

**Human Services Department Report to County Board
September 2021**

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER (ADRC)

Disability Awareness

In partnership with the Disability Action Network (DAN) and the Accessible Icon Project, the accessible parking signs in front of the Health & Human Services building have been updated. The original International Symbol of Access, designed in the 1960s, portrays the wheelchair user as passive, stationary. The updated icon, first introduced in 2011 in Boston, portrays the person in forward motion—a “driver” in charge of his/her own fate. People all over the US and the world have used the updated icon for a variety of events—bringing groups together to repaint or replace signs. DAN, as part of No Limits Ability Awareness Week, partnered with local businesses, like Health & Human Services, to take action and update.



Health Promotion

A new evidence-based program, Physical Activity for Lifelong Success (PALS), will soon be offered in our community! PALS has been proven to help people who are not currently active (or active less than 60 minutes/week) improve their ability to perform activities of daily living. To learn more and/or determine if you are eligible to participate, call the ADRC at 608-785-5700. Class begins October 7.

ECONOMIC SUPPORT (ES)

Temporary COVID-Related Policy Waivers Scaling Back

A number of temporary public assistance program policy waivers were implemented in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The waivers were intended to ensure access to program benefits for individuals and families struggling financially because of the pandemic. While some of the policy waivers will remain in effect for the duration of the federal public health emergency, others will be incrementally rolled back throughout the rest of 2021. Annual Food Share renewal and verification requirements, both waived since March 2020, transitioned back to regular policy in July 2021. Beginning in July, households that receive Food Share will again be required to complete an annual re-eligibility review. Since March 2020, individuals applying or receiving Food Share or Medicaid were not required to provide written verification to support information they provided that was used to determine their eligibility for program benefits. Effective July 19, providing written documentation is again a required part of the eligibility determination process.

Food Share Annual Management Evaluation Review (MER)

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), the federal agency that oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Share, requires an annual administrative review of all agencies that directly administer the program. This review is called the Food Share Management Evaluation Review (MER). Each year FNS designates target areas for review. For Federal Fiscal Year 2020, those areas included program access and customer service, Food Share accuracy, and compliance with training requirements. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) reviews consortia error rates, reviews case files, conducts customer call reviews, reviews Food Share emergency card issuance and staff training logs, observes agency lobby operations, and conducts surveys of customers, advocates and consortium staff. WREA's 2020 MER was excellent. The Western Region for Economic Assistance's (WREA) Food Share accuracy rate for 2020 was at 5.54%, below the national standard of 6%. Results of the customer and advocate surveys conducted for WREA were exceptional. For example, 97% of customers surveyed indicated that WREA staff treat them with respect and were helpful. DHS commended WREA for the important services they provided throughout the pandemic.

Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) – Additional Funding Provided

La Crosse County administers the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP). Financial challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a significant increase in households struggling to afford their heating and electric costs. Federal and State WHEAP crisis benefit dollars are available to households experiencing an energy crisis. This includes a household that has no heat, has received a disconnect notice from their vendor, or is nearly out of fuel and is unable to purchase more. WHEAP agencies also receive administrative funding to support operational expenses incurred in determining eligibility for crisis benefits. The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) has provided La

Crosse County an additional \$260,000 in benefit dollars in Federal Fiscal Year to assist families facing an energy crisis. La Crosse County also received an additional \$105,000 to support operational costs incurred in determining eligibility for the increased applications. La Crosse County has been able to assist 630 households with \$374,713 in WHEAP Crisis benefits so far in 2021.

INTEGRATED SUPPORT & RECOVERY SERVICES (ISRS)

Co-Responder Pilot Program – Crisis Unit

The ISRS Crisis Unit and La Crosse Police Department have begun to pilot a Co-Responder program, recognizing a need in the community to help further access and early intervention/prevention to those who struggle with mental health symptoms. Attached are a few links to press coverage on this new pilot program.

- [Watch now: La Crosse police introduce co-responder program for mental health calls | State and Regional News | madison.com](#)
- [La Crosse Police Department, county create mental health crisis response program \(news8000.com\)](#)
- [Newsmakers, July 30, 2021 | Wisconsin Public Radio \(wpr.org\)](#)

Comprehensive Community Services (CCS)/ Justice Support Services (JSS) Social Worker Position

Recognizing the need for Collaboration between ISRS/Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) and Justice Support Services (JSS), a trained CCS Social Worker has been embedded within the JSS section. The goal with this position is to provide short-term case management alongside the Fresh Start grant (currently held within JSS) for individuals connected to the jail/treatment courts while accessing and offering CCS services to aid in recovery of mental health and/or substance abuse.

Mental Health Specialist Positions – Crisis Unit

Positions funded within the 2021 budget were featured in the La Crosse Tribune recently. These 3.5 Mental Health Specialist positions were created with specific intentions of partnering in community response to crisis, early intervention/preventative response, and filling in gaps of service to individuals, children, youth, and families.

https://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/county-connection-there-s-always-somebody-here-to-help/article_96aa3217-9870-51e6-972a-2b56d1cd1065.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share

Coordinated Service Teams (CST) / La Crosse Area Family Collaborative (LAFC)/ CCS Social Worker Position

Collaboration between La Crosse Area Family Collaborative (LAFC) and Comprehensive Community Services (CCS), along with funding through a State grant (CST) has allowed for a new community social worker position who is working with you involved in multiple systems of care. In recognizing the need for wrap around services for youth and families struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse, the goal of the partnership is to help create stronger coordination and collaboration between LAFC and CCS, providing early intervention and prevention services to youth and families.