

2025

Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Audra Martine, Health Officer



LA CROSSE COUNTY

A Healthier La Crosse County

MESSAGE FROM THE HEALTH OFFICER



The La Crosse County Health Department in 2025 continued to focus our work on the needs of our community. One way we did this was by reviewing the County's new Strategic Plan with all staff so we could better respond to the priorities and challenges our community and leaders highlighted for us. We identified several ways our work currently addressed the goals of this plan and created internal plans about how we could improve our focus to deepen our work in the key areas.

Another way our department continued this momentum was to consider capacity in each service area against the data, feedback, and funding we receive that develops our community plans. This process touched each

section of our department, leading us to let go of some projects in order to reach out to new opportunities that will allow us to focus more effort where we feel we can be most impactful. As a result, we've worked to increase collaborative efforts with other departments, changed our focus in some work areas, and made some very important strides in our workforce development, culture, and operations.

During the year, we've seen great success in some of our work to improve policy and systems. One example to call out was work done to add new ordinance language for the County that allows a Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return (TNVR) process for community cats to humanely decrease the number of free roaming cats. A second example is our effort to educate and advocate for the continuation of fluoridated water systems where they exist in our county. And a final example is work accomplished to increase the number of municipalities in the county that now have laws to prohibit access by anyone under age 21 from purchasing or possessing hemp derived THC products. These three efforts are good displays of our department working hand in hand with residents, leaders, and organizations to meet the needs of a changing community.

At the same time, as I mentioned earlier, we've sunset important work that transitioned to new beginnings. In 2025 we saw the end of our funding and work in the Fit Families SNAP-Education program, overdose fatality review process and in the Alliance to Heal collaborative all of which had many strong years of outcomes in the county. We're thankful for the interest, partnerships and trust that exists to allow us to venture into short term projects that ebb and flow as needs and options change – and we're excited for what comes next. As always, we invite you to join us in continuing to create a healthier La Crosse County!

Yours in health,

Audra Martine, Health Officer,
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Inside the Health Department

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Across Wisconsin, there are less dental health providers than needed to meet community needs. Due to a variety of reasons, only 29% of oral healthcare providers in the state accept Medicaid funding. The La Crosse County Health Department responds to this gap in service that affects residents most in need in a variety of ways including:

- Providing system advocacy.
- Assisting with referrals/access to providers for critical cases.
- Training emergency room staff in dental protocols that are most effective in treating oral pain.
- Support of prevention activities such as fluoridation of community water systems.
- Directly providing oral health care in our Seal A Smile, La Crosse Smiles, Give Kids a Smile and Give Vets a Smile programs.
 - Our Seal A Smile program served 1264 children in the 2024/25 school year. 99% received fluoride treatment and 23% received assistance with a referral to a local dentist.
 - Our La Crosse Smiles program offers students dental care onsite in their school; during the 2024/25 school year 194 children received a screening and x ray.
 - In our Wisconsin Dental Pain Protocol project, the non-traumatic dental pain referrals received from urgent and emergency care visits are assisted to access ongoing dental care; 286 individuals received assistance in 2025 from this service.
 - In 2025 we also piloted a new program called Give Vets a Smile. The County Veterans Service Office and Health Department worked with Western Technical College dental assistant staff and students along with volunteer dentistry services to provide services to Veterans who had difficulty accessing care. We served 14 Veterans, providing free care with a value of \$36,407.



Another area where the Health Department provided valuable awareness, strategy and an outcome this year was in our work toward creating policy change in the county regarding youth access to hemp derived THC products. Limited awareness of loopholes that allow access to these newly developing products have left Wisconsin youth vulnerable to these products that are sometimes marketed specifically to them.

Over the past year, Health Department staff provided education, discussed options and promoted ordinance changes to limit youth access to these products as we wait for further state or federal law changes. We have supported newly created ordinances to address this topic in the County of La Crosse, the cities of Onalaska and La Crosse, and the Village of West Salem.

2025 Highlights

1. Number of **bites and exposures** reviewed for rabies follow up: 298
2. Number of **Human Health Hazard** complaint investigations: 217
3. Number of **communicable disease reports** in 2025 in La Crosse County: 1459
4. 887 contacts were made to the Health Department for assistance in accessing **Forward Health** benefits (622 individuals (unduplicated count) received this assistance)
5. Average monthly number of individuals **participating in WIC**: 1640

Looking Ahead

With many changes occurring across the United States, public health agencies are working to understand and respond to how these shifts affect our communities. We're seeing new disease patterns, such as measles cases reemerging after years of eradication. Evolving healthcare systems and insurance industries require us to address gaps that differ from those faced by past generations. In the coming year, we expect continued shifts in public health. Our perspective is always learning and adapting—but what matters most is meeting our community where it is: listening and building the best approach together. Anticipated changes this year include:

- **Funding shifts:** Governmental public health funding will likely continue to decline or change, which may alter program structures, reduce services, or end some offerings. New services may emerge to replace past efforts. Leaders must stay informed and communicate changes clearly.
- **Opioid prevention efforts:** We're beginning new collaborative work with other county departments focused on opioid addiction prevention, systems, and recovery—bringing together expertise for positive outcomes.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Rapid advancements in AI will likely impact our work, systems, and workforce.

Employee Spotlight: Tracy Kayser



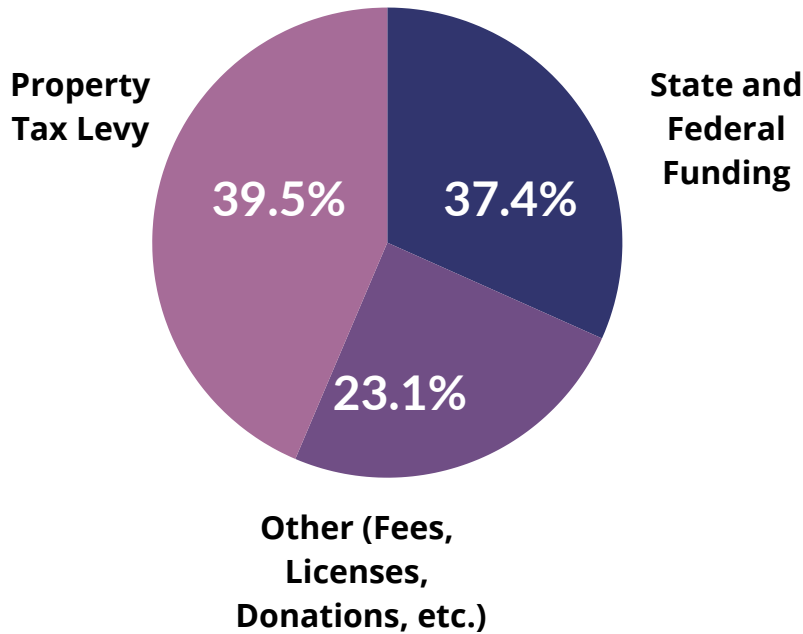
Tracy Kayser became a full-time County employee in 2021 and now serves as the Community Dental Care Coordinator for the Health Department.

A licensed dental hygienist, Tracy oversees three key programs: Seal-A-Smile, which provides sealants and fluoride treatments to students in six schools; the Wisconsin Dental Pain Protocol, connecting ER patients with dental offices; and La Crosse Smiles, which brings dentists into schools to reduce wait times for care.

"I love my job," Tracy says. "Helping people is my passion. When I see a child go from being afraid to letting me clean their teeth—it's amazing. That progress means everything."

2025 Budget

REVENUE & EXPENSES

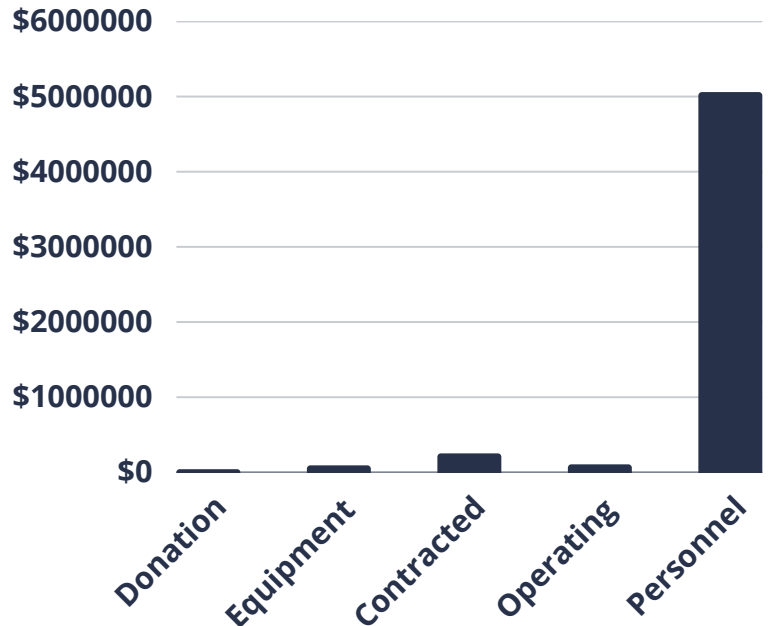


REVENUE

- Donation: \$41,843
- Grants: \$90,650
- Fund Balance: \$188,430
- Sales, Screenings, Other: \$174,358
- Licenses: \$880,049
- State & Federal Funding: \$1,762,480
- Property Taxes: \$2,425,673
- **Total: \$5,563,483**

EXPENSES

- Donation Expense: \$41,843
- Equipment: \$93,168
- Contracted Funds: \$262,400
- Operating: \$106,518
- Personnel: \$5,059,554
- **Total: \$5,563,483**



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People were assisted with resource referrals through the Community Liaison Program

10

Issues of our RISE newsletter were published to provide health education information to school districts and families.



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