



The Impact of ADRC and Tribal Programs in Wisconsin

Status Report, 2023

Aging and disability resource centers (ADRCs) and Tribal aging and disability resource specialists (ADRSs) provide objective, reliable information about various programs and services available to older adults and people with disabilities. They are at the forefront of efforts to adapt to the emerging needs of our communities, and the staff have a robust knowledge of local agencies and resources that are available for their customers.

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs make a significant impact on our communities, especially in the lives of those who are aging or living with a disability. This report summarizes ADRC and Tribal program services and uses a variety of data and customer stories to outline the impact that ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs made in Wisconsin in 2023.

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“The ADRC Specialist was great! Even came to my house twice with papers I needed to sign. Would not have known what to do or where to go without her help.”

—ADRC customer from Calumet County

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Our mission

The mission of ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs is to provide older adults and people with physical and intellectual disabilities the resources needed to live with dignity and security and achieve maximum independence and quality of life.

Our goal

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs strive to empower individuals to make informed choices and to streamline access to the right and appropriate services and supports.

Who we are

ADRCs in Wisconsin are integral components under the Division of Public Health in the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs are one-stop sources for objective, reliable information about programs and services available to older adults and people with disabilities. They connect people with services and supports that allow them to maintain self-sufficiency and conserve personal resources.

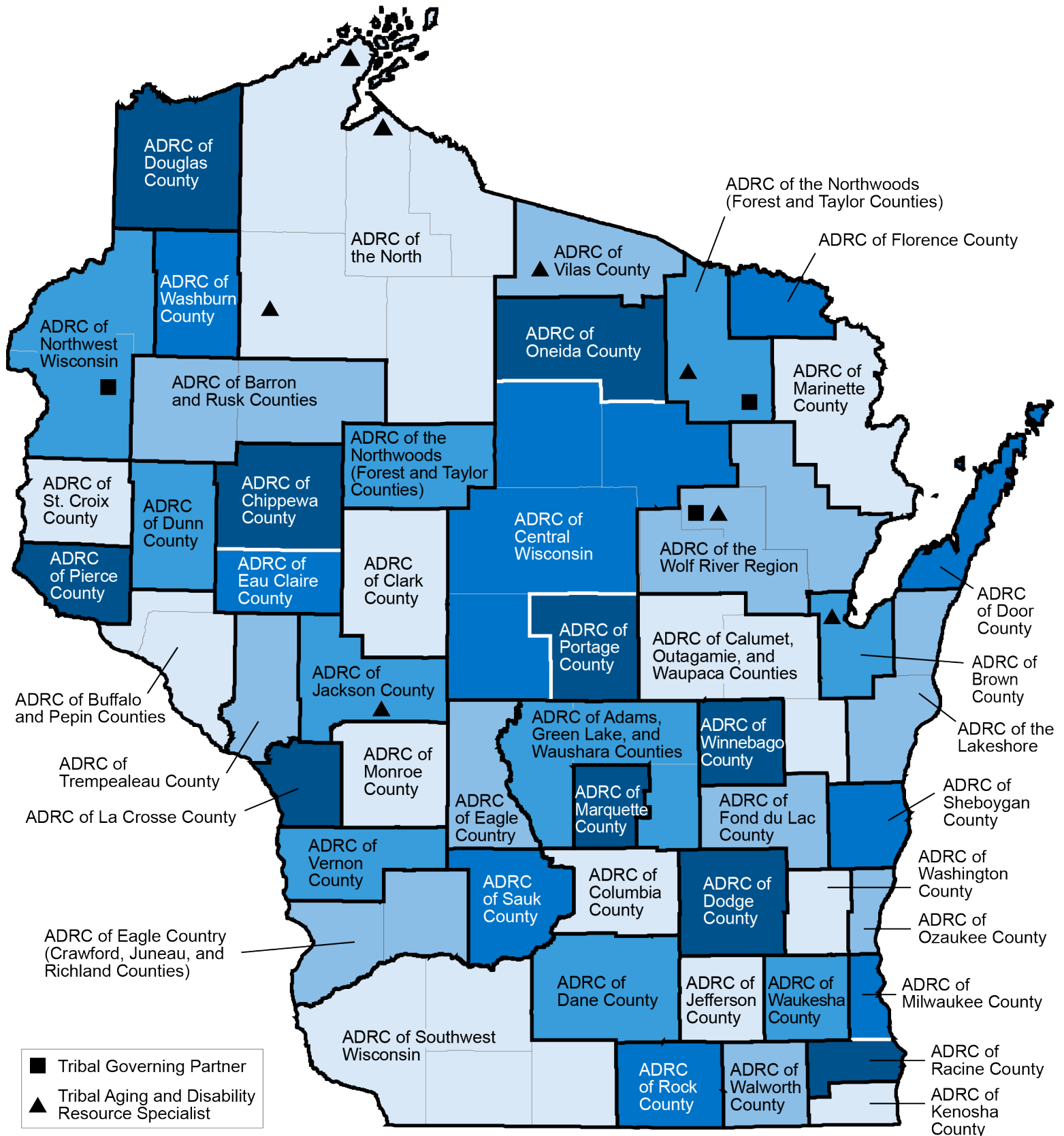
ADRC and Tribal ADRS services are:

- Free for everyone.
- Available statewide.
- Unbiased.
- Locally based.
- Trusted as community resources.

ADRC and Tribal staff are available to meet:

- At a local ADRC or Tribal office.
- Over the telephone.
- In the customer’s home.

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs stand ready to provide information and assistance. They are at the forefront of efforts to adapt to the emerging needs of our communities, and their staff have a robust knowledge of local agencies and resources that are available for their customers.



An impactful investment for Wisconsin

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs have served an average of 135,400 customers annually since 2016. In 2023, ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs in Wisconsin experienced remarkable success in meeting the needs of their communities, marking the most significant year since 2016. This milestone emphasizes their dedication to providing essential support and services in the community.



ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs have played a vital role in the lives of the people in their communities since the first ADRCs opened in Wisconsin in 1998—25 years ago! This impact emphasizes the ongoing need for their services.

Return on Investment

ADRCs in Wisconsin offer a strong return on investment while significantly enhancing the well-being of individuals across the state.

In 2023, every \$1 invested into ADRCs in Wisconsin led to a savings of \$3.88. This savings is calculated based on hospital readmissions and emergency department visits among Medicare beneficiaries and other individuals within 30 days of their original admission. Those who visited an ADRC showed a significant decrease in 30-day readmissions and emergency department visits compared to those who did not visit an ADRC. These data make clear that the state's investment in ADRCs is paying dividends.

ADRCs are successful in helping individuals address aging and disability-related challenges and preventing the escalation of issues that could lead to costly interventions down the road.

The positive impact of ADRCs extends beyond fiscal savings. ADRCs also play a pivotal role in health care outcomes.

ADRCs reduce the burden on the health care system and enhance quality of life for those receiving assistance. These impressive cost savings directly contribute to the state's fiscal well-being, helping to allocate resources more efficiently and effectively. Resources devoted to ADRCs have value and efficiency, making continued support and investment essential.

147,319
customers served in 2023



A person interacts with an ADRC in Wisconsin every **60** seconds.

The role of ADRCs in health care outcomes

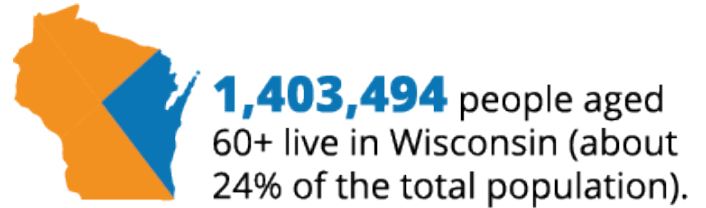
According to 2023 statistics, ADRCs prevented:

- 61 hospital readmissions per 1,000 people served.
- 101 emergency department visits per 1,000 people served.

Populations served by ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs are crucial in providing comprehensive support and assistance to community members. Specialists serve as invaluable resources for:

- Adults aged 60 and older.¹
- Adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.²
- Adults with physical disabilities.²
- Non-professional caregivers.
- Anyone seeking information or aid on behalf of someone in these groups.

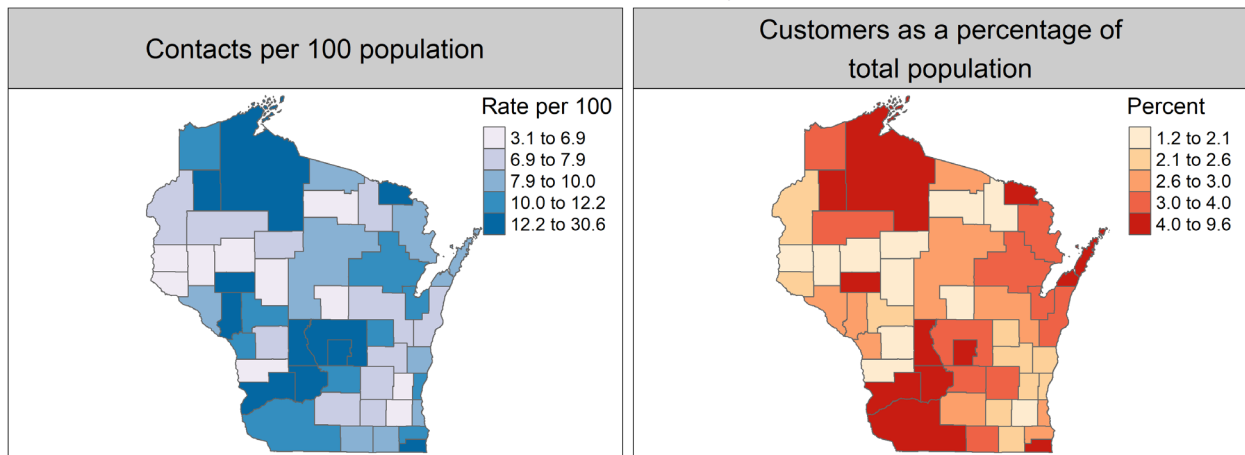


ADRC and Tribal ADRS services are available to people regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, or other demographic factors.³



The following maps illustrate ADRC contacts and customers relative to the population in their service areas.

Customers and contacts compared to total population by Wisconsin ADRCs, 2023



Population data from ACS 5-year estimates 2017-2022.

¹ Tribal nations recognize older adults as aged 55 and older.

² Disability status is determined from the answers in the U.S. Census' American Community Survey (ACS). Respondents are considered to have a disability if they report any one of the six following difficulty types: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living difficulty.

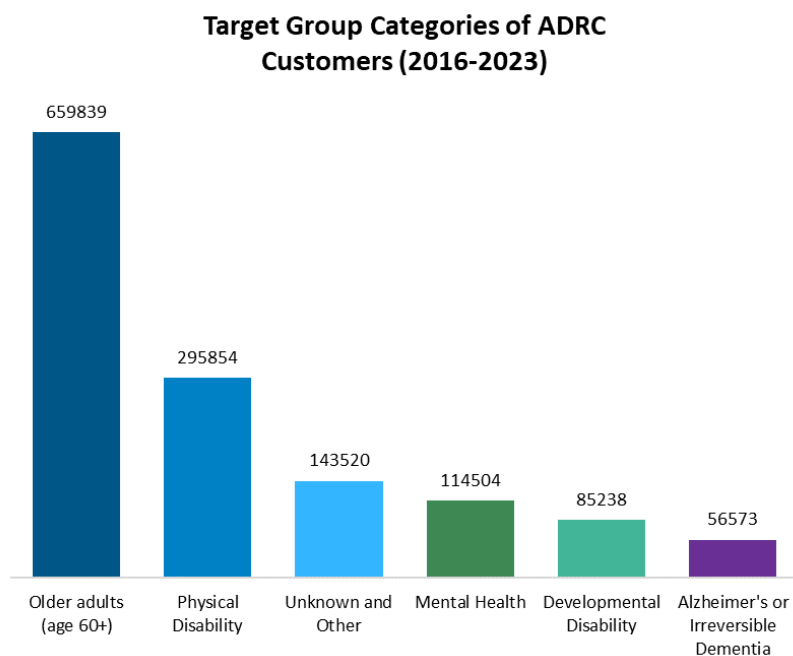
³ Tribal ADRS services are limited to members of the Tribal nations they serve.

The first map illustrates the number of ADRC customer contacts per 100 eligible individuals in each agency's service area. It provides insight into how well ADRC services reach the population across different geographic areas. This map focuses on the intensity or frequency of contacts relative to the population.

The second map highlights the proportion of the total population that are customers of the ADRCs, providing insight into the broader impact and reach of ADRC services within the community.

Core demographics of customers

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs are crucial in supporting adults with diverse characteristics and disabilities. Between 2016 and 2023, nearly three-fourths of all customers were older adults or individuals with physical disabilities. It is worth noting that it is rare for a customer to fit neatly into just one category. Many customers fit into multiple categories, so there is overlap.



This data describes the populations ADRCs are contact about and does not represent who contacted the ADRC on someone else's behalf.

Ensuring services are accessible to all

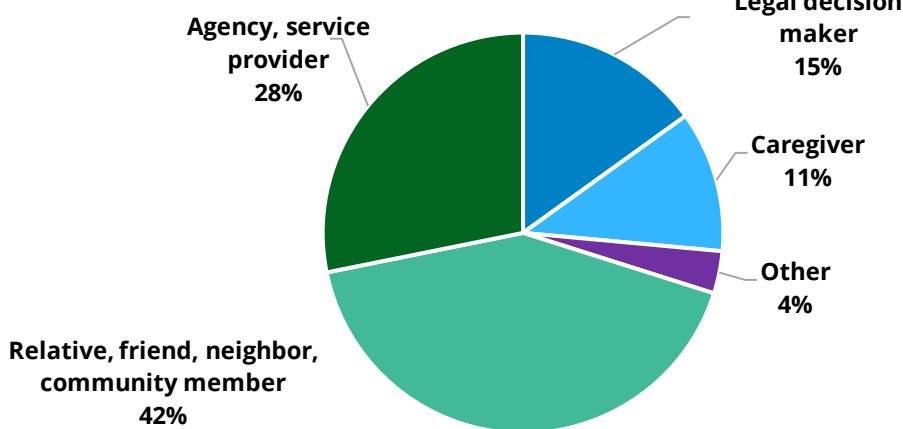
The **ADRC of Dane County** reaches out to communities of color and socioeconomic disadvantaged groups. They advertise in neighborhood newspapers, partner with churches to host community events, and build trust within the community.

The **ADRC of Columbia County** works to develop relationships with businesses and agencies that serve the aging and disability populations. They use social media to share information that appeals to people with diverse backgrounds. Their staff also participate in various educational events to further their knowledge in working with diverse groups.

The **ADRC of the Lakeshore** offers classes virtually and participates in outreach days at community centers in rural areas that do not have an ADRC office.

The **ADRC of Brown County** collaborates with diverse community centers, which include Hmong, Hispanic, refugee, and more.

Contact's Relationship to Customer (2016–2023)



ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs consistently engage with individuals seeking assistance on behalf of someone else. In fact, more than half (63%) of the individuals that contacted ADRCs between 2016 and 2023 did so on behalf of someone else. Only 37% contacted the ADRC to seek assistance for themselves.

Those who contact the ADRC on behalf of others may include family members, caregivers, and friends who are advocating for the needs and well-being of their loved ones.

“Not an easy process moving from one state to another. The ADRC staff was excellent helping us with our adult son with disabilities. We are very thankful for her and the ADRC team.”

—ADRC customer from Jefferson County

Services

The dedicated staff at ADRCs offer assistance in various forms, ensuring that their customers receive the support they require to navigate challenges associated with aging and disabilities.

Information and assistance

Many people contact ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs for general help and guidance. ADRC and Tribal ADRS staff can help people locate and connect with a broad range of community resources. **Approximately half of all ADRC interactions each year involve general information or assistance.**

ADRC staff track the topics discussed during customer interactions. Public benefits were discussed in almost half of all information and assistance interactions recorded in 2023 (47.2%). Other popular topics included housing, food, and transportation (18.6%); medical and health concerns (10.5%); and financial and legal assistance (8.5%).

Most popular topics discussed during ADRC interactions in 2023

1. Public benefits
2. Housing, food, and transportation
3. Medical and health concerns
4. Financial and legal assistance
5. Nursing homes and assisted living
6. Community resources and education
7. Caregiving
8. Abuse, neglect, and loneliness
9. Unmet needs

Delivering services and hope to customers

An ADRC customer from Ozaukee County shared the following story about her experience working with the ADRC to get services for her son.

"Our son is 21, and we'd been at a loss as to how to help him get going into adulthood with his disabilities.

"There is something of a stigma to getting help, and my son was really conscious of that. The staff's sensitivity to his desire to do life on his own absolutely saved the day. She treated my son with respect and just the right level of compassion, and she helped him understand that it's okay to get help. She had great insights as to what kind of services he would appreciate and would help him take charge of his life better, while being sensitive and knowledgeable about the needs of our family as a whole.

"The staff was able to engage my son, draw him into conversation, and help him take ownership of decision-making. She recalled things that were important to him and brought those into the conversation, really showing him a personal level of interest that greatly helped his self-esteem. She praised him for the work accomplishments he had made and helped him feel that he had a lot to offer in the right job situation.

"We are really excited as we get going with employment for my son. My son told me he felt hopeful, something he hasn't expressed in a long while."

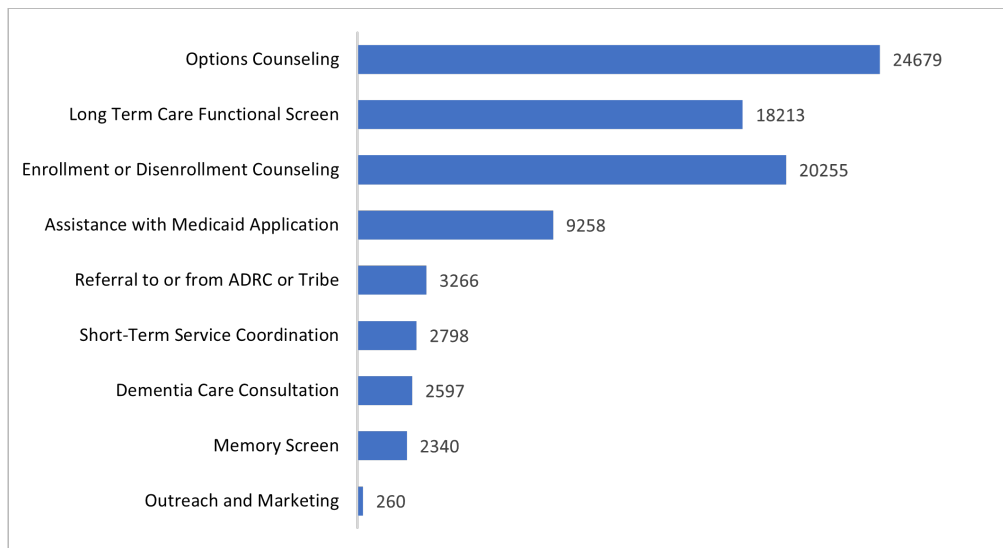
Long-Term Care Options Counseling

ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs are vital in counseling individuals seeking guidance on addressing their long-term care needs. ADRC staff engage with clients in a person-centered decision-support process known as options counseling. ADRC staff will help clients explore and understand the various alternatives available for long-term care. This collaborative approach empowers individuals to make informed decisions tailored to their circumstances. Regardless of whether someone requires financial assistance, options counselors are dedicated to helping customers navigate the complex landscape of long-term care options.

"I appreciate the ADRC for reaching out to me to discuss and help me with the complex situation of my wife's care. I thank the options counselor for taking the time to discuss the different facets involved with the Medicaid process and the available services for my wife. Her patience and professionalism eliminated my stress, which made the process a wonderful experience for me."

—ADRC customer from Milwaukee County

Next to general information and assistance, the most common outcome for an interaction in 2023 was an ADRC staff providing options counseling to the client.



“My parents are aging and enduring severe health issues. This is an extremely difficult time for us. My family and I have no desire to place my parents in a nursing home and have been seeking assistance. The entire process was a nightmare, until I contacted the ADRC. I am so grateful for the ADRC staff. She restored my faith in the system. ... she cut through all the red tape and was extremely knowledgeable. She was patient, listened to our concerns, and made me feel heard. At no point did we ever feel rushed or ignored.

—ADRC customer from Fond du Lac County

Benefits specialist services

Disability benefit specialist (DBS) and elder benefit specialist (EBS) programs support older adults and adults with disabilities who encounter challenges to their independence and financial security. Benefit specialists provide free and confidential benefits counseling services. They help customers access Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, health insurance, and other public and private benefits.

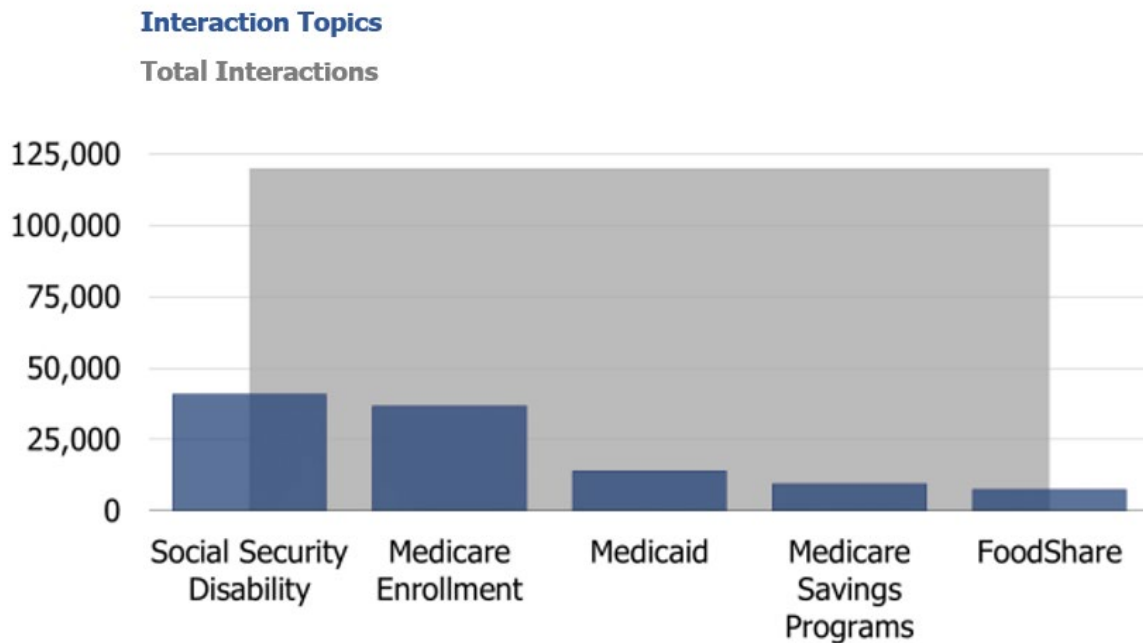
The chart below shows the top five topics that benefit specialists discussed with customers in 2022 (blue bars) compared to the total number of interactions (gray bar).

The impact of benefit specialist services

In 2022, benefit specialists had
120,069
interactions with customers.

They helped **45,000** customers
and resolved **92,000** of those
customers’ needs.

The estimated monetary impact totaled
\$224,746,524.



"The staff went above and beyond to help me try to resolve issues. They made me feel understood and validated and I will be forever grateful for that. The staff actually care about the individuals who come to them for assistance."

—ADRC customer from Vernon County

Benefit specialist success story: reversing the harm of aggressive marketing

A dialysis patient had various Medicare and Medicaid plans. She spotted a TV advertisement promising valuable information about her Medicare options. She called the number on the screen, seeking clarity on her coverage. Little did she know this inquiry would set off a series of events affecting her health and well-being.

During her conversation with the phone agent, they enrolled her in a Medicare Advantage plan without her knowledge or consent. It wasn't until she faced a pressing medical need, requiring surgery, that the consequences of this unexpected enrollment became apparent.

As she prepared for her much-needed surgery, she learned that the medical facility did not accept Medicare Advantage plans. This revelation left her anxious and confused as she wondered how she would proceed with her operation.

She contacted an EBS who recognized the situation's urgency and swiftly submitted a formal complaint on the patient's behalf. Thankfully, the advocacy and diligence of the EBS paid off. The client was successfully disenrolled from the Medicare Advantage plan. She was then reinstated into her original Medicare coverage, bringing her peace of mind and ensuring she could proceed with her surgery.

Dementia care specialist program

The dementia care specialist (DCS) program, within the ADRCs, has recently undergone a substantial expansion, almost tripling in size, and is available in every county and nearly every Tribal Nation. This program plays a vital role in the community by offering services around three pillars.

Dementia-friendly work environments

DCSs contribute to creating dementia-friendly work environments by offering education and training to colleagues. This understanding is essential for fostering a supportive atmosphere within ADRCs for individuals with dementia.

Dementia-friendly communities

DCSs actively collaborate with various agencies to create a welcoming and accommodating community for individuals living with dementia. They engage in outreach initiatives to establish safe spaces where people with dementia can thrive. They also provide education to increase awareness and understanding of dementia, helping community members recognize the signs and provide support.

Work closely with families

Often, individuals with dementia may not have insight into their condition or may resist help, making family caregivers essential. DCSs engage with caregivers, providing them with the knowledge and resources to provide the best care for their loved ones.

The DCS program is a valuable asset to the community, promoting awareness, education, and support for dementia-related issues.



"I was in tears worrying about getting things together for my husband who has dementia, and the ADRC staff said, 'Don't worry about it. I can help you. Let's take it one step at a time.' I feel like someone actually cares and is helping me, and I have a direction to go now. I cannot believe the service I got from them."

—ADRC customer from Milwaukee County

"Your DCS has been a wonderful resource. She is friendly, experienced, caring, and resourceful. It's very clear that she cares about the people she works with and is always willing to answer questions, find resources, and support those of us caring for people with dementia. I'm very glad she is part of my support team."

—ADRC customer from Milwaukee County

The Remember Project at the ADRC of Columbia County

The ADRC of Columbia County brought [The Remember Project](#) to their community in 2022 and 2023. The Remember Project uses art to end dementia stigma. The ADRC of Columbia County director, Sue Lynch, explains that “[the Remember Project] has been such a wonderful opportunity to help build dementia-informed communities and reduce stigma of a memory loss diagnosis.”

Community engagement

ADRCs and Tribal ADRCs actively engage with their communities to provide their services, offer community support, and ensure they are a trusted resource. They participate in numerous committees and workgroups. They also collaborate with various stakeholders to develop and implement solutions to address critical issues such as housing affordability, hospital discharge procedures, suicide prevention, and the transition of high school students with disabilities into the community.

ADRCs also participate in and sponsor local events and projects. For example, the ADRC of the Lakeshore works with their local YMCA, clinics, and other partner agencies to provide community classes. They also work with local farmers to deliver fresh produce to homebound individuals.

Bridging trust and building healthy lives: a success story in Richland County

Staff at the ADRC of Eagle Country in Richland County worked with an older woman with mental health issues. As her condition declined, she had issues with hoarding, and became estranged from her family. The one connection she consistently kept was her relationship with the ADRC. Over the years the ADRC helped facilitate the cleaning of her home, home-delivered meals, and enrollment in a Family Care program. The ADRC helped her transition to an assisted living facility, where she receives her meals and medications and lives in a clean and safe environment. Her health condition has been improving, and the hope is that by the time she can leave the assisted living facility, her home will be suitable for her to return to and live in with supports.

“When I was referred to the ADRC by my dad’s social worker, I was hesitant, thinking this will be an enormous hassle and a long, painful process, and boy was I wrong. [When I called,] I explained my situation with my dad [and that] I had no clue where to turn. Even though I visited every three days, and he had a caregiver twice a week, it was getting quite scary from a few falls. [The ADRC staff] listened, gave me her number, and said she would follow up.

“The ADRC staff came to assess in less than a week from my call and was always very accessible, responded quickly, and was so kind. She was very thorough with her requests and the process. Within three weeks we were through the process. Dad has been approved to move into our desired assisted living, and we can’t be happier. I will now be five minutes from my dad, and he will be safe, warm, and well fed.”

—Email from ADRC customer

Tribal services

The Tribal aging and disability resource specialist (ADRS) is a professional position employed by a Tribal Nation or Tribal organization. Tribal ADRSs ensure that Native American people have access to culturally appropriate information on aging and disability services.

Tribal ADRSs represent a critical component of the aging and disability network's strategy for ensuring that the unique needs of Tribal communities, specifically Tribal Elders,⁴ are met. Tribal ADRSs serve Tribal members based on the customers' individual needs and preferences. This person-centered model of services fosters an effective and supportive approach to addressing the needs of Tribal elders and those with disabilities.

A large Tribal community

"The Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe is fortunate to have two aging and disability resource specialists," says Rosalie Gokee. "The Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe has over 8,194 Tribal members, and 3,060 of those reside within the Tribe's service area."

"One elder wanted to make me aware that they are so thankful for the assistance provided by the ADRS. They made them feel comfortable and helped them through a hard time in their life!"

—Tribal aging and disability services director of the Lac Courte Oreilles Aging and Disability Services, Rosalie Gokee

Ten of the 11 Tribal nations that share geography with Wisconsin employ at least one Tribal ADRS. In coordination with each Tribal Nation's elder services, disabled services, health care services, veteran services, and community services, the Tribal ADRS role enhances service to best meet the needs of the community.

Members of Tribal nations can choose to work with the Tribal ADRS or the local ADRC when seeking services such as information and assistance, options counseling, or access to publicly funded long-term care. The coordination between Tribal ADRSs, ADRCs, and Tribal nations is essential in ensuring Tribal elders receive culturally sensitive and appropriate services.

Special projects

Community health workers grant

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Office for Resource Center Development (ORCD) received funds from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to combat COVID-19 infection, illness, and death. The project aims to reduce health disparities related to COVID-19 by reaching underserved populations in ADRCs that serve rural areas. The funding is available through May 31, 2025.

"We had an unexpected, overwhelmingly positive response from the community to hire a CHW. She is teaching customers how to keep themselves healthy, which has been a big trust builder."

—ADRC worker

⁴ Tribal nations recognize older adults as those aged 55 and older, as opposed to local ADRCs, which provide aging services beginning at age 60.

The ADRCs of Barron and Rusk Counties, Dunn County, and Jackson County applied and were awarded funding to implement community health workers (CHW).

- **Barron and Rusk counties** focus on working with the home-delivered meal program to identify participants needing a connection to further community resources. The CHW works with clients for 90 days.
- **Dunn County** focuses on working with Hmong community members. The CHW is Hmong and is integral in building rapport between the ADRC and the Hmong community.
- **Jackson County** focuses on providing short-term service coordination and extra attention for people in complex situations who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Vaccine access grant

ORCD received funds from the Administration for Community Living in 2021 to support ADRC and No Wrong Door agencies. These agencies used the funds to provide resources and information to promote receiving COVID-19 and other relevant vaccinations among at-risk older adults and people with disabilities.

Grant activities included:

- Public education and outreach related to the COVID-19 vaccine.
- COVID-19 vaccine appointment registration assistance.
- Sponsorship of or help with COVID-19 vaccination events.
- Transportation to and from COVID-19 vaccination sites.
- Addressing accessibility needs through assistive technology or accommodation.
- Coordination of in-home COVID-19 vaccinations.

The flexibility of the funding allowed ADRCs to develop projects that best fit their community's needs.

ADRC modernization

The ADRC modernization project comprises five initiatives focused on modernizing and diversifying access to ADRC and Tribal ADRC information and resources. The project is one of many for older adults and people with disabilities to allow them to live as independently as possible. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) supports this work.

Enhanced public outreach

Both the ADRC of Milwaukee County and the ADRC of Jackson County used funds for unique public outreach and education projects.

- The ADRC of Milwaukee County developed a marketing campaign called "Boosted and Blessed" to reach areas with low vaccination rates.
- The ADRC of Jackson County developed "Healthy Measures" totes. The totes were insulated bags containing a "COVID Kit" and information on community resources like ADRC services, community health worker contacts, a how-to guide for fraud protection, and an emergency preparedness toolkit for people with physical disabilities.

Marketing and outreach

The marketing and outreach team is implementing a coordinated statewide marketing and outreach campaign to promote:

- A virtual resource platform.
- Local ADRCs and the centralized website.
- Early access to information and resources.

Reporting system improvements

Efforts are underway to identify a modernized information system that better meets the reporting needs of ADRCs and aging programs. Desirable features of the system include:

- Improved user interface.
- Customizable reports.
- Document storage.
- Interoperability with other systems.
- Additional features based on feedback from state and local partners.

Long-term care enhancement

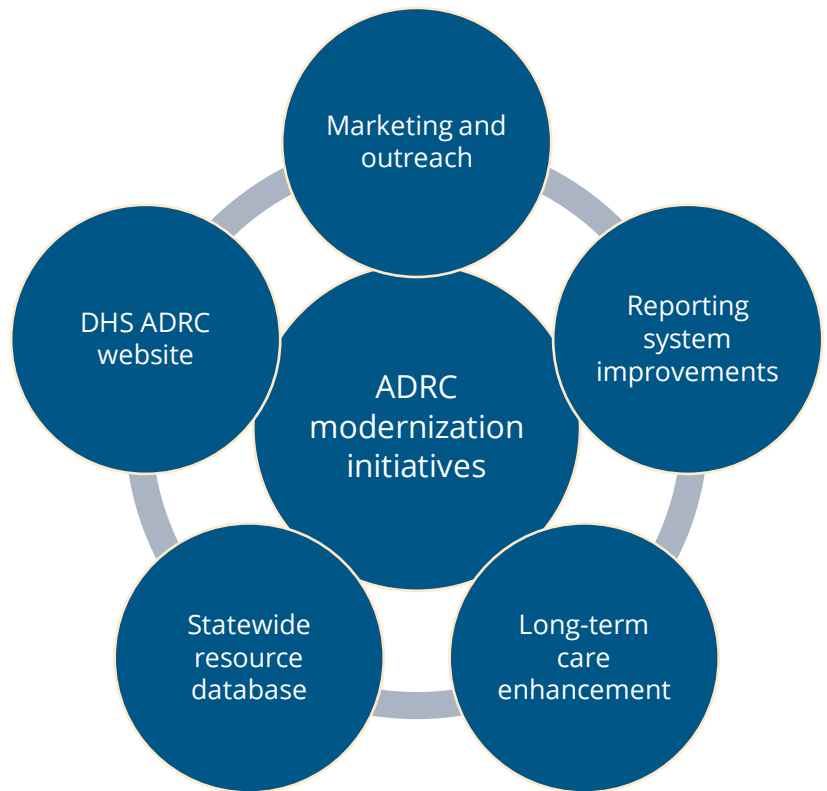
The long-term care enhancement workgroup aims to improve people's access to and understanding of publicly funded long-term care programs. The team is working on the following projects:

- Revising the long-term care enrollment counseling publications.
- Providing online information about the process of youth in transition to adult services for youth and their families.
- Creating a long-term care program decision tree to assist customers in understanding their options during enrollment counseling.

Statewide resource database and DHS ADRC website

A statewide resource database will meet the needs of local ADRC and Tribal ADRC staff and have a public-facing search capability. Features may include:

- Smart logic for resource searches.
- Login option for local ADRC and Tribal ADRC staff where additional information can be kept.
- Ability to select and seamlessly email resource information to customers.





Learn more about ADRCs and Tribal ADRSs in Wisconsin and find your local ADRC

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/index.htm>



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