FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WILDERNESS HEALTH RECEIVES RURAL HEALTH NETWORK DEVELOPMENT GRANT FROM HRSA FOR TELEHEALTH MENTAL HEALTH DEVELOPMENT**

Two Harbors, MN (June 25, 2020) – Wilderness Health is pleased to announce it has received a $771,767 grant from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). These funds will support the development of a telehealth program across the 10 health system network, starting with mental health services.

The grant funds will be used to develop capacity and infrastructure to provide telehealth services across the Wilderness Health network, including the addition of a dedicated program manager, equipment, and training resources. Successful implementation will enable our members to provide increased access to necessary care, starting with critical mental health services, where the wait time to see a provider can sometimes be several months. This program will allow patients who live in remote areas to access care without having to travel long distances. The addition of telehealth services will also benefit primary care providers by pairing them with specialists for treatment consults as well as medication management assistance.

According to Cassandra Beardsley, Wilderness Health Executive Director, “The network has been working on improving access to mental health resources in our region for several years and had identified expansion of telehealth capacity as a crucial need in our strategic plan. Our entire region has a shortage of mental health resources. This grant funding will enable us to expand capacity and bring services to more patients. The explosion of telehealth services during the pandemic has only highlighted that these services are valuable, yet we still have much work to do to enhance mental health services.”

The anticipated outcomes of the planned telehealth program include: increasing the ability to recruit providers and staff, increasing access to mental health resources, increasing the ability to provide services locally, reducing patient barriers to care, and ultimately, improving patient health outcomes. Telehealth offers the opportunity to maximize the productivity of providers and to increase access to services in our region.

Greg Ruberg, Wilderness Health Board Chair and CEO, Lake View Hospital: “The HRSA grant will help to support Wilderness Health in leveraging the strong partnership of its 10 hospital members in Northeastern Minnesota to improve access to high-quality health care across the region. Our goal is to provide convenient access to innovative and cost-effective care delivery models, such as telehealth, to best serve patients in their own communities. Wilderness Health has made a commitment to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health care and to improve access to these vital services though this telehealth network.”

Dr. Gretchen Karstens, Wilderness Health Medical Director and Pediatrician at St. Luke’s Pediatric Associates, agrees: “The opportunity this grant offers to our communities is for improved access to care, especially mental health care. Missing work or pulling our kids from school for the drive to and from distant appointments is an additional burden to accessing health care for many patients in our region. This grant allows appointments from your home or other locations. Increased availability for health care without some of our classic barriers to healthcare delivery will improve the health of our region.”

HRSA awards annual grants through a competitive application and review process.

***About your organization***

Wilderness Health is a non-profit collaborative of independent providers working together to improve health care in Northeastern Minnesota. Headquartered in Two Harbors since 2013, Wilderness Health brings smart strategies, such as shared services, quality improvement, and accountable care organizations, to Minnesota’s rural health care systems.

Members of Wilderness Health include:

Bigfork Valley Hospital, Bigfork Community Memorial Hospital, Cloquet

Cook Hospital, Cook Ely Bloomenson Hospital, Ely

Fairview Range Hospital, Hibbing Grand Itasca, Grand Rapids

Lake View, Two Harbors North Shore Health, Grand Marais

Rainy Lake Medical Center, International Falls St. Luke’s, Duluth

***About HRSA***

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the primary federal agency for improving health care to people who are geographically isolated, economically or medically vulnerable.

HRSA programs help those in need of high quality primary health care, people with HIV/AIDS, pregnant women, and mothers. HRSA also supports the training of health professionals, the distribution of providers to areas where they are needed most and improvements in health care delivery.