

Help Wisconsin's Homeless Youth Get the Help They Need

Expand Health Care and Mental Health Care Access for Unaccompanied Minors

Why can't Wisconsin's Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Receive the Health and Mental Health Care They Need?

Family members experiencing homelessness and crises are often separated from each other, have limited resources, and are fearful of systems involvement. Youth under 18, who are not in the custody of a parent or guardian, need essential services for dental emergencies, basic medical care, or counseling for non-substance related issues, cannot access these services even when providers are willing to care for them, regardless of their ability to pay.

Samantha, a 17 year old youth, has accessed a shelter with a broken tooth that is causing her significant pain. Her legal guardian is in another state and has substance abuse issues that lead to her disappearance for months at a time. The shelter has located a local dentist who is willing to meet Samantha's emergent dental need but cannot do so without her guardian's consent.*

Returning to the street is dangerous. Nationally, 20% of Runaway and Homeless Youth report being trafficked, 20-40% have been abused prior to being homeless, and 1 in 3 will be lured into exploitive sex within 48 hours of leaving home (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)

Jackson, a 17 year old whose parents are also homeless and unable to be located, is finishing high school while working and living with a friend. He needs mental health counseling to deal with the trauma of his experiences on the street, but cannot*

**real examples encountered by 17 year old youth in Wisconsin. Names have been changed.*



consent to care for non-emergency, non-substance related needs.

Wisconsin's unaccompanied homeless youth need the right to consent to their own mental and physical health care.

29 States, including Indiana, Minnesota, and Illinois, allow unaccompanied minors to consent for their own healthcare services ultimately improving their own well-being and reducing long-term health care costs.

What can we do? In 2019, Wisconsin Act 22 expanded Chapter 48 to allow 17-year-old youth to access shelter when their parents or guardian cannot provide this consent. While this provides a safety net to prevent non-system youth from falling through the cracks, once these youth access shelter, they also need the right to access essential healthcare.

The Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services: Through a membership of community-based organizations and statewide partnerships, WAHRS supports family reunification, provides safe and stable housing and shelter options, and supports youth well-being, education, employment, and permanent connections to address and solve the underlying causes of youth homelessness. Learn more at www.wahrs.org

Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services
Growing Stronger Together: 1982-2022

40 Years of Collective Advocacy and Services: Improving the Lives of Wisconsin Youth and Families