Participants in the East Madison Community Center’s summer program visited the Troy Kids’ Garden during a week-long course—funded by the Wisconsin Partnership Program—for educators to observe garden-based learning. At the Kids’ Garden, children learn to grow, clean and prepare vegetables. For instance, these youth are washing lettuce to prepare a salad. Children also get to sample various fresh produce, with the goal of helping them make nutritious food choices.

It’s almost as if it had been planned this way. In 2004, as the University of Wisconsin–Madison celebrated the Wisconsin Idea’s 100th anniversary, the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) began a journey toward making the state healthier. As steward of the Partnership Program endowment, the UW School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) embodies the Wisconsin idea—the principle that the university should improve lives beyond classrooms and research laboratories.

“Serving the people of Wisconsin and beyond has been in our school’s DNA since its inception,” says Dean Robert Golden, MD. “For the past 10 years, the Partnership Program has taken that to new heights.”

Funding for the Partnership Program’s investments in research, education and community collaboration stems from the conversion of Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin from a nonprofit service insurance corporation to a stock insurance corporation more than a decade ago. Since 2004, the Wisconsin Partnership Program has awarded 360 grants totaling $151 million to improve health.

“Successful research and interventions depend on engaging communities as partners,” Golden adds. “The Partnership Program is numerous collaborations exemplify the projects that helped the school earn the prestigious 2013 Spencer Foreman Award for Outstanding Community Service from the Association of American Medical Colleges.”

La Crosse, Wisconsin, County Public Health Director Doug Mormann has seen many successes firsthand. An inaugural member of the Partnership Program’s Oversight and Advisory Committee, Mormann points to the Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine (WARM) and the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW) as prime examples of the program’s reach and impact.

“SHOW provides researchers, including partners such as the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, with extensive data that identifies local health issues,” Mormann says. “And WARM seeks to improve people’s health in rural Wisconsin by addressing the critical need for physicians in those areas.”

One of the first two WARM graduates, Nathan Vakharia, MD ’11, recently began caring for patients in far northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Fifty SMPH graduates have completed the WARM Program since Vakharia earned his diploma, and more than 60 percent of these physicians stayed in Wisconsin for their residencies. Two-thirds of those chose to enter primary care careers.

SHOW—created in 2006 with Partnership Program funds—is the first research survey of its kind to measure...
**Wisconsin Partnership Program Leadership**

**The Oversight and Advisory Committee (OAC) and the Partnership Education Committee (PEC)** serve as the Wisconsin Partnership Program’s governance committees. They allocate and distribute funds for community partnerships and education, as well as for research initiatives that advance population health.

**OAC chair:** Pat Remington, MD ‘81, MPH, SMHP associate dean for public health

**PEC chair:** Richard Moss, PhD, SMHP senior associate dean for basic research, biotechnology and graduate studies

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**Wisconsin’s Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Program**

Together, they support development of a “sufficient and competent workforce”—fulfilling a state health plan priority.

Participants include leaders of health care systems, communities, public health agencies and academic organizations. The Fostering Futures Team focused on incorporating trauma-informed care into child service agencies. It held statewide listening sessions, wrote an action plan, recruited partners and obtained a pilot program grant.

**Fighting Antibiotic-Resistant Microbes**

Another Partnership Program project brings together researchers from several disciplines to address the public health crisis of antibiotic-resistant infections. The Wisconsin Infectious Disease Drug Discovery Project—led by Bruce Klein, MD (PG ‘98), a professor in the SMHP Departments of Pediatrics and Medical Microbiology and Immunology—developed methods for screening chemical compounds for antimicrobial activity. Laboratory research identified novel lead compounds for anti-staph and anti-fungal activity, which are being studied in animal models.

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**Caprice Greenberg, MD, MPH, an associate professor in the SMHP Department of Surgery, is the principal investigator for the WPP-funded Surgical Coaching Program. It will evaluate the educational value and impact of video-based coaching on patient safety.**

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**Beloit, Kenosha, Milwaukee and Racine.** The Partnership Program has long provided funding for successful projects, and supports new initiatives that advance population health. The grants described above and many others—ranging from $20,000 to multi-million-dollar investments—emphasize the importance of fully integrating medicine and public health at the SMHP.

**Partnering History**

1999: Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin (BCBSUW) files an application with the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance to convert from a nonprofit service corporation to a stock insurance corporation.

2000-2001: By Order of the Insurance Commissioner, the conversion of BCBSUW is approved and the Wisconsin United for Health Foundation is established to distribute the funds, equally between the two medical schools in the state. The UW School of Medicine and Public Health’s organization is the Wisconsin Partnership Program; the Medical College of Wisconsin is a founding a Wisconsin Health.

2004: Wisconsin Partnership Program establishes two governance committees to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate grant programs. The new program, along with a work group and statewide partners, created a strategic plan for the Partnership Program’s soon-to-be-launched obesity prevention initiative focusing on children. It will create a statewide network for obesity prevention and a child obesity surveillance system to assess interventions and trends. It also will work with communities to test community engaged, and disseminate best practices and unified messages.

“The Partnership Program has long provided funding for successful projects that address the serious health issue of obesity,” says Adams, a professor in the SMHP Department of Family Medicine. “This initiative will allow us to expand this network to additional communities. It will have built-in partnerships to the new initiatives that advance population health. The grants described above and many others—ranging from $20,000 to multi-million-dollar investments—emphasize the importance of fully integrating medicine and public health at the SMHP.”

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