

A Vital Bridge with the Community

PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center

2022-2025 Community Health Needs Assessment



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Message from leadership:

Strong. Resilient. Compassionate. These words define our Longview community.

Our community has a history of working together to create a strong foundation in support of the greater good. At the core of the community are educational institutions, business and industry, social service organizations, and health partners.

In times of great need, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the collective work of our community demonstrated compassionate care for our most vulnerable, underserved, and historically marginalized members, as well as anyone who needed a helping hand.

PeaceHealth is proud to partner with many exemplary organizations who share an unwavering commitment to making our community stronger and healthier. The pandemic made the disparities that exist in our community more visible, opening more eyes to growing social inequities, including access to food, housing, and healthcare.

Through financial support and collaboration with our partners—Lower Columbia School Gardens, Lower Columbia CAP, Youth and Family LINK, Cowlitz Family Health Center, and the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington—we collectively:

- provided food to children and families
- helped community members out of homelessness and into housing with access to ongoing medical care
- supported community health worker programs that serve medically vulnerable, Latinx and Pacific Islander communities

These past two years have been humbling. We have grown and learned along with our community. We are thankful for the work our community has achieved and grateful to provide support in collaboration with our partners.

It is with this knowledge that we will continue moving forward, as there is much more work to be done. We will continue addressing food insecurity, pursuing housing for the unhoused, improving access to behavioral health services, and advocating for social and health justice for all. This is our PeaceHealth Mission, and it is who we are. We are honored to take part in this work, standing beside our partners and the individuals and families we serve within our community.

We are collaborative, perseverant, and courageous and we will continue this work together.



Cherelle Montanye
Chief Administrative Officer
PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center



Liz Cattin
Director of Community Health
PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center

Our report to the community

The importance of a Community Health Needs Assessment

Every three years, each PeaceHealth community conducts a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) as required by the 2010 Patient Care and Affordable Care Act.

Tax-exempt hospitals like ours—as defined by IRS Section 501(r)—use the CHNA to report current community needs, statistics and activities. We are also expected to develop an implementation strategy outlining our plans to improve health and well-being of the communities we serve.

We see our CHNA report and implementation strategy as much more than a requirement or obligation. Through this narrative, we are presenting the story of our dedication and service to the community and people we serve. Beyond traditional medical services and care, we are committed to helping people in need.

Click to view previous editions of our [CHNA](#) and [implementation strategy](#).

WHAT IS OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

We conducted a thorough review of publicly reported data from state and local resources including Washington State Department of Health, Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Cowlitz County Health and Human Services. Additionally, we reviewed national sources of information related to the social determinants of health from Feeding America, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Rankings, the Centers for Disease Control, and other key sources. After completing our data collection and analysis in the fall of 2021, we held listening sessions with community partners to hear their perspective and learn about specific needs in Cowlitz County that may not be reflected in the data.

In addition to our listening sessions, we reviewed the Lower Columbia Community Action Program CHNA, the Housing Opportunities of SW Washington Strategic Plan, and the Council of Governments Housing Assessment and Plan.

Listening session attendees shared their expertise and experience, including representatives from Cowlitz Family Health Center, Emergency Support Shelter, Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington, Youth and Family LINK, Habitat for Humanity, Community Foundation for Southwest Washington, Highlands Neighborhood Association, Revitalization Association of South Kelso, Lower Columbia School Gardens, Longview Parks and Recreation, Cowlitz County Health and Human Services, and Housing Opportunities of SW Washington. Through these sessions, we learned even more about the impact of COVID-19 on our community and the impact to the health and support services our valuable partners provide.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE BELIEVE IN

Located near parks, residential neighborhoods, businesses, and commerce in Longview, Washington, PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center and our associated PeaceHealth Medical Group clinics provide vital services to Cowlitz County and other adjacent communities including the southern coast of Washington and the northwest corner of Oregon. PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center provides quality services through the emergency department, trauma program, surgery services, Kearney Breast Center, palliative care and specialty care. We provide primary care, rehab services, diagnostic imaging, behavioral health and cancer care. We partner with other local providers to help ensure equal access to care for all members of our community.

We work closely with the federally qualified health center Cowlitz Family Health Center, The Free Clinic operated by Community Health Partners, Kaiser, Longview Orthopedics, Community Home Health Hospice and other community-based organizations to serve the clinical health and non-clinical social needs of our community.

As the only hospital in our area and the county's largest employer, our impact is multi-dimensional. PeaceHealth provides living wage jobs in addition to caring for the health of community members through our broad regional referral network of care. With a focus on serving the needs of every individual patient from hospital care to recovery, we are committed to safety, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Access to behavioral health services, adequate healthy food and affordable housing continue to challenge many of our community members. Affordable childcare is another concern and a critical factor for helping working parents keep their jobs so they can continue to meet their basic food and housing needs. PeaceHealth St. John has formed strong partnerships with community organizations to address these interrelated needs, to ensure access to fresh, healthy food and provide the additional social supports needed to help fill these gaps.

KEY FINDINGS

There is a significant need for **all types of housing** in Cowlitz County including affordable housing, workforce housing and shelter options for unhoused individuals. The lack of affordable housing options and availability is a concern for the entire community.

Although access to resources for food insecure households improved over the past few years, the need has increased. Community members ask for improved access to healthy, culturally specific foods.

Another common theme was the **need for service provider connections in support of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and other underserved individuals**. Expanding community health worker, peer support specialists and community health advocate programs, along with increased collaboration between all health and social service providers, is critical to improving social determinants of health in the community.

The **need for behavioral health supports** continues. The mental health needs of our community, especially children, expanded during the pandemic. Similarly, the **need for Opioid Use Disorder treatment** has increased as synthetic opioid use has grown in our area and across the nation during the pandemic.

The **need for a stable workforce** is another common concern among our partners. Workforce shortages, due in part to COVID-19, have impacted services for those in need and threaten income stability in our community. One important and overlooked reason for the workforce shortage has been the **lack of available childcare, especially for low-income families**. Without reliable, affordable childcare, many parents are unable to reenter the workforce.

About PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center

66.68 Average daily census

332 Total licensed beds

143 Operating beds

4.03 Average length of stay (days)

6,044 Inpatient discharges

204,702 Outpatient clinic visits

1,576 Employees

374 Active medical staff

49,242 Emergency Department visits

680 Births

4,450 Surgeries

Source: PeaceHealth FY 2021;
Active medical staff as of October 2021

Supporting health justice for all

From our very beginning to the present day

PeaceHealth was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, who traveled west in 1890 to care for early settlers and people in need. Their legacy continues today as we recognize that achieving health and well-being is a lifelong journey.

We are committed to our Mission: We carry on the healing Mission of Jesus Christ by promoting personal and community health, relieving pain and suffering, and treating each person in a loving and caring way. We are driven by our belief that good health, prevention and community well-being are fundamental rights. We support health justice for all and are especially called to be in service to the most vulnerable members of our community. And we believe that every person should receive safe and compassionate care—every time, every touch.

BUILDING A NETWORK OF CARE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Inspired by a challenge from the [Catholic Health Association's "We Are Called" Pledge](#), we have embarked on a journey to "put our own house in order." We recognize that change starts from within, believing that our caregivers can best focus on others when we focus on caring for them. This has been an essential element in preserving our 130-year legacy of community service and care.

With more than 7,000 employees in our Columbia network (Southwest Washington), including 1,576 in the PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center service area, we are the largest employer in Cowlitz County. Our employees are a vital part of our community. Like everyone else, they have been deeply impacted by the pandemic.

In 2020, 525 PeaceHealth employees in Cowlitz County received support with housing and utilities (48%); access to care or basic services like internet, transportation and childcare (33%); and food access (19%).

In addition to creating a supportive workplace, PeaceHealth continues to refine hiring practices to ensure a diverse workforce. We are committed to implementing change reflective of our Core Values: respect, stewardship, collaboration and social justice.

But we need to do more—and we cannot do it alone. This is why community-based partnerships like the ones described in this assessment are crucial to our community's success. They enable us to address social determinants of health and improve care and access.

“We have a responsibility to shine a light on the profound effect inequities have on health and well-being, and to do something about it. We are called to promote the inherent dignity of each person, to further the common good and seek justice through solidarity, especially in services to the most vulnerable.”

– Liz Dunne, President and Chief Executive Officer, PeaceHealth



PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE ACROSS COWLITZ COUNTY—AND BEYOND

PeaceHealth has taken steps to increase awareness of social inequities and promote health justice among patients, caregivers employees in our organization, and across the greater healthcare community. We also recognize the significant journey that lies ahead—with partners and with our community—to move the needle on health justice, equity and inclusion.

RECOGNIZING INEQUITIES AND ELEVATING PARTNERSHIPS

During these unprecedented times, it is clear that Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities face higher risk for chronic medical conditions. In Cowlitz County, many families in these vulnerable communities live in multi-generational housing, often with more than one family living in each household.

With less access to healthcare, immigration concerns, language barriers, higher poverty rates and the likelihood of working in close contact with other people in essential worker jobs, these members of our community are also at a higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. Due to cultural differences and communication challenges, reaching Pacific Islander and Latinx members of our community has been challenging.

A growing community

KELSO:

12,685

Population

6.37%

2010-20 population growth

LONGVIEW:

39,224

Population

7.03%

2010-20 population growth

COWLITZ COUNTY:

114,275

Population

11.64%

2010-20 population growth

Source: World Population Review

...is becoming an increasingly diverse one

% Race/Ethnicity Data of Population					
	Kelso	Longview	Cowlitz County	Washington	United States
White	75	79	83	68	60
Latinx	17	11	9	13	19
Multi-Racial	6	8	4	5	3
American Indian/ Alaska Native	4	1	2	2	1
Asian	1	2	2	10	6
Black/African American	1	1	1	5	13
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	<1	<1	<1	1	<1

Source: U.S. Census

POVERTY'S EXPANSIVE GRIP

To overcome language and cultural barriers, PeaceHealth partnered with Youth and Family LINK, a community health advocate who intentionally focused on the needs of Latinx and Pacific Islander communities during COVID-19. With bilingual staff and culturally appropriate outreach, their team supported basic needs by delivering food and self-care items, providing education, and coordinating access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines with other community partners. PeaceHealth St. John provided \$28,000 to support Youth and Family LINK's COVID-19 response efforts.

Lower Columbia CAP (Community Action Program) and Lower Columbia School Gardens (LCSG) also stepped up to address growing levels of food insecurity in our community. PeaceHealth provided \$30,000 to LCSG and \$28,000 to Lower Columbia CAP to support their COVID-19 response.

From 2019-2021, Peace Health invested \$1,153,485 in programs and partnerships that serve Cowlitz County residents. Program partners include Lower Columbia CAP, Youth and Family LINK, Lower Columbia School Gardens, WSU Extension Service, Highlands Neighborhood Association, Emergency Support Shelter, Community Health Partners, YMCA, Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities, Pathways 2020, Cowlitz Family Health Center and Longview Parks and Recreation.

Our robust partnerships provided food, housing, personal care items, and social supports to 16,995 of our most vulnerable community members in Southwest Washington through ongoing work and COVID-19 response programs in 2020.



Poverty's expansive grip

Poverty rate by race in
Cowlitz County



Source: [U.S. Census](#)

A year that inspired action

Answering the call of an unprecedented time in history

2020 saw a remarkable convergence of critical challenges in the United States: racial and social injustice and COVID-19. The pandemic highlighted how continuing inequities in income, education and access to health and social services inordinately affect Black, Indigenous and People of Color. As the pandemic progressed, it became clear that vulnerable members of our community were more at risk for infection, hospitalization and death.

PeaceHealth took a closer look at 2019-2021 data from our Cowlitz County facilities and discovered significant disparities. While only 4.6% of patients who received care identified as Latinx, the percentage of patients testing positive for COVID-19 who were Latinx was 26%, more than five times the rate of the Latinx patient population (Source: [WA DOH COVID-19 Dashboard](#)). At PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center, patients identifying as Latinx were also hospitalized at a rate disproportionate to their population and had the highest hospitalization rate of any demographic group besides white individuals.

COVID-19 VACCINATION EFFORT

Our PeaceHealth physicians and caregivers have answered the call by talking with the community about creative care solutions, including support to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, and increased outreach and access to vaccine education. PeaceHealth Medical Group in Longview stepped up early on in the COVID-19 pandemic to support a collaborative of nine school districts, Cowlitz County Health and Human Services and Cowlitz County Incident Command and Emergency Medical System.



COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic at SJMC

PeaceHealth St. John Medical Group stood up a drive-through COVID-19 testing location that completed as many as 95 tests per day at its peak. In total, we completed 20,000 community COVID-19 tests over the course of 2020.

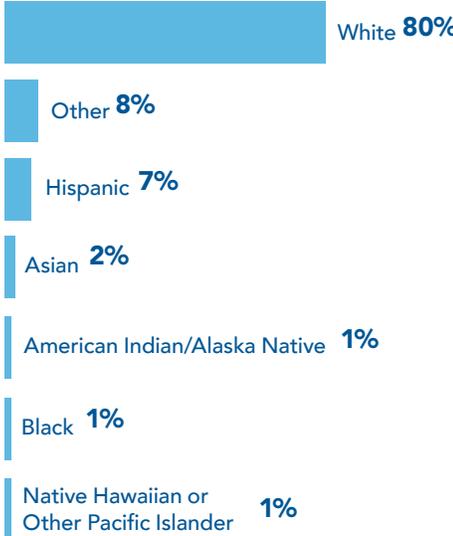
As the vaccine became available and school districts planned to re-open, PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center provided advisory staff to inform and educate schools about the pandemic. We also held a series of virtual sessions to educate community businesses and organizations about the virus and the vaccine.

In December 2020 and January 2021, PeaceHealth Medical Group held vaccine clinics for first responders and healthcare workers from skilled nursing facilities and other healthcare clinics in our community. In one day, staff and volunteers vaccinated 600 first responders and healthcare workers. By the end of February 2021, we had vaccinated 1,077 first responders and healthcare workers in Cowlitz County.

Percent of fully vaccinated, by race and ethnicity

52.9%

of Cowlitz County is fully vaccinated, and of those



Source: [Washington State Department of Health COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#) (As of 11/22/2021)

PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center was the only healthcare facility in Cowlitz County with the capacity to appropriately store the Pfizer vaccine. We provided safe vaccine storage and transportation to help Child and Adolescent Clinic, Cowlitz 2 Fire and Rescue and Community Health Partners bring the vaccine to community members who were unable to travel to vaccination sites.

Exacerbated by the grueling realities of the pandemic and an aging population, there are growing shortages of healthcare workers. In addition to the ongoing need to recruit and retain these highly skilled workers, it has never been more important for us to promote collaboration with our community partners and expand community-based care options.

“As our population ages, there is a greater need for healthcare providers. Yet we face significant challenges in recruiting providers to work in our Southwest Washington communities. We must work together to address the workforce challenges we face as a community.”

– Meghan McCarthy, System Director of Community Health, PeaceHealth

OUR FOUR PILLARS OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

Our four pillars of community health ensure that we are partnering to create a healthy community beyond the walls of our medical center and clinics. Across these pillars is the awareness of our responsibility to care for the most vulnerable and underserved people in our communities while promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in everything we do.

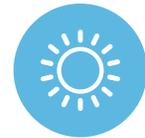
Our priority is to provide the best possible care to our entire community. To do this, we need an equitable system of support that recognizes needs, focuses on overcoming barriers, and builds resiliency for vulnerable populations, including:

- Low-income households and children living in poverty
- Unhoused individuals and families
- Those who are food insecure
- Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with behavioral health or substance use conditions



HOME

Improve access to service-enriched housing



HOPE

Increase education, access to treatment and prevention of dependence



CARE

Expand knowledge, access and engagement with community caregivers



NOURISH

Address food insecurities to enhance family and child well-being



Safe shelter for the unhoused

Recuperative care helps unhoused individuals heal

Over the past decade, the number of available rental properties in Cowlitz County has plummeted. For years, the vacancy rate for rental housing in our county was among the lowest in the state, at 1% or lower, and it dropped even further by the spring of 2021 to just 0.5%. The state average for rental housing during the same time period was about 4% and the national average was 5.8%. In Cowlitz County, there is more need for low-income housing than there is housing available. As of fall 2021, the waiting list for low-income housing vouchers closed with 1,900 households and many more who were not even able to apply.

According to the [Housing Opportunities of SW Washington strategic plan](#), 47% of low-income housing voucher applicants are households with children. On average, renters in Longview use 55.9% of their income for housing, well above the HUD defined 30% threshold for cost burdened families. In the 2020 Washington State Department of Commerce Homeless Point in Time Count, there were 328 homeless individuals in Cowlitz County. Of those, 153 were unsheltered and more than 600 reached out to the housing coordinated entry program for assistance in 2020.

When unhoused patients are healthy enough to leave the hospital, the lack of a warm, dry shelter makes them more likely to decline in health and return for care. To support the needs of unhoused individuals in transition by ensuring a safe discharge location after a hospital stay or acute care, PeaceHealth partnered with Lower Columbia CAP and Cowlitz Family Health Center to open the Care 2 Home Program.



Housing realities of Cowlitz County

1,900
low-income households waitlisted

55.9%
percentage of income paid for housing by Longview renters

47%
of low-income housing voucher applicants are households with children

0.5%
rental vacancy rate

1%
owner vacancy rate

Sources: Housing Opportunities of SW Washington strategic plan 2021-2025, WA state apartment Market Report 2021, U of Washington & Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Homeownership report third Quarter 2021, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau- census.gov.

Homeless by the numbers 2020-2021

328
homeless individuals during the 2020 Point In Time count

153
unsheltered individuals during 2020 Point In Time count

600
individuals served by housing solutions center for a housing crisis

THE COMMUNITY SPOKE—AND WE LISTENED

While providers of housing are working to find solutions and the Care 2 Home program is a start, we know there is still a significant need for the following:

- Shelter beds or innovative programs to house the unhoused
- More low-income housing units
- New workforce housing to support a growing economy

With \$400,000 in funding from PeaceHealth and the PeaceHealth St. John Foundation, the Care 2 Home recuperative care home opened in the fall of 2020. The program provides a safe place to recover in a 5-bedroom home, along with food, transportation, and intensive housing case management services to help residents find permanent housing solutions. In addition, Cowlitz Family Health Center provides intensive medical case management and connection to follow-up care. To date, 17 individuals have received 1,471 nights of housing, approximately 2,900 meals, 142 social service connections and 131 medical appointments.

This program prevents high-risk individuals from being re-admitted to the hospital. To date there have been no avoidable emergency room visits or hospital admissions among program participants.



HOME - Community priorities: housing as health

We share a belief that affordable housing should be a human right. When we provide housing in our communities, health is more attainable. This is especially true for individuals transitioning from care and those who need added support to find housing or stay housed.

Prioritizing collaborations to serve the unhoused and prevent people from becoming unhoused is the important work ahead. PeaceHealth looks forward to partnering with both public and private partners to help address the critical housing needs in Cowlitz County with a focus on increasing the inventory of shelter beds and low-income housing units. Secondly, we will focus our advocacy efforts in support of the economic need to increase workforce housing.

KEY BENEFITS

- Provides a supportive environment for critical services and care.
- Upholds individual dignity and respect through robust wraparound services.
- Breaks down barriers to engagement by meeting individuals where they are.
- Decreases avoidable hospital readmissions and emergency room visits.



Resilience in the face of hardship

Community programs inspire hope

Cowlitz County has a higher incidence of substance use than the state average. In 2019, reports showed 18% of adults and 8% of 10th graders in the county smoked, compared to 12% and 6% respectively across the state of Washington. Cowlitz County reported 18 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 residents, compared to 16 deaths per 100,000 people in the rest of Washington State, according to [2021 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings](#).

Like many other health related concerns, Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and behavioral health needs in our community increased over the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the New York Times, drug overdoses rose nationally by 30% in 2020 to a record high of 93,000 deaths, with pronounced increases on the west coast. This trend includes a significant increase in deaths related to synthetic non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, all opioids including prescriptions and heroin, and stimulants like methamphetamine. Since 2019, drug deaths have increased 16.3% in Washington state.

(Source: [America's Health Rankings-Washington State Summary](#))

According to research by the University of Washington Drug and Alcohol Institute, Washington state saw overdose deaths climb by 37% in 2020 alone. The largest contributor to this increase was illegally produced and distributed fentanyl and related drugs.

Preliminary data from the Washington State Department of Health in March of 2021 indicates Cowlitz County saw a 43% increase in drug overdose deaths in the first half of 2020, with 14 overdose deaths as compared to 8 in the first half of 2019.

THE COMMUNITY SPOKE—AND WE LISTENED

We know there is a need for behavioral health and SUD treatment in Cowlitz County. Our efforts have focused on building systemic supports for children, youth and adults to further increase access to services and coordinated systems for prevention, treatment and recovery.

The opioid crisis in our community and state

43%

increase in drug overdose deaths in Cowlitz County in 2020

(Source: [University of Washington Drug and Alcohol Institute Washington State](#))

37%

increase in number of overdose deaths in Washington state in 2020

(Source: [University of Washington Drug and Alcohol Institute Washington State](#))

15%

of all deaths in Washington are drug overdoses

(Source: [WA DOH Opioid Overdose Dashboard](#))

18%

of all adults smoke in Cowlitz County

8%

of all 10th graders smoke in Cowlitz County

33%

of all 12th graders in Washington state have used alcohol in the past 30 days

(Source: [2019 Healthy Youth Survey](#))

PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center has partnered with Cowlitz Family Health Center to connect hospital and emergency room patients who express interest directly to SUD treatment. Cowlitz Family Health Center provides a substance use disorder liaison who works with PeaceHealth social workers and multiple local and regional SUD treatment programs to find the right fit for patients seeking treatment upon discharge. The liaison works onsite to meet with patients, start conversations about treatment and provide resources for those who are not yet ready to enter treatment. Since the inception of our partnership in July of 2020, the liaison has met with 149 patients at St. John Medical Center with 14% entering an inpatient or an outpatient program at the time of discharge.



“The substance use disorder liaison has added clinical strength to the care management team. He meets with patients at the hospital who struggle with addiction and develops a rapport to help them navigate community resources. It’s our hope that this intervention can be a catalyst to help break the chains of addiction. The care management team relies on his expertise and community knowledge to help those in need.”

– Sheldon Conrad, Supervisor,
Medical Social Work St. John Medical Center

Cowlitz County Behavioral Health by the numbers 2019-2021

8th

leading cause of death in Washington is death by suicide

(Source: www.afsp.org/statistics)

16%

age-adjusted suicide rate per 100,000 individuals

(Source: www.afsp.org/statistics)

88%

of Washington communities without enough mental health providers

(Source: www.afsp.org/statistics)

58%

12th graders unable to stop or control worrying

(Source: [2019 Healthy Youth Survey](http://2019HealthyYouthSurvey.org))

22%

12th graders considered attempting suicide, 2018

(Source: [2019 Healthy Youth Survey](http://2019HealthyYouthSurvey.org))

KEY BENEFITS

- Liaison integrates community programs with hospital caregivers and patients and provides direct access handoffs to community organizations providing care.
- Individuals receive a direct connection to SUD treatment when they are most ready.

In March of 2021, the University of Washington partnered with the Washington State Health Care Authority, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Washington State Department of Health to survey more than 32,000 high school students in grades 9-12 across the state of Washington about their mental health.

Results in this [survey](#) were staggering. More than 17% of high school students reported they had seriously considered attempting suicide and more than 53% of transgender students said they seriously considered attempting suicide. These statistics reflect the urgency to strengthen mental health supports for youth.

Our partners share our concerns that children and young adults are struggling with mental health due to the isolation and stress of the pandemic. We do not yet have local data to better understand the scope of this issue, but we know that the next two to five years will demonstrate its impact on our most vulnerable community members. We have a close connection to local school districts and youth and family organizations, and we will continue to work side by side with them to support behavioral health needs in our community.



HOPE - Community priorities: collaborating to increase access

In addition to well-established programs in our community, there is a need for increased access to mental health, SUD treatment and early prevention and support services. We will continue to work collaboratively to bring these services to our community. We support current efforts to provide mental health crisis services for all populations and to strengthen mental health and SUD supports. We will partner to ensure new programs are developed to address these needs and others over the next three years.





Holistic care for patients

Wraparound support to improve long-term health and reduce hospital readmissions

Demand for holistic, preventative care is high. Our partnerships with organizations like Youth and Family LINK and the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities reach deep into our communities to engage individuals and families in their everyday lives, addressing social, economic and behavioral needs that impact their health. This is especially important when patients leave our direct care, returning home to manage their own health. Our goal is to create supportive environments where patients can develop the skills and community relationships needed to manage their health while preventing repeat hospital and emergency room visits.

Many individuals in Cowlitz County struggle to meet basic needs due to disability, low income, marginal housing or struggles with mental health and substance use disorder. Individuals dealing with these issues often struggle to maintain their health and well-being, leading to the development of chronic diseases or frequent visits to the emergency room or hospital for care. Access to supports that address safe housing, nutrition and emotional well-being can significantly improve individual health today and increase the likelihood of maintaining or improving health as patients age.

According to the 2020 census, 14.4% of individuals in Cowlitz County live in poverty and 15.5% are disabled. Notably, 13% of Cowlitz County adults have diabetes, a much higher rate than the state average of 9%. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation also shared that 38% of Cowlitz residents are overweight or obese. All of these factors are indications of inadequate social supports leading to health consequences for the community.



“To improve the well-being of some of our most vulnerable community members, AAADSW leverages its resources and expertise with the resources and expertise of our community partners to provide whole-person care that supports an individual’s well-being. AAADSW’s Community Paramedicine program meets people where they live. We listen to their story to understand what is most important to them and provide wraparound services that address the reasons they frequently contact EMS. Our nurse is down to earth & empathetic when engaging the patients!”

THE COMMUNITY SPOKE—AND WE LISTENED
Community organizations see the need to establish stronger connections between sectors to ensure all who seek services receive the supports they need. Community health workers, peer supports, and community health advocates are key to creating these connections.

To address whole-person care, including the social needs of patients who are leaving the hospital, PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center has partnered with the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington (AAADSW) through its Community Paramedicine program to create a collaborative discharge plan with supports for patients who are at high risk for returning to the hospital after an acute care stay. The program initially began

– Christina Marnaris, Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington (AAADSW)

as part of the Medicaid Transformation Project in Washington state in partnership with Cowlitz County Emergency Medical Services and 911 to address low-level medical and social needs of individuals who are high utilizers of 911 services.

This proactive program employs a nurse who connects with individuals in their home to identify and address their environmental, behavioral, and social needs. The community paramedicine nurse creates connections with agencies and services to resolve trip and fall hazards, home care needs, medical case management, transportation and food needs to improve or maintain the health of the individual and prevent repeated 911 calls and preventable hospital admissions.

In the winter of 2020, the AAADSW nurse began taking direct referrals from PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center's care management, with a warm handoff and connection to the community paramedicine program before and upon discharge from the hospital. In the past 11 months, 45 patients have participated in the program. The average age of enrolled patients is 68, and on average, patients have more than five co-morbidities. As we finish the first year of this program, 35% of enrolled patients saw a decrease in the frequency of their hospital readmissions after enrollment in the program.

Initial outcomes have proven successful, with nearly all patients receiving long-term support options including Medicaid Care Supports, Tailored Supports of Older Adults, access to durable medical equipment, help with cleaning and maintenance to improve living conditions, home delivered meals, and care coordination.



CARE – Community priorities: supporting our community beyond traditional healthcare settings

There is an evident need for community health workers, advocates and peer supports to address individual needs that fall outside the scope of traditional healthcare, but still impact total health. We are committed to continuing work with community partners to increase opportunities for new community health worker positions to support whole-person care.

We recognize that one size does not fit all for our community members. We seek to support and partner with organizations that meet the specific needs of priority populations, including people with disabilities; older adults; Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color; and children; to reduce healthcare disparities. We hope to help all community members achieve their individual health goals through advocacy and individual empowerment outside of traditional healthcare settings.

KEY BENEFITS

- Addresses individual social and environmental needs that cause poor or declining health.
- Promotes improvements in healthcare delivery through increased connection with service providers.
- Encourages development of a community health worker model to expand access to care.





Improving access to healthy foods

Connecting hospital patients and community members with food, community gardens, and supportive resources

Access to healthy, affordable food is a critical issue affecting children and families in our communities. We believe everyone should have access to nutritious food because food insecurity can lead to a lifetime of negative health consequences. There is a clear connection between food insecurity and high levels of stress, poor nutrition and chronic diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes.

THE COMMUNITY SPOKE—AND WE LISTENED

We partner with garden programs to expand access to fresh produce for low-income neighborhoods. We are working to create connections that will expand access to food resources for all community members.

A food environment index indicates access to healthy foods by considering the distance an individual lives from a grocery store, supermarket or other locations for healthy food purchases as well as the cost barriers to accessing healthy food. The Food Environment index ranges from a scale of 0 (worst) to 10 (best) and equally weights two indicators of food environment: 1) limited access to healthy foods, and 2) food insecurity.

In 2019, Feeding America reported that 15,510 individuals in Cowlitz County were food insecure, approximately 15% of the total county population. It is estimated that number increased to 17% in 2020, with 20.4% of children, or 5,000 children, experiencing food insecurity. Feeding America predicts one in eight individuals and one in six children will have experienced food insecurity in 2021.

While food insecurity is related to poverty, not all people experiencing food insecurity live below the poverty line. Of the individuals in Cowlitz County who are food insecure, only three-fourths qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. The remaining 4,000 food insecure individuals do not meet the income requirements to qualify for assistance and must find food in other ways.

Food insecurity is part of a complex web of issues related to not having enough resources to meet basic needs. Even households that only experience periodic food insecurity often struggle with multiple challenges including lack of affordable housing, healthcare, steady employment and a living wage. The result is often a series of difficult choices between buying food and paying other expenses such as rent, utilities and healthcare.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO HEALTHY, FRESH FOODS

PeaceHealth has partnered with multiple organizations to support gardening and nutrition education, food production and distribution over the past three years. Investments of \$356,777 in support of Lower Columbia School

Cowlitz County Food Access

7.1/10

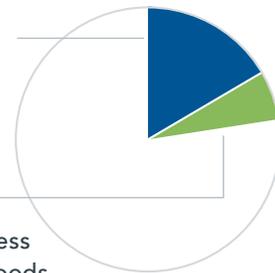
Food Environment Index
in Cowlitz County

15%

Food
insecurity

9%

Limited access
to healthy foods



Source: [Cowlitz County, Washington | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)

Gardens, Youth and Family LINK, Highlands Neighborhood Association, Longview Parks and Recreation, Meals on Wheels, and Lower Columbia CAP have helped establish four new community gardens in low-income neighborhoods, supporting the growth and distribution of produce and other food resources to households in need.

SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS LEAVING THE HOSPITAL

PeaceHealth St. John Medical Center established the Food Farmacy Program in 2019 to help meet the short-term nutritional needs of food insecure patients and their households after discharge from the hospital. Patients who express interest receive three days of groceries, a warm connection to the local food bank network and support from community health workers who can help remove barriers to food bank access. To date, 299 patients and their families—a total of 376 individuals—have been served by the Food Farmacy program, with approximately 86% reporting no food insecurity in the 30 days following their program enrollment.

KEY BENEFITS

- Community members of all ages learn how to grow their own food.
- Improved access to fresh produce for low-income neighborhoods without easy access to grocery stores.
- Direct connection to food insecurity programs for previously underserved individuals and families.
- Supports healthy eating habits and food choice empowerment for individuals and families.

NOURISH – Community priorities: expanding partnerships, gardens, and advocacy efforts

Access to healthy food has improved in the past two years due to local and federal COVID-19 response funds, but we still have work to do. We will continue to partner with food banks and community health worker programs to increase ease of access for individuals in need. Our robust partnerships to establish more garden spaces and garden education programs in low-income neighborhoods will continue to grow. In addition, we will research and define opportunities to advocate for public policy changes at the local, state, and federal level to improve the supports available to food-insecure individuals.

Cowlitz Food Access by the numbers 2020-2021

299

number of patients and their families served by Food Farmacy Program

376

individuals served by the Food Farmacy Program

86%

individuals served by the Food Farmacy Program reported they were no longer food insecure

4

number of new community gardens established between 2020-2021

Source: PeaceHealth Food Farmacy Annual Report 2021



“I have seen the Food Farmacy program provide a crucial step toward food access for those who are facing financial hardships while also trying to manage their well-being. It addresses health justice by setting patients up for success in the discharge-to-home process.”

– Kelly Ferguson, Lead Dietitian,
St. John Medical Center

Final thoughts

For times ahead

Our Community Health Needs Assessment process holds us accountable to listening and learning from our communities. PeaceHealth recognizes that our work is far from over. The needs are forever evolving—and so are we.

We are humbled and honored to serve and learn from our communities. We pledge to continue our collaborative work, standing beside our partners during these challenging times. We invite you to join us in our pursuit of health justice for all.

TOGETHER WE WILL BUILD THE FUTURE.