



# Executive Summary

## 2022 – 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment

Prepared by:  
Billings Clinic  
RiverStone Health  
St. Vincent Healthcare  
Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana

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Healthy communities are thriving, active and open. They also don't happen by accident. Healthy, thriving communities meet the needs of their residents head-on with resources, education and collaboration. By working together, they identify barriers and challenges and find solutions to address them for the betterment of everyone.

Yellowstone County is where we see that happen every day, but it takes commitment. Every one of us can influence the health of our community – through our own behavior and health habits, our work and our advocacy.

Since 1994, RiverStone Health, Billings Clinic, and St. Vincent Healthcare (often called the Alliance) have partnered to identify and address the complex community health needs of Yellowstone County. So much of this work is based on our community's unique needs, which is why, since 2005, we have partnered every three years to create the Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). This year, we welcomed The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana to participate in the CHNA.

The CHNA resource provides a comprehensive, data-driven look at our community's overall health and a detailed assessment of the county's health needs, behaviors, and issues. In turn, we use this vital information to identify the top local health priorities and find solutions to help improve the health of all Yellowstone County residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique health challenges and needs in the last few years, and that has influenced some of what we've learned, but many of the top needs are unchanged. Through surveys of hundreds of Yellowstone County residents, the CHNA has identified, in order of priority, mental health, substance abuse, access to health care services, and the combination of physical activity, nutrition and weight as the top health priorities in our community. These issues are essential to Yellowstone County and will help drive what we do in the coming years.

We are committed to continuing to collaborate to meet these needs and encourage each of you to join us. Together, we can use this valuable information to inform our decisions and improve the health of our community for everyone.

Sincerely,



**Jennifer Alderfer, MBA, MHA, FACHE**  
President, Montana | Wyoming Market &  
St. Vincent Healthcare, Intermountain Health



**Clint Seger, MD**  
Interim CEO | Billings Clinic



**John Felton, MPH, MHA, FACHE**  
County Health Officer/Lead Local Public Health  
Official | RiverStone Health



**Jennifer Graves, MHA, RN**  
CEO | The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana

## Key Findings

### Priority Area #1 - Mental Health

Mental health support continues to be a persistent need in the community, despite the majority of residents saying their mental health status remained the same or improved since the pandemic.

### Priority Area #2 - Substance Abuse/Misuse and Safety

Substance misuse was ranked as the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest community health priority by forum attendees. Like many communities, the issues of substance misuse and safety are closely related in Yellowstone County, presenting a challenge for local leaders and residents alike. Substance misuse, unintentional injuries such as falls, poisonings and overdoses, and motor vehicle accidents, continue to rise.

### Priority Area #3 – Access to Healthcare

More residents have health insurance than ever before and are using it. However, people are having a tough time finding appointments and providers.

### Priority Area #4 – Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Weight

Yellowstone County is becoming more physical active, but healthy eating remains a challenge.

### Health Disparities and Discrimination in Yellowstone County

Many residents experience worse health outcomes than the general population. Differences in income, educational attainment and quality, neighborhood quality, healthcare access, and social experiences contribute to these health disparities. Bullying, discrimination, and lack of opportunities based on a person's race, ethnicity, ability, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and more, can worsen health outcomes. In 2023, the CHNA survey included questions regarding perceived discrimination. The results are sobering.

- 19% of residents strongly agree that Yellowstone County is welcoming to all races and ethnicities
- People of color are significantly more likely than the general population to report being treated with less courtesy or respect, as less intelligent, and as a potential danger; and receiving poorer service

### COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

It will take years to understand the true outcomes associated with this unprecedented global event. According to the 2023 assessment:

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*The ongoing COVID pandemic has exacerbated issues such as mental health and substance abuse in our community. The continued strain on our national and local economy makes it hard for people to meet basic needs, this puts constant stress on mental health. Many with mental health issues turn to substance abuse. There are not near enough resources in our community to meet this need, let alone the workforce to do it. – Community Leader*

”

23% were financially impacted by lost employment, wages, hours, or health insurance



15% avoided medical care at some point during the pandemic due to COVID-19 concerns

24% say their mental health worsened since the pandemic began



# Community Health Needs Assessment Process

The CHNA is a collaborative process involving community stakeholders to plan, promote, and provide input on the needs of the community. The 2023 CHNA is a follow-up to similar studies conducted in 2020, 2017, 2014, 2011, and 2006.

The CHNA follows the **Association for Community Health Improvement (ACHI)** model (right) from the Community Health Assessment Toolkit. This model is a continuous process centered on community.

2023 CHNA data sources included:

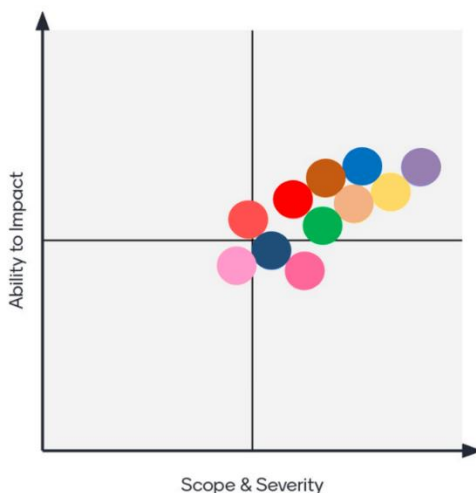
- Telephone and online survey data
- National and state survey data
- Input from community stakeholders

## Focus on COVID-19, Equity, and Inclusion

The 2023 CHNA included questions related to the impact of COVID-19. We added a web-based survey option, promoted among historically underrepresented groups by partnering Community Health Workers (CHWs). The survey is representative of the demographics of the population served and provides a statistically valid sample size. For the first time, health disparities by race/ethnicity can be examined. Unfortunately, sample sizes were too small to responsibly report on other priority demographics, an effort we will continue to improve upon in future assessments.

## Prioritization

A public forum was held in November 2022. Attendees were asked to rank community health priorities based on scope and severity as well as ability of our community to impact the issue.



Community priorities include:

1. Mental Health
2. Substance Abuse
3. Access to Healthcare
4. Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Weight
5. Heart Disease and Stroke
6. Injury and Violence
7. Diabetes
8. Cancer
9. Sexual Health
10. Potentially Disabling Conditions
11. Respiratory Disease

## Response

The Healthcare Alliance of Billings Clinic, RiverStone Health, and St. Vincent Healthcare will develop a collective implementation plan to address key community needs. This plan will include community stakeholders as part of the Healthy By Design Coalition.



## Key Areas of Opportunity

This section highlights key takeaways from the top community health priorities identified by Yellowstone County residents and leaders. For more information, please visit [www.hbdyc.org](http://www.hbdyc.org) for the complete 2023 CHNA and additional resources.



## Area of Opportunity: Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, pray, and age that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.

Examples include:

- Access to nutritious foods
- Access to physical activity opportunities
- Safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods
- Education, job opportunities, and income
- Polluted air and water
- Language and literacy skills
- Racism, discrimination, and violence

SDOH also contribute to wide health disparities and inequities. For example, people who lack access to grocery stores with healthy foods are less likely to have good nutrition. That raises their risk of health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity — and even lowers life expectancy relative to people who do have access to healthy foods.

Just promoting healthy choices will not eliminate these and other health disparities. Instead, public health and health care organizations and their partners in sectors like education, transportation, and housing need to take action to improve the conditions in people's environments.

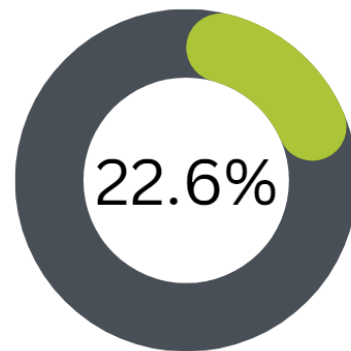
(Source: Healthy People 2030)

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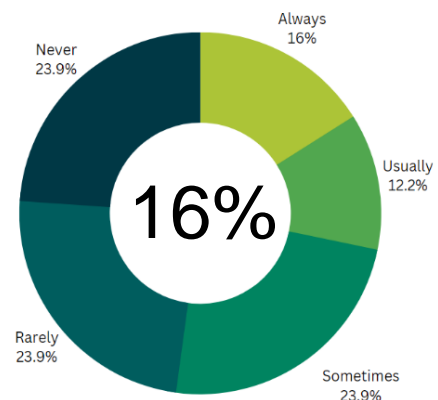
*Chronic health issues are among the top 3 root causes of homelessness locally, according to a 2020 analysis by the Continuum of Care. This problem as a public health issue was exemplified by COVID-19.*

*– Social Service Provider*

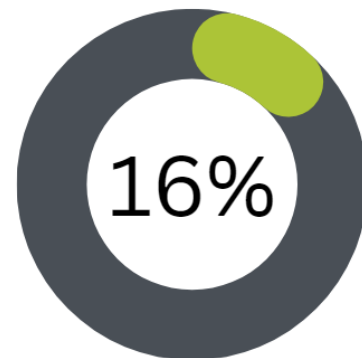
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22.6% of residents say a household member lost a job, hours, wages, or health insurance since the beginning of the pandemic



16% of residents always worry about paying their rent or mortgage each month



16% of residents do not have cash on hand to cover a \$400 emergency expense

## Area of Opportunity #1: Mental Health

Mental health continues to be a struggle for many Yellowstone County residents.



79% say their mental health is good, very good, or excellent

75% say their mental health remained the same or improved since the pandemic

8% feel socially isolated and have no social or emotional support

Suicide and thoughts of suicide continue to rise

**Yellowstone County's suicide rate is nearly 2x the US**

24% have considered suicide at some point in their lifetime

26 people died by suicide each year per 100,000 population in Yellowstone County



*Access to quality care that is affordable without having to navigate waitlists or complicated eligibility criteria... – Social Service Provider*

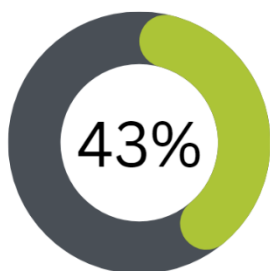
*Stigma. Most people that I know are treating mental health issues or have actively acknowledged they need help. However, those same people seem to feel that they can't talk about it the same way they talk about their physical health treatments. – Community Leader*



## Area of Opportunity #2: Substance Abuse (Misuse) and Safety

Substance misuse and community safety are a complex challenge.

According to community leaders, injury and safety are an important aspect of this issue.



43% of residents' lives have been negatively impacted by substance misuse

23% of residents drink excessively, a worsening over time

24% residents have experienced intimate partner violence, higher than the US

30% residents have an unlocked firearm at home or in their vehicle, up from 2020

Yet, 85% of residents feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood

Deaths caused by unintentional injuries have nearly doubled in the past decade



*Billings is a small community. It is hard to form healthy relationships in the recovery process. There is a lack of services to meet the need. There is a lack of workforce to meet the need. Consuming alcohol is too culturally acceptable in Montana. – Community Leader*



## Area of Opportunity #3: Access to Healthcare

More residents have health insurance than ever before.



**Just 5% of residents are uninsured**

However, 30% struggle to find appointments and providers

81% of adults have specific source of ongoing care

67% of adults had routine checkup in past year

86% of youth had a routine checkup in past year

*Billings is Montana's largest city and has the largest health care providers. Healthcare drives the Billings economy. Yet, Billings has a very hard time recruiting and retaining physicians. We must ask why. The community needs to change, or this problem will continue and will become a larger problem. Over the last three years, I have seen 5 doctors, 4 of them left Billings.*

- Community Leader

## Area of Opportunity #4: Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Weight

Residents are becoming more physically active, but healthy eating remains a challenge.



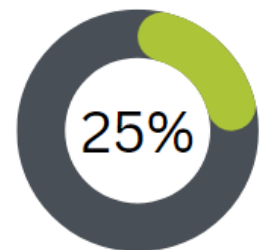
**Just 28% of adults eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily**

27% of adults find it difficult to buy affordable, fresh produce

**33%** of adults and **58%** of children meet physical activity guidelines

73% of adults are overweight – higher than Montana (65%) and the US (61%)

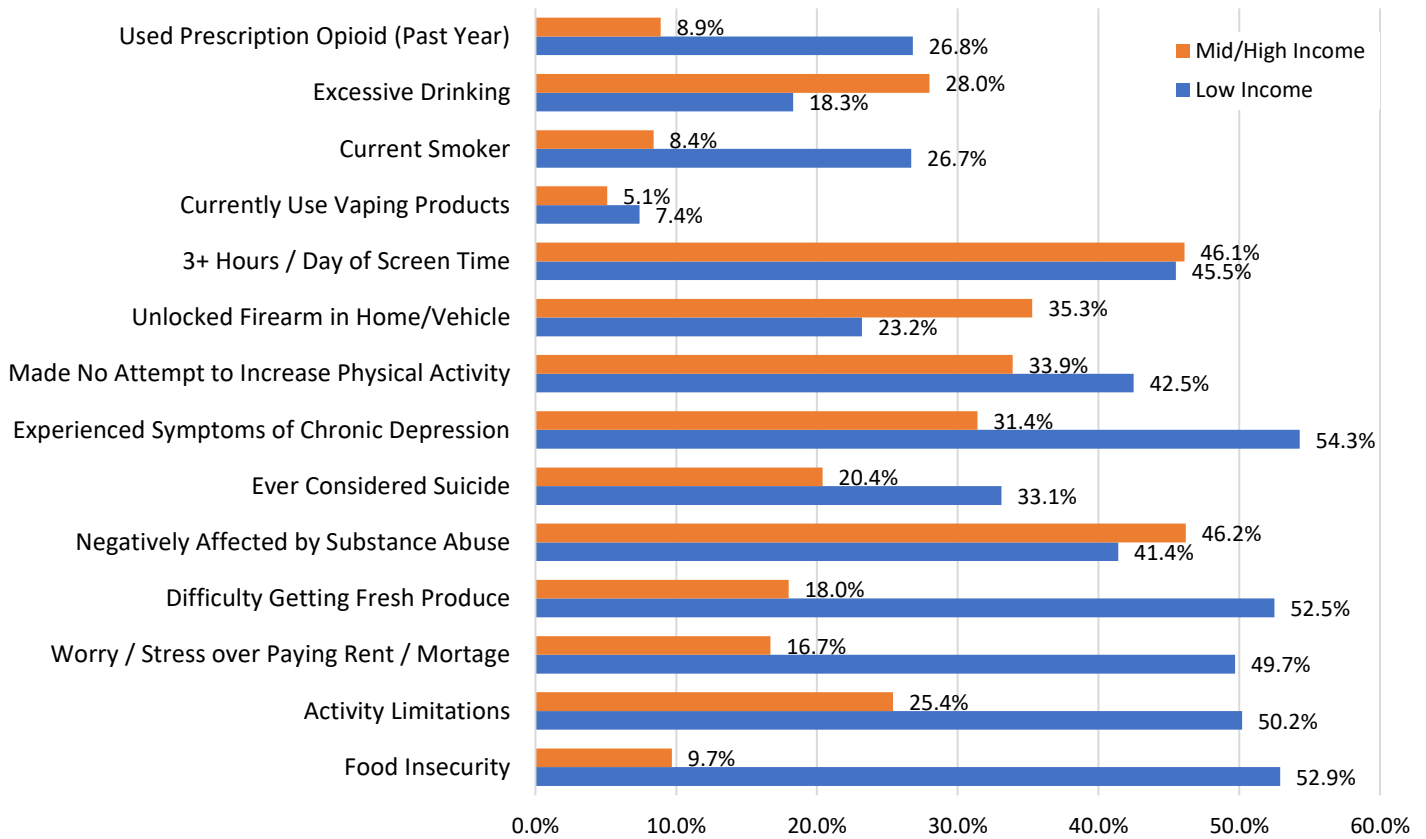
25% of adults drink 7+ sugar-sweetened beverages weekly



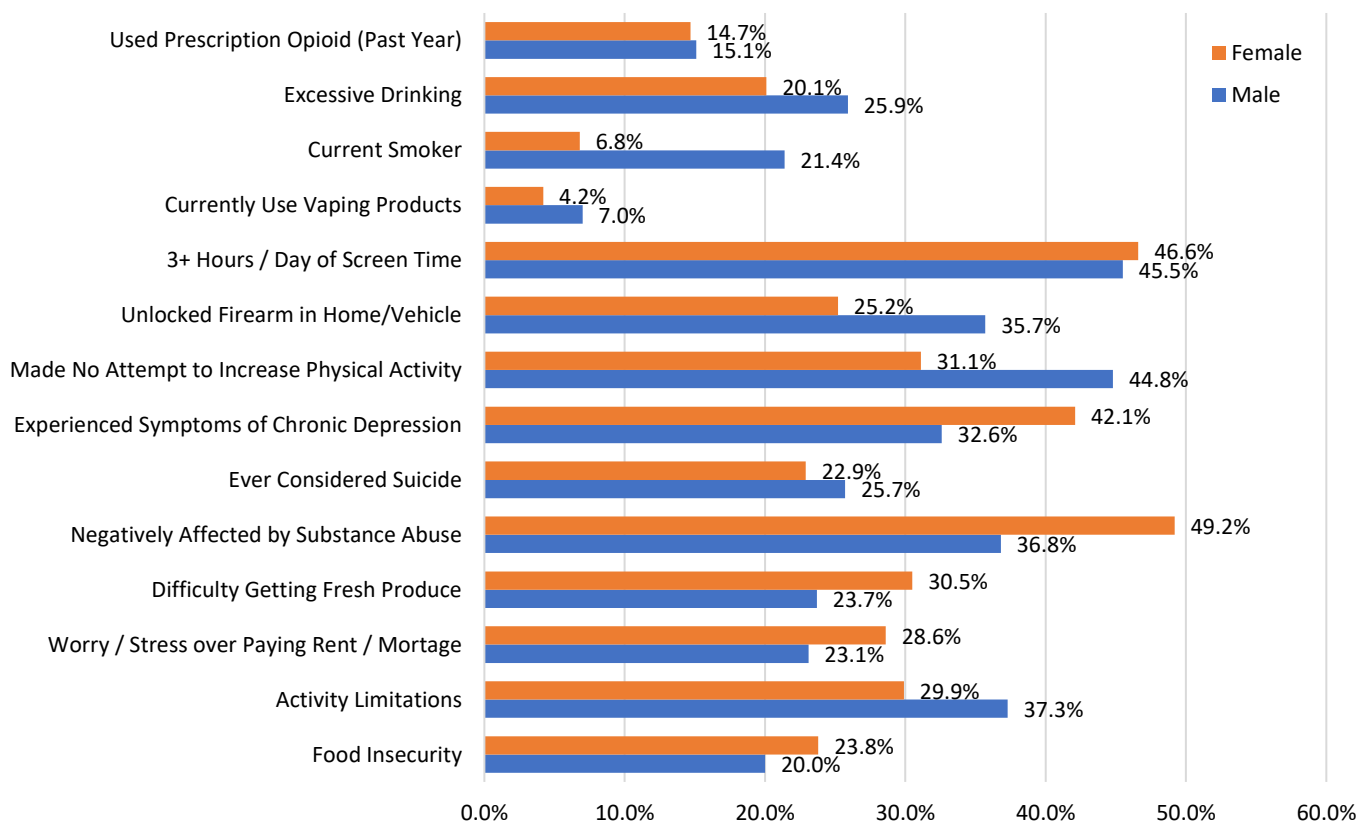
*A large number of fast food or quick food restaurants are prevalent in the community. Affordable family-style restaurants are limited, especially in the Heights. There are a lot of trails but not all connected. Limited options for non-trail walking exercise, such as Indoor pools, frisbee golf, pickle ball, ice skating, and safe bike paths are limited. Free nutrition counseling would help as many do not want to pursue fad diets but would like inexpensive non-stigmatizing help. – Public Health Representative*

# Health Disparities: Income, Gender, Age, and Race/Ethnicity

## Disparities by Income for Selected Yellowstone County Health Indicators (2023)



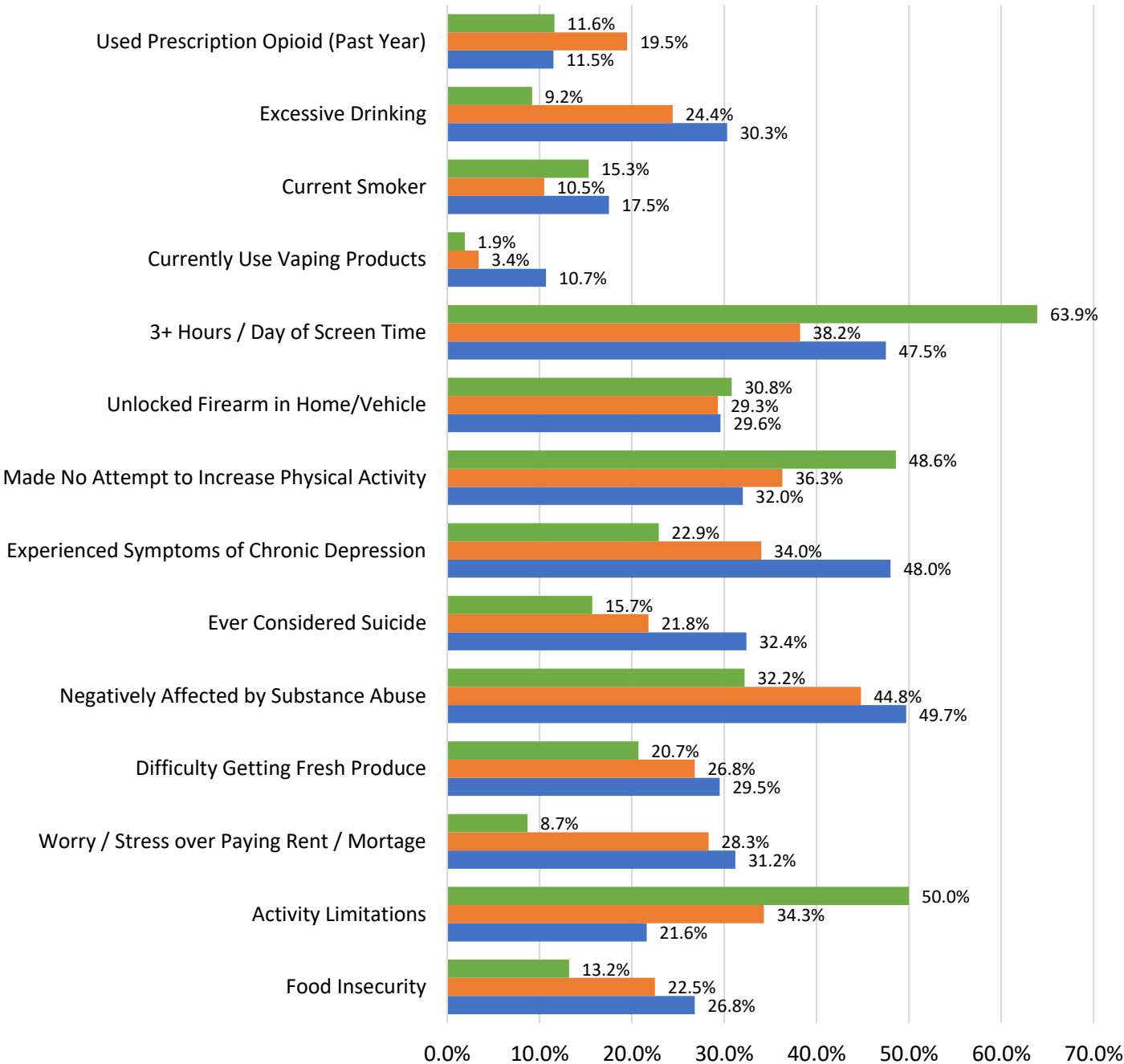
## Disparities by Gender for Selected Yellowstone County Health Indicators (2023)



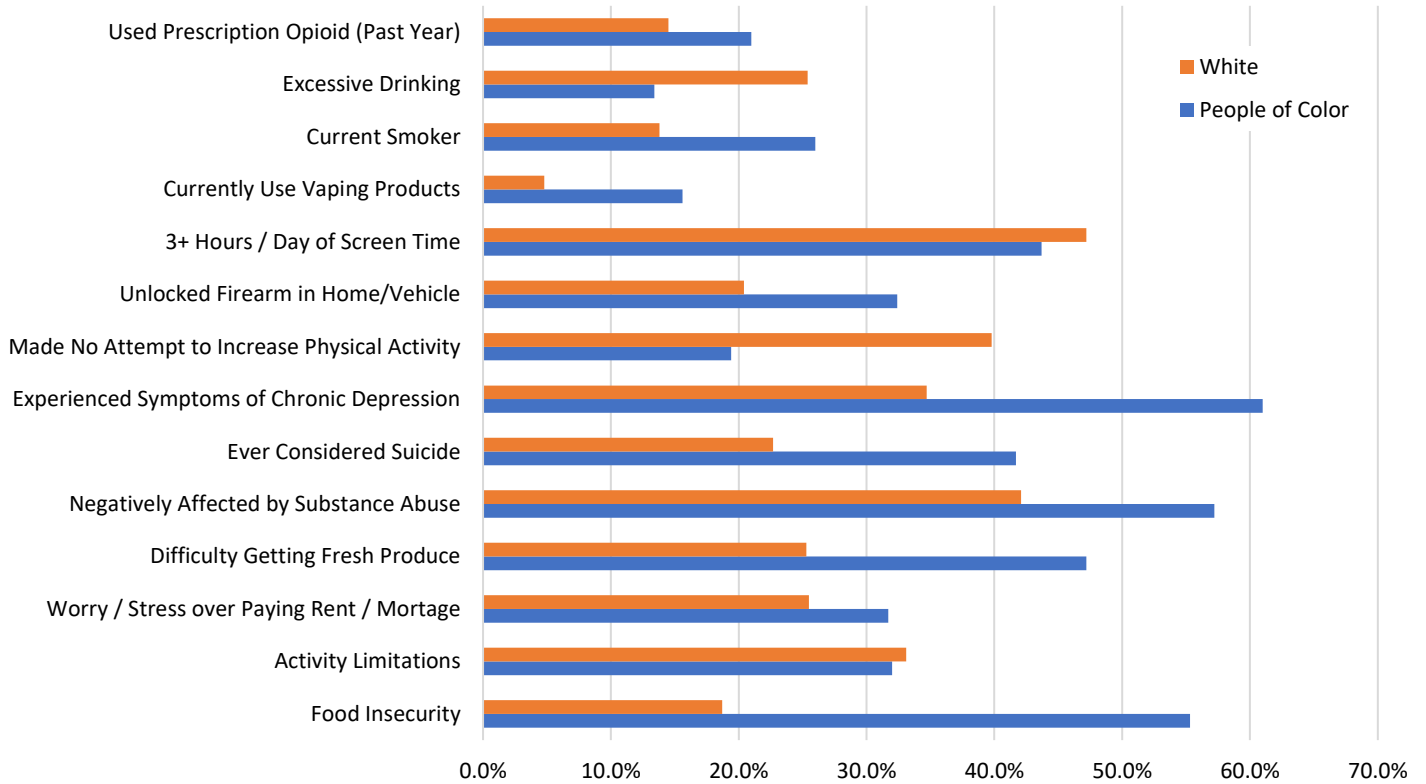


### Disparities by Age for Selected Yellowstone County Health Indicators (2023)

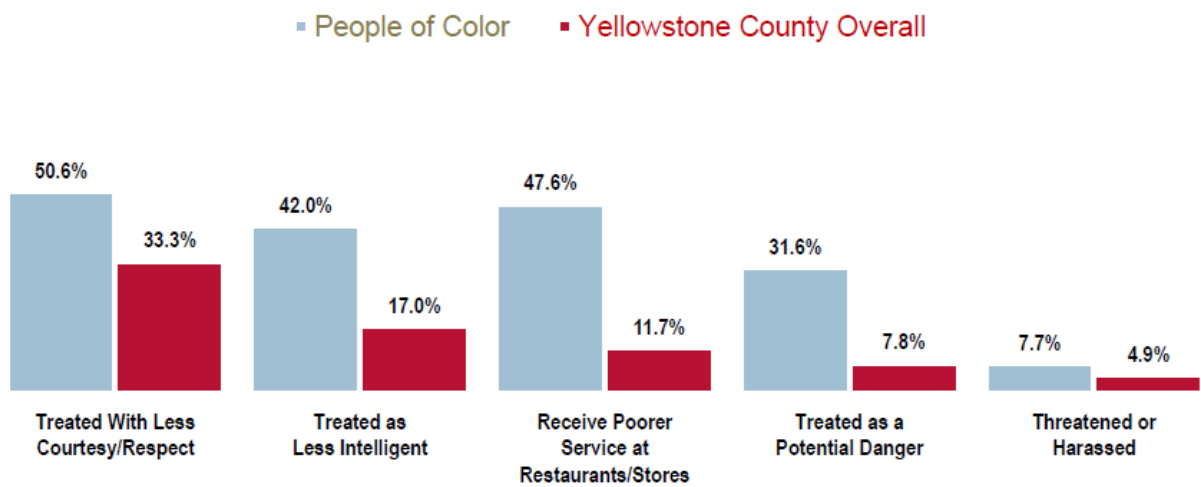
65+ years    40 - 64 years    18 - 39 years



## Disparities by Race & Ethnicity for Selected Yellowstone County Health Indicators (2023)



## Perceptions of Unfair Treatment in Day-to-Day Life (Yellowstone County, 2023)



## Next Steps

### Collective Action

Following each CHNA, a community process is undertaken to create an improvement plan for Yellowstone County, to be carried forward by the Healthy By Design Coalition. Our 2020 - 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is available on the Healthy By Design website. The 2020-2023 CHIP addresses the priority areas of healthy weight, mental health, and substance use through a framework of healthy neighborhoods, healthy connections, and healthy investments. Planning for the next CHIP will occur throughout spring 2023 with several opportunities for community stakeholders to engage in its development.

### Organizational Action

Following the development of the community CHIP, the hospitals and RiverStone Health will each review the results of the CHNA and select organization-specific priority areas, taking into account the collective community priorities. A hospital-specific Community Health Implementation Plan is developed to address selected priority needs. RiverStone Health incorporates prioritized strategies into its strategic plan.

## For more information:



[www.hbdyc.org/chna](http://www.hbdyc.org/chna)



Visit our *Health Forecast* portal through the HBD site



[info@hbdyc.org](mailto:info@hbdyc.org)



**(406) 247.3394**



**@HBDyellowstone**

## With Gratitude

We would like to thank everyone who made the 2023 CHNA our most successful report yet.

Survey Respondents

CHNA Work Team Members

CHNA Advisory Team Members

Resilient Yellowstone Community Health Workers

Forum Attendees

...and more!

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