

# Washington County Community Health Assessment And Improvement Plan

2023-2028



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## **What is a CHA-CHIP?**

A Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement plan is a community-wide process for identifying the most important factors affecting health in the community, and developing a plan to improve health by utilizing community strengths and working to fill gaps that are identified.

## **Community Health Assessment**

A review of Washington County health status included a community health survey through which data was collected directly from community members who completed a survey that was distributed to gather qualitative data regarding current health assets and needs within the community. The survey was published and open to the public from June-September. The assessment was available electronically and on paper, in both English and Spanish. Over 200 individuals gave their input on the health issues that affect the people who live, work, and play in Washington County.

In addition to the survey, information was gathered and reviewed from the Iowa State Data Center, County Health Rankings, Iowa Health and Human Services, and the United States Census Bureau.

Top priorities identified through the CHA include: mental health, access to health care, obesity/overweight, substance abuse, affordability of child care, housing, wages, and social connectedness.

## **Community Health Improvement Plan**

This Community Health Improvement Plan includes information on the results from our Community Health Assessment – including priorities, goals, objectives, and strategies identified by community members as areas for strength and improvement in Washington County.

There are many benefits to a Community Health Improvement Plan. The benefits include:

- A plan raises awareness in the community of the health status of its residents- what we are doing well and where we need to focus more attention.
- A plan enhances a sense of shared community responsibility to address unmet health needs.
- A plan develops a coordinated, community-wide effort directed at a few top health priorities.
- A plan creates new, innovative strategies that fit the unique needs and assets of Washington County.

### **How we got here?**

Washington County has a rich history of conducting Community Health Assessments and Community Health Improvement Plans. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most recent CHA-CHIP was conducted in 2015. Planning efforts for the 2023 CHA-CHIP began in 2021, and active steps in the process took place from June to October 2023.

The State of Iowa requires that counties conduct a Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan regularly. Critical components to the CHA-CHIP are: data, partnership/community involvement, and priority health topics along with goals, objectives, and strategies.

### **How to use this guide**

A Community Health Improvement Plan can, and should, be used far beyond the work of the local health department. It is a partnership among individuals, agencies, and organizations dedicated to improving the health of Washington County citizens. The Community Health Improvement Plan will be a 5-year, community-driven initiative.

We invite our community partners to utilize this Community Health Improvement Plan as a tool to guide, justify, and enhance the work you do within your own organizations – and we are eager to work along side you every step of the way.

The objectives, goals, and strategies identified in this report can be used as a tool for community initiatives, but are not an exhaustive list of ways to achieve improved health outcomes. As strategies are implemented, or new ones are identified, this document will be updated to reflect those new ideas and outcomes for Washington County.

## Washington County: Who are we?

Washington County is located in southeast Iowa. Encompassing 571 mi<sup>2</sup>, the county is included in the Iowa City Metropolitan Statistical Area. Nearly 70% of Washington County is considered rural. In 2022, the population was estimated to be 22,491, a 5.16% growth from 2010. Median age of Washington County residents is 40.2 years old. Approximately one-fifth of Washington County is over the age of 65. Washington County has a population that is 92.6% white, 6.8% Hispanic or Latino, 0.6% Black or African American, 0.5% Asian, and 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native.

Median household income from 2017-2021 was \$66,908. The unemployment rate during the same time was 2.6%. Nearly 92% of persons over 25 years of age have completed high school or other higher education, and 23.6% of those in the same age group have completed their Bachelor's degree or higher.

Poverty in Washington County is approximately 7.1%, although we see significant disparity in poverty rates by race and household type. The Native American poverty rate in the county is 55.56%, Black is 38.78%, Hispanic poverty rate is 17.4%, and white is 9.41%. Additionally, 25.5% of homes where the primary householder is female, with no spouse present, are living in poverty in Washington County.

On average, more than 1,500 Washington County residents received food assistance in 2020, a decrease from an average of 2,100 in 2015. Additionally, a monthly average of 3,800 residents received Medicaid benefits in 2023, an increase from approximately 2,900 per month in 2017.

Washington School District saw 42.7-48.2% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch during the 2020-2021 school year. During the same year, Highland Schools saw 9.9-24% free and reduced lunch rates throughout the buildings, and Mid-Prairie Schools had 17.7-24% of their students eligible.



**Washington County Courthouse,  
located in Washington, Iowa.**



## Who was involved?

Participating organizations represented in the process include:

Washington County Public Health

Washington County Hospitals and Clinics

Washington County Environmental Health Department

KCII Radio

Washington County Board of Health

Washington County Board of Supervisors

Hospice of Washington County

Washington County Ambulance Service

City of Washington

Halcyon House

Mental Health Agency of Southeast Iowa

Washington Area Ministerial Association

United Presbyterian Home

Choices

Early Childhood Iowa – DHLW

Latinos for Washington

Washington for Justice

Community and Family Resources

*..... and many more that assisted in sharing information about the process!*

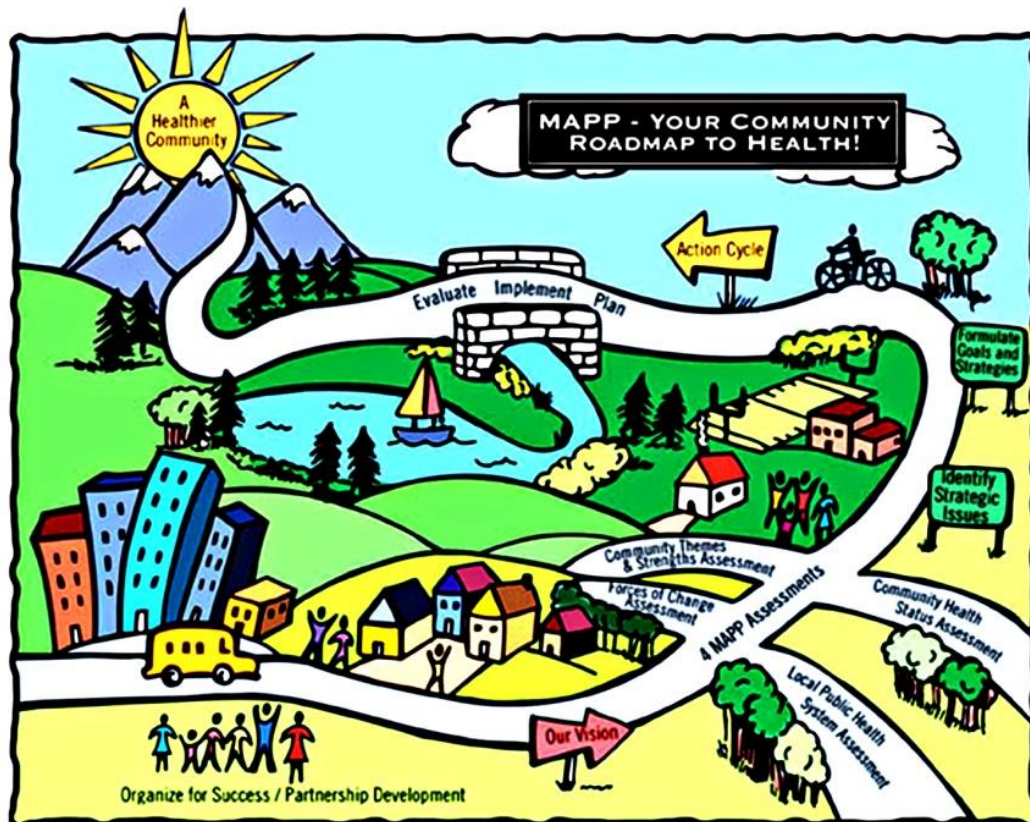
Beyond meeting participation, we invited anyone who lives, works, and plays in Washington County to take our Community Health Assessment survey. Through that survey, we heard from 219 individuals on what they think makes a community healthy and how our community can be healthier. Their feedback, in addition to other data collection and review, informed the health priorities found in this Community Health Improvement Plan.

A key partner for Washington County Public Health through the CHA-CHIP process has been Washington County Hospital and Clinics. Because our organizations serve the same community, we want to be unified by our goals and strategies to improve health in Washington County.

## Strategy Development

Every five years the Iowa Department of Public Health and the local public health department are required by the state to lead the Community Health Needs Assessment for our county. The process requires community members to get involved in making decisions about improving their health. Involvement of and support from the many areas of the community significantly improve and strengthen the local planning process. In order to guide this method, we used the **MAPP Framework**—Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships.

MAPP consists of six phases, usually consisting of organizing, visioning, assessments, strategic issues, goals/strategies and an action cycle. These phases ultimately lead to the building of community partnerships in order to work in collaboration with a variety of organizations and people. Through these partnerships, everyone can discuss and help agree upon a shared community vision, areas of need, existing strengths and strategies for achieving their goals.



## Meetings, Topic Selection

During the months of June and September 2023, Washington County Public Health partnered with over 30 organizations and community members to conduct the Washington County Community Health Assessment. Over the span of two meetings, a wide variety of health-related topics were discussed including healthy living, disease prevention, social support, access to health care, mental health care and affordability. At the conclusion of the second meeting, the community members voted on the top three health priorities on which to focus for the next five years. The top three priorities were Mental and Behavioral Well-Being, Healthy Eating and Active Living, and Strengthening Relationships.

## Theories & Models Used



**Social Ecological Model** The Social Ecological Model helps us to identify the different levels of influence in our lives that can affect health (the social determinants). From the center of the model outward, the levels include sources from within ourselves, between people, from the places we work/go to school, the community in which we live and the overarching public policies from local and national governments.

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## **Ten Essential Services of Public Health**

The Ten Essential Services serve as a framework for any number of community activities, public health services or potential interventions. They



all fall within the three fundamental purposes of public health: assessment, policy development and assurance. These services represent the building blocks for the Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan.



Health Priority:

# Mental and Behavioral Well-Being

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## The Current Situation

Mental and behavioral well-being is not a new focus area in Washington County. Access to mental health care was identified as a top priority in the 2015 Washington County Health Improvement Plan. While access to mental health care has significantly improved in recent years, one local mental health professional citing a recent influx of providers and minimal wait times, mental health status of community members remains a top concern in Washington County and the State of Iowa. Based on Washington County's Community Health Assessment, 68% felt that mental health is a top health concern for our community.

In 2021, Iowa's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) found that 13.9% of Iowans, and Washington County residents, reported experiencing Frequent Mental Distress (FMD). According to the same data, Iowa adults in low-income households (32.1%) and Iowans with disabilities (30.5%) are at greater risk of experiencing FMD. The average number of poor mental health days for adults in Washington County is 4.2 out of 30.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reported that 473,000 adult in Iowa have a mental health condition, and it is reported that more than half of all Americans report COVID-19 had a negative impact on their mental health.

Out of 219 Washington County respondents, 34.25% said it was "difficult" or "very difficult" to access a mental health provider in the past year.

Nearly 80 people, out of 219, stated mental health services is missing/most needed in Washington County to improve their health.

More than half of all people in the United States with a mental health condition did not receive any treatment in the last year.

### Goals and Objectives

- Increase awareness of existing mental health resources available in Washington County.
- Reduce mental health stigma by starting discussions about understanding mental and behavioral health.
- Decrease the number of poor mental health days
- Educate employers on the benefits of supporting employees' mental health and well-being.

### Suggested Strategies

- Distribute pamphlets with mental health resources specific to Washington County
- Increase the number of events hosted by the Washington County Mental Health Coalition
- Host community education sessions to discuss mental health stigma.
- Include substance abuse in the conversations and education surrounding mental health and well-being
- Plan a farmers' event, including input from local farmers.
- Collaborate with local businesses to help provide access to mental health services through Employee Assistance Programs.

### Spotlight on Success

Community-based social interventions have a long history of improving mental health across communities. One study looked at the success of a program called Communities That Care in multiple states including Kansas, Colorado, Maine, Illinois, and Utah, among others. The program focused on preventing youth substance abuse and violence as well as preventing depression, suicide, and other mental health outcomes. The program included community stakeholders, a community coalition to identify areas of need and an action plan, and delivery of the program to students in grades 6-9. These students were followed up over several years and it was found that students who participated in the program had improved outcomes such as reduced substance use and violence, and later introduction to alcohol and tobacco than students who did not participate in the program. These trends in improved behaviors and choices remained true until the students were followed-up with at age 21. At 21, the students were also found to have "increased abstinence from antisocial behavior." Success of the program is attributed to community input and participation through each phase from planning to implementation and evaluation.

Castillo EG, Ijadi-Maghsoodi R, Shadravan S, et al. Community Interventions to Promote Mental Health and Social Equity. *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2019;21(5):35. Published 2019 Mar 29. doi:10.1007/s11920-019-1017-0

Health Priority:

# Healthy Eating and Active Living

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## The Current Situation

The benefits of eating well and remaining active throughout the lifespan are well-known: live a longer life, lower the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers, achieve and maintain a healthy weights, support muscles and strengthen bones, and supporting healthy growth in children. While many know these benefits, 27% of individuals who responded to the Washington County Community Health Assessment ranked “personal choice” as the top barrier keeping them from being healthy. Knowing this information, it is increasingly important that we aim to make the healthy choice the easy choice in our community through accessible physical activity options and increasing the availability of balanced meals, including fruits and vegetables.

According to the BRFSS survey, less than 60% of Iowans self-reported eating at least one fruit per day, and 77% reported eating at least one vegetable per day. Men reported lower intake of both fruits and vegetables than women. Fruit and vegetable consumption increased with age, education, and household income.

Nearly 2 out of every 5 adults in Washington County are obese. Obesity and inactivity have been shown to lead to many negative health outcomes such as: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and premature death. Additionally, it is estimated that obesity costs the United States health care system \$173 billion in 2019. (CDC, 2022) Community-driven efforts to combat obesity and overweight include supporting eating healthy and active living in various settings.

Eating enough fruits and vegetables can help reduce many preventable illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. (CDC, 2021)

Less than 60% of Iowans self-reported eating at least one fruit per day, and 77% reported eating at least one vegetable per day (BRFSS, 2021)

In Iowa, men reported lower intake of both fruits and vegetables than women. Fruit and vegetable consumption increased with age, education, and household income.

### Goals and Objectives

- Increase the number of Washington County residents eating healthy and being active throughout the lifespan.
- Increase the amount of healthy foods available to Washington County residents at public events and restaurants.
- Educate community members of all ages on the benefits of healthy eating and active living.
- Increase the amount of free recreational opportunities in Washington County.

### Suggested Strategies

- Partner with local YMCA and/or schools to establish a free indoor walking program.
- Establish community gardens and enhance those that already exist.
- Map outdoor designated walking paths near business districts to encourage employees to be active throughout the day.
- Partner with local organizations to host educational sessions to promote healthy eating to community members
- Partner with Farmers' Markets to increase availability of healthy eating options.
- Host online cooking demonstrations to encourage budget-friendly healthy food options
- Increase awareness of existing healthy eating and active living activities in the community.
- Collaborate with local businesses to promote worksite wellness initiatives.

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### Spotlight on Success

In 2015, the South Dakota state Department of Health partnered with 18 worksites throughout the state to establish worksite wellness policies intended to improve worksite physical activity for their employees. The changes included adaptations to the built environment, encouraging and allowing time throughout the work day for physical activity, and policy changes to promote flexible work schedules. All participating worksites received guidance, tools, and training on physical activity in the workplace. Employees at the worksites were surveyed before and after their employer made changes through this program. On average, physical activity increased by nearly 20 minutes per week following changes made at worksites.

One participant stated: "Once my employer gave me time during the workday to exercise and a gym I could readily access, it made a huge difference in my total exercise each day."

Prosch, Nikki. (2015) South Dakota's Workplace Wellness Program Gets Employees Moving at Work. Accessed 10/24/2023 from: <https://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/TemplateThree.aspx?s=12609&ds=1>



Health Priority:

# Strengthening Relationships

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## The Current Situation

Our community, and the world, faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly one of the largest challenges that we are still seeing the effects of today was social isolation. Many individuals were confined to their homes in order to protect their health and the health of loved ones. While this was critical for some at-risk populations during the height of the pandemic, it has been difficult to rebuild those connections that may have been lost due to time spent apart.

Through feedback from the Community Health Assessment, it has been found that social support is lacking but strongly desired. Encouraging and supporting inclusive relationships can help our community thrive through the support of overall well-being, safety, health, and resilience of Washington County.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are many benefits from social connectedness (CDC, 2023). These benefits include, but are not limited to: longer life, prevention of some serious illness and negative health outcomes, improved ability to recover from stress, anxiety, and depression, improved sleep, quality of life, and well-being, reduced risk of violent and suicidal behaviors, and the promotion of other healthy habits. Social connectedness influences the way we think, move, act, and live.

The feeling of community belonging and supportive connections to our neighbors helps communities thrive by supporting overall health, well-being, safety, and resilience. We now have an opportunity to rebuild these social connections that were lost through community programming, social support groups, and education.

**“Social connectedness** is the degree to which people have and perceive a desired number, quality, and diversity of relationships that create a sense of belonging, and being care for, valued, and supported.”

### Goals and Objectives

- Increase the sense of community felt by Washington County residents through volunteer opportunities
- Establish programs to improve intergenerational relationships.
- Establish support groups to improve social connection
- Reduce the number of Washington County residents who feel that social support are missing in our community.

### Suggested Strategies

- Establish a 'snow buddies' program to assist older adults with snow removal.
- Establish a Washington County volunteer network
- Partner with local libraries to host support groups with likeminded needs and goals.
- Partner with schools to increase opportunities for students to interact with older adults.
- Utilize Farmers' Market partnerships to increase awareness of existing groups/coalitions
- Plan a veterans' event, seeking input from VA Hospitals (possibly Iowa City's)

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### Spotlight on Success

The City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa hosts an annual Snow Buddies program intended to assist residents who “are not physically able to remove snow and do not have other resources to remove snow.” Residents request help through the city’s website, and are connected with a “Snow Hero,” which is what the program calls volunteers who help their neighbors remove snow and ice from sidewalks. Ensuring snow removal on all sidewalks protects the safety of various residents who may walk to school, work, or for activity during the winter.

Cedar Rapids is one of many cities throughout the country that hosts this type of program, with some including other services such as leaf clearing. These programs are active for several months out of the year and benefit both the volunteer and persons receiving assistance through service and partnership.

## **Thank you!**

On behalf of Washington County Public Health and the Washington County Board of Health, thank you for your interest in this Community Health Improvement Plan. It takes all of us working together to improve health in our community. The work of public health is ever changing because our community is always growing and changing, too. We hope you join us in our efforts so we may all look back in five years and see how we made Washington County a healthier place to live, work, and play!