

**MEDIA RELEASE – OPINION-EDITORIAL  
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**St. Clair County Health Department-Opinion Editorial  
2021 St. Clair County Community Health Needs Assessment**

Over the past two-years, the COVID-19 pandemic has consumed most of our time and energy. In 2019, the St. Clair County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) was halted due to the pandemic. The CHIP outlined priorities and strategies as a result of health issues identified in the 2017 St. Clair County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). We must continue these efforts. We are now pleased to announce the release of the [2021 St. Clair County CHNA report](#). The CHNA highlights the overall health of our county, including healthcare access, personal behaviors and built environment. From this information, we can identify gaps in health care services and programs, as well as health disparities.

The 2021 CHNA report contains several data sources, such as the Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS). In the fall of 2021, the BRFS, a voluntary phone survey, was conducted with 1,000 community residents 18 years and older. Primary data was also collected from underserved community residents, health care workers, and community leaders. Secondary data, which is information collected from other reliable sources, was also analyzed and presented. This data gives a full perspective of our health status within all age groups, over time, and is compared to other communities. In health, “one size does not fit all”.

A snapshot of St. Clair County’s 2021 CHNA data reveals increases in most chronic diseases as well as ongoing problems with higher mortality rates from most causes. We reported feeling worse in both our physical and mental health. We are binge drinking more, vaping more (but smoking less), and more of us are obese. Mental health conditions continued to be a critical issue for both youth and adults. Underprivileged residents suffered twice as much from COVID-19 as the general public. We were happy to see that 79% of the population believed they made a difference by following COVID-19 mitigation measures (wearing masks, handwashing, physical distancing, etc). 66% of St. Clair County adults have experienced at least one adverse childhood event, while 24% have experienced four or more. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) have a profound impact on both physical and mental health in adulthood. On a positive note, more people who are living with mental illness are receiving treatment, and more people who have health insurance reported seeing a doctor.

In moving forward, this information is important to improve the use of community resources. The next critical step is finding solutions to these issues. This is done by developing a new CHIP. As I mentioned, in 2019 this was done and halted by COVID-19, however we did make some progress! A summary on our last plan is being finalized and continued work on the next CHIP (spanning 2023-2028) will begin in the coming months. The process will start by convening community advocates on June 8<sup>th</sup>, with other opportunities to discuss and prioritize health needs. We urge the entire community to stay involved. The good news is, when we address the social determinants of health and other key components identified in the new CHNA, we can improve the overall health of our community and work together on the solutions. View the full report on our website, [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co).

Yours in health,

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