamoto and Suresh Marulasiddappa used their Collaborative Health Sciences Program award to explore the relationship between inhibition of the NF-κB signaling pathway, the rate of production of T cells and the possibility of cancer and viral immunity. In 2021, the team was awarded a $1.88 million National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute award to expand upon this project. Read more about their new award in the NIH RePORTER database.

Promoting a Healthy Community: Improving Health through Social Service Redesign

A grant to Sixteenth Street Community Health Center (SSCHC), Milwaukee’s largest federally qualified health center, supports the organization’s work to build a strong foundation of community health by addressing housing instability in its community. Using a Community Impact Grant, SSCHC staff are working directly with their patient population to integrate social needs screening, reduce barriers to meeting those needs and provide additional resources for those in need. Through this new approach to addressing both medical needs and social needs, the SSCHC staff have provided more comprehensive care for the more than 8,700 patients who have been screened to date.

Research on Brain Health in Down Syndrome: Modeling Basal Forebrain Cholinergic Vulnerability in Down Syndrome

Individuals with Down syndrome experience Alzheimer’s disease as they age. A specific group of neurons called basal forebrain cholinergic neurons are at the center of this degeneration. To better understand why these neurons are vulnerable in Down syndrome, Dr. Anita Bhattacharyya was awarded a New Investigator Program grant. Results of this research will be useful in understanding neurodegeneration in Down syndrome as well as developing future therapeutic targets. Read Basal Forebrain Cholinergic Neurons: Linking Down Syndrome and Alzheimer’s Disease in Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience.
GOAL: ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY

Advancing health equity is an integral part of WPP’s mission and grantmaking activity. Achieving health equity is only possible when we address the social factors and conditions that lead to health inequities. Grants funded during this period sought to improve health and advance health equity by supporting projects and solutions in communities that are disproportionately impacted by adverse health outcomes. WPP supported work across a diverse range of populations, from urban Milwaukee to tribal communities in rural Northern Wisconsin.

- **A Successful Tribal–Academic Partnership: Preventing Strokes in the Oneida Nation**
  Wisconsin Native Americans have a disproportionately high mortality rate from strokes compared to the general population. The Oneida Stroke Prevention Program received a WPP Opportunity Grant to address the community’s risk for stroke. This successful tribal–academic partnership includes partners from the Oneida Comprehensive Health Division, Oneida Business Community, SMPH Native American Center for Health Professions and a team of SMPH researchers, led by Robert Dempsey, MD, and Carol Mitchell, PhD. The project is raising tribal awareness of stroke risk factors, conducting individual-level screenings and evaluation for potential risk factors and symptoms, and testing the effectiveness of personal coaching for participants with disease risk factors and symptoms. More than 120 people participated in the screenings, and 51 were assigned to a personal health coach to address their individual risk factors. More than 2,800 people have attended the project’s community education and Facebook Live events. The Oneida Nation hopes the lessons learned from the partnership can benefit other tribes throughout the state and country as well. Visit the [Oneida Stroke Prevention Program’s website](#) to learn more.

- **LGBTQ+ Health: Supporting the Mental and Social-Emotional Health Needs of Black, Brown, Multiracial, Trans, & Nonbinary LGBTQ+ Adolescents Impacted by COVID-19**
  As the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the social and emotional health of Wisconsin’s LGBTQ+ youth, GSAFE worked to create supportive school communities across the state. They used a WPP
COVID-19 Response grant to create a youth advisory council, develop materials for youth and educators alike to put to use in schools, and pursued student-led awareness campaigns. The youth council wrote and received a $2400 By Youth for Youth grant to develop and deliver peer-to-peer education about mental health. This project was one of eight awards funded through WPP’s COVID-19 Response Adolescent Social and Emotional Health Grant Program. Read more about these projects.

**Addressing Mental Health Needs: Black Men’s Mental Health and Well-Being**

Black men in Wisconsin report high rates of psychological stress and simultaneously experience health disparities regarding mental health, including mental health stigma and lack of access to care. A 2021 Community Impact Grant for the initiative Black Men’s Mental Health and Well-Being, is working to change that. Through a partnership between the Urban League of Greater Madison and the Rebalanced-Life Wellness Association (RLWA), this project is working to normalize and destigmatize mental health issues in the Black community while improving access to care. In its initial phase, this grant has been successful in increasing Black men’s access to health care and mental health services, in particular through the Perry Family Free Clinic, which was established by the RLWA through a previous WPP grant. The project is also partnering with a local health system to develop the Black Men’s Health Community Advisory Board to provide input on the health needs of Black men in Wisconsin. The grant team continues to build trust and social support networks to serve Black men and has developed collaborations in Madison, Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha and Beloit. View the grant description.


COVID-19 presented a number of unique challenges for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including high mortality rates and the inability to receive needed health care and services. Karla Ausderau received a COVID-19 Response Grant to achieve three things: understand the impact of the pandemic on people in Wisconsin with IDD, clarify the ways in which nonprofits could better serve this community, and develop strategies to mitigate service delivery disruption in the future. Read more about Dr. Ausderau’s work in this School of Education article.

**Nutrition and Health: Safeguarding Fresh Food Access at Farmers Markets to Address Food Insecurity of Vulnerable Populations**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated health challenges facing some communities, including those struggling with food insecurity. Wello, a nonprofit serving the Greater Green Bay area, received a WPP COVID-19 Response Grant to partner with Seasonal Harvest LLC and Casa ALBA Melanie. The project supported local farmers and expanded access to fresh produce to 1,920 individuals in Brown County. Now Wello is increasing its reach and impact through new partnerships and additional funding, including a grant from WPP’s sister program, the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment at the Medical College of Wisconsin. Read more about Wello’s work in this Green Bay Press-Gazette article.
GOAL: BUILD CAPACITY AND LEADERSHIP

Since its inception, the Wisconsin Partnership Program has directed funding to enhance clinical and public health education and build capacity and leadership training for the health care workforce, including strategic investments in novel education infrastructure and new models of medical and public health curriculum. Recent WPP-funded projects supported student health care workers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, training to improve clinical care around the state, and skill and capacity-building for community organizations to help them achieve their goals and advance their missions.

- **Supporting Wisconsin’s Health Systems: UW Student Health Care Worker Tuition Program**

  COVID-19 placed tremendous pressure on Wisconsin’s health care facilities. To support Wisconsin’s health care workforce during and after a pandemic surge, the UW–Madison School of Nursing, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin System and WPP, developed a program to provide tuition support to enrolled students who completed at least 50 hours of work in a Wisconsin clinical or health care setting. Ultimately, 1,689 UW System students across 13 UW System campuses participated in the project, serving 79 different zip codes across the state and providing critical workforce infrastructure when Wisconsin health systems needed it most. For more information, read the project’s outcome report.

- **Expanding Wisconsin’s Healthcare Workforce through Innovative Partnerships: Increasing Indigenous Representation in Medicine**

  A strategic education grant to the UW–Madison Native American Center for Health Professions (NACHP) will strengthen NACHP’s work to strategically expand Wisconsin’s American Indian (AI) health care professional workforce. The initiative *Increasing Indigenous Representation in Medicine through Academics EnGagement and American INovation (IIMAGIN)* was established with three key goals: create a dedicated pre-college and college pathway to increase student engagement, establish resources to increase faculty retention, and develop new AI health-focused educational opportunities. The grant is led by Bret Benally Thompson, MD, assistant professor of medicine and...
faculty advisor for NACHP, and Danielle Yancey, MS, NACHP director. The grantees will work in partnership with the College of Menominee Nation and the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University to enhance and expand pre-college programming focused on college preparation and health care career exploration, with a unique emphasis on early engagement prior to and during high school with the goal of reaching 75 students each year. Read more about this new award here.

- **Addressing Childhood Lead Exposure: Making Milwaukee a Lead Safe City**

Leads poisoning can have devastating effects on children, and Milwaukee’s north side has a rate of lead poisoning up to nine times the average rate across Wisconsin. The Coalition on Lead Emergency (COLE) is a group of partners working to reduce lead-related harm in Milwaukee. In partnership with Walnut Way Corp., COLE is using a 2022 Community Impact Grant to implement multi-level, community-driven solutions. In addition to launching the Lead-Free Families intervention, emphasis is being placed on training and mobilizing impacted parents and caregivers. The group expects to train 100 parents through this program. Read more about COLE’s work on their website.

- **Improving the Care of Wisconsin Residents Living with Dementia: Enabling Clinicians and Health Care Trainees to Improve the Care of Wisconsin Residents Living with Dementia**

By 2025 it is estimated that 130,000 individuals residing in Wisconsin will have dementia due to Alzheimer’s disease, and of these, 90 percent will experience behavioral and psychological symptoms. These symptoms are often associated with worsened outcomes, and often clinicians struggle to appropriately diagnose and manage these symptoms. Dr. Art Walaszek and collaborators received a WPP Opportunity Grant to address this issue by developing a curriculum to improve diagnosis and care in a culturally responsive manner, enhance knowledge and skills of primary care providers, and improve communication between health care staff and caregivers for people living with dementia. The grant team has trained clinicians in both urban and rural Wisconsin and developed a dementia curriculum for medical students. Learn more about the curriculum on the Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute webpage.

- **Building Capacity in Mental Health Care: Community-Campus Partnership to Create Mental Health Support for the Latino Community**

Centro Hispano of Dane County was awarded a Community Impact Grant centered around increasing access to and improving quality of mental health care for Latino individuals in Dane County. In collaboration with the University of Wisconsin School of Education, the Esperanza: Nuestra Cultura de Salud project has developed and taught five new courses in the UW Counseling Psychology Department, created a bilingual certificate for students in counseling, rehabilitation and school psychology programs, conducted research on Latino wellness in Dane County, and engaged the community in wellness efforts through activities such as a new podcast. To learn more about the certificate program, visit the Esperanza: Nuestra Cultura de Salud website.
GOAL: CATALYZE SYSTEMS CHANGE

Improving the health and well-being of the people of Wisconsin requires a commitment to bettering the systems in which people live their lives. Systems change necessarily includes modifying polices, practices and institutions which can impact health and changing them to create a more equitable system of care and access for all. WPP supported a diverse array of work in this area through 2019-2024. Here are just a few examples:

• Improving Dementia Care: The Latino Dementia Health Regional Consortium
  The Latino population in the United States is at high risk for dementia, yet oftentimes experiences barriers to care. Milwaukee’s United Community Center (UCC) is using a Community Impact Grant to reduce the barriers to dementia health care access and caregiver support in the Latino community in southeast Milwaukee. As part of this WPP funded effort, the UCC, the Hispanic Resource Center in Waukesha, and the Alzheimer’s Association have partnered with the Latino Aging Consortium, a coalition of ten academic and community partners dedicated to addressing the impact of disparities in aging and health in the Greater Milwaukee’s Latino community. Through the grant, UCC is creating a culturally responsive system of virtual services and mobile memory clinics to increase access to care, improve services and support caregivers of Latino individuals dealing with dementia symptoms. Read more about United Community Center’s work in this article.

• Supporting Innovation in Care for Persons with Addiction Disorders: Biehl Bridges to Recovery
  Rates of substance use disorders, and particularly opioid-related issues, in Marinette County are among the highest in Wisconsin. Individuals who are in recovery often face systemic barriers related to obtaining and maintaining employment, yet employment and economic stability is a fundamental part of sustaining recovery. The Marinette County Group Home Association received a Community Impact Grant to connect individuals in recovery to employment while also working with employers to break down stigma surrounding addiction and recovery. The new project plans to partner with seven area workplaces and serve 320 adults in recovery. Read more about their approach to this work on the Bridges to Recovery webpage.
• **COVID Research at the Cutting Edge of Innovation and Response: Genetic Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 Spread in Wisconsin to Inform Outbreak Control**

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extent of the disease in Wisconsin was unknown and genome sequencing was rare. Dr. Thomas Friedrich, professor, UW–Madison School of Veterinary Medicine and SMPH professor Dr. David O’Connor, and team received a 2020 COVID-19 Response Grant to partner with statewide collaborators in order to better understand the genetics and spread of SARS-CoV-2 well before similar work was launched by state and federal entities. A key element of this project was to use genetic testing to understand spread in conjunction with and outside of direct-case testing, with the goal of being able to use genetic surveillance in the future for tracking outbreaks. WPP’s rapid response COVID-19 funding allowed the researchers to quickly launch their project and sequence more than 5,000 SARS-CoV-2 genomes early in the pandemic. Read more about this project in the 2020 Nature Communications article “Revealing Fine-scale Spatiotemporal Differences in SARS-CoV-2 Introduction and Spread”.

• **Addressing Maternal Child Health: Improving Birth Outcomes for Black Families through Community-Clinic Collaborations**

In 2019, the United Way of Dane County (UWDC) and community and health system collaborators received a Community Impact Grant to develop a care coordination service that would reduce disparities in birth outcomes. This service, called ConnectRx, supports pregnant people through increasing access to health care and other resources that will fill unmet needs related to the social determinants of health, including food, housing, employment and transportation. UWDC collaborated with another WPP grantee, the Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness and local health systems to implement the ConnectRx care coordination model with health systems in southern Wisconsin. As of the end of 2022, 3,007 patients have been screened. Read “Community health partners celebrate first anniversary of ConnectRx Wisconsin” to learn more.

• **Statewide Partnership: Understanding and Addressing Health Disparities in Wisconsin through Statewide Partnerships**

The Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment at Medical College of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Partnership Program jointly funded a statewide effort to research and recommend solutions to inequities in accessing and delivering care in Wisconsin. Led by Drs. Maureen Smith and Joan M. Neuner, and in partnership with the Wisconsin Collaborative for Health Care Quality, the team is working to build connections between academic institutions, health systems, payers and communities to build sustainable and responsive systems that will reduce inequities in the long term. To accelerate efforts to reduce health disparities in health care, the initiative’s Disparities Improvement Team convenes health systems and stakeholders throughout Wisconsin to identify and implement best practices to create tangible improvement in health care disparities, focusing on the priority measures including diabetes A1c control, blood pressure control and colorectal cancer screening. Learn more on the Healthy Metric website.
LASTING IMPACT

Understanding the impact of the work funded by WPP requires monitoring organizations and projects beyond the grant cycle. Often, funding can have a continual or lasting impact, as the work of the initial grant is sustained or expanded through new funding and collaborations.

The selected projects are examples of WPP-funded work that has succeeded in expanding or sustaining their work and exemplify the ongoing progress and long-term positive health impact the WPP seeks to achieve through its grantmaking.

Discovering Novel Antibiotics: Wisconsin Center for Infectious Disease

WPP-funded projects led by Dr. Bruce Klein, professor, SMPH Department of Pediatrics, exemplify the ways in which WPP awards can be leveraged and expanded to successfully address significant public health needs. Dr. Klein was awarded a Collaborative Health Sciences Program grant in 2007 for the project Wisconsin Infectious Disease Drug Discovery to address the alarming rise of antibiotic resistant infections through discovery of novel compounds that could lead to new antimicrobial drugs. The data from this WPP-funded grant directly led to additional funding from National Institutes of Health, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), and a strategic research grant from the Wisconsin Partnership Program to establish the Wisconsin Center for Infectious Disease (WisCID). The main goal of WisCID was to foster interdisciplinary research and training in microbiology and infectious disease to translate new discoveries into clinical advances to reduce the threat of infectious disease. WisCID was successful in achieving its goals including a five-year $16 million National Institutes of Health Center for Excellence in Translational Research grant focused on anti-microbial drug discovery. Led by Dr. David Andes, professor, SMPH Department of Medicine, this project has resulted in the discovery of hundreds of novel compounds which are being tested for development as antibiotics, with several moving towards FDA approval. Read more about WisCID.
Addressing the Opioid Crisis: Southwestern Wisconsin Recovery Pathways

Like many areas of the United States, rural Wisconsin is facing an opioid crisis. In 2017, the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program (SWCAP) was awarded a Community Impact Grant to pilot the Recovery Pathways Program, to improve outcomes for people in recovery. The grant established Opportunity Houses, sober living homes that offer safe, substance-free, affordable housing for people in recovery. The grantee provides Narcan training, and established connections with treatment courts, mental health providers, Opioid Task Force of Iowa County and the Department of Health Services. The ultimate goal is to create a replicable model of recovery that supports people to become self-sufficient and live healthy lives. Read more about the Recovery Pathways program and the Opportunity House on the SWCAP website.

Growing the Rural Health Care Workforce: Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine

As one of its earliest investments in novel education infrastructure, the Wisconsin Partnership Program provided essential start-up funding to establish the Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine (WARM) to address rural physician shortages facing Wisconsin communities. Initially established under a Community-Academic Partnership Fund grant, WARM is now embedded in the medical school curriculum and has become a renowned training opportunity for medical students interested in rural medicine. WARM admits 26 students per year who demonstrate a strong commitment to practice medicine in rural Wisconsin. The program has graduated 274 medical students since 2007. Ninety-one percent of these graduates are practicing in Wisconsin. Read this story to learn how this rural physician training track continues to positively impact the health of patients and communities in rural Wisconsin.

Supporting Aging Populations: Improving Assisted Living Quality through Collaborative System Change

In 2016, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services was awarded a Community Impact Grant to expand access to the Wisconsin Coalition for Collaborative Excellence in Assisted Living (WCCEAL) and improve the quality of care for Wisconsin's seniors residing in assisted living facilities through the implementation of a tested quality improvement infrastructure. WCCEAL is the only organization of its kind in the United States, and with the help of this grant they were able to increase its membership 28 percent and improve the quality of life for residents at assisted living communities in 55 Wisconsin counties. The initiative has established benchmarks for important safety indicators such as falls, hospital readmission and medication management. Currently there are 494 participating assisted living communities, and more than 11,000 Wisconsin senior occupants who benefit from this project. The work is sustained through an agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Read more about this project and their use of data to improve quality in assisted living in this 2022 Journal of the American Medical Directors Association article.
CONCLUSION

The Wisconsin Partnership Program’s 2019-2024 Five-Year Plan built a strong foundation to implement effective grant mechanisms, deliver essential funding, create and strengthen impactful partnerships and pave vital pathways that continue to advance the mission of the Wisconsin Partnership Program and improve health across Wisconsin. The researchers, educators and community organizations and projects featured in this report represent just some of the remarkable work the Wisconsin Partnership Program has funded to positively impact health and advance health equity throughout Wisconsin and beyond.

Photo Highlights:


Page 6: Members of the Oneida Nation participate in a stroke prevention program, a successful tribal-university partnership supported with WPP funding.

Page 8: The UW Student Health Care Worker Tuition Program supported Wisconsin’s health care workforce in responding to COVID-19 through a partnership with UW System nursing schools and health sciences students.

Page 10: The United Community Center Latino Health Regional Consortium in partnership with the Aging and Disability Resource Center offices is expanding UCC’s Memory Care Clinic services to a regional model of virtual and mobile/home-visiting dementia services.

Page 12: Discovering Novel Antibiotics: Wisconsin Center for Infectious Disease was successful in promoting research and leveraging federal funding to further anti-microbial drug discovery.