

# La Crosse County

## 2025 WORKFORCE PROFILE



## State Narrative for County Profiles

Wisconsin's labor market experienced a strong year in 2024. Employment reached record levels, inflation appeared on the wane, and interest rates are accommodating a largely reconstrued supply chain. In addition, real wages turned positive, and consumer spending was robust.

The primary challenge still facing the future economic construct is the labor quantity challenge and its broader economic impacts.

### Wisconsin Jobs

The 2024 employment picture was favorable for Wisconsin, reaching new records in December at 3,076,500. The state's low unemployment rates were also noteworthy registering 3.0% or below the entire year. Although setting new records is always a good sign, new highs in employment would be expected through new expansionary economic periods.

Total non-farm employment also reached new highs, climbing through the year to peak in August at a seasonally adjusted basis of 3,048,000 and consolidating high levels through the remainder of the year, ending in December at 3,042,100. That marks a 1.6% increase over the pre-pandemic highs set in December 2019.



Figure 1: Wisconsin employment and jobs.

## Economy

Wisconsin Gross Domestic Product (WGDP) reached new highs in nominal and real dollar terms in 2024<sup>1</sup>, at \$456 billion or \$357 billion in real 2017 dollars. After a slower recovery coming out of the COVID-19 recession, Wisconsin's GDP growth rate has mimicked that of the country.

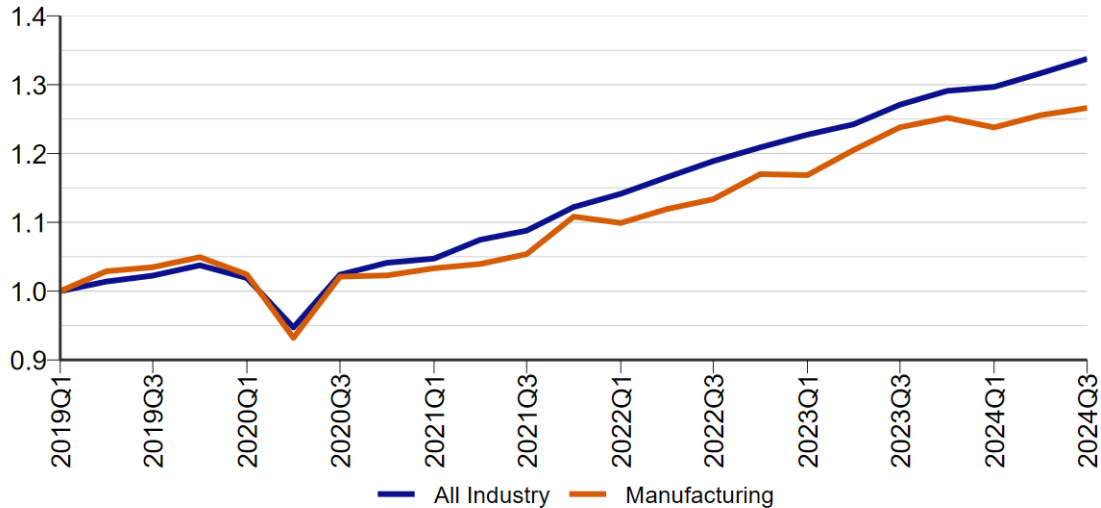


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

Many industry sectors were vibrant. Construction industry jobs hit new records, surpassing 140,000. Healthcare jobs also set new highs at 324,200. The leisure and hospitality sector recovered almost all the nearly 50% loss of jobs experienced during the COVID-19 recession, finishing with 285,200 jobs. Manufacturing jobs rose above 2023 levels to 481,200, but have not yet returned to pre-Covid19 levels.

Wisconsin ranks first in the number of manufacturing jobs per government job and second in manufacturing jobs share of total jobs. However, state-level manufacturing output was relatively weak against overall economic output. Two of the state's primary manufacturing industries, fabricated metal and machinery manufacturing, lost jobs through 2024. Fabricated metal manufacturing jobs peaked in July 2019, before the COVID-19 recession at 79,400 jobs, and ended 2024 with 74,300. Machinery manufacturing peaked in early 2023 with 68,800 jobs and finished 2024 with 67,200.

<sup>1</sup>Third quarter 2024 is latest data available.

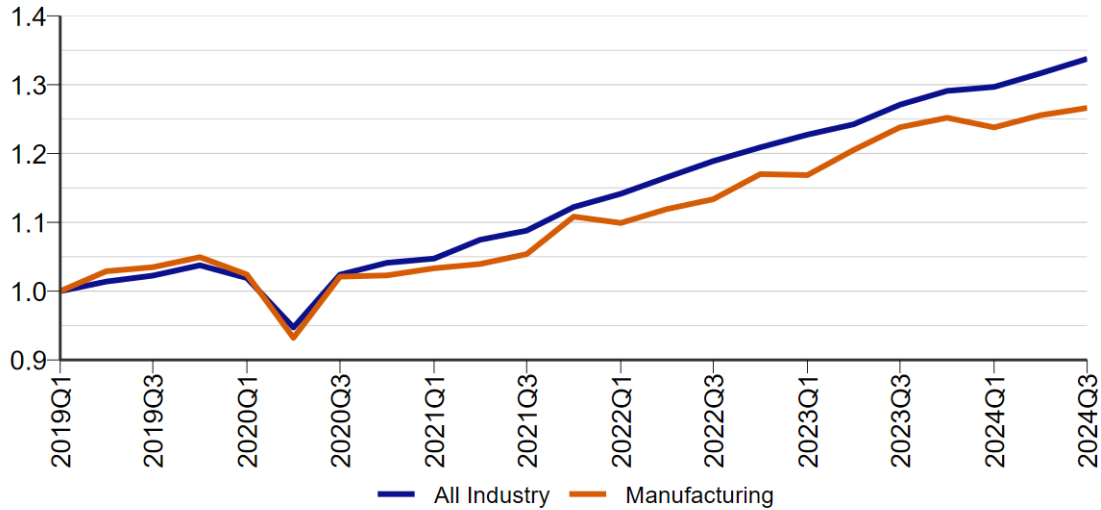


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

While the durable goods manufacturing sector saw declines, non-durable goods manufacturing in Wisconsin has made headway. Jobs in the non-durables industries have increased since the pre-Covid high of 198,600 in July of 2019, to 201,000 in December 2024. Most of that has occurred in the food processing industry.

### Labor Quantity Challenges

Employers continue to express challenges finding workers. This situation is being felt in all industries and most occupations – locally, regionally, and globally. Even China is experiencing population and workforce declines. Industries that are showing steady job growth, such as construction and healthcare, are limited by the number of workers available for positions.

As noted in studies dating back to 2000, there are not sufficient numbers of young workers to fill the jobs being vacated by the generation of baby boomers and the increased demand for workers associated with economic growth. The number of workers entering the labor market is essentially the same as the boomers exiting. A growing economy necessitates an increasing labor force or at least a more productive one. Wisconsin's labor force growth has remained close to zero.

The new high in Wisconsin's labor force reached in December 2024 of 3,170,300 is only 0.63% above the previous high in July 2017 and only 0.83% above the peak before that in June of 2009. That amounts to an annual average labor force growth rate of 0.08% per year, or about zero over 15 years.



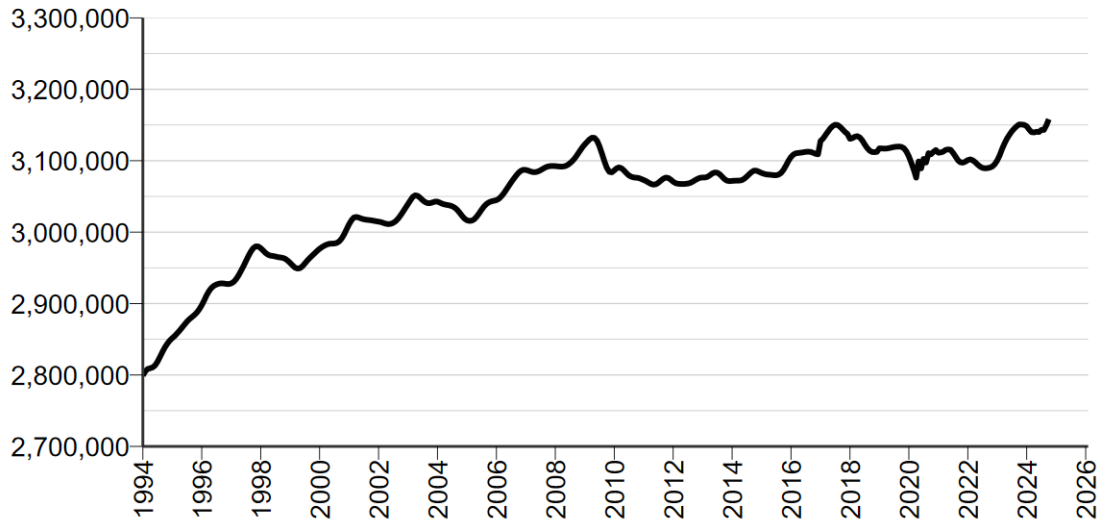


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

This shift has long been anticipated and is well documented. The front edge of the baby boomers turned 63 years old in 2009. By 2024, the back edge of the boomers (those born in 1964) were 60 years old. And while the labor force participation rates of workers 65 and older has increased since the 1990s, the remaining tenure of the boomers is short.

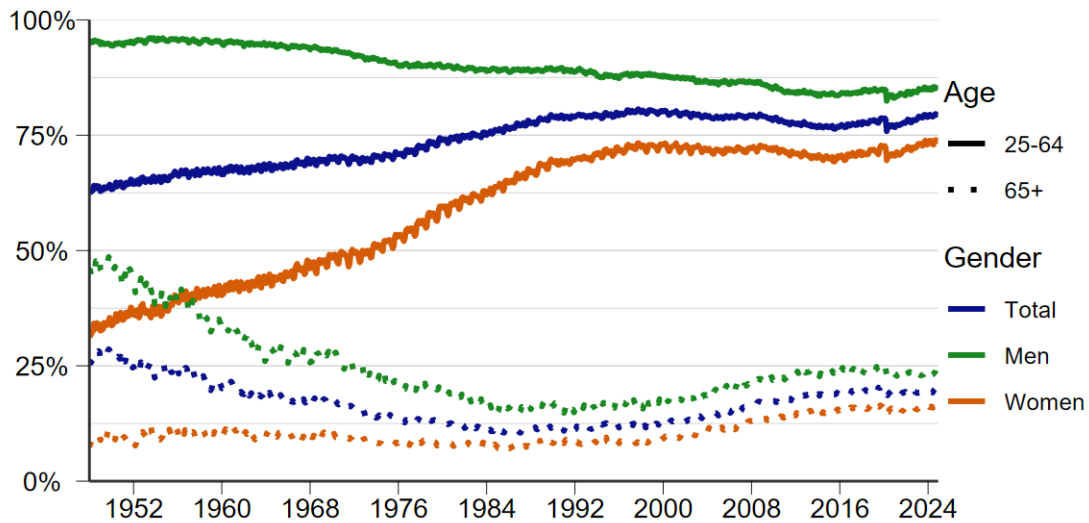


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

Below is a graph of Wisconsin's population and labor force projected out to 2040 based on the latest information from the Wisconsin Department of Administration Demographic Services. On a decennial basis, Wisconsin's population has already peaked. This suggests that the workforce will not experience substantial growth moving forward.

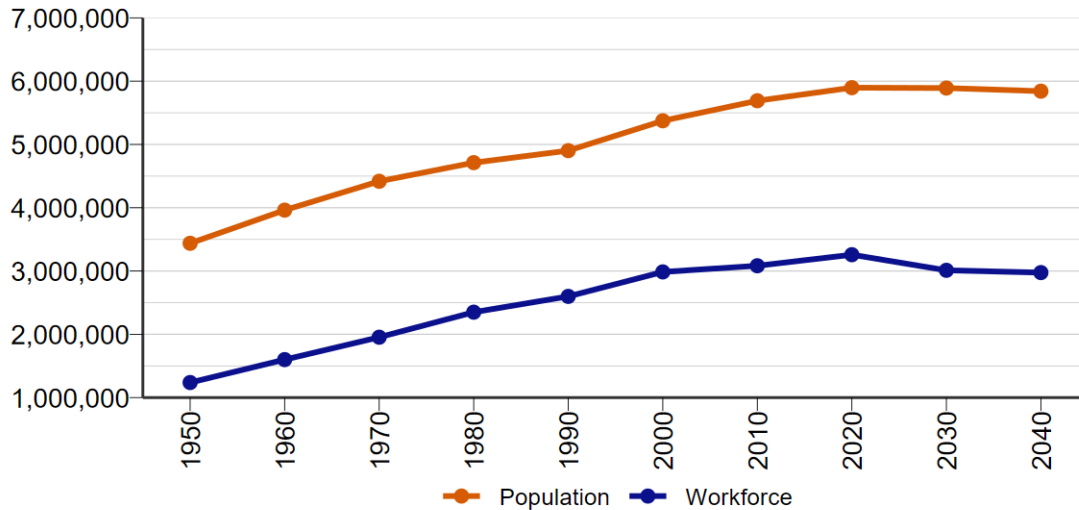


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

While the overall situation has been realized for some time, the actual quantity of the shortfall has been undetermined until now. Staff at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Office of Economic Advisors estimate that by 2031, the state could face a labor shortage exceeding 241,000 workers. (See Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin 2020 – 2040, Winters, Kaur, and Otis, [Labor Supply Projections for Wisconsin](#)).

## New Construct

Human resource constraints affect the entire economic construct. As one of the three primary components of economic inputs – along with natural resources and capital – a compromise in the abundance of labor permeates the economy. Having never encountered a labor constraint before, it needs to be noted – old models and old policies do not apply.

Moreover, the labor quantity challenge is a macroeconomic phenomenon. It cannot be remedied with microeconomic solutions. Microeconomic attraction and retention incentives of higher wages, better benefits, early exposure, and more are, at best, short-term and limited symptom remedies.

Jobs will go unfilled. Macroeconomic solutions to the challenge include:

1. A workable immigration policy
2. Reducing barriers to employment (see [2023 Wisconsin County Profiles](#))
3. Expanding trade
4. Technology infusion

Altering a fundamental input of the macroeconomic construct will impact all sectors. The limited and shifting human resource segment will alter income streams, change demand for goods and services, and affect the provision of public goods and services.

Wisconsin's economic health and vigor has been illustrated in the employment and jobs data. However, record low unemployment rates signify two usually unassociated yet coupled performance indicators. On the one hand, low unemployment rates indicate an engaged labor force – a relatively large numerator. On the other hand, in today's environment, low unemployment rates indicate a scarce labor force – a relatively small denominator.

This is an unprecedented situation – and it is not likely to resolve itself quickly.

Yet to be explored are how the limited labor pool and aging population effects other critical economic drivers, such as personal income, as a significant portion of the population (Baby Boomers) shifts to transfer payments that are fixed in real dollar terms, housing stock, dependency ratios, and fiscal balances.

One major unknown on the horizon are the effects that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will have on the future of economic and workforce development. The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan ([dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf)) outlines some of the expected effects of AI. For example, the chart below sheds some light on the extent that occupations may be affected by AI.

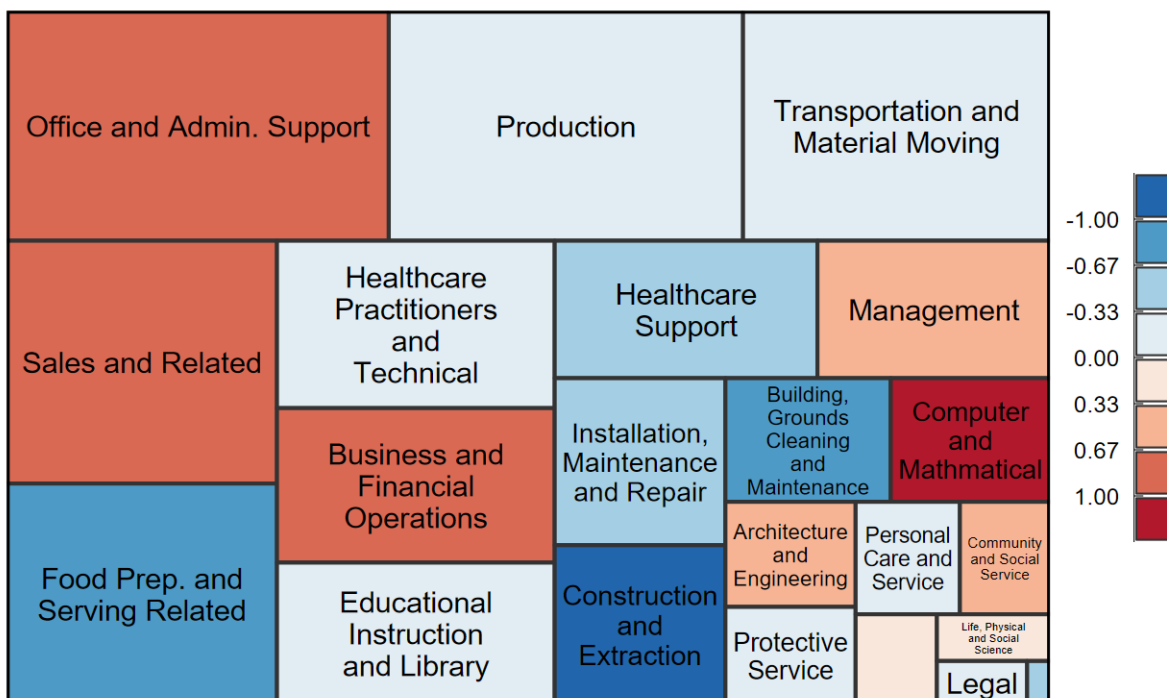


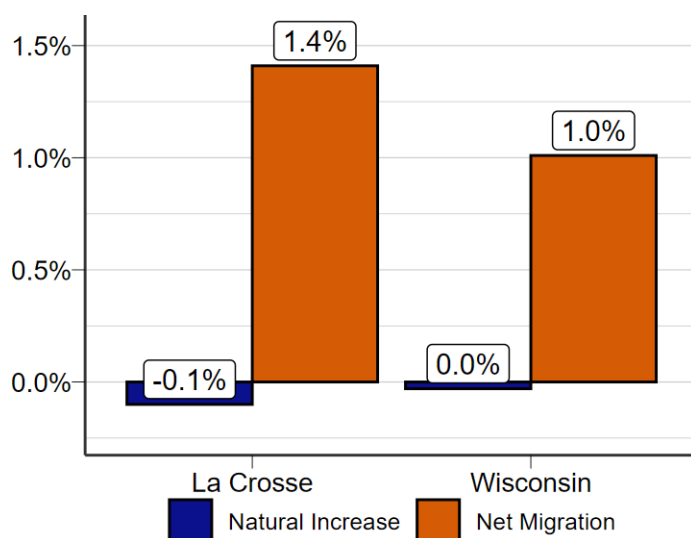
Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

Fundamental changes are in store for Wisconsin's economy due primarily to two new influencers: workforce constraints and artificial intelligence technology. The degree to how each will affect the other and the whole is yet to be determined.

## Population and Demographics

	2020 Census	2023 Final Estimate	Numeric Change	Percent Change
La Crosse, City	52,680	51,978	-702	-1.3%
Onalaska, City	18,803	19,578	775	4.1%
Holmen, Village	10,661	11,794	1,133	10.6%
Onalaska, Town	5,835	5,875	40	0.7%
West Salem, Village	5,277	5,397	120	2.3%
Shelby, Town	4,804	4,779	-25	-0.5%
Holland, Town	4,530	4,608	78	1.7%
Campbell, Town	4,284	4,232	-52	-1.2%
Hamilton, Town	2,428	2,417	-11	-0.4%
Greenfield, Town	2,187	2,179	-8	-0.4%
La Crosse, County	120,784	122,365	1,581	1.3%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

La Crosse County is the 12th most populous county in Wisconsin with 122,365 residents. It is also the state's 10th fastest-growing county. From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by 1.3%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin.



### Components of Population Change

Population change is driven by natural increase and migration. Natural population increase occurs when there are more births than deaths, while migration increases when more people move into the county than leave. Natural increase is primarily influenced by the population's age structure, while migration has a more immediate and actionable impact on the county labor force.

Figure 8: Source: WI Department of Administration.

The estimated population of the county from 2020 to 2023 is 1,581 individuals. The greatest decrease came from the county's most populous city, La Crosse, with an estimated decrease of 702. It's possible many people moved to nearby municipalities of City of Onalaska, Village of Holman, Town of Onalaska, or the Village West Salem. All four municipalities are part of the La Crosse-Onalaska metropolitan statistical area and had increases in populations from 2020 to 2023, with the Village of Holman having the largest increase of 1,136 individuals. Together, the five municipalities are estimated to account for roughly 77.3% of the county's population.

La Crosse County's population growth in terms of natural increase was -0.1%, ranking 24th in the state. Net migration was 1.4%, ranking 23rd in the state.



Net migration was positive by 1,701, a sign that individuals are choosing to move to La Crosse County. However, population change due to natural increase was negative by 120 from 2020 to 2023. While there are many factors that impact natural increase being positive or negative, having an aging population typically causes natural increase to be negative. The sum of net migration and natural increase explains the increase of 1,581 people in La Crosse County.

## Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
La Crosse	120,784	122,760	122,765	121,755	0.8%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

La Crosse County is projected to have a stable population size from 2020 to 2050, increasing marginally from 120,784 in 2020 to 121,755 in 2050. There are many factors that go into these estimates that can change quickly or over time, so it's important to emphasize these are estimates. However, based on current and expected trends in natural increase and net migration, it is likely the county will have a stable population over the next couple of decades.

## Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	68,872	-990	-1.4%	100.0%
Education and Health Services	21,325	39	0.2%	31.0%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	15,263	569	3.9%	22.2%
Manufacturing	7,942	47	0.6%	11.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	7,421	-425	-5.4%	10.8%
Professional and Business Services	5,903	390	7.1%	8.6%
Construction	2,847	259	10.0%	4.1%
Financial Activities	2,756	-1,509	-35.4%	4.0%
Other Services	2,638	24	0.9%	3.8%
Public Administration	2,082	-122	-5.5%	3.0%
Information	648	-250	-27.8%	0.9%
Natural Resources and Mining	47	-12	-20.3%	0.1%

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

La Crosse County employment lost -990 jobs (-1.4%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 68,872 jobs in 2023. From 2018 to 2023, the fastest-growing industry was construction, adding 259 jobs for a 10.0% growth rate.

Looking at the five-year numeric change, the county hasn't recovered to pre-pandemic employment numbers. Education and health services remained the largest industry, accounting for an average monthly employment of 21,325 employees in 2023, representing 31.0% of the county's industry workforce. The largest numeric decrease between 2018 and 2023 was in financial activities, showing a decrease of 1,509 jobs over the five-year period. Part of the decline in financial activities is believed to stem not from job losses but rather from a coding change that shifted some employment out of the region between 2022 and 2023. When accounting for this code change, La Crosse County has recovered to pre-pandemic employment numbers.

# Unemployment

La Crosse County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 2.6%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. This ranks the county eighth in terms of the rate of unemployment in 2023.

The average unemployment rate for La Crosse County has decreased and remained low since the pandemic. In 2020, the average unemployment was 5.6%, decreasing to 2.6% in 2023. With unemployment rates being around historical lows since the pandemic, it's common to hear the term "tight labor market," meaning there are more job openings than workers to fill the positions. While a tight labor market is usually considered good for job seekers, it can make it difficult for employers to maintain and grow their business.

## i Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate is the percentage of people who are not working but actively looking for work compared to the total number of people in the labor force.

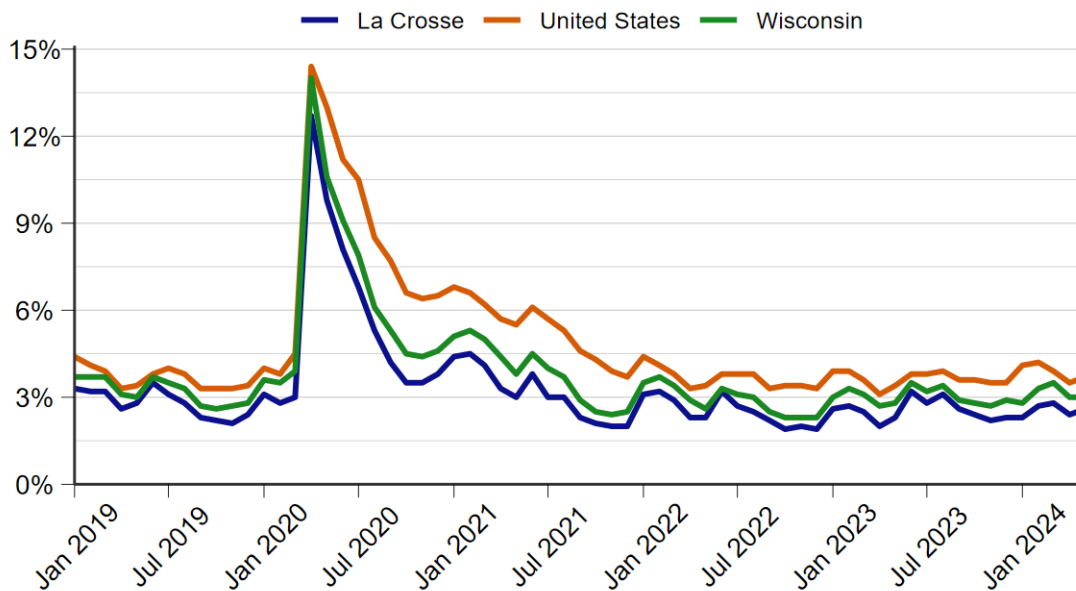


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## Labor Force Participation

La Crosse County's labor force participation rate (LFPR) has been mostly decreasing since 2017, going from a rate of 70.2% in 2016 to 66.3% in 2023. This downward trend is not unique to La Crosse County, but is a county, state, and national trend associated with an aging population no longer participating in the labor market. The older generation, known as baby boomers, are leaving the labor market for retirement in large numbers.

### Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) looks at the relative labor resources available and is expressed as the percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older that is working or actively looking for work.

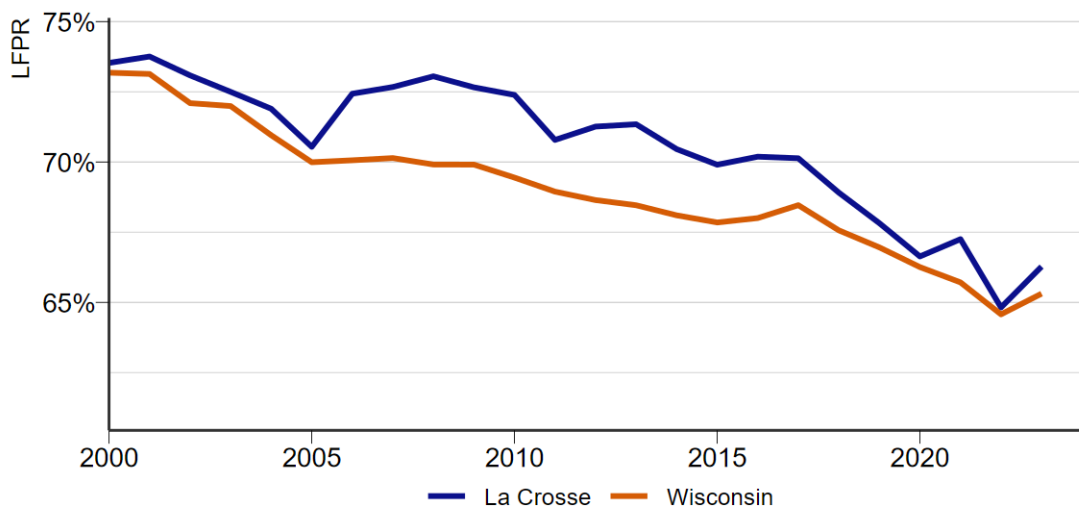


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

## AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
Cashiers	4,230	3.1%	0.89
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,230	3.1%	-0.09
Registered Nurses	3,780	2.7%	0.04
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	3,680	2.7%	-0.78
Fast Food and Counter Workers	3,220	2.3%	-1.00
Retail Salespersons	2,860	2.1%	0.40
Stockers and Order Fillers	2,560	1.9%	-0.05
Office Clerks, General	2,270	1.6%	1.00
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,150	1.6%	-1.27
Customer Service Representatives	2,010	1.5%	0.75

Source: Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence.

### AI Exposure

AI exposure, as computed by the Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence, is the median value across four different research paper's measures of exposure after normalizing each paper's measure to the same mean and variance. A positive value of AI exposure indicates placement in the top 50% of occupations for AI exposure, with higher values indicating greater exposure to AI. Conversely, negative numbers indicate exposure in the bottom 50%. For more information about AI exposure, refer to The Governor's Task Force on Workforce and Artificial Intelligence Advisory Action Plan ([dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ai-taskforce/pdf/ai-advisory-action-plan.pdf))

In the Western Workforce Development Area (WDA), which includes Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon counties, the largest occupation was cashiers, accounting for 3.1% of the area's employment. This occupation has an artificial intelligence exposure index of 0.89. For comparison, the occupation with the highest potential AI exposure is bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, with an AI exposure index of 1.89.

Manual occupations, such as laborers and janitors, tend to have lower AI exposure indexes (0.78 and -1.27, respectively). In contrast, office-based roles like office clerks and customer service representatives have higher AI exposure indexes, reflecting a greater likelihood of being impacted by AI adoption. Given the emerging nature of AI and its limited current adoption across industries, the long-term effects on occupations and the economy remain uncertain.



## Industry Employment Projections

	Industry	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Most Jobs Added	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	30,377	33,791	3,414	11.24%
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	37,865	40,773	2,908	7.68%
Highest Percent Growth	Leisure and Hospitality	12,616	14,521	1,905	15.10%
Lowest Percent Growth	Government	12,345	12,735	390	3.16%
Total	Total All Industries	159,570	173,359	13,789	8.64%

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

DWD produces employment projections for Wisconsin's 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in the Western WDA is projected to grow by 13,789 (8.6%) between 2022 and 2032, slightly outpacing the state's overall rate of 7.1%.

Industries are categorized as either goods-producing industries (e.g., manufacturing, construction, and natural resources and mining) or service-producing industries (e.g., trade, transportation, utilities, education, health services, and leisure and hospitality). Goods-producing industries are expected to see modest growth of 6.1% over the decade, while service-producing industries are projected to grow by 9.4%, reflecting demand for services.

During the pandemic, demand shifted dramatically from services to goods, contributing to rapid inflation. With the economy opening, demand for services – and the industries that provide them – is expected to grow significantly.

For more information and detailed projections results for both occupations and industries, view the WisConomy projections page ([jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections](http://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections)).

## Occupation Employment Projections

	Occupation	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Highest Percent Growth	Computer and Mathematical	2,543	2,903	360	14.2%
Lowest Percent Growth	Office and Administrative Support	17,927	18,189	262	1.5%
Highest Number Employed	Transportation and Material Moving	18,291	20,662	2,371	13.0%
Most Jobs Added	Transportation and Material Moving	18,291	20,662	2,371	13.0%
Total	Total, All	159,570	173,359	13,789	8.6%

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

In the Western WDA, employment is projected to grow by 13,789 jobs between 2022 and 2032, translating to an average annual increase of approximately 1,379 jobs in the region. However, annual growth is just one component of total yearly job openings. The other two components include labor force exits (e.g., retirements) and occupational transfers (people switching to different roles). Strategies to address job openings will vary depending on the combination of these factors for each occupation.

For example, the occupation of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers illustrates the dynamics of job openings. This role is expected to have 546 annual openings for western Wisconsin, but only 56 of these openings stem from expected employment growth. The remaining 493 openings are from estimated labor force exits or occupation transfers. Addressing these openings may require strategies beyond simply hiring new workers, such as incentivizing current workers to stay in their occupations longer.

## Aging Population

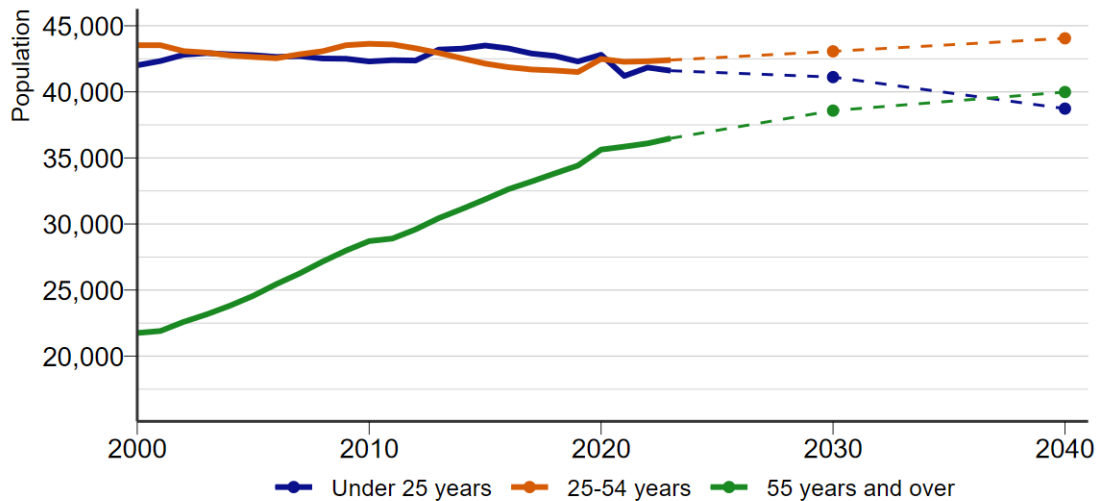


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The selected age groups, under 25, 25-54, and over 55, roughly generalize three different stages of life for the population, each having their own unique needs and impacts on society. Individuals under 25 years of age are usually going to school or exploring career options as young adults. Ages 25-54 tend to be the prime working years and when individuals start to have families, and lastly, around the ages of 55 and older is when people begin to drop out the labor force.

The share of the population age 55 and older was 30.3% in 2023, growing from 26.1% in 2013. From 2017 to 2022, the median age in La Crosse County was 36.6, compared to Wisconsin's median age of 39.9, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The chart shows individuals 55 years and over increasing significantly in La Crosse County, going from 21,754 in 2000 to 36,483 in 2023. The population groups 25-54 and under 25 years were stable to slightly decreasing over this period.

It's important to understand that the increasing population of 55 years and over is not unique to La Crosse County but is also a state and national trend. A rapidly aging population can cause shifts in the dynamics of a community impacting the labor force, increasing health care needs, and adding to the number individuals receiving transfer payments to name a few. Between the years of 2024 and 2040, the population of 55 years and over is projected to continue growing at a slowing rate for La Crosse County, reaching roughly forty thousand individuals in 2040.

## Personal Income

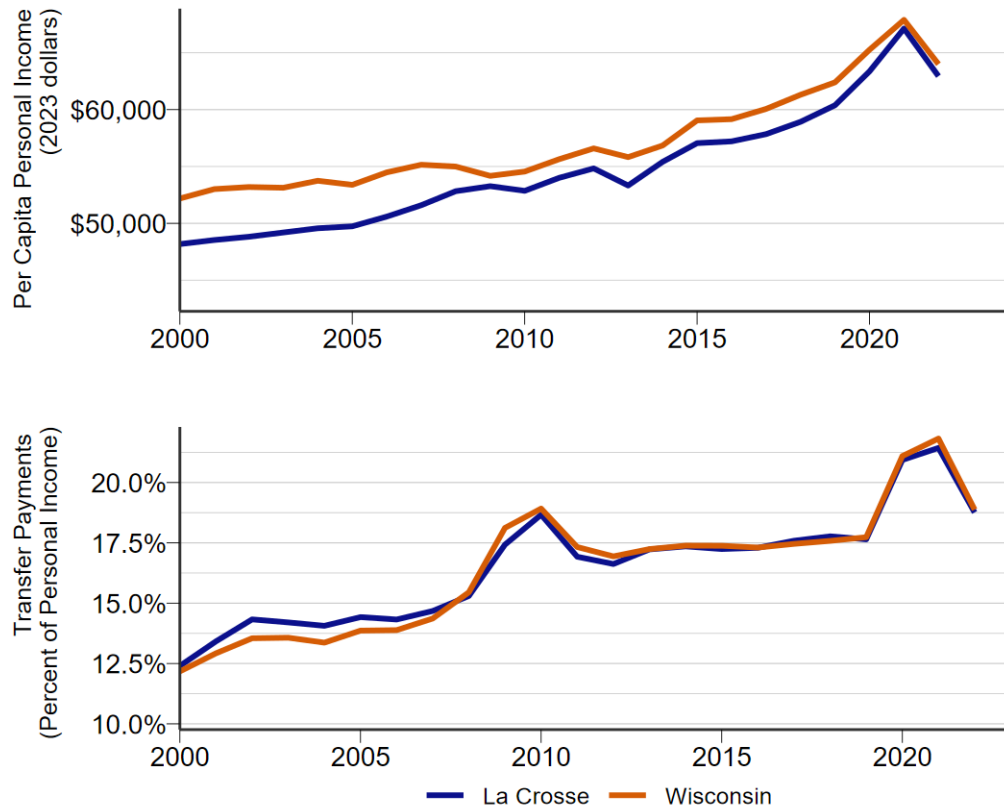


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

### **i** Personal Income

Personal income includes income from all sources, such as wages, business income, rental income, investments, and government transfer payments. It excludes capital gains or losses, whether realized or unrealized. All dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation using 2023 dollars.

The per capita personal income (PCPI) in La Crosse County was \$62,942 in 2022, compared to the statewide average of \$63,996. While these numbers are adjusted for inflation, they do not account for differences in cost of living. Counties with higher proportions of younger or older population demographics with less of the population in their prime working years naturally tend to have a lower PCPI than the state.

In total, 18.8% of that income came from transfer payments as opposed to earned income in 2022. The steady increase in transfer payments as a percentage of PCPI is likely associated with the aging population demographics of La Crosse County. As individuals age, they become eligible for Social Security payments. Increases in transfer payments can also be seen during the years of

the 2008-2009 Great Recession and the 2020 pandemic. These transfer payments were largely in the form of Unemployment Insurance and stimulus checks to help stabilize the economy during these economic downturns.



## Workforce Pipeline

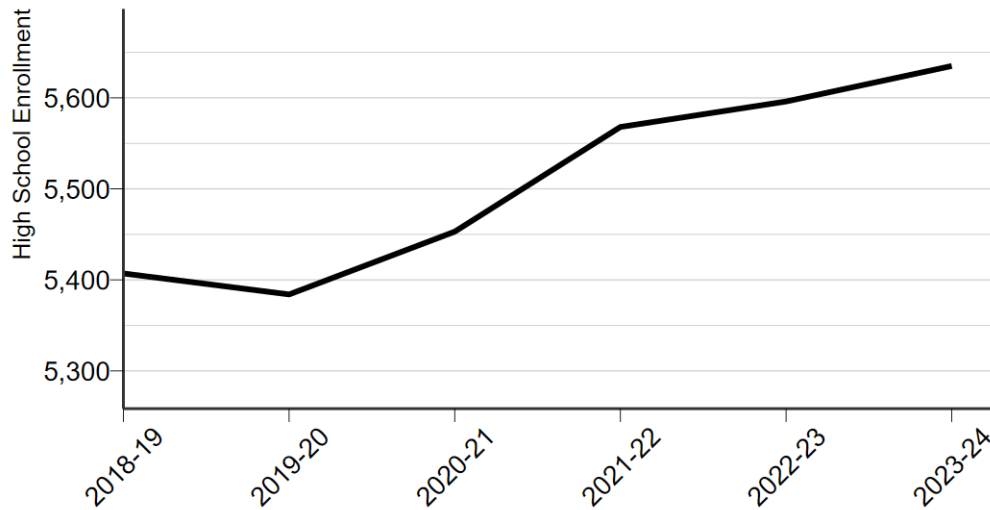


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education prepares the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 5,635 students were enrolled in grades 9-12. This includes public, private, and home-based schools. Note that school district borders can extend into multiple counties, meaning that county-level counts may not necessarily represent the precise enrollment within county borders. Counts are determined by the reported enrollment of school district whose main office is located in the county.

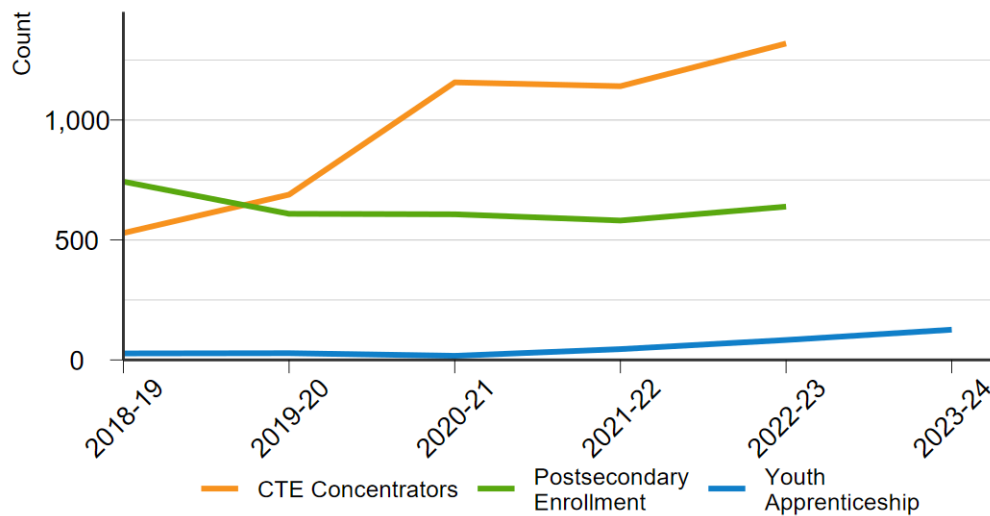


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

## Career and Technical Education

Of those attendees in grades 11 and 12, 47.4% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. The career pathway in marketing, sales, and service had the largest number of students with 173. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics was a close second with 164 concentrators.

### i Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education (CTE) equips students for both the workforce and postsecondary education through work-based learning opportunities. CTE concentrators are 11th and 12th graders who have passed at least two CTE courses within a specific career pathway. Home-based students are not included in this data.

	CTE Concentrator	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
La Crosse	1,319	47.4%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

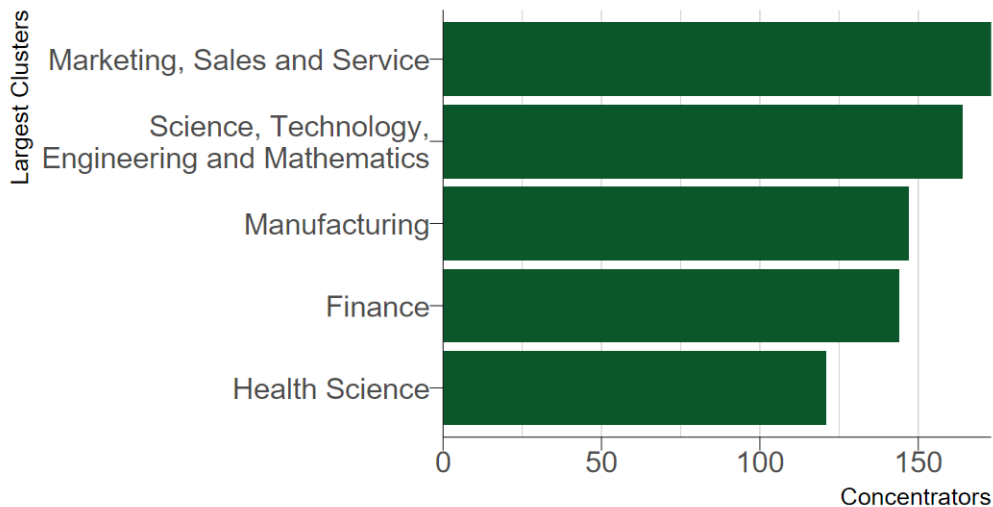


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## Postsecondary Enrollment

The percentage of high school completers who went on to enroll in a postsecondary institution as a percentage of all 12th grade students in 2022-23 was 45.6%. In Wisconsin, it was 43.6%.

### i Postsecondary Enrollment

Postsecondary enrollment tracks the percentage of high school graduates who attend a postsecondary school (public or private colleges, two- or four-year universities, technical colleges, or training programs) in the fall immediately following graduation. It is important to note that this data may slightly underrepresent actual enrollment

due to limitations in how information is matched within the National Student Clearinghouse.

	Postsecondary Enrollment	Percent of Grade 12
La Crosse	639	45.6%
Wisconsin	31,893	43.6%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## Youth Apprenticeship

Youth apprenticeship prepares participants for the workforce through direct, hands-on work experience. There were 83 youth apprentices in La Crosse County in the 2022-23 school year.

### Youth Apprenticeship

Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program is a school-supervised program that combines work and classroom learning to help high school students prepare for a career. Participants receive on-the-job training directly from the employer. The program helps students explore career paths and helps employers develop a qualified workforce.

	Youth Apprenticeship Participants	Percent of Grade 11 and 12
La Crosse	83	3.0%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.