



WISCONSIN

TOMORROW

Building an Economy for All



WISCONSIN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

CONTENTS



5	Secretary Letter
8	COVID Response and Recovery
10	Executive Summary
12	Economic Well-Being
16	Wisconsin's Perspectives
28	Fuel Financial Stability
34	Educate Everyone
40	Support Healthy Living
46	Reinforce Community Infrastructure
54	Respect the Environment
58	We're Asking You to Innovate



MISSY HUGHES

Secretary and Chief Executive Officer

Wisconsin Economic
Development Corporation

As I write this, a year has passed since we first began to experience the pandemic in Wisconsin. In late February 2020, the economy was strong and growing by most measures — unemployment was low, gross domestic product (GDP) was high. As the pandemic began to unfold, and the unknown was laid before us, businesses across Wisconsin, primarily places where gatherings happened or personal services were delivered, closed their doors. As COVID-19 spread, every state in the nation experienced school closures, event cancellations and a dramatic slowdown in leisure and business travel. More importantly, the ravages of COVID-19 on our vulnerable populations began in earnest.

In April 2020 as part of a COVID relief effort, Governor Tony Evers signed Act 185, which required a report from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Wisconsin's economy and our most critical industries, including agriculture, tourism, retail, forest products and manufacturing, with the anticipation that the worst of the pandemic would be over by sometime in mid to late 2020.

When we published our report *Wisconsin Tomorrow: An Economy for All* on June 30, 2020, we documented the impact of the pandemic on our communities, regions, institutions like education and health care, and the critical industries. With the public health and economic crises still unfolding, WEDC's report outlined the situation in real time and pinpointed three immediate priorities — fixing broadband, getting people back to work and supporting innovation.

Today, the pandemic continues to impact the state, the nation and the globe. However, with the deployment of several safe and effective vaccines, recovery can truly start to come into focus.

At WEDC, we worked through the pandemic to support the state's economy — supporting businesses during the Safer at Home order, deploying resources from our own budget, and directing over \$240 million in Coronavirus Relief Fund resources to Wisconsin small businesses.

Although many Wisconsin businesses remained open and vibrant during the pandemic, we learned that our economy is reliant on many externalities that go beyond just having a job — child care, broadband, schools and, of course, our health. The intersection of economic health with many other aspects of daily life has never been made clearer than during the pandemic. To be a participant in the economy, to simply show up for work, many determining factors must be aligned and available for every Wisconsinite. As strong as our economy seemed, the pandemic revealed vulnerabilities and gaps in our systems that became chasms during the pandemic. Women left the workplace to care for children at home when child care, already in

extremely short supply, became unavailable. Broadband, considered by some to be a luxury for Netflix watching, became critical for learning and working remotely. Family savings, invested in Main Street businesses, were rapidly depleted and then lost completely as businesses silently closed their doors. People with poor health, reflected in conditions like asthma and obesity, became especially susceptible to the virus. Regular preventive health care for cancer, diabetes and other long-term illnesses was delayed, which will have real and adverse longer-term consequences. Mental health challenges, strained by stigma and lack of access to care, became a hallmark of the pandemic, as stress turned into abuse and addiction. Each of these challenges disproportionately impacted people, communities and businesses of color, further exacerbated by a history of systemic racism. Without a focused effort on their recovery, many will remain in despair.

Because of WEDC's unique position as a bridge between the public and private sector, Governor Evers asked WEDC to return to its report and outline a strategy for recovery that takes these important lessons and translates them into action. Central to this strategy is the most important lesson of the pandemic — that people are the engine of our economy. An economy of the future must be powered by Wisconsinites, but must also serve Wisconsinites.



Melissa L. Hughes
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation



COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Funding
Total



\$1.99 billion

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Purchased
26,992,511 units

Testing and Lab Supplies Distributed
2,746,783 units

Small Businesses Assisted
52,920

Farms Supported
15,249

Cultural Facilities Assisted
375

Households Provided Rental Assistance
14,280

Food Pantries Assisted
1,103

Child Care Providers Assisted
2,712

Local and Tribal Government Assistance
\$201 million



COVID-19 Statistics¹



COVID-19 Tests Administered
3,329,698

Confirmed COVID-19 Cases
580,184

COVID-19 Hospitalizations
27,797

COVID-19 Deaths
6,640

Vaccines Administered
3,087,492

Received first dose
33%



Executive Summary

A strategy for investment, for economic recovery and for growth must draw upon the authentic Wisconsin ideal – that everyone deserves an opportunity to prosper. That opportunity will no doubt come with challenges, with a need to persevere, and with a requirement to work hard — and Wisconsinites should not be held back because of inequity or lack of access to infrastructure, health care or education.

Central to this strategy is a comprehensive approach that promotes economic well-being for every person in our state. It's a strategy that must focus on removing obstacles and providing the necessary support, which requires valuing all individuals and understanding their needs and their dreams. As we look forward, we must use the experience and knowledge gained from the COVID-19 pandemic to reinforce the elements of each individual's economic well-being – their financial stability, their education and health, the infrastructure of the community they live in and their immediate environment – to find gaps and opportunities so we know where to invest.

The experience of the past year has shown that these economic forces and personal aspirations are essential both independently and when they work together. They are the essence of economic well-being. By staying focused on what is important to realize the full potential of an economy for all, we will prioritize investments and policies that build a Wisconsin that is stronger, more inclusive, more resilient and more forward-looking.

This requires comprehensively connecting the dots between all investments and all policies, and recognizing their intersections. The public sector and private sector must work together; state agencies must work with local leaders; and rural and urban areas must bridge divides.

Next Steps

Invest in key areas that help remove barriers to participating in the economy, and invest in building a path to financial stability: child care, health care and stable housing.

Expand access and reinvigorate our culture of education and innovation to fuel ideas, businesses, people and the next generation for future prosperity.

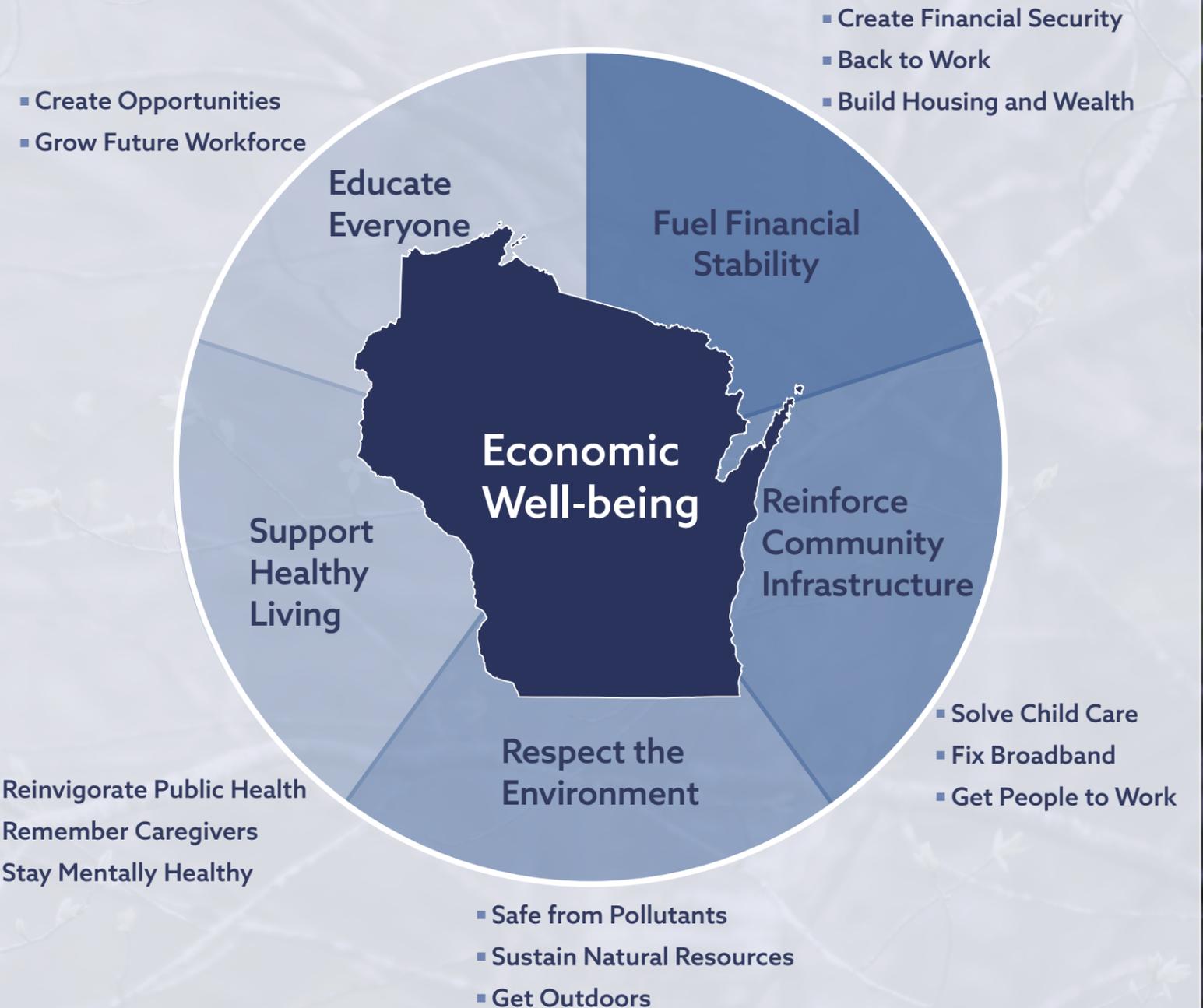
Respect our environment, as it plays a key role in keeping our children safe, our economy healthy and our communities thriving.

What can you do?

Take this comprehensive approach to your community, to your leaders, to your neighbors.

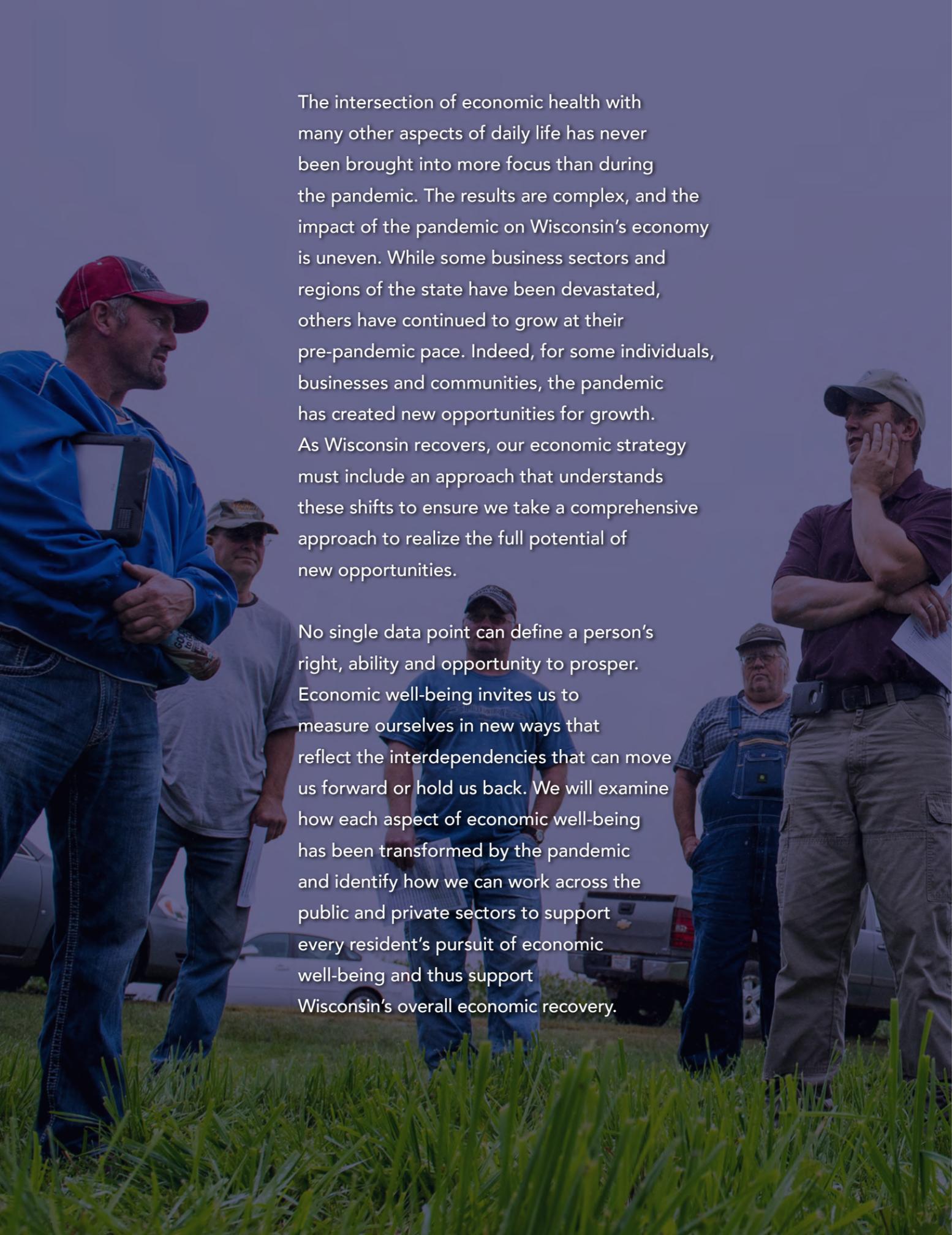
Ask yourself: Are we removing obstacles for everyone? Are we creating opportunities for everyone?

Innovate new ideas and new policies, and be willing to invest to support your plans.



A person wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt with a circular logo, blue pants, a black beanie, and a black face mask is captured mid-air, jumping over a sand pit. The person's arms are outstretched, and their feet are just above the sand, with some sand kicked up. In the background, several other people are visible, some wearing yellow shirts and others in green or black. They are standing on a grassy field with a forested hillside in the distance. The sky is overcast. The text "Economic Well-Being" is overlaid at the bottom of the image in white, with thin white lines above and below it.

Economic Well-Being



The intersection of economic health with many other aspects of daily life has never been brought into more focus than during the pandemic. The results are complex, and the impact of the pandemic on Wisconsin's economy is uneven. While some business sectors and regions of the state have been devastated, others have continued to grow at their pre-pandemic pace. Indeed, for some individuals, businesses and communities, the pandemic has created new opportunities for growth. As Wisconsin recovers, our economic strategy must include an approach that understands these shifts to ensure we take a comprehensive approach to realize the full potential of new opportunities.

No single data point can define a person's right, ability and opportunity to prosper. Economic well-being invites us to measure ourselves in new ways that reflect the interdependencies that can move us forward or hold us back. We will examine how each aspect of economic well-being has been transformed by the pandemic and identify how we can work across the public and private sectors to support every resident's pursuit of economic well-being and thus support Wisconsin's overall economic recovery.

Economic Well-Being

Fuel Financial Stability

Protecting citizens from shocks that alter progress toward their long-term goals and creating a foundation for building wealth helps reinforce the financial actions that move people toward broader well-being.

Educate Everyone

Embracing continuous learning to prepare for the future of work is critical to realizing personal potential. Reducing inequalities of access to learning and training is essential to promote better educational and economic outcomes.

Support Healthy Living

Achieving better health outcomes improves productivity, increases individual earnings and enables individuals to enjoy a better quality of life. Reducing health disparities in quality and access is key to overall economic growth.

Reinforce Community Infrastructure

Supporting people with the essentials – including housing; schools; libraries; arts; recreation; and the connections we all need to live, learn and work, including buildings, roads, and broadband – defines the “quality of life” that Wisconsin often claims, but which some communities continue to struggle to find.

Respect the Environment

Avoiding pollutants, assuring clean water and intentionally clearing unsafe conditions makes good business sense as our resources fuel global leadership in key industries. It also means that all Wisconsinites can continue to access the benefits of the outdoors, which is vital to our state and its citizens.

Perspectives on Economic Well-Being



WEDC asked community and business leaders to share their thoughts on applying the principles of economic well-being to guide public and private sector investments in Wisconsin's recovery and future growth.



Economic development is not about investing money to create jobs. It is about supporting the creative drive resident in the human heart and will. This may involve facilitating individual and collective efforts with financial and technical support. Money can stimulate activity in both helpful and harmful ways. Money is not the cause of prosperity; rather, prosperity is the result of the work of people. WEDC's focus should not be on creating splashy press releases about major initiatives. We need to do the quiet and humble work of removing barriers to human initiative and cooperation. **Financial incentives will be effective when delivered in a more granular and personal manner.**

Money doesn't cause prosperity any more than eating causes food.



Bob Atwell, Chairman of Nicolet Bankshares and UW Board of Regents
— **Brown County**



Milwaukee County supports efforts by the state to advance an economic policy agenda rooted in people and opportunity. **We believe that improving and stabilizing the health and well-being of our residents is paramount to advancing community interest, whether social or economic.** Milwaukee County's declaration of racism as a public health crisis and housing first approach to homelessness demonstrate how we support members of our community who have faced unjust barriers to economic success.

We recognize that resilient communities are built by creating opportunity for our residents. When we create a place that works for all, our workforce will be strengthened, productivity will increase, and more entrepreneurial pursuits will be achieved. **There's no better business recruitment and retention policy than building quality places that meet the needs of workers and employers. Victories for equity are victories for everyone.**



David Crowley, Milwaukee County Executive
— **Milwaukee County**

Perspectives on Economic Well-Being



The pandemic has underscored the health, economic and infrastructure inequities in Indian Country that have created devastating effects on Native families and entire Native communities. COVID-19 had deep fault lines for many, especially tribes and tribal entities that are heavily dependent on the industries hit hardest by COVID-19—gaming, tourism and hospitality in particular.

Too many Native American and rural communities are on the wrong side of the digital divide, lacking access to broadband internet service and to the economic, educational and health care opportunities that it enables, and to much-needed innovative support systems for our communities. As we look to recovery, it is imperative that broadband infrastructure is expanded to bridge the technology divide and find new capabilities to operate, deliver services and allow everyone access to economically

compete in this ever-evolving and fast-moving market. What is greatly needed is an infusion of capital investment in this area in the face of these deficiencies.



Shannon Holsey, President,
Stockbridge-Munsee
— **Shawano County**



As an organization that focuses diligently and intentionally to address economic and social disparities, we must focus on building intentional and meaningful relationships to establish culturally competent ways to address economic and workforce disparities, create intentional community development and provide space for impactful leadership development and education.

As we build meaningful relationships with underserved, suppressed communities and communities of color across Wisconsin, we have found that **one system does not work for all. We understand that, just as we need our five senses to learn, people and communities also learn in different ways. The life and cultural experiences or barriers define what success could look like for individuals or communities.** That's why it's so important that in this new era, we learn from the flaws of our current system and start building a system that is culturally relevant and inclusive of all backgrounds and learning experiences.



We are optimistic that if Wisconsin can create equitable and safe spaces that are culturally inclusive for communities and successfully create a cultural shift in how our current system is practicing, we can all do better together and help communities build generational wealth.

Mai Xiong, President, Hmong American Leadership & Economic Development (HALED)
— **Eau Claire County**

Perspectives on Economic Well-Being



The practice of economic development has undergone a seismic shift in the last decade. Rather than focusing on a trickle-down strategy, **asset-based economic development has become the hallmark of thriving communities throughout the world. An asset-based economic development strategy focuses on growth by developing a region's existing resources.** As the Great Recession fades into the past, talent—or **human capital**—has become our most valuable asset.

Here at MadREP, we've experienced this in real time as **companies considering locating in our region will now often ask about our available workforce and talent pipeline long before they inquire about available real estate. That means it's up to us to make sure our communities here in Wisconsin have a skilled workforce with access to family-sustaining jobs and a high quality of life.** Wisconsin must strategically invest in our educational system to guarantee we are graduating students who are career- or college-ready. At the same time, we should continue expanding our network of technical schools, which are already offering specialized training for a wide range of careers, and prioritize our university system, which, enhanced by the private sector, feeds our entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem.

And **when we have talent in our community, we need to make sure we don't lose them over quality-of-life issues like access to broadband, health care, or diversity and inclusion. As economic developers, we must be realistic about the gaps, because opportunities exist when we move the needle on equity.** Strategic partnerships with internet service providers, health systems and mission-driven organizations will be the lifeblood of economic development organizations as the industry continues to pivot toward a focus on the economic well-being of the individual citizen and balancing the needs of rural and urban residents. Here at MadREP, we continue to be excited about what's next for Wisconsin and for the Madison region. While we've enjoyed

some nice accolades in recent years, we see data on a daily basis that tells us not everyone is benefiting from that growth. Racial disparities continue, and areas of the country that we view as our competition continue to outpace us. Our region is now competing at a higher level for talent, employers and investment, and we must rise to the occasion.



Jason M. Fields, CCRS, CFEI, President and CEO,
Madison Region Economic Partnership
— **Dane County**



This is an exciting opportunity for all of us to reflect on the factors that best sustain our economy. **Taking into consideration one's economic well-being is challenging because it requires examining factors that are difficult to measure. This is all the more reason why it is necessary to define economic well-being and recognize it as a critical component we can no longer exclude from our economic development framework.**



Maysee Y. Herr, Ph.D., Executive Director,
Among Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce
— **Milwaukee County**



As we already know, the COVID-19 pandemic and the diverse antiracism community movements have exposed a variety of cultural disparities and reaffirmed the enduring impact of racial discrimination in Wisconsin.

I applaud the renewed courage and vision of WEDC to introduce five pillars of economic development to transform and rebuild neighborhoods with full participation of Wisconsin's diverse citizenry so that all people can prosper and flourish. The engagement of existing public-private partnerships will be the catalyst to manage everyone's real-world experiences.

As a business and community leader, it is my profound hope that the intersectionality of these economic pillars will focus on diverse, accountable leadership that provides equitable access and distribution of resources, dismantling the structural biases that have impeded people of color and unskilled workers for far too long.



The success of the integration of this economic development theory and its impact on the overall well-being of a community is rooted not in the ignorance of, but in the awareness and acceptance of, our disparate backgrounds.

Tim Mahone, President and CEO, Mahone
Strategies
— **Kenosha County**

Perspectives on Economic Well-Being



Economies are the work of people. Any form of economic development that does not focus on the development of stability, prosperity and opportunity for our whole society will suffer inefficiency or failure. But an economic development strategy that focuses on stabilizing individuals in crisis, lifting people from poverty, building wealth in the middle class and incentivizing entrepreneurship for even the smallest of businesses has the power not only to create a healthy economy but to solve critical social problems.

Economic development is easily confused with “business development,” which is vital but only a small part of economic growth and stability. **A comprehensive economic development strategy includes housing and home ownership, access to diverse transportation options, the right to organize, upward and lateral job mobility, and entrepreneurship.**



Jim Paine Mayor of Superior
— **Douglas County**

Economic development can be large or small, broad or narrow. But the strategy we choose determines our results. **If we have large goals and a broad vision, we have to adopt an economic strategy that works for everyone.**



Economic development cuts across all aspects of life, and in order to make greater strides in the Wisconsin economy, we must understand and center the well-being of every Wisconsinite and their needs and challenges. The exacerbated experiences and circumstances that we have seen coming out of 2020 require that we take a holistic approach that considers the varying realities of access and lack thereof, across the state, from community to community. **It is critical to provide access to what is needed for all individuals to thrive, including but not limited to equity and inclusion, education, health care, child care, financial education and resources, housing, workforce development, business and entrepreneurship, agriculture and food access, and community resources. All of these foundations of well-being intersect and are codependent in that if one fails, access to the others can be jeopardized.** It is crucial that we acknowledge this reality and not only work toward financial survival and stability, but also strive to make prosperity an inclusive opportunity.

We all have a role to play in advancing economic development in our state, and we cannot afford to silo economic development and prosperity in the realm of large business and industry. Notably, increased support is needed for the micro, small and growing business sectors. The key role they play in the economy, in job creation and revitalization, and as valuable social fabric of communities makes it an even greater imperative.”



Eugenia Podestá, Ph.D., Senior Director, Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship, Vital Voices Global Partnership; Co-founder, Synergy Coworking; Member; WEDC Board of Directors
— **Dane County**

Perspectives on Economic Well-Being



The prevalence of **food insecurity in households and communities is primarily caused by poverty, not the lack of food. If we are to truly address food insecurity and solve the issue of hunger, we need to work through the larger and more complex issue of poverty. This is best done by addressing the financial stability; community infrastructure; and health, education and environmental issues that affect the person in need. Tackling hunger without tackling these root causes will not create sustainable change.**

As the largest hunger relief organization in the state, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin embraces WEDC's new theory of economic development, which looks at the drivers of economic well-being. **This evolution in approach is a more sustainable way to address hunger and produces an environment where Wisconsinites can thrive.**



Patti Habeck, CEO/President,
Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin
— **Milwaukee County**



WEDC's new approach to economic development represents a thoughtful and much-needed reexamination of our state's economic aspirations. The experience of the pandemic has thrown harsh light on the inadequacies of measuring the success of our economic development efforts through traditional indicators such as GDP growth and job creation. For instance, even as the labor market has rebounded and the stock market has reached record highs, we are falling short of the mark on advancing well-being as measured by indicators of health and education.

At our company, we provide good jobs that pay a solid wage. We do our best to support our employees in other ways, such as health care benefits and ongoing training. But having a good job is not the end. It is one of several critical elements that people need to enjoy economic well-being. They need strong and safe communities, they need good schools and hospitals, and they need a healthy environment. We look forward to working with WEDC and leaders across Wisconsin to develop an economy that truly cares for Wisconsinites as individuals.



Sachin Shivaram, CEO,
Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry; Member,
WEDC Awards Administration Committee
— **Manitowoc County**



Cooperatives have a rich history in the Midwest and in Wisconsin in particular, and serve hundreds of thousands of people statewide through retail, farm services, utilities of all kinds, housing and health services. The very premise of this resilient and unique business structure is the concept that the co-op exists to serve the needs of its members and to return wealth to individual members. At food co-ops throughout the state, the pandemic exposed how the values of taking care of the local owners and users of the business made the necessary pivots very easy. When large, industrial food systems broke under sudden strains, the food co-ops were ready: We were the only store in town with eggs, and we had a steady supply of meat, dairy and staple foods as other larger chains struggled to keep their shelves full. The difference? We know our farmer, we know our grower, we know our producer. The logistic webs are smaller — and therefore harder to break — when the focus is on individual needs and local wealth.

An economic development strategy that focuses on the health of the individual and the community, and values the strength of the resources at hand, will be more sustainable, as it generates wealth that stays closer to home. In order to truly have this focus, this strategy cannot ignore the forces at work that are consolidating economic power. When a few companies, far away from here, dominate large portions of the markets we participate in (whether it is agribusinesses, retail chains or food processors), we lose our power. Enforcement of antitrust regulation is an important tool in the quest to increase an individual's health and wealth, although it seems so disconnected to us in our complex world.



Crystal Halvorson, General Manager, Menomonie Market Food Co-op
— **Dunn County**



We are watching a major shift happen in the world of economic development. The economy of the past was focused almost entirely on the natural resources in a community, but as the means of production have advanced and shipping and communication channels have sped up, we have moved into an economy that is significantly less tied to location.

Companies headquartered in one town have remote workers Zooming in from across the globe, keeping track of goods and services that tie together a web of places and their resources. Much of this can happen from a phone in a coffee shop.

The most valuable asset of the new economy, then, is people, and the communities that thrive will be those that invest in their residents — in support for their creativity and innovation, in improvements to their quality of life, in guarantees that they can grow in step with these rapidly changing conditions.



Greg Wright, Executive Director, CREATE
— **Portage County**

Fuel Financial Stability

Create Financial Security

Back to Work

Build Housing and Wealth

CREATE FINANCIAL SECURITY

Financial stability represents different things to different people. It could mean a job, a house, a savings account, a little break with the family, or just being able to afford an unexpected expense such as car repairs or an emergency trip to the dentist – or all the above. Regardless of how we each define financial stability, Wisconsin families are seeking a stronger sense of security as our state recovers.

The past year has shown just how fragile financial stability can be for many in Wisconsin. In the first few months of the pandemic, more than 460,000 Wisconsin workers lost their jobs, and roughly half had still not gone back to work by the end of 2020. U.S. Census Bureau surveys show many remain concerned about how they will pay their rent or mortgages or whether they will have enough to eat in the days and weeks ahead.

Families in nearly every community have had to reevaluate what stability looks like and make decisions in light of new circumstances, whether taking early retirement, pursuing self-employment, or working or attending school remotely. In many homes, habits and routines have changed, budgets tightened and expenses trimmed. The U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey finds that among Wisconsin families with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$99,900, more than a third have someone who has lost employment income since the start of the pandemic.

The greatest economic burden of the pandemic has fallen on those who earn the least and face the most uncertainty. These include low-wage workers, people of color and women. Even before the pandemic hit, many were coping with additional barriers – such as higher unemployment; lower educational attainment; physical and developmental disabilities; lack of access to early care and education, health care, and transportation issues; and past criminal convictions. In particular, citizens of Wisconsin's 11 tribal nations have faced uncertainty as casinos closed or scaled back operations.

As we continue our focus on economic recovery in Wisconsin, the financial stability of Wisconsin businesses, workers and families must be a core metric of our success. This includes providing support for Wisconsin-grown businesses, entrepreneurs and family-supporting jobs.

Financial stability depends in part on financial literacy. Managing finances takes an understanding of tools, services and habits that can help lead to economic security and resiliency. In February, Governor Evers expanded the Governor's Council on Financial Literacy and Capability, which helps provide individuals and businesses with the tools and resources they need to invest in education and housing, capitalize on business opportunities, save for retirement and cope with various economic shocks. It will focus on financial inclusion and provide a sounding board for the Governor and the Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) to improve the financial literacy and inclusion of all citizens.





GET WISCONSIN BACK TO WORK

As a key to financial stability, getting people back to work was identified as a priority in the first Wisconsin Tomorrow report and it continues to be critical months later. The Department of Workforce Development (DWD), the University of Wisconsin System, and the Wisconsin Technical College System are working together to develop training programs to match unemployed workers with Wisconsin businesses facing worker shortages. Through its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Plan, DWD is also focusing on workers with barriers to employment. DWD and its local partners such as technical colleges and private-sector employers are collaborating to ensure these workers develop the skills they need through classroom and on-the-job training. DWD is also partnering with other state agencies such as DHS and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to coordinate training and job placement programs for individuals receiving FoodShare benefits and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). These efforts are aimed at putting job seekers first and making sure they have all the resources they need, as seamlessly as possible. Additional investments in job training and reskilling opportunities for workers and support for businesses looking to provide on-the-job training will be critical components of Wisconsin's economic recovery and continuing success.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is working to meet the needs of “people in their care” reentering the workforce. These Wisconsinites often face special barriers such as getting routine documents like driver's licenses or state IDs and connecting with community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. DOC offers several wraparound training and rehabilitation programs, both in state institutions and county jails, that provide individuals with life skills as well as job skills. Most recently, DWD and DOC have established on-site job centers at four correctional institutions so individuals can begin preparing for and applying for jobs before they return to the community.

For many individuals, personal financial stability is tied to business ownership. As the state's leading economic development organization, WEDC worked with the Department of Revenue (DOR), Department of Administration (DOA) and other agencies to get financial assistance into the hands of small business owners across the state. By the end of 2020, WEDC had distributed more than \$240 million in federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to many hardest-hit businesses and regions. This has enabled businesses to keep their doors open, their staff working and their customers served. While we anticipate that additional federal stimulus funds will further assist businesses, many may have closed their doors after depleting family savings and laying off workers. Moving forward, Wisconsin's economic development strategy must include helping Wisconsin businesses reopen or reinvent themselves, as well as supporting new Wisconsin-grown small businesses.

The [Job Center of Wisconsin](#) is where talent and opportunity meet with resources to help job seekers and employers connect.

BUILD HOUSING AND WEALTH

A lack of affordable housing is a challenge that many of Wisconsin's urban and rural communities share. Without affordable housing near employers, both workers and employers are negatively impacted by that disconnect. Not only does affordable housing provide financial stability for the individual and help build intergenerational wealth for a family, but it also has far reaching community effects as regions with affordable housing benefit from greater community spending, a healthier population and greater job opportunities.

To address the need for housing, Wisconsin must expand its work to support development of affordable housing options in every corner of the state, explore options to support individuals in their journey to homeownership, and work to end homelessness in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) last year launched the rural affordable workforce housing initiative, which will provide \$10 million in new financing tools for home buyers and developers in rural areas as well as support a workforce housing pilot in three rural communities to establish an adaptive framework to identify needs, evaluate choices and implement solutions. Additionally, the WHEDA Foundation is providing \$1 million in grants to 41 organizations around the state to provide emergency shelter, transitional residences and extremely low-income housing. These grants are aimed at people with disabilities, survivors of domestic abuse, individuals with chronic mental illness, low-income families and youths experiencing homelessness.

Building housing also means removing obstacles. To accelerate the construction process, the Department of Safety and Professional Standards (DSPS) overhauled their plan review process, a move that is expected to reduce review times for projects by as much as 70%.

For our state to move forward, achieving financial stability for everyone must be one of the keys to Wisconsin's economic well-being. This will require coordination and collaboration among state agencies, public and private sectors, businesses and educational institutions, and, most importantly, listening to families to understand what success means to them. ▶

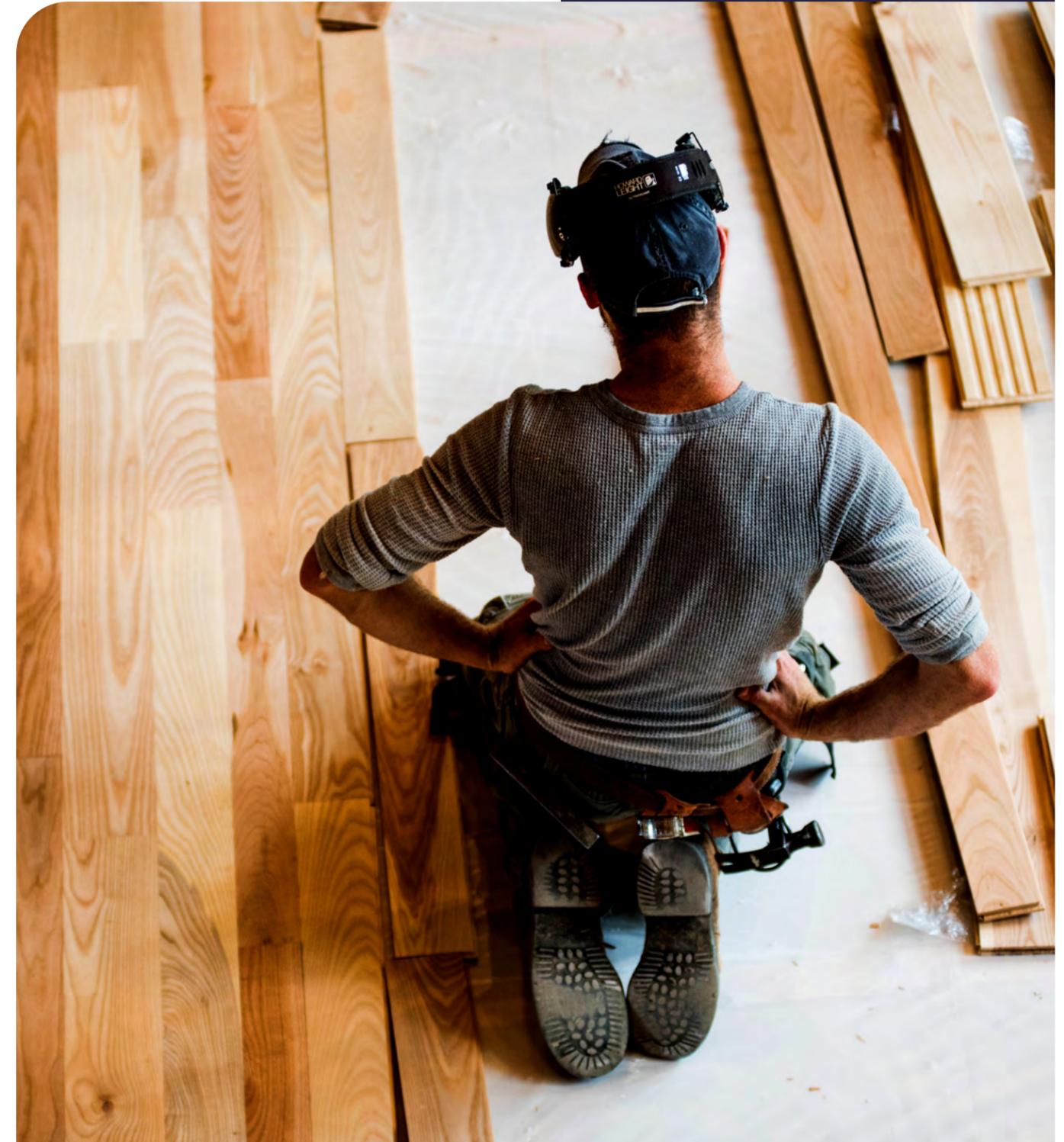
“

I want to go deeper and figure out in Wisconsin who is an African American or Latino homebuyer. What is their credit score? What is their debt ratio? Where do they live? How old are they? Are they male or female? When we define who that person is, then we try to match up our underwriting guidelines to see if there's a disconnect between them. We're responding with tools, not just a loan. Tools are homebuyers' education. Tools are marketing and advertising in the right place. Whatever we learn about African American ownership, we hope we can figure out how we reconstruct that in rural communities or with the elderly.

According to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, even after the recession, homeownership remains the source of most families' wealth in the United States, particularly for low-income people. This is astounding. We've been through a significant recession. It hurt almost everybody in this world. WHEDA has the opportunity to be working at the epicenter, where we can be a game changer for people.

Joaquín Altoro,
CEO

Wisconsin Housing and Economic
Development Authority





Educate Everyone

Create Opportunities
Grow Future Workforce

From being the first state to introduce kindergarten to having a globally renowned university system and unparalleled technical college system, Wisconsin has the foundation to realize better outcomes for more of our residents.

In addition to enhancing individual opportunity and success, education is central to economic well-being in many ways. Education is linked to more job opportunities, higher earnings, better health and housing, and improved connections to the community as a whole. In Wisconsin, the median wage of a worker with some college or an associate degree is more than \$40,000, compared with a median wage of roughly \$33,000 for a high school graduate.

Education is also essential to meeting both the current unemployment crisis and the state's longstanding workforce gaps. Before the pandemic, one of the biggest challenges facing Wisconsin businesses was a worker shortage in key industries, especially manufacturing. With the increase in unemployment, learning new skills and retraining can provide a way to match displaced workers with available jobs — and, potentially, to move low-wage earners into higher-paying positions. This underscores the need for investment in the state's educational institutions to ensure Wisconsinites have the opportunity to get the education and training they need, and that educational institutions can partner with industry to create the training programs needed.

While we see a path forward, we need to recognize that Wisconsin's educational institutions have been battered by the pandemic, starting from early childhood education to post-secondary education. For our most vulnerable children, recent figures show a 15.8% decline in 4K and preschool special education, as well as a 4.9% decline in kindergarten enrollment.

In these early years, students learn many non-cognitive skills that are important to long-term success, such as the ability to focus and self-discipline. The impact of the pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to affordable, quality early childhood care and learning for our youth, our families and our economy. It is critical that we act quickly to support reengagement with these youngest learners to limit learning disruption and support their development.

School districts have faced overhead costs to keep their K-12 services and school buildings operational, whether through the transition to distance learning or hybrid models, the need for reduced class sizes to limit the spread of COVID-19, or other added costs related to delivering instruction during the pandemic. The pandemic has also highlighted the uneven access to education among some communities. The move to online classes in both public schools and higher education has heightened the divide between digital "haves" and "have-nots," favoring students who have desktops or laptops with high-speed internet connections over those trying to use cell phones or slower internet access, or those who don't have access to digital devices or high-speed broadband service at all.

▼
15.8% decline in 4K and preschool special education enrollment

▼
4.9% decline in kindergarten enrollment



As we emerge from the pandemic, a strong educational foundation in our K-12 system is critical both to prepare young Wisconsinites to seize opportunity in the future and to ensure our state has the educated populace needed for the workforce of the future. In addition to prioritizing investments in K-12 education, we must also tackle systemic issues, such as continuing achievement gaps between Black and Latino K-12 students and their white and Asian peers, that otherwise threaten to permanently “bake in” income inequality, consigning generations of young people to diminished futures. And as more careers demand technological training, there will continue to be an increase in inequality, as skill-biased technological employment will continue to increase unless young people can gain the needed skills and have reliable, affordable access to high-speed broadband and digital devices.

Higher education has not been immune to the financial effects of the virus. The UW System estimates \$317 million in lost revenue during 2020 — more than half of it at the UW-Madison campus alone — largely due to the closing of in-person classes during the spring semester. Similarly, Wisconsin’s technical colleges estimated enrollments dropped 3% to 10% in 2020 from the year before.

Typically, an economic downturn would result in an increase in technical college enrollment. But the pandemic downturn is different in that it was unexpected and there is uncertainty how long it will last. Additionally, technical college students tend to be older and financially responsible for other family members, including as caregivers to parents. The need for these potential students to home-school, provide child care, and work — possibly more hours to make up for lost household income or because they are earning less — leaves less time, energy and resources for pursuing college.

As childcare and K-12 education return to more pre-pandemic norms, ensuring that our college campuses and technical colleges have the capacity and resources and that the state has sufficient financial support for workers seeking retraining and educational opportunities needed to reenter the workforce will be critical.



Wisconsin’s technical colleges estimated enrollments dropped from 3% to 10% in 2020

Source: Wisconsin Technical College System



Employment in the education and health services sector was down 6.8% from 2019

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

SKILLS, TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITY

To help retrain workers, the UW System is working with businesses and other state agencies to expand access to online/distance learning to support the 815,000 Wisconsinites currently with some college, but no degree or certificate; establish specific workplace development initiatives; increase virtual internship opportunities; and streamline industry credentialing efforts. The UW System is also partnering with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), subject matter experts from UW-Madison, and UW Extended Campus on the Prison Education Initiative, which will deliver a pilot program to offer bachelor's degree programs at three UW campuses to adults in nearby prisons focused on fields that meet student interests and employer needs. Nearly 70% of individuals in Wisconsin prisons have a high school degree or equivalent, and one in four have some post-secondary education. Providing inmates an opportunity to access additional education to build workforce possibilities can improve individuals' lives, reduce recidivism, reduce racial disparities in incarceration and strengthen Wisconsin's economy.

Tim D'Jock is in a hurry, and so are the students he works with, in a unique program that uses a heavy equipment simulator to prepare trainees for construction jobs in five to six weeks.



"In their words, they don't want to waste any more precious time," D'Jock said of the people who seek training from SOFTEC Education, the nonprofit he runs in Siren. The group was started to help area residents find jobs that can support families and allow young people to stay in Wisconsin's Northwoods. Program graduates who are accepted into a trade union can start at \$28.50 an hour before benefits, D'Jock said. The program works with a mix of new high school graduates and career changers seeking a chance at higher salaries.

"These kids come in broken," D'Jock said. "In two weeks, we can build their confidence. In the third week, we can build their competence."

On January 15, 2021, the Department of Corrections celebrated the graduation of 14 people from Milwaukee Area Technical College while in Wisconsin correctional institutions.

Wisconsin Department of Corrections also offers training to individuals to obtain a technical college certificate through the Career and Technical Education Initiatives. Training programs include high-demand fields such as industrial maintenance, control machine operations and welding.

The Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), which licenses 250 professions ranging from landscape architects to funeral directors, also aims to streamline the credentialing process and has proposed lower license fees, making it easier for workers to move into fields that typically pay higher-than-average wages. DSPS and WTCS continue to collaborate on career pathways targeting specific areas of need and assisting military personnel in training into professional areas. WTCS is focused on building as many on-ramps as possible to facilitate life-long learning and talent development.

To that end, the Department of Workforce Development continues to seek opportunities to expand training opportunities including the Wisconsin Apprenticeship Program to include professional career paths in addition to the traditional trades apprenticeship programs. As we emerge from the pandemic, many unemployed residents can look to DWD and the local workforce development boards for technical assistance, workshops and programs that allow for upskilling, such as providing tuition grants for eligible training and certificate programs.

Recognizing the importance of early exposure and hands-on access to science, technology, engineering, arts and math for expanding future opportunities, WEDC has expanded support of the Fabrication Laboratories Grant Program for public school districts K-12.

Ongoing collaboration across our academic institutions, industry and state agencies helps Wisconsin get back to work and establishes a strong foundation for economic well-being and shared prosperity for the residents, businesses and communities of Wisconsin. ►





Support Healthy Living

Reinvigorate Public Health
Remember Caregivers
Stay Mentally Healthy

REINVIGORATE PUBLIC HEALTH

The first recorded case of COVID-19 in Wisconsin was on Feb. 5, 2020. Since then, more than 580,000 of our residents have confirmed cases, more than 27,000 have been hospitalized, and more than 6,600 have died. As of April 5, 2021, DHS helped get 3,087,492 doses administered to Wisconsinites all across the state. The effects of the virus have been disparate, taking the heaviest toll on elderly, Black, Latino and Native American residents, low-income workers and rural residents. This experience over the past year has highlighted the importance of a strong public health infrastructure that can respond to urgent and emerging public health threats. Even as we return to pre-pandemic norms, Wisconsin has a need for investment in rebuilding our public health system.

Prior to COVID-19, Wisconsin's investment in public health was among the lowest in the nation. Coming out of the past year, we have the opportunity to reverse that trend by investing in state and local public health capacity as well as investing dollars in efforts that promote health — education, prevention, early detection and treatment of disease, and treatment. Keeping people healthy is important for their own quality of life and longevity, and it also has direct impacts on the productivity of the workforce and health care costs for individuals and businesses.

Increasing investments in Wisconsin's public health infrastructure, from local health departments to tribal health centers, will help Wisconsinites lead healthier, more productive lives. Additionally, public health programs aimed at reducing risk or exposure to health hazards such as contaminated water or lead poisoning can produce significant health and economic benefits. Decades of studies suggest that every dollar invested in lead hazard control, such as replacing lead service lines or eliminating lead paint, produces significant economic returns, especially for children, in addition to promoting better health. Likewise, the Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council's Report to the Legislature for Fiscal Year 2020 estimates that contaminated water creates tens of millions of dollars' worth of health and remediation costs each year for Wisconsinites.

Preventive public health initiatives to address social and economic determinants of health, such as transportation, housing and nutrition, have been shown to produce better health outcomes and improve family and community financial well-being. When making investments in public health, Wisconsin should look to approaches that have been successful in other states, including community health workers and health equity planning that focuses on the specific needs of communities. Strengthening public health infrastructure and investing in programs that mitigate health hazards and address determinants of health will be crucial to maintaining thriving communities across Wisconsin.

REMEMBER CAREGIVERS

Caregiving has individual, industry and community impacts. All caregivers, and the Wisconsinites who depend on them, should have access to affordable, quality care that allows people to live with dignity and respect. Hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites provide critical caregiving services each and every day, including unpaid family caregivers and others in our direct-care workforce who are working in our nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other home- and community-based settings. In addition to the critical role that caregivers play in helping people to live their lives, the work of caregivers also often means that other family members or friends are able to be engaged outside the home, in the workplace or in the community, while a caregiver assists their loved one.

Prior to the pandemic, Wisconsin long-term care providers reported increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. A significant number of caregiving positions remained unfilled, creating obstacles for Wisconsinites seeking long-term care services. These workforce and accompanying access barriers have only been exacerbated by the evolving challenge posed by COVID-19. Furthermore, these frontline health care professionals are often working in settings with individuals at substantially higher risk of developing severe cases of COVID-19.

In February 2019, Governor Tony Evers signed Executive Order #11 creating a Task Force on Caregiving, convening dozens of stakeholders to develop solutions and a roadmap to address this growing caregiving crisis. According to a report produced by the Task Force on Caregiving, the vast majority of nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other long-term care providers continue to struggle covering shifts and cited low wages as a barrier to maintaining a steady workforce. As Wisconsin seeks to recover and address challenges compounded by the pandemic, policymakers should prioritize the adoption of strategies proposed by the task force, including shoring up Wisconsin's long-term care provider community through increased Medicaid reimbursement rates and dedicating funding to support direct care workforce wages.

The task force report also notes that over 60% of Wisconsinites with intellectual or developmental disabilities live with family members who provide daily personal care. Family caregivers frequently provide unpaid and underrecognized, yet essential, care for hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites. Families seeking financial stability following the economic disruption caused by the pandemic would benefit greatly from the creation of a program or tax credit that could help cover expenses related to the caregiving services they are providing each day. Ensuring adequate support for both family caregivers and the long-term care community will be an important component to ensuring the financial health of Wisconsin families.



of Wisconsinites had a form of health care insurance

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



of Wisconsinites surveyed delayed medical treatment during the pandemic

Source: Household Pulse Survey, April 23 - January 18 2020





STAY MENTALLY HEALTHY

Mental wellness is a critical barometer of the health and well-being of our family members, neighbors and community. Mental health, like physical health, also has a direct impact on the quality of life in our communities and the productivity of our workforce. Thriving communities are healthy communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the prevalence of mental health conditions, the need for care and treatment for mental health issues and problematic substance use, and barriers to accessing that care. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, more than one in three Wisconsin adults has reported symptoms of anxiety or depression since May 2020. Furthermore, one in five adults indicating a need for counseling, therapy or some form of mental health treatment reported not receiving that care. Similar to other challenges in Wisconsin, lack of access to mental and behavioral health services is a challenge that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Opioid and methamphetamine use and overdoses — which have grown dramatically over the last decade — remain a significant concern for Wisconsin.

As of September 2020, the Federal Bureau of Health Workforce reports that Wisconsin needs to add more than 100 psychiatrists in order to remove its Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). HPSAs are used to identify areas that are currently experiencing a shortage of health professionals compared to the estimated need of the population. Due to workforce challenges, many Wisconsinites, particularly in rural areas, face obstacles to accessing mental health or substance use treatment in a timely manner. During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth services have become essential for many seeking mental health care, providing a convenient and flexible model of care. Expanding access to telehealth services like telepsychiatry could help remove significant barriers for Wisconsinites, particularly for those living in rural areas or HPSAs.

In order to further bolster efforts to address mental health and substance use disorders, Wisconsin policymakers should continue to pursue strategies to increase access to care and strengthen the health care workforce providing these critical services. This can include targeted programming for youth through school aids, the creation of programming for traditionally underserved communities, or rate increases for preventative mental health services. Other strategies to pursue include the expansion of programs operated by state agencies like the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, which provide mental and behavioral health support and services for Wisconsin veterans and farmers.

Additionally, the Department of Health Services' BadgerCare program continues to play a critical role in addressing mental and behavioral health needs of Wisconsinites. Expanding programs like BadgerCare can increase access to care and improve outcomes by reducing barriers and connecting people to vital health care services. ▶

Being able to access a vaccine for COVID-19 is just one part of recovering from the pandemic, according to Sharon-Rose Nartey, a second-year medical student at UW-Madison's School of Medicine and Public Health.



Nartey has spent time researching the vaccine gap between white and Black children in Wisconsin. As a Black woman, Nartey believes doctors and public health officials need to not only educate the public on the importance of vaccines, but also work toward earning the trust of historically marginalized groups such as the Black community.

"We can't just tell people to get vaccinated when there is a long history of fear and mistrust between the Black community and the medical establishment," Nartey said.

Instead, health officials must build partnerships with Black community leaders and solve practical obstacles to getting vaccinated such as child care, time off work and cost.

"Perhaps some are not getting vaccinated because they don't have a way to get to the vaccine site," she said.



Reinforce Community Infrastructure

Solve Child Care

Fix Broadband

Get People to Work

For a community to thrive, it must have the qualities and the resources needed for people to feel at home. Those “must haves” are personal and may be different depending on where you live. However, when it comes to community infrastructure, there are certain essentials everyone agrees make a place livable.

The sense of connection residents feel to their local community supports an overall sense of individual health and well-being. Creating places where people want to be allows communities to attract and retain the workers and families needed for a prosperous future. Support for and pride in local communities are at an all-time high. This support has been illustrated by the hundreds of thousands of dollars in local gift cards purchased by Wisconsin employers for employee holiday gifts, coordinated take-out and picnic events, and thousands of people who contributed to crowdfunded initiatives to support local restaurants, bars and hospitality workers. National surveys found that 53% of consumers were concerned with supporting local businesses during the pandemic, with 84% citing a desire to support the local community as a key reason for the shift in habits, according to a survey by ZypMedia.

State and local governments have also adjusted regulations to aid local businesses. In addition to numerous state and local financial supports, the Wisconsin Department

of Transportation (WisDOT) waived right-of-way limitations to allow outdoor patio seating along state highways, WEDC released numerous tools and guidelines to help business navigate pandemic best practices, and 62% of Main Street and Connect Communities participants launched one or more targeted initiatives to accommodate business adjustments that allowed small businesses to survive and thrive.

Just as concern over preserving small businesses has increased, communities have recognized the need to support and sustain the cherished civic and arts organizations. In 2020, the state used part of its federal Coronavirus Relief Fund allocation to target these important community gathering places. According to Johns Hopkins University, as of January 2021, the nonprofit workforce remains down by 958,000 jobs over pre-pandemic levels. These lost jobs include more than 36% of arts and entertainment associations as well as 8% of workers in nonprofit social service institutions. At present, 59% of arts and cultural destinations remain closed, with 39% not yet reporting a target date for reopening.

Certain essentials of community infrastructure remain priorities for our state’s recovery and will continue to play a key role in providing access to financial opportunities, health care and education for years to come.



CREATE AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Access to quality early care and education (ECE) is critical for economic well-being and must be a central goal of our state's economic recovery strategy. Without it, parents who work outside the home must choose between giving up their jobs or relying on a patchwork of family, friends and other temporary arrangements. Access to ECE also has educational consequences for children, who tend to develop social skills and perform better in school if they receive quality care in their early years.

The pandemic has been a stark reminder of just how critical access to ECE is for our communities. National studies have shown the move to online learning and the lack of affordable care have cost millions of women their jobs since the start of the pandemic, wiping away a generation's worth of economic and professional gains. In December alone, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 140,000 jobs were lost with data revealing a shocking gender gap: Women accounted for all the job losses, losing 156,000 jobs, while men gained 16,000. These losses have hit communities of color and low-wage workers especially hard. While Wisconsin Safer at Home orders allowed ECE facilities to remain open during the pandemic, reduced demand for services from households with job loss, together with reduced staffing or concerns from small owners about the safety of operation, prompted some facilities to close.

To help providers respond to those shocks in the ECE market, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) distributed \$131 million from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund in 2020 to child care providers through the Child Care Counts program, which helped many of them stay afloat through the pandemic. Wisconsin was one of only a handful of states to use these funds to assist ECE providers, a move that is credited with avoiding the meltdown in child care seen in other states. Longer term, DCF is proposing more robust investment in both ECE centers and the ECE workforce, and is working with providers, which are often small businesses, to find ways to increase worker pay, encourage professional development and create a sustainable business model for their operations. Now more than ever, Wisconsin's work to address pervasive challenges around equity, access, quality and affordability within the ECE system are imperative to helping the state move forward.



Xoua Yang would like to help the parents who call his Eau Claire child care center. But he can't. "Staffing is the number one concern, and keeping quality and motivated staffing has been

a challenge during this pandemic," said Yang, the owner of Adventures Begin Childcare.

In addition to regular bonuses and paid training for staff who want to grow in the field, Yang has raised wages significantly during the pandemic. But he said it's still difficult to find workers, as many are still concerned about COVID-19 or are facing their own physical or mental health challenges and other stressors.

Before the pandemic hit, Yang said the center was regularly caring for about 70 children. Now, the center has between 30 and 40 children on any open day.

Lack of available staff prevents Yang from accepting more children into the center.

"A lot of parents are going back to work," Yang said. "They need care but they can't get care and then they can't go back to work. It's a struggle for everybody."



Now more than ever, Wisconsin's work to address pervasive challenges around equity, access, quality and affordability within the Early Care and Education (ECE) system is imperative to helping the state move forward. Partnering with local business and community leaders to develop plans for ongoing support and financing of the ECE system is a necessary next step to help reopen Wisconsin's economy. Without a robust, well-funded ECE system, Wisconsin's ability to move toward economic recovery will not be realized to its full potential. Investing in early childhood in the wake of COVID-19 will continue to be a strong investment in a more secure economic future.

Emilie Amundson

Secretary

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families



A lack of broadband access stifles economic development in Wisconsin and puts business, industry and agriculture at a disadvantage — especially in rural areas. By prioritizing broadband expansion and working to diminish the digital divide, our state can realize the benefits of connectivity and enable Wisconsin to reach its full potential.

Becky Valcq

Chairperson, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

FIX BROADBAND

Access to reliable, high-speed internet access has become a necessity of modern life. Over the past year, the need for broadband and online access has been exacerbated as so much of what we do has gone virtual. Even prior to the pandemic, broadband was already increasingly necessary for business, education and personal use.

In areas without broadband coverage, students and workers are using the free Wi-Fi networks at fast-food restaurants to complete their schoolwork and apply for jobs. The pandemic has thrown into sharp contrast the divide that separates the digital “haves” from “have-nots.” As explored in the first *Wisconsin Tomorrow* report, the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access and the report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity, this is not solely an urban-rural divide: While thousands of rural residents do not have any broadband service, there are also large numbers of urban and rural residents who cannot afford the broadband service available in their communities.

In 2020, WEDC’s Office of Rural Prosperity and the Public Service Commission jointly established the Broadband Connectors pilot program, which received tremendous interest from communities, with the initial pilot receiving 96 applications for the six open slots — a sign of the significant unmet demand for broadband in Wisconsin communities. Governor Evers has declared 2021 the Year of Broadband, and the state’s partnership in expanding broadband infrastructure and increasing affordability is critical not only to individual access but to our communities. Access to broadband is a necessary component for new business ventures and remote work opportunities, for accessing telehealth services, and for people in some communities being able to gain skills training and education from institutions that otherwise would be beyond their reach. Increased investment in broadband is an investment in our economic future.

Reliable broadband service has allowed mental health therapist Stephanie Kneuppel and her team to be there for their patients even when they can’t be in the same room. The flexibility of being able to pop



online for a virtual telehealth appointment anywhere has allowed patients to more easily access therapy on breaks at work or school, said Kneuppel, who owns Steline Mental Health Services in Beloit.

“I feel like a lot of people, a lot of my clients, really like the virtual stuff,” Kneuppel said. And therapists are able to open up more convenient evening and weekend appointments without the need to commute into the office.

“Easily 90% of what I do is virtual at this point,” she said.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PLACES

While it often goes unnoticed, transportation is critical to our economy and to our day-to-day lives. Without transportation infrastructure — ports, rail, roads and more — vital supply chains would break down, affecting everything from the nation’s food supply to distribution of vaccines and personal protective equipment. Online shopping, delivery services and curbside pick-ups all depend on local roads and highways.

And although remote working has reduced the need for some commutes, many workers still need to get to factories, stores, restaurants and other businesses. For the thousands of Wisconsinites who do not own vehicles or cannot drive, public transit is the only way to get to jobs, child care and medical care. More than 73,000 Wisconsin households do not own a car, and Milwaukee is in the top 10 cities in the U.S. for growth in car-free households. In many rural areas, aging populations also represent a population with limited mobility, with 31% of households with residents older than 65 reporting some type of disability that could impair driving. Transit connections are needed across boundaries to ensure that workers are able to travel to jobs. In rural areas, transit services are limited or nonexistent, especially if taxi services are constrained by preset service hours.



At the municipal level, public transit routes were modified or even shut down, causing difficulties for essential workers and low-income individuals in getting to work. WisDOT is continuing to work with local governments to identify and disseminate best practices, including incorporating the lessons learned from the pandemic into Connect 2050, the state's long-range multimodal plan that will guide decision-making for the next 30 years. In addition to lessons learned from the pandemic, recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, such as the promotion of public transit, greater inclusion of green public transportation and inclusive transportation planning and development, will also be in the Connect 2050 report.

Another key area dependent on our transportation system is our food supply chain. With shifts in consumer purchasing and decreased demand in commercial markets driven by the pandemic, Wisconsin's agriculture industry felt the impact from production to processing to packaging. This required coordination between WisDOT and DATCP: WisDOT waived regulations for road weights and hours of service, and DATCP helped to inform agriculture transportation groups.

In addition, to align supply to where the demand was most needed, DATCP helped connect food producers that had excess product with the food security network and other buyers. This included granting nearly \$20 million to the food security network to help them increase their capacity to handle the large amounts of food, and to purchase the food itself. According to the Global FoodBanking Network, 100% of food banks across 40 countries witnessed an increased demand for food since the start of the pandemic. Many Wisconsin food banks are doubling or tripling their weekly spending to serve long lines of people, many of whom are first-time food bank users. Hunger Task Force supplied more than three million pounds more of food in 2020 than they did in 2019, and Second Harvest Foodbank, which serves southern Wisconsin, has seen a 53% increase in the amount of food distributed over the past year. Programs such as FoodSourceUSA, an online exchange program, have also helped fill gaps in the food supply network by connecting farmers impacted by product surpluses - created by the closure of large purchasers such as schools and restaurants — with an outlet in the form of food banks.

Because many of the shifts in behavior caused by the pandemic will continue to some extent, planning for the post-pandemic economy must include a mix of approaches, including current and new modes of transportation for both industry and individuals. ▶



Households with residents older than 65 reporting some type of disability that could impair driving

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Increase in the amount of food distributed over the past year

Source: Second Harvest

Respect the Environment

Safe from Pollutants

Sustain Natural Resources

Get Outdoors



SAFE FROM POLLUTANTS

In Wisconsin, stewardship of the environment is ingrained in the state's DNA, linking stewardship with our economic growth and contributing to two of our top three industries (namely, agriculture and tourism). The Department of Tourism's Office of Outdoor Recreation reports that outdoor recreation contributes \$7.8 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy and supports 93,000 jobs, which depend on our state's abundant resources. In general, more businesses today are organizing around sustainability because they are seeing the positive impacts it has on their business outcomes, including more efficient operations as well as introduction of new products and expanded markets. Adopting sustainable practices makes good business sense because customers expect it — especially in Wisconsin, where our leadership in agriculture, water technology and energy provides solutions to global challenges while building a stronger economy here at home.

Unfortunately, Wisconsin has also experienced pollution of our air, water and land over the years, and we continue to wrestle with emerging contaminants such as PFAS. Working together to address contamination and prevent pollution is important not just for our health but for our industries that rely on Wisconsin's natural resources.

SUSTAIN NATURAL RESOURCES

An environment that is safe and healthy intersects with other keys to well-being, resulting in improved health and better opportunities for financial stability. Likewise, reliance and stewardship of Wisconsin's environment connects with individual, community and industry needs, requiring a comprehensive and coordinated approach for future prosperity.

Unfortunately, the effects of environmental degradation have disproportionately affected communities of color, low-income Wisconsinites and farmers. Wisconsin's farmers have been buffeted in recent years by record flooding and droughts. Communities of color and low-income communities face more compromised health, financial burdens, and social and cultural disruption due to environmental problems, and like many inequities, systemic environmental bias was highlighted during the pandemic. Recognizing these inequities in environmental quality and safety, the governor's proposed FY21-FY23 budget builds on the work of the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change and proposes the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice to take the lead on environmental equity issues, with the intent of informing intentional and transformational policy. Vulnerable communities should have equal protection from environmental hazards, a say in the decision-making process, and access to a clean and safe outdoor environment.

While agencies like the Department of Natural Resources, DATCP, and PSC often work together on environmental issues, the state is now developing a comprehensive, statewide strategy to implement the recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change, led by Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes. Task force members were selected by Governor Evers to broadly represent Wisconsinites from across the state. From industry professionals to youth activists, from elected and tribal officials to entrepreneurs, these diverse perspectives provided input on how the people, communities and industry of our state can work together to make Wisconsin a cleaner, safer and more equitable state.

To that end, both public and private utilities have been looking to modernize their systems to move toward clean and sustainable energy. The Task Force’s Report also calls for developing opportunities to reduce carbon emissions and increase renewable energy, educating and training workers with the skills needed to transition to a low-carbon economy, and ensuring that environmental decisions minimize impacts on diverse communities.

Last year, the PSC increased funding for many of their renewable and clean energy programs, such as the Energy Innovation Grant Program, which provides incentives for projects that reduce energy consumption and support renewable energy. By investing in innovative technologies that intersect with keeping people healthy, our communities vibrant and industry sustainable with jobs of the future, Wisconsin is demonstrating its commitment to an environment that works for all of us.

GET OUTDOORS

Wisconsin’s beautiful natural resources are important not just to industries like agriculture and forestry that rely on what our environment produces, but also to the recreation and tourism industries in the state. In addition, the ability to get outside for recreation is beneficial to individual health, and can be a selling point for employers and workers in considering the quality of life associated with locating in Wisconsin.

Increasing equitable access to Wisconsin’s outdoors will help improve economic well-being on many levels. Wisconsin’s state parks and other open spaces have offered families respite and options to get out of their homes while remaining safe during the pandemic. Last year, the DNR reported record visits to state parks as well as increases in hunting and fishing licenses and ATV trail passes. Notably, first-time fishing licenses had the greatest increase, more than doubling from 2019.



As highlighted in the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change Report, Dodge County Farmers Healthy Soil & Water is a producer-led group whose mission is to improve soil and water through conservation practices and education. The group promotes improving soil health through the use of cover crops, residue management and reduced tillage. For the past five years, the group has provided the knowledge and leadership needed to improve farming practices.

The group also works collaboratively with non-farming organizations to ensure farming practices are not detrimental to the land and water. With the changing climate and increased precipitation, the group believes that implementing soil health practices can help reduce runoff and erosion as well as create a more efficient carbon sink— all while making agriculture more sustainable. Dodge County Farmers Healthy Soil & Water is committed to being part of Wisconsin’s solution to preserving its natural resources and working to create a state where its rich farming practices and conservation practices can coexist.



We are asking you to innovate



The Prairie Tillers Mural

Whitewater Art Alliance

In our first *Wisconsin Tomorrow* report, we identified three priorities, one of which was to support innovation. In the midst of a global pandemic, we knew that there would be relief and recovery, and that innovation would guide us there.

Innovation solves problems — and in Wisconsin, we know how to do that. Whether it takes the form of duct tape and baling wire, the invention of four-wheel drive, or a scramble at the 30-yard line of Lambeau Field, Wisconsin finds a way through. Some might call it can-do, grit or hustle. In the past year we have seen incredible innovation — from online learning to manufacturing PPE to taking Main Street businesses online. Wisconsinites have invented rapid tests, reinvented restaurant eating and added safety measures to getting a tattoo.

Today, tomorrow and in the coming months, we find ourselves confronted with an incredibly complex problem — a problem not just borne out of months fighting a virus. Our challenge is that many of us and many of our neighbors were vulnerable to that virus — not only its health effects but its economic effects — long before it ever came to Wisconsin. As the vulnerable in our communities became even more endangered, so, too, did our whole community and our whole state.

Many Wisconsinites find themselves on the brink. As the pandemic hit, jobs were lost, parents stayed home because of a lack of child care, family savings were used up to keep a business alive. Challenges were not only financial, but across the spectrum of daily needs.

Without concerted, intentional and innovative thinking and acting, our neighbors will suffer more.

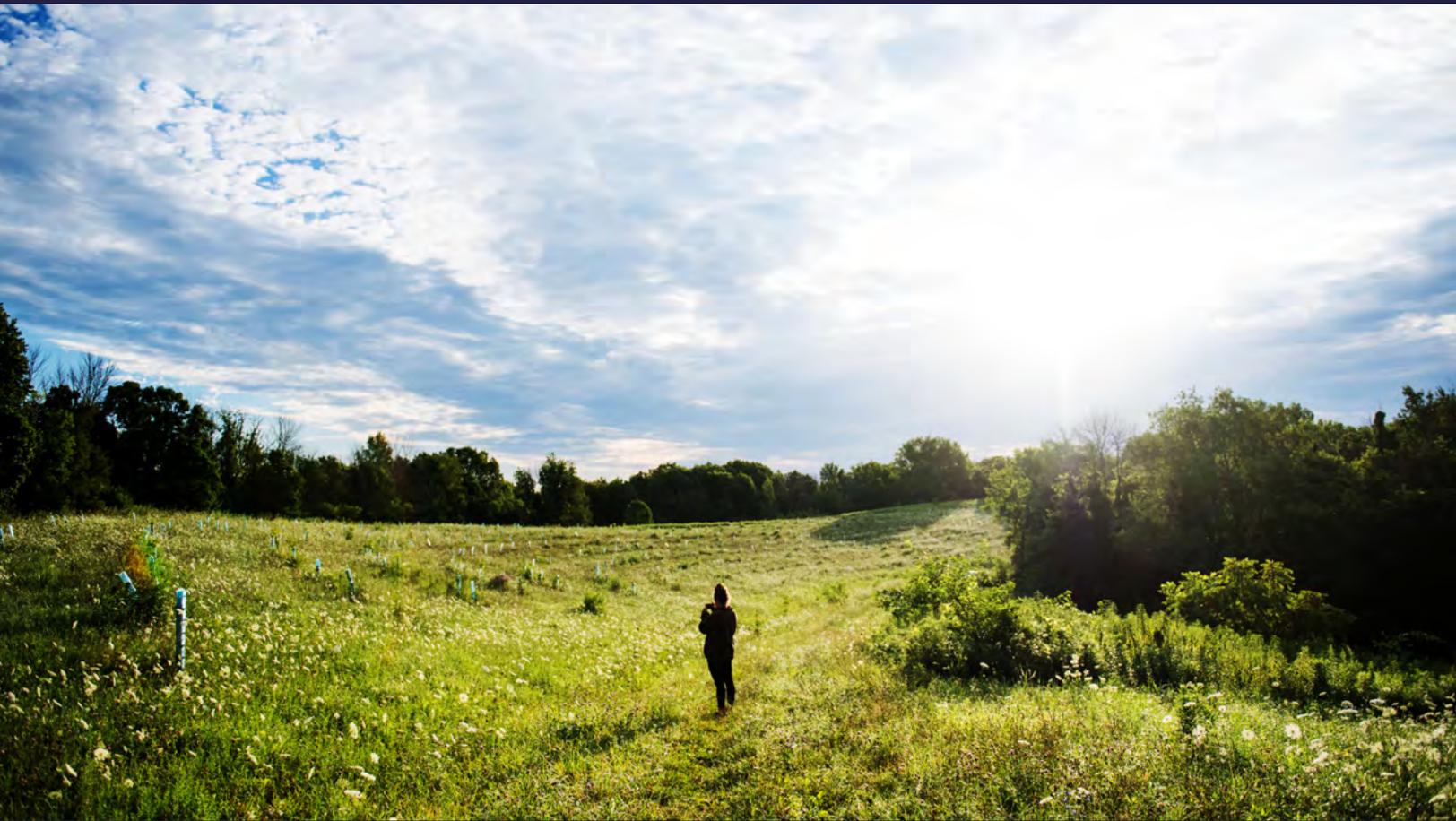
As we head into recovery, innovation is more important than ever — not only in what we make or what we do, but in how we think. And we are asking you to innovate your thinking.

First, let's put the people at the center of our efforts.

The challenges are not just in helping someone find work, but also in making sure the community infrastructure is available to “get” them to work — whether remotely by broadband, or through public transportation, or making sure they have a secure and affordable place for child care. It's making sure they can get the skills they need, not just for a job, but the job of their dreams. It's making sure families stay together, mentors are available and resources are at hand. Make no mistake, this is a complex problem — the day-to-day crisis for each individual is often wrapped in decades of neglect and systemic racism.

Second, we must recognize this is a local challenge, a regional challenge and a statewide challenge. It is a whole Wisconsin challenge. At the state level, our eyes have been on the vulnerable in our communities — before, during and after the pandemic — with efforts and initiatives intended to help all Wisconsinites achieve economic well-being. But we need help at the local and community levels. By putting people first, and especially keeping our most vulnerable at the center of our efforts and action, we keep our decisions precisely on target with who needs support.

With these two guideposts, we will not only solve today's problem but creatively and innovatively build tomorrow's future. Join your fellow Wisconsinites in solving a once-in-a-generation problem for the next generation.



**WISCONSIN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**