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**A MESSAGE FROM  
HEALTHFIRST CEO,  
DR. JESSICA SCHARFENBERG:**

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As many of our clients and followers know, Healthfirst Network leaders continually look for ways to reduce the burden and health disparities that our clients face. We took one significant step in March of 2022 when we added a social worker to our model of care.

Throughout the past 17 months, our social worker has helped our clients navigate a very complex medical and social system. However, one gap became apparent early on – access to mental health services. After further research and review, it has been identified that there is a 46% treatment gap for those living with mental illness and receiving treatment in our service area. Our social worker has been facing this stark reality with our clients daily.

In early 2023 we sat down to discuss how to fill this gap as an organization. From those initial conversations, one definition from the World Health Organization continues to resonate with me: Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes during all stages of life. As I reflected, I saw the infrastructure we have built to ensure our clients' physical and social well-being. However, I could also see our and the community's gap in services related to the mental well-being of our clients. At that point, pen went to paper to create a proposal to address that gap.

What started as that proposal is now an action plan coming to life! Healthfirst Network is expanding our service line and physical location in Wausau to accommodate the addition of mental health counseling services. We are beyond excited to be able to soon offer these much needed services onsite for our clients and community. We also have immense gratitude for the fiscal support from the Healthfirst Board of Directors, The Community Foundation of Northcentral Wisconsin, The B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation, and an anonymous donor who are helping make the physical expansion a reality! In Mid-September, we will be breaking ground with Scherrer Construction at the helm with an early 2024 completion date.

We are overjoyed to work towards fulfilling our mission and core values with this addition of services.

Affordability—Accessibility—Innovation—Evidence Based—High Quality—Empathetic Care

Jessie Scharfenberg, DBA, MPH, BSN-RN  
Healthfirst Network CEO