

Hospital Implementation Strategy | 2022-25



PURPOSE STATEMENT

This document serves as the facility specific implementation strategy for Harris Regional Hospital and addresses the community health needs identified through a collaborative community health needs assessment (CHNA) process conducted with local and regional partners in western North Carolina. This document outlines plans for Harris Regional Hospital to support specific community benefit efforts as part of a larger community-wide plan.

Paper copies of this document and the CHNA may be obtained at Harris Regional Hospital, 68 Hospital Road, Sylva, NC 28779 or by phone 828-586-7000. This document is also available electronically via the hospital website www.myharrisregional.com.

OVERVIEW

Based on the findings of the 2022-2025 Community Health Needs Assessment, Jackson County faces a number of health challenges, including high rates of obesity, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

Food insecurity affects close to 25% of the population, leading to concerns about nutrition and access to healthy foods. While the county offers outdoor recreational opportunities, only a quarter of residents engage in regular physical activity. The community has a history of self-sustenance through family gardens and farmers' markets, but many rely on fast food due to long commutes and budget constraints.

Substance abuse prevention is a top priority, especially among youth, with efforts focused on education, awareness, and access to treatment. Additionally, the county has seen a rise in opioid-related emergency department visits despite a decrease in opioid prescriptions.

Jackson County also faces challenges in mental health care access, with a quarter of the population unable to obtain needed services. The aging population has access to strong support services, but there are gaps in resources such as affordable housing, communication between agencies, and access to health care. Unintentional injuries, including falls among the elderly, are a significant concern.

The county is working to address these challenges through various programs and initiatives, but more resources and collaboration are needed to improve health outcomes for all residents.

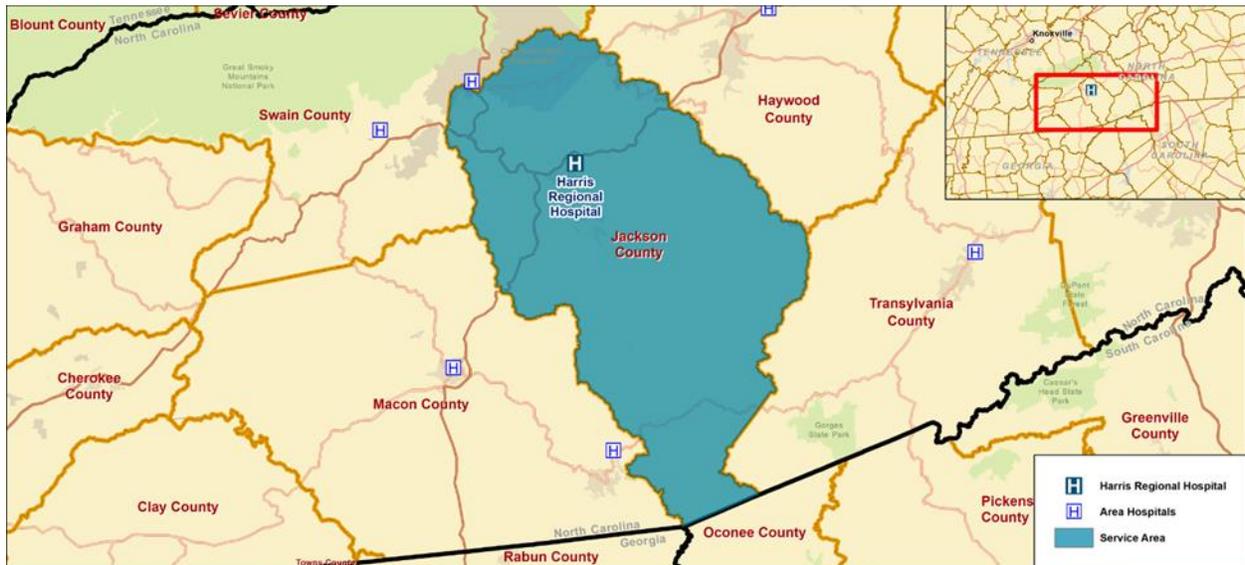
Harris Regional Hospital plays a crucial role in addressing the health challenges identified in Jackson County's health needs assessment. Through various offerings, the hospital can educate the community

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on nutrition, physical activity, and healthy lifestyle choices. Substance abuse education programs can help prevent and reduce substance abuse, especially among youth. Through efforts to help individuals establish with a primary care provider, the hospital can provide mental health screenings and referrals to address mental health needs. Expanding access to subspecialty care through physician recruitment and retention efforts, combined with providing access to telemedicine services, will improve access to needed care, particularly for underserved populations. The hospital will make a diligent effort in collaborating with community partners to strengthen initiatives and promote health and wellness across the county.

OUR COMMUNITY AND KEY PARTNERS

Harris Regional Hospital's Community



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Jackson County's population has been steadily growing over the past decade. In 2010, the population was 40,271, and by 2020, it had increased to an estimated 46,837. The age distribution in Jackson County has remained relatively stable, with a median age of around 37 years. However, there has been a slight increase in the older population, with more residents reaching retirement age. Access to certain types of healthcare has been a concern in Jackson County. The percentage of residents unable to get needed medical care increased significantly from 8.6% in 2018 to 14% in 2021. This indicates a growing need for improved healthcare access in the area. The way residents consume healthcare has likely shifted over the years. Factors such as the availability of healthcare services, changes in insurance coverage, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced how residents access and utilize healthcare services. Overall, Jackson County has experienced significant population growth across the last two decades, along with challenges related to healthcare

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access and an aging population. Efforts to improve healthcare access and address the needs of the growing population, particularly the elderly, are crucial for the county's public health.

Our community health needs assessment process and products were supported collaboratively by **WNC Healthy Impact**, a partnership between hospitals and health departments to improve community health in western North Carolina. This innovative regional effort is coordinated, housed and financially supported by **WNC Health Network**, the alliance of western NC hospitals working together to improve health and healthcare. Learn more at www.WNCHN.org.



WNC **HEALTHY** IMPACT

2022-2025 COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Key Findings and Data:

- **Food Insecurity:** 25% of Jackson County residents worry about running out of food before having money to buy more.
- **Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse prevention is a top priority across all health and community service organizations in the county, especially focusing on youth substance abuse prevention.
- **Unintentional Injuries:** Jackson County has a higher rate of unintentional injuries compared to regional and state averages, with falls being a leading cause among older adults. From 2015-2019, 118 deaths were due to unintentional injuries, accounting for 8.1% of all-cause mortality in the county.
- **Opioid Epidemic:** The number of unintentional opioid-related overdose deaths decreased from 10 in 2018 to 8 in 2019, but the ED visits with an opioid overdose diagnosis grew from 19 in 2019 to 42 in 2020. Despite this, the number of opioid pills dispensed in Jackson County has been decreasing each year, with only 11% of residents receiving opioid pills in 2020, the lowest percentage compared to the region and state.
- **Mental Health:** 26% of Jackson County residents were receiving treatment or medication for mental health issues, with 25% reporting that they could not find adequate access to resources to support their mental health.
- **Behavioral Health:** In 2021, Jackson County residents reported a decline in receiving the social and emotional support they needed, with roughly 66% stating they "always/usually" received

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such support, an 8% decrease from three years prior. Additionally, 74% of residents reported being able to stay hopeful in difficult times, which was about 10% below the regional average. While there was an improvement in the number of days residents experienced poor mental health, the percentage of residents unable to obtain needed mental health services in the past year doubled since 2018, with one quarter of the population unable to access these services. Suicidal ideation was reported by 12% of residents in 2021, higher than the regional average of 8%, indicating a significant need for concern.

Corresponding Resource Gaps:

- **Affordable Housing:** There are few affordable housing options in the county, and available housing is often either unsafe, inadequate, and too expensive.
- **Communication:** While resources may be available, there is a lack of communication between agencies, hindering access to these resources for residents.
- **Healthy Foods:** Healthy food options are lacking, with limited grocery stores and farmers' markets. Fast food is readily available and cheap, contributing to unhealthy diets.
- **Homeless Shelter:** There is a need for a long-term plan for a homeless shelter, as the homeless population has increased significantly in the county and there is no official shelter provided through the county or other agencies.
- **Internet Access:** Limited internet access is a major issue, especially in rural areas, leaving many residents without access to essential services and information. Lack of information often contributes to lack of knowledge about available resources.
- **Mental Health Services:** There is a need for more mental health services, including housing and treatment facilities, to help those suffering from mental health and substance use issues.
- **Spanish-Speaking Providers:** The availability of healthcare providers who speak Spanish is limited, hindering access to healthcare for Spanish-speaking residents.
- **Access to Healthcare (Including Subspecialty Care):** Residents have difficulty accessing healthcare due to a lack of providers, financial constraints, and the need to travel out of the county for some types of subspecialty care, such as neurology and endocrinology. Many residents do not have the means to travel and instead go without necessary care.

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Existing Resources and Strengths:

- **Support services for aging population:** The community has a strong network of support services for the aging population, including the Cashiers Senior Center, which provides resources and programs tailored to the needs of older adults. The Department on Aging works to identify the needs of older adults and ensure they receive the necessary support and guidance.
- **Community health resources for the uninsured and underinsured:** Jackson County offers a range of resources to support the uninsured and underinsured population. This includes the Mountain Area Pro Bono PT Clinic, Blue Ridge Health FQHC, Nurse Family Partnership, and more, which provide essential healthcare services to those who may not have access to insurance.
- **Access to free outdoor recreational opportunities:** The county offers a variety of free outdoor recreational opportunities, such as the Greenway Trail, which provide residents with access to physical activity and leisure activities. These resources are valuable for promoting a healthy lifestyle and are particularly beneficial for residents who may not have the means to access private gyms or recreational facilities.

Corresponding Recommendations for Harris Regional Hospital:

- **Healthy Living Workshops:** Harris Regional Hospital can offer regular workshops on nutrition, physical activity, and healthy lifestyle choices. These workshops can be open to the community and focus on practical tips and strategies for improving overall health and well-being.
- **Substance Abuse Education:** Develop educational materials and programs to raise awareness about substance abuse and addiction. These programs can be targeted at different age groups and can include information on the dangers of substance abuse, signs of addiction, and available resources for treatment and support.
- **Mental Health Outreach:** Partner with local clinics and organizations to provide mental health screenings and referrals. Harris Regional Hospital can also organize community events and workshops to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma.
- **Telemedicine Services:** Expand telemedicine services to improve access to care, especially for underserved populations. Telemedicine can provide a convenient and cost-effective way for patients to consult with healthcare providers, particularly for mental health and behavioral health services.
- **Physician Recruitment:** Continue recruitment efforts within various subspecialties to meet the community's needs. Having a diverse team of healthcare providers can help address the unique health challenges faced by the community.

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- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with local agencies, schools, and businesses to promote health and wellness initiatives. By working together, Harris Regional Hospital can leverage existing resources and expertise to maximize the impact of their programs and services.

Evaluation and Monitoring Recommendations:

- Regular assessment of impact
- Collect feedback from community members
- Adjust strategies based on evaluation findings

Implementation Strategy Plan for Harris Regional Hospital

Goal: Improve the overall health and well-being of the Jackson County community by addressing key health issues identified in the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA).

Priority Areas:

1. **Obesity/Physical Activity/Nutrition**
2. **Substance Abuse Prevention**
3. **Behavioral Health**

Objectives & Corresponding Implementation Strategies

1. **Objective 1: Obesity/Physical Activity/Nutrition**
 - **Implement community-based programs:** By utilizing the data indicating that only a quarter of the community engages in regular physical activity, despite the outdoor-friendly environment, Harris will work to develop programs that leverage the outdoor recreational spaces and promote community-wide physical activities such as walking groups, fitness classes, and outdoor events, such as “Walk With a Doc”, revitalizing the annual Smoky Streak 5K race each fall, and supporting and promoting the development of walking groups sponsored by the hospital.
 - **Collaborate for healthy food access:** To address the lack of healthy food options and reliance on fast food, Harris Regional Hospital can showcase collaboration with local farmers' markets, community gardens, and food distribution programs, helping to foster awareness about available resources. Additionally, the hospital can develop marketing strategies and campaigns to increase awareness of healthy eating and provide resources for growing and accessing fresh produce.

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- **Educational workshops:** By partnering with and hosting other community agencies at the hospital, Harris can offer workshops on nutrition and healthy cooking, emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet. The hospital can use data on food insecurity and limited access to healthy foods to tailor programs that are accessible and affordable for all residents.

2. Objective 2: Substance Abuse Prevention

- **Expand access to treatment:** To address the increase in opioid-related ED visits and deaths, Harris Regional Hospital can expand access to substance abuse treatment programs. These programs will utilize the data on prescription drug abuse and overdoses to prioritize resources for prevention and intervention programs.
- **Educational resources:** Harris Regional Hospital can develop educational materials and programs based on key informant data indicating the need for more awareness and better distribution systems for substance abuse prevention. This can be done by collaborating with local law enforcement and EMS to provide training and resources for overdose prevention, including Narcan distribution.
- **Stigma reduction:** The hospital can help to address the stigma associated with substance abuse by providing community education and support programs, highlighting success stories, and promoting understanding of substance use disorder as a mental health issue.

3. Objective 3: Behavioral Health

- **Increase access to mental health services:** Harris Regional Hospital can respond to the data indicating a significant increase in residents unable to obtain needed mental health services by working to expand its own mental health services. This may be done by providing telemedicine options for mental health consultations to reach rural residents.
- **Reduce stigma:** The hospital can develop campaigns to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues, based on key informant data highlighting the strong stigma attached to mental health in the community. This may be done by partnering with local organizations and schools to promote mental health awareness and acceptance.
- **Support for older adults:** The hospital can address the decline in social and emotional support among older adults by providing specialized programs and services tailored to the aging population. This may be done by collaborating with the Jackson County Department on Aging, the Southwestern Commission/Area Agency on Aging, and local

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long-term care facilities to offer counseling, support groups, and activities tailored to the needs of older adults.

Resources Needed:

1. Funding for Program Development and Implementation:

- Allocate resources for the development and implementation of healthy living workshops, substance abuse education programs, and mental health outreach initiatives through the budgeting process.
- Seek, develop, and sustain community partnerships to support these programs.

2. Staffing Resources:

- Consider hiring additional healthcare providers and workers specializing in obesity, substance abuse, and behavioral health to deliver services and workshops.
- Recruit support staff to assist in program coordination, educational outreach, and administrative tasks, to include dedicated time by various departments such as marketing, clinical education, human resources, and physician services.

3. Educational Materials and Equipment:

- Build into the budgeting process the ability to purchase educational materials such as pamphlets, brochures, and visual aids for workshops and outreach activities.
- Invest in equipment for workshops, such as exercise tools, cooking utensils for healthy cooking demonstrations, and educational technology.

4. Technology Upgrades:

- Invest resources to upgrade telemedicine technology to improve access to care for underserved populations, such as iPads for hospital units which may utilize telemedicine services heavily.
- Working with information services, ensure that the hospital's technology infrastructure can support telemedicine services effectively.

Evaluation and Monitoring:

• Regular Assessment of Impact:

- **Use Data Collection Tools:** Utilize existing data and collect new data to assess the impact of programs and initiatives. For example, track changes in obesity rates, substance abuse rates, and mental health outcomes before and after program implementation.

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- **Data Analysis:** Compare data over time to identify trends and patterns. Look for correlations between program implementation and changes in health indicators.
- **Collect Feedback from Community Members:**
 - **Conduct Surveys, Focus Groups, or Community Forums:** Engage with community members to gather feedback on the effectiveness of programs and services.
 - **Feedback Areas:** Seek feedback on program content, accessibility, and impact on health behaviors. Also, inquire about community needs and preferences for future programs.
 - **Use Feedback for Informed Decisions:** Use community feedback to make informed decisions about program improvements and adjustments.
 - **Actionable Feedback:** Implement changes based on community suggestions to enhance program effectiveness and relevance.
- **Adjust Strategies Based on Evaluation Findings:**
 - **Refine Programs and Initiatives:** Use evaluation findings to refine programs and initiatives to ensure they are effective and sustainable.
 - **Modify Strategies to Address Emerging Health Needs:** Stay responsive to emerging health needs and community priorities.

Timeline

Year 1 Goal: Develop and implement comprehensive programs to address obesity, substance abuse, and mental health in Jackson County.

- Analyze data and collaborate with stakeholders to inform strategies.
- Develop partnerships with local organizations, schools, and businesses.
- Launch Healthy Living Workshops focusing on nutrition, physical activity, and healthy lifestyles.
- Initiate Substance Abuse Education programs in schools and community centers.

Year 2 Goal: Expand programs and services to meet evolving community needs.

- Begin mental health outreach activities, including screenings and referrals.
- Implement telemedicine services for mental health consultations.
- Open additional physician recruitment searches for subspecialties lacking in the area.
- Survey primary care providers regarding access to mental health services and develop plans to provide additional resources where possible.

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Year 3 Goal: Evaluate program effectiveness and ensure long-term sustainability.

- Expand healthy living workshops to reach more community members.
- Enhance substance abuse education programs based on feedback and evaluation.
- Increase mental health outreach activities and expand telemedicine services.
- Evaluate the impact of the programs and make adjustments as needed.

Conclusion

By focusing on these priority areas and implementing targeted programs and initiatives, Harris Regional Hospital can play a crucial role in improving the health and well-being of the Jackson County community. Collaboration with local organizations and ongoing evaluation will be key to the success of these efforts.

APPROVALS

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