



Amy J.H. Kind, MD, PhD



Robert N. Golden, MD

The Wisconsin Partnership Program: Balancing Our Goals and Responsibilities as a Funder

Amy J.H. Kind, MD, PhD; Robert N. Golden, MD

The clinicians, researchers, and educators at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) have the opportunity to witness and contribute to the translation of new ideas into clinical care innovations, which ultimately advance the health of people and populations. Our academic community holds a deep appreciation for the rigorous processes of inquiry, program development, and research. We also strongly value our partnerships with diverse stakeholders to ensure that innovations and discoveries lead to meaningful health improvements. Through the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP), we have the privilege of seeing how these concepts unite to benefit people and communities across our state.¹

The Wisconsin Partnership Program was established as a permanent endowment within the SMPH in 2004. It resulted from the conversion of Blue Cross/Blue Shield United of Wisconsin to a stock insurance corporation and was established with the sole purpose

• • •

Dr Kind is chair, Oversight and Advisory Committee, Wisconsin Partnership Program, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH); director, Health Services and Care Research Program, Department of Medicine, SMPH; and associate professor, Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology, Department of Medicine, SMPH. Dr Golden is dean of SMPH and vice chancellor for medical affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

of improving health in Wisconsin. In accordance with the Order of the Commissioner of Insurance, the proceeds from the sale of the company were distributed between the SMPH and the Medical College of Wisconsin, which established a “sister” program.

The Wisconsin Partnership Program has

everyone in Wisconsin living healthy and full lives.

The Wisconsin Partnership Program’s approach to grantmaking utilizes “gold-standard” processes of science, as well as community knowledge and input to provide the best possible investments for improving health in

The Wisconsin Partnership Program is committed to its vision of advancing health throughout our state...

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that opportunities for optimal health and well-being extend to all corners of our state.

two governing committees: the Oversight and Advisory Committee and the Partnership Education and Research Committee. They are comprised of public members and faculty who are responsible for directing and approving the funds for public health, research, and education initiatives aimed at improving population health. Since its launch in 2004, the WPP has awarded more than \$244 million to support research, education, and public health initiatives, including more than \$90 million to support over 300 community partnerships. Grantees have leveraged WPP dollars to successfully compete for more than \$600 million in additional funding from organizations such as the National Institutes of Health. These innovations have reached into every corner of Wisconsin to advance the WPP’s vision of

Wisconsin. The success of the WPP’s awards is based in large part on its commitment to a robust review process that balances the confidentiality needs of scientists and community partners, with the public’s right to information. Since its inception, the Wisconsin Partnership Program has adhered to a review process that is tightly aligned with that used by the National Institutes of Health, as well as other public funders and academic institutions. This includes a confidential, rigorous, multistep review process conducted by content experts, and further review, discussion, and decision-making by the governing committees. In addition to peer reviews and rankings, final committee decisions also are based on how each proposal aligns with the WPP’s strategic priorities and fits within the context of its total port-

folio, taking into consideration factors such as geographic reach and potential impact.

Recently, the WPP faced a court challenge that received attention in our local media related to the application of the requirements of the open meetings and public records laws to community grant applicants. Despite numerous affidavits from scientific experts across the country supporting the critical importance of maintaining the confidentiality of reviewer comments as part of a gold-standard grant-review process, the Dane County court disagreed. The court declared that reviewer comments for community applications are public records and must be released to the public upon request. The Wisconsin Partnership Program will, of course, follow the court's ruling.

The WPP's goal always has been, and continues to be, to honor the nature of the competitive review process while balancing the public's need for information and recognizing that the honest feedback of reviewers is vital to the grant process and ultimately to the success of the work. It is clear that the WPP's approach

to grantmaking holds great promise for improving health and health equity. For example, a research project recently identified a genetic link that makes Wisconsin Hmong residents more susceptible to the deadly fungal infection blastomycosis, which could lead to new therapies; another research initiative resulted in an innovative tele-ophthalmology program that has increased diabetic eye screenings in rural Wisconsin; and a community initiative is piloting a recovery house model of opioid treatment and recovery in Richland and Iowa counties. In addition, WPP grants to education initiatives within the SMPH ensure that Wisconsin has a sufficient and highly skilled health care workforce that is trained in the best approaches for preventing and treating illness, dedicated to serving urban and rural areas, and capable of addressing public health challenges at the population level. Going forward, our objective is for the WPP grant processes to continue to both attract and allow for the rigorous sifting and winnowing necessary to move the very best proposals forward.

The Wisconsin Partnership Program is committed to its vision of advancing health throughout our state. Our research grant programs will continue to advance scientific discovery, while our education initiatives will ensure our physicians and public health leaders are among the most well-prepared in the nation. Our community partnerships will continue to address health challenges at the population level, with the goal of reducing health disparities and improving health across Wisconsin. We will continue to meet our responsibility as a funder by respecting both the integrity of our grant-making process while fully complying with all state and federal regulations. Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that opportunities for optimal health and well-being extend to all corners of our state.

REFERENCES

1. Golden RN, Smith EM. The Wisconsin Partnership Program: Investing in a healthier state. *WMJ*. 2012;11(4):189-190.

Navigating the Transition Zone

from adolescence through young adulthood

April 17 & 18, 2020
Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center
Madison, WI

School of Medicine and Public Health
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Medical Society

This two-day conference will explore emerging health care trends within the transition zone of adolescence to young adulthood, with an emphasis on mental and behavioral health, sexual health, adolescent lifestyles and complex diseases. Developed as a partnership between Wisconsin Medical Society, the Medical College of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, there's something for everyone, plus the opportunity to network with colleagues from all specialties.

Visit bit.ly/TransitionZoneReg for more information and to register!

advancing the art & science of medicine in the midwest

WMJ

WMJ (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

© 2019 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

Visit www.wmjonline.org to learn more.