

Community Engagement Profile: Aroostook County

October 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: 12

Top Themes

- Affordable housing
- Available resources
- Provider shortages
- Timely and affordable care
- Transportation

The following sections contain select quotes from focus group participants.

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

- “Opportunities for all age groups. [...] Programs that are accessible (affordable) for everyone.”
- “Transportation or telemedicine. There are efforts to expand telehealth access in the community.”
- “Empathy – not being judgmental, being open minded. Have compassion for different people. Not all walking the same path in life.”
- “Reliable government – if there is growth, town isn’t over compensating.”

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

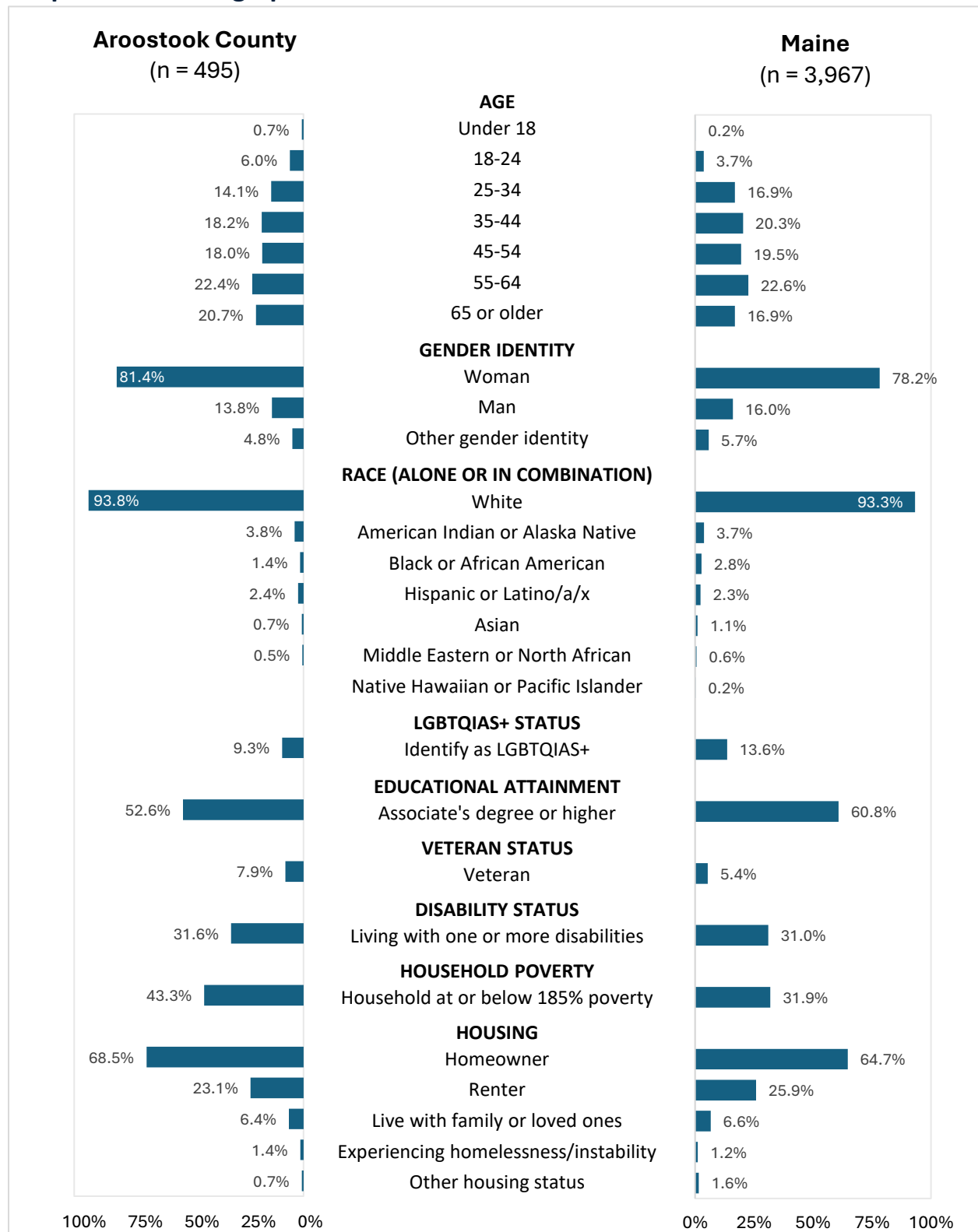
- “Providers are not really seeking newer patients.”
- “There aren’t enough providers, especially mental health and substance use treatment. Houlton may be a steppingstone in their career, and we appreciate having them, but...”
- “Specialists – if you want to see one quickly, you have to go as far as Bangor.”
- “[Someone I know] is disabled vet. He's able to use telehealth for his appointments, otherwise he has to go down to Augusta, Bangor, Caribou. Some people can't travel all over to get the care they need.”

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

- “Wages have not kept up. You need 30% of your paycheck in order to get housing.”
- “Have wants and needs that are totally different from the homeless population. What if you are in the situation where there is nothing to eat? That’s an eye-opener. Doctors ask, “Do you have enough to eat? Do you feel safe at home?” But it’s just to check a box. What are they prepared to offer?”
- “Loneliness – being connected through electronics is better than nothing, but it doesn’t replace playing pickleball with friends, or playing cribbage.”
- “Spectrum is available but expensive. Low income internet program ended. Some people are getting Starlink.”

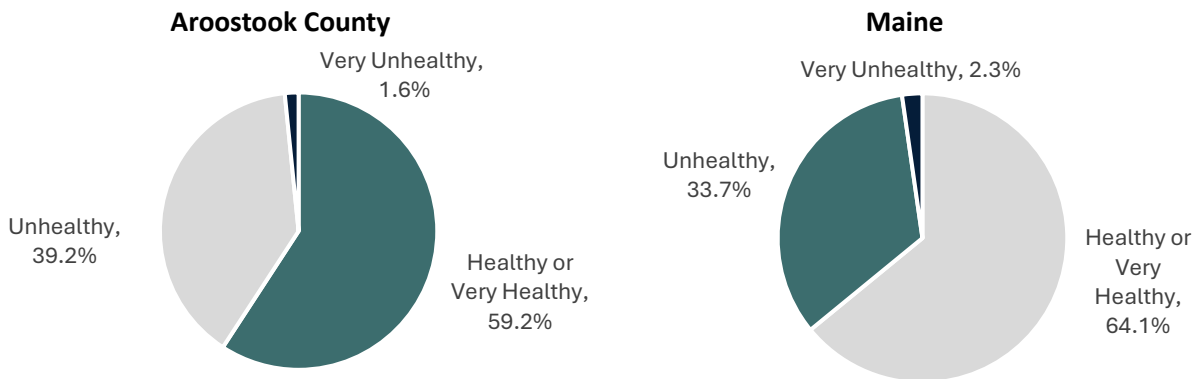
Community Survey

Respondent Demographics



Community Health Status

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



Top 5 strengths of the community

Aroostook County	Maine
1) Locally owned businesses	1) Safe opportunities to be active outside
2) Safe opportunities to be active outside	2) Locally owned businesses
3) Schools & education for all ages	3) Safe neighborhoods
4) Banks & financial institutions	4) Schools & education for all ages
5) Safe neighborhoods	5) Low crime

Top 5 social concerns that negatively impact your community

Aroostook County	Maine
1) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)	1) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)
2) Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	2) Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, prescription drugs, illicit drugs, etc.)
3) Low incomes and poverty	3) Low incomes and poverty
4) Childcare	4) Housing insecurity
5) Lack of transportation	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'

Aroostook County		Maine	
Chronic health conditions (cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.)	76.8%	Economic needs	76.1%
Economic needs	76.6%	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	73.1%	Substance use	68.5%
Transportation needs	63.6%	Housing needs	68.5%
Housing needs	63.2%	Transportation needs	60.9%
Public safety needs	54.6%	Environmental needs	58.4%
Environmental needs	52.8%	Public safety needs	53.7%

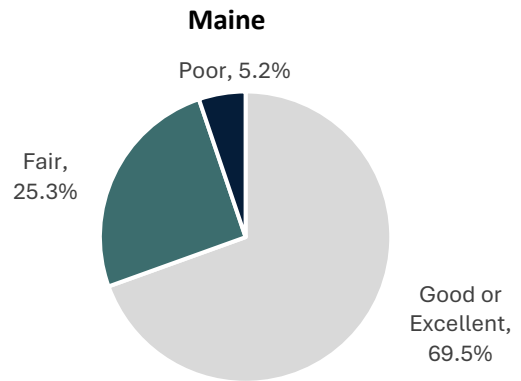
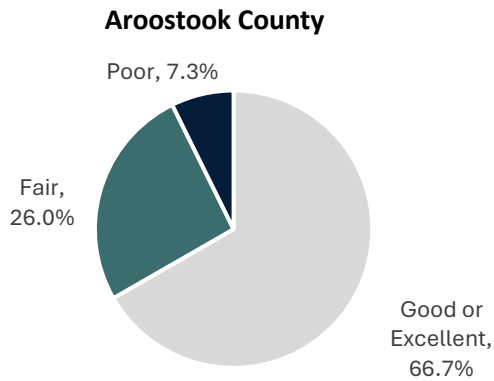
Socioeconomic Empowerment

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.

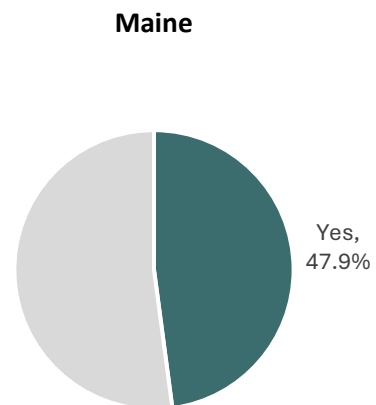
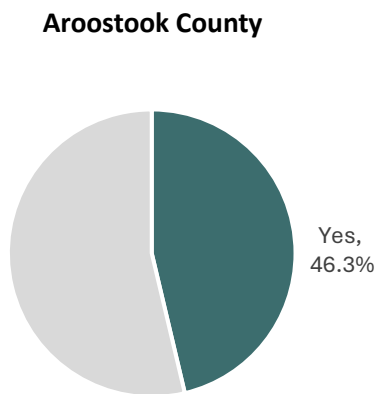
Aroostook County	Maine
1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage	1) Jobs that pay enough to support a living wage
2) Affordable and safe housing	2) Affordable and safe housing
3) Affordable & quality childcare	3) Mental health care and treatment
4) Reduction in substance use (drugs, alcohol)	4)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

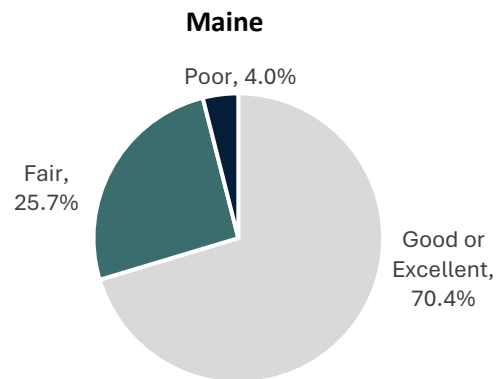
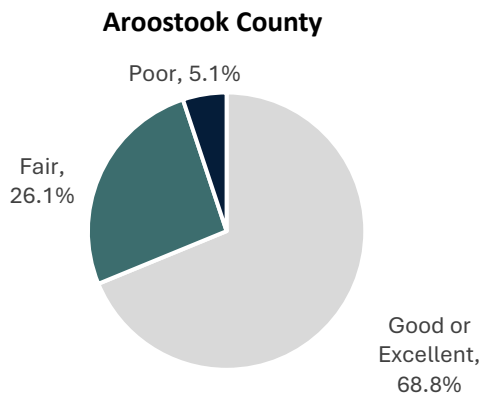


If yes, what stopped you from getting care when you needed it? (Select all that apply)

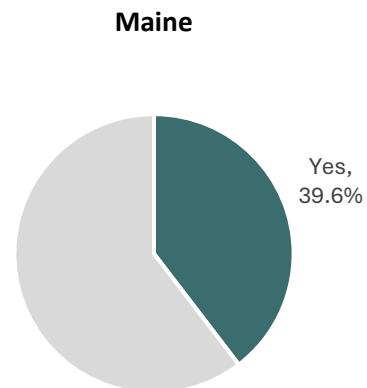
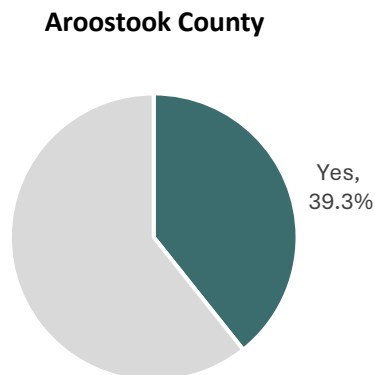
Aroostook County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Had health insurance, could not afford care	2) Had health insurance, could not afford care
3) Did not feel comfortable with available providers	3) No evenings or weekend hours to get care

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)

Aroostook County	Maine
1) Long wait times to see a provider	1) Long wait times to see a provider
2) Did not feel comfortable with available providers	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

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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.

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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.