

COMMUNITY HEALTH



Health

Health is a term that is often associated with an individual and their lack of sickness or disease; the same thought concept can be carried over to a large grouping or area of people within their neighborhoods.

Community health is determined by the wellness of the residents of a particular area along with the aptitude of the environment to promote health and necessary resources. Most urban areas consist of a diverse population of residents which result in a stratified spectrum of community health. The following sections are all factors that make up or can determine community health.

Obesity Rate

Obesity is the condition when an individual has excessive body fat which presents itself as a risk to their health. This condition has been shown to lead to more chronic ailments such as heart disease and stroke, the leading causes of death in Pooler and worldwide (Plan4healthus).

The prevalence of obesity has continued to rise due to an increasing sedentary lifestyle, lack of nutritional health understanding, and oversaturating of fast-foods and processed foods which numerous studies have shown are related to numerous health issues including obesity.

To help reduce the risk of being obese and developing diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and various other diseases associated with a sedentary lifestyle, investments into our transportation infrastructure, parks & recreation and healthy food retail can positively impact our ability to increase physical activity though the built environment.



HEALTHY SAVANNAH

In November of 2018, Healthy Savannah, and the YMCA of Coastal Georgia, was awarded a five year, \$3.4 million grant to undertake a REACH project from the CDC. REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health).

The primary goal of the Project HOPE grant is to reduce health disparities among African American and Hispanic/Latino Americans in low-income Chatham County neighborhoods.



Overlaying areas with a lack of pedestrian mobility (such as sidewalks), access to parks and recreation, and locating food deserts can begin the process to creating more equitable and healthier communities.

Mental Wellness

Although a controversial topic, mental illness is a common reality many people live with. Mental illness can simply be defined as a wide range of conditions that affect mood, thinking, and behavior.

Numerous factors contribute to mental illness such as genetics, societal influences, and physical environment. A SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) survey conducted between 2009 and 2013 revealed that nearly 40% of adults in the State of Georgia were living with some form of mental illness. In response to this figure and other health related matters, Chatham County partnered with the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition (CGIC) and developed strategic pathways to address community health issues, mental health being included, further ensuring that communities in Chatham County foster wellness.

It is a common occurrence for an individual suffering with a mental health condition to be confronted by law enforcement when their condition presents a challenge.

Instead of mental health workers addressing the matter, law enforcement, many of whom are not properly trained for mental health situations, often intervene in these scenes. In events like this, it is common for law enforcement officers to arrest the individual and bring them to an emergency room (ER). This creates a strain not only on the individual suffering through their mental health crisis, but also on the system of law enforcement and emergency medical service workers. The number of officers dispatched and number of ER rooms available to those in need are greatly impacted by the lack of structure and guidance regarding the process to assisting those in need of mental health services.

This continuum of care (CoC) process is in need of improvement to ensure patients are being tracked and provided with the services needed. This secures better outcomes for the patients over time while adapting to their changing needs.

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Food Access & Nutritional Education

Taking a ride through most urban areas, it is much easier to purchase a hamburger or fried chicken than it is to find fresh produce or a sugar free smoothie. The foods available to a community have a dire impact on its overall health. When an area is devoid of fresh and healthy foods it is considered a “food desert.” Contrarily, the term “food swamp” is used to describe areas that are over saturated with options of fast foods, processed foods, and junk foods. We live in the time where the majority of people reside in urban areas and do not grow their own food; this leads many to depend on external sources for their food.

Given the County's widespread development pattern, it becomes clear that there are not enough grocery stores and markets to accommodate each community. This is a strain particularly for the elderly and those with limited access to personal vehicles and public transit.

According to Federal Reserve Economic Data, 40,098 residents in Chatham County received SNAP benefits in 2018, a number that has notably dropped from previous years. Although this figure has decreased, it shows that a significant number of residents, nearly 14% of residents in Chatham County, still need assistance in providing foods for their households, 5% higher than the national average. In alignment with food access, food nutrition is just as important. If someone is gifted the option to choose between a monthly supply of sweets and potato chips or a monthly supply of dry beans, rice, and vegetables; their knowledge of food nutrition, or lack of, will usually be the driving force behind their decision. Having access to affordable healthy food is paramount; however, so is the ability to recognize the value in it is as well.

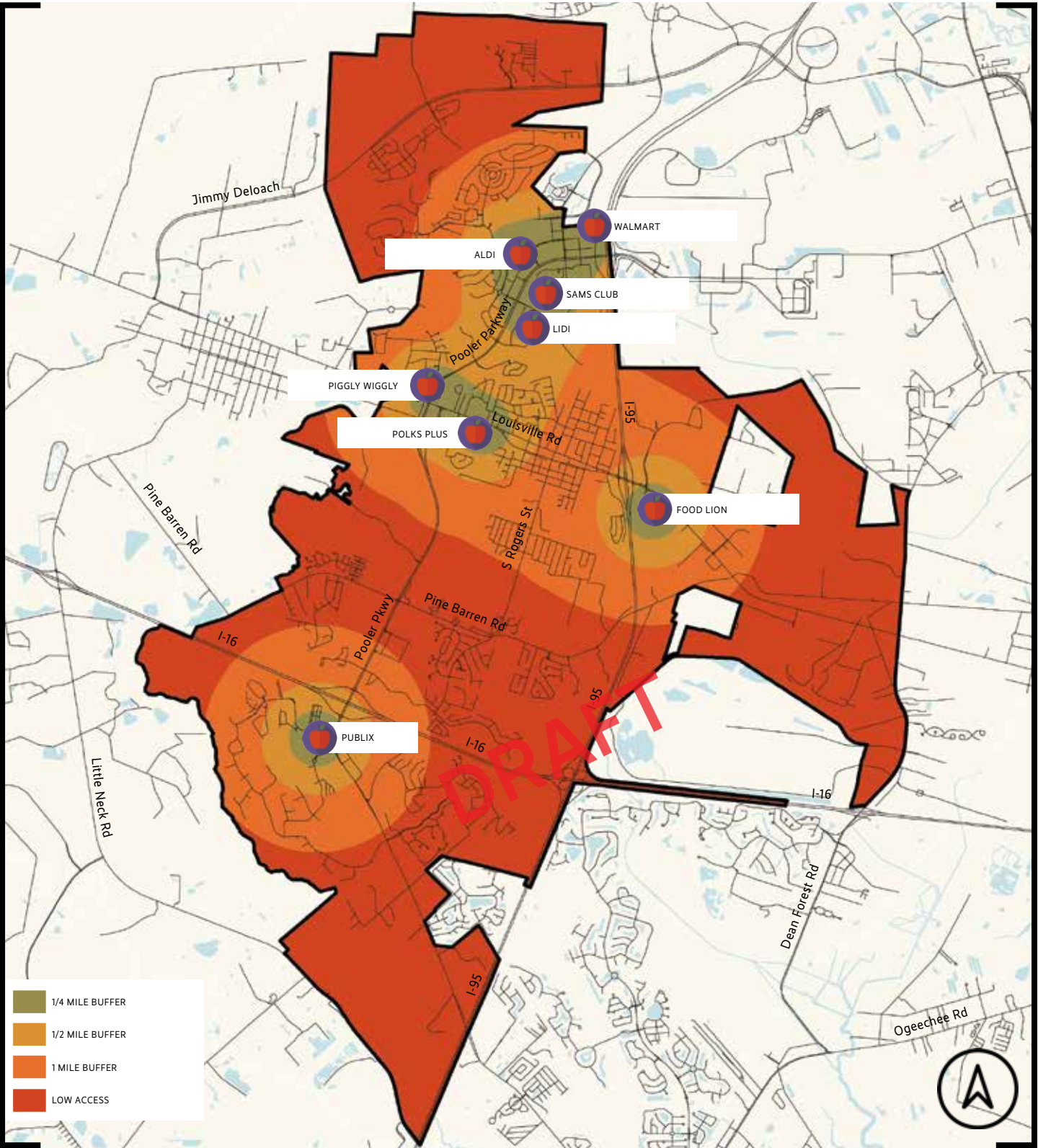
FARM TRUCK 912

In an effort to increase the access to healthy and affordable foods, Farm Truck 912 is stationed at Sheppard's Gas & Food Mart on Thursdays in the City offering local and fresh produce for to the public most in need of healthy foods.



Pooler's evaluation of areas not having a grocery store within 1 mile radius reveals that for the most part, Pooler is food rich with a diverse range of healthy food options. While it is a food rich community, there are 2 areas in particular that lack healthy food access. The Pine Barren Road and Southern Quacco Road Corridor along with the northern most area along Jimmy Deloach Parkway.

While this might draw some concern for Pooler, the 2 identified areas of Pine Barren Road and Jimmy Deloach Parkway are still developing and will attract future commercial development as more residential households are constructed. Currently, Pooler has approved the coastal region's first Costco along Pooler Parkway, which will have a positive effect for food access on the Pine Barren Road area.



Map 8.6–City of Pooler's Food Deserts

Unemployment & Poverty

Unemployment does not merely mean ‘one without a job’. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployed citizens are individuals who are jobless and actively seeking work. Those who are not working and not seeking work are not considered to be in the labor force. When individuals struggle to find work, it puts a strain on a myriad of areas in life including finances, mental wellness, safety, and food security.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the unemployment rate for the City of Pooler was on a gradual decline until 2020 when the pandemic occurred.

Unemployment Rates 2016–2020

| Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Chatham County | 5.3 | 4.5 | 3.8 | 3.4 | 7.6 |
| City of Pooler | 4.5 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 2.7 | 5.9 |

Figure 8.14–County & City Unemployment Rates

Unemployment Stats for 2020 (Annual Average)

| Year | Labor Force | Employment | Unemployment | Rate (%) |
|------|-------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| 2013 | 10,214 | 840 | 11,054 | 7.6 |
| 2014 | 10,667 | 749 | 11,416 | 6.6 |
| 2015 | 11,134 | 653 | 11,787 | 5.5 |
| 2016 | 11,797 | 555 | 12,352 | 4.5 |
| 2017 | 12,225 | 471 | 12,696 | 3.7 |
| 2018 | 12,560 | 399 | 12,959 | 3.1 |
| 2019 | 13,501 | 379 | 13,880 | 2.7 |
| 2020 | 12,856 | 810 | 13,666 | 5.9 |

Figure 8.15–City of Pooler's Unemployment Stats

COVID-19

As a nation, we were unaware of the dire impacts that COVID-19 would have on us all. As cases and fatalities continued to increase in 2020, many went into a state of paranoia and panic. Questions such as- “what exactly is this virus”, “how can I properly protect myself and family from it” and “how long will it last” came across the minds of virtually every person in this Country. As of April 2021, Chatham County has had more than 20,000 cases and 417 deaths due to COVID-19. In response to the pandemic, virtually every public and private space had to alter how human activity existed within their vicinities and the need for more accessible open and open outdoor spaces became evident. The virus has proven to be an incident that will have lasting effects moving well into the future.

Unemployment began to see an increase from COVID-19 starting in March of 2020 as it reached its peak at rate of 15.3% in April. It tapered down slowly until it reached a rate of 5.6 % by the end of 2020. Concerns with facing grave fears of death, eviction/foreclosure due to loss of income, drastic changes to household dynamics, and shortages of food, heightened the mental health challenges many were already suffering with and created a large splinter of anxiety for others.

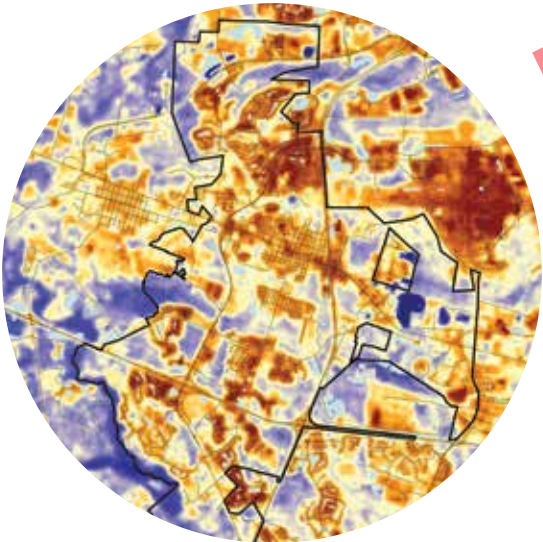
Climate Change

As the nation continues to experience drastic changes in weather patterns, the affects have been severe on the general population in many areas. Excessive heat has increased the number of emergency room visits for strokes and dehydration.

There are studies that have revealed the correlation between excessive heat and violent crimes, even more so in low income areas (The Urban Crime and Heat Gradient in High and Low Poverty Areas | NBER). Extreme cold can decrease the amount of time spent outside which can in return lower levels of Vitamin D resulting in weaker immune systems and depression. Recent weather patterns have exposed severe cold temperatures to areas of the Country that normally do not experience hard freezes. These shifts left many states and local governments ill prepared in early spring of 2020 as the effects of the weather disengaged power sources and destroyed infrastructure. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the parallel between these changes in climate and weather, and public health threats with the need to assist and protect our most vulnerable populations and communities.

It is known that building wind and solar farms helps to reduce the human impact on climate change by displacing noxious emissions from coal-fired power plants. However, Harvard research also shows that improved public health is an added benefit to the local implementing of renewable development.

Renewable and energy efficiency measures help displace coal power plants and other fossil fuels, and helps reduce harmful emissions of nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, and carbon dioxide. A concentrated local effort must be taken to help reduce the impacts of noxious emissions and other pollutants on Pooler's population.



LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about unemployment please check our Economic Development Element.
Check it out on page XX!

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about Urban Heat Island Effects please check our Natural Resource Element.
Check it out on page XX!

COMMUNITY HEALTH GOALS

GOAL 1

Organize and promote community health services, recreational opportunities, and fitness programs in order to encourage citizens to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors

There is a community-wide need to encourage and provide opportunities to incorporate physical activity into daily routines. Physical activity has been proven to improve health and reduce the risks of several diseases, however barriers such as lack of time or access can act as impediments to adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors. Removing barriers by providing more opportunities and easier access to health services, recreational opportunities, and fitness programs can have immediate and long term health benefits and can improve the quality of life for many in the community.

Objectives:

- Identify and make accommodations for specific needs of targeted groups such as those with special needs, elderly, and disabled in order to eliminate barriers to access and encourage use of recreational opportunities and fitness programs
- Identify opportunities to incorporate physical activities into daily lives of citizens
- Encourage mixed land uses and designs to reduce vehicle trips and accommodate walkability

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GOAL 2

Ensure access to preventative healthcare services, health education and strategies to motivate individuals and families to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors

Preventative healthcare reduces the risk for diseases, disabilities and death, and is much less expensive than the cost of treatment once issues have arisen. Many do not have access to or do not take advantage of (because they do not understand the importance of) available preventative healthcare services. Ensuring access to all, educating on the importance of, and encouraging usage of preventative healthcare services will improve long term healthcare, increase lifespan, reduce medical expenditures, and improve quality of life for man in the community.

Objectives:

- Invest in community-based health resources for citizens to increase health equality while optimizing their health and wellness with preventive healthcare services and health education
- Increase health education efforts to encourage the prioritization of preventative healthcare
- Identify barriers to access of preventative healthcare services and work to eliminate those barriers
- Develop local and regional collaboration among similar organizations to improve the delivery of social services and to expand the continuum of services

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GOAL 3

Effectively address mental health in the community

Mental health is important at every stage of life, from birth to death, and significantly impacts quality of life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recognized depression as a critical public health issue, as mental illness is a leading cause of both injury and disease for people around the world. There is still much stigma to discussing mental health issues but it is necessary to increase awareness and address the mental health needs of the community in order to improve quality of life and public health of the citizens.

Objectives:

- Educate the public in order to reduce stigma and increase awareness
- Increase early intervention programs and remove gaps and barriers to those programs
- Increase access to treatment particularly as it impacts incarcerated individuals, children, and adolescents
- Develop local and regional collaboration among similar organizations to improve the delivery of social services and to expand the continuum of services

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GOAL 4

Increase access to healthy food for populations most likely to experience food insecurity through community gardens and alternative distribution methods

Access to healthy food is a major issue affecting health in the community. Good nutrition plays an important role in the growth, development, health and well-being of individuals through all stages of life. Eating a healthy diet can reduce risks of chronic diseases, improve overall health and quality of life. However, eating a healthy diet is difficult without access to affordable, nutritious food. Difficulty in accessing healthy food is often times exacerbated by the higher costs associated with healthier food options when they can be found, making eating a healthy diet virtually impossible for many. Nearly 14% of residents in Chatham County need assistance in providing food for their household, which is 5% higher than the national average. Improving access and affordability of healthy food options for more members of the community is imperative in improving the health and quality of life of the community as a whole.

Objectives:

- Identify funding mechanisms to increase access to healthy food in “food deserts” within the community
- Expand community garden and urban farmer programs to encourage alternative methods to access healthy food
- Create farmer support programs
- Develop local and regional collaboration among similar organizations to improve the delivery of social services and to expand the continuum of services

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