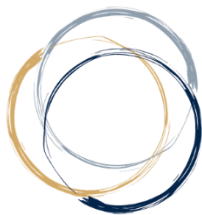


ANNUAL REPORT

2024



IRON COUNTY
Public Health
Prevent. **Promote.** Protect.

Content

- Iron County Community Profile3
- Community-specific Needs4
 - Key Health Concerns4
 - CHIP Goals.....4
- Foundational Areas.....5
 - Communicable Disease Control5
 - Adult and Child Vaccines5
 - Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention6
 - Health Screenings.....6
 - StrongPeople StrongBodies.....6
 - The Fitness Court.....7
 - Harm Reduction.....7
- Environmental Public Health.....7
 - DATCP Enforcement.....7
 - Transient Non-community Water System Surveillance.....8
 - Water Lab.....9
 - Beach Monitoring and Assessments.....9
- Maternal, Child, and Family Health10
 - Comprehensive Reproductive Health Services11
 - Birth to 311
 - Childhood lead screenings11
- Access to and Linkage with Care12
 - Foot Care and Nail Care12
 - Tuberculin Skin testing12
- Community Specific Services13
 - Teen Outreach Program13
 - School Health Collaboration.....13
- Foundational Capabilities15
 - Emergency Preparedness & Response.....15
- Budget and Expenditures.....16
- Board of Health.....17
- Our Team17
- Vision, Mission, and Values.....18

Iron County Community Profile



6,136

Population



\$55,777

Median household income

(\$18,854 below state average)



6%

People without health insurance
(Same as state average)



78.6 yrs

Life Expectancy

(0.4 years higher than state average)



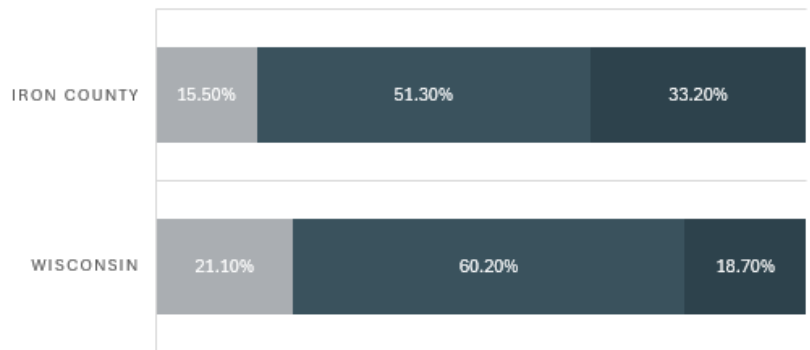
16%

Children in poverty

(3% higher than state average)

AGE DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON: IRON COUNTY VS. WISCONSIN

■ Below 18 years ■ Adults (18-64) ■ 65 and Older



11%

People who lack adequate access to food

(4% higher than state average)



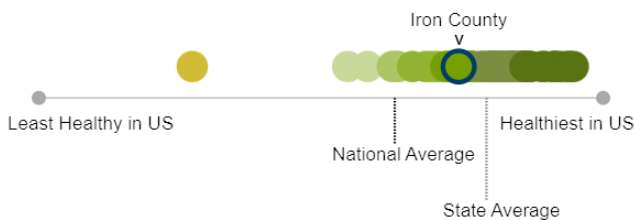
9%

Severe Housing Cost Burden

(2% below state average)



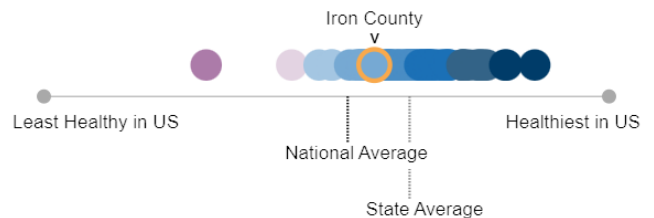
Iron County Health Outcomes - 2024



Iron County is faring slightly worse than the average county in Wisconsin for Health Outcomes, and better than the average county in the nation.



Iron County Health Factors - 2024



Iron County is faring slightly worse than the average county in Wisconsin for Health Factors, and about the same as the average county in the nation.

Community-specific Needs

The Iron County Health Department, in partnership with Ashland and Bayfield Counties and Tamarack Health, conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to identify top health concerns. The 2024-2026 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is based on these findings.

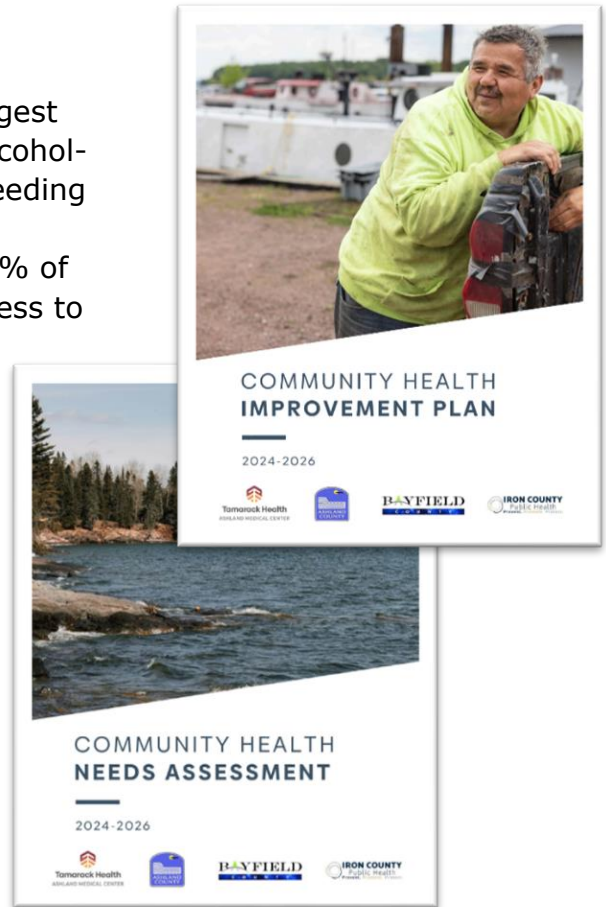
Key Health Concerns

1. **Substance Use** (Drugs & Alcohol) – 70% of residents identified substance use as the biggest health concern. Opioid-related deaths and alcohol-related driving deaths are major issues, exceeding state and national averages.
2. **Mental Health & Suicide Prevention** – 62% of residents highlighted the need for better access to mental health services, as 16% of residents experience frequent mental distress, a rate higher than the state average.
3. **Housing & Economic Stability** – High housing costs, low wages, and a lack of affordable housing create financial stress, impacting overall health and well-being. Many residents struggle to find stable housing and jobs that provide a livable income.

CHIP Goals

1. **Increase Awareness** – Improve community knowledge of health resources and services by enhancing communication efforts.
2. **Strengthen collaboration** – Expand partnerships among public health, healthcare, education, law enforcement, and social services to improve health outcomes.

We remain committed to working with Tamarack Health and neighboring county health departments to strengthen partnerships, share important health data, and support those making a difference in public health. By raising awareness and working together, we can build a healthier, more connected community across the tri-county region.



Foundational Areas

Communicable Disease Control

The Health Department works closely with the Wisconsin Division of Public Health to identify and manage the spread of infectious diseases, as required by state law, Wis. Stat. § 252. This important work is a team effort, involving local hospitals, clinics, schools, long-term care facilities, employers, and laboratories. By working together, we help keep our communities healthy by monitoring disease patterns, responding to outbreaks, and ensuring proper reporting and prevention measures are in place.



Iron County received **233** disease reports, including **107** classified as Category I, which required a timely public health response. The remaining **126** Category II cases involved routine monitoring, follow-up or disease investigation. Public health staff worked to track cases, notify those affected, and help reduce the spread of illness in the community.

Disease Incident	Confirmed, Probable
Illnesses spread by Ticks	7
Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)	8
Respiratory Illness Hospitalizations	16
Diarrheal Illnesses	7
Outbreak Investigations	2

FIGURE 1: SNAPSHOT OF CONFIRMED AND PROBABLE ILLNESSES IN 2024 REQUIRING INVESTIGATION.

Adult and Child Vaccines

To protect residents from vaccine-protectable diseases, the Health Department administered **32 Vaccines for Children (VFC)** and **Vaccines for Adults (VFA)**. Additionally, **283 Flu** and **51 COVID vaccines** were provided through community-based drive-thru clinics in Hurley and Mercer, as well as at on-site vaccination events at the Hurley and Mercer Schools, and Senior centers in Hurley, Mercer, and Springstead. To further expand access, clinics were also held at Action Floors and Highline Corporation for local employees.



Ensuring that every person in Iron County, regardless of age has access to recommended vaccines is a critical public health goal. In 2024, our department prioritized outreach efforts to connect uninsured and underinsured children and adults with available immunization services. Through a combination of targeted social media messaging, provider collaboration, and a dedicated radio ad campaign, we worked to increase

awareness and access to vaccines. This outreach contributed to meaningful progress in vaccination rates. By the end of the year, **64% of children turning 24 months old had completed the recommended 4313314 immunization series**, exceeding our initial goal of 63%. Additionally, **our late-up-to-date (LUTD) rate reached 68%**, reflecting the impact of ongoing efforts like reminder recall, provider engagement, and public education. These efforts helped ensure more community members could protect themselves against vaccine protectable diseases.

Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention

Health Screenings

In response to community needs the Health Department connects community members to essential health services that support a healthy community. One way the department does this is by offering low-cost health screenings to raise awareness of chronic disease risk and help individuals make informed health decisions.

Total Health Screenings	52
Blood Pressure Screening	71
Pulse	40
Blood Glucose	34
A1C	41
Cholesterol	40
Hemoglobin	30

FIGURE 2 SNAPSHOT OF PREVENTIVE HEALTH SCREENINGS PROVIDED.

StrongPeople StrongBodies

The StrongBodies program helps midlife and older adults build strength, improve balance, boost energy, and support bone health through safe and structured strength training. These classes are open to community members for a very minimal fee, making them an accessible option for those looking to stay active and healthy.



22 individuals participated at the **Hurley** location and **14 individuals** participated at the **Springstead** location.

The Fitness Court

The Health Department & Quartz continue to support free, accessible fitness opportunities, including the Fitness Court at Cary Park. This space remains a vital resource for community wellness.

The ADRC of the North – Iron County Branch and UW Extension FoodWise have integrated the Fitness Court into their Walk with Ease program, a **14-week series** combining walking, strength-building activities, and nutrition education. These efforts help ensure equitable access to physical activity and promote lifelong wellness for all.



Harm Reduction

The Health Department collaborated with community partners to expand harm reduction education and **NARCAN training**, helping to prevent opioid overdoses. Training sessions were provided for GCC nursing students, the Hurley Fire Department, and the Tavern League, along with community training at the Ironwood Theatre. The department also participated in regional initiatives such as the Opioid, Stimulants, and Trauma Summit, planning meetings with UW-Stevens Point, and discussions at the Northwest Wisconsin Lung Health Alliance (NWLHA) and AODA Prevention Coalition meetings.

Additionally, the Opioid Settlement Funds Work Plan was developed in collaboration with the **AODA Prevention Coalition**, which includes the Health Department, Human Services, and the County Sheriff's Office. This partnership is working to allocate funds strategically to expand harm reduction efforts, increase access to life-saving resources, and strengthen community prevention strategies across Iron County.

Environmental Public Health

DATCP Enforcement

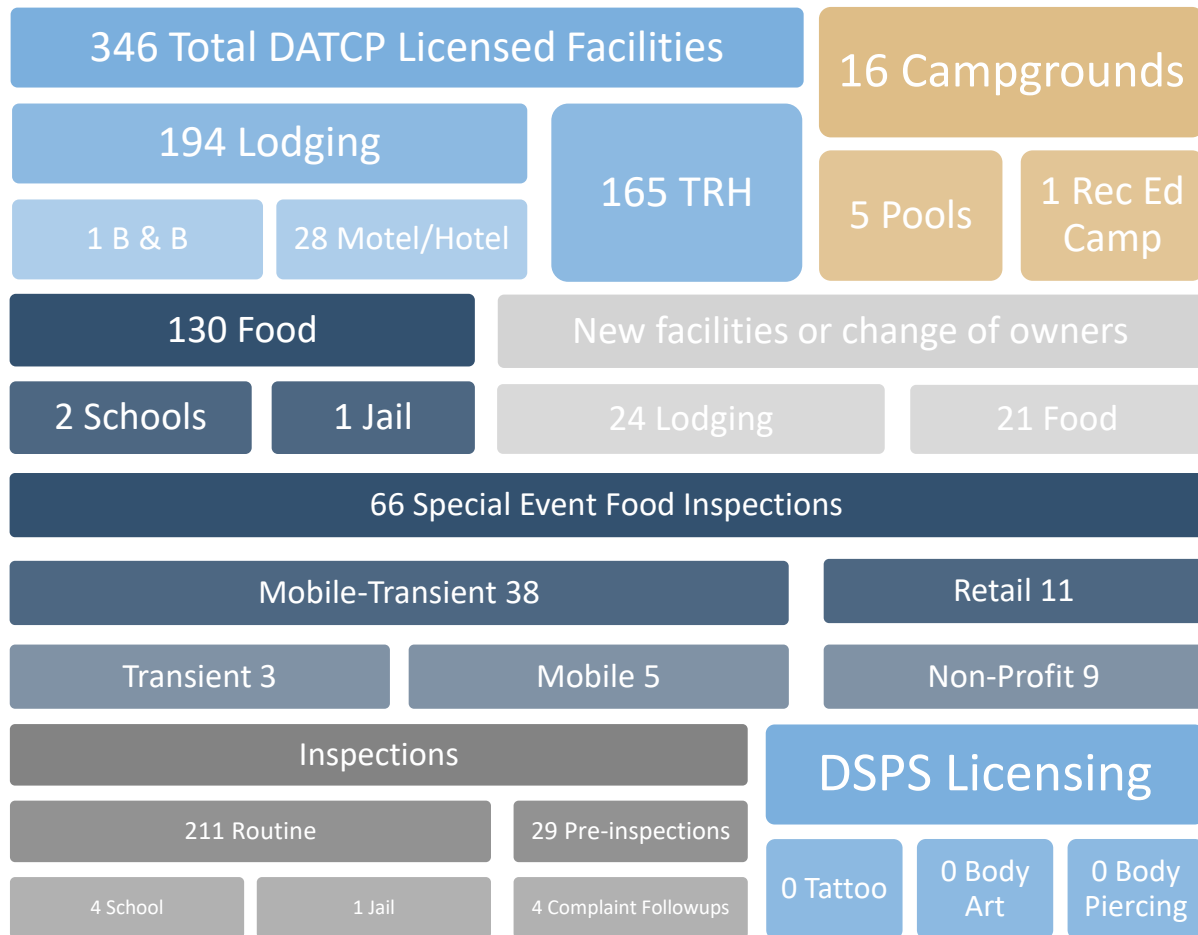
The Health Department works to keep our community safe by regularly inspecting local businesses where people eat, stay, and play. As an agent of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), our Registered Sanitarian conducts routine inspections of restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, campgrounds, and other recreational facilities to ensure they meet health and safety standards.

These **inspections help prevent foodborne illnesses, maintain clean and safe lodging, and reduce risks at recreational facilities.** By working closely with

business owners and operators, we help them follow best practices and correct any safety concerns before they become a hazard to public health.

Our goal is simple: to ensure that residents and visitors can dine, stay, and enjoy recreational activities in Iron County with confidence, knowing that these establishments are operating safely and responsibly.

FIGURE 3: DATCP AND DSPS LICENSE BREAKDOWN IN IRON COUNTY.



Transient Non-community Water System Surveillance

Ensuring access to safe drinking water is a priority for the department. As part of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Transient Non-Community (TN) Water Program, routine monitoring and inspections are conducted for water systems that serve the public at places like restaurants, campgrounds, gas stations and motels.

In 2024, **47 water systems** were overseen, which included **34 annual site visits and 13 sanitary surveys** to assess water safety and system compliance.

Additionally:

- 9 seasonal systems required annual startup documentation and inspections between May and September.
- 1 system was placed on monthly monitoring, while 2 others were monitored quarterly for water quality.
- 2 emergency backup wells were tested every quarter to ensure reliability.
- 35 additional (TN) bacteria samples were collected to monitor potential contamination risks.
- 7 potential new wells/systems were identified for onboarding in 2025.

Through regular inspections, sampling, and compliance monitoring, the Health Department ensures that businesses and public facilities provide clean and safe drinking water for residents and visitors. These efforts play a vital role in protecting public health by identifying and addressing water safety concerns before they become a risk.

Water Lab

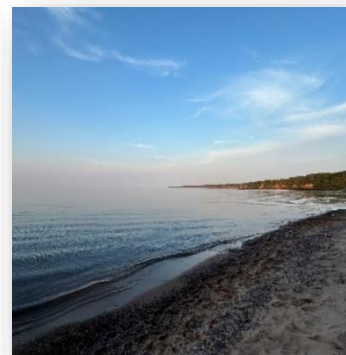
In 2024, we conducted bacteria and nitrate testing in-house, with some samples sent to the Environmental Research and Innovation Center (ERIC) at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (UWO) for further analysis. Below is a summary of our drinking water testing efforts:

Bacteria Samples	Nitrate	Samples sent to ERIC/UWO
502	85	11

FIGURE 4: BREAKDOWN OF WATER SAMPLE TESTING.

Beach Monitoring and Assessments

In collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) the Iron County Health Department conducted a **14-week water quality monitoring program** from Memorial Day to Labor Day. This initiative aimed to ensure the safety and enjoyment of our community members at local beaches. **6 inland beaches** and **3 Lake Superior coastline beaches** were tested weekly to ensure residents and visitors can safely enjoy recreational waters throughout the summer season.



The Iron County Health Department plays a vital role in monitoring environmental health risks and ensuring community safety through surveillance and follow-up efforts. In 2024, the department conducted 25 recycling inspections to support proper waste management and reduce environmental contamination. Eight radon kits were distributed to help residents detect and

address potential exposure to this odorless, cancer-causing gas, promoting healthier indoor air quality.

To protect water safety and recreational health, the department responded to three harmful algal bloom (blue-green algae) events, which can produce toxins harmful to people and animals. Additionally, seven animal bites were investigated to assess potential rabies exposure and ensure timely interventions.

Lead exposure remains a significant public health concern, particularly for young children. The department conducted one lead hazard/clearance investigation, working to identify and mitigate risks associated with lead-based paint or contaminated environments.



8 Radon kits distributed



7 Animal Bites



3 Harmful Algal Bloom (Blue Green Algae)



25 Recycling Inspections



**1 Lead Risk Assessment &
1 Lead Clearance Investigation**

Each of these efforts contributes to preventing disease, promoting safe living conditions, and protecting both human and environmental health in Iron County.

Maternal, Child, and Family Health

MCH and Kid's Club

The Health Department partnered with UW-Extension Iron County, Hurley School, and Mercer School to help kids stay active and eat healthy outside of school. Through the **School Garden Project** and **Kid's Club**, students played fun games to get moving, learned how to plant and care for a garden, and enjoyed healthy snacks. They also took home recipe cards to share with their families, making it easy to try nutritious foods together. These programs encouraged teamwork, hands-on learning, and lifelong healthy habits.



Other Support for Families



3 child safety seat inspections



2 Prenatal Care Coordination clients



7 WIC Clinics in collaboration with Bay Area WIC

Comprehensive Reproductive Health Services

Confidential, affordable reproductive health family planning (RHFP) services continue to be available for anyone regardless of religion, race, color, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identify, sex characteristics, number of pregnancies or marital status. A total of **61 unduplicated clients received services** accounting for a total of **225 family planning encounters**.



Birth to 3

The Iron County Birth to 3 program is dedicated to supporting families with children under the age of three who have delays or disabilities. In 2024, the program received **8 referrals**, and **6 children qualified** to receive services, **2 families either declined services or did not return call for evaluation**.

This early intervention program is crucial because the first three years of a child’s life are vital for brain development. Providing support during this period can significantly enhance a child’s ability to learn and thrive. The program offers services tailored to each child’s needs, including speech therapy, physical therapy, and developmental education all aimed at promoting optimal growth and development.



This multidisciplinary team is made up of 1 Registered Nurse, 2 Speech Therapists, 1 Physical Therapist, 1 Early Childhood Education Specialist, and 1 Infant Mental Health Specialist, collaborating closely with families to create individualized plans that support each child’s unique development journey. By focusing on early intervention, the program aims to empower families and foster an inclusive community where all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Childhood lead screenings

Lead exposure remains a serious health concern for younger children, as even low levels of lead can affect brain development, learning, and behavior. Universal testing ensures that all children receive at least two lead tests by age 2. To help identify and address lead poisoning, the Health Department provides blood level screenings and follows up on all elevated test results.

In 2024, **47 children** in Iron County were screened, including **32** first-time tests, **15** follow-up tests. Of these, **9 screenings were performed in-house at the Iron County Health Department**. When elevated blood lead levels are identified, the Health Department works with families to provide education, resources, and

follow-up testing. Early testing helps detect lead exposure and allows families to take steps to protect their child’s health.

Access to and Linkage with Care

Foot Care and Nail Care

Recognizing the need for accessible services, the Health Department provides essential foot care services to support mobility, comfort, and overall, well-being. Services include foot assessments, callous removal, toenail trimming, thinning and filling, and foot care education. The program has experienced steady growth, with appointments increasing in demand over the last three years. **302 Foot and nail care encounters** were performed in 2024 with **28 new clients** receiving services.

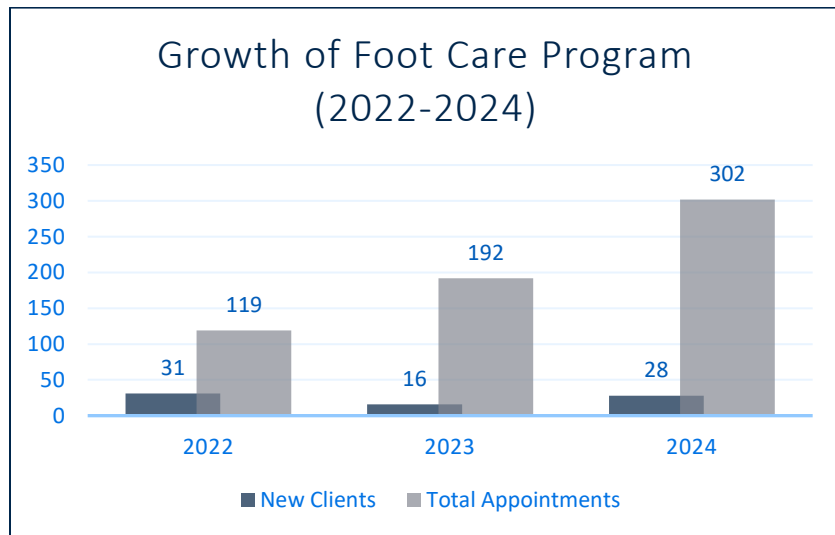


FIGURE 5 GRAPH HIGHLIGHTING FOOTCARE VISITS FROM 2022-2024.

Tuberculin Skin testing

Access to tuberculin skin testing (TST) is essential for nursing students, as it is required for clinical placements to ensure safety. Limited access, especially in rural areas, can create enrollment barriers and delay workforce entry. Expanding TST availability supports workforce development by removing obstacles to nursing education and helping address the healthcare workforce shortage.

Tuberculin Skin Testing	25
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The Health Department partnered with UW Extension-Iron County and 4-H Youth Development to provide the Summer Youth Camp program with Registered Nurse services.

44 new parent/guardians received **newborn packets** in the mail containing information on local services, developmental health screening resources and other health education.

Community Specific Services

Teen Outreach Program

The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) at Hurley School, facilitated by the Health Department through Wisconsin's Project WISE, is a positive youth development initiative designed to build life skills, leadership, and healthy behaviors among middle school students. Throughout the 2023-2024 school year, students engaged in over **30 TOP lessons** and multiple Community Service Learning (CSL) events, reinforcing key social and emotional skills while making a positive impact in their community. Meeting weekly, students participated in interactive discussions, received guidance from trained facilitators, and completed hands-on CSL projects such as making dog beds for a local animal shelter, cleaning up school grounds, assisting with Grandparent's Day, assembling appreciation bags for school staff, maintaining a school garden, and supporting an end-of-year picnic. Efforts to expand the program included recruitment strategies like "Bring a Friend" days and collaboration with the Hurley School District for outreach. With **14 students** attending sessions and two completing the full curriculum, the program successfully combined structured lessons with real-world application, fostering personal growth and community engagement.



School Health Collaboration

The Health Department continues to collaborate with Hurley and Mercer Schools to support student health and well-being through education, prevention, and community partnerships. In 2024, key initiatives focused on comprehensive health education, emergency preparedness, and student engagement in health-related activities.

As part of these efforts, a variety of Health Education and Outreach Programs were implemented to promote healthy behavior and empower students with essential knowledge and skills:

- **INDEPTH Program:** Six students successfully completed the intervention program designed to support youth in reducing nicotine dependency. Sessions were held from November 2023 through March 2024.



sessions.

- **Mr. Chilson's Hands-on Science Class:** Students participated in specialized health lessons covering reproductive health, vision, respiratory health, heart health, vital signs, and car seat safety. The class also included a hospital visit for an interactive learning experience.
- **Vaping Prevention and Outreach:** Presentations were delivered during Hurley School's "Reach Out" event to educate students on the risks of vaping and nicotine use.
- **Human Growth and Development:** Age-appropriate education was provided to 4th, 5th, 7th, and 9th-grade students, including reproductive health sessions.
- **Handwashing and Allergy Awareness:** First-grade students participated in an interactive lesson to promote hygiene and allergy safety.

In addition, the health department worked closely with Hurley School administrators, local agencies, and community partners to strengthen school health programming and improve access to resources. Regular collaboration supported events such as the Back-to-School Open House, where families received health education and services.

A critical component of this collaboration includes school nurse consultation and emergency preparedness. The health department partnered with school staff to review and update emergency care plans, ensuring students with medical needs receive individualized support. These proactive efforts, combined with ongoing education and outreach, help create a safer and healthier learning environment for all students.

Jail Nurse Services

In 2024, the Health Department continued its partnership with the Iron County Sheriff's Office to provide essential jail nursing services. The Registered Nurse completed **142 health service encounters**, including **34 inmate assessments**, **48 medical requests and follow-ups**, **10 medication management visits**, and ongoing coordination of provider and clinic appointments. The nurse also facilitated lab reviews, mental health referrals, and emergency medical interventions, ensuring consistent care for inmates. Additionally, they managed inmate transfers for specialized care, conducted vital sign monitoring, and worked closely with healthcare providers to address urgent medical needs. These efforts support the health and well-being of individuals in custody while strengthening coordination between the correctional and healthcare systems.

Foundational Capabilities

The Health Department remains committed to building and maintaining a strong public health system to effectively serve the community. Strengthening public health workforce capacity, foundational services, and data infrastructure is essential to addressing current and future health challenges. Efforts to improve performance management, service delivery, and system efficiency will ensure a more responsive and resilient health department. Updates on these initiatives can be found in the ICHD Resource Guide.

Emergency Preparedness & Response

The Iron County Health Department actively participated in emergency preparedness efforts, strengthening local and regional response capabilities. Staff engaged in **hazardous materials (Hazmat) and mass shelter response exercises** with the North Central Wisconsin Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalition (NCW HERC) and the Red Cross, respectively, ensuring readiness for public health emergencies.

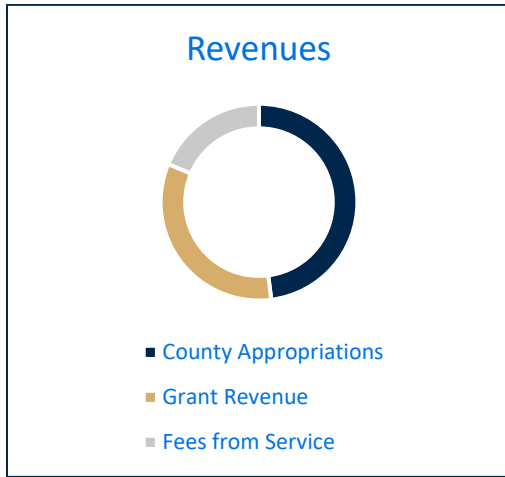
Education and training were also key components of preparedness efforts. Nursing students from Gogebic Community College (GCC) learned from public health nurses how emergency preparedness is implemented in the community and gained valuable insight into the role of healthcare professionals in emergency response.

Collaboration with state and regional partners was a major focus, including **MI/WI Border Meetings** to coordinate cross-state emergency planning and Traffic Safety Meetings to enhance response strategies for roadway incidents. Additionally, training sessions such as helped rural responders improve disaster response for vulnerable communities. The department also contributed to the Iron County Local Emergency Planning Committee, working to enhance emergency coordination and resource allocation.

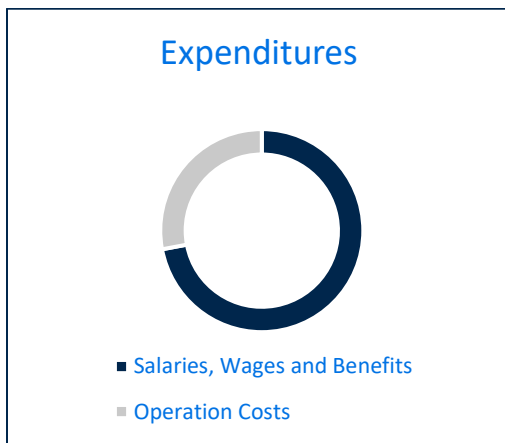
These efforts ensure Iron County remains prepared for emergencies, protecting residents through proactive planning, training, and collaboration with key response agencies.



Budget and Expenditures



Revenues	January 1-December 31, 2024
<i>County appropriations</i>	\$380,242
<i>Grant revenue</i>	\$263,916
<i>Fees from service</i>	\$147,884



Expenditures	January 1-December 31, 2024
<i>Salaries, Wages, and Benefits</i>	\$561,591
<i>Operation costs</i>	\$217,778
<i>Total expenditures</i>	\$779,369

Board of Health

Karen Lauer, Chair

Jamey Francis, Vice Chair

James Rocco, MD, Medical Director*

Zona Wick, RN Health Representative*

Dr. Paul Hagemann*

Paul Mullard

Tanner Hiller

Larry Youngs, County Board Chair

*not elected officials

Our sincere thanks to our Board of Health members for their direction, counsel, and unwavering support in our efforts to improve the health of our community.

OUR TEAM

Our dedication to the health of this community is essential to the work that we do!



Melissa Geach
Health Officer



Maria Mackey
Public Health Nurse



Dan Mueller
Community Health Nurse



Denise Lotzer
Environmental Health
Specialist



Melissa DeCarlo
Office Manager



Sue Herlevi
Program Assistant

OUR VISION

Everyone in Iron County Living Better, Longer

OUR MISSION

To promote health, protect the environment and prevent disease and injury in Iron County, Wisconsin.

OUR CORE VALUES

Collaborative Partnership-Based

We strive to assure strong collaborative partnerships within Iron County and beyond its geographic boundaries

Prevention Based

Our programs focus on health promotion and disease prevention

Evidence-Based

Our practice is science based and uses best practices that improve population health status

Social Justice

We are advocates for vulnerable populations and work to empower families to assure quality of life

Responsiveness

We provide leadership on health related issues and concerns expressed by the community, by population data and by the Board of Health

Effective, Efficient, Sustainable

We strive to deliver services that address the health priorities of our community and that last over time

Cohesive and Competent Workforce

We are a cohesive agency achieving and enhancing our shared vision

