

**2022 Regional Community Health Needs Assessment:
Geographic Community Conversation Summary: Main Line Central
[Delaware & Montgomery Counties]**

Community Assets

Participants spoke highly of **local organizations serving the community**, including **resources for older adults**, such as the PALM (Positive Aging in Lower Merion) Center located in Ardmore and the Montgomery County Office on Aging, as well as **activities for youth**, such as the Haverford YMCA and local scouting programs.

- *“The senior center, I think has done a good job over the years in giving out various information about health, including exercise classes. ... My mother was doing exercise classes for 20 years at the PALM, and she swears that's what's kept her as active as she is.”*
- *“I think the senior centers are a wonderful source of information. ... Through PALM, I was turned on to a diabetes prevention class that's offered by Montgomery County Aging and Adult Services, and I signed up for that.”*

Local churches, several of which donate food to those in need, were cited as important assets. One church has a community garden that gives away fresh produce and has hosted free COVID vaccine clinics open to the public.

A long-time Ardmore resident commented on the **strong sense of community** in her area, saying: *“You have people in the community check up on you or checking in or making a phone call or dropping something off. They're very supportive around here, which is the beauty of this town.”* Another participant mentioned that **local social media groups also help foster community connections**. *“There's a lot of social media groups, like the Buy Nothing groups, that ... connect community members, new folks. That has been a really good, I feel, connection—allowing people, especially people who are new or who may not [know] people, to get things that they need, and also form a community.”*

Several mentioned the benefit of nearby **green space and other recreational spaces**:

- *“As a lifelong resident, Haverford College and their nature trail have been valuable for me. ... Just a place to be able to experience – lift your spirits by experiencing the different seasons, walking through the woods, I love that.”*
- *“The Ardmore playground, especially during the summertime, man, there's always a basketball game going on.”*

Key Challenges

The pandemic's detrimental effects on mental health and access to health care were chief concerns for most participants. Stress, trauma, and grief associated with the pandemic have increased demand for mental health services, at a time when health system capacity is strained. *“This is trauma,”* said one participant. *“I don't think there's many people who haven't lost someone or know someone that's lost someone either to COVID or something that's indirect.”*

Several participants reported **long waits for scheduling medical appointments, leading to delayed or avoided care** for preventive services, such as mammograms, and other health

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services. Concern also was expressed about the pandemic’s impact on health care providers, both in terms of their well-being and their capacity to meet demand for medical services:

- *“We are losing so many providers because of COVID. How are all the people in the area going to receive medical care? If you have to wait two or three months to get a doctor's appointment, what's that doing to your health?”*
- *“Clearly, the hospitals lack capacity to deal with things that are non-COVID, right? I think the ICUs are pretty much packed if not near packed with COVID. ... I do wonder what is being done to care for the mental health of medical providers on the other side of COVID as well, because they're just dealing with it day in and day out.”*

Substance use issues, including alcohol and drugs, are common among both youth and adults, several participants said. **Obesity, heart disease, and diabetes** also are prevalent, noted several participants.

Social Determinants of Health

Despite the Main Line’s reputation as a wealthy area, participants cited a number of social and environmental determinants that impede health and well-being for some, especially older adults and people living on fixed or limited incomes. One participant dubbed it *“the myth of the Main Line. ... People just sort of think if you live on the Main Line, you are [in] the healthy-wealthy group. And we need to recognize that there are children going hungry in this area.”* Another added: *“the financial impact of COVID has really put financial strain on a lot of older adults and families.”*

Housing affordability and the ability for older adults to age in place are key challenges for those living on fixed or limited incomes:

- *“Ardmore has been overdeveloped and overpriced [so]that those of us who have lived here for years are being forced out of our homes.”*
- *“I definitely feel like I'm being priced out of my own home. The older neighbors are all passing on, and those of us who are left are really under the gun to try and keep our properties up to standard with a limited income.”*

Recent consumer price inflation has added to the financial strain for some. *“The price of gas, the price of food, the price of everything has increased so much that it has put a strain on families, and it definitely has impacted the aging population.”*

Another concern, cited by several participants: **lack of convenient access to local markets selling healthy food at affordable prices**: *“There should be more places that have, you know, fresh produce at reasonable prices.”* Another shared: *“They have a farmers market in Bryn Mawr, but the prices are pretty darn high.”* Eating out also poses challenges due to cost: *“All the new restaurants that are coming up are very pricey for people on fixed incomes.”*

Also of note: **Ardmore is divided between Montgomery and Delaware Counties**. A few participants said that residents living in the Montgomery County area of Ardmore have access to

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more robust services than those residing in Delaware County, at least with regard to county services for the aging. *“That’s a really big issue, because there are a lot of elderly people living in Delaware County that are totally neglected,”* said one participant.

Other issues affecting health, mentioned were **transportation barriers**, such as lack of bike lanes and limited public transportation routes, and **noise pollution**, both from traffic on major roads, such as Lancaster Avenue, and commercial jets with low overhead flight patterns.

- An older adult participant commented: *“The regional line that goes through Philadelphia-- good luck climbing up the stairs on that thing, you know? And even though we ride for free on SEPTA, it’s – transportation is hard.”*
- *“I used to ride my bike up Ardmore Avenue when I was younger, and last week, I tried to do the same thing, I almost got killed, you know? There’s no bike lanes or anything.”*

Children and Youth

The pandemic’s impact on mental health among young people was a major concern for participants, along with delayed and limited access to mental health care. *“Affordable therapy is just very lacking right now. I think social isolation has been rough on the kiddos,”* said a participant who works with youth. *“The wait right now for mental health treatment for children is three to five months or longer for us to be able to get them connected to somebody who is trained, who can actually work with them on a fee that is affordable for the families.”*

Several participants also raised concern about the **high rate of substance use among children and youth**, which they said has increased during the pandemic. *“We’ve had kids as young as 11, 12 on cocaine. I think it’s a contribution of the high pressure of mental health, the need to numb themselves and escape. And I think alcohol is somewhat normalized to a point where it’s like, is it normal or is it alcoholism, right?”* said one participant.

“I’m just sort of thinking about in terms of our young people, their involvement with drugs and weapons. ... It’s more of a problem now than it used to be,” added another participant, who cited the recent murder of a young man in the community over a gun argument.

During the pandemic, domestic violence also has increased, said a participant who works with youth. *“We have definitely seen [an] increase for children who are witnesses to domestic violence, sometimes resulting in homicide, and that has increased more, especially during COVID.”* In addition, she mentioned **an increase in online sexual exploitation of children**, which she attributed to lack of safeguards to ensure children’s internet safety, such as adequate education and supervision.

Although the area has abundant playgrounds and recreational facilities for youth, one participant noted that cost can be a barrier for participation in local youth sports leagues. *“The fees can get hefty, depending on the sport. And that would create a barrier for some families to allow their kids to be part of something that they should be.”*

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Older Adults

Social isolation during the pandemic has been harmful to older adults' mental and physical health, several participants said. A participant who works at a senior center mentioned recently seeing an older man who her organization serves. During the pandemic, *"he stayed engaged in our virtual programs. ... [But] when I saw him, he looked so old, and he looked isolated. He looked unkempt and disheveled. So, the isolation aspect is, I think, first and foremost. ... What COVID did do is expose the need for social interaction—that it is important to be able to speak and touch and have those relationships."*

Although a range of local resources and services are available to support older adults and others in need, some may be reluctant to access those services: *"There are those who, because they're on the Main Line, and they're [in] the aging population, they don't want folks to know that they're struggling."*

Barriers to health care access among older adults include insurance expenses and the ability to afford or use technology:

- *"For seniors who are on Medicare or whatever, the cost of co-pays prevent a lot of people from seeing different specialists and people that they need to see. ... If you're not connected with the right health plan or supplemental plan, the co-pays can be prohibitive."*
- *"I can think right now of three people I know that are 80s to 90s that are living by themselves, do not have internet services, wouldn't even have a clue how to get onto the internet."*
- *"I live in a community where we have a number of old folks who just don't access the internet, and they live in isolation."*

Other Groups

Several participants mentioned the **needs of immigrants living in the area who lack English proficiency, creating barriers to access health care and other services**. With a growing number of Asian and Hispanic/Latino immigrants, the area has greater need for more language services in healthcare settings and other services for these populations. One participant, speaking from a patient's perspective, noted that access to high-quality language interpretation services is important for *"empowering people to actually be part of what's happening to their lives and their treatment and their needs."*

An Asian American participant who speaks English fluently said that she accompanies her non-English-speaking family members on medical appointments to ensure they understand health communications. *"I just know for us, we obviously, we help them because [they're] family,"* she said. *"But if you didn't have family, what would you do, right? Are there even resources to help?"*

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Suggested Actions

Expand access to primary care services. One participant advocated for passage of statewide legislation that would give nurse practitioners the ability to set up independent practices to provide primary care. While the Main Line has a number of good hospitals and health care facilities, this participant said: *“The wait is crazy. The wait for dermatology visits or to see a primary care [for a] physical, it's just crazy, so we need to do something about the wait times.”* Another participant suggested creating a visiting nurse program or once-monthly clinic in an easily accessible community location to provide basic care for older adults who do not drive.

Expand affordable transportation options for older adults and create a way to regularly check in on those who are socially isolated. Free or inexpensive transportation options are needed to help older adults get to and from medical appointments and other community services, helping them to age in place. One participant also recommended creating a service, perhaps led by volunteers, to call on those who are homebound to check in and assess their needs.

Increase outreach to boost awareness of community health and social service resources. For example, hospitals need to better publicize their community health services, such as free seminars, screenings and health fairs, one participant recommended. Another suggested creating a centralized clearinghouse with easily accessible information about a wide range of health and social service resources in the area.

Expand access to affordable housing. One participant, an attorney, suggested passing a local ordinance requiring that a certain percentage of units in new developments be offered at affordable prices for people living on fixed or limited incomes.