

Every three years, as part of its mission to serve communities, Buffalo Hospital conducts a federally required Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to examine health in the communities it serves, identify health priorities and develop an action plan to address them. The hospital's primary service area, and the subject of its 2022 CHNA, is Wright County which is located in central Minnesota, slightly northwest of the Twin Cities. Wright County is Minnesota's tenth most populous county.

Community Health Needs Assessment Process

The priorities identified in the previous cycle were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and require long-term effort to see significant, measurable improvement. As a result, the 2022 CHNA goals were to refine our understanding of 2019 priorities and identifying new or emerging community needs that may not be addressed through existing work. For the first time, Allina Health and each of its hospitals also identified prioritized communities in addition to prioritized health topics.

Buffalo Hospital completed its 2022 CHNA as a member of Wright County Community Health Collaborative (WCCHC). The group was formed in 2017 and includes Wright County organizations who are encouraged or required to complete a CHNA. In addition to Buffalo Hospital, members include CentraCare — Monticello, Wright County Public Health and Wright County Community Action.

The CHNA process occurred in three steps: community input, data review and prioritization and the development of a three-year implementation plan. The impact of these efforts will be tracked and evaluated over the three-year cycle. WCCHC convened conversations with more than forty community stakeholders to participate in the process, including providing input and reviewing data. The process began in March 2021 and was completed in December 2022.

Data Review and Prioritization

WCCHC members reviewed county-specific data related to demographics, social and economic factors, health behaviors, prevalence of health conditions and health care access. Sources included patient data; the Minnesota Student Survey; and Minnesota Housing Partnership, among others.

Additionally, Wright County Public Health provided results from a 2021 community health survey. The survey asked about residents' health behaviors and attitudes. Results from this survey were compared with those from similar 2018 and 2015 community surveys.

Where possible, data were reviewed at the zip code data and disaggregated by race and ethnicity to better understand opportunities to increase health equity in the community and among the patients seen at Allina and CentraCare facilities.

The review process included a formal prioritization tool known as the Hanlon method. Rather than embark on new priority areas and leave previously identified work unfinished, WCCHC decided to do a "refresh" for 2023–2025 to allow work that had begun prior to COVID-19 to continue and a larger impact to be potentially gained.

Based on this process, Buffalo Hospital, as part of WCCHC, will pursue the following priorities in 2023–2025:

- Mental health and well-being
- Dental care
- Misuse of alcohol, tobacco and other substances

Additionally, the following communities have been prioritized for action:

- Individuals living with disabilities.
- Individuals and families living with financial constraints.
- Individuals who are underinsured or uninsured.

Community Input

To incorporate additional community feedback, WCCHC conducted a conversation with community partners to share data on specific topics and priority areas, facilitate small group discussion and gather input that would further define potential priority health issue strategies. In addition, Buffalo Hospital facilitated focus groups with people living with disabilities and their caregivers.

As part of the stakeholder conversations, community members mentioned the need for increased suicide prevention efforts, wrap around services and programs aimed at supporting healthy aging to address mental health. Loneliness and community division were identified as contributing to poor mental health. Language barriers, cost, transportation and limited knowledge of the importance of preventative care were identified as barriers to dental care access. To reduce substance use, community members urged WCCHC to consider people of all age groups, increase supports for people in recovery, increase prevention efforts aimed at youth and participate in the upcoming opioid grant work.

2023–2025 Implementation Plan

Based on community input, Buffalo Hospital, as part of WCCHC, developed strategies and activities it will pursue in 2023–2025. The hospital will collaborate closely with residents and other agencies. This plan reflects contributions from community partners, Buffalo Hospital, WCCHC and Allina Health System Office. The local WCCHC implementation plan is as follows:

Mental Health and Well-Being

Goal: Provide education on activities that protect mental wellness and build resilience and healthy coping skills.

Strategies

- Increase awareness of the importance of social connectedness to combat isolation and loneliness.
- Increase awareness of mental illness as a medical condition and decrease stigma related issues.
- Increase awareness of suicide related issues with a focus on suicide prevention.
- Share information about the mental well-being continuum presence in our communities.

Dental Care

Goal: Reduce the rate of dental care delay in Wright County.

Strategies

- Increase access to and utilization of dental care for all with the focus on underserved populations.
- Educate the community about the importance of regular dental care.

Evaluation of 2020–2022 CHNA implementation plan

Between 2020 and 2022, Buffalo Hospital conducted activities to pursue the health priorities identified in its 2019 CHNA: mental health and wellness, substance abuse, and dental care in addition to Allina systemwide priorities.

To pursue local hospital and WCCHC collective impact goals, Buffalo Hospital implemented community health improvement initiatives, advocated for health-promoting policies and made charitable contributions to community organizations. Highlights included:

- In response to tragic attack on Allina Health Crossroads Clinic in 2021, Buffalo Hospital participated in the creation of Buffalo Strong, a community collaborative to support community wellness in partnership with various community groups. Buffalo Strong Collaborative has been an ongoing resource to promote and support mental wellness and provide resources and tools for all to use through “caring, connecting and continuing.”
- Engaged in WCCHC Dental Health Workgroup, which led to the opening of Community Dental Care Clinic in September 2022. This not-for-profit clinic is available for anyone to use as their dental home and receive full service dental care. The clinic accepts private insurance, state-funded insurance programs and has a sliding scale for those in need of scholarships. Allina Health provided \$70,000 in charitable contributions from 2020–2022 to support the building of the Community Dental Care Clinic and patient scholarships
- Provided more than \$40,000 in charitable contributions to community partners who provide support for mental wellness.
- Actively participating in Mentorship, Education and Drug Awareness in Wright County MN (MEADA) Board of Directors and community coalition.

A complete description of 2020–2022 achievements is available online at allinahealth.org/about-us/community-involvement/need-assessments.

Misuse of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Substances

Goal: Support local prevention, treatment and recovery efforts and policy changes to address substance misuse and substance use disorders in Wright County.

Strategies

- Reduce stigma related to diagnosis and treatment of addictions and substance use disorders and the possible connection to mental health conditions.
- Offer education to increase awareness of opioid use and misuse.
- Share age-appropriate resources about the use and misuse of substances such as tobacco, vaping, alcohol, and other substances.

In addition to the work conducted as WCCHC, Buffalo Hospital will implement Allina Health's systemwide strategies and activities. By developing systemwide initiatives to address these priorities, Allina Health ensures efficient use of resources across its service area and provides hospitals with programs they can adapt to meet their community's unique needs. Allina Health systemwide priorities are as follows:

- Mental health and wellness
- Substance use prevention and recovery
- Social determinants of health and health-related social needs
- Access to culturally responsive care

A complete description of 2023–2025 Allina Health systemwide efforts is available online at [allinahealth.org/about-us/community-involvement/need-assessments](https://www.allinahealth.org/about-us/community-involvement/need-assessments).

Evaluation Plans

Hospitals will monitor the general health and wellness of the community. Additionally, each hospital will establish or continue evaluation plans for specific programs and initiatives (e.g., HRSN Program). Evaluation plans will include process measures, such as participant or partner satisfaction, goal completion, people served and dollars contributed, to monitor reach and progress on planned activities. Where possible, Allina Health will also assess outcome metrics to evaluate the effects of its initiatives on health and related outcomes.

Conclusion

Through the CHNA process, Allina Health hospitals used data and community input to identify health priorities and priority communities for action in 2023–2025.

Full 2023–2025 Community Health Needs Assessment reports for each hospital are available on the Allina Health website: <https://www.allinahealth.org/about-us/community-involvement/need-assessments>.

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- Allina Health staff at Allina Health and local hospitals who provided knowledge, skills and leadership.

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