One Statewide Council, Two Medical Schools, and Six Rural Communities: A Collaborative Effort to Address Rural Health in Wisconsin

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Background & Project Description

Purpose: The Strong Rural Communities Initiative (SRCI) was established in 2004 to improve health indicators for selected rural communities in Wisconsin and significantly accelerate establishing collaboration for prevention as the norm, not the exception, in rural Wisconsin.

Key Players: Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), UW-School of Medicine and Public Health, Rural Health Development Council (RHDC).

Funding Process: Each medical school was awarded funding through the Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Wisconsin Convention-Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment. With this funding, six rural communities were selected from among 22 proposals.

SRCI Mission: Support/enhance rural health through the development of local interventions by coalitions that include: 1. The local hospital and representatives of the medical community 2. The county health department 3. Representatives of other non-health agencies

Lessons Learned

Each medical school was awarded funding through the Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Wisconsin Convention-Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment. With this funding, six rural communities were selected from among 22 proposals.

Policy Focus and Outcomes

Policy Focus: To accelerate the establishment of local collaborations to support prevention as the norm in rural Wisconsin.

Statewide Policy Objectives: 1. Promote statewide the critical need for and benefit of collaboration among rural medical, public health, and business partners to increase preventive health services. 2. Identify and promote statewide public and private sector policies to support collaboration among rural medical, public health, and business partners.

Impacts of SRCI Policy

Impact 1: Contributed to process of broadening the focus and membership of a State Forum for Rural Health & Economic Development.

Impact 2: Led to State Forum adopting a wellness priority and focus.

Impact 3: Led to shift in focus of the Federal RUSH Program in Wisconsin.

Impact 4: Contributed to process of broadening vision of the UW-SMPH.

Impact 5: Contributed to an eight county economic development enterprise adding a workplace wellness focus.

Impact 6: Contributed to institutionalizing a Statewide Community Health Roundtable among rural hospitals.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The SRCI provided a broad framework of leadership to assist each of the six rural communities in developing and implementing interventions that addressed the specific needs of the community. Despite the complex layers of this partnership, the SRCI was able to execute multiple statewide community academic programs that equitably engaged contributions from various academic, policy-making, and community partners. The SRCI continues its work through the efforts of the RHDC, the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health, and the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative.

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