



WILLS MEMORIAL
HOSPITAL

Community Health Needs Assessment

May 2025

Lincoln, Taliaferro, & Wilkes Counties



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Introduction

The Community Health Needs Assessment completed by Wills Memorial Hospital is a federal requirement of charitable hospital organizations under Section 501(r)(3) of the IRS code. It was designed to help hospitals better understand the populations in which they serve, to identify current needs within the community, and also to recognize existing assets. By completing this needs assessment, Wills Memorial Hospital can learn how to respond to these needs within the scope of our services and partnerships.

All non-profit hospitals are required to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years and make it available to the public. The Assessment should take into account input from “persons who represent the broad interests of the community served by the hospital facility, including those with special knowledge of or expertise in public health”. Through surveys and interviews with local community leaders, as well as individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, we feel that the assessment IRS Section 501(r)(3) standards have been satisfied.



CHNA Leadership Committee Members:

Tracie Haughey, WMH CEO & CFO

Kelly Powel, RN, Practice Manager of Community Medical Associates of Washington and Lincoln

Susan Duncan Pope, WMH Human Resource and Community Relations Director

Angie Radford, WMH Director of Nursing

Jillian Morris, WMH Administration Assistant

Community Advisory Council:

Carolyn Reynolds: Family Connection Board, Communities in Schools of Wilkes County Board, God's Marketplace Board, Kiwanis Member

Jennifer Jackson: RN & Wilkes County Health Department Nurse Manager

Michelle Smith: Superintendent of Wilkes County Board of Education, Wilkes County Board of Health

Kenya Smith: RN & Nurse Manager of Taliaferro County Health Department

Amethyst Wynn: Executive Director of Wilkes County Family Connection, Leader of Health & Wellness Coalition



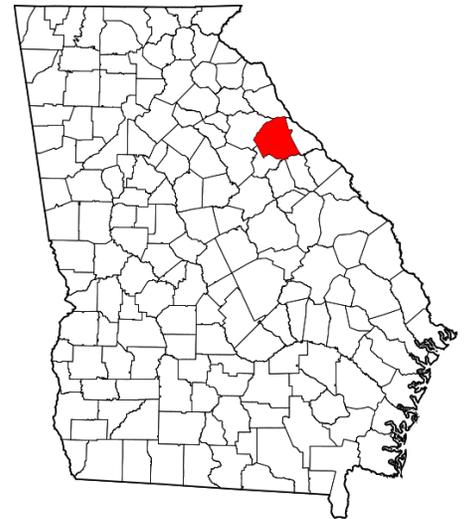
Wills Memorial Hospital and the Community it Serves:

Wills Memorial Hospital is a 19 bed acute care hospital located in Washington, Georgia. It is governed by the Hospital Authority of Wilkes County. WMH is accredited by the Joint Commission and is designated a critical access hospital. The facility serves the counties of Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes. It is the only hospital located in this tri-county area. All three counties are rural and designated “medically underserved” by the State of Georgia’s Rural Health Division of the Department of Community Health (DCH).

According to the 2020 census, the total combined population of these counties is 18,814. This is a 7.34% decrease in population compared to data taken from the 2010 census. The following figures represent the breakdown of county populations served by Wills Memorial Hospital in 2021: Wilkes 75%, Lincoln 11.3%, Taliaferro 6.7%, and other counties 7%.

The original facility opened in 1924 as Washington General Hospital. In 2012, a new inpatient wing, pharmacy, respiratory therapy department, registration, emergency room, reception, main entrance, specialty clinic, and physical therapy/occupational therapy facilities were completed. Wills Memorial Hospital focuses on providing complete medical care for Wilkes, Taliaferro, and Lincoln County residents.

Washington is a beautiful town, touted as a retirement haven and tourist destination due to the many historic homes and the town’s rich civil and revolutionary war history. However, poverty in WMH service areas is higher than the Georgia average. Many socioeconomic groups face disparities due to poverty and the issues that arise from it. Several area manufacturing facilities have closed or experienced a reduction-in-force over the last decade leading to higher than average unemployment rates. Due to these factors, a high percentage of Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes residents are uninsured and, as a result, not as healthy as their insured counterparts.





Process

The WMH's Community Needs Assessment is a process that identifies the health needs of the communities of Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes using primary and secondary data from various sources. The primary data was derived from on-line and in-person surveys that included community leaders as well as many diverse groups of community members. The secondary data was obtained through national and state demographic studies including the U.S. Census and the University of Georgia's <https://Georgiadata.org> website.

The assessment began with the collection of data from various Georgia and U.S. studies. This data includes demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, health data and vital statistics, as well as general county health rankings. After this secondary data was collected, a comprehensive survey was completed by community members who are knowledgeable about health care in the WMH service areas. These community members have an expertise or a vested interest in the health of our community. Surveys were also conducted with individuals from differing socioeconomic backgrounds to gather primary data. Finally, the WMH Community Needs Assessment leadership committee met to determine which needs the hospital can financially and physically undertake. The Hospital assessment was posted on the WMH website: <https://www.willsmemorialhospital.com>.



Primary Data/Community Input

Primary data was collected from community members who are knowledgeable about health care in the WMH service areas. These community members have expertise and/or a vested interest in the health of our community. Data was also collected from targeted socioeconomic groups in the Lincoln-Taliaferro-Wilkes area that are known to have unmet health needs. After the survey was completed, the results were shared with the following community leaders:

- Carolyn Reynolds, Family Connection Board , Communities in Schools of Wilkes County Board, God's Marketplace Board, WMH Auxiliary, Kiwanis Member
- Jennifer Jackson, RN & Wilkes County Health Department Nurse Manager, Health & Wellness Coalition member
- Kenya Smith, RN & Taliaferro County Health Department Nurse Manager
- Michelle Smith, Superintendent of Wilkes County Board of Education
- Amethyst Wynn, Executive Director of Wilkes County Family Connection, Leader of Health & Wellness Coalition
- Dr. Michelle Mason-Woodard, physician in Lincoln County
- Taaliyah Booker, WMH Social Worker
- Dr. Alicia Finnell, Wilkes County Schools Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director
- Newton Gunter, Wilkes County Senior Center Director
- Dan Wright, Wilkes County EMS Director



Secondary Data

- 2019 Georgia County Guide, Carl Vinson Institute of Government and Georgia Cooperative Extension, The University of Georgia. Available at: www.countyguide.uga.edu
- Georgia Department of Community Health. Oasis Population Data 2019. Available at: www.oasis.ga.us
- Georgia Department of Public Health. Health and Data Information. Available at www.health.state.ga.us
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2022 County Health Rankings, Countyhealthrankings.org
- 2020 Census, Federal Government, Census.gov



Demographic Data

The 2020 census data reports the combined populations of Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes Counties as 18,814. This is a 7.34% decrease since the 2010 census.

Age

Race/Ethnicity	Lincoln	Taliaferro	Wilkes	Georgia
Median age	45.8	46	44.4	38.4
Age 65 and over	17.9%	20.3%	18.8%	14.0%

Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Lincoln	Taliaferro	Wilkes	Georgia
Black	32.4%	59.7%	42.4%	28.4%
White	65.8%	37.8%	55.2%	68.6%
Other	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.7%
Hispanic/Latino	1.4%	2.5%	3.6%	6.0%

Household Information

Households	Lincoln	Taliaferro	Wilkes	Georgia
Married Couple	67.8%	48.2%	60.0%	70.8%
Married Couple with children < 18	20.9%	7.1%	15.2%	27.7%
Male Household with children <18	1.6%	3.7%	3.6%	3.1%
Female Household with children <18	12.8%	12.4%	14.4%	12.4%



Education Level

Education Level	Lincoln	Taliaferro	Wilkes	Georgia
High School Grad/GED	85%	78%	85%	88%
Some College	46%	22%	36%	64%
Bachelor’s Degree	6.4%	4.5%	8.4%	17.5%
Graduate/Professional	3.3%	2.3%	7.1%	9.7%

Public Education

Public Education	Lincoln	Taliaferro	Wilkes	Georgia
High School Drop Out Rate (per 100 enrolled)	1.9%	1.4%	6.3%	3.3%
Completion Rate	75.7%	40.0%	66.7%	70.3%
Economically disadvantaged	66.2%	93.6%	75.6%	66%
Students retained in a grade	5.4%	6.5%	6.8%	3.7%
Students with disabilities	14.3%	14.1%	12.4%	12.3%
Students in Gifted Program	3.2%	0.0%	7.5%	6.7%
Grads with college prep diploma	64.4%	38.5%	51.1%	66.0%



Socioeconomic Characteristics

A significant percent of the population of Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes Counties lives below the poverty level. The percentages range from 20%-30%, which are higher than the state average of 21.7%. The population without a high school diploma/GED in the WMH service area ranges from 22% to 41.7% and is higher than the state average of 16%. The unemployment rates are above the 3.1 % state average in Lincoln, Taliaferro, and Wilkes Counties. The median household income in all three counties is much lower than the state average of \$61, 950.

Social and Economic Indicators

	Children Below Poverty 2022	Single Parent Children 2022	No High School Diploma 2022
Lincoln	28%	38%	22.6%
Taliaferro	33%	34%	41.7%
Wilkes	28%	35%	28.2%
Georgia Average	20%	30%	16.0%

	Minority 2022	Unemployed 2022	Uninsured 2022	Median Household income 2022
Lincoln	34.6%	10.8%	25.1%	\$45,299
Taliaferro	63.1%	12.6%	26.3%	\$37,047
Wilkes	46.9%	12.0%	22.6%	\$39,716
Georgia Average	36.1%	3.1%	22.5%	\$61, 000



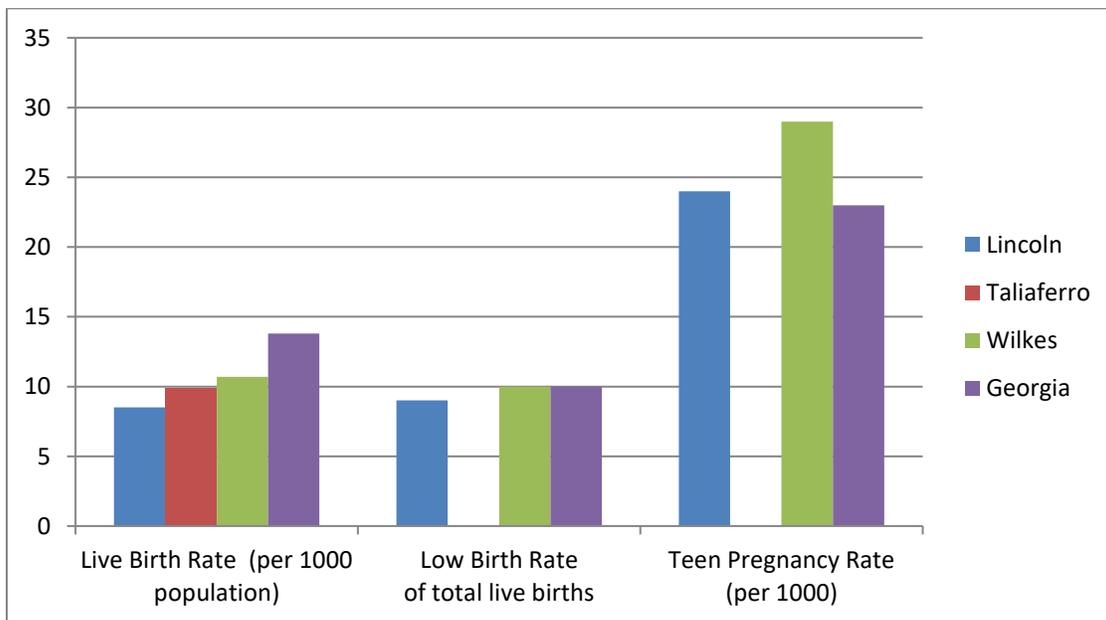
Health Data

The County Health Rankings report premature death as a measure of mortality. In 2022, the Lincoln County rate of premature death was 7900 per 100,000 of the population. In Taliaferro the rate was unreported, and in Wilkes it was 10,000 per 100,000. Premature death represents the years of potential life lost before the age of 75 (rate is age adjusted). The overall Georgia premature death rate in 2022 was 8000.

A vital statistic that is important to include in health data is the death rate. The Lincoln County death rate in 2021 was 1138.1 per 100,000 population. In Taliaferro the death rate was 1863.7 and in Wilkes it was 1406.6 per 100,000. The average county in Georgia's death rate in 2018 was 923.5 per 100,000.

The following graphs give information about several vital statistics and health indicators:

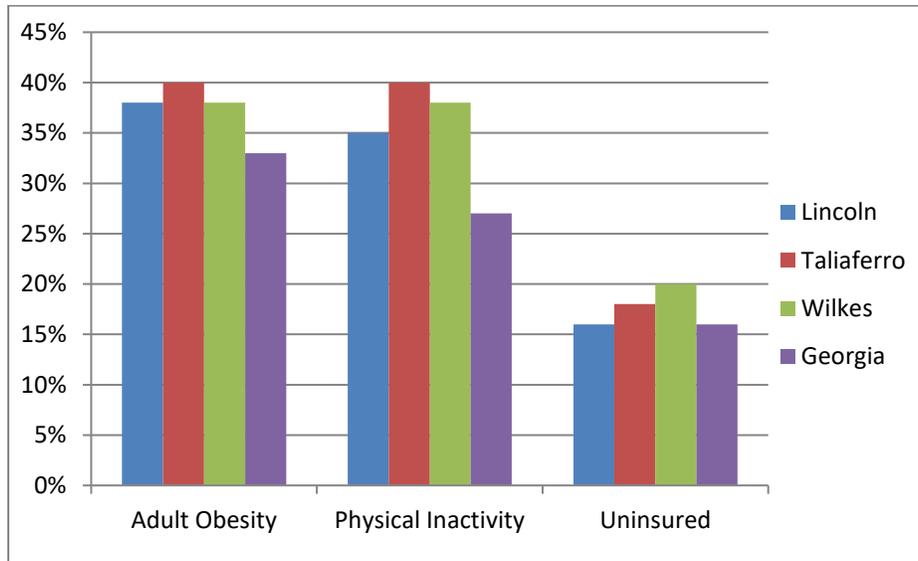
2021 Vital Statistics



The rate of Sexually Transmitted Diseases reported in a county is an indicator of the population's health. The cases in 2021 per 100,000 of the population in Lincoln were 303, Taliaferro was unreported, and in Wilkes 511. The Georgia average in 2021 was 637. The percentage of the population that is uninsured is also an indicator of the general health of a community. The uninsured rates in the WMH service areas are higher than the Georgia average of 16%.



Health Indicators

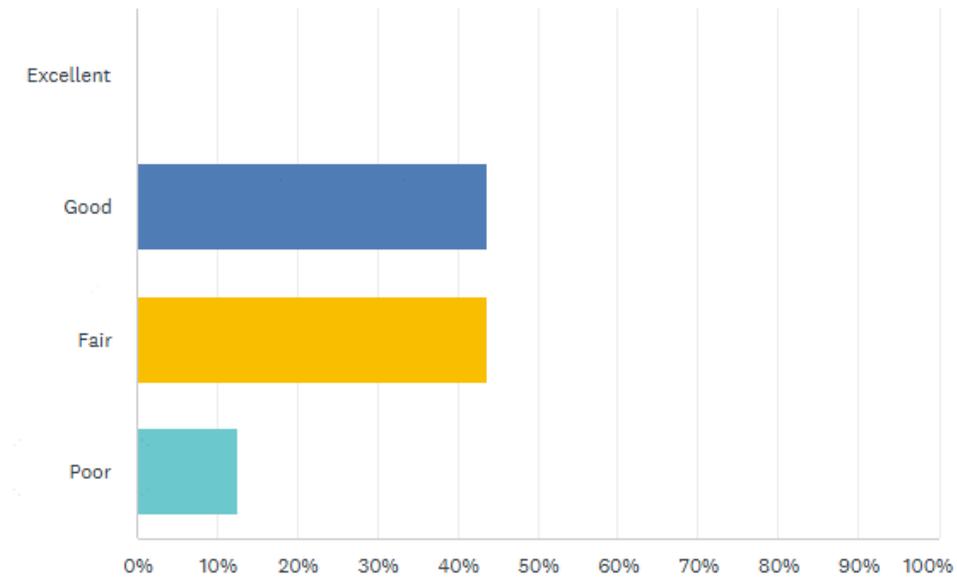


The County Health Ranking report also identifies “health behaviors” and ranks each county in the state in numerical order from 1 to 159 in this category. Included in health behaviors are: adult smoking, adult obesity, physical inactivity, excessive drinking, motor vehicle crash death rate, sexually transmitted infections, and teen birth rate. Lincoln County ranks 47th in health behaviors, Taliaferro ranks 144th, and Wilkes ranks 121th out of 159 Georgia Counties.



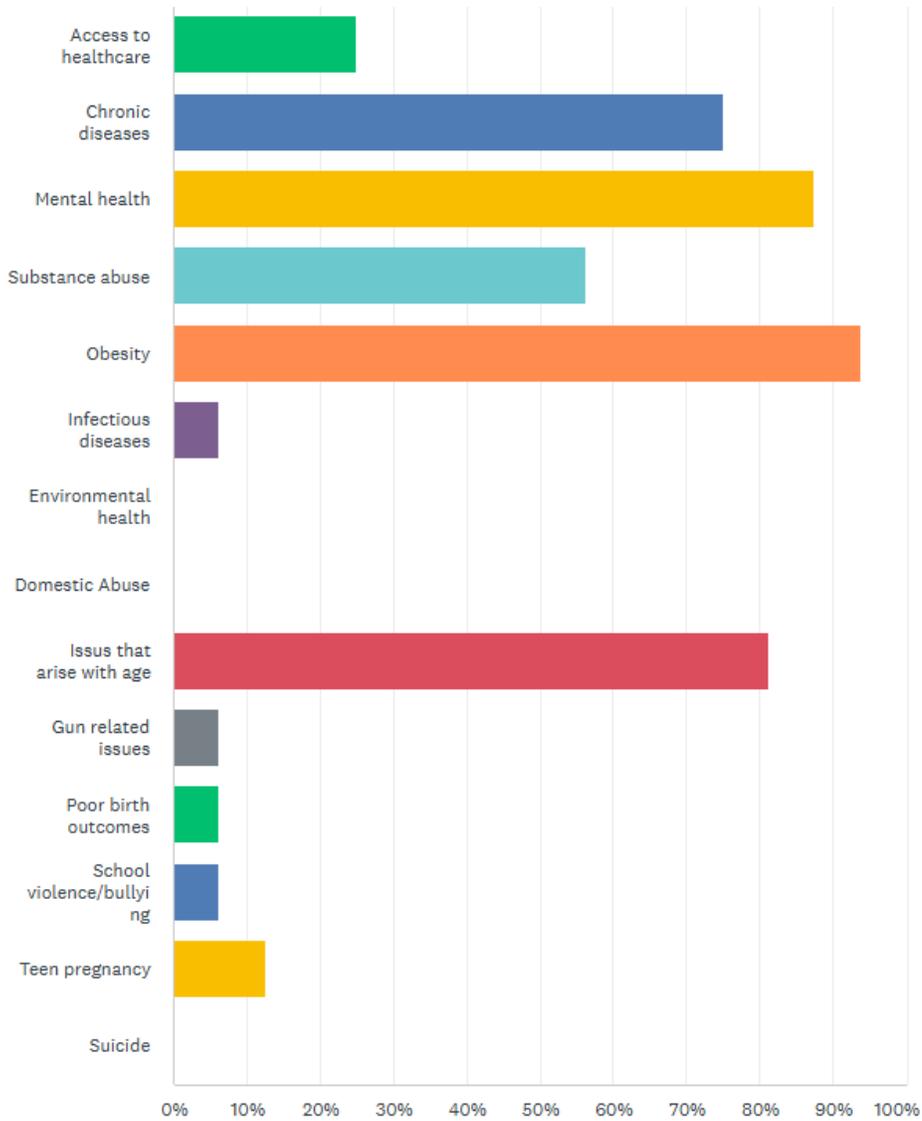
Needs Assessment Responses:

How would you rate the overall health of your community?



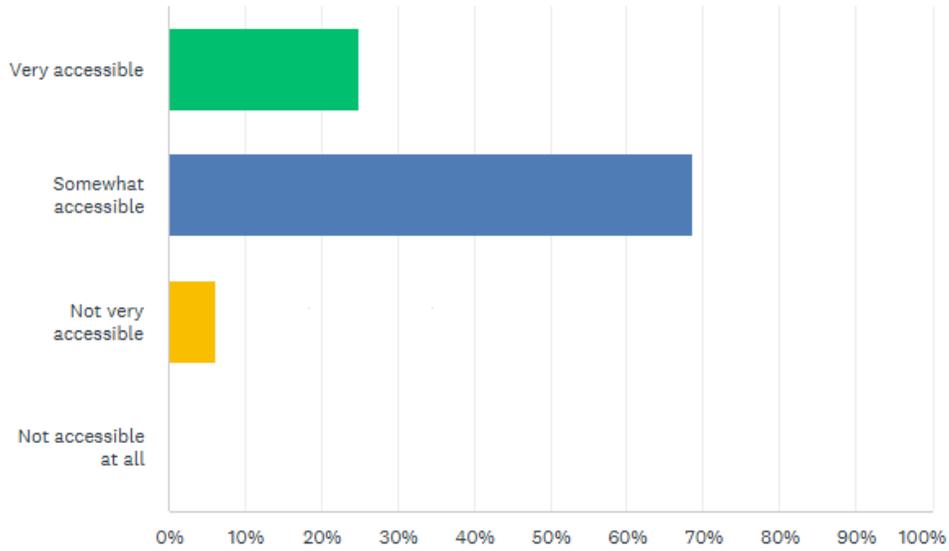


What are the most pressing health issues in your community? Select all that apply.

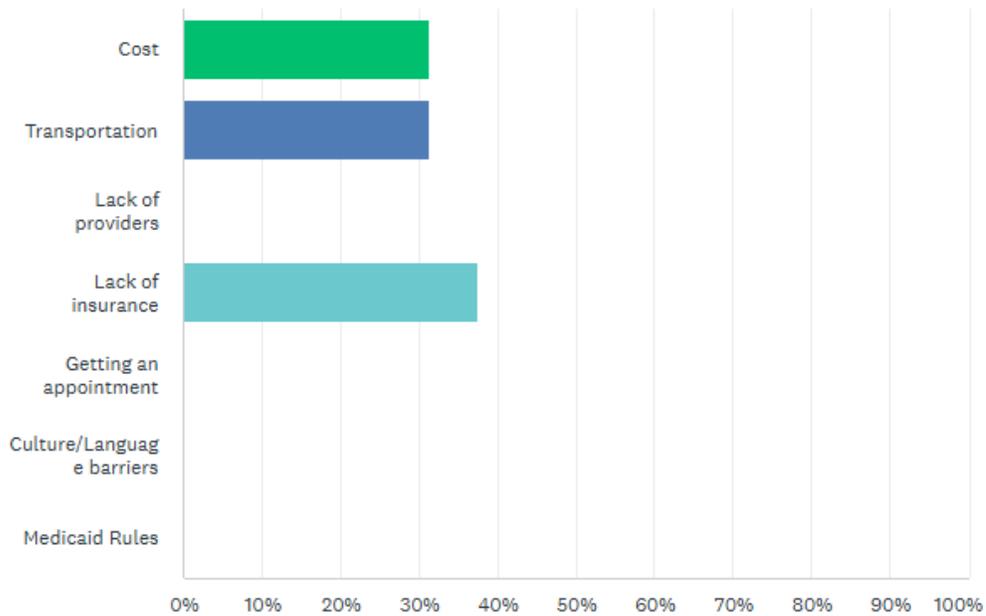




How accessible is healthcare in your community?

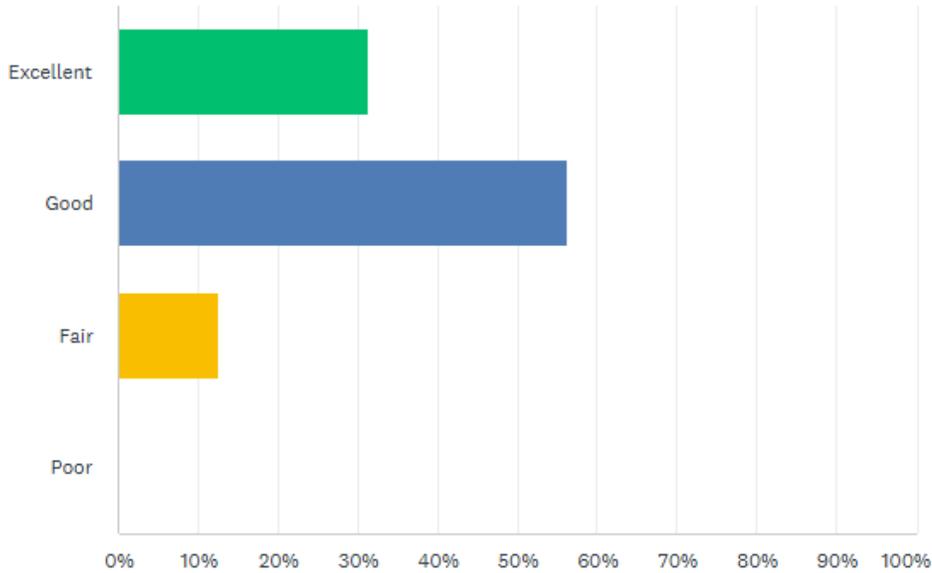


What is the biggest barrier to accessing healthcare in your community?

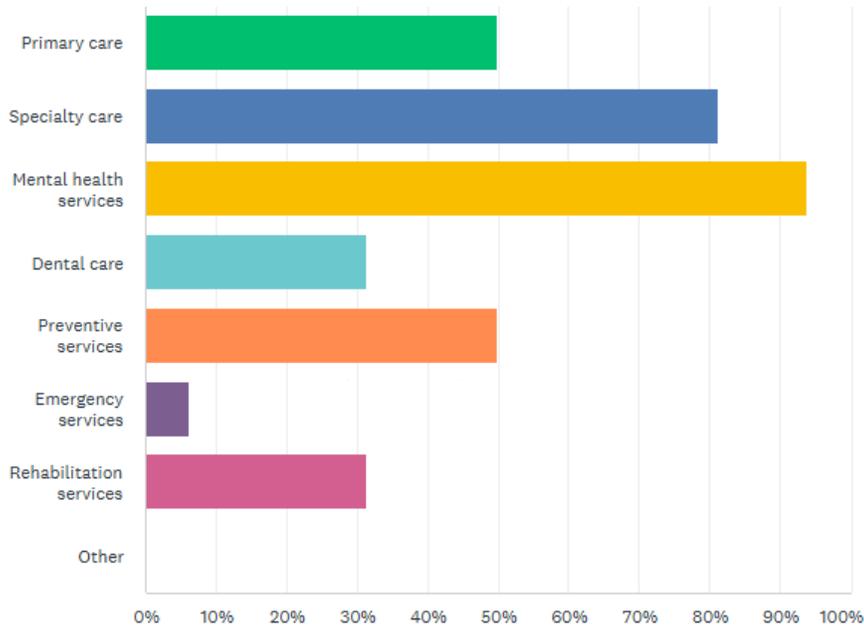




How would you rate the quality of healthcare services available in your community?

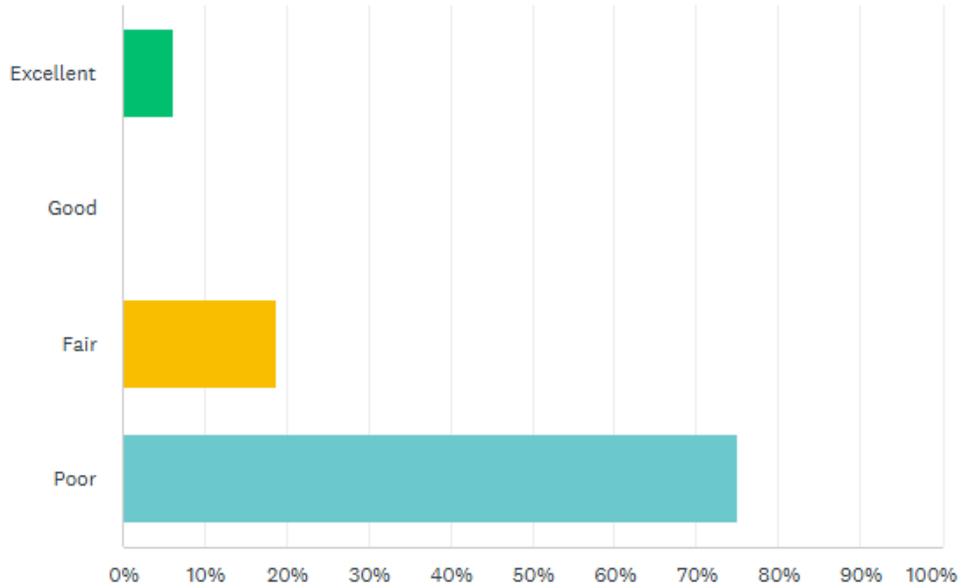


**What types of healthcare services are most needed in our community?
Select all that apply.**

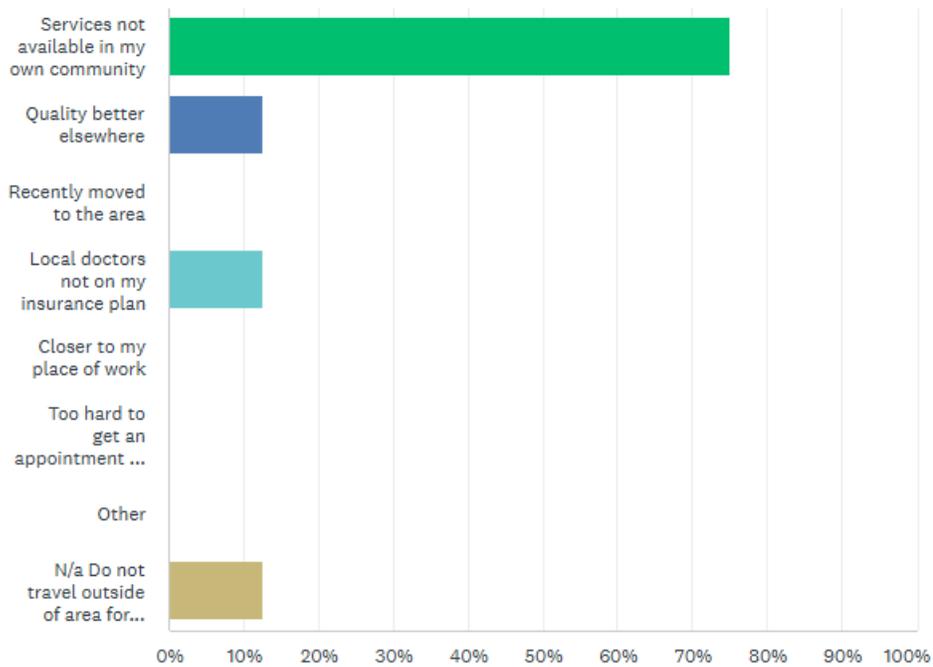




How would you rate the availability of healthcare services in your community?

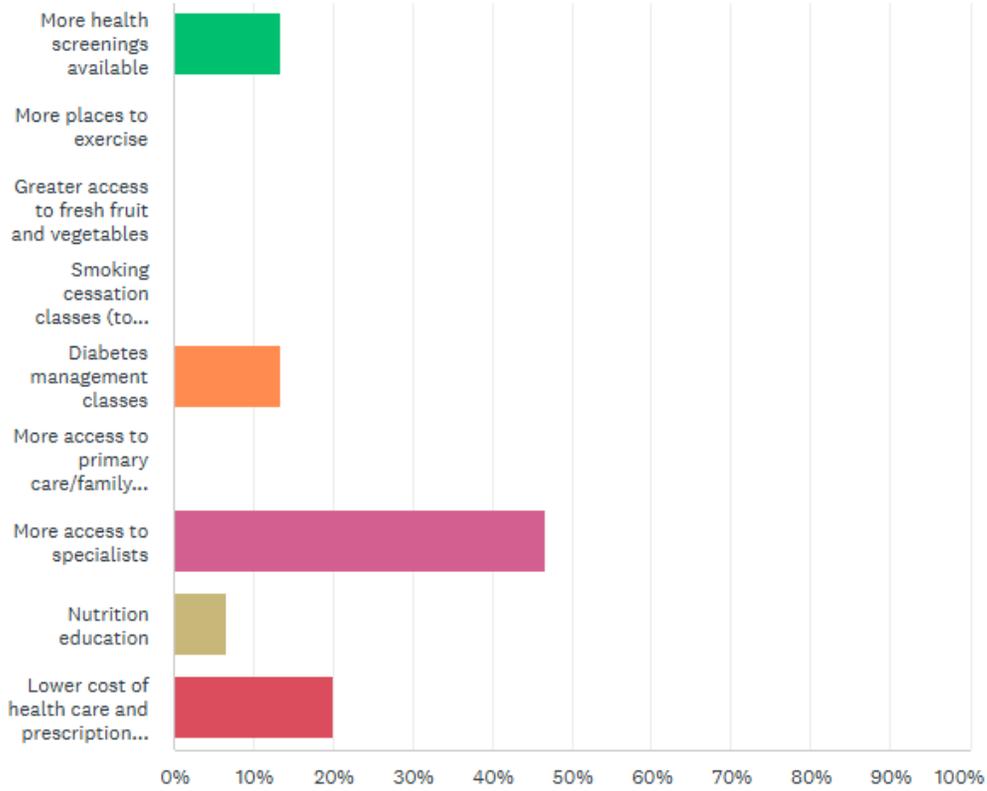


If you travel outside the community for healthcare, why?

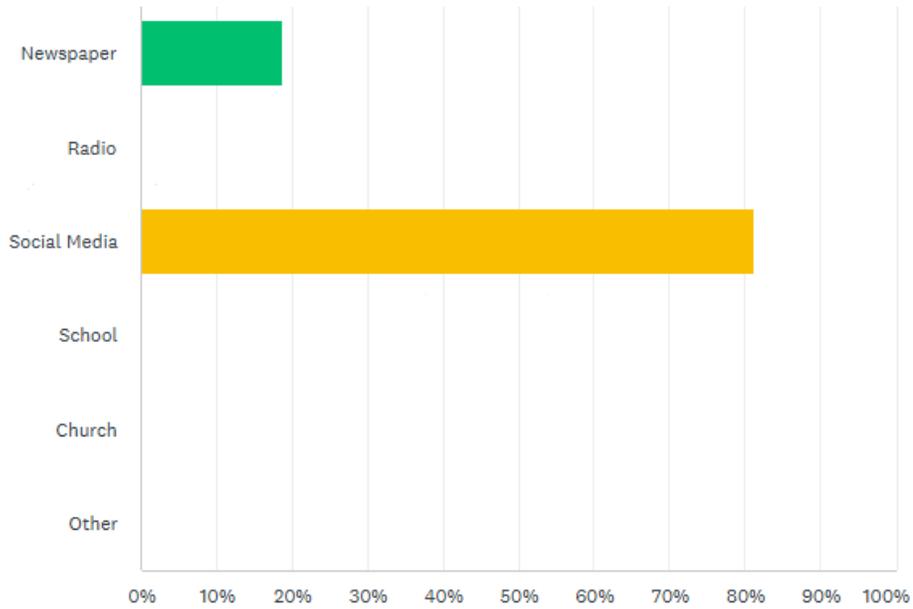




What is the best way to improve the health of our community?



Where do you obtain information concerning LOCAL health events, such as health and wellness, education events, etc.





Summary of Needs Assessment Responses

Identified Health Issues:

- Obesity
- Mental Health
- Issues that arise with age
- Chronic Diseases
- Access to Healthcare

Services Most Needed In The Area:

- Mental Health Services
- Specialty Care
- Primary Care
- Preventative Care
- Rehab Services

Identified Ways To Improve The Health Of Our Community:

- More access to specialists
- Lower cost of healthcare and prescription drugs
- More health screening available
- Diabetes management classes
- Nutrition education



Prioritization Process

Wills Memorial Hospital used the following process to prioritize and address the needs identified in the 2022 Community Needs Assessment.

- A. All data, primary and secondary, were read and analyzed
- B. Reoccurring issues were identified and noted
- C. Information was presented to the Community Advisory Council
- D. The Advisory Council made their recommendation to the CNA Leadership Committee that the reoccurring health issues that impacted the community the most be focused on by the Wills Memorial Hospital CNA team.
- E. The identified health issues/needs were presented to the Hospital Authority of Wilkes County to make the final decisions based on our human and financial resources.



Community Health Resources

Wills Memorial Hospital: Wills Memorial Hospital is a non-profit, community, 19 bed, acute care hospital that has been serving the area since 1924. It is designated a critical access hospital. The campus includes: inpatient wing, pharmacy, outpatient surgery, laboratory, radiology, respiratory therapy, emergency room, specialty clinic, and physical therapy/occupational therapy facilities. Also available through our emergency room are telemedicine services for early stroke recognition and intervention. Specialty services provided in Wills Memorial Hospital focus on providing complete medical care for Wilkes, Taliaferro, and Lincoln County residents. These specialty services include: general surgery, cardiology, urology, orthopedics, and podiatry. Our current Medical Staff consists of an Active Staff of 5 physicians and Courtesy, Consulting, and Affiliate Staffs consisting of 57 physicians and mid-levels.

Community Medical Associates Lincolnton: A subsidiary of WMH, CMA is a growing primary care clinic that accepts Medicare, Medicaid, and privately insured patients. The full-time provider staff consists of one family medicine physician and one nurse practitioner.

Lincoln County Health Department: The Lincoln County health department offers many services to the public including screening and treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes, TB, and sexually transmitted diseases, immunizations, family planning services, environmental health services, outbreak investigation, and is a provider of the WIC food supplementation program for low-income children.

Two Private Family Medicine Practices in Lincoln County

Taliaferro County Health Department: The Taliaferro County health department offers many services to the public including screening and treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes, TB, and sexually transmitted diseases, immunizations, family planning services, environmental health services, outbreak investigation, and is a provider of the WIC food supplementation program for low-income children.

Community Medical Associates Washington: A subsidiary of WMH, CMA is a growing primary care clinic that accepts Medicare, Medicaid, and privately insured patients. At the time of the last assessment, the full-time provider staff consisted of one internal medicine/pediatrician and one nurse practitioner. In 2022, we have increased our staff to include: one internal medicine/pediatrician, one family medicine doctor, and two nurse practitioners.



Community Health Resources

Urgent MD Washington

Wilkes County Health Department: The Wilkes County health department offers many services to the public including screening and treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes, TB, and sexually transmitted diseases, immunizations, family planning services, environmental health services, outbreak investigation, and is a provider of the WIC food supplementation program for low-income children.

Two Private Primary Care Physician Practices in Wilkes County



Conclusion

The Community Needs Assessment has provided Wills Memorial Hospital with clear evidence that many of the health issues that we see and treat on a daily basis are indeed, the most prevalent health concerns among our population. Cancer, obesity in children and adults, lack of access to primary and specialty health care, problems associated with age, and lack of mental health/alcohol/drug counseling and treatment options were identified time and time again by respondents.

Wills Memorial Hospital is a non-profit, community hospital that focuses on serving our community's needs. The information that has been gathered in this CNA will direct our community outreach efforts. It will serve as the foundation for fostering new partnerships within our community and outside as well. It will provide an outline for us as we work to generate new ideas, approaches, and educational programs to help solve these issues. This tool has provided much useful information that we can use to better understand and serve our community.



References

- 2020 US Census. Available at: www.quickfacts.census.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: www.cdc.gov
- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Available at: www.countyhealthrankings.org
- 2018 Georgia County Guide, Carl Vinson Institute of Government and Georgia Cooperative Extension, The University of Georgia. Available at: www.countyguide.uga.edu
- Georgia Department of Community Health. Oasis Population Data 2018. Available at: www.oasis.ga.us
- Georgia Department of Public Health. Health and Data Information. Available at www.health.state.ga.us



Wills Memorial Hospital FY2025-FY2028 Implementation Plan

The CHNA team ranked the community health needs based on size and prevalence of the issue, effectiveness of interventions, and the hospital's capacity to address the need. Once this prioritization process was complete, the team discussed the results and decided to address the prioritized needs in various capacities through hospital specific implementation plans.

The five most significant needs are listed below:

1. Access to affordable health care and access to primary care services
2. Prevention, education, and services to address obesity, poor eating habits, chronic diseases, preventable conditions, and unhealthy lifestyles
3. Access to specialty care services
4. Access to mental health services
5. Age related issues including loss of mobility and mental health