

A photograph of a rural street with various signs and utility poles under a clear blue sky. The street is paved and has yellow double lines down the center. On the left side, there are several signs for businesses like 'PAUL'S SHEET METAL', 'TIRE AUTO REPAIR', 'UNIROYAL', and 'CAR WASH'. On the right side, there is a sign for '48' and a chain-link fence. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

Ethics & Boundaries for Rural Practice

**Kate Ann Kipp, MSSW, APSW
Northwood Technical College
January 26, 2024**

Welcome!

I am glad you're here!



Workshop Agenda

- NASW Code of Ethics 101
- What does it mean to be rural?
- Privacy & Confidentiality
 - Confidentiality and Informed Consent
 - Telehealth
- Resources
 - Distributive justice
- Boundaries & Dual Relationships
 - Types of boundaries and dual relationships
 - Guidelines, Considerations, and Strategies to Setting Healthy Boundaries
- Case Study & Reamer's Ethical Decision-Making Model
- Wrap Up

Introductions

- Let's go around Zoom and share:
 - Your name
 - The one thing that motivates you to do something you're dreading...

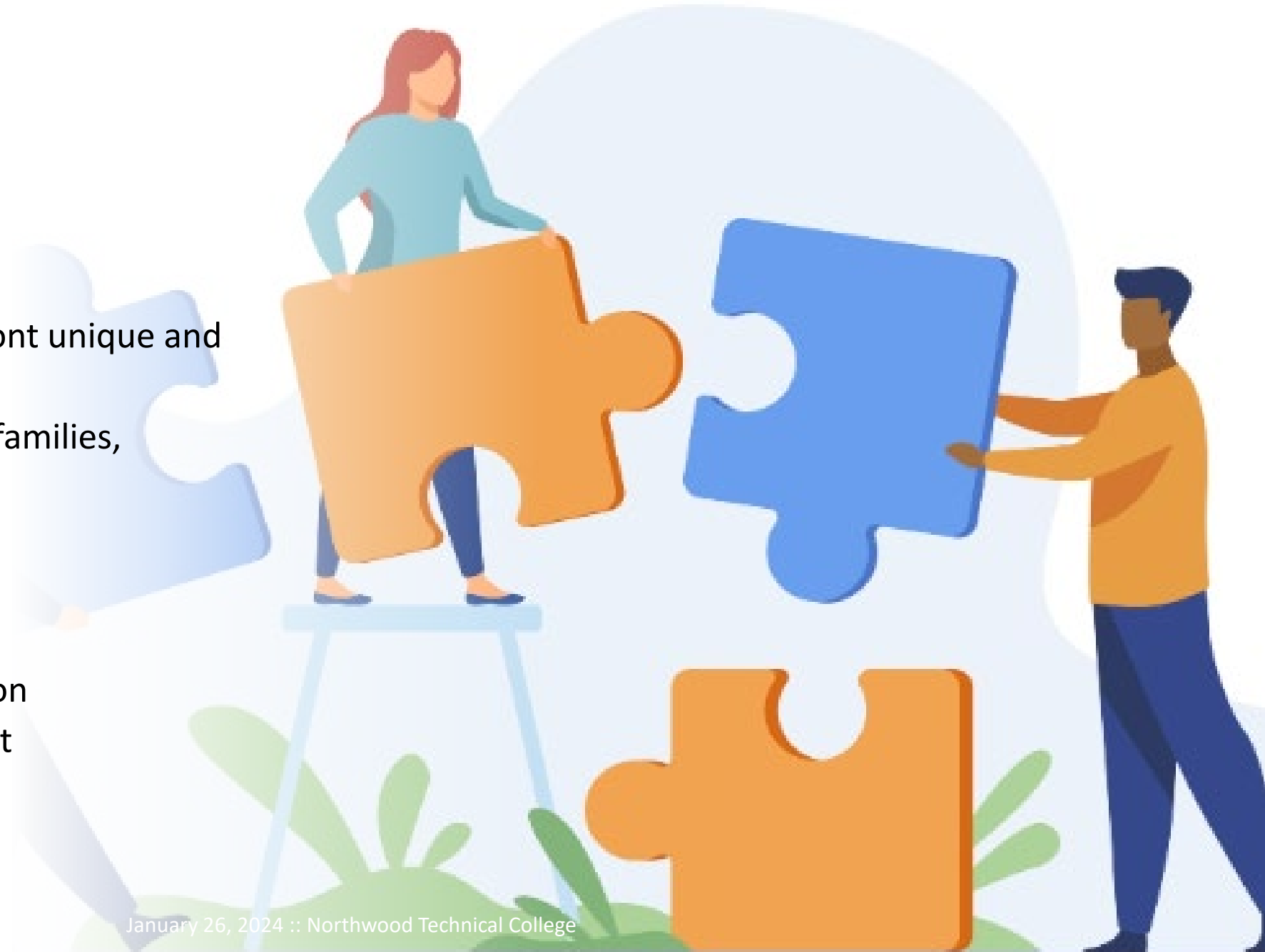
Why ethics & boundaries?

- Ethical Dilemma
 - Dilemma : two horns
 - Equal in size, equal in complexity
- Lifelong learning
- Licensure
- Consultation
- Self assessment



Why is Ethical Practice Important?

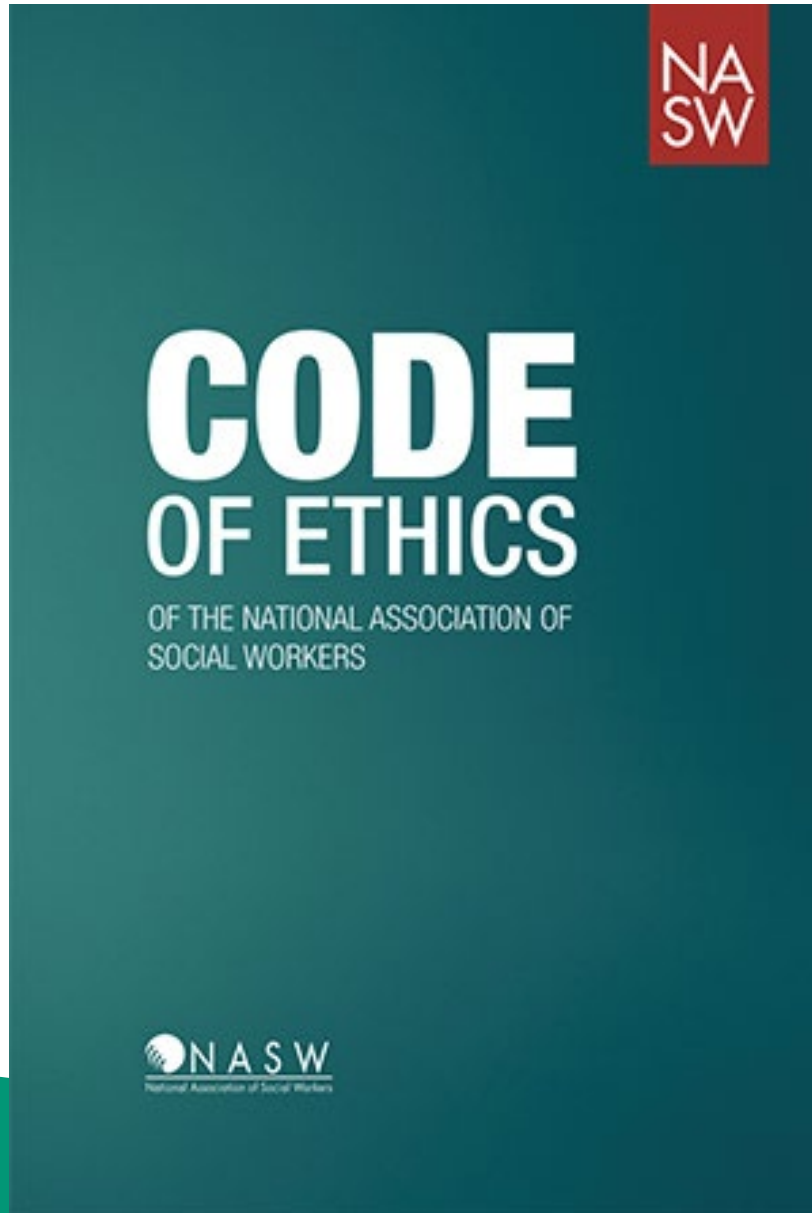
- Helping professionals confront unique and difficult problems.
- Obligations to clients, their families, communities, society
- Issues:
 - Confidentiality
 - Informed Consent
 - Client Self-Determination
 - Responsibility to Protect
 - Value Differences



“The NASW Code of Ethics offers a set of values, principles and standards to guide decision-making and everyday professional conduct of social workers. It is relevant to all social workers and social work students regardless of their specific functions or settings.”

Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics>

NASW Code of Ethics



NASW Code of Ethics

- Identify professional core values
- Summarize ethical principles and standards to guide practice
- Assess ethical/unethical conduct
- Inform the general public for professional accountability.

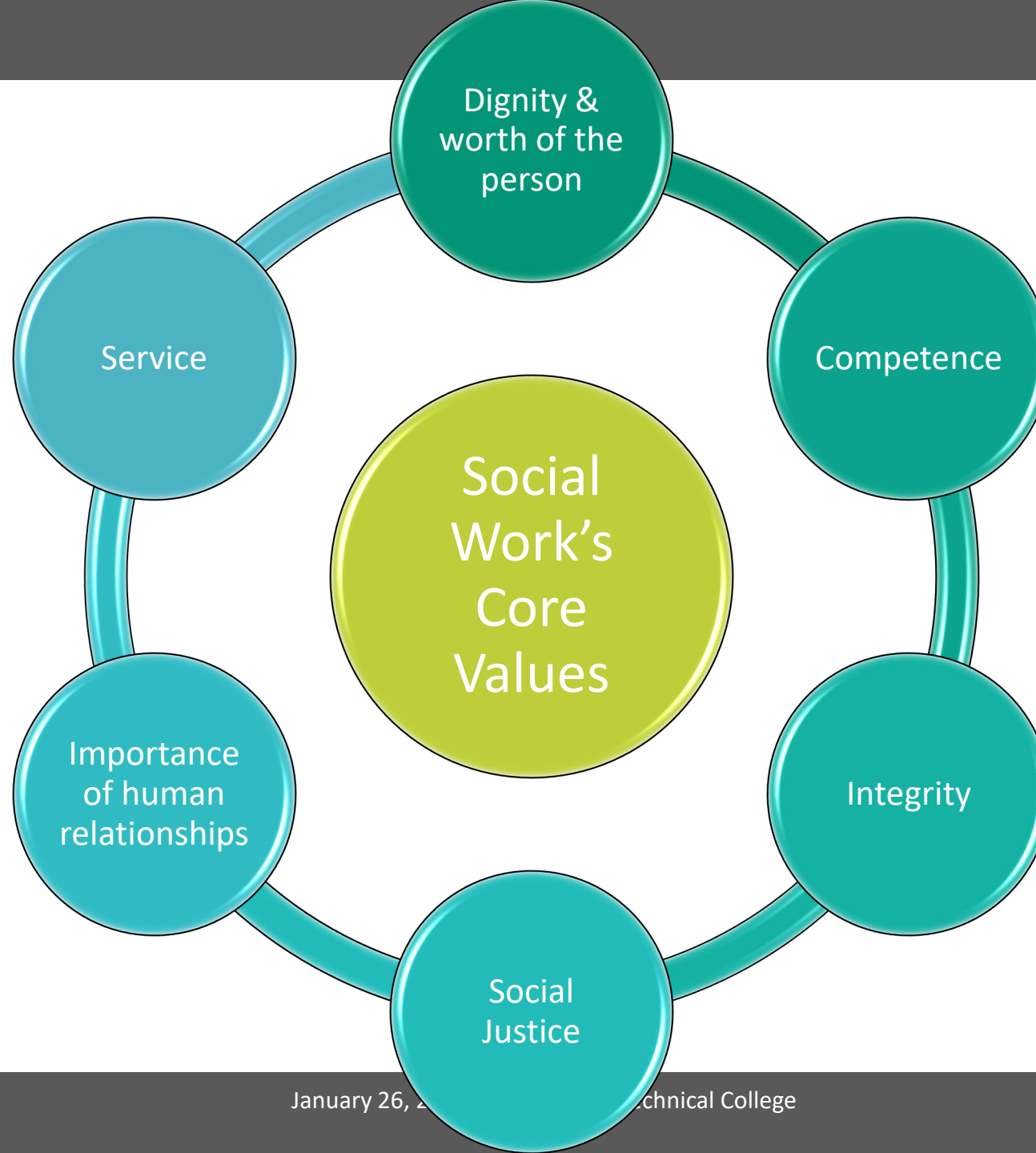
Content of the Code of Ethics

“The NASW Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers.

The Code has four sections:

- 1. Preamble - summarizes the social work profession's mission and core values.
- 2. Purpose - provides an overview of the Code's main functions and a brief guide for dealing with ethical issues or dilemmas in social work practice.
- 3. Ethical Principles - presents broad ethical principles, based on social work's core values, that inform social work practice.
- 4. Ethical Standards - includes specific ethical standards to guide social workers' conduct and to provide a basis for adjudication.”

Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>



Ethical Standards

Section IV of the NASW Code of Ethics contains the Ethical Standards. The Ethical Standards are broken into six specific areas of concern:

- (1) Social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients
- (2) Social workers' ethical responsibilities to colleagues
- (3) Social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings
- (4) Social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals
- (5) Social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession
- (6) Social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society

2021 NASW Code of Ethics Revisions

Recent revisions to the NASW Code of Ethics include:

- **Self Care as a key aspect of professional, ethical practice**

“ETHICAL PRINCIPLE: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner. Social workers are continually aware of the profession’s mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers should take measures to care for themselves professionally and personally. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.”

- **Reintroduction of cultural competence**

“1.05 Cultural Competence (c) Social workers should demonstrate awareness and cultural humility by engaging in critical self-reflection (understanding their own bias and engaging in self-correction); recognizing clients as experts of their own culture; committing to life-long learning; and holding institutions accountable for advancing cultural humility.”

Retrieved 01/11/2024 from https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=UyXb_VQ35QA%3d&portalid=0



Rural Wisconsin

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What is rural Wisconsin?

- Different perspectives based on
 - Population density
 - Place that is NOT part of a city/town of at least 2,500 people
 - Proximity to urban centers
 - Commuter areas
 - Remoteness and access to services
 - Deer and cattle per person
 - Types of land use

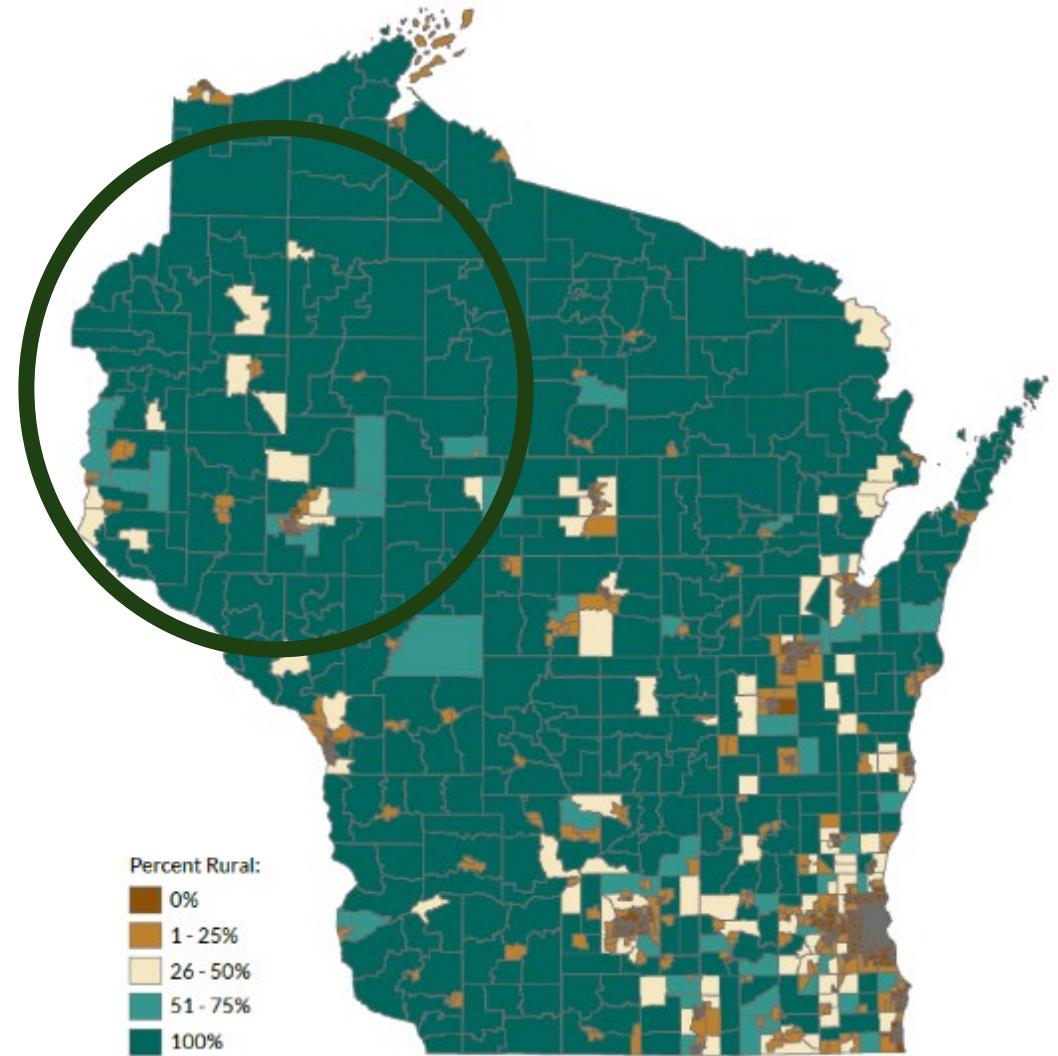
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Wisconsin's Rural Population

Retrieved 04/14/2023 from <https://worh.org/resources/data-maps/defining-rural-wisconsin/wisruralareas/>

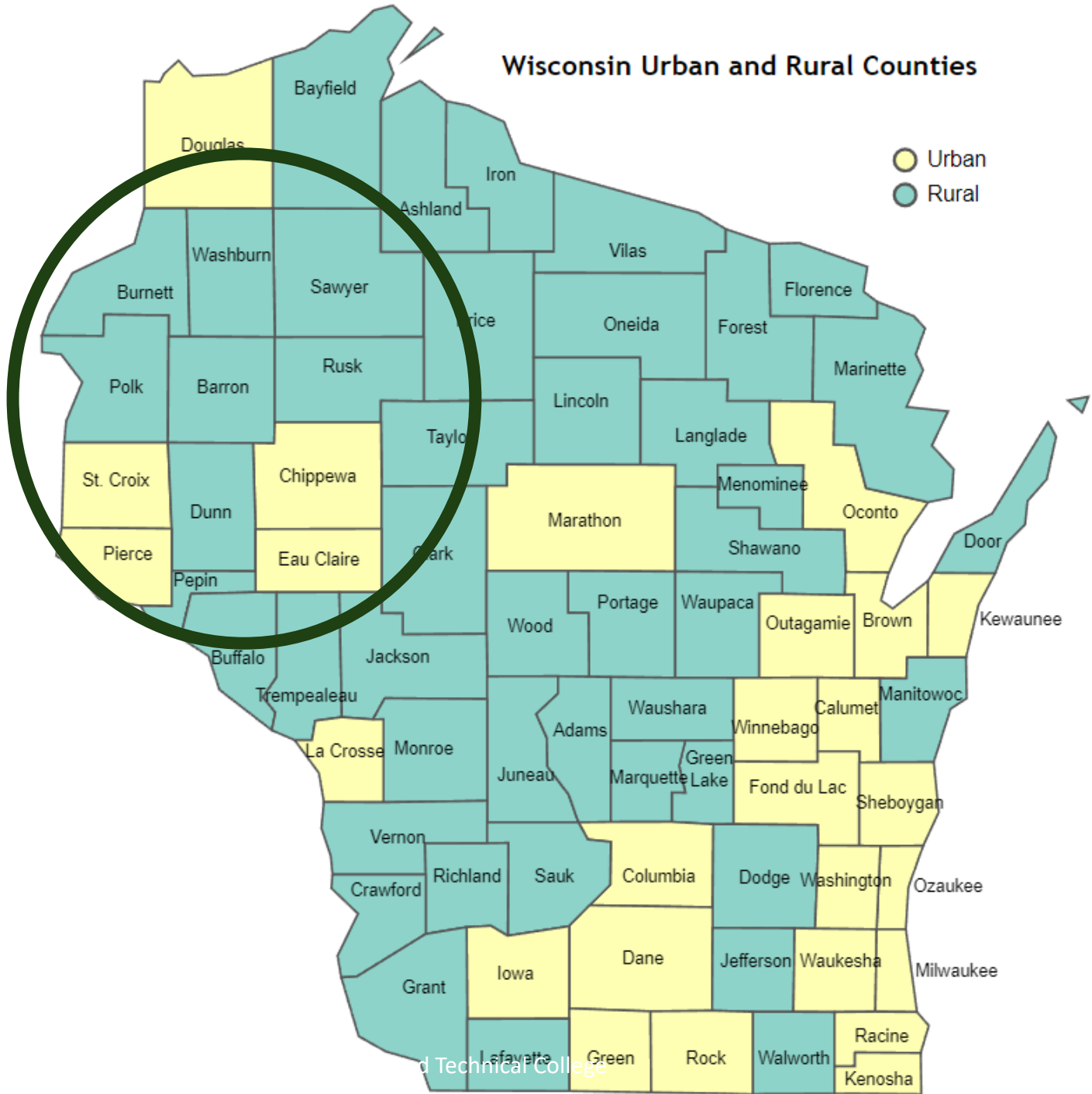
Rural Population 2010



Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial 2010 Summary File 1, Table P2

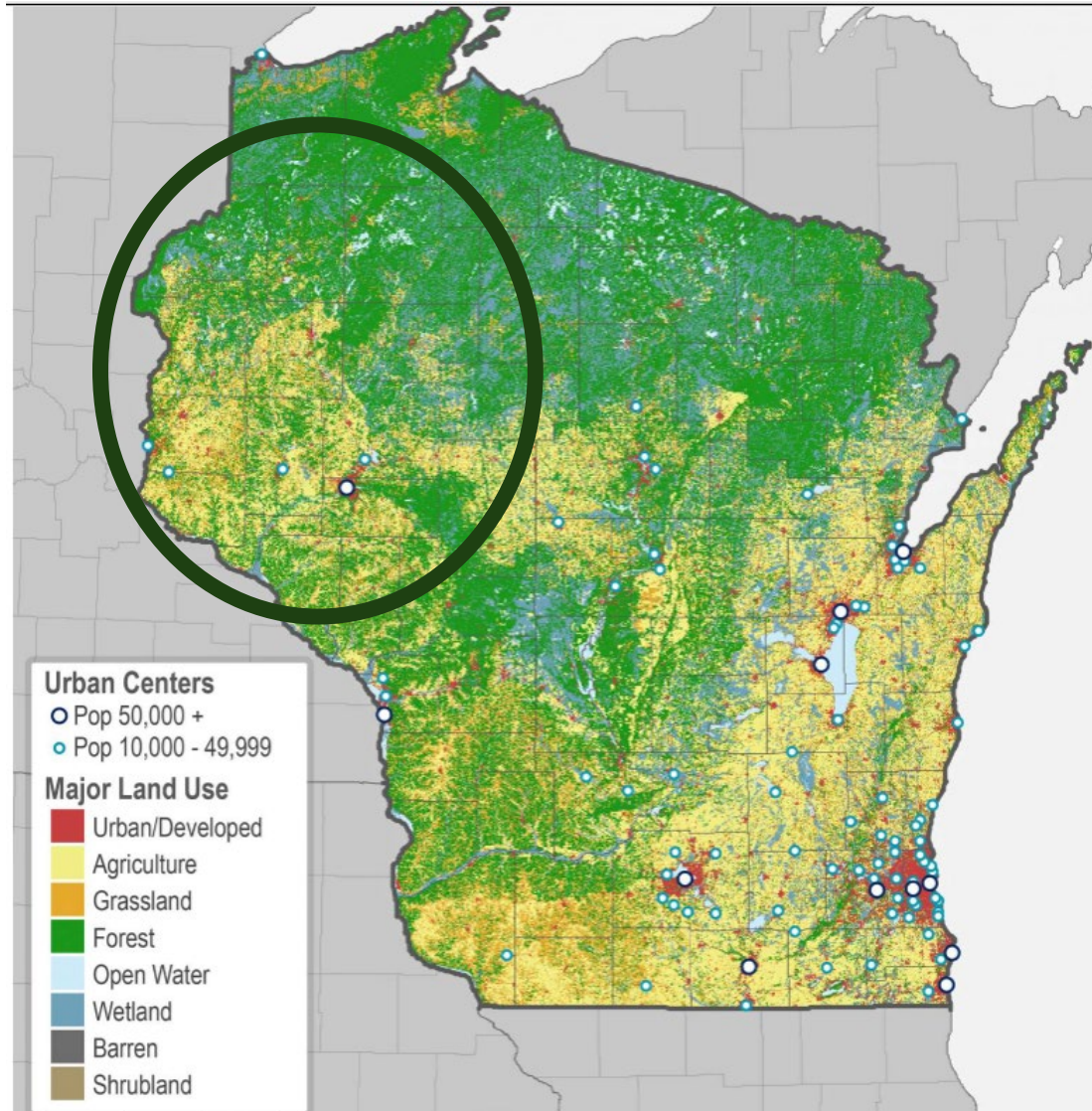
Wisconsin Urban and Rural Counties

- Urban
- Rural



Wisconsin Urban and Rural Counties per 2020 Census Data

Retrieved 01/11/2024 <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/urban-rural.htm>



- Wisconsin: Land Use

- Retrieved 01/11/2024 from <https://www.wiscontext.org/putting-rural-wisconsin-map>



What makes
rural practice
unique?



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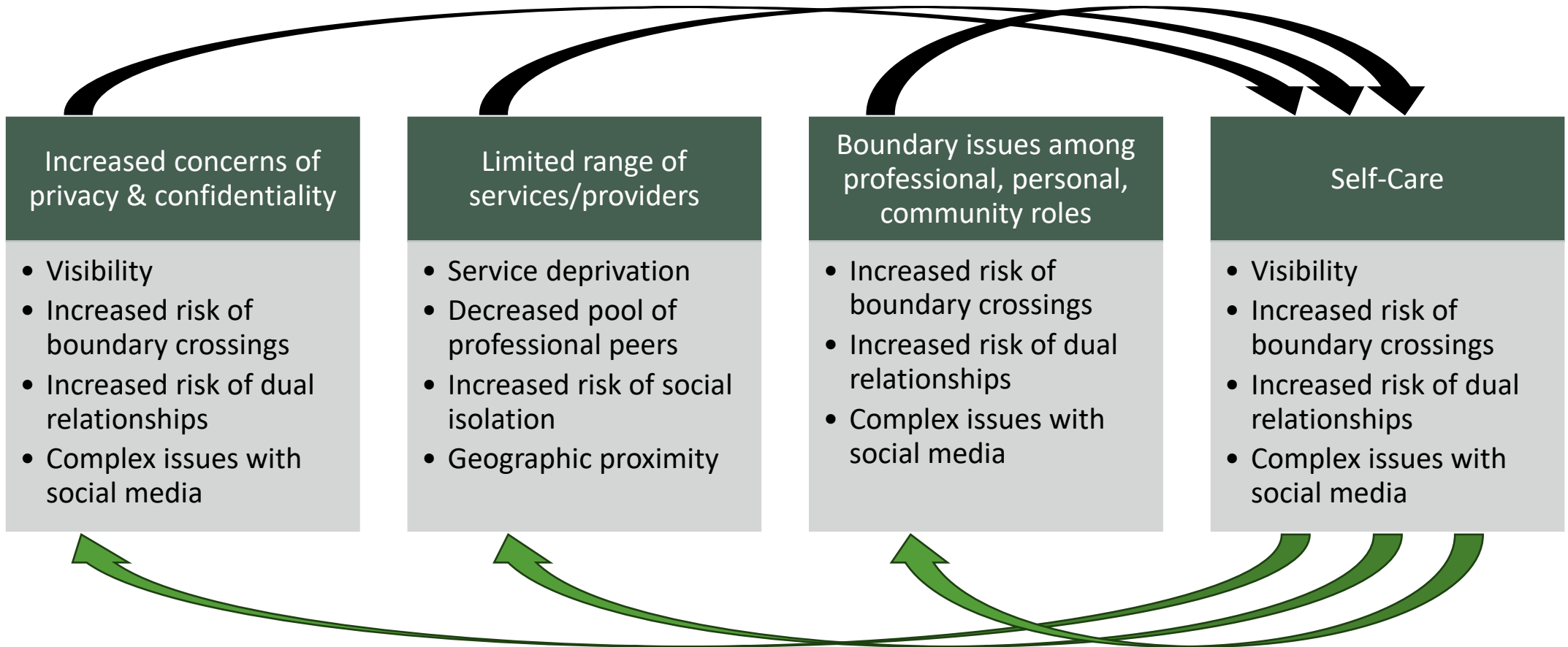
What ethical issues have you experienced that are directly related to rural practice?

Why is rural important?

- Wisconsin ranks in the top 10 states for its number of rural places (WORH, 2024)
 - Rural places have *different* needs than urban places
 - Rural places have *different* challenges than urban places
 - Rural places have *greater* needs than urban places (due to being underserved)
 - Physical health
 - Dental health
 - Mental Health
 - Emergency Health
 - Education
 - Economic security

Retrieved on 01/11/2024 from <https://worh.org/resources/data-maps/defining-rural-wisconsin/wisruralareas/>

Emerging Ethical Issues in Rural Communities



A photograph of a social gathering, likely a dance or party, with several people in the foreground and background. The scene is dimly lit with warm, bokeh-style light sources. In the center, a woman with short brown hair, wearing a grey lace-trimmed top, is dancing with a man in a purple polo shirt. To their left, a man in a black t-shirt with 'AEROPOSTAL ATHLETICS' printed on it is smiling. Other people are visible in the background, some dancing and some watching. The overall atmosphere is festive and social.

Privacy & Confidentiality

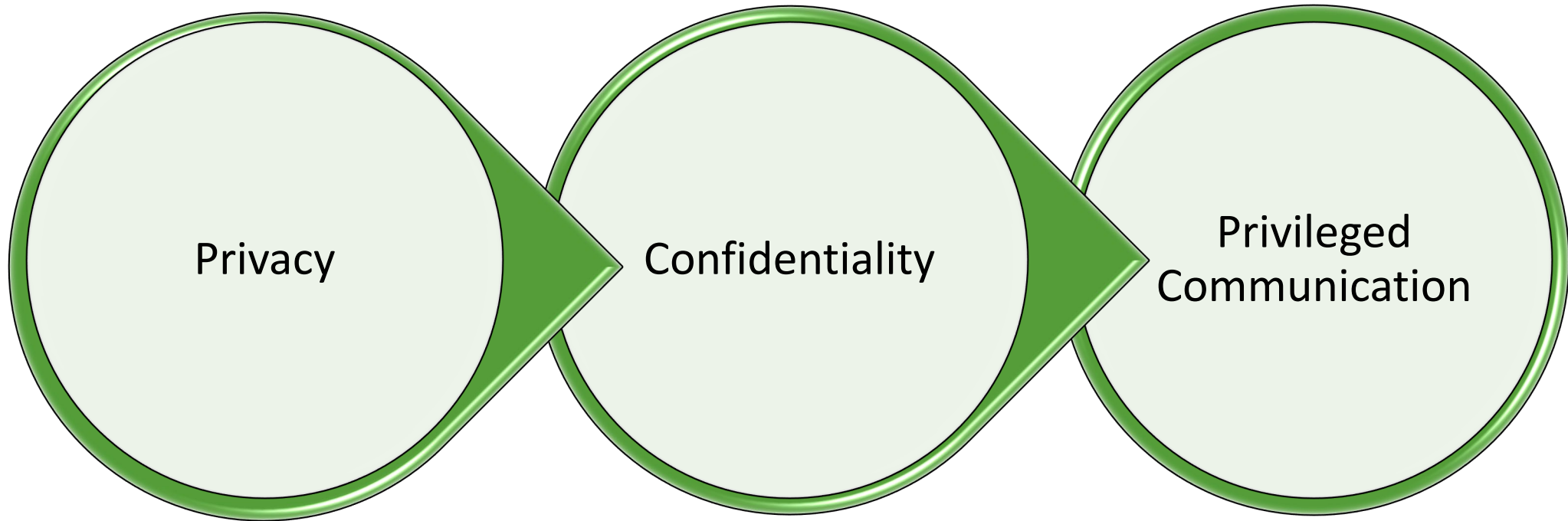
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Group Discussion

When you think about:

- Your client's privacy & confidentiality,
- Your privacy & confidentiality.

How does rural practice shape privacy for you and clients?



Client Privacy

- **Rural practice:** What do we know before we ask
- How do we handle “what we know” with what “we need to know.”
- Clients are entitled to privacy
 - Need to know
- NASW Standard 1.07(a): “Social workers should respect client’s right to privacy. Social workers should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.”



Guidelines for Privacy



Ask only what is required, needed to complete work



Information gained through previous professional interaction may not be included in current interaction (different unit, different job...)

Statutes on privacy
Agency policy



Information gained through shared experiences, history, may not be included in current interaction

Agency policy
Right to privacy

What is Confidentiality?

Confidentiality means that any helping professional is not to divulge any information to anyone that has been shared by a client, without the client's informed consent.

NASW, 2021



Confidentiality

- Professionals need explicit written permission from clients to share information
- Clients should have access to records concerning them
- Care should be taken to protect the confidence of others contained in records
- Informed consent for recording clients
- Safeguarding of electronic communications
- “Relative confidentiality”
 - Not absolute
 - Has Limits



Confidentiality in the Engagement Process



Explain legal or ethical responsibilities related to confidentiality at the first visit.



Explain the responsibilities of both the worker and client



Secure the client's signature on any releases of information



Explain what can or cannot be held in confidence



Confidentiality & Telehealth

- Policies
 - Confidentiality
 - Storage
 - Security
- Technology
 - Inclusive and equitable distribution
- Patient informed consent
 - Including safety
- Training for **all (competence!)**

Our Privacy: Social Media & Technology

- **Our social media accounts**
 - Locked
 - Appropriate
 - Factual
- **Posting on public social media accounts**
 - Appropriate
 - Factual
 - No client information
- **Not a forum for client engagement** (NASW, 2021)



Limited Resources



Table Talk



What are some of the challenges in finding resources for clients in a rural community?



What are some of the ethical decisions you've had to make?

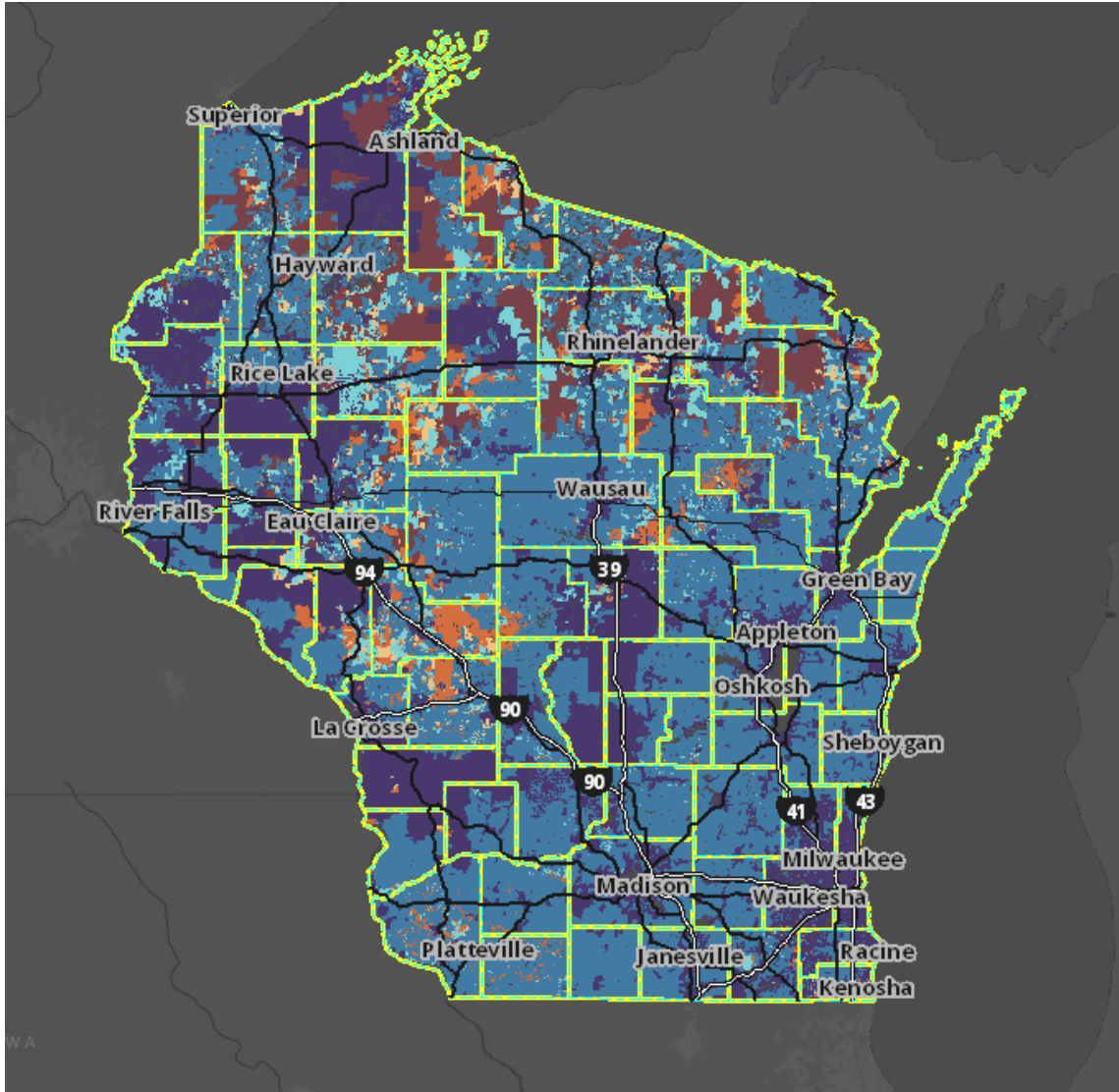


ACCESS to Limited Resources

Access as Distributive Justice

- Distributive Justice (Reamer, 2015)
 - **“Involves the use of ethics concepts and criteria to determine how scarce resources should be divided among people, groups, organizations, and communities.”**
 - Not always unique to rural practice
 - Early days COVID-19 vaccines
 - Shelter beds
 - Greater likelihood
 - Mental Health, Health Care, and Dental Health
 - Poverty (US Dept of Ag, rural poverty 4% higher than metro areas)
 - Child Abuse (US Dept of HHS, 1.7X higher than urban areas)
 - Greater risk of dying of drug overdose and suicide

<https://socialworkonline.uky.edu/resources/article/rural-social-work/>



Legend

Fixed Internet Speeds

100+ Mbps Download / 20+ Mbps Upload



25+ Mbps Down / 3+ Mbps Up



10+ Mbps Down / 1+ Mbps Up



5+ Mbps Down / 0.6+ Mbps Up



< 5 Mbps Down / < 0.6 Mbps Up



No Known Internet Coverage



Wisconsin & Rural Access to Healthcare

Primary Health Care Shortage Areas

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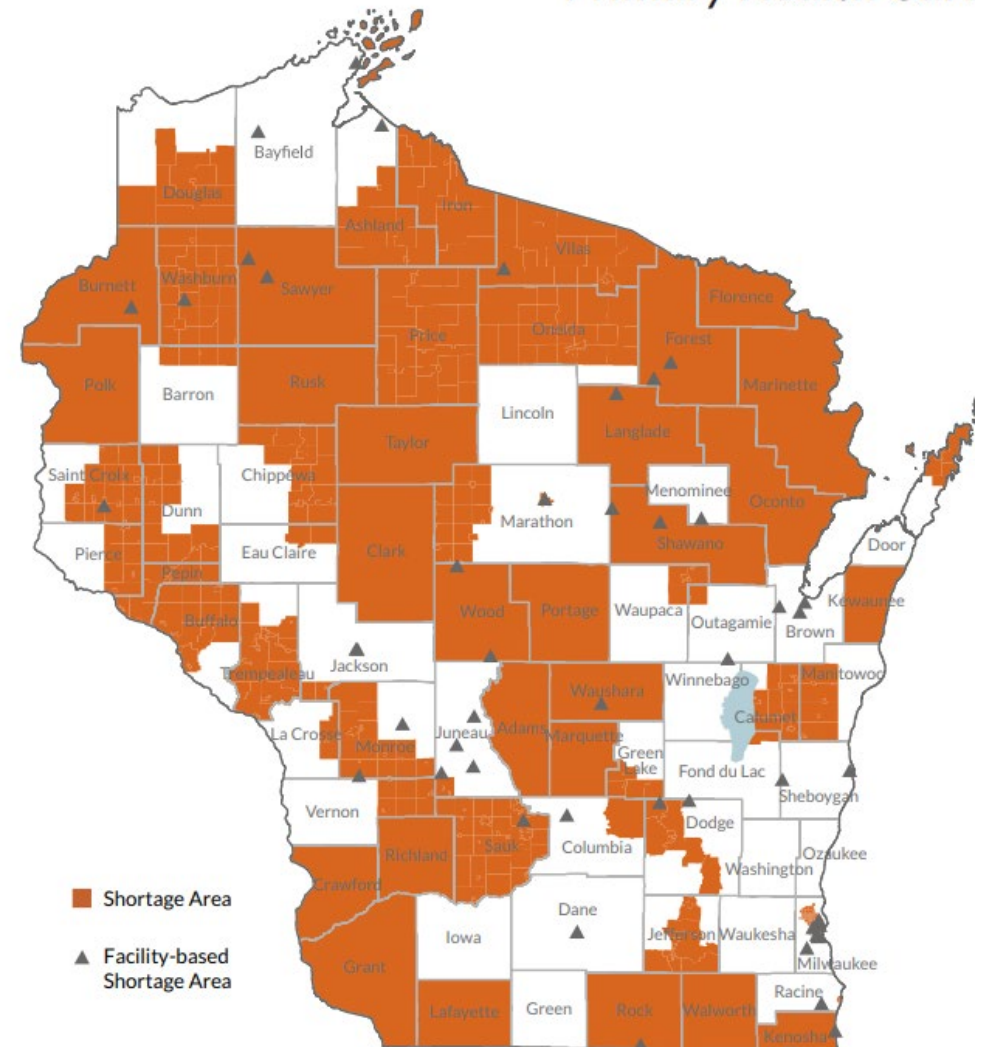
<http://www.worh.org/library/health-professional-shortage-area-primary-health-care-0>

If telehealth is available,

- Internet
- Lack of feeling connected to physician
- Awareness of telehealth

<https://socialworkonline.uky.edu/resources/article/rural-social-work/>

Health Professional Shortage Areas *Primary Health Care*



Wisconsin & Rural Access to Healthcare

Mental Health Care Shortage Areas

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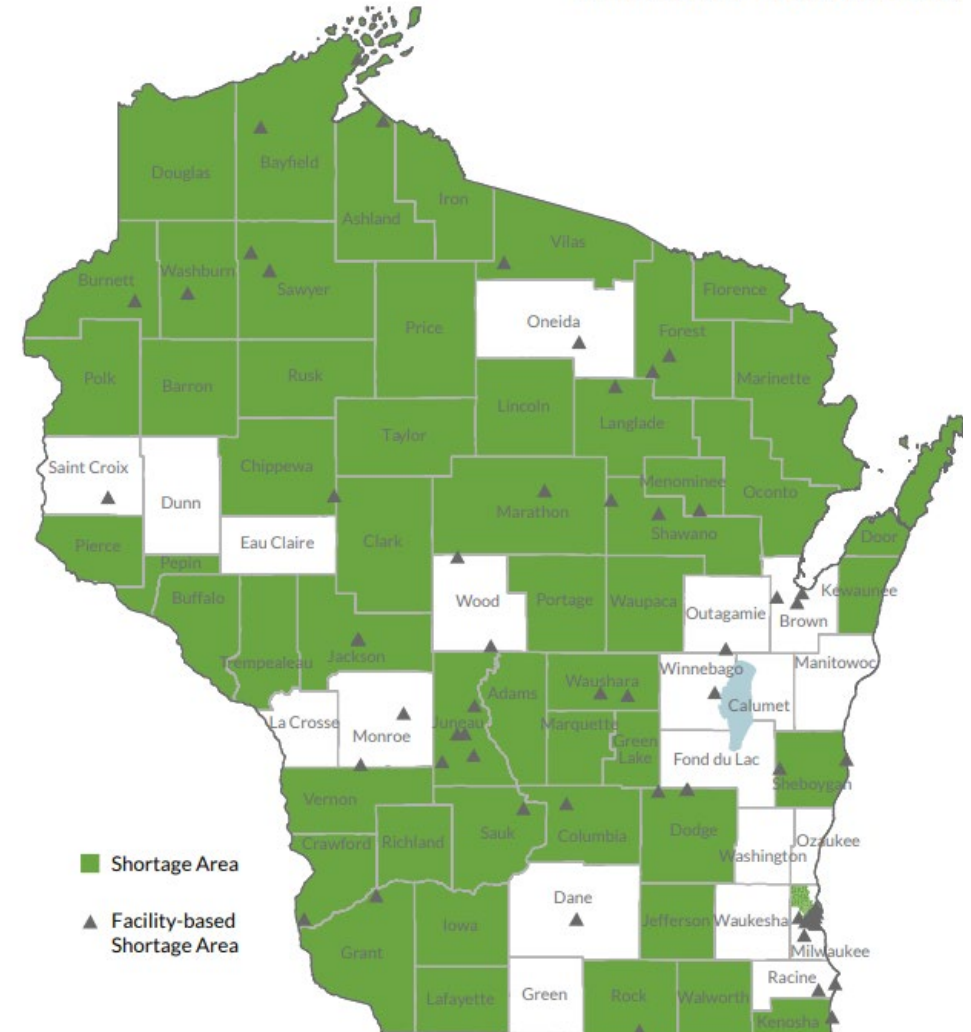
<http://www.worh.org/library/health-professional-shortage-area-mental-health-care-0>

-69% nonmetropolitan counties without psychiatrists

-Expand telehealth (442% increase between 2019 and 2020)

<https://socialworkonline.uky.edu/resources/article/rural-social-work/>

Health Professional Shortage Areas: *Mental Health Care*



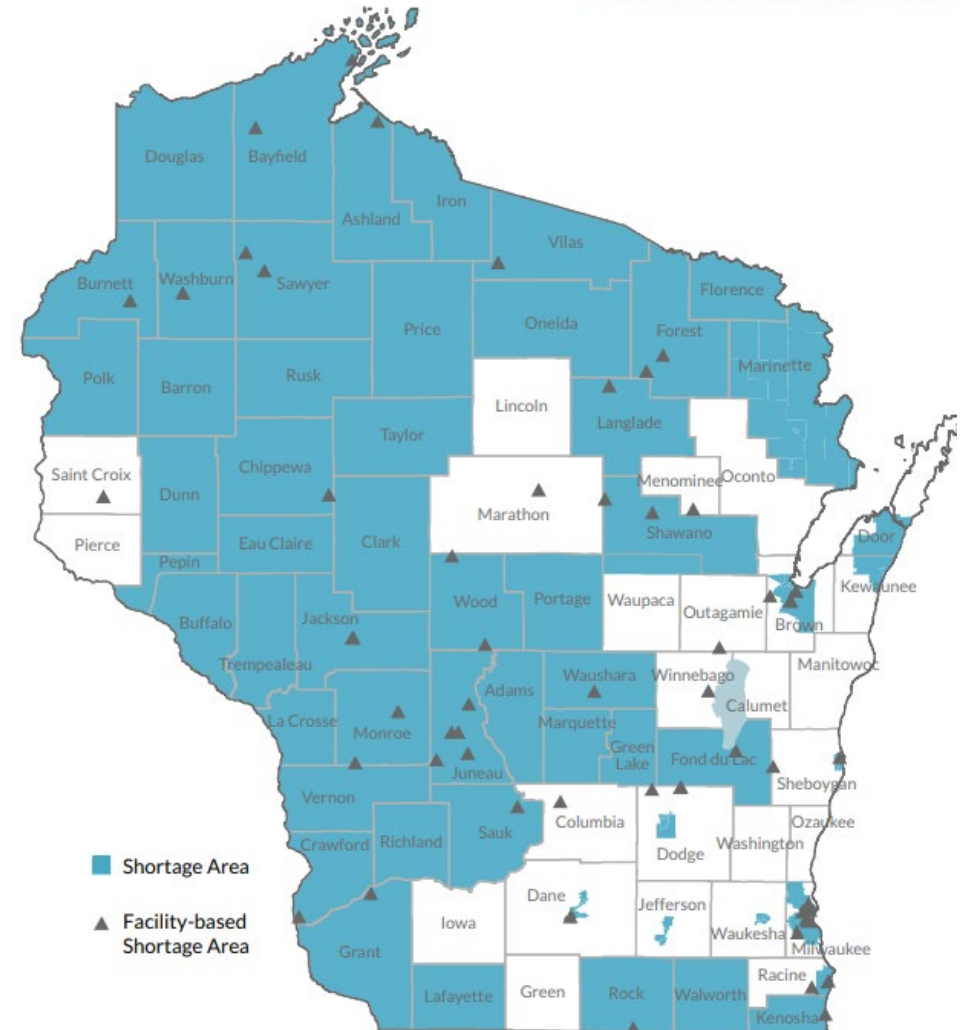
Wisconsin & Rural Access to Healthcare

Dental Care Shortage Areas

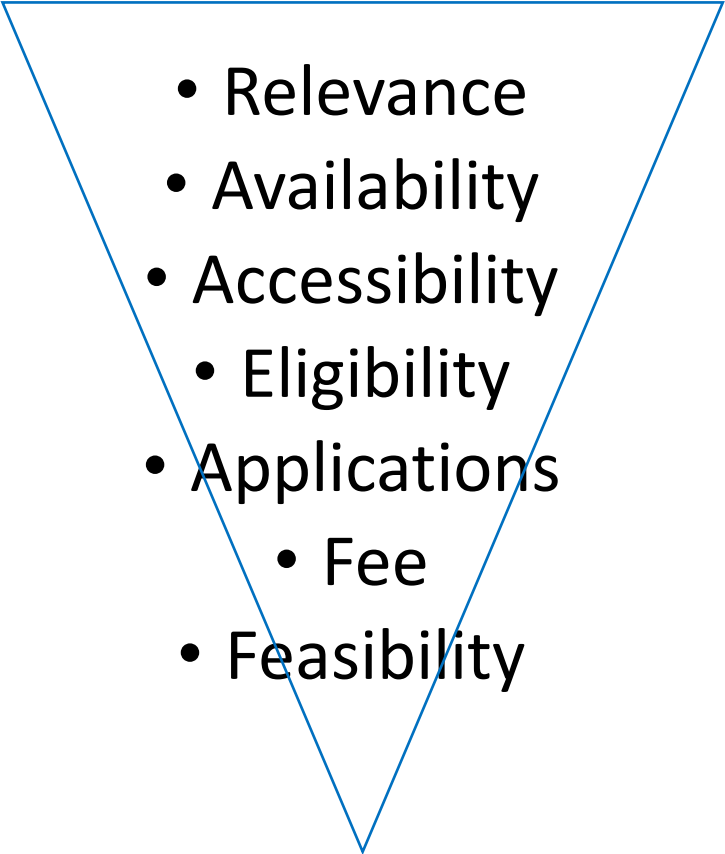
Retrieved from:

<http://www.worh.org/library/health-professional-shortage-area-dental-health-care-0>

Health Professional Shortage Areas *Dental Health Care*



Distributive Justice & Resources

- 
- Relevance
 - Availability
 - Accessibility
 - Eligibility
 - Applications
 - Fee
 - Feasibility

Strategies for Distributive Justice

Policy

- Ensure agency has clear policy on how to prioritize client access to limited services.

Purpose

- Social justice → taking action on local, state, federal levels to increase access, services

Competence: Key Terms



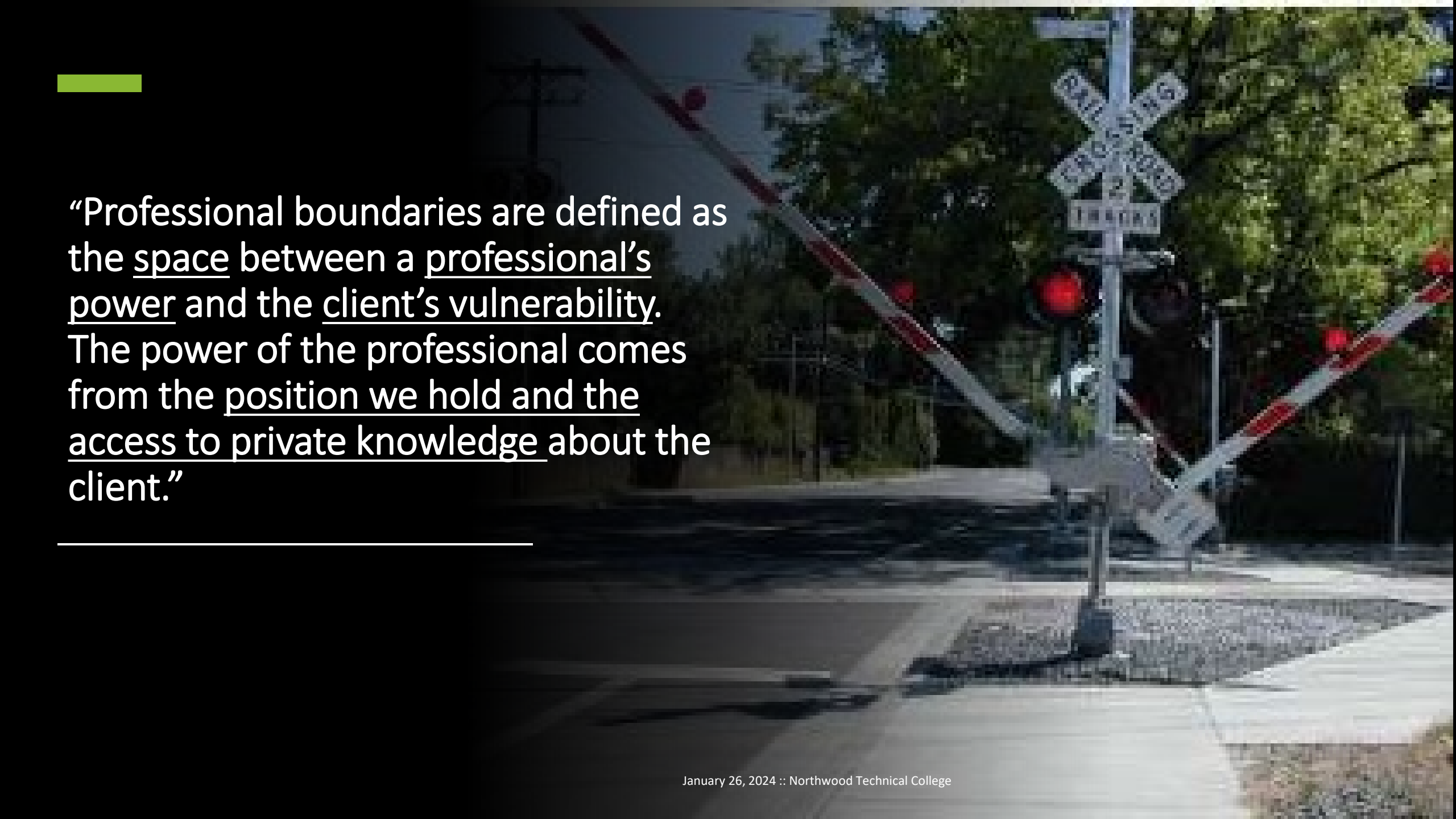
Professional Domain

- The profession's area of expertise.

Professional Drift

- Neglect of profession's traditional purpose and functions in favor of activities associated with another setting.

Boundaries & Dual Relationships



“Professional boundaries are defined as the space between a professional’s power and the client’s vulnerability. The power of the professional comes from the position we hold and the access to private knowledge about the client.”



Professional Relationship Considerations

- **Boundaries exist on a continuum**
 - Can be hard to know if someone has blurred or violated boundaries
- **If you are bending rules toward the personal:**
 - Reflect on why you are doing this.
 - Utilize consultation/ Point out concerns of colleague
- **Be aware of relationships that are conducive to becoming personal:**
 - Type of setting
 - Specific professional role

Boundaries



Healthy Boundary the respected space between the worker's power and the client's vulnerability.



Overlapping Boundary having contact with clients outside the professional relationship where there is no significant role conflict or boundary crossing.



Boundary Crossing departing from or **not supporting** commonly accepted practices or safe connections.



Boundary Violation acts or actions that moves professional relationships to the unprofessional.

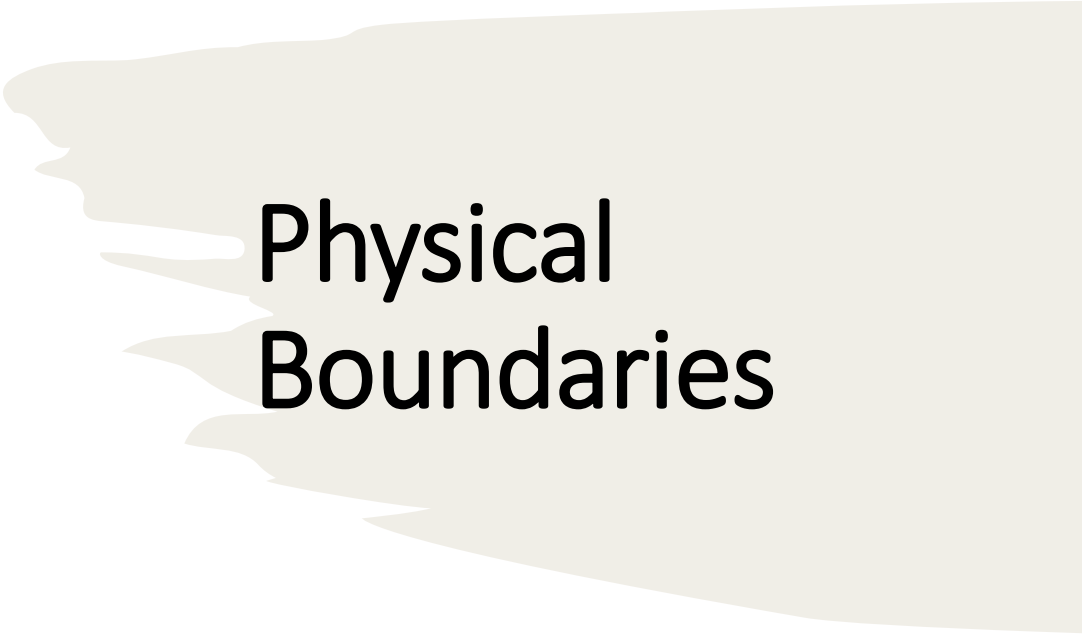
Overlapping Boundaries

Think about a time you or a colleague experienced an overlapping boundary or potential boundary crossing.

- Talk about it in small groups:
 - How did it occur?
 - How did you navigate it?
 - What did you learn from the experience?



- Maybe?
 - **Client permission IS PARAMOUNT! ALWAYS!**
 - Provides momentary comfort
 - The client is clear about intentions
- Further Considerations:
 - Trauma experienced by client
 - The age of the client
 - The gender identification of client & worker
- Don't:
 - When possibility of psychological harm



Physical Boundaries

Sexual Boundaries

- No Sexual Contact with Clients
- NASW Code- 1.09:
 - No engagement in sexual activities with current clients, whether consensual or forced
 - **Worker assumes full burden of setting boundaries**
 - No sexual activities with former clients
 - No services to a person they have had a prior relationship with.
- 2.06 (a):
 - Workers should not engage in relationships with those they are supervising or teaching



Other Boundary Issues

- **Overfamiliarity**
 - Discussions of topics unrelated to services
- **Personal Gain**
 - Taking advantage of a professional relationship
 - Conflicts of interest
- **Gift Giving**
 - Giving or accepting goods and services
- **Providing Services to Family and Friends**
- **Social Contact**
 - Contact with clients outside professional relationship

Boundaries & Self-disclosure

“A worker’s divulgence of personal thoughts, information, feelings, values, or experiences to his or her client (Kohn, 2010)”

Guidelines for self-disclosure:

Any self-disclosure should always benefit or be in the best interest of the client.

Self-disclosure should be for a specific purpose.

Self-disclosure requires judgment about when, what, and how much to share with a client.

Self-disclosure is done to facilitate relationship building.

Consequences of Boundary Violations

Client Consequences

- Worker dependency
- Physical and emotional stress
- Regression
- Develop feelings of mistrust

Worker Consequences

- Negative impact on Career
- Implications for license/certification
- Burn-out
- Negative impact on professional reputation

What is a Dual Relationship?

When multiple roles exist between a professional and a client.

- Client is also a student, friend, family member, employee or business associate of worker.



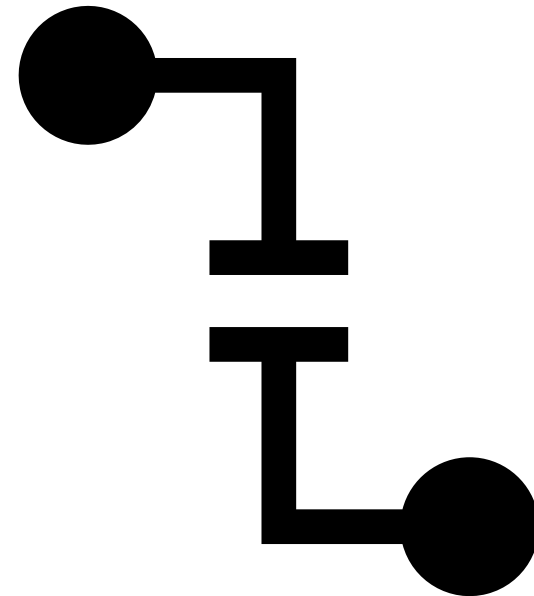
Types of Dual Relationships

- **Social** Worker & client are friends or have some other social relationship.
- **Professional** Worker and client are colleagues in some capacity
- **Business** Worker & client have an employer-employee relationship.
- **Communal** Worker and client live in the community, belong to the same church, etc.
- **Supervisory** relationships with multiple roles, loyalties, responsibilities and functions.
- **Digital** Relationships that take place online, such as social networking sites

Managing Dual Relationships



1. Be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest.
2. Inform clients and colleagues about potential or actual conflicts of interest; explore alternative remedies.
3. Consult with others in complex cases and document clearly.
4. Study the complexities of entering a dual relationship.
5. Create policies that include the risks of dual relationships.
6. End any dual relationship that causes conflict of interest, harm or distress.





Case Study

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Case Study

- Read the case study (handout)
- Review the NASW Code of Ethics

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

- Review Reamer's Ethical Decision-Making Model (handout)
- Impact of dual relationships, boundaries, and distributive justice

1. Identify the ethical issues, including the social work values and ethics that conflict.
2. Identify the individuals, groups, and organizations that are likely to be affected by the ethical decision.
3. Tentatively identify all possible courses of action and the participants involved in each, along with possible benefits and risks for each.
4. Thoroughly examine the reasons in favor of and opposed to each possible course of action, considering relevant (a) ethical theories, principles, and guidelines; (b) codes of ethics and legal principles; (c) social work practice theory and principles; and (d) personal values (including religious, cultural, and ethnic values and political ideology).

Group Discussion

- What did your group discuss concerning the impact of
 - dual relationships,
 - privacy, and
 - resource distribution?
- Reamer's Ethical Decision-Making Model
- Can you summarize:
 - Relevant NASW cites
 - Decision



- Take good care and thank you for the important work you do!

Wrap Up

Thank you kindly!

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