

# 2024 Forest County Health Department Annual Report



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Inspiring Better Health for All

## Department Overview

### Vision

Inspiring Better Health for All

### Mission

To protect and promote optimal health and safety for all by providing essential public health services.

### Core Values

- Respect
- Accountability
- Excellence
- Empowerment
- Flexibility
- Collaboration

### Staff



Amy Gatton  
MSN, RN, Health Officer



Julie Weber  
Public Health Assistant



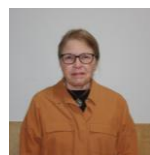
Chris Slagowski  
Public Health Clerk



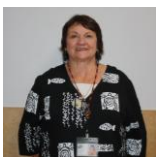
Kathleen Fuller-Kautz  
MSN, RN, Public Health N



Jill Krueger, BSN, RN  
Public Health Nurse Consult



Gayle Webster, BS Ed  
Health Information Tech



Lenore Blemke  
DHEd, MSN, RN, Consultant



Morgan Seidl, RN  
Staff Nurse



Jessica Wilson, RN  
Staff Nurse



Michelle Palubicki, RN  
Staff Nurse

## **Board of Health Members 2024**

### **Current**

*Chairperson:* Bruce Decorah

Brooke Dewing

Sam Augustin

### **Community Members**

Althea McMillion

Laurie VanGrinsven

Dr. Khristyne Lindgren, Medical Advisor

### **1/2024-4/2024**

*Chairperson:* Lynne Black

Scott Goode

Ron Skallerud

Brooke Dewing

Sam Augustin

Althea McMillion

Laurie VanGrinsven



## Essential Services & Core Functions



The **10 Essential Public Health Services** provide a framework to protect health, promote policies, systems, and community conditions, and to remove barriers to optimal health and well-being. The 10 essential public health services align with the **3 Core Functions** of public health: Assessment, policy development, and assurance.

## Community Health Assessment

Local health departments are required by law to complete a community needs assessment every 5 years. Forest County collaborated with Oneida County, Vilas County and Aspirus Health to create a community health assessment in 2023, which can be found on the website [www.forestcountyhealth.org](http://www.forestcountyhealth.org). The priority health areas identified are Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Chronic Disease.

## Community Health Improvement Plan

The 5-year improvement plan to address the top health issues can also be found on the website. Work plans to address the priority health areas were created with partners.

Goals for chronic disease, activity and nutrition are to:

- Increase knowledge and access through expansion/promotion of food resources and referral systems.
- Increase access to healthy foods.
- Decrease food insecurity in Forest County.

*In 2024, the health department supported a community and school garden that provided fresh produce to the meal sites, the libraries, and local food pantries. Resources were provided to local food pantries to improve public access and storage.*

Goals for mental health and substance misuse are to:

- Increase awareness of community mental health and substance misuse resources.
- Increase access to youth prevention services for mental health and substance use/abuse.
- Decrease the number of deaths caused by opioid overdose by 5% by Forest County.

*In 2024, the Art Expressions program was expanded in all schools to educate students on healthy activities to decrease stress and express emotions. Naloxone and Fentanyl Test Kits were distributed to EMS.*

## Partnerships

The health department works with many coalitions and community organizations to increase the health and well-being of the Forest County Community. Partners include schools, Head Start programs, libraries, pharmacies, the Aging and Disability Resource Center, the Commission on Aging, Forest County Human Services, UW Extension, Forest County Potawatomi Community, Sokaogon Chippewa Community, local nonprofits, and more. We are fortunate to have a great support system!



## Communicable Disease

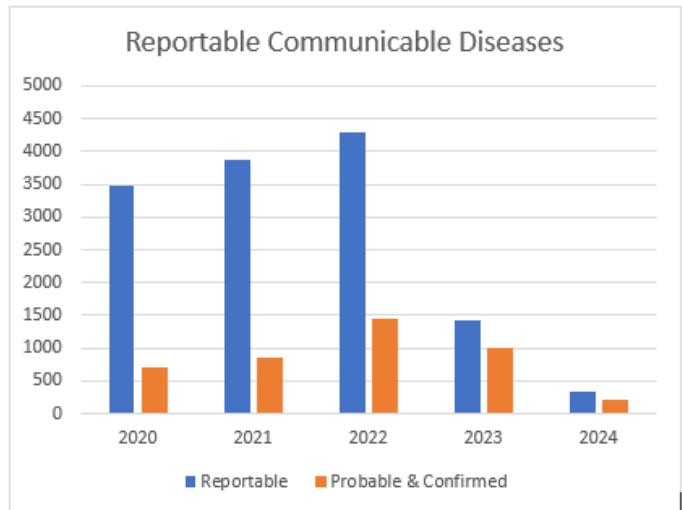
By law, specific diseases must be reported to local health departments. Staff receive reports through the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS). Surveillance is completed to control the incidence and spread of communicable diseases in our state. Statewide communicable disease surveillance and control activities in Wisconsin are coordinated by the Bureau of Communicable Diseases.

We investigated **273** reportable diseases in 2024.

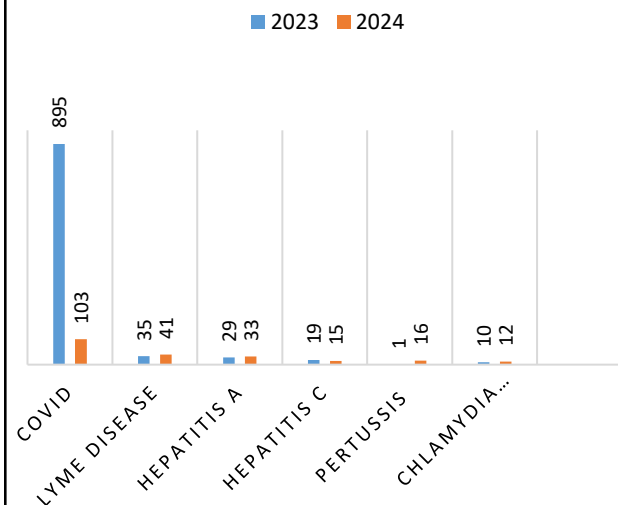
**Reportable Diseases** include all illnesses consistent with a disease whether or not it is lab confirmed.

**Probable Diseases** are those illnesses that meet the clinical case definition and is not laboratory confirmed.

**Confirmed Diseases** are illnesses that meet the case definition and are confirmed by laboratory testing.



### MOST COMMON COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN FOREST COUNTY 2023-2024



The health department investigates animal bites as part of our **Rabies Prevention Program**. In 2024, **18** animal bites were received. Three animal specimens were sent to the state lab for follow up rabies testing and all were negative.

**Tuberculosis skin tests** are offered to health care workers, school employees, and students. In 2024, we provided **9** skin tests.

## Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

PHEP is the capability of public health and healthcare systems, communities, and individuals to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from health emergencies. Preparedness involves a continuous process of planning, implementation, and corrective action. The Forest County Health Department equipped the emergency trailer with supplies to meet disaster needs. This was used in an emergency drill to determine functionality. Approximately 400 Files of Life were delivered throughout the county, with education on how to utilize the information.

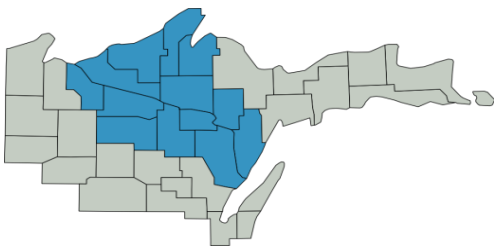
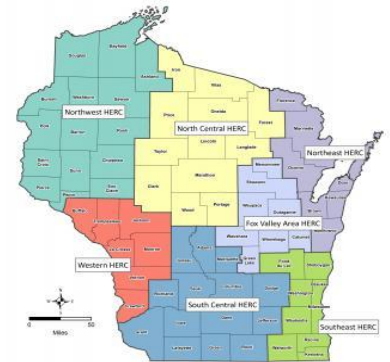
### Local Partners:

Our local partners consist of Emergency Management, emergency medical services, hospitals and clinics, tribal agencies, fire departments, law enforcement, the American Red Cross, schools, and volunteer groups. We work to ensure local plans are in place and participate in the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) annually. We work to improve communication with our partners and the public during emergency situations. We have a yearly tabletop drill. We continue to work on our plans for mass vaccination of the public if the need arises and participate in annual training to improve emergency preparedness skills.

### Regional Partners:

The Forest County Health Department belongs to a Health Care Coalition that includes Region 2 local public health, hospitals, clinics and tribes. We are a part of the North Central Wisconsin Healthcare Readiness Coalition (HERC). Each year we work with the coalition to complete a table-top exercise to improve our planning and test our capabilities. We identify our top 5 areas of vulnerability (Health Vulnerability Assessment) and work to address them.

Wisconsin Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalitions (HERC)



### Mutual Aid

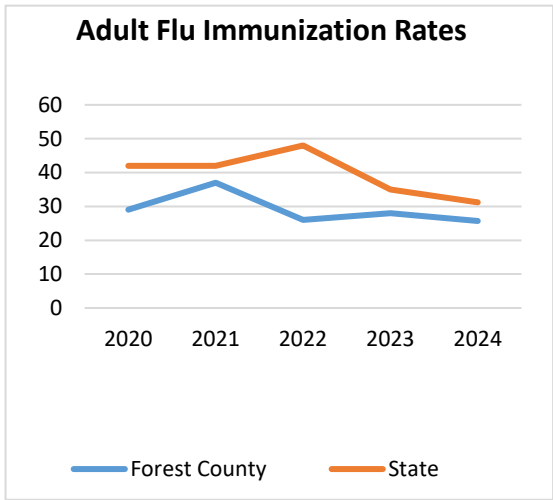
The health department has mutual aid agreements with the Northern Regional local public health departments, the Wisconsin Disaster Medical Reserve Corps, and the Wisconsin/Michigan Border Group to assist with public health emergencies. We have Memorandums of Understanding in place with local agencies to assist with response and recovery. We meet with our bordering counties in Michigan annually to prepare and plan.

### ***Northwood's Syndromic Surveillance***

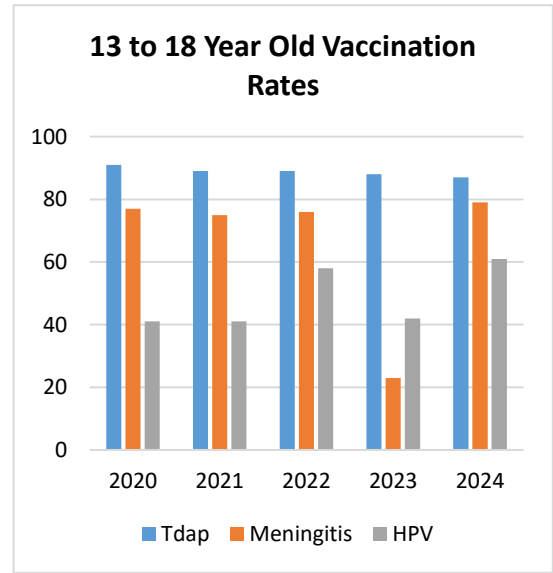
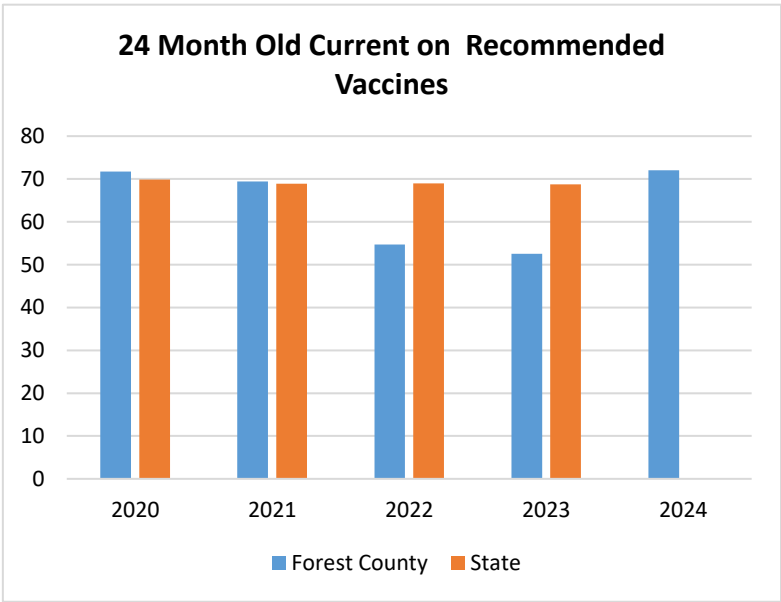
*Forest County Health Department is a member of this group. Northern Wisconsin health care providers work to ensure that agencies are updated with timely information and guidelines on communicable disease events.*

# Immunizations

The health department administered 518 vaccinations in 2024. Free vaccines were given to 193 children under the Vaccine for Children Program. Adults were administered 325 vaccines, including 263 influenza vaccines.



Schools and Day Care Providers are required by law (Wis. Stat. 252.04) to report child immunization status to the Health Department. We work with the schools and daycares to ensure reporting is complete.



The Health Department participates in the Northwood’s Immunization Coalition which focuses on improving vaccination rates, increasing access to care, and vaccine education.



The Health Department conducts a mass vaccination clinic each year to offer students flu vaccine free of charge.



## Environmental Programs

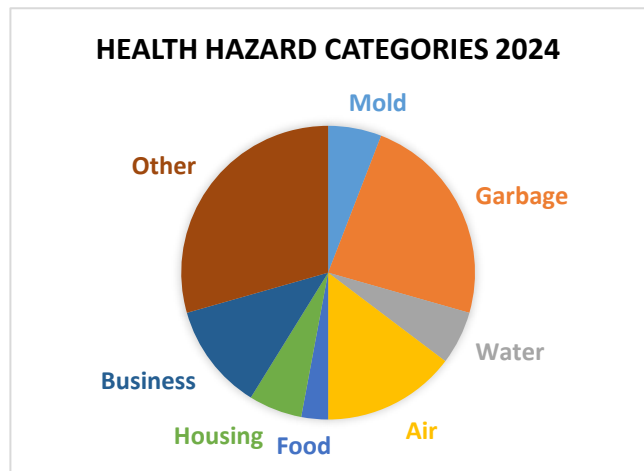
### Licensing and Inspections

Our department relies on the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to inspect Forest County food operations, lodging establishments, restaurants, pools, and campgrounds. Inspection reports can be found at <http://healthspace.com/Clients/WI/State/web.nsf/home.xsp>



### Health Hazards

A variety of Human Health Hazards are investigated by the health department. These include concerns regarding water, air, housing, garbage, animals and more. An investigation is done following a complaint. If property owners do not comply with removal of the hazard, a citation or abatement order may be issued. We investigated 27 health hazard complaints in 2024. The graph to the right shows the number of hazards by category. Some human health hazards fall into multiple categories.



### Radon

**Seventeen (17)** radon tests were sold to Forest County Residents in 2024. **Seven (7)** tests were elevated and referrals were made for mitigation services.



### Water Testing

The health department offers free well water test kits to Forest County residents with pregnant women or small children in the home. We assist families with information and referrals to other agencies if water is found to be unsafe. In 2024, testing was requested by four community members. Transient non-community water supplies are tested and inspected by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources ensuring safe and dependable water to the public.



### Lead

There were **139** children screened for lead in Forest County in 2024. **Two (2)** children had elevated lead levels and required further testing. This is a decrease from 3 children in 2023. Parents are given educational information on the environmental risk factors and the symptoms of increased lead in the blood.



## Maternal Child Health Programs



### Child Passenger Safety

The health department offers free car seats to eligible families. In 2024, Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians installed **17** free car seats and provided education on car seat safety and installation to all clients.

### Child Death Review

Forest County Health Department is the lead agency for the community-wide child death review team. Members collaborate to review child death information and institute interventions to prevent childhood injuries and deaths. Three Life jacket loaner stations were established in 2017. Two are on Lake Metonga in Crandon and one is on Silver Lake in Laona. These continued to be utilized by community members and visitors in 2025. The Forest County Health Department increased safe sleep education in post-partum packets and implemented the Sleep Baby Safe Project. Education on mental health resources was increased.



### School Health

The public health nurse provided consultation to local school districts and Head Starts related to communicable diseases, school illnesses, school wellness, medications and immunizations. The Forest County Health Department provides education on a variety of topics to all schools in Forest County and participated in wellness events, career fairs, and open houses, educational information and resources on nutrition, activity, mental health, immunizations were provided.

### First Breath

First Breath is a smoking cessation program for pregnant women. The program offers nonjudgmental support, counseling, and incentives. The Forest County Health Department renewed its provider status for First Breath and worked with area healthcare providers to provide the First Breath Cessation Program to Forest County Residents in 2024.

### Postpartum Follow-Up

There were **96 births in 2024**. The Forest County Health Department provided postpartum follow-up phone calls and sent resource packets to all new parents in the county. All parents were given information on WIC, breastfeeding, car seats, safe sleep, and vaccines. This outreach allows the health department to gather data regarding access to healthcare.

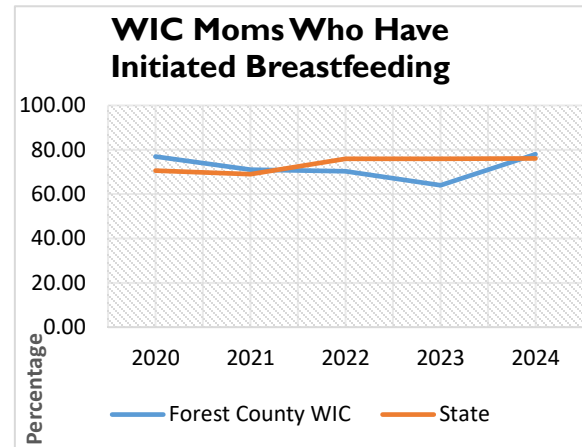
## Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)



The Forest County WIC program helps income-eligible pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are have a health risk due to nutrition. Participants receive nutrition counseling, education, healthy foods, and information on resources. We averaged **205 clients per month** in 2024. This is a 9% increase from 2023!

The **WIC Peer Breastfeeding Counselor** assists our WIC mothers with the education and resources needed to be successful at breastfeeding. **78%** of our WIC mothers initiated breastfeeding which is higher than the state incidence of 76.1%.

*The Northwood's Breastfeeding Coalition works to improve breastfeeding rates by promoting breastfeeding as the natural nourishment for babies.*



**\$88,046.00 of WIC approved food was redeemed at our WIC approved grocery store in Forest County.**  
**\$1,328.00 of farmer market coupons were redeemed at WIC approved farm stands.**

**Fit Families:** This childhood obesity prevention program encourages families with children ages 2–4 to improve their eating and activity habits. Clients receive nutrition education, motivational resources, and activity coaching to make a healthy habits goal for 12 months. In 2024, **11** Forest County children were actively enrolled in the program. 5 children graduated from the program.

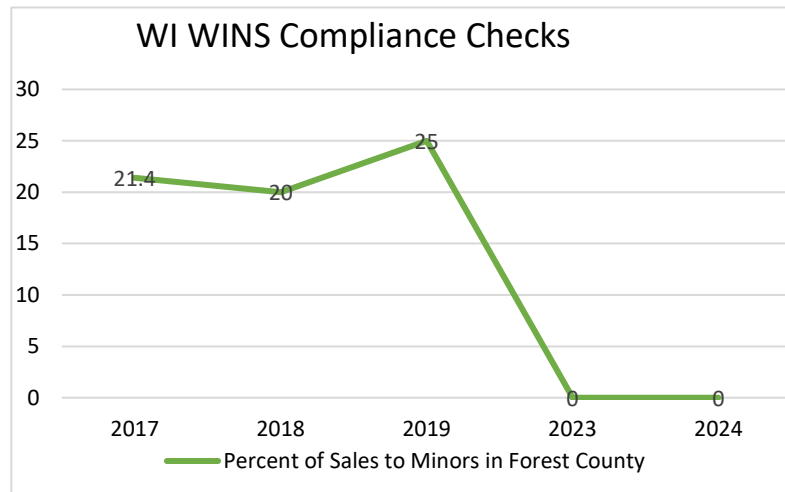


### **FIT FAMILIES CORE MESSAGES**

- MAKE EVERY BITE COUNT: MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
- MAKE EVERY SIP COUNT: MORE HEALTHY BEVERAGES
- MOVE MORE, WATCH LESS: MORE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LESS SCREEN TIME
- YOUR KIDS ARE WATCHING: MODEL HEALTHY EATING & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

## Other Programs and Outreach

**Tobacco Prevention:** The Wisconsin WINS Program is designed to monitor the sales of tobacco to minors at our tobacco retailers. We offer education and information to local businesses each year. In 2024, **8** businesses were checked and all were in compliance.



*Northwood's Tobacco Free Coalition is a seven-county coalition working to address tobacco related health concerns in our communities. A few of the focus areas include:*

- *Outreach to local & state leaders*
- *Addressing the dangers of other tobacco products like E-cigarettes*
- *WI WINS Compliance Checks*

**Blood Pressure Screenings:** We provide blood pressure screenings in the community at meal sites, community events, worksites or at the office when community members stop by.

**Health Education:** The health department participated in several community educational events in 2024. These events provided outreach and education on alcohol and drug use, maternal child health, mental health, immunizations, lead, nutrition, chronic illness prevention and physical activity. We submitted over **85** public awareness articles in newspapers, social media, and newsletters.



**The Art Expressions Program:** These programs serve all ages in Forest County. Engaging in the arts is growing in popularity as a way to improve well-being, and can enable people to deal with psychological distress. (Mental Health.org, 2019) Through our art programs, people can rebuild social connections and alleviate isolation. In 2024, the Arts Expressions Programs served **855** clients, which was an increase of 399 clients from 2023.

**Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program:** The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is a USDA program that provides eligible Seniors in Wisconsin with vouchers to purchase fresh locally grown fruits, herbs, and vegetables from certified farmers. The program is designed to improve the nutrition of low-income seniors, increase the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities through farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agricultural programs and aid in the development of new vendors and markets. This program supports locally grown produce and farmers. There was an increase of **20** participants in the Forest County Senior Farmer's Market Program in 2024. In addition, **83%** of farmer's market checks were redeemed.

**Public Health Outreach and Education for Medication and Safety:** Approximately **100** medication lock boxes and **300** Detera medication disposal pouches were distributed in Forest County in 2024. Educational handouts were included for appropriate medication disposal and the importance of securing medications from children.

**Files of Life:** Approximately **400** Files of Life were delivered throughout the County, with education on how to utilize them. These allow residents to access emergency phone numbers in minutes and provide vital information to emergency responders. The Files of Life also includes a list of essential supplies needed for emergencies.

**Stock Box Deliveries:** The health department assisted with the delivery of supplemental food through the Stock Box Program. Food was delivered to home-bound residents or those without transportation in Forest County. Assessments and referrals for other resources were made during these home visits.

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## **Finance and Management**

**Systems updates:** Our financial and budget tracking system was updated in the fall of 2024 to provide an improved financial tracking system. This change has increased efficiency in the financial division of the health department.

**Workforce Development:** To provide the highest quality public health service, the Forest County Health Department strives to ensure staff possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. The Public Health Core Competencies are reviewed each year to determine training priorities and to maintain competency in best practices and emerging public health issues.

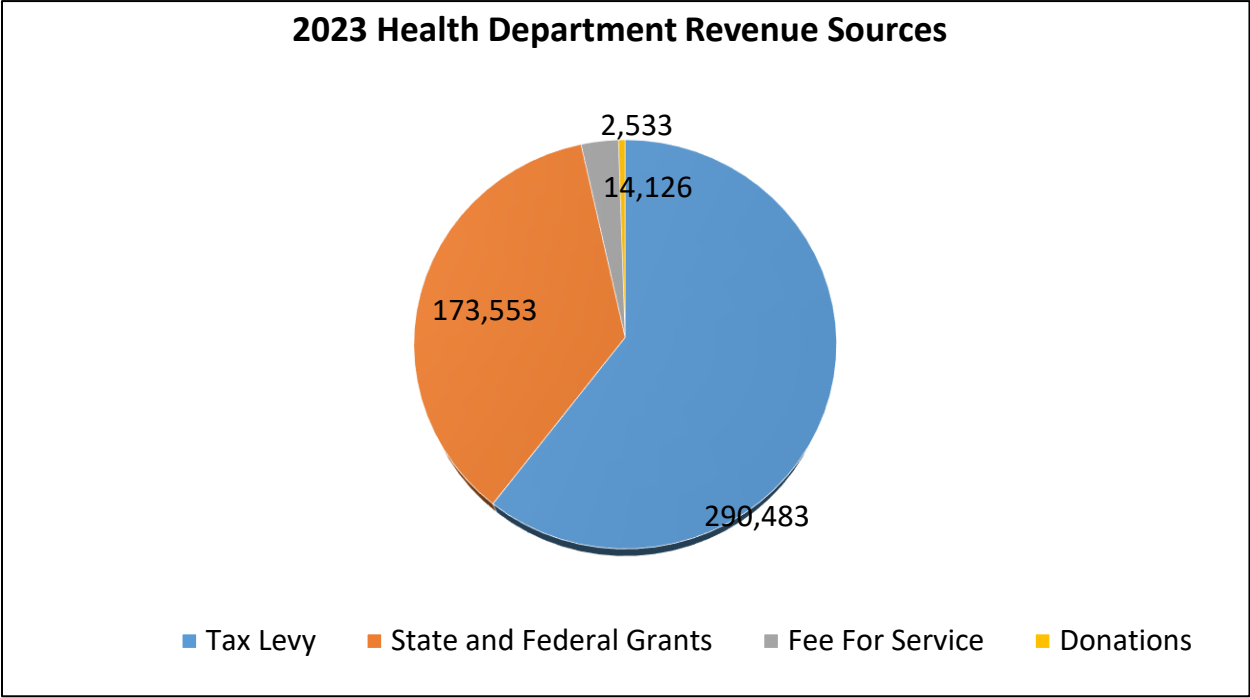


**Professional Memberships:**

- National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)
- Wisconsin Women, Infants, and Children Association (WIC)
- Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA)
- Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments & Boards (WALDHAB)



**Performance Management:** Each year we establish benchmarks for programs and monitor progress towards meeting program objectives for the year. Some of our performance management goals in 2024 were to increase the number of adult influenza vaccinations, increase the percentage of 24-month-olds who are fully immunized, increase Fit Family enrollment, increase training in preparedness, and implement strategies from the department Strategic Plan and Community Health Improvement Plan.



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