

2024 Community Health Improvement Plan

Initial Work Plan

Rusk County, Wisconsin



Rusk County
WISCONSIN



PUBLIC HEALTH
PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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Mission

The mission of the Rusk County Health and Human Services, Public Health Department, is to maximize the quality of life across the lifespan by promoting health, protecting the environment, and preventing disease and injury.

Introduction

In this report, you will find more about what Rusk County Public Health and their partners are doing to address health needs in our community. This report will lay out our plan for the next three to five years, until the completion of the next Community Health Assessment. At that time a final report will be issued regarding what was accomplished during this improvement plan.

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is not all inclusive of what our Public Health department focuses on. We offer many programs to promote the health of our community.

Some examples of service Rusk County Public Health always provides are **communicable disease control** (through immunizations, follow up of communicable diseases, and education to the community about signs and symptoms, testing for sexually transmitted infections and campaigns such as “Fight the Bite” to raise awareness regarding tick and mosquito born illness), **chronic disease and injury prevention** (education regarding things like management of diabetes, hypertension, and signs and symptoms of stroke and services like Narcan training and access to Narcan for the community), **environmental public health services** (such as beach water testing to ensure it is safe for swimming, and inspection of licensed establishments such as hotels, pools, restaurants, etc. for cleanliness and safety), **maternal, child, and family care** (through programs like Birth to 3 which work with children who may be experiencing some developmental delays from birth to thirty-six months, WIC which provides nutrition benefits, education, ancillary services and support to family with pregnant or breastfeeding women and/or children up to four years of age who meet income requirements, Healthy Beginnings which provides prenatal education, participating in coalitions like Rusk County Youth Council and the Infant Safety Committee that focus on the health of infants and children in our county, and reproductive health services such as access to birth control and education), and **access to and linkage with clinical care** (by working closely with health care in the area to know what services are available, coordinating with providers to come to our office and provide basic dental care for kids in the area, and providing information to clients as well as by providing education about services that are available in our area). To find out more information, please visit our website at <https://ruskcounty.org/publichealth>.

Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan: Working Hand in Hand

Every local public health department in Wisconsin is tasked with conducting a Community Health Assessment (CHA) every three to five years. The purpose of the Community Health Assessment is to gather important information about the health of the community and use this information to look at areas where we should be working to improve. This information can be gathered using surveys, statistical data, focus groups and interviews, and information provided by community members and stakeholders. All the information gathered is then reviewed and presented to the community.

We can then work together with community partners to plan and take actionable steps to make our community healthier. Community partners can be offices that provide health or support care services, other county government offices, business owners, industries in the area, social or community groups, and just citizens interested in working to improve the health of our community.

Public Health departments often collaborate with hospitals in the same community to work on the CHA, as hospitals use much of the same data to make their own Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). We partnered with Marshfield Medical Center's Center for Community Health Advancement (which works with Marshfield Medical Center Ladysmith) to complete our respective health assessments.

After the CHA is completed, and we determine which areas we will focus on, the next step is to make a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The CHIP can focus on one problem area or several. Some local public health offices make a committee that will look at each problem area and work to make improvements. Some will have a general CHIP committee.

2023 Community Health Assessment Findings

Rusk County last conducted a CHA in 2023. As stated, Rusk County Public Health partnered with Marshfield Medical Center's Center for Community Health Advancement to begin work on the Community Health Assessment (CHA)/ Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) in June of last year. Data was collected by surveying those who were fifteen and older and lived or worked in Rusk County. Advertisements were placed in the Ladysmith News encouraging residents to complete the survey. The link was shared on the county webpage (www.ruskcounty.org) and on social media pages. Paper copies of the survey were made available throughout the county including at the Rusk County Community Library, Bruce Public Library, Hawkins Public Library, Imperium Chiropractic, Donohue Chiropractic, Prevea

Clinic in Ladysmith, Skabroud's Store in Sheldon, and The Foodmill in Conrath. Meals on Wheels also distributed surveys to meal recipients and collected completed surveys. Public Health met with the public and collected surveys at the Rusk County Fair, National Night Out, and the Rusk County Farmer's Market. WIC staff shared the survey information with their participants and encouraged them to complete the survey. The Rusk County Sheriff's Department distributed paper surveys to inmates. In total, 458 surveys were collected. These survey results were compiled and reviewed. Focus groups were conducted with community members to dig further into topics that were frequently mentioned as areas of concern in our CHA surveys, and secondary data was also reviewed. Secondary data includes things like census data, the Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings which looks at several factors, such as access to providers, air quality, chronic disease and obesity rates, life expectancy of county residents, and more.

The top ten ranked issues were:

1. Mental health (including access to providers)
2. Prescription and illegal drug misuse
3. Obesity/ chronic disease/ nutrition/ physical inactivity
4. Alcohol use and misuse
5. Tobacco use
6. Access to affordable health care and providers
7. Access to affordable dental care and providers
8. Adequate income
9. Aging-related concerns
10. Access to safe and affordable housing

All this data was presented to anyone who attended our public community meeting at the Rusk County Government Center in October 2023. Those who attended this meeting were then invited to vote for what they felt were the most pressing issues to be addressed in Rusk County over the next three years.

After voting, the top five areas of concern were:

1. Mental health (including access to providers)
2. Access to affordable healthcare providers
3. Access to safe and affordable housing
4. Prescription and illegal drug misuse
5. Obesity, chronic disease, nutrition, physical inactivity

Rusk County Public Health's report with more details of the process and of the findings can be found in our 2023 Community Health Assessment Summary Report. (A copy of the report is available on our website at

https://ruskwi.govoffice3.com/vertical/Sites/%7B0E3C6206-148D-4975-AF41-4ECFC3FF0AF0%7D/uploads/2023_Rusk_County_Community_Health_Assessment_Report.pdf).

The next step was for Rusk County Public Health to decide which issues they would focus on in the next coming years. Many things were considered, including department capacity, availability of needed resources, gaps where more work could be done, and possible interventions to be considered. In the end, Rusk County Public Health decided to focus on two issues: **Improve Mental Health Resiliency While Also Decreasing Stigma Around Mental Health** and **Increase Physical Activity in our Community**.

CHIP Priorities Rationale

So why were these chosen for our focus areas?

Mental health concerns was the top ranked issue. Poor mental health was one of the most concerned about health behaviors on our survey (Rusk County, 2023). Lack of mental health providers was the top ranked clinical issue people were concerned about. Poor mental health was the top-rated health outcome of concern. It came up over and over again in our survey findings.

When looking at secondary data, the average number of days Rusk County residents reported poor mental health in the previous 30 days was 4.7 days, which was slightly higher than the rest of the state, which reported 4.4 days out of the previous 30 days. Rusk County also has one mental health provider for every 1,770 residents, while the rest of Wisconsin reports one mental health provider for every 420 residents (County Health Rankings and Roadmap, 2023). While Rusk County Public Health does not have the ability to bring more mental health providers to our county, we can provide resources, information, and work to build awareness and resiliency in our community as well as decrease the stigma many people may still experience around mental health illness.

Looking at increasing physical activity, there were several reasons. It was part of the second highest ranked health outcome, behind poor mental health (Rusk County, 2023). It was part of the third highest rated concern after the survey data was all after data collection, and the fifth highest after voting. Physical activity has many benefits. While there are the obvious potential benefits of weight loss and increased strength, physical activity can also improve mental health, reduce falls, reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels, improve blood glucose control, and improve sleep quality (CDC, 2024).

When looking at the secondary data, it showed that 22% of Rusk County residents reported no physical activity outside of their jobs (County Health Rankings and Road Maps, 2023). Because of these things, it was chosen for the second area of focus for our Community Health Improvement.

CHIP Objectives

In January, the CHIP Committee met for the first time. The CHA data and chosen priorities were discussed. The group decided collectively to have one CHIP Committee that would focus on both issues, rather than to have a separate committee for each concern. The group meets for one hour, once a month to review the plan, discuss progress, and share ideas of ways to improve these two priority areas.

Improve Mental Health (Specifically Depression and Anxiety) and Decrease Stigma Around Mental Health

Goal 1: Offer training to interested residents to help recognize when someone in their life might need additional help for things such as depression, or suicidal ideation. This could be through offering QPR and/or Mental Health First Aid to community members.

Reasoning: Rusk County has one mental health provider for every 1,770 residents, while the rest of Wisconsin reports one doctor for every 420 residents (County Health Rankings and Road Maps, 2023). While this goal will not improve that ratio, it will help reduce stigma around mental health and help community members recognize warning signs and know what they can do to help.

Goal 2: Gather data on the mental health of the youth in our community, and then use this data to assess what further action is needed. This could be done by working with schools to resume the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and determine any barriers or alternatives to this.

Reasoning: During the CHA process, there was no data available regarding the health of the youth in Rusk County. The Covid pandemic has had a negative health impact on the mental health of people of all ages, and we know youth were hit especially hard. Without having a baseline of where we are, it is difficult to gauge whether any interventions we make are having a positive impact.

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for all community members to have access to support and resources to deal with factors that are negatively affecting their mental health. This can be done by focusing efforts on community outreach that will promote positive mental health in the community.

Reasoning: Rusk County residents report reported poor mental health in the previous 30 days: Rusk County- 4.7, Wisconsin- 4.4 (County Health Rankings and Road Maps, 2023). We know mental health issues affect all ages, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, or any other factor.

Improve Physical Activity of the Community.

Goal 1: Provide family friendly, and low cost (preferably free) opportunities for community members to become more active. This can be done by hosting events such as the Bike Rodeo/ Safety Fair, and advocating for projects that would accomplish this.

Reasoning: In Rusk County 22% of adults report no physical activity outside of work, which is slightly elevated from the rest of the state, which is at 20% (County Health Rankings and Road Maps, 2023).

Goal 2: Gather information of physical activities taking place in the community or areas where they can engage in physical activity and provide this to our community members. Rusk County Public Health has expanded their website to include a page that just shows upcoming opportunities for physical activity that are available in the community. Some of these are recurring classes and some are yearly or one-time events. This page is continually being updated and new events are being added. This page is located at:

<https://ruskcounty.org/actcal>

Reasoning: Physical activity provides many benefits to both physical and mental health (CDC. 2024).

Goal 3: Highlight our counties great trails and parks by hosting community events. Rusk County has trails and parks throughout that offer free access to the outdoors. These are often managed by the county, but there are also trails and parks Ladysmith managed by the city and some privately managed trails that are open to the public. Many people may be interested in exploring these further, but often are unsure how to get started. Community events could include hikes, nature walks, snowshoeing events, or other events that would allow people to meet, socialize, and explore together.

Reasoning: In Rusk County 22% of adults report no physical activity outside of work, which is slightly elevated from the rest of the state, which is at 20% (County Health Rankings and Road Maps, 2023).

An Invitation

These are just initial ideas and that the CHIP Committee has come up with and work continues. This plan will expand as time and resources allows. Rusk County Public Health and our community partners will continue to work on the CHIP for the next few years. If you are interested in hearing more about the work, have questions or comments, or would like to attend a meeting, you are welcome to reach out for more information. Public Health can be reached at 715/532-2299.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024, April 24). *Benefits of physical activity*.

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County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. (2023). Rusk county.

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