



Administration

February 28, 2024

City Council  
City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

To Members of the City Council,

On behalf of the Health Department of La Crosse County, I am contacting you regarding the need for and importance of supportive services such as those provided by Scenic Bluffs within the county. Supportive services including triaging of needs, counseling, primary care, dental care, and housing concerns are all part of the services that are planned to occur at the REACH Center, in collaboration with Scenic Bluffs and other local partners. Continued work to make these types of services easily accessible within our community are vital to the needs of county and city residents.

I'd like to share one example that highlights how these services impact the lives of and meet the needs of individuals and families in our community. In recent (2022) U.S. Census Bureau data, it is reported that the poverty rate in La Crosse County is 11.8%. This positions us with greater poverty than is seen across the State of Wisconsin (10.7%) but less than in the United States as a whole (12.6%). In our local community need assessment (COMPASS), we note that we have a disparity in access to receiving some important health services for those in poverty.

For the general population in our area, it is reported that 83% of children, 77% of high schoolers, and 71% of adults over age 18 visited a dentist in the past year. The top 3 barriers locally (per COMPASS) to receiving dental care were cost, scheduling availability, and lack of insurance that is accepted for care. From state Medicaid reporting, we know that for those in our community who are on Medicaid, only 15% were able to visit a dentist for a preventative care appointment. Since 2018, we have locally seen increased barriers for this population to access dental care. Scenic Bluffs performs care that fits this important service gap. Having them available within the county to provide these services eliminates additional planning for transportation and accommodations necessary to travel further distances to receive care as well as social service triaging that tries to identify options for care (if able to be found).

The Health Department provides support for the local dental care gap also through our Seal-A-Smile, La Crosse Smiles, and Dental Pain Project programs, however, the unmet needs are significant. Untreated dental care needs lead to a number of other needs for individuals including more severe infections, conditions that are exacerbated when not treated earlier, and use of other methods to treat pain. We also have situations in our services where individuals report concern about being unable to find employment or housing due to the condition of and inability to repair their teeth and how others may respond to them. For these specific reasons based on just a dental example, along with our need as a community to provide access to the other types of services Scenic Bluffs provides for those with less opportunity – I encourage our community to work together to support Scenic Bluffs and other providers like it to provide services locally in easily accessible places and in ways that individuals can feel comfortable and safe going to.

Thank you for your service to the community and consideration of the needs of all citizens.

Respectfully,

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