



2023

# ROCK COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT



[WWW.CO.ROCK.WI.US/DEPARTMENTS/PUBLIC-HEALTH](http://WWW.CO.ROCK.WI.US/DEPARTMENTS/PUBLIC-HEALTH)

# A Message from the Director



We are excited to make our 2023 Annual Report available to residents of Rock County, the Rock County Board of Health, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The past year has been marked by progress toward fostering conditions that improve health outcomes in our communities.

Throughout this report, you will see a snapshot of our work as a department. These efforts include the continued implementation of the 2022-2024 Community Health Improvement Plan, the development of Rock County's Opioid Settlement Implementation Plan, collaboration with schools to update wellness policies, enhanced communication strategies, and continued focus on reducing disease transmission through vaccination, disease investigation, and facility inspections.

As a department, we have continued implementing our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan to help ensure that we are strengthening our ability to respond to public health needs alongside our dedicated community partners. In 2023, we participated in a statewide assessment to evaluate our skills and capacity to address foundational public health areas. This assessment, along with our inaugural Health Equity Workshop will help guide internal planning for years to come.

The work reflected in this report is only possible through the continued dedication of our public health team, support from our Board of Health, and a commitment from our partners to work towards collaborative solutions. As Health Officer, I am grateful for this dedication, support, and commitment.

Katrina Harwood, Health Officer | Rock County Public Health Director

# Rock County Public Health Overview

## Who we are and what we do

We are a Level III Health Department serving Rock County, Wisconsin. Our work is guided by state statutes, state administrative code (Chapter DHS 140), the 10 Essential Public Health Services, the Foundational Public Health Services framework, and national public health department accreditation standards and measures. We work to prevent illness and premature death associated with environmental factors, communicable diseases, and social factors.

We work to address health inequities, or differences in health status that are unfair and preventable. We do this work in partnership with many organizations across Rock County, including schools, businesses, non-profits, healthcare systems, and municipal governments to help create conditions where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full health potential.

### Vision

Everyone has the opportunity to reach their full health potential

### Mission

To improve population health outcomes and remove barriers through community partnerships

### Shared Identity

We are Inclusive, evidence driven, transparent, accountable, and collaborative

**Goal** Prevent Disease Transmission

**Goal** Prevent Premature Death

**Goal** Remove Barriers to Health

**Goal** Be a Highly Effective Organization



# Rock County Public Health Overview

## Rock County Board of Health

The Board of Health assures that measures are taken to provide an environment in which individuals can be healthy and advocates for equitable distribution of public health resources. In 2023, the Rock County Board of Health met 12 times and considered 19 resolutions and other actions to protect and promote public health.

## 2023 Board Members

Supervisor Lou Peer (Chair)  
Debra Kolste (Vice Chair)  
Supervisor Tricia Clasen  
Supervisor Kim Schneider  
Supervisor Kathy Schulz

Dr. BJ Nowak  
Dr. Rachel Bergstrom  
Nicole McBride  
Eric Gresens



Pictured left to right, back: Lou Peer, Dr. BJ Nowak, Kim Schneider, Deb Kolste  
Front: Dr. Rachel Bergstrom, Nicole McBride, Eric Gresens

# Programs and Initiatives

We work across four main areas that include Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Communicable Disease, Environmental Health, and Maternal, Child, and Family Health. We are engaged in over 44 different programs and initiatives. Data, communications, and policy development support are provided for all programs and services to assist teams in reaching their goals and objectives.

## Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention

- Diabetes Prevention
- Health Equity Alliance of Rock County Coordination (HEAR)
- Overdose Fatality Review
- Overdose Prevention
- Carbon Monoxide Surveillance
- Violence Prevention

## Communicable Disease

- Disease Investigation & Case Management
- HIV Partner Services
- Immunizations for Children & Adults
- Public Health Emergency Preparedness
- Tuberculosis Case Management & Support
- Travel Immunizations

## Environmental Health

- Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention
- Food Safety & Licensed Facility Inspections
- Groundwater & Private Wells
- Emergency Planning for Hazardous Chemicals
- Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems
- Public Health Nuisance Program
- Rabies Program
- Radon
- Prescription Drug (Rx) Take Back
- Surface Water Testing
- Transient Non-Community Well Sampling
- Vector Surveillance
- Water Laboratory

## Maternal, Child, & Family Health

- Better Birth Outcomes
- Breastfeeding Promotion
- Child Death Review
- Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention
- Fetal Infant Mortality Review
- Food Access Promotion
- Nutrition Collaborative of Rock County Coordination
- Rock County Breastfeeding Coalition
- School-Age Nutrition, Physical Activity, & Wellness
- School Health Collaborative Coordination

# 2023 at a Glance

## Prevent Disease Transmission



**3,400+**  
Disease investigations conducted



**1,100+**  
Facility inspections conducted



**384**  
Animal bite order follow ups



**515+**  
Vaccines administered

## Prevent Premature Death



**3,000+**  
Pounds of unused prescription drugs collected



**1,400+**  
Private water samples tested for bacteria and nitrates



**151**  
Water sampling assessments conducted



**162**  
Residents provided with low-cost radon test kits



**40**  
Uses of Heart Health Kits by community members

## Remove Barriers to Health



**1,800+**  
Children under the age of six screened for blood lead poisoning



**534**  
Cartons of Narcan distributed



**270**  
Fentanyl test strip kits distributed



**2,500+**  
COVID-19 antigen test kits distributed to community members through 15 local organizations

## Highly Effective Organization



**300,000**  
Dollars in new grant funding awarded



**53%**  
Increase in govD newsletter subscribers



**6,821**  
Total govD newsletter recipients



**155,000+**  
Facebook accounts reached with RCPH content

# Prevent Disease Transmission

We work to prevent disease transmission by reducing opportunities for exposure and by increasing the level of protection from disease transmission in the community.

## Communicable Disease Investigation

Confirmed cases of reportable conditions in Rock County, not including COVID-19, decreased by 30% from 2022-23. Our Communicable Disease (CD) Team investigated more than 3,400 cases of illness, helping prevent further transmission of the disease and connecting individuals with the information they may need. We responded to 100% of Category I Reportable Diseases within 24 hours of receiving report of them over the course of 2023.

## Licensed Facilities

Our Environmental Health (EH) Team licensed and inspected over 1,100 public food, lodging, and recreational facilities in Rock County to help prevent and reduce the occurrence of illness and injury. Our EH Team completed over 1,350 permit release, routine, follow-up, complaint, and training inspections at these facilities. In addition, we conducted four foodborne outbreak investigations.

Newsletters and advisories were distributed through our govDelivery (govD) system to keep facility operators informed of code updates and trends. Our retail food program staff also partnered with Blackhawk Technical College to help teach at multiple food safety certification classes in the fall.



**30%**

Reduction in confirmed cases of reportable conditions\*

\*excluding COVID-19



**3,400+**

Disease investigations conducted



**100%**

Response to Category I Reportable Diseases within 24 hours



**1,100+**

Facility inspections conducted

## Animal Bites & Rabies

Our EH Team partnered with law enforcement, veterinarians, and state agencies to investigate potential rabies exposures to residents and pets. Our EH Team followed up on 384 animal bite orders issued by police departments for domestic pet bites or scratches to humans. In addition, 50 animals were submitted for laboratory analysis, and all were deemed negative for rabies infection. Three pets were required to undergo long-term quarantine due to being exposed to wildlife that were unable to be tested for rabies. Residents were advised on post-exposure treatment in cases where rabies exposure could not be ruled out.



**384**

Animal bite order follow ups



**50**

Animals submitted for lab analysis



**75+**

Individuals received immunizations prior to international travel



**440**

Vaccines administered through VFA/VFC programs

## Immunization – Travel

Our travel immunization program continued to serve clients with travel related immunization needs to prevent disease and illness while abroad. More than 75 individuals received immunizations, medications, and prevention education from our team before their international travel.

## Immunization – Vaccines for Children & Adults

RCPH's Vaccines for Children (VFC) and Vaccines for Adults (VFA) programs helped those without health insurance receive the vaccines they needed to protect themselves and others from disease. A total of 440 vaccines were administered through these efforts.



# Prevent Premature Death

We work to prevent premature death by reducing chronic disease and by reducing accidental injury and death through assessment, intervention, and education.

## Prescription Drug (Rx) Collection

We worked with our community partners to help ensure the safe disposal of unused prescription drugs. This helped prevent injury from misuse and protect Rock County's groundwater, rivers, lakes, and streams from contamination.

Our collaborative effort with law enforcement, pharmacists, and other community organizations resulted in over 3,000 pounds of unused prescription drugs collected. Since the program's inception in 2006, over 30 tons of prescription drugs have been collected. Additionally, we increased awareness of the program through several community events, including participating in the Beloit and Janesville Senior Fairs.



**3,000+**  
Pounds of unused  
prescription drugs  
collected



**30+**  
Tons of prescription  
drugs collected since  
program inception in  
2006



**222**  
Suspected CO  
poisoning  
investigations  
completed

## Carbon Monoxide (CO) Surveillance

Surveillance helps us learn how exposures occur and where to focus our prevention and education efforts. We monitored CO poisoning trends and worked to identify groups at highest risk. We investigated 222 suspected CO poisoning cases with blood carboxyhemoglobin (COHb) levels at or above 5%.

## Child & Infant Mortality Prevention

Preventing infant and child accidental and preventable deaths is the focus of the Rock County Child Death Review (CDR) Team. Our CDR team includes service providers and first responders across Rock County. This group met three times in 2023 to review child death cases and made over 18 recommendations relating to safe sleep, traffic safety, and suicide prevention that will guide our team's work. Our Team sponsored both Direct On Scene Education (D.O.S.E.) and a Child Death Scene Investigation training for law enforcement, first responders, and other county child services staff.

Our Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Team implemented strategies to reduce fetal and infant death including safe sleep promotion and additional safe sleep education as part of the D.O.S.E. program.

The First 1,000 Days Collaborative held a half day summit, bringing together 36 maternal, infant, and child health service providers to learn more about community resources for healthy infants and families. This collaborative helped implement strategies from our CDR and FIMR teams including referring families to services in the county and sharing resources.

## Diabetes Prevention

Our Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (CDIP) Team held two diabetes education convenings. Thirty-one partners attended from local and state organizations to collaborate and discuss diabetes resources and areas of need. New partnerships were developed and there was an increased awareness of diabetes prevention services and programs in Rock County.



**18+**

Safe sleep, traffic safety, & suicide prevention recommendations made



**36**

Maternal, infant, & child health service provider connections



**31**

Local & state partners collaborated to discuss diabetes prevention

Our CDIP Team held diabetes focus groups with 19 community members experiencing or caring for someone with diabetes. These focus groups helped identify barriers to managing diabetes. Seventy community surveys were collected to understand perceptions around diabetes education and services. The results of the survey were used to develop diabetes prevention strategies to improve accessibility to resources and education throughout Rock County.

Several social media posts and 26 radio ads were shared in Rock County to raise awareness about prediabetes and diabetes. RCPH also maintains a diabetes webpage that was viewed 324 times.

### **Heart Disease Prevention**

Our CDIP Team worked to prevent heart disease by making heart health kits accessible for everyone in Rock County. Heart Health Kits were made available for check out at seven public libraries and three local YMCAs. These kits are available with a blood pressure monitor, informational sheets about blood pressure, and a heart healthy cookbook. The Heart Health Kits were checked out 40 times by community members.

### **School Wellness, Physical Activity, & Nutrition**

Our Maternal, Child, and Family Health (MCFH) Team partnered with the UW-Extension Rock County Health and Well Being staff and Foodwise staff to promote school wellness, physical activity, and nutrition in schools. Our Team provided input and technical assistance to update the District Wellness Policy and assess the wellness environment at all six elementary schools in the Beloit School District



**19**  
Community members  
in attendance at  
diabetes focus groups



**26**  
Prediabetes and  
diabetes radio ads



**324**  
Diabetes website  
visits



**40**  
Uses of Heart Health  
Kits by community  
members



**6**  
Elementary school  
wellness policies  
updated

### **School Wellness, Physical Activity, & Nutrition, continued**

Beloit Turner School Nutrition was assisted with applying for a Healthy Meals Incentive grant. In addition, our team is promoting safe walking to school at several schools throughout the county.

The School Health Collaborative met eight times over the school year as a forum for school nurses to share updates and concerns related to student health.

RCPH attended at least 18 outreach events to connect with community members and promote wellness, physical activity, and nutrition in Rock County. Community events included health fairs, farmers markets, meet and greets, family fun night, and a community baby shower.



**18**  
Community outreach events attended by RCPH staff



**25**  
Beaches & waterbody areas monitored



**151**  
Water sampling assessments conducted



**28**  
Water quality advisories posted

### **Surface Water & Beaches**

Our EH Team monitored 25 beaches and waterbody areas frequently used for recreation by Rock County residents and visitors. Our EH team conducted 151 assessments, which included water sampling for harmful E. coli bacteria, visual evaluations for harmful algal blooms, and other indicators of unsafe swimming conditions. A total of 28 water quality advisories were posted onsite, on our website, and via press release during the testing period.





## Ground Water & Private Wells

We worked to protect our groundwater and ensure a safe supply of water for residents that obtain their water from over 15,000 private wells located in Rock County.

- Our water laboratory conducted over 1,400 bacterial and nitrate tests from samples obtained from private wells, a 22% increase from 2022.
- Reverse osmosis water treatment systems were installed in over 20 homes that had high nitrates in their drinking water. Treatment system installations were made available through funding designated by the Rock County Board of Supervisors.
- We partnered with the WI Department of Natural Resources to assess and monitor 120 water systems of public facilities served by onsite wells. Changes in state and federal groundwater regulations resulted in several small public water systems in Rock County having to initiate action to provide lower levels of nitrates to their employees and customers.
- Our Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (POWTS) program continued to ensure wastewater generated from rural homes was properly treated before recharging local groundwater aquifers. This included approving 143 septic system designs and completing 221 field inspections to approve installations and soil evaluations.



**1,400+**

Private water samples tested for bacteria and nitrates



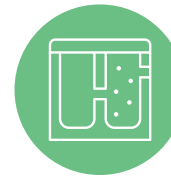
**20+**

Reverse osmosis water treatment systems installed



**120**

Public facility water systems assessed & monitored



**143**

Septic system designs approved



**221**

Septic field inspections completed

## Radon Exposure

All Rock County homes are at risk for unsafe levels of radon gas exposure. Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas that seeps into homes through cracks and holes in foundations. Long-term radon exposure is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers.

We continued to bring awareness to this risk through social media and by providing low-cost test kits to 162 residents, a 93% increase compared to last year.



**162**  
Residents provided with low-cost radon test kits



**20**  
Violence prevention capacity assessments conducted

## Violence Prevention

Our CDIP Team conducted 20 capacity assessments on violence prevention from multiple and diverse sources throughout Rock County to better understand the services and resources available to community members and families. Our Team worked with partners on awareness, collaboration, and support to address risk factors for violence.

Review our [Violence Prevention Assessment](#) to learn more.



# Remove Barriers to Health

We work to remove barriers to health by collaborating with partners to address underlying factors that influence population health. We advocate for policies and system changes that advance health and address health disparities, and we connect individuals to programs and services.

## Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention

Over 1800 Rock County children under six years of age were screened for blood lead poisoning. Our Team received 152 referrals for lead detected in the blood, and 19 of these were for elevated levels greater than 10 micrograms per deciliter, when intervention is required. We completed home visits and developmental assessments for 35 children with blood lead levels greater than or equal to five micrograms per deciliter and offered home visits to another 23 additional families with blood lead levels between 5 and 9.9 micrograms per deciliter. Follow up education and treatment was provided; 90% of the children who were tested again had a drop in their blood lead levels, and 70% had a drop below 10 micrograms per deciliter.



**1,800+**  
Children under the age of six screened for blood lead poisoning



**35**  
Total home visits made to children with high blood lead levels



**90%**  
Of children retested had a drop in blood lead levels



**26**  
New Nutrition Collaborative of Rock County members

## Food Access & Insecurity

The Nutrition Collaborative of Rock County (NCRC) grew to 26 members. The NCRC completed their strategic plan and received an Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin endowment grant to strengthen the collaborative's efforts promoting access to healthy, nutritious food for all Rock County residents. The NCRC attended public events including the Beloit farmer's market and a meet and greet at the Merrill Community Garden.

## Tuberculosis Case Management

RCPH nurses utilized the TB Dispensary Program to help multiple Rock County residents get the medical services and treatment they needed without the concern of financial costs.



**50+**

**Organizations  
represented on HEAR**

## Health Equity Alliance of Rock County (HEAR)

The Health Equity Alliance of Rock County (HEAR) includes representatives from over fifty organizations including healthcare systems, community and non-profit organizations, local government agencies, and residents to address health disparities and health inequities. HEAR works to expand its partnerships throughout the community.



**35**

**HEAR members  
collectively addressing  
mental health**

In 2023, HEAR members worked to implement the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) that focuses on building strategies to address mental health and access to care. The activities were funded by the WI Department of Health Services (DHS) Mobilizing Communities for a Just Response Grant.

## Mental Health

In 2023, we partnered with 35 representatives of HEAR through a Mental Health subcommittee. The subcommittee works to reduce barriers to mental wellness and improve social connectedness within the community.

HEAR awarded funding for three Walking School Bus pilot programs to increase intergenerational connection, student engagement, and physical activity. A walking school bus allows for children in local neighborhoods to be picked up by trusted adults and walked to school with other students.



### **Mental Health, continued**

Additionally, billboard and bus wrap media campaigns spread the message of mental health awareness throughout Rock County. Local students helped to design and select the messaging. HEAR provided a water line and hydrant for Merrill Community Garden to support shared neighborhood green space and allow for engagement to improve mental health and access to healthy foods.

### **Access to Care**

In 2023, we partnered with 21 HEAR representatives through Access to Care subcommittee initiatives. The subcommittee works to address health literacy, navigation of the healthcare systems, interpretation services, and cultural humility practices to improve health outcomes in Rock County.

We consulted with Wisconsin Health Literacy to conduct and review organizational assessments with five Rock County healthcare systems. HEAR used the assessment results to inform best practices for healthcare policy.

A health insurance course was developed to integrate health literacy into high school curriculums. Modules were created in partnership with local schools.



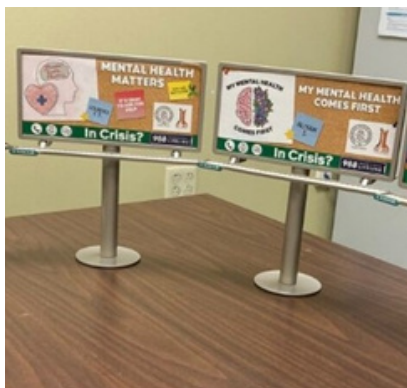
**1**  
Water system provided for Merrill Community Garden



**21**  
HEAR members collectively addressing access to care



**5**  
Healthcare systems received health literacy assessments



## Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

Our PHEP program made significant progress on PHEP planning efforts throughout 2023. We developed and implemented two new plans, a Multi-Year Training & Exercise Plan and Continuity of Operations Plan, that will improve our ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies. We also began work on the department's first ever Volunteer Management Plan to help assure sustainable staffing levels during emergency and non-emergency situations.

We continued to partner with local non-profits, libraries, daycares, and other organizations to provide free COVID-19 antigen test kits to residents. In total, we distributed more than 2500 antigen test kits through 15 partnerships to increase access to COVID-19 testing.

## Overdose Prevention Initiatives

Since 2019, there have been over 234 overdose fatalities occurring in Rock County. The number of overdose deaths have decreased in Rock County since peaking in 2021. Deaths due to drug overdose continue to be assessed through a Rock County Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) team and overdose data dashboard. Over 60 recommendations have been generated through our OFR team. To further support overdose prevention in Rock County, RCPH supported the development of the County's Opioid Settlement Funds Implementation Plan.

RCPH hosted an Overcoming the Stigma of Addiction Summit attended by 65 stakeholders. Additionally, 240 Hope Kits were distributed to local healthcare systems, fire, EMS, police departments, and harm reduction agencies to put resources into the hands of people who are experiencing the effects of substance use.



**2,500+**

COVID-19 antigen test kits distributed to community members through 15 local organizations



**60+**

Overdose prevention recommendations made



**240**

Hope Kits distributed

### Overdose Prevention Initiatives, continued

Hope Kits include Narcan, fentanyl test strip kits, a CPR face shield, a Dispose Rx packet, and a resource card. Bus wraps, billboards, radio, and juke box messages on opioid and fentanyl awareness were showcased throughout Rock County. We created an online Overdose Dashboard that shows trends and metrics concerning substances in Rock County. One Opioid Spike Alert was sent out in 2023 due to a local spike in opioid overdoses.

### Beloit Public Library Narcan Vending Machine

Our CDIP team secured grant funding for a public health vending machine at the Beloit Public Library (BPL). Since August of 2023, 534 cartons of Narcan and 270 fentanyl test strip kits have been distributed through this partnership.

### Narcan Direct Program

RCPH participated in the Narcan Direct Program. This program provides free Narcan for community distribution and is intended for people who are using opioids and people who may witness an opioid overdose. To receive free Narcan, participants must attend a training to learn how to identify an opioid overdose and how to use Narcan to reverse an opioid overdose. RCPH hosted seven Narcan trainings with 64 people attending.



**534**  
Cartons of Narcan distributed



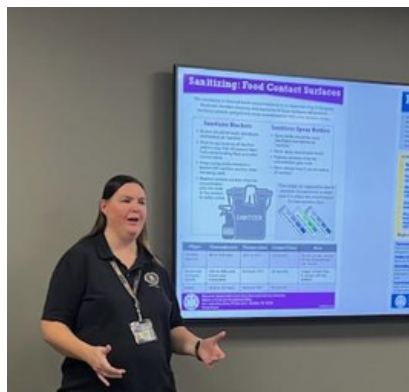
**270**  
Fentanyl test strip kits distributed



**7**  
Narcan Direct training sessions held



**64**  
People trained in administering Narcan



# Highly Effective Organization

We work to maintain a highly effective organization by developing and retaining a qualified and engaged public health workforce, effectively managing resources for efficient operations, and implementing systems to ensure effective communications internally and externally.

## Public Health as a Career

We supported students and interns of all ages who were interested in public health through the following academic partnerships:

- A Public Health AmeriCorps (PHA) member to assist with community conversations and our public health emergency preparedness (PHEP) plan.
- An AmeriCorps VISTA member to assist with our communications efforts.
- Six public health nursing students to introduce them to public health nursing.
- A UW Population Health Institute Service Fellow to assist with the development of our policy and system changes.
- Two Environmental Health internships for a college and a high student that included hands-on experience and exposure to a variety of programs.
- An Externship for a high school science teacher which provided Environmental Health experiences that could be incorporated into classroom curriculums



6

Nursing students educated about public health



300,000

Dollars in new grant funding awarded

## Funding

We were awarded more than \$300,000 in new grant funding to support initiatives to reduce overdose deaths, address food access, and strengthen our efforts to address radon and groundwater concerns.



## Strategic Priorities

We worked to implement our department wide strategic priorities to ensure a highly effective organization. Five Strategic Priority Teams were established and onboarded to develop, implement, and monitor plans relating to our five priorities which are workforce development, community partnership development, external and internal communications, and performance management. Each plan includes goals, objectives, activities, and measures. Through this work, we developed the systems and processes to measure and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of our work.



**5**

**Strategic Priority Teams  
were established**



**58**

**Percent of targets met  
or exceeded**

## Health Equity

We held our inaugural Health Equity Workshop where we reviewed six of our programs and initiatives. Through the workshop, we identified specific actions to improve the reach and effectiveness of our work. For example, we identified that language is often a barrier to fully accessing our services and as a result, we developed a new partnership with a contracted interpreter to provide in-person interpretation services.

## Performance Management

Our Performance Management Team implemented our first performance management dashboard, which allows us to track progress toward reaching our performance management related goals and objectives and identify quality improvement opportunities. As of the final quarter of 2023, we were meeting or exceeding targets for 58% of our performance measures.

## Communication

Our External Communications Team continued improving strategies for public-facing information sharing. A strategic external communications plan, a communications model, and a communication crosswalk were drafted.

RCPH streamlined its use of govDelivery (govD), which is the tool used to distribute both internal and external newsletters, press releases, and other information to subscribers' email inboxes. GovD subscribers increased by 53% for a total of 6,821 recipients in 2023.

Social media also saw growth with a 5% increase in Facebook followers and a 3% increase in Instagram followers. RCPH Facebook posts reached over 155,000 accounts last year. Development of a new brand strategy also began in 2023.



**53%**  
Increase in govD subscribers



**6,821**  
Total govD recipients



**155,000+**  
Facebook accounts reached with RCPH content



# ANNUAL REPORT

2023



## Public Health

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