



Needs Assessment

2025

Introduction

About the Needs Assessment

This Mid-Shore Behavioral Health Needs Assessment is a product of Mid Shore Behavioral Health’s (MSBH) role as a Hub Pilot for the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports (The Consortium). The Consortium is responsible for developing a statewide framework to expand access to comprehensive behavioral health and wraparound services for Maryland students. The Consortium was created in 2021 by the Maryland General Assembly as part of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future to build a statewide network of Hubs and Spokes based on the Collective Impact model. MSBH serves as the Hub Pilot Hub for Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s, and Talbot counties.

The Hub’s primary functions are (1) coordinating Service Providers/ Spokes, (2) acting as a fiduciary by managing grants from the Community Health Resource Commission (CHRC) and awarding grants to Spokes as subgrantees, and (3) collecting and reporting data.

The intended outcome of this Needs Assessment is to gather data that provide a comprehensive picture of community assets and needs across the full life span. The Needs Assessment findings will provide critical insight into resources and gaps and support grant applications and other funding opportunities across the five counties – a valuable and current resource to a variety of partners in the mid-shore region.

Key Findings

This Needs Assessment is based on three primary sources of data, described in more detail in the Methodology section: administrative data; surveys of community members and partners/providers; and focus groups and event-intercept conversations with community members. In total, over 750 people representing the five counties contributed their perspectives to this report. Data were gathered in five primary domains: Health, Behavioral Health, Economic Stability, Cradle to Career, and Family and Community.









When asked to rank issues of concern in their community, survey respondents in four out of five counties listed affordable housing as their top concern. In Dorchester County, poverty was the top concern, followed by affordable housing.

What are the **top five challenges** that children/youth, young adults, adults, and older adults face in your County?

Caroline	Dorchester	Kent
Affordable housing (52%)	Poverty (67%)	Affordable housing (63%)
Poverty (43%)	Affordable housing (43%)	Childcare (51%)
Unemployment (43%)	Unemployment (39%)	Poverty (49%)
Affordable, quality care (36%)	Behavioral health (32%)	Homelessness (43%)
Homelessness (37%)	Hunger (29%)	Unemployment (35%)
Queen Anne’s	Talbot	All Counties
Affordable housing (77%)	Affordable housing (79%)	Affordable housing (63%)
Transportation (46%)	Affordable, quality care (42%)	Poverty (44%)
Affordable, quality care (38%)	Transportation (40%)	Affordable, quality care (36%)
Education/ career readiness (30%)	Poverty (35%)	Transportation (33%)
Behavioral health (30%)	Education/ career readiness (35%)	Behavioral health (32%)

Across all five counties, respondents described tight-knit communities where residents care about and support each other. Respondents also named a number of service providers that provide excellent services related to basic needs, healthcare, and senior living.

When discussing gaps or areas for improvement, the top concerns of respondents within each domain and across counties were quite consistent. Key findings related to opportunities for improvement across counties include:

-  **Housing:** Expand affordable and supportive options for seniors, disabled, low-income, recovery, foster care, and high-needs populations
-  **Mental Health:** Increase services and providers for youth and adults, including SUD, inpatient, outpatient, autism, and walk-in care
-  **Transportation:** Improve access to public and private options for rural areas, seniors, and those needing help getting to services
-  **Healthcare:** Expand preventive care, bilingual providers, and mobile health services
-  **Schools:** Provide on-site behavioral health, afterschool and summer programs, IEP/504 support, and safe, inclusive environments
-  **Training & Outreach:** Offer parenting, life skills, financial, digital, and bilingual education for at-risk groups
-  **Youth Support:** Strengthen career prep, inclusive activities, early literacy, and access to MH/SUD care
-  **Senior Support:** Increase social opportunities, support for financial planning, and centralized healthcare services

Methodology

MSBH contracted with Due East Partners to conduct the needs assessment. In partnership with MSBH and other community partners, Due East gathered secondary data from a variety of sources and administered and analyzed surveys and community focus groups.



SECONDARY DATA REVIEW

Quantitative data gathering and analysis were primarily informed by the five domains—health, behavioral health, economic stability, cradle to career, and family and community. During the planning phase of the assessment, Due East Partners and MSBH staff collaborated to develop target data indicators within each domain to inform data collection and analysis across the project.

Due East accessed a variety of secondary data from publicly available sources, such as state agencies and longitudinal databases. MSBH supplemented those data with its own administrative data that were not publicly available at the time, as well as regional, context-specific data. A comprehensive list of sources used can be found in the MSBH data deck ([linked here](#)).



SURVEYS

As part of a community-driven approach, MSBH launched two online surveys to gather input from residents and providers across the five counties. A Community Survey and a Partner Survey were distributed via social media and email invitations, with outreach tailored to ensure participation from relevant audiences.

The Community Survey covered topics across each domain such as behavioral health needs, service access, and community priorities. The Partner Survey focused on provider perspectives, including service gaps, strengths, and collaboration opportunities. In total, 481 participants completed a survey.



FOCUS GROUPS

MSBH partnered with local organizations to host focus groups across the five counties. Many focus groups were held in concert with ongoing community meetings to ensure accessibility and relevance to local participants, while others were convened independently to reach specific populations or accommodate scheduling needs. Invitations were shared through MSBH’s network of partners, with a focus on engaging high-school-age youth, adults, and senior adults.

Focus groups were facilitated by either the consulting team, Due East Partners, or MSBH staff. Sessions were organized by age group and conducted in both virtual and in-person formats. Each session followed a structured questionnaire to ensure consistency, and participants were assured confidentiality to create a respectful, open environment. Feedback was collected to better understand regional behavioral health needs, with no comments attributed to individuals.

To express appreciation, all focus group participants received a \$25 gift card. To broaden input, MSBH and Due East also attended community events in person across the region, where attendees were invited to share real-time feedback on behavioral health needs and community priorities. Those who provided input at events were entered into a raffle for a chance to win a \$25 gift card. This inclusive, multi-pronged approach helped ensure that a diverse cross-section of community voices informed the process. In total, 295 people contributed their input through focus groups and event-intercepts.



DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Due East Partners analyzed all data and prepared three comprehensive data reports found [here](#).






Acknowledgments

The robust input collected would not have been possible without the invaluable support of community partners, who helped distribute surveys, convene focus groups, and connect MSBH and Due East Partners with residents across the five counties. Their collaboration ensured that diverse voices and experiences were reflected in this assessment. The following were key partners in this effort:

- Brookletts Place
- Caroline Human Services Council
- Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center
- Chesapeake Voyagers
- Crossroads Community, Inc.
- Grasonville Senior Center
- Kent Local Management Board
- Minary’s Dream Alliance
- Moving Dorchester Forward
- St. Michael’s Community Center
- Talbot Family Network
- University of Maryland Shore Regional Health
- Upper Shore Aging, Inc.
- Queen Anne’s County Community Partnerships for Children and Families



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Findings By Topic and County



Health data examined include indicators of access to healthcare as well as indicators of population health across the age span.

Key Findings

Strong themes emerged across counties when looking at questions of population health and healthcare access, including:

- ✓ **Mental health is cited as the top health issue** affecting both individual respondents and the populations served by partners
- ✓ The vast majority of residents across the five counties have health insurance. Still, healthcare access is limited because of a lack of primary care providers and specialists. Residents report having to travel a significant distance for care.
- ✓ There is a need to expand preventive care, bilingual providers, mobile health, and prenatal services.
- ✓ Providers who are in the area are moving away; partners are unsure how to attract and retain them.
- ✓ Respondents across both survey groups reported that the quality of available health services does not meet expectations. Community members expressed the lowest levels of satisfaction with the quality of mental health, specialty, and substance use health services. Primary care and dental care are perceived to be of higher quality by community members. Specialty care and substance use are also perceived as lower quality by community partners.



Access to Primary Care and Dental Care Services

Indicators	Caroline	Dorchester	Kent	Queen Anne's	Talbot
Access to primary care services Ratio: Individuals per primary care physician	3340:1	2950:1	1380:1	3170:1	860:1
Access to dental care services Ratio: Individuals per dentist	1450:1	1490:1	2150:1	2150:1	1220:1

Source: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org>

Access to Health Insurance

Indicators	Caroline	Dorchester	Kent	Queen Anne's	Talbot
% of residents (under 65) with health insurance coverage	93.20%	92.10%	92.90%	95%	91.50%
Uninsured adults	10%	9%	9%	6%	8%

Source: 2023 Census / <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org>

County by County Snapshot

Caroline County

- Caroline County has the **second highest preterm birth rate (11.1%)** compared to the other counties, and has the **fewest primary care physicians per individual** in the five-county area (1 provider per every 3,340 individuals).
- A lack of local medical services means **seniors often have to travel to Easton (18 miles), Annapolis (43 miles), or even Baltimore (70 miles) for healthcare.**
- Community members reported significant barriers for **emergency and specialty care.**
- Seniors requested centralized access points for services to make it **easier for them to get what they need without traveling long distances.**

// "To access my doctors, I have to go to different counties because there aren't many medical facilities in Caroline County—the closest one is Easton."



Dorchester County

- **Gun violence and drug activity** in schools and neighborhoods remain top concerns.
- **Students often feel judged or unsupported** when seeking mental health help at school.
- **Many youth lose access to care after high school**, with little guidance navigating adult systems.
- The county has a **higher child mortality rate (100 per 100,000 in 2024) and premature adult death rate than other counties.**
- **The top issues** survey respondents identified as affecting their own health include (in order): **mental health, overweight/obesity, and diabetes/high blood sugar.**
- **Dental care was rated as being the lowest quality** among health services in the community survey.

Physical Health/Chronic Health Conditions*	Dorchester
Frequent Physical Distress	12%
Diabetes Prevalence	11%
% Adults with Obesity	42%
% Excessive Drinking	16%
% Adults Currently Smoking	18%
Average Number of Physically Unhealthy Days	4.7
Premature Age-Adjusted Mortality	500

Kent County

- Kent County has the **highest percentage (10%) of births with low birthweight** compared to the other counties examined and the **lowest birth rate overall.**
- Kent County has the **lowest child death rate (0%).**
- Key services like **maternity care** require travel, creating **access and billing challenges.**
- **The top issues** community survey respondents identified as affecting their own health include (in order): **diabetes/high blood sugar, mental health, and overweight/obesity.**
- **Specialty care was rated as being the lowest quality** among health services in the community survey.

// I'm mostly going to Easton Hospital for major concerns. You have to go this far just to deliver a baby."



Queen Anne's County

- **Specialty care and mental health services were rated as being the lowest quality** among health services in the community survey.
- Residents value **telehealth, food assistance, and crisis services.**
- Many face **financial stress related to healthcare.**
- There is a **lack of providers** for healthcare. **Queen Anne's County has the second fewest primary care physicians per individual** in the five-county region (1 provider per every 3,170 individuals).
- Queen Anne's County has the **second highest immunization rate** in the region (**32.3%**).
- Queen Anne's County has the **lowest number of premature deaths (6,400)** compared to the other counties.
- **The top issues** survey respondents identified as affecting their own health include (in order): **overweight/obesity, mental health, and social isolation/loneliness and smoke/vaping/tobacco use** (tied for third).
- **Seniors** experience isolation and want more **tailored wellness programs and social events.**

// The County has the basics—food, housing help, doctors—but once you need specialized care, you're driving 30 minutes or more. For older people, that's a big problem."

Talbot County

- Survey respondents reported **limited healthcare access**, particularly prenatal, mental health, and primary care.
- **There are transportation challenges.** Appointments take a full day of travel; residents have to take off of work and pull kids out of school for appointments.
- **There is a limited awareness of critical services** such as mobile crisis and hospital access.
- **Some residents experience cultural and engagement barriers**, particularly related to language.

// It is difficult to get to primary doctors and medical specialists, you are either put on a waiting list or sent across the bridge."



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

[Behavioral health data](#) examined include indicators of access to behavioral health services as well as indicators of mental health and substance use by age group.

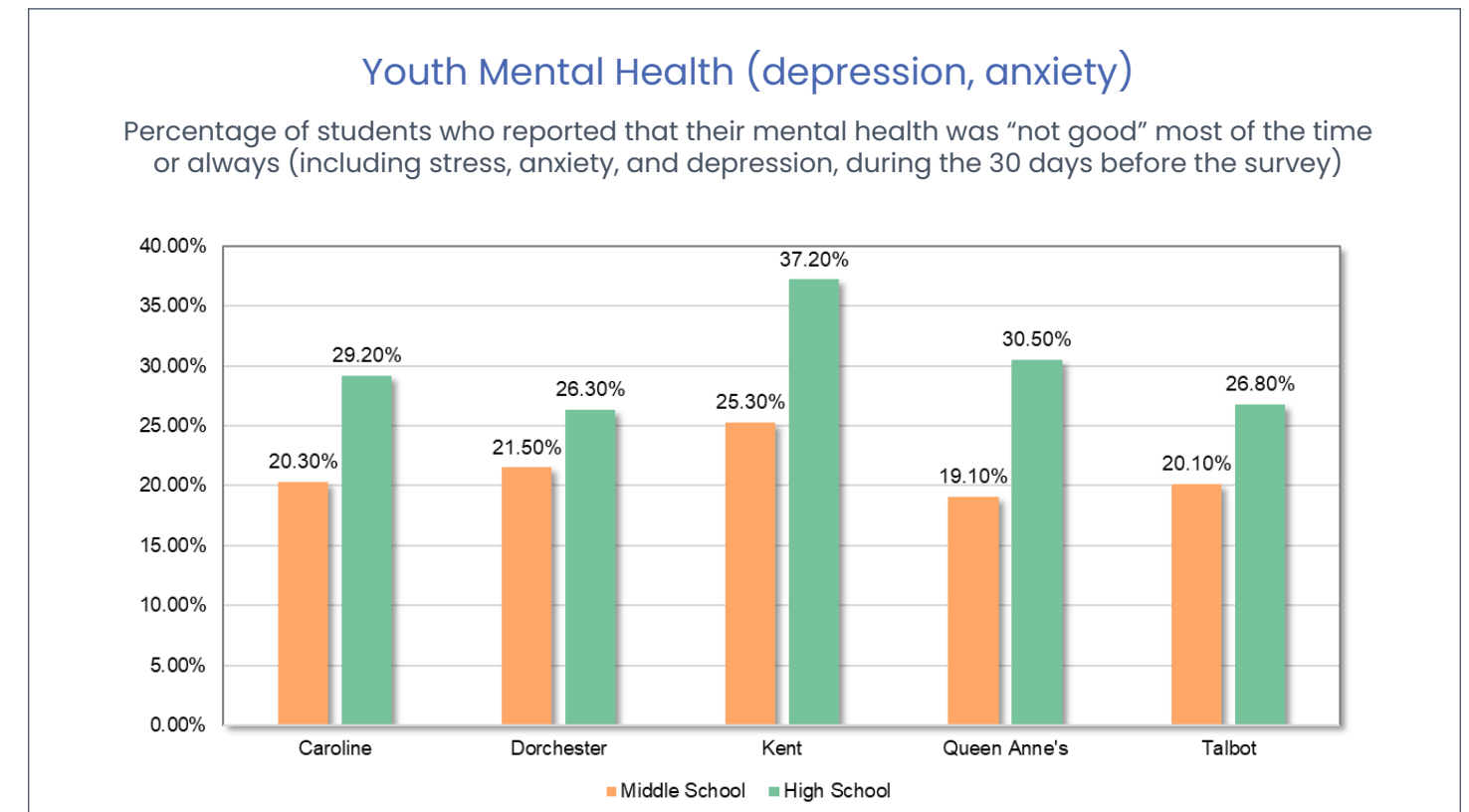
Key Findings

Mental health emerged as the top health issue affecting community members. As with healthcare in general, there is a need for more behavioral health clinicians and practitioners to serve the full spectrum of youth, adults, and seniors, including substance use disorders, inpatient, outpatient, autism, and walk-in care. Stigma is also cited as a barrier to receiving behavioral health services.

Mental Health

- ✓ The majority of community members (69%) and partners (89%) surveyed felt that mental health is a very significant issue for their region. Most community members (63%) and partners (82%) also reported that substance is a very significant issue for the region.
- ✓ The most pressing mental health concerns include depression, anxiety, PTSD and trauma, and behavioral challenges at home and in schools.
- ✓ Nearly 1 in 3 high school students reported having “not good” mental health most of the time or always in a 30-day period. Adults reported an average of 5 days of “not good” mental health in the same period.
- ✓ Over half of community members felt that they had access to the resources they needed for both mental health and substance abuse. Nearly two-thirds of partners felt that community members did.
- ✓ Community survey respondents showed very little agreement on what’s working well with regard to mental health, with the exception of faith-based groups and spiritual resources. Partners agreed that churches, community support organizations, and schools were performing well. Therapeutic group housing was cited as an unmet need.
- ✓ Barriers to accessing behavioral health services differ by group: Community members cite limited availability of providers and high costs, and partners cite transportation and persistent stigma as key barriers.
- ✓ Outpatient mental health care is the most accessed type of service by far.

- ✓ The percentage of the population in each county accessing mental health services has been relatively constant for the past four years, averaging 17%.
- ✓ The main barriers to getting help include difficulty navigating services (61%), limited provider availability (56%), cost or lack of insurance (50%), stigma (54%), and lack of transportation (46-54%).
- ✓ Anxiety (63%) and depression (67%) are the biggest mental health challenges among youth, with PTSD/trauma and behavioral issues also noted.

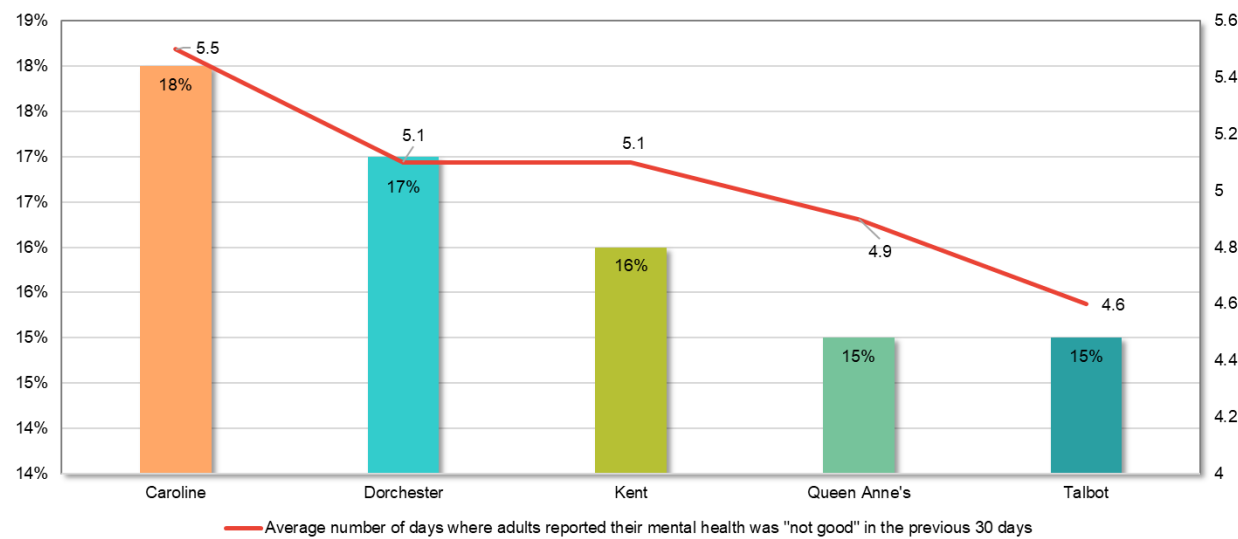


Source: [Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Youth Tobacco Survey \(YRBS/YTS\) 2022-2023](#)



Adults Mental Health Distress (2024)

Percentage of adults who reported that their mental health was "not good" on 4.8 of the previous 30 days. This ranged from 4.4 to 6.4 days across counties in the state.



Source: UM Shore Regional Health FY2025-FY2027 Community Health Needs Assessment Implementation Plan

Substance Use

- ✓ The most commonly cited substance use issues impacting individuals and families include: alcohol, cannabis, fentanyl/heroin, prescription opioids, and cocaine.
- ✓ Rates of excessive drinking are higher in four out of five counties (all except Dorchester County) than both the Maryland and U.S. averages.
- ✓ Preliminary data for 2024 suggest that overdose deaths are down substantially, likely due to harm reduction efforts such as Naloxone distribution, peer support, test strip distribution, and education.
- ✓ Emergency Department visits related to opioid overdose are down significantly from 2023 to 2024 in Kent and Queen Anne's counties but increased in Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot counties.

County by County Snapshot

Caroline County

- Community survey participants ranked **mental health and substance use as very significant issues** in the county. **About half of respondents feel they have access to the resources they need** for both.
- The majority of community survey respondents (79%) identified **alcohol as the biggest substance use issue in the community**.
- Community members and partners call for **more accessible mental health services, especially for teens and older adults**. Specific requests include support for sobriety and for LGBTQ+ children and youth.
- There is a perception that the **stigma around mental health prevents people from getting help**.
- There is a need for **more providers who speak different languages**.
- Caroline County has the **highest** percentage of **Public Behavioral Health System (PBHS) recipients of inpatient psychiatric hospitalization (56.9%)** and **psychiatric emergency room services (51.4%)** among 13-17 year olds in the region. However, the percentage for both is lowest among 7-12 year olds.

Dorchester County

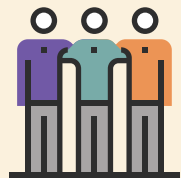
- **Youth substance use is rising** with inadequate prevention, education, and early intervention in schools.
- **Schools often respond with punishment** rather than addressing root causes of substance use.
- There is a **lack of age-appropriate programs and healthy lifestyle alternatives** for youth at risk.
- **Poor coordination between families, providers, and schools** limits the impact of mental health and substance use efforts.
- There is a **significant gap in support when youth transition from school-based care to adult services**, leaving many without guidance or follow-up.
- **Stigma around mental health persists**, and parental awareness and involvement in mental health challenges are often limited.
- **After psychiatric treatment, ongoing support and holistic care are often lacking**, with follow-up services being minimal or non-existent, leaving individuals at higher risk for relapse and feeling unsupported.



Bright Spot



Community services and organizations provide essential support for mental health and addiction. The community has a high naloxone saturation.



The community is close-knit, with many people knowing each other well, facilitating connections to social services and job opportunities.

// I don't think schools are taking substance abuse seriously at all. The schools are turning a blind eye until one kid gets caught and they have to address it instead of addressing the root problem. There is punishment instead of education and prevention."

Kent County

- Nearly 70% of community survey respondents identified **mental health and substance use as very significant issues** in the community. Depression (73.9%) and alcohol (73.8%) were cited as the biggest issues.
- Ongoing **behavioral health services are limited** and hard to access. Community survey respondents identified limited availability being the top reason people don't get help.
- Kent County has the **highest percentage (37%) of high schoolers and middle schoolers (25%) who report their mental health is "not good"** most of the time or always compared to the other counties.
- Kent County high school seniors have the **highest rate of vape use (24%)**.
- Seniors **want more support for managing stress** and personal struggles.
- Substance use support is **insufficient for the needs of older adults**.
- **Cost is the biggest barrier to accessing support**, cited by 67% of survey participants, followed by transportation issues affecting 37% of families.
- **Social cohesion and trust among residents are lacking**, with 50% of survey respondents reporting that it was not working well in their community.

Queen Anne's County

- **80% of community survey respondents identified mental health as a very significant issue** in the community, compared to 72% for substance use. **Alcohol (74%) and depression (67%)** were identified as the biggest issues.
- Queen Anne's County has **one behavioral health provider for every 439 residents**, less than half the number of most other counties.
- Community survey respondents identified **PTSD/trauma, behavior issues at home or in school, and anxiety as the biggest issues** facing the community.
- Queen Anne's County has the **highest rate of vape use among high school students (30%)**.
- Many community members in recovery feel there are good available behavioral health resources, but **staying on schedule and managing paperwork can be overwhelming**.
- Behavioral health staff are viewed as supportive, but underpaid—**raising concerns about the sustainability of care**.
- Community members call for better, **more consistent support for individuals experiencing relapse**.

Talbot County

- Community survey participants identified **alcohol (80%) and depression (67%) as the biggest behavioral health issues** facing the community.
- A lack of effective **mental health facilities** and the **societal stigma** surrounding mental health often leads to individuals "slipping through the cracks."
- **There is a perception that schools don't provide enough education about mental health and substance use and that guidance counselors are overburdened** and not always available to support all student needs.
- **Telehealth can be difficult** for some due to **language barriers** or lack of personal connection.
- **Long waitlists and frequent provider turnover** make it hard to maintain consistent mental health care.
- There is **limited access to inpatient services**, and emergency departments often provide **poor experiences for people in crisis**.
- **There is a perception that youth risk behaviors and high suicide rates are tied to limited mental health resources and stigma**.

// My biggest concern is people in a position to help aren't taking it seriously. People slip through the cracks because caseworkers aren't taking it seriously or don't care to help."

// Our provider helps us with our mental health challenges, getting to appointments, and supporting us"



ECONOMIC STABILITY

Economic indicators examined include household income and employment rates. A variety of services, resources, and conditions contribute to the economic stability of individuals and families, including workforce opportunities and availability of housing, transportation, and other basic needs like food.

Key Findings

Across age groups and counties, community members made clear calls for more affordable housing and better transportation options.

- ✓ Affordable housing was cited as the top issue facing communities in four out of five counties (all except Dorchester where poverty was the top concern). Community members called for expanded affordable and supportive options for seniors, disabled, low-income, recovery, foster care, and high-needs populations.
- ✓ Community members seek improved access to public and private transit options for rural areas, seniors, and those needing help getting to services.
- ✓ Nearly one-third (31%) of all community respondents across counties reported their personal financial circumstances as unstable or highly unstable.
- ✓ Child poverty rates are highest in Caroline (20%), Dorchester (23%) and Kent (19%) and lowest in Queen Anne’s (8%). Talbot County falls in the middle (14%).

Indicators	Caroline	Dorchester	Kent	Queen Anne’s	Talbot
Financial hardship	37%	32%	35%	25%	29%
Median household income 2023 (Alice households 2023)	\$66,368	\$60,495	\$74,402	\$113,347	\$84,378
Access to affordable housing (Annual income needed to afford 2 bedroom home)	\$49,280	\$44,840	\$50,760	\$77,720	\$55,200

Source: Alice households 2023; <https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/maryland#10/39.0493/-76.0619>
https://nlihc.org/oor/state/md-state-data-2024_OOR-maryland.pdf

County by County Snapshot

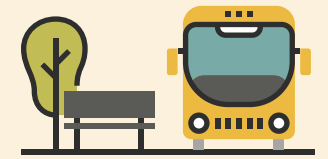
Caroline County

- **Caroline County residents continue to face economic challenges**, with per capita income remaining significantly lower than surrounding Mid-Shore counties. In 2023, Caroline’s per capita income was \$56,447—over \$40,000 less than Talbot County and more than \$25,000 less than Queen Anne’s.
- Community survey respondents identified **jobs, health, and housing as the top barriers** to achieving or maintaining their financial goals.
- **Expanded senior-focused transportation options** could improve access to medical appointments, groceries, and community activities.
- Residents are concerned that there is a **lack of transitional housing and affordable housing/emergency shelter**.

Dorchester County

- **High rent prices and rising utility costs** create financial strain for many residents.
- Dorchester County has the **lowest median household income (\$60,495) and least access to affordable housing** compared to the other counties.
- Dorchester County has the **highest poverty rates among adults (15.7%) and children (23%)** compared to the other counties.
- Community survey respondents identified **jobs, equitable/fair wages, and health as the top barriers** to achieving or maintaining their financial goals.
- **Public transportation is limited**, with buses often stopping service by 6 p.m., making it difficult for people without other transportation options to travel during evenings.
- **Limited regional resources and funding create gaps in services**, leading to overcrowded shelters with high barriers and insufficient after-school programs, especially for children facing behavioral challenges and academic struggles.

Bright Spot



A community bus service runs throughout the week and on weekends, with flexible routes that accommodate personal requests.

“The community bus doesn’t necessarily run on a schedule, but it takes personal requests, which really helps us get where we need to go.”

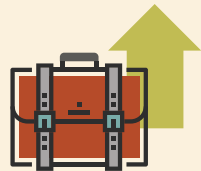
“There’s a growing population but resources aren’t keeping up—people struggle to pay rent, become homeless, and then face high-barrier shelters that require drug testing, limiting access.”



Bright Spot



Community services and organizations provide essential support for mental health and addiction.



Kent County saw a **3% increase in the employed population** from 2022-2023, the highest of the five counties.

// Homelessness is increasing; people are living outside of stores.

// Affordable housing is scarce, even with assistance."

Kent County

- Kent County has the **highest unemployment rate** (tied with Dorchester County) compared to the other counties.
- Community survey respondents identified **jobs, housing, and health as the top barriers** to achieving or maintaining their financial goals.
- Transportation is **limited, costly, and requires advance scheduling**.
- Affordable housing is scarce, with **rising rents and poor maintenance**. 52% of community survey respondents identified **affordable housing as a top challenge**.
- There is limited **assistance to help with cost of living** (food, bills).
- Assisted living is **too expensive for most seniors**.
- Flex cards and other **financial supports are limited** to certain Medicaid plans.

Queen Anne's County

- Queen Anne's County has the **highest labor force participation rate (67%)** compared to the other counties. However, community survey participants reported that **employment opportunities are limited**.
- Queen Anne's County has the **highest average median household income** in the region, however survey participants reported **stable and affordable housing** as a major issue—some have no place to go (both those in recovery and seniors).
- **There are limited transportation options** beyond medical appointments, especially to school, work, or on weekends.
- **Healthcare is unaffordable** for many.
- **Financial support with housing costs**, especially security deposits, is a frequent need.



Talbot County

- Talbot County has the **highest rate of food insecurity (14%)** compared to the other counties.
- The community has the **lowest labor force participation rate (58%)** compared to the other counties.
- Patrons of the food pantry reported difficulty getting around due to a **lack of affordable, accessible, and safe transportation**, especially for healthcare, shopping, and travel across the Bay Bridge.
- The community faces **significant financial strain** due to the rising cost of living; the economic shift is making the town unaffordable for long-time residents and local job seekers.
- **Affordable housing and childcare are key economic pain points**. Fewer than 10% of respondents believe affordable housing is currently "working well."
- There is a desire for **more accessible vocational training** to equip individuals with marketable skills.

// There is some new housing being built, but it's not affordable for working class individuals. There is a long waiting list for housing based on income."

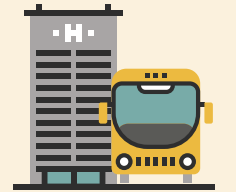
// The price of housing is high; there are new buildings but there are still homeless people. Who can afford the new housing?"

Bright Spot

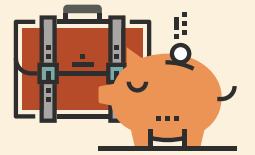
The Community Center Food Pantry is a highly valued resource, not just for food but also for fostering **strong social connections and sense of community**.



Bright Spot



County Ride and the medical bus are **key transportation resources**, especially for appointments.



Queen Anne's has a low **unemployment rate (2.8%)** and the **lowest poverty rates for adults (6.5%) and children (8%)**.

Food assistance programs like food stamps, pantries, and free food distribution are appreciated.



CRADLE TO CAREER

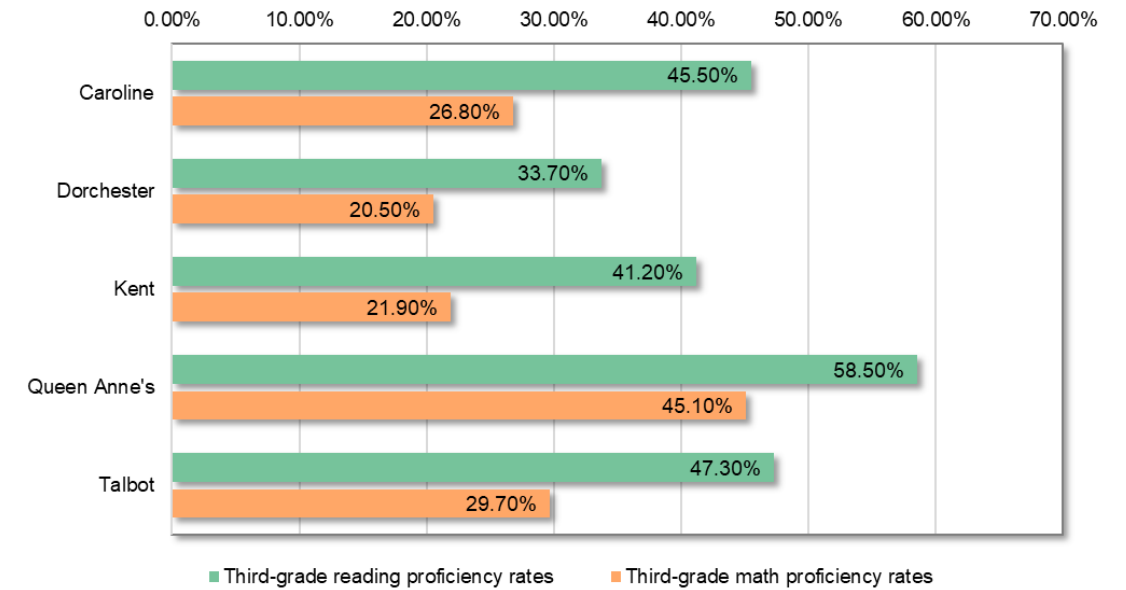
Cradle to career data examines how well children, youth, and young adults are doing on key markers of educational and career progress and wellbeing, as well as the availability of specialized supports and programs that help them meet their goals.

Key Findings

Across the five counties, most students are graduating high school and entering either post-secondary school or the workforce. Still, there are a variety of opportunities to strengthen the cradle-to-career pipeline and ensure that every child succeeds. Opportunities include a focus on early childhood education, mathematics, mental health, mentoring, and extracurricular activities.

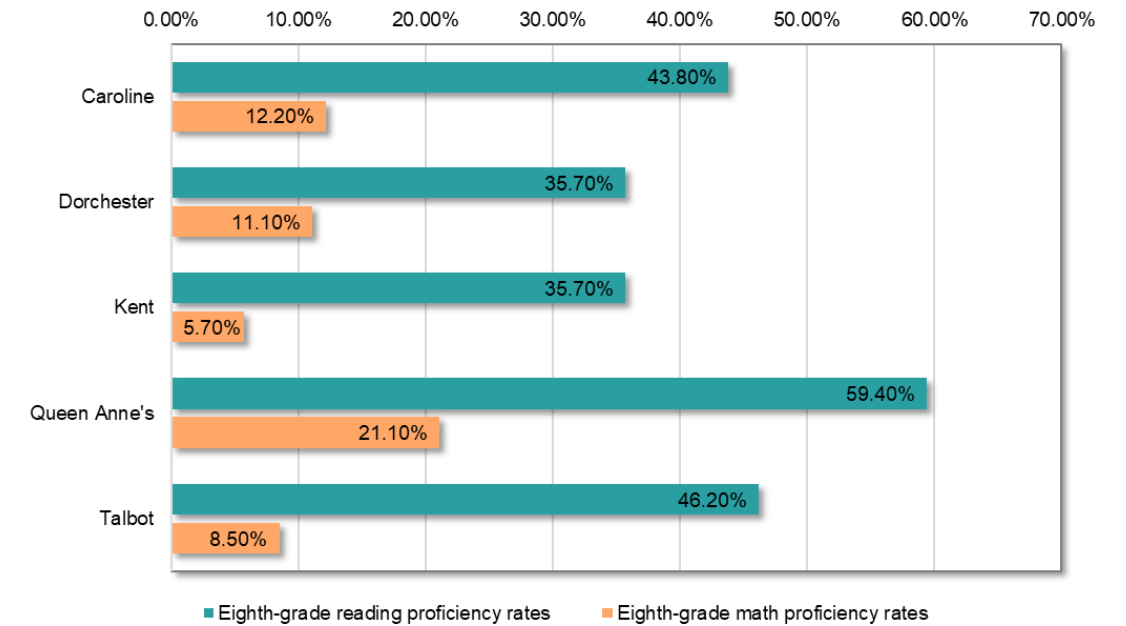
- ✓ Early-learning literacy was rated as “working well” by 126 community members and “not working well” by 62, out of 200 total respondents. However, most partners rated it as “not working well.”
- ✓ Literacy proficiency rates are significantly higher than math in both third and eighth-grade in all counties.
- ✓ Mentoring opportunities and internships rated highest on “missing” resources by both community members and partners.
- ✓ The majority of community members and partners said that Education/Career Readiness, Special Education Supports, and Childcare were not working well.
- ✓ Cost and availability are top barriers to quality early childhood education according to both partners and community members.
- ✓ Social emotional learning and mental health resources were the top gaps in elementary and middle school reported by both partners and community members. Support for students with special needs; literacy and reading support; and access to extracurricular activities were all commonly cited gaps/needs.
- ✓ The biggest perceived barriers for high school students in preparing for life after graduation are: financial barriers (tuition, transportation, housing) and lack of life skills training (budgeting, time management, etc.).
- ✓ The top three perceived barriers faced by young adults in maintaining academic and/or career success after college include: financial stress/student debt; lack of affordable housing; and mental health challenges.

Third-Grade Reading and Math Proficiency Rates



Source: [Maryland ELA, Mathematics, and Science Assessment Results, SY 2023-2024](#)

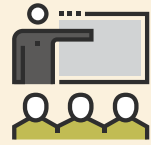
Eight-Grade Reading and Math Proficiency Rates



Source: [Maryland ELA, Mathematics, and Science Assessment Results, SY 2023-2024](#)



Bright Spot



Focus group participants praised high schools with **supportive teachers and role models** who help students plan for their futures.



The availability of a local technical school (DCTC) **offering trade programs and providing alternative career pathways** benefits students.



Summer internships through programs like Dream Big Academy combine **activities, trips, and work experience opportunities** for young people.

County by County Snapshot

Caroline County

- In the community survey, **early literacy/learning ranked highest as working best** in the County, while **mentorship opportunities ranked lowest** as not working well and internships were identified as the leading opportunity missing or not available.
- Compared to the other counties, Caroline has the **lowest percentage of adults 25 and older (86%) who have a high school diploma or higher**.
- Caroline has the **highest recorded incidents of bullying and harassment** from 2022-2023 (98).
- Caroline has a **low percentage (3.3%) of disconnected youth**, which is the second lowest in the region.

Dorchester County

- Dorchester County has a **13% high school dropout rate and the lowest rates of third grade proficiency in the region in both math and reading**.
- The county has the **highest rate of chronic absence**, nearly 1 in 4 students, as well as the highest proportion of youth ages 16-19 not in school and not working.
- Youth need more **safe spaces, structured activities, and academic support**.
- Community members shared their ideas for strengthening cradle-to-career services in the county:
 - Improve transportation options to **help students access jobs, school, and extracurricular activities**.
 - Increase **resources to support studying and academic success**, including tutoring and learning materials.
 - **Assist with job readiness**, including help with work permits, resume writing, and job applications.
 - Support **navigating the college application process and career counseling** to prepare for post-graduation opportunities.
 - **Ensure safe** community **spaces and free activities**.

// Seventy percent of students are behind grade level reading in 3rd grade. There is a serious need to educate parents about the value of school and kids attending school. It's a foundational conversation about the value of education."

Kent County

- **Community survey participants identified early-learning/literacy as working well** and mentorship opportunities as not working well.
- Among the five counties, Kent County has the **lowest eighth-grade math proficiency rate (5.7%)**.
- Community survey participants identified **access to extracurriculars as the biggest gap** in elementary and middle school. Youth want more options like volleyball and flag football and better public spaces.
- Kent County has the **lowest percentage (2.8%) of disconnected youth** (youth not working and not in school).
- **School infrastructure and safety concerns exist** such as broken pipes, lack of heating or air conditioning, and not enough academic support.
- **There are inadequate mental health resources in school**, with only a few school counselors and limited outside help for stress, behavior, and anxiety.



Bright Spot



Kent County has a **high CTE completion rate (66%)**



Youth sports programs like football and basketball help young people stay active and build friendships.

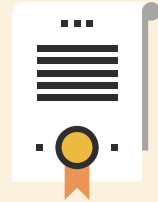


Teachers and school staff are often helpful



Volunteering and community clean-up efforts show youth are engaged in taking care of their environment.

Bright Spot



91% of adults ages 25+ in Queen Anne's County **have a high school diploma or higher** (the highest among the five counties) and 50% of graduates immediately enroll in post-secondary education (also the highest).

“Schools have so much to focus on. Sometimes they get lost in focusing on testing results and forget to focus on the wellbeing of kids and their other needs.”

“There are not enough recreational options for teenagers - there haven't been any changes in 40 years.”

Queen Anne's County

- Compared to the other counties, **Queen Anne's County ranks highest in most educational indicators** including enrollment in early childhood education, third-grade reading and math proficiency rates, eighth-grade reading and math proficiency rates, and post-secondary enrollment rates.
- Focus group participants called for **more positive activities or places to keep children and youth busy outside of school.**
- **In the community survey, early literacy/learning ranked as working best** in the County.
- Among community survey respondents, **childcare and vocational opportunities ranked lowest** as not working well and mentorships were identified as the leading opportunity missing or not available.
- Community survey respondents viewed **early-learning and literacy programs positively (72%), but education and career readiness support was less consistent.** Half said it is working well and 35% said it is not.
- **High school students face barriers** like financial challenges (65%), lack of life skills training (65%), mental health challenges (60%), limited internships/job training (60%), and lack of career guidance (50%).



Talbot County

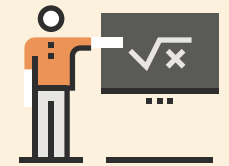
- Talbot County has the **second highest chronic absenteeism rate (28.5%).**
- **Youth and young adults face significant challenges in career readiness and economic stability,** citing lack of life skills training, job preparation, mental health issues, and financial stress.
- Community survey participants identified **education/ career readiness, childcare, and special education supports as the top three things not working well.**
- **The top barriers preventing families from accessing early childhood education** identified in the community survey were **cost and availability** (both 76%).

“Schools don't set people up for success anymore. You should have a workable skill when you graduate high school.”

Bright Spot



Talbot and Caroline Counties have the **most youth enrolled in apprenticeship programs** (13 and 8, respectively).



Talbot County has the **second highest eighth-grade math proficiency**

(46%)

and **post-secondary enrollment**

(43%)

rates.



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Family and community success examines indicators of basic needs, child welfare, community safety, and access to programs and amenities that enable social connectedness and thriving.

Key Findings

- ✓ Food insecurity hovers around 12% across counties.
- ✓ Questions about access to safe spaces for families to gather and children to play and general safety yielded mixed responses, though most respondents said they were “working well.”
- ✓ Whereas partners cited lack of transportation as the top barrier that families face when accessing services, community members rated cost as the biggest barrier, with only 36% mentioning transportation.
- ✓ Partners identified school cohesion and trust as the greatest challenge, and ranked access to prenatal resources as the area working best.
- ✓ Community and partner respondents reported the largest gaps in services related to financial education, transportation, housing, and child care.
- ✓ Participation in the Community First Choice program for seniors has steadily risen over the past five years in all counties.



County by County Snapshot

Caroline County

- About half of community survey respondents said **community engagement is working well (51%)**, but **trust among residents and support for seniors was seen as weak**, with around 50% saying those areas are not working well.
- **Families face big challenges accessing support** due to cost (67%), not knowing where to go (43%), lack of transportation (37%), and stigma (38%).
- **Support for families of English Language Learners is mixed**, with about half of community survey respondents saying it works well but 43% saying it does not.
- **Childcare and early-learning have some strengths** (45% and 68% said working well), but many community survey respondents **still reported gaps, especially in availability, cost, and transportation**.
- **Access to safe spaces for families and children, transportation, and affordable nutritious food have large gaps**, with 30–55% community survey respondents saying these are not working well or missing.
- Caroline County has the **second highest number of children in foster care (45), number of children out-of-home under 18 (46), and rate of child mistreatment (46)**.

Bright Spot



Adult day care programs offer a safe, engaging space for seniors to socialize, play games, do puzzles, and spend time with friends



Community spaces including the library, community center, churches, and restaurants are valued by residents.

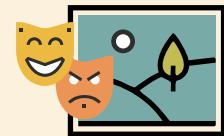




Bright Spot

There is access to social services, job opportunities, and cultural activities in nearby Cambridge and the wider region.

The county benefits from strong promotion of the arts and welcoming faith communities that foster connections.



Local amenities such as museums, and community outings provide residents with opportunities for recreation and social engagement.



Residents enjoy waterfront living and accept longer commutes to access needed resources.

Dorchester County

- Dorchester has the **most children in foster care** (50 children in 2022) of the five counties examined.
- The county has **significantly higher juvenile arrests** than other counties at 74 per 1,000 in 2024. Most arrests (70%) were for nonviolent offenses.
- The **overall crime rate is highest in Dorchester County**, as are the number of domestic violence hearings and the rates of child maltreatment.
- Many community survey respondents felt **community engagement and social trust need improvement**, with about 40–50% saying these are not working well.
- Support for seniors and **access to affordable, nutritious food were also reported as lacking** by nearly half of respondents.
- **Transportation is a challenge**, with less than 35% saying it works well and over 40% saying it does not. **Limited public transit**—especially after 6 p.m.—makes it hard to access jobs, activities, and services.
- **Families face big barriers** like cost (64%), not knowing where to get help (52%), transportation issues (33%), stigma (26%), and worries about immigration status (21%).

// There’s a lot of violence and shooting in the community spaces available. Kids can’t go to a park without running into violence.”

// The closeness of the community can make things difficult, but it also makes it easier for people to get help—neighbors feel comfortable reaching out when they need support.”



Kent County

- Kent County has the **lowest number of children in foster care** (25 children), **crime rates** (892.8 per 100,000 people), and **rates of child maltreatment** (14) compared to the other counties.
- Participants from the senior adult focus group expressed **concerns about countywide racism**.
- **Barriers to early childhood education identified in the community survey included cost (78%) and limited availability** of spots or providers (69%), restricting access for many families.
- Public spaces are lacking—youth reported **broken equipment in parks, no playgrounds, and not enough recreational areas**.
- Residents expressed **concern about a marijuana processing facility** in Centerville and its impact on children playing nearby. They suggested a designated smoking area that protects children.

// Coming to the center helps us connect with others, especially when people have lost loved ones or spouses.”



Bright Spot



Kent County Hospital offers in-home visits and physical therapy after discharge.

The Senior Center is free, welcoming, and offers meals, exercise, social events, and health talk.



Library, YMCA, and local churches provide social and learning opportunities for seniors.



Churches and community groups provide food, funeral planning, and basic assistance.



Bright Spot

People enjoy having more property, trees, and rural surroundings.



Quieter pace of life, lower congestion, and easier access to appointments.



Residents feel generally safe in their neighborhoods, there are feelings of increased safety compared to nearby counties.



Effective traffic control, especially near the beach. While traffic has increased over the years, people are pleased with the action that is being taken.

Queen Anne's County

- Residents **enjoy the rural setting, quiet pace, and generally feel safe**, especially compared to nearby areas.
- Queen Anne's County has the **lowest rate of food insecurity (11.5%)** compared to the other counties.
- Queen Anne's County has **the second lowest rates of crime (900.8), out-of-home children under 18 (31), and child mistreatment (32)** compared to the other counties.
- **Seniors feel there is a lack of exercise and wellness opportunities** tailored to them and that **isolation and limited social interaction** are common challenges.
- **Seniors are worried about scams and personal safety**, especially around shopping centers.
- **Seniors report** few grocery stores, poor trash collection, and not enough public spaces like benches or trails.
- Community members shared their ideas for strengthening senior services in the county:
 - **Create more outdoor and park-based options** like picnic tables, seating, vegetable beds, and walking spaces.
 - Offer **more senior-specific classes** such as nutrition, computer skills, gardening, lectures, and music events.
 - **Expand open hours at the YMCA** to reduce crowding to make it more accessible for seniors.
 - Provide more social gatherings for seniors, including **relationship-building opportunities**.

Bright Spot



Community gathering places like churches, libraries, 4-H Park, VFW, Chesapeake College, and the YMCA offer helpful programs and activities. The senior center offers social programs, resources, and services.



Talbot County

- Talbot County **ranks in the middle among the five counties examined** for food insecurity (13.9%), children in foster care (35), out-of-home children under 18 (39), crime rates (1,578), and instances of child maltreatment (41).
- Many seniors are **searching for their "place" or purpose** in the community.
- **Retirement planning** support is lacking and people often feel unprepared.
- **Seniors reported limited social opportunities** outside of a few main locations.
- Seniors in **rural areas have fewer options** and feel more isolated.
- Community members shared their ideas for strengthening family and community support:
 - **Leverage the Community Center as a Resource Hub** for residents to post needs and other services (e.g., handyman services, babysitting, lawn mowing) to foster community support and economic exchange.
 - Local businesses could **offer discounts for long-term residents**.

// There are a lot of people out there who need support with day-to-day things (basic functions and skills - how to shop, balance their checkbook, make good decisions, etc.)."



Bright Spot

There are abundant community resources and spaces for families, including WIC, the Judy Center, and the library.



Local parks offer recreation for families, creating engaging and updated opportunities.

Community events and cultural activities (e.g., Pride, Chesapeake Music, festivals) **foster inclusion and engagement; there is a growing acceptance and openness toward diverse populations.**



The county has a supportive recovery community and active mental health conversations.



Key Considerations For Planning

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING

Leverage shared challenges and solutions: Many of the identified gaps are common across counties. Coordinating efforts and pooling resources can create more sustainable and scalable solutions.

Build on local strengths: Several counties demonstrate bright spots in outcomes or strong community perceptions of their programs. These examples can serve as models to replicate and adapt in other areas, and have potential for expansion.

Center community voices: Lasting impact requires structures that consistently engage youth, adults, and seniors who are closest to the issues. Create ongoing feedback loops to ensure solutions remain relevant, equitable, and responsive to changing needs.

In the **shorter term**, focus on:

- Transportation - reallocate or procure new resources
- Financial education/life skills
- Mentorship
- Social engagement
- Bilingual providers

In the **longer term**, focus on:

- Expanding access to affordable housing
- Strengthening preventative healthcare
- Improving math readiness and achievement

These longer-term priorities may be best advanced through existing planning commissions and cross-sector groups, which can develop comprehensive and coordinated strategies over time.

Across All Counties:



HOUSING

Expand affordable and supportive options for seniors, disabled, low-income, recovery, foster care, and high-needs populations



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Increase services and providers for youth and adults, including SUD, inpatient, outpatient, autism, and walk-in care; focus on increasing bilingual, culturally competent providers



TRANSPORTATION

Improve access to public and private options for rural areas, seniors, and those needing help getting to services



HEALTHCARE

Expand preventive care, bilingual providers, and mobile health services



SCHOOLS

Provide on-site behavioral health, afterschool and summer programs, IEP/504 support, and safe, inclusive environments



TRAINING & OUTREACH

Offer parenting, life skills, financial, digital, and bilingual education for at-risk groups



YOUTH SUPPORT

Strengthen career prep, inclusive activities, early literacy, and access to MH/SUD care



SENIOR SUPPORT

Increase social opportunities, support for financial planning, and centralized healthcare services

County by County:

Caroline County:

Increase availability of local medical facilities, especially for emergency, behavioral health, and specialty care. Consider how to attract medical practitioners to the area. Support families experiencing financial hardship.

Dorchester County:

Opportunities for the community to invest in young people, including a focus on grade-level reading and math, chronic absence, and substance use. Increase services and protective factors like mentoring and afterschool/summer programs.

Kent County:

Invest in young people through afterschool programs, playgrounds, and recreational spaces. Increase availability and flexibility of transportation options. Support seniors to pay their bills.

Queen Anne's County:

Community priorities include: more behavioral health providers; increased extracurricular activities for students; more social activities for seniors; and more affordable housing.

Talbot County:

Improve transportation. Focus on making healthcare more accessible, especially for prenatal, mental health, and primary care. Create more opportunities for social connection, especially for seniors.

