



Mental Health in Millinocket

Perspectives of Local Providers and Community Stakeholders



MENTAL HEALTH: An Introduction

The 2021-2022 Penobscot County Community Health Needs Assessment identified Mental Health as the top priority for Penobscot County⁽¹⁾. Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community.⁽²⁾

Millinocket is considered 'small rural' and is designated a mental health professional shortage area although it sits within Penobscot County, a metropolitan county.⁽³⁾ However, Millinocket-specific mental health data for the most part is aggregated with Penobscot County, which obscures the reality of the local need. Millinocket's demographic data, however, differs significantly from the rest of Penobscot with a higher median age, lower median household income and lower employment rate.⁽³⁾ Many common mental disorders are shaped to a great extent by social, economic and environmental factors and when considering other characteristics of the area, such as its isolation and lack of mental health workers puts the community at a higher risk for mental health problems.⁽⁴⁾

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES: Recommendations



Provider Recruitment

- Establish training sites and provide tuition reimbursement for medical and mental health professionals as these both encourage providers to remain in the community; Millinocket Regional Hospital may want to partner with MERGE and Building ME to create training opportunities.^(5,6)
- Organizations should make a video/brochure advertising what is in area (i.e. outdoor recreation, existing cultural outlets) - accurate portrayal of what the community has to offer could potentially lead to increased provider recruitment/retainment.



Community

- Prioritize a needs assessment for community LCSW position potentially funded by tri-town support (Millinocket, East Millinocket, and Medway) and Millinocket Regional Hospital. The position could be created through MRH. That way, downtime could be spent contributing to the CHNA and Community Benefit Report, as a need for this was outlined in the 2021-2022 MRH Strategic Plan.
- Prioritize youth interventions and mental health support. Consider creating a community coalition similar to Katahdin Response Network, but instead with a focus on mental health. This could include community organizations such as the Millinocket School Systems, Millinocket Regional Hospital, Katahdin Valley Health Center, and the local fire departments.



Amplifying Local Voices

- Create a hospital group responsible for community level data collection, which could be useful in applying for grants and representing the needs of Millinocket accurately.
- The Shared Community Health Needs Assessment should reconsider how it collects and/or reports community health data to minimize the chance of misrepresenting the needs of rural and underserved communities that happen to be situated within metropolitan counties.

Current State

The State of Maine Department of Economic and Community Development offers a Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program, but this is only available to the 4 designated rural counties in Maine. Millinocket is a rural community situated within an urban county and therefore underrepresented in Community Health Needs Assessment data. The recommendation is that the State reconsider how it identifies eligible communities for grant opportunities based on local, rather than aggregate data. Instead, Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes could be used for qualification. RUCA codes give classification to towns at the sub-county level, on a scale of 1-10 from urban to rural. This way, rural areas within metro-counties could be given eligibility based on their RUCA code, which would provide a more specific criteria for grant disbursement.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES: Verbal Survey

After administering a short verbal survey to local providers and community stakeholders regarding mental health in Millinocket, common themes in responses were found:

When identifying the largest issues many respondents mentioned there were a **lack of mental health services**, **transportation difficulties**, and **cultural stigma towards seeking help for mental health**.

When asked about difficulties attracting and obtaining health professionals, the most common responses were **lack of social/cultural outlets**, and **isolation of the community**. When prompted for solutions the most common answers were **recruitment of providers**, and **expansion of telehealth services**.

Majority of respondents agreed that **people in the Millinocket area do not have access to the mental health treatment they need** and that an expansion of mental health resources would be of the greatest benefit to **local youth**.

What do you think is the #1 undermet mental health need in Millinocket?	Lack of providers/services (10) Lack of long-term counseling (4) Lack of Youth Programs (1) Resources for families (1)	Substance Use Disorder (1) Appropriate Screening (1) Depression (1)
What parts of the community would benefit most from an expansion of mental health resources?	Youth (13) Families (2) Those in poverty (2)	
What barriers exist in the area that prevent people from getting the mental health treatment they need?	Lack of services/providers (12) Transportation/isolation (9) Culture/stigma (6) Cost (5)	Lack of insurance (3) Health Literacy (1) Local governance (1)
What factors in the area make it difficult to obtain or retain providers	Lack of Amenities/Cultural Outlets (12) Isolation (4) Salary (4) Availability of housing (4)	Lack of Industry (3) Cost of Living (2) Licensing Req. for Social Workers (2) Lack of provider support/Burn-out (2)
Do you have any suggestions for solutions for improving mental health in Millinocket?	Recruitment of providers (7) Expansion of Telehealth (4) Funding/Grants (3) Improved advertising by organizations (3) Relax Licensing Requirements for LCSW (2)	Improved Interorganizational Collaboration (1) Early intervention (1) Reducing Stigma (1) Youth Programs (1)

Funding Resources

• **State grant opportunities can be tracked at:**

<https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants>

• **The John T Gorman Foundation supports organizations that address mental health in underserved communities across Maine:**

<https://www.jtgfoundation.org/our-work/grants-giving/>

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