

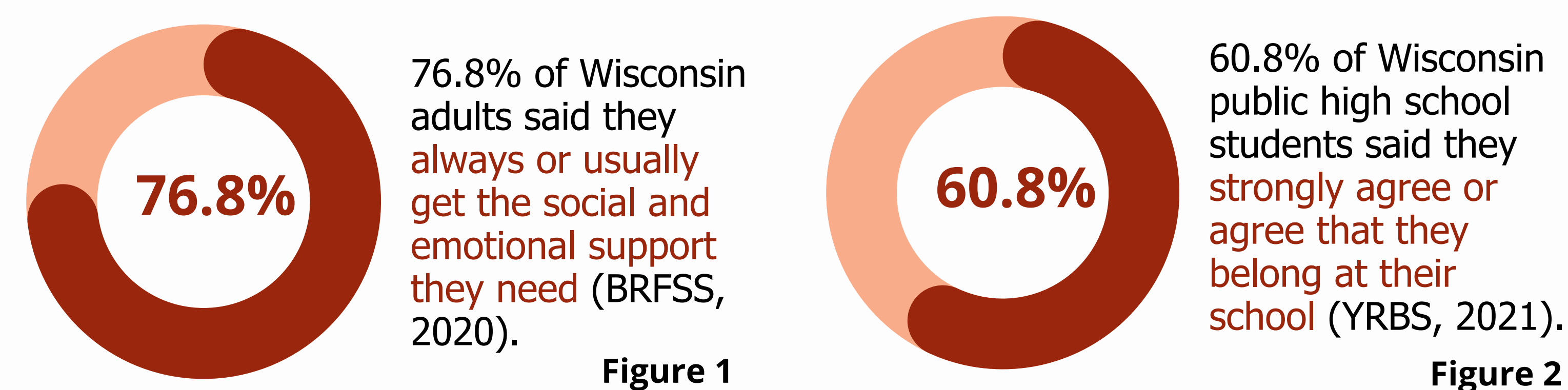
Social Connections: A Wisconsin Performance Measure

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Issue

Many Wisconsinites report lacking meaningful social connection, which can lead to increased risk of adverse health outcomes. The number of adults and youth who feel socially connected has declined in recent years.

During the 2020 Title V Needs Assessment and the 2022 Title V Mid-Cycle Needs Assessment, individual community members and agencies serving maternal and child health populations shared the need for social connections in their communities. The importance of social connections in making their communities a good place to live was clear throughout these assessments.



Setting and Project

Create a Title V state performance measure to address social connections

In response to the needs assessment data, we launched a State Performance Measure to address social connections in 2021.

- Twenty-one local agencies, across all five regions in Wisconsin, used Title V funding to work on social connection initiatives in their communities.
- Strategies included an assessment and implementation of an action plan and practice change developed through feedback from MCH Advisory Committee.
- Activities included outreach, partnership building, community engagement, promoting social connections throughout the community, and participating in learning community calls.

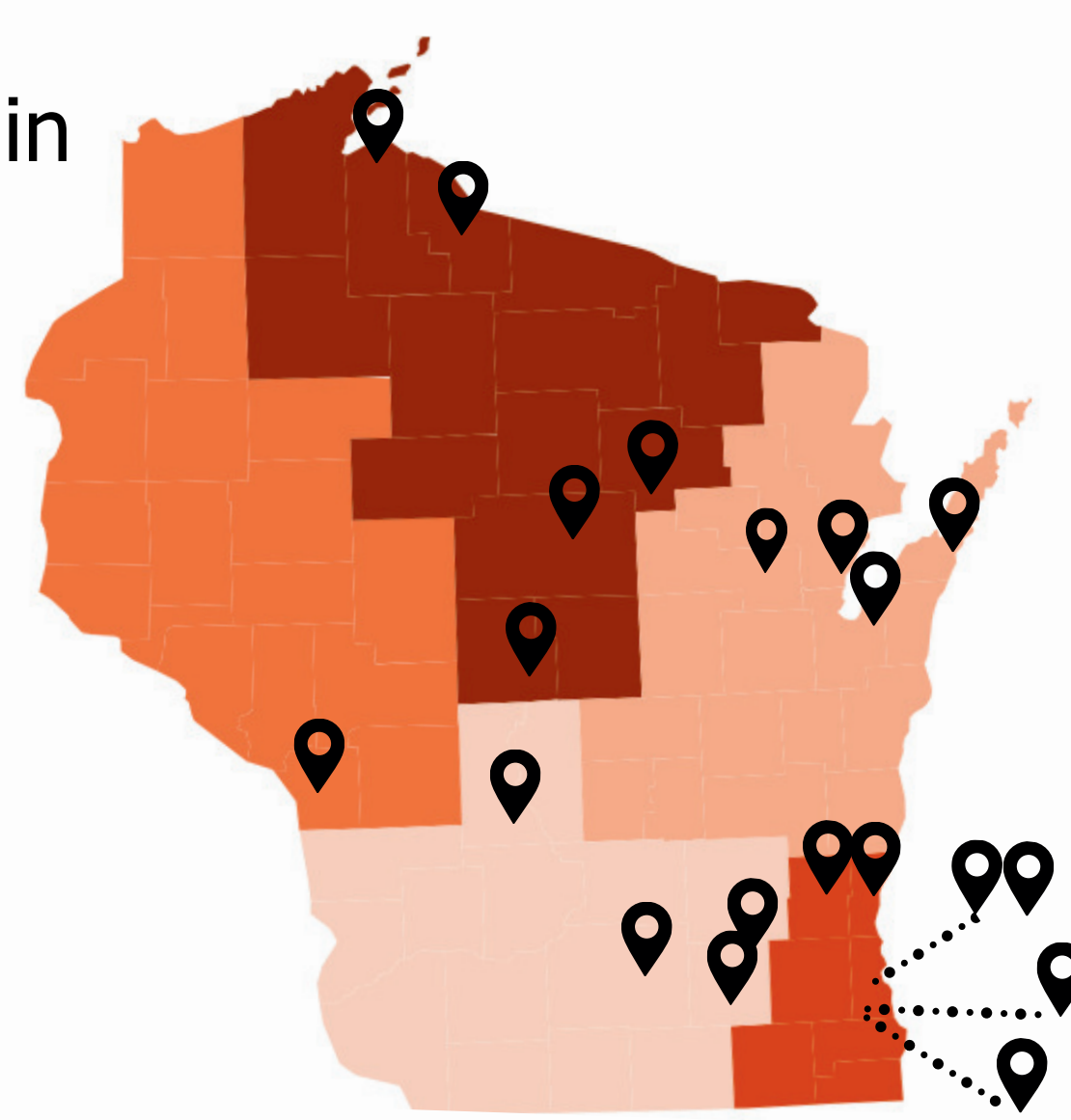


Figure 3

Learning Community Calls

- Quarterly calls were held for all agencies that selected social connections.
- A variety of topics were addressed and partners were invited to attend and participate including the Office of Children's Mental Health, Wisconsin's Maternal Mortality Review Team, the Wisconsin Prevention Board, the Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan team, and Providers and Teens Communicating for Health (PATCH).
- Evaluations completed by participants indicated that the calls were engaging, helped support their agency's work, and provided a helpful space to learn about other agencies' work.

Accomplishments

A new evaluation tool was developed and implemented among the local agencies in 2023, gathering quarterly local social connections data.

The data collected helps inform state-level work by allowing us better understand and support the unique needs for social connection across Wisconsin communities. Some key takeaways from the quarterly reports include:

- Areas of focus at the local level, with the majority focusing on community connections, social isolation, and social support (see Figure 4 for more detail).
- Importance of partnerships in this work. The vast majority of agencies carried out social connections programs alongside strong community partners (95.2%), with approximately half having developed new partnerships. These partners came from many sectors: schools, health organizations, faith-based groups, community organizations, coalitions, other governmental departments/agencies, and private businesses.

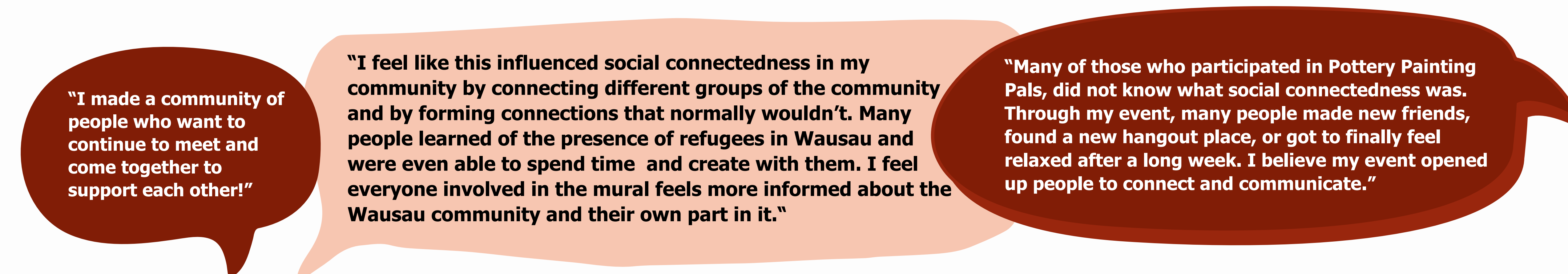
Various initiatives were carried out by local health agencies.

Local health agencies planned or implemented programming including:

- Held community-wide events (52.4%), such as family activities, presentations and resource handouts, as well as food and promotional merchandise.
- Hosted group sessions tailored for specific populations within their districts (28.6%) that encompassed both educational and supportive elements, creating a cohesive environment for participants.
- Provided educational or activity packages for established organizations (38.1%).
- Developed work groups and launched marketing campaigns to improve outreach efforts (14.3%).

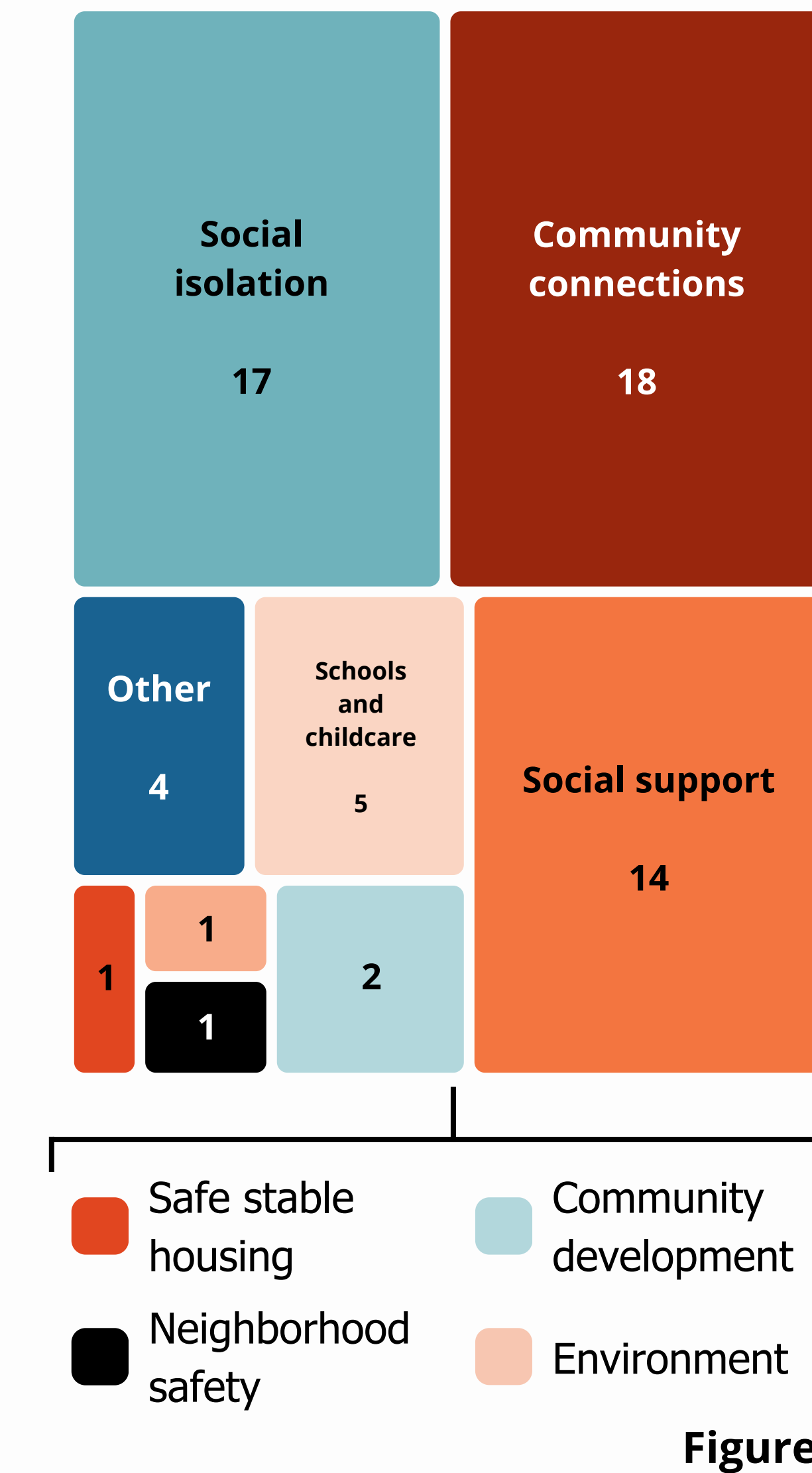
A mini grant program was created in partnership with PATCH for youth to design and implement their own social connections projects in their communities.

Twelve projects were awarded funding and implemented in spring 2024. Their projects included focuses on creating connections with refugees in the state, the LGBTQIA+ community, veterans, and intergenerational connections. The youth developed a variety of creative activities to help facilitate these connections, including music performances, outdoor art, painting murals, equine therapy, yoga, pottery, a clothing swap, and discussions around food security and water stewardship.



Title V MCH Internship Program students created a report and series of one-pagers using local- and state-level social connections data.

These one-pagers included an extensive literature review that highlighted the importance, facilitators, health impacts, and equity considerations of social connections. The students also identified opportunities for future data collection to enhance data collection methods and reduce reporting barriers. These data products have been used internally to support programmatic decision-making as well as shared externally to support partners and grantees in their decision-making, project planning processes, and sustainability of their work.



Barriers

Challenge: Social connections has not been a performance measure for local and Tribal health agencies to work on in the past. It's a newer concept for public health and can be broadly defined.

Strategy to address and overcome: We created a social connections workgroup that met monthly to define, establish measurements, and create activities before offering social connections as an option for local and Tribal health departments. We utilized state specific needs assessment data to inform activities and kept the project parameters broad so they could be specifically implemented to each community's unique needs.

Challenge: There are lack of resources for social connections in public health settings, including staff and partner capacity and funding.

Strategy to address and overcome: We developed the Social Connections Objective so local and Tribal health agencies could use Title V funding towards this effort. We built in the importance of creating partnerships in the project parameters to help address reduced capacity.

Challenge: We have struggled to find a statewide partner that can help lead this objective.

Strategy to address and overcome: We partnered with youth focused agency to expand the work. The mini-grant project for youth was the result of this challenge and resulted in so many positive outcomes across youths' local communities.

Challenge: We launched when public health was heavily focused on COVID relief efforts. Local agencies reported needing to build trust with their communities.

Strategy to address and overcome: We encouraged agencies to build projects around the needs their communities shared through local needs assessments.

Lessons Learned

- When we launched the objective in 2023, many local agencies weren't sure how to begin their social connections work and looked to us for guidance. **The first year we focused on community engagement, encouraging local agencies to reach out to community members for feedback on what was most important.**
- The new evaluation tool implemented among local agencies gathered mostly qualitative, open-ended data. This was informative but burdensome to agencies. **The tool has been updated with mostly close-ended responses informed by the rich data shared in 2023, reducing survey fatigue.**

Contact information

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