



WHOLE CHILD HEALTH ALLIANCE

Advancing the Key Elements of Whole Child Health: Provider Case Studies

Children's Wisconsin



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Introduction

Children's Wisconsin is Wisconsin's only independent healthcare system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of kids. Children's Wisconsin provides medical care, dental care, mental and behavioral health services, community health and education, and many other services to children and families across the state. Children's Wisconsin operates a 309-bed hospital in the Milwaukee area, a 42-bed hospital in Wisconsin's Fox Valley area, and provides outpatient care at dozens of primary, specialty, urgent, dental, and mental health care locations across the state. *More than 50%* of Children's Wisconsin's hospital inpatient visits are children covered by Medicaid.

In addition to its clinical and community care, Children's Wisconsin operates an affiliate Medicaid-managed care organization (MCO) called *Chorus Community Health Plans*, which covers approximately 113,000 Medicaid-enrolled children and adults across 41 Wisconsin counties. Chorus Community Health Plans is the largest Medicaid MCO covering acute and primary medical services in eastern Wisconsin. It is the third largest Medicaid MCO in the state.

Children's Wisconsin leverages a Whole Child Health approach to realize its *vision* that the children of Wisconsin will be the "healthiest kids in the nation." Children's Wisconsin's strategy aims to advance every aspect of child and adolescent health by:

- Integrating prevention and Whole Child Health services into routine visits and clinical practices
- Providing proactive, seamless, and personal experiences at every visit by focusing on what matters most to the patient family
- Offering easily accessible services located across the community
- Maintaining purposeful partnerships with community partners, community leaders, and other stakeholders to enhance community health

Children's Wisconsin recognizes that when its experts collaborate with families, they accomplish even greater and more sustainable outcomes. Purposeful connection between patient-centered healthcare practices and Children's Wisconsin community-based programs have provided meaningful opportunities to transform clinical care and health outcomes by using data, evidence, and the voices of patients and families to guide our paths. By working in collaboration with a shared purpose, Children's Wisconsin can identify variances in health outcomes, understand root causes and drivers of health, and adopt innovative solutions that result in lasting improvements in child and adolescent health, and in family and caregiver well-being.

Children's Wisconsin's Whole Child Health Approach

Implementing an Integrated, Preventive Approach to Address Children's Holistic Needs

Children's Wisconsin employs an integrated approach to addressing children's and families' holistic needs. This includes integrating services into primary care to address children's behavioral health and oral health needs and providing services to promote early relational health and support families.

Integrated Behavioral Health. All Children's Wisconsin primary care practices offer integrated behavioral health services. Through their integrated behavioral health model, behavioral health and primary care professionals collaborate through a team-based approach to offer several services that promote child well-being, including universal behavioral health screenings, early intervention services to address behavioral health concerns before they escalate, and parent education on child development. Primary care providers conduct warm handoffs with behavioral health providers, ensuring that patient families have immediate access to behavioral health care on-site at the primary care office. After integrating behavioral health services into primary care in 2021, Children's Wisconsin has provided more than 115,000 visits with behavioral health consultants and has reduced its *outpatient therapy*

waitlist by 46%. Children's Wisconsin also conducts universal screening for suicidal ideation in primary, specialty, emergency, and inpatient care settings, and universal screening for positive affect, functioning, depression, and anxiety in primary care.

To staff their integrated behavioral health program and other mental health services, Children's Wisconsin created a behavioral health workforce grow-their-own pathway to onboard master's level therapists into the integrated behavioral health model while they are still in training. This pathway offers an opportunity to provide necessary supervision hours needed for state licensure and enables therapists to learn specific skills for providing integrated behavioral health services that are not a standard part of a therapist's training. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services launched a statewide grant program to support Children's Wisconsin and others in transforming therapist training and has also implemented changes in Medicaid billing to support reimbursement for these services.

Medical-Dental Integration Model. [*Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin*](#), part of Children's Wisconsin, implements a medical-dental integration model where dental hygienists join primary care appointments to provide dental screening, education, prevention, and early intervention services. The hygienists also connect children to a dental home for ongoing and coordinated oral health care. To date, 11 healthcare systems and centers have been involved in the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin's Medical-Dental Integration model, serving more than 17,000 patients.



Integrated Registered Dietician Pilot. Children's Wisconsin has implemented a pilot to improve access to a registered dietician in one of their primary care locations. The pilot provides prevention and early intervention opportunities to address nutrition concerns, including healthy eating habits. Through this pilot, a Children's Wisconsin Clinical Nutrition Team developed a family habits survey to quickly assess family habits around eating and activity. The pilot began with a focus on patients with elevated BMI and accelerated weight gain but has since expanded to focus on children with any nutrition concerns, including infants with feeding and growth concerns. The registered dietician is available for scheduled and same-day preventive visits and provides age-appropriate resources. In 2024, the pilot conducted nearly 1,000 registered dietician visits as part of this integrated primary care model. Initial analysis indicates a 15% average improvement in family habits (e.g., having conversations around healthy eating, eating dinner without screens) among families served.

Fostering Thriving Communities

Children's Wisconsin invests in an array of community health initiatives that deliver services where families and children live, learn, and play, including schools and families' homes. The services respond to the [*Children's Wisconsin Community Health Implementation Strategy*](#), addressing community health improvement priorities that include infant health, behavioral health, safety and violence, and addressing children and family's nonmedical needs. To develop and sustain its community-based programs, Children's Wisconsin leverages philanthropic, government, and other grants, as well as Children's Wisconsin system investments and community partnerships.

School-Health Partnerships. Children's Wisconsin provides programs and resources in dozens of schools across the state, including oral health services, health education, and promoting Heart Safe schools – a designation that indicates schools are prepared to respond to sudden cardiac emergencies. Children's Wisconsin offers full-time school nurses in a small number of Milwaukee Public Schools, and Children's Wisconsin mental health therapists provide care in over 80 schools across the state. Children's Wisconsin's e-learning center content brings important health and wellness concepts to life for students in five topic areas, including mental and emotional health and bullying. Children's Wisconsin also deploys athletic trainers to more than 20 schools in southeastern Wisconsin as well as physical and occupational therapists to several schools in the Fox Valley region to support youth with special health care needs and implement interventions to help them participate in school as independently as possible.

Programs to Support Families. Children's Wisconsin promotes safe and stable families through a variety of parenting education resources, groups, classes, and home-based programs. For example:

- The [Triple P Parenting Program](#) provides self-guided early childhood development education, complemented by one-on-one coaching and group sessions.
- The [Period of PURPLE Crying Program](#) helps parents understand and manage the stress associated the phase of infancy where babies cry for long periods.
- Children's Wisconsin operates [Family Resource Centers](#) in nine communities across the state, many of which are in rural areas, offering information and classes on topics like child development, stress management, and strengthening family relationships. The Family Resource Centers also provide nurturing environments for parents and young children to learn and play.
- Families can also be connected to individualized [Home Visiting](#) services to support and strengthen parent-child relationships through visits to families prenatally up to age 5 to empower families to meet their goals and connect them to resources.

Community Engagement to Improve Child Health.

Children's Wisconsin focuses on promoting health through community engagement to promote community-initiated change, resiliency, empowerment, and improved health outcomes. Children's Wisconsin supports all communities and provides intentional support to neighborhoods and community members with greater levels of need and that face adversity and barriers to achieving positive health outcomes. Children's Wisconsin engages directly with neighborhood residents and community-based resources, connecting people and organizations to improve outcomes for families and communities. For example:

- Children's Wisconsin's [Community Health Advocates](#) are trusted community health workers who provide services to families with children under age 18 in homes and community settings in the city of Milwaukee and several counties in Northeast Wisconsin. Healthcare providers and community programs can refer families to Community Health Advocate services – or families can refer themselves. Then, a Community Health Advocate meets with the family to learn about their needs and goals so that they can support families to improve their health and build their capacity to address their medical and nonmedical needs.

About Home Visiting

Home visiting is a voluntary, individualized, home-based parenting education and support program offered to parents prenatally up to age 3 or 5. Using evidence-based models, home visitors help families to improve physical and mental health, engage parents in their child's development and achievements, empower families to become economically self-sufficient, and promote positive parenting practices.

Children's Wisconsin provides home visiting services in more than a dozen counties across the state. In 2024, they served more than 500 families, helping to provide resources and support in reaching the families' goals.

The program tracks several outcomes of families who participated in the program. Of the children served:

- 97% have an identified primary care provider.
- 82% of children are up to date on immunizations at age 2.
- 100% of children were referred to a provider to address developmental delays identified by an Ages and Stages Questionnaire score in the "monitoring zone" or below.
- 94% of the group referred to a provider for developmental delays had an action plan developed.

Patient Story: Community Health Advocates

A relative recently received guardianship of her two nieces. After a referral from the local Boys & Girls Club, a Children's Wisconsin Community Health Advocate connected the family to the local St. Vincent de Paul thrift store, so they could obtain much needed clothing, bedding, and household items for the girls. One of the girls was having some mental health concerns, so a Children's Wisconsin community health advocate provided several resources for psychiatric testing that accepted her insurance. In addition, the community health advocate referred them to a nonprofit that provided free, new school clothes and shoes for the girls. The caregiver was very grateful for the information and support as they took on this new role for their nieces.

- Children's Wisconsin also offers services through the Community Connectors Program, which helps address nonmedical needs for City of Milwaukee families with children ages 0–5 years. Like Community Health Advocates, Community Connectors meets with families to learn about their needs and help parents access services to support early parenting. Community Connectors specifically focuses on developing positive parenting, accessing social support and resources, and learning about child and family development.

Addressing Chronic Disease and Mitigating Environmental Factors That Impact Health

In addition to the individual-level approaches described above, Children's Wisconsin also leverages a [population health](#) approach to promote Whole Child Health. Their approach relies on population-level data to identify children and families in need of support. (i.e., focusing on the delivery of healthcare services and health care-related outcomes of a group of individuals)

Specialized Asthma Services. Children's Wisconsin developed the Asthma Plus program, which provides specialized care to Children's Wisconsin patients with difficult-to-control or high-risk asthma. Applying a multidisciplinary approach, care team members from several specialties collaborate with patients to coordinate care, provide education, set goals, address barriers to care, and develop an asthma plan. Children's Wisconsin also offers the [Community Health Asthma Management Program](#) (CHAMP), which provides in-home asthma self-management education and support to Milwaukee County children and families covered by Medicaid, at no cost to families. Respiratory therapists provide services and follow-up support to improve asthma self-management at home and in the community. They also help identify common asthma triggers in the home and deliver supplies to help reduce trigger exposure. Clinicians, schools, and other organizations can refer children or families to this program. CHAMP outcomes show improved asthma control as well as fewer emergency room visits and hospitalizations for children who receive services.

CHAMP Outcome Data

- 83% of CHAMP clients had improved asthma control test scores at follow-up.
- Among CHAMP clients, there was a:
 - » 79% reduction in urgent care visits
 - » 26% reduction in emergency room visits

Integrated Lead Care Management Program. Children's Wisconsin established its Integrated Lead Care Management Program in response to clinical data showing high numbers of children overdue for lead testing due to the reduction in well-child visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Integrated Lead Care Management Program conducts outreach to Children's Wisconsin patients to increase lead testing rates, focuses on improving adherence to recommended clinical management, and provides high-touch support to families with known lead poisoning through collaboration with local health departments. Children's Wisconsin has offered community-based lead testing at no charge for Wisconsin children including at the MacCanon Brown Homeless Sanctuary since 2023 and in partnership with the City of Milwaukee Health Department, Coalition on Lead Emergency and Milwaukee Public Schools.



Journey to Pay for Health

Children's Wisconsin is committed to redesigning systems of care to advance health outcomes, improve patient and family experience, and reduce total costs of care. Currently, many of the efforts outlined in this case study are made possible by investments from Children's Wisconsin and generous philanthropic partners. Children's Wisconsin is partnering with Wisconsin Medicaid and other stakeholders to bring innovative systems of care to children who need it most and develop payment models to incentivize and support such care, including:

- **Care4Kids** is a medical home for children in out-of-home care in southeastern Wisconsin that provides comprehensive and coordinated care to meet the unique needs of this population. Care4Kids enrolls an average of over 2,800 children each month.
- **Complex Care Program** coordinates the medical and nonmedical services of children with complex medical conditions whose care crosses many specialties and who face challenges navigating care and supports. Wisconsin Children's collaborated with the state to develop a payment model to support this care model.
- **Performance- or Value-Based Contracts** are payment arrangements with payers to achieve cost effective and quality care, including addressing nonmedical needs, attending well-child visits, and more. Contracts, including with Medicaid managed care organizations, encourage an upstream focus on quality and access to care through screenings, preventive care and connections to resources.

Conclusion

Children's Wisconsin demonstrates its commitment to Whole Child Health inside its clinics and hospitals as well as in the communities it serves through strong partnerships. Through initiatives that integrate holistic care into the primary care setting, bring healthcare services into the community, and address factors that lead to chronic disease, while also moving the health system to pay for health, Children's Wisconsin advances Whole Child Health. Together, these efforts can create lasting improvements in child health, helping more children have the opportunity to thrive.