



**LA CROSSE COUNTY**  
Health Department  
Nationally Accredited

# CHIP Progress Report

January - March  
2026

## Health Priorities

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) includes 3 health priority areas. Our community helped shape the goals written in this plan. Each year, our department puts together a community-driven action plan to address the greatest needs in La Crosse County.



### Behavioral Health Vision

Build a community that prioritizes protective factors for positive childhood experiences and resilient communities.



### Healthy Environment Vision

Collaborate for solutions that build healthier and more accessible neighborhoods where people are connected to what they need where they live.



### Access to Care Vision

Grow a system of care that represents and supports underserved individuals to get the right care at the right time.

# Behavioral Health

The Behavioral Health priority has three goals. Over time, the work aims to improve mental health and decrease substance use. This quarterly update describes the activity from January through March 2026.

## Progress: What has been done?



### Youth substance use prevention

- Staff are focusing on township meetings to educate on hemp-derived THC.
- Onalaska Police completed **alcohol compliance checks with 19 out of 21 passing**. Letters containing education were sent to all retailers after the checks.
- Health Education staff and members from the prevention workgroup attended parent teacher conferences in Holmen. They **educated and provided resources** about the risk of substance use and how to have conversations with youth.
- The Logan High School FACT club **created wellness and quit kits** to be handed out during chill week. The Logan Middle School FACT club **created a classroom display** with activities they can do instead of using tobacco and nicotine products.



### Mental health and resiliency

- Staff attended the Early Childhood Impact Steering Committee. The initiative has a new name - **La Crosse Area Bright Beginnings**.
- Staff attended the Mental Health Coalition and are working on the **Be Here campaign** which will focus on getting youth and adults to **“Unplug. Connect. Thrive.”**



### Self-harm and substance use prevention

- The **Coulee Region Harm Reduction Collaborative kicked off** with their first meeting in January. They are currently focusing on overdose awareness and a harm reduction campaign.
- **15 high school students** from multiple area schools were **trained in naloxone administration**.
- **66% of dental pain calls** have received treatment this quarter.
- Dental Pain program staff **added Allen Dental and Badger Smiles** to the list of dental offices who are willing to take new clients in need of dental pain relief.

# Healthy Environment

The Healthy Environment Priority has three goals. Over time, the work aims to improve housing, food access, and opportunities for physical activity. This quarterly update describes the activity from January through March 2026.

## Progress: What has been done?



### Safe, affordable, and supportive housing

- Environmental Health Staff attended the La Crosse Area Business Association Home Show, where they educated on the **importance of radon testing and mitigation**.
- **Radon testing** was performed at a local private school.
- **Housing inspection checklist** is being used by sanitarians as they respond to housing complaints. The new process ensures that all inspections are looking for the same criteria. The team is collecting data on the **most commonly seen issues** that need to be addressed.
- Staff met with the Village of West Salem and City of La Crosse to update the Building Inspector Referral Guide.



### Year-round access to healthy food

- The Food Resource poster was updated with a QR code to go directly to the **mobile resource guide**. This work was highlighted by a **News 19 Interview**, and presentation to the HHS board.
- The Family Health team created the La Crosse County **Food Insecurity Report** and provided four recommendations for continued work on year-round access to healthy food.



See the Food Insecurity Report on pages 5-10



### Increase opportunities for active transportation

- The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program hosted Winter Walk to School Day with **3 participating schools in February**.
- Staff continue to explore opportunities for **collaboration** at the high school age level.
- Staff provided education and encouragement for including **safety measures and age restrictions** for the City of La Crosse e-bike/e-scooter ordinance.

# Access to Care

The Access to Care priority has three goals. Over time, the work aims to improve relationships, communication, and community-centered services. This quarterly update describes the activity from January through March 2026.

## Progress: What has been done?



### Increase access to clinical services

- Public Health Nurses are building new school relationships and planning 2026 clinic schedule for offering vaccines in the community. **6 community clinics are planned so far.**
- LCHD staff offer the Seal-A-Smile program at 20 local schools - 19 public and 1 private school **receive fluoride, sealants, and dental cleanings** throughout the school year. The program is offered to all students at **no cost to the families.**
- Public Health nurses are working closely with Quartz Health Insurance to increase lead testing availability to children ages 1-5.



### Enhance organizational health literacy

- The goal for 2026 is to **increase health literacy** on our health department **website and our educational materials** available to the public. This means our materials will be easy to read, messages will be clear, and will include county logo and colors.
- The health department is **working closely with IT** to ensure our website follows **ADA compliance guidelines.** This will be ongoing work over the next year.



### Increase connections to resources

- Health Department Social Workers assisted **281 individuals with health insurance benefits in the last three months.** The team helps clients apply for childcare, Foodshare, and Medicare benefits.
- Community engagement and outreach help clients access resources. Health department staff participate in **weekly outreach at Mobile Medicine** as well as ongoing contact with Hunger Taskforce, Coulee Recovery Center, and other local non-profits.
- Annually, the WI Well Woman program sends out marketing and income guidelines to local clinics and businesses. In the first quarter, **57% of the women** enrolled in the program had used their **free preventive cancer screenings** - mammograms and cervical screenings. Our team is making additional efforts to encourage all participants to use the benefits of the program.



LA CROSSE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

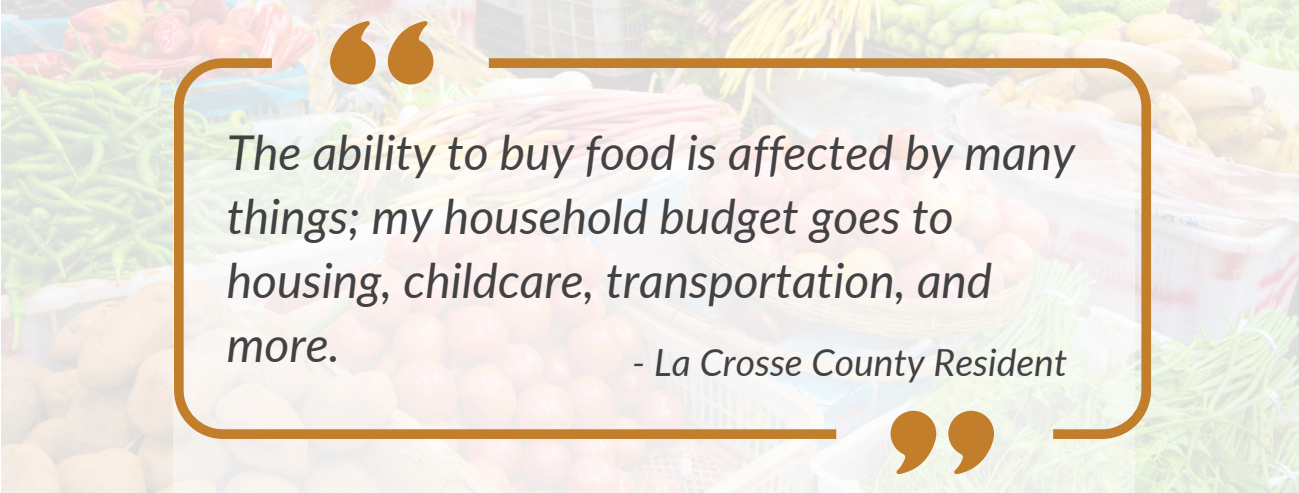
# Food Insecurity Report

APRIL 2026



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# Introduction



*The ability to buy food is affected by many things; my household budget goes to housing, childcare, transportation, and more.*

*- La Crosse County Resident*

A community's food environment is shaped by many factors including the location of grocery stores, cost of food, and availability of locally grown foods. These factors influence how people access food in their communities. A healthy food environment ensures that people can eat a nutritious diet to support health.

In 2022, the La Crosse County Health Department set out to assess and potentially improve access to healthy foods. Over the last four years, the team has brought together local food partners to collaborate.

The **Food Access Partners Group** grew in response to the concern that not all residents of La Crosse County have access to fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods (as identified in the 2021 and 2024 La Crosse County Community Health Assessments).

A nutritious diet contributes to optimal health, lowers incidence of disease, and reduces healthcare costs. Access to healthy food allows individuals and families to make the best food choices supporting physical and mental health.

La Crosse County is a community rich in food assistance resources, yet some residents face challenges in accessing healthy foods. This report includes data, themes, and recommendations, to support the La Crosse County food environment.

## Food Insecurity

**Food insecurity** is defined as the condition of not having access to sufficient food, or food of adequate quality, to meet one's basic needs.

In other words, food insecurity is when people don't have enough to eat and/or don't know where their next meal will come from.

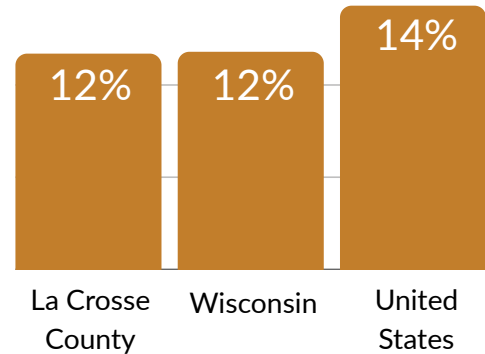
## Food Insecurity can impact:

- Physical health - heart disease, diabetes
- Mental health - depression, anxiety
- Well-being - social isolation, stigma, shame
- School and work - low energy and concentration

# The Data

Feeding America data shows that in 2023, 12% of people in La Crosse County were food insecure.

Food insecurity impacts over 14,000 La Crosse County residents. This means that local families, children, older adults, and individuals are not able to access enough food for an active and healthy life.



**3,000+**  
children faced hunger

In 2023, there were 3,240 La Crosse County children that were food insecure and did not have access to healthy foods.

Many factors influence food insecurity, including:

- Cost of food
- Low wage jobs (income and employment)
- Cost of other basic needs - housing, transportation, healthcare, childcare, utilities
- Access to healthy food in your own neighborhood
- Transportation to healthy food sources
- Eligibility for food assistance programs
- Access to food pantries and free meal sites



**\$3.94**



The average meal costs \$3.94 in La Crosse County. This is close to 40 cents more than across WI or the US.

# Themes

In 2023, discussions were held with local families, older adults, and adults with disabilities. They shared their perspective about food access issues and their creative solutions for improving the food system in La Crosse County. The themes and quotes below came from La Crosse area residents.



## Gardens & Locally Grown Food

Community members shared that they value fresh produce, especially locally grown fruits and vegetables. While some participants had gardens, other express that more space to grow their own food would be helpful.

**“Healthy foods are way too expensive, that's why the community garden is my favorite place.”**



## Mobility & Transportation

Community members shared challenges with mobility and transportation. Some report that using a walker or wheelchair make shopping difficult. One solution shared was having volunteer drivers matched with community members to bring people to food resources including stores, farmers' markets, and food pantries.

**“I cannot get to the store; a car is too expensive to have, and the bus ride takes too long. Also, it is difficult to bring a stroller on the bus.”**



## Stores, Pantries, & Free Meals

Community members shared that fresh produce does not last long making it difficult to have fresh fruits and vegetables available in the home. Some expressed that classes or education on how to preserve food would be helpful for families.

**“It's hard where we live - only have convenience stores nearby.”**



## Resources

Community members shared concerns about how to find resources. Some expressed that it is a lot of work to look for resources. Others reported that they do receive food assistance, but it is not enough compared to what they have received in the past.

**“We need a registry or book to tell you where to go. Get the word out on what exists”**



## Budget, Food Cost, and Policy

Community members expressed challenges of balancing household budgets including the cost of housing, childcare, transportation, and utilities. Others felt that hunger did not feel prioritized by lawmakers.

**“Foodshare dollars don't buy much because groceries are so expensive.”**

# Recommendations

## 1. Maintain an Advocacy Group

A local group dedicated to networking, sharing resources, and working collaboratively to combat food insecurity in the La Crosse area is important.

The La Crosse Food Access Partners Group, hosted by the La Crosse County Health Department, may consider:

- how often they benefit from meeting
- a written “charge” or mission and vision
- who to invite to the table (grow partnerships)

## 2. Promote Local Resource Guides

La Crosse County is rich in resources. It is important to assure that people who need resources know where to find support. There are multiple tools available.

**Current tools identifying food resources include:**

- <https://www.findhelp.org>
- <https://www.lacrossecounty.org/Health/>
- <https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/>
- <https://www.wellbadger.org>

## 3. Explore Food is Medicine

**Food is Medicine (FIM)** is a health-based approach that incorporates nutritious food into clinical care to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related chronic conditions. Examples include medically tailored meals, groceries, and produce prescriptions.

The Wisconsin Medicaid program now includes the FIM benefit of medically tailored meals (MTMs) for eligible members of BadgerCare Plus who receive benefits through their participating health insurance company.

In March 2026, Governor Tony Evers announced that Wisconsin applied to be one of 10 states to apply for funding to grow the Food is Medicine movement in our state.

## 4. Track Local Food Insecurity Data

Across the nation, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has surveyed households about food insecurity since 1995. This survey has provided essential data used in policy planning, nutrition programs, research, and advocacy efforts. In September 2025, USDA announced it would no longer be producing this report.

Local data is essential to analyze the effectiveness of services and evaluate the need in our community. Sources to consider for monitoring trends for local food insecurity include:

- Local pantry usage numbers
- WIC and SNAP usage data
- Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap
- State and Local Survey data

## SOURCES:

### Definition of Food Insecurity

- [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)
- [Feeding America](#)

### Data about Food Insecurity

- [Map the Meal Gap from Feeding America](#)

### Goal for Nutrition and Healthy Eating

- [Healthy People 2030](#)

### Food is Medicine

- [Department of Human Services](#)
- [Center for Health Care Strategies](#)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Feder, E. and Crull, N (2023). UW-Madison Population Health Institute. Listening to Communities in Community Assessment: Access to Food and Physical Activity in Wisconsin's Immigrant and Black Communities

- [https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/316/2023/06/FoodWise-Report\\_design.pdf](https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/316/2023/06/FoodWise-Report_design.pdf)



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