

2025

Northeast Ohio SOCIAL DRIVERS OF HEALTH COMMUNITY STUDY

Summary Results



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2025 Northeast Ohio Social Drivers of Health Community Study Summary Results

Across Northeast Ohio, conditions in which people live, learn, work, and grow shape their health and daily experience in powerful ways. These conditions, often called the **social drivers of health (SDoH)**, include employment in jobs that pay a livable wage and afford economic opportunity, access to reliable transportation, food security, housing stability, and neighborhood safety. These social drivers are everyday realities that determine whether individuals and families can move forward, support themselves, and contribute to the strength of their communities.

This inaugural 10-county SDoH survey is unique in its level of geographic reach and community participation. Through the leadership of the WellLink Health Alliance and the support of the WellLink SDoH Innovation Hub Advisory Council, this survey includes the voices of residents from Ashland, Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Tuscarawas counties of Northeast Ohio. It provides a shared foundation of knowledge that allows all of us — community members, nonprofit leaders, business executives, and policymakers — to understand our region in a clearer and more unified way.

Each county brings its own story. Some counties experience high housing cost burdens. Others face significant transportation challenges that limit access to jobs, education, and medical care. Rural communities experience different pressures than urban neighborhoods. Yet, the overall message of the survey is clear: **Every county has important strengths to build on; and every county has opportunities for improvement.**

Taken together, the results from this survey point to a set of priorities that matter across the entire region. Residents need dependable pathways to well-paying jobs, access to safe and affordable housing, use of reliable transportation, and stable access to food and utilities. These are the building blocks of thriving communities; and they are essential for a vibrant regional economy. When these social drivers of health are met, individuals are better able to work, support their families, and contribute to a strong and resilient Northeast Ohio.

Methods

This executive summary provides an overview of health-related data for adults ages 18 and older in **10 Northeast Ohio counties** (Ashland, Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit and Tuscarawas) who participated in a county-wide SDoH survey from February 2025 through August 2025.

The findings are based on self-administered surveys using a structured questionnaire. The questions were modeled after the survey instruments used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for its national and state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), United Nations Development Programme (UDNP) Peoples' Climate Vote, and the Health Council of Northeast Ohio's (HCNO) master questionnaire. HCNO collected the data, guided the study process and integrated sources of primary and secondary data into the report.

Secondary data included county-level data from multiple sources including the BRFSS, numerous CDC web pages, U.S. Census data, American Community Survey (ACS), Healthy NEO, and other national and local sources.

From the beginning, **community leaders were actively engaged** in the planning process and helped define the content, scope and sequence of the study. Active engagement of community members throughout the planning process is regarded as an important step in completing a valid analysis.

Key Findings

Findings in this report reveal important strengths, as well as areas where many residents face daily pressures. Adults across the region describe challenges related to housing costs, transportation barriers, rising utility expenses, and access to nutritious food. Families with children, adults with low incomes, working-age residents, veterans, older adults, and individuals living alone are among those who face the highest levels of strain. These stresses affect health and influence our region's economic vitality, workforce participation, and long-term stability.

The survey revealed the following key findings:

45%

of Northeast Ohio area adults are always, usually or sometimes worried or stressed about having enough money to pay their rent or mortgage.

26%

of adults in Northeast Ohio indicated they had received behavioral healthcare in the past year.

2 in 4

Almost **2 in 4** households spent **30%** or more on rent. The Healthy People 2030 national health target is to reduce the proportion of families that spend more than 30% of their income on housing to 25.5%.

33%

of Northeast Ohio adults reported they needed help meeting daily needs such as food, clothes, shelter or paying for utilities in the past month. **27%** reported they had bills they could not pay in the past 12 months and **25%** experienced a decline in their own health.

54%

of Northeast Ohio adults had at least one transportation issue and **18%** indicated a lack of transportation kept them from medical appointments or getting medications.

33%

reported that, compared to previous years, extreme weather events – such as droughts, flooding, storms, or extreme heat or cold – impacting their community were worse than usual.

33%

of Northeast Ohio adults were worried about having enough food for themselves or their family in the past month and **44%** experienced at least one food insecurity issue in the past year.

28%

of Northeast Ohio adults traveled **20 miles or more** to access healthcare.

Conclusion

These survey results **establish a baseline** that will guide the work of the WellLink Health Alliance and our many community partners. They provide us with a starting point for tracking progress, identifying what works, and adjusting strategies over time. Most importantly, they center the lived experiences of residents. Starting with this foundation ensures funders, policymakers, residents, and everyone who cares to truly measure progress the ability to effectively shape policies and programs that benefit the people most affected.

This report is both an invitation and an encouragement. The data calls us to work together — across counties, across sectors, and across different lived experiences — to build a Northeast Ohio where every person can live with dignity, stability, and hope. Through this effort, WellLink and our regional partners are laying the foundation for a **stronger, healthier, and more prosperous future for all**.