**Fiscal Facts: In Jefferson County, a look at how service sharing might help communities**

*By Wisconsin Policy Forum*

As many local officials across Wisconsin face tight 2021 budgets in the wake of COVID-19, consolidation or enhanced service sharing with neighboring municipalities may offer an opportunity to spread the cost of certain services across multiple jurisdictions, while increasing efficiency and improving service levels in the long term.

The latest Wisconsin example may be found in Jefferson County, between Madison and Milwaukee, which launched a study with the Wisconsin Policy Forum this year to examine the region’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and possible options to enhance regional collaboration and service levels.

For the most part, EMS providers in Jefferson County operate independently and without county-wide consistency, employing staffing and operational models that meet their perceived needs and objectives. However, they are experiencing particular strain in light of growing calls for service; consistency of service and response times across communities; technological advances that may require increased investment; and the difficulty of attracting and retaining highly-trained personnel.

These issues, while not severe at this time, are likely to intensify, the report notes. Between 2016 and 2019, most EMS providers in the study experienced call volume increases of more than 10%, and projections of continued population growth and an aging population in Jefferson County suggest this trend will continue. Enhanced service sharing and collaboration among the county’s EMS agencies might allow them to confront their mutual challenges more effectively and perhaps at lower cost than efforts to do so alone.

Like Jefferson County, communities across Wisconsin could initiate cooperation across a host of services with smaller-scale activities, such as joint training, that could be enacted easily on a consensus basis. More comprehensive strategies range from formal regional service-sharing agreements among individual municipalities to full consolidation at the county level. None of these approaches are mutually exclusive and could be pursued in stages designed to create a stronger framework for future implementation of more in-depth joint initiatives.

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