

Forest County Health Department

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Forest County, WI Health Department
Public Health
prevent. promote. protect.



**Forest County –
Inspiring Better Health for All**

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

Values:

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

Forest County Health Department Staff



Michelle Palubicki, RN
Registered Staff Nurse



Kathleen Fuller-Kautz MSN, RN
Public Health Nurse



Julie Weber
Public Health Assistant



Chris Slagowski
Public Health Clerk



Jessica Wilson, LPN
Public Health Assistant



FOREST COUNTY HEALTHIER TOGETHER

Not pictured:

Jill Krueger BSN, RN

Amy Gatton, MSN, RN
Health Officer
January 2023- August 2023

Annette Seibold MSN, RN
Interim Health Officer
August 2023-December 2023

Lenore Blemke, MSN, RN

Sydney Rhody, BS

Gayle Webster, BS Ed, Health Information
Tech

Board of Health Members 2023

Chairperson: Lynne Black

Scott Goode

Tina Anderson

Ron Skallerud

Community Members:

Althea McMillion

Laurie VanGrinsven

Kathleen Fuller-Kautz

Dr. Khrystyne Lindgren, Medical Advisor

Larry Berg – Resigned 2023





These **10 Essential Public Health Services** identify the actions necessary to provide the protection and improvement of public health. This image shows how the 10 essential public health services align with the **3 Core Functions** of public health, which are assessment, policy development, and assurance.

Community Health Improvement

Local health departments are required by law to develop a health improvement plan based on a community needs assessment every 5 years. Forest County is collaborating with Oneida County, Vilas County, and Aspirus Health on a 2023-2028 plan that will be available on our website in the near future at www.forestcountypublichealth.org

Priority Areas:

- * Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- * Mental Health
- * Nutrition and Activity

FOREST COUNTY 2023-2028 COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN



FCHD is involved in many coalitions throughout Forest County and the northern region of Wisconsin to work on improving the priority areas determined in our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and overall health and well-being of Forest County residents.

What We Are Doing?

We work with the Community Coalition of Forest County and other partners such as schools, head starts, libraries, pharmacies, ADRC, meal sites, social services, clinics, law enforcement, UW Extension and tribal agencies. We are collaborating and working towards a few common goals as a community.



Community Coalition of Forest County
working together to identify and address community goals

We work with the Forest County Partnership to provide leadership training at all three schools, Red Ribbon Week activities, and sponsor mental health speakers.



We work with Tri-County COPE to improve access to substance abuse and mental health treatment and raise awareness to mental health concerns. We are part of 988 (suicide/crisis lifeline) sticker campaign. All 5 pharmacies in Forest County are putting the 988 stickers on medication bags.

We work with the Forest County CAN! Coalition to increase opportunities for physical activity and increase access to healthier foods.



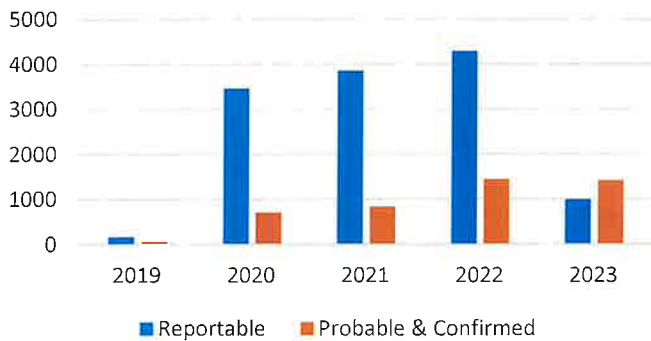
The health department supported a community garden that provided fresh produce to the meal sites, a traveling food pantry at the libraries, as well as local food pantries. The community garden also had a master gardener present to teach community members of all ages, about gardening so they can be successful when starting their own gardens. Our master gardener also started a school garden in Crandon and taught the elementary students how to plant vegetables!

Essential Public Health Service

By law specific diseases must be reported to local health departments. Staff receive these reports through an electronic reporting system called Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS). These incidents are investigated and with counseling given to the patients and family members.

Wis. Stat. 252.05: Any health care provider who knows or has reason to believe a person treated or visited by him or her has a communicable disease is required to report per Administrative Rule DHS 145.04 (1), this includes reporting of a case or suspected case.

Reportable Communicable Diseases



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

We investigated 1,036 reportable diseases in 2023.

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.

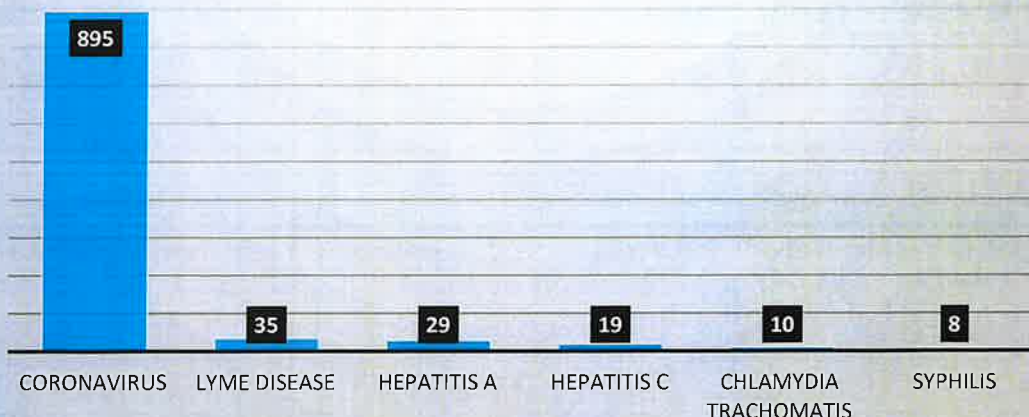
Most common diseases:

- Coronavirus: 895
- Lyme Disease: 35
- Hepatitis A: 29
- Hepatitis C: 19
- Chlamydia Trachomatis: 10
- Syphilis: 8

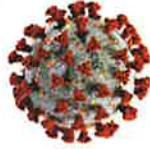
The health department investigates animal bites as part of our **Rabies Prevention Program**.

In 2023, we investigated **30 animal bites**. 2 animals were sent to the state lab for follow up rabies testing and were negative.

2023 Most Common Communicable Diseases



FCHD provides **Tuberculosis skin tests** to screen health care workers and students before they enter the workforce to make sure they do not spread disease. **We provided 26 skin tests in 2023.**



Background

Covid-19 is a viral respiratory illness that can spread from person to person through respiratory drops and aerosol particles. Forest County saw its first positive cases in May of 2020. The Forest County Board of Supervisors declared a local state of Emergency in Forest County on March 24, 2020. On May 11th, 2023, the federal Public Health Emergency came to an end. By the end of 2023, Forest County had experienced 164 confirmed and probable cases reported.

Public Information and Education

Our staff has continued to respond daily to phone calls and emails regarding COVID-19. We sent over 23 press releases to our local newspapers regarding COVID-19 and posted to our website and Facebook page, informing the public on the number of positive results and number of confirmed and probable deaths.

Partner Collaboration and Communication

We continued frequent communication with schools, nursing homes, businesses, tribes, law enforcement, emergency management and clinics with virtual meetings.

Guidance and Resource Sharing

We provided continued guidance and recommendations for local businesses, schools, health care facilities, nursing home, community members, other county departments, and various community organizations on infection control and best practices.

Disease Investigation and Contact Tracing

The staff continued to work daily, contacting all positive cases and reviewing isolation procedures through May 11th, 2023. Contact tracing for COVID-19 is no longer being done. Disease investigation for COVID-19 Hospitalizations continue to be investigated following the end of the Public Health Emergency.

Testing

Testing was available in the community from area clinics and throughout the northern region. Public Health was a resource to provide people with test kits, testing sites and information.

Vaccine

2023 was spent encouraging community members to get vaccinated and working with our healthcare providers to hold vaccine clinics throughout the county. Current completed COVID-19 vaccination rate for the 2023-2024 updated vaccine is 6.8%.

Looking at 2024

We anticipate Covid-19 continuing to be an annual respiratory illness.



Emergency Preparedness

The department receives grant funding through the Department of Health Services and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to support public health preparedness activities. Each year we focus on two of the CDC Public Health Emergency Capabilities.

Our Local Partners:

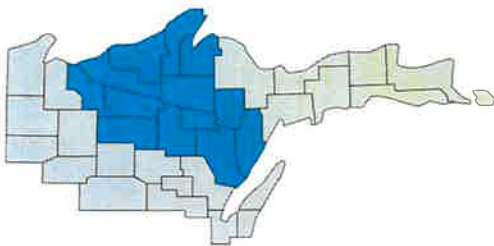
Our local partners consist of Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Hospitals and Clinics, Tribal Agencies, Fire Departments, Law Enforcement, American Red Cross, Schools and Volunteer groups. We work to make sure local plans are in place and reviewed on a regular basis and participate in the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) annually. We are working to improve communication with our partners and the public when an emergency happens, so 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 trainings to improve our skills.

Our Regional Partners:

We are part of 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 also identify out top 5 areas of vulnerability (Health Vulnerability Assessment) and work to address them.



Wisconsin Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalitions (HERC)



Immunizations

Mutual Aid

The health department has several mutual aid agreements in place to assist us. The Northern Regional Local Public Health Departments, the Wisconsin Disaster Medical Reserve Corps, and the Wisconsin/Michigan Border Group. We have MOUs in place with local agencies such as the Forest County Potawatomi and Sokaogon Chippewa tribes to assist with response and recovery. We meet with our bordering counties in Michigan annually to prepare and plan.

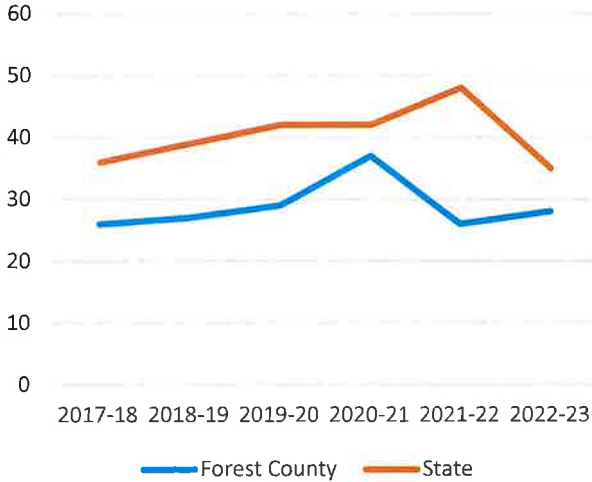
Northwood's Syndromic Surveillance

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

Having these preparedness plans, partnerships and mutual aid in place are critical pieces in our response to threats to the health of our community members.

Immunizations

Adult Flu Immunization Rates



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 the reporting forms are completed on time.

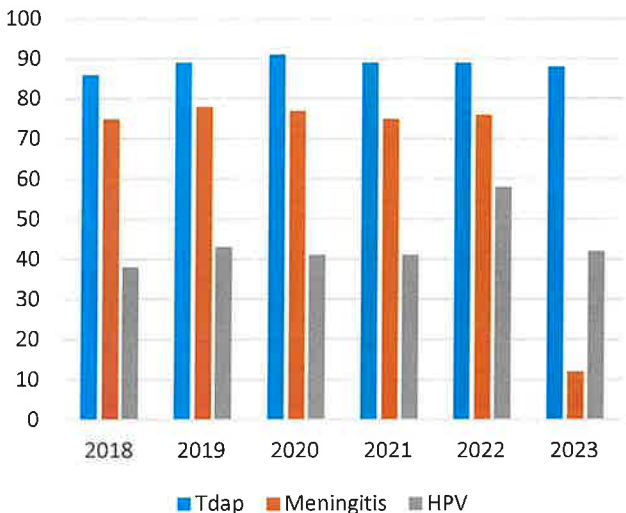
The Health Department took part in a school mass vaccination clinic to offer students flu vaccine free of charge.

851 vaccinations were given by the health department in **2023**. **520** were given free to children under the Vaccine for Children Program. **331** were administered to adults and of those, **307** were flu shots.

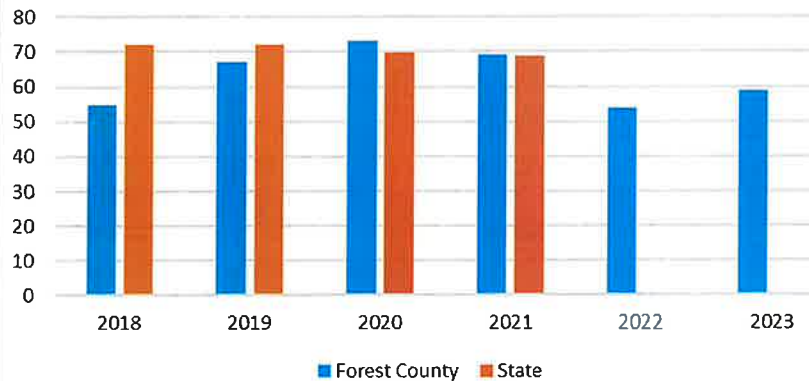
The Health Department is part of the Northwood's Immunization Coalition which focuses on improving vaccination rates, increasing access to care, vaccine education, and being prepared for mass vaccination.



13 to 18 Year Old Vaccination Rates



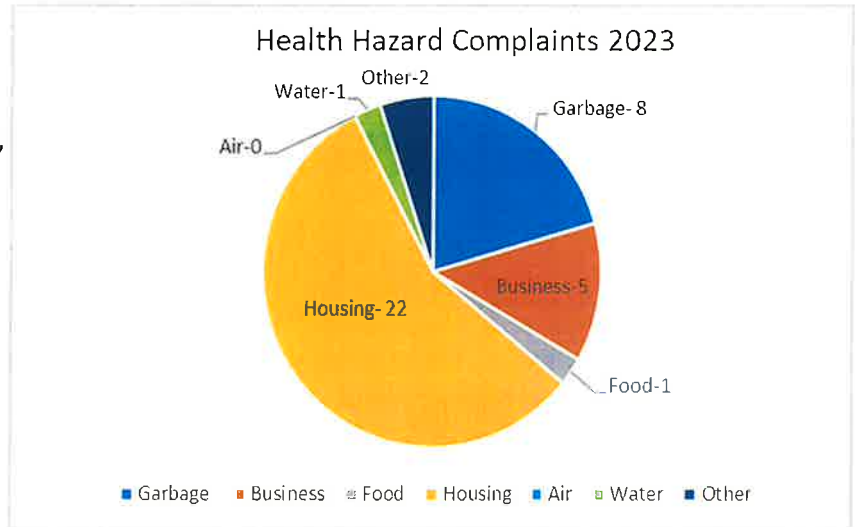
24 month old up to date with all recommended vaccines



Environmental Programs

Health Hazards

A variety of Human Health Hazards are investigated by the health department. These range from concerns regarding water, air, housing, garbage, and more. Typically, an investigation is done following a complaint or concern from a community member. If property owners do not comply with removal of the hazard, a citation may be issued. We investigated **39** health hazard complaints in 2023 as compared to **4** in 2022. The graph to the right shows the categories in which the hazard fell. Some hazards fall into multiple categories.



Radon: 21 radon tests were sold to Forest County residents in 2023. 4 tests were elevated and referrals were made for mitigation contractors.

Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning

Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health.



Lead: 149 children were screened for lead in Forest County in 2023 which is more than doubled from 2022. Three children had elevated lead results requiring one or more retests. Parents are given educational information on the environmental risk factors and the symptoms of increased lead in the blood.

Water Testing: The health department offers free water test kits to Forest County residents who have well water 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 2023, testing was requested by **4** 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.



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>



Maternal Child Health Programs

School Health:

The public health nurse provide consultation to the local school districts and Head Starts related to communicable disease, school illnesses, school wellness policies, emergency services, and more. We provide education on a wide variety of topics at the schools' request, participate in wellness events, and offer wellness challenges. Nurses Kathy and Michelle set up booths at the schools this last fall on open house night, providing educational/resource info on nutrition/activity/mental health/immunizations. Jump ropes, water bottles, toothpaste and toothbrushes were handed out to the school kids.



North Lakes Dental Outreach Project 2023:

We partnered with the project to provide FREE fluoride varnish to children 6 months to 5 years and FREE dental sealants to all 2nd and 6th graders at all of our schools by a mobile dental clinic. The program includes oral health education, oral health exams and referrals for dental care. This program is offered FREE due to a Wisconsin Grant. This program is continuing into 2024!

Child Passenger Safety:

The Health Department has **TWO** Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians and are able to provide education and assistance to parents on how to choose the correct seat and check that it is installed safely. We are able to give away a limited number of car seats to low-income families. In 2023 11 parents received free car seats and education from the health department. All parents increased their knowledge of how to correctly install a seat.



Child Death Review:

Forest County Health Department is the lead agency for a community wide child death review team. Members come together to review child death information and collaborate on ways to prevent injury. Three Life jacket loaner stations were established in 2017 - two on Lake Metonga in Crandon and one on Silver Lake in Laona. These continued to be utilized by community members and visitors in 2023.



First Breath:

First Breath is a smoking cessation program for pregnant woman. The program offers nonjudgmental support and counseling and incentives. Our Maternal Child Health Nurse sends all new moms a resource packet which includes "First Breath" information. The health department will continue to work with other providers in our community to provide the First Breath Cessation program in 2024.



There were 91 births in 2023. The Forest County Health department provides postpartum follow-up phone calls, as well as, sending resource packets to all new parents in the county.

Women, Infants and Children WIC & Fit Families

The **Forest County WIC program** helps income eligible pregnant and breastfeeding women, women who recently had a baby, infants and children up to age 5 who are at a health risk due to nutrition.

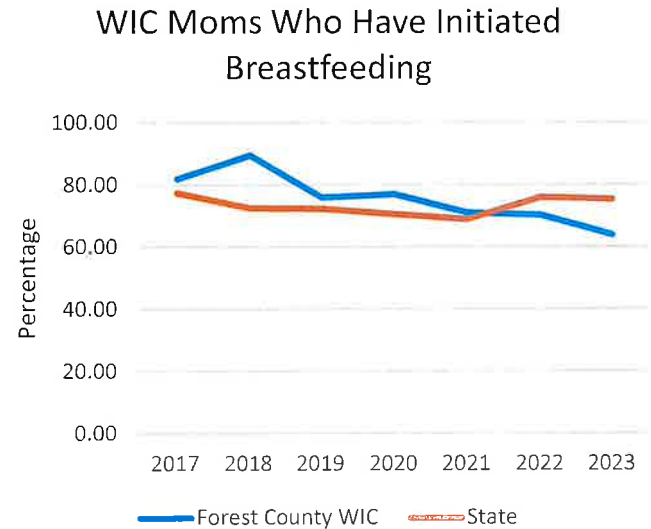
Participants receive nutrition counseling, education, learn about other services and receive WIC approved foods. We averaged **188 clients per month** in 2023.



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



The WIC Peer Breastfeeding Counselor assists our WIC mothers with education and resources needed to be successful at breastfeeding. **64%** of our WIC mothers initiated breastfeeding.



\$ 91,159.12 of WIC approved food was redeemed at our WIC approved grocery store in Forest County. **\$1,002.00** of farmer market coupons were redeemed at WIC approved farm stands.

Fit Families: Fit Families is an education program serving families of 2–4-year-old children enrolled in the WIC program. Fit families strive to prevent child obesity by empowering families to adopt healthy eating and physical activity behaviors through in person and phone/text coaching. **5 Forest County** children were actively enrolled in the program in 2023.



fit families

Eat healthy • Be active • Your kids are watching

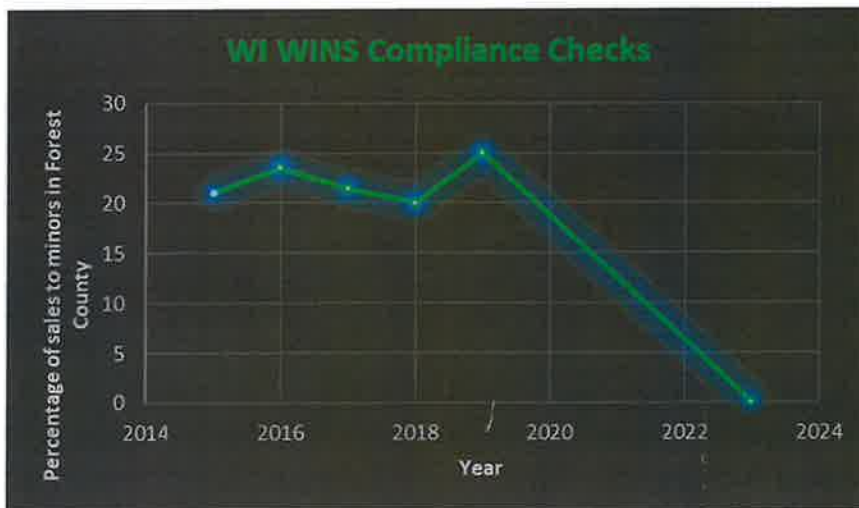
FIT FAMILIES CORE MESSAGES

- 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 AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

Other Programs

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.

Tobacco Prevention: WI 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 2023, 15 businesses were checked with one receiving a warning. It passed when checked later in the year.



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

Health Education: The health department was able to participate in several community educational events throughout 2023. These events focused on prevention such as, "Hidden in Plain Sight," for National Night Out, maternal child health, mental health and nutrition and physical activity education with community members. We send a postpartum newsletter and educational information to all new mothers in Forest County following their phone call with a nurse at the department. We submitted over 85 different public awareness articles either in newspapers, social media, or newsletters.



Other Programs

Art Therapy: The health department created an Art Therapy program in 2023 to serve our community members of all ages. Art therapy has been shown to be effective in a broad range of conditions. It can enhance communication, bolster self-esteem, reduce anxiety and can provide a sense of self control. Art therapy is used in all age ranges for increased feelings of well-being and reduce depression. It can improve mood, and provide a feeling of self-control as it provides a safe outlet for a variety of feelings such as fear, guilt, pain, and anger. There were **456 total interactions** within Forest County in 2023. This included **400** children less than 18 years old and **56** adults over 18. In addition, there were **94** participants at our Job Corp Rock Painting event and Open House with the ADRC.



Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program: The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is a program of the USDA which provides to income eligible Seniors (60+, Native American 55+) residing in approved states/counties, vouchers to purchase fresh locally grown fruits, herbs, and vegetables from certified farmers. The program is designed to improve the diets 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. The program requires income declaration and completion of a simple one-page form with approved agency staff. Although the program began in 2001, 2023 was the first year of participation for Forest County. During our first program year, **79 individuals were certified**. Each eligible participant received a booklet of vouchers totaling \$35 (seven (7) \$5.00 coupons) for the purchase of specified fruits and vegetables from Farmers' Market or Farm Stand vendors certified through the WIC Program. In 2023, **three vendors serving Forest County were certified**. Program flexibility allows participants to spend their vouchers at any certified market or stand throughout the State of Wisconsin, broadening access to approved produce. Through the Forest County Health Department's Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Planning processes, food insecurity has been identified as a major contributor to the chronic diseases of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease - all areas of concern for Forest County. The SFMNP is recognized as being a positive step towards improving nutrition security and the health of Forest County Seniors. The Department looks forward to increased program participation in 2024.

Finance and Management

Our new and improved website, forestcountypublichealth.org, provides information on our programs and services, community events and other resources. You can also find us on Facebook where we post and share health information and events.

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. Staff review the Public Health Core Competencies each year to determine training needs and attend trainings and conferences to keep abreast of best practices and emerging public health issues.

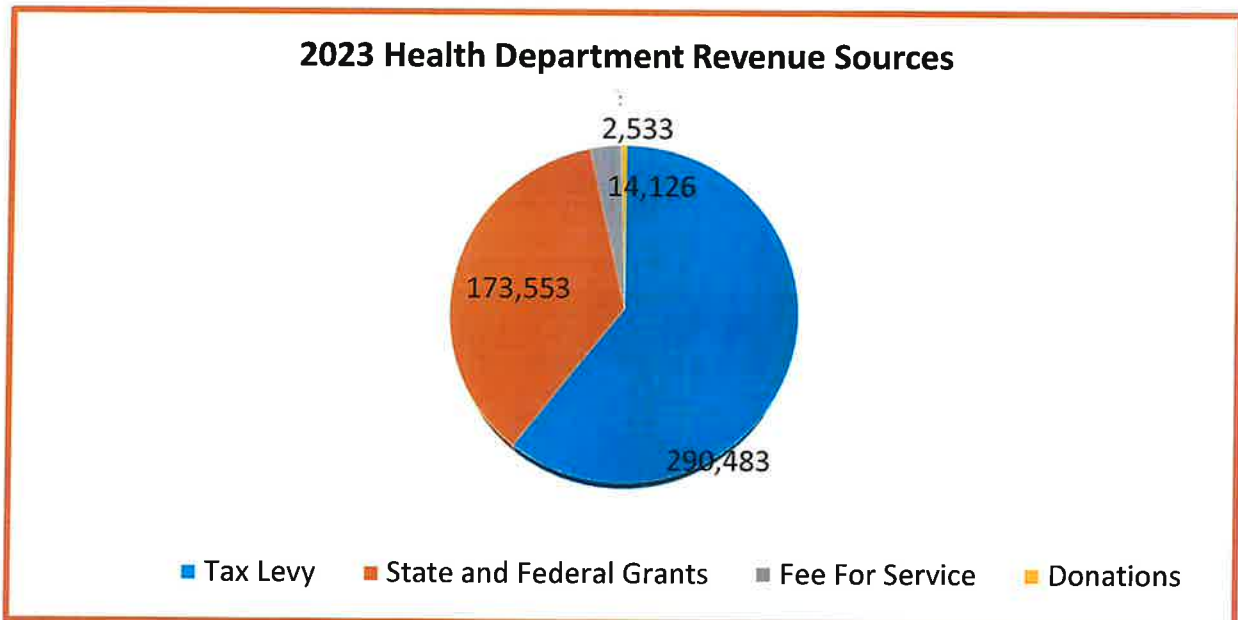


Professional Memberships:

- 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 specific programs and monitor the progress towards meeting the targets throughout the year. Typically staff collectively choose a Quality Improvement project each year. We will continue this in 2024.



140 Review: One of Forest County Health Department's accomplishments in 2023 was the completion of our 140 Review by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. This review is completed every 5 years to ensure the health department is meeting state guidelines for public health departments. Thanks to the hard work of all of our staff, the Forest County Health Department was recertified as a Level II health department. To see the requirements that must be met for a 140 Review for a Level II health department, please see:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/register/2017/734B/insert/dhs140>





Forest County Health Department
200 East Madison Street
Crandon, WI 54520
715-478-3371
<http://forestcountypublichealth.org/>



Dear Community Members of Forest County,

I would like to present the Forest County Health Department Annual Report for 2023. During this year, the staff of the health department has been working to restore services, education and programming following the decline of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Thank you all for your positive attitude, flexibility and determination.

Major accomplishments during this year included completion of the Community Health Assessment, and strategic planning for the Community Health Improvement plan. This work will enable us to focus on key areas and partnerships to improve the health of the people of Forest County. This plan is completed every five years.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services 140 Review was completed during 2023. This is a comprehensive review of the health department to ensure provision of public health services according to the Wisconsin statutes and administrative codes. Again, the staff worked as an efficient team to ensure that we were certified as a Level II health department for the next five years.

Our board of health members for 2023 included Khrystyne Lindgren (Medical Advisor), Lynn Black (Chair), Tina Anderson, Ron Skallerud, Scott Goode, and two new community members, Althea McMillion and Kathleen Fuller-Kautz. Kathleen resigned early in the year and was replaced by Laurie Van Grinsven. Thank you to the Board of Health and County Supervisors for your continued support.

I hope you enjoy reading about our year in review.

Sincerely,

Amy Gatton

Amy Gatton, MSN, RN, CNE
Forest County Health Officer