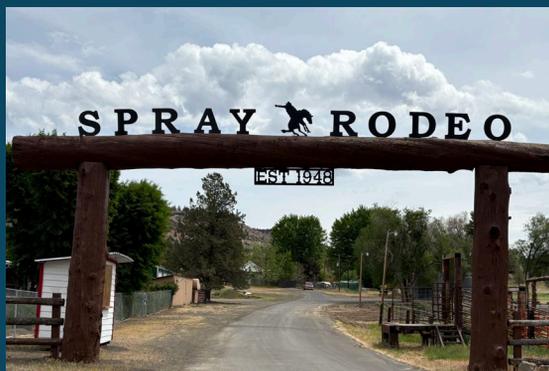


# 2025 Wheeler County Community Health Assessment



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## Acknowledgments

Wheeler County Public Health extends a heartfelt gratitude to the people and organizations who contributed to developing this Community Health Assessment. We appreciate the time, wisdom, and effort of the steering committee members, Joni Kabana's dedicated efforts to administering the Wheeler County Livability Survey, the 169 county residents who completed the survey, the 11 people who participated in knowledge holder interviews, and Insight for Action for facilitating the process (Ronda Zakocs) and drafting (Nidhi Pai) this report.

# Executive Summary

**Purpose** | The purpose of the Community Health Assessment is to describe and prioritize critical health conditions to inform the development of the Wheeler County Health Improvement Plan and support funding efforts to address those critical conditions.

**Process** | Wheeler County Public Health contracted with [Insight for Action](#) to facilitate the development of the Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan. A seven-member steering committee comprised of residents and agency leaders reviewed assessment data and prioritized critical community health conditions. [The Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being](#) was used to guide the assessment, where vital conditions are the conditions, places, and institutions that people need for health and wellbeing. Multiple data points were collected and analyzed from federal and state datasets; local reports; interviews with 11 local knowledge holders, and surveys from 169 county residents.

**Priority Community Health Conditions** | Informed by the community health data, the steering committee identified six critical health conditions to address in the Wheeler County Community Health Improvement Plan.



Access to healthcare services



Functioning county-wide emergency medical service system



Access to nutritious and affordable food



Access to housing



Access to childcare and early childhood education opportunities



Opportunities for greater community engagement

**Community Action** | Goals and strategies to address these priority health conditions can be found in the 2025 Wheeler County Community Health Improvement Plan.

# Purpose and Process



## Purpose

This assessment describes and prioritizes critical community health conditions to inform Wheeler County's Community Health Improvement Plan and support local government and community-based organizations' efforts for community health improvement.



## Steering Committee and Consultant

Wheeler County Public Health contracted with [Insight for Action](#) to facilitate the Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan process. The following Wheeler County residents and agency leaders served on a steering committee to review assessment data and prioritize critical community health conditions: Diana Kirkham, Spray resident; Joan Field, Oregon Rural Health Program & Spray Volunteer Ambulance; Jon McMurray, Fossil School District; Joni Kabana, Spray General Store; Maryhelen Peterson, Community Counseling Solutions; Sarah Hartenstein, Wheeler County Public Health; and Teresa Hunt, Asher Community Health Center.



## Guiding Framework

[The Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being](#) was used to guide the assessment, where vital conditions are the conditions, places, and institutions that people need for health and well-being – healthy food, humane housing, educational opportunities, living wage jobs, a sense of belonging, and transportation.



## Guiding Questions

The following questions guided collection and analysis of data.

- 1 What are the **demographics** of residents in Wheeler County?
- 2 What is the **health status** of county residents?
- 3 What is the status of **vital conditions** for county residents?
- 4 What vital conditions do **county residents** believe are most important to address?
- 5 What are the county's critical **gaps** and **assets** for community health improvement?

# Data Sources



Insight for Action collected, analyzed, and synthesized the following data into key takeaways displayed in this report.

Multiple **federal and state datasets** (i.e., US Census Bureau, Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Health Authority) were accessed to compare data points for Wheeler County to the State of Oregon and 11 other Eastern Oregon counties where applicable

Three health-related **reports** were reviewed

- ✓ 2024 Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization (EOCCO) Community Health Assessment
- ✓ 2024 Asher Community Health Center Community Healthcare Needs Survey
- ✓ 2024 Wheeler County Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Capacity Assessment

Eleven interviews were conducted with local **knowledge holders** – people familiar with the county’s vital conditions and assets

Surveys were collected from 169 **Wheeler County residents** about their experiences with and perceptions around vital conditions

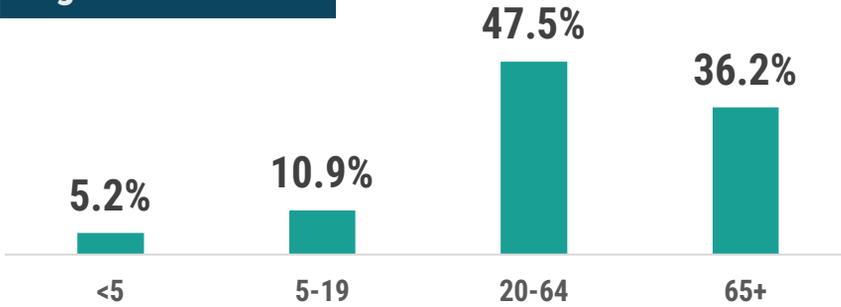
# Wheeler County Demographic Profile

Total Population<sup>1</sup>

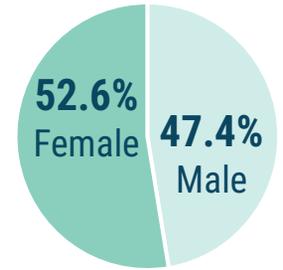
1,434



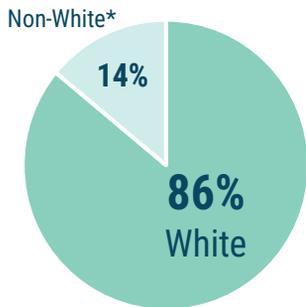
## Age Distribution<sup>1</sup>



## Sex<sup>1</sup>

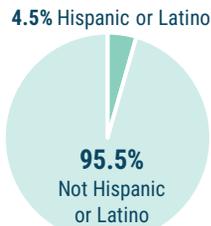


## Race<sup>1</sup>



\* 10% of the population is Two or More Races, 3% is Some Other Race, and <1% is Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or Black of African American.

## Ethnicity<sup>1</sup>



## Disability<sup>2</sup>

27.2%  
with recognized  
disability status

## Foreign Born<sup>3</sup>

3.6%  
who were not U.S.  
citizens at birth

## Veterans<sup>3</sup>

14.1%  
(age 18+)

## Language<sup>3</sup>

% people 5+  
years who speak  
a language other  
than English at  
home

5.2% (Yes)

94.8% (No)

## Net Migration<sup>4</sup>

12  
per 1,000  
population\*

\*change in population due to  
people moving in or out

### References:

<sup>1</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: DP05 ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

<sup>2</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: S1810 Disability Characteristics

<sup>3</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: DP02, Selected Social Characteristics

<sup>4</sup>Annual Population Report 2020-2022 (Released 2023), Population Research Center, Portland State University

# Wheeler County

## Population Health Status

### Birth, Early Childhood, and Death Outcomes

Key:

Wheeler County, EOCCO\*, Oregon

\* Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization (EOCCO) consists of 12 counties: Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wheeler

#### Total Births Per 1,000<sup>1,4</sup>

10.4  
Wheeler

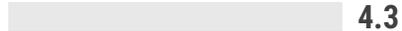
10.2  
EOCCO

8.9  
Oregon

#### Infant Mortality, Low Birthweight, and Vaccination Rates<sup>1,2,4</sup>

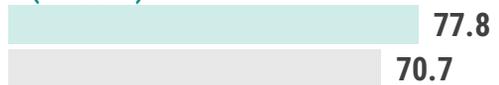
Infant Mortality Rate<sup>1</sup>:  
Per 1,000 Births

0 (Wheeler)  
N/A (EOCCO)



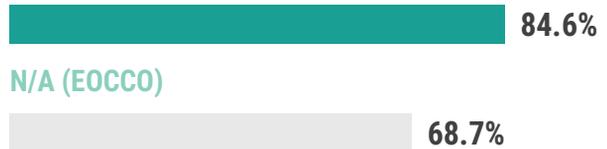
Low Birthweight<sup>1,4</sup>:  
Per 1,000 Births

0 (Wheeler)



Vaccination Rate<sup>2</sup>:  
2-year-olds

N/A (EOCCO)



#### Total Deaths Per 100,000<sup>3,4</sup>

1,592  
Wheeler

1,238  
EOCCO

1,052  
Oregon

#### Deaths by Condition Per 100,000<sup>3,4</sup>

	Wheeler	EOCCO	Oregon
Alcohol-related Deaths	19	-	52.9
Suicide	69.2	24.1	20.7
Diabetes Mellitus	69.2	50.1	34.2
Unintended injuries (Accidents)	69.2	69.2	75.2
Chronic lower respiratory disease	138.4	73.1	47.5
Cerebrovascular disease	138.4	64.3	61.7
Tobacco-related Deaths	168.2	-	146.7
Cancer (Malignant Neoplasms)	276.8	222.4	199
Heart disease	346	264.6	191.4



References:

<sup>1</sup>Oregon Births and Pregnancies by County (2023), Center for Health Statistics, Oregon Health Authority

<sup>2</sup>Oregon Child Immunization Rates (2022), Oregon Health Authority

<sup>3</sup>Leading Causes of Death by County (2023), Center for Health Statistics, Oregon Health Authority

<sup>4</sup>Community Health Assessment (2024), Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization

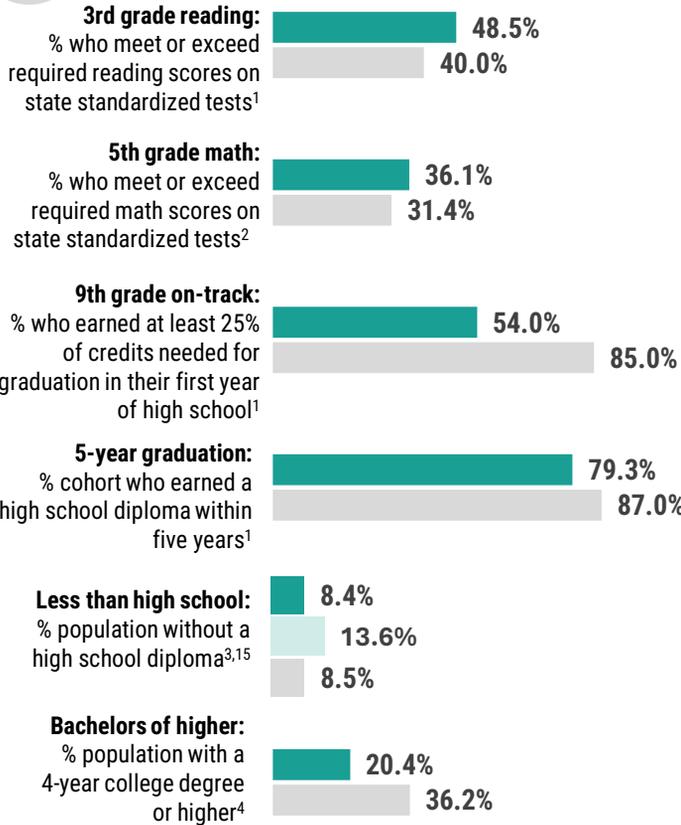
# Wheeler County

## Vital Conditions

Key:  
Wheeler County, EOCCO, Oregon



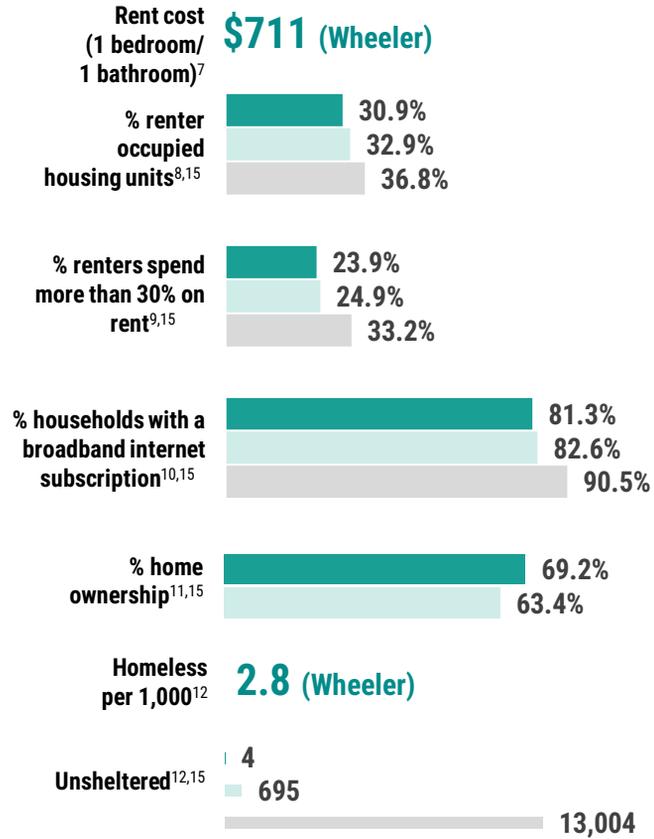
### Education\*



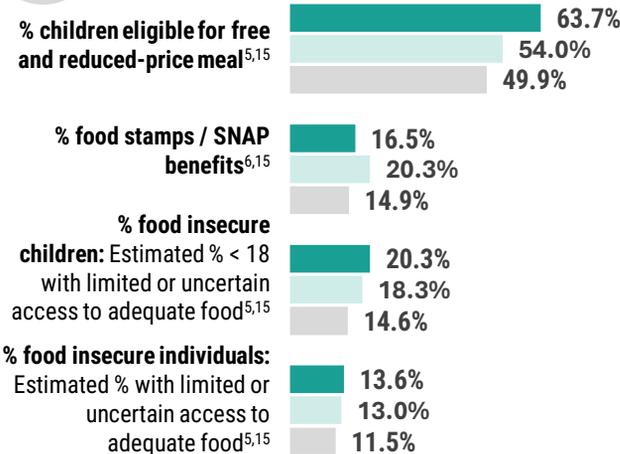
\* Values are average of Fossil, Mitchell, and Spray School Districts



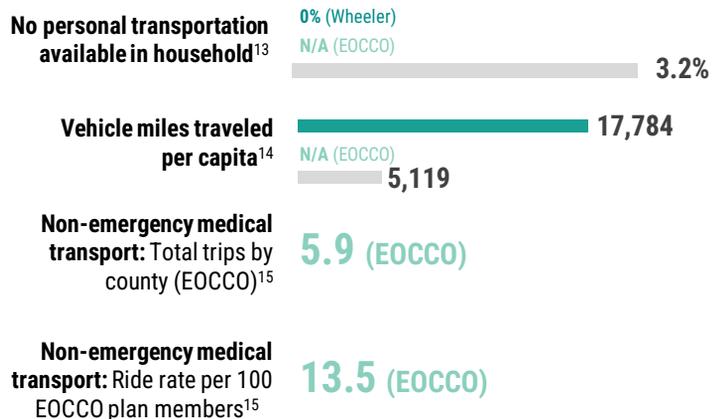
### Housing



### Food



### Transportation



#### References:

<sup>1</sup>At-a-Glance School District Profile (2023-24), Oregon Department of Education  
<sup>2</sup>Mathematics - District Level Report (2023-24), Oregon Department of Education  
<sup>3</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022), Table ID: B06009 Place of Birth by Educational Attainment  
<sup>4</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: S1501 Educational Attainment  
<sup>5</sup>Oregon Hunger Task Force (2022)  
<sup>6</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022), Table ID: S2201 Food Stamps/SNAP  
<sup>7</sup>Fair Market Rent (2025), US Department of Housing and Urban Development Documentation System  
<sup>8</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022), Table ID: S1101 Households and Families  
<sup>9</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022), Table ID: S2503 Financial Characteristics

<sup>10</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2018-2022), Table ID: S2801 Computers and Internet Subscriptions  
<sup>11</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: DP04 Select Housing Characteristics  
<sup>12</sup>Point in Time Homeless Rates by Oregon County (2023), Portland State University  
<sup>13</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: B08141, Means of Transportation to Work by Vehicles Available  
<sup>14</sup>Population Research Center (2022), Portland State University, Oregon Department of Transportation  
<sup>15</sup>Community Health Assessment (2024), Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization

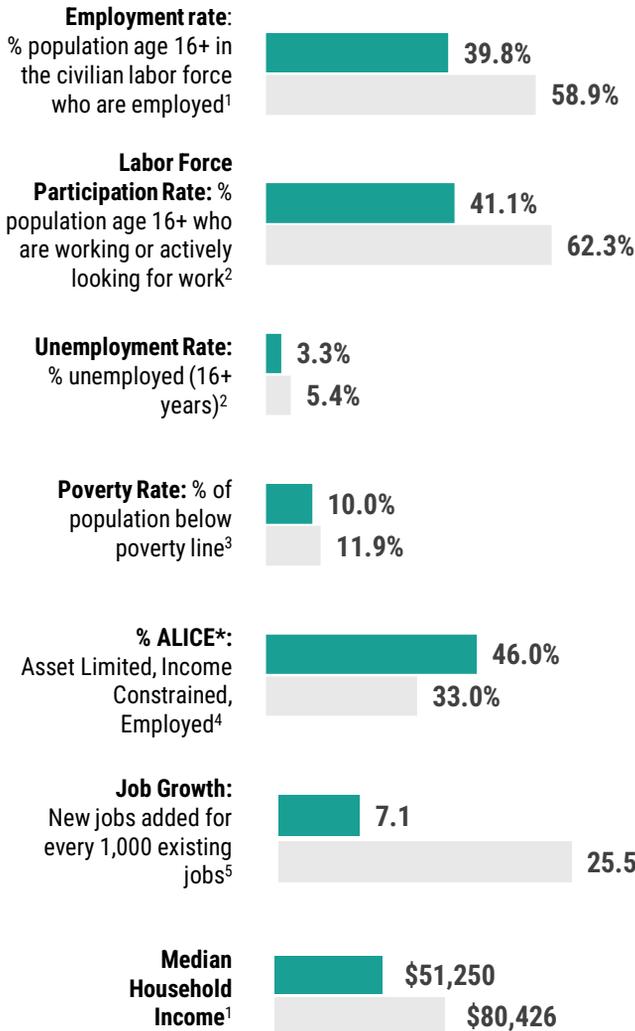
# Wheeler County

## Vital Conditions

Key:  
Wheeler County, EOCCO, Oregon



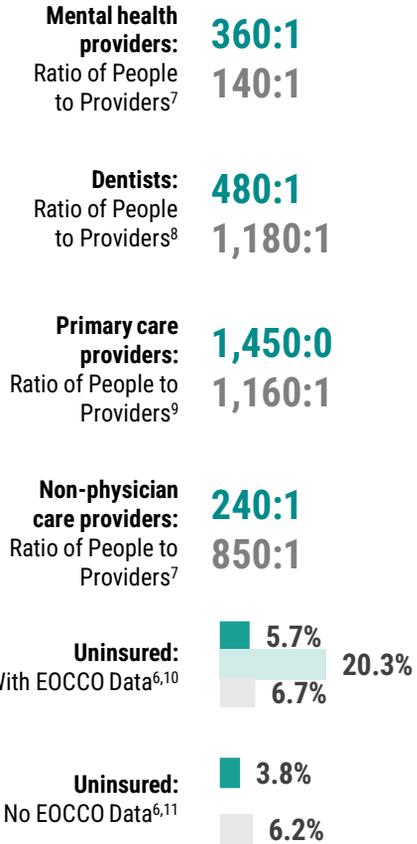
### Employment/Economic Opportunity



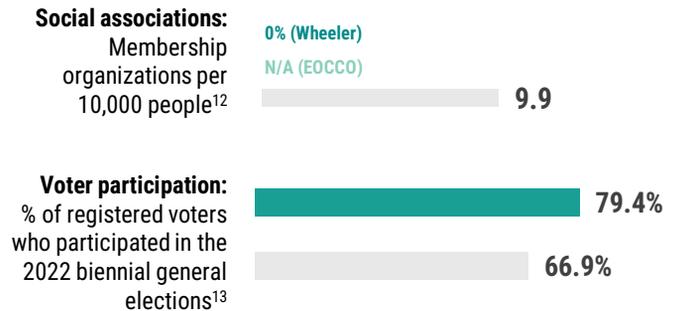
- Top Employment Industries**<sup>6</sup>
1. Educational services
  2. Executive, legislative and general government
  3. Gasoline stations



### Healthcare



### Social Connection/Civic Engagement



**References:**

<sup>1</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: DP03 Selected Economic Characteristics  
<sup>2</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: S2301 Employment Status  
<sup>3</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months  
<sup>4</sup>Point-in-Time Data (2022), United for Alice Report  
<sup>5</sup>Regional Economic Accounts, CA25N (2022), US Bureau of Economic Analysis  
<sup>6</sup>Community Health Assessment (2024), Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization  
<sup>7</sup>CMS National Provider Identification (2024)  
<sup>8</sup>Area Health Resource File/National Provider Identifier Downloadable File (2022)

<sup>9</sup>Area Health Resource File/American Medical Association (2021) (Note: Data is incorrect – Asher Community Health Center employs primary care providers)  
<sup>10</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2016-2020), Table ID: S2701 Selected Characteristics of Health Insurance Coverage in the United States  
<sup>11</sup>American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019-2023), Table ID: S2701 Selected Characteristics of Health Insurance Coverage in the United States  
<sup>12</sup>County Business Patterns (2022), US Census Bureau  
<sup>13</sup>Election Statistics (2022), Office of the Oregon Secretary of State

\*ALICE: Families who work but struggle to afford basic necessities despite earning above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

# Wheeler County Residents

## Critical Vital Conditions that Warrant Action

### Overview

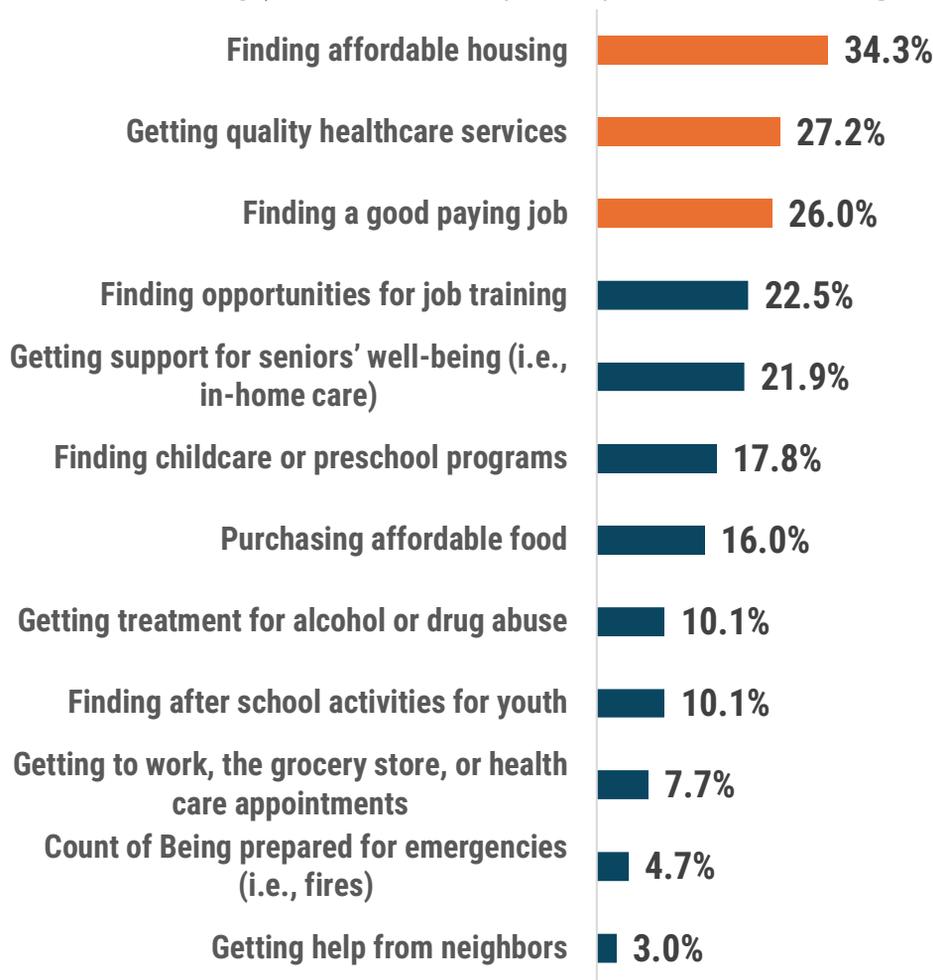
In spring of 2025, Insight for Action contracted with a Spray resident to administer a 2-page livability survey to Wheeler County residents age 18 years and older by attending local events, hanging out in public places (i.e., health Center, convenience stores), and communicating through word of mouth in Fossil, Mitchell, and Spray.

The survey inquired about residents' demographics, what they value most about Wheeler County, perceptions about most challenging vital community conditions (i.e., housing, food, transportation), what vital conditions they believe are most important to improve, and ideas for improving quality of life. A total of 169 surveys were collected.

**See Appendix 1 for the full report.**

### Vital Conditions Ranked by Most Responses to "A Big Challenge" (n =169)

Respondents were asked to rate **12 Vital Conditions** on a scale from 1 (Not a challenge at all) to 5 (A Big Challenge). The chart below depicts responses rated as a **5 - Big Challenge**.

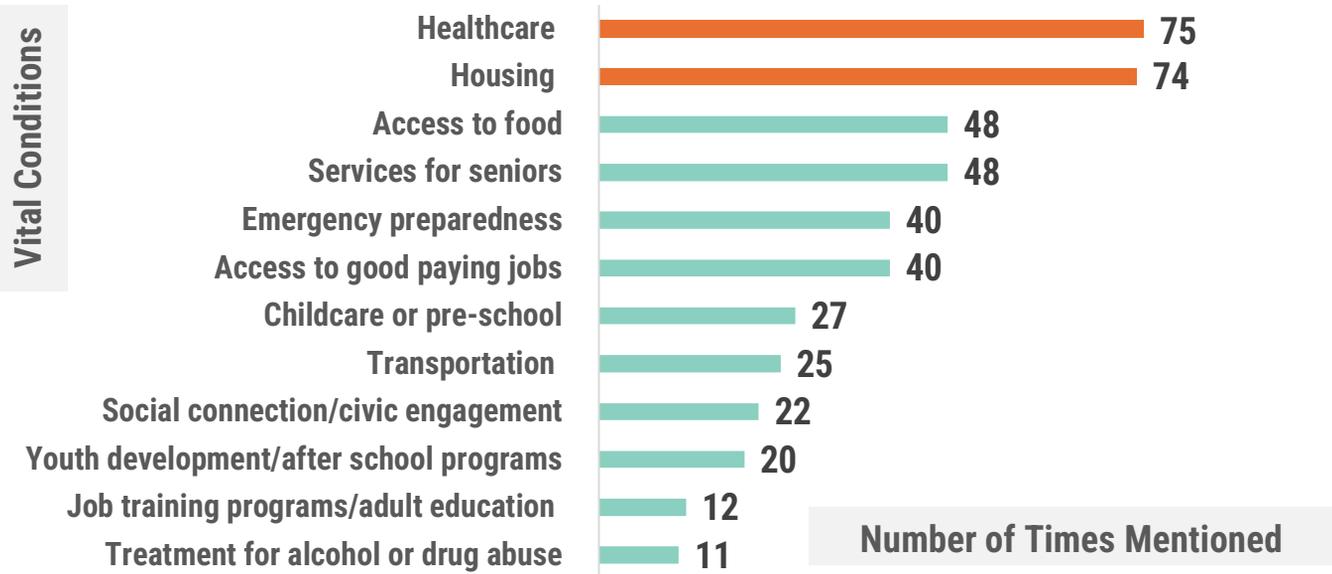


# Wheeler County Residents

## Critical Vital Conditions that Warrant Action

### Top Vital Conditions Participants Want Addressed to Improve Quality of Life

169 participants selected the top three vital conditions from a list of 12 that generated a total of 442 responses



# Wheeler County

## Assets and Gaps Matrix

### Assets and gaps were identified for 10 vital community conditions by:

- ✓ Reviewing three **reports** generated by local organizations – 2024 Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization Community Health Assessment, 2024 Asher Community Health Center Community Healthcare Needs Survey, and 2024 Wheeler County Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Capacity Assessment; and
- ✓ Conducting interviews with 11 local **knowledge holders** – people familiar with the county’s vital conditions.

Vital Condition	Asset	Critical Gap
 <h3>Early Childhood</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Childcare</b> program at Fossil School District for staff only</li> <li>▪ HeadStart <b>preschool</b> programs at Fossil, Mitchell, and Spray school districts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No “formal” <b>childcare</b> options for residents</li> </ul>
 <h3>Education</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Three K-12 school districts in Fossil (w/community charter school), Mitchell, and Spray with low student to teacher ratios</li> <li>▪ North Central Education Service District</li> </ul>	
 <h3>Food</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Grocery stores in Fossil, Mitchell, &amp; Spray</li> <li>▪ Food bank in Fossil – once a month</li> <li>▪ Congregate senior meal weekly in Fossil &amp; Spray</li> <li>▪ Senior food box drop weekly in Fossil, Mitchell, Spray</li> <li>▪ Free breakfast &amp; lunch programs in schools</li> <li>▪ EOCCO Frontier Veggie Rx for 50 families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No full-service grocery store. Must drive to Bend or Primeville</li> </ul>
 <h3>Housing</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fossil &amp; Mitchell School Districts and Asher Center purchased six houses for employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High cost of housing</li> <li>▪ Low availability of any type of housing</li> <li>▪ Limited land available to build housing</li> <li>▪ Poor quality of many existing homes</li> </ul>

## Vital Condition



### Economic Opportunity

- Full and part-time jobs available

## Critical Gap

- Many residents live in poverty
- Few jobs pay living wages
- Low workforce capacity because of older population and limited skills
- Difficult to recruit; rural area and limited housing
- Some resistance to economic development
- Inadequate navigation support for resident to access services



### Healthcare

- EOCCO serves ~ 450 Wheeler County residents who are Oregon Health Plan members (Medicaid)
- Asher Community Health Center (FQHC) w/clinics in 3 towns
- Community Counseling Solutions w/clinic in Fossil & telehealth
- Wheeler Co PH – vaccinations
- Mental health counselors in Fossil and Mitchell school districts

- No EMS in Fossil, Mitchell & Wheeler EMS volunteers aging out
- More primary care providers needed
- No hospice, home health programs, community paramedicine, x-ray imaging, hearing or vision, or specialty care services
- Low workforce capacity
- Lack of coordinated health services



### Senior Services

*See food on page 1*

- Lack of outreach services for isolated seniors



### Social Connection

- Culture of helping people in need
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors volunteer group
- Churches in 3 towns
- Annual events in 3 towns
- Gathering venues ta Spray General Store & Spray Grange

- Decline in volunteerism
- Some seniors and teenagers are socially isolated
- Few eating and drinking establishments



### Transportation

- Wheeler County Community Transportation provides on-demand responsive service for seniors and persons with disabilities, scheduled routes, and non-medical emergency transport for EOCCO OPH members

- Long travel distances to meet social needs
- High gas costs for long distance travel
- More frequent trips and routes for Wheeler County Community Transportation



### Youth Development

- County-wide school district athletic program
- 4-H Clubs
- Girl's Circle Program & Sources of Strength Groups in Fossil school

- Few youth programs, activities, or hang out places
- Some parents struggle to provide consistent support and guidance to children

# **Appendix 1**

## **2025 Wheeler County Livability Survey**

# 2025 Wheeler County Livability Survey

## Overview & Demographics

### Overview

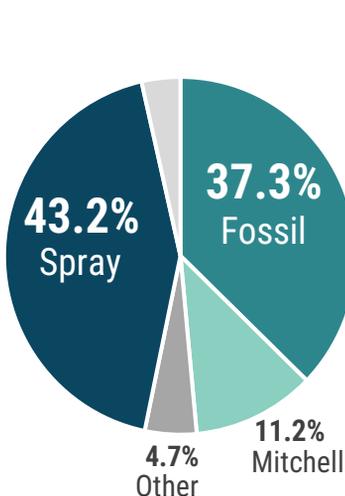
In spring of 2025, a Spray resident was contracted to administer a 2-page livability survey to Wheeler County residents age 18 years and older by attending local events, hanging out in public places (i.e., health clinic, convenience stores), and communicating through word of mouth in Fossil, Mitchell, and Spray.

The survey inquired about residents' demographics, what they value most about Wheeler County, perceptions about most challenging vital community conditions (i.e., housing, food, transportation), what vital conditions they believe are most important to improve, and ideas for improving quality of life. A total of 169 surveys were gathered and entered into a Google Forms database. Open-ended questions were coded for themes.

The following pages display the results of the survey.

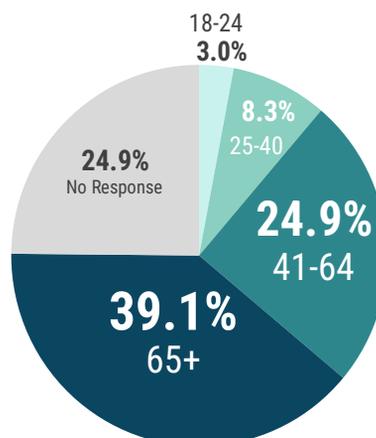
<b>Demographics</b>	Page 1
<b>Values</b>	Page 2
<b>Biggest Challenges</b>	Page 3
<b>Vital Conditions</b>	Page 4-5
<b>Quality of Life</b>	Page 6-7

**Where Respondents Live (n=163\*)**

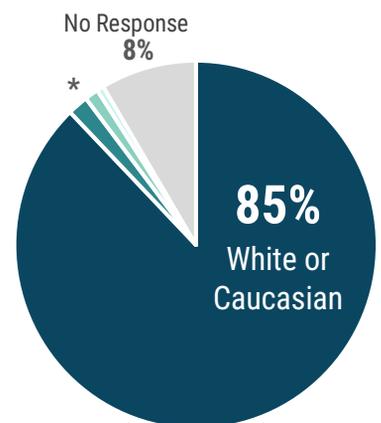


\* 6 respondents did not report town

**Age of Participants (n=169\*)**



**Race/Ethnicity of Participants (n=169)**



\* American Indian (4%); Hispanic or Latino/a (2%); Asian (1%)



# Wheeler County Livability Survey

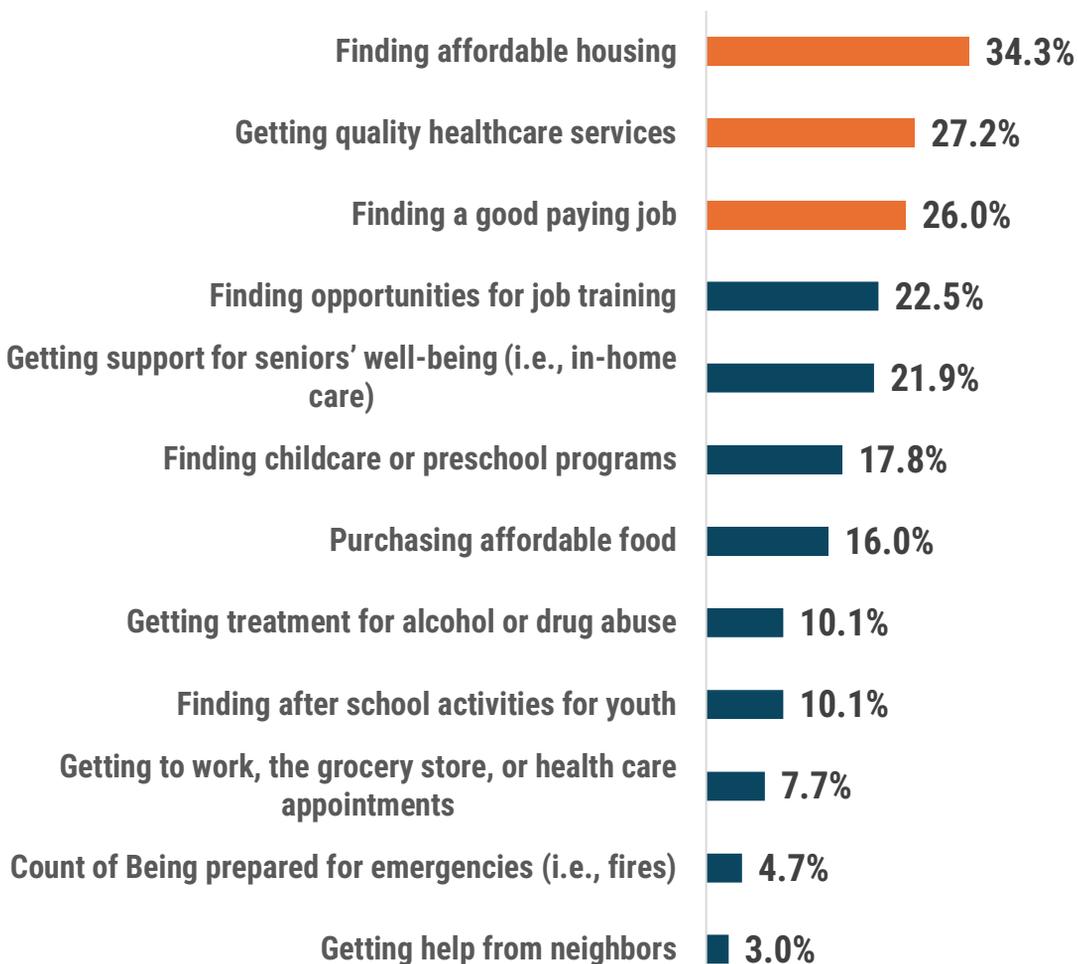
## Vital Conditions: Biggest Challenges

Respondents were asked to rate **12 Vital Conditions** on a scale from 1 (Not a challenge at all) to 5 (A Big Challenge).

The chart below depicts responses rated as a **5 - Big Challenge**.



### Vital Conditions Ranked by Most Responses to "A Big Challenge" (n =169)



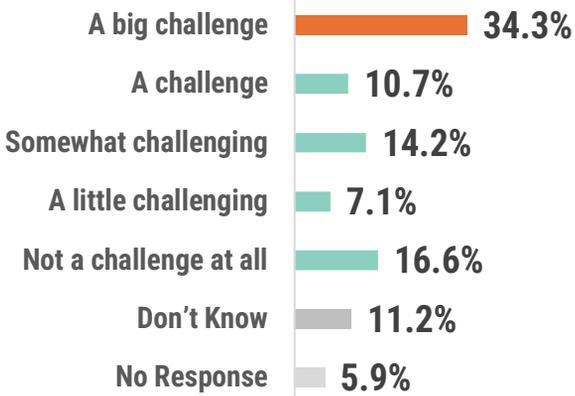
# Wheeler County Livability Survey

## Vital Conditions: Responses to “How much of a Challenge is...”



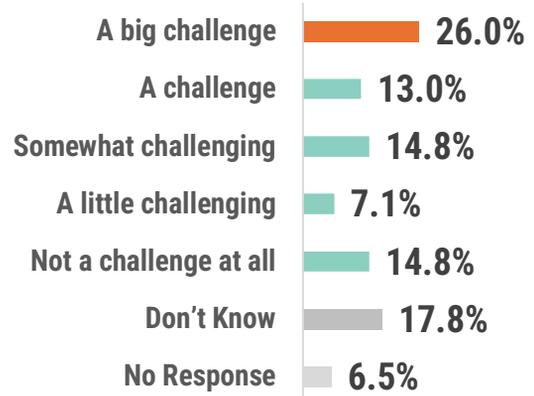
### Finding Affordable Housing?

(n=169)



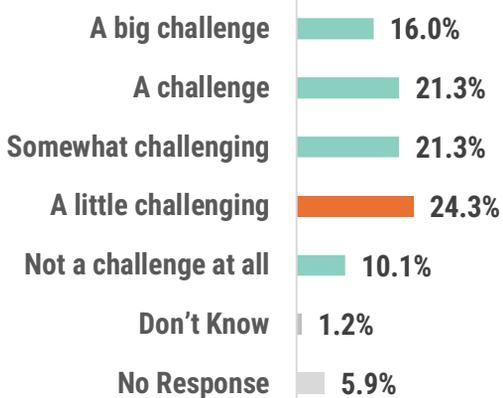
### Finding a Good Paying Job?

(n=169)



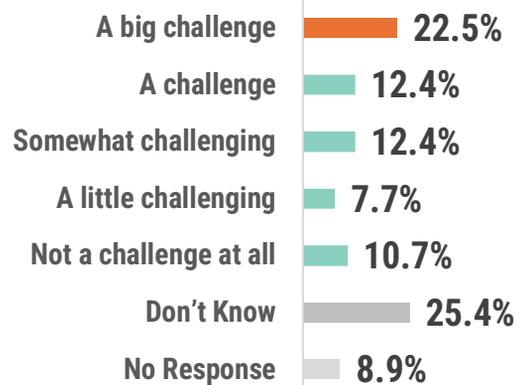
### Purchasing Affordable Food?

(n=169)



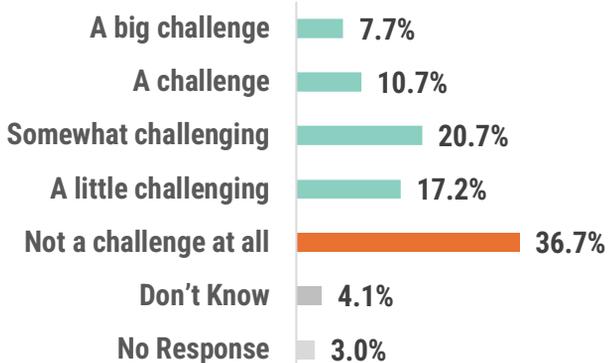
### Finding Opportunities for Job Training

(n=169)



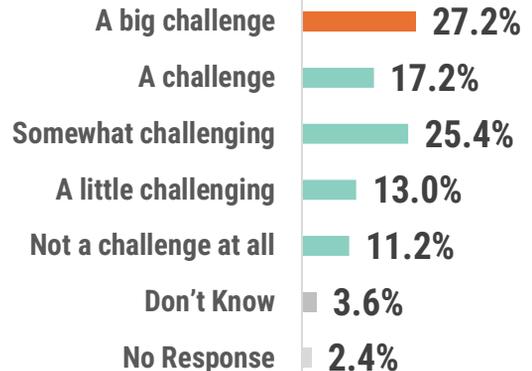
### Getting to Work, Grocery Store, or Healthcare Appointment?

(n=169)



### Getting Quality Healthcare Services?

(n=169)



# Wheeler County Livability Survey

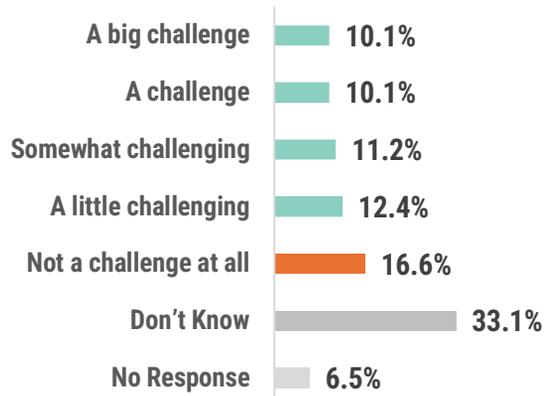
## Vital Conditions: Responses to “How much of a Challenge is...”



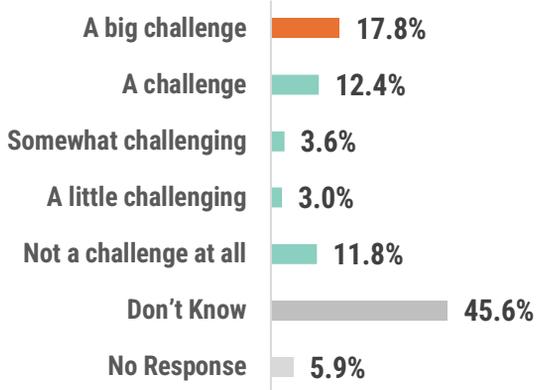
### Getting treatment for alcohol or drug abuse? (n=169)



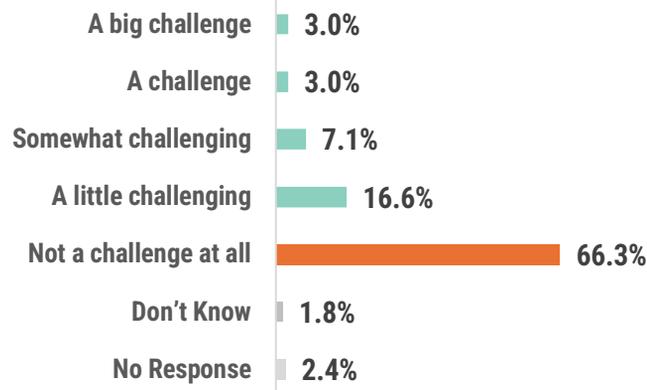
### Finding after school activities for youth? (n=169)



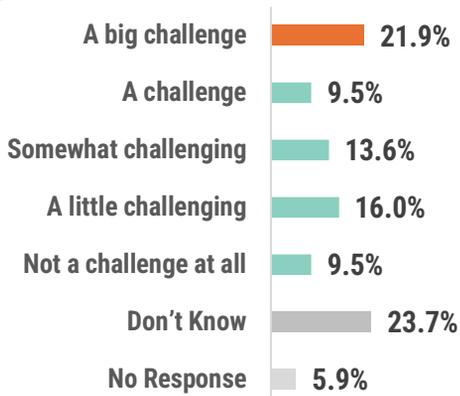
### Finding childcare or preschool programs? (n=169)



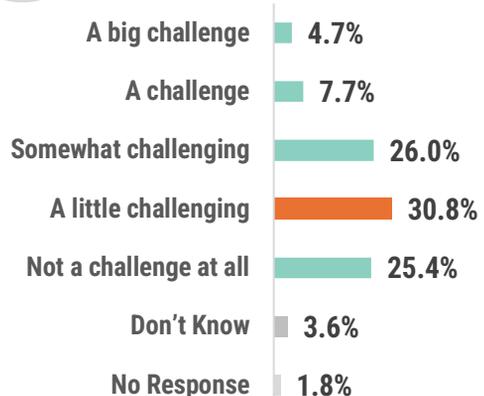
### Getting help from neighbors? (n=169)



### Getting support for seniors' well-being? (n=169)



### Being prepared for emergencies (i.e., fires)? (n=169)

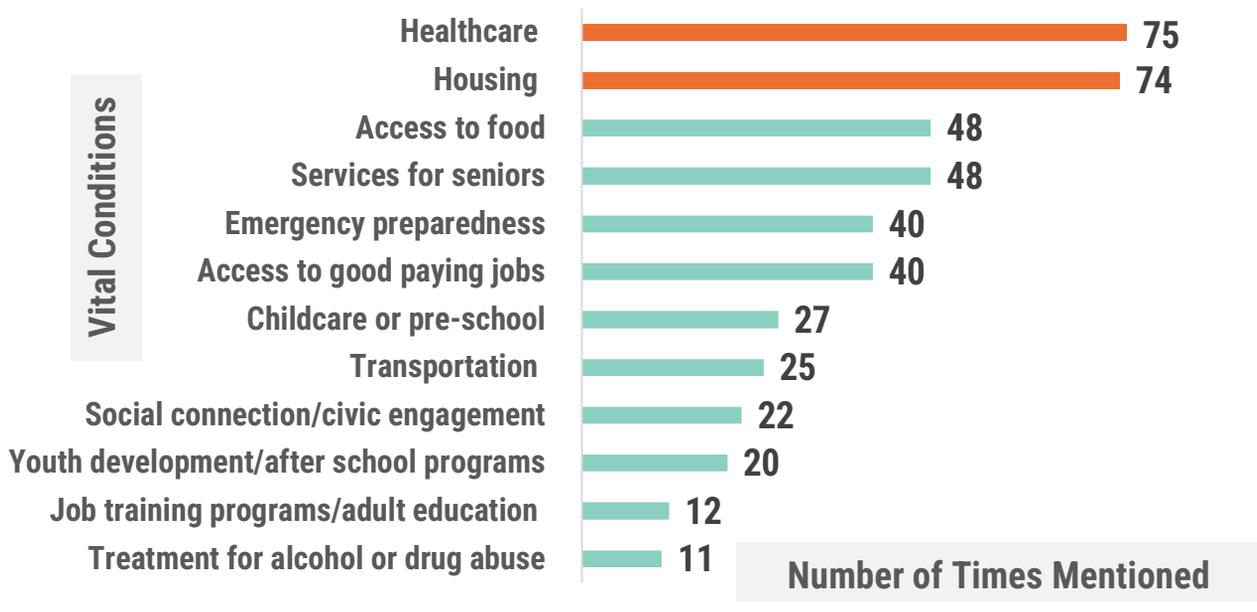


# Wheeler County Livability Survey

## Quality of Life

### Top Vital Conditions Participants Want Addressed to Improve Quality of Life

169 participants selected the top three vital conditions from a list of 12 that generated a total of 442 responses



### Participants' Ideas for Improving Quality of Life in Wheeler County

Participants generated 217 ideas that were coded into 41 categories

#### Idea Mentioned 10 or More Times

<b>Emergency Services:</b> Adding an ambulance service, including adding a medical clinic (i.e., Asher Clinic) that serves emergencies or has an ambulance service
<b>Community Events:</b> More community-building events and social gatherings: including a large event across Fossil, Mitchell, and Spray, concerts, street dance rodeo, community get togethers and well-checks
<b>Housing Availability:</b> More housing, including multi-unit housing (i.e., 4 plexes). Note: Three responses called out adding 4-plexes in each town.
<b>Community Participation and Support:</b> Encouraging general involvement and availability to help neighbors, especially the elderly or vulnerable; keeping homes, yards, and other areas clean
<b>Community Services:</b> A public library in the General Store, better library program, car wash, building storage units, tool library, more available handymen and mechanics, some one to do home maintenance, people to do odd jobs
<b>Fire Preparedness and Prevention:</b> Fire prevention education and work parties, becoming a firewise community (mentioned twice), longer firewood cutting seasons, and helping neighbors learn about wildfire preparedness
<b>Healthcare:</b> More/better options for healthcare (including callouts that Asher Clinic needs to be more community-oriented; adding a healthcare clinic and mental healthcare in Spray, increasing transportation options to healthcare appointments)
<b>Food Access:</b> Increase access to healthy/organic food & groceries (including suggestions to add another grocery store, creating a community garden, creating a group that orders fresh produce in bulk weekly, adding a rural route for Meals on Wheels)
<b>Housing Affordability:</b> Need for more affordable housing (especially for local workers, first-time buyers, and seniors)
<b>Volunteers:</b> Need for more volunteers, particularly youth volunteers (currently, there is an overreliance on older volunteers)
<b>Job Creation:</b> Need for job creation, especially for youth (two recommendations to create more local businesses)

# Wheeler County Livability Survey

## Quality of Life

### Participants' Ideas for Improving Quality of Life in Wheeler County

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Idea Mentioned Nine or Less Times
<b>Emergency Services Personnel:</b> Need for full-time/paid EMS personnel or more volunteers
<b>Grantseeking and Fundraising:</b> Bringing in external funding through grant writing or partnerships to provide and sustain local efforts, including recommendation to create a county grant writer position
<b>Housing Policies:</b> Including stricter rules on land development, extra tax for absentee homeowners, restrictions on home building, restricting out of state house sales, less restrictions on property building, difficulty becoming a landlord, and frustration with school district buying housing in town
<b>Senior Supports:</b> More supports and services for seniors (i.e. Senior Center, volunteers, group exercise, events)
<b>Healthcare for Seniors:</b> Better healthcare for seniors (i.e. home care, hospice)
<b>Youth Programming:</b> More programs, activities, and opportunities for youth
<b>Mobile and Home Healthcare:</b> More mobile and home healthcare options
<b>Roads, Drainage, and Utilities:</b> Fixing water run off from heavy rain that goes under houses (including recommendation to add French drain at the top of Asher St); replace roads or city streets in all three cities; concern that county road department stretched too thin, making it hard to maintain county roads systems in all seasons
<b>Waste Management and Recycling:</b> Yard garbage pickup service, dump site improvements, more recycling options
<b>Cafés:</b> Desire for more café restaurants
<b>Rideshare:</b> Desire for more rideshare options
<b>Wildlife:</b> Frustration with turkeys/desire to get rid of them
<b>Animal :</b> Desire for animal control regulations
<b>More Unified Emergency Preparedness:</b> merge local fire districts into one unified command
<b>Childcare:</b> Need for more childcare
<b>Outreach:</b> Community involvement through door to door campaigns and outreach
<b>Cost of Living:</b> Desire to reduce cost of living, which is too high
<b>Wages:</b> Need for more affordable wages
<b>Public Transport:</b> Desire for easier public transportation to cities with amenities
<b>Job Training:</b> Desire for facility to host job training programs
<b>Drug and Alcohol Treatment:</b> Increase availability of drug and alcohol treatment
<b>Government:</b> Less government interference
<b>Property Taxes:</b> Lowering property taxes
<b>Diversity in Education:</b> Need for better representation and more diversity in education
<b>Internet Access:</b> Need for more affordable and accessible internet/phone service
<b>Vocational Training:</b> Trade skills and vocational training for high schoolers
<b>Rental Housing:</b> More AirBnbs; putting houses for rent not sale
<b>Overdevelopment:</b> Reducing/avoiding overdevelopment of housing
<b>Housing Cleanup:</b> Fixing up housing
<b>Infrastructure:</b> Concern about clean water if power grid fails;