

**COMPASS NOW 2012 is a joint effort of Great Rivers United Way, area health care organizations, and county health departments to improve the quality of life for everyone in our community.**

The purpose of COMPASS NOW 2012 is to:

- Assess the needs in our community
- Identify community resources to address the most urgent needs
- Encourage action plans that solve community problems

This is the fourth COMPASS NOW assessment implemented in the Great Rivers Region. Previous assessments were completed in 1995, 2001, and 2007. The COMPASS NOW Report serves as an important resource for organizations by providing updated data to measure progress, monitor trends, and further prioritize efforts to improve the quality of life for all residents in the Great Rivers Region.

COMPASS NOW 2012 gathered information in 3 ways:

- A random household survey
- Focus group discussions held with community members
- An analysis of key socio-economic indicators

The most important element of the COMPASS NOW 2012 needs assessment is the widespread community involvement. More than 1,900 people contributed to the results of this report. Filling out the household survey, participating in a focus group or serving as a COMPASS NOW team member is vital to the process. This COMPASS NOW Report would also have not been possible without the financial support of each partner organization.

The COMPASS NOW process does not end with this report. The information collected must be the foundation for action plans that not only respond to needs but help solve problems long term. With limited resources and increasing needs, now is the time to reimagine how we collaborate efficiently and effectively to solve our most profound problems. Our action plans must have solutions that will have a lasting impact on our communities so all members may reach their full potential.

**Thank you for the support and dedication to the Great Rivers Region!**



The Great Rivers Region is located in western Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota.

### **La Crosse County**

Population: 114,638  
Population in poverty: 12.8%  
Unemployment rate: 6.3%  
Uninsured ages 18-64: 11%  
Uninsured under age 19: 3.7%  
Adults 25+ years with a high school education or less: 37.9%

### **Monroe County**

Population: 44,673  
Population in poverty: 12.2%  
Unemployment rate: 7.2%  
Uninsured ages 18-64: 13.9%  
Uninsured under age 19: 7.2%  
Adults 25+ years with a high school education or less: 53.1%

### **Trempealeau County**

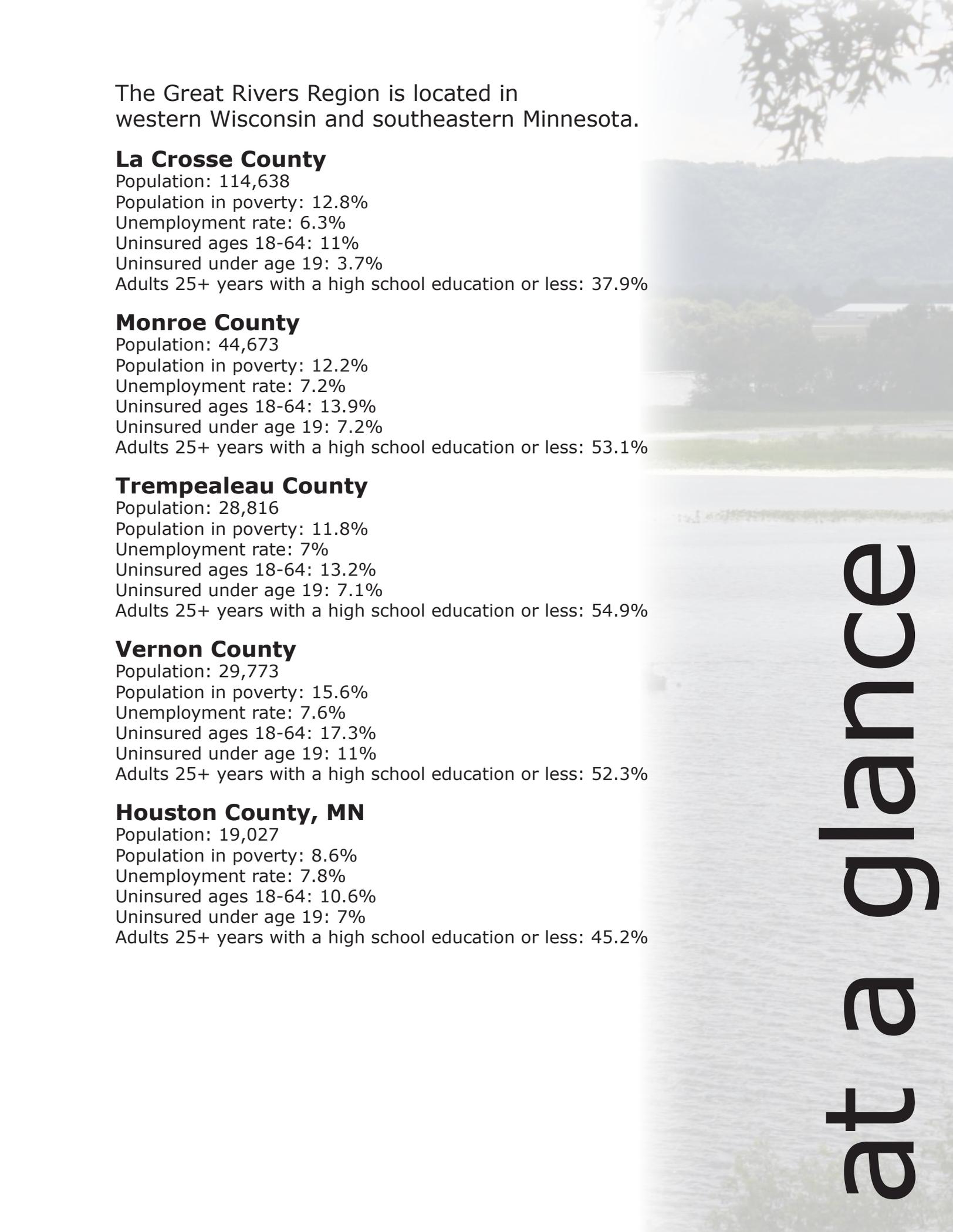
Population: 28,816  
Population in poverty: 11.8%  
Unemployment rate: 7%  
Uninsured ages 18-64: 13.2%  
Uninsured under age 19: 7.1%  
Adults 25+ years with a high school education or less: 54.9%

### **Vernon County**

Population: 29,773  
Population in poverty: 15.6%  
Unemployment rate: 7.6%  
Uninsured ages 18-64: 17.3%  
Uninsured under age 19: 11%  
Adults 25+ years with a high school education or less: 52.3%

### **Houston County, MN**

Population: 19,027  
Population in poverty: 8.6%  
Unemployment rate: 7.8%  
Uninsured ages 18-64: 10.6%  
Uninsured under age 19: 7%  
Adults 25+ years with a high school education or less: 45.2%



at a glance

## **Preventing disease and promoting healthy behaviors improves lives, lowers health care costs and improves quality of life.**

The COMPASS NOW Report identified these key health issues:

- Alcohol Use
- Health Care Access and Cost
- Mental Health
- Obesity

Emerging issues in the region are:

- Dental Care Access and Cost
- Illegal Drug Use

### **Health Highlights**

- There is a high rate of binge and excessive drinking in the Great Rivers Region by adults and youth. In 2010, between 20-25% of 9-12th graders in the region reported binge drinking in the past 30 days. Between 23-27% of adults reported excessive drinking in the past 30 days.
- The Great Rivers Region has high quality health care providers; however, focus group participants indicated that rising health care costs, specifically high deductibles and reduced health benefits result in people avoiding health care.
- Mental illness is the leading cause of disability in the US for people ages 15-44. Spending for mental health care in our region reached more than \$27 million in 2010, a nearly 11% increase from the previous year. The suicide rate in the Great Rivers Region is higher than the state and national average.
- Adult obesity is associated with several serious health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Obesity rates in adults and children have dramatically increased over the past decade. In the last 5 years alone, the adult obesity rate in the Great Rivers Region increased by 16%. Nearly 30% of adults in the region are obese and about 35% are overweight.
- Oral health is essential to overall health yet 54% of those surveyed rated the affordability of dental care in their community as fair or poor. The Great Rivers Region has a shortage of dentists who provide services to Medicaid patients; only one-quarter of those receiving Medicaid receive dental services.
- Illegal drug use is a concern with 67% percent of survey respondents expressing high concern.

# health



## **A high quality of life in a thriving community requires safe, satisfying jobs that offer wages that can provide adequate housing and a good standard of living.**

The COMPASS NOW Report identified these key income issues:

- Limited Economic Development
- Low Living Wages
- Unemployment

An emerging issue in the region is:

- Having Enough Food / Food Insecurity

### **Income Highlights**

- One-third of survey respondents indicated their ability to meet the basic needs of food, housing, and clothing was either fair or poor.
- Focus group participants stated that unemployment and poor wages have a negative impact on the health of our community. People are less able to afford healthy food and many have to choose between food and medical care.
- Several indicators show the limits to economic development in the Great Rivers Region such as losses of manufacturing jobs, unemployment, foreclosures, aging homes, and an unprepared workforce. 62% of survey respondents rated their community's efforts to plan for a strong economic future as fair or poor.
- Local unemployment is less than the national average yet unemployment and underemployment remain one of the most challenging issues facing the region. 75% of survey respondents rated the availability of jobs with wages that offer a good standard of living as either fair or poor.
- Although homelessness in our community remains largely hidden local data suggests it is on the rise. Local shelters and schools are seeing more families with young children becoming homeless.
- More children in the Great Rivers Region are living in poverty. In the past 5 years, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunches has risen in every county and increased by 30% overall. The percentage of the population using the Federal food stamp program doubled from 2006 to 2010.



income

## **Education provides us a better understanding of the world around us; it is a key building block to a healthy community reaching its full potential.**

The COMPASS NOW Report identified these key education issues:

- School Readiness
- Job Skills Training

Emerging issues in the region are:

- Risks to Youth
- Higher Education Costs

### **Education Highlights**

- 85% of survey respondents rated their K-12 schools either good or excellent. The same percentage rated the quality of higher education as good or excellent.
- School readiness is more than having an expected level of knowledge in language and math. A child's family and community must be able to provide an environment that encourages positive growth throughout the child's entire education. Children without enough nutritious food or who do not have a supportive home life are less ready to learn.
- In 2009, between 12-25% of children in the Great Rivers Region under age 19 lived in poverty (income below \$21,756 for a family of two adults and two children). The state average for the same year was 17%.
- Schooling after high school is much lower in our rural areas. Focus group participants said the greatest barrier to higher education is rising tuition costs.
- Youth face several risks and how they manage them has a profound impact on their health and future. In recent youth surveys, between 35-47% of high school students responded that they had sex; 19-30% had ever used marijuana, and about 13% had seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- Increasingly, employers require a more educated workforce. This trend will continue as industries demand specific skills to compete effectively in a global and technology-based economy.



# education

## **A healthy natural environment, public safety, transportation, leisure, and support services contribute to strong community life.**

The COMPASS NOW Report identified these key community issues:

- Transportation
- Food Availability
- Childcare

An emerging issue in the region is:

- Senior Housing

### **Community Highlights**

- 92% of survey respondents rated their community as a good or excellent place to live. 90% rated the air quality as good or excellent and 76% rated the quality of the drinking water as good or excellent.
- Respondents rated the Great Rivers Region highly on several aspects of public safety; however, property crime, violent crime, and sexual assault rates are highest in La Crosse County and are similar to state averages.
- Reports point to a need for public transportation that crosses county borders particularly for the elderly and people with lower income. 55% of survey respondents rated the availability and accessibility of public transportation in their community as either fair or poor.
- Monroe and Vernon counties have large areas of their counties that are considered “food deserts”, areas where at least a third of the population has limited access to healthy food.
- Childcare is a costly expense for working families. Wisconsin and Minnesota rank in the top 10 most expensive states for childcare. On average, the annual cost of licensed child care for an infant in Wisconsin is \$10,520 and \$13,650 in Minnesota.
- Focus group participants expressed concern for the elderly with regard to their transportation needs, support services and lack of suitable housing.



community