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Buffalo County Health Department

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

As we move forward in 2024, we would like to disclose the highlights of our activities in 2023.

Thank you for your support, partnership, and shared vision.

- Buffalo County conducted a Groundwater Quality and Well Sampling Project during the summer of 2023 with two AHEC interns. 315 wells were sampled and analyzed in partnership with UW-Steven's Point. Results for bacteria, nitrate, pH, alkalinity, total hardness, chloride, conductivity, corrosivity, and DATC were provided to well owners free of charge. A free education event was offered to the project participants following sample analysis and receipt of results. The University of Wisconsin-Steven's Point will compile the findings into a comprehensive final report for the Board and the residents of Buffalo County.
- Together with Great Rivers United Way and our regional partners, we launched a survey initiative aimed at gathering insights and perspectives from residents in Buffalo County called a Community Health Assessment, which is done every 3 years. The surveys are designed to capture a wide range of feedback on various aspects of community health, including access to healthcare services, social determinants of health, and prevalent safety and environmental concerns. We will be presenting the findings at stakeholder meetings in early 2024.
- In 2023 we worked to establish and promote our new reproductive health and family planning clinic. In collaboration with local taverns, we initiated targeted outreach to distribute condoms and raise awareness about STI prevention and safe sexual practices. Condoms were provided within the restrooms of these establishments, providing patrons with easy access to essential protection and resources. We also partnered with a local school to provide period packs in the girls' restrooms with feminine supplies, contact information for the clinic, and education on toxic shock syndrome.
- We continued to partner with the UW-Eau Claire nursing program and local interpreters to support migrant farm workers in Buffalo County. Working in the agricultural sector exposes these workers to potential injuries without adequate healthcare access, compounded by communication, transportation,

and financial barriers. By visiting participating farms and providing the workers with health assessments and immunizations, we can provide some healthcare resources to this underserved population.

- An initiative by Buffalo County Health and Human Services to utilize American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for outdoor improvements at local community parks kicked off in 2023. By focusing on enhancing outdoor recreational areas for youth, the county is addressing a crucial aspect of community well-being, particularly in response to the mental health challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. There was also an emphasis on improving park amenities to be more inclusive for children of all abilities. Some examples of this are incorporating ADA-compliant picnic tables and installing wheelchair-accessible pathways and swings. 14 community parks were allotted funding, totaling \$227,745.00 in requested recreational upgrades.
- Public Health nursing continues to provide flu shots, childhood immunizations, and immunizations for those who are underinsured or not insured. In 2023, 69% of 2-year-olds in Buffalo County were fully vaccinated. The statewide average was 71%. 61% of adults 65 and older received a flu vaccine in 2023.
- We track communicable diseases through a channel of communications at the local, state, and regional levels between public health, private physicians, hospitals, and labs. In 2023, 130 communicable disease cases, not including COVID-19, were followed up on by our communicable disease staff. Vector-borne diseases are on the rise in Buffalo County with a total of 56 of those cases being tickborne diseases. Our environmental health staff worked with local campgrounds and libraries to provide education and tick repellent to promote awareness in the community.
- Our environmental health program works with licensed retail food stores, restaurants, hotels, bed and breakfast establishments, public swimming pools, and campgrounds. In 2023, 265 inspections were conducted at licensed facilities in Buffalo County. These inspections included routine inspections, pre-licensing inspections, re-inspections, complaint investigations, and on-site visits. Inspections ensure that licensed facilities are code compliant and when the public eats, sleeps, swims, or camps at these facilities they are further protected against health and safety concerns.
- Our health educator position provides Botvin *Lifeskills Training* (LST) at all four of our local public schools. The program is an evidence-based substance abuse and violence prevention program that is uniquely designed to be flexible and interactive. The LST program has been extensively tested and

proven effective at reducing tobacco, alcohol, opioid, and illicit drug use by as much as 80%. Long-term follow-up studies also show that it produces prevention effects that are durable and long-lasting. This program was largely put on hold in 2023 while the Health Educator position experienced turnover. Dyllan Smith started training as an instructor in the program in late 2023 and will be able to resume program delivery in 2024.

- In 2023, our department faced the challenge of significant staff turnover and position vacancies. While transitions in personnel are a natural part of organizational growth and evolution, we want to acknowledge the impact that these changes can have on team dynamics, productivity, and morale.

Buffalo County Public Health Staff Moving Into 2024

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