

A portrait of Nadine Bean, a woman with short blonde hair and purple-rimmed glasses, smiling. She is wearing a dark blue blazer over a light blue top and a black beaded necklace. The background is blurred, showing other people in a professional setting.

Nadine
Bean

First 15 Students Selected for \$1.6 Million HRSA-Funded Integrated Health Project

Over the next four years, 100 students from WCU's departments of Graduate Social Work and Counselor Education, specifically School Counseling, will each receive a \$10,000 stipend to support their education and training in settings that integrate primary health care and behavioral health care.

Funding is provided through a \$1.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) awarded to Nadine Bean, master of social work professor. The project aims to expand the number of social work and school counseling professionals who can deliver integrated behavioral health services to people in vulnerable and medically underserved populations in southeastern Pennsylvania, Camden, NJ, and Wilmington, DE.

"We are developing leaders within an integrated framework and strengthening partnerships in the community," says Bean. The key is interprofessional education training with faculty from WCU's nutrition, health, and nursing departments in addition to those from the MSW and M.Ed. School Counseling programs. Field supervisors and community partners are invited to these trainings and provided free continuing education units.

As advocates for patients/clients and families, social workers and school counselors are trained in integrated behavioral health and are ready to collaborate and provide leadership in the interprofessional collaborative care (IPC) model. IPC leads

to better outcomes for clients and supports cost containment, notes the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), by addressing an individual's health needs holistically: from access and diagnosis to support services and culturally competent care. Bean explains using food insecurity as one example. "It's been proven that flora in the gut can affect mental health. It's important to ask the client — and for the primary care provider to ask them — for example, 'How far is it to your grocery store? How difficult is it for you to get there?'"

"IPC provides the 'warm hand-off' from one health professional to another that patients need," says Bean. Plus, new CSWE standards require students to have interprofessional classroom and experiential training.

The first 15 students, all in their final year of field placement, are now serving at regional hospitals, schools, substance use disorder treatment centers, and other area community health partners. Each contributes 1,000 hours of community placement. The MSW program has more than 25 such affiliation agreements, ensuring sustainability for the program. The M.Ed. School Counseling program has agreements with a number of Title I school districts.

HRSA is the primary federal agency for improving health care to people who are geographically isolated, economically or medically vulnerable.