

2025 Community Health Assessment (CHA)

Executive Summary

Assessing and monitoring population health is an essential public health service. To address this need, as well as IRS and public health accreditation standards, every three years Mary Washington Healthcare (MWHC) and the Rappahannock Area Health District (RAHD) complete a collaborative assessment of community health in Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford counties and the City of Fredericksburg. This region is also known as Planning District 16, or PD16. Data was also examined from MWHC's service area in Orange, Prince William, and Westmoreland counties.

The Community Health Assessment (CHA) process identifies priority health issues and community resources that may be mobilized to address those needs. This report builds upon the previous CHA completed in 2022, utilizing multiple data sources to understand community health needs:

- Qualitative data from focus groups and guided conversations with 135 community members
- Survey responses from 1,308 community members
- Quantitative, secondary data from sources such as the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- Screening data on social determinant of health needs collected from MWHC's adult inpatient population in 2024
- Survey responses from 37 community partner organizations

In analyzing the data, several themes arose across data sources, and five key issues were identified (listed alphabetically):

- 1. Aging-related Concerns** were identified as one of the largest health concerns among survey respondents. Focus groups discussed mental health concerns among older adults, particularly related to isolation and loneliness, as well as transportation concerns. Older adults experience elevated suicide rates and high rates of chronic disease. Communication of available resources was identified as a particular challenge in this population, especially as communications shift increasingly toward online spaces. As the population continues to age, these challenges are likely to be exacerbated.
- 2. Behavioral Health**, including both mental health and substance abuse, were key issues in the 2022 CHA and remain issues today. Over half of survey respondents selected mental health as their biggest health concern, and both quantitative and qualitative data point to high rates of behaviors such as bullying, isolation, driving under the influence, long commute times, and insufficient sleep, which may be negatively tied to behavioral health outcomes. While the number of mental health providers relative to the population has improved in recent years, depression rates among adults increased across all PD16 localities, and high rates of adults are reporting poor mental health or frequent mental distress. Deaths by suicide exceed the Virginia rate in all PD16 localities except for Stafford County.
- 3. Healthcare Utilization and Access** also remains an issue. Compared to the Virginia and US averages, there are fewer primary care providers relative to the population. Community members noted the long wait times to see a provider and the long driving distances that may be required to seek care, particularly for rural residents. Maternal and infant health outcomes also highlight potential access to care issues, with higher rates of preterm births, low birthweight deliveries, and infant mortality compared to the state average. This especially impacts families of color and rural areas. Finally, dental issues also arose as a concern for some groups, with Hispanic/Latino and low-income survey respondents identifying this as a top health concern. The ratio of residents to dentists is very high across the counties in PD16.

4. Physical Activity and Healthy Eating arose as well as their link to chronic disease outcomes. About one in five residents report engaging in no physical activity. Residents expressed concern about access to affordable and healthy foods in focus groups, and food and exercise were the top behaviors community members would like to see addressed in the community. In PD16, rates of many chronic diseases are higher than the state average, particularly in Caroline County and the City of Fredericksburg. High blood pressure rates are higher than the state average across all PD16 localities. Obesity rates among adults increased across all PD16 localities from 2018-2022 by as much as 21%, and all PD16 localities have obesity rates at or above the state average.

5. Social Determinants of Health, or non-medical factors that influence a person's health and well-being, were also key issues in the data. Affordable housing was a top issue in the 2022 CHA, and housing costs continued to increase since that time to the point that even median income households may struggle to afford the average rent. Survey respondents identified affordable housing as the top factor that would most improve community health, with other affordability issues, such as childcare and affordable food also appearing in the top five responses. MWHC's inpatient screening for social determinants of health further highlighted housing-related needs, with housing presenting as the top need followed by food insecurity and transportation. Community conversations and focus groups identified transportation needs. This was cited as a particular issue in rural areas, but also impacts some more populated areas where public transit is limited.

Additional themes that cut across all identified issues include challenges related to communicating about the availability of resources and navigating resources, collaboration between community organizations, and population growth and demographic changes.

The goal of the CHA process is not only to collect and assess data, but to take action on key issues to improve population health. The full report provides additional data on key issues, cross cutting themes, and other issues impacting community health, including more detailed information on geographic and demographic groups experiencing inequitable health outcomes. The next step in this process is to use CHA findings to develop a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), for 2025-2028, set to be released by July 2025.



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