

# Community Health Improvement Plan & Implementation Strategy Report

# 2020



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Grand Forks Public Health



# COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REPORT

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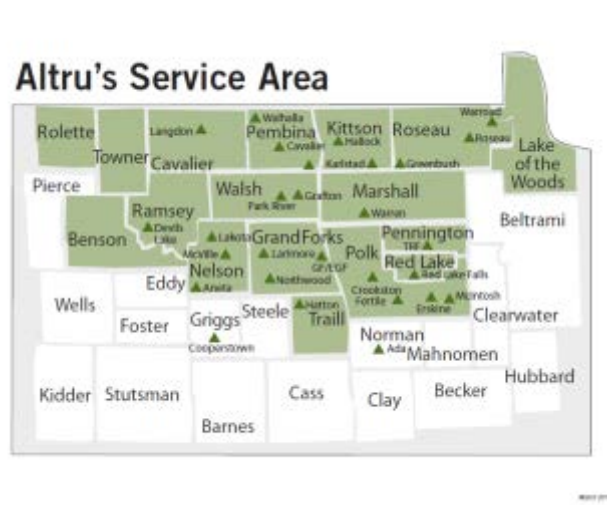
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## Introduction

The 2019 Community Health Assessment was a joint effort led by Altru Health System and Grand Forks Public Health and was approved by our governing bodies in December and January, respectively. Our two organizations have a history of collaboration to improve community health. Together, we engaged multiple partners to conduct the assessment, which provides information on health issues, status, and needs and identifies areas for improvement. Our assessment work provides the backbone for our Community Health Improvement Plan & Implementation Strategy Report.

### Altru Health System

Altru Health System is a community-owned, integrated system with an acute care hospital, a rehabilitation hospital, more than a dozen clinics in Grand Forks and the region, and large home care and outreach therapy networks. We employ more than 200 physicians and over 3,700 staff. We serve the approximately 220,000 residents of a 17-county region as shown in the map below.



## Grand Forks Public Health

Grand Forks Public Health (GFPH) provides services to the City and County of Grand Forks, North Dakota. GFPH believes in creating a culture in which all people have the means and the opportunity to make choices that lead to the healthiest lives possible. GFPH facilitates policy, system and environmental changes that are supported by businesses, government, individuals, and organizations all working together to foster healthy communities and lifestyles.

Grand Forks Public Health is committed to:

- » promoting healthy environments and lifestyles
- » preventing disease
- » building community resilience through preparedness
- » assuring access to health service

### Grand Forks Public Health Service Area





## Assessment Methodology

Leadership from Altru and Grand Forks Public Health agreed to adopt the process from the Association for Community Health Improvement (an American Hospital Association affiliated group) for our community health assessment. The diagram below shows the six steps that comprise the process.



Our Community Health Needs Assessment report documents steps 1-5 of the process. This Improvement Plan & Implementation Strategy report will address step 6.

## Priorities

As noted in our Community Health Needs Assessment report, we worked with a Community Advisory Committee to conduct our assessment. (Please see Attachment One for a list of organizations represented by this group.) This group was instrumental in every step of the process. They also established the purpose for our assessment which was to “improve the overall health of the community by focusing on determinants that promote health and wellness (versus treating disease).” After reviewing primary and secondary data, the Committee provided input for the priority setting process and ultimately agreed that the top six priority areas for improvement should be as follows:

1. **Substance Use** – Reduce the prevalence of substance use including alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
2. **Mental Health** – Promote mental health and building resilience
3. **Obesity** – Reduce the prevalence of obesity in our population
4. **Transportation** – Improve the quality of and access to transportation
5. **Cost of Health Care** – Reduce the burden of the cost of health care
6. **Housing** – Increase the availability of affordable housing, including permanent supportive options.

Committee members approved the following criteria to guide them during the prioritization process:

- » The burden, scope, severity, or urgency of the health need
- » The estimated feasibility and effectiveness of possible interventions
- » The health disparities associated with the need
- » The importance the community places on addressing the need
- » The community resources already allocated to addressing the need
- » The connection to the purpose of the assessment developed by the Advisory Committee: Improve the overall health of the community by focusing on factors that promote health and wellness (versus treating disease)

## Improvement Planning/Implementation Strategy Development

The next section of this report features additional information on each of our priority areas. Several areas were identified as similar priorities in previous assessments: substance abuse, mental health, obesity, and cost of health care. While Altru, Grand Forks Public Health and the community have been addressing these topics for several years, these are significant issues that result from complex social, economic and environmental factors. They are not easily addressed over the short-term. They require long-term, collaborative interventions based on evidence-based practices to impact community infrastructure and norms and subsequent individual behavior.

**Like the assessment, this phase of work will be facilitated with community partners. Given the current public health crisis around the coronavirus pandemic, this work has not been launched. The timeline for initiation is unknown given the unprecedented situation our community is facing. When we are able to convene a team, we will set goals and identify how we can partner to address these issues over the next three years.**

## Step 6: Planning for Action and Monitoring Results

### Priority Area: Substance Use

#### **Background:**

Substance use and addiction remain a persistent problem in the United States and regionally. These substances vary in source from legal to illegal, natural to synthetic, and stimulant to depressant. The economic loss due to substance use disorder in the United States annually is over \$400 billion. The growing impact of addiction has gained local media attention, resulting in the Mayor's Call to Action in 2017. Since that time, numerous events and focus groups have taken place.

Altru Health System has been committed to reducing opioid perceptions by monitoring provider prescription rates systemwide and reviewing the data at monthly Opioid Committee meetings. Pharmacies at Altru participate in a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) and provide free naloxone as needed. There have been community medication take back events hosted by Altru. In 2019, Altru gained two providers that are licensed to give medication assisted treatment (MAT). Altru's newest Opioid Committee in Thief River Falls is hoping to increase this number and reduce stigma regarding MAT.

As a result of the work done by Altru and other community groups, there has been a shift in drug seizures that may indicate the supply of pharmaceutical opioids have been replaced by illicitly produced opioids due to continual demand. This aligns with the findings of the 2019 Community Health Assessment Survey which shows that 51.46 percent of people in the Grand Forks Community are very worried about illegal drugs within the population.

Substance use can be a risk factor for the spread of infectious disease, such as Hepatitis C and HIV. This is particularly prevalent among people who use injectable drugs. In 2017, 88% of newly acquired Hepatitis C cases in Grand Forks County reported injection drug use. Furthermore, the rate of HIV infection in Grand Forks County has been on the rise from 2016 to 2017; 2.8 per 100,000 to 9.9 per 100,000 retrospectively.

Prescription and illegal drugs are not the only substance use concern in our region; alcohol and tobacco use are as well. Historically, North Dakota has a high prevalence of binge drinking and alcohol abuse. Although youth alcohol consumption has declined in recent years, adult binge drinking remains a concern. In 2019, 26% of adults in Grand Forks County reported excessive drinking in the last month. New legislation passed in 2019 permits alcohol sales at youth hockey tournaments, a signal of the cultural acceptance of alcohol use among our residents. Lastly, there has been a decline in conventional cigarette use among the youth in the City of Grand Forks, but there has been a rise in e-cigarette use.

**Source/Evidence-Base:**

- County Health Rankings data on the following: adult binge drinking rates, percentage of motor vehicle accidents impacted by alcohol, and the prevalence of deaths due to drug overdoses
- A comprehensive report on Substance Use in Grand Forks and Polk County was published in 2015 and updated in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. This report includes the following stakeholders and data sources: Grand Forks Police Department, Grand Forks Regional Narcotics Task Force, Altru Health System, North Dakota Department of Health, Grand Forks Public Safe Answering Point, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Grand Forks Withdrawal Management Center, Grand Forks Public Health, and Youth Risk Perception Survey
- Community Health Survey results

**Policy Implications:**

The policy implications that will assist in reducing the incidence of substance use are outlined below:

- AC609 expand access to community-based behavioral health supports through Medicaid State Plan. This bill expands access to community-based recovery for Medicaid enrollees 18 and older.
- A syringe service program was started in Grand Forks in October 2019. These programs reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis and encourage drug users to enter recovery programs (CDC).
- In 2017, a federal grant was given to North Dakota regarding opioids; \$180,000 given to Grand Forks.

**Stakeholders:**

There are many stakeholders within our community working to reduce the prevalence of substance abuse:

- Grand Forks Public Health: Opioid STR Grant
- Altru Health System
- Grand Forks Public Schools
- Grand Forks Police Department
- Grand Forks Regional Task Force
- Grand Forks Regional Narcotics Task Force
- Grand Forks Public Safe Answering Point
- Grand Forks Withdrawal Management Center
- Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition



## Priority Area: Obesity

### **Background:**

Obesity was identified as a priority area in the 2013, 2016, and 2019 Community Health Assessments. County Health Ranking data showed that 29% of adults in Grand Forks County and 31% of adults in Polk County are obese with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or greater. Although this is slightly lower than the 2016 data, obesity remains a significant concern.

Altru Health System has addressed this issue by offering a weight management program focused on intensive weight-loss and lifestyle-changes. It utilizes meal replacements and behavior changes. This program has an in-person and an at-home option. In addition, Altru offers consultations through Altru's Healthy and Fit Kids and Families for adolescents or teens struggling with weight loss. Altru also provides biometric screening to anyone in the community and gives individual report cards with next steps on how to improve various health indicators such as cholesterol levels, diabetes, blood pressure, and weight. In November of 2019, Altru launched a diabetes prevention program through the CDC. Lastly, Altru provides various diet and nutrition talks throughout the community.

In 2019, Altru and other community sponsors partnered with Zagster to implement Grand Rides, a bike share program in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. This program provides access to bikes at convenient locations around the community to encourage an active way for people to run errands, attend events, or just enjoy the cities. (More about Grand Rides is included in the Transportation priority area.)

A current community asset is Live Well Grand Cities, a coalition focused on making Grand Forks and East Grand Forks "the healthiest place to live, work, and play". This group is actively promoting or coordinating health and wellness activities and resources available to residents. Altru is actively involved in this coalition.

To increase access to fresh food, public health efforts have created the Grand Forks Community Gardens. These gardens provide community members with fresh produce and are subsidized to reduce barriers. In addition, Molly's Trolley is a mobile farmers market that brings fresh fruit and vegetables to neighborhoods. Molly's Trolley collaborates with the Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), offering vouchers for those in the program. There are also plans to open a grocery store later this year in downtown Grand Forks to improve access to fresh food for those who live close to the center of the city.

Grand Forks has been selected as one of four North Dakota cities for participation in the Blue Zones Project in conjunction with the North Dakota Department of Health. "Blue Zones" are areas around the world where citizens live longer and remain active and healthy throughout their entire lives. These areas were dubbed "Blue Zones" per research by Dan Buettner. The Blue Zones Project stems from this research and focuses on creating community environments where "the healthy choice is the easy choice." The

Project uses the [nine secrets of longevity](#) as its frame: move naturally, purpose, plant slant, 80% rule, wine @ five, down shift, family first, right tribe, and belong. In short, these “secrets” address what we eat and drink, how we move throughout our days, who we connect with, and our attitude and purpose in life. Planning for a community site visit was just launching prior to the coronavirus pandemic; it’s unclear when the work will be able to reconvene given the focus on COVID-19 at the Department of Health.

**Source/Evidence-Base:**

- County Health Ranking: obesity rates in adults
- CDC Strategies to Prevent Obesity:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/index.html>
- CDC Data, Trends and Maps on Obesity:
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/databases.html>

**Stakeholders:**

Given the prevalence of obesity, every business/organization is a stakeholder in this epidemic. Organizations that are taking the lead include the following:

- Altru Health System
- Grand Forks Public Health
- Live Well Grand Cities
- The University of North Dakota (UND)
- NDSU Extension

## Priority Area: Behavioral Health Services

**Background:**

Depression, suicide, and mental health are significant public health concerns in Grand Forks. According to the Community Health Assessment Survey in 2019, 57.69% of respondents are very concerned about suicide attempts and 53.13% are very concerned about depression.

In response to growing concerns regarding mental health, The Mental Health Call to Action took place in 2019. Local leaders across Grand Forks discussed the issue of mental health in our community. This group includes Altru Health System, public health officials, education leaders, and law enforcement. The goal of this group is to educate the community on mental health issues and to bring awareness to certain issues, such as suicide.

Another behavioral health milestone took place in 2019; the Grand Forks Public Schools hired a licensed addiction counselor to their district. In addition, Sources of Strength, a suicide prevention program, expanded into all middle and high schools and is piloting a program at Century Elementary School. Furthermore, Altru Family Medicine Center added a social worker, helping to integrate mental health care with primary care. Plus, the University of North Dakota School of Medicine started a suicide prevention walk.

In 2020, Mental Health Matters kicked off. This is a community collaborative promoting emotional well-being for people in Grand Forks. This partnership includes many local stakeholders. Lastly, Altru Health System's TEARS (Together we Educate About the Realities of Suicide) Suicide Awareness program has many plans for 2020. This includes establishing a survivor support group in Crookston, expanding Mental Health First Aid classes for our community and region, and providing grief education offerings to the community.

#### **Policy Implications – State:**

- In 2019, legislators passed funding for \$4 million in community-based support and \$300,000 in a mental health promotion program. This is the first-time state funding in North Dakota has gone toward mental illness prevention and promotion.
- Legislators doubled the funding for the Parents Lead Prevention Program to \$200,000 and provided behavioral health prevention in schools.
- Future legislation is being drafted to provide Medicaid coverage for community-based care.
- Free Through Recovery is also a target for legislation. This would allow community treatment for incarcerated individuals. It would also focus on preventing others from falling into the criminal justice system.

#### **Source:**

- County Health Rankings provides data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) on the average number of mentally unhealthy days reported in the past 30 days
- Altru Health System data
- Grand Forks Police Department data
- North Dakota Department of Health data

#### **Stakeholders:**

- Altru Health System
- TEARS
- Grand Forks Public Schools
- Metal Health Matters
- Grand Forks Public Health
- Grand Forks Police Department

- University of North Dakota
- Red River Behavioral Health System
- Mountain Plains MHTTC
- Northeast Human Service Center
- University of North Dakota Prairie Community Clinic
- Global Friends Coalition
- North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

## Priority Area: Transportation

### **Background:**

The current transportation system in Grand Forks has led to public health and community concerns. According to the County Health Rankings, 82% of Grand Forks County residents drive to work alone. The public transit system lacks funding, frequency, and serves a relatively small service area. The current pedestrian system, especially in winter months, makes walking or biking around the community difficult. The adoption of a complete streets policy in 2018 by the Grand Forks City Council signals a commitment to making improvements in this area.

Access to grocery stores within walking distance of neighborhoods is an issue. This leads to a high prevalence of food deserts which contribute to poor health outcomes. In the fall of 2020, there are plans to break ground for a new Hugo's grocery store in Grand Forks' city center. This grocery store will be conveniently attached to apartments for individuals with a low to moderate income. As a result, residents in downtown Grand Forks will have a grocery store within walking distance and will be able to access healthier food choices.

Certain individuals in our community have greater transportation needs, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. To improve access to public transportation for the older population, City Area Transit promotes a Senior Ride Program. This allows adults 62 and older in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks to schedule a ride. There is also a Dial-A-Ride Program which is a paratransit service for people with disabilities who cannot utilize the city's bus system. Rides are offered between 6:00 am to 10:00 pm and cost \$3.00. Although these programs address a significant need, there are several scheduling restrictions which could make it difficult for some people to use. Connected to the issue noted above, the two-grocery bag limit for City Area Transit makes shopping without a car difficult, increasing the desire to have grocery stores within walking distance of neighborhoods.

Our current transportation issues can lead to inactivity in our community. To promote biking, Altru Health System was a lead sponsor for Grand Rides, a bike share program that started in August of 2019. This program allows community members to rent bikes (\$1 for

15 minutes, \$5 a month, \$60 a year) at docking stations throughout the city of Grand Forks. Currently, there are 55 bikes with docking stations at 13 parks. There are plans to add 16 more bikes. All the bikes are linked to an app that shows bike availability. Implementing a bike share program was an important step to help create an environment that promotes activity within the community. There is still concern, however, regarding the safety and accessibility of sidewalks, especially during winter months.

**Source:**

- Community Health Assessment Survey
- Census Bureau

**Stakeholders:**

- City Area Transit
- North Dakota Department of Transportation
- Dakota Public Transit Association
- ND Moves
- Altru Health System

## Priority Area: Cost of Health Care

**Background:**

The cost of health care continues to rise and can be a significant burden for individuals and business owners in our community. To help address this concern for patients, Altru staff provide estimates of costs for services so patients can understand their financial obligation before a significant elective procedure. Altru Health System also offers many financial assistance programs. For example, charity care is available to certain patients allowing full or partial discounts for services deemed medically necessary. Community care is also available, providing patients coordinated care from their Altru primary care physician if they have limited means to pay for medical services. Altru's Healthcare Eligibility Reduce Options (HERO) program screens uninsured and underinsured patients for health care coverage through local government and internal programs.

Other community groups have addressed the growing burden of health care costs in our community as well. For example, Global Friends Coalition offers an educational course to new immigrants on how to navigate the United States health system and how to receive health insurance. Another community program is the North Dakota Women's Way. This program offers free breast and cervical cancer screens in North Dakota. Third Street Clinic also offers services to underserved residents. There is only a \$5 co-pay



for individuals making 150% of the federal poverty line and a \$7 co-pay for individual making 151-170% of the federal poverty line.

**Source:**

- County Health Rankings: percentage uninsured
- Altru Health System
- US Census Bureau: percent employer coverage

**Stakeholders:**

- Altru Health System
- Global Friends
- North Dakota Women's Way
- Third Street Clinic

## Priority Area: Housing

**Background:**

The Grand Forks community struggles with affordable housing. For housing to be considered “affordable” it must be less than three times one’s annual income. In Grand Forks, the median household income is \$48,241 and the median property value is \$186,500. Therefore, the cost of housing is 30% higher than what’s deemed affordable per this definition.

To combat the expensive housing prices, the City of Grand Forks revised its special assessment policies in 2016 and 2017. This resulted in a three-year deferral on special assessments for new homes in an effort to lower costs and allow first-time home buyers to enter the market. In addition, there has been a push for smaller lot sizes. In the next few years, there are plans to improve city zoning and provide tax exemptions to further reduce the barriers to affordable housing.

In addition to expensive housing prices, the cost to rent properties in Grand Forks has increased despite stagnant wages. In response to this, there has been an increase the availability of low-income housing in the community. There are currently 39 low income apartment buildings in Grand Forks. In 2019, the Community Development Block Grant restored Riverside Manor, a 38-unit affordable rental property. There are also plans to build more affordable housing in Grand Forks in coming years.

Another housing issue in Grand Forks is chronic homelessness. To help combat this issue, a permanent housing residence opened in 2018 named “LaGrave on First”. This residence is part of an evidence-based program, Housing First, which addresses chronic homelessness. LaGrave has 42 one-bedroom, one-bathroom units. Residents do not need pre-requisites like sobriety or actively in

treatment. As a result, residents can stabilize and then utilize available services. Altru Health System provides onsite services to residents, including a family practitioner one day a week, a full-time RN case manager, therapy services, medical financial services, and telemedicine for certain specialties.

Altru addressed another housing need in our community: the need for affordable, temporary housing for patients' families. Sunshine Hospitality Home opened in 2018, providing a home for patients and their families who travel to receive healthcare in Grand Forks. It is conveniently located near Altru Hospital so individuals can stay close to their loved ones. Length of stay at the facility can vary from an afternoon to indefinitely depending on the family's situation. The cost of an overnight stay is affordable at \$40 per night; financial assistance is available if needed. Since opening, the Sunshine Hospitality Home has served people from 56 counties, 15 states, and 2 provinces.

**Source/Evidence-base:**

- County Health Ranking's severe housing problems data which includes overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities
- Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, City of Grand Forks North Dakota
- US Census data
- Housing first and permanent supportive housing

**Legislation:**

- State Fair Housing Law
- Federal Fair Housing Act

**Stakeholders:**

- Housing Authority Board
- Planning & Zoning Commission
- Grand Forks Homes
- City of Grand Forks
- High Plains Fair Housing Center

## Resources

Altru's Planning and Marketing team and leaders from Grand Forks Public Health have been co-facilitating the Community Health Assessment process. Both entities will continue to facilitate the implementation strategy and improvement process along with community partners, coordinate activities where appropriate, and monitor progress per specific outcomes identified.

## Approval and Next Steps

This report will be shared for approval as follows:

- » Altru Health System's Board of Directors on April 27, 2020.
- » Grand Forks Board of Health on July 9, 2020.

Upon approval by Altru's Board, the report will be available to the public as follows:

- » An electronic copy will be given to each Community Advisory Committee member.
- » An electronic file will be available on Altru's website ([www.altru.org](http://www.altru.org)) and Grand Forks Public Health's website ([www.grandforksgov.com/publichealth](http://www.grandforksgov.com/publichealth)).
- » A copy of the report can be requested for review at the information desk located in Altru Hospital's front lobby and at the front desk of Grand Forks Public Health Department at 151 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
- » A copy of the report will be sent—electronically or via U.S. Postal Service—to anyone who requests it.

## ATTACHMENT ONE | ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

In addition to Altru Health System and Grand Forks Public Health, individuals representing the following agencies/organizations made up the community-based Advisory Committee:

- » Altru Family YMCA
- » Cities Area Transit
- » City Council
- » Community Violence Intervention Center
- » Grand Forks Parks and Recreation
- » Grand Forks Public Schools
- » Grand Forks Air Force Base
- » Grand Forks Fire Department
- » Grand Forks Herald
- » Grand Forks Housing Authority
- » Grand Forks Park District
- » Grand Forks Police Department
- » Grand Forks Public Schools
- » Grand Forks Senior Center
- » Global Friends Coalition
- » Grand Forks EDC
- » Inspire Pharmacy
- » Northeast Human Service Center
- » Northlands Rescue Mission
- » Northwestern Mental Health Center
- » Polk County Public Health
- » Quality Health Associates
- » Simplot
- » Spectra Health
- » The Chamber
- » Turtle River State Park
- » University of North Dakota
- » United Way