



1 | OVERVIEW

Photo by: Emily Ernst, Abby Grall & Kara Van Kirk

COMPASS NOW 2015 is a joint effort of Great Rivers United Way, area healthcare organizations, area foundations, and county health departments to assess community needs, identify community resources, and encourage action to improve the quality of life for everyone in the community. COMPASS NOW has been a resource in the Great Rivers Region since the first needs assessment in 1995. Great Rivers United Way initiated this strategic endeavor as an agency transition from resource distribution to community solutions. This has resulted in focused Great Rivers United Way funding to the programs that answer the greatest needs. In addition, many community organizations use COMPASS NOW findings to shape their own priorities and support grant applications.

The wide-reaching efforts of the global economic crisis, coupled with federal mandates for the healthcare organizations to conduct community needs assessments, was the impetus to implement COMPASS NOW in 2012. The need to keep this report current and fulfill the partners' needs have led to an ongoing three-year process in which Great Rivers United Way works with a committed team of area experts to complete an assessment that can be adopted by its healthcare partners. The partnership operates in synergy, promoting greater collaboration among organizations working towards improving the health and well-being of the population.

The COMPASS NOW 2015 process used a variety of data collection methods to create an overall depiction of the issues facing our communities. These methods included a Random Household Survey, convenience survey, community conversations, and an extensive review of socioeconomic indicators, which provides an inventory of community resources. The data collected during COMPASS NOW 2012 guided the development of four pillar profiles. These are referred to as pillars because they create the building blocks for a better life. The pillars of COMPASS NOW 2015 are Community, Education, Income/Economic, and Health. The profiles describe our community with regards to the key issues of each area. Each profile pulls key indicator data and COMPASS survey results into a narrative format that is intended to provide a context to the data found in the indicator report, making the data easy to navigate. Additional reports on the household survey are included in the Appendix. The website www.compassnow.org has additional indicator reports with county-level data wherever possible.

The COMPASS NOW 2015 community needs assessment included a Random Household Survey to complement the socioeconomic indicators. The objective of the Random Household Survey was to increase the understanding of the community's needs and their perceptions of the main challenges facing the region. Results from this survey were examined by respondent characteristics as well as compared to the previous survey results. Of the 5,000 households that received the Random Household Survey, 791 were returned with responses analyzed.

In addition to the Random Household Survey, the COMPASS NOW 2015 community needs assessment also included a convenience sample that focused on specific subgroups in the Great Rivers Region. The overall objective of this sampling was to collect feedback from populations within the community that were potentially underrepresented in the Random Household Survey due to the small number in which they exist in the community. These smaller populations included, but were not limited to, African Americans, Hispanics, LGBT youth, youth at-risk, low-income adults, and senior citizens. Results from this survey were compared to the responses of the Random Household Survey respondents in an attempt to determine any significant differences that existed between the general population and those in smaller subgroups within the community. In total, 753 community members shared feedback through the convenience sample process.

Another way in which community feedback was gathered was through community conversations. These conversations were conducted in lieu of the focus groups that were conducted in the COMPASS NOW 2012 community needs assessment. These small group gatherings were a safe space in which community members could come together and share their thoughts and experiences about living in the Great Rivers Region. Additional information and a brief summary on the results of these community conversations can be found in the Appendix.

COMPASS councils were advisory groups of local experts in the fields of education, income, health, and a variety of community issues. These members collected and reviewed data, analyzed the survey results, and offered professional insights about topic-specific issues in the Great Rivers Region. After significant review of the data and survey results, priority issues were identified by COMPASS council members. These issues were then ranked by Council members using the criteria below:

1. How widespread is the issue in our community?
2. How serious are the effects of the issue in our community?
3. How important is the issue to the community?

The COMPASS NOW Steering Committee then applied its knowledge of the issues. The combination of COMPASS Council recommendations and the insights from the COMPASS NOW Steering Committee resulted in the identification of three top areas of need for each of the four Great Rivers United Way pillars.

COMPASS NOW provides guidance and should provide a foundation for action plans that solve problems, long term. Great Rivers United Way uses COMPASS NOW to guide its grant allocation process and develop its strategic plan. Healthcare organizations and county health departments use COMPASS NOW to develop their own community health improvement plans (CHIPs).

The COMPASS NOW 2015 partnership is made up of Great Rivers United Way, Gundersen Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System-La Crosse, Mayo Clinic Health System-Sparta, Otto Bremer Foundation, Gundersen St. Joseph's Hospital and Clinics, Tomah Memorial Hospital, Gundersen Tri-County Hospital and Clinics, Vernon Memorial Healthcare, La Crosse Community Foundation, La Crosse County Health Department, Monroe County Health Department, Trempealeau County Health Department, Vernon County Health Department, and Houston County Health Department.