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New Program to Expand Access to Substance Abuse Treatment in Rural WI

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) and the UW School of Medicine and Public Health are collaborating on a new program to assist rural communities experiencing a rise in substance use and addiction.

The Wisconsin Rural Health & Substance Use Clinical Support (RHeSUS) program is designed to improve care for patients in rural hospitals and clinics who need help managing substance use disorders and provide training to health care workers in rural counties how to recognize and care for people showing signs of unhealthy substance use, according to Dr. Randall Brown, professor of family medicine and community health, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, and an addiction medicine specialist.

WHA serves as the community organization for RHeSUS, with WHA Chief Quality Officer Nadine Allen serving as the program champion and WHA Clinical Quality Improvement Manager Jill Lindwall as the program director. Dr. Brown will serve as the academic partner for the program with members of his team Cindy Burzinski, director, Wisconsin Voices for Recovery (WIVFR); and Dr. Alison Miller, assistant clinical professor of family medicine and community health, and principal investigator for WIVFR, leading this effort across the state.

"We are so fortunate to be working with such a strong academic partner and collaborators that truly are bringing forward expert resources to assist our rural communities," Allen said. "Substance use disorder is certainly a high priority for our members."

"Rates of alcohol, opioid and other drug use were already increasing in Wisconsin prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but have only surged additionally during the pandemic," Dr. Brown said. "The need is as great as it's ever been for substance use disorder services, especially in rural areas."

The program is funded by a \$1 million community action grant from the Wisconsin Partnership Program, and as it continues to roll out, on-call support will be available to rural health care workers who need immediate support in how best to support addiction recovery of their patients.

Through Wisconsin Voices for Recovery, a statewide recovery advocacy program that is operated by personnel in the UW–Madison Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, RHeSUS will also leverage and expand a network called [ED2Recovery+](#), which serves as an emergency department peer recovery coaching program.

ED2Recovery+ network coaches provide training and support for emergency room staff to care for people admitted for substance-related issues. The Wisconsin Hospital Association will aid in connecting Brown, Burzinski and their teams with rural hospitals and clinics in Wisconsin.