

Executive Summary

Overview

Lake District Hospital's 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment covers the Lakeview Service Area in southern Lake County, Oregon — a rural population of approximately 6,262 people. The assessment follows a Social Determinants of Health framework organized around five domains.

Neighborhood and Built Environment

The area is car-dependent (Walk Score 41), with limited public transit and 7.7% of households lacking personal transportation. Housing affordability is a significant burden — 37.6% of renters spend more than 35% of income on rent, and only 30 affordable units exist per 100 extremely low-income families. Wildfire smoke is a recurring air quality concern. Outlying communities lack adequate access to fresh produce and qualify as food deserts.

Health and Health Care

Lake District Hospital operates as a Critical Access Hospital offering a broad range of services, though long-term care and assisted living closed in 2023 due to financial constraints. Maternal health indicators are poor, with inadequate prenatal care and low birthweight rates well above state averages. The top clinic diagnoses include hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, PTSD, and anxiety. Mental health providers per capita are roughly half the state rate, and emergency department dental and mental health visit rates are elevated. Obesity affects 44% of clinic patients.

Social and Community Health

Child abuse, neglect, and foster care rates exceed state averages. Alcohol use is described as a significant community concern, with Lake County reportedly the highest per capita consumer in Oregon. LGBTQ residents face barriers to care access related to trust, safety, and stigma. Behavioral health provider capacity is insufficient, particularly for youth and those with substance use disorders. The community also lacks an optometrist.

Education

Third-grade reading proficiency (33%) and 8th-grade math proficiency (32%) fall below the state average of 40% and 26% respectively. On-time graduation rates are strong at 95%. About 13% of adults lack a high school diploma. The kindergarten readiness assessment is under redesign following concerns about bias and inconsistent methodology.

Economic Stability

Food insecurity affects 15.7% of the county population, compared to 11.5% statewide, and 21.5% of children are food insecure. Lake County is classified as a childcare desert, with only 5% of children ages 0–5 having access to a regulated childcare slot. Poverty rates are elevated — 18.8% in Lakeview versus 12.1% statewide. Broadband access lags significantly at 68% versus 90% statewide. Forty-six percent of households are one unexpected expense away from financial crisis.

Qualitative Findings

Focus group participants identified community strengths including strong social cohesion, youth programs, and collaborative responses to crises. Key concerns include physician workforce sustainability as longtime providers near retirement, behavioral health capacity and provider burnout, communication gaps about available resources, and growing disparities related to poverty, housing, and LGBTQ inclusion.

Biggest Gaps in Service and Barriers to Care

Health Care Service Gaps

Mental health providers are available at roughly half the state rate (0.58 vs. 1.15 per 1,000 population), with insufficient capacity to serve those with substance use disorders, particularly

youth in the justice system. The community lacks an optometrist entirely. Dental services are limited — while Advantage Dental is present, surgical procedures require referral to Bend or Klamath Falls with extended wait times. Long-term care and assisted living were closed in 2023. Behavioral health specialists with specialty training (e.g., Parent Child Interactive Therapy) are scarce. The Veterans Administration does not recognize certain levels of behavioral health clinicians for service delivery approval.

Workforce Sustainability

The four primary physicians who have long served Lakeview were recruited around the same time, are similar in age, and are nearing retirement simultaneously, with no clear succession plan identified. Provider burnout is a recurring problem across community organizations, creating a revolving door that undermines continuity of care.

Barriers to Access

Transportation is limited to scheduled services requiring 24-hour advance notice, creating hardship for vulnerable populations. Housing and financial instability consume resources that would otherwise support health-seeking behavior. Marginalized groups — including those in poverty, LGBTQ individuals, and those with justice system involvement — report distrust of authorities and fear of stigma as deterrents to seeking care. A "benefits cliff" discourages some from earning more income due to loss of Medicaid or nutrition assistance eligibility. Communication gaps leave many residents unaware of available resources and services.

The Unique Needs of the Community

Aging Population

At 26.3% of residents over age 65 — compared to 19.7% statewide — the service area has disproportionately high demand for elder care services, made more acute by the 2023 closure of long-term care and assisted living facilities.

Geographic Isolation

The extreme rurality of the service area means specialty and surgical care routinely requires travel to Bend or Klamath Falls. Outlying communities including Adel, Paisley, Plush, and Summer Lake face compounded isolation with food desert conditions and minimal services.

Frontier-Level Workforce Challenges

Recruiting and retaining qualified health care and social service workers in a remote rural community is persistently difficult. When a good fit is found, burnout from capacity overload leads to turnover. Skilled tradespeople are similarly scarce, limiting economic development that would support community health broadly.

Youth and Family Vulnerability

Foster care rates, child abuse and neglect rates, food insecurity among children, and poverty rates among those under 18 all exceed state averages. Kindergarten readiness data shows a declining trend. Childcare access is severely limited, with only 5% of children ages 0–5 having a regulated slot available.

Social Inclusion and Equity

LGBTQ residents, those in poverty, and racial and ethnic minorities face distinct barriers rooted in stigma, cultural distrust, and limited safe spaces. The community is identified as needing intentional education and communication strategies around acceptance and inclusion, which directly impacts health-seeking behavior.

Connectivity and Digital Equity

With only 68% broadband access compared to 90% statewide, and 14% of households lacking a computer, a significant portion of residents cannot access telehealth, online resources, or digital communication about available services.

Strengths of the Community

Social Cohesion and Mutual Aid

Residents consistently describe a strong sense of neighborliness and willingness to help one another in times of need. Community members rally during crises, as demonstrated by the organized COVID-19 vaccine distribution effort and collaborative responses to fires and other emergencies.

Youth Programs and Engagement

There is strong community backing for youth in sports and agriculture. Career and Technical Education was highlighted as a positive force, producing tangible community benefit through projects like mini houses while developing leadership skills. Youth groups including 4H, FFA, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts have historically supported community health initiatives through fundraising and civic participation.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

The community demonstrates capacity for multi-agency collaboration, evidenced by the Dark Sky Sanctuary project involving federal, state, and local partners, and the historical formation of the Lake Health District through broad community and civic engagement.

Behavioral Health Investment

Schools are actively building a system of care through additional behavioral health personnel. Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups are functioning in the community. The Strong People program at The Center provides group-based exercise and mutual support for participants.

Natural Environment and Recreation

Abundant access to hiking trails, public lands, outdoor spaces, and a community swimming pool support physical activity. Oregon State University Extension leverages natural resources to engage potentially at-risk youth in active programming.

Primary Care Capacity

The Lakeview Service Area's primary care capacity ratio of 1.2 exceeds the state ratio of 1.0, indicating relatively strong primary care availability relative to population size.