

LIFE

Local Indicators For Excellence

SNAPSHOT

PORTAGE COUNTY

2017

John R. Horton
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COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Portage County is a great place to live, work, and play. Respondents to the 2017 LIFE in Portage County Community Survey told us what they liked best about living in Portage County. Below is a summary of what residents feel are the strengths of our community.

Recreation and Natural Resources

- An abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities
- Beautiful lakes, rivers, and streams
- Plentiful parks, trails, and green spaces
- Clean air and water

Size, Location, and Accessibility

- The size offers a small-town feel with some of the services and amenities of a bigger city
- Central location with easy access to the state
- Easy to get around in the community

Education

- New efforts focused on children prenatal to age 5
- High quality K-12 school systems
- UW-Stevens Point and Mid-State Technical College offer many opportunities for residents

Activities

- A variety of activities, events and festivals
- Strong arts and cultural activities
- A wide variety of youth and sporting activities

Support Services/Philanthropic Community

- Solid support system for residents in need
- A volunteer community that graciously gives of its time and talents
- Generous residents, businesses, and organizations that provide financial support for our community

Community Engagement

- Growing diversity of our community
- Concern for the environment
- Sustainable food options such as the Farmers Market and Food Co-Op
- Engaged and civic-minded community members

Health and Wellness

- Quality health care and wellness resources
- Unique dental health resources and intervention
- Community initiatives that focus on nutrition, physical activity, and worksite wellness

Sense of Community

- Friendly, kind and generous people
- Safe area with low crime rate
- Quiet and peaceful atmosphere
- Cooperation among community partners

Business and Economy

- A diversified economy
- A skilled, productive, and dedicated workforce
- Lively downtown
- Variety of shopping, restaurants, and retail stores

“Overall a great community with many cultural and social opportunities. Great place to raise a family.”

“It’s a diverse community that puts a high value on education and the environment.”



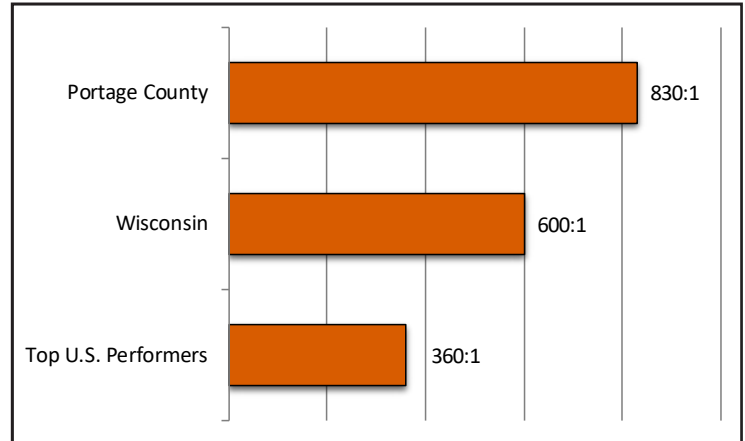
Mental Health



Why is this important in Portage County?

- Of U.S. adults, an estimated 18% (43.6 million) suffer from a mental illness. An estimated 1 in 7 children aged 2-8 has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.
- There was an increase in adult suicides in Portage County from 2010-2016.
- Of the respondents to the LIFE in Portage County Community Survey, 17.4% said that they or someone in their family/household struggled with mental health concerns.

Ratio of Population to Mental Health Providers



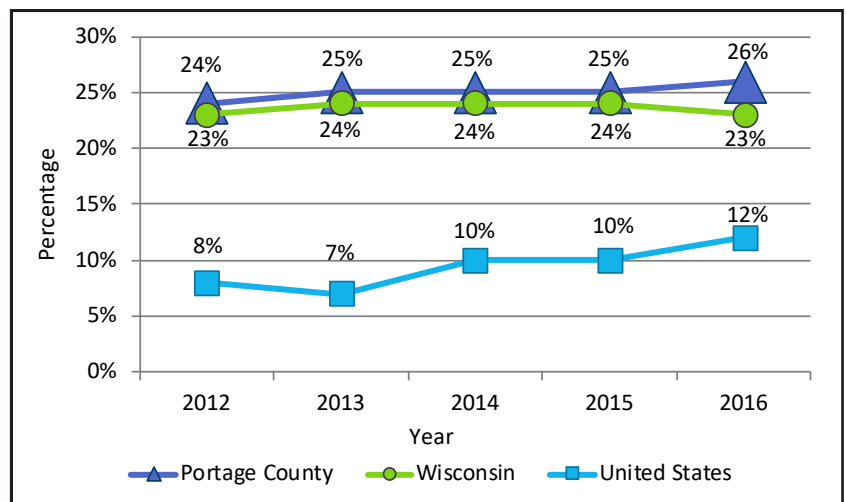
Alcohol & Other Drugs



Why is this important in Portage County?

- The abuse of illicit drugs, including the non-medical use of prescription drugs remains a problem. From 2012 to 2016 there was a 77% increase in the number of persons arrested for drug offenses in Portage County.
- Wisconsin has the highest rate of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Nearly 71% of LIFE Community Survey respondents felt drinking and driving is a problem in Portage County.
- Portage County's drug-related school suspensions and expulsions rate was higher than surrounding counties.

Prevalence of Excessive Drinking



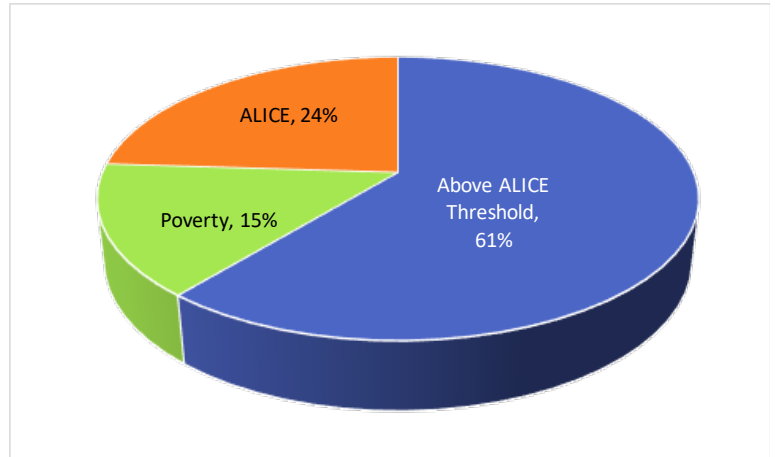
Financial Stability



Why is this important in Portage County?

- In Portage County, 39% of the households struggle to afford basic necessities.
- Of residents in Portage County, 8,510 (12.1%) are considered food insecure, meaning at times there was limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.
- In Wisconsin, 36% of the jobs pay less than the amount needed for two working parents to support their family.

Struggling Households in Portage County



ALICE, an acronym for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mloyed, are households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county (the ALICE Threshold). Combined, the number of poverty and ALICE households equals the total population struggling to afford basic needs.

Affordable Housing



Why is this important in Portage County?

- The number of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs has increased significantly in recent years.
- From 2014-2016, there were more than 1,000 calls to 2-1-1 regarding rental/housing assistance.
- There has been a steady rise in rental rates in Portage County during the past ten years, with a sharper increase over the past few years.
- The demand in home sales outpaces the supply, particularly for lower to moderate priced houses.

Percentage of Income Spent on Housing in Portage County

LIFE in Portage County Community Survey Responses: Do you spend 30% or more of your total family/household income on housing?		
Response	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Yes	280	42.9%
No	291	44.6%
Do not know	48	7.4%
Prefer not to say	33	5.1%

***Includes rent or mortgage plus utilities, insurance, and property taxes**

LIFE CALLS TO ACTION

The LIFE (Local Indicators For Excellence) Report provides a comprehensive overview of the quality of life in Portage County. The LIFE Report of Portage County is conducted every five years. Since the last LIFE Report in 2012, progress has been made on many of the issues identified. In addition, the report has proven to be a valuable resource for groups in the community who use it for decision-making, priority setting, grant writing and recruitment purposes. The LIFE report is an excellent tool to empower local leaders and other citizens to collaborate in order to improve the quality of life in our communities.



Community input for the 2017 report was obtained through household surveys and listening sessions with key stakeholders in the community, as well as data on 70 indicators reflecting the quality of life in Portage County.

Based on report data, four Calls to Action were identified. The community is encouraged to engage around these issues with the goal of further improving the quality of life in Portage County.

- Mental Health
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Financial Stability
- Affordable Housing

This graphic demonstrates the interconnectedness between the Calls to Action. It is designed as a cog to reflect forward motion. Just like a cog in a wheel, these Calls to Action are intended to serve as catalysts to propel our community to move forward in addressing these issues.

Mental Health



Mental health issues impact daily living and functioning, and can lead to challenges including substance abuse, diminished physical health, poor performance at school/work, homelessness, and other issues.

Alcohol & Other Drugs



Substance abuse is harmful to individuals, families, and communities, and contributes to costly social, physical, mental and public health problems as well as increased crime.

Financial Stability



Many individuals in Portage County work full time but still cannot meet the basic needs of their families. These families are often forced to make difficult trade-offs, having to choose between child care, health care, transportation, and food.

Affordable Housing



The cost of renting and owning a home has increased in recent years. A growing number of owners and renters are allocating a larger share of income to housing, leaving less for other expenses.

Purpose of the LIFE in Portage County Project

- Identify community strengths, challenges, and priorities that help guide and mobilize action to improve life in Portage County.
- Be an effective tool in raising awareness in our community about quality of life issues as well as to monitor trends and underlying causes.
- Serve as a resource: a centralized, easily accessible source of data, for non-profit organizations, policy makers, government entities, faith based organizations, foundations, corporations, and others.

Portage County Community Demographics

	2000 Census	2010 Census	2015 Projections	% Change 2000-2015
Population	67,182	70,019	70,432	4.7%
Median Age (Years)	33.0	35.8	36.2	9.7%
Minority Population	4.3%	5.8%	6.0%	39.5%
Families in Poverty	4.4%	5.1%	7.2%	63.6%
Median Household Income	\$43,487	\$51,456	\$51,613	18.7%
Average Household Size	2.54	2.39	2.41	-5.1%
Speak Language Other Than English in Home	6.4%	6.4%	5.9%	-7.8%
In Labor Force (16 years and over)	71.4%	68.7%	67.7%	-5.2%

FULL REPORT AVAILABLE ON THE WEB AT: www.unitedwaypoco.org

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

1100 Centerpoint Drive, Suite 302
 Stevens Point, WI 54481
 715-341-6740
uway@unitedwaypoco.org