

Community Health Needs Assessment Report

Mille Lacs Health System Onamia, Minnesota

Published September 18, 2019

Introduction

Mille Lacs Health System (MLHS) is a not-for-profit, community owned organization. MLHS includes a 25-bed critical access hospital that has a level IV Trauma Center. Based in Onamia on the southern edge of Mille Lacs Lake in central Minnesota, MLHS serves many of the individuals living around the lake and in communities to the south.

Our mission is “to assist those residing and visiting the Mille Lacs area in achieving and maintaining optimal health.”

Our organizational values are:

- We hold a reverence for life.
- We strive to ensure access for all.
- We strive to serve all with compassion and hospitality.
- We believe in open, honest and direct communication at all levels.
- We believe collegiality, teamwork, and participation are necessary for excellence.

Our history began in April 1956, when the first patients were admitted to the Onamia Hospital. Mille Lacs Health System was created in 1990 when the area’s hospital, nursing home and clinic were merged. Between 1956 and today, we have expanded to include the hospital, four area clinics, a chiropractic and physical therapy clinic, a geriatric psychiatric unit, a long-term care facility, home care/hospice, and ambulance services. Our services include:

- Specialty care – audiology, cardiology, diabetes education, dietetics and nutrition, ENT, nephrology, neurology, obstetrics and gynecology (OB/GYN), ophthalmology, optometry, orthoptist, orthopedic medicine, pain management, podiatry, pre-natal education, psychiatry/psychology, sleep and respiratory therapy, and urology
- Surgery – inpatient, outpatient and specialty, including orthopedic, podiatry, pain management, ophthalmology, ENT and OB/GYN procedures
- Ambulance and part-time paramedic services
- Behavioral health – adult and child psychiatric care, individual, marriage and family counseling, and tele-psychiatric care
- Chiropractic care
- Diabetes education
- Emergency care
- Eye care

- Home care and hospice
- In-patient geriatric psychiatric care – short-term care, long-term care, and memory care (Alzheimer’s unit)
- Laboratory
- Outpatient therapy
- Radiology and diagnostic imaging
- Rehabilitation – physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, cardiac rehab
- Respiratory therapy
- Sleep study center
- Urgent care

The hospital also provides swing bed services for patients who have recovered from an illness or injury but are not yet able to care for themselves at home. It’s designed to meet each patient’s need for continued rehabilitation and recovery in a hospital setting. Services include skilled nursing for IV or extended antibiotic infusions, wound care, post-surgery care, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, nutritional support, counseling, insulin monitoring, and enteral feeding.

Despite rapid technological change and the economic stresses of today’s healthcare environment, Mille Lacs Health System remains strong. Numerous medical and surgical specialists have joined our healthcare team, providing diagnostic and support services that allow for a sophisticated level of diagnoses and treatment in a local setting.

Our mission and values also compel us to take a holistic approach to our patients’ healthcare needs; addressing their emotional, mental, and spiritual concerns as well as their physical needs. In addition to traditional services, we now provide access to a variety of counseling services as well as health education, wellness and rehabilitation.

Thanks to the hard work of many dedicated employees, directors and trustees—and strong support from area communities—healthcare in the Mille Lacs region has changed greatly since those first patients were admitted to the Onamia Hospital in 1956. We are proud to play such a significant role in improving the quality of life of the people and communities we serve. We are proud to be part of a community-driven, community-supported healthcare system. We look to the future with confidence.

Mille Lacs Health System is pleased to submit this Community Health Needs Assessment. We do so both as a matter of compliance with Section 501(r)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, as mandated in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and as an obligation to those we serve. As an organization, we have taken this change in law as an opportunity to improve our community service and continuously focus on meeting the changing health care needs of our community.

Consistent with the requirements of Section 501(r)(3) the Community Health Needs Assessment Report is organized as follows:

- Our Community
- Review of Previous Community Health Needs Assessments
- Community Health Needs Assessment Methodology
- Prioritized Significant Community Health Needs
- Health Resources

Our Community

Mille Lacs Health System is located in the city of Onamia in Mille Lacs County, Minnesota. However, we have historically defined our “community” as a broader area, including the communities around the southern half of Mille Lacs Lake and the towns south of the lake down to Milaca. Based on inpatient and outpatient usage in recent years, our primary service area includes the following zip codes and towns:

- 56359 – Onamia
- 56342 – Isle
- 56386 – Wahkon
- 56338 – Hillman
- 56450 – Garrison
- 56353 – Milaca



Approximately 80% of our inpatient and 83% of our outpatient usage is from individuals living within this primary service area. The additional 20% and 17% of our usage, respectively, is from individuals living in the broader community as well as individuals vacationing near Mille Lacs Lake. Throughout this document, all references to our community refer to these six towns and their surrounding countryside.

One special aspect of our community is Mille Lacs Lake itself. According to the Lakes Area Tourism Council, “*the Mille Lacs Lake area is Minnesota’s year-round destination for the best fishing and family vacations! The spring and summer fun on Lake Mille Lacs include group fishing launches, golf, beach days, and guided fishing adventures. Mille Lacs is not only one of the state’s largest lakes with 132,500-acres, but the fish are also*

trophy-size whether you are looking for walleye, muskie, northern pike, or bass fishing!” Our community also includes the Grand Casino Mille Lacs Hotel. With 494 rooms, the Grand Casino

Mille Lacs is one of the largest casino hotels in the state of Minnesota. Such attractions mean that temporary visitors are extremely common, and we are a popular retirement location.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted the nation’s most recent census and published that data by county. Similarly, the Population Health Institute collects and reports health data and demographic data by county on an annual basis. U.S. census data is primarily from the 2010 census, with some figures being estimated based on that census and others being actual data from subsequent years. Population Health Institute data is as of August 2019.

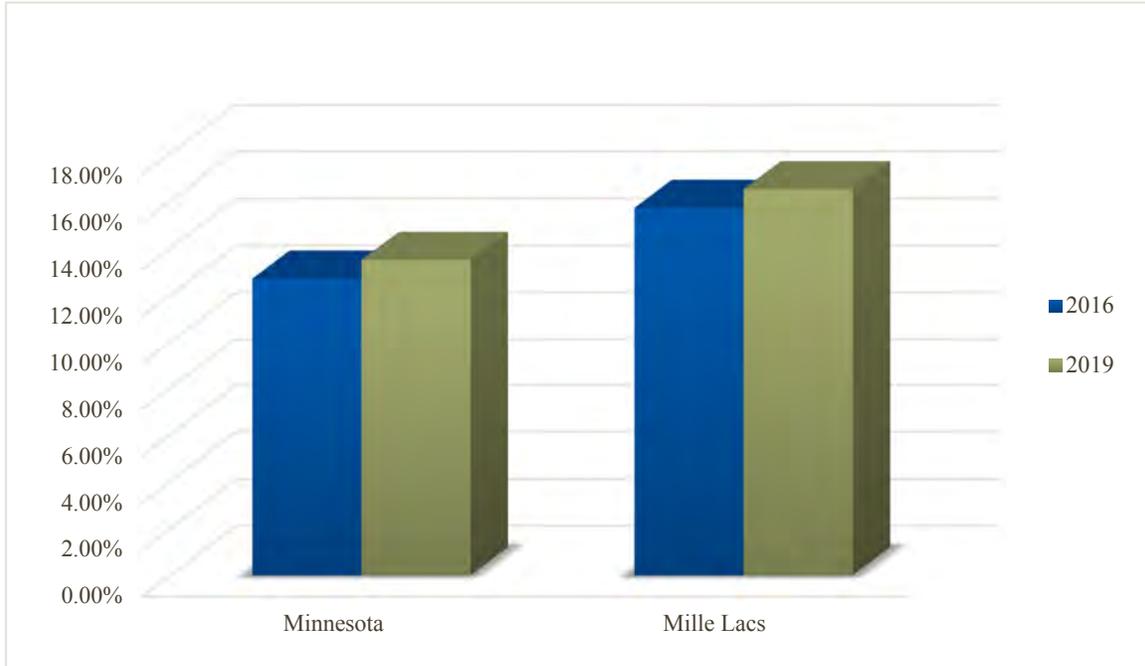
	MN 2015	MN 2018	MN Change	Mille Lacs 2015	Mille Lacs 2018	Mille Lacs Change
Population	5,457,173	5,611,179	2.82%	25,884	26,139	0.99%
Age < 18	23.50%	23.20%	-1.28%	24.30%	24.10%	-0.82%
Age 65+	14.30%	15.90%	11.19%	18.00%	18.30%	1.67%
Female	50.30%	50.20%	-0.20%	50.00%	49.70%	-0.60%
Caucasian	81.40%	84.10%	3.32%	89.90%	90.40%	0.56%
African American	5.70%	6.80%	19.30%	0.50%	0.60%	20.00%
American Indian	1.30%	1.40%	7.69%	6.00%	6.40%	6.67%
Asian	4.70%	5.10%	8.51%	0.50%	0.60%	20.00%
Hispanic	5.10%	5.50%	7.84%	1.80%	2.50%	38.89%
Rural	26.70%	26.70%	0.00%	70.80%	70.80%	0.00%
Median Household Income	\$61,473	\$65,699	6.87%	\$48,434	\$53,737	10.95%
Per Capita Health Care Cost	\$7,828	\$8,871	13.32%	\$7,604	\$8,871	16.66%
Uninsured Adults	11.00%	5.00%	-54.55%	12.40%	7.00%	-43.55%
Uninsured Children	5.90%	3.00%	-49.15%	6.90%	5.00%	-27.54%
Free Lunch-Eligible Children	31.10%	38.00%	22.19%	32.50%	43.00%	32.31%

Mille Lacs County is primarily Caucasian, although we have a large Native American population living in and around the reservation of the Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe Tribe. Throughout the community health needs assessment process, we carefully considered the special health needs of the Native American population. Both Minnesota and Mille Lacs County are becoming more racially diverse.

Both Minnesota and Mille Lacs County have experienced similar trends in our aging populations. In 2016, Mille Lacs County had a larger percentage of youth and elderly individuals than Minnesota as a whole. Between 2016 and 2019, both the state and our community experienced a decrease in the percentage of youth and an increase in the percentage of elderly individuals. Although the rates of change in the elderly population were greater in the state than in Mille Lacs County, the county still has a larger elderly population than the state by 2.4%. The initial difference combined with additional growth emphasizes the continuing aging nature of our community.

Our community is largely rural, with small towns surrounding Mille Lacs Lake and spread out south of the lake.

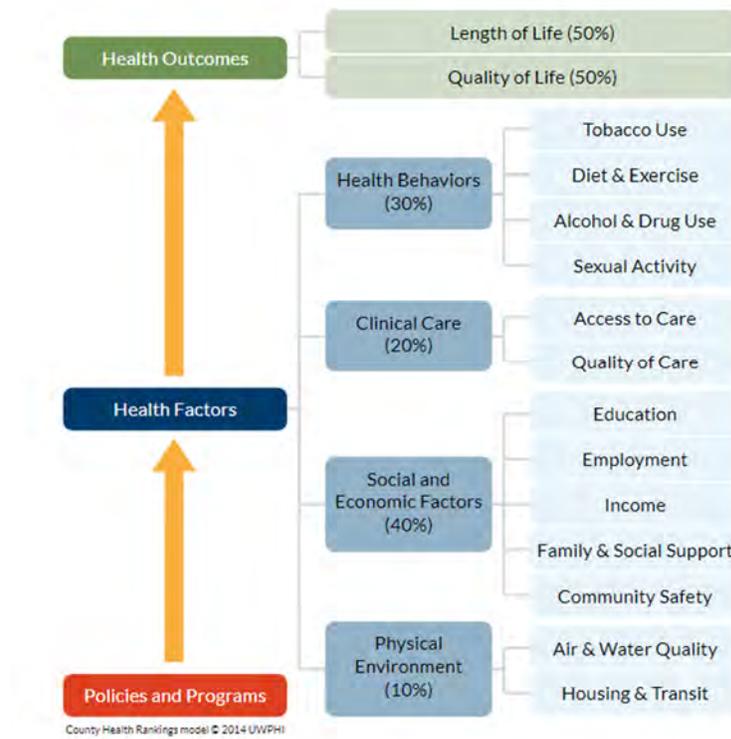
Per Capita Healthcare Cost as a Percentage of Median Household Income



Several factors indicate the low-income nature of our community. First, our median household income is much lower than the state average. We believe this is primarily due to our high proportion of retired elderly individuals, the Native American population, and our rural setting. Additional indicators of our struggling economy and low-income community are our above-average rates of uninsured adults, uninsured children, and children who are eligible for free lunch. In both 2016 and 2019, Mille Lacs County had a median household income well below the state average, although the growth in median household income was higher in Mille Lacs County than in the state; a positive sign for our community.

In dollars, Mille Lacs County's per capita healthcare cost was slightly lower than the state average in 2016 and equal to the state average in 2019. However, per capita healthcare costs as a percentage of annual per capita income are higher in Mille Lacs County (16.5%) than in Minnesota (13.5%). Unfortunately for individuals throughout Minnesota and in our community, per capita healthcare costs rose more than median household income in recent years. This means that healthcare was relatively more expensive in both Mille Lacs County and in Minnesota in 2019 than in 2016.

The Population Health Institute ("PHI") publishes annual health data for every county in the United States. The data is aggregated into *health outcomes* and *health factors*. The PHI separates health outcomes into mortality (length of life) and morbidity (quality of life). Health factors are separated into four factors that largely influence the health outcomes: physical environment, society and economics, clinical care, and health behaviors.

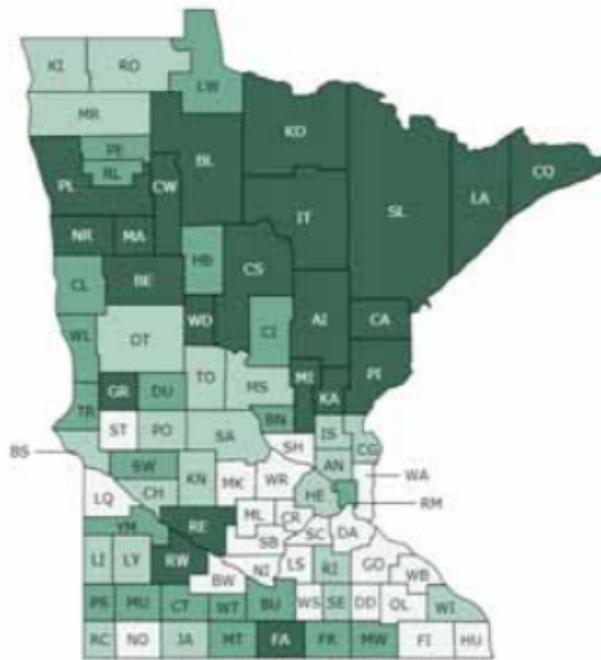


Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

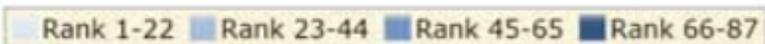
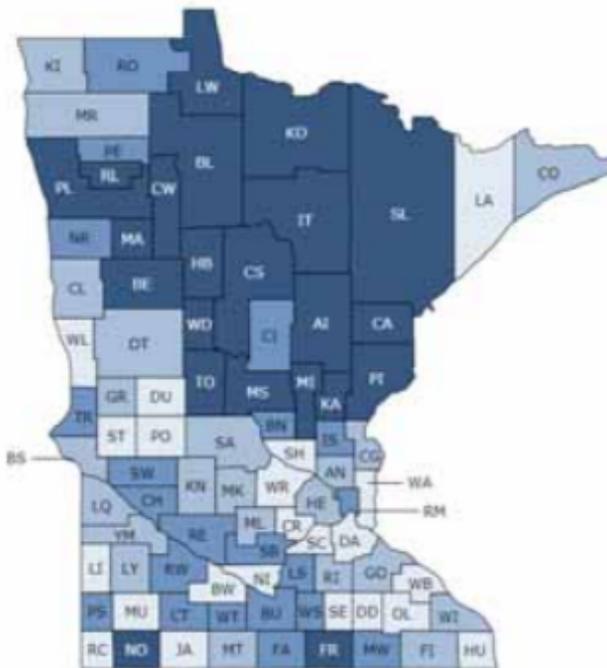
2019 County Health Rankings for the 87 Ranked Counties in Minnesota

County	Health Outcomes	Health Factors
Aitkin	82	76
Anoka	23	31
Becker	68	73
Beltrami	83	86
Benton	52	56
Big Stone	27	44
Blue Earth	62	50
Brown	12	9
Carlton	73	67
Carver	1	1
Cass	86	83
Chippewa	31	60
Chisago	36	37
Clay	58	32
Clearwater	81	84
Cook	77	28
Cottonwood	59	61
Crow Wing	47	58
Dakota	21	7
Dodge	7	14
Douglas	55	10
Faribault	70	57
Fillmore	17	24
Freeborn	61	68
Goodhue	19	33
Grant	80	23
Hennepin	41	27
Houston	18	19
Hubbard	56	75
Isanti	43	51
Itasca	69	77
Jackson	40	15
Kanabec	75	81
Kandiyohi	34	36
Kittson	29	42
Koochiching	72	80
Lac qui Parle	8	25
Lake	67	16
Lake of the Woods	49	66
Le Sueur	20	49
Lincoln	24	17
Lyon	38	30
Mahnomen	87	87
Marshall	42	41
Martin	45	35
McLeod	13	29
Meeker	22	40
Mille Lacs	78	82
Morrison	32	69
Mower	53	62
Murray	51	22
Nicollet	3	6
Nobles	14	74
Norman	84	65
Olmsted	11	3
Otter Tail	37	38
Pennington	54	52
Pine	79	85
Pipestone	50	45
Polk	71	72
Pope	33	20
Ramsey	64	54
Red Lake	48	70
Redwood	74	59
Renville	66	53
Rice	25	39
Rock	30	8
Roseau	26	48
Scott	4	4
Sherburne	9	12
Sibley	15	47
St. Louis	76	71
Stearns	39	26
Steele	28	21
Stevens	10	5
Swift	60	63
Todd	35	78
Traverse	46	46
Wabasha	6	18
Wadena	85	79
Waseca	16	55
Washington	2	2
Watonwan	65	64
Wilkin	57	11
Winona	44	34
Wright	5	13
Yellow Medicine	63	43

Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

In 2013, Mille Lacs County’s health factors ranked 81st out of Minnesota’s 87 counties and the County’s health outcomes ranked 85th. In 2016, Mille Lacs County’s health factor ranking worsened to 82nd although its health outcomes improved to 77th. By 2019, Mille Lacs County’s health factor ranking held constant at 82nd and health outcomes slipped by one spot to 78th. Because today’s health factors lead to tomorrow’s health outcomes, these rankings indicate that Mille Lacs County’s individuals are currently experiencing a relatively longer length of life and relatively better quality of life because of positive health choices and conditions in the past. However, the trend of relatively poor health factors indicates that individuals should experience relatively shorter lives with lower quality of living in the future because of worse choices and conditions today.

Mille Lacs County Health Rankings out of 87 Minnesota Counties

	2013	2016	2019
Health Behaviors	50	84	82
Clinical Care	75	70	74
Social & Economic Factors	80	76	79
Physical Environment	10	61	60
Overall Health Factors	81	82	82
Length of Life	85	76	77
Quality of Life	54	72	77
Overall Health Outcomes	85	77	78

Review of Previous Community Health Needs Assessments

Mille Lacs Health System conducted a community health needs assessment in 2013 and 2016 and published the related reports in September 2013 and 2016. In those assessments, the following needs were identified:

2013	2016
Access to care	Behavioral health
Obesity	Chronic diseases
Chronic diseases	Obesity

The final regulations related to Section 501(r), which became effective in December 2014, limited the scope of community health needs assessments to “significant” community health needs. Based on the new information, MLHS determined that access to health care, obesity, and chronic diseases were the significant health needs identified in the 2013 community health needs assessment. Therefore, only these significant community health needs from the 2013 community health needs assessment will be discussed and addressed going forward.

In September 2016, MLHS published its second CHNA Report. In conducting that assessment, MLHS collected information about community health needs through interviews and community forums in May 2016. The 2016 CHNA Report identifies the organizations that participated. Fifty-eight community members participated in community forums in five communities. These findings were supplemented with quantitative data obtained from various public sources.

Based on the 2016 community health needs assessments, we implemented the Chronic Opioid Analgesic Therapy Program, which is designed to help people with a history of chronic opioid use, reduce or eliminate their dependence on those medications for non-cancer related pain. We partnered with Behavioral Health Providers (BHP), a subsidiary of Fairview Health Services, to provide telemedicine services for MLHS emergency room patients with mental health needs. BHP assisted MLHS with assessment of patients and treatment plan development. MLHS also partnered with Northern Pines Mental Health Center to provide social service visits at our Onamia clinic. Additionally, we worked to hire more psychiatrists and psychologists onto our medical staff.

A copy of the 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment is available on MLHS's website at http://www.mlhealth.org/sites/default/files/MLHS_CHNA_Report.pdf.

Community Health Needs Assessment Methodology

Mille Lacs Health System's executives led the planning, conduct, and reporting of the community health needs assessment. We contracted with CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, a professional services firm, to assist with the community health needs assessment process.

Interviews

We gathered qualitative information and perspectives on community health needs through one-on-one and small group interviews with key community stakeholders. These interviews were conducted in July 2019. The primary goal of these interviews was to ascertain a range of perspectives on the community's health needs. We gathered information from the following specified groups within our community:

- People with special knowledge or expertise in public health
- Government health departments and other government agencies
- Leaders, representatives or members of medically underserved populations
- Leaders, representatives or members of low-income populations
- Leaders, representatives or members of minority populations.

The following agencies, organizations and businesses participated in the community health needs assessment process by contributing their perspectives, opinions and observations. We thank them for their past and continued assistance.

- Mille Lacs County Department of Community & Veteran Services
- Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe Tribe
- Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Department
- City of Onamia
- City of Isle
- Mille Lacs Health System
- Holy Cross Catholic Church
- Freedom Center

We believe each of these organizations is a qualified representative of the identified groups because the nature of their work brings them into contact with those groups on a regular basis. For many of the organizations listed, the nature of their mission and purpose *requires* them to consider the special needs of the groups identified.

Quantitative Data

The community health needs assessment included consideration and analysis of the following publicly available data:

- Data USA
 - <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/mille-lacs-county-mn/#about>
- Foundation for a Drug-Free World
 - <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/crystalmeth/the-deadly-effects-of-meth.htm>
- Health Resources and Services Administration Shortage Designation
 - <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>
- Merritt Hawkins, an AMN Healthcare Company
 - https://www.merrithawkins.com/uploadedFiles/Merritt_Hawkins_2018_incentive_review.pdf
 - https://www.merrithawkins.com/uploadedFiles/MerrittHawkins/Content/News_and_Insights/Thought_Leadership/mhwhitepaperpsychiatry2018.pdf
- Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe Tribe's Programs and Services
 - <https://millelacsband.com/about/our-communities>
 - <https://millelacsband.com/services/behavioral-health-services>
 - <https://millelacsband.com/services/community-support-services>
- Mille Lacs Community Health Board's Community Health Improvement Plan 2015-2020
 - <http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/193/2015-to-2020-Community-Health-Improvement-Plan-PDF>
- Mille Lacs Community Health Board's Community Health Annual Revised CHIP report
 - <http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/1209/Community-Health>
- Mille Lacs County Department of Community & Veterans Services' Region 7E Mental Health Needs Assessment
 - <http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/173/Region-7E-Mille-Lacs-County-Assessment-Report-Summary-PDF>
- Mille Lacs Tourism Council
 - <https://millelacs.com/>
- Mille Lacs Messenger
 - https://www.messagemedia.co/millelacs/news/local/local-solutions-to-opioid-epidemic/article_4510e44a-9a4c-11e8-bef5-4f873dfd59ed.html
 - https://www.messagemedia.co/millelacs/news/local/changing-the-stigma-of-substance-abuse-disorder/article_d0b62546-b5cc-11e8-b275-47da34486826.html
 - https://www.messagemedia.co/millelacs/news/business/dollar-general-opens-in-onamia/article_4ad39712-83bb-11e8-8514-0f7cca9c13a8.html
- Minnesota Department of Human Services' Substance Abuse in Minnesota
 - <http://www.sumn.org/data/location/show.aspx?loc=48>

- Minnesota Department of Human Services’ Mille Lacs County 2017 Fact Sheet
 - http://sumn.org/~media/513/MILLE_LACS_COUNTY_2017_SUMN_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- NIH National Institute on Drug Abuse
 - <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/opioid-facts-teens/opioids-heroin>
- Population Health Institute’s county health rankings
 - https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/minnesota/2019/compare/snapshot?counties=27_095
- Rural Health Info
 - <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/minnesota>
- U.S. Census Bureau
 - <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/millelacscountymn,us/pst045218>

Information Gaps

Mille Lacs Health System did not receive input directly from all members of the low-income, minority and medically underserved populations in our community, instead obtaining input from individuals and organizations that work with those individuals on a daily basis. Although we are unable to identify any specific information gaps, we recognize that members of those populations may have provided different information if they directly participated. Additionally, we recognize that other individuals who weren’t invited to participate may have provided different input.

Request for Feedback

Mille Lacs Health System was willing to consider written comments related to its 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment Report and Implementation Strategy, but received no such input. If any reader would like to provide input on this community health needs assessment, they can submit their comment(s), in writing, to the following address:

Attention: Chief Executive Officer
 RE: Community Health Needs Assessment
 Mille Lacs Health System
 200 North Elm Street, P.O. Box A
 Onamia, MN 56359

Determination of Significance

While many needs were identified during the community health needs assessment process, this report focuses on those needs that were deemed *significant* by Mille Lacs Health System. A health need’s significance was evaluated based on many factors. The factor given the most weight was the relative importance placed on the health need by the community participants as a whole. Other factors included potential preventative impact, the likely quantity of change, and impact on quality of life. The decision was made by Mille Lacs Health System’s executives.

Prioritization of Significant Community Health Needs

The significant community health needs were then prioritized by Mille Lacs Health System based on various factors including potential preventative impact, the likely quantity of change, impact

on quality of life, proximity with other health needs, our mission, cost, and community satisfaction. The decision was also made by Mille Lacs Health System's executives.

Prioritized Significant Community Health Needs

Through the community health needs assessment, Mille Lacs Health System identified the following significant community health needs and prioritized them in the given order:

1. Transportation and Access
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health

The following is a discussion of these significant community health needs.

Transportation and Access

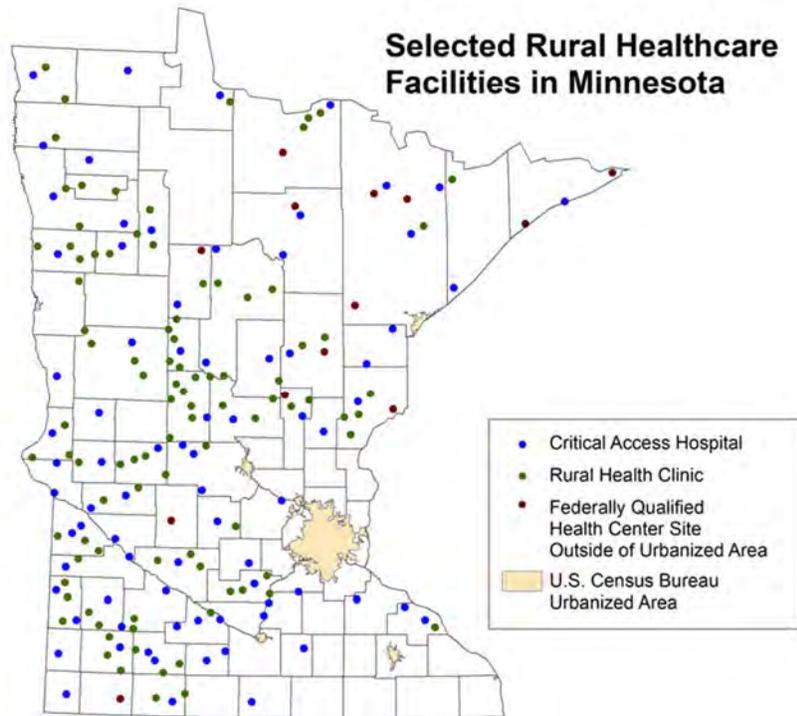
Throughout the interview process, transportation and access were frequently identified as two of the most significant health needs in our community. Every interview participant identified transportation and some form of access as a significant concern.

A lack of transportation in Onamia and other surrounding rural areas limits access to healthcare, the ability to be employed, and access to healthy foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat. There is currently no grocery store located in the area. With no regular public transportation system available, this creates challenges for much of the local population to access basic needs. Local residents are able to purchase processed food, boxed items, canned goods, bread, milk, and eggs at the Dollar General in Onamia, which opened at the end of July 2018, but the nearest grocery store is 12-13 miles away.

The local area does not support Lyft, Uber, taxi services, or regular bus services. There is a bus that runs once a week for local residents providing transportation to and from the nearest Wal-Mart, but outside of this one service, there are few options for non-emergent transportation. Community participants stated that volunteer programs have been created to help with transportation issues in the area, but it is hard to find volunteers to provide these rides, and many residents use ambulance services for non-emergent medical issues just to gain transport to the hospital for treatment.

Per Data USA, Mille Lacs County's poverty rate is 11.5%, compared to 10.5% for the state of Minnesota. The elderly also make up 18.3% of Mille Lacs County's population, compared to 15.9% for the state of Minnesota. Given the larger population of low income and elderly residents in the area, who are less likely to own or have access to a car, participants worry that this may contribute to our community's struggles with overall health and wellness, possibly causing an increase in chronic health conditions now and in the future.

According to data.HRSA.gov, as of April 2019, Minnesota had 78 critical access hospitals, 96 rural health clinics, 13 federally qualified health sites and 35 short term hospitals located outside of urbanized areas.



Source(s): data.HRSA.gov,
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services, April 2019

In general, healthcare options in Mille Lacs County are and always have been limited. Mille Lacs Health System has done much to improve the availability and quality of care, but faces challenges to attract physicians and clinical care providers to the local area. Community participants noted that MLHS does a great job partnering with those who live outside their service area to bring varying specialty services to our patients on a regular basis, but pointed out that if emergent services are needed, residents had to be sent elsewhere for care. Many participants also lamented the fact that labor and delivery services are no longer provided in our community. Additionally, community participants mentioned access to mental health and substance abuse programs being a challenge, even though MLHS and other organizations have worked to increase staffing to meet these needs.

Mille Lacs County’s shortage of mental health professionals is not a problem specific to our community or even to Minnesota. It is a nationwide problem, and one that does not have an easy fix. Merritt Hawkins, a physician-recruitment firm based in Texas, released their *2018 Review of Physician and Advanced Practitioner Recruiting Incentives* and a white paper, *The Silent Shortage*, which provide insight into the growing issue of mental health care in the US. Below is an excerpt listing drivers of the shortage:

“The shortage of psychiatrists in the United States is driven in part by a growing need for psychiatric services. Consider:

- One in every five adults in America experiences some form of a mental illness.
- Nearly one in 20 adults in America (13.6 million) live with a serious mental illness.

- 60% of adults with a mental illness received no mental health services in the prior year.
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youths age 10-24, and the 10th leading cause of death for adults in the U.S.
- The average delay between onset of mental health symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years.
- Over \$193 billion dollars in lost earnings a year result from serious mental illness.
- 24% of state prisoners have “a recent history of a mental health condition.”

According to these reports, the average per capita number of psychiatrists in the U.S. is 9.35 per 100,000 people, while Minnesota had 8.18 per 100,000 people. Psychiatry is also the second most requested physician placement search for the third consecutive year. 59% of the nation’s 30,451 psychiatrists are at least 55 year old, and many will retire in the near future. In reviewing data related to resident census in psychiatry, we will continue to see demand increase as supply dwindles because individuals are joining the profession at a slower rate than attrition due to retirement. To further complicate the issue, Merritt Hawkins reported that psychiatrists prefer to work in outpatient settings and it’s becoming increasingly difficult to recruit them for hospital positions.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Additional significant community health needs identified by community participants were substance abuse and mental health.

Substance abuse covers a broad range of health issues, including tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs and illicit drugs. Participants—including law enforcement officials, social service workers, and medical professionals—indicated that the most prevalent substances abused in our service area were:

- Methamphetamines (“meth”)
- Opioids, including Heroin
- Alcohol

Community participants indicated that the greatest substance abuse occurs in the younger population—those in their 40s and younger, although substance abuse occurs across all ages and demographics. While heroin and meth use are still less common than alcohol, the consequences of their use is considered far more serious.

Meth creates a false sense of well-being and energy, causing a person to push their body faster and further than it is meant to go. Because continued use of the drug decreases natural feelings of hunger, users can experience extreme weight loss. Short-term effects can also include increased heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature, disturbed sleep patterns, nausea, irritability, violent behavior, panic, psychosis, hallucinations, convulsions and seizures. In the long-term, meth use can result in increased heart rate and blood pressure, damaged blood vessels in the brain, strokes, an irregular heartbeat, cardiovascular collapse, and damage to the liver, kidney and lungs.

Heroin binds to opioid receptors in the brain and body, creating a rush of dopamine and a feeling of extreme happiness. Short term effects of heroin use include dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, severe itching, and clouded thinking. Long term effects include insomnia, depression, addiction, collapsed veins in people who inject heroin, and damage to various organs, including the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. It also poses special problems related to the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other diseases that can occur when needles are shared. The resurgence of opiate-related problems in the United States coincides with worsening trends in emergency room visits, crime, homicides, high school drop-outs, and loss of employment. These trends were generally echoed by our community participants and by the following article excerpts from the Mille Lacs Messenger, one of which also adds that the availability of Narcan may be skewing Opioid use overdose data and opioid users from seeking treatment:

“Mille Lacs Health System is seeing increased heroin use, OD deaths and opioid addiction rates. Approximately 70 patients were seen in the ER for overdose in 2017, almost three times the number in 2015 which was 25.” - *Local solutions to opioid epidemic*, August 2018

“Alcohol is still the number one problem in the nation in spite of the media hype with heroin,” Naumann (a worker at Freedom Center) said. “And in rural Minnesota, meth is the number one drug of abuse. It is all a matter of what is in the area. If heroin users don’t have access to heroin they will go back to meth. It is the perception that everyone is abusing opiates, but if they are, they are not making it to treatment. Narcan is saving lives, but it is allowing people to overdose multiple times and it is used as a crutch. I think we have unleashed something that is going to backfire, with Narcan.” – *Changing the stigma of substance abuse disorder*, September 2018

Community members expressed concern that the substance abuse treatment facilities and addiction recovery services in our community may not be sufficient to meet the needs of our community members. This concern was expressed in our 2013 and 2016 community health needs assessments and continues to be a concern today. On a positive note, The Freedom Center in Onamia opened in August 2018, providing outpatient substance abuse treatment for men and women ages 13 and up, anger management and domestic violence counseling, and gambling treatment classes. This still leaves a gap in access to detox facilities and inpatient treatment centers. Participants noted it is still hard to access these services, as facilities with programs fill up fast and lack availability, causing wait times for those in need. Community participants also indicated that local substance abuse problems are linked to mental health issues, as they feel many in the area are using substances to self-medicate.

Mental health problems arise at almost every age in a variety of ways, including depression, anxiety, grief, psychosis, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, as well as dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease among elderly individuals. Based on publicly available data, our community members tend to suffer from mental health at the same rate as Minnesota as a whole. The rate of adults suffering from frequent mental distress in Minnesota and in Mille Lacs County is 10%, meaning that one in ten adults in our community acknowledge feeling frequent mental distress.

While cognitive decline among elderly individuals is a major concern across the country, our community is fortunate to have some effective resources including the geriatric psychiatric unit at Mille Lacs Health System. However, community participants expressed a desire for even more access, in the form of additional beds and health care providers, especially for low-income individuals. Community participants were also concerned about the severely limited resources available to children. Effective care for children is impacted by multiple factors. First, the more affordable facilities in every community tend to operate at or near maximum capacity. Although there may be available space at some facilities, they tend to be more costly locations that low-income individuals cannot access. The limited access to facilities means that many children have to wait days, weeks or months to obtain the care they need. Second, our nation tends to view mental health problems more harshly than other health problems, and fear of judgment can drive a person to try to hide or ignore their problem. This fear of public judgment can be even more severe when it's a parent evaluating the health of their child. Finally, related to the last issue, it can be extremely difficult for a parent to admit that their child may have a mental health problem.

In a 2013 survey by the Mille Lacs County Department of Community & Veterans Services, transportation was identified as the top concern related to mental health. In our assessment, community participants echoed that this is still a very real issue. Our community has always had extremely limited mental health care services, partially because several larger communities have such services within a reasonable distance from our community's boundaries. One of the few available treatment centers, Riverwood, was closed several years ago, further limiting access. As a note, Lighthouse Child & Family Services remains open, but availability of spots in their programs are challenging to come by due to high demand in the surrounding area.

Effective care for mental health issues tends to require multiple appointments over an extended period of time, which means the distance to those appointments can be a significant barrier for individuals with limited finances and/or time. This tends to be of most concern for low-income and rural individuals, the elderly and youth. For low-income individuals who have vehicles, the cost of gasoline and wear-and-tear on a vehicle can be a concern. Other low-income individuals may not have a vehicle. As discussed previously, our community doesn't have a public transportation system and other transportation methods are either extremely limited or expensive. Finally, some individuals, especially lower-income individuals, may not be able to repeatedly take time off of work to attend the mental health appointments, primarily because the individual is concerned that they could be fired or replaced if absent too often from work. Young and elderly community members tend to struggle more in obtaining effective care because they naturally rely on others for transportation to the care.

Health Care for Native Americans

Our community includes the reservation of the Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe Tribe of Native Americans. We recognize that Native Americans in general, and those who live within our community, face special circumstances across all aspects of their lives, including health. The special health concerns include:

- Above-average rates of most diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and strokes
- A higher percentage of substance abuse including alcohol, tobacco, heroin and meth

- A high incidence of depression and environmental stress
- A greater incidence of child neglect
- High incidence of obesity, coinciding with limited nutrition and physical activity

Some of the problems described above may be attributed to genetic differences between Native Americans and other races. Other causes include what one Native American participant described as “historical trauma and intergenerational grief” related to the treatment of their people over hundreds of years. The high incidence of low-income individuals in the Tribe also increases their health needs.

Our Native American community members recognize their health needs and attempt to be self-sufficient in this area. From its website:

“The Mille Lacs Band’s Department of Health and Human Services operates three clinic locations across the reservation to make high-quality health care available to Band members. The Band also offers public health services, behavioral health services, family services such as child welfare and foster care services, and community support services to assist Elders and Band members in need. The Band also provides assisted living facilities to Elders in all three districts, as well as Circle of Health, an insurance program set up to help Band members with healthcare costs

“The Mille Lacs Band’s Behavioral Health Department, a division of Health and Human Services, assists Band members suffering from addiction and mental illness. We provide a full range of services, including Rule 25 assessments, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Wellbriety groups, relapse prevention and aftercare, a halfway house, outpatient treatment, and an adolescent chemical health group. The Behavioral Health Department also Operates Four Winds Lodge inpatient treatment center in Brainerd.

“Community Support Services includes the Elder Services Program, Family Violence Prevention Program, Elder Abuse Program, Women’s Shelter, Sexual Assault Program, Community Advocates, Food Distribution, Food Shelf, Emergency Loan Program, and Wraparound.”

While we continue to work with our Native American partners in treating their health needs, we also recognize and applaud their efforts to treat their own needs.

Conclusion

Mille Lacs Health System conducted this community health needs assessment to better understand our community and the individuals we serve. The hospital will develop a strategy to respond to the significant community health needs and will create an Implementation Strategy to formalize those responses. That Implementation Strategy will be approved by Mille Lacs Health System’s Board of Directors no later than February 15, 2020, and will be used by the organization as a guide for thoughtful, impactful decisions and actions in the coming years.

The following pages include a list of resources currently available in our community to address the significant community health needs discussed in this report. Despite our efforts, we recognize that this list may not be all-inclusive and welcome any information to add available resources and increase its usefulness. Such information can be sent to the address provided on page 10 of this report.

Health Resources

The Mille Lacs County Department of Community & Veterans Services provides support to our community members in numerous ways, including community health, adult developmental disabilities, child and adult mental health, child and adult protection, chemical dependency, child support, child welfare, elderly services, financial assistance, foster care, special needs, and veterans services. For a complete list of their activities, we recommend contacting them.

- 525 2nd Street SE, Milaca
- (320) 983-8208
- <http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/1177/Community-Veterans-Services>

Members of the Mille Lacs Band of the Ojibwe Tribe can also contact the Band's Department of Health and Human Services, which provides support to our Native American community members in various ways, including dental care, health care, behavioral health, community support, public health, and family services. For a complete list of their activities, we recommend contacting them at the Ne-Ia-Shing Clinic.

- 43500 Migizi Drive, Onamia
- (320) 532-4163
- <https://millelacsband.com/government/department-of-health-human-services>

In addition to governmental support, the following health care facilities and related organizations are currently available within our community.

Hospitals

The Mille Lacs Health System, located at 200 North Elm Street in Onamia, is the only hospital in our community. However, community members may also choose to use the following hospitals that are relatively close to our community:

- Fairview Northland Medical Center – 911 Northland Boulevard, Princeton
- St. Cloud Hospital – 1406 6th Avenue N, St. Cloud
- Essentia Health St. Joseph's Medical Center – 523 N 3rd Street, Brainerd
- Riverwood Healthcare Center – 200 Bunker Hill Drive, Aitkin

Clinics and Specialty Practices

- Mille Lacs Family Clinic – 200 N Elm Street, Onamia
- Mille Lacs Family Clinic – 375 W Isle Street, Isle
- Mille Lacs Family Clinic – 27378 State Highway 18, Garrison
- Mille Lacs Family Clinic – 26362 370th Avenue, Hillman
- MLHS Chiropractic and Physical Therapy of Milaca – 1000 5th Street SE, Milaca
- Riverwood Healthcare Center – 27278 State Highway 18, Garrison
- Fairview Northland Clinic – 150 10th Street NW, Milaca

- Natural Elements Health Center – 14094 9th Avenue SE, Milaca
- Pierz Community Medical Center – 200 1st Avenue SE, Pierz
- Essentia Health Pierz Clinic – 221 Main Street N, Pierz

Behavioral Health Facilities

- Mille Lacs Health System – 200 North Elm Street, Onamia
- Freedom Center – 102 Croiser Dr., Onamia
- Lighthouse Child and Family Services, LLC – 160 3rd Avenue NW, Milaca

The Mille Lacs County Department of Community & Veterans Services maintains a list of behavioral health resources, although most of the facilities are outside of our community. That list is available online by clicking the “Mental Health Resource Flyer” link at the bottom of the Department’s adult mental health website, <http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/1195/Adult-Mental-Health>.