

Area Agency on Aging of Dane County

Board of Directors

Carole Kretschman, Chair

Don Ashbaugh

Fran Barman-Paulson

Ted Bunc

Pam Flad

Nikole Jones

Richard Kilmer

Dianne Leigh

Sridevi Mohan

Melissa Ratcliff

Matt Veldran

10 October 2019

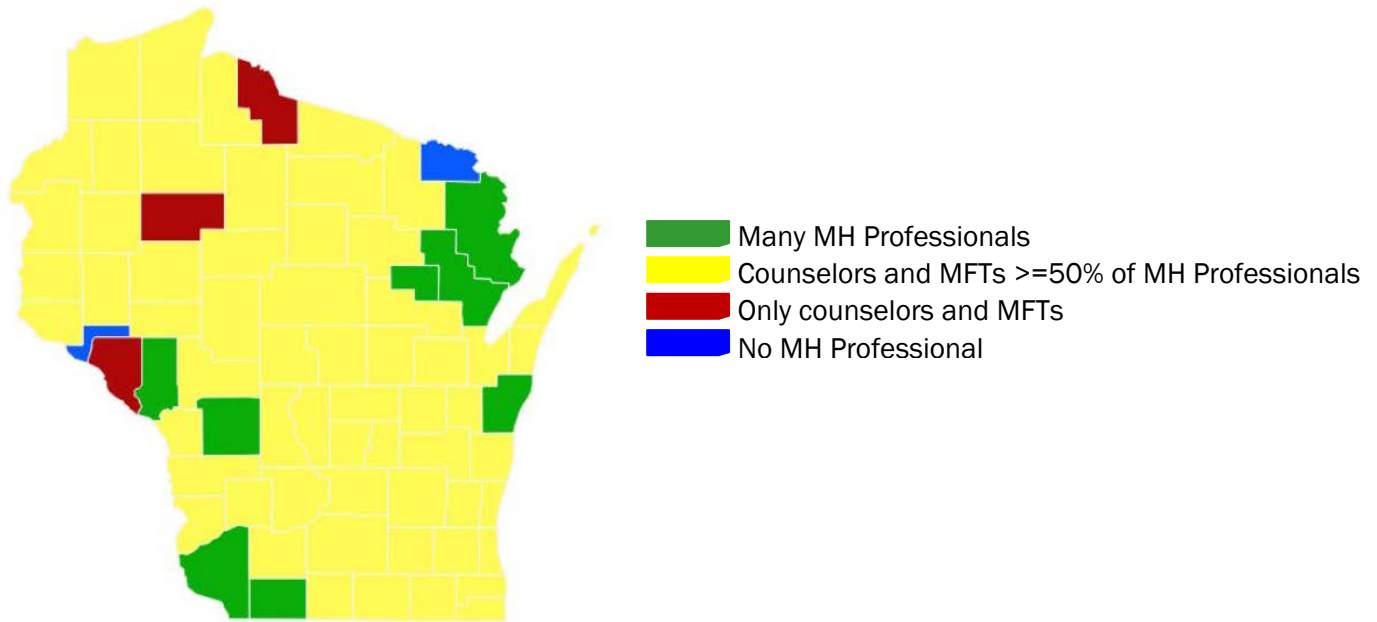
[This letter was sent to Senators Baldwin & Johnson and Representative Pocan]

The Area Agency on Aging of Dane County is one of America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Using a variety of funds from the Older Americans Act, state and local governments, and private foundations, we contract with community-based organizations to provide programs and services for persons who are 60 years of age or older. These include a range of services to support aging in place, such as case management, home-delivered and congregate meals, legal advocacy, family caregiver support, and evidence-based classes to promote healthy aging.

The Dane County Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors endorse the bipartisan Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286/H.R. 945). This Legislation would permit credentialed Mental Health Counselors (MHCs) and Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) to become eligible Medicare Part B providers. Access to treatment is in critical shortage, in part because Medicare now only covers treatment provided in hospital settings or by Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs).

10,000 baby boomers a day qualify for Medicare. There are 3,000 areas in the country that are considered "mental-health-professional-shortage areas." 50% of rural counties do not have a single practicing psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker. People who depend on Medicare often wait years before receiving appropriate treatment and often must travel great distances to get it.

As this map of "Wisconsin—Medicare Mental Health Professionals by County" from the National Provider Identification data file indicates, mental health professionals in Dane County make up less than half of the total number of MFTs and MHCs. In fact, there are six counties in Wisconsin that have only MFTs and MHCs available or no mental health professionals available to community members.



It is understood that dollars are limited; but it is unwise to spend the majority of Medicare's mental health funding on expensive inpatient care while providing insufficient lower-cost services in the community. One way to effectively increase outpatient mental health services is to expand the classification of eligible providers to include MFTs and MHCs.

We strongly urge your support for the passage of S. 286/H.R. 945

Sincerely,

Carole L. Kretschman

Carole Kretschman, Chair

cc: The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor, State of Wisconsin
 State Elected Officials (representing Dane County)
 Members, Dane County Board of Supervisors
 The Honorable Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive
 Ms. Shawn Tessmann, Director, Dane County Department of Human Services