

Executive Summary

Overview

In order to strategically address health issues within the community, it is vital to sustain broad community partnerships first and develop a shared vision and goals for the future. Led by the Williamson County and Cities Health District (WCCHD), the 2019 Williamson County Community Health Assessment (CHA) was developed by a strong task force of community partners (CHA Task Force): Ascension Seton, Baylor Scott & White Health, Bluebonnet Trails Community Services (BTCS), Eastern Williamson County Collaborative, Georgetown Health Foundation, Lone Star Circle of Care (LSCC), Opportunities for Williamson and Burnet Counties (OWBC), St. David's Foundation, United Way of Williamson County, and the WilCo Wellness Alliance. The 2019 CHA is designed to collect, analyze, and use data to educate and mobilize communities, develop priorities, gather resources, plan actions to improve population health, and provide a foundation of data to be used for evidence-based goal setting and decision making for Williamson County, Texas.

Methodology

The CHA Task Force used the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) process as a proven systematic framework for identifying community health needs and the resources for meeting those needs.(1) The MAPP process consisted of four assessments – the Community Health Status Assessment (CHSA), the Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA), the Forces of Change Assessment (FoCA), and the Local Public Health Systems Assessment (LPHSA).(2) The findings from each assessment are included as individual sections in the report. Together, the four assessments provide a comprehensive view of the factors influencing the health of the community and guide the community's determination of priority areas. Through the process, the CHA Task Force engaged over 2,600 community members and stakeholders and 182 households.

The assessment process involved gathering both quantitative data (e.g. “numbers”) and qualitative data (e.g. “voices of the community”) through a variety of methods:

- Community Health Survey
- Facilitated activities at community meetings
- Community focus groups
- Stakeholder focus groups
- Key informant interviews
- Mom's Community Listening Forum
- Local Public Health Systems Assessment
- Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER)
- Primary and secondary data analysis

Community Health Status Assessment

The CHSA explores aggregated, population-level data to define the health status of the county and provide key findings to residents and stakeholders. Indicators are divided into eleven broad categories based on the MAPP framework's “Core Indicator List.” The CHSA draws comparisons between Williamson County and Texas health indicators, as well as applicable Healthy People 2020 (HP2020) targets. The CHA Task Force obtained data from many primary and secondary sources at the local, state, and national level. Significant secondary data sources include American Community Survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Texas Department of State Health Services, and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Local organizations, including BTCS, Hill Country Community Ministries, and LSCC, also provided primary data.

In 2017, the **TOP 10 CAUSES OF DEATH** in Williamson County were:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Cancer | 6. Unintentional Injuries |
| 2. Heart Disease | 7. Kidney Disease |
| 3. Alzheimer's Disease | 8. Suicide |
| 4. Stroke | 9. Diabetes Mellitus |
| 5. Lung Disease | 10. Parkinson's Disease |

Community Themes and Strengths Assessment

The CTSA focuses on identification of current community issues, perceptions about quality of life, and community assets through feedback from community stakeholders and the general public.

Strengths and Assets

Through the CTSA, nine strengths and assets in the county were identified by residents and stakeholders and can continue to be leveraged to improve the health and wellness of the community:

- **GOOD EDUCATION SYSTEM:** Residents identified good schools as the #1 strength of the county. Fifteen Independent School Districts and multiple higher education campuses provide resources and services.
- **LOW CRIME AND SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS:** Residents identified low crime and safe neighborhoods as the #2 strength of the county. However, focus group participants noted higher crime areas and unsafe neighborhoods in rural communities.
- **ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE:** Residents identified access to healthcare as the #3 strength of the county. There is a general perception that available healthcare is of high quality, especially for the insured.
- **PARKS, TRAILS, AND RECREATION FACILITIES:** Residents identified use of parks and recreation as the #4 strength of the county. The county has many parks, facilities, and over 208.6 miles of trails.
- **CLEAN ENVIRONMENT:** Residents identified a clean environment as the #5 strength of the county. A clean environment is essential to the health and well-being of residents.
- **RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL VALUES:** Residents identified religious or spiritual values as the #2 strength in the East. Churches, a place of trust, play a key role in community support and delivery of services.
- **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS:** Stakeholders identified community partnerships as the #1 solution to improving health in the county. Many organizations that provide essential services have formed partnerships to provide wrap-around services and to meet gaps in service delivery.
- **COMMUNITY RESOURCES:** Residents perceive the county to have an abundance of available resources. Aunt Bertha listed 149 claimed organizations and 329 claimed programs in the county.
- **COMMUNITY SUPPORT:** The community is supportive of one another, especially in times of need. As one focus group participant noted, "we all pull together in the community and make miracles happen."

Concerns Identified

The CHA Task Force identified two cross-cutting themes and ten health concerns in the county.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- **LACK OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY:** Residents and stakeholders identified the need for translation and bilingual services among community and healthcare organizations and information disseminated in multiple languages. The local public health system should ensure a culturally competent workforce.
- **LACK OF HEALTH EQUITY:** Residents and stakeholders frequently mentioned differences in income, wealth, employment, access, and resources. Decision makers should prioritize underserved populations in the East and in rural areas that tend to have less access and worse health outcomes.

Social Determinants of Health

- **LACK OF AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE:** Uninsured, low-income, and underserved populations tend to lack access to affordable healthcare. Residents listed multiple contributing factors, including rising medical bills, copays, deductibles, and cost to referral services.
- **LACK OF AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES:** Even though community resources are abundant, access and awareness differ by region and population. Decision makers should prioritize increasing access and awareness in the East, in rural communities, and in underserved populations.
- **LACK OF (PUBLIC) TRANSPORTATION:** Only about 4% of households had problems getting transportation in the past six months; however, access remains a major concern for residents and stakeholders. Decision makers should seek alternative solutions to improve transportation options.
- **LACK OF AFFORDABLE AND SAFE HOUSING:** Housing and rental prices have steadily increased making it less affordable for those that have always lived in the county. The county has no homeless shelters and few transitional services for individuals facing homelessness.
- **LACK OF COMMUNITY TRUST:** East residents and stakeholders mentioned distrust of local government by minority groups due to political, historical, and cultural issues. To become a more resilient Williamson County, decision makers should focus on the community resiliency framework.

Behavioral Health

- **MENTAL HEALTH, STRESS, AND WELL-BEING:** Mental health and stress affect all populations in the county and were ranked the #1 and #4 health problems, respectively. About one in ten households reported that a member of the household had been diagnosed with psychosocial or mental illness.
- **SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE:** Residents identified drug abuse as the #3 health problem in the East. The rate of excessive drinking among adults is higher in the county than the state, and tobacco use continues to remain high because of the increased prevalence of e-cigarette use.

Chronic Disease and Risk Factors

- **CHRONIC DISEASE (OBESITY AND DIABETES):** Following cancer, heart disease is the #2 cause of death in the county. Residents identified obesity as the #1 and diabetes as the #5 health problem in the county. Improving healthy food access and increasing physical activity rates will improve chronic disease rates.
- **LACK OF HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS:** Stakeholders identified healthy food access as the #3 health problem. The county contains multiple food deserts. Decision makers should increase grocery store access for low-income populations and households with no vehicle.
- **PHYSICAL INACTIVITY:** Adults who are sedentary are at an increased risk of many serious health conditions. One in five households reported having barriers or challenges that prevent physical activity, such as injury, illness, or disability.

Forces of Change Assessment

The FoCA identifies trends, factors, or events that influence the health and quality of life of the community and the Williamson County public health system. These external factors create many opportunities and challenges for the community and are categorized into eight forces of change.

- **AFFORDABILITY AND COST OF LIVING INCREASES:** As the cost of living increases and the county becomes a more affordable alternative to Austin, many current residents are being priced out of the housing market.

- **CITY DEVELOPMENT:** Cities are being developed to keep up with demand and the influx of new residents. While cities may have good intentions to develop new community resources for new residents, attention should also be placed on taking care of current residents and their needs.
- **CURRENT EVENTS:** Current events such as recent suicides and school shootings in the nation continue to affect the behavioral, emotional, and physical health and wellness of residents.
- **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES:** The Hispanic population and the aging population are each expected to double by 2050. Decision-makers should prioritize these populations in future planning efforts.
- **POLITICAL CLIMATE:** Due to shifting priorities at the state and national level, there have been funding cuts for social services, access to healthcare, and access to affordable health insurance.
- **POPULATION GROWTH:** Between 2010 and 2017 the county's population grew by 29.5%, adding about 20,000 residents per year, more than double the growth in Texas. Liberty Hill, Leander, and Hutto lead the county in growth.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY:** Social media use continues to become more pervasive in the county, mirroring nationwide trends. Social media affects how children and youth connect with one another other, while older adults are struggling to adapt to technological changes.
- **URBANIZATION AND GENTRIFICATION OF RURAL AREAS:** Growing numbers of the population are moving to traditionally rural areas. Rapid gentrification of areas in the county exacerbates income disparity and growing health inequity which is related to worse health outcomes.

Local Public Health Systems Assessment

The LPHSA provides an understanding of how the Williamson County public health system is performing and can help local partners make more effective policy and resource decisions to improve the community's health. The CHA Task Force identified the highest- and lowest-ranked performance measures of the public health system.

HIGHEST RANKED: Two of the five highest measures were related to establishing and assessing community partnerships.

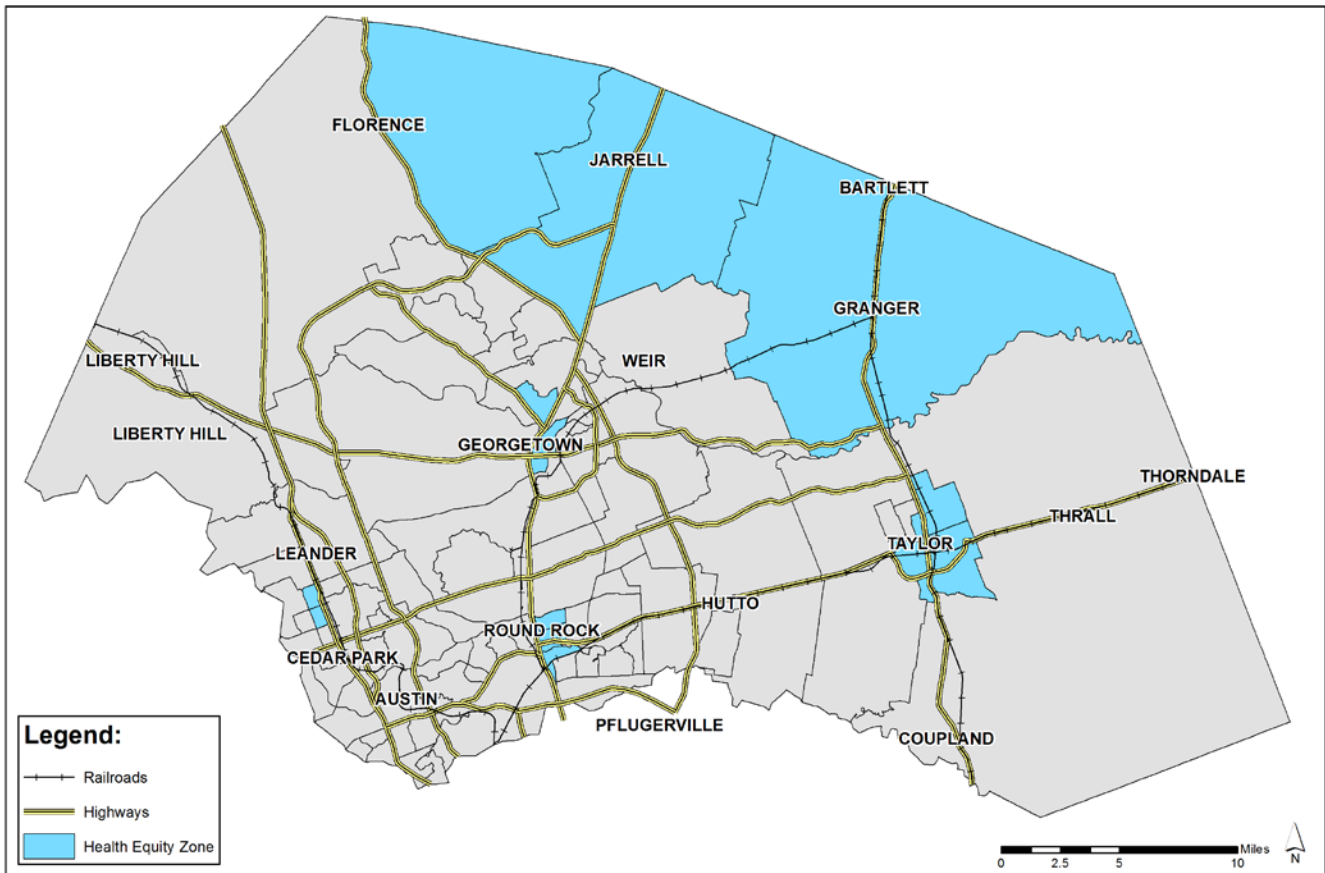
- 4.2.1. Establish community partnerships and strategic alliances to provide a comprehensive approach to improving health in the community
- 4.2.3. Assess how well community partnerships and strategic alliances are working to improve community health

LOWEST RANKED: Three of the five lowest measures were related to assuring a culturally-competent health care workforce.

- 8.3.1. Identify education and training needs and encourage the public health workforce to participate in available education and training
- 8.3.5. Continually train the public health workforce to deliver services in a culturally competent manner and understand the social determinants of health
- 8.4.4. Provide opportunities for the development of leaders who represent the diversity of the community

Health Equity Zones

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), health equity “means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.”(3) Health equity is a critical factor that contributes to the economic prosperity, safety, and security of all county residents.(4) As of 2018, Williamson County ranked in the top three healthiest counties in Texas for the eighth consecutive year.(5) Overall, quality of life ranks high.(6) Despite being the second healthiest county in Texas, disparities in health and wellness continue to persist.(6) The CHA Task Force identified five Health Equity Zones in Williamson County. Health Equity Zones are census tract areas in the county that tend to have higher than average health risks and burdens.(7)



Williamson County, Texas Health Equity Zones






This map identifies five health equity zones in Williamson County, Texas. Health equity zones are census tract areas in the county that tend to have higher than average health risks and burdens.
 Data Source: 2019 Williamson County Community Health Assessment
 Date Created: 2/6/2019



Top Five Health Priorities

The CHA is just the first step of the community health improvement process. The companion document, the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), will be the community's action plan for addressing the top five health priorities and coordinating county-wide efforts for the next three years. Through feedback and prioritization from residents and stakeholders, the CHA Task Force identified the following five health focus areas for decision makers in Williamson County to prioritize and to improve health and wellness for all residents.

Residents and stakeholders are highly invested in improving behavioral health, access to healthcare, and chronic disease in Williamson County. Behavioral health, stress, and well-being (with a focus on decreasing poor mental health, stress, and substance abuse) remain the #1 health priority in the county. Access to and affordability of healthcare (with a focus on increasing dental care and improving access to affordable health insurance for vulnerable populations) and chronic disease risk factors (with a focus on increasing healthy food access and physical activity) continue to remain in the top five. Social determinants of health (with a focus on increasing affordable and safe housing, access to transportation, and workforce development) is a new health priority for the county. These priorities highlight the need to build capacity in the county to tackle issues that require long-term solutions. Lastly, the CHA Task Force identified "Building a resilient Williamson County" as the #5 health priority of the county. Recent research and public health evidence have shown the impact of community resiliency on the health and wellness of a community and the necessity of this priority to improving the other four health priorities.

ICON	RANK	HEALTH PRIORITY
	1	Behavioral health, stress, and well-being <i>Focus on decreasing poor mental health, stress, and substance abuse</i>
	2	Chronic disease risk factors <i>Focus on increasing healthy food access and physical activity</i>
	3	Social determinants of health <i>Focus on increasing affordable and safe housing, access to transportation, and workforce development</i>
	4	Access and affordability of healthcare <i>Focus on increasing dental care and improving access to affordable health insurance for vulnerable populations</i>
	5	Building a resilient Williamson County <i>Focus on increasing the community's ability to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations</i>

Conclusion and Implications for Williamson County

The 2019 CHA provides a comprehensive snapshot into the health and quality of life of Williamson County residents. Though the county consistently ranks among the healthiest in Texas, health inequities continue to exist. Community partners will use this assessment to guide the development of the CHIP, the community's action plan to address the top health priorities and areas of need in the county. The CHA Task Force hopes this assessment will increase engagement in supporting health for all who live, learn, work, play, worship, and age in the county and spur on efforts to building a resilient Williamson County.

