

2023 SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH REGIONAL LISTENING SESSIONS

Prepared for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

DRAFT 09.18.23



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....	3
Region 1.....	4
Region 2.....	9
Region 3.....	14
Region 4.....	18
Region 5.....	23
Region 6.....	28
Region 7.....	33
Region 8.....	38
Region 10.....	41



Quotations used in this report have been transcribed using the clean verbatim style. Speech errors, false starts, stutters, repetitions, and filler words have been omitted so long as their removal did not change the meaning or sentiment of the statement.



The Program Evaluation Group (PEG) partners with public and private organizations to provide evaluation training, consulting, and data services.

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BACKGROUND

Project

The Policy and Planning Office of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) partnered with local organizations in each of Michigan's ten prosperity regions to hold listening sessions with community members who have lived experience with unmet social needs and chronic disease.

The goal of the listening sessions was to provide feedback to MDHHS, community-based organizations, and local public health agencies about the most important changes local community members want to see. MDHHS will use these sessions to guide the development of a Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Plan for Michigan.

The University of Michigan Program Evaluation Group (PEG) team provided facilitation, audio-recording, and note-taking for each listening session. PEG team members also administered a demographic survey at the beginning of each session.

Limitations

The listening sessions sought perspectives from people with high levels of social vulnerabilities and from historically under-represented communities, rather than from a representative sample of the region's population. Participant demographics also reflected the focus population of the host agency and, in most cases, participants came from specific geographic areas within the prosperity region. Finally, while the sessions were intended to include up to 50 people, average attendance was less than 20 people. For all of these reasons, the perspectives shared, while valid, should not be assumed to reflect the experiences of everyone in the region.

Despite our efforts to include all session participants in the demographic survey, some people did not complete the survey. Also, some survey respondents selected "prefer not to answer" to some questions and are therefore not represented in the survey data.

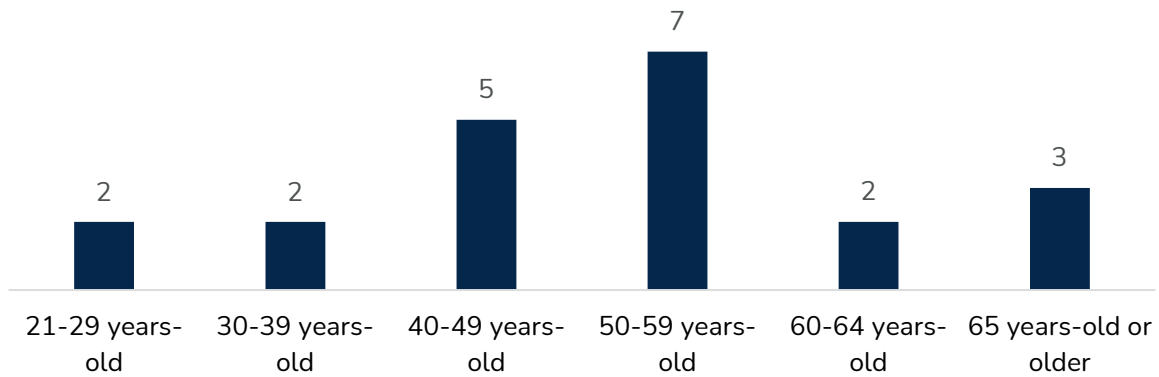
Lastly, some of the hybrid and virtual sessions that promoted the event through social media inadvertently drew individuals from outside of the intended region. We made every effort, however, to exclude these individuals from both the demographic surveys and the perspectives captured during the listening sessions.

REGION 1 LISTENING SESSIONS

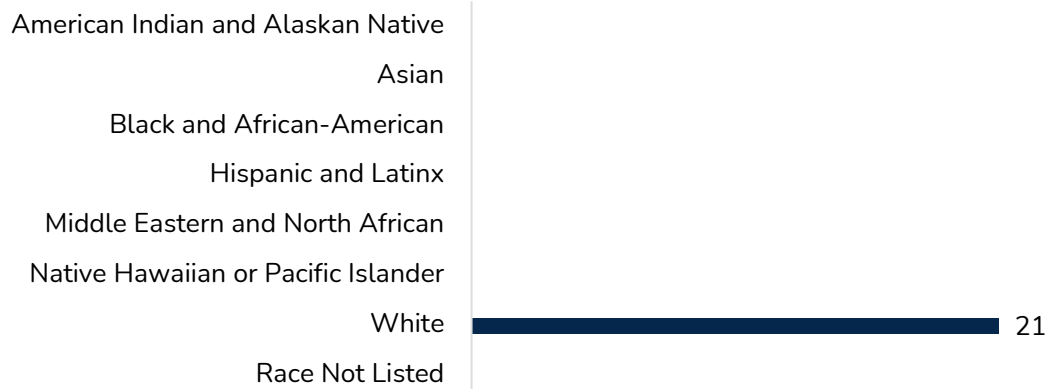


- 1 virtual session on August 10, 2023 with 13 attendees
- 1 in-person session in Marquette on August 29, 2023 with 13 attendees
- 21 survey respondents

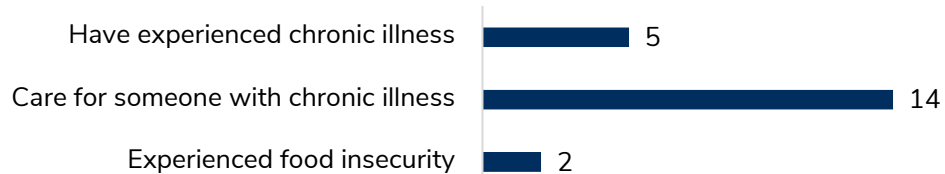
Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

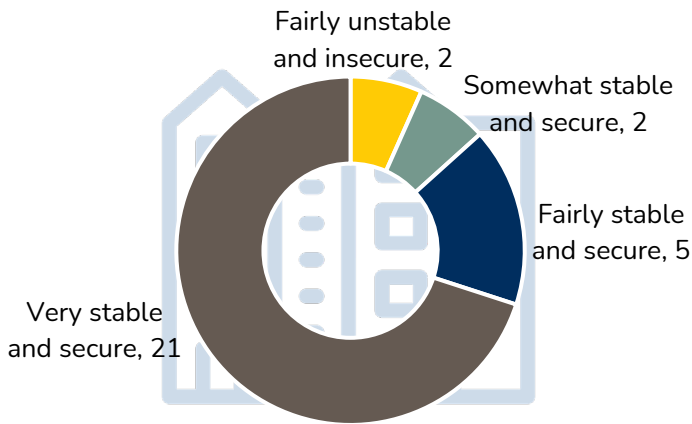


Chronic Disease and Food Security

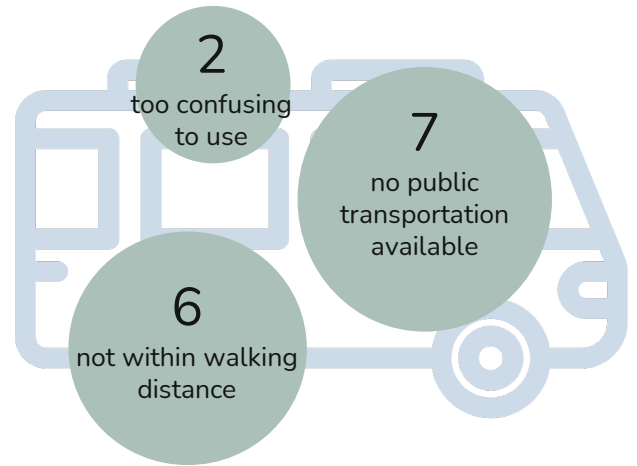


REGION 1 LISTENING SESSIONS

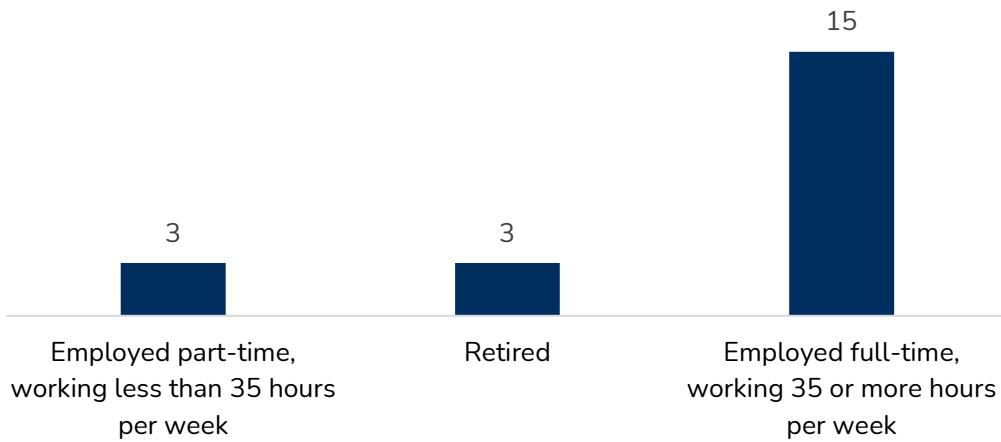
Housing Stability



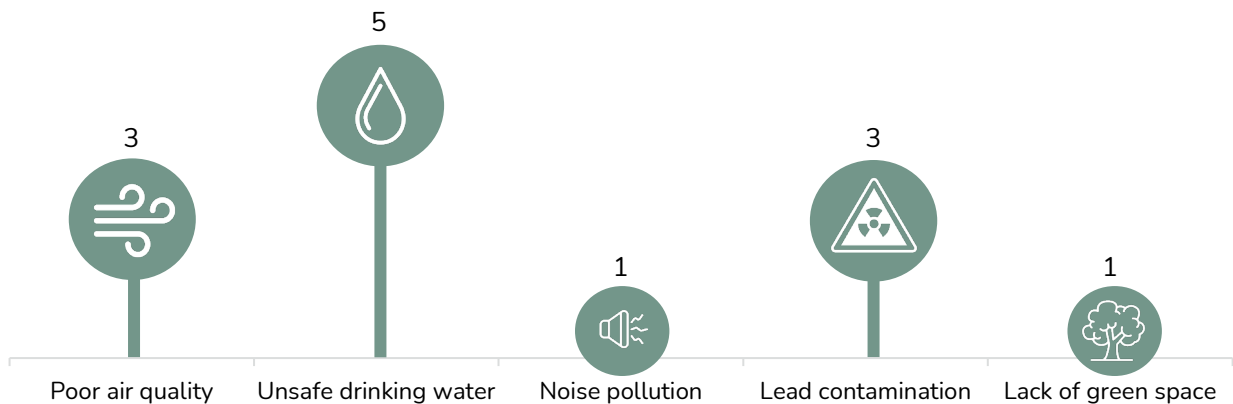
Transportation Barriers



Work Status



Environmental Concerns



REGION 1 LISTENING SESSIONS

Participants highlighted concerns on **housing** availability and affordability, challenges **accessing social services** and navigating complex application processes, **transportation barriers** that impact access to resources, the need for greater community collaboration, and a desire for more **communication** about available programs. Residents emphasized the housing crisis in the Upper Peninsula, which affects individuals across income levels, and is driven by factors such as high rental costs and the conversion of homes into short-term rentals. Additionally, there are **no homeless shelters** available in the region, making it very difficult for homeless individuals to find temporary housing.

Both sessions mentioned strong community connections and mutual support networks as assets, but felt more could be done to centralize information about local resources. Participants noted the importance of investing in knowledgeable, long-term staff in order to build trusted relationships and provide guidance to community members seeking services. There were also calls for more inclusive **education and career development** initiatives that align with community needs and leverage local institutions.

Community Strengths

Community and natural assets

Participants noted the following assets: local health systems, hospitals, clinics, food access programs like food pantries, Double Up Food Bucks, service organizations like United Way, Salvation Army, Red Cross, educational institutions like community colleges, recreational assets like farmers markets, parks, trails, faith communities and churches, mutual aid networks and strong community connections.

Food Security Concerns

Limited availability

With limited supermarket access, many residents rely heavily on nearby convenience stores and gas stations, resulting in less healthy purchases. Residents shared that food pantries are struggling with low supply due to a lack of donations.

“If you're walking, you probably would go to a gas station instead because that's much closer than the store. So that would deter you from getting healthy food.”

Food education

Education on nutrition, cooking skills, food budgeting, and purchasing produce is lacking, especially for youth. Participants shared that food literacy programs in schools and community venues can empower residents of all ages to make healthy choices.

Food assistance programs

People discussed the complexities and challenges associated with accessing food assistance programs. Barriers included difficulties navigating the application process, online applications requiring internet access, and challenges in reaching government offices for assistance.

REGION 1 LISTENING SESSIONS

Healthcare Concerns

Transportation	Attendees shared that transportation difficulties prevent vulnerable populations like elderly and low-income residents from reaching needed medical services, resulting in delayed care and use of ERs for non-emergencies. Expanded free or low-cost transportation services are needed to connect people to healthcare resources.
Lack of providers	Shortages of local medical providers, including primary care, dental, maternity, and mental health services lead to lack of access to essential care.
Mental health services	Participants described gaps in mental health services, as well as the need for more access to clinical services, counseling, and psychiatric care. The participants also highlighted the importance of addressing social determinants of health that can influence one's mental health.
Education and outreach	Participants suggested that more education and outreach is needed to empower residents around health topics like preventative screenings and self-care management. In particular, participants working with families mentioned that parents sometimes lack knowledge about important regular screenings for young children before school age.
Health disparities	Participants described disparities in healthcare access, especially for vulnerable populations such as Native American communities. Disparities include a lack of dental care and limited access to dental screenings.

REGION 1 LISTENING SESSIONS

Built Environment Concerns

Infrastructure Participants highlighted that limitations, like the lack of sidewalks, lighting, and safe walking paths, pose risks to pedestrian safety and accessibility.

“Dollar Bay has one main street that has sidewalk, but there isn't even a playground there for the kids. They used to have one in basketball court, but it's cracked and there's grass growing through it”

Transportation limitations Participants expressed concerns about limited public transportation options which prevent residents from reaching essential services like medical appointments and food stores, particularly during off-hours. Attendees mentioned that better coordination between regional transit authorities could help improve access and reduce fragmentation of services.

Recreation opportunities The availability of parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas varied across neighborhoods. Some areas had multiple parks and trails, while others lacked these amenities. Participants felt that access to recreational opportunities, like hiking, biking, and playgrounds, is essential for promoting physical activity and community interaction. Participants shared that lack of time, long commutes, and limited childcare options are barriers that prevent them from spending time outside.

Housing crisis Participants discussed the housing crisis in the region, which affects individuals across income levels. Lack of affordable housing, rising rental costs, and the conversion of homes into short-term rentals (like Airbnb) contribute to homelessness and difficulties for new employees to stay in the area. In addition, many participants shared that there are no homeless shelters in several of the counties in this region, making it very difficult for homeless individuals to find temporary housing.

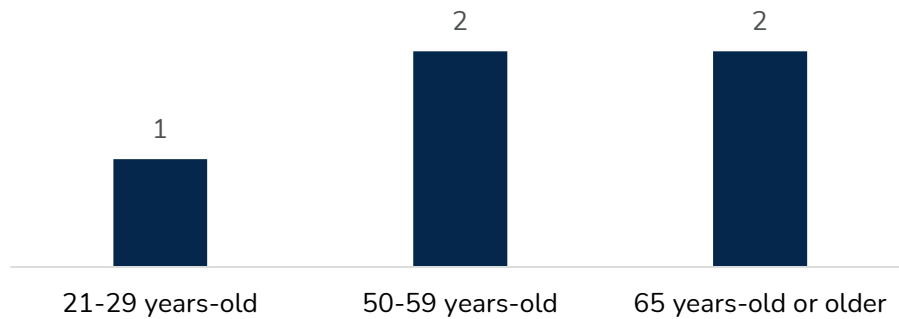
“The housing crisis is not just for people that are on the low end of the income. We're having people who can't afford a house because there aren't any... the ones they find they can't afford. We're also having the problem where, when recruiting healthcare professionals, they can recruit them but they can't find a place for them to live, so there's nowhere for them to go.”

REGION 2 LISTENING SESSION

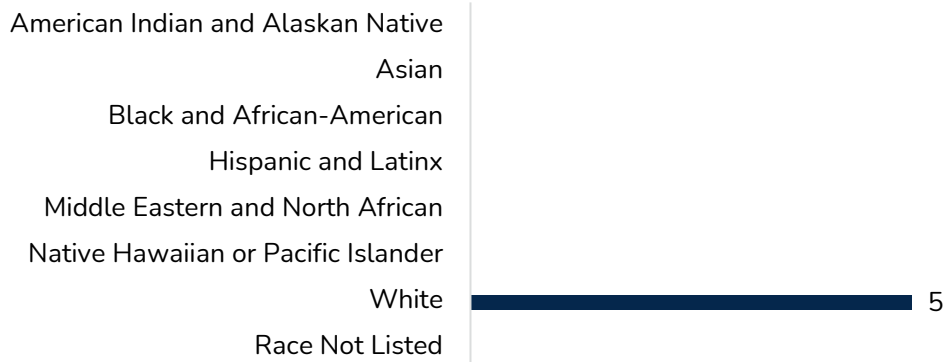


- 1 in-person session in Traverse City on August 30, 2023 with 5 attendees
- 5 survey respondents

Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

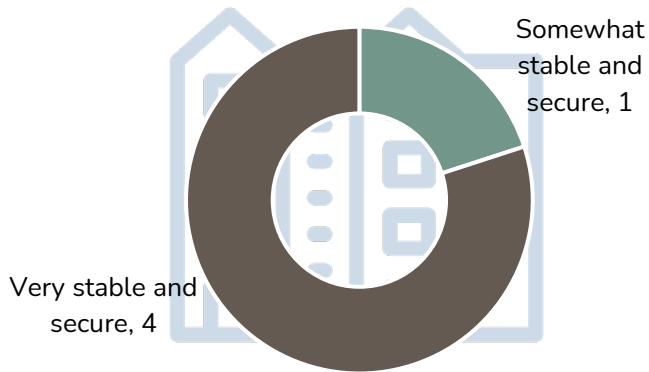


Chronic Disease and Food Security

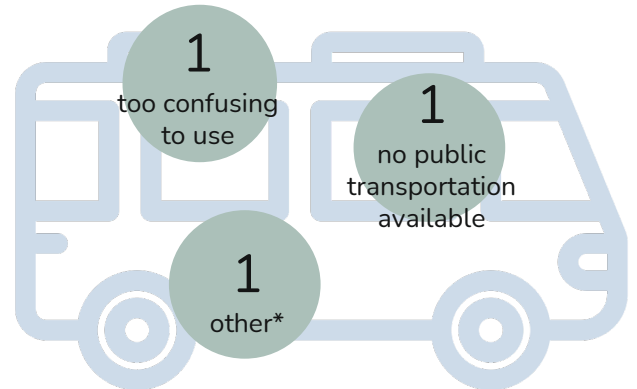


REGION 2 LISTENING SESSIONS

Housing Stability

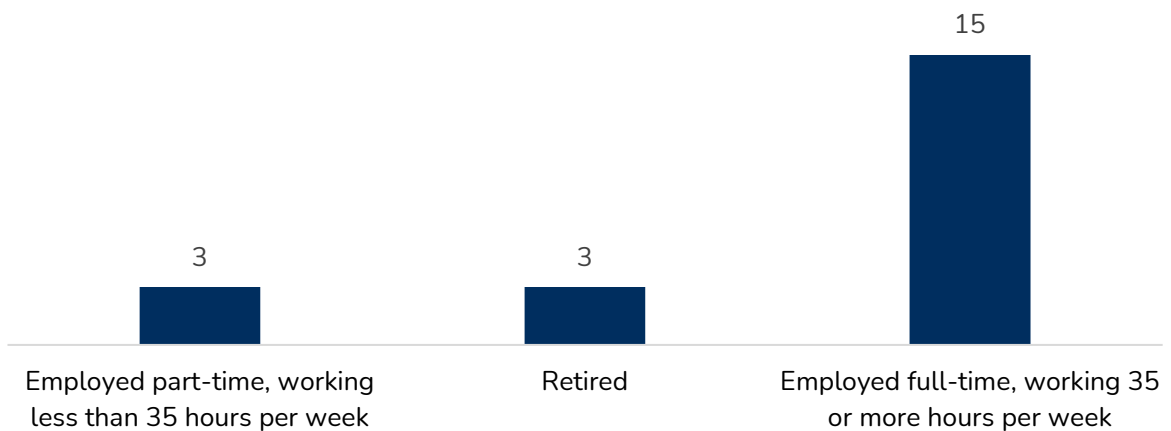


Transportation Barriers

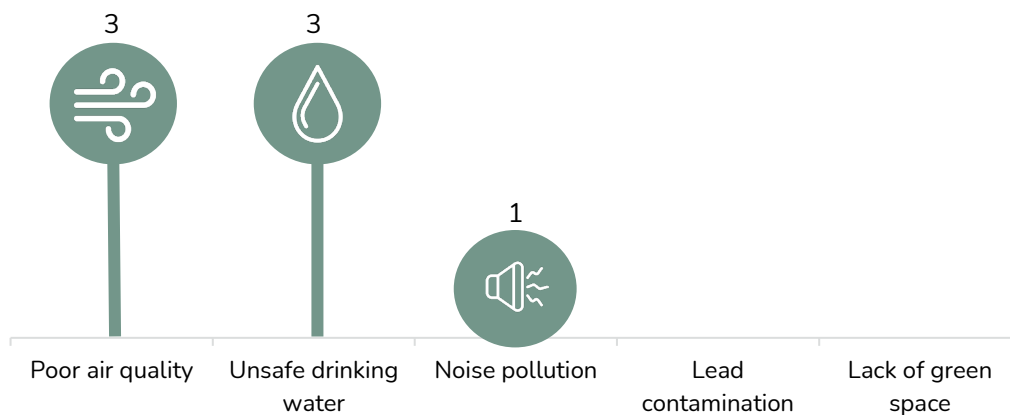


* "Take too long, does not go everywhere I need. Sensory processing disorder/ptsd"

Work Status



Environmental Concerns



REGION 2 LISTENING SESSION

Session participants highlighted significant **disparities in access to basic resources** between city and rural residents. While housing, grocery stores, and healthcare services are fairly accessible for urban dwellers, rural residents face challenges obtaining these necessities. Participants noted that grassroots organizations often provide invaluable resources for underserved communities, but their impact is limited if people are unaware the services exist. Participants saw limited knowledge and awareness of community resources as an obstacle to utilizing available support.

Despite positive outcomes from current community-driven initiatives, participants emphasized the need for more government-funded interventions and policies to truly address social determinants of health on a wider, more impactful scale. Broader government-sponsored programs were viewed as essential to reaching the maximum number of people and enacting systematic change. Overall, the dialogue centered on the hardships rural residents face accessing resources, the **lack of awareness** of community supports, and the need for expanded government initiatives to address these gaps more comprehensively.

Community Strengths

Community assets	Participants highlighted the following community assets: A local LGBTQ+ network that connects people to queer- and trans-friendly health providers and services, senior centers, religious organizations (churches), food rescue resources, MSU Extension, and the Bay Area Transportation Authority Bus (BATA Bus).
Services and funding prioritization	Participants noted that their communities have had long standing social and political tensions that often influence what services are prioritized by their local government and organizations and what services and projects receive funding.

REGION 2 LISTENING SESSION

Food Security Concerns

Food access Participants discussed how local farmers markets and mobile markets are often the “go-to” for residents in rural areas when it comes to accessing healthy foods. Participants also noted the positive outcomes from community members coming together to both maintain and create more healthy and accessible food options. For example, a participant spoke about the efforts of a local entrepreneur and advocate that has been trying to stabilize resources in their local rural town.

“The grocery store was going to leave a year ago and they bought it and they made it better than it was, and the hardware store was tiny and they bought it. Now it's better than it's ever been. And it's like we've got this wonderful advocate for our community. If anything happened to this person or his wife, then I am fearful for what happens to our community because they really are holding us up.”

Nutrition education Participants noted that there is a need to create more educational opportunities for individuals and families to learn about nutrition and the benefits of physical activity. One participant noted that their community could benefit from a program that teaches younger children and teens how to maintain fruit and vegetable gardens as well as the benefits of fresh foods. Participants also spoke about ways to expand knowledge on healthy meal preparation by training healthcare providers who can then assist their patients with nutrition concerns.

Healthcare Concerns

Healthcare access Attendees shared that high costs of healthcare services often increase stress of patients and pose a barrier to accessing the care needed.

Patient-provider relationships Participants discussed that there are population groups that are overlooked when addressing the health needs of the community, including LGBTQ+ individuals, migrant workers, and individuals who speak English as a second language. All participants agreed that healthcare providers should have a better understanding of how to best serve individuals in these communities and assist their patients in accessing tailored resources.

Mental health services Participants noted that mental health services for those who live in rural areas, especially children and teens, should be addressed. The limited virtual options available and the transportation barriers make it difficult to access local providers in urban areas.

REGION 2 LISTENING SESSION

Built Environment Concerns

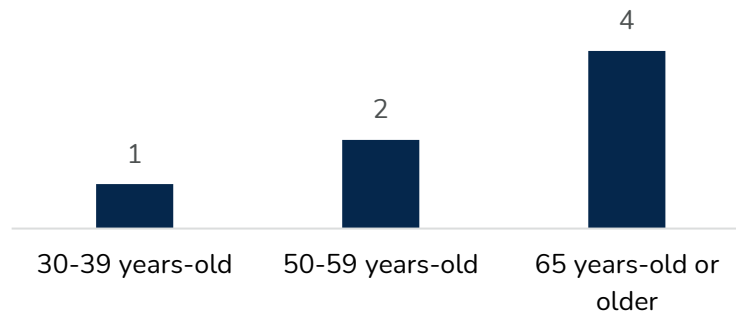
Transportation limitations	Participants highlighted transportation as a major issue when trying to access resources and services. While there are some options available (i.e., cabs, buses), there are additional barriers to using these options, such as cost and scheduling constraints.
Affordable housing	Participants discussed the challenges of gentrification in their neighborhoods, noting that city planners and property managers should strive to help current residents stay in the community alongside housing expansion projects. Participants also noted there are major discrepancies in what gets designated as “affordable housing.” Housing listed as “affordable” will often still be too expensive for low-income residents. If residents do find housing they can afford, they may have to deal with long waitlists for housing vouchers, which can be between 5 to 10 years.
Park maintenance	Attendees discussed the importance of parks, playgrounds, and other recreational amenities in neighborhoods. Participants noted that while there are some facilities for outdoor activities, local governments should prioritize the development and maintenance of parks and recreational spaces, especially in underserved communities, in order to promote physical activity and community engagement.

REGION 3 LISTENING SESSION

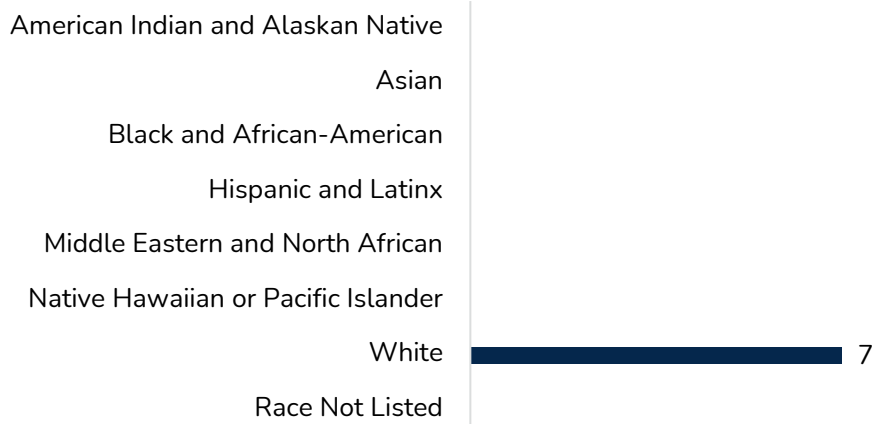


- 1 in-person session in Alpena on August 1, 2023 with 7 attendees
- 7 survey respondents

Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

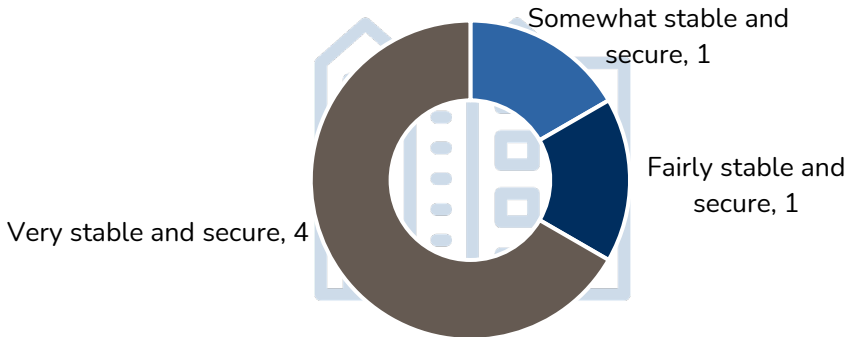


Chronic Disease and Food Security

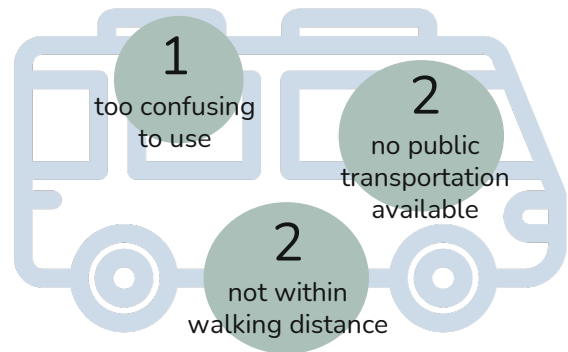


REGION 3 LISTENING SESSION

Housing Stability

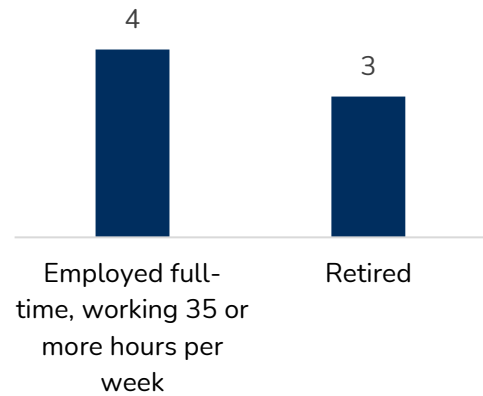


Transportation Barriers

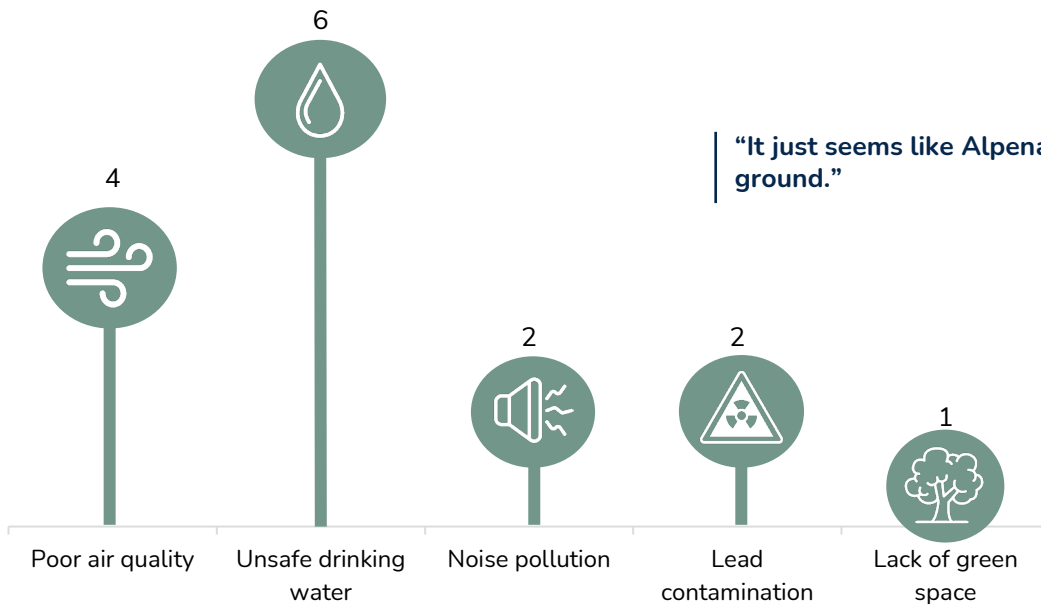


“We need all levels of housing. “[Housing] hasn't been built for a really long time. Part of it has to be affordable, but we also can't attract physicians and nurses because there's not readily available housing.”

Work Status



Environmental Concerns



“It just seems like Alpena is a dump ground.”

REGION 3 LISTENING SESSION

Region 3 participants highlighted significant concerns about **environmental issues**, citing worries about PFAS contamination, water runoff, air pollution, and fly ash. Residents have low trust in authorities and government agencies based on observations of inconsistent rule application. They shared strong concerns with **drinking water safety** and placed a high priority on water quality in Lake Huron and other bodies of water. The north side of Alpena bears a heavier burden of environmental and socioeconomic problems. **Limited healthcare access** also adds to the community's challenges.

Childcare scarcity strains the community, with high demand driven by the lack of facilities. Many people face a years-long waiting list. The lack of housing in the region has made it difficult for people to settle in the region long-term. Poor awareness of local services and inadequate broadband access affects employment, healthcare, education, and communication in the region.

Community Strengths

Community and natural assets	Community Health Workers, Friends Together, United Way 211), Boys and Girls Club, St Vincent's, Kiwanis , MSU Extension, Senior Centers, Alpena Community College, Salvation Army, NOAA, Habitat for Humanity, Churches, Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency (NEMCSA), lakes and natural habitats
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Food Security Concerns

Limited availability	There are active food pantries, but they are not able to deliver. If residents do not have access to transportation, then they are not able to take advantage of these services. Participants shared that a mobile pantry would be helpful as well as increasing sites that accept Double Up Food Bucks.
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Disparities	Participants shared that the north side of Alpena does not have any grocery stores, leaving some residents to purchase groceries at the Dollar General or Rite-Aid.
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Healthcare Concerns

Healthcare providers and facilities	Participants highlighted the lack of medical providers in the area. Some residents use ERs as primary care but have no way to access follow-up care. In particular, dental care, orthodontics, maternity care, and advanced medical treatments are very limited. Local mental health services, especially for youth, are urgently needed.
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“There are so many patients that do not have a provider and they use the emergency department as their primary care. Even after they're discharged... they have nowhere to go for that follow up care.”

“I think it's clear that we have a problem with primary care and continuity of care. My father just passed, and he saw three cardiologists in the last six years.”

REGION 3 LISTENING SESSION

Built Environment Concerns

Housing Participants reported that their region lacks housing “at all levels.” This has led to people only staying for a short period and having to leave due to not being able to secure stable housing. In the summertime the local fairgrounds are filled with tents for unhoused people, a problem that becomes more urgent in the colder months.

“We keep hearing, too, that there's not jobs for the spouses. Someone gets a job up here, but the spouse can't get one, they can't sustain living up here, and they go back downstate, to be able to find work elsewhere. We have a lot of people that come for a short time, it seems, and then they leave.”

Transportation limitations Participants expressed concerns about the lack of public transportation. The current public transportation service available is unpredictable and time consuming. Some participants rely on walking, which they found unsafe or inaccessible due to the lack of or unmaintained sidewalks, especially for individuals in wheelchairs or using walkers.

“When you watch people with a scooter or a wheelchair trying to get across 23, you just hold your breath. You do it when you walk, let alone when you're in a mobility device.”

Street lighting The community needs better lighting, including crossing lights. Some participants shared that they have no streetlamps where they live.

Environmental Quality Concerns

Various pollutants Participants highlighted significant environmental concerns about citing worries about PFAS contamination, water runoff, air pollution, and fly ash. The north side of Alpena bears a heavier burden of environmental and socioeconomic problems.

“If you go down M-32, all those low spots that now seem high, that's all fly ash. I have 40 acres right next to my house. You can walk on the land, and it's like this sponge, because it's 4 to 6ft of fly ash.”

Low trust in authorities Residents have low trust in authorities and government agencies based on observations of inconsistent rule application.

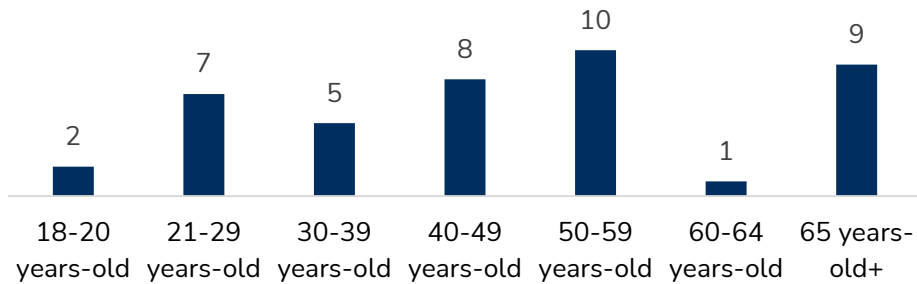
Drinking water They shared strong concerns with drinking water safety and placed a high priority on water quality in Lake Huron and other bodies of water.

REGION 4 LISTENING SESSIONS

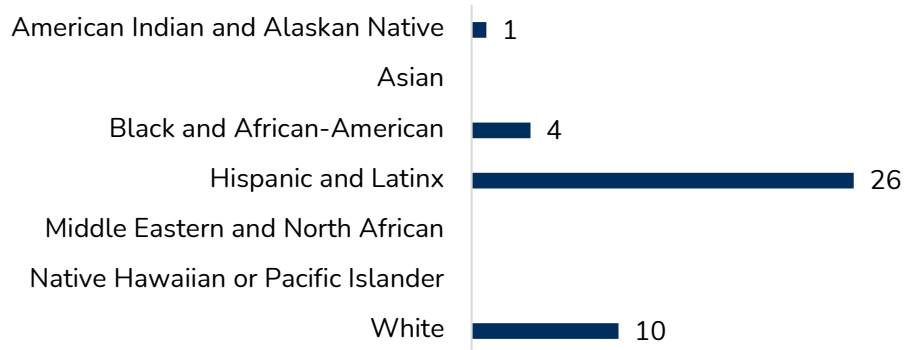


- 1 in person session in Holland on August 28, 2023 with 18 attendees
- 1 in-person session in Holland held in Spanish on September 6, 2023 with 27 attendees
- 42 survey respondents

Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

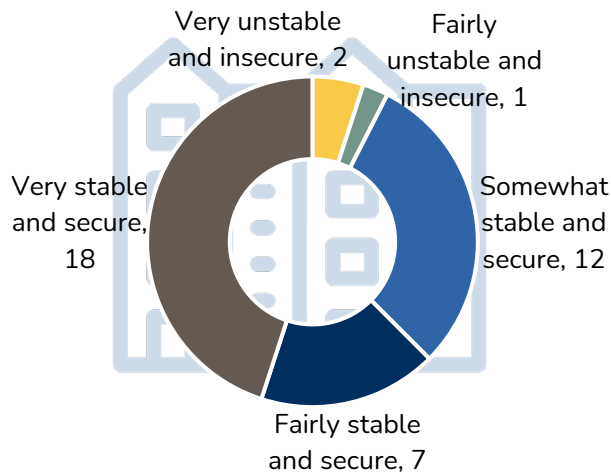


Chronic Disease and Food Security

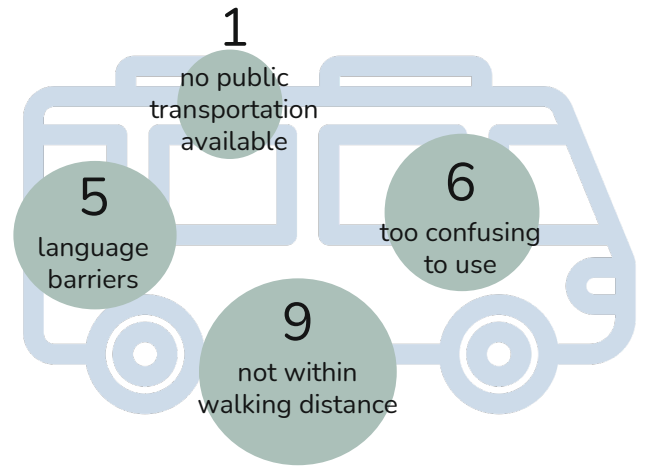


REGION 4 LISTENING SESSIONS

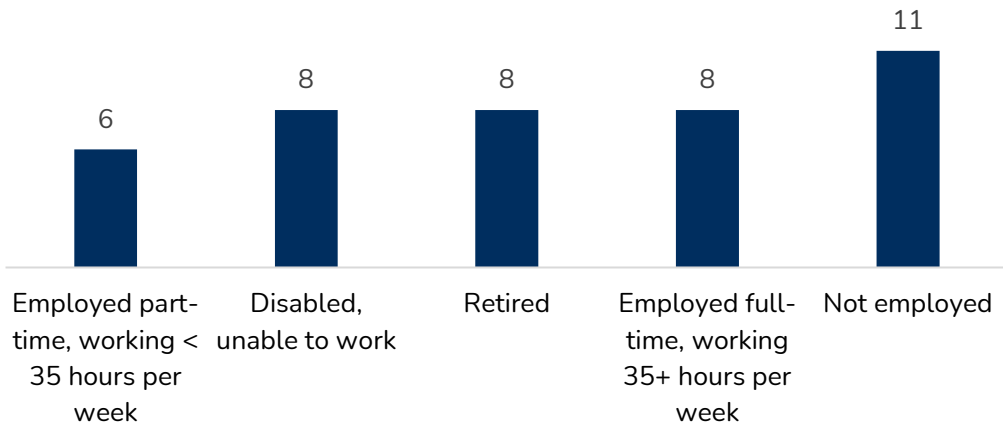
Housing Stability



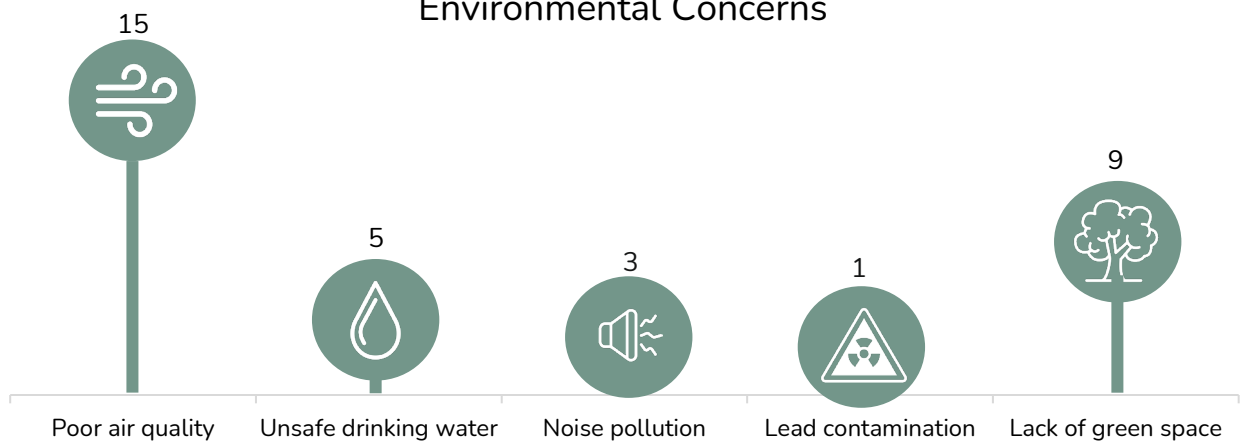
Transportation Barriers



Work Status



Environmental Concerns



REGION 4 LISTENING SESSIONS

The region 4 sessions both took place in Holland, with one session in English and one in Spanish. **Transportation** was a major concern among the participants of both sessions. Participants shared that both routes and schedules are insufficient. Participants in both of the Holland-area groups also shared a desire for greater **access to information** about existing programs and services. Finally, participants in both sessions talked about a desire for **mental health services** and greater **access to healthcare providers**.

Community Strengths

Community and natural assets

Participants noted the following community assets: community health workers, Friends Together, United Way, 2-1-1, Boys and Girls Club, St Vincent's, Kiwanis, MSU Extension, Senior Centers, Alpena Community College, Salvation Army, NOAA, Habitat for Humanity, churches, Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency (NEMCSA), and the lakes and natural habitats of the region.

Food Security Concerns

“Los precios se subiendo pero los ‘food stamps’ se bajando.”

“Food prices are going up but food stamp amounts are going down.”

Nutrition Education

Participants noted that there should be more opportunities for education on the different food options available and food-related health issues, especially for parents, children and teens.

Food assistance programs

Participants appreciated assistance from SNAP and programs like Double Up Food Bucks and Senior Project Fresh. However, some participants were frustrated with what they saw as unreasonable income limits for SNAP eligibility and inadequate SNAP amounts.

Access to healthy food

Participants spoke about the high cost of food in grocery stores. People often seek out alternatives, like food pantries or organizations that donate meals. They highlighted that even with the alternatives, there are still barriers that come up, like lower food quality of pantry items and limited time to prepare meals. Participants also noted that finding affordable food when you have dietary restrictions, or health conditions like diabetes, can be challenging. On the other hand, the Spanish-speaking participants were satisfied with their access to culturally appropriate foods.

“I suffer with Type I Diabetes. I have Crohn's disease. I have a lot of problems with my stomach and it is hard to find food that is good and non-perishable.”

REGION 4 LISTENING SESSIONS

Healthcare Concerns

Access to disability services

Participants expressed how difficult it can be to access resources like disability assistance, especially for young adults. It often requires someone to have a third-party advocate with them to get the assistance they need.

Mental health

Participants spoke about how there are a lot of senior residents in the Holland area who feel a sense of loneliness and neglect. They also noted that there is a need for more people to work in senior residences. Participants suggested educational campaigns designed for the Latinx community that could address multi-generational trauma.

Access to healthcare providers

Attendees talked about the complications of getting an appointment with a healthcare provider. With long wait times and the scarcity of specialized providers and therapists, attaining the needed healthcare feels impossible.

"I had a lot of parents in Zeeland bring up to me that if your child needs mental health services or if somebody has an emergency, it's months to wait. I also heard that if you have a child with autism, it can be up to a year wait. And that's just not acceptable"

Stigma

Participants shared that people in the Latinx community are often reluctant to access health and social services because of pride, mistrust in institutions, a cultural emphasis on work above all else, and a norm of pushing through adversity alone.

Free clinics

Participants valued the existing free healthcare clinics and would like to see more of these resources.

REGION 4 LISTENING SESSIONS

Built Environment Concerns

“El transporte es el más importante porque sí existe los recursos, pero si no puede llegar, no funciona.”

“Transportation is the most important because the resources exist, but if you cannot get to them, it does not work.”

Infrastructure	Some participants expressed concerns on the road conditions, sidewalks, and crosswalks, which can pose risks for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities.
Accessible programs	Participants would like to see more free facilities and programs for outdoor exercise in the parks, such as exercise machines and classes like Zumba or Tai Chi. They also advocated for more health and wellness programs outside of working hours in order to provide opportunities for employees.
Transportation	Many participants were frustrated with the limited public transportation system, which only runs once per hour and has limited stops. They also noted that while there may be alternative transportation methods, like Uber or Lyft, the cost of utilizing these services is prohibitive. Participants advocated for transportation services owned and operated by the Latinx community, which residents feel more comfortable with.

Economic Opportunity Concerns

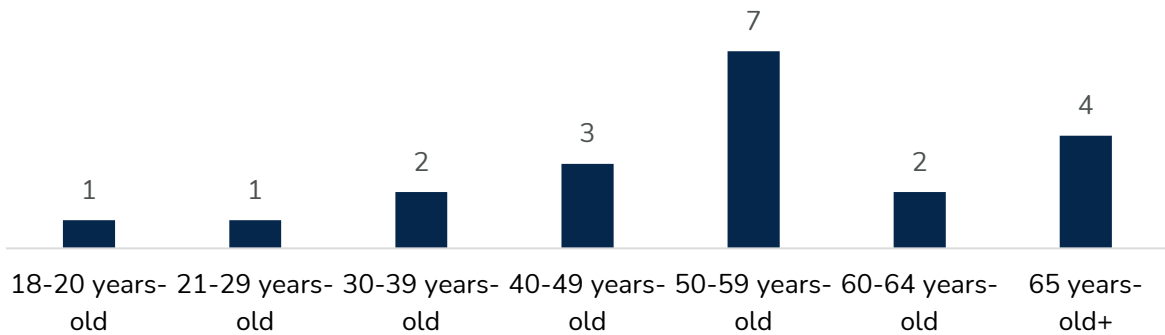
Childcare	Participants advocated for more free or low-cost childcare centers. This would allow both parents to work and increase mental and economic well-being for the household.
Personal vehicle use	Participants were frustrated that they no longer have access to obtaining a drivers license if they are undocumented. Some of them have their own cars but are not able to drive or insure their vehicles because they cannot obtain a license.

REGION 5 LISTENING SESSIONS

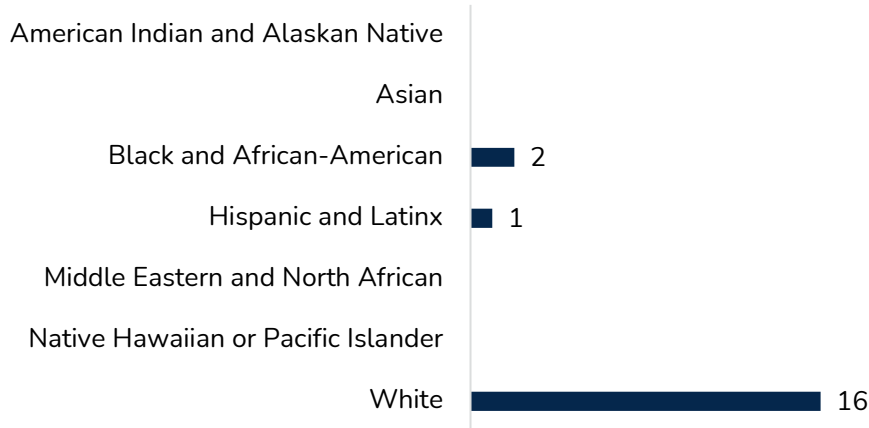


- 1 in-person session in Bay City on September 5, 2023 with 14 attendees
- 1 in-person session in Bay City on September 7, 2023 with 8 attendees
- 19 survey respondents

Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

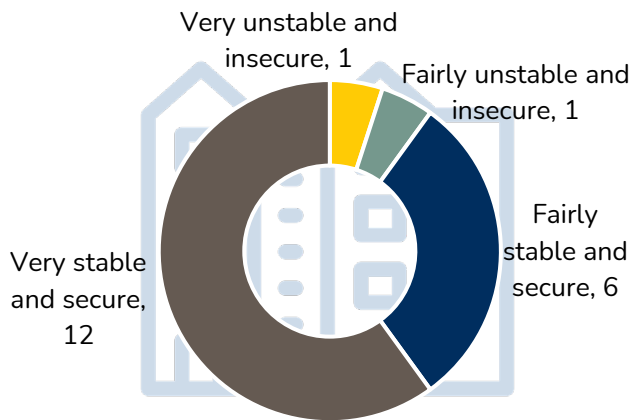


Chronic Disease and Food Security

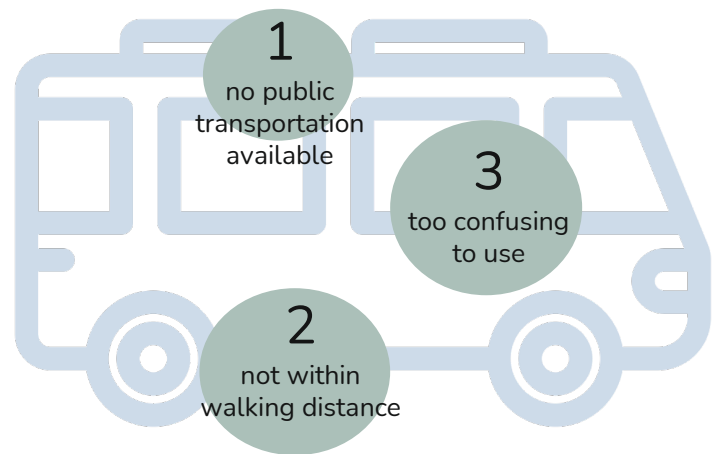


REGION 5 LISTENING SESSIONS

Housing Stability



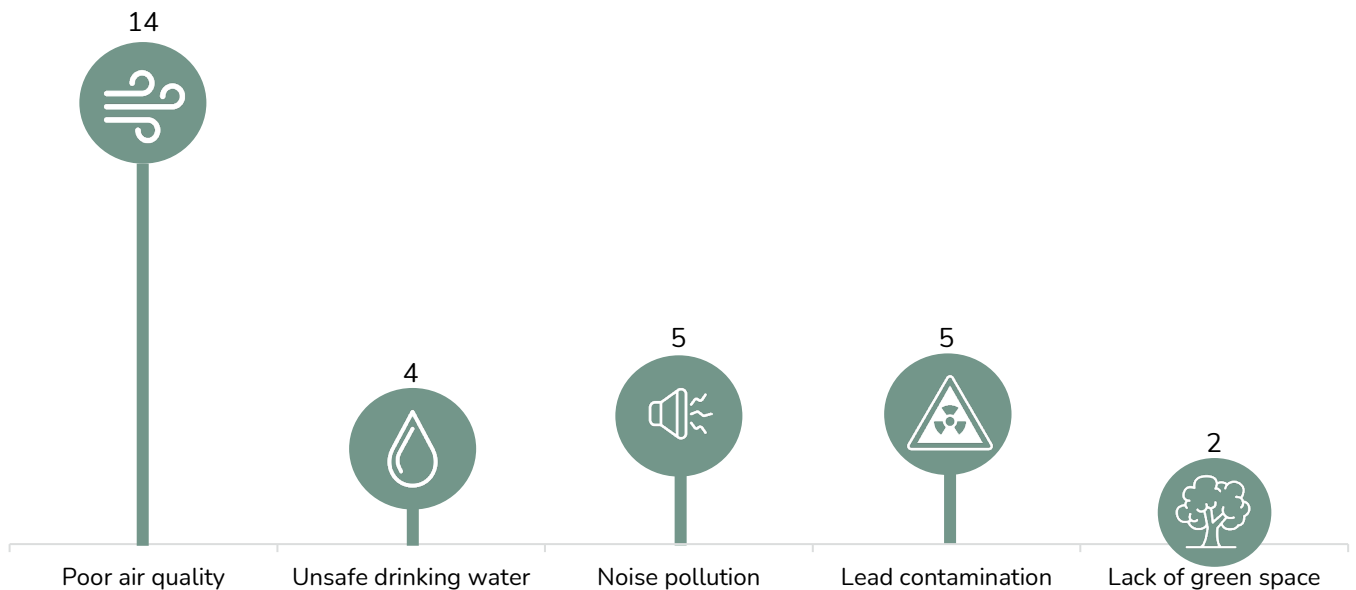
Transportation Barriers



Work Status



Environmental Concerns



REGION 5 LISTENING SESSIONS

Participants in both Region 5 sessions highlighted concerns about **transportation** access and lack of coordination between community programs and services. Attendees noted challenges with public transportation availability, schedules, and overall complexity. Additionally, residents at both sessions highlighted a lack of communication and coordination between **food assistance programs**, citing different guidelines and eligibility criteria that make accessing services difficult. Others shared concerns were the aging infrastructure, limited housing options, a shortage of healthcare providers, and a decrease in population as a result of struggles to attract young families and individuals to the community because of limited job opportunities and a lack of access to healthcare, childcare, and other amenities.

Community Strengths

Valuable programs	Participants highlighted several community services and programs, including: YMCA, United Way, Great Lakes Bay Health Centers, Saginaw Food Club, McClaren, Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance, Community Information Exchange, 211, MSU Extension Program, Salvation Army, and the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission.
Infrastructure assets	Trails, state campground and recreation area, festivals, and the Japanese gardens.

Food Security Concerns

Volunteers	Attendees share that many agencies with food pantries lost a lot of volunteers during the COVID surge and people have not come back to volunteer, limiting the pantry's capacity.
Food education	Attendees shared that there is an opportunity to provide education on healthy eating, in particular for younger generations and ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population.
Program coordination	Participants noted a lack of coordination between food pantries and agencies providing food assistance in the community as well as differing guidelines between programs that can make it challenging for people to stay up to date on programs/services requirements.
Food access	Participants noted that grocery stores are few and far in between, and if they want to go to a bigger store like Meijer, they have to far out or find transportation. They also stated that the farmers market in Bay City ceased operations.

“There is very little coordination and part of the problem is you've got your formal programs and informal programs and guidelines and eligibility are all over the board.”

“I know we typically use the phrase food desert, but I've moved away from using that because the food desert would suggest that it's non-existent. So I use one of two terms: either *food mirage* because we know where to get the food, people just can't get to it. The other phrase is *food apartheid* because it is intentional where these grocery stores are, the prices, lack of access, whether it's transportation, and it's certain people of certain classes or certain races that don't have access to food.”

REGION 5 LISTENING SESSIONS

“There are not enough providers in Bay County. There's a lot of Medicaid patients but you don't make much on Medicaid, if any at all. Sometimes you lose money on Medicaid, so that's why a lot of doctors don't want to get into it or even Medicare.”

Healthcare Concerns

Provider access Participants shared there is a low physician to patient ratio in the community and wait times for healthcare appointments are often long. Seeing specialists often requires travelling outside of the region. This gap spans across various areas of health, including behavioral and dental, and leads to very long wait times for all medical services.

Community health workers Participants highlighted the importance of having CHWs in their community to connect people to existing and active resources, rather than directing people to outdated websites and documents.

“Having community health workers is amazing, they're looking at health as a whole person and not just these little tiny segments. You can't deal with [just] one thing. A person can't take care of their health if they can't put food on their table or they can't afford their medications.”

Health education Participants highlighted the importance of health education and literacy; they suggested improving the health education curriculum in schools to address common health challenges and social determinants of health. There was also a focus on the need for clear and accessible information in healthcare settings, including the use of interpreter services for non-English speaking individuals.

Healthcare navigation Participants expressed frustration with the fragmentation of the behavior healthcare system. The fragmentation of providers is layered on top of a complex array of healthcare plans, making it hard to navigate effective care. Participants also shared that many healthcare services require patients to use an electronic format for communication, which is difficult for some people, especially older adults.

Built Environment Concerns

“Welcome to Bay City, you can't get there from here.”

Transportation Participants highlighted various barriers to transportation for residents including bridge tolls which limit bus access across bridges, limited hours, and increasing gas prices.

Roads and sidewalks Participants shared road conditions are very poor, especially in Bay City, and that sidewalks are limited and often not accessible to wheelchair users.

Utilities Attendees mentioned the housing units are old and inefficient, leading to very high utility bills for residents. Participants suggested that requirements for landlords to improve the insulation and conditions of housing would help tenants.

REGION 5 LISTENING SESSIONS

Economic Opportunity Concerns

Job opportunities The limited job opportunities in the area, particularly limited high-paying jobs, was a top concern for residents. This has led young families to move out of the area and made it difficult to attract professionals.

“I knew a family that had to move out of town in order to stay economically viable. Not out of state yet, but out of town.”

Environmental Quality Concerns

Air and water quality Overall, participants felt that environmental issues were being addressed adequately, including replacing lead service lines, clean-up of the Saginaw River, and clean-up of the beaches. Participants had some remaining concerns with air quality from the Canadian wildfires as well as Dow Chemical. The local sugar beet factory releases a bad odor, which lowers nearby property value. Sawmill residue also leaves much on local beaches.

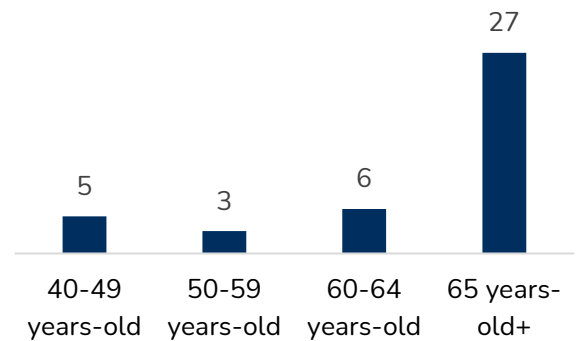
“We took our grandkids there [Bay City State Park] – I’m nervous for them to go in the water because of what has been dumped out there.”

REGION 6 LISTENING SESSIONS

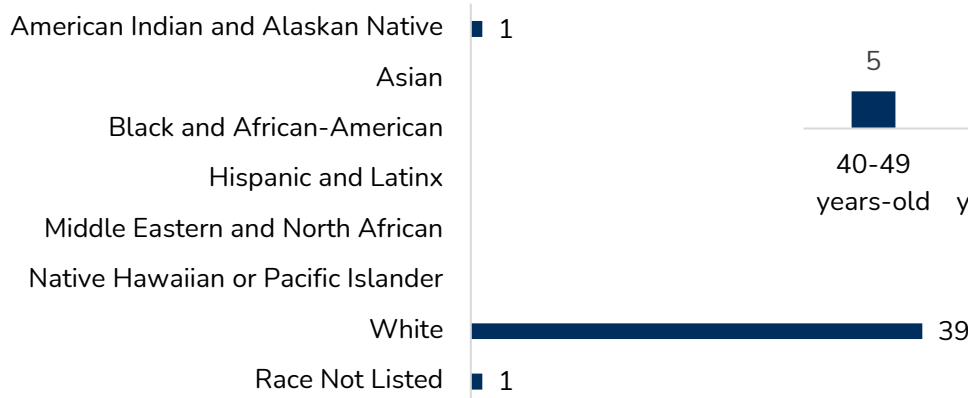


- 1 virtual session on July 26, 2023 with 18 attendees
- 1 in-person session in Cass City on August 8, 2023 with 7 attendees
- 1 in-person session in Lapeer on September 5, 2023 with 23 attendees
- 42 survey respondents

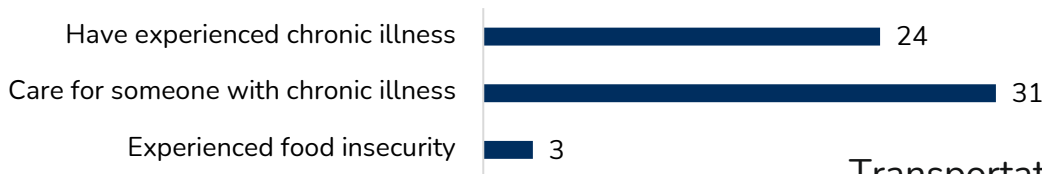
Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

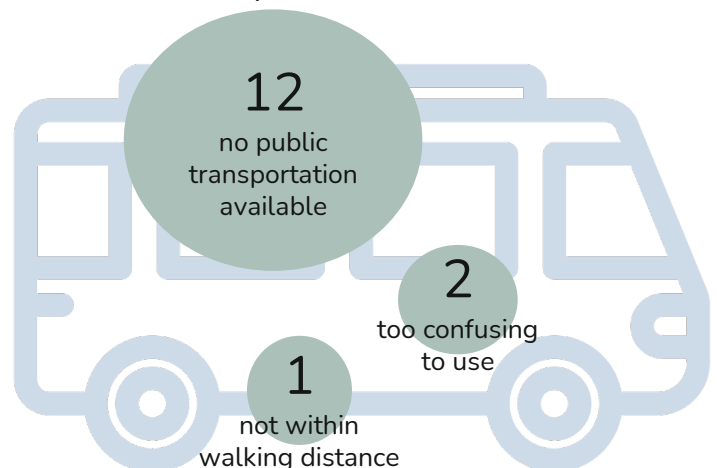


Chronic Disease and Food Security



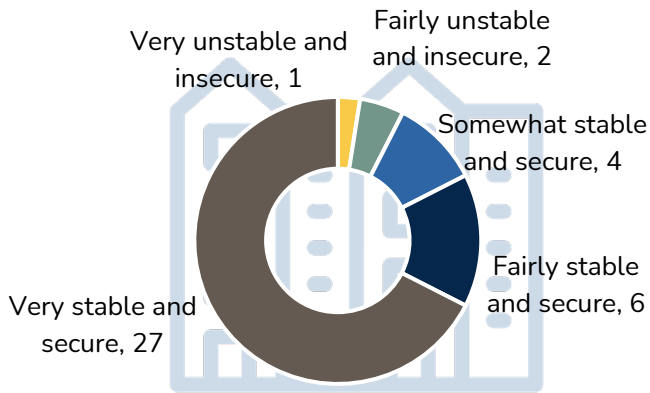
“The county's public transportation, which is the Thumb area transit, sucks because sometimes you need to get to an appointment and you're on that bus for an hour and a half while they travel out throughout the whole county to get you to your spot, which is ten minutes from your house.”

Transportation Barriers



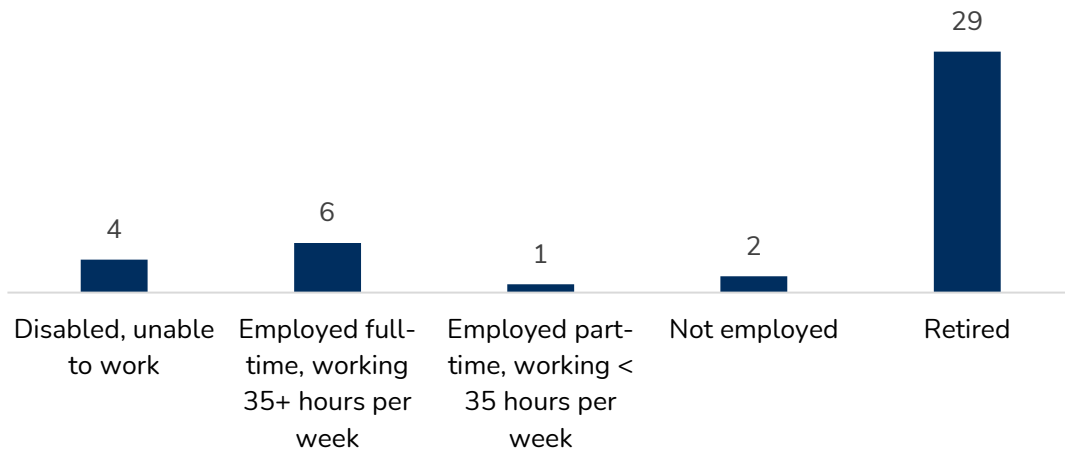
REGION 6 LISTENING SESSIONS

Housing Stability

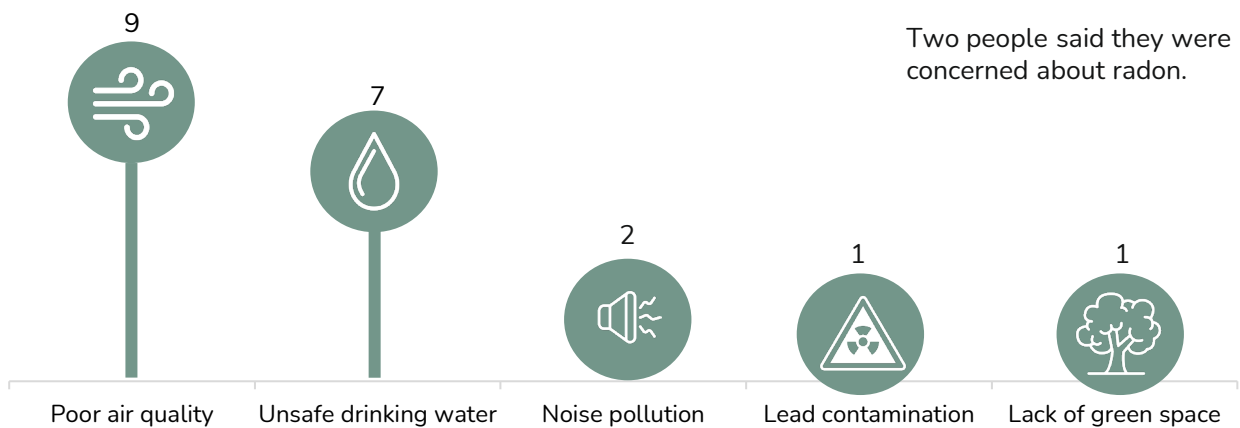


“I can’t hold a job because I never know how I’ll feel from one day or next. So maybe a program where you can build self esteem and confidence, but you also understand that this person is dealing with health issues – they can’t hold down a job with regular attendance.”

Work Status



Environmental Concerns



Two people said they were concerned about radon.

REGION 6 LISTENING SESSIONS

All the individuals in the first two Region 6 sessions had participated in Women 2 Women, a program for women with chronic disease. **Access to information** was a major theme in both sessions. Many participants stressed the need for more communication about existing wellness resources and programs. Ideas included centralized websites, health and wellness fairs, and Facebook groups, which would also provide socialization and peer networks for assistance.

In addition to the concerns shown below, participants discussed challenges finding **resources for caregivers**, including parents and grandparents caring for young children and those caring for seniors or others with chronic disease. Childcare was prohibitively expensive for some. Many participants voiced concerns with finding and maintaining employment while managing chronic illnesses.

Community Strengths

Valuable programs	Women 2 Women, Monthly gardening group at the Sandusky Library, Diabetes classes at Hills and Dales General Hospital, Great Start, McKenzie Hospital classes, RecConnect
Infrastructure assets	Walking trails, Community gardens, Farmers markets, Food pantries, Churches, Community Supported Agriculture Farms, Seed banks at local libraries, schools and sports, Thrift Shop of North Branch, Bad Axe VA Clinic, Sanilac County Historic Village and Museum

Food Security Concerns

“My mother-in-law has a Social Security disability. She only gets \$20 a month for food stamps – \$20 doesn't cover anything in this day and age.”

Availability	Many rural, small towns do not have full-size grocery stores, which limits access to healthy foods and variety. Some towns have either smaller, pricier grocery stores, or dollar store chains with low quality foods.
Accessibility	Some of the local grocery stores offered home delivery during the pandemic, which was very helpful for seniors, but are no longer providing this service. Participants were also concerned with the high cost of food.
Emergency food	Participants shared that food pantries have limited variety and have not been open as often since the onset of COVID-19. Finding the foods needed for specific diets is also difficult at pantries.
Food assistance	The income criteria for food assistance leaves people who need support ineligible. Some of those receiving assistance found the amount insufficient. Many seniors also found it difficult to understand and complete the required paperwork.
Food education	Participants stated that providing more education on food options and food-related health issues should be an important part of any action plan made. They suggested offering cooking and nutrition classes, especially for seniors and young people.

REGION 6 LISTENING SESSIONS

Healthcare Concerns

Provider availability Many participants were frustrated with the lack of healthcare providers in the area, especially the lack of specialists. Although doctors from Port Huron travel to Sandusky periodically, their availability fills quickly. Participants expressed a desire for holistic and functional medicine providers in the region. Some participants shared that they have no pharmacies in their area.

“I have to have a neurologist. Well, I haven't found one that travels yet, and the one that's in Bad Axe will refer you to Ann Arbor.”

“I just wish there was more training to listen to women and listen to their concerns.”

Provider support Participants felt that many medical professionals do not listen to or understand their concerns, leading to inadequate support and care. They shared that finding providers who can effectively manage chronic disease and understand food intolerances is challenging. Some participants felt the lack of provider support was related to gender.

Mental health The demand for mental health support services far exceeds the availability, with wait lists of six months or more. There are also policy barriers – people are not eligible for assistance until they are at a breaking point.

Healthcare assistance limitations Many people found the process of applying for programs like Medicaid challenging.

Technology requirements Participants spoke about how many healthcare services require patients to use an electronic format for communication; with that, they talked about how they would like providers to talk with patients beforehand to ensure they know how to use the virtual platform being recommended and that the patient has access to someone who can help them learn to utilize the platform.

“Whether it’s technology for either elderly or low literacy populations... these are all incredible barriers to navigate access to these services.”

REGION 6 LISTENING SESSIONS

“We don't really have anything around here for winter at all.”

Built Environment Concerns

Physical activity opportunities

Participants were interested in more opportunities for physical activity, particularly affordable programs and indoor activities during the winter months. Suggestions included community centers, an indoor pool, and more walking paths.

“I think eliminating the financial barriers from these things would be fantastic because I've tried before to get into some programs and they cost - like even \$5 a session makes it a barrier when you don't have that \$5 to spare.”

“Literally there are no sidewalks in town except on the two main highways, so you have to walk in the street and the streets aren't in the greatest shape, very few sidewalks. So for the small rural communities, I think it's an issue.”

Transportation limitations

Transportation was identified as a major obstacle to access grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and recreational activities. There is little to no public transportation available, and the schedules are very unreliable. Furthermore, the county buses do not cross county lines and some buses limit the number of bags people can carry on. Taxis are unavailable in the region.

Housing for older adults

Participants spoke about how there is not enough housing available in their community for senior residents. They noted that that the community needs more affordable housing as well as better maintenance of existing housing.

Infrastructure

Participants shared that some communities lacked proper sidewalks, making it challenging for pedestrians. Participants also noted that while there are some safeguards in place, there were still limiting factors affecting their ability to get out more (changing weather conditions, contaminated water at the beach, and fear of safety that's prevented them from going out at night).

Economic Opportunity Concerns

Economic growth

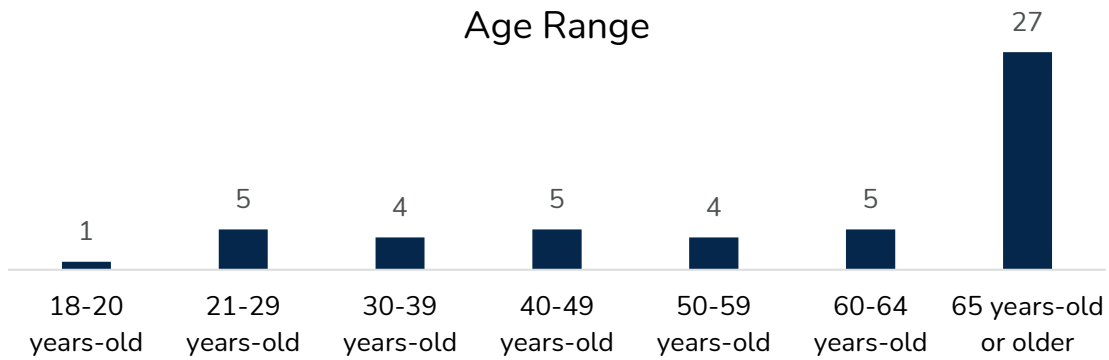
Participants believed that due to the limited availability of recreational activities and a scarcity of job opportunities, their community's concerns were ignored by their local and state government when they attempted to express their needs. They also noted the lack of amenities is one of the big reasons a lot of younger adults and families usually look outside of Lapeer when seeking housing and employment opportunities.

REGION 7 LISTENING SESSIONS

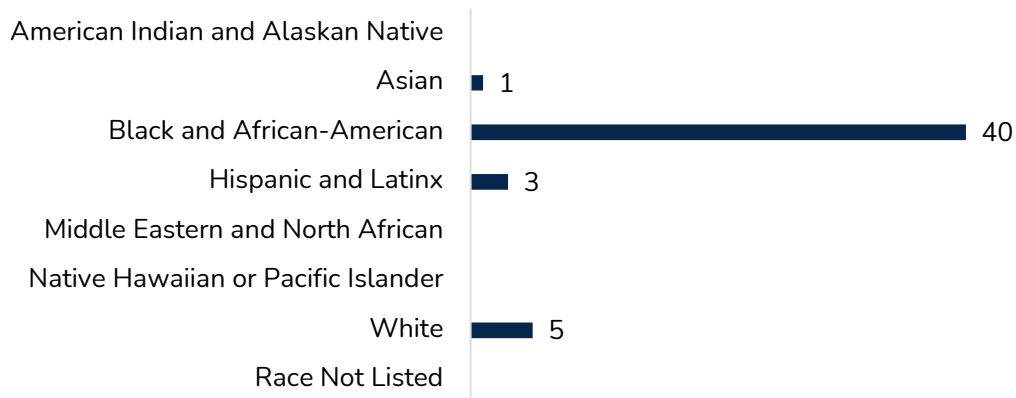


- 1 in person session in Lansing on July 26, 2023 with 20 attendees
- 1 in person session in Lansing on August 29, 2023 with 39 attendees
- 49 survey respondents

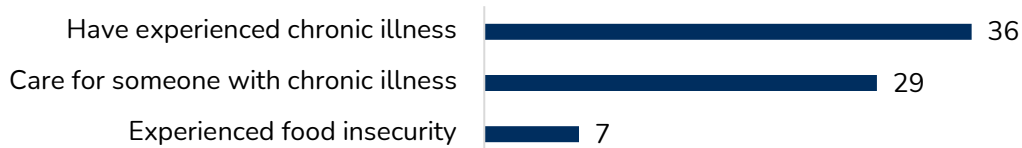
Age Range



Race and Ethnicity

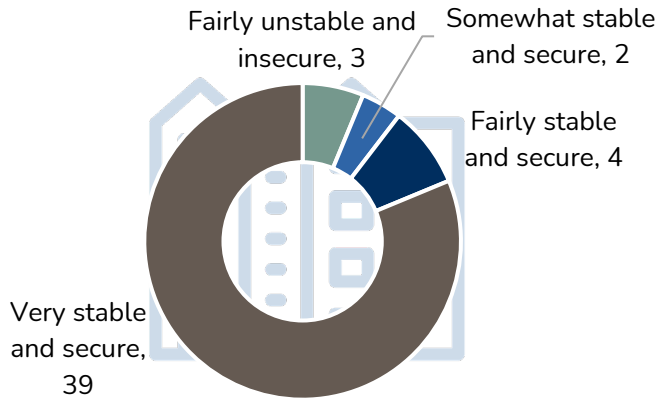


Chronic Disease and Food Security

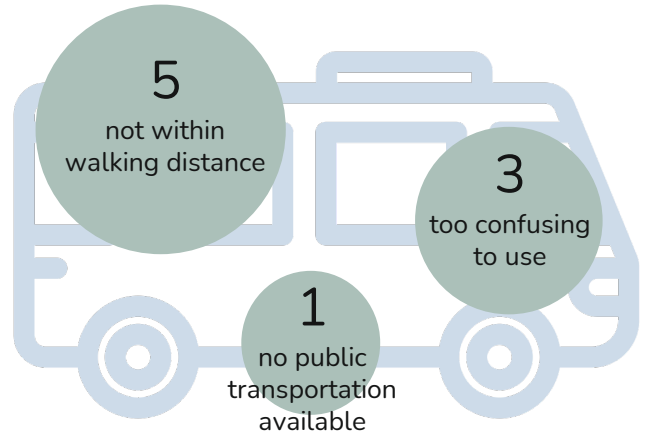


REGION 7 LISTENING SESSIONS

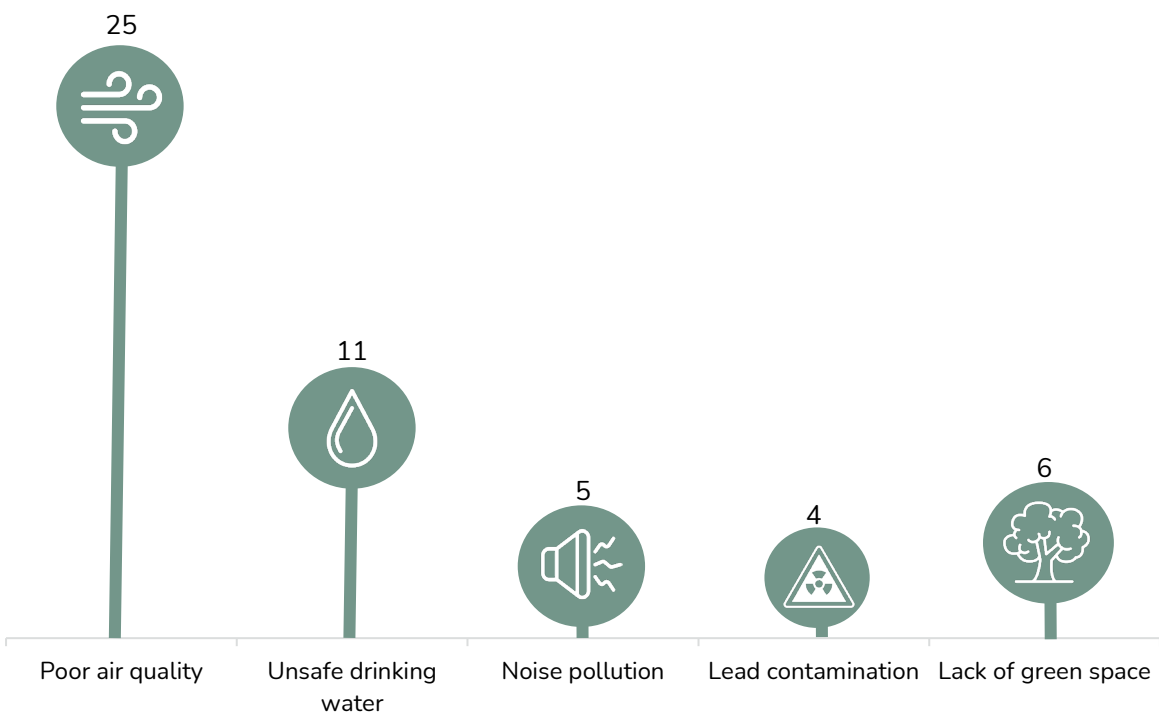
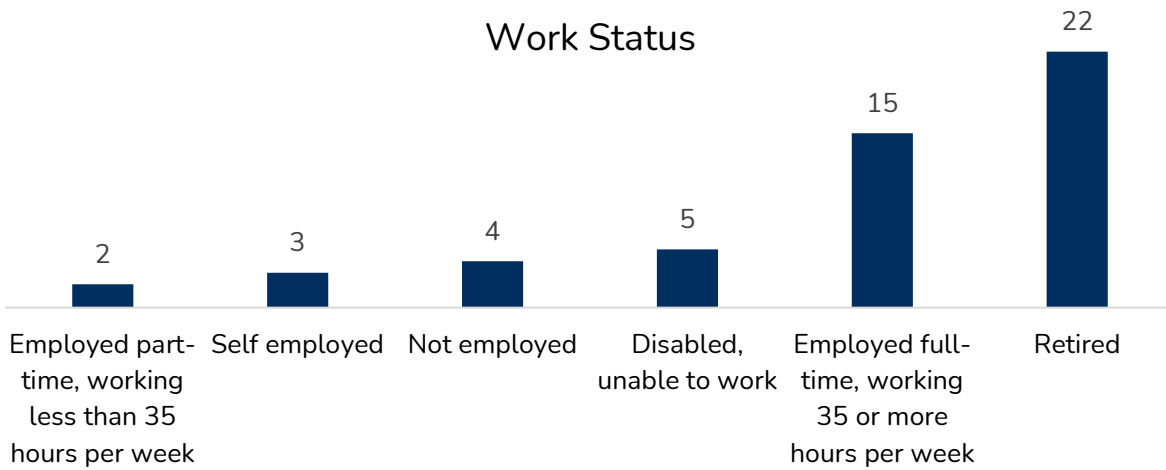
Housing Stability



Transportation Barriers



Work Status



REGION 7 LISTENING SESSIONS

Region 7 participants saw **more communication** about various social supports as a top priority in their community. Although there are numerous existing programs, ranging from food assistance supports to local community health workers, participants shared that many people in their community are not aware of these resources.

The group agreed on the importance of an approach that centers “meeting people where they are at” in terms of how to share important information about existing programs. They suggested sharing information in doctors’ offices, bus stops, blood plasma donation centers, churches, libraries, unemployment offices, homeless shelters and parks.

Walkability and transportation challenges were also top concerns. Participants discussed the lack of sidewalks adjacent to bus stations and the challenges for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs when the sidewalks are in disrepair or stop altogether, forcing pedestrians to travel in the street.

Community Strengths

Valuable programs The Allen Neighborhood Center (greenhouse, farmers market), The Greater Lansing Food Bank, The YMCA, Mobile Farmers Market programs, 2-1-1, diversity within the community including an international refugee population.

“One of the big barriers in a lot of our communities is there are a lot of these programs, but there's not necessarily a vessel to make sure that the people that need the program know that the program exists.”

Infrastructure assets The Lansing River Trail, sufficient street lighting, access to culturally appropriate foods.

Community support Participants noted the positive impact that local community groups, including neighbors, faith-based communities, and support groups, have when it comes to supporting individuals during times of hardship. They also discussed the need to organize more events to provide the opportunity for community members to get to know one another and build stronger community bonds.

REGION 7 LISTENING SESSIONS

Food Security Concerns

Accessibility Participants shared that accessing groceries in this community becomes very difficult without a car. Grocery delivery is prohibitively expensive, especially since an EBT card is not eligible for grocery delivery. Participants also cited frustrations with grocery delivery due to products getting “subbed out” against their wishes. Furthermore, many grocery stores in this region are not designed to be accessible to people in motorized wheelchairs.

“ You need to plan the whole day around getting groceries [when taking the bus] because the roundtrip takes many hours.”

Dietary needs Participants shared that food that serve as alternatives for people with dietary restrictions can be hard to access based on the area they live in, and is often much more expensive

Food education Participants noted that more education on the different food options available and food-related health issues should be an important part of any action plan made, for example, by creating discussions around what healthy alternatives can be implemented into someone’s diet, going into more depth on food consumption and the impact ingredients can have on the body)

Food assistance Attendees shared that they’ve seen different barriers impacting a person’s ability to access food, including income guidelines and policy restrictions for food assistance programs and food banks as well as long wait times before hearing back about determination of eligibility. Attendees were also frustrated that it is prohibited to use an EBT card for grocery delivery.

“I just recently tried to help my dad get on assistance. He came from Florida with stage four cancer and couldn't go out in public...So me trying to help him, I run into all these roadblocks...I have to figure out all these things on my own.”

REGION 7 LISTENING SESSIONS

Healthcare Concerns

Racism Participants agreed that racism in healthcare settings means that People of Color do not receive the same quality of care as White people.

Language This region has a significant population of people with limited English proficiency. Communicating about healthcare and other social services in more languages would increase access to care for this population.

Chronic disease This community is looking for more support for people living with chronic disease.

“Support for people living with chronic illness needs to be discussed so people can support each other.”

Provider relationships Participants expressed a need for more local doctors and health professionals that are willing to come directly to the local community to build relationships with residents and provide needed services.

Built Environment Concerns

Housing Participants shared that homelessness and access to housing is a major challenge for this community.

Walkability Community members agreed that better quality sidewalk infrastructure is needed. Sidewalks with large cracks, bumps, or other structural issues make it especially difficult to navigate for people with mobility challenges and give them no choice but to “end up in the road.” Some bus stops in the community are located in areas without sidewalks, creating dangerous walking conditions for bus riders.

Community centers and schools The limited hours of local community centers and school facilities create barriers to participation. There is also a need for more affordable summer youth programming.

“Fewer people would be in trouble [if there were more accessible activities for youth].”

Outdoor activities Participants noted that they have new or expanded trails and areas for outdoor activities. Some also noted that having events held outside (E.g. live bands, food festivals, etc.) could incentivize people to walk outside and explore more outdoor activities.

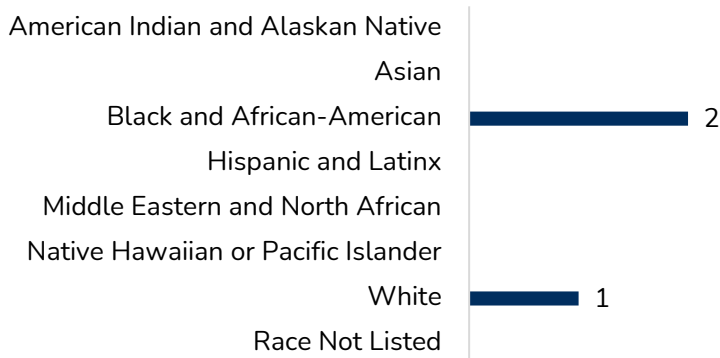
“If there are community health workers, they need to let the community know they are there. Where are they? Who is eligible to work with them?”

REGION 8 LISTENING SESSION

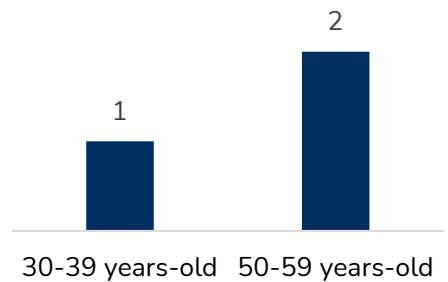


- 1 hybrid session in Kalamazoo on June 28, 2023 with 61 attendees
- 3 survey respondents

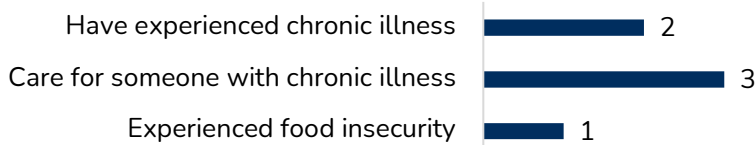
Race and Ethnicity



Age Range



Chronic Disease and Food Security



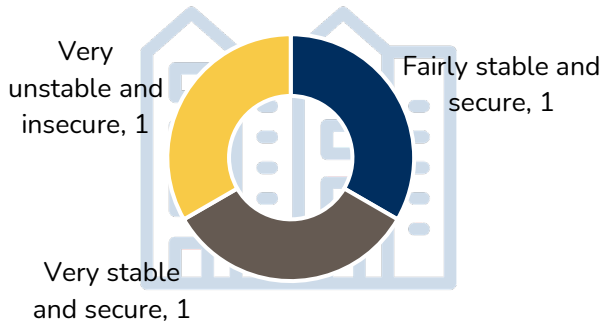
Transportation Barriers

“I have a child and am not comfortable taking them on long journeys on public transportation.”



REGION 8 LISTENING SESSION

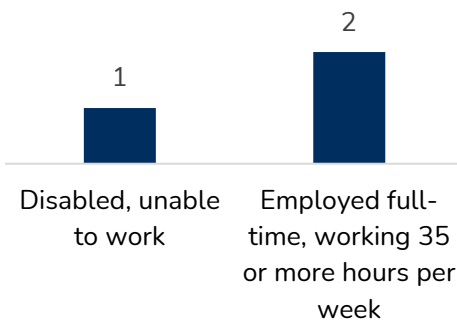
Housing Stability



“But the building that I live in is not maintained and so it doesn't to me seem healthy.”

“When we're outside, there's garbage everywhere and I live next to a liquor store, and so it's just like a lot of garbage everywhere. . . We've been wanting to move for so long.”

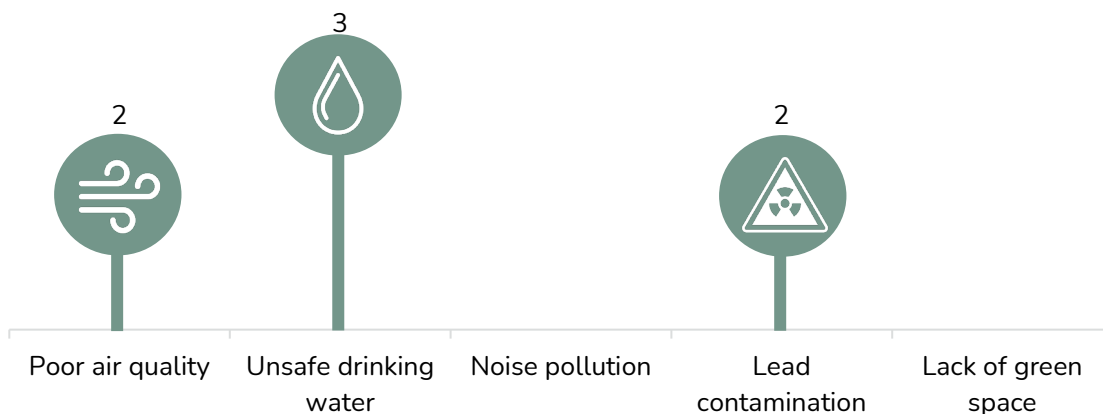
Work Status



“I've lived on the East Side for almost five years now, and [the water] is just not drinkable for my family. . . Our water bill went from \$82 in a high quarter to almost \$400 every quarter. . . Your water bills are sky high for sub-par water.”

“[There are] plenty of organizations out there meant for the homeless, and 90% of them will help you get a place temporarily. After that, you're on your own again. And it shouldn't be like that. If they're going to help you, they should help you all the way, not just you put in the door and then push you back out the door.”

Environmental Concerns



REGION 8 LISTENING SESSION

Region 8 participants shared a desire for **more resources and programming, especially for families with young children**. They found existing amenities expensive, limited in hours, or hard to reach by bus. They suggested programs for teenagers could increase community safety by giving young people options for healthy activities.

Participants wanted **more information** about, fewer limitations within, and greater coordination between existing services. Program requirements and time limitations prevented people from benefitting from current programs.

Healthcare was also a concern. Participants spoke of the difficulty getting timely health care appointments, the high cost of care, and the need for assistance paying medical bills.

Community Strengths

Valuable programs Early On, Healthy Babies Healthy Start, Loaves and Fishes, Reproductive Health Fund, Street Medicine, The Wish Program

Infrastructure assets Community gardens, Farmers markets

Food Security Concerns

Accessibility Participants' access to healthy food was limited by the high cost of food at stores in the neighborhood and the difficulty of getting to stores with more produce and better prices without a personal vehicle.

Emergency food limitations Participants expressed frustrations with currently available emergency food, including the limit of monthly distributions, the proximity of distribution sites, and the fact that food distributed is often expired.

Built Environment Concerns

Environmental concerns Participants spoke of concerns with air pollution and a lack of access to clean drinking water. They described being forced to choose between paying for an expensive service or using bottled water.

Lack of green space There were lots of concerns with the lack of desirable outdoor spaces for recreation, including an overall lack of parks and green spaces, poorly maintained properties with lots of trash, and the desire for exercise equipment in parks, which would be more accessible than gym memberships. Participants were also concerned about neighborhood violence, which deters time spent outdoors.

Transportation limitations Participants shared frustrations with limited bus routes that hinder access to healthy food, outdoor spaces, and other community resources.

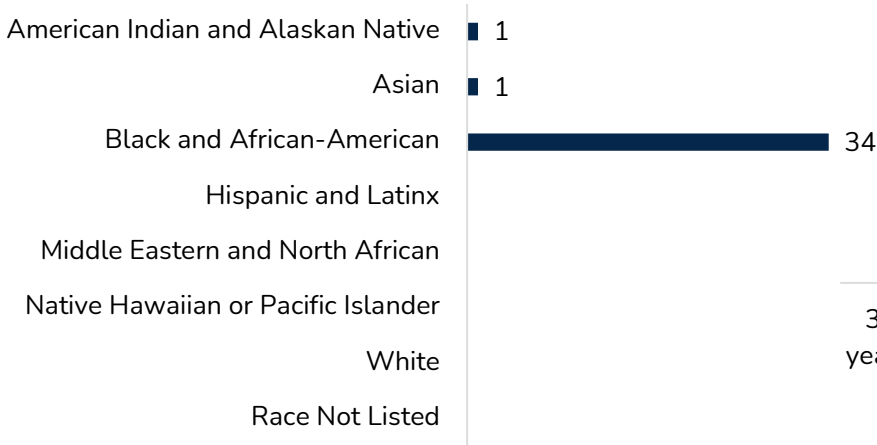
“The building that I live in is not maintained, and it doesn't seem healthy to me. Like, when we're outside, there's garbage everywhere.”

REGION 10 LISTENING SESSIONS

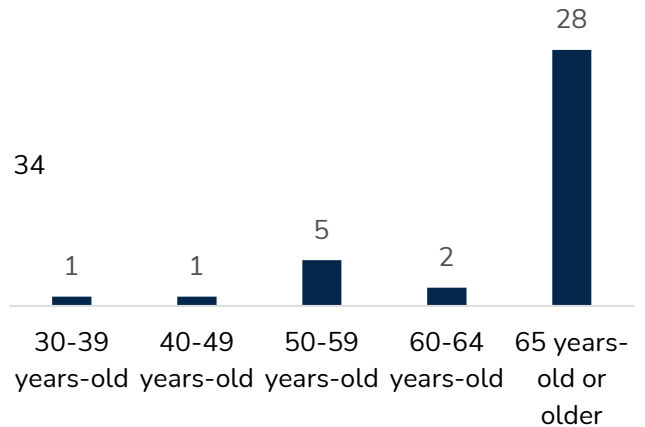


- 1 in-person session in Detroit on June 29, 2023 with 22 attendees.
- 1 in-person session in Detroit on July 23, 2023 with 17 attendees.
- 1 in-person session in Detroit on July 27, 2023 with 13 attendees.
- 37 survey respondents

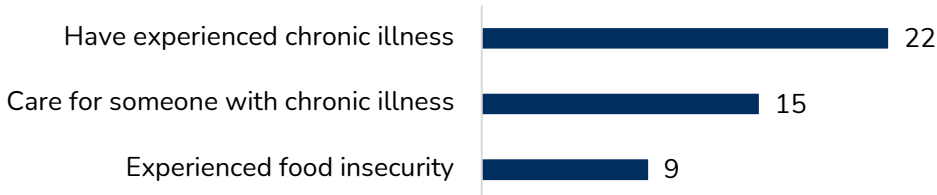
Race and Ethnicity



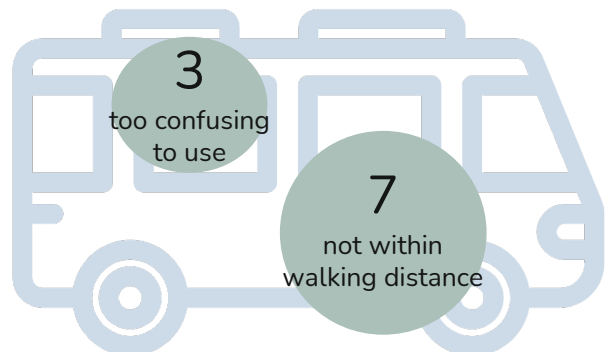
Age Range



Chronic Disease and Food Security

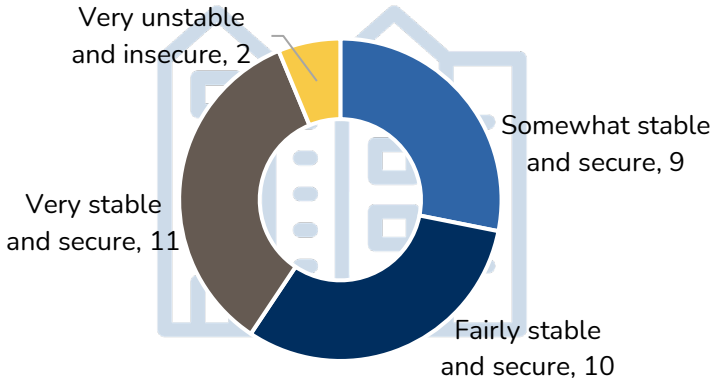


“You have to go through a process to get MetroLift. You have to get an application from MetroLift, take it to your doctor, have them sign it, and then give it back to MetroLift”



REGION 10 LISTENING SESSIONS

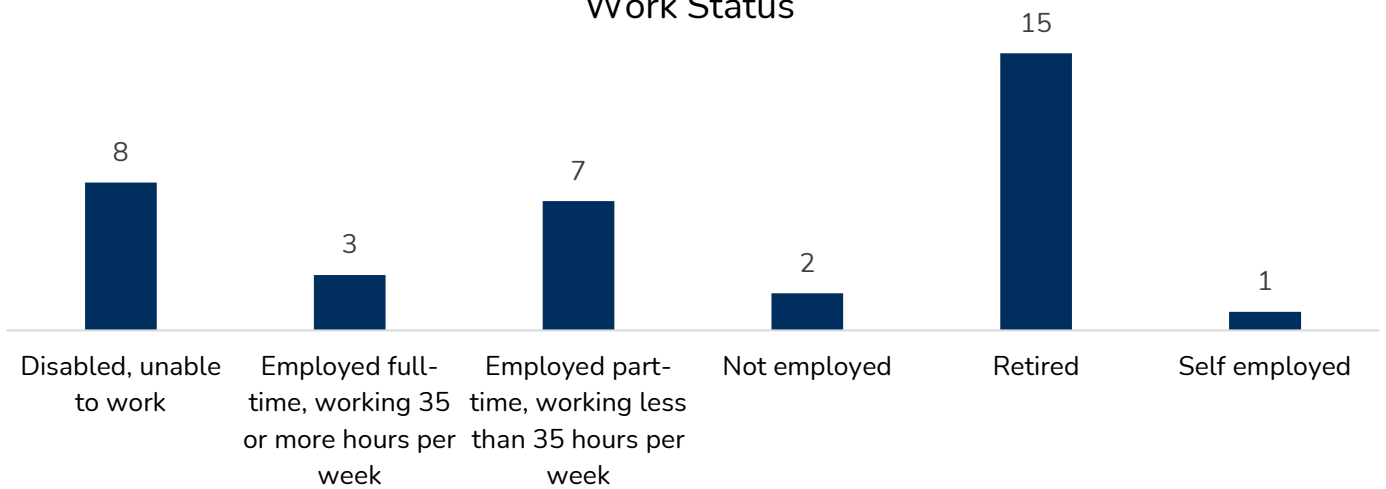
Housing Stability



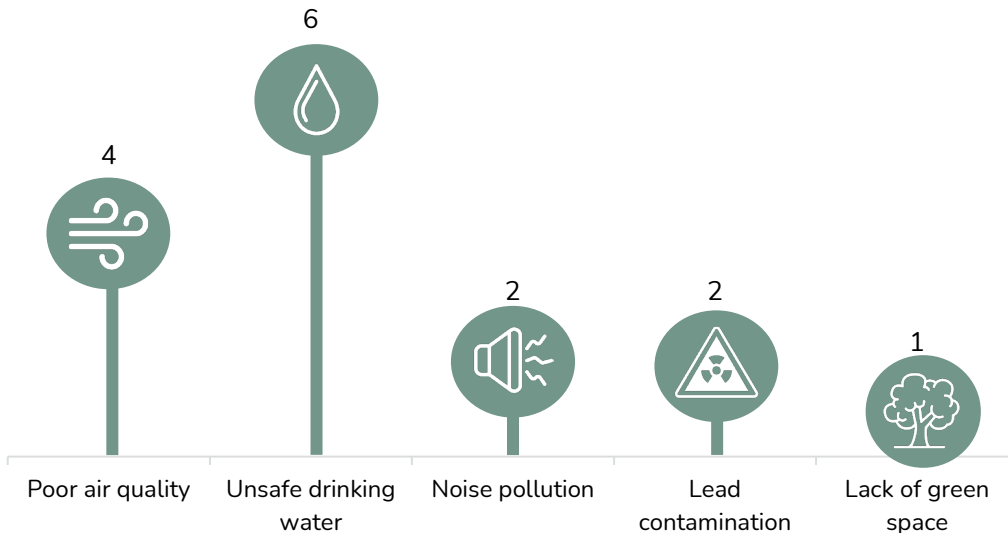
“I mainly shop through the white businesses. I can't afford to stay in business. My utilities cost 3X as much as another person who had a business in Farmington Hills. If you live in the city of Detroit and you are Black, they are gonna squeeze you out.”

“As seniors, we have been put into a category too. It's like we've been put in the corner. We've assisted our children and grandchildren, everything coming up. And then when you get to this age, it's like nobody really wants to listen to you because they don't think you know what you're talking about.”

Work Status



Environmental Concerns



REGION 10 LISTENING SESSIONS

Region 10 participants shared concerns related to **safety** and **diminishing community connections**, leading to increased stress and unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking. Participants also shared **homeownership struggles**, highlighting historical hurdles and property tax increases leading to community displacement. Accessing good quality **healthcare** has been challenging due to distant doctors and costly insurance. Food security problems included **limited grocery options** and poor produce quality.

Overall, a widespread **distrust** in local and state-wide governments stemmed from perceived systemic inequities. Some participants also noted a **decline in community services**, which they often attributed to systemic neglect, and racial inequalities affecting the allocation of resources. Participants discussed equity-focused development and advocacy with elected officials as possible solutions.

Community Strengths

Valuable programs	Detroit Association of Black Organizations (DABO) programming, Adams Butzel Complex, Detroit Medical Center, MetroLift, Library programming
Infrastructure assets	Community gardens, Eastern Market, Senior Living community

Food Security Concerns

Food access	Participants' access to quality food is limited by poor selection at the stores in Detroit. Some people travel to the suburbs to find good quality food. Participants shared various solutions and their limitations. The use of Instacart, is helpful for some but not affordable for everyone. Walking to the store limits how much one can purchase to only what can be carried. Some people shop at gas stations, which are easier to access. Lastly, participants shared that there are tensions between Middle Eastern store owners and Black community residents.
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Food safety	Participants expressed concerns related to food safety at both food banks and grocery stores, including receiving expired/expiring produce and adulterated food in local stores (e.g. formaldehyde in meat).
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Poor quality food	Participants underlined the poor quality of food within the city, stating that people have to travel to the suburbs to find good quality food. However, this means that even more money is leaving their community. The quality of produce was also a concern, with people mentioning that sometimes the produce they purchase is expired or near expiration. Lastly, some residents shared that they believe nutrients in soil have been depleted so the food they purchase, or grow, is less nutritious than it used to be.
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“The food we get [in our neighborhood] is after market food.”

“The fruit is terrible at the store where I live.”

REGION 10 LISTENING SESSIONS

Healthcare Concerns

Healthcare facilities Participants shared that the city of Detroit is a “healthcare desert” as doctors are not close, and drugstores have closed. This includes a lack of facilities and infrastructure for mental health. Difficulties in navigating health insurance options also emerged, as well as a desire for in-home medical care.

“You talked about Detroit being a food desert, but it's also a healthcare desert since they closed so many CVSs and Rite AIDs. There's no doctors, no doctor's office near them.”

In-home medical care Some participants expressed a desire for in-home medical care, such as having doctors or nurses visit them at their residences.

Accessing health insurance Participants shared difficulties navigating health insurance options. People felt they did not have access to information to compare options, were tricked into signing up for certain plans, and received both legitimate and fraudulent calls advertising insurance options.

Some people were offered financial incentives to switch healthcare providers even if they were receiving good care from their current doctor.

Built Environment Concerns

Utility costs Residents shared that utilities are expensive in Detroit. One person shared that the utilities for their business cost three times as much as another person who had a business in Farmington Hills.

Transportation Participants expressed concerns about the lack of reliable and accessible transportation options, especially for seniors. Some participants rely on walking or public transit, which they found unsafe or inaccessible. Limited transportation options hinder peoples’ ability to obtain high quality food.

“I’m disabled...I can't drive. To walk to the store I have to walk slowly because I can't really walk on the street. I can only carry maybe a bag of potatoes or maybe a bag of onions. So the next day it might be a meat trip.”