



# *Dane County Department of Human Services*

*Vision: Next  
2021-2026*

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## Letter from the Director

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The year 2020 demanded that we examine the underlying systems and structures that have perpetuated disparate outcomes for people of color across nearly every measure – higher infant mortality, higher rates of arrest and incarceration, lower rates of educational attainment, lower rates of home ownership, and higher rates of poverty are just a few examples. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked protests demanding racial justice with a fervor that our communities have not seen in many years.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has raged across the U.S. killing over 544,000<sup>1</sup> people as of late March 2021. Across the country in a matter of weeks, millions of people filed initial unemployment claims as their places of employment and children’s schools closed, immediate consequences of having to “shelter in place”. In Dane County, over 89,000 people filed initial unemployment claims in 2020<sup>2</sup>. Creative problem solving was required to meet immediate needs such as helping people sign up for BadgerCare as they lost employee-sponsored health care, rapidly transitioning our DCDHS workforce to work remotely, and ensuring the safety of children and older adults while maintaining social distancing. The pandemic has highlighted the need for the human services safety net to be flexible and nimble. It has also highlighted great inequities in our economic system – a system in which often the lowest-paid jobs are considered essential, are nearly impossible to do remotely, and disproportionately employ people of color (i.e. janitorial services, grocery store cashiers and stockers, food service workers, and delivery drivers to name just a few). The pandemic, because of inequitable economic and health systems, has disproportionately affected communities of color<sup>3</sup>.

A traditional strategic planning process enables communities, employees, partners, and leaders to have a conversation about what could be. Questions like “If you had a magic wand...” encourage building



**Figure 1: Madison Northside youth, through Dane Arts Mural Arts (DAMA), created this mural, installed outside the Dane County Job Center. The vibrant King Protea flower stands for diversity, courage, and strength breaking through and thriving in hardship. A powerful symbol of hope.**

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (March 3, 2021). *COVID Data Tracker*. <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. (March 3, 2021). *2020 Unemployment Insurance Claims by County*. <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/uistats/>

<sup>3</sup> Gracia, J.N., (November/December 2020). *COVID-19’s Disproportionate Impact on Communities of Color Spotlights the Nation’s Systemic Inequities*. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*. November/December 2020, Vol 26, Issue 6, p 518-521.

visions that are aspirational and developing plans to get there. These types of questions encourage individuals to dream about their future community and the services and resources that support that future. Those dreams coalesce into aspirational goals that the community gets excited about and works toward. That is the scenario we imagined when we kicked off the *Vision: Next* strategic planning process in early 2020.

Instead, a worldwide pandemic happened. Our community did not tell us about a dream world or ideal state at some point in the future. Instead, we heard urgent calls to examine all our policies, programs, and processes with a racial equity lens and a charge to eliminate racial disparities in our programs and services; to shift funding from police responses to mental health responses for many emergency calls; to develop prevention or early intervention responses that mitigate the need for mental health crisis or police responses; and to address the affordable housing crisis in Dane County. There was a great sense of urgency around all these needs because of the realities of the situation we found ourselves in.

The pandemic has also highlighted DCDHS' areas for improvement. We have systems and processes that are outdated. We have aging technology supporting our various programs. Data from one program all too often cannot be connected to data from another program, limiting our ability to answer systemic questions or efficiently address root causes. We recognize that in order to provide holistic, person-centered services that meet individuals' needs in a timely way, we need to fundamentally transform how we operate. We need to build the capacity internally, and across our communities, to effect transformational outcomes for people, families, and communities. That requires breaking down silos through better processes, communication, and information systems. It requires ensuring our employees have the necessary support, resources, knowledge, and time to build these connections with the families and individuals with whom they work. It requires changing our business model – fundamentally shifting how we provide services.

This strategic plan presents our five priorities for the next five years. It outlines where the Department will prioritize time, attention, and resources to achieve our vision and meet the needs of all stakeholders. There is a lot of work to be done. We believe that through articulating this clear high-level plan, we can make incremental and impactful positive changes. We look forward to continuing to share our progress on these priorities with you in the coming years.

Thank you,



Shawn Tessmann

Director, Dane County Department of Human Services





## Introduction

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Dane County Department of Human Services (DCDHS) works with hundreds of partners across Dane County to provide access to *Effective, innovative, and evidence-based services and resources that support wellbeing, opportunities to thrive, safety, and justice to persons of all backgrounds.*

*Vision: Next*, our strategic plan for 2021-2026, will guide the Department in this work over the coming five years. The strategic priorities focus on internal changes that will enable us to be more effective, innovative, and evidence-based; as well as external programming and partnership enhancements necessary to support wellbeing, opportunities to thrive, safety, and justice for all people. Each priority identifies four or five initiatives necessary to advance the priority. These initiatives are likely to shift over the next five years, while we expect our priorities to remain stable. Likewise, the Department will identify actionable short-term tactics that will be refreshed annually.

The services and resources we offer to customers/clients will remain broad. This plan is not a comprehensive listing of all the services and resources that DCDHS funds and/or provides. Rather, this plan highlights the areas where DCDHS intends to prioritize investment – time, money, skills, and effort – in order to make impactful changes. The plan also offers an explanation as to why those systemic changes are important to all Dane County residents, even those who do not use our services.



## Creating the Plan

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*Vision: Next*, the Department's strategic planning process, began in late 2019 with Department leadership committing to a process that was fundamentally different from previous strategic planning processes. The goal was to seek feedback and insight from partners, stakeholders, elected officials, communities, clients, and employees.

The Department created the Strategic Advocate Workgroup (SAWG) to do the bulk of the discovery work that typically accompanies a strategic plan. This group of employees from across the Department met from April through mid-December 2020 and created surveys, drafted the new Vision, Mission, and Value statements, conducted stakeholder interviews, and held community listening sessions. The SAWG work, and the synthesis of that learning, was guided by three consultants hired by DCDHS; Jeff Russell of Russell Consulting, Inc., Deborah Biddle of The People Company, and Mark Richardson of Unfinished Business, LLC. The Department's Management Team (M-Team) was able to move forward final Vision, Mission, and Value statements as well as craft the strategic priorities presented here due to the groundwork of the Strategic Advocate Workgroup and the consultants.

The learning process that the Strategic Advocate Workgroup elicited on behalf of the Department was significant and took many months. Through the process, DCDHS heard from hundreds of stakeholders, community members, and employees. The appendices to this report describe each step in more detail and summarize what the Department learned as part of that step.

**Table 1: Vision: Next List of Appendices**

When	What	Appendix
May - July, 2020	Creation of the new Vision, Mission, and Values	Appendix A
July - September, 2020	Stakeholder Interviews	Appendix B
September - October, 2020	Stakeholder and Community Surveys	Appendix C
November, 2020	Community Listening Sessions	Appendix D
November, 2020	SWOT List Compilation	Appendix E
December, 2020	Employee SWOT Survey	Appendix F
September - December, 2020	Data Compilation	Appendix G

The Department is deeply appreciative of everyone who participated in our process and took the time to provide their feedback and insights. We confirmed that most stakeholders envision a Dane County human services system that is equitable and inclusive, built on communication and collaboration, in which access is easy and there are few service gaps. Repeatedly, housing and mental health were raised as issues the Department should prioritize in the coming years. Stakeholders shared their views about the Department’s role in addressing and eliminating disparate outcomes for communities of color. Many stakeholders also encouraged the Department to improve coordination, communication, and collaboration to achieve these priorities.

Often, employees and stakeholders expressed a desire for a human services system that meets the needs of individuals at the time those needs are communicated with fewer barriers to service. In describing this ideal future state, stakeholders used phrases like: holistic, person-centered, root causes, no wrong door, warm handoffs, and collaboration.

## Dane County by the Numbers

Data trends and community demographics set an organization’s planning context. Organizations attempt to plan for a future that is somewhat predictable in terms of economics and population growth, and anticipate needs that may arise with these factors. Appendix G includes a large set of data describing trends in Dane County in depth. This report highlights just a few noteworthy trends.

## Growing Population and Diversity

Wisconsin's population grew approximately 2.95% since the 2010 Census. Dane County grew by 11.34% during this period, making it the fastest growing county in Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup> By 2040, Dane County is expected to have a population of nearly 700,000 individuals. The "Silver Wave" will affect Dane County, with the largest proportional growth among adults over age 60, as shown in Figure 2<sup>5</sup>. Dane County will

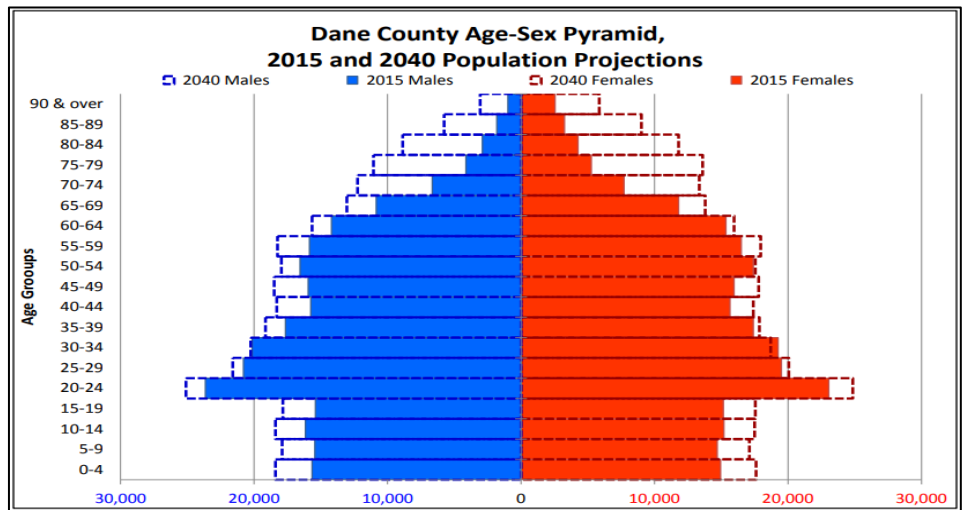


Figure 2: Dane County Age-Sex Pyramid

also become more diverse, primarily through large growth in the number of youth of color. This population growth will continue to impact the City of Madison, but surrounding cities and villages may likely continue to experience larger growth rates than the City of Madison<sup>6</sup>.

## Income and Disparities

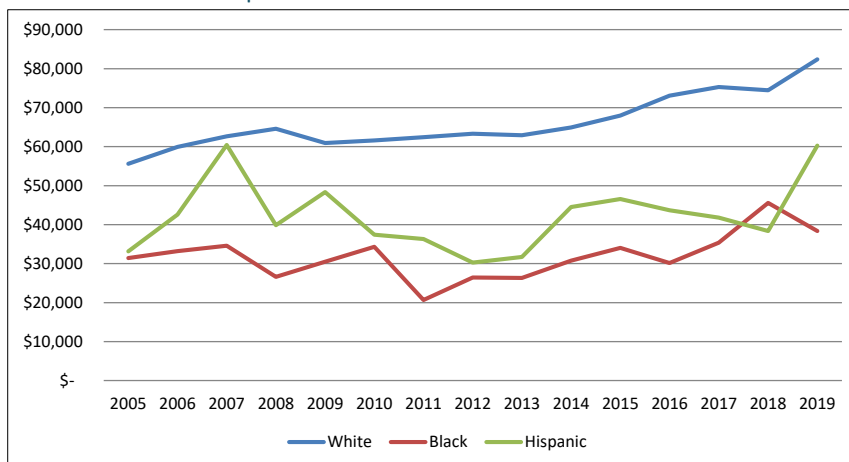


Figure 3: Dane County Median Household Income by Race

As shown in Figure 3, in Dane County there continues to be significant disparities between median household income for White households (\$82,387) and those that identify as Black (\$38,365) or Latino/a (\$60,254)<sup>7</sup>. Nationally, these disparities persist over time, educational achievement, employment status, gender, age, household size, and other factors<sup>8</sup>.

Likewise, there continues to be racial disparities in the rate of poverty experienced by families in Dane County. About 10% of Whites experience poverty, while about 20% of Asians and 28% of Black or African

<sup>4</sup> State of Wisconsin, Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center (2020). *Demographic Services Center's 2020 Population Estimates: Wisconsin's Moderate Growth Continues*. [https://doa.wi.gov/DIR/Final\\_Ests\\_Summary\\_2020.pdf](https://doa.wi.gov/DIR/Final_Ests_Summary_2020.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Projections: Demographic Services Center, Division of Intergovernmental Relations, WI Department of Administration: [https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population\\_Projections.aspx](https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Capital Area Regional Planning Commission. (May 2016). *Regional Trends in Population and Housing*. [https://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/PDF/capd/RegionalTrends/2016\\_RegionalTrends\\_PopHousing.pdf](https://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/PDF/capd/RegionalTrends/2016_RegionalTrends_PopHousing.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S1903, *Median Income in the Past 12 Months*, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S1903&tid=ACST1Y2019.S1903>

<sup>8</sup> Patten, E. (July 2016). *Racial, Gender Wage Gaps Persist in U.S. Despite Some Progress*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>

Americans experience poverty<sup>9</sup>. From 2014 through 2018, the poverty rate for Black or African Americans decreased by about 12%, while remaining relatively stable for the other groups.

Poverty often determines eligibility for DCDHS services and programs, or is closely correlated with such services and programs. While the relative decline in the overall poverty rate over the past four years is good news, it is possible it will not continue in the coming years. The long-term economic consequences of the pandemic response has the potential to disproportionately affect low-income individuals and families across Dane County, even those just above the poverty threshold<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, due to population growth and unpredictable changes in the poverty rate, DCDHS is likely to experience a greater demand for services in the future.

## Needs

DCDHS heard from many stakeholders throughout our *Vision: Next* process that behavioral health needs and housing access and affordability were important foundational root causes that needed to be addressed in order to achieve our vision of **Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities**.

Thousands of Dane County low-income families struggle to pay rent every month. Nearly 21% of all renters in Dane County are spending over 50% of their gross income on rent, according to 2019 data, with another 13% of renters spending between 35-49.9% of their gross income on rent<sup>11</sup>. Low-income families are spending the greatest portion of their income on rent, meaning eviction is too often just one missed paycheck away.

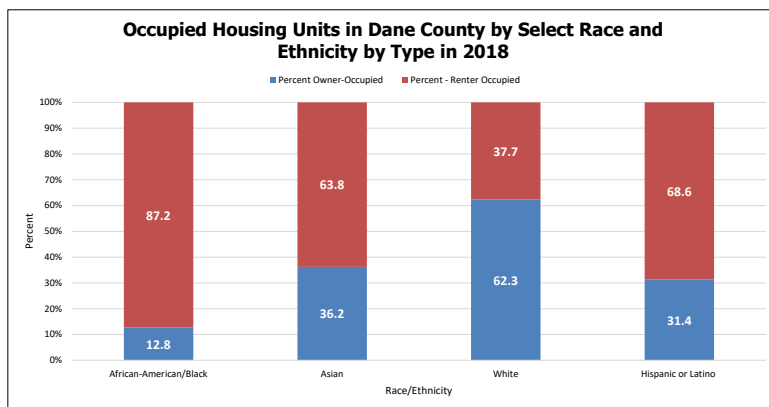


Figure 4: Occupied Housing Units in Dane County by Race and Ethnicity

Further, about 42.7% of households rent, rather than own their own home. There continues to be racial disparity in home ownership rates, as shown in Figure 4, with 62.3% of Whites owning their home, while only 12.8% of Black or African Americans, 31.4% of Hispanic or Latino, and 36.2% of Asian households own their home<sup>12</sup>. Housing insecurity, often combined with other challenges, results in about 600 individuals experiencing homelessness at any given time in Dane County.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1701, *Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months*, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S1701&tid=ACSS1Y2019.S1701>

<sup>10</sup> Horowitz, J.M., Brown, A., and Minkin, R. (March 5, 2021). *A Year Into the Pandemic, Long-Term Financial Impact Weighs Heavily on Many Americans*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/03/05/a-year-into-the-pandemic-long-term-financial-impact-weighs-heavily-on-many-americans/>

<sup>11</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Table B25070, *Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months*, 5 Year Estimates Detailed Tables, accessed 2 February 2021.

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B25070&g=0500000US55025&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B25070&hidePreview=false>

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Table S2502, *Demographic Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units* <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ACSS1Y2019.S2502&g=0500000US55025&tid=ACSS1Y2019.S2502&hidePreview=true>

<sup>13</sup> Homeless Services Consortium. (January 2019). *Point-In-Time County of Homelessness Madison/Dane County*. [https://0dae4f91-4a77-41b6-8005-0e9000834ebd.filesusr.com/ugd/73dee7\\_0b8de62f766f4c58959646551ca62140.pdf](https://0dae4f91-4a77-41b6-8005-0e9000834ebd.filesusr.com/ugd/73dee7_0b8de62f766f4c58959646551ca62140.pdf)



Mental health, substance abuse, and other behavioral health needs continue to increase for individuals and families across Dane County, especially as routines are disrupted and financial stressors of the pandemic impact low-income households. Even prior to the pandemic, youth reported increased measures of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts<sup>14</sup>; the number of suicides was trending slightly upward<sup>15</sup>, as were opioid-related emergency room use<sup>16</sup> and alcohol-related hospitalizations<sup>17</sup>. These general trends have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic recession. “Four in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder<sup>18</sup>”. Dane County mirrors the U.S. population in this regard, with individuals experiencing more concerning levels of stress, while simultaneously, the pandemic has increased barriers to service. These trends point to a growing need to deliver timely and responsive behavioral health interventions across the life span and across diverse racial and ethnic communities.

Given this data, DCDHS generally expects that the growing diverse population and the potential for increasing poverty rates will result in increased demands and needs for all services in the next several years. Behavioral health and housing needs will continue to be root-cause challenges facing many Dane County households.

## Meeting Root-Cause Challenges

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While we heard from stakeholders that focusing on housing and behavioral health are very important to all communities in Dane County, we also heard stories about the gaps in the existing safety net. Stories emerged of individuals being given yet another phone number to call or website to visit to get assistance with a challenge they expressed to a service provider. This results in too many families or individuals needing to make multiple contacts with the Department or service providers across the county. Holes in the safety net emerge when these families retreat, often due to frustration or lack of knowledge in how to navigate the complex human services system.

Conversations with stakeholders, employees, and community members highlighted the need and desire to create a person-centered **system** that meets all needs of all individuals in a timely manner, with fewer doors to enter or phone numbers to call. When asked about needs that were not being met, responses were often not about **what** was missing, but about **how** those services and resources were provided.

Through the conversations, surveys, listening sessions, and interviews themes emerged about the types of changes needed in order to develop the person-centered approach necessary to fulfill our vision of **Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities**. We heard that we should:

- Improve **coordination** and **communication** in order to enable community organizations to deliver services better, break down silos, increase community awareness of resources available,

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<sup>14</sup> Dane County Youth Commission. Dane County Youth Assessments (2013, 2015, 2018) <https://danecountyhumanservices.org/yth/>

<sup>15</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health, Office of Health Informatics, Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health (WISH) data query system, Mortality Module, accessed 9/11/2020, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/index.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Data Direct, Opioid Hospitalizations Module [web query]. Data last updated 9/11/2020. Accessed 9.11.2020

<sup>17</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, DHS Interactive Dashboards (data query), Alcohol Hospitalizations Module, data last updated 7.1.2020. Accessed 9.10.2020.

<sup>18</sup> Panchal, N., Kamal, R., Cox, C., Garfield, R., (February 10, 2021). *The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use*. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

make services more accessible to ALL people, make those programs and resources meet all needs that individuals or families identify without “revolving doors”, and understand if services and resources are meeting needs. Stakeholders often talked about communication as the foundation of collaboration.

- **Collaborate by** inviting communities to “the table” to discuss issues and innovate solutions; convening community experts and trusting their feedback; listening to the expertise of the communities we serve; and being genuinely open to feedback.

Stakeholders, partners, and employees also encouraged DCDHS to examine programs, policies, procedures, and partnerships with a **racial equity and social justice** lens and to make changes necessary to reduce disparate outcomes for communities of color. Recommendations included:

- Hire more staff with lived experience and/or hire more people of color.
- Mandate implicit bias training, staff reflection, and facilitated conversations.
- Contract with more agencies staffed and lead by people of color, and with organizations that are already in communities doing this work.
- Provide information, resources, and services through websites, phone numbers, and in-person, in Spanish and Hmong. Ensure there is adequate resources and training to use professional translation and interpretation services when needed, not children.
- Build partnerships and collaborations with communities by first building trust. Ask communities what they need, how they are already addressing their community needs, trust that they know this, and then do it.
- Honor the Latinx community as a multifaceted, complex group. There are many Latinx individuals and families with diverse experiences, languages, needs, etc. Take the time to hear from them all.
- Examine RFP, funding, and contracting processes to ensure greater equity.
- Share resources, subject matter expertise, and funding with community organizations to enable them to do their work better.

## Putting it all Together

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Again, we are deeply appreciative of what we learned from discussions with stakeholders, employees, policy makers, and community members. As the result, this plan presents a few internally facing strategic priorities. We recognize that DCDHS staff, programs, and partners already achieve valuable short-term outcomes, but all too often our systems, structures, information, and/or allocation of resources are not optimally aligned, limiting our ability to achieve greater long-term outcomes that address root causes. By focusing on internal priorities such as improving organizational culture and modernizing internal infrastructure, we expect to increase and strengthen our capacity to be innovative, responsive, and effective. It will also enable us to more effectively achieve our more externally facing

priorities of advancing racial justice, strengthening partnerships, and building innovative and systemic solutions to our communities' challenges.

Our strategic priorities reflect intent to address the systemic changes requested by stakeholders, employees, and community members, which is supported by our data. They demonstrate our understanding of the changes necessary to address root-causes with families and individuals we serve as well as everyone in Dane County. These priorities are presented as five-year priorities because to achieve significant systemic alignment and positive outcomes, we likely will need to work at them in some way for many years to come.

As our priorities speak to *what* we will do differently, our new Vision statement serves as our aspirational “North Star”, or the *why*. In a perfect world, *Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities* would not need interventions from human services. In a perfect world, we would work ourselves out of existence. To do that, we must achieve our mission: *Provide access to effective, innovative, and evidence-based services and resources that support wellbeing, opportunities to thrive, safety, and justice to persons of all backgrounds.*

Finally, our value statements are aspirational statements of *how* we intend to work with each other, our partners, our community, and our clients. The list is certainly not comprehensive. The selection of these words was intentional. For instance, DCDHS has chosen to pursue racial *justice* instead of racial *equity*. There were many conversations across the Department about equality, equity, and justice throughout our process. These conversations were at times challenging, but this challenge helped us grow and learn. Figure 6, on page 14 effectively encapsulates the differences between these words that informed our thinking on these values. The value of racial justice, by definition requires us to hold the value of equity, yet justice is a bolder concept. Similarly, you will see the word diversity emphasized in the values, but not the word inclusion. We encourage you to look more closely at the commitment we make to demonstrate the value of diversity. We value the diversity that all people of various genders, sex, races, ethnicities, sexualities, economic status, abilities, religions, ages, and experiences bring to our work. In valuing this diversity, we are committing to inclusion of different voices and perspectives to inform our work in deep and authentic ways.

By aspiring to these values every day, in every decision we make, we will be able to make progress on each of the strategic priorities and fulfill our mission. We look forward to going on this purposeful journey with you. We look forward to a future of *Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities.*

## Vision, Mission, and Values

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The new Vision, Mission, and Value statements were developed during the summer of 2020 in a collaborative process involving our Strategic Advocate Workgroup and the input of hundreds of DCDHS employees. For more information on the process used to arrive at these statements, refer to Appendix A.

**VISION:** Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities.

**MISSION:** Provide access to effective, innovative, and evidence-based services and resources that support wellbeing, opportunities to thrive, safety, and justice to persons of all backgrounds.



Figure 5: Our values support our Vision

## VALUES

### **ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

We are stewards of public resources. We commit to the evaluation and review of our services and programs. We will be as transparent as possible through open communication within our own organization, with our partners, and with the communities we serve.

### **COLLABORATION**

We commit to building collaborative, inclusive, and informed relationships with staff, clients, partners, and the larger community to foster trust, respect, and effective partnerships across all programs and services.

### **RACIAL JUSTICE**

We commit to pursuing racial justice through institutional change to actively dismantle policies, practices, messages, and attitudes that both perpetuate and fail to eliminate racism and differential outcomes by race.

### **DIVERSITY**

We celebrate our differences, recognizing diversity as a strength that will help us effectively tackle the challenges we collectively face. We strive to create an inclusive culture by authentically bringing diverse voices and perspectives into discussions and decision-making.

### **EMPATHY**

We recognize the existence of generational, historical, community and personal trauma. We approach every interaction, with clients and staff, with the empathy and compassion necessary to address trauma and repair harm.

### **GROWTH AND LEARNING**

We commit to organizational learning and growth by listening, training, collaborating, and innovating, to ensure that our work is responsive, current, engaged, and focused on positive change.

***DCDHS acknowledges the harm caused by systems that contribute to socio-economic and other disparities and inequitable outcomes, especially among communities of color. DCDHS understands that these systems still exist and seeks to chart a path of improvement by committing to a new aspirational vision, mission, and set of values.***

# DCDHS 2021- 2026 Strategic Priorities

<p><b>1</b> <i>Advance Racial Justice</i></p>	<p><i>Advance racial justice in Dane County through the programs we fund, the services and resources we provide, and how we recruit and retain staff of color.</i></p>
<p><b>2</b> <i>Promote Organizational Culture</i></p>	<p><i>Create, strengthen, and support an organizational culture that exemplifies our core values in which employees feel empowered, respected, and valued.</i></p>
<p><b>3</b> <i>Modernize Internal Infrastructure</i></p>	<p><i>Enhance computer systems, program evaluation infrastructure, contract management processes, and communications strategy to enable and facilitate data driven decision-making and effective collaboration.</i></p>
<p><b>4</b> <i>Strengthen Our Partnerships</i></p>	<p><i>Build trusting collaborative partnerships, internally and externally, to ensure the Department meets the needs of all communities in innovative and effective ways.</i></p>
<p><b>5</b> <i>Innovate and Build Systemic Solutions to Our Communities' Challenges</i></p>	<p><i>Innovate and build systemic solutions that reduce multi-system involvement for individuals with behavioral health needs or facing housing instability, in which individuals receive culturally competent and person-centered services.</i></p>

The strategic priorities presented here will be the focus for the rest of 2021 through the end of 2026. The pages to follow provide greater discussion on each strategic priority and the desired outcome we are hoping to achieve. Within each *priority*, there are four or five *initiatives*, or goals, that will assist DCDHS in achieving the priority. These initiatives will likely evolve over the coming five years. *Tactics*, the measurable action or deliverable to achieve the initiative, will be updated and modified at least annually. Tactics for 2021 are presented within Appendix H of the *Vision: Next* plan.



## Priority 1 - Advance Racial Justice

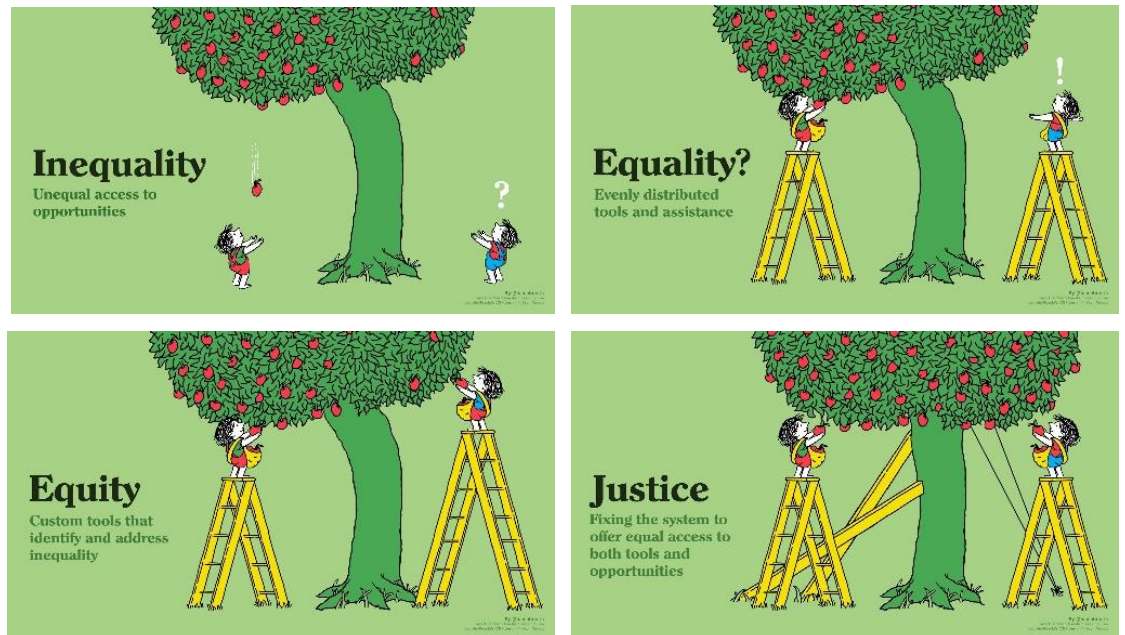
People of color in Dane County experience significant racial disparities across a variety of measures. DCDHS acknowledges the harm caused by systems that contribute to socio-economic and other disparities and inequitable outcomes, especially among communities of

color. DCDHS understands that these systems still exist and seeks to chart a path of improvement by disrupting these systems to create just communities for everyone.

DCDHS' first strategic priority is to **Advance racial justice in Dane County through the programs we fund, the services and resources we provide, and how we recruit and retain staff of color.**

### **We will achieve this through the following initiatives:**

1. Enhance organizational commitment and focus on racial equity through department-wide trainings and conversations to develop shared understanding, enhance individual commitment, and build staff and organizational capacity.
2. Make changes to recruitment and hiring policies and procedures to increase retention, trust, and racial and ethnic diversity of staff.
3. Apply a racial justice lens to decision-making.
4. Expand the Purchase of Service (POS) network to include more providers of color.
5. Examine our policies and procedures for interpretation and translation to improve access for all members of the community.



**Figure 6: Advance Racial Justice**

Created by Tony Ruth for John Maeda's 2019 *Design in Tech Report*. Images retrieved from <https://cx.report/2020/06/02/equity/> with use permission.

## Priority 2 - Promote Organizational Culture

The second priority is to **Create, strengthen, and support an organizational culture that exemplifies our core values in which employees feel empowered, respected, and valued.** The values DCDHS adopted over the summer of 2020, presented earlier in this document, were in many ways aspirational. Our intention is to do the work necessary internally to change that and make DCDHS the best workplace in Dane County. Our employees do amazing work every day and they are the backbone of the services and resources we provide to thousands of individuals every year. Without about 740 talented, dedicated, and resourceful employees, DCDHS cannot fulfill our mission. Therefore, we are prioritizing our employees in the coming years.

### **We will achieve this through the following initiatives:**

1. Engage employees in policy and process development in meaningful and intentional ways that breaks down programmatic silos and effectively utilizes their skills, knowledge, and abilities.
2. Enhance internal communications for increased accountability and transparency.
3. Ensure performance reviews are timely, meaningful, and encourage employee professional development.
4. Develop, formalize, and implement on-boarding and off-boarding procedures.
5. Develop and implement recognition practices that increase staff engagement and retention.



Figure 7: Promote Organizational Culture

## Priority 3 - Modernize Internal Infrastructure

DCDHS will **Enhance computer systems, program evaluation infrastructure, contract management processes, and communications strategy to enable and facilitate data driven decision-making and effective collaboration.** Information is key to breaking down silos within DCDHS and between DCDHS and our partners. Too often, individuals have multiple contacts with different programs and organizations to address multiple issues. No one provider in that system can see the “full picture” because no one provider in that system has all the information needed to paint that picture. Working on this priority will help DCDHS enhance internal infrastructure necessary to start painting the larger systemic picture of the world of our clients, coordinate efforts to build holistic services, and communicate internally and externally.

**We will achieve this through the following initiatives:**

1. Create a project management approach to effectively prioritize our portfolio of projects (both IT and non-IT) and provide infrastructure necessary for innovation and collaboration.
2. Evaluate information technology (IT) infrastructure needs to reduce manual work, enhance data analytics, and support innovation.
3. Design a department-wide communications approach and develop internal and external communications protocols.
4. Strengthen contract management best practices.
5. Enhance program and outcome evaluation infrastructure.

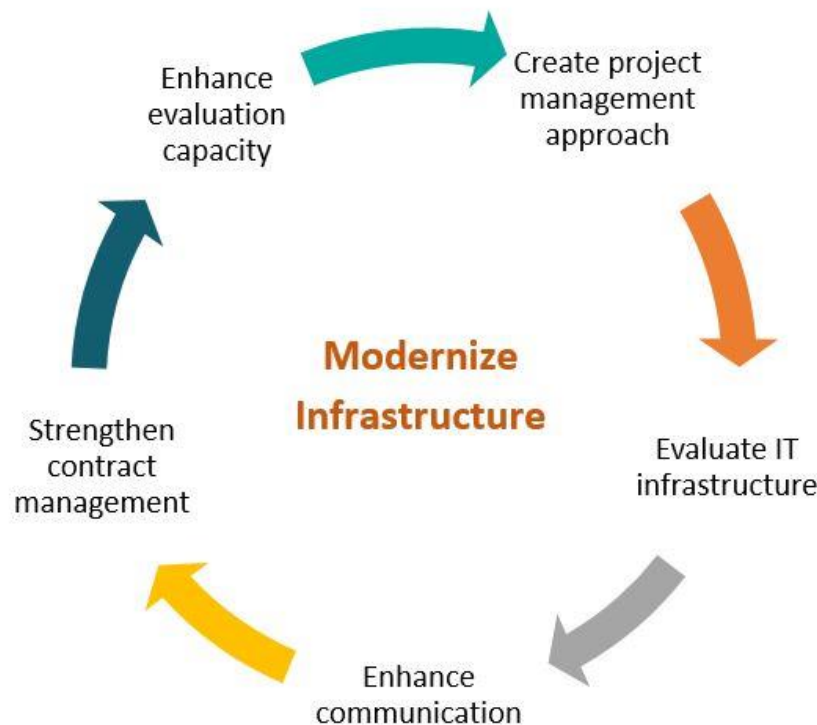


Figure 8: Modernize Internal Infrastructure

## Priority 4 - Strengthen Our Partnerships

Person-centered and holistic services require collaboration across the system, both with programs and partners DCDHS funds as well as those system providers that do not receive funding from DCDHS. This collaboration starts with greater awareness among all system stakeholders about the services and resources available and provided by each player, and builds over time to a “no-wrong-door” system in which a customer/client can talk to one person or provider and find the resources necessary to meet all their needs.

To achieve this, our fourth priority is to ***Build trusting collaborative partnerships, internally and externally, to ensure the Department meets the needs of all communities in innovative and effective ways.***

***We will achieve this through the following initiatives:***

1. Assess the health of our current partnerships and identify ways to strengthen or expand those partnerships.
2. Seek feedback on the experience of our clients to broaden the community and lived-experience voice in service delivery.
3. Support training and development needs of contracted and non-contracted providers across the county to strengthen their performance.
4. Redesign our website as an engagement and information-sharing tool for clients, DCDHS staff, and others throughout the community.

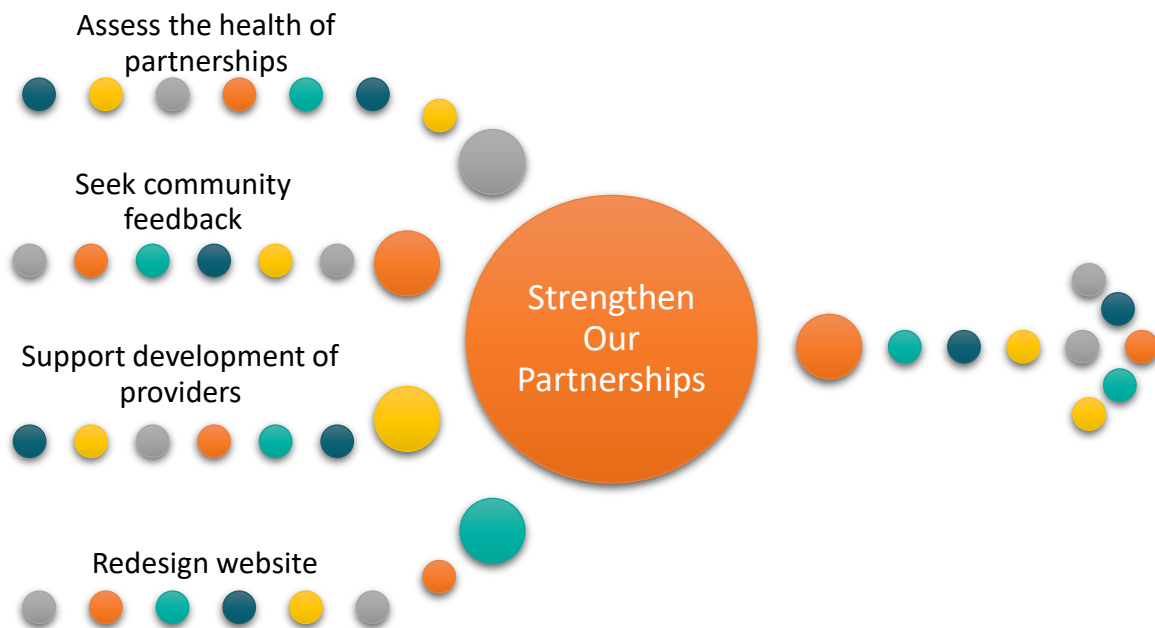


Figure 9: Strengthen Our Partnerships

## Priority 5 - Innovate and Build Systemic Solutions to Our Communities' Challenges

Behavioral health and housing are foundational for families across Dane County. If families lack access to stable or well-coordinated resources in these areas it too often leads to involvement in other systems. One person could have multiple people from multiple systems working with them at the same time, and those partners may not know who else is assisting their client. Through community engagement, we learned that focusing attention and resources on housing and behavioral health would have the greatest positive impact for the community.

Our fifth priority is to ***Innovate and build systemic solutions that reduce multi-system involvement for individuals with behavioral health needs or facing housing instability, in which individuals receive culturally competent and person-centered services.***

Our focus on our other strategic priorities will help us build these systemic solutions over time and help us address the pressing needs around behavioral health and housing.

***We will achieve this through the following initiatives:***

1. Design and launch a Behavioral Health Triage and Restoration Center<sup>19</sup>.
2. Partner to develop a purpose-built shelter for those experiencing homelessness with adequate case management services and resource connections<sup>20</sup>.
3. Increase the number of affordable housing units and make those units more accessible to people with a less-than-perfect housing history.
4. Build staff awareness of programs and resources across the Department to enable appropriate referrals and warm handoffs.
5. Create and implement a holistic approach that connects individuals to preventive services and resources at the time they are needed.



**Figure 10: Innovate and Build Systemic Solutions to Our Communities' Challenges**

<sup>19</sup> This initiative is in anticipation of policy direction and resource allocation by the County Executive and Dane County Board of Supervisors.

<sup>20</sup> This initiative is in anticipation of policy direction and resource allocation by the County Executive and Dane County Board of Supervisors.



## Conclusion and Next Steps

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As stated earlier, this plan provides a broad outline of the changes DCDHS will pursue in the coming years. It remains purposefully silent on programs, resources, and operations for which we either do not expect or cannot anticipate significant changes. The priorities outlined will necessitate change in all Department Divisions. They are large and aspirational and will require a great deal of focus, intention, and resources in the coming years.

Likewise, we have offered a preview of the initiatives that we will move forward to make progress on each of the five strategic priorities. We will continue to work with DCDHS staff to identify actionable tactics, a more detailed road map, to achieve our vision. DCDHS anticipates publishing annual updated “road maps” of actionable tactics, starting in early 2022.

In the meantime, in Appendix H you will find DCDHS’ 2020 SMART goals and 2021 Tactics that the Department is already working on. The tactics presented for 2021 reflect the listening, learning, and decision-making that the Department’s leadership was able to make through the *Vision: Next* process.

We look forward to working with our staff, our stakeholders, our community partners, our elected officials, and all Dane County communities to build a human services system that ***Provides access to effective, innovative and evidence-based services and resources that support wellbeing, opportunities to thrive, safety, and justice to persons of all backgrounds.*** Through achievement of these priorities, we envision ***Empowered people thriving in safe, just, and caring communities.***