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## **Children's Mental Health Awareness Day Recognized**

*State Agencies Work Together to Improve Children's Long-Term Outcomes*

(MADISON) – Today is [Children's Mental Health Awareness Day](#), a day recognized throughout the United States as an opportunity to renew focus on the importance of caring for every child's mental health starting at birth.

Wisconsin continues to be a leader in developing programs that address children's mental health. First Lady Tonette Walker has championed the use of trauma informed care as a means of improving children's long-term outcomes, and Governor Walker recently appointed Elizabeth Hudson to lead the newly created Office of Children's Mental Health which will coordinate and integrate services focused on children's mental health issues across state agencies.

"The creation of the Office of Children's Mental Health shows the Governor and First Lady's commitment to finding better ways to improve the lives of children," said Eloise Anderson, Secretary of the Department of Children and Families. "This office will help DCF, DHS, DPI and DOC coordinate services to help fight the effects of trauma on children's mental health."

Secretary Kitty Rhoades of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services further explained how Wisconsin now is better equipped to serve the children who are in need of mental health services.

"We can't be effective if a parent or guardian has to jump through hoops to get a child's mental health needs met," she said. "The Office of Children's Mental Health is designed to reduce or eliminate the duplication of efforts in programs geared to assisting children with mental health problems, and to improve a child's access to the services they need. It's a great investment to ensure that children served today will be happy, functioning adults tomorrow."

To promote Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, a Wisconsin coalition is inviting the public to a special event presenting children's artwork, youth performances, and information about why children's mental health matters.

The Children's Mental Health Awareness Coalition is honoring the winners of the 2014 "My Feelings Matter" youth art contest. Over 150 art entries were sent in by children Pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade from across Wisconsin, depicting their interpretation of the theme, "My Feelings Matter." Children's artwork, expressing their stories, will be on display today, from 1 to 2 p.m. at the Overture Center for the Arts, Rotunda Stage. The location is 201 State Street in Madison.

The Coalition is comprised of Wisconsin non-profits and state entities invested in supporting children's mental health. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), four million children and adolescents in the U.S. have a mental disorder that significantly impairs their ability to function at home, at school, and with peers. In a given year, only 20 percent of those children are identified and receive mental health services.

"By working to ensure that children have access to effective mental health services, we can shape a better future for Wisconsin," said Elizabeth Hudson, Director of the Office of Children's Mental Health. "Art is a natural way for many children to express their feelings. Coupling art work with mental health awareness is a great example of what communities can do to promote social and emotional skills, the foundation of mental wellness and resilience."

For information about Children's Mental Health Awareness Day and for resources to promote positive children's social and emotional health, visit *Wisconsin Knows: Children's Mental Health Matters* at <http://wisconsinknowschildrensmalhealthmatters.wordpress.com/>.

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