



Mental Health America of Wisconsin

2026 Application Overview

PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

This project is Opioid and Substance Use Prevention Program for Youth and Families. The Better Ways to Cope (BWTC) project will strengthen substance use prevention efforts for Milwaukee youth by implementing a comprehensive, school- and community-based prevention program that addresses both the risks of substance use and the underlying mental health and trauma-related factors that contribute to unhealthy coping behaviors. The program seeks to increase knowledge of opioids, fentanyl, vaping, and other substances; build social-emotional skills and healthy coping strategies; strengthen family engagement; and improve early identification and referral to behavioral health and community services. By the end of the 24-month project period, the program aims to establish a sustainable prevention framework that can continue to benefit schools and communities beyond the grant period.

SCOPE OF WORK AND KEY ACTIVITIES

Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) will implement a multi-tiered prevention initiative in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools and community organizations. Key activities include:

- **Youth Prevention Education:** Deliver 4–6-session classroom workshops focused on opioid, fentanyl, vaping, and polysubstance use prevention, peer pressure, trauma-informed coping, emotional regulation, and healthy decision-making.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Integrate skill-building activities that promote resilience, self-esteem, healthy relationships, communication, stress management, and emotional wellness.
- **Family Education and Engagement:** Provide evening workshops, PTO presentations, and community education sessions to help parents and caregivers recognize early warning signs of substance use, communicate effectively with youth, and access available resources.
- **Community Collaboration and Referral:** Strengthen partnerships with schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations to ensure students and families have timely access to behavioral health, healthcare, and supportive services when additional intervention is needed.

TARGET POPULATION

Street to Stability serves women throughout Milwaukee County who are experiencing or are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, substance use disorders, homelessness, and other significant barriers that contribute to poor health outcomes and increased overdose risk. Many participants have experienced severe trauma and remain disconnected from traditional healthcare and social service systems, making relationship-based outreach essential to reaching this underserved population.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Success will be measured through outreach records, participant engagement, service referrals, and follow-up outcomes, with a focus on reducing overdose risk, increasing participants' confidence in healthier coping strategies, and strengthening connections to long-term care and support. Through compassionate, trauma-informed outreach, Street to Stability seeks to save lives while creating sustainable pathways from survival to healing and lasting stability.