

La Crosse, Wis., Achieves HEARTSafe Community Designation

A collaborative effort helped the community meet criteria that improves sudden cardiac arrest outcomes

Through continued efforts to improve survival from sudden cardiac arrest, the city of La Crosse, Wis., has earned its HEARTSAFE Community designation from the Citizen CPR Foundation.

La Crosse joins two other cities — Richland, Wash. and West Point, N.Y. — in achieving HEARTSafe Community designation. The Citizen CPR Foundation HEARTSafe Community Program Chair, Josh Smith, says the work to meet qualifying criteria exemplified collaboration at all levels across the city.

“To sustain these efforts, it takes engagement at all levels of local government, leadership and community, as well as a focused effort by representatives throughout the entire chain of survival,” he says.

HEARTSafe Community is a national preparedness program, initiated by Citizen CPR Foundation, that helps communities develop plans to more effectively prepare for and treat those who experience sudden cardiac arrest. Cardiac arrest is an abrupt loss of heart function in a person who may or may not have been diagnosed with heart disease. It can come on suddenly, or in the wake of other symptoms, and is often fatal if appropriate steps aren’t immediately taken.

In order to become HEARTSafe, the community must fulfill 13 criteria:

- Establish a lead organization to guide and coordinate local efforts;
- Have a plan for the collection and analysis of cardiac arrest data;
- Train 15% of the community population on a yearly basis;
- Recognize rescuers for their lifesaving efforts;
- Develop and implement strategies to improve public awareness and bystander intervention;
- Establish or advocate for the provision of CPR instructions to 911 callers by trained dispatchers;
- Have effective emergency action plans for schools and municipal buildings;
- Permanently place automated external defibrillators (AEDs) that can be easily and reliably accessed;
- Participate in an AED registry that has been mapped and integrated with the area 911 system;
- First Responder agencies are defibrillation capable and have supporting protocols, training and medical oversight;
- EMS providers trained in “high-performance” CPR and supported by protocols, technology and equipment;

- Quality improvement processes for cardiac arrest data review and sharing of results with the public:
- Established secondary public health measures supporting cardiovascular wellness

Jim Hillcoat, Captain and EMS Coordinator, La Crosse Fire Department, says that once the La Crosse program committee began reviewing the HEARTSafe criteria, they were energized by the progress they didn't realize they had made.

"I picked up involvement from Pat Corran, previously our community risk educator," Hillcoat says. "When we started reviewing the criteria, we realized we were more than halfway there, and that's what piqued Pat's interest. We have a good EMS system, pre-hospital system, the Seven Rivers Cardiac Arrest Preparedness Group and two major medical facilities, Gundersen Health System and Mayo Clinic Health System."

Although La Crosse had already made significant progress toward HEARTSafe designation, Smith says the remaining process required involvement across all interested parties.

"Adding the City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, to the list of HEARTSafe communities is proof that although the process of designation is difficult, when the organization, city and community come together, the result is a resilient emergency response system that is aware, equipped and ready to not only save lives, but also enhance the quality of life for all who live, play and visit La Crosse," he says. "On behalf of the program advisory committee, congratulations to the entire La Crosse community."

Citizen CPR Foundation leadership echoed Smith's congratulations.

"We are proud of the work being done to improve recognition, response, care and outcomes in La Crosse," says Stuart Berger, MD, President of the Citizen CPR Foundation Board and Division Head of Cardiology at the Children's Hospital of Chicago. "This is an excellent example of how communities can leverage resources to save hearts too young to die and we commend all those who have worked to achieve this designation."

For Hillcoat, achieving HEARTSafe Community designation signals just how much the community of La Crosse prioritizes the health of residents and visitors.

"You just don't achieve this designation if there isn't a commitment to health, wellness and safety in your community," he says. "As a result of the HEARTSafe Community program, Citizen CPR Foundation has given us the tools to continue to evaluate and also move our cardiac arrest response forward."

For more information about how to champion HEARTSafe Community designation efforts in your own community, please visit www.CitizenCPR.org.

About the Citizen CPR Foundation

The mission of the Citizen CPR Foundation is to save lives from sudden cardiac arrest by stimulating effective community, professional and citizen action. This mission is put into action through three core values: We know that CPR and AED use saves lives. Collaboration among citizens, professionals, communities, and organizations is key to survival from cardiac arrest. Action based on best practices in science, education, and implementation improves outcomes. www.citizencpr.org

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