



# **SOMERSET COUNTY LOCAL MANAGEMENT BOARD NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

***FY 2025***

*Prepared by:*



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## Executive Summary

The Business, Economic, and Community Outreach Network (BEACON) at the Franklin P. Perdue School of Business, Salisbury University, conducted a Community Needs Assessment in partnership with the Somerset County Local Management Board (SCLMB) to inform resource allocation and strategic planning for the upcoming fiscal years. Building on the 2022 assessment, this study explored challenges faced by families and children, including childhood poverty and transportation challenges. The study also included feedback from entities that assist children and families to improve coordination of services to meet community needs.

This assessment utilized surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews, and analyses of existing reports and data from allied agencies to identify community priorities, service gaps, and strengths.

Key findings highlight challenges in economic stability, with a shortage of full-time, adequately paying jobs and a need for workforce training and educational opportunities. Transportation barriers limited access to employment, healthcare, and essential services, particularly in isolated areas. Concerns were also raised about inadequate school facilities, gaps in healthcare and mental health services, community safety, rising housing costs, and limited affordable childcare options.

Recommendations include developing job training programs, expanding youth engagement initiatives, improving school infrastructure and safety, enhancing mental health services, addressing transportation barriers, increasing access to affordable housing and childcare, and improving service delivery by agencies. These strategies aim to support policy decisions that improve services and resources for Somerset County residents.

### **Recommendations fall into seven categories**

1. Improved Access to Employment Opportunities
2. Education and Youth Programs
3. Behavioral Health and Healthcare
4. Transportation
5. Community Engagement
6. Housing and Family Support
7. Improved Service Delivery

## Introduction

In collaboration with the Somerset County Local Management Board (SCLMB), the Business, Economic, and Community Outreach Network (BEACON) at the Franklin P. Perdue School of Business, Salisbury University, conducted a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment and developed planning recommendations to guide Somerset County's policy-makers in their decision-making processes regarding resource allocation. This effort built upon the previous assessment completed in 2022 and aimed to inform SCLMB's future strategies and projects.

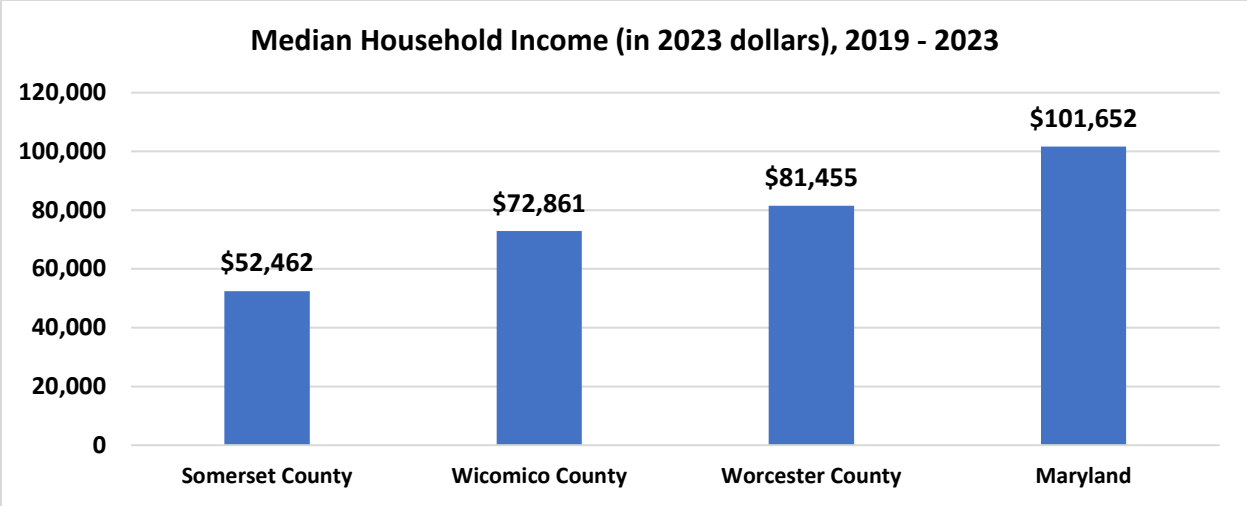
The assessment drew on multiple data collection methods to gain a multifaceted understanding of community needs and priorities. These methods included surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews with stakeholders, complemented by analyses of existing reports, data sources, and allied agencies' capacities. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding childhood poverty and transportation challenges affecting the target populations. BEACON and SCLMB completed the contracting process for the assessment on May 3, 2024. BEACON began the design of collection methodology and instruments during May and June. The completed processes had delayed approval from the University's Institutional Review Board due to completion during the summer. BEACON worked with the client through August to schedule outreach activities, review contact lists, acquire target email lists, and complete background research. In September of 2024 the project was approved and active collection began.

The resulting Community Needs Assessment and its associated recommendations have been designed to provide SCLMB and other key decision-makers with data-driven insights into the local service environment. This includes identifying both systemic gaps and existing strengths. By integrating extensive community input and rigorous analysis, this assessment will serve as a valuable resource to inform Somerset County's policies, investments, and programmatic initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of children, youth, and families.

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# Background

Somerset County, situated on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, had an estimated population of 24,910 as of July 1, 2023, reflecting a 1.2% increase since April 1, 2020. Of this population, 18.3% are under the age of 18, and 4.3% are under the age of five.<sup>1</sup> As of 2022, 27.4% of individuals under 18 are below the poverty line, compared to 22.2% of the overall population in Somerset County.<sup>2</sup> The median household income in the county for 2023 was \$52,149, compared to the median household income of the State of Maryland which was \$101,652.



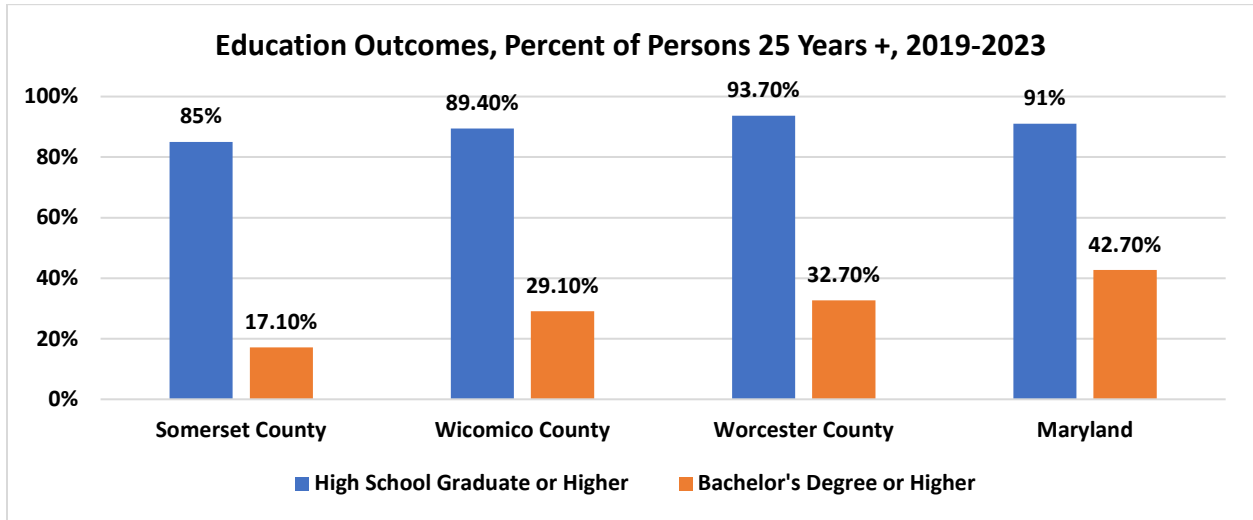
In terms of racial and ethnic composition, Somerset County’s population was 54.5% White, 40.8% Black or African American, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.0% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3.0% identifying as two or more races, and 4.7% Hispanic or Latino. Educational attainment in Somerset County reflected varying levels of completed education across different age groups.

Among residents aged 18 to 24, the majority (58.8%) had completed some college or an associate’s degree, though fewer (7.2%) had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. For individuals 25 years and older, 84.7% had completed at least high school, and 16.8% held a bachelor’s degree or higher. Achievement levels differed among age cohorts: while 78.5% of 25- to 34-year-olds had completed high school or beyond, this figure rose to 87.6% among those aged 35 to 44, and to 88.7% for the 45 to 64 demographics. Among older residents (65

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Population by Age." *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table K200104*, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSSE2023.K200104?t=Age and Sex:Populations and People&g=050XX00US24039>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1701*, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1701?t=Poverty&g=050XX00US24039>.

years and over), 82.2% had at least a high school education, with 15.7% holding a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>3</sup>

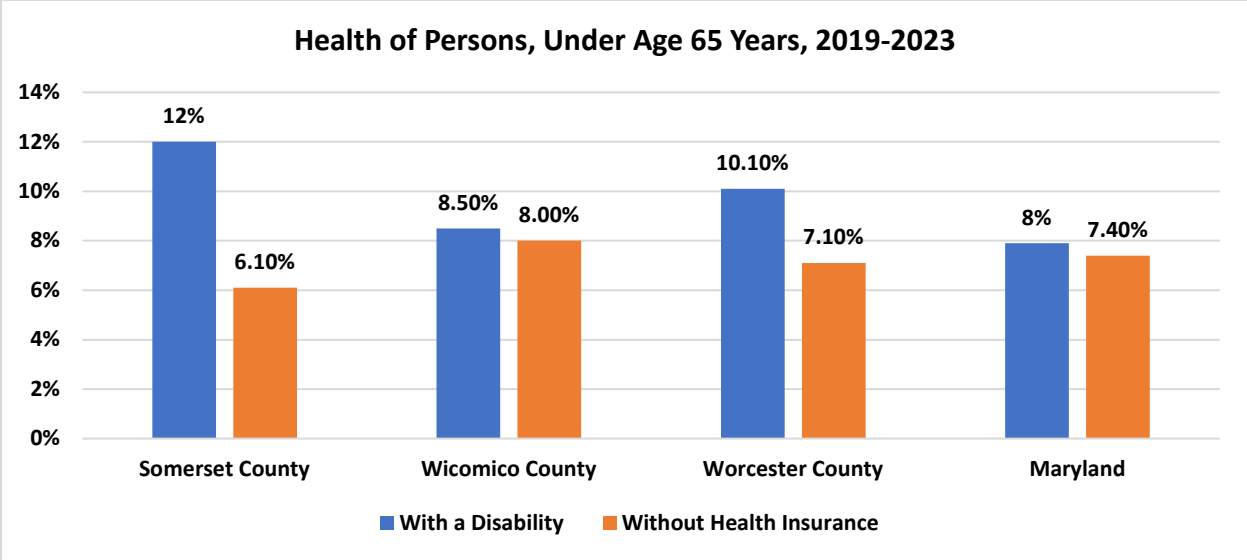


As of September 30, 2023, Somerset County had an enrollment of 2,894 students across its eight public schools, which included four elementary schools, one middle school, two combined schools, and one vocational school. During the 2022–2023 school year, 95% of graduating students earned a high school diploma, while 5% obtained a certificate. The 2023 data indicates that a majority of the student population faces economic challenges. Of the 2,894 total students, approximately 75% were identified as economically disadvantaged or participating in free and reduced meals programs (FARMS). Title I services reached nearly half of all students (47.9%). Other special populations, such as those identified under ADA 504 plans, military-connected, multilingual learners (ML), and homeless students each represented 5% or fewer, often too small to report specific figures without risking privacy. About 15.6% of students were classified as students with disabilities, indicating a segment requiring specialized resources.<sup>4</sup>

In 2023, in Somerset County, 12% of the population under the age of 65 reported having a disability, a rate higher than the state average of 7.9%. Additionally, 6.1% of individuals under 65 in Somerset County were uninsured, slightly better than the statewide average of 7.4%.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. "Educational Attainment." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1501, 2022, [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1501?t=Education:Educational Attainment&g=050XX00US24039](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1501?t=Education:Educational%20Attainment&g=050XX00US24039).

<sup>4</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. *Maryland Report Card*. 2023, [reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/StudentPopulation/1/1/19/2023](https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/Graphs/#/Demographics/StudentPopulation/1/1/19/2023).



## Methodology

This assessment employed a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys, focus groups, round table discussions, and key informant interviews to gather comprehensive community input. Two separate surveys were administered: a 22-question young adult survey, which yielded 14 responses, and a 24-question community survey, which received 179 responses. Both surveys were distributed via purchased email lists and promoted through flyers placed at high-traffic community locations (e.g., libraries and post offices) as well as promotion from the SCLMB and partnering agencies. The young adult survey targeted individuals aged 18–24, reaching out to 364 recipients via email and other promotion, while the community survey was emailed to 1,557 recipients and promoted similarly. A service provider survey was sent via email to a list provided by the SCLMB but received no responses.

Key informant interviews were conducted by phone, with 29 service providers and stakeholders contacted and 14 agreeing to participate in these 30-minute calls. A service provider round table was conducted at the Princess Anne Library, with six participants discussing challenges and potential areas for improved collaboration. Finally, three community focus groups were held in Crisfield, Princess Anne, and Westover, along with two youth focus groups at Crisfield High School and Washington High School

## Results and Outcomes

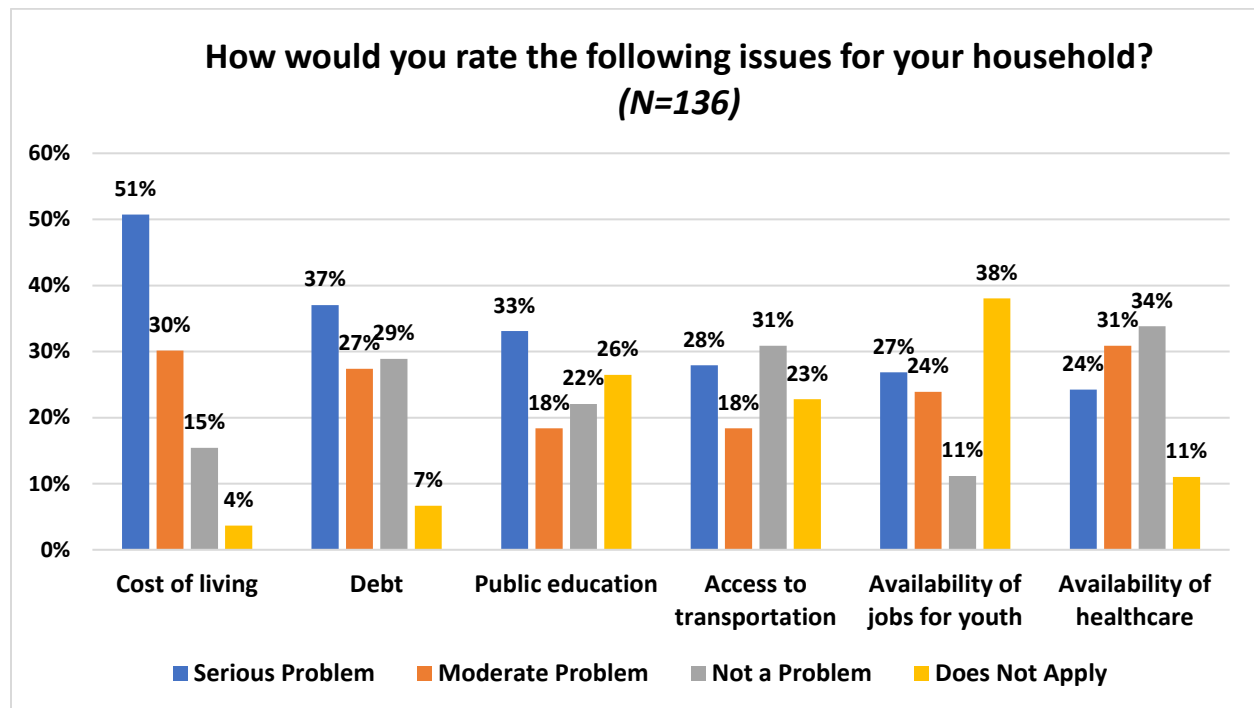
### Survey Results

In the community survey conducted for the SCLMB, a total of 179 individuals participated. Out of these, 168 respondents met the eligibility criteria by being 25 years of age or older. Five

participants, aged between 18 and 24, were redirected to a separate survey designed specifically for young adults. Six respondents under the age of 17 were excluded from the study due to not meeting the age requirement. The survey targeting young adults received 17 responses, aiming to better understand their perspectives on their educational experiences during their youth in Somerset County and their current needs as young adults. Out of 17 respondents to the young adult survey, three were disqualified for not being within the age range of 18-24. Of the remaining 14 respondents, only six completed the survey in its entirety, with others omitting some questions.

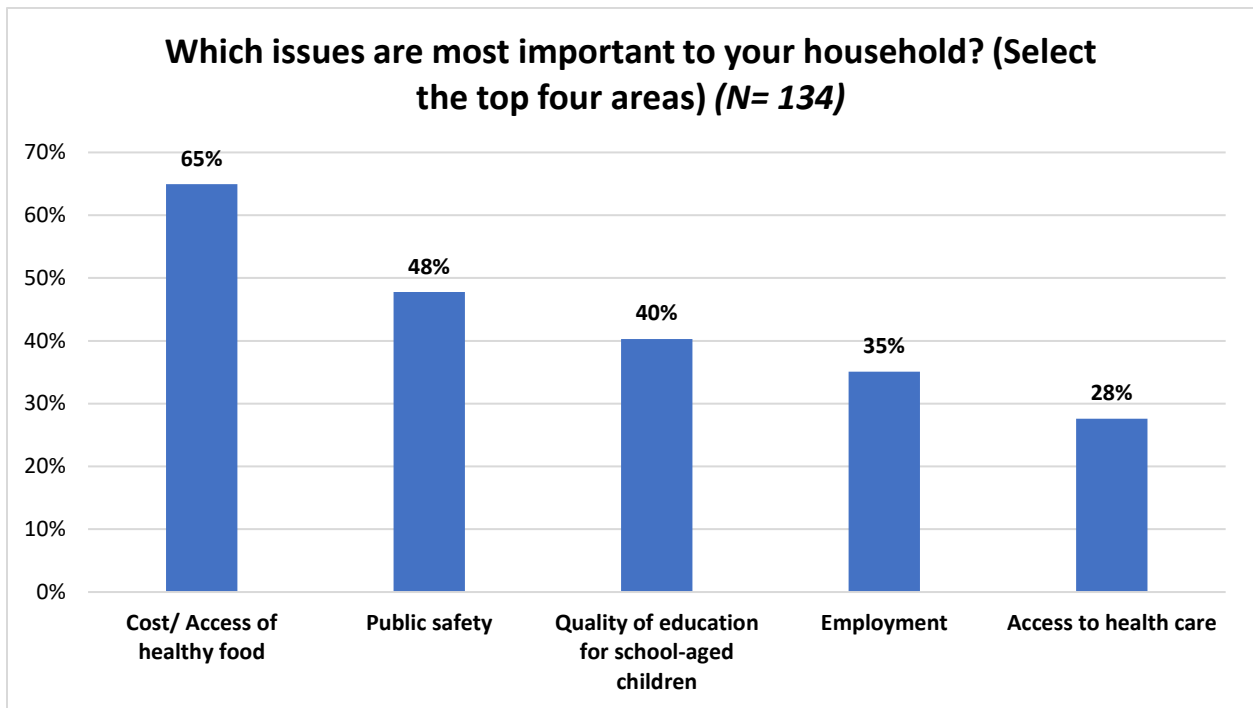
### Community Survey

The survey data from Somerset County presents a clear ranking of concerns among the residents. The most pressing issue is the cost of living, considered a serious problem by 50.74% of respondents. Debt also emerges as a significant issue, with 37.04% of participants identifying it as a major concern. Public education is another critical area, viewed as a serious problem by 33.09% of respondents. Transportation and employment opportunities for youth are noted as serious problems by 27.94% and 26.87% of respondents. Access to healthcare and childcare services was indicated as a serious problem for 24.26% and 23.53% of the participants, respectively. Other concerns include financial services, elderly assistance, and employment for adults, which are seen as serious by 18.38% to 23.13% of those surveyed. Specialized services such as substance abuse and immigrant support are noted as serious by a smaller portion of respondents. The graph below shows the top 5 issues that are viewed as a serious problem among respondents.





The survey results highlight the most important issues for households in the community, emphasizing concerns over the cost and accessibility of healthy food as the leading priority, selected by 64.93% of respondents. This suggests a significant focus on nutritional health and affordability within the community. Public safety follows as the second most pressing issue, with 47.76% of households considering it crucial. Quality of education for school-aged children also stands out, with 40.30% of respondents marking it as a top concern, reflecting a desire for improved educational standards and outcomes. Employment concerns are highlighted by 35.07% of the participants. Other concerns include access to healthcare, recreational programming, and various aspects of community involvement and support for vulnerable groups such as seniors, those needing care, and youth needing after-school programs.

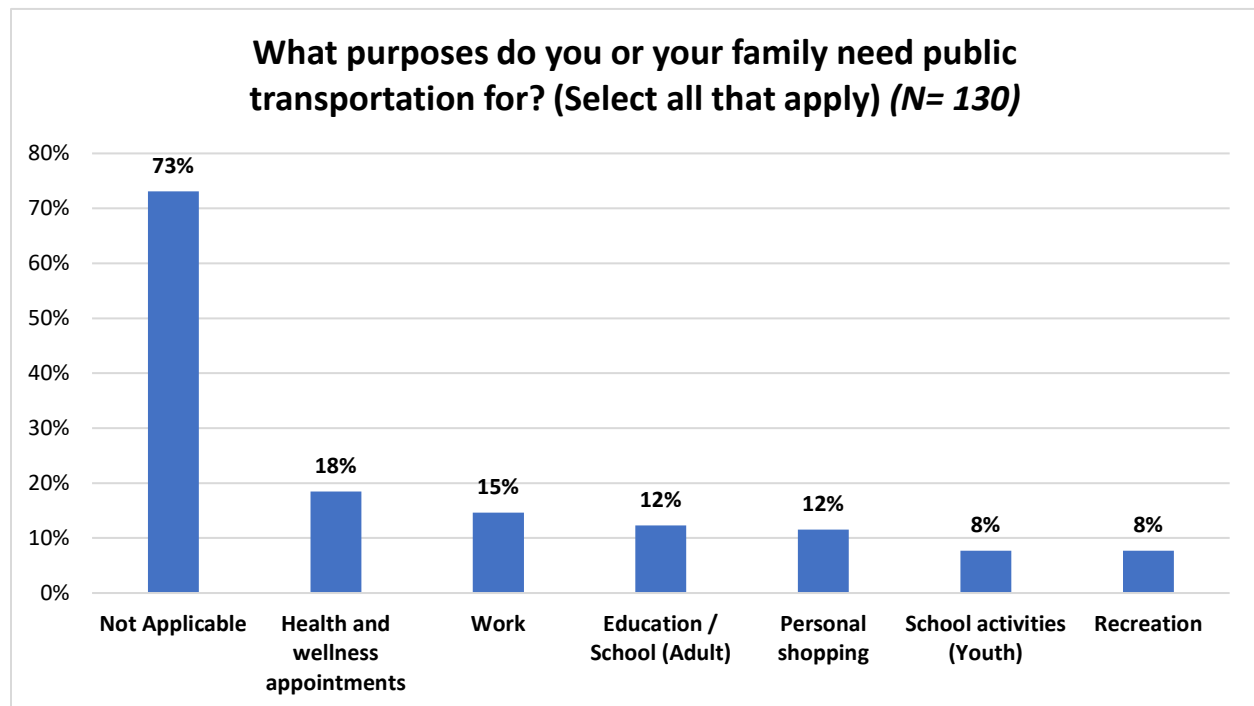


The data from the survey regarding service usage by families over the past year provides insightful details into community needs and resource utilization. A significant portion of respondents, 68.99%, reported using healthcare services, highlighting the critical role these services play in maintaining community health. Mental health care was accessed, with 27.91% of respondents seeking such support. Recreational programs and public safety offices were used by 15.50% and 12.40% of participants, respectively. Childcare and transportation services were utilized by 8.53% of respondents. Additionally, services like educational support, career training, and elderly assistance each drew usage from 6.98% of those surveyed. Financial counseling and housing support were among the least accessed services, with only 6.20% of participants using each. Open-ended responses highlighted critical localized issues such as inadequate emergency medical services on Deal Island and concerns regarding property management and zoning.

Participants indicated barriers they or their families face in accessing community services, offering insights into the challenges within the community infrastructure. The majority of respondents (42.54%) indicated they faced no barriers. However, the availability of services is a concern for 36.57% of the participants, pointing to gaps in the local service provision.

Awareness of available services is another barrier, affecting 23.13% of respondents, highlighting the need for better communication and outreach. Financial constraints were cited by 20.90% of participants. Transportation issues were noted by 14.18%. A smaller percentage reported language barriers and other specific challenges such as delayed medical appointments and the lack of accessible facilities for children with disabilities. Specific feedback from respondents also highlighted community concerns like infrastructure issues during flooding, perceived abuses of welfare systems, and the need for more comprehensive support for residents with disabilities.

Regarding the use of public transportation, 73.08% of respondents stated that public transportation does not apply to them. For those who do utilize public transportation, the primary uses are diverse. Health and wellness appointments are the most common reason, cited by 18.46% of the respondents. Work-related travel follows, with 14.62% using public services to commute. Other significant uses include adult education and school activities, with 12.31% and 7.69%, respectively. Personal shopping and recreational activities are also reliant on public transportation for a smaller portion of the community, each accounting for 11.54% and 7.69%.

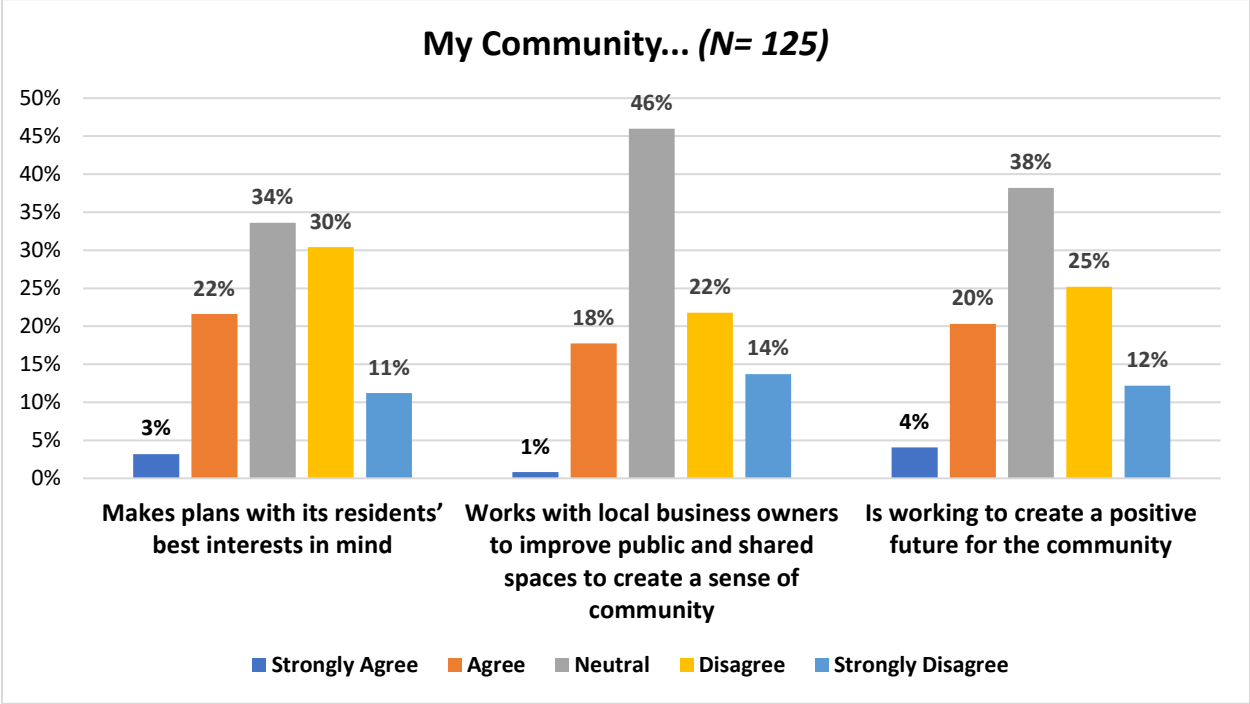


The frequency of public transportation use in Somerset County shows a dominant trend: the majority of respondents, 90.30%, report that they do not use public transportation at all. For

the small portion of the respondents that do use public transportation, usage is minimal: 2.99% of respondents use it three or more days per week, and an equal percentage (2.24%) use it weekly, one or two times a month, or less than once per month.

Aligning with the previous responses for individuals who do not utilize public transportation, a substantial proportion, 56.25%, express neutral feelings toward the current public transportation services. A small fraction, 2.34%, report being very satisfied, with an additional 8.59% satisfied, totaling just under 11% of respondents expressing positive contentment with the services. This suggests that while some users find public transportation adequate, they are a minority. Conversely, dissatisfaction is more pronounced with 32.82% of respondents feeling discontent, broken down into 15.63% dissatisfied and 17.19% very dissatisfied. This level of dissatisfaction highlights areas where public transportation services might be lacking, such as coverage, frequency, reliability, or accessibility.

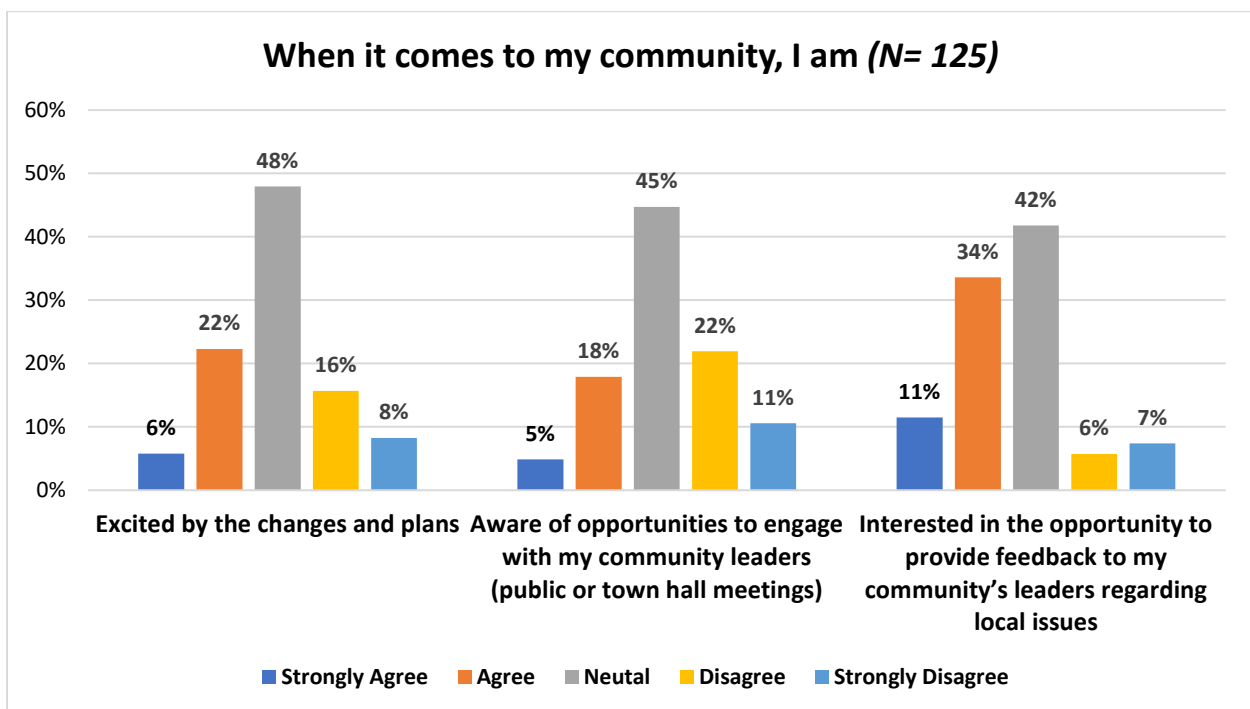
The survey results reveal a nuanced view of community sentiment regarding the effectiveness of local governance and collaboration with business owners. A small fraction of respondents, 3.20%, strongly believe that the community makes plans with residents' best interests in mind, with an additional 21.60% agreeing. Respondents were asked about the community's collaboration with local businesses to improve public and shared spaces; 0.81% of respondents strongly agree that these efforts are effective, 17.74% agree, and 45.97% remain neutral. Regarding the community's efforts to create a positive future, 4.07% strongly agree and 20.33% agree that effective steps are being taken, while 37.40% either disagree or strongly disagree. The detailed results are displayed in the graph below.



The survey data reflects diverse levels of engagement and sentiment regarding community changes and participation within Somerset County. Regarding attitudes toward community changes and plans, 47.93% of respondents indicated neutrality, while 22.31% agreed, and 5.79% strongly agreed with the changes. Disagreement was expressed by 23.96% of participants, indicating some level of dissent.

Concerning awareness of opportunities to engage with community leaders at public or town hall meetings, 44.72% of respondents remained neutral, suggesting a moderate level of engagement or awareness. The proportion of respondents who disagreed (32.52%) surpassed those who agreed (22.77%), highlighting a potential disconnect or lack of communicated opportunities for civic participation.

The survey also explored interest in providing feedback to community leaders, showing a relatively higher level of engagement, with 45.09% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing on their interest in this form of civic engagement. However, 41.80% remained neutral, possibly indicating uncertainty about the effectiveness or outcomes of providing such feedback.

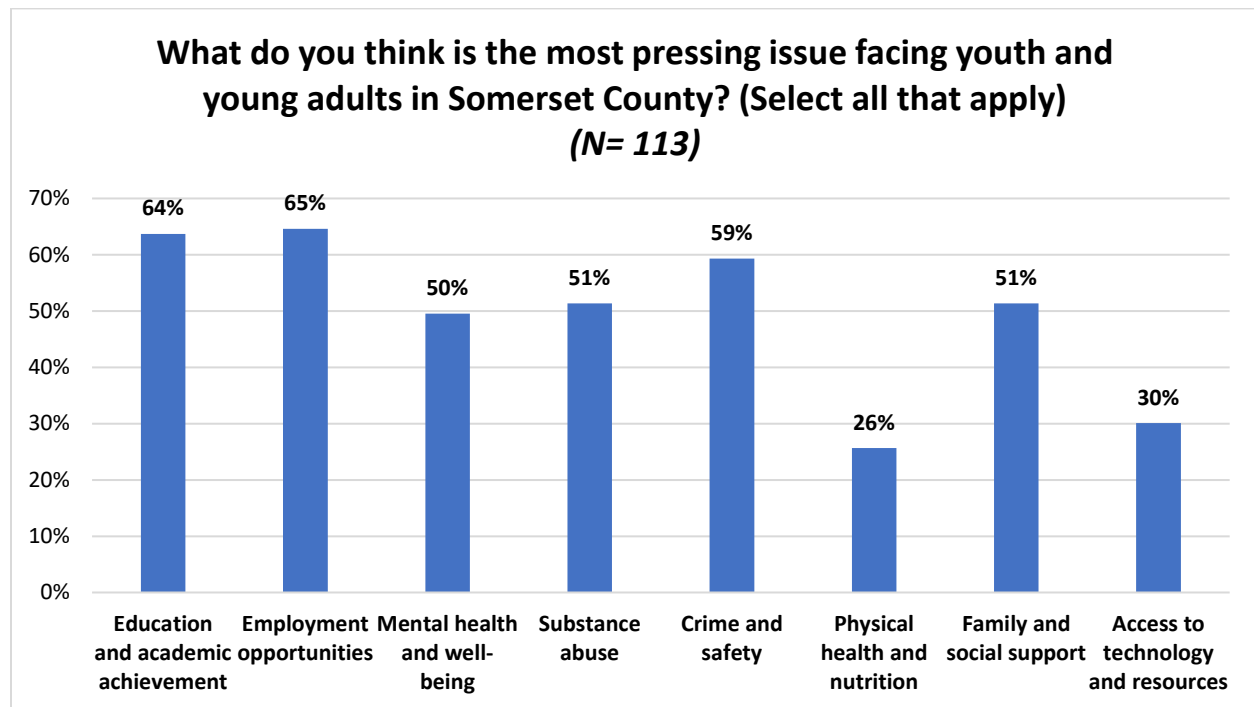


The survey asked about recreational and educational opportunities for youth and young adults in Somerset County. Few respondents, 9.47%, believe that there are enough opportunities available, while 66.96% feel there are not enough, and 23.48% are unsure. Those who believe there are insufficient opportunities expressed a desire for a broader range of activities, particularly beyond sports. Respondents suggested numerous activities and programs they would like to see introduced or expanded, including summer job programs, free swimming, volunteer opportunities, and more diverse youth sports outside of the school system such as track and field and soccer.

Educational and recreational activities that are not sports-related were also a common theme, highlighting a need for inclusive programs that cater to various interests. Suggestions included establishing more community-based educational programs, clubs, tutoring, life skills programs, mentoring, and job training. Additionally, the creation of community centers, youth centers, YMCA facilities, skate parks, theaters, and “safe” hangout spots such as basketball courts and public pools were mentioned. There was also a call for more inclusive events such as fall festivals and Christmas events, reflecting a community desire for programs that foster social interaction and community spirit.

Respondents were asked to identify the most pressing issues facing youth and young adults in Somerset County. There was a broad range of concerns with significant emphasis on employment opportunities and education. Employment opportunities were identified by 64.60% of respondents as a critical issue, closely followed by education and academic achievement, noted by 63.72% of participants. Other significant areas include crime and safety, acknowledged by 59.29% of respondents, and mental health and well-being, concerning nearly half the participants at 49.56%. Substance abuse and family and social support each were identified by 51.33% of respondents, highlighting concerns about the social environment and personal challenges that youth face. Physical health and nutrition, and access to technology and resources were less frequently cited, at 25.66% and 30.09%, respectively.

Responses in the 'Other' category included specific comments that underscore a community desire for more focused educational options like vocational/technical education, a push against the proliferation of marijuana stores in favor of funding for educational facilities, and concerns about parental involvement and engagement in children's lives.



Satisfaction with the current educational opportunities available to youth and young adults in Somerset County reveals a range of sentiments, with the majority of respondents indicating less than positive views. A small fraction, 0.88%, reported being very satisfied, and 17.70% expressed being satisfied, totaling 18.58% who feel positively about the current educational offerings. The largest group, 35.40%, reported neutrality, indicating neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is a notable issue, with 27.43% feeling dissatisfied and 18.58% very dissatisfied, totaling 46.01% of respondents who are unhappy with the current educational opportunities for youth and young adults.

Respondents were asked about the accessibility of mental health services for youth and young adults in Somerset County. A small percentage of respondents, 2.70%, rated these services as very accessible, and 18.92%, considered them accessible, combining for a total of 21.62% who perceive these services as readily available. The largest proportion of participants, 52.25%, responded neutrally, indicating either ambivalence or a lack of definitive experience with the accessibility of these services. Conversely, 19.82% of respondents felt that mental health services were inaccessible, and an additional 6.31%, rated them as very inaccessible. Together, these groups constitute 26.13% of the survey population who report difficulties in accessing mental health services.

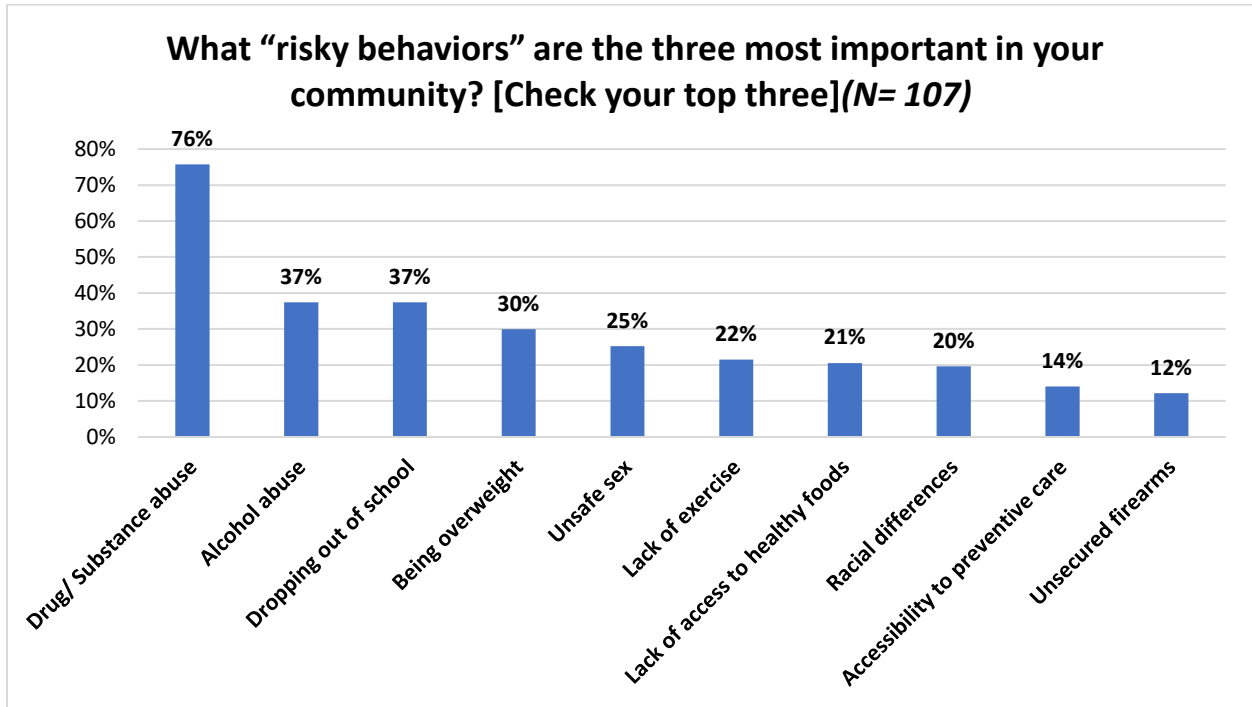
When assessing the resources deemed most necessary for the success of youth and young adults in Somerset County, respondents highlighted a variety of key areas. The need for better educational opportunities and more employment and career services both received significant attention, with each cited by 58.04% of participants as a critical need. Additionally, more recreational facilities and programs were seen as the top requirement by 64.29% of respondents, indicating a desire for more comprehensive, accessible leisure and engagement opportunities to support youth development.

Stronger family and social support systems were also deemed essential by 56.25% of participants, emphasizing the importance of robust community and familial networks in fostering youth success. On the other hand, improved mental health support and enhanced substance abuse prevention programs were noted by 38.39% and 37.50% of respondents, respectively, highlighting a need for better health and wellness resources.

Less prioritized but still notable were increased community safety measures, recognized by 45.54% of respondents, and greater access to technology and resources, identified by 25.89%. This points to an awareness of safety and digital connectivity as foundational elements for youth development.

Additional comments from respondents suggested a need for vocational/technical education options for those not pursuing college, accountability in family and community settings, and the establishment of youth and senior centers, particularly in areas like Crisfield. These responses reflect a broader community call for varied educational paths and stronger community accountability structures to ensure safer, more nurturing environments for young individuals.

The survey results reveal concerns within the community regarding risky behaviors that impact overall health. The most frequently identified issue is "Drug/Substance abuse," highlighted by 75.70% of respondents, followed by "Alcohol abuse" and "Dropping out of school," each selected by 37.38% of participants. "Being overweight" was also a concern at 29.91%, reflecting worries about lifestyle-related health issues. "Unsafe sex" was noted by 25.23% of respondents. Additionally, open-ended comments highlighted issues like the need for welfare reform to address child neglect and the challenges posed by children facing trauma from unstable homes, unwed pregnancies, and a general lack of discipline and accountability.



The survey data provides insights into the prevalence of mental health conditions within families and opinions on the adequacy of local mental health services. According to the survey, 40.37% of respondents reported that either they or someone in their immediate family had been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Satisfaction levels with the mental health services in Somerset County are mixed: 2.53% of respondents strongly agree, and 11.39% agree that the services met their needs, while 50.63% neither agree nor disagree. Additionally, 18.99% disagree and 16.46% strongly disagree with the statement that the services are adequate.

The demographic data from the survey shows a predominantly older and female respondent base. The largest age group represented is those aged 49-64, accounting for 48.15% of the responses, followed by the 37-48 age group at 25%, and those 65 and older at 20.37%. Young adults aged 25-36 make up only 6.48% of the participants, and there were no respondents aged 18-24. In terms of gender, 75.93% of respondents identify as women and 19.44% as men, with

no non-binary individuals or other genders reported. A small percentage (4.63%) chose not to specify their gender.

Educationally, the respondents are quite varied, with the highest percentage (23.15%) holding advanced degrees (Master's, PhD, or other). Some college education was reported by 22.22% of participants, closely followed by those with a bachelor's degree at 19.44%. High school diploma or equivalent holders make up 17.59% of the survey population.

Racially, 62.62% of respondents are White, and 20.56% are Black or African American. Very few respondents are of other races, and 12.15% preferred not to answer the race and ethnicity question. Household income data shows a broad range, with the largest group (21.50%) earning between \$50,000 and \$74,999 annually, and a similar percentage opting not to disclose their income. The next largest income group earns \$25,000-\$49,999, representing 14.02% of responses.

The survey asked respondents to identify their household compositions. Among those who provided details, 30.61% have children under the age of 5, and 55.10% have children between the ages of 5 and 17. Young adults aged 18 to 24 are present in 37.76% of the households, while the majority, 90.82%, have members aged 25 years or older. The additional breakdown of household members by specific age ranges reveals diverse family structures. For children aged 5 to 17, responses ranged from having none to four children in this age group. Households with members aged 18 to 24 typically reported having up to three young adults. The most varied responses were for members aged 25 or older, with numbers ranging from one to five or more individuals in this category. This detail indicates that many households include multiple adults and at least one child under 17, while fewer contain members in the young adult category of 18 to 24.

### Young Adults Survey

Survey participants were asked about their overall educational experience attending Somerset County Schools. Out of six respondents, none reported being satisfied or very satisfied. A small portion, approximately 17%, felt neutral about their education. The majority expressed dissatisfaction, with 50% stating they were dissatisfied and about 33% very dissatisfied. Regarding the adequacy of current education or training in preparing students for their future careers, responses were unanimous. All respondents believe that their education does not adequately prepare them for their future careers.

The data on students' access to resources necessary for success in their educational or career pursuits shows varied responses. One out of six respondents, or 16.67%, feels that they have consistent access to the needed resources. Half of the respondent's report having no access to essential resources, and the remaining two respondents (33.33%) indicate that they only sometimes have access.



Participation in various activities among respondents over the past year shows a diverse range of engagements. The highest participation rate is in college coursework, with 66.67% involved in academic studies. Recreational activities, such as sports and fitness, also saw significant involvement, with 50% of respondents participating. Vocational or skills training was pursued by 33.33%. A smaller portion, 16.67%, engaged in volunteer work and college or career readiness programs.

The survey highlights several significant barriers that respondents face in participating in activities. Financial problems are the most common obstacle, affecting 83.33% of respondents, followed by a lack of transportation and mental health issues, each impacting 66.67%. Family responsibilities and lack of interest each were cited by 50% of respondents as impediments. Safety concerns also pose a barrier for 33.33% of individuals.

Over the past year, respondents have utilized a range of services, with counseling or therapy being the most frequently accessed at 83.33%. Health services, including visits to doctors and dentists, were also notably used by 66.67% of the respondents. Other services such as tutoring, career training/counseling, and transportation (including buses, taxis, Uber, or similar) were each utilized by 16.67% of the respondents. No respondents reported using free meal programs, and a small portion, 16.67%, did not use any of the services listed. This data highlights a significant dependence on mental health support and healthcare services within this group.

The surveys assessing the quality of services provided to respondents indicate significant room for improvement, as no services were rated as "Excellent." School counseling/therapy and tutoring were both critically viewed, with 60% of respondents rating them as "Poor." Additionally, school counseling/therapy was deemed "Fair" by 50% of the participants, while only 20% gave the same rating to tutoring. Career training/counseling and health services (doctors, dentists) received relatively better feedback, with 40% of responses rating them as "Good" and another 40% as "Poor." Transportation services and the free meal program showed mixed results; half of the respondents rated them as "Fair," but the free meal program was also considered "Poor" by 40%. Notably, 40% of participants did not use transportation services, and 20% did not use the free meal program, marking these as "N/A."

The respondents' evaluation of their overall physical health shows a range of views. No one rated their physical health as "Excellent." Only a minority, 33.33%, considered their health to be "Good." Most, 50%, rated it as "Fair," and a smaller group, 16.67%, regarded their health as "Poor." When asked about resources for physical health, only a third of respondents, 33.33%, confirmed that they have access to such resources. The majority, 66.67%, expressed uncertainty about their access.

The assessment of respondents' mental health also raises concerns. None rated their mental health as "Excellent" or "Good." The responses were divided equally, with half, 50%, labeling their mental health as "Fair" and the remaining half, 50%, considering it "Poor." Concerning

access to mental health resources, only a third of the respondents, 33.33%, feel they have access to these resources. Half of the respondents, 50%, are unsure about their access. An open-ended comment revealed concerns with feeling safe while accessing mental health resources.

Emotional distress is another area of concern. All respondents, 100%, reported experiencing feelings associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, 66.67% of the respondents indicated they have had trouble sleeping (insomnia) and the same proportion reported having thoughts about self-harm (suicidal thoughts). None of the respondents reported being free of these feelings, nor did they specify any other feelings outside those listed.

Respondents revealed a variety of significant stressors affecting their lives. All respondents, 100%, identified managing work/study responsibilities, relationships with family/household members, financial difficulties, and planning for the future (career, further education) as primary sources of stress. Additionally, concerns about physical appearance/weight were a source of stress for 66.67% of respondents. Responsibilities at home and accessing food at home were stressors for 50% and 16.67% of the participants, respectively. Relationships with friends and balancing extracurricular activities (sports, hobbies) each were noted by only one respondent (16.67%).

Results concerning access to a nutritious diet at home show that 33.33% of respondents consistently have access to nutritious food. However, 50% reported that they only sometimes have access, and 16.67% indicated that they do not have access to nutritious food at all.

Community involvement shows an even split among respondents regarding their participation in community service or volunteer activities. Half of the respondents, 50% (3 out of 6), reported that they are involved in such activities, while the other half indicated that they are not involved. Results on preferred methods for receiving information about services or activities indicate a strong preference for digital communication channels. Local websites and social media were the most preferred methods, with 66.67% of respondents selecting each. Email and text messages were also favored by 50% of respondents. In contrast, no respondents indicated a preference for community newsletters or flyers/posters.

Results on job opportunities indicate that 75% of respondents feel they do not have adequate job opportunities, while only 25% believe they do. Among those who cited barriers to employment, specific challenges included a lack of understanding of mental health issues and insufficient transportation options.

The open-ended responses regarding the biggest challenges young adults face in the community highlight a range of concerns. Respondents identified financial struggles, such as difficulty escaping financial hardship and poverty, as significant issues. A lack of job opportunities and insufficient funding for education were also noted, alongside concerns about poor quality of life and limited support systems. Additionally, mental health challenges,

substance abuse, and a shortage of resources for education and personal development were mentioned.

The open-ended responses regarding missing programs or services for young adults in the community reveal a focus on employment and mental health support. Respondents highlighted the need for more job opportunities, job fairs, and fun activities to engage young adults. Mental health services and access to college fairs were also identified as important areas for development.

The survey data shows that 66.67% of respondents are aged 21-24, while 33.33% are aged 18-20. Half of the respondents identified as female, and the other half chose not to disclose their gender; no respondents identified as male, non-binary, or another gender. Regarding employment, 66.67% reported having a job, while 33.33% were unemployed. In terms of education, 33.33% completed some college without a degree, 33.33% hold a bachelor's degree, 16.67% have a high school diploma or GED, and 16.67% preferred not to disclose their education level. For race and ethnicity, 33.33% identified as White, 16.67% as Black or African American, and 50% preferred not to disclose.

### Focus Group Outcomes

To encourage participation and interest in the focus groups, several deployment strategies were employed, including social media promotion, printed materials, emails sent to a purchased email list, and direct outreach to SLMB constituent groups. Focus groups were held with both residents and partner agencies in Somerset County to gather insights on their opinions and experiences related to community needs. A total of 40 individuals participated in the discussions. Three community focus groups were conducted in Crisfield, Princess Anne, and Westover, along with two youth focus groups at Crisfield High School and Washington High School. Additionally, a service provider roundtable was held at the Local Management Board office, with six participants discussing challenges and potential opportunities for enhanced collaboration. The chart below offers a comprehensive overview of each focus group.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Constituency Group</b>
Oct. 30, 2024	Princess Anne Library	18 and over	1	Community
Nov. 7, 2024	Crisfield Library	18 and over	2	Community
Nov. 12, 2024	Somerset Board of Education	18 and over	18	Parents
Nov. 14, 2024	Princess Anne Library	18 and over	6	LMB Providers
Dec. 11, 2024	Crisfield High School	17 and under	12	Youth
Dec. 16, 2024	Washington High School	17 and under	4	Youth

## Community Focus Groups

Residents of Somerset County face challenges with limited job opportunities, particularly in full-time roles that provide sufficient income. Key employment sectors include the Eastern Correctional Institute and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, but fear and geographical limitations, such as those in Crisfield's seafood industry, often deter job acceptance. The community strongly feels the need for more industries to offer better-paying, full-time positions, as many available jobs are part-time and low-wage, exacerbating issues like transportation and economic instability.

Transportation issues are a barrier in maintaining employment, especially for well-paying jobs requiring long commutes. This challenge extends to youth and young adults, limiting their employment opportunities and increasing their likelihood of engaging in problematic behaviors. Furthermore, transportation difficulties hinder access to essential services, including healthcare, with inadequate solutions for accommodating special needs like specialized wheelchairs.

Healthcare access is constrained with long wait times and a shortage of local providers, compounded by transportation challenges. There is also a notable distrust of healthcare providers among African American communities.

Substance abuse is a critical concern, with apparent generational patterns of negative behaviors and a lack of early intervention services for youth. The community has suggested that mental health providers also screen for substance abuse to better address these interconnected issues. Treatment services are often limited unless a youth's condition becomes severe. Youth engagement and education also present challenges, with limited recreational programs and varying educational quality. Some schools face significant issues like crime, leading some families to prefer homeschooling. The community has noted a need for better inclusion of non-English speaking residents and recommended more resources such as translators and English instruction to improve participation and integration in community and educational programs.

On November 12, 2024, following a scheduled meeting of parents of young children, BEACON hosted a gathering with 18 parents to discuss community issues impacting their families. The discussion started by identifying the most pressing concerns through a show of hands, revealing that the cost of living was the most significant issue, affecting 89% of participants. Childcare services and job availability for youth were also major concerns. Other noted issues included healthcare, transportation, and access to treatment services, among others.

During the group discussion, financial struggles were highlighted, with many parents stressing the importance of credit building and financial education. They proposed that teaching financial literacy in schools could prevent financial difficulties and help future generations make better decisions. Education concerns extended to local schools, which were seen as lacking compared

to other regions like New York. Issues such as canceled after-school programs due to transportation challenges and the inability to make up school days due to flooding were also discussed.

The conversation also touched on the need for continuing adult education, suggesting that local Vo-Tech schools should offer more programs for adults to learn trades or earn a GED. This could lead to higher wages and boost the local economy. In terms of youth engagement and mental health, parents expressed a need for more structured programs and after-school activities to keep young people engaged and out of trouble. They highlighted a severe gap in mental health services, noting long waiting lists and insufficient access to necessary care, even in critical situations.

Transportation issues were a significant concern, with many residents lacking personal vehicles and facing inconvenient bus schedules. Participants expressed a need for more frequent and reliable public transportation options to ensure timely access to employment and services. Healthcare access was another critical issue, especially the lack of specialists and the distance required to travel for specialized care, which ties back to the transportation difficulties.

The availability and quality of nutritious food were discussed. Participants noted the limited options in local stores, with many opting to travel further for better quality and variety, especially when purchasing meat and fresh produce. This situation underscores the broader challenges facing Somerset County residents, from economic struggles to health care and nutrition access.

### **Youth Focus Groups**

High school students in Somerset County raised numerous concerns about their school environments, highlighting several critical issues affecting their educational experience. A significant concern was the lack of funding, which was evident in the deteriorating school facilities. Students reported peeling paint, malfunctioning laptops, broken microphones, flickering auditorium lights, outdated textbooks, bathroom stalls that don't lock, a shortage of paper towels, inadequate sports equipment, and broken windows, indicating a broad need for comprehensive renovations.

In terms of educational content, while overall complaints about the quality of instruction were minimal, students noted that some tests were overly challenging, and teachers did not always cover all the necessary material on exams. There was a clear desire among the students for more practical courses, such as financial literacy, budgeting, resume writing, and career planning and development, to better prepare them for future challenges.

Nutritional concerns were also prominent, with students expressing dissatisfaction with the small portions, limited choices, and the overall healthiness of the food provided. Although Crisfield High School had introduced a salad bar, it was not always free, requiring students to

choose between it and the regular lunch offerings. Additionally, suggestions were made for providing athletes with two meals on game days to better support their nutritional needs.

Transportation and access posed significant challenges, impacting students' ability to work and access medical care among other services, with many essential facilities located significant distances away in places like Princess Anne or Salisbury. The lack of reliable transportation options led to a dependency on parents and made it difficult for students without a driver's license to gain employment.

Teacher turnover and conduct were also areas of concern. Students reported that many teachers leave for better-paying positions in other counties, and there were instances of inappropriate behavior by some teachers, exacerbated by the difficulty in finding replacement staff. This shortage has led to higher education officials temporarily taking on teaching roles, often expressing dissatisfaction with the situation.

Safety at the schools was flagged as an issue by participants. Students described an alarming environment with daily fights, incidents of shootings, and other violent behaviors, noting that younger students, particularly those in 8th grade, were often the most involved in these disturbances.

These various issues, from funding and safety to the quality of educational content and access to resources, underline the complex challenges facing students in Somerset County. The concerns reflect broader systemic issues within the educational system and the community infrastructure, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and sustained improvements to enhance the educational environment and overall student well-being.

### **Service Provider Round Table**

During the meeting on November 14th at the Princess Anne Library, representatives from different service providers in Somerset County shared insights on the services their organizations provide and the challenges they face, without specifying their respective agencies. The discussions revealed several key issues and areas for improvement.

The representatives highlighted the local workforce training efforts, including hosting classes like Excel and utilizing spaces such as libraries in Crisfield and Westover to meet with clients. They pointed out the geographical challenges of service delivery in areas far from the population centers and stressed the importance of one-on-one spaces for client meetings. Transportation was repeatedly mentioned as a significant barrier, affecting not only service delivery but also the client's ability to access services, including for families and children, who often need basic supplies like car seats and diapers. The group also discussed the challenges in education and community services, emphasizing the need for more accessible and engaging programs for families, particularly those with young children. They noted the difficulties in getting people to programs due to transportation issues and the lack of essential supplies.

On the topic of unmet needs, there was a consensus on the scarcity of mental health services and suitable living arrangements for seniors, highlighting the hardship these gaps create. The lack of digital literacy and outdated technology were significant barriers, making it difficult for residents, including seniors, to access online services and fill out necessary forms for state services. The representatives proposed several innovative solutions to improve service delivery and access, such as creating a comprehensive resource manual and ensuring each agency has a dedicated contact person to facilitate easier access and updates. They were aware of the ageing and retirement of long-serving staff who have developed a working knowledge of the other resources and contacts. The agencies should coordinate in helping new staff learn about what other agencies do and who to contact. The Local Care Team has not been as active as it once was; there may be an opportunity to improve participation. They emphasized the need for better coordination among service providers, more precise referrals, and addressing specific issues like transportation for seniors with mobility aids.

## Key Informant Interviews

SCLMB and BEACON curated a list of key stakeholders that would serve as Key Informant (KI) interviewees. The KIs would provide a range of perspectives and would be the most knowledgeable on community needs in Somerset County. Scheduling of KI interviews was completed via email to potential participants. These emails included a brief background of the project, a reference to the SCLMB, and interview logistics (i.e., the approximate number of questions, the amount of time expected for the interview, and the overall timeline for completing the interviews).

Follow-up emails were sent to confirmed participants that included the meeting invitation and details regarding what to expect the day of the meeting. A total number of 34 individuals were contacted to participate in these conversations, and 14 individuals responded to schedule the interviews. Interview notes were analyzed and summarized by question type. All participating agencies were asked the same 18 questions which helped develop the core themes.

The most frequently discussed challenge was the lack of transportation, which was highlighted in all interviews conducted. When asked to identify the top three issues requiring immediate attention, 10 out of 14 respondents pointed to transportation as a critical concern. The problem is particularly acute on isolated, landlocked islands and in rural areas like Crisfield, where access to essential services such as medical, dental, and mental health care is limited. For example, obtaining specialized care for conditions like autism involves lengthy travels, such as a six-hour round trip to the Kennedy-Krieger Institute on the Western Shore. Although there are plans to open a facility in Easton, the lack of public transportation continues to be a significant barrier for those without personal vehicles.

The intersection of low wages and scarce employment opportunities exacerbates transportation issues. Residents, unable to afford a car, find themselves unable to pursue job opportunities in distant towns like Salisbury or Princess Anne. Suggestions to improve public transportation, like increasing the frequency of Shore Transit and adding more stops, have been proposed as partial solutions. However, unlike some regions where employer-provided bus services exist, such options are currently unavailable in Somerset County, further complicating access to jobs and essential services.

Access to social and government services also remains a substantial challenge, closely tied to transportation barriers. Services available in Princess Anne are often inaccessible to residents of more remote areas like Crisfield. Although some government buildings like the District Court House are served by bus routes, comprehensive coverage is lacking, leaving many essential services out of reach for those without personal transport.

In addition to transportation, employment is a pressing concern. Somerset County's economy relies on a few major employers like the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), Eastern Correctional Institution (ECI), and Rubberset in Crisfield. Job opportunities are limited, and the closure of local businesses adds to the economic strain. The need for more substantial economic development to create better-paying jobs is evident, as is the role of education in fostering local employment opportunities.

For juveniles, engagement in positive activities is seen as a preventive measure against delinquency. However, opportunities for involvement in sports and mentorship programs are limited. Programs at Washington High School, such as mentoring by sheriff deputies, have shown positive impacts, reducing arrests significantly. The lack of recreational facilities and structured after-school programs continues to leave many young people at risk of engaging in negative behaviors.

Housing affordability is another challenge, linked closely with the broader challenges of poverty and unemployment. The rise in housing costs post-COVID has made it increasingly difficult for many residents to afford rent, with social service agencies struggling to assist those in need.

Mental health has gained prominence as a concern, especially since the pandemic. While there are mental health providers in places like Princess Anne and Crisfield, specialized services are scarce, and the stigma associated with seeking mental health care remains a significant barrier. Substance abuse is noted as a major concern, with significant impacts on the youth of the county. The lack of positive recreational outlets and financial stress within families contribute to higher rates of drug use and experimentation among young people.

Childcare is another critical area where the lack of services impacts the community significantly. The scarcity of available childcare options restricts parents' ability to access employment, utilize social services, and engage with government organizations, adding considerable stress to families already under financial strain. Interviewees noted the urgent need for more childcare facilities but did not provide detailed elaboration on potential solutions.



## Linkages Between Focus Groups, Key Informant Interviews and Surveys

The major themes emerging from both the focus group discussions and the Key Informant (KI) interviews reveal significant overlap and provide a cohesive picture of the community's core challenges and needs.

**Employment and Economic Stability:** Both focus groups and KI interviews identified a shortage of employment opportunities, particularly full-time positions that offer adequate income. The scarcity of jobs contributes to the broader economic challenges faced by residents, with both discussions suggesting a need for more local workforce training and better educational opportunities to enhance employability and stimulate economic growth.

**Transportation:** Transportation was identified as a significant barrier in all discussions, impacting access to jobs, healthcare, and other essential services. The geographical isolation of areas like Crisfield exacerbates these issues, limiting residents' ability to access medical care or pursue employment outside their immediate locality. Suggestions for improving public transportation infrastructure include increasing the frequency of Shore Transit and adding more stops.

**Education and Youth Engagement:** Concerns about education were prevalent, with participants highlighting inadequate school facilities and a curriculum that does not adequately prepare youth for practical challenges. KIs and focus groups both stressed the importance of more relevant educational content, like financial literacy and career planning, and the need for vocational training programs to engage youth more effectively and prepare them for future employment.

**Healthcare and Mental Health Services:** Both sets of discussions pointed to gaps in healthcare and mental health services, amplified by long wait times and a shortage of providers. The transportation challenges further complicate access to these services. The discussions also touched on the stigma associated with seeking mental health care and the urgent need for addressing substance abuse, which is particularly impactful on the youth.

**Safety and Community Welfare:** Safety within the community, especially in schools, emerged as a critical concern from the focus groups, with frequent reports of violence affecting the learning environment. The KIs also recognized the need for more robust community support systems to improve safety and welfare, underscoring the connection between social stability and access to comprehensive community services.

**Housing and Childcare:** The rising cost of housing post-COVID has made affordability a pressing issue, as highlighted by both KIs and focus groups. The lack of affordable childcare further strains families, impacting parents' ability to work and access essential services.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on comprehensive data gathered from surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews conducted across Somerset County. These sources collectively highlight critical issues such as limited employment opportunities, transportation barriers, gaps in healthcare and mental health services, educational challenges, and the need for enhanced community engagement. Addressing these topics through targeted strategies will help create a more supportive, inclusive, and resilient community for residents of all ages, particularly young adults.

### **1. Improved Access to Employment Opportunities**

**1.1.** Emphasize vocational and technical education, particularly for young adults not pursuing college degrees. Expand earlier access to vocational and career training, looking at classes that can be provided at the start of high school.

**1.2.** Organize biannual job fairs in collaboration with local employers and educational institutions. Include resume-building workshops, interview preparation, and career counseling services.

### **2. Education and Youth Programs**

**2.1.** Enhance school safety by securing grant funding and fostering public-private partnerships. Advocate for state-level support to provide resources such as additional school resource officers or increased access to behavioral counseling services.

**2.2.** Increase the availability of after-school programs and recreational activities, focusing on diverse interests beyond sports. Introduce mentoring programs, financial literacy, resume writing, career planning, life skills workshops, and volunteer opportunities to engage youth constructively. This may include funding to staff access to school facilities after normal operating hours.

### **3. Behavioral Health and Healthcare**

**3.1.** Expand mental health service offerings, including counseling, therapy, and crisis intervention programs. Ensure services are accessible, affordable, and culturally sensitive. Because the quality of school counseling/therapy and tutoring was very low, and there is demand among the youth/young adults, a targeted activity of increasing the quality and availability of these services should be explored. This should also include regular evaluation of students' perception of those services.

**3.2.** Implement community-wide awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around mental health and substance misuse treatment. Ensure services are provided in safe, welcoming environments.

**3.3.** Address healthcare provider shortages, especially in mental health and substance misuse, by offering incentives to attract medical professionals to Somerset County. Explore opportunities to collaborate with TidalHealth’s physician residency program to support this effort.

**3.4.** Increase access to healthy food and nutrition education, with a focus on engaging youth. Introduce nutrition education programs in schools and throughout the community to promote healthier lifestyles.

#### **4. Transportation**

**4.1.** Collaborate with local employers to explore the feasibility of employer-sponsored transportation services, particularly for shift workers and those commuting to distant job locations.

**4.2.** Provide transportation subsidies or vouchers for residents needing access to healthcare, education, and employment. The SCLMB could explore a very targeted project in coordination with social services, looking at the geographic area with the highest density of requests.

#### **5. Community Engagement**

**5.1.** Use preferred digital communication channels such as local websites, social media, email, and text messages to disseminate information about services and activities. Increase awareness of available resources and civic engagement opportunities.

**5.2.** Promote town hall meetings and other forums where residents can voice concerns and participate in community decision-making. Ensure representation from young adults and marginalized groups. The regular inclusion of translation services at these meetings could improve participation and engagement of individuals with limited English proficiency.

#### **6. Housing and Family Support**

**6.1.** Develop programs that provide financial counseling, credit-building resources, and emergency rental assistance to prevent housing instability.

**6.2.** Expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare facilities by providing subsidies and support to families facing childcare barriers. The SCLMB can explore partnerships with the Lower Shore Childcare Resource Center to offer targeted assistance within the county.

**6.3.** Additional support activities could include ongoing support for individuals with limited computer abilities, building on existing programming at the local libraries. This may also include scheduled days when individuals from the service agencies or a state

agency could be available at the library once a month to provide their services and answer questions about forms and processes.

**6.4.** Improve support for family intervention and training by expanding programs like the Healthy Families initiative to include families with children aged 6 to 10 in specific areas. This support could include parental training in areas such as stress management, along with access to respite care services.

## **7. Improved Service Delivery**

**7.1.** Improve coordination among service providers to ensure seamless access to resources. This could include a renewed Local Care Team meeting schedule, possibly inviting new staff members to attend so they would learn about other agencies.

**7.2.** Develop a comprehensive resource manual and establish dedicated contact points within each agency.

**7.3.** Provide more accurate referrals that address specific needs, including transportation solutions for individuals with unique challenges, such as those who use motorized wheelchairs.

## **Conclusion**

The Community Needs Assessment for Somerset County reveals a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities that require coordinated efforts from policymakers, service providers, and community members. Key areas of concern include employment accessibility, transportation limitations, gaps in mental health and healthcare services, and deficiencies in educational resources and youth programming. By addressing these issues through targeted interventions—such as expanding job training programs, improving transportation infrastructure, enhancing healthcare access, and investing in educational facilities—the county can create a more equitable and thriving environment for its residents. The recommendations outlined in this report, grounded in community input and data-driven analysis, serve as a roadmap for informed decision-making and resource allocation. Implementing these strategies will not only meet immediate needs but also promote long-term growth and resilience within Somerset County.

## Appendix A: Survey Questions

## Somerset County Community Needs Assessment Community Survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your input is valuable in understanding the needs of Somerset County. This survey aims to gather information on various issues including transportation, youth/young adults, and mental health in Somerset County.

Your opinion is important as the Local Management Board aims to understand the issues facing Somerset County to create a safe and successful community. The following survey will only take a couple of minutes to complete but will provide us with the necessary information that will allow us to continue our research. The survey is anonymous, and no personally identifying information will be collected.

If you choose NOT to complete this survey, it will not affect any of the services provided to you by Somerset County. If you do not feel comfortable answering or have no answer to a question, you may use the answer choice N/A or skip the question. Respondents should be 18 or older and a resident of Somerset County.

If you have any adverse effects or concerns about the research, please contact the primary investigator, John Hickman, at [Beacon@salisbury.edu](mailto:Beacon@salisbury.edu).

### **Are you 18 years or older?**

- Yes
- No (Disqualified)

### **1. How would you rate the following issues for your household? (Rank Needs from Serious Problem, Moderate Problem, Not a Problem, Does not Apply)**

- a. Availability of jobs for adults
- b. Availability of jobs for youth
- c. Access to transportation
- d. Public education
- e. Childcare services
- f. Cost of living
- g. Debt
- h. Access to financial services
- i. Elderly living assistance
- j. Availability of healthcare
- k. Access to immigrant services
- l. Access to substance abuse services
- m. Access to treatment services

**2. Which issues are most important to your household? (Select the top four areas)**

- a. Employment
- b. Child care
- c. Public safety
- d. Cost/Access of healthy food
- e. Access to childcare
- f. Quality of education for school-aged children
- g. Accessibility for people with disabilities
- h. Involvement in local decision making
- i. After-school or summer programs for youth
- j. Access to health care
- k. Access to mental health services
- l. Caring for family members who cannot care for themselves
- m. Access to recreational programming
- n. Transportation
- o. Services and programming for seniors
- p. Other (please specify)

**3. Which services have you or your family used in the past year? (Select all that apply)**

- a. Health care
- b. Mental health care
- c. Child care
- d. Transportation
- e. Work/Career training
- f. Educational support
- g. Public safety offices
- h. Financial counseling
- i. Elderly assistance
- j. Housing support
- k. Recreational programs
- l. Not Applicable

**4. What barriers have you or your family faced in accessing community services? (Select all that apply)**

- a. Transportation
- b. Financial
- c. Awareness
- d. Language barriers
- e. Availability of services

- f. None
- g. Other (please specify)

**5. What purposes do you or your family need public transportation for? (Select all that apply)**

- a. Public transportation includes Bus, Train, Taxi or Rideshare, Shared van, and other similar services.
- b. Work
- c. Health and wellness appointments
- d. Personal shopping
- e. Education / School (Adult)
- f. School activities (Youth)
- g. Recreation
- h. Not Applicable

**6. How frequently do you use public transportation in Somerset County?**

- a. Three or more days per week
- b. Weekly
- c. One or two times a month
- d. Less than once per month
- e. I do not use public transportation

**7. How satisfied are you with the current public transportation available in Somerset County?**

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

**9. When it comes to my community, I am...(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)**

- a. Excited by the changes and plans
- b. Aware of opportunities to engage with my community leaders (public or town hall meetings)
- c. Interested in the opportunity to provide feedback to my community's leaders regarding local issues



**10. Do you believe there are enough recreational and educational opportunities available for youth and young adults in Somerset County?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure
- d. Other (please specify)

12. What do you think is the most pressing issue facing youth and young adults in Somerset County?  
(Select all that apply)

- a. Education and academic achievement
- b. Employment opportunities
- c. Mental health and well-being
- d. Substance abuse
- e. Crime and safety
- f. Physical health and nutrition
- g. Family and social support
- h. Access to technology and resources

13. How satisfied are you with the current educational opportunities available to youth and young adults in Somerset County?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- d. Dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

14. How accessible are mental health services for youth and young adults in Somerset County?

- a. Very accessible
- b. Accessible
- c. Neutral
- d. Inaccessible
- e. Very inaccessible
- f. Other (please specify)

15. What do you believe is the most needed resource for youth and young adults in Somerset County to succeed? (Select all that apply)

- a. Better educational opportunities
- b. More employment and career services

- c. Improved mental health support
- d. Enhanced substance abuse prevention programs
- e. Increased community safety measures
- f. More recreational facilities and programs
- g. Stronger family and social support systems
- h. Greater access to technology and resources

**16. Of the following list, what “risky behaviors” are the three most important in your community? (Those that have the greatest impact on the overall community health.) [Check your top three]**

- a. Alcohol abuse
- b. Being overweight
- c. Dropping out of school
- d. Drug/ Substance abuse
- e. Lack of exercise
- f. Lack of maternity care
- g. lack of access to healthy foods
- h. Not getting “shots” to prevent disease
- i. Racial differences
- j. Tobacco use
- k. Not using seat belts/child safety seats
- l. Unsafe sex
- m. Unsecured firearms
- n. Accessibility to preventive care

**17. Has anyone in your immediate family, including yourself, ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition?**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

**18. If yes, do you feel that the mental health services available in Somerset County were adequate in meeting your or your family member's needs?**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

**19. What is your age Range?**

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-36
- c. 37-48
- d. 49-64
- e. 65+

**20. Which of the following options most closely aligns with your gender?**

- a. Woman
- b. Man
- c. Non-binary
- d. A gender not listed here
- e. Prefer not to answer

**20. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- a. Some Middle School or Less
- b. High School Diploma/GED/Equivalent
- c. Some College
- d. Associate's Degree
- e. Bachelor's Degree
- f. Advanced Degree (Master's, PhD, other)
- g. Trade School
- h. Prefer not to answer

**21. What is your race or ethnicity?**

- a. Asian
- b. Black or African American
- c. Hispanic or Latino
- d. Middle Eastern or North African
- e. Multiracial or Multiethnic
- f. Native American or Alaska Native
- g. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- h. White
- i. Prefer not to answer

**22. What is your approximate average household income before taxes?**

- a. \$0-\$24,999
- b. \$25,000-\$49,999
- c. \$50,000-\$74,999

- d. \$75,000-\$99,999
- e. \$100,000-\$124,999
- f. \$125,000-\$149,999
- g. \$150,000 or more
- h. Prefer not to answer

**23. Including yourself, please list how many individuals in your household are:**

- a. Under the age of 5
- b. 5 to 17 years old
- c. 18 - 24
- d. 25 years or older

**24. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?**

- a. Employed, working full-time
- b. Employed, working part-time
- c. Not employed, looking for work
- d. Not employed, NOT looking for work
- e. Retired
- f. Disabled, not able to work
- g. Prefer not to answer

## **Somerset County Local Management Board**

### **Community Needs Assessment for Young Adults**

#### **Introduction:**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey! Your input is valuable in understanding the needs of Somerset County. This survey aims to gather information on various issues including transportation, employment opportunities, safety, and mental health in Somerset County, which may be personal or sensitive. Your responses will help in developing strategies to address these issues effectively.

The following survey will only take a couple of minutes to complete but will provide us with the necessary information that will allow us to continue improving services within Somerset County. The survey is anonymous, and no personally identifying questions will be collected. Please use your honest opinion to ensure we get the best results.

If you choose NOT to complete this survey, this will not affect any of the services provided to you by Somerset County. If you do not feel comfortable answering or have no answer to a question, you may use the answer choice N/A or skip the question. Respondents should be 18-24 years old and residents of Somerset County.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at Salisbury University at 410-548-3549 or toll-free 1-888-543-0148.

#### **Survey Questions:**

**1. How do you feel about your overall education experience attending Somerset County Schools?**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**2. Do you feel you have access to the resources you need to succeed in your educational or career pursuits?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**3. Do you think your current education or training is preparing you adequately for your future career?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

4. **Which of the following activities have you participated in during the past year?** (Check all that apply)

- Recreational activities (sports, fitness)
- Volunteer work
- Professional development programs
- College or career readiness programs
- Vocational / Skills Training
- College course work
- Other (Please specify):

5. **Have any of the following ever prevented you from participating in activities?** (Check all that apply)

- Lack of transportation
- Financial problems
- Family responsibilities
- Safety concerns
- Mental health issues
- Lack of interest
- Other (Please specify):
- None of the above

6. **Which of the following services have you used in the past year?** (Check all that apply)

- Counseling/therapy
- Tutoring
- Career training/counseling
- Health services (doctors, dentists)
- Transportation services (buses, taxis, Uber or similar)
- Free meal programs
- None of the above

7. **How would you rate the overall quality of these services? Please check on box per row.**

Service	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
School counseling/therapy					
Tutoring					
Career training/counseling					
Health services (doctors, dentists)					
Transportation services (buses, taxis, Uber or similar)					
Free meal program					

8. **How would you rate your overall physical health?**

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

9. **How would you rate your overall mental health?**

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

10. **Do you have access to a nutritious diet at home?**

- Yes
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- No

11. **Do you feel you have access to resources for physical health?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

12. **Do you feel you have access to resources for mental health?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

13. **Have you experienced any of these feelings recently?** (Check all that apply)

- Feeling very sad (Depression)
- Feeling very worried or scared (Anxiety)
- Having trouble sleeping (Insomnia)
- Feeling very stressed (Stress)
- Having thoughts about self-harm (Suicidal Thoughts)
- Other (Please specify):
- None of these

14. **What are your primary sources of stress?** (Check all that apply)

- Managing work/study responsibilities

- Responsibilities at home
- Relationships with family/household members
- Relationships with friends
- Financial difficulties
- Concerns about physical appearance/weight
- Accessing food at home
- Planning for the future (career, further education)
- Balancing extracurricular activities (sports, hobbies)
- Other (Please specify):

**15. Do you feel you have a voice in your community?**

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

**16. Are you involved in any community service or volunteer activities?**

- Yes
- No

**17. What is the best way for you to receive information about services or activities? (Check all that apply)**

- Community newsletters
- Local websites
- Flyers/posters
- Email
- Social media
- Text messages

**18. Do you feel you have adequate job opportunities?**

- Yes
- No

➤ **If no, what barriers have you faced?**

**19. What do you think are the biggest challenges young adults face in your community?**

**20. What programs or services do you think are missing in your community that would help young adults?**



**21. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or needs?**

**22. How old are you?**

- 18-20
- 21-24

**23. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- A gender not listed
- Prefer not to say

**24. What is your race/ethnicity?**

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

**25. What is your highest level of education completed?**

- Middle School or less
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree
- Other (Please specify):
- Prefer not to say

**26. Do you have a job?**

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

## Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

## Community Focus Group Questions

*For this discussion, “community” is defined as where you live, work, and play.*

### General Community Questions:

- Which of these issues do you perceive as having the largest impact on you and your family?  
Why? *(list will be provided)*
  - Availability of jobs for adults
  - Availability of jobs for youth
  - Access to transportation
  - Public Education
  - Childcare services
  - Cost of living
  - Debt
  - Access to financial services
  - Elderly living assistance
  - Availability of healthcare
  - Access to immigrant services
  - Access to substance abuse services
  - Access to treatment services
  
- Are there issues that are not included that impact you and your family?
- Are there issues that impact the community at large, but not your family specifically?

### **Access to services:**

- Which of the following services have you used in the past years?
  
- Have you or your family faced any barriers in accessing community services (e.g., career counseling, health services, transportation)? If so please describe, and share how they may be delivered to make access better.
  
- How would you rate the quality of the services you’ve used? What improvements would you suggest to enhance these services?
  
- Do you or your family experience transportation challenges? If so how does this impact you?
  
- What solutions would you suggest?

### **Youth (Education and recreation):**

- Do you believe there are enough recreational and educational opportunities available for families, youth and young adults in Somerset County? What would be activities or facilities that would help meet any perceived needs?
- How satisfied are you with the current educational opportunities available to youth and young adults in Somerset County? Are there gaps? How might these be addressed?
- What do you believe is the most needed resource for youth and young adults in Somerset County to succeed? (Select all that apply)

- What do you think is the most pressing issue facing youth and young adults in Somerset County?

### **Health and Well-being:**

- Do you have consistent access to nutritious food? What challenges do you face in maintaining a healthy diet, and what solutions can you propose?
- How accessible are mental health services for youth and young adults in Somerset County?
- What are the “risky behaviors” that have the greatest impact on the overall community? What services would aid in addressing these?
- Do you feel that the mental health services available in Somerset County are adequate in meeting you or your family member's needs? What services are lacking or hard to access?

### **Community Involvement and Information Access**

- Do you feel you have a voice in your community? Can you share any experiences where you felt empowered or disempowered?
- Are you involved in any community service or volunteer activities? How do these activities affect your connection to the community and your personal growth?
- What are the most effective ways for you to receive information about services, opportunities, and events? Why do these methods work best for you?
- Do you feel like you have opportunities to participate in community decision-making?

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing youth and families in your community? How do you think these challenges can be addressed?
- What programs or services do you think are missing in your community that would support youth and families? How do you think these programs could make a difference?

### **Open Feedback**

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences, needs, or suggestions for improving services and opportunities in Somerset County?

## **Youth Focus Group Questions**

### **School Experience and Resources**

- Can you share more about your overall school experience? What aspects of school do you find most satisfying or dissatisfying?
- What specific resources do you feel are most important for your success in school? Are there any resources you wish were more available?
- In what ways do you think your school is preparing you (or not preparing you) for future jobs or careers? Can you give examples?

### **Participation in Activities**

- What types of activities do you enjoy participating in the most, and why? Are there any activities you wish you could participate in but haven't been able to?
- What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to participate in activities or attend school? How do these challenges affect you?
- Which services have you found most helpful over the past year, and why? Are there any services you haven't used but think could be beneficial?
- How would you describe the quality of the services you've used? What improvements, if any, would you suggest?

### **Health and Well-being**

- How do you feel about your overall physical health? Are there any factors that influence your physical health, positively or negatively?
- How do you manage your mental health? Are there resources or support systems that help you, and are there any that you feel are missing?
- How easy is it for you to access nutritious food at home? What kind of food would you like to have more access to?
- Can you talk about any feelings of sadness, anxiety, stress, or other emotions you've experienced recently? What do you think contributes to these feelings?

### **Community Involvement and Information Access**

- Do you feel like you have a say in what happens in your community? Can you share any experiences where you felt heard or not heard?
- Are you involved in any community service or volunteer activities? How do these activities impact you and your community?

### **Biggest Challenges**

- What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by people in your community? How do you think these challenges could be addressed?

### **Additional Thoughts**

- What programs or services do you think are missing in your community that would help you?  
How do you think these programs could make a difference?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or needs that we haven't covered?

## **Service Providers Collaboration Session Questions**

### **Service Provision and Target Population:**

- Can you describe the services your organization provides in Somerset County and how you collaborate with other providers?
- What populations do you primarily serve, and how have you adapted your services to meet their evolving needs through partnerships or collaboration?

### **Community Needs and Service Gaps:**

- In your experience, what are the most significant unmet needs in Somerset County? How can service providers work together to address these gaps (e.g., transportation, employment, mental health)?
- Are there any services that are consistently difficult to find or refer clients to, and how might a more coordinated effort improve access?

### **Challenges Faced by Service Providers:**

- What are the primary challenges your organization faces in delivering services, and how could better collaboration or resource-sharing with other providers help address these challenges?
- What obstacles have you encountered when coordinating with other agencies, and what improvements could enhance collaboration?

### **Service Awareness and Accessibility:**

- What barriers do your clients face when accessing services, and how might better inter-agency coordination help reduce these barriers (e.g., streamlining referrals, sharing information)?

### **Coordination and Collaboration:**

- What are the biggest challenges when it comes to coordinating referrals between agencies, and how can this process be improved to better serve clients?

### **Innovative Solutions and Future Needs:**

- What innovative solutions or collaborative approaches do you believe could improve service delivery and access in Somerset County?

### **Support for Service Providers:**

- Are there any changes or improvements you would recommend to enhance collaboration and service delivery in Somerset County?

### **Closing:**

- Do you have any additional insights or suggestions on how service providers in Somerset County can work together more effectively to improve service delivery and meet the needs of the community?

## Appendix C: Key Informant Questions



## **Key Informant Interview for Somerset County Community Needs Assessment**

### **Disclaimer:**

Your input is crucial to the success of collecting valuable data on community needs in Somerset County. Your honest opinions are important and will only be used in aggregate. No one will be identified in any of the notes obtained from this session. Please DO NOT provide any personal information/personally identifiable information of anyone which includes names, addresses, and so on during the focus group session. You may choose to not participate. If you have any concerns please contact the primary investigator, John Hickman, at [BEACON@salisbury.edu](mailto:BEACON@salisbury.edu), 410-546-6001 or the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at Salisbury University at 410-548-3549 or toll-free 1-888-543-0148. This research is approved by Salisbury University's IRB under protocol number 402.

### ***Script:***

Thank you for participating in this key informant interview for the Somerset County Community Needs Assessment. Your insights are crucial for understanding and addressing key issues within our community, including transportation, employment opportunities, safety, and mental health.

Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used in aggregate for analysis. You will not be personally identified or linked to any specific responses. Your honest feedback is highly valued and will contribute significantly to improving services and resources in Somerset County.

To participate, you must be at least 18 years old and a service provider in Somerset County. By remaining on the call, you agree this is accurate.

Thank you for your time and valuable input.

### **General Community Needs**

- Can you provide an overview of the current state of the community in Somerset County?  
What are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed?
- How does your agency interact with other service providers in Somerset County?
- What are the most common services that you refer to other service providers?
- What specific services that your clients need are difficult to find?
- What are the main barriers preventing your clientele from accessing other services?
- How could the network of providers adjust to provide additional access? ( Examples may be different hours, different delivery methods, better communication between providers)

## **Transportation**

- What are the main transportation challenges faced by residents, in Somerset County? How do these challenges impact their daily lives and access to opportunities?
- What are the primary barriers that prevent residents from accessing reliable transportation? How can these barriers be overcome?

## **Youth Opportunities and Safety**

- How would you describe the current level of youth engagement in the community? What opportunities are available for youth to participate in positive activities?
- What safety concerns are most prevalent among the youth in Somerset County? How do these concerns affect their well-being and participation in community activities?

## **Support Services**

- What support services are available to address issues like safety, education, and employment? How accessible and effective are these services?
- In your opinion, what additional programs or initiatives are needed to improve access to the services in the community?

## **Mental Health**

- How would you describe the current state of mental health among residents in Somerset County?
- What mental health resources and services are available in the community? How well are these resources meeting the needs of residents?
- What are the main barriers that prevent residents from accessing mental health services? How can these barriers be addressed?

## **Recommendations and Future Directions**

- What innovative approaches or adjustments would you suggest to improve service access for your clientele?
- From your perspective, what are the top three issues affecting the community? Why do you believe these are the most important?
- Do you have any additional insights or comments regarding the needs of the Somerset County community?