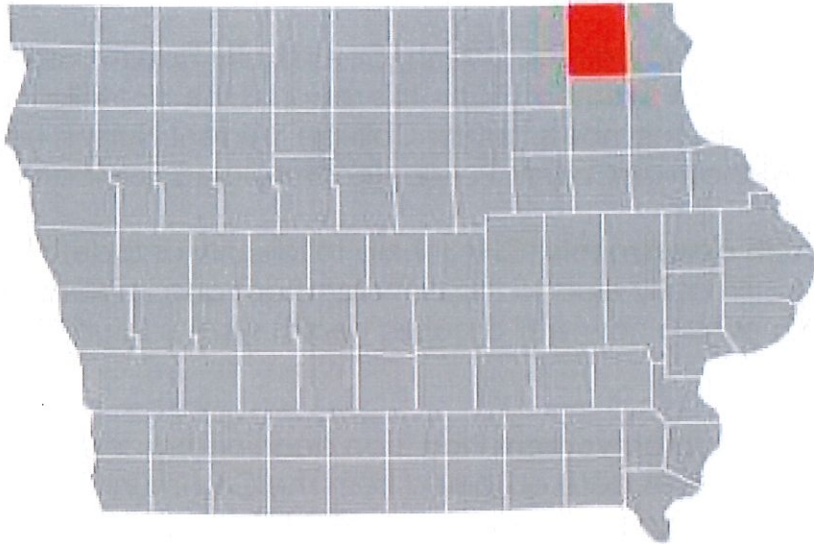


2023 WINNESHIEK COUNTY HEALTH ASSESSMENT AND COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN



Contents

WELCOME AND PURPOSE.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
BACKGROUND OF PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT.....	3
SURVEY PROCESS.....	4
DEMOGRAPHICS.....	5
REPORT OF DATA.....	7
HOUSING.....	10
MENTAL/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH.....	12
OLDER ADULTS.....	14
SUBSTANCE USE.....	15
FOOD SCARCITY.....	17
WORKFORCE.....	18
COVID-19 IMPACT.....	20
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.....	21
SUMMARY OF CONCERNS.....	24
COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN.....	26

WELCOME AND PURPOSE

Welcome to the 2023 Winneshiek County Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan. This report is the compilation and analysis of data from community members, Luther College Student Nurses, healthcare personnel and Winneshiek County Public Health Nursing Service staff.

Community health assessments (CHAs) help to identify and define problems and assets and may ultimately lead to the development and implementation of policies. CHAs also help measure how well a public health system is fulfilling its assurance function.

A **Community Health Improvement Plan** is an ongoing process. A community health improvement plan utilizes data obtained from the Community Health Assessment to identify priority issues, to develop and implement strategies for action, and establish accountability to ensure measurable health improvement. A community health improvement process looks to the way in which the activities of many organizations contribute to community health improvement.

Sources

- *National Library of Medicine, The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century* (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- *National Library of Medicine, Improving Health in the Community: A Role for Performance Monitoring* (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2023 Winneshiek County Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan is possible through collaborative efforts between healthcare personnel, community members, Luther College Student Nurses, the University of Iowa, Winneshiek County Emergency Management and Winneshiek County Public Health Nursing Service staff.

Many hours were spent preparing the community survey. University of Iowa Student Nurse Sinn worked on developing the questionnaire that was distributed as part of her internship with Winneshiek County Public Health.

Winneshiek County Emergency Management shared a tool for data collection. This tool made capturing data responses quite easy.

Luther College Student Nurses under the guidance of Janna Edrington, ARNP and Angela Kueny, PhD, captured data surrounding mental health, exercise and the elderly and workforce issues. Data they collected and analyzed is reported in this document.

Over 550 community members completed the online and paper survey! This was an amazing response. Local newspapers, area partners, social media and the use of websites assisted in publishing notice and access to the survey. A small local site requested paper copies to capture responses from patrons. Their responses have been separated and are reported as a cohort group and are shared in the report.

Winneshiek County Public Health Nursing Services staff spent several hours identifying needs, available services and gaps in services for county residents. Staff time also included the use of interns to research and write the Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan.

BACKGROUND OF PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS

The previous Community Health Needs Assessment was completed in 2016. The health priorities identified at that time included:

- mental and behavioral health;
- aging issues;
- radon exposure;
- a decrease in vaccination status;
- a lack of personal emergency preparedness and;
- communicating with the public.

This information had been collected through a Survey Monkey and paper distributed survey process.

Healthcare partners within Winneshiek County and community partners worked independently to address the identified healthcare needs. The healthcare community has worked tirelessly to increase awareness of health-related issues to community members through a variety of communication platforms including social media and print and audio media.

It was observed during annual immunization audits that the county's vaccination rates were decreasing. Some families were choosing to follow their own schedule of vaccinations or seek completion of exemption forms.

Winneshiek County Public Health staff continued to sell radon test kits and shared contact information for area radon mitigators.

The Winneshiek County Emergency Preparedness Coalition tried a variety of methods to increase participation at their quarterly meetings presence in the community in hopes of encouraging individuals and families to be prepared for personal emergencies.

Mental health and behavioral issues cast a looming shadow over the entire area. Although providers knew there was a need, there just was not an answer or a way to solve the crisis. There were more requests for mental health appointments than were available pushing the wait time to over 6 weeks and into 6 months. After COVID and the national emphasis on mental health awareness, there has been a significant increase in work to reduce the stigma often associated with mental health.

SURVEY PROCESS

It was important that as many individuals as possible would complete the Community Health Assessment. Social determinants of health and the social vulnerability index were used to help identify populations who may not have easy access to the survey tool.

Winneshiek County Public Health worked with the University of Iowa Student Nurse intern to determine questions to be asked. It was a goal to have community members to be able to rate their level of concern about various issues so that issues could be ranked accordingly. In order to keep the response rate high, professors

were consulted who suggested limiting the number of questions. It was determined that in order to capture the type of data desired and needed, extra thought would be needed in the wording of each question. The integrity of each question was also verified.

There were several discussions about how to survey the community. Originally, the plan was to provide a direct mailer to every address in the county. The direct mailer would have a link and a QR code linking people to the survey. Since the Community Health Assessment survey was occurring during the COVID pandemic, healthcare professionals that had been discussing methods of information distribution for COVID vaccines had already determined this would be an ineffective use of monies.

During this time, WinnMed, the local critical access hospital also was needing to complete their Community Health Assessment. The project lead from WinnMed and Administrator of Winneshiek County Public Health connected to determine the best way to proceed to collect data that could be used by both entities.

Emergency Management suggested the use of Jotform. Jotform is an online platform that can be customized to collect data. Our student nurse intern was able to create and edit the Jotform Assessment tool to allow for consumer responses. Logos for the Public Health agency and WinnMed were added to help consumers recognize that the information they shared would be used by local healthcare providers in addressing community health concerns.

A QR code was developed and published in the print media and on social media for the entities involved. This allowed individuals to be able to complete the survey using their handheld technology. A QR code was new technology for our agency. It was important for the agency to be progressive and utilize the available technology.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population: 19,974 (July 1, 2022)

20,061 (April 1, 2020)

Persons under 5 yrs of age: 4.6%

Persons under 18 yrs: 18.4%

Persons 65 and over: 23.3%

Females: 49.6%

Median household income: \$65,330

% in poverty: 8.7%

Total employment: 8,789

Source

- United States Census Bureau QuickFacts; Winneshiek County

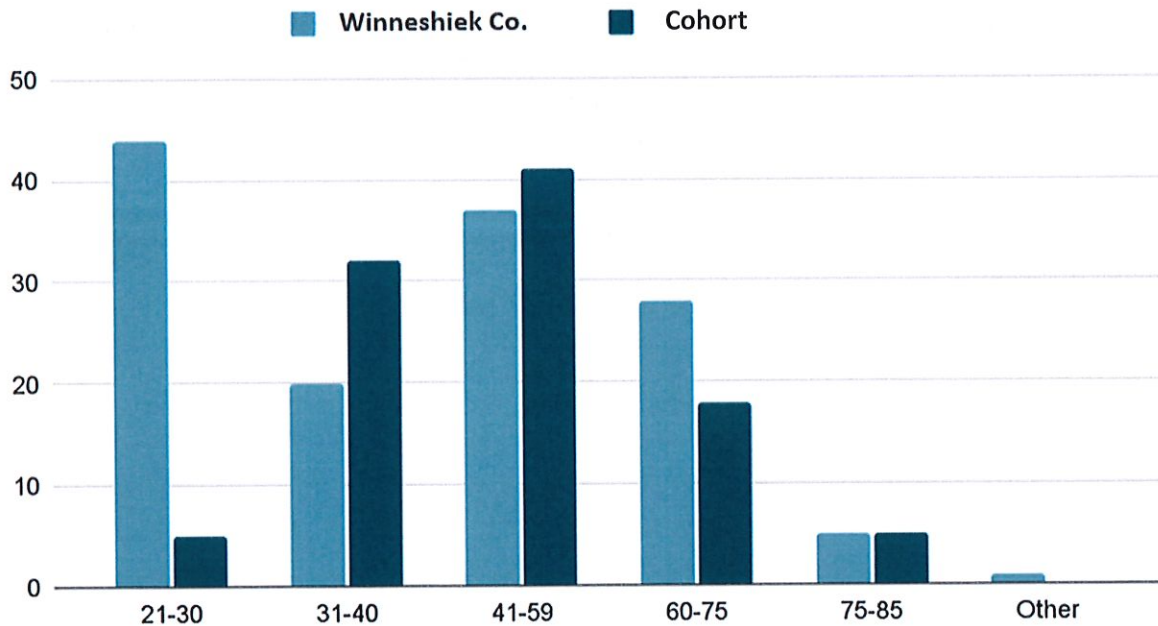
Residence		
Winneshiek Co.	55% town residence	43% rural residence
Survey respondents	53% town residence	47% rural residence

REPORT OF DATA

COHORT DATA

We were approached by an entity that wished to have paper copies for consumers to complete. These responses have been kept separate and are being reported as a cohort of the larger sample.

It must be noted that the larger Winneshiek County CHA survey is based on a sample size of 515 respondents. The smaller survey from the Cohort sample was based on 26 respondents. Since the Cohort is in Winneshiek County, it reflects a small subset of the same population from which the overall Winneshiek County survey was taken. This report, thus, is a reflection of two different samples of varying sizes where both surveys were taken in Winneshiek County. Thus, this report is not a direct comparison of two different populations, but a larger look at the county and then a smaller look at a more localized region within the larger population.



Social determinants of health, also called structural drivers of health, are factors that form part of the foundation of a person or community's health. Structures like economic stability, availability of resources and opportunities, or racism can all fit into this category. These factors, sometimes not addressed in the health profile of individuals, can affect both health and healthcare of communities. Individuals that live in an area with less economic security and opportunities, for example, may have access to fewer healthcare centers, may have more difficulty commuting to these centers, or these places could be less-adequately funded than those in other areas. While these structural drivers of health should not be seen as sole determinant of a person's health status, they are important to factor into the assessment of a community's health status.

The two samples from which this survey was taken exhibit discrepancies in demographics and discrepancies in the reported health statuses of these two samples may come from populations with different social determinants of health.

Decorah serves as a center in which a larger array of services, both public health-related and otherwise, are often frequented by residents of the county's more rural towns and communities. As such, Decorah can be characterized as a less rural and more adequately equipped healthcare center for Winneshiek County. The respondents to this Community Health Assessment from the smaller Cohort sample, then, reflect a population primarily based farther away from Decorah's public health services than the overall sample of the WinnMed.

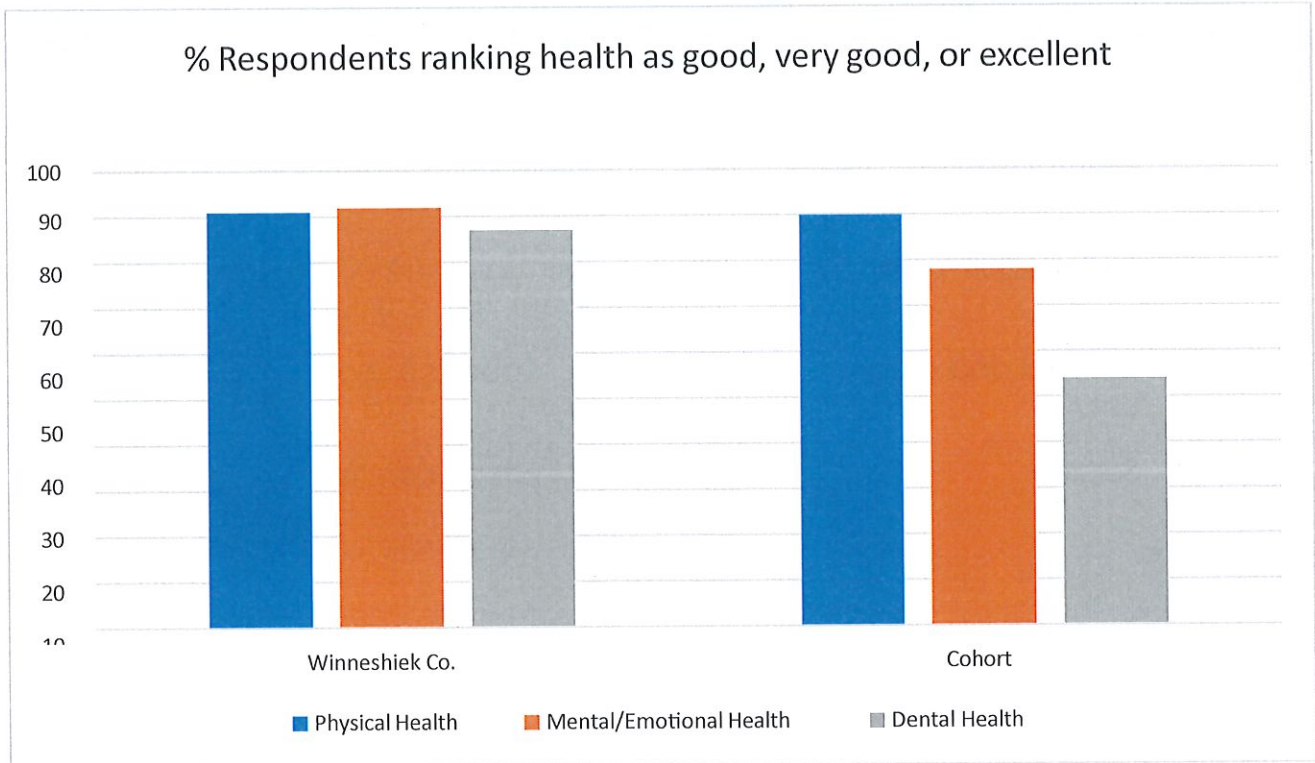
Among those respondents to the general Winneshiek sample survey, 77 percent had Decorah zip codes. For the smaller Cohort sample respondents, there were too few to accurately report zip code percentages, but they consisted of codes 52101, 52132, 52136, 52155, 52142, 52161, and 52175.

Sources

- *National Library of Medicine, Structural Interventions to Reduce and Eliminate Health Disparities* (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- *World Health Organization, Social Determinants of Health* (who.int)

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Most respondents of both surveys felt they have overall good, very good, or excellent health, with the exception of dental health among the Cohort sample:



Top Categories of Priority Concern

Categories ranked among the top five for priority include many similar concerns between the two surveys, while the order in which they appear differs.

Winneshiek County		Cohort	
Housing Options	88%	Older Adult Care	57%
Mental Health Care	86%	Housing Options	52%
Older Adult Care	78%	Mental Health Care	46%
Alcohol and drug use	76%	Tobacco Use	48%
Suicide	68%	Food Scarcity	48%

HOUSING

Priority Concerns: housing availability, rent prices

The category of housing options was the highest-rated area of concern among the respondents of the Winneshiek County CHA. 88% of survey respondents ranked it as an area of high concern.

Winneshiek County is not unlike many other parts of the state and country in that there is not enough available housing. County Health Rankings data from 2015 to 2019 reports that 10% of the county's households experienced at least one of the following housing problems: overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities or lack of plumbing facilities. According to city of Decorah and

county officials, they realize this challenge and each municipality is needing to address the issue for their community. Infrastructure needs such as sewer, electricity, and septic systems must be considered which can be challenging based upon the topography of Winneshiek County. There are a number of Airbnb's spread throughout the county. It is important to have locations available for the tourists who visit however, Airbnb's may end up removing sites for long-term rental use.



Image Credit: DowntownDifferent.com

Affordable housing is a related issue. Consumers have shared that due to low wages and high home and rent prices within Winneshiek County, they are unable to afford appropriate housing. U.S Census data reports the county's owner-occupied housing unit rate as 64.6%. Individuals often compare rental rates to other communities. Although new apartments have been built, a studio apartment may cost as much as \$1200 a month within Decorah city proper but, compare this to a 2-bedroom, 1 bathroom with a garage apartment in another community for only \$875. U.S Census data reports that the median gross rent in Winneshiek County is \$1,163. Consumers are perplexed why rentals are so high. Much discussion remains to be had.

Sources

- *County Health Rankings, Winneshiek, IA (Countyhealthrankings.org)*

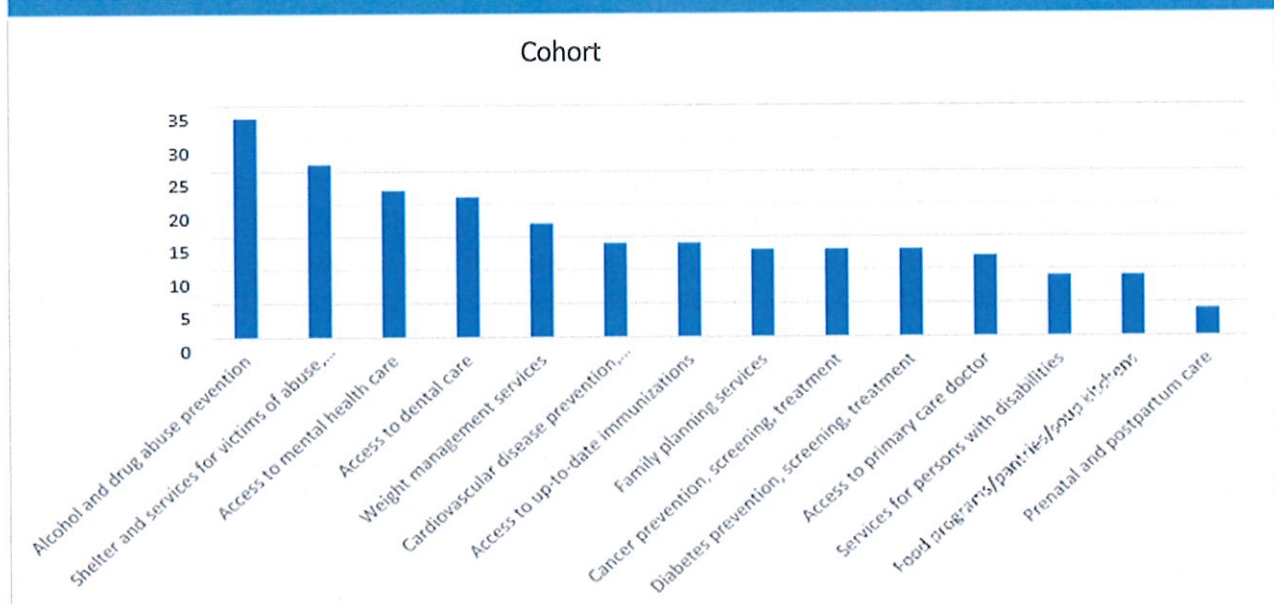
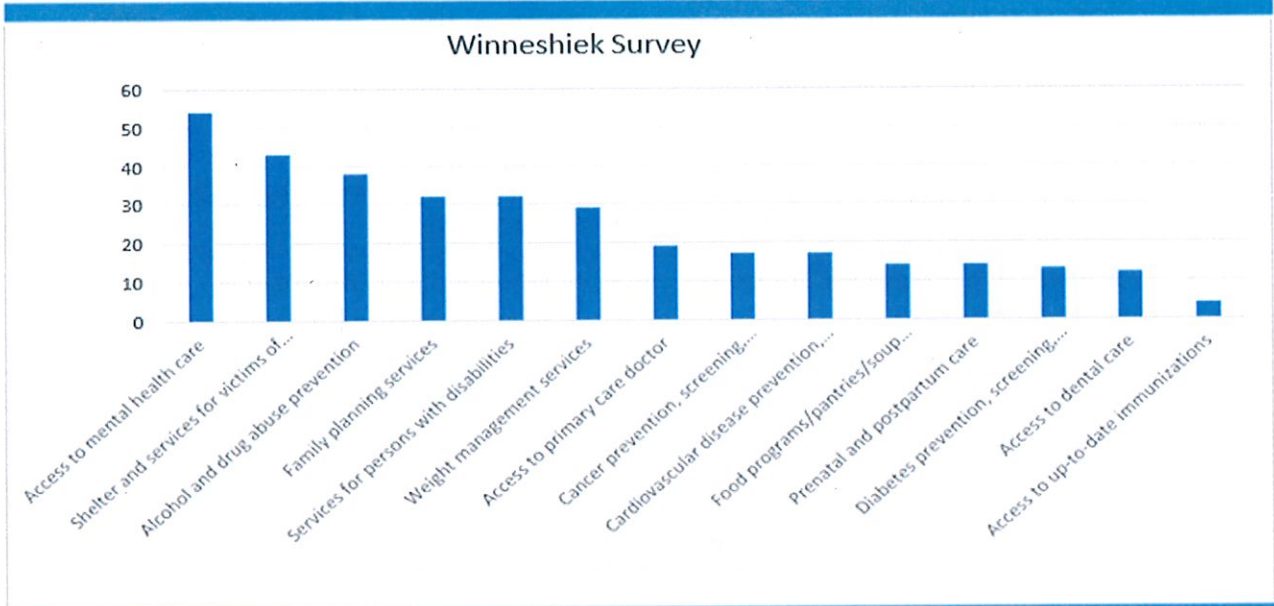
- *United States Census Bureau QuickFacts; Winneshiek County*

MENTAL HEALTH

Priority Concerns: mental health care resource availability and accessibility

Data from the Winneshiek County CHA's larger online survey found that 86% of respondents viewed mental health care as a top category of concern. This was the second highest ranked category for this survey. Additionally, respondents to this same survey stated ranked mental health care access as the least available healthcare service. While CHA data and other county data indicate that the mental health condition of Winneshiek County is not unusually poor, it is clear that the access and availability of services to address mental health is lacking.

According to County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Winneshiek County residents reported an average of 4.1 poor mental health or mentally unhealthy days out of the previous 30 days when surveyed. As is the case with many other healthcare services, Decorah, Iowa is the main center for mental health resources and services for Winneshiek County residents. A 2020 report by senior nursing students at Luther College found that 70% of respondents from the county stated the nearest place they can access mental health care was Decorah, and the majority of respondents wished their community had more resources for mental health care. Thus, it is important to factor in a person's access to transportation when considering residents that live long distances away from Decorah. In this same survey, though, 93% of respondents stated that they had access to transportation for mental health care services.



Suicide prevalence in Winneshiek County, as well as the nation, is a continuing issue, affecting the physical and mental health of community members. While thoughts and actions taken by individuals regarding taking one's own life are not always caused by or linked with mental and behavioral health issues, there can often be coinciding and underlying factors that correlate the two. (source) According to the CDC, existing concerns of loneliness and isolation in the country were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Iowa and Winneshiek County youth face particular rises in suicide and suicidal behavior, according to the Iowa Public Health Tracking Portal. Since the year 2000, the Iowa Public Health Tracking Portal has seen an overall increase of suicide rates.

Among teens in particular, it recorded a consistent rise in teen suicide rates since 2007.

Sources

- *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Winneshiek, IA (countyhealthrankings.org)*
- *Iowa Public Health Tracking Portal, Suicide (tracking.idph.iowa.gov)*
- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (cdc.gov)*
- *National Library of Medicine, Suicide Risk and Mental Disorders (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)*

OLDER ADULT CARE

Priority Concerns: access to care

Among Winneshiek County CHA survey respondents, 77% stated that older adult care was a category of high concern. Concerns over older adult care are complicated and often interconnected. Issues with the overall health of older adults in Winneshiek County and their avenues to care are of special concern in Decorah, Iowa, as it is a common place for retirement. As such, the Decorah community has taken steps to increase access to care for older adults and increase their access to necessities. Taxi and bus services are available for transportation. The COVID-19 pandemic saw local grocery stores implement curbside pick-up which aids adults with mobility issues in getting groceries.

Physical activity for older adults is important for their overall mental and physical health, this is important for the overall health of the community. According to survey information gathered by the Luther College Nursing Department and the Winneshiek County Public Health Department, adults aged 65 and over responded that walking, yardwork, and housework were the top three categories of physical activity engaged in by respondents. Twenty-six percent of respondents to this survey stated that insufficient knowledge of physical activities or exercise programs was a barrier to their engagement in physical activity. This was the second highest rated barrier in this study.

In addition to care access, knowing when to seek care and how to better care for oneself are important components in the health of older adults. Information on healthy lifestyles and healthcare options must be considered when looking at older adult concerns. Winneshiek County's CHA survey found that many

respondents get most of their information about health from doctors and nurses. While this was rated as the main source of information, the internet and family and friends were also cited as a source for many. While medical accuracy certainly varies among reports from different sources, it is important that primary care providers who interact with older adults provide consistent and clear messages to their patients about their health and avenues to a healthy lifestyle. The survey by the Luther College Nursing Department found that among respondents, by far the largest motivating factor for engagement in physical activity was for one's physical health.

Source

- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Older Adults (cdc.gov)*

SUBSTANCE USE

Priority Concerns: binge drinking, meth and drug use

Concerns related to alcohol use and misuse were rated highly among respondents to the Winneshiek County CHA. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported high concern over alcohol and drug use. These concerns are reflected in other alcohol misuse data from the county.

According to 2020 data from County Health Rankings, 26% of Winneshiek County adults reported binge or excessive drinking. This is down from 28% in 2018. While this number is slightly above the average reported in Iowa (25%), the country average rate is 19%. When combined with other related data, however, the state of alcohol misuse in Winneshiek County appears more concerning. The county's percentage of motor vehicle crash deaths involving alcohol was 33%, while the state and national average is 27%. In 2017, the county had 53 alcohol treatment admissions, ranking the county 32nd in the state.



Image Credit: FloridaRehab.com

The county's youth, in regards to binge drinking, appear to likewise land above the state's averages. The percentage of 11th graders, for example, that reported binge drinking during the previous 30 days was 12%, and the state's average was 9%. Among 11th graders that reported consuming any alcohol in the previous 30 days, the county percentage that reported binge drinking was 57 compared to the state percentage of 51.

In addition to alcohol use, drug use is a concern in this community. Recent police reports from the county indicate that substantial seizures of methamphetamine are occurring in 2023. Overall, Winneshiek County reports below both the state and the national average for substance use disorders, according to Health Data, while the

Sources

- *County Health Rankings, Winneshiek, IA* (countyhealthrankings.org)
- *KCRG, Sharp Increase in Meth Seized by Winneshiek Co. Sheriff's Office from 2022 to 2023* (kcrg.com)
- *Iowa Youth Survey, Winneshiek County* (iowayouthsurvey.edph.iowa.gov)

FOOD SCARCITY (AS MENTIONED BY COHORT)

Priority: access to food

Individuals from the cohort group identified food scarcity as their fifth highest health concern. Food scarcity, by definition, is not having enough food being produced whereas, food insecurity is the consistent lack of food to have a healthy life because of one's economic situation. Hunger is the feeling someone has when they don't have food. The CHA survey did not differentiate between the three nor did it define 'food scarcity' in the actual question. This discussion area will address each of the potential impacts the cohort group may have referenced when indicating food scarcity.

Per Feeding America, more than 44 million people in the United States experience food insecurity in the United States. Food insecurity can have significant impacts on one's health. Winneshiek County has three food pantries run by organizations, with two located in Decorah and one in Calmar. All are very busy food pantries which speaks to the identified need from the Cohort group.

Some of the Cohort group have perhaps experienced hunger. It is possible that they have not had access to transportation or the operating hours of the food pantry conflict with other responsibilities. It is possible that the food pantry shelves have been bare when individuals have sought food. These are just some of the many reasons why one may go hungry.

The high food prices and national news about the number of individuals living in poverty and the amount of food production needed to feed the people of the nation and world weighs heavily on people.

Source:

- *Feeding America, Hunger in America (feedingamerica.org)*

WORKFORCE

Priority Concerns: job vacancies, health worker demand

Workforce issues facing Winneshiek County, both in healthcare and overall, have impacts on the community's productivity and availability of services. This can affect the healthcare access of residents and increase pressure and burnout for workers in areas with high vacancies. While healthcare position vacancy rates in the county are not especially high, vacancies in other areas can have negative impacts in the community. Workforce analysis report data collected from Luther College Student Nurses reports that the area with the highest number of job vacancies is in grocery. Impacts reported in this report show that these vacancies cause a decrease in productivity and less net income which impacts the community's economy.

Considering workplace vacancies in healthcare specifically, the same survey by Luther College Student Nurses reported that the highest vacancy types were for registered nurses and patient care technicians. While this study reports that 4.2% of available healthcare positions in the county are unfilled, these vacancies affect health centers by increasing employee burnout, having to pay employees more to work premium or incentive shifts, and having to pay more money to hire travel agency nurses.



Image Credit: NurseJournal.org

While job positions in the field of health care face nursing and patient care technician shortages, other areas face workforce issues as they look to expand their care services. As discussed in the previous Mental/Behavioral Health section of this report, Winneshiek County residents state that access to adequate mental health services is a top priority. Responding to this need of increased care access, the county's Northeast Iowa Behavioral Center is currently looking to expand and hire new mental health professionals, according to the same workforce report from Luther College Nurses. The reported workforce issues facing Winneshiek County mean that this center is having to refer patients, provide more triage care, and having to spend less time with clients.

The workforce issue is not just a local issue. There can be significant impacts but, this topic will not be discussed in the Community Health Improvement Plan.

COVID-19 IMPACT

Winneshiek County CHA data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the health and financial situation of community members. The majority of respondents stated that COVID-19 had impacted both their mental and physical health. A majority of respondents likewise stated that the pandemic had impacted them financially. As commonly seen across U.S. counties, the pandemic impacted virtually every facet of life, especially populations and demographics more vulnerable to the virus.

The results of the 2022 CHA must be considered in context with the impacts COVID-19 had across the health of the community, the economy, and the community's social life. As discussed previously in this report's Workforce section, the pandemic caused workforce issues that are continuing to have effects on the community. The workforce report from Luther College Student Nurses found that COVID-19 was among the reasons for job vacancies in the county.

While still posing a threat to the health of the county, Winneshiek County is among the top in Iowa for vaccination rates. According to CDC data, 65.2% of residents have completed a primary series, and 27.7% have completed updated vaccinations.

According to the World Economic Forum, the pandemic's impact on the national public health level is continuing to cause large-scale workforce issues. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) states that COVID-19 exacerbated an already-existing national public health workforce crisis. This organization states that over half of the nation's public health workers report symptoms of PTSD and other mental health concerns due to the pandemic. NACCHO also states that in 2022, approximately one third of public health workers were currently considering leaving the organization they were working for, and almost 40% of these workers cited COVID-19 as the reason for doing so.

COVID-19 did affect people as the data indicates however, this topic is not discussed in the Community Health Improvement Plan.

Sources

- *National Library of Medicine; Impact of COVID-19 on the Social, Economic, Environmental and Energy Domains: Lessons Learnt from a Global Pandemic (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)*
- *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Tracking the COVID-19 Economy's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships (cbpp.org)*
- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID Data Tracker (covid.cdc.gov)*
- *National Association of County and City Health Officials, Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Passes Congress (nacho.org)*
- *World Economic Forum, How is the US economy Doing After COVID-19? (weforum.org)*

Environmental Health

Priority Concerns: radon levels, agricultural runoff, flooding

Data from the Winneshiek County CHA indicate that among survey respondents, environmental concerns are relatively of low concern compared to other community health issues. The highest two rated environmental concerns from the surveyed respondents included air quality, which 33% rating as a high concern, and water quality, which 30% rated as high concern.

Winneshiek County is known as part of the Driftless Region. During the most recent glaciation period (about two million to 13 thousand years ago), giant lobes of ice flattened the ground as they moved up and down the landscape. As the glaciers receded, rocks and soil trapped within the ice (known as glacial drift) were left behind. The absence of glacial drift in this area is what makes it *drift-less* (4). Winneshiek County is a karst topography. There are areas of the

county which sit firmly on limestone and other areas which consist of richly soiled agricultural land.

Due to the limestone topography, the area is known to have high radon levels. Radon is an odorless, invisible, radioactive gas naturally released from rocks, soil, and water. Radon can get into homes and buildings through small cracks or holes and build up in the air.

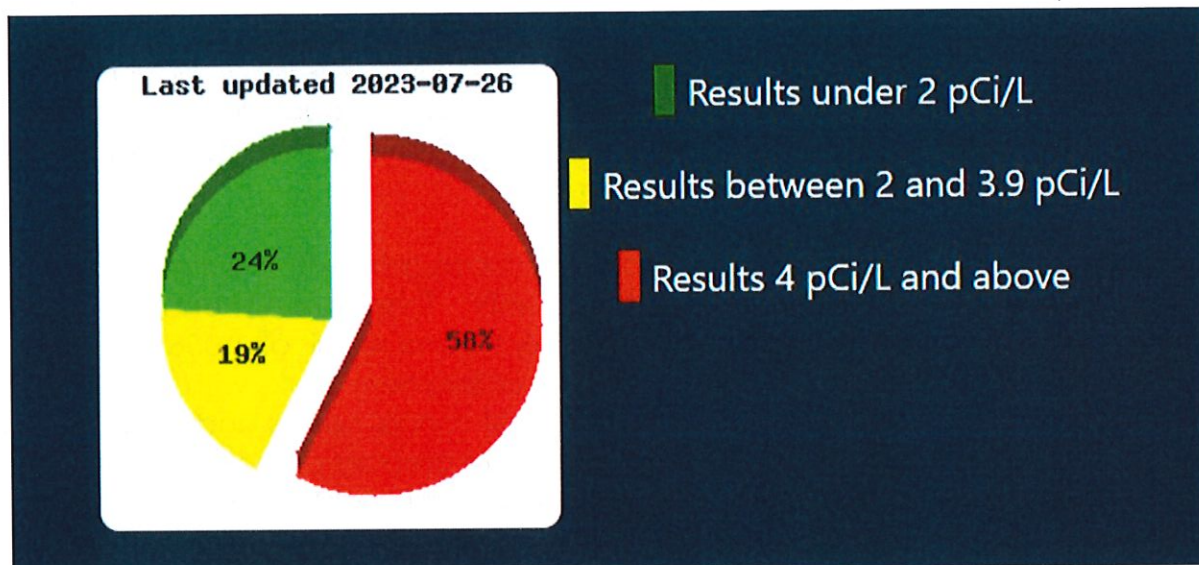


Image Credit: Radon.com

Winneshiek County participates in the Grants to Counties program managed by the Iowa Health and Human Services. The County annually applies to receive funding to cost share for water testing, well plugging, well chlorination and well repair. The office is staffed with one Environmental Health Specialist whose time is consumed with water testing, issuing well drilling permits, well plugging, wastewater design and troubleshooting and issuing septic permits all under the Iowa Department of Natural Resources regulations. Wells in the county are old but functional. Recently the prolonged drought resulted in two wells going dry and new wells being dug.

According to the Winneshiek County Iowa Farmland Profile, 286,614 acres are cropland (7). The limestone geology creates issues for farming. Farmers routinely use fertilizer and during heavy rains, the agricultural runoff flows into underground springs and aquifers. Of particular concern are nitrogen and phosphorus.

Tourism provides a major economic impact to the County. Trails, parks, campgrounds, fishing, breweries, shopping and other trades offer a plethora of activities inviting others to participate. Due to flooding events in 2008, 2016 and 2017 have affected waterways and many of the recreational waters can be considered unsafe.

Winneshiek County prides itself on its lush and natural setting. The County has a strong Conservation Board of Directors, Director and staff. Community members are passionate about the environment. The Secondary Roads Department and Conservation work tandemly to ensure the ditches have native grasses to help build a stronger foundation for roads and other infrastructure. In early 2023 elected county officials and members of the community were at odds with each other regarding the roadside vegetative program. County leaders chose to suspend the program which resulted in several comments from the public in support of and disagreeing with the decision.

The community has often shared complaints and concerns with county officials about poor road conditions throughout the county. There are not enough allocated federal or state funds to appropriately fix and repair all 1,056 miles of roads and bridges within the County. The County Engineer works with the Secondary Roads Department to identify the most critical needs and works to address them within the budgetary constraints. The amount of moisture and other weather conditions throughout the year can have positive and negative impacts on those planned improvements.

Winneshiek County also has a robust recycling program. Recycling bins are located throughout the county and at the central location. They process paper, cardboard, and plastics. They also work to accept various appliances and electronics. They are the only area site to accept some household hazardous wastes.

Decorah, specifically, is involved in several projects that will have positive impacts on the environment. The city participated in the Drinking Water Protection Plan in which a study was conducted to learn how quickly water moves through the area in order to determine how to respond. Each municipality has its own water issues to contend with.

Decorah has also applied for a Safety Action Planning grant through the Safe Streets and Roads for All, an infrastructure bill providing safe transportation for all users. The city has made some changes by adding curb bump-outs to allow for better accessibility for those in wheelchairs and scooters, temporary speed bumps in varied neighborhoods, lighted crosswalks and a road diet. They also have a community composting grant and are participating in a stormwater grant by adding bioretention at several sites throughout the city.

Although environmental issues do have an impact on a community's health, they will not be addressed in the Community Health Improvement Plan.

Sources

- *Eagle Bluff, About the Driftless Area (eaglebluffmn.org)*
- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Radon and Your Health (cdc.gov)*
- *Radon, Radon Levels for Iowa (county-radon.info)*

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS

Housing

- Housing availability
- Rent prices

Mental/Behavioral Health/Suicide

- Availability of services outside of Decorah
- Access to services

Older Adult Care

- Clear, consistent messaging to consumers

Substance Use/Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Use

- Alcohol use
- Drug use

Food Scarcity

- Food pantry usage

Workforce

- Job vacancies,
- Health worker demand

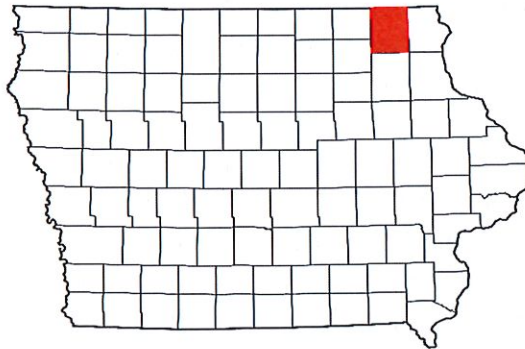
Environmental

- Radon levels
- Agricultural runoff
- Flooding

Community Health Improvement Plan

Mission Statement of Winneshiek County Public Health

To promote, preserve, enhance and protect the health and well-being of all persons in the community...realizing that HEALTH CARE is the fundamental right of every human being without distinction because of race, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age, mental or physical disability, social or financial status.



Health Improvement Plan

Data analysis from the Winneshiek County Community Health Assessment identified many important issues. Although each is a legitimate area of concern for varied populations, the following are the five most reported issues which will be addressed in the Health Improvement Plan.

- 1) Housing Options
- 2) Mental Health Care/Suicide
- 3) Older Adult Care
- 4) Substance Use/Alcohol and drug use
- 5) Food Scarcity

ISSUES

Problem: Housing

Housing is a complicated issue. Each living person requires an adequate, safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate place to reside and to call home.

According to Niche.com, 78% of Winneshiek County residents own their own homes and 22% are renting. The median home value is \$196,000 compared to the national average of \$244,900. The county's median rent is \$737 per month versus the national average of \$1,163. Particular communities within Winneshiek County may note rental rates to be higher or lower than the county median. This may be due to whether the dwelling is a single-family house or an apartment building.

There are several housing options within Winneshiek County. Single family homes, multi-family homes, long-term rental units, and rental units comprise the options. Some families have opted to have multi-generations living together.

Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation has four complexes within Winneshiek County that individuals may apply for. Some of these sites have certain maximum income and age eligibility requirements. Additionally, several programs may provide limited assistance such as the Northeast Iowa Regional Housing Trust Fund established by Upper Exploreland in an effort to develop and renovate homes and rental units. Many of the programs have specific guidelines and requirements but are available for home-owners within the county.

Decorah in particular, is in the process of looking at the housing situation in the city proper. A community discussion was held with about 50 attendees. Realtors and city leaders participated in a panel discussion and are more aware of citizen concerns regarding affordable housing. City and County elected officials understand the complexities of making housing affordable and that the need is great. Consensus is that these discussions are important and need to continue.

Our smaller surrounding municipalities also have limited availability of rental housing. Many times available rental units are not advertised and are made known by word-of-mouth. This can be challenging for those individuals and families moving into the community who may not have friends or family currently living in the community.

New homes continue to be built outside of the city limits. However, the topography of the county poses challenges. Although the rolling hills and bluffs create nature's beauty, it also means there are few level areas on which to build. The limestone karst means that wells must be dug deeper to reach usable water. This can increase costs to the homeowner. Likewise, septic installation has similar installation issues.

Goal: The goal is for individuals to report an increased ability to secure affordable, accessible and safe housing.

Strategy: There is not a "fix" to the housing issue. It is important that the Community Conversations continue to be held so that participants learn about concerns and challenges of both homeowners and future renters.

No one entity is responsible for addressing the housing issue. It is vital that Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation continues to have complexes available for rent. Several of these complexes are also accessible. Many renters also utilize some of the additional programs provided by the organization. The varied community programs that exist within the area offer assistance to landlords and homeowners to keep homes safe and habitable. Community programs also help renters to secure possible suitable living situations.

Community agencies and users of the agencies need to be advocates for continued programmatic funding addressing housing. We will need to communicate with local and state elected officials, local boards and consumers about the importance of ensuring that these programs continue to receive adequate funding to be able to help as many as the funds allow.

We will need to continue to advocate for continued conversations so that affected partners can learn more about the issues from each other. We will also continue to receive information from the Iowa Finance Authority which provides eligible homeowners with assistance with property expenses.

The entire community is responsible for addressing the housing issue. It will take elected officials, individuals familiar with housing codes, organizations with available monies and lay citizens to work together to meet this need.

Problem: Mental Health Care/Suicide

During COVID one of the recommendations to help prevent disease transmission was for individuals to socially isolate. Although social isolation did indeed help to prevent disease transmission, we have further identified that isolation is harmful to the mind. We recognize that some individuals truly do need some 'alone' time scattered throughout life but, not to the extent of isolating away from friends and family. Our increased dependence on technology is also a factor to consider. Many individuals would prefer to have a conversation via text messaging instead of face-to-face. Humans are social creatures.

Winneshiek County is fortunate to have counselors, psychiatrists and psychologists working in our local clinics. However, the availability of appointments with a mental health professional is poor. A person in crisis simply cannot wait to have their crisis until there is an available appointment time. It is very common for individuals to need to wait up to six months to be able to have an initial appointment with a professional. This delay in appointment availability also impacts law enforcement, EMS and fire service providers who may be experiencing a crisis due to unusual occupational stressors. These necessary service providers need to have immediate access to mental health professionals without the need to have to wait for provider availability.

It is very difficult for many people to talk with others about suicide. It is an emotionally charged subject and attempts to be sensitive may go awry. Few individuals have been trained in how to assist individuals in crisis. When a suicide does occur, the community often rallies an effort surrounding suicide awareness. Annually a suicide awareness walk is held in Decorah with many from surrounding communities participating.

Winneshiek County is home to two colleges. One is a Community College and the other a 4-year liberal arts college. The student population at each college is unique but, they present their own sets of challenges to the mental health equation and must be considered when working to address the needs of the community.

Goal: Have a provider only offer emergent appointments for those experiencing a mental health crisis and make this known throughout the community.

Strategy: Winneshiek County Public Health will pursue various types of staff training to increase awareness of mental health issues. A variety of training options exist, including the Make It Ok training, Mental Health First Aid, QPR

training, and training from the Mobile Crisis Outreach program designated to provide services to Winneshiek County. It is important that additional partners also be given the opportunity to participate in various trainings to help increase awareness. These trainings may provide tools to help individuals to have some of the difficult discussions with those experiencing crisis. These trainings may be appropriate for the college populations to participate in due to the significant amount of transition in student lives throughout the course of their college experience.

Winneshiek County participates in an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It is important that each staff is reminded of the EAP program benefits available.

The utilization of messaging for 988—the crisis hotline is essential. This can be achieved through a variety of 988 products available through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) to be distributed at health fairs throughout the community. The purchase of billboard space with 988 information is also another method of messaging that can reach a greater number of individuals.

Local emergency responders have access to a Critical Incident Stress Management team for assistance in processing an unusually stressful event. This intervention can address immediate issues but, does not provide for recurring flashbacks, thoughts, and emotions that may be experienced by the responder.

Local clinics may need to consider the need for additional providers to meet the needs of those in the community. Although this is an added payroll expense, this would be offset by additional revenue. Child Health Specialty Clinics is also a resource available to youth.

Self-care has become a buzz word and it can be vital in helping one to address situational stressful and mental health situations. Self-care does not need to be expensive or cost anything. It can simply involve taking a walk in nature or having some quiet time meditating. There are many community organizations that offer self-care therapies for individuals. This is important for the students at the local colleges as well.

Problem: Older Adult Care

Respondents of the survey identified Older Adult Care as an area for improvement. This topic can be complex and is multi-faceted.

Winneshiek County has two vibrant healthcare clinics and a critical access hospital. Both clinics are affiliated with tertiary care centers and have access to specialists. Some of the specialists provide in-person appointments and others offer tele-health services, both allowing our residents to have access to world-class care. There are four long-term care facilities located throughout the county. Three facilities offer assisted living options and three provide memory care units. Two certified home health agencies are located within the county and several entities help with personal cares. There is not an agency that provides private duty nursing care.

Many adults over the age of 65 years who responded to a survey regarding exercise indicated they participated in a variety of physical activities. Walking and yard work are cited as the most common forms of exercise in this age group. This age group is also fairly good about exercising between 30-60 minutes daily, thereby following the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for physical activity. Cited barriers to regular exercise for this age group include a lack of motivation, insufficient knowledge of exercise programs, the cost and their physical disabilities and pain. Unfortunately, many physical health promotion initiatives overlook older adults who may have physical and functional limitations.

Goal: Develop a Community Resource Guide that identifies many resources for individuals.

Strategy: Winneshiek County Public Health is working collaboratively to develop a Community Resource Guide. The goal of this guide is to identify as many resources as possible that consumers may need to contact. The Community Resource Guide will have an online presence and will also be available in print format. It is hoped that the Community Resource Guide can be made available at medical facilities and the Chamber of Commerce. A challenge will be to keep the online version of the Community Resource Guide updated.

Iowa HHS has initiated a campaign called "Ask Me." Although the focus of this campaign is addressing vaccine hesitancy, this theme can be utilized by healthcare professionals to remind consumers that we are a resource it is best to seek knowledge from reputable sources and not just the internet or social media.

Consistent messaging about available services is still critical for all ages. Most often we do not pay attention to an available service until we actually have need for it. Advertising, particularly in the form of brochures that can be left behind for review at a later date are beneficial. Participation in local health fairs is another way for citizens to gather information. Winneshiek County has brochures that can be shared and participate in health fairs as schedules allow.

As noted, many seniors prefer to walk to get their regular exercise and so it is important to encourage municipalities to focus on safe sidewalks. This means enforcement of snow and ice removal and repairing broken and uneven sidewalks.

There are several fitness centers within driving distance for most individuals. Each center has a varied menu of fitness options. Cost may be prohibitive for some to participate.

Problem: Alcohol and Drug Use/Substance Abuse

Overall, alcohol consumption in Winneshiek County is higher than state averages. Binge drinking and alcohol related deaths can have significant impacts on one's health and the health of the community. Excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious health problems such as cancer and heart disease, and addiction issues. Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance in Iowa.

In collecting data, Luther College Student Nurses notes that alcohol use is commonly high on college campuses. Furthermore, some students have indicated they do not know what to do or who to turn to when they become concerned about a friend's drinking habits and when the line is crossed from "college partying" to concerning drinking behaviors.

Illegal drug use is also an identified concern. Local law enforcement is diligently working to combat the problem through arrests. Penalties for possession of drug paraphernalia in Iowa may not be a deterrent for repeat offenders as illegal drugs are habit forming and addicting.

Goal: Increase awareness of substance use and abuse within the county.

Strategy: Continued messaging about the dangers of alcohol and drug use. The ERASE Coalition and Helping Services for Youth and Families provides most of the messaging and education to area youth. Funding for this program is from Iowa HHS and is done in a variety of ways. The ERASE Coalition is made up of community members who meet monthly to discuss, plan and review substance use topics and educational needs. This group uses a variety of campaigns to increase awareness of underage drinking, binge drinking and consequences associated with drinking and illegal drug use. Prevention is the heart of the ERASE Coalition. Billboards, posters, social and print media and radio advertising are all effective avenues for messaging utilized by the ERASE Coalition.

Twice a year, Drug Take Back programs net several hundred pounds of medications no longer needed by consumers. Additionally, two pharmacies located in Winneshiek County have secure receptacles for safe medication disposal during business hours.

Your Life Iowa and Quitline Iowa are state initiatives in which consumers are able to seek assistance for addictions and be referred to entities that are able to offer help.

The Opioid Task Force is a recently formed group of key stakeholders. This group is tasked determining best ways to utilize monies from the Opioid Settlement Funds. Creating awareness campaigns is critical to deterring individuals from experimenting with varied substances. They are in the early stages of formulating a plan for County needs.

Food Scarcity

Food scarcity is an issue many individuals face every day. For some, not enough food is produced and for others, their economic situation may mean an increased dependence on community food pantries which rely on the generosity of community organizations and lay people to donate food products or monies for purchasing power.

Access to a variety of healthy food is important for all age groups. We know that adequate prenatal nutrition contributes to a healthy baby at birth. Continued good nutrition promotes growth and development of the brain and body. Students have better academic achievement when well-nourished which may lead to educational successes and career advancement.

Some individuals and families may travel from food pantry to food pantry to get the amount of food they need for their family. Some food pantries require the completion of income documentation verification to ensure that only individuals that meet the requirements are provided the service. Other pantries limit the frequency of visits or have a limit on the number of products one may receive.

Goal: In an ideal world, the goal would be to not need food pantries to exist. In our current world, the goal is to have stocked food pantries available to meet the needs of the community.

Strategy: Many decision makers and leaders do not fully understand food scarcity or the impacts it can have on one's life. A Poverty Simulation Activity which is available through Clayton County would be an excellent introduction to many. The Poverty Simulation Activity does require many participants for it to be successful but, in the end makes the participants think differently about the services offered and the hours of availability provided for by their organization.

Food pantries are often gifted generous donations from organizations throughout the year but, particularly during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday seasons. Community members often consider these times the best times to donate to food pantries as well. Some food pantries are associated with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank from Waterloo where monies go further in being able to purchase products. Food pantries however, need monies and donations of food weekly to meet the needs of the community. Continued regular support for the various food pantries remains critical.

Schools have been receptive to offering breakfast programs and more recently, backpack programs for some families. Backpack programs are ideal in that they offer a meal for use over the weekend to ensure a child is still getting nourishment even when they are not in school.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Winneshiek County is fortunate to have a wealth of resources and the strength of those resources comes from our residents who all want to have a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

