

## **Executive Summary**

Curry Health Network conducted this assessment to evaluate the health needs of Curry County.

Key findings on social determinants of health include:

- Aging population with 34.4% over age 65
- Lower income levels and higher poverty rates than state/national averages
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lower educational attainment levels
- Higher food insecurity rates
- High drug overdose mortality rate
- Less access to healthcare providers, especially mental health

Top health issues identified:

1. Mental and behavioral health
2. Access to providers (especially specialists)
3. Housing
4. Health education/prevention

Survey results showed only 23% rate access to healthcare as Good/Very Good and 42% rate quality of care as Good/Very Good. Top needs identified were mental health services, specialist care, and more providers overall.

Recommendations:

1. Address mental/behavioral health by recruiting more providers and improving coordination
2. Increase access to providers, especially specialists like oncology and cardiology
3. Improve housing options for staff and community
4. Enhance community health education and outreach programs

The assessment will be used to develop implementation strategies to address these priority health needs in Curry County over the next 3 years.

## **Biggest Gaps in Service**

1. Mental and Behavioral Health Services: The county falls 69.5% below state and 67.4% below national averages for psychiatrists per 100,000 population. Mental health services were rated as the least accessible by survey respondents.

2. Specialty Care: There's a significant lack of specialist physicians, particularly in areas like cardiology and oncology. Survey respondents identified specialist care as one of the top needed services.

3. Primary Care: Curry County falls 39.4% below state and 28% below national averages for access to primary care providers.

4. Dental Care: Access to dentists is also below state and national averages, similar to primary care.

5. Substance Abuse Treatment: Given high rates of alcoholism and opioid use, there's a need for more substance abuse treatment services.

6. Preventive Care Services: The population falls below national averages for preventative screenings like cholesterol, colorectal cancer, cervical cancer, and mammograms.
7. Cancer Care: With high cancer mortality rates, there's a gap in oncology services and cancer treatment options locally.
8. Cardiology Services: Heart disease mortality rates are high, but cardiology services are reported to be over 2 hours away with long wait times.
9. Pediatric Services: There's a lack of pediatric specialists mentioned in the report.
10. Transportation Services: While some transportation options exist, there's a lack of awareness and coordination of these services, creating a gap in access to care.

These gaps are particularly pronounced due to the rural nature of Curry County and its aging population.

### **Greatest Barriers to Care**

1. Lack of Providers: There's a significant shortage of healthcare providers, especially specialists and mental health professionals. The county falls below state and national averages for access to primary care, dental care, and mental health providers.
2. Geographic Access: As a rural county, many residents must travel long distances for specialized care. For example, cardiology services are reported to be over 2 hours away.
3. Transportation: While some transportation services exist, there's a lack of awareness about these options, particularly among vulnerable populations.
4. Affordability: Lower income levels and higher poverty rates in the county make healthcare less affordable for many residents.
5. Housing: Lack of affordable housing is cited as a barrier to recruiting and retaining healthcare providers.
6. Mental Health Stigma: The report suggests there's a stigma around mental health issues, which can prevent people from seeking care.
7. Lack of Awareness: Many residents are unaware of the health services available to them, including transportation options.
8. Insurance Coverage: While not explicitly stated as a major barrier, the report notes that 29% of respondents indicated their insurance coverage was not adequate for their health needs.
9. Wait Times: For specialist care that is available, long wait times (e.g., 2-month waiting list for cardiology) can be a barrier to timely care.

10. Education: Lower educational attainment levels in the county may contribute to less health literacy and awareness of preventive care needs.

11. Aging Population: With a high percentage of residents over 65, there are unique challenges in providing appropriate care for an older population.

12. Substance Abuse: High rates of alcoholism and drug use create barriers to overall health and accessing appropriate care.

### **The Unique Needs of the Community**

1. Mental and Behavioral Health Services: There's a significant need for more mental health providers and services, given high rates of mental health issues and substance abuse.

2. Specialized Care for an Aging Population: With 34.4% of the population over 65, there's a unique need for geriatric care and services tailored to older adults.

3. Substance Abuse Treatment: The community has high rates of alcoholism and opioid use, necessitating more treatment options.

4. Affordable Housing: There's a critical need for affordable housing, both for community members and to attract healthcare providers.

5. Specialist Care: The community needs better access to specialists, particularly in areas like cardiology and oncology.

6. Chronic Disease Management: There are higher rates of chronic conditions like arthritis, COPD, and coronary heart disease that require ongoing management.

7. Transportation Services: While some exist, there's a need for better coordination and awareness of transportation options to healthcare services.

8. Cancer Screening and Treatment: With high cancer mortality rates, there's a need for better cancer screening and local treatment options.

9. Preventive Care Services: The community needs better access to and education about preventive care services.

10. Dental Care: There's a need for more accessible dental care, particularly for pediatric patients.

11. Health Education: The community needs more education on healthy behaviors, available health services, and how to access care.

12. Services for Veterans: The county has a higher percentage of veterans compared to state and national averages, suggesting a need for veteran-specific health services.

13. Economic Development: With lower income levels and higher poverty rates, there's a need for economic opportunities to improve overall community health.

14. Addressing Food Insecurity: The county has higher food insecurity rates than state and national averages.

15. Suicide Prevention: The suicide rate in Curry County is significantly higher than state and national averages, indicating a need for targeted prevention efforts.

### **What the Hospital or CCO is Doing Well**

1. Community Engagement: The hospital has engaged in a thorough community health needs assessment process, including surveys and stakeholder interviews, showing a commitment to understanding community needs.

2. Planning for Expansion: The report mentions that Curry Health Network is planning to expand its infusion center to include chemotherapy services, with a projected start in 2025. This shows proactive planning to address community needs.

3. Basic Services: The report indicates that 95% of survey respondents had received care at Curry Health Network in the past three years, suggesting the hospital is providing essential services to the community.

4. Patient Satisfaction: Of those who received care, 57% indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the care they received.

5. Strategic Planning: The hospital has a 2024 Strategic Plan in place and is willing to adapt it based on the findings of this assessment, showing responsiveness to community needs.

6. Ambulance Services: Ambulance services were rated as the most accessible healthcare service in the community survey.

7. Emergency Services: Emergency Room services were rated as the second most accessible healthcare service.

8. Collaboration: The hospital appears to be open to collaborating with other healthcare providers and community organizations to address health needs.

### **Strengths of the Community**

1. Community Engagement: There was strong participation in the community health survey, with 235 respondents, indicating an engaged populace interested in community health issues.

2. Aging Population as a Resource: While presented as a challenge, the large population of older adults (34.4% over 65) could also be seen as a strength, bringing experience and potentially volunteer capacity to the community.

3. High Rate of Health Insurance Coverage: The uninsured population is below both state and national averages, suggesting good access to health insurance.

4. Declining Unemployment: While still higher than state and national averages, unemployment has been decreasing, indicating economic improvement.

5. Improved Youth Health Indicators: Teen birth rates and the percentage of uninsured children have decreased since the previous assessment.
6. Physical Activity: The county has a lower rate of individuals with no physical activity than national averages, suggesting a relatively active population.
7. Natural Environment: While not explicitly stated, the rural nature of the county likely provides opportunities for outdoor recreation and activities.
8. Preventable Hospitalizations: Curry County has a lower rate of preventable hospital visits than state or national averages, possibly indicating good management of certain health conditions.
9. Veteran Population: The high percentage of veterans could be seen as a community strength, bringing unique experiences and potential federal resources to the area.
10. Community Health Awareness: The survey results suggest that community members are aware of health challenges and the need for additional healthcare services, which could drive community action.
11. Existing Transportation Services: While not well-known, the community does have some transportation services in place to help people access healthcare.

## **Priorities**

### **1. Address Mental and Behavioral Health**

- Examine feasibility of recruiting additional mental health professionals
- Collaborate with other providers and organizations on mental healthcare
- Utilize partnerships to provide telepsych services
- Educate the community on financial options for mental health services

### **2. Increase Access to Providers**

- Continue work towards expanding the infusion center to include chemotherapy
- Examine feasibility of recruiting an oncologist
- Consider implementing telecardiology or recruiting a part-time cardiologist
- Examine provider productivity and potential barriers to patient access
- Increase education and collaboration on transportation to care outside the county
- Explore opportunities with regional providers for specialty consultations and clinics

### **3. Improve Housing**

- Develop a housing policy that meets the needs of Curry Health Network and its employees
- Collaborate with community organizations to increase availability of long-term affordable rentals
- Work with organizations to increase assisted housing units in Curry County

### **4. Increase Education**

- Develop community outreach programs to improve community health
- Increase education on available transportation services
- Further educate on health services available and healthy eating behaviors
- Publicize available services through primary care physicians and social media