

Wants, Needs & Resources

In early 2005, United Way of Benton County and its community partners commissioned the consulting firms of Cogan Owens Cogan (COC) and Davis, Hibbitts and Midghall (DHM) to assess the health of our community as a guide to setting priorities for wise allocation of resources. To ascertain the information for the report, the following were undertaken:

- Interviews with community leaders representing the partnering agencies, local foundations and other interests.
- Random-sample telephone survey of County residents, including low-income households.
- Informal survey of service providers in the County.
- Focus groups with service recipients and others.
- Empirical research.

By many objective measurements, Benton County is indeed, a Healthy Community. . . a good place to live, work and play. We enjoy:

- An educated, quality work force
- The fourth highest ranking in the state in regards to personal per capita income
- A strong economy, with one of the lowest unemployment rates and highest average per capita incomes in Oregon
- A wide variety of recreational opportunities and natural resources
- Generally well-performing public schools and strong higher educational opportunities
- Interested and involved citizenry

In such an environment, the minority who cannot afford or enjoy these advantages can be invisible.

A Summary of an Assessment by United Way of Benton County and Community Partners

What are the implications to Decision-Makers?

Everyone is affected
when some of us are
in distress.

The cost of crime
prevention and
apprehension increases
with the incidence of
alcohol and
substance abuse.

Resources spent to
address problems cannot
be used to help meet other
community needs.

People who lack the basic
essentials of life are less
productive citizens.

Are there signs of ill health in our community?

Unfortunately, all is not as well as we would like.

- ➔ More than half of all households in the County (53%) spend greater than a third of their income on housing. This is above the standard measurement.
- ➔ Renters are more likely than homeowners to have low or very low incomes.
- ➔ Of all County residents, 12%, or nearly 10,000 people, have some type of disability. The number climbs to 50% for those over the age of 75.
- ➔ There are more people with substance abuse problems (19%) here than elsewhere in the state (15%.) Drug and alcohol abuse was identified most often by County residents as the most significant problem here.
- ➔ Though we have a generally lower rate of violent crime, arrests for fraud, liquor abuse and disorderly conduct are higher here.

There are more people with substance abuse problems here than elsewhere in the state.

- ➔ Drug and alcohol use among high school students is prevalent, with more than 40% reporting they have consumed alcohol recently.
- ➔ Some OSU students sleep in their cars because they cannot afford adequate housing.
- ➔ OSU's Escape Hunger food program fed lunch to 230 needy students in just one day.
- ➔ Only one organization in the County provides free residential treatment for youths with substance abuse problems, and there is space for only two local young people.

More than half of all Benton County households pay more than a third of their income for housing.

Benton County households below median income levels that spend more than 30% of income on housing (including utilities), 2000

Region	Owner-occupied	Renters
Benton County	32.7%	82.3%
Statewide	40.1%	70.1%

What can we do to ensure that Benton is a Healthy County for all?

Target monetary and staff resources to problems identified by the community as most significant.

- ➔ Focus on a full range of solutions—prevention, intervention and enforcement.
- ➔ Pool our resources and talents to work together to solve problems through public/private partnerships, intergovernmental efforts, volunteerism and private giving.
- ➔ Think globally and act locally by putting our charitable resources to work solving broad problems in our own backyard.
- ➔ Continue to monitor our progress, celebrate our successes and constantly strive to do better.

For more information or a copy of the full report, contact United Way of Benton County, 541.757.7717.