

Community Engagement Profile: Washington 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.

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: 3

Top Themes

- Affordable housing
- Childcare
- Dental care
- Food deserts and access to affordable, healthy food
- Navigation of healthcare system
- Transportation

The following sections contain select quotes from focus group participants.

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

- “Transportation.”
- “Places for teens and young adults to go and things for them to do.”
- “Affordable housing.”
- “Childcare resources and educational opportunities – not just for school age, but extended learning opportunities for those of all ages.”

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

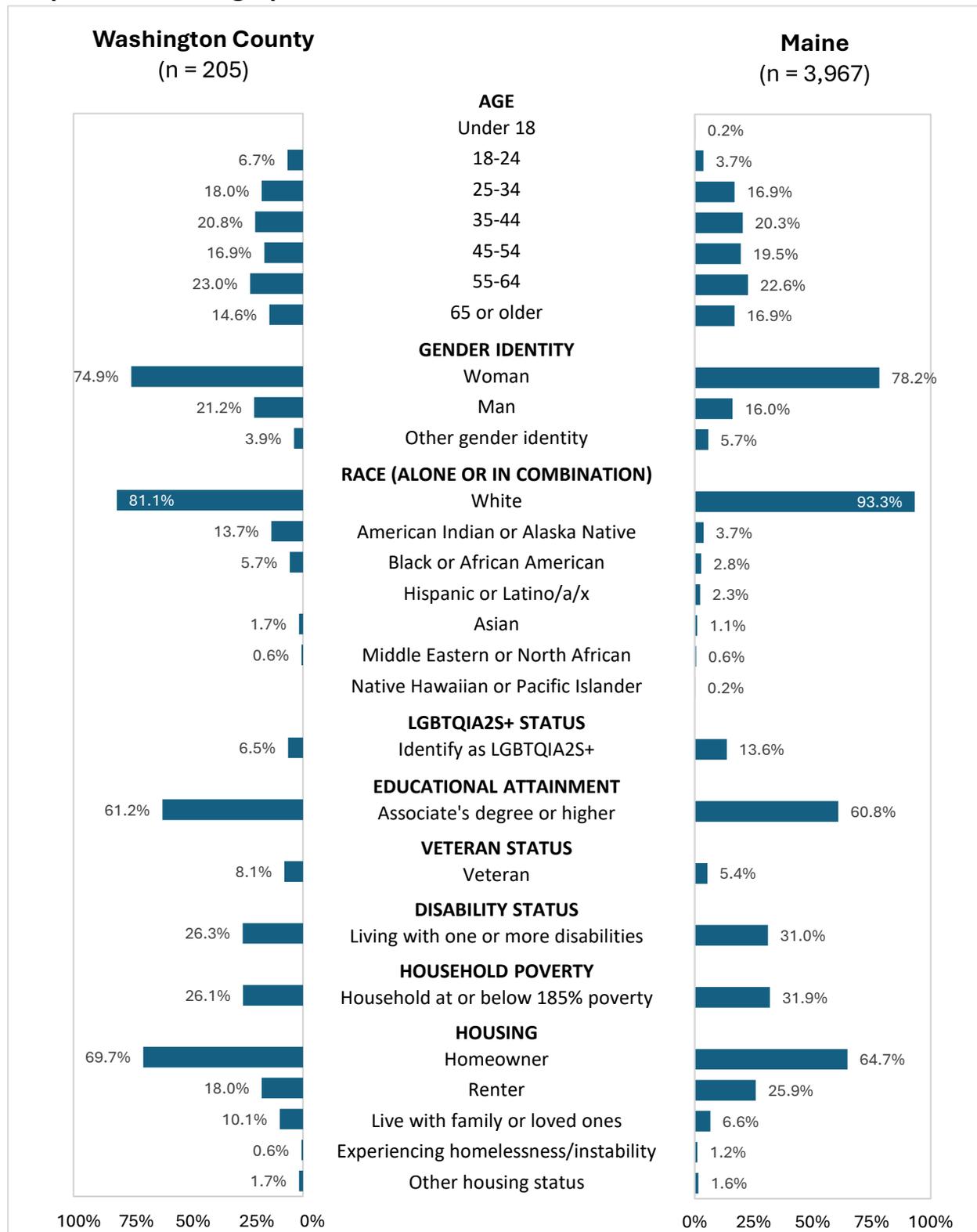
- “Many [providers] are retiring. There are many older providers who have been around for years and it’s hard to replace them. No one wants to move here when they find out how rural it is.”
- “I had neighbors tell me they won’t go to X health center because they fear that their neighbors will find out.”
- “For the population I work with [LGBT kids], having a consistent provider is important because you build trust with them. If you don’t have this, you might not go to the doctor. There are about 20% of teens in Washington County that identify as LGBTQ, and many have wanted mental health care but are unable to access it. There are elevated levels of suicidality among this population.”
- “Stigma around substance use disorder – they’re ‘bad people’ or have some moral failing. Even medical providers have some beliefs like this. Treatment is vastly different than any other mental health disorders.”

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

- “I have heard many people say, ‘I can’t go back to work’ because they would spend so much on childcare.”
- “Last winter there was so much damage [from the storms]. FEMA was here to provide relief, but a lot of people didn’t know that. People were choosing between fixing their roof or buying food.”
- “Once you have kids who are school age, what do you do when school is out? School is childcare for many people.”

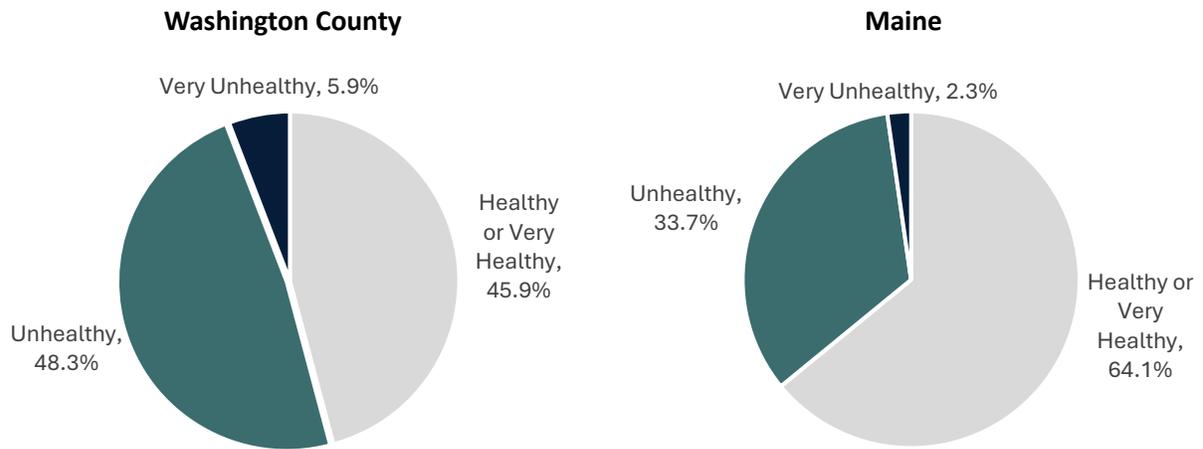
Community Survey

Respondent Demographics



Community Health Status

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



Top 5 strengths of the community

Washington County	Maine
1) Safe neighborhoods	1) Safe opportunities to be active outside
2) Safe opportunities to be active outside	2) Locally owned businesses
3) Locally owned businesses	3) Safe neighborhoods
4) Strong sense of community	4) Schools & education for all ages
5) Low crime	5) Low crime

Top 5 social concerns that negatively impact your community

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

Top 5 health concerns that negatively impact your community

Washington County	Maine
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) Dental and oral health	4) Aging health concerns (arthritis, osteoporosis, dementia, Alzheimer's, etc.)
5) Aging health concerns (arthritis, osteoporosis, dementia, Alzheimer's, etc.)	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'

Washington County		Maine	
Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	81.5%	Economic needs	76.1%
Economic needs	81.4%	Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	75.7%
Substance use	77.0%	Mental health needs	73.6%
Mental health needs	76.0%	Substance use	68.5%
Housing needs	73.1%	Housing needs	68.5%
Transportation needs	72.6%	Transportation needs	60.9%
Environmental needs	67.7%	Environmental needs	58.4%
Public safety needs	63.3%	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
Asthma, COPD, or Emphysema	22.2%	36.8%	46.2%	6.4%	3.5%	7.0%
Arthritis	26.3%	45.0%	38.0%	5.8%	11.1%	4.1%
Cancer	12.3%	46.2%	60.2%	2.9%	5.8%	4.1%
Diabetes or high blood sugar	17.0%	47.4%	59.6%	1.2%	1.8%	4.7%
Heart disease or heart attack	9.9%	43.3%	48.0%	5.8%	6.4%	4.1%
High cholesterol	24.0%	43.9%	36.8%	4.1%	12.3%	5.8%
High blood pressure or hypertension	29.2%	57.9%	46.8%	2.9%	2.9%	2.3%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
Overweight/obesity	45.0%	46.8%	55.6%	2.3%	2.9%	3.5%
Stroke	4.1%	24.6%	40.4%	8.2%	18.7%	12.3%
Chronic liver disease/cirrhosis	3.5%	14.0%	39.2%	13.5%	22.2%	11.7%

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	18.6%	20.5%	58.4%	17.4%	11.8%	3.7%
Availability of jobs and employment opportunities	27.3%	36.0%	73.3%	8.1%	6.8%	0.6%
Availability of high-speed internet	31.1%	26.7%	59.0%	14.3%	9.9%	3.1%
Availability of quality, affordable childcare	15.5%	26.7%	75.2%	3.7%	8.7%	1.9%
Ability to contribute to savings, retirement	49.1%	46.6%	65.2%	3.1%	8.7%	1.9%
Access to affordable, quality foods	39.1%	37.9%	75.8%	5.0%	4.3%	0.6%

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
Alcohol misuse or binge drinking	9.4%	40.9%	79.2%	1.3%	1.3%	2.0%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
Opioid misuse	6.0%	24.8%	84.6%	3.4%	2.0%	3.4%
Tobacco use	10.1%	41.6%	81.2%	1.3%	3.4%	2.0%
Vaping	9.4%	30.2%	68.5%	5.4%	12.1%	2.7%
Adult cannabis use	8.7%	32.2%	71.8%	9.4%	4.7%	6.0%
Other illicit drug use	4.0%	27.5%	81.2%	1.3%	4.0%	2.7%
Youth substance use	6.7%	15.4%	73.8%	4.7%	11.4%	2.7%

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	50.0%	54.5%	48.1%	1.3%	5.2%	1.3%
Depression	40.9%	63.0%	56.5%	2.6%	2.6%	1.3%
Bipolar disorder	7.1%	22.1%	46.8%	7.1%	20.1%	8.4%
Trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	27.9%	39.6%	51.9%	5.8%	12.3%	4.5%
General stress of day-to-day life	57.8%	53.9%	55.2%	3.2%	2.6%	2.6%
Social isolation or loneliness	26.6%	39.6%	63.6%	3.2%	5.8%	3.2%
Stigma associated with seeking care for mental health or substance use disorders	18.8%	27.9%	66.2%	7.8%	11.0%	5.2%
Suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors	9.1%	24.0%	61.0%	4.5%	15.6%	8.4%
Youth mental health	13.0%	32.5%	62.3%	3.9%	8.4%	4.5%

Housing Needs

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
Housing costs	34.5%	37.8%	73.6%	1.4%	4.7%	0.7%
Availability of affordable, quality homes/rentals	23.6%	35.8%	79.7%	1.4%	4.1%	0.0%
Availability of affordable, quality housing for older adults or those with special needs	12.2%	29.7%	78.4%	3.4%	2.7%	2.7%
Issues associated with home ownership or renting	25.7%	36.5%	73.6%	1.4%	8.1%	2.0%
Health risks in homes (indoor air, tobacco smoke residue, pests, lead, mold)	20.3%	25.0%	67.6%	2.0%	15.5%	4.1%
Homelessness and/or availability of shelter beds	5.4%	12.2%	62.2%	4.7%	23.0%	4.1%
Cost of utilities	33.1%	46.6%	75.7%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0%
Costs associated with weatherization	33.1%	40.5%	70.9%	3.4%	5.4%	0.7%

Transportation

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
Access to transportation (for medical appointments, work, childcare)	15.8%	30.1%	82.9%	2.1%	4.1%	0.0%

	Impacts me	Impacts a loved one	Impacts my community	Doesn't have an impact	I don't know	Not applicable
Availability of public transportation (buses, trains, ride shares, taxis)	20.5%	34.2%	82.2%	2.1%	5.5%	2.1%
Availability of transportation that meets a variety of specific needs (older adults, physical or cognitive needs)	8.2%	26.7%	79.5%	1.4%	8.2%	0.0%
Costs associated with owning and maintaining a vehicle (insurance, registration, repairs)	44.5%	44.5%	69.2%	2.7%	6.8%	0.7%

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
Air quality	26.7%	20.5%	43.2%	25.3%	15.8%	7.5%
Water quality	29.5%	30.1%	56.8%	13.7%	17.8%	3.4%
PFAS ("forever chemicals") contamination	21.9%	25.3%	46.6%	8.2%	37.0%	2.7%
Extreme weather events (hurricane, flooding, etc.)	27.4%	27.4%	62.3%	15.1%	11.6%	4.8%
Access to parks and green spaces for recreation	23.3%	19.2%	38.4%	41.8%	4.8%	6.2%

Public Safety

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
Pedestrian (walking) or bicycle safety	20.0%	17.9%	60.0%	15.7%	12.9%	4.3%
Property crime	6.4%	9.3%	69.3%	7.9%	16.4%	3.6%
Community violence (gangs, guns, street crime)	9.3%	9.3%	42.9%	27.9%	20.0%	8.6%
Violence between people (domestic, sexual, bullying)	11.4%	21.4%	87.9%	0.0%	7.1%	1.4%
Racism	9.3%	15.7%	56.4%	12.1%	21.4%	5.0%
Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, LGBTQIA2S+, age, ability, etc.	13.6%	17.1%	55.0%	13.6%	22.1%	5.0%

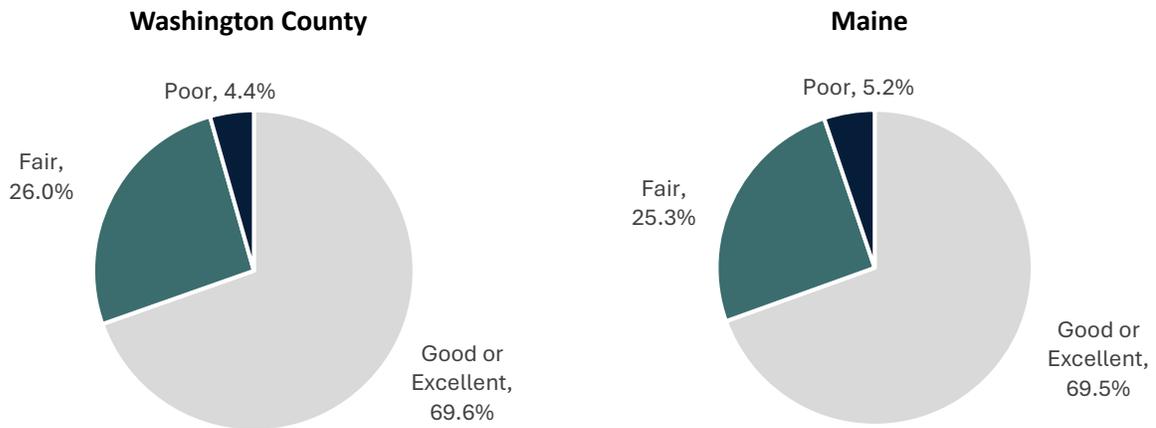
Socioeconomic Empowerment

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.

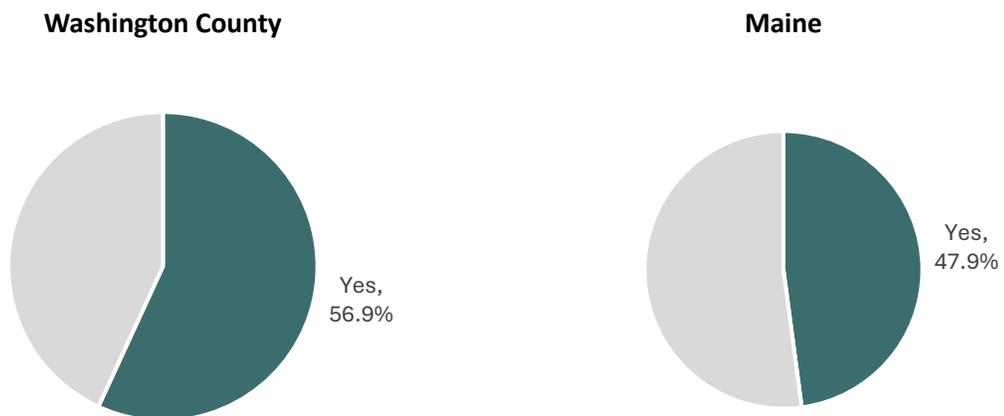
Washington County	Maine
1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage	1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage
2) Mental health care and treatment	2) Affordable and safe housing
3) Affordable & available health care	3) Mental health care and treatment
4) Affordable and safe housing	4) Affordable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

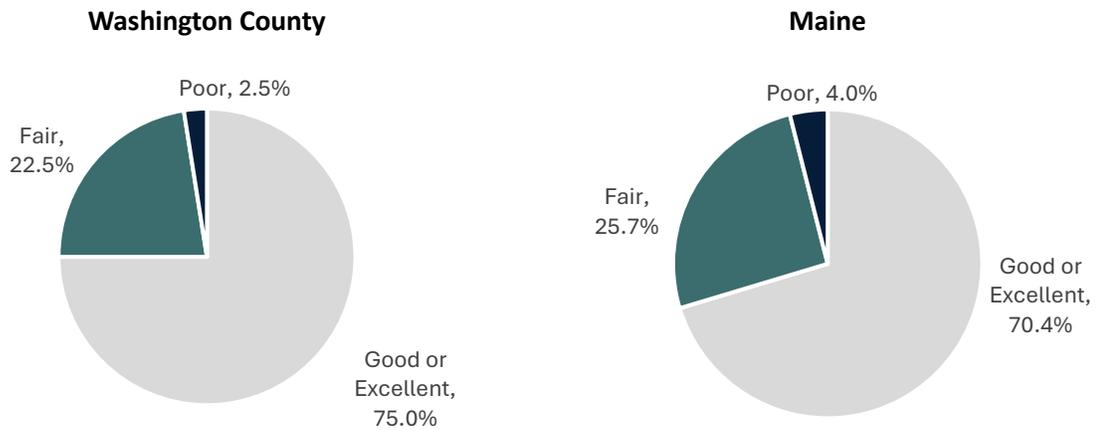


If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

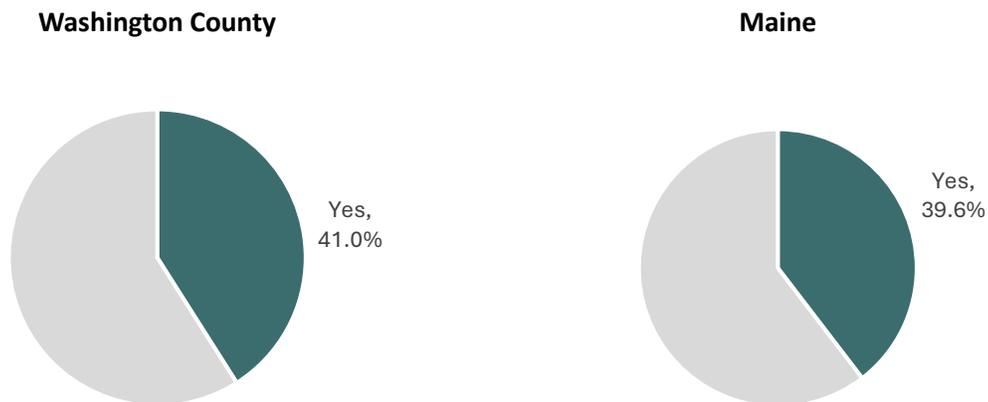
Washington County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) No evenings or weekend hours to get care	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Had health insurance, could not afford care	3) No evenings or weekend hours to get care

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)

Washington County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Not sure where to go for help	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Did not feel comfortable seeking help	3) No evenings or weekend hours to receive care

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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.

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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.