

Executive Summary

Overview

Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City conducted a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for Baker County, Oregon in 2023. The assessment used a social determinants of health framework, gathering primary data through surveys, focus groups, and interviews between July and November 2022, alongside secondary data from public datasets.

Top Three Priorities

Safe, Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Housing emerged as a severe concern, with shortages of available units and rising costs relative to local incomes. Home vacancies have decreased while values have risen, particularly impacting renters who face increased cost burden. Both adult and student homelessness have increased in recent years, straining limited shelter resources.

Access to Affordable Health Care, Including Oral and Vision Health

Residents reported significant barriers including long waitlists, difficulty scheduling urgent appointments, limited pharmacy services, and challenges accessing specialty care. Baker County is a designated health provider shortage area with approximately 65 primary care physicians per 100,000 individuals, well below the state average of 109. The region is also designated as a dental health professional shortage area.

Caregiver Supports, Including Childcare and Assistance for Older Adults

Baker County has an aging population requiring increased support for older adults to age in place. Childcare shortages, particularly for infants and toddlers, pose obstacles for parents entering the workforce. Childcare expenses increased as a percentage of household income from 2019 to 2021, making it increasingly cost prohibitive for families, especially single parents and those near the poverty line.

Next Steps

Saint Alphonsus will develop and publish implementation strategies by the end of 2023.

Community resources to address these and other social care needs can be found at findhelp.org.

Biggest Gaps in Service and Barriers to Care

Provider Shortages

Baker County is a designated health provider shortage area with approximately 65 primary care physicians per 100,000 individuals, compared to the state average of 109. The region also faces a dental health professional shortage, with only 89 dentists per 100,000 residents versus 115 statewide.

Access Barriers

Residents reported long waitlists for appointments, difficulty scheduling urgent appointments, inconvenient operating hours, and challenges accessing pharmacy services. Many residents travel to larger cities in Idaho or further west in Oregon for specialty care.

Insurance and Cost Issues

Insufficient health insurance or lack of coverage is the largest reported barrier. Insurance problems and complications, along with cost of services, prevent many from receiving needed care. Finding providers who accept Medicaid or Medicare is particularly challenging, with only one dentist in the area accepting these programs.

Oral and Vision Health

Dental care is especially difficult to access, with residents reporting long wait times in Baker County and many seeking care in other communities like Ontario or LaGrande. Oral health access was identified as inadequate for many residents.

Mental Health and Substance Use Services

Despite having higher rates of mental health providers per capita than the state average, workforce shortages and high demand result in long wait times. Survey respondents identified insufficient mental health care services and substance use services as major gaps.

Service-Specific Gaps

Baker County lacks neurology and inpatient psychiatric services. Respondents reported insufficient family planning services, exercise and physical activity opportunities, and general health care services including primary care, specialty care, and hospital services.

The Unique Needs of the Community

Aging Population

Baker County has a higher percentage of seniors (age 65 and older) compared to the state average. Concerns for older adults include transportation to medical appointments, availability of health care services, and availability of caregivers to help them age in place and remain independent.

Veterans

Baker County has a significantly higher percentage of veterans (13.2%) compared to Oregon statewide (7.9%). Veterans have access to specialty services but may experience difficulty navigating systems or finding local providers.

Rural Geography and Distance

The rural nature of the county creates challenges with transportation to services. Residents report driving long distances to access health care, particularly specialty services. Many travel to larger cities in Idaho or further west in Oregon for care.

Limited Public Transportation

Public transportation use is very low, falling far below the state average. Survey respondents indicated that lack of public transportation options, particularly accessible options and transportation for activities beyond work or emergency health needs, is a significant challenge.

Housing Vacancy Issues

A disproportionate number of housing units are used as short-term vacation rentals (VRBOs) rather than for residential occupancy. This shift has reduced rental housing availability for residents in a community that attracts tourists due to recreational opportunities.

Higher Disability Rates

Baker County has a larger population with disabilities (22.3%) compared to the statewide average (14.4%), requiring additional support services.

Small Population Challenges

Due to Baker County's small population size, some public data is unavailable or unreliable because of lower participation in data collection efforts and privacy protections for small numbers.

Workforce Shortages

Respondents frequently mentioned workforce shortages as a barrier to accessing services, with many services reducing hours of operation due to lack of available staff.

Strengths of the Community

Strong Behavioral Health Provider Program

Baker County has New Directions Northwest, a strong behavioral health provider offering outpatient programs, residential treatment, prevention, and alternative incarceration programs.

Higher Mental Health Provider Ratio

Baker County has a higher rate of mental health providers per capita compared to the state average.

Community Collaboration

Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City partners with numerous community leaders, policymakers, public and private organizations, and nonprofits serving Baker County, demonstrating strong community partnerships.

Comparable Health Outcomes

Baker County has similar rates of adults visiting dentists (65%) compared to the state average (66%). Self-reported fair or poor health declined during 2020, aligning with state trends.

Educational Performance

Baker County schools have higher rates of students scoring proficient in English Language Arts compared to the state average. The county experienced a much smaller decrease in test score proficiency rates than statewide averages during the pandemic.

Veterans Services

The Baker County Veterans Services Office and Community Connections of Northeast Oregon provide transportation services for veterans.

Community Health Resources

The Baker Early Learning Center (BELC) provides childcare and early childhood education, with Saint Alphonsus contributing \$25,000 in FY23 as a lead sponsor and partner.

Transportation Program

The Rides to Wellness non-medical transportation program received \$27,000 in December 2022 to provide transportation for Baker County residents to and from health care appointments.

Lower Crime Rates

Violent crime rates in Baker County have remained relatively stable and lower than state averages in recent years.

Priorities and Goals

Previous CHNA Implementation (2022)

Health Care Access

Utilized Community Health Workers (CHWs) to assess and address social determinants of health through Pathways models. Between July-December 2022, CHWs made 2,279 encounters with patients and 652 referrals to community resources. As of December 2022, 31.7% of patients in emergency departments, primary care, and specialty care settings were screened for social care needs. Contributed \$961 in staff time to enroll patients in Oregon Health Plan, Medicaid, and financial assistance programs.

Education

Deployed 1.0 FTE between two CHWs within Baker School District to screen and assess students, caregivers, families, and residents for social determinants of health. Between July-December 2022, the CHWs served 120 families in Baker School District. Provided ongoing support for the Baker Early Learning Center with \$25,000 in FY23 as a lead sponsor and partner.

Transportation

Awarded Community Connections of Northeast Oregon \$27,000 in December 2022 to provide non-medical transportation for Baker County residents to and from health care appointments, anticipated to serve 150 riders over the year.

2023 Top Three Priorities

Safe, Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Identified as the top priority due to housing shortages, rising costs relative to local incomes, increased rent burden, and increases in both adult and student homelessness.

Access to Affordable Health Care, Including Oral and Vision Health

Identified due to long waitlists, difficulty accessing urgent care and specialty services, provider shortages, and challenges for Medicaid/Medicare patients.

Caregiver Supports, Including Childcare and Assistance for Older Adults

Identified due to aging population needs, childcare shortages particularly for infants and toddlers, and increasing childcare costs as a percentage of household income.