Perry County Health Improvement Zone

Southern Perry County Assessment Report

Prepared for Perry County Health Department
by Ohio University's Voinovich School
of Leadership and Public Service

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Perry County
Health Department

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION 3

METHODOLOGY 4

THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS 4

- Social Connections and Community 4
- Access to Health Care 6
- Access to Healthy Foods 7
- Substance Abuse Epidemic, Associated Crime, and Law Enforcement 8
- Quality of the Water 9
- Quality of Housing 10
- Mental Health 11
- Physical Activity 12
- Transportation 12
- Information Awareness 13
- Maintenance of Recreational Opportunities 14
- Education 15

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES AND RESOURCES 15

CONCLUSION 17

APPENDICES 19

A. Date, Time, and Location of Each Focus Group 19
B. Focus Group Instrument 20
C. Social Determinants of Health Handout 22
D. Place and Health: Perry County's Social Vulnerability Index Handout 23
E. Additional Unrelated Findings 24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Perry County Health Department (PCHD) received a grant from the Ohio Department of Health to fund a project to address social determinants of health and improve healthy behaviors of residents through meaningful community engagement and cross sector collaborations. PCHD identified the Southern Perry County villages of Shawnee, New Straitsville, and Hemlock for the Ohio Health Improvement Zone project. Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service was enlisted to provide technical assistance for the project.

To assess health needs in the community, five focus groups were held in fall 2022 at locations in the Southern Perry County villages. The following themes emerged from the discussions:

- Individuals' relationships and interactions with family, friends, and community members have a major impact on their health and well-being. Increased programming and activities—across all age groups—are needed to build social connections and support networks in the community. Facilities are needed to host such activities.
- Having access to affordable health care is a major determinant of health. The high cost of health care often prevents people from getting the care that they need. Greater access to health care is desired, such as through a mobile clinic or day clinics.
- Being healthy means eating healthy. Food insecurity is an issue for many children and families in Southern Perry County. Greater access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns is needed to improve individuals' health and the health of others in the community. Education about eating healthy is also needed.
- The ongoing substance abuse disorder epidemic and the associated crime affects the wellbeing of the community as it causes mental distress and social isolation. Feedback from residents suggest that both treatment and increased law enforcement efforts are needed in Southern Perry County.
- Southern Perry County residents are concerned that their tap water is contaminated and that they will experience negative health issues if they drink the water. Residents from all three communities indicated they buy bottled water, which is a major expense for such an essential physiological need. Improvements in the quality of the water are needed.
- Many residents in Southern Perry County live in poverty. The poor quality and inadequate conditions of some of the housing in Southern Perry County not only negatively impacts the mental and physical health of the children and families living in those conditions, but also impacts the overall safety and well-being of the community.
- Having a healthy mindset and positive mental health is essential to overall health. Additional resources for mental health are needed including support for addiction and recovery.
- Being healthy means staying active. More opportunities are needed for physical activity such as an indoor exercise facility, sidewalks, and bicycle/walking paths.

- Lack of transportation affects many other determinants of health in the community because it hinders access to services and opportunities. Increased transportation options in Southern Perry County may be warranted.
- A part of being healthy is being aware of resources and social opportunities that are available to you. Greater promotion of information and resources is needed in the community.
- Resources are needed to maintain and improve the recreational resources/facilities that exist in the community.
- Generational poverty and lack of education impact health. More education, especially pertaining to health literacy, is needed.

In addition, the residents of New Straitsville, Shawnee, and Hemlock described a number of factors in their communities that they see as positively impacting the health and well-being of Southern Perry County residents. Above all, the resource most frequently cited (especially in the Shawnee and Hemlock groups) was the people that live in the communities.

Finally, residents were enthusiastic about the potential impact of the Ohio Health Improvement Zone project on their communities. A majority of participants signed up to participate in Phase II of the project.

INTRODUCTION

The Perry County Health Department (PCHD) received a grant from the Ohio Department of Health to fund a project to address social determinants of health (SDoH) and improve healthy behaviors of residents through meaningful community engagement and cross sector collaborations.

The Health Department identified two communities in the county for the Ohio Health Improvement Zone pilot project: New Lexington and the Southern Perry County villages of Shawnee, New Straitsville, and Hemlock. Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service was enlisted to provide technical assistance for the project.

Phase I of the project focused on assessing the health needs of the community. This report focuses on the assessment that occurred in the Southern Perry County communities. The document describes the methods that were used to engage the community, the questions that were posed to the community participants, and a detailed analysis of the congruent themes that emerged from the focus group discussions. Substantial quotations from participants are included throughout the report to convey the richness of the discussion and provide the authentic voices of the community members. Appendices provided at the end include details on the focus groups, the protocol for the focus groups, the handouts that were provided to participants to facilitate discussion, and information on additional findings that were not directly related to the scope of the assessment project.

METHODOLOGY

The Perry County Health Department worked with leaders in the villages of New Straitsville, Shawnee, and Hemlock to recruit members of the community to attend focus groups to discuss what it means to be healthy. In the recruitment process, community members were informed they would receive a $25 Kroger gift card for their time and that the data collected from sessions would be used to secure funding and drive decision-making for health improvement initiatives in Southern Perry County.

A series of five community engagement focus groups was held at locations in each of the villages in Southern Perry County during late October and early November. A total of 39 individuals participated, including: 10 residents of New Straitsville, 19 residents of Shawnee, and 10 residents of Hemlock.

The community engagement focus groups were facilitated by members of the Perry County Health Department with assistance from community partners. Staff members from Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service (OU) attended each session to record and take notes from the discussion.

Participants were provided a handout on Social Determinants of Health and Perry County's Social Vulnerability Index prior to the discussion. During the session, PCHD facilitators asked

each group a series of questions related to their health and the health of their community, including:

- What does being healthy mean to you?
- What do you need to be healthy?
- What things need to change in order to be healthy?
- Which of the items on the Social Determinants of Health list affect people's health in your community?
- Are there other things that affect people's health in your community that are not on the list?
- What resources are positive impacts on people's health in your community?
- What changes do you think would help improve your health and the health of other people in your community?

Following the sessions, OU staff created written transcripts from the recordings of each focus group and conducted a careful analysis of the documents to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns that were present in the community engagement discussions.

THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The results of the thematic analysis across all questions discussed in the focus groups are presented below. Rather than presenting the results from each discussion question individually, responses across questions were examined holistically and were synthesized into overarching themes. Each theme was evaluated for strength in support of the theme. The strength of the theme is provided in column two as follows: ++++Very strong theme among most participants; +++Strong theme across many participants; ++Moderate theme across multiple participants; +Theme emerged among a few participants. Representative quotes from participants are provided under each theme as supporting evidence.

Social Connections and Community		
	+ + + +	**Individuals' relationships and interactions with family, friends, and community members have a major impact on their health and well-being. Increased programming and activities—across all age groups—are needed to build social connections and support networks in the community. Facilities are needed to host such activities.**

- “I think being healthy could not just be food, not just activities, but having friends and family you can depend on. . . .I know several people that has no one. . . .Someone you can turn to, that’s a lot of your happiness.”
- “Well, I just think in general, when you have, you’re more socially connected, you just get out and do more, you're more active, you have a better attitude.”
- “I kind of feel isolated living here. That’s why I’m all for community activities, you know, to get to know people.”
- “A community center would be nice, where you could go. I mean, that would be really cool to see [the theater in Shawnee] you know, come together, that would be a good way for people to get together and connect in addition to what's you know, that our community events that we have so it would be a big draw to get. I think it would be a draw in the county, especially to get people down here to see that theater in operation would be amazing, right?”
- “Within our community, we need a social building.”
- “An essential building would be nice. Some kind of a social hall, you know where you could do something like this. You could have kids’ activities. You could have somebody do yoga.”
- “The building was old, but we had, you know, a lot of good times and stuff there. Like at Halloween, we’d have hot dogs and all kinds of snacks and stuff and everything was free for the kids. And there just was always a good turnout. But we just don’t have the building.” (lots of agreement and side conversations)
- “I still think we ought to have a place that kids can come and play, even if they have a room for teenagers to come in and dance. People used to love to go do that. Just things like that to keep them busy that they're not taking drugs and running around the town.”
- “Just some place to have activities even to join together. You know so people can sit around even if all they're doing is talking and there’s some music going on, they get out and walk around and talk to somebody else. It gets you out.”
- “Social connection also brings people together, and we need something like that, 'cause there's no place for kids to go, adults to go. There's no place.”
- “Something for kids to do, to get out. I mean, that's important. We had that when we were younger. And we have nothing here anymore and that would help us healthwise just in general.”
- “And if we don’t start getting kids out now and finding them something to do, the drug problems will just continue and the depression and all that's just gonna continue because there's nothing for them to do.”
- “[A community center] would seriously take care of everything. It would give space to have a little bit of workout equipment that we could walk in there and use. It would give a meeting space where people could just get together and socialize. Maybe have Euchre night or checkers night or you know whatever. Activities for kids.” (lots of agreement)

Access to Health Care		
	+ + + +	**Having access to affordable health care is a major determinant of health. The high cost of health care often prevents people from getting the care that they need. Greater access to health care is desired, such as through a mobile clinic or day clinics. Access to timelier emergency response is also desired.**

- "That's a part of being healthy. Can you afford to get the services that you need, that you want?"
- "The cost of health care. The cost of insurance has to play a major factor in that people can't, people can't afford it, so they don't go."
- "For a lot of people it's their copay. Yeah, they won't go do it because they don't have the money for the copay. Give them a voucher or something to take care of that copay."
- "We have to have access to good doctors, care and in close vicinity. Not having to drive 60-70 miles to see a specialist. "
- "There's a lot of people that can't make it, can't drive numerous miles to make it to the doctor."
- "[We need] doctor checkups for people. Just like a yearly blood draw or, you know something I mean every six months."
- "You know having a doctor closer so that you could, when you're feeling overwhelmed, or you're feeling those things and not have to wait 45 minutes for a squad you know which causes more stress."
- "Better access to medical care. . .down here the closest thing is the hospital in Logan or you drive all the way up to Lancaster if you can, but that's a long distance to get to your doctor."
- "It would be nice to actually have a doctor's office in this community, even it was only once or twice, some kind of urgent care. Even if it wasn't open every day."
- "But if you think about it, if you could get [a mobile health clinic] on a route where it would be in New Straitsville one day, Shawnee on another, and Hemlock school area and Corning—work your way up to Moxie and end up in New Lex or wherever. I think you could do like a medical loop and just have these things rotate out."
- "As far as in this area, Southern Perry County, when it comes to needing an ambulance, it takes a while because first they'll try toning out for first responders and then they tone out New Lex."
- "They can't get our squad to go because the ones on the squad are working. Yeah, so then they're never here when you need a squad."

Access to Healthy Foods		
	+ + + +	**Being healthy means eating healthy. Food insecurity is an issue for many children and families in Southern Perry County. Greater access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns is needed to improve individuals' health and the health of others in the community. Education about eating healthy is also needed.**

- "You have to have good nutrition."
- "Having enough food to eat, you have to have money for your food. So if you go back up here to health care and health care coverage, if you're paying all that like somebody was saying, somebody paid, we don't thank goodness, but all that money for your health care coverage and for your medication or you don't have health care. You're not going to if you have to have that for your health. You're not going to have money for your food, very healthy food. Or any food for that matter."
- "There's some kids that only get meals when they come to school. And that's what they rely on." (lots of agreement)
- "It's kind of hard to put this in words now when we think about, when you take a drive around the community and see the houses, you see the kids that you know are getting one meal a day and you know that can bring you down pretty fast."
- "I feel like access to healthy foods is probably [a major need]. I mean I know we have the Friday farmers market and that it's been a huge success, but. And I feel like Southern Perry County, much like Appalachia, in general, there's a lot of food deserts around, and that kind of gets back to like accessibility and transportation to like going to New Lex to get produce. . . .Yeah, definitely being in a food desert doesn't help access to nutritious foods."
- "Access to good food and the knowledge of what's good for you."
- "[We need] a grocery store with access to like fruits and vegetables."
- "It would be stinking awesome to have something like that here!" (referring to the Veggie Van from Community Food Initiatives in Athens)
- "Access to healthy foods. I cannot shop for anything that I can eat in this area."
- "And it's not even about groceries, even like the restaurants around here. I mean, there's really not a lot of healthy foods. Most places around here are fast food or bar food."
- "I think we have access to healthy foods, but just like I said earlier, I don't think we know what they are."

- “If you don’t have health literacy, then you don’t even know if you’re being unhealthy or eating unhealthy food.”

Substance Abuse Epidemic, Associated Crime, and Law Enforcement		
	**+ + + +**	**The ongoing substance abuse disorder epidemic and the associated crime affects the well-being of the community as it causes mental distress and social isolation. Feedback from residents suggest that both treatment and law enforcement efforts are needed in Southern Perry County.**

- “When people don’t feel safe, that affects their health.” (unanimous agreement)
- “I worry about crime. There are people that come in my yard. They walk through my yard at night. I don't, you know. I saw 1-2 weeks ago, there was a local drug addict traipsing through my yard and I'm like, we're out there going, please stop doing this, we don't want you here. But I found people in my house before. I didn't even bother to call the law because there wasn't any law that night and we usually know that.”
- “Crime and violence for one, worrying about your life or where you go and is somebody doing something. It’s not like it used to be.”
- “I feel like it does affect my mental health, knowing that I can't pull out of my driveway without watching my garage doors close all the way. Constantly worried like making sure that my kid has his phone and if he's out where he's at, who he's with. Things like that.”
- “[My mother] is so worried about somebody breaking in and robbing from her, she just shuts herself off. And I think in general that tends to happen in this area. There's no place for people to get out. They don't feel comfortable going out, walking up and down the streets. They don't feel comfortable going away from their home and leaving the doors unlocked like we used to or whatever.”
- “[Living in this community] is not good for mental health. It creates antisocialism and solidarity. It really does. There is stigma in this town.”
- “What drives me crazy mentally is all the drug trafficking that I see almost every day of my life. I see that and nothing being done about it.” (yeah, yeah)
- “Well, you never really feel safe about walking down the streets, especially after dark. Yeah, it's just, it’s not the Shawnee we used to know.”
- “The biggest thing we need down here is, you have to have police officers. You have to have some form of law enforcement, whether it's Perry County sheriff and you guys all

heard the jokes at the time the guy was trying to break into my house in the middle of the night and I called 911. They told me not to worry about it."

- "[The sheriff] probably wouldn't have come anyhow, 'cause if you're not, someone's not dying, they don't come down here. That's the truth."
- "Yeah, I've heard that our county enforcement, law enforcement isn't really making it a priority to prosecute or crack down or whatever you wanna say, on a lot of these small drug offenses. But it's all of those small drug offenses that you know make it a big drug problem."
- "That (law enforcement) was the first thing that came to my mind. I mean, it seems pretty unanimous that. . .law enforcement in general is probably more needed. I think it would be great if we had an officer on duty 24 hours a day."
- "And you call up and they go well, we only have two deputies on duty, yeah, and they're up north."

Quality of the Water		
	**+ + + +**	**Southern Perry County residents are concerned that their tap water is contaminated and that they will experience negative health issues if they drink the water. Residents from all three communities indicated they buy bottled water, which is a major expense for such an essential physiological need. Residents would like to see improvements in the quality of their water.**

- "I mean, I think everybody in town probably has something to say about the water quality. I know a few years back we used to get notices all the time on our doors about [inaudible] things in our water. We know that's not great for you. That's a tough, tough contaminant to remove from water, and I don't know if they've done anything about it."
- "The quality of the water. I think it's disgusting." (lots of agreement)
- "I mean if (the water) corrodes my plastic in the dishwasher, then I don't want it in my body."
- "Everybody drinks bottled water, which makes water expensive." (unanimous agreement)
- "The quality of our water here isn't what it used to be. It used to come straight from Burr Oak and now it comes from on down Chauncey and down in that area. And there's chemicals put in. It used to be, we didn't have a whole lot of chemicals in our water. I think mostly everybody here buys bottled water." (unanimous agreement)
- "The water causes cancer."

- “A lot of them, they tell you don’t drink the water out of the tap.”
- “The water. Don't drink the water.”

Quality of Housing		
	**+ + + +**	**Many residents in Southern Perry County live in poverty. The poor quality and inadequate conditions of some of the housing in Southern Perry County not only negatively impact the mental and physical health of the children and families living in those conditions, but also impact the overall safety and well-being of the community.**

- “I mean, obviously the quality of housing in this town leaves a lot to be desired. . . .But the quality of housing for our neighbors for a large amount of the community here in New Straitsville is not good. It's not good. And they don't have the money to make it better. They just don't. I mean, come on, you know they're living with mice and cockroaches and bed bugs and everything else, and there is no way that's conducive to a healthy person. I mean, there's no way, no way. I mean, that just invites all kinds of disease and sickness, you know.”
- “We do a tour of the district every year for new staff members, and just seeing some of the conditions and stuff that these kids live in. A lot of them live in houses that are run down. A lot of them live in houses that the parents just decided they were going to move into here just because it’s shelter.”
- “One of the ladies that we know, she was shuffled from house to house her whole entire life, childhood. I mean didn't have stability and is still, you know, working on trying to solidify that, that stability because when you don't have it as a child, it's hard to now have it as an adult and break the cycle of you know constant debt and repaying old debts that you know that people have. And so I mean, unfortunately, a lot of people, they do bounce from house to house, sleep on a couch, borrow a friend’s, like sleep in a car. A lot of people sleep in their car, and it's, it's heartbreaking to see. “
- “The safety of their house there, the price of fuel and all this stuff. People are going to be freezing here this winter.”
- “A lot of houses in this area need obvious help. Whether they have ceilings or roofs coming down or their stairways are non-existent anymore. That not only probably poses a health problem for the people living in that house and it might come down to the rest of the economic stability of not being able to afford to fix their property. But it also affects the people in the community because some of these houses aren't necessarily safe to be around.”

- “I need this town to be cleaned up—that would help a lot. . .things like that if we clean them up, everybody’s going to feel better about the place.”
- “There are lots of houses that should be condemned. Some have been condemned and people still live in them.”

Mental Health		
	**+ + +**	**Having a healthy mindset and positive mental health is essential to overall health. Residents would like to see more resources for mental health in general as well as support for addiction and recovery.**

- “I think health means that you're able to cope with your environment.”
- “Healthy mind, healthy body.”
- “Mine would be exuberant. . . .If I mean I see somebody that's, that's full of energy and peppy, and I mean I, you just kind of take for granted that that's a healthy person. They're, they're just feeling good and doing good, and they're just exuberant. That's the word.”
- “For me, it's, my mental health affects my physical health a lot.”
- “I think no matter what you do, if you think positive, it helps all the way around (lots of agreement). Negative thoughts have nowhere in your mind.”
- “I think not just physically, but like emotionally like you might look at somebody and then they look healthy, but on the inside they're not.”
- “What’s the point of health if you’re not mentally there to enjoy it?”
- “[We need] mental health resources.”
- “I'm a recovering addict, an alcoholic. I’m doing good. I'm here. For me, I have to go to Newark or New Lex or into Logan for like a support meeting or whatever and sometimes I don't have a way of getting there. . . .But I think it might help people, if they know they have that support system, that might give them the nudge. Yeah, you know saying OK, I have a support group or whatever.”
- “Get groups together and talk about it and have a meeting once a week or something. And hopefully everyone stays together and gets good.”
- “I also think the lack of access like mental health care and maybe the stigma around mental health too, like that probably exacerbates, along with other things, the crime rates and crime activities around, you know, this area specifically.”

Physical Activity		
	+ + +	**Being healthy means staying active. More opportunities are needed for physical activity such as an indoor exercise facility, sidewalks, and bicycle/walking paths.**

- "Being active and being able to do things you want to do. You get around."
- "Being able to be out like with my grandkids, and great grandkids and doing stuff. And being able to do like they said, exercising."
- "The more active you are, the better you are."
- "Well, do you know what would help me in New Straitsville with my health? I'm going to tell you I would love to have an exercise facility somewhere closer to my home."
- "I wish here we had a building or something where people could get together and, you know, exercise. You know for me to do it myself, I start out maybe a week or two and then I forget, if where, if we had a group or something [I'd do it]."
- "We actually have a lot of recreational stuff around here, but it's the hiking trails and that kind of stuff which is not really conducive to the population down here. Older people can't, most older people don't hike hills and go, they need straight, smooth sidewalks so that they don't trip or fall."

Lack of Transportation		
	+ +	**Lack of transportation affects many other determinants of health in the community because it hinders access to services and opportunities. Some residents expressed a need for increased transportation options in Southern Perry County.**

- "There's a lot of people that can't make it, can't drive numerous miles to make it to the doctor."
- "You know living in this area, a lot of people might not be able to afford gas to go to New Lex or Logan or wherever because we don't have fresh, we don't have the fruits and vegetables."
- "That comes down to transportation too. A lot of people don't have access to go to Lancaster or go to Columbus or something for a better job. There's really not anything around here."

- “And it's kind of hard around here to have a job. I drive an hour every day to have a job, because there's nothing in accounting around here that pays me enough to make it worth me staying around here. I have to drive, and I mean I'm spending 10 hours a week in a car by myself.”
- “They are aware of transit in general, but I know a lot of people that won't use it because of the wait times. You know nobody wants to go to the doctor sitting there for an hour. By the time they're done with their doctor's appointment and they come out and have a nurse call for their ride home, and then they're sitting in the lobby for another hour waiting to be picked up together. It's exhausting, especially for somebody like older you know or somebody with young kids. Kids get antsy, kids get hungry. They don't want to be sitting with nothing to do waiting on a ride home.”
- “Yeah there's a lot of people who live here without transportation and I know that there is a transit or whatever, but you have to pay for that [and some people can’t afford it].”
- “I rode it twice. . . .Six-hour round trip and $3 one way.”

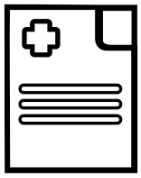
Information Awareness		
	**+ +**	**A part of being healthy is being aware of resources and social opportunities that are available to you. Residents feel that greater promotion of information and resources is needed in the community.**

- “That brings another point here is that not everybody gets all the information about all programs available.”
- “Yeah, a lot of people doesn't know what's available either. Yeah, a lot of people doesn't know about that (Perry County Community Action assistance). They don't know what's available for them.”
- “The people that I've talked to around here, 99% of the people that have a Medicaid card in this area have no idea that they have transportation available to them to get to a doctor’s appointment.”
- “Yeah, you know, getting the word out so that people understand that these programs are available.”
- “Right, right, because everybody in the world thinks if it's on Facebook, we've seen it. It’s just, it's not the case.”
- “If we had a program, if someone could type that in, and set a screen in the municipal building, so it would just run with all the info on that, people could stop there and look or sit at the carry out and say oh hey, that's coming up then, yeah. 'Cause you do miss everything on Facebook.”

- “There are some good things that do happen here in New Straitsville for people and for their health and I just, the word doesn't get around good enough is what I think some of the problem is.”
- “Really, in our community, especially if you have a question about something and you're not like from here, you wouldn’t know anybody to talk to.”
- “Well, if you don't know about it, you can't use it.”

Maintenance of Recreational Opportunities		
	+	**Resources are needed to maintain and improve the recreational resources/facilities that exist in the community.**

- “Well, the recreational things we do have, we need some help from government or somebody because most of these [are] like the playground out there. Most of them were built with volunteer labor. And some of them were taken from the school house and brought there.”
- “We have a lake here in town that you can sit over there all day and never catch a fish. It used to get stocked. And you know kids would have somewhere to go then and enjoy themselves.”
- “There's no safe pedestrian way to get to the lake 'cause they have to cross that four way stop down there and traffic's always heavy. So we need to do something in that area too.”
- “You know, like that gym up there, it needs the roof fixed. It was leaking bad, and if they don’t take care of it, then it’s not gonna last.”

Education		
	+	**Generational poverty and lack of education impact health. Residents feel that more education, especially pertaining to health literacy, is needed.**

- “I mean, we walk into homes and apartments every day that are deplorable some of them you know. And it's just like how does anybody live like this? But I mean it, you know it's because they don't know any better. Nobody’s ever, ever in their lifetime, nobody’s ever told them any better. You know, they, they just don't have the knowledge. They think that this is OK. This is, it's OK to live like this.”
- “I guess it's the younger ones that would be, maybe bring more things into the schools to teach the kids. And I know it's happened all along, you know we used to get our toothbrushes and but you know, maybe these kids need to know. . . .Some kids just don't know. They need some instruction. And the adults that are like that now are the ones that fail. Society, we failed them, society failed them by not helping them with that instruction, or know how, I guess.”

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES AND RESOURCES

The residents of New Straitsville, Shawnee, and Hemlock described a number of factors in their communities that they see as positively impacting the health and well-being of Southern Perry County residents. Above all, the resource most frequently cited was the people that live in the communities. Specific resources that were mentioned are listed below with representative quotes from participants as supporting evidence.

The Residents of the Community

- “There's a lot of caring people and people that, you know, really want the best for Shawnee, and so I think that’s a cool resource.”
- “Well, being someone fairly new to the community, I feel like with the social connection that everybody in this town is fairly good at that, keeping everybody in the loop and just being very welcoming, so I feel like this, we're all pretty. It's pretty easy to get connected to the people here in this town.”
- “Yeah, I'd say my mental health is much improved being here and I just have a real sense of peace (from being around the people).”
- “I mean me personally I love living here. It’s nice and quiet, it's, it's not too urban. It's pretty rural, but you still have like friends and like people like in the Council and stuff. Like it's companionship.”
- “You have about 80% of the town you know. . .and you know your next door neighbor. And a lot of times people look out for each other.”
- “There's a lot of volunteer people, and they're willing to volunteer for certain things here.”

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- “But there's all kinds of trails and stuff. It doesn't necessarily have to be within (inaudible). I mean, yeah, there's Wayne National. There's the Buckeye Trail; there's all kinds of hiking trails.”
- “The lake, it's been, I mean, a lot of kids take interest in it and stuff like that so I mean, that's always a really good resource.”
- “I think like living in a National Forest is super beneficial just with the accessibility to the Buckeye Trail and you know, having that right, you know right outside my back door anyway is super beneficial for me from like a mental health perspective and just from obviously a physical perspective.”

Community Events

- “We’ve got the theater. I'm sure they do a lot at the theater that I'm not even really aware of, but I know this year our son was down here for the summer programs which that was great he really enjoyed. . . .That was a really cool thing for a lot of kids I think in town and gave a lot of opportunity to get together and do some activities and get to know each other.”
- “I know with working with our farmers market too, and trying to create that access to healthy foods. I think that made a difference too.” (agreement)
- (The car show) was a big thing. I didn't think it was going to be that big. I pictured like 7 or 8 cars, and there was like a bunch. (agreement and side conversations)
- “All the events that they do on like the second Saturdays and the first Fridays and even being invited to the church, all the things that they do here and it's, it's really easy to get connected.”

Perry County Transit

- “We've got pretty good transportation because Perry County’s Transit, there's quite a few of them vans and I think that's better than what it used to be. And all they gotta do usually is call ahead of time, and I think most or all of them are handicapped [accessible].”
- “I’ve used [transit] several times when all my kids were working and I couldn’t drive for 4 months and you know between friends and the transit, that’s how I got to my therapy and everything. It was a big help.”
- “In our area, I feel [transportation] is pretty good. Transit’s down here a lot.”

The School

- “And during COVID, the district utilized our buses and delivered meals door-to-door to our students because we knew that a lot of them relied on school.” (lots of agreement)
- “I will say this school does a really good job of like mathematics and like literacy and stuff like that. Like they do a really good job of like teaching you how to pass

standardized tests. I mean we have some of the best test scores in the county, I mean, for how small we are."

- "I do think it's gotten better because I know when I went to school we had a guidance counselor but we didn't have. . .the TRIO program. You know to actually help people with the financial aid forms and just you know, the college visits and all that kind of stuff. It seems like there's more now than there used to be."

The Senior Center in New Lexington

- "Our Senior Center in New Lex, they do transportation, too, and it's donations. And if they have, if you need a way, because I've used it two different times. And they also do transportation for people, take them back and forth maybe to a doctor or something."
- "I like to socialize, so I go to our Senior Center in New Lex."

The Gymnasium in Shawnee

- "[The gymnasium] is still functioning, so that's a resource."
- "I think we have some untapped potential up on top of the hill with the gymnasium." (agreement; most definitely)

Library and Businesses in New Straitsville

- "I mean the library does stuff all the time. To increase their circulation, they'll set up, you know, a little book, like four or five little books, and if it's about crocheting, here's a skein of yarn and a crochet needle to go with it."
- "Well you know the campground came in. Dollar General came in. So yeah, so things are looking up a little bit."
- "The New Thrift Store (is a resource)."

CONCLUSION

Phase I of Perry County Health Department's Ohio Health Improvement Zone project focused on assessing the health needs of the Southern Perry County villages of New Straitsville, Shawnee, and Hemlock. Through five community engagement focus groups in fall 2022 centered on the social determinants of health, Southern Perry County residents provided detailed information about factors that impact their health and the health of their communities.

Focus group participants described a number of changes they felt would improve the health and well-being of individuals in Southern Perry County. These suggestions, along with the enthusiastic interest and support from the community residents who registered to be involved in the project, provide the Perry County Health Department a wide range of options for moving into Phase II of the project.

- Increased programming and activities to build social connections and support networks in the community;
- Mobile clinics or day clinics to provide greater access to health care;
- More access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns as well as education about eating healthy;
- Increased presence and response times from law enforcement to reduce drug-related crimes and increase safety;
- Improvements in the quality of the water to reduce the financial burden of having to buy bottled water;
- Improvements in the quality of housing in the community;
- Additional resources for mental health in general as well as support for addiction and recovery;
- More opportunities for physical activity such as an indoor exercise facility, sidewalks, and bicycle/walking paths.
- Increased transportation options;
- Greater promotion and advertising of community information and resources;
- Resources to maintain and improve existing recreational resources/facilities; and
- More education, especially pertaining to health literacy.

APPENDIX A

Date, Time, and Location of Southern Perry County Focus Groups

The table below provides information on participation in the five community engagement focus groups that were held.

DATE	TIME	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
October 26, 2022	4-6 p.m.	Robinson's Cave History Museum New Straitsville	6 females 2 males
October 27, 2022	6-8 p.m.	Robinson's Cave History Museum New Straitsville	2 females
November 1, 2022	4-6 p.m.	United Methodist Church Shawnee	7 females 3 males
November 1, 2022	6-8 p.m.	United Methodist Church Shawnee	4 females 5 males
November 2, 2022	6-8 p.m.	Miller Middle School Hemlock	6 females 4 males
		TOTAL	**39** **25 females; 14 males**

APPENDIX B

Script for Perry County OHIZ Community Engagement Focus Groups

Introductory Text

- Introduce facilitator and anyone assisting.
- (As participants arrive, OU contacts will be taking care of paperwork for the $25 Kroger Gift Cards)
- Explain purpose of session. Explain that this session is one of many.
- Explain what will be done with information collected.

Ice Breaker *(5 minutes)*

1. To get started, let's go around the room and have everyone say their name and then give us 2 or 3 words to tell us how you're feeling today.

Transition *(5-10 minutes)*

2. The word healthy can mean different things to different people. What does "being healthy" mean to you?

   Prompts, if needed:

   a. What does it look like when someone is healthy?
   b. What words would you use to describe someone who is healthy?
   c. Are there different ways to be healthy?

Key Questions

3. What do you need to be healthy? *(10 minutes)*

   Prompts, if needed:

   a. Let's think about how we defined "being healthy." What do you need to achieve that?
   b. Another way to look at this question is to think about what might get in the way of being healthy. Are there things that might need to change in order to be healthy?

Some people who study health have come up with a list of things they say affect our chances of being healthy. These are listed on the Social Determinants of Health handout. Each row includes the categories, underneath each you'll see the specific factors that people say affect your health. Please take a minute to go through this list, and think about your own experiences and your community.

4. Which of the items on the list affect people's health in your community?

Follow up: How does this affect people's health?

5. Are there other things that affect people's health in your community that should be on this list?

6. Overall, how does living in this community impact your health?

7. We will be having more meetings later to select and plan projects that support the health of those of us living in [community name]. If you want to be a part of this process, I will be happy to give you more information when we're done with today's discussion. In the meantime, let's get a head start on that process by answering our final question. What changes do you think would help improve your health and the health of other people in your community?

Thank you for helping us understand the issues that affect your health and the health of others in the community. We want to take this information and use it to identify a way forward that helps support the health of people in [community name].

Social Determinants of Health

Our personal circumstances impact our health and well-being.

How do the factors below impact your health?

Health Care Access and Quality

- Access to Healthcare
- Health Insurance Coverage
- Health Literacy

Neighborhood and Housing Stability

- Quality of Housing
- Transportation
- Access to Healthy Foods
- Quality of the Air and Water
- Crime and Violence
- Recreation Opportunities

Social and Community Context

- Discrimination
- Social Connections
- Imprisonment
- Workplace Safety

Economic Stability

- Having a Job
- Poverty
- Having Enough Food to Eat on a Regular Basis
- Having Safe and Consistent Housing

Education Access and Quality

- Childhood Development
- Language and Literacy
- High School and College Education

Source: Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved October 4, 2022, from https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health.

Place and Health:

Perry County's Social Vulnerability Index

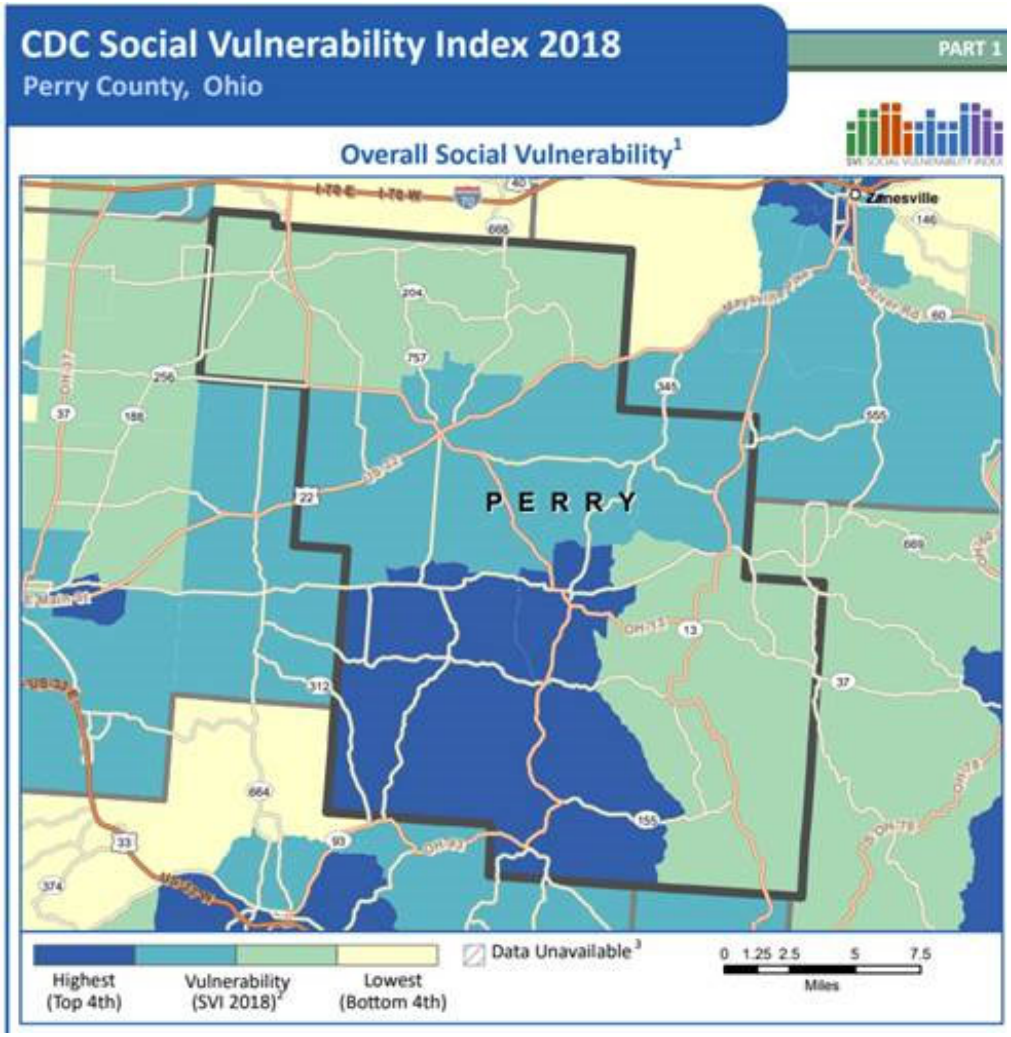
The Social Vulnerability Index is a score that compares communities by the level of impact from natural or human-caused disasters, or disease outbreaks.

The scores include **socioeconomic status**, **household composition and disability**, **race/ethnicity and language**, and **housing and transportation**. Higher scores mean greater risk.

The map of Perry County below shows the Overall Social Vulnerability scores in in Perry County.

In this map the dark blue parts of Perry County have the higher levels of social vulnerability. These areas are at greater risk for negative impacts from natural disasters or outbreaks of disease.

We can prevent human suffering and economic loss by reducing social vulnerability.



Source: CDC's Social Vulnerability Index Prepared County Maps. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from https://svi.cdc.gov/prepared-county-maps.html.

APPENDIX E

Additional Unrelated Findings

Concerns and recommendations that emerged from the focus groups but that were not directly related to the scope of the project are included below.

I. Residents would like to see improvements in school offerings.

- "I went to school in Logan and with it being a large school what I'm noticing with (name) going to Miller is they don't offer a whole lot of programs in that school for these kids. . . .They don't have an outlet at these schools for these children to express themselves creatively and to express themselves educationally. So I feel like that is something that could be really important to our kids in this area."
- "I think just trying to ensure that younger people know that there's different options available to them too. And I'm sure the school does a great job of that in some ways, but just trying to reinforce that and knowing that like you do have these other options. Like you don't, you know you can go down different pathways and don't have to necessarily go down path A or B but C and D are available so that might be beneficial."
- "[The school] doesn't teach them what they're going to be doing when they get out of high school. Doesn't teach them how to balance a checkbook and doesn't teach them how to pay their bills."
- "We should be educating kids how to survive life after high school rather than teaching them how to pass a test, and I think that's what with, that's everywhere."

II. Residents would like to see improvements in how the U.S. Postal Service operates or recognizes their community.

- "Technically the federal law is that if you don't have a post office within one mile, they're supposed to deliver it your house. That crap they got set up downtown, it's ridiculous. There's a lot of plastic mailboxes down there. That's the law and how they get around that I still don't quite understand."
- "Down there [where the mailboxes are located] it is, you know, it's dark at night and a lot of times you know access in and out of there isn't the best, especially if you're handicapped or disabled or got you know any kind of issues. Mobility issues especially, good luck getting around down there, and I don't know if anybody does it but you know you park your car and then have to get your wheelchair over to that box or something like that. That's probably tough, especially in the winter time.
- "A post office would be nice to have. That would be very nice 'cause you always get other people's mail. You have to throw it back in. They don't even take time to sort it, they just throw it in there."
- "It's stuff like this that I need to bring up to the officials about not having our own zip code. We missed out on a grant because we are lumped in with Corning's [zip code].