

## *In the News....*

# Counties from Across Wisconsin Experiencing Extreme Child Protective Services Challenges

(Excerpts from media coverage from around the state)

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## Price County

### **One effect of drug epidemic in Price County? Eliminating the county tourism department**

Submitted: 10/03/2017

[http://www.wifw.com/storydetails/20171003183602/one\\_effect\\_of\\_drug\\_epidemic\\_in\\_price\\_county\\_eliminating\\_the\\_county\\_tourism\\_department](http://www.wifw.com/storydetails/20171003183602/one_effect_of_drug_epidemic_in_price_county_eliminating_the_county_tourism_department)

Price County needs to reallocate its funding to fill a major gap in its 2018 budget.

In 2016, a surge in meth and opiate use hit the area.

"It started happening fairly quickly and increased pretty dramatically," said Price County Health and Human Services Director Marilyn Schreuder.

More homes with drug problems means more homes unsafe for children. The county is legally required to find and pay for new homes for those kids, whether through foster care or group homes.

From 2015 to 2016, the cost of that county expense more than doubled from \$308,880 to \$670,578.

"I don't think anybody could have probably predicted the increase in out-of-home care that the drug epidemic was going to cause all of us," Schreuder said.

Schreuder expects the cost to the county to be around \$800,000 in 2017, and at least that much next year, meaning the county budget needs a major adjustment.

"We knew we had a problem," Trimner said. "We knew we were going to have a shortfall."

To make up for that shortfall, Trimner proposed a budget to the County Board that would eliminate the county's tourism department.

## St. Croix, Buffalo, Trempealeau & Monroe Counties

### **Opioid, methamphetamine addiction strains CPS resources**

By Maureen McMullen on Jan 12, 2018 at 3:00 a.m.

<http://www.hudsonstarobserver.com/news/4385285-opioid-methamphetamine-addiction-strains-cps-resources>

The number of children St. Croix County Human Services took into custody nearly tripled in the past year, and officials say methamphetamine and opioid abuse are the primary culprits.

St. Croix County Board Supervisor Chris Babbitt, who chairs the county's Health and Human Services board, told the full County Board at their Jan. 4 meeting he's not quite ready to "pull the alarm bell" in St. Croix County, "but we're close."

"It's unprecedented: child welfare agencies are struggling," said Fred Johnson, director of St. Croix County Health and Human Services. "We're seeing the highest level of utilization of our foster care system in a decade."

Most of these cases stem from parents' struggles with addiction to methamphetamines or opioids, said Julie Krings, St. Croix County Children's Services administrator.

Out of home placements for children in Trempealeau County rose from 10 in February 2015 to 39 in February 2017.

That number in Buffalo County jumped from seven in July of 2016 to 18 the following year, while the average number of children in Monroe County custody rose more than 80 percent from 2013 to 2016.

Some counties, Krings said, have to rely on hotels to house the influx of children in their care.

Others will set up air mattresses in county buildings and provide children meals through county jail food services.

## Ashland County

### **Drug-Related Costs Prompt Ashland County To Seek Referendum To Raise Tax Levy County Seeks Voter Approval To Raise Tax Levy By About \$1M To Pay For Public Safety, Health And Human Services**

WPR News Tuesday, July 10, 2018, 6:05am By Danielle Kaeding

<https://www.wpr.org/drug-related-costs-prompt-ashland-county-seek-referendum-raise-tax-levy>

One northern Wisconsin county plans to ask voters this August whether they would support raising property taxes to pay for services. Ashland County is putting a referendum before residents because of rising costs due mostly to methamphetamine use.

The number of felonies related to drug abuse in Ashland County has more than doubled in recent years from 122 in 2011 to 303 last year. Ashland County Administrator Jeff Beirl said they'd like to increase the tax levy by about \$1 million to pay for law enforcement and health and human services.

"It's just not sustainable to keep covering these continued shortfalls out of the general fund because at some point in life the general fund won't have any more money in it," said Beirl.

The cost to the county for placing children in out-of-home care rose from \$405,420 in 2016 to \$720,909 last year.

### **An open letter to the Bay Area community**

Ashland Daily Press 5/7/2018

[http://www.apg-wi.com/ashland\\_daily\\_press/free/an-open-letter-to-the-bay-area-community/article\\_237111f4-517a-11e8-9910-178e68c641da.html](http://www.apg-wi.com/ashland_daily_press/free/an-open-letter-to-the-bay-area-community/article_237111f4-517a-11e8-9910-178e68c641da.html)

Caseloads in Ashland County Human Services Child Protection Unit of the number of children placed out of home due to drug related issues have doubled since one year ago.

The cost to the County has gone up over \$300,000 in one year to care for these children in out of home care. Meth and Opioids are the major factor for this

## Barron County

## County asks for help with soaring meth costs; 'Child welfare system to a point of crisis'

Bob Zientara Dec 5, 2018

[https://www.news-shield.com/news/top\\_stories/article\\_67c2a1d6-f898-11e8-86c2-d3dbad1a382e.html](https://www.news-shield.com/news/top_stories/article_67c2a1d6-f898-11e8-86c2-d3dbad1a382e.html)

In just four years, Barron County's costs to serve and/or house children whose parents are involved with drugs or other problems have risen by more than \$1.5 million, members of the Barron County Health and Human Services Board noted last week.

[State Representative Romaine] Quinn said that after a lawsuit was filed, "the state guarantee(d) that Milwaukee caseworkers will have no more than 10 cases per worker; Barron County caseworkers can have up to 33 cases. Even cutting that in half would represent a major step in fighting the meth epidemic."

"...I will make that funding a top priority in my budget requests this year," Quinn said. "Our children deserve the same focus and level of attention as children in Milwaukee."

## Brown County

### Child Protective Services Experiences Lack of Case Workers, 39 Percent Turnover Rate

By: Robyn Oguinye Posted: Aug 23, 2018 10:15 PM CDT Updated: Aug 23, 2018 10:15 PM CDT

<https://www.wearegreenbay.com/news/local-news/child-protective-services-experiences-lack-of-case-workers-39-percent-turnover-rate/1392046251>

The Brown County Human Services Department is struggling to keep case workers for Child Protective Services. The rate of turnover is the highest it's ever been at 39 percent. Longer hours and more cases has the department looking for ways to alleviate workloads.

CPS supervisor Amy Knutson says their job is to protect children. But that becomes increasingly difficult when your team of case workers is getting smaller." When you are going from having 12 cases and all of a sudden you're at 25 and you're trying to manage those, people are putting in more hours," says Knutson.

[Says Brown County Health and Human Services Director Erik Pritzl], "And at this point, if we were talking about this it means we've exhausted a lot of the ideas that we have and it's time to engage other people and look for how we can get additional resources to address the issue."

## Burnett County

### 'Putting a band-aid on a hemorrhage'

Jonathan Richie Oct 26, 2018 Updated Oct 26, 2018

[http://www.burnettcountysentinel.com/news/putting-a-band-aid-on-a-hemorrhage/article\\_ab17f16e-d7ca-11e8-af04-db90eba3d9a1.html](http://www.burnettcountysentinel.com/news/putting-a-band-aid-on-a-hemorrhage/article_ab17f16e-d7ca-11e8-af04-db90eba3d9a1.html)

["Putting a band-aid on a hemorrhage."] That is how Allison Fern, Burnett County Department of Health and Human Services Director, described the state's reaction to the methamphetamine crisis concerning its effect on child protective care services.

She said the state did increase funding by \$5.5 million last year. "That amounted to around \$23,000 "Since 2013, our placement costs for children have increased by 936 percent."

Placement costs in 2013 were \$69,577 and in 2017, it ballooned up to \$720,912.

She said that standards need to be looked at and adjusted for counties like Burnett, who have departments entirely overrun by burgeoning caseloads.

Fern outlined that three CPS workers in Burnett County have 12, 13, and 14 cases open. Those cases involve 19, 17 and 20 children in care.

## Fond du Lac & Portage Counties

### Across Wisconsin, a steep increase in kids separated from addict parents

Post Crescent. Part of the USA Today Network

The number of children separated from their parents by county authorities has climbed across Wisconsin to its highest level in nearly a decade. A USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin investigation found drug abuse is clearly driving the uptick — leaving more families in turmoil, straining public resources and creating a shortage of foster parents.

Fond du Lac County social workers reported 49 parent-child separations involving drugs last year, more than double the county's average over the previous seven years. Portage County social workers counted 54 drug-related separations in the past two years, exceeding the previous six years combined.

"You have people who are just struggling, even if they have a desire to be sober," said Teresa Kovach, Portage County's child welfare supervisor

This year's push to boost state funding for child protection services gained steam from an opioid task force formed by Gov. Scott Walker. Citing a "significant surge in casework due to opioid-related child welfare cases," the group recommended in January that state officials help counties hire more social workers.

## Chippewa County

### Meth: The impact on foster care

News 18 ABC 1:16 pm September 14, 2018

<http://wqow.com/news/meth/2018/09/14/meth-the-impact-on-foster-care/>

In 2015, only 15 kids were in placement in Chippewa County. Now, three years later that number has multiplied by 12. "We are now over the 180 mark, so what that's doing is that's placing a tremendous burden on our system," Easker said. "Not only financially as we're trending towards \$600,000 over budget." All the problems lead back to meth.

The case load is heavy, the job is stressful. So, case workers aren't sticking around. "It's \$54,000 for every child protective services worker that we have to replace," Easker said. "There's a cost associated with turnover. It's not that we want people to go because there's another person standing in line that we want to hire. It takes over a year to learn how to walk at this job. They're running after two years, and hopefully they're not running out the door."

### More social workers needed in Chippewa County

Posted: Aug 20, 2018 4:30 PM CDT Monday, August 20, 2018 5:30 PM EDT

<http://wqow.com/news/2018/08/20/more-social-workers-needed-in-chippewa-county/>

The interim director for the Chippewa County Department of Human Services, Tim Easker, said with 180 children in foster care because of meth-related issues, there's not enough social workers to handle all of these cases.

"Standard should be roughly no more than 16 depending on if you're doing an initial assessment or ongoing, but our folks are averaging about 24 cases at the present time and that does not allow for good case work. What happens then is that we often see kids end up in foster care much longer than they should be than if our social workers had manageable caseloads," Easker said.

Easker said they are \$500,000 over budget on placement costs.

### Meth abuse displaces hundreds of Chippewa County children

Posted: Tue 6:12 PM, Jan 23, 2018 | Updated: Tue 6:49 PM, Jan 23, 2018

<http://www.weau.com/content/news/Meth-abuse-displaces-hundreds-of-Chippewa-County-children-470794003.html>

The human services department says meth addiction is overwhelming the county system and causing health leaders to take action.

“The scope of the problem is consuming many of our public resources, from law enforcement to our courts, to our department of human services and other nonprofit organizations who serve this cliental,” said [County Human Services Director Larry] Winter

In 2014 there were 28 cases referred to child protective services in Chippewa County by 2017 that number increased to 211.

## Douglas County

### County officials educate state legislators on crisis

By Shelley Nelson on Nov 16, 2018 at 6:05 p.m

<http://www.superiortelegram.com/news/government-and-politics/4530116-county-officials-educate-state-legislators-crisis>

While about 80 percent of child welfare cases statewide are related to drug or alcohol abuse, Douglas County's caseload for child protective services related to those issues is about 95 percent, said Doreen Wehmas, children's services manager and deputy director of the Douglas County Health and Human Services Department.

...the county has only closed the gap on about \$600,000 of the projected shortfall in the human services budget for this year.

“Imagine where we're getting that money from ... we found half the money. We're going to have to meet in June and make some even harder decisions. [Douglas County Board Chairman Mark Liebaert]”

Decisions already made include cutting \$300,000 designated for highway projects; increasing the forestry transfer to \$1.8 million; raising revenue projections for sales tax; and increasing what county employees pay toward their health insurance. He said things that could be cut next include UW-Extension, which provides services that could likely keep families together, and creating a wheel tax.

"It's a downhill slope that we just can't figure a way out of ... the state and the feds have got to figure out this is a bigger problem than a local county government can handle with its tax base," Liebaert said. "It has to be handled at a bigger level."

"To me this is equal to a natural disaster," [State Senator] Janet Bewley said. "You summon different resources because things are so critical, almost like an emergency ... you almost have to triage on a daily basis."

### Douglas County leaders say they need more resources to address meth and heroin problem

By Michelle Alfini, Reporter Posted: Jun 22, 2017 5:42 PM CDT Updated: Jul 06, 2017 5:42 PM CDT

<http://www.kbjr6.com/story/35730287/douglas-county-leaders-say-they-need-more-resources-to-address-meth-and-heroin-problem>

According to the Wisconsin attorney general, in Douglas County the heroin and meth cases are among the worst in the state.

It's an issue that deputy director of children's services Doreen Wehmas said she's noticed on the rise over the past few years through the cases she's seen.

"A lot of our cases are involving parents or care providers that are struggling with addiction issues and we've had to remove children from their care because of those issues and not being to keep their children safe," she said

Douglas County leaders said some of their problems surprised even the attorney general. They say based on that they hope their requests for more resources will lead to solutions.

## Eau Claire County

### Eau Claire County social services see red: Out-of-home placements for children, people with mental illnesses far exceed budget

By Andrew Dowd | Leader-Telegram staff Published on April 28, 2018 | Updated 12:01 a. m.

<http://www.leadertelegram.com/News/Front-Page/2018/04/28/div-class-libPageBodyLinebreak-Social-services-see-red-div.html>

“Overall, our placements have increased,” said Diane Cable, the county’s human services director.

A major factor affecting the child welfare cases — more than 80 percent of them in Eau Claire County — is homes where use of drugs or abuse of alcohol are factors. Methamphetamine use has had a notable effect on the county along with prescription drug abuse and alcoholism, she added.

And that's been part of the 54 percent increase in out-of-home placements the county has seen in the past four years. And cases are more complex, requiring a higher level and longer duration of treatments, which results in higher costs, Cable noted. That means scenarios in which children may be traumatized by abuse, exposed to drugs and also have a disability or disorder.

The county's children and family services placements went \$2.44 million over its budget of \$2.54 million, according to Cable.

### **Meth's empty desks: Children sometimes pay stiff price for parents' addiction**

#### **Children are innocent victims of the skyrocketing methamphetamine crisis. It's a problem a north side Eau Claire school knows well.**

By Julian Emerson Published on Feb. 26, 2017

<http://www.leadertelegram.com/News/Front-Page/2017/02/26/Meth-s-empty-desks.html>

The growing number of children in need of new homes because of meth use is straining an overburdened alternate care system in the Eau Claire area, officials said. That system already faced shortages of appropriate homes for children removed from their living situations because of meth use and a wide range of other issues deemed to endanger kids' safety.

According to Eau Claire County Human Services Department statistics, the number of cases involving child protective services has doubled between 2010 and 2015. The percentage of those cases involving alcohol or other drugs also has grown, officials said.

"Our alternate care system was already stretched," said Terri Bohl, social work manager for the department's child protective services division. "Now you add this big number of cases where kids are removed from their homes because of meth exposure, and we just can't keep up."

The prevalence of meth in the county is borne out in statistics. In 2010, 67 percent of child protective services cases here involved alcohol and other drugs, a figure that grew to 82 percent last year. That increase was driven almost exclusively by meth, figures show, as 94 percent of those cases in 2016 involved the drug.

Eau Claire County isn't alone in experiencing far more meth-related cases in recent years. In Chippewa County, meth-related out-of-home placements for children have grown from 10 in 2014 to 83 last year.

Tina Buhrow and her husband live in Chippewa Falls, where they are foster parents and provide crisis care in their home for children from eight counties in need of immediate relocation. She called the increase in meth-related cases in recent years "alarming" and said it is overwhelming an already maxed-out child protective services network.

Our system simply isn't designed to handle the numbers we are seeing," Buhrow said

## **Marathon and Wood Counties**

### **Drug epidemic separates more kids from parents**

Stevens Point Journal, Part of the USA Today Network 22-Dec-16

<https://www.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/2016/12/22/drug-epidemic-separates-more-kids-parents/94988372/>

The officers found methamphetamine and marijuana in places the children could easily reach. The two children, both younger than 10 years old, couldn't stay with their parents under those conditions. They were living with other relatives by the end of the day.

The number of children removed from their parents' home because of drug abuse has nearly doubled in Marathon County in the last few years.

Anne La Chapelle, Wood County's social work supervisor, estimated in early December roughly half of the 102 children placed with a relative or foster parent were removed from their parents' home because of drug or alcohol abuse.

The situation escalated earlier this year in Marathon County when social workers found themselves managing caseloads more than 40 percent higher than the amount recommended by national standards, according to Lance Leonhard, the county's deputy administrator.

“There was no end in sight for this large influx of cases,” Leonhard said. The county responded by creating three new social worker positions at a cost of \$242,830 in 2017.

## Juneau County

### Juneau County grapples with opioid drug problem

KEVIN DAMASK [kdamask@wiscnews.com](mailto:kdamask@wiscnews.com) Jun 22, 2017

[https://www.wiscnews.com/juneaucountystartimes/news/local/juneau-county-grapples-with-opioid-drug-problem/article\\_dec0bdd7-fcc3-5a92-b365-f28b5fa4b759.html](https://www.wiscnews.com/juneaucountystartimes/news/local/juneau-county-grapples-with-opioid-drug-problem/article_dec0bdd7-fcc3-5a92-b365-f28b5fa4b759.html)

Juneau County Director of Human Services Scott Ethun gave county officials a sobering look into the county's opioid drug epidemic June 20.

Speaking during the board of supervisors meeting at the county courthouse in Mauston, Ethun said the problem is unlike anything he's seen in 37 years working in human and social services.

“The problems with the budget have never been as much about staff costs as it's been with placement cost for foster care or treatment care for children.”

Ethun said out-of-home placements are the biggest expense for the department's budget.

During the meeting, the board approved adding staff and extending hours for current human services personnel.

## La Crosse County

### La Crosse County Board pushes state to boost child protective services funding

Randy Erickson La Crosse Tribune Jun 22, 2018

[https://lacrosetribune.com/news/local/la-crosse-county-board-pushes-state-to-boost-child-protective/article\\_b8ee7f71-7c9d-553f-b922-c081b21f9b02.html](https://lacrosetribune.com/news/local/la-crosse-county-board-pushes-state-to-boost-child-protective/article_b8ee7f71-7c9d-553f-b922-c081b21f9b02.html)

...between 2011 and 2017, annual spending for out-of-home child placements in La Crosse County — both for child protective services and through the juvenile justice system — increased nearly \$1.9 million, a whopping 89 percent. During the same period, Youth Aids and Children and Family Aids payments from the state decreased by \$121,260, a 4 percent drop.

Those state Youth Aids and Children and Family Aids payments were up 5 percent this year, rising \$152,250 over the previous year, but a much larger investment will be needed.

“We know the state needs to step up,” board member Sharon Hampson said, noting the similarities and differences between CPS funding and state transportation funding. “This situation is a crisis of equal proportion, but unlike roads, you can't see this problem.”

## Pierce County

### The line of neglect: Foster Care in Pierce County

By Matthew Lambert on Nov 7, 2017 at 8:00 a.m.

"The biggest issue we see in this county is child welfare concerns due to methamphetamine," Schmidt said. "Ninety percent, more than 90 percent, of the kids who are in out of home care or foster care, it's because of parents who are abusing methamphetamine."

The ideal number per staffer would be 10 cases per worker, which means they would have to hire another person, Schmidt said.

"Just from a supervisory standpoint, I will tell you that 10 of these cases is just damn near inhumane," Schmidt said. "At 15, you just have to decide what is the highest priority to address and just accept that you're not meeting the standards. It's just the way that this thing is."

The issue of meth abuse in Pierce County won't be going away anytime soon. Schmidt called meth abuse "a trend" rather than "a fluctuation" and worries the caseload won't end anytime soon.

"I don't think we're ever going to get below 30 cases in the near term, the next two, three, four years in our [Child Protective Services]," Schmidt said. "So I will be continuing to advocate for the resources we need."

## Portage County

### Opioid crisis leads to large increase of children in foster care

By Emma Henderson | Posted: Mon 8:28 PM, May 21, 2018 | Updated: Mon 11:16 PM, May 21, 2018

<http://www.wsaw.com/content/news/Opioid-crisis-leads-to-large-increase-of-children-in-foster-care-483273761.html>

According to Portage County Health and Human Services, the average age of a child being taken out of their home and put into foster care is between 5 and 12 years old.

With so many children in the system, homes within a child's local county are full, meaning they are forced to move to a different community in a different part of the state.

Danita Docka is the Foster Care Coordinator in Portage County. She said it's been harder to find children a safer place to live recently.

"I would say a very sharp rise in the past three to five years," Docka said. "The opioid crisis is really driving the rise in children being placed out of home."

## Washington County

### "A disaster:" Federal lawsuit filed by 28 WI counties blames drug makers for opioid crisis

Posted 11:02 am, November 7, 2017, by AP Wire Service and A.J. Bayatpour, Updated at 06:18PM, November 7, 2017

<http://fox6now.com/2017/11/07/more-than-2-dozen-counties-sue-pharmaceutical-companies-for-fraudulent-marketing-of-opioids/>

"We have seen a large increase of children placed in out-of-home care due to their parents dealing with an opioid addiction," said Washington County Director of Human Services Julie Driscoll.

## Waukesha County

### Counties Feel Strain Of Families Destabilized By Opioid Epidemic

## In Waukesha County, Reports To Child Protective Services Rose 16 Percent From 2015 to 2016

By Kyla Calvert Mason Tuesday, June 27, 2017, 2:15pm

<https://www.wpr.org/counties-feel-strain-families-destabilized-opioid-epidemic>

"What's going on?" A dispatcher asked.

"I think my dad's dead. He's not waking up or anything," a young boy answered. He was calling from a cell phone inside his father's car.

The calls that come after emergencies like these are becoming routine for Vickie Smith. She oversees foster care for Waukesha County. She says they've always gotten calls about parents who are too intoxicated or high to care for their children.

"What's been happening recently is that a parent is overdosing either on heroin or opiates. We've had quite a few kiddos who have found their parents unconscious and called law enforcement," she said.

The number of opioid overdoses that resulted in a hospital encounter more than doubled from 2006 to 2014, to nearly 3,000. The fallout from incidents like those are straining Waukesha County's available foster homes and Smith hopes to add 40 more foster families to their roster this year.

Waukesha County data shows reports to child protective services rose about 5 percent from 2015 to 2016. Preliminary data show referrals rose 2.3 percent statewide. But it isn't just the number of cases that's up.

"The severity of cases when we're actually getting them are increasing," said Kathy Mullooly, who heads intake and child services for the county. "Where we need to go out right away, within 24 hours and provide for the safety of those kids. That type of work has increased."

## Wisconsin

### Meth: A Growing Problem in Wisconsin

WAOW ABC News 2:25 pm September 18, 2018

<https://waow.com/news/waow-featured-reports/2018/09/18/meth-a-growing-problem-in-wisconsin/>

[Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel] calls the meth epidemic one of the most challenging problems the state faces.

The D.O.J reports meth use has surged, especially in rural areas.

"Methamphetamine costs us \$424 million dollars a year to deal with the affects this is causing in our communities and that includes law enforcement, treatment and child protective services," Schimel explained.

Wisconsin crime labs analyzed 300 meth cases in 2010.

By 2017 the number jumped close to 1,700– a nearly 500 percent increase

### The opioid crisis is flooding foster care in Wisconsin

GUEST COLUMN Natalie Goodnow 2/24/2018

[http://host.madison.com/wsj/opinion/column/natalie-goodnow-the-opioid-crisis-is-flooding-foster-care-in/article\\_2b33d7da-7d98-52fd-8fef-a2f90234e8a7.html](http://host.madison.com/wsj/opinion/column/natalie-goodnow-the-opioid-crisis-is-flooding-foster-care-in/article_2b33d7da-7d98-52fd-8fef-a2f90234e8a7.html)

In just five years, the number of Wisconsin children removed from their homes because of parental drug abuse has more than doubled. And the number of kids in foster care is higher than it's been in a decade, growing 20 percent in the last five years.

Counties are straining under the influx of new cases.

A new report from the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, "Flooding the System," shows just how intertwined the state's growing opioid crisis is in the rise of kids in foster care.