



Office of Policy and Practice Alignment (OPPA) 2023 Annual Report

Letter from the Director

Dear Partners in Public Health,

We are pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report for the Office of Policy and Practice Alignment (OPPA) within the Department of Health Services (DHS), Division of Public Health (DPH). OPPA bridges, supports, and builds capacity for our public health partners including local health departments, Tribal health systems, community based organizations and others by leveraging our strengths and relationships to create connections to resources, and subject matter experts. We advance policy and system change, promote health equity, and strengthen Wisconsin's collective capacity to assure the conditions and opportunities to promote and protect the health and safety of all people in Wisconsin, so that everyone can live their best lives.

Our work is accomplished by listening to the needs of our partners and providing services including:

- Technical assistance and partnership building.
- Learning opportunities on health equity.
- Population-based data collection and analysis.
- Workforce development.
- DHS Administrative Rule 140 review.
- Grant management and distributions.

Vision: Everyone in Wisconsin benefits from a dynamic, inclusive, and responsive public health system.

Mission: OPPA builds and supports accountable, collaborative, and sustainable public health policies and practices.

This past year was a year of growth and change. We welcomed many new members due to both staff changes and new positions in support of meeting the needs of local partners and the system. We consistently strive to uplift our partners and embrace our team's strengths to improve the public health system. We are proud of the work we have accomplished in the past year, and look forward to continuing to work with you all through 2024 and beyond.



Sincerely,

Jen Rombalski

Director, Office of Policy and Practice Alignment

Division of Public Health

Department of Health Services



OPPA regional directors

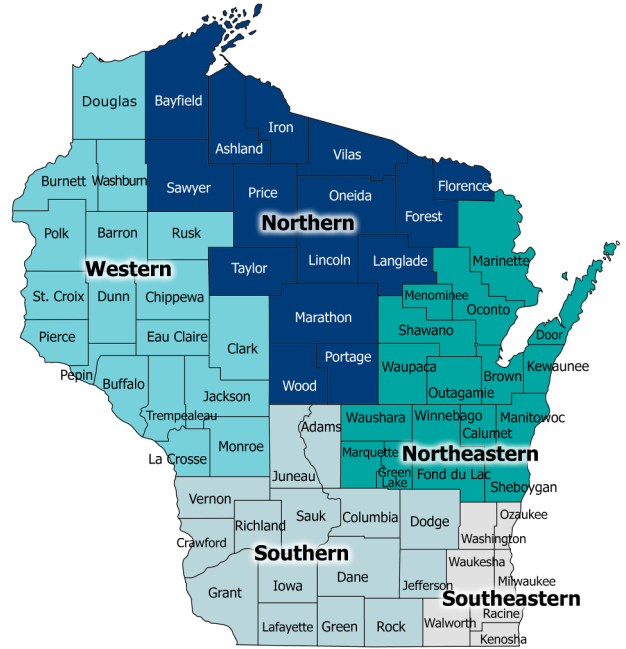
OPPA’s team of regional directors (RDs) serve as liaisons, strategists, and connectors to local and Tribal health departments (LTHDs) and DPH in each of the five **DPH regions**. They also act as stewards and advocates of the governmental public health system assuring compliance with state statute.

OPPA public health nurse consultants

The OPPO public health nurse consultants (PHNCs) provide consultation and technical assistance to promote and maintain a strong public health system including a generalized public health nurse program.

In 2023, the team stood up a **statewide public health nurse network** for LTHD nurses and supervisors to increase communication, discuss work roles and projects, identify content experts and topics of interest, and share inquiries and knowledge specific to public health nursing.

The PHNC team also started a **PHNC inbox** for LTHD staff to send general, non-emergency public health nursing questions.



Tribal Nations support

OPPA provides direct support to Wisconsin’s Tribal Nations with the guidance of the **Tribal Affairs Office**. Our priority is to foster cultural awareness and strengthen relationships by providing a variety of resources and grant technical support.

OPPA public health strategists

The public health strategists (PHS) serve as liaisons between the DPH and LTHD staff to promote best practices and support LTHDs in striving for a Public Health 3.0 model.

In 2023, the PHS team supported two different public health generalist networking groups.

The team assisted Northeast region health educator meetings by bringing in subject matter experts and empowering local public health staff to build professional capacity and skills.

The team facilitated networking meetings for public health generalists in the Southern and Western regions on topics such as health equity, the State Health Assessment and Improvement Plan, data presentation, project management, and resilience.



Health Equity Assessment and Resource Team

During the pandemic, a team was created to support LTHDs health equity needs. The Health Equity Assessment and Resource Team (HEART) conducted a strengths and needs assessment with over 180 responses, which led to the development of a two-pronged approach to supporting partners, their expectations, and improved their understanding of the topic. Guides are available on the DHS training webpage under the "Health equity resources tab": **[Training for Public Health Employees in Wisconsin | Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)**.

Learning communities

These were designed to provide education and a community of practice for health equity efforts. As of 2023, HEART has administered 10 learning communities on various topics to over 300 people. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with increased attendance at each session, and over 95% of attendees reporting that the sessions met or exceeded their expectations and improved their understanding of the topic.

Resource guides

Guides were developed to provide additional learning through information, programs, and practices. The topics were identified based on LTHD feedback.

The recorded trainings and resource guides are available on the DHS training webpage under the "Health equity resources tab": **[Training for Public Health Employees in Wisconsin | Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)**.

Health equity strategists

Do you need additional health equity help? **Tailored health equity technical assistance support is now available to LTHDs.** Health equity technical assistance can include incorporating equity into community health assessment (CHA) and community health improvement plan (CHIP) processes, strategic planning, workforce development, and services.

In 2023, OPPA hired health equity strategists to provide health equity content expertise and technical assistance. Support is also available to address the challenges of putting equity into practice.

Contact Kirsten Gunderson with questions, requests for technical assistance, or to connect and learn more: **kirsten.gundersen@dhs.wisconsin.gov**. Kirsten brings extensive experience from her previous role as a Health Equity Strategist for Kenosha County Public Health, and over a decade of working as a community organizer focused on systems change.

New qualitative data guide available

Are you working to expand opportunities for community members to be involved in public health decision-making? If so, consider leveraging qualitative information gathered via interviews, focus groups, or testimonies from those with lived experience. The new **[Qualitative Data Standards guide](#)** walks through key steps needed to collect high-quality qualitative data that can inform meaningful action.



State Health Improvement Plan

The **State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)** is Wisconsin’s guide to improve health and well-being, from root causes to outcomes of all residents, communities, and the state as a whole. The SHIP centers health equity, policy, and community voices in all processes and products, and its priorities are anchored in community input.

The SHIP serves as a platform on which people and organizations can connect, learn, and work together to address these important issues. The State Health Plan team expanded and had several major accomplishments in 2023, including:

- Publication of the **SHIP summary**.
- Four rounds of community of practice meetings for LTHDs.
- Expansion of new partnerships, especially in sectors beyond traditional public health.



Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan 2023-2027

Summary

Did you know?

OPPA supports Public Health Council operations. The **Public Health Council** was established in **Wis. Stat. §15.197(13)**, as enacted by **2003 Wis. Act 186** to inform and advise the Governor, Wisconsin DHS, the Wisconsin State Legislature, and the people of Wisconsin.

Its objective is to address prioritized public health concerns in line with the SHIP and reflecting the diverse needs of the state. In the past year, the Public Health Council focused on its revitalization and transition into an actionable council.

Community health assessment and improvement plan support

The PHS team provides technical assistance (TA) to LTHD staff on a variety of tasks such as strategic planning, **community health assessments**, community health improvement plans, and capacity building. Find your regional PHS on our **website**.

Data support

This past year, several CHA data support needs were identified and discussed through a community of practice (CoP) series with LHD staff. OPPA has been working to address these needs, starting with a standardized CHA indicator list set to become available spring of 2024.



Workforce development

The OPPA Workforce Development team prioritized onboarding and orientation of governmental public health employees in 2023. The team collaborated with the DPH Workforce Development team to revamp DPH 101 training, Public Health 101 training, and local health officer orientation framework, content, and delivery systems.

Public health orientation training resources and webpages can be found on the [**Training for Public Health Employees in Wisconsin**](#) webpage.

Further support for these initiatives is provided through the Workforce Advisory Group which brings together a variety of partners from various sectors to address and collaborate on workforce issues across the state.

Health officer qualifications review

Qualifications of all new and interim local health officers are reviewed by the DPH to assure compliance with Wis. Stat. chs. **250** and **251** and Wis. Admin. Code chs. **DHS 139** and **140**. The RDs work under the authority of the state health officer and utilize a standard of practice to ensure consistency in interpretation of law, credential review, and determination of local health officer qualifications.

In 2023, the RDs completed 15 health officer qualification reviews and developed **two** resources to support the local health officer hiring process.

[**Information Sheet: Local Health Officer Qualifications Review**](#)
[**Local health officer qualifications review flowchart**](#)

Did you know?

Since 2020, Wisconsin has welcomed **44 new local health officers**.



DHS 140 review

Wisconsin administrative code requires every local health department (LHD) in Wisconsin to be reviewed by the DHS and DPH at least every five years to ensure compliance with statute and rule. This review is called the DHS 140 review, which comes from **Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 140.**

Wisconsin Admin Code ch. DHS 140 was updated in 2019 to align local requirements with changes in public health practice and the latest innovations modernizing Wisconsin's public health system. By the end of this year, all LHDs will have completed the updated format.

In 2023, OPPA was excited to welcome a new DHS 140 Program Coordinator and kickstart the development of several new resources to aid the DHS 140 review process including:

- A formal policy and procedure for reviewing LHD's who are nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) via an alternative process which recognizes the standards already demonstrated by accreditation status.
- A revised DHS 140 question list utilizing plain language and incorporating a rubric on public health nursing services.
- Press release templates for LHD use.

Did you know?

Wisconsin is the only state in the U.S. that has a system in statute that classifies LHDs at different levels.

Results-Based Accountability and performance excellence

Through the RBA Partnership Cohort, OPPA provides statewide training and technical assistance on using the:

- Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework for data-informed decision-making.
- Performance excellence (PE) to guide performance management (PM) and quality improvement (QI).

In 2023, the RBA Partnership Cohort supported participants from six local health departments in learning and growing their PE expertise. The 2024 RBA Partnership Cohort is planned for fall.

Interested in accreditation?

Join sixteen local and three Tribal health departments across the state by getting accredited by PHAB. PHAB accreditation is a great way to formally recognize the quality work of your health department.

OPPA is developing resources to support LTHDs in pursuing accreditation and re-accreditation to be made available this year. These include a fine-tuned alternative 140 review process for accredited health departments and an updated webpage with DHS resources to support documentation.



CDC Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

Grantee activity examples include child passenger safety and injury prevention programs, PHAB accreditation and reaccreditation support, healthy lifestyle and chronic disease prevention, supporting mental health and suicide prevention, and community health worker outreach.

Public Health Infrastructure Grant

Last year was the second year of the Public Health Infrastructure Grant (PHIG), an unprecedented investment in public health infrastructure, workforce, and data modernization across the U.S. Wisconsin DPH is proud to provide pass-through funding directly to LTHDs to support workforce and foundational capabilities.

In 2023, OPPA implemented two statewide assessments: Costing and Capacity assessment, and the first Wisconsin Public Health Workforce Assessment. Thank you to all that contributed to the **62% statewide response rate**, giving us a detailed view of the background, skills, and needs of public health workers across the state.

CDC Health Disparities Grant

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted health inequities across the nation and in Wisconsin. The need for more direct engagement with communities and better understanding the appropriate approaches, interventions, and needs became obvious early on during the pandemic and within the recovery stage.

In June 2021, the Wisconsin DHS was awarded \$27 million to combat health inequities, which includes \$9 million dedicated to rural communities. Two of these grant-funded projects in OPPA are the MC4JR and the Qualitative Data grants.

Mobilizing Communities for a Just Response (MC4JR)

The MC4JR grant centers on uplifting community voices and expanding partnerships. MC4JR has 42 sub-grantees and recipients ranging from local health departments to Tribal entities, and from small, grassroots organizations to well-established community-based organizations in communities across Wisconsin.

Qualitative data capacity

The Qualitative Data grant is a series of mini grants provided to LTHDs across Wisconsin to build qualitative data capacity. Grant recipients engage with community members or organizations representing underserved communities to build community input and capacity to identify health improvement strategies and address barriers. The grants also provide support for the public health system by providing technical assistance, resources, and techniques for qualitative data collection and analysis.

Grant-Tribal infrastructure strategy

Tribal grantees are providing tireless and outstanding community-driven services with partners. The grant is meant to promote stability in support of new, existing, and expanding Tribal partnerships and collaboration. These partnerships address Tribal infrastructure and the social determinants of health as determined by each Tribal nation and two Tribal-serving agencies. This grant has expanded direct communication between the Wisconsin DHS, DPH, the Tribal Affairs Office, and OPPA. This increases learning opportunities and supports sustained relationship-building.

Grant objective themes include medical and community transportation; community health worker outreach; housing instability; health promotion and data collection; Elder Advocacy Program; organization environment and capacity; Healthy Homes-Healthy Community; food sovereignty; and broadband expansion.

