

# HEALTH BACKGROUND AND TRENDS



## MONTCO

### A Comprehensive Plan for a Changing World

People and Population

Existing Land Use

Transportation

Preservation and  
Recreation

Environmental Systems

Infrastructure and Utilities

Economic Development

Housing

Health

Government and  
Community  
Facilities

There are real connections between land use and health. Areas with more tree cover tend to be cooler because dark pavement and roofs absorb the hot summer sun. People want to age in place and grow old among family and friends, but if that “place” isn’t built for aging gracefully, where will the county’s seniors go? Contaminated properties are complicated to reclaim for new uses. The older housing stock in some of the county’s most affordable areas has the highest risk for lead contamination — higher than the risk countywide. How we plan for the county’s housing, jobs, transportation, recreation, and natural systems has direct connections to and implications for the health of the county’s residents.



*Farmers markets create opportunities for economic development as well as increase access to locally grown and produced foods.*



*The county's trail system provides recreational opportunities for people of all abilities.*

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

According to the [County Health Rankings and Roadmaps](#), Montgomery County is the fourth healthiest county in the state. This ranking considers a number of factors, including:

- A relatively low level of physical inactivity and high access to exercise opportunities
- A relatively low teen birth rate
- Good access to healthcare
- Participation in healthy behaviors, such as flu shots and health screenings
- The quality of our physical environment

We’re not in perfect health, though, as increases in certain chronic and communicable diseases show. Like many counties, our residents are gaining weight (despite proximity to exercise opportunities). Our obesity prevalence is 29.1 percent.

Also worth noting is a continued rise in

sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections, particularly in young people. In 2021, syphilis cases increased 28 percent in Pennsylvania (higher than the nationwide increase). While Montgomery County’s rate of syphilis cases is lower than most surrounding counties, cases have been increasing over time and are a public health concern. Other STD infection rates continue to increase, though whether this is due to a change in testing frequency is unclear. Public health priorities shifted tremendously during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it remains to be seen if an uptick in STDs is something that can be easily reversed.

### MENTAL HEALTH

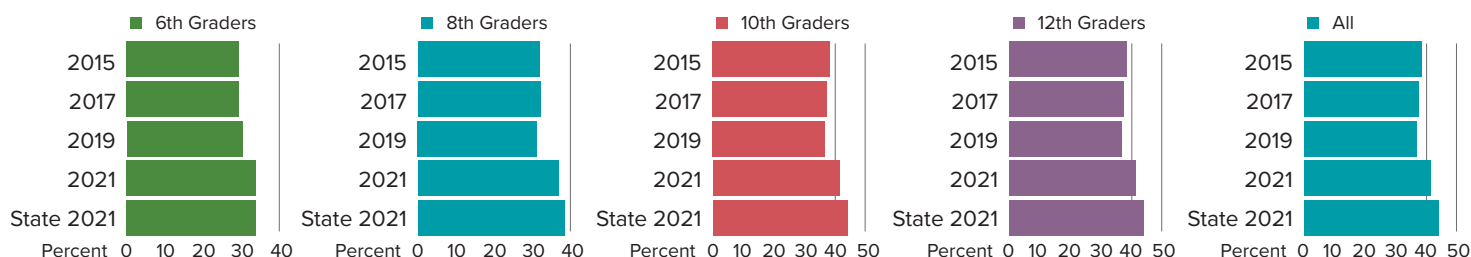
Mental health struggles are receiving more public attention than ever before. The isolation that the Covid-19 pandemic caused shows how critical mental health is to overall well-being and has shifted the conversation about

## Changes in Teen and Pre-Teen Mental Health

Montgomery County pre-teens and teens rated their own mental health states worse in 2021 than in the three previous surveys (2015–2019). All grade levels experienced higher rates of feeling sad or depressed.

Source: *Pennsylvania Youth Survey*

### In the past 12 months have you felt depressed or sad MOST days, even if you feel OK sometimes?



### Sometimes I think that life is not worth it.



**6,409** responses  
27% of students agreed with this statement.

### At times I think I am no good at all.



**8,924** responses  
37.6% of students agreed with this statement.

### All in all, I am inclined to think I am a failure.



**6,076** responses  
25.6% of students agreed with this statement.

mental health needs. The nation's surgeon general went as far as declaring that the "epidemic of loneliness and isolation" is an underappreciated public health crisis.

The pandemic was particularly hard on the mental health of our most vulnerable populations. For children, this was highlighted in the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (or PAYS) report, a long-running survey given to 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders with consistent data from prior to, during, and, as of this year, after the Covid-19 pandemic. As of 2021, the report stated that more than a third of school-aged respondents in Montgomery County felt sad or depressed most days over the year prior, and 17.7 percent of respondents had seriously considered suicide (compared to 18.6 percent at the state level). These numbers worsened between 2019 and 2021 when many students were still learning from home. While it could be easy to write this off as the turbulence of being a teenager or a pre-teen, these statistics have very real implications for creating safe places to provide recreational and social opportunities for the county's youth.

## CAUSES OF DEATH

Chronic disease is the leading cause of death in Montgomery County. There are several genetic and non-biological risk factors associated with chronic disease. Many

chronic conditions disproportionately impact racial minorities and lower income residents. Heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death in the county. Covid-19 was the third leading cause of death in 2020, and

while the pandemic public health emergency may have ended, the severity of this virus and its continued and long-lasting effects on county residents will affect public health planning for years to come.

### Causes of Death

Age-adjusted Rates of Selected Causes of Death, 2016-2020

Source: Community Health Needs Assessment, 2022

| MEASURE                                      | MONTGOMERY | PENNSYLVANIA |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| All causes of death                          | 680.6      | 788.4        |
| Heart disease                                | 148.0      | 176.2        |
| Cancer                                       | 142.6      | 157.8        |
| Accidents                                    | 46.8       | 64.4         |
| Cerebrovascular disease                      | 43.9       | 36.3         |
| Chronic lower respiratory disease            | 26.8       | 35.3         |
| Alzheimer's disease                          | 19.1       | 21.9         |
| Diabetes mellitus                            | 13.5       | 21.1         |
| Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome, and nephrosis | 12.9       | 15.9         |
| Influenza and pneumonia                      | 12.9       | 14.1         |
| Septicemia                                   | 12.0       | 13.1         |

ND = Not displayed when count is less than 10 data is not available.

Age-adjusted rates are per 100,000 and are calculated using the U.S. 2000 standard million population distribution.

## FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER

Food insecurity is a persistent challenge in the county. It's not the same as hunger, which is the feeling one has when they don't have food. The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food to live an active, healthy life. According to *Feeding America*, 7 percent of county residents are food insecure (though this data is from 2020). That's nearly 25,000 people, and when you take a closer look at the numbers, food insecurity disproportionately affects residents of color. Census data also shows an increase in the numbers of people receiving SNAP benefits, going from 3.6 percent of county residents to 5.6 percent in a ten-year time frame. It's worth noting that the Covid-19 pandemic (and the end of pandemic-era financial assistance), the increasing cost of food, and rising inflation rates worsened food insecurity. Area food pantries continue to report ongoing increases in need and rising numbers of clients. Data from the Montgomery County Anti-Hunger Network show an increase in pantry visits among its partner providers, rising from 19,880 unduplicated individuals served in 2021 to 28,504 unduplicated individuals in 2023. Unduplicated households served rose within the same timeframe from 6,492 to 9,927.

## OPIOID AND DRUG OVERDOSES

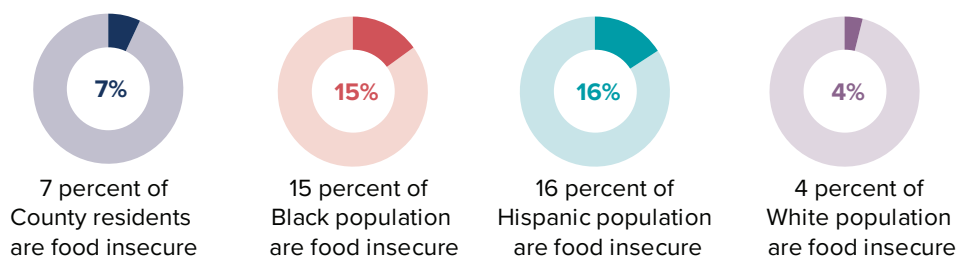
As more states consider the decriminalization of some drugs, concerns about opioid use and overdoses in Montgomery County persist. Since 2015, drug overdose deaths have tripled and are the leading cause of death among young adults in the region. Montgomery County has had more than 890 drug overdose deaths in the last 5 years — opioids and fentanyl (or some combination of the two) are the most frequent contributors to drug overdose deaths.

## HEALTHCARE ACCESSIBILITY

Healthcare facilities exist in the county in several categories: hospitals, ambulatory surgery centers, urgent care facilities, and outpatient care centers. Hospitals are licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and are either general acute care hospitals or specialty hospitals (which include psychiatric facilities and drug and alcohol treatment centers).

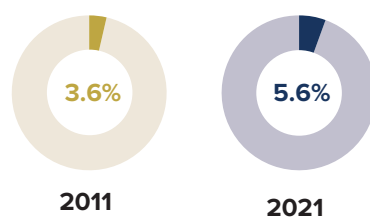
### Food Insecurity Disparities in Montgomery County

Source: Feeding America, 2020



### Percent of Households Receiving Food Stamps/ SNAP Benefits

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates 2007-2011 and 2017-2021

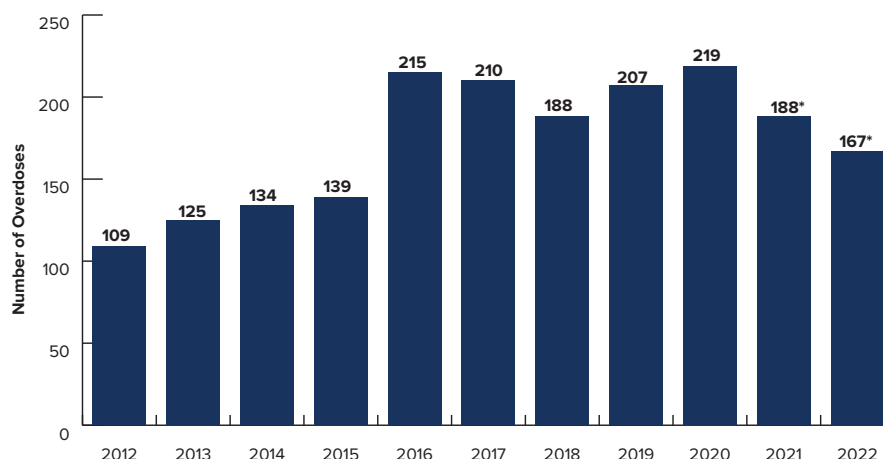


Food pantries in the county continue to have increased demand for assistance. *Manna on Main Street, Lansdale*

### Opioid and Drug Overdoses

\*2021 and 2022 data as of April 2023

Source: Pennsylvania Opioid Dashboard



There are new hospitals and affiliated facilities in the county, including a Children's Hospital of Philadelphia pediatric hospital in King of Prussia and a Main Line Health outpatient center. St. Luke's University Health Network opened an outpatient facility in Upper Merion Township. Several existing hospitals, including Bryn Mawr Hospital (part of the Main Line Health System), have expanded over the last decade. Pottstown Hospital, once a

nonprofit hospital, was purchased by Tower Health and converted to a for-profit facility in 2018.

What is new is the rise in urgent care and outpatient care centers throughout the county. Census data from 2021 indicates there are 141 outpatient care centers in the county, an increase from 77 establishments in 2017. According to the Urgent Care Association, visits to urgent care centers nationwide are up

60 percent from 2019, and today nearly 90 percent of the U.S. population lives within 20 minutes of an urgent care center. Some, but not all, urgent care locations are affiliated with the major health care networks serving the region.

Telehealth services are an increasingly common way of interacting with healthcare professionals. Virtual visits provide flexibility (and limit the spread of germs).

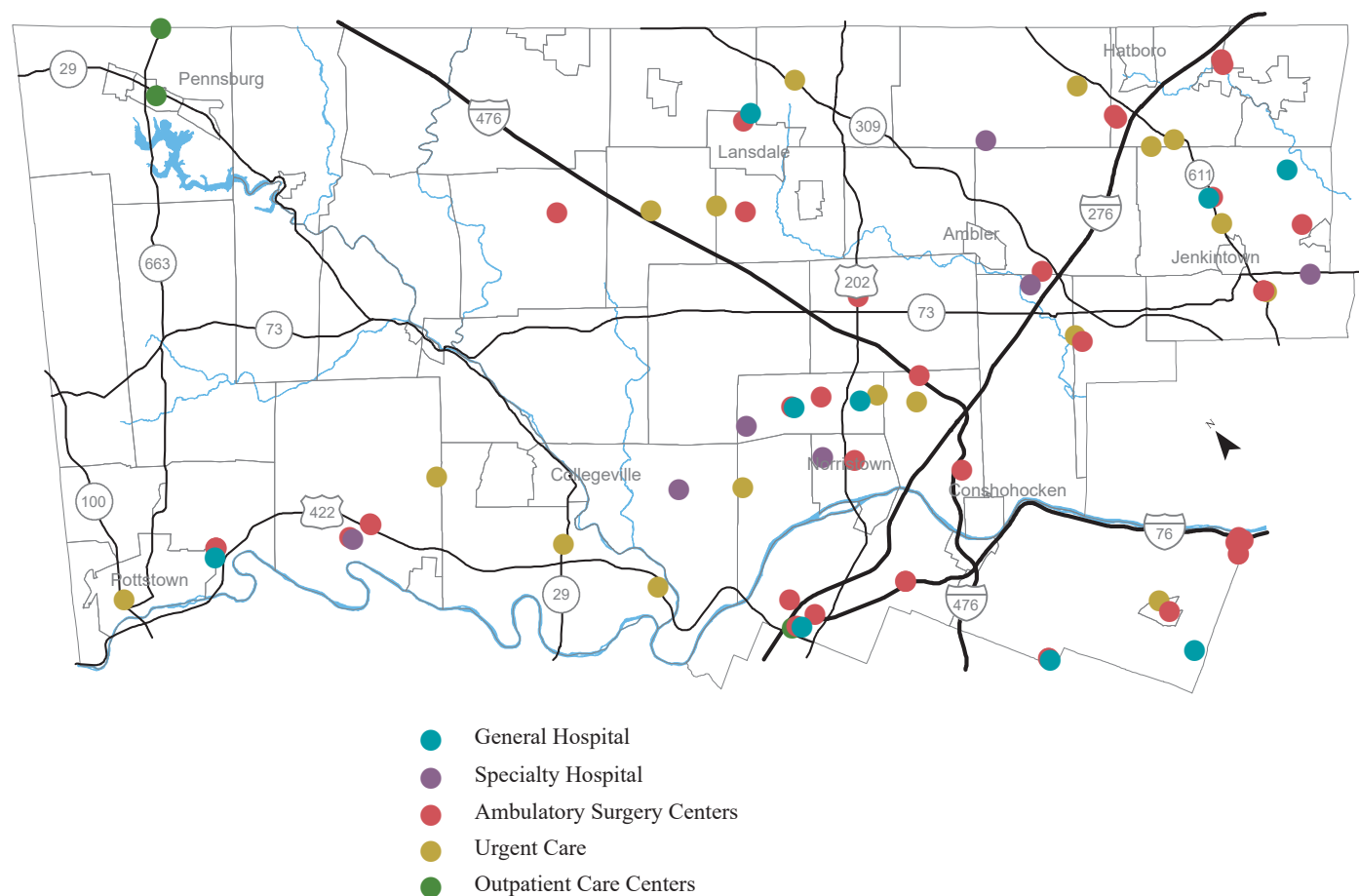
## CONSIDERATIONS

Planning for people and places means also planning for overall health and well-being. Working to build communities that have a positive impact on mental health, provide access to healthcare facilities, support an aging population, and allow for healthy lifestyles will benefit county residents.

### Accessibility of Healthcare

Source: Hospitals and Ambulatory Surgery Centers, Montgomery County, 2023

Source: Urgent Care Facilities, Pennsylvania Department of Health, 2023



Disclaimer: Not all urgent care facilities in the county are shown on this map.

Montgomery County government departments and boards play a role in furthering the county's comprehensive planning work. The Department of Health and Human Services is expansive, covering functions from immunizations to restaurant inspections. Program offices include the Early Learning Resource Center, Children & Youth, Community Connections, Drug & Alcohol, Public Health, Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Early Intervention, Senior Services, and Veteran's Affairs.



Additional maps and data are available at:  
<https://montco-2050-1-montcopa.hub.arcgis.com>



Prepared by:  
 Montgomery County Planning Commission, 2023