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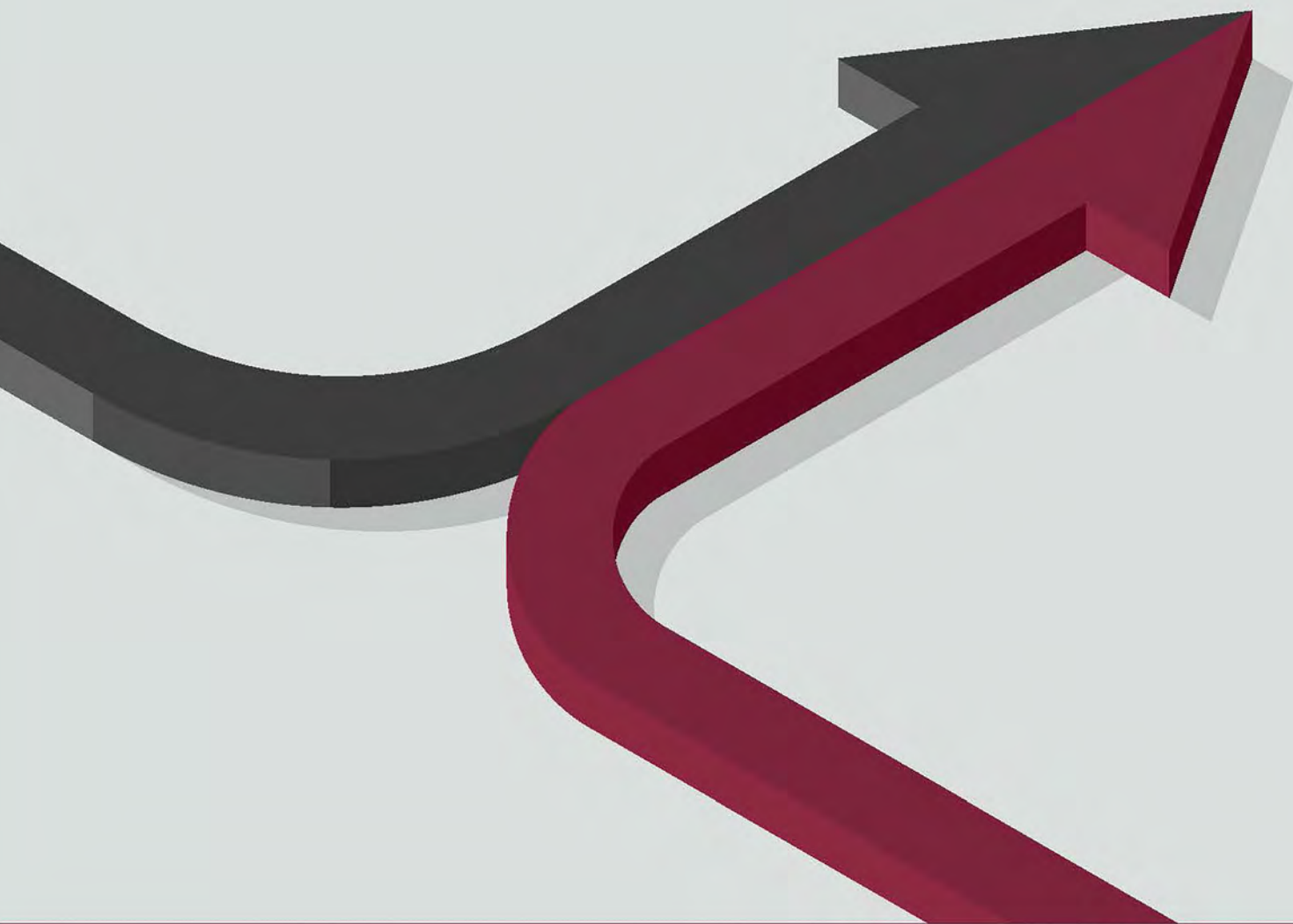
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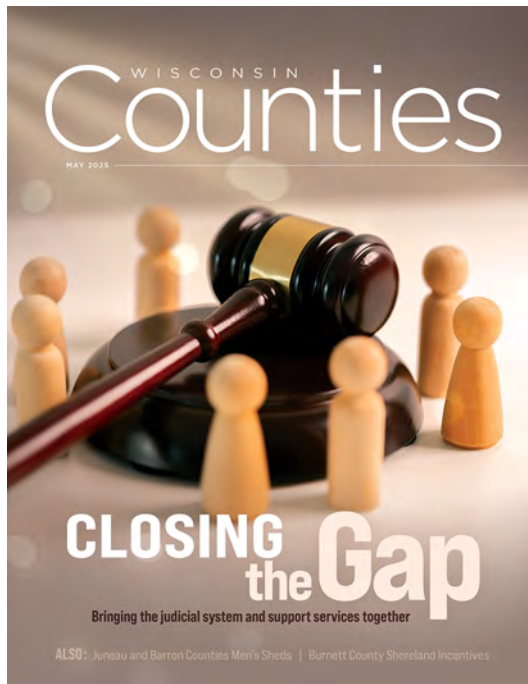
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WISCONSIN Counties

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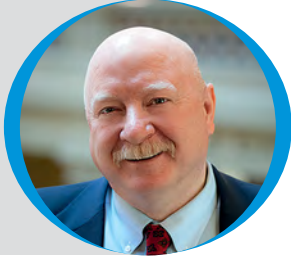
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From the President

Mark D. O'Connell

/ President & CEO

Strengthening Advocacy Through Storytelling and Collaboration

One of the greatest challenges in advocacy is bridging the gap between policy decision-making and the real-world impact.

When county officials advocate for funding and statutory changes, they are not just discussing numbers and concepts; they are speaking on behalf of everyone who relies on our transportation infrastructure, criminal justice system, health and human services programs, and the many other services counties provide.

While projects like road repairs are highly visible, investments in social services, such as mental health programs, often go unnoticed despite their profound impact on helping individuals lead stable, productive lives.

This is why storytelling is such a powerful advocacy tool. By sharing real examples from your counties with decision-makers at the state and federal levels, you bring these issues to life and illustrate the direct impact of legislative action.

Through your advocacy, legislators have gained insight into the importance of Medicaid funding, the urgent need to repair crumbling bridges, and the vital role court interpreters play in ensuring an effective judicial system.

Earlier this year, in conjunction with the ongoing biennial state budget debate, the WCA held two County Ambassador Program (CAP) Team meetings and the annual

Legislative Conference in Madison. We sincerely thank all the county officials who participated.

These meetings provide an essential platform for sharing our stories with legislators, but advocacy extends far beyond these events. It includes legislative forums, in-district meetings, resolutions, phone calls, emails and text messages — every touchpoint matters.

As we move forward in this legislative session, remember that advocacy is a continuous effort that requires persistence, collaboration and clear communication. By working together and staying engaged, we can ensure that county needs remain a priority in the legislative agenda, ultimately strengthening our communities and our state.

With the next biennial state budget under development, now is a crucial time to initiate conversations and make your voices heard. Engaging directly with state legislators allows you to address pressing county concerns and reinforce our key legislative priorities, including funding for transportation, mental health services, and the state's court system.

The WCA is proud to walk alongside you on this journey as we build on past successes, advocate for the resources necessary to support public services, drive innovation, and foster economic growth in our communities. ■

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According to All Rise:

“Treatment courts are the most successful justice intervention for individuals with substance use and mental health disorders.”

A recent analysis by the Wisconsin Department of Justice found that for every \$1 the state invests in a diversion program, the criminal justice system saves \$8.68. Similarly, every dollar spent on treatment court programs yields a savings of \$4.17.



CLOSING the Gap



Treatment Courts and Diversion Programs: A STATE PERSPECTIVE

By Heather Kierzek, Evidence-Based Program Manager, Director of State Courts – Office of Court Operations

A large body of research has documented the potential harms caused by involvement in the criminal justice system, including mass incarceration, racial disparities,¹ and negative impacts on individuals and families.² Involvement in the criminal justice system can lead to housing instability, loss of employment opportunities, increased mental health issues, and difficulty accessing education.

Treatment courts and diversion programs offer individuals the opportunity to access the rehabilitative services they need to avoid prolonged involvement with the criminal justice system. These programs can also improve community safety by making participants less likely to re-offend, reducing recidivism rates, and have been shown to be an effective use of taxpayer dollars.

► **Risk-Need-Responsivity principle**

Diversion programs and treatment courts are based on the “Risk-Need-Responsivity” principle, which provides a framework for addressing and treating individuals in the criminal justice system.³

- **RISK** refers to an individual’s likelihood to re-offend. Research indicates “low-risk” individuals are most likely to self-correct and do not require the same level of supervision and intervention as “high-risk” individuals. A validated assessment tool is used to determine the risk level and serves as the foundation for the requirements imposed by a diversion program or treatment court.
- **NEED** in this framework refers to “criminogenic needs,” which are factors that are changeable or treatable (i.e., dynamic) and have been shown to reduce recidivism.⁴ Criminogenic need areas include antisocial behavior (e.g., impulsiveness, aggression), antisocial personality (e.g., impulsiveness, lack of empathy), criminal thinking, antisocial peers, family dysfunction, employment/education (e.g., lack of job skills, poor work history, low educational attainment), substance use, and leisure/recreation (e.g., no pro-social activity engagement). Successful intervention in the identified need areas has been shown to reduce recidivism.
- **Responsivity** refers to tailoring interventions to

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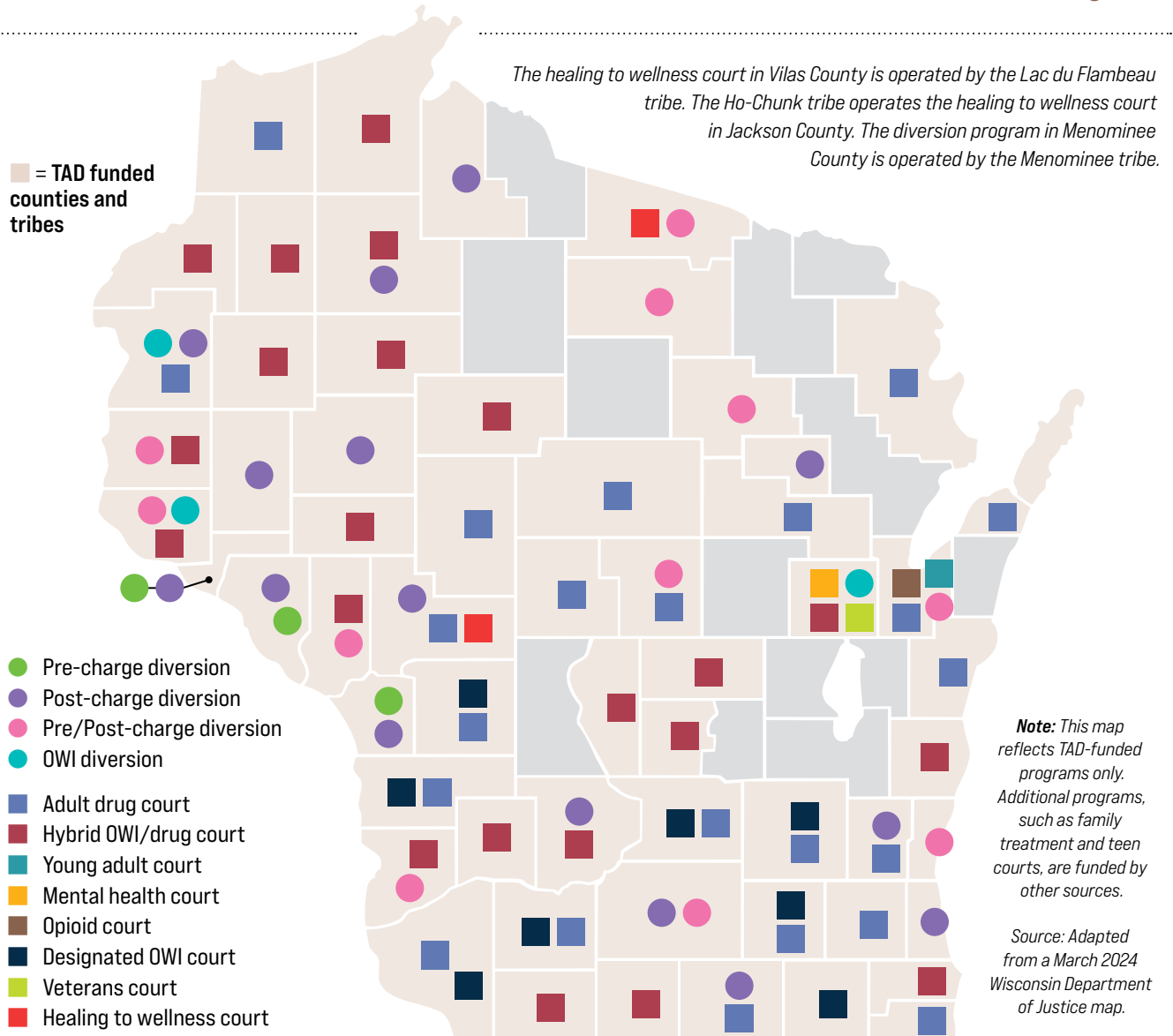
meet the unique characteristics of the individual. These characteristics might interfere with the individual's ability to engage with and benefit from the interventions. Such characteristics include mental health condition(s), learning style, motivation, gender, cultural barriers and social factors such as transportation, child care, and housing.

Successful implementation of the Risk-Need-Responsivity principle into the framework of diversion programs and treatment courts is central to reducing involvement in the criminal justice system and creating safer communities.

Decision points

Being aware of the wide range of decision points in the criminal justice system is important for understanding diversion programs and treatment courts. There are multiple points at which an individual could be diverted out of the traditional criminal justice system. Participants in treatment courts and diversion programs tend to have more opportunities to access services and treatment at an earlier point in this continuum, resulting in better outcomes for the individual and decreased taxpayer costs.

WISCONSIN COUNTIES AND TRIBES: 2024 Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) Funded Programs



► Diversion programs

There is no standard national definition for what constitutes a diversion program. Some agencies have adopted a broad definition that includes any program designed to divert individuals out of the criminal justice system, including deflection programs and treatment courts.

According to the draft Wisconsin Diversion Program Standards that were developed through the state's Evidence-Based Decision Making Initiative, "diversion" is defined as: "A global term used to describe pre-arrest, pre-charge, post-charge and treatment/specialty court programs (which can be pre- or post-conviction) that are an alternative to the formal prosecution process and divert offenders into voluntary programs of supervision and services based on established criteria and a screening or assessment process.⁵ Participants who successfully complete the program will receive a beneficial outcome (e.g., no charges filed, charges reduced or dismissed, averted incarceration, etc.)."

The size, scope and prevalence of programs vary greatly

across the state. Using the definition above, diversion programs and treatment courts have been developed to serve individuals pre-arrest (i.e., deflection),⁶ those entering the criminal justice system for the first time, and individuals diagnosed with a substance use disorder or mental health condition, and others. Diversion programs have also been developed in the juvenile justice and municipal court systems.

► Treatment courts

Treatment court programs have expanded rapidly across the state since the first program was implemented in Dane County in 1996. Currently, more than 100 treatment court programs of varying types serve different populations in Wisconsin. They include drug, operating while intoxicated, hybrid (i.e., combination drug and OWI), veterans, tribal healing to wellness, mental health, and family treatment courts.

Although each program has unique characteristics, they are all guided by national⁷ and state standards,⁸ designed

Continued on page 10

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Continued from page 9

to last 12-18 months, and serve high-risk individuals with a diagnosed substance use or mental health disorder.

► Funding

In Wisconsin, local programs are funded through several different streams, the largest being the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion grant program overseen by the Wisconsin Department of Justice.⁹ In 2023 and 2024, just under \$10 million was allocated to the TAD program for new and continuing grants to tribes and counties. In 2025, this funding stream is anticipated to support 30 diversion programs and 61 treatment court programs. Federal grants, county tax levy funds, court fees and other grant funds also support programs.

► Do they work?

According to All Rise, “Treatment courts are the most successful justice intervention for individuals with substance use and mental health disorders.” (All Rise was formerly known as the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and works to bridge the gap between the justice and public health systems.)

A recent analysis in Wisconsin found that for every \$1 the state invests in a diversion program, the criminal justice system saves \$8.68. Similarly, every dollar spent on treatment court programs yields a savings of \$4.17.¹⁰

These figures do not account for the societal benefits of participants who successfully reintegrate into the community as law-abiding and productive citizens or the preservation of families who are no longer involved with the criminal justice or child welfare systems. Although diversion and treatment court programs are not a silver bullet, if implemented correctly, they have been shown to lead to more successful outcomes than the traditional criminal justice system. ■

Heather Kierzek is the evidence-based program manager for the Director of State Courts in the Office of Court Operations.

1. NAACP, Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet.
2. American Military University, bit.ly/AMU-Criminal-Justice.
3. Marlowe, Douglas B., “The Most Carefully Studied, Yet Least Understood, Terms in the Criminal Justice Lexicon: Risk, Need, and Responsivity,” Policy Research Associates, prainc.com/risk-need-responsivity.
4. Zoukis, Christopher, “Criminogenic Needs: Keys to Reducing Recidivism,” The Criminal Center, bit.ly/Criminal-Center.
5. Wisconsin Evidence-Based Decision Making Initiative, “Wisconsin Diversion Standards,” bit.ly/WI-Diversion-Standards.
6. Wisconsin Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, “Wisconsin Deflection Initiative,” bit.ly/WI-Deflection-Initiative.
7. All Rise, allrise.org/publications/standards.
8. “Wisconsin Treatment Court Standards,” bit.ly/WI-Treatment-Court-Standards.
9. Wis. Stat. 165.96.
10. Wisconsin Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis, “TAD Program 2014-2018 Participant Outcome Summary and Cost-Benefit Report,” bit.ly/DOJ-TAD-Analysis.

The Legal Issues column on pages 44-46 provides examples of how counties around the country are using opioid settlement dollars to fund treatment courts and diversion programs.

“St. Croix County has had an effective adult treatment court program for more than a decade.

Nearly 70% of its participants graduate, with about half continuing to live crime-free lives.

Having personally witnessed numerous graduations, these success stories serve as a powerful testament to the capacity and resilience of the human spirit to improve. I’ve also seen individuals being escorted back to jail. These are people who desperately need our help if they are willing to accept it.

While they can be expensive, making it difficult to weigh the moral benefits against the impacts on county budgets, these programs can be very effective by taking a comprehensive approach to promoting healthy individuals and lifestyles as well as keeping families intact.”

— **BOB LONG**, Board Chair, St. Croix County Board of Supervisors



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Intervention Programs and Recovery Court

Putting participants on new paths in Chippewa County

By Rose Baier, Criminal Justice Services Director, Chippewa County

Drug and alcohol addictions, specifically opioids and methamphetamines (meth), have ravaged our communities.

Although it is prevalent throughout the state and country, meth has devastated many families in northern Wisconsin, leaving our service providers and the criminal justice system struggling to provide resources, interventions and solutions.

The Chippewa County Criminal Justice Service Department is striving to provide opportunities for individuals within the system to enhance their quality of life by facilitating recovery and community integration through innovative, evidence-based programs. The department is working with the state's Criminal Justice Collaborating Council and Evidence-Based Decision Making Initiative, the National Institute of Corrections, and other stakeholders.

Using funds from the levy, grants, and the Comprehensive Community Service program, the county has developed several diversion programs to provide appropriate, research-based alternatives to incarceration, alter offender behavior,



and enhance public safety. These include the First-Time Offender and Front-End Intervention Treatment

programs as well as a recovery court.



Rose Baier

► **First-Time Offender program**

The First-Time Offender program aims to divert low-risk, first-time offenders at their initial point of contact with law enforcement. Ideally, the incident never reaches the district attorney's office or is recorded in the Wisconsin Circuit Court Access database. Rather than issuing a citation or charge, the individual is offered the opportunity to participate in an educational session. Ultimately, this allows prosecutors to focus their time and resources on higher-risk cases while minimizing harm for low-risk offenders, enabling them to change their behavior.

► Front-End Intervention Treatment program

Established in 2015, the Front-End Intervention Treatment program is a pre-conviction program for nonviolent offenders whose criminal activities are influenced by substance use. This program accommodates offenders at all levels, with service delivery and program duration determined by a COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) assessment that evaluates risk and need. Its aim is to support individuals at the initial stages of the justice system prior to being sentenced and placed on probation. The duration of the program can range from nine to 24 months, depending on the assessed risk and need levels. Participation enables individuals to avoid criminal charges and probation while receiving treatment and services.

During the Front-End Intervention Treatment program, participants receive case management, treatment, drug and alcohol screening, and evidence-based programming. Successfully completing the program can lead to reduced or dismissed charges. Additionally, a specific component allows third- and some fourth-time offenders charged with operating while intoxicated to serve half of their jail time upfront while participating in the program. They typically finish within 24 to 30 months without being placed on probation. So far, the model has demonstrated significant success, yielding positive outcomes and high success rates.

► Recovery court

The Chippewa County Recovery Court was established in 2007 and expanded with a federal justice assistance grant in 2013, enabling the addition of a full-time case manager. Currently, the recovery court offers two tracks for offenders: a high-risk/high-need track available post-conviction or as an alternative to revocation, and a low-risk track option introduced in 2023 for those who present lower risks but greater needs. Both tracks incorporate advancement phases that lead to graduation, which typically take about 18 to

24 months to complete. Individuals are assigned to the appropriate track based on the COMPAS risk assessment. The recovery court is recognized as a hybrid court serving both OWI and drug offenders.

► Team screening

A team screens referrals for the Front-End Intervention Treatment program and the recovery court. It comprises judges, representatives from the prosecution, defense, child protection and jail systems, treatment professionals, UW-Madison Division of Extension staff, the county Criminal Justice Services director, a physician, law enforcement (including a member of the drug task force), and a community member.


► Additional services

The diversion specialist and the recovery court case manager also facilitate the Comprehensive Community Service program. This program, which focuses on unique needs related to mental health and substance use, is offered in every county. In Chippewa County, it is offered in both diversion programs through a partnership with the county Department of Human Services.

Additionally, the county's Criminal Justice Service Department manages a three-bed sober living house for individuals in the Front-End Intervention Treatment and recovery court programs who lack a safe and sober place to live.

Chippewa County's Criminal Justice Service Department remains committed to implementing evidence-based interventions that offer individuals a path toward lasting change. By leveraging diversion programs, treatment-focused alternatives, and strong community partnerships, we strive to reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and support individuals in rebuilding their lives. As we continue to refine and expand these initiatives, our focus remains on fostering a healthier, more resilient community. ■

Rose Baier is the criminal justice services director for Chippewa County and has worked in the criminal justice area for 28 years in both the juvenile and adult systems. She has been instrumental in creating adult diversion programs and the Chippewa County Crime Stoppers program. Baier is also the coordinator for the "Take a Stand Against Meth" campaign and a facilitator for the Criminal Justice Collaborating Council.



The First-Time Offender program allows prosecutors to focus their time and resources on higher-risk cases while minimizing harm for low-risk offenders, enabling them to change their behavior.



THE HO-CHUNK NATION

Healing to Wellness Court: A Culturally Rooted Path to Justice

By Robert J. Mann, Healing and Wellness Court Project Coordinator, Ho-Chunk Nation

When Native nations first began developing their own wellness courts, they sought a term that resonated culturally, one that went beyond the conventional “drug court” label. The result was the “tribal healing to wellness court,” a name that reflects the deeply ingrained Native values of healing and holistic well-being. This complex initiative, crafted by a coalition of tribal leaders and professionals from the justice, substance abuse, public health and social services fields, is far more than just a legal system. It’s a transformative program designed to address substance abuse while honoring tribal traditions.

► A vision for wellness

In November 2018, the Ho-Chunk Nation Legislature enacted the Ho-Chunk Healing to Wellness Court Code. A component of the tribal justice system, the code incorporates and adapts the wellness court concept to meet the specific substance abuse needs of the Ho-Chunk Nation while emphasizing wellness as an ongoing journey.

The program is overseen by a diverse team of professionals comprising a judge, special prosecutor, defense bar representative, project coordinator, case

manager, probation/parole officer, treatment provider, social services representative, Ho-Chunk Nation law enforcement, traditional court representative, and Ho-Chunk Nation legislator. The team ensures that cultural wisdom and traditional practices are considered and supported as fundamental elements of programs, policies and activities to improve behavioral health.

The court meets weekly for staffing and bi-weekly for status review hearings in the traditional courtroom of the Ho-Chunk Nation Tribal Courthouse. Featuring a unique design, the traditional courtroom has a circular layout with a central fireplace. Here, the judge foregoes a robe but maintains strict adherence to legal procedures and protocols. The non-adversarial approach helps the participant focus on the healing process instead of retribution and punishment.

While adhering to the best practices for decision-making and treatments from the national organization All Rise, the tribal healing to wellness court draws from traditional Ho-Chunk problem-solving methods and utilizes the tribe’s unique strengths, culture and history.

As a member of the Wisconsin Association of Treatment Court Professionals, the tribal healing to wellness court



►

The court meets weekly for staffing and bi-weekly for status review hearings in the traditional courtroom of the Ho-Chunk Nation Tribal Courthouse. Featuring a unique design, the traditional courtroom has a circular layout with a central fireplace.



contributes to training initiatives and educates other treatment courts about Native traditions. In addition, the Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Du Flambeau, La Courte Oreilles, Potawatomi, and Oneida tribes formed their own Wisconsin Association of Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts to meet and share ideas.

The Ho-Chunk Nation does not have a reservation but operates within a 14-county service area. Initially, the tribal healing to wellness court's jurisdiction was limited to Jackson County, but a recent change to tribal law has expanded eligibility. Now, any member of a federally recognized tribe aged 18 or older who resides within the tribal healing to wellness court's service area, which encompasses Jackson County and any Wisconsin county where the court can provide adequate supervision, may participate. This expansion opens the door for more Native members to seek alternatives to incarceration and embark on a path of healing.

The court also collaborates with neighboring county treatment courts to provide cultural advice to tribal participants in their programs. In addition, it works with public defenders' offices in other counties to determine whether any tribal members wish to have their cases transferred to Jackson County to participate in the tribal healing to wellness court program, provided the applicant can establish residency in Jackson County.

One key logistical challenge the court faced was maintaining the integrity of randomized drug testing as recommended by best practices, especially on weekends and holidays. An agreement was reached with Black River Memorial Hospital in Black River Falls to conduct

testing on these days, ensuring continuous, high-quality monitoring of participants.

By intertwining cultural traditions with modern rehabilitation strategies, the Ho-Chunk Nation Healing to Wellness Court is not only changing lives but also contributing to the ongoing community and nation-building efforts of Indigenous tribal governments in Wisconsin. The court serves more than just as a justice system; it's a beacon of hope, demonstrating that healing and justice can coexist. ■

Robert J. Mann is the Healing and Wellness Court project coordinator for the Ho-Chunk Nation.

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MARQUETTE COUNTY

Law Enforcement Check-In Program Makes a Difference

By Chad Hendee, Circuit Court Judge, Marquette County

The Marquette County Treatment Court is a hybrid treatment court that serves individuals involved in the criminal justice system who struggle with drugs and alcohol.

Drug treatment courts are specialized court programs designed to help individuals with substance use disorders break the cycle of addiction and criminal behavior. Instead of traditional punitive measures, these courts focus on rehabilitation by providing structured treatment, close supervision and judicial oversight.

Participants undergo regular drug testing, counseling and court appearances while receiving support services like job training and housing assistance. The goal is to reduce recidivism and improve public safety by addressing the root causes of substance-related offenses. Successful completion of the program can lead to lesser penalties or reduced

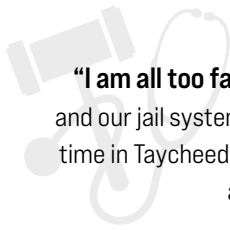
or dismissed charges, helping individuals productively reintegrate into society.

In recent years, the Marquette County Treatment Court has developed a unique program that integrates law enforcement check-ins with participants as part of their recovery process. The program began modestly, initially involving a deputy assigned solely to participants who were struggling. The goal was to provide an additional layer of oversight, ensuring that participants followed the program rules and stayed on track while also offering them more support. Over time, however, the program has expanded and evolved in ways that have yielded unexpected yet rewarding results.

Today, upon entering the program, each participant is assigned a law enforcement deputy who regularly checks in with them in the community or at their homes. The check-ins are structured to provide consistent support while allowing

“The direct involvement of Judge Chad Hendee and his team in the lives of the participants is what makes this program work in Marquette County. Without a strong judicial commitment, these programs would not be successful. Judge Hendee and his team go out of their way to work with each participant and get to know them individually, ensuring they have the support they need to be successful.”

— Ron Barger, Marquette County Administrator



"I am all too familiar with the challenges that drug and alcohol addictions pose for families and our jail systems. I have lost close family members to drug overdoses and have another who spent time in Taycheedah Correctional Institution. Families are often ill-equipped to handle drug addictions, and the financial burden on our county jail systems is astronomical.

Not everyone will successfully complete our diversion programs, but those who do receive a second lease on life. The cost savings of one recovered individual amount to thousands of dollars for the county. The value for the participant who can rebuild broken relationships and create a new life is priceless."

— **TIM MCCUMBER**, Board Chair, Sauk County Board of Supervisors

for flexibility as participants move through the program.

In the early phases, deputies conduct check-ins every other week to ensure participants adhere to program requirements and receive the guidance they need. As participants progress and show stability, these meetings become less frequent.

Over time, the interactions evolve into more organic encounters as deputies become familiar with participants' schedules, routines and daily lives. Rather than feeling like formal compliance checks, these meetings develop into meaningful conversations that reinforce trust and accountability.

After each interaction, deputies provide the program coordinator with a written report documenting the participant's progress, any concerns, and support they may need moving forward. This process helps maintain clear communication between law enforcement and the treatment court team, ensuring that participants receive the right balance of oversight and encouragement.

One of the most significant impacts has been the development of positive relationships between participants and law enforcement deputies. Many individuals in the program have spent much of their lives avoiding or fearing law enforcement due to past arrests or negative interactions. Through these regular check-ins, they come to see deputies as real people who genuinely want to support them in their recovery. Likewise, deputies who previously encountered these individuals only in the context of arrests or criminal activity now have the opportunity to view them in a different light: as people who are working hard to change their lives.

Ultimately, the Marquette County Treatment Court's law enforcement check-in program demonstrates how a compassionate, community-based approach to justice can bring about positive change for individuals in recovery and the deputies who serve them. ■

The Honorable Chad Hendee was elected Marquette County circuit court judge in April 2019. He previously served as Marquette County's district attorney and as an assistant district attorney in Sauk County.



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UW-Madison students evaluated Monroe County's drug court, providing a useful report for the county and learning firsthand the transformative power behind specialized court programs. Photo credit: Dr. Patti Coffey, UW-Madison

Evaluating the Monroe County Drug Court

By Abigail Becker, Senior Associate for Communications & Outreach, UW-Madison UniverCity Alliance

Tara Nichols, the justice programs manager in Monroe County, hopes the stigma of substance use disorder is broken every time someone observes drug treatment court.

Understanding people's experiences with substance use disorder, the criminal justice system, and efforts to access treatment is critical for students seeking to work with this population. "Humanizing addiction is a lot different when you see somebody's struggles," said Nichols. "It's not like what's in a textbook."

To comply with the treatment court's best practice of conducting an external evaluation at least once every five years, Monroe County partnered with UniverCity Alliance, a UW-Madison initiative that connects Wisconsin local



UniverCity Alliance
Better. Places. Together.

governments with university resources to address community-identified goals.

In this case, Monroe County's

goal was clear and aligned well with Dr. Patti Coffey's Psychology 601: Issues in Prisoner Reentry class at UW-Madison. Coffey is committed to community-based learning opportunities for students interested in careers related to criminal justice or clinical services.

Through a partnership with UniverCity, the students observed Monroe County's drug treatment court, watched a graduation ceremony, interviewed staff and participants, and evaluated the program across three standards selected from the national All Rise "Adult Treatment Court Best Practices Standards."

Ultimately, the students found that Monroe County's

drug court meets a significant portion of the standards they evaluated, although there is room for improvement with specific cultural training.

Their report incorporated qualitative interviews, quantitative data, and a review of program documents that will assist Monroe County in sharing progress with elected officials, applying for grants, and identifying potential changes to the drug court program.

A benefit of this partnership, Nichols said, was viewing Monroe County's drug court from an outside perspective.



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Conducting a holistic review of a program can be challenging while balancing day-to-day work.

"Having a focused time to really talk about the program and answer

questions about what we think we're doing well and what we can improve upon, and knowing that was going to help the students look at our data was really great," Nichols said. ■

Abigail Becker is the senior associate for communications and outreach at the UW-Madison UniverCity Alliance. The mission of UniverCity is to improve the quality and visibility of UW-Madison's education, research and service contribution to the high-road development of local communities that reflects the values of equity, democracy and sustainability.



"Monroe County's success with court and diversion programs is attributed to our multi-department approach. Our justice coordinating committee, which includes the district attorney, sheriff's office, justice programs, elected officials, and other partners, meets quarterly. All our current and past circuit court judges support, and, in some cases, even help lead, our drug and OWI courts.

The county board of supervisors backs the effort to hold offenders accountable while providing them with an opportunity to succeed outside of incarceration.

I'm always excited to hear our graduates' testimonials each year as they share their stories of flourishing outside of incarceration and becoming thriving, active members of society."

— **CEDRIC SCHNITZLER**, Board Chair, Monroe County Board of Supervisors

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Teen court panel members in Buffalo and Pepin counties participate in training, learning how to ask restorative questions, facilitate a hearing, and develop restorative requirements for their peers.

Creating Positive Change

How Teen Courts Support Youth and Communities

By Deilee Calvert, Communications Manager, UW-Madison Division of Extension

Patrol Captain Mike Kowalski of the Marquette County Sheriff's Office believes in giving teenagers a second chance. "The negative ramifications of a mistake can be especially impactful when a young person is just starting out in life," said Kowalski, noting that a citation can disqualify a young person from military service or make it difficult to secure student loans.

That does not mean Kowalski looks the other way when teens break the law. Instead, when dealing with a first-time, nonviolent offense, he refers them to the Marquette County Teen Court Program. Teen courts, some of which have been established in partnership with counties and the

UW-Madison Division of Extension, provide an alternative to navigating the court system and paying fines. When teen courts utilize restorative practices, the focus is on encouraging teens to reflect on the impact of their actions and make amends.

As the parent of a teenager, Kowalski has a new appreciation for the teen court process. "When my son came home with a traffic citation, I contacted the issuing officer and asked if he could participate in teen court instead of paying the fine," said Kowalski. "We have an opportunity to teach teens how their actions affect others. Paying a fine, especially if it's their parents' money, might

“We have an opportunity to teach teens how their actions affect others.”

— Patrol Captain Mike Kowalski, Marquette County Sheriff's Office

not teach them anything.” Through teen court, teenagers talk with peers about the harm their behavior has or could cause to all those involved, and that perspective-taking process is important.

According to Jonathan Scharrer, a clinical associate professor at UW-Madison Law School and director of the Restorative Justice Project, youth have some limitations in their ability to make decisions that take their future and the people around them into account because their frontal lobes are still developing. “In thinking about how we empower youth to find and embrace their own talents and their inner strengths, to thrive rather than being stuck in cycles of harm or violence,” said Scharrer, “how do we help youth change that narrative to one of harmony where they feel connected to and a part of their community?”

► What is teen court?

In Marquette County, when a teenager violates a law or school policy, such as vaping or theft, a school official, law enforcement officer, county social worker, or judge can refer them to teen court. Once referred, the teenager appears before a panel of peers.

Christa Van Treeck, an associate professor and 4-H youth development educator in Marquette County, played a key role in initiating the teen court program. Now, she collaborates with county partners to manage the program, train panelists and support the youth involved. She explains that teen court differs from what one might envision in a traditional courtroom. “We literally sit in a circle with just chairs,” said Van Treeck, “engaging in a conversation led by the youth with the person who has been referred and their parent or guardian.”

The panel asks questions to understand the root cause of the



behavior. Based on that discussion, everyone in the circle agrees on requirements specific to the situation that are designed to be educational rather than punitive. If the requirements are not met within a certain timeframe, the teenager will enter the court system with a citation.

Among other options, they may be asked to take an online educational course, perform community service, conduct an activity to broaden their community awareness, or develop life or coping skills.

A central aspect of teen courts that utilize restorative practices is the youth panel. Teen panelists receive training and learn about restorative justice and the role of collaborative discussion. Before each case, Van Treeck meets with the youth to support them in preparing questions and stays during the session in case they need guidance.

Having a panel of youth is particularly meaningful for teenagers as they expand their own awareness and develop into their own people. That often means testing boundaries against adults. “They will hear what a peer has to say in a way that someone older may not be able to offer,” said Scharrer.

Continued on page 22



Teen court panel members in Marquette County hold a mock session to demonstrate the restorative process.

The idea behind the juvenile justice system is that it should be more restorative. It should be behavior-changing so they do not re-offend.

Continued from page 21

► Benefitting youth

Buffalo and Pepin counties share a teen court coordinated by Annie Lisowski, an Extension professor and 4-H youth development educator for those counties. “It’s a 360-degree approach. Youth with violations are given requirements to complete from their peers, aimed at rethinking their behavior, repairing relationships, and restoring their image in the community,” said Lisowski.

She works closely with Danielle Schalinske, social services manager and youth justice coordinator in Buffalo County. Schalinske has been active with teen courts and youth justice for more than 20 years, sending referrals to the program and serving on the county advisory committee. “The adult system is really a consequence-based system. You get sentenced, you go to jail, you serve probation,” said Schalinske. “In contrast, the idea behind the juvenile justice system is that it should be more restorative. It should be behavior-changing so they do not re-offend.”

Schalinske frequently speaks with youth after they have fulfilled their requirements. “It’s very interesting to hear them say, ‘It was scary. I didn’t want to tell those kids my age what I had done. My parents were in the room, and they got to hear everything too.’” She finds that helping them process other people’s feelings can be very effective.

Schalinske believes that teen court offers a two-fold benefit for the volunteers who serve as panelists and the youth referred to the program. She sees value when a group of young people come together to collaborate, reach consensus and exercise decision-making. Scharrer agrees.

“Providing these opportunities helps youth develop skills in communication, conflict resolution, self-confidence and leadership,” said Scharrer. The process allows young participants the opportunity to understand that situations have nuances and resolutions are not one-size-fits-all. This understanding encourages them to move beyond binary thinking, helping them see multiple solutions to individual problems.

The benefits go beyond the youth involved. Research shows that when victims are part of the restorative process,



they are less likely to be upset about the crime, fear re-victimization, or fear the offending youth. The ability to ask questions and express one’s perspective is important for healing and reducing long-term stress.

“Restorative justice really is a future-oriented process that separates the person from the behavior. It says we, as a community, don’t agree with this behavior, but we are not labeling and ostracizing or engaging in exclusionary processes with the youth in question,” said Scharrer. Instead, teen courts offer them a pathway back. “And oftentimes we adults can be quite surprised by the incredible insight and wisdom that can be given to us by our youth.” ■

Deilee Calvert is the communications manager for the UW-Madison Division of Extension. Focusing on agriculture, natural resources, community development, human development and relationships, health and well-being, and positive youth development, Extension connects campus and communities, creating key connection points for families, communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government.

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THE MEN'S SHED

Building Community and Connection in Juneau and Barron Counties

Conversation and a shared meal have made the Men's Shed in Juneau County a "highlight of the month" for its participants.

As we age, people often experience an increasing sense of isolation and disconnection. This tends to be particularly true for older men who are less likely than women to have well-established social networks and spaces where they can gather, share experiences, and stay engaged with their communities.

Recognizing this service gap, magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Eagle County, which serves Juneau, Crawford and Richland

counties, began searching for solutions. This led Abby Heckman, a dementia care specialist with the agency, to attend a webinar about a Men's Shed program in Minnesota.

What began as a small grassroots effort in Australia has evolved into an international movement, addressing social isolation through local Men's Shed chapters in communities across the globe. "The concept is simple yet powerful," says Heckman, "create a dedicated space where men can meet, work on projects and build friendships."

► From idea to reality

The first step for Heckman and her team in creating a local chapter was to determine its structure. The movement itself



THE MEN'S SHED

Photos courtesy of the Barron County ADRC.
Taken at their recent Men's Shed meetings.

“The concept is simple yet powerful: create a dedicated space where men can meet, work on projects, and build friendships.” – Abby Heckman

allows for flexibility, enabling each community to shape its Shed according to local needs. “From the beginning, we knew that food and educational programming would be essential for attracting participants to a monthly gathering,” explained Heckman.

The local conservation club, Outdoors Forever, offered the use of its shed, giving Heckman a location. With the ADRC providing a small amount of funding and transportation, the Men's Shed in Juneau County officially launched with a kick-off meeting in August 2022, just four months after its conception.

► A growing community

“One of our primary goals was to create a welcoming and safe space for men aged 60 and older, especially those experiencing isolation,” says Heckman. This commitment enabled the group to gain official approval from the Men's Shed Association, making it the first chapter to incorporate dementia-friendly principles into its core values.

The chapter initially averaged 25 attendees at the monthly meetings, which have included presentations on beekeeping, the history of clocks, and cranberry farming.

Continued on page 26

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THE MEN'S SHED

Continued from page 25

Thanks to outreach efforts and support from several local champions, the Shed now regularly welcomes 60 to 70 participants. In January 2025, the group celebrated its largest gathering yet with over 80 men in attendance, many of whom were veterans, for a presentation from the nearby Air National Guard base Volk Field. Plans are underway to organize field trips, with Volk Field likely to be the first destination.

Beyond the meetings, friendships have flourished. Participants are discovering other local opportunities and carpooling to make sure no one misses out. “The Shed is accomplishing precisely what it aimed to do: bring people together,” says Heckman. “The men involved value the connections, the coffee and the shared meals.”

► Sustaining the movement

Attendees donate to the Men's Shed, and some local businesses, including Kwik Trip, have stepped in to help with food, but more sponsors and a larger facility are needed.

To address the latter, the ADRC and the Juneau County Land and Water Department collaborated to secure an American Rescue Plan Act grant to combat social isolation. With these funds, they are partnering with the conservation club to construct a new facility. Scheduled to open this summer, the Conservation Education Center will accommodate up to 200 people and serve various community functions, including hunter safety programs and Men's Shed meetings.

Beyond its regular meetings, the Juneau County Shed continues to evolve. In 2024, organizers began incorporating pre-meeting activities such as CPR training, flu shots and tobacco awareness sessions. This year, they are introducing dementia-friendly programming to support caregivers.

State officials have acknowledged the program's potential, helping with data collection efforts to enable the county to secure additional grants for its sustainability and expansion. Other counties, including Barron, have also taken notice.

Continued on page 28

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THE MEN'S SHED

The [Barron County] Shed's programming has been guided by a four-member committee, ensuring that it is diverse and engaging. Early meetings featured presentations from a K-9 unit and a demonstration on tapping maple syrup.

Continued from page 26

► Expanding the Men's Shed Movement

Inspired by the success in Juneau County, Trisha Witham, a dementia care specialist at the ADRC of Barron County, launched a local chapter in 2024 with ARPA funding.

Identifying a suitable meeting location was crucial. The Barron County Highway Shop proved to be the perfect venue, providing ample space at no cost to the program. Within just a few months, attendance quickly increased to an average of 35 to 40 men per meeting.

According to Witham, a four-member committee has guided the Shed's programming, ensuring that it is diverse and engaging. Early meetings featured presentations from a K-9 unit and a demonstration on tapping maple syrup.

"Future topics and hands-on projects are already planned," says Witham, "including a presentation by a hunting guide, a wood carving activity, and a community service initiative to build wheelchair ramps."

To support the program's long-term sustainability, the Barron County ADRC partnered with the senior nutrition program to designate the Shed as a pop-up meal site eligible for funding through the federal Older Americans Act. Marketing efforts, including newspaper articles and social media outreach, have raised awareness; however, similar to Juneau County, word of mouth has proven to be the most effective way to attract new members.

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Transportation, initially funded by the ARPA grant, has been crucial in ensuring accessibility. As the grant approaches its expiration, efforts are underway to secure community donations to maintain this service.

► The power of connection

As word spreads, the programs in Juneau and Barron counties continue to grow and have been followed by a

chapter in Portage County and a joint chapter in La Crosse and Monroe counties.

For many participants, the Men's Shed meetings have become the highlight of their month. They provide a space for laughter, friendship and purpose. These meetings prove that the need for community never fades and serve as a testament to the power of connection. ■

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Burnett County Shoreland Incentives Program

Turning a Mission Statement Into Action

By Nathan Ehalt, County Administrator, Burnett County

Water possesses an undeniable appeal. Its sound, scent and beauty inspire us to paint, photograph and build our lives around it.

In Burnett County, located in northwest Wisconsin, this attraction is especially evident. With over 500 lakes, the county boasts forested landscapes, pristine water clarity and abundant wildlife, making it a popular destination for tourists and an ideal location for cabins and second homes. However, the demand for waterfront properties has created development pressures



that jeopardize water quality and shoreline habitats.

In the 1980s and 1990s, concerns about water pollution and invasive species escalated, prompting the creation of initiatives to protect shoreland habitats. The economic importance of these properties is significant. In 2024, Burnett County had 29,390 taxable parcels, of which 8,548 were shoreland properties.

Remarkably, these shoreland parcels contributed 52.5% of the total \$41 million in net tax revenue despite representing a smaller share of the total properties. Research indicates that even a slight 3-foot decline in water



The program aligns with state standards for shoreland zoning while taking an innovative approach by offering incentives to waterfront property owners who commit to preserving or restoring natural buffers along shorelines.

Photo credit: Linda Luman of Webster. Submitted for the 2022 Discover Wisconsin photo contest sponsored by the WCA.

clarity, caused by stormwater runoff and invasive species, could reduce a lakeshore property value by nearly \$30,000, underscoring the need for protective measures.

► The birth of the Shoreland Incentives Program

To address these challenges, the Burnett County Board launched the Shoreland Incentives Program in 2000, funded by state grants totaling nearly \$1.3 million over 25 years. These funds have supported staffing, cost-sharing for conservation projects, and efforts to combat invasive species like purple loosestrife. The program aligns with state standards for shoreland zoning while taking an innovative approach by offering incentives to waterfront property owners who commit to preserving or restoring natural buffers along shorelines.

Property owners who enroll in the program sign a

restrictive shoreline covenant, which ensures compliance with county regulations and preservation standards. Program requirements include maintaining a vegetation buffer that extends at least 35 feet from the ordinary high-water mark, with an optional 30-foot viewing and access corridor. Enrollment is available to properties that already meet these standards, as well as those undergoing voluntary or required restoration.

To promote participation, the program provides a combination of financial and nonfinancial incentives:

- An initial enrollment payment of \$250 and an annual payment of \$50 per parcel to the owner
- A complimentary site visit by an expert to evaluate and recommend preservation or restoration actions
- An exclusive hat or shirt that identifies the landowner as a program participant, along with an optional shoreline sign
- Cost-sharing opportunities for projects such as rain gardens, rock infiltration basins and stormwater control measures

► Impact and success

By the end of 2024, the program had preserved shoreline buffers on 810 parcels, spanning over 54 miles of shoreland across more than 110 lakes and rivers in 19 of the county's 21 townships. The combination of financial incentives and technical assistance has proven effective in encouraging landowners to participate.

To ensure compliance, at least 10% of enrolled properties are subject to annual spot checks. Additionally, new property owners receive letters informing them about the program and their property's enrollment status.

The success of Burnett County's Shoreland Incentives Program has attracted attention from neighboring counties and states facing similar challenges as development pressures increase. By combining education with financial incentives, the program has not only preserved shoreland habitats and water quality but has also enhanced property values and secured ongoing grant funding for the county.

Aligning with the county's mission "To Provide Vision and Stewardship," the Shoreland Incentives Program serves as a model for sustainable shoreline management and stands as a testament to the significance of proactive conservation efforts. ■

Nathan Ehalt has been the county administrator for Burnett County since 2013. He holds a master's degree in public administration from Hamline University and served as community development director for the city of North St. Paul, Minnesota, before moving to Wisconsin.



Rodriguez meets with students before joining them for a hike on the Ice Age Trail in St. Croix Falls.

Pathways of Service

WISCONSIN LT. GOV. SARA RODRIGUEZ

By Michelle Gormican Thompson, Thompson Communications

As a young neuroscience graduate from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1997, Sara Rodriguez was at a crossroads with two very different applications in front of her. One for a doctoral program and the other for the Peace Corps.

“Research, science and numbers have always made me happy,” said Rodriguez. “I was born and raised in Wisconsin and after college, I thought I’d get a Ph.D., but was drawn to the mission and excitement of the Peace Corps.”

That decision led her to a post in Samoa in the South Pacific Ocean as a volunteer helping the local community with HIV, AIDS and reproductive health. It was here that she fell in love with public health and the profound impact of this important work.

After her service in the Peace Corps, she connected with the World Health Organization, where she received career advice that would once again set her down a new path: that of nursing.

“I went back to school at Johns Hopkins University and earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in nursing,” she said. “It was the

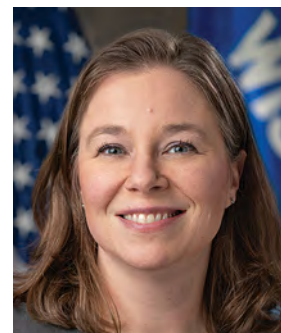
best decision I ever made, connecting the dots between nursing and public health. I was an emergency room nurse in Baltimore, and it was a powerful lesson in meeting people where they are and the importance of taking care of our people.”

Post graduation, Rodriguez received a two-year fellowship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where she focused on applied epidemiology training as an epidemic intelligence service officer stationed in Oklahoma.

“In this role, I found myself on the first commercial plane that landed after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans,” she said. “We stayed on a U.S. Navy ship as hotels were not open.” Rodriguez would visit ERs, get data and help as much as she could on the ground. “We were up in helicopters overlooking the disaster zone, understanding how hospitals work from an infection control perspective.”

Following her fellowship, Rodriguez married and moved to Colorado, but the needs of her parents and a desire to return to her Wisconsin roots with their two children ultimately brought her back to Brookfield.

Her career took another turn when she entered the



Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez



Rodriguez volunteering as a nurse in Haiti during her time studying at Johns Hopkins University.

private sector, working on clinical products aimed at improving public health. While she gained valuable experience in the industry, she felt a disconnect from the direct impact of her work. “It felt like a coat that didn’t fit,” she said, “I was looking for a role where I could serve my community.”

After leading the care management division at Advocate Aurora Health Care, Rodriguez launched her own consulting business, leveraging her expertise in public health and health care management.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically shifted her focus. Witnessing the devastating impact of the virus and the ensuing public health crisis, she felt compelled to act. The unprecedented time and a deep sense of responsibility to her community fueled her decision to run for office. Ultimately, she served for two years representing Wisconsin Assembly District 13, covering parts of Milwaukee and Waukesha counties, bringing her nursing expertise to the state Legislature and working to impact responsible public policy.

A perfect storm of redistricting and then-Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes running for the U.S. Senate opened the door for Rodriguez to bring her clinical nursing experience to the entire state. And on Jan. 3, 2023, Sara Rodriguez, MSN, MPH, RN, was sworn in as Wisconsin’s 46th lieutenant governor.

► Opportunities and challenges

“As lieutenant governor, I have visited all 72 counties to learn what people want from state government,” said Rodriguez. “They want us to work together, neighbor to neighbor. It was never a goal of mine to run for office. This desire to serve comes from nursing and has nothing to do with politics.”



Rodriguez speaks with a U.S. Army officer while commemorating Veterans Day in the village of Brandon in Fond du Lac County.

Sara Rodriguez’s journey is truly a testament to the power of diverse experiences and the impact one individual can have on their community and beyond.



Rodriguez poses for a photo with her fishing guide following the Governor’s Fishing Opener in the village of Siren in Burnett County.

A self-described “servant leader,” Rodriguez believes in setting people up for success and giving them the tools and skills to accomplish this.

“You need to surround yourself with people who think differently and put your ego aside, you need to

meet people where they are,” she said. “I took this job to make a little bit of a difference. I understand government can implement policies that make life easier. I love talking to people and helping to problem solve.”

In her role, she strives to position Wisconsin in the best possible place. “Our state is a great place to open a business, and we are working with our state’s workforce task force to ensure we can do what we can to support our workers, our housing and our infrastructure needs,” she said. “These pathways are incredibly important for the future of Wisconsin.”

In her spare time, Rodriguez can be found with her husband, 18-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter. Never one to sit still, she loves to hike, has won salsa dancing competitions with her husband, and is a licensed archery instructor for the Girl Scouts.

Sara Rodriguez’s journey is truly a testament to the power of diverse experiences and the impact one individual can have on their community and beyond. Her unique blend of experience in public health and unwavering commitment to serving others makes her a tireless advocate for the people of Wisconsin.

“I love this job and am honored to serve the citizens of Wisconsin,” said Rodriguez. “It is humbling to be in this position, and I can’t wait to see all the good we can accomplish.” ■

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TENTATIVE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

► SUNDAY, SEPT. 21

- 11:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.* Registration
- 12:30 – 1 p.m.* Credentials Pick-up for 2025 WCA Annual Business Meeting
- 1 p.m.* 2025 WCA Annual Business Meeting
- Evening Dinner on Your Own

**Times may change pending Green Bay Packers schedule*

► MONDAY, SEPT. 22

- 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. Registration
- 7 – 8 a.m. WCA Breakfast
- 8 – 9 a.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. WCA Exhibit Hall Open
- 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Opening General Assembly
- 12 – 1 p.m. Exhibitor Luncheon

- 1 – 2 p.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 2 – 3:30 p.m. Exhibit Hall Game Day Challenge
- 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 4:30 – 6 p.m. Exhibitor Reception
- 6 – 7:30 p.m. WCA Dinner

► TUESDAY, SEPT. 23

- 7 – 10:30 a.m. Registration
- 7 – 7:45 a.m. Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation Breakfast
- 8 – 9 a.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 9 – 9:15 a.m. Break
- 9:15 – 10:15 a.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 10:15 – 10:30 a.m. Break
- 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. Concurrent Workshops
- 11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. Closing General Assembly and Lunch

For the latest up-to-date information on registration, speakers and events, visit wicounties.org/conference.

Be sure to stay tuned for new events and details.



2025 Team WisCo

Join us as we celebrate Wisconsin's rich sports culture while emphasizing the values of teamwork and leadership in county government. Just like athletes working together toward victory, county officials must collaborate to lead their communities toward success.

We encourage attendees to show their team spirit by wearing apparel from your favorite sports teams — high school, college or professional — to foster county pride and camaraderie.

We want to see your sports spirit! After registering, you will receive an email encouraging you to send in a photo from your past — whether you were on the field, in the stands or coaching from the sidelines. We'll showcase these memories to highlight the role of teamwork and leadership in sports and in government. □

GENERAL INFORMATION

► Register Online Starting June 2

Registration for the 2025 WCA Annual Conference is online and opens June 2.



To register, visit wicounties.org and click on the "Register Online" icon. This will take you directly to our online registration page, where you can register yourself, as well as any guests, spouses, or additional delegates. Once you have registered, you have the option to pay online with a credit card or have an invoice sent to you via email.

► Transportation

Complimentary shuttle service will be provided on Monday and Tuesday between the participating conference hotels and the Kalahari Resort and Convention Center. Look for a transportation schedule at the WCA registration desk.

► Reserve Hotel Room Starting June 2

Conference hotel room block start date: June 2

Conference hotel room block cut-off date: *Varies by hotel location*

The WCA has room blocks at four hotels in Wisconsin Dells. All room blocks open June 2. County officials are responsible for booking their own hotel rooms. If booking multiple rooms at any of the WCA-selected hotels, you must have a different name for each reservation. Booking multiple rooms under one name is not allowed. Rooms are booked on a first-come, first-serve basis. Visit the conference event page for a complete list of hotel information, rates and registration links.

If you require an accessible room, please contact the WCA at 866-404-2700 to reserve your room by July 16.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact the WCA at 866-404-2700 or mail@wicounties.org.

► Spouse & Guest Tour: Upper Dells Boat Tour

Monday, Sept. 22 | 9:30 a.m.

On the Upper Dells Boat Tour (a two-hour, slow-moving boat tour), we will journey northward, cruising through an awesome path cut by ancient glaciers, passing under pine-coned cliffs, and navigating through the winding river to view iconic sandstone formations like Chimney Rock, Blackhawk's Profile and Romance Cliff. Our adventure begins with the onshore landing at Witches Gulch, a spectacular and spooky walk through a narrow canyon carved by wind and water, and filled with fern glens, shadowy passages and hidden whirlpool chambers. After the boat tour, we will enjoy lunch in the Crystal Room at Buffalo Phil's Grille. Get ready for a fun-filled day! The bus will return the guests around 2 p.m. □





The Team Behind the Magic

By Michelle Gormican Thompson,
Thompson Communications

When people are at the top of their sport or their craft, they often make what they are doing appear to be incredibly easy to the average spectator. But the work behind the scenes is anything but, and that is where the true magic happens.

The team behind Uniquely Wisconsin demonstrates this theory. Their work transcends county lines and tells the story of our state's people, history and community.

"Season three featured a diverse array of interesting, heartfelt, and community-centered stories," said Regan Ernst, lead producer at Discover Mediaworks for the Uniquely Wisconsin brand. "It was a genuine pleasure to travel throughout Wisconsin to share stories from the Bad River Tribe in Ashland County, the remarkable trails of Lincoln County, the impressive facilities of Trek headquarters in Jefferson County, the generational family farm transformed into a winery in Calumet County, and the exhilarating thrill of Dirt City Motorplex in Oconto County. These merely scratch the surface of what we accomplished this season."

The Uniquely Wisconsin folks include talented producers, cinematographers, audio engineers and editors to bring the stories to life. Along with Ernst, the team includes producer Jake Rome, producer Travis Boles, cinematographer Teddy Maier, cinematographer Blaze Davis, and audio engineer and editor Portia Danis.



LINCOLN COUNTY

Melissa Omernick, a passionate musher, carries on the legacy of dog sledding in Wisconsin with her infectious passion for the sport and her sled dogs.

► A closer look at the team and the shoots in season three

LINCOLN COUNTY

Wisconsin Musher and the Love for Their Dogs: The Beauty Behind Dog Sledding

"This one had its challenges. With our snowless winter up north last year, we had to be diligent about making the most of the filming. Additionally, trying to keep up with the dogs for filming required expert ATV riding while our team hung off the back with the cameras," said Ernst. "Dog sledding can be a challenge because if the dogs stop, they get stressed out since they simply want to be running. This means that we had to be in constant communication and fully understand our destination before harnessing the dogs."

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Lifeline for Youth: Jefferson County's New Youth Stabilization Program

"What may be considered a somewhat unorthodox Uniquely Wisconsin episode was quite impactful," said Ernst. "I tend to be drawn to stories that would have a hard time being told on Discover Wisconsin, and the story of the Matz Center and the Youth Stabilization Facility was one of those cases. We wanted to highlight

the fact that Jefferson County cares deeply about the mental and physical health of its residents. While it was a challenge because we didn't want to film the youth who use the facility to protect their privacy, we knew this was an important story to tell and one that people would be interested in seeing."

ASHLAND COUNTY

Reviving Tradition, Ensuring Tomorrow: Ashland Fishing & Bad River Fish Hatchery

"I had the pleasure to work alongside the Bad River Tribe to ensure that the episode was a knockout piece, and it was," said Ernst. "This episode had some of my favorite clips of the entire season. The tribal members were a pleasure to work with, and we appreciated their participation in this episode. We were able to show a side to fishing that many people in Wisconsin don't get to see. And riding around in boats on Lake Superior wasn't so bad either!"

CALUMET COUNTY

Olympic Biathlon Training Facility: Ariens Nordic Center in Brillion

"Biathlons were a topic I knew very little about from the start, but I found the story to be interesting once I dove in," said cinematographer Teddy Maier. "I will never forget desperately trying to keep up with the skiers in our golf cart. It was wonderful getting to work with the Ariens family on this episode and their story was such a great example of the impact you can have on your local community."

OCONTO COUNTY

Uncover Culinary Charm in the Northwoods: Braise North

"This episode was such a fun piece to work on," said Ernst. "Honestly, the food was incredible! We ate there for two days, breakfast and dinner, and never grew tired of their food options. (My tip: get the empanadas

To see season four stories when they debut in September, as well as the current three seasons, visit Discover Wisconsin's YouTube page at youtube.com/DiscoverWI and scroll down to the "Uniquely Wisconsin" section. You can also listen to "The Cabin" podcast on your favorite podcast player, where counties in the program are featured.

To learn more and join the Emmy Award-winning Uniquely Wisconsin brand, contact WCA President & CEO Mark O'Connell at 866-404-2700 or Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann at 262-306-2200.



OCONTO COUNTY

Founded by husband-wife duo Dave and Rebecca Swanson, Lakewood's Braise North is known for its farm-to-table ethos and gourmet delights.

and pastries.) This episode featured business owners Becky and Dave trying to keep up with their location in Lakewood. It showcases their dedication to using locally sourced foods and supporting farmers in the area, which was wonderful to see firsthand. All the staff and visitors were kind and welcoming, making for a smooth-going episode. I'd go back!" ■



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NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the Board Room

with **Attorney Andy Phillips** and
ATTOLLES
LAW, S.C.

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WCA
WISCONSIN COUNTIES
ASSOCIATION

SAVE THE DATES for upcoming webinars: May 28 — June 25 — July 23 — August 27 — October 22 — November 19 — December 17

May “In the Board Room” to Focus on Judicial Privacy Act

Join us on Wednesday, May 28 for the next installment of the “In the Board Room with Attolles Law” webinar series. We will discuss Act 235 (the Judicial Privacy Act), almost two months post-implementation.

In addition to covering the legal requirements related to Act 235 compliance, we will discuss implementation challenges and progress. We will also review the status of proposed legislation that is intended to supplement Act 235 and provide additional clarity for counties to adequately

shield a judicial officer’s personal information. To provide perspective from the front lines of implementation, special guest Staci Hoffman, Jefferson County Register of Deeds, will join the attorneys from Attolles Law.

To attend the live webinars and receive the webinar link, pre-registration at bit.ly/InTheBoardRoom25 is required. There is no cost to register. The webinars are recorded and posted on the WCA website at wicounties.org. □

Monday County Leadership Meetings | EVERY MONDAY AT 11 A.M.

This weekly virtual meeting features updates from the WCA Government Affairs team and Attolles Law, association announcements, and guest speakers, such as state agency staff and legislators. A link to the virtual meeting is emailed to WCA members each week.



Prime Exclusive Offer for WCA Members

The WCA has partnered with Amazon Business for a new, exclusive program. WCA member counties and their departments are now eligible to sign up for a free Amazon Business Prime membership that includes free and fast shipping, a pre-approved line of credit, and a 25% discount on select office, maintenance, repair, operational and IT products. WCA members can also leverage a competitively awarded contract by OMNIA Partners to purchase on Amazon Business across all categories for additional savings. Contact the WCA for more information.

Group Health Trust and County Mutual 2025 Scholarship Applications Due May 9

Applications are being accepted until May 9 for scholarships to a Wisconsin college or university from the WCA Group Health Trust and the Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation. Visit wcaght.org and wisconsincountymutual.org for details.



Interactive Opioid Payment Tool Now Available from Forward Analytics



Need an estimate on how much your county has received in opioid settlement funds?

Forward Analytics created an interactive opioid payment tool utilizing data from settlement value calculations prepared by PMA Securities.

The tool, available at forward-analytics.net, can be useful in planning discussions. Counties should consult with their corporation counsel to verify the numbers, as they are estimates only.

To use the tool, go online, select a year and then select a participating county or municipality to see how much they were awarded that year from the various litigants.

The tool is also linked on the WCA's Wisconsin Opioid Abatement site at wisopioidabatement.com. The site includes resources shared during the WCA Virtual Opioid Summit held in March, including reporting forms and strategies for using the funds. □



Submit Resolutions for WCA Annual Meeting by June 23

Each year, counties may submit resolutions for consideration at the **WCA Annual Business Meeting**, held in conjunction with the WCA Annual Conference in September. Resolutions adopted at the Annual Business Meeting become part of the WCA Platform.

Per the requirements of the WCA Constitution, all resolutions must be submitted to the WCA office no later than 4:30 p.m.

on Monday, June 23, 2025, to be considered at the 2025 Annual Business Meeting, which is scheduled for Sept. 21 in Sauk County.

To submit a resolution, contact Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, WCA Director of Outreach and Member Engagement, at 608-663-7188 or diedrick@wicounties.org.

See page 39 of the April 2025 issue of Wisconsin Counties for full submission criteria.



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WISCONSIN'S AMERICA250 COMMISSION Connecting with Counties



The **Armed Forces Subcommittee** of Wisconsin's America250 Commission wants to help counties celebrate the upcoming 250th birthday of the United States military in 2025 and the 250th birthday of the United States in 2026. If you have relevant ceremonies, festivals or other events planned in your county, the subcommittee welcomes the opportunity to provide speakers, program materials, color guards and other resources.

To request a speaker or other resources from the Wisconsin National Guard, visit dma.wi.gov/community-relations. To request a speaker from the Wisconsin judiciary, contact Judge Randy Koschnick (retired) at rkixonia@gmail.com.

Learn more about Wisconsin's America250 Commission at wisvetmuseum.com/america250.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

▪ JUNE 16-18

Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference

Join **UW-Madison Division of Extension** on June 16-18 in Wisconsin Rapids for the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference, a hands-on, immersive conference aimed at strengthening rural Wisconsin's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The conference "about small towns, for small towns," is designed for economic developers, local government leaders, and community champions. Attendees will learn new ideas about digital commerce, agritourism, and public-private partnerships. Register by June 3. For more information, visit go.wisc.edu/cec.

▪ JUNE 19

AI, Cybersecurity & Citizen Engagement Summit

Spend the day in Appleton learning why and how to use artificial intelligence, the latest in cybersecurity, and how to establish and strengthen your social media presence. The one-day summit is sponsored by the Local Government Institute of Wisconsin, which includes the WCA. Visit localgovinstitute.org/events for more information and to register.

▪ SEPTEMBER 5

2025 Corporation Counsel/Defense Counsel Forum

The Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation, along with sponsor firms Stadler Sacks, LLC and Crivello, Nichols & Hall, S.C., will hold the 32nd Annual Corporation Counsel/Defense Counsel Forum on Friday, Sept. 5 at the Holiday Inn Stevens Point Convention Center. For more details, visit bit.ly/2025-CountyMutual-CounselForum.



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Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center Loses Federal Funding

By National Association of Counties Staff

Editor's note: The Trump administration has been proposing and advancing widespread reductions to federal government spending. This article focuses on one aspect of cybersecurity funding. Visit [NACo.org](https://naco.org) for more information about these and other cuts to federal programs and staffing.

On March 11, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) announced a \$10 million cut in funding for the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC), which provides critical local assistance for cybersecurity threat detection and analysis resources and support. The announcement was the latest development in a series of funding cancellations from CISA that have affected multiple cybersecurity sharing regimes that support county cybersecurity readiness initiatives. In February, CISA made a similar announcement to withdraw federal support for the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing Analysis Center (EI-ISAC), which provides critical cybersecurity tools and technical assistance to election offices across the country and rural and under-resourced counties at no cost or low cost.

► What is the MS-ISAC?

The MS-ISAC provides no-cost and low-cost cyber threat prevention, protection, response, and recovery for state and local governments. CISA has provided funds to support the MS-ISAC under a cooperative agreement with the Center for Internet Security for nearly 20 years. Under this contract, the MS-ISAC provides more than 17,000 state, local, tribal and territorial entities with the following no- and low-cost services:

- Vulnerability management programs (low-cost)
- End-point protection (no-cost and low-cost)
- IP and domain monitoring
- Notifications of possible compromises

- Incident response resources
- Tools for simplifying security updates
- Secure portals for communication and document sharing
- Cyber intel advisories and alerts
- Malicious code analysis platform
- Self-assessments for cybersecurity management

The \$10 million allocated by CISA accounted for just under half of the MS-ISAC's funding. The Center for Internet Security is reportedly reviewing which operations they will continue and which they will discontinue under a scenario of no federal support for the MS-ISAC.

► What is the EI-ISAC?

The EI-ISAC supports local government threat prevention for election offices. EI-ISAC members have free access to technical support, threat monitoring, election security operations centers, and trainings to bolster election security. According to the EI-ISAC website, the \$10 million cut in funding has effectively halted all operations for the program.

The EI-ISAC serves as an important information-sharing center, allowing election officials to share cybersecurity threat and response tactics. As elections have rapidly become more automated, county election officials have had to become cybersecurity experts in addition to election administrators. The EI-ISAC plays a unique role in cyber support and information sharing, and the loss of access to critical support staff at the EI-ISAC will have an impact on counties that do not have in-house staffing capacity and rely on the EI-ISAC for up-to-date information and resources.

The Impact on Wisconsin Counties

By Trina Zanow, Chief Information Officer, Department of Administration's Division of Enterprise Technology

The state of Wisconsin, along with nearly 600 local and tribal government entities in Wisconsin, including 62 county governments, are members of MS-ISAC and will be impacted by these cuts. The state is currently working to understand how these cuts will affect state and local cybersecurity efforts and taking steps to keep state and local information systems protected.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration's Division of Enterprise Technology (DET) participated in calls with the Center for Internet Security and other state governments in March and April to learn how these changes will affect Wisconsin. The information below reflects DET's understanding following these calls and is subject to change.

Currently, there is no impact on managed security services. This includes network monitoring for all three branches of state government, local governments, school districts, and libraries; malicious domain blocking and reporting; and intrusion detection functionality for the state. In the last three years, DET has received more than 500 security event notifications due to these services.

MS-ISAC has told DET that the following services are or could be impacted by the cuts. The exact impact is currently unknown.

- Cybersecurity advisories and threat intelligence sharing
- Cyber Incident Response Team services, including malicious code analysis, cyber forensics, external vulnerability assessments, and incident response
- Passive threat notification services, including targeted vulnerability notifications, initial access and credential compromise notifications, and IP/domain monitoring
- Cybersecurity awareness, education, and information sharing, including mentoring, working groups, tabletop exercise templates, and webinars
- Cybersecurity assistance services to strengthen cybersecurity for critical infrastructure
- CIS SecureSuite® membership

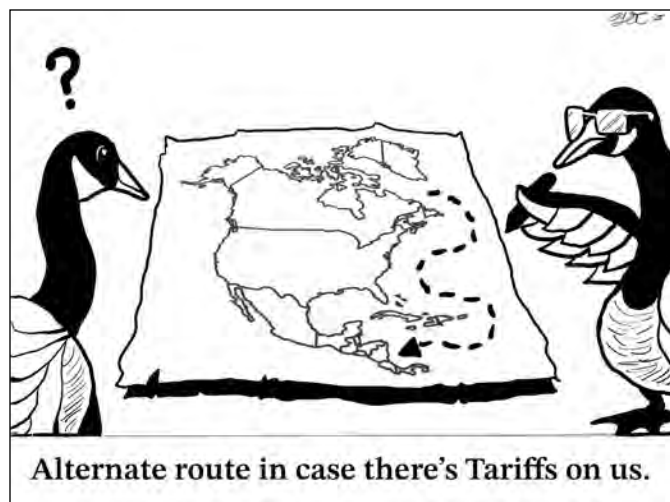
As much of the Center for Internet Security's and MS-ISAC's remaining funding is also federal, there could be further impacts if additional cuts occur. □

► How does this affect counties?

Rural and under-resourced counties have relied on free tools and technical assistance through both the MS-ISAC and EI-ISAC to bolster cyber-readiness and improve security practices. Counties also utilize available resources from the MS-ISAC and EI-ISAC to coordinate with other localities, including cities and municipalities, on cybersecurity readiness and information-sharing. Counties support funding assistance for critical cybersecurity tools and resources required to adequately protect county security at all levels, including the cybersecurity of election infrastructures and election workers.

NACo is urging Congress to re-instate federal funding

for both initiatives to preserve an information-sharing ecosystem that can support county cybersecurity readiness across critical infrastructure areas and core functions, such as in the administration of the nation's elections. ■



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LEGAL ISSUES

RELATING TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: Counties Find Innovative Ways to Fight the Opioid Crisis with Settlement Funds

By Andy Phillips and Jake Apostolu, Attorneys, Attolles Law, s.c.

As most are aware, national opioid settlements were reached with defendants Janssen, Cardinal, McKesson, AmerisourceBergen, Teva, Allergan, CVS, Walgreens, Walmart, and Kroger Co., which resulted in significant payments to Wisconsin counties from each of the defendants.¹ Each settlement includes a list of approved uses for the remediation funds but ultimately leaves it up to states and local governments as to how exactly funds will be distributed. The approved uses and the “core strategies” are listed in Exhibit E to the settlements, which are substantially identical to one another. An example from the Teva Settlement can be found at bit.ly/Exhibit_E.²

Each state has taken a unique approach to distributing opioid settlement funds, often formalized through memorandums of understanding (MOUs).³ These agreements outline how funds should be allocated, balancing state, county and municipal interests. The MOUs typically emphasize treatment, harm reduction, prevention, and recovery services, ensuring compliance with settlement guidelines. The state-by-state variation reflects differing political priorities, public health infrastructures and local needs. Consequently, the landscape surrounding use of settlement funds varies greatly across the country, requiring each county to navigate a unique combination of legal and administrative processes to ensure that the funds make the greatest possible difference in their communities.⁴

In this article, we’ll highlight counties in other states that have creatively and effectively used their settlement dollars to develop and implement drug treatment programs, specialized courts, and jail diversion programs that aim to save lives and address the underlying causes of opioid use disorder and substance abuse generally.

► Bexar County, Texas

Bexar County, Texas, is a leading county in the national fight against opioid-related deaths due, in part, to how severely the epidemic has affected the county. In 2023, the Bexar County medical examiner reported that opioids were involved in more than 40% of the deaths that came through the medical examiner’s office.⁵ Earlier this year, the county declared drug overdoses to be a public health crisis.⁶ Bexar County received about \$14.4 million in opioid settlement funds.⁷ Soon thereafter, the county released a notice of funding availability related to the distribution of the settlement funds.⁸ The notice asked organizations to apply for funding to address the county’s needs with respect to early identification, access to care, and continuity of care — giving specific consideration to opioid abuse prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery, evaluation, and administration.⁹

Following contract negotiations, the Bexar County Board allocated approximately \$8 million to organizations to provide housing, mid-litigation substance abuse treatment services, and inpatient programs.¹⁰ In addition, Bexar County allocated \$1.5 million to a recovery home for mothers recovering from substance abuse disorders and their children, \$95,000 went to hiring a county substance use program coordinator, and more than \$47,000 went to purchasing Narcan for the sheriff’s office.¹¹

► Cumberland County, North Carolina

Having been hit especially hard by the opioid epidemic, counties in North Carolina were awarded a large sum of settlement funds. Cumberland County is set to receive nearly \$31 million over 18 years.¹² In August 2022, the

By focusing on rehabilitation rather than incarceration, these types of programs make real progress toward reducing recidivism and supporting individuals in their personal battles with substance use disorders.

Cumberland County Board approved the use of \$800,000 to support multi-year pilot projects aligning with evidence-based, high-impact strategies outlined in North Carolina's MOU.¹³ Among these strategies is the development and enhancement of criminal justice diversion programs.

For example, the county's Family Drug Treatment Court received \$200,000 to expand services, offering alternatives to incarceration for parents and guardians who are in danger of termination of parental rights due to substance misuse.¹⁴ The

family court filters misdemeanor clients into a specialized court geared towards keeping families together by providing parents with opportunities to avoid drug-related jail time if they can certify their sobriety over a specified period of time.¹⁵ The family court also offers coaching and support to help parents become emotionally, financially and personally self-sufficient through accountability training and behavioral therapy.¹⁶ Participants are generally required to attend court every two weeks. They receive praise and other incentives to maintain their recovery and progress in treatment.¹⁷ Although a parent's successful completion of family court cannot promise that their children will be returned to them, a parent who is successful is much more likely to be determined to be fit to have their child(ren) returned.¹⁸

► **Clay and Dickinson Counties, Iowa**

Clay County, Iowa, is a small county with only 16,000 residents, but the local judicial system has been operating at near capacity for years with nonviolent opioid-related drug charges increasing steadily throughout the epidemic.¹⁹ In response, a local circuit court judge proposed a drug treatment court alternative. Recognizing its financial limitations, Clay County approached its neighbor to the north — Dickinson County — to establish a regional collaborative drug court serving both counties.²⁰ The

goal of the regional drug court is to identify and divert individuals who are charged with qualifying nonviolent offenses from jail to treatment. Upon pleading guilty to drug-related charges, qualifying individuals are sentenced to drug court probation instead of prison.

The drug court was originally funded by the state Department of Corrections, but it only had capacity for 15 spots. Fortunately, settlement funds have since become available to each county. These funds have been used to hire and sustain a full-time probation officer position and

compensate the mental health and substance use disorder experts serving on the community board, which meets with drug court participants twice a month to evaluate their progress.²¹ New projections made after the funding influx expect the court to handle 25 to 30 cases at a time, with enough money to fill in any other gaps in funding.²²

► **Albany County, New York**

Albany County, New York, has been working to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths for years and is finally seeing a year-over-year decline (about 33% from 2022 to 2024).²³ But local officials remain focused on eliminating the problem. Albany County intends to use the over \$1.5 million it received in the settlements to funnel money into some of its more successful initiatives.²⁴

For example, \$400,000 will be dedicated to the county's Department of Mental Health to help employ a part-time nurse practitioner to administer medication for opioid use disorder induction treatment and to implement a second mobile outreach response unit.²⁵ The response units partner with local law enforcement agencies, which share information on overdose survivors and create a daily vulnerable persons list.²⁶ Team members then follow up on every overdose case with a phone call and a home visit.²⁷

Continued on page 46



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION regarding the opioid settlements in Wisconsin and how the dollars are currently being invested, visit wisopioidabatement.com, a website the WCA established to assist counties with the difficult task of determining how to appropriately invest the settlement funds.



LEGAL ISSUES

Continued from page 45

► Benzie County, Michigan

Benzie County is the smallest county in Michigan by land area and one of the smallest by population.²⁸ Its size and remoteness to major urban hubs have contributed to a lack of public transportation in the county, which, in turn, has contributed to poor attendance at parole and probation meetings for the county's drug court program.²⁹ In response to worsening diversion outcomes, Benzie County allocated \$70,000 in settlement funding to local organizations, including \$20,000 to Benzie Bus to transport individuals attending parole and probation services, which are integral components of the diversion program.³⁰ By facilitating access to these services, Benzie County aims to support individuals in meeting legal requirements and accessing treatment, thereby reducing recidivism.

► Reno County, Kansas

Reno County, Kansas, recently implemented its "First-time Drug Felony Diversion Program" through the district attorney's office, funded by a \$25,000 grant from settlement funds.³¹ This program offers first-time drug offenders an opportunity to avoid felony convictions by completing a structured diversion plan, which includes substance use treatment and regular monitoring.³² This approach represents a bit of a departure from the typical diversion program that targets lower-lever misdemeanor clients. However, according to a Reno County news brief posted on Sept. 25, 2024, "[t]he [Reno County] District Attorney's Office is seeing that ... individuals are taking the opportunity to not only keep a serious charge from going on their record, but actively working to improve their life by working on their sobriety and coping mechanisms for issues that may cause them to want to use drugs or alcohol in the future."³³

► Conclusion

The billions of dollars of settlement funds to be paid out over the coming years present a critical opportunity for counties to reshape their response to the opioid crisis through programs such as innovative treatment courts and

diversion programs. While county-by-county approaches may vary, these case studies indicate that the focus should be on addressing the pain points specific to your county — whether they be transportation to drug court or establishing a whole new end-to-end overdose support framework.

Wisconsin counties are encouraged to look into what has and has not worked in the past, listen to key stakeholders, and maximize this rare opportunity to fund programs that save lives without the need to levy a tax or incur county debt. ■

Attolles Law, s.c. works on behalf of Wisconsin counties, school districts and other public entities across the state of Wisconsin. Its president & CEO, Andy Phillips, has served as outside general counsel for the Wisconsin Counties Association for nearly 20 years.

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FIND A LOCAL AGENT AT:
communityinsurancecorporation.com





BIDDER DATABASE

FREE to registered users!

Construction Business Group has launched a Bidder Database in cooperation with The League of Wisconsin Municipalities, The Wisconsin Counties Association and The Wisconsin Towns Association. CBG has collected publicly available information on over **13,700 businesses** - who are likely to bid on public works projects. The Bidder Database includes links to downloadable public documents.

15 categories of information have been collected on every business, including:

- prevailing wage violations
- OSHA violations
- federal and state court civil judgments
- debarments
- environmental violations
- delinquent taxes



CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS GROUP®
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To apply to be a registered user, visit:

responsiblewisconsin.com

