

Northeast community health advocates at Children's Wisconsin support families' needs

Since 2024, Children's Wisconsin's Northeast Community Health Advocates (CHAs) have supported kids and families to help address their holistic needs. Working in collaboration with hospitals, clinics and community partners in Outagamie, Calumet and Winnebago Counties, the Northeast CHAs provide evidence-based, relationship-centered support through screening, goal setting, care coordination, resource navigation, referrals and follow-up support. Families are referred to the program through school social workers and nurses, community organizations, clinical partners and self-referrals.

The three Northeast CHAs are certified community health workers who help families connect to resources and navigate health care, schools and community organizations. Children's Wisconsin's Northeast CHAs build trusting relationships with families with children up to age 18 and help them address their needs.

They begin with a social needs assessment to understand areas of concern and then coach families on accessing support for basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, and financial stability. Children's Wisconsin's Northeast CHAs connect families with resources and provide weekly coaching, care coordination and follow-up support for up to six months as they work toward their goals. The Northeast CHAs coordinate with clinical and community partners to support care plan follow-through, reduce barriers to client appointments and help families stay connected to services.

CHAs often help families address issues that have been identified through Children's Wisconsin's community health needs assessment, conducted in partnership with other area health systems. Identified community priorities include chronic disease, infant and early childhood health, mental and behavioral health and safety and violence. In 2025, the Northeast CHAs served nearly 400 people, including nearly 250 children. More than half of participants accomplished their goals and approximately 25% were still working towards them. Last year, families most often identified concerns with housing, financial stability and health and well-being.

Recently, a single mother of three relocated to the area due to safety concerns and was connected to Children's Wisconsin's Northeast CHAs through a community partner. The mom was employed part-time and was looking for stable housing while the children stayed with their grandmother. After assessment and goal setting, the CHA connected her to housing resources. Within two months, she secured stable, affordable housing and reunited with her children. With support from the CHA, she increased her work hours, established medical care for her family, and re-enrolled in school to pursue an associate degree. With connections to other community resources and supports, this mom developed stronger self-esteem and self-advocacy skills.

Through Children's Wisconsin's Northeast CHAs, families build problem-solving skills, increase confidence and develop protective factors that support long-term stability. Community health worker services are not currently reimbursable through insurance. Children's Wisconsin relies on generous support from benefactors, including Lynne Cumings Keller, and system investments to support the Northeast CHAs.

By coaching caregivers and helping stabilize family conditions, the Northeast CHAs help create healthier environments where children can be safe, supported, and thrive.