MCW’s Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment awards more than $200,000 to help improve vision health for Wisconsin children

Jan. 11, 2016 MCW News - The Medical College of Wisconsin’s (MCW) Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Endowment awarded more than $200,000 over two years to improve vision health for Wisconsin’s children through an integrated system of screening, referral and education across schools and communities.

Prevent Blindness Wisconsin, a not-for-profit volunteer organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight, is the lead community partner on the award. The organization will work with Deborah Costakos, MD, MS, associate professor of ophthalmology at MCW. The partners will collaborate with a community-wide support network, including Milwaukee Public School (MPS) nurses, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, Health Navigators and Herslof Optical.

Prevent Blindness Wisconsin provides free, direct sight-saving services throughout Wisconsin. In implementing these services, they prevent blindness by identifying early signs of vision disorders, facilitating early and effective treatment, and preventing eye injury. The project, Healthy Eyes, Healthy Futures, will allow the partners to serve the high-risk children in MPS that have higher rates of undetected, undiagnosed and untreated vision problems because of disparities in access or appropriate referral policies.

In 2014-2015, more than 3,000 MPS children failed their vision screening and were referred to care. Through AHW funding, the partners will develop and conduct vision screenings in multiple settings, including nine MPS schools. They aim to increase awareness of eye health and thus improve children’s vision health access and outcomes in the long-term. Sustainable practices will include new referral patterns to address how vision screening follow-up is conducted and increased education and intervention to help overcome barriers to care. In addition, new systems for recording and sharing data will be developed, and new educational tools and programming will be integrated with existing educational systems. Tools will remain with schools and health navigators for long-term use.

Additional community partners working on this project include social workers, parent coordinators, BadgerCare vision providers, community primary care providers, and HMO advocates.