

# Community Engagement Profile:

## Aroostook County

2024



## Introduction

The Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment (Maine Shared CHNA) is a collaborative partnership between Central Maine Healthcare, Northern Light Health, MaineGeneral Health, MaineHealth, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Maine Community Action Partnership. By engaging and learning from people and communities and through data analysis, the partnership aims to improve the health and well-being of all people living in Maine. This is the fifth collaborative Maine Shared CHNA.

The mission of the Maine Shared CHNA is to:

- Create shared CHNA reports,
- Engage and activate communities, and
- Support data-driven improvements in health and well-being for all people living in Maine.

## Community Engagement

In order to begin to understand how people interact in their communities and with the systems, policies, and programs they encounter we must build relationships and engage in ways that are mutually beneficial. Drawing on narrative and lived experience we are better positioned to identify the root causes of health and well-being behaviors and outcomes and not just what those behaviors and outcomes are. Qualitative data, resulting from community engagement, provides an important context for the health and well-being outcomes and trends contained in the numbers. In combination, qualitative and quantitative data produce a broader picture of what a community is experiencing and enable a more thorough and well-rounded approach to program and policy development.

The Maine Shared CHNA's community engagement included: focus groups, key informant interviews, and a statewide, community survey.

The Maine Share CHNA recognizes the need to work with communities to build relationships and trust to more respectfully, transparently, and meaningfully work together in an effort to continuously improve upon our community engagement processes.

This document contains a summary of key themes from the County focus groups and a comparison of the County level survey results to the overall Maine results. The Maine Shared CHNA's data commitments are outlined in the Appendix. The community engagement overviews, as well as additional information and data, can be found online at the Maine Shared CHNA's website – [www.mainechna.org](http://www.mainechna.org).

## **Populations and Sectors Identified for Engagement**

### **Focus Groups**

As part of the Community Services Block Grant reporting, the Community Action Programs are required to engage directly with the communities they serve, namely those of lower income. To meet this requirement, the Maine Shared CHNA hosted local focus groups with people with low-income in each Maine County. The focus groups also provide important information and insights to the experiences of people at the County level. Two focus groups were conducted in Aroostook, Cumberland and Penobscot Counties to account for their variation in population and geography. A focus group was planned and recruited for in Sagadahoc County; however, no one was in attendance.

We recognize that for many people, their lives and their health is affected by multiple aspects of their identity and lived experiences or their “intersectionality.” We attempted to recognize participants’ intersectionality by asking them to voluntarily share any other identities they may have. It should be noted the voices we hear in focus groups are not meant to be representatives of their entire identified population or community. The totality of focus group participants also identify as: a Tribal member, older adults, Non-English speaker, immigrant, asylee, migrant, Latino/Latine/Latinx, residents of rural, urban, and suburban areas, people with substance use disorder, people with mental health disorder, members of the disability community, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, people who are unhoused or experiencing homelessness, and caregivers.

Focus groups and key informant interviews were also conducted at the state-level with specific populations and sectors. The findings are outlined in the Maine Community Engagement Overview.

### **Statewide Community Survey**

The Maine Shared CHNA also conducted a statewide, community survey on health and well-being. The survey was developed in collaboration by a small working group comprised of members of the Community Engagement and Metrics Committees, the Maine Shared CHNA Program Manager, and Crescendo Consulting Group, with final approval by the Steering Committee. The survey was open to anyone living in Maine. Respondents were asked to complete 40 questions related to the local resources and strengths of their communities and their own health and well-being and that of those who live in their community.

## Focus Group

**Number of Participants:** 12

### Top Themes

- Affordable housing
- Available resources
- Provider shortages
- Timely and affordable care
- Transportation

**The following sections contain select quotes from focus group participants.**

### What does a “healthy” community look like to you?

- “Opportunities for all age groups. [...] Programs that are accessible (affordable) for everyone.”
- “Transportation or telemedicine. There are efforts to expand telehealth access in the community.”
- “Empathy – not being judgmental, being open minded. Have compassion for different people. Not all walking the same path in life.”
- “Reliable government – if there is growth, town isn’t over compensating.”

### What services and resources for becoming and staying healthy are difficult to find?

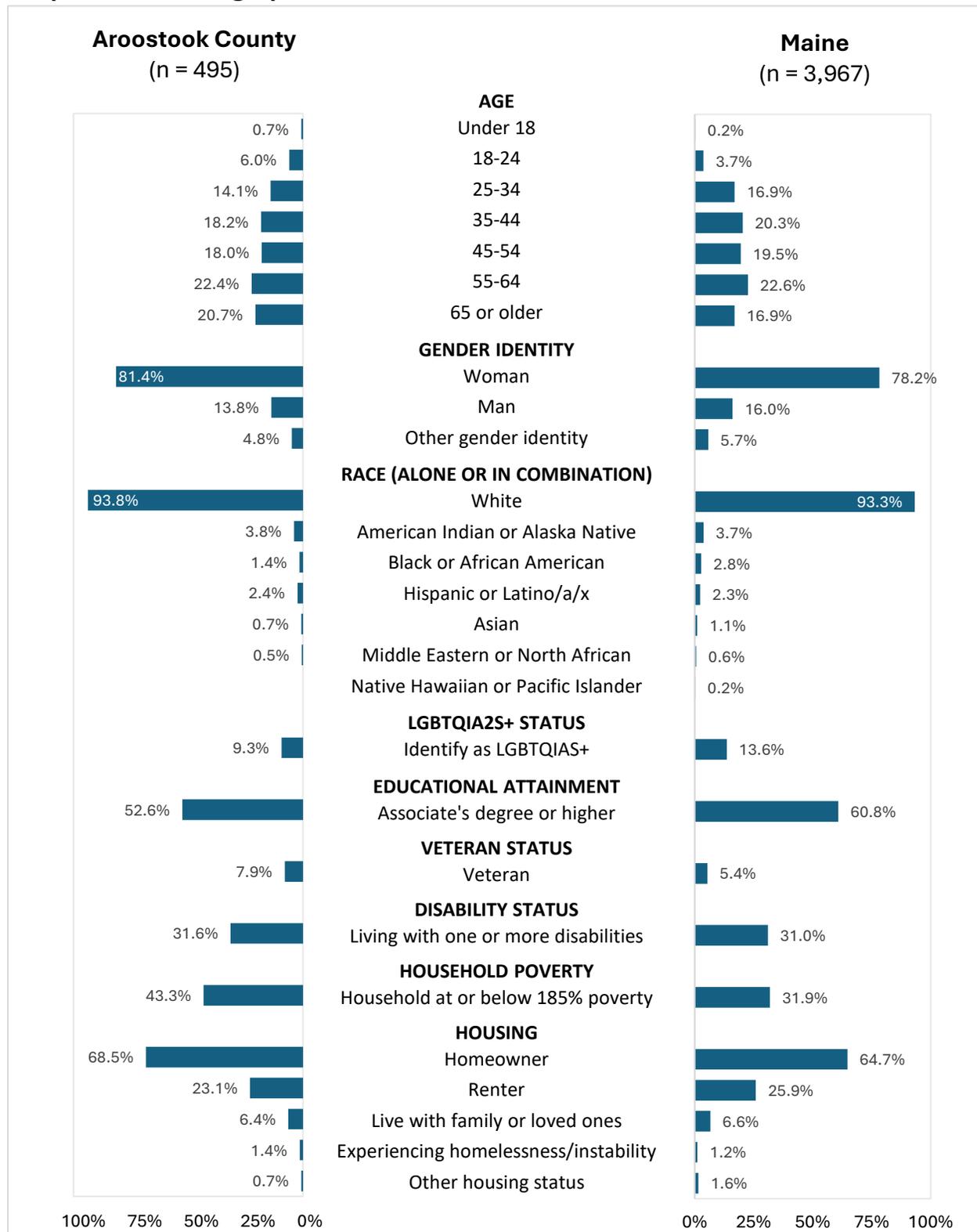
- “Providers are not really seeking newer patients.”
- “There aren’t enough providers, especially mental health and substance use treatment. Houlton may be a steppingstone in their career, and we appreciate having them, but...”
- “Specialists – if you want to see one quickly, you have to go as far as Bangor.”
- “[Someone I know] is disabled vet. He's able to use telehealth for his appointments, otherwise he has to go down to Augusta, Bangor, Caribou. Some people can't travel all over to get the care they need.”

### What are the top three social or environmental health needs or challenges in the community?

- “Wages have not kept up. You need 30% of your paycheck in order to get housing.”
- “Have wants and needs that are totally different from the homeless population. What if you are in the situation where there is nothing to eat? That’s an eye-opener. Doctors ask, “Do you have enough to eat? Do you feel safe at home?” But it’s just to check a box. What are they prepared to offer?”
- “Loneliness – being connected through electronics is better than nothing, but it doesn’t replace playing pickleball with friends, or playing cribbage.”
- “Spectrum is available but expensive. Low income internet program ended. Some people are getting Starlink.”

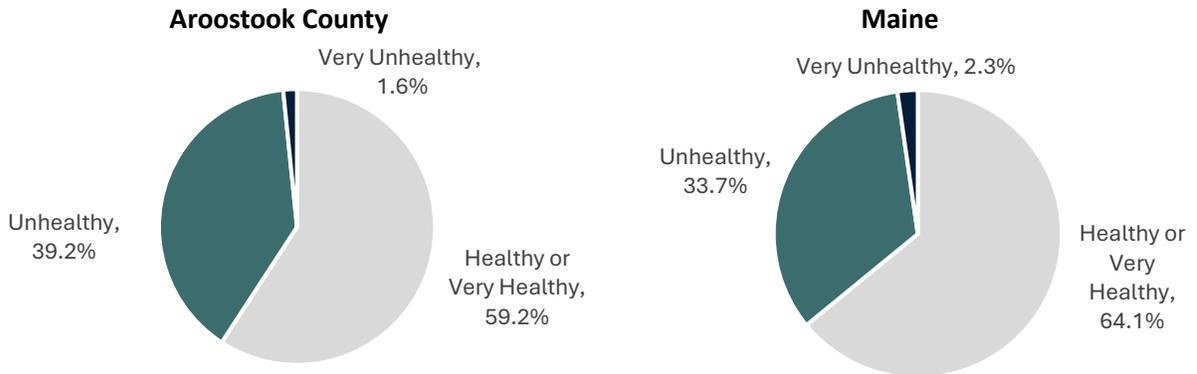
# Community Survey

## Respondent Demographics



## Community Health Status

### Overall health and well-being of the community where you live



### Top 5 strengths of the community

Aroostook County	Maine
1) Locally owned businesses	1) Safe opportunities to be active outside
2) Safe opportunities to be active outside	2) Locally owned businesses
3) Schools & education for all ages	3) Safe neighborhoods
4) Banks & financial institutions	4) Schools & education for all ages
5) Safe neighborhoods	5) Low crime

**Top 5 social concerns that negatively impact your community**

<b>Aroostook County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
1) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)	1) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)
2) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	2) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)
3) Low incomes and poverty	3) Low incomes and poverty
4) Childcare	4) Housing insecurity
5) Lack of transportation	5) Obesity

**Top 5 health concerns that negatively impact your community**

<b>Aroostook County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
1) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)	1) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)
2) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	2) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)
3) Obesity	3) Obesity
4) Aging health concerns (arthritis, osteoporosis, dementia, Alzheimer’s, etc.)	4) Aging health concerns (arthritis, osteoporosis, dementia, Alzheimer’s, etc.)
5) Dental and oral health	5) Tobacco or nicotine use (cigarettes, cigars, vapes, dip, nicotine pouches, etc.)

## Community Health Needs

Please indicate if \_\_\_\_\_ negatively impacts you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live.

*Percentage of respondents who answered 'Impacts me, a loved one, and/or my community'*

Aroostook County		Maine	
Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	76.8%	Economic needs	76.1%
Economic needs	76.6%	Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	75.7%
Mental health needs	73.6%	Mental health needs	73.6%
Substance use	73.1%	Substance use	68.5%
Transportation needs	63.6%	Housing needs	68.5%
Housing needs	63.2%	Transportation needs	60.9%
Public safety needs	54.6%	Environmental needs	58.4%
Environmental needs	52.8%	Public safety needs	53.7%

### Chronic Health Conditions

Please put a check mark if any of the following chronic health conditions negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Asthma, COPD, or Emphysema</b>	22.9%	41.3%	35.7%	5.1%	8.2%	15.2%
<b>Arthritis</b>	37.9%	48.6%	30.9%	3.6%	7.7%	8.5%
<b>Cancer</b>	11.6%	45.9%	46.1%	2.9%	6.5%	14.5%
<b>Diabetes or high blood sugar</b>	21.3%	49.8%	42.5%	2.9%	5.6%	9.7%
<b>Heart disease or heart attack</b>	11.6%	42.0%	39.4%	4.3%	9.9%	14.5%
<b>High cholesterol</b>	28.5%	47.3%	29.5%	4.3%	10.6%	10.1%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
High blood pressure or hypertension	36.0%	54.3%	34.1%	3.4%	6.5%	6.5%
Overweight/obesity	41.1%	45.7%	51.2%	2.7%	4.3%	5.3%
Stroke	2.7%	25.4%	30.0%	10.9%	15.5%	23.9%
Chronic liver disease/cirrhosis	4.8%	14.7%	23.2%	11.1%	27.5%	25.1%

### Economic Needs

Please put a check mark if any of the following economic needs negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
Availability of quality educational opportunities	12.9%	17.9%	52.4%	18.9%	15.9%	10.2%
Availability of jobs and employment opportunities	16.9%	26.6%	71.2%	10.2%	8.2%	5.7%
Availability of high-speed internet	27.0%	21.8%	58.1%	13.6%	14.1%	5.0%
Availability of quality, affordable childcare	15.9%	27.3%	77.7%	3.5%	5.7%	7.7%
Ability to contribute to savings, retirement	53.6%	42.7%	62.3%	4.2%	10.9%	2.5%
Access to affordable, quality foods	39.5%	39.2%	74.2%	6.5%	7.2%	2.0%

### Mental Health Needs

Please put a check mark if any of the following mental health needs negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
Anxiety or panic disorder	52.7%	60.4%	48.6%	3.1%	5.6%	2.3%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Depression</b>	44.5%	56.3%	57.3%	2.3%	5.6%	2.8%
<b>Bipolar disorder</b>	8.2%	32.7%	44.0%	6.9%	19.7%	12.0%
<b>Trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)</b>	32.7%	41.7%	47.1%	4.6%	12.8%	6.4%
<b>General stress of day-to-day life</b>	61.1%	54.0%	55.2%	2.6%	7.2%	3.1%
<b>Social isolation or loneliness</b>	26.9%	39.4%	57.8%	3.1%	8.7%	6.6%
<b>Stigma associated with seeking care for mental health or substance use disorders</b>	15.1%	32.5%	55.0%	7.7%	15.1%	9.2%
<b>Suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors</b>	10.2%	29.7%	53.5%	7.7%	17.9%	10.0%
<b>Youth mental health</b>	17.4%	34.0%	56.8%	5.1%	12.3%	8.4%

## Substance Use

Please put a check mark if substance use negatively impacts you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Alcohol misuse or binge drinking</b>	7.1%	41.8%	72.8%	1.6%	8.2%	2.9%
<b>Opioid misuse</b>	3.7%	22.5%	76.7%	2.4%	12.7%	3.2%
<b>Tobacco use</b>	13.2%	49.7%	72.2%	2.4%	4.8%	3.7%
<b>Vaping</b>	5.8%	33.1%	66.9%	4.0%	13.5%	5.8%
<b>Adult cannabis use</b>	8.7%	34.1%	63.8%	11.1%	7.7%	6.3%
<b>Other illicit drug use</b>	5.6%	25.9%	79.4%	2.1%	10.1%	3.2%
<b>Youth substance use</b>	3.2%	16.7%	71.2%	3.2%	15.9%	5.6%

## Transportation Needs

Please put a check mark if any of the following transportation needs negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Access to transportation</b> (for medical appointments, work, childcare)	17.7%	24.6%	81.2%	2.9%	5.2%	1.7%
<b>Availability of public transportation</b> (buses, trains, ride shares, taxis)	18.6%	25.2%	83.2%	2.9%	4.9%	1.7%
<b>Availability of transportation that meets a variety of specific needs</b> (older adults, physical or cognitive needs)	13.0%	20.9%	77.4%	3.8%	9.9%	1.7%
<b>Costs associated with owning and maintaining a vehicle</b> (insurance, registration, repairs)	45.8%	42.6%	71.9%	1.4%	7.5%	1.2%

## Housing

Please put a check mark if any of the following housing needs negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Housing costs</b>	37.9%	44.0%	79.9%	1.1%	5.2%	0.3%
<b>Availability of affordable, quality homes/rentals</b>	25.6%	38.2%	82.2%	1.4%	5.5%	1.1%
<b>Availability of affordable, quality housing for older adults or those with special needs</b>	14.1%	30.7%	77.0%	1.7%	10.3%	1.4%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Issues associated with home ownership or renting</b>	33.6%	35.3%	74.1%	1.7%	10.3%	2.6%
<b>Health risks in homes</b> (indoor air, tobacco smoke residue, pests, lead, mold)	19.8%	26.1%	64.4%	3.4%	20.4%	3.2%
<b>Homelessness or availability of shelter beds</b>	4.9%	12.9%	74.1%	2.6%	15.2%	4.9%
<b>Cost of utilities</b>	58.0%	53.4%	78.2%	0.9%	3.7%	0.6%
<b>Costs associated with weatherization</b>	35.9%	38.2%	71.8%	2.6%	8.6%	3.2%

**Public Safety Needs**

Please put a check mark if any of the following public safety needs. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Pedestrian (walking) or bicycle safety</b>	12.2%	11.9%	51.9%	23.7%	16.9%	5.3%
<b>Property crime</b>	11.9%	11.0%	66.5%	8.0%	20.5%	1.2%
<b>Community violence</b> (gangs, guns, street crime)	5.9%	7.4%	37.4%	22.8%	27.3%	9.8%
<b>Violence between people</b> (domestic, sexual, bullying)	11.0%	20.5%	75.1%	3.9%	14.8%	1.8%
<b>Racism</b>	10.1%	13.1%	53.1%	13.6%	22.8%	6.2%
<b>Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, LGBTQIA2S+, age, ability, etc.</b>	12.5%	19.9%	58.5%	11.3%	20.8%	4.5%

## Environmental Concerns

Please put a check mark if any of the following environmental concerns negatively impact you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live. (Select all that apply)

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
<b>Air quality</b>	20.3%	18.5%	37.0%	28.2%	21.5%	7.6%
<b>Water quality</b>	23.9%	17.6%	46.4%	20.3%	20.0%	4.8%
<b>PFAS ("forever chemicals") contamination</b>	14.5%	12.1%	40.6%	11.5%	38.8%	6.7%
<b>Extreme weather events (hurricane, flooding, etc.)</b>	14.5%	14.2%	37.9%	30.9%	13.0%	13.6%
<b>Access to parks and green spaces for recreation</b>	12.7%	11.8%	35.2%	38.2%	10.3%	14.2%

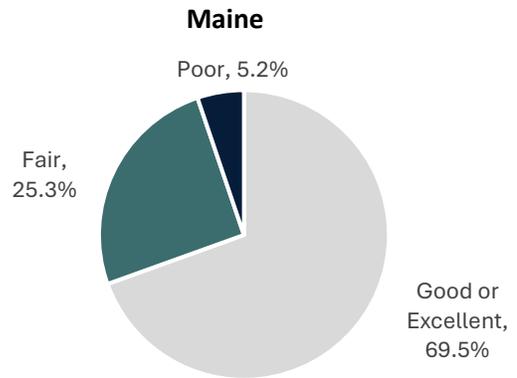
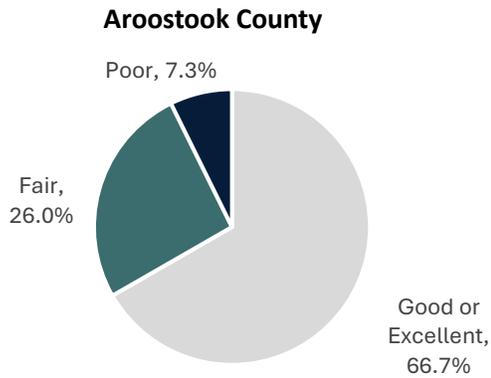
## Socioeconomic Empowerment

Top 5 items rated by respondents as ‘very necessary’ steps to help move people out of poverty and to a place of housing stability & financial stability.

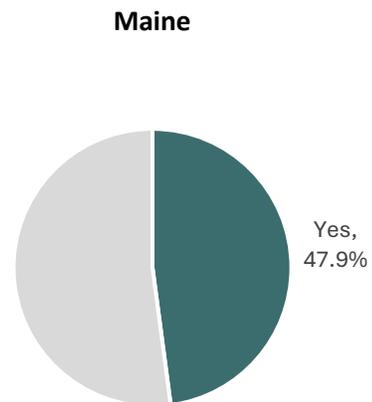
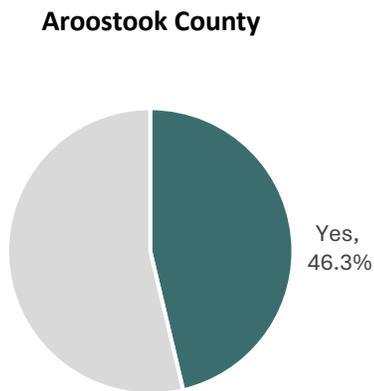
Aroostook County	Maine
1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage	1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage
2) Affordable and safe housing	2) Affordable and safe housing
3) Affordable & quality childcare	3) Mental health care and treatment
4) Reduction in substance use (drugs, alcohol)	4) Affordable & available health care
5) Affordable & available health care	5) Affordable & quality childcare

## Physical Health Status

How would you rate your own physical health?



Within the past year (365 days), have there been 1 or more times when you or a loved one needed health care services but could not or chose not to get it?

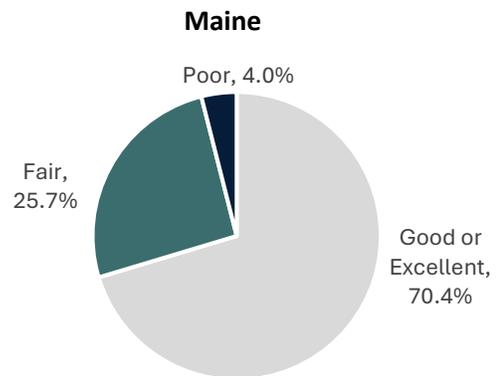
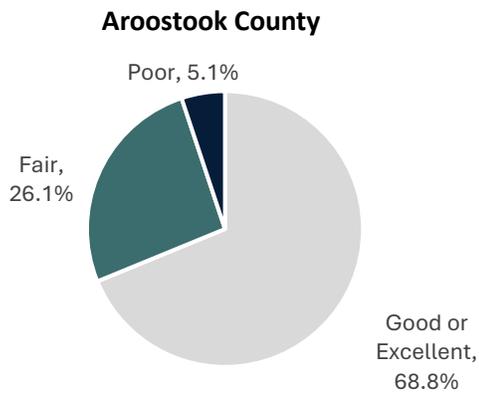


If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

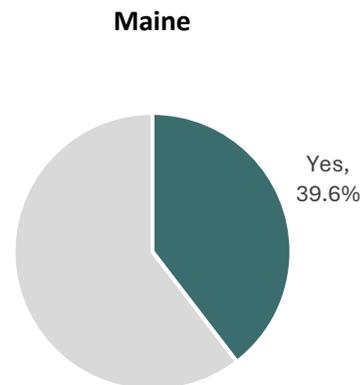
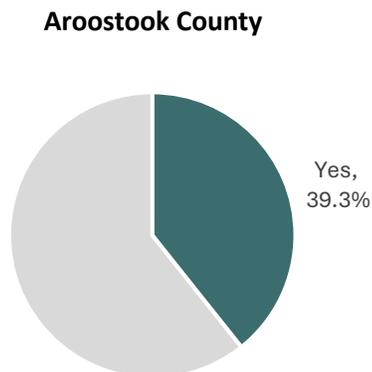
Aroostook County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Had health insurance, could not afford care	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Did not feel comfortable with available providers	3) No evenings or weekend hours to get care

## Mental Health Status

How would you rate your own mental health?



Within the past year (365 days), have there been 1 or more times when you or a loved one needed mental health care services but could not or chose not to get it?



If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

Aroostook County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Did not feel comfortable with available providers	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Did not feel comfortable seeking help	3) No evenings or weekend hours to receive care

## Acknowledgements

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We are grateful to our community partners and stakeholders who took the time to help advertise and recruit for our focus groups, both at the state and county level, and for our statewide community survey. Our utmost thanks also goes to all of the individuals who took part in our key informant interviews. Each of you enabled us to learn more about populations, communities and sectors in Maine. Without all of these efforts we would not have been able to conduct this aspect of our assessment.

A special thank you also goes to the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine and Maine DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and John Snow, Inc. and Disability Rights Maine for use of their assessments and ability to include their findings in ours.

## Appendix

### Data Commitments

The Maine Shared CHNA uses a set of data stewardship guidelines to ensure data is collected, analyzed, shared, published, and stored in a transparent and responsible manner. Included in these guidelines is a commitment to promote data equity in data collection, analyses, and reporting. These include a commitment to:

- Correctly assign the systemic factors that compound and contribute to health behaviors and health outcomes rather than implying that social or demographic categories are “causes” of disparities. We will use a systems-level approach when discussing inequities to avoid judging, blaming, and/or marginalizing populations.
- Lead with and uplift the assets, strengths, and resources when discussing populations and communities, specifically with qualitative data collection.
- Acknowledge missing data and data biases and limitations.
- Identify and address important issues for which we lack data.
- Share data with communities affected by challenges, including sharing analysis, reporting and ownership of findings.