

Chapter 8: Public Health

Background

While public health is indirectly addressed in other chapters of this plan as it relates to topics such as walking and cycling infrastructure or healthcare and emergency services facilities, Comprehensive Plans in Wisconsin historically haven't dedicated public health-specific chapters. As described in this Plan's introduction, NCWRPC identified in previous planning efforts that public health should be included as a topic in future Comprehensive Plan updates, leading to the creation of this Chapter.

Previous Planning Efforts

The North Central Wisconsin Pandemic Assessment and Future Response was created following the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan's purpose is to better prepare the Region if future public health disruptions occur based on the following recommendations: 1. Meet public health mission objectives, 2. Build on intergovernmental and interagency collaboration, 3. Advance health equity, and 4. Invest in public health.

Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) have been adopted in all ten of the Region's Counties (Forest, Oneida and Vilas share a single CHIP). Refer to these documents for a description of each County's unique health needs and the strategies being used to address them.

The State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) identifies the following priorities for improving health outcomes in Wisconsin: economic well-being, supportive systems of care, healthy housing, physical/mental/systemic safety, person/community-center health care, social connectedness and belonging, and mental/emotional health and well-being.

1. Issues

The Aging Population will require more healthcare services, low-maintenance and ADA-accessible housing options, and alternative forms of transportation. Senior citizens are at a higher risk of safety concerns related to car collisions, and reduced mobility hinders the ability to live independently and maintain a home. Many residents in the region do not live near a clinic or hospital, so there is an opportunity to assist with the expansion of telehealth and mobile clinic services. There is also a need to support training and educating the healthcare workforce.

Aging-in-Place Practices are expected to rise in popularity as the population ages. These are retrofits to homes and communities that help extend the time seniors can live independently. Examples include physical upgrades like ADA-accessible bathrooms and wheelchair ramps as well as emerging household technology.

Emergency Services will require creative recruitment and funding strategies to address police, fire, and emergency medical service needs as an aging population increases demand and a smaller share of the population is of working or volunteering age. Inflation and staffing will impact the ability of providers to serve the region, especially in rural areas with dispersed populations.

Food Deserts are areas where grocery stores are limited, resulting in dependence on food that is often more processed and less healthy. Locally Sourced Food, along with farmers markets and agritourism, is typically discussed as an economic development tool. Promoting it improves access to high-quality, affordable groceries while allowing the Region to be less reliant on imported food in the event of a natural disaster or supply chain disruption.

Healthcare Access is a concern as workforce shortages and network consolidation can result in fewer providers and locations. There is an opportunity to support telehealth, mobile clinics, and other innovative healthcare services in areas with populations too low to support clinics or hospitals. Healthcare costs are also a growing concern, especially for those on fixed income.

Inflation impacts a household's ability to afford healthcare and healthy groceries, which affects health outcomes. Additionally, households who must take on additional jobs may have less free time to cook, exercise, and rest appropriately, which also impacts health. Overall, the wealth gap between households is growing nationally, which is expected to also result in gaps related to health outcomes.

Living Conditions can be impacted when finances, abilities, and/or age make it difficult to maintain a home. Black mold, infestations, and other health hazards can occur because of poor home maintenance. Housing insecurity can also occur as a result of economic and/or medical hardships, exacerbating health outcomes.

Low Levels of Physical Activity can result from sedentary lifestyles and/or disabilities, impacting health outcomes. Enhancing ADA-friendly bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, parks, trails, and other forms of recreation throughout the region encourages higher levels of physical activity. Additionally, encouraging new housing units to locate near existing services and jobs increases the ability of residents to choose active transportation options that save households money while increasing levels of physical activity.

Mental Health is a growing concern statewide. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), 46 percent of Wisconsinites experienced poor mental health during the month respondents were surveyed. Portage County was the Region's only County not considered to be in a mental health professional shortage area, with Adams, Forest, Marathon, Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas Counties being considered "high needs" areas.

Pandemics and Economic Shocks like COVID-19 demonstrated how various local, state, and federal guidelines and regulations impact how the Region responds to and recovers from future similar events. While NCWRPC is not involved in public health regulations, the organization should be prepared to assist in minimizing economic, educational, workforce, and public health impacts should future events occur.

Severe Weather can cause power outages and block the transportation of supplies, affecting medical equipment and refrigerated medicines. Power outages affect air conditioners and furnaces, putting vulnerable populations at risk during heat waves or winter storms. Storms or precipitation patterns can impact agriculture production, affecting food quality and costs. Temporary energy and transportation solutions are needed to address these issues.

Substance Abuse is a regional concern, particularly with drug and alcohol use. According to DHS, "poor mental health is associated with greater use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, higher rates of suicide and accidents,

as well as decreased school performance and lost productive workdays, which are factors in economic well-being,” indicating that mental health and substance abuse must be addressed together.

Water Quality and Pollution, as discussed in other Chapters of this Plan, are a concern since they can affect health. NCWRPC has an opportunity to support projects and strategies to remediate these issues.

In summary, regional public health concerns overlap with various planning and economic development projects NCWRPC is engaged in. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies in this Chapter are a guide to address these complex but related issues by integrating them within NCWRPC’s various projects.

2. Inventory & Trends

County Health Departments are found in all ten of the Region’s Counties, and they are responsible for conducting community health assessments (CHA) and community health needs assessments (CHNA). According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), these assessments identify critical health needs through data collection and analysis, and a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is created following the assessment to address public health concerns. There is also a State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP). The SHA and the SHIP provide a framework and recommendations for Counties to develop local CHAs, CHNAs, and CHIPs. See the DHS website for information regarding the guidelines surrounding these health planning activities.

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (CHR&R) provides University of Wisconsin – Extension with county-level reports with public health statistics. According to its 2022 report, county health rankings vary greatly across the region, with Marathon and Portage Counties being in the top quartile of all Wisconsin Counties, Forest, Adams, and Juneau Counties being in the bottom quartile of all Wisconsin Counties, and the rest of the Region’s counties falling in the middle quartiles. These rankings are based on four categories:

- **Health behaviors** (tobacco use, diet, exercise, alcohol use, drug use, and sexual activity)
- **Clinical care** (access to care and quality of care)
- **Social and economic factors** (education, employment, income, family support, social support, and community safety)
- **Physical environment** (air quality, water quality, housing, and transit)

Therefore, NCWRPC’s role in assisting communities and counties in projects that address these topics, especially in housing, childcare, economic development, transportation, and parks and recreation planning, is an opportunity to improve the Region’s public health and address disparities between counties.

Healthcare Providers include Marshfield Clinic and Aspirus Health Care in most of the Region. Juneau County is served by Mile Bluff Medical Center and Adams County is served by Emplify Health.

3. Public Health Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals

1. Promote healthy lifestyles in the Region.
2. Work with communities, healthcare systems, and colleges working to train healthcare workers and expand healthcare facilities.
3. Monitor and mitigate health impacts from environmental contamination.
4. Improve access to healthy produce and other food products.

Objectives

1. Encourage comprehensive planning that supports outdoor recreation, active transportation, cultural opportunities, and economic revitalization to expand opportunities for healthy lifestyles and social connections.
2. Facilitate conversations and projects involving public sector, private sector, and nonprofit groups related to public health.
3. Monitor and assist communities in response to changing information regarding drinking water safety and other environmental hazards.
4. Monitor, assist, and respond to significant events like natural disasters, diseases, and other threats that impact the region's health and economy.

Policies

1. Assist communities, healthcare systems, and colleges with planning and funding efforts that improve healthcare access and infrastructure in the region.
2. Assist communities, healthcare systems, and colleges with planning and funding efforts that expand both active and ADA-accessible transportation options.
3. Assist communities with navigating programs and policies that cleanup polluted sites for reuse.
4. Assist communities with navigating programs and policies related to ensuring safe drinking water.
5. Recommend that communities support a greater variety of housing styles along transportation routes or within walking distance of amenities, businesses, and services for those with limited mobility.
6. Assist communities with navigating "aging-in-place" programs to retrofit existing structures with ADA-accessible upgrades.
7. Work with state, federal, and local officials to quickly allocate resources during large-scale events that impact health and the economy.
8. Work with state, federal, and local organizations to improve healthcare access for households of all income levels.

Chapter 9: Intergovernmental Cooperation

Background

The chapter examines the relationship of the NCWRPC with Counties and local units of government within the North Central Region.

Previous Studies

Regional Livability Plan, 2015

The RLP briefly describes intergovernmental cooperation, cooperative agreements, and other methods that local governments can use to address common issues. Not all conflicts between local governments can be settled using these methods, but by looking at problems that transcend local boundaries in a regional context, solutions are more likely to be discovered. The RLP also contains a detailed description of NCWRPC's regional planning efforts that precede this plan and the RLP.

1. Issues

Consistency of Plans

Since 2010, state law requires land use actions to be consistent with a municipal or county comprehensive plan. For example, each comprehensive plan has a future land use map, which should be consulted when zoning changes are reviewed. Therefore, all comprehensive plans in the region should attempt to make policies between adjoining and overlapping jurisdictions consistent with one another to the greatest degree possible. The consistency requirement in the comprehensive planning statutes address the need for land use decisions to be consistent with the plan, but there is no legal requirement that plans be consistent one with the other, except that where a Town is under County zoning, then the adopted plan of the Town should be consistent with the County plan so that decisions that affect the town reflect a common policy direction.

Cities, Villages, Towns, and Counties must review and update their Comprehensive Plans at a minimum of ten years to ensure these maps remain consistent with each other. As of 2024, about three-quarters of the Region's municipalities have adopted comprehensive plans, and one-third of the region's municipalities have an up-to-date plan or are currently updating their plans. Additionally, all ten of the Region's Counties have adopted comprehensive plans, eight of which are up-to-date or currently being updated.

Shared Services

There are opportunities for local and county governments to share services. Whether this involves one town contracting with another for fire or EMS service, or the County agreeing to work with an adjacent county to solve a common problem, the goal is to maximize the benefit from the expenditure of public dollars. The economies of scale that result from a single entity providing service to several jurisdictions can benefit all by reducing cost and at the same time improving the quality of services received.

Overlapping Jurisdictions

Corporate boundaries of towns and counties often do not coincide with the boundaries of other functional service providing agencies, especially school districts. School district boundaries are set based on the location of school buildings, where the students live, and the efficiency of transporting children to a given school. Another example is the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee, which is located in Marathon County, but jointly owned by Marathon and Portage Counties. In planning for intergovernmental cooperation, it is important to remember that jurisdictional boundaries can present an obstacle to efficient service delivery. All overlapping jurisdictions must be taken into consideration when considering how to implement intergovernmental agreements and deliver services to citizens.

2. Overview of Efforts

This portion of the chapter examines the various existing governmental cooperation agreements, identifies some potential efforts, and provides a summary of the surrounding county planning efforts.

Local Efforts

The following are examples of intergovernmental efforts:

- Counties often administer zoning and subdivision ordinances for unincorporated towns.
- Contracts are common that allow municipalities and counties to share responsibility for snow removal, law enforcement, fire and emergency services, waste management services, and other services to increase efficiency and maximize limited tax dollars.
- Counties disperse state funding for local road projects in unincorporated towns.
- County and local Clerks work with the State Elections Board to manage elections.
- County and local housing authorities administer rental subsidies for low-income households in both authority-owned and participating privately-owned housing units.
- University and technical college systems, such as UW-Stevens Point, Northcentral Technical College, Mid-State Technical College, and Nicolet College frequently operate multiple campuses throughout the North Central Region.
- Cultural institutions also operate independently of jurisdictional boundaries. For example, CREATE Portage County recently expanded to add hubs in Adams, Wood, Marathon, Lincoln, and Oneida Counties utilizing a federal grant program with assistance from NCWRPC.

Regional Efforts

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) provides planning and economic development assistance to 10 counties in Central Wisconsin and their municipalities (Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, and Wood). Members of this organization are

also eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding (see Chapter 6: Economic Development) as well as cost-effective planning projects led by NCWRPC staff.

NCWRPC’s past Regional Comprehensive Plans recommended the following:

1. Encouragement of coordination and cooperation among nearby units of government, including Tribes, and special districts.
2. Cooperative service arrangements should be made among local units of government to handle basic services most feasibly.
3. Local units of governments should seek stable and adequate revenue sources for government operations and capital expenditures and prepare “capital improvement programs” that are based upon adopted development plans.
4. The most cost-effective methods should be used for carrying out government programs and projects.
5. There should be equity in the distribution of costs and benefits of public facilities and services, as determined by local government.

State Efforts

Counties and municipalities primarily work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and Department of Administration (DOA) to implement goals, objectives, and policies of local comprehensive plans. Additionally, DOA provides demographic data to the County each year and is the agency responsible for monitoring comprehensive plans among all of Wisconsin’s cities, counties, towns, and villages. Finally, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) administers Innovation Planning Grants and Innovation Grants that assist with consolidation of government services to save costs under 2023 Wisconsin Act 12.

Surrounding Efforts

It is important for every local jurisdiction to look beyond its boundary to see if there are plans in adjacent jurisdictions that will impact them. There could be potential conflicts or there might be opportunities to work cooperatively, such as related to service delivery. All ten counties in the North Central Region have adopted comprehensive plans, but not every county bordering the region has.



3. Conclusion

Local comprehensive plans should consider the possibility of improving the efficiency of services and minimizing conflicts by identifying opportunities for collaboration between jurisdictions.

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Chapter 10: Implementation

Background

This Regional Comprehensive Plan is adopted as outlined in Wisconsin Statute 66.1001 for the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. As an advisory organization, the NCWRPC will encourage adoption of this plan at the local level. As the region's many local units of government develop and update their comprehensive plans, they can incorporate the goals, objectives, and recommendations of this plan.

1. Procedures

Consistency Among Plan Elements

The state comprehensive planning law requires that the implementation chapter discuss how each of the plan chapters or elements is integrated and consistent with each other. Since this plan was completed as part of one overall process, there is no inconsistency, nor is there any contradiction to the previously adopted Regional Comprehensive Plan.

Responsible Organizations

The Regional Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through the efforts of many. Since the NCWRPC has no implementation authority, it is the local communities that will integrate this plan's recommendations into their local plans and policies to meet regional goals. As county and local units of governments develop and update their own comprehensive plans, often with the assistance of the NCWRPC, it is recommended that they review and incorporate many of the goals, objectives, and recommendations developed through the regional comprehensive planning process.

In addition, federal, state, and regional government agencies and quasi-governmental organizations may be directly involved in project coordination, funding, and execution based on the findings of this plan. Although many of the strategies and objectives outlined in the Regional Comprehensive Plan can only be fully implemented by government agencies, nonprofit and community organizations can carry out many activities that help make the vision of the Regional Comprehensive Plan a reality. Various nonprofits' missions coincide with objectives in the Regional Comprehensive Plan and many of the programs, activities, and events that these nonprofits sponsor further the goals outlined in this plan.

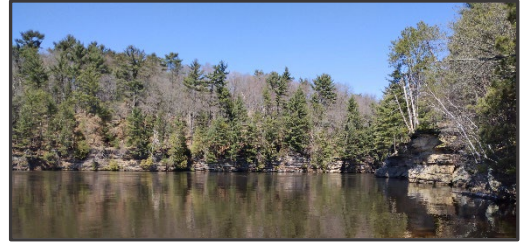
Plan Adoption

The North Central Regional Planning Commission has followed the process for plan adoption as outlined in the State's comprehensive planning statute 66.1001(4) and the regional planning statute 66.0309(10). The first step towards implementation is adoption. Although the NCWRPC has no formal authority, it can undertake numerous activities to aid in the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Plan. Implementation activities will be incorporated into the NCWRPC's annual work plan, including county and local planning assistance.

Plan Monitoring, Amendments, and Update

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission will regularly evaluate its progress towards achieving the goals of the Regional Comprehensive Plan, as well as the level of incorporation at the county and local level. While the plan is intended to provide a long-term framework for the community, it must also be responsive to change. As circumstances change, so should the plan. Over time it is expected that numerous things, from the economic climate to social demands, will create a need for change. As such, this comprehensive plan should be reviewed periodically.

This section recommends criteria and procedures for monitoring, amending, and updating the Regional Comprehensive Plan. The NCWRPC will also monitor State law for any changes that may clarify the amendment process.



Public Participation

NCWRPC adopted a public participation plan (PPP) required by state statute prior to updating this comprehensive plan. Included in the process was a public survey that was distributed regionally that gathered input on what the regional issues, goals, objectives, and policies should be, and how to best prioritize them. A subcommittee of NCWRPC Commissioners and staff from various state agencies was created to review the plan chapters and maps throughout its creation. The plan was reviewed, posted publicly, and adopted using the process in State Statute 66.1001. See Attachments A through E.

Plan Monitoring

As part of the comprehensive planning process, several goals, objectives, and recommendations were developed. As these are promoted for incorporation in local comprehensive plans, NCWRPC staff will evaluate how relevant and useful they are to municipalities and counties. It is recommended that a periodic “Plan Status” report be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. The NCWRPC’s annual work program will also be evaluated and modified, if needed, to achieve implementation. It is expected that a review and possible amendments will be conducted at the Plan’s 5-year mark (2030) to ensure that it maintains its usefulness as regional conditions change.

Plan Amendments

Amendments may be appropriate in the years following adoption, particularly in instances where the Regional Comprehensive Plan contradicts emerging policies or trends. Amendments are generally defined as minor changes to the document text or maps.

Plan Update

The state’s planning law (66.1001) requires comprehensive plans be fully revised and updated every ten years. This differs from an amendment as the data, text, and maps for all chapters are thoroughly revised in the process. The NCWRPC will complete each full update on a ten-year cycle.

2. Conclusion

The 2025 NCWRPC Regional Comprehensive Plan’s content will be used to inform local planning efforts as they are developed, especially county and municipal comprehensive plans. It also will assist NCWRPC in developing work programs and prioritizing projects each year. Though NCWRPC is not a policy making entity that creates rules and enforces them, the organization plays a role in assisting its counties and communities in navigating ever-changing economic, social, and political conditions. Therefore, this plan reflects the latest issues and strategies that must be addressed to ensure continued success and livability for the region.

This Plan is intended to be a “living” document, with periodic updates that ensure that it remains accurate and consistent with the needs and desires of the Region. Goals, objectives, and policies that will ultimately be implemented through local plans may be adjusted as the region’s conditions change. Ultimately, successful implementation of this planning effort will be measured by the future quality of life experienced by both residents and visitors to the Region.