

2024 Annual Report

EAU CLAIRE CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Message from the Health Officer

Welcome to our Eau Claire City-County Health Department 2024 Annual Report! I'm proud to highlight a small portion of our public health work this year.

The past year brought challenges – a reduction of local health care facilities available to our community, increased social and economic challenges for people living in Eau Claire, outbreaks of communicable disease, and more – but it also brought growth and progress in our work. I'm grateful for the opportunity to celebrate our successes, honor the organizations and people who support our work, and commend the staff whose day-to-day efforts help keep our community safe, healthy, and thriving.

A few of our wins in 2024:

- Working with community partners, we completed an in-depth Community Health Assessment, which compiled data and public feedback and identified the top health issues in our county. We also began to develop a Community Health Improvement Plan, which will guide the work of the county's health coalition, the Eau Claire Health Alliance, from 2025 through 2027 to improve those top health issues.
- We collaborated with five local organizations to produce the Eau Claire County Child and Youth Data Report, which gathered data about the health and wellbeing of our kids and will help us understand different health outcomes for youth in our county.


- After a months-long process, we renewed our accreditation as a health department through the Public Health Accreditation Board. Through reaccreditation, we strengthened many of our internal processes, ensured we offer a variety of health services to the community, and improved evaluation of our many processes.

You can read more about our 2024 work in this report. If you'd like to read more about our services, programs, priorities, and goals, please visit our website: echealthdepartment.org.

I'm grateful to our dedicated and skilled health department team, our community partners, and other organizations in Eau Claire County (and beyond) who work with us. You've helped steer policies, reviewed data, identified pressing health issues, held us accountable, and guided many health projects in our county. Thank you for leaning into the difficult work of prevention alongside us.

Let us know how we can continue to improve our work at the Health Department. You can reach us at echealth@eauclairecounty.gov.

Respectfully,



Lieske (Elizabeth) Giese
Health Officer / Director
Eau Claire City-County Health
Department



Eau Claire County Health Data

Data gives us a snapshot of the health of our community. It shows that many factors influence our health, including housing, income, employment, and our everyday surroundings. Accurate data helps us:

- Understand current and potential health problems
- Give reliable information to our partners and the public
- Evaluate if our programs, policies, and environmental changes are making a difference.

Eau Claire County
population:

108,830

U.S. Census estimate, 2024

Median household
income in the county:

\$71,834

U.S. Census, 2019-2023

Approximate number of county
residents living in poverty
(10.8% of county residents fall under
the U.S. poverty threshold):

11,754

U.S. Census, 2023

Percentage of county
residents living in
rural areas:

24%

*County Health Rankings,
2025*

Average life
expectancy of
county residents,
in years:

78.7

*County Health Rankings,
2025*

Percentage of county residents
who are African American, Asian,
American Indian/Alaskan Native,
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific
Islander, two or more races, and/or
of Hispanic or Latino origin:

11.3%

U.S. Census, 2023

Households in poverty or
who qualify as ALICE
(Asset Limited, Income
Constrained, Employed)
households:

33%

United Way, 2024

Minimum yearly income
needed to support a
single adult on a
"survival budget" in Eau
Claire County:

\$25,560

United Way, 2024

Maternal & Child Health

Our Healthy Beginnings division works to support families, especially maternal and child health, by facilitating a wide variety of programs and services.

Breastfeeding rate in WIC families increases

There's another reason to celebrate moms and babies in Eau Claire County this year: 86% of moms enrolled in Eau Claire County WIC breastfed their babies in 2024! That's the highest percentage of breastfeeding moms enrolled in our county's WIC program in the last 10 years.

Breastfeeding not only protects babies against many diseases, but also helps build strong immune systems, protecting moms and babies from infection and illnesses. There are other benefits – it reduces the risk of children developing allergies and asthma, and it helps infants' digestion. Breast milk is the perfect food for a baby, giving them everything they need for the best start in life.

WIC – or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children – is a program that helps income-eligible families in Eau Claire get healthy food, nutrition recommendations, farmers market vouchers, breastfeeding support, and more. It supports income-eligible pregnant women, breastfeeding and postpartum women, babies, and children under 5.



WIC has supported nearly 11,000 people in Eau Claire over the last five years. The Health Department administers the WIC program in Eau Claire County and holds clinics in Eau Claire and Augusta for families in the program.

WIC consistently produces positive results, like improved birth outcomes, reduced food insecurity for kids, and reduced healthcare costs. To learn more, visit wic.echealthdepartment.org.

Car seat program helps ensure kids' car safety

Healthy Beginnings staff continued to help increase car seat safety in our county in 2024. The department now has two car seat technicians certified in child passenger safety. Having two technicians on staff will help us meet high demand for our free car seat check program.



Our staff also provided assistance at two free community car seat check events in 2024. At these events, people can get their car seats and booster seats checked to confirm they're installed correctly and will keep their kids safe.

In 2024, we gave out 66 total car seats to families who didn't have a safe seat for their child and weren't able to acquire one. Car accidents are fatal to hundreds of kids in the U.S. each year, and in many of these accidents, children weren't in car seats. Our car seat program aims to reduce preventable deaths and injuries by helping families access and safely use child car restraints.

**By
the
numbers...**

166

Nurse-Family
Partnership
clients served

1,418

Nurse-Family
Partnership
home visits

Health Promotion

Our Community Health Promotion division provides education, coordinates programs, and promotes policies and practices that impact local health priorities. Those priorities include chronic disease; mental health; community connectedness; and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug misuse.

Department helped fulfill sharps disposal box project

In 2024, Community Health Promotion staff partnered with other city and county agencies, healthcare organizations, and community members to facilitate a project to install public sharps disposal boxes around the county.

The 9 sharps disposal boxes provide a place for community members to dispose of needles, lancets, syringes, and other sharps devices at no cost. The boxes will reduce the risk of discarded needles found at parks, roadsides, and outdoor spaces. As part of this project, we're sharing other local sharps disposal resources and encouraging people to use options offered by their health care providers.

When sharps aren't disposed of safely, they put emergency responders, community members, and pets at risk for injury and infection.

The project was paid for with Eau Claire County opioid settlement funds.

Sharps boxes are located around the county at: Owen Park, Wilson Park, Big Falls County Park, the Eau Claire County Government Center (Jail lobby and Police Department waiting area), Altoona Public Works building, Coon Fork County Park, Augusta City Hall, and the Fairchild Community Center. To learn more, visit grco.de/sharps.



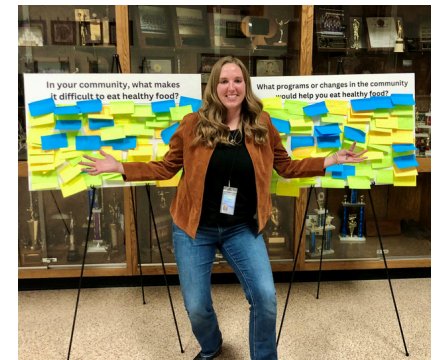
Assessing rural residents' nutrition needs

Forty percent of our county's residents live in rural areas with limited access to affordable healthy food, and have higher rates of food insecurity and chronic diseases.

We completed a grant-funded project in 2024 to learn from people who work and live in rural Eau Claire County about the factors that contribute to nutrition security. We interviewed partner agencies in Augusta, Fairchild, and Fall Creek; surveyed 300 residents; and talked with more than 150 community members. Our goal was to identify what causes nutrition security disparities in rural Eau Claire County and to gather input on how to improve nutrition security.

In rural parts of the county, some of the most common barriers to eating healthy food included cost, availability of and distance to access healthy food, and lack of time and knowledge to prepare healthy foods, especially for people with low income, families with children, and older adults.

The assessment also highlighted ways to reduce barriers to nutrition security, such as increasing access to healthy foods at schools, retailers, food pantries, and the community center, and providing nutrition education, like resources to help prepare healthy meals. You can read more about the assessment at bit.ly/ECnutritionsecurity.



**By
the
numbers...**

130
Students who
participated in
student
advocacy
groups

52
Student activists
completed on
vaping, alcohol,
mental health, and
other topics

2,856
Students who
received
substance misuse
curriculum across
15 schools

Communicable Disease & Clinical Services

Our Communicable Disease and Clinical Services division works to prevent and control outbreaks of communicable disease and provide inclusive sexual health services, including testing, treatment, and reproductive health services. It also provides education about risk reduction and preventing disease.

Mpox work leads to Washington D.C.

Since an outbreak of mpox in the U.S. in 2022, which also affected Wisconsin, the Health Department has worked with community partners to prepare and educate people about mpox and promote mpox vaccines.

To aid in this work, we were awarded a CDC mpox response grant in 2023-2024. We used the funding to strengthen our community partnerships and enhance vaccination efforts, outreach, and education. Staff developed innovative informational materials, created advertising campaigns across several platforms, and hosted community vaccine events for people most impacted by mpox.

Staff partnered with UW-Eau Claire, Planned Parenthood, Vivent Health, and The Fire House bar to distribute mpox education materials and provide mpox vaccination opportunities.

In spring 2024, the CDC's Division of STD Prevention invited two Health Department staffers to co-present at the STI Engage Conference. They made the trip to Washington D.C. to present at the conference about fresh and innovative outreach strategies that the health department used for this mpox response grant.



Responding to norovirus, pertussis outbreaks

In addition to influenza, COVID-19, measles, and more in 2024, communicable disease staff responded to multiple large outbreaks of pertussis and norovirus in Eau Claire County.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, had a big year all around the U.S. In 2024, there were 2,572 cases of pertussis identified in Wisconsin, and 35 people were hospitalized. We responded to 28 confirmed and probable pertussis cases in Eau Claire County, including multiple outbreaks.

When a case of pertussis is reported, our team follows up with cases and people who are high-risk contacts.

We ensure timely treatment for people sick with pertussis, offer education on preventing the virus from spreading, emphasize the importance of vaccination, and guide people who are high-risk contacts on how to protect themselves.

Eau Claire County – along with the state and country – also had an unusually high number of norovirus outbreaks in 2024. Our communicable disease and environmental health teams investigated a large outbreak of norovirus at UW-Eau Claire in December, as well as several other outbreaks in the community.

Staff partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and the sites experiencing an outbreak to identify the source of the virus and implement safety measures to prevent it from spreading further.

**By
the
numbers...**

1,214

Communicable
disease
reports

1,052

STI
screenings
completed

897

Family
Planning
Clinic visits

Regulations & Licensing

Our Regulations & Licensing division inspects and educates facilities that provide food, housing, or other necessities to the public. This division also inspects lodging, recreation, and body art facilities.

New technology improves lead testing program

The Health Department acquired a new tool in 2024 to help test for lead in our environment. This tool - a new X-ray fluorescence analyzer, or XRF - has improved reliability and testing efficiency, and lowered our annual operating costs for lead testing.

It's important to do followup lead testing in homes where children have elevated blood lead levels. Kids being exposed to lead can contribute to learning disabilities, behavior issues, and more. Adults exposed to lead can suffer from high blood pressure and headaches.

About 58% of Eau Claire County homes - or more than 25,000 homes - were built before 1980 and may contain lead-based products.

When we identify children in Eau Claire County who have been exposed to harmful levels of lead, our staff not only ensure that those children get ongoing medical care and testing, but we also assess lead hazards in their homes. That means testing for lead in soil, children's toys, household items, deteriorated paint, and dust hazards.

The new equipment produces results in less than 5 seconds and lets our



staff do additional testing on soils and other materials.

The new XRF is also able to test other materials, including consumer products like children's toys or common household items.

This year, we completed 16 environmental investigations related to childhood lead poisoning and provided outreach and partial inspections to 25 other households.

To find out more about lead testing at the Health Department, visit bit.ly/ECleadtesting.

Training volunteers on food safety

In addition to helping keep restaurants and retail food facilities in our county safe, our food inspectors often educate people who work with food.

In 2024, two of our inspectors had the opportunity to host food safety presentations at Feed My People Food Bank in Eau Claire.

The presentations were aimed at volunteers who work at different food pantry sites in western Wisconsin. Volunteers are responsible for collecting food from businesses, ordering and receiving bulk items, and distributing many types of food from the Feed My People warehouse.

About 40 food bank volunteers attended the presentations. Our inspectors educated volunteers about how to safely transport, store, and handle food to prevent spoilage and outbreaks of illness.

**By
the
numbers...**

1,416

Food
establishment
inspections
completed

279

Radon
test kits
sold

16

Environmental
investigations
related to child
lead poisoning

Environmental Sciences

Our Environmental Sciences division works to enhance and protect our environment and educate about how the environment affects our community's health.

Well testing projects in 2024 targeted drinking water quality

Thousands of people use the approximately 10,000 private wells in Eau Claire County for drinking water. To help protect this vital resource, our Environmental Science division worked on several well water quality projects in 2024.

The department supported environmental public health and geology researchers at UW-Eau Claire to offer a limited amount of free private well water tests for common water quality indicators, including bacteria, nitrate, and metals. The project was funded by the county's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars.

PFAS, a group of less common contaminants sometimes referred to as "forever chemicals," were also tested for in some wells. PFAS are commonly found in everyday items and can be found in soil and water from regular use or disposal of these items.



Prior to 2024, PFAS sampling in Eau Claire County was extremely limited and often cost-prohibitive. When testing in late 2023 and 2024 revealed PFAS in a small number of private wells, the health department quickly began outreach to expand testing for PFAS.



Photo courtesy of Sarah Vitale

We notified people with private wells in the affected areas and offered them additional testing support, such as sampling and shipping to a qualified lab for analysis. This testing revealed numerous additional rural wells impacted by PFAS contamination. Our staff worked to help homeowners understand their test results and, if needed, connect them with resources to improve their drinking water.

For more information about testing private well water, visit wells.echealthdepartment.org. For information about PFAS, visit pfas.echealthdepartment.org. To view water quality data in rural Eau Claire County, visit publicwater.echealthdepartment.com.

**By
the
numbers...**

19,097

*Drinking
water tests
performed*

353

*Water samples from
county beaches
analyzed for bacteria
contamination*

Policy & Systems

Our Policy & Systems division works with our partners to identify and communicate about health needs, gaps, resources, and policy and system changes—both inside and outside the department.

Working with public, partners on community health issues

A wide-ranging project to identify and reduce the impacts of our county's most pressing health issues came several steps closer to the finish line in 2024.

The Community Health Assessment, or CHA, is part of a process that's repeated every three years to focus work on the most urgent health needs identified by the community. (Twelve organizations from Eau Claire, Dunn, and Chippewa counties worked on this project together—health departments, health coalitions, United Way chapters, Hospital Sisters Health System, and Marshfield Clinic and Mayo Clinic health systems.)



Following a large community health survey in 2023, the Policy & Systems team worked with our partners to identify the top five health issues facing Eau Claire County. Chosen with input from the public and partners, the top five health priorities in our county were: alcohol misuse, poor mental health, lack of access to childcare or unaffordable childcare, substance misuse, and lack of safe or affordable housing.

Policy & Systems staff worked with our partners to create comprehensive reports for each county, which included extensive data around each county's top health issues. The next step: we supported the community in developing in-depth Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), which will guide the work of the Eau Claire Health Alliance coalition for 2025 through 2027.

At a summer workshop, the coalition chose its priorities for 2025-2027: **Community Connectedness and Mental Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Substance Misuse.**

Guided by Policy & Systems staff, the coalition met several times in 2024 to develop goals and objectives for each of the three priorities. At the end of the year, coalition members voted on final objectives. The results of that vote will lay the foundation for the coalition's work in 2025.

Here's what some of the coalition's goals will be: increasing the consumption of healthy food and drink, boosting physical activity, encouraging healthy social connections, strengthening social and emotional wellness, and reducing alcohol and substance misuse.



The Eau Claire County CHIP was released in February 2025. To read the plan, visit www.echealthalliance.org/data.

**By
the
numbers...**

149,041

*Unique Facebook
users our content
reached in 2024*

78

*Media interviews
completed by Health
Department staff in
2024*

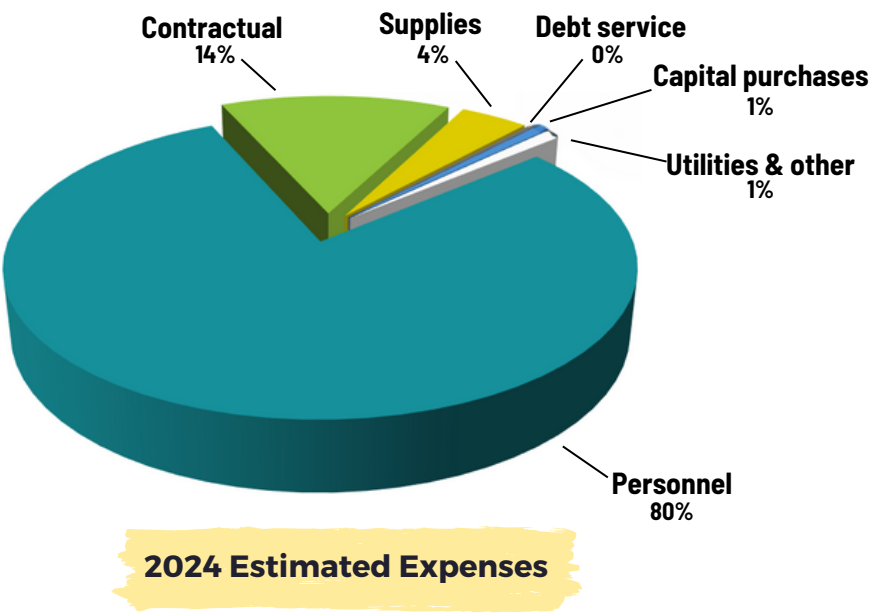
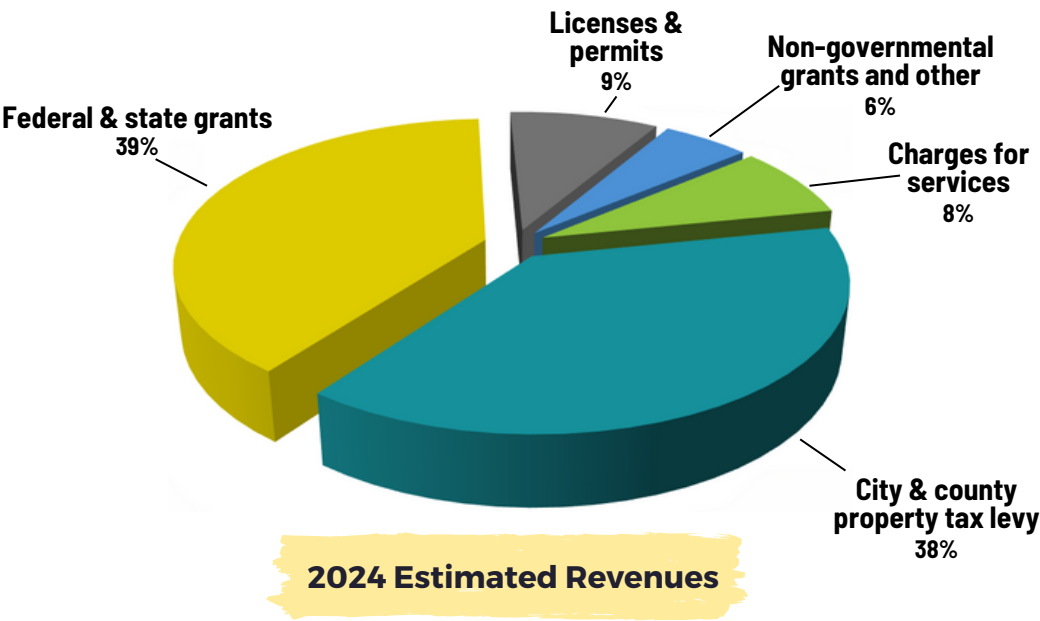
Operations

The Operations division leads, supports, and oversees operations for all divisions, including human resources, finances, and technical support. This division works to keep the Health Department organized and functioning efficiently.

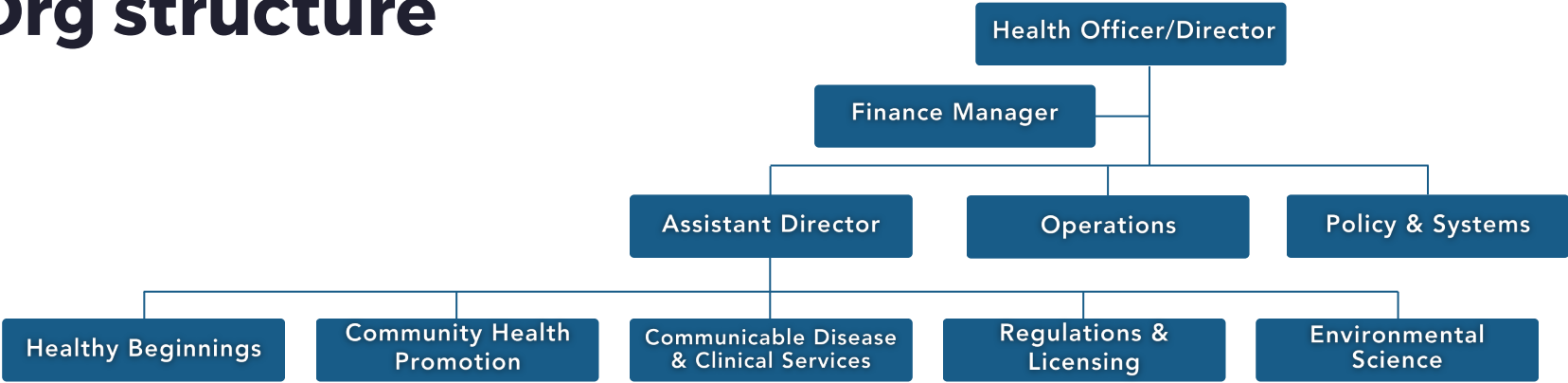
2024 budget

Here is a general, preliminary review of the 2024 Eau Claire City-County Health Department budget.

Staff represent the largest and one of the most important assets we have. Our staff strive to acquire diverse funders to support the department's work. We are proud of our remarkable staff and the amazing work they do.



Org structure



More from 2024



Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program



Training Eau Claire County Medical Reserve Corps volunteers to use CPR



Distributing sexual health education materials to students at a UW-Eau Claire event



Presenting about our housing inspection program at the Wisconsin Public Health Association Conference



Health Department Director Lieske Giese promoting Prescription Drug Take-Back Day in Eau Claire, along with Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, Eau Claire County Sheriff Dave Riewestahl, and Wisconsin DHS Director of Substance Use Initiatives Michelle Haese



Submitting final paperwork to renew our accreditation as a public health department

Meet our Management Team

Assistant
Department
Director



Marisa
Stanley

Operations



Tegan
Ruland

Communicable
Disease &
Clinical Services



Janel
Hebert

Policy &
Systems



Cortney
Sperber

Healthy
Beginnings



Elizabeth
Draeger

Regulations &
Licensing



Nicole
Kragness

Environmental
Sciences



Matt
Steinbach

Community Health
Promotion



Peggy
O'Halloran

Board of Health

The Eau Claire City-County Board of Health (BOH) is an eight-member board appointed by the County Board and City Council.

The BOH advocates for reasonable and necessary public health services. They also provide leadership and foster local involvement and commitment. The BOH is made up of a City Council member, a County Board member, two practicing physicians, one practicing dentist, one registered nurse, and two community representatives.



L-R: Kaeding, Nordin, Wildenberg, Bodeau, Miskulin, Vue, Miller (Hirsch not pictured)

MEMBERS:

Donald Bodeau, MD
David Hirsch, MD (County Board)
Mark Kaeding
Joshua Miller (City Council)
Terry Miskulin, DDS
Terri Nordin, MD
True Vue
Catherine Wildenberg, RN

Health Department Overview

Mission

Building a healthier community for all through prevention-focused programs and partnerships.

Vision

A community where everyone can live a healthier life.

Guiding principles

Our work is guided by five overarching principles:



Our Divisions and Programs

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS DIVISION

- Farmers Market Nutrition program
- Nurse-Family Partnership® home visitation
- Prenatal care coordination benefit services
- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) services
- Vision screening for elementary kids
- Breastfeeding peer counseling
- Fit Families program

OPERATIONS DIVISION

- Budget support
- Administrative support
- Human resources
- Health Department leadership
- Emergency preparedness program
- Western Wisconsin Public Health Readiness Consortium
- Eau Claire County Medical Reserve Corps

POLICY & SYSTEMS DIVISION

- Communications
- Health equity
- Community Health Assessment
- Community health improvement planning
- Strategic planning
- Quality improvement
- Eau Claire Health Alliance coalition

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE & CLINICAL SERVICES DIVISION

- Immunizations
- Communicable disease followup and surveillance
- Disease outbreak response and investigation
- STI prevention, screening, and treatment
- Contraceptive options
- Pregnancy testing
- HIV Partner services
- Regional Nurse Practitioner services
- Wisconsin Well Woman program
- Colposcopy program

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE DIVISION

- Private well program
- Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS) program
- Local ordinance support and administration (environmental hazards)
- Potential rabies exposure followup
- Environmental sampling and testing
- Certified drinking water lab testing
- Radiological field team

REGULATIONS & LICENSING DIVISION

- Restaurant and retail food inspections
- City of Eau Claire proactive housing inspection program
- Human health hazards and housing complaint investigations
- Tourist rooming house (Airbnb, VRBO) and other lodging inspections and licensing
- Radon protection
- Pool and campground inspections
- Body art inspections
- Manufactured home community inspections
- Asbestos and lead inspection and prevention
- Childhood lead poisoning prevention and followup

COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTION DIVISION

- Mental health promotion
- Suicide prevention
- Alcohol, tobacco, and substance misuse prevention
- Alcohol and tobacco compliance checks
- Child, overdose, and suicide death review teams
- Opioid misuse and overdose prevention
- Healthy relationship promotion and sexual violence prevention
- Chronic disease prevention

We're committed to building a safe, healthy community for everyone in Eau Claire County.

We're proud to share some of the progress our department made in 2024!



Eau Claire City-County
Health Department

Find our Annual Report online:

www.echealthdepartment.org

Get more Health Department news:

www.facebook.com/eauclairehealth

**720 Second Avenue
Eau Claire, WI 54703
715-839-4718**