

**2008
LAKES REGION
COMMUNITY NEEDS
ASSESSMENT
REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

The Lakes Region Partnership for Public Health and other health and human service groups in the Lakes Region have been working together for over one year to collect information about our community. This information is essential to organizations, community groups, municipalities and the general public to better understand the needs in our communities and to identify ways we can work together to meet some of these needs.

The members of the Community Needs Assessment Group (listed below) will be presenting this report throughout our community. We hope to do this through community presentations, media, distribution of a community report card and distribution of this report to key stakeholder groups such as police, housing and government officials. We will continue to meet throughout the year to assess our communities' progress in meeting the identified needs.

As citizens, all of us can participate in activities that benefit and strengthen our community. Agencies may use the information in this report to seek funds to meet a need and businesses may assist with fundraising and awareness. Community members may join with others to form committees to help others with significant needs, or as individuals we may choose to help neighbors by volunteering time and/or expertise to help meet a community need.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this assessment as well as to those who will work toward its improvement.

Belknap County Citizens Council on Children & Families
Community Action Program Belknap-Merrimack Counties, Inc.
Community Health & Hospice, Inc.
Genesis Behavioral Health
Lakes Region Community Services
LRGHealthcare
Lakes Region Partnership for Public Health, Inc.
Lakes Region United Way
Taylor Community

METHODS

The partnering organizations used three methods to collect information for this report. We developed and administered a Community Needs Assessment Survey, conducted focus groups with key community groups, and gathered regional statistics from secondary data sources.

Community Needs Assessment Survey

The Community Needs Assessment Survey (Survey) was developed collaboratively by all partners to assess perceptions specific to the Lakes Region. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 3600 residents, were distributed to town halls and libraries, and were available on all of the partners' web-sites via Survey Monkey in June 2008. Surveys were mailed to every fourth resident from a list of 14,400 residents. 794 paper surveys were returned and 189 were completed on Survey Monkey, for a total sample of 993.

The majority of survey respondents, 52.3%, were residents of Laconia and 16.5% were residents of Belmont. The remaining 32.2% of survey respondents represented the remaining towns (See Table 1).

Table 1. Geographic Representation of Community Need Assessment Survey Respondents	
Laconia	52.3%
Belmont	16.5%
Gilford	6.1%
Gilmanton	5.9%
Moultonborough	4.5%
Meredith	3.5%
Sandwich	2.8%
Center Harbor	2.4%
Tilton	2.3%
Alton	1.3%
New Hampton	1.0%
Sanbornton	1.0%
Barnstead	0.5%

The majority (52.3%) of the respondents have lived in the region for more than 15 years. Most of the respondents were 21 years old or older and the greatest response was from the 36-64 year old age range with 58% of individuals in this age bracket. 84.9% of respondents were female, 47% of respondents live in a two-person household, 49.2% with a partners/spouse, and there was equal representation among respondents' from various household income levels.

The Community Needs Assessment Survey allows us to better understand community beliefs, and perceptions of health, safety, and community services in the Lakes Region Community.

It is important to consider the demographic makeup of those that responded to our survey when interpreting the results. Since the respondents represent a small portion of our overall demographic, these results cannot be generalized as a reflection of the perceptions of the entire target population.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted by the participating partners during Fall 2008 using a standardized set of questions. Focus groups were conducted with the Friendship Club – representing the senior community, Corner Bridge/Genesis Behavioral Health–representing the mental health care community, and the Spiritual Care Committee – representing the faith community. We looked for common patterns within the three focus groups and major themes amongst the three focus groups for use in this report.

Secondary Data

Public health and community statistics were gathered from several secondary data sources to help us better understand the potential health, safety, and community issues affecting our region. The secondary data sources include:

- **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS):** The BRFSS was established in 1984 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a state-based system of health surveys that collects information on health risk behaviors, preventive health practices, and health care access primarily related to chronic disease and injury for adults. For many states, the BRFSS is the only available source of timely, accurate data on health-related behaviors. Currently, data are collected monthly in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. More than 350,000 adults are interviewed each year, making the BRFSS the largest telephone health survey in the world. States use BRFSS data to identify emerging health problems, establish and track health objectives, and develop and evaluate public health policies and programs. Many states also use BRFSS data to support health-related legislative efforts.
- **Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS):** The YRBSS monitors priority health-risk behaviors and the prevalence of obesity and asthma among youth and young adults. The YRBSS includes a national school-based survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state, territorial, tribal, and local surveys conducted by state, territorial, and local education and health agencies and tribal governments.

- **New Hampshire State Cancer Registry (NHSCR):** The NHSCR is a state-supported service that maintains a data base documenting cancer incidences in NH; the NHSCR makes these data available on a timely basis as a resource for studies of the causes of cancer. NHSCR also makes information available to guide planning and evaluation programs leading to cancer prevention and control.
- **CDC Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (PedNSS):** The PedNSS and the Pregnancy Surveillance System (PNSS) are program-based surveillance systems that monitor the nutritional status of low-income infants, children, and women in federally funded maternal and child health programs. PedNSS data represent more than 7 million children from birth to age 5. PNSS data represent approximately 750,000 pregnant and postpartum women. These surveillance systems provide data that describe prevalence and trends of nutrition, health, and behavioral indicators for mothers and children.
- **Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families (BCCCCF):** Information on youth delinquency was provided by BCCCCF based upon juvenile case closing forms, 108 out of 122 cases were successfully closed in 2007.
- **2007 Lakes Region Planning Commission Housing Needs Assessment:** Lakes Region Planning Commission assesses housing needs per state guidelines.
- **New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority:** New Hampshire Housing maintains databases on demographic and various housing data for the towns, counties, Regional Planning Commission, Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), and Labor Market Areas (LMAs) as well as statewide information for New Hampshire

RESULTS

Benefits of living in the Lakes Region Community

When asked “**What do you like best about living in our Lakes Region Community?**”
Survey respondents told us:

1. The **physical environment**.
 - The mountains and lakes are “beautiful.”
 - The mountains and lakes are “accessible.”



2. The **people and the community**.
 - “Small town” feel.
 - “The small community living where you can count on your neighbors and they can count on you.”
 - “Lots of things to do, yet still a small town feel.”
 - “Safe.”
 - “Great place to raise children.”



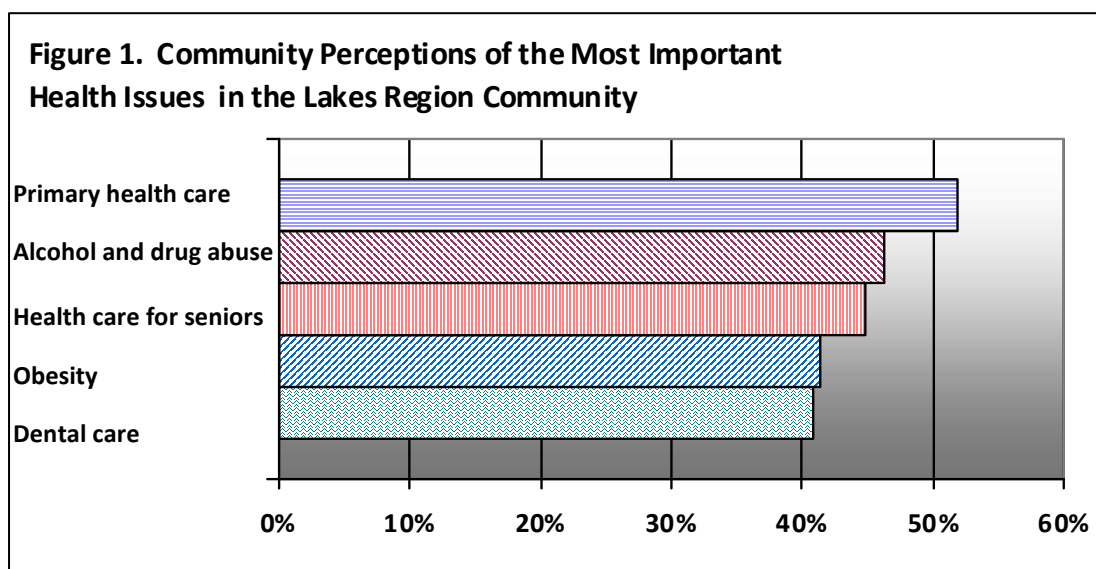
- Survey respondents also told us that **services and resources are available and convenient.**

HEALTH

We asked the Survey respondents to identify **five health issues that they think are the most important** in the Lakes Region from a comprehensive list of potential health issues.

The **five health issues identified as the most important** are:

1. **Primary health care** (51.9%)
2. **Alcohol and drug abuse** (46.3%)
3. **Health care for seniors** (44.9%)
4. **Obesity** (41.4%)
5. **Dental care** (40.9%)*



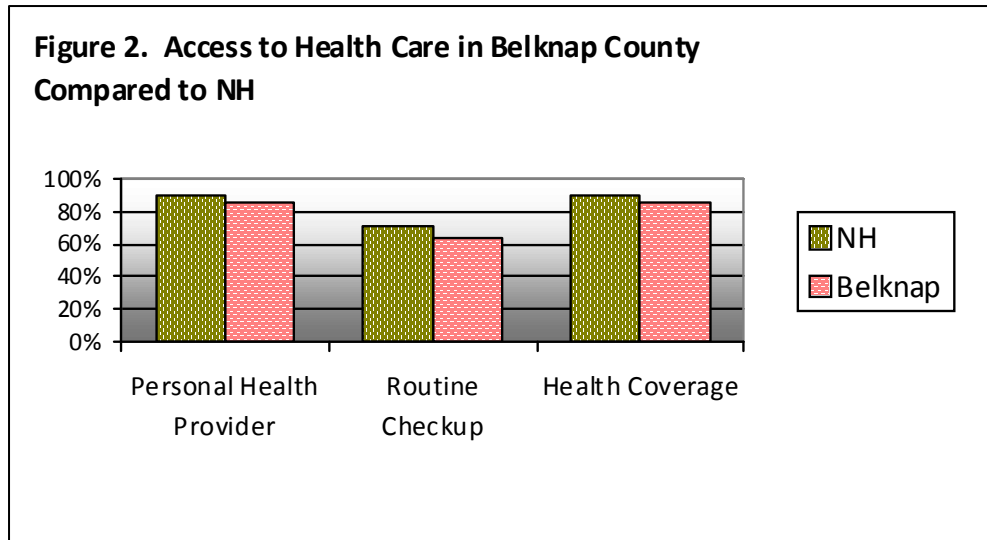
In addition, at least 20%-40% of the community respondents identified **cancer, mental health care, mental illness (depression, anxiety, etc), and nutrition** to be one of the five most important health issues in the Lakes Region (See Table 2).

Table 2. Community Perceptions of Most Important <u>Health Issues</u>	
Primary health care, Alcohol and drug abuse, Health care for seniors, Obesity, Dental Care	Over 40% of respondents
Cancer, Mental health care, Mental illness (depression, anxiety, etc)	30%-40% of respondents
Nutrition	20%-30% of respondents

* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check up to five responses.

Health Care

- Residents of Belknap County report slightly lower percentages of having access to a personal health care provider, having routine check-ups, and having health coverage than New Hampshire overall (See Figure2).



Source: 2005 BRFSS

Primary Health Care

- 15.8% of Survey respondents reported that they have had trouble receiving care from medical professionals in the past year.
- 10.1% of Survey respondents reported that they have had trouble receiving routine health care in the past year.

★ *Seniors expressed the need for information about primary care practices that are accepting new patients (Friendship Club Focus Group).*

Health Care for Seniors

- 3.1% of Survey respondents reported having trouble receiving long-term care (assisted living or nursing home care in the past year).
- 5.8 % of Survey respondents reported having trouble receiving in-home support services in the past year.
- 48.7% of Survey respondents are aware of adult day care offered in the Lakes Region.
- 34.0% of Survey respondents are aware of caregiver support services in the Lakes Region.

★ *Seniors would like to be better educated about services and supports and have the opportunity to learn how to become better self advocates (Friendship Club Focus Group).*

Dental Care

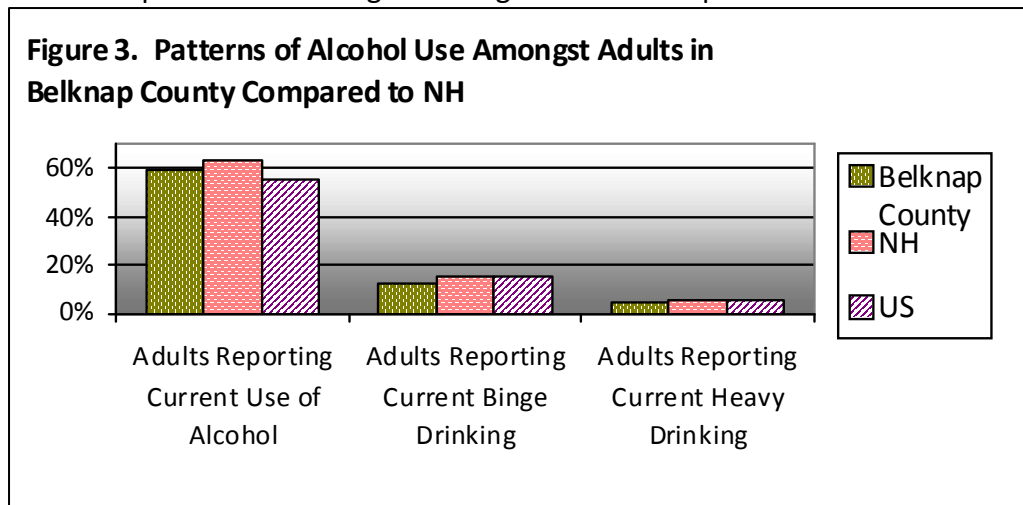
- 15.4% of Survey respondents reported having trouble receiving services from dental health professionals.

Reasons for Not Getting Services (includes health and human services)

- **The five reasons most reported by the Survey respondents for not getting services are:***
 1. The waiting time to receive the service was too long (17.1%).
 2. Could not afford the service (14.1%).
 3. Service was not accepting new clients/patients (11.8%).
 4. I was not eligible for services (11.1%).
 5. Had no health insurance (9.1%).
- ★ *For enhanced quality of care there is a need for medical and health care professionals to better communicate about a patients' care plan (Corner Bridge/Genesis Behavioral Health).*

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

- Belknap County residents report higher prevalence of smoking and heavy drinking and lower prevalence of binge drinking than their NH peers.**



Source: 2006 BRFFS

- 59% of the adults in Belknap County report that they drank alcohol at least once in the past 30-days, while 12.8% (up .2% from 2005) report at least one episode of binge drinking in the past 30 days.
- **26.8%** Survey respondents **are aware of drug and alcohol prevention services.**
- **37.0%** Survey respondents **are aware of drug & alcohol abuse treatment services.**
- **1.2%** Survey respondents reported **having trouble receiving drug and alcohol services** in the past year.
- **7.9%** Survey respondents reported **having trouble receiving services from mental health professionals** in the past year.
- **9.0%** Survey respondents reported **having trouble receiving social/human services** in the past year.

* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check up to five responses.

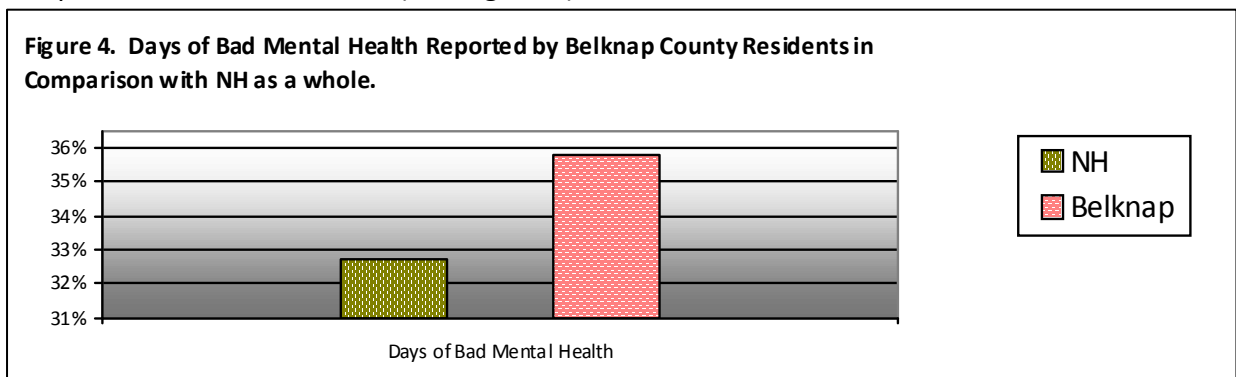
** Definition of heavy drinking: For men, heavy drinking is typically defined as consuming an average of more than 2 drinks per day. For women, heavy drinking is typically defined as consuming an average of more than 1 drink per day

The students that reside in some of our Lakes Region communities report the following ¹ :

- Higher prevalence of past 30-day use of alcohol than their peers in New Hampshire.
- Up to 79% of the students in our region's communities report having **ever tried alcohol**.
- Up to 25.7% of the student in our region's communities report having **tried alcohol for the first time before age 13**.
- Up to 41.9% have of the students in our region's communities have reported **binge drinking in the past 30 days**.

Mental Health

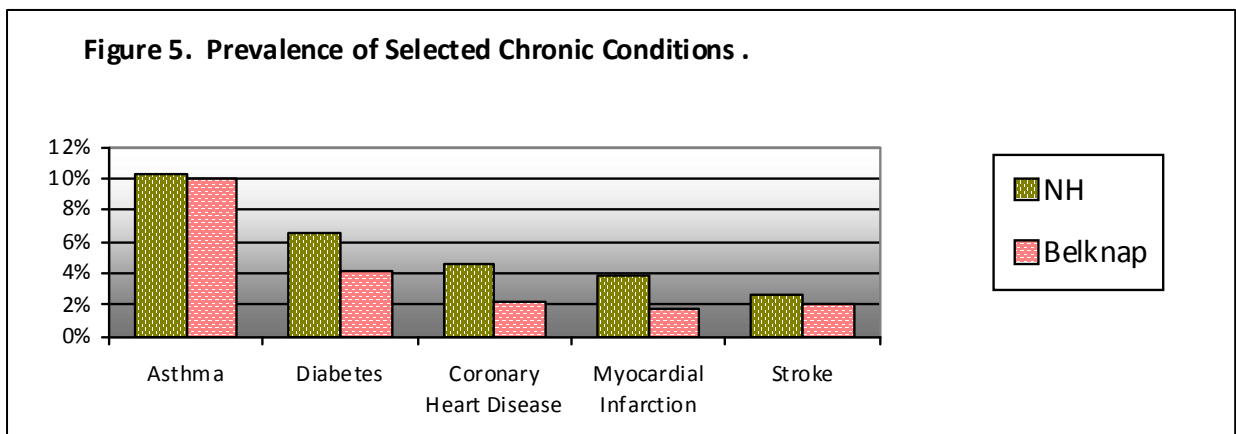
- 35.3% of Belknap County adults surveyed report experiencing bad mental health (stress, depression and problems with emotion) on one or more of the past 30 days, compared to 32.2% statewide (See Figure 4).



Source: 2005 BRFSS

Chronic Disease

- Belknap county residents consistently report lower prevalence of chronic disease than their NH peers (See Figure 5).
- Prevalence of Coronary Heart Disease and Myocardial Infarction are over twice as low in Belknap County than in NH overall (See Figure5).



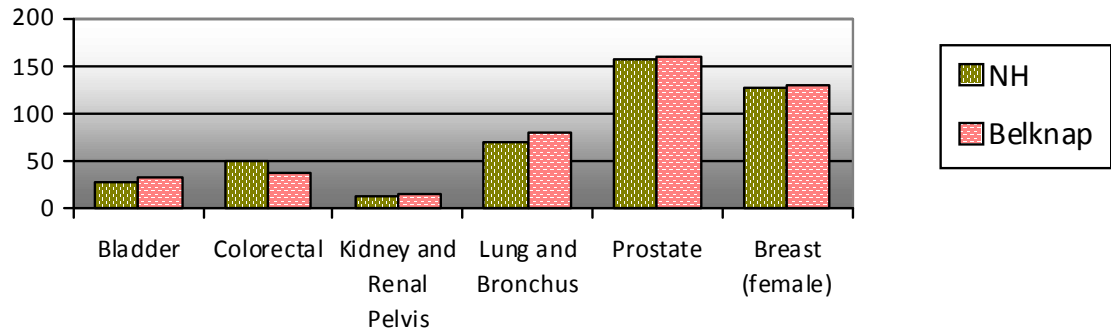
Source: 2005 BRFSS

¹ 2007 YRBS

Cancer

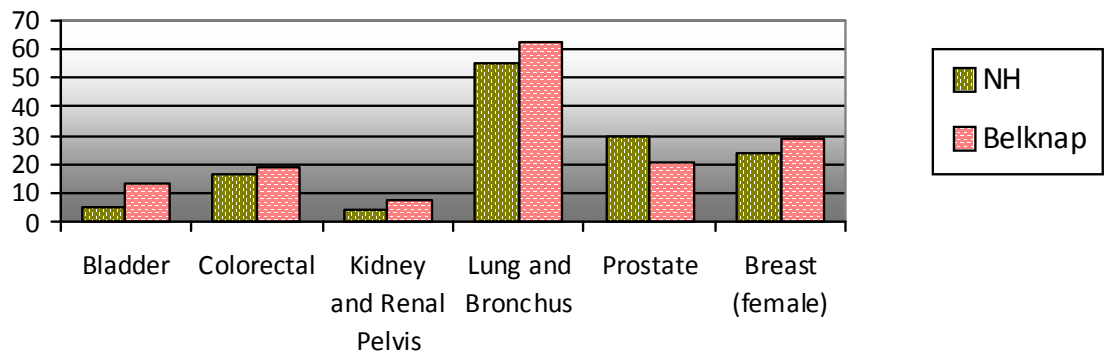
- Belknap County residents have higher rates of bladder, kidney and renal pelvis, prostate, and female breast cancer compared to NH statewide.
 - Mortality in Belknap County, due to cancer, is higher in all types of cancer except prostate cancer, in comparison to the state of NH as a whole (See Figure 7).

Figure 6. 2004 Age-Adjusted Incidence Rate/100,000.



Source: 2004 New Hampshire State Cancer Registry

Figure 7. 2004 Age-Adjusted Mortality Rate/100,000

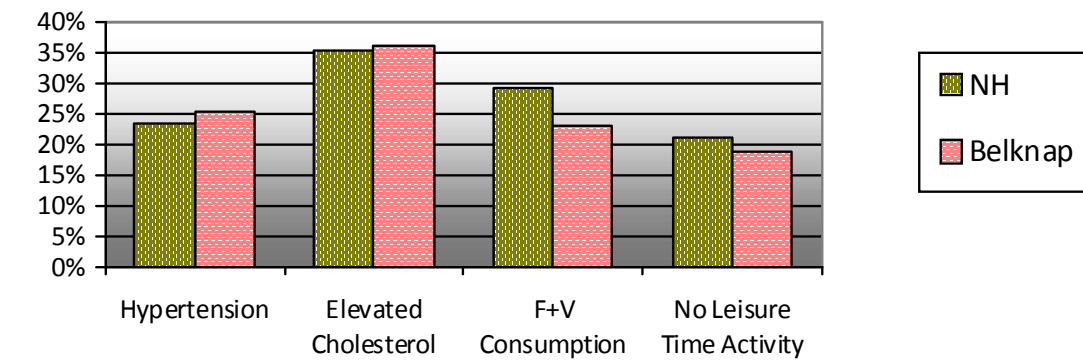


Source: 2004 NH State Cancer Registry

Risk Factors

- Belknap County residents report higher prevalence of hypertension and elevated cholesterol and lower prevalence of fruit and vegetable consumption and less leisure time activity than residents of NH overall (See Figure 8).

Figure 8. Prevalence of Selected Modifiable Risk Factors.



Source: 2005 BRFSS

- 52.4% of Belknap County residents meet the recommendations for daily physical activity.
 - 75.3% of Belknap County residents do not consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
 - 67.3% of Belknap County residents are overweight and obese compared to 61.8% in NH.
 - 58.3% of Survey respondents are aware of fitness/exercise programs offered in the Lakes Region.
 - 45.5% of Survey respondents are aware of weight loss programs offered in the Lakes Region.
 - Belknap County has the highest percentage of at risk of overweight, based on the growth chart, (23.3%) and overweight (24.7%) WIC enrolled children of all counties in New Hampshire.¹
- ★ *There is a need for healthy eating and active living education and activities (Spiritual Care Committee and Corner Bridge/Genesis Behavioral Health).*

¹ CDC's Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (PedNSS).

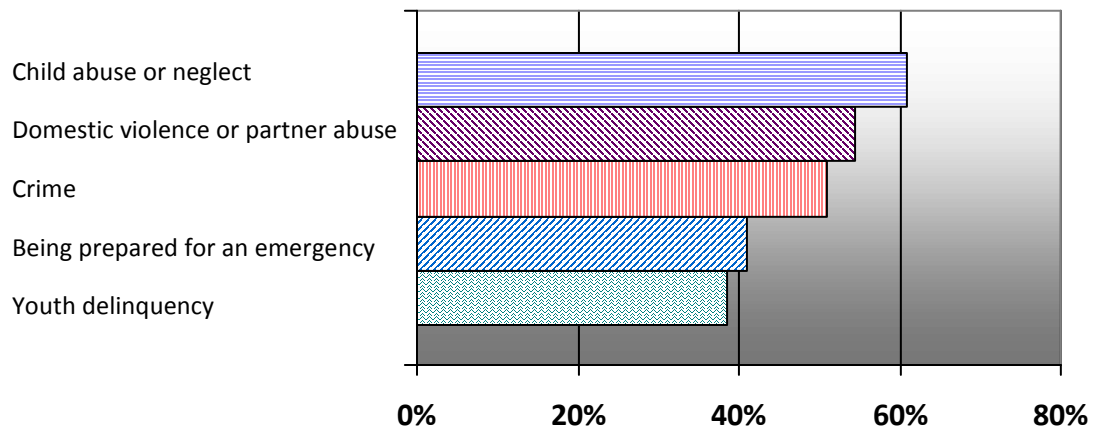
SAFETY

We asked Survey respondents to identify **five safety issues that they think are the most important** in the Lakes Region from a comprehensive list of potential safety issues.

The **safety issues identified as most important** are (See Figure 9):

1. **Child abuse or neglect** (60.8%)
2. **Domestic violence or partner abuse** (54.5%)
3. **Crime** (50.9%)
4. **Being prepared for an emergency** (40.9%)
5. **Youth delinquency** (38.6%)*

Figure 9. Community Perceptions of The Most Important Safety Issues in the Lakes Region Community



In addition, at least 20%-40% of Survey respondents identified the **safety of public places, identity theft, and school violence** as one of the top five most important safety issues in the Lakes Region (See Table 3).

Table 3. Community Perceptions of Most Important Safety Issues

Child abuse or neglect, domestic violence or partner abuse, crime	Over 40% of respondents
Youth delinquency, being prepared for an emergency, safety of public place (parks, streets, etc)	30%-40% of respondents
Identity theft, school violence	20%-30% of respondents

* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check five responses.

Child Abuse or Neglect and Domestic Violence or Partner Abuse

- 29.7% of Survey respondents are aware of parenting support groups offered in the Lakes Region.
- 29% of Survey respondents are aware of family mediation services in the Lakes Region.
- 24.3% of Survey respondents are aware of education workshops for parents.

Youth Delinquency

- The top criminal offenses by youth in 2007 were theft, criminal mischief, simple assault, drug offense, and possession of alcohol.³
- 3.48% of youth under the age of 17 are juvenile offenders in Belknap County.⁴

Being Prepared for an Emergency

- Less than 25% of adults in New Hampshire report that they feel well prepared for a disaster or emergency.⁵
- 19% of Belknap County residents report that their household is prepared to handle a large-scale disaster or emergency (compared to 22% in NH overall).⁶
- 30% of New Hampshire families report being without a supply of one or more of the most important disaster supplies: water, non-perishable food, prescription medicines, battery operated radio, working flashlight.⁷

^{3,4} 2007 Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families

^{5,6,7} 2007 BRFSS

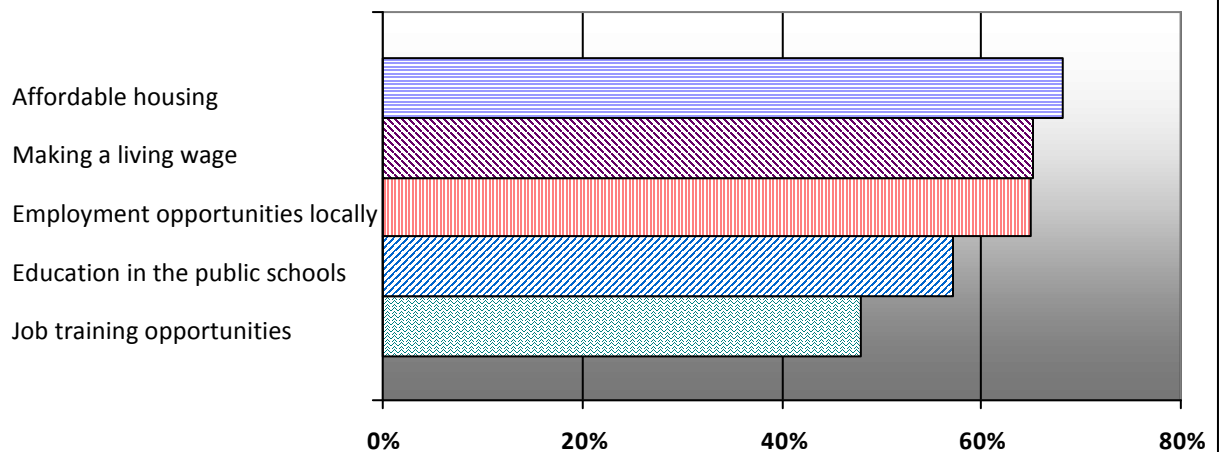
COMMUNITY LIFE

We asked respondents to identify **five community life issues that they think are the most important** in the Lakes Region community from a comprehensive list of potential community issues.

The **community issues** identified as most important are:

1. **Affordable housing** (68.2%).
2. **Making a living wage** (65.2%).
3. **Employment opportunities locally** (64.9%).
4. **Education in the public schools** (57.1%).
5. **Job training opportunities** (47.9%)*.

Figure 10. Community Perceptions of the Most Important Community Life Issues in the Lakes Region Community



In addition, at least 20%-40% of respondents identified the issues below as one of the top five most important health issues in the Lakes Region (See Table 4).

Table 4. Community Perceptions of the Most Important Community Issues in the Lakes Region

Job training opportunities, education in the public schools, making a living wage, affordable housing	Over 40% of respondents
Adult education and learning opportunities	30%-40% of respondents
Literacy	20%-30% of respondents

* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check five responses.

Job Training Opportunities

- 67.8% of Survey respondents are aware of adult education programs.
 - 24.2 % of Survey respondents are aware of job training opportunities.
- ★ *There is a need for more public transportation opportunities (Spiritual Care and Corner Bridge/Genesis Behavioral Health).*

Affordable Housing

- There is a trend of population growth and limited housing diversity (single-family homes, multi-family homes, manufactured homes, etc) especially in towns outside of Laconia and Meredith. There is also a decline in multi-family home building.⁸
- Median cost of a 2 bedroom rental unit in 2008 was \$927.00.⁹
- Over the past decade, income rose by 28% and the cost of housing increased by 42%.¹⁰

⁸ 2007 Lakes Region Planning Commission Needs Assessment

^{9,10} New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority

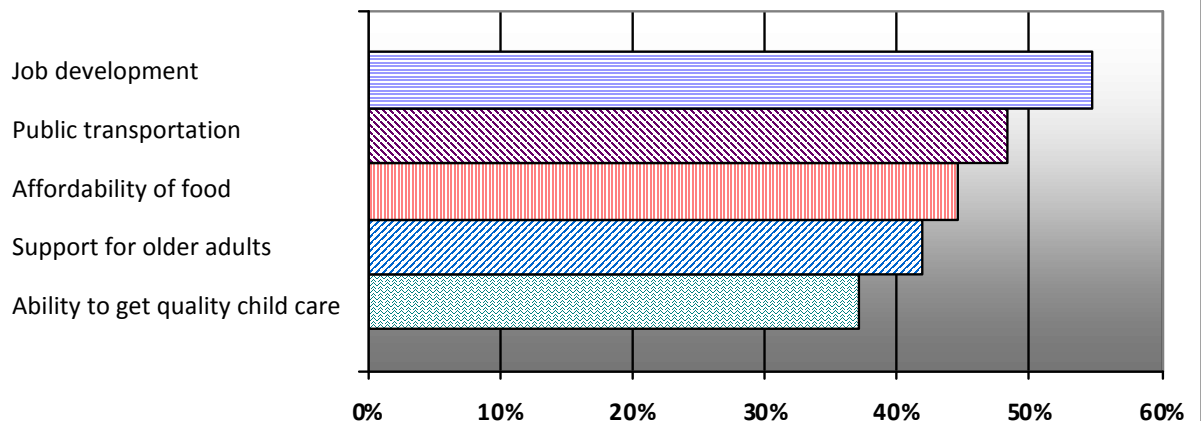
Social and Human Services

We asked the Survey respondents to identify where they felt the Lakes Region should focus its resources.

The top five social and human service areas are:

1. **Job development** (54.7%).
2. **Public transportation** (48.3%).
3. **Affordability of food** (44.6%).
4. **Support for older adults** (41.9%).
5. **Ability to get quality child care** (37.1%)*.

Figure 11. Community Perceptions of where the Lakes Region should focus its resources



Other areas receiving significant response include: children's programs and support (37.0%), ability to get housing assistance (34.7%), parenting support (31.5%) and substance abuse recovery programs (30.6%).

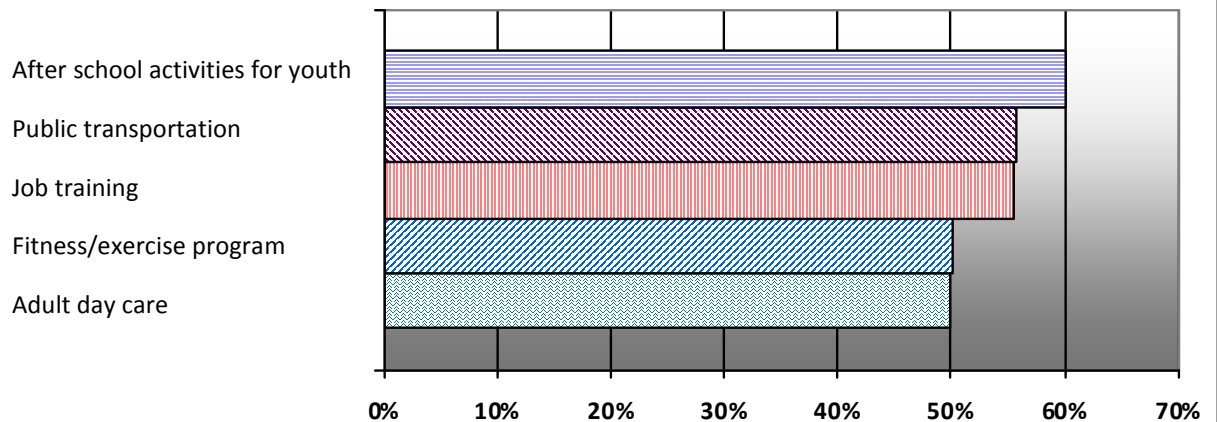
* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check five responses.

In addition we asked the Survey respondents what services should be available in the Lakes Region.

The top five services identified are:

1. **After-school activities for youth** (60.2%).
2. **Public transportation** (55.8%).
3. **Job training** (55.5%).
4. **Fitness/exercise program** (50.2%).
5. **Adult day care** (49.9%)*.

Figure 12. Community Perceptions of what services should be available in the Lakes Region



Other services receiving significant response include: weight loss program (47.7%), care giver support (47.5%), mental health counseling (46.9%), adult education (46.1%), child care (45.4%), drug and alcohol abuse treatment (45.2%), health education (44.8%), parenting support groups (43.1%), stop smoking program (42.3%), drug and alcohol prevention activities (42%), education workshops for parents (40.2%), information and referral (40.1%), short-term (1-2 hours) child care (39.9%), stress reduction and relaxation classes (39.2%) and family mediation (37.9%).

* Percentages do not equal 100% because respondents were asked to check five responses.

CHALLENGES OF LIVING IN THE LAKES REGION

When asked “What do you think is the most difficult thing about living in the Lakes Region?” Survey respondents told us:

Healthcare

- The lack of certain healthcare services including specialty medicine as well as the small number of doctors in the area were cited as top concerns for respondents. Also of concern was the quality of those medical services that are available.
- Respondents indicated a belief that the healthcare services available in the Lakes Region were: “difficult to access,” “not plentiful,” and “lacking primary health doctors.” Of particular concern were emergency services and services for chronic illness. Respondents also cited healthcare costs as a difficult aspect of life in the Lakes Region.

The Economic Environment

- Few job opportunities, low wages, lack of affordable housing, taxes, and the general cost of living were all cited as posing challenges to respondents. Of particular concern was the perceived inability for young workers and families to remain in the community due to the economic conditions.
- Respondents indicated a belief that the Lakes Region’s economic environment: “lacks well-paying jobs to sustain young individuals and families,” suffers from “high taxes,” and is ripe with exorbitant gas/heating fuel, food, housing, and clothing costs.

Transportation

- A common theme was the belief that the current public transportation system was not as plentiful/frequent as necessary and is not available to all citizens. Additionally, comments focused on the need for a more regularly scheduled local and regional public transportation system, with specific requests for free transportation for the elderly, and for transportation to the Robbie Mills field. Many were very interested in developing train service to Concord and Boston. Limitations of the public transportation system and distance at which it travels were also identified as having a direct impact on both the economic environment and the ability to access healthcare in our community.
- There were quite a few comments of concern/frustration with heavy traffic in the area. Respondents identified the traffic along Union Avenue in Laconia and around exit 20 of Interstate 93 in Tilton as negative. Those that mentioned traffic concerns often referenced Bike Week and the difficulties that bike week traffic poses for local residents. There were suggestions to “abolish” and “get rid of” bike week. Others suggested limiting this event to a single weekend as it was in the past. One other event listed relating to traffic concerns was the NASCAR races in Loudon.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE IN THE LAKES REGION

When asked "If you could change one thing about the Lakes Region what would it be?"

Survey respondents told us:

Housing and Jobs:

- The themes that emerged most often relating to employment is the need for: "better" jobs; more desirable wages; decent year round employment; livable wages; decent jobs for young adults (including those with college degrees); the need for job training services; job development for all people of all abilities; and better availability of full time jobs with benefits. The need to attract new manufacturing and high tech business to the area was mentioned by several people.
- The need for affordable housing was mentioned over and over again. However, there were also comments stating concern that our area already has too much low income housing. Other comments included increasing housing opportunities for the middle class; affordable housing for starter homes; more help for single parents; and cheaper rent. Several suggested limiting the growth of condos and seasonal housing.
- Additionally, respondents stated concern about the burden of real estate taxes, "rampant" development and the need to take greater care to preserve the natural environment

Downtown Laconia:

- Many respondents listed the "decline of downtown" (Laconia) as the one thing they would change about the Lakes Region. They felt that downtown was in need of "drastic" renovation and revitalization. They expressed desire for a viable downtown center with restaurants and shops. Several mentioned a downtown that offered arts and culture opportunities and renovation of the Colonial Theater as a catalyst to reinvigorate downtown.

Comparison to 2003 - 2008

New Hampshire's Community Benefit statute requires the periodic assessment of community needs. This document represents the second comprehensive assessment conducted by a coalition of community providers. The first assessment was completed in 2003 and served to guide regional non-profit healthcare organizations in planning and program development. To some degree, the results of the 2008 assessment are shaped by the findings of the 2003 assessment and by the subsequent action of community non-profits in response to those findings. Therefore, it is useful to provide some comparison to the 2003 findings.

- **Methods:** Both assessments used similar tools for measurement (focus groups, secondary data reports and a written survey), but the 2008 survey saw a more robust community response to the survey. In 2003, the on-line tool known as Survey Monkey did not exist; while in 2008, 20% of all responders used Survey Monkey. In addition, although 4000 surveys were mailed to households in 2003 and 3600 in 2008, response to the 2008 mailed version of the survey was 5% higher than in 2003.
- **Who Responded:** The distribution of responders by town was markedly different from 2003 to 2008. In the earlier version, only 32% of responders were from Laconia, while 17% were from Gilford and 15% were from Meredith. In 2008, over half (52%) of responders resided in Laconia, while Gilford represented only 6.1% and Meredith 3.5%. Belmont's representation grew dramatically from 2% in 2003 to 16.5% in 2008. Thus, the 2008 version of the survey captured a geographically different mixture of responders than the 2003 version. In terms of age, however, the results were more consistent. Over 55% of responders were between the ages of 34 and 64 in both years.
- **Results:** The survey tools used in both the 2003 and 2008 assessments were similar, but were not identical. In 2003, responders were asked to select a number of important issues and to name "the most important issue" in several categories. This option was not offered in 2008. It is impossible, therefore, to make a point-by-point comparison between the two. However, the questions were sufficiently alike that useful comparison can be made.

Health Related Concerns

- Health care access appeared as the most important health issue on both surveys, with nearly identical proportions reporting difficulty - 52% in 2003 and 51.9% in 2008. Similar proportions found that they "could not afford the service" in each year (13% and 14% in 2003 and 2008 respectively) and that "the waiting time was too long" (15% and 17% respectively).
- Little movement has been made on the issue of health insurance access, as 9% of responders in both years listed "having had no health insurance" as a limiting factor.
- "Health care for seniors" made the list in 2008 as the third highest concern, but it was not offered as a stand-alone choice in 2003.

- Dental care appeared among the top five concerns in both years, ranking as number 3 in 2003 and as number 5 in 2008.
- Obesity moved higher on the list– from 5th place in 2003 to 3rd place in 2008. This may be reflective of the attention obesity receives on a national scale, a phenomenon that was just emerging in 2003.
- In the 2003 survey, underage drinking was listed as a major Crime & Safety concern. In the 2008 version, it was reclassified as a healthcare issue, where it rose to be voted as 2nd among all the concerns.

Safety Concerns

- The two surveys demonstrated remarkable similarity in responses related to safety issues. In both years, the issues of child abuse, crime and youth delinquency ranked among the top five issues.
- In 2003, the top safety issue identified was under-age drinking and drug use, which was reclassified as a health issue in the 2008 survey where it ranked second among the critical issues selected by responders. It can be safely interpreted as a continuing issue of importance in the Lakes Region community.

Community Concerns

- The issues of affordable housing, making a living wage, local employment opportunities and quality of education in the public schools ranked among the top five important community life issues in both surveys, demonstrating remarkable consistency over the five year period.
- In 2003, the 5th issue of importance was a need for youth services, while in 2008, that was surpassed by a need for job training, perhaps reflecting the economic environment that was unfolding in the region and the country when the survey was circulated in the community.

The Benefits of Living in the Lakes Region

- Responders were consistent in both surveys, identifying the natural beauty of the region and the sense of community as offering quality of life to residents.

The Challenges of Living in the Lakes Region

- Responders again demonstrated remarkable consistency between the two survey periods, illustrating concerns with the job market, housing access in light of wages and lack of public transportation as issues of great importance.
- Responders commented on both surveys about traffic congestion during the summer months as having a negative impact on the quality of life. In 2008, concerns about congestion and safety during motorcycle week and the Loudon races were specifically noted as major concerns, possibly reflecting an increase in concern about the impact of these national events on the community and its infrastructure.
- Unlike 2003, the 2008 survey highlighted concerns with lack of access to medical care, specifically noting the relatively small number of primary care physicians.

What Should be Changed

- While, again, there was remarkable similarity in the responses offered in both 2003 and 2008, there was greater emphasis in the latter survey on issues of creating new jobs with good wages and the development of affordable housing for the workforce. Since the circulation of the survey preceded the 2008 economic recession (or the recognition of it), it can be surmised that increasing community concern developed about the local economy over the intervening five years.
- Concerns expressed about the decline of downtown Laconia and the impact of Motorcycle week in the region have increased between the two surveys, possibly reflecting increasing concerns among the year round residents.

Summary 2003-2008

As noted, the two surveys used a similar format while the most recent refined certain sections to permit more specific analysis. It is not surprising that the assessments, conducted five years apart, yielded similar results. While the data obtained in 2003 served as a guide for area non-profit organizations, not all issues could be or were addressed by community organizations. In addition, some of the problems identified are illustrative of concerns on the national stage, such as the shortage of primary care providers. This issue emerged as the top concern of those who responded to both surveys and appears to be increasing as an issue of importance in the Lakes Region.

Responders to both surveys are attracted to the Lakes Region because of its natural beauty and the quality of community life, the sense of connectedness they feel. It would appear, through analysis of the data, that there is an increasing sense that this quality of life is threatened by the economy and other factors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Needs Assessment Report is to provide organizations, businesses, government, and citizens' with information to assist in the planning and development of programs that support the needs of our community members. We hope that you will find this report useful and we welcome your comments and recommendations.

An outgrowth of the 2003 Community Needs Assessment was the formation of the Lakes Region Partnership for Public Health (LRPPH). LRPPH was established to focus on the public's health by meeting the identified community needs of public health emergency preparedness, substance abuse prevention, childhood obesity, family caregivers and elder support and services.

As with any assessment, it is important to identify its limits. Individuals and planning groups who read this data may identify the need to further study an issue. An example of this is in the respondents desire to have enhanced public transit services. It may be important to then ask: "If this service was available, would respondents use it?"

Additionally, since the majority of respondents were ages 34-64, we cannot and should not translate the outcomes to young adults 18-33. Respondents from the more rural towns such as Barnstead, Sanbornton, New Hampton and Alton were limited in number. Citizens from these towns may have a different view of the needs than citizens from a more populated town. It may be important to utilize focus groups and other methods to access more feedback from these under represented groups.

Thank you for taking time to review this report. The Survey results provide valuable information about our community strengths and areas in need of development. We hope that the information provided will assist with the understanding of, and growth in, our community.