

# *Health Department 2011 Annual Report*

## *Executive Summary*

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***Making Marathon County the  
Healthiest County in Wisconsin***



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# Health Department 2011 Annual Report Executive Summary

## Making Marathon County the Healthiest County in Wisconsin



### Message from the Health Officer

Looking back to 2011, we reflect and take stock on how healthy we are as a community, and where we can make impacts in the next four years to make a difference in the quality of life for individuals, families and in the communities where they live, learn, work and play.

In 2011, Marathon County Health Department worked collectively with the LIFE Report Steering Committee, Healthy Marathon County, and the Marathon County Board of Health to look at our community successes and progress and the challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Some of our successes as a community include the implementation of Wisconsin's Smoke-Free Air Law, access to high-quality health care services, systems in place to readily detect and respond to communicable diseases, immunization rates remaining high, and people engaging in healthy behaviors. Like many Wisconsin communities, we face similar challenges including the percentage of children and adults being overweight and obese, high alcohol consumption, dental care not being affordable for all residents, and tobacco use not decreasing among high school students and pregnant women.

Our health challenges impact the health of individuals and families, as well as our economy. The epidemic of chronic diseases is costing all of us in terms of expenses associated with healthcare, and lost wages and productivity. Research informs us the economic vitality of Marathon County is supported by the health of our community. In turn, the health of

our community is intrinsically tied to our economic vitality.

We are fortunate to live in a community where leaders have taken on the charge of implementing a community-wide plan to address our identified health challenges – a group known as Healthy Marathon County (visit [www.healthymarathoncounty.org](http://www.healthymarathoncounty.org)). In 2009, Healthy Marathon County put forth a vision for our community to be the healthiest county in the state. As of March 2012, Marathon County ranks 24 out of 72 counties.

So what does the healthiest county in the state look like? What is our prescription for better health as a community? We have the choice to make healthy foods more available, increase outdoor spaces for individuals/families to walk, bike and play thereby increasing our physical activity, to promote responsible alcohol use, and to decrease tobacco use. In order to be the healthiest county, we will need to build upon our successes as a community to address the challenges that lie before us.

I invite you to read about the "difference" Marathon County Health Department, with our community partners, made in 2011, and reflect on how a service or initiative improved the quality of life for you, your family, your neighbors, and your community.

Joan Theurer, RN, MSN  
Health Officer

For more in-depth information, a comprehensive report is available at:  
[www.co.marathon.wi.us/Departments/HealthDepartment.aspx](http://www.co.marathon.wi.us/Departments/HealthDepartment.aspx)

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## Chronic Disease Prevention

The Marathon County Health Department's Chronic Disease Prevention Program has continued to



guide the community in making better decisions about health. Gaining support of policy-makers has been vital to the efforts of the program. Examples being the one year anniversary of Wisconsin's Smoke-Free Air Law in July, and the work underway to implement social host ordinances throughout Marathon County. In 2011 the City of Wausau and the Village of Weston passed Social Host ordinances with forfeitures up to \$5,000 for anyone who provides a location for underage drinking to take place. This concept may deter parents and other adults from hosting underage drinking parties.

"The Marathon County AOD Partnership Council is improving Marathon County's alcohol environment. The Council's focus on practical evidence-based alcohol policies allows municipalities to adopt the most effective policies and practices that reduce alcohol misuse without any inconvenience for legal age moderate drinkers. If you think Wisconsin's alcohol culture can't improve, one look at what Marathon County has done will change your mind."

Julia Sherman, Coordinator  
Wisconsin Alcohol Policy Project  
Resource Center on Impaired Driving  
University of Wisconsin Law School



As the nation experiences continued increases in rates of overweight and obesity it has become even more important to improve access, and remove barriers, to choosing healthy foods. In 2011 this effort saw significant gains through the implementation of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Food Share Benefits purchasing at the Wausau Farmers Market.



Additionally, efforts are under way to improve the built environment to support active living. Improvements to bike and pedestrian routes are being implemented, and an Active Schools initiative will be pursued.

## Wisconsin Well Woman Program

The Wisconsin Well Woman Program (WWWP), a breast and cervical cancer screening program for women funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of Wisconsin, continued to provide limited health care screening services, referral, follow up, and patient education for women. In 2011 we saw an increase in the number of women enrolled and served through this program due to an increase in referrals from Aspirus through their Susan G. Komen program.

"I write to express gratitude for past services from WWWP. It is a wonderful program and I thank you for your assistance throughout the years."

– Wisconsin Well Woman Program Client

## Environmental Health & Safety

### Human Health Hazards

This program responds to reports or health concerns from the public or other agencies about potentially hazardous situations. Staff seeks to provide information as to the amount of risk associated with circumstances and how it may impact health. When conditions warrant, we investigate and may issue orders to address the hazard. Program outcomes include reducing exposure to substances, activities, or conditions that can negatively impact health and minimizing health impacts of such exposures.

This past year, a landlord contacted the health department about a tenant who piled their apartment, including the kitchen and bathroom, full of plastic bags and buckets containing non-perishable food items. The landlord expressed that the tenant would be evicted if the issue was not resolved. An environmental health sanitarian fielded the call and visited with the tenant at their apartment. With a few short visits the staff member was able to understand the reasoning for the issue. With the tenant's input, a plan was developed to organize the food and remove unnecessary and excess items from the apartment providing access and use of bathroom and kitchen facilities. The tenant was able to remain in the apartment.

### Licensing

The Marathon County Health Department functions through contract as an agent of the State of Wisconsin to provide public health inspections and

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licensing for a variety of establishments. Program staff serves as the primary investigators when there is a suspected food or water borne illness in Marathon County. Our sanitarians see themselves as resources for our facilities serving in something like a consulting role, assisting to meet the regulations.

An email received about one of our sanitarians:

"She is professional in her approach and I sense her desire to be more of a "partner" with our businesses to help us all succeed in providing the best in service, quality, cleanliness and safety to our guests. If pointing out deficiencies, she takes the time to educate and help be a part of finding the best solution to an issue vs. throwing down the gauntlet. She is well educated in her area, but isn't afraid to take extra steps to get additional information if she doesn't have a specific answer.

Too often, we concentrate on the negatives in our lives and fail to recognize those that deserve to be praised for the good work they do day in and day out. We take great pride in operating our businesses with a high level of integrity and a commitment to support our communities and those here to help us be successful. And also thank you for employing such a quality individual; it makes me proud to be a resident of this community and Marathon County."

## Food Safety



The Environmental Health and Safety program works to identify and respond to health problems related to food safety including outbreak investigations. Our goal is to identify factors that may have contributed to the outbreak, provide recommendations to the establishment operator, and work together in an effort to prevent a

similar outbreak from happening again using education, consultation, and regulation. Every type of inspection is viewed as an opportunity to educate food handlers and assist businesses with meeting regulations. Experiences from food borne illness investigations, media outreach, and education during inspections and communication through the Food Thoughts newsletter have been used to highlight the importance of giving attention to these issues.

## Radon and Other Indoor Air Quality

Radon gas is a naturally occurring radioactive product that results from the decay of uranium found

in soil, particularly our granite rich areas. After tobacco exposure Radon is identified as the second leading cause of lung cancer. Our staff operates the regional Northcentral Radon Information Center. The RIC provides radon information and test kits to individuals, private businesses, and government agencies.

## Family Health

### Start Right



The Start Right program serves women who are pregnant, their children from birth through age four, and their families with home visits and visits to the Family Resource Centers. Start Right aims to provide parents with education, support, and resources to help them raise a healthy family. Start Right program goals are:

- Children will experience nurturing relationships with their parents
- Children will be healthy
- Children will be safe in their homes
- Children will be "school ready" when they begin school

Start Right has four program components:

**First Steps** – A public health nurse provides education and care coordination to women during their pregnancy and/or to families with a newborn.

"I'm so glad that I had the help of a public health nurse during my pregnancy; I've learned so much and have told my friends about the program."  
- Start Right client

"I really appreciated the help I got from my nurse, otherwise I would have stopped breastfeeding."  
- Start Right client

**Step by Step** – A family educator provides parenting education and information on community resources to parents in their home.

**Stepping Stones** – A family educator provides parenting and child development information to parents over the phone, by email, or by visiting the family resource center. In 2011, this service

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was provided through United Way of Marathon County and therefore is not included in this report.

**Stepping Out** – Family resource centers are available in many communities within Marathon County to provide life-long connection to parenting education and support.

With Start Right providing services to families from pregnancy through age four, families benefit from the support to help them be the best parents they can be. The nurses and family visitors form meaningful relationships with families, supporting them in their parenting, connecting them to community resources, and encouraging their independence while giving them the level of support that they need to raise healthy, school ready children. It is common for the nurses and family visitors to received warm thanks from families for their support through their pregnancy, postpartum time, and home visiting. By supporting effective parenting through Start Right and collaborating partners, we are ultimately strengthening our community.

## **First Breath and My Baby and Me**

Despite gains made in decreasing the overall tobacco use among adults in Marathon County, smoking during pregnancy continues to be a concern. Marathon County Health Department continues to be a First Breath site, a state wide program through which we offer one-on-one cessation support to women during their pregnancy and up to 60 days after the birth of their baby. Similar to the First Breath program, My Baby and Me is a state wide program designed to individually support women in abstaining from alcohol during pregnancy.

## **Child Health**

Child health services are provided to families that need services beyond the scope of the Start Right First Steps program, a service that typically ends at 60 days postpartum. Program services include case management and health teaching for parents of infants and children for a variety of conditions and situations including: failure to thrive; family support in the case of child abuse or neglect; families who have relocated to the area and are unfamiliar with community services; and parents who are cognitively or physically challenged.

When the health department gets a call to help support a child in need, the community benefits by having the family connected to necessary resources and supports so that they can parent their child to the best of their ability. Research shows that when children are well supported, they can grow and learn in a healthy manner, readying them for school and preparing them to be healthy adults.

## **Childhood Lead**

Childhood lead poisoning represents an area that highlights a multidisciplinary approach in diagnosis and investigation involving public health nursing and environmental health staff.

The public health nursing staff works with the parents and children involved in a lead poisoning and the environmental health staff investigates the homes and buildings to identify the potential sources of lead exposure. One child had an elevated blood lead level in the summer of 2011. Health Department staff responded with a lead hazard investigation of the property and education to the child's parents. Concerned for their child's health, the parents moved within weeks to a newer, lead safe location. Approximately a month later, the child's parents had another blood test with a result of a 50% reduction from the first test, though still a concern. By December, the child's blood test was at a safe level. The intervention by our staff and actions by the parents is expected to greatly reduce the impact lead will have on their child for reduced IQ and attention span, learning disabilities, developmental delays, and a range of other health and behavioral effects.

## **Injury Prevention**

Marathon County's Cribs for Kids program works to ensure that every newborn has a safe place to sleep. Low-income families who are unable to afford a crib for their newborn are able to secure a Graco portable crib at a nominal cost. In 2011, 47 low-income families received one-on-one education on safe sleep practices and a Pack N Play portable crib for their newborn.

The Car Seat Rental Program enhances the education activities by providing safe infant/toddler car seats to families who can't afford to purchase a safe seat or need a second seat for a short period of time. Passenger safety and injury prevention efforts

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are maximized by our involvement with the Wausau Area Safe Kids Coalition (aka Safe Kids).

## **Children's Hearing and Vision Screening**

In the 2010-11 school year, screening was provided to four-year-olds in four-year-old kindergarten and children in 5K, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. For the 2010-11 school year, 90% of the children we referred for hearing difficulties and 86% of the children we referred for vision difficulties have completed the referral process with medical follow up.

## **Communicable Disease Prevention**

Infectious diseases remain one of the major causes of illness, disability, and death. Local health departments are responsible for investigating and controlling further spread of disease. On a weekly basis, infection control practitioners from area hospitals and clinics receive a report of communicable disease occurrences in Marathon County from our epidemiologist. In 2011, Marathon County Health Department received 899 confirmed and probable reports of 30 different communicable diseases.

### **Immunizations**

As part of a county-wide protocol established with area health care providers, Marathon County Health Department is responsible for implementing a monthly recall/reminder system, notifying parents by letter and telephone when their child is due for immunizations. By keeping immunization rates high, the rate of vaccine preventable diseases in Marathon County is kept low. Marathon County Health Department provides vaccines at immunization clinics held at the health department in Wausau as well as locations in several outlying communities in the county. By providing education and access to vaccines, we are protecting the health of our community members against vaccine-preventable disease.

Educating the community and partner agencies on the benefits of immunization will also continue to be an important part of the Communicable Disease Prevention program.

Our nurse immunization coordinator follows up on children in the county who are late on their vaccinations or have not received any vaccinations. She works with the family, educating them on vaccine preventable diseases and helping them to get an appointment with their medical provider or with the health department so that the child can get

needed vaccinations. Often, when speaking with the parents, the nurse finds there is a lack of knowledge about the seriousness of diseases that can be prevented through vaccination. Other times, the parents want to get their child vaccinated, but face barriers such as lack of insurance or transportation. The nurse will work with them to overcome these barriers, helping them to get insurance or transportation so that the child can be protected through vaccination.

### **Tuberculosis**

Through the State of Wisconsin Tuberculosis (TB) Program and the Marathon County Health Department, medications to treat active and latent TB are provided at no cost. The service is designed to assure all individuals with TB are fully treated, thus reducing their risk of developing active disease. Treating those with TB serves as a measure to prevent TB exposure in the community.

### **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

In an effort to provide accessible screening, treatment, and partner follow up, the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) program at Marathon County Health Department provides STD clinic services weekly at two sites: UW Health Family Medicine and at the Marathon County Jail. As a result of the clinic, individuals who may not seek care due to barriers such as cost and/or not having a health care provider are screened and treated, reducing further transmission of STDs/HIV in the community.

The communicable disease nurses regularly hear from clients about how they have made a difference. An STD is a very personal topic; common remarks from clients include: "Thank you for being so respectful and kind." We strive to give information in a non-judgmental manner. By providing education and support, we are helping to reduce a person's risk for contracting a disease through sexual contact or drug use. In this way, we help to prevent the spread of these diseases, and the associated costs, in our community.

### **Rabies Prevention**

The Rabies Control Program goal is to prevent humans from contracting rabies. Marathon County Health Department works closely with local veterinarians, law enforcement, and those in contact with animals to ensure health and safety when a bite occurs, or when a person has had exposure to an animal suspected of carrying rabies.

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This past year, our staff followed up with a child who had been bitten in the hand by a dog. In addition to providing important information about the bite and rabies, staff issued a press release on the dog. Fortunately, the dog returned to the child's home and was captured. Our staff contacted the Wausau Police Department who transported the dog for quarantine at the Marathon County Humane Society. This coordinated effort avoided the pain and cost to the child and family to receive rabies shots.

## Public Health Preparedness

In recent years, efforts have been underway in Marathon County to develop a comprehensive community plan to meet the sheltering needs of vulnerable populations in the case of a disaster.

## Water Testing Laboratory



The Marathon County Health Department's Water Testing Laboratory continues to provide a measure of safety to local residents, ensuring safe drinking water for municipal water users and homeowners with private wells, as well as safe recreational waters. In 2011 the lab found 447 drinking water samples to be unsafe and 71 recreational water samples to be bacteriologically unsatisfactory. Corrective actions taken for these water sources resulted in safer drinking water and recreational water for Marathon County's residents.

## Children and Youth With Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN)

The Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program

provides service to people from birth to 21 years old with a chronic condition that requires specialized health or educational services. These chronic conditions may be physical, emotional, developmental or behavioral.

**Northern Regional Center**  
Children and Youth with  
Special Health Care Needs



## Northwoods Preparedness Collaborative

Nine member agencies of the former Northwoods Consortium created a new partnership to continue collaborating and sharing services around preparedness.

August through December, local public health agencies throughout Wisconsin assessed their performance on 15 capabilities released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These new standards for PHEP planning will provide the framework for preparedness efforts in coming years. While the intent of NPC is to focus on public health emergency preparedness, the partnership has committed to working together in areas such as accreditation, epidemiology, and planning and evaluation.

## Community Health

### WDA Mission of Mercy (MOM)

In June 2011, the Wisconsin Dental Association and the Wisconsin Dental Association Foundation provided their third Mission of Mercy event in Wisconsin selecting the Wausau area. The Greenheck Field House and a high school gym in Weston were transformed into a large-scale, charitable dental clinic on June 24 and 25. The event served a two-fold purpose – first, providing \$1.13 million worth of dental care to those who are unable to access dental care. Secondly, the event highlighted the need to address the barriers related to oral health care in Marathon County.

### Healthy Marathon County



In 2011, Marathon County conducted a comprehensive community health assessment. The LIFE Report's 15 measures of health were used as the basis for the assessment. Representatives from Healthy Marathon County with the Marathon County Board of Health reviewed assessment findings and identified the following health priorities for Marathon County.

- Access and affordability of health care,
- Alcohol misuse,
- Oral health care,
- Overweight/obesity, and
- Tobacco use.

For more information on the work being completed by Healthy Marathon County visit:  
[www.healthymarathoncounty.org](http://www.healthymarathoncounty.org)



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