



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Kirsten L. Johnson, Secretary

October 16, 2023

Governor Tony Evers
Office of the Governor
115 East, State Capitol Building
Madison, WI 53702

Members of the Wisconsin Legislature
State Capitol Building
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers and Legislators:

I am pleased to submit to you the Department of Health Services biennial report as required by Wis. Stat. s. 15.04(1)(d).

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Johnson".

Kirsten L. Johnson
Secretary-designee

State of Wisconsin
2021-2023 Biennial Report

Publication required by Wis. Stat. § 15.04(1)(d)



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of **HEALTH SERVICES**

Department Overview

The Department of Health Services (DHS) is one of the largest state agencies in Wisconsin, with an annual budget of roughly \$16.8 billion and more than 6,500 employees. DHS is committed to protecting and promoting the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin, enabling everyone to live their best life.

DHS oversees Medicaid, the single largest program in the state budget, and other health and human service programs. DHS works with local and tribal health departments, health care providers, community partners, and others to provide alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, mental health, public health, implementation of long-term care, disability determination, regulation of state nursing homes, and numerous other programs that aid and protect Wisconsinites. DHS also oversees seven 24/7 institutions: three centers for individuals with intellectual disabilities; a facility for people with a mental illness and involvement with the criminal justice system; a facility that cares for individuals living with challenging behaviors and complex psychiatric conditions; a facility that provides specialized treatment to people referred from the Department of Corrections; and a facility for people committed under Wisconsin's sexually violent persons' law. DHS ensures that the care provided to Wisconsin residents is in accordance with state and federal law and ensures that Wisconsin taxpayer dollars are used effectively and efficiently by implementing evidence-informed programs and by preventing and detecting waste, fraud, and abuse; and works to promote strong health outcomes and innovation.

DHS has ten Divisions and Offices that work to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin, ensuring everyone lives their best life.

The *Office of the Secretary* leads DHS and contains the Executive Team, Communications Team, Director of Opioid Initiatives, Area Administration and Tribal Affairs.

The *Office of Health Equity* works to help address health disparities and promote a culture of inclusion where all Wisconsinites are able to thrive and be engaged.

The *Office of the Inspector General* protects Wisconsin taxpayers by preventing and detecting waste, fraud, and abuse of public assistance programs.

The *Office of Legal Counsel* provides legal services and advice to DHS.

The *Office of Policy Initiatives and Budget* provides departmentwide budgeting and policy and research services.

The *Division of Enterprise Services (DES)* oversees financial management, information systems and technology, procurement, and facilities management..

The *Division of Care and Treatment Services (DCTS)* manages and supports seven care and treatment facilities, community mental health and substance use services, community forensic

treatment services, and the protection of client rights for individuals receiving services for intellectual disabilities, mental health, and substance use.

The *Division of Medicaid Services (DMS)* manages Wisconsin's Medicaid and FoodShare programs and provides access to health care, long-term care, and nutritional assistance for individuals and families who are elderly, disabled, or have low income.

The *Division of Public Health (DPH)* is responsible for oversight and funding of public health services to the people of Wisconsin.

The *Division of Quality Assurance (DQA)* is responsible for regulating and licensing more than 40 different programs, facilities, and caregivers that provide health and residential care.

Our Vision

Everyone living their best life.

Our Mission

To protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin.

Our Values

- Focus on the needs of the people we serve
- Foster independence
- Address health disparities
- Value our colleagues and recognize excellence
- Encourage innovation and critical thinking
- Collaborate with our partners
- Manage public resources responsibly

Department of Health Services Accomplishments 2021-2023

Everyone Living Their Best Life WI

At the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), we impact every Wisconsinite with our work. Promoting health and wellness, improving access to health services, protecting patients, and navigating the pandemic and the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency guided our work in 2021-2023. In the second half of 2021 through 2022, DHS oversaw the latter stages of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, including recommended booster doses for all Wisconsinites 6 months old and older.

Promoting the Health of Wisconsinites During COVID-19

Vaccine Program

As the supply of vaccine increased and eligibility expanded to different populations, we built our capacity for getting vaccines to people through community clinics, pharmacies, hospitals, and clinics. We helped implement and improve technology systems for vaccine registration, testing registration and results, and exposure notification systems that helped deliver approximately 11 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine shots in Wisconsin since the beginning of the pandemic. We assisted in managing two call centers that answered more than 250,000 calls and helped lead the vaccine incentive program that encouraged over 140,000 Wisconsinites over a one-month period to get their vaccine.

COVID-19 Support Transition - Vaccination Call Center Consolidation

The massive rollout of call center support services during the pandemic transitioned to a consolidation of these existing supports into a successful new model. To do this, we partnered with the Wisconsin COVID-19 Vaccine Registry (WCVR) provider support team and Wisconsin 211. Under the direction of DHS' chief information officer (CIO), the agency successfully transitioned support of the public-facing call center from a vendor (TTEC) to the WCVR provider support team.

In-Home Vaccination Services

In 2021, Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) and Tribal Aging and Disability Resource Specialist (ADRS) partners were enlisted in a statewide effort to vaccinate individuals who faced barriers to vaccine access due to mobility concerns, disability, high risk health conditions, or caregiving responsibilities. ADRCs played a crucial role in developing partnerships with local providers, conducting public outreach and education, identifying people in need, and assisting with registration, scheduling and coordination of appointments. They distributed registration forms to home-delivered meal program participants, conducted targeted wellness check-in calls to identify potential access issues, provided hands-on registration assistance to people who lacked internet access; offered free shared ride service; and provided transportation vouchers to lower income individuals.

Statewide Multimedia Campaigns

The You Stop the Spread campaign relaunched in May 2021 to promote the COVID-19 vaccine and was updated in August 2021 to promote vaccine and safety measures for children in schools. The updated messaging built off the success of the first iteration of You Stop the Spread,

delivering more than 584 million impressions and 38 million digital video completions in 2021. In total, each Wisconsinite saw a You Stop the Spread ad over 100 times throughout the campaign.

The Our Doctors campaign brought together health care professionals across Wisconsin from different health systems and specialties to share their confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines. It encouraged Wisconsinites who had questions about vaccines to start a conversation with their own family doctor about the COVID-19 vaccines. This also included messaging for parents to talk to their child's doctor about the COVID-19 vaccine for kids. Our Doctors ads were integral to reach and engage with audiences in areas of the state where vaccination rates were lowest. From July 12-December 31, 2021, Our Doctors messaging delivered 173 million impressions with 405,000 clicks to the DHS website – the highest engagement rate of any of the messaging tactics in You Stop the Spread. Apart from the numbers, DHS heard stories from campaign participants of Wisconsinites in their communities who got the COVID-19 vaccine after seeing an Our Doctors ad.

Transition Back to Normal Operations

Following the federal government's announcement of the May 11, 2023, end to the COVID-19 public health emergency, DHS laid out its plans for continued monitoring of COVID-19. COVID-19 prevention and precaution remained a priority as response programs transitioned. As part of that effort, DHS was able to consolidate many of the reporting metrics that were no longer relevant due to the widespread use of at-home testing or no longer being reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including daily case counts and percent positivity. DHS will continue to monitor and report hospital and wastewater metrics as they remain strong indicators of COVID-19 activity and severity in communities.

Addressing Health Care Workforce Shortages

Wisconsin's health care workforce challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. From short-term programs to help handle surges in virus activity to long-term solutions to promote staffing across all health care sectors, DHS continues to innovate and invest in the state's health workforce.

Supporting our Health Care System During the COVID-19 Surge

Staffing Contracts

Since October 2021, DHS and Wisconsin's hospitals and long-term care providers have invested more than \$100 million to work with staffing agencies to recruit 1,180 nurses, nursing assistants, and other types of health care workers to support 155 health and residential care facilities like hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities across the state. As COVID-19 cases began to stabilize, DHS reached a point where it did not have to accept new staffing requests. DHS continued to work with facilities that already had a staffing contract in place with DHS to recruit temporary staff as needed.

CNA Training for National Guard Members

To help mitigate staffing shortages at Wisconsin's hospitals and nursing homes during a surge in COVID-19 cases due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant, DHS, in collaboration with the Evers Administration, Madison College, and the Wisconsin National Guard, helped 154

Wisconsin National Guard members complete certified nursing assistant (CNA) training. This initiative was intended to bring needed short-term staffing support to Wisconsin's hospitals and nursing homes. As of March 2022, 226 beds had been opened at 17 nursing homes, while six additional nursing homes prepared to receive National Guard placements.

WisCaregiver Careers

DHS and Governor Evers announced the expansion of the WisCaregiver Careers program in July 2022. The expanded program will train more certified nursing aides to support Wisconsinites living in nursing homes. WisCaregiver Careers expanded again in August 2023 using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to offer a free online program to train and certify direct caregiver professionals supporting home and community-based care.

Health Service Staff in K-12 Schools

DHS invested \$8.3 million to support K-12 school health service staff in Wisconsin schools. School nurses and health staff play an essential role in the well-being of children in Wisconsin. This first-of-its-kind funding will support hiring and retention for school nurses and health staff in K-12 schools and provide funding for school nurses to pursue wellness activities and professional development. In addition to supporting the current workforce, this funding creates pipelines to support the education of future school nurses in partnership with the University of Wisconsin—Madison, School of Nursing.

Public Health Workforce

In December 2022, DHS was awarded a \$45 million grant to assess the statewide public health system to help build a stronger public health workforce through retention, recruitment, and training efforts. The five-year investment will help to strengthen the foundation of public health in Wisconsin by supporting a robust assessment of the state's multi-layered public health system to evaluate the system-wide structure, including staffing levels, capacity, and workforce well-being. In addition, the funding will support strategies to recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse public health workforce at the state, local, and Tribal levels, including efforts to support recruitment pipelines, strengthen diversity and wellbeing of existing workers, and provide ongoing training in core competencies to the workforce.

Medicaid Rate Increases

The people who work in and lead Wisconsin's nursing homes are critical to ensuring quality care for residents across the state. The 2021-23 biennial budget included a significant Medicaid rate increase for nursing homes to help providers continue meeting the needs of skilled care residents and support staff who are essential in meeting those needs.

Supporting Wisconsin's Most Vulnerable Residents Through the End of COVID-19 PHE

Food Assistance for Pre-School and School-Aged Children and Their Families

DHS, in partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, took on new responsibilities implementing the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer, or P-EBT, Program. Created by Congress, P-EBT was designed to help children who were unable to get their free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program when they were learning from home

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Congress then expanded the program in 2021 to also help FoodShare families with children under the age of six and not in school yet. DHS provided nearly \$860 million in food benefits to vulnerable households across Wisconsin through P-EBT between March 2020 and the summer of 2023.

FoodShare

During the pandemic, we provided emergency benefits that brought all FoodShare households up to the maximum benefit amount they could receive in a month or provided an extra \$95, whichever was more.

FoodShare has been a lifeline to safe and nutritious food for almost 700,000 Wisconsinites during the pandemic. Wisconsin was awarded funding of about \$4.6 million and \$8.5 million in federal fiscal years 2021 (October 1, 2020-September 30, 2021) and 2022 (October 1, 2021-September 30, 2022) through ARPA for FoodShare administration.

Elder Nutrition Program

As nutrition programs continued to respond and recover from COVID-19, congregating dining locations for seniors reopened. Approximately 35% of Wisconsin's dining locations had reopened for congregating meal services in the final quarter of 2021. Eighty-three percent of Wisconsin's nutrition programs continued to provide carryout meals throughout 2021. In calendar year 2021, Wisconsin's Elder Nutrition Program served 3,029,750 home-delivered meals, 561,907 carryout meals, and 210,611 congregating meals to approximately 56,000 older adults.

ARPA Home and Community-Based Services

DHS has been working on a range of projects for home and community-based services (HCBS) to support Wisconsinites who are elderly or have a disability receive services that allow them to live as healthily and independently as possible. Funded by over \$400 million through ARPA these projects focus on making changes and improvements that address the needs and priorities of members of programs like Family Care, IRIS (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct) and Children's Long-Term Support. DHS is also using the funding to improve Wisconsin Medicaid services like personal care, private duty nursing, home health, and habilitative services.

DHS awarded 158 grants to organizations to support innovation and enhancement to the state's HCBS programs. Awardees represent Wisconsin's urban and rural areas and support diverse organizations and populations. Funded projects reflect a variety of ways to positively impact Medicaid program members and participants, direct care workers, families of individuals receiving services, HCBS providers, and more. A dashboard with information about the projects and posts featuring a range of success stories are available on the DHS website.

Women, Infants, and Children Program

During the 2021 – 2023 biennium, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program continued to support our local WIC agencies who provided nutrition services and issued food benefits remotely.

The Wisconsin WIC program provided nutrition education, access to healthy foods, referral services and breastfeeding support for a monthly average of over 87,000 participants in 2021,

83,000 participants in 2022, and over 87,000 participants again in 2023. The program has seen a steady month over month increase in participation in the second half of SFY 2023, and we expect this to continue through SFY 2024. Participation has increased across categories, with a monthly average of over 17,500 pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding participants, over 18,500 infants, and over 51,000 children receiving services from WIC in SFY 2023. The largest increase in monthly participation has been in children, with a 5% increase from SFY 2022 to 2023.

The WIC program also responded to the challenges of the Abbott formula recall and formula shortage in 2022. There were over 14,000 infants in the Wisconsin WIC program who were affected by the formula recall. WIC responded by providing breastfeeding support and expanding formula options available to WIC families.

The WIC program implemented an increase in Farmers Market Nutrition Program benefits. The allocation of these checks transitioned from a family issuance to individual, providing families with the opportunity to receive more to spend at farmers' markets across the state. WIC families purchased \$582,000 worth of produce from 1,150 farmers who sold at 225 farmer's markets and 300 farm stands throughout Wisconsin.

The WIC program also completed the implementation and evaluation of the breastfeeding support "Learn Together. Grow Together." social marketing campaign in cooperation with the University of Nevada, Reno and Creative Marketing Services, Inc. Funding for this was provided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service. The campaign achieved the grant goals of promoting and supporting breastfeeding to build a supportive environment as part of the nutrition education offered to program participants.

ARPA funded the temporary increase of the cash value benefit for fruits and vegetables in late SFY 2021, and through 2022 and 2023 which allowed WIC families to purchase over three times the amount of fruits and vegetables usually purchased without this expansion. In SFY 2023 WIC families purchased about \$1.4 million dollars of fruits and vegetables per month at local groceries. These enhancements to the WIC program increased access to healthy fruits and vegetables for Wisconsin families and increased sales for Wisconsin grocers and farmers.

Also in 2021, the WIC program was awarded the Tufts University Telehealth Intervention Strategies for WIC grant to implement and evaluate the use of an online education platform for engagement and accessible nutrition education. The online platform called Online Nutrition Education (ONE) was implemented at 11 agencies in 2022 and 2023, and feedback was received from WIC agency staff as well as participants through surveys and key informant interviews. The analysis of results continues through 2024. Results from the study will be used to reduce barriers and enhance the quality of nutrition education for WIC participants.

[Supporting Resettlement of Afghanistan Evacuees](#)

In Fall 2021, approximately 13,000 Afghan evacuees temporarily resided at Fort McCoy, an army base near Tomah, Wisconsin. On base, DHS along with other state agencies, and U.S. Department of State worked with local health departments, health care facilities, and federal partners to investigate disease outbreaks, ensure guests received medical and dental care, help guests obtain necessary vital records, and enroll guests in benefits. All evacuees residing at Fort McCoy were offered vaccinations against measles and other communicable diseases, including

COVID-19. Adopting preventive health measures such as vaccination, helped maintain low disease transmission rates on base and improved the quality of life for Afghan individuals in the short- and long-term. Widespread vaccination at the base also prevented the spread of measles and other communicable diseases to surrounding communities.

No Wrong Door System Business Case Development Grant: ADRC Return on Investment and Options Counseling Standards

In September 2021, the Office for Resource Center Development wrapped up a three-year \$2.4 million project funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL). The project supported improvements in:

- **Long-Term Care Options Counseling Standards:** The grant supported the development of robust training and tools for use by ADRC options counselors; and customer survey data collected during the project indicates that implementation of these staff supports has had a positive impact on ADRC customers' confidence in their ability to make informed decisions and to continue living independently in their own homes.
- **ADRC Return on Investment.** The grant also supports in-depth analysis of Medicare, Medicaid and ADRC data in order to better understand how ADRCs can positively impact customer outcomes. The data show that ADRC customers have a 22% reduction in 30-day hospital readmissions and a 2% reduction in emergency room visits. And the reduced health care needs translate to a significant return on investment.

Mpox Response

Amid managing COVID-19 operations, another virus began circulating in the U.S. On June 30, 2022, DHS identified the first confirmed case of mpox in a Wisconsin resident. On July 11, an incident management team was initiated to help streamline communications, therapeutics, and vaccine distribution. DHS worked throughout the mpox response (May-October 2022) to determine the health risks of the mpox virus and communicated these to health providers and the public. As the outbreak progressed, there was evidence of a distinct effect of the virus on the LGBTQ+ community and significant racial and ethnic differences in disease transmission.

Outreach was conducted to seven sites which provide HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis and testing for sexually transmitted infections and primarily service the populations most impacted by mpox. This outreach was done to share mpox related communications with staff and providers at the agencies. These sites were also used as vital spokes in the subsequent vaccine distribution effort. The therapeutic Tecovirimat (also known as ST-246 or TPOXX) was utilized during the response to minimize the symptoms of the mpox virus. DHS made TPOXX available at several pharmacies so Wisconsin residents could quickly access it. DHS utilized the pre-existing COVID hub and spoke model to distribute the JYNNEOS vaccine quickly. As of October 24, 2022, 4,306 Wisconsinites had received at least one dose of the JYNNEOS vaccine and 7,126 doses of JYNNEOS had been administered.

Medicaid Unwinding

When Congress passed a law early in the pandemic requiring states to maintain continuous coverage for Medicaid members, DHS put temporary rules in place so members of BadgerCare Plus and Wisconsin Medicaid programs maintained their health care benefits and services. To

support social distancing, we streamlined eligibility processes so people did not have to put themselves at risk to submit their required information to obtain coverage.

At the end of the continuous coverage period, Wisconsin's Medicaid programs were covering acute and/or long-term care for more than 1.6 million people – or roughly 1 in 4 Wisconsinites. Between June 2023 and May 2024, all members need to renew if they wish to continue in their current state health care program.

DHS continues to work extensively with community-based organizations, local and Tribal income maintenance agencies, health plans, and health care providers across the state to raise awareness of this process, provide help to members as they renew, and find out their options if they're no longer eligible. Our goal is always to keep the people of Wisconsin covered, whether through one of our state programs if they're eligible, through employer-sponsored insurance, or through one of the options available through the marketplace at HealthCare.gov.

Expanding Health Care Eligibility and Access

Telehealth Expansion

We quickly changed Medicaid telehealth policies at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure Wisconsinites could deliver and receive safe, effective, high quality health care services remotely to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Most of the changes implemented as part of the pandemic response have already been made permanent, transforming telehealth delivery from a special service into an innovative standard of care. These changes have increased access, equity, choice, and safety for providers and vulnerable populations.

Support for Broadband

High-speed, affordable internet is critical to our goal of fostering healthy communities, addressing health disparities, ensuring access to health care, and helping everyone in Wisconsin live their best lives. People in Wisconsin use the internet to access health education materials, connect with health care providers, and manage their health and nutrition benefits. For older adults and people with disabilities, access to broadband helps them stay safe, live independently by using assistive technology, and keep in touch with loved ones and caregivers. We continue to support the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin's broadband expansion efforts to ensure access to high-speed and affordable internet and how it can promote better health for the people in our state.

Access to Affordable Health Insurance

Having health insurance is critical to the health and wellbeing of all Wisconsinites – not just during a pandemic, but all the time. In 2021, DHS announced \$2 million in funding for Covering Wisconsin, a federally certified, state-licensed navigator agency based out of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, that provides free education and enrollment support for anyone looking for health care coverage. Covering Wisconsin has years of experience helping Wisconsinites secure health insurance coverage, seek timely care, and navigate the health care system, with a focus on communities most at risk. The funding provided by DHS, made available through ARPA, supports outreach and awareness efforts; expands enrollment assistance services; enhances efforts to reach underserved and vulnerable populations with the information they need; and creates easy-to-understand materials.

Investing in EMS Health Care Access

Wisconsin's emergency medical services responders are among the first on the scene of medical emergencies and provide consistent, high-quality services when they are needed most. Local communities, especially in the state's rural areas, have historically struggled to secure the resources necessary to provide these crucial services. In June 2022, DHS opened up requests for applications for \$12 million in EMS Flex Grant funding alongside an additional \$22 million investment toward emergency response in Wisconsin. Funds were available to cover reasonable operating expenses for EMS and all EMS providers licensed in Wisconsin were eligible to request funding. There are 791 Wisconsin-based EMS services and over 16,000 licensed providers delivering pre-hospital emergency medical care statewide. Over 450 EMS services that are solely volunteer or operating with a combination of volunteers, part-time, and full-time staff.

As of 2023, 442 Wisconsin licensed emergency medical services throughout the state have been awarded grants through the program. Due to an overwhelming number of requests submitted, the total amount available was increased from \$12 million to \$32 million.

Children's Health Insurance Program Housing Support Initiative

Research shows that stable housing is a crucial factor in health, and that health in childhood sets the foundation for positive life-long outcomes. Connecting families with supportive housing services not only helps them in the short term but is a proactive measure that can build a better future for Wisconsin children. In Fall 2022, DHS received approval from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to provide housing support for low-income Wisconsin families in need, making Wisconsin the first state to implement this type of housing benefit with CHIP funds. In June 2023, grants were awarded to homeless assistance providers who will offer a set of supportive housing services, including housing consultation, transition supports, sustaining supports, and relocation supports.

Increasing Access to Dental Care

Lack of access to dental health services impacts people throughout their life. In Wisconsin, 1 in 5 children and nearly 1 in 3 adults with low income have untreated tooth decay. In 2021, only 1 in 3 Wisconsin Medicaid members ages 3-20 received a preventive dental service and, in that same year, 7 out of 10 Medicaid members did not receive any dental care. DHS awarded \$5.1 million in grants to 14 nonprofit dental clinics in 2023 to increase access to dental care in Wisconsin. By making it easier for dental health providers to serve more Medicaid and uninsured patients, DHS aims to address a critical disparity. As a result of this funding, nonprofit dental clinics will be able to serve 7,000 more patients over the three-year period, including more than 4,700 Medicaid and BadgerCare Plus patients and more than 2,700 patients who have low income or are uninsured.

Data and Information Technology (IT)

DHS saw a continued commitment to the agency's data strategy program, strengthening initiatives related to improving data literacy, strengthening data protections, and compiling an application inventory, which is key to our ongoing IT Disaster Recovery project. Additionally, we initiated public health data modernization to optimize our data systems and promote interoperability, in alignment with federal goals related to improving public health infrastructure.

Regarding the following statutory reports, DHS:

- Completed the semiannual reporting of the large, high-risk IT projects.
- Finalized the annual IT strategic plan report of proposed and active SFY 24 projects.
- Prepared the report to the legislature on data processing projects for 2022.

Making Forms More Accessible

DHS implemented AccessGov, a software-as-a-service product that is available for agency-wide use for the development and hosting of accessible agency forms. DHS manages nearly 8,000 forms and this tool helps support the creation and distribution for collecting data electronically.

Milwaukee Enrollment Service (MiES) Move

In November 2022, the Milwaukee Enrollment Services moved from their location at 1220 W. Vliet St. to 6055 N 64th St. The new location is a 56,000 square foot converted warehouse space that includes a comprehensive customer service area as well as office, training, and conference space for staff. Some key features include:

- A build out of 13 conference rooms at the new location for in-person and hybrid meetings.
- Access to self-service phones with automatic dialing in workstations.
- Ensuring the Qflow (a check-in system for customers) monitors were successfully reinstalled in customer areas for easy viewing and use.

The move allows DHS to provide optimum customer service to our clients and partners in a pleasant and updated environment.

Charting the Course of Health in Wisconsin

State Health Improvement Plan

Public health activities lay the groundwork for healthy communities. They protect us from diseases and injury we cannot prevent alone and help us change behaviors harmful to our health. In early 2023, DHS released its 2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan. This five-year roadmap for improving health and well-being for all Wisconsinites summarizes priority areas to guide action, alignment, and collaboration across the state’s public health system and local partners, plans, and initiatives. The plan was developed through an extensive process that involved input of local and Tribal health departments, state agencies, health care organizations, and community-based organizations and individuals. It introduces three foundational shifts in the way Wisconsin does the work of public health, and five priority areas Wisconsinites are facing to achieve optimal health. The foundational shifts include institutional and systemic fairness, representation and access to decision making, and community-centered resources and services, along with the following five priority areas:

- Social and community conditions, including economic well-being, supportive systems of dependent care, and healthy housing
- Physical, mental, and systemic safety
- Person and community-centered health care
- Social connectedness and belonging
- Mental and emotional health and well-being

Improving Water Quality

Working to make Wisconsin water clean, safe, and healthy for all is a top priority of Governor Evers and DHS. Since our Division of Public Health scientists completed their review of 40 substances that have been or may be found in Wisconsin's groundwater in 2020, we have been working to apply the recommendations that resulted from that review to help public water systems, private well owners, and water consumers interpret test results and make sound public health decisions based on these findings. This has been particularly important for the set of substances known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), for which DHS developed a hazard index that provides simple guidance to determine the significance of PFAS contamination when multiple PFAS chemicals are identified in a water source. DHS has also been working with DNR and DATCP to provide support to the rulemaking efforts that lead to the promulgation of these recommendations as groundwater enforcement standards.

Preventing Lead Poisoning

As part of Governor Evers' lead poisoning prevention initiative, the Lead-Safe Homes Program was established to assist Wisconsin families with addressing lead hazards in the home by providing services to eliminate or control for homes built before 1978. Over the last two years, the program has allocated \$25.5 million to fund 42 local agencies and organizations to support program efforts. This includes the training of 248 people to perform lead investigations and abatement services and completing lead hazard reduction work on 252 homes and protecting 656 children from the irreversible damage of lead poisoning. Staff visited program-funded lead abatement projects to highlight the collaboration between local government, community partners, and businesses to prevent childhood lead poisoning in their communities.

During this period, the Lead-in-Water Testing and Remediation Initiative was established to assist Wisconsin's licensed group childcare facilities and Head Start programs with testing for and fixing lead-in-water hazards. The program has completed sampling in 281 childcare centers in 31 jurisdictions around the state, impacting 17,000 children. The program encourages strong collaboration between local public health departments and their childcare facilities, supports local communities by employing local plumbing companies for replacement projects, and facilitates cooperations between state government, local government, and our communities.

Promoting Immunizations

Immunizations are an effective prevention tool against many diseases, and data showed many children fell behind in routine vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coverage rates for vaccines such as MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) and DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis) fell approximately 3-5% as measured for children 24 months of age over the period of the pandemic. While vaccines for teens were also adversely affected, the initiation and completion of the HPV (Human Papillomavirus Vaccine) continued to slowly increase. Continued efforts by partners across the state highlighted the importance of vaccination and rates are slowly levelling off.

Climate and Health Program

The Wisconsin Climate and Health Program has pursued innovative strategies to reduce health impacts from extreme heat and flooding, and to enhance local climate change resilience across the state. The CDC awarded us an additional five years of funding in 2021 to continue implementing and evaluating climate change adaptation strategies—including adaptations with

mitigation co-benefits— to improve public health outcomes and address systemic health disparities exacerbated by climate change. The program has developed climate change planning tools, such as the flood resilience scorecard, that can be implemented at all levels of government. The program is also working on initiatives to improve health outcomes during heat waves and periods of unsafe air quality with community-based partners, focusing on school and community involvement, and risk communication and education. Finally, the program is co-leading a statewide climate and health community awareness and engagement initiative with a large, diverse group of partners serving local communities across the state.

Investing in Behavioral Health

In July 2022, DHS announced the opening of the newest state-funded drop-in center offering support to adults experiencing mental health concerns. Kaleidoscope Center is managed by the Wisconsin Milkweed Alliance, which received a \$30,000 peer recovery center grant from DHS in summer 2021.

Governor Evers and DHS awarded more than \$2.5 million to 27 providers for community behavioral health services that will provide access to mental health and substance use treatment and recovery supports through telehealth.

DHS marked the 50 years since a team of clinicians at today's Mendota Mental Health Institute on Madison's north side opened the Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) in a house in downtown Madison. This would be the beginning of the world's first community-based mental health treatment service.

2023: The Year of Mental Health

Following Governor Evers' declaration that 2023 is the Year of Mental Health, DHS announced a year-long multimedia campaign to ensure all state residents know about the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a free and confidential service to support people experiencing a suicidal, mental health, or substance use crisis. The service marked its first anniversary in July 2023, receiving 91,834 contacts for mental health and substance use support in the first year of operation.

Opioid Settlement Funds and Substance Use Initiatives

On February 25, 2022, the Wisconsin Department of Justice announced final approval of an agreement with the nation's three major pharmaceutical distributors (Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen) as well as Johnson & Johnson. Payments from the distributors will continue for 18 years. Payments from Johnson & Johnson will continue for nine years.

Wisconsin is due to receive more than \$400 million in total funding. 2021 Wisconsin Act 57 requires that the 87 local governments that participated in this litigation receive 70 percent of the funds, with the state receiving 30 percent of the funds. This means that the local governments will share \$280 million and the state will receive \$120 million, as well as \$9.6 million in additional restitution.

Revised Rule: DHS 75

DHS 75 regulates community substance use services. From 2017 to 2021, we worked to revise the rule to contain modern language and standards for services. With a goal of supporting access to services throughout the state, the revised rule also eases requirements for providers in many

areas while maintaining safety and quality of care standards. More than a dozen training webinars and other meetings were held to support providers in their transition to the revised rule, which took effect in October 2022.

Hub and Spoke Health Homes for Substance Use Disorder

We are collaborating with three providers in different areas of the state (Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Minocqua) to pilot a new approach to treating eligible BadgerCare Plus and Medicaid members who have substance use disorders and at least one other health condition. These providers are using an innovative hub and spoke program design to expand beyond traditional substance use disorder treatment services. It includes providing integrated services that give eligible members rapid access to comprehensive addiction and mental health treatment, primary care, and other needed supports to assist their recovery. Providers are using a person-centered treatment approach to help members get and stay healthy.

Suicide Prevention

DHS did significant work to ensure a seamless transition from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. The new three-digit code allows all Wisconsinites to call, text, or chat and get free, confidential help for themselves or a loved one, and there have been nearly 5,000 contacts to the call center each month since the July 2022 transition.

Through a competitive bid process, DHS worked to ensure Wisconsin is one of just six states to receive the latest CDC grant funding that will be used to reduce deaths by suicide in our state. Strategies include establishing partnerships with groups involved in mental health and suicide prevention, while also engaging people with lived experience of suicide loss, attempts, and/or ideation.

Supporting Wisconsin Children's Mental Health

Birth to 3

The Birth to 3 Program is an early intervention program helping children under the age of three who have developmental delays or disabilities. DHS has directed supplemental Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding received through ARPA to support an infant mental health services pilot program focused on improving the social-emotional development of participating children and promoting equity in access and outcomes through culturally sensitive and responsive services. Funds are also supporting the personnel development of providers, along with stipends for Birth to 3 Program professionals to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health Infant, Early Childhood, and Family Mental Health Capstone Program, allowing them to build the skills needed for county professionals to be able to assist parents and young children who have experienced trauma and toxic stress.

Children's Long-term Support

The Children's Long-Term Support Program now includes a new health and wellness benefit that offers non-traditional or alternative medicine options supporting an overall healthy lifestyle and well-being. Examples include yoga, meditation, mindfulness, sound healing, traditional African based holistic services, Ayurveda, Chinese or Oriental medicine, Reiki, Tai Chi, Native American healers, and spiritual counseling. In addition, there is a new safety planning and prevention service prohibiting isolation, seclusion, and manual restraint in the program.

Children's System of Care

The Children's System of Care supports promoting wellness and empowers families to achieve their fullest potential. The new self-assessment tool assists Tribal Nations and counties in identifying the Wisconsin Children's System of Care principles that describe the strengths of existing services and supports that are locally available. It also identifies resources that typically exist in each Tribal Nation and county that can contribute to building a children's system of care.

Get Kids Ahead

Governor Evers and DHS are committed to improving the health and well-being of Wisconsin children by investing in children's mental and behavior health programs, including the Get Kids Ahead Initiative. Nearly every K-12 school in the state will be able to use a share of \$30 million to provide direct mental health care, hire and support mental health navigators, provide mental health first aid and trauma-based care training, or provide family assistance programs – whatever kids need.

Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center (MJTC)

Construction is underway on a \$65.9 million expansion and renovation of the MJTC that allows the facility to serve more boys, and for the first time, girls, with its one-of-a-kind rehabilitative programming. The expansion will open 50 new beds at MJTC, for a total of 93 beds, and provide staff and funding for 14 new beds in the center's existing space, helping young people at the deepest end of the youth justice system learn to accept responsibility for their actions, gain problem-solving skills, and build healthy relationships, all with the goal of helping them successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Pediatric Telepsychiatry

As we recover from the pandemic, Governor Evers has invested \$2.5 million in Pediatric Telepsychiatry, making telehealth services more accessible to Wisconsin children by removing location and technology barriers. Five organizations received one-year grants for \$500,000 in ARPA funding to support projects focused on the recruitment and retention of psychiatrists and other behavioral health providers and the deployment and maintenance of technology to connect the providers with patients through virtual visits.

The Wisconsin Child Psychiatry Consultation Program (WI CPCP)

WI CPCP is working to improve mental health care for children and adolescents with mental and behavioral health concerns. 1,794 participating providers across Wisconsin have access to expert consultation, continuing education, and referral resource support. The WI CPCP has provided 7,925 consults to the participating providers since program inception. With child and adolescent mental health remaining a top priority, the WI CPCP will continue to offer services to participating primary care providers. This program is funded by the state and by the Health Resources and Services Administration pediatric mental health care access grant.

Integrity in DHS Administered Programs

As state and federal funding increased to support the public health emergency, so did the presence of fraud, waste, and abuse in public assistance programs. In response, DHS has implemented a range of initiatives to prevent, identify, and investigate fraud.

FoodShare Program

DHS received two Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) fraud framework grants to help prevent, detect, and investigate FoodShare fraud. The 2022 grant awarded \$741,751 to develop a data analysis program to identify fraudulent and at-risk transactions. In 2023, the grant awarded \$662,689 to develop new electronic benefit transfer card features and cardholder education.

The state also became [authorized by FNS](#) to replace benefits stolen due to third party fraud using federal funds in 2023.

DHS investigated multiple instances of fraud including skimming fraud rings resulting in large out-of-state spending and recipient trafficking of benefits. Case highlights include:

- Milwaukee woman charged in ‘Judy Justice’ food stamp fraud case pleads not guilty (Source: [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#), 09/25/2023).
- Madison Store Owner Pleads Guilty to Illegally Buying FoodShare Benefits Cards, Gets Probation (Source: WI State Journal, [10/07/2022 Article](#))
- Milwaukee County Employee Sentenced for Fraud Scheme (Source: U.S. DOJ, [01/26/2021 Press Release](#))

Medicaid Program

DHS aided the Wisconsin Department of Justice – Medicaid Fraud Control Unit with multiple investigations and criminal convictions. Case highlights include:

- Precious Cruse, owner of Caring Through Love LLC, was indicted on 17 charges and \$700,000 in Health Care Fraud. (Source: U.S. Attorney’s Office – Eastern District; 08/16/2023).
- Markita Barnes, owner of Here For You PNCC, was indicted for \$2.3 Million in Health Care Fraud. (Source: U.S. Attorney’s Office – Eastern District; [06/22/2023 Press Release](#)).
- New Jersey Man and Company Operating Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities in Wisconsin Charged with Health Care Fraud (Source: U.S. DOJ, [02/02/2023 Press Release](#))
- Milwaukee Man Sentenced to Federal Prison for Conspiracy to Defraud Medicare and Medicaid (Source: U.S. DOJ, [11/21/2022 Press Release](#))
- Milwaukee Pharmacy Chain to Pay Over \$2 Million to Resolve Allegations It Violated the False Claims Act (Source: U.S. DOJ, [01/28/2022 Press Release](#))
- Brookfield Doctor Sentences to Eighteen Months’ Imprisonment for Drug Crimes (Source: U.S. DOJ, [11/03/2022 Press Release](#))

DHS also conducted post-payment audits to ensure proper documentation and identify improper payments in dental, durable medical equipment and disposable supplies, home-health, hospice, medical transportation, mental health, prenatal care coordination, prescriptions, therapy, and ventilators.

In April 2023, DHS launched a payment integrity review program to proactively review claims prior to payment to ensure federal and state requirements are met through proper payments.

DHS also developed numerous educational and technical assistance resources to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. Resources include fact sheets, technical assistance reports, and recorded training modules: [‘Overview of the OIG’](#) and [‘Provider Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in the Wisconsin Medicaid Program.’](#)

DHS designed an annual caregiver background check audit to identify ineligible caregivers, according to [DHS 105.17\(1n\)\(a\)3](#), rendering services to Medicaid beneficiaries and remove these caregivers from the program as deemed appropriate. Two annual audit cycles have been completed with the following findings:

- 2022 Audit: 72 agencies with 102 caregivers that had 42 criminal offenses.
- 2023 Audit: 70 agencies with 110 caregivers that had 49 criminal offenses.

Internal Audit

DHS designed and launched agency-wide enterprise risk management training and DHS staff resources to establish a risk management framework at DHS and manage risks across the organization and also launched DHS’ first agency-wide risk assessment.

Additionally, DHS updated and finalized our internal audit charter and completed multiple internal audits and investigations of DHS operations to assess programmatic weaknesses and develop recommendations.

Centering Equity

Supporting the Governor’s Health Equity Council

The Governor’s Health Equity Council began meeting in 2020. The council began the process of creating a comprehensive plan to achieve long-lasting and equitable health outcomes for all Wisconsinites with a specific focus on race, economic status, education level, history of incarceration, and geographic location. In May 2022, the council provided their final recommendations, putting forth a plan that will address upstream factors that drive health disparities in Wisconsin. Following the council’s approval of these recommendations, they released the full report in January 2023, which details the 20 recommendations adopted by the council.

Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council

Also established in 2021 was the Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (HEDI) Council. The council is made up of equity-driven individuals who work to provide analysis, insights, and recommendations on internal and external policies, programs, and projects related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and affirmative action. To ensure their work represents DHS, HEDI is made up of members from each agency division and office and includes members from outside of the agency who can bring their expertise and wealth of knowledge.

Maternal and Child Health

Wisconsin’s children are our future, and DHS is committed to supporting healthy birth outcomes and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in the state. A 2020 report found Wisconsin had the worst Black infant mortality rate in the U.S. among 36 states and the District of Columbia.

Infants born to Black mothers in Wisconsin are three times more likely not to survive before their first birthday as infants born to white mothers in the state, this inequity has been largely unchanged for decades. In 2022, DHS submitted a request to CMS for an additional 30 days of Medicaid coverage for women after pregnancy, increasing coverage from 60 to 90 days. This request was made in accordance with 2021 Wis. Act 58. That same year, DHS and Governor Evers announced \$16 million in grants to improve maternal and child health.

Reducing Disparities in Behavioral Health System

We know when people have access to a system that respects the whole person and addresses an individual's needs, beliefs, and preferences, they are empowered to create healthier outcomes for themselves and their communities. DHS is committed to meeting people where they are with respect, dignity, and understanding of cultural differences to meaningfully address the gaps in service. In February 2023, DHS announced \$1 million in grants to increase access to mental health and substance use care for underserved communities. Ten organizations were given \$100,000 to develop projects that build on the ability of behavioral health professionals to support people with diverse values and beliefs.

Equity in COVID-19 Vaccinations

Due to various social factors and systemic barriers, communities of color experienced higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death during the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, DHS utilized trusted community sources to ensure all Wisconsinites had access to effective, safe COVID-19 vaccines, as well as reliable information to ensure everyone could protect themselves and their families. In early 2022, DHS awarded \$3.4 million in grants to 43 organizations to promote health equity in COVID-19 vaccinations in Wisconsin. These organizations served as trusted messengers within their communities to help reduce barriers to vaccine access among disadvantaged or underserved populations.

Ongoing Increase in Supplier Diversity Spend

The Bureau of Procurement and Contracting's final SFY 2022-23 spend for supplier diversity shows an increase of \$15.6 million. The bureau believes the contracting and procurement changes we made in response to our supplier diversity strategic goals in SFY21-23 is the reason for this result. It also illustrates a successful cross collaboration with the Office of Health Equity. The bureau is continuing in SFY24 on further opportunities both internally and with grant partners in the Division of Public Health and the Division of Care and Treatment Services.

Flexible Work Schedules

DHS supports and encourages the use of existing policies as a foundation for creating flexible work arrangements to address employees' individual needs.

Programs, Goals and Objectives as Outlined in the DHS 2023-25 Biennial Budget Request

PROGRAMS, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Program 2: Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Services; Facilities

Goal: Reduce Emergency Detention (ED) admissions by youth to Winnebago Mental Health Institute (WMHI).

Objective/Activity: Reduce the percentage of youth under age 18 admitted to WMHI as an ED.

Goal: Maintain Intensive Treatment Program (ITP) bed capacity at State Centers for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

Objective/Activity: Maintain the number of ITP beds at State Centers.

Goal: Reduce readmissions of youth to WMHI.

Objective/Activity: Reduce the rate at which youth under the age of 18 are readmitted to WMHI within 30 days of being released.

Program 4: Medicaid Services

Goal: Assist participants in the FoodShare Employment and Training Program (FSET) to gain employment.

Objective/Activity: Sustain the number of FSET participants that all 11 regions report gaining employment during the reporting period.

Goal: Sustain the timely processing of applications for Medicaid and FoodShare benefits.

Objective/Activity: Sustain the percentage of applications for Medicaid and FoodShare benefits that are processed within 30 days.

Program 6: Quality Assurance Services Planning, Regulation and Delivery

Goal: Increase immunization rates for residents at long-term care facilities.

Objective/Activity: Increase influenza and pneumococcal immunization rates for residents at long-term care facilities.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

2021 AND 2022 GOALS AND ACTUALS*

Prog. No.	Performance Measure*	Goal 2021	Actuals 2021	Goal 2022	Actuals 2022
2.	Reduce the percentage of youth under age 18 admitted to WMHI as an ED.	5% Decrease	4.39% Increase	5% Decrease	1.59% Increase
2.	Maintain the number of ITP beds at state centers.	45	45	45	45
2.	Reduce the rate at which youth under the age of 18 are readmitted to WMHI within 30 days of being released.	8%	10.43%	8%	8.14%
4.	Sustain the number of FSET participants that all 11 regions report gaining employment during the reporting period.**	6,000	3,721	6,000	3,627
4.	Sustain the percentage of applications for Medicaid and FoodShare benefits that are processed within 30 days.	95%	98.71%	95%	97.37%
6.	Increase influenza immunization rates for residents at long-term care facilities.	90%	80%	90%	74%

2023, 2024 AND 2025 GOALS*

Prog. No.	Performance Measure*	Goal 2023	Goal 2024	Goal 2025
2.	Reduce the percentage of youth under age 18 admitted to WMHI as an ED.	5% Decrease	5% Decrease	6% Decrease
2.	Maintain the number of ITP beds at state centers.	45	45	45
2.	Reduce the rate at which youth under the age of 18 are readmitted to WMHI within 30 days of being released.	8%	7%	7%
4.	Sustain the number of FSET participants that all 11 regions report gaining employment during the reporting period.	4,000	5,000	6,000
4.	Sustain the percentage of applications for Medicaid and FoodShare benefits that are processed within 30 days.	95%	96%	96%
6.	Increase influenza immunization rates for residents at long-term care facilities.	90%	91%	92%

*All data is on a fiscal year basis.

**Participation in the FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) program has been significantly lower during the COVID-19 public health emergency due to the federal government temporarily waiving participation requirements.