



Olivia Nichols, Ph.D.
CEO/Executive Director
director@rockrivercommunityclinic.org
262.472.6839 (work)
920.650.7502 (cell)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rock River Community Clinic Awarded \$249,998 Grant to Enhance Behavioral Health Services in Rural Jefferson and Dodge County

Whitewater, WI – July 17, 2024 – Rock River Community Clinic (RRCC) is pleased to announce the award of a \$249,998 Momentum Grant funded by the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Endowment in collaboration with the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW). The grant is in support of a larger, regional project “Advancing Access to Behavioral Health Care in Rural Jefferson and Dodge County.” The funding, distributed over 24 months beginning July 1, 2024, will significantly enhance access to critical behavioral health services for residents in these rural areas.

“We are thrilled by this opportunity with MCW to increase access to affordable, high-quality behavioral health services across Jefferson and Dodge County,” states Olivia Nichols, PhD, CEO of RRCC. “At RRCC, the expansion of our behavioral health services is a natural and needed next step towards meeting our community needs.”

With MCW’s Department of Family and Community Medicine, the approved proposal aims to establish a coordinated, financially sustainable behavioral health delivery system that leverages existing healthcare resources and empirically-based care models. This initiative is particularly focused on improving health equity and access to behavioral health services in underserved regions.

Dr. David Songco, PsyD, Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Professor at MCW, and Dr. Nichols, will lead this transformative project. The initiative will employ a strategic approach to unify existing community health partnerships, improve access to behavioral health services, and develop sustainable care models that address the unique challenges faced by rural populations.

"The approval of this grant is a testament to our commitment to enhancing the health and well-being of residents in Jefferson and Dodge County," said Dr. Songco. "By leveraging our collaborative network and focusing on sustainable, integrated behavioral health services, we aim to make a lasting impact on the community."

A HealthWorks Behavioral Health Committee has been formed to oversee the development of a dual-county wide collaborative network, including but not limited to, Fort Healthcare and Watertown Regional Medical Center leadership, county health & human services leadership, and Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation representatives. The committee will be tasked with aligning behavioral health services to maximize reimbursement revenue and ensure long-term sustainability, and to create a network-wide Masters of Social Work (MSW) field rotation in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to support workforce development.

"Partners across the greater Jefferson County region have a long history of collaboration," states Tina Crave, President and CEO of the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation. "Mental health is a top priority for all of us, and we are eager to work together to innovate and improve the wellbeing of our community."

Specifically at RRCC, the MCW grant funding will allow for expanded capacity of primary care and behavioral health providers to deliver integrated care, an improved referral system within the HealthWorks network, and enhanced screening and quality measures for mental health and substance misuse services throughout their service area.

"We know that there is a desperate shortage of behavioral health services, especially in rural areas and communities of color," adds Beth Lucht, PA-C, LCSW, Behavioral Health Director at RRCC. "And we also know that providing integrated behavioral health services within primary care improves access as well as helping patients attain better outcomes in managing chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. We are excited to have this opportunity to work to build a more robust, accessible system of care in Jefferson and Dodge Counties."

RRCC aims to provide affordable, accessible healthcare services to any individual in need of care. From dental to medical to behavioral health, RRCC accepts patients who are uninsured, on Medicare or BadgerCare, or underinsured through their private health insurance plan.

“Our organization strives to make accessing affordable healthcare services attainable to historically underserved communities,” states Nichols. “Now, with the inclusion of expanded behavioral health, we are able to offer a full healthcare home to all those in our communities who need our care.”

RRCC encourages stakeholders and community members to join in celebrating this significant award towards critical advancement in the overall mental health of our communities. Further announcements and updates about the project will be shared on RRCC’s Facebook & Instagram account and website. Any specific questions about the grant or RRCC’s participation in the HealthWorks Committee can be directed to Nichols at director@rockrivercommunityclinic.org or 262.472.6839.

Rock River Community Clinic (RRCC) is a community health center that provides comprehensive and cost-effective health care services to ensure all community members have access to the care they need. Serving families in Jefferson, Dodge, and Walworth County, RRCC includes medical clinics located in Whitewater and Watertown, and one dental clinic located in Fort Atkinson.

At RRCC, all community members are welcome and accepted, regardless of ability to pay, with discounted prices for patients who are uninsured or underinsured (high deductible plans). RRCC also provides care coordination services to help patients overcome barriers to accessing healthcare (e.g., transportation), and helps to coordinate referrals. Bilingual staff (Spanish & English) are available to support patients and their families. By increasing access to health care services, offering care at affordable costs, and assisting with healthcare navigation, RRCC works to create a healthier, more equitable, community. For clinic hours and directions, visit www.rockrivercommunityclinic.org

###