2018 COMPASS NOW

NAVIGATING TOWARD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

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Houston County Needs Report
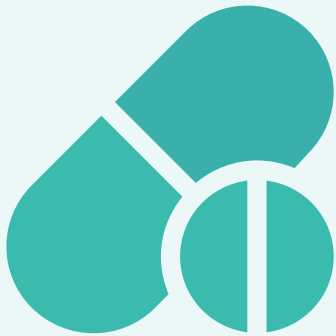
COMPASS Now 2018 is an assessment of needs in the Great Rivers Region. The COMPASS Now 2018 Report presents the results of data collected through a community survey, focus groups, an extensive review of health and socioeconomic indicators, and stakeholder meetings. Visit COMPASS Now online at: **www.compassnow.org**.

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- The Data Workgroup met from June 2017 to January 2018 for approximately 3 hours per week to review and organize the data and develop a structure in the data to share with the stakeholders.

2

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7 Rivers Alliance	International Quality Homecare
Aptiv, Inc.	La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools
Big Brothers Big Sisters of the 7 Rivers Region	La Crosse Community Foundation
Bluff Country Family Resources	La Crosse County Board Member
Caledonia Argus Newspaper	La Crosse County Health Department
Caledonia Boy Scouts	La Crosse County Human Services Department
Caledonia Economic Development Authority	La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium
Caledonia Public Schools	La Crosse Task Force to Eradicate Modern Slavery
City of Caledonia	Lifestyle Fitness
City of Houston	Mayo Clinic Health System
City of La Crosse	Neighbors in Action
Community Members	New Beginnings Christian Fellowship
Coulee Region RSVP	Onalaska Public Schools
Couleecap	Public Health Board Members
Crest Inn	Red Cross
ESB Bank	Salvation Army
Essential Health Clinic	School District of Holmen
Families First of Monroe County	Semcac
Family & Children's Center	Sheriff's Office
Gateway Area Council-Boy Scouts of America	Spring Grove Herald
Great Rivers Hub	Spring Grove Public Library
Gundersen Health System	The Parenting Place
Herman Dental	University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Hmoob Cultural & Community Agency	UW-Extension
Houston County	Viterbo University
Houston Public Schools	WAFER
Hunger Task Force of La Crosse	WI Department of Health Services
Huston County Public Health	WKBT News 8
Immanuel Lutheran Church	Workforce Connections
Inclusa	YMCA
Independent Living Resources	

4

Table of Contents

Additional content available at www.compassnow.org

List of tables

List of figures

Introduction

COMPASS Now is a joint effort of Great Rivers United Way, area healthcare organizations, and county health departments to improve the quality of life for everyone in the community. The purpose of COMPASS Now is to assess the needs in the community, identify community resources to address the most urgent needs, and encourage action to address the needs. The first COMPASS report and needs assessment process was conducted in 1995, and since then United Way has focused its funding system to more closely reflect those needs identified indicated by COMPASS Now; community organizations have used the report findings to shape their own priorities and support grant requests.

As a reader of this report you can expect to see information about how Houston County is faring in numerous areas that affect quality of life. You can also expect to see information about the top identified needs within Houston County and some initial ideas about resources and opportunities to address the needs. As a reader, you can use this report as guidance to build the foundation for action plans to solve community problems.

The COMPASS Now 2018 needs assessment involved three steps: (1) gathering information about needs, (2) reviewing and prioritizing needs, and (3) documenting the results.

Based on the data collected and the voices of community members, the top needs for Houston County in 2018 are:

- More livable wage jobs
- Increased access to mental healthcare services
- Improved access to public transportation
- Reduced drug and alcohol misuse and abuse
- Increased access to affordable, high-quality housing
- Increased school and community safety

Overview of methods for the COMPASS Now 2018 Report

A needs assessment is a systematic process for determining needs, or gaps, between current conditions and desired conditions. A needs assessment can help identify problems, which can help people identify resources and plan and implement solutions to address the problems.

A needs assessment typically involves three steps: (1) gathering information about needs, (2) reviewing and prioritizing needs, and (3) documenting the results. Every three years, Great Rivers United Way organizes a Steering Committee to help guide the COMPASS process. The Steering Committee, which has community members from the six Great Rivers Region counties (Buffalo, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties in Wisconsin and Houston County in Minnesota) including representatives from public health departments, local hospitals, and human services organizations, is tasked with determining the details of the process. Below is an overview of the process used for the 2018 needs assessment based on the Wisconsin guidebook on improving the health of local communities developed by the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB). Additional details about the process can be found in the Appendices located on Great Rivers United Way's website.

Step 1: Gathering information on needs

The needs assessment process used many sources of information to understand the needs of the Region.

The key data source was the Random Household Survey (RHS). The Random Household Survey was mailed to a random selection of 5,450 households throughout the Region in July and August of 2016. After reviewing the demographics of the Random Household Survey, the Steering Committee determined whose voices were missing. A plan was developed to conduct a Convenience Survey (CS) to capture the opinions of the groups of people who did not respond to the Random Household Survey to ensure that their voice was heard. These are called Convenience Surveys because they are collected in a non-random way – surveys are given to people that are easy to reach. Due to this difference, the CS data are separate from the RHS results. Steering Committee Members and other community partners collected responses to the Convenience Survey. The Data Workgroup oversaw the analysis of the data and reviewed the results under the guidance of Dr. Laurie Miller at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Table 1: Random Household Survey response rates

Random Household Survey Response Rates by County			
County	# of Households Received Survey	# of Households Returned Survey*	Response Rate
Buffalo	450	51	12.1%
La Crosse	2,400	292	12.2%
Monroe	900	86	9.6%
Trempealeau	600	85	14.2%
Vernon	650	87	13.4%
Houston	450	62	13.8%
No County Indicated*	-	9	-
Total	5,450	672	12.2%

*Nine surveys were returned without county or ZIP code identification.

To add to the survey data, the Data Workgroup was tasked with collecting existing data from federal, state, and local sources. These data included information about demographics, health, social factors, economic factors, and many other topics.

Because numbers-based data only tells part of a story, the needs assessment process also included holding county-based focus groups. Focus groups are usually small groups of people whose opinions are gathered through a guided discussion. Focus groups were held in all six counties and with general community members, students, family advisory councils, Latino community members, service providers, and Hmong community members.

Data from all the sources discussed above is used throughout this report.

Step 2: Reviewing and prioritizing needs

The Steering Committee and Data Workgroup reviewed all of the data collected in Step 1 and organized it into understandable presentations that were shared at stakeholder meetings. To determine regional and county-specific needs, the needs assessment process included stakeholder meetings. The meetings presented data that had been gathered about each county and the Region. Community members at the meetings generated ideas of the top needs of their community and voted to prioritize the needs based on the data presented and their personal knowledge of the community. Results were tabulated and the top needs were identified for each county and the Region; the regional priorities were determined by combining all of the county-level and regional results.

Step 3: Document results

This report serves as the documentation of the Houston County COMPASS Now Report for 2018. A writer for the report was hired by the Steering Committee and

tasked with synthesizing all the data that had been gathered and documenting the needs that had been prioritized.

Including the voice of under-represented populations

As part of the COMPASS Now 2018 process, organizations were asked to reach out to and share their expertise about populations that may be under-represented. The following organizations were asked to participate in the process by soliciting Convenience Survey responses, holding focus groups, and/or attending stakeholder meetings. This list is not exhaustive.

Table 2: Under-represented population outreach

Populations Represented	Organizations
People with disabilities	Aptiv, Inc. Independent Living Resources Inclusa International Quality Homecare
Aging population	Coulee Region RSVP Inclusa International Quality Homecare Neighbors in Action Senior Services, ADRC Strong Women Exercise Class
Low-income population	Coueecap, Inc. Essential Health Clinic Families First of Monroe County Great Rivers United Way Hunger Task Force of La Crosse Living Faith Food Pantry Monroe County Food Pantry Neighbor for Neighbor Food Pantry Place of Grace Salvation Army Semcac WAFER Western Dairyland Workforce Connections
Children, Youth, and Families	4H Big Brothers Big Sisters of the 7 Rivers Region Caledonia Boy Scouts Caledonia Public Schools Family and Children's Center Gateway Area Council - Boy Scouts of America Houston Public Schools La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools La Crosse Area Family Collaborative Onalaska Public Schools School District of Holmen The Parenting Place

Populations Represented	Organizations
	Monroe County WIC YWCA
Racial and Ethnic Minorities	AAMAN Hmoob Cultural & Community Agency Lugar de Reunion Monroe County WIC St. Clare Health Mission Scenic Bluffs Health Center Viterbo Diversity Committee and Student Club
Victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking	Bluff Country Family Resources La Crosse Task Force to Eradicate Modern Slavery
LGBTQ+ community	The Center

The results of the needs assessment are used by Great Rivers United Way, healthcare organizations, area foundations, county health departments, and other community organizations to identify community resources and encourage action to improve the quality of life for everyone in the Region. The results also help many organizations shape their own priorities and support grant applications.

Figure 1: Timeline of key COMPASS Now 2018 activities

COMPASS Now Steering Committee guidance

Random Household Survey

Convenience Survey

Focus Groups

Data Workgroup analyzes survey and gathers extra data

Report writing

Stakeholder meetings

| Mar 2016 | Jul 2016 | Nov 2016 | Mar 2017 | Jul 2017 | Nov 2017 | Mar 2018 |
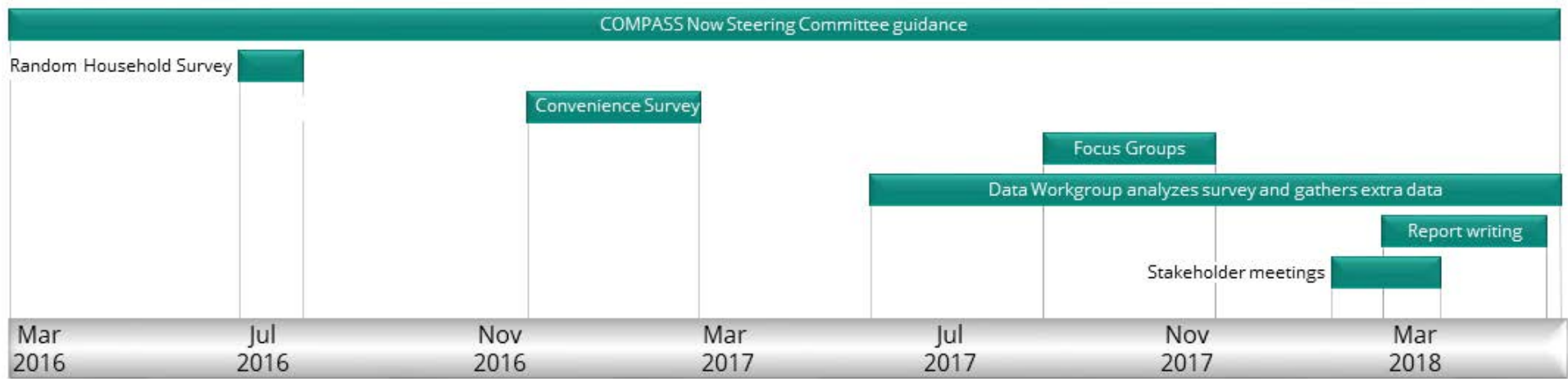
Limitations to this report

In this section, several key limitations that you should keep in mind as you read this report are listed.

1. Data presented from the **Random Household (RHS) and Convenience Surveys (CS) are based on people's perceptions**.
2. The number of people that responded to the surveys was lower than the RHS done for COMPASS Now 2015. **Out of the 5,450 surveys that we mailed out, 12% came back**. **Houston County's rate of response was similar** – of the 450 surveys that were mailed, **14% came back**.
3. There were some questions in the RHS and CS where a "Does Not Apply/Not Sure/Don't Know" option was provided, and other questions where it was not but should have been. This means that **some people may not have had an option that exactly fit their experience when answering the questions** and the results might be a little different if people had been presented with different options. Where applicable, throughout the report, RHS and CS questions with the "Does Not Apply" option had this answer removed to more accurately assess the perceptions of survey respondents.
4. There are **some topics for which data and other related information was not available**. Either the data did not exist or it was too old to be relevant. For example, the section on dental health does not include some data that was presented in past reports because it was not available. Also, there is not a lot of county-level data about persons with disabilities that is available to use in the report.
5. The key source of information about teenagers, **the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, was not available** for all counties because not enough schools administered the survey for the results to be representative of the entire Region. So, there will not be as much information about teenagers in this report as in past reports.
6. The demographics of respondents that completed the **RHS are not completely representative of the County** based on comparisons to U.S. Census data.
7. The appendices where gender-specific analyses for counties are presented do not include data on **respondents who selected "Prefer Not to Answer" or "Self-Identify" because confidentiality was a concern**.
8. The RHS and CS data **is not broken down by race because there were not enough non-White respondents** to ensure the results would be reliable.

Who is this report about?

Demographics

Demographics are data points that are used to describe a group of people. There are roughly 18,737 people living in Houston County. Demographics are used to help you understand who has responded to this report's main data sources – the Random Household and Convenience Surveys (RHS and CS). Knowing about the people who live in the County is important because, as those characteristics change, the needs of the County may also change. It is also key to understand who responded to the surveys because not everyone's voice is represented by those responses and you should be aware of whose voices are missing. Although the Steering Committee tried to gather the voices of the people who did not respond to the survey by having focus groups and including that information in the report, these groups may have different experiences and opinions that may not be captured.

What do the data tell us about the survey respondents?

Overall, the **Random Household Survey and the Convenience Survey had different groups of people responding to them**.

Both sets of information are needed to better understand the perspectives of the people in the County. The characteristics of the people who responded to the survey are somewhat different than the characteristics of the County based on census data. Taken together, **the surveys generally do a good job of describing the views of people in the County**.

Table 3: Houston County respondent and population characteristics

	Categories	RHS	CS	County[1]
Age of adults*	20-24	0%	20%	7%
	25-64	66%	60%	68%
	65 & older	34%	10%	25%
Gender	Female	70%	95%	50%
Race	White	100%	95%	97.2%
	Black	0%	0%	0.3%
	Native American	0%	0%	0.3%
	Hmong	0%	0%	0.2%
	Other Asian/Pacific Islander	0%	0%	
	Other	0%	5%	2%
Ethnicity	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	0%	5%	1%
Education	Less than HS	2%	20%	8%
	HS	23%	30%	34%
	Some college or vocational	41%	20%	38%
	College grad and above	34%	30%	20%
Income	<=$25,000	16%	58%	20%
	$25,001-$75,000	54%	26%	48%
	>$75,000	31%	16%	32%
Health insurance	With health insurance	93%	81%	95%
Household size	1 person	19%	10%	28%
	2 people	43%	30%	41%
	3 people	10%	15%	14%
	4 or more	28%	55%	18%
Children in household	Yes	34%	71%	26%
Home ownership	Own	98%	50%	81%

* Calculated using the total population of adults in the region age 20 and older as the denominator.

Overall, the RHS respondents tended to be older, female, less racially diverse, more educated, have larger household sizes, and live in a household with children, while CS respondents tended to be younger, female, have lower income, have larger household sizes, and live in a household with children than the actual makeup of the County.

As you read the report, please keep in mind that you need to look at responses from the RHS *and* the CS to get an idea about how people view the County. Throughout the report, when the RHS and CS data is presented in a

graphical format the RHS data is presented in the first bar and the CS data is presented in the second bar for each measure.

What do the data tell us about the people in the County?

There are many data points that can tell us about *who* the people in the County are. Below we show some key characteristics. We also present a few data points that could have important implications for how the County tackles the needs identified in this assessment.

Table 4: Demographics section RHS and CS data

	Sample	Yes	No
Care for someone who is aging	RHS	23%	77%
	CS	10%	90%
Care for someone with a disability	RHS	16%	84%
	CS	0%	100%
Volunteer in your community	RHS	61%	39%
	CS	48%	52%
Years living in the community	RHS	>10 = 87%	<10 = 13%
	CS	>10 = 80%	<10 = 20%

Three other data points not included above but also important to note are below.

Houston County is about half rural.[2] As you will see throughout the report, living in a rural area poses certain types of challenges for its residents – driving great distances to get groceries, lack of transportation options, etc.

The **median income of households in Houston County is lower than the state median income**.[3] Although median income doesn't consider cost of living, you will see throughout the report that people's income factors into many of the decisions they make regarding healthcare, food, childcare, and even health behaviors.

A final data point to review is the **rate at which the population is aging**. Below, we show how the population is expected to age over the course of the next 25 years. The darker the color, the greater the number of people aged 65 and over. This could be important to consider as you think about the needs of the County and how to meet those needs. **By 2030, about 30% of the people in the County are estimated to be age 65 or older.[4]**

Figure 2: Aging population projections
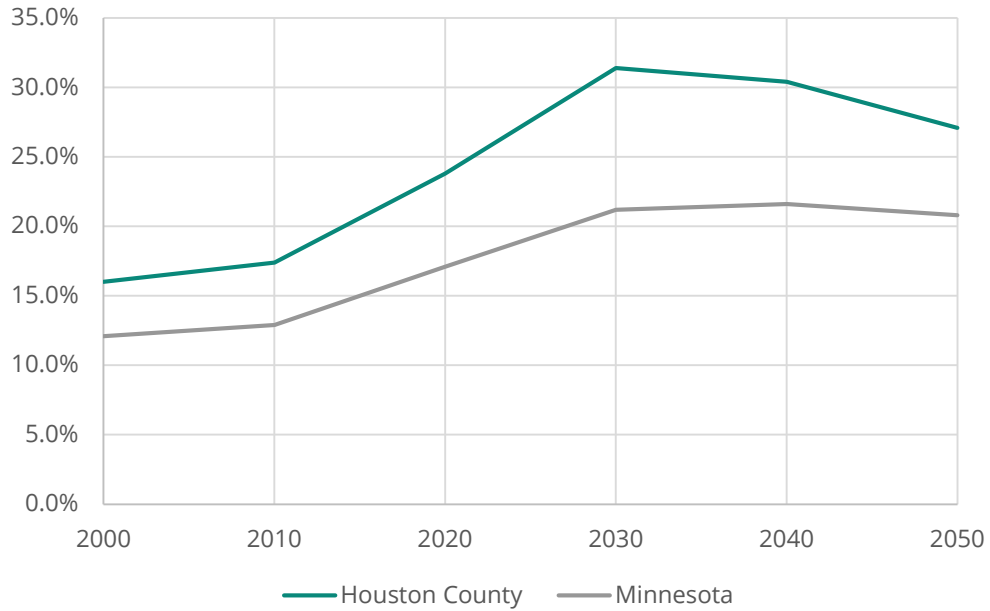
Source: *MN DHS Aging Data Profiles, https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/aging/aging-2030/data-profiles/*

Table 5: Demographics section data

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Population age 25-64[1]				50%	52%	49%	52%	52%	49%	52%
Population non-white race[1]				6.4%	2.5%	8.5%	5.9%	6.6%	2.7%	2.8%
Population with some college or higher[1]				58%	49%	67%	49%	49%	49%	58%
Population with health insurance coverage[1]				91%	92%	94%	89%	92%	83%	95%
Households with children[1]				27%	26%	26%	29%	29%	27%	26%
Population living in rural area[2]					100%	17%	58%	90%	86%	57%
Median income[3]	$63,300	$55,600	$63,500		$53,900	$51,400	$53,000	$53,700	$49,200	$56,300

References

1. U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *American Community Survey – 5-year estimates.* Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml
2. University of Wisconsin-Madison Population Health Institute. (2017). *County health rankings - % rural*. Retrieved from http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/wisconsin/2017/measure/factors/58/data
3. University of Wisconsin-Madison Population Health Institute. (2017). *County health rankings – median household income*. Retrieved from http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/wisconsin/2017/measure/factors/63/data
4. MN DHS Aging Data Profiles, https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/aging/aging-2030/data-profiles/

How is Houston County faring?

In this section of the report, data about the wellbeing of the County from multiple sources including the Random Household Survey (RHS) and Convenience Survey (CS), focus groups, community meetings, and data from federal, state, and local government departments is presented. Where possible, this section points out how the County is doing in comparison to Minnesota and the top U.S. performer. The top U.S. performer is any county in the U.S. that is performing in the top 10% of counties for that data point.

"Great community to live in, but there's always things we can improve."
- La Crosse County RHS Respondent

Quality and Length of Life

According to the World Health Organization, "quality of life" is a person's perception of their position in life and is affected by physical health, mental health, personal beliefs, relationships, and the physical environment.[5] Quality of life data can give an overall picture of how people are feeling about their lives. Length of life, or life expectancy, is a data point that tells us about the overall quality of people's lives using statistics, because how long people live is affected by so many things, like personal behaviors to social customs, expected length of life can give a general sense of how all those factors are influencing people. There may be specific factors that are affecting the quality of life of many of the people living here. If we identify those factors, then we can try to change them.

What do the RHS/CS survey data tell us?
People in the County view their community, overall health, mental health, and dental health as good to excellent. But there are differences between the RHS and CS respondents, especially in their view of the community as a place to live and their overall mental health.

Figure 3: RHS and CS quality of life measures

Legend: Excellent | Good | Fair/Poor

Measure	Excellent	Good	Fair/Poor	Survey
Overall rating of community as place to live	46%	53%	2%	RHS
	29%	57%	14%	CS
Your overall health	23%	72%	5%	
	24%	62%	14%	
Your overall mental health	34%	62%	3%	
	24%	62%	14%	
Your overall dental health	26%	60%	15%	
	33%	52%	14%	

Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

When residents of the County were asked via survey about the opportunities available to them that could increase their quality of life, **people viewed those opportunities as good, but needing improvement. Fine arts and youth opportunities were the lowest ranking**. Also, CS respondents rated all opportunities lower than the RHS respondents, suggesting there is a need for more arts and culture experiences that are diverse and affordable to all.

Figure 4: RHS and CS quality of life opportunity measures

Legend: Excellent | Good | Fair/Poor

Measure	Excellent	Good	Fair/Poor	Survey
Opportunities to volunteer in community	37%	50%	13%	RHS
	24%	48%	29%	CS
Opportunities for physical recreation for adults	19%	60%	21%	
	24%	43%	33%	
Opportunities to enjoy fine arts and cultural experiences	15%	50%	36%	
	14%	33%	52%	
Opportunities for youth to explore interests and participate in positive activities	15%	49%	36%	
	10%	33%	57%	
Availability of leisure time opportunities that meet your interests	21%	52%	27%	
	19%	33%	48%	

Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

What do other data tell us?

People living in the County are expected to live slightly longer than the general U.S. and Minnesota populations (County = 81.8 years; U.S. = 79.1 years; MN = 80.9 years).[6]

When we look at data about people dying an early death, we see a similar, positive trend to that of the County's life expectancy. **The County has a low amount of "years of potential life lost before age 75."** Years of potential life lost is an estimate of the average years a person would have been expected to live if he or she had not died prematurely. When added up for all of the people who died prematurely, it gives a sense of how much social and economic loss occurs when people die before 75. The top U.S. performer has about 5,200 years of potential life lost. In comparison, Houston County has 3,100 years of potential life lost.[7]

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, the **top causes of death have not changed much over time for the County[8]**. Heart disease and cancer are the top leading causes of death for the County and have remained that way for the last 10 years. These causes of death are followed by unintentional injuries, lung diseases, stroke, and diabetes (see Appendices at www.compassnow.org for more information).

The **County is doing well when you examine its rate of self-inflicted injury hospitalizations** (the closest measure we have for suicide attempts). The rate of death by suicide was not available for Houston County.[9] **Rates of self-inflicted injury hospitalizations have not changed dramatically over time and are lower than the state rate.[9]**

Figure 5: Rate of self-inflicted hospitalizations over time
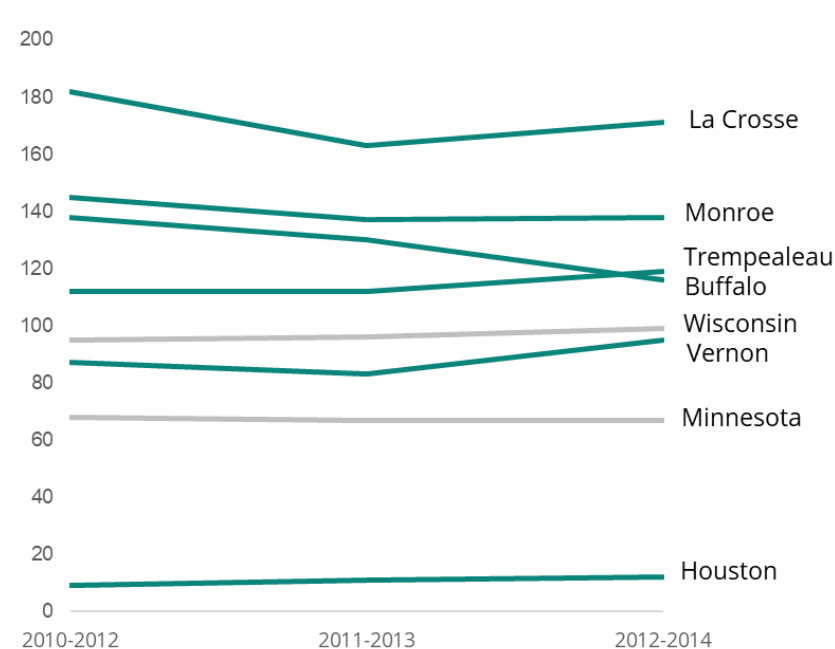
Source: _Minnesota MIDAS[9] County Health Rankings, 2010-2014[10]_.

Another measure of population health is the infant mortality rate. This is the number of deaths of children under 1 year of age per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is influenced by economics, living conditions, social wellbeing, rates of

illness, and environmental factors. **The infant mortality rate for the Wisconsin counties of the Great Rivers Region was 5.2 deaths per 1,000 live births, which was slightly lower than the WI rate of 5.9 per 1,000[11] but higher than the MN rate of 5.0 deaths per 1,000**.[12] The rate for Houston County was too unstable to report due to the small number of births and deaths. The percent of babies born at a low birth weight in the County is about the same as the top U.S. performer and MN, at about 6%.[13]

There are a few data points that can give us a sense of the **quality of people's health**. The table below shows how Houston County is doing compared to the Minnesota state average. The **percent of adults who are obese is the same for the County than the top U.S. performer (26%) and slightly lower than the MN rate**. All other data measures presented below are comparable to the state rates.

Table 6: Quality of health indicators

	Houston County	MN
Adults obese[14]	26%	27%
Adults with diabetes[15]	9%	8%
Rate of new cancer diagnoses per 100,000 people[16]	429	459

Summary

Survey respondents generally view their health as in good to excellent condition, but a greater proportion of CS respondents rated their overall health and mental health as fair/poor compared to RHS respondents. Data points about life expectancy, years of potential life lost, and others confirm that the overall health of residents is good.

Data about the quality of people's lives, based on health conditions people have, suggest that quality of life is good.

Opportunities to increase one's quality of life are generally viewed as good. People feel they have opportunities to volunteer and for recreation. However, accessible and affordable opportunities for fine arts and for youth activities could be improved.

Table 7: Quality and Length of Life indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Life expectancy (years)[6]		79.8	80.9	80.2	80.2	80.3	78.7	80.3	80.0	81.8
Premature death (years of potential life lost; smaller number is better)[7]	5,200	6,000	5,100		5,100	5,000	7,000	5,000	6,000	3,100
Rate of self-inflicted injury hospitalizations per 100,000 people[9, 10]										
2010-2012		95	68		138	182	145	112	87	9
2011-2013		96	67		130	163	137	112	83	11
2012-2014		99	67		116	171	138	119	95	12
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births[11, 12]	6.5 (US)	5.9	5.0	5.2	6.8*	3.6	8.8	1.5	7.5	NA
Low birth weight births[13]	6%	7%	6%		6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	6%
Obesity (% adults with BMI>30)[14]	26%	30%	27%		32%	28%	33%	30%	33%	26%
Adults with diagnosed diabetes[15]		9%	8%		10%	8%	9%	9%	9%	9%
Rate of new cancer diagnoses per 100,000 people[16, 17]		468	459		383	471	479	457	426	429

*Due to the small number of births, this rate should be interpreted with caution.

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> "I feel like drug use is the biggest challenge facing our community currently. In the last year there have been two houses raided on my block by police due to drug issues."
> - La Crosse County RHS Respondent

Health Behaviors

Health behaviors include both positive and negative actions that people engage in that influence their health and wellbeing. For example, eating a lot of high fat foods can lead to obesity, and obesity can lead to heart disease and early death.[18] Yet, being physically active can lead to better health.[18] We can look at health behaviors as one area of people's lives which may benefit from improvement. If we can improve some of these health behaviors, then we may be able to improve people's quality and length of life.

What do other data tell us?

When we look at health behavior data about the people of the County, it paints a picture that shows room for improvement. Below, we look at alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, child health activities, adult health behaviors, and reproductive health behaviors.

Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use

Excessive drinking, which includes binge drinking (more than 4 or 5 alcoholic beverages on a single occasion) and heavy drinking (drinking more than 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks per day on average) is prevalent in the County. Excessive drinking is related to hypertension, interpersonal violence, suicide, and sexually transmitted infections.[19] **Slightly more than 1 in 5 people (21%) drink excessively**, which is more than the top U.S. performer, at 1 in 8 (12%).[20]

However, data about alcohol-involved driving deaths shows that zero of the 8 fatal car crashes in Houston County between 2012 and 2016 involved alcohol.[21] This is much lower than the WI state average (37%), MN state average (31%), and better than the top U.S. performer (13%). The measure only looks at fatal crashes that occur on public roads in Houston County.

It's estimated that **about 8% of people in the Southeast Region of Minnesota have used illegal drugs in the past month based on self-report**.[22] That is the same as the Minnesota estimate and the Wisconsin estimate and slightly lower than the Western Region of Wisconsin (9%).[22]

There has been **a gradual increase in the number of drug overdose deaths in the Great Rivers Region** from 2000 to 2016, with a more noticeable increase from 2007 to 2016. In 2000 there were 12 drug overdose deaths and in 2016 there were 39 drug overdose deaths, which is a 225% increase.[23,24] In addition, **more than half of the drug poisoning deaths (62%) were unintentional** between 2000 and 2016.[23] In Houston County from 2000-2016 there were 17 drug overdose deaths. Data was not available on intention.

Figure 6: Drug overdose deaths in the Region over time
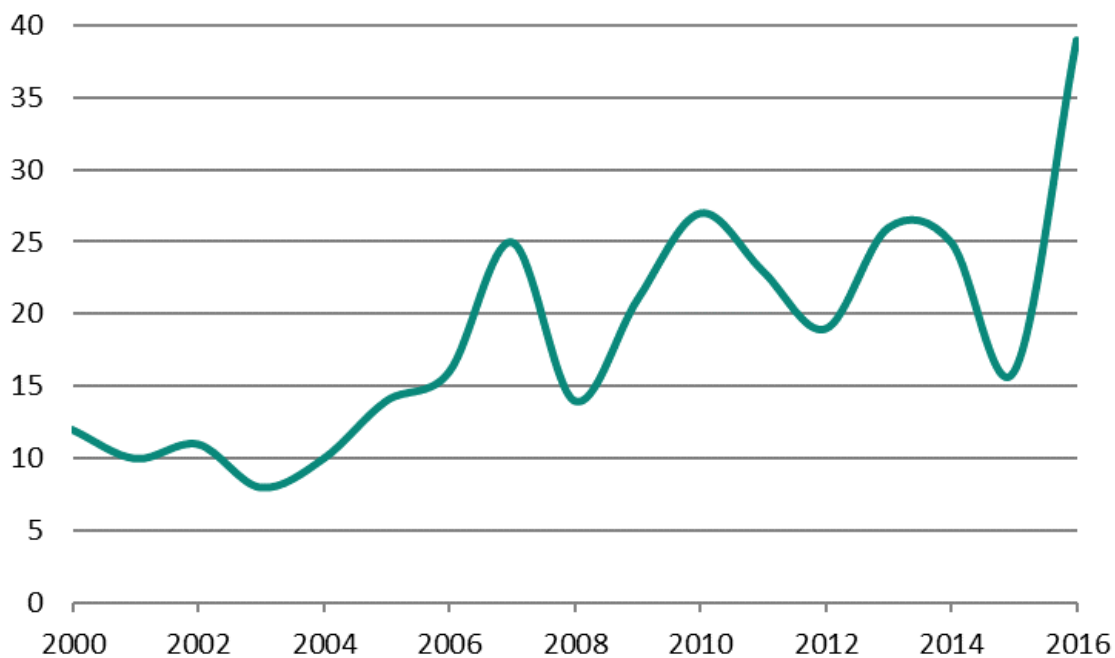
Source: *Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2000-2016, and Minnesota Department of Health Services, 2000-2016.*

We know from statewide data that opioid use and abuse has been rising in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Data on opioid use suggests that the Region is doing slightly better than Minnesota and Wisconsin. **Deaths due to opioid overdoses in the County (5.3 deaths per 100,000 people) are not as high as the WI rate (11 deaths per 100,000 people) or the MN rate (12.3 per 100,000)., but we know the problem is getting worse because death rates, emergency room visits, and hospital stays have been increasing over the years.**[23,24]

Smoking data tell us that there has not been much change, and the rate remains relatively low – **about 14% of people in the County report current smoking**.[25] This is about the same as the Wisconsin and Minnesota rates, and the same as the top U.S. performer (14%).

Child health activities

People's decision to vaccinate their children varies greatly across the Region, and may also be affected by people's access to healthcare and their religious and cultural beliefs. **The percent of children receiving all recommended vaccinations in the County is 78%.**[26] Recommended vaccinations include DTaP, polio, MMR, Hib, hepatitis B, varicella, and Pneumococcal conjugate, and protect children from acquiring serious diseases.

Adult health behaviors

A key data point that has major effects on people's health is their amount of physical activity. In a prior section of the report, we saw that 26% of adults in the County were obese. When we look at physical activity rates, we see that **24% of people report no leisure time physical activity.**[27] The lack of leisure time physical activity may contribute to the rate of obesity.

Another area to consider is whether people in the County are getting recommended health screenings. Health screenings can detect disease early, and with early detection comes better treatment options. Although data is not available for Houston County, **people in the Region are getting their health screenings as often as people in Minnesota and Wisconsin.**[28-30]

Reproductive health behaviors

Two data points that can give us a sense of how well the County is doing when it comes to reproductive health are sexually transmitted infection rates and teen birth rates. Rates of chlamydia can give a sense of unsafe sexual activity in the County. Sexually transmitted infections, like chlamydia, are a major cause of infertility and pelvic pain and disease.[31] Treating sexually transmitted infections is also quite costly.[32]

The chlamydia rate is low in Houston County, and is better than the top U.S. performer.[33]

Table 8: Chlamydia and teen birth rates

	Houston County	MN	Top U.S. Performer
Rate of chlamydia cases per 100,000 people[33]	122	367	123
Rate of teen births per 1,000 females age 15-19[39]	11	17	15

The teen birth rate can give us a sense of the sexual health of our teenagers. We know that people who have children as teenagers are more likely to have poor birth outcomes, [34,35] poor socioeconomic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes.[36-38]

The rate of teen births in the County (11 per 1,000) is much lower than the state rate (21 per 1,000) and top U.S. performer (20 per 1,000).[39]

Teen birth rates have been trending down in all counties within the Region.[39] Buffalo, Houston, Vernon, and La Crosse counties have overlapping rates for some years of data, and for 2017, Vernon and La Crosse counties ended up with a teen birth rate of 10 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19.

Figure 7: Teen birth rates over time (7-year rates)
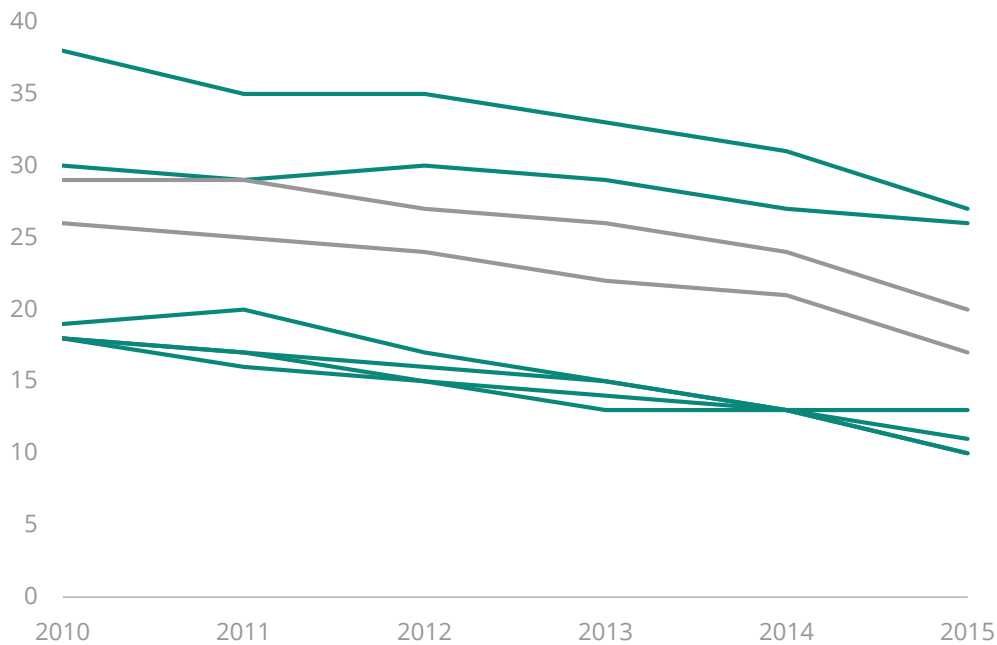
Source: *County Health Rankings, 2013-2018.*

Summary

Slightly more than one in five people drink excessively, which is more than the top U.S. performer, at one in eight.

Illegal drug use continues to be a top concern for the County.

Most children are getting their recommended vaccinations.

Physical activity is low, but most people are getting their recommended health screenings.

The rate of sexually transmitted infections is low, suggesting that safe sex practices are being used, and the County has a low rate of births among teenagers.

Table 9: Health Behaviors indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Adult excessive drinking (binge drinking or heavy drinking)[20]	12%	24%	21%		23%	24%	25%	23%	21%	21%
Alcohol-involved driving deaths[21]	13%	37%	31%		38%	32%	38%	32%	42%	0%
People over 12 years using illicit drugs in past month[22]	9.6% (US)	8.4%	8.3%			Western WI Region = 8.7%				Region 5 & 6 = 7.6%
Rate of opioid-involved deaths per 100,000 people[23, 24]		11		7.2	3.0	8.2	7.0	6.1	8.0	5.3
Rate of opioid-related emergency department visits and hospitalizations per 100,000 people[23]		362	NA	297 (WI)	251.6	329.8	294.0	261.3	228.8	NA
Adults self-reporting smoking[25]	14%	17%	16%		16%	16%	17%	16%	17%	14%
Children aged 19-35 months who received all recommended doses of DTaP, polio, MMR, Hib, Hepatitis B, Varicella, & PCV[26]		71%	60%		63%	79%	68%	73%	43%	78%
Adults reporting no leisure time physical activity[27]	19%	20%	19%		25%	20%	24%	20%	27%	24%

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Women who should have and got at least one mammogram in past 24 months[28]		79%	81%	84%						
Women who should have and got cervical cancer screening[29]		81%	81%	81%						
Men and women who should have and got colorectal cancer screening[30]		77%	72%	78%						
Rate of chlamydia cases per 100,000 people[33]	123	403	367		112	397	316	203	129	122
Rate of teen births per 1,000 females age 15-19[39]	15	20	17		13	10	27	26	10	11

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> "Paying for my medical bills and my daily pills are a real hardship. Social security doesn't give me much of a raise and prices are always going up. Something has to change or I won't be able to see a doctor or take my pills."
> - Buffalo County RHS Respondent

Clinical Care

Does the type of care you need exist? How easy is it to get the care you need? When you get care, is it high quality? In this section, important data that answer these questions is shown. If the care that people need is not available, is difficult to access, or is not high quality, then people's health will suffer. If we can identify and change these things, then we may be able to increase people's quality and length of life.

What do the RHS/CS survey data tell us?

Whether you ask people about physical healthcare, mental healthcare, or dental care, people feel that they have good or excellent access if you look at the County as a whole, but that is not the whole story.

People in the County view their access to physical, mental, and dental care as good to excellent. However, CS respondents consistently rated access to care lower than RHS respondents. This is particularly apparent in people's access to dental care. In addition, RHS respondents rated access to mental health care the lowest overall.

Figure 8: RHS and CS access to care measures
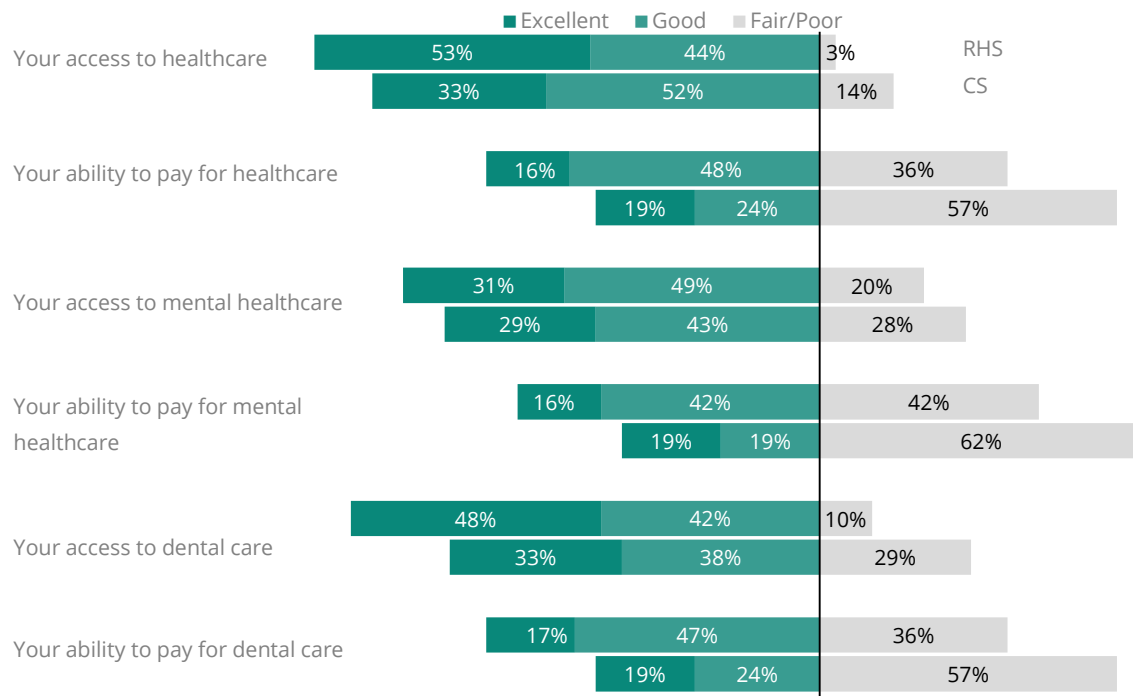
Source: *COMPASS Now, 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

RHS and CS results show that far **fewer people felt that their ability to pay for healthcare, mental healthcare, and dental care were good to excellent**, compared to how they viewed their access to care. This may be due to the care being too expensive, insurance premiums or co-pays being too high, or many other factors. **Nearly three of every five CS respondents said they had poor to fair ability to pay for healthcare (57%)** and results for RHS respondents were lower at almost two out of five (36%).

Based on the RHS and CS surveys, around **21% (CS) to 27% (RHS) of people said that there was a time in the past 12 months that they needed to see a doctor but did not because of the cost**.

What do other data tell us?

Data that compare the number of people in a county to the number of providers tells a different story about the availability of doctors, mental healthcare providers, and dentists than the RHS and CS data about access to care. **The availability of clinical care for Houston County is lower than the state average and the top U.S. performer.**[40-42] In addition, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has designated all of Houston County as a medically underserved area or

populations.[43] These areas or populations are designated by HRSA as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality rates, high poverty rates, or a high elderly population.

Table 10: Availability of providers

	Houston County	MN	Top U.S. Performer
Availability of primary care providers (ratio of population to providers)[40]	1,440:1	1,100:1	1,040:1
Availability of mental health providers (ratio of population to providers)[41]	4,690:1	510:1	360:1
Availability of dental care providers (ratio of population to providers)[42]	2,090:1	1,408:1	1,320:1

Although **94% of people in the County under age 65 have health insurance**,[44] the lack of providers combined with people's lessened ability to pay for care may decrease the chances that people try to get care when they need it.

One clinical healthcare data point suggests that **when people receive care, it is high quality**. For example, the percent of diabetic Medicare enrollees aged 65-75 that received blood sugar monitoring is 89% and is about the same as the WI (90%) and MN averages (88%) and about the same as the top U.S. performer (91%).[45] This suggests that their diabetes is well-monitored. The rate of blood sugar monitoring is important as it is a preventive approach which indicates access to care, one's knowledge of health, and one's ability to utilize services.[46]

Summary

People generally view their access to healthcare, mental healthcare, and dental care as good to excellent, but metrics on how many care providers there are in the County show that there are not enough care providers to sufficiently serve all people in the County. In addition, people have difficulty paying for care, and some have not seen a provider when they needed to because of cost.

When people receive healthcare, it appears to be of high quality.

Table 11: Clinical Care indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Availability of primary care providers (ratio of population to providers)[40]	1040:1	1240:1	1100:1		6590:1	700:1	1820:1	2460:1	1210:1	1440:1
Availability of mental health providers (ratio of population to providers)[41]	360:1	600:1	510:1		6600:1	390:1	710:1	2270:1	820:1	4690:1
Availability of dental care providers (ratio of population to providers)[42]	1320:1	1560:1	1408:1		940:1	1140:1	1690:1	4220:1	2770:1	2090:1
Population under age 65 with no health insurance coverage[44]	8%	9%	7%		9%	7%	10%	9%	13%	6%
Diabetic Medicare enrollees 65-75 that received diabetes monitoring[45]	91%	90%	88%		90%	93%	92%	92%	91%	89%

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Social & Cultural Factors

Social and cultural factors include social support, schools, educational opportunities, and social norms and attitudes. Social factors influence a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes. For example, completing more education is linked with being less likely to smoke and more likely to exercise, in addition to better physical health.[47-49] Research also shows that poor family support, limited contact with other people, and limited involvement in one's community are linked to early death and poorer health.[50] Social factors are clearly important.

What do the RHS/CS survey data tell us?

Social factors data are presented in three main areas: social diversity, care for children, the aging, and people living with disabilities, and early care/education.

Social diversity

Having respect for and an understanding of, people of different ages, genders, values, ethnicities, customs, and backgrounds than us can help everyone understand different points of view, find new solutions to old problems, increase trust, and work better together as a community.

The RHS and CS surveys ask two important questions about the County's social diversity. The results suggest that **respect for community diversity is valued but could use improvement**. In addition, **including people with different backgrounds in decision-making could use improvement**.

Figure 9: RHS and CS diversity measures
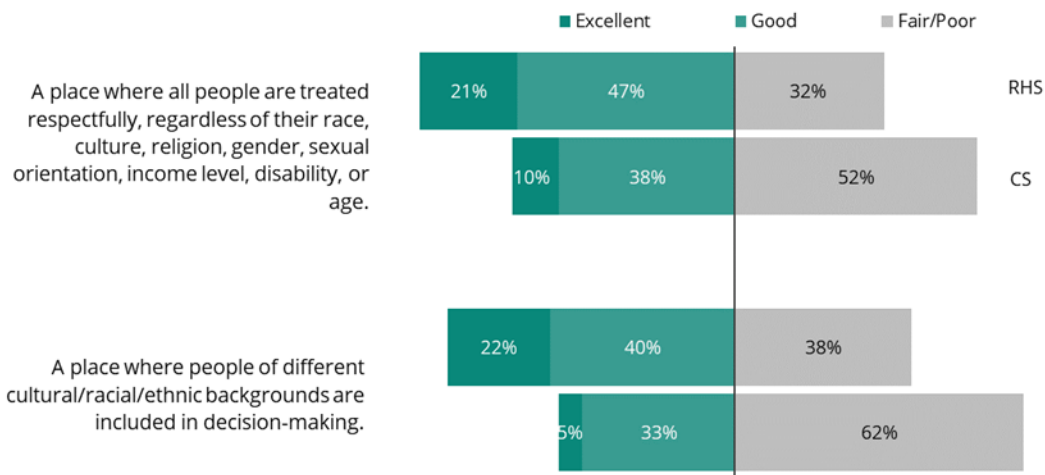
Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

Attention to and care for children, the aging, and people living with disabilities

An area that tells us about the support within our communities is how well we care for our children, people with disabilities, and the aging. If we are not taking care of these people as best as we can, it may suggest that those in a caregiving role may be unable to fulfill their responsibilities because of their own health, economic, or social problems. In addition, if we are not caring for these populations, their wellbeing may suffer.

Caring for the needs of aging persons and persons with disabilities is of vital importance to the wellbeing of these populations. When people in the County were asked about how well their community meets the overall needs of the aging and persons with disabilities, results were fairly similar. About **50% of people said their community was *good* at meeting the overall needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities** (elderly RHS = 51%, CS = 55%; persons with disabilities RHS = 53%, CS = 60%).

Table 12: RHS and CS meeting needs of populations measures

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Community as a place that meets needs of elderly persons	RHS	29%	51%	20%
	CS	30%	55%	15%
Community as place that meets needs of persons with disabilities	RHS	29%	53%	18%
	CS	15%	60%	25%

Similarly, about half of survey respondents believe their communities are preventing abuse of the aging and persons with disabilities. Even though about half of RHS respondents stated both efforts (meeting needs and preventing abuse) are good, one-quarter still rated efforts as "*fair/poor*." About one-third of RHS respondents stated efforts to prevent abuse or neglect of children are fair/poor where CS respondents viewed those efforts more positively. Additionally, nearly two out of five RHS and CS respondents rated the availability of services that meet the need of abused children, adults, and people with disabilities as "*fair/poor*," suggesting room for improvement.

Figure 10: RHS and CS abuse prevention measures
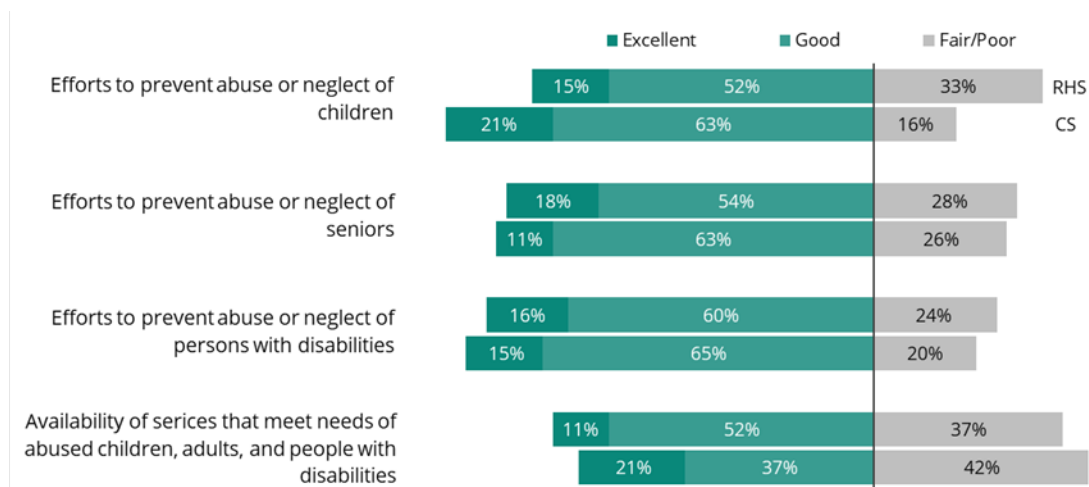
Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

Early care, 4K-12, and higher education

Care and education for our children is very important if we want our communities to continue to be positive places to live and to improve in the future. There is a link between getting more education and having better health.[51] More education also tends to help a person get better-paying jobs. Below, we present data from birth to adulthood about education and education opportunities.

Overall, **most people feel that their community does a *good* to *excellent* job in meeting their family's education needs** (RHS = 82%; CS = 90%).

Table 13: RHS and CS educational needs measure

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Community as place that meets your educational needs	RHS	18%	61%	21%
	CS	10%	65%	25%

When people in the County were asked about the availability of Birth to 3 (a program that supports families of children with developmental delays or disabilities), childcare, and early education, the picture was not entirely positive. **People felt that early education, Birth to 3 opportunities, and the availability of quality childcare were good to excellent, but paying for high-quality childcare was difficult.**

Figure 11: RHS and CS early education and childcare measures
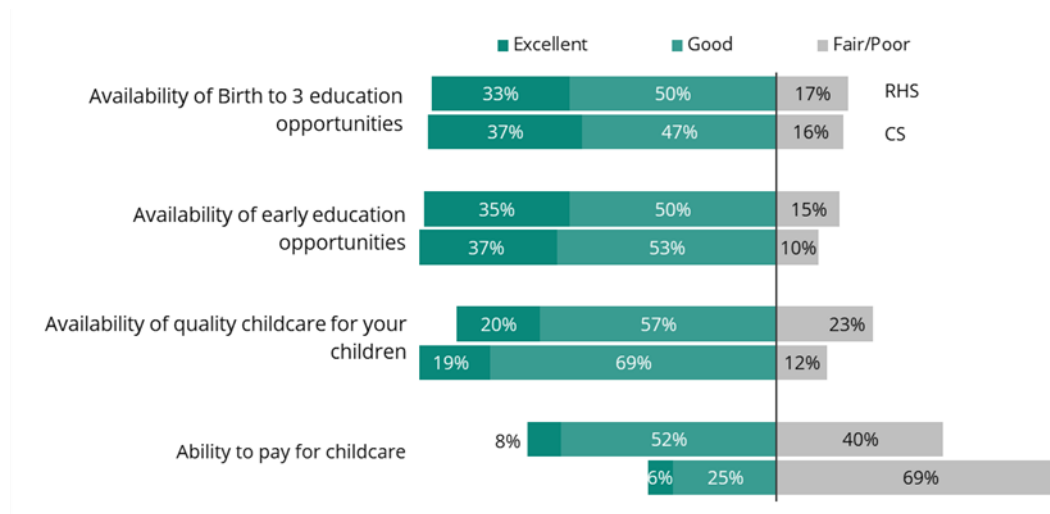
Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

Once children enter elementary, middle, and high school, the picture is positive. People view the schooling as *good* to *excellent* quality (RHS = 88%; CS = 85%)

The **quality of higher education in the community is also viewed very positively** (RHS good/excellent = 92%; CS good/excellent = 69%). However, people feel that their **ability to pay for education beyond high school for themselves or their family is *fair* to *poor* (RHS = 63%; CS = 80%)**.

Nearly half of people viewed opportunities in their job to gain additional knowledge or skills as *poor to fair* (RHS = 43%; CS = 65%). And slightly less than half **viewed the availability of community resources to learn new skills as *poor to fair*** (RHS = 40%; CS = 45%).

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Quality of schools, grades 4K-12	RHS	12%	63%	25%
	CS	15%	60%	25%
Quality of higher education	RHS	8%	47%	45%
	CS	31%	25%	44%
Ability to pay for higher education	RHS	63%	27%	10%
	CS	80%	10%	10%
Opportunities in job to gain additional knowledge or skills	RHS	43%	35%	22%
	CS	65%	29%	6%
Availability of community resources to learn new skills	RHS	40%	41%	19%
	CS	45%	45%	10%

What do other data tell us?

An area that tells us about the support within our communities is how well we care for our children. Child maltreatment data, which includes neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse allegations, is an area that can tell us how well we are caring for our children. Looking at the number of juvenile arrests can tell us more about teenagers and how well we are paying attention to and providing them with positive environments and activities. Taken together, the data should give us an idea of how children fare from early childhood through adolescence.

Low child abuse rates,[52] and increases in out-of-home placements[55] are occurring in Houston County.

Table 15: Child abuse and neglect indicators

	Houston County	MN
Child abuse rate per 1,000 children, 2014[52]	0.9	3.5
Out-of-home placements 2011	33	
Out-of-home placements 2016	46	

The **number of out-of-home care placements has increased 39% in Houston County from 2011 to 2016**.[55]

Figure 12: Out-of-home placements over time
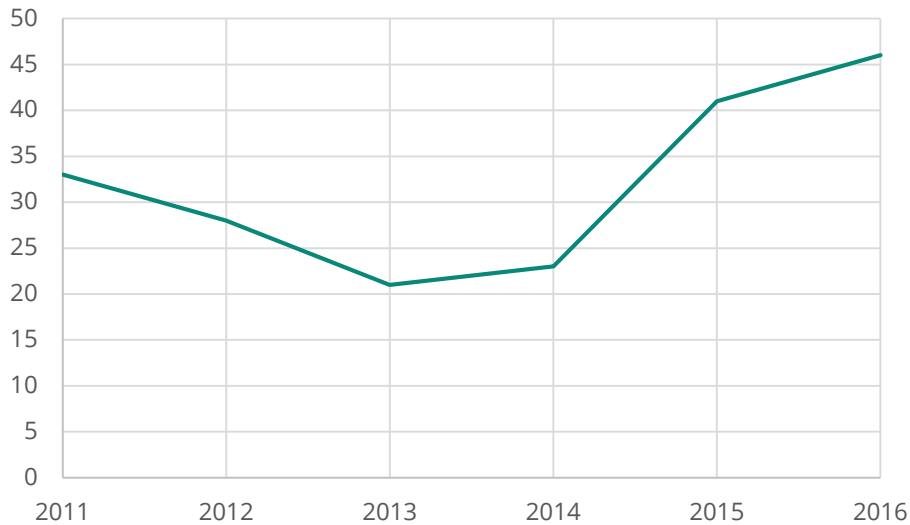
Source: *Minnesota Social Services Information System, 2011-2016.*

A positive sign is that **juvenile arrest rates have decreased slightly over time**.[56,57] Counties in the region showed an overall decrease in rates since the 2012 COMPASS report. [56, 57]

Figure 13: Juvenile arrest rates over time
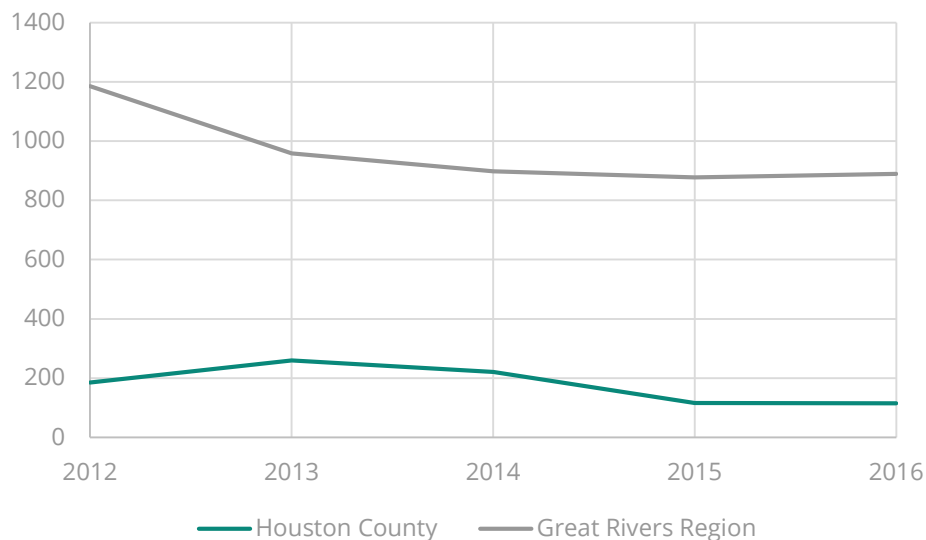
Source: WI Department of Justice. *UCR Arrest Data,* 2012-2016; Minnesota Department of Public Safety. *Arrest Dashboards*, 2012-2016.

As noted earlier, survey respondents felt positively about the quality of 4K-12 education. Other data tell a similar story. The percent of fourth-graders in the County who are proficient or advanced in reading is 61%.[58] This is higher than the state averages of Wisconsin (52%) and Minnesota (59%). Similarly, the percent of ninth-graders that graduate from high school in four years is well above the state averages (County = 96%; WI = 88%; MN = 93%).[59, 60] The high school graduation rate is a calculation of all public high schools physically located in Houston County and does not include the Minnesota Virtual Academy which is hosted by the Houston School District. The percent of adults with some higher education (68%) is higher than the state average for Wisconsin (67%) but less than the state average for Minnesota (74%). [61]

Summary

Generally, social diversity is valued and acknowledged throughout the County, but more could be done to increase respect for those with different backgrounds and to include them in decision-making. There is a long-standing saying of "nothing about us without us," which means that no decision should be made by anyone without the full and direct participation of members of the group affected by the decision. The data seem to support this notion.

People view the County as doing a *good* job of meeting the needs of children, the aging, and those with disabilities. People also feel that efforts to prevent the abuse and neglect of these populations is *good*. Even though about half of RHS respondents stated both efforts (meeting needs and preventing abuse) are good, one-third still rated efforts as *fair/poor*. In addition, data on child abuse and neglect suggest that the problem may be increasing, while juvenile arrest rates are decreasing.

Education, overall, is viewed as good to excellent, and data suggest that 4K-12 and higher education is of high quality. Yet, families find it difficult to pay for higher education for themselves or their family members.

Childcare is an area where people struggle to afford high quality care. Quality childcare impacts whether children will be school-ready, read at grade-level, and graduate from high school. If childcare is not available, employment options for parents are limited.[62]

Table 16: Social Factors indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Child abuse rate per 1,000 children, 2014[52, 53]		4.0	3.5		4.3	3.3	4.9	2.5	5.5	0.9
Percent change in number of out-of-home placements, 2011-2016[54, 55]		11%	NA		71%	9%	141%	155%	111%	39%
Juvenile arrest rate per 10,000 youth age 10-17, 2012-2016[56, 57]		863		962	114	1589	954	190	224	180
2012		1137		1185	158	1967	1135	246	266	185
2013		926		959	68	1604	914	180	259	260
2014		785		898	148	1508	755	196	236	221
2015		754		878	79	1442	960	174	132	116
2016		712		889	118	1418	1002	157	229	115
4th grade students proficient or advanced in reading[58]		52%	59%		59%	59%	51%	51%	53%	61%

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
9th grade cohort that graduates in four years[59, 60]		88%	93%		94%	93%	93%	94%	95%	96%*
Adults, 25-44, with some higher education[61]	72%	67%	74%		59%	77%	61%	60%	53%	68%

*Houston County percentage was calculated using individual schools. The county as a whole has a much lower graduation rate because the Houston School District hosts the Minnesota Virtual Academy, an online public high school that had a graduation rate of 38.8% in 2017.

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Economic Factors

Economic factors include job opportunities, living wages, exposure to and living in certain socioeconomic conditions like concentrated poverty, and resources to improve people's economic standing. Economic factors influence a wide range of health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes. Again, if we know in which areas we are not doing well, then hopefully we can find ways to improve them.

What does the RHS/CS survey data tell us?

RHS and CS respondents seem to suggest that the County could be doing better economically. **Between one in three and one in two people rated their ability to meet their basic needs as poor to fair** (RHS = 31%; CS = 48%).

The **majority, 64%, of RHS respondents rated the availability of jobs with wages that offer a comfortable standard of living as poor to fair**.

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents felt that the availability of services for people who may need extra help was good to excellent, but a sizeable proportion felt that it was only fair to poor.

Figure 14: RHS and CS availability of financial services measures

Legend: ■ Excellent ■ Good ▪ Fair/Poor

Ability you have to meet basic needs
- RHS: 18% Excellent, 51% Good, 31% Fair/Poor
- CS: 14% Excellent, 38% Good, 48% Fair/Poor

Availability of jobs with wages that offer a comfortable standard of living
- 9% Excellent, 27% Good, 64% Fair/Poor
- 10% Excellent, 20% Good, 70% Fair/Poor

Availability of resources to help budget money
- 5% Excellent, 55% Good, 40% Fair/Poor
- 10% Excellent, 30% Good, 60% Fair/Poor

Availability of services for people who may need extra help
- 14% Excellent, 49% Good, 37% Fair/Poor
- 15% Excellent, 50% Good, 35% Fair/Poor

Efforts to reduce hunger in community
- 18% Excellent, 50% Good, 32% Fair/Poor
- 14% Excellent, 57% Good, 29% Fair/Poor

Efforts to reduce poverty in community
- 5% Excellent, 43% Good, 52% Fair/Poor
- 10% Excellent, 38% Good, 52% Fair/Poor

Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

When survey respondents were asked about their community's efforts to help families in need, results suggest that more could be done. **Around 50% of RHS and CS respondents rated efforts to reduce hunger in their community as *good***. But efforts to reduce poverty were viewed quite differently – **over half of RHS (52%) and CS (52%) respondents said that efforts to reduce poverty were *poor to fair***.

What does other data tell us?

Overall, **median household income in the County ($56,300) is lower than MN ($63,500) and is much lower than the top U.S. performer ($63,300)**.[63] Unemployment rates in the County (4.0%) are around the state averages (WI = 4.1%; MN = 3.9%).[64,65] The labor force participation rate (the percent of people employed and unemployed but looking for a job) for adults in their prime working years (age 20-64) for the County is 87%.[66] Although unemployment rates in the County are low and the labor force participation rate is high, median household incomes are still lower than the state ranges and the U.S. top performers.

Another way to think about how people are doing financially is to look at the number of adults and children living below the federal poverty threshold. The poverty threshold is based on how much money a household in the city pays for a

certain set of goods and services, like food and beverages or medical care. In 2015, the federal poverty threshold for a household consisting of two adults and two children was $24,036. **The percent of the population in the County living below the federal poverty threshold is 11%.**[67] This rate is similar to WI (12%) and MN (11%).[67] Additionally, Asian and White people in the County have the lowest percentage of people living at or below the poverty threshold at 0% and 10% respectfully, while 74% of Black people, 44% of Hispanic people, 43% of Native American people, and 32% of people who identify as an Other race live at or below the poverty threshold.[68] These percentages should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of non-White residents.

The **percent of children in the County living below the federal poverty threshold** is a bit lower. About 10% of children in Houston County live below the federal poverty threshold, which is lower than MN (13%) and the top U.S. performer (12%).[69] However, **27% of children are eligible for free and reduced school lunch** in the County.[70] Eligibility for free and reduced school lunch is based on household size and household income; each year the eligibility criteria is updated to reflect changes in costs of living.

A resource that is available to families in need of financial assistance is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), formerly known as Welfare. In Minnesota it is called General Assistance. It provides financial assistance to pregnant women and families with one or more children. It can be used to help pay for food, shelter, utilities, and non-medical expenses. **In the County, the percent of households receiving TANF is 2.5%.** The rate is lower than the Minnesota average (3.6%).[71]

Other government assistance includes programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The **percentage of households that received SSI, cash public assistance income, SNAP in the past 12 months was lower for the County than the U.S. (County = 19%; U.S. = 28%)**.[72] The lower overall receipt of government assistance may be due to low need, few households applying for benefits, lack of knowledge about the programs, state-specific policies, or other factors.

Summary

Data suggest that a sizeable number of people are struggling financially. Although unemployment rates are about the same as the state rates, about two in five households are struggling to meet their basic needs.

What is more, people feel that jobs that pay livable wages are hard to come by in the County. They also feel that efforts to reduce poverty could be better and that there could be more resources to help with budgeting and finances.

Table 17: Economic Factors indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Median household income[63]	$63,300	$55,600	$63,500		$53,900	$51,400	$53,000	$53,700	$49,200	$56,300
Unemployment[64, 65]		4.1%	3.9%		4.6%	3.7%	4.0%	3.8%	3.7%	4.0%
Labor force participation rate[66]		81%	84%	82%	83%	83%	80%	85%	76%	87%
People living below Federal Poverty Threshold[67]		12%	11%		10%	14%	13%	9%	15%	11%
Children living below Federal Poverty Threshold[69]	12%	17%	13%		14%	12%	20%	14%	26%	10%
Children eligible for free and reduced school lunch[70]		41%	38%		34%	37%	48%	43%	46%	27%
Households receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families[71]		2.2%	3.6%		2.0%	1.8%	2.6%	1.7%	1.7%	2.5%

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Household receiving SSI, cash public assistance, or SNAP/Food Stamps[72]	28% (US)	19%	27%	21%	19%	21%	26%	18%	19%	19%

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Physical Environment

The physical environment includes the natural environment (e.g., weather, climate, rivers, bluffs), built environment (e.g., buildings, transportation, housing, neighborhoods), and even physical barriers (especially for people with disabilities). The physical environment can have wide ranging effects on people. For example, places like rural Wisconsin and Minnesota where there are sometimes no nearby supermarkets or where people must travel great distances to get food have higher rates of overweight, obesity, and early death.[73-75] Another factor that has been linked to poor health outcomes is living in areas of violent crime. High levels of violent crime can decrease physical safety, mental health, and physical activity.[76] If we can identify areas where we are doing poorly, then we may be able to figure out ways to change these things and improve people's lives.

What do the RHS/CS survey data tell us?

Safety and safety services

When it comes to safety services in the County and the **general safety of the communities in which people live, residents see things positively**. However, **many people find that safe bike routes are severely lacking**.

Figure 15: RHS and CS community safety measures
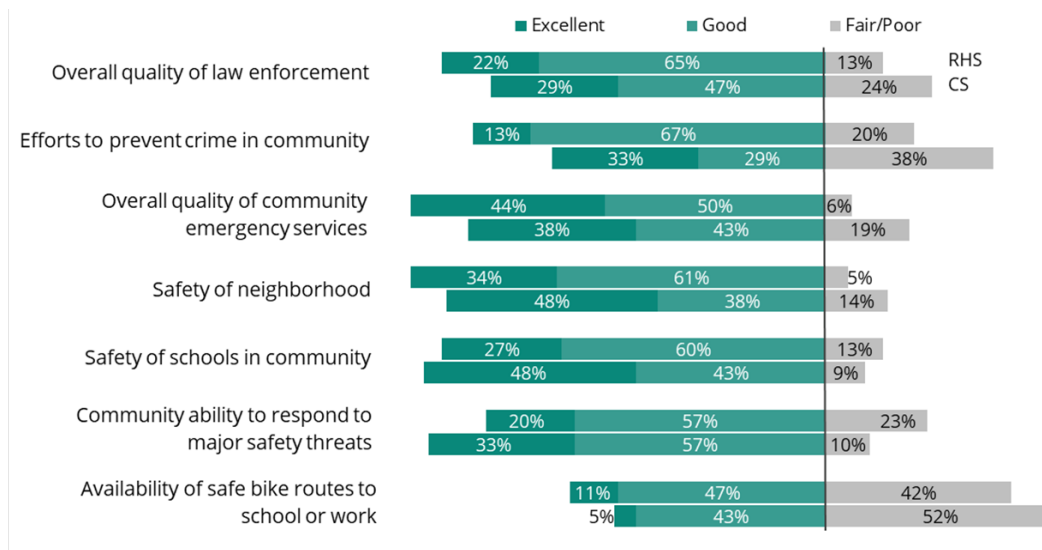
Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

Access to healthy food

When RHS/CS survey respondents were asked about access to and ability to pay for healthy food choices, there were sizeable differences between the RHS and CS samples in their ability to pay for healthy food. Less than one out of five RHS respondents said they had fair/poor ability to pay for healthy food, whereas nearly two out of five CS respondents said they had fair/poor ability to pay for healthy food. This suggests that some people in the County may be going hungry or may buy unhealthy food because it is what they can afford, getting healthy food requires them to travel farther, or there may be no other options.

Figure 16: RHS and CS healthy food access measures

Source: *COMPASS Now 2018 Random Household and Convenience Survey*

Access to high-quality housing

A safe, stable place to live is one of the most basic needs that everyone has. If one or more substandard housing conditions exists, such as overcrowding, high cost, or lack of basic kitchen or plumbing features, people will be less able to hold onto a job, take care of their children, and be more stressed. When people were asked about their ability to pay for housing, there was a notable difference between the RHS and CS samples. **A greater proportion of CS respondents felt they had a fair/poor ability to pay for housing (50%) than RHS respondents (30%)**.

Access to transportation

If transportation is not easily accessible and affordable it will limit people's ability to get healthcare, healthy food, social interaction, education, and employment, among other things.

The majority of RHS respondents said that the **accessibility of public transportation was poor to fair** (65%), and results were similar for the CS respondents (58%).

Similarly, the majority of RHS respondents said that the **convenience of public transportation was poor to fair** (62%), and results were similar for CS respondents (63%).

Yet, the majority of RHS respondents said that their **ability to pay for their own vehicle was good to excellent** (67%); results were lower for the CS respondents (55%).

Table 18: RHS and CS transportation measures

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Accessibility of public transportation	RHS	65%	28%	7%
	CS	58%	37%	5%
Convenience of public transportation	RHS	62%	30%	8%
	CS	63%	62%	5%
Ability to pay for own vehicle	RHS	33%	45%	22%
	CS	45%	50%	5%

Natural environment

A final physical environment area to consider is the natural environment. The majority of RHS respondents viewed the quality of water in lakes and rivers as good to excellent (65%); results were lower for CS respondents (48%). In addition, people

thought that efforts in their community to protect the natural environment were good to excellent (RHS = 61%; CS = 57%).

Table 19: RHS and CS natural environment measures

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Quality of water in rivers and lakes	RHS	35%	53%	12%
	CS	52%	38%	10%
Efforts to protect natural environment	RHS	39%	43%	18%
	CS	43%	52%	5%

What do other data tell us?

The violent crime rate (homicide, rape, physical assault, armed robbery, etc.) for the County is 86 violent crimes per 100,000 people; it is lower than the Wisconsin and Minnesota rates (WI = 283; MN = 231).[77]

The physical environment also includes people's access to healthy food. In the County, **about 14% of people have low food access (percent of people living in an area with low access to a supermarket or grocery store),** according to the USDA.[78] That means that approximately one in every seven people have low food access.

According to federal data, **the number of households that have severe housing problems is 11%**.[79] A household is counted as having severe housing problems if any of four issues is present: paying more than 30% of the household's income, overcrowding, lack of complete plumbing facilities, or lack of complete kitchen facilities. The Houston County rate is lower than MN (14%).

The **percent of people with fluoridated public water, which helps people have healthy teeth, is 57% in the County**.[80] With over half of the County's population considered rural, many people have private wells. Private wells may have naturally-occurring fluoride and the water can be tested to determine fluoride levels.

Lead levels are also a safety concern within homes. Older homes are more likely to have lead in paint and pipes, and if children are exposed to this lead it can lead to developmental delays. Generally, **data on elevated blood lead levels among children suggest that lead is not a concern in most homes in the County, as most children tested had normal ranges of lead in their blood**.[82]

Air quality is also not a problem, based on federally-collected data.[84]

Summary

Community safety and safety services are viewed as *good to excellent*. However, safe bike routes are lacking.

People generally have healthy food available in their area, but many people find it hard to pay for.

High-quality housing is hard to find and expensive for many people.

Public transportation is a major issue for many people. It is viewed as not very available and not convenient. Yet, most people felt that they had the ability to pay for their own vehicle. It is possible that vulnerable populations, like the aging and those with disabilities, and people with lower income, could benefit from improvements in public transportation.

The natural environment is mostly viewed in a positive light. Air quality has been determined to be good based on federal testing., Water quality in lakes and rivers and efforts to protect the natural environment are good to excellent based on RHS respondents however CS respondents viewed the water quality as having room for improvement.

Table 20: Physical Environment indicators

	Top US	WI	MN	GRR	Buffalo	La Crosse	Monroe	Trempealeau	Vernon	Houston
Violent crime rate, number of reported violent crime offenses per 100,000 population[77]	62	283	231		32	140	126	61	69	86
People with low food access (live in a food desert)[79]		21%	28%	19%	23%	22%	18%	10%	17%	14%
Households with severe housing problems[79]	9%	16%	14%		14%	14%	15%	12%	17%	11%
People with access to fluoridated public water[80, 81]		88%	99% (2014)		63%	95%	32%	62%	0%	57%
Rate of lead poisoned children (% based on children tested for lead)[82, 83]		4.6%	0.9%		5.1%	2.3%	1.7%	1.8%	2.0%	0.9%*
Average daily ambient ozone concentration[84]		38	36		38	38	39	38	39	38

*Should be interpreted with caution due to low number of tests

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What are the needs of Houston County?

This section contains the needs identified by community members, a review of key data points, and a brief overview of what can be done or resources that should be tapped into to meet the need. The opportunities and resources were identified by stakeholders in the community and are not an exhaustive list.

The county held a stakeholder meeting. The meeting presented data that had been gathered about the County. Community members at the meeting generated ideas of the top needs for their community and voted to prioritize the needs based on the data presented and their personal knowledge of the community. Results were tabulated and the top needs were identified.

Need: More livable wage jobs

A job with a livable wage is one that provides the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs. These basic needs include food, housing, healthcare, other essentials like clothing, and an amount for unexpected events. If a person cannot meet their most basic needs, then their health will suffer, they will not be able to contribute to their community, and they will have a poor quality of life.

Why was this an identified need?

Overall, median household income in the county ($56,300) is slightly higher than WI ($55,600) and lower than MN ($63,500) and is much lower than the top U.S. performer ($63,300).[3]

About 11% of people are living below the Federal Poverty Threshold.[67]

Between one in three and one in two survey respondents rated their ability to meet their basic needs as *poor* to *fair* (RHS = 31%; CS = 48%).

Most survey respondents rated the availability of jobs with wages that offer a comfortable standard of living as *poor* to *fair* (RHS = 64%; CS = 70%).

Jobs with livable wages was also a theme that emerged from Houston County's focus groups.

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants identified resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources are listed that were mentioned.

Table 21: Houston – livable wage opportunities and resources

Opportunities	Resources
Partnership between schools and employers to ensure young people are college and career ready after high school	Houston County Economic Development Workforce Solutions
	Schools
	Businesses

Need: Increased access to mental healthcare services

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel, and act.[85] Mental health is a critical part of overall wellness. Positive mental health allows people to cope with the stresses of everyday life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities.[85] If someone is having mental health issues, being able to easily get care can help them with recovery. Mental health services can include services from doctors, hospitals, social workers, counselors, psychologist, psychiatrists, and other providers. The services they provide can include prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care.

Why was this an identified need?

The availability of mental health providers is worse than the state rates and top U.S. performer (Houston = 4,690:1; MN = 510:1; top U.S. performer = 360:1).[41]

More than 2 in 5 survey respondents felt their ability to pay for mental healthcare was *poor* to *fair* (RHS =42%; CS =62%).

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants identified resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources are listed that were mentioned.

Table 22: Houston – mental health opportunities and resources

Opportunities	Resources
Mental health practitioner will be hired by the Caledonia School Board	Hiawatha Valley for infant mental health
Trauma-sensitive school system and adult response in Caledonia	Houston County Human Services
	Bluff County Family Resources for children's programs and support groups

Need: Improved access to public transportation

Public transportation consists of buses, light rail, van pool services, paratransit for senior citizens and people with disabilities, and many other modes of transportation. Overall, it contributes to the economy, helps the environment, and connects people to jobs, education, healthcare, and their community.

The need for rural public transportation is especially important. About 40% of all rural counties in the U.S. have essentially no public transit options at all.[86] For low-income, rural residents the lack of transportation and long commuting times are barriers to working; in addition, limited transportation options also isolate people who are eligible for government services and programs.[86] The investment in rural transit is cost efficient – for every dollar spent on it, rural communities gain about three dollars in benefits.[86] Rural transit connects workers to jobs, supports economic development, helps the elderly access human services, and connects tourists to scenic destinations. [86]

Why was this an identified need?

The majority of people said that the accessibility of public transportation was poor to fair (RHS = 65%; CS = 58%).

Most people said that the convenience of public transportation was poor to fair (RHS = 62%; CS = 63%).

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants did not identify resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources are listed that were generated by the Health Department.

Table 23: Houston – public transportation opportunities and resources

Opportunities	Resources
Legislative advocacy	SEMCAC – Rolling Hills Transportation
	Apple Express
	County veteran's services for transportation for veterans

Need: Reduced drug and alcohol misuse and abuse

Drug and alcohol misuse and abuse is the use of a substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines.[87] It has a negative influence on health or functioning and may cause someone to experience social, psychological, physical, or legal problems related to intoxication, excessive use, or dependence.[87]

People who misuse drugs and alcohol can suffer from a range of health and social problems including overdose, HIV, depression, anxiety, relationship problems, unemployment, homelessness, and criminal activity.[87]

Why was this an identified need?

About 1 in 5 people engage in excessive drinking, which is higher than the top U.S performer.[20]

About 7.6% of people in the Southeastern Region of MN have used illegal drugs in the past month.[22]

Deaths due to opioid overdoses in the Region (7.2 deaths per 100,000 people) are not as high as the WI rate (11 deaths per 100,000 people) or the MN rate (12.3 per 100,000). The rate of deaths due to opioid overdoses in Houston County was lower than the Region, at 5.3 deaths per 100,000 people, but we know the problem is getting worse because death rates, emergency room visits, and hospital stays have been increasing over the years.[23,24]

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants identified resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources are listed that were mentioned.

Table 24: Houston – drug and alcohol resources

Resources	
Hiawatha Valley	Teachers
Law enforcement	Public Health
Dental offices for tobacco use	

Need: Increased access to affordable, high-quality housing

Affordable, high-quality housing is when people have access to apartments, condos, or houses that cost no more than 30% of a household's income,[88] are not overcrowded, have complete plumbing facilities, and have complete kitchen facilities.[89]

Good health and wellbeing depends on having homes that protect people, and provides them with a sense of privacy, security, stability, and control.[90] Poor quality and inadequate housing contributes to health problems such as infection, disease, and injuries.[90]

Why was this an identified need?

According to federal data, 11% of households in Houston County have severe housing problems (cost more than 30% of a household's income, are overcrowded, lack complete plumbing facilities, or lack complete kitchen facilities).[79]

Affordable housing is harder to find for CS respondents than RHS respondents – 1 in 2 CS respondents had a poor to fair ability to pay for housing, whereas only 1 in 3 RHS respondents had a poor to fair ability to pay for housing. CS respondents in Houston County tended to have lower income, be renters, and have less education.

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants did not identify resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources and opportunities are listed that were generated by the health department.

Table 25: Houston – housing opportunities and resources

Opportunities	Resources
Legislative advocacy	City and county planning
Coalition work	Housing authorities
	SEMCAC
	Bluff Country Housing and Redevelopment Authority
	La Crescent Area Healthy Community Partnership
	Continuum of Care

Need: Increased school and community safety

Community safety includes violent acts like homicide, but also injuries caused by accidents. Accidents and violence affect health and quality of life in the short and long-term, and living in unsafe neighborhoods can impact health in many ways.[91]

Why was this an identified need?

Many of the areas of concern within the community among RHS respondents included concerns related to school and community safety, including illegal drug use, prescription drug misuse, bullying, domestic abuse/child abuse/elder abuse, and funding for local schools.

The violent crime rate for the county was 86 per 100,000, which is higher than the top U.S. performer at 62 per 100,000.[77]

	Sample	Poor/Fair	Good	Excellent
Efforts to prevent crime	RHS	20%	67%	13%
	CS	38%	29%	33%
Safety of neighborhood	RHS	5%	61%	34%
	CS	14%	38%	48%
Safety of schools in community	RHS	13%	60%	27%
	CS	9%	43%	48%

What resources and opportunities do we have to address the need?

During community meetings, participants did not identify resources and assets to help address the identified needs. Below, resources and opportunities are listed that were generated by the health department.

Table 26: Houston – school and community safety opportunities and resources

Opportunities	Resources
Legislative advocacy	City and county government
Local advocacy	Law enforcement
Community involvement	School districts/safety drills at schools
	Emergency services
	La Crescent Area Healthy Community Partnerships
	American Red Cross
	Service organizations

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