



4C 2023 CHNA Addition – Howard County

Located just north of the Indianapolis metro area, Howard County is home to a population of 83,658. The county seat and largest city is Kokomo, where 4C Health operates a site at 1948 West Boulevard. One-quarter (25.66%) of the population resides in rural areas, whereas the remaining majority lives in urban areas. This blend of urban and rural areas presents both opportunities and challenges, further emphasizing the importance of organizations like 4C Health in bridging healthcare disparities and improving the overall well-being of residents across the county. Manufacturing is a large industry in Howard County and notable employers in the area are Chrysler Indiana Transmission, BorgWarner, Haynes International Manufacturing, and GM Components Holdings.

Health Factors and Outcomes

Howard County's position at #79 out of 92 Indiana counties, based on health factors and outcomes, underscores the pressing need for services from 4C Health Center. This county ranks among the least healthy in the state, with alarmingly high rates of smoking, obesity, alcohol-impaired driving deaths, unemployment, and injury. These concerning statistics paint a stark picture of the health challenges facing the community, which 4C Health is uniquely positioned to address. By offering high-quality, comprehensive healthcare services, 4C Health aims to directly confront these health factors and disparities shown below, ultimately striving to uplift the well-being of Howard County residents and improve their overall quality of life.

Health Factors	Howard County	Indiana	United States
Social Vulnerability Index	0.38	0.46	0.58
Households with No Motor Vehicle	5.56%	6.26%	8.45%
Population 5+ with Limited English Proficiency	1.00%	3.18%	8.25%
Housing Cost Burden (30%)	19.85%	23.71%	30.34%
Substandard Housing	19.14%	24.10%	31.49%
Unemployment	4.40%	2.60%	3.10%
Uninsured	6.69%	7.97%	8.77%
Population below 100% of the FPL	11.63%	12.50%	12.63%
Percent Children below 100% of the FPL	16.72%	16.79%	17.05%
Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	49.70%	44.40%	51.70%
Living Below ALICE Threshold	35%	39%	N/A

Area Deprivation Index	74	63	46
Food Insecure Households	12.20%	10.70%	10.40%
Population With HS Diploma Only	37.6%	33.0%	
Population Age 65+	18.96%	15.66%	16.04%
Population With Any Disability	16.91%	13.61%	12.64%

While most factors are similar to state and US rates, barriers to care are still prevalent within the community:

- Transportation: 5.56% of the population does not have a vehicle, impacting ability to access appointments and other services. As a portion of the county is rural and/or smaller communities, public transportation is not as readily available or accessible.
- Language Barriers: Limited language proficiency and lower educational attainment, such as that seen in the service area population, contribute to health disparities and negatively impact access to care and utilization of services. The inability to communicate well or to understand more complex health issues hampers access to health care, employment, transportation, social services, and education.
- Housing Insecurity: Nearly 20% of the service area faces substandard housing or a significant housing cost burden. Residents facing housing insecurity can contribute to health disparities and negatively impact access to care and utilization of services.
- Educational Attainment: A significant number of the population only has a high school education. The combination of poverty and lower educational attainment in 4C Health’s service area presents significant barriers to health care access and often results in poorer health outcomes amongst the impoverished and housing insecure target population.
- Income & Poverty: Nearly 12% of Howard County lives in poverty, with more than two-thirds living below the ALICE Threshold. ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – meaning households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county. Income is a socioeconomic factor that predetermines an individual’s access to housing, healthcare, health insurance and healthy foods, impacting the health and wellbeing of the individual and their family.

There is a notable difference in the food insecurity rate, unemployment rate, Area Deprivation Index (ADI), population with a disability, and aging population above state and national rates.

- Food Insecurity: The rate of food insecurity in Howard County (12.20%) is much higher than Indiana as a whole (10.70%). Food insecurity has a harmful impact on both physical and mental health and can contribute to the development of children. 4C Health is continuously working to build relationships with local partners to provide patients with enabling services and information to assist them in overcoming food insecurity (food banks, soup kitchens, shelters and religious organizations providing meals). 4C Health also refers qualifying patients to WIC, which assists mothers, infants, and children in achieving food security.

- **Unemployment:** Howard County has the highest unemployment rate of 4C Health’s service area at 4.40% (April 2023). Examples of negative health outcomes associated with unemployment include increases in depression, symptoms of distress, and low self-esteem, with a more limited body of research suggesting an association with poorer physical health, including increases in cardiovascular risk factors such as serum cholesterol, hypertension, and respiratory infections. Those that are unemployed or uninsured may forego health services, especially preventive health care. 4C Health eliminates this barrier to care, providing care to all patients regardless of their ability to pay for services.
- **Area Deprivation Index (ADI):** The ADI for Howard County is 74, compared to 63 in Indiana. ADI ranks neighborhoods and communities relative to all neighborhoods across the nation and uses a scale to indicate the levels of deprivation/disadvantage in an area, where 1 is the lowest and 100 is the highest level of deprivation.
- **Disability:** As noted, the percentage of Howard County with a disability is higher than Indiana (16.91% versus 13.61%). Individuals with disabilities face significantly higher disparities related to health care access, behaviors, health status, and social determinants of health, and there is evidence of an increase in likelihood of substance misuse. With higher rates of people living with disabilities in the service area, there will continue to be a greater need for healthcare and supportive services from this group.
- **Aging Population:** A significant proportion of Howard County’s population is above 65 years of age (18.96%), compared to Indiana (15.66%). The aging population has unique healthcare needs and challenges, as well as barriers to care, that 4C Health must address.

In alignment with Healthy People 2030, 4C Health focuses on reducing health disparities for patients and Indiana communities. Health disparities are defined as differences in health or the critical determinants of health such as safe housing, discrimination, resources, and education that negatively affect marginalized populations.

Health Outcomes

Health Outcomes	Howard County	Indiana	United States
Premature Death	11,100	8,600	7,300
Poor or Fair Health	15%	15%	12%
Poor Physical Health Days	3.4	3.3	3.0
Poor Mental Health Days	5.2	4.9	4.4
Life Expectancy	74.1	76.5	78.5
Mortality – Cancer	184.8	166.8	149.4
Mortality – Coronary Heart Disease	125.8	98.1	91.5
Mortality – Lung Disease	65.8	55.3	39.1
Mortality – Motor Vehicle Crash	19.4	12.6	11.5
Mortality – Poisoning (Including Drug Overdose)	42.3	30.5	24.0

Mortality – Unintentional Injury (Accident)	75.0	57.7	50.4
Obesity	33.0%	31.6%	29.0%

The significant causes of morbidity and mortality and health disparities outlined above provide a clearer picture of the gaps in services that 4C Health is helping to fill. The high rates of premature death, cancer mortality, coronary heart disease, lung disease, motor vehicle crash, drug overdose, accidents, and obesity. It reveals populations high in mental distress, poverty, and health disparities. These statistics paint a picture of a population in great need of the accessible, affordable, and high-quality health care that 4C Health provides.

Mental Health and Substance Use

When analyzing the need for behavioral health services specifically, Howard County has rates of child abuse and neglect, mentally unhealthy dates, death by suicide, and opioid poisoning deaths above the state rate.

Mental Health and Substance Use	Howard County	Indiana
Ratio of Mental Health Providers	460:1	530:1
Rate of Children Removed From Home Due to Parent Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse	0.5	0.5
Rate of Child Abuse and Neglect Victims	12.5	12.0
Average Number of Mentally Unhealthy Days	5.2	4.9
Age-Adjusted Rate of Death by Suicide	23.0	14.9
Rate of Opioid Poisoning Deaths	34.8	27.8

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 4,426,818 people in Indiana live in a community that does not have enough mental health professionals. More than 90,000 Hoosiers aged 12-17 have depression and 54% did not receive any care in the past year.¹ 4C Health offers a myriad of support to patients, including integrated care delivery through specialty partnerships that allow patients to receive mental health and substance use services at their primary care office and primary care services at their 4C Health location and school-based services in 42 school corporations, addressing the dire need for mental health support in Indiana.

Existing Health Services

Various other health services exist within Howard County, including:

- FQHC Health Centers: IHC Howard County WIC, IHC at Kokomo, Meridian Health Services Corp
- Hospitals: Community Howard Regional Health, Ascension St. Vincent Kokomo

¹ National Alliance on Mental Illness, Indiana State Fact Sheet – February 2021

- Substance Use Treatment and Mental Health Facilities: Community Howard Regional Health, Gilead House, Lucina Treatment Center, Groups Recover Together, St. Vincent Kokomo

4C Health is one of the three certified Community Mental Health Centers in addition to Community Howard and Meridian Health Services. However, there is still a great need for services as suicide and overdose deaths have increased over previous years, the current workforce is aging, and the population of Howard County is growing.

Need For Health Services

Despite the current health services in Howard County, there is still a pressing need, as identified by the community. Community surveys, other local healthcare organization's CHNAS, and focus group meetings indicated a high level of concern and need surrounding behavioral healthcare and substance use disorder and the need for more behavioral health care services and substance use disorder services. The Indiana Behavioral Health Commission released a final report in September 2022 examining Indiana's behavioral healthcare system and outlining recommendations to improve the system. The Commission found that Indiana's Behavioral Health System infrastructure is grossly underfunded and in need of reforms to improve and enhance behavioral healthcare.

Recent Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) from both hospitals in Howard County (Ascension St. Vincent Kokomo and Community Health Network – Howard Region) highlights the importance of behavioral health services in Howard County.

- Ascension St. Vincent Kokomo selected mental health as a prioritized need for the FY2023-2025 Implementation Strategy based on mental health indicators, including mentally unhealthy days, number of mental health providers per population, depression rate and/or suicide rate compared to peer counties or US averages.² Community meeting participants also identified mental health as a priority.
- Community Health Network – Howard Region identified mental health status and access to mental health services and substance use disorder and overdoses as significant community health needs based on data, community health assessments, and input from community stakeholders. Conversations with participants highlighted the worsening state of mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic and interviewees expressed challenges in accessing mental healthcare due to shortage of providers, barriers related to health insurance and cost, and the aging health workforce. Both drug deaths and alcohol-related mortality in Howard County exceed the Indiana rate. Community stakeholders identified substance abuse as a significant need, citing self-medication for untreated mental health conditions and misuse of both opioids and alcohol.

² FY 2023-2025 Ascension St. Vincent Kokomo Implementation Strategy

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the behavioral health and SUD crisis. Behavioral health greatly impacts physical health and integration is necessary to ensure that primary care and behavioral health is coordinated to achieve optimal health status for patients. Those with untreated behavioral health and SUD may not seek primary health care due to their conditions, stigma or even fear. 4C Health understands the importance of integration and is continually looking for ways to better meet the behavioral and SUD needs of patients in the service area to improve overall health status.

Summary

Despite existing health services in the area, there is a pressing need to address the health factors and outcomes, coupled with an aging demographic, in Howard County, Indiana. Plagued by alarming rates of chronic health conditions and mental health issues leading to premature death and a life expectancy lower than neighboring counties, Howard County is in dire need for comprehensive healthcare reform and increased access to quality medical services. 4C Health is well positioned to address the specific needs of the community and provide crucial mental health and substance use services to the population of more than 83,000 people. Community feedback noted the critical need for expanded access to mental health and substance use services in two community hospital CHNAs, further driving the point that there is a need and demand for services in the community.