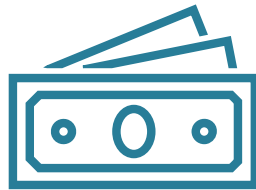


# Vermont State Health Assessment Community Engagement Data



## High Cost of Living

The data in this slide deck is specific to the **high cost of living** as a health need.

May 2024

# Where does this data come from?

**This data was collected as part of the 2024 [Vermont State Health Assessment](#).**

We are grateful to the people of Vermont who participated in focus groups and interviews for the State Health Assessment. The following information comes from individuals who identify as members of and/or support one or more of the following communities:

- Indigenous people
- People of color
- People with disabilities
- People who are unhoused
- People who identify as LGBTQ+
- Older Vermonters

The information presented here are the expressed opinions of Vermonters based on their lived and professional experiences. They are not the opinions of the Vermont Department of Health, but rather the people who make up the communities for whom we work.

# How can I use this data?

Please use this data freely! We hope that it is useful for our partners in your efforts to improve health and well-being.

You can use this data to:

- Elevate the voices of people with lived experience to provide context to quantitative data.
- Understand the factors that impact health and well-being.
- Identify solutions to address some of the most important health needs facing people in Vermont.
- Inform planning and decision-making for your organization or community.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration with other organizations or sectors.

Visit [How Healthy Are We? Data Resources | Vermont Department of Health](#) to access other Health Department data. Access local data, trends over time, visualizations and maps, equity and disparities information, topic-specific data and more.

# Who does this data reflect?

## Geographic representation of focus group participants

County	Focus group involvement	% of State population
Addison	7%	6%
Bennington	<b>13%</b>	6%
Caledonia	7%	5%
Chittenden	25%	26%
Grand Isle	<1%	1%
Lamoille	4%	4%
Missing	6%	
Orange	<b>1%</b>	5%
Orleans	6%	4%
Rutland	6%	9%
Washington	8%	9%
Essex	1%	1%
Franklin	6%	8%
Windham	<b>4%</b>	7%
Windsor	<b>5%</b>	9%

## Community representation of focus group participants

Community	Focus group involvement
Older Vermonters	19%
Vermonters with a disability	19%
LGBTQ+ Vermonters	15%
Vermonters of color	14%
Missing data	11%
Unhoused Vermonters	10%
None of the above	8%
Indigenous Peoples	4%

## Community representation of interviewees

Community	Key informants
No specific community	23%
Vermonters of color	18%
Older Vermonters	15%
Vermonters with a disability	14%
Unhoused Vermonters	13%
LGBTQ+ Vermonters	11%
Indigenous Peoples	5%

# Cost of Living: Key Drivers & Health Impacts

## (slide 1 of 2)

Key drivers are important factors that contribute to a health need. These were identified by the community.

Key Drivers	Health Impacts
<b>1. Increasing costs of basic needs</b> like housing, food, transportation, childcare, and healthcare create barriers to health. People must choose between paying for essentials, forcing them to deprioritize medical care and healthy lifestyles.	High levels of stress, inability to access preventive and needed medical care, unsafe and unstable housing conditions, lack of transportation to services. "...people will neglect other things like the electric bill because they'd rather eat than be warm. So then that plays into things like asthma, and if you have really small kids, that's obviously a problem, so that you'd stay alive. So that's first and foremost there and everything else gets pushed."
<b>2. Food insecurity:</b> Rising food prices causing food insecurity and reliance on cheap, unhealthy options. Food banks seeing unprecedented demand.	Food is medicine. Without fresh and nutritious food, many chronic diseases flourish.
<b>3. Increasing costs are outpacing wages.</b> High-cost distress is felt deep into middle class. Difficulty attracting and retaining young professionals, especially in healthcare and other essential fields, due to high living costs and low wages.	"Those making just enough to not qualify for benefits, but not enough to afford essentials...Losing benefits like insurance when starting a job, despite still not making enough to survive."
<b>4. Socioeconomic issues are burdening the healthcare system.</b> Providers struggle to address patients' socioeconomic issues during brief medical appointments. Lack of affordable housing and transportation impedes hospital discharges and follow-up care.	Medical needs don't get enough attention if socioeconomic needs are greater, or socioeconomic support is not provided when desperately needed.

# Cost of Living: Key Drivers & Health Impacts

## (slide 2 of 2)

"I think it's largely around the fact that we are probably the most rural part of the state. That brings in the problems...having transportation, having to drive a distance for anything. But it also affects the prices, the cost of everything. Because with less supply, less competition, it keeps prices higher."

Key Drivers	Health Impacts
<b>5. Rural communities</b> grapple with limited affordable housing stock, limited transportation options, fewer job opportunities, and higher costs for heating and transportation. In rural areas with limited public transportation and few grocery stores, affording gas to drive to distant stores with better produce can be impossible.	Greater social isolation, reduced access to health-promoting resources, and longer travel times for medical care.
<b>6. High levels of family stress:</b> Constant stress around affording basic needs takes a huge toll on mental health and family dynamics. Parents work multiple jobs and have no time for kids or to care for their own health.	"...there isn't space often for parenting, there isn't space for parental well-being. They're living in a high cortisol environment, they then provide that high cortisol environment, and its negative effects impact their children..."
<b>7. Impacts on youth have a ripple effect throughout communities:</b> forcing many young adults to move out of state or preventing them from achieving self-sufficiency. High student loan debt compounds challenges of affording basic needs. Lack of teen-friendly spaces and activities, as communities struggle to afford such investments.	Higher rates of anxiety and depression, food insecurity affecting physical and mental development, and unsafe or unstable housing situations for youth. The ripple effects of economic instability in younger generations could have long-term consequences. Social isolation and mental health challenges.
<b>8. Disproportionate impacts on communities already experiencing health inequities:</b> seniors, people with disabilities, and BIPOC and immigrant populations face compounded challenges that put their health and wellbeing at even greater risk.	Higher rates of chronic diseases, poorer access to care, greater mental distress for these populations.

# Cost of Living: Summary of Key Drivers

"It winds up eating up time because the providers don't have unlimited time...They feel frustrated when...the person is in for like a healthcare medical issue but really the issues are more about economics and how crappy your apartment is and the fact that you didn't buy your medication last month because you were paying your rent or your utilities were doubled."

#	Key drivers (not in order of importance)
1	Increasing costs of basic needs negatively affect personal health and overall quality of life.
2	Food insecurity is an increasing concern for many.
3	Increasing costs are outpacing wages.
4	Socioeconomic needs are burdening the healthcare system.
5	Rural communities are further impacted by high costs.
6	High levels of family stress are a chronic burden.
7	Impacts on struggling youth have a ripple effect throughout communities.
8	Disproportionate impacts on communities already experiencing health inequities.

# Cost of Living: Possible Solutions

These solutions were identified by participants of the focus groups and interviews.

## Possible solutions

Expand food assistance programs and make healthy foods more affordable and accessible (e.g., expand free school meals and food pantries; offer meal delivery for those without transportation; extend VeggieVanGo; treat food as a health service/medicine; fund community-supported agriculture programs).

Increase affordability and availability of quality childcare.

Increase food, fuel, wood, and gas/vehicle repair assistance.

Support and fund Indigenous communities to engage in and train others on gardening, harvesting, and other sustainable agricultural practices.

Target assistance programs and investment in rural communities.

Sustainably fund organizations that are the bridge to connect people to resources.

Streamline or centralize application processes for public benefits. Decrease administrative hurdles.

Offer loan forgiveness programs and subsidized housing to attract health professionals.

Invest in building pathways to education and employment for young Vermonters.

Lower the cost of medicines.

Offer sliding scales for health services, even when someone has insurance.

Implement a thriving wage, not just a livable wage.