

# Pierce County

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## 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 reconstructed 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.

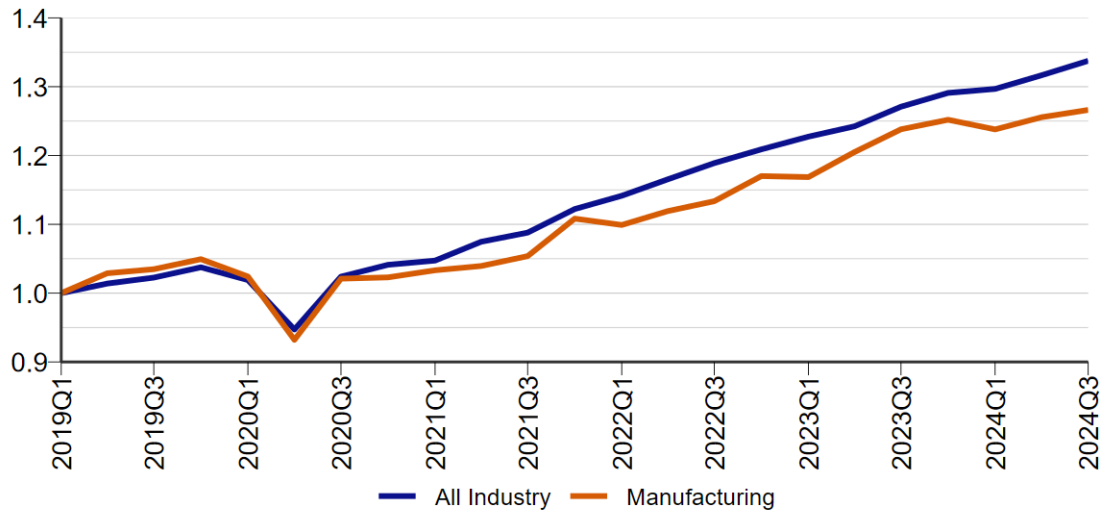


Figure 2: GDP growth index (2019Q1 = 100).

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.

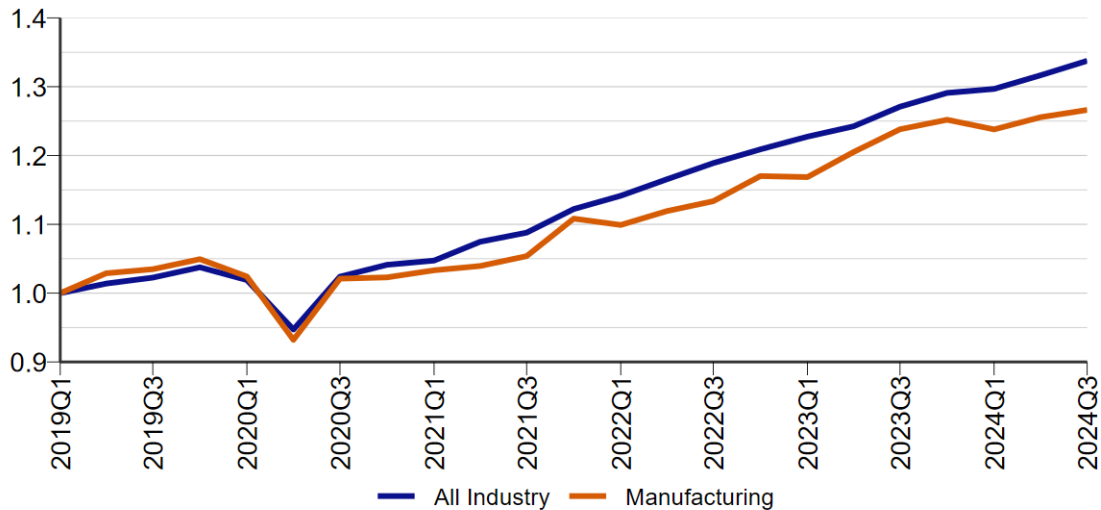


Figure 3: Wisconsin all industry v manufacturing growth (2019Q1 = 100).

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.



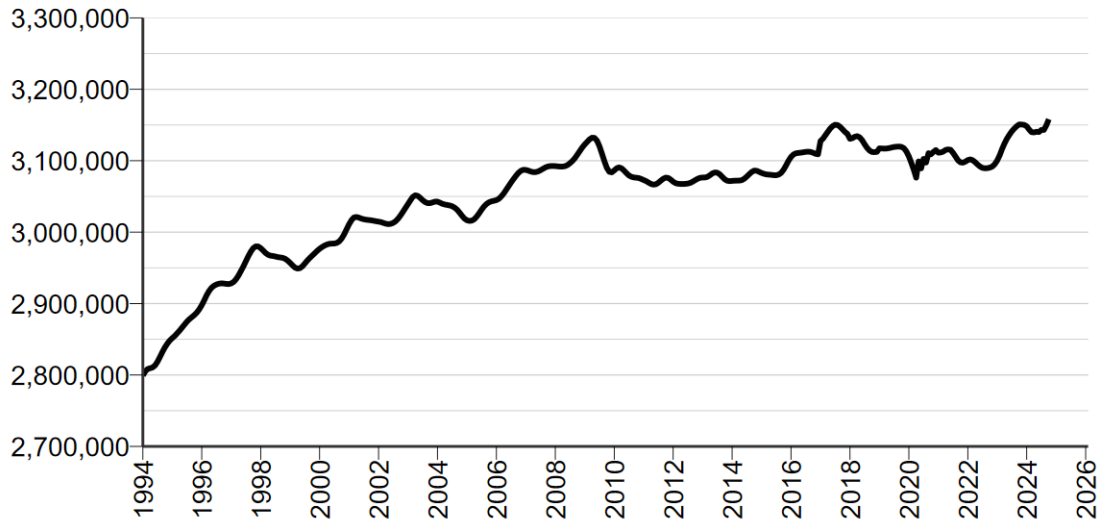


Figure 4: Wisconsin labor force.

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.

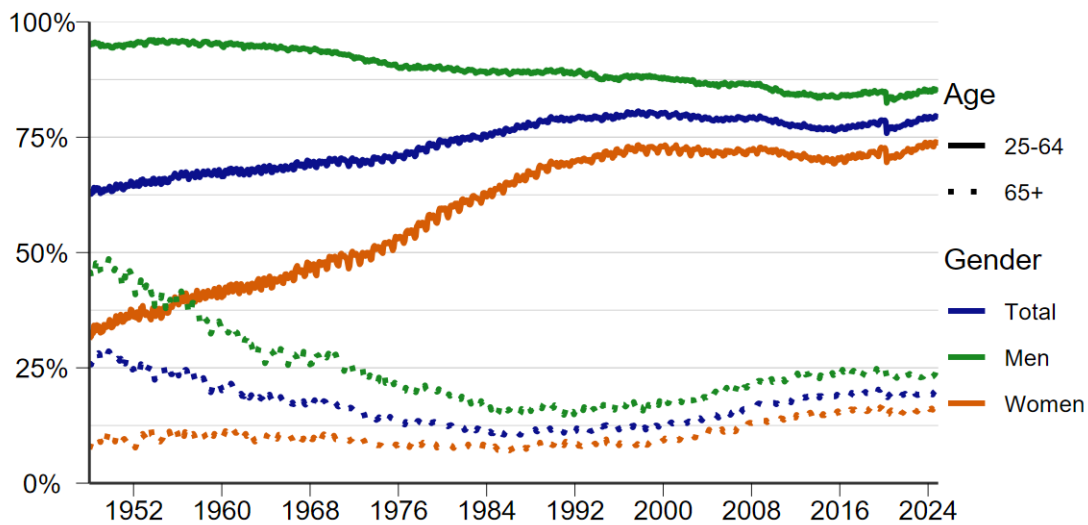


Figure 5: US labor force participation rate.

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.

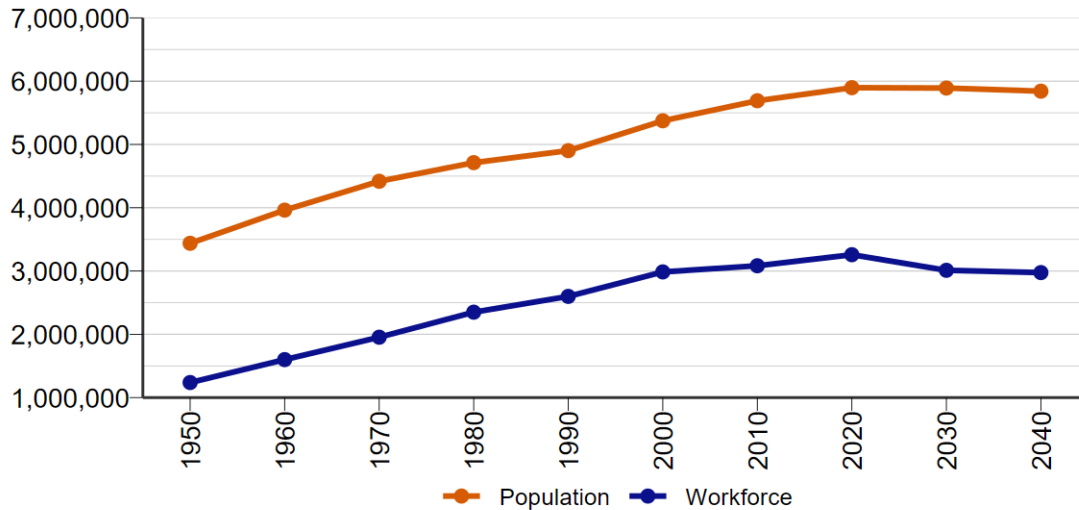


Figure 6: Wisconsin population and workforce projections.

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.

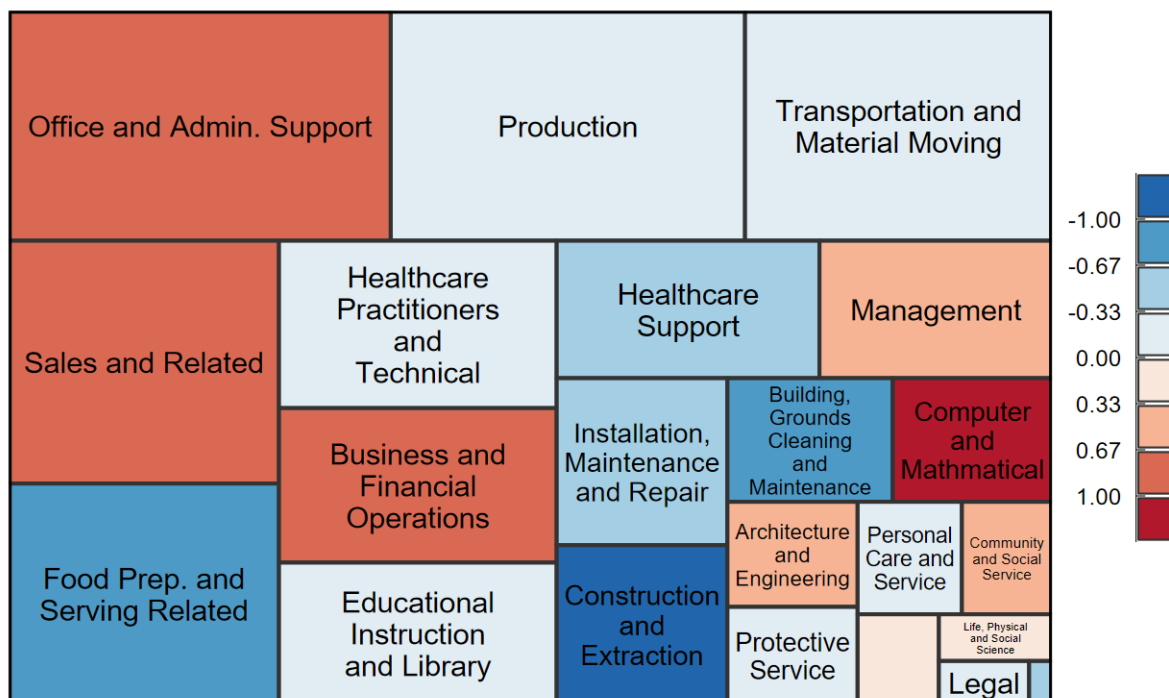


Figure 7: AI exposure per occupation group by number employed.

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
River Falls, City	12,546	12,379	-167	-1.3%
Prescott, City	4,333	4,454	121	2.8%
Ellsworth, Village	3,348	3,317	-31	-0.9%
Oak Grove, Town	2,361	2,461	100	4.2%
Clifton, Town	2,177	2,245	68	3.1%
River Falls, Town	2,215	2,214	-1	0.0%
Trenton, Town	1,911	1,911	0	0.0%
Trimbelle, Town	1,679	1,680	1	0.1%
Spring Valley, Village	1,390	1,407	17	1.2%
Martell, Town	1,147	1,163	16	1.4%
Pierce, County	42,212	42,342	130	0.3%
Wisconsin, State	5,893,718	5,951,400	57,682	1.0%

Pierce County is the 35th most populous county with 42,342 residents. The ten most populous municipalities make up 78.4% of the county's population. Pierce County is part of the Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, MN-WI Metropolitan Statistical Area. More than one-third of employed residents work in neighboring Minnesota.

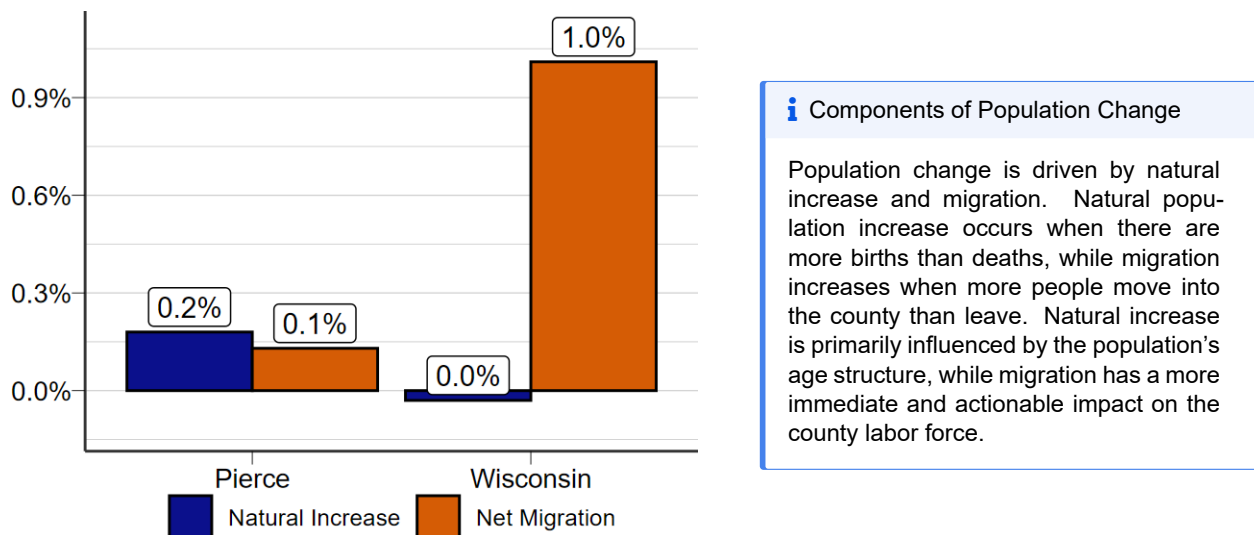


Figure 8: Source: WI Department of Administration.

From 2020 to 2023, the population changed by 0.3%, compared to the 1.0% change in Wisconsin. Pierce County had a much lower rate of net migration when compared to the state. Unlike the state, the county recorded more births than deaths. The median age of the County is 37.7, which is 2.2 years younger than the median age of the state. The positive natural increase is reflective of the relatively younger population. Fertility rates, measured as births per 1,000 women between 15 and 50 years old, are actually lower in the county than the state (43 vs 50).

Going forward, state and county population are both projected to decline. The county is projected to decline at a faster rate than the state. This is a concerning outlook, but it is important to remember



that projections are not set in stone. The outlook will change if the actual components of change are different than the underlying rates in the projections. Fertility rates have declined over time with the county's fertility rate, measured as births per 1,000 women between 15 and 50 years old, dropping over the past decade. There would be a positive impact on population growth if fertility rates increase.

Net migration can also improve through continued efforts to retain current residents and to attract new people to the county. This could include increasing the number of family supporting job opportunities, and generally making the county a more desirable place to live.

While net migration is typically viewed in the short-term, it can also help lead to more sustainable population growth. Long-term natural population could increase if net migration improves among younger residents.

## Population Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050	2020-2050 Population Change
Pierce	42,212	41,375	39,500	36,770	-12.9%
Wisconsin	5,893,718	5,890,915	5,841,620	5,710,120	-3.1%

Source: Demographic Services Center, Wisconsin Department of Administration.

## Employment by Industry

	2023 Avg Monthly Employment	5-year Change	5-year % Change	% of Total Employment
Total, All Industries	10,538	167	1.6%	100.0%
Education and Health Services	3,084	29	0.9%	29.3%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	1,930	96	5.2%	18.3%
Manufacturing	1,825	121	7.1%	17.3%
Leisure and Hospitality	1,391	29	2.1%	13.2%
Public Administration	667	11	1.7%	6.3%
Construction	453	-50	-9.9%	4.3%
Professional and Business Services	427	45	11.8%	4.1%
Natural Resources and Mining	306	-90	-22.7%	2.9%
Financial Activities	265	-9	-3.3%	2.5%
Other Services	151	-23	-13.2%	1.4%
Information	40	9	29.0%	0.4%

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

Pierce County employment added 167 jobs (1.6%) from 2018 to 2023. Average employment levels were at 10,538 jobs in 2023. Important context to the 5-year change is that employment experienced an unprecedented dip in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent public health response. Employment bottomed out at 9,927 before steadily rebounding.

The three largest industries in the county make 64.9% of total employment in Pierce County. About two-thirds of employment in education and health services is in education, due to the presence of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Trade, transportation, and utilities highlights the county's location along I-94, an ideal location for distribution along a route that ultimately connects Minneapolis with Chicago, and other nearby metro areas. Manufacturing had the largest numeric gains among all industries in the county, adding 121 jobs. Machinery manufacturing stands out for strong growth among industry subsectors. Employment nearly doubled growing from 74 to 143.

# Unemployment

Pierce County's monthly average unemployment rate in 2023 was 3.5%, compared to the state's rate of 3.0%. Rates for both the county and the state are historically low and indicative of a tight labor market. Simply put, employers are having difficulty finding workers. There are some signs that the difficulty has eased more recently. However, the demographic challenges of an aging population that are driving the tight labor markets are not going away.

## 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.

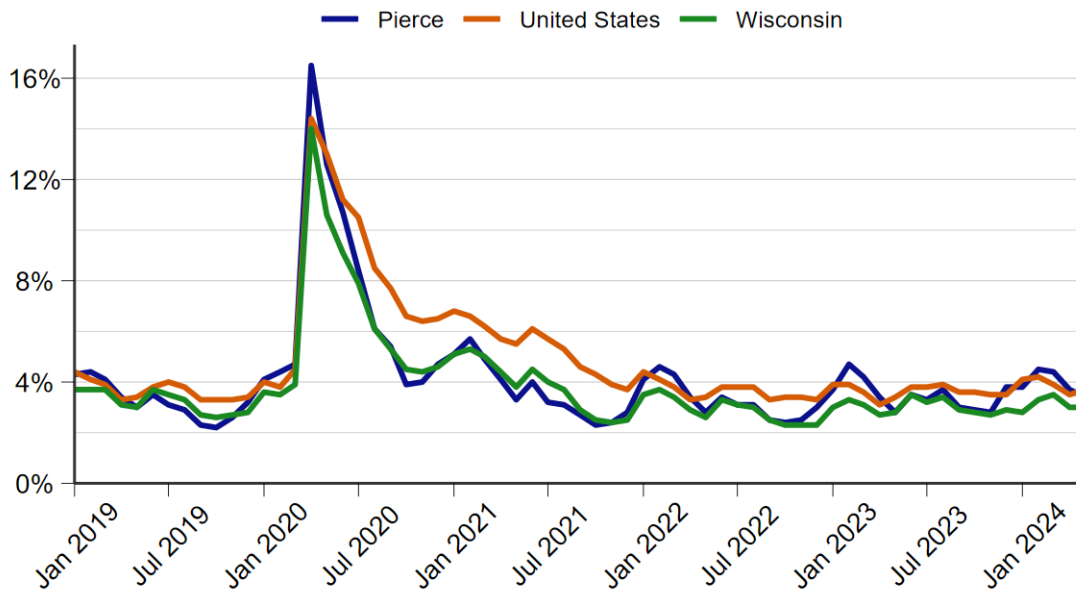


Figure 9: Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## Labor Force Participation

The long-term impact of the aging population is also seen in the declining labor force participation rate (LFPR). LFPR by age group has remained relatively steady over time. However, the population is getting progressively older. Therefore, the overall LFPR is declining as more and more residents enjoy their well-deserved retirements. While Pierce County's 2023 LFPR of 71.4% ranked third highest in the state, it was nearly 80% in the mid-1990s when baby boomers were in their prime working years. There are two general strategies that can help alleviate the challenges of declining labor force: 1) increase migration and, 2) more fully using the existing population, which largely boils down to addressing workforce barriers.

### 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.

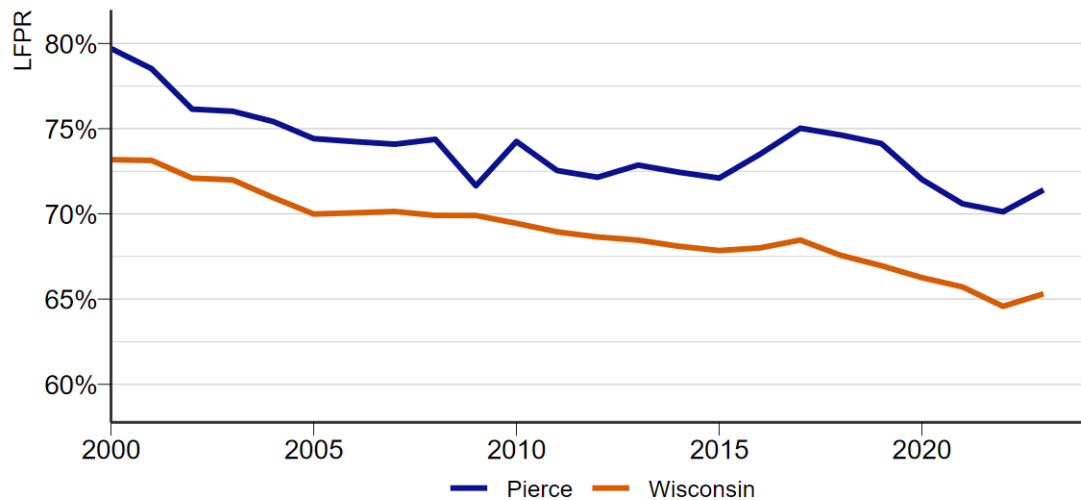


Figure 10: Source: WI Department of Workforce Development Office of Economic Advisors.

## AI Impact

Occupation	Employment	% of Total Employment	AI Exposure Index
Cashiers	6,300	3.2%	0.89
Fast Food and Counter Workers	5,290	2.7%	-1.00
Retail Salespersons	4,930	2.5%	0.40
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	4,640	2.3%	-0.78
Registered Nurses	4,310	2.2%	0.04
Stockers and Order Fillers	4,050	2.0%	-0.05
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,030	2.0%	-0.09
Customer Service Representatives	3,340	1.7%	0.75
Office Clerks, General	3,270	1.6%	1.00
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	2,630	1.3%	-1.27

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 West Central Workforce Development Area (WDA), which includes Barron, Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties, the largest occupation is cashiers, accounting for 3.2% 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 cashiers 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
Highest Percent Growth	Construction	8,800	10,035	1,235	14.03%
Lowest Percent Growth	Information	1,208	1,075	-133	-11.01%
Highest Number Employed	Education and Health Services	48,084	52,353	4,269	8.88%
Most Jobs Added	Education and Health Services	48,084	52,353	4,269	8.88%
Total	Total All Industries	221,430	242,223	20,793	9.39%

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 West Central WDA is projected to grow by 20,793 (9.4%) between 2022 and 2032, slightly outpacing the state's overall rate of 7.1%.

Industries are categorized as either goods-producing industries (for example, manufacturing, construction, and natural resources and mining) or service-producing industries (trade, transportation, utilities, education, health services, and leisure and hospitality). Goods-producing industries are expected to see growth of 8.3% over the decade, while service-producing industries are projected to grow by 9.5%, 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](https://jobcenterofwisconsin.com/wisconomy/pub/projections)).

## Occupation Employment Projections

	Occupation	2022 Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Employment Change 2022-2032	% Change 2022-2032
Lowest Percent Growth	Protective Service	3,352	3,381	29	0.9%
Highest Percent Growth	Personal Care and Service	5,561	6,447	886	15.9%
Highest Number Employed	Production	25,871	27,394	1,523	5.9%
Most Jobs Added	Transportation and Material Moving	21,814	24,472	2,658	12.2%
Total	Total, All	221,430	242,223	20,793	9.4%

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

In the West Central WDA, employment is projected to grow by 20,793 jobs between 2022 and 2032, translating to an average annual increase of approximately 2,079 jobs in the region. However, annual growth is just one component of total yearly job openings. The other two components include labor force exits (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 computer numerically controlled tool operators occupation illustrates the dynamics of job openings. Total employment in this role is expected to decline by 1.6% for west central Wisconsin, but there are 96 projected annual openings. The openings will stem from 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

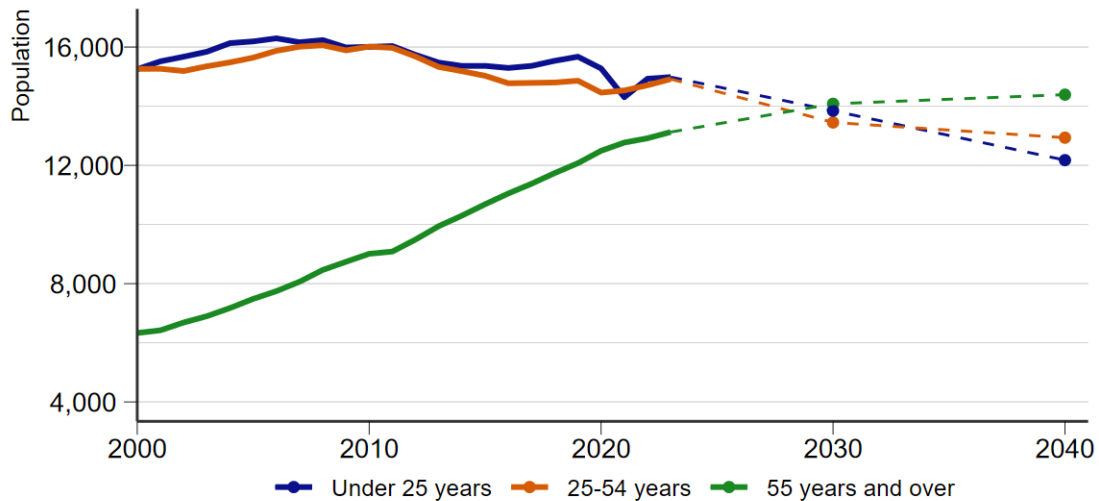


Figure 11: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program and  
WI Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center.

The selected age groups, under 25, 25-54, and over 55, represent three broad life stages, each with unique needs and impacts in society. Individuals under 25 are typically pursuing education or exploring early career options. The 25-54 age group represent the prime working years, often associated with career advancement and family formation. Those aged 55 and older are more likely to be transitioning out of the workforce and into retirement.

In 2023, individuals aged 55 and older comprised 30.5% of Pierce County's population, up from 17.2% in 2000. This trend is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. This aging trend is not unique to Pierce County but reflects broader state and national patterns. A rapidly aging population impacts communities by reducing the labor force, increasing demand for health care, and raising the number individuals relying on transfer payments. These demographic shifts present challenges and opportunities for policy and workforce planning.

## Personal Income

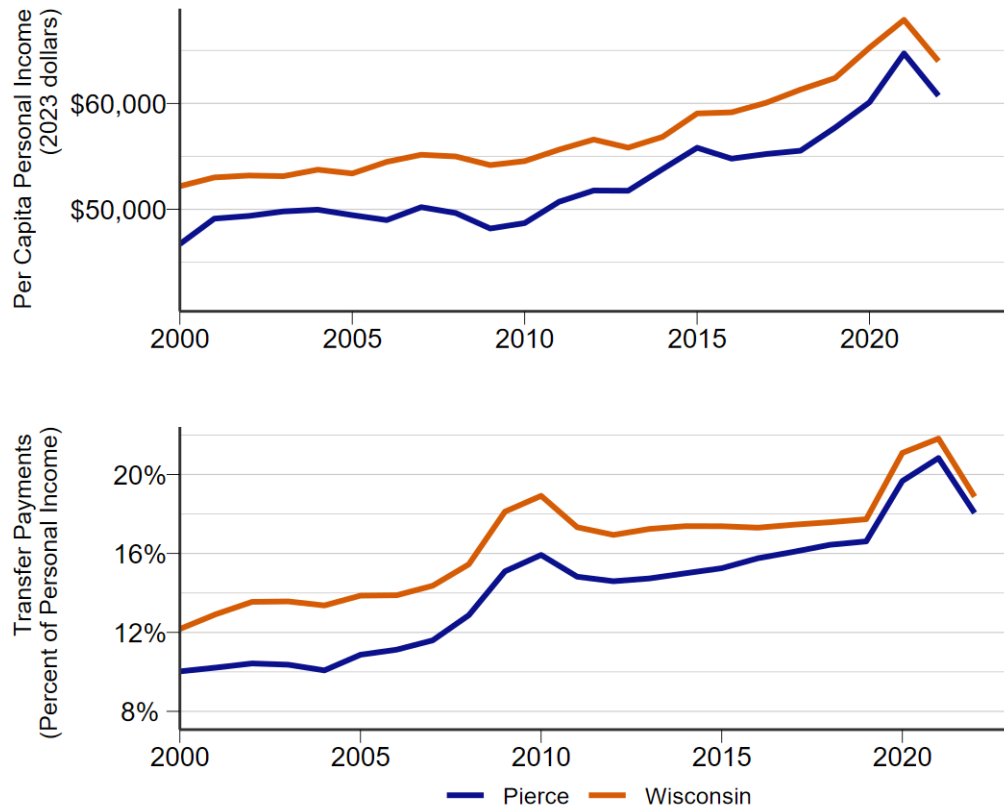


Figure 12: Source: United States Bureau of Economic Analysis.

### **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 in Pierce County was \$60,729 in 2022. This is below the statewide average of \$63,996 but above to the median among Wisconsin's 72 counties (\$56,656). While these figures are adjusted for inflation, they do not account for differences in cost of living across regions.

In 2022, 18.1% of PCPI came from transfer payments rather than earned income. This share is an increase from 10.0% in 2000. The steady increase in the share of transfer payments is likely closely tied to the county's aging population. As residents age, many become eligible for Social Security benefits, which contribute significantly to transfer payments.

## Workforce Pipeline

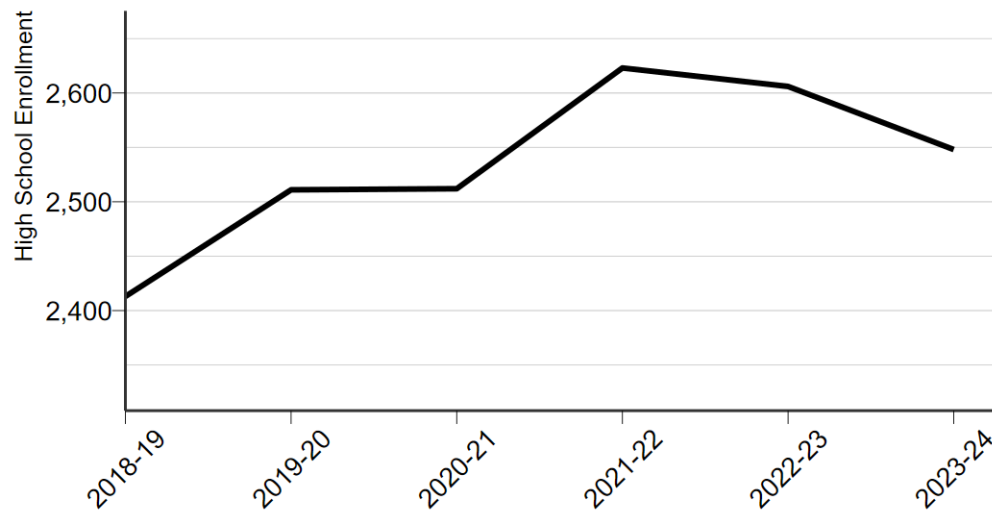


Figure 13: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Education plays a vital role in preparing the next generation of the labor force. As of the 2023-24 school year, 2,548 students were enrolled in grades 9-12 across public, private, and home-based schools. County-level totals are determined by the reported enrollment of school district whose main office is located in that county. As school district borders do not necessarily align with county borders, the numbers below may not match the total number of students residing in the county.

As Pierce County's population continues to decline and age, high school enrollment has followed a similar downward trend over recent years. With a shrinking workforce, the quality of education and training becomes increasingly critical to meet the county's economic needs and ensure a skilled labor force.



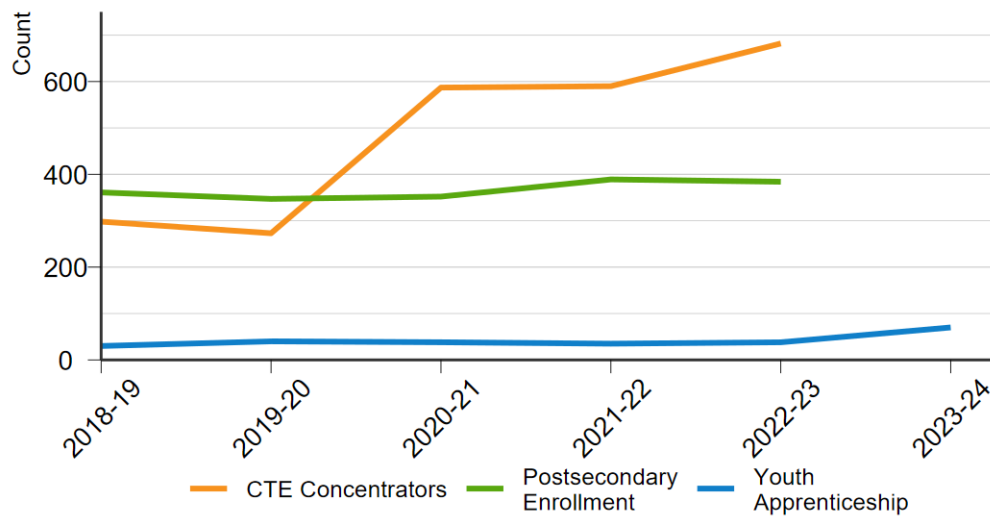


Figure 14: Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and Department of Workforce Development.

## Career and Technical Education

Of those attendees, 53.5% were concentrators in career and technical education (CTE), compared to 44.3% for the state during the 2022-23 school year. The largest career cluster – business, management, and administration – is apt given that management occupations are projected to add the most jobs in the Western WDA from 2022 to 2032.

Among students in grades 11-12, 53.5% were enrolled as concentrators in career and technical education (CTE) during the 2022-23 school year, compared to 44.3% statewide.

### **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
Pierce	682	53.5%
Wisconsin	64,124	44.3%

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

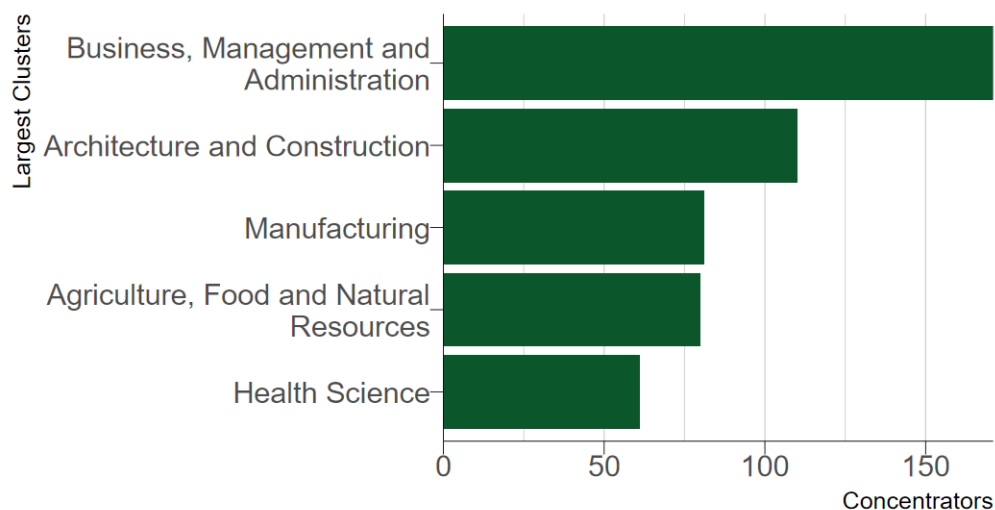


Figure 15: School year 2022-23. Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

## Postsecondary Enrollment

In the 2022-23 school year, 57.9% of high school graduates in Pierce County enrolled in a postsecondary school, compared to 43.6% statewide. This includes enrollment in public and private colleges, universities, and technical schools.

### 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
Pierce	384	57.9%
Wisconsin	31,893	43.6%

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

## Youth Apprenticeship

Youth apprenticeship programs provides students with hands-on experience to prepare them for the workforce. In the 2022-23 school year, 38 students in Pierce County participated in youth apprenticeship opportunities, gaining valuable skills and practical training.

### 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
Pierce	38	3.0%
Wisconsin	8,222	5.7%

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