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Community Health Needs Assessment 2025-2027
Salem County

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SALEM COUNTY

BREAKOUT REPORT

RUTGERS–CAMDEN
Senator Walter Rand
Institute for Public Affairs

Contents

Executive Summary SALEM COUNTY

This report summarizes the findings of the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for Inspira Health—specifically focusing on findings from Salem County. The CHNA was conducted by The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers University-Camden on behalf of Inspira Health.

The regional report documenting the overall CHNA process, methods, and findings can be found here. Separate reports with detailed findings for each county (Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem) were generated and are available here.

We conducted the CHNA to fulfill the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) CHNA regulations for tax-exempt hospitals by characterizing community members' views on the health needs in their communities. For the purpose of this CHNA, community is defined as the three counties in the Inspira Health's service area (Gloucester, Cumberland, and Salem counties), and findings in this county report focus on the data from Salem County. Our focus on community voice means that the findings are framed by the community's *self-reported perception and experience* of health barriers and needs as well as assets and recommendations.

Broadly, the goal of conducting CHNAs is to provide actionable information for improving health at the community level. The main questions asked in the CHNA were:

1   What are the health-related **needs** of the populations within Inspira Health's service area?

2   What are the health-related **assets** within Inspira Health's service area?

3   What are gaps that are feasible to address with intervention or additional resources? What are the **solutions/recommendations** available or that could be implemented to address gaps/needs?

To achieve the goal of gathering contextualized, local information, WRI used a mixed-methods iterative strategy of data collection and analysis that combined existing publicly available-data with primary data collected from a survey with community members, focus groups with community members, and interviews with key regional health stakeholders. The interviews, focus groups and surveys allowed us to hear directly from and with those who live, work, and play in Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) CHNA regulations stipulate that many different methods of need prioritization are acceptable for CHNAs. WRI generated the top needs for this CHNA using the community voice from the focus groups, interviews, and survey around health issues facing the community, barriers to care in the community, and resources missing in the community. Top barriers were generated separately for each of the three counties, and for the region. WRI also included data around assets, solutions and recommendations as reported by community members.

Community-report assets and **solutions/recommendations** were directly generated by the data from interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with community members for each county and regionally. Community-reported barriers/needs were generated by a thorough review of all the data across interviews, focus groups, and interviews for each county and regionally. All primary data (interview, focus group, and survey data) included in this CHNA is self-reported based on perceptions and experiences of community members.

Community-reported **assets** across Salem County included the existing local programs, organizations, and community-wide partnerships. Residents were grateful for services offered to vulnerable populations and especially the youth. Community partners were also noted to be collaborative and invested in helping the community.

The Top 5 Salem County Barriers/Needs are:

A. **Cost of living and cost of health care.** This barrier refers to challenges in meeting basic needs (e.g., food, transportation, rent, etc.) and the cost of medical expenses, prescriptions, and insurance coverage.

B. **General infrastructure, especially transportation and healthcare infrastructure.** Overall, a large dearth of infrastructure limits residents access to healthcare, transportation, social connections, and other activities of daily living.

C. **Chronic illnesses.** This need refers to the presence of various chronic illnesses/conditions, mental and physical (e.g., cardiovascular issues, mental health, substance use, tobacco use, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, functional difficulties, and chronic pain).

D. **Community connections and spaces.** This barrier highlights the need for community connection and safe spaces where adults and youth can come together.

D. **Food access and availability.** This barrier reflected the challenge for residents to meet basic food and grocery needs, particularly around access/distance to foods, and lack of healthy food options.

What the Barriers Mean/Context for the Barriers – Salem County: Data from Salem County highlights the lack of existing infrastructure and the overarching impact this has on residents. The absence of local, well-resourced institutions limits residents in their ability to access fresh and affordable foods, healthcare, transportation, employment, and recreational activities. Participants expressed that the barriers they face are often intertwined and connected with one another as a result of missing infrastructure. For instance, lack of local medical specialists and accessible public transportation makes it difficult for some to access health care for chronic conditions.

Community-reported **solutions and recommendations** across Salem County included creating more local infrastructure. People suggested increasing local medical health professionals and facilities, grocery stores, employers, community spaces, recreational activities, and public transportation, suggesting co-locating some of these services. Additionally, there is a recommendation for current standing businesses and organizations to be more consistent and transparent in their practices to generate trust within the community. Data spoke to the importance of said institutions treating people with dignity, respect, and free of internalized bias. Furthermore, recommendations included increasing information sharing (about community activities, local health programs, and events), through both digital and print media to inform residents.

WRI + Inspira Project Teams

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Team Organizations

ABOUT THE SENATOR WALTER RAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS (WRI)

The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers–Camden has been a long-standing and trusted regional community partner for over 25 years. WRI honors former Senator Rand's dedication to Southern New Jersey and exists to produce and highlight community-focused research and evaluation leading to sound public policy and practice. With that as a foundation, WRI convenes and engages stakeholders in making connections across research, policy, and practice in support of Camden City and Southern New Jersey residents. Using social science research methods, WRI specializes in transforming data into actionable information across a variety of areas, including workforce development, education, transportation, and public/population health. WRI reinforces and amplifies Rutgers' research, teaching, and service goals by connecting the multidisciplinary expertise of faculty to regional problems, developing research and professional skills in students, and linking the resources of higher education to communities in Southern New Jersey. For additional information about WRI, visit https://rand.camden.rutgers.edu/

ABOUT INSPIRA HEALTH

Inspira Health is the region's leading network of health care providers, delivering the full continuum of primary, acute and advanced care services. Inspira Health is a charitable nonprofit health care organization committed to providing an exceptional experience for patients and their loved ones. Tracing its roots to 1899, the system comprises four hospitals, two comprehensive cancer centers, nine multi-specialty health centers and locations throughout South Jersey.

Inspira's surgical teams provide nationally accredited bariatric procedures and a wide array of robotic and minimally invasive surgeries. In partnership with Cooper University Healthcare, Inspira provides comprehensive neuroscience and cardiology services throughout the region. Inspira's extensive ambulatory services include urgent care; ambulatory surgery centers; physical and occupational therapy; comprehensive behavioral health; primary and specialty physician practices in Gloucester, Cumberland, Salem, Camden and Atlantic counties; and extensive outpatient imaging in partnership with Atlantic Medical Imaging (AMI). Additionally, Inspira EMS covers communities throughout South Jersey. Inspira's Population Health and Community Impact Departments proactively reach out to underserved communities and address social drivers of health that impact individuals and families in our region.

Together with its medical staff of more than 1,300 physicians and advanced practice providers, as well as more than 7,800 employees, Inspira Health provides evidence-based care to help each patient achieve the best possible outcome. And as a regional leader in physician training, Inspira Health mentors and provides extensive clinical opportunities for more than 280 medical residents and fellows in 16 nationally accredited programs. Accredited by DNV Healthcare, the system's clinical and support staff are focused on providing quality care as a High Reliability Organization. To learn more about Inspira Health, visit InspiraHealthNetwork.org or call 1-800-INSPIRA.

Community Context — Salem County

Salem County is located in the southwestern part of New Jersey, about an hour from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is bordered to the west by the Delaware River, and its geography is almost entirely flat coastal plain. The county seat is Salem. Salem County is the least populated of the 21 counties in the State of New Jersey but the 10th largest county in square miles (QuickFacts: Salem County, New Jersey, 2020). Salem County is the most rural county in the State of New Jersey. The population is 195.4 people per square mile while the state rate is 1,263 per square mile (U.S. Census, 2020). Of its total area, 93.4% (310 square miles) of Salem County is considered rural and 45.3% of the population lives in a rural area. The county has been successful in maintaining the cultural history of agriculture and open space that has long defined much of South Jersey. Today, 42.6% of the land is under active farm cultivation. The county has 6 rivers, more than 34,000 acres of meadow and marshland, and 40 lakes and ponds. In term of population change, between 2010 and 2020, Salem County's population decreased from 66,058 to 65,117, an approximately 1.42% drop; whereas the state population increased from 8,791,894 to 9,290,841, a 5.67% increase (U.S Census Bureau, 2022).

As of 2022, the top employment sectors in Salem County are Healthcare and Education, which represent 22.1 % of the jobs in the county. The largest employer is the utility company PSE&G, with roughly 1,500 employees. Employment numbers for Salem County are projected to remain virtually unchanged— showing a small growth of 0.1% per year. This is partially due to losses in manufacturing, utilities, and retail trade that are expected to offset the growth experienced in construction, healthcare and social services in this area.

In Salem County, the unemployment rate in September 2024 was 5.1%, higher than the state's rate of 4.1% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). There are a number of municipalities in Salem County with high unemployment rates, including Salem City (12.1%), Penns Grove (9.0%), and Carney's Point (6.8%). The COVID-19 pandemic's effects saw the unemployment rate in New Jersey (9.8%) surpass that of Salem County (9.5%) for the first time in 10 years.

According to the (2022) American Community Survey, Salem County residents are above the state average for high school but not college educational attainment. Statewide, 90.7% of the population has a high school diploma or higher, and 91.3% of Salem County's population has a high school diploma or higher. In contrast, 43.5% of New Jersey's population has earned a bachelor's degree or higher, while 25% of the population in Salem County has earned a Bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Salem County's Food Environment Index was 7.9 out of 10 (compared to the state's 9.0 score out of 10). The Food Environment Index scores range from 0 (worst) to 10 (best) (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2024). Moreover, food insecurity affects 10% of the population, with 8% having limited access to healthy foods (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2024).

In Salem County, 67% of individuals have access to exercise opportunities in Salem County, compared to 96% of New Jersey citizens who have access to exercise opportunities (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2024). Moreover, around 8% of adults and 3% of children do not have health insurance (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2021). There is 1 primary care physician for every 4,070 residents in Salem County, 1 dentist for every 3,260 residents, and 1 mental health provider for every 870 residents (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2021). In New Jersey, there is 1 primary care physician for every 1,280 residents, 1 dentist for every 1,160 residents, and 1 mental health provider for every 340 residents (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2021).
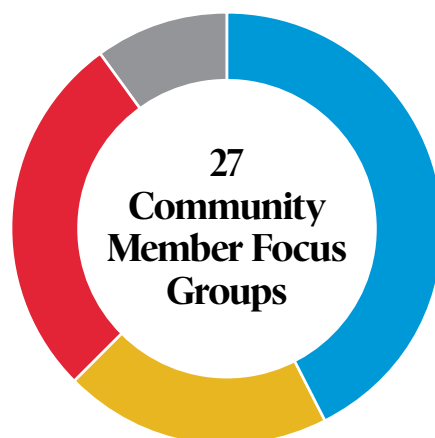
In Salem County, a significant majority of the population—81%—commutes to work by driving alone, reflecting a heavy reliance on personal vehicles for transportation. Among these commuters, 40% experience a journey lasting longer than 30 minutes, indicating that a substantial portion of the workforce faces extended travel times on a daily basis. This data highlights both the prevalence of individual car use and the potential challenges associated with lengthy commutes in the area (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2022).

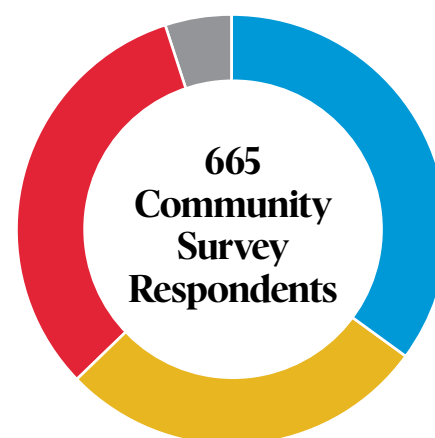# Data Collection Totals and Community-Reported Demographics

REGIONAL DATA COLLECTED:

18 Key Stakeholder Interviews

27 Community Member Focus Groups

665 Community Survey Respondents

- **Cumberland County Stakeholders** 4 interviews (22.2%)
- **Gloucester County Stakeholders** 1 interview (5.5%)
- **Salem County Stakeholders** 3 interviews (16.7%)
- **Regional Stakeholders** 10 interviews (55.6%)

- **Cumberland County Community Members** 9 focus groups, 91 participants (42.52%)
- **Gloucester County Community Members** 7 focus groups, 43 participants (20.09%)
- **Salem County Community Members** 11 focus groups, 59 participants (27.57%)
- 21 other county participants (9.8%)

- **Cumberland County Community Members** 234 respondents (35%)
- **Gloucester County Community Members** 186 respondents (28%)
- **Salem County Community Members** 212 respondents (32%)
- **Other County Community Members** 33 respondents (5%)

Key Stakeholder Interviews

There were 3 Salem County stakeholder interviews conducted.

Community Member Focus Groups

There were 234 focus group participants (214 for whom demographic information was reported), and 27.57% (59) were from Salem County. **Full focus group demographics can be seen in the Inspira CHNA 2025–2027 Background, Process + Regional Findings Report** here.

Community Member Survey

There were 665 community survey responses, 28% (212) of whom were from Salem County. The municipalities with the most survey responses in Salem County were Salem City (28), Pennsville (24), and Woodstown (23). In Salem County, 77% (164) of respondents go to Inspira for health care. **Additional community survey demographics can be seen in the Inspira CHNA 2025–2027 Background, Process + Regional Findings Report** here.

Findings: Salem County

A note about the data.

Note that data (interview, focus group, and survey data) is self-reported based on perceptions and experiences of community members. The top needs selected in the survey by respondents and discussed by community members in focus groups and key stakeholders in the interviews reflect what is important to the participants at the time of the data collection. Many of the barriers are deeply interconnected and they reflect the perception of community members of individual and community health needs based on their experiences.

All survey responses will be reported with percentages as well as the number of survey takers who chose/selected that question choice, out of the total number of survey respondents to that question (e.g., 50% means 10 out of 20 survey takers selected that question choice, 10 out of 20 total survey takers who answered that question of the survey).

The responses in this report are totals across Salem County.

A. Community-Reported Existing Assets

Data highlighted that interview and focus group participants shared an appreciation for a number of programs and organizations that exist within Salem County. Specifically, programs that serve to bring medical providers to uninsured and underinsured individuals, housing programs for the youth and elderly, Family Success Centers and community centers, transportation programs, and food pantries.

Acenda, in particular, was praised by multiple groups of individuals for the services they provide to young people with housing difficulties. One individual stated, "Acenda has a lot of programs for young individuals... and they have a place for them to live and resources such as that." (Salem County Community Member).

Participants discussed how the existing organizations and businesses in the county help the community. For example, both Mid-Atlantic Shipping and Pennsville Visiting Nurses were mentioned to host food pantries offering fresh produce and non-perishables. The Salem Health and Wellness Foundation was also recognized, with one person sharing, "I think that the strength of the Salem Health and Wellness Fund Foundation [is] they clearly want to be a partner and want to help" (Salem County Community Member).

In addition, community spaces such as the Birds Eye Family Success Center were valued amongst focus group participants for providing residents with a safe space to build relationships and community with others through activity engagement. While at the centers, residents recounted meeting other individuals, obtaining resources for needed goods and services, learning new skills, and finding a sense of belonging. One resident described valuing their time spent at the community center through stating, "Birds Eye, they have a lot of stuff, we were just here last night for healthy cooking...and then everybody cooks together and eats together, and then they send you home with a bag of all the ingredients to make it at home, so Birds Eye." (Salem County Community Member).

In regard to transportation, the SCOOT (Salem County Office of Aging & Disabilities: Senior, Disabled and 5311 Non-Urbanized Transportation Program) program was also praised by both community residents and stakeholders for being an available resource for both the elderly and disabled communities. While the program itself is not available to all residents of Salem County, as there are specific eligibility criteria users must qualify for, there is recognition that it is a much-valued asset. For instance, one individual stated, "Thank God we have a SCOOT program. The SCOOT program is the bus that runs for seniors and disabled because that's a population of people who would just be isolated in their homes and not get any help at all" (Salem County Stakeholder).

Data also spoke to how existing organizations work together to serve the community. For instance, one person shared how community partners compromised in attempts to address emergency vehicle shortages across the county,

"They had the municipal mayors and the municipal EMS [Emergency Medical Services] leaders there, and they were talking to each other instead of at each other about one of the communities. Carney's Point, I think, has two active ambulances running at any given time, which is enough to feed Carney's Point. When they're getting called out on calls to neighboring townships, that's leaving a gap. It was the opportunity for that EMS leader to express that and say, 'Look, it's not that we don't mind doing this, but we have a community that's paying taxes to us for us to serve them. We're sitting out with you and we're doing it for free because the reimbursement on this is peanuts.' They began to understand that and they began to problem solve it, and they began to work." (Regional Stakeholder)

B. Community-Reported Barriers/Needs

The top main health needs identified across Salem County were cost of living and cost of health care, general infrastructure, especially transportation and healthcare infrastructure, chronic illnesses, community connection and spaces, and food access and availability.

What the Barriers Mean/Context for the Barriers
Data from Salem County highlighted that stakeholders and residents alike have a desire to see long-term investment in Salem. There is a need for program funding, a stronger sense of community, and efforts to understand the individualized needs of the county. Overall, data conveyed that Salem County is severely lacking in infrastructure, negatively impacting residential health and lifestyle. Data called attention to the importance of meeting people where they are and investing in the community at large.

In Salem, the overall lack of infrastructure and deep need to meet basic needs can be summarized through this participant's experience:

"In Salem, I know that I had heard recently that the closest grocery store is eight miles, eight-point-something miles from center city Salem. Then I know that one was going to be coming in and then it didn't happen. For a place that grows so much food, and it is a food desert, it's outstanding. Then you're driving to Delaware to deliver your baby. It's just crazy. I know someone that lives in the county and he was telling me that his family fosters children. One of the children was an infant who needed a special formula, and it was not carried in any of the stores in Salem County. Then WIC [Women Infants and Children] doesn't transfer—he couldn't use his benefits to get it in other counties. It's just like the infrastructure and the systems at play, having access to healthy food and having a way to get there and a way to get back. That's the other issue. Sometimes you can get an Uber to an appointment, but no one can pick you up from it. From being stranded in 95-degree weather... I think that would be my dream of dreams, to really invest in the infrastructure at the county" (Regional Stakeholder).

A. Cost of living and cost of healthcare

The rising cost of living is a significant challenge for local residents. When asked about community health-based issues, approximately three-quarters of respondents (74.5%; 149 of 200) selected cost of living as a top barrier. For said individuals, issues such as transportation, gas, groceries, and housing are classified as severe needs that are not currently being met. Residents reported instances in which they could not afford their health care needs due to having to financially prioritize other daily essentials. One individual stated "A lot of people have-- it's not healthcare, but it could be they have transportation issues too. That's hard for them, or it's costly to get around. You got to pay your copays and whatnot. Sad to say, they'll just skip [care]. What if something happens? Nobody cares. It's sad. It's crazy." (Salem County Community Member).

The financial burden of medical care is a top concern for Salem County residents. When surveyed about missing community resources, 50.8% (97 of 191) reported that the lack of low cost of generalized medical care is a concern. Additionally, 35.1% (67 of 191) of survey takers specifically selected that the absence of low-cost dental care is a salient barrier to their health. Finding providers that accept one's health insurance was reported as a challenge, with 28.8% (55 of 191) reporting that insurance coverage is a concern. Salem County residents have expressed difficulties with, not only obtaining health insurance coverage, but also locating providers that are knowledgeable of their specific insurance. One individual stated:

> "My five-year-old needed a physical to start kindergarten. I called and I tried to make an appointment. He had to have his one-year checkup, so I was just trying to do it at the same time. She didn't tell me that I had to wait exactly 365 days for my insurance to cover it, so then we went 10 days earlier. They called me two days later and they're like, 'Oh, now you have to call your insurance because they're trying to dispute it.' I'm like, 'Why didn't you guys explain this to me when I was on the phone?' She started giving me an attitude and was like, 'You could have just used your well visit from last year to fill up paperwork.' I'm like, 'Nobody explained that to me. I could have waited an extra 10 days.' Now I'm possibly getting billed for it because I went 10 days sooner." (Salem County Community Member).

In addition, slightly more than one-third, 35.3% (65 of 184) of Salem County survey takers reported a need for financial assistance services to help them apply for vouchers, connect to government services, budgeting, and paying bills. Individuals reported instances in which they do not have health care at all, are underinsured, or struggle in other ways due to their lack of knowledge on how local health programs work. For instance, one individual highlighted the need for program assistance by sharing,

"A lot of people around here don't have health care. Say, they had to go to the hospital or something like that, now they're getting a $1,000 bill, because they didn't have any insurance or anything like that. You can sit there and look at it. Some people don't know which direction to go. I need help with signing and filling up the paperwork." (Salem County Community Member).

B. General infrastructure, especially transportation and healthcare infrastructure

An identified barrier within Salem County is the lack of available infrastructure. Across food, housing, healthcare, and transportation, data from Salem County community members highlighted an overall shortage of robust and updated infrastructure to support residents in moving through their daily lives. Many individuals spoke of challenges relating to the lack of local medical providers/appointments, reliable public transportation, affordable housing, recreational activities, and shopping centers. Residents felt that it was difficult to give a review, positive or negative, of the current systems because Salem County does not have enough of them. Some reported traveling to other towns and/ or states to meet their needs. One person shared,

> "I came from Camden County and coming from there to here, it's completely different. I've learned, I've been here now almost 18 years, and everybody, no matter if it's healthcare or anything outside of that, it's forgotten about. Nobody comes here. There's not a lot out here. Everybody leaves and has to go for anything. Even just shopping and stuff. People always either cross the bridge and go to Delaware or they're going [elsewhere] because nothing's coming to us. We're just forgotten, I feel like." (Salem County Community Member).

The lack of available infrastructure and resources presents challenges to the everyday lives of Salem residents. For some, that means not being able to obtain proper health care when needed. When asked about the most salient barriers to one's health and about missing medical resources, 35.6% (68 of 191) of survey respondents answered "availability of appointments" (finding appointments/ having available appointments), 34.6% (66 of 191) responded with "closer (distance wise) providers," and 27.2% (52 of 191) responded with "low or lower cost of prescriptions." Moreover, when asked about missing community health resources, 34.8% (64 of 184) responded with public transportation assistance and routes (services) to medical centers (hospital, clinic, urgent care, doctor's office). This is an ongoing concern for both residents and stakeholders alike. One person shared,

"The state now is paying attention that even with all the things that have been done, Salem County continues to be last on the list. I think they're asking the questions, what could or should we do? Again, many of the programs that exist, the county doesn't qualify for because there aren't enough people who live there. That forces us to ask the question whether or not we should be looking at different metrics. Not based upon population, but based upon need." (Regional Stakeholder)

Participants discussed how the lack of healthcare infrastructure places residents at a disadvantage. One person shared,

> "I actually came from Pennsauken (Camden County) and have moved to Salem and have only worked in this office for a year. One of the things I would observe is the access to good healthcare locally. As I've started here, Salem Medical Center was already getting ready to close. That wasn't the best situation. There is also a lot of just need for emergent health as opposed to health maintenance and keeping healthy. I think the focus on the barriers of health by transporting everybody out of the city in order to get health care is something that needs to be addressed. Healthcare needs to be where the people are." (Salem County Community Member).

Another person shared, "Traditionally, in cities like this, healthcare left and has not come back. There are social service agencies, Acenda, and different agencies that help people, but there's no healthcare locally. That would be my biggest barrier to community health, is the access to health locally." (Salem County Community Member).

Residents throughout Salem County expressed concern with the lack of local doctors and specialists. Those with reliable means of transportation often reported having to drive long distances to obtain health care. This sometimes means having to pay tolls, putting additional mileage on their vehicles, an increase in fuel expenses, and significant amounts of time being taken out of one's day. One resident shared,

"My one-year-old had to see a urologist, and we had to go all the way to Washington Township (Gloucester County), which is almost an hour and a half away. Literally, we were there for five minutes. The doctor examined him and was like, 'Okay, you're going to schedule your surgery, and whatever,' and then that was it. I was like, 'I drove over an hour away just for you to see him for five minutes.' Then after surgery, we did the same thing. You had to go back, and they were in there for 5, 10 minutes. I'm like, This is ridiculous.' They didn't have anywhere closer. The other ones were Voorhees and Cherry Hill (both in Camden County), all just further away." (Salem County Community Member).

Moreover, data conveyed that there is a need for more consistent and reliable public transportation within Salem County. While there are various means of medical-based transportation systems, such as the SCOOT (Salem County Office of Aging & Disabilities: Senior, Disabled and 5311 Non-Urbanized Transportation Program) and CATS (Cumberland Area Transit System) buses, participants must meet specific criteria to qualify for use. Residents and stakeholders alike expressed a need for affordable transportation that is available to all and that takes them to places such as the grocery store, work, and medical offices without having to be scheduled in advance.

One person shared, "How [do] these people around here get whole families to go grocery shopping up here at Pennsville, to the ACME or Save-A-Lot for the whole family with no transportation. Even on a bus, you can't—it's only so much it can get you know. I don't know about the schools and stuff. I said medical transportation, they're not dependable." (Salem County Community Member).

Additionally, one stakeholder shared, "It is hard for people in the community, especially with the transportation issues, to go somewhere to big events and stuff like that." (Salem County Stakeholder)

Also, residents who do qualify and rely on transportation programs and public transportation reported challenges in obtaining medical care due to the lack of local providers. Those without reliable, accessible, or personal means of transportation are often unable to travel externally to obtain care and instead must rely on what is available locally. When local options are not available for certain conditions or treatments, some residents go without access to care entirely. One individual stated, "Just from what everyone talks about, and we were frustrated, and I was like, 'I'll just go across the bridge.' To me, that was just an obvious answer, but if you don't have that option, or if you don't want to cross the bridge, we drive a half hour to get there. If you don't have that option then you don't have any options." (Salem County Community Member).

Moreover, residents reported challenges with obtaining appointments within a reasonable time frame. Some have shared instances in which they were required to make appointments that were far away as there were no other options available. One resident stated "I've been sick like twice in the last year, but I got really sick with an upper respiratory infection and I could not even get a doctor appointment for like nine days" (Salem County Community Member). Another resident expressed frustration in sharing,

> "I made my stepdaughter an appointment for the dentist. You know you have to wait six months. Then they called me only a couple days before, and they're like, "Oh, we're short–staffed. You have to call and reschedule." I'm like, I literally made this appointment six months ago...When I call now, I'm going to have to push it months in advance so then by that point, she's getting closer to almost a year, where you need the next six months." (Salem County Community Member).

People also expressed distrust in some of the local healthcare facilities. In particular, community residents discussed the Salem Medical Center as an institution with poor reviews and ratings. Although Inspira has purchased the facility, there is still distrust and concern held by residents due to their experiences with the previous administration. Those who have the resources to travel out of the county for health care often do so in an attempt to obtain what they perceive as better quality care.

Participants we spoke with shared,

> "Well, I think Inspira has a presence. Clearly, it's kind of the Goliath of Salem County because it's a large healthcare provider. Having said that, my sense is that people are not enamored with the two local hospitals. I think they use them when they have to, but I don't know that they're using them because they want to. That means, in my mind, a couple of things. One is that because of years of mistrust and not being able to rely on those two hospitals, now the trend has been for people to go outside of the county. To Vineland or Mullica Hill or into Delaware or into Philly, depending on what their need is."

C. Chronic illnesses

When asked about top medical health issues, the top issues from survey takers in Salem County were related to chronic illness (e.g., cardiovascular issues, mental health, substance use, tobacco use, diabetes, obesity, hypertension). Over forty percent (41.3%; 85 of 206) stated cardiovascular diseases, 39.8% (82 of 206) said cancer; 37.4% (77 of 206) reported high blood pressure/hypertension; 31.6% (65 of 206) stated dental health; and 30.6% (63 of 206) reported mental illness and wellbeing.

Additionally, other challenges were reported in relation to chronic illness. For instance, those who require supportive care to manage their conditions reported struggling to find resources within Salem County. One individual stated, "Mental health, like she said, is huge because it's all part of everything else too. There's not enough mental health of anything, anywhere, this area or outside this area, there's just not enough to help people." (Salem County Community Member). Interview and focus group data highlighted that the lack of in-county specialists and providers served to increase travel times to providers, and mostly required use of a personal vehicle to get there. One individual shared, "I'd like to see more specialists in the area because I have fibromyalgia and a lot of chronic conditions. I have to drive almost 45 minutes just to see one specialist." (Salem County Community Member). Congruently, there were also concerns about people not being aware of the resources that currently exist for them.

"I know Inspira does, like she said, you can drop them off to the ER, but people who are homeless and are on the brink of their last resort, like, "I've had enough." They don't know that they can even walk into the ER and that they don't have to have a mental health breakdown to be accepted into the site department that they'll take home under––. They just want to get off drugs. They just want to get off the streets. Like I said, I didn't know Inspira offered that or I would've done it a long time ago. These guys don't advertise or have any resource centers that are telling us or telling people that this is available." (Salem County Community Member).

D. Community connections and spaces

When asked about community-based health issues, 31% (62 of 200) respondents selected housing availability, and 31.5% (63 of 200) selected environmental health and justice (e.g., lead, pollution, water safety, climate events, etc.) among their top five issues. For both residents and stakeholders alike, lack of available safe and affordable housing is a concern within Salem County. One stakeholder reflected on housing insecurity and its impact on health,

"A lot of people are struggling with homelessness. That's another big thing in our county. I see it with the seniors because we've been working with them one-on-one. They're not able to afford it. We have a lot of abandoned homes, apartments that are flipping over to LLCs, they want to charge more. The seniors can't afford it. We're helping them. We don't have a lot of housing. We don't have a lot of senior housing or affordable housing. That's been an issue. The more we see that, the more we're going to need mental health. People are depressed. I think that's always going to be—For a while, it's going to be an issue." (Salem County Stakeholder).

Residents of Salem County reported that there is a lack of available community support, social services, and programs, such as social clubs and hobby interest groups, where they could connect with others. Slightly more than a third (35.9%; 66 of 184) of those surveyed listed this as a top community health barrier and missing resource. Data highlighted a lack of public places for individuals to meet and build community. With 30.4% (56 of 184) surveyed individuals selecting lack of recreational services as a missing community resource, it is evident that residents long for programs such as those outdoor activities, and opportunities for group-wide exercise.

Some residents have reported that they leave the county and, occasionally, the state to seek out other community-based resources. In placing emphasis on the lack of available programming in Salem County, one resident shared, "We don't even go to church [here], we go to church in Wilmington [Delaware] and always feel bad that we're doing things outside of the community, but it's just hard to do things here." (Salem County Community Member).

Residents also spoke to the concerns around youth activities and having safe spaces for youth engagement. One resident shared, "I have grandkids here and there's nothing for them to do around here. Like, keep him busy instead of going on to the left side when he gets older to go in the streets, you know what I mean? Because he wanted to come outside and play and everything, but there's nothing really for him to do." (Salem County Community Member). When asked about community-based health issues, 30% (60 of 200) respondents selected individual safety (e.g., child maltreatment, domestic violence, sexual assault) and community safety (community violence, police, guns, etc.,) as a community-based health issue.

E. Food access and availability

A barrier identified within Salem County was residents' access to healthy foods. Slightly more than half of those surveyed (53%; 106 of 200) indicated that they struggled with the local food options available to them. Amongst community resident focus group participants, individuals reported having to travel to other towns or different counties all together in order to efficiently grocery shop. Residents have described the stores geographically closest to them as inaccessible, often either due to transportation barriers or cost. One community resident stated:

> "They're like, 'Tell us what the needs are.' It's like, well, there's two grocery stores in the county. Both of them are Acme.' Everybody knows that's one of the most expensive grocery stores there is. There's all these resources, but when you don't have things like transportation, it's crazy. At the end of it, everybody's like, listen, this is the conversation we've been having for 5 years, 10 years, 15 years. I think there needs to be a movement in action or we're just going to keep having conversation." (Salem County Community Member).

Data highlighted that Salem County residents face challenges with the lack of affordable grocery options. Some of those interviewed described Salem County as a food desert. Without a proper grocery store, residents expressed challenges with obtaining healthy foods, or any groceries in general. Those with transportation barriers especially face difficulties as they are often not easily or regularly able to travel to out of community grocery stores to obtain food. One resident stated, "Salem City is a food desert and we have dirty water. Those are one of your three basic needs, and we don't have that. Then we have lack of shelter, we have lack of childcare, we have lack of employment. When you put all that together, it's hard to survive." (Salem County Community Member). Local stakeholders also emphasized the difficulties residents face with obtaining fresh and healthy foods due to the apparent food desert within Salem County. Another person shared, "It's hard to have healthy eating programs and that sort of thing. The best option for people is the unhealthy choices that are in the bodega. I think that's one of the biggest [issues], it's the food desert." (Salem County Stakeholder).

While there are food distribution programs in Salem County, often hosted by local organizations or churches, some indicate that they are only a temporary solution and there is a need for something more permanent. In addition, reportedly the food provided from said programs is commonly lacking in both health and nutrition. One stakeholder stated, "There's a lot of food distribution that goes on

around the city, across town, I think maybe like the nonprofits and the churches. That's just a band-aid solution." (Salem County Stakeholder). Another person shared, "We have great partnerships with food banks, which is wonderful, but the food that is coming from the food banks is not healthy eating. It's not fresh produce or protein meats and things like that." (Salem County Stakeholder). Some individuals reported feeling frustrated with the numerous corner stores and fast food options being created instead of grocery stores with healthy food options.

One resident shared: "I know they just got a new Wawa and they're getting a McDonald's, but I don't know that all of the new stuff that's going up, I don't know. It's like they're giving us a new Super Wawa. We're like, we have two Wawa's, do we really need another Super Wawa?...McDonald's isn't all that good for you anyway and you're giving them a Wawa and the prices at Wawa, you can't really grocery shop at Wawa. I think lack of grocery stores also hinders some of your healthy eating and healthy family style stuff." (Salem County Community Member).

Participants also demonstrated awareness and concern about the long-term impacts of inefficient access to healthy foods and unhealthy long-term diets. One resident stated, "You get a bag of chips and a sandwich. That's what you eat for lunch and breakfast, whatever you can afford..it's really, really affecting our systems and our bodies and even how it goes down to our DNA and how we're passing down that DNA to our children. It's a big deal" (Salem CountyCommunity Member).

See full Salem County and Regional Top Self-Reported Needs (Barriers) from the Community Survey in the Inspira CHNA 2025-2027 Background, Process + Regional Findings Report here.

C. Community-Reported Solutions and Recommendations

While data from Salem County highlighted multiple barriers, individuals from the community also shared many ideas for ways to address current challenges. In recognition that transportation barriers and concerns have shown to impact a number of Salem County residents, it is often difficult for them to get their basic needs met let alone show up to hosted events. While there is a desire from residents for more opportunities to come together as a community, there are also suggestions to bring resources directly to the people via mobilized efforts.

Respectful Development/Opportunity and Accountability for Institutions
In addition, some residents shared that it would help the community if they witnessed a sincere effort to follow through on plans and promises held by larger organizations. "I think everything we talked about is pretty much terrible. If you're going to put up the new hospital, it's nice to take a picture and put it on the news and say, "Oh, we got a new hospital," but do the work behind it." (Community Member, Salem County). Data demonstrated community resident disappointment with seeing businesses come and go without holding true to the pledges they made. It has been shared that when organizations come to Salem there is often hope and excitement for the future, as a new resource is being added. However, if work is not being done to maintain the integrity of the organization's original mission, then residents experience feelings of doubt and frustration.

Residents suggested that the existing structures could be utilized more effectively to address community needs. One community member stated "Some of the places, some of the buildings are torn up now. They were building it up. They had a few couple [places] I know that were for homeless people and stuff like that. Next thing I know, 20 years later on down the road... There's enough buildings out here. I'm sure they can do something. There's got to be something." (Salem County Community Member). Congruently upon the closure of businesses, empty lots are said to remain abandoned with nothing of use in its place. Ideally, residents would like to see these vacant spaces be filled with resources for the community, such as a shared garden or affordable housing. There is both disappointment and annoyance in watching lots and buildings remain vacant while Salem already struggles with a lack of infrastructure.
Interview and focus group participants expressed that in order for the community to want to trust and support the efforts made by both current and incoming institutions, there is a desire for efforts to be both observable and genuine. Some organizations recognize this and have made efforts to build up both community relationships and trust.

One stakeholder shared: "I think consistency is important. If you say you're going to do something, you need to do it. If you don't do it, then you fall under that bracket of just another program in the system that just needs numbers. Really just getting involved in people's lives and being consistent. It is with the small things. 'Oh, you said you were going to take me over to find food.' 'Okay, let's meet at this time.' Follow-up, consistency is important." (Salem County Stakeholder).

Community Care and Trust

Data highlighted that Salem community residents expressed a desire for better treatment from the organizations they frequent. One individual advised, "Don't assume someone has a lack of knowledge because of the way they're dressed or how they look, because they might even be smarter than you think, or could even help you with something as you are helping them." (Salem County Community Member). Reportedly there have been instances in which individuals had felt their level of care was impacted by their current social status, socioeconomic standing, or their individualized circumstances. As a result, some have suggested that service providers would benefit from training courses relating to bedside manners and understanding the unique needs of specialized populations such as those struggling with substance use and/or housing challenges. There is encouragement for those in leadership positions, or roles in which they serve others, to make conscious efforts not to assume things about people and learn how to identify and be aware of one's own stigmas and biases.

> "Gender identity is a big issue. I've seen so many ugly things and comments and it's new for everyone. It's not new for everyone, but they're asking about it now in applications. How do you identify and stuff? It's coming around. When you're talking to big corporations, like in Inspira, I don't think that it's being properly, sorry, educated throughout the staff, how to handle situations and how to treat them. It's the same with drug addiction, they treat people differently... These people are doctors or nurses and lawyers, they could be homeless, or might be your child's teacher; they're people. Definitely, the stigma is horrible. Same with gender identification, the stigma. There's not enough education on that and how to treat people and handle different situations." (Salem County Community Member).

Some stakeholders themselves also highlighted the importance of being situationally aware and cognitive of one's own biases when working with the generalized population. One individual shared,

> "Focusing on the kids, the other pieces, you have to focus on adults that are caring for the kids. It's this self-healing for our collective healing. Again, our group, we were trained in healing practices. We had to have conversations in terms of training them on 'this is how you interact with students', because guess what, you're an educator but you're also a parent. You're this holistic person, and now, these kids are triggering you because maybe they rolled their eyes at you but it's not about you. You have to think about–– deal with your own stuff, need to be able to support the needs of the children... Then I also think checking our own biases, there needs to be frank conversations about biases and not looking at it as those kids, those homeless kids. Those things also need to be addressed" (Salem County Stakeholder).

Increased Information Sharing and Outreach
With an emphasis on making efforts to both identify and understand the specific needs of residents, one stakeholder shared, "I know I get a lot of my information, my resources, my networking done at –just– little community events. I think the best place is on the ground, to spread the information and resources and the networking and bringing people together." (Salem County Stakeholder).

Data highlighted community residents' desire for increased methods of relaying information relating to local upcoming programming and events along with existing services. Participants expressed a recommendation for increased communications through the internet and through print advertisements. Posting on social media platforms was thought to help reach people digitally, while displaying physical advertisements in commonly frequented shops, organizations, and centers would likely reach those who are not online. One community member stated, "I use Facebook a lot. When I go to the pet store and I see the little post-its– post them up at stores, please." Another local resident chimed in to add "Different people see different things at different places, so [post things] everywhere." (Salem County Community Member).

Skills building and training
Salem County stakeholders and residents alike had also expressed a need for more community skill building classes on topics such as healthy eating, nutrition, weight loss, job skills, health insurance registration, and tax filing. "We have to teach them the skills or give them the education. I think there are adults in Salem County that can learn. I mean, I see it every day. They are willing to learn,

and it makes a difference." (Salem County Stakeholder). Additionally, there is also a desire for more affordable childcare that would give adults the opportunity to attend said programming. In a direct reference to the ongoing focus group, one participant shared an example of childcare needs through stating, "We had a girl that could have come with us today [to the focus group], but she had her child with her. Even if you had a child at a daycare at the event, where they could bring their child with them and have a room for kids with toys and a lunch available for them, the children as well." (Salem County Community Member).

Bringing Infrastructure to Salem and Co-Location of Services
The overall lack of infrastructure within Salem County is challenging. Participants desired both accessible and affordable grocery and food options. As one person shared, "You can get a market, you can get an Acme, or you get whatever. I think they should have something where the price is low enough, like an Aldi's, like a Save A Lot." (Salem County Community Member). Data suggested that a mobile produce van could provide access to healthy foods and bring the service to community members. One person described the benefits of a similar mobile food unit as follows,

"They go to all the different public housing sites that most need it, food desert areas. They sit out there. People go in there. They grocery shop their produce, whatever they need. It's at a discounted cost. I think that's a good idea. I'm just really big into bringing those resources that the people need directly to them. Salem used to have everything here. As the years went by, they all left. I think Inspira, whatever, they need to show that they're actually invested in the community. Consistency, all that good stuff, I think that needs to be shown." (Salem County Community Member).

Data from the community also revealed the need of improving access to healthcare facilities within Salem County, once again highlighting the lack of infrastructure and transportation barriers that exist. Locally, there is a desire for not only more specialists to be brought into the area, but also facilities that could house multiple branches of healthcare providers within a singular location. Similarly to what currently exists at both the Cooper Healthcare centers in both Camden and Gloucester Counties, residents can see multiple doctors in a single location. For instance, one resident said "I know Cooper has an amazing neurological program. They have the Three Cooper Plaza [in Camden City]. It's a whole building with dental, heart, and cancer. It's a whole thing." (Salem County Community Member). Additionally, in highlighting the overall need for more specialists to be brought to the area, one individual stated:

"I think Inspira should have their specialists local also. In case someone decides to leave Cooper and go to Inspira, there's specialists in the county. We don't always have to travel out to Gloucester County. It's like they got here, and they feel like the hospital is just enough, and they don't have to offer what they offer everybody else. They also have a day program that's in Gloucester County, and they bring our people up there because they aren't offering it here. I just think if you think of doing something, sometimes you have to be committed to what you're doing. That means wholeheartedly, not just put a piece here for the time being." (Salem County Community Member).

Similarly, data suggested an upgrade of the current Inspira Mobile Health unit that could bring various forms of specialized care to those in Salem County who may also be struggling with the ongoing transportation barriers. As another participant suggested, "(Mobile Health) Units that can come out in the neighborhood, like [every] two weeks for your mouth, dental, whatever it is." (Salem County Community Member).

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