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Contact: Emily Miota, [emiota@kidsforward.org](mailto:emiota@kidsforward.org), 262-853-6863

## **Northeast Wisconsin Providers, Patients, and Everyday Individuals Join Forces to Stand up for Medicaid**

*"Loss of Medicaid dollars will result in program closures, reduced staff, increased waitlists, and destruction of community supports. With program loss, no one will have access to needed care."*

Over 35 concerned individuals, mental health service recipients, impacted family members, school and community-based mental health providers, and substance use therapists gathered at Foundations Health & Wholeness in Green Bay yesterday to call on decision makers to protect Medicaid.

"Yesterday's event showed just how concerning the proposed Medicaid cuts are to everyday folks, not just activists," William Parke-Sutherland, Government Affairs Director for Kids Forward. "There were no politicians here today. These were open conversations among community members joining together in a way we don't see often."

As part of the panel, one foster mom shared, "I am here to represent my foster son. He is the sunshine of my day. I would be devastated if cuts were made to Medicaid services that he utilizes currently, like mental health services, equine therapy, speech and occupational therapy. He deserves a fighting chance."

In addition to sharing impacts and experiences, attendees wrote letters to their legislators, including Representatives Tony Wied and Tom Tiffany. Among the experiences shared by attendees:

*"As the Executive Director of a nonprofit behavioral health provider agency...over 35% of our clients rely on Medicaid for their care. The future of our communities is only as strong as our weakest neighbors."*

*"Every day, I get the honor to work with students aged 5-18, helping them set and reach goals around mental health. Counseling helps students manage emotions and behaviors, heal from trauma, and improve relationships with peers and adults—with ripple effects far into the future. Jeopardizing Medicaid jeopardizes the positive, community-wide effects of school-based mental health, as MANY students rely on this coverage."*

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Medicaid is the largest payer for mental health and addiction treatment services in Wisconsin and across the nation. It provides a lifeline for over one million Wisconsinites, including children, parents, and adults with lower incomes who often lack other insurance options. BadgerCare, one of our state's Medicaid programs, is particularly crucial in rural communities where access to employer-sponsored health insurance is limited.

However, the stability of these essential services is under threat. Congress is considering drastic cuts to Medicaid – potentially as much as **\$880 billion over the next ten years**. These cuts would be devastating for Wisconsin, jeopardizing access to mental health and substance use treatment for countless individuals and families, including the one in three rural children who rely on Medicaid for their health coverage.

This event was organized by the Wisconsin Medicaid Coalition. The Coalition has approximately 300 participants from more than 150 entities, all concerned about the impact of major changes to Medicaid being considered at the federal level.