The La Crosse County Health Department completes a Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan every 5 years. The health assessment identifies the most pressing health concerns in La Crosse County by looking at data and listening to our residents. The improvement plan puts together action steps to address those health concerns.

La Crosse County residents and community partners participated in the assessment through key informant interviews, forums, and a community-wide survey. Community conversations shed light on health equity issues and framed the story that highlights the lived experience of our residents.

Over 300 residents shared their input about what health issues are the most important to address. The Health Department and community partners will focus our time and efforts on the top 3 health priorities for La Crosse County.

### Top 3 Health Priorities for La Crosse County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Health</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Substance Use</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Environment</td>
<td>Safe Housing</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Care</td>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>Mental Health Care</td>
<td>Dental Care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What affects our health?

Health equity is when everyone has a fair and just opportunity to achieve a healthy life. How someone experiences health can depend on different factors. These differences can and do lead to serious health outcomes. Factors that can change health equity in our communities:

- Education
- Access to healthy foods
- Access to physical activity
- Clean air and water
- Violence
- Racism
- Safe and affordable housing
- Safe neighborhoods
- Access to transportation
- Access to quality health care

The way a community is built can impact health on a large scale. How a community is built often influences health more than the choices or behaviors of individual people.

See the example below to understand more about how factors can change a person’s living situation.

GETTING TO THE STORE

Family A on Main Street
- Owns a car
- 10 minutes to grocery store by car
- Grocery store has more options for fresh and affordable food
- Carry more food in car

Family B on Main Street
- Needs to use public transportation
- 45 minutes to grocery store by bus
- Convenience store is closer but has less affordable and fresh foods
- Can only carry some food on bus

Where we live and how we get around can make it easier or harder to get healthy foods, medical care, and physical activity.
Behavioral Health: Substance Use

Substance Use in La Crosse County looks like...

- 26% of adults in La Crosse County drink excessively
- 64.9 per 100,000 ER visits for opioid overdose
- Over 1/4 of cancer deaths in La Crosse County are connected to tobacco use

HEALTH EQUITY

Substance use can affect anyone. Mental health, community factors, and social connection with others can impact substance use and access to recovery services.
Factors that impact mental health can also impact substance use. 18.5% of adults & 20% of kids have been diagnosed with a mental illness. 5

Other health, behavior, and environmental factors can impact mental health. Access to medical care, safe housing, and not using substances can help reduce other factors that negatively impact our mental health and resilience. 6
Access to Care

Residents report poor access to care:

La Crosse County residents with low-income report less access to general health, mental health, and dental health care services than those with higher income.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health care</th>
<th>Not Low Income</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental health care</th>
<th>Not Low Income</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dental care</th>
<th>Not Low Income</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mental health, treatment for substance use, and dental health services have a treatment gap in La Crosse County.  

7 of every 10 adults with substance use disorders are unable to access treatment services.  

46% of adults living with low income have seen a dentist in the past year compared to 75% of all adults.  

15% of adults delayed dental care in the past year specifically due to cost.  

Cost of services, mistrust in the health system, availability of care, and a lack of culturally diverse providers and staff in the health system impacts access to care in La Crosse County.  

HEALTH EQUITY
When the majority of a paycheck goes toward the rent or mortgage, it makes it hard to afford doctor visits, healthy foods, utility bills, and reliable transportation to work or school. This can, in turn, lead to increased stress levels and emotional strain.

11% of older adults & 19% of low income residents report low access to food. Older adult and low-income residents are less likely to have access to healthy foods.\(^7\)

Almost 1/4 of La Crosse County residents report low or no physical activity. Connectivity from where people live to their jobs, healthcare, food, and other resources can increase physical activity and active transportation.\(^4\)

12% of La Crosse County residents are impacted by severe housing cost burden. The constant strain on finances due to housing, can lead to food insecurity and other hardships that can last for years.\(^7\)
References


10. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019