

# WISCONSIN PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

*Assure safe and healthy people by monitoring progress on the state health plan  
and on the readiness for public health emergencies.*



April 24, 2024

## **Resolution on Impact of Social Connection and Belonging on the Health and Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities**

Whereas, the Wisconsin Public Health Council is a statutorily created body of Wisconsin residents charged with advising the Department of Health Services, the Governor, the Legislature and the public on progress in implementing the state's public health plan as well as responses to public health emergencies; and

Whereas, the Public Health Council is comprised of representatives from health care consumers, health care providers, health professional educators, health departments, American Indian Tribes, public safety and community-based agencies; and

Whereas, social connection and belonging is one of five priority areas "that were raised as the most important to address to promote individual, community, and population health" in the 2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP); and

Whereas, the 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation" concludes that 1) Loneliness and isolation represent profound threats to our health and well-being and 2) The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day; and

Whereas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that "Loneliness costs the US economy an estimated \$406 billion a year, in addition to the estimated \$6.7 billion a year in Medicare costs for socially isolated older adults"; and

Whereas, social connection and belonging include individual and group actions, virtual and face-to-face social interaction, community events, celebrations for all ages; they also include civic engagement, such as voting, participating in local government processes, and being a community advocate; and

Whereas, Wisconsin measures of social connection and belonging inform:

- Twenty-three percent of Wisconsinites report that they only sometimes or never get the social and emotional support they need. (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, 2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey)
- Seventeen percent of Wisconsinites aged 18 years or older and 29% aged 65 years or older live alone (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 1-Year Estimates)
- An estimated 74% of eligible Wisconsinites voted in the 2020 elections. When looking at voter participation by race and ethnicity, an estimated 77% of white Wisconsinites, 44% of Black Wisconsinites, and 58% of Hispanic Wisconsinites voted in the election. (Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020, US Census Bureau).

- Poor mental health affects many, as nearly 1 in 7 adult Wisconsinite's report having 14 or more days of poor mental health during the past month. This overall number masks large disparities that persist due to experiences and structures that perpetuate chronic stress, trauma, and inaccessibility of mental health care. (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, 2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey)

Whereas, socially connected communities create more opportunities for improving mental and physical well-being, leveraging the collective power to create change, and enabling communities to more successfully influence policies, systems and environments that can positively impact individual health.

Be it resolved, the Public Health Council acting in its statutorily defined role as an advisory body to the Department of Health Services, the Governor, the Legislature, and the public, commends social connection and belonging being raised up as a priority for Wisconsin's public health system.

Therefore, be it further resolved, the Public Health Council recommends Wisconsin's governmental agencies and public health system partners to:

- Support the implementation of the 2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) strategies to improve community connections, social support, and belonging.
- Invest in 'building tables of community voices and engagement' within local and state decision-making processes at the policy and service level.
- Examine opportunities to advance social determinants of health within local and state policies, systems, and services, as means of improving conditions that shapes the overall health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities.

Lastly, be it resolved, that copies of this resolution be shared with multiple partners, including the State Health Officer, the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, the Governor, the Legislature and at minimum representatives of:

- the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
- the Wisconsin Public Health Association
- leaders of Wisconsin's Federally recognized American Indian Tribes and Bands
- the Wisconsin Counties Association
- the League of Wisconsin Municipalities
- the Wisconsin Hospital Association
- the Wisconsin County Human Service Association
- the United Way of Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Association of School Boards
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
- Wisconsin University System
- Wisconsin Private Schools
- Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- AARP