

Social and Economic Factors that Influence Health

The identification of Social and Economic Factors that Influence Health as one of the 11 health priorities in Healthiest Wisconsin 2010 reflects the strong influence of socioeconomic status on health and life expectancy. Many public health programs and services are directly linked to social and economic initiatives throughout Wisconsin. Examples include the “Talk, Read, Listen” campaign in the KidsFirst Initiative; child-care certification and provision; the education and training of childcare providers; the Governor’s “Grow Wisconsin Initiative;” and Medicaid.

The Social and Economic Factors that Influence Health priority has four sets of objectives: improving income levels of Wisconsin households; social connectedness and cultural competence; literacy and educational attainment; and child care.

Progress in Meeting Objectives—Specific Findings

Improving income levels of Wisconsin households. The first objective for this priority seeks to increase the percentage of Wisconsin households that have annual income at or above 300% of the federal poverty level to 70%. In 2000, an estimated 48% of Wisconsin households had income at or above 300% of the poverty level (51% in 2001, 48% in 2002, 49% in 2003, and 50% in 2004), according to Family Health Survey results.

Based on a two-year average, the percent of household residents with household incomes at or above 300% of the FPL is lowest among Hispanics (20% in 2003-2004) and African Americans (24%), and was 42% among American Indians, 48% among Asians, 52% among whites, and 49% overall. There has been no stable pattern of increases or decreases in any of these groups since 2000.

Literacy and educational attainment. Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction show that the high school graduation rate in Wisconsin has improved, from 89.3% in 2000 to 91.8% in 2003 (**2010 target: 95%**).

A second component of this objective seeks to eliminate racial/ethnic disparities in the high school graduation rate. The graduation rate has improved since 2000 for all groups. The high school graduation rate has increased among African Americans (from 51.4% in 2000 to 62.9% in 2003), American Indians (from 73.8% to 78.5%), Asians (from 88.0% to 91.4%), Hispanics (from 69.3% to 76.2%), and whites (from 93.7% to 95.2%).

Sufficient data was not available to measure the other objectives for this priority.

Selected Accomplishments and DHFS Activities

- Awarded over \$3.3 million in grants to counties through the Safe and Stable Families program to fund family preservation, support and reunification services for children and families. Another \$1,077,578 was allocated to the Special Needs Adoption Program.
- Conducted public health education to increase health literacy in general and specifically in WIC and the FoodShare Nutrition Education Program.

- Hosted “Bridges Out of Poverty” workshops where participants learned how economic class affects behaviors and mindsets; the “hidden rules” within economic classes; the resources that affect individual outcomes; and “patterns of survival” as a way of understanding behavior.
- Created ACCESS (Access to Economic Support Services), a Web-based tool that allows Wisconsin citizens to determine if they qualify for certain public assistance programs by entering basic information about themselves and their family. Programs included on the Web site are Medicaid, BadgerCare, SeniorCare, FoodShare, WIC, State Tax Credits, Summer Meals Program, Medicare Part D’s Low Income Subsidy program and the Free School Lunch Program.
- Initiated conversations with Wisconsin Literacy, Inc., a coalition of adult, family, and workplace literacy providers, to identify ways to become involved in literacy efforts and to involve other state agencies, including the Departments of Workforce Development, Public Instruction, and Corrections.
- Increased BadgerCare, a State Children's Health Insurance Program, coverage to about 29,000 children and over 60,000 adults.
- Expanded SeniorCare, a prescription drug program to assist seniors with the cost of their medications, to over 86,000 seniors.
- Increased participation in FoodShare (the former Food Stamps program) through outreach and other activities. In October 2005, FoodShare enabled more than 150,000 families encompassing nearly 360,000 individuals to purchase nutritious foods, freeing up household income to pay for other living expenses.
- Collaborated with the Department of Public Instruction to establish “Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards” to address literacy and numeracy (math and science) standards.
- Implemented an enhanced community transitions program focused on female offenders incarcerated for non-violent crimes who have children in Southeast Wisconsin. In partnership with the Department of Corrections, the goal is to safely reunite children with their mothers and breaking the intergenerational cycle of incarceration. Another partnership with the Department of Corrections expanded and modified the Female Alternative to Prison program to give offenders with children priority placement.
- Submitted an implementation grant to the Wisconsin Partnership Fund for a Healthy Future to research and make available to the public health system partners evidence-based practices for ethnic and racial minority populations.
- Increased numbers of licensed day care centers in Milwaukee.
- Developed the Quality Care for Quality Kids Rating System; this has the potential to have a positive impact on child care in all regions of the state, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the family.
- Published a supplement to the state health plan (available on the Department’s Web site at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/statehealthplan/>) that reflects the views of five stakeholder groups: African Americans; American Indians; Asians, Hmong, and Pacific Islanders; Hispanics and Latinos; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered persons.
- Implementing the Brighter Futures Initiative, a program designed to assist Wisconsin youth to achieve their maximum potential to become responsible, self-sufficient, productive adults.

New and Emerging Issues

- Upgrades in the ACCESS Web site will allow participants to see specific information about their eligibility and benefits, and apply for benefits online.
- The state minimum wage increased from \$5.15 to \$5.70, effective June 1, 2005.
- The Governor's Quality Counts for Kids Task Force, established in 2004, is responsible for providing recommendations for establishing a child-care quality rating system. This system is aimed at reforming the way child care is provided, and allowing parents of every socioeconomic group to make informed decisions about child care.
- The Department will continue to build collaborations with the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the Child Care Resource and Referral Network, and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Child Care Section to have a positive impact on child care services provided by the state and accelerate realization of the following three goals: (1) Describe the child care population, using the Child Care Program data in the child care data warehouse; (2) Compare the structural quality of state-subsidized child care with the quality of child care for other licensed programs in the state; and (3) Assess the state's record for supporting high-quality child care for children and families that do and do not receive subsidies for child care.
- In April 2005, the U.S. Institute of Medicine published *Health Literacy: A Prescription for Confusion*. This report documents that nearly 90 million people in the United States have difficulty understanding and using health information, leading to billions of dollars in avoidable health care costs. To address this problem, systemic action needs to be taken by the public health and health care system, educational system, and health care consumers.
- Based on the most recent federal data, Wisconsin's poverty rate rose 1.9 percentage points from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004, the largest increase for any state. Milwaukee's poverty rate rose from 12th highest in 2003 to 7th highest in 2004 among large cities in the United States.