

Community Engagement Profile:

Piscataquis County

September 2024



Introduction

The Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment (Maine Shared CHNA) is a collaborative partnership between Central Maine Healthcare, Northern Light Health, MaineGeneral Health, MaineHealth, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Maine Community Action Partnership. By engaging and learning from people and communities and through data analysis, the partnership aims to improve the health and well-being of all people living in Maine. This is the sixth collaborative Maine Shared CHNA.

The mission of the Maine Shared CHNA is to:

- Create Shared CHNA reports,
- Engage and activate communities, and
- Support data-driven improvements in health and well-being for all people living in Maine.

Community Engagement

In order to begin to understand how people interact in their communities and with the systems, policies, and programs they encounter we must build relationships and engage in ways that are mutually beneficial. Drawing on narrative and lived experience we are better positioned to identify the root causes of health and well-being behaviors and outcomes and not just what those behaviors and outcomes are. Qualitative data, resulting from community engagement, provides an important context for the health and well-being outcomes and trends contained in the numbers. In combination, qualitative and quantitative data produce a broader picture of what a community is experiencing and enable a more thorough and well-rounded approach to program and policy development.

The Maine Shared CHNA's community engagement included: focus groups, key informant interviews, and a statewide, community survey.

The Maine Share CHNA recognizes the need to work with communities to build relationships and trust to more respectfully, transparently, and meaningfully work together in an effort to continuously improve upon our community engagement processes.

This document contains a summary of key themes from the County focus groups and a comparison of the County level survey results to the overall Maine results. The Maine Shared CHNA's data commitments are outlined in the Appendix. The community engagement overviews, as well as additional information and data, can be found online at the Maine Shared CHNA's website – www.mainechna.org.

Populations and Sectors Identified for Engagement

Focus Groups

As part of the Community Services Block Grant reporting, the Community Action Programs are required to engage directly with the communities they serve, namely those of lower income. To meet this requirement, the Maine Shared CHNA hosted local focus groups with people with low-income in each Maine County, conducting two focus groups in Aroostook, Cumberland and Penobscot Counties to account for variation in the population and geography of these counties. These focus groups also provide important information and insights to the experiences of people at the County level.

We recognize that for many people, their lives and their health is affected by multiple aspects of their identity and lived experiences or their “intersectionality.” We attempted to recognize participants’ intersectionality by asking them to voluntarily share any other identities they may have. It should be noted the voices we hear in focus groups are not meant to be representatives of their entire identified population or community. The totality of focus group participants also identify as: a Tribal member, older adults, Non-English speaker, immigrant, asylee, migrant, Latino/Latine/Latinx, residents of rural, urban, and suburban areas, people with substance use disorder, people with mental health disorder, members of the disability community, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, people who are unhoused or experiencing homelessness, and caregivers.

Focus groups and key informant interviews were also conducted at the state-level with specific populations and sectors. The findings are outlined in the Maine Community Engagement Overview.

Statewide Community Survey

The Maine Shared CHNA also conducted a statewide, community survey on health and well-being. The survey was developed in collaboration by a small working group comprised of members of the Community Engagement and Metrics Committees, the Maine Shared CHNA Program Manager, and Crescendo Consulting Group, with final approval by the Steering Committee. The survey was open to anyone living in Maine. Respondents were asked to complete 40 questions related to the local resources and strengths of their communities and their own health and well-being and that of those who live in their community.

Focus Group

Number of Participants: 7

Top Themes

- Dental shortage
- Long drive times to see providers
- Mental health services for youth and adults
- Substance misuse
- Transportation

The following sections contain select quotes from focus group participants.

What does a “healthy” community look like to you?

- “Affordable and accessible healthcare”
- “Invest not only in our older population, but also in our youth”
- “Education and prevention are huge. We don’t teach how to be healthy”

What services and resources for becoming and staying healthy are difficult to find?

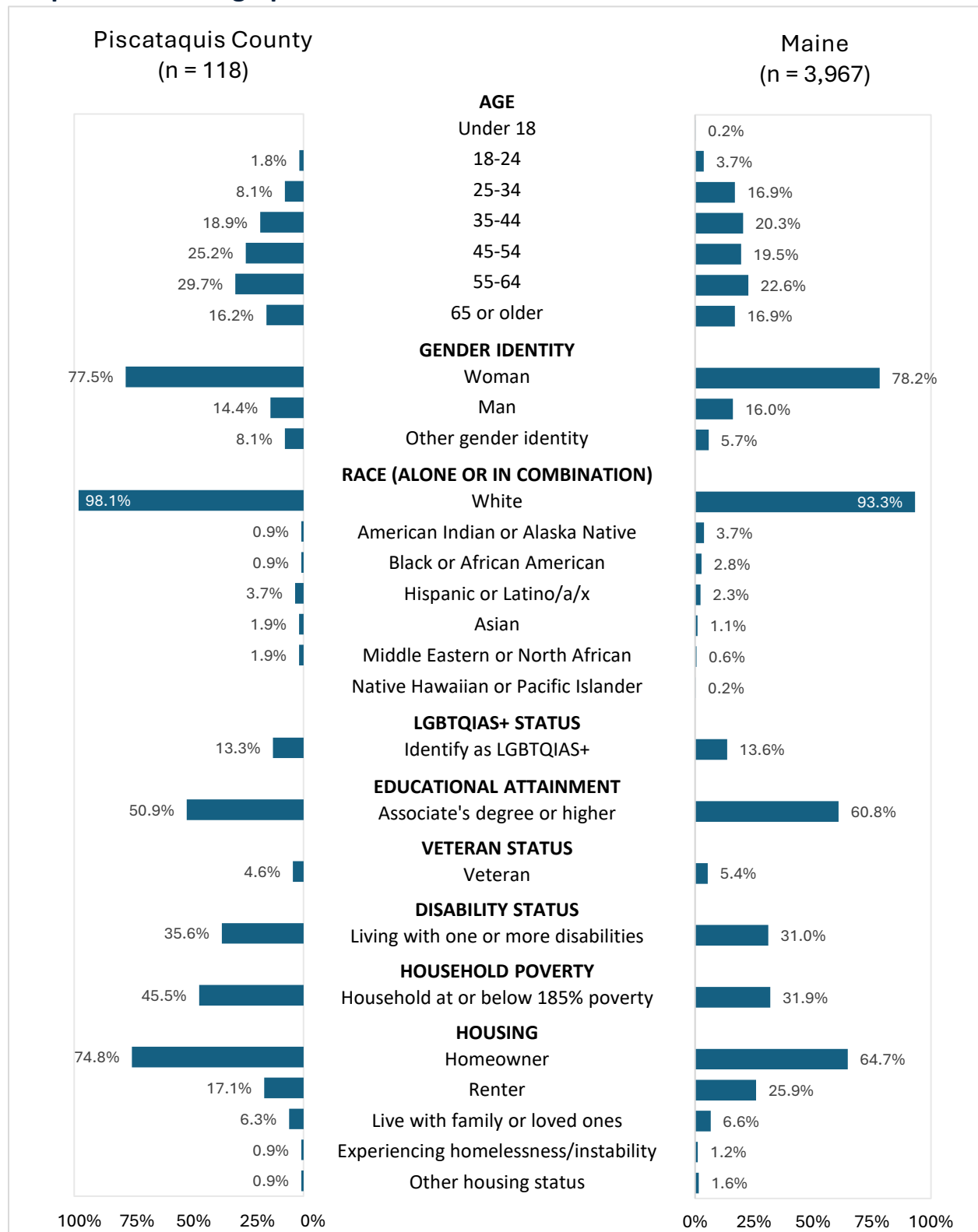
- “Dentists and therapists – it is absolutely impossible. I have lived in Medway for the past two years and after at least 50 phone calls, I found one two hours away and the appointment is for next year. My son needs the help now.”
- “Rural Maine has a drug issue and yet we have no access to alternative forms of treatment and pain management. I have arthritis in all my joints. I go in [to my doctor] and all I get is let’s give you more drugs. I want acupuncture or alternative treatments.”
- “There’s a pharmacy in Milo and we’re supposed to get one in Brownville. A lot of clients I work with get their medicines through the mail, but UPS only comes here once or twice a week so people who need medicines are potentially waiting more time to get them.”

What are the top three social or environmental health needs or challenges in the community?

- “The electric bill just keeps going up and up. Same with food and housing. Our salaries are not keeping up. Everything is becoming unaffordable. My electric bill is \$600, and I do not have that.”
- “I think houses are in really poor condition, like falling down. The town has bought some but doesn’t have the money to do anything with them.”
- “I’ve seen people on Facebook asking for childcare. I think grandmas take care of a lot of kids while mom works.”
- “A lot of people drive to work in Bangor to get jobs with [health] insurance.”

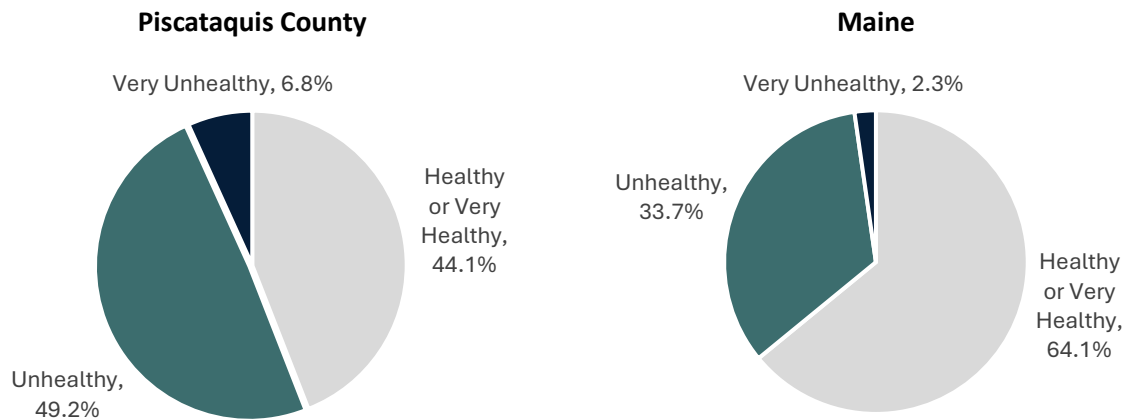
Community Survey

Respondent Demographics



Community Health Status

Overall health and well-being of the community where you live



Top 5 strengths of the community

Piscataquis County	Maine
1) Low crime	1) Safe opportunities to be active outside
2) Safe neighborhoods	2) Locally owned businesses
3) Safe opportunities to be active outside	3) Safe neighborhoods
4) Locally owned businesses	4) Schools & education for all ages
5) Strong sense of community	5) Low crime

Top 5 social concerns that negatively impact your community

Piscataquis County	Maine
1) Low incomes and poverty	1) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)
2) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)	2) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)
3) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	3) Low incomes and poverty
4) Employment opportunities	4) Housing insecurity
5) Obesity	5) Obesity

Community Health Needs

Please indicate if _____ negatively impacts you, a loved one, and/or the community where you live.

Percentage of respondents who answered 'Impacts me, a loved one, and/or my community'

Piscataquis County		Maine	
Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	80.0%	Economic needs	76.1%
Economic needs	79.8%	Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	75.7%
Mental health needs	73.6%	Mental health needs	73.6%
Substance use	72.8%	Substance use	68.5%
Housing needs	63.1%	Housing needs	68.5%
Transportation	62.2%	Transportation needs	60.9%
Environmental needs	52.6%	Environmental needs	58.4%
Public safety needs	49.1%	Public safety needs	53.7%

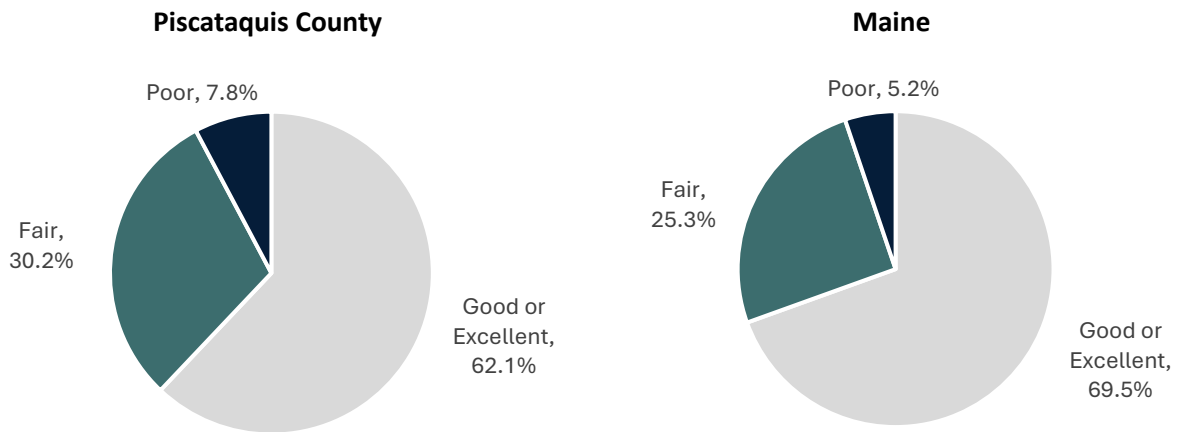
Socioeconomic Empowerment

Top 5 items rated by respondents as 'very necessary' steps to help move people out of poverty and to a place of housing stability & financial stability.

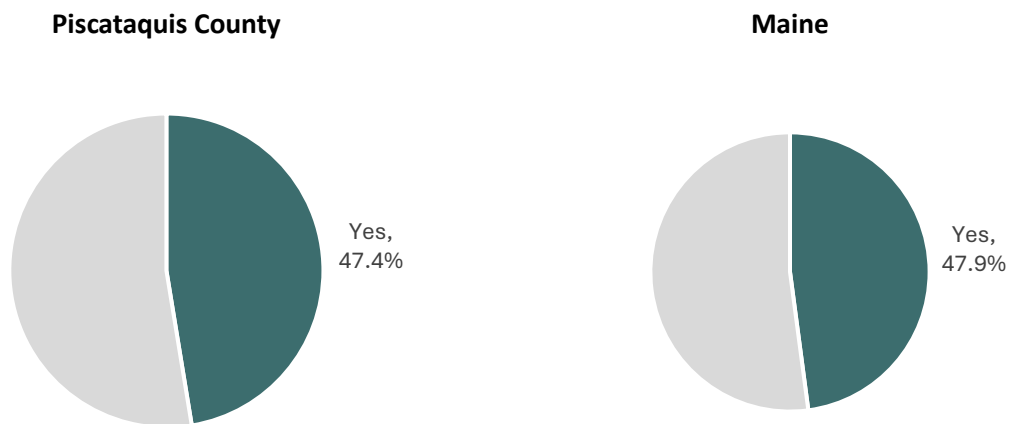
Piscataquis County	Maine
1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage	1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage
2) Affordable and safe housing	2) Affordable and safe housing
3) Affordable & available health care	3) Mental health care and treatment
4) Mental health care and treatment	4) Affordable & available health care
5) Reduction in substance use (drugs, alcohol)	5) Affordable & quality childcare

Physical Health Status

How would you rate your own physical health?



Within the past year (365 days), have there been 1 or more times when you or a loved one needed health care services but could not or chose not to get it?

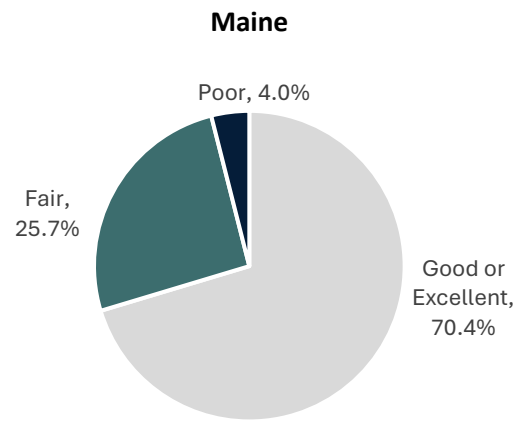
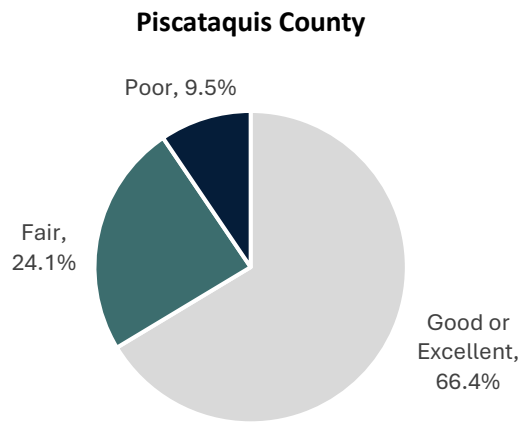


If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

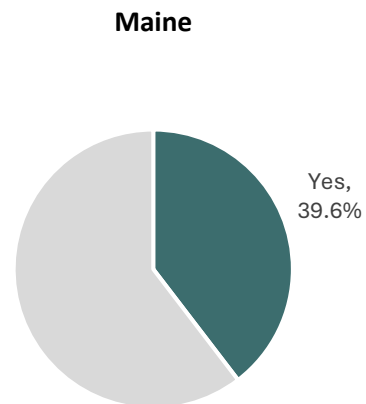
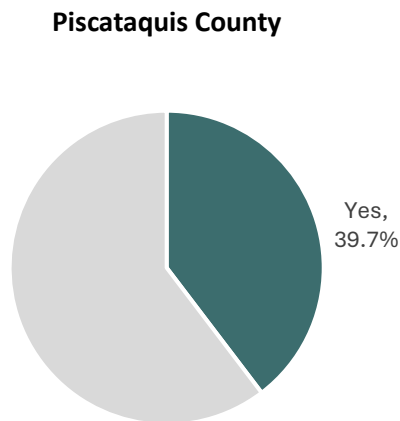
Piscataquis County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) No evenings or weekend hours to get care	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Had health insurance, could not afford care	3) No evenings or weekend hours to get care

Mental Health Status

How would you rate your own mental health?



Within the past year (365 days), have there been 1 or more times when you or a loved one needed mental health care services but could not or chose not to get it?



If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

Piscataquis County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Had health insurance, could not afford care	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Did not feel comfortable seeking help	3) No evenings or weekend hours to receive care

Acknowledgements

Funding for the Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment (Maine Shared CHNA) is provided by the partnering healthcare systems and the Maine Community Action Partnership with support from the Maine CDC. The Maine Shared CHNA is also supported in part by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. DHHS) as part of the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (award 1 NB01TO000018). The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by the U.S. CDC/DHHS, or the U.S. Government.

We are grateful for the time, expertise, and commitment of numerous community partners and stakeholder groups, including: the Metrics Committee, the Community Engagement Committee, Local Planning Teams, and several Ad-Hoc Committees. Crescendo Consulting Group provided quantitative and qualitative expertise, design and production support, and analysis.

We are grateful to our community partners and stakeholders who took the time to help advertise and recruit for our focus groups, both at the state and county level, and for our statewide community survey. Our utmost thanks also goes to all of the individuals who took part in our key informant interviews. Each of you enabled us to learn more about populations, communities and sectors in Maine. Without all of these efforts we would not have been able to conduct this aspect of our assessment.

A special thank you also goes to the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine and Maine DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and John Snow, Inc. and Disability Rights Maine for use of their assessments and ability to include their findings in ours.

Appendix

Data Commitments

The Maine Shared CHNA uses a set of data stewardship guidelines to ensure data is collected, analyzed, shared, published, and stored in a transparent and responsible manner. Included in these guidelines is a commitment to promote data equity in data collection, analyses, and reporting. These include a commitment to:

- Correctly assign the systemic factors that compound and contribute to health behaviors and health outcomes rather than social or demographic categories. We will use a systems-level approach when discussing inequities to avoid judging, blaming, and/or marginalizing populations.
- Lead with and uplift the assets, strengths, and resources when discussing populations and communities, specifically with qualitative data collection.
- Report results in an actionable form to improve the lives of those represented in the data.
- Acknowledge missing data and data biases and limitations.
- Identify and address important issues for which we lack data.
- Empower professionals and community members to use data to improve their work and their communities.
- Share data with communities affected by challenges to share analysis, reporting and ownership of findings.