



# 2019 IN REVIEW

*Department of Health Services*



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT**  
*of* **HEALTH SERVICES**



# Everyone Living Their Best Life



The Department of Health Services impacts every Wisconsinite with our work. Improving access, protecting patients, promoting health and wellness, and increasing transparency, responsiveness and cost savings were highlights of 2019.

## Highlights

- Made historic investments in behavioral health services and long-term care
- Secured SeniorCare prescription drug program for 10 more years
- Passed innovative, bipartisan telehealth legislation to increase access to care
- Launched lead poisoning prevention efforts that will protect kids for generations

## Increasing transparency and customer service, by the numbers:

### **EMAIL**

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- Provided technical support, clinical guidance, and policy-related updates via email listserv messages to:
  - Public health professionals
  - Members
  - Clinicians
  - Partners and Stakeholders
- Sent 2,659 email listserv messages

### **DHS.WISCONSIN.GOV**

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- 15 million total page views
- Most popular page was the Wisconsin Immunization Registry landing page with 397,493 total page views

### **LEGISLATIVE AND CONSTITUENT SUPPORT**

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- Provided technical assistance or testimony on 15 bills
- Participated in all 13 Water Quality Task Force hearings
- Participated in the Suicide Prevention Task Force hearings
- Responded to 947 constituent matters through constituent services, legislative requests, or open records requests

# IMPROVING ACCESS

## **Governor Evers' 2019-2021 Biennial Budget**

Governor Evers' first biennial budget invests more in health care than any other budget in Wisconsin's history. This budget makes critical investments in long-term care, behavioral health services, and reducing childhood lead poisoning through prevention and abatement.

## **Telehealth**

In partnership with the legislature and key stakeholders, we helped pass bipartisan legislation to increase Wisconsin residents' access to telehealth services by providing reimbursement through Medicaid. Our Medicaid program provides high-quality health insurance to more than one million Wisconsinites. Technology is one way that we can help people get connected to the care they need, particularly Wisconsinites living in rural communities where there are provider shortages. These critical services will pave the way to increase access to health care professionals, particularly behavioral health professionals, in all areas of the state.

## **Continuing the Popular SeniorCare Program for 10 More Years**

We secured a rare 10-year federal approval for the SeniorCare Program. SeniorCare is a prescription drug assistance program for Wisconsin residents who are 65 years of age or older.



With a \$30 annual enrollment fee, copayments ranging from \$5 to \$15, and no gaps in coverage, SeniorCare provides more comprehensive and less expensive coverage than Medicare Part D. Over 50,000 seniors use this program to make prescription drugs more affordable. This 10-year extension continues our commitment to providing quality and affordable prescription drug coverage to Wisconsin's seniors.

## **Ensuring Children and Adults With Disabilities Can Live Independently in Their Communities**

We continued to make progress in reducing the number of children and adults who are waiting to access home and community-based services and supports provided by the Medicaid program. In the beginning of 2019, there were 1,372 adults and 1,069 children waiting and by October, those numbers were down to 916 adults and 943 children. We are on track to eliminate the waitlist for these vital services by July 2021.

Additionally, we got federal approval to continue the FamilyCare Program for the next five years. This allows frail elders and adults with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities to remain in their homes and communities whenever possible.

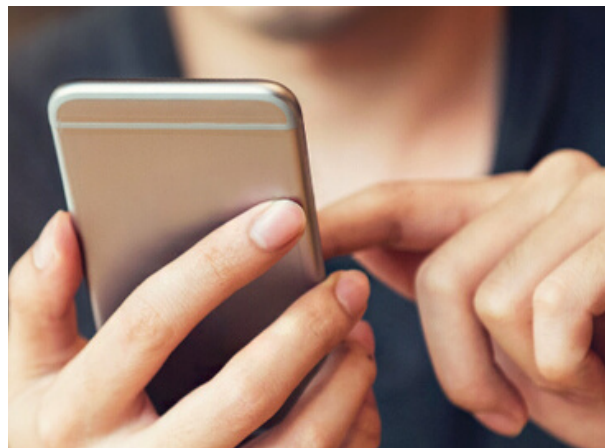


### **Increasing Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment**

To address a gap in substance use disorder coverage and provide access to treatment for Medicaid members, we obtained federal approval to offer increased access to residential substance use disorder treatment. Beginning in 2020, Medicaid and BadgerCare members will have more treatment options in their communities.

### **Increasing Access to Opioid Overdose Help**

We established the NARCAN® Direct Program with 14 community partners to increase access to this opioid overdose reversal agent. Expanding access to NARCAN® means it is more likely that a person will have immediate access to this life saving product in the event they experience an overdose. These partners distributed 2,077 doses of NARCAN® from June through October. They received the doses at no-cost directly from the manufacturer through an order on demand system. By the end of the year, 68 agencies—county or municipal health department, tribal health clinics, and syringe access programs—had joined the program. To accommodate the expansion, we developed a train-the-trainer effort to teach staff at the partner agencies on how to train others in the identification of an opioid overdose and the administration of NARCAN®. Sixty-five people were trained in 2019.



### **Connecting the Dots to Substance Use Services**

To help connect Wisconsinites looking for help with substance use challenges, we have a dedicated resource, the Wisconsin Addiction Recovery Helpline. It connects individuals seeking help for themselves or a loved one with substance use services in their community. 2019 was our first full year the helpline was available and it handled 5,567 calls, texts, and online chats. We work with 211 Wisconsin to provide this free and confidential service. People can call 211 or 833-944-4673 to get help.

# Protecting Our Neighbors



To help protect the health and safety of Wisconsinites, we inspect, investigate, and provide training opportunities so that people living in or receiving services from health and residential care facilities like hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities are safe and receive quality care.

## By the numbers:

### **EMPOWERING CONSUMERS AND FAMILIES**

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In 2019, we launched a new initiative to better connect with consumers and their families.

We frequently get questions from families, physician's offices, insurance companies, and consumers about types of care. These consumer town hall events bring together the resources available to proactively answer those questions.

We hosted six assisted living town hall meetings for consumers across the state in 2019 and plan to host six in 2020.

### **INSPECTIONS AND INVESTIGATIONS**

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We completed more than **7,600 inspections and complaint investigations** of health and residential care facilities.

### **PARTNERING WITH PROVIDERS TO IMPROVE CARE**

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We supported health and residential care providers to meet state and federal law and rules while providing high-quality care by hosting provider forums and conferences. These were attended by **3,300 health and residential care providers**.

Our assisted living and nursing home provider forums give us an opportunity to share regulatory updates, as well as problem solve shared challenges.

At our forums and conferences, providers learned from local and national subject matter experts on topics like dementia, resident rights, and nurse aide training. They can use this information to improve the quality of care they provide to those in their facilities.

# GOOD GOVERNMENT

## Responsiveness

### *Sharing Best Practices*

Wisconsin is one of the states that best protects against elder abuse. As our state's population continues to age, it is important that our counties have the tools they need to protect our most vulnerable residents. We worked with county Adult Protective Services workers to share local resources and best practices. We will continue this effort in 2020 and build a toolkit of standardized best practices and templates for counties to use to further streamline services.

### *Launching Statewide Issuance of Marriage Licenses*

We launched a new process for issuing marriage licenses that replicates our new, popular process for issuing birth certificates. The new process gives automated access to marriage license records that were not previously part of the Statewide Vital Records Information System. By making this data available to all vital records offices we are providing much better customer service to the public and reducing the burden to access this information. Now the public can get copies of their marriage license from the county they live in rather than needing to travel to the county that they were married in.



### *Supporting Sharing Lived Experience*

Sometimes the best remedy to struggle is connecting with someone who has been there. We certified 351 new peer specialists in 2019, bring us to more than 1,400. Peer specialists are individuals with experience in the mental health and substance use services system trained to provide support to others struggling to find a path to recovery. We also certified 33 parent peer specialists in 2019, the first group to be certified under this expansion of the peer specialist initiative. They are individuals with lived experience raising a child with behavioral health challenges trained to utilize their experiences to support other parents. To ensure the voice of lived experience remains a guiding force in the peer specialists initiative in Wisconsin, in 2019, we established the Certified Peer Specialist Advisory Committee.

### **Innovation**

We received the first ever Wisconsin Procurement Innovation Award from the Department of Administration. This award recognized our new centralized system for tracking and monitoring contracts throughout their lifecycle. This centralized process for managing contracts helps us ensure that all of our grant agreements and contracts use taxpayer dollars wisely, efficiently, and appropriately.

# GOOD GOVERNMENT

## Transparency

We created a series of interactive data dashboards on Wisconsin's opioid epidemic to give people the information they need to more quickly gain a sense of trends in order to help guide efforts to save lives. These dashboards contain the most up-to-date information we collect on adult opioid usage, youth opioid usage, opioids hospitalizations, and opioid-related deaths. The dashboards are a first step in an ongoing initiative to make our data more available to the public and provide more localized data that our communities can use to make more informed decisions.

## Continuity of Services

The partial government shutdown at the beginning of 2019 had the potential to cut off FoodShare benefits to more than 284,000 Wisconsinites. We were a national leader in immediately acting to protect people who need food assistance. We quickly pulled together a rapid response task force to develop a plan for issuing benefits prior to the shut down so no Wisconsin child or adult would be without access to this vital food benefit. We also launched a multi-faceted external communications effort to ensure that members and stakeholders were in the loop on what was happening, what we were doing, and what members needed to do and could expect.



## Cost Savings

BadgerCare Plus is a national leader in maximizing prescription drug cost savings. And our SeniorCare program provides more comprehensive and less expensive coverage than Medicare Part D. Through running our own pharmacy benefit, taking advantage of rebates, and consistently revising preferred drugs to get better value, we are able to save Wisconsin taxpayers millions while still meeting the needs of our customers.

As part of the implementation of DHS Connect, the electronic health records system for our seven care and treatment facilities, we were able to avoid \$600,000 in costs by using in-house staff rather than the support services offered by the system's vendor. The on-time, successful completion of this required upgrade was critical for the continued operation of DHS Connect at the three facilities currently using the system and the implementation timeline for the remaining four facilities.

# PROMOTING HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Enhancing Suicide Prevention

We began developing a comprehensive approach to unify our suicide prevention efforts. This included the development and release of our four key recommendations and strategies to promote more effective suicide prevention efforts. This information was used to inform the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. Our final suicide prevention plan will be released in early 2020 and will set goals to promote the widespread use of evidence-based and best practices for suicide prevention in Wisconsin.

## Leading Dementia Care-Related Initiatives

We have been working since 2013 to make Wisconsin a better place to live for people with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias and their caregivers. In 2019, we continued working on this important initiative by recruiting the volunteers and stakeholders needed to advance the goals of the 2019-2023 Wisconsin State Dementia Plan.

Dementia care specialists play a critical role in this effort by providing direct support, information and access to resources for individuals with dementia. Governor Evers increased the number of these specialists to 33 from 24 in the 2019-21 State Budget. The new dementia specialists will be in place in aging and disability resource centers and tribal agencies across the state in early 2020.



## Supporting Caregiving

We helped launch Governor Evers' Task Force on Caregiving and are supporting it as it works to create recommendations to make sure that both family caregivers and direct care workers have the support they need to care for older adults and people with disabilities while staying healthy themselves.

## Investigating Vaping Lung Injury

We played a key role in identifying the initial lung injuries related to vaping with colleagues at the Children's Hospital in Milwaukee. Our public health professionals also played a key role in investigating and informing clinicians across the nation about how to most effectively treat it through articles in the New England Journal of Medicine and the CDC's weekly public health scientific report. We quickly deployed external communications products throughout the investigation to raise public awareness about the outbreak, the significant increase in youth vaping, and the harmful effects on young people's health.



# PROMOTING HEALTH & WELLNESS

## Improving Water Quality

Working to make Wisconsin water clean, safe, and healthy for all is a top priority of Governor Evers. In 2019, we used an evidence-based process to review 27 key compounds that can be in Wisconsin's groundwater. We identified the effects they could have on health and gave groundwater quality standards to the Department of Natural Resources. This was the first time in 10 years that these groundwater standards have been evaluated. We will review another 40 substances to develop groundwater quality standards in 2020. Our environmental health team also provided critical information at 13 statewide Water Quality Task Force hearings on how policy decisions could impact the health and safety of Wisconsin residents.

## Preventing Lead Poisoning

Preventing child lead poisoning can mean the difference between a child who succeeds in school and in life, and one who doesn't. The burden of child lead poisoning especially affects lower income families who often live in older homes that contain lead paint dust. By securing new federal resources, we were able to launch new lead poisoning prevention efforts that will address lead hazards in Wisconsin homes and protect kids for generations.



## Preventing Outbreaks Through Promoting Immunization

Immunizations are the best way to prevent diseases that can have serious, if not deadly, health effects. To promote the importance of getting a flu vaccine, we developed and distributed materials for local health officers, employers, and school staff. Our goal with these materials was to stress how the flu vaccine protects individuals and the people around them.

As a national measles outbreak was unfolding, we raised awareness about the disease and why vaccination is critical to protect everyone, especially children, the elderly, and other vulnerable people. Wisconsin did not have any measles cases during 2019.



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