



## Press Release

### For Immediate Release

**Date:** October 14, 2024

**Contact:** Jason Holcomb, Director of Community Impact

**Email:** [jholcomb@r1planning.org](mailto:jholcomb@r1planning.org) | **Phone:** 815-227-1022

## WCCMHB Given Honorable Mention in Grantmaker of the Year Award

**ROCKFORD, IL** – Region 1 Planning Council (R1) is pleased to announce that the Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board (WCCMHB) was awarded a Grantmaker of the Year – Honorable Mention. Given yearly by the Grant Professionals Association (GPA), this national award recognizes grantmaking organizations that have improved the way grant professionals do their work and acknowledges outstanding contributions in the field.

Since the WCCMHB's inception in 2020, R1 has played a pivotal role in crafting its structure and led to the success seen today. Soon after the board's formation, R1 was invited to complete the foundational work of developing a strategic plan, conducting a community needs assessment, and designing a grantmaking process for Core Program grants, which have expanded mental health and substance use services in Winnebago County. Now in its fourth year, Core Program grants provide funding to 38 programs.

This is a dream come true for Winnebago County. "While we know there is more work to do to reduce wait times and bolster the mental health workforce in Winnebago County, we cannot overstate the importance of this funding for the expansion of services in Winnebago County," says Mary Ann Abate, WCCMHB President.

One unique means of expanding services recognized by the GPA are the Accelerator Awards. Due to workforce shortages, WCCMHB had a funding surplus after its first three years of Core Program grants, which required programs to fill new positions in order to receive grant payments. In partnership with the mental health board, Region 1 identified innovative funding models from the philanthropy world, developing an Accelerator Award program that would use surplus funding to invest in one-time capital improvement projects that increase system capacity for mental health services. One of these awards will provide funding to boost the mental health workforce through development of a social work pathways program in Winnebago County.

WCCMHB was also recognized by GPA for its comprehensive online site that provides transparent program details in order to increase awareness and access to much need mental health services. Hosted on R1's community engagement website, Engage R1, the WCCMHB Funded Programs page contains information about each of its funded programs, including a description, contact information, website and social media links, and how to access services from the organization. This site provides details a community member needs to access specific mental health services, and communicates agencies' progress, as well as the Board's overall community impact in one easily accessible spot.

**ABOUT RPC** – [Region 1 Planning Council](#) is a special-purpose, regional government agency providing cross-jurisdictional, government-to-government collaborative planning for Northern Illinois. The regional planning model provides an efficient means to promoting a well-informed, comprehensive dialogue that holistically addresses regional issues by fulfilling the needs of government entities for long-range planning, securing funding, and analyzing and providing data in support of regional projects and initiatives. *The Region 1 Planning Council provides staff support to the Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board.*

**ABOUT WCCMHB** – The [Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board](#) (WCCMHB) is a board of appointed community leaders and public officials dedicated to investing and supporting mental health and substance use services for adults and children in Winnebago County. WCCMHB receives funding through a half-cent sales tax which was approved by Winnebago County residents in March 2020. This sales tax generates approximately \$18 million annually for mental health and substance use services across the county. WCCMHB positively impacts the Winnebago County community by increasing access to local services by providing support and funding to organizations, non-profits, and government agencies that offer mental health and substance use services. This allows Winnebago County residents to live and recover in the community.

# #