



A Vital Bridge with the Community

PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center

2025 Community Health Needs Assessment



Our report to the community

The importance of a Community Health Needs Assessment

Every three years, each PeaceHealth location 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 the 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?

Our process is a continuation of the work led by [Healthy Whatcom](#), which started with an assessment of key health indicators and progressed into priority setting and action planning. Our assessment builds on this strong work, and references other key reports produced locally, such as the Opportunity Council's Prosperity Project Assessment and data available at Whatcom Community Health Insights. The priorities we heard in these 2024 reports and gatherings are referenced throughout this assessment.



Our key findings

Healthy Whatcom identified three priority areas for child and family well-being that persist today:

1. child and youth mental health,
2. support for early learning and childcare, and
3. need for stable family housing.

Each of these areas is impacted by economic well-being. Unfortunately, the percentage of Whatcom households (38% overall) facing financial hardship has been steadily on the rise since 2010 with only a single drop in 2021 attributed to the Child Tax Credit stimulus. With more people than ever needing to rely various levels of support and assistance, community health workers, peer supports, and liaisons are needed more than ever. Also needed are trauma informed, compassionately delivered services. The mental health needs in community, especially in children, continues to be higher than the needs experienced pre-pandemic and wait lists are the norm.

The featured examples in this assessment all aim to mitigate the impacts of hardship on health, but there are relatively few examples of work happening to address root causes. One thing remains clear — community is a cornerstone of health. There are many positive examples of community coming together to restore, heal, and collaborate.

Who we are and what we believe in

PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center and PeaceHealth Medical Group serve patients from Whatcom County and beyond. Our caregivers deliver a comprehensive range of preventative, emergency, hospital, specialty and recovery services with kindness and compassion.

Whatcom County is bordered to the north by Canada and to the west by the Salish Sea. Mt. Baker and the foothills region form our eastern border. Whatcom County is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of Coast Salish People who have been the spiritual caretakers of these lands since time immemorial. It is a great honor and responsibility to be entrusted with the care of all people who live here, especially the original inhabitants of these lands — the Lummi and Nooksack People.

To meet our community's health needs, PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center works collaboratively with community providers and service partners, including public health, emergency services, social services, educational partners, housing developers, and many others. These partnerships are celebrated as a shining example of regional collaboration.

Building a network of care from the inside out

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

PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center and PeaceHealth Medical Group have more than 3,500 employees. As one of the largest employers in Whatcom County, we have an added responsibility to learn and lead. This begins by hiring a diverse workforce and creating conditions where every person feels a sense of belonging. We are proud to join local partners in supporting the North Sound Health Equity Scholarship for Black, Indigenous and Students of Color pursuing healthcare education. The scholarship fund has raised \$144,332 since it was established in 2021 and has awarded \$133,600 to 51 scholars living and working in the region. Scholarships help address financial barriers, particularly for underrepresented students or those who have faced systemic oppression due to race.

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 those described in this assessment are crucial to our community's success.



About PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center

190

Average daily census

255

Total licensed beds

4.3

Average length of stay (days)

16,178

Inpatient discharges

401,455

Outpatient clinic visits

10,471

Surgeries

69,986

ED visits

1,885

Births

3,504

Caregivers

837

Physicians and clinicians

Source: PeaceHealth FY 2024



"As we continue to grow and evolve, I want to express my gratitude for the work we do and the communities we serve. The support and trust in our mission is heartfelt. Our journey is shaped by the passion and commitment of individuals, and together, we are building something truly special. These efforts are laying the foundation for the future of healthcare, creating lasting value and positive impacts for all. In this process, we strive to engage, listen and learn as we move forward together. Thank you for being part of this journey."

— Charles Prosper, chief hospital executive,
PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center

A growing community...

Whatcom County

233,240 Population

Bellingham

95,669 Population

Source: World Population Review, 2024

Whatcom County race and ethnicity

10.5% Hispanic/Latino

5.5% Two or more races

5.3% Asian

1.7% Native American/
Alaska Native

1.0% Black/African American

0.1% Native Hawaiian/
Pacific Islander

74.4% White

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 1-year estimates

Supporting health justice for all

Our Mission: From the beginning to present day

The PeaceHealth Mission has remained a constant: 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. Fueled by a commitment to advance health justice for all, we seek to support collaborations that improve community health for all. We do this by continuously asking the question of 'who is impacted most' and matching investments to benefit those shouldering the greatest impact. From 2022-2024, PeaceHealth St. Joseph gave out \$1,865,500 in direct community benefit grants. Combined with financial assistance and unreimbursed Medicaid, 10 cents of every dollar PeaceHealth spends in Whatcom County is towards community benefit.

Financial hardship and connection to health

Economic well-being and health have a deeply interconnected impact on individuals and communities. According to the World Health Organization, people living in poverty have a decreased life expectancy and increased child mortality rates.

People are profoundly impacted by the social drivers of health (SDOH) – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These factors are responsible for a significant portion of health inequities. Financial hardship compounds these conditions in ways that worsen health outcomes and increase susceptibility to disease.

Many agree that the federal poverty level measure doesn't accurately tell us who is struggling to get by in community. ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) is a better measurement; it captures individuals and families who earn more than the federal poverty level, but less than the cost of living for the county and do not qualify for financial assistance. Many ALICE individuals and families continue to struggle despite working one or more jobs and still can't afford the basics (housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare and technology).

The percentage of households below the ALICE threshold has been steadily on the rise from 2010 to 2022. The only observed drop happened in 2021 when families benefitted from the American Rescue Plan's Child Tax Credit stimulus payments. The increase underscores the ongoing struggle for financial stability faced by a significant portion of the population. Focused support to address the economic challenges faced by households exceeds the capacity of many local, dedicated funding sources.

Whatcom County ALICE report findings

35,833 households (38%) fall below the ALICE threshold

ALICE Household types

86% rural residing households

37% White households

53% Hispanic/Latino households

79% single, female households with children

Household costs to survive

\$31,788 single individual household

\$98,736 family of four

Source: ALICE Update, 2024

Our community health pillars

Becoming a healthier community means going beyond the walls of our medical center and clinics. Four pillars of community health inform our priorities for health improvement and collaboration. Across these pillars is the awareness of our solemn responsibility to those that have been underserved and historically marginalized.

- **HOME:** Improve access to service-enriched housing,
- **HOPE:** Increase education and access to treatment and prevention of dependence,
- **CARE:** Expand knowledge, access and engagement with community caregivers, and
- **NOURISH:** Address food insecurities to enhance family and child well-being.

"The Community Health Needs Assessment process serves as a conversation starter that leads to an understanding of our communities that statistics cannot create alone. At PeaceHealth, we find value and joy in building the relationships that make those conversations never-ending."

– Liz Dunne, PeaceHealth President and CEO



Home



Hope



Care



Nourish

Recognizing inequities and elevating partnerships

We are stronger when we work together, this is why community-based partnerships like the ones described in this CHNA report are crucial to our community's success. Partnerships are key to making real change in practice, policy and systems that will lead to more equitable health for all. Throughout this report, you will read about community-based partnerships focused on improving access and conditions for those impacted most by health inequities and system injustice.

Partnership improving access to healthcare for underrepresented groups

One shining example of partnership started in 2024 and focuses on improving access to preventative health screenings. Access to annual mammograms for people over 40 and earlier for those with family breast cancer history is the best way to detect breast cancers. Unfortunately, underrepresented groups like Black, Latina and Native American women, are more likely to face barriers to accessing this life saving screening annually.

Recognizing the pivotal role of community engagement, the mammogram initiative focused on supporting partners with strong community relationships to drive successful screening. Outreach efforts were tailored to meet the needs of each community and speak directly to the concerns of the groups we hoped to reach.

Partnerships like these foster trust and raise awareness about the importance of early detection. It also helps to address cultural and logistical barriers to healthcare access, ensuring that the work is inclusive and impactful.

Breast cancer outreach efforts in 2024 were led by community leaders Devyn Nixon (Divinity Health & Wellness), Lori Melton (Sisters of Whatcom), and Bridgette Hempstead (Cierra Sisters) with support from PeaceHealth. Organizations like Sisters of Whatcom, which aims to create a community for and by Black women and girls, and Cierra Sisters, founded “to break the cycle of fear and increase knowledge concerning breast cancer in Black and other underserved communities” are the trusted messengers in community.

The hope is to continue this outreach annually and expand to serve additional groups.



My Sister's Keeper Community Breakfast and mammogram screening event.
Photos courtesy of Bwell Photo.



Community priority: Safe and affordable housing is a vital condition for health

Community need

Unfortunately, lack of affordability is the leading cause of homelessness. Low vacancy rates have driven up the average cost of rental units for the few that are available. The high cost of housing puts added stress on families and can lead to poor mental and physical well-being. One of the main concerns is that Whatcom County renters and owners are cost-burdened, meaning they spend thirty percent or more of their income on housing costs. This burden increases the risk of homelessness when a medical bill, job loss or other unexpected expense forces people to miss a rental payment.

Homelessness continues to be a persistent concern across our community. In 2023, 1028 households applied for housing assistance through the Coordinated Entry System, more than any other year, and the demand for housing increased by 27% between 2022 to 2024. Homelessness continues to have a disproportionate impact on communities of color: 37% of those in the housing pool identify as non-white. Young adult households (aged 18-24) in the housing pool increased by 10% from 2023 to 2024.

Housing programs are showing success in getting people housed. Unfortunately, additional people are losing their stable housing as fast as the system can find people homes. Housing providers are also grappling with the increasing use of harmful substances like meth and fentanyl. They have faced contaminated units, risks to residents and staff, and increased evictions due to substance misuse.

Contrasting the bleak outlook are shining examples of affordable housing developments that opened in 2023 and 2024. These partners opened 210 new apartments, including Mercy Housing NW's Trailview (77 units) and Millworks (83 units) along with 50 senior housing units at Opportunity Council's Laurel Forest. These projects were years in the making and many also included units set aside for families who had just exited homelessness. A bonus were the early learning and childcare programming built into each site.

Housing realities in Whatcom County

\$1,320 average rent for a one-bedroom apartment

\$1,605 average rent for a two-bedroom apartment

30% of Whatcom households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their income on housing

56% of Whatcom renters are cost-burdened compared to 49% of all Washington renters

4% of all Whatcom County pre-K to grade 12 met the homelessness definition

Source: U of W. WA State Apartment Market Report, Whatcom Point in Time Count, 2024

Way Station opens doors to the community

Unity Care NW, Opportunity Council, PeaceHealth and Whatcom County celebrated the opening of The Way Station, a state-of-the-art health and hygiene facility dedicated to serving individuals experiencing homelessness in Bellingham. Health and hygiene services started in November 2024 and respite care followed in 2025 providing essential services to those living unsheltered.

The Way Station's unique partnership between local health care providers and social services aids in the disruption of cycles that keep people from accessing available housing. Visitors to The Way Station can access case management provided by Opportunity Council and other services to assist their transition to sustainable housing. In addition, Whatcom County Response Division teams are co-located at the Way Station providing further support for visitors.

PeaceHealth investment

PeaceHealth partners with a wide range of organizations involved in supporting those facing housing insecurity. Over the past three years, investments totaling \$553,000 have been made to Road2Home, the Opportunity Council's Recovery House, medical respite at The Way Station, Mercy Housing NW and Northwest Youth Services.

In-kind support also makes a difference. PeaceHealth donated the use of its conference center commercial kitchen to Lighthouse Mission Ministries while the new Mission was under construction. Over 472,000 meals were prepared during the three years that the kitchen was in use.

PeaceHealth looks forward to continuing vital housing partnerships with organizations that share the belief that "housing is health."



The Way Station by the numbers

Health and hygiene facility

17 beds

24/7 staffing

5 days a week that showers and laundry facilities are open to clients

\$10.5M raised to cover Way Station renovations

"Housing instability and homelessness are enormously complex issues, but there is one simple guiding moral imperative: Everyone should have access to decent, safe, and affordable housing. Housing should be considered a human right that we need to invest in as a nation."

— Greg Winter, executive director
Opportunity Council

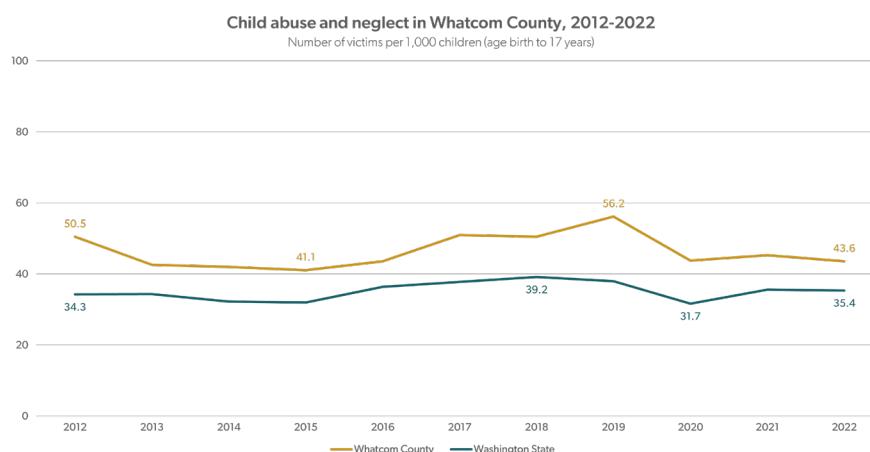


Community priority: Community healing

Community need

Community solutions that help people struggling with behavioral health and substance dependency are in great demand. Long wait times to access mental health providers are common throughout Whatcom County. Like many communities across the nation, Whatcom County has seen a dramatic increase in fentanyl use and overdoses over the last two years. The availability and affordability of this powerful and highly addictive drug have drastically changed the landscape of care and impacted how individuals engage with the healthcare system. Fatal overdoses in Whatcom County increased nearly 31% from 2022 to 2023. Then, in 2024, we saw a downward trend in both fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses. However, numbers remain unacceptably high (5x higher than 2019), and one death is too many.

These life-threatening struggles require the community to come together and better understand the lived experience of youth and young children. Adverse childhood experiences (known as ACEs) and the environments in which children grow up (known as Adverse Community Environments) can help us predict the challenges someone may face throughout life.¹ Data in Whatcom County shows a concerning rate of childhood trauma and neglect that has been higher than the state average for more than 10 years. In 2022, 1,895 children in Whatcom County were accepted by Child Protective Services as having been found to be victims of abuse and neglect. Sadly, this is the same number of babies that are born annually in Whatcom.



¹ Ellis, 2020

A staggering amount of community loss

- 306** people lost their lives to overdose
- 40%** accounting for approximately of all injury deaths in Whatcom County
- 3,691** EMS calls for suspected overdose
- 2,353** overdose emergency visits

Source: Whatcomoverdoseprevention.org, 2022-2024

Executive Director of Brigid Collins Family Support Center, Jenn Lockwood, writes, “The fact that for every child born in our county, there is another that experiences abuse is staggering, disturbing, and frankly, unacceptable. For every miracle of new life celebrated in our community, we have a child, one of those previous miracles, that is devalued and harmed. We envision a community where no child suffers. We commit to working tenaciously with our community to provide support and services to reverse these numbers.”

Efforts like the voter-approved [Whatcom Healthy Children's Fund](#) (HCF) in 2022 were developed to help young children and their families. The Fund aims to create a county where more children are fed, safe, healthy and ready to learn, and families are strong, stable and supported.

Monitoring youth well-being will need to be a continued priority. In March 2023, the Washington State Department of Health's [Healthy Youth Survey](#) assessed the health behaviors, mental health and resiliency of more than 217,000 youth in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. Although still concerning, the results of the survey showed improvements in the mental health of youth when compared to the past surveys completed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feelings of depression or contemplation of suicide among 10th graders declined from 30% in 2021 to 15% in 2023 — the lowest it has been in 20 years. Students also reported an increase in support from trusted adults and schools and academic success for the same period. Transgender and LGBTQI+ students continue to report higher incidences of depression and self-harm. These statistics reflect the positive work that has occurred to support youth since the pandemic and continue to highlight the need for more mental health support for youth.



“While the need is immense, I hold onto a deep sense of hope. We're collaborating more closely than ever, making a real difference and saving lives. Together, we're preventing overdoses, connecting people to treatment, and intervening with compassion”

– Shannon Boustead, MD, medical advisor, Whatcom County Health and Community Services Opioid Response

All Hands Whatcom models collaboration in action

2023 marked the launch of a multi-year [All Hands Whatcom](#) collaborative rooted in the belief that the solution to the opioid crisis we face is community. All Hands Whatcom is focused on gathering as a community to learn together, cultivate compassion and connection, and foster a healing-centered approach to the opioid crisis. PeaceHealth joined with 16 organizations and hundreds of engaged community members committed to healing-centered solutions.

The result has been transformative. Creating opportunities to hear from a variety of different perspectives is a core objective of the All Hands work. When we share what we're seeing from each sector and individual's perspective, we can build community solutions that are lasting, effective, and will save lives. A recurring theme of the annual summits has been the power of collective action, encapsulated in the phrase, "One person can make a difference, but imagine what 100 people who care can do in our community." Another inspiring quote was, "Community begins when judgment ends," highlighting the importance of acceptance and support.

PeaceHealth Investment

Over the past three years, PeaceHealth has contributed \$630,000 to partner organizations that work directly with individuals of all ages in our community to prevent and address mental health and substance use disorders. Our partners include [Brigid Collins Family Support Center](#), [Catholic Community Services Recovery](#), [Lydia Place](#), [All Hands Whatcom](#), [Vamos Outdoors Project](#), [Whatcom Clubhouse](#), [Lynden School District](#), [NAMI Whatcom](#), [Whatcom County Health and Community Services Response Division](#) and [Communities in Schools](#). The long list of partners reflects the deep commitment to addressing the impacts of childhood trauma in our community, reducing stigma, and improving care for generations to come.

All Hands Whatcom models collaboration in action

A new website and online learning library live at www.allhandswhatcom.org

Engagement of over 700 community members, leaders and service providers through virtual learning series, annual summits in 2023 and 2024, and more.

The creation of the Impact Fund provides critical, flexible, emergency financial assistance to families with infants and young children impacted by substance use.

In the first three months alone, clinic partners worked with 48 families to provide funds for transportation, diapers, clothing, groceries, prenatal vitamins, car seats, phone minutes, car repairs, bottles and other much-needed resources.



Care

Community priority: Community connectors as a bridge to better health

Community need

Community caregiving is about engaging people in their everyday lives and addressing factors impacting their health in a community where people live and work. Since social and economic factors are responsible for 40% of a person's total health, community health workers (CHWs), liaisons and others play a vital role in helping people navigate available resources. This is especially true when patients leave a healthcare setting and return home. Individuals have better health outcomes when transitions are well supported, often preventing a return to the hospital or emergency department in crisis. Our community has a thriving network of CHWs, advocates, and volunteers serving diverse communities in unique settings.

Tribal member experience of care, rural access, perinatal health, and care for the immigrant community are identified as top priorities. There is data to support additional efforts and attention. CHWs are often the experts on the barriers faced by community members. They are also trusted messengers when it comes to health outreach. PeaceHealth and others rely on these trusted individuals to ensure that outreach and approaches to care are linguistically and culturally responsive.

Native Liaison Program at PeaceHealth

The [Native Liaison Program at PeaceHealth](#) is a shining example of a unique partnership with the Northwest Washington Indian Health Board. The Native Liaison started in 2022 and works seamlessly across settings, advocating for Tribal members as they navigate emergency care, hospitals, hospice, in-home care, specialty visits and childbirth. Trust and emotional support are cornerstones of the program.

In 2024, the program was able to expand to include a perinatal focus with help from a \$244,000 grant from the North Sound Accountable Community of Health. Known as the Indigenous Life Givers program, the team focuses on growing a network of Indigenous doulas, making childbirth education available, and supporting Native people through birth and the first year of a newborn's life.

About the artwork

The spindle whirl shape is representative of having strong moral fiber and the important role women play in the matriarchal Coast Salish culture. The eagles on each side act as messengers of the creator, carrying prayers up and watching over us in good and bad times. The three human spirits represent how we all need each other and, at the very center, are the Salmon People.

Rural and remote navigation need by the numbers

- 50** average commute miles round trip from rural and remote areas to access care
- 60%** of farmworkers who speak languages other than Spanish (*Source: Sea Mar Promotores Program, 2021*)
- 2nd** Mixteco — an Indigenous language — 2nd most requested language needing interpreter in Childbirth Center. Spanish is first most requested.



Artwork by Jason LaClair created for the Native Liaison Program



Over 100 Lummi Island residents gather to discuss community wellness and set health priorities (2024).

Another program opening in 2025 focuses on supporting women from communities of color, especially Spanish-speaking families, after childbirth. Pasos Seguros (Safe Steps) is

located at Villa Santa Fe on Bakerview in Bellingham and is staffed by Catholic Community Services Community Health Workers. At Pasos Seguros, mothers and families can access postpartum and newborn resources, weigh baby, feed baby and review educational materials. Key collaborators include PeaceHealth, Sea Mar, and the Prepares Program at Assumption Parish.



PeaceHealth investment

Over the past three years, PeaceHealth has contributed \$300,000 to organizations that work directly with individuals of all ages to build a network of care support. Partners include the [Health Ministry Network](#), [YMCA at Lydia Place's Heart House](#), [Sea Mar Promotores](#), [East Whatcom Regional Resource Center](#), [Northwest Regional Council](#), [Lummi Island Health and Wellness](#), [Catholic Community Services](#), and the [GRACE program](#). Each partner has stepped forward with innovative supports identified by the community. These supports range from help accessing health services, hospital discharge care transitions, accessing early learning and childcare, health education, and much more. The valuable efforts of community health workers, promotores and faith community nurses are making a real difference.

"We founded Oasis to respond to the great challenges faced by the migrant Latino community that has made the PNW their home, especially members of the indigenous communities of México and Guatemala. Our call is to serve with equity focused on fundamental justice."

*– Marcela Leonor Suárez Díaz, founder
Oasis*



Nourish

Community priority: Addressing food insecurity

Community need

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 the alternative 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. All 13 of The Whatcom County Food Bank Network food banks report record high visits. In 2024, the area's largest food bank, Bellingham Food Bank, spent over \$5M on food purchases to meet shoppers' needs compared to the \$400K spent on food in 2019. Food banks across the region had to shift from relying on donations to food purchasing because food available from previous partners like Food Lifeline and Harvest NW are down 50 to 75%.

All this adds up to greater demand and much less food available. 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 affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, steady employment and a living wage. The result is often a series of tradeoffs that explain in part the rise in food bank visits.

In response to urgently rising demand, PeaceHealth contributed more than \$250K between 2021 and 2024 to support the Bellingham Food Bank expansion and food distribution efforts. PeaceHealth and the Bellingham Food Bank also continue to serve families through the Food Farmacy programs at PeaceHealth Pediatrics and soon at the Lynden Clinic. When a family or individual is identified as food insecure during a clinic visit, they are offered a food box to meet immediate hunger needs containing several days of shelf-stable foods, protein, dairy and produce. This long-standing partnership goes beyond offering immediate support by connecting families with ways to access food banks after their visit.

Since 2017, Whatcom youth eligible for free and reduced lunch has gone from 38% to 51%, and some school districts like Nooksack, Mt. Baker and Ferndale have rates as high as 70% of students. Unfortunately, over the same period, fewer people have been signing up to receive Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In Whatcom County, the rate is around 12%. This is why programs like Food Farmacies, Market Match and Fruit & Veggie Vouchers help.

Whatcom county food insecurity

127%	increase in Whatcom Food Bank visits since 2021, compared to state average increase of 57%
50%	of food bank shoppers are BIPOC, immigrants and/or refugees
1 in 4	individuals depended on a food bank in 2024
56-64%	of migrant farmworkers are food insecure
~90%	of Indigenous farmworkers are food insecure
27%	of low-income respondents reported having experienced hunger in the last 12 months because they couldn't get enough food (N=450)

Source: Opportunity Council Prosperity Project, 2024.



“Despite working one or more jobs, many people in our community still can’t afford the basics. This leads to some tough situations for families, forcing people to choose between things like buying food or paying rent, picking up a prescription or putting gas in the car, seeing the doctor or buying baby formula.”

– Kristi Birkeland, president and CEO, United Way of Whatcom County

Basil, the food truck, makes healthy food choices fun

Over the past several years, thanks in part to support from PeaceHealth, [Common Threads](#) launched a food truck, Basil, that has served over 32,000 meals to low-income youths and their families.

Basil brings free healthy meals and educational activities to low-income, BIPOC and rural youth with access barriers to nourishing foods. All meals meet the USDA healthy meal guidelines and focus on choice, dignity, joyful exposure to new healthy foods, and cultural relevance. The food truck team works closely with community partners to identify gaps in food access for hungry youth.

Common Threads has built important relationships with affordable housing sites like Villa Santa Fe, Regency Park, Sterling Meadow and Millworks, where youth face challenges in accessing summer and after-school meals. Community input informs the food truck schedule, menu and paired enrichment offered by our food educators.

These are communities where fresh, healthy food is not easily accessible.

Food programs by the numbers

32,000	meals served to low-income youth
800	grocery home deliveries each week
13	area food banks that make up the Whatcom Food Bank Network

Source: Common Threads and Bellingham Food Bank, 2024

PeaceHealth investment

PeaceHealth has partnered with multiple organizations to support access to nourishing food with a focus on nutrition education, access to nutritious foods, and the enhancement of facilities where meals are served. Three years of investments totaling \$382,000 were distributed to [Bellingham Food Bank](#), [Lummi Nation Boys and Girls Club](#), [Twin Sisters Mobile Market](#), [Community to Community Development](#), [Whatcom Family YMCA](#), [Common Threads](#) and [Birchwood International Market](#). All these partners and more have helped grow the network of accessible nutritious food for residents of Whatcom County who are experiencing food insecurity during these unparalleled times.