



2008 Community **COMPASS NOW**

A Resource Provided by the Great Rivers United Way

*A Snapshot of **LIFE**
in the Great Rivers Region*

Summary of Leading Indicators For Excellence

A report from the COMPASS Partnership

for the counties of:

Houston, MN; La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon, WI

Full Report available on-line at www.greatriversunitedway.org

Executive Summary

Overview

COMPASS is...People helping people navigate toward better communities.

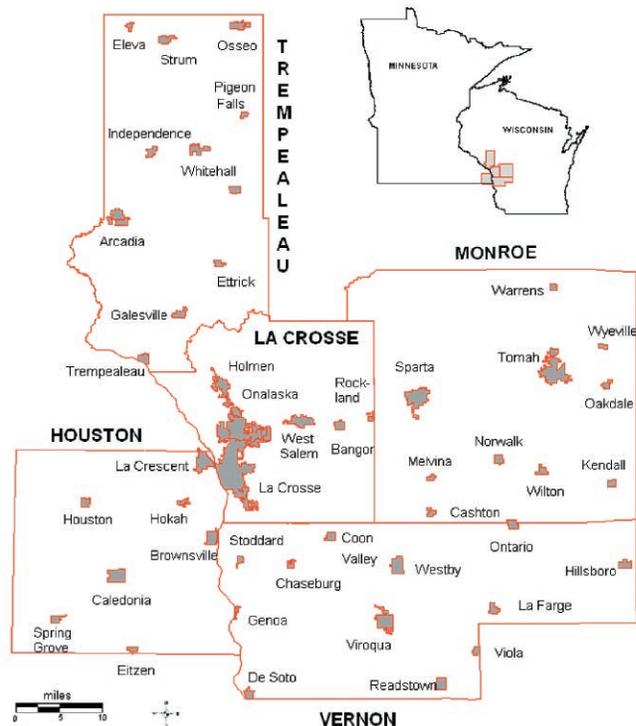
The VISION of COMPASS is...collaboration.

The purpose of the third COMPASS assessment is to identify community strengths and priority issues that help guide and mobilize action to improve life in the communities in the Great Rivers Region.

What is COMPASS?

COMPASS is a collaboration of partners who care about advancing the quality of life in our communities. It is an eight-phase community building process which results in communities becoming better places for people to live, work, play, raise a family, and grow old.

The COMPASS challenge is to spark regional leaders and citizens to action--action based on information about the present status of their community and a vision of what they can accomplish in the future. The 2008 COMPASS NOW Report will enable people who care about the Great Rivers Region to understand the issues and, through collaboration, to work toward resolving those issues. The ultimate goal of this process is to improve the quality of life for the residents throughout the five-county Great Rivers Region.



Prepared By: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

Background

The COMPASS process, designed to be repeated every five to seven years, has been a resource in the Great Rivers United Way service region since the first COMPASS needs assessment was conducted in 1995. This first assessment included a seven-county area (Houston and Winona Counties in Minnesota and Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties in Wisconsin) and identified three problem areas:

- Youth at Risk
- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence

The second COMPASS assessment was completed in 2001 and included two counties (Houston County, Minnesota and La Crosse County, Wisconsin). La Crosse was one of seven pilot cities in the United States to test the new “Community Action” Eight Phase Plan developed by United Way of America. The second COMPASS took the needs assessment process to the next level by identifying strategy champions and specific community action plans for each identified issue area. The four issue areas identified included:

- Financial Challenges
- Substance Abuse
- Youth and Families at Risk
- Diversity Issues

The third COMPASS assessment was initiated in 2007 and included the Great Rivers United Way five-county service area (Houston County in Minnesota and La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties in Wisconsin). The goal of the 35 volunteers in the Partnership Committee was to further develop the COMPASS process and standardize the approach to enable comparison of the outcomes from this third COMPASS and future COMPASS projects.

“COMPASS, like the previous community assessments, will enable private and governmental health and social agencies to use limited resources to meet high priority needs in our area.”

**--Doug Mormann, La Crosse County Public Health,
Partnership Co-Chair**

Process Steps

The eight phases of the COMPASS community needs assessment and community building process are summarized below.

Phase 1: Form a Community Partnership

- The Partnership includes community leaders representing the culture and diversity of the region.
- Partnership members are listed on page viii of the Executive Summary.

Phase 2: Inventory Key Community Assets

- Key community assets identified include associations and organizations that are capable of providing needed programs and resources to address identified community issues.
- A Capacity Assessment of our five-county region can be found in Chapter 5 of the full report, available online.

Phase 3: Collect, Map and Analyze Data

- Data sources included household surveys, key informant and community focus group input and secondary data collected.
- A detailed review of the Data Collection Methods used in this COMPASS Project can be found in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the full report, available online.

Phase 4: Create a Community Vision

- A statement of “vision” is found on page i of the Executive Summary portion of this report.

Phase 5: Identify Critical Community Issues and Desired Outcomes

- A listing of Regional Issues can be found on page 1 of Chapter 4 of the full report, available online.
- Issues are also listed by county – please refer to Chapter 4 of the full report, available online.

Phase 6: Detail a Community Action Plan

- Each community will be responsible to develop their own local plan. (Refer to Chapter 5 of the full report, available online, for suggested resources that can be used by any group interested in community building efforts.)

Phase 7: Take Action

- Each community will identify their own priority issues and collaborate to find solutions.
- COMPASS Leadership and the Great Rivers United Way encourage communities to create action plans that will address critical community issues. Please contact the Great Rivers United Way at 608-796-1400 for program information.

Phase 8: Measure Outcomes

- The COMPASS Coordinator will support groups in developing and measuring outcomes. Please contact the Great Rivers United Way for support.

Plan Findings and Recommendations

Community Strengths

The COMPASS report is a reflection of community strengths and illustrates the high quality of life that is enjoyed in the five counties making up the Great Rivers Region.

STRENGTHS	RECOGNIZED ASPECTS OF THE GREAT RIVERS REGION
Community Services . . .	The quality of emergency services received high ratings on community surveys. Library services are a valued community asset.
Health Care	The Great Rivers Region is widely recognized for its quality medical facilities and care.
Education	K-12 and post-secondary schools received high ratings in the region. Preschools are generally available. Our region is known to be a place that meets the educational needs of the people.
Natural Environment . .	Air quality is good.
Safety	The region is proud of its safe neighborhoods and schools.



“COMPASS involved hundreds of people in identifying those services that can be the most effective in improving the quality of life and health in our region.”

--Doug Mormann, La Crosse County Public Health, Partnership Co-Chair

Regional Issues Identified

The report identifies regional and county issues. The list below does not rank the issues in any particular order. (Note: Many of the issues were consistent across the five counties, but some were specific to their own county. Issues can be found listed by County in Chapter 4 of the full report, available online.)

I. Personal and Community Responsibility – engaging community members to take personal responsibility for their health

- Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco misuse and abuse
- Obesity

II. Health and Wellbeing of Residents

- Affordable Health Care
- Access to Dental Care
- Access to Mental Health Care

III. Violence Toward Others and Oneself

- Child Abuse
- Domestic Abuse
- Elder Abuse
- Suicide

IV. Diversity and Inclusiveness

- Greater Multicultural Understanding and Sensitivity
- Inclusiveness in Decision Making and Opportunities

V. Individual and Community Financial Challenges

- Housing
- Transportation
- Employment Providing a Livable Wage
- Reduce Poverty
- Meeting Basic Needs for Low Income Populations

VI. Conserve and Protect Our Natural Resources

- Air Quality
- Water Quality
- Land Use
- Energy and Alternative Energy
- Recycling and Disposal

Recommendations

A Town Hall Meeting, “Charting Our Direction for the Future,” was held on Saturday January 12, 2008, to share regional and local issues that were identified in the survey and focus group input. Participants were given the background on COMPASS including the results from the first and second COMPASS studies and the regional and county issues identified through household survey and focus group work during the third COMPASS project. They were asked to break into small groups to identify key action items, key leaders to get involved and key strategies for problem solving. Upon analysis of the comments recorded at each of the meeting locations the following action steps were recommended:

1. Educate the public on identified issues to raise awareness
2. Increase local and regional collaboration
3. Encourage community involvement
4. Identify and train leaders

The goal of our COMPASS Partnership is to share information, help communities form collaborations utilizing local and regional resources to address identified issues. We will encourage local communities to make “Community Action Plans,” to take action and to measure outcomes. We will offer regional support and resource referrals.



“COMPASS sought individual and collective ideas and concerns from the community. From this, we’ve identified areas where collaboration will strengthen the community. Only with individuals helping each other out, will we accomplish great things. COMPASS provides a solid foundation to build on.”

--Brenda Rooney, Gundersen Lutheran

Acknowledgements

The Great Rivers United Way would like to acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations for their time, expertise and/or financial assistance in developing this report.

Community COMPASS Partnership Members

Rob Abraham, Captain, La Crosse Police Department
Bob Berndt, La Crosse Police Department
Tom Brock, Altra Federal Credit Union
John Burgess, Family & Children's Center
Rusty Cunningham, River Valley Newspaper Group
Sheila Garrity, La Crosse Community Foundation
Gary D. Gilmore, MPH, PhD, CHES, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse and University of Wisconsin-Extension
Peter Grabow, Franciscan Skemp Healthcare Foundation
Dick Granchalek, La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce
Janae Halm, Graduate Student, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Joe Heim, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Tracy Herlitzke, C.E.S.A. #4
Jerry Huber, La Crosse County Human Services
Tim Jacobson, Mississippi Valley Conservancy
Grace Jones, Couleecap, Inc.
Jerry Kember, La Crosse School District
Lacie Ketelhut, C.E.S.A. #4
Larry Kirch, City of La Crosse Planning Department

Chongcher Lee, Hmong Golden Eggrolls
John Medinger, Former Mayor of La Crosse
Mary Meehan-Strub, University of Wisconsin Extension
Doug Mormann, La Crosse County Health Department
Brad Pfaff, Policy Analyst for Congressman Ron Kind
Heather Quackenboss, La Crosse Community Foundation
Scott Rada, City Editor River Valley Newspaper Group
Lee Rasch, Western Technical College
Brenda Rooney, PhD, MPH, Clinical Epidemiologist, Gundersen Lutheran, Community and Preventive Care Services
Mike Rosborough, Vernon County Judge
Ruthann Schultz, YWCA CASA For Kids Program
Jack Schwem, Retired CEO
Jennifer Shilling, State Representative-District 95
Dave Wagner, Kwik Trip
Tony Yang, School District of La Crosse United Way Staff-
Becky Barnes, Project Coordinator
Rose Mary Boesen, Chief Professional Officer

Community COMPASS Technical Consultants

Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning
Department

Gary D. Gilmore, MPH, PhD, CHES,
Professor and Director, Graduate
Community Health Programs, Univer-
sity of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Janae Halm, Graduate Student, University
of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Lacie Ketelhut, C.E.S.A. #4

Jackie Kettner, Western Technical College

Larry Kirch, City of La Crosse Planning
Department

Joan Pierce, Western Technical College

Brenda Rooney, PhD, MPH, Clinical
Epidemiologist, Gundersen Lutheran,
Community and Preventive Care
Services

Mary Torstveit, Retired, University of
Wisconsin-La Crosse

Miriam Wuensch, Community Volunteer

COMPASS County Partners / Focus Group Report Contributors

Houston County:

Extension

Naomi Fruechte

Public Health

Beth Wilms

La Crosse County:

UW Extension

Mary Meehan-Strub

Karl Green

Robert Matysik

Public Health

Doug Mormann

Monroe County:

UW Extension

Karen Joos

Laura Pettersen

Amy Schanhofer

Public Health

Sharon Nelson

Linda Smith

Trempealeau County:

UW Extension

Patricia Malone

Cyndy Jacoby

Public Health

Christine Hovell

Vernon County:

UW Extension

Karen Ehle-Traastad

Public Health

Beth Johnson



Community COMPASS Financial Contributors

City of La Crosse
Coulee Bank
Downtown Rotary
Franciscan Skemp Healthcare
Great Rivers United Way
Gundersen Lutheran
Hale, Skemp, Hanson, Skemp & Sleik
Kwik Trip

La Crosse Community Foundation
La Crosse County Health Department
Monroe County Health Department
Dick Record
Rotary East
Trane
Dave Villeneuve
Xcel Energy

In-kind Contributors

Caledonia School District
City of La Crosse
Great Rivers 2-1-1
Great Rivers United Way
Gundersen Lutheran
River Valley Newspaper Group

Simply Graphics, Christian Cook
Summit Elementary School, La Crosse
School District, Report Pictures
Western Technical College
Xerox – Printing

Volunteers

COMPASS Partnership and County Partners
Great Rivers United Way Staff
Many others: Data entry, Data reviewers,
Editors, Focus Group Facilitators

Report Consultant and Editor

Mississippi River Regional Planning
Commission, Greg Flogstad, Director
Barb Buros, Administrative Assistant
Sheena Harms, UW-La Crosse, Geography
Intern

Special thanks

to Mr. Dirk Hunter, Principal, Summit
Elementary School of the La Crosse
School District for providing the
pictures in the report.



“COMPASS provided a regional
dialog, offering new opportunities
for collaboration to address
community needs”.

--Lee Rasch, Western Technical College



A complete COMPASS report is available on the Great Rivers United Way website, www.greatriversunitedway.org or by calling the United Way office at (608) 796-1400.

Available materials include:

- A complete listing of the COMPASS Partnership, including county partners
- A listing of community assets
- An explanation of the process by which the COMPASS components -- survey, analysis, key needs and action plans -- were developed
- Survey questions and results



Great Rivers United Way, Inc.

1855 E. Main Street
Onalaska, WI 54650

608 796 1400

608 796 1410 fax

greatriversunitedway@centurytel.net

www.greatriversunitedway.org

Table of Contents

Executive Summary:

Overview and Background
Process Steps
Plan Findings and Recommendations
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents

Data Collection Methods:

1. Household Survey
2. Key Stakeholder and Focus Group Work
3. Social and Economic Indicators

Plan Findings:

4. Issues Identified

Regional Issues
Houston County Issues
La Crosse County Issues
Monroe County Issues
Trempealeau County Issues
Vernon County Issues

Capacity Assessment:

5. Key Community Assets and Resources

Regional
By County

Social and Economic Indicators:

6. Healthy Families

- 6.01 Birth and Death Rate
- 6.02 Childhood Immunization
- 6.03 Tobacco Use
- 6.04 Alcohol Use
- 6.05 Health Insurance Coverage
- 6.06 Teen Pregnancy Rate.
- 6.07 Low Birth Weight Babies
- 6.08 Prenatal Care
- 6.09 WIC Participants
- 6.10 Communicable Diseases
- 6.11 Preventable Hospitalization
- 6.12 Suicide Rate
- 6.13 Lead Poisoning
- 6.14 Dental Health
- 6.15 Mental Health
- 6.16 Obesity Rate
- 6.17 Sedentary Lifestyle
- 6.18 Public Health Expenditures

7. Education and Quality of Life

- 7.01 High School Graduation Rate
- 7.02 ACT Scores
- 7.03 Post Secondary Degrees
- 7.04 Career Placement in New Careers/Retraining
- 7.05 School District Expenditures
- 7.06 Library Expenditures and Circulation
- 7.07 3rd Grade Reading Comprehension
- 7.08 Extra and Co-Curricular Activities
- 7.09 Habitual Truancy

8. Housing and the Economy

- 8.01 New Housing Units
- 8.02 Homeowner and Renter Occupancy
- 8.03 Age of Housing Stock
- 8.04 Fair Market Rent
- 8.05 Median Home Value
- 8.06 Residential Building Permits
- 8.07 Poverty Rate
- 8.08 Median Family Income
- 8.09 Unemployment Rate
- 8.10 Cost of a Home
- 8.11 Tourism
- 8.12 Income and Earnings By Economic Sector
- 8.13 Most Employees By Economic Sector
- 8.14 Personal Income and Earnings by Economic Sector

9. Environmental Quality

- 9.01 Ambient Air-Water Quality Trends
- 9.02 Surface Water Quality Trends
- 9.03 Impaired Surface Waters
- 9.04 Solid Waste and Recycling
- 9.05 Public Recreational Lands
- 9.06 Leisure License Sales
- 9.07 Municipal Water Quality Trends
- 9.08 Private Well Water Quality Trends

10. Crime

- 10.01 Drug and Alcohol Arrests
- 10.02 Property Crime
- 10.03 Violent Crime
- 10.04 Delinquent Offenses
- 10.05 Probation and Parole
- 10.06 Traffic Crashes
- 10.07 Driving While Intoxicated

11. Social Concerns

- 11.01 Voter Participation
- 11.02 Race and Ethnicity
- 11.03 Child Abuse and Neglect
- 11.04 Domestic Abuse
- 11.05 Elder Abuse
- 11.06 Assisted Living Facilities
- 11.07 Nursing Home Beds
- 11.08 Community Options Program
- 11.09 Hunger
- 11.10 Free/Reduced Lunch Program
- 11.11 Changing Family Structure
- 11.12 Commuting to Work

Data Collection Methods

1. Household Survey – Regional Results

A household survey was conducted in the spring of 2007 to gather input from community members residing in the five counties in the United Way service area (Houston County in Minnesota, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties in Wisconsin) on their perceived needs for their community across several dimensions. The dimensions assessed included:

- Health
- Public Safety
- Lifelong Learning and Enrichment
- Quality of Life and Living
- Care For Families Across the Generations
- Self-sufficiency
- Community Traits
- Overall Issues

Four thousand Household Surveys were mailed in the five-county area. Overall, 532 community members completed the survey. The survey asked multiple questions for each of the subject areas. The answer to each question was scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with “4” being excellent and “1” being poor. The responses for each question were averaged and then ranked alongside the other questions within the same section. Strengths, weaknesses, and important issues or concerns were identified based on their average response compared to other items within the same general categories. The Regional details and statistical analysis are detailed in this chapter. Analysis and details for each county are available online at www.greatriversunitedway.org.

Household Survey Regional Results - Five County Data Combined

Community Strengths: (on a scale from 1 to 4, 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent)

Access to quality health care (3.17)

Air quality (3.1)

Quality of emergency services (3.24)

Safety of neighborhoods (3.13)

Safety of schools (3.04)

K-12 schools (3.15)

Availability of preschools (3.05)

A place that meets the educational needs (3.04)

Library services (3.16)

Community Weaknesses: (on a scale from 1 to 4, 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent)

Affordable health care (2.08)

Affordable mental care (2.04)

Affordable dental care (1.98)

Availability of jobs that offer enrichment and advancement (2.17)

Inclusion of diverse populations in decisions (2.4)

Meeting basic needs for low income (2.32)

Affordable personal transportation (2.28)

Ensuring a strong economic future (2.28)

Affordable and accessible public transportation (2.26)

Efforts to reduce poverty (2.16)

Jobs that offer a good standard of living (2.15)

Jobs that offer health insurance (2.11)

Community Concerns/Issues: (on a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 is a high/serious concern)

Illegal drug use (3.06)

Alcohol use (3.01)

Obesity (2.81)

Tobacco use (2.77)

Household Survey Methods

A panel of experts from various community organizations developed the survey as well as patterning the survey on a version conducted by the United Way Fox Cities. Permission was obtained to use questions from their survey. (See Appendix A for copy of survey.)

The survey was mailed to a random number of households in the five county United Way service area (Houston County, Minnesota, and La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon County, Wisconsin). A mailing service (Compukey) was used to generate the mailing lists and managed the mailing of the survey. Completed surveys were returned to the La Crosse County offices. A copy of the survey was also available on the United Way website. People had the option of downloading the file, completing the survey, and mailing it in. Additionally, the survey was available electronically through the use of Secure Surveys. The link to the electronic survey was sent to United Way partner agencies and other non-profit service organizations in the area and contacts were encouraged to have employees complete the survey. A question was added to the electronic survey in order to distinguish between those random individuals sent the survey and those completing the survey at someone else’s request. The results from the convenience sample were compared to the random sample and determined to be different in participant characteristics as well as responses. (See results.) Because of this difference, the convenience sample was not included in the remainder of the results.

The data from the paper surveys were entered into a spreadsheet. Researchers at Gundersen Lutheran conducted analysis of the results using SAS statistical package.

Subjects were asked to rate aspects of their community on a scale from 1 to 4, (1 = poor, two = fair, three = good, and four = excellent) in the following areas: health, public safety, lifelong learning and enrichment, quality of life and living, care for families across the generations, self-sufficiency, community traits, and overall issues. Regional results for each section follow. Results by county are available online at: www.greatriversunitedway.org.

Regional Survey Results

Comparison of Random Sample to Convenience Sample: Overall 678 surveys were returned; 146 were from the convenience sample, and 532 from the random sample. A majority of the convenience sample surveys (80%) came from La Crosse county residents. Convenience sample participants were more likely to be: younger females with children living at home, have college or advanced degrees, have a higher household income, own their home, and respond that they had “much opportunity to affect things in their community.” They were also more likely to be newer to their community. See Appendix B. Convenience sample participants were more likely to rate their communities worse than the random sample on most all of the health items, better on most all of the lifelong learning and quality of life items, worse on several of the care for families across the generations, and better on many of the self-sufficiency items. Because of the differences in characteristics and how they responded to the questions, only the random sample was included in the remainder of the analysis. Return rate of the random sample is shown in Table 1.

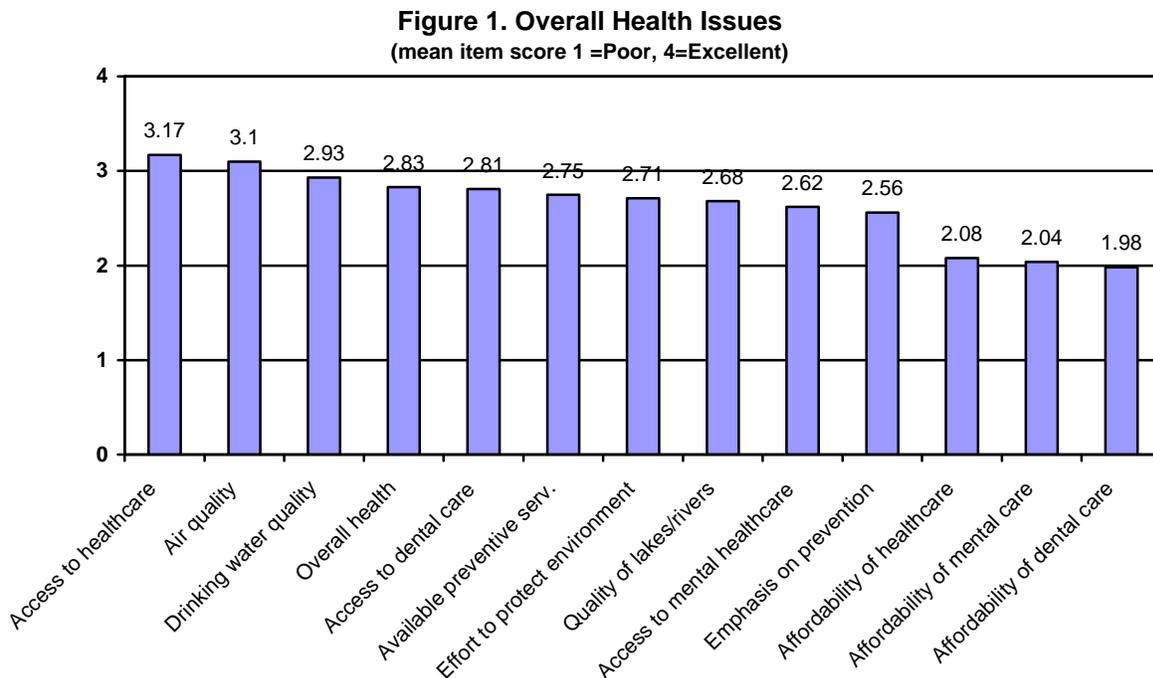
Table 1. Response Rates by County

County	Number of households (2000)	Number of surveys sent	Number (%) returned	Response Rate	% of households surveyed
Houston	7,633	500	67	13.4%	0.9%
La Crosse	41,599	2000	292	14.6%	0.7%
Monroe	15,399	500	42	8.4%	0.3%
Trempealeau	10,747	500	56	11.2%	0.5%
Vernon	10,825	500	75	15.0%	0.7%
Total	86,203	4000	532	13.3%	0.6%

Random Sample Characteristics: Overall, 61% of the sample was female. The overall average age was 55.2 years. Forty-one percent of respondents had a college or advanced degree and 24% had a household income over \$75,000. Over 75% of the sample had lived in their community for 10 or more years; 82% owned their home. Over 60% of respondents had volunteered in their community, and about 10% felt they could make an impact on their community.

Health Subject Survey Summary

- The highest rated item in the health category was **access to healthcare in your community**. See Figure 1. Overall, 41% indicated that access was excellent in their community, 39% indicated it was good, 15% rated it fair, and 5% rated access as poor.
- **Air quality** was the second rated item overall.
- **Water quality** rated third.
- **Overall health of people in your community** was ranked fourth, and was rated as good or excellent by 78% of people surveyed in the region (6% excellent, 72% good), 20% rated the overall health as fair, and 2% rated the health in their community as poor.
- Of all the items included, the **affordability of mental healthcare, dental care, and healthcare for all** were rated the lowest. Seventy-two percent rated the affordability of healthcare as fair or poor, 74% rated the affordability of dental care as fair or poor, and 72% rated the affordability of mental health care as fair or poor.

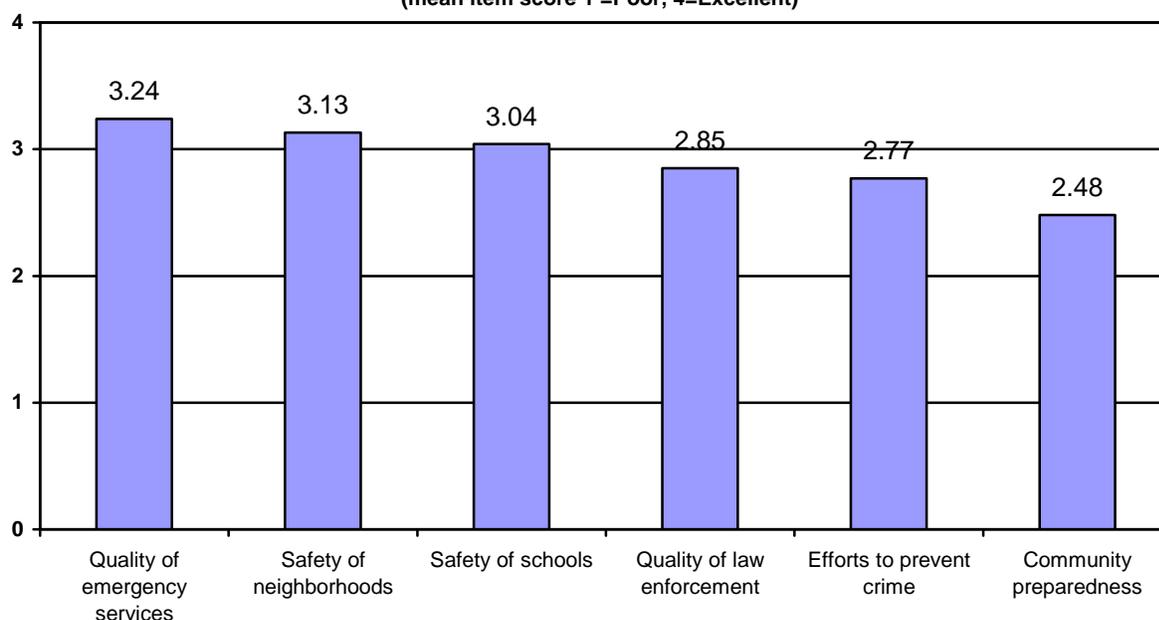


Difference in Response by Demographics to the Survey’s Health Subject Area: Males were more likely to report higher quality air and higher quality drinking water than females. (See Appendix C for all tables of results.) Males were also more likely to rate the efforts made within the community to protect the natural environment as higher than females. Older adults tended to rate their community higher than younger adults on the following items: quality of healthcare, affordability of healthcare, access to quality dental care, affordability of dental care, affordability of mental health care, and efforts being made within the community to protect the natural environment. Those with less formal education were more likely to rate their community poorer on access to quality mental healthcare and on the emphasis the community places on prevention of health problems. Those subjects with the lowest income rated their community as poorer than those in the middle and higher incomes on the following items: access to quality dental care, access to quality mental healthcare, quality of air, and quality of drinking water in your community.

Public Safety Subject Area Survey Summary

- The highest rated item in the public safety category was the **overall quality of your community's emergency services, such as fire protection and ambulance services**. See Figure 2. Overall, 34% of respondents indicated their community was excellent in the emergency services it provides, 58% indicated it was good, 7% rated it as fair, and 1% claimed their community did a poor job of providing emergency services.
- **Safety of your neighborhood** received the second highest ranking following the provision of emergency services.
- The third highest item under the public safety section was **safety of the schools in the community**.
- Of all the items included, the **community's preparedness for major safety threats** was rated the lowest. Forty-eight percent of respondents rated their community as fair or poor on this item; 10% reported their community as poor and 38% rated it as fair.

Figure 2. Overall Public Safety Items
(mean item score 1 =Poor, 4=Excellent)

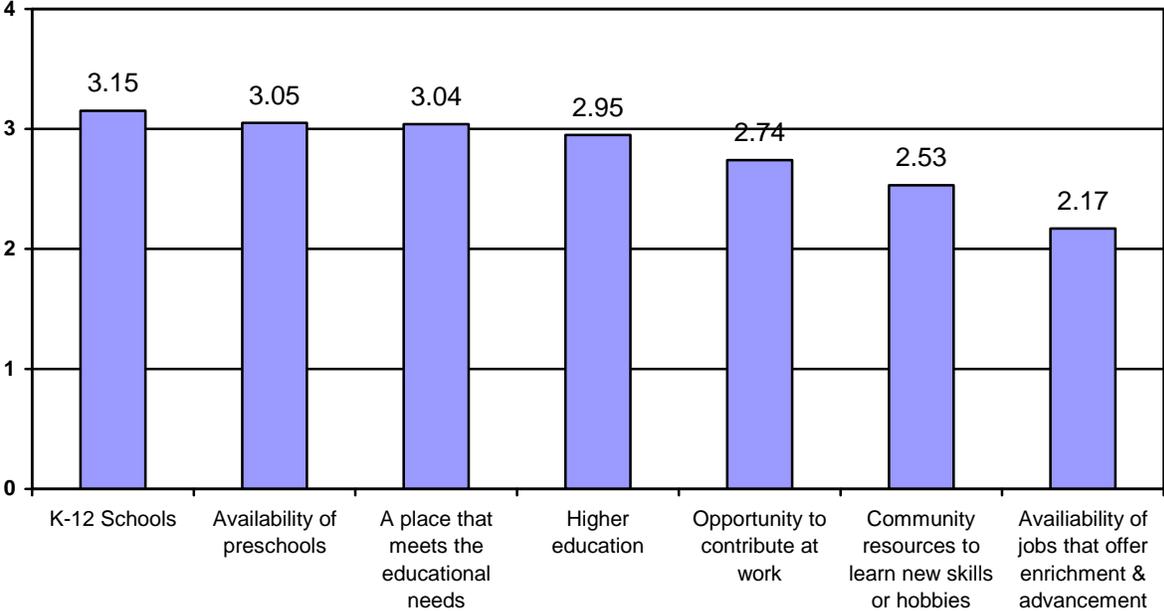


Difference in Response by Demographics to the Survey's Public Safety Subject Area: Males and females gave similar scores in the area of public safety in their communities; however, males tended to give slightly higher rankings in the individual items listed under this category. Males rated their community higher in the overall quality of law enforcement in their communities, overall quality of their community's emergency services, the safety of their neighborhoods, the safety of the schools in their communities, and their community's preparedness for major safety threats. Both males and females gave an equal rating of the community's efforts to prevent crime, and both genders ranked their community's preparedness for major safety threats as the lowest score. Older adults tended to rate their community's public safety higher than younger adults. Adults over the age of 75 years reported the highest ratings for all the items under the public safety section. The lowest ratings of public safety were given by the younger age groups of 40-54 and less than 40 years of age. Those with a formal education of college or an advanced degree were more likely to report higher ratings of the public safety of their community. However, those respondents with a college education or advanced degree gave their community the lowest rating under the item of the overall quality of the community's emergency services. Respondents with education less than or equal to high school education gave the highest rating for their community's preparedness for major safety threats. Those subjects of the highest income level (\$75,001+) gave their community higher scores for the overall quality of law enforcement, efforts to prevent crime, safety of the neighborhood, safety of the schools, and the community's preparedness for major safety threats. Subjects in the lowest income bracket of less than or equal to \$25,000 reported the highest ranking in the overall quality of the community's emergency services.

Lifelong Learning and Enrichment Subject Area Summary

- The highest rated item in the lifelong learning and enrichment category was **schools grades K-12 in your community**. See Figure 3. Overall, 30% indicated that K-12 schools were excellent in their community, 59% indicated they were good, 9% rated them fair, and 2% rated their schools as poor.
- **Availability of preschool opportunities** was the second rated item overall.
- **Community as a place that meets the educational needs of their family** was rated third.
- **Higher education in your community** was ranked fourth, but was rated as good or excellent by 73% of people surveyed in the region (34% excellent, 39% good). Higher education had the highest percent of people rating it as excellent of all questions in the lifelong learning category.
- Of all the items included, the **availability of jobs that offer enrichment and advancement opportunities** rated the lowest, region-wide. Sixty-seven percent rated this as fair or poor.

Figure 3. Overall Lifelong Learning and Enrichment Items
(mean item score 1 =Poor, 4=Excellent)

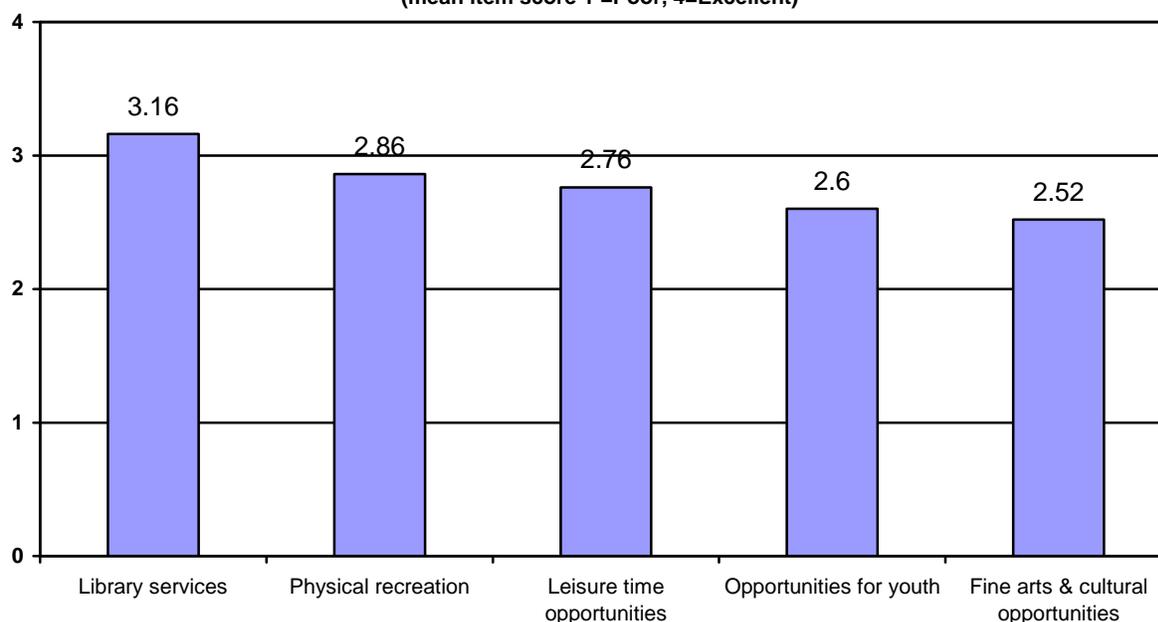


Difference in Response by Demographics to the Survey's Lifelong Learning and Enrichment Subject Area: Males and females gave similar scores in the area of lifelong learning and enrichment in their communities. Older adults (ages 55+) tended to rate their community's K-12 and preschool opportunities higher than younger adults (ages 18-54). Older adults also rated the community as a place that meets the educational needs of its citizens higher than younger adults. Adults over the age of 75 years reported the highest ratings for all the items under the lifelong learning and enrichment section, except for the availability of community resources to learn new skills or hobbies. This is reflective of the people most likely to seek those opportunities. Those with a college or an advanced degree were more likely to report higher ratings of the higher educational systems in their community, and the opportunity to contribute significantly in their work environment. Those respondents with a vocational or some college education gave the highest rating for the availability of community resources to learn new skills or hobbies. Those subjects of the highest income level (\$75,001+) gave their community higher scores for the overall quality of K-12 education, the opportunity to contribute to their work, and the availability to learn new skills and hobbies. Subjects in the lowest income bracket of less than or equal to \$25,000 reported the lowest rankings on all the lifelong learning and enrichment categories.

Quality of Life and Living Items Subject Area Summary

- The highest rated item in the quality of life and living category was the **quality of library services in your community**. See Figure 4. Overall, nearly 33% indicated that library services were excellent in their community, 53% indicated it was good, 11% rated it fair, and 3% rated services as poor.
- **Physical recreation** for both youth and older community residents was the second rated item overall.
- **Availability of appealing leisure time opportunities** rated third.
- **Opportunities for youth to explore interests and participate in positive activities** was ranked fourth and was rated as good or excellent by 57% of people surveyed in the region (12% excellent, 45% good), 32% rated youth opportunities as fair, and 9% rated youth opportunities in their community as poor.
- Of the five survey questions in the quality of life and living dimension, the **fine arts and other cultural opportunities for citizens** ranked the lowest. The respondents were fairly evenly split on these questions with 53% of respondents feeling that cultural opportunities were good (40%) or excellent (13%) and 45% feeling that cultural opportunities were fair (30%) or poor (15%).

Figure 4. Overall Quality of Life and Living Items
(mean item score 1 =Poor, 4=Excellent)



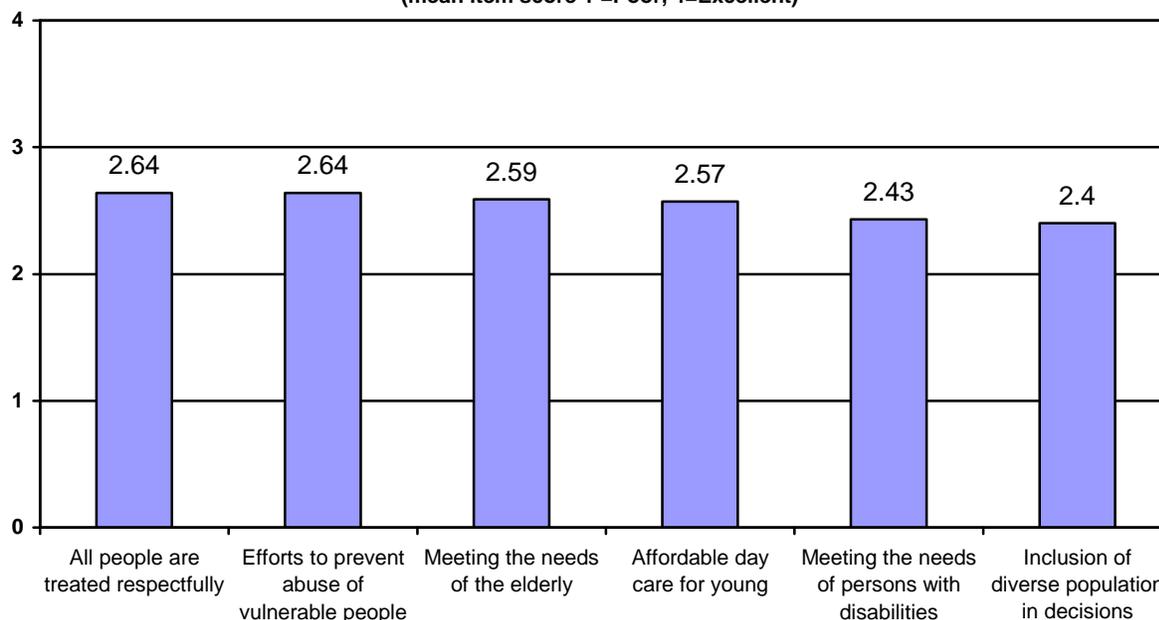
Difference in Response by Demographics to the Survey's Quality of Life and Living Items Subject Area:

Overall, males had slightly higher rankings for each question than females. For the question concerning the availability of appealing leisure time activities and the question regarding physical recreation for citizens, young and old, males responded with higher scores than females. For availability of leisure time opportunities, the males scored a rating of 2.89 and females scored a rating of 2.70. In regard to physical recreation for citizens young and old, males rated physical recreation opportunities as 2.95 while females rated them as 2.81. The remaining three questions had males and females ratings with only slight differences in the spread (e.g. quality of library services 3.19 for males and 3.16 for females.) Older adults rated their community higher than younger adults on all items, with the exception of the physical recreation opportunities for citizens young and old. For each question in the life and living section of the survey, as the level of formal education increased the respondents rating also increased. The most notable item was in the area of fine arts. As educational attainment increased from high school to vocational / some college education, the mean increased from 2.22 to 2.57. Regardless of income, respondents ranked library services the same (3.18 for all respondents below \$75,000), and slightly lower for those making more than \$75,000 (3.14). For the other four questions in the quality of life dimension (library services, leisure time opportunities, opportunities for youth, and fine arts & cultural opportunities), as income increased so did the respondents rating. With the exception of library services, lower income residents tended to respond less favorably with regard to the availability of and opportunities for leisure time, youth activities, fine arts, and physical recreation for citizens young and old.

Care for Families Across the Generations Subject Area Survey Summary

- Two items received the highest ranking in the “care for families” category. See Figure 5. The first was a **place where all people are treated respectfully, regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income level, disability or age**. Overall, 10% indicated that respect for all was excellent, 51% indicated it was good, 31% rated it fair, 1% rated respect between fair and poor, and 7% rated respect as poor. The second category was **efforts to prevent abuse or neglect of vulnerable people (children, seniors, people with disabilities)**. Overall, 8% indicated prevention efforts are excellent, 52% indicated prevention is good, 36% rated prevention as poor, and 4% rated it as poor.
- Of all the items included, the region ranked lowest in **a place where people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds are included in decision-making** and **a place that meets the overall needs of persons with disabilities**. Fifty-five percent rated the inclusion of different backgrounds in decision-making as fair or poor and 55% rated meeting needs of people with disabilities as fair or poor.

Figure 5. Overall Care for Families Across the Generations Items
(mean item score 1 =Poor, 4=Excellent)



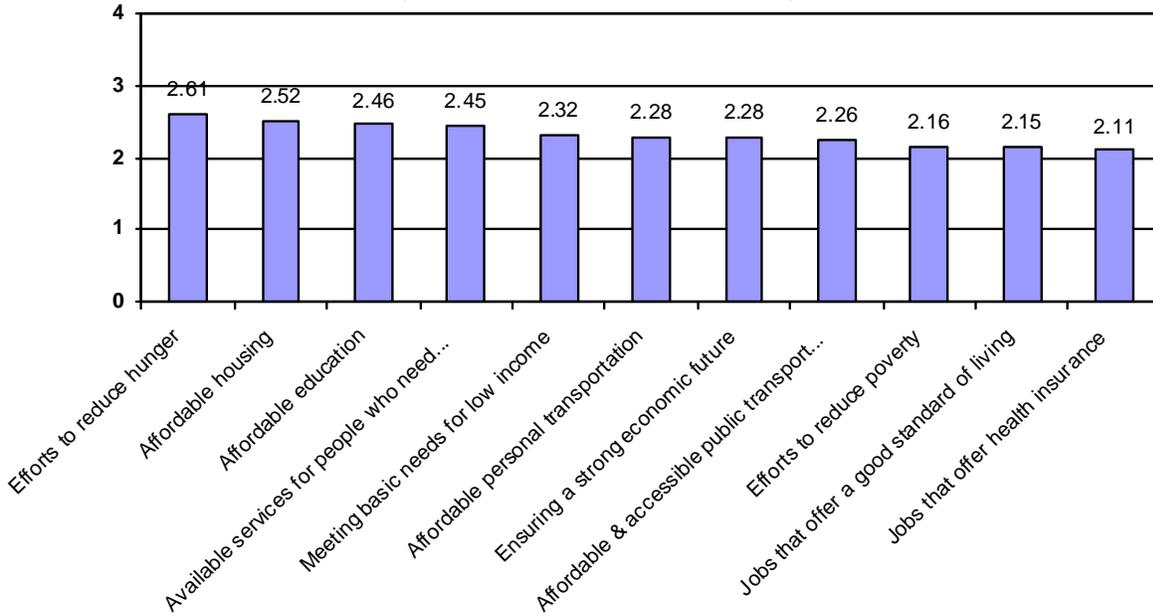
Differences in Response by Demographics to Overall Care for Families Across Generations Subject Area:

Females were more likely to rate people of different backgrounds being included in decision-making higher than males. Males were more likely to rate the efforts to prevent abuse or neglect of vulnerable people, meet the needs of elderly persons, and meet the needs of persons with disabilities higher than females. Older adults tended to rate higher than younger adults on the following items: the availability and affordability of safe daycare for young children, a place where all people are treated respectfully, and as a place where people of different backgrounds are included in decision making. Those with more formal education were more likely to rate their community poorer as a place where all people are treated respectfully and as a place where people of different backgrounds are included in decision-making. Those subjects with the lowest income rated their community as poorer as a place that meets the overall needs of persons with disabilities and the availability of affordable and safe daycare than those in the middle and higher incomes.

Self-Sufficiency Subject Area Summary

- The highest rated item in the self-sufficiency category was **efforts to reduce hunger in your community**. See Figure 6. Overall, 10% indicated that the effort to reduce hunger was excellent in their community, 49% indicated it was good, 33% rated it fair, and 8% rated access as poor.
- The **availability of affordable, quality housing for you and/or your family** was the second rated item.
- The **availability of affordable education beyond high school** was the third rated item.
- The **availability of services for people who may need extra help** (for example, government or non-profit services) was ranked fourth, and was rated as good or excellent by 50% of households surveyed in the region (6% excellent, 44% good), 39% rated the availability as fair, and 11% rated the availability as poor.
- Of all the items included, the **availability of jobs that offer health insurance, efforts to reduce poverty in your community, and your community as a place that provides jobs and career opportunities with wages and benefits that offer a good standard of living for you and/or your family**, were rated the lowest. Seventy-one percent rated the availability of jobs that offer health insurance as fair or poor, 68% rated the efforts to reduce poverty as fair or poor, and 67% rated your community as a place that provides jobs and career opportunities with wages and benefits that offer a good standard of living as fair or poor.

Figure 6. Overall Self-Sufficiency Items
(mean item score 1 = Poor, 4 = Excellent)



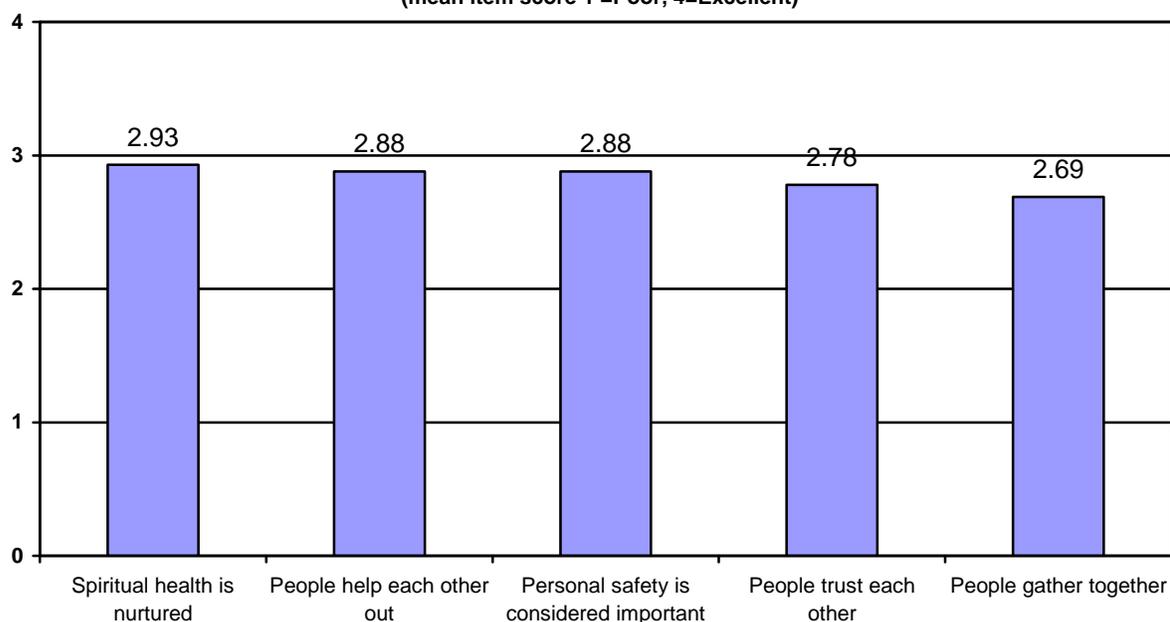
Difference in Response by Demographics to Self-Sufficiency Subject Area: Males were more likely to rate the availability of services for people who may need extra help (for example, government or non-profit services) higher than females. Males were also more likely to rate the availability of affordable education beyond high school higher than females. Older adults tended to rate their community higher than younger adults on the availability of affordable education beyond high school. They also rated a place that is doing things to ensure a strong economic future higher than younger adults. Adults under the age of 40 tended to rate affordable and accessible public transportation higher than adults 40 and older. People with a high school diploma or less were more likely to rate their community poorer on the availability of jobs that offer health insurance, the availability of affordable, quality housing for you and/or your family, the availability of affordable education beyond high school, the availability of services for people who may need extra help, efforts to reduce hunger in your community, and affordable personal transportation than people with vocational or college education. People with lower incomes rated their community as poorer than those in the middle and higher incomes on the following items: your community as a place that provides jobs and career opportunities with wages and benefits that offer a good standard of living for you and/or your family, the availability of jobs that offer health insurance, the availability of affordable, quality housing for you and/or your family, and the availability of

services for people who may need extra help. People with lower and middle incomes rated their community poorer than people with higher incomes in the area of affordable personal transportation. However, people with lower incomes rated their community as better than those with middle incomes in the area of affordable and accessible public transportation.

Community Traits Subject Area Survey Summary

- The highest rated item in the community traits category was **a place where spiritual health of residents is nurtured**. See Figure 7. Overall, 21% of respondents indicated their community was excellent in nurturing the spiritual health of its residents, 55% indicated it was good, 20% rated it as fair, and 4% claimed their community was poor in the area of nurturing spiritual health.
- Both **a place where people help each other out when they have a problem** and **a place where personal safety is considered important** were rated second overall.
- **A place where people trust each other** rated third.
- Of all the items included, **a place where people gather together as neighbors, friends, and families** was rated the lowest. Seven percent claimed their community does a poor job of gathering together as neighbors, friends, and families, 29% rated it as fair, 52% indicated their community does a good job of gathering together, while 12% indicated their community was excellent in this specific area.

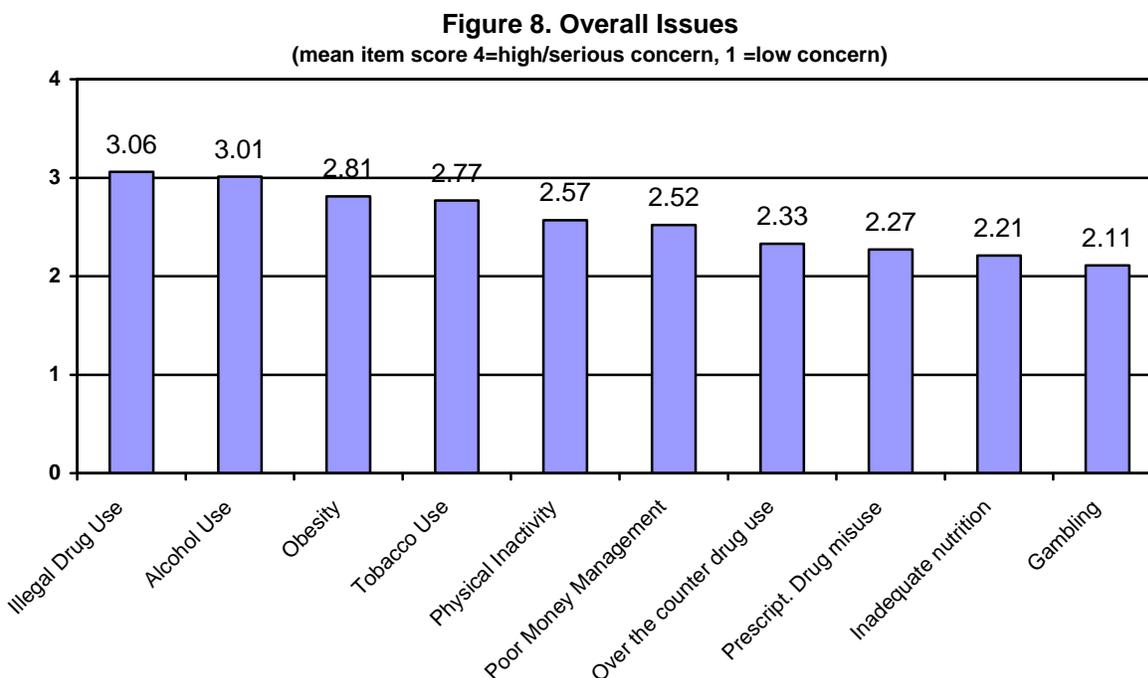
Figure 7. Overall Community Traits
(mean item score 1 =Poor, 4=Excellent)



Difference in Response by Demographics to the Community Traits Subject Area: Males were more likely than females to give their community higher rankings in all items of the community traits section. Males rated their community higher in the areas of being a place where people gather together, personal safety is important, people help each other out when they have a problem, people trust each other, and where spiritual health of residents is nurtured. Older adults tended to rate their community higher than younger adults on the following items: a place where personal safety is important, people help each other out when they have a problem, people trust each other, and spiritual health of residents is nurtured. Those with less formal education were more likely to rate their community poorer as a place where people gather together and where personal safety is important in their community. Respondents with a college or an advanced degree reported the highest ratings of their community in all items of the community traits section. Those subjects with the lowest income gave their community lower scores for being a place where people gather together, personal safety is considered important, people help each other out when they have a problem, and as a place where people trust each other. Respondents with a lower income were more likely to report lower ratings on the traits of their community.

Issues Subject Area Survey Summary

- The highest rated item as a concern in the issues category was **illegal drug use**. See Figure 8. Overall, 38% of respondents indicated this was a high concern (score of 4, out of 4).
- **Alcohol use** was the second highest rated item as a concern with 37% rating it as a 4 or high concern.
- **Obesity and tobacco use** were rated a high concern by 25% of participants.
- **Inadequate nutrition and gambling** were seen as the least significant problems with 8% rating gambling as a high concern, and 7% rating inadequate nutrition as a high concern.



Difference in Response by Demographics to the issues Subject Area: There were no significant differences in how males and females rated the overall issues as concerns. Those respondents between the ages of 55 and 74 were more likely to rate inadequate nutrition, illegal drug use, gambling, and poor money management as significantly higher concerns than the other age groups. Those younger than 40 or ages 40-54 reported these as a lower concern. The only difference in response by education level was for gambling as a concern. Those with a high school degree or less rated gambling as a higher concern than those with college or advanced degrees. There were no differences in any of the responses by income level.

Data Collection Methods

2. Key Stakeholder and Focus Group Work

Overview of Key Stakeholder and Focus Group Outreach

Key stakeholder and focus group sessions were facilitated in the Spring and Summer of 2007 to identify and prioritize key challenges and issues within the five counties that make up the Great Rivers United Way service area (Houston County in Minnesota, and Monroe, Vernon, Trempealeau, and La Crosse Counties in Wisconsin). Details of both the household survey and focus group work, along with statistical analysis are detailed in this report and online at www.greatriversunitedway.org.

Key Stakeholder Meeting Methods

The COMPASS Partnership enlisted the support of the University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living and Resource Development faculty and county health department directors to coordinate and facilitate key stakeholder and focus group sessions in each respective county. Fifteen to thirty key stakeholders were invited to identify and prioritize key challenges and issues within each county.

Key stakeholders were divided into small groups and asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are your hopes and dreams for our region?
- What are our greatest assets and strengths as a community?
- What are the bigger challenges and issues that we need to address?

Using the nominal group process, participant responses were shared in small groups and through group consensus were combined with like ideas. Participants then voted on what they perceived to be the top five challenges or issues for their community.

The top five challenges or issues identified by each small group were then transferred to flip charts. Small groups came together as a total group to again clarify, combine, and vote on what they perceived as the top five challenges or issues for their community.

Key Stakeholder Results – Top five results for each county

Houston County, Minnesota

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Issue</u>
1	7	Environmental Awareness & Protection -Water quality -Land use planning & development -Incentives to facilitate use of alternative & renewable energy -Identify options to reduce global warming -Live lightly to support a sustainable environment -"Nature Deficit Disorder" nature is important to human development. Too many kids inside w/ computer -Our culture of fear that doesn't allow kids to free play in nature--who will care for natural places?
2	6	Funding For Aging Population -Funding for senior care - finding resources -Preparing for an aging population
3	6	Business Development, Jobs and Innovation -Opportunities to keep youth in area - careers & business entrepreneurship -Attracting, retaining, supporting & expanding business -Keeping websites up to date -Adequate childcare for workforce -Affordable life-cycle housing -Preparing for technology changes
4	6	Facilitate Production & Processing For Locally Grown Foods For Local Consumption
5	5	Work & Family Balance -Lack of positive adult engagement in lives of our children -Teaching mentoring values

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Issue</u>
1	15	Employment Opportunities with adequate support systems (daycare, transportation, living wages, job training, benefits)
2	15	Access & cost of healthcare (including dental & mental health)
3	13	Increasing Poverty & Concentration of Poverty & Disparities
4	9	Alcohol & Substance Misuse/Abuse
4	9	Personal Health Promotion & Individual responsibility
4	9	Increase 'ownership' in the community & personal responsibility

Monroe County, Wisconsin

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Issue</u>
1	15	Lack of money/funds to address issues
2	13	Affordable housing/homeless
3	12	Affordable healthcare; accessibility for under and uninsured/dental care
4	10	Drug abuse/alcohol/meth/smoking (parents attitudes towards alcohol)
5	6	Community awareness & understanding of individuals and their situation (non-judgmental); look at strengths not weaknesses

Trempealeau County, Wisconsin

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Issue</u>
1	10	Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse -Particularly in our schools
2	10	Natural Resources--Depletion & Deterioration
3	6	Increasing Cultural Diversity
4	5	Healthcare Availability
5	5	Connecting employees and employers
	5	Supporting families and kids in crisis

Vernon County, Wisconsin

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Issue</u>
1	9	Economic Growth
2	8	Acceptance of Diversity -Tolerance and caring
3	7	Funding for Programs /Services -With decreasing dollars
4	6	Aging Population Needs -Housing -Transportation -Medical needs
5	6	Access to Dental Care
6	6	Land Use Issues -Having a development plan -Protection of farmland by zoning -Nuisance complaints on agriculture -Bypass development impact -Poorly planned development -Independence versus community/public good

The one challenge or issue that crossed all five county lines was the area of economic opportunity—including poverty, economic development, affordable housing, homelessness, livable wage, daycare, and transportation. Access to and availability of affordable health, dental, and mental health care was identified as a priority in four of the five counties. Alcohol and other drug misuse and abuse were prioritized by three of the five counties. Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across three of the five counties. Increased ownership in the community and personal responsibility combined with community awareness and understanding of individuals situations were prioritized in two of the counties, as was funding for aging population needs and programs.

Focus Groups Methods

The challenges or issues that resonated in a majority of the counties provided the basis for questions asked at the second round of focus group sessions held in each county. Key stakeholders and UW-Extension faculty, health department directors, and United Way staff identified seven target groups of people to participate in round two focus groups. Some groups were combined. Target groups included:

- Youth Groups (e.g. an organized youth group, Youth Initiative, 4-H Junior Leaders- Ambassadors, Boys and Girls Club, or work with the Social Studies instructors within a school district to meet with a class.)
- Experienced People (e.g. senior citizens, Senior Nutrition sites, Aging Department representatives, American Association of Retired Persons, Retired Educators)
- Limited Resource Individuals/Families (e.g. HeadStart Parents, Wisconsin Education Nutrition Program participants, WIC participants)
- Business Representatives (e.g. Downtown business owners/operators, Chamber of Commerce, small business representatives, Farmers-farm operators, Agriculture businesses)
- Financial Representatives (e.g. Banks, Savings and Loans, Credit Unions, Financial Investors)
- Service Providers (e.g. healthcare providers including dentists, social service type agencies/providers, Community Action, in-home care providers, nursing homes, assisted living)
- General (e.g. educators, school district representatives—public and private, ministers-priests-religious affiliates, law enforcement representatives, government representatives, general public)

Focus groups in each county were asked the same initial four questions that address the issues consistent across county lines. Each county was to develop their own additional fifth question from one of the issues prioritized in their respective county that was not already covered in questions one through four. Finally, focus group participants in each county were given the opportunity in question six to add additional ideas on any other issues they felt were impacting their community.

Focus Group Results

An analysis and summary of the focus group input for each of the questions asked was reported for each county. The issues and responses are listed below. The italicized paragraphs are summaries provided by those who facilitated focus groups. The bulleted items are summarized comments from focus group participants. Issues are not listed in prioritized order. Results will be listed by county.

Houston County, Minnesota

Issue 1: Economic Opportunity

A number of issues related to poverty and economic development were identified across the United Way service area. Economic opportunity is sometimes described as homelessness or increasing disparity between the rich and the poor or a lack of jobs that offer a livable wage.

1. How is poverty/lack of economic opportunity impacting our citizens and our communities?

While the discussion of poverty and economic development issues in Houston County touched on lack of jobs, low wages and transportation problems, they focused on the need to find resources to bring people together (workers and employers). The community must step up to the challenge.

- The elderly and those without job skills need to keep working at multiple low paying jobs in order to cover their living expenses.
- The skill of the workforce is falling. It is hard to find people with the proper skills. The lack of job skills is at the base of this issue. Companies need to support and educate these entry level people...teach them skills.
- Children, grandchildren and great grandchildren have to go outside the area to get jobs. Eventually we will lose students and be unable to keep schools running.
- Outsourcing may result in cheaper parts and cheaper products, but may hurt the economy of the community in the future.
- Families should take care of families. People must be receptive to information. Pride is involved.
- The problem is that people do not want to come to the "outback" of Minnesota or Wisconsin. How do we create urgency for training in the local population? People must realize they have to EARN jobs.

2. How should our community effectively address these issues?

- Education is the key. Look at the school systems and facilities that are available. Use them to provide training during summer or at night. Invest in the retraining of the workforce.
- Bring in better jobs and higher wages – tax incentives for employers.
- Companies need to invest to support services of the future – the latest and greatest technology. We need to keep businesses here, connect with the schools, offer training, etc. and we will attract skilled workers.
- We need the support of ALL community aspects working together – the arts, excellent restaurants, etc.
- It comes back to human resources. People must realize that they have to "earn" jobs – be willing to retrain in missing skill areas including verbal skills, written skills, life skills, basic hygiene, and common sense. "Common sense is an uncommon commodity".

Issue 2: Access to Affordable Health, Dental, and Mental Health Care

1. How is this issue affecting our community?

Initial focus groups in Houston County did not identify access to affordable health, dental and mental health care as one of their most pressing issues. Discussion across the second round of focus groups did show a lack of access to dental care and a great concern surrounding the cost of healthcare in general.

- Our system is about to implode. The cost is out of control. People work at jobs they hate, in order to have the health insurance. Employers have to make complicated decisions which include reducing benefits. Out of pocket costs are too high – people can not even afford insurance through their employers.
- Dental care is not reasonable. Premiums are high, insurance is hard to get, and insurance does not cover many of the costs. Costs are higher to those without insurance. People need to go out of the area for dental plans and sometimes must travel great distances for care.
- Lack of dental care can lead to other health issues – heart for example.

- Several excellent programs are available in Minnesota for low income folks (help with bills through Area Agency on Aging, prescription drug program through Medicare).
- Mental health care for Alzheimer and dementia patients is scarce. The stigma is becoming less. Depression and long term care issues are difficult to deal with. There are not enough facilities to take care of people who need care.
- We are fortunate to have two systems. But it is a double edged sword – a political issue – and the cost is a major fundamental issue.

2. What strategies/ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Companies need to step up to the plate. They have a huge opportunity to be proactive with wellness issues. We have a duty to teach. Wellness should be a priority. Provide access and instill personal responsibility for wellness.
- Give money for wellness checks. Insert nutrition information in with paychecks.
- Have a wellness room or assist people to join wellness centers.
- Eliminate fear, stress and loneliness through programs offering activities, nutrition centers for meals and education on aging issues.
- Bring down the cost of dental care without insurance.
- Create an insurance pool so it can be affordable and everyone has access – state insurance.
- Make healthcare more affordable at the point of service or premium for care.
- More information about ways to get less expensive care.
- A free clinic in Houston County for dental health and mental health care.
- More support for in-home care for the elderly and halfway homes for those with mental illness.
- One participant stated strongly that government should not regulate healthcare. He stated that regulation would lead to long waits for services and other problems.

Issue 3: Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

1. How are alcohol and other drugs affecting you and your friends and neighbors?

Alcohol and other drug abuse were not identified as major issues by initial focus group work in Houston County. Most group members acknowledged the problem as a social issue in our culture but do not see it as "that bad". The Business and Finance focus group was more keenly aware of the impact on families, employers and the community overall.

- There are worse things out there, this is not so bad. The perception is that alcohol and marijuana are not really that bad. Teens have to make choices and they may see friends not making the best choices.
- Farmers in rural areas need to be aware of the signs of meth operations. The affects of meth use on families is devastating.
- The social costs of alcohol and drug abuse affect us all directly or indirectly: Police calls to domestic situations, drunk driving and accidents, jails full of offenders, the decline of family structure. This whole area is affected. People need to realize that their tax dollars are already being spent on the problem. The impact is wide spread.
- Festivals in the area encourage drinking and support alcohol. We offer a "drunk bus". We need to change the adult mindset [it is ok to get drunk as long as you do not drive].
- Alcohol and drugs affect business, employers and employees. It is a product of our society. We need to get the message to kids and to adults. We need a whole change in society.
- The business community has an obligation to give to society. We need to encourage a drug free society and to teach the responsibility that goes along with it [drinking]. Employees need to understand that their actions (drug & alcohol use) affect their family and job. It also affects them as an employee. Employers try to offer programs internally (employee assistance programs) but prevention is the key. We must get to the people who can lead.

- Parents do not supervise kids. They supply the kids with alcohol at field parties and lie for them when they are caught. What has happened to the family nucleus? It is unacceptable – there needs to be accountability. Parents need to put responsibility on the kids.
 - Among seniors the problem goes unreported. There are no geriatric professionals in this area.
2. **Where should our community spend time and money to most effectively address alcohol and other drug issues?**
- Bring a geriatric professional to Houston County to address issues with the elderly – help with understanding prescriptions and alcohol issues.
 - People in jail could earn privileges to go to a Senior Nutrition site to serve and wait on them [senior citizens].
 - Educate parents on the issues surrounding alcohol. Parents who are poor role models are at fault. They drink and kids learn it – it is a way of life. As a community, we must first teach parental responsibility and then help parents teach their kids responsibility. Parents and employers cannot continue to “fix” problems while ignoring the responsibility to teach about the consequences of one’s actions.
 - Teach leadership skills to youth to lead them in the “right” direction.
 - Law enforcement needs to be involved. Community policing is needed. The kids need to know law enforcement – then they can accept help. Consequences should be quicker and more effective.
 - Have community festivals that do not include alcohol. Take entertainment out of the beer tent at local festivals.

Issue 4: Natural Resources

Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across the United Way service area. This included the depletion and deterioration of natural resources, protection of farmland, land use planning and development, and a sustainable environment.

1. How do you see this affecting our community?

Environmental awareness and the use of our land and natural resources generated a healthy discussion in all focus groups across the county. People appreciate the natural beauty and the family farm lifestyle in Houston County.

- While people are aware of the benefits of recycling, the service is not offered in all rural communities. Everything is thrown away. Debris in fields requires clean up by farmers.
- People in rural areas struggle to balance energy use and convenience. Public transportation is not available and carpooling is a challenge.
- It is hard for the little farmers to stay in business. Equipment is expensive and liability costs are high. Sometimes landowners find themselves at odds with land use plans.
- The laws and their application have a profound effect. We must have respect for neighbors – cooperation – working together – respect for others.
- The overuse of chemicals is a concern. Cancer rates are high in this part of Southeast Minnesota. There are also high mental retardation rates and autism rates. Is this related to contaminated ground water or to alcohol consumption?
- We must be aware of our assets. We have such natural beauty – we get to enjoy it for free every day.
- We need to recognize the issues and assets, and how they affect the way we deal with each other every day.

2. What ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- We need awareness – support – education.
- The cost of “un-wellness” is huge. Tell the story. It will open availability of recognizing the natural beauty.
- As leaders we need to step up and support the policies set by our planning and zoning commissions.

- Educate landowners about conservation techniques [contour strips and no-till planting], the safe use of chemicals, organic farming, the importance of water quality, protection of trees, etc.
- Support local farmers.
- Senior citizen's knowledge is lost in the younger generations. Seniors need to share knowledge of gardening, cooking and hobbies.
- Consider tax increases to allow municipalities, townships, and counties to restore the infrastructure.

Issue 5: Houston County Choice of Issue

Balance between work and family

Issues relating to the balance between work and family were identified in Houston County. This might include teaching mentoring values and encouraging adults to engage in the lives of children.

1. How do you see these issues affecting our community?

Focus groups agreed that families are faced with many demands on their time. Participants were concerned with our culture's "drive to succeed" at the expense of the family. Focus group participants discussed how the "community" could help families keep balance and perspective.

- Older people work too much and do not have time for their kids. Working mothers miss out on a lot when they cannot stay home. Some families face financial strain and do not have a choice – they cannot afford a reduced schedule at their place of employment.
- We are a consumer society. The list of wants and needs is too long – cell phones, computers, 24/7 service. We need to consider how these expectations affect families, employees, and jobs.
- There is not enough communication in families. We need to discuss attitudes, discipline, and the importance of family time.
- How much time can we [employers] require from our employees? Today's youth demand time. Employers need to recognize these demands. They need to keep this in balance.

2. How might we address this issue of family balance?

- Make family a priority. People should focus on acquiring local jobs in order to decrease the time and expense of commuting. Have family meetings and make them fun. Praise your kids.
- Attend family oriented events and programs. Volunteer to help with programs that promote family values and encourage youth to become engaged with adults.
- Parents need education on parenting. We need mentors to stand beside the parents who need help. Use mentoring in a prevention way as opposed to intervention. Encourage parents to be the parent.
- There could be a foster care where the parents and children are both in care to help the parents learn.
- Conduct the Search Institute survey for all school districts in the county.
- Look for ways to help families deal with issues of childcare, elder care, and spousal care.

Issue 6: Additional Input in Houston County

1. What other issues impact our community that we as a community should address?

Responses to the final question concerning what other issues needed to be addressed were quite varied. Ideas ranged from better access to services and information and concern about sexual predators on the internet, to safety and issues surrounding the new jail. Dealing with family issues and caring for others – community – crossed over all groups.

- The issue of poverty was discussed: providing resources for battered and abused women, people having to choose between medicine and food, the working poor and seniors needing food shelf services.

- Communities caring for people: helping those impacted by summer flooding, providing safe places and activities for teenagers and for older adults, offering community education on varied topics and people who will listen.
- Family issues: helping families cope with long term care, financial planning, childcare, etc. This is all linked to the decline of the family structure.
- There is a certain "coarseness of society" – the lack of simple common courtesy. The community as a whole needs to value education, community and volunteerism.

La Crosse County, Wisconsin

Issue 1: Economic Opportunity

A number of issues related to poverty and economic development were identified across the United Way service area. Economic opportunity is sometimes described as homelessness or increasing disparity between the rich and the poor or a lack of jobs that offer a livable wage.

1. How is poverty / lack of economic opportunity impacting our citizens and our communities?

Finances, lack of finances, or other issues that are dependent on sufficient finances provided the overall focus of discussion across focus groups. Many of the issues were interwoven. In addition to lack of adequate finances and the need for livable wage employment, the amount families have to pay for housing and transportation to and from work leaves little money left for other expenses. The ability to encourage business growth and to connect the community to those businesses and to the regional educational institutions is a potential avenue to building, developing, and maintaining a local workforce.

- Livable wages and benefits, middle to high paying jobs are missing, not many job opportunities outside of La Crosse, loss of manufacturing jobs, people living paycheck to paycheck, and not enough money were needs identified across all of the focus groups. The need for parents to work two or three jobs to make ends meet can lead to limited parental supervision of their children.
- Transportation is a problem for low income people—how to get to the workplace. In the opinion of one participant, “if they need to rely on public transportation, they are less likely to be more involved with their neighborhood, community, or children’s school activities”.
- Housing and transportation go hand in hand. There is a lack of affordable housing in the area, and many low income people spend over half of their income on rent, and in some cases, for substandard housing.
- On opposite ends of the spectrum, the Experienced focus group presented welfare as “going from generation to generation”, and “people with a willingness to help themselves” as important; whereas, the Youth focus group indicated that “poorer families do not do as well in school”, in some cases “they do not have the things they need”, and “teachers fail to take that into consideration”. Yet, some do not recognize poverty as a need in their area. They have never seen a homeless person, or have only seen a few homeless people in the summer but indicated the homeless individuals “seemed happy about it [being homeless]”.
- Opportunities to “grow business” are needed. Participants wondered if there was some way to connect community needs to business needs and to provide a linkage including area universities.
- Participants noted tax loopholes for companies that do not own the land that their business is located on. Because a holding company leases the land, the business does not pay any income tax.
- Wealth leaves the city and moves out, thus, we lose the intermixing of incomes in neighborhoods and schools.
- Educational programs are needed to enable individuals and families to make positive lifestyle changes. Areas identified include: personal financial management, training to get middle to high paying jobs, and how to rent responsibly.

2. How should our community effectively address these issues?

- Find ways to get business together with those underemployed. Develop a rehabilitation process for those with a criminal record. Find/develop employers who are willing to take risks to hire transitional people, and provide the benefits needed to enable them to turn their lives around—childcare, release time, education.
- Wraparound –programs with the flexibility to provide what a family may need.
- More home-owner programs for low-income. Expand Habitat for Humanity.
- Offer programs that enable people to return to school ultimately resulting in achieving a higher paying job.
- We need money management programs in the high schools and the community that will help people manage their money rather than handing them a budget.

- Find the draw to our community for big business and sell it. Create tax incentives to bring big business to the area. Market the quality of life for potential employees. Match existing investor groups with available opportunities.
- Develop a plan to bring socio-economic balance to neighborhoods and address transportation issues.

Issue 2: Access to Affordable Health, Dental, and Mental Health Care

1. How is this issue affecting our community?

Focus groups identified access to affordable health, dental, and mental health care as the number one issue in the country. This is a national issue and is not unique to La Crosse. Access to healthcare includes the ability to pay for or have insurance coverage to pay for the care received; it is not just the availability of healthcare within the area where people live. Discussions across the focus groups centered on the high costs, inability to pay, lack of insurance coverage, and lack of mental health and dental care due to costs and exclusions in insurance policies.

- Senior citizens who cannot afford to go to the doctor do not go. In some cases they do not take their medicine because it is too expensive.
- Healthcare costs continue to rise even with health insurance coverage.
- Costs to businesses to offer healthcare for employees are prohibitive.
- There is a sense that inferior care is given to Medical Assistance patients.
- We currently have a free healthcare clinic. There are limited resources for medicine at the free clinic, and there is a three month waiting list for those who have mental health issues to be treated.
- Low reimbursement rate for dentists who provide care to Medical Assistance patients has resulted in virtually no dental care for the low income—which leads to other medical issues.
- Mental health issues are affecting younger people. Insurance does not treat mental illness as other illnesses. There are insufficient numbers of mental health professionals in the areas to take care of all who need care. Mental illness is the route of other health-related problems. There is still a stigma regarding mental health.
- Competing interests – prevention versus treatment.

2. What strategies/ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Increase reimbursement for dentists serving low income patients. Require dentists to take a certain number or percentage of Medical Assistance patients.
- Consortium to start the non-profit dental office for Medical Assistance patients. Form a dental alliance.
- Incorporate videoconferencing to reduce travel costs associated with healthcare.
- Get medical institutions to collaboratively provide a basic healthcare plan for uninsured and catastrophic events.
- The Limited Resource and Business and Finance Focus Groups recommended working towards the European government style of healthcare.
- Expand or broaden Coulee Area Regional Employers Health Action Cooperative approach to lower health care costs. Incorporate Quick Care—onsite labs, care to lower costs.
- Become the impetus for a statewide effort that rewards being healthy – no sickness.
- More reasonable healthcare and employee shift of attitude – accept fiscal responsibility and be healthier employees to benefit all.
- Provide consistency of continued care for homeless community – to oversee medicine for mental health issues, to include behavioral management, talk therapy, and family support.
- Educational programs on healthcare and personal responsibility, parent education on child related mental health issues.

Issue 3: Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

1. How are alcohol and other drugs affecting you and your friends and neighbors?

Awareness and visibility of alcohol usage was consistent across all focus groups. Alcohol is prominent in the La Crosse area and identified as an accepted culture. There is recognition of double standards and the impact of role models with respect to usage. Use and misuse of alcohol is prevalent among youth in high school and college. None of the focus groups identified drugs and drug usage as a major issue. Only one focus group indicated drug abuse is more prevalent now, but did not identify why, how, or where.

- Young people feel a pressure to drink and use drugs. Younger kids see drunken college students as role models. Youth/teens are drinking everywhere, but in moderation. Youth do not see any more problems here than elsewhere, and do not see having a couple of drinks at home or at a friend's home as a problem as long as you are not drunk or abusive. Fake ID's are a big deal.
- There is a group of parents that allow their children to drink and have parties—"If at my house, they are under my watch."
- Role modeling of inappropriate alcohol use is everywhere—if not abusing they are using. Role models do not practice what they preach—do not drink. It is socially acceptable for parents and role models to drink.
- Alcoholism is not viewed as a disease but a problem. Alcohol is not viewed as a drug.
- Alcohol is accepted as the climate of our community. Perception is that La Crosse is the place where people drank alcohol when they were in college. Binge drinking is a "right of passage".
- University student deaths related to alcohol impact everyone, anyone who pays taxes.
- A large percentage of the cases in the court system are related to alcohol and drugs.
- There is a belief that a lot of people who abuse drugs and alcohol are unemployed. Others indicated that alcohol and drug usage can be found in various places—low income housing, at work, at community festivals, even with the military.
- Several focus groups indicated there is a double standard with respect to drinking. The City of La Crosse fines bars for serving alcohol, but then promotes beer at community celebrations. Community festivals that are promoted as family events have beer as the central focus or it is available.

2. Where should our community spend time and money to most effectively address alcohol and other drug issues?

- More education is needed, beginning at the middle school level—when youth start to recognize the use of alcohol and drugs. Focus for educational programs needs to be on prevention and responsible drinking. Promote positive role-modeling.
- Promote wholesome community (family) oriented activities without alcohol.
- Provide alternatives and more opportunities for activities and "natural highs". Some participants felt this was a downtown La Crosse issue, others felt it was needed to avoid the private parties held in the woods in rural areas. Alternatives are needed for the nights considered to be "drinking night" for college students and high school students.
- One-stop concept for treatment recommended. Treatment facilities and opportunities available to capture the potential moment of change. Alternatives to jail – where the system can affect the element of self-worth. Alternatives, such as Drug Court to reduce the need for a new jail or jail addition.
- Recognize that the drinking culture is Wisconsin, not just La Crosse, we need to advocate for a change across the state. One suggested change -- raise the age at which one can sell alcohol to twenty-one, to coincide with the legal age one can drink.
- Priority issues can and do overlap and impact other priority issues. Recognize that when persons with mental health issues do not receive adequate care, they are at an increased risk of using alcohol and drugs.

Issue 4: Natural Resources

Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across the United Way service area. This included the depletion and deterioration of natural resources, protection of farmland, land use planning and development, and a sustainable environment.

1. How do you see this affecting our community?

It was evident that environmental issues and the protection of our natural resources are major priorities as all of the focus groups, including the youth, identified some aspect of preserving or conserving wetlands, bluff-land, and farmland.

- Urban sprawl, farmland turning into suburbs and new development are all resulting in less and less farmland each year.
- There is a real concern for the future and the impact of not being able to produce enough food for ourselves. Farmers are tempted to sell their land to developers who want to convert farmland for commercial and development purposes.
- Smart Growth – County Comprehensive Plan process is viewed as being proactive. Consistent zoning through the municipalities will work to unify communities.
- Encroachment on the bluffs was identified as a problem. Bluff-land preservation was emphasized.
- A need to protect wetlands and the natural beauty of the area.
- A need to do a better job in recycling was emphasized.
- Alternative energy sources were discussed by the youth group. They like the idea of alternative energy sources but “not in my town”.

2. What ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Leadership that takes the county in a constructive direction. A plan that encourages a certain amount of land for residential and for commercial use.
- Education on how to preserve what is left in terms of farmland, wetlands, and bluff-land, while retaining the natural beauty of the area. Water quality should be included.
- Downtown revitalization—develop condominiums and lofts in the downtown area, similar to Minneapolis, rather than taking farmland to build these on.
- Maintain public access to natural resources and develop more walking and bike trails.
- The development of a comprehensive transportation plan. Study where people live and work and find reasonable alternatives including public transportation, creating more park and rides, and incentives for car-pooling. There is a need for a better mass transit system—public transportation for people to get to their jobs.
- Increase support for small family farms; diversify agriculture into niches (niche marketing) that have a higher margin.
- Recycle in a broader way, to include plastics. Implement recycling in the school systems.
- Accept alternative resources for energy—wind, solar, nuclear, water – use the river for energy. Promote incentives from a state and federal perspective for what can't be provided locally.

Issue 5: La Crosse County Choice of Issue

Community Ownership and Personal Responsibility.

Increased ownership in the community and personal responsibility were prioritized as needs in La Crosse County. This can include whole community ownership for prevalent issues and understanding that government cannot do it all.

1. If whole community ownership for issues within the community was the norm, how would it impact this community?

All of the focus groups unanimously identified the positive impacts that would result from Community Ownership and Personal Responsibility. This issue and changes in this direction would impact all of the issues identified previously.

- Involving the community in creating and sharing a vision can lead to closer-knit neighborhoods and greater opportunities for people to interact recreating a community feeling—block parties, know your neighbors. More community efforts like “Neighborhood Clean-up” and “River Clean-up” days will happen.
- The “Our Community” concept will develop rather than a “Government Community.” People will take pride in where they live, resulting in less vandalism. By taking ownership, people will be more responsible, and focus on keeping it up rather than fixing it up. Livable neighborhoods and community pride.
- Mentorship and volunteerism will flourish. Volunteers will come together to help out the disadvantaged, e.g. kids aging out of foster care.
- People will come together to lower healthcare costs. We will see lower unemployment, less poverty, less depression.
- By coming together and empowering people to change, we will see a positive impact as the masses working toward something are greater than a few.
- A culture shift in the community where we celebrate and recognize good – “pay it forward.”

Issue 6: Additional Input in La Crosse County

1. What other issues impact our community that we as a community should address?

Many and varied are the responses to other issues that are impacting our community. Ideas ranged from cultural differences and diversity, the green movement, next generation of community leaders, transportation, to lack of finances. Issues related to transportation and lack of finances crossed over several of the focus groups.

- Transportation costs, with the increased price of fuel, promoted the emphasis on carpooling, development of bike trails, implementing the “community car” concept—rent a car for \$_/hr (Minneapolis), and green bikes.
- Programs focusing on resources to extend individual and family budgets are needed. Program ideas could include: Affordable housing, low interest funds for neighborhood revitalization, tuition costs and the need for more financial aid, standardized tuition based on income, and dealing with debt.
- A perceived need to bring people together as a neighborhood—block parties, to address the paranoia that is present, and offering conferences and training on how to build a community.
- Diversity – the need for multicultural understanding and sensitivity to issues in a multi-cultural community. Minority subcultures are divided. The community must deal with overt racism, and we need to better understand poverty at all levels.
- Level the system of identifying sexual predators –the difference between someone who made a mistake and a pedophile.
- Children in poverty, increased number of homeless children attending school.
- People leaving the area is a concern. College graduates are leaving the area to work for higher pay. We need to recruit workers from other states to bring in other community perspectives. The exodus of retirees and the senior citizens is also a concern.
- More collaboration between municipal governments, and a consolidation of government bodies.
- Economic Development Plan for 2020—what businesses are we attracting to shape the future of the city/county. We need to communicate the area’s identity and vision, and to market the region both internally and externally.
- Who will be the next generation of community leaders, volunteers, philanthropists?
- Disaster response in support of American Red Cross and Salvation Army.

Monroe County, Wisconsin

Issue 1: Economic Opportunity

A number of issues related to poverty and economic development were identified across the United Way service area. Economic opportunity is sometimes described as homelessness or increasing disparity between the rich and the poor or a lack of jobs that offer a livable wage.

1. How is poverty/lack of economic opportunity impacting our citizens and our communities?

Family finances, lack of finances, lack of basic skills and housing issues all are a piece of Monroe County's number one issue brought out in the discussion across Focus Groups. Many of the economic issues identified also affect the emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being of families.

- The housing issues of safe, affordable housing, lack of available housing and homelessness need to be addressed. People can only afford to pay so much for rent, so rent often needs to be subsidized. Some homes or housing units are unsafe due to lack of housing inspections. There is a lack of affordable housing with rising rents and low (poor) wages, coupled with lack of financial management skills.
- Families lack basic life skills and financial management skills. There is a definite trickle down effect when 50% of jobs keep people at the poverty level. Some lack of economic opportunity is due to low education levels and/or alcohol and other drug abuse issues. In many cases, low levels of education lead to low income levels. Low income levels cause people to struggle to afford basics and to live from paycheck to paycheck. Sometimes this is due to a lack of real life skills necessary to survive.

2. How should our community effectively address these issues?

- There needs to be a better way to help families with the transition from support services to being eligible for supportive services with increased wages.
- More homeowner programs for low-income individuals/families. Emergency shelters and related programs are needed to address homelessness issues. Rent Smart education programs can provide renters with: 1) a better understanding of developing cooperative relationships with their landlord, 2) opportunities to find adequate housing, and 3) increased housing stability.
- Financial counseling is needed to help people manage financial resources and issues. Money management programs and Reality Store events in the high school and community can help people develop skills to manage their finances.
- Economics is an issue in Monroe County. The business community needs to become involved in addressing the problems of 1) lack of educated workers, 2) low wages, and 3) affordable housing.
- More awareness is needed at the policymaker level to promote the understanding of the core issues and to consider policy solutions to address the issues about money and programs.

Issue 2: Access to Affordable Health, Dental, and Mental Health Care

1. How is this issue affecting our community?

Focus groups identified affordable healthcare, accessibility to healthcare for under and uninsured populations, and dental care as key issues. These issues are not unique to Monroe County. Access to healthcare includes the ability to pay for or have insurance coverage to pay for care received.

- People are going without services due to economic issues. Many people living below poverty are underserved.
- Families may lack medical insurance or may experience higher deductibles that put an additional strain on finances. Going without medical services due to economic issues may cause family members to miss time from work/school. Pain, discomfort, and/or poor self-esteem linked to an individual's dental health or physical health can contribute to work and school performance.

- Dental health and dental care access is an issue of priority. Dentists will not see people on medical assistance or Badger Care since these programs reimburse at a lower rate. Many young children, as well as adults, on medical assistance have dental issues due to lack of preventative care. Individuals who pay privately for dental care must pay up-front, before services are rendered.
- With limited or low incomes, many people are not eligible for healthcare benefits and are unable to afford out-of-pocket healthcare costs and cost of medications.
- Double digit increases on health insurance premiums continue. In order to adjust to the higher insurance premiums, employers are cutting insurance benefits or passing on higher deductibles to employees as they [employers] seek to meet their bottom line. Insurance cuts affect every economic level. They also decrease the availability of providers. If one provider is not available, patients have to search for other providers and may pay more.
- Financial issues contribute to healthcare issues in the elderly. Due to limited income and increasing food costs, many are not eating a balanced diet. Elderly may also use the strategy of decreasing or eliminating medications to save money and make ends meet.
- Current services are not well known among community members.

2. What strategies/ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Increase medical assistance reimbursements to dentists in order to increase availability of service providers
- Invest in free health clinics and low fee care providers who offer services to low-income individuals/families.
- Create more collaboration with community providers like Western Technical College for dental checks, referrals to dentists and free sealants.
- Use student nurses for vision/hearing screening of kids
- Coordinate healthcare services to be able to share with agencies
- Establish or encourage the use of wellness programs to employees along with incentives.

Issue 3: Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

1. How are alcohol and other drugs affecting you and your friends and neighbors?

Focus groups discussed the awareness and visibility of alcohol usage. Life long addiction and problems with alcohol are engrained in our society and lead to financial costs to individuals, families, and the community. All participants agreed that issues around alcohol reflect the times and attitudes of drinking alcohol as an acceptable practice, especially from peers and adult role models. There can be long term devastating effects on individuals and the community.

- Alcohol tends to be prevalent at graduation parties with either no adult supervision or there is promotion of teen alcohol use.
- Communities and neighborhoods see the effects of those needing money to buy alcohol and drugs, in addition to paying for essential needs. Consequently, people commit criminal theft and vandalism.
- Domestic violence is directly correlated to alcohol and drug abuse issues. There are no cultural boundaries for alcohol. In Monroe County we are seeing the affects of alcohol related to violence in the Hispanic community.
- There are health impacts of long term abuse – nutrition, oral health and alcohol/drug dependency at birth with impact as child grows. We see more children with emotional or special needs from the effects of family alcohol or drug use. Physicians are seeing the increased need for prescribing anti-depressants to family members due to spousal abuse related to alcohol and the effects of alcohol or other drugs on children. The affects of alcohol and drug use are worse than people perceive. Alcohol and drug use impacts others both emotionally and financially.
- Businessmen must deal with employee alcohol and drug problems and the related costs. There are alcohol-related issues in the hiring process when potential employees have citations for driving under the influence.

These tickets cause people to be disqualified from driving positions even if they have passed the drug and alcohol screening.

- There is a lack of involvement or lack of activities for kids. The youth of Monroe County need to learn to work and most do not know the meaning of responsibility. If they [youth] are drinking and using drugs, then there is a lack of responsibility.
- There is a lack of county vision to the benefits of prevention resources.

2. Where should our community spend time and money to most effectively address alcohol and other drug issues?

- Monies for alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and education.
- Community gatherings to discuss impacts of alcohol/other drugs on the community.
- Full continuum of care from prevention to treatment. There is a need for long-term voluntary shelters where there is accountability and a support network. These long-term facilities in small communities would be ideal.
- Education for kids and parents about alcohol and other drugs is necessary. Early education and prevention with children and parents not only for kindergarten and 1st graders, but sequential education programs are needed before 5th & 6th grades when middle school youth begin to experiment with alcohol. Parent education on the long-term effects of using alcohol and other drugs on teen brain development is also essential.
- Focus on life and coping skills for kids, along with more community activities available for youth. Plan community events that do not involve alcohol.
- Add the Strengthening Families Program in more locations or other children/family strengthening programs.
- There is lack of involvement or lack of activities by kids. The youth of Monroe County need to learn to work and to be responsible for their actions.

Issue 4: Natural Resources

Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across the United Way service area. This included the depletion and deterioration of natural resources, protection of farmland, land use planning and development, and a sustainable environment.

1. How do you see this affecting our community?

No Response

2. What ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

No Response

Issue 5: Monroe County Choice of Issue

Community Awareness - Diversity

One additional issue raised was "community awareness" and the understanding of individuals and their situation.

1. How can we address issues of the increasing diversity in our community?

- We need to work together as a partnership and whole community. Continue with grassroots, small group efforts to build enthusiasm, grow interest and nurture involvement
- Strong advocacy
- Bring policymakers to our table. There is a disconnection between people who are involved and those who can effect change.

- Involve the people that this issue affects; bring them to table, listen to their perception of their needs, and make them part of the solution.
- Village of Norwalk has been proactive in addressing increasing diversity with people talking through the issues. Continue conversations and programs to help. Build trust/relationship.
- People do not understand exposure to diversity – there is fear – it is an education issue – we have adults with disabilities in the area, most people understand that and respect those folks.

Issue 6: Additional Input in Monroe County

1. What other issues impact our community that we as a community should address?

In addition to affordable healthcare, other health related issues were identified.

- Wellness programs or community programs need to be addressed. We need to recognize people who participate and do well in wellness programs and reward them!
- We have hungry children. One program that is in place provides backpacks of food for the weekend when students are not in school.
- Increasing number of obesity in children and the short and long-term health concerns of this trend.

Trempealeau County, Wisconsin

Issue 1: Economic Opportunity

A number of issues related to poverty and economic development were identified across the United Way service area. Economic opportunity is sometimes described as homelessness or increasing disparity between the rich and the poor or a lack of jobs that offer a livable wage.

1. How is poverty/lack of economic opportunity impacting our citizens and our communities?

Poverty/lack of economic opportunity was one of the issues that had the least amount of consensus between groups. Limited income individuals talked in detail about how the support systems did not work as effectively as they should. They also emphasized the importance of reliable transportation. On the other end of the spectrum, we observed a general lack of knowledge about the challenges faced by the poor. Some participants were unsympathetic to the challenges faced by the poor and advocated a free market approach.

- Poverty or the lack of economic opportunity affects alcohol and other drug abuse issues and healthcare.
- [Limited] transportation affects people's ability to get to jobs or to needed services.
- Participants felt there were plenty of jobs. They questioned whether people wanted these jobs, or if they were able to meet job requirements.
- Populations with special needs can be particularly impacted (e.g. those with disabilities or low literacy levels)
- Participants wondered where poor people are living. Group participants felt that landlords are taking advantage of the situation with immigrant workers. They inflate rent and allow many people to share one apartment.
- For the youth, it was often about access to more rewarding job opportunities (most youth tend to be employed in service jobs). Youth noted that technical school and apprenticeships were considered less desirable. One participant noted that "this shouldn't happen. These alternatives are good choices for some - if it works for you."

2. How should our community effectively address these issues?

- Skills training – whether it is targeted towards populations with special needs (literacy, disability, etc) or changing what programs are available and emphasized at our high schools.
- Most participants stressed the importance of increasing awareness of the kinds of private and public help that is available for those in need.

Issue 2: Access to Affordable Health, Dental, and Mental Health Care

1. How is this issue affecting our community?

While participants did not have extensive contact with this issue of accessibility, they did notice some trends. A majority of participants noted that access in terms of there being a number of clinics and hospitals throughout the county is good. However, mental health care access is an issue. At least one key informant noted that the Trempealeau County Health Care Center was an important resource for people from the county and surrounding areas.

- Accessibility of care most often impacts those people at the margins – those who are not poor enough for medical assistance and who do not have a job with medical insurance.
- Healthcare of all kinds is often seen as a "luxury" so people put off care until a more serious problem arises.
- We have many options for healthcare. The question is if people can afford them.
- It can be difficult for people on Medicaid to access dental care because of reimbursement rates.

- Insurance and fiscal health is linked. The more that is paid for healthcare, the less money is available for living expenses such as rent, food, or transportation.
- Mental illness still has a stigma attached to it. Progress to reduce the stigma has been made, but improvements are still needed. Often access to adequate mental healthcare can be an issue.

2. What strategies/ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- While most participants noted that action needs to be taken at a higher level (universal healthcare, increased Medicaid reimbursement rates), they also noted that a free or flat rate clinic could help. The participants visualized a clinic that visited several different sites throughout the county on a regular schedule.
- Another common suggestion was improving education and prevention. The ideas ranged from improving school curriculum, to Well Baby Clinics, to videos / DVD's on preventative healthcare strategies.

Issue 3: Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

1. How are alcohol and other drugs affecting you and your friends and neighbors?

Almost universally, the groups and individuals identified alcohol as the most abused drug. Most groups acknowledged what might be described as a "culture of alcohol." Individuals who had any connection with the schools (administrators, teachers, students) noted the widespread use and abuse of alcohol among the youth. The youth who participated in a focus group were also quite dismayed about the lack of uniform enforcement of existing local and school rules. The "jocks" [athletes] can get away with quite a lot.

- Other drugs are present, but alcohol is the number one drug of choice.
- The view is strongly held that there are not enough positive youth activities in our communities.
- There was broad agreement that alcohol use (in particular) is occurring at younger ages. Access is relatively easy, and the source is often the home.
- There is widespread acceptance or tolerance of alcohol use and abuse. One participant commented that the common adult viewpoint is that "kids will be kids."
- There is concern that drinking and other drug abuse are impacting the school performance of young people. Whether or not they are abusing or their parents are abusing, the use of alcohol impacts attendance and performance.
- Young abusers often brag and share their drinking experiences. They even use technology (My Space, etc.) to share their stories.
- Alcohol can impact families. Service providers often see an increase in domestic abuse calls after bar time. Families and individuals may find it difficult to meet their financial commitments. There continues to be suicides and fatal accidents directly linked to alcohol abuse.
- Enforcement of existing laws and rules is not uniform.
- DARE is viewed as not being as effective as young people move from grade school to middle school to high school.

2. Where should our community spend time and money to most effectively address alcohol and other drug issues?

- Almost unanimously, the groups identified school programs as the place to target time and money. The ideas ranged from school/home promotions (e.g. "Parents who host lose the most.") to additional programming for both younger and older students. The teen group noted the need to push drug prevention programs. It is important to continue programs throughout the educational system. They also noted that visual, graphic presentations on the issues and consequences followed up by classroom discussions made a strong impact on them and their peers.
- Develop additional positive outlets for young people.

Issue 4: Natural Resources

Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across the United Way service area. This included the depletion and deterioration of natural resources, protection of farm land, land use planning and development, and a sustainable environment.

1. How do you see this affecting our community?

Focus group participants seemed to be knowledgeable and to have strong opinions around natural resource issues. There was a general consensus that United Way may not have the capacity or desire to address natural resource issues.

- Our natural environment is generally considered a positive. We live in a beautiful area that attracts visitors.
- Loss of prime farmland and family farms to development pressures was seen as a problem. Along with urban development there is the establishment of more houses, roads, and industry.
- Conflicts over wind energy are currently being debated throughout the media. At the same time, energy costs continue to rise.
- Government regulations are seen as being too complex.

2. What ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- The natural resource base can be used as a way to provide youth activities and community building. These activities can then be a way to maintain the rural character of the land.
- The energy question needs to be addressed through policy changes – e.g. farmers raising inputs for bio-fuels. At the same time, we need balance between economics and the maintenance of our environment.

Issue 5: Trempealeau County Choice of Issue

Cultural Diversity

1. How is cultural diversity impacting our communities?

There is an undercurrent of anger surrounding the increasing Hispanic population. Some focus group participants saw it as an extension of our immigrant history and were fairly easygoing about any issues. Other participants were downright hostile about their perception of immigrants getting a “free ride.”

- The increasing Hispanic population was universally mentioned.
- Service providers are experiencing increased costs to deal with the needs of our new residents.
- There is a tendency to stereotype the behavior of the entire group (Hispanics) based on the actions of just a few.
- People see very little cultural understanding or efforts to become integrated.
- There does appear to be an undercurrent of tension – it might show up in some schools. It might be landlords taking advantage of immigrants. It might be expressed as knowledge (or a lack of knowledge) about the immigrant experience.
- Language is a barrier. The young learn English quickly, but adult language skills lag behind.

2. Strategies

- Provide opportunities to learn another language. This is not just seen as teaching English to immigrants (although people saw that as very important). It is also about English speakers learning another language. It was also viewed as important to start teaching language at younger ages.
- Community celebrations or events to share cultural traditions.
- Increased efforts to connect older students to new students to help them navigate school more effectively.

Issue 6: Additional Input in Trempealeau County

1. What other issues impact our community that we as a community should address?

No additional issues were raised.

Vernon County

Issue 1: Economic Opportunity

A number of issues related to poverty and economic development were identified across the United Way service area. Economic opportunity is sometimes described as homelessness or increasing disparity between the rich and the poor or a lack of jobs that offer a livable wage.

1. How is poverty/lack of economic opportunity impacting our citizens and our communities?

Finances, lack of finances, or other issues dependent on sufficient finances was an overall theme of discussion in the focus groups. Many areas were linked together; such as lack of jobs, economy around agriculture that is losing money, economic pressure businesses face and the increased money it takes to survive.

- Lack of employment opportunities for adults and youth, whether it be for those with higher education degrees, laborers or for part-time employment. The pay scale is a concern as it affects the individual's ability to provide adequate housing, insurance and transportation for their families.
- Individuals are forced to leave the area to find work that offers a livable wage as there is a lack of industry in our communities. Loss of students in a community means less money for education in the public school system. Thirty percent of families in Vernon County qualify for "free lunches".
- A loss of federal and state monies/grants/subsidies hurts the employment situation.
- Vernon County's economy is largely based on agriculture and conflicts have begun to surface surrounding farmland.
- The Experienced focus group felt training programs for entrepreneurs were a necessity as cottage industries would evolve and help fill some of the empty store fronts in our towns and villages.

2. How should our community effectively address these issues?

- There is a need for county leadership to market our area and for individuals to work together to strategize on how to bring business and industry to the community.
- In addition to strategizing, individuals need to be encouraged to start their own businesses and for Inventors/Entrepreneur Clubs that will encourage members to explore this area.
- Research the factors that brought Organic Valley to La Farge and use the research to promote business development in other communities. There is a need to help and educate people to support local business. Local contractors/laborers need to be responsive to local calls and needs.
- Offer programs/classes for all needed trades and provide scholarships to low income families.
- Overall there is a need for more employment opportunities for the youth.
- Government should look at cost sharing to attract and bring in new industry. Communities could provide tax incentives and perhaps utilities cost sharing along with a public relations program that would draw people and business to the area.

Issue 2: Access to Affordable Health, Dental, and Mental Health Care

1. How is this issue affecting our community?

Focus groups identified access to affordable health, dental and mental healthcare as an issue across the nation. Access to healthcare includes the ability to pay for and/or have health insurance to cover the care needed. Discussions centered around the high cost, inability to pay for, lack of insurance coverage, as well as lack of dental and mental health care due to cost and exclusions in insurance policies.

- The Experienced focus group felt the medical care was excellent in part due to the hospitals and the school systems that have attracted healthcare professionals to the area.
- There is a lack of affordable health insurance. Consequently, many Vernon County residents are without insurance and farm families have to carry insurance with a large deductible. There is a need to find

reasonable health insurance for farm families. Employers also struggle with making insurance affordable, and most insurance companies will not take on individuals who have “pre-existing conditions”.

- There is a need for improvement in the area of mental health care. Health insurance does not cover mental health care as it should. A stigma surrounding counseling continues in our society, consequently, counseling is “cloaked in secrecy”. Quality of care in some areas was also in question as well as the qualifications of those providing care.
- Dental care is a priority issue because dentists do not accept Medical Assistance due to low reimbursement. Thus, a large portion of the population is without care. This leads to other medical issues.
- Prevention versus treatment remains an issue.

2. What strategies/ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Create a community health network that works outside of the normal insurance model. Bring Vernon Memorial Hospital, Scenic Bluffs Clinic, and Hillsboro Hospital together to work on the issue. Look at developing a healthcare co-operative.
- Work with clinics to provide greater accessibility to care with extra hours for appointments such as after school, evening and Saturdays.
- Work to increase the reimbursement rate for dentists.
- Work with the dental providers to take more clients, and work with the clients to educate them on the importance of seeking care and keeping appointments. Investigate the possibility of a volunteer dental clinic.
- Add tooth care products to the Food Pantry.
- Develop wellness/prevention programs.
- Work at improving funding for programs such as dental and mental health care.
- Encourage citizens to express concerns to elected officials – look at universal health care.

Issue 3: Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

1. How are alcohol and other drugs affecting you and your friends and neighbors?

Alcohol and other drug abuse issues were not seen as major problems by Vernon County focus groups. It was not identified as a major issue with the key stakeholders group early on. Discussion centered on the fact that alcohol is the accepted method of recreation and stress reduction. The Experienced focus group felt that people consistently misuse alcohol and that over consumption/overuse is the result of larger issues such as mental health.

- A general consensus was that alcohol is the most often abused drug. It is a cultural and wellness issue.
- There is a lack of activities without alcohol present. Most activities have alcohol present.
- Parental habits have an impact on their children and family structure, and parents need to be role models for their children.
- The Youth focus group felt alcohol and other drug abuse was not a problem; however, they did acknowledge that drinking parties are illegal and drinking may lead to conflict among friends. They also stated that drug dogs have been used in some of their schools and guards are present because of threats. As a result, all students enter the school through the same door.

2. Where should our community spend time and money to most effectively address alcohol and other drug issues?

- The community should address the issues by educating students, starting in elementary school, on the dangers of alcohol and other drugs. Parents should also be educated.
- The Youth focus group felt it was hard to stop the misuse/abuse of drugs and alcohol, but wanted to know where the problems are and where the drinking is taking place. They expressed an interest in having more activities available.

- Several of the focus groups felt there are programs available in Vernon County to educate citizens of all ages, but funding needs to be stable for a longer period of time.
- It was suggested that the tax on alcohol be raised to pay for alcohol abuse prevention programs.
- Other suggestions were to look for alternatives, work on wellness/prevention programs, support Teen Court, make the Help Line available for individuals to have someone to talk to about their problems and concerns.
- There is a need to change expectations and, along with that, there is a need to make a positive difference.
- Form an intergenerational group to focus on issues and prevention.

Issue 4: Natural Resources

Natural resources, land use issues, and environmental awareness were also identified as issues across the United Way service area. This included the depletion and deterioration of natural resources, protection of farmland, land use planning and development, and a sustainable environment.

1. How do you see this affecting our community?

Environmental awareness and land use issues affecting the county's natural resources were identified by all focus groups.

- The need for comprehensive planning and zoning to protect property and land. The plans need to be enforceable.
- Environmental effects on health and safety such as air and water quality, runoff, pesticide drift, dust from saw mills, erosion and quarry operations.
- Research is needed on health impacts. Are the issues real? What are the perceptions?
- The Youth Focus Group identified concerns around the wasting of resources on "new" housing rather than fixing the "old" and building "too many" homes on farmland.
- Cost of buying land affects economics such as farmland versus development.
- Education needed on the proper disposal of waste for the general public and farmers.

2. What ideas should our community consider if they address this issue?

- Communities need to be proactive on the issues rather than reactive.
- The Youth Focus Group commented that communities should maintain the dams and bridges for safety and upkeep.
- There is a need for community dialog to discuss natural resources and environmental issues and to work together to come up with solutions.
- Plan and develop comprehensive zoning for Vernon County, where local townships and municipalities work with county officials to ensure the plans and rules are consistent.

Issue 5: Vernon County Choice of Issue

Aging Population Needs – Housing, Transportation, Medical

1. What do you see as needs of the aging population in this county?

The key stakeholders group identified this issue as one of great concern due to Vernon County's large senior citizen population. Transportation to medical appointments as well as general shopping is a problem as taxi service is available in only two communities. It is the consensus of the focus groups that a need exists for an expansion of activities for senior citizens living in the community. Fixed incomes and higher real estate taxes make it more difficult for the seniors to stay in their own home. Health insurance is an issue in that individuals need to work until age 65 years to continue in their current plan. It is difficult to make a job change because insurance can not stay with the individual. Nutrition is very important. The Meals on Wheels for the homebound and the Meal Sites become very important – socially and nutritionally.

- Health insurance requires care out of the immediate area, thus, transportation becomes an issue.

- Transportation – need for more volunteer drivers and a need to help people maintain independence rather than being so structured and regulated.
- There is a need for chore services such as snow shoveling, raking leaves, and cleaning eaves.
- Look for strengths and experiences to keep seniors a vital part of the community. Volunteering is a good way to keep busy and active.
- Expand activities for seniors and especially those living downtown in rooming houses.

2. How could our community address these needs?

- There is a need for programs that will keep land taxes down, such as farmland preservation, forest management programs, and purchase of development rights.
- The Youth focus group felt communities should set up a network of volunteers that would be willing to contact seniors to assure they were alright as well as a phone line whereby seniors could call and ask for help. Participants of the youth focus group also were concerned that publicity be forthcoming so the services were known.
- The General Public focus group felt churches should play a bigger roll in supplying volunteers. The volunteers would have individual contact with the seniors and offer a “personal touch”.
- Funding for programs is a necessity. The Experienced focus group felt that legislators should be contacted about seniors’ health concerns.
- Activities were a topic of great discussion in the “Experienced” focus group. They felt activities were a very important part of the senior citizen’s daily life and that communities should find a place to hold the activities. There are empty medical clinics and storefronts in several communities that could be remodeled for such activities. This group also felt it was important that activities for those residents living downtown was a need as there is nothing for them to do but sit on the street corner.
- The Experienced focus group felt that groups could work cooperatively such as youth helping senior citizens with activities or skills and vice versa.
- The Experienced focus group discussed the need for crisis housing for the senior citizen.
- Transportation is an issue.
- The Business/Financial focus group discussed the possibility of exploring and possible establishment of a co-operative of caregivers to provide assistance.
- Explore ways of informing the seniors about the available resources and encouraging them to help each other.

Issue 6: Additional Input in Vernon County

1. What other issues impact our community that we as a community should address?

The responses were varied including thoughts on teaching reusable skills, cost of fixing one of the county’s popular recreational sites, and communication between communities.

- Capitalize on tourism and assets of Vernon County.
- Need to explore ways of encouraging new volunteers to help with emergency services. What will happen to the small emergency units and fire departments?
- There is a need for a vision to make sure the county’s infrastructure remains intact, and there is a need for communication between Vernon County communities.
- The repair of Jersey Valley Dam and the extreme expense to the county.
- The Experienced focus group felt too much emphasis was being placed on sports rather than academics and that athletics seems to provide students with a false sense of security. Most athletes do not make the “big league”. Parents place too many expectations on their children who participate in athletics.
- The Experienced focus group strongly felt there was a need to teach reusable skills and there is a need for affordable family housing.

- Due to some of recent land use issues, the Business focus group would like Senator Dan Kapanke to work with the community to look at current issues in Vernon County.
- Encourage United Way to capitalize on their strengths and explore what they can do in Vernon County.

Data Collection Methods

3. Social and Economic Indicators

Overview of Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection followed the key stakeholder and focus group work. This secondary source data was collected to help further understand the social and economic situation of our region. Greg Flogstad, of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, was contracted to supervise this collection and to create indicator templates containing information on 68 social and economic indicators for the five counties that make up the Great Rivers United Way service area (Houston County in Minnesota, and La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties in Wisconsin). This indicator data was collected for the purpose of analyzing and comparing our five counties, the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin, and the Nation as a whole across seven categories. These categories are the same as those assessed in the Household Survey. They include:

- Healthy Families
- Education
- Economic Opportunity and Housing
- Natural Resources and Environmental Quality
- Crime
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Social Concerns

The indicator data was reviewed and folded in with the household survey and focus group data for the purpose of corroborating or identifying any other community needs in the region. Chapters 7-12 of this report contain the gathered indicator data. This chapter gives a summary of the six categories.

Secondary Data Collection Methods

The source of this information comes from a wide variety of secondary data sources such as the U.S. Bureau of the Census, National Center for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Commerce, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium, Departments of Natural Resources in Wisconsin and Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, U.S. Department of Justice and the Minnesota Department of Health among others.

In some instances you will see that county, state or national data is missing. This occurs because we either could not find the data for that governmental jurisdiction or the data was not available. If you know of data that is available that we do not have listed, please contact the Great Rivers United Way. We would like to be informed of your data source so we can include it in future updates of this document.

Summary of Social and Economic Indicators

Healthy Families Positives:

- Tobacco use is on the decline
- A decline in sedentary lifestyles appears to be occurring.
- The region's rate of teen pregnancies is lower than the State of Wisconsin rate.
- The rate of lead poisoned children incidences in the region is declining and is lower than the State of Wisconsin rate.
- In 2000, a higher percentage of residents in the region were uninsured than the percentage of uninsured in the State of Wisconsin, but in 2005 there were more insured regionally than in Wisconsin.

Healthy Families Negatives:

- Overall our region's birth rate is lower than the Nation and our death rates are higher, this is a major workforce development concern and is detrimental to future economic growth.
- The State of Wisconsin consistently had a higher binge-drinking rate (23-25%) than the State of Minnesota (16-21%) and at least one or more of the region's counties exceeded Wisconsin's binge drinking rate during the 2000–2005 time period.
- Overall, the region has a higher suicide rate the States of Wisconsin and Minnesota.
- Obesity rates are increasing in the region and the states. In 2005 two counties in the region had obesity rates of over 28%.
- Routine dental checks in the region, with the exception of Houston County, Minnesota are much lower than State levels.
- Two communicable diseases are also on the rise. Chlamydia Trachomatis and Genital Herpes are increasing in the region as well as in the State of Wisconsin.
- All of these negative health indicators increase healthcare costs and strain local, state, and federal resources.

Education Positives:

- Regional high school graduation rates are higher than the State of Wisconsin graduation rate.
- Our region's ACT scores are lower than the State of Wisconsin but usually higher than the National ACT average score.
- Several schools in the region have ACT scores greater than the State of Wisconsin and the Nation.
- La Crosse County has a higher percentage of population with a bachelor degree than the State of Wisconsin.
- Our 3rd grade advanced reading scores are higher than the two state's levels.
- Our region is fortunate to have strong support for extra co-curricular activities within the school districts.
- Our region's schools have lower truancy rates than the State of Wisconsin.

Education Negatives:

- The region as a whole has a lower percentage of residents with a bachelor degree than the two States.

Economic Opportunity and Housing Positives:

- Our unemployment levels are typically below the two States and the Nation.
- Housing unit construction in the region has been strong until recently. In the recent past some counties new housing units constructed exceeded their population growth.
- Manufacturing is a key driver of the regional economy.
- From 1990-2000 U.S. Census figures showed our income levels in the region increasing more than the State and Nation.

Economic Opportunity and Housing Negatives:

- Our region's per capita income level is lower than the two States and the Nation.
- Within the region, La Crosse and Monroe counties have poverty rates exceeding the State of Wisconsin, and Vernon County has a poverty rate exceeding both the State and Nation.
- The age of the housing stock in La Crosse and Houston counties is older than Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Nation.

Natural Resources and Environmental Quality Positives:

- Our region has over 100,000 acres of federal, state and county recreation lands; seven state trails; four state parks; and over 180 municipal recreation facilities.
- The quality of our region's outdoor recreation resources is exemplified by the continual increase in leisure licenses sold.
- All counties in the region are air quality "attainment areas" meaning they meet all state and federal ambient air quality standards.
- We have high quality ground water and drinking water.
- The Great Rivers United Way Region is located in five major river basins.

Natural Resources and Environmental Quality Negatives:

- Non point source pollution is affecting many of the region's rivers and streams. Manure run-off is a significant problem.
- Thirty-one surface rivers and streams were listed on the Federal Clean Water Act 303(d) Impaired Waters List in the region. High turbidity, sedimentation, PCBs, phosphorous and nutrient levels were the major reasons for these listings.

Crime, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Positives:

- Property crime rate offense rates are much lower in the region than the rates reported by the two States.
- Driving while intoxicated arrests dropped considerably in the region from 2002 to 2005.

Crime, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Negatives:

- La Crosse and Monroe County have higher drug and alcohol arrest rates than the State of Wisconsin and the other counties in the region.
- Violent crime offense rates are much higher in the region than our respective two States.
- Child abuse and neglect is significantly high in the region and in the State of Wisconsin.

Social Concerns Positives:

- The Hispanic population in the region has increased by more than 25% from 2000-2005.
- Black and Indian race groups each increased by 11% from 2000-2005.
- Asian population increased by 7% over the 2000-2005 time period.

Social Concerns Negatives:

- The region's child abuse rates are higher than state levels.
- An increase of incidences of domestic and elder abuse has occurred in several counties.
- A change in family structure has also been occurring in the region and state with percent of births to unmarried mothers increasing annually to rates as high as 30% in some cases.
- The need for elderly housing is increasing with the region's aging population. Occupancy rates are not at 100% currently but the need for elderly housing will continue to increase.
- La Crosse County actually saw a decline in nursing home beds from 2000-2005.
- The number of women, children and infants using FoodShare resources has increased in all counties from 2000 to 2005.
- Participation rates in the Free/Reduced Price Lunch Program increased in all counties and in the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin overall from 2000 through 2005.

- The percent of births to unmarried women increased in all counties and in the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin overall from 2001 through 2004.

Plan Findings

4. Key Social and Economic Issues

At its November and December 2007 meetings, the COMPASS Partnership reviewed and integrated all data sources and key findings to arrive at a listing of key issues. For details concerning data collection refer to chapters 1 and 2. Issues were identified for the region and for each of the counties. The listed issues were not ranked. Many of the issues were consistent across the five counties, but some were specific to their own county.

In the Regional list, those issues with a check mark indicate that the issues were corroborated further by the social and economic indicator research reported in Chapters 7 through 12.

Key Issues Identified in the Great Rivers Region

I.	Personal and Community Responsibility – Engaging Community Members to Take Personal Responsibility for Their Health	Corroborating Social and Economic Indicator
	• Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Misuse and Abuse	√
	• Obesity	√
II.	Affordable Healthcare	
	• Affordable Healthcare	√
	• Access to Dental Care	√
	• Access to Mental Health Care	√
III.	Violence Toward Others and Oneself	
	• Child Abuse	√
	• Domestic Abuse	
	• Elder Abuse	
	• Suicide	√
	• Violent Crime	√
IV.	Diversity and Inclusiveness	
	• Greater Multicultural Understanding and Sensitivity	√
	• Inclusiveness in Decision Making and Opportunities	√
V.	Economic Opportunity and Housing Challenges	
	• Housing	
	• Transportation	
	• Employment Providing a Livable Wage	√
	• Reduce Poverty	√
	• Meeting Basic Needs for Low Income Populations	√
VI.	Conserve and Protect our Natural Resources	
	• Air Quality	
	• Water Quality – Surface Waters	√
	• Land Use	
	• Energy and Alternative Energy	
	• Recycling and Disposal	

Key Issues Identified in Houston County, Minnesota

- I. Personal and Community Responsibility – engaging community members to take personal responsibility for their health
 - Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco misuse and abuse
- II. Health and Wellbeing
 - Affordable Dental, Mental Health and Medical Healthcare
 - Jobs that offer Health Insurance
- III. Individual and Community Financial Challenges
 - Available jobs that offer enrichment and advancement
 - Available services for people who need help
 - Meeting basic needs for low income
 - Affordable and accessible transportation
 - Ensuring a strong economic future
 - Jobs that offer a good standard of living
 - Ensuring local jobs
 - Efforts to reduce poverty
 - Adequate childcare for the workforce
- IV. Community disaster preparedness
- V. Affordable education
- VI. Conserve and protect our natural resources
- VII. Funding for aging population
- VIII. Facilitate production and processing for locally grown foods for local consumption

Key Issues Identified in La Crosse County, Wisconsin

- I. Individual and Community Financial Challenges
 - Transportation
 - Housing
 - Money Management
- II. Personal and Community Responsibility
 - Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco misuse and abuse
 - Obesity
 - Ownership in Responsibility
- III. Health and Wellbeing of Residents
 - Affordable Healthcare
 - Access to Dental Care
 - Access to Mental Healthcare
- IV. Violence Toward Others and Oneself
 - Child Abuse
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Elder Abuse
 - Suicide
- V. Diversity and Inclusiveness
 - Greater Multicultural Understanding and Sensitivity
 - Inclusiveness in Decision Making and Opportunities
- VI. Conserve and Protect Our Natural Resources
 - Air Quality
 - Water Quality
 - Land Use
 - Energy and Alternative Energy
 - Recycling and Disposal

Key Issues Identified in Monroe County, Wisconsin

- I. Financial challenges
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Basic needs
- II. Health and Wellbeing
 - Affordable Healthcare
 - Affordable Dental Care
 - Affordable Mental Healthcare
- III. Personal and Community Responsibility
 - Drug, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Meth use and abuse
- IV. Wellness Programs
 - Obesity
 - Physical inactivity
- V. Community Awareness involving Diversity

Key Issues Identified in Trempealeau County, Wisconsin

- I. Personal and Community Responsibility – engaging community members to take personal responsibility for their health
 - Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco misuse and abuse
 - Obesity
 - Community Preparedness
- II. Health and Wellbeing of Residents
 - Affordable Healthcare
 - Access to and Affordability of Dental Care
 - Access to and Affordability of Mental Healthcare
- III. Violence Toward Others and Oneself
 - Child Abuse
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Elder Abuse
 - Suicide
- IV. Diversity and Inclusiveness
 - Greater Multicultural Understanding and Sensitivity
 - Inclusiveness in Decision Making and Opportunities
 - Meeting the Need of the Elderly and Disabled
 - Opportunities for Youth
 - Address Barriers Caused by Language
- V. Individual and Community Financial Challenges
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Employment Providing Livable Wage
 - Reduce Poverty
 - Meeting Basic Needs for Low Income Populations
 - Hunger
 - Emphasis on Economic Development
- VI. Conserve and Protect Our Natural Resources
 - Air Quality
 - Water Quality
 - Land Use
 - Energy and Alternative Energy

- Recycling and Disposal
- Farm Land Protection

Key Issues Identified in Vernon County, Wisconsin

- I. Personal and Community Responsibility – engaging community members to take personal responsibility for their health
 - Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco misuse and abuse
 - Obesity
- I. Health and Wellbeing of Residents
 - Affordable Healthcare
 - Access to Dental Care
 - Access to Mental Healthcare
- II. Violence Toward Others and Oneself
 - Child Abuse
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Elder Abuse
 - Suicide
- III. Diversity and Inclusiveness
 - Greater Multicultural Understanding and Sensitivity
 - Inclusiveness in Decision Making and Opportunities
- IV. Individual and Community Financial Challenges
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Employment Providing a Livable Wage
 - Reduce Poverty
 - Meeting Basic Needs for Low Income Populations
 - Employment Opportunities for Youth
- V. Conserve and Protect Our Natural Resources
 - Air Quality
 - Water Quality
 - Land Use
 - Energy and Alternative Energy
 - Recycling and Disposal
 - Land Use Planning – Large-scale Livestock Operations
 - Jersey Valley Damage Repair – Expense; Flood Control/Recreational Issues

Capacity Assessment

5. Key Community Assets and Resources

Key community assets are associations and organizations which are likely to be interested in participating in community building efforts. The COMPASS Partnership's Data Collection Committee was charged with identifying these assets and creating a database of the identified assets in each of the five counties.

As the Data Collection Committee examined various methods to develop a regional inventory of assets, it became clear that an asset inventory and database already exists with the regional Great Rivers 2-1-1 system. This toll-free call-in system is an established federal communications commission entity and provides up-to-date information about regional resources.

The Data Collection Committee created a Capacity Subcommittee consisting of Dr. Gary Gilmore, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and graduate student Janae Halm. They recommended partnering with Great Rivers 2-1-1 to identify and map key community assets. Additional detail involving Great Rivers 2-1-1 is provided in Attachment A. Attachment B details the types of agencies and organizations included in Great Rivers 2-1-1. Attachment C is a template that can be used for recording goals.

The COMPASS Data Collection Group determined that the following categories of organizations would be helpful in reviewing already-established capacity for the region (Kinship, Economic, Education, Political, Religious, and Associations). These basic organizational categories were established by the Southern Rural Development Center in Mississippi. (<http://srdc.msstate.edu>)

- **Kinship (Family):** The family carries out a number of important activities, such as the care and socialization of the young, providing food, housing, and nurturing for family members, and the biological reproduction of the human race.
- **Economic:** This involves the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in a community. The community's economic system influences the kind of work available, where jobs are located, how much people earn, the quality of the work environment, the prospects for future jobs, and the level of unemployment and underemployment in the area.
- **Education:** The major function of education is to prepare youth to be successful contributing members of society upon reaching adulthood. This includes preparing them for the world of work, but also passing on to them knowledge, values, beliefs, and accepted behaviors (what we often call "norms") that we believe young members of our community should learn.
- **Political (Government):** The political (or governmental) institution is the arena in which power and authority is acquired and exercised. Its major functions include: (1) protecting the life, liberty and property of local residents (such as enforcing laws and providing police protection); (2) regulating conflict, including developing procedures and practices for resolving disputes; and (3) planning, coordinating, and providing public facilities and services to local residents.

- **Religious:** The religious institution plays an important role in attending to the spiritual needs of local citizens. In addition, it serves as an important source of support for certain moral values, norms, and customs. It also provides residents with personal support in time of need.
- **Associations:** Associations refer to the civic, service, social, fraternal, and other voluntary organizations available for people to participate in local activities. They operate with formal constitutional rules and by-laws, and operate with a team of officers and/or a board of directors.

In some instances, certain communities within the five-county region will want to conduct their own capacity assessments. This is encouraged when possible since the necessary resources can be quite location specific, but it is realized that not every community will have the capacity necessary to do so (e.g., staff; volunteers; financial support; time; and the like). Examples of such community-based capacity assessments can be found in the landmark work by Kretzmann and McKnight (1997) entitled A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local residents. Using the approach outlined by Kretzmann and McKnight is particularly helpful when communities wish to promote health and wellbeing advancement among their populations, rather than remaining specifically focused on primary and secondary prevention measures.

The following list of associations and organizations, provided by Great Rivers 2-1-1, is a dynamic tool that can be used by any group interested in participating in community building efforts. These associations and organizations have great capacity and unique opportunities for improving community life. The next five pages provide an updated alignment of possible resources with the assessed “Community Weaknesses” in each county. A review of these alignments clarifies that continuing information is needed regarding available community based and regional resources.

Houston County

Community Weaknesses and Existing Community Resources:

1. Affordable dental care (2.01)
 - Houston County Public Health Department
2. Affordable mental care (2.01)
 - *No local resources*
3. Affordable health care (2.00)
 - Houston County Department Of Human Services
4. Community preparedness (2.36)
 - Houston County Emergency Management
5. Available jobs that offer enrichment and advancement (2.07)
 - *No local resources*
6. Personal Responsibility (alcohol, drugs, obesity)
 - Counseling Clinic – La Crescent
 - Houston County Department Of Human Services
 - Franciscan Skemp Caledonia Clinic - Mayo Health System
 - Houston Public School District #294
7. Transportation
 - African American Mutual Assistance Network Inc (AAMAN)
 - Houston County Department Of Human Services
8. Affordable education
 - La Crescent - Hokah Public School District
9. Natural resources
 - Houston Nature Center/Houston Area Chamber Of Commerce
10. Aging population
 - Houston Public School District #294
 - Office Of Ombudsman For Older Minnesotans
 - Valley View Nursing Home

La Crosse County

Community Weaknesses and Existing Community Resources:

1. Individual and Community Financial Challenges (transportation, housing, money management)
 - Catholic Charities Of The Diocese Of La Crosse, Inc.
 - The Salvation Army
 - Couleecap, Inc. - Community Action Program
 - Consumer Credit Counseling Service Of La Crosse

2. Personal and Community Responsibility (drug, alcohol and tobacco misuse and abuse, obesity, ownership in responsibility)
 - Center For Effective Living, Ltd.
 - Coulee Council On Addictions
 - Coulee Youth Centers, Inc.
 - Franciscan Skemp Behavioral Health Services
 - Gundersen Lutheran Behavioral Health
 - La Crosse County Health Department

3. Health and Wellbeing of Residents (affordable health care, access to dental and mental care)
 - La Crosse County Human Services
 - Franciscan Skemp Healthcare
 - Jon & Nettie Mooney Health Resource Center
 - Western Technical College

4. Violence Toward Others and Oneself (child abuse, domestic abuse, elder abuse, suicide)
 - Gundersen Lutheran Behavioral Health
 - Boy Scouts Of America - Gateway Area Council
 - Coulee Region Children's Advocacy Center, Ltd.
 - Coulee Region Retired And Senior Volunteer Program
 - Family & Children's Center
 - La Crosse Police Department
 - The Butterfly Ministry

5. Diversity and Inclusiveness (greater multicultural understanding and sensitivity, inclusiveness in decision making and opportunities)
 - Multicultural Advocates,

6. Conserve and Protect Our natural Resources (air, water, land, energy, recycling)
 - County Of La Crosse Offices – La Crosse County Land Conservation, Zoning, Planning, And Land Information
 - La Crosse County UW Cooperative Extension Office
 - Wisconsin Dept Of Natural Resources
 - City Of La Crosse

Monroe County

Community Weaknesses and Existing Community Resources:

1. Health and Wellbeing (Affordable health, dental, and mental care)
 - Families First
 - Monroe County Department of Human Services
 - Tomah Area Cancer Support, Inc
 - *No resources available for dental care*
2. Financial Challenges (housing, transportation, basic needs)
 - Monroe County Department of Human Services
 - Families First
 - Tomah Area Cancer Support, Inc
 - Salvation Army
 - *No resources available for transportation*
 - DAK Management Co., Inc.
 - Habitat For Humanity
 - HOMZ Management Corporation
3. Personal and Community Responsibility (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, meth)
 - Franciscan Skemp Sparta Campus - Mayo Health System
 - Gundersen Lutheran Behavioral Health
 - Monroe County Health Department
4. Wellness Programs (obesity, physical inactivity)
 - Franciscan Skemp Sparta Campus - Mayo Health System
 - Monroe County Health Department
5. Community Awareness Involving Diversity
 - *No local resources*

Trempealeau County

Community Weaknesses and Existing Community Resources:

1. Emphasis on prevention
 - Franciscan Skemp Arcadia Clinic: Sex Education
 - Trempealeau County UW Extension Office: Family Nutrition Program
 - Gundersen Lutheran - Blair and Whitehall Clinic: HealthCheck and Health Education
2. Affordable mental care
 - *No local resources*
3. Affordable health care (2.00)
 - Franciscan Skemp Arcadia Clinic: Patient Financial Assistance
4. Affordable dental care
 - *No local resources*
5. Community preparedness
 - The Salvation Army
 - Trempealeau County Office Of Emergency Management
6. Community resources to learn new skills or hobbies
 - Western Technical College: Adult Evening Education
7. Available jobs that offer enrichment and advancement
 - *None*
8. Fine arts and cultural opportunities
 - *No local resources*
9. Affordable & accessible public transportation
 - Trempealeau County Senior Services: Ride Solutions Program
 - *Does not seem to be any public transportation in Trempealeau*

Vernon County

Community Weaknesses and Existing Community Resources:

1. Personal and Community Responsibility (drug, alcohol and tobacco misuse and abuse, obesity)
 - Couleecap, Inc
 - Vernon Memorial Healthcare
 - Gundersen Lutheran - Viroqua Clinic
 - Vernon County Health Department

 2. Health and Wellbeing of Residents (affordable health care, access to dental and mental care)
 - Health Supportive Services
 - BadgerCare
 - Healthy Start Medical Assistance
 - Family Planning Waiver Medicaid
 - Community Options Program
 - Family Support Program
 - Financial Assistance For Children With Cancer
 - Donated Dental Services Program
 - Dental Work Funding
 - Community Options Program
 - *No resources available on affordable mental care*

 3. Violence toward Others and Oneself (child, domestic, elder abuse and suicide)
 - Family & Children's Center
 - Vernon County Health Department

 4. Diversity and Inclusiveness (greater multicultural understanding and sensitivity, inclusiveness in decision making and opportunities)
 - *No local resources*

 5. Individual and Community Financial Challenges (housing, transportation, employment providing a livable wage, reduce poverty, meeting basic needs for low income populations, employment opportunities for youth)
 - Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
 - Catholic Charities
 - UW Extension
 - Coulee Cap Transitional Housing
 - E-Z Pickins
 - Vernon County Human Services
 - Living Faith Church
 - Couleecap, Inc.

 6. Conserve and Protect Our Natural Resources (air, water, land, energy, recycling, land use planning, Jersey Valley Dam repair, flood control)
 - Vernon County Offices - Land And Water Conservation
 - Vernon County Offices - Solid Waste And Recycling
 - Coulee Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
 - Couleecap, Inc.
-

Attachment A

2-1-1 Area Information Center

- Easy to remember number
- Easy access, no cost
- Information management experts
- Internet site www.211.org

Refer callers or those accessing via the Internet to:

- **Specialized Information and Referral (I & R)**
Substance Abuse, Aging, Child Care, Mental Health, Crisis Intervention, Juvenile, Disability, Protective Services, Community Information Centers
 - Coordinated access
 - Community Partners
 - Content experts

Or Direct Referral to:

- **Community Services**
Food, Housing, Transportation, Education and Employment, Financial Assistance, Health Care, Mental Health Care and Counseling, Criminal Justice and Legal Services, Family Support Services, Community Services, Consumer Services, Public Health and Safety
 - 1,000s of Federal, State and Community resources



Easy to remember telephone number that connects people with important information

One of 2-1-1 is to build America's capacity to strengthen the way people access help in civic life

- **How Did 2-1-1 Come About?**
 - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) assigned 2-1-1 on July 21, 2000, stating:
 - "We find that the Information & Referral Petitioners have demonstrated sufficient public benefits to justify use of a scarce public resource and we therefore assign 211 to be used for access to community information and referral services."
 - While services offered through 2-1-1 vary from community to community,
 - 2-1-1 provides callers with information about and referrals to human services for every day needs and in times of crisis.
- **2-1-1 Can Offer Access to the Following:**
 - Basic Human Needs Resources
 - Physical and Mental Health Resources
 - Employment Supports
 - Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities
 - Support for Children, Youth and Families
 - Volunteer Opportunities and Donations
 - Disaster Assistance

- **Community Benefits**
 - 2-1-1 is a resource for everyone in the community 24/7.
 - There are almost 900,000 non-profit organizations in the United States plus scores of government agencies. It is a complicated web of health and human service programs and 2-1-1 can reduce confusion.
 - 2-1-1 is a useful planning tool. Based on aggregate data about calls, communities are in a better position to anticipate demand for services and mobilize resources to meet changing needs.
 - 2-1-1 maintains the integrity of the 9-1-1 system; saving that vital community resource for life and death emergencies.
 - Community access in times of disaster or crisis.

 - **Typical 2-1-1 Calls**
 - The mother of a 12 year old seeks counseling for her son who is not going to school regularly.
 - A single mother is worried about the gas shut-off notice she just received.
 - A caller is depressed, considering suicide and wants help.
 - A mother calls looking for after school care for her children.
 - A young woman with a disability inquires about available transportation.
 - A caller needs information about applying for food stamps.
 - A guidance counselor is searching for parenting education classes for a teen father.
 - A widower is looking for a social group to join.
 - A recently retired gentleman is looking for volunteer opportunities.
 - A caller with a gambling problem seeks services.
 - A traveler wants to know how to get a passport.

 - **2-1-1 Wisconsin**
 - **Purpose:** To develop and manage a statewide I&R system that utilizes a 2-1-1 dialing code and to assist in the provision of high quality and community based information and referral services
 - **Membership**
 - Two members from each 2-1-1 Call Center
 - Division of Public Health
 - Wisconsin State Telephone Association
 - United Way of Wisconsin
 - Wisconsin AIRS
 - Department of Administration
 - Public Service Commission (Ex-Officio)

 - **National Standards for 2-1-1 Centers**
 - 24/7 Phone Coverage
 - AIRS Standards
 - AIRS Accredited
 - Certification of staff
 - Monitor/track calls
 - Provide follow-up to callers
 - Comprehensive database using AIRS taxonomy
 - Community education
 - TTY/Multilingual accessibility
-

- Great Rivers 2-1-1 Calls
- Information and Referral
 - Information
 - Referral
 - Brief Telephone Counseling
- Crisis
 - Crisis Intervention
 - Brief Telephone Counseling
 - Information

Advocacy

Follow-up

Research

- Great Rivers 2-1-1 Resources
 - Professionally trained and certified staff - Information and Referral Specialists and Resource Specialists
 - Computerized database of over 4,000 agencies and 20,000 services
 - Up-to-date telephone technology including IPCC (Internet Protocol Call Center)
- Simply dial 2-1-1 to get help with life.
 - Support Groups
 - Community/Cultural Events
 - Parenting Concerns
 - Adult and Child Abuse
 - Relationship/Family Concerns
 - Alcohol and Drug Abuse
 - Housing/Emergency Shelter
 - Suicidal Thoughts and Feelings
 - Food Resources
- Current Great Rivers 2-1-1 Service Area



Attachment B

Great Rivers 2-1-1 Database Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

- The following types of agencies and organizations will be included in the database:
 - Nonprofit 501 and 501C3 organizations
 - Other public/private organizations offering free/low cost services
 - Hospitals and clinics
 - Membership organizations (i.e. faith-based organizations) offering a health and human service to the greater community, not confined to their own membership
 - Agencies providing Information and Referral including specialized Information and Referral services
 - Elected officials and government offices
 - Public educational institutions
 - Fundraising organizations providing services to the nonprofit sector
 - Nursing homes, retirement homes and communities, independent and assisted living facilities
 - Counseling agencies
 - Proprietary agencies under government or nonprofit sector
 - For-profit agencies may be included if they offer services not adequately covered by the nonprofit sector and/or where they offer free or low cost services or accept third party payments including Medicare, Medicaid
 - Self-help groups
 - Professional organizations
 - Private practitioners or individual therapists when appropriately licensed or accredited
- Agencies will be included within the following geographical area:
 - Located with the Wisconsin Counties of Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, Vernon; the Iowa Counties of Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek; and the Minnesota Counties of Fillmore Houston and Winona
 - Regional/statewide agencies and organizations within Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa will be included if they serve one of the above listed counties
 - Statewide and national organizations will be included at the discretion of Great Rivers 2-1-1
- The following will not be included:
 - Agencies or services which misrepresent their services in any way
 - Private for-profit organizations at the discretion of Great Rivers 2-1-1
 - Those agencies not being licensed where licensing standards exist
 - Home based businesses
 - Agencies engaged in fraudulent or illegal activities

Disclaimers:

- A listing in the Great Rivers 2-1-1 database does not constitute endorsement of or liability for any agency program or service
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 reserves the right to refuse listing an agency, if in its sole opinion, such a listing is deemed inappropriate
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 does not guarantee client referrals to organizations in the database. Agencies are completely and wholly responsible for screening clients for eligibility of services within their program(s)
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 reserves the right to cancel a listing when an agency no longer meets the required criteria or if the agency does not provide updated information regarding the organization when requested by Great Rivers 211
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 reserves the right to delete an agency from the database when the agency does not provide updated information as requested by First Call For Help
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 will consider the following as a basis for denying inclusion in its database:
 - Agencies denying services on basis of color, race, religion, ancestry, sexual preference, nationality, creed, or whose service is illegal
 - When Great Rivers 2-1-1 knows or has reasonable basis to believe services to clients are not in accord with community accepted professional practices and standards

Attachment C

The following template may be used to record goals. By recording specific goals, action and project ideas to accomplish goals, funding and other resources needed, developing a timeline, and identifying responsible parties, communities can begin to address the key regional concerns that were identified by the COMPASS Partnership.

Goals	Actions and Projects	Funding or Other Resources Needed and Time Period	Responsible Party and Other Comments
	•		
	•		
	•		

Birth and Death Rates

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Birth Rates 2000-2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Houston	11.1	10.9	9.7	10.5	10.6	11.3
La Crosse	11.5	11.6	11.6	11.4	11.5	11.8
Monroe	14.7	14.3	13.4	14.8	13.7	14.3
Trempealeau	11.9	12.1	10.4	12.3	12.9	11.8
Vernon	13.9	13.2	13.4	14.3	14.9	13.8
Wisconsin	12.9	12.7	12.6	12.7	12.7	12.7
Minnesota	13.7	13.5	13.6	13.8	13.8	14.0
U.S.	14.4	14.1	13.9	14.1	12.7	14.0

Source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

Death Rates 2000-2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Houston	7.2	9.1	9.2	8.0	10.3	9.3
La Crosse	8.3	8.8	8.2	8.0	8.1	7.4
Monroe	10.1	9.1	10.4	9.8	9.5	9.3
Trempealeau	11.0	11.8	10.4	11.5	9.4	10.0
Vernon	11.8	11.8	10.9	10	9.4	11.1
Wisconsin	8.7	8.6	8.6	8.4	8.2	8.3
Minnesota	7.7	7.6	7.7	7.4	7.3	7.3
U.S.	8.7	8.5	8.5	8.3	8.0	8.2

Source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

Trends and Issues

The birth rate is a measure of childbirths per 1,000 people, per year. The death rate is calculated in the same way, to each 1,000 people. In this way you can combine both birth and death rates to get an idea of population growth for a county, state or nation.

Birth and death rates are indicators of many aspects of a community. They can measure general age-sex structure, fertility, economic prosperity, education, and quality of life of a community. When the birth rate exceeds the death rate the population increases.

Higher birth rates can be linked to better medical attention throughout a pregnancy and during birth. Lower death rates can be attributed to medicines and procedures to save people's lives and help them live longer.

Information Source:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>

For Further Information:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us>

Information Collected By:

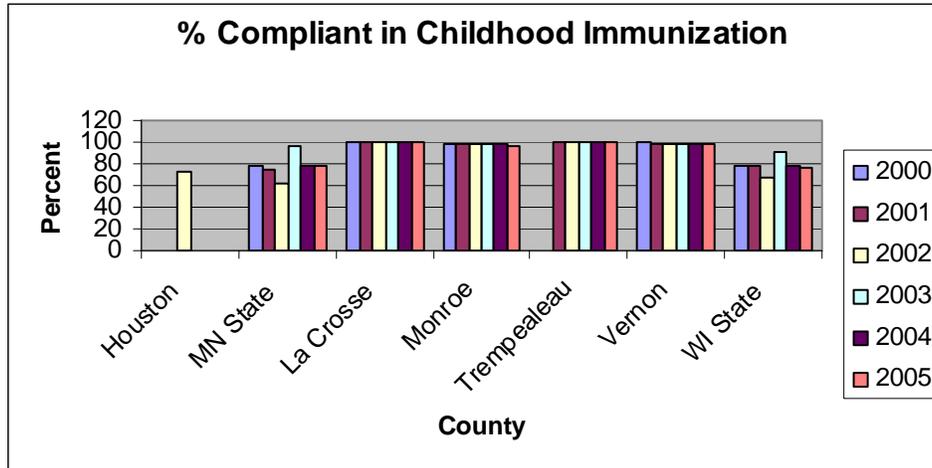
Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- Overall, Wisconsin and Minnesota are slightly below, or at, the National average birth rate.
- Minnesota's birth rate is consistently higher than Wisconsin's.
- Monroe County has the highest birth rate in the five counties, which hovers at or above the national average.
- Houston County has the lowest consistent birth rate of the five counties represented.
- The Wisconsin death rate is at or above the National death rate, whereas Minnesota's death rate is continually lower than both.
- The death rates for Vernon, Trempealeau, and Monroe Counties are all higher than the Wisconsin death rate.
- Of these counties, La Crosse has the lowest death rate.
- Between 2000 and 2005 the birth rates in these counties, and in Wisconsin, were always higher than the death rates.

Childhood Immunizations

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Immunization is one of the best ways to reduce communicable diseases such as measles, rubella, mumps, and polio in a community. Immunizations allow the immune system to identify and attack diseases before they cause problems. Although deaths caused by vaccine-preventable diseases are fairly rare, the causes of the diseases have yet to be eliminated, making the diseases a continued threat.

The Center for Disease Control requires very young children to be immunized according to the following schedule: a two-year old child should have had four doses of Diphtheria/Tetanus/Pertussis (DtaP), three doses of Polio (IPV), one dose of Measles/Mumps/Rubella (MMR), one dose of Varicella, three doses of Hepatitis B and three doses of Haemophilus Influenza (HIB).

It is imperative that parents realize the importance of preventing childhood illness and where they can obtain vaccines. Cost-benefit analyses show that for every dollar spent on immunizations, about five dollars are saved in medical care and costs.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County has been consistent with 99% compliant immunizations from 2000-2005.
- Trempealeau County has had the highest % compliance in immunizations, with 99.9% compliance in 2002, 2004, and 2005.
- The counties listed had higher percent compliancy rates than Minnesota and Wisconsin overall for each year listed.

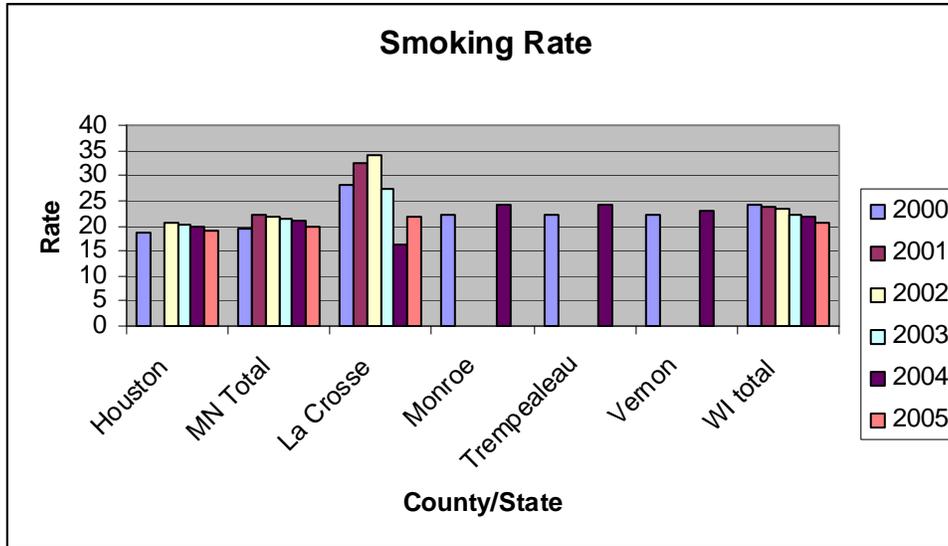
Information source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

For Further Information: www.cdc.gov

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Tobacco Use

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Tobacco use is the most common preventable cause of disease and death, and is a major risk factor for heart disease and lung disease. Tobacco use has been shown to be the cause of more deaths than alcohol, car accidents, illegal drugs, murders, suicides, and AIDS combined.

In 2005, 21% of La Crosse County adults were smokers. This was a higher percentage than both Houston County and the state of Wisconsin.

Not just smokers are affected by tobacco use. Non-smokers living or working with smokers are about twice as likely to die from lung cancer as are members of a non-smoking household. Secondhand smoke can in some cases be as deadly over the long term as actually smoking.

Cities and townships within La Crosse County have initiated smoke-free dining ordinances; the county has also adopted a smoke-free dining policy. Other efforts have begun to focus on smoke-free worksites. Since there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, this is the only way to assure protection to the public.

Tobacco initiatives targeted at youth have focused in recent years on limiting youth access to tobacco. Compliance checks are conducted in most communities. Some communities have begun to ticket those vendors that sell tobacco to youth.

Data Highlights

- The data is not available for every county, every year due to small sample sizes in state-wide surveys.
- The smoking rate has decreased slowly in Wisconsin from 2000-2005 and is currently about 20%.
- The highest incidence of smoking for La Crosse County occurred in 2002.
- Tobacco use for the state of Minnesota is near 20% for each year listed, slightly lower than the rate in Wisconsin.
- These trends follow a similar national trend of decreasing smoking rates.

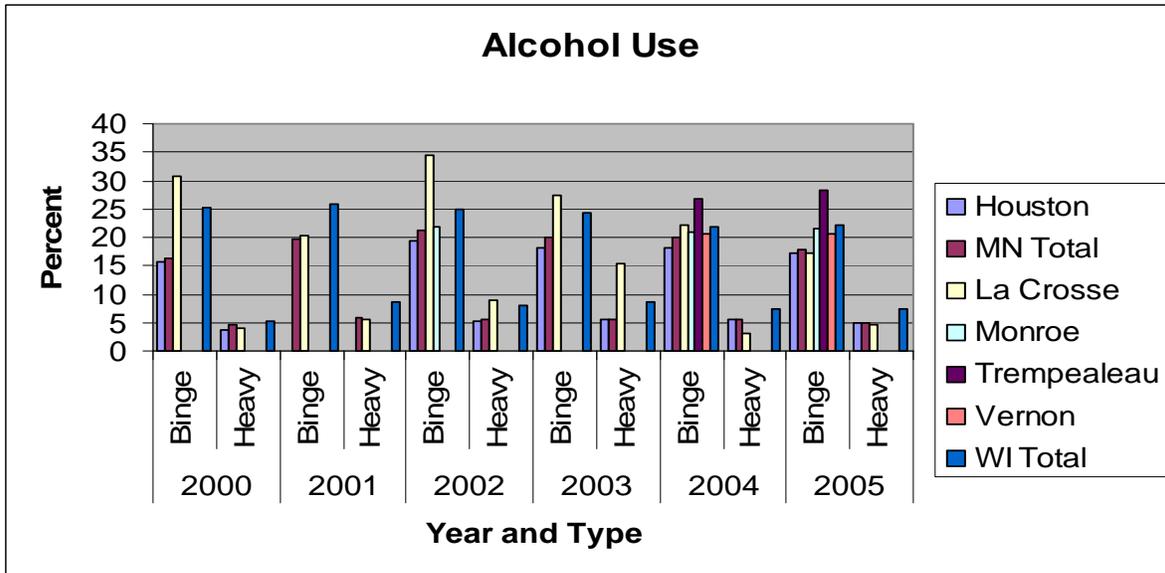
Information source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; Tobacco Control Resource of Wisconsin; Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; UW Tobacco Surveillance and Evaluation Program

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/stats.html> ; <http://www.tobwis.org/> ; http://www.medsch.wisc.edu/mep/departments/data/fs_data.html ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Alcohol Use

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Alcohol abuse is a major cause of premature death and illness in this country. The abuse of alcohol can also lead to mistreatment of children, domestic violence, car accidents, drowning, assault, suicide, and property damage. The effects of alcohol abuse upon the body include liver disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease, neurological damage, depression, and anxiety. Alcohol misuse has a negative effect on the health, economy, and quality of life in a community.

Binge drinking is defined as five or more drinks in a single occasion. Heavy drinking is defined as consuming 14 or more drinks per week. These questions are assessed as part of the Behavior Risk Factor Survey conducted in each state, every year.

In any one separate year, La Crosse County's percent of binge drinking is comparable to Houston County, and both are less than the state of Wisconsin. When the data from 2000-2006 is combined, the binge drinking rate was higher in La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon, and Trempealeau counties than the state average. Heavy drinking in La Crosse County reached a high of 15.4% in 2003, but has since decreased dramatically.

Information source: Wisconsin Dept. of Health and Family Services; UW Population Health Institute; US Census; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

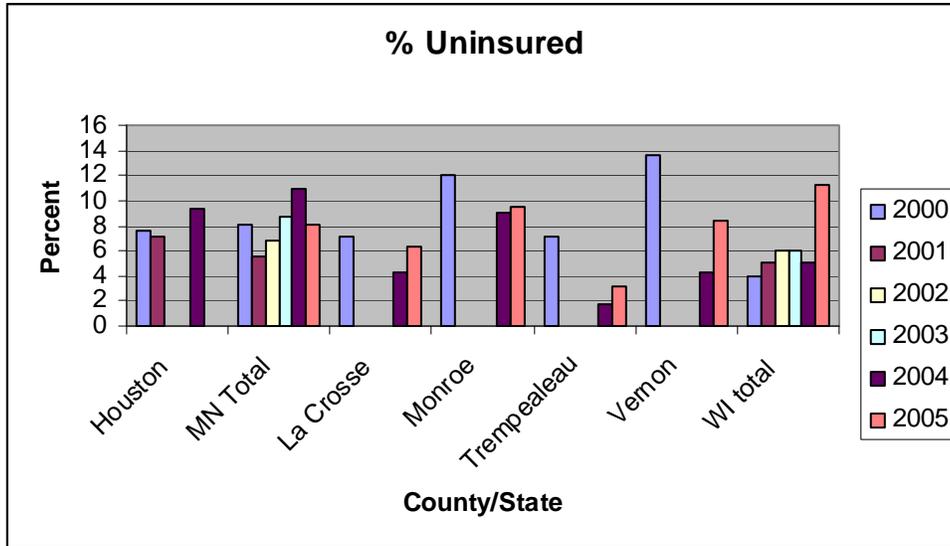
For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/> ; <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/> ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Data Highlights

- Binge drinking for the state of Wisconsin from 2000-2005 was 24%.
- Houston County binge drinking decreased 2.3% from 2002-2005.
- Binge drinking was the highest in La Crosse County in 2002. The average binge drinking rate in La Crosse County for 2000-2005 was 26.1%
- Trempealeau County had the highest percentage of binge drinking over the 5 years of 27.6%.
- Vernon County's binge drinking rate from 2000-2006 was 26.6%.
- Monroe County had the lowest 5 year binge drinking rate of 25.9%.
- It is estimated that in Houston County in 2004, \$1.7 million dollars in healthcare costs were a result of alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents.

Health Insurance Coverage Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Data Highlights

- Both La Crosse and Trempealeau County had low uninsured rates of 7.1% in 2000, but this is still higher than the Wisconsin uninsured rate of 4%.
- The percent of Wisconsin's uninsured was at a five-year high in 2005 at 11.2%.
- Vernon County had an uninsured rate near 14% in 2000.
- Minnesota's uninsured rate was higher than Wisconsin's in all years listed except 2005.
- A new set of Web pages from the Department of Health and Family Services provides access to local information about poverty status and health insurance coverage for many localities in Wisconsin.
- The new tables are available at on the DHFS Web site.
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/localdata/FHS/index.htm>

Trends and Issues

Health insurance coverage is usually offered through employers or federal or state sponsored plans. The Federal and state sponsored coverage plans are generally for children, adults over 65, the poor, the disabled, veterans, Native Americans, and federal civilian employees.

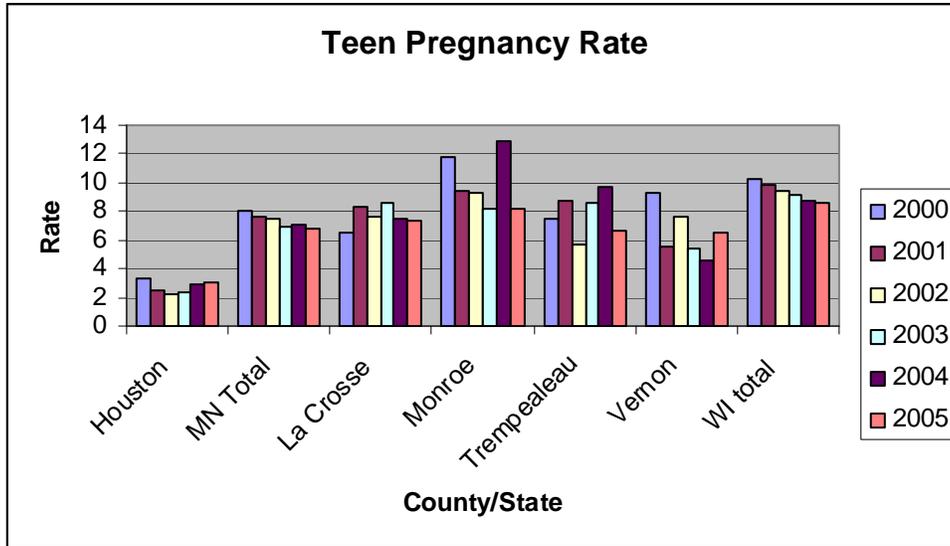
There are various reasons for one being uninsured. Many uninsured are unemployed or work where no insurance is offered. Some are self-employed and cannot afford the cost of private coverage. Others simply cannot afford the cost of premiums and deductibles. The problem is that without health insurance coverage, an individual's quality of life is greatly jeopardized.

Information source: UW Population Health Institute; US Census; www.statecoverage.net; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

For Further Information: www.census.gov; <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/>; <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/>

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Teen Pregnancy Rate Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Teen pregnancy rates in the United States declined sharply between 1990 and 2002. The rate of teen pregnancies per 1,000 individuals in 2002 was about 64% less than what it was in 1990. Although we are close to the Healthy People 2010 goal of 43 per 1000, many health experts believe we could do much better at lowering our rates. The US teen pregnancy rate is second highest among 46 countries in the developed world.

Teenage childbearing has many negative implications for both the mother and the child. Some studies have indicated that children of teenage mothers are at an increased risk for low birth weights and lower cognitive scores. Also, due to early childbirth, a teenage mother's education levels and economic independence are generally lower than older mothers. Teenage mothers also show an incidence of relying on economic aid and living in poverty.

Teenage pregnancies are often a result of peer pressure, lack of contraceptive use, poor family relationships, and the influence of the mass media.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County has had an average of 7.66% teen pregnancy rate over the 2000-2005 period.
- Monroe County has the highest rate of teen pregnancy overall of all the counties included.
- Compared to the other counties, Houston County had a relatively low teen pregnancy rate in all years.
- Wisconsin had a higher teen pregnancy rate than Minnesota overall in each year listed.

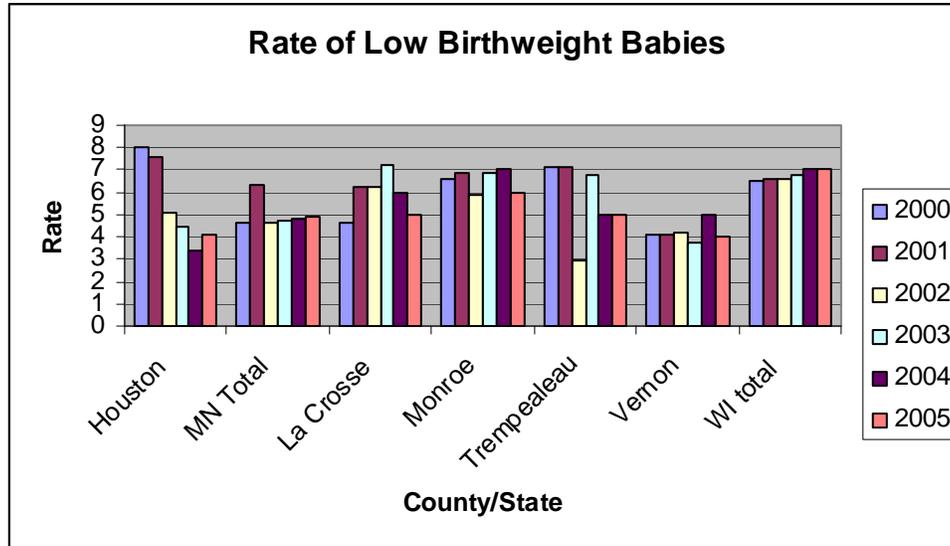
Information source: Minnesota Department of Health; Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/> ; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/stats.html> ; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Low Birth Weight Rate

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Low birth weight is defined as a birth weight lower than 5 pounds, 8 ounces (2,500 grams); very low birth weight is defined as a birth weight below 3 pounds, 5 ounces (1,500 grams); and extremely low birth weight is defined by a birth weight less than 2 pounds, 2 ounces (1,000 grams). Many premature babies, born before the 37th week of pregnancy, are also low birth weight.

Many low birth weight babies face an increased health risk including respiratory illness, chronic lung disease, vision and hearing problems, and neuron-developmental impairments. If a mother smokes, drinks, uses drugs, or has exposure to poor environmental toxins or health, it can lead to the risk of low birth weight.

Low birth weight deliveries are on the increase, nationally, and can have a significant economic impact on the family, and community. Low birth weight deliveries are also more common among teen pregnancies, mothers who began prenatal care later in the pregnancy, and women with no health care coverage or lower socioeconomic status.

Data Highlights

- Houston County had the highest rate of low birth weight babies in 2000.
- The state of Wisconsin had a higher rate of low birth weight babies than the state of Minnesota in all years listed.
- Trempealeau County had the lowest incidence of low birth weight babies in 2002.

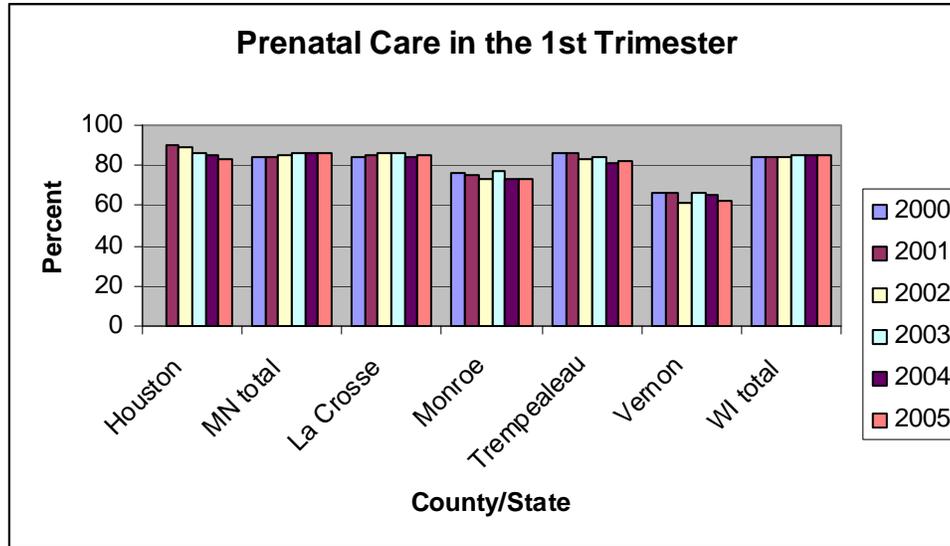
Information source: Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/stats.html> ; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Prenatal Care

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Prenatal care beginning during the first trimester of a pregnancy has been shown to increase the odds of a healthy birth and a healthy baby. The wellbeing of both the mother and child is at risk when care is delayed or neglected altogether. These risks—medical conditions, environmental hazards, and lifestyle factors—can be identified by early prenatal care.

Late prenatal care is related to low birth weight babies, preterm deliveries, and an increase in infant mortality. Not only does early prenatal care increase the health of the mother and baby, but it has been shown to be cost effective in terms of healthcare. Every healthcare provider should stress the importance of beginning pregnancy care during the first trimester. For the care to be adequate, healthcare providers claim that women should have at least nine visits throughout her full term pregnancy.

The five counties listed had a range of 61%-90.2% receiving 1st trimester prenatal care between 2000 and 2005. In 2005, the average percent of all counties listed was the lowest at 77.12%.

Information source: Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

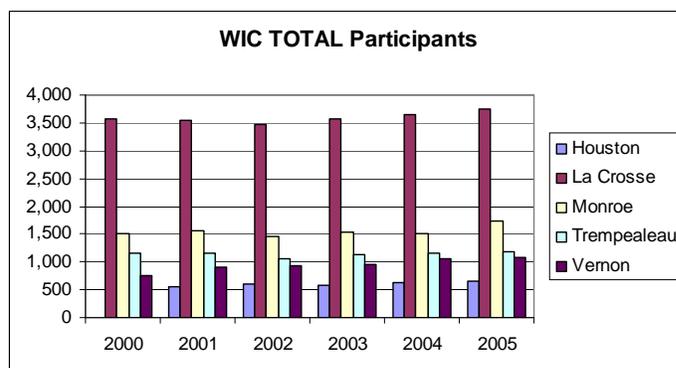
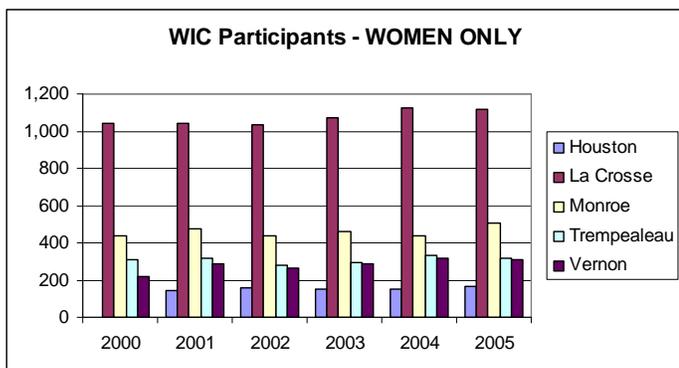
For Further Information: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/stats.html> ; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Data Highlights

- The national and state goals are to have at least 90% of pregnant women receive prenatal care within the first trimester. No county is currently meeting this goal.
- La Crosse County had relatively steady mid-eighties percentages of 1st trimester prenatal care from 2000-2005.
- Vernon County consistently had the lowest instances of 1st trimester prenatal care from 2000-2005, with percents only in the low to mid-sixties.
- Minnesota had a higher percentage of 1st trimester prenatal care than Wisconsin in all years listed.

WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) Participants Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

The WIC Program, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, acts to safeguard the health of low-income women, children, and infants who are up to age 5. The program provides nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. The program is monitored by the Food and Nutrition Service, a Federal agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Services of the program are funded by federal grants. The services can be provided at county health departments, hospitals, schools, community centers, public housing sites, etc.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County consistently had more than double the number of both women and total participants in the WIC program than any county listed from 2000-2005.
- Houston County had the least number of WIC participants overall from 2000-2005 of all counties.

Information source: Wisconsin Dept. of Health and Family Services; US Census

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; www.census.gov

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Healthy Families Indicator # 6.10

Communicable Disease

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

La Crosse	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	356	389	425	423	571	<534
Chlamydia Trachomatis	232	289	300	326	398	378
Genital Herpes	54	46	68	71	83	84
Gonorrhea	73	47	52	16	64	47
Syphilis	0	0	0	0	5	<5
Hepatitis B	6	7	5	10	21	20
Food and Waterborne (total)	26	<39	<29	32	54	43
Salmonella	14	15	10	18	8	13
Giardiasis	12	19	14	14	46	31
Hepatitis A	0	<5	<5	0	7	0
Vaccine Preventable (total)	0	<5	14	5	39	12
Measles	n/a	0	0	5	0	0
Pertussis	n/a	<5	14	0	39	12
Other (total)	<39	<72	<56	47	<51	51
Lyme Disease	34	67	51	47	46	51
Tuberculosis	<5	<5	<5	0	<5	0

Monroe	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	<84	<98	<135	<110	<111	125
Chlamydia Trachomatis	60	78	98	83	75	88
Genital Herpes	14	10	26	12	17	27
Gonorrhea	<5	<5	6	5	9	10
Syphilis	0	0	0	<5	<5	0
Hepatitis B	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0
Food and Waterborne (total)	<11	<13	<15	14	<22	11
Salmonella	<5	<5	<5	9	12	6
Giardiasis	6	8	<5	5	<5	5
Hepatitis A	0	0	<5	0	<5	0
Vaccine Preventable (total)	0	0	<5	<5	<5	9
Measles	n/a	0	0	<5	0	0
Pertussis	n/a	0	<5	0	<5	9
Other (total)	25	<21	<32	<39	<46	34
Lyme Disease	25	16	27	34	41	34
Tuberculosis	0	<5	<5	<5	<5	0

Trempealeau	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	<35	<60	63	<60	<74	<75
Chlamydia Trachomatis	25	50	53	43	55	62
Genital Herpes	5	<5	5	7	9	8
Gonorrhea	<5	<5	5	<5	<5	0
Syphilis	0	0	0	0	<5	0
Hepatitis B	0	0	0	<5	0	<5
Food and Waterborne (total)	<11	<18	12	18	<10	11
Salmonella	<5	<5	7	13	<5	5
Giardiasis	6	8	5	5	<5	6
Hepatitis A	0	<5	0	0	0	0
Vaccine Preventable (total)	0	<5	<5	0	15	0
Measles	n/a	0	0	0	0	0
Pertussis	n/a	<5	<5	0	15	0
Other (total)	18	11	24	22	44	32
Lyme Disease	18	11	24	22	44	32
Tuberculosis	0	0	0	0	0	0

Vernon	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	23	<28	<36	47	<60	<49
Chlamydia Trachomatis	17	23	26	31	37	35
Genital Herpes	6	<5	<5	11	13	9
Gonorrhea	0	0	<5	5	5	<5
Syphilis	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hepatitis B	0	0	0	0	<5	0
Food and Waterborne (total)	<11	<10	<16	<10	<14	<5
Salmonella	<5	<5	<5	5	9	<5
Giardiasis	6	<5	6	<5	<5	0
Hepatitis A	0	0	<5	0	0	0
Vaccine Preventable (total)	0	0	5	<5	5	18
Measles	n/a	0	0	<5	0	0
Pertussis	n/a	0	6	0	5	18
Other (total)	11	15	15	19	<40	17
Lyme Disease	11	15	15	19	35	17
Tuberculosis	0	0	0	0	<5	0

Houston	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)		18	20	19	36	21
Chlamydia Trachomatis		14	14	17	26	19
Genital Herpes		Not Available				
Gonorrhea		3	6	2	10	2
Syphilis		0	0	0	0	0
Hepatitis B		1	0	0	0	
Food and Waterborne (total)		8	5	9	4	5
Salmonella		6	4	5	2	3
Giardiasis		2	1	4	2	2
Hepatitis A						
Vaccine Preventable (total)		0	2	5	2	
Measles		0	0		0	
Pertussis		0	2	5	2	
Other (total)		13	16	15	32	26
Lyme Disease		13	16	15	32	26
Tuberculosis		0	0	0	0	0

WI	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	26492	25905	26824	26733	28306	30401
Chlamydia Trachomatis	16357	16552	17063	17780	19621	20497
Genital Herpes	2402	2452	2643	2825	2908	3280
Gonorrhea	7008	6114	6365	5602	5150	5977
Syphilis	183	138	96	111	128	138
Hepatitis B	542	649	657	415	499	509
Food and Waterborne (total)	1607	1681	1793	1764	2216	1986
Salmonella	731	829	902	1032	1000	935
Giardiasis	774	764	694	687	1088	1005
Hepatitis A	102	88	197	45	128	46
Vaccine Preventable (total)		<153	<197	<715	4802	1102
Measles		<5	<5	710	0	<5
Pertussis		148	192	<5	4802	1097
Other (total)	728	683	1912	813	1199	1531
Lyme Disease	636	597	917	747	1104	1453
Tuberculosis	92	86	78	66	95	78

Communicable Disease

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

MN	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
STDs (total)	10352		13304	14111	14703	15875
Chlamydia Trachomatis	7450		10107	10714	11601	12187
Genital Herpes	Not Available					
Gonorrhea	2830		3049	3202	2957	3481
Syphilis	72		148	195	145	207
Hepatitis B	Not Available					
Food and Waterborne (total)	2225		1575	1431	2041	1821
Salmonella	674		593	580	643	580
Giardiasis	1551		982	851	1398	1241
Hepatitis A						
Vaccine Preventable (total)						
Measles	Not Available					
Pertussis	Not Available					
Other (total)	484		914	687	1222	1117
Lyme Disease	283		867	473	1023	918
Tuberculosis	201		47	214	199	199

Data Highlights

- Chlamydia had the highest prevalence in all counties from 2000-2005.
- Measles, tuberculosis, and hepatitis A were uncommon across all counties in all years.
- Pertussis (whooping cough) has seen a recent resurgence in the United States and in our counties. Pertussis is underreported since many people who develop the illness do not seek treatment.

Trends and Issues

With the many advances in sanitation, immunizations, and antibiotics in the past century, communicable disease is no longer the most common cause of mortality. Communicable diseases are illnesses that are contagious and usually spread through direct or close contact with bodily fluids, food, water, insects, or animals.

Communicable diseases can cause significant complications, long-term health effects, and even death. They threaten the quality of life in many communities.

The categories of communicable diseases are: vaccine preventable (measles, chickenpox), water or food-borne (E. coli, Salmonella), sexually transmitted (Hepatitis B, Chlamydia, HIV), direct or close contact (Tuberculosis), or insect/animal transmission (Rabies, Lyme disease).

Communicable diseases can be prevented by good hygiene and sanitation, safe sexual practices, to-date immunizations, and safe use of needles.

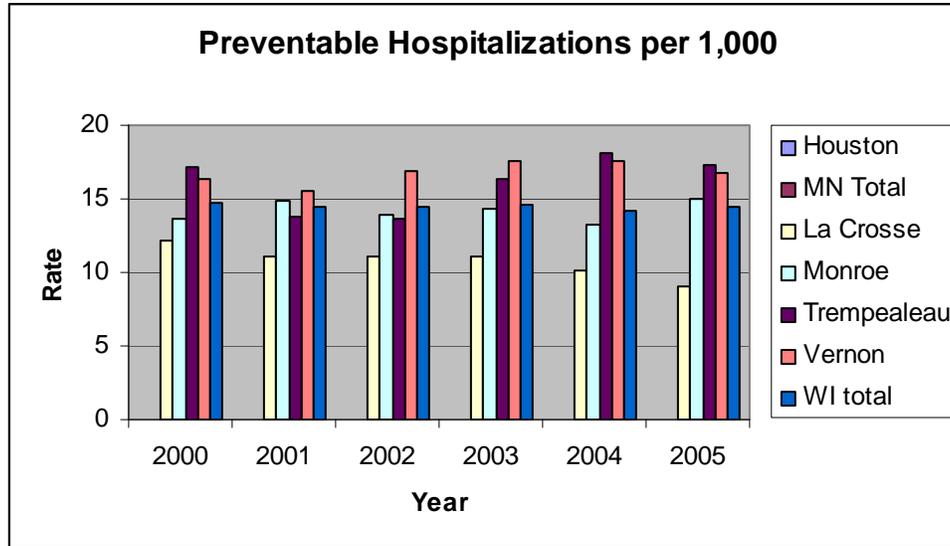
Many times several of these illnesses are underreported if people do not seek medical care.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/> ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Dept., (608)789-7512

Preventable Hospitalizations Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A "preventable" hospitalization is one that could have been avoided if timely and suitable care had been administered. Some diagnoses that are often avoidable with good out-patient care include diabetes, asthma, dehydration, and pneumonia. Not only does a preventable hospitalization cost the family, and ultimately, the community more, it increases the risk of poorer health outcomes such as hospital-acquired infections or other complications.

With adequate primary and preventive healthcare, hospitalizations can be decreased by preventing, managing, or controlling a condition or chronic disease. Primary care for these conditions focuses on family education about a condition's cause, optimal treatment, and how to respond to worsening symptoms.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>, www.lmhscscorecard.com

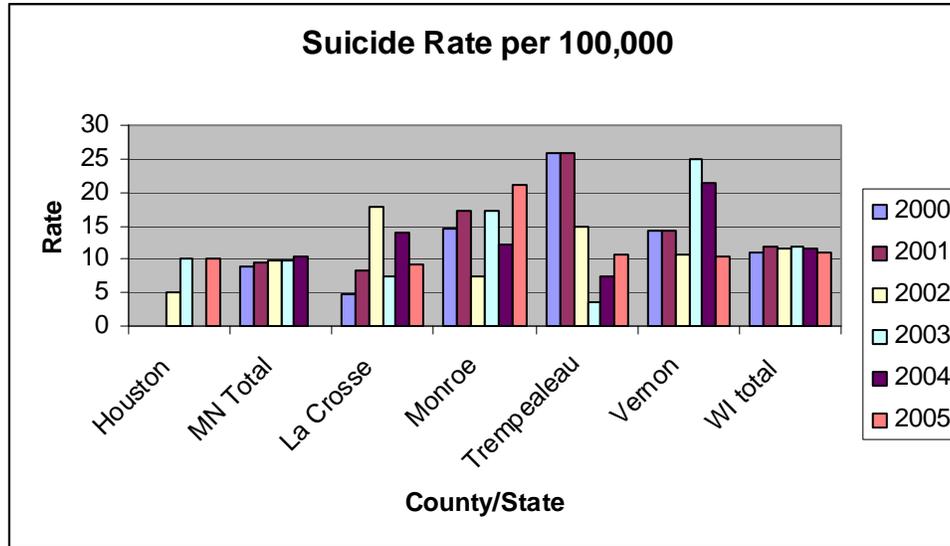
Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Data Highlights

- From 2000 to 2005, La Crosse County consistently had the lowest rates of preventable hospitalizations.
- Trempealeau and Vernon Counties had the highest rates of preventable hospitalizations over the five-year period.
- The state of Wisconsin had a relatively constant rate of preventable hospitalizations in each year, ranging between 14.0 and 15.0.
- Data from Minnesota and Houston County could not be found.
- Great Rivers 2-1-1 and Gundersen Lutheran Telephone Nurse Advisor Line, which are both available in the Great Rivers region, are free and confidential resources - assisting community members to determine if and when they should seek medical care.

Suicide Rate

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States. There are many reasons people take their own lives, including depression, alcoholism, schizophrenia, terminal illness, a sudden trauma, and other psychological and physiological reasons. National statistics show that men are more likely than women to commit suicide, and people over the age of 65 have the highest suicide rates. Suicide is the sixth leading cause of death among those 5-14 years of age, and the third leading cause of death among those age 15-24 years. Risk factors for suicide can include anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, depression, drug and/or alcohol use, stress, and access to firearms.

The suicide rate is a sign of a community's mental health standing. A low suicide rate could reflect the importance and knowledge placed on mental health issues which contribute to a higher quality of life. There may also be some variability in suicide rates by race or ethnicity.

Data Highlights

- Houston and La Crosse Counties have a consistently lower incidence of suicide over the years 2000-2005.
- Monroe County had the highest suicide rate in 2005, at 21.1%.
- Trempealeau County's suicide rate has varied significantly over the past 6 years, and was the highest of any county listed in 2000 and 2001, but was low in 2003.
- Minnesota's suicide rate was lower than Wisconsin's in all years listed.

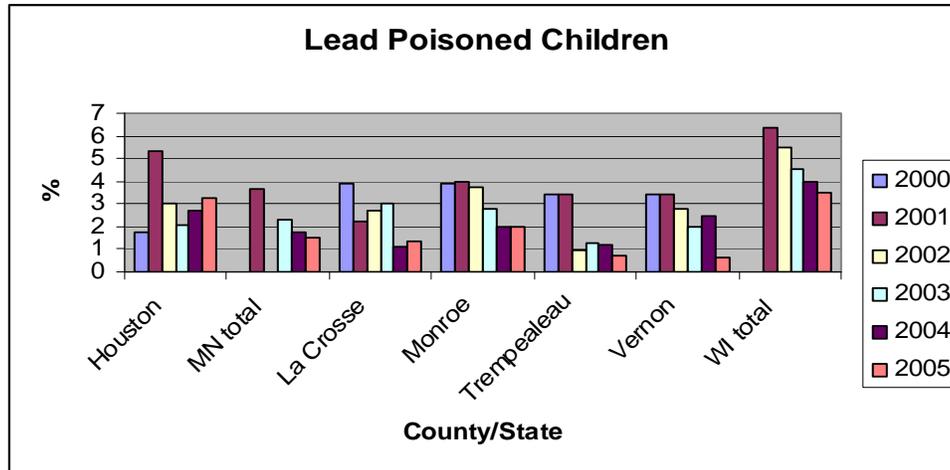
Information source: Medical College of Wisconsin; Minnesota Department of Health; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ;
<http://www.mcw.edu/display/router.asp?DocID=1> ;
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/> ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Lead Poisoning

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Lead poisoning is caused by ingesting or inhaling an amount of lead that causes the level of lead in the blood to meet or exceed 10 micrograms per deciliter. Lead can be found in cooking and drinking water from lead pipes, contaminated soil, lead dishware, lead-based paint, and poorly maintained homes. Lead may also be found in certain home-remedies that certain ethnic groups may use for indigestion or other illnesses. If the child lives or spends significant time in a home built before 1970, there is an increased risk of exposure to lead. There can also be significant exposure to lead when remodeling older homes.

Communities with older housing stock are at higher risk of lead poisoning in children.

At lead levels of 10 mg/dL, there will be no visible symptoms of exposure in children. Lead poisoning symptoms are rarely visible until the child has reached an exposure level of 25-35 mg/dL. Any elevated amounts of lead in the body can cause great harm to vital organs, and at low levels can affect IQ and learning and behavioral development. If left undetected, a child with elevated blood lead levels will suffer and their quality of life will continue to deteriorate through time.

It is recommended that children age six and under be tested at least once for lead poisoning between 6 and 24 months. Tests consist of a finger poke or needle stick for a small blood sample.

Information source: Minnesota Department of Health; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/> ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

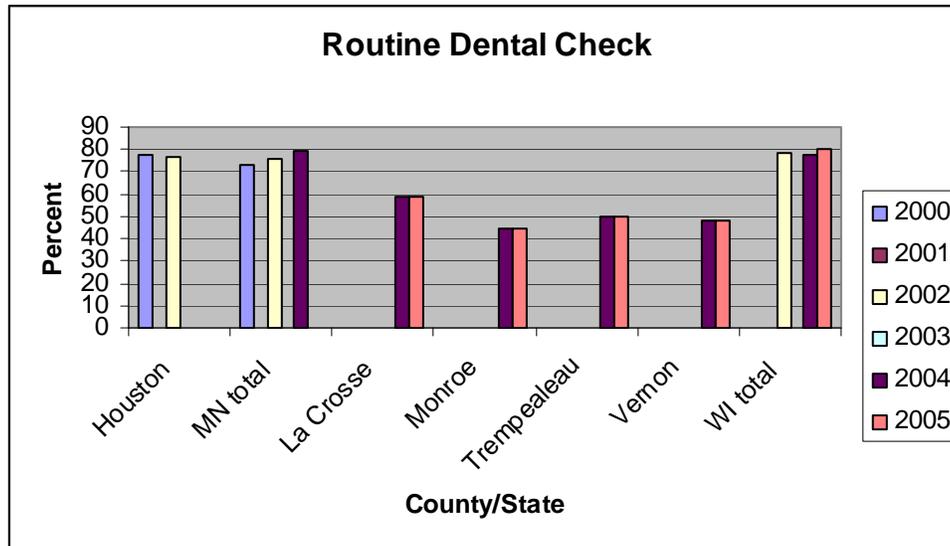
Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Data Highlights

- The rate of lead poisoned children varies greatly by county and year. These numbers fluctuate greatly depending on how aggressively a community screens for lead exposure and do not necessarily represent the overall risk in the community. If a community has many homes built before 1970, the risk is much greater than the numbers may indicate.
- Trempealeau County had the lowest rate of lead poisoned children from 2000-2003, with an average of 2.26%.
- A general trend is the decrease in lead poisoned children in more recent years.
- The highest rate of lead poisoning was for the state of Wisconsin in 2001. Milwaukee County has one of the highest rates of lead poisoning in the Nation.

Dental Health

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

The single most common disease affecting children is tooth decay. Poor dental health can compromise a child's ability to eat and be properly nourished. Dental health and access to care has become one of the greatest public health concerns.

To promote good oral health, individuals can practice brushing, flossing, using fluoride treatments and dental sealants, eating healthy foods, and getting regular checkups. With regular check-ups and fluoridated water, most children can grow-up cavity-free.

For adults, good oral health care is important because untreated dental disease including periodontal disease and untreated dental caries have been linked to heart disease, prenatal distress for infants, and other health-related conditions.

Unfortunately, many people today can not afford dental insurance and unfortunately lower cost dental facilities are difficult to find in communities.

Data Highlights

- Unfortunately, there is very little data available on the percent of children or adults that receive routine dental care.
- In 2004 and 2005, the state of Wisconsin overall had a higher percentage of people getting a routine dental check than the Wisconsin counties listed.
- Many communities and rural areas in the Great Rivers Region do not have fluoridated water systems, which greatly increases the risk of dental caries in young children.

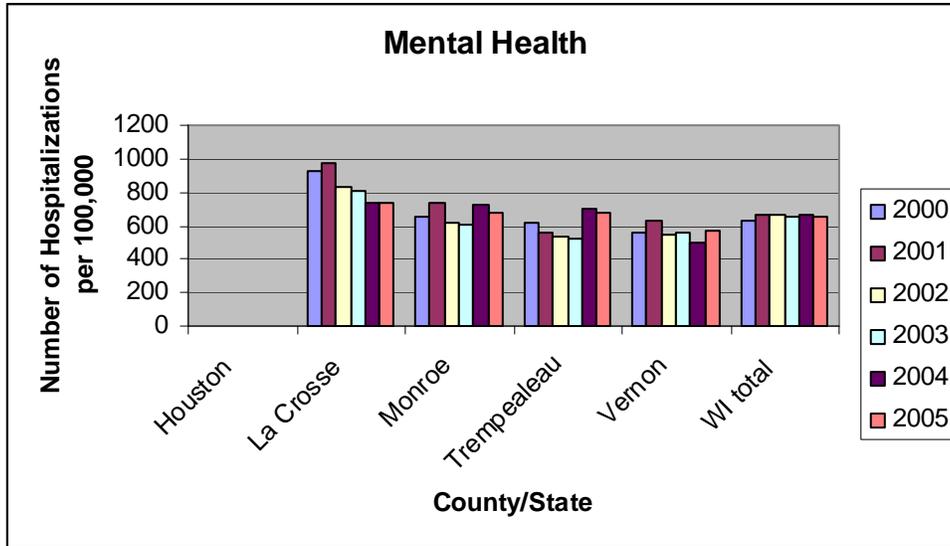
Information source: Minnesota Department of Health; UW Population Health Institute; Minnesota Center for Health Statistics; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

For Further Information: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>; <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/>; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/stats.html>; <http://www.prevention.va.gov/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Mental Health

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

The World Health Organization claims there is no official definition of mental health due to subjectivity, cultural differences, and differing professional theories. However, mental health is generally a term used to describe a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder.

An individual's mental health can be affected by stress, nutrition, alcohol, exercise, illness, prescriptions, and/or over-the-counter medications. Those with a mental disorder are more likely to have an increased risk of suffering, being disabled, injury, or death. Receiving proper mental health care can improve and extend life.

Current concerns regarding mental health care in the community include shortages of mental healthcare workers leading to poor access for patients when needed, limited hospital beds for hospitalizations, and limited insurance coverage for proper follow-up care.

Data Highlights

- Houston County data was not available for this measure.
- La Crosse County had higher average incidence of psychiatric hospitalizations than the other counties over the years.
- The lowest average number of mental health hospitalizations was in Vernon County in 2004.

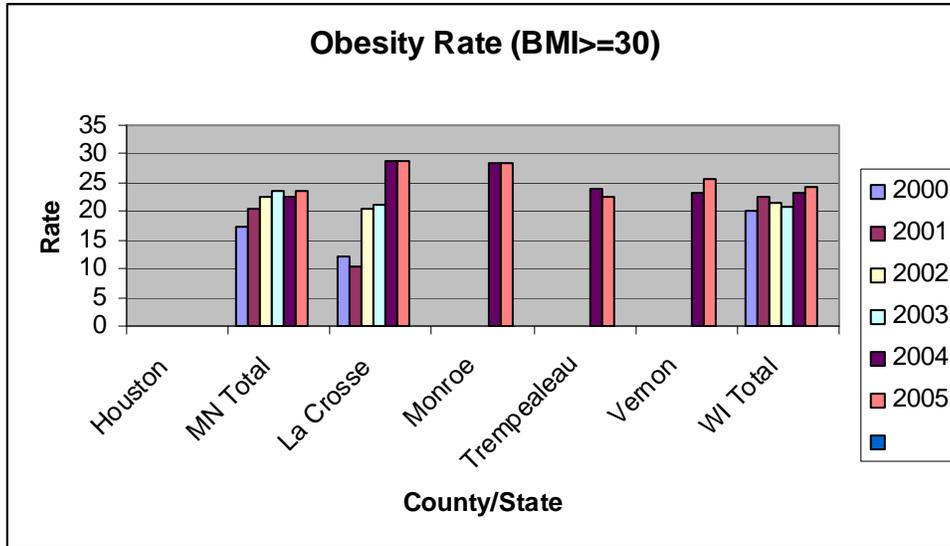
Information source: La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

For Further Information: <http://www.lmhscscorecard.com>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Dept., (608) 789-7512

Obesity Rate

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Obesity, overweight, and a lack of physical activity are common health problems in the United States. Excess weight on the body is associated with conditions such as hypertension, osteoarthritis, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular disease, dyslipidemia, and selected cancers.

Overweight and obesity are determined by examining the body mass index, a ratio of a person's weight to their height as is calculated by taking:
(Weight in kg) / Height (in meters-squared)

If the Body Mass Index (BMI) is greater than or equal to 25, a person is considered to be overweight. A BMI of 30 or above is considered obese. Lifestyle changes can reduce body weight and health conditions through adjustments such as dietary improvements and increased physical activity.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; UW Population Health Institute; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; www.cdc.gov ; <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/> ; <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/> ; www.lmhscscorecard.com

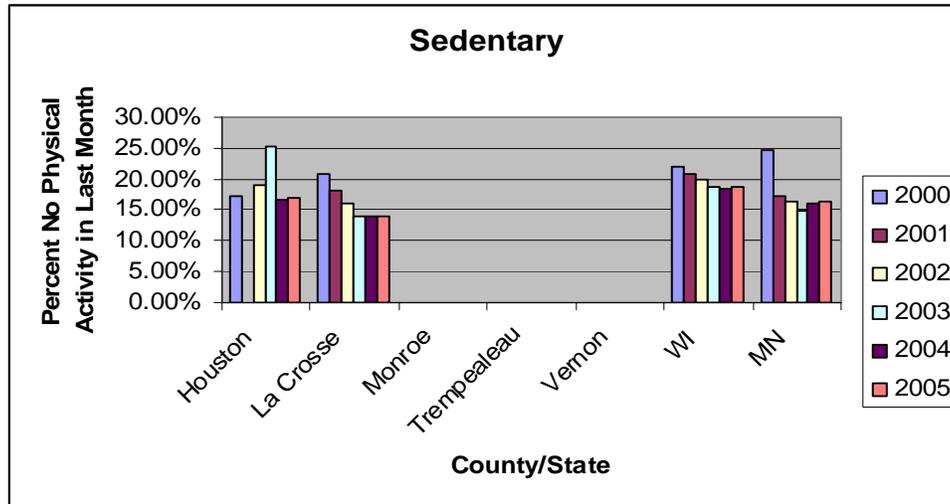
Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Data Highlights

- The number of overweight and obese adults is increasing locally, as well as nationally.
- Little information is available on children, although nationally, the rate of obesity is increasing dramatically for this population as well.
- Little information is available at the county level for most counties.
- La Crosse County's obesity rate was highest in 2004 and 2005, exceeding the total for the state of Wisconsin.
- The state of Wisconsin's obesity rate increased from 2003-2005 by 4.5%.
- Minnesota's obesity rate was higher than Wisconsin's in 2002 and 2003.

Sedentary Lifestyle

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A sedentary lifestyle is characterized by one sitting or remaining inactive with little or no physical activity for most of the day. Sedentary lifestyles are most common in modern Western cultures due to many jobs requiring only sitting in an office, and increased use of automobile trips. The lack of physical activity for long periods of time is thought to lead to such diseases as obesity, type II diabetes, heart disease, and depression. Reasons for a sedentary lifestyle include personal preference, disability, or old age.

Despite the clear health benefits of regular physical activity, more than 50% of Americans do not get enough activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most, or preferably all days. New recommendations encourage 30 minutes of moderate exercise on at least 5 days or 20 minutes of vigorous exercise on at least 3 days a week. Most experts agree that any activity is better than no activity and consistency is very important.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; UW Population Health Institute; Minnesota Department of Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

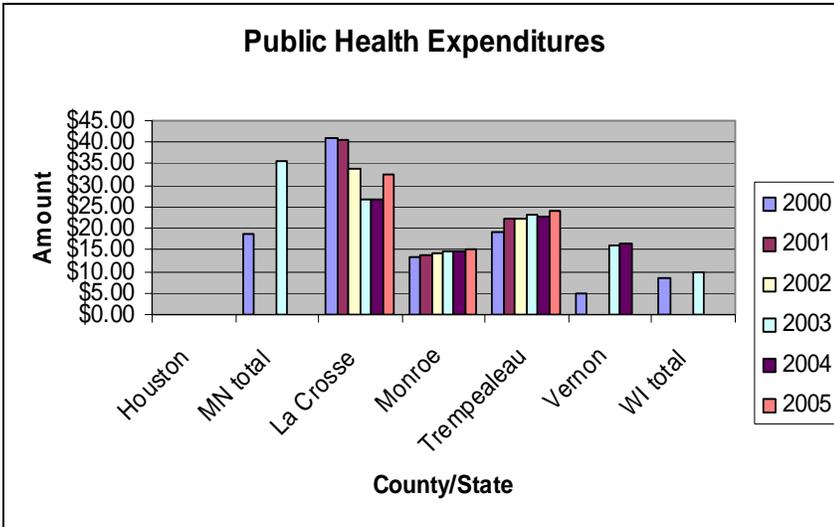
For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/> ; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/> ; www.cdc.gov

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had a steady decline in the percentage of sedentary adults from 2000-2004. Thus, there is a trend for increasing physical activity for La Crosse County adults.
- Except for 2000, Minnesota consistently had a lower percentage of sedentary residents than Wisconsin.
- This information is not available for many of the counties due to small sample size on the state-wide survey.
- Communities should examine their environment to determine if there are small changes that can be done to improve the possibility of their citizen's level of activity (such as adequate green space, sidewalks, areas to exercise indoors, etc.)

Public Health Expenditures Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Public health expenditures are the expenses paid for essential public health services and activities that should be undertaken in every community. The guiding framework for the responsibilities of local public health systems are as follows:

- 1) [Monitor](#) health status to identify and solve community health problems.
- 2) [Diagnose and investigate](#) health problems and health hazards in the community.
- 3) [Inform, educate](#), and empower people about health issues.
- 4) [Mobilize](#) community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.
- 5) [Develop policies and plans](#) that support individual and community health efforts.
- 6) [Enforce](#) laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety.
- 7) [Link](#) people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of healthcare when otherwise unavailable.
- 8) [Assure](#) competent public and personal healthcare workforce.
- 9) [Evaluate](#) effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
- 10) [Research](#) for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest public health expenditures per capita of all counties listed in all years 2000-2005.
- Vernon County had the least amount of public health expenditures per capita in 2000 of all the counties.
- Monroe County's public health expenditures per capita have generally been near \$15.00 in all years 2000-2005.

Information source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For Further Information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/od/ocphp/nphsp/EssentialPHServices.htm>

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

High School Graduation Rate Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Students who earn a high school diploma are eligible to continue on with their education. All accredited colleges require a high school diploma or its equivalent. A high school diploma can open the door for higher incomes creating an improved quality of life. Without a high school diploma, finding a job or furthering one's education is difficult.

When a student completes the course of study established by a local school district, he or she is considered a high school graduate. The State of Wisconsin and the State of Minnesota have established graduation requirements. The State of Wisconsin requires 4 credits of English, 3 credits of Social Studies, 2 credits of Math, 2 credits of Science, 1.5 credits of Physical Education, and .5 credits of Health Education. In addition, the state superintendent encourages a requirement of a minimum of 8.5 additional credits in vocational education, foreign languages, fine arts and other courses. The State of Minnesota requires 4 credits of Language/Arts, 3 credits of Math, 1 credit of Art, 3 credits of Science, 3.5 credits of Social Studies and 7 elective credits. School districts have the option to exceed the minimum credit requirements required for graduation.

The way states calculate their graduation rates can vary. Information on how the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin calculate their graduation rates can be found at the information source websites listed below. The State of Wisconsin graduation (regular diploma) rate reporting changed in 1998-99 and 2003-04. 2003-04 was a year of transition to a new student data collection, and as a result 2003-04 high school completion data may not be comprehensive.

Information Source:

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Minnesota Department of Education

For Further Information:

<http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/>; <http://education.state.mn.us/>; Local School Districts

Information Collected By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

High School Graduation Rates

County	High Schools	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	3 yr avg
Houston	Caledonia	97.3%	95.7%	100.0%	97.7%
	Houston	Not Available			
	La Crescent	99.4%	99.3%	99.2%	99.3%
	Spring Grove	100.0%	100.0%	96.0%	98.7%
La Crosse	Bangor	100.0%	83.3%	93.2%	92.2%
	Central	89.6%	85.3%	88.0%	87.6%
	Holmen	97.3%	96.1%	94.0%	95.8%
	Logan	90.9%	90.0%	93.7%	91.5%
	Onalaska	92.5%	95.7%	96.7%	95.0%
	West Salem	92.9%	96.0%	96.1%	95.0%
	Monroe	Brookwood	100.0%	86.9%	86.0%
Monroe	Cashton	100.0%	100.0%	97.8%	99.3%
	Sparta	98.0%	97.6%	93.2%	96.3%
	Tomah	99.0%	95.6%	98.3%	97.6%
	Trempealeau	Arcadia	97.3%	91.3%	93.1%
Trempealeau	Blair-Taylor	81.0%	81.8%	93.6%	85.5%
	Eleva-Strum	N/A	92.2%	92.0%	92.1%
	Galesville-Ettrick-Trempe	N/A	88.1%	94.6%	91.4%
	Independence	91.2%	90.6%	95.8%	92.5%
	Osseo-Fairchild	82.6%	89.6%	79.0%	83.7%
	Whitehall	98.1%	96.3%	96.6%	97.0%
	Vernon	De Soto	100.0%	97.4%	95.8%
Hillsboro		N/A	96.0%	97.5%	96.8%
Kickapoo		97.8%	100.0%	100.0%	99.3%
La Farge		90.6%	100.0%	87.0%	92.5%
Viroqua		96.3%	97.5%	91.9%	95.2%
Westby		99.0%	97.8%	95.4%	97.4%
*State of MN	Not Available at This Time				
State of WI	91.2% 88.8% 89.3% 89.8%				

Source: WI-Dept. of Public Instruction, Minnesota Dept. of Education and Local School Districts

Data Highlights

- Three year averages show that only three school districts have graduation rates less than 90% or under State of Wisconsin Average
- The majority of school districts had graduation rates of over 95% for the three year period of 2004-2006
- Three school districts in the region had graduation rates of over 99% for the three year period of 2004-2006

ACT (Enhanced American College Test) Scores Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

The American College Test (ACT), designed to assess educational development during the K-12 educational experience, is administered in all 50 states. The ACT test consists of four subject areas and a 30 minute writing test. The 215 question, multiple-choice test covers four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The ACT, which is optional, is typically taken by college bound students in their junior or senior years. The ACT is an entrance requirement for many colleges and universities. The SAT, an alternative test, may be required by some private and out-of-state colleges.

Each portion of the ACT test has a maximum score of 36. The composite score is the weighted average of the four subject specific scores. In 2007, one in 4,000 students scored a 36 on their ACT.

Typically, students who take a rigorous college preparatory curriculum will score better on the ACT. Composite score averages are influenced by the percentage of students who opt to take the test - the greater the percentage, the lower the composite average. Students are allowed to retake the ACT with only the most recent score being recorded.

The ACT is not required for admission to two-year Minnesota and Wisconsin Technical Colleges, however often there is an assessment process to go through as part of that application process.

Information Source:

<http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/>
<http://education.state.mn.us>

For Further Information: www.act.org

Information Collected By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Avg. Composite Scores on ACT

County	High Schools	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	5 yr avg
Houston	Caledona	Not Available					
	Houston	21.7	21.5	22.7	21.4	21.2	21.7
	La Crescent	21.6	22.0	22.4	23.1	23.4	22.5
	Spring Grove	22.3	22.3	21.7	21.9	20.6	21.8
La Crosse	Bangor	20.5	23.2	21.1	20.4	22.3	21.5
	Central	22.6	22.7	22.5	22.1	22.3	22.4
	Holmen	21.2	22.3	21.6	21.4	21.5	21.6
	Logan	21.9	21.7	21.3	21.0	22.8	21.7
	Onalaska	22.2	23.7	23.7	23.2	23.1	23.2
	West Salem	22.6	22.4	21.7	22.6	22.2	22.3
	Monroe	Brookwood	22.7	21.5	21.6	22.8	21.6
	Cashton	20.7	23.0	21.5	21.4	21.3	21.6
	Sparta	21.2	21.8	20.5	21.6	22.7	21.6
	Tomah	21.6	22.0	22.1	22.3	22.0	22.0
Trempealeau	Arcadia	21.0	21.9	21.4	22.4	21.8	21.7
	Blair-Taylor	22.4	21.7	21.9	20.9	20.2	21.4
	Eleva-Strum	20.9	20.4	20.7	20.6	20.7	20.7
	Galesville-Ettrick-Tremp	21.7	22.3	21.8	20.9	21.6	21.7
	Independence	21.2	19.6	19.4	23.0	22.5	21.1
	Osseo-Fairchild	20.1	21.0	21.6	20.2	20.1	20.6
	Whitehall	22.3	20.5	19.9	20.9	22.2	21.2
Vernon	De Soto	21.4	20.2	19.8	20.7	22.3	20.9
	Hillsboro	21.8	22.6	22.2	22.1	21.2	22.0
	Kickapoo	21.2	21.1	21.0	22.2	21.0	21.3
	La Farge	21.2	21.4	NA	20.1	20.8	20.9
	Viroqua	22.5	22.3	21.8	22.5	22.4	22.3
	Westby	20.5	20.7	21.3	20.9	21.5	21.0
State of MN		22	22.2	22.3	22.3	22.5	22.3
State of WI		22.2	22.2	22.2	22.2	22.3	22.2
Nation		20.8	20.9	20.9	21.1	21.2	21.0

Source: WI-Dept. of Public Instruction, Houston Co. High Schools and <http://act.org>

Data Highlights

- With the exception of a few schools in the Great Rivers United Way Region, the average ACT composite score for both urban and rural schools was higher than the national composite score from 2002-2007.
- Seventy percent of students in Wisconsin and Minnesota took the ACT in 2007.
- Schools in the Great Rivers United Way Region scoring the highest composite scores from 2002-2007 were: Onalaska High (23.2), La Crescent High (22.5), and La Crosse Central High (22.4).

Post Secondary Degrees Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

The percentage of population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher is comprised of those who have received a Bachelor's degree from a college or university, or a Master's, Professional, or Doctorate degree. These data include only persons 25 years old and over. The percentages are obtained by dividing the counts of graduates by the total number of persons 25 years old and over.

The percentage of people who have completed secondary education can be a good indicator of how well off a population is and what kind of opportunities for growth there are in the community. The percentage of people who have completed secondary education may also give some insight as to the types of jobs which are available nearby and their entry level or advancement requirements.

Post Secondary degree rates also show the percentage of people who have the potential to earn more. When a larger percentage of people have completed higher levels of study, it follows that there will be greater competition for higher level job positions.

Information Source:

www.census.gov

For Further Information:

<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Information Collected By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Percentage of Population over age 25
with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher

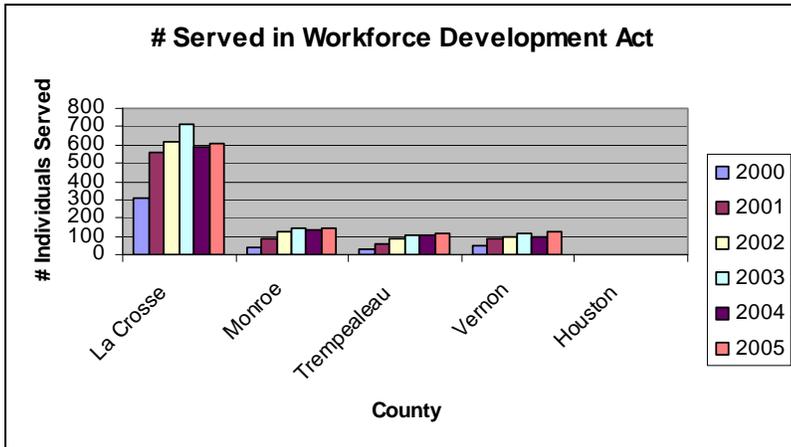
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Chapter 7 Houston	20.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
La Crosse	25.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Monroe	13.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trempealeau	13.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vernon	14	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	22.6	23.2	23.2	23.8	-	-	25.1
Minnesota	27.7	28.3	29.8	30.6	-	-	30.4
U.S.	25	25.5	25.9	26.5	-	-	27

Source: American Community Survey

Data Highlights

- Minnesota is above the national average for the number of people with Bachelor's degrees or higher, while Wisconsin is below the national average.
- La Crosse and Houston counties have a considerably higher percentage of degree holders than do Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties.
- Wisconsin shows a consistent rise in percentage of degree holders, whereas Minnesota seems to have peaked at 30.6% and then dropped down slightly to 30.4%.
- Minnesota consistently has more people with Bachelor's degrees than Wisconsin.

Career Placement in New Careers / Retraining Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Workforce Connections, Inc. is a non-profit corporation that provides opportunities for individuals who have experienced barriers to employment. Their programs assist job-seekers, laid-off workers, youth career planning, and skills training. They can also assist with retraining and recruiting employees. Workforce Connections, Inc. serves the counties of La Crosse, Vernon, Monroe, Trempealeau, Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, Douglas, Pierce, and Columbia. The graph shows the number of individuals who were served under the Workforce Development Act.

Served in Workforce Development Act

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
La Crosse	309	560	621	715	585	608
Monroe	38	89	122	143	133	144
Trempealeau	29	61	86	102	110	113
Vernon	48	83	100	119	101	126
Houston						

Data Highlights

- La Crosse had the largest number of people served of all the counties listed.
- In 2000, each county listed had the fewest number of people served of all the years included.
- Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties had similar numbers of individuals served in each year.

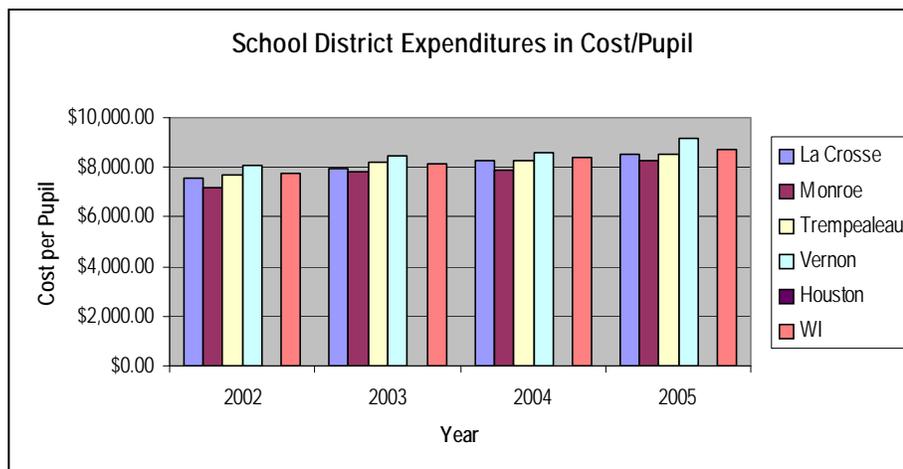
Information source: Workforce Connections, Inc.

For Further Information:

<http://www.workforceconnections.org/About.htm>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608) 789-7512

School District Expenditures Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

School districts need to have adequate financing. School districts lacking funding may not be able to hire sufficient staff, purchase new books and equipment, or support extra-curricular activities.

Much of a school district's operating budget comes from local property taxes. The rest comes from the state and other local and federal funds. The majority of school district expenses come from general fund expenditures, which include categories of licensed instruction, transportation, support services, and operation/administration/other.

The cost per pupil is an average of all the school districts within each county.

Data Highlights

- All counties listed and the state of Wisconsin's expenditures per pupil increased with each year over the 2002-2005 period.
- Vernon County had the highest expenditures per pupil in all years 2002-2005.

Information source: Wisconsin Taxpayer's Alliance

For Further Information: <http://www.wistax.org/facts/>

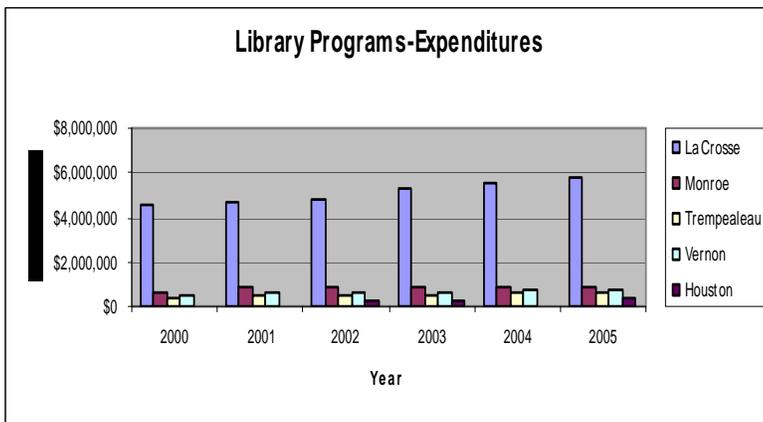
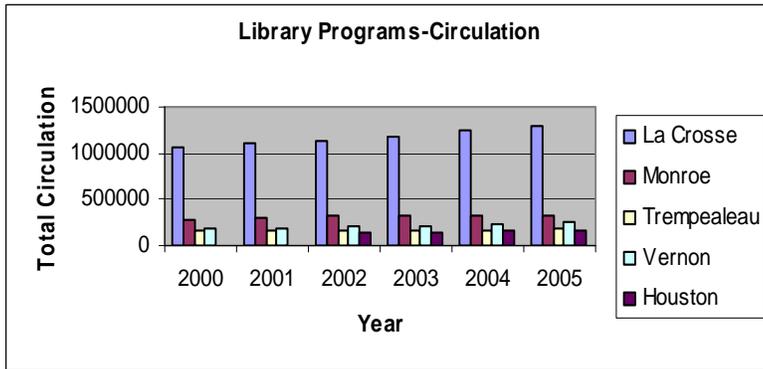
Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512



Education and Quality of Life Indicator # 7.06

Library Expenditures and Circulation

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Information source: Wisconsin Department of Instruction, Minnesota Department of Education.

For Further Information: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/> ; <http://education.state.mn.us>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Trends and Issues

Public libraries provide educational and cultural opportunities for people of all ages for life-long learning. Adequate funding not only enhances the quality of life in a community, but also allows the library to offer programs, services, and updated collections.

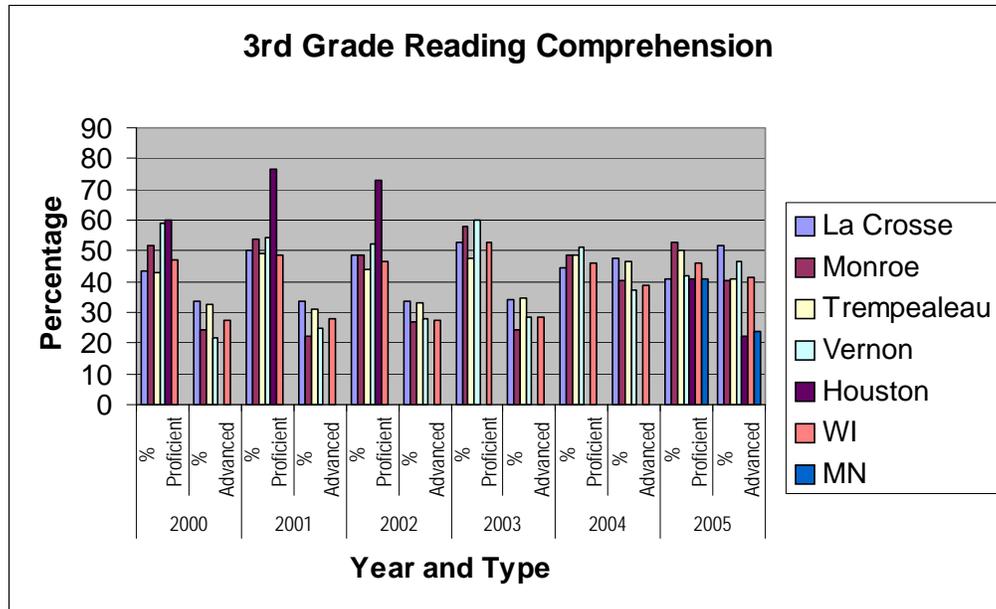
Funding for public libraries comes mainly from local, county, state, and federal sources. Common items that are circulated include books, DVDs, videos, and audiocassettes. The amount of library materials circulated is an indication of each county's residents' interest in reading and learning.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest library expenditures and circulation in all years 2000-2005.
- Trempealeau County and Houston County had the least expenditures and circulation over all years 2000-2005.
- Both circulation and expenditures in La Crosse County gradually increased each year from 2000-2005.

3rd Grade Reading Comprehension

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A child's ability to read and comprehend is an important determinant of his or her success in all academic areas. The development of instructional programs is often dictated by the measurements of a student's knowledge and reading ability. High levels of reading comprehension lead to an increased quality of life in a community.

Each student's performance is reported in varying levels of achievement. The data presented here are for proficient scores and advanced scores. Proficient means the child is competent in the important academic knowledge and skills tested. Advanced means the child has expressed distinguished achievement, and shows an in-depth understanding of academic knowledge and skills tested.

Data Highlights

- Vernon County had the highest proficiency rate in 2003 at 59.9%.
- La Crosse County had the highest advanced rate in 2005 at 51.6%.
- In general, most proficiency rates were higher than advanced rates across all counties, states, and years.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; Minnesota Department of Education; Minnesota Department of Administration

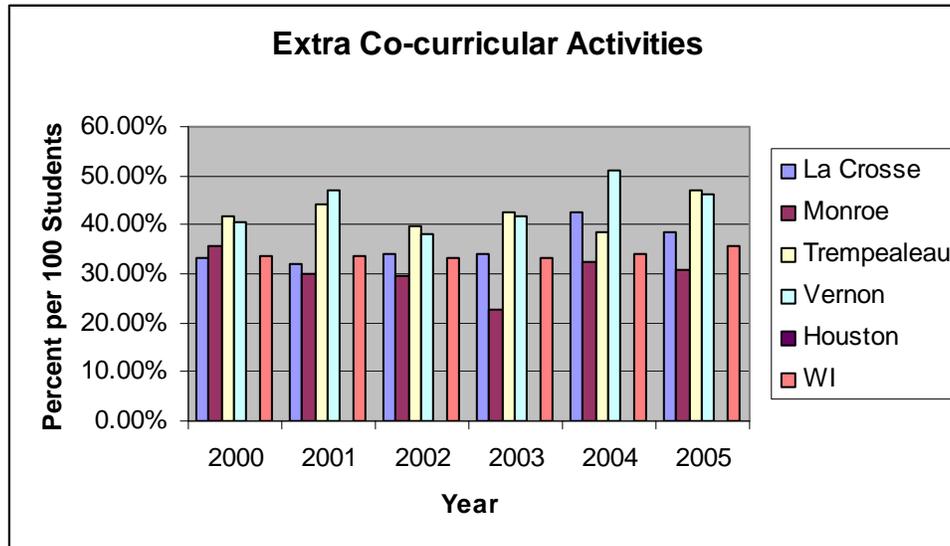
For Further Information: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/> ;
<http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html> ;
<http://server.admin.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512



Extra and Co-Curricular Activities

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Extra and co-curricular activities can increase a student's quality of life by broadening, developing, and enhancing their school experience.

Included in this data are academic, athletic, and musical co-curricular activities for each county. Through extra-curricular activities, students can develop their minds, bodies, social skills, and learn to be part of a team. Another key point of co-curricular activities is that they are not for credit.

The overall participation rate can be over 100% because many students are involved in more than one activity. A student in a music program and on a sports team will be counted separately for each activity, but a student on two sports teams will only be counted once, since the two teams count as athletics.

Data Highlights

- In 5 of the 6 years listed, Vernon and Trempealeau counties had higher percentages of co-curricular activities than the other counties and the state of Wisconsin.
- Most counties listed and the state of Wisconsin had extra-curricular rates above 30% every year.
- The state of Wisconsin was fairly consistent with percentages of extra-curricular activities in the low 30% range each year listed.

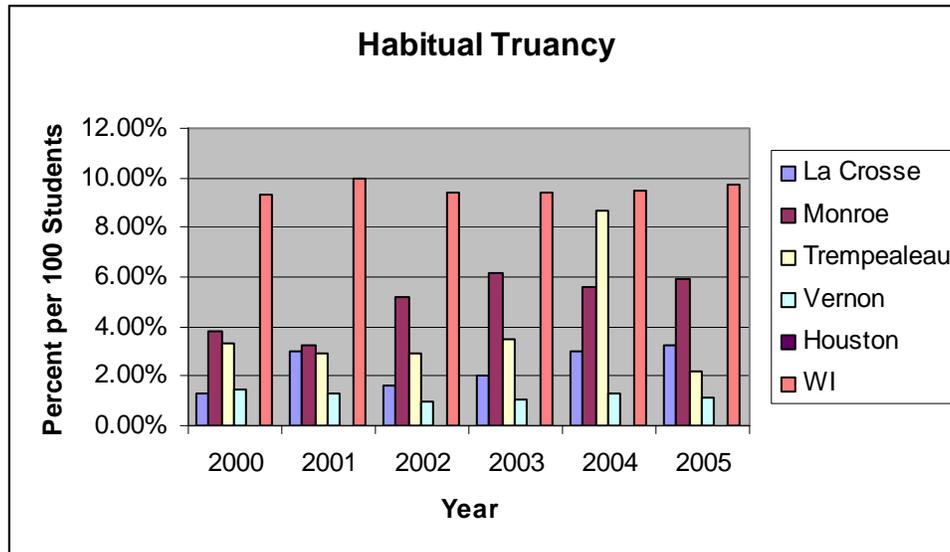
Information Source: Wisconsin Department of Instruction

For Further Information: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Habitual Truancy

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A student is considered habitually truant when he or she is absent from school without an adequate excuse for some or all of 5 or more days during a school semester. Appointments and illness confirmed by a doctor are not included in this definition. Parents can only excuse a child's absence for up to five days per semester without truancy. Unexcused absences are determined by each school district, and the truancy rate can vary depending on the level of strictness in each school district.

Data Highlights

- Except for 2004, Monroe County had the highest rates of truancy in all other years.
- All counties listed fell below the state of Wisconsin's truancy rates in all years 2000-2005.
- In 2004, Trempealeau County's truancy rate more than doubled.

Information Source: Wisconsin Department of Instruction

For Further Information: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

New Housing Units Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

	2000 (census)	2001 (est.)	2002 (est.)	2003 (est.)	2004 (est.)	2005 (est.)	2006	Percent change
Chapter 8 Houston	8,168	-	-	-	-	-	8,620	5.5
La Crosse	43,479	43,954	44,466	44,907	45,443	46,028	46,407	6.7
Monroe	16,671	17,019	17,348	17,607	17,925	18,246	18,591	11.5
Trempealeau	11,482	11,653	11,790	11,955	12,104	12,296	12,457	8.5
Vernon	12,416	12,619	12,786	12,977	13,156	13,355	13,541	9.1
Wisconsin	2,321,157	2,353,416	2,388,559	2,425,572	2,463,963	2,500,779	2,534,075	9.2
Minnesota	2,065,946	2,102,727	2,132,632	2,167,054	2,214,253	2,251,975	2,283,453	10.5
U.S.	115,904,641	117,824,134	119,303,132	120,879,390	122,672,386	124,528,801	126,316,181	9

Housing Units Added Source: State of Wisconsin, Department of Administration

Trends and Issues

The above table shows the number of housing units added to the region, the respective states and the nation since 2000. A housing unit is defined as *"a house, an apartment, a mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied as a separate living quarters, or if vacant, intended for occupancy as separate living quarters."*

Estimates were tabulated using the number of new building permits applied for and estimating time to their completion. The housing market is generally seen as one of the first economic sectors to rise or fall when economic conditions improve or degrade. New residential housing construction generally leads to other types of economic production.

Information Source:

www.doa.state.wi.us

For Further Information:

www.census.gov

Information Collected and Reported by:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- All estimates across the table indicate a steady rise in total number of new housing units over time.
- The number of housing units and the population of counties and states are linked, indicating a rise of population over time for Minnesota and Wisconsin, and their respective counties.
- Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties had the highest percent increase in housing units from 2000 through 2006, reporting percentage increases of 11.5, 8.5 and 9.1% respectively.
- La Crosse and Houston Counties recorded the lowest percent increases in housing units from 2000 through 2006, reporting increases of 6.7 and 5.5% respectively.
- The states of Minnesota and Wisconsin's percentage increases in housing units over this six year period of 10.5% and 9.2% exceeded the nation's 9% housing rate growth.

Home Owner and Renter Occupancy Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

(2000)	Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied		Occupied	Vacant		Total
	#	%	#	%	%	#	%	#
La Crosse	27,067	65	14,532	35	96	1,880	4	43,479
Monroe	11,354	74	4,045	26	92	1,273	8	16,672
Trempealeau	7,959	74	2,788	26	94	735	6	11,482
Vernon	8,559	79	2,266	21	87	1,591	13	12,416
Houston	6,182	81	1,451	19	93.5	535	6.5	8,168
Minnesota	1,412,865	74.6	482,262	25.4	91.7	170,819	8.3	2,065,946
Wisconsin	1,426,361	68.4	658,183	31.6	89.8	236,600	10.2	2,321,144
U.S.	69,815,753	66	35,664,348	34	91	10,424,540	9	115,904,641

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Trends and Issues

- All counties had a higher home occupancy rate than the nation as a whole.
- All counties, with the exception of La Crosse, had lower renter occupancy rates than the state of Wisconsin and the Nation.
- La Crosse County serving as the center of a regional trade area has more market opportunities for rental properties.
- Minnesota has a higher percentage of owner occupied homes and Wisconsin has more renter occupied homes.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County has a higher percentage of renter occupied properties, and therefore the lowest percentage of owner occupied properties, when compared to the surrounding counties, states, and national percentages.
- Houston County has the highest percentage of owner occupied properties (81%). Inversely, Houston County also has the lowest number of renter occupied properties (19 %).
- Vernon County has the highest percentage of vacant properties (13 %), while La Crosse County has the lowest (4 %).
- Wisconsin has a higher percentage of vacant properties (10.2%) than the State of Minnesota (8.3%) and the nation (9%).
- There are more homes in Wisconsin than in Minnesota, and also more vacant homes in Wisconsin.

Information Source:

U.S. Census Bureau – American FactFinder

For Further Information:

www.census.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Age of Housing Stock

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Age of Housing

	Total # of Homes	# of Homes Built Before 1970	% of Homes Pre-1970
La Crosse	43,479	30,222	70
Monroe	16,672	1,696	10
Trempealeau	11,482	1,575	14
Vernon	12,416	1,498	12
Houston	8,168	4,676	57
Regional Total	92,217	39,667	43
Wisconsin	2,321,144	1,290,214	56
Minnesota	2,065,946	1,058,104	51
U.S.	115,904,641	56,437,873	49

Source: U.S. Census 2000

Trends and Issues

The age of homes in a community can be an indicator of population or economic growth or stagnation. The higher the percentage of homes that are newer in an area the more likely the area is growing. This growth can be for a variety of reasons, such as overcrowding, changing family structure, and financial means. Newer housing is mostly driven by new jobs and land availability.

Age of homes is also influenced by when a community was first established or had its greatest period of growth.

In the table above, the regional number and percentage of homes built before 1970 includes La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, Vernon, and Houston Counties.

Information Source:

U.S. Census Bureau – American FactFinder

For Further Information:

www.census.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

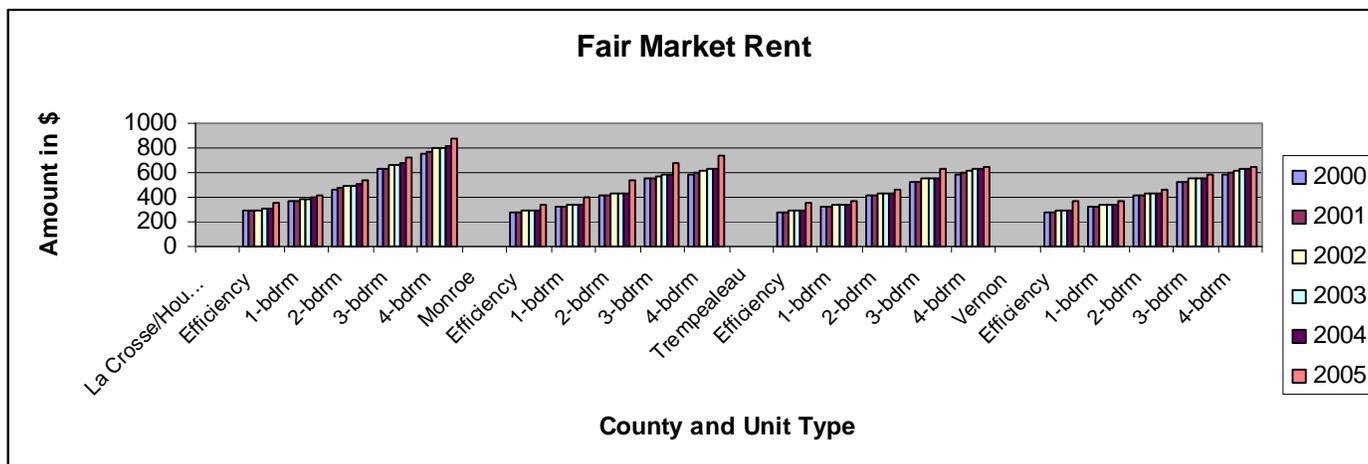
Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- The majority of homes in La Crosse are significantly older than homes in surrounding counties.
- Wisconsin has a higher percentage of older homes than does Minnesota or the Nation.
- There is a vast difference in percentage of older homes between La Crosse County and its neighbors. While La Crosse County has 70% of homes built before 1970, neighboring Wisconsin Counties range between 10% and 14%.
- Houston County is nearer the Wisconsin and Minnesota averages, with 57% of its homes built before 1970.
- Despite the vast range of percentages represented on the county level, regionally the percentage of homes built before 1970 is at 43%. This is below the state and national percentages.
- This data is based on the number and percentages of new housing units constructed prior to 1970, as of March 2000.

Fair Market Rent

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Fair market rent is the amount that would be needed to pay the rent and utilities (excluding telephone) of privately owned, up to code, sanitary, and safe rental housing in a certain area. Rental guidelines reflect how affordable housing is in an area, and relates directly to the quality of life.

Fair market rents are based on the number of bedrooms in a housing unit and are estimated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Rents must be high enough to allow a selection of units or neighborhoods and low enough to serve as many families as possible. The fair market rental amounts are used for various government housing programs, including Section 8 Rental Assistance Program.

La Crosse and Houston counties are combined and averaged in the data table above.

Data Highlights

- Across all counties, fair market rents increased or stayed the same each year.
- La Crosse and Houston counties had the highest fair market rents in almost all years and almost all unit types.
- The fair market rent for most sized units increased more significantly from 2004 to 2005 in most counties than in other years.

Information source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD User

For Further Information: www.huduser.org

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Median Home Value

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Gross Median \$ Value of Homes 2000-2006

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Chapter 8 Houston	88,600	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chapter 8 La Crosse	96,900	-	-	-	-	138,400	140,000
Monroe	77,500	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trempealeau	77,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vernon	73,400	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	109,096	118,873	122,258	131,908	137,727	152,600	163,500
Minnesota	123,202	141,523	155,212	169,778	181,135	198,800	208,200
U.S.	120,476	129,723	136,929	147,275	151,366	167,500	185,200

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Trends and Issues

Owning a home is the goal of many families and is often thought of as the fulfillment of an American dream. Providing safe, sanitary and affordable housing is a goal of all communities but is often not met. Living in substandard or unaffordable homes results in feelings of insecurity that cause behaviors that are destructive to the individual and their community.

Many factors determine the cost of a home, including demand for housing, the state of the economy, location, and the quality of school districts.

Usually housing costs that increase at a rate close to that of inflation will be most affordable. When costs increase at a higher rate than inflation, homes become less affordable.

Data Highlights

- 2000 Census data is the most recent data available that has home values for all the counties, the two states and the nation.
- The data reflects the median dollar amount of a home, meaning half the homes sold for more than the value listed above and half sold for less than that value.
- The U.S. Census reports home values as "housing unit" values in each county. A housing unit may be a house, apartment, mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied as separate living quarters.
- The region's home values are significantly lower than values of the two states and the nation.
- The home values in Minnesota are significantly higher than Wisconsin's and the nation as a whole.

Information Source:

U.S. Census Bureau – American Factfinder

For Further Information:

www.census.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Residential Building Permits Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Communities set regulations pertaining to the construction of new houses or alterations to existing housing units. New home construction and improvements to existing housing are a good indicator of a community's economic viability.

The adjacent table shows building permit trends in the five county region from 2002 through 2006. The permit information is based on new privately owned residential housing units authorized by building permits. The U.S. Census Bureau collected the building permit information on form C-404 "Report of Building or Zoning Permits Issued and Local Public Construction". The building permit figures used are "estimates with imputation". These estimates include reported data from respondents and imputed data for nonrespondents.

Data Highlights

- U.S. Census Bureau estimates show that from 2002-2006 building permits were issued for an estimated 4,699 single family homes, 165 two family housing units, and 91 multi-family housing units in the five county region.
- La Crosse County averaged an estimated 435 building permits annually for single family housing units during the five year period of 2002-2006. Other county averages during this five year period for single family units were Monroe County (185), Trempealeau County (140), Vernon County (96) and Houston County (83).
- Permits issued for multi-family building construction were the most prevalent in La Crosse County with 88 permits for two-family buildings and 57 permits for multi-family buildings.
- The peak of construction during this five year period occurred in 2004 and residential construction steadily decreased in both 2005 & 2006.

Permits for New Residential Buildings 2002-2006

	2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		Total 2002-2006	
	bldgs	units	bldgs	units	bldgs	units	bldgs	units	bldgs	units	bldgs	units
Houston County												
Single Family	63	63	90	90	121	121	85	85	58	58	417	417
2 family	2	4	1	2	0	0	2	4	0	0	5	10
3 & 4 family	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
5 or more family	2	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	12
La Crosse County												
Single Family	431	431	438	438	469	469	444	444	392	392	2174	2174
2 family	16	32	30	60	14	28	19	38	9	18	88	176
3 & 4 family	1	4	7	24	0	0	3	11	6	23	17	62
5 or more family	6	78	8	62	17	230	3	28	6	125	40	523
Monroe County												
Single Family	161	161	159	159	215	215	214	214	178	178	927	927
2 family	4	8	9	18	9	18	7	14	12	24	41	82
3 & 4 family	2	8	4	16	1	3	3	12	2	8	12	47
5 or more family	2	19	1	6	3	26	2	22	1	16	9	89
Trempealeau County												
Single Family	132	132	116	116	163	163	179	172	118	118	701	701
2 family	4	8	6	12	2	4	0	0	3	6	15	30
3 & 4 family	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4
5 or more family	0	0	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	1	6
Vernon County												
Single Family	62	62	72	72	140	140	95	95	111	111	480	480
2 family	4	8	3	6	3	6	3	6	3	6	16	32
3 & 4 family	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8
5 or more family	0	0	2	14	2	34	2	32	0	0	6	80
Annual Total	893	1034	948	1103	1161	1467	1054	1177	899	1083	4955	5864

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Information Source:

www.census.gov

For Further Information:

County Zoning Departments

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Poverty Rate

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

The quality of life for people living in poverty is usually inadequate and often people living in poverty do not have adequate income to meet housing, nutritional, health and other basic needs.

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income which includes earnings, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, social security, supplemental security income, public assistance, veterans payments, survivor benefits, pension or retirement income, interest, dividends, rents, royalties, income from estates, trusts, educational assistance, alimony, child support, assistance from outside the household, and other miscellaneous sources. The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or non-cash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid and food stamps).

Poverty thresholds are the dollar amounts used to determine poverty status. Each person or family is assigned a poverty threshold that varies according to size of the family and age of the members. In 2006 a family with five members including two children would have a threshold of \$24,662, so their income could not exceed that amount or they would not be considered as living in poverty. Government aid programs do not have to use the official poverty measure as eligibility criteria.

Information Source:

www.census.gov

For Further Information:

www.wisconsin.gov

www.state.mn.us

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Poverty Trends 1989-1999

Jurisdiction	1989		1999	
	No. in Poverty	% in Poverty	No. in Poverty	% in Poverty
Houston	1,604	8.8	1,264	6.5
La Crosse	12,504	13.4	10,841	10.7
Monroe	4,614	13	4,774	12.0
Trempealeau	2,619	10.7	2,186	8.3
Vernon	3,970	15.8	3,918	14.2
County Totals	25,311		22,983	
Wisconsin	508,545	10.7	451,538	8.7
Minnesota	435,331	10.2	380,476	7.9
United States	31,742,864	13.1	33,899,812	12.4

Source: U.S. Department of The Census

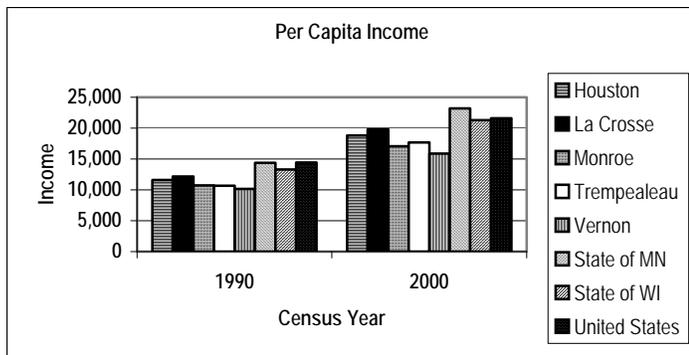
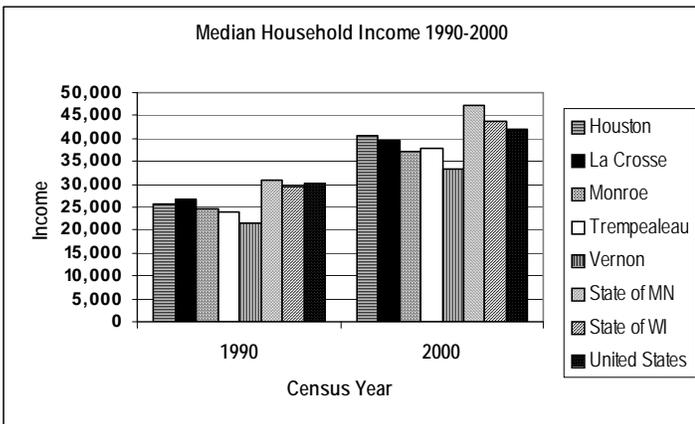
Data Highlights

- As of the 2000 census, three counties in the region had poverty rates higher than the State of Wisconsin's rate of 8.7%. The counties with these higher rates were Vernon County (14.2%), Monroe County (12.0%) and La Crosse County (10.7%).
- Houston County has the lowest poverty rates in the region.
- The State of Minnesota's poverty rates are lower than all counties with the exception of Houston County and are lower than the State of Wisconsin and the Nation.
- From 1989 to 1999 poverty rates for the entire region as well as the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin and the Nation decreased. The poverty rate in Minnesota actually decreased by 2.3%, while the State of Wisconsin rate decreased by 2.0%. The Nation's poverty rate during this same time period decreased by .7%.
- From 1989 to 1999 La Crosse County's poverty rate decreased by 2.7%, followed by Trempealeau County (2.4%) and Houston County (2.3%).
- The total number of people living in poverty in the five county region decreased by 2,328 individuals from 1989 to 1999.

Median Family Income Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

	Median Household Income			Per Capita Income		
	1990	2000	% Chg	1990	2000	% Chg
Houston	25,846	40,680	57.4	11,587	18,826	62.5
La Crosse	26,857	39,472	47.0	12,141	19,800	63.1
Monroe	24,799	37,170	49.9	10,744	17,056	58.7
Trempealeau	23,864	37,889	58.8	10,674	17,681	65.6
Vernon	21,548	33,178	54.0	10,132	15,859	56.5
State of MN	30,909	47,111	52.4	14,389	23,198	61.2
State of WI	29,442	43,791	48.7	13,276	21,271	60.2
United States	30,056	41,994	39.7	14,420	21,587	49.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Information Source:

<http://www.census.gov>

For Further Information:

www.wisconsin.gov and www.state.mn.us

Information Collected By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Trends and Issues

Livable incomes are key to a stable economy. Adequate incomes enable residents to purchase necessary items and maintain quality lifestyles. Federal, state and local health and human service resources and budgets can be strained and unable to meet needs of resident populations if income levels are insufficient. Median household incomes and per capita money incomes are shown for the last two decennial censuses for the five county region, the States of Wisconsin and Minnesota and the Nation.

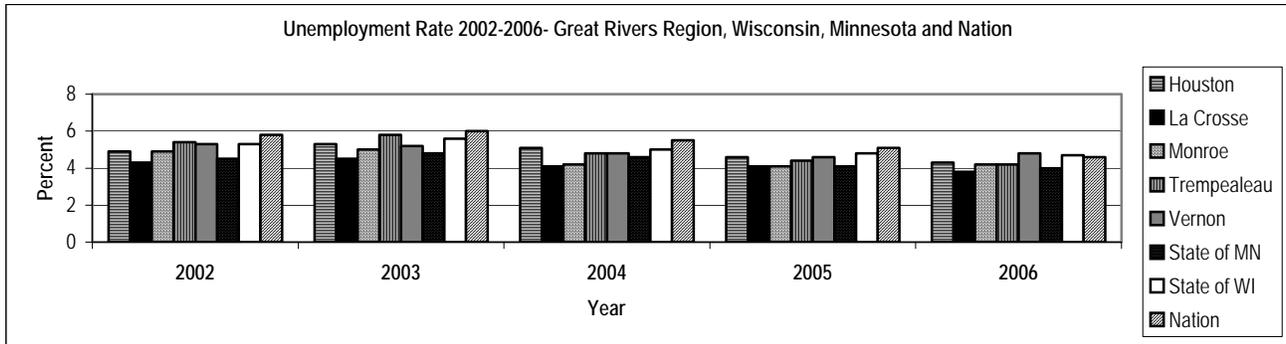
Household income refers to the amount of income earned by all people who occupy a living unit, other than "group quarters". Median household income divides income distribution into two equal parts, one having incomes above the median and one having incomes below the median.

Per capita money income includes amounts reported separately for wage or salary income; net self-employment income; interest, dividends, or net rental or royalty income or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement income; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor, or disability pensions; and all other income. It is derived by dividing the total income of all people 15 years old and over in a geographic area by the total population in that area.

Data Highlights

- The five counties in the Great Rivers Region traditionally have income levels below their respective states' and the nation.
- Trempealeau County had the largest increase in median household income from 1990-2000, an increase of 58.8% as compared to the State of WI (48.7%), State of MN (52.4%) and the Nation (39.7%)
- Trempealeau County also had the largest increase in per capita income from 1990-2000, an increase of 65.6% as compared to the State of WI (60.2%), State of MN (61.2%) and the Nation (49.7%)
- Houston County and La Crosse County recorded the highest income levels in the region.
- The State of Minnesota's income levels are appreciably higher than the State of Wisconsin's and the Nation's

Unemployment Rate Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Civilian Labor Force 2002-2006

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	% Chg 02-06
Houston	11,291	11,274	11,331	11,221	11,330	0.3
La Crosse	62,353	62,047	62,067	61,669	62,778	0.7
Monroe	22,532	23,241	23,121	23,421	24,248	7.6
Trempealeau	15,798	15,803	15,748	15,813	16,505	4.5
Vernon	14,843	15,248	14,708	14,293	14,560	-1.9
State of MN	2,880,329	2,906,867	2,915,347	2,915,949	2,939,304	2.0
State of WI	3,021,068	3,038,164	3,023,454	3,033,025	3,062,932	1.4
Nation	144,863,000	146,510,000	147,401,000	149,320,000	151,428,000	4.5

Trends and Issues

Unemployment has a financial and emotional impact on those looking for work as well as their families. Low unemployment rates result in a stronger economy.

The Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) Program is a federal-state cooperative program between the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and state agencies that provides estimates of employment and unemployment. Models use both current and historical data from the Current Population Survey, the Current Employment Statistics (CES) program, and the Unemployment Insurance (UI) statistics program.

“Employed persons” for the purposes of the LAUS program includes persons age 16 or older who, in the survey week, worked for pay or profit, or worked unpaid in a family-operated business, or were temporarily absent from their regular jobs. “Unemployed persons” refers to those not employed but available for work and actively looking during the last 4 weeks; those waiting to be called back to a job from which they were laid off; or persons waiting to report to a new wage or salaried job.

Changes in business ownership, global competition, supply and demand, and the national economic climate are some of the factors that impact the number of people who are out of work.

Workforce development organizations, local job centers, chambers of commerce, schools, unions and other providers have developed a variety of programs to address unemployment issues in the Great Rivers region. Goals of these programs include preparing individuals for employment by upgrading necessary skills through training, education and referrals.

Data Highlights

- The five county Great River Region traditionally has an overall unemployment rate lower than the Nation.
- Houston, Trempealeau and Vernon counties, the more rural counties in the Great Rivers Region has the highest unemployment rates from 2002-2006.
- La Crosse County traditionally has an unemployment rate lower than the surrounding counties and the State and Nation.
- Four counties in the region had labor force increases of less than 5% from 2002-2006 while Vernon County experienced a decrease in their labor force. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors anticipate a tight labor force market by the end of the decade. Both the Minnesota and Wisconsin labor markets project a need for skilled, trained workers in this knowledge based economy.

Information Source:

<http://worknet.wisconsin.gov/worknet/>
<http://www.deed.state.mn.us/lmi/regional.htm>

For Further Information:

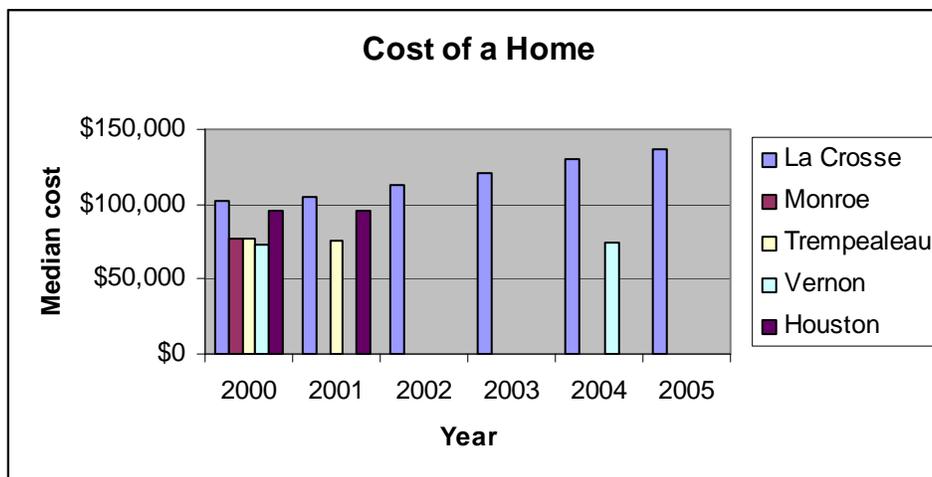
<http://www.bls.gov/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, www.mrrpc.com

Cost of a Home

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Since owning a home is the goal of many American families, the quality of life is decreased when housing costs are so high that many people cannot afford their own home. Many factors determine the cost of a home, including demand for housing, the state of the economy, location, and the quality of school districts.

Usually, housing costs that annually increase at a rate close to that of inflation will be most affordable. When costs increase at a higher rate than inflation, people are less able to pay.

The data reflects that median calculation for the cost of all homes sold, meaning half the homes sold for more than the median, and half sold for less than the median.

Data Highlights

- The median cost of a home increased steadily each year in La Crosse County.
- La Crosse and Houston counties had the highest median cost of a home in 2000.
- Both Trempealeau and Houston counties' cost of a home increased by \$1,000 from 2000 to 2001.

Information source: Wisconsin Realtor's Association, Minnesota State Demographic Center, U.S. Census 2000.

For Further Information: www.census.gov ; <http://www.wra.org/> ; <http://www.demography.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Tourism

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Tourism is important to the economy of the five county region. As the adjacent table shows, tourism dollars spent in the region provide jobs that support business involved in amusement, lodging, food and beverage services and other support businesses. The tourism industry also generates state and local tax revenue through sales and income taxes they pay that help fund recreation facilities and other government services.

Our region has an abundance of tourism resources. Some of these include: nationally recognized trails available for hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle riding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. Outstanding golf courses, high quality fishing and hunting opportunities, water sports and an abundance of public lands including the Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Refuge are other great tourism resources in the region.

The region has a wide variety of high quality lodging accommodations including bed and breakfasts, campgrounds, hotels and motels. Other popular tourism venues include shopping centers, museums, theatres, performing art centers, historic and heritage centers, nature centers and exhibitions such as Memorial Park in Arcadia, Wisconsin. Throughout the year many popular festivals and fairs are sponsored by communities including the Warrens Cranberry Fest and Oktoberfest in the City of La Crosse.

Local schools, universities and numerous sports clubs are other tourism resources that offer many different forms of sporting entertainment.

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Department of Tourism

For Further Information:

<http://industry.exploreminnesota.com/>

<http://agency.travelwisconsin.com/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

www.mrrpc.com

2005 Tourism Impact

	2005 Jobs	(1) 2005 Employed Civilian Labor Force	2005 Estimate - % of Population employed in Tourism Industry	(2) Wisconsin 2005 Tourism Expenditures	(3) Minnesota 2005 Gross Sales - Leisure/Hospitality Industry
Houston County	314	10,710	2.9		595,898
La Crosse County	5,630	59,167	9.5	205,187,373	
Monroe County	2,652	22,453	11.8	103,656,438	
Trempealeau Co.	969	15,111	6.4	37,383,656	
Vernon County	1,067	13,637	7.8	41,682,258	
State of Minnesota	242,304	2,796,622	8.7		10,200,000,000
State of Wisconsin	308,174	2,887,434	10.7	11,950,050,300	

Source: Wisconsin Department of Tourism and Explore Minnesota

(1) Employed Civilian Labor Force, 2005 annual estimate

(2) Expenditures estimated by a survey research company, Davidson-Peterson Associates, Inc.

(3) Sales at leisure and hospitality businesses - report prepared by Tax Research Division of the MN Dept. of Revenue for Explore Minnesota

Data Highlights

- Over 10,000 jobs were related to the tourism and leisure and hospitality industry in 2005 in the five county region
- In 2005 an estimated 12% of Monroe County's labor force was employed in the tourism industry. This was higher than any other county, the two States and the Nation.
- Estimated 2005 tourism expenditures in the State of Wisconsin were almost \$12 billion.
- Estimated 2005 gross leisure/hospitality sales in the State of Minnesota were over \$10 billion.
- Between the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin over 550,000 jobs were attributed to the tourism and leisure and hospitality industry in 2005.
- Tourism expenditures for the State of Wisconsin are prepared annually by a survey research company.
- The States of Wisconsin and Minnesota used different research techniques in calculating their respective economic impacts. Comparisons therefore should not be made between the two states and the counties with this data.

Income and Earnings By Economic Sector Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Economic Sectors in Region Reporting Greatest Personal Income and Detailed Earnings by Industry in 2005 (thousands of \$)

Economic Sector	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston	Total	Rank
Total Earnings	3,361,431	1,115,516	783,495	670,210	611,368	6,542,020	
Farm Earnings	10,993	27,426	21,621	12,835	9,575	82,450	15
Forestry, Fishing, Related Activities and other 7/	(D)	(D)	1,647	(D)	(D)	1,647	19
Mining	246	(D)	246	246	(D)	738	20
Utilities	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	0	21
Construction	155,833	37,717	16,977	17,727	17,942	246,196	6
Manufacturing	490,892	164,254	266,782	33,614	32,450	987,992	1
Wholesale trade	170,809	(D)	(D)	14,233	(D)	185,042	8
Retail trade	212,919	51,824	22,667	26,872	14,311	328,593	4
Transportation and warehousing	116,390	85,832	36,892	(D)	17,983	257,097	5
Information	68,562	9,531	7,215	5,216	15,748	106,272	14
Finance and insurance	156,744	17,718	11,808	13,463	8,465	208,198	7
Real Estate and rental and leasing	39,775	7,178	5,557	22,893	2,015	77,418	16
Professional and technical services	99,422	(D)	7,365	6,751	7,209	120,747	10
Management of companies and enterprises	110,331	(D)	(D)	(D)	0	110,331	13
Administrative and waste services	78,979	36,696	(D)	(D)	2,829	118,504	11
Educational Services	30,041	4,887	(D)	(D)	2,668	37,596	17
Health care and social assistance	576,490	54,623	(D)	(D)	20,867	651,980	3
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	19,361	1,320	1,405	824	712	23,622	18
Accommodation and food services	79,237	21,426	7,483	6,784	2,713	117,643	12
Other services, except public administration	88,129	24,261	13,536	10,404	9,571	145,901	9
Government and government enterprises	434,842	242,888	86,786	69,833	45,908	880,257	2

Trends and Issues

Across the region, Manufacturing and Government sectors account for the majority of income and earnings, while Mining, Forestry, and Arts sectors account for the lowest amounts out of sectors with data.

Information Source:

Bureau of Economic Analysis, Economic Statistics Division,
U.S. Department of Commerce

For Further Information:

www.bea.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- Out of this region, La Crosse County has over 80% of the total income and earnings for the Wholesale Trade, Professional and Technical Services, Health, and Arts Sectors.
- Monroe County has the highest amount of income and earnings for the Farming Sector.
- Together, Trempealeau and La Crosse County account for over 75% of the Manufacturing Sectors income and earnings.

Most Employees By Economic Sector Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Economic Sectors in Region Reporting the Most Employees in 2005

Economic Sector	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston	Total	Rank
Total Employment	82,990	26,219	17,269	14,306	9,574	150,358	
Farm Employment	1,182	2,208	2,068	2,731	1,320	9,509	6
Forestry, Fishing, Related Activities and other 3/	(D)	(D)	116	(D)	(D)	116	19
Mining	(L)	(D)	(L)	(L)	(D)	0	NA
Utilities	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	0	NA
Construction	3,876	1,186	604	785	642	7,093	7
Manufacturing	9,002	4,323	5,440	1,045	953	20,763	1
Wholesale trade	3,469	(D)	(D)	421	(D)	3,890	12
Retail trade	10,008	2,691	1,313	1,515	956	16,483	4
Transportation and warehousing	2,483	1,993	694	(D)	480	5,650	9
Information	1,327	229	169	156	329	2,210	16
Finance and insurance	3,682	554	388	472	354	5,450	10
Real Estate and rental and leasing	2,173	442	201	309	222	3,347	14
Professional and technical services	2,738	(D)	232	345	293	3,608	13
Management of companies and enterprises	1,785	(D)	(D)	(D)	0	1,785	17
Administrative and waste services	3,813	1,298	(D)	(D)	210	5,321	11
Educational Services	1,347	217	(D)	(D)	127	1,691	18
Health care and social assistance	13,851	1,931	(D)	(D)	961	16,743	3
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1,658	152	171	127	145	2,253	15
Accommodation and food services	6,418	1,909	762	736	351	10,176	5
Other services, except public administration	4,020	1,189	553	620	637	7,019	8
Government and government enterprises	9,850	4,468	2,205	1,877	1,231	19,631	2

Trends and Issues

The Great Rivers Region has a diverse employment base. Manufacturing, Government and Government Enterprises, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Retail Trade employment sectors are strongest in the region.

Information Source:

Bureau of Economic Analysis, Economic Statistics Division,
U.S. Department of Commerce

For Further Information:

www.bea.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- In 2005, La Crosse County accounted for over 55% of the employment in the five county region.
- Manufacturing accounted for 14% of the employment base in the five counties in 2005 followed by Government and Government Enterprises (13%), Health Care and Social Assistance (11%), and Retail Trade (10.9%).

Personal Income and Earnings by Economic Sector Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Economic Sectors in Region Paying the Highest Personal Income and Detailed Earnings by Industry per Employee in 2005

Economic Sector	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston	Total	Rank
Farm Earnings	9,300	12,421	10,455	4,700	7,254	44,130	17
Forestry, Fishing, Related Activities and other 7/	NA	NA	14,198	NA	NA	14,198	19
Mining	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	NA
Utilities	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	NA
Construction	40,205	31,802	28,108	22,582	27,947	150,643	6
Manufacturing	54,531	37,995	49,041	32,167	34,050	207,784	3
Wholesale trade	49,239	NA	NA	33,808	NA	83,046	12
Retail trade	21,275	19,258	17,264	17,737	14,970	90,504	11
Transportation and warehousing	46,875	43,067	53,159	NA	37,465	180,565	4
Information	51,667	41,620	42,692	33,436	47,866	217,281	1
Finance and insurance	42,570	31,982	30,433	28,523	23,912	157,421	5
Real Estate and rental and leasing	18,304	16,240	27,647	74,087	9,077	145,355	7
Professional and technical services	36,312	NA	31,746	19,568	24,604	112,230	8
Management of companies and enterprises	61,810	NA	NA	NA	NA	61,810	15
Administrative and waste services	20,713	28,271	NA	NA	13,471	62,456	14
Educational Services	22,302	22,521	NA	NA	21,008	65,831	13
Health care and social assistance	41,621	28,287	NA	NA	21,714	91,622	10
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	11,677	8,684	8,216	6,488	4,910	39,976	18
Accommodation and food services	12,346	11,224	9,820	9,217	7,729	50,337	16
Other services, except public administration	21,923	20,405	24,477	16,781	15,025	98,610	9
Government and government enterprises	44,146	54,362	39,359	37,205	37,293	212,365	2

Trends and Issues

Across the region, Information, Government, and Manufacturing sectors act as the sectors with the highest personal incomes and earnings, while the Arts and Farming sectors are the lowest with complete data.

Information Source:

Bureau of Economic Analysis

For Further Information:

www.bea.gov

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- Vernon County shows the greatest range of personal income and earnings, with the Real Estate and Rental and Leasing Sector as the highest ranking and Farming as the lowest. This is of note, as Vernon County is also the county with the most employed farmers in the region.
- The Arts sector is the lowest netting sector for Monroe, Trempealeau, and Houston Counties, and ranks as 18th overall.
- Management of Companies and Enterprises, Information, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, and Government and Government Enterprises are the highest netting Employment Sectors.

Ambient Air Quality Trends

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

National Ambient Air Quality Standards 1990-2003									
	Meets Standards Particulate Matter (PM)	Active Monitors Particulate Matter (PM)	# Exceed. Particulate Matter (PM)	Meets Standards Sulfur Dioxide (SO ₂)	Active Monitors Sulfur Dioxide (SO ₂)	# Exceed. Sulfur Dioxide (SO ₂)	Meets Standards Ozone	Active Monitors Ozone	# Exceed. Ozone
Houston	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0
La Crosse	Yes	Yes ⁽¹⁾	0	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0
Monroe	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0
Trempealeau	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0
Vernon	Yes	No	0	Yes	No	0	Yes	Yes	0

(1) Monitor is not always active

Trends and Issues

Clean air is essential to our health and well-being, and the air we breathe impacts our quality of life. Air quality standards determined by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin help protect the public from high concentrations of air pollutants that can impact human health. Ambient Air is the portion of the atmosphere external to buildings and which the general public breathes.

The three contaminants of primary concern are particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and ozone. Particulate Matter (PM), tiny airborne particles suspended in the air, can penetrate portions of the lung and may affect sensitive people with respiratory diseases. Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂) is released during the burning of fossil fuels. Ozone at ground level is produced in the air through a reaction involving several contaminants. Automobile exhaust, solvent use, and fuel combustion sources are the main contributors. At ground level, ozone is unhealthy to breathe. Ozone also damages trees, crops, corrodes masonry, and causes paint to darken.

Information Source:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

For Further Information:

<http://www.epa.gov/air/>
<http://airnow.gov/>
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/aw/air/>
<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- A report published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency entitled "The Ozone Report – Measuring Progress through 2003" did not list any counties in Wisconsin and Minnesota with poor ozone quality.
- *The Particle Pollution Report – Currently Understanding of Air Quality and Emissions through 2003* published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showed all PM_{2.5} pollution from 1999-2003 was within air quality standards in the Upper Midwest that includes Minnesota and Wisconsin. PM_{2.5} includes particles within diameters equal to or smaller than 2.5 micrometers (µm). PM pollution varies by time of year and by location and is affected by the weather.
- The counties in the Great Rivers Region are all "attainment" areas meaning they meet all state and federal standards for ambient air quality.
- All five counties meet the standards for particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and ozone contaminants.
- The State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) monitors for ozone at Wildcat Mountain in Vernon County. The DNR also does PM_{2.5} monitoring in La Crosse but not continuously.
- No air monitoring stations are operated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the region, however there are several monitors located in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Surface Water Quality Trends Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

The quality of the region's rivers, lakes and streams can impact the health, recreational interests, tourism, economy, and overall quality of life of its residents.

The region is made up of five major river basins: Bad Axe-La Crosse, Black River, Buffalo-Trempealeau, Lower Wisconsin and Lower Mississippi that covers rivers in Houston County. Wisconsin's watersheds are ranked by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for their potential to be impacted by non-point source runoff. Non-point source pollution includes soil erosion, animal waste, pesticide and fertilizer misuse and urban runoff. Watershed rankings will list a high, medium, low or not ranked for the three areas of streams, lakes and groundwater, as well as an "overall ranking". These watershed rankings are used in Runoff Management Grant applications. The table in the right hand column shows the overall rankings of the watersheds by the Wisconsin DNR for La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties. The watersheds ranked as high priority are in need of improved pollution control practices.

Non-Point source laws in the State of Wisconsin require that counties create state approved Land and Water Resource Management Plans identifying county programs to implement agricultural and urban performance standards to protect the state's surface water resources. La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon County all have Land and Water Resource Management Plans in place to protect their surface waters. Houston County is a member of the Southeast Minnesota Board of Water Resources dedicated to the protection of the water resources in southeast Minnesota. They and other agencies have prepared a Lower Mississippi River Basin Plan that analyzes the various watersheds within this Basin including the Root River. This Plan states that high concentrations of fecal coliform bacteria and sediment impair the Root River and also list strategies on how to deal with this problem usually attributed to cattle waste and erosion.

Watershed Non-point Source Rankings

Basin	Major Watersheds	Overall Ranking
La Crosse County		
Bad Axe La Crosse	Coon Creek	High
Black River	Lower Black River	High
Bad Axe La Crosse	Lower La Crosse River	High
Bad Axe La Crosse	Little La Crosse River	High
Monroe County		
Lower Wisconsin	Beaver Creek-Juneau	Not Ranked
Black River	Big & Douglas Creeks	High
Black River	Trout Run & Robinson Creeks	High
Lower Wisconsin	Middle Kickapoo River	High
Lower Wisconsin	Upper Kickapoo River	High
Bad Axe La Crosse	Little La Crosse River	High
Bad Axe La Crosse	Upper La Crosse River	High
Lower Wisconsin	Little Lemonweir River	Not Ranked
Trempealeau County		
Black River	Beaver Crk-Lake Marinuka	High
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Elk Creek	High
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Pigeon Creek	Not Ranked
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Upper Buffalo River	High
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Upper Trempealeau River	High
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Middle Trempealeau River	High
Buffalo-Trempealeau	Lower Trempealeau River	Not Ranked
Black River	Lower Black River	High
Black River	Big & Douglas Creeks	High
Vernon County		
Bad Axe La Crosse	Bad Axe River	High
Bad Axe La Crosse	Coon Creek	High
Lower Wisconsin	Middle Kickapoo River	High
Lower Wisconsin	West Fork Kickapoo	High
Houston County		
Lower Mississippi	Root River	Not Ranked
Lower Mississippi	Mississippi River-La Crescent	Not Ranked
Lower Mississippi	Mississippi River-Reno	Not Ranked
Lower Mississippi	Upper Iowa River	Not Ranked

Source: Minnesota & Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Basin Alliance for the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
County Land and Water Resource Management Plans
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

For Further Information:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/>
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>
<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- Twenty-one rivers and streams in La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties are ranked high, in needing improved pollution control practices because of non-point source runoff. The State of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency does not assign a non-point source ranking to their rivers.
- Houston County, MN and La Crosse, Trempealeau and Vernon counties all border the Mississippi River.

Impaired Surface Waters

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Section 303(d) of the Federal Clean Water Act states that water bodies that are not meeting their designated uses (fishing, swimming), due to pollutants, must be placed on the impaired waters list. States are responsible for listing waters that are impaired and submitting the lists to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for review and approval. States must then develop an analysis of the sources of pollutants causing the impairments, and the reductions of each source to address the impairments.

There are two types of pollution: point source and non-point source. Point sources are pollution sources that discharge effluent directly into the stream (for example a factory discharging coolant water into adjacent river) and non-point sources that include agriculture, forestry construction site and urban runoff and more.

The Federal Clean Water Act requires states to develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for these water bodies. A TMDL is a quantitative analysis of the amount of a particular pollutant or load a stream or lake can allow before exceeding water quality standards. A TMDL can be used to implement water quality standards. TMDLs are required under the Clean Water Act for all impaired waters and in order for states to receive Clean Water grants they must produce a TDML. The list is updated every two years.

Data Highlights

- Thirty-one surface water bodies were listed on the 303(d) impaired waters list in the five county region in 2006. A breakdown of the 2006 impaired waters for the region is shown on the adjacent table. The breakdown is as follows: Houston County (1), La Crosse County (8), Monroe County (8), Trempealeau County (8), Jackson/Trempealeau (2), Vernon/Juneau (1), Vernon (1) and multiple (2).
- The most common pollutants for impaired waters in the region are sedimentation, mercury and polychlorobiphenyls.
- The impaired waters list is a requirement under the Federal Clean Water Act.

303(d) 2006 Impaired Waters List

County	Impaired Water	Pollutant
Houston	Root River	turbidity
La Crosse	Adams Valley Creek	sed
La Crosse	Fleming Creek	sed
La Crosse	Gills Coulee Creek	sed
La Crosse	Halfway Creek	sed
La Crosse	Johnson Coulee	sed
La Crosse	Long Coulee Creek	sed
La Crosse	Neshonoc Lake	pcb, phos, sed
La Crosse	La Crosse River at Angelo Pond	Hg
Monroe	Lake Tomah	phos
Monroe	Printz Creek	sed
Monroe	S. Fork Lemonweir R.	BOD, phos
Monroe	Squaw Creek	temp
Monroe	Stillwell Creek	sed
Monroe	Unnamed Crk (23-13b)	urb
Monroe	North Flowage	Hg
Monroe	Ranch Crk at Lost Lake	Hg
Multiple	Mississippi River-L&D 6 to Root River	Hg, pcb
Multiple	Mississippi River-Root River (MN) to V	Hg, pcb
Jackson/Trempealeau	Black River-BRF to Mississippi River	pcb
Jackson/Trempealeau	Black River-Lake Arbutus to Mississip	Hg
Trempealeau	Hardies Creek	sed
Trempealeau	Irvin Creek	sed
Trempealeau	Trempealeau River below Arcadia	pcb
Trempealeau	Marinuka Lake	Hg
Trempealeau	*Newcomb Valley Crk	sed
Trempealeau	*North Creek	sed
Trempealeau	*Tappek Coulee Creek	sed
Trempealeau	*Welch Coulee Creek	sed
Vernon/Juneau	W. Branch Baraboo River	Nutr, BOD, sed
Vernon	*Jug Creek	sed

Source: MN Pollution Control Agency & WI Department of Natural Resources
 Key: sed = sedimentation, pcb = polychlorobiphenyls, phos = phosphorous, Hg = mercury, BOD = biochemical oxygen demand, temp = elevated temperature, urb = urban runoff

* Approved TMDL but still does not meet water quality standards

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources
 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

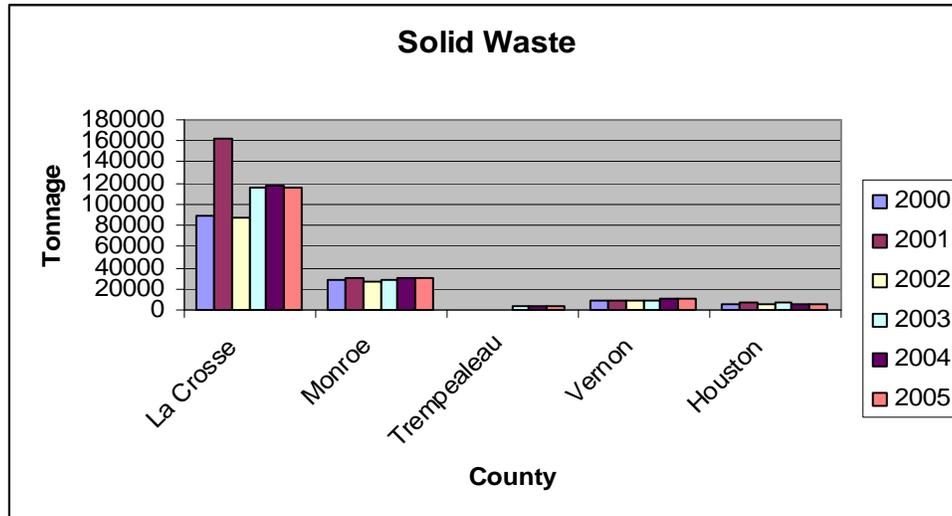
For Further Information:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/>
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>
<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Solid Waste and Recycling Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

The amount of waste a community produces can have a large impact on the natural environment and the quality of life. Today's modern landfills are designed with environmental controls, and must meet the Department of Natural Resources requirements.

La Crosse County has both a waste-to-energy plant and a sanitary landfill. Most waste is taken to the Northern States Power Company's waste-to-energy plant, where it is burned to create energy. The plant processes more than 100,000 tons of waste per year. Large items are taken to the landfill, which spans 25 acres and can hold 1.8 million cubic yards of refuse. Houston County and part of Trempealeau County also use the waste-to-energy plant and the La Crosse County Landfill.

La Crosse County has a Household Hazardous Wastes Facility where residents and businesses can take their paints, batteries, chemicals, medicines, etc. Electronic wastes can also be recycled there for a small fee.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest amount of solid waste in all years 2000-2005, which is most likely because of the population size.
- La Crosse County had an unusually large amount of solid waste in 2001.
- Trempealeau County had the least amount of solid waste in all years of the counties listed.

Information source: La Crosse County Solid Waste Management Plan; Houston County Solid Waste; Monroe County Solid Waste; WI DNR

For Further Information: www.dnr.state.wi.us

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Public Recreational Lands

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Federal and State lands as well as local parklands provide an abundance of recreational activities for all age groups in the five county region. Outdoor recreation opportunities are important in developing a healthy and viable region.

Most of the public recreation land in the region is part of the 55,000 acres that make up the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge and the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge that was established by an Act of Congress on June 7, 1924 as a refuge and breeding place for migratory birds, fish, wildlife and other plants. The refuge located along the Mississippi River is located in all counties in the region except Monroe.

Our five counties are home to four state parks: Beaver Creek Valley State Park – Houston County; Mill Bluff State Park – Juneau and Monroe County; Perrot State Park – Trempealeau County; and Wildcat Mountain State Park – Vernon County. These state parks provide over 7,000 acres for recreation. Vernon County is also home to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, 8,500 acres of land owned jointly by the State of Wisconsin and the Ho Chunk Nation set aside for recreational and educational purposes. Other state land open to the public include state managed forests, wildlife areas, fishery areas, state natural areas, state trails and historical sites.

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties all operate county recreation facilities. Houston County leases Wildcat Park and Boat Landing from the U.S. Corps of Engineers that features 62 campsites, 3 picnic shelters, 2 boat landings and a fishing pier. La Crosse County has over 2,000 acres of county recreational facilities and areas, Monroe County has 6,700 acres, Trempealeau County has 110 acres and Vernon County has 1,525 acres. Activities offered at these facilities include hunting, hiking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, swimming, bird watching/wildlife viewing, canoeing and fishing.

Many cities and villages in Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties as well as some towns located in the five county region also operate recreational facilities such as: local parks, golf courses, nature centers, aquatic centers, playgrounds, tennis courts, trails and sports fields. The region's public elementary, secondary and post secondary schools offer many recreational lands for both active and passive recreational uses as well.

Data Highlights

- The Great Rivers Region has over 55,000 acres of federal recreation land and over 39,000 acres of state recreation land that include federal wildlife refuge areas, state parks, state forests, wildlife areas, fishery areas, state trails and state natural areas.
- State trails located in the five county region include the Buffalo River State Trail, La Crosse River State Trail, Great River State Trail, Sparta Elroy Trail, 400 Trail, Hillsboro State Trail in Wisconsin and the Root River Trail in Minnesota. These trails vary in their allowed uses that include: hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle riding, snowmobiling cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.
- Mill Bluff State Park, straddling Monroe and Juneau Counties, is one of nine units of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve. Its sandstone buttes were islands in the Glacial Lake Wisconsin during the Ice Age 12,000 and more years ago.
- There are over 10,000 acres of county recreation facilities in the five county region.
- There are over 180 municipal recreation facilities in the region. Many municipalities have active park and recreation programs that provide organized recreation activities for residents of all ages.

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources
County Websites

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

For Further Information:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/>

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>

<http://www.fws.gov/refuges>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Leisure License Sales Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties are havens for year-round outdoor leisure activities. This region has over 90,000 acres of state and federal recreation land and over 10,000 acres of county owned recreation land. These recreational lands provide an abundant opportunity for residents to pursue numerous outdoor activities many of which require leisure licenses. Along with legal licensure, the states provide regulations and safety tips for each leisure activity that requires a license.

The Great Rivers Region is home to some very unique recreational lands including four state parks, the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge and Trempealeau County National Wildlife Refuge, and the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Some of the leisure activities available in the region include: hunting, fishing, canoeing, boating, hiking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling, canoeing, and wildlife viewing. Promoting and maintaining these recreational opportunities can improve the economies and quality of life in the region.

Data Highlights

- Overall leisure licenses increased by 9.5% from 2002 to 2006 in the region.
- ATV licensing recorded the largest increase (36.8%) for licensing from 2002 to 2006. Vernon County recorded a 43.4% increase, La Crosse County recorded a 39% increase, Monroe County recorded a 36.9% increase, Trempealeau County recorded a 32.7% increase and Houston County recorded a 22.7% increase in ATV licenses from 2002 to 2006.
- Snowmobile licenses actually decreased by 18.2% from 2002 to 2006 in the region. Snowmobile licensing in Houston, La Crosse and Trempealeau Counties decreased by over 20% in each of those counties from 2002 to 2006.
- Hunting and Fishing licenses increased by 10.5% from 2002 to 2006 in the region.
- Boat and Watercraft licenses increased by 4.2% from 2002 to 2006 in the region.

Leisure Licenses Sold in Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Licenses	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	% Inc 02-06
*Houston County Hunting/Fishing	3,650	3,840	3,930	4,045	4,163	14.1
La Crosse County Hunting/Fishing	37,790	39,749	39,928	39,884	41,818	10.7
Monroe County Hunting/Fishing	19,063	21,202	20,705	20,405	21,719	13.9
Trempealeau Co. Hunting/Fishing	12,313	12,642	12,621	12,685	13,084	6.3
Vernon County Hunting/Fishing	9,907	10,664	10,385	10,418	10,587	6.9
Total Hunting	82,723	88,097	87,569	87,437	91,371	10.5
*Houston Co. Boat/Watercraft	913	835	844	848	912	-0.1
La Crosse Co. Boat/Watercraft	10,752	10,623	10,560	11,483	11,080	3.1
Monroe Co. Boat/Watercraft	3,179	3,149	3,183	3,453	3,342	5.1
Trempealeau Co. Boat/Watercraft	2,977	3,025	2,996	3,256	3,190	7.2
Vernon Co. Boat/Watercraft	2,405	2,448	2,474	2,662	2,551	6.1
Total Boat/Watercraft	20,226	20,080	20,057	21,702	21,075	4.2
*Houston Co. Snowmobile	261	391	261	243	200	-23.4
La Crosse Co. Snowmobile	1,365	1,256	1,164	1,090	1,036	-24.1
Monroe Co. Snowmobile	1,293	1,266	1,303	1,198	1,168	-9.7
Trempealeau Co. Snowmobile	1,189	1,176	1,129	996	920	-22.6
Vernon Co. Snowmobile	724	709	706	701	630	-13.0
Total Snowmobile	4,832	4,798	4,563	4,228	3,954	-18.2
*Houston County ATV	185	209	242	254	227	22.7
La Crosse County ATV	1,766	2,065	2,255	2,376	2,454	39.0
Monroe County ATV	1,737	2,039	2,203	2,304	2,378	36.9
Trempealeau County ATV	1,558	1,782	1,937	2,008	2,068	32.7
Vernon County ATV	765	909	1,004	1,065	1,097	43.4
Total ATV	6,011	7,004	7,641	8,007	8,224	36.8
TOTAL LEISURE LICENSES	113,792	119,979	119,830	121,374	124,624	9.5

*Reporting years are 03/01/02 - 02/28/03; 03/01/03 - 02/29/04; 03/01/04 - 02/28/05; 03/01/05 - 02/28/06; and 03/01/06 - 02/28/07.

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

For Further Information:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cs/licenses.htm>

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/rlp/index.html>

Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

www.mrrpc.com

Municipal Water Quality Trends Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Groundwater is an important resource for all counties in the region. A clean, safe drinking water source is necessary for the region's health and well-being and quality of life.

Within the Great Rivers Region there are 47 municipal water systems that provide drinking water to residents. They are: **Houston County** – Caledonia, Eitzen, Hokah, Houston, La Crescent, Spring Grove; **La Crosse County** – Bangor, Holmen, La Crosse, Mindoro, St. Josephs, Onalaska, Rockland, Shelby, West Salem; **Monroe County** - Cashton, Kendall, Norwalk, Oakdale, Sparta, Tomah, Warrens, Wilton; **Trempealeau County** – Arcadia, Blair, Dodge, Eleva, Ettrick, Galesville, Independence, Lincoln, Osseo, Pigeon Falls, Strum, Trempealeau, Whitehall; **Vernon County** - Chaseburg, Coon Valley, Genoa, Hillsboro, La Farge, Ontario, Readstown, Stoddard, Viola, Viroqua, Westby. Each of these water supply systems must meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) water quality standards.

All municipal water systems in these counties use groundwater as their source. Each municipality provides some level of treatment to the water before it reaches the public for use. Each community must test their drinking water periodically for various parameters including inorganic minerals, man-made organic compounds, and bacteriological contaminants. The public must be notified whenever the contaminant exceeds drinking water standards.

Information Source:

Wisconsin DNR-Drinking and Groundwater
Minnesota Dept. of Health- Environmental Health Div.

For Further Information:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/>
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/com/>

Information Collected By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Municipal Water Quality Exceedances

County	# of water systems	# of water quality exceedances 2002-2006	Contaminants
Houston	6	1	Bacteria
La Crosse	9	3	Bacteria
Monroe	8	0	N/A
Trempealeau	13	2	Bacteria
Vernon	11	1	Bacteria

Data Highlights

- From 2002-2006 seven municipal water quality contaminant exceedances were reported. Compliance was achieved soon afterward.
- All 47 municipal water systems use chlorine to keep the water biologically safe throughout the distribution system.
- All six municipalities in Houston County, Minnesota add fluoride to their water prior to distribution; and in Wisconsin four municipalities in La Crosse County, one in Monroe County, six in Trempealeau County and none in Vernon County add fluoride to their municipal water systems.
- The number of municipalities treating their water supply systems for removal of iron is: Houston County (2), La Crosse County (5), Monroe County (4), Trempealeau County (10), and Vernon County (4).
- The number of municipalities treating their water supply systems for manganese removal is: Houston County (2), La Crosse County (1), and Monroe County (1).
- The number of municipalities treating their water supply systems for corrosivity removal is: Houston County (1), Monroe County (5), Trempealeau County (8), and Vernon County (1).
- The number of municipalities treating their water supply systems for radon removal is: Monroe County (1), and Trempealeau County (1).
- All municipalities in Houston County, MN are in various stages of developing Wellhead Protection Programs and 18 of the 41 municipalities in La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties have developed Wellhead Protection Programs for all of their wells, and six have plans in place for some of their wells.

Private Well Water Quality Trends Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Trends and Issues

Because of the rural nature of the counties located in the Great Rivers Region, many residents rely on private wells to provide water for household use. In rural areas, nearly all residents rely on private wells as their source for domestic drinking water. The health and welfare and quality of life of the region's residents can be compromised when the water supplies become contaminated with undesirable elements.

Private wells if not properly maintained can provide a direct route for contamination from the surface to the groundwater. Other potential impacts on private wells include failing septic systems, leaking underground storage tanks, and mismanagement of fertilizers and pesticides.

Tests for coliform bacteria and nitrates are important for protecting the health of rural residents relying on private wells. Coliform bacteria tests help determine whether disease-causing bacteria are entering the water supply. Nitrate is a form of nitrogen that can cause serious illness in infants less than six months of age. Nitrogen is a good qualitative indicator and can be an indicator that other contaminants are in the water. Bacteria tests should be done annually or any time there is a change in the taste, color, or appearance of the water. In the first few years, private well water should also be tested for nitrates.

Steps everyone can take to ensure safe clean well water include: testing the water regularly at a certified laboratory, evaluating the location of the well and contamination sources, evaluating the construction of the well, recording all information on the well and its water quality, and taking steps to manage any problems or concerns with the well water.

Well construction reports for wells installed by licensed contractors in Wisconsin since 1936 are kept at the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey in Madison.

Information Source:

Minnesota and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Central Wisconsin Groundwater Agency
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

For Further Information:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/>

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html>

<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/gndwater/>

Information Collected and Reported By:

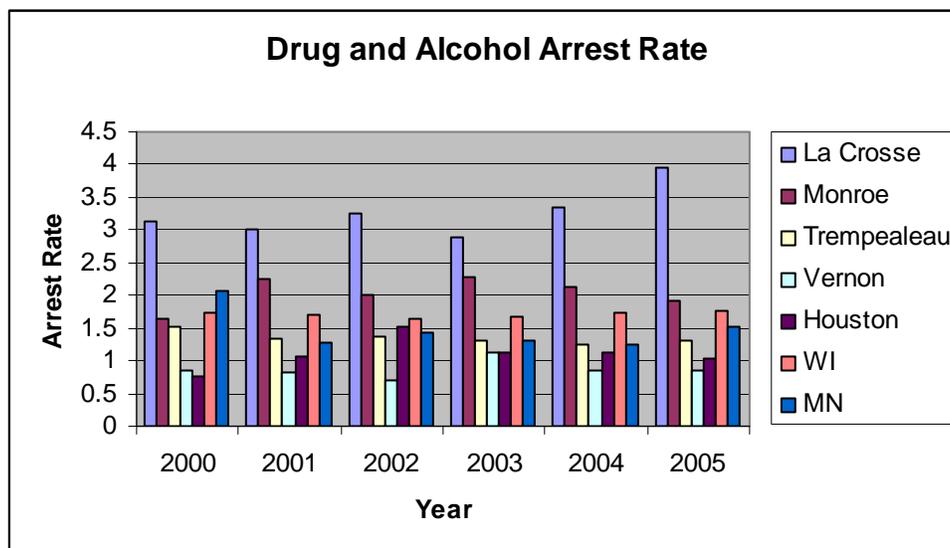
Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission,
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- The exact number of private wells located in Houston County, Minnesota, and the Wisconsin counties of La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon is unknown. However since 1988, there have been at least 11,000 new wells drilled for private use in La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties in Wisconsin.
- A map published by the Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center in October 2002 recorded the percent of wells with levels of Nitrate > 10mg/l for counties with 15 or more samples. Trempealeau County recorded 21.6%, Monroe County 10.8%, Vernon County 12% and no data was shown for La Crosse County.
- A map published by the Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center in October 2002 recorded the percent of wells with levels of positive bacteria for counties with 15 or more samples. Trempealeau County recorded 14.4%, Monroe County 16.1%, Vernon County 28% and no data was shown for La Crosse County.
- A map published by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency developed from a baseline study of domestic wells in Minnesota from 1992-1996 indicated that in Houston County there were no elevated clusters of nitrate concentrations.
- Effective January 2007, the Minnesota Department of Health has designated Sections 11, 12, 13, and 14 of Township 101 North and Range 7 West located in Spring Grove Township and the City of Spring Grove in Houston County as a special well construction area (SWCA) because of well contamination. The area is located northeast and south of Spring Grove. The SWCA designation applies to the construction, repair, modification, and sealing of wells and borings.

Drug and Alcohol Arrests

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Drug and alcohol abuse is a major problem that can negatively impact health, socio-economic, and safety related issues. Drug and alcohol abuse in a community can reduce the overall quality of life.

The data is a compilation of the total operating while intoxicated, liquor law violations, and drug arrests for adults in each county in each year. The liquor law violations and the operating while intoxicated categories had the highest number of arrests in each county.

Working together as a community and parental education will help younger generations avoid drugs and alcohol. Reducing the instance of drug and alcohol use also decreases the risk for criminal behavior in a community.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest rate of arrests in all years listed.
- Vernon County had the lowest arrest rate in all years listed except 2000.
- Wisconsin had a higher arrest rate than Minnesota in all years except 2000.

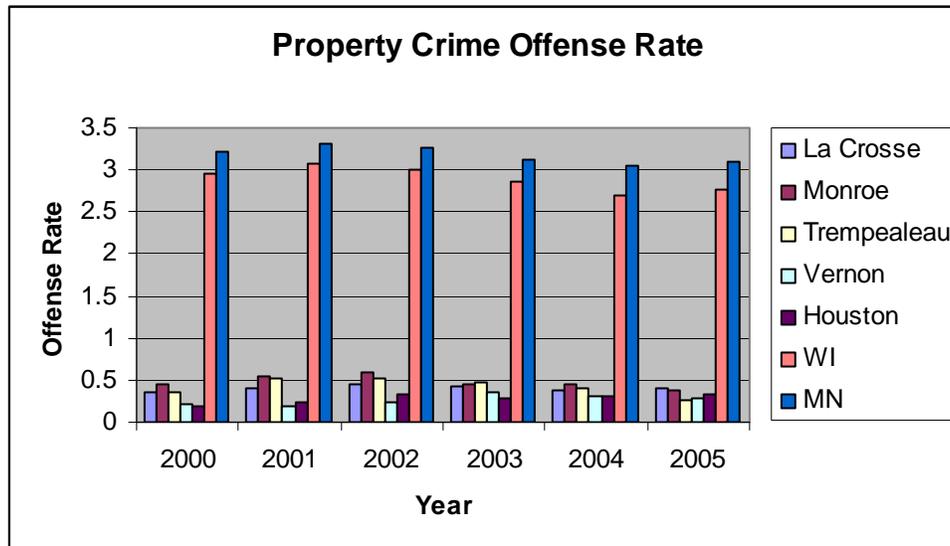
Information source: Office of Justice Assistance; FBI Crime in the United States; Minnesota Department of Public Safety

For Further Information: www.oja.wi.gov ; <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/00cius.htm> ; <http://www.dps.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Property Crime

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Property crimes, or property offenses, include burglary, theft, arson, motor vehicle theft, and criminal damage to property. These types of crimes do not involve face-to-face confrontation between a perpetrator and a victim. Crime rate levels are dependent upon the willingness of victims to report crimes.

According to the FBI, the national number of property crimes decreased significantly between 2002 and 2006, from about 10.45 million in 2002 to about 10 million in 2006. This is also a general trend for the counties listed in the data above.

Data Highlights

- Monroe County had the highest property crime rate of all counties in 2002.
- Minnesota had a higher property crime rate than Wisconsin in all years listed.
- All the counties listed had much lower property crime rates when compared to Minnesota and Wisconsin overall.

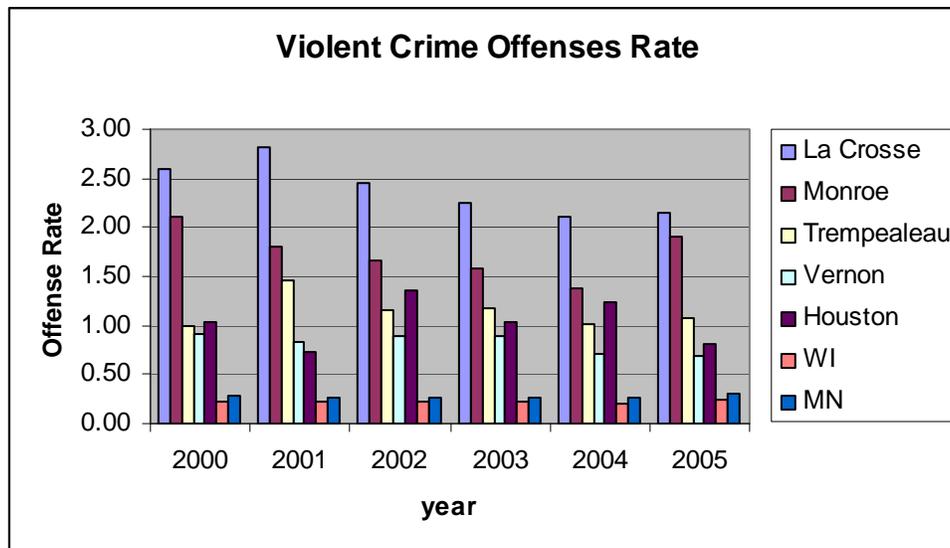
Information source: FBI Crime in the United States

For Further Information: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/index.html>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608) 789-7512

Violent Crime

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Violent crimes involve face-to-face confrontations between a victim and a perpetrator. Violent crime offenses include murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Violent crimes can be committed with or without the use of a weapon. Quality of life in a community is enhanced when the violent crime rate is low.

Violent crime rates in the United States fell dramatically between 2001 and 2004. There were about 1.44 million violent crimes in 2001, compared to only about 1.36 million violent crimes in 2004.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest violent crime rate of all other counties listed in all years from 2000-2005.
- Of the counties listed, Vernon County had the lowest violent crime rate in all years except 2001.
- Both Minnesota and Wisconsin had very low overall violent crime rates when compared to the counties listed.

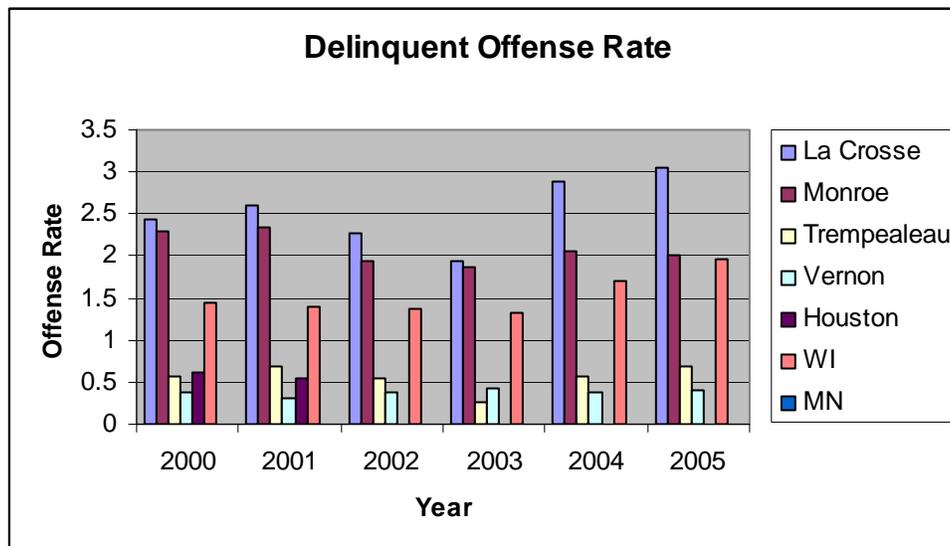
Information source: FBI Crime in the United States

For Further Information: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/index.html>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608) 789-7512

Delinquent Offenses

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Delinquent offenses are acts committed by a juvenile age 10 or older that violate any state or federal criminal law. These offenses often include burglary, theft, battery, forgery, arson, and carrying a concealed weapon. Exceptions include traffic, boating, snowmobile, ATV violations, and civil law or ordinance violations. Also excluded are juveniles who are waved into adult court or have original adult jurisdiction for specific criminal proceedings.

Juveniles are more likely to commit an offense when issues of poverty, lack of educational and job training opportunities, lack of supervision, or family violence or instability are involved.

Data Highlights

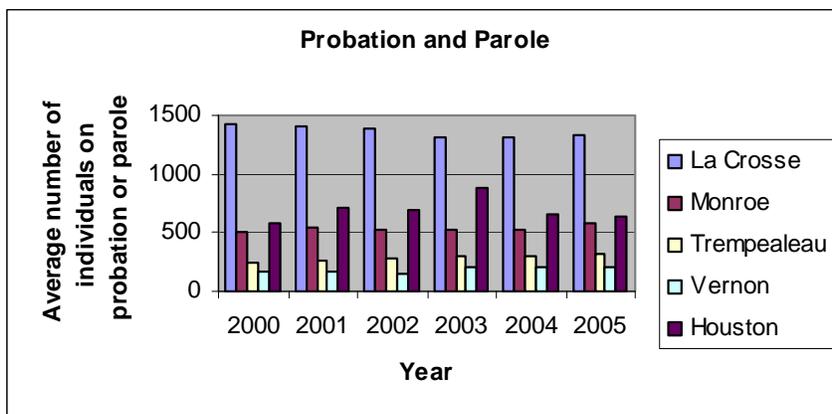
- La Crosse County had the highest rate of delinquent offenses in all years from 2000-2005.
- Trempealeau, Vernon, and Houston Counties all had relatively low delinquent offense rates in all years listed.
- Minnesota consistently had a higher rate of delinquent offenses than Wisconsin for all years listed.

Information source: Office of Justice Assistance

For Further Information: <http://oja.state.wi.us>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608) 789-7512

Probation and Parole Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Residents of a community often feel threatened or uneasy knowing that offenders are continuously being integrated back into the community. Quality of life increases when the number of offenders on probation and parole is low.

Community-based supervision helps protect the public from offenders released on parole or sentenced to probation. Through this supervision, offenders are provided opportunities to live, work, and receive treatment and training that helps them become better citizens. The likelihood of future or repeated criminal behavior is reduced when these opportunities are offered.

The data represents an average count of offenders who are on community supervision (as of each Friday during the calendar year).

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County had the highest average number of individuals on probation or parole in all years 2000-2005.
- Except for Vernon County, 2005 had the highest average number of individuals on probation or parole across all counties.
- Houston County had a higher number of individuals on probation and parole than three of the Wisconsin counties listed.

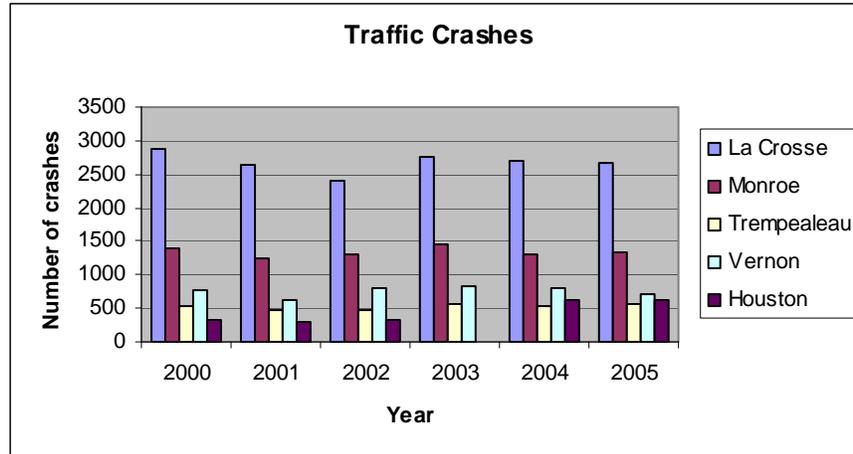
Information source: Wisconsin Department of Corrections; Minnesota Department of Corrections

For Further Information: <http://www.wi-doc.com/> ; <http://www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/publications.htm>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608) 789-7512

Traffic Crashes

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A traffic crash involves at least one motor vehicle and results in an injury or death to any person or damage to any property. Road-traffic crashes are responsible for more harm than all other forms of transportation combined. Traffic crashes are generally placed into categories such as fatal, injury, and property damage.

Traffic crashes are caused by many things, including driver fatigue, driver intoxication, bad weather events, failure of brake or steering systems, slow driver reaction-time, and roadway obstructions.

Data Highlights

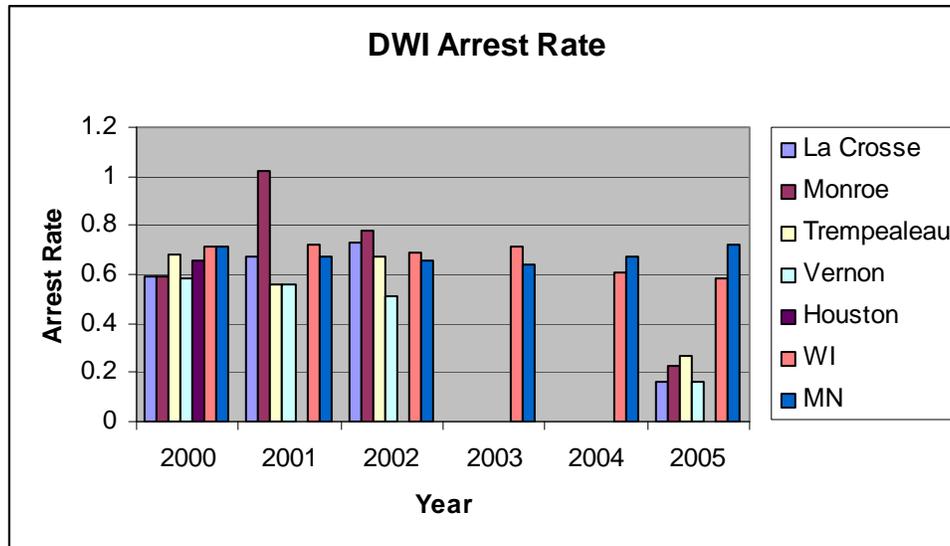
- La Crosse County had the highest incidence of traffic crashes in all years 2000-2005.
- Trempealeau County consistently had the lowest number of traffic crashes each year from 2000-2005.
- Houston County had nearly double the amount of traffic accidents in 2005 as it did in 2001.

Information source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation; La Crosse Medical Science Consortium; Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety

For Further Information: www.dot.wisconsin.gov ;
www.lmhscscorecard.com ;
<http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ots/teens/default.asp>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

In 2003, Wisconsin became the 43rd state to enact legislation to lower the blood alcohol content (BAC) for driving while intoxicated (OWI or DWI) to 0.08% BAC. Studies have shown that a driver's BAC of 0.08% or above impairs the ability to apply brakes, change lanes, control speed, and be attentive.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation states that alcohol is involved in about a third of all fatal traffic crashes in the state. This makes alcohol-related crashes the largest component of all traffic fatalities in Wisconsin.

Data Highlights

- Monroe County had the highest DWI arrest rate in 2001 of all counties listed.
- In 2005, all counties had a significantly lower rate of DWI arrests than both Minnesota and Wisconsin.

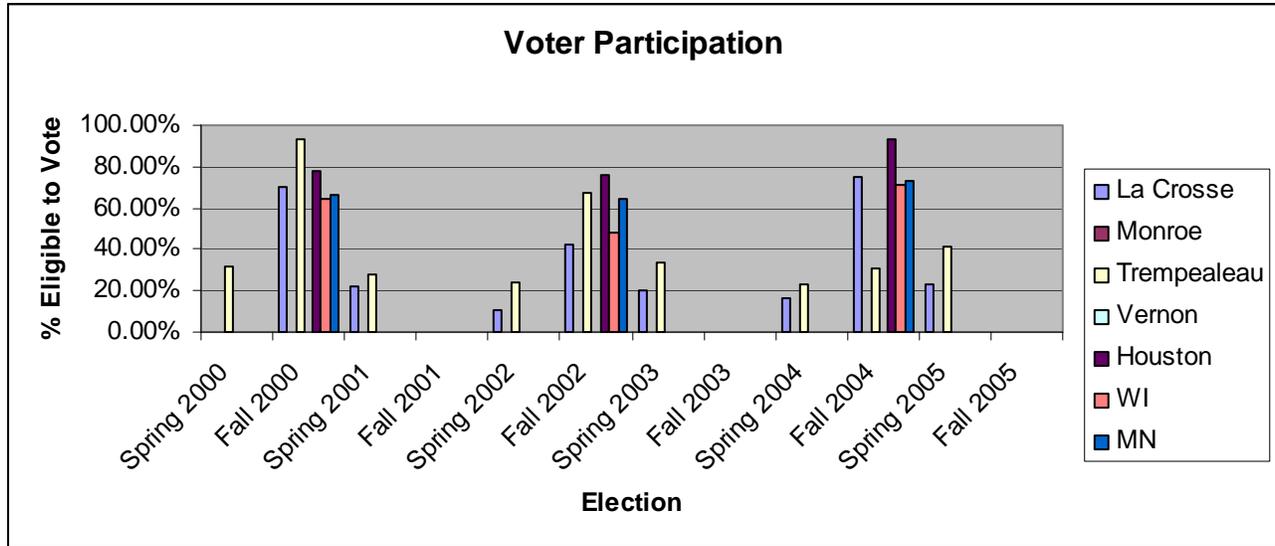
Information source: Wisconsin DOT; Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety; FBI Crime in the United States

For Further Information: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/> ;
<http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ots/teens/default.asp> ;
<http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/05cius/arrests/index.html>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Voter Participation

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

One of the most basic fundamental rights as a citizen is voting. By casting a vote, a citizen can express his or her preference and have a say in the formulation of public policy. A higher quality of life is associated with communities that have higher voter turn-outs and participation.

Voter participation is the most basic measure of political and civic engagement. Voting is open to U.S. citizens aged 18 and above. Voting allows individuals to hold their elected officials accountable and make them responsive to people's concerns.

Participation in voting is generally higher during presidential, gubernatorial, and congressional elections than other elections. The more popular elections take place in the fall.

Data Highlights

- Trempealeau County had the highest participation of eligible voters in the fall of 2000, with 93.27%.
- Fall elections generally had higher voter participation than spring elections.

Information source: US Census; La Crosse County Clerk; MN Secretary of State; Wisconsin State Elections Board; Trempealeau County Clerk

For Further Information: www.census.gov ; <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp> ; <http://elections.state.wi.us/>; <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/Departments/Court/index.htm> ;

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Dept., (608)789-7512

Race and Ethnicity

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Location/Year	Indian		Asian		Black		Other		Multiple		White		Hispanic		Non-Hispanic	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
La Crosse 2000	440	.4	3397	3.2	1016	1	286	.3	1098	1	100,883	94.2	990	.9	106,130	99.1
La Crosse 2005	471	.4	3594	3.3	1222	1.1	2	0	1068	1	102,601	94.2	1081	1	107,877	99
Monroe 2000	376	.9	210	.5	188	.5	347	.9	304	.7	39,474	96.5	740	1.8	40,159	98.2
Monroe 2005	442	1	259	.6	308	.7	7	.0	265	.6	41,363	97	988	2.3	41,656	97.7
Trempealeau 2000	45	.2	39	.1	35	.1	77	.3	126	.5	26,688	98.8	240	.9	26,770	99.1
Trempealeau 2005	44	.2	38	.1	56	.2	1	0	62	.2	27,611	99.3	434	1.6	27,378	98.4
Vernon 2000	42	.2	62	.2	18	.1	75	.3	136	.5	27,723	98.8	186	.7	27,870	99.3
Vernon 2005	50	.2	72	.3	33	.1	0	0	67	.2	28,833	99.2	229	.8	28,826	99.2
Houston 2000	36	.2	76	.4	61	.3	28	.1	101	.5	19,416	98.5	121	.6	19,597	99.4
Houston 2005	39	.2	85	.4	111	.6	-	-	94	.5	19,612	98.4	148	.7	19,793	99.3
Region 2000	939	.4	3784	.9	1318	.4	813	.4	1645	.6	214,184	97.4	2,277	1	220,526	99
Region 2005	1046	.4	4048	.9	1460	.5	10	0	1556	.5	220,020	97.6	2,880	1.3	225,530	98.7
Wisconsin 2000	.049*	.9	.084*	1.7	.300*	5.7	.084*	1.6	.071*	1.2	4.77*	88.9	.184*	3.6	5.02*	96.4
Wisconsin 2005	.045*	.9	.107*	2	.307*	5.7	.117*	2.2	.062*	1.2	4.73*	88.1	.242*	4.5	5.13*	95.5
Minnesota 2000	.054*	1.1	.140*	2.9	.167*	3.5	.065*	1.3	.088*	1.7	4.40*	89.4	.126*	2.9	4.65*	97.1
Minnesota 2005	.053*	1.1	.177*	3.6	.205*	4.1	.087*	1.8	.073*	1.5	4.39*	88	.181*	3.6	4.8*	96.4
U.S. 2000	2.44*	.9	10.55*	3.6	34.36*	12.3	15.43*	5.5	7.27*	2.4	211.35*	75.1	34.47	12.6	239.2*	87.4
U.S. 2005	2.35*	.8	12.47*	4.3	34.96*	12.1	17.29*	6	5.55*	1.8	215.33*	75	41.87*	14.5	246.5*	85.5

* are in millions

Source: La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

Trends and Issues

The figures above analyze the breakdown of the Great River Region's population by race. The white race is the largest population group in the region followed by Asian Pacific Islanders. The Hmong, an ethnic group from Southeast Asia, make up most of this population. Over the last several decades, the Hmong immigrated to this area due to political persecution in their homeland for siding with the U.S. during the Viet Nam War.

Information Source:

La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium, U.S. Census Bureau

For Further Information:

www.lmhscscorecard.com, www.census.gov

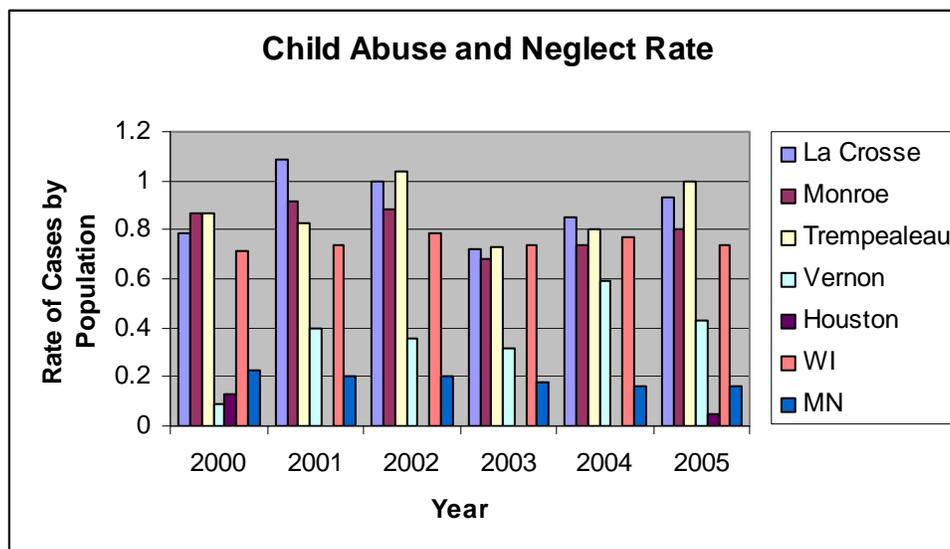
Information Collected and Reported By:

Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission
www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- In 2005, over 96% of the population in the five county region was White, followed by Asian (1.8%), Black (.8%), and Indian (.5%).
- Between the years of 2000-2005 several racial groups recorded increases. The increases recorded are as follows: Black (11%), Indian (11%), Asian (7%), White (3%).
- The Hispanic population showed a 26% increase between the years of 2000-2005.
- The States of Minnesota and Wisconsin showed similar trends to those in our region.

Child Abuse and Neglect Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

The social problem of child abuse and neglect in our society presents many challenges. The quality of life for children and the entire society is reduced by the long-term impact of abuse and neglect.

All children deserve to have a basic level of care and to be safe. Intervention by a social service agency and/or a law enforcement agency is required when children do not receive basic care and/or are abused. The protective services system promotes the well-being of children in their home environment whenever possible, or provides for another safe and stable place for them to live.

Data Highlights

- Wisconsin had a substantially higher rate of child abuse and neglect cases than Minnesota for all the years listed.
- Vernon County had the lowest rate of child abuse and neglect cases compared to all other Wisconsin counties in all years listed.
- La Crosse County had the highest rate of child abuse and neglect cases in 2001.

Information source: Administration for Children and Families; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Domestic Abuse Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Domestic Abuse-New Horizons-Men/Women/Children served

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
La Crosse	1553	1481	1415	1541	1514	1672
Monroe	36	40	24	21	27	35
Trempealeau	175	166	225	225	197	158
Vernon	18	19	14	8	12	19
Houston	20	15	20	10	17	20

Trends and Issues

For many years, domestic violence was considered a personal matter, and law enforcement often ignored such problems. Current legislation requires that batterers be arrested and held accountable for their actions. As programs and services more effectively meet the needs of victims, the number of incidents decreases, and those who have experienced domestic violence see an improved quality of life.

Domestic violence destroys families and homes, and can have life-long negative impacts on children. Physical wounds are not the only pain inflicted by domestic violence. Power and control are used to threaten, intimidate, isolate, and financially and emotionally trap victims. Domestic abuse affects all socio-economic classes, age levels, and ethnic groups.

Domestic abuse is defined in Wisconsin as the intentional infliction of physical pain, injury or illness, intentional impairment of a physical condition, a sexual assault, or a physical act that causes another person to reasonably fear that any of these actions will happen. The law applies to acts by adults against a spouse, former spouse, or against an adult with whom the alleged abuser resides, or formerly resided, or with whom the alleged abuser has a common child.

The data is from New Horizons Shelter and Women's Center. This organization provides free and confidential services and temporary housing. The shelter is for women and children who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and/or harassment. New Horizons offers a 24 hour crisis help line with counseling and information. Their outreach services are available to men, women, and children who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and/or harassment. The services include resource advocacy, legal advocacy, children's advocacy, housing advocacy, as well as weekly support groups.

Data Highlights

- The majority of people were served in La Crosse County, but this is probably a reflection of the larger population of the county.
- Vernon County had the least number of people served overall.
- All county data includes men, women, and children served.

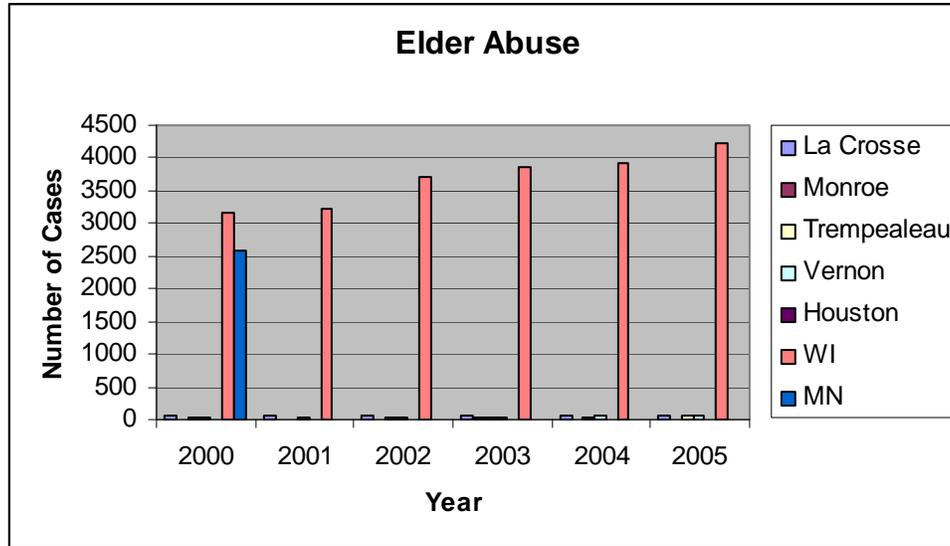
Information source: New Horizons Shelter and Women's Center

For Further Information: (608) 791-2600

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Dept., (608) 789-7512.

Elder Abuse

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Wisconsin law defines elder abuse as occurring when any person at or above the age of 60 has been subjected to any of the four categories of abuse. Those categories include physical abuse, material exploitation, neglect, and self-neglect. The categories have been further defined by the National Center on Elder Abuse to include sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and abandonment.

Reporting elder abuse is voluntary and not required by medical professionals or other service providers. If an elderly person is legally competent, he or she may refuse any help offered or an investigation. This means that the number of reports of elder abuse often does not adequately reflect the problem of elder abuse. Shame, fear, and not knowing how to get help are several reasons elder abuse may not be reported.

Data Highlights

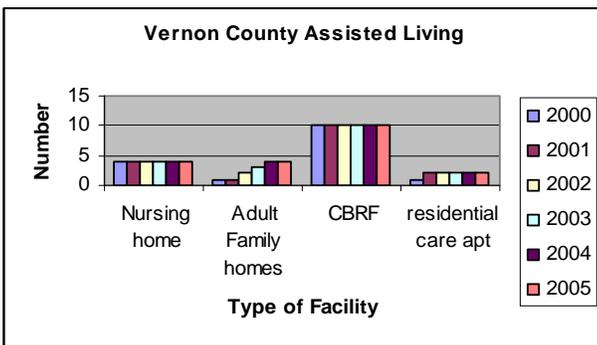
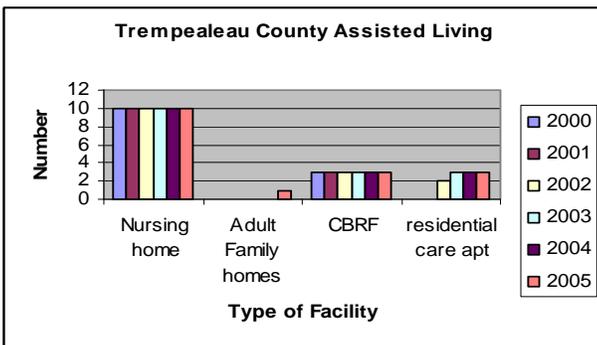
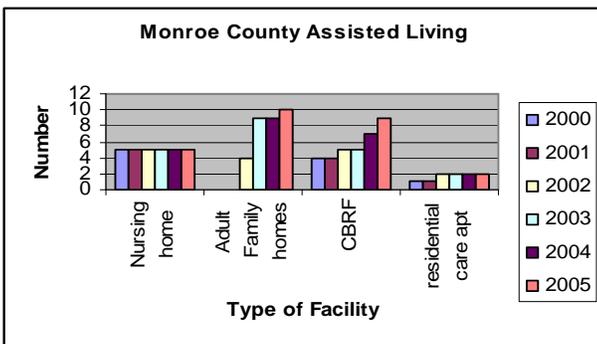
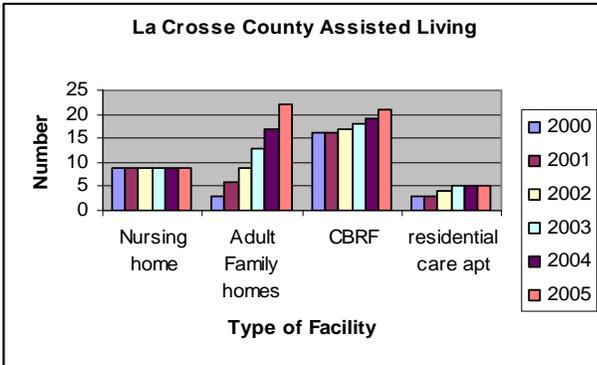
- The number of elder abuse cases in Wisconsin increased each year from 2000-2005.
- Of the counties listed, La Crosse County had the highest number of elder abuse cases overall, with an average of 59 per year.
- The fewest cases of elder abuse were in Monroe County in 2004, with only 4 cases reported.

Information Source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; National Center on Elder Abuse

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/index.aspx

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Assisted Living Facilities Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

All people need a place to live and to call home, no matter what their age. A good quality of life depends on a housing supply that meets the demands of an increasing aging population.

There are options for senior living. These can include senior apartments, a family household, living alone, and assisted living facilities.

Independent living or senior apartments are designed specifically for independent senior adults who want to enjoy a lifestyle filled with recreational, educational, and social activities with other seniors. These facilities are designed for people who can live on their own but want the security and/or convenience of community living.

Assisted living facilities can be a free-standing part of a continuing care community that provides independent, assisted and nursing care affiliated with a nursing home. Assisted living facilities are often specialized services brought into independent retirement communities.

Data Highlights

- Community-based Retirement Facilities (CBRF) are the most common type of assisted living facility in La Crosse and Vernon counties.
- Trempealeau County had the highest number of nursing homes in all counties in all years listed.
- The number of adult family homes increased steadily each year in La Crosse County.

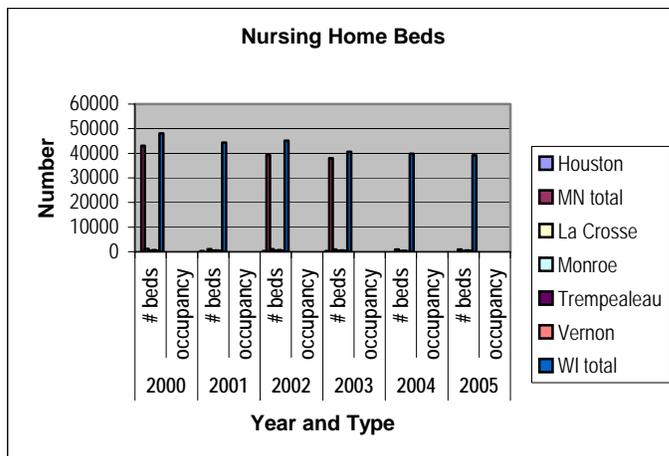
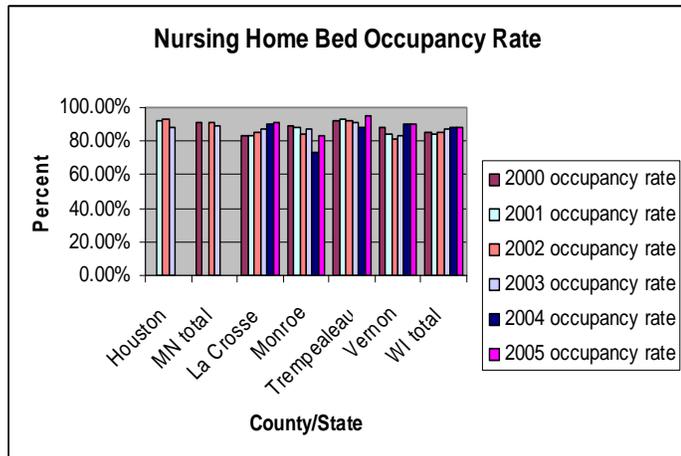
Information Source: WI Department of Health and Family Services; US Census

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; www.census.gov

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Nursing Home Beds

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

As people age and generally need more medical attention, they will need a place to stay. This can either be a senior apartment, an assisted living facility, or a nursing home.

According to the Census, in the 1990s Wisconsin saw a 26% drop in the rate of people age 85 and above living in a nursing home. This age group however is one of the fastest growing age groups in the United States. Advances in medicine are allowing elderly people to remain in their homes longer, and they have access to other types of housing options other than nursing homes.

Data Highlights

- La Crosse County by far had the highest number of nursing home beds across all counties and years, but the number decreased from the years 2000-2005.
- La Crosse County had a steady increase in the occupancy rate each year from 2000-2005.
- The highest occupancy rate was in Trempealeau County in 2005.

Information Source: Minnesota Department of Health; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> ; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, Gunderson Lutheran

Community Options Program - Cost and Number Participating Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Clients

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Houston	Information Not Available					
La Crosse	226	66	60	52	56	58
Monroe	55	94	17	18	11	10
Trempealeau	55	102	15	15	13	11
Vernon	91	59	30	26	23	21
WI total	9171	8553	1651	1470	1299	1170
MN total	Information Not Available					

Chapter 11 Cost

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Houston	Information Not Available					
MN total	Information Not Available					
La Crosse	\$644,788	\$281,663	\$453,482	\$423,995	\$432,856	\$454,788
Monroe	\$168,200	\$314,365	\$335,536	\$444,316	\$296,910	\$276,725
Trempealeau	\$274,811	\$188,026	\$210,475	\$219,350	\$169,025	\$126,800
Vernon	\$188,878	\$262,167	\$206,838	\$150,878	\$156,581	\$164,071
WI total	\$33,348,916	\$30,865,735	\$23,794,479	\$22,894,187	\$22,373,990	\$21,642,333

Trends and Issues

The Community Options Program provides cost-effective alternatives to more expensive care in institutional settings. Community Options provides funding and services to the elderly and those with long-term disabilities which they cannot receive from other programs.

The Community Options Program has no income limit on eligibility for an assessment or care plan. Income guidelines are used to determine if Community Options will pay for all or part of needed services.

The Community Options Program offers the following services: care management, home modification, respite care, financial counseling, communication aids, residential services, personal care, housekeeping, adaptive equipment, and home health care.

Data Highlights

- The State of Wisconsin had a major decrease in the number of Community Options clients after 2001.
- The highest cost of Community Options for a county was in La Crosse County in 2000.

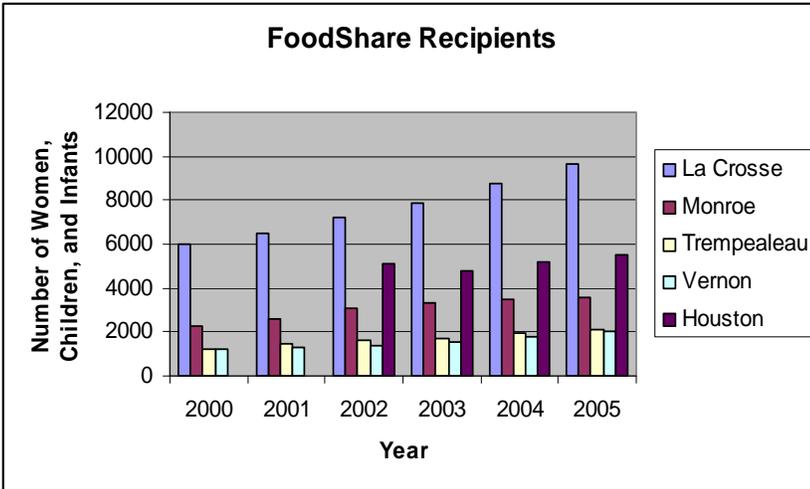
Information Source: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services

For Further Information: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>

Information Collected By: Brenda Rooney, PhD, Gundersen Lutheran

Hunger

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

Food is a basic need, a staple for sustaining human life. Constant struggle to keep food on the table can directly affect one's quality of life. The lack of adequate nutrition has a number of negative impacts on a community's residents including: poor health, reduced productivity, learning disabilities, and an increased demand for social services.

Food and nutrition programs are critical to the health and well being of low-income children and families. The federal Food Stamp program is one food assistance program, helping low-income families afford the food they need. WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children provides food, nutrition counseling, and access to health services.

Great Rivers 2-1-1 lists 30 Food Pantry resources serving residents in Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties. These organizations provide groceries, meals, nutrition education and other services to county residents. The fact that these services are being utilized helps to document a food need in the Great Rivers Region. These community-based food programs are supported by area churches, civic groups and individuals. They depend on donations of food, money and volunteer time.

Data Highlights

- FoodShare reports that food shelf use is at record high levels and shows a steady increase each year in all five counties.
- 54% of food stamp recipients in Wisconsin are children.
- 62% of eligible, low-income families in Wisconsin are served by the Federal Food Stamp Program.
- According to the Hunger Study 2006, 64.6% of food pantries nationally indicate that they serve more clients now than they did in 2001.

Information Source: Wisconsin and Minnesota Departments of Health and Family Services, Public Health Profiles, FoodShare Programs Wisconsin and Minnesota.

For Further Information:

About USDA Food and Nutrition Services, go to:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/>

About hunger in America, go to: <http://www.hungerinamerica.org/>

About FoodShare in Wisconsin, go to:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/index.htm>

In Minnesota, go to: <http://www.gmcc.org/foodshare/index,.htm>

About WIC, go to: www.fns.usda.gov/wic

Information Collected By: Derek Moore, La Crosse Co. Health Dept.,

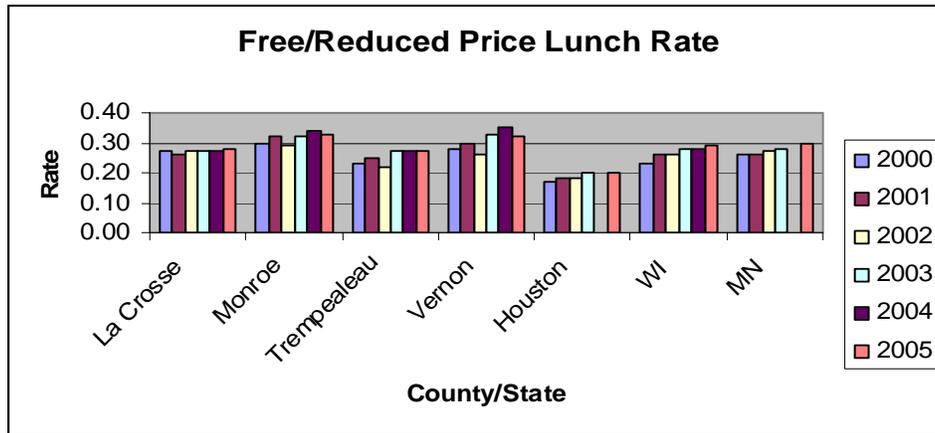
moore.derek@co.la-crosse.wi.us, Office: 608-785-6287,

www.publichealthprepare.org

Mary Jane Mullin, Houston Co. Health Dept., MaryJane.mullen@co.houston.mn.us,

Office: 507-725-5810

Free Lunch / Reduced Lunch Program Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Trends and Issues

A student's nutritional intake influences his/her health and ability to learn. Poor nutrition and hunger can lead to nervousness, lack of interest in learning, irritability, and the inability to concentrate.

The National School Lunch Program is a federally regulated program that provides nutritious food to students. Families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level qualify for free meals, and those between 130% and 185% qualify for reduced-price meals.

Participating school districts and private schools receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for each meal served. The meals must meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Data Highlights

- All counties and states listed had rates between 0.17 and 0.35 for free/reduced price lunches in the years listed.
- Vernon County had the highest rate of students utilizing free/reduced-price lunches in 2004.
- Houston County had the fewest number of students needing free and reduced school lunches in each year listed in the chart.

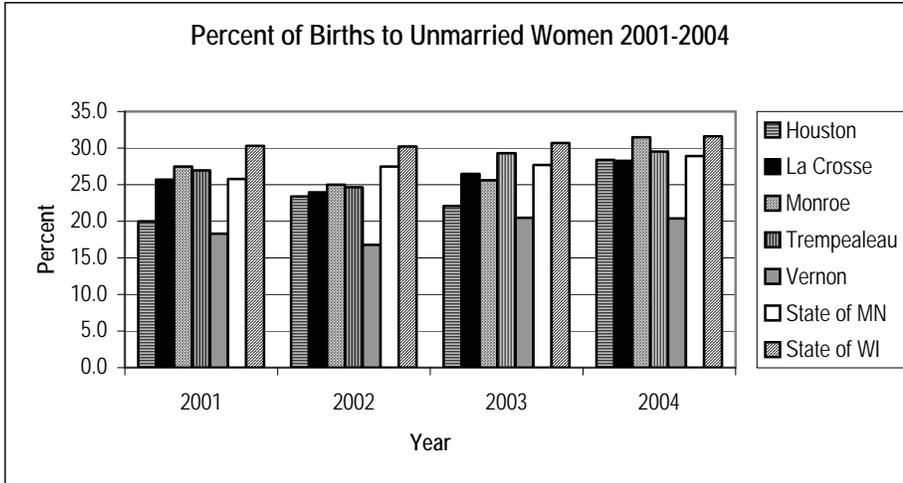
Information Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; Minnesota KIDS COUNT; National Center for Education Statistics

For Further Information: <http://dpi.wi.gov/fns/progstat.html> ; http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/cliiks.cgi?action=rawdata_results&subset=MN ; <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Department, (608)789-7512

Changing Family Structure

Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties



Divorce Totals 2002-2005

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Houston	54	55	52	46	51
La Crosse	312	343	380	293	293
Monroe	158	181	176	161	212
Trempealeau	91	99	91	87	89
Vernon	72	83	89	75	78
State of MN	15785	14892	16962	16985	17242
State of WI	17471	17150	16802	16297	16730

Note: Above figures include divorces and annulment

Trends and Issues

Over the last few decades, the average family structure has been changing. In the past, children were usually born to married parents, and lived with them through childhood and adolescence. Today, children are more likely to live apart from at least one parent before reaching adulthood. This change can be attributed to higher divorce rates and higher instances of children being born out of wedlock.

Children who are raised in married-couple families typically have more support and resources available to them. The quality of life of children in married-couple families is usually higher than those in single-parent households.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated in 1999 that more than 25% of American children do not live with their fathers. Boys raised without fathers are 63% more likely to run away from home and 37% more likely to do drugs. Girls without fathers are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant as a teenager and 53% more likely to commit suicide.

Information source: US Census; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services; Center for Health Statistics, Minnesota Department of Health; MN Court Information System

For Further Information: www.census.gov; dhfs.wisconsin.gov/localdata/; <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>

Information Collected By: Erica Black, City of La Crosse Planning Dept., (608)789-7512; and Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, www.mrrpc.com

Data Highlights

- Houston and Vernon counties had the lowest percentage of births to unmarried women from 2001-2004.
- From 2001-2004 births to unmarried women in La Crosse, Monroe and Trempealeau County exceeded 25%.
- Over 30% of all births in Wisconsin were to unmarried women from 2001-2004.
- From 2002-2006 the number of divorces increased in Monroe County by over 30%.
- The State of Wisconsin recorded a 4% decline in the number of divorces from 2002-2006 while the State of Minnesota had a 9% increase in the number of divorces in the state.

Commuting to Work Houston, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon Counties

Chapter 11 Jurisdiction	Workers Commuting Alone To Work		Workers Carpooling To Work		Workers Using Public Transportation To Work (including taxi)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
La Crosse	45,364	81	4,948	8.8	700	1.3
Monroe	15,062	75.6	2,346	11.8	56	.3
Trempealeau	10,359	74.7	1,633	11.8	28	.2
Vernon	9,213	71.3	1,379	10.7	68	.5
Houston	7,562	75.6	978	9.8	30	.3
Regional Totals	87,560	77.7	11,284	10	882	.8
Wisconsin	2,138,832	79.5	267,471	9.9	53,340	2
Minnesota	1,971,668	77.6	264,690	10.4	81,276	3.2
U.S.	97,102,050	75.7	15,634,051	12.2	6,067,703	4.7

Data Highlights

- In the table above, 77.7% of the workers in this region who commute to work, using some type of vehicle, do so alone; 10% carpool, and .8% use public transportation.
- The low population densities in much of the region, as well as a tradition of rural independence, has resulted in relatively few opportunities for public transportation for those persons who do not have access to a private automobile.
- In the La Crosse metro area, there is bus service but it does not cover all areas and does not run all hours of the day. For people working second and third shifts, the bus will not get them to and from work. For families needing to make multiple stops, using the bus is very difficult. Several counties offer some type of mini-bus service and/or volunteer driver program, but people have to meet the eligibility requirements to access these services.
- The inability to access or afford reliable transportation can serve as a barrier to getting and keeping a job; participating in school activities; and accessing services.

Information Sources:

Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2003; Decennial Census 2000, U.S. Bureau of the Census; Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission; County Human or Social Services and Aging/Senior Resource Units; La Crosse MTU and taxicab companies in La Crosse

Information Collected and Reported By: Couleecap, Inc.

Trends and Issues

Costs of Transportation

- In 2004, the average annual cost of owning and operating a midsize car in the U.S. (assuming 15,000 miles driven per year) was \$8,759.
- A monthly MTU bus pass in La Crosse costs \$30 for an adult.
- A 5 mile taxicab ride costs approximately \$10 in La Crosse.

According to the 2007 Couleecap Needs Assessment, more than 40% of low-income households surveyed reported that all of the costs associated with owning an automobile – repairs, insurance, gasoline, and price – were serious or very serious issues for their household.

For low-income families, the expense of transportation poses a tremendous burden and inhibits wealth creation. Nearly 95% of funds spent on transportation by the poorest American families are devoted to private vehicle expenses. But communities designed with the car in mind give low-income families no other alternative. To meet life's daily needs, to reach jobs, doctors, and buy groceries, most American families, including those who can least afford it, must rely on a car.