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IPHCA: Behavioral Health Care Focus Grows with New Executive VP Sara Howe

SPRINGFIELD – Mental and behavioral health needs are soaring in Illinois, and health care providers struggle to keep up. One prominent statewide association continues to bring on the expertise and vision needed to transform how the problem is addressed.

The Illinois Primary Health Care Association, representing the state’s community health centers, also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), today announced accomplished behavioral health leader Sara Howe will join the Association in April as Executive Vice President.

Howe is an award-winning, nationally recognized mental health leader who has spent the last 20 years with the Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, including as CEO since 2007. She is the third exceptional behavioral health care advocate to join IPHCA under the guidance of President and CEO Jordan Powell, joining Cyrus Winnett and Amber Kirchhoff for the Association’s advocacy efforts in Springfield, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

“I am excited to be joining Illinois’ premier health care association, and honored to work with Jordan and the talented, dedicated staff at IPHCA,” Howe said. “Community health centers are leading a revolution in health care. Patients are receiving comprehensive, fully integrated primary, dental and behavioral health care, as centers work to meet the varied and complex needs in their communities. I am excited to serve the Association’s members as they work to ensure all individuals receive quality care.”

Howe comes to IPHCA at a critical time of transformation in how Illinois provides quality, affordable health care options.

Community health centers have led an innovative, efficient combination of health care services to best meet each patient’s individual needs. FQHCs serve as a health home where primary care physicians, dentists, behavioral health providers and specialists meet every need under one roof. Costs are greatly reduced, and patients’ problems can be treated earlier and more effectively.

Policymakers see the difference and are embracing it. The Illinois Legislature and Gov. J.B. Pritzker included \$50 million in the state’s new capital construction program last year to expand health center infrastructure and capacity. The Illinois Department of Human Services has set aside \$5 million to health centers to increase their substance use disorder treatment services. And in Chicago, the current city budget funds expanded mental health services at health centers.

The behavioral health care focus and health center support could not come soon enough.

In just the last five years, patients seeking mental health services at community health centers have nearly doubled at a 90 percent increase, and 98 percent of health centers now offer behavioral health care services. Substance use disorder treatment has nearly tripled since 2014, with 57 percent of centers providing services and nearly two-thirds employing medication assisted treatment (MAT) providers.

IPHCA expects those numbers to continue to grow, as the broader shift to care provided at community health centers with a fully integrated care model brings more people through the doors who need behavioral health and substance use treatment.



Howe is past Chair of the Illinois Department of Human Services Social Services Advisory Council and serves as the Public Policy Chair of the National Council for Behavioral Health. She has a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and a Master of Science (MS) in Health Promotion from Purdue University and also is a certified health education specialist.

IPHCA President and CEO Jordan Powell said Howe's experience and passion for helping people work through mental and behavioral health challenges will add to a successful team approach that preserves and promotes high-quality, cost-effective care around the state.

"I'm pleased to have someone of Sara's caliber on our leadership team," Powell said. "Her expertise and knowledge in mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery services, and her track record of public policy achievements, will be a tremendous addition and undoubtedly help us achieve our mission of positioning community health centers to be the providers of choice within Illinois.

"We are at a critical time in reshaping what health care means today, and for tomorrow. Being able to see all of your providers in one place, and having all of them work seamlessly together to meet your specific needs as they develop and change, is simply the best model of care available for patients today. We are eager to continue to build on our progress and position community health care to reach its full potential."

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ABOUT IL PRIMARY HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION

IPHCA is a health care trade association representing Illinois' community health centers that collectively serve more than 1.4 million patients at 390 sites statewide. Community health centers provide accessible, comprehensive and integrated services and are known for providing high quality outcomes while substantially reducing health care expenditures, saving the state of Illinois nearly \$2 billion on an annual basis according to an independent economic analysis.