



# News Release

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For immediate release:

## **Rock River Health Care Network Featured in State Population Health and Equity Report Card Jefferson County, WI**

Jefferson County and the Rock River Health Care Network (RRHCN/Network) were recently recognized in the *2021 Wisconsin Population Health and Equity Report Card*, published by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute<sup>1</sup>. According to the report, “the *2021 Report Card* is a call to action to better understand the health of our communities and implement strategies to create conditions that allow all people to have a fair and just chance to lead the healthiest lives possible.”

“It is an honor to be recognized for the work of the Rock River Health Care Network. Bringing together this group of varied partners has been a wonderful experience and it is exciting to see how developing new relationships truly is making a positive difference in the health of our communities”, stated Kristin Wallace, RRHCN Network Director.

The RRHCN was formed in 2020 to increase health equity in Jefferson and Dodge Counties, Wisconsin, specifically focusing on low-income individuals’ access to primary care and providing quality health care at a lower cost. Development of the Network was made possible through a federal grant awarded to Fort HealthCare in 2020 through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$900,000 with 80% financed with non-governmental sources. This Award will enable RRHCN to implement a strategic plan to accomplish this work.

The RRHCN is comprised of eight local organizations that have a long history of collaboration, and include Fort HealthCare, Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, Jefferson County Health Department, Jefferson County Human Services, Rainbow Hospice, Rock River Community Clinic, Watertown Health Department, and Watertown Regional Medical Center. There are many strategies that can increase access to healthcare for all. RRHCN’s accomplishments thus far have included merging the area safety net clinics (medical and dental) to form the Rock River Community Clinic (RRCC), installation of an electronic health record system for RRCC, assistance developing more robust clinical systems, and support for RRCC to become a newly established FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center).

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<sup>1</sup> *The 2021 Wisconsin Population Health and Equity Report Card*. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2022.

The RRHCN is also focused on projects that help to address the social determinants of health (SDOH) and aid in removing all barriers to care.

The *Care Navigation Pilot Project* includes three Network Partners who have been utilizing an evidence-based screening tool to capture SDOH data and inform "next steps" of assistance for the patients/clients. A full-time Care Navigator is employed at RRCC to help identify barriers that patients may be experiencing and then connect them to needed services. The Care Navigator, along with RRCC's Referral Coordinator, Financial Advocates, and Prescription Assistance Program Coordinator, all provide a "wrap around" experience for patients. Additionally, appointments are available at four locations for patients with or without insurance, over half of RRCC's medical staff are bilingual, and RRCC will be adding their own Behavioral Health Counselor in April.

"Addressing the many social determinants of health in our community requires a multifaceted approach with high levels of collaboration across different organizations and services. The Rock River Health Care Network has not only made this possible but has devoted significant resources to make it happen. We are incredibly grateful to be a part of the Network as we work to ensure all community members have access to the health services and care they need," said Olivia Nichols, CEO/Executive Director of RRCC.

As another priority for the RRHCN, the Behavioral Health Subcommittee surveyed all area Behavioral Health Providers early in the project to assess the community capacity of behavioral health services for the medically underserved. Area capacity does not support the actual referral experience for the RRCC patient population in the RRHCN service area. The Committee mapped existing community resources to get a clear understanding of gaps in care. The Committee engaged consulting resources to better understand best practices for supporting community emotional wellbeing, asking the questions, "What best practices have been deployed in communities similar to us that have improved access to and quality of behavioral health services?" The Committee will use learnings from this journey to design more effective access systems and improve care coordination.

"The pandemic has increased behavioral health needs in our community and across the country. It is humbling to work collaboratively with leaders from these partner agencies who are so committed to supporting our community's wellbeing needs. Together, we can improve systems so individuals can access the right care, when they need it, in a setting that is comfortable and convenient," said Tina Crave, CEO of the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation.

Wallace concludes, "We believe the formation of the Rock River Health Care Network has allowed our communities to take the next important and collaborative step towards becoming the healthiest community in Wisconsin!"

To learn more about RRHCN/Network, visit <https://rockrivercommunityclinic.com/rock-river-health-care-network/>.

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