

# CONVERSE COUNTY CSBG COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*MAY 2021*



 Prepared by:  
**CBI** Community Builders, Inc.

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## Executive Summary

The Converse County Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Board of Directors contracted with Community Builders, Inc. (CBI) to prepare a CSBG Community Needs Assessment regarding poverty in Converse County, Wyoming. This study examines the extent of poverty in Converse County, factors that support the creation of poverty, factors that worsen the impact of poverty. This study also analyzes the community services and resources that are currently available to offset poverty, identifies the top priorities for meeting the community's needs, and suggests ways to overcome existing barriers to services.

The assessment process included a review of the previous CSBG Community Needs Assessments conducted for Converse County in 2011, 2014, and 2018. CBI also reviewed other information about the community. CBI conducted general surveys of the community's residents and also surveyed known stakeholders and agencies that provide services to low-income persons in Converse County.

This Community Needs Assessment has been completed in the midst of the worst pandemic to hit the United States in 100 years. The COVID-19 pandemic has seemingly impacted every single person in the world, killing more than 3 million people (global) and shutting down nearly every public event and activity we once took for granted. Even now, as the pandemic is easing, the lingering negative impacts and ongoing social/political unease associated with COVID-19 have created a unique situation where many residents' economic security remains threatened, even while recovery begins. This assessment reflects the challenges presented by the pandemic. For example, CBI's findings have been influenced by the lower numbers of residents who chose to participate in the community survey.

Working with the CSBG Board, CBI developed two different surveys, using Survey Monkey (a popular online survey tool). The first survey focused on known agencies and organizations that provide services in Converse County (this is the "Stakeholder" survey). These agencies and organizations were in turn asked to obtain surveys from the individuals they serve in the community. That second survey (the "Community" survey) was also pushed through local media (Douglas Budget/Glenrock Independent and KKTU Radio), encouraging all local residents to participate.

Additionally, CBI gathered and analyzed objective data from several sources. Most important, CBI analyzed the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau/American Community Survey (2019) and the most current economic information from the State of Wyoming (often current through 2021). Where appropriate, survey responses are cross-referenced with official data, so that the CSBG Board can make informed decisions.

By combining and analyzing the survey results with the objective data, this community needs assessment provides a good understanding of residents who are living in poverty in Converse

County. CBI focused its analysis on the official CSBG Information System Survey Service Categories, which include:

- Employment
- Education
- Housing
- Nutrition
- Asset Development
- Health Services
- Transportation

Converse County appears to continue prioritizing its poverty services around children and senior citizens, who remain among the most vulnerable. For example, there are a number of highly visible nutrition and after-school services for children. Likewise, the Douglas and Glenrock Senior Centers have strong nutrition and social networking programs for the more elderly population. There are several senior housing facilities in Converse County, as well.

In general, customer and stakeholder input strongly show that concerns about health insurance and medical care continue to be the biggest needs in Converse County. Perceptions about the services that are the “most needed” can vary, especially when comparing the community’s perception to that of service providers.

Collection of surveys (and perhaps even the opinions stated within the surveys) have been impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements. Far fewer surveys were completed than in the past. And yet, the current surveys are remarkably consistent with past surveys. Based on CBI’s analysis, the most needed services currently are as follows:

Most Needed Services in Converse County		
Rank	Stakeholders' Top 5	Community's Top 5
1	Substance and alcohol abuse services (tied #1)	Affordable health insurance coverage
2	Help paying rent or mortgage (tied #1)	Prescription drug assistance
3	Help paying utility bills/deposits (tied #1)	Vision services
4	Support for senior citizens	Dental services
5	Affordable health insurance coverage (tied #5) Mental health services (tied #5)	Help paying utility bills/deposits

The need for affordable health insurance coverage has consistently been at or near the top of this list since at least 2011 in Converse County. The shift of need toward more direct healthcare and payment of bills suggests that people are more concerned about their health than their jobs. This shift of concern is apparent in many other reports regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, but this year's findings are otherwise very consistent with previous years' assessments.

The 2018 Needs Assessment completed for Converse County also prioritized affordable health insurance and prescription drug assistance. But it also included food/commodity assistance and mental health services. Those types of needs are currently not being expressed by the community. One reason may be that food distribution networks in Wyoming have been improved.

In the 2014 Needs Assessment, the top needs identified were:

- Extended hours childcare
- Affordable housing for seniors
- Homeless shelters/services
- Public transportation
- Health insurance coverage
- Help paying rent/mortgage/utilities

In the 2011 Needs Assessment, stakeholders identified job assistance, childcare, and teen programs as the most needed resources. Clients identified health costs for insurance, vision and dental care, and prescription drug assistance as their primary unmet need in 2011.

Thus, for the past decade, one conclusion of every Converse County Community Needs Assessment has been that healthcare costs and affordable health insurance are at the top of the list for most-needed resources in Converse County. That remains true now in 2021. However, healthcare insurance and healthcare affordability are problems that stubbornly resist resolution at every level. Other communities have identified sliding fee scale service availability and expansion of Medicaid are goals to work towards. Wyoming's legislature continues to debate (but not approve) Medicaid expansion. Subsidizing the direct cost of healthcare is not a feasible option for limited CSBG funds, and so the quest to resolve this persistent problem remains.

Converse County's most vulnerable population continues to be those households where there is only one working adult in the home, especially if they are providing for children or others who need assistance. These are often families who rent an apartment or mobile home. Whether from supply or demand, there are fewer apartments in Converse County than elsewhere in Wyoming (or the nation), and so there are far more mobile homes in Converse County than elsewhere. Often, these are households that are heated by electricity or propane, exposing the residents to seasonal spikes in their cost of living. Effective promotion of available low-income housing options and utility relief programs can help address these problems.

CBI recommends that the Converse County CSBG Board consider these findings as they make their annual allocations of funding for local service providers.

## Vision and Approach

### Overall Vision for Project

The Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) program requires that a comprehensive community needs assessment be conducted every three years. This needs assessment becomes the basis for considering whether current programs are effectively achieving their strategic goals. Accordingly, this assessment seeks to empower local community leaders to understand the scope of both emerging and ongoing needs of economically insecure residents in the community.

The Converse County Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Board contracted with Community Builders, Inc. (CBI), to conduct this needs assessment. These assessments must be completed every three years. The CSBG Board is annually responsible for allocating Converse County's share of federal CSBG funds. The primary objectives of the CSBG program are to assist low-income families to become more self-sufficient, more employable, and better able to stay employed.

The CSBG Board will use this assessment to make future decisions about allocating CSBG funds, based on the services and resources available and the identified needs of the low-income, disabled, and elderly residents of Converse County. Targeted assistance for those populations is the priority for the federal CSBG program.

### Methodology and Data Sources

To complete this assessment, CBI engaged community leaders to identify economic resources, social resources, and partnership opportunities in the community. Surveys were conducted of the community and also of local service providers. CBI also analyzed official data from the state and federal government, particularly regarding demographics and economics.

This report can be used to help guide local discussions about public policy issues, and it can educate community residents and leaders about the local needs. CBI prepared this Needs Assessment for delivery to the Converse County CSBG Board.

CBI worked with the CSBG Board to develop a contact list for every known health and human service provider in Converse County. More than 70 agencies and organizations were identified and contacted for input. Targeted stakeholders included government agencies, schools, nonprofit/community service agencies, health agencies, housing/senior housing facilities, churches, and others.

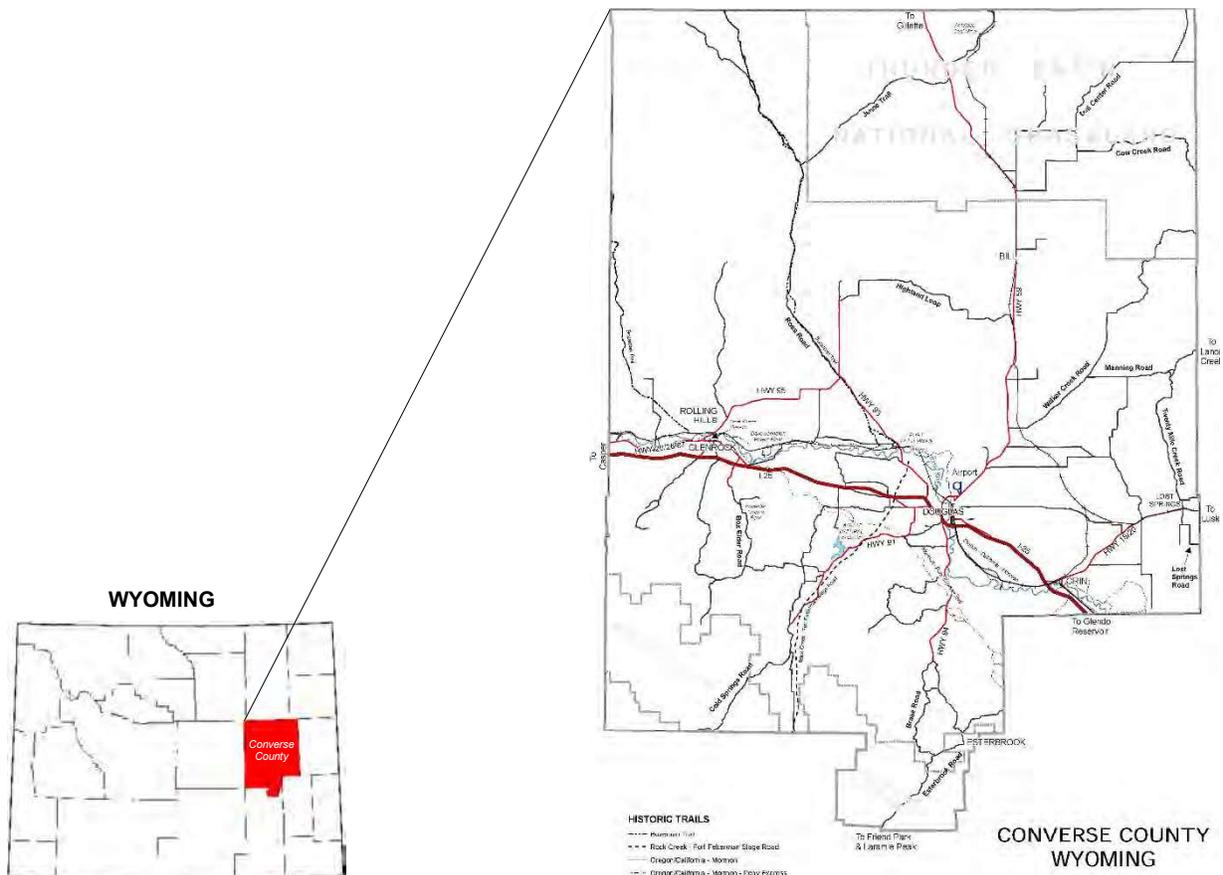
Providers and stakeholders were contacted via email by CBI and also by CSBG Board members. They were asked to complete a survey and to provide their clients with either electronic or paper copies of the community survey. Additionally, CBI provided press releases and interviews to local media (KKTY and Douglas Budget). CBI followed up with dozens of telephone conversations with stakeholders. In spite of this effort, COVID-related communication and logistic concerns had an impact on public input. Ten (10) stakeholders and 115 community members responded to their

respective survey. These interviews and surveys were conducted to identify key needs, assets, and services to help fight poverty.

CBI also conducted an objective analysis into the Converse County population, including demographics, economics, housing, employment, and poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) data is used throughout this report. Additional data has been obtained from the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services/Labor Market Information, and the Wyoming Division of Economic Analysis, the Wyoming Community Development Authority, and many other official data sources.

### Defining the Community

The primary service area for information collection is countywide – all of Converse County is served by most social service agencies and overlapping jurisdictions are not a factor in most social service areas. There are four incorporated municipalities in Converse County (Douglas, Glenrock, Lost Springs, and Rolling Hills), as shown in the map below. The “community of place” is defined by these distinct geographic boundaries. The “community of interest” is defined by shared common interests, goals, or knowledge of local residents. These communities, rural by nature, tend to share common interests. Residents often live and work in the county, and they identify with Converse County specifically. For those reasons, the CSBG Board has decided to focus on the entire county, as a whole, when completing this Community Needs Assessment.



## **Issues for Analysis**

This needs assessment is organized around the CSBG Information System Survey Service Categories, including:

- Employment
- Education
- Housing
- Nutrition
- Asset Development
- Health Services
- Transportation

Questions developed for interviews and surveys centered around these topical areas.

## **Statement of Purpose**

This Converse County Community Needs Assessment (CNA) becomes a primary tool to guide Converse County's CSBG Board as it makes future decisions. The CSBG Board is expected to exercise its own collective judgment, including consideration of other sources of information that can help them fight poverty. Accordingly, this CNA is not the final authority on the agency's decisions, even though the report includes many recommendations. The assessment is intended to be a dependable source of information, allowing the CSBG Board and others in Converse County to make informed decisions. This CNA is not intended for any political use. Any opinions that might be included herein are those of the primary author, Joe Coyne (Principal Consultant for Community Builders, Inc.), and no one else.

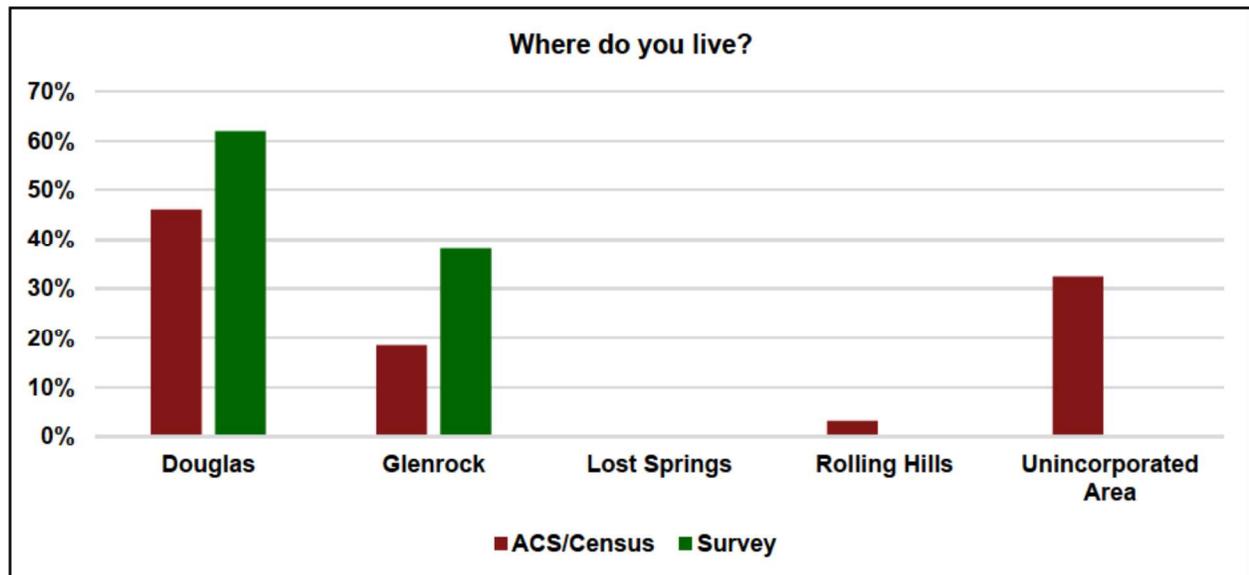
## Information Gathering – Community Profile

Converse County is in east-central Wyoming (see map above). The local economy is largely based on agriculture, natural resource extraction, and utility power generation. Coal mining, oil and gas, uranium, and other mineral assets provide much of the local tax base. The primary jobs created by these industries extend well beyond mining, employing many transportation and healthcare workers. When the natural resource extraction industries struggle, everyone in Converse County feels it.

### Population

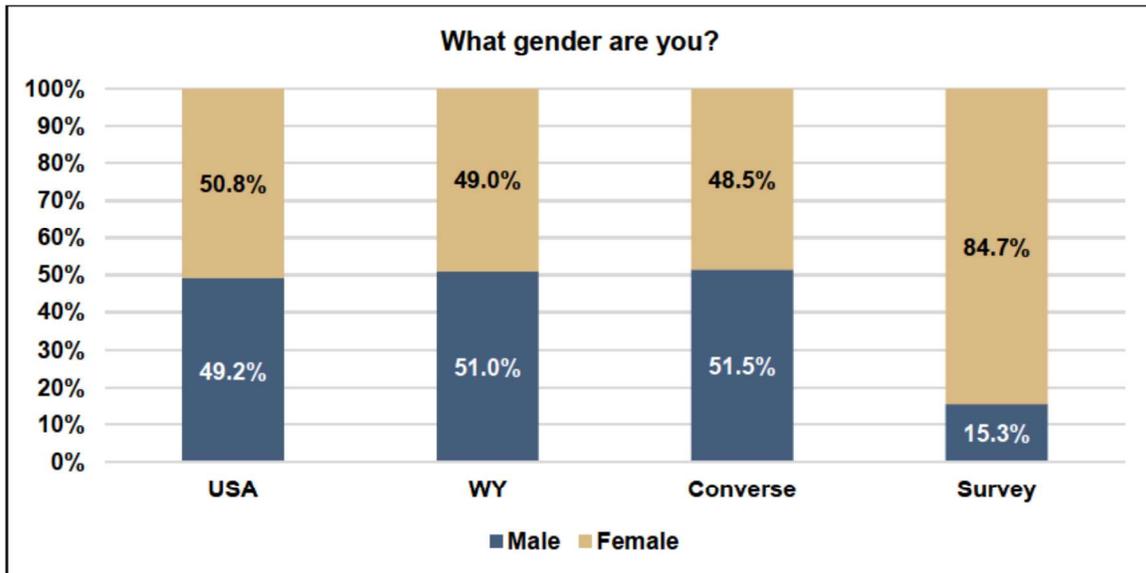
Converse County covers a large rural area (4,265 square miles) with a population of 13,822 residents (as of July 1, 2019). Two-thirds (67.6%) of those residents live in one of the municipalities: Douglas (population 6,364), Glenrock (population 2,547), Lost Springs (4), and Rolling Hills (population 424), according to the official and most estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. These estimates reflect an ongoing decline in the population, a trend that started in 2015.

Most (61.9%) of the 115 community surveys were returned by Douglas residents, even though Douglas comprises just 45.5% of the actual population. Thus, Douglas residents are overrepresented in the survey, and residents in unincorporated areas of Converse County are underrepresented, in this survey data. However, most people completing the survey probably listed the community they identify with, rather than saying “unincorporated,” when completing the survey. Survey results are provided below for all survey responses.

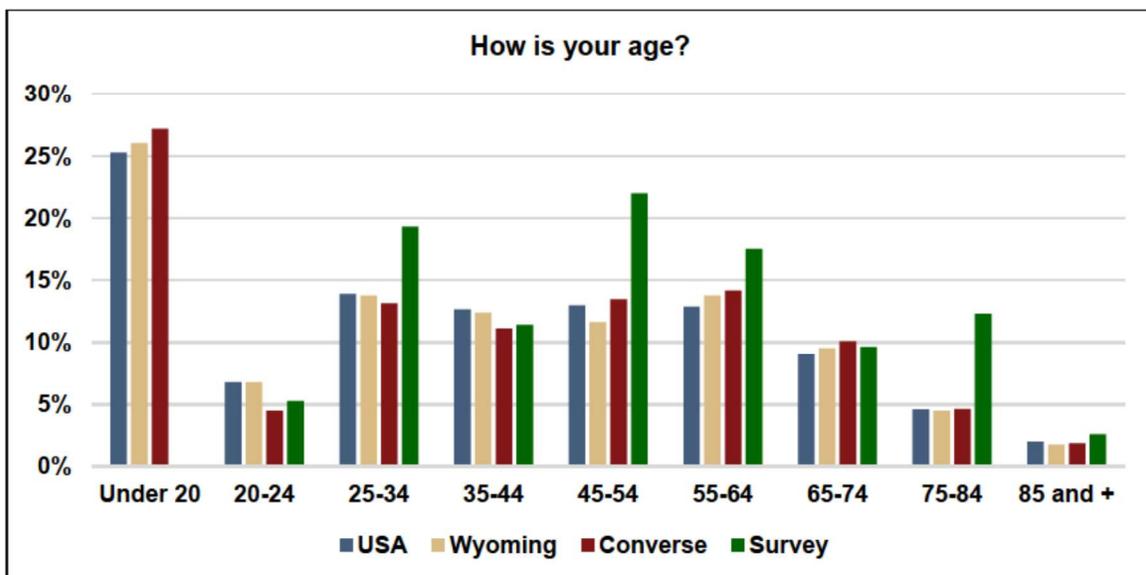


## Demographics

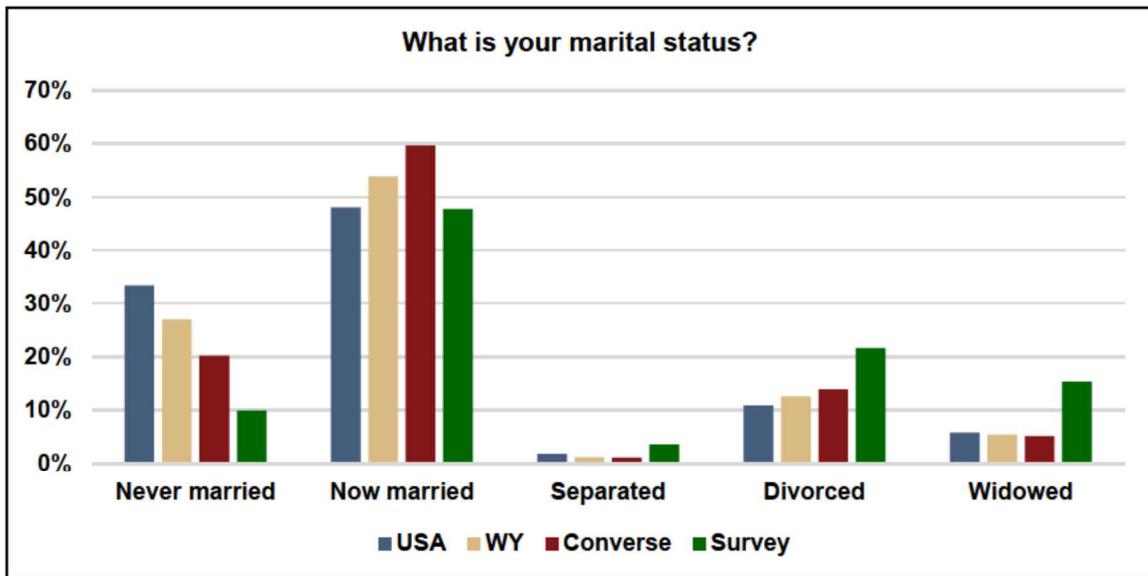
As is typical in Wyoming, there are more males (51.5%) than females (48.5%) living in Converse County. However, far more surveys were completed by women than men. This is common for non-random surveys, and it can skew results. However, because women are often the primary caregiver in a home, they provide some of the best information. Women also outnumber men in the older age groups, a vulnerable population.



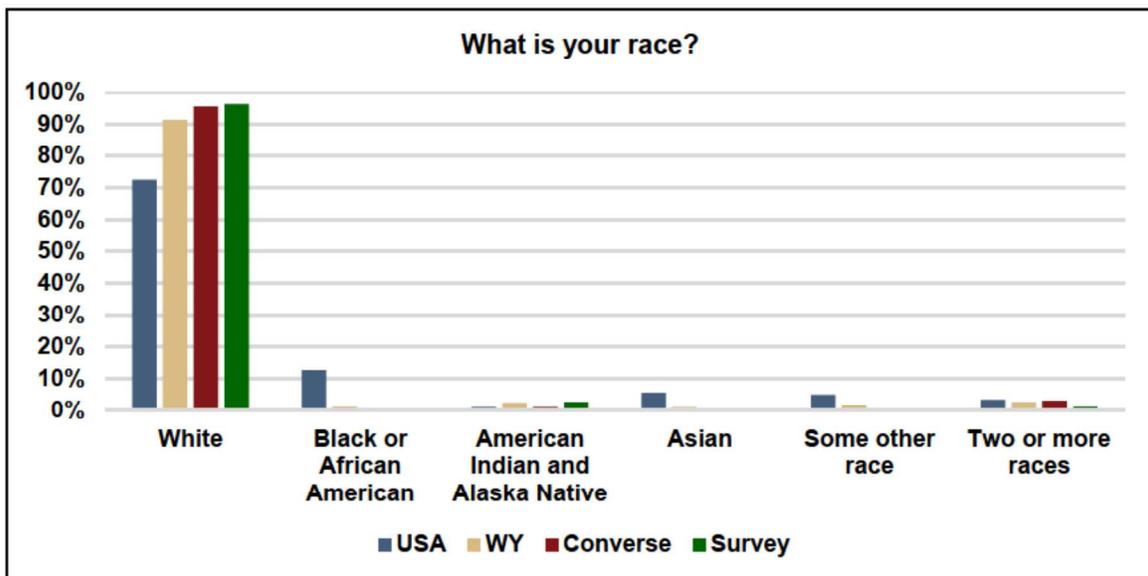
Minors were not targeted for surveys, and so none were collected from them. Instead, the distribution of age groups of those who did complete the survey shows that they were all adults.



A significant percentage of survey respondents are separated, divorced, or widowed. Change in marital status is a known factor driving poverty.

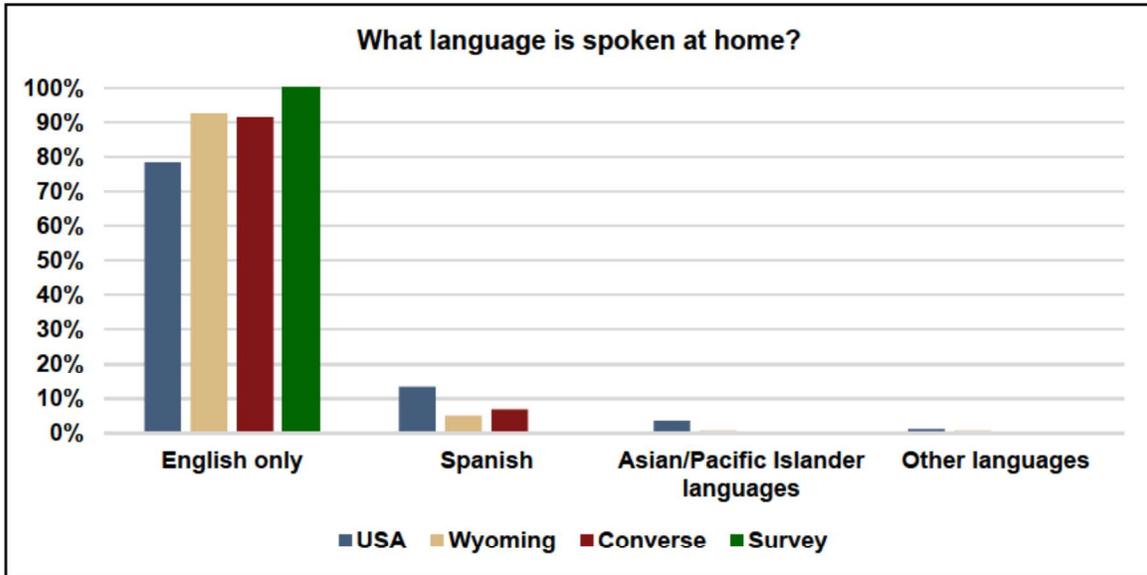


Converse County residents are mostly (95.6%) white, with very few minority races. The survey respondents, likewise, were mostly white (96.4%), which means that we did not reach nor hear from most minorities.



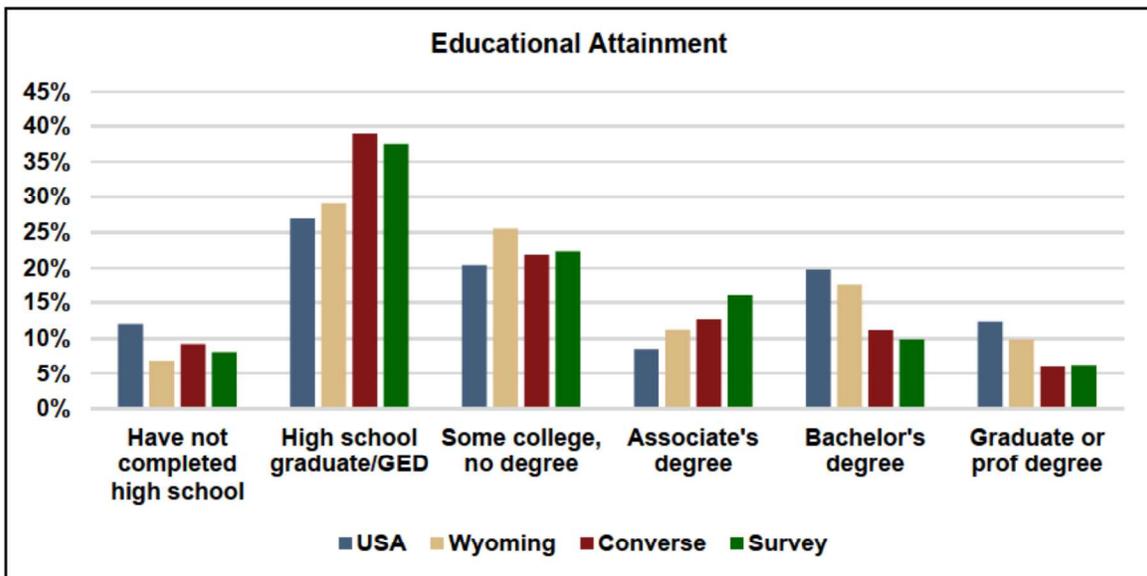
Similarly, Hispanics comprise 8.1% of the Converse County population, but only 2.7% of the survey respondents were Hispanic or Latino.

In Converse County, the primary language spoken at home is English, just slightly higher than the ACS data. Not one of the completed surveys indicated that another language was spoken at home. This result is consistent with the survey's lack of minority and Hispanic input.



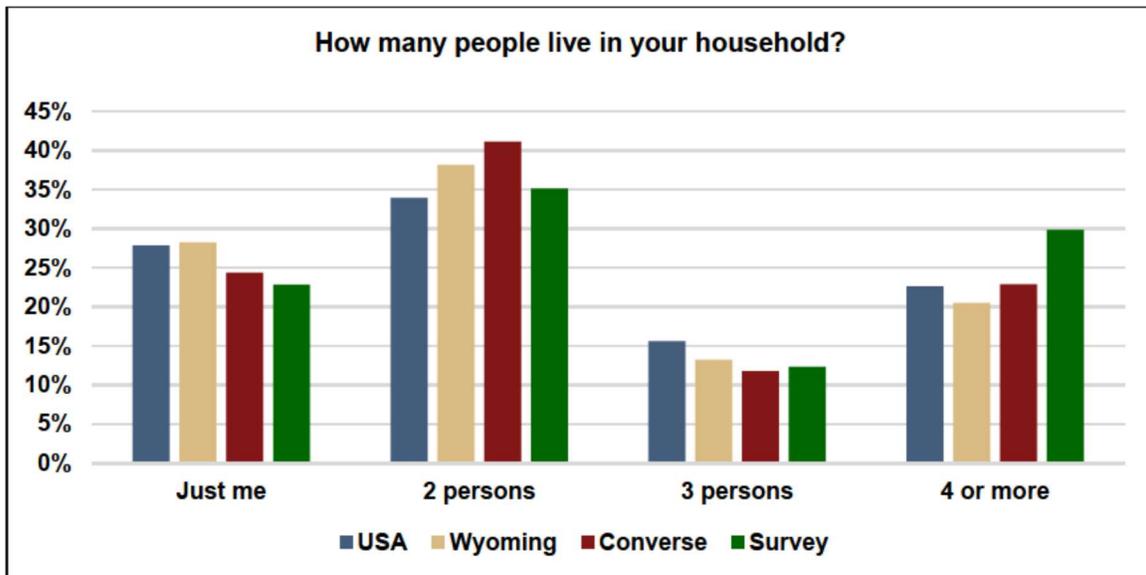
### Educational Attainment

Converse County boasts a high percentage of high school graduates and residents who have at least some post-secondary education. The number of residents with advanced professional degrees is smaller than other areas as shown in the following chart. The survey did a good job of capturing a good cross section of the community from this perspective.



## Household Size

Survey respondents were asked to identify the number of people living in their homes, and the breakdown of children's ages and those over age 65 living in the household.

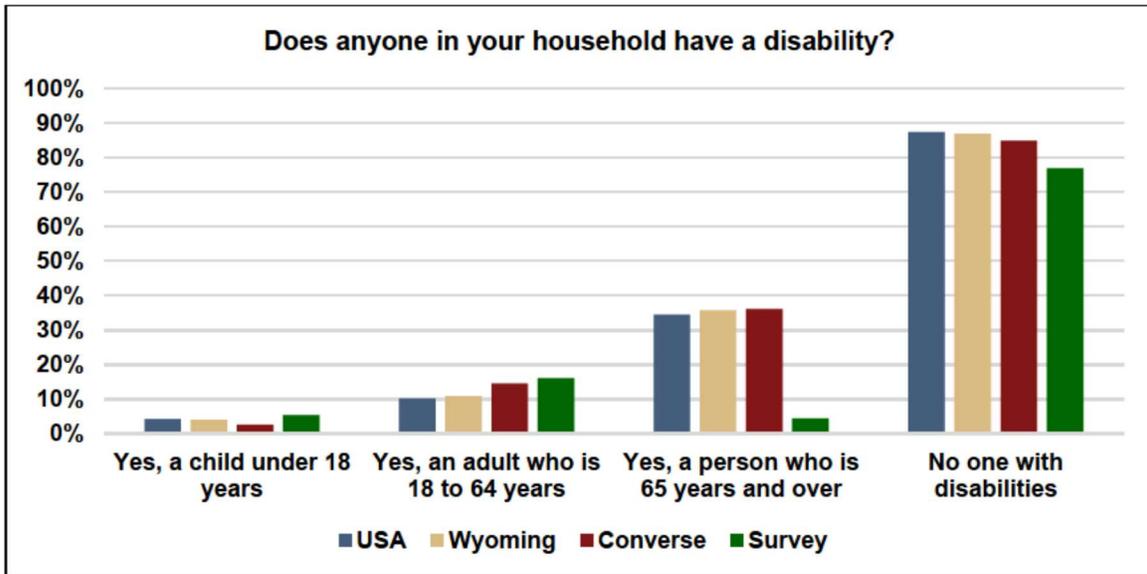


Those with 1-2 persons living in the household were underrepresented in the survey results; and those with 4 or more persons were overrepresented in the survey. Further study may be warranted to understand the factors affecting household size for those living in poverty.

Of those survey respondents who had children living in their household, 25.0% had at least one child under the age of 6 years, 20.5% had at least one child who was age 6-12, and another 18.8% had a teenager, age 13-17. Those percentages are a bit lower than expected, since 33.0% of all households in Converse County have one or more people under the age of 18, according to the latest Census/ACS data.

Older residents represent another vulnerable population. According to the latest Census/ACS data, 29% of all Converse County households currently have one or more people 65 years and over.

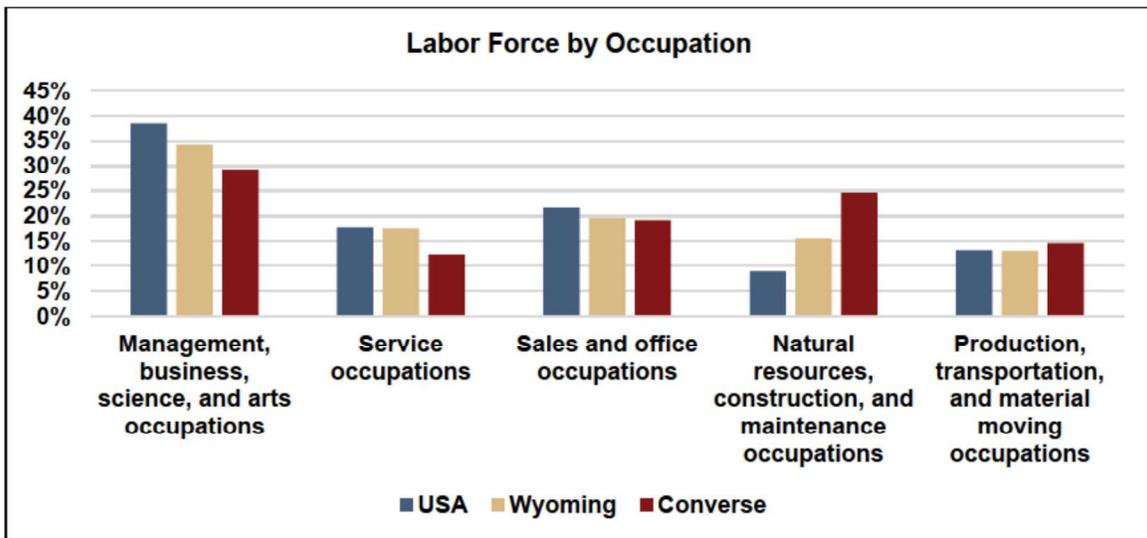
Converse County has a relatively low rate (2.6%) of young people (under 18 years) with disabilities, compared to Wyoming (4.0%) and the nation (4.2%). However, disability is much more prevalent (14.5%) among the working-age population in Converse County (18-64 years), compared to Wyoming (10.9%) and the nation (10.3%). That represents an unusual shift from the typical pattern of disability, as shown below. The survey seems to have gathered input from both of these age groups, but not seniors who are 65 years and over. Nonetheless, it is clear from the survey responses that a large contingent of older residents completed the survey (just not those with disabilities, apparently).



Very few survey respondents reported having a teenage parent in the home (just two).

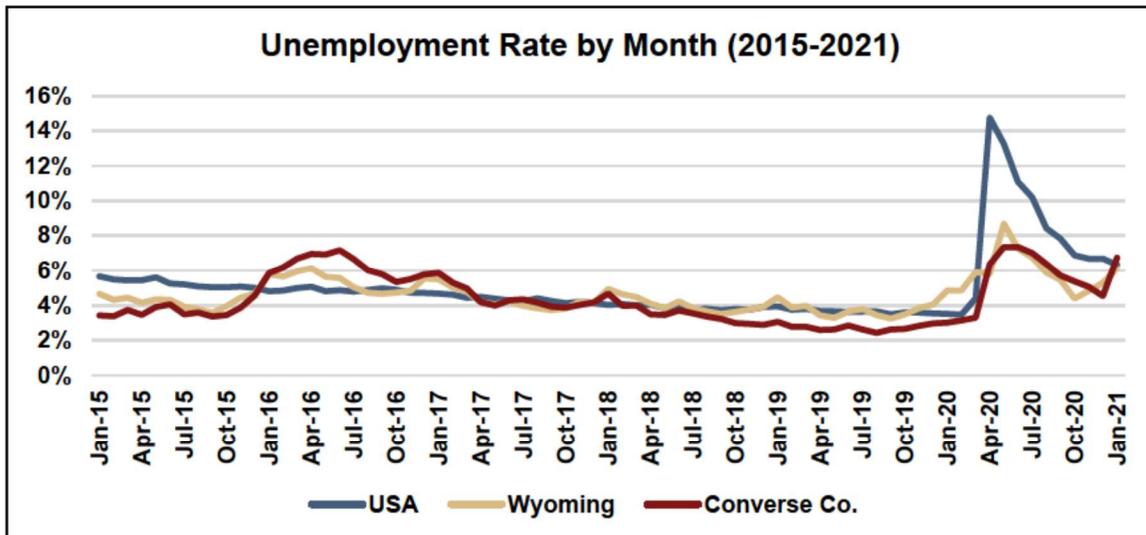
### Labor Force

Converse County has a civilian workforce of 7,023 workers, much smaller than it was just one year ago. These workers live near their workplace, with short commutes (averaging 26.3 minutes, compared to 26.9 minutes nationwide). The mix of occupations in Converse County reflects the dominance of local economic clusters built around agriculture and natural resource extraction. The following chart compares the types of occupations found in Converse County, compared with Wyoming and the United States, according to the latest Census/ACS data.



## Unemployment

Unemployment is typically very low in Converse County (about 4% the last few years). Recently (during the last few years), unemployment has remained low as the labor force has shrunk. According to the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, a big reason for the region's low unemployment rate is that workers are leaving the area to find work elsewhere.



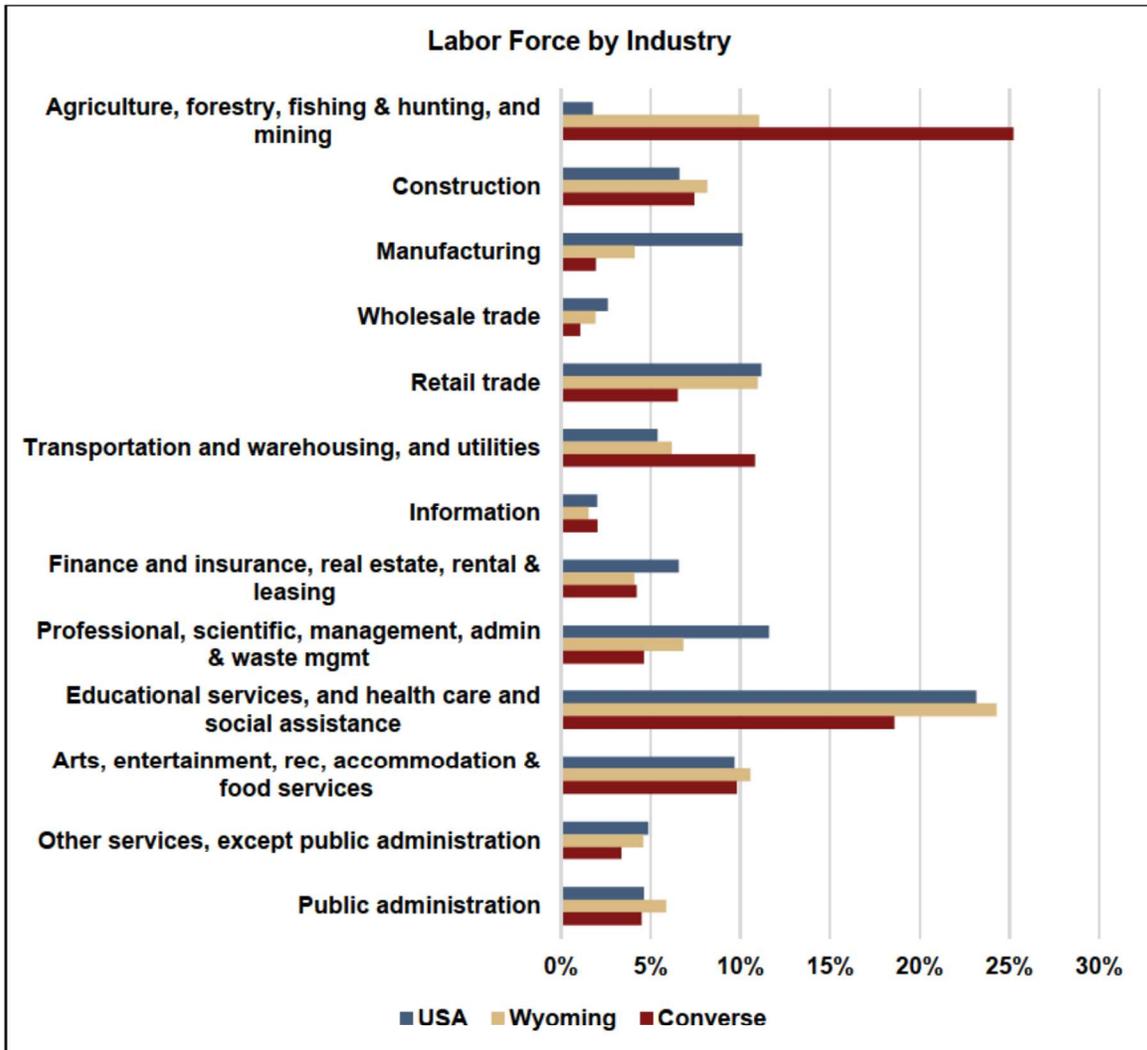
Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Survey respondents were asked if something was keeping them from being employed. Disability (19.8% of all respondents), lack of jobs (10.8%), and low wages (10.8%) topped the list for those survey respondents who identified barriers to employment. More than half of all survey respondents (52.3%) said they experienced no barriers to employment.

## Industries

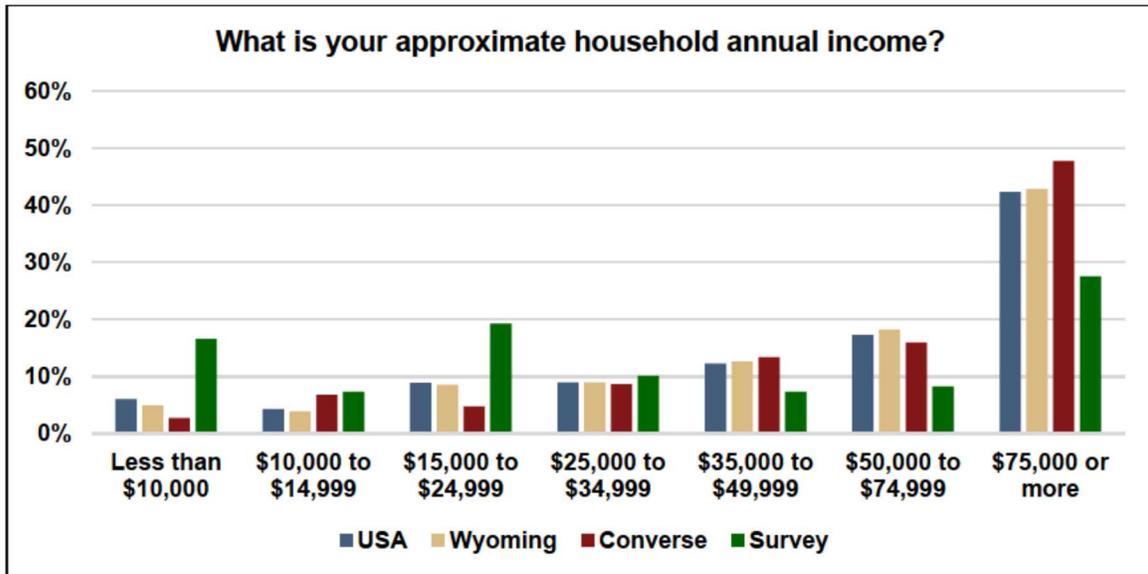
The largest industry sectors in Converse County are associated with agricultural production, natural resources, tourism, and travel. Interstate 25 traverses the county, bringing recreational users and tourists on their way to Glendo Reservoir, Laramie Peak, Ft. Laramie Historic Site, or some other place. Additionally, public schools and local governments are some of the largest employers in Converse County, which is typical in many parts of Wyoming.

The following table illustrates the mix of industries providing jobs in Converse County, Wyoming, and the United States.



**Income**

One of the biggest differences between the general population and the residents who completed a survey is found with income. Many survey respondents earn far less than most Converse County residents. This needs assessment was open to the entire community. Of course, stakeholders were encouraged to ask their clients to complete surveys, so the survey results are purposely targeted to reach the lower-income residents who struggle with poverty. The survey results, shown below, clearly show that the survey was completed the intended audience, while also gathering a smattering of input from citizens across a broad spectrum of income.



As of the latest Census/ACS data (2019), Converse County’s median household income is much higher than Wyoming and the nation. The following table provides comparisons for various measures of income, and by every measure Converse County’s income level is higher.

Income Measure	USA	Wyoming	Converse Co.
Median household income	\$62,843	\$64,049	\$69,647
Median family income	\$77,263	\$79,782	\$82,156
Per capita income	\$34,103	\$33,366	\$33,693

### Housing

According to Census/ACS data, 19.5% of all housing units in Converse County are vacant, which is higher than both the nation (12.1% vacancy) and the state (16.9%). Most housing units in Converse County are single family homes (68.9%), and the next most common type of housing is mobile homes (18.6%). There are a few multi-family units in Converse County (just 12.0% of all housing units). In contrast, other communities in Wyoming and the rest of the nation have significantly more multi-family housing units (15.8% and 26.3%, respectively). About 58.0% of all housing stock in Converse County was constructed prior to 1980, compared to 51.6% in Wyoming and 53.6% in the rest of the nation.

Home values in Converse County are lower than generally found in Wyoming and the nation. Converse County home values are about 95% of the national median, and 93.7% of the Wyoming median. The following table compares median home values.

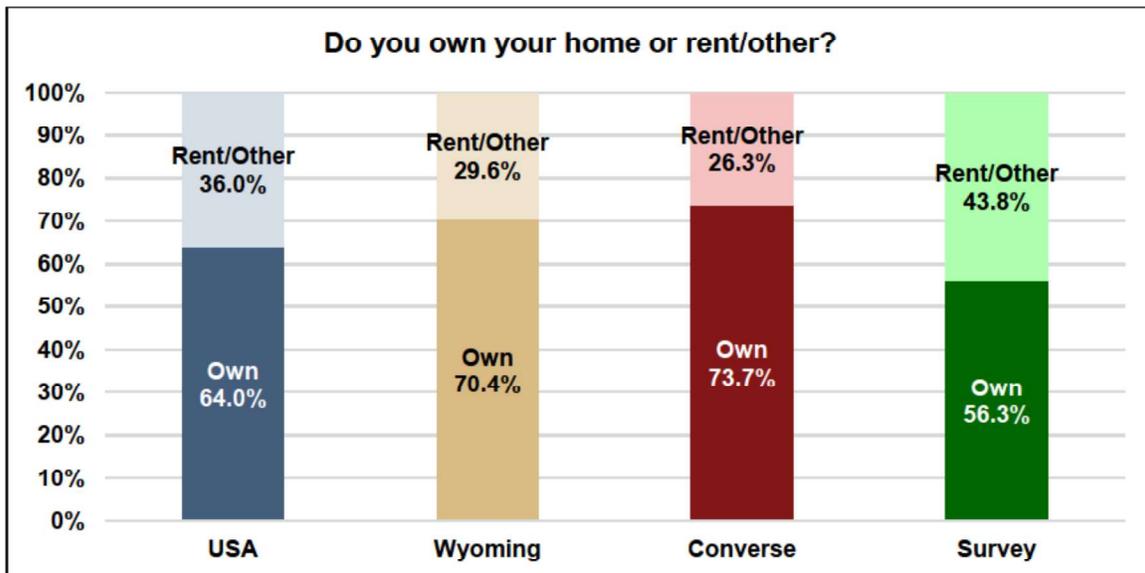
Median Home Values (Census/ACS)		
USA	Wyoming	Converse Co.
\$217,500	\$220,500	\$206,700

The median gross rent paid for living units is much lower in Converse County than elsewhere. The following table compares median gross rent amounts. Even still, the cost of rent in Converse County has been steadily rising for years, driven by the energy extraction industries.

Median Monthly Rent (Census/ACS)		
USA	Wyoming	Converse Co.
\$1,062	\$855	\$739

Low home values and low rental costs help to keep the cost of living low for Converse County residents. Relatively low housing costs can help ease the impact of poverty.

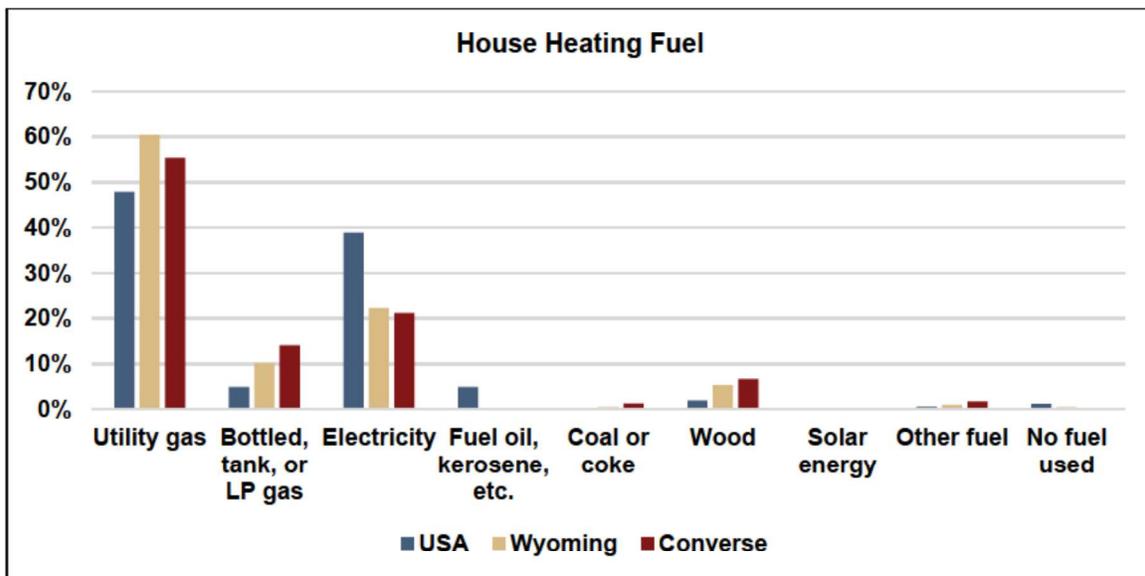
Most survey respondents own their own homes, but the community survey included a higher percentage of renters/others than there are in the community, as seen in the chart below. That finding is consistent with any study on poverty, and it supports the notion that home ownership is one of the key benefits of escaping poverty. Homeownership may also be the key to fighting poverty, so it is important to understand the local housing situation.



Although home values and rental costs appear to be affordable in Converse County (especially given the higher incomes), they are still out of reach for some. Additionally, local residents are concerned about utility costs, property taxes, and other costs. The following table identifies housing concerns identified in the community survey. Utility costs are the only housing concern that a majority of survey respondents identified.

What are your major housing concerns?	
Answer Choices	Survey
Utilities too high	51.0%
Rent too high	27.1%
Property tax too high	17.7%
House needs major repairs	14.6%
Cannot find house in price range	9.4%
Unsuitable neighborhood	9.4%
House too small	6.3%
No rentals available	4.2%
Residence not handicapped accessible	3.1%

Given this concern for high utility costs, it may be important to consider how local residents heat their homes. According to the Census/ACS data, many homes in Converse County (14.1%) are heated by propane, which is particularly prone to price hikes during the winter months when it is most needed. The following chart compares the different fuels being used to heat homes.



## Information Gathering - Public Engagement

To complete this assessment, CBI engaged community leaders and the public to identify economic resources, social resources, and partnership opportunities in the community. CBI sought input from Converse County residents through surveys and interviews with the CSBG Board of Directors, stakeholders, and residents/clients.

These interviews and surveys were conducted to identify key needs, assets, and services to help address local poverty. This public input helps to target limited resources so that they can be used most effectively.

A general media release was prepared and distributed within the community at the beginning of the public engagement process to encourage reactions and input to key findings. Stakeholders were encouraged to promote the survey on their websites and to their clients, providing the links to online surveys.

### Community Survey

The community survey was available online or as a paper copy at several locations (e.g., senior centers). Agencies were asked to distribute surveys to their low-income customers/clientele. Agencies used their own social media to help boost survey responsiveness. A total of 115 surveys was returned in the community survey.

All of the community survey responses have been included in the prior demographic section or in the relevant sections that follow.

### Stakeholders

CBI worked with the CSBG Board to develop a contact list for every known health and human service provider in Converse County. Approximately 70 agencies were identified for survey, with just 10 surveys being returned. Targeted stakeholders included the CSBG Board, government agencies, schools, nonprofit/community service agencies, health agencies, housing/senior housing facilities, churches, and others.

All providers and stakeholders were contacted via email and/or telephone. They were asked to complete an online survey and were asked to provide their clients with either electronic or paper copies of the community survey. Those stakeholders and service providers who completed a survey include:

- Boys and Girls Club of Douglas
- Converse County
- Converse County Aging Services, Inc.
- Converse County Public Health
- Douglas Housing Authority
- Riverside Plaza Two, Inc.

- Salvation Army Service Extension Unit, Douglas WY
- Solutions for Life
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Stakeholders were asked a number of questions relating to the service that they provide to residents in Converse County. Because a limited number of them responded, the survey results do not accurately reflect the broad spectrum of services that are available in Converse County. However, the stakeholders who did take the time to respond provided some great insight. For example, they note that key providers are actually working together to solve hunger and housing issues. These providers are coordinating their food distribution networks and they are making cross referrals for housing.

Many of the stakeholders are calling for more job training to prepare for and to support economic diversification efforts. They note the availability and quality of job training at the public schools and at Eastern Wyoming College, and they see a continuing need to support such efforts. Many are expressing concerns about the impending end of the coal industry, and the directly related impacts to the local railroad industry. These are primary jobs in the community that will be difficult to replace.

The stakeholder survey and interviews included many open-ended questions. Key highlights of their answers to these questions are summarized below:

**What Employment Services are Needed but Not Available?**

- Job training for higher paying jobs
- Need creation of new occupations/diversity

**What Education Services are Needed but Not Available?**

- Parenting
- Basic life skills
- Employment skills
- Trade schools

**What Housing Services are Needed but Not Available?**

- Affordable housing for singles and families
- Need more low-income senior housing
- Affordable housing for workers
- Rentals for new/transient workers

**What Nutrition, Food and Commodities are Needed but Not Available?**

- Food services are under-used
- Access to fresh fruits/vegetables

**What Health Services are Needed but Not Available?**

- Discounted/Sliding scale fees
- Specialty services
- Available services are under-used

**What Transportation Services are Needed but Not Available?**

- Need expanded public transportation with longer hours and more options
- Medical transportation to specialists in Casper

**What Community, Cultural, Social and Economic Assets are Needed but Not Available?**

- None are available
- There are no cultural, social, economic assets, but they are needed

**If you could do one thing to improve family and individual economic security in Converse County, what would it be?**

- Provide affordable access to healthcare
- Diversify economy to provide more jobs at all levels

**If you could do one thing to improve the well-being of families and children in Converse County, what would it be?**

- Offer more family-oriented activities or events
- Parents need better paying jobs, so they do not both have to work
- More and better mental health services

**If you could do one thing to increase community economic vitality and opportunities in Converse County, what would it be?**

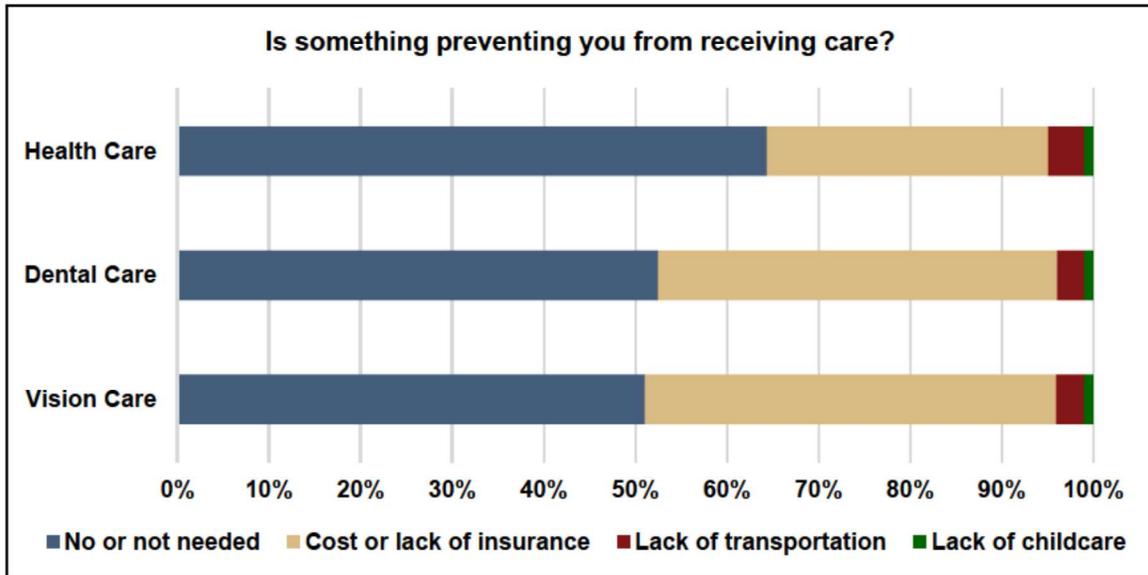
- Creation of more jobs, diversified economy
- Job training and re-education

Some of the concerns being expressed by stakeholders were also echoed by the community survey respondents. For example, community members were asked about their cell phone and Internet use. Lack of Internet access at home and lack of phone ownership can contribute to poverty.

Do you have any of the following?	
Answer Choices	Survey
Cell phone	83.9%
Internet access at home	68.8%
Computer	58.0%
Smart phone	52.7%
Land line phone	8.9%

The community survey also asked respondents whether there was something preventing them from receiving vision, dental, and health care. Most respondents said that nothing was

preventing them from receiving care. The most prevalent barrier is the cost of care or lack of insurance, as shown below.

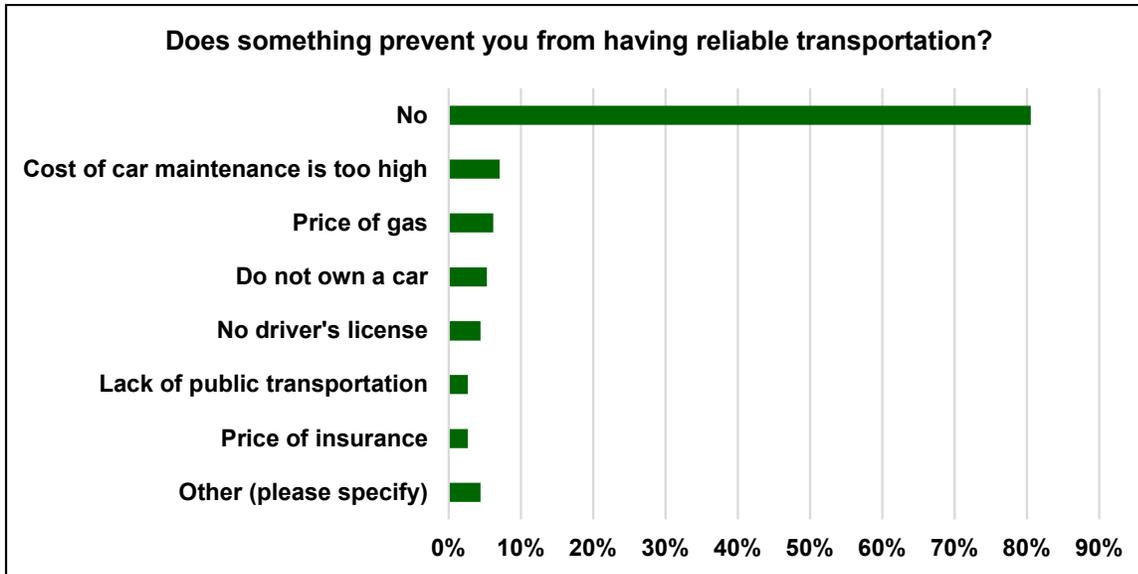


According to the latest Census/ACS data, Converse County has a low incidence of residents who have no health insurance coverage (8.7%), as shown below.

Health Insurance Coverage	USA	Wyoming	Converse
With health insurance coverage	91.2%	88.6%	91.3%
With private health insurance	67.9%	73.6%	75.8%
With public coverage	35.1%	27.7%	28.3%
No health insurance coverage	8.8%	11.4%	8.7%

However, there was a much higher percentage of community survey respondents who said they did not have insurance (16.2%). Since this is nearly twice the expected rate, it is clear that the survey reached the residents who do not have health insurance.

Survey respondents were also asked about their barriers to transportation. Transportation can be an insurmountable barrier.



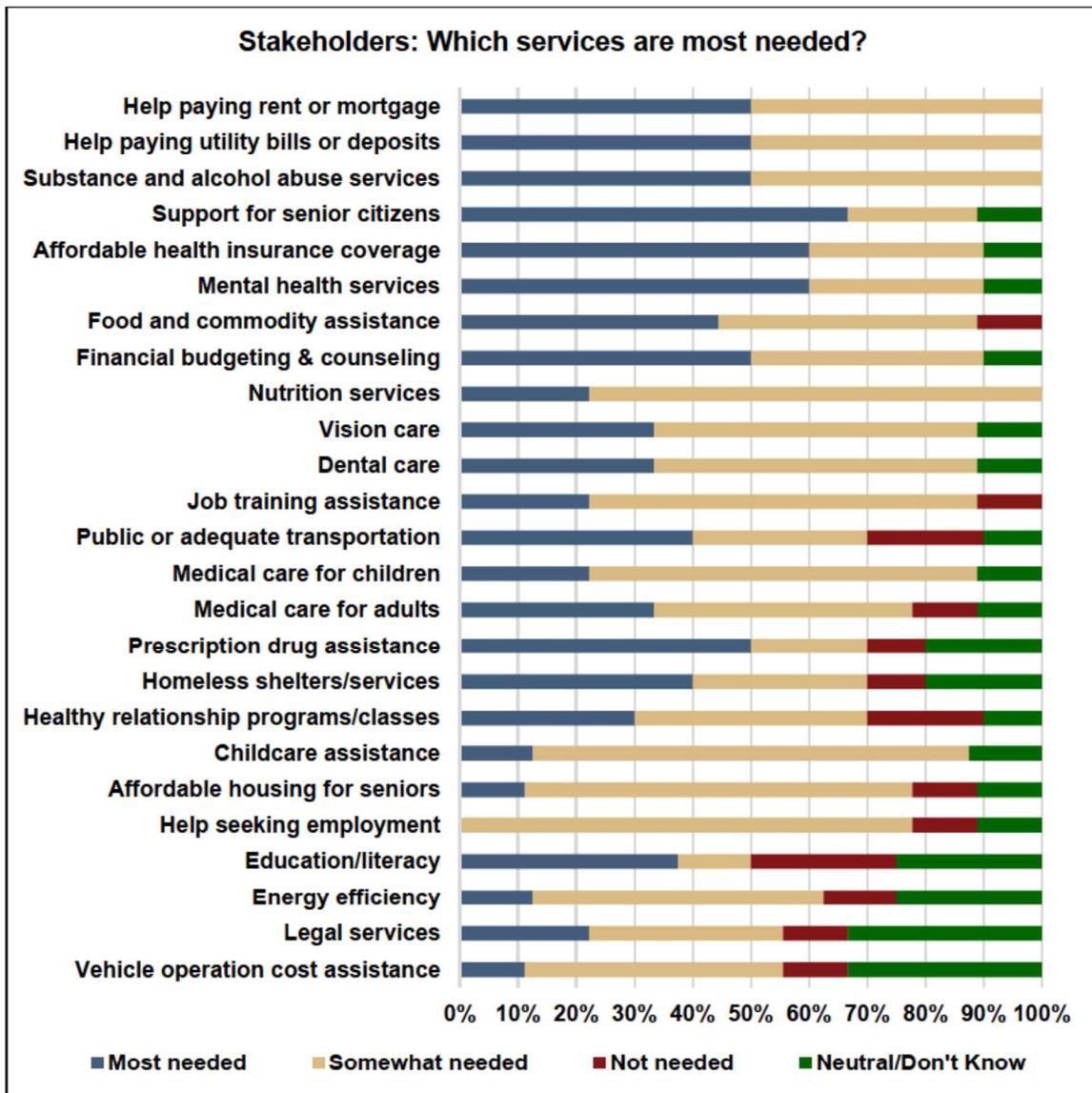
Finally, there were several questions that were asked of both stakeholders and clients. These responses have been combined for comparative purposes here.

### Most Needed Services

Stakeholders were asked what services were most needed in Converse County. Their top responses included:

- Help paying rent or mortgage
- Help paying utility bills or deposits
- Substance and alcohol abuse services
- Support for senior citizens
- Affordable health insurance coverage
- Mental health services

The following chart illustrates the services that are the most needed in Converse County, as identified by the stakeholder survey responses.

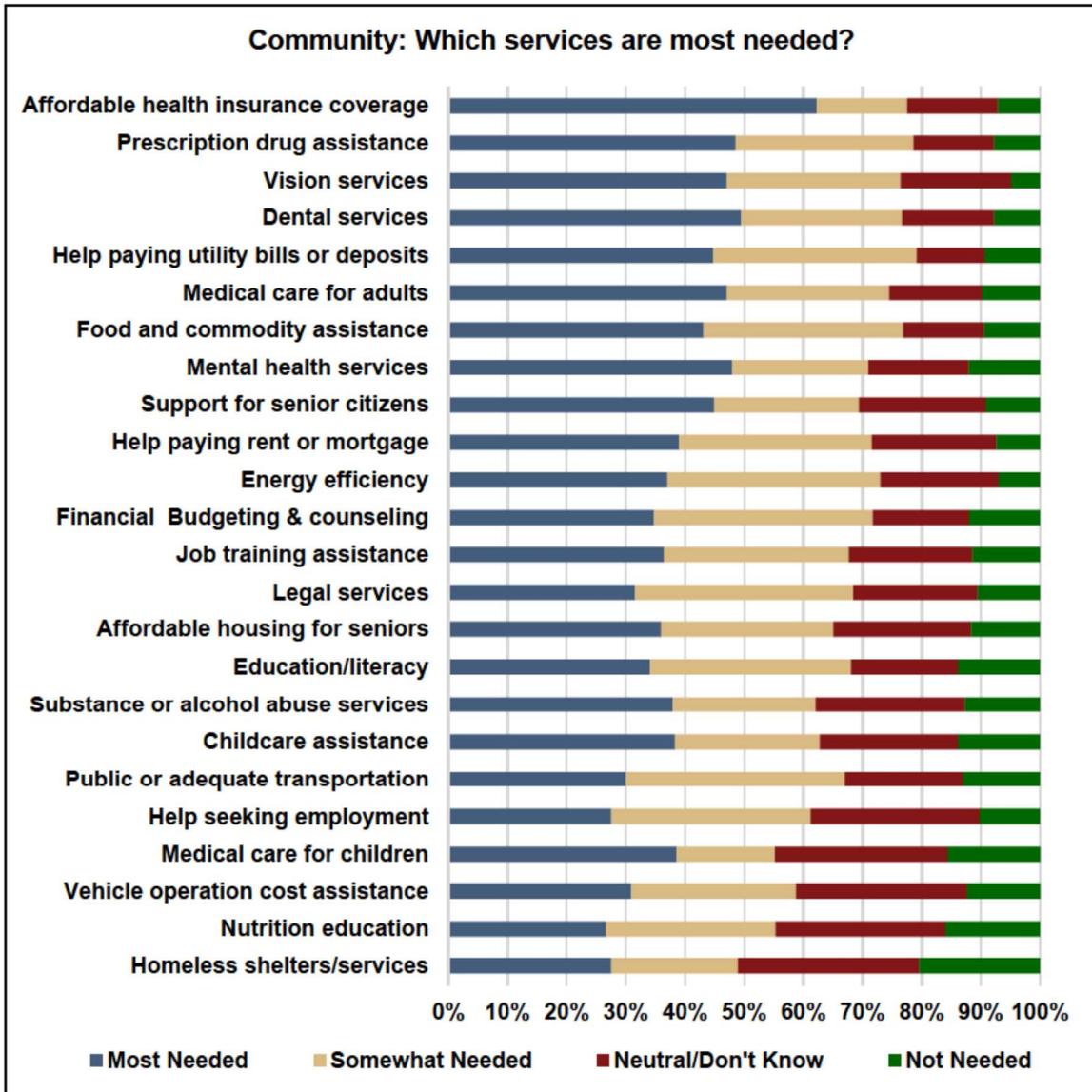


Client responses differed from the stakeholders, and came up with their own top priorities:

- Affordable health insurance coverage
- Prescription drug assistance
- Vision services
- Dental services
- Help paying utility bills or deposits

The difference between the stakeholder and community surveys is not as big as it might seem. It is clear that some residents are struggling to obtain the care and financial assistance they need. Stakeholders seem to be suggesting that the root cause of their problem may simply be that their housing costs (including utility costs) are too high.

The following chart illustrates the services that are most needed in Converse County, according to the community survey respondents.



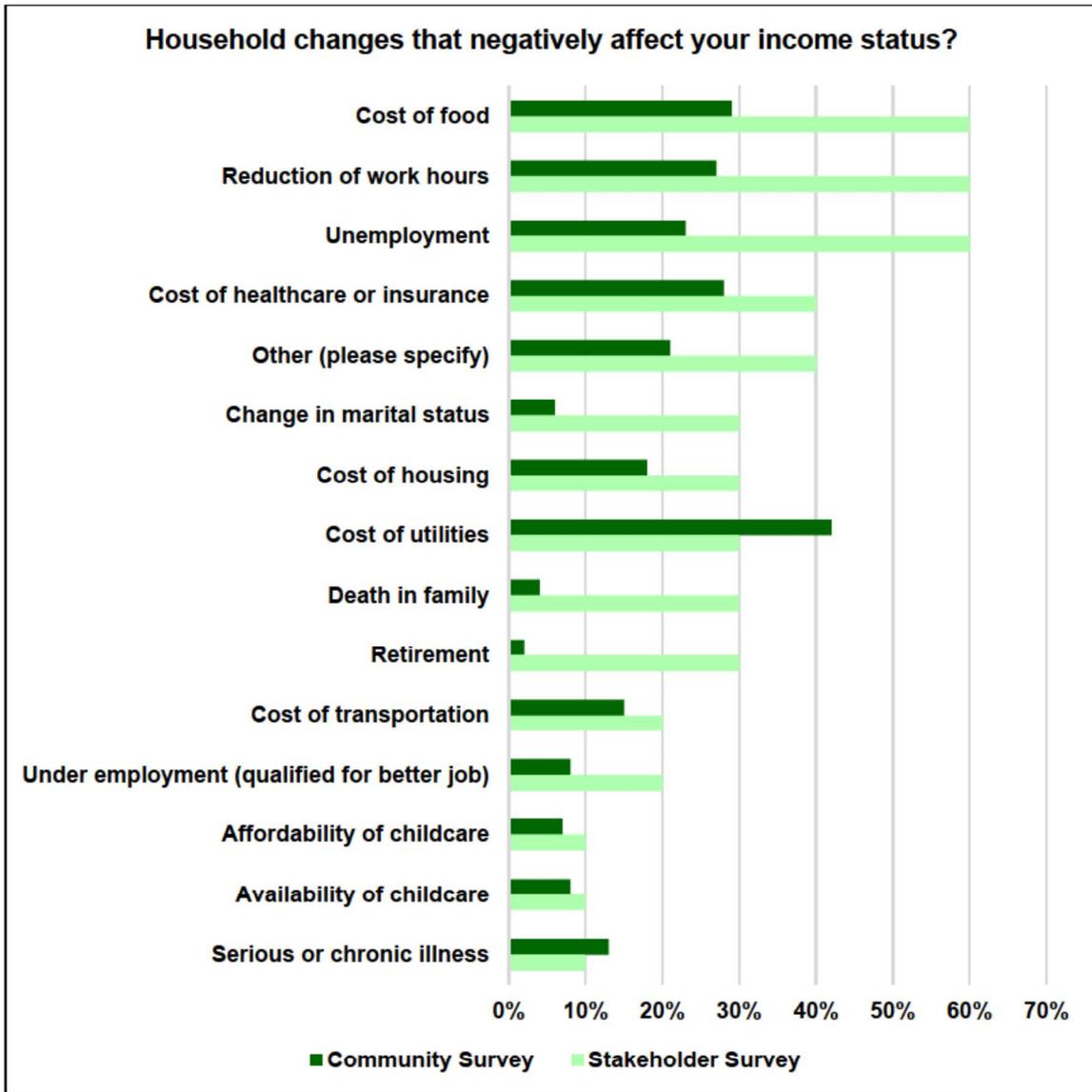
While there are some similarities between Stakeholders and the Community, there are some important differences of perspective about what is “most needed” in Converse County, as shown below:

Most Needed Services in Converse County		
Rank	Stakeholders' Top 5	Community's Top 5
1	Substance and alcohol abuse services (tied #1)	Affordable health insurance coverage
2	Help paying rent or mortgage (tied #1)	Prescription drug assistance
3	Help paying utility bills/deposits (tied #1)	Vision services
4	Support for senior citizens	Dental services
5	Affordable health insurance coverage (tied #5) Mental health services (tied #5)	Help paying utility bills/deposits

The results above show that survey respondents want medical care and food. Stakeholders see the situation differently, and they point to substance abuse and mental health issues as top problems. They might be saying the same thing: Converse County residents need health care (including for mental health). Without that access, some who are struggling turn to self-medication, which worsens their condition.

### Changes that Impact Income

Stakeholders and clients were asked about changes that impacted their income in the past 12 months. These responses differed dramatically on some points, as shown in the following comparative chart:



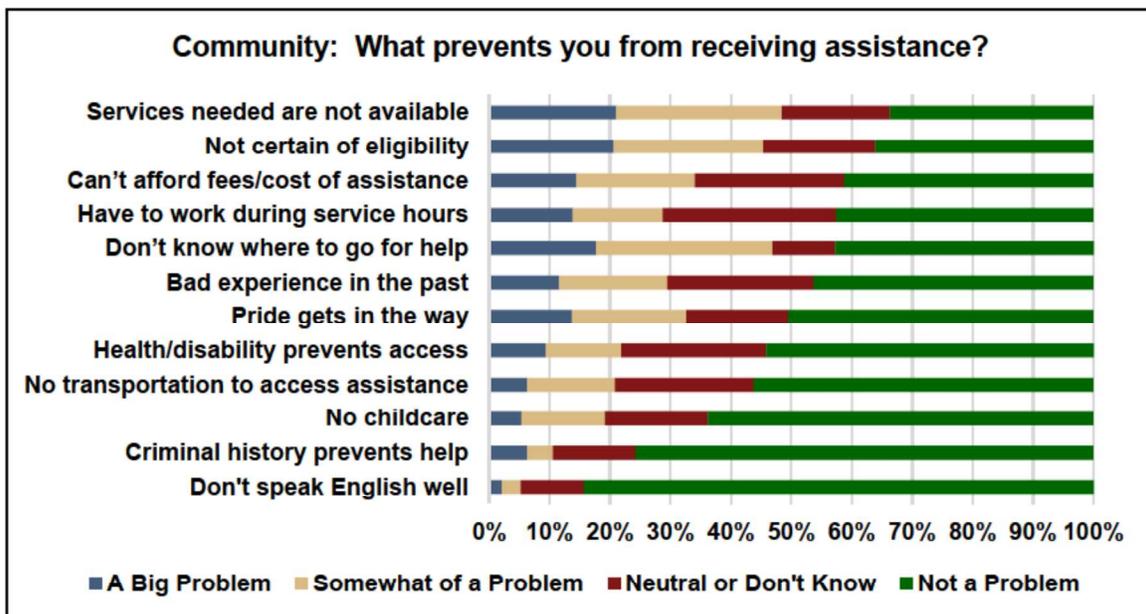
Stakeholders apparently believe that job-related impacts have the greatest impact on income. Conversely, community members often cite things like the cost of healthcare, insurance, food, and utilities as having the biggest effect on their income.

## Services Available/Factors that Prevent People from Receiving Assistance

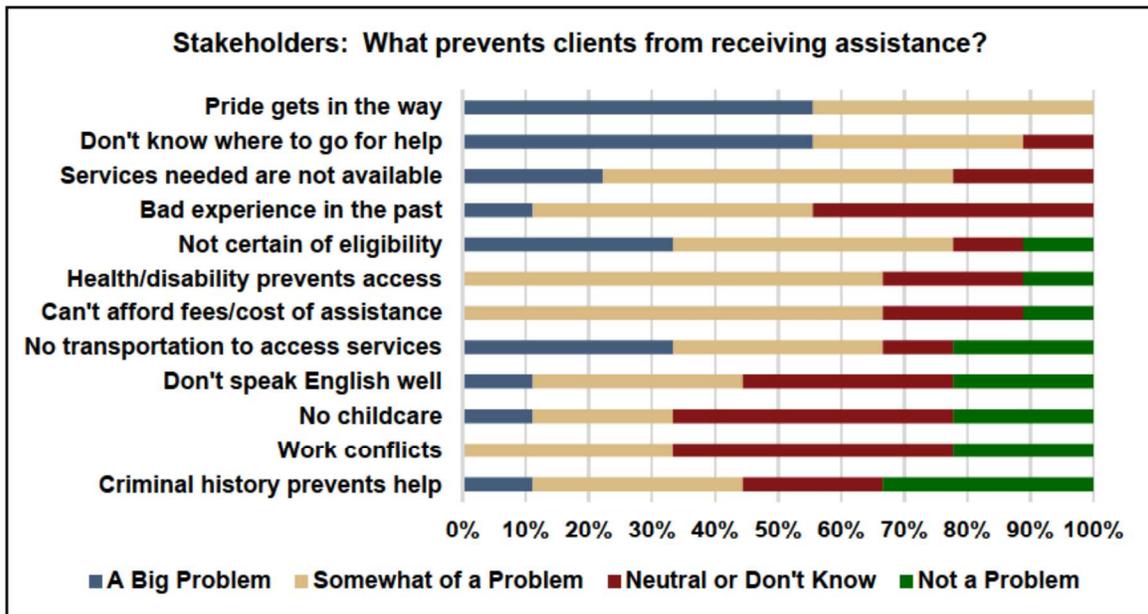
Stakeholders and clients were asked questions about services they receive/provide and about factors preventing them/their clients or customers from receiving assistance with basic needs. There are a wide variety of services available to the low-income population in Converse County.

Indicate the areas your household receives assistance.	
Answer Choices	Survey
Medicare, Medicaid, Medicaid Waiver	56.0%
SNAP	34.5%
Low-income housing or renter's assistance	16.7%
Free or reduced-price lunch (at public school)	16.7%
LIEAP (Low-Income Energy Assistance Program)	15.5%
Food Bank	14.3%
Senior services (meals, transportation, home assistance)	14.3%
SSDI (Social Security Disability Income)	13.1%
WIC	9.5%
Equality Care, Kid Care, or other state coverage	6.0%
Veteran's Administration	6.0%
Youth services (Child and Family Development/Head Start, Boys & Girls Club, etc.)	4.8%
Mortgage assistance	3.6%
Employment training services	3.6%
Education literacy (GED, ESL, adult education)	1.2%

Community members reported that some services that are needed are not available as a top barrier. They are also not certain of their eligibility for some services; and they cannot afford other services. These and other barriers identified in the community survey are listed in the order of difficulty.



Stakeholders tend to agree with their clients regarding barriers to receiving assistance. They acknowledge that awareness and availability of services is a problem. But a bigger barrier, stakeholders say, is that clients let their pride get in their way, preventing assistance. These and other barriers (as reported in the Stakeholder survey) are shown below.



## Current Status and Trends in Poverty

The two major questions to be analyzed in this Needs Assessment are the following:

1. What is the *current status* of poverty and the conditions with which low-income residents struggle; and
2. What are the *trends* in poverty and conditions that may impact low-income residents in the future?

According to the Census Bureau, the poverty rate in Converse County (for 2019, which is the most recent data available) is relatively low (9.6%). By comparison, Wyoming's poverty rate is 11.0% and the nation's is 13.4%. However, the poverty rate should also be considered for different cohorts. For example, minors (i.e., those persons who are under 18 years old) are more likely to be living in poverty. Women are more likely to be living in poverty than men, as shown below.

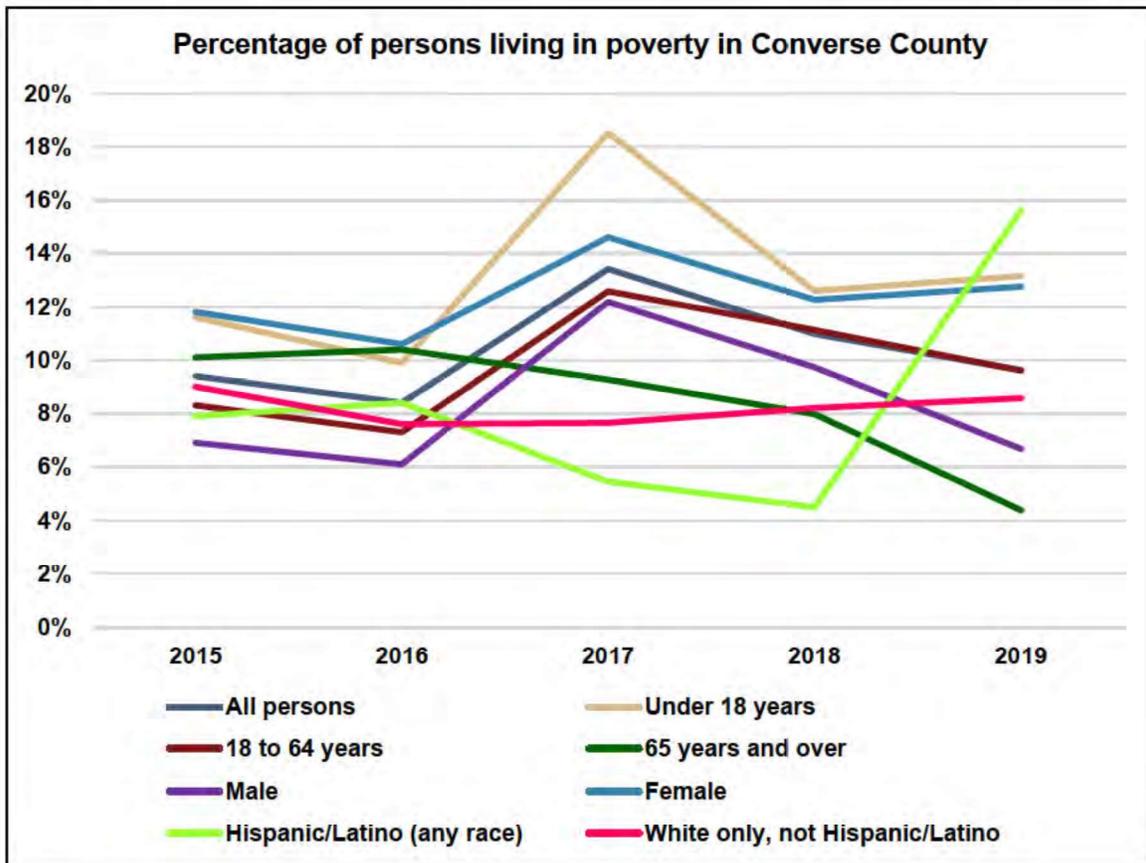
Percentage living in poverty last 12 months (2019)	USA	WY	Converse
Poverty rate overall	13.4%	11.0%	9.6%
Under 18 years	18.5%	12.6%	13.2%
18 to 64 years	12.6%	11.1%	9.6%
65 years and over	9.3%	8.0%	4.4%
Male	12.2%	9.7%	6.7%
Female	14.6%	12.3%	12.8%

When examined over a period of years, these poverty rates suggest a certain level of stability, whereby residents are doing relatively well but are clearly affected by economic growth and contraction. Poverty rates for each of these cohorts is provided below.

Converse Co.: Poverty Status by Demographic	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
All persons	9.4%	8.4%	13.4%	11.0%	9.6%
Under 18 years	11.6%	9.9%	18.5%	12.6%	13.2%
18 to 64 years	8.3%	7.3%	12.6%	11.1%	9.6%
65 years and over	10.1%	10.4%	9.3%	8.0%	4.4%
Male	6.9%	6.1%	12.2%	9.7%	6.7%
Female	11.8%	10.6%	14.6%	12.3%	12.8%
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	7.9%	8.4%	5.4%	4.5%	15.6%
White only, not Hispanic/Latino	9.0%	7.6%	7.6%	8.2%	8.6%

In general, poverty rates in Converse County rise and fall with the economy. However, there has been a noticeable shift during the last five years for certain cohorts. From 2015-2019, older residents have enjoyed a significantly lower rate of poverty. In addition to this unusual trend, it is clear that economic downturns (e.g., 2017) impact children more than the other cohorts, as seen in the following graph. Finally, the poverty rates for Hispanics and Latinos are curious in Converse County. Until 2018, this cohort was thriving and had some of the lowest rates of

poverty in the area. Since then, there has been a dramatic shift to the point where Hispanics now have some of the highest rates of poverty in Converse County, as seen in the following graph.



In Converse County, there are so few residents who are not white that Census estimates of those living in poverty can vary wildly. Even so, these shifts in the poverty rate merit more research to understand their importance to fighting poverty in Converse County.

A high school education (or equivalent) is a key factor for avoiding poverty. That rule of thumb has been evident in Converse County, where those who have less than a high school education are more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the population. Nonetheless, a remarkable shift has occurred in Converse County during the last five years, during which all residents seem to be able to move away from poverty regardless of their educational attainment, as illustrated in the following table.

<b>Converse Co.: Poverty Status by Educational Attainment</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Population 25 years and over	7.2%	6.3%	6.1%	6.0%	6.9%
Less than high school graduate	14.4%	11.6%	10.6%	6.9%	8.5%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	9.5%	7.1%	5.2%	5.4%	5.7%
Some college, associate's degree	4.6%	5.1%	6.5%	6.9%	8.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.3%	3.9%	4.9%	5.3%	6.2%

Full-time employment is the single best strategy to avoid poverty. Working part time (or part-year) helps, but those who worked full-time for the past 12 months were the least likely to be struggling with poverty.

<b>Converse Co.: Poverty Status by Employment/Work</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Civilian labor force 16 years and over	5.8%	5.1%	5.0%	5.2%	6.3%
Employment Status					
Employed	5.0%	4.2%	4.4%	4.2%	5.0%
Male	3.3%	2.7%	2.4%	2.1%	1.6%
Female	7.1%	6.0%	6.9%	6.8%	9.5%
Unemployed	21.4%	20.9%	15.4%	26.2%	28.7%
Male	23.5%	19.5%	11.9%	15.2%	23.8%
Female	19.0%	22.7%	20.9%	38.3%	34.9%
Work Experience					
Population 16 years and over	7.2%	7.5%	8.0%	8.1%	9.0%
Worked full-time, year-round in the past 12 months	2.2%	1.7%	2.9%	3.4%	2.7%
Worked part-time or part-year in the past 12 months	11.6%	11.8%	7.0%	7.0%	11.5%
Did not work	13.1%	14.8%	17.1%	16.6%	16.7%

Poverty rates can be much higher in families with young children, especially for female householders when no husband is present. The difference between having two working parents and just one (a mother) is very significant to avoiding poverty, as shown below.

<b>Converse Co.: Poverty Status by Family</b>	<b>All Families</b>	<b>Married couples</b>	<b>Female Householder</b>
Families (ALL)	4.9%	0.7%	53.2%
With related children of householder under 18 years	9.4%	1.1%	55.6%
With related children of householder under 5 years	0.0%	0.0%	NA
With related children of householder under 5 years and 5-17	11.6%	6.4%	28.3%
With related children of householder 5 to 17 years	12.2%	0.0%	66.9%

Converse County residents access food stamps via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Locally, the focus appears to be on getting assistance to children and young families.

<b>Food Stamps (SNAP) in Converse County</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>WY</b>	<b>Converse</b>
<b>Percentage of household receiving SNAP benefits</b>	11.7%	5.4%	7.4%
With one or more people in the household 60 years and over	33.8%	26.8%	33.6%
No people in the household 60 years and over	66.2%	73.2%	66.4%
<b>HOUSEHOLD TYPE</b>			
Married-couple family	25.2%	24.2%	2.3%
Other family:	42.9%	39.6%	50.8%
Male householder, no spouse present	8.0%	10.2%	30.6%
Female householder, no spouse present	34.9%	29.4%	20.2%
Nonfamily households	31.9%	36.2%	47.0%
With children under 18 years	50.1%	52.8%	50.8%
Married-couple family	17.1%	18.7%	0.0%
Other family:	32.4%	33.6%	50.8%
Male householder, no spouse present	5.3%	7.3%	30.6%
Female householder, no spouse present	27.0%	26.3%	20.2%
Nonfamily households	0.6%	0.5%	0.0%
No children under 18 years	49.9%	47.2%	49.2%
Married-couple family	8.1%	5.6%	2.3%
Other family:	10.6%	6.0%	0.0%
Male householder, no spouse present	2.7%	2.9%	0.0%
Female householder, no spouse present	7.9%	3.1%	0.0%
Nonfamily households	31.2%	35.6%	47.0%
<b>POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS</b>			
Below poverty level	47.3%	48.0%	38.6%
At or above poverty level	52.7%	52.0%	61.4%
<b>DISABILITY STATUS</b>			
With one or more people with a disability	46.1%	50.4%	51.3%
With no persons with a disability	53.9%	49.6%	48.7%

The SNAP usage figures and the poverty statistics suggest that, while poverty rates are generally low in Converse County, those rates can be much higher for single parents and for those who may have disabilities.

## Analysis of Core Poverty Issues

### Improving Family and Individual Economic Security

Employment is the key to individual and family economic security. This assessment seeks to identify the barriers for local residents to get and keep jobs that will support their family and allow them to build assets. There are many known barriers to employment, including lack of education and training, lack of transportation, and lack of adequate housing. Identification of community resources that can help remove these barriers is critical.

- **Snapshot and trends of economic security/insecurity**
  - Converse County has approximately 1,334 residents, or about 9.6% of local residents, living in poverty as of 2019
  - Converse County's poverty rate is lower than Wyoming's (11.0%), and much lower than the nation's current poverty rate (13.4%). Converse County's relatively low rate of poverty is explained, in part, by having higher levels of employment, higher wages, and higher rates of workers who have health insurance
  - Unemployment in Converse County is generally lower than the state. For 2020, Converse County's average monthly unemployment rate was 5.4%, lower than Wyoming's rate (5.8%) and the nation's rate (8.1%). Low unemployment may or may not be a positive economic indicator in this instance, because one known impact of the pandemic was a nearly complete shutdown of the oil and gas industry. With that shutdown, many workers actually left the area. As of March 2021, local employment (7,343 actual jobs) had dropped by more than 1,000 workers (was 8,356 in March 2020).
  - Converse County residents earn more than others, including Median Household Income and Per Capita Income (see table below).
  - Converse County Median Home Values are relatively low, which should make it easier for residents to purchase homes (see following table).

Economic Measures	USA	Wyoming	Converse Co.
Median Household Income	\$62,843	\$64,049	\$69,647
Per Capita Income	\$34,103	\$33,366	\$33,693
Unemployment Rate	8.1%	5.8%	5.4%
Median Home Value	\$217,500	\$220,500	\$206,700

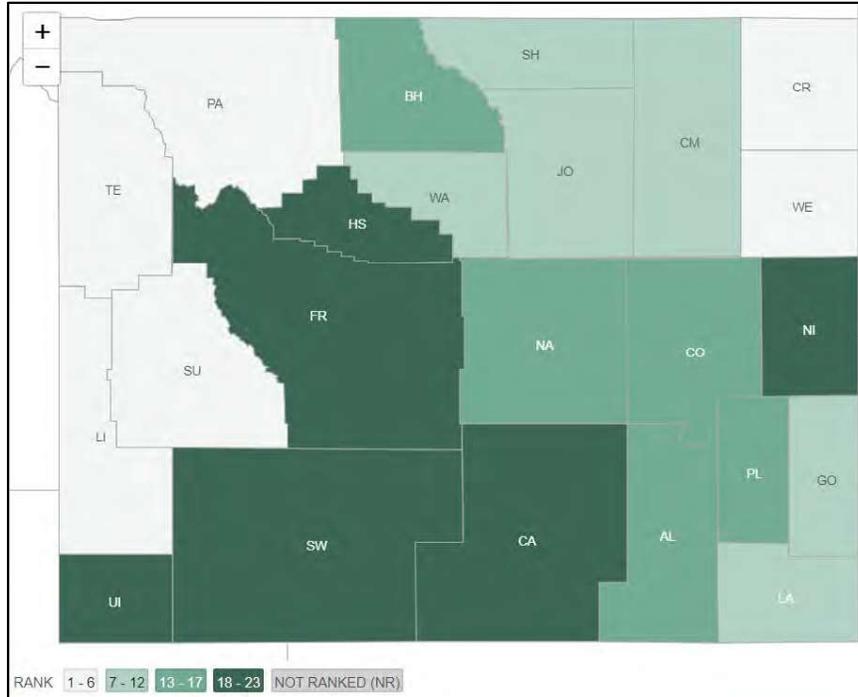
- **Community, cultural, social, and economic assets**
  - Strong senior centers and senior housing available in Douglas and Glenrock. Local residents like and support these services.
  - There are fairly new county library facilities and Douglas Campus for Eastern Wyoming College. The local community was both strategic and supportive in the funding of these facilities, by voting to approve a temporary excise tax increase during the previous boom.

- Effective governmental leadership at the municipal and county level. Effective governance and collaboration can help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services.
- Many residents note the proximity of Casper as being a resource for many services, shopping, jobs, etc. These connections can lead to opportunities for future collaboration.
- **Community deficits that threaten a more secure future**
  - Unemployment rates are currently low, but Converse County is nonetheless going through some extraordinary economic jolts cause by the shutdown of the energy extraction industry.
  - Lack of economic diversity exposes community residents to economic shocks, including the impact of the COVID pandemic on energy markets. If the March 2021 preliminary estimate from the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services is correct, then more than 1,000 jobs have disappeared from Converse County economy in the last 12 months. In that light, the pandemic has been an economic disaster for Converse County.
  - Affordability of housing, healthcare, utilities, food, etc. makes it difficult for some families to get by, especially during these “bust” cycles of the economy. Temporary and/or seasonal shocks to the cost of living are typical factors leading to poverty. This is particularly a problem for rural residents who use electricity and propane for heating purposes.
- **Individual and family assets and deficits**
  - Customer/client survey respondents list the cost of utilities, cost of food, and cost of healthcare or insurance as the factors that affected their income the most in the past 12 months.
  - Reduction of work hours and unemployment are high on the list of family concerns. The severe contraction underway with the local economy is affecting all residents. It is obvious that from the surveys and from comments made by public leaders that the pandemic has negatively affected Converse County residents.
  - Yet, survey comments indicate that Converse County residents remain fiercely independent and resilient. That attitude can be a strength as the community recovers from the pandemic. But pride can get in the way of seeking help, and that is in fact the #1 barrier to getting help of any kind to escape poverty (per the stakeholder survey results).
- **Agency resources**
  - The downturn in the energy economy continues to have a significant and negative impact on residents and social service providers alike. Budget cuts are likely for local governments unless pandemic relief programs are able to replace lost tax revenue and provide some stability for the future.

- Some state and county agencies do not have offices in Glenrock, which means that many residents have to travel to Douglas (or Casper) for needed services. Transportation can be a barrier for many residents. Many service providers have improved their service delivery for these residents by offering online access. It remains to be seen whether online or virtual access to services can be sustained, or even if they are as effective as in-person services. Even after the pandemic, the CSBG Board might consider encouraging the continuation of online access for services indefinitely.
- Online forms, intended to provide for an easier, more streamlined application process, instead are often difficult to complete for the less tech savvy. Those are the very people who tend to be at risk of poverty. So, service providers should be encouraged to maximize accessibility and usability of online services.
- COVID-19 has impacted agencies in many ways. Funding for some has been cut; others are benefiting from increases in federal assistance programs. All agencies have needed to improve their online and virtual service capacity. In some instances, these changes have made it easier for residents to obtain services; in others, there is now a bigger disconnection from the residents who need services. There probably are some good lessons to learn from these differing impacts, and the CSBG Board should continue to monitor how service providers are making their services available to residents.

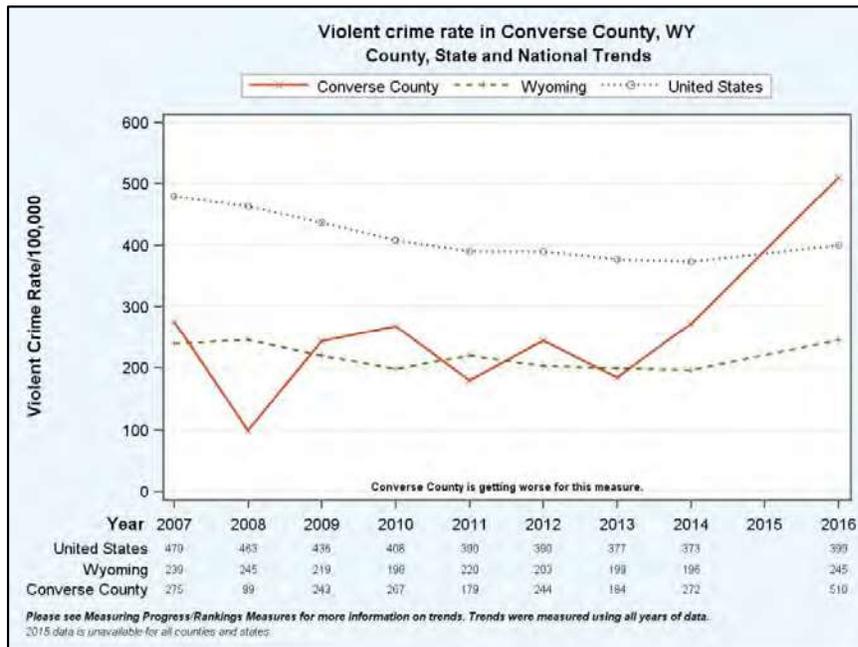
### Improving the Well-Being of Families and Children

- **Community, cultural, social, and economic assets**
  - The childcare crisis that had been affecting Converse County for years seems to have abated, or at least has not been a top concern for those voicing their opinion in the surveys.
  - 31.9% of students are enrolled in free/reduced price lunches in Converse County compared to the higher Wyoming average of 37.8%. The COVID-19 pandemic relief programs expanded the use of free/reduced price lunch program to ALL students. It is unclear how that temporary change will impact future eligibility. However, the historic trend has been relatively low enrollment in the program.
  - Through 2019, Converse County has 396 SNAP (food stamp program) participants, which represents a lower prevalence than in the rest of Wyoming or the USA. The most likely SNAP participants are nonmarried-couple families who live below the poverty level.
  - Converse County ranked 17<sup>th</sup> out of 23 counties in the 2020 County Health Rankings National Database in terms of health outcomes (see map chart below). This ranking has been slipping the last few years. Prior to 2018, Converse County was regularly ranked among the top ten counties for these rankings.



Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, Overall Rank for Health Outcomes (2020)

A rise in violent crime appears to be driving the decline in Converse County’s overall Health Outcomes ranking, as shown in the following graph. Local leaders have previously attributed the rise in crime to the rapid increase of workers in the once-booming oil and gas industry. If true, then we might expect less crime as the economy contracts and those jobs end.



Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, Overall Rank for Health Outcomes (2020)

- **Community deficits that threaten a more secure future**
  - Most providers in Converse County do not use a sliding-scale medical fee system. Clients must find transportation to Casper or even Cheyenne to access these services. Memorial Hospital of Converse County and some other medical providers have a policy of providing care to indigent residents in certain circumstances.
  - As is typical in most communities, poverty rates are higher for children and those over 65. Converse County continues to make specific efforts to protect and provide for these vulnerable populations.
  - Converse County residents tend to have certain unhealthy behaviors that stress the health care system. These unhealthy traits include high rates of adult obesity, physical inactivity, excessive drinking, substance abuse, and mental illness. Programs that encourage healthy choices and provide activities and other supports to local residents are needed.
  - Access to affordable healthcare is a barrier for local residents. This is a problem for about many Wyoming residents, not just Converse County. There are an estimated 25,000 Wyoming residents who would benefit from Medicaid expansion, if approved by the Wyoming legislature.
  
- **Individual and family assets and deficits**
  - Pride can hinder an individual's access to services. For some, there can be a real or perceived stigma associated with receiving assistance. In a small town, the simple act of walking into a service provider's facility can be too visible for some to bear. The stakeholder survey identified pride as the #1 barrier for residents to seek help. It may be helpful to have a public campaign to address that stigma, particularly now as we discover how many people have been affected by the pandemic.
  - Continuation of strong senior support services will minimize the threat of poverty for the elderly population in Converse County, but there is a need to consider more housing options for low-income residents, especially families. There is a high percentage of mobile homes in Converse County, especially when compared to the relatively low percentage of low-income apartments.
  
- **Agency resources**
  - Wyoming 2-1-1, which keeps a database on social service agencies throughout the State of Wyoming, is a little-known entity in Converse County and should be more visible. Given Wyoming 2-1-1's operation, one way to increase local residents' access to and awareness of available services is to simply promote 2-1-1 as the gateway to all social services.
  - Survey results clearly demonstrate that many residents do not know where to go for help. Survey respondents also say that eligibility requirements are unclear. These are two barriers that can be immediately and effectively addressed with a coordinated educational effort that provides residents with timely information. CBI recommends taking a collaborative approach to marketing, intake, service

coordination, and referrals. The CSBG Board is in an excellent position to lead such an initiative in Converse County.

## Increasing Community Economic Vitality and Opportunities

- **Community, cultural, social, and economic assets**
  - There is a great deal of support for senior citizens in the county, as evidenced by the senior centers, senior housing, assisted living facility, and nursing home services that are present. Support for seniors is a community strength, although the current tax structure has been criticized for its negative impacts on residents who have fixed incomes.
  - The communities within Converse County each have very strong community spirit, and local residents have a long record of supporting for those in need. Whenever called upon, local residents have shown that they will rally for causes that affect them. Many residents in Converse County enjoy good incomes and reasonable costs of living, and they are quick to generously share when asked. But there is also some skepticism about poverty, in part because of the persistent myth that anyone can just “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.” Thus, some survey comments suggest that Converse County simply needs to retrain to be ready for the next economic boom.
  - The energy industry continues to drive Converse County’s economy. Global market shifts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ever-changing regulatory environment are all threats to the local economy. Yet another boom-bust cycle has rolled through the entire region. Economic diversification would help to stabilize the local economy, but most analysts are now claiming that any new business recruitment will actually result in a net loss of tax revenue.
  - The Enterprise and Glenrock Economic Development Corporation have been strong advocates for economic diversification. The Wyoming Business Council continues to work to grow the economy. The CSBG Board might consider working collaboratively with those economic developers, particularly to highlight the effect that boom-bust cycles have on poverty.
  - Memorial Hospital of Converse County and Glenrock Health Center continue to provide high quality services for residents within and outside of Converse County. Publicly funded healthcare remains important, and its availability is having a positive influence on local residents.
  - Relatively low home values and rents keep the cost of living fairly low for Converse County residents, helping to ease the impact of poverty. Even so, there are far more mobile home units than apartments that we typically find. The lack of apartments exposes new residents and transient workers to seasonal spikes in their cost of living, as the other primary rental option (mobile homes) typically uses electricity and/or propane as their primary heat source. These heat sources are far more expensive than natural gas.

- **Community deficits that threaten a more secure future**
  - There are few multi-family units in Converse County (12.0% of all housing units). In contrast, other communities in Wyoming and the rest of the nation have significantly more multi-family housing units (15.8% and 26.3%, respectively). As a consequence, there are approximately 1,245 households in Converse County living in mobile homes, and another 29 households who are living in their RV, van, or camper.
  - Nearly half of all homes in Converse County (48.8%) were built during the “boom” times of the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, 34.1% of homes in Wyoming were built during that time (and just 28.6% of all homes nationwide).
  - According to the most recent Census/ACS data, the massive fracking activity in Converse County has NOT generated a corresponding increase in home construction. In fact, just 28.3% of local housing units have been built since 2000, which lags behind Wyoming (33.7%) and the nation (33.0%).
  
- **Individual and family assets and deficits**
  - While local incomes remain high, the dominance of natural resource extraction in the local economy leaves residents exposed to unpredictable boom/bust cycles, often driven by world events and global markets that are in turn pushed by an ever-changing mix of profits and politics.
  - Education is a community priority, as evidenced by educational attainment. Many residents have gone beyond their high school education to obtain at least some post-secondary education.
  - Welding and agriculture are two key areas where specialized training has enabled local residents to earn more money. There are calls for continued job training, especially for new fields like the creative arts, programming, and cyber security.
  
- **Agency resources**
  - Continued collaboration amongst community services organizations is working to reduce the overall cost of providing services in Converse County. The CSBG Board should continue to prioritize collaborative approaches to ending poverty.
  - While no community can single-handedly solve the healthcare/affordability crisis, this problem is especially hard to solve in Wyoming without Medicaid expansion. While the CSBG Board should be careful to not become engaged in politics, this is a topic that needs more facts and less emotion.
  - More community education/awareness of availability and eligibility for services is needed. While no agency can provide limitless services, we need to make sure that local residents are aware of the services that are available.
  - Better access to healthy and affordable food would lead to lower healthcare costs and more productive workers. There have been many recent changes in the way food programs operate in Converse County. COVID-19 and educational partners have both had net positive impacts providing food to local residents. Ongoing relief programs are set to extend lunch programs through the summer, for example.

## Key Opportunities

- **Threats and opportunities**

- The community is having success in taking a collaborative approach to providing critical services to residents in their fight against poverty. Working together, service providers are improving nutrition and housing services for many local residents. That should be celebrated as part of a broader campaign to raise awareness of poverty. Success leads to more support, creating a positive cycle.
- Additional budget cuts will exacerbate the pain being felt by most social service agencies. Many agencies have exhausted their reserves. Some operate at a greatly diminished level. Some are fighting to survive. This means that Converse County now has minimal abilities to provide much-needed services. According to the survey responses, local leaders are placing a lot of hope on a return to “normal” after the pandemic. There is a renewed sense of urgency to diversify the economy, especially toward industries that are attracting today’s youth.
- Better awareness of available services and their eligibility criteria would help some residents obtain needed services. It might also create a demand for services that local agencies cannot meet. Again, this suggests a role for the CSBG Board to lead a collaborative approach to marketing, intake, service coordination, and referrals. By improving awareness and coordination of services, the system should become even more efficient and effective.

- **Assets**

- Based on the surveys and CBI’s analysis, one can generally conclude that Converse County has appropriate services available for those in need. Several agencies are actively making referrals to others in the area. There is evidence of effective linkages among various providers of services and resources. The CSBG Board should continue supporting this level of cooperation. Existing successes can become the basis to do even more together. Joint marketing, creation of a mutual intake process, and coordination of services (where possible) are all examples of ways to continue improving services.
- Converse County residents have been known to step up and fight for causes important to them. Examples include rallying around sick or dying residents, support for childcare and assisted living. They have even voted to tax themselves to build new libraries and a community college campus. Their generosity truly has been a community asset, perhaps best left in reserve for those unexpected moments when critical needs arise.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

CSBG requires Community Needs Assessments so that local CSBG Board can appropriately allocate resources to fight poverty. For the past decade, one conclusion of every Converse County Community Needs Assessment has been that healthcare costs and affordable health insurance are at the top of the list for most-needed resources in Converse County. That remains true now in 2021. However, healthcare insurance and healthcare affordability are problems that stubbornly resist resolution at every level. Other communities have identified sliding fee scale service availability and expansion of Medicaid are goals to work towards. Wyoming's legislature continues to debate (but not approve) Medicaid expansion. Subsidizing the direct cost of healthcare is not a feasible option for limited CSBG funds, and so the quest to resolve this persistent problem remains.

Converse County's most vulnerable population continues to be those households where there is only one working adult in the home, especially if they are providing for children or others who need assistance. These are often families who rent an apartment or mobile home. Whether from supply or demand, there are fewer apartments in Converse County than elsewhere in Wyoming (or the nation), and so there are far more mobile homes in Converse County than elsewhere. Often, these households are heated primarily by electricity or propane, exposing the residents to seasonal spikes in their cost of living. Effective promotion of available low-income housing options and utility relief programs can help address these problems.

CBI recommends that the Converse County CSBG Board consider these findings as they make their annual allocations of funding for local service providers. Along with consideration of other information they may have available in the future, the CSBG Board will use this assessment as a guideline for such decisions until 2025.

## Appendices

- News Release regarding project
- Community Survey results (Excel file)
- Stakeholder Survey results (Excel file)
- List of Converse County Service Providers

## **POVERTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT UNDERWAY IN CONVERSE COUNTY**

**NEWS RELEASE March 29, 2021**

\*\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\*\*

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### **Poverty Needs Assessment Underway**

The Converse County Community Service Block Grant Program is conducting a Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Needs Assessment to determine the needs and resources of low-income people within Converse County. This process is completed every three years to assist in identifying the community's greatest needs and implementing programs to reduce poverty and increase economic self-sufficiency of county residents.

Community Builders, Inc. (CBI), a consulting firm headquartered in Douglas, has been contracted by the Converse County Community Service Block Grant Program to complete the Community Needs Assessment. One of the key elements of the assessment is to gather information from local residents and community stakeholders about the perceived needs in Converse County.

CBI will be gathering information from service providers, community stakeholders, and low-income consumers of services through surveys and personal interviews for the next two weeks. After gathering this information, CBI will analyze data with two perspectives:

- (1) What is the current status of poverty and the conditions with which low-income residents struggle; and
- (2) What are the trends in poverty and conditions that may impact low-income residents in the future?

Due to continuing concerns for everyone's safety, community members are encouraged to complete the survey online: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2021CSBGsurvey>  
A deadline of April 14, 2021 has been set for completion of surveys. Stakeholders and other agencies working to defeat poverty should be completing a separate stakeholder survey.

The end result will be the development of strategic goals with a clear action plan to meet the needs of the community. Areas that are expected to be targeted include education, employment, nutrition, health services and housing.

Findings from the survey and demographic data for the assessment will be reviewed later this Spring by the Converse County CSBG Board. Based on the findings, the CSBG Board will adjust its Community Action Plan to allocate its limited resources to local agencies that provide targeted services to fight poverty.

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## Converse County Service Providers (May 2021)

2-1-1	Converse County Aging Services, Inc.	Greyhound Bus
Abortion.Com	Converse County Cancer Awareness Task Force	Healthcare.gov
Airbnb Open Homes	Converse County Community Service Block Grant Program	Helping Hearts
Al-Anon/Alateen	Converse County Government	Homestyle Direct
Alcoholics Anonymous Area 76	Converse County Library	Hope House
Alzheimer's Association Wyoming Chapter	Converse County School District #1	Human Trafficking Hotline
American Association of Poison Control Centers	Converse County School District #2	Huntsman Cancer Institute
American Cancer Society	Converse County Senior Housing, Inc.	InciWeb
American Civil Liberties Union of Wyoming	Converse Hope Center	Indeed
American Heart Association	Crisis Text Line	International Service Organization of Sex Addicts Anonymous - SAA
American Lung Association of Wyoming	Dental Lifeline Network - Wyoming	Jason's Friends Foundation
American Red Cross of Wyoming	Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)	Job Corps - Wyoming
American Stroke Association	Diversified Services, Inc.	Jobs for Felons Hub
Angel Flight West	Donate Life Wyoming	Joey's Foundation, Inc.
Asbestos.com	Douglas Care Center	KabaFusion
Aspire Case Management	Douglas Police Department	KEPRO
Best Pest Control	Drew's Decision, Inc.	King's Portion
Bethany Christian Services	Eastern Wyoming College	Laramie County Community College
Better Business Bureau	EnTouch Wireless	Laramie County Community Partnership
Bikers Against Child Abuse	Epilepsy Foundation	Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.
Boy Scouts of America	Epsilon Health Solutions	LifeRing Secular Recovery
Boys & Girls Club of America	Equal Justice Wyoming	LinkedIn
Boys Town National Hotline	Eskaton Telephone Reassurance	LinkUp
Brain Injury Alliance of Wyoming	Experience Works	Lions Club of Wyoming District 15
Campbell County Critical Incident Stress Management Team	EyeCare America	Love Is Respect - National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline
Campbell County Memorial Hospital	FamilyWize	MADD Wyoming
Catholic Charities of Wyoming	FAST - Family And School Transition	Magellan Healthcare
Centers for Disease Control - CDC	FlexJobs Corporation	Make-A-Wish Foundation of Wyoming
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services	Free Email Service Sign Up	Memorial Hospital of Converse County
Central Wyoming Counseling Center	Friends of Man	Miracle Flights for Kids
Central Wyoming Hospice and Transitions	Frontier Home Health and Hospice	Moderation Management Online
Chelsea's Fund	Gamblers Anonymous	Modest Needs
Cheyenne Regional Medical Center	Girl Scouts of Montana and Wyoming	Money Fit by DRS
Cheyenne VA Medical Center	Give an Hour	Monster Worldwide, Inc.
Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline	Glassdoor	Mothers of Preschoolers
Chronically Capable	Glenrock Area Food Pantry	NALEO Educational Fund
City of Cheyenne	Glenrock Hospital District	National Abortion Federation
Clay Pot Counseling, Inc.	Glenrock Police Department	National Alliance on Mental Illness - NAMI
Cocaine Anonymous Online	Good Neighbor Pharmacy	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
Community Action of Natrona County	Good Rx	National Domestic Violence Hotline
	Good Shepherd Foundation	National Multiple Sclerosis Society
	Goodwill Industries of Wyoming Inc.	National Resource Directory
	Grace For 2 Brothers Foundation	
	GreenPath Debt Solutions	

## Converse County Service Providers (May 2021)

National Runaway Safeline	US Department of Health and Human Services	Wyoming Cowboy Challenge Academy
National Safe Haven Alliance	US Department of Housing and Urban Development	Wyoming D.A.R.E
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	US Department of Justice	Wyoming Department of Agriculture
Normative Services, Inc.	US Department of State	Wyoming Department of Education
Our Military Kids	US Department of the Treasury	Wyoming Department of Family Services
Parent Information Center	US Department of Veterans Affairs	Wyoming Department of Health
Parents of Addicted Loved Ones	US Departments of Housing and Urban Development	Wyoming Department of Insurance
Parkinson Association of the Rockies	US Social Security Administration	Wyoming Department of Transportation
Patriot Angels	United Way Worldwide	Wyoming Department of Workforce Services
Pilots for Christ International - Wyoming Chapter	University of Wyoming	Wyoming Epilepsy Association
Presto-X	University of Wyoming College of Law	Wyoming Food Bank of the Rockies
RAINN	University of Wyoming Extension	Wyoming Free Tax Service
Recovery Dharma Online	Upsolve	Wyoming Guardian Ad Litem Program
Rising Phoenix Counseling, L.C.	VaccineFinder	Wyoming Guardianship Corporation
Riverside Plaza Two	VFW National Home for Children	Wyoming Health Council
Ronald McDonald House Charities	Vision Outreach Services	Wyoming Housing Network, Inc.
Rudloff Solutions	Volunteers of America Northern Rockies	Wyoming Hunger Initiative
Rx Outreach	Western Wyoming Community College	Wyoming Independent Living, Inc.
Safeway	WHMI Strong Families Strong Wyoming	Wyoming Institute for Disabilities - WIND
Salvation Army	Wisconsin Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Association, Inc	Wyoming Military Department
Scouted	Women for Sobriety	Wyoming Office of Homeland Security
ServeWyoming, Inc.	Writers Guild of America West	Wyoming Protection & Advocacy System, Inc.
Sheridan VA Medical Center	WyoCARE	Wyoming Public Defender Office
Sight for Students Program	Wyoming 2-1-1, Inc.	Wyoming Quit Tobacco
Smart Recovery	Wyoming Attorney General	Wyoming Recovery
Smiles Change Lives	Wyoming Behavioral Institute	Wyoming Rx Card
Snagajob	Wyoming Cancer Resource Services	Wyoming SBDC Network
Solutions for Life	Wyoming Cares	Wyoming Secretary of State
Specialty Counseling & Consulting, LLC	Wyoming Child and Family Development, Inc. (WCFD)	Wyoming Senior Citizens, Inc.
St. Joseph's Children's Home	Wyoming Child Support Program	Wyoming State Bar
StopBullying.gov	Wyoming Children's Society	Wyoming State Chamber of Commerce
StrongHearts Native Helpline	Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault	Yellowstone Behavioral Health Center
Tempo	Wyoming Community Development Authority	Youth Development Services
Terminix	Wyoming Congressional Award Council	
The American Legion		
The Arc of Natrona County		
The Emergency Rental Assistance Program - Wind River		
The Ladders		
The Trevor Project		
Trans Lifeline		
Transition Assistance Advisors		
Turner Syndrome Foundation		
Uinta B.O.C.E.S. #1 Education Center		
US Census		
US Department of Defense		