

Community Needs Assessment

Niobrara County

2020

Updated

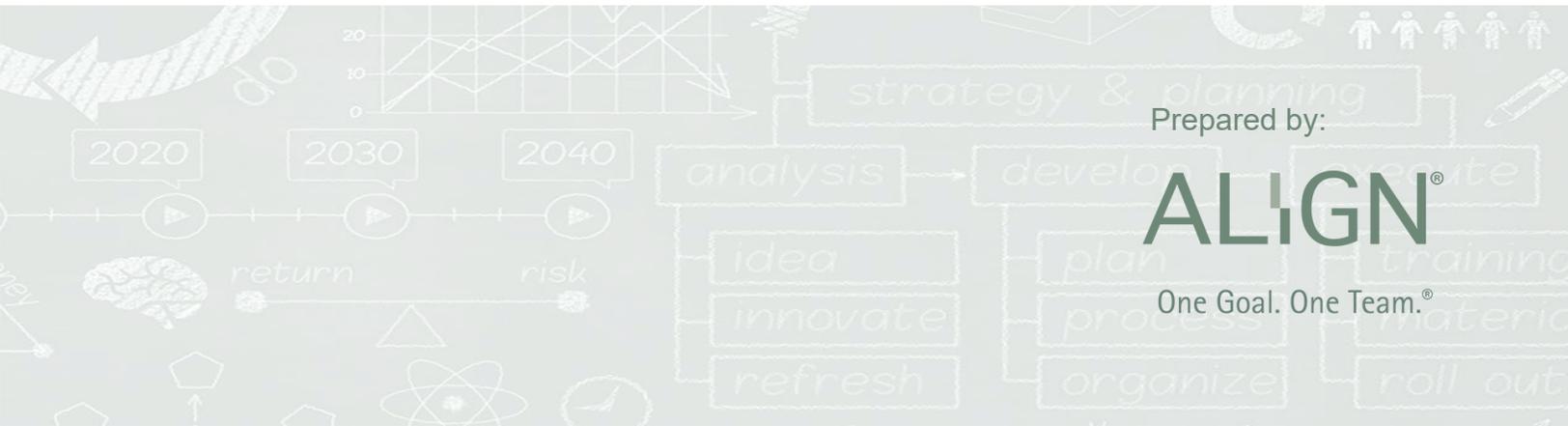


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Introduction and Overview

In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act as part of America's War on Poverty. This act created a funding stream for communities to address poverty on the local level. Today, each state receives Community Services Block Program (CSBG) funds according to a statutory formula. In turn, states fund a network of local entities for the purpose of assisting low-income individuals and families with activities and support services that empower them to overcome the effects of poverty and to support their progress towards greater self-sufficiency.

The Wyoming Department of Health administers CSBG funds in Wyoming. In the federal fiscal year 2020, there were 17 CSBG agencies in Wyoming that provided CSBG assistance in 23 counties. These agencies consist of public and nonprofit entities. There are three national goals of CSBG:

1. Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.
2. Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
3. People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in their communities.

Community Needs Assessments are a requirement of CSBG. The Community Needs Assessment is a systematic process for creating a profile of the needs and resources of a given community or target population. CSBG funding priorities are based on needs and resources in the community.

Western States Learning Corporation, d/b/a Align, was the grantee for the CSBG funds for Niobrara County from October 2018 to September 2020. Align stepped into this role until a local or regional grantee could be identified. Align is a Wyoming-based nonprofit headquartered in Cheyenne that works across the state and region. Align's mission is to create stronger communities by partnering with nonprofits, government, and businesses for more impactful, successful organizations and programs.

During Align's tenure as the grantee for Niobrara County, CSBG funds were utilized for assisting households with rent payments, utility bills, transportation assistance and health expenses. Recipients of these funds must meet income eligibility requirements. As of October 2020, Goshen Help is the grantee for Niobrara County. Goshen Help's mission is to improve the quality of life for people in need by empowering them to become more self-sufficient. They will be utilizing the findings from this Community Needs Assessment in developing priorities for funding services.

This Community Needs Assessment was conducted by Align through two separate contracts with the Wyoming Department of Health's Public Health Division. One contract was for the purpose of funding and oversight of the CSBG program in Niobrara County. The second contract expanded the Assessment scope to include a health component. Many of the CSBG requirements for a Community Needs Assessment overlap with Community Health Needs Assessment requirements.

Align consulted with the Wyoming Department of Health's Office of Rural Health and Community Service Program in defining the process for this collaborative community needs

assessment. This included the formation of a local advisory group for the assessment process, which included Niobrara Community Hospital leadership as well as representatives from other agencies and organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges for this Assessment process. Originally, the timeline for the Assessment was from March 2020 through June 2020. Typically, Align would be in the communities conducting interviews and working with local agencies and the hospital in the distribution of surveys. By the end of March, the Assessment process was put on hold. In July, it was clear another strategy was needed. This strategy included phone interviews instead of in-person interviews. Also, surveys would be mailed to households instead of distributed through local agencies and the hospital.

The information contained in the Community Needs Assessment analyzes and synthesizes many types of information, including quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources. Align collected demographic information, as well as data specific to poverty and its prevalence as related to gender, age and race/ethnicity for the service areas. Quantitative data was also collected in the areas of cost of living, income, housing, food insecurity, employment, education and health. All sources of information are noted in this report.

Qualitative data is the process of collecting people's opinions and observations. This information was collected through a combination of key informant interviews and survey.

The local advisory group members were interviewed, and they helped identify additional interviewees. There were 16 individuals, representing 14 different agencies/organizations interviewed in September and early October. The list of interviewees is included in this report.

The Community Needs Assessment Survey was distributed to 1,144 households in Niobrara County. There were a total of 169 survey responses. The complete survey results are in this report.

Following the Introduction and Key Findings, the report is broken into sections by topic area. Each topic area incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data.

Align is extremely grateful to the multitude of people and agencies that contributed to this report. Without the information provided from agencies and the thoughtful input from residents of Niobrara County, this Assessment would not have been possible. The project lead for this Assessment was Jody Shields, Vice President, Align. Any questions about this report can be directed to her at jshields@TheAlignTeam.org or 307-772-9148.

Key Findings

As mentioned in the Introduction and Overview section, Align utilized key informant interviews and the Community Needs Assessment Survey to gather input for this report.

When interviewees were asked what their community strengths were, most cited a strong “sense of community” and people coming together in times of need. This is partly driven by the remote nature of the area, where access to resources and services is limited. When asked about the greatest challenges, the most common response was a resistance to change and new ideas.

Niobrara County is the least populated county in the state and according to the most recent Census estimate, its population has dropped by 5% since the 2010 U.S. Census. In Niobrara County, 19% of the population is over 65 years of age. This compares to 15% for Wyoming as a whole. It will be important to compare these numbers with the 2020 Census numbers when they are released.

The Median Household Income for Niobrara County is \$39,359, which is lower than any county in the state and dramatically less than Wyoming overall, which is \$62,268. According to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), the poverty rate in Niobrara County is 13.6%, compared to Wyoming overall, which is 10.1%. When interviewees were asked why they thought the poverty rate was higher in Niobrara County, the most common response was lack of job opportunities that provide a livable wage.

Most interviewees rated the local economy as fair. They cited the loss of energy sector jobs as the main driver for this, not the current pandemic.

It should be noted that the Community Needs Assessment Survey results are weighted heavily by individuals that are retired (53%).

Low-Income Individuals and Families

In reporting on the low-income population needs, Align is relying heavily on interview responses. An attempt was made to extract survey responses from households that were near or below 200% of the poverty guideline. However, there were too few in this group to include any kind of substantive analysis.

The following needs were identified as priorities for Niobrara County:

1. Childcare
2. Housing
3. Job opportunities
4. Healthcare

When interviewees were asked if the needs changed with the current pandemic, the overwhelming response was that the needs haven't change. The reader of this report will find information on each of the needs listed above in the sections that follow. Job opportunities is addressed in the Employment section.

Health Needs

The Community Needs Assessment Survey asked what services they would like to see offered in their local healthcare facilities. The top responses were:

1. Home Health Care
2. Women's Health
3. Same Day surgery

When asked what the three most pressing health concerns were in the county, the top responses were:

1. Cost of healthcare
2. Lack of health insurance
3. Prescription drug affordability

When asked why they don't use medical facilities in Niobrara County and why they didn't access services at some point, the most common responses were related to the cost of healthcare.

The following health education needs were identified:

1. Health screenings
2. Healthy lifestyle education
3. Substance abuse education

When asked what needed to be added, changed, or removed to improve their access to and use of medical services in the county, many people responded that they were satisfied or pleased with the medical services. They recognize that for a small rural area, some services will be limited. For those that identified a need, the top responses were additional family physicians and specialty doctors, as well as affordable health services

This Assessment utilized the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program to look at health outcomes and health factors. In the area of clinical care, Niobrara County ranked 22 out of 23 counties in Wyoming. The report highlighted the following areas for improvement: Uninsured population, number of dentists, number of mental health providers, mammography screenings and flu vaccinations.

A shortage of mental health providers is a challenge across the state. When survey respondents were asked if they have a mental health specialist they can go to, 64% of the respondents replied "no". Some interviewees indicated that one of the barriers to accessing mental health services is the societal stigma.

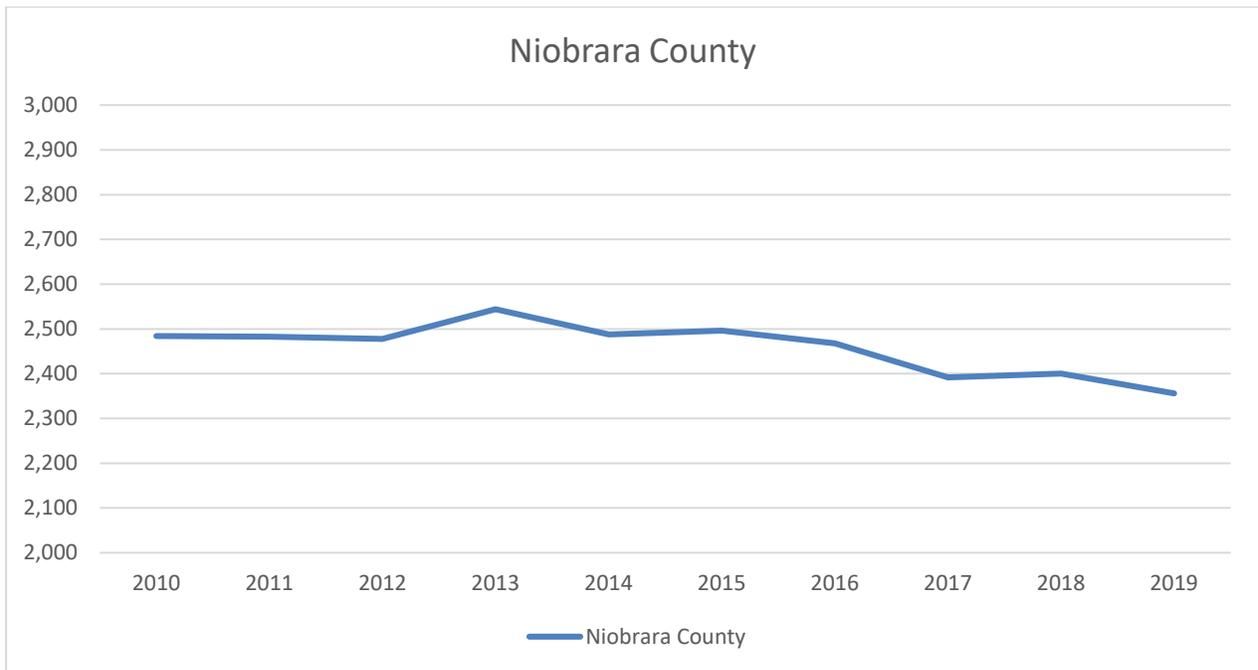
Additional information can be found in the Health Section of this report.

Demographics

According to the Annual Census Population Estimate, the population of Niobrara County in 2019 was 2,356. This reflects a 5.15% **decrease** in population since the 2010 Census.

Niobrara County Population by Year

2019 Population Estimate	2015 Population Estimate	2010 Census Population
2,356	2,496	2,484



U.S. Census Bureau – 2010 Census, 2011-2019 Population Estimates

Population – Incorporated city/towns and outside of city/town limits

	2019 Estimate	2010 Census
Total Population	2,356	2,484
Lusk	1,526	1,567
Manville	87	95
Van Tassell	18	15
All other	725	807

U.S. Census - Population Division

Population – Gender and Age

The most recent population data break down by gender and age is the U.S. Census 2018 5-Year Estimate. In Niobrara County, the female population increased slightly since the 2010 population. The male population has declined.

2018 Population Estimate and 2010 Census by Gender and Age

	2018 Estimate	2010 Census	Percent Change
Total Population	2,448	2,484	-1.45%
Gender:			
Male	1,088	1,159	-6.13%
Female	1,360	1,325	2.64%
Age:			
Under 5	122	96	27.08%
5 to 19 years	407	414	-1.69%
20 to 44 years	765	695	10.07%
45 to 64 years	686	766	-10.44%
65 and over	468	513	-8.77%

U.S. Census Bureau – 2010 Census, 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimate

2018 Population Estimate Comparison

	Niobrara County	Wyoming
	Percentage	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	44.44%	51.04%
Female	55.55%	48.96%
Age:		
Under 5	4.98%	6.41%
5 to 19 years	16.63%	19.83%
20 to 44 years	31.25%	32.97%
45 to 64 years	28.02%	25.71%
65 and over	19.12%	15.09%

U.S. Census Bureau – 2010 Census, 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimate

Race

Race	Percent
White alone	94.1%
Black or African American alone	0.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	1.1%
Asian alone	0.5%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone	0%
Two or more races	2.8%
Hispanic or Latino	4.0%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	91.4%

U.S. Census – Population Estimates, July 1, 2019

Cost of Living

The State of Wyoming’s Economic Analysis Division, produces the Wyoming Cost of Living Index (WCLI) Report biannually. The Comparative Cost of Living Index compares each county’s cost of living in one period (not over time) to the statewide average (100). Price data are collected in Wyoming cities and towns and the data is used to build a Comparative Cost of Living Index by county. There are 140 consumer items surveyed and then aggregated into six categories. These categories are then weighted to reflect their overall importance in the average consumer’s budget. The categories and respective weights are:

Housing	48.4%
Transportation	16.3%
Food	13.3%
Recreation & Personal Care	9.5%
Medical	8.7%
Apparel	3.8%

For the second quarter of 2020, the Comparative Cost of Living Index ranked Niobrara County 91 for all items, which is lower than the statewide average of 100. The highest category was Apparel at 104. The lowest category was housing at 83. As stated, these values reflect relative price levels at the time of data collection, not over time.

Niobrara County Cost of Living Index

All Items	Food	Housing	Apparel	Transportation	Medical	Recreation & Personal Care
91	99	81	104	99	101	102

Wyoming Economic Analysis Division - The Wyoming Comparative Cost of Living Index: 2nd Quarter, 2020

Survey Results

Medical Costs

The Community Needs Assessment Survey included questions related to healthcare costs.

Survey Question: “In the past three years, was there a time when you or a member of your household thought you needed health services but did NOT receive or were delayed in receiving medical services?”

Out of the 166 respondents to this question, 14.46% answered “yes”. The follow-up question for those that answered yes, was ‘What was the primary reason(s) you did not receive health care services? Out of the 31 respondents, 14 selected “It costs too much”.

Survey Question: “Are medical, dental or prescription co-pays a large enough problem that you postpone or go without services or prescriptions”

Of the 163 respondents to this question, 21% replied “yes”.

Survey Question: “In your opinion, what are the three most pressing health concerns in the county?” *A list of choices was provided.*

The top three responses were:

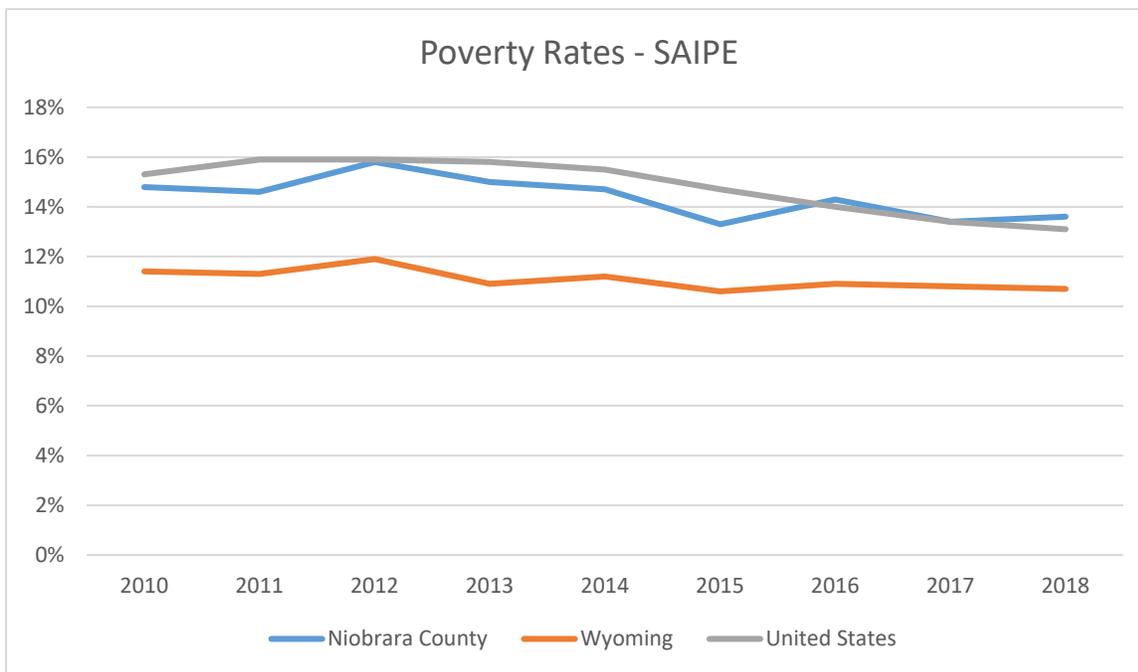
1. Cost of health care
2. Lack of health insurance
3. Prescription drug affordability

Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau reports poverty data from several different household surveys and programs. This report contains two different estimates: The Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) and the American Community Survey (ACS).

SAIPE are model-based estimates of income and poverty produced annually for school districts, counties, and states. The U.S. Census Bureau states “SAIPE estimates are specifically designed for use in annual Title 1 allocations to school districts. The SAIPE methodology combines the 1-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates with other data sources to provide more timely, precise, and stable estimates than the 5-year ACS estimates”. SAIPE provides these estimates for the administration of federal programs and the allocation of federal funds to local jurisdictions.

According to SAIPE, Niobrara County’s poverty rate was 13.6% in 2018. There have been some variations over the past eight years as indicated in the chart below. The highest percentage was 15.8% in 2012 and the lowest was 13.3% in 2015.



US Census Bureau – Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)

While the SAIPE estimates are more precise and stable than the 5-year ACS estimates alone, the ACS provides some additional information. The table below reflects Niobrara County percentages for the 2018 5-Year Estimate.

Percent below poverty level		
	Niobrara County	Wyoming
All Population	16.1%	11.1%
Gender:		
Male	12.5%	9.7%
Female	19.9%	12.6%
Age		
Under 18 years	10.5%	12.8%
18 to 34 years	22.7%	16.7%
35 to 64 years	15.6%	8.1%
65 years and over	17.4%	7.9%
Race/Ethnicity		
White alone	16.9%	10.5%
Black or African American alone	0%	12.4%
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	0%	24.3%
Asian alone	0%	18.5%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander alone	-	4.8%
Some other race alone	-	23.5%
Two or more races	-	13.4%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	25.0%	21.2%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	16.7%	9.6%

US Census - 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates

The US Department of Health and Human Services has two slightly different versions of the federal poverty measure: poverty thresholds and poverty guidelines.

The **poverty thresholds** are the original version of the federal poverty measure. They are updated each year by the Census Bureau. The thresholds are used mainly for statistical purposes. All official poverty population figures are calculated using the poverty thresholds, not the guidelines.

The **poverty guidelines** are the other version of the federal poverty measure. They are issued each year in the Federal Register by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The guidelines are a simplification of the poverty thresholds for use for administrative purposes such as determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs. See the next page for the current Poverty Guidelines.

2020 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,760
2	\$17,240
3	\$21,720
4	\$26,200
5	\$30,680
6	\$35,160
7	\$39,640
8	\$44,120
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,480 for each additional person.	

US Department of Health and Human Services

Survey Results and Interviews

An attempt was made to extract survey respondents that were near or below the poverty guideline for household size. However, there was too few in this group to include any kind of substantive analysis.

When interviewees were asked about the key drivers for poverty in Niobrara County, the most common response was lack of employment opportunities that provide a livable wage.

CSBG Program

From October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019, 15 households were assisted as part of the Community Service Block Grant Program. The average amount of the aid was \$749.80. Five households were given rent payment assistance. Five households were assisted with utility payments. Five households were assisted with medical and dental expenditures.

Despite efforts to promote this program, there were fewer applications the following year. From October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020, only three households were assisted as part of the CSBG Program. Two were assisted with dental payments and one was assisted with utilities.

Additional Wyoming Data

Wyoming 2-1-1 is a statewide helpline and website that provides free, confidential health and human services information and referral. By dialing 2-1-1 or visiting the website from anywhere in the state of Wyoming, people are linked to information about local nonprofit and government resources.

In a 12-month period from October 2019 to September 2020, Wyoming 2-1-1 received 18 calls from Niobrara County. The number one need was for utility service payment assistance.

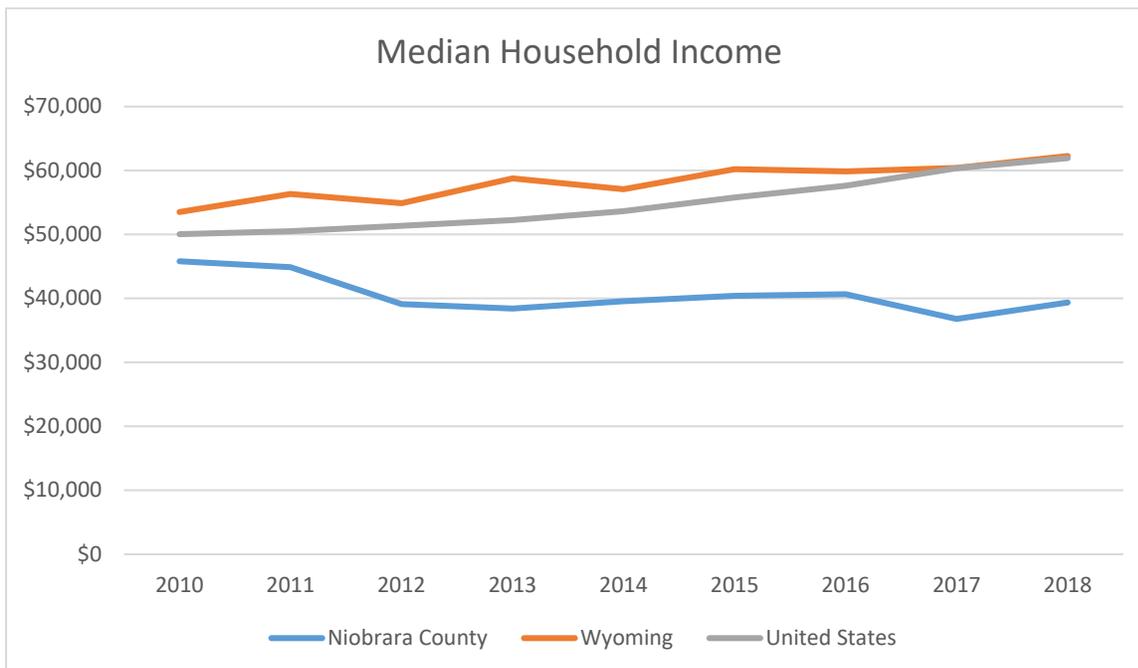
Income

In 2018, the median household income in Niobrara County was significantly lower than Wyoming and the United States.

Area	Median Household Income
Niobrara County	\$39,359
Wyoming	\$62,268
United States	\$61,937

U.S. Census Bureau – 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates

In 2010, the median household income in Niobrara County was \$45,813, which was below the state average. The gap between Wyoming’s median household income and Niobrara County’s median household income has continued to widen.



U.S. Census Bureau: 2010, 2015, 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates

Education

Graduation Rates

There were 92 students in the 2018-2019 cohort in Niobrara County. A cohort year is a group of students expected to graduate on-time (4 years) at the end of the same school year. Of the 92 students, 52 graduated for a 56.5% graduation rate. It is important to note that Niobrara County School District #1 is home to the Wyoming Virtual Academy. The Academy students are included in these figures. Mr. Mirich, Superintendent, reports that for students who attend Niobrara County High School, the graduation rate is over 90%. Out of the 92 expected cohort graduates, approximately 30 were Niobrara County High School students and the remaining were Wyoming Virtual Academy students.

Niobrara County District #1 Graduation Rates – 2018-19 Cohort

Includes Wyoming Virtual Academy

	Niobrara County	Statewide
All Students	56.5%	82.1%
Male	53.7%	79.3%
Female	53.8%	85.1%
Lunch Eligible*	47.1%	71.9%

**Students who qualified for free or reduced lunch*
 Wyoming Department of Education

Education Attainment

Education attainment refers to the highest level of education that an individual has completed. This is different from the level of school the individual is attending. The tables below and on the next page provide the educational attainment levels and percentages for Niobrara County 18 to 24-year-old individuals and for those over 25 years old.

Educational Attainment – 18 to 24 years

	Total	Percent
Population 18 to 24 years	211	
Less than high school graduate	55	26.1%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	69	32.7%
Some college or associate degree	67	31.8%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	20	9.5%

U.S. Census Bureau – 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates

Educational Attainment - 25 years and over

	Total	Percent
Population 25 years and over	1,758	
Less than high school graduate	209	11.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	550	31.3%
Some college, no degree	546	31.1%
Associate degree	161	9.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher	292	16.6%

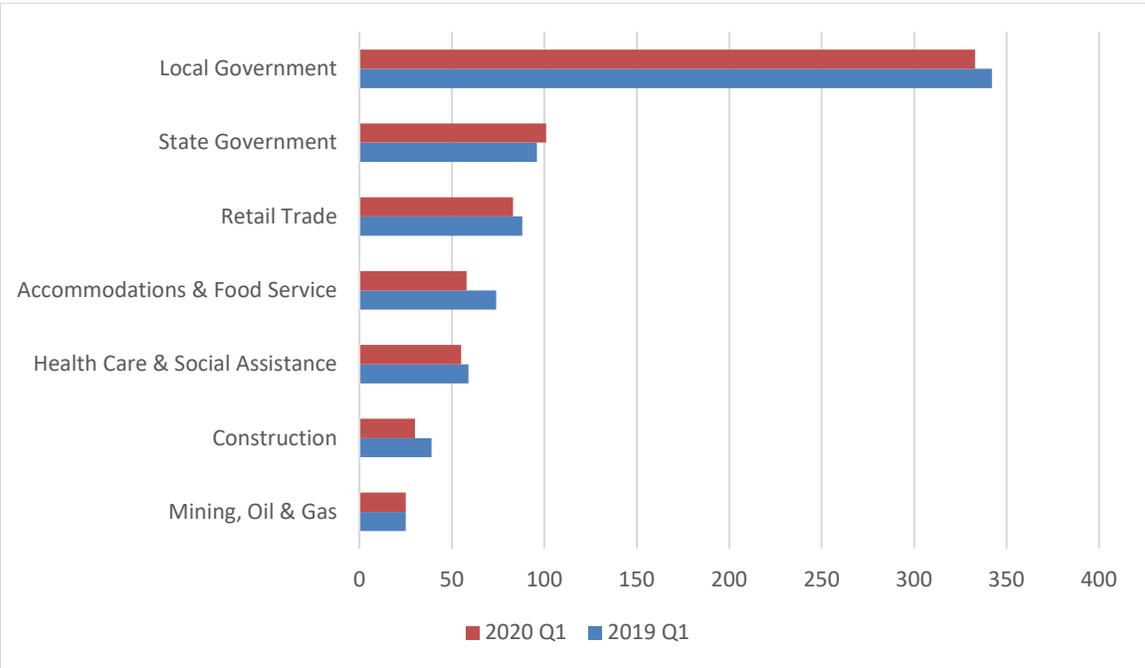
U.S. Census Bureau – 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates

Employment

According to the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Research and Planning Division, Wyoming experienced weakened job growth in the first quarter of 2020 mostly due to large job losses in the mining sector. This included oil and gas. Niobrara County has experienced a drop in employment numbers as well.

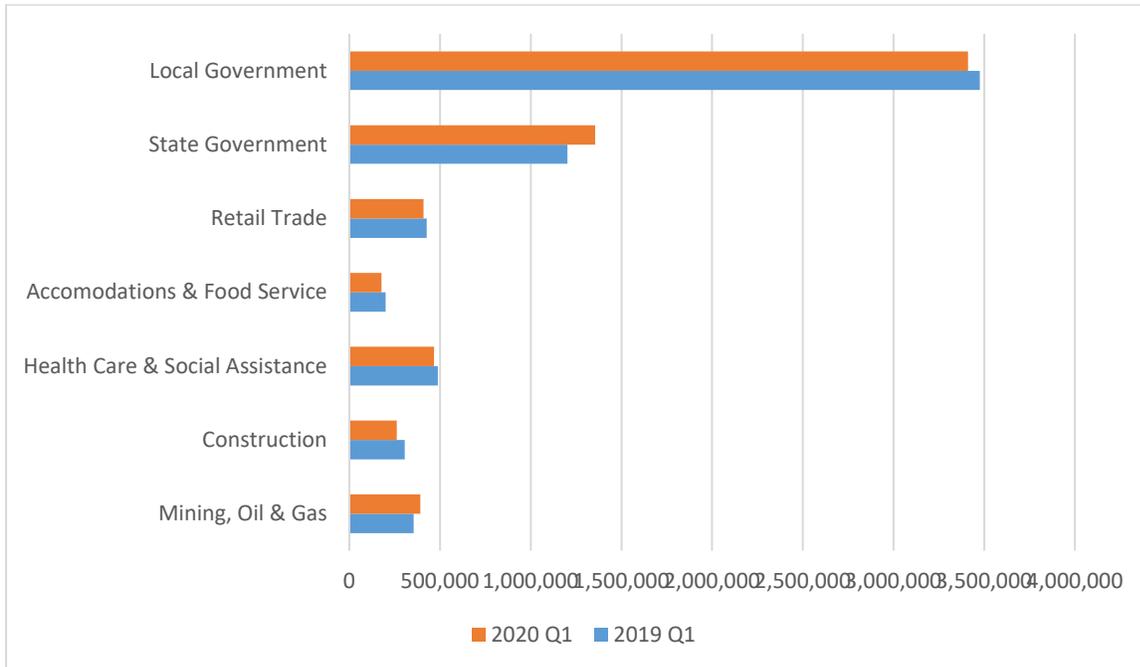
Quarter	Average Monthly Employment Total
Quarter 1, 2020	835
Quarter 4, 2019	847
Quarter 3, 2019	854
Quarter 2, 2019	887
Quarter 1, 2019	872

The graph below compares 1st quarter 2020 with 1st quarter 2019 for the top 7 industries in terms of employment numbers in Niobrara County. The graph on the next page compares total wages by these same industries.



Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Research & Planning – Wyoming Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2020 1st Quarter

Total Wages (2020 Quarter 1 and 2019 Quarter 1) – Same Industries as Previous Graph



Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Research & Planning – Wyoming Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2020 1st Quarter

According to the Wyoming at Work website, the three largest employers in Niobrara County are:

- Niobrara County School District #1 (including schools)
- Wyoming Correctional Department
- Niobrara Community Hospital

Unemployment

With the coronavirus-related business impacts and the energy sector decline, Wyoming’s economy has experienced layoffs and other negative impacts. The first two columns compare unemployment rates for September 2020 and September 2019. The remaining four columns shows unemployment rates since April. From August to September, unemployment rates fell in every county. Niobrara County has the second lowest unemployment rate in the state for September 2020.

	Sept 2020	Sept 2019	August 2020	June 2020	May 2020	April 2020
Niobrara County	3.4%	2.4%	3.8%	4.8%	4.6%	4.6%
Wyoming	5.5%	3.3%	6.1%	7.6%	8.7%	9.6%

Wyoming Department of Workforce Services – Wyoming Labor Force Trends, August 2020, July 2020; Monthly News Release

Survey Results and Interviews

Of the 128 respondents to the survey question that rated difficulty level for “Being employed with a livable wage”, 14.5% identified this as “difficult for me most of the time” or “sometimes difficult for me”.

Of the 165 respondents that answered the question regarding employment status, 4.24% were unemployed/not searching for a job and 1.21% were unemployed/job searching. Only one of those responses were unemployed due to the coronavirus and the related economic downturn.

When this same group (9 households) responded to what the barriers to employment were, they selected:

- 2 - No job for my skills
- 2 - Pay too low to support family
- 2 - Physical disability
- 1- No transportation

When interviewees were asked about the local economy, most of them rated it as fair. While there are employment opportunities at the hospital and prison, there has been the loss of railroad and energy jobs. As mentioned in the Key Findings Section, job opportunities was identified as one of the top needs.

When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy, the majority of interviewees said that there has been less impact in Niobrara County compared to other parts of the state. The impact was mostly felt by small businesses that had to temporarily close or reduce their hours and services.

Childcare

Childcare was the number one need identified by interviewees.

There are three different licensing categories in Wyoming:

- Child Care Center – Care provided for 16 or more children
- Family Child Care Center – Care provided in a residential or commercial structure for no more than 15 children
- Family Child Care Home – Care provided in the provider’s own home for up to 10 children

There are staff-child ratios which are based on the ages of the children.

In Niobrara County, there is just 1 licensed provider.

- Child Care Center (CCC) – 1 facility
- Family Child Care Center (FCCC) – 0
- Family Child Care Home (FCCH) – 0

Statewide Training and Resources Center (STARS)

The Wyoming Child and Family Development Lusk Center, the only licensed provider, offers services for children birth to five years old.

Survey Results and Interviews

Based on the respondents of the survey with children in the household (18):

- 28% stated that finding childcare is sometimes difficult for me
- 11% stated that finding childcare is difficult for me most of the time

With such limited licensed providers, this is an issue for families regardless of income level.

Housing

Rentals

The Wyoming Cost of Living Index (WCLI) produced by the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division reports average rental rates. The average rental rates reported in the WCLI are broken down by specific types of housing. Apartment averages are for two-bedroom, unfurnished units without gas and electric. Mobile Home Lots are single-wide, including water. Houses are two or three-bedroom, single family, and exclude gas and electric. Mobile homes are two or three-bedroom and lot rent is included. Average rental rates are collected by pulling information from newspapers, online sources and real estate companies that handle rentals. Income-restricted rentals are not included in the data, nor are any housing units located outside the city limits or in rural parts of the county.

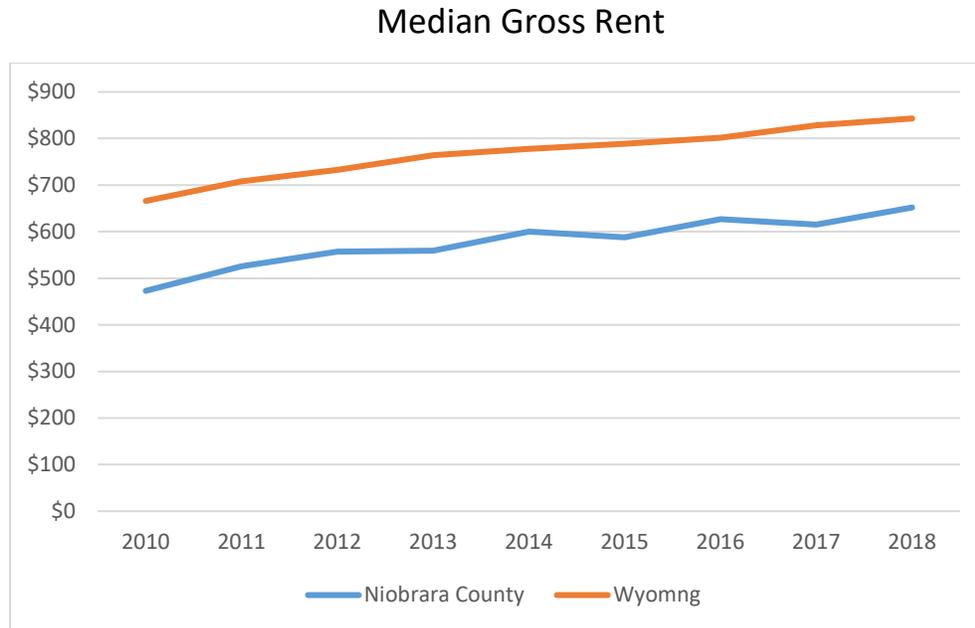
According to this data, Niobrara County has experienced large increases in rental rates for houses. Any column noted as “NA” means that there were too few observations to report.

	2020 Quarter 2	2019 Quarter 2	Percent Change
Apartment - Niobrara County	\$550	\$564	-2.5%
Apartment - Statewide Average	\$781	\$757	3.1%
Mobile Home Lot - Niobrara County	NA	NA	NA
Mobile Home Lot - Statewide Average	\$386	\$360	7.3%
House - Niobrara County	\$864	\$683	26.5%
House - Statewide Average	\$1,133	\$1,007	2.3%
Mobile Home - Niobrara County	NA	NA	NA
Mobile Home - Statewide Average	\$768	\$734	4.7%

Wyoming Cost of Living Index - Second Quarter of 2020
Wyoming Economic Analysis Division

Median Gross Rent

The American Community Survey data, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, varies from the previous data for various reasons. This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that the median gross rent listed in the ACS includes estimated cost of utilities. In addition, the data includes all rentals regardless of type, i.e. apartment, house, mobile home, etc. and of all sizes, 1 bedroom, 2 bedrooms, etc. In addition, data from the ACS is collected through household surveys sent to a sample of housing units with margins of error calculated with the data.



U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2018,2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010

Median gross rent has steadily increased since the 2010 Census. According to this data, Niobrara County remains well below Wyoming as a whole.

Housing Cost Burdened

Households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing are termed “housing cost burdened”. If you are renting, this percentage includes utilities. According to the US Census, American Community Survey 2018 5-Year Estimate, 55.8% of renters in Niobrara County are housing cost burdened. Note margin of error is 23.6%.

Niobrara County Affordable Housing Options

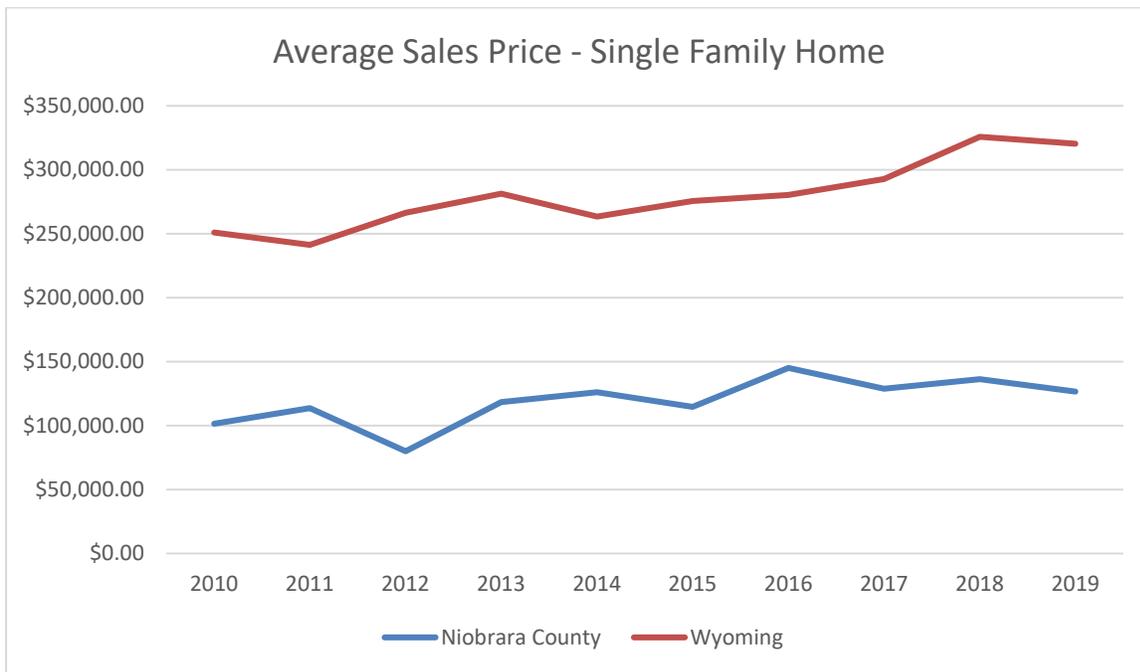
Lusk Housing Authority offers 20 multi-family housing units. Multi-family means apartment units as opposed to individual houses, to low-income qualifying people in Niobrara County. Lusk Housing Authority is the official agency offering the Section 9 HUD Public Housing Program. Currently Lusk Housing has a waitlist for occupancy from 3 to 6 months depending on the number of bedrooms the applicant is requesting. A 3-bedroom unit usually has a shorter wait period than 1- and 2- bedroom units.

Ranger Apartments offers 28 units of Section 8 HUD Project-Based Housing. Ranger Apartments is privately-owned and managed by Spartan Management LLC who have contracted with the federal government to offer the Project-Based Section 8 Housing Program to applicants who income-qualify. Once an applicant income-qualifies for the unit, they are required to pay 30% of their income to the owner/management company. The Section 8 contract then subsidizes the remainder of rent due. There is currently no wait list for affordable housing and there is vacancy/availability. Ranger Apartments have been forced to request waivers from the contract administrator to allow them to rent their units to market renters (or over-incomed applicants) in order to avoid a loss in rental income for their property.

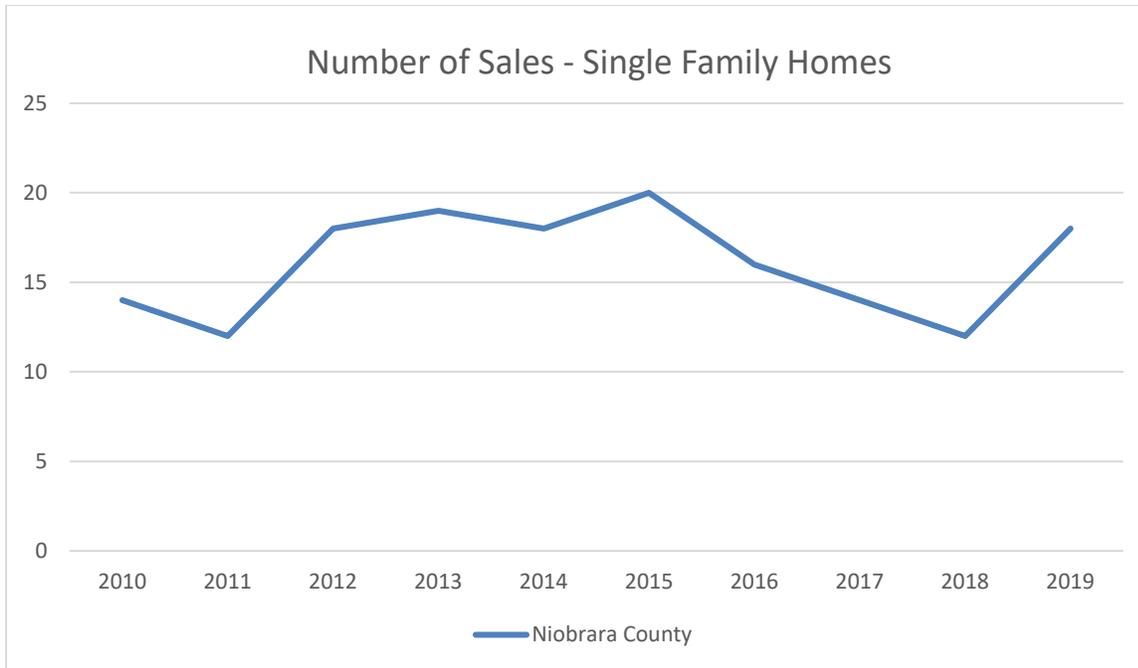
Home Ownership

Home Ownership – Average Sales Prices and Number of Sales

According to the Wyoming Department of Revenue, the average sales price of existing, detached, single-family homes in Niobrara County was \$126,666.67 in 2019.



Wyoming Department of Revenue, Wyoming Community Development Authority, County Profile (September 4, 2020)



Wyoming Department of Revenue, Wyoming Community Development Authority, County Profile (September 4, 2020)

According to the most recent US Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, the median home value in Niobrara County is \$144,900. This compares to the Wyoming median home value of \$213,300.

Of the 743 owner-occupied housing units, 370 of these have a mortgage. The monthly owner costs median is \$990. The US Census includes the sum of payment for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances, utilities, fuels, mobile home costs and condominium fees in the monthly owner cost calculation.

As stated earlier, households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing are termed “housing cost burdened”. In Niobrara County, 20.2% of homeowners with mortgages are housing cost burdened.

Survey Results and Interviews

Of the survey respondents, 6% of the households are currently living in a rental unit. The average rental payment was \$596.64. Both apartments and houses are included in this average. Of the survey respondents, 88.1% of the households are currently living in a home they own. For those with a mortgage (and provided a response to the payment question), the average mortgage payment was \$1,152.45.

On the question of housing problems, 29 households reported one or more of the housing problems below. These are ranked from highest response to lowest.

1. I cannot afford to make needed repairs on my home
2. I cannot find affordable housing to buy
3. Bad credit makes it hard to find a place to rent
4. I am at risk of eviction from home that I rent

Based on all the respondents:

- Being able to pay my rent or mortgage was identified as “difficult for me most of the time” or “sometimes difficult for me” by 6.36% of the respondents to that question

As stated in the Key Findings, interviewees identified housing as one of the top needs of low-income individuals and families. With such a small percentage of survey respondents living in a rental unit and the low response rate of low-income households, additional research will need to be conducted to determine the scope of the issue. As stated in the Poverty Section of this report, there were only five households that were assisted with housing payments over the course of a two-year period as part of the CSBG program.

Food Insecurity

Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, defines food insecurity as follows:

Food insecurity refers to the USDA's measure of lack of access to enough food for an active healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. Food-insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

According to Feeding America, the Niobrara County food insecurity rate in 2018 was 14.3% or an estimated 350 people. The child food insecurity rate was 17.1% or 80 children. Wyoming's overall food insecurity rate was 12.2%. The child food insecurity rate was 15.9%.

Of the estimated 350 food insecure individuals:

- 44% are below 130% poverty and qualify for SNAP, free lunch meals, WIC
- 31% are between 130% and 185% poverty and qualify for WIC and reduced-price school meals.
- The remaining 25% don't qualify for federal programs.

Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, E. Engelhard, M. Strayer & L. Lapinski. *Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018*. Feeding America, 2020.

Food costs in Niobrara County are near the statewide average. Based on the Wyoming Comparative Cost of Living Index for 2nd Quarter 2020, Niobrara County's index for food was 99. The Statewide average is 100.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides monthly benefits that help low-income households buy the food they need for good health. According to the Wyoming Department of Family Services, for most households SNAP funds account for only a portion of their food budget. They must also use their own funds to ensure they have enough food for the month. According to the U.S. Census, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 5.6% of households in Niobrara County participate in SNAP.

According to the Wyoming Hunger Initiative website, food pantries are operated by New Life in Christ Baptist Church and Niobrara Senior Center.

Survey Results and Interviews

Of the 120 respondents to the question that rated difficulty level of "Having enough food in the home", 11.67% identified this as "difficult for me most of the time" or "sometimes difficult for me". Food insecurity was only mentioned a couple of times by interviewees.

Health

The Wyoming Facility Directory produced by the Wyoming Department of Health, listed the following health facilities in Niobrara County:

- Niobrara County Hospital District – Critical Access Hospital, including an extended care facility
- Rawhide Rural Health Clinic
- Cozy Corner – Boarding Home

Solutions for Life offers mental health services in Lusk.

Niobrara County Public Health offers a variety of services including adult and child immunizations, chronic disease education, mother/baby support and other services.

Health Rankings

For this Community Needs Assessment Report, the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R) program is being used as the primary source of information. CHR&R is a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. As stated on their website, “CHR&R program provides data, evidence, guidance, and examples to build awareness of the multiple factors that influence health and support community leaders working to improve health and increase health equity”. The county rankings provide a measurement of the overall health of each county in the United States. They also evaluate different measures that impact future health of communities. For example, high school graduation rates, access to healthy foods, rates of smoking, children in poverty, and teen births.

2020 CHR&R Rankings

Health Outcomes

The overall rankings in health outcomes represent how healthy counties are within the state. Health outcomes are measured by length and quality of life. The healthiest county in the state is ranked #1. **Niobrara County ranked #18 in overall health outcomes.**

Length of life is measured by premature death which is years of life lost before age 75. In looking at Length of Life, Niobrara County ranks 11 out of the 23 counties. Years of Potential Life Lost is used to measure the rate and distribution of premature mortality.

The other component of Health Outcomes is Quality of Life. This is measured by the percentage of adults reporting poor or fair health, poor physical health days and poor mental health days. In addition, low birthweight is factored in. This data is provided by National Vital Statistics System. Births are counted in the county corresponding to the mother’s address on the child’s birth certificate, not the county in which the child was born. In looking at Quality of Life, Niobrara County ranks 22 out of the 23 counties.

Health Factors

Health Factors are the things that people can change to improve health for all. The ranks are based on four types of measures health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors and

physical environment. Overall, **Niobrara County ranked #20**. The four components and their rankings for Niobrara County are outlined below.

Health Behaviors – Niobrara County ranked 14 out of the 23 counties. The report highlights the following as areas to explore for improvement.

- Adult Smoking

Clinical Care – Niobrara County ranked 22 out of the 23 counties. The report highlights the following as areas to explore for improvement:

- Uninsured
- Dentists
- Mental health providers
- Mammography screening
- Flu vaccinations

Social & Economic Factors – Niobrara County ranked 21 out the 23 counties. The report highlights the following as areas to explore for improvement.

- High School graduation
- Social Associations
- Injury deaths

Physical Environment – Niobrara County ranked 12 out of the 23 counties. There were no areas highlighted for improvement.

Health Insurance

According to the US Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE) for 2018, 16.9% of the population under 65 years old are uninsured.

Survey Results and Interviews

When asked about local health services, facilities and the perception in the community, the majority of interviewees said that local health services are viewed favorably. Several pointed out that EMTs are viewed highly favorable. There were also positive comments regarding the new doctor in town. There were a few comments regarding the high cost of hospital services. Also, as with any small rural hospital, there are limited services.

When asked about the barriers or limitations to access health and mental health services, many people mentioned the stigma associated with accessing mental health services and lack of counselors. In terms of medical services, the lack of specialty services was mentioned most often.

In reviewing the survey findings, it is important to note that 52% of respondents included at least one person over 65 years old in the household. When looking at total people included in survey numbers, 49.03% were over the age of 65.

Of those 13 households that indicated someone in the house had no health coverage, 77% of them cited affordability of health insurance as the reason.

On the question of how they would rate their personal health, 63% selected Very Healthy or Healthy, 34% selected Somewhat Healthy, and only 3% selected Unhealthy or Very Unhealthy.

Of the 167 respondents, 96% reported that they have a doctor to go to. 85% of respondents stated they had a dentist to go to. On the question as to whether they had a mental health specialist they can go to, only 36% responded yes.

When asked which facilities they use in Niobrara County, 15% of the households reported that they don't use the hospital or local clinic. When asked why, they cited cost, lack of trust in care and going elsewhere as the top reasons.

When asked what services they would like to see offered at their local health care facilities, the top four were:

- Home Health Care – 60%
- Women's Health – 48%
- Same Day Surgery – 40%
- Physical Therapy – 38%

When asked if there was a time within the last three years that they, or a member of their household, thought they needed health care services but didn't receive it or were delayed in receiving it, 14% responded yes. The primary reason was "It costs too much" followed by "not covered by insurance".

The foremost pressing health concerns in the county were:

- Cost of health care
- Lack of health insurance
- Prescription drug affordability
- Cancer

When asked what resources they rely upon to keep themselves and their family healthy, the top three were:

- Clinic
- Hospital
- Place of worship

When asked what the greatest health education need in the county is, the top three were:

- Health screenings
- Healthy lifestyles education
- Substance abuse education

When asked what needs to be added, changed, or removed to improve your access to and use of medical services in our county, the most common responses were:

- Nothing needs to be added/changed/removed; satisfied/pleased with medical services
- Need additional healthcare providers: family physicians and specialty doctors
- Affordable health services and insurance

More information on health survey responses can be found in the Community Needs Assessment Survey section.

Community Needs Assessment Survey

The Community Needs Assessment survey was mailed to 1,144 households in Niobrara County. Respondents were given four choices for completing the survey:

- Complete the paper survey and mail back in the enclosed postage-paid envelope; or
- Take the survey online by going to the hospital or library website for the survey link; or
- Scan the QR code with their phone; or
- Call Align if they had a language barrier or needed other assistance with completing the survey.

As an incentive for completing the survey, respondents could provide their first name and phone number to be entered in a drawing for a \$200 gift card. These names and phone numbers were kept confidential and this information is not contained in any part of this report or in the survey results.

169 surveys were completed for a rate of 14.8%. Of the 169 surveys, 149 were returned in the mail and the remaining 20 were completed online.

Survey Results

Where do you live?

Response	Percentage
Lusk	79.17%
Manville	7.74%
Lance Creek	4.76%
Van Tassell	2.38%
Other:	5.95%

Answered: 168; Skipped:1

Which best describes your household? (Check only one)

Answer Choices	Response %
Two adults NO children at home	46.67%
Single person	29.70%
Two-parent household	8.48%
Single parent male	6.06%
Single parent female	3.03%
Multi-family household	1.21%
Grandparent(s) and grandchildren	3.64%

Answered: 165; Skipped:4

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

Response	# of responses	Response %
One	65	38.46%
Two	87	51.47%
Three	2	1.18%
Four	10	5.91%
Five	2	1.18%
Six	2	1.18%
Seven	1	0.06%

Answered: 169

Including yourself, how many people in your household are:

Answer Choices	Number of household responses	Total number of people in this age category
0 to 5 years old	9	15
6 to 17 years old	11	15
18 to 49 years old	26	48
50 to 64 years old	56	80
65+ years old	110	152

Answered: 166; Skipped: 3

What best describes the place where you are living currently? (Check only one)

Answer Choices	Response %
Live in home that I/we own	80.60%
Rental unit	6.06%
Share home with family/friends/roommate	5.45%
Other	7.87%

Answered: 165; Skipped: 4

What is your monthly payment for housing?

Type of Housing	Number of Responses with payment	Average Payment
Rental	9	\$643.11 Average Rental Payment
Own	32	\$903.75 Average Mortgage

Number of responses with no payment or no response:

Type of Housing	Number of Responses	Response
Rental	1	No response
Own	87	\$0 (paid off)
Own	14	No response

Do you receive help with your rent or house payment from a government program or agency?

Answer Choices	Response %
Yes	1.80%
No	98.20%

Answered: 167; Skipped: 2

Do any of these housing problems apply to you? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Response %
I am at risk of eviction from home that I rent	0.63%
I am at risk of foreclosure on home that I own	0.00%
I cannot find affordable housing to rent	1.88%
I cannot find affordable housing to buy	3.13%
I cannot afford to make needed repairs on my home	12.50%
Bad credit makes it hard to find a place to rent	0.00%
Criminal background makes it hard to rent a home	0.00%
None of these apply	85.00%

Answered: 160; Skipped: 9

What best describes your race and ethnicity? (Check all that apply for your household)

Answer Choices	Response %
African American/Black	.61%
Asian	0.00%
Caucasian or White	95.15%
Hispanic or Latino	1.21%
Bi-Racial/Multi-Racial	1.82%
Native American	2.42%
Alaska Native	0.00%
Other	3.03%

Answered: 165; Skipped: 4

What is the employment status for each adult in your household? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Response %	Response #
Full-Time	29.70%	49
Part-Time	12.12%	20
Self-Employed	24.85%	41
Retired	53.33%	88
Unemployed/Job Searching	1.21%	2
Unemployed/Not Searching	4.24%	7

Answered: 165; Skipped: 49

If unemployed, is the reason you are unemployed due to COVID-19 and the related economic downturn?

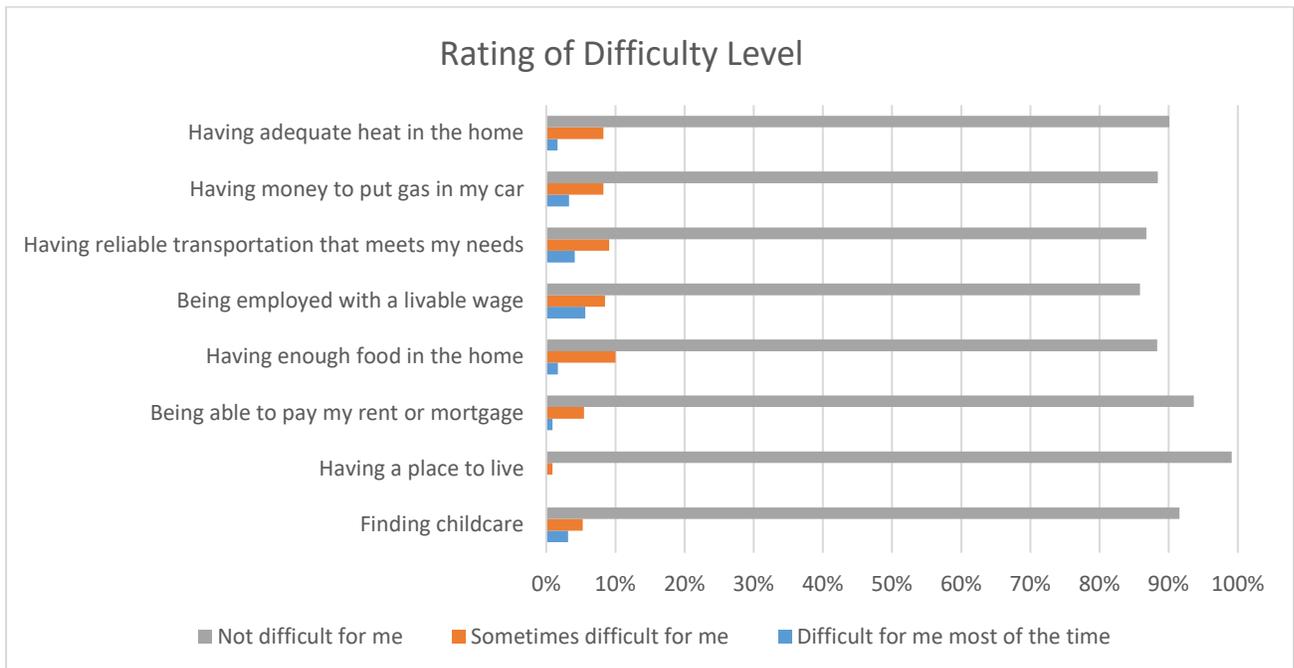
Of the 9 households that selected employment status as unemployed, only one responded “yes” to the question.

If unemployed, what are your barriers to employment? (Check all that apply)

Showing results for just the 9 households that selected employment status as unemployed.

Answer Choices	Response #
No jobs for my skills	2
No transportation	1
Pay too low to support family	2
No childcare during work	0
Lack of training or experience	0
Physical disability	2
Mental disability	0

Please rate the following by putting an “x” in the appropriate column: Not difficult for me; Sometimes difficult for me; or difficult for me most of the time.

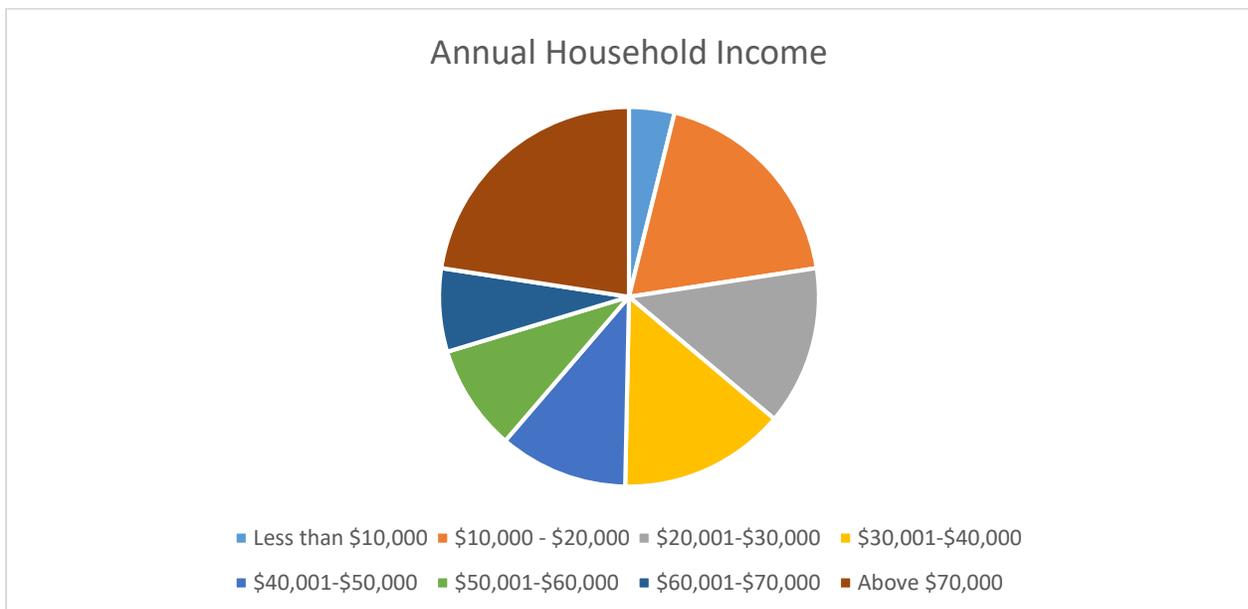


Answered: 128; Skipped: 41

Utilizing a weighted average to the question on page 35, the highest degree of difficulty was:

1. Being employed with a livable wage 2.80
2. Having reliable transportation that meets my needs 2.83
3. Having money to put gas in my car 2.85
4. Having enough food in the home 2.87
5. Both responses were 2.88
 - a. Finding childcare
 - b. Having adequate heat in the home

What is your annual household income from all sources? (Including, but not limited to employment, self-employment, Social Security, retirement, disability, worker’s compensation, unemployment, VA benefits, alimony).



Answered: 155; Skipped: 14

For each adult in the household, what is the highest level of education completed?

Answer Choice	Responses
Less than high school diploma	7.98%
High school graduate	32.52%
GED or high school equivalency	8.59%
Vocational or trade school	12.27%
Some college (or still in college)	25.15%
Two-year college degree	15.34%
Four-year college degree	29.45%
Graduate college degree	9.82%
Other:	2.45%

Answered: 163; Skipped: 6

Indicate your health coverage for each individual in your household.

Coverage Choices:	Percentage (based on total people)
Medicare	37.87%
Medicaid	3.71%
Employer’s health insurance	16.83%
Retirement insurance plan	5.45%
VA; Militar	5.69%
Privately insured	18.81%
Kid Care CHIP	0.5%
No health coverage	5.94%
Other	5.20%

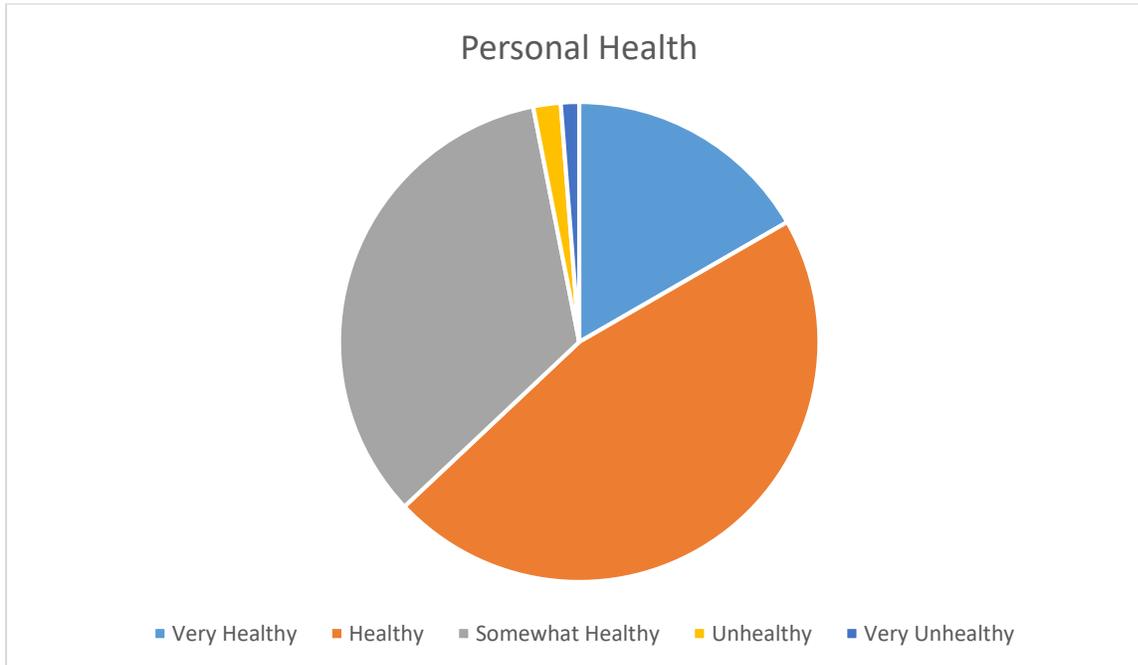
Answered: 168; Skipped: 1

If you do NOT have insurance, please check why:

Answer Choices:	Reponses
Cannot afford to pay for health insurance	76.92%
Employer doesn’t offer insurance	7.69%
Choose not to have health insurance	7.69%
No response	7.69%

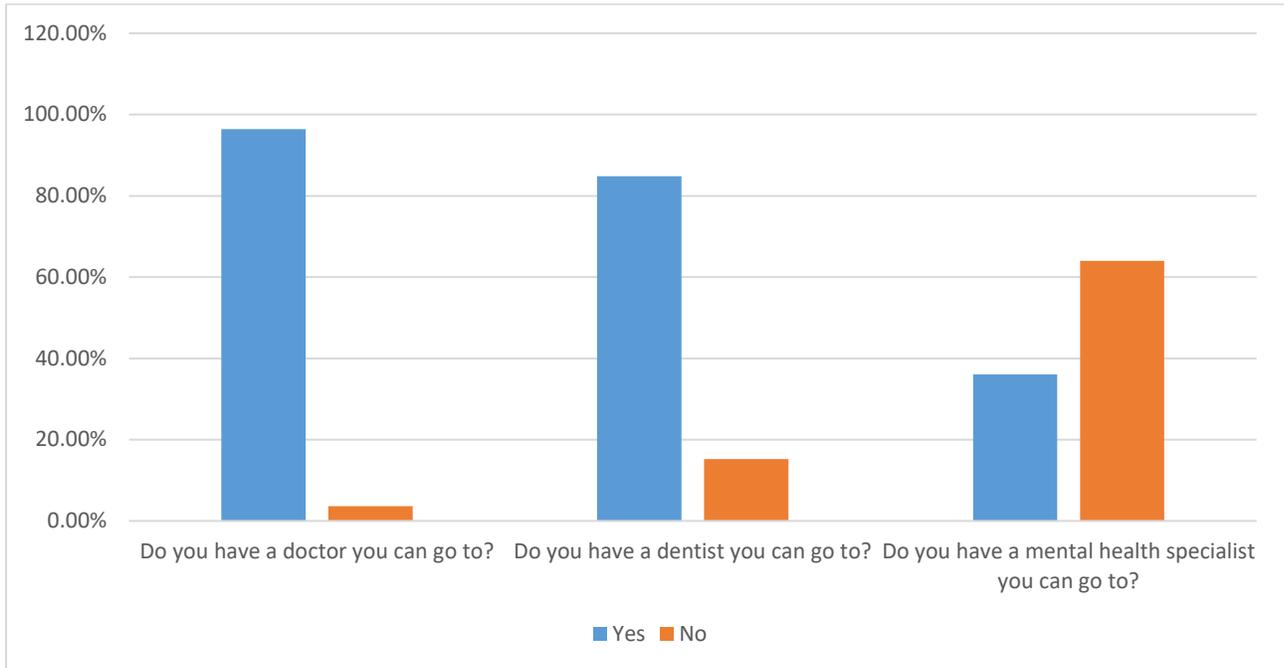
Only showing responses for the 13 households that indicated that someone in the household had “no health coverage”.

Overall, how would you rate your personal health?



Answered: 162; Skipped: 7

If you or a household member have a health care need:



Answered: 167; Skipped:2

Which medical facilities do you use in Niobrara County?

Answer Choices	Responses
Clinic	25.30%
Hospital	1.20%
Both Hospital and Clinic	58.43%
Neither	15.06%

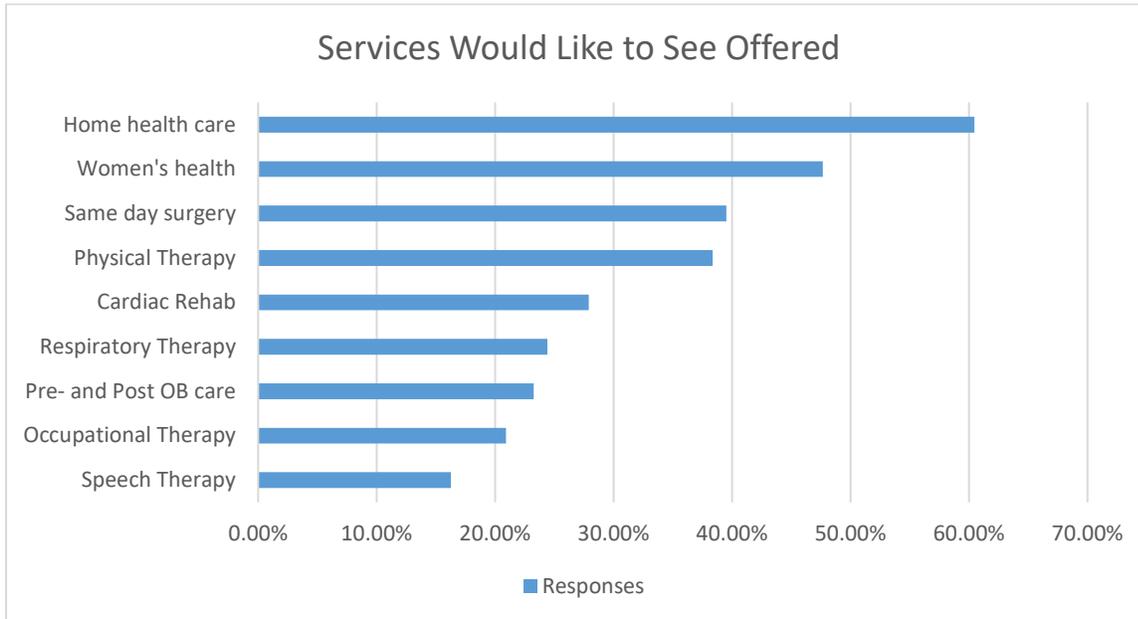
Answered: 166; Skipped:3

If you do not use medical facilities in Niobrara County, why not?

This was an open-ended question with 32 households responded. Most common responses were:

1. Cost (6)
2. Lack of trust in the quality of care provided (6)
3. Go to VA – (5)
4. Go elsewhere for specialty care (4)

What services would you like to see offered in your local health care facilities?



Answered: 86; Skipped:83

In the past three year, was there a time when you or a member of your household thought you needed health care services but did NOT receive or were delayed in receiving medical services?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	14.46%	24
No	85.54%	142

Answered: 166; Skipped:3

If yes, what was the primary reason(s) why you did not receive health care services? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Reponses
It costs too much	45.16%
Not covered by insurance	25.81%
Too long to wait for an appointment	22.58%
Office wasn't open when I could go	16.13%
Transportation problems	12.90%
Could not get an appointment	22.58%
Don't like doctors	6.45%
Too nervous or afraid	6.45%
Could not get off work	6.45%
Language barrier	3.23%
Had no one to care for my children	0.0%
Other	22.58%

Are medical, dental or prescription co-pays a large enough problem that you postpone or go without services or prescriptions?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	20.86%	34
No	79.14%	129

Answered: 163; Skipped:6

In the past three years, have you or a household member received care in a hospital?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	63.10%	106
No	36.90%	62

Answered: 168; Skipped:1

If yes, name of hospital(s):

Reporting top responses

- Niobrara Community Hospital (Lusk) – 42
- Memorial Hospital of Converse County (Douglas) – 28
- Wyoming Medical Center (Casper) – 20
- Regional West (Scottsbluff) – 8

In the past three years, have you or a household member seen a primary health care provider such as a family physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner for health care services?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	92.81%	155
No	7.19%	12

Answered: 167; Skipped:2

If yes, where was the primary health care provider located?

Reporting top responses

- Lusk – 115
- Douglas – 11
- VA (Cheyenne or Hot Springs) – 10

In the past year, have you or someone in your household had a medical emergency?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	40.25%	64
No	59.75%	95

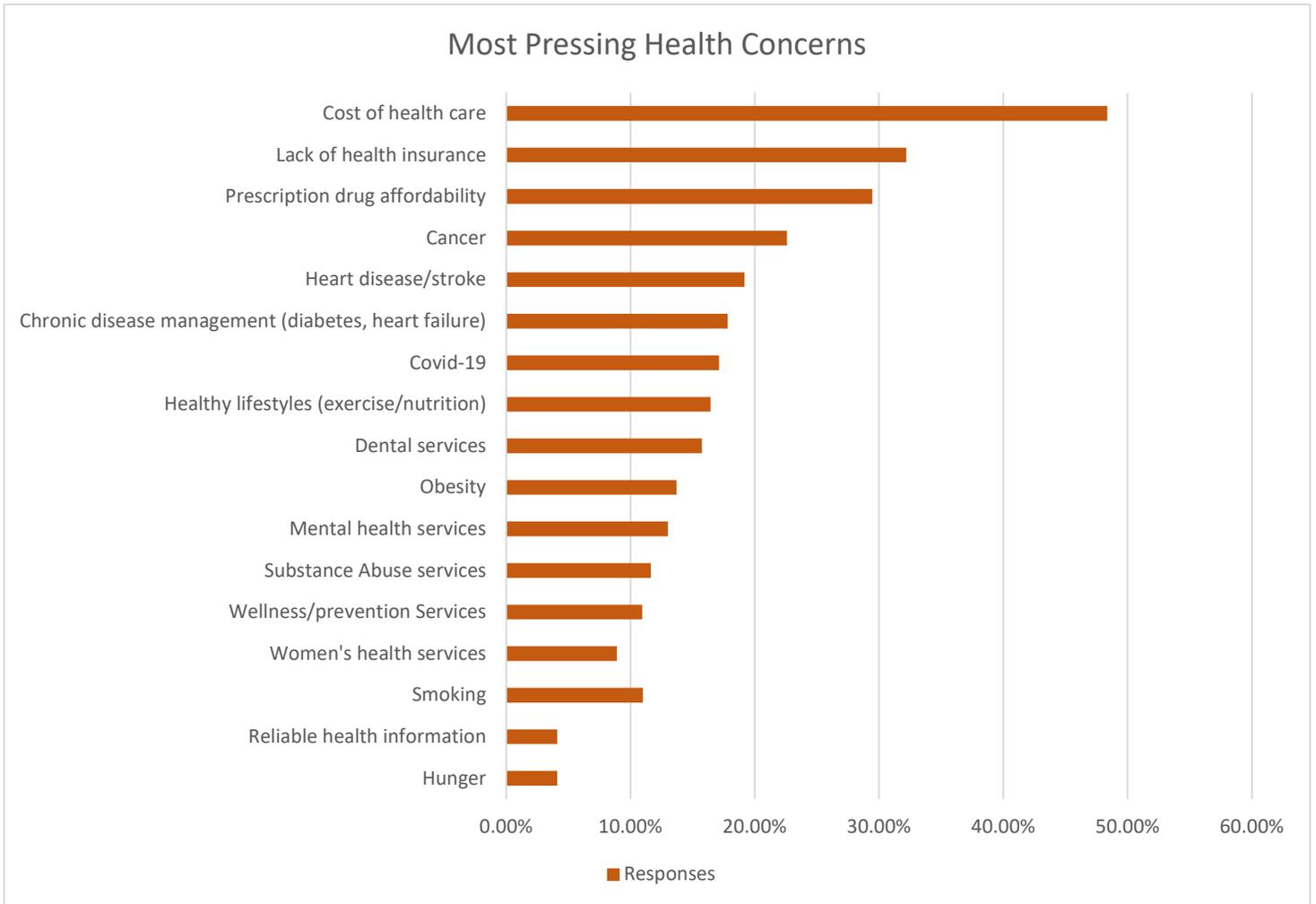
Answered: 159; Skipped:10

If you answered yes to the above question, did you access the 911 system for an ambulance?

Answer Choices	Responses	Number
Yes	30.36%	17
No	69.64%	39

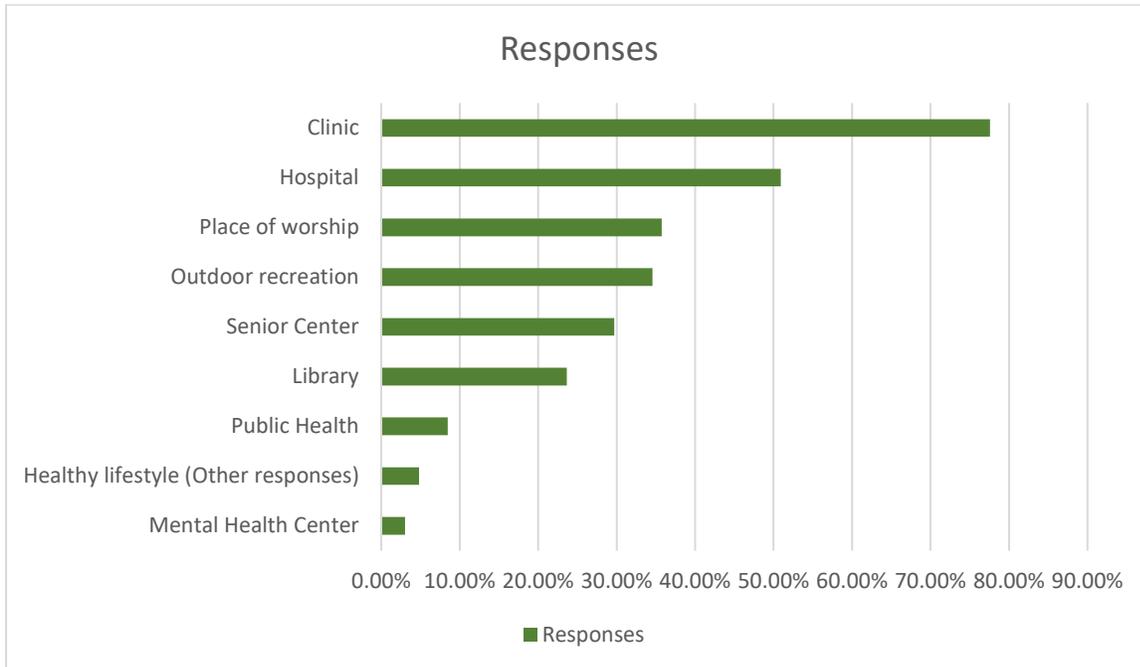
Answered 76; Skipped: 93

In your opinion, what are the three most pressing health concerns in the county? (Choose only 3)



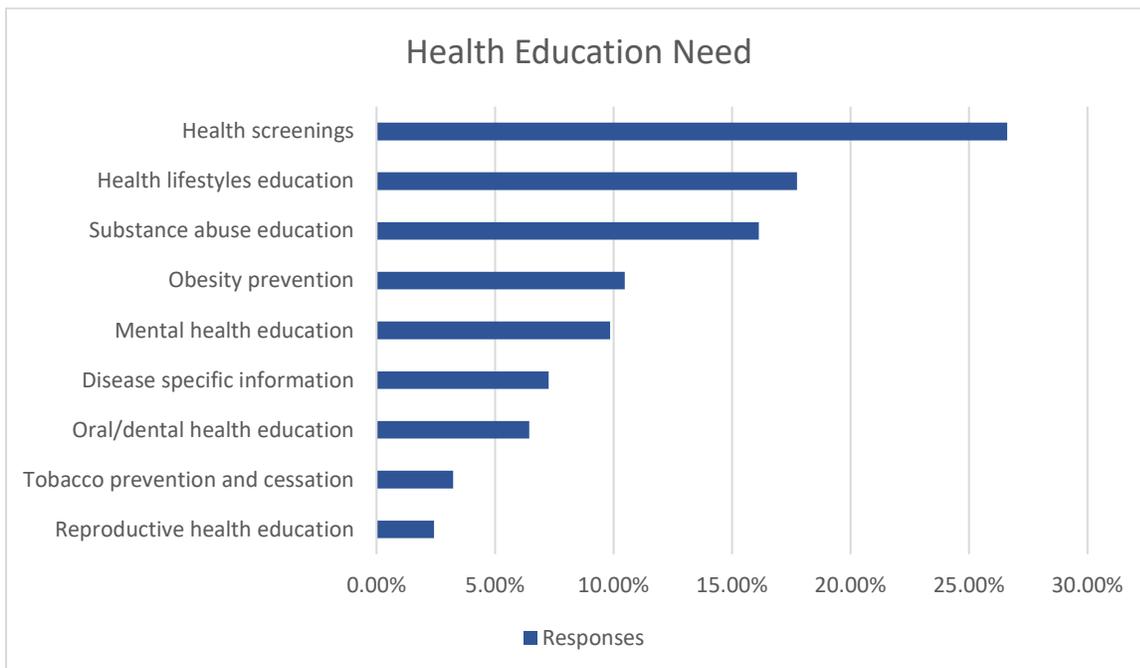
Answered: 146; Skipped: 23

What resources do you rely upon to help keep you and your family healthy? (Check all that apply)



Answered: 165; Skipped:4

What is the greatest health education need in our county? (select one)



Answered: 124; Skipped:45

What needs to be added, changed, or removed to improve your access to and use of medical services in your county?

The most common responses included:

- Nothing needs to be added/changed/removed; satisfied/pleased with medical services (12)
- Need additional healthcare providers: family physicians and specialty doctors (8)
- Affordable health services and insurance (8)
- Health education classes (5)

Key Informant Interviews

Helpmate Center for Family Violence and Sexual Assault	Sabrina Kruse, Director
Niobrara Chamber of Commerce	Jackie Bredthauer, Executive Director
Niobrara County Commissioners	Elaine Griffith, Commissioner
Niobrara Community Hospital	Nick Doucette, CEO Amanda Smith, Patient Admissions and Discharge Planner Christa Stream, Human Resources Manager
Niobrara County Library	Debbie Sturman, Director
Niobrara County Public Health	Melanie Pearce, Regional Supervisor
Niobrara Prevention Coalition	Katie Krein, Community Prevention Specialist
Niobrara County School District #1	George Mirich, Superintendent
Prairie Hills Church	Ty DesEnfants, Pastor
Solutions for Life	Hope Phelon, LCSW
Wyoming Business Council	Kim Rightmer, East Center Regional Director
Wyoming Child and Family Development	Martha Bridge, Center Coordinator/Teacher
Wyoming Department of Family Services	Alyssa Barnsdale, Benefits & Eligibility Specialists
Wyoming Department of Workforce Services Vocational Rehabilitation	Amanda Bruno, VR Counselor