Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist

Wilkes Medical Center Community Health Implementation Strategy

January 1, 2026 - December 31, 2028

Community health improvement is an effective tool for creating a shared vision and supporting a planned and integrated approach to improving health outcomes. The basic premise of community health improvement is that entities identify community health issues, prioritize those that can be addressed, and then develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to address those issues. Tax-exempt hospitals are required to conduct a community health needs assessment (CHNA) and develop an implementation strategy to document how the hospital will address prioritized community health needs. The following outlines a summary of the CHNA process and provides details on Atrium Health Wilkes Medical Center plans to address their prioritized community health needs.

SUMMARY OF CHNA PROCESS

In 2025, Wilkes Medical Center conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) in Wilkes County, which consisted of a comprehensive presentation and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Wilkes Medical Center CHNA relies on multiple sources of information:

Community Health Survey (Primary Data): Online surveys were conducted from February through April 2025, with nearly 7,500 respondents regionally and 527 Wilkes County residents participating. The survey captured perspectives on priority health needs, self-rated overall health, access to health services, and key social drivers of health, including factors that support opportunities for a healthier community.

Key Informant Interviews (Primary Data): Within the 2024 CHNA cycle 41 key informant interviews were conducted by email with key leaders to identify the top social drivers of health and health conditions/behaviors in the community. These interviews were revisited and incorporated in the current CHNA cycle to build on previously identified insights.

Metopio (Secondary Data): Advocate Health has a contract with Metopio to provide an internet-based data resource for their hospitals. This robust platform offers curated data from public and proprietary sources for information on health behaviors and health risks, health outcomes, health care utilization, demographic, and community-level drivers of health like economic, housing, employment, and environmental conditions. Data for each indicator is presented by various demographics when the data is available (Metopio: https://public.metop.io).

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps: Wilkes County 2025 (Secondary Data): A program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute provides a compilation of data using county-level measures from a variety of national and state data sources.

Top Health Issues Identified

- Access to Care
- Alcohol and Substance Use
- Chronic Disease and Prevention
- Economic Stability/Social Drivers of Health
- Mental Health

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The top health issues identified were presented to the Wilkes Medical Center Steering Council, and members were asked to rank the issues based on the following criteria: size/seriousness of the problem, effectiveness of available interventions, available resources to address the health issue, health care system adequately situated to address the health issue, meets a defined community need as identified through data, potential for issue to impact other health and social issues and ability to effectively address or impact health issue through collaboration.

Using these criteria, Wilkes Medical Center has prioritized the significant health needs to address in 2026-2028:

Significant Need	Implementation Strategy Selection Reasoning
Access to Care	Access to care means having the ability to obtain affordable, relevant health services and wellness programs that raise the quality of life for everyone. It includes local options for basic health care like screening and prevention services and having access to health care providers when urgent health care needs arise.
Behavioral Health: Mental Health and Substance Use	Mental health—our emotional, psychological, and social well-being—affects how we handle stress, build relationships, and make decisions, and it is more than the absence of illness; it's the ability to thrive. Alcohol and substance use, including tobacco, illicit drugs, and prescription misuse, contribute to preventable health issues and social challenges, and are closely tied to mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and trauma. These issues often co-occur, creating complex barriers to recovery and highlighting the need for integrated prevention, treatment, and support strategies. (CDC, 2025)
Chronic Disease and Prevention	Chronic Diseases are long-term health problems that often develop slowly from genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. Some common ones are heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and asthma. These diseases can make daily life harder and often need ongoing medical care. Over half of Americans have at least one chronic disease. (CDC, 2024)

For each prioritized health need, the hospital plans to commit resources, which may include staff time, information technology systems, outreach, promotions and educational materials, funding, medical supplies, and other resources as available.

PRIORITY: Access to Care

DESCRIPTION OF HEALTH NEED DATA:

- Of adults surveyed 30.2% reported that someone in their household has delayed or did not receive needed health care in the past year.
- Medical debt in the United States averages 5.0%, with North Carolina experiencing a higher rate of 8.5%. Wilkes County has an even higher medical debt rate of 11.9%.
- Secondary data shows large gaps in access to providers in Wilkes County including dental, vision and primary care coverage.
- Wilkes County has 31.8 Primary Care Providers per capita, significantly lower than North Carolina's at 83.9 and the United States at 90.8. This measure has consistently declined since 2018 from 42.1.

STRATEGY #1: Enhance patient access by providing care through innovative approaches

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- Emergency Department team
- Wilkes County EMS
- Wilkes County Care Coordination
- Engagement Team

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

- Number of paramedicine visits

**Impact measures are subject to change depending on the direction of each intervention.*

PRIORITY: Behavioral Health: Mental Health and Substance Use

DESCRIPTION OF HEALTH NEED DATA:

- According to the survey respondents' substance use is ranked as one of the most important health related challenges in the community.
- Wilkes County has a 21.2 alcohol-related mortality rate (deaths per 100,000) which has increased from 12.5 in 2020. This is a notable concern for the service area compared to the North Carolina rate of 11.1 and the United States at 12.6.
- Secondary data shows Wilkes County has had a significant increase in the drug overdose rate per 100,000 people since 2019. The rate has jumped from 27.8 in 2019 to 45.4 in 2023.
- The opioid-related hospitalization rate in Wilkes County is 210.0 which is notably higher than the state at 131.3 (per 100,000 residents).
- In the service area, 36.4% of respondents reported that they did not receive the mental health care needed.

STRATEGY #1: Expand and educate about the peer support specialist program

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- Wilkes Recovery Revolution
- WMC Foundation
- WMC Emergency Department

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

- Number of patients completing prescribed treatment plan
- Number of total patient engagements and unique patient engagements
- Number of patients screened for eligibility for service/program eligibility

**Impact measures are subject to change depending on the direction of each intervention.*

STRATEGY #2: Create access to substance use treatment

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- Wilkes Recovery Revolution
- WMC Foundation
- WMC Emergency Department

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

- Number of Narcan dispenses from ED vending
- Emergency department visit rate for overdose

**Impact measures are subject to change depending on the direction of each intervention.*

PRIORITY: Chronic Disease and Prevention

DESCRIPTION OF HEALTH NEED DATA:

- Secondary data shows that Wilkes County has notably higher rates of heart disease deaths particularly among the non-Hispanic white population.
- The top three leading causes of death are chronic diseases: heart disease, cancer, and chronic lower respiratory disease
- Diabetes mortality rates of 66.7 (deaths per 100,000) are significantly higher in Wilkes County compared to North Carolina's at 25.3 and the United States at 22.4.

STRATEGY #1: Conduct outreach with the Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) population

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- Wilkes Medical Center (inpatient and outpatient cardiac clinic)
- WMC Foundation

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

- Number of patients referred to program
- Number of pieces of equipment distributed through program (by equipment type)

**Impact measures are subject to change depending on the direction of each intervention*

STRATEGY #2: Reduce medication costs for Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) population

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

- Wilkes Medical Center (inpatient and outpatient cardiac clinic)

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

- Number of applications provided by inpatient nurses
- Number of patients enrolled in program

**Impact measures are subject to change depending on the direction of each intervention*

Needs Not Addressed

This Community Health Implementation Strategy focuses on the above priority health needs selected by the hospital based on community input, available resources, and alignment with organizational and community partner capacity. The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) also identified additional significant health needs, including economic and housing opportunities, food security and mental health. These needs are not addressed in this CHIS due to factors such as limited hospital resources, the presence of existing initiatives led by other organizations, or a determination that the hospital is not best positioned to lead efforts in these areas at this time. Wilkes Medical Center will continue to collaborate with community partners and share resources, when appropriate, to support progress on these needs within the community.

Adoption of the Implementation Strategy

The Community Health Implementation Strategy report was adopted by Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Wilkes Medical Center board of directors on May 13, 2026.

Note: Plans to address selected CHNA priorities are dependent upon resources and may be adjusted on an annual basis to best address the health needs of our community.