

A wellness check for Yellowstone County

By **Amanda Zimmerman-Murter**

A community health needs assessment, or CHNA, is a wellness exam for a community. Instead of taking blood pressure or drawing blood, a community health needs assessment relies on input from residents, community leaders and other data sources to provide an overall snapshot of our health as a population. In Yellowstone County, the Alliance of Billings Clinic, Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital and RiverStone Health, in partnership with The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana, work together on this important assessment. In November 2025, a sneak peak of the data was shared with more than 70 members of the public during a community health forum. Attendees were asked to rank Yellowstone County's most pressing community health issues. Some of the key highlights are below.

Social Drivers of Health

Social drivers of health are the conditions where people live, learn, work and age that shape health and quality of life. These include access to healthcare and nutritious food, safe housing, opportunities for physical activity and employment, and the impacts of racism and discrimination.

Nearly 3 in 10 residents report having run out of food in the past year and/or worry about running out of food. Additionally, 36% of residents report they always or sometimes worry about paying their rent or mortgage. Among adults, 7% report having no insurance coverage, which has significantly improved since 2005 and is better than the state percentage.

Healthy Eating, Active Living, and Weight

Residents are becoming more physically active. The percentage of Yellowstone County residents who are overweight or obese has decreased since 2023. Healthy eating continues to be a challenge and there is room for improvement around the cost and availability of fresh produce.

Mental Health

More residents are experiencing poor or fair mental health than in the past. Emotional and social support from friends, family and coworkers is an important way to reduce stress and improve mental health. Over 14% of residents report often feeling isolated. According to the 2026 report, 3 in 10 residents have considered suicide at some point in their lifetime.

Substance Use

Substance use can cause higher rates of health complications, hospitalizations, and death. Over half of residents report their lives have been negatively impacted by substance use, either by their own use or someone else's.

What Happens Next?

Now that the community's wellness exam has been completed, leaders from the Alliance and a variety of other organizations will work together to develop a Yellowstone County Community Health

Improvement Plan. This plan will bring together diverse groups, volunteers, and professional sectors to collaborate on making the healthy choice, the easy choice.

The full CHNA will be released on February 5, 2026. Leaders from the Alliance and The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana will share key findings at a press conference at 4:15 p.m. at the First Interstate Bank Great West Center. The report will be free and open to the public and can be used to guide decisions, investments and community action. Everyone can play a role in improving health in Yellowstone County whether that's getting active, trying healthier meals or supporting friends and family. To learn more about the 2026 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment and how you can get involved, please visit the Healthy By Design Coalition's website: www.hbdyc.org.

Amanda Zimmerman-Murter is the Community Health Improvement Manager on behalf of the Healthy By Design Coalition. To learn more, visit Healthy By Design's website at hbdyc.org or call 406-247-3276.