

# Powder River County

## *Community Health Assessment*

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# 2021

*Prepared for the Powder River County Health Advisory Board by Loveland Consulting LLC*

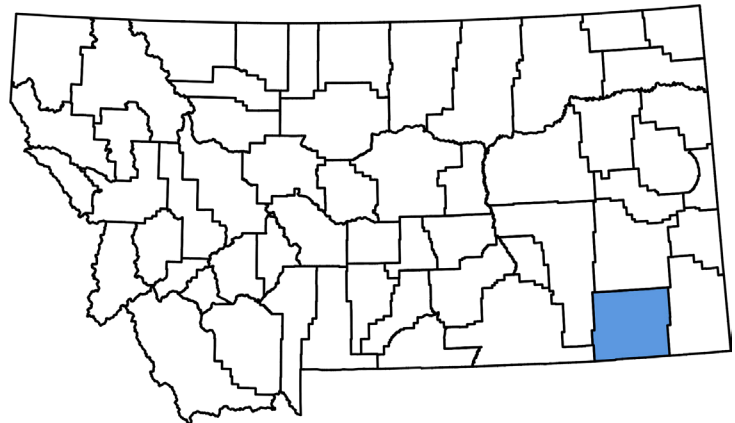
# Introduction

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Powder River County, population 1,619, is a frontier county in southeastern Montana encompassing 3,298 square miles. With a population density of less than one person per square mile, Powder River County is one of the most rural counties in the lower 48 states. The population center and county seat of Powder River County is Broadus, Montana, population 519. Our primary industries are agriculture and ranching, and most of the land in the county is used for grazing.

Powder River County is governed by three county commissioners who oversee the Powder River Board of Health and the Powder River Public Health Department which administers a number of public health programs including Communicable Disease Control, Immunizations, and Tobacco Prevention. There is no hospital facility in our county, however the Powder River Medical Clinic in Broadus offers primary care services both in person and via telehealth.

In 2020, the Powder River County Commissioners created the Powder River County Health Advisory Board to assess the need for additional health services in our community. As part of the assessment process, the advisory board chose to develop a comprehensive Community Health Assessment. The advisory board served as the steering committee for this process, which resulted in this document which provides an overview of the data available on the current health status of the population of Powder River County with a focus on the need for health services. This report includes data from an online survey of local key informants along with an analysis of available secondary data from local and state. The assessment was compiled by Katie Loveland of Loveland Consulting, LLC.



For more information on this assessment contact Shane Copps at (307) 670-1400 or [shanecopps@live.com](mailto:shanecopps@live.com)

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# Acknowledgements

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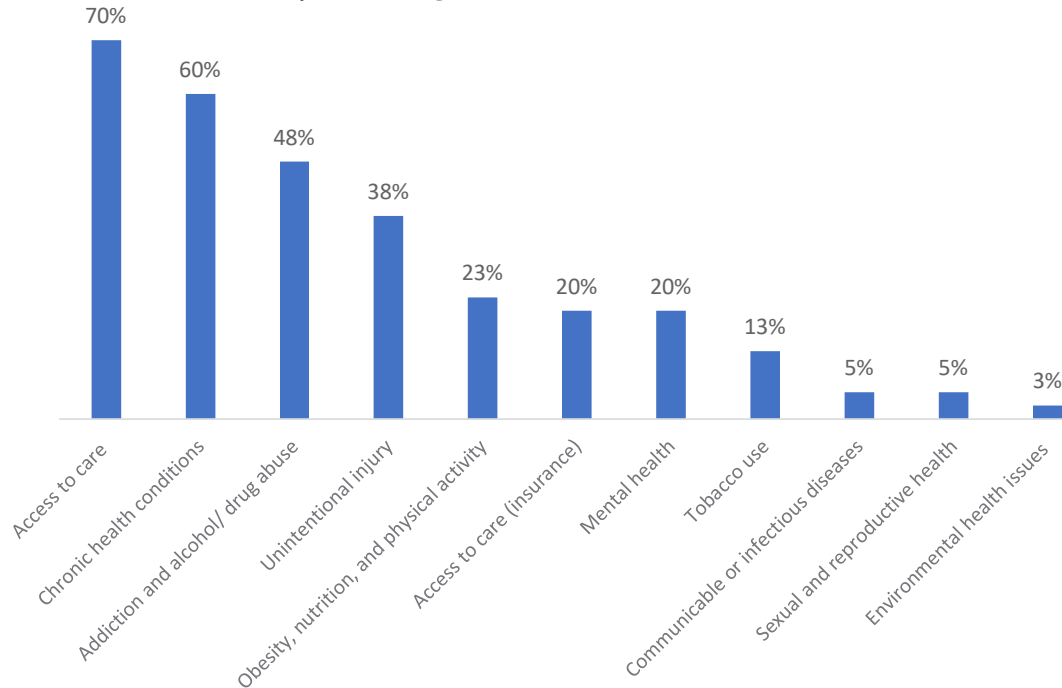
The following members of the Powder River County Health Advisory Board contributed to the development of this report:

- Sean Hill, Advisor to the Board
- Shane Copps
- David Gardner
- Mike Riley
- Kristy Elgin
- Wendy Richards

# Community Stakeholder Survey

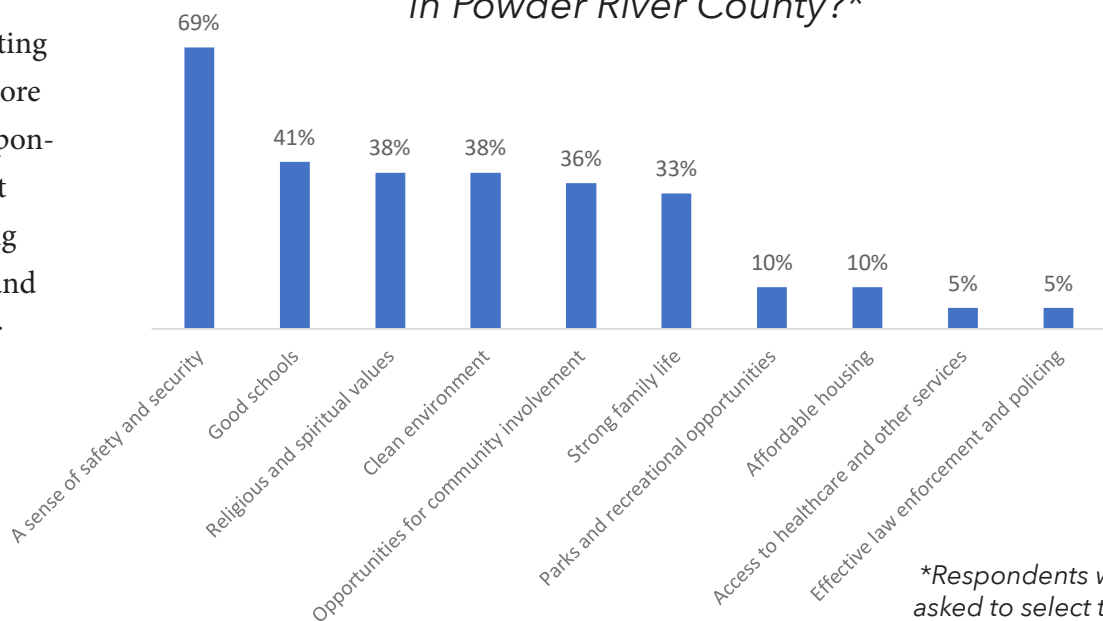
In December, 2020 an electronic survey was sent to community stakeholders in Powder River County to assess their perceptions of the health challenges in our community and the need for health services. A total of 44 responses were received. The following pages detail the results of this survey. Overall, stakeholders in Powder River County cite access to care and service availability as key health concerns in our community.

## What are the most pressing health issues in Powder River County?\*



## What are the biggest health assets that already exist in Powder River County?\*

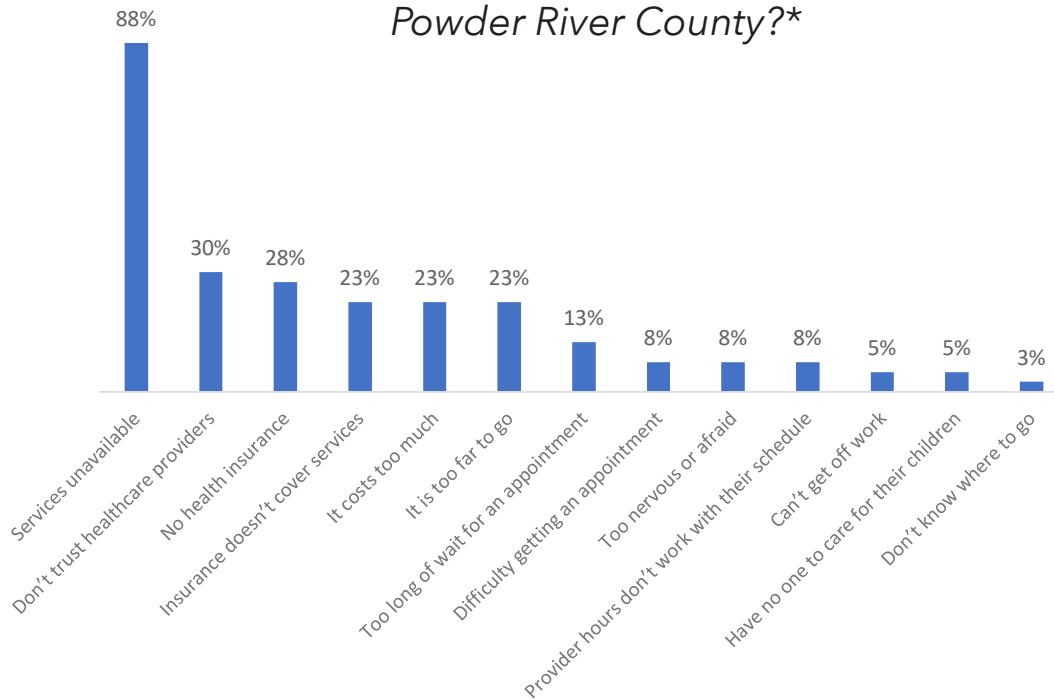
In terms of existing health assets, more than half or respondents noted that they feel a strong sense of safety and security in their community.



\*Respondents were asked to select three options

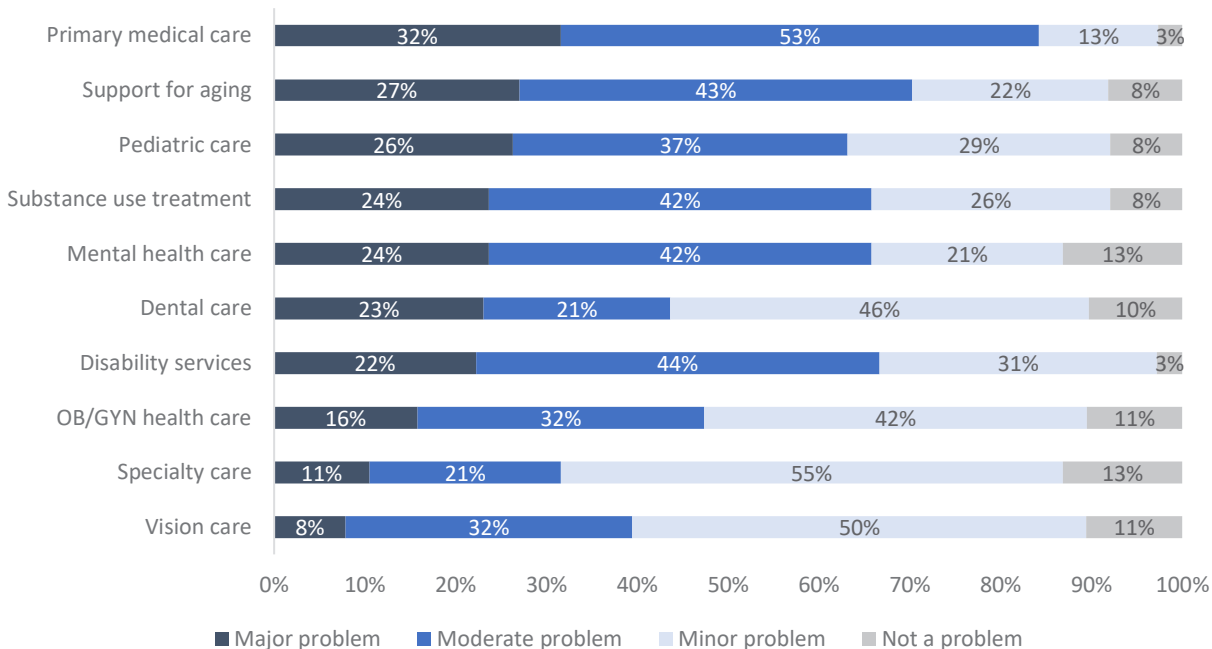
# Access to care

What are the most significant barriers to accessing health care in Powder River County?\*



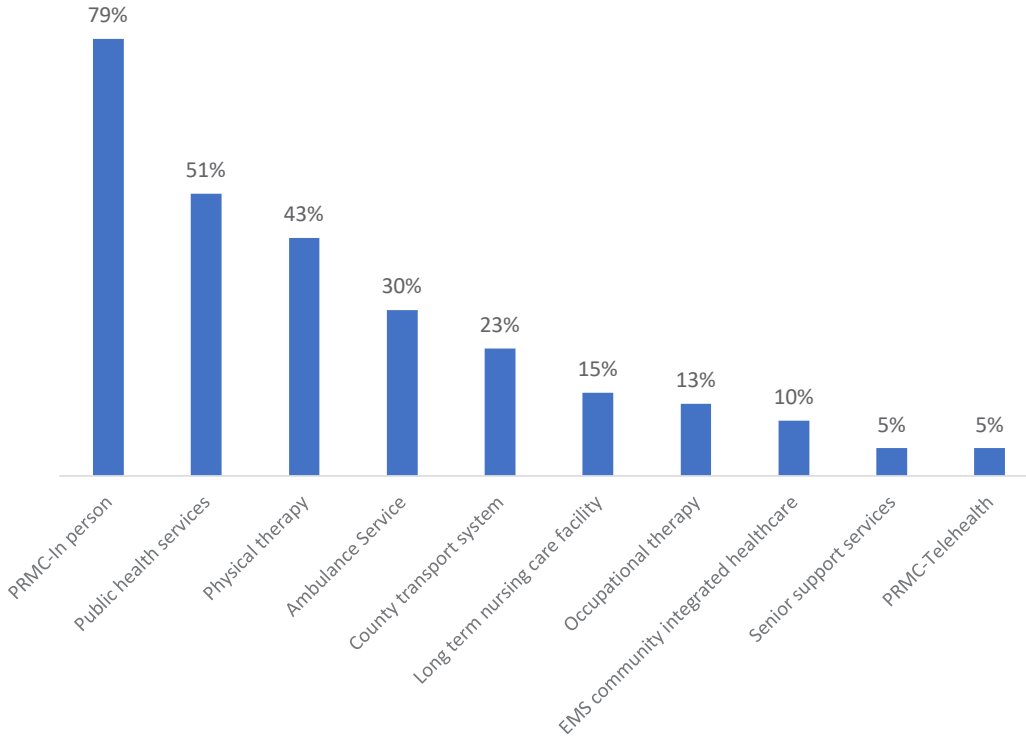
Overwhelmingly, health services being unavailable was identified as the primary access to care barrier in Powder River County, followed by mistrust in healthcare providers and a lack of insurance.

How big of a problem are the following access to care issues in Powder River County?



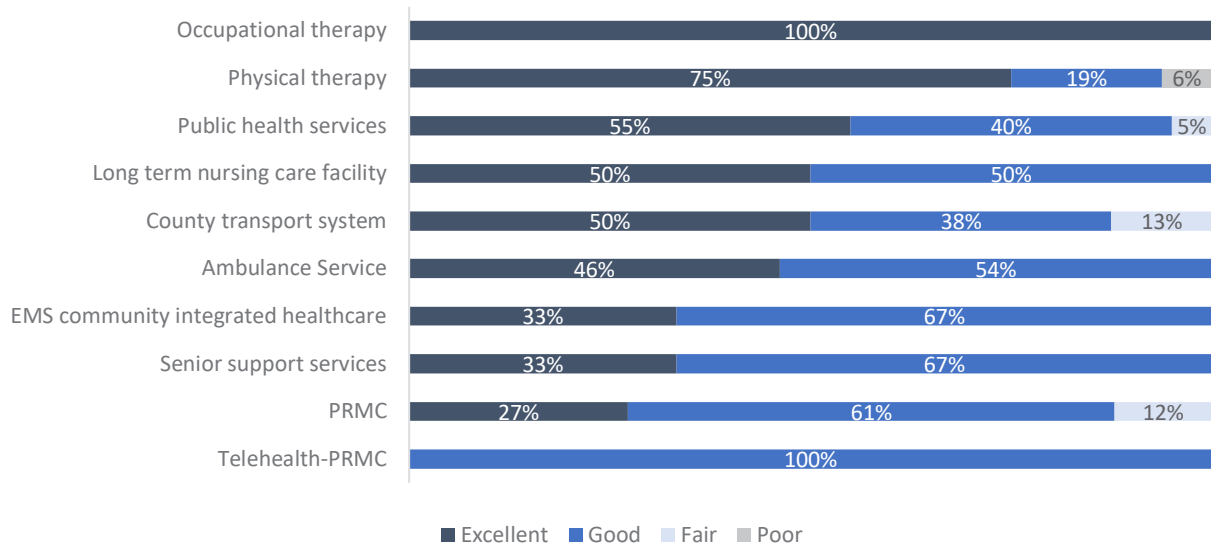
More than 85% of respondents said that primary medical care is a major or moderate problem in Powder River County, followed by support for aging individuals at 70%. More than half of respondents also said access to pediatric care, substance use treatment, mental health care and disability services are also major or moderate problems in our community.

## Have you or your family members utilized the following health services in Powder River County in the last year?



The most common health service accessed in Powder River County by respondents or their families in the past year were in person services at the Powder River Medical Clinic (PRMC) followed by public health services such as vaccination and tobacco prevention.

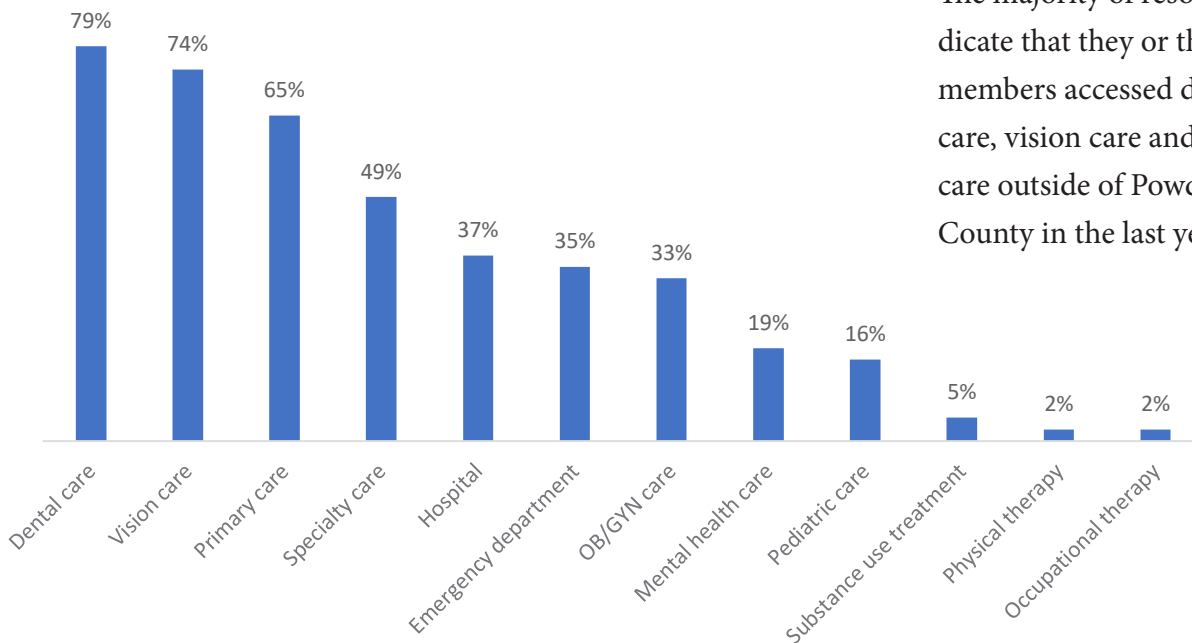
## How would you rate the health services you or your family receive in Powder River County?\*



\*Respondents were only asked to rate services they or their family members had used in the last year.

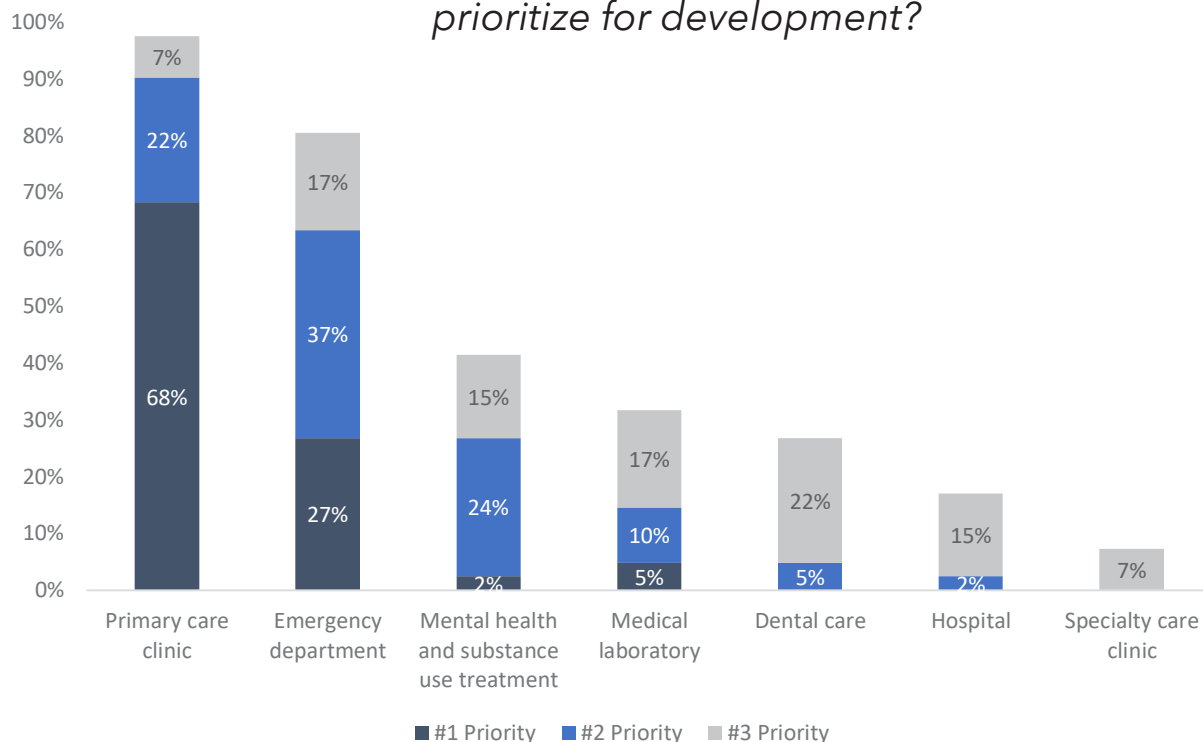
Respondents rated the services they or their family members received in Powder River County in the last year very highly. All of the services were rated “Excellent” or “Good” by 85% of respondents or more.

*Have you or your family members utilized the following health services outside of Powder River County in the last year?*



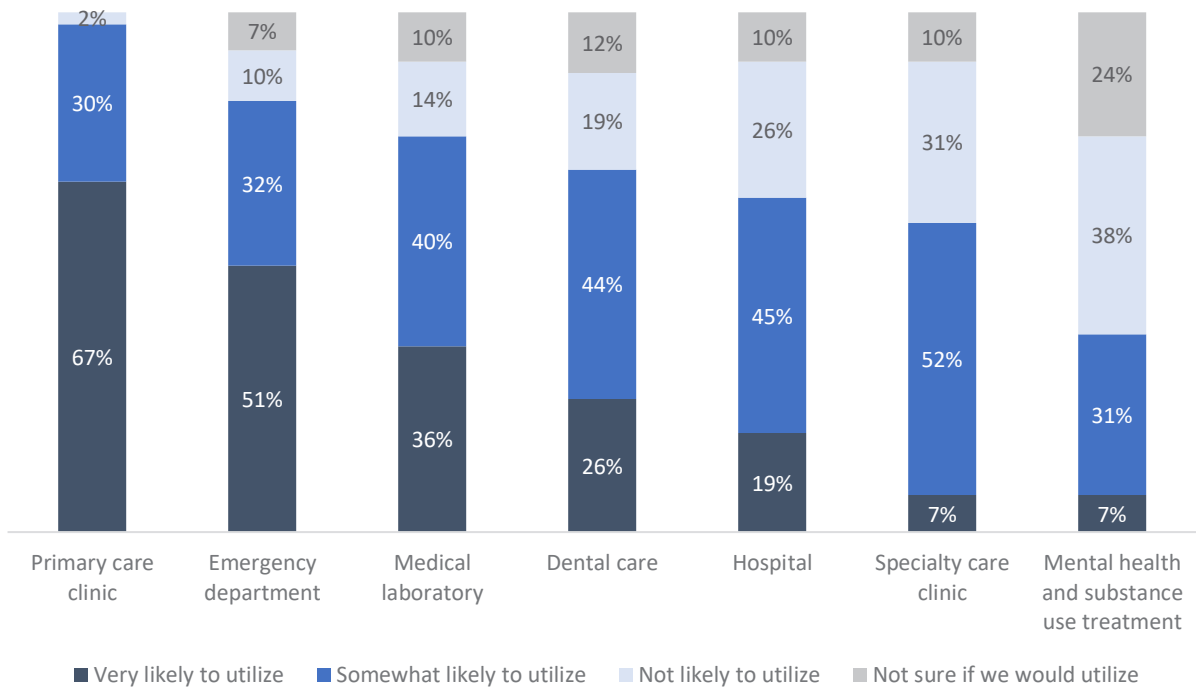
The majority of respondents indicate that they or their family members accessed dental care, vision care and primary care outside of Powder River County in the last year.

*Below are a list of health services that are being considered for development in Powder River County. What service would you prioritize for development?*



More than half of all respondents say that their top priority for the development of health services is primary care services. Other top priorities included an emergency department and mental health and substance use treatment.

*Of the services under consideration for development in Powder River County, which would you and your family most likely utilize?*



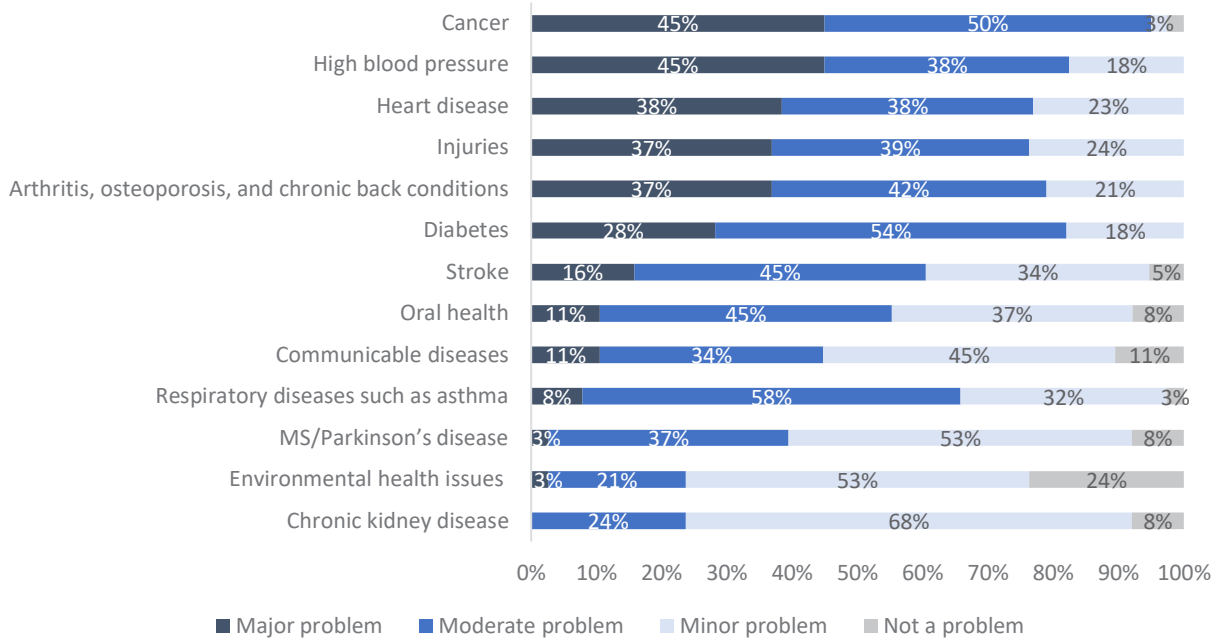
When asked what services respondents would most likely utilize, primary care again rose to the top, followed by the emergency department and medical laboratory. Other comments and suggestions related to the development of health services from respondents are below.

- I don't feel that the county can support any new services.
- I think that we need to improve the systems we do have, not add to them.
- I would like to see our ambulance service get better taken care of. They do so much for our community.
- Ambulance and EMS should be maintained before developing a hospital, specialty care, emergency department, or medical laboratory.
- A ranching community this far from a town needs emergency services
- I feel the ambulance service is a major concern at this point as far as ownership and maintaining reliable crews.
- Would like to see the clinic become more of a frontier clinic so that an ER could be established there in order to serve the community better.
- Develop after hours services
- Support a critical access hospital/ER
- Naturopathic and functional medicine care and integrative incorporated into the Primary Care Clinic
- Optometrist oncology, cancer treatment dementia support and home care
- Chiropractic
- In-home health and hospice care
- Health Management



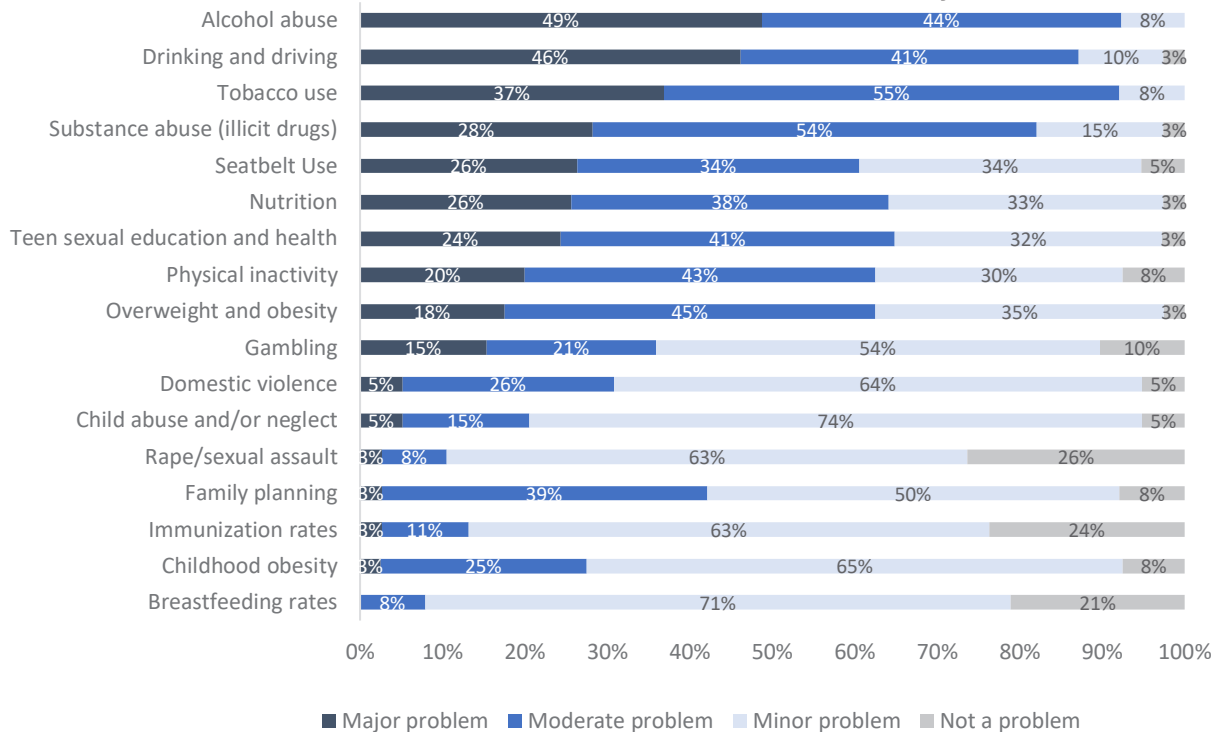
# Rating health issues in Powder River County

*How big of a problem are the following physical health issues in Powder River County?*



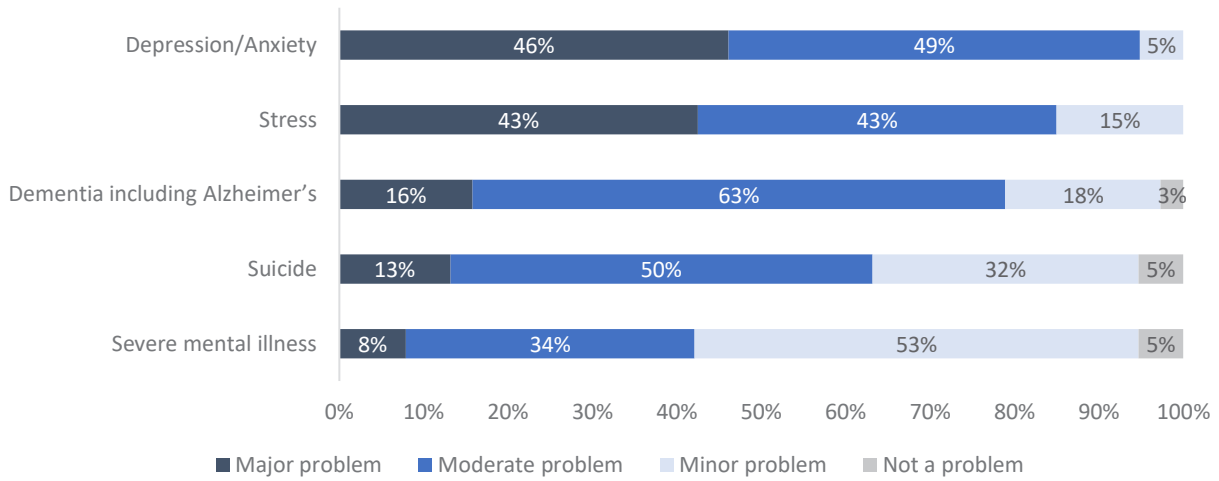
Cancer, cardiovascular issues and injuries were flagged as the biggest physical health issues by respondents.

*How big of a problem are the following health behaviors in Powder River County?*



Substance use issues and driving behaviors were the top health behaviors of concern among respondents.

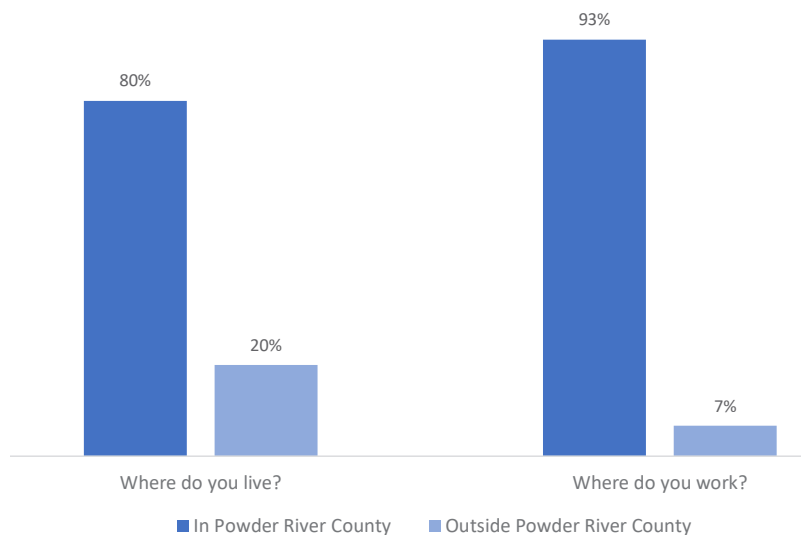
## How big of a problem are the following mental health issues in Powder River County?



Depression and anxiety and stress were the top rated mental health issues of concern by respondents. 95% of respondents rated depression and anxiety as a major or moderate problem in our community.

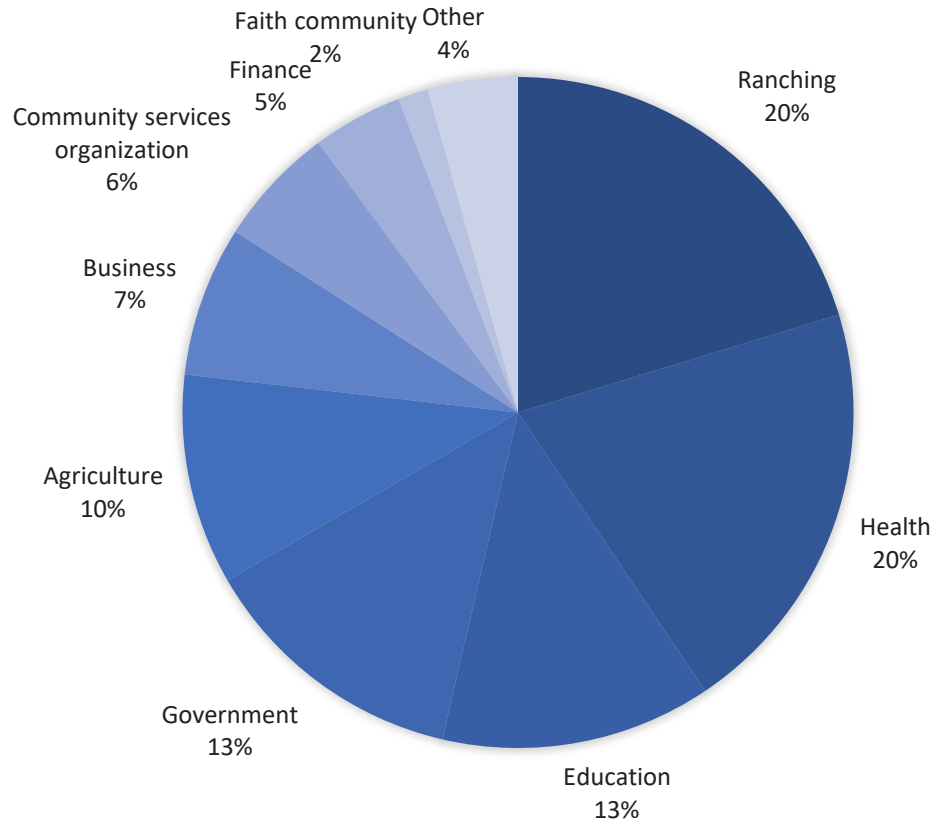
## Respondent demographics

### Where do you live and work?



The survey included representation from individuals who either live or work in our community, elected by the Health Advisory Board to participate. Four out of five respondents indicated that they live in Powder River County and 93% indicate they work in our community.

## What is your field of work?



Respondents indicated that they work in a range of sectors. The majority of respondents work in ranching, agriculture, health, education or government.

### Sample of organization represented among respondents

Broadus Public Schools and School District 79J  
 Powder River County  
 Powder River Chamber of Commerce  
 Sheriff's Office  
 Ambulance Service  
 Powder River Health Care  
 Powder River Manor  
 Southeastern Montana Development Corporation  
 Broadus Fire  
 Powder River County Extension Service  
 Broadus Town Council  
 Ambulance  
 Private businesses and ranches  
 Powder River County 4-H  
 Tri-County Special Education Coop  
 Powder River Trails

A list of some of the key organizations represented among respondents is listed in the inset table. Private businesses and corporations are not listed.

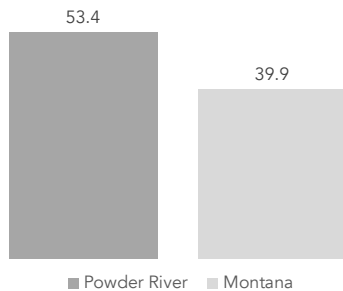
# Population Level Data

## Powder River County Demographics

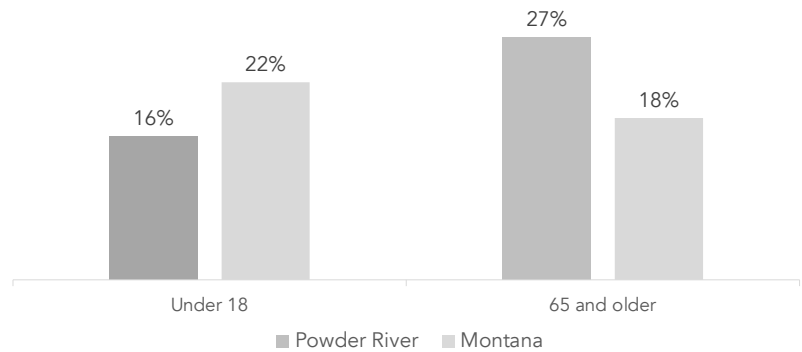
Demographics	Powder River	Montana
Population	1607	1,050,649
Median Age	53.4	39.9
Under 5	7%	6%
Under 18	16%	22%
65 and older	27%	18%
White (alone)	94%	89%
American Indian (alone)	2%	6%

The population of Powder River County is older and more racially homogenous than the population of Montana as a whole. More than one in four residents in our community is over age 65.

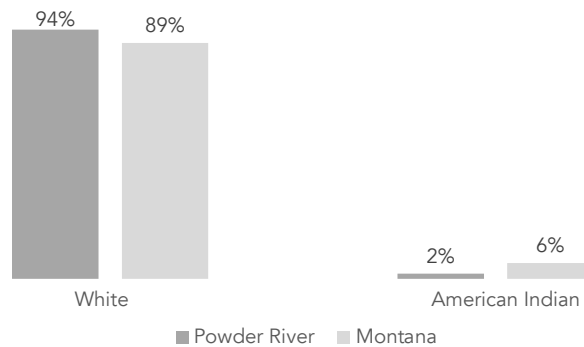
Median Age



Age Group Percent

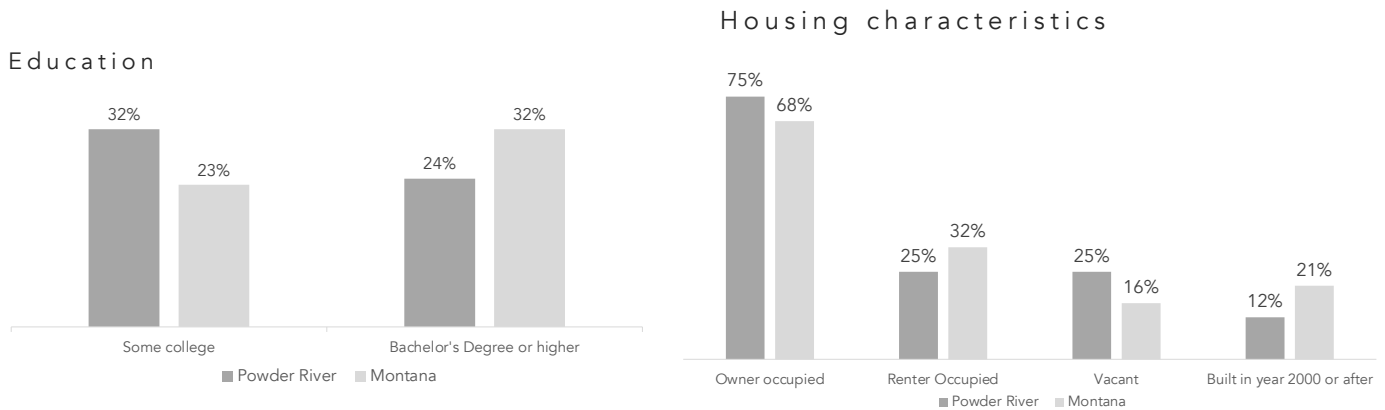


Race



Education, income and employment	Powder River	Montana
Unemployment	3%	4%
Did not graduate high school (aged 25 years and up)	6%	6%
Some College	32%	23%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	24%	32%
Median household income	\$47,400	\$55,200
Children in Poverty	21%	16%
Children in Single-parent households	23%	27%
Percent below poverty	13%	16%

Only one in four residents of Powder River County has a bachelor's degree, and the median income for our community is lower than Montana as a whole. However, a smaller portion of our population lives in poverty compared to the state.



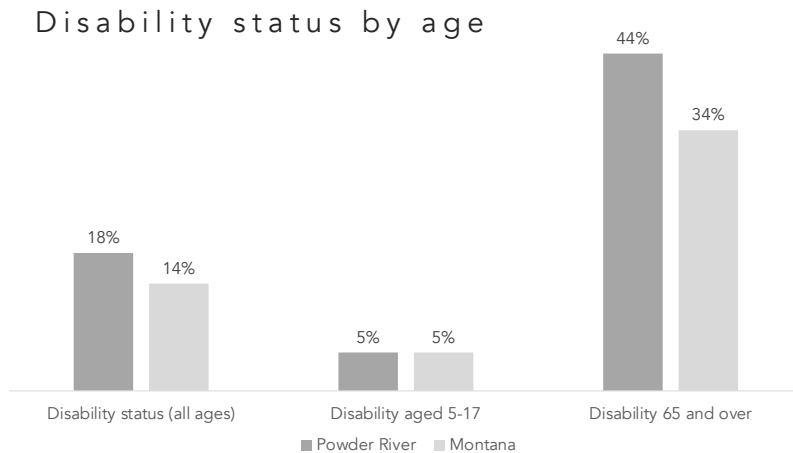
In terms of housing, Powder River county residents are more likely to own their homes and live in older housing than all Montanans. Renters experience a lower housing burden in our community than elsewhere in the state.

Housing	Powder River	Montana
Owner Occupied Housing	75%	68%
Renter Occupied Housing	25%	32%
Vacant Housing	25%	16%
Housing built in year 2000 or later	12%	21%
No vehicle available	2%	5%
Severe housing problems	7%	15%
No telephone service	0.4%	3%
Gross rent as a percentage of household income is 30% or more	28%	45%

# Disability

Disability	Powder River	Montana
Disability status	18%	14%
Disability aged 5-17	5%	5%
Disability 65 and over	44%	34%

One in five county residents, and almost half of all seniors have a disability in our community. Serving seniors with disabilities should be a consideration in the development of health services.

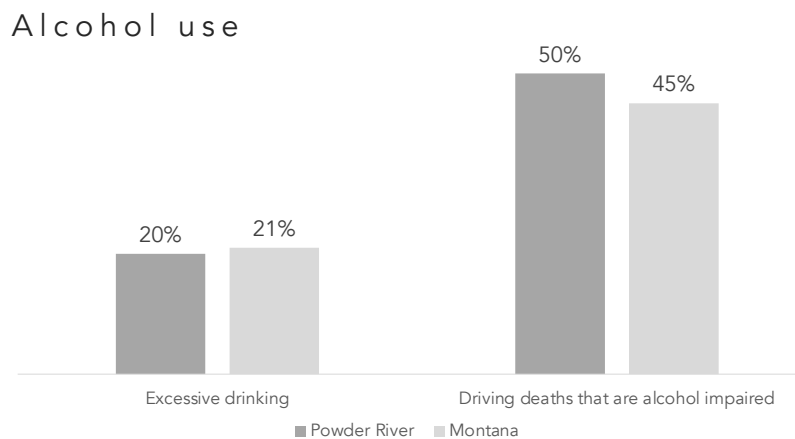


# Substance use and mental health

	Powder River	Montana
Excessive drinking	20%	21%
Driving deaths that are alcohol impaired	50%	45%
Opioid prescription rate (per 100 in 2018)	33.9	61.1
Drug offense rate (per 1,000 in 2018)	2.3	8.7
Drug arrest rate (per 1,000 in 2018)	2.3	5.2
Frequent mental distress (adults)	12%	12%
Current cigarette use	15%	17%

One in five adults drinks to excess in our community, and drinking and driving is a major contributor to driving deaths in Powder River County.

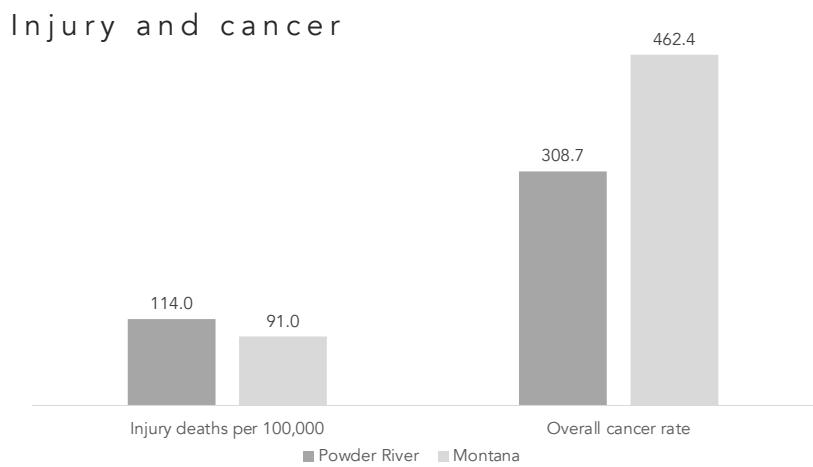
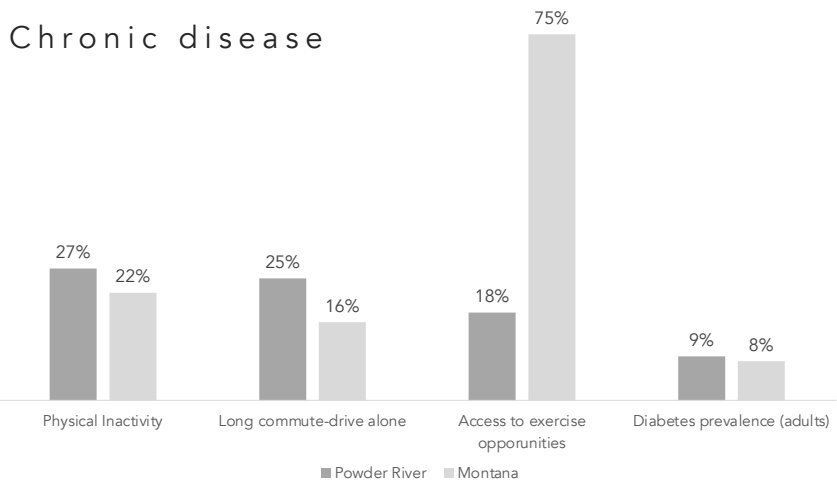
One in ten adults reports frequent mental distress.



# Chronic disease and injury

	Powder River	Montana
Physical inactivity	27%	22%
Obesity (adults)	27%	26%
Driving alone to work	67%	76%
Long commute-drive alone	25%	16%
Access to exercise opportunities	18%	75%
Injury deaths (per 100,000)	114	91
Diabetes prevalence (adults)	9%	8%
Overall cancer rate, all sites (2014-2017)	308.7	462.4

As a rural community, our residents have far less access to exercise opportunities, which may drive elevated rates of physical inactivity and obesity. As an agricultural and ranching community with few emergency services, we also experience an elevated rate of injury deaths in our community.



# Communicable disease

Communicable disease	Powder River	Montana
Newly diagnosed chlamydia cases per 100,000 population, 2017	285.4	434.1
Flu vaccinations (Medicare enrollees receiving vaccine, 2017)	43%	42%
Covid cases through January 2021	108	92934
Covid case rate through January 2021	6.7	8.9
Total covid vaccines administered through January 2021	73	92567
Covid vaccines rate per 100 through January 2021	4.5	8.9

In 2020, COVID-19 emerged as a significant communicable disease issue in the US. In the first year of the pandemic, nearly 7% of Powder River County residents contracted the disease and nearly 5% received at least one dose of the COVID vaccine. As a community with a large elderly population at higher risk for complications from COVID-19, control of the disease should remain a priority.

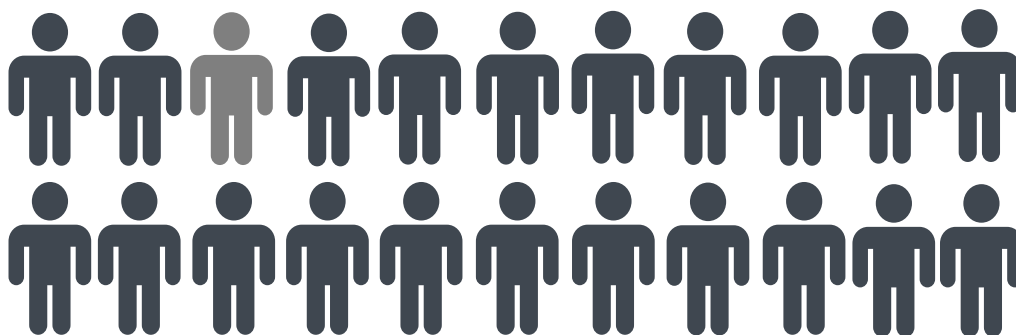
## COVID 19

As of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021-one in 15 Powder River County residents has tested positive for Covid-19



## VACCINATION

As of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021-one in 22 residents has been vaccinated against COVID-19

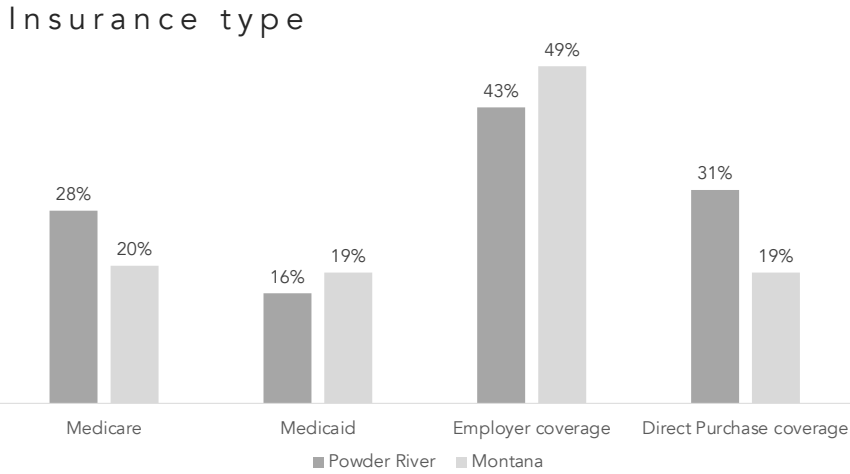




# Insurance coverage

Insurance Coverage	Powder River	Montana
Without health insurance coverage	7%	9%
Uninsured Adults (aged 19-64)	9%	13%
Uninsured Children	10%	7%
Medicare Coverage (alone or in combination)	28%	20%
Medicaid Coverage (alone or in combination)	16%	19%
VA Coverage (alone or in combination)	3%	4%
Employer Coverage (alone or in combination)	43%	49%
Direct Purchase Coverage (alone or in combination)	31%	19%

Compared to Montana, adults in Powder River County are slightly more likely and children are slightly less likely to be insured. In our community, a larger percentage of adults are covered by Medicare and by private insurance obtained through direct purchase than in Montana as a whole.



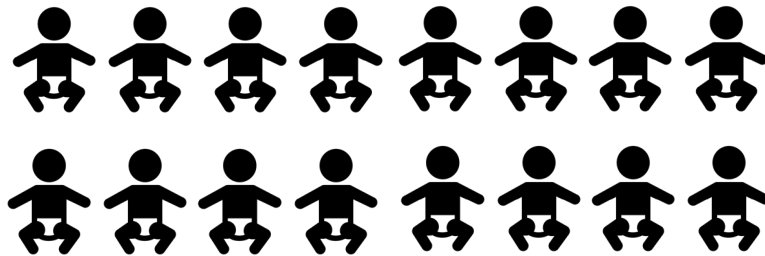
## Early childhood measures

Early childhood measures	Powder River	Montana
Number of births (2019)	16	11,080
Births to women who initiated prenatal care in the first trimester	77%	73%
Children enrolled in Medicaid (2019)	14%	10%
Children enrolled in Healthy Montana Kids (CHIP) (2019)	11%	6%

Fewer than 20 births a year occur in our community, and most pregnant women are accessing prenatal care in their first trimester. One in four children in our community is insured through Medicaid or CHIP.

### BIRTHS

There are 16 births (and around 16 deaths) in Powder River county per year



## Childhood Nutrition

Childhood nutrition	Powder River	Montana
Average cost of a meal (2018)	\$3.2	\$3.0
Child food insecurity (2018)	14%	13%
Eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (2019/2020)	4%	11%
SNAP recipients (2020)	1.5%	2.6%
WIC participants (2018)	39%	43%

One in seven children in our community experiences food insecurity. Participation in WIC, SNAP and free and reduced priced school lunch can help support low income children to access proper nutrition.

### HUNGER

One in seven children in Powder River County experience food insecurity

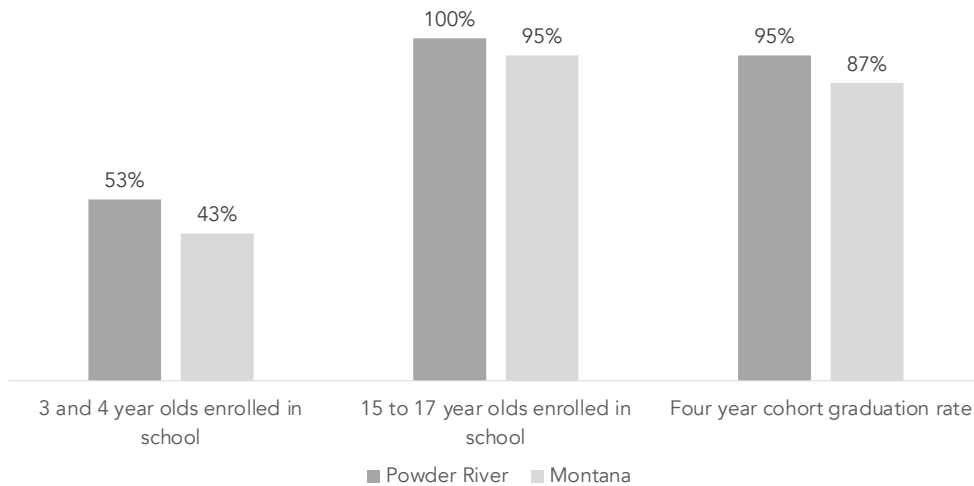


# Childhood Education

Childhood education	Powder River	Montana
Public school enrollment K through 12 (2019/2020)	193	149,607
Percent of children enrolled in special education in public schools	14%	13%
Private school enrollment	0	7,845
Homeschool enrollment	13	5,815
Total enrollment (K through 12)	206	163,267
Average expenditure per student in public school (2018/2019)	\$16,782	\$12,247
3 and 4 year olds enrolled in preschool	53%	43%
15 to 17 year olds enrolled in school	100%	95%
Four year cohort graduation rate (2018/2019)	95%	87%
Third graders who score at or above proficient on statewide English Language Arts assessment (3 year totals-2017-2019)	51%	51%

Educational outcomes in Powder River County are favorable compared to the state of Montana. Our community has high levels of school enrollment and graduation and invests more funding per student than the state average.

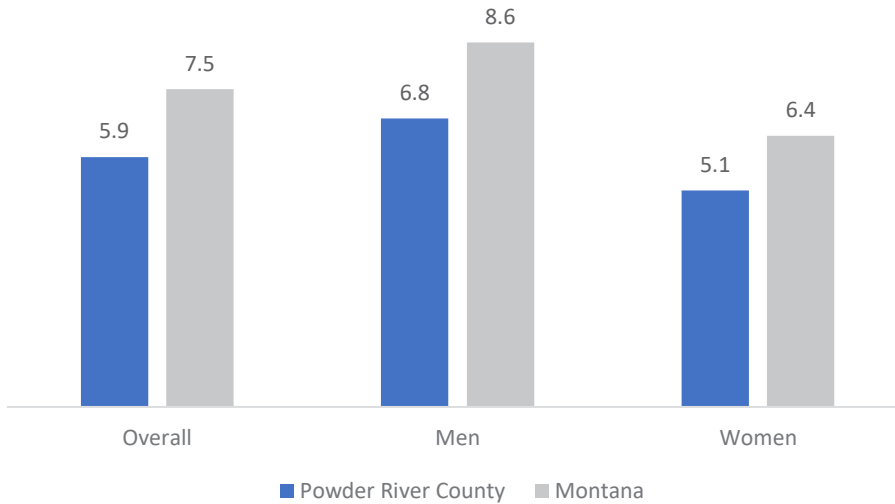
## School enrollment and graduation



# Deaths

In 2018, there were 16 deaths among Powder River County residents, the same as the number of births in the county in 2019. From 2009-2018, the age adjusted death rate for the county overall and for both men and women was lower than the state of Montana as a whole. Men have a higher age adjusted death rate than women in our community.

*Age-adjusted death rate per 1,000, Powder River County and Montana, 2009-2018*



The leading causes of death in the last decade in our community are heart disease, cancer and injury.

- Leading causes of death, 2009-2018
- Heart disease
  - Cancer
  - Unintentional injury
  - Cerebrovascular disease
  - Chronic lower respiratory disease
  - Influenza and pneumonia
  - Kidney disease

# Conclusion

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Powder River County is an aging, rural community where disability and chronic disease are likely to increase over time. One in four residents in our community is over the age of 65 and the median age of the population is 13.5 years higher than for all Montanans. The county is in the top 1% of all counties in the United States in terms of rurality with a population density of less than one person per square mile. Almost one in five residents currently has a disability, including 44% of seniors. The leading causes of death in the county are linked to chronic diseases whose risk increases with age: heart disease and cancer.

Throughout the assessment, the need to increase access to healthcare was emphasized, with 70% of key health stakeholders surveyed indicating that this issue was a top health concern in the community. In addition, 88% of stakeholders indicated that health services being unavailable was a significant barrier to accessing healthcare in the community. Most health stakeholders surveyed indicated that they or their family members traveled outside of Powder River County in the last year to access health services including dental care (79%), vision care (74%), primary care (65%) and specialty care (49%). Thus, support for transportation to health services, especially for seniors, should be supported as a priority to bolster access. When asked to rate which health services to prioritize for development within the county, stakeholders selected primary care and emergency services, followed by behavioral healthcare. Stakeholders indicated that primary care and emergency services were also the services they or their family members would be most likely to utilize. Community members surveyed expressed concern about the development of high cost or specialized health services that could not be sustained.

In addition to access to care, the population-level data presented in this report highlight a number of other key areas to prioritize to improve the health of our community. Support for more opportunities to exercise, prevent injuries and reduce high-risk driving behavior and alcohol use will support our population to age with less disability and disease. Only 18% of Powder River County residents have access to exercise opportunities compared to 75% of Montanans. Powder River County has slightly elevated rates of injury deaths compared to Montana as a whole and unintentional injury is the third leading cause of death in the community. Alcohol abuse and drinking and driving were rated as the top health behaviors of concern in the county by health stakeholders and one in five county residents are estimated to engage in excessive drinking behaviors. Half of all driving deaths in Powder River County are alcohol related, a rate higher than that seen in Montana or the US as a whole.

Finally, the emerging threat of COVID-19 should not be forgotten, especially in a community like ours that includes a disproportionate number of seniors at elevated risk of severe disease.

# Data sources

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The following population level data sources are utilized in this assessment:

- Powder River County Key Informant Health Survey (December 2020)
- American Community Survey 5 year Estimates (2015-2019)
- Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings
- Kids Count Montana
- Montana Vital Statistics
- Montana Hospital Discharge Data System
- Montana COVID Dashboard
- Montana Board of Crime Control
- Montana Tumor Registry
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Opioid Dispensing Maps

