



Community Health Needs Assessment
SGMC Health Berrien

Prepared by:
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Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation to the Berrien County community for participating in the 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) study, particularly with the community survey. We would also like to thank the SGMC Health Berrien Campus and all parties involved with this study; their input was essential to completing this assessment plan.

2023 CHNA Project Participants

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- Erika Bennett, Director of Marketing and Brand Experience, SGMC Health
- Darrell Moore, Director of VSU's Center for South Georgia Regional Impact
- Keith Lee, Coordinator of VSU's Public Administration and Organizational Leadership Program, Department of Political Science
- Joseph Robbins, VSU's Department Head for the Department of Political Science

2023 Focus Group Participants

- Sara Akins
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SGMC Health Breaks Ground on \$15 million Expansion Project

Executive Summary

SGMC Health is pleased to present this 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for the Berrien Campus in Nashville, Georgia. The plan was developed by SGMC staff in conjunction with Drs. Keith Lee and Joseph Robbins (Valdosta State University faculty) and Valdosta State University's Center for South Georgia Regional Impact (led by Darrell Moore). Lee, Robbins, and Moore have extensive consulting experience, having worked with numerous public and private organizations.

This CHNA is based on information gathered from a variety of sources, including:

1. Focus group interviews with community advocates and stakeholders who are knowledgeable about public health and healthcare issues;
2. A community survey of Berrien County residents; and,
3. Secondary data compiled from national, state, and local agencies and organizations.

Focus Group Interviews

The primary social and behavioral risk factors emphasized as having a negative impact on Berrien County are:

- Illegal substance and alcohol abuse
- Mental and behavioral health issues
- Under or uninsured families
- Healthcare literacy
- Child abuse and/or neglect

Healthcare services that could improve the access and quality of care available to local residents are:

- Pediatric care
- Healthcare services for women, especially pregnant women
- Family support services
- Mental health
- Cardiology, nephrology, neurology, etc.

Additional factors that impact overall community health and well-being include:

- Improved transportation and expanded ambulatory services
- Limited number of specialists in Berrien County
- Limited adult and protective services to address elder abuse
- Limited Georgia Department of Family and Children Services resources to address child abuse and neglect

Community Survey

The primary social and behavioral risk factors emphasized as having a negative impact on Berrien County are:

- Illegal substance and alcohol abuse
- Mental and behavioral health issues
- Under or uninsured families
- Adult obesity
- Poor nutrition

Healthcare services that could improve the access and quality of care available to local residents are:

- Expanded access to primary and urgent care
- Expanded access to emergency care
- Additional mental health services
- Greater access to pediatric care
- Additional prenatal care

Healthcare services not readily available in the community include:

- Cardiology services
- Cancer care
- Elder care services
- Prenatal care
- Primary and urgent care facilities

Community Indicators

- Healthcare access remains a challenge for Berrien County. The county falls below the Georgia rates when it comes to primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers per capita.
- Berrien County economic metrics fall below state averages as well. Median household income, child poverty, and food security measures show that Berrien residents are below state averages.
- Health insurance coverage rates are consistent with Georgia county averages but lower than national averages.
- The following measures exceed state and/or national benchmarks:
 - Cancer and heart disease death rates
 - Child abuse
 - ER visit rates
 - Persons with a disability
 - Physical inactivity
 - Smoking and tobacco use
 - Teen birth rate

- Between 2017 and 2021, Georgia's Online Analytical Statistical Information System (OASIS) reports that Berrien County's leading causes of death are ischemic heart and vascular disease, COPD, COVID-19, cerebrovascular disease, malignant neoplasms of the trachea, bronchus, and lung, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes.
- Berrien County generally ranks in the lower 50% of Georgia Counties for county health rankings such as clinical care (144 out of 159), health outcomes length of life (100), health outcomes quality of life (139), health behaviors (121), and social & economic factors (94).

Overall health concerns

- The focus group listed diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease as major long-term health concerns. Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer were long-term health concerns shared via the community survey. Likewise, the OASIS dashboard reports - cerebrovascular disease, heart disease, and COPD as the county's primary threats.
- Mental and behavioral health challenges were identified as major concerns across all three information sources.
- Cost, limited number of available physicians, and issues with insurance coverage remain major impediments to Berrien County residents' having access to preventative or regular healthcare. Around 18% of Berrien residents (and around 8% of children under 19 years old) are without healthcare insurance.
- Overall health and physical activity are regularly noted as challenges for county residents. Around 32% of Berrien residents reported no leisure-time physical activity in the past month and around 37% of the population reportedly have higher-than-average BMI indices. Both metrics are above Georgia means.

Introduction and Background

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) mandates that non-profit hospitals conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment at least once every three years to retain tax-exempt status. Input from community stakeholders including those with special knowledge or expertise in public health is required. The assessment report must also be made available to the public and should also include an implementation plan, which describes how the organization will address a given community's health needs.

The primary objective of CHNAs is to identify those factors that influence community health and to identify the availability of or need to pursue resources to address the primary challenges. The CHNA objectives:

- Report on the current state of the area's healthcare market, access to care of various services, and which needs are currently unmet.
- Ascertain health status and risk factors present that shape a community's overall health.
- Compare and contrast local indicators with state and/or national measures to identify areas of concern.
- Compile an inventory of healthcare facilities, providers, and services available in the community.
- Use qualitative and quantitative data to identify and prioritize community needs.
- Create an action plan with specific tactics to describe how the organization can address community health needs.

Project Methodology

To comply with regulatory requirements, the steps below summarize the process used to develop this CHNA for SGMC Health's Berrien campus. The steps involved are:

Step 1: Establish the SGMC Health Berrien County CHNA Team. A CHNA team was formed to provide guidance on this project, promote the community survey, select members for the community task force interviews, and to prepare the Community Health Action Plan, and healthcare provider and services inventory.

Step 2: Collect community feedback. The second phase of the project consisted of quantitative and qualitative feedback that was used to gather information on the community's local healthcare needs, summary of available care and preventive services, social and behavioral community risks, and healthcare needs not currently present in the immediate area. The information for this phase was compiled through interviews with community representatives who possessed appropriate knowledge regarding the county's health situation and a survey of Berrien County citizens.

Step 3: Gather community measures for health status, demographics, economics, etc. The third phase of this project entailed gathering secondary data from various agencies and organizations to produce a comparison of Berrien County's demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental status vis-à-vis state and national benchmarks. These indicators are useful for identifying areas of concern or attention for the Community Health Action Plan.

Step 4: Assemble an inventory of healthcare services in the community. In cooperation with SGMC Health officials, an inventory of healthcare facilities, services, and programs were produced to better promote these assets to the broader community.

Step 5: Identify primary health issues in Berrien County. The team next prioritized the most pressing health issues gleaned from the interviews, surveys, and indicator assessment. Identifying the top priorities makes for a more manageable action plan.

Step 6: Create a Community Health Action Plan. After reviewing the key health issues to be addressed, the CHNA team next sought to identify specific actions to address these areas of needs while remaining mindful of the available resources. Timelines, goals, objectives, and assessment benchmarks were also developed.

Step 7: Publicize CHNA to the community. The final phase in this project was to publicize the entire plan to the local community. This includes all components of the CHNA, including the community overview, prioritized healthcare needs, Community Health Action Plan, and implementation strategy.



Organizational Profile

SGMC Health is the most comprehensive medical system in South Georgia. Supported by more than 3,000 healthcare workers who care for 400,000 patients annually across 15 counties annually, SGMC Health operates four hospitals, an ambulance service, 28 medical office locations, a cancer center, a hospice facility, a retirement center, a skilled nursing facility, an imaging center, and an urgent care center.

The SGMC Health Berrien Campus has been a part of the Nashville, Georgia community since 1965. The campus facility includes 51 acute care beds and 12 geriatric/psychiatric beds that serve the residents of Berrien County. The hospital provides general medical care for inpatient, outpatient, and emergency room services. The Berrien Campus also includes:

- Senior Behavioral Health Services
- 24-Hour Emergency Services
- Cardiopulmonary Services
- Health Information Management
- Laboratory Services
- Medical Imaging Services (Echo)
- Hospital-Based Rehabilitation

Community Profile & Health Rankings

Founded in 1856, Berrien County is located in South Georgia, just north of Lowndes County Georgia. Named after John Berrien, President Andrew Jackson's Attorney General, Berrien County was created out of sections of neighboring Coffee, Irwin, and Lowndes counties. The county seat, Nashville, was incorporated in 1892 and was named after General Francis Nash, who earned distinction during the Revolutionary War. Berrien's other communities include Alapaha, Enigma, and Ray City.

Berrien County Map



According to 2022 Census estimates, 18,214 people call Berrien County home. The population has increased around 0.3% from the 2020 Census, when the population was around 18,160 people.¹ Berrien County's racial composition consists of Whites (79.9%), Black or African American (11.3%), Hispanic or Latin-Americans (6%), Asian Americans (1.1%), American Indian or Native American (0.6%), and other groups. Meanwhile, approximately 17% of the county's population is 65 years old and over. Economically, Berrien County generally falls below the state average when it comes to various indicators such as per capita income (\$22,072), median house value (\$103,700), and education level (13% with bachelor's degree or higher).² Conversely, the county surpasses state averages when it comes to the poverty rate (17.2%), percentage of the population with a disability (13.3%), and percentage of the population without insurance (21.1%).³

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/berriencountygeorgia/PST045222>

² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/berriencountygeorgia/PST045222>

³ <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/georgia/berrien-county>

Berrien County Community Profile (2022)

Profile	Berrien County	Georgia Average
Population		
• Population	18,214	10,912,876
• Percent change (2020-2022)	0.03%	1.9%
Age and Sex		
• Persons under 5 years	5.8%	5.8%
• Persons under 18 years	23.2%	23.0%
• Persons 65 years and over	17.6%	15.1%
• Females	50.5%	51.2%
Race and Hispanic Origin		
• White	79.9%	50.4%
• Black or African American	11.3%	33.1%
• Hispanic or Latino	6.0%	10.5%
Housing		
• Housing Units	8,095	4,539,156
• Homeownership	68.7%	64.5%
• Median Housing Value	\$103,700	\$206,700
Families & Living Arrangements		
• Households	6,634	3,885,371
• Persons per household	2.72	2.67
Education		
• High school graduate or higher	80.6%	88.2%
• Bachelor's degree or higher	13.0%	33.0%
Health		
• Persons with a disability (under age 65)	13.3%	8.9%
• Persons without health insurance (under age 65)	18.3%	14.7%
Economy		
• Labor force participation age 16 years and over	53.4%	62.9%
Income & Poverty		
• Median household income	\$44,907	\$65,030
• Per capita income	\$22,072	\$34,516

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2022)

Community Indicators

A variety of benchmarks and comparisons can further illustrate the status of a community's overall health, healthcare, and general standing. This section is informed by data from the State of Georgia's OASIS dashboard, the Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps annual report, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Overall, Berrien County generally ranks in the lower half of Georgia's counties. More specifically, the county ranks 117th and 116th in health outcomes and health factors (out of 159 Georgia counties), respectively.⁴ Health outcomes are derived from quality of life and length of life indicators whereas health factors scores are based on health behaviors, clinical care, social & economic factors, and physical environment.



Photo courtesy of SGMC Health

⁴ https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/CHR2022_GA_0.pdf

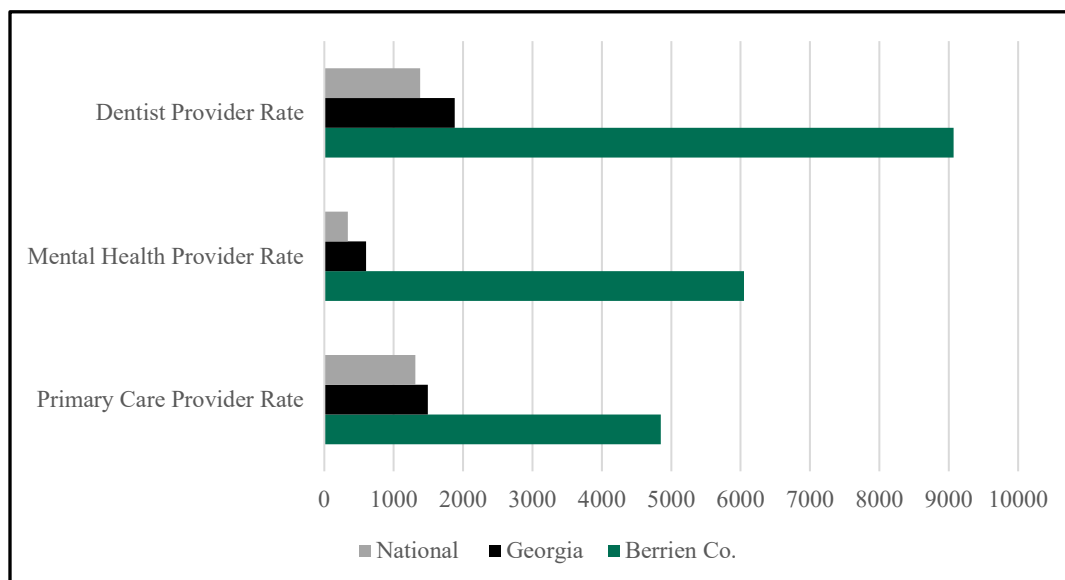
Berrien County Health Rankings Among Georgia Counties

Indicator	Berrien County Rank	Percentile	
Clinical Care	144	91%	
Health Behaviors	121	76%	
Length of Life	100	63%	
Physical Environment	45	28%	
Quality of Life	139	87%	
Social & Economic Factors	94	59%	

Source: *Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps Annual Report (2022)*⁵

Berrien County clinical care access is limited by the number of providers available to support community needs. The number of residents per provider is a common metric to assess healthcare access and the graph below illustrates the disparity in provider rates in Berrien County versus state and local ratios. The number of residents per dental, mental health, and primary care providers is substantially higher than state and national averages overall. these ratios for Georgia and U.S. overall. Despite this, SGM Health Berrien receives exceptionally positive reviews for the care provided by this facility.

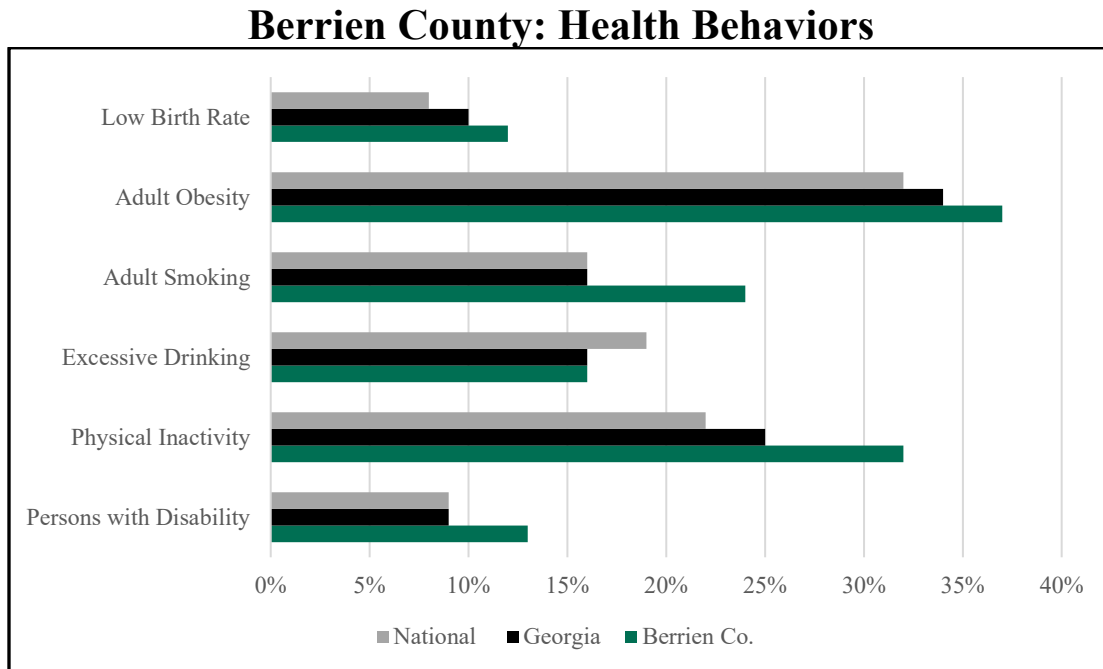
Berrien County: Clinical Care Health Care Providers Per Capita (Number of Residents Per Provider)



Source: *Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps Annual Report (2022)*

⁵ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/georgia/lanier?year=2022>

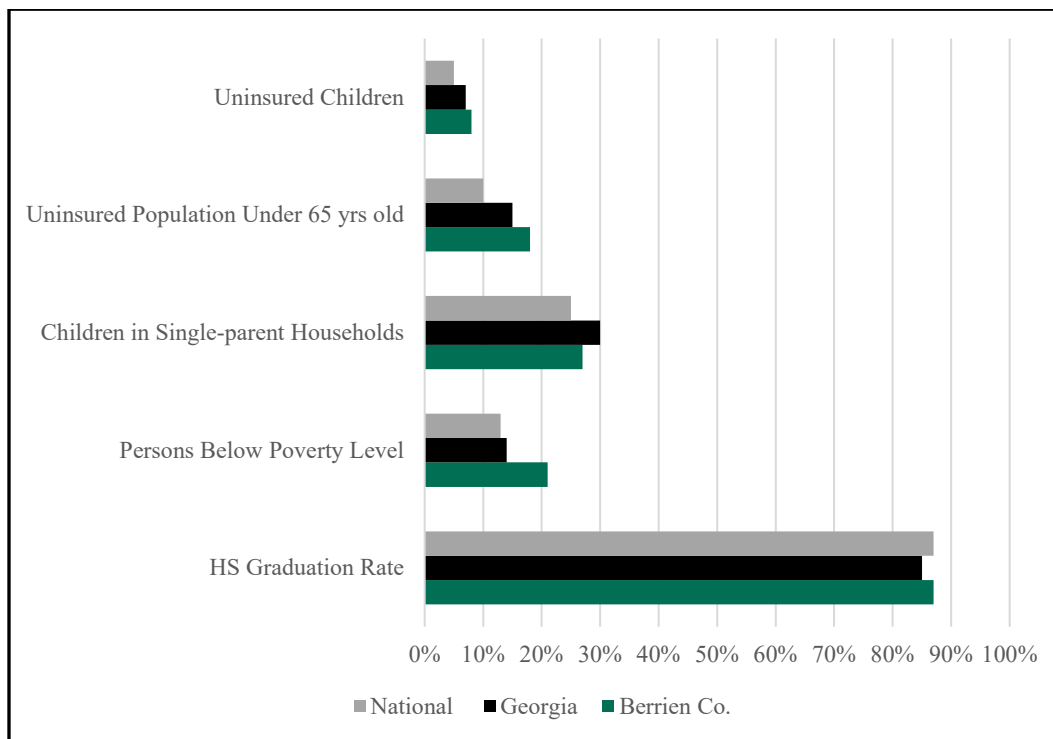
There are several other health indicators that also underscore some of the findings from the community survey and focus group session. The figure below shows that Berrien County has higher than average benchmarks for the percentage of residents with a disability. The county's indicators for low birth rates, adult obesity population, smoking population, and physical inactivity rates are higher than state and national rates too. By contrast, the percentage of residents who excessively drink is lower than the state and national averages.



Source: Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps Annual Report (2022)

Looking beyond these aggregate rankings reveals additional insights about the county. The other social and economic indicators shown below reveal that Berrien County is above state and national averages when it comes to uninsured populations. The county is also home to more people below the poverty line than the state and national averages. Conversely, the high school graduation rate is above the state average and right in line with the U.S. mean.

Berrien County: Social & Economic Indicators

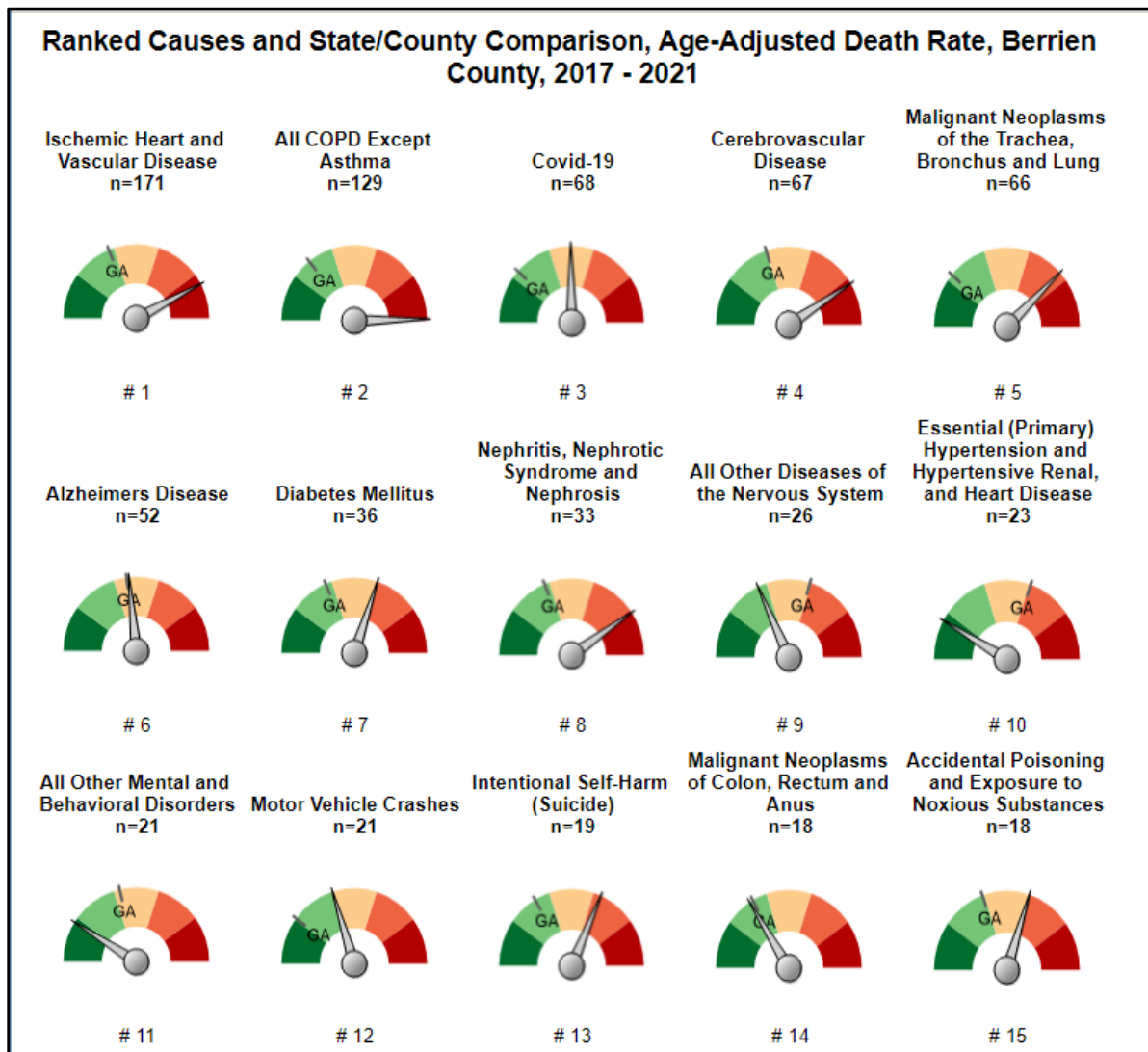


Source: Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps Annual Report (2022)

Community indicators can also provide much information about an area's leading health and healthcare challenges. The findings in this section report data from various sources to summarize the overall, cardiovascular, and cancer-related statistics for the county.

The next group of indicators speaks to the county's leading mortality factors. The indicators previously discussed offer a potential link to some of the mortality factors below. Using OASIS data, the leading causes of death for Berrien County residents between 2017 and 2021 are heart and vascular disease, COPD, cerebrovascular disease, and malignant neoplasms. Berrien residents have slightly elevated death rates from factors such as Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and motor vehicle crashes. Suicide rates are also higher than the state average.

Berrien County: Leading Mortality Factors⁶

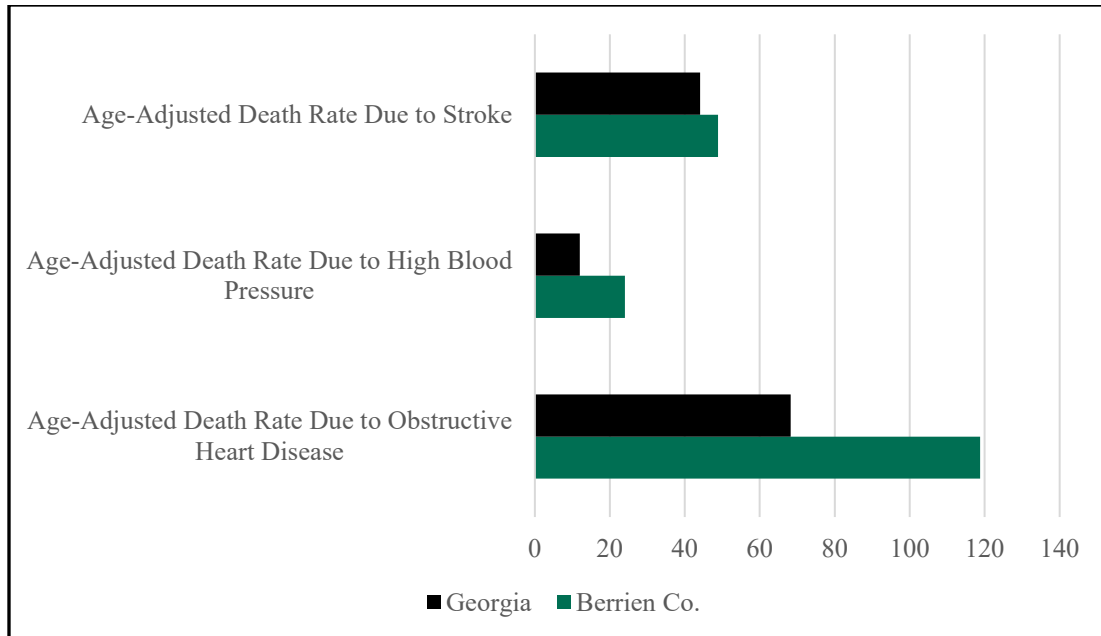


Source: OASIS Trending Tool

The figure below provides additional information on the heart and vascular disease profile. All three measures below report death rates that are higher than the Georgia average, with obstructive heart disease representing the most serious concern in this category.

⁶ <https://oasis.state.ga.us/CHNADashboard/Default.aspx>

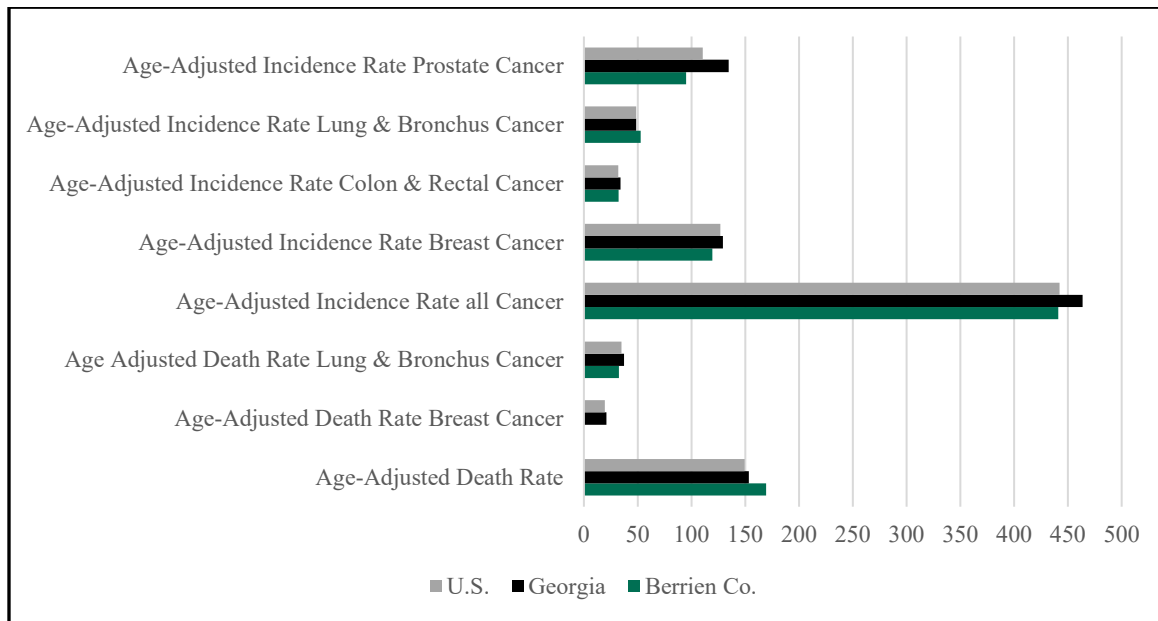
Berrien County: Heart and Vascular Disease Profile



Source: OASIS Trending Tool

Berrien County's cancer occurrence and death rate profile shows that the county generally has lower cancer risks than the rest of the state or the U.S. With the exception of lung and bronchus cancer rates, Berrien County numbers are encouraging when compared to other benchmarks. It should also be noted that breast cancer rates for the county were largely not reported in recent years due to the low number of reported cases. Overall, Berrien County cancer rates were similar to the state and national averages with only a couple of exceptions.

Berrien County: Cancer Disease Profile



Source: National Cancer Institute

Focus Group Discussions

On Thursday, October 19, 2023, Dr. Lee and Dr. Robbins conducted a focus group meeting with several knowledgeable stakeholders representing Berrien County (a list of participant names is in the appendix). The session was conducted on the SGMC Health Berrien Campus and guided by a script prepared by the researchers with help from SGMC Health staff. The discussions focused on gathering feedback regarding:

- Social and behavioral factors negatively impacting health in the community
- Identifying those services that the SGMC Health Berrien Campus does well and what growth opportunities are available
- The barriers or challenges associated with healthcare in the community
- What healthcare services or facilities, that are currently absent, would residents like to have available to them?

Social & Behavioral Risk Factors

Social and behavioral risk factors can lead to, or exacerbate existing, health conditions in a community. During the focus group session, the primary social and behavioral risk factors emphasized as having a negative impact on Berrien County were:

- Illegal substance and alcohol abuse
- Mental and behavioral health issues
- Under or uninsured families
- Healthcare literacy
- Child abuse and/or neglect

Healthcare Access

Having access to healthcare services is vitally important to a community's well-being. During the focus group session, participants shared which healthcare services are needed, though not currently available. Addressing this need is important as the absence of such services may lead residents to pursue healthcare outside of the county. Participants listed the items below as those services most sought after or needed by residents in the community.

- Pediatric care
- Healthcare services for women, especially pregnant women
- Family support services
- Mental health
- Cardiology, nephrology, neurology, etc.

Other Considerations

The focus group session also yielded multiple, other notable considerations. These include:

- Berrien County does not have enough specialists in the area. Specifically, the community would benefit from having oncologists, cardiologists, pediatricians, etc.
- Access to reliable transportation is an issue for several residents. As a result, this places strain on existing ambulatory services. Plans were shared for how the community was addressing (and expanding) this service, but there were issues with this in the past.
- There was a reported paucity of after-hours and weekend care, which further strains the ER services.
- Given demographic changes and an aging population in Berrien County, and across the U.S., there are growing concerns with elder care. This includes ensuring that there are sufficient healthcare services available for this demographic. It is also important that the community has adequate protections in place to safeguard against elder abuse.
- Members of the group noted that there are not enough services available to combat child abuse and neglect in the region. This is also an area where medical services alone may not be suitable to address this community need.
- Mental health issues were noted as a concern by many individuals during the session. Indeed, depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention among community members of all ages are growing challenges facing the community. One participant suggested that a crisis therapy service or provider could be a welcome addition to the community.

Community Survey Results

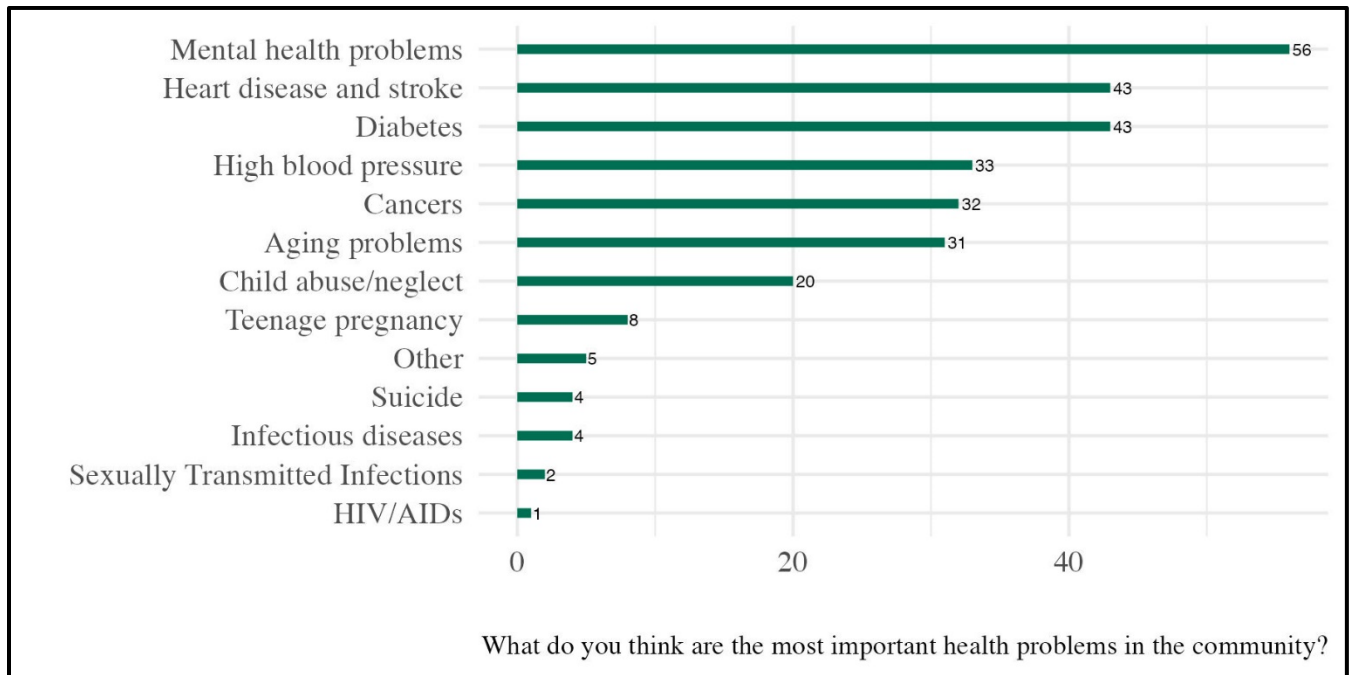
A community survey was conducted from July 2023 through the end of October 2023. The survey was promoted by hospital administration and disseminated through social media and posted flyers. In total, 101 surveys were completed and submitted from the community.

The demographic breakdown of survey respondents is presented below. The information in the adjacent table indicates that women were more likely to complete the survey than men. Beyond this category, more college-educated, married, and white individuals completed this survey than other groups.

Gender				
Females			Males	
88%			12%	
Marital Status				
Married	Divorced	Never Married	Other	
63%	19%	10%	8%	
Age				
18-29 Yrs	30-39 Yrs	40-49 Yrs	50-59 Yrs	60+
11%	18%	19%	26%	27%
Household Income				
<\$30,000	\$30,001-\$50,000	\$50,001-\$70,000	\$70,001-\$90,000	>\$90,000
21%	19%	23%	20%	15%
Education Attainment Level				
Some HS	HS Diploma	Some College	College Degree	Advanced Degree
2%	11%	38%	39%	9%
Race				
White	Black		Other	
90%	5%		5%	

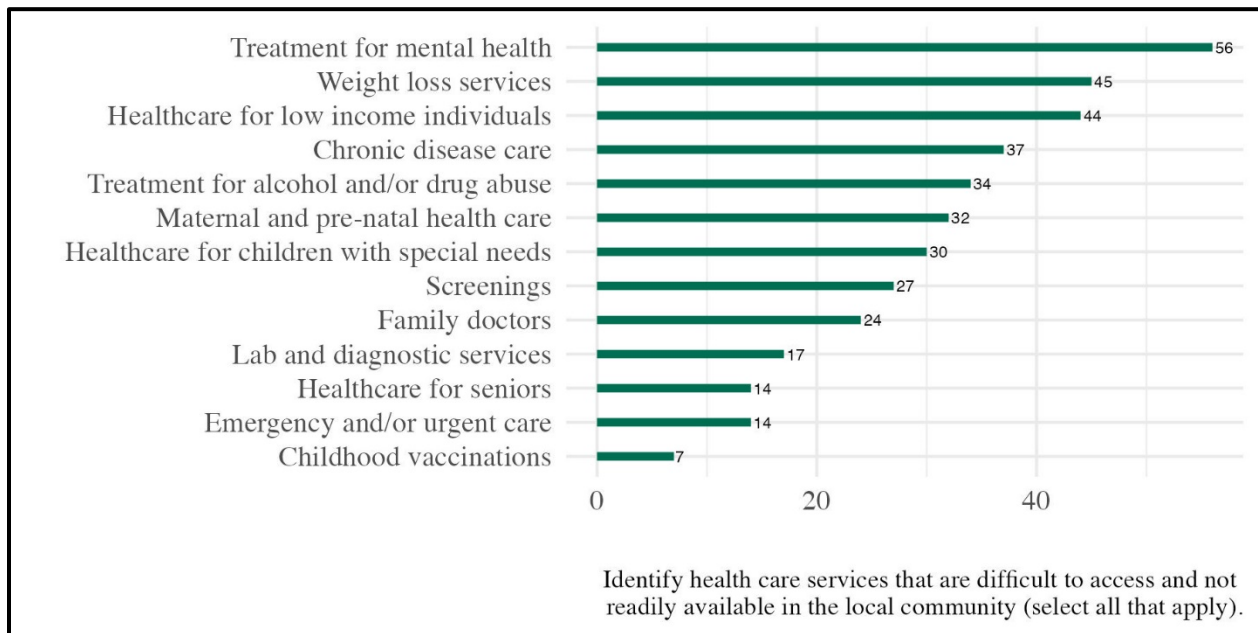
The first portion of the survey asked respondents to share their thoughts on the leading health challenges. The figure below presents the responses to this question. The top five leading reported concerns were mental health, cardiovascular disease, cancers, and aging. Suicide, teen pregnancy, and child abuse/neglect were also listed as concerns.

Berrien County: Leading Health Challenges



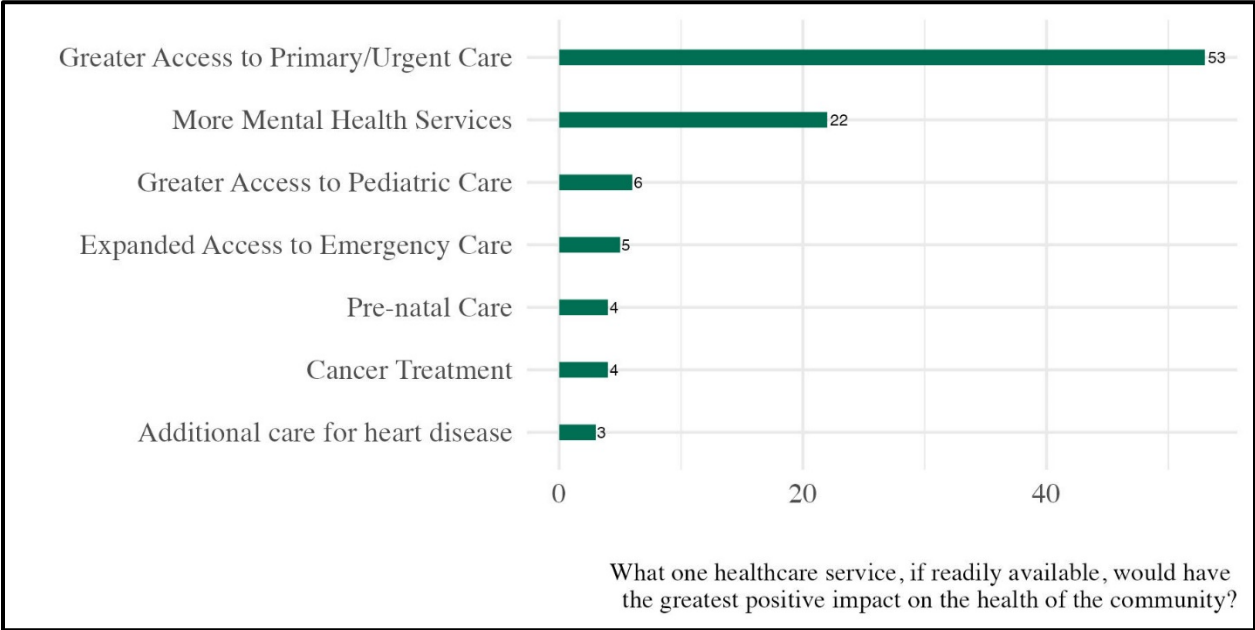
Berrien residents were also asked which healthcare services were difficult to attain (and were not readily available). The responses shown below identify mental health care, weight loss services, healthcare for low-income individuals, chronic disease care, and alcohol/drug abuse treatment as the most needed services.

Berrien County: Difficult to Access Healthcare Services



Respondents were next asked which services would most help Berrien County residents. Many of the responses speak to the reported concerns or health challenges in the community (e.g., obesity, limited access to specialists, after-hours care, etc.). The graph below shows that mental health, greater access to urgent care, pediatric services, cancer treatment, and expanded ER care were the services that could have the greatest impact on the community.

Berrien County: Which Healthcare Service Would Have Greatest Impact on Community



Implementation Plan

The SGMC Health Berrien Campus currently provides many services and programs to meet the needs of Berrien County residents, and while no single medical facility can meet all of the challenges facing a community, opportunities exist to continue to meet the community's needs. The primary objective of this CHNA's Implementation Plan is to ensure that the pieces are in place to help all community members achieve their optimum health and well-being.

The next section discusses the Implementation and Action Plan for the next CHNA cycle. In the section, we discuss:

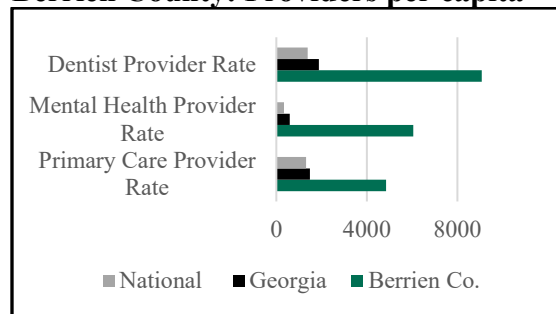
- Description of need
- Objectives for addressing need
- SGMC's ongoing programs/services related to need
- Progress in addressing need

1. Need for enhanced access to primary care services for uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid recipients to reduce the inappropriate use of emergency services for common illnesses and minor injuries.

Description of Need

There continues to be a serious need in the county for primary care providers, especially for those who are uninsured, underinsured (or those with high deductibles), or reliant upon Medicaid. The limited number of physicians, coupled with the paucity of after-hours facilities, concomitantly places greater strain upon the county's ER services.

Berrien County: Providers per capita



The community's need for additional healthcare providers is well-established by the data. The focus group session referenced this challenge, which was echoed by the community survey feedback. The secondary data sources (utilized in the figure above) also speak to this need.

Objectives for Addressing Need

- SGMC Health will continue to provide funding for the provision of free and low-cost primary care services through the Partnership Health Center.
- SGMC Health will continue to identify appropriate opportunities for nurse practitioners and physician's assistants to extend primary care access options within the community.
- SGMC Health will continue to facilitate recruitment efforts to attract new primary care physicians to the service area, particularly physicians willing to accept Medicaid patients.

Ongoing Programs & Services Related to Need

- SGMC Health provides more than \$1.3 million in grant funds to the Partnership Health Center for the provision of primary care services to uninsured individuals between the ages of 18 and 64.
- SGMC Health has grown its physician network to include 10 primary care locations in Lowndes, Berrien, and Lanier counties with 19 physicians specializing in family medicine or internal medicine. SGMC also utilizes three nurse practitioners at its clinics.
- SGMC Health, in affiliation with Mercer University School of Medicine, provides graduate medical education opportunities for physicians through residency training programs and medical student clinical site rotations. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation while helping to attract and retain healthcare professionals to South Georgia, this partnership aims to expand the number of high-quality physicians interested in providing healthcare in our region. In addition to inpatient coverage, the residency program includes a continuity clinic. This serves as a low-cost primary care clinic and is an integral portion of internal medicine training as it allows medical residents to learn how to manage both common and complicated outpatient conditions and to follow patients over time.

Progress in Addressing Need

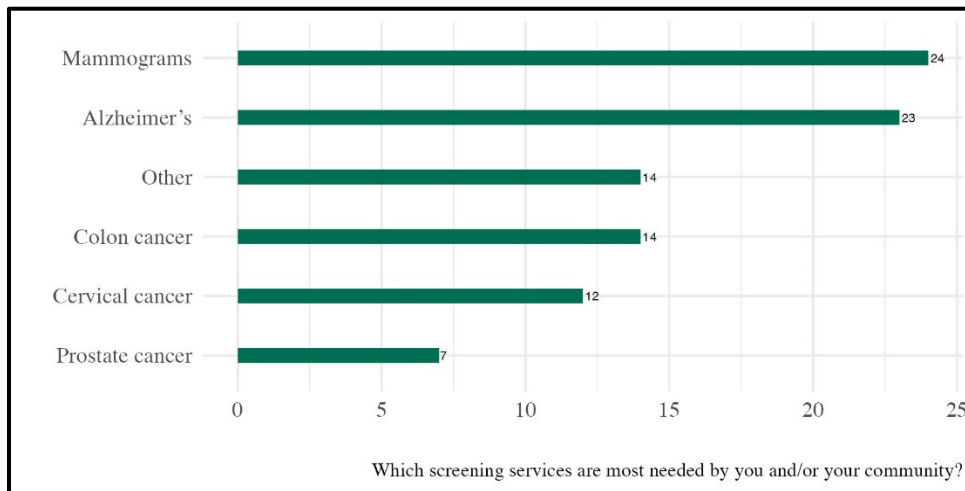
SGMC Health continues to make significant progress in addressing the need to expand access to primary care services for uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid recipients. SGMC Health welcomed two family medicine physicians and two internal medicine physicians in 2023.

While there continues to be a need to expand access to primary care services, substantial progress has been achieved in addressing this community health need over the past three years.

2. Need for enhanced timely access to select medical subspecialty services

Description of Need

The second area of need lies with the number of specialists in the community. The figure below provides a summary of the community survey responses for which services are most needed in Berrien County. Five of the six leading categories all require a specialist or specialist services in order to meet the community’s needs. The figure in the preceding section also speaks to this need, as it alludes to the small number of dentists and mental health providers in the area.



Objectives for Addressing Need

- Continue to monitor the demand for and the time it takes to obtain a medical subspecialty appointment within SGMC Health’s service area and quantify the magnitude of unmet sub-specialty demand within the community.
- Identify options for addressing quantifiable unmet demand for medical sub-specialties

Ongoing Programs & Services Related to Need

SGMC Health has more than 300 physicians with admitting privileges. The SGMC Health Physician Network includes more than 40 specialists to decrease the number of patients who leave the region for care. SGMC Health has an ongoing program to recruit physicians but continues to experience challenges in attracting selected medical sub-specialists to maintain open and active practices within the community.

The South Health District, through the Georgia Department of Public Health's Children's Medical Services Telemedicine Program, is equipped for pediatric patients to be seen by physicians that are not located in Valdosta via telemedicine. Pediatric patients can potentially see more than 20 specialists, such as cardiologists, dermatologists, endocrinologists, neurologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, and others.

In October of 2023, in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness month and to advocate for women's health, SGMC Health's Breast Center offered 50 free 3-D mammogram screenings to women who were uninsured and exhibited a demonstrated financial need for the annual screening at the SGMC Health Berrien Campus in Nashville. Additionally, SGMC Health's Breast Center, which opened in March of 2022, allows women to receive an order and screening mammogram without a primary care provider.

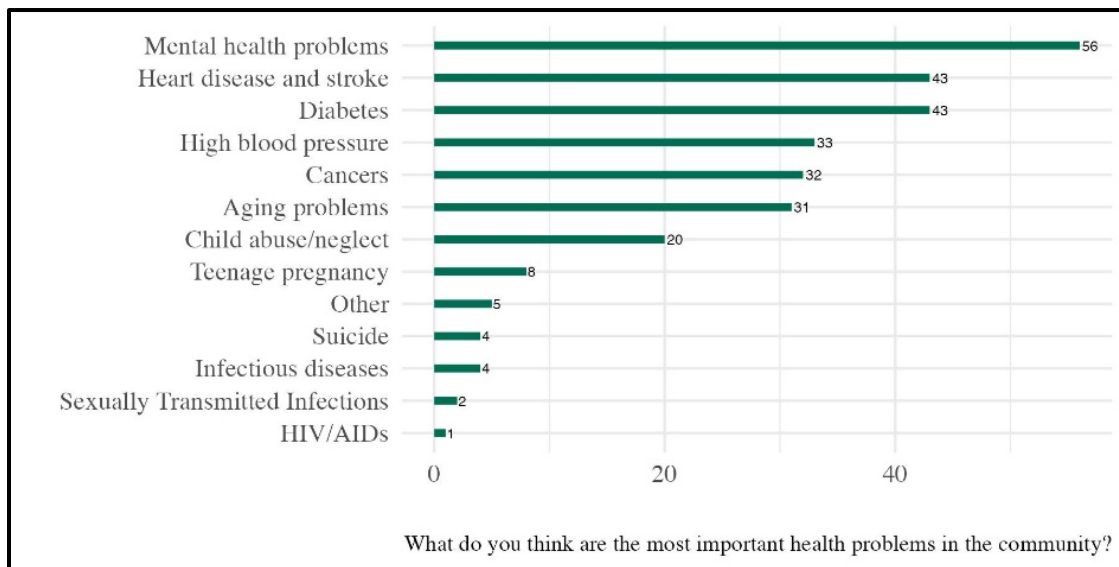
Progress in Addressing Need

Over the past three years, SGMC Health has recruited an endocrinologist and neurosurgeon to address specific previously identified medical sub-specialist needs. In addition, SGMC Health recruited a cardiologist who can perform electrophysiology procedures, a colorectal surgeon, two infectious disease specialists, and it instituted an obstetric (OB) hospitalist program. SGMC Health also added two gastroenterologists and three obstetrician-gynecologists (OB/GYNs) in 2023. While there continues to be a need to enhance timely access to medical sub-specialty services, significant progress has been achieved over the past three years.

3. Need for enhanced access to behavioral health services for uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid recipients.

Description of Need

Mental health is a growing concern across the U.S. and this study shows that Berrien County is hardly immune from this trend. The focus group session included an extended discussion of this issue, particularly in the school system. A member of the focus group alluded to the need for a crisis therapy provider who could provide immediate mental support for students undergoing challenges.



Berrien County's youth are just one piece to this puzzle, though Community Health Rankings & Roadmaps data showed that there is a dearth of mental health providers (6,050 Berrien residents per mental health provider) and the number of poor mental health days experienced by residents outpaces both state and national averages. The mental health need was also one of the leading concerns expressed in the community survey.

Objectives for Addressing Need

- SGMC Health provides inpatient treatment for geriatric psychiatric patients at its SGMC Health Berrien Campus.
- SGMC Health does not provide inpatient or outpatient treatment services for patients with behavioral health issues at its facilities in Valdosta or Lakeland. However, SGMC Health does provide emergency stabilization services as necessary to ensure patient safety when individuals with acute psychiatric and/or substance abuse issues present in the emergency department.
- SGMC Health will continue to meet with behavioral health advocates to discuss the need for increasing access to behavioral health services for the target populations identified.

Ongoing Programs & Services Related to Need

Other than its inpatient geriatric psychiatry program at the SGMC Health Berrien Campus, SGMC Health does not provide inpatient or outpatient behavioral health services. SGMC Health's Main Campus accepts patients within its emergency department in Valdosta who are in need of stabilization, pending transfer to an appropriate behavioral health facility.

Progress in Addressing Need

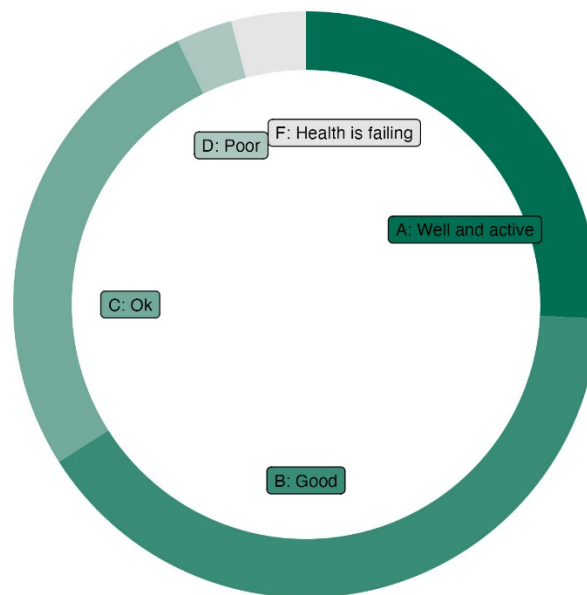
SGMC Health continues to provide psychiatric and substance abuse stabilization services in the Emergency Department at its Main Campus in Valdosta. SGMC Health is planning a dedicated behavioral treatment area with 11 behavioral health stations within its proposed Emergency Department expansion, which is projected to be completed by July 2025. Currently, SGMC Health does not plan to begin providing inpatient or additional outpatient behavioral health services.

SGMC Health works with the United Way and United2Prevent, a local task force focusing on preventing suicide, increasing awareness of suicide, and destigmatizing mental illness. United2Prevent's mission is to increase the community's awareness, understanding, and knowledge of suicide so that people contemplating taking their own lives can be helped before they choose it as a solution to their suffering.

4. Need for partnerships to enhance education and promotion of healthy nutrition, lifestyle, and exercise to reduce the prevalence of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, overweight, obesity, and cancer.

Description of Need

Lifestyle issues are another leading community concern. The challenge here is multi-faceted, which speaks to the complex nature of this issue. There should be efforts to address the need for healthier lifestyles. This is spurred on by low physical activity levels, higher tobacco use, drug and alcohol use, low health literacy, and unhealthy eating habits. When asked to grade their health, respondents answered “Ok” or better, with a near even split between “Well and Active”, “Good,” and “Ok.” A small fraction of respondents selected “Poor” or “Failing.”



Respondents were also asked about their exercise habits and more than half reported exercising less than twice per week.

Response	Count	Percentage
0-1 days per week	49	52.13
2-3 days per week	27	28.72
4-5 days per week	13	13.83
6-7 days per week	5	5.32

The focus group session provided an extended discussion of the community's struggles with tobacco, drug, and alcohol use; these concerns were reinforced by the survey. Additionally, the focus group sessions raised concerns with health and healthcare literacy and nutrition. Several participants shared that many residents are unaware of what services are available. There is also a perception among some that residents are not actively taking steps to manage their own health and well-being. Similarly, it was shared that access to quality, nutritional foods is both scant and expensive. Consequently, this makes it more difficult for citizens to eat healthy.

Objectives for Addressing Need

- Continue to support existing initiatives within the community that promote healthy nutrition, lifestyle, exercise, and smoking cessation programs.
- Continue to identify opportunities to enhance communication channels and social support networks to promote healthy nutrition, lifestyle, and exercise choices.

Ongoing Programs & Services Related to Need

SGMC Health has multiple programs and activities to promote healthy nutrition, lifestyle, and exercise to reduce the prevalence of cancer, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, obesity, and overweight. In addition, SGMC Health works collaboratively with local community partners to support healthy nutrition, lifestyle, and exercise choices. Specific programs that SGMC Health sponsors and supports in collaboration with local community partners include:

Healthy Lifestyle: SGMC Health provides speakers for local civic organizations, clubs, and hospital-sponsored "Lunch & Learn" programs.

Cancer Awareness: SGMC Health promotes and sponsors cancer awareness programs and events throughout the year including mammogram screening events, 5K run/walk, and the Relay for Life.

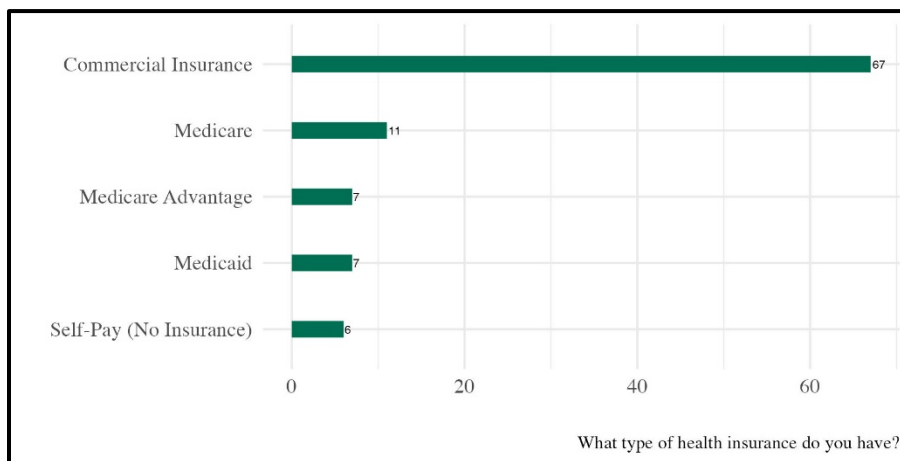
Progress in Addressing Need

There continues to be a need for partnerships to enhance education and promotion of healthy nutrition, lifestyle, and exercise habits to reduce the prevalence of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, overweight, obesity, and cancer.

5. Need for enhanced access for low-income families, including uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid recipients.

Description of Need

The final substantive challenge facing residents is the support for low-income families. This is illustrated from multiple sources. The uninsured population was estimated to be around 18%, which is notably higher than the national average (10%). There are also a number of uninsured children in Berrien County (8%) compared to the national average (5%). Similarly, the community survey revealed that while most participants used commercial insurance, several other participants depend on Medicare, Medicare Advantage, or Medicaid for healthcare coverage.



The survey and focus group also conveyed that numerous individuals would benefit greatly from low-cost healthcare options for Berrien residents. Indeed, healthcare for low-income individuals received the third most responses when respondents were asked which services are needed but not readily available.

Objectives for Addressing Need

- SGMC Health will continue to provide funding for the provision of free and low-cost primary care services through the Partnership Health Center.

Ongoing Programs & Services Related to Need

- SGMC Health provides more than \$1.3 million in grant funds to the Partnership Health Center, for the provision of primary care services to uninsured individuals between the ages of 18 and 64.

Progress in Addressing Need

There continues to be a need for healthcare access for low-income families.

In May 2023, SGMC Health broke ground on a \$15 million project to greatly expand its Berrien campus.⁷ The expansion will more than double the emergency department, leading to an additional 26,000 square foot space that will include enhanced capacity to meet trauma and specialty care needs. The space will also include enhanced clinical and support space and will contain state-of-the-art monitoring systems and furnishings. This new space should directly address the emergent care needs identified earlier in this report and is set to open in fall 2024.



⁷ “SGMC Breaks Ground on Berrien Hospital Expansion.” <https://www.sgmc.org/sgmc-breaks-ground-on-berrien-hospital-expansion/>

Appendix:

Focus Group Participants

Name	Title
Sara Akins	Berrien Kinship Support Coordinator, Family Connections Communities
Kristin Barker	School Counselor, Berrien Middle School
Selena Brady	Director of Nursing, SGMC Health Berrien
Evelyn Fox	Community Coordinator Family Connection/Communities in Schools of Berrien County
Hayden Hancock	City Manager, Nashville
Betty Smith, FNP-C	Family Practice Nurse Practitioner
Audrey Bradford	Nursing Manager, SGMC Berrien