

Key Informant Interviews Report

Juneau County Key Informant Interviews Results 2021

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Introduction



Introduction

Thirty-one (31) key Informant interviews were conducted as a part of the Juneau County Community Health Assessment. Interviews were led by the Juneau County Health Department. The interviews were conducted between August and September 2021. The interview questions looked at a variety of topics including mental health, workforce development, healthy foods, and housing to gain knowledge and perspective from residents living in Juneau County.

Study Method and Design



Study Design and Methods

The Juneau County Health Department in Juneau County, Wisconsin, contracted with Epiphany Community Services to analyze the results of their Key Informant Interviews were conducted between August and September 2021.

A total of thirty-one (31) residents were interviewed by five professionals that were asked or volunteered to conduct the interviews. Interviewers previewed the list of possible interviewees to confirm that the interviewer did not know any possible interviewee either personally or professionally. Most of the interviewers work and/or lived in Juneau County but did not live in the municipality of the interviewee.

There were a total of 13 questions that were asked in three different iterations that were labeled “Rotation #1”, “Rotation #2” and “Rotation #3”. To ensure that each topic area was being covered as equal as possible, each of the iterations was asked to roughly 10-11 people. Each iteration included six or seven questions, including two overall questions and two or three topical questions with the other two or three relating to other topics. Rotations were randomized for interviewees and interviewers. A list of all questions can be found in appendix A.

Topic Areas were determined based on results from the community survey and secondary data research completed by the Juneau County Health Department and the Health Assessment Steering Committee. They included Mental Health, Workforce Development, Healthy Foods, Housing, and Changes in the Community.

Study Design and Methods

Participants from various backgrounds offered to participate in the key informant interviews. All of the participants were residents of Juneau County. Some roles represented among the participants included parents, social services, retirees, teachers, medical professionals, and community volunteers. Some specific perspectives that were represented in the interviews were of individuals who have a history of incarceration and those who have a history of accessing state resources, i.e., Women Infant and Child (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Each participant was able to bring a unique perspective based on the way that they live, work, and play in Juneau County to the five topic areas represented in the interview questions. Juneau County intentionally recruited an oversampling of people who are lower income and those aged 18 to 45 to an effort to reverse the skewing that resulted from the Community Survey.

Each interview was conducted either in person or over zoom depending on the interviewee's preferences and lasted between 10 to 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Audios of the interviews were destroyed after transcription had taken place. Responses were then compiled based on question and topic area and then analyzed and reported in the following report.

Mental Health



Mental Health

Mental health in Juneau County is a topic that is highly susceptible to stigma and disregard but needs to be addressed more than ever. Anxiety, unemployment, and life stressors are assisting in the decline on mental health among Juneau County.

- Access and resources to mental health services is a top concern for most of the participants who participated in the key informant interviews.

Questions related to mental health were mainly focused on the perceptions of the community members, specifically, around mental health services and the mental health of the community in general. Interviewees were also asked why Juneau residents in need of mental health services choose not to use them. Responses from all three questions showed patterns of similarities.

- Most of the respondents felt that a major reason individuals who may want services choose not use them is due to the stigma around mental health.
- Other responses revolved around cost of mental health services, transportation, and lack of knowledge of possible resources to receive such services are issues that some individuals may face to getting access to services.
- Some participants mentioned that since Juneau County is so small, they are afraid to be seen using the services or even have the mental health providers be people that they know and feeling “embarrassed” to be needing the services.
- A few people mentioned the religious and generational divide when it comes to receiving mental health services.
- A respondent mentioned that they are taught “You just need to pray and get over it”.
- A few of participants believe that there is a belief amongst the older generations in relation to mental health services that they are not needed. In turn, this creates a family- and even community-wide stigma about going to receive services.

Mental Health continued

When asked about perceptions of mental health in the community.

- Most of the participants felt that, on some level, there are mental health concerns throughout the community. COVID-19, recent job lay-offs, and stigma in the community were listed as major factors into the decline in mental health most recently.
- One participant from a school setting mentioned that mental health is a topic that is being talked about in the schools and is creating and promoting resources for students to use.

Perceptions around mental health services in the community were mostly in unison.

- Most of the participants felt that there were not enough mental health services in the area and for the services that are in the area there is a lack of awareness of them.
- Some of the participants mentioned that there is a deep need for more mental health services due to the rising mental health concerns in the community relating to the rise in drug use, sexual and physical abuse, unemployment and poverty rates they are observing in the community.

Workforce Development



Workforce Development

Currently, Juneau County residents believe, there is a need of vital support systems to become a strong and stable economy. Interviewees reported lack of adequate pay, limited options for transportation, and lack of variety in jobs and business opportunities as barriers in allowing Juneau County to build a stronger and more stable workforce. Childcare availability was also indicated as a significant barrier for residents living in Juneau County. Improvements in any of these areas, Juneau County will be able to make advances in their workforce development.

A strong local economy was mainly defined by the interviewees as having sufficient well-paying jobs. Presently, there are jobs, but not all pay very well, which makes it hard for people to get by and poverty rates are high in the County. It was also mentioned that some individuals lost their jobs when businesses had to lay-off employees due to COVID-19. Other interviewees were concerned that not everybody has a strong work ethic. Others expressed a mismatch between available jobs and residents' qualifications, age, education, and expectations.

When asked what makes for a strong and stable economy.

- Affordable childcare with extended hours (past 5-6 pm). Almost all interviewees expressed that childcare is important but that there are not enough childcare options (especially for evenings) and the available options are expensive, have waitlists, and/or are not certified.
- Local stores such as an affordable grocery store. Currently, there is only one grocery store, and it does not have any competition so it can set higher prices. There are some fast-food places and bars but not a lot of other restaurants or commercial options.
- A good transportation infrastructure. A concern was that there is very limited public transportation so people are dependent on private vehicles but not everyone can afford a good car, which is a barrier to showing up to work on time and accessing other necessities.
- A good education system

Workforce Development continued

Interviewees were asked if lack of transportation was a barrier for community members in the workforce.

- All participants said that transportation was certainly a factor related to the workforce.
- Specifically, some mentioned that since most of the community does not have access to consistent and reliable public transportation that it can be hard for individuals to get to work.
- For those who do have mode of transportation, they noted that if they are not reliable it can also cause problems.

Childcare was also responded to as barrier for those in the workforce.

- Many participants mentioned that childcare in the area is both hard to come by and is extremely expensive.
- One participant mentioned that there is sometimes a waiting list just to get a spot in the daycare.
- Others noted that the hours of childcare centers are not always in alignment with the hours that individuals work, which creates barriers into the types of jobs and hours some parents must work to meet the needs of their child.

Workforce Development continued

Another question that was asked to some of the participants was related to some small changes they felt would help build better jobs and strong economy. Participants gave several different responses.

- Making sure employers are sharing the wealth and want to contribute to the community. That includes offering higher pay and benefits.
- Finding out better ways to distribute job postings to the community, e.g., job fairs or ads at laundromats, taverns.
- Rideshares, carpooling, buses, or affordable taxis to assist with transportation needs.
- While some interviewees recommend getting the word out about economic assistance programs, others believed economic assistance should be restricted so that people are more encouraged to work.
- Additional education and training would help but most adults don't have the time and/or money. Possibly training in trades such as carpentry and plumbing.
- Support for people to start their own business.
- Attracting more local businesses will create local jobs and keep money spent locally.
- Encouraging residents to spend their money locally instead of ordering from chains like Amazon and Walmart. This includes supporting local farmers.
- More environmentally sustainable industries such as an ethanol plant and solar panels.

Healthy Foods



Healthy Foods

According to the participants, healthy and affordable foods are important to residents in Juneau County. They feel that the price of food in their county is dependent on the basis that they only have one real grocery store, and it allows for the grocery store to keep prices high on items because there is no competition. Many residents noted the desire to have another grocery store in the area to hopefully bring down food costs, specifically on healthy foods. Participants were asked to define "affordable" based on their own knowledge and experiences. This led to robust and varied responses among interviewees. Ranging from yes food is affordable to no it is not. All responses are relative to the individual's self definition.

Participants were asked about their interpretation of affordable food. Responses varied greatly on this specific question.

- One participant related affordable food to being free, while others mentioned that affordable is a relative term and depends on how much money you have.
- A few of the respondents mentioned that affordable to them means being able to purchase food and still be able to meet the other needs of your family, i.e., childcare and housing.

Some participants were asked if they thought that healthy food in Juneau County was affordable. Responses for this question were diverse.

- A large portion said that Juneau County did have affordable, healthy food.
- For some it was about physical access to farmers for more affordable produce, while for others affordable, healthy foods meant having their own garden, only buying what is on sale or frozen, or going to the farmers' market.
- Others felt that affordable healthy food are not accessible in Juneau County.
- The need for more grocery store options, such as Aldi, were mentioned. A couple of participants mentioned that if you have access to government assistance, i.e., WIC and SNAP, that can help in gaining access to the healthy foods within the county and thus making them affordable.

Housing



Housing

Housing is a major concern for most of the Juneau County residents that were interviewed. They felt that many individuals have to make decisions on housing based on a number of different areas of their lives. The affordability and quality of housing is also a large portion of where residents believe the problems with housing lie.

- Almost all the participants felt that individuals in Juneau County sacrifice quality of housing to allow them to meet other needs in their lives.
- Some of the needs participants felt that individuals were sacrificing were related to transportation, their child(ren)'s needs, housing location, and food.
- A couple of participants mentioned that affordable and safe housing is a large need for the community.
- Spending money on purchasing of drugs or cigarettes was a repeated response as to why they felt individuals had to sacrifice quality of their housing because they could not afford better housing.

When asked what practical steps they thought could be made to making housing better in Juneau County, there were a various ideas.

- These included rental assistance, lowering rents to match the wages of the area, building more homes, and working with landlords more directly.
- The idea to create a homeless shelter in area was also a way that a couple of participants thought would help because it would give people a roof over their head until they were able to afford something else.
- A few participants mentioned working with landlords to improve housing in the area; one suggested working with landlords to help them evictions of individuals specifically not taking care of their properties.
- Other participant(s) mentioned working with landlords to create more housing for low-income renters.
- Bringing awareness to resources that help with housing. rent assistance, was brought up as a potential avenue to improve to overall quality of housing in the county.
- Additionally, fostering a sense of community and pride in one's housing was mentioned as a way to have residents care more about the way that they treated their homes and rental properties and how both the renters and the landlords interacted with one another.

Changes in the Community

A large, light blue, stylized graphic of a human figure with arms and legs outstretched, centered on the page. The figure is composed of rounded shapes and is set against a background of several smaller, semi-transparent circles of the same color.

Changes in the Community

Outside of the input that interviewees gave on the four specific topics, they also presented some input on things they wished to see changed in their community. Most people were very candid in their responses and gave powerful suggestions on things they wished to see change or added to benefit the community. Items such as physical buildings and education program were listed, just to name a few.

To end the interview participants were asked what was something they would change about their community.

- Some participants felt that their community was okay, and they already liked where they lived.
- One participant mentioned that they loved the efforts being made to make changes in the county especially in relation to younger children.
- Another participant mentioned that they believed that in Juneau County there is great access to primary care and understanding doctors.
- A few specifically touched on the leadership at the government level and felt that the problems relating to workforce development and the overall well being of the residents in their community would be changed or helped if things were changed at that level.
- Some participants expressed their opinions on how they feel that the courts need to be tougher on some topics, such as truancy.
- One participant noted that truancy has been on the rise in their community as of late.
- One participant mentioned more of a physical improvement they wished to see in their community such as a new park.
- Others noted buildings that they would like to see built a YMCA, other shopping options, and more housing. Family activities and events were noted as ways to bring the community together.
- Bringing awareness to any existing and/or creating new resources surrounding mental health, homelessness, and substance use prevention were given as responses as a way to educate the community on important topics to change the current culture of the community.
- A homeless shelter specifically was mentioned several times as a way to help with the housing problems in the county.

Conclusions



Conclusions

Findings from the 31 interviews with Juneau County residents in August and September 2021 suggest that there is a general agreement on most of the challenges and struggles that Juneau County is facing. While these specific topics are just a few of the ones that were highlighted through the community survey, they are a starting point for change through the county.

Mental health in Juneau County is a topic that is highly susceptible to stigma and disregard but attention to mental health is needed more than ever. Anxiety, unemployment, and life stressors are assisting in the decline of mental health in Juneau County. Both physical and financial access and availability of mental health services and resources is a top concern for most of the participants who participated in the key informant interviews.

Currently, Juneau County residents believe, there is a need of vital support systems to become a strong and stable economy. Interviewees reported lack of adequate pay, limited options for transportation, and lack of variety in jobs and business opportunities as barriers in allowing Juneau County to build a stronger and more stable workforce. Childcare availability was also indicated as a significant barrier for residents living in Juneau County. Improvements in any of these areas, Juneau County will be able to make advances in their workforce development.

A strong local economy was mainly defined by the interviewees as having sufficient well-paying jobs. Presently, there are jobs, but not all pay very well, which makes it hard for people to get by and poverty rates are high in the County. It was also mentioned that some individuals lost their jobs when businesses had to lay-off employees due to COVID-19. Other interviewees were concerned that not everybody has a strong work ethic. Others expressed a mismatch between available jobs and residents' qualifications, age, education, and expectations.

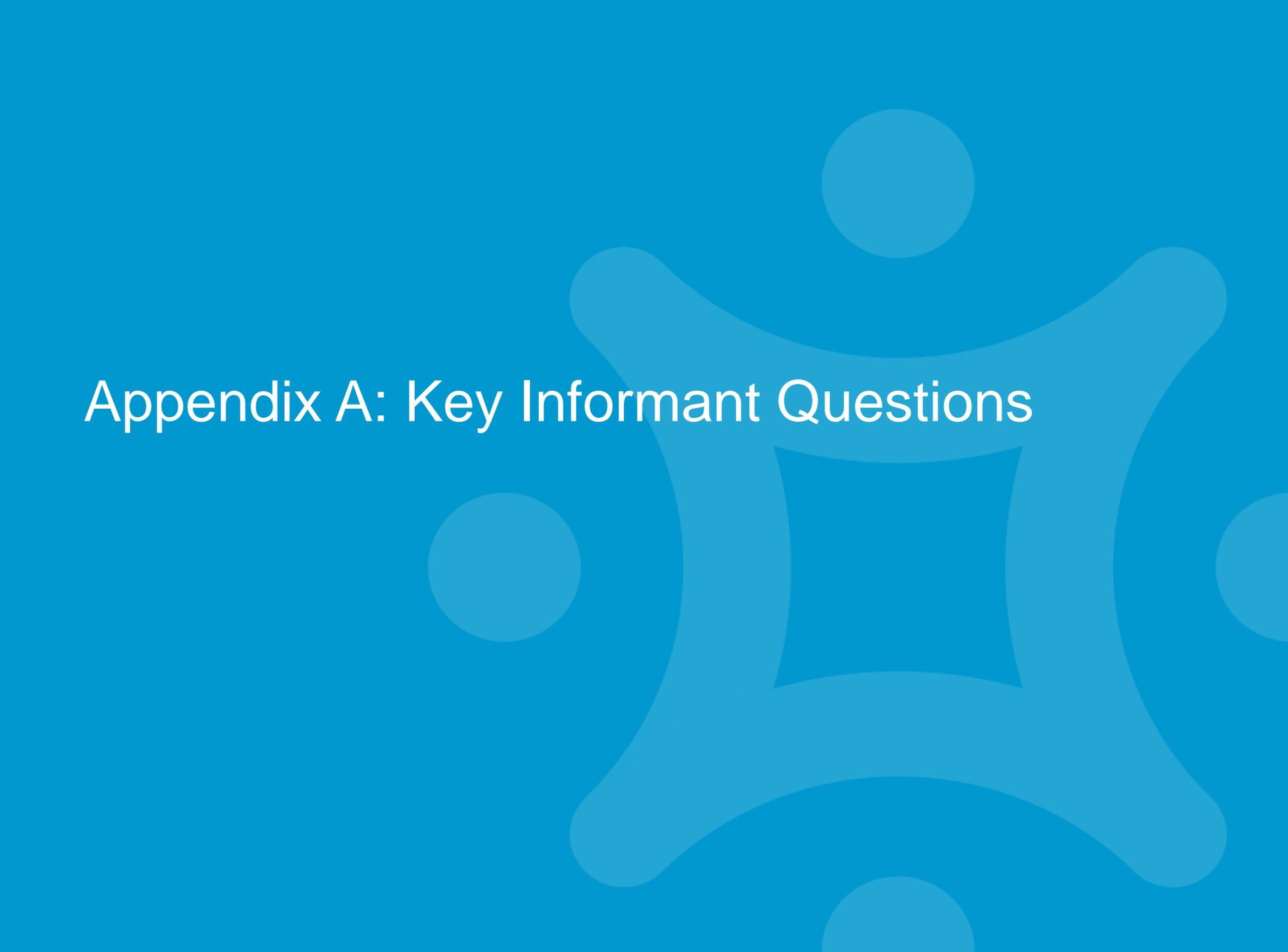
Conclusions continued

Healthy and affordable foods are important to residents in Juneau County. They feel that the price of food in their county is determined by the one grocery store in the county that can keep prices high because there is no competition. Many residents noted the desire to have another grocery store in the area to hopefully bring down food costs, specifically on healthy foods.

Housing is a major concern for most of the Juneau County residents that were interviewed, especially as it pertains to housing affordability and quality. Some of the needs participants felt that individuals were sacrificing were related to transportation, their child(ren)'s needs, housing location, and food.

Outside of the input that interviewees gave on the four specific topics, they also presented input on ways to make improvements in their community. Most people were very candid in their responses and gave helpful suggestions on things they wished to see changed or added to benefit the community. Items such as buildings that could offer places for people to gather, shop, and have safer homes, as well as creating and promoting educational resources, just to name a few.

Appendix A: Key Informant Questions

The background features a large, light blue, stylized figure with four arms raised, resembling a person or a symbol. This figure is centered and surrounded by several smaller, light blue circles of varying sizes, creating a patterned effect against the solid blue background.

Key Informant Questions

Introductions

1. Please let me know what role you play in your community (Juneau County)?

Mental Health Services

1. Why do you think some individuals in Juneau County who may want to receive mental health services do not use them?
2. What is your perception of mental health in general in your community?
3. What is your perception of mental health services in your community?

Workforce Development

1. What makes for a strong and stable economy? (3 or 4 characteristics)
 - a. Follow up questions, do you believe Juneau County has any or all of these characteristics?
2. What potential barriers exist for people entering or advancing in the workforce locally?
 - a. Follow-up/Guiding question: Do you believe transportation is a factor in the location and type of work for residents in Juneau County?
 - b. Follow-up/Guiding question: Do you believe childcare is a factor in getting a good job for residents in Juneau County?
3. What are some small changes that you think would help build better jobs and a stronger economy?

Key Informant Questions continued

Healthy Foods

1. When thinking of food, what does “affordable” mean to you?
2. Do you think health foods are affordable in Juneau County?
 - a. Why or why not in the comments

Housing

1. Do you think that individuals sacrifice quality of housing to meet other needs in their life?
 - a. What other needs?
2. What are practical steps you think could be made to making housing better in Juneau County?
 - a. For renting?
 - b. For homeownership?

Overall

1. If you had a magic wand, what is something you would change about your community?
2. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that was not already covered today?