

Executive Summary

Community Overview

Union County is a rural area in northeast Oregon served by Grande Ronde Hospital, a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital. The assessment surveyed 343 adults ages 19 and older from October-November 2024, with responses weighted to represent the county's population of approximately 26,192 residents.

Prioritized Health Needs

Based on community input and data analysis, three priority areas were identified:

1. Chronic Disease (prevention and wellness)
2. Social Determinants of Health
3. Mental/Behavioral Health

Key Findings by Category

Health Care Access

10% of adults lack health insurance, with cost being the primary barrier. While 72% had routine checkups in the past year, 63% traveled outside Union County for services, primarily for specialty care. Top reasons for leaving include unavailable local services and perceived better care elsewhere. Dental care access shows 64% visiting a dentist in the past year, decreasing to 46% among those earning under \$25,000 annually.

Health Care Service Gaps

Residents reported difficulty accessing specialty care, with long wait times for appointments being the most common barrier (48%). Transportation issues affected 5% of adults. Depression and anxiety services were the most searched-for programs (25% looked, 6% could not find services).

Chronic Disease Burden

71% of adults are overweight or obese. Cardiovascular risk factors are prevalent: 37% have high cholesterol, 36% have high blood pressure, and 11% have diabetes. Cancer affected 20% of adults at some point in their lives. Asthma diagnosis increased to 20% from 14% in 2015.

Behavioral Health

Mental health concerns are significant: 33% of adults reported poor mental health on four or more days in the past month. One-third (33%) of adults or family members were diagnosed with or treated for depression. Despite need, 7% reported stigma and embarrassment as barriers to seeking mental health services. Substance use includes 3% current smokers (down from 10% in 2015), 9% recreational marijuana users, and 5% who misused prescription medications.

Social Determinants

Food insecurity affected 9% of adults, with 6% experiencing multiple insecurity issues. Economic challenges include 14% of residents living in poverty and median household income of \$63,524 (below state and national averages). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) affected 15% of adults (four or more ACEs), correlating with higher rates of substance use, obesity, and mental health challenges. Housing costs consume 30-50% of income for 31% of households.

Preventive Care Utilization

Women's health screenings show gaps: only 52% of women over 40 had a mammogram in the past year, and 57% of women ages 21-65 had a Pap smear in the past three years. Among adults 65 and older, 62% had pneumonia vaccination and 56% had flu vaccination in the past year—both below state and national averages.

Community Strengths

80% of adults have a personal health care provider. Most adults (85%) rate their overall health as good or better. Strong community support exists, with 94% of parents discussing important topics like bullying with their children. High school graduation rates are strong at 93.5%.

Health Disparities

Significant income-based disparities exist throughout the data. Adults with household incomes under \$25,000 consistently show worse health outcomes: 29% rate their health as fair/poor (versus 11% of higher earners), 74% report activity limitations (versus 45%), and 59% have high blood pressure (versus 34%).

Biggest Gaps in Service and Barriers to Care

Access to Specialty Care

63% of adults went outside Union County for health care services in the past year, primarily for specialty care (63% of those who left), followed by dental care (24%) and mental health services (18%). The need for services unavailable locally was the top reason (36%) for seeking care elsewhere.

Appointment Wait Times

48% of adults who needed but did not receive medical care cited excessively long wait times for appointments as the barrier. This was the most frequently reported access issue.

Financial Barriers

Cost remains a significant obstacle: 33% could not access care due to expense, 48% of uninsured adults cited inability to afford premiums, and 29% did not fill prescriptions because they were too expensive. Insurance issues included 12% unable to access care because providers did not accept their insurance.

Mental Health and Counseling Services

25% of adults looked for depression, anxiety, or mental health services. Of those, 6% searched but could not find services. Barriers to mental health care included: taking too long to get appointments (7%), stigma (7%), embarrassment (7%), inability to find a mental health provider (6%), and high co-pays or deductibles (4%).

Substance Use Treatment

For drug and alcohol treatment programs, barriers included: lack of awareness about where to find programs (3% for alcohol, 2% for drugs), fear (2-3%), concern about getting in trouble (1-2%), and inability to miss work (1-2%). Some residents noted inpatient treatment was not available in Union County.

Provider Shortages

The county faces provider shortages with a 1,190:1 population-to-primary care physician ratio, 1,540:1 population-to-dentist ratio, and 230:1 population-to-mental health provider ratio. Some adults reported providers were not accepting new patients (5% as reason for no usual source of care).

Distance and Transportation

17% who did not receive care cited distance as a barrier. 5% of adults experienced transportation issues including: no car (2%), disability preventing travel (2%), inability to afford gas (1%), and limited public transportation (1%).

Dental Care Access

36% of adults had not visited a dentist in the past year. Barriers included: no reason to go/had not thought about it (24%), fear or anxiety (24%), cost (22%), and inability to find a dentist accepting Medicaid (1%).

Income-Related Disparities

Adults with incomes below \$25,000 experienced greater barriers: only 46% visited a dentist in the past year (versus 70% of higher earners), 79% had routine checkups (versus 71%), and 71% had health insurance through Medicaid compared to employer-based coverage for higher earners.

Insurance Coverage Gaps

10% of adults lack health insurance. Among those with insurance, gaps exist: 29% reported issues with cost, 21% faced limited in-network providers, and 15% opted out of certain coverage due to affordability.

Office Hours and Scheduling

12% could not access care because offices were not open when they could get there, and 7% cited inconvenient appointment times.

The Unique Needs of the Community

Rural Geographic Challenges

Union County covers over 2,039 square miles in northeast Oregon with dispersed population. Distance to care is a significant issue, with 63% of adults traveling outside the county for services and 17% citing distance as a barrier to accessing needed care.

Limited Local Specialty Services

The county has only one hospital (Grande Ronde Hospital, 25-bed Critical Access facility). Residents must leave the county primarily for specialty care (63%), cardiac care (15%), cancer care (13%), orthopedic care (9%), and mental health counseling (18%). This creates access challenges for those with transportation limitations.

Aging Population

67.1% of survey respondents were age 60 and older, compared to 28% in Census data, suggesting an aging population with higher needs for chronic disease management, preventive screenings, and services for conditions like diabetes (19% of those 65+) and high blood pressure (54% of those 65+).

Economic Vulnerability

Median household income is \$63,524, below state (\$88,061) and national (\$77,719) levels. 14% of residents live in poverty, including 16% of children. Economic barriers affect health care access, with significant disparities: adults earning under \$25,000 have worse outcomes across all health indicators.

Food Insecurity

9% of adults experienced at least one food insecurity issue in the past year, with 6% experiencing multiple issues. Specific challenges included choosing between paying bills and buying food (5%) and being hungry but unable to afford food (3%).

Mental Health Service Gaps

33% of adults reported poor mental health on four or more days in the past month. Mental health services were the most sought-after assistance (25% looked), yet 6% could not find services. Stigma remains a barrier, with 7% reporting embarrassment or stigma preventing them from seeking care.

High Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

15% of adults experienced four or more ACEs, correlating with increased substance misuse (9% vs. 1%), obesity (85% vs. 67%), and suicide ideation (20% vs. 0%). This indicates need for trauma-informed care approaches.

Substance Use and Addiction Services

Legal recreational marijuana use (9%) and prescription medication misuse (5%) are concerns. Barriers to addiction services include stigma (5% for alcohol issues), lack of knowledge about where to find programs (2-3%), and lack of inpatient treatment facilities within Union County.

Dental Care Access Challenges

Only 64% visited a dentist in the past year, dropping to 46% for low-income adults. The population-to-dentist ratio is 1,540:1, worse than state (1,180:1) and national (1,360:1) averages. Cost and fear are primary barriers.

Chronic Disease Management Needs

71% of adults are overweight or obese, significantly higher than state and national averages. Multiple cardiovascular risk factors cluster together: 83% of diabetics also have high blood pressure, and 75% are overweight or obese. This suggests need for integrated chronic disease prevention and management programs.

Workforce and Employment Challenges

Work schedules were the top day-to-day parenting challenge (45%). Unemployment rate of 5.6% exceeds state levels. Some residents cannot access care due to inability to miss work (1-2% for various services).

Housing Affordability Pressures

31% of households spend 30-50% of income on housing, and 9% spend 50% or more. 5% considered leaving the county due to unaffordable housing, and 2% stayed with others or in temporary situations due to housing insecurity.

Low Preventive Care Utilization

Preventive screenings lag behind benchmarks: only 52% of women 40+ had mammograms in the past year, 57% of women 21-65 had Pap smears in the past three years, and flu vaccination rates for seniors (56%) are below state (65%) and national (63%) levels.

Transportation Limitations

5% of adults experienced transportation barriers including no car (2%), disability (2%), inability to afford gas (1%), and limited public transportation (1%). This is particularly challenging given the rural geography and need to travel outside the county for many services.

Social Isolation Concerns

12% of adults with activity limitations cited isolation/loneliness as a limiting factor. This is notable in a rural community where geographic dispersion may compound social connection challenges, particularly for aging residents.

Strengths of the Community

Strong Primary Care Relationships

80% of adults have at least one person they consider their personal doctor or health care provider. 72% had routine checkups in the past year, demonstrating engagement with preventive care.

High Insurance Coverage

90% of adults have health care coverage, comparable to state (94%) and national (93%) rates. Only 10% are uninsured, showing relatively good insurance access for a rural community.

Positive Health Self-Perception

85% of adults rate their overall health as good, very good, or excellent. 48% rate their health as excellent or very good, matching national averages and exceeding state rates.

Educational Attainment

93.5% of adults age 25 and older have a high school diploma or equivalent, exceeding national levels (89%). 24.9% have at least a bachelor's degree.

Declining Tobacco Use

Current smoking rates dropped significantly from 10% in 2015 to 3% in 2024, well below state (11%) and national (12%) rates. This represents substantial progress in tobacco prevention.

Strong Parent Engagement

94% of parents discussed bullying with their 12-17 year-olds in the past year. High percentages also discussed dating and relationships (94%), career planning (91%), body image (85%), and substance abuse prevention (79%).

Family Structure Stability

64.6% of occupied housing units are owner-occupied. 56.6% of adults are married, and 71% of children on school days spend no time unsupervised, indicating stable family environments.

Disaster Preparedness

Adults demonstrate good emergency readiness: 90% have cell phones, 86% have working flashlights with batteries, 82% have working smoke detectors, and 71% have a 3-day supply of nonperishable food.

Access to Technology

92.4% of households have computing devices (desktop, laptop, smartphone, tablet), and 84.1% have internet subscriptions, supporting telehealth and information access opportunities.

Community Engagement

Union County has 15.6 membership associations per 10,000 population, significantly higher than state (9.8) and national (9.1) averages, indicating strong civic participation and social connections.

Active Living Resources

85% of the population has adequate access to locations for physical activity. 69% of adults engage in physical activity at least three times per week, and only 11% report no physical activity.

Local Health Care Infrastructure

Grande Ronde Hospital and its clinics are well-utilized: 64% accessed Grande Ronde Hospital Regional Medical Clinic, and adults reported multiple access points including urgent care (36%), women's clinic (28%), and emergency room (28%).

Veteran Services

7% of adults reported accessing the Union County VA Clinic, providing specialized services for the 8% of the civilian population who are veterans.

Safe Environment

Union County has low violent crime indicators. Only 2% of adults reported being abused in the past year. The injury death rate (84 per 100,000) is comparable to state (83) and national (80) rates.

Food Environment Quality

The food environment index is 8.1 out of 10, matching the state average and exceeding the national average (7.7), indicating relatively good access to healthy food options and low food insecurity compared to other rural areas.

Workplace Wellness Programs

Adults reported access to employer wellness benefits including free or discounted gym memberships (16%), counseling services (14%), and stress management programs (11%).

Low Binge Drinking Rates

Only 12% of adults are binge drinkers, below state (15%) and national (15%) rates, and down from 19% in 2015, showing progress in reducing harmful alcohol consumption.

Collaborative Health Networks

The Community Health Needs Assessment Task Force includes approximately 20 organizations spanning health care, education, public health, social services, and community agencies, demonstrating strong cross-sector collaboration.