



The 2021 Avery County Community Health Assessment priorities are:

- **Mental Health**
- **Substance Abuse**
- **Food and Nutrition**

A key to navigating this scorecard:

CH	<b>Community Health Assessment (CHA):</b> Local health departments are required to complete a health assessment at least every 48 months.
R	<b>Result:</b> Concise three-part statement that defines a condition of well-being for an entire population.
I	<b>Indicator:</b> How to quantify the achievement of a result.
P	<b>Program:</b> Evidence-informed implementation.
PM	<b>Performance Measure:</b> How to quantify the impact and effort of a program.
PY	<b>Policy:</b> A course of action that has been adopted or proposed by a government, business, or individual.
ST	<b>Strategy:</b> A plan of action designed to impact a performance measure or indicator.
CO	<b>Coalition:</b> A group of individuals from different organizations that agree to work together to impact a result.
TF	<b>Task Force:</b> A temporary group of individuals from different organizations that agree to work together to impact a result.
A	<b>Activity:</b> Any behavior or action that is not a program, policy, strategy, etc.
CC	<b>Clinical Care:</b> Anything related to the direct medical treatment or testing of patients.
S	<b>State of the County Health Report (SOTCH):</b> Annual report that is completed every year that a CHA is not completed.

The following resources were used/reviewed to complete this scorecard:

- [WNC Healthy Impact](#)
- [WNC Healthy Impact Data Workbook](#)
- [NC DHHS County Health Data Book](#)
- [NC DHHS/ DPH CHA Data Tools](#)
- [Clear Impact Results-Based Accountability](#)
- [Healthy People 2030](#)
- [Healthy North Carolina 2030](#)

## Community Health Assessment Report

### CA HNC 2030 Scorecard: Avery County (2021-2023)

#### Executive Summary

The Executive Summary can be found on pages 5-11 of the 2021 Avery County Community Health Assessment.

#### Avery County 2021 Community Health Assessment Executive Summary

## Community Results Statement

Our mission is to partner with local agencies to not only identify health needs of our community, but to also explore and develop possible solutions to address health concerns in order to work toward improving health for all residents.

## Leadership for the Community Health Assessment Process

The Community Health Assessment team is comprised of many participants representing area agencies in Avery County, North Carolina. The purpose of this Community Health Assessment is to learn about the health status and quality of life concerns of Avery County residents, collaborate with citizens by soliciting input from the community, and to provide an overview of resources that exist for handling those concerns. This document is the result of collaboration between Toe River Health District, WNC Healthy Impact, and the Healthy Carolinians of Avery County Partnership.

## Partnerships

A health department-led comprehensive Community Health Assessment (CHA) provides community insight into the health status of the county. Using surveys, focus groups, interviews, community members, local government and business leaders, and health professionals came together to identify and prioritize health issues. Participating in the assessment process puts the county in a position to take the next steps in developing policy, environment, and system changes that support their concerns. Currently in Avery County there is a coalition to bring together all the organizations and individuals that are committed to improving health in the county. This group consists of motivated individuals who are advocates on behalf of a broad range of community members and can represent appropriately the concerns of various populations within the county. The limited resources available in the county demonstrates a need for a coalition who will take responsibility and provide leadership for promoting and supporting policy, systems and environmental change that support healthy eating, and increase physical activity and prevent tobacco use throughout the county to combat most chronic disease conditions.

## Membership of Healthy Carolinians of Avery County Partnership

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## Regional/Contracted Services

Our county received support from **WNC Healthy Impact**, a partnership and coordinated process between hospitals, public health agencies, and key regional partners in western North Carolina working towards a vision of improved community health. We work together locally and regionally to assess health needs, develop collaborative plans, take action, and evaluate progress and impact. This innovative regional effort is coordinated and supported by **WNC Health Network**. WNC Health Network is the alliance of stakeholders working together to improve health and healthcare in western North Carolina. Learn more at [www.WNCHN.org](http://www.WNCHN.org).

## Theoretical Framework/Model

WNC Health Network provides local hospitals and public health agencies with tools and support to collect, visualize, and respond to complex community health data through Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA). RBA is a disciplined, common-sense approach to thinking and acting with a focus on how people, agencies, and communities are better off for our efforts.

## Collaborative Process Summary

Avery County's collaborative process is supported on a regional level by WNC Healthy Impact (WNCHI). Locally, our process is a community-wide and multi-faceted approach to completing the community health assessment and giving this information to the community.

The collaborative process includes input from the community as an important element of the community health assessment process. Our county included community input and engagement: (1) Through partnerships on conducting the health assessment process; (2) Through primary data collection efforts; (3) In the identification and prioritization of health issues. Community engagement is an ongoing focus for our CHA Leadership Team as we move forward to the collaborative action planning phase of the community health improvement process. Partners and stakeholders with current efforts or interest related to priority health issues will continue to be engaged. We also plan to work together with our partners to help assure programs and strategies in our community are developed and implemented with community members and partners.

Phase 1 of the collaborative process began in January 2021 with the collection of community health data. For more details on this process see Chapter 1 – Community Health Assessment Process.

## Key Findings

A community wide 75-questionnaire was conducted in the spring and summer of 2021 to give residents an opportunity to express concerns and opinions about the quality of life in Avery County. This included questions about the quality of life, economy, education, health, housing, physical activity, social issues, transportation, and COVID. Surveys were conducted by telephone by a trained interviewer and efforts were made to reach a representative sample of the population. Self-administered surveys were also available online. A total of 225 Avery County surveys were analyzed: 200 via telephone interview and 25 via the publicly available weblink.

Some of the major findings that the Healthy Carolinians of Avery County discussed in the prioritization process included the large proportion of respondents whose life has been negatively influenced by substance abuse. Approximately 27% of respondents were classified as excessive drinkers and 12% reported using opioids in the past year, with or without a prescription. Twenty percent of respondents reported more than seven days of poor mental health in the past month and almost 20% did not get needed mental health care or counseling in the past year. Sixty-five percent of Avery County respondents had calculated BMIs in the overweight or obese range and less than a quarter of respondents got the recommended amount of physical and strengthening activity in an average week. Twenty percent of respondents reported current smoking, 12% used smokeless tobacco and 7% used vape products.

In addition to secondary data and survey collection, eleven (11) community stakeholders participated in an online key informant survey. Individuals were asked to consider specific health issues, provide comments about social determinants of health, and evaluate the strengths and opportunities of the Avery County community. The graphic below displays a summary of their ranking of health topics in the community.

During monthly meetings, standards for the Community Health Assessment Process and Accreditation were discussed and reviewed for publication in the 2021 Community Health Assessment. Each member reviewed and approved of the Community Health Assessment Survey and Community Resource Directory included in the assessment. After the analysis was completed, qualitative and quantitative data findings were presented to the CHA team. The team reviewed the data and developed the top ten major health issues based upon statistical data and community survey results. Based on findings from the community survey combined with secondary health data, in November 2021, Healthy Carolinians of Avery County members identified chief health concerns for the county.

1. Substance Abuse
2. Obesity Issues
3. Mental Health
4. Childhood Trauma
5. Food Insecurity
6. Poverty Issues
7. Housing Expenses
8. Language Barriers
9. Stigma
10. Effects of COVID-19

## Health Priorities

In November 2021, Healthy Carolinians of Avery County along with the CHA Team members participated in a prioritization activity to determine the three leading health concerns to be addressed during this cycle. The worksheet asked that each of the ten concerns be ranked, to find the top three concerns for future action. The results from the prioritization process were reviewed and discussed at the meeting. Results of these worksheets were calculated to come up with the top three priorities, which are as follows:

1. **Mental Health**
2. **Substance Abuse**
3. **Food and Nutrition**

## Next Steps

The 2021 CHA will be disseminated in a variety of ways. To begin, the document will be made available online at <http://www.toeriverhealth.org>. Hard copies will also be available at the Health Department, local library, and printed upon request. The CHA Facilitator will present the CHA data during a Board of Health Meeting, Healthy Carolinians of Avery County steering committee meeting, Avery County Health Department staff meeting, and upon request.

Further steps will be taken including the development of a community health improvement plan based on the findings from the CHA. The CHA Facilitator will convene community members and partners interested in moving forward on the selected health priorities. Action teams will emerge from the selected health priorities and the teams will begin brainstorming evidence-based strategies. While much work has already been done to improve the health of our community's residents, more work is left to do to ensure that Avery County is the healthiest place to live, learn, work, and play.

Collaborative action planning with hospitals and other community partners will result in the creation of a community-wide plan that outlines what will be aligned, supported and/or implemented to address the priority health issues identified through this assessment process.

A key step in action plans will be to determine what is currently going on regarding the top health concerns, and what we would like to see going on regarding these health concerns.

The health partnership will create subcommittees for each health concern and these committees will work on creating collaborative action planning and implementation efforts. Upcoming meetings will be scheduled, and partners will be notified. We will conduct a root cause analyses and identify possible evidence-based strategies to tackle the health concerns during the action planning process.

While much work has already been done to improve the health of our community's residents, more work is left to do to ensure that Avery County is the healthiest place to live, learn, work, and play.

## CHA Priorities

The 2021 Avery County Community Health Priorities are:

1. **Mental Health**
2. **Substance Abuse**
3. **Food and Nutrition**

### Mental Health and Substance Abuse Priorities



All people are living happy, healthy lives because Avery County has the ability to respond, withstand, and recover from adversity.

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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## Experience and Importance

**If we are successful in fully achieving this result, we envision Avery County where....**

























- All people are happy and healthy.
- People are thriving in a healthy environment all day long.
- People have access to mental health care, for themselves and family members.

**Why is this important?**

- 20% of survey respondents reported 7+ days of poor mental health in the past month
- The county suicide mortality rate is 28% higher than NC and rose 3% since 2012-2016.

- 16% of survey respondents were currently taking medications or receiving treatment for mental health issues.
- 20% of respondents indicated a time in the past year when they needed mental health care or counseling but could not get it.
- The domestic violence shelter in Avery County served 124 clients in the FY2019-2020 and the shelter was full on 250 days out of the year.

Good mental health is more than just the absence of individual mental illness or distress. The social, environmental, systemic, and economic factors of the community we live in and interact with significantly contribute to mental well-being and resilience. Evidence also provides a strong cause and effect relationship between mental health and physical health, and the relationship between mental health and community factors goes beyond individuals. When a community fosters good mental health, it is rewarded with healthy youth, families, schools, workforce, and economy.

 	Incarceration Rate (Total) per 100,000 population aged 13 and older in North Carolina prisons	2023	192.0	 3	-23% 
 	Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Percent of children in NC (Total) with 2 or more ACEs	2023	17.3%	 1	-27% 
 	Unemployment (Total): Percent of Population in NC Aged 16 and Older Who are Unemployed but Seeking Work	2023	4.8%	 9	-54% 
 	Uninsured: Percent of North Carolina population under age 65 without health insurance (Total) - SAHIE	2022	11.2%	 3	-26% 
 	Severe Housing Cost Burden in North Carolina: Percent of Households in NC That Spend 50% or More of Their Household Income on Housing	2025	13%	 2	-7% 
 	Severe Housing Problems - Rental Units (Units Spending >50% Income) Avery County	2019	23.5%	 1	0% 

## Freedom Life: Reentry Intensive Program (Mental Health and Substance Use)

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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### What Is It?

The **Freedom Life Program** helps individuals with criminal records, including those who have been incarcerated, as they work to rebuild their lives and transition back into the community. Many people in our neighborhoods face challenges from their past and lack the support they need to break free from harmful cycles that affect not only themselves but also their families and the community. **Freedom Life** helps provide the spiritual, mental, medical, relational, and practical support necessary to make this transition successful.

By partnering with local organizations and the community, **Freedom Life** offers the resources and guidance that can help justice-involved individuals turn the difficulties of their past into opportunities for a brighter, more hopeful future.

### Partners

The partners for this program include:

Avery County Government  
Avery County Health Department  
Toe River Health District  
Avery County Commission Board  
Western Youth Network  
Vaya Health  
Avery County Schools  
NC Judicial Branch  
Blue Ridge Partnership for Children  
Avery County EMS Office  
High Country Council of Government  
Freedom Life Program Coordinator  
Daymark Health  
Oasis

### Progress in 2022-2023

- Prepared to open its doors in April 2023 as the reentry coordinator continues to learn everything in order to help the community
- Helped people who are struggling, in turn helped families and loved ones, which truly helped community as a whole
- Planned for people who are getting clean to be able to reach back in and help other people get clean
- Encouraged people in Avery County to show love toward those who are in jail, just coming out of jail or struggle with substance abuse
- Increased clential by reaching out to the individuals that have been incarceration in community
- Reached out and prepared clients for their release from prison and transition back into society
- Assisted clients in finding and maintaining housing
- Referred clients to resources to meet basic needs such as food and clothing
- Enrolled clients in community college programming to earn a high school diploma or GED
- Partnered with mental health agencies to address clients mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- Supported clients by addressing addiction/substance abuse issues
- Developed the skills clients need to live independently
- Provided a safe space for clients to share their experiences and connect with others who have been through similar situations
- Created a volunteer directory to help with a variety of tasks, such as mentoring clients, running errands, or helping out at events
- Hosted fundraisers for others to donate money to fund its programs and services

PM	# Events to Promote Program	2023	5	2	400%
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## TF Avery County Drug Crisis Roundtable

### What Is It?

The **Avery County Drug Crisis Round Table (Task Force)** is a collaborative effort aimed at tackling drug-related problems in the community. Composed of local organizations, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and other key stakeholders, the Task Force works together to develop and implement strategies for prevention, treatment, and recovery. Its goal is to raise awareness, provide resources, and coordinate efforts to reduce the impact of drug use in the county.

### Progress in 2022-2023

- Hosted a Trauma Informed training were attendees learned scientifically sound information about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma informed principles from some of the experts in the field working at the intersection of health, faith, ACEs, and addiction. This event was free and open to anyone who would like to be better prepared to assist someone struggling with addiction or a mental health condition.
- Held two community input sessions to gather feedback on how to address substance use disorder, expand treatment options, and develop prevention services in Avery County. These were open to the public and all were encouraged to attend.
- Tasked with overseeing the national opioid settlement monies for Avery County, planning to receive \$1,713,552 over an 18-year period as part of the national opioid settlement. Early plans consist of calling for applications for funding that will be considered by a small seven-member committee made up of subject matter experts selected by the public input attendees and members of the drug crisis roundtable. The committee's considerations and recommendations will then be presented to the Avery County Board of Commissioners for approval. Avery County anticipates granting awards between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per applicant per year. While the County is open to considering grant awards that fall outside of this range, it is the intent of the County to spread out funding awards over the next 18+ years. This funding strategy will be reviewed annually by the Avery County Board of Commissioners and at the public input meeting and drug crisis roundtable meetings.
- Received Dogwood Health Trust grant monies totaling \$350,000 for reentry housing infrastructure. A plan is in process to determine how best to use the property with input from the committee and commissioners
- Launched a media campaign by partnering with Bramble Media & Marketing to help the task force design and brand the task force's work, build an online presence through establishing a website and social media base, and craft creative content such as booklets, brochures, and event flyers. They committed to reporting key metrics back to the group.

## co Avery Youth Coalition

### What Is It?



Avery Youth Initiative, an empowerment and leadership program which centers the voices of youth in Avery County and provides a space for youth to take action on the issues most important to them. The participants seeks to engage young people through meaningful discussions, activities, and experiences, developing their ideas and capacities to implement positive change in their communities and schools.

## Partners

The partners for this program include:

Western Youth Network
Avery County Government
Avery County Health Department
Vaya Health
Daymark Mental Health
Avery County Schools
Mayland Community College
Williams YMCA of Avery County

## Progress in 2022-2023

- Launched a coalition Facebook page and website to (y2yavery.org) to have both a website and social media platform. This allows the coalition to create a comprehensive online presence, maximizing our reach by using the strengths to reach parents and teens: a website provides a central hub with detailed information and our unique branding, while social media facilitates engagement and interaction with our audience. The plan is to us the social media platform to drive traffic to our website, ultimately building stronger brand awareness and family relationships.
- Hosted events targeting youth providing a dedicated space for young people to socialize, develop skills, access information relevant to their lives, build community, and ultimately become active and engaged members of society, shaping the future by fostering their growth and development from a young age, these events included:
  - Girls Night Out- Coping through Hard Times
  - Prom Expo - Free dresses, jewelry, and shoes and after prom skating/glow party with food, music, and friends
  - Taco Bout a Party - fifth quarter party on Friday night football games until Midnight
  - Summer Program - youth meet weekly for fun activities, hanging out with friends, free space to learn about discuss issues facing teens
- Partnered with Avery County Schools to hold a "Vaping 101" training for teachers and other staff who regular work with youth. This training included learning opportunities with informative and impactful content on youth vaping, effective communication, and positive discipline designed to equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to address youth vaping.
- Implemented, "Our Healthy Futures", a program from Stanford Medicine that helps students avoid the negative consequences of using tobacco. It's an alternative to suspension for first-time offenders.
- Conducted a program called "Project Sticker Shock" aiming to prevent underage youth from obtaining alcohol from adults 21 or older or using a fake ID to purchase alcohol by raising community awareness. During an event, participants place stickers and window clings that warn about the legal consequences for providing alcohol to underage youth and using a fake ID to purchase alcohol on cases and coolers of alcohol at local retailers. This program encouraged partnership between community organizations, youth, retail establishments, law enforcement, media, and other community members.
- Taught CATCH My Breath in both middle schools in Avery County. CATCH My Breath is the only evidence-based youth nicotine vaping prevention program for grades 5-12 that has been proven to substantially reduce students' likelihood of vaping and utilizes a peer-led teaching approach.

## Food and Nutrition Priority



All people in Avery County will obtain optimal health by developing good eating habits through having access to adequate nutrition, being more productive in daily life.

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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## Experience and Importance

### If we are successful in fully achieving this result, we envision Avery County where....

- All people are living as healthy as they can by having all their basic daily needs met.
- All children in Avery County are clean, fed, and clothed ready to learn at school.
- People in Avery County are obtaining a healthy diet to support normal growth, maintaining a healthy body weight, and reducing the risk of chronic disease leading to overall health and well-being.
















### Why is this important?

Reliable and sufficient nutrition is necessary order to have a healthy, active life. Many rural communities, including Avery County, were already struggling with low grocery store access, availability, low wages, and poverty. The inflating cost of food, supply chain disruptions, and employment impacts resulting from the COIVD Pandemic have complicated the food environment in Avery County.

- Feeding America projects, that 17% of adults and 21% of children are food insecure in 2021.
- Only 7% of Avery County survey respondents consume the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- 24% of survey respondents reported running out of food at least once in the past year or worries about running out of food in the past year.
- The number of individuals receiving Food and Nutrition Services (food stamps) in Avery County rose from 1,815 in Nov. 2,020 to 2,056 in Nov. 2021, indicating an increasing need for food-related assistance.
- There are only four grocery stores in Avery County and all are located in close proximity in the central part of the county; additional grocery shopping options require traveling out of the county. There are convenience stores and small stores that might sell shelf-stable items.

People who eat too many unhealthy foods — like foods high in saturated fat and added sugars — are at increased risk for obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other health problems. Obesity in turn is also linked to many serious health problems, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancer (Healthy People 2030).

Individuals with low incomes and long work hours may have less time to prepare meals at home and less time to participate in physical activities. In addition, people in rural areas and low-income communities may be far from a grocery store that sells healthy foods. Their communities may lack formal facilities for exercise, or the roads and public spaces may not be safe to move around in (Healthy NC 2030).

 <small>NCDPH HNC2030</small>	Third Grade Reading Proficiency: Percent of children in NC (Total) who are proficient in reading at end of Third Grade	2024	48.5%	 3	-18% 
 <small>NCDPH HNC2030</small>	Food Insecurity in North Carolina: Percent of People Without Access to a Reliable Source of Food	2025	14%	 1	0% 
 <small>NCDPH HNC2030</small>	Limited Access to Healthy Foods: Percent of People in North Carolina (Total) with Limited Access to Healthy Foods	2025	8%	 3	0% 
 <small>NCDPH HNC2030</small>	Life Expectancy (Total) in NC - 3 Year rolling: Avg. # of years of life remaining for people who have attained a given age	2023	76.0	 1	-3% 
 <small>NCDPH HNC2030</small>	Life Expectancy (Total) in Avery County - (3 Yr Rolling) Avg. # of years of life remaining for people who have attained a given age	2023	75.0	 1	-5% 

## Food Distribution Center Friday Markets

### What Is It?

Food Distribution Center Friday markets

Every Friday, **Feeding Avery Families (FAF)** hosts a weekly Food Distribution Program to provide vital support to individuals and families in need throughout Avery County and surrounding areas. Serving more than 500 families (over 1,100 individuals) each month, FAF delivers supplemental food assistance to communities in Newland, Banner Elk, Elk Park, Beech Mountain, Crossnore, Linville, and beyond. With the help of generous donations and dedicated volunteers, FAF distributed over 450,000 pounds of food in 2023, ensuring that thousands of local residents have access to nutritious meals. The program is a key part of FAF's mission to combat hunger and foster a healthier, more resilient community.

### Partners

The partners for this program include:

Avery County Government
Avery County cooperative Extension

- Avery County Library
- Avery County Public Library
- Williams YMCA of Avery County
- Avery County Schools
- Avery County Senior Center
- Avery County Parks and Recreation Department
- Intermountain Children's Head Start
- Avery County RAMS Rack
- Manna Food Bank

Progress in 2022-2023

- Began construction of the new \$1.2 million FAF Operations Center, doubling the size of the current space. The 10,000 square foot building allows the return to client choice and many additional programs
- Received more than \$400,000 in donations for the new building, including \$100,000 from the Cannon Foundation, \$90,000 from High Country Charitable Foundation and \$75,000 from Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church. This is in addition to \$500,000 previously raised
- Gave away 441,718 pounds of food in 2022, about 18% less than 2021 due to supply issues and higher food costs that affected our primary source of food, MANNA FoodBank. This was still enough food to create approximately 400,000 individual meals
- Served 5,486 families (13,425 individuals) on our 48 Distribution Fridays during 2023. This is an increase of 12% from 2021. Each family received an average of 50+ pounds of food – including boxes of groceries, frozen meats, produce, bread and more
- Distributed 70 tons of fresh produce to promote healthier eating habits. Received \$10,000 in grants to purchase more from local farms, including TRACTOR Food and Farms Cooperative in Spruce Pine and Trosley Farm in Elk Park
- Secured 63% of the food for distribution at no cost, a value of \$443,018. This is down from 88% last year due to less donated food and fewer opportunities to secure free food through government programs
- Benefited greatly from 10,000+ volunteer hours from 350 volunteers
- Provided 125 children in Avery County schools with a pack of groceries weekly for weekend meals
- Supplied 300 food packs weekly to YMCA Summer Camp
- Stocked pantries inside each of the nine Avery County schools with snacks for teachers to give to hungry students during the school day
- Served 125 families each second Thursday of the month at the Mobile Community Market in partnership with Avery County Schools and MANNA FoodBank
- Picked up donated food from Food Lion in Banner Elk 5 days a week, receiving 42,697 pounds of food, including fresh meats, deli and bakery
- Received 40,204 pounds of food from customers of Lowes Food in Banner Elk, donated through “Friends Feeding Friends” program
- Collaborated with Project Dignity in Asheville to offer free feminine hygiene products on distribution Fridays
- Distributed personal hygiene care items (toothpaste, soap etc.) thanks to \$5,000 from Dogwood Health Trust and donations from local businesses
- Began partnership with the Community Association in the old Beech Mountain area to deliver food to residents unable to travel to the center
- Offered free dog and cat food to families at many weekly distributions
- Kept cost per meal to just 35 cents, due to FAF's ability to secure top quality food at very low costs and using hundreds of volunteers to keep administrative costs low
- Celebrated two successful and unique fundraisers: received \$2,026 from Linville River Pottery’s Clay for Community and \$6,000 from Woolly Worm Festival parking by volunteers
- Received \$70,000 in operation grants from Wee Kirk Presbyterian, All Saints Episcopal Church, Arthur Family Foundation, Kiwanis Club of Banner Elk, Avery County Rotary Club and others

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New

Program to help Avery seniors stay in their homes

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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What Is It?

**Avery County Senior Services** works to improve the lives of older adults in the community by offering services and activities that support their health, independence, and dignity. The mission is to encourage seniors to stay involved in their community while providing the support they need to live their best lives.

One of the key services is **Congregate Meals**, where seniors can enjoy nutritious meals in group settings, and **Home Delivered Meals**, where volunteers bring meals directly to those who are homebound. In addition, Senior Services offers transportation, health and wellness programs, social activities, and help for caregivers. These programs all work together to help seniors stay independent, healthy, and connected to others in the community.

### Partners

The partners for this program include:

- Avery County Health Department
- Avery County Cooperative Extension
- Avery County Public Library
- Williams YMCA of Avery County
- Avery County Senior Center
- Avery County Parks and Recreation
- Avery County Government
- Intermountain Children Services
- Community Volunteers

### Progress in 2022-2023

- Hosted a Community Resource Fair featuring resources that will provide vital information to support your life and health, offering food, prizes, games, and music
- Educated caregivers and family members on the necessary support and assistance to help the aging loved one live comfortably and safely in a familiar environment by scheduling and planning classes
- Offered home assessments to the elderly population where a professional visits an older adult's home to evaluate potential safety hazards and accessibility issues, identifying areas that could be modified to allow them to live independently and safely within their current residence as they age
- Evaluate health by offering weekly blood pressure checks, periodical eye exams and hearing screenings, and scheduling/arranging appointments and transportation
- Coordinate monthly trips out of town that include full agendas and round trip transportation to engage in meaningful conversations, share stories, and simply enjoy each other's company. This interaction helps them feel valued and connected. Some of the trips they took this year include Pigeon Forge, Barter Theater, Bowling, Shopping, and Fall Foliage Train Excursion.
- Encouraged hobbies and interests to provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment to all Avery County Senior population. Some of these hobbies include bingo, dominoes, crafting, sewing, acrylic painting, trivia, and more.
- Scheduled a variety of physical activity for overall health, mobility, and independence to improve strength, balance, and flexibility, reducing the risk of falls and other injuries. Activities offered at the senior center this past year include line dancing, tai chi, yoga, cardio drum, and more.

PM	# Of Meals Served	2023	17	3	25%
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### Healthy Opportunities Pilot

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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### What Is It?

The **Healthy Opportunities Pilot Program** is a program in North Carolina designed to help people lead healthier lives by offering support for essential needs like housing, food, transportation, and safety. These important factors, known as social determinants of health, play a big role in a person's overall well-being. The program aims to make sure people have access to these basic necessities, helping them live healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Through this program, people can get:

- **Safe Housing:** Help with finding stable and safe places to live.
- **Healthy Food:** Access to healthy food to improve nutrition and overall health.
- **Transportation:** Support with getting to important places, like doctor's appointments or work.

- **Safety:** Help for people who need protection and support to feel safe in their homes and communities.

The **Healthy Opportunities Pilot Program** aims to show the critical link between social factors and health outcomes, with the ultimate goal of finding successful interventions to benefit more individuals across the state. By tackling the root causes of health disparities, this program works to promote long-term wellness, reduce health inequalities, and build a stronger, healthier North Carolina.

## Partners

The partners for this program include:

Avery County Senior Center
Avery County Cooperative Extension
Avery County Health Department
Williams YMCA of Avery County
Rams Rack
Feeding Avery Families
Avery County Schools
Avery County Government
Avery County Parks and Recreation
Intermountain Children Services
Cannon Memorial Hospital

## Progress in 2022-2023

- Hosted a ribbon cutting for a new facility at the local YMCA dedicated to child care. The new facility is prepared to host children two to five years old as a full-time daycare. The facility looks to care for approximately 45 children once it’s open.
- Opened a youth center that serve third- through eighth-grade students for after school programming throughout the school year at no cost to families. This new facility, the Arthur Youth Center, is a vibrant hub for youth engagement and development. Importantly, these programs respond to one of our community’s greatest needs—reliable and quality childcare. We understand that dependable and affordable childcare is not only a fundamental necessity for families but is also imperative to economic development. Access to quality childcare enables parents to participate fully in the workforce, contributing to the economic growth and prosperity of our community.
- Offered Healthy Living Programs low or no-cost evidence-based programs that help adults prevent the onset of a chronic conditions or diseases. They can also help adults with a chronic disease learn how to manage and improve their health. Programs include interactive activities that promote healthy and active lifestyles and focus on common problems individuals may deal with everyday. These programs aim to improve your quality of life while reducing helping reduce health care costs by preventing or minimizing the effects of a disease.
  - Blood Pressure Self Monitoring Program: encourages participants to track their blood pressure at least once a week while making manageable lifestyle changes to lower their blood pressure. Participants meet with a Heart Healthy Ambassador to monitor their progress, ask questions, and learn about healthy changes they can make to their diet.
  - Moving Mountains with Parkinson's: coordinates movement, flexibility, strength, balance, and cardio fitness designed specifically for those with Parkinson’s Disease. Group encouragement and support sets this program apart from standard workout routines. Taught by trained instructors, this program has helped participants delay the onset of signs and symptoms of Parkinson’s Disease.
  - Enhance Fitness: manages arthritis focusing on fitness. Helping older adults become more active, energized, and empowered for independent living. The program focuses on cardiovascular endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance, which could help reduce the severity of arthritis symptoms in a group that is supportive and understanding – a vital part of anyone’s health and well-being
  - LiveStrong: assists adult cancer survivors improve their strength and physical fitness, diminish the severity of therapy side effects, and develop supportive relationships to improve their quality of life. This program creates a welcoming community in which survivors can reclaim their health and well-being at their own pace.
  - Diabetes Prevent T2: helps adults reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by taking steps that will improve their overall health and well-being. Through group discussions facilitated by a trained Lifestyle Coach, participants work to lose weight and increase their physical activity over the course of 25, 60-minute sessions.
- Scheduled community hiking trips designed to serve all ages with an emphasis on serving Avery County Seniors. As we age we tend to shy away from activities that we use to for fear of injuring ourselves. This gives everyone an opportunity to get outside and enjoy the fellowship of good friends while being active.

Most Recent Period	Current Actual Value	Current Trend	Baseline % Change
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What Is It?

Avery Mentoring Program, a program assigning a compassionate adult role model and advocate who helps a youth in need or caring guidance grow up to be their best; commits to spending about two hours per week for one year with a specially-matched mentee. Go fishing together, take a walk, make a meal, or do whatever everyday fun things you both enjoy doing, and just listen to each other.

Partners

The partners for this program include:

- Williams YMCA of Avery County
- Avery County Schools
- Community Volunteers
- Avery County Government
- Avery County Senior Center
- Avery County Public Library
- Avery County Health Department
- Feeding Avery Families
- Western Youth Network

Progress in 2022-2023

- Began a mentor program through Western Youth Network that helps youth between the ages of 6 and 17 in Avery and Watauga Counties who need a little extra support and guidance. WYN connects them with a mentor who can be their role models and cheerleaders. A mentor commits to spending about two hours per week for one year with a specially-matched mentee. Some go fishing together, take a walk, make a meal, or do whatever everyday fun things both enjoy doing, and just listen to each other
- Observed young people involved in this mentoring programs improved academic performance, school attendance, and behavior. Research on child development has revealed that the presence of one safe, stable, and nurturing caregiver or adult can change the trajectory of a child’s entire life. This is because a supportive relationship with a trustworthy adult can buffer children against trauma and help them develop the resilience to overcome adversity
- Partnered with Crossnore Communities for Children to combine efforts, expand services, and outreach to even more children in our community.
- Awarded a \$5,000 donation to the Western Youth Network on to support Western Youth Network’s mentoring program
- Collaborated with the YMCA to host the mentor program agreeing to offer a free membership to mentor/mentee pairs who start and maintain a relationship. Not only does this serve as an added incentive for mentors, but it also gives pairs a place to go and spend time together.
- Worked with with Blue Ridge Academy counselor Michelle Grit and Principal Ruth Shirley to reach students who could benefit most from mentoring services

PM # Participants	2023	158	↗ 1	56% ↗
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State of the County Health Reports (SOTCHs)

Progress on CHIPs

Click on each program/ strategy below to find and review updates in the "Progress in 2022-2023" note tabs.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Priorities

- **New** [Freedom Life: Reentry Intensive Program \(Mental Health and Substance Use\)](#)
- [Avery County Drug Crisis Roundtable](#)
- [Avery Youth Coalition](#)

#### **Food and Nutrition Priority**

- [Food Distribution Center Friday Markets](#)
- **New** [Program to help Avery seniors stay in their homes](#)
- [Healthy Opportunities Pilot](#)
- [Avery Mentoring Program](#)

## Significant/ Notable Changes in Morbidity and Mortality

The following represent significant morbidity and mortality changes in our community.

[Guidance: Keep this section brief! Here are some examples provided by WNCHI partners.]

- Drug Abuse and Overdoses rising and need education on Narcan use
  - NC Opioid Dashboard
- Child Adverse Effects are showing more than ever
- Severe Housing Problems getting worse

## Emerging Issues Impacting Health

These are the new or emerging issues in our community in 2022 that were not identified as priorities in our CHA.

- Animal Cruelty
- Lack of childcare and daycare options

## New/ Paused/ Discontinued Initiatives/ Activities

The following is information on new/ paused/ discontinued initiatives or activities in our community in 2022:

- Community Paramedic Program
- New part of the high school opened and is being enjoyed by students
- Feeding Avery Families purchased a new lot of land and has a brand new facility to serve people free food in a grocery store type environment

## **SR** 2023 Avery County State of the County Health Report

### Progress on CHIPs

[Click on each program/ strategy below](#) to find and review updates in the "Progress in 2022-2023" note tabs.

#### **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Priorities**

- New [Freedom Life: Reentry Intensive Program \(Mental Health and Substance Use\)](#)
- [Avery County Drug Crisis Roundtable](#)
- [Avery Youth Coalition](#)

#### **Food and Nutrition Priority**

- [Food Distribution Center Friday Markets](#)
- [New Program to help Avery seniors stay in their homes](#)
- [Healthy Opportunities Pilot](#)
- [Avery Mentoring Program](#)

## Mental Health

Mental health issues in Avery County, North Carolina include anxiety, depression, self-inflicted injury, and suicidal ideation. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a significant increase in mental health conditions. Factors that contribute to mental health issues are stress, socioeconomic level, and gender.

As of 2023, the Appalachian Regional Mental Health Center, also known as Appalachian Regional Behavioral Health Hospital, has a new, independent, freestanding facility in Linville, North Carolina. This facility provides expanded inpatient mental health services with 27 beds and focuses on community-based care for patients in the region. This facility boasts a high patient/family satisfaction rate, demonstrating its commitment to quality care. The facility focuses on positive patient outcomes with a reported 96% patient/family satisfaction rate.

Health is largely determined by social, economic, behavioral, and environmental factors, all of which affect health outcomes. These factors, known as social determinants of health, can serve as a barometer for wellness and quality of life.

21 social determinants of health were selected, as part of the Healthy 2030 initiative, to be a public health focus for the state's next decade. This initiative allows us to explore how Avery County is doing in comparison to the rest of the state for all indicators. Some indicators that were more challenging for Avery County included Primary Care, Suicides, Poverty, Incarceration, Reading Levels, Tobacco Use, and Binge Drinking; while some of the stronger areas incorporated Prenatal Care, Infant Mortality, ACES, Exercise, Overdose Deaths, and HIV Diagnoses.

Emergency departments do not always have a mental health specialist on-site, and patients are often left waiting to go somewhere more appropriate for care. In addition, in a rural setting like ours, patients are often incredibly hesitant to go through an emergency department. Our communities are small and everyone knows each other. Inside the new hospital, there is space for staff to assess up to five patients simultaneously. The goal is that no one is forced to wait.

Another unique feature of the new behavioral health hospital is a designated visitation space for visitors under the age of 12. In the past, small children were not allowed to visit psychiatric patients at Cannon Memorial for safety reasons.

Recruiting medical staff to a rural area can be challenging, and the new behavioral health hospital is in the process of hiring for about 50 new positions.

The hospital is also set up to accommodate the increasing number of patients who are admitted under involuntary commitment, a court order that mandates treatment when a patient is considered a risk of harm to themselves or others.

It should be noted that 50 percent of patients in the past were admitted under involuntary commitment, which typically means law enforcement officers bring them to the facility. The new psychiatric hospital includes a separate entrance and waiting area for patients brought in by law enforcement under this type of court order.

The hospital also has a courtroom inside, where the judge and other legal representatives can meet with the patient and their doctors — both in person or virtually — to determine the next steps of treatment for a patient under an involuntary commitment.

## Substance Abuse

As Freedom Life Ministries prepares to open its doors in April 2023, the organization's reentry coordinator in Avery is continuing to learn everything in order to help the community. Originally based in Marion, Freedom Life Ministries is a Christian nonprofit organization that focuses on helping people reintegrate to society after being incarcerated. The organization was founded in 2012 and was born out of McDowell Mission Ministries, a prison ministry. Though it is a faith-based organization, it offers both a spiritual track and a moral track, so individuals who are interested in the program but are not interested in the religious aspect can still participate. Ten years after it started, Freedom Life has helped thousands of people, both those who are currently incarcerated and those who have recently been released, in the McDowell community.

The program includes interviewing and assessing them to connecting them with whatever community resources they may need and helps clients work through their day-to-day lives and, in some ways, acts as a life coach for clients.

McDowell is starting to see big changes thanks to Freedom Life, which is what Avery hopes to see in their county as well. The hope is that this organization will have the biggest impact on the community because if you can help people who are struggling, you can also help their families, loved ones and the community as a whole.

Part of the plan is for people who are getting clean to be able to reach back in and help other people get clean. The people that Freedom Life aims to help are still members of the community and part of our obligation is to encourage people in Avery County to show love toward those who are in jail, just coming out of jail or are struggling with substance abuse. Freedom Life does not explicitly work with people who are struggling with addiction, but 85% of justice-involved people struggle with addiction, so there is a huge overlap. People coming out of jail face many barriers and challenges, she explained, but if the community came together to support their reintegration, it would make a world of difference.

## Food and Nutrition

### **Feeding Avery Families: Non-profit Food Pantry in Avery County**



- ***As always dedicated to eliminating hunger by providing supplemental food assistance to those in need with a mission achieved through monetary and food donations, and a committed group of volunteers. The non-profit serves residents of Avery County and surrounding areas including Newland, Banner Elk, Elk Park, Beech Mountain, Crossnore, Linville, and more providing supplemental food assistance to 500+ families (1,100+ individuals each month). They distributed more than 450,000 pounds of food in 2023, enough for 375,000 individual meals.***

2023 was very busy and productive year at Feeding Avery Families (FAF), providing more than \$700,000 worth of free food to the hungry in Avery County, North Carolina. Here are some highlights:

1. Began construction of the new \$1.2 million FAF Operations Center, doubling the size of the current space. The 10,000 square foot building allows the return to client choice and many additional programs.
2. Received more than \$400,000 in donations for the new building, including \$100,000 from the Cannon Foundation, \$90,000 from High Country Charitable Foundation and \$75,000 from Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church. This is in addition to \$500,000 previously raised.
3. Gave away 441,718 pounds of food in 2022, about 18% less than 2021 due to supply issues and higher food costs that affected our primary source of food, MANNA FoodBank. This was still enough food to create approximately 400,000 individual meals!
4. Served 5,486 families (13,425 individuals) on our 48 Distribution Fridays during 2023. This is an increase of 12% from 2021. Each family received an average of 50+ pounds of food – including boxes of groceries, frozen meats, produce, bread and more.
5. Distributed 70 tons of fresh produce to promote healthier eating habits. Received \$10,000 in grants to purchase more from local farms, including TRACTOR Food and Farms Cooperative in Spruce Pine and Trosley Farm in Elk Park.
6. Secured 63% of the food for distribution at no cost, a value of \$443,018. This is down from 88% last year due to less donated food and fewer opportunities to secure free food through government programs.
7. Benefited greatly from 10,000+ volunteer hours from 350 volunteers.
8. Provided 125 children in Avery County schools with a pack of groceries weekly for weekend meals.
9. Supplied 300 food packs weekly to YMCA Summer Camp.
10. Stocked pantries inside each of the nine Avery County schools with snacks for teachers to give to hungry students during the school day.
11. Served 125 families each second Thursday of the month at the Mobile Community Market in partnership with Avery County Schools and MANNA FoodBank.
12. Picked up donated food from Food Lion in Banner Elk 5 days a week, receiving 42,697 pounds of food, including fresh meats, deli and bakery.
13. Received 40,204 pounds of food from customers of Lowes Food in Banner Elk, donated through “Friends Feeding Friends” program.
14. Collaborated with Project Dignity in Asheville to offer free feminine hygiene products on distribution Fridays.
15. Distributed personal hygiene care items (toothpaste, soap etc.) thanks to \$5,000 from Dogwood Health Trust and donations from local businesses.
16. Began partnership with the Community Association in the old Beech Mountain area to deliver food to residents unable to travel to the center.
17. Offered free dog and cat food to families at many weekly distributions.
18. Kept cost per meal to just 35 cents, due to FAF's ability to secure top quality food at very low costs and using hundreds of volunteers to keep administrative costs low.
19. Celebrated two successful and unique fundraisers: received \$2,026 from Linville River Pottery's Clay for Community and \$6,000 from Woolly Worm Festival parking by volunteers.
20. Received \$70,000 in operation grants from Wee Kirk Presbyterian, All Saints Episcopal Church, Arthur Family Foundation, Kiwanis Club of Banner Elk, Avery County Rotary Club and others.

Feeding Avery Families needs additional volunteers and financial contributions for expanding programs in the new year:

1. Move into the new Operations Center by spring (189 Old Vale Road, Newland). The paving will be delayed until additional donations of \$200,000 are received.
2. Work with Avery County Emergency Management to equip the Operations Center as an Emergency Disaster Relief Center for people forced to leave homes due to fires, natural disasters or power outages.
3. Begin a new outreach program for the Latino community, including hiring a Hispanic Outreach Coordinator to build relationships with 600+ families living in Avery County.
4. Begin the Community Health Initiative, collaborating with many sister agencies to improve health and quality of life for citizens through improved nutrition, access to other resources, and health follow-up. Thank you to Arbor Dale Church for their \$25,000 donation.
5. Expand Mobile Distributions to additional communities and locations for Avery County citizens unable to come to Friday distributions at the Operations Center.
6. Collect final funds to cover building cost, with the aid of a \$100,000 matching gift for donations through June.

Reaching Avery Ministry (RAM)'s RACK:

This past Christmas, Reaching Avery Ministry was able to provide food and presents to more than 400 children in Avery County with the help of the High Country Charitable Foundation. As the cost of living continues to climb, some families may have trouble finding a way to pay for utilities and necessities, such as electricity and groceries, making the holidays especially stressful. This year, even more than most, we have seen so many families struggling on a daily basis (a counselor at Newland Elementary School). These hard-working, deserving families often do not have the means for necessities, let alone toys and extras for Christmas. RAM has stepped in for more than 20 years to help families through Avery Project Christmas, purchasing Christmas presents for children who otherwise may not get any. It is a rewarding day for many, always amazed at the humbleness of the children as they create and turn in their wish lists. So many items on their lists are items that many families might be blessed enough to purchase for their child any day of the week. For these children and families, these items are special Christmas treasures.

Reaching Avery Ministry has spent more than 40 years helping Avery County citizens. They operate a full-time, five-day-a-week food pantry, provide diapers and formula to those who need it and offer emergency financial assistance in extreme circumstances. Additionally, the nonprofit works closely with similar organizations in the area and helps the community through various projects, such as Avery Project Christmas. Each year, RAM asks the Department of Social Services (DSS), the health department and the counselors at each school in the county to refer students with the most need to Avery Project Christmas. The school-aged children who are referred to RAM make a wish list of around five items that they wanted, and from there they went shopping to compile all the gifts. The wish lists were not extravagant items. They asked for things like pillows, hygiene items, coats, blankets and sometimes toys and stuff like that. The number of high school students that were referred to Avery Project Christmas this year doubled, and the amount of children in the program overall doubled from 2022 to 2023. Once they started shopping, shoppers realized that it was going to be impossible to buy gifts for all the children in need with the budget RAM had, which is where High Country Charitable Foundation stepped in. HCCF has supported RAM for many years, but once the organization was made aware of the funding shortage for Avery Project Christmas this year, it found grant money to buy presents for the remaining children. With how hard the economy has hit many families over the past year, RAM especially hoped to take a little burden off families through Avery Project Christmas.

## Significant/ Notable Changes in Morbidity and Mortality

Avery County, North Carolina has seen increasing mortality rates and morbidity.

- In 2023, Avery County, NC had a population of 17.7k people with a median age of 46.5 and a median household income of \$53,513. Between 2022 and 2023 the population of Avery County, NC declined from 17,747 to 17,679, a -0.383% decrease and its median household income grew from \$46,383 to \$53,513, a 15.4% increase.
- The 5 largest ethnic groups in Avery County, NC are White (Non-Hispanic) (87.5%), Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) (3.64%), Two+ (Non-Hispanic) (2.42%), Other (Hispanic) (2.08%), and White (Hispanic) (1.75%).
- None of the households in Avery County, NC reported speaking a non-English language at home as their primary shared language. This does not consider the potential multi-lingual nature of households, but only the primary self-reported language spoken by all members of the household.
- 97.4% of the residents in Avery County, NC are U.S. citizens.
- The largest universities in Avery County, NC are Lees-McRae College (233 degrees awarded in 2022) and Mayland Community College (177 degrees).
- In 2023, the median property value in Avery County, NC was \$215,900, and the homeownership rate was 78.6%.
- Most people in Avery County, NC drove alone to work, and the average commute time was 20.7 minutes. The average car ownership in Avery County, NC was 2 cars per household.
- *The most common diseases in Avery County are chronic diseases, including heart disease, respiratory disease, Alzheimer's, and hypertension.*

Even though the leading causes of death among citizens are Heart Disease (245 compared to NC 277.6) and Cancer (209 compared to NC 236.8), people in Avery County commonly die from drug and alcohol poisoning, and from injuries related to violence (36 compared to NC 40.8). Avery County rates compared to the state rate, as well as other surrounding counties, are very similar and proportional with each other.

- Heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are the leading causes of death in the United States.
- In 2022, heart disease, cancer, and accidents were the leading causes of death in North Carolina, accounting for 45% of all deaths.
- Lifestyle risk factors, such as tobacco use, diet, and physical inactivity, can play a role in the development of chronic diseases.
- Suicide was also a leading cause of death in Avery County, though the mortality rate was based on a small number of cases.
- The mortality rate for UMVI in Avery County doubled between 2002–2006 and increased by 61% between 2012–2016.

RANK	CAUSES	NUMBER	%
1	Diseases of Heart	59	24.4
2	Cancer	42	17.4
3	Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	30	12.4
4	Alzheimer's Disease	16	6.6
5	Influenza and Pneumonia	9	3.7
6	All Other Unintentional Injuries	7	2.9
7	Cerebrovascular Diseases	6	2.5
8	Diabetes Mellitus	6	2.5
9	Parkinson's Disease	6	2.5
10	Pneumonitis Due To Solids and Liquids	5	2.1
	All other Causes (Residual)	56	23.0
Total Deaths All Causes		242	100

## Emerging Issues Impacting Health

- *Residents in Avery County lack both animal control and an animal control officer. This has raised concerns about the potential for neglect and abuse cases to thrive in the area*
- *Avery County faces a number of issues, including health, education, poverty, and economic development*
  - *In 2020, 39.5% of Avery County residents were below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

- *Drugs, academic success, citizenship, healthy living, and volunteerism are some of the issues facing youth in Avery County*
- *Scammers have been targeting Avery County residents with fraudulent texts claiming to be from the IRS, tolling agency, and other bill collecting agencies*
- *Substance abuse is a continuing issue in Avery County, including alcohol, tobacco, prescription drugs, and illicit drugs*
- *Mental health services are an ongoing issue in Avery County.*
- *Avery County has a shortage of dentists*
  - *Avery Dental is one of the few dental offices in the area, and it offers sliding-scale fees and accepts Medicaid*

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## New/ Paused/ Discontinued Initiatives/ Activities

- *The process for securing Broadband Internet service for many residences and businesses across Avery County is proceeding at a moderate pace, but still with the likely date of December 31, 2026, when it comes to total fruition. The Avery County Commissioners have prioritized obtaining Broadband Internet service for all the county's residents and businesses and have used large sums of county funds and grant money to achieve that goal*
  - *Lees-McRae College has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Avery County High School that creates a more accessible pathway toward higher education for high school students in the county. Lees-McRae College is excited to offer new opportunities for the students at Avery County High School. This partnership will allow more of our local students the chance to afford a private college education, as well as prepare them for a wide variety of academic and career fields. The increased connections between the students, faculty, and staff at both Lees-McRae and Avery County High School will be invaluable for the students who participate and enroll. We look forward to a long and successful partnership*
  - *Avery County has a position for a firefighting leader who chases smoke from outdoor fires. It's called a "smoke chaser". The new smoke chaser comes as a recent drought caused fires to pop up around Avery County*
  - *The Beech Mountain Town Hall and Visitor Center buildings are set to be connected by a new two-story addition, creating more public space and staff offices. The project, which costs \$1.9 million, began on Monday, May 1st, 2023*
  - *Avery County Schools has introduced a brand new safety feature called RAPTOR for the upcoming 2023 school year*
  - *A plan is in progress to renovate Lake Coffey, which will serve as an additional water source for the town. Additionally, the project will include the development of a recreational area for the townspeople at the connected lakes*
  - *A new terminal building and corporate hangar will be constructed at the airport. The existing terminal building and two hangars will be demolished*
  - *The Avery County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution to pay CPL Architecture-Engineering-Planning to develop plans for a new parks and recreation center*
  - *In 2023, Avery County, North Carolina, was renovating and building a new Department of Social Services (DSS) building and a Probation and Parole office. The county also planned to develop and build an animal shelter*
-