



# STRATEGIC PLAN

Opening Doors to Thriving Communities  
2025-2027





## MESSAGE FROM DHHS LEADERSHIP

### DHHS STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2027

When we published the *2020-2025 DHHS Strategic Plan: Creating Healthy Communities*, it was a time of transformation and uncertainty. We were in the midst of a global pandemic and operational and culture changes within the department. Adjustments across programs and services needed to be made as a result of the pandemic, which, in some cases, helped us reimagine and streamline service delivery. Our hope at the outset of the previous plan was to make meaningful changes to provide greater access to services and better serve residents across our community.

We are very pleased that over the past four years, we have seen a dramatic transformation in philosophy, infrastructure, and service delivery that is advancing our vision and moving the department forward. This has been possible because of the dedication and commitment of each of our DHHS staff.

We have listened to the community. We have leaned into innovative ideas asking, “*why not?*” There have been major changes to our facilities with new and improved locations where people can access services. We have successfully socialized the *No Wrong Door* model of customer service. Through countywide and community-wide collaboration, we have made significant upstream investments across all of our service areas. We took “divisions” out of our name and broke down silos, physically and philosophically. As a result of the accomplishments of the previous strategic plan, we are a stronger, more united, and more effective department.

Our work is not done. **We remain deeply committed to our vision, “*Together, creating healthy communities.*”** We will be successful in achieving this vision by working with others, and growing a diverse network of community partners, together being bold and courageous and focused on our collective impact for housing, mental health, violence prevention, serving

children, families, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. We will need one unified voice to advocate for change at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure policies are equitable and fair, and resourced to support our vision.

This new strategic plan will continue our positive momentum building on the tremendous accomplishments of the past four years. Through thoughtful planning, we will further advance our two key strategies to improve individual and community health by addressing social determinants of health with a grounded strategic direction.

As it was with the previous plan, this plan will not be static. It will serve as a roadmap and take us on a journey of discovery and system improvement. We are committed to the residents of Milwaukee County, and intend to fully embrace the direction of this new strategic plan to achieve our vision in support of Milwaukee County’s vision: **By achieving race and health equity, we will be the healthiest county in the state.**



**Shakita LaGrant-McClain**  
*Executive Director*



**David Muhammad**  
*Deputy Director*



## 2025-2027 DHHS STRATEGIC PLAN: OPENING DOORS TO THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Milwaukee County's Department of Health and Human Services has a bold vision for healthy communities, and this strategic plan reflects our commitment to racial equity, upstream solutions, and working together in new ways to create the best access and outcomes for people in need.

As we close out our previous five-year strategic plan, we are building on our past success in the next planning period for 2025-2027. This document reviews accomplishments since the last plan, information from staff and collaborators for priorities for the next plan, and our goals and objectives for the next planning period.

Some of the changes required to achieve this plan will be challenging, but we have learned from the previous strategic plan that we are stronger when we come together around a vision, when we collaborate across service areas and organizational boundaries, and when we remain focused on the residents and community that we sincerely care for. Our region brings with it a complex legacy of both harmful policies and inequities, as well as creativity, caring people, and inspiring innovation. The Department of Health and Human Services continues to shout its shared vision with an enthusiasm we will bring to implementing this plan: **"Together, Creating Healthy Communities!"**

**\$440M**  
ANNUAL BUDGET

**1,000**  
APPROXIMATE  
STAFF

**+300**  
CONTRACTED  
PARTNER AGENCIES

In this work, we manage the complexity of providing a variety of services at once. The Department consists of six service areas: Aging & Disabilities, Behavioral Health, Child Support, Children Youth & Families, Housing, and Veterans Services. With a budget of **\$440 Million**, approximately **1,000** staff, and **over 300** contracted partner agencies throughout the community, we serve Milwaukee County residents from birth through the end of life. As One Department, the six service areas work together to provide crucial basic needs and wellness supports to enable safe, stable, healthy lives for people in Milwaukee County.

## MILWAUKEE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Aging & Disabilities, Behavioral Health, Child Support,  
Children Youth & Families, Housing, and Veterans' Services



Provides resource navigation and options counseling for support services for those 18+ with disabilities and all people over 60  
Provides programming, protection, and services for older adults and those with disabilities



Provide resources and options counseling for programs that support children with disabilities  
Support youth through the youth justice system



Provides crisis response and support for mental health and substance use needs  
Provides ongoing clinical, case management, and other services to support mental and behavioral health wellness



Provide resources and housing navigation for those experiencing homelessness  
Stabilize community housing through home repair and low-income housing



Provides support for families to have the resources they need to raise children well, including child support orders  
Support parents with their parenting through specific programs



Help veterans navigate the VA and other systems for benefit acquisition  
Provide short-term support for veterans in need

## 2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

The previous Strategic Plan had two strategies: **Strategy 1 - No Wrong Door/Integrated Services** and **Strategy 2 - Population Health/Systems Change**. These two strategies have been surrounded by plans to implement infrastructure changes and to continue to advance racial equity, supported by nine focus areas:

 <p>No Wrong Door/ Integrated Services</p>	 <p>Investing in Staff and Ecosystem</p>	 <p>Leading Major Systems Change</p>
 <p>Re-Investing Upstream</p>	 <p>Participant and Community at Center</p>	 <p>Address Racial Equity and Investment in Affected Communities</p>
 <p>Addressing Root Causes and Social Determinants</p>	 <p>Developing Trust</p>	 <p>Developing and Intentionally Applying Resources</p>

As we embark on the creation of our next Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Strategic Plan, we want to recognize how far we've come in the four years since our last strategic plan—the *2020-2025 DHHS Strategic Plan: Creating Healthy Communities*. The Strategic Plan laid out an ambitious roadmap with specific and measurable goals. It defined an integrated service model to orchestrate care for program participants while providing a welcoming, trauma-informed environment. It challenged us to address social determinants of health and improve community health outcomes through policy and practice with the understanding of racial and health equity. Moreover, it acknowledged that significant investments in staff and the human services ecosystem would need to be made.

DHHS' work toward the department's strategic vision has been transformative. Staff at all levels have embraced change, adapted, and embarked on the journey together to improve community health.

## FOUR YEARS LATER, WE HAVE MUCH TO CELEBRATE. HERE IS A SUMMARY OF OUR SUCCESS:

To serve residents with dignity and improve access, DHHS leadership led the charge to build a new health and human services building, to be a cornerstone of the community. The new Marcia P. Coggs Health and Human Services Center is located in the King Park neighborhood, the same trusted location where it has been for more than 50 years. When it opens in 2025, Milwaukee County will have a building designed specifically to deliver health and human services for the first time, eliminating physical barriers, creating a warm, welcoming, accessible location.

Public officials and community leaders come together for the groundbreaking of the new Marcia P. Coggs Health and Human Services Center.



DHHS staff have advanced the new person-centered No Wrong Door philosophy, improving the customer service experience, better serving residents throughout their lifespan, and getting to 'yes' faster, all while addressing the root cause of someone's needs and advancing racial equity.

Aging Services, Veterans' Services, Child Support Services, and the Office for Persons with Disabilities were successfully integrated into DHHS, providing residents with more direct access to help.



The We Care Crew partnered with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center on a Drive-Thru Turkey Giveaway in November of 2021. DHHS remains an active member of Milwaukee County's "We Care Crew." The We Care Crew's goal was to build trust between communities disproportionately affected by the dual pandemics of racial inequity and COVID-19.





More than a decade in the making, the behavioral healthcare system saw seismic change in the past four years with the redesign of the system. In 2022, the Mental Health Complex and Psychiatric Crisis Services (PCS) closed after 40 years, transitioning services from institutional care to community-based locations, meeting residents where they are.

A new model of emergency behavioral healthcare was developed with a public-private partnership between Milwaukee County, Advocate Aurora, Ascension, Children's Wisconsin, and Froedtert, known as the "Joint Venture." The Joint Venture opened the Mental Health Emergency Center (MHEC) in September of 2022, which is able to serve patients closer to where they live.



DHHS has undertaken a variety of efforts to advance harm reduction strategies in vulnerable communities, including the placement of vending machines offering free harm reduction supplies and outreach campaigns targeting elderly residents and people with disabilities.

Opioid Settlement Funds have significantly increased DHHS' ability to strategically respond to the opioid crisis. Efforts include community regranting through the Better Ways to Cope initiative, DHHS' first opioid prevention interventions specific to older adults and people with disabilities, and Harm Reduction Vending Machines placed to ensure that lifesaving supplies are accessible in geographic areas with the greatest incidence of death from overdose.

DHHS has funded the largest number of affordable housing projects in Milwaukee County history. More than \$35 million has been invested in affordable housing projects across the community, particularly in Milwaukee County suburbs where racial disparities in housing access and homeownership opportunities continue to prevent many residents from living in the neighborhood of their choice.

In addition to the new Cogs building in the King Park neighborhood, DHHS is revitalizing the neighborhood. By leveraging a State of Wisconsin Neighborhood Investment Fund grant, DHHS and its partners are building 100 new homes for first time homeowners.

DHHS helped Milwaukee County achieve having zero chronically homeless individuals unsheltered for two years in a row, 2022 and 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). \*Chronically homeless is defined as being homeless for at least 12 months or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years.



As part of the transition from institutional care to community-based care, DHHS opened three new Access Clinics in two years, co-located within Federally Qualified Health Centers, along with a new outpatient clinic for youth.

County officials gather for the opening of Access Clinic North - one of three new clinics aimed at bringing mental health care and resources into Milwaukee neighborhoods with demonstrated need.



David Crowley signs bill for affordable housing development; DHHS leaders join the County Executive in breaking ground for homes to be built in the King Park neighborhood.





Over the past four years, DHHS has made significant investments in the coordination and collective impact of Community Violence Intervention work with our partners, addressing gun violence prevention and community healing. These include two programs:

The Credible Messenger Program launched in 2021, with an emphasis on transformative mentoring for those in the youth justice system. In its first year, youth involved reported a 77% success rate for recidivism and pro-social behavior.

The new Advance Peace program, added in 2024, interrupts gun violence by investing in the development of those at the center of the crisis in a way that alters their life trajectories.



Top: County Executive David Crowley takes a photo with CYFS team and Credible Messengers at the Juneteenth Day resource fair. Middle: Advance Peace launch with county leaders and community partners.



In July of 2024, DHHS broke ground on the new Milwaukee County Center for Youth, an investment in keeping young people in the youth justice system closer to home, with greater access to evidenced-based services. The new secure residential care center, to open in 2026, is a treatment-oriented facility that will provide a developmentally appropriate treatment environment for youth, contributing to a safer community.



DHHS continues to work to become an employer of choice focusing on internal culture, retention and opportunities for advancement, including cross-department collaboration, new training offerings, town hall events with DHHS leaders, an annual Professional Development Day for staff, coaching sessions, internal potluck lunches, Lunch & Learn sessions, the employee engagement group—Do The Right Thing—and weekly all staff communication.

DHHS Executive Director Shakita LaGrant-McClain speaking to attendees at New Employee Orientation



## PREPARING FOR THE 2025-2027 PLAN

To prepare for this next iteration of the plan, we solicited feedback from DHHS staff, program participants, community members, and reviewed our successes and continued opportunities from the previous plan. We engaged in the following sessions:



16 MEETINGS WITH EACH SERVICE AREA ADMINISTRATOR



3 MEETINGS WITH DHHS STAFF



2 FACILITATED FOCUS GROUPS WITH DHHS STAFF AND ADMINISTRATORS



2 FOCUS GROUPS WITH DHHS PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



2 FOCUS GROUPS WITH DHHS CONTRACTED PARTNERS



3 PRESENTATIONS AT MILWAUKEE COUNTY DHHS COMMISSIONS AND BOARDS



4 COMMUNITY INPUT SESSIONS

We heard that people have appreciated the 2020 strategic framework and believe that it has provided a foundation for transformation of DHHS. The vision of these strategies is substantial, and pushes against forces that can maintain the status quo. For instance, DHHS receives program-specific funding, which can lead to separation and siloing of programming. However, we know that people's well-being comes from the interconnectedness of all facets of people's lives. Creating healthier communities requires us to recognize that no one program or service area will be able to fully address people's needs for health and well-being, so we must break down the systemic and structural barriers that exist to serve people effectively. Our feedback sessions revealed that the strategic plan has indeed inspired this transformational work, and that we need to continue this work in the next plan.



DHHS Executive Director Shakita LaGrant-McClain addressing department leaders during a strategic planning session.



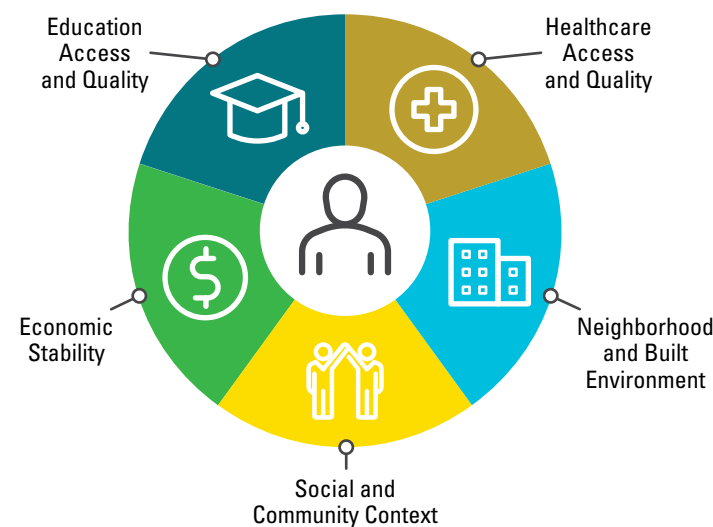
## 2025-2027 PLAN FRAMEWORK

The 2025-2027 Strategic Plan represents a significant step forward in putting DHHS values into action. As will be described, it builds on the past plan in ways that increase attention to access, quality and collective action.

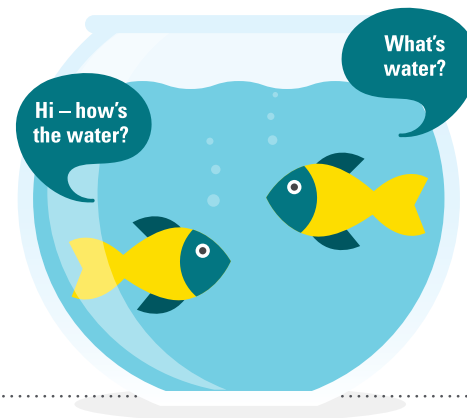
Based on the feedback we received, we have determined that our Strategies #1 and #2 from the 2020 strategic plan will remain our strategic directions in this plan. DHHS has made significant progress on both strategies through all of our service areas, and feedback indicates we are headed in the right direction. We will continue enacting these strategies with renewed focus through our goals.

In working toward our mission: *Empowering safe, healthy, meaningful lives* and vision: *Together, creating healthy communities*, we embrace the programming that we provide directly and through contracted partners, as well as our influence on systemic change. We strive to be One Department as a part of a united Milwaukee County. We know that the goals we aspire to achieve elevate all service areas and that we will not realize our goals in isolation. Service areas across the department and partners from within and outside of Milwaukee County will need to work collectively to make gains toward health and wellness. We believe in doing this together because, simply put, we all do better when we all do better.

### SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



People’s needs for services and access are driven by things beyond their individual ability; these are the *Social Determinants of Health* (also known as Social Drivers of Health). Unfortunately, there are vast economic and racial disparities within Milwaukee County, but DHHS is uniquely positioned to improve equity by influencing Social Determinants of Health. By addressing these factors in programming and in population health, we will advance our core strategies.



*A fish is swimming along one day when another fish comes up and says “Hey, how’s the water?” The first fish stares back blankly at the second fish and then says “What’s water?”*

**- Kania, Kramer, Senge, 2018**

This strategic plan uses a *Systems Theory* of work. The idea is that the fish are so impacted by the water they’re swimming in, but are often unaware. Our systems are all around us and impact our well-being. Ultimately, to improve community health, we need to improve the water we’re swimming in. DHHS is working toward this by looking at the system of DHHS and influencing our systemic partners.

In this plan, we chose **four systemic focus areas** that we believe we can transform for the highest impact on community health and well-being. As we put the person at the center of our work, and focus on the *Social Determinants of Health*, we will work through *No Wrong Door* and *Collective Impact* to increase equity in these four focus areas.

### HOUSING

We have invested \$32M in the development of affordable housing units across Milwaukee County; for the first time we own a building for emergency housing, which connects people to services onsite. By 2027, we will work toward housing justice and equity for all by reducing the number of individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity.

### COMMUNITY SAFETY

By 2027, we will see results from our investment in Community Violence Intervention, with a decrease in youth in detention/ state run facilities and an overall reduction in community violence.

### AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

By 2027, we will improve the quality of life for older adults and people of all ages. Through the AARP Livable Communities model, Milwaukee County’s community hubs will be reimagined and improvements to our lived environment initiated so that residents of all ages can live fully engaged lives.

### MENTAL/EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

By 2027, the redesign of the behavioral healthcare system will be complete and all residents will have improved access to responsive, high quality, community-based supports with expanded services for children, youth, and adults.

# THE 2025-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Department of Health and Human Services works toward our own mission and contributes to Milwaukee County’s overall vision of becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin through the following goals and objectives.



## Strategic Direction #1:

### No Wrong Door

Assure prompt, equitable access to quality health and human services.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
1. All residents have streamlined access to services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create intentional structure to support Adult and Childrens’ systems of care that streamline access to services across all service areas.</li> <li>2. Maximize the opportunity presented by the new Coggs building and other facilities, creating a community hub to facilitate no wrong door access to services.</li> </ol>
2. Provide high-quality, person-centered services across the lifespan.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assess current services and realign them to meet the population needs for prevention, early intervention, crisis response, and ongoing services for individuals and families from birth to end of life throughout our six service areas.</li> <li>2. Evaluate and enhance each program’s effectiveness in terms of people served, services offered, and intended outcomes.</li> </ol>
3. Build capacity to support personal and professional growth of our staff and partners.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure training, capacity building, and development of a talent pipeline that is grounded in an equity mindset and aligned with meeting programming targets.</li> <li>2. Ensure the DHHS contracting process is equitable and invites diverse partners to meet the community’s needs.</li> </ol>



## Strategic Direction #2:

### Collective Impact/Population Health

Foster an environment that addresses root causes of disparities in community health and wellness, thus advancing equity and reducing the need for crisis intervention.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
1. Transform our system and influence others to ensure equity for Milwaukee County residents in housing, community safety, mental well-being, and age-friendly communities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actively work with partners across the housing system to fill the most crucial housing gaps to promote housing stability across the County.</li> <li>2. Formalize programs and partnerships that champion safety in communities through enhanced trauma response and violence prevention efforts, focusing on our most in-need youth.</li> <li>3. Engage County departments, education systems, municipal health departments, health systems, faith communities, and nonprofits to collectively bridge gaps in resources to meet mental wellness needs.</li> <li>4. In collaboration with system partners, support Milwaukee County residents of all ages and abilities to thrive through age-friendly communities.</li> </ol>
2. Proactively influence policies, regulations, and funding to meet community needs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement a policy advocacy action plan that meets community needs in four key areas: housing, community safety, mental well-being, and age-friendly communities.</li> <li>2. Engage partnerships with foundations, government, and other funders to achieve our goals.</li> </ol>



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The 2025 – 2027 DHHS Strategic Plan’s most notable changes will be made in the following two areas:

**CHANGING HOW PEOPLE IN NEED ACCESS DEPARTMENT EXPERTISE**



**REFINING THE FOCUS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT EFFORTS**

These changes, described below, will result in better overall community well-being due to increased impacts and access to care. Too often, targeted funding streams lead to an employee having the ability to help people only through the single program he or she is funded to work on, within one of DHHS’ defined service areas. This encourages siloed expertise and creates barriers for people in need to navigate as they seek services. Through this plan, DHHS, as One Department, will provide more holistic care.

### Accessing Help

Under this plan, people seeking care will be met with DHHS employees who are equipped to thoroughly assess diverse needs across all relevant areas. Key DHHS employees will serve as members of interdisciplinary teams including expertise from each service area. Teams will meet regularly to review participant needs and ensure that each person in need can access the full range of expertise and resources across DHHS.

Through the new interdisciplinary teams, DHHS’ structure will adapt to best serve participant needs and overcome access barriers. We will enhance our assessment ability by leveraging cross-department expertise in new ways, ensuring that no one area shoulders the work alone.

Achieving this will entail implementing changes to staff positions, organizational charts, and usage of funds. It will also involve some revision of the ingrained tendency to work as separate service areas.



#### Multidisciplinarity

Combining different disciplinary perspectives but with minimum interactions, while maintaining the identity of each discipline and its knowledge structures.



#### Interdisciplinarity

Creating integrative knowledge based on interactions between different disciplines, while exploring issues that are not unique to a certain discipline.

*Currently, Milwaukee County DHHS Service Areas work toward No Wrong Door by making warm handoffs to Service Area partners who are best suited to address the participant’s need; we currently work in multidisciplinary teams. Our next phase of No Wrong Door will be to bring staff from various Service Areas together into one team to most effectively offer screening, assessment, and enrollment into all potential DHHS services seamlessly. These teams will bring expertise from various Service Areas to make interdisciplinary teams so that people are able to access all programs of the Department at once.*

## Focusing Collective Impact

The previous strategic plan gave high-level endorsement to the need to address root causes and collective impact. That catalyzed important progress, including a new department-wide *Prevention Collective*. This plan continues and builds on that work in a more targeted way by focusing on the four areas analysis found most likely to foster community health and well-being: 1) Housing, 2) Community Safety; 3) Mental and Emotional Wellness; and 4) Age-Friendly and Livable Communities. This population-health level work will include collaborating with external partners and creating and implementing a policy advocacy plan for each of the four areas. By addressing the root causes of disparities, DHHS will impact racial and health equity through fostering an environment that focuses on prevention, intervention, and wellness.



**HOUSING**



**COMMUNITY SAFETY**



**MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**



**AGE-FRIENDLY AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

Achieving this will include new staffing assignments, analysis of DHHS’ role as a convenor and coalition member, and strategy related to the goals of each collective space. In addition, DHHS’ policy analysis and advocacy work will be enhanced with additional resources and strategic focus.

Our 2020-2025 strategic plan drove us to think about our role in a new light, as an influencer of systemic change. Our 2025-2027 plan continues the journey and challenges us to intentionally change structural components to fundamentally meet people’s needs more seamlessly. Furthermore, we know we can’t do this work alone and will continue to use our influence to advance systems change crucial to elevating the health and well-being of Milwaukee County residents. This work will be the core of our focus through 2027.



## THANK YOU

This plan could not have come together without the following groups:

### DHHS Executive Leadership

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### All DHHS Staff

### Countless community members





MILWAUKEE COUNTY  
**DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH & HUMAN  
SERVICES**

For more information, please visit:  
[county.milwaukee.gov/DHHS](https://county.milwaukee.gov/DHHS)

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