



**Civic Participation and Power for  
Inclusive, Healthy Communities**

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Healthy Democracy Healthy People

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Vision: All people and communities in Wisconsin have the opportunities and supports they need to reach their full potential.

**Wisconsin State Health  
Improvement Plan  
2023-2027**

# Building Inclusive, Healthy Communities

- What does civic participation and power have to do with our health and democracy?
- What role can we play-
  - to strengthen civic participation and
  - promote an inclusive, representative democracy?
- How can we build our collective power to advance health equity?

# My story...



# *Healthy Democracy Healthy People*

... [Healthy Democracy Healthy People \(HDHP\)](#) is a nonpartisan coalition of major public health and civic engagement groups.

Our overall aim is to advance health and racial equity by promoting an inclusive, representative democracy and strengthening civic and voter participation.



# 2020 Brought Public Health and Elections Together

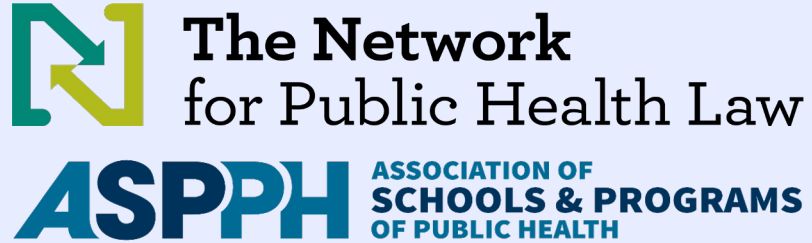


We can vote.

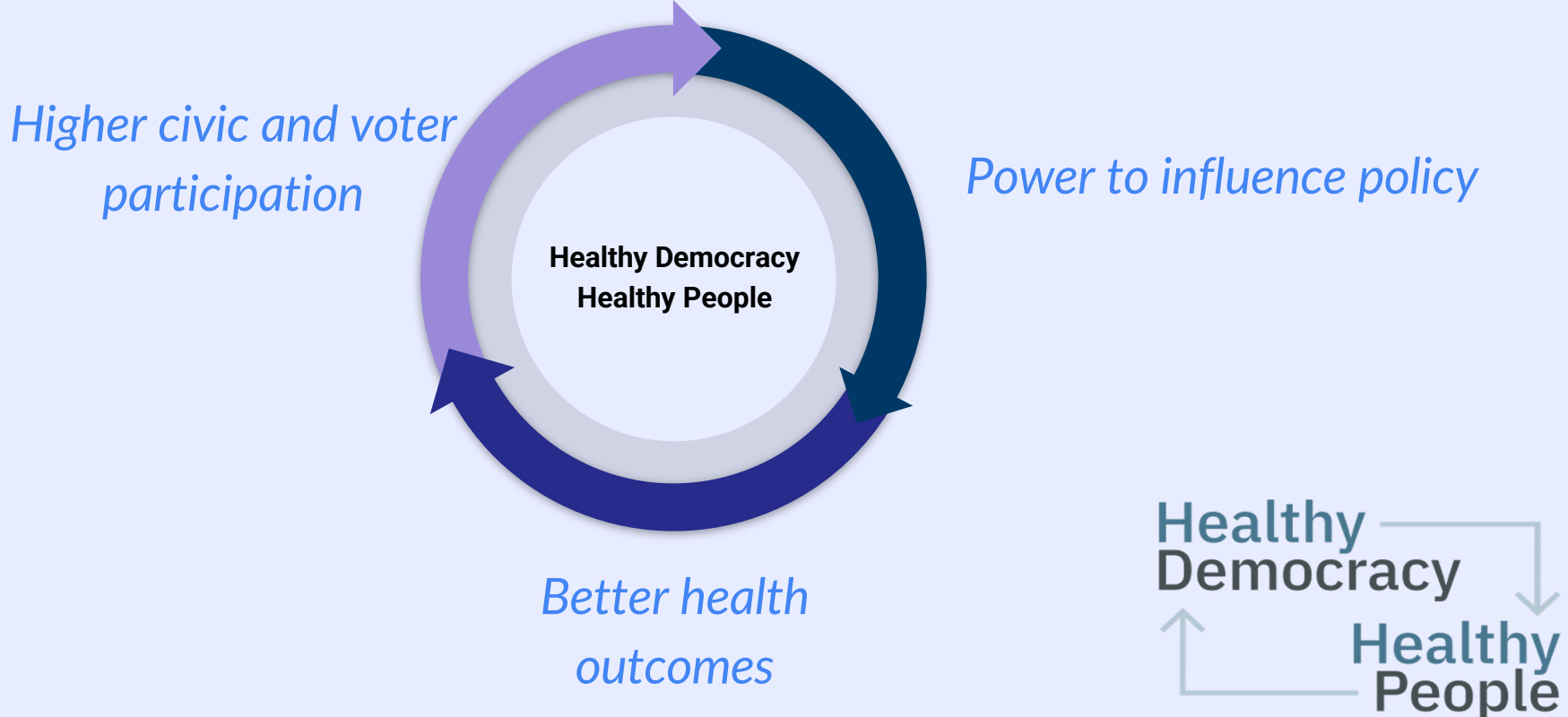
Healthy Voting

**NACCHO** **ACPM**  
National Association of County & City Health Officials

American College of Preventive Medicine  
physicians dedicated to prevention



# Health and Democracy are Interdependent



# Public Health Is...



“... Public Health is what we...  
do *collectively to assure the  
conditions* in which (all)  
people can be healthy”

- Institute of Medicine (1988), Future of Public Health



**Aim “all people can be healthy”**

**It is critical we center health equity in our work**

Health equity means achieving the conditions in which **all people have the opportunity to realize their health potential—**

**—the highest level of health possible for that person—without limits imposed by structural inequities**

Everyone benefits! Improving the health of those experiencing the greatest inequities will **result in improved health for all.**

# How do we center health equity?

Value **everyone** with focused and ongoing efforts to address avoidable systematic, historical inequalities and contemporary injustices.

**Healthy equity is a feature not of persons but of systems**

Focus on systems –**Targeted universalism**–

- Set universal goals and use **targeted processes and practices to achieve those goals** based on how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies–

Example-Universal goal: **All Eligible Voters Vote**

# Universal goal: All eligible voters vote

## *Healthy People 2030*

### Increase the proportion of the voting-age citizens who vote SDOH-07

Status: Getting worse 

[Learn more about our data release schedule](#)



Most Recent Data:  
**52.2** percent (2022)



Target:  
**58.4** percent



Desired Direction:  
**Increase desired**



Baseline:  
**53.4** percent of US citizens 18 years and older reported voting in the federal, state, and/or local November election in 2018

# Universal goal: All eligible voters vote:

- **Voter ID policies have unequal impact**
  - 15% of eligible voters do not have acceptable forms of ID required by states with strict ID requirements
  - 18% of Hispanic voters have difficulties with accessing acceptable ID
  - 31% of eligible voters aged 18-29 lack photo identification
  - 21% of eligible voters with incomes less than \$30,000 lack proper identification
- **Polling Location Accessibility**
  - While polling locations are required to be accessible, many are not, making it harder for voters with disabilities to cast a ballot
- **Flexible Voting Options**
  - Many states require voters to have eligible excuses to vote from home making voting challenging for:
    - People who lack reliable transportation
    - Voters who have strict work schedules that do not accommodate polling hours
- **Language Accessibility**
  - Many voters primary language is not English and it can be difficult to navigate the voting process when in-language materials are not available.

# What is at stake if we do not lead with equity?

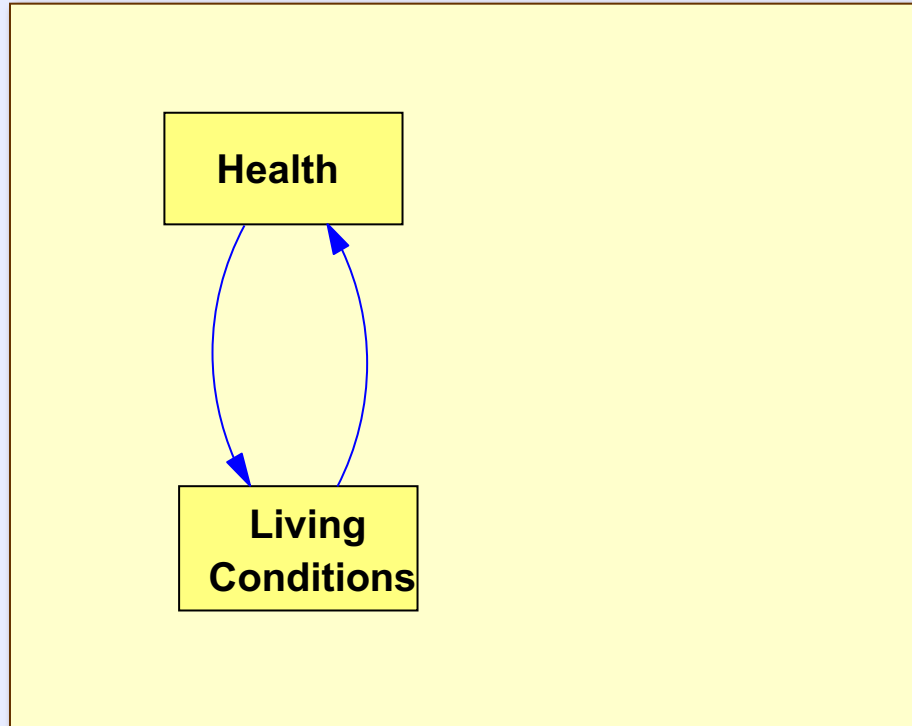
- Increase inequities & decrease overall health
- Limit our understanding of the impact of structural, historical inequities and how to create change
- Create barriers to targeted investments or approaches
- Decrease power of communities most impacted and decrease our collective power to create meaningful change
- Over-represent the interests of those already thriving

# Where do we start? How to Advance Health Equity in a Complex System

*To advance health equity we need to develop the capacity to influence the systems that create healthy communities.*

# “What is the pattern?”

## Seeing a Wider Set of Relationships



# What is necessary for Health?

- **Peace**
- **Shelter**
- **Education**
- **Food**
- **Economic security**
- **Infrastructure-Transportation**
  - **internet**
- **Stable eco-system**
- **Sustainable resources**
- **Social justice and equity**  
*(inclusion, social cohesion, healthy governance)*

World Health Organization. Ottawa charter for health promotion. International Conference on Health Promotion: The Move Towards a New Public Health, November 17-21, 1986 Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1986. Accessed July 12, 2002 at <<http://www.who.int/hpr/archive/docs/ottawa.html>>. (adapted)n.



# Social Determinants of Health

The conditions and circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These circumstances are *shaped by* a set of forces beyond the control of the individual: economics and the *distribution of money, power, social policies, and politics* at the global, national, state, and local levels.

*WHO and CDC (adapted)*

# What holds the pattern in place?

## Communities of Opportunity

- Social/economic inclusion
- Thriving small businesses and entrepreneurs
- Financial institutions
- Good transportation options and infrastructure
- Home ownership
- Better performing schools
- Sufficient healthy housing
- Grocery stores
- IT connectivity
- Strong local governance
- Parks & trails

**Better Health Status**

**Worse Health Status**

**Contribute to health disparities:**

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Asthma
- Obesity
- Injury

## Low-Opportunity Communities

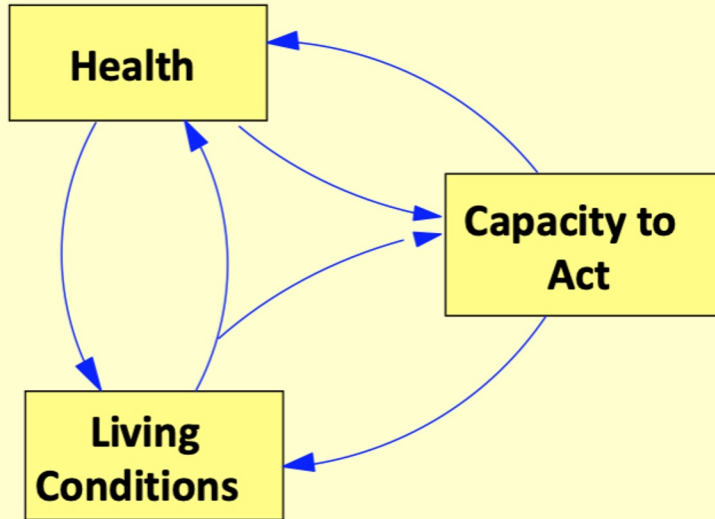
- Social/economic exclusion
- Few small businesses
- Payday lenders
- Few transportation options
- Rental housing/foreclosure
- Poor performing schools
- Poor and limited housing stock
- Increased pollution and contaminated drinking water
- Fast food restaurants
- Limited IT connections
- Weak local governance
- Unsafe/limited parks

# Political Determinants of Health

***Politics***– the set of activities associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals, such as distribution of resources or status.

***“Health is a political choice, and politics is a continuous struggle for power among competing interests.”*** Ilona Kickbusch

# The Determinant of The Determinants: Power



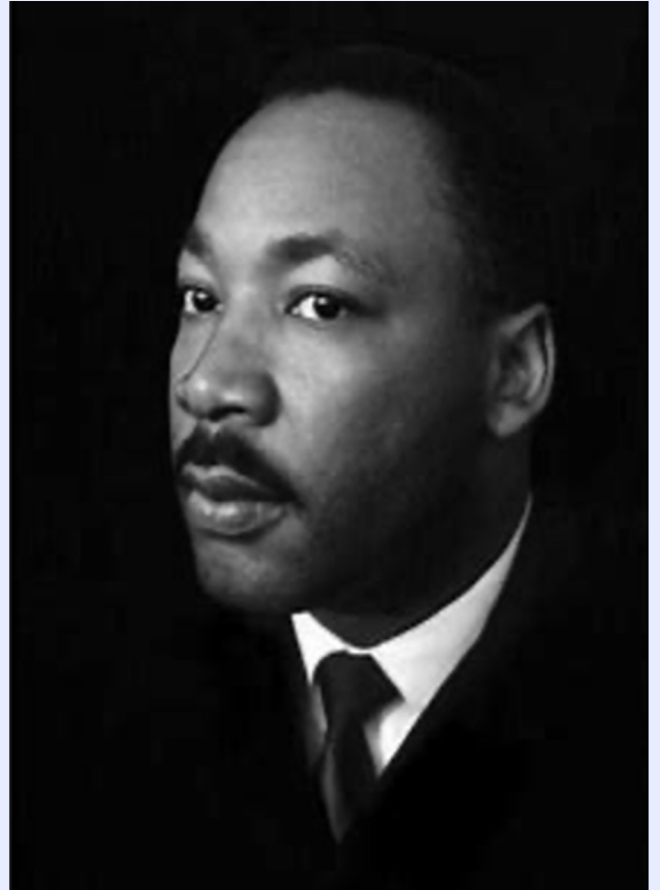
*We create health conditions through our collective power or our lack of power.*

*By participating or not participating in politics we play a role in choosing who will thrive and who will not*

***“Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose.***

It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



# Expansion of Electoral Power and Health: Examples from History

- After the *Civil War* Black voters elected representatives who made community investments including a division of medical services for newly freed slaves
- After *women's suffrage*, MCH investments, child mortality rates declined by 8 to 15%
- The *20th Century Civil Rights Movement* expansion of voting rights ushered in more inclusive policies in education, housing, economic opportunity, and health care including the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid
- In **2010** following passage of the ACA advocates began to organize state level ballot initiatives to assure Medicaid Expansion

***All these steps forward contested “continuous struggle for power...”***

# Research: Consistent association between civic/voter participation and health

- States where it is easier to vote are more likely to have *better rates of state-level self-reported health* across time (1996-2020); Schraufnagle 2023
- States where it is easier to vote have *lower uninsured rates*; Pabayo et al., 2021
- Counties in states where it is easier to vote had *lower pre-vaccine COVID case and mortality rates*; Pabayo et al., 2022
- Civic engagement (voting, volunteering, and activism) among adolescents and young adults is positively associated with better future income, education levels and mental health compared to non-voters; Ballard et al., 2019

# The Continuous Struggle for Inclusive Democracy

- **2020-** Unprecedented Voter Turnout across – 66.8% turnout rate across the full political spectrum
  - **And yet... 80 million eligible people did not vote (33.2% of eligible people).**
- **Since 2020:** Limits to dropboxes, limits in acceptable forms of ID, limits to polling hours, limiting online and same-day voter registration, limits to campus and student voting access
- **In 2022** Only 46%, less than ½ of of eligible voters voted!

***We cannot sit out and achieve our aims for inclusive civic participation***



# Healthy Democracy Healthy People: Three Practices to Build Power

## **Organize People/Organizations**

Coalition members represent tens of thousands of public health leaders

Bridge connections between public health and civic engagement groups

Support and organize communities to create their own healthy futures

## **Organize Policies/Resources**

Take actions to implement the policies, resource investments, and system changes at every level necessary to ensure access to the ballot for all citizens

## **Organize Narrative/Story Research**

Lift-up connection between voting participation and health through story, research and policy statements

Build public understanding and political will to promote health through inclusive access to the ballot and civic participation

# Organizing Narrative and Research

Compares 12 public health indicators and voter turnout to the restrictiveness or ease of voting policies in each state.



**Health &  
Democracy  
Index**

# Inclusive voting policies

**Policies strengthening civic and voter participation are necessary to advance health and racial equity**

**Policies that expand voter access**

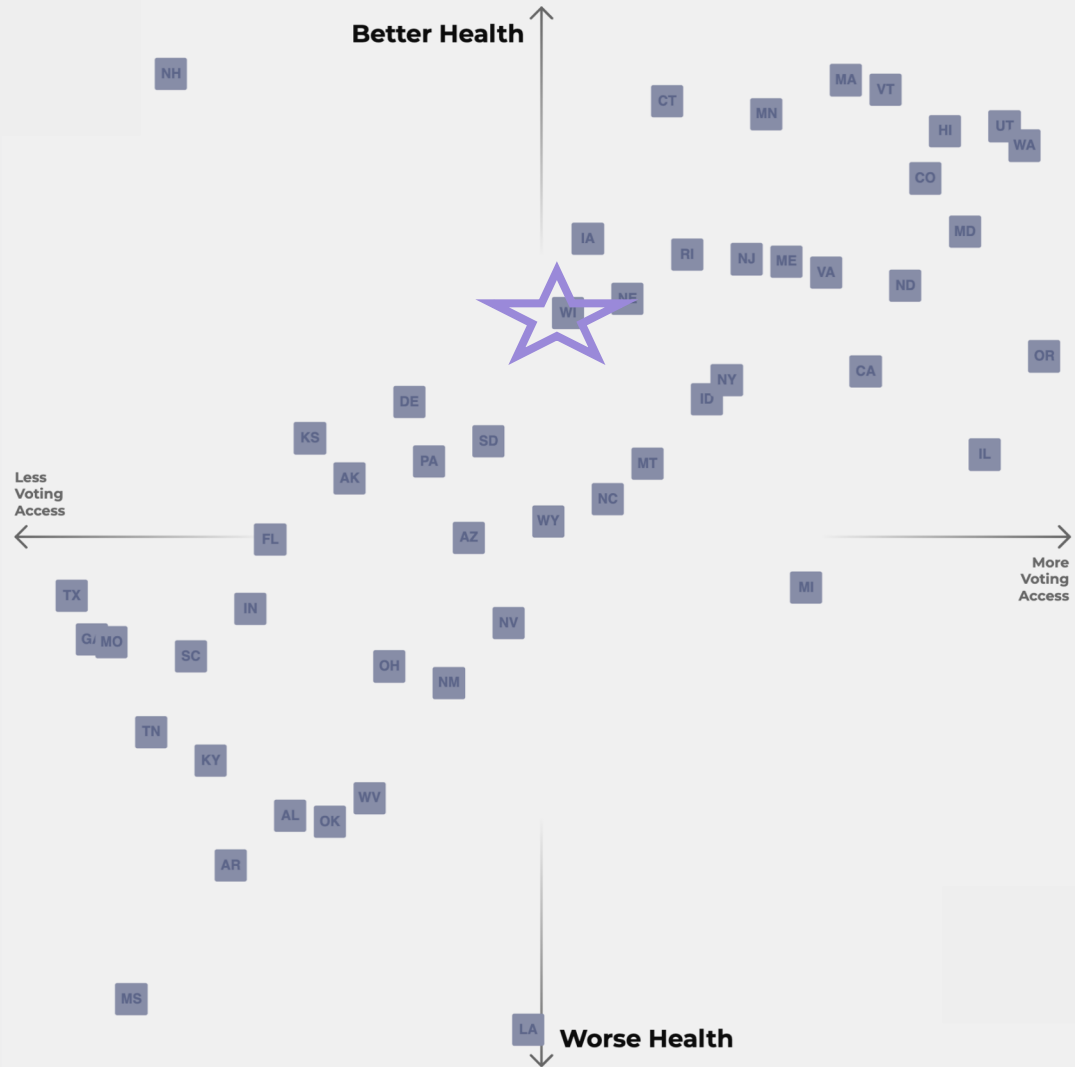
- ❑ no-excuse mail and early voting,
- ❑ Inclusive voter registration programs: i.e. automatic voter registration (AVR), online & same day voter registration
- ❑ enabling voter registration and education in service settings–
- ❑ Reinstatement of voting rights



OVERALL FINDINGS:

# More Voting Access, Better Health Outcomes

States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation are healthier.



# Key Findings

- **States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation are healthier.**
  - States that make elections more accessible through policies like automatic and same day registration, non-strict voter ID requirements, felon re-enfranchisement and mail voting options enjoy higher levels of voter participation, greater social cohesion, and stronger public health outcomes.
- **Lower voter participation drives health disparities**
  - People who are experiencing poor health and/or have a disability are less likely to vote.
  - Rates of infant mortality are higher among Black and American Indian communities than white communities, but this disparity shrinks for all racial and ethnic groups in states that have better civic participation.

# Civic Health...cornerstone of democracy..



County Health  
Rankings & Roadmaps

People and places thrive when everyone can participate

Civic health starts with our local communities and is the cornerstone of our democracy.

... source of hope, opportunity, belonging and shared responsibility

# Civic Health

**Civic infrastructure---** cultivate spaces to meet, make our voices heard, engage in cultural activities and assure belonging. This requires intentional policies and practices to create and cultivate environments where everyone can exchange ideas and solve problems together.

**Civic participation---** includes the ways people engage in community life to improve conditions. For example, voting, advocacy, volunteering, mentoring or participating in unions so that their work can meet their basic needs.

**Civic participation is vital to building the collective power to create an inclusive, representative democracy and healthy, thriving communities.**

# Infrastructure – Your Network

- **Network:** County and Tribal ADRC's and Aging Units and Independent Living Centers, Coalitions-i.e.(To End Social Isolation and Loneliness) Governor's Councils
- You represent an array of organizations with **geographic, demographic, community identities** –systems embedded in systems
- **Resources and services**
- What are you doing? Creating thriving communities through **social connections and civic participation.**
- **Relationships, relationships, relationships**



# Participation: Your Network

- Create community spaces where everyone can **engage, be informed and have a say** – key to healthy communities and to our democracy.
- Who is at the table? **Include those most impacted by inequities**
- Social connectedness and belonging is **strengthened when we leverage the collective power** of connected communities to create change, through representation and access to decision-making.
- **Pay attention to policies and practices** that either include or exclude people and communities from participating.
- **Advocacy** – engage policy-makers -advocate for policies, practices, resources that advance health equity

# Develop public and political will through relationships, shared vision and stories



# Now What? Leverage our collective power: Strengthen democracy by:

- **Voting**
- **Partner with community** groups and folks who represent communities where you find inequities in health and voting to hear their voices and join in the efforts
- **Partner with organizations** to help folks feel empowered to vote - example League of Women Voters mock voting and youth voting initiatives
- **Develop or adapt, and adopt, policies and position statements** within your organizations promoting inclusive civic and voter participation
- Support efforts to expand **inclusive voting policies** at the local, state and national level
- **Be creative** about including voter registration into your work and life

# Build a Movement for Inclusive, Representative Democracy



**How is  
Wisconsin  
Doing?**

# Wisconsin Voter Participation

- **Wisconsin was ranked as the 25<sup>th</sup> easiest state to vote in 2020 and 47<sup>th</sup> in 2022.**
  - Voters must register 20 days before Election Day if using online or mail-in application
  - Voters must show photo identification to vote
  - Voters can vote absentee without an excuse
  - People who were previously incarcerated do not have their rights restored post-incarceration
- **61% percent of eligible Wisconsinites voted in the 2020 elections including:**
  - 75% of white Wisconsinites,
  - 44% of Black Wisconsinites,
  - 42% of Hispanic Wisconsinites, and
  - 42% of Asian Wisconsinites.



## 6.3. Percent of voting age population who voted in the last general election (2022) (Wisconsin Elections Commission)

57.1%  
(2022)

Increase

In the 2022 general election, 57.1% of voting age Wisconsinites cast a ballot, though there was significant variability across counties. Voter turnout ranged from 37.8% of the voting age population in Menominee County to 72% of the voting age population in Ozaukee County.

*Clear disparities in voter participation reinforce health and racial inequities*

# Voting Challenges for Aging Americans

- Millions of older Americans do not have current government IDs
  - Photo identification is required to vote in Wisconsin
- Seniors are forced to travel longer distances to reach the polls due to poll closures – a sometimes insurmountable hurdle
  - Many aging and disabled Americans lack reliable transportation
- Even though polling locations are required to be accessible, many fail to comply with federal standards

# What can YOU do? Health is ALWAYS on the ballot—

- Make a voting plan for every election (especially local ones)
- Invite colleagues, friends, and family to make voting plan-Am I registered?
- Join *We Will Vote* and promote opportunities for civic and voter participation in your workplace
- Invite your colleagues to learn more!





# Thrive through Civic Health: *We Will Vote*



[healthydemocracyhealthypeople.org/www](http://healthydemocracyhealthypeople.org/www)

# Why Organize The Health Sector?

- Largest workforce and accounts for at least 22 million workers which represents about 14% of all workers in the United States.
- In 2020 a third of U.S. eligible voters did not cast a ballot and more than half of eligible voters did not vote in 2022.
  - Healthcare workers including physicians, nurses, physician assistants, and dentists are *12-23% less likely to vote than the general population.*
- Build the collective influence and political will for the policies that support healthy communities.

*First step: organize during and between elections and requires several intermediary calls-to-action that aim to build power and leaders.*

# Current Organizational Champions

- Advocates for Better Health
- American Public Health Association
  - Iowa Public Health Association
  - Michigan Public Health Association
  - Minnesota Public Health Association
  - Pennsylvania Public Health Association
- American Medical Women's Association
- Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
- Big Cities Health Coalition
- California Primary Care Association
- Civic Health Alliance
- CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy
- Division of Public Health, Central Michigan University
- Doctors for America
- Engaging Communities to Change Health Outcomes (ECCHO)
- Eta Gamma Chapter of Eta Sigma Gamma
- Frey Evaluation LLC
- Grantmakers In Health
- Healing the Vote
- Health Begins
- Health Policy Institute of Ohio
- Healthy Democracy Healthy People
- Human Impact Partners
- ITest Health
- National Disability Rights Network
- National Network of Public Health Institutes
  - Public Health Institute of Oklahoma
- Network for Public Health Law
- Ohio Academy of Family Physicians
- Oklahoma Turning Point
- Open Pixel Studios
- Oregon Health and Science University's Richmond Community Clinic
- Society for Public Health Education
  - Minnesota Society for Public Health Education
  - Great Lakes SOPHE
- Public Health Accreditation Board
- Skyview Family Medicine
- Transition Health
- University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute
- Unruhly Medicine
- Vitalyst Health Foundation
- Vot-ER
- Voting 4 Climate & Health
- Woods Family Medicine



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
For science. For action. For health.



American Medical Women's Association  
The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915



HEALING THE VOTE



PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION



HEALTH BEGINS



ADVOCATES FOR BETTER HEALTH



PHAB



Society for Public Health Education



University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



# Thrive Through Civic Health:

## *We Will Vote*

### *Pledge to Vote*



The health of my community hinges on the health of our democracy and that robust civic participation is required to advance health and racial equity. I understand that the first step starts with me. I join with my colleagues and institutions across the health sector.

I will:

- Vote in upcoming elections.
- Encourage friends, family, and/or colleagues to vote in upcoming elections.
- Work with my professional organizations and/or workplace to promote the Thrive Through Civic Health: We Will Vote initiative this year.
- Support elections through volunteer roles in my local community.

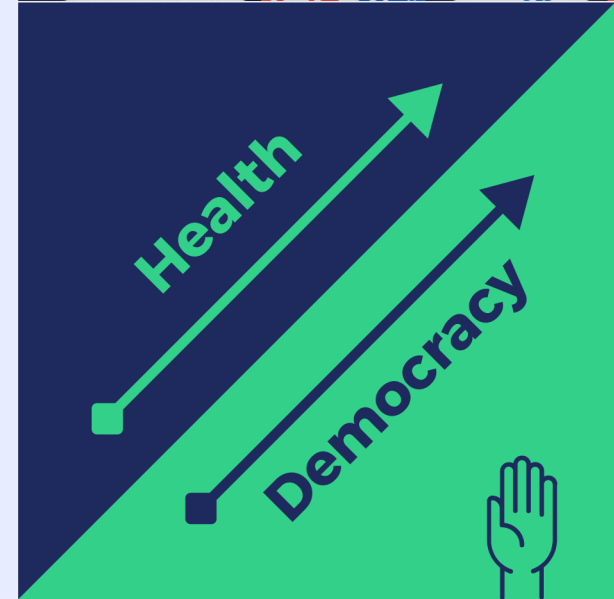
I will vote because I care about:

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# Health is always on the ballot

- Public Safety & Violence prevention
- Health care access
- Early childhood investments
- Climate resiliency
- Pandemic & infectious disease prevention
- Maternal and Infant Health
- Reproductive Health
- Public Health Authority
- Housing, water, food, education, transportation, civil rights.....



# Resources: Voting in Wisconsin

<https://gwaar.org/voting-in-wisconsin>

<https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>

<https://elections.wi.gov/>

<https://disabilityvote.org/>

<https://my.lwv.org/wisconsin/voter-information>



## MyVote Wisconsin

MyVote Wisconsin is voters' best source of information about when and where to vote, what's on the ballot, absentee voting and voter registration.

[Go to MyVote](#)



# Questions?

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