

Community Health Implementation Strategy



2023-2026

ASPIRUS MERRILL HOSPITAL & CLINICS

601 South Center Avenue
Merrill, WI 54452

ASPIRUS TOMAHAWK HOSPITAL & CLINICS

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Acknowledgments

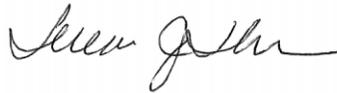
Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital are excited to share this Implementation Strategy with the community. This work reflects significant cross-sector collaboration, building on the recently completed Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA).

The hospitals are grateful to work with the Live Well Lincoln partners to identify, strategize around and address top community issues. We anticipate leading some local efforts and supporting others. The complex issues facing our communities require sustained collaboration and leadership. We look forward to continuing both of those over the next three years.

Respectfully,



Dawn Gapko
Chief Administrative Officer
Aspirus Merrill Hospital



Teri Theiler
Regional President
Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	1
Aspirus Health, Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital.....	3
Prioritized Significant Needs	5
Needs Not Selected	5
About the Implementation Strategy	6
Definition / Purpose of a CHNA and Implementation Strategy	6
Compliance.....	6
Implementation Frameworks	7
Implementation Assumptions and Hospital Specifics.....	8
Community-Centered Resources for the 55+ Population.....	10
Healthy Lifestyles – Weight, Nutrition	12
Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being	15
Social and Economic Needs.....	17
Approval by the Hospital Board.....	17
Conclusion.....	17
Appendices	18
Appendix A: Strategy Descriptions	19

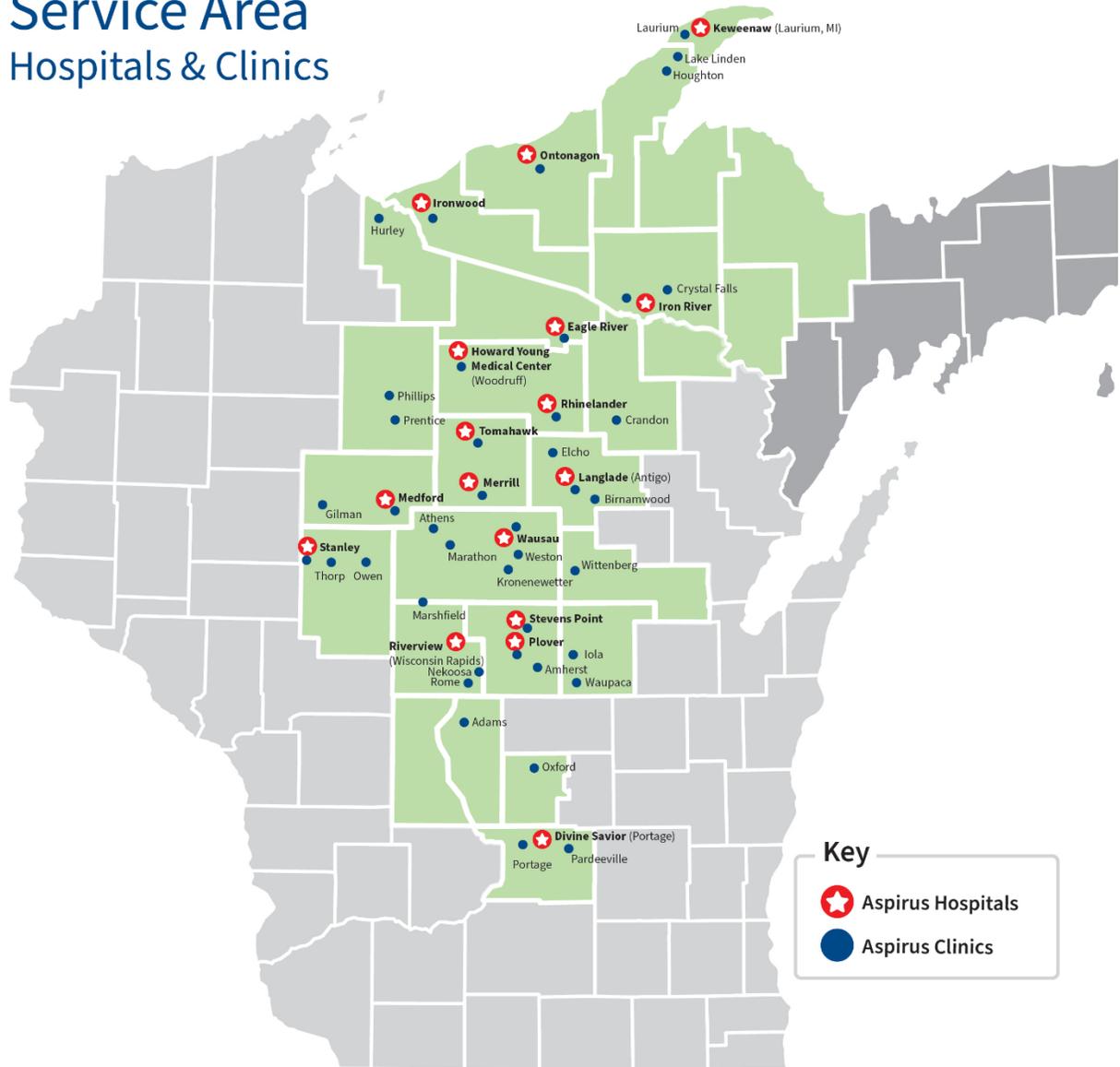
Aspirus Health, Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital

Aspirus Health is a non-profit, community-directed health system based in Wausau, Wisconsin. Its 11,000 employees are focused on improving the health and well-being of people throughout Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Aspirus serves communities through four hospitals in Michigan and 13 hospitals in Wisconsin, 75 clinics, home health and hospice care, pharmacies, critical care and air-medical transport, medical goods, nursing homes and a broad network of physicians. For more information, visit [aspirus.org](https://www.aspirus.org).

Aspirus Merrill Hospital is a 25-bed critical access hospital that provides primary and specialty services to Merrill and rural Lincoln County. The hospital features: inpatient hospital care, 24/7 emergency department, urgent care as well as imaging, laboratory and rehabilitation services.

Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital is a 25-bed critical access hospital that provides primary and specialty services to Tomahawk and rural Lincoln County. The hospital features: inpatient hospital care, 24/7 emergency department, urgent care as well as imaging, laboratory and rehabilitation services.

Service Area Hospitals & Clinics



Key

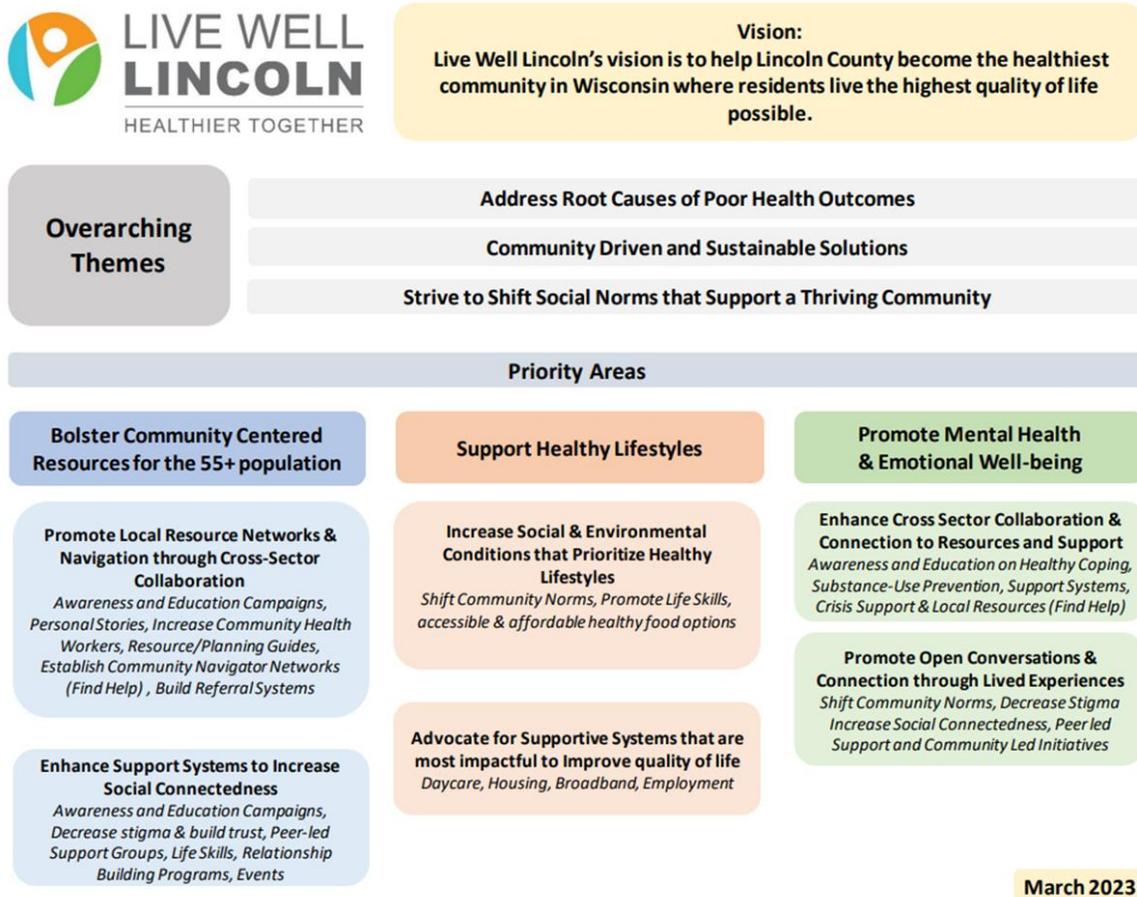
-  Aspirus Hospitals
-  Aspirus Clinics

Prioritized Significant Needs

Based on the results of the most recent community health needs assessment (CHNA), Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital will formally address the following issues through its three-year implementation strategy:

- Community-Centered Resources for the 55+ Population
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Live Well Lincoln’s community health improvement model is below.



Source: Lincoln County Health Department

Needs Not Selected

The needs prioritized by the hospital were the same needs Live Well Lincoln and the community stakeholders identified.

About the Implementation Strategy

For Aspirus, the community health needs assessment (CHNA) and the corresponding implementation strategy (IS) is one way to live our mission – to heal people, promote health and strengthen communities – and reach our vision – being a catalyst for creating healthy, thriving communities.

Definition / Purpose of a CHNA and Implementation Strategy

A CHNA is “a systematic process involving the community to identify and analyze community health needs and assets in order to prioritize, plan and act upon unmet community needs.”¹ The value of the CHNA lies not only in the findings but also in the process itself, which is a powerful avenue for collaboration and potential impact. An implementation strategy is “the hospital’s plan for addressing community health needs, including health needs prioritized in the CHNA and through other means”.²

Compliance

The completion of a needs assessment – and a corresponding implementation strategy – is a requirement for both hospitals and health departments. For non-profit hospitals, the requirement originated with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The IRS Code, Section 501(r)(3) outlines the specific requirements, including having the final, approved report posted on a public website. Additionally, CHNA and Implementation Strategy activities are annually reported to the IRS.

In Wisconsin, local health departments are required by Wisconsin State Statute 251.05 to complete a community health assessment and create a plan every five years. The statute indicates specific criteria must be met as part of the process.

¹ Catholic Health Association of the United States, <https://www.chausa.org>

² Catholic Health Association of the United States, *A Guide for Planning & Reporting Community Benefit*

Implementation Frameworks

For its community health improvement efforts, Aspirus Health is using the following approaches:

- *Results-based accountability.* Aspirus Health is applying the results-based accountability (RBA)³ framework to its implementation plans. The green-table descriptions below are outlined in the RBA framework, which includes:
 - Program accountability – What the organization (and its partners) will do and measure.
 - Strategies – Activities or programs to address the health issue.
 - Performance measures – Strategy evaluation data.
 - Population accountability – What (ideally) the multi-sector collaborative effort to address the issue will result in.
 - Indicators – Specific community-level measures or data points.
 - Results – The desired end-state of the community if all efforts are successful.
- *Continuum of care.* Aspirus Health is approaching complex community health issues from multiple levels, as outlined by the Institute of Medicine (IOM):⁴
 - Upstream prevention (also known as promotion): Strategies that are designed to “create environments and conditions that support behavioral health and the ability of individuals to withstand challenges. Promotion strategies also reinforce the entire continuum of behavioral health services.”⁵ Examples of upstream conditions include housing, community safety, education/learning, a living wage/income and more.
 - Prevention: Strategies that are designed to “prevent or reduce the risk of developing a behavioral health problem...”⁶
 - Treatment: Strategies that are designed for individuals “diagnosed with a substance use or other behavioral health disorder.”⁷

³ Clear Impact, <https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/>

⁴ Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies Fact Sheet, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/samhsa-behavioral-health-continuum-of-care-overview-9232019/download>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Implementation Assumptions and Hospital Specifics

Assumptions: A hospital's formal Implementation Strategy report is a three-year plan. With organizational circumstances and community environments constantly changing, this Implementation Strategy report is shared with the following assumptions:

- The planned efforts are described at a general level, allowing flexibility over time.
- Changes in circumstances or the environment may:
 - impact the completion of the efforts.
 - result in the addition, discontinuation and/or alteration of a given effort.

Hospital Specifics: Although this Implementation Strategy is reflective of two different hospitals, there is overlap between the two. The hospitals are in the same county and are represented on the same coalitions. The 'Strategy' column in the green tables in the subsequent pages outlines the efforts by hospital.

The community health priorities and accompanying plans are outlined on the next pages. For each health priority area, there are two or three pages. The first page describes some of the relevant secondary data and community input; the second (and sometimes third) page(s) describe(s) the plan (using the results-based accountability framework and the Institute of Medicine's continuum of care model), collaborators and organizational resources. For a more detailed description of some of the strategies, please see [Appendix A](#).

Community-Centered Resources for the 55+ Population

Why is it Important?

- By 2060, almost a quarter of the U.S. population will be age 65 or older. Older adults are at higher risk for chronic health problems like diabetes, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer’s disease. In addition, 1 in 3 older adults fall each year, and falls are a leading cause of injury for this age group.² Physical activity can help older adults prevent both chronic disease and fall-related injuries.
- Older adults are also more likely to go to the hospital for some infectious diseases — including pneumonia, which is a leading cause of death for this age group. Making sure older adults get preventive care, including vaccines to protect against the flu and pneumonia, can help them stay healthy.
- ... [C]aregivers of people with health conditions or disabilities influence the health of the people they’re caring for in many different ways. It’s important to make sure caregivers have the resources and support they need to keep themselves and the people they’re caring for healthy.

Sources: Excerpted nearly verbatim from Healthy People 2030 – [Older Adults](#) and [Caregiving](#);

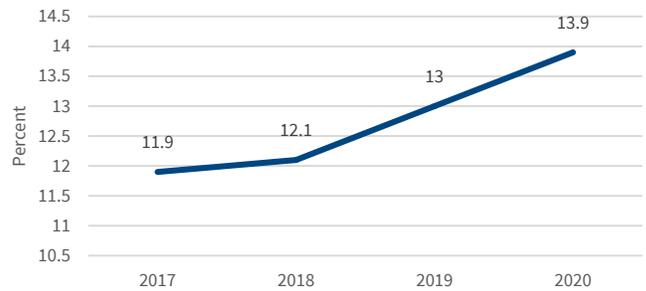
Disparities and Equity

- Alzheimer’s disease disproportionately affects individuals who are African American or Hispanic.
- Individuals with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to live shorter lives.
- Women are more likely to live longer than men.
- Women are more likely to develop osteoporosis or depressive symptoms or to report functional limitations as they age.
- Men are more likely to develop heart disease, cancer or diabetes.
- Social environmental factors such as residential segregation, discrimination, immigration, social mobility, work, retirement, education, income, and wealth can also have a serious impact on health and well-being. Economic circumstances can determine whether an individual can afford quality health care and proper nutrition from early life into old age. Individual and family financial resources and health insurance often determine whether an older adult enters an assisted living facility or nursing home or stays at home to be cared for by family members.

Source: [National Institutes on Aging](#); some verbiage is verbatim.

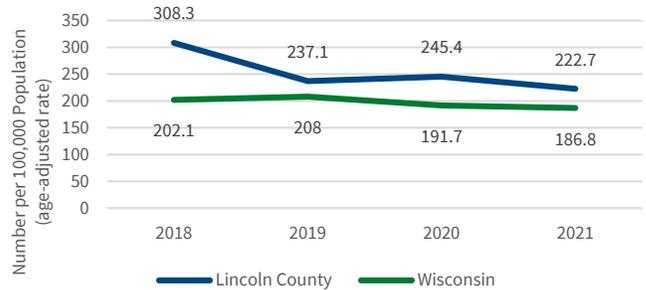
Data Highlights

Population Age 65+ Living Alone in a Non-Family Household



Source: Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking System.

Rate of Unintentional Falls-Related Injury Hospitalizations



Source: Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health (WISH), Injury Hospitalizations Module.

Additional Data

- Falls are the leading injury-related cause of hospitalization and death in Lincoln County. (Department of Health Services, WISH)
- The median age of Lincoln County residents is increasing: 38.1 in 2010 and 47.9 in 2020. (U.S. Census, American Community Survey)

Community Perceptions & Momentum

From the 2022 Lincoln County Community Survey:

- 33.5% indicated aging-related concerns were a health concern.
- 36.2% indicated caregiving for their family (childcare, aging relative, special needs) was a concern.

Community-Centered Resources for the 55+ Population

Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital plan to support community-centered resources for the 55+ population through the strategies below. Strategies might be completed with funding, dedicated staff time and/or coalition participation. Additional strategy details can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategies	Performance Measures	Indicators	Results
Prevention			
Merrill Only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meals on Wheels funding for bad weather days Community Care Paramedic Program (CCPP) – nutrition and depression screening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of meals # of CCPP patients screened # CCPP patients who received an intervention based on screening 	Corresponding to the health department’s measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in the percentage of adults reporting fair or poor health (baseline is 15% (2019)). Decrease in the average number of mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days (baseline is 4.5 (2019)). Decrease in hospitalizations for unintentional falls (baseline is 222 per 100,000 population (age-adjusted) (2021)). 	Lincoln County 55+ population will have the knowledge and ability to access programs, services, and resources that enhance their overall well-being.
Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote social connectedness opportunities (e.g., programs) 			
Treatment			
Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on resources (e.g., through FindHelp.org and/or a resource directory) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # closed loop referrals (FindHelp.org) 		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aging and Disability Resource Center Lincoln County Health Department Lincoln County Social Services Department St. Vincent DePaul CAP Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding – particularly for ADRC education, awareness, and caregiver programs Staff time – coalition participation, event planning and promotion, resource identification, volunteer coordination Printing services (in-kind) – community-facing health- and aging-focused materials Space (pending COVID-19 restrictions) – hosting space for non-profit agencies that serve individuals with low income, including older adults Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development

Healthy Lifestyles – Weight, Nutrition

Why is it Important?

- Regular physical activity in adults can lower the risk of early death; coronary heart disease; stroke; high blood pressure; type 2 diabetes; breast and colon cancer; falls and depression.¹ Physical activity in children and adolescents can improve bone health; improve cardio-respiratory and muscular fitness; decrease levels of body fat and reduce symptoms of depression.¹
- A healthy diet reduces risk of several chronic diseases, some cancers, oral disease, malnutrition, anemia and others risk factors, diseases and illnesses.¹ Good nutrition in children is important to healthy growth and development and to maintaining appropriate weight.¹
- At a healthy weight, one is less likely to develop chronic diseases and die at an earlier age.¹
- When families have ready-access to sufficient and nutritious foods, they are food secure. Ten percent of Wisconsin households are food insecure.²

Sources: (1) Healthy People 2020; (2) Healthiest Wisconsin 2020

Disparities and Equity

“Rates of obesity and chronic disease are generally significantly higher among racial and ethnic minorities and low-income populations. In many cases, disparities are linked with wide-reaching factors such as access to resources including healthy foods, safe places for physical activity, healthcare, and equitable opportunities for education, housing, employment and transportation.”

Source: [Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity State Health Plan](#), page 94

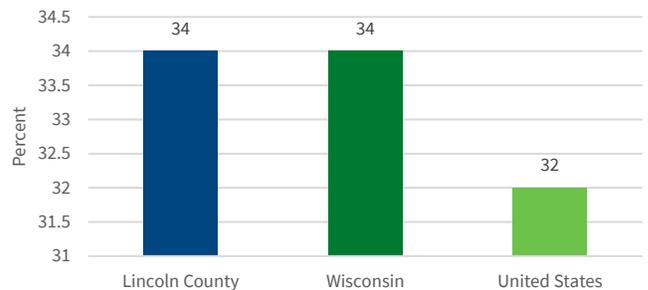
Community Perceptions & Momentum

From the 2022 Lincoln County Community Survey:

- 52% indicated that overweight or obesity across lifespan was a top health concern.
- 41% indicated that access to community parks and other recreation was a community strength.

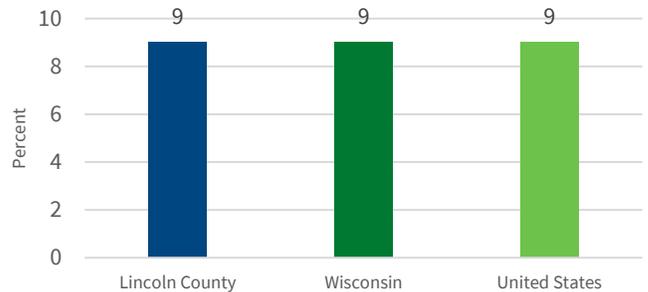
Data Highlights

Percentage of Adults that Report a BMI of 30+ (obese)



Source: 2022 County Health Rankings; data are from 2019

Percentage of Population Who Lack Adequate Access to Food



Source: 2022 County Health Rankings; data are from 2019

Additional Data

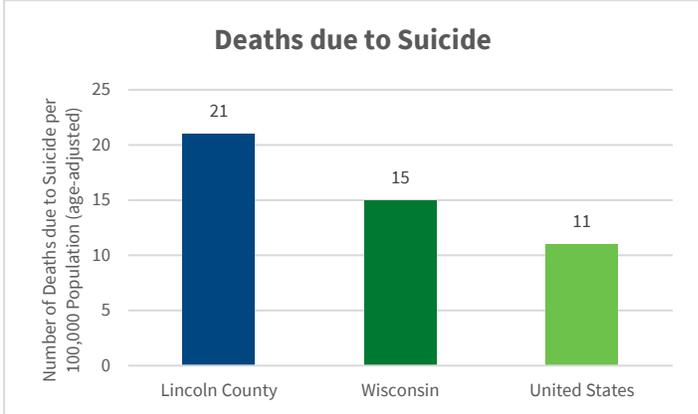
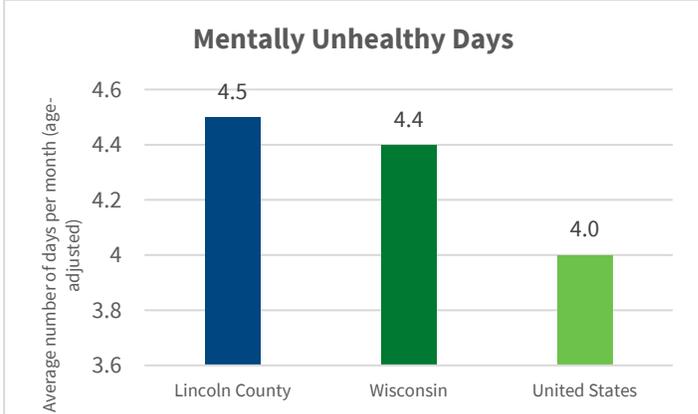
- 25% of Lincoln County adults ages 18 and over reporting no leisure time spent physically active (22% WI) (2022 County Health Rankings; data are from 2019)
- 39% of Lincoln County high school students who spend 3+ hours per day on phone, Xbox, or other devices (excluding use for schoolwork) (49% WI) (Lincoln County Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019)
- 22% of Lincoln County high school students who experienced hunger due to lack of food at home (past 30 days) (25% WI) (Lincoln County Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019)

Healthy Lifestyles – Weight, Nutrition

Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital plan to support healthy lifestyles – especially healthy weight and nutrition – through the strategies below. Strategies might be completed with funding, dedicated staff time and/or coalition participation. Additional strategy details can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategies	Performance Measures	Indicators	Results
Prevention			
Merrill Only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food repurposing program Community Care Paramedic Program (CCPP) – nutrition screening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pounds of food gleaned # of CCPP patients screened # CCPP patients who received an intervention based on screening 	Corresponding to the health department’s measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved percentage of students who ate fruits and vegetables every day (past 7 days) (baseline is 43% (2019)) Additional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the percentage of adults who are overweight or obese (baseline is 34% (2019)) 	Community members have equal opportunities to access healthy, nutritious foods.
Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition participation Cooking demonstrations Farmers market coupons Update the nutrition brochure (food assistance, pantries, etc.) Create advocacy network for policy, systems and environmental change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of cooking demos # of cooking demo participants Amount of redeemed farmers market coupons # of nutrition brochures distributed 		
Treatment			
Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on resources (e.g., through FindHelp.org and/or a resource directory) Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRx) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of closed loop referrals (FindHelp.org) # of vouchers given to patients % of vouchers redeemed at the farmers markets 		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Well Lincoln Leadership Group – Lincoln County Health Department, Lincoln County Social Services, Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), Opportunity Inc. • Nutrition Coalition – HealthFirst (WIC provider), FoodWise (UW-Extension), ADRC, health department • Kinship (Tomahawk) • Merrill school district • Tomahawk school district • Local farmers markets / Tomahawk Main Street • Food pantry • Merrill EMS (Community Care Paramedic Program) • St. Vincent DePaul • CAP Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding – particularly for farmers market coupons, fruit and veggie prescription program, cooking demonstrations and other programs • Staff time – coalition participation, event/program planning and promotion, resource identification • Printing services (in-kind) – community-facing nutrition materials • Space (pending COVID-19 restrictions) – hosting space for non-profit agencies that serve individuals with low income, including the food pantry • Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development • In-kind food repurposing program

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being									
<p style="text-align: center;">Why is it Important?</p> <p>- Approximately 20 percent of the population experiences a mental health problem during any given year.¹ Mental health issues are associated with increased rates of risk factors such as smoking, physical inactivity, obesity and substance abuse. As a result, these physical health problems can lead to chronic disease, injury and disability.²</p> <p>- Economic challenges (e.g., unemployment, poverty) are associated with poor mental health.³</p> <p>- During the COVID pandemic, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation increased and access to mental health providers and treatment was limited.⁴</p> <p><small>Sources: (1) National Institute for Mental Health; (2) Healthiest Wisconsin 2020; Healthy People 2020; (3) Macintyre, A., Ferris, D., Gonçalves, B.et al. What has economics got to do with it? The impact of socioeconomic factors on mental health and the case for collective action. Palgrave Commun4, 10(2018). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0063-2 (4) Czeisler ME, Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, June 24–30, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1049–1057. DOI:http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Data Highlights</p> <div data-bbox="812 457 1510 871"> <p style="text-align: center;">Deaths due to Suicide</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Deaths due to Suicide</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Entity</th> <th>Number of Deaths due to Suicide per 100,000 Population (age-adjusted)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Lincoln County</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wisconsin</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>United States</td> <td>11</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><small>Source: 2022 County Health Rankings; data are 2016-2020</small></p> </div>	Entity	Number of Deaths due to Suicide per 100,000 Population (age-adjusted)	Lincoln County	21	Wisconsin	15	United States	11
Entity	Number of Deaths due to Suicide per 100,000 Population (age-adjusted)								
Lincoln County	21								
Wisconsin	15								
United States	11								
<p style="text-align: center;">Disparities and Equity</p> <p>- Individuals with less than a high school education are more than twice as likely to have frequent mental distress compared to individuals with a college degree.⁵</p> <p>- Women have a 70% higher rate of depression compared to men.⁵</p> <p>- Individuals who are multiracial or American Indian / Alaskan Native are three times as likely, and White individuals were 2.5 times as likely, to experience depression compared to individuals who are Asian/Pacific Islander. However, the rate of depression in individuals who are Asian/Pacific Islanders is increasing at a faster rate than other groups.⁵</p> <p>- Poor family relationships can increase the likelihood of depression. Some individuals are at higher risk of poor family relationships – individuals who identify as LGBTQ, persons with disabilities and their caretakers, and individuals who suffered from child abuse and neglect.⁶</p> <p><small>Sources: (5) 2021 America’s Health Rankings, Executive Summary. https://assets.americashealthrankings.org/app/uploads/2021_ahr_health-disparities-report_executive_brief_final.pdf (6) Shim, Ruth S; Ye, Jiali; Baltrus, Peter; Fry-Johnson, Yvonne; Daniels, Elvan; Rust, George. Racial/Ethnic Disparities, Social Support, and Depression: Examining a Social Determinant of Mental Health. Ethn Dis. 2012 Winter; 22(1): 15-20. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4039297/</small></p>	<div data-bbox="812 934 1510 1348"> <p style="text-align: center;">Mentally Unhealthy Days</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>Mentally Unhealthy Days</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Entity</th> <th>Average number of days per month (age-adjusted)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Lincoln County</td> <td>4.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wisconsin</td> <td>4.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>United States</td> <td>4.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><small>Source: 2022 County Health Rankings; data are 2019</small></p> </div> <p>Additional Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depression and anxiety in Wisconsin youth has been increasing since 2017. <small>(Source: YRBS)</small> - Depression and anxiety in Wisconsin disproportionately affects students who: identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; have a disability; are a person of color; are food insecure. <small>(Source: YRBS)</small> <div data-bbox="812 1659 1510 1858"> <p style="text-align: center;">Community Perceptions & Momentum</p> <p>From the 2022 Lincoln County Community Survey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% indicated that mental health was a top issue. • 37% indicated that a lack of mental health care providers is a concern. </div>	Entity	Average number of days per month (age-adjusted)	Lincoln County	4.5	Wisconsin	4.4	United States	4.0
Entity	Average number of days per month (age-adjusted)								
Lincoln County	4.5								
Wisconsin	4.4								
United States	4.0								

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Aspirus Merrill Hospital and Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital plan to support mental health and emotional well-being through the strategies below. Strategies might be completed with funding, dedicated staff time and/or coalition participation. Additional strategy details can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Program Accountability		Population Accountability	
Strategies	Performance Measures	Indicators	Results
Prevention			
Merrill Only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merrill Area Public Schools (MAPS) Mental Health Matters Alliance Training for school personnel to implement best practice youth AODA interventions Community Care Paramedic Program (CCPP) – nutrition and depression screening Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition participation Resource guide Awareness campaigns (e.g., billboards) Mental health and suicide prevention trainings (e.g., Question, Persuade, Refer; MH First Aid) Reduce access to lethal means Raise Your Voice (school-based club focused on mental health) Depression screening in primary care Tomahawk Only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote mentorship of youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School reporting of AODA intervention effectiveness # of trainings # of training participants Training evaluation results # of CCPP patients screened # CCPP patients who received an intervention based on screening # of resource guides distributed # of Raise Your Voice participants Depression screening measures (% of patients screened; % who screen positive) # of youth being mentored 	Corresponding to the health department’s measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in the average number of mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days (baseline is 4.5 (2019)). Decrease the percentage of adults who have ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) (baseline is 16% have four or more ACEs (2017-2021)) Decrease the percentage of high school students who report significant problems with anxiety (past 12 months) (baseline is 41% (2019)). Decrease the percent of high schoolers that felt sad or hopeless in the last 12 months (baseline is 26% (2019)) Improve the ratio of population to mental health providers (baseline is 1450:1 (2021)) Additional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the suicide rate (baseline is 21 deaths per 100,000 population (2016-2020)) 	Community members have equal opportunities for mental well-being.
Treatment			
Merrill and Tomahawk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on resources (e.g., through FindHelp.org and/or a resource directory) Peer recovery coaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of closed loop referrals (FindHelp.org) # of patients accessing recovery coaches; # and type of referrals made by recovery coaches 		

Collaborative Partners	Aspirus Resources
<p>Live Well Lincoln / Healthy Minds Coalition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln County Health Department • Lincoln County Social Services • Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) • Opportunity Inc., • Kinship (Tomahawk) • Merrill school district • Tomahawk school district • Merrill EMS (Community Care Paramedic Program) • HAVEN (domestic abuse shelter and programs) • NAMI for Raise Your Voice Club • St. Vincent DePaul • CAP Services • Law enforcement • Justice system (e.g., judges) • Library (Merrill and Tomahawk) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding – particularly for youth (e.g., Raise Your Voice Club) and community programs and campaigns • Staff time – coalition participation, event/program planning and promotion, resource identification • Printing services (in-kind) – community-facing resource guide to mental health resources • Space (pending COVID-19 restrictions) – hosting space for non-profit agencies that serve individuals with low income, including CAP Services, St. Vincent DePaul and United Way • Clinical services and related infrastructure – providing direct care, supporting the FindHelp platform and related resource development

Social and Economic Needs

Research shows that social and economic factors are significant ‘upstream’ contributors to poor mental health and substance use issues (as well as many other health issues). Children who don’t have their basic needs met early can suffer irreparable long-term harm. Aspirus is committed to recognizing and addressing these ‘root causes’ as part of its overall community health improvement efforts.

Recent regulatory changes reinforce Aspirus’ commitment to this work. Aspirus has increased its screening of patients for social needs, in part by integrating a resource platform (FindHelp.org) into its electronic medical record system. The community health team and their internal partners are working to assure that when patients identify a social need they are connected with the appropriate resource.

Approval by the Hospital Board

This CHNA report was reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors for:

- Aspirus Merrill Hospital on October 18, 2023.
- Aspirus Tomahawk Hospital on October 17, 2023.

Conclusion

Thank you to the leadership of the Lincoln County Health Department and all of the coalition partners. The collaborative planning efforts have resulted in a shared vision for a healthier Lincoln County. Aspirus looks forward to continued collaboration to address the health issues important to the community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Strategy Descriptions

The list below describes some of the plan resources, programs and strategies.

All Three Health Issues

FindHelp.org. FindHelp.org is a publicly available platform of community-based resources. The hospitals are working with their community partners to better connect the community resources with patients' social needs through closed-loop referrals. FindHelp.org is integrated into the electronic health records.

Community-Care Paramedic Program. The Community Care Paramedic Program utilizes paramedics to bridge the gap between patient discharge and primary care follow up. The program has included depression screening, nutrition screening, falls prevention and disposing of unused or expired prescriptions. In the last year, the program expanded in three ways. First, patients discharged from the hospital who had diabetes were eligible for the program. Second, the program began working with the Aspirus Wausau Hospital Med/Surg Department to connect patients who are from Merrill (but in the Wausau Hospital) to be part of the program upon discharge. Third, the Merrill Hospital Community Health Lead began working with the Wausau Fire Dept to replicate the Community Care Paramedic Program in Marathon County.

Community-Centered Resources for the 55+ Population

Promote social connectedness opportunities. The hospitals and their coalition partners plan to increase the promotion and visibility of opportunities to decrease social isolation. Examples include making programs available virtually, providing transportation and accessibility options, and diversifying promotion strategies (e.g., social media, churches, etc.).

Healthy Lifestyles – Weight, Nutrition

Food repurposing program. Aspirus Merrill Hospital implements a food repurposing program that packages untouched food from the hospital's cafeteria and makes it available for individuals who use the food pantry. Thousands of pounds are donated annually.

Cooking demonstrations. The hospital works with local partners to conduct healthy cooking demonstrations. Past demonstrations have been held with families with children enrolled in HeadStart and also at the food pantry. Small appliances, cooking utensils and/or cookbooks are also provided to participants to help remove barriers to using the recipes.

Farmers market coupons. The hospital provides triple-your-bucks coupons for local farmers market purchases to individuals who receive FoodShare.

Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program. Aspirus Health, primarily through Care Management, implements a fruit and vegetable prescription (FVRx) program across the system. Patients with chronic disease are screened for food insecurity and ‘prescribed’ fruits and vegetables. The FVRx can be used like cash at the local farmers market.

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Merrill Area Public Schools (MAPS) Mental Health Matters Alliance. In response to youth struggling with mental health issues, the Alliance aims to increase awareness and connect youth, families and staff to mental health services in the school and community. The Alliance includes school personnel as well as external community agencies.

Mental health promotion and suicide prevention trainings. Trainings and programs such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) and Mental Health First Aid are periodically conducted in the community and in the schools.

Reduce access to lethal means. One way to reduce the risk of suicide is to reduce access to methods or means of suicide. The hospitals and their partners regularly make prescription drug lockboxes and Detera bags available to the general public, reducing the accessibility of prescription drugs for self-harm.

Raise Your Voice. Raise Your Voice was developed by NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Wisconsin to empower teens “to create a new conversation about mental health through education, leadership development and civic advocacy.” The clubs are student-led. Raise Your Voice has been growing in Merrill; in the third year of the program (2022-23), 150 students participated. Aspirus is working to expand the program to Tomahawk.

Promote mentorship of youth. Kinship of Tomahawk provides mentoring opportunities for youth and families in the area. Mentoring has been shown to have a positive impact on youth.

Peer recovery coaches: To support individuals struggling with addiction, Aspirus contracts with a non-profit organization to provide peer recovery coaches to individuals presenting in the Emergency Department and seeking recovery. Aspirus has not had peer recovery coaches in this region, but is exploring this opportunity for the future.



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