

Community Health Needs Assessment

St. David's Foundation Community Health Needs Assessment

At St. David's Foundation (SDF), we are committed to building a vibrant and inclusive Central Texas where every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

A key part of that commitment is listening—regularly and intentionally. Our staff engage directly with community members across the region to better understand their experiences, priorities, and challenges. Every three years, we formally gather these insights to shape our Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA).

This year's CHNA takes a different approach. Rather than leading with charts and graphs, we began with deep community engagement—spending months in conversation before determining which data points to include. **We're centering the voices of community members**, highlighting what matters most, and the changes they want to see.

We believe this shift will make the CHNA a more useful, actionable tool—not just for St. David's Foundation, but for anyone working to advance health equity and well-being in our region.

We have also published a companion qualitative report, the [Community Voices Project](#)[↗], developed in partnership with Texas Health Institute and eleven community-based organizations. This collection of powerful, insightful stories from Central Texans helped shape the focus of our CHNA. We encourage you to explore these first-hand perspectives, which bring depth and context to the report's findings. Details about our community-led approach can be found in the [Methodology](#)[↗] section.



Community Voices Project

[Explore the stories and themes shared through community conversations across the Central Texas Region.](#)

[Read More](#)



Pathways to Health Equity

[Explore the Foundation's 2024-2030 Strategic Plan.](#)

[Read More](#)

About St. David's Foundation [↗]

St. David's Foundation is one of the largest health foundations in the United States, funding over \$100 million annually in a five-county area surrounding Austin, Texas. Through a unique partnership with St. David's HealthCare, we strategically reinvest proceeds from the hospital system back into the community, with the goal of advancing health equity and improving the health and well-being of our most underserved Central Texas neighbors.

Beyond our grantmaking work, we operate the largest [mobile dental program](#) [↗] in the country providing charity care and offer the largest healthcare scholarship program in Texas, the [St. David's Neal Kocurek Program](#) [↗].



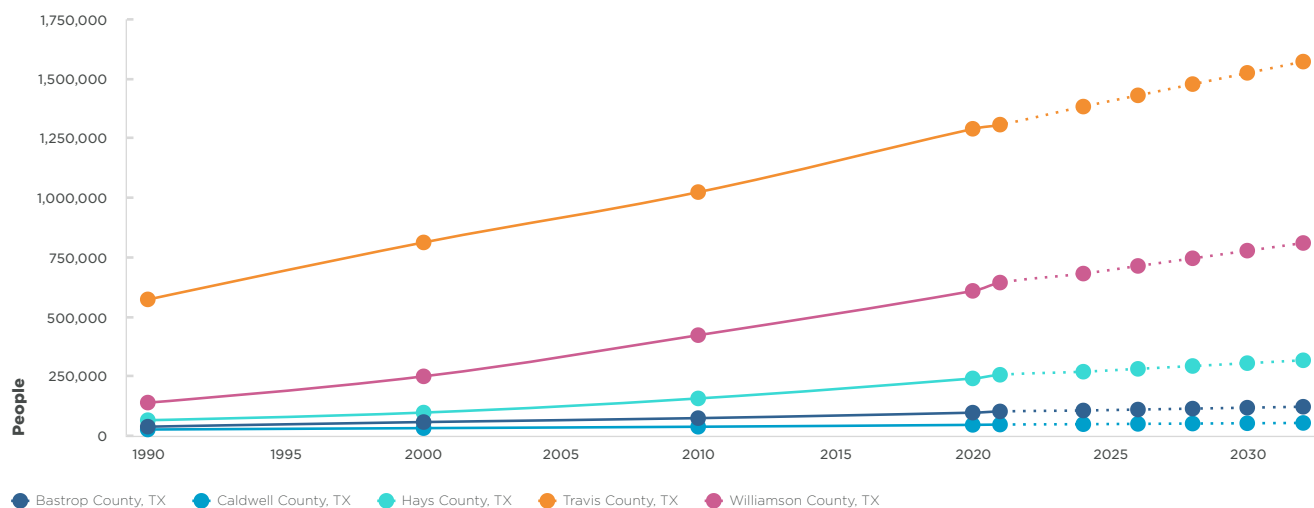
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Our Central Texas Population

Central Texas is home to more than 2.55 million people as of 2024—an increase of nearly 11% since 2020. **From 2010 to 2022, the Austin-Round Rock Metro Area was the fastest-growing region in the country**, expanding by approximately 33% between 2010 and 2020 alone. While the pace of growth has recently slowed, it continues to reshape the region, driving significant demographic shifts, increased suburbanization, and ongoing gentrification within Austin’s urban core.

The area’s population increased from about 1.7 million in 2010 to over 2.5 million in 2024.

Total Population



Sources: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

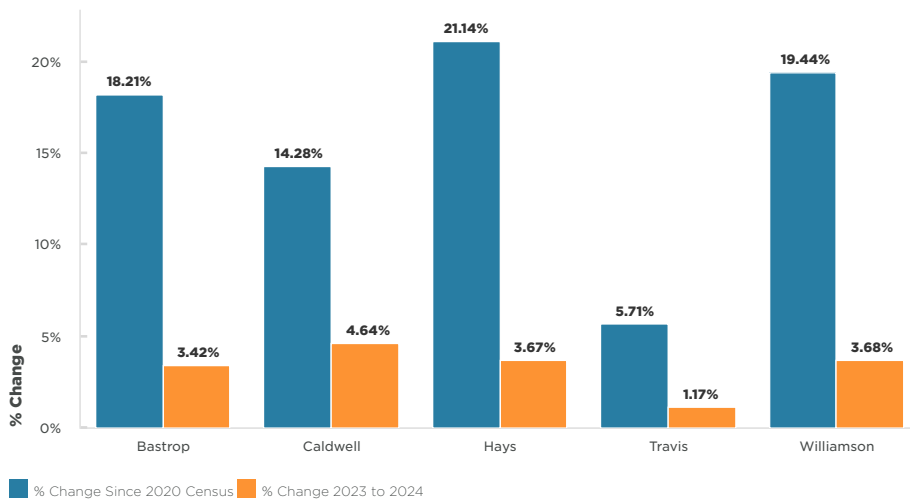
Impact of Suburbanization and Gentrification

Suburban areas north of Austin, such as Pflugerville and Georgetown, along with towns to the south, like San Marcos, have all expanded significantly as new residents seek more affordable housing. At the same time, **Travis County has experienced extensive displacement** of historically marginalized communities, particularly Black and Hispanic residents, from central neighborhoods like East Austin due to gentrification and resulting rising housing costs.

Hays County has experienced rapid suburbanization. Between 2020 and 2024, its population surged from 243,967 to 292,029—a 21.14% increase. This growth is attributed to various factors, including the county’s proximity and easy access to Austin, with the largest cities in the county aligned along the I-35 corridor, and the relative affordability of housing.

Caldwell County is now entering a similar period of rapid growth. While Hays and Williamson Counties have long topped regional and national growth charts, Caldwell County is now outpacing all four other counties in our region. According to the 2024 census update, its population grew by 4.64% between 2023 and 2024—nearly four times the growth rate of Travis County and about one percentage point faster than Bastrop, Hays, and Williamson Counties.

County Population Growth (2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Demographics

Factors such as race and ethnicity, languages spoken, and immigration status are all important in understanding the unique needs of our community.

Central Texas as a whole is 49% White, 32% Hispanic or Latino, 7% Black, 7% Asian, and 4% Multi-racial. Within counties, we see variation in rates, with White being the largest share in all counties except for Caldwell, where the majority of the population is Hispanic or Latino, 56%, compared to 36% White.

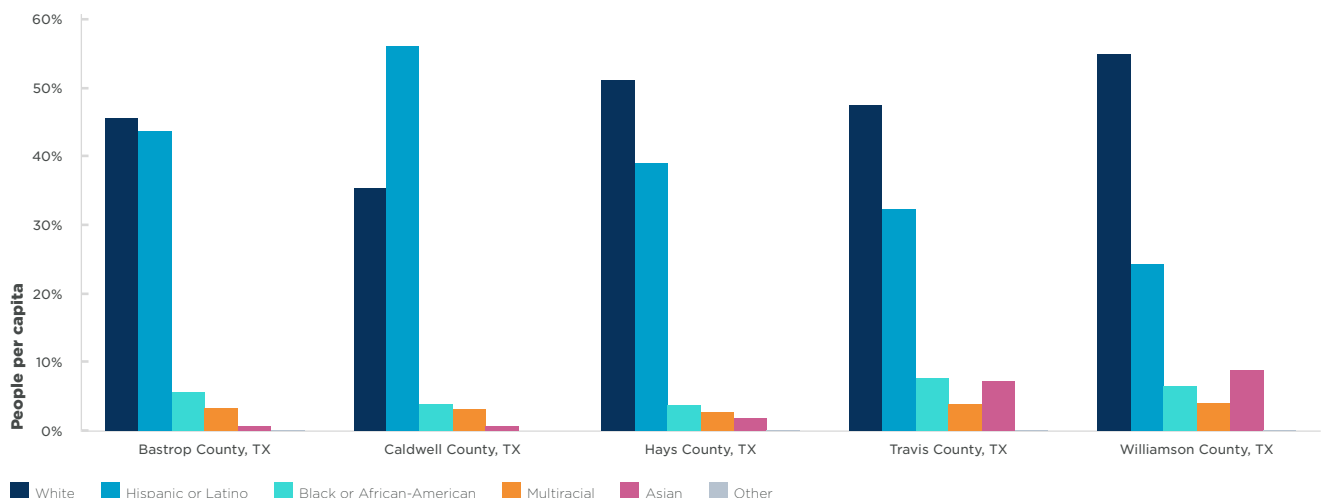
Over 15% of the population in Central Texas was not born in the United States. The proportion of immigrants in our communities also varies, from 10% in Hays County up to 17% in Travis.

English is the primary language spoken by 72% of residents.

Compared to the state of Texas overall, Central Texas has a larger share of working-age adults (ages 20–40) and fewer children and older adults (ages 60+).

Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity by Central Texas County



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Note: Hispanic or Latino includes any race. All other races in this chart are not Hispanic or Latino.

Nativity



Immigrant Population

15.5%

of People

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

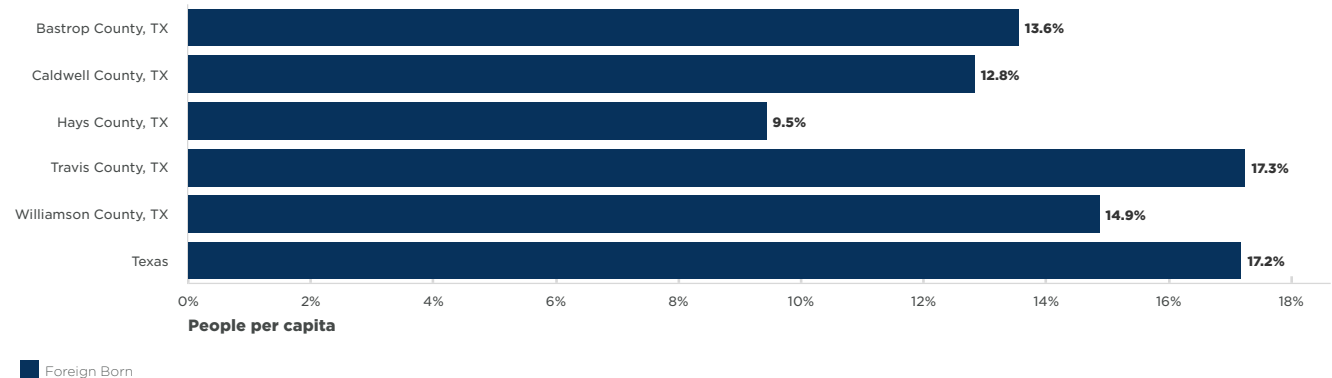
17.2%

of People

Texas

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Immigrant Population by County



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Primary Language



Limited English Proficiency

9.1%

of People ages 5+

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

12.8%

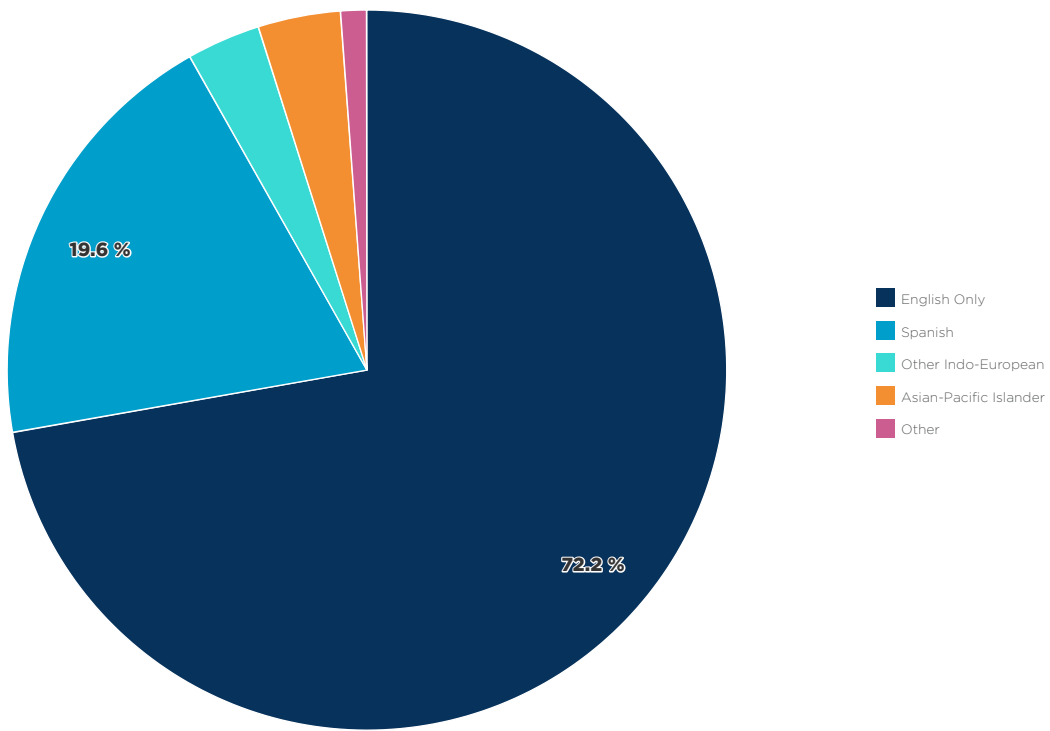
of People ages 5+

Texas

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Note: Limited English Proficiency is defined as speaking English less than "very well."

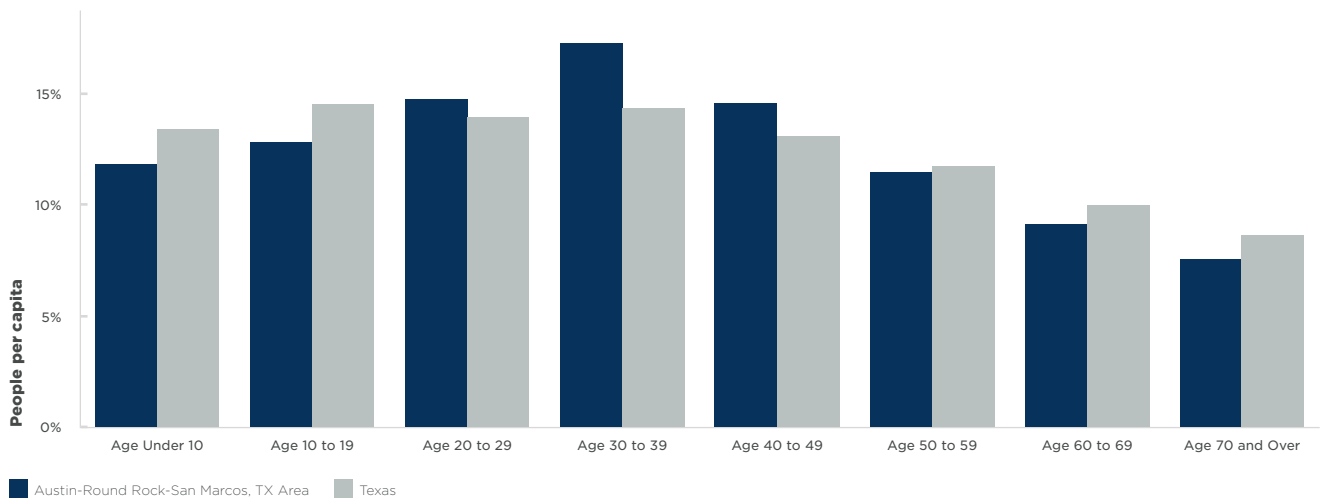
Language Spoken at Home Among People Ages 5+



Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area
 Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Age Distribution

Age Distribution in Central Texas versus the State of Texas



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023



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Central Texas Health Equity Zones

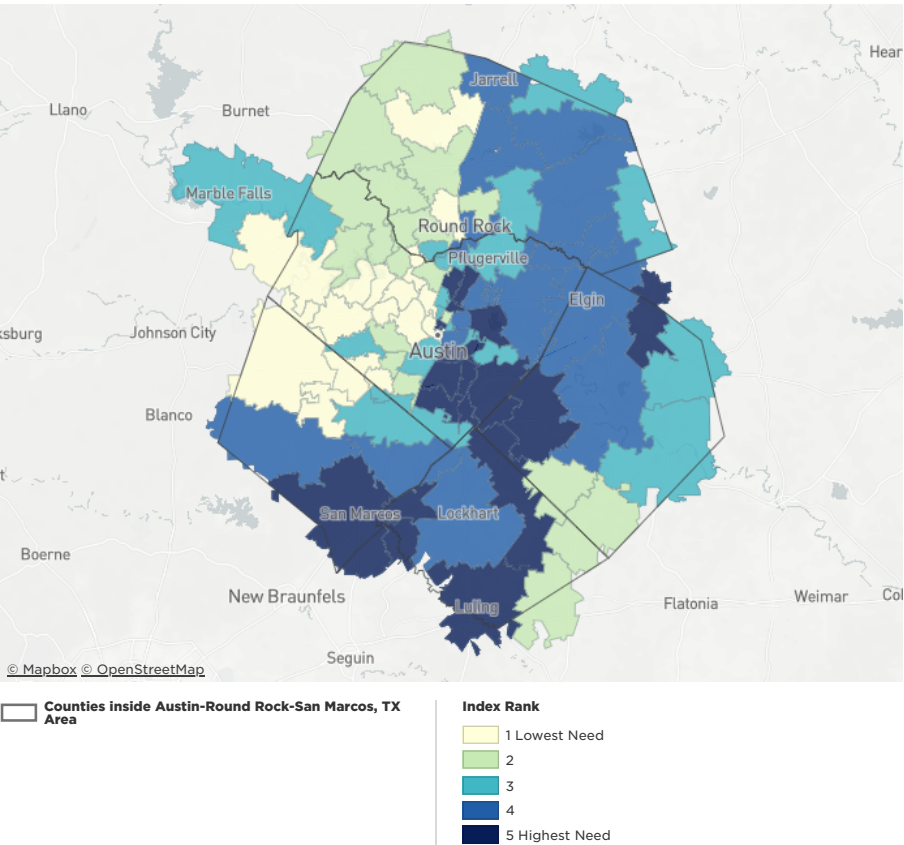
Where are the communities with the greatest health needs?

One way we identify the communities with the greatest health needs in Central Texas is by using the Health Equity Index.⁷ The Index summarizes seven indicators that are strongly correlated to the community health of a geographic area, allowing us to create a map that shows the comparative health of zip codes in Central Texas.

The areas of highest need in Central Texas are shown in the darkest blue on the map that follows.

The Health Equity Index score for each Central Texas zip code was ranked and then grouped by quintile, from one (low need) to five (high need).

Central Texas Health Equity Zones (2024)



When considering the highest need zones, we recognize that this is where health and social systems are failing. Our long-term goal is to successfully address the underlying systems and conditions—the root causes of health disparities—so [income](#), [race/ethnicity](#), [education level](#), and [zip code](#) will no longer be able to accurately predict one's health.

As we work toward this goal, we see the individuals within these communities as not problems to be fixed but rather as an essential part of the solution. **We are committed to learning from and supporting the residents facing the greatest health disparities** and continuing to work with grantees and other partners to advance our mission.

What are the components of the Health Equity Index?

No single score can fully capture the complexity of a community. Still, this data offers an insightful view into where systems and conditions are falling short of meeting the needs of residents.

The indicators included in the Health Equity Index were selected based on the combined statistical strength of their correlation with these health outcomes: preventable hospitalization, premature death rate, adults with medical conditions limiting lifestyle (disability), and self-reported poor general health.

The table below shows these health outcomes for our five Central Texas counties.

Community Health Outcomes

By County

Preventable Hospital Stays

Number of stays per 100,000 Medicare enrollees that may have been prevented by outpatient treatment (2022)

Premature Death

Years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population (2019-2021)

Adults with Medical Condition Limiting Lifestyle

Percent of adults 18-64 with a disability (2018-2022)

Self-report Poor General Health

Percent of adults reporting fair or poor health (2021)

Caldwell	Bastrop	Hays	Travis	Williamson
3,158	2,895	2,327	2,306	2,173
8,900	8,400	5,500	5,400	4,800
12.9%	9.8%	10.1%	7.9%	8.6%
22.90%	19.20%	15.90%	13.60%	13.30%
Values greater than the Central Texas area average are highlighted				

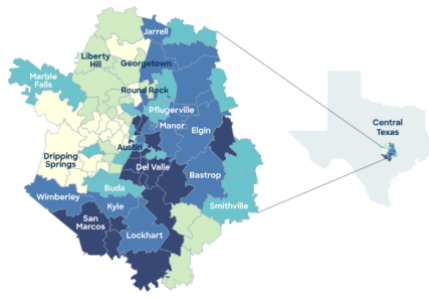
We know that community health is influenced more by the [Non-Medical Drivers of Health](#)¹ than by a person’s genes or the healthcare services one receives. The Health Equity Index reflects this reality—in the following list, social and economic indicators such as median income and unemployment rate are included alongside measures that reflect historical marginalization, such as race/ethnicity and immigration status.

The full list of seven indicators included in the index calculation:

- Median Household Income
- Families Below Poverty
- Percent of Civilian Labor Force Unemployed
- Population 25+ with a High School Degree or Higher
- Population 5+ that Speaks Only English at Home
- Adults with Medicaid Health Insurance
- Percent Population that is Non-White

In the full report, we explore [how social factors impact health in Central Texas](#)¹ and highlight the [stories and experiences of community members](#)¹ who live and work in the communities with the greatest health needs.

¹Conduent Healthy Communities Institute [Health Equity Index](#)¹ data sources have been adapted to reflect American Community Survey data.



Central Texas Health Equity Overview

A visual representation on where the communities with the greatest health needs are located.

Read More



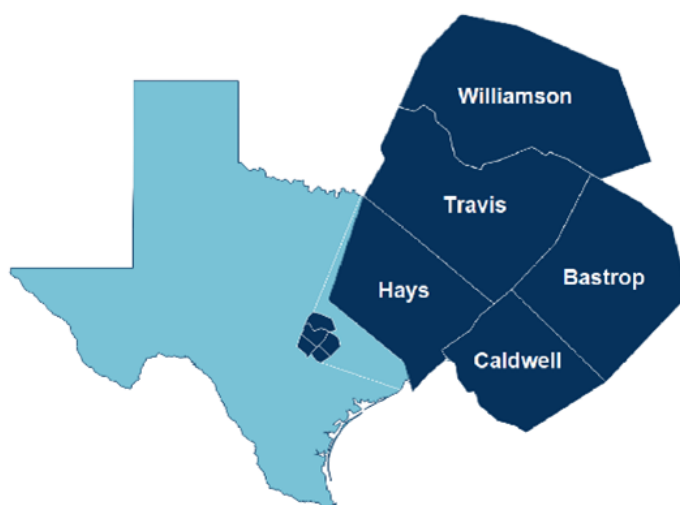
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CHNA Process & Methodology

The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), a government-required report, is conducted on behalf of both St. David's Foundation and St. David's HealthCare to help us more deeply understand our region's health needs—particularly those faced by historically underserved community members. We go beyond the baseline requirements by not only engaging stakeholders who serve and represent communities with the greatest health needs, but by speaking directly to residents from those communities to learn from their experiences. We utilize both data and community voices to inform the report, which staff use to guide our efforts to advance health equity through investment and action.

Why is SDF focused on Central Texas?

The Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area, also known as Central Texas, is where the vast majority of patients served by the St. David's HealthCare facilities reside. Based on this information, the following counties are included in the CHNA: Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson.



This report focuses on the entire region of Central Texas, with specific inter-county disparities named, because the data and community stories showed us that county lines are blurring. Challenges in accessing healthcare, attaining economic stability, and building community power were echoed across the region by [the diverse communities we spoke with](#)[↗], and are apparent in the quantitative health indicators we analyzed.

Keep reading to learn more about the reporting process, including how we collected perspectives from community members, [prioritized needs](#)[↗], and built the report for both future SDF strategies and stakeholders throughout our community interested in utilizing the report.



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Gathering Perspectives

This CHNA was completed in partnership with our evaluation partner, [Texas Health Institute](#)[↗] (THI), and five non-profit research partners, representing each Central Texas county:

- [Bastrop County Cares](#)[↗] (Bastrop County)
- [Black Parents & Families Collective](#)[↗] (Williamson County)
- [Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas](#)[↗] (Hays County)
- [Community Health Centers of South Central Texas](#)[↗] (Caldwell County)
- [Foundation Communities](#)[↗] (Travis County)

The team started the CHNA process in August 2024 with innovative engagement opportunities, including focus groups, pláticas, story circles, a youth-focused photovoice project, and a community art project. These events were co-designed and led by each non-profit based on their knowledge of what would work best for the communities they serve. We prioritized the voices from communities with the greatest health needs and those that have historically been missing in decision-making, including low-income families, People of Color, seniors, youth, the uninsured, and Spanish-speaking populations. In total, **135 community members** shared their stories with us about the challenges and obstacles they face every day.

To pair these findings with a regional and systems-level perspective, THI conducted **15 in-depth interviews** with community leaders. This included government officials, non-profit senior staff, public health experts, and leaders who represent specific demographic populations. Additionally, SDF formed a **Community Advisory Committee**, made up of 11 community leaders representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives, to ensure that we appropriately acknowledged the role of inequitable systems and conditions on community members' experiences throughout both the process design and sensemaking phases.

We encourage you to learn more about how [Community Voices](#)[↗] were gathered for the CHNA and read the standalone qualitative report. More information on our community partners can be found [here](#)[↗]. We are deeply grateful for their participation and leadership.



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Prioritizing Needs

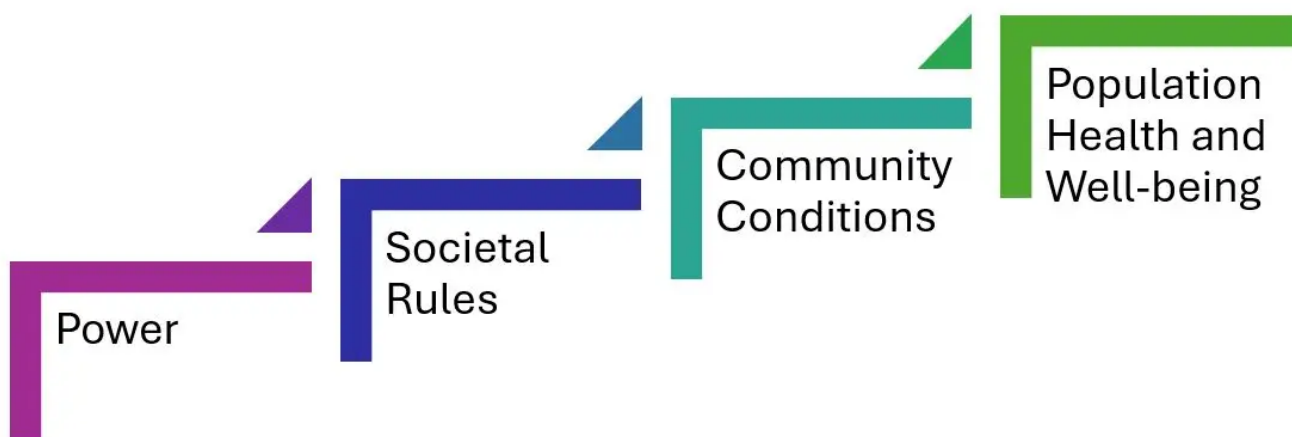
To understand the greatest health needs in Central Texas, we leveraged qualitative data, in the form of the stories and themes from [the Community Voices Project](#)[☞], and quantitative data, specifically population-level health and social well-being indicators available at the county and sub-county level.

We used what we heard from the community to guide our work. The quantitative analysis began with the health needs identified by the community. We conducted an extensive review of available population-level indicators related to these topics and themes, analyzing each for concerning trends and inequities.

To supplement this and ensure that we did not miss any significant areas of need, we conducted additional analysis to identify any health and social indicators that exhibited stark differences by geography, race/ethnicity, or both. In total, over 130 indicators were reviewed, and 53 are included in this report.

The results of the combined analysis reveal a consistent pattern of inequity and disadvantages for communities with lower incomes, communities of color, and those in more rural areas. Informed by the Community Voices Project, we know that these same communities often lack representation and believe that the lack of power, community, and belonging is a significant driving force behind barriers to achieving equitable health and well-being outcomes.

This direct connection between representation and population health aligns with and is affirmed by existing public health frameworks, including the Model of Health developed by the [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#)[☞] (UWPHI), which is utilized by the [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#).[☞] The UWPHI model reiterates that the driving factor underlying health inequities is **power**.



The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health

Those in positions of power historically and continuously shape the laws, policies, institutional practices, and budget allocations that become our **societal rules**.

Societal rules create the **community conditions** we live in every day, both directly through policies and laws that benefit some and not others, but more commonly indirectly through unwritten rules and beliefs often based on societally constructed differences such as race, gender, and nativity.

In turn, community conditions, many of which we lift up as priorities in this report, such as clinical care, housing, and income, have a widespread effect on **population health and well-being**.

We invite you to learn alongside us and explore this [Model of Health](#).[☞] dig into the data on health outcomes and community conditions, and reflect on [evidence-based strategies](#)[☞] to support change for healthier communities.



Public Health Framework

The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health

Short YouTube Video Explanation



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Top Health Needs in Central Texas

We have organized the priorities raised by communities into three overarching themes, recognizing that social issues are complex and often interconnected. **Across all areas of need, one message was clear: Community voices must be included in decision-making.** When communities lack representation and power, the systems, programs, and institutions they engage with are often not designed with them in mind. Despite the barriers that make building community more challenging, we consistently heard a desire from residents to come together and collectively address these deep-rooted social issues.



Healthcare in Reach

Central Texans are not seeking healthcare due to economic pressures and past experiences navigating a broken system.

- People cannot find healthcare that is close by, affordable, and efficient with their time
- Eligibility processes for healthcare feel specifically designed to keep people out
- Patients feel disrespected, ignored, and unsafe when they seek healthcare

[Jump to Healthcare in Reach](#)



Economic Stability

Financial stress hinders families' ability to focus on anything beyond basic needs, including health.

- Many families struggle to make ends meet but earn too much to qualify for supports
- Parents face overwhelming costs, including childcare, and often do not have time to take care of their own mental and physical health needs
- Rising cost of housing is a major cause of stress for families and individuals

[Jump to Economic Stability](#)



Community & Belonging

Community members feel that Central Texas is not welcoming and inclusive due to racism, discrimination, and community displacement.

- Community members feel the impacts of racism and discrimination every day, and it is leading to poorer physical and mental health
- As Central Texas changes, older adults and People of Color are feeling a loss of family and support systems, and the social isolation is impacting our community's well-being
- People are eager to work together to drive their own solutions if trusted with the resources

[Jump to Community & Belonging](#)

“Se necesita un pueblo, estamos en una comunidad donde no existen ciertos recursos, pero necesitamos unirnos y organizarnos, **nosotros como padres podemos hacer muchas cosas.**”

“It takes a village! We’re in a community where certain resources do not exist, but we need to get together and organize. **Us parents can get a lot of stuff done.**”

– Plática Participant, Caldwell County 2024



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Healthcare in Reach

"No he ido al doctor y no quiero ir porque ya sé lo que me van a decir. No he ido porque si voy pierdo el trabajo porque eso significa citas, citas y citas"

"I haven't gone to the doctor, and I don't want to go because I already know what they're going to tell me. I haven't gone because if I go, I lose my job because it means appointments, appointments and appointments."

- Plática Participant, Bastrop County 2024

Central Texans are not seeking healthcare due to economic pressures and past experiences navigating a broken system.

What we consistently heard from communities is how healthcare is designed and delivered to be patient-centered, flexible, and culturally respectful is as important as the availability of those services. Otherwise, community members may still avoid healthcare. The three overarching needs related to healthcare access include:

- People cannot find **healthcare that is close by, affordable, and efficient** with their time
- Eligibility processes for the **healthcare and benefits system** feel specifically designed to keep people out
- Patients want **culturally responsive care** because they too often feel disrespected, ignored, and unsafe when they seek healthcare

Healthcare that is Close by, Affordable, and Efficient

"It's kind of scary not having specialty care here. We may have cardiology, pulmonology care, but the appointments get booked six months to a year out because everybody here is trying to go there."

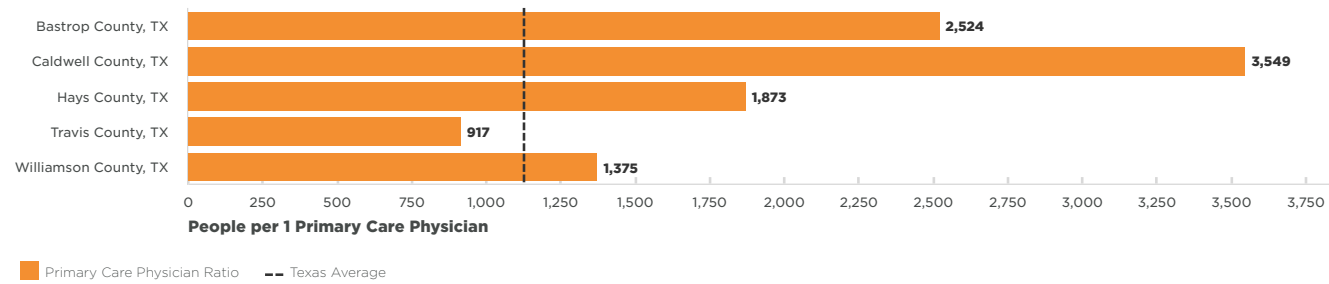
- Community Conversation Participant, Caldwell County 2024

Receiving high-quality medical care helps us stay healthy and live longer. It also reduces the number of days of lost productivity, learning, and earning an income. Whether it's an annual checkup, specialist appointment, or emergency room visit, having ample providers and clinics available to deliver this care is crucial to our community's health.

Like many regions in Texas, Central Texas is considered both a [primary care provider shortage area](#)¹ and a [mental health provider shortage area](#)². With the rapid growth of Central Texas, the need to educate and train new providers will only grow.

Primary Care Providers per Population

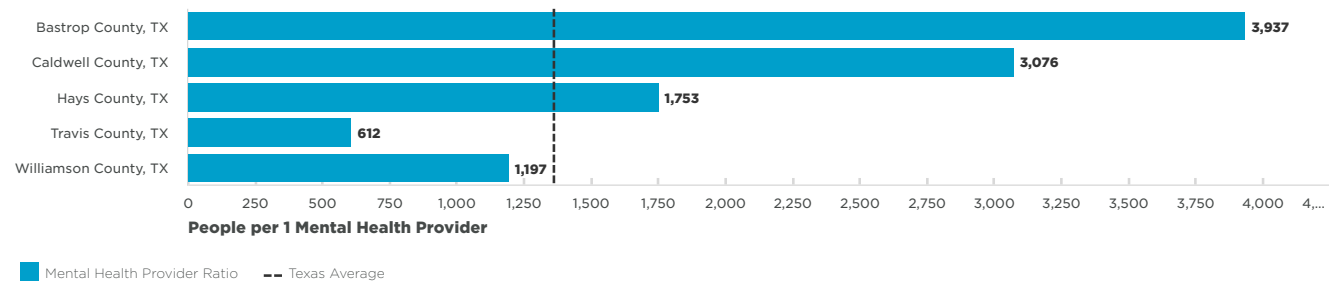
Primary Care Physician Ratio



Sources: NPPES NPI 2024

Mental Health Providers per Population

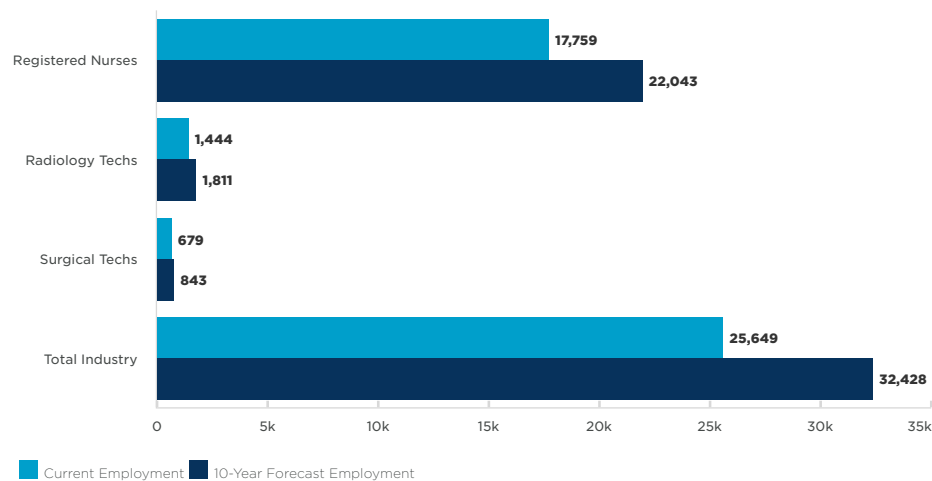
Mental Health Provider Ratio



Sources: NPPES NPI 2024

A 2024 healthcare labor market report conducted by [Workforce Solutions for the Capital Area](#)[↗] and Central Texas Healthcare Partnership identified particularly **severe shortage areas for positions in Nursing, Radiology Technicians, and Surgical Technicians**. These positions have an average annual salary ranging from \$61,000 (Surgical Techs) to \$86,900 (Registered Nurses), making all three pathways to economic stability.

High Demand Healthcare Careers Hiring Outlook



Source: JobsEQ, 2024 Q2, Austin metro; Lightcast via Workforce Solutions for the Capital Area Healthcare Austin Labor Market Insights + Community Insights (April 2025)

Residents in more rural areas were particularly concerned with emergency response times. For instance, [local reporting](#)[↗] indicates that Bastrop County residents are often experiencing wait times of 30-60 minutes for Emergency Services, significantly exceeding the median time of eight minutes across the Central Texas Region (Source: [TX DSHS 2021](#)[↗]).

Navigating Healthcare and Health Insurance

"We need to put the human back in human services...whether it's mental health, or physical health, or medical resources, or benefits...people are feeling dehumanized. It's also about computer literacy and having a screen between you and a person that is diving into your private business...it's really impacting people."

- Community Partner, Travis County 2024



282,064

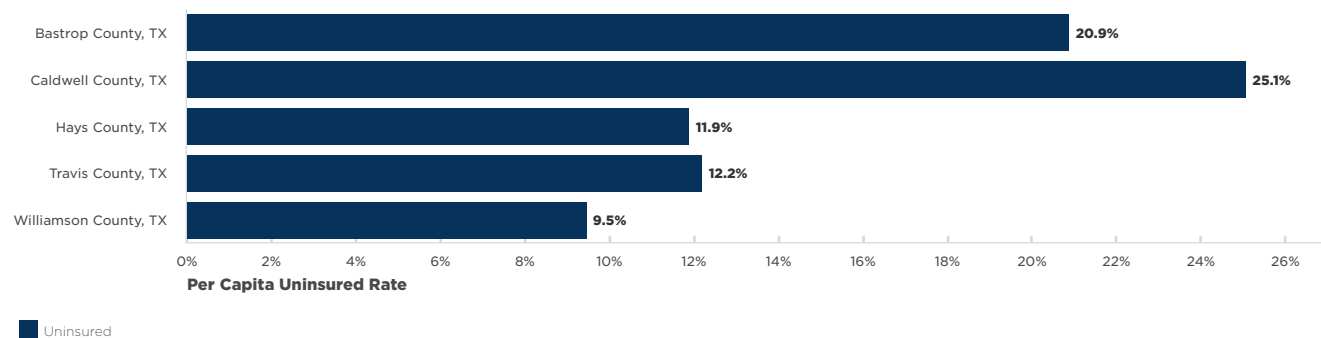
People without Health Insurance

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Within our five counties, over 280,000 people do not have health insurance (an overall rate of 12%). Dramatic differences within our region exist: The rate of uninsured is 2.5 times higher in Caldwell (25% of residents are uninsured) than in Williamson (10%).

Central Texas Uninsured Rates by County



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

For the uninsured, ACA plans and other safety net benefits that should be available are also put out of reach due to administrative hurdles, lack of trust, and limited awareness. Data from [Texas 2036](#) estimates that 56% of uninsured Texans, nearly 2.7 million, are eligible for either ACA subsidies (designed to make Marketplace plans more affordable for those whose employers do not provide health insurance), Medicaid, or CHIP.

May 2023 marked the end of the Public Health Emergency and the beginning of the [Medicaid disenrollment crisis](#), which, between May 2023 and January 2025, resulted in [1.8 million Texans losing Medicaid](#).

[Most enrollees](#) lost coverage due to procedural issues rather than actual ineligibility (68% of those disenrolled). Of those disenrolled, [nearly half became uninsured](#), and two-thirds reported delaying care due to cost and not having any preventive checkups in the past year.



33% Fewer Texans have Medicaid After 2023 Disenrollment

Mar 2023 - Jan 2025

Source: KFF - Medicaid Enrollment and Unwinding Tracker

Complicated eligibility requirements, confusing enrollment processes, and accessibility limitations make community members feel like support systems are designed to make it more difficult to access them. The emotional and time-consuming toll of navigating complex systems deters people from accessing the support they need for themselves and their family regarding health, education, employment, and housing.

Culturally Responsive Care

“I hear a lot of people saying that they can’t find healthcare providers that look like them. And I think there are well-documented issues of healthcare biases impacting the healthcare of Black and Brown people, Black and Brown women. And so when you look for a doctor or a therapist that looks like you, it’s really difficult to find. And when you find one, they’re all booked up. You can’t get an appointment because everybody’s found them. So that whole representation, again, just being able to find healthcare providers that look like you so you feel safe and you feel that you’re being heard”

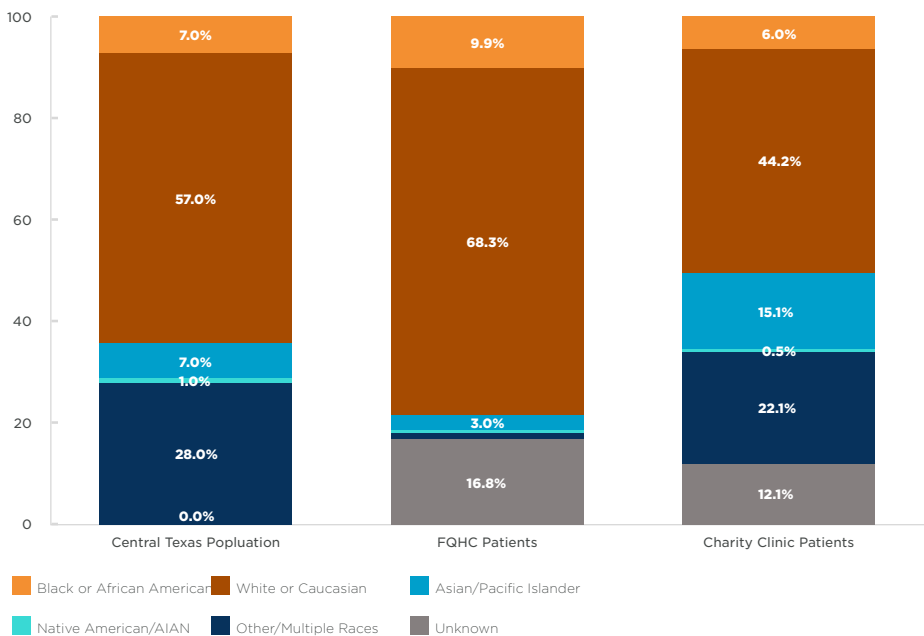
- Story Circle Participant, Williamson County 2024

Community members shared that in addition to feeling that the healthcare system is stressful and burdensome, the past bad experiences that stemmed from a lack of safety and cultural understanding are reasons they are prevented from seeking necessary physical or mental health support. This qualitative theme is supported by [studies](#) that show patients have better health outcomes when treated by providers who share their racial or cultural background. It increases trust, communication, and adherence to treatment.

We know from the [2024 Primary Care Capacity Assessment](#) that charity clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers see higher rates of patients who identify as People of Color or whose primary language is not English, when compared to the general population in Central Texas. The clinic leadership teams are trying to meet the demand for culturally responsive and accessible services, but face staffing challenges.

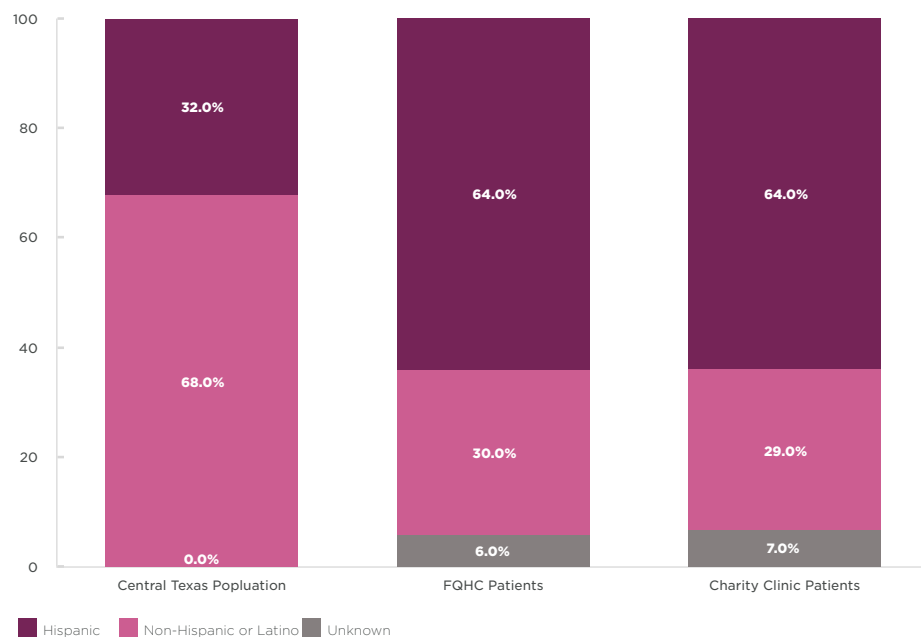
Race and Ethnicity of Patients Served at Safety Net Clinics

Distribution of Race by Clinic Type (2022)



Source: Decision Information Resources, Inc. Primary Care Capacity Assessment in Central Texas

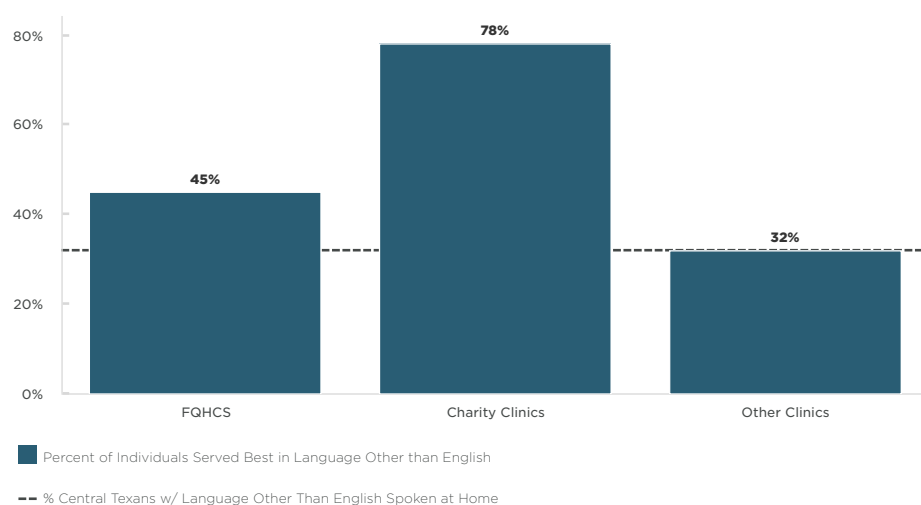
Distribution of Ethnicity by Clinic Type (2022)



Source: Decision Information Resources, Inc. Primary Care Capacity Assessment in Central Texas

Patients with Primary Language Other Than English

Patients Best Served in a Language Other Than English



Sources: Decision Information Resources Inc. Primary Care Capacity Assessment for Central Texas (2023); US Census Bureau 5-Year ACS (Language Spoken at Home)

These findings challenge the idea that “if you build it, they will come.” Simply increasing the availability of services is not enough. To ensure that people seek and receive the care they need, the patient experience must be improved. By addressing both access and experience, the healthcare system can become more equitable and responsive to the needs of Central Texans.



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Economic Stability

"If you're already struggling with your basic needs, there's no way you can afford childcare. If you're already struggling for basic needs like food, then healthcare is another big expense you cannot afford. We're not thriving, we're just surviving."

- Story Circle Participant, Travis County 2024

Financial stress hinders families' ability to focus on anything beyond basic needs, including health.

We know that economic stability is closely linked to several health and well-being challenges, such as access to healthcare. Additionally, community members identified these major barriers to their economic stability as central factors affecting the well-being of Central Texans:

- **Too many are struggling to make ends meet** but earn too much to qualify for safety net programs
- **Parents face overwhelming costs**, including childcare, and often do not have time to take care of their own mental and physical health needs
- **Rising cost of housing** is a major cause of stress for families and individuals

"Living paycheck to paycheck. They don't have the time to be on the phone with the bank for overcharge fees or mishandling of fees. They don't have the time to call and stay on hold for an appointment. **They just don't have the time, and they don't have the money to be able to go to the front of the line.**"

- Key Informant, Williamson County 2024

Too Many are Struggling to Make Ends Meet

"Your monthly check is increased by, I guess, \$90. And sometimes that will put you over for Medicaid, food stamps [eligibility]. **You lose those services - I've known people losing those services for being over five or ten dollars...**"

- Community Conversation Participant, Hays County 2024

Many people in Central Texas are one unexpected expense away from a financial crisis, and their economic precarity has profound implications for their health and well-being. This includes many people who **are employed but are not earning enough to afford basic needs, including food, childcare, housing, health care, and transportation costs (ALICE or Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)**.

The Foundation believes it is essential to focus on families struggling financially (ALICE), a group that can be overlooked when only focused on traditional poverty measures such as the federal poverty level (FPL). These traditional poverty measures are important but insufficient because they fail to account for the high cost of living in our region and the large number of households that struggle to afford basic necessities despite earning above the FPL.

ALICE Metrics Defined

ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed—households with income above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but below the basic cost of living.

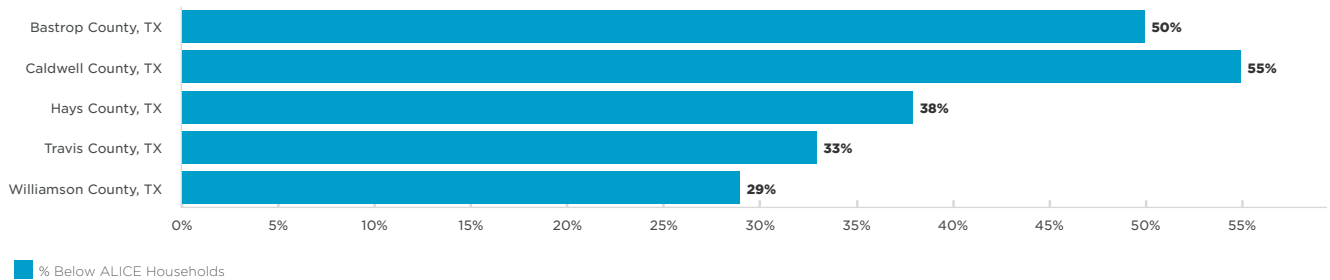
Below ALICE Threshold: Includes both poverty-level and ALICE households—all households unable to afford the basics.

You can read more about the ALICE methodology [here](#).

346,734 **Families live below the ALICE Threshold** Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

Sources: Sources: United for ALICE 2025 Report

Percent of Families Struggling to Make Ends Meet

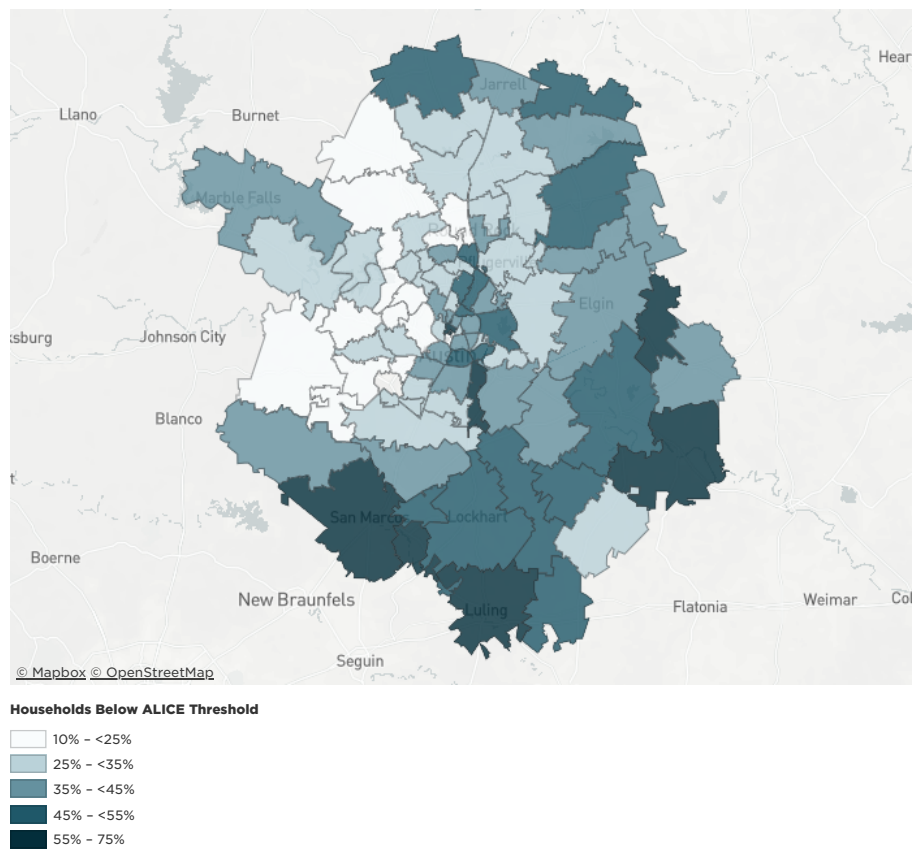


Source: United for ALICE 2025 Report

According to ALICE, In Travis County, a single parent with one child needs to make over \$50,000 a year to make ends meet yet the federal poverty level for a household of two people is just \$21,150 and the income level for which a family this size is eligible for supports such as WIC or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is \$10,000-\$18,000 less than the ALICE threshold, or what it would cost to cover housing, food, childcare, transportation, and technology for a family of two in Central Texas.

Below ALICE Population by Zip Code

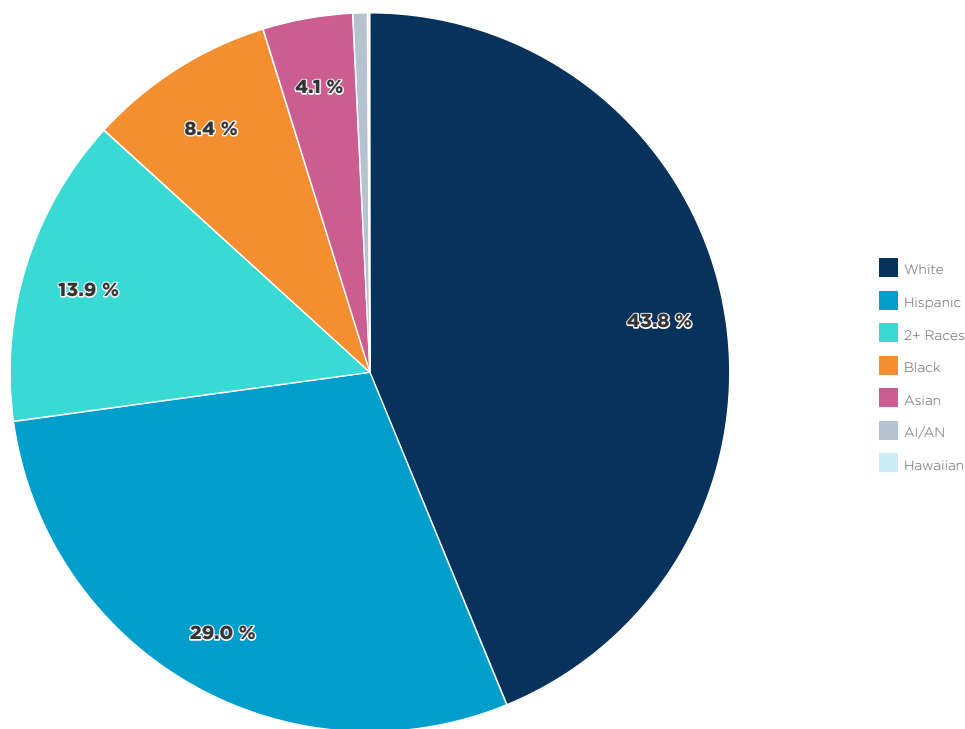
Percentage of Households in each Zip Code Living Below ALICE Threshold



Sources: United for ALICE 2024 State Report

ALICE Population by Race/Ethnicity

Families Below ALICE Threshold in Central Texas by Race/Ethnicity



Austin-Round Rock, TX Area

Sources: United for ALICE 2024 State Report

Parents Face Overwhelming Costs

“As a single mom, I’ve noticed even rent, **for a single parent, there’s no possible way that you can live.** When I first got here, it was fine. I could manage by myself. But the longer that I stay here, I’ve noticed that there’s almost no way a single parent can survive by herself. And I just have one child at home. I now have my granddaughter here, but I just have one child. I can’t go and apply for food stamps [or Medicaid] because I make ‘too much’ money.

- Story Circle Participant, Williamson County 2024

According to data from the U.S. Department of Labor’s National Database of Childcare Prices, the median annual cost for preschool in Travis County, for a center-based facility, is over \$12,000 a year, making it the most expensive in Texas. **This figure is comparable to the cost of in-state tuition at The University of Texas at Austin**, which is approximately \$13,500 per year.

For families earning the median income in Central Texas, childcare expenses for just one child can consume up to 17% of their annual income, significantly exceeding the federal recommendation that no more than 7% of a household’s income should be spent on childcare. This disparity highlights a systemic issue where childcare costs are outpacing wage growth, leaving many parents with difficult choices between maintaining employment and ensuring their children’s well-being.

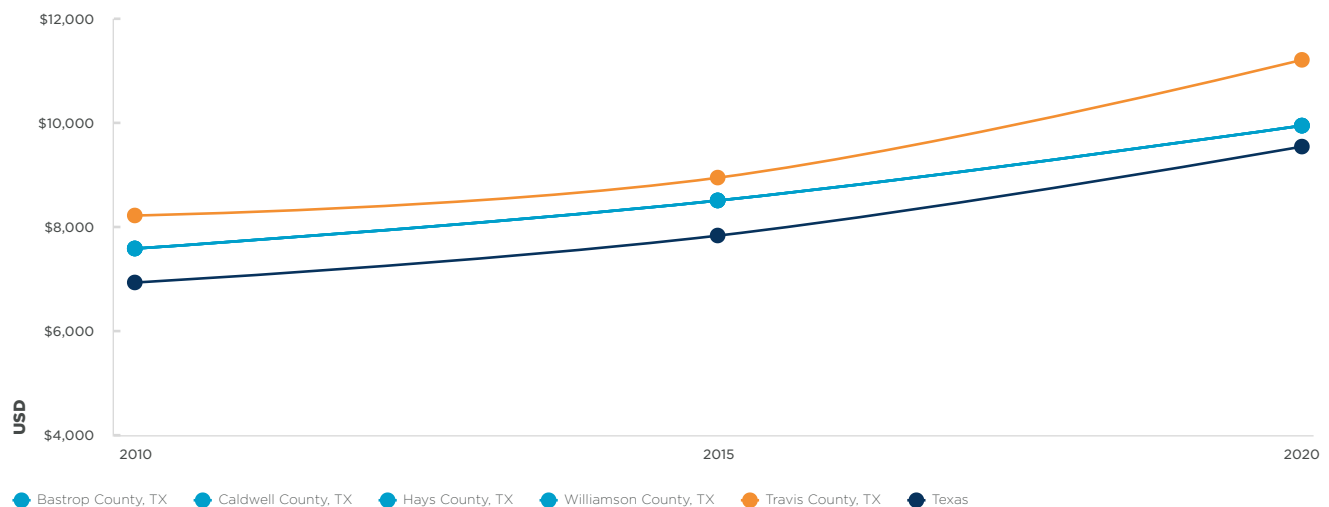
The situation is exacerbated by a shortage of childcare providers. Texas Health and Human Services data indicate that while there are 232,697 children under the age of 13 in Travis County, licensed childcare centers can accommodate only 56,036, creating a significant gap in availability. This scarcity leads to long waitlists, often forcing parents to resort to informal care arrangements or leave the workforce entirely.

Infant Childcare Costs

\$11,908
median yearly cost of
Infant Center Childcare Price
Travis County, TX

Sources: WB NDCP 2022

Infant Center Childcare Prices by County



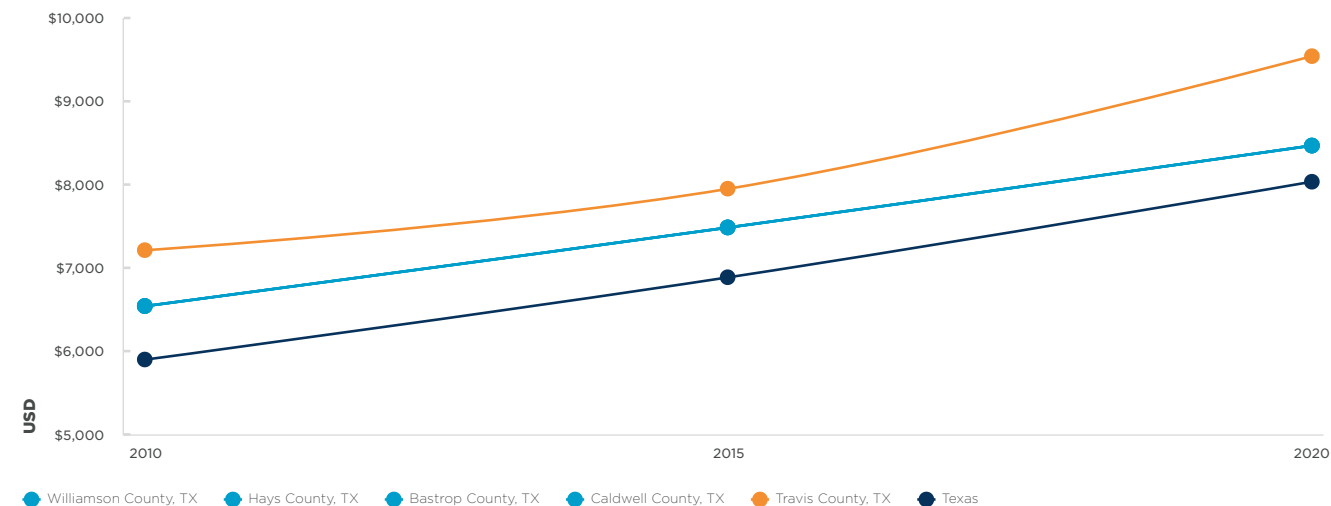
Sources: WB NDCP

Preschool Childcare Costs

\$10,868
median yearly cost of
Preschool Center Childcare Price
Travis County, TX

Sources: WB NDCP 2022

Preschool Center-based Childcare Cost per Child



Sources: WB NDCP

Rising Costs of Housing

“Están aumentando nuestros impuestos cada año. Cuando llegamos eran \$500, luego \$1,000, \$1,500 y ahora son \$3,000.”

“They are increasing our taxes every year. When we arrived it was \$500, then \$1,000, \$1,500, and right now it's \$3,000.”

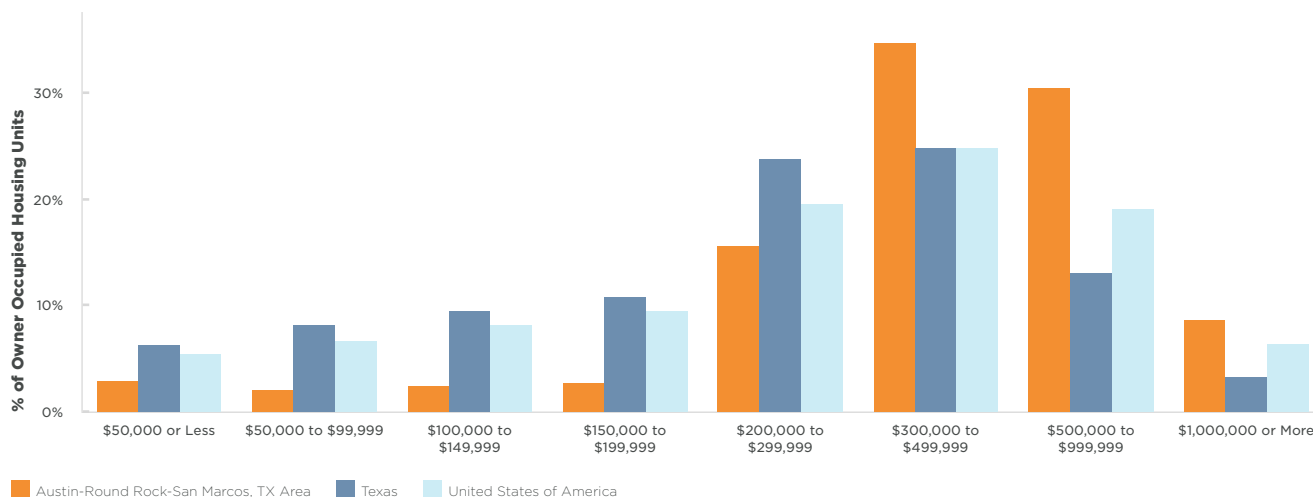
- Plática Participant, Bastrop County 2024

Back in 2010, Austin was named one of the [most affordable cities](#) in the country, but just over a decade later, Austin has fallen off that list. In fact, when considering housing alone, the Austin-Round Rock MSA has more recently been ranked among [the least affordable housing markets](#), outside of California.

In [a 2021 report](#) on Housing Affordability commissioned by St. David's Foundation, the Austin Community Foundation, JPMorgan Chase & Co., and NI, identified a total of 42,136 subsidized affordable housing units in Central Texas. The report estimates that **60,000 additional affordable housing units are needed** for families earning less than 80% of the Median Family Income.

The chart below shows that median home prices vary greatly between the Central Texas area and the larger Texas and U.S. regions. Most homes in Austin-Round Rock are priced higher compared to state and national averages, with only about 10% of homes at or below \$200,000 compared to 35% for the state of Texas.

Distribution of Median Home Price



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Exclusively showing owner occupied Housing units; does not include renter occupied units

Housing Cost Burden

Whether renting or owning a home, a family that spends a large portion of their income on housing doesn't have room left in their budget for the other things they need to survive, let alone thrive. [When the burden of housing limits the personal choices we can make, our health suffers.](#)

When the percentage of household income spent on housing is equal to or greater than 30%, families are considered Cost Burdened, and when that proportion goes up to 50% or greater, they are considered Severely Cost Burdened.

In Central Texas, renters are more than twice as likely to be Cost Burdened and almost three times as likely to be Severely Cost Burdened, when compared to homeowners.

The data also shows a clear disparity in severe housing cost burden rates among different racial and ethnic groups. Black or African American renters experience a much higher rate of cost burden when owning or renting a home in Central Texas when compared to almost all other racial groups.

Housing Cost Burden by Owner vs. Renter

Housing Cost Burden in Central Texas



23%

Housing Cost Burdened Owners

2019-2023



47%

Housing Cost Burdened Renters

2019-2023



9%

Severely Housing Cost Burdened Owners

2019-2023



22%

Severely Housing Cost Burdened Renters

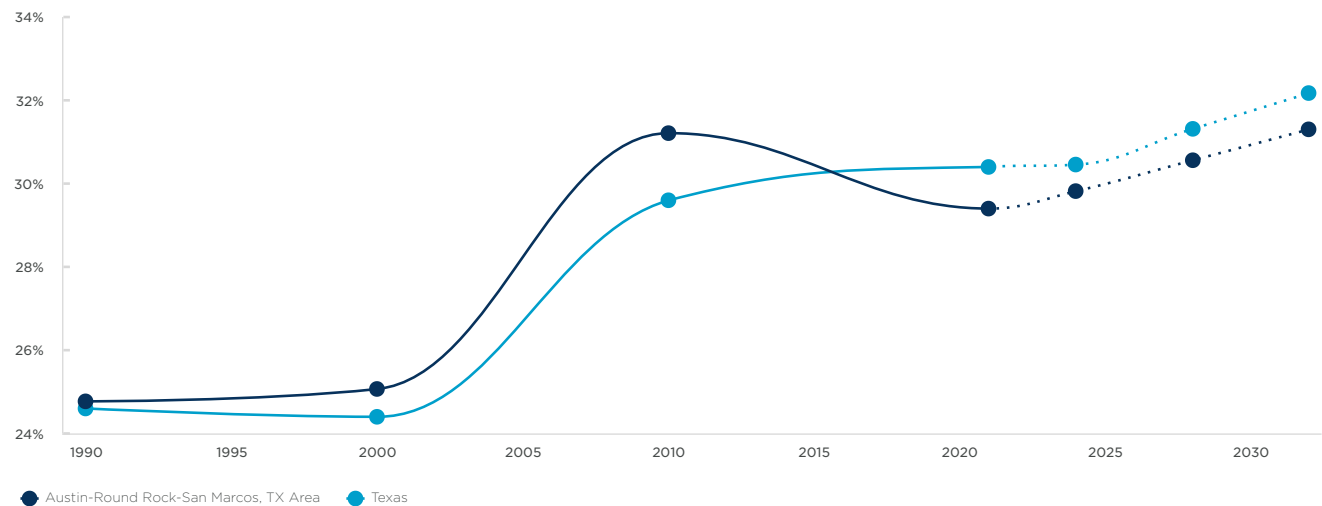
2019-2023

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Cost Burdened is defined as monthly housing expenses above 30% of income; Severe Cost Burdened is defined as monthly housing expenses at or above 50% of income

Over Time Increase in Housing Cost Burden

Median Housing Costs as a Percentage of Income

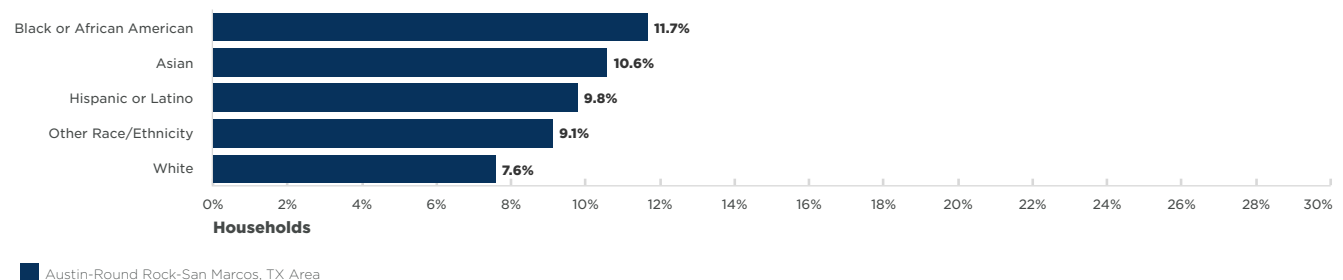


Sources: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

The Census Bureau defines selected monthly owner costs as "the sum of payment for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances, utilities, fuels, mobile home costs, and condominium fees."

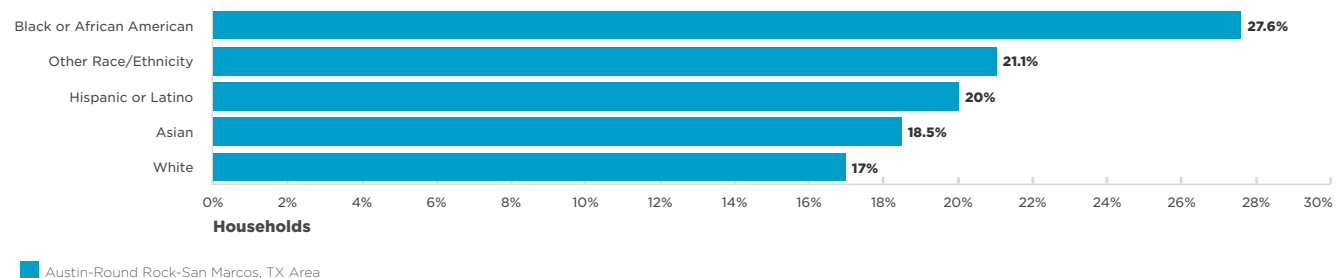
Severe Housing Cost Burden by Race/Ethnicity

Owners : Severely Cost Burdened by Race/Ethnicity



Sources: HUD CHAS 2017-2021

Renters : Severely Cost Burdened by Race/Ethnicity



Sources: HUD CHAS 2017-2021

Note: All racial groups listed are non-Hispanic unless stated otherwise. Data shows the proportion of renter housing units that are severely cost burdened within each racial/ethnic group. For example, the value shown for the Asian racial group reflects the proportion of total Asian renter housing units that are severely cost burdened.



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Community & Belonging

"Do they understand my culture? Are they even interested in my culture? We do things differently. We react differently to different situations. **Do you truly understand me?** When you don't feel that connection, it makes it harder to understand yourself. You start to question who you are."

- Story Circle Participant, Williamson County 2024

Community members feel that Central Texas is not always welcoming and inclusive. However, we heard that folks are motivated to mobilize for change.

When communities feel disconnected and disengaged, it can create obstacles to the civic participation that is essential for driving change and enhancing representation among decision-makers, something community members care deeply about. By nurturing informal networks of support and promoting civic engagement, we can help alleviate stress related to the three key findings about community and a sense of belonging:

- **Community members feel the impacts of racism and discrimination** every day, and it is leading to poorer physical and mental health
- As Central Texas changes, older adults and People of Color are feeling a loss of family and support systems, and the **social isolation is impacting our community's well-being**
- **People are eager to work together** to drive their own solutions if trusted with the resource

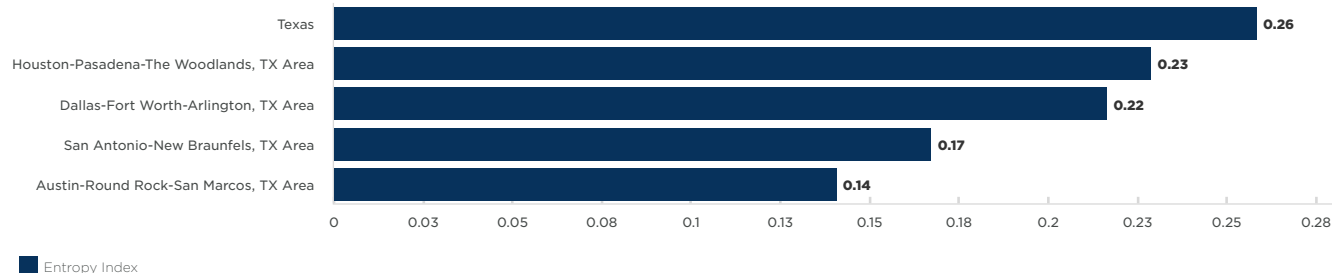
Community Members Feel the Impacts of Racism and Discrimination

"Psychological and emotional safety is actually one that we need to be talking about more specifically with mothers and families that I serve in a city that has such a long history of systemic racism and the displacement that has now come from the gentrification. **There is no physical proximity to create village.**"

- Key Informant, Travis County 2024

Austin is more racially segregated than any other large city in Texas. Looking at the Entropy Index, which is a measure of racial segregation, we see that the Austin area is more segregated than all big cities in Texas, the state of Texas, and worse than the nation as a whole.

Entropy Index (Measure of Segregation)



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Values range from 0 to 1, where values near 0 are when the 7 race/ethnicity categories are very unevenly distributed in the Census Tracts within the larger containing geography. Values near 1 are when the distribution of the 7 race/ethnicity categories within the Census Tracts matches the overall geography distribution.

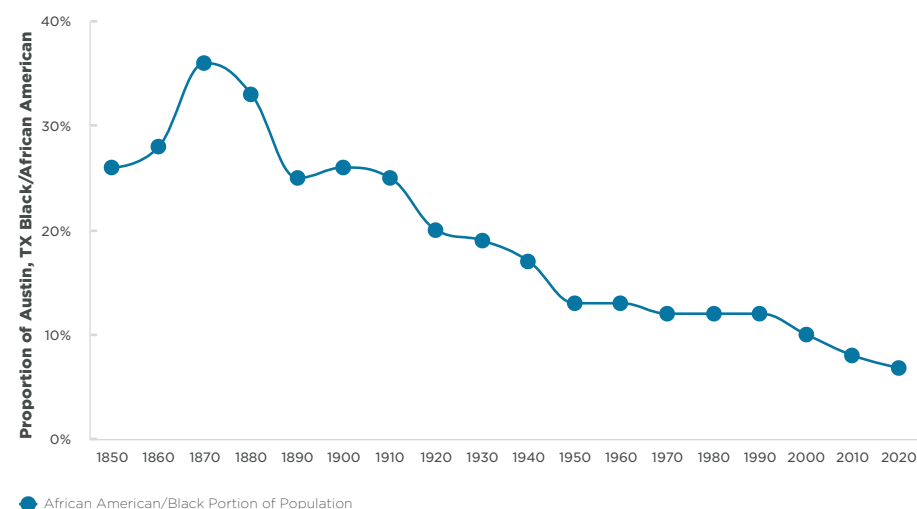
At the Foundation, [we believe](#) that structural racism and discrimination can unfairly constrain the chances and choices of too many people to be healthy, and through the CHNA conversations, we heard that our neighbors feel the impact of racism and discrimination on their mental health and everyday well-being.

Austin has a legacy of inequitable access to homebuying and, therefore, [community cohesion](#) and [wealth](#) building.

In the early 20th century, Austin implemented the [1928 Master Plan](#) that forcefully displaced African American and Mexican American populations from their neighborhoods throughout the city, many of which were freedman communities established during Reconstruction, into specific districts in East Austin. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the Federal Housing Administration and banks employed redlining practices that further entrenched these divisions, denying home loans and investments to minority communities. The construction of Interstate-35 in the 1950s-60s only further reinforced the racial segregation of the city while urban renewal efforts meant homes in East Austin were demolished, without much relocation support, contributing to housing instability and loss of generational wealth.

The effects of redlining are still evident today, and present-day acts of discrimination and racism can make Central Texas feel less welcoming. The portion of Black or African American Austinites continues to decline. And while East Austin remained underinvested for decades, recent rapid investment and redevelopment have driven gentrification and significant displacement of neighbors who have called Austin home for generations.

Black Population in Austin Since 1850



Source: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

Social Isolation is Impacting our Community's Well-being

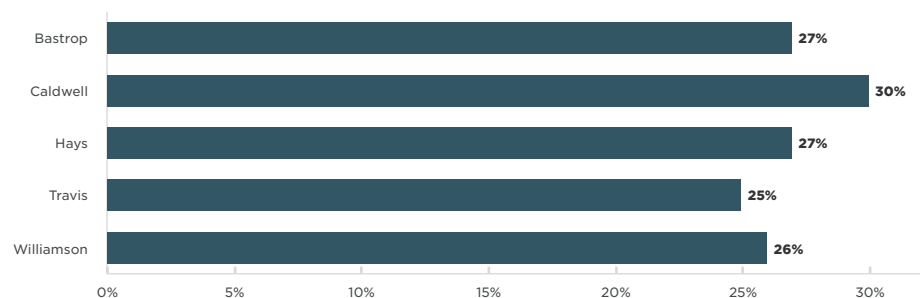
“**Not having support or a support system** is the worst thing for somebody who’s struggling. Just mentally, emotionally, physically, financially.”

– Story Circle Participant, Travis County 2024

According to the National Institute on Aging, the health risks of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Higher loneliness and isolation are correlated with [higher rates of depression and early death](#).²⁷ When youth in our community are disengaged and isolated, we may see an increase in violence, substance abuse, and lower educational attainment. When our older adults are isolated, they are at a higher risk of chronic illness and poorer cognitive function.

Data on adults in Central Texas indicate that 25-30% of adults, by county, report not receiving the social or emotional support they need. These values are consistent with the US average, but research shows this type of measure can often be higher for older adults, those living with disabilities, and transgender or gender nonconforming individuals.

Adults Who Lack of Social and Emotional Support (2022)



Percentage of adults reporting that they sometimes, rarely, or never get the social and emotional support they need.
Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System 2022

Connected Thread

The importance of trust, belonging, and safety is essential to participants so they can be seen, heard, and engaged in their community.

Older adults shared feelings of being overlooked by society. Caregivers and seniors alike expressed fatigue at a system that is confusing and does little to support them.

People of Color, particularly Black and African American key informants, expressed that they have lost community ties due to gentrification and subsequent displacement.

People are eager to work together

“Change happens in the micro communities. We have to be **hopeful and continue to support each other** and continue to uplift the voices.”

– Community Partner, Bastrop County 2024

Above everything else, we heard **the need for community voices to be included in decision-making** about the conditions we live in and the institutions we interact with. This includes how resources are distributed, how neighborhood needs are prioritized, and who is trusted with implementing solutions.

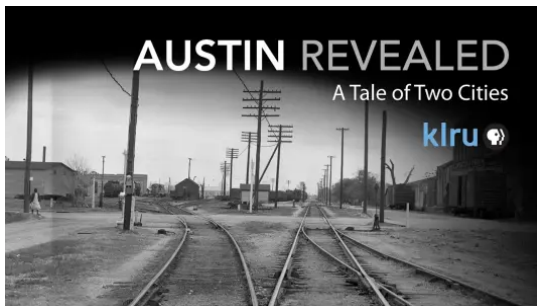
When communities do not see themselves represented in **positions of power**, we consistently hear **feelings of exhaustion** related to isolation and lack of belonging, the difficulty and emotional toll of navigating complex enrollment and social support systems, and the need to constantly advocate for oneself and one’s family just to receive the resources that one is entitled to.

But even facing these systemic barriers, we repeatedly heard a hunger to **come together as a community**, mobilize, and be trusted to have and implement the solutions needed. Residents discussed the assets and strengths of their communities in comparison to the needs. Many of the engagement events ended with residents brainstorming action steps they could take together to tackle these persistent community issues.

“Se necesita un pueblo, estamos en una comunidad donde no existen ciertos recursos, pero necesitamos unirnos y organizarnos, **nosotros como padres podemos hacer muchas cosas.**”

“It takes a village! We’re in a community where certain resources do not exist, but we need to get together and organize. **Us parents can get a lot of stuff done.**”

– Plática Participant, Caldwell County 2024



Learn More

KLRU and The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross created a series called Austin Revealed, which captures the city’s history through first-person accounts of local African Americans. More videos can be seen on the Austin Revealed YouTube page.

Watch the Series



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Health Outcomes & Disparities

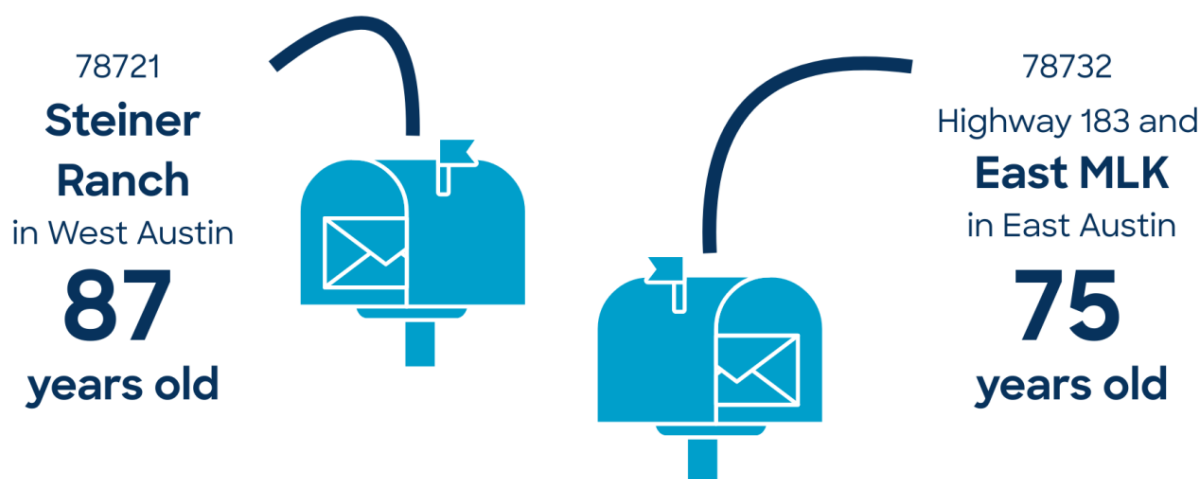
The communities we engaged throughout Central Texas shared with us the challenges they must navigate in order to live healthy lives, including the resources and services they do or do not have access to in their neighborhoods. These challenges and inequitable access to opportunities have very real impacts on health and wellness.

Widening Gap in Life Expectancy by Zip Code

How long we remain healthy as we age is influenced by community conditions beyond our genetics or quality of healthcare. We believe health equity is achieved when your zip code no longer predicts how long you live or your quality of life.

On average, people in Central Texas live to be **80 years old**. However, this can vary up to **12 years** depending on where you live.

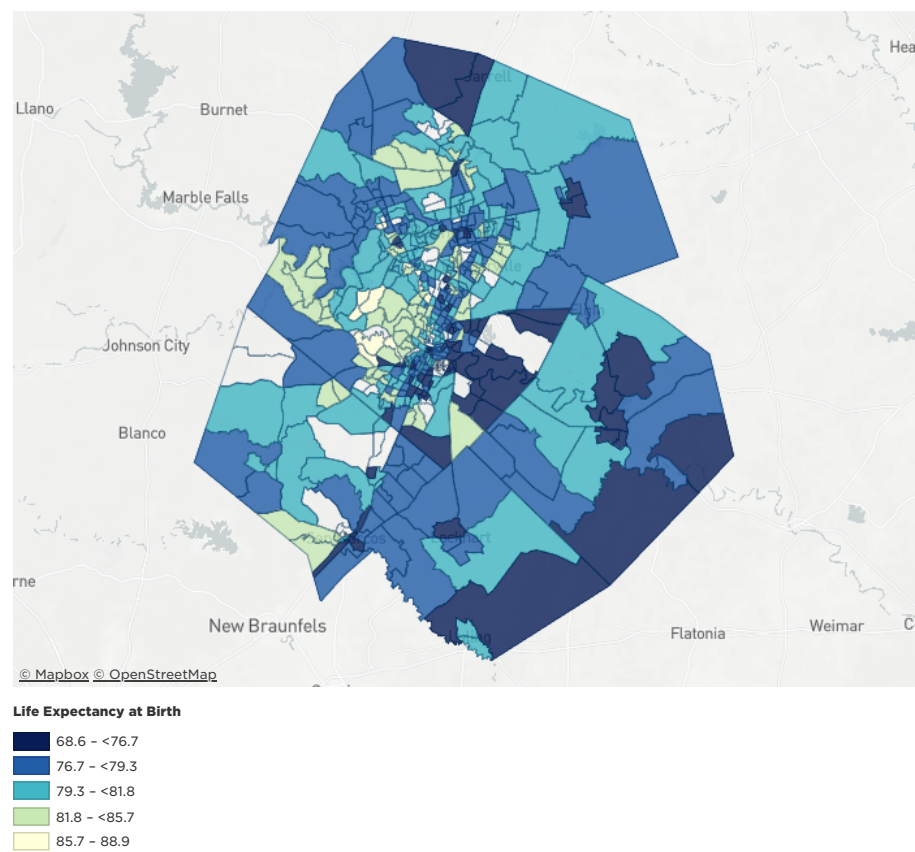
Largest Gap in Life Expectancy by Zip Code



CDC NCHS USALEEP

Visual Map of Life Expectancy Disparities

Life Expectancy by Census Tract

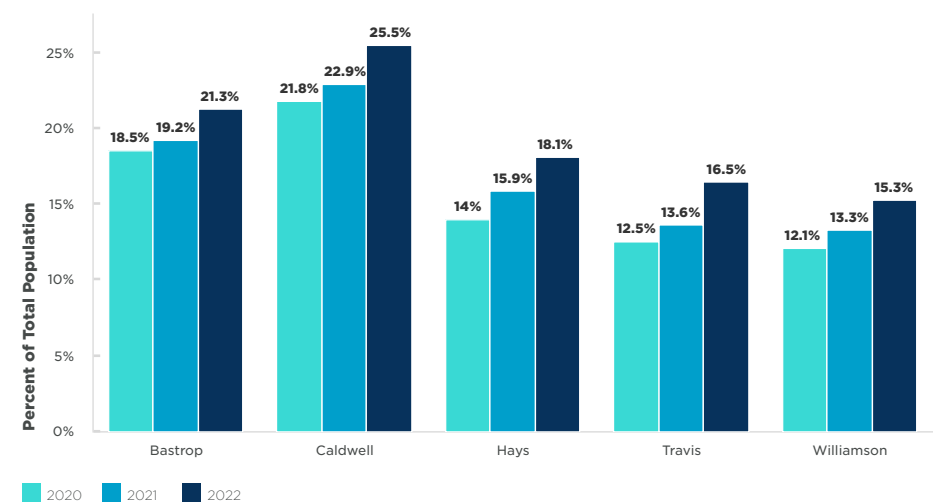


Sources: CDC NCHS USALEEP 2010-2015

Poor Health on the Rise Since 2020

Throughout Central Texas, an increasing number of people are reporting that their health is only fair or poor. This decline in perceived health coincides with the peak pandemic years (2020, 2021, and 2022), as more families struggled to juggle health needs with other competing priorities.

% Adults Reporting Fair or Poor Health



CDC BRFSS PLACES

One factor that impacts one's perception of health is disability status. This isn't to say that many people with disabilities do not live completely fulfilling and healthy lives. However, when disabilities impact our daily functions, they can be an obstacle to general health. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) defines six disability types covering difficulties related to hearing, vision, cognitive functions, mobility, self-care, and independent living. Using this broad definition of disabilities, one in four Central Texas adults reports having one or more of these conditions that impact their everyday lives. This increases to one in three adults for some of the counties within Central Texas.



Adults With a Disability

26.1%

of Adults

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

32.6%

of Adults

Bastrop County, TX

36.7%

of Adults

Caldwell County, TX

30.1%

of Adults

Hays County, TX

25.6%

of Adults

Travis County, TX

23.8%

of Adults

Williamson County, TX

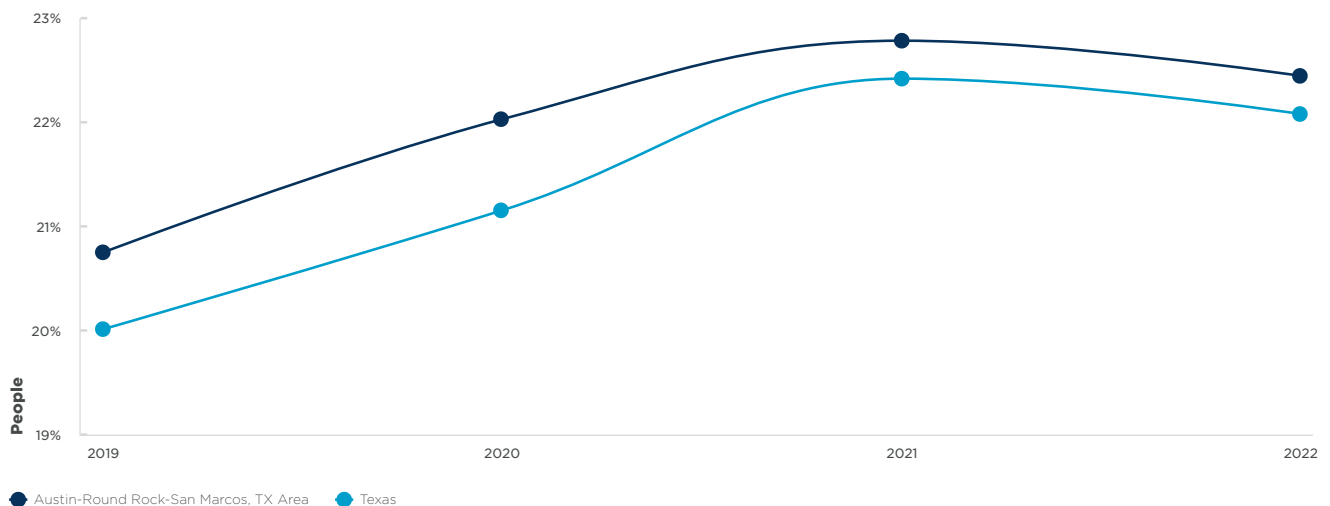
Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES 2022

Mental Health Concerns

An estimated [one in five adults](#)² in the United States struggles with their mental health at some point in life. [Only half](#)² receive treatment.

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the United States. In Central Texas, 22% of adults have been diagnosed with depression. Since 2019, this rate has increased in all five counties, with the regional rate peaking at almost 23% in 2021.

Diagnosed Depression Among Adults



Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES

The proportion of residents self-reporting 14 or more days during the past 30 days during which their mental health was not good varies by county with Hays and Caldwell having the largest proportions.



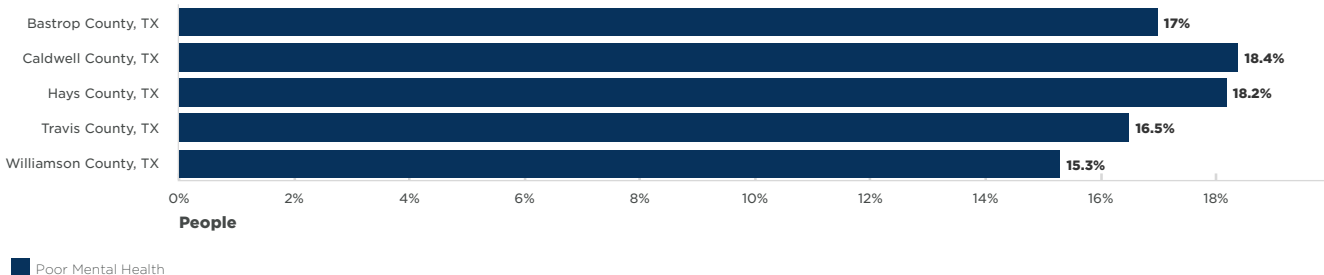
16.9%

of Adults

Self-Reported Poor Mental Health

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

Poor Mental Health Among Adults



Sources: CDC BRFSS PLACES 2022

This supports what we heard from communities when describing more informal mental health challenges. While how clinical care is provided (e.g. representative, culturally competent, and trauma-informed) was identified as a need, so was the need to reduce everyday stressors, particularly for parents, that add to the mental fatigue experienced by Central Texas families. This indicates that solutions might need to focus on the removal of structural barriers that make everyday life more stressful, in addition to increasing availability of therapeutic or counseling services.

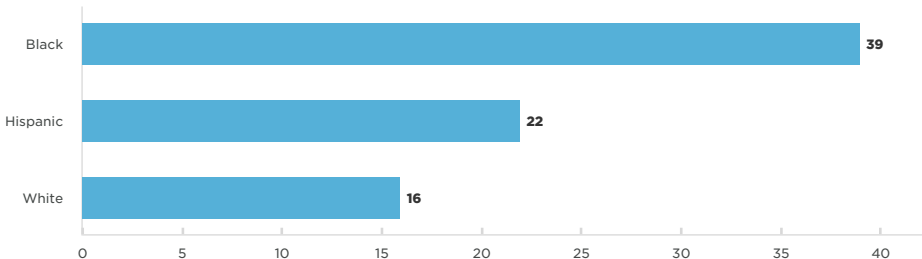
“Black parents often have to **sacrifice their own mental health and wellness** because they simply don’t have the time or the financial means to slow down.”

– Public Art Participant, Williamson County

Stark Disparities in Maternal Health by Race/Ethnicity

[Data at the state level](#)² has consistently shown disparities in maternal and birth outcomes by many social factors including race/ethnicity. Black women are **twice as likely** to die during or within one year of their pregnancy due to pregnancy complications compared to white women.

Pregnancy Related Deaths in Texas



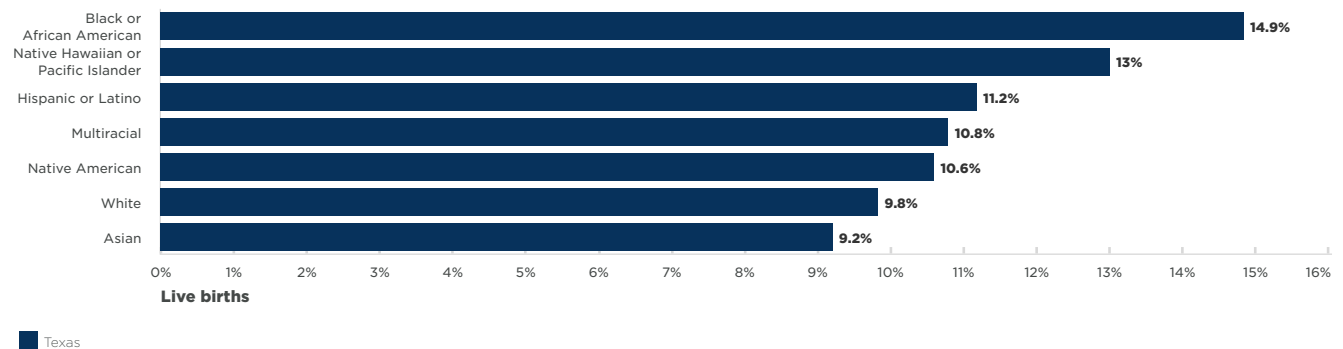
CDC Wonder - Number is per 100,000 deliveries in Texas

We also observe disparities by race/ethnicity for infant outcomes in addition to outcomes for the mothers. For example, Black women are at a much higher risk of their babies being born prematurely.

11.1%
of Live births
Pre-Term Births
Texas

Sources: CDC WONDER Natality 2023

Preterm Births by Race / Ethnicity



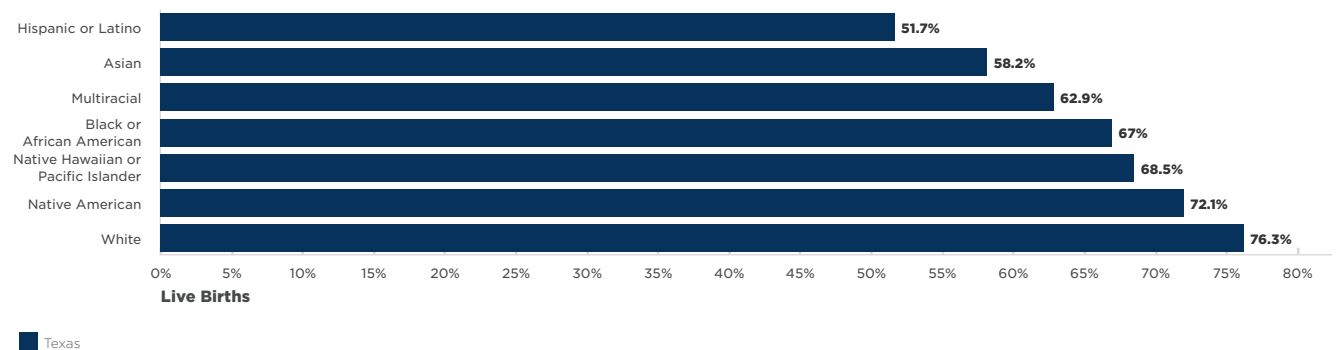
Sources: CDC WONDER Natality 2019-2023

Recommendations from [Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee](#) include promotion of pregnancy planning and safe birth spacing, increased access to preventive care (both related to pregnancy but also broader to include treatment of hypertension and diabetes), and engaging Black and Brown communities to better understand their needs and inform program development.

65.3%
of Live births
First Trimester Prenatal Care
Texas

Sources: CDC WONDER Natality 2023

Prenatal Care Started in First Trimester by Race/Ethnicity



Sources: CDC WONDER Natality 2019-2023



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Other Structural Health Factors

The following section highlights three additional and critical topics that—while mentioned less frequently in our community engagement sessions than the core themes—are known to be key determinants of health and well-being. Each reflect notable disparities across race/ethnicity, or geography.

Each page includes data specific to the Austin-Round Rock MSA with demographic breakdowns highlighting disparities experienced by different groups, providing insights that we hope inform the Foundation and the larger community's collaborative action.

Education

Residents want a school system that supports all students, particularly the most marginalized.

- Parents struggle to find quality early childhood education providers in Central Texas
- Beyond early childhood, there is a need for appropriate services for kids, no matter their needs
- Higher education and opportunities for career advancement leave many behind

Neighborhood and Physical Environment

People have better health when they have access to transportation, affordable and healthy foods, and safe open spaces like parks where they can be active and connect with one another.

- Transportation challenges impact healthcare and service access across all five counties
- Food access disparities have health implications across the region
- Unequal access to community spaces to connect

Health Promoting Behaviors

When our environments and institutions are designed to support everyone's well-being, all individuals are more likely to make choices that positively impact their health, and health disparities close.

- Teen birth rates in our region vary greatly by both geography and race/ethnicity
- Excessive drinking patterns and their public health implications across demographics
- Drug overdose trends and access to community-based prevention strategies in the region



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Education

“We see Black, Hispanic, emerging bilingual, and special education students all having these same outcomes year after year that are not near what we’re seeing for other populations. And we need to ask ourselves, ‘Why is that?’ And to me, it’s not that they have the greatest needs in the community, but **they have the greatest need of being thought of and designed for in our community.**”

– Key Informant, Williamson County 2024

Residents want a school system that supports all students, particularly the most marginalized.

Education is a pathway to improvement and opportunity, but across Central Texas, residents identified challenges to receiving high-quality and appropriate educational resources for their kids. Research shows that learning leads to opportunities – this has been widely studied over time. The more education a person can receive, the better their chances for success, which includes health. The data highlighted in this report reveal some of the starkest disparities in access to education in Central Texas:


- In addition to the [cost](#), **parents struggle to find quality early childhood education** providers in Central Texas
- Beyond early childhood, parents are searching for **high-quality and appropriate educational resources**
- **Higher education and opportunities for career advancement leave many behind**

Parents struggle to find quality early childhood education

Between March 2020 and January 2023, Texas had [5,000 child care centers and licensed family homes close](#)[↗], leaving the state with 27% fewer child care programs compared with pre-pandemic levels. This meant that more than half of all Texas counties have become childcare deserts, where there are at least three times as many children under five as there are fully licensed childcare slots available.

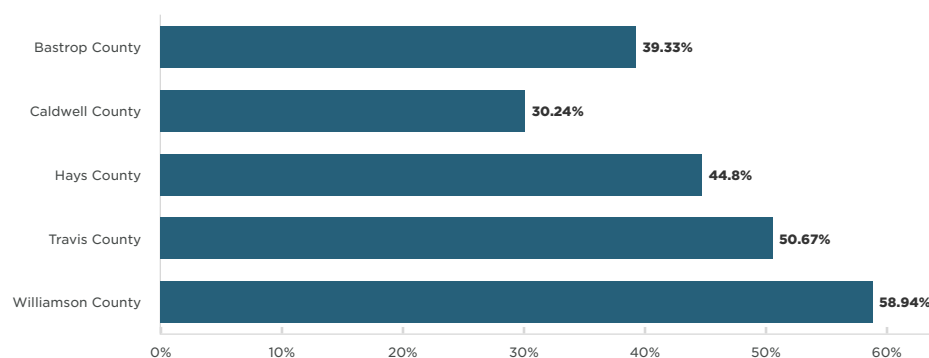
This is a challenge not only for families with young children but also for our economy and the state of public health in our communities. [Research](#)[↗] demonstrates that early childhood education yields substantial public health returns, with every \$1 invested generating approximately \$7 in health, education, and social benefits. Quality early education programs [support brain development](#)[↗] during crucial formative years, establish healthy behaviors, and create protective factors against adverse childhood experiences.

We need to be aware of how education can improve or further exacerbate health disparities. The data shows that Caldwell and Bastrop are enrolled in preschool at a rate that is 20-28% less than in Williamson County, where 59% of young children are enrolled in school.

 **51.4%**
of children ages 3 to 4 are enrolled in pre-school
Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Percentage of Children Ages 3-4 Enrolled in Nursery or Preschool



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates. ACS 2019-2023

Ability to find high-quality and appropriate educational resources

"My son can't even go to school here because they don't offer programs [he needs]. He has to go all the way to Seguin to get the help that he needs. And to me, somebody who lives here, pays taxes here, owns a home here, I have to put my son on a bus to go to Seguin. I personally don't think that's fair."

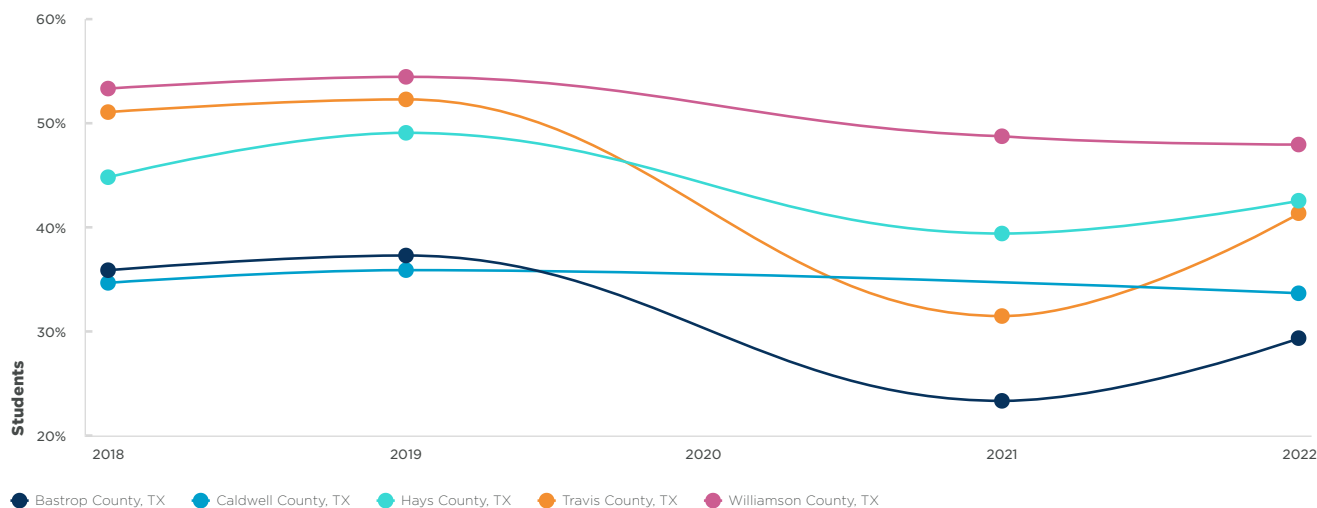
- Community Conversation Participant, Caldwell County 2024

Residents want a school system that supports all students, particularly the most marginalized. Parents across the region spoke about the challenges of obtaining educational resources for their children with special needs, as well as their limited ability to access them within their own neighborhoods.

Quality education has a direct impact on public health through its influence on cognitive development, health literacy, and future socioeconomic status. In the Austin-Round Rock MSA, schools with higher academic performance ratings tend to be located in neighborhoods that exhibit better health metrics, including lower rates of chronic disease, higher rates of preventive care utilization, and higher income levels. The data shows the geographic inequity of school quality, with our more rural counties and poorer zip codes faring worse than the more central and affluent areas.

Student Outcomes Over Time

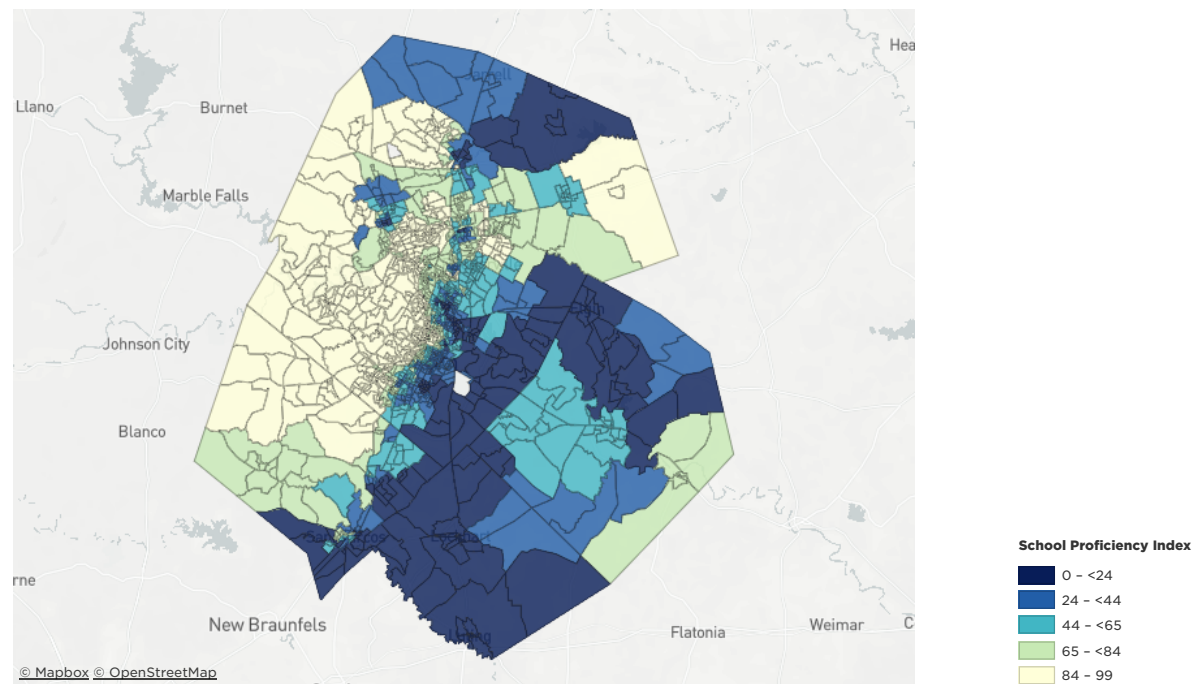
Student Math or Reading Proficiency All Grades



Sources: EDFacts

School Proficiency Map (2015-2016)

School Proficiency Index



Sources: US HUD 2015-2016

The school proficiency index is a function of the percent of 4th grade students proficient in reading and math on state test scores for up to three schools within 1.5 miles of the block-group centroid, weighted by 4th grade school enrollment.

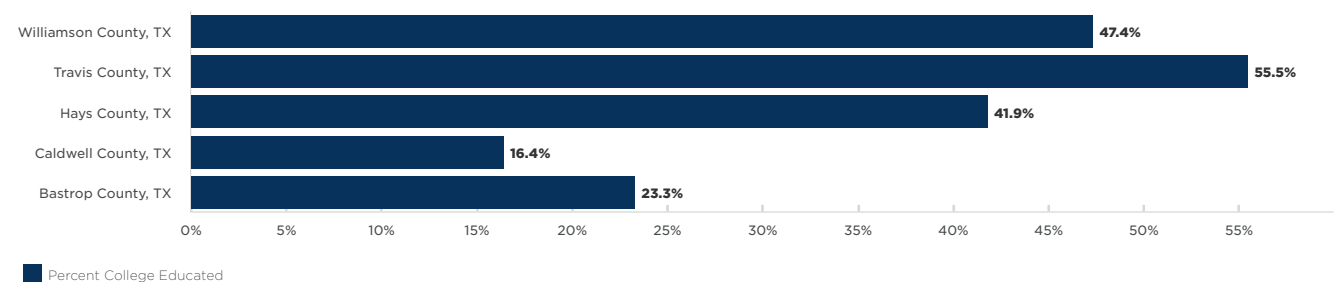
Higher education and opportunities for career advancement leave many behind

Research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows that each additional year of education is associated with increased life expectancy. So, having access to higher education pathways is critical for improving public health and closing health disparities. Despite this, barriers still exist that prevent students from achieving as much education as they want. When research shows that [students of color and students in low-income families](#)¹ achieve less schooling than the average, it points to a larger issue—we aren't all starting from the same place. Our whole community is healthier when more people are empowered to complete high school and beyond.

In Central Texas, we see an unequal distribution of higher education attainment by geography, with less than 20% of adults in Bastrop and Caldwell County having a college degree compared to 45-55% of Williamson and Travis County adults. Similarly, we see disparities in educational attainment by race. More than half of White adults age 25 and older hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 29% of Hispanic residents.

Education Attainment by County and Race/Ethnicity

Percent College Educated by County



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Percentage of Central Texas Adults with Bachelor's Degree or Higher by Race/Ethnicity

29%
of Hispanic adults
have a Bachelor's Degree

37%
of Black/African American adults
have a Bachelor's Degree


38%
of Multi-racial adults
have a Bachelor's Degree

59%
of White adults
have Bachelor's Degree


Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Values are the percentage of residents in Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, MSA of each race/ethnicity category who are ages 25 and older

Educational Attainment Over Time

 **High School Diploma or Equivalent**
91.6%
of People age 25 and over
Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

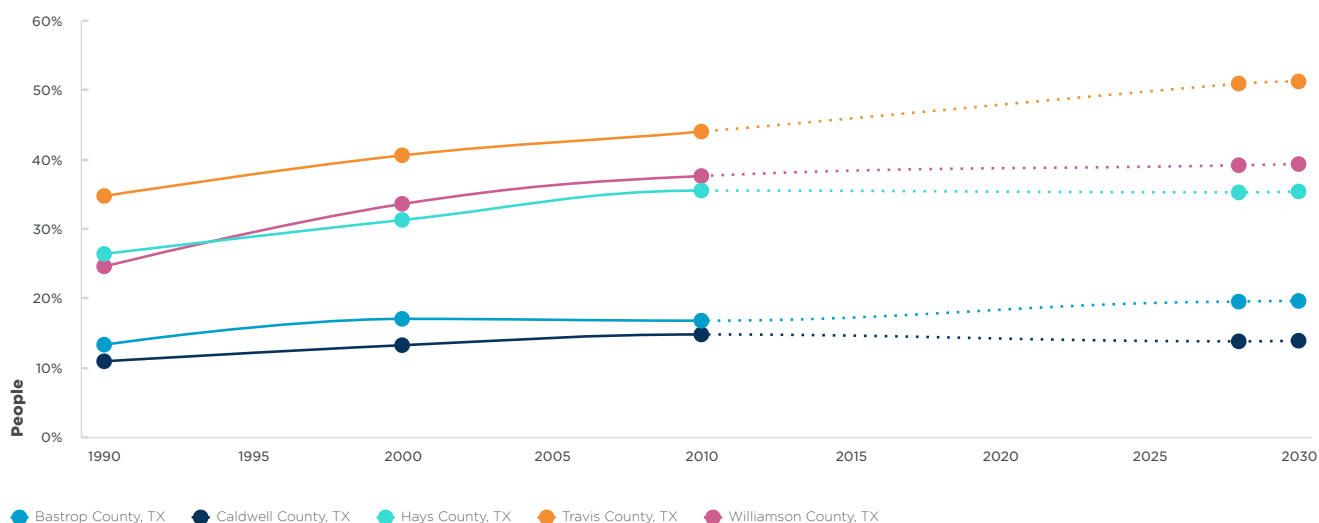
85.7%
of People age 25 and over
Texas

 **Bachelor's Degree or Higher**
49.9%
of People age 25 and over
Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

33.1%
of People age 25 and over
Texas

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher Education



Sources: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year



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Neighborhood and Physical Environment

People have better health when they have access to transportation, affordable and healthy foods, and safe open spaces like parks where they can be active and connect. However, the region has not been designed to support these needs in every neighborhood. Three topics and corresponding disparities are explored here:

- **Transportation challenges impact healthcare and service access** across all five counties
- **Disparities in food access** have health implications across the region
- **Unequal access to safe and public spaces** limits opportunities to connect and be healthy

Transportation challenges impact healthcare and service access

“Our transportation system is strained. It only really serves the San Marcos area and very limited transportation to kind of the more rural areas of the county. Wimberley, Dripping Springs, Buda, and Kyle don’t really have bus systems, like fixed routes. San Marcos has a bus that can go out to certain parts of the county, but it doesn’t cover all parts. If you don’t have a car or are not in walking distance of certain things, that poses an issue, to be able to access services, to get healthy food, to get to medical appointments, or more.”

- Key informant, Hays County 2024

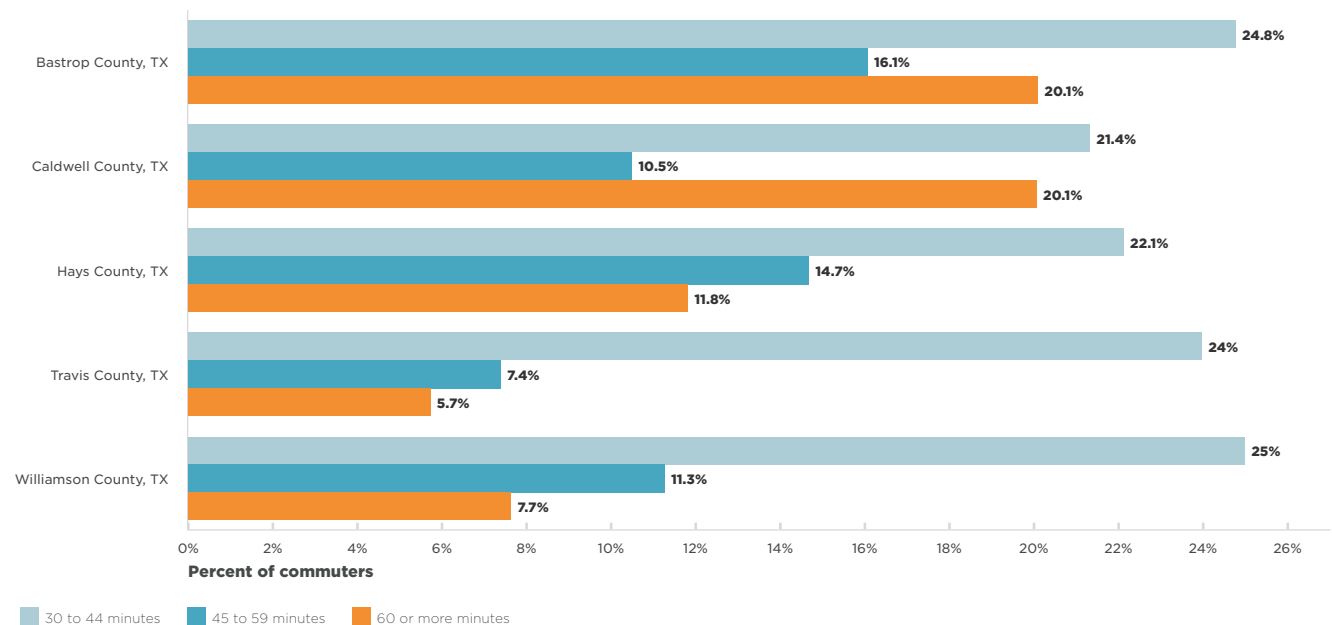
[Research](#)[↗] shows that transportation barriers are associated with delayed care, reduced medication adherence, and missed appointments. Additionally, having to drive long commutes daily to get to work or school has meaningful impacts on an individual’s health. For example, [every extra hour spent in a car](#)[↗] each day increases the risk of obesity by six percent.

Residents in suburban and rural communities highlighted limited transportation options, distance, and the time involved in travel as impediments to accessing healthcare, education, jobs, and community services. Transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth, creating mobility barriers, particularly for older adults, people with disabilities, and those without personal vehicles, furthering the geographic and income-related health disparities highlighted throughout this report.

In our region, 20% of Bastrop and Caldwell County commuters spend an hour in the car each day, compared to only six percent of those who live in Travis. We see an additional concerning trend in the vehicle fatality data. The per capita rate of fatal car wrecks is 100% higher than the regional average in Bastrop County, and +200% higher than that average in Caldwell County. We see similar geographic disparities when looking at fatal car wrecks involving drunk drivers: The rate in Caldwell County is four times that of the regional average.

Commute by Length and County

Commute Length by County



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Data on Vehicle Fatalities



Motor Vehicle Crash Fatalities

13.9

Rate per 100k

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

27.8

Rate per 100k

Bastrop County, TX

↑ 99.4%

41.4

Rate per 100k

Caldwell County, TX

↑ 197.3%

15.8

Rate per 100k

Hays County, TX

↑ 13.2%

13

Rate per 100k

Travis County, TX

↓ 6.5%

10.8

Rate per 100k

Williamson County, TX

↓ 22.2%



Motor Vehicle Fatal Crash Involving Drunk Driver

3.9

Rate per 100k

Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, TX Area

7.2

Rate per 100k

Bastrop County, TX

↑ 86.8%

13.1

Rate per 100k

Caldwell County, TX

↑ 239.3%

2.9

Rate per 100k

Hays County, TX

↓ 24.7%

4

Rate per 100k

Travis County, TX

↑ 2.6%

2.8

Rate per 100k

Williamson County, TX

↓ 27.6%

*% Diff. shows the *percentage increase or decrease* as compared to the original geography.

Sources: NHTSA FARS 2022; US Census Bureau 2020

Food access disparities have health implications across the region

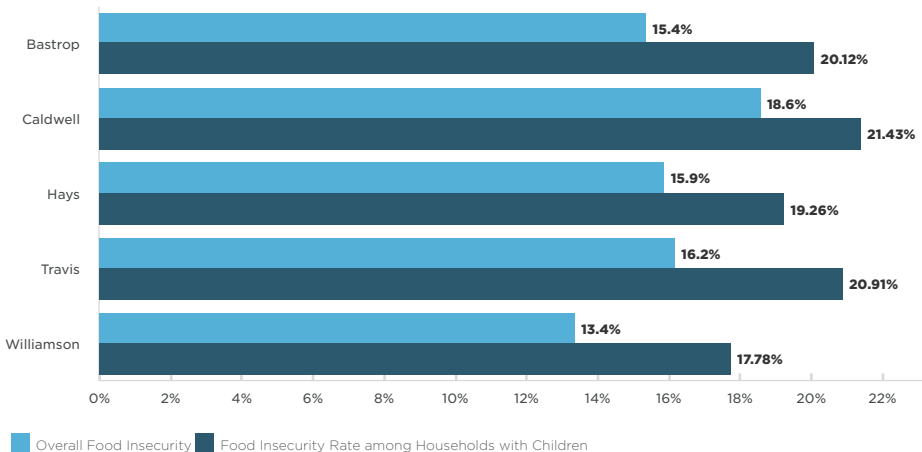
“I was able to transfer to Section 8 and thought I had died and gone to Heaven. I got access to real meat products, canned products, rice and beans, fresh fruits, and vegetables. It was a wholesome meal plan for the week. I’m diabetic and I had a nurse assigned to me to go over my food intake. She would chastise me for my diet. I told her I was on a fixed income and food was coming from the food bank. She would tell me every month that I need to buy fresh fruits and vegetables and to stop squandering my money.”

- Community Conversation Participant, Hays County 2024

Food access directly impacts population health through its influence on dietary quality, nutrition status, and chronic disease risk. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, areas with limited access to healthy food show higher rates of diet-related conditions.

Texas’ food insecurity rate is the [second-highest](#) in the United States. In our five-county Central Texas area, [the Central Texas Food Bank](#) estimates that about 16% of the population is food insecure, and Black and Latino communities face a higher rate of food insecurity across all the counties they serve. Children also face higher rates of food insecurity when compared to other age groups, and in our area, these rates are particularly high for children in Caldwell (21.4%) and Travis (20.9%) Counties.

Food Insecurity Rate by County and Age



Source: Central Texas Food Bank FACT County Estimates (2024)



Central Texas Food Bank

For a very comprehensive understanding of food access needs in Central Texas, we encourage you to visit the Central Texas Food Bank’s Central Texas Food System Dashboard and Food Access Community Needs Assessments.

[Read More](#)

Unequal access to safe and public spaces

"I live off a highway. People that live in small neighborhoods can walk and run, but for the person running in the highway, it is dangerous and limits the way they can exercise."

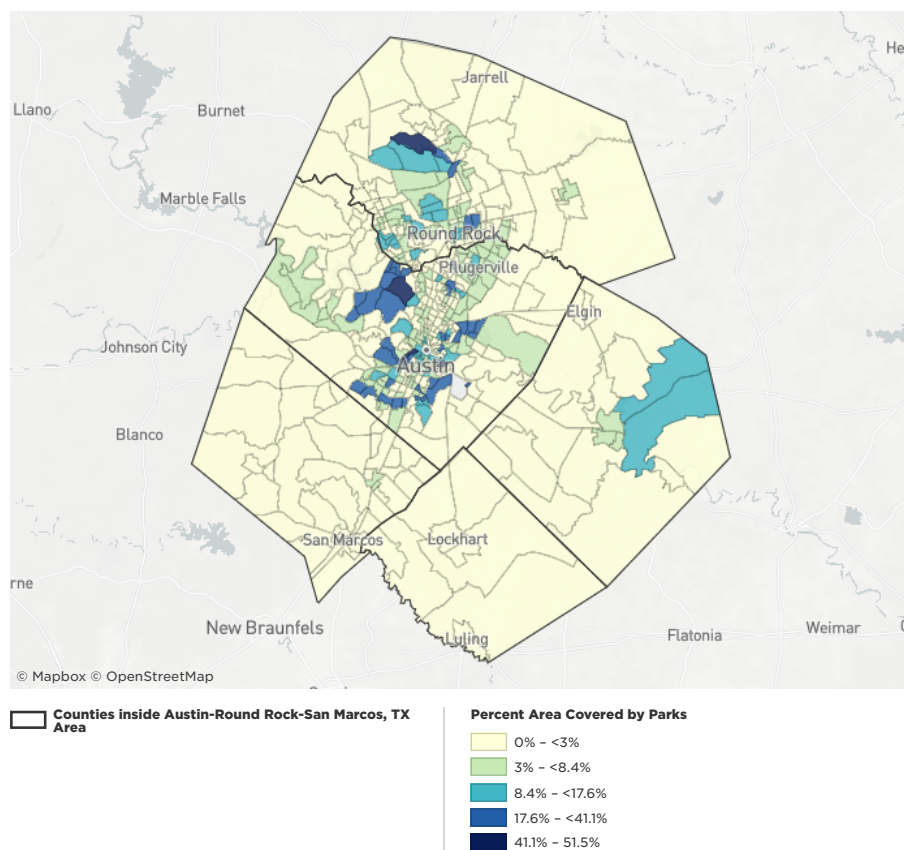
- Youth Photovoice Participant, Bastrop County 2024

[The Trust for Public Land](#)² found that neighborhoods with quality parks within a 10-minute walk have residents who report an average of 25% more days of good physical health per month compared to areas lacking such access. [Access to parks](#)³ is also positively correlated with increased leisure time, more moderate to vigorous physical activity, and improved mental health. Parks can also increase social cohesion, as they are places for gathering and building a sense of belonging.

In our five counties, we see that park access is not equally distributed. In fact, access to parks and high walkability are features of almost exclusively the downtown Austin area. The other areas where we see community design that supports walking and park access are near other major cities and in more affluent parts of our region.

Access to Parks

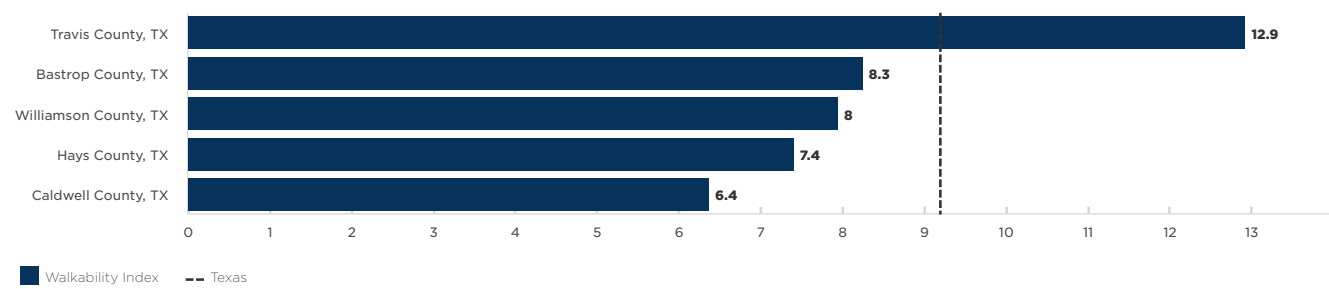
Public Park Coverage by Census Tract



Sources: openICPSR NaNDA 2018

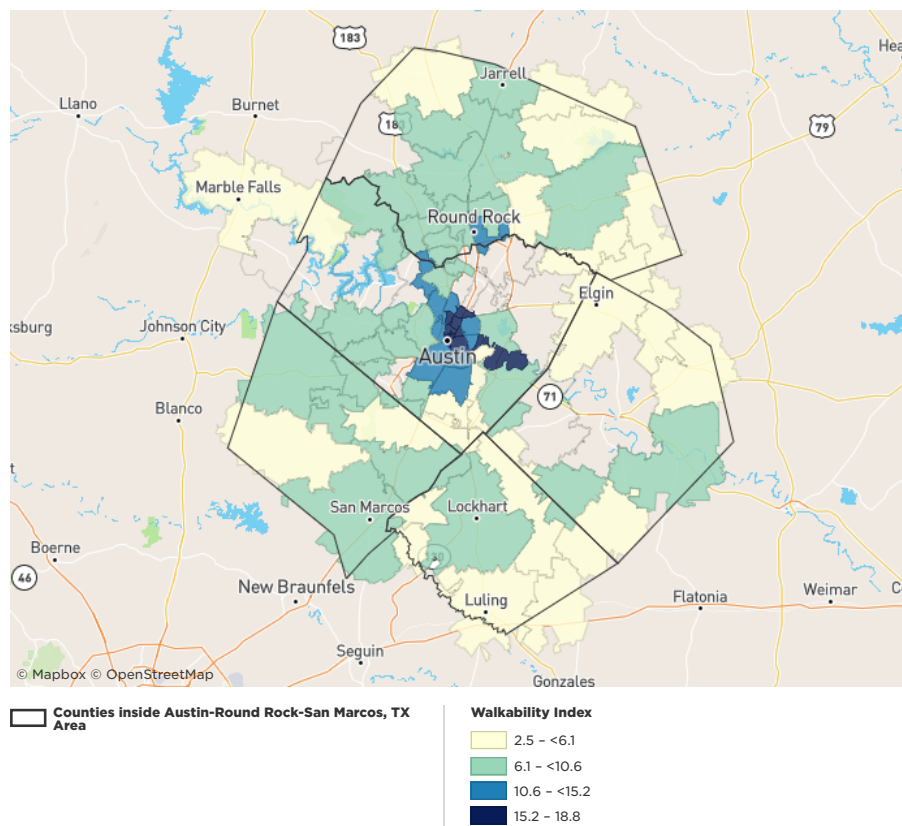
Walkability Measures

Walkability Index



Sources: EPA 2021

Walkability Index



Sources: EPA 2021

Note: Walkability is a measure used to characterize the ease of pedestrian travel in an area. The index ranges from 1-20, with lower values being less walkable locations and higher values being more walkable.



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Health Behaviors

When our environments and institutions are designed to support everyone’s well-being, all individuals are more likely to make choices that positively impact their health, and health disparities are reduced. However, that is not our reality. Data in these three topic areas exemplify what happens when marginalized groups face more barriers to engaging in health-promoting behaviors due to environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural factors.

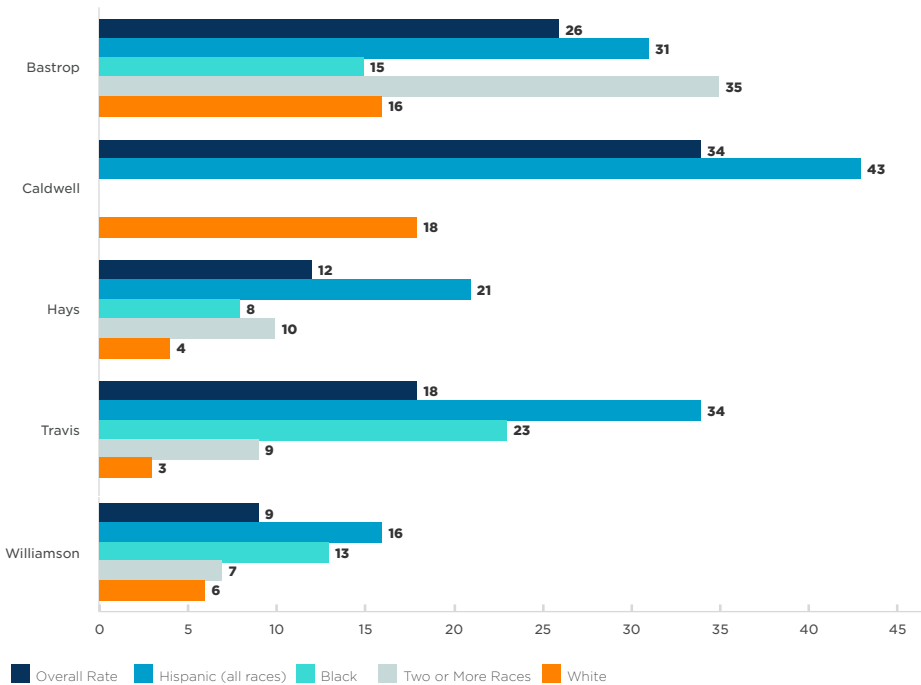
- **Teen birth rates** in our region vary greatly by both geography and race/ethnicity
- **Excessive drinking** patterns and their public health implications vary across demographics
- **The overdose epidemic** has a large impact on the health and well-being of Central Texas

Teen Birth Rates

Teen births significantly impact public health through effects on both adolescent parents and their children. Mothers who give birth during their teen years face barriers to attaining education at or above high school completion and face additional mental and physical stress, as well as an ongoing lack of community support. The [CDC reports](#) that nationwide, infants born to teen mothers have higher rates of low birth weight and preterm delivery compared to those born to older mothers.

While the [teen birth rate in Texas is declining](#), it remains higher than the national teen birth rate. Additionally, we see persistent disparities by race/ethnicity: Black teens in Travis County are almost eight times more likely to have a baby, and Hispanic teens have babies at a rate 10 times higher compared to White teens.

Teen Births per 1000 female population ages 15-19



Source: National Center for Health Statistics - Natality Files; Census Population Estimates Program (2017-2023) via County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

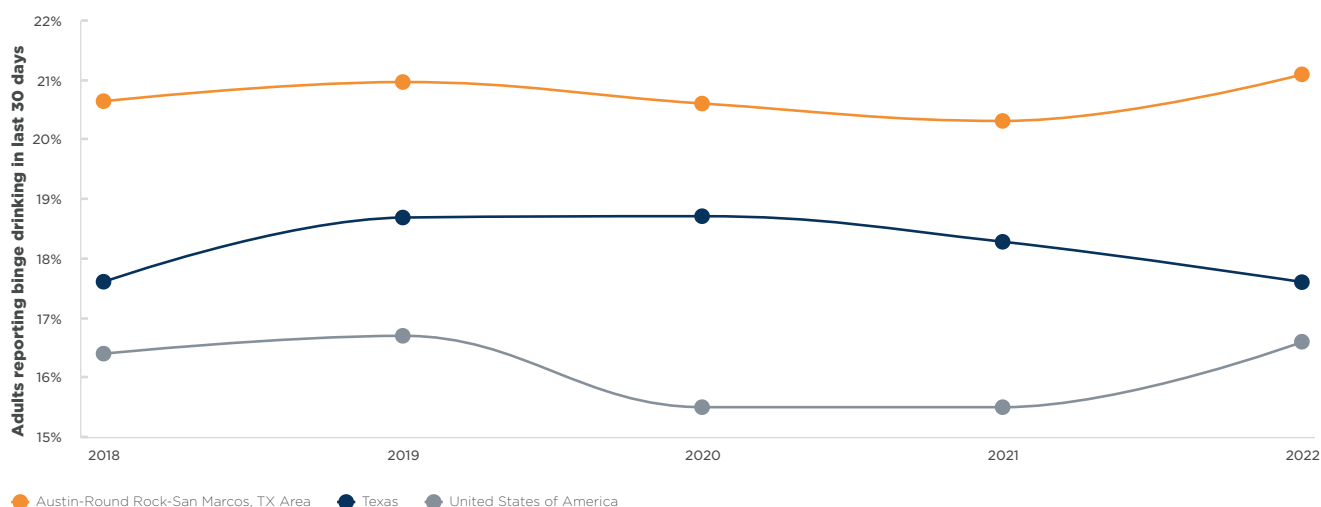
Excessive Drinking

To understand the impact of excessive drinking on community health, it's important to understand these definitions:

- Binge drinking, defined as consuming five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women on an occasion,
- Heavy drinking, defined as 15 or more drinks for men or eight or more drinks for women per week, and
- Any alcohol use by pregnant women or people younger than 21.

Excessive alcohol consumption represents a significant public health challenge in the Austin-Round Rock MSA and nationwide. Excessive drinking [cost the United States](#)[☞] about \$249 billion in 2010 (the most recent data available). According to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, binge drinking prevalence in Central Texas is higher than the state and national average.

Binge Drinking Among Adults



Sources: CDC BRFSS 500 Cities; CDC BRFSS PLACES

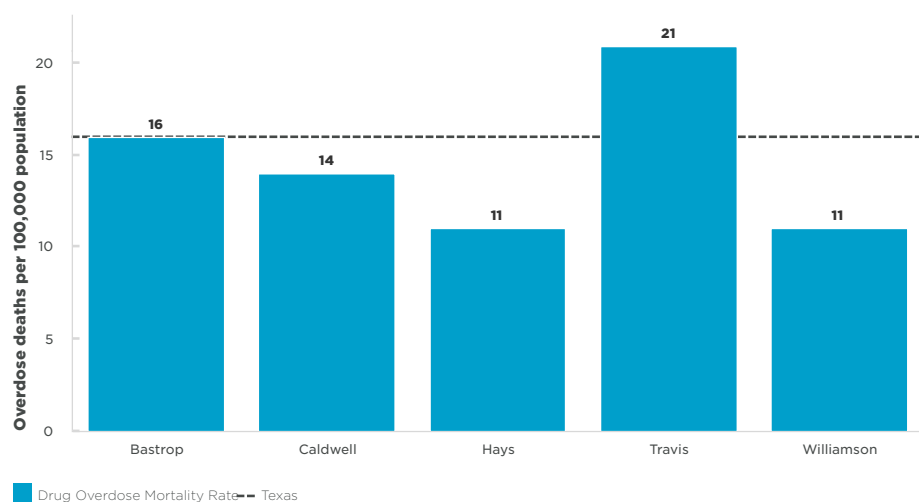
The Overdose Epidemic in Central Texas

Drug overdose deaths are a leading contributor to premature death and are largely preventable. In 2022, the number of people who died of a drug overdose was 10 times the number who died in 1999.

The overdose epidemic has hit Central Texas. Data shows that Travis County has the highest rate of drug overdose deaths in our region. Additionally, Travis has one of the highest rates of opioid specific overdoses compared to other Texas counties.

[According to the county Medical Examiner](#)[☞], the total overdose fatalities increased by 60% between 2020 and 2022 in Travis County. By drug type, fentanyl overdose death is the most frequent, and the number of overdose deaths due to fentanyl increased by 600% between 2020 and 2022.

Drug Overdose Mortality Rate (2022)



Source: The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) (2020-2022) via County Health Rankings & Roadmap



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Community Spotlights

Through our community engagement and interviews across the region, what struck us most was how consistent the top health needs were across all five counties. The more we talked with residents, the clearer it became that county lines don't reflect how people live their lives. A person might live in Hays County but work in downtown Austin. Parents might send their children to school in Bastrop County but drive to Williamson County for their pediatrician.

Because people's daily experiences cross county boundaries, we've focused this report on regional patterns and solutions rather than county-by-county breakdowns. This approach better reflects the shared challenges that require coordinated responses across the entire area.

However, we discovered that some health needs connect more to who people are—their background, identity, or circumstances—than to where they live. Facilitated by [our research partners](#)², we spoke with diverse groups throughout the five counties and each emphasized different priorities within the broader themes:

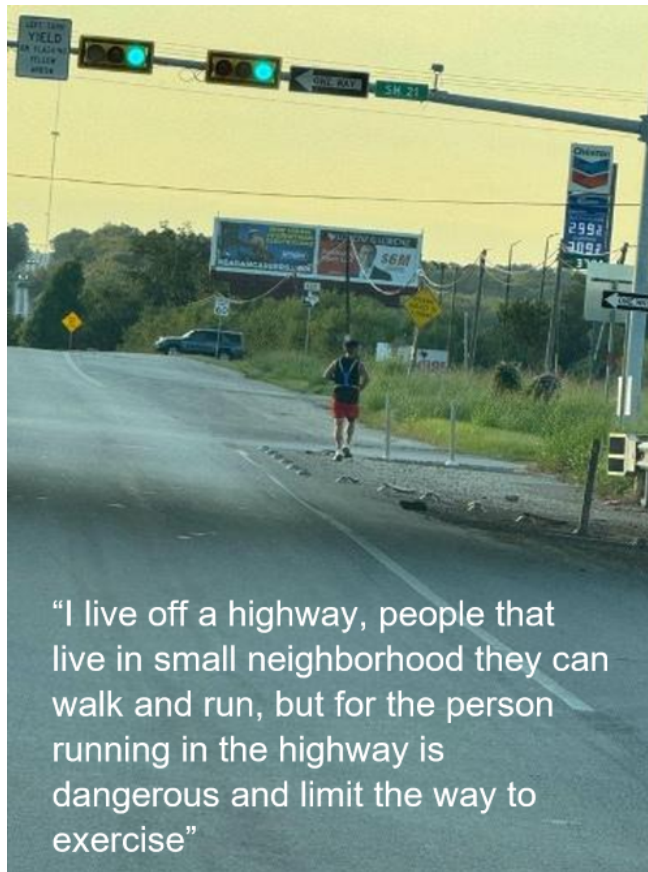
- **Youth** PhotoVoice participants shared about their joys, including their friends, hobbies, and the natural beauty of their communities, alongside challenges they face, like social anxiety, stress about their grades, and being able to access the things they know they need to be healthy, like whole foods and places to exercise.

"I enjoy writing a whole lot..."



"I enjoy writing a whole lot, I've always been a bit more on the creative sides of things, and writing has always been my out, before I started going to therapy, I always wrote out what was wrong or how I was feeling when I couldn't say it. I have ideas or even when I have ideas for stories I would wanna create."

"Limits the way to exercise"



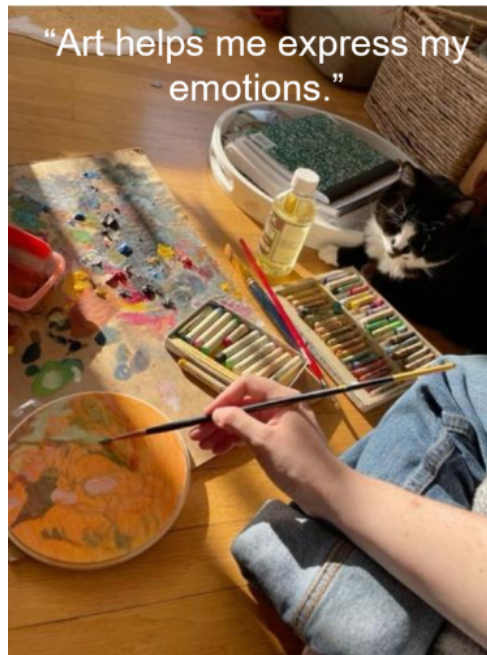
"I live off a highway, people that live in small neighborhood they can walk and run, but for the person running in the highway is dangerous and limit the way to exercise"

"I'm trying out for basketball team"



"Get exercise, stay fit, enjoy playing. I'm trying out for basketball team"

"Helps me express my emotions"



- **Black and African American parents** in Williamson County spoke about a need for representation and cultural awareness in public school classrooms and school district leadership positions, to address bullying and to create an inclusive and safe learning environment.
- In Travis County, our community conversations revealed an added facet of culturally competent care, beyond race, ethnicity, or language, and that is that providers of physical and mental healthcare should consider the specific needs of members of the **LGBTQ+ community**.

"Many patients have traumatic healthcare experiences, or they've gone to other healthcare providers who are not experts in serving LGBTQIA+ people."

- Key Informant, Travis County 2024

- We heard from **older adults** how limited access to healthcare and economic stability create nearly impossible decision points. Because they live on a fixed income and precarious public benefits, many face the difficult choice of spending their monthly budget on healthcare, even much-needed medications, and basic needs like food and rent. Additionally, for older adults in Hays County specifically, we heard that geriatric and specialty care often requires travel to Austin or San Antonio, creating financial and logistical barriers that lead to delayed or missed care.



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The Community Voices Report

For a deeper dive into the stories from the diverse communities we engaged with to understand the systems and conditions affecting health and well-being in Central Texas.

[Read More](#)

Looking Forward

St. David's Foundation is committed to listening to the communities we serve, learning from them, and evolving our work in response to the needs of our region. **What we learned is that systems are failing—not people.** Community members shared that they are exhausted with the constant demand to advocate for the services and supports they need for themselves and their families. **We also heard repeatedly about the power and importance of communities supporting each other.** Community members are excited and motivated to mobilize around the issues they care about and are eager to be a part of the important work to improve our community.

In the Summer of 2025, we hosted community events and celebrations across the five counties we serve—returning to many of the **135 community members** who generously provided their stories and experiences for this report, while also engaging new participants to continue the conversation. When residents shared their experiences, they did so eagerly and openly—but also wanted to know what would become of the stories they shared. They did not want it to be a one-time conversation.

By returning to these communities, we are honoring their time and trust, testing our understanding of the themes we gathered, and exploring potential co-solutions to the issues raised.

By the end of 2025, the stories and data within this report, along with continued community conversations, will inform our next three-year **Community Health Implementation Plan** and guide the Foundation's strategy through 2030 as we work to demonstrate measurable progress toward a more vibrant and healthier Central Texas.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all our partners who made it possible to create this report.

Project Partners:

- Bastrop County Cares: Norma Mercado and team
- Black Parents & Families Collective: Tiffanie Harrison, Meenal McNary, Craig McNary, and Jarrid Williams
- Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas: Doug Mudd, April DeLeon-Huggard, and Jessica Bailey
- Community Health Centers of South Central Texas: Rafael De La Paz and Gabe Gallardo
- Foundation Communities: Julie Candoli and Danette Lopez Garza
- Texas Health Institute: Blair Williams and Andrea Jacks

Community Advisory Committee:

- Armando Perales, St. Vincent De Paul – Luling
- Ashton Cumberbatch, Equidad ATX
- Doug Mudd, Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas
- Enrique Castro, Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Julie Candoli, Foundation Communities
- Krystal Grimes, HEAL Alliance
- Norma Mercado, Bastrop County Cares
- Rafael De La Paz, Community Health Centers of South Central Texas
- Tamara Atkinson, Workforce Solutions Capital Area
- Tiffanie Harrison, Black Parents and Families Collective
- Tyler Bybee, City of Taylor Parks & Recreation
- William “Bill” Rice, St. David's Hospital

Special thanks to Dr. Miguel Guajardo for helping to facilitate discussions for Bastrop and Caldwell events, and to the larger teams employed by our partners that supported the project at various stages.

Resources

Throughout the report, we have referenced several resources and companion reports, which we present here for easy access.



Community Voices Project

Explore the stories and themes shared through community conversations across the Central Texas Region.

[Read More](#)



Pathways to Health Equity

Explore the Foundation's 2024-2030 Strategic Plan.

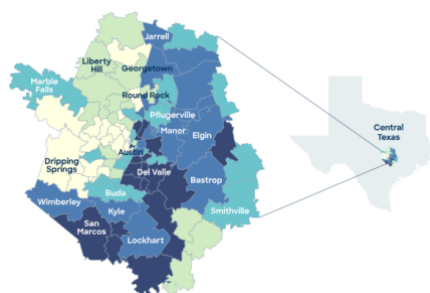
[Read More](#)



The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health

Explore the framework and dig into county-level data on many of the factors that influence our community health and wellbeing.

[Short YouTube Video Explanation](#)



Central Texas Health Equity Overview

A visual representation on where the communities with the greatest health needs are located.

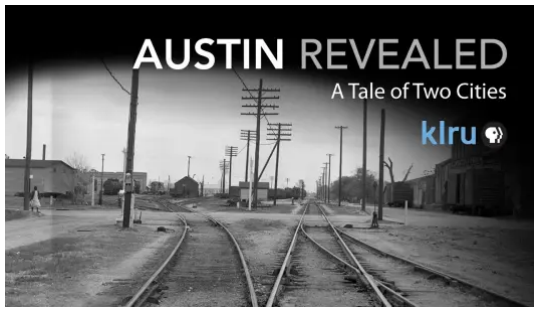
[Read More](#)



Central Texas Food Bank - Central Texas Food System Dashboard

For a very comprehensive understanding of food access needs in Central Texas we encourage you to visit the Central Texas Food Bank's Central Texas Food System Dashboard and Food Access Community Needs Assessments.

[Read More](#)



KLRU - Austin Revealed

KLRU and The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross created a series called Austin Revealed, which captures the city's history through first-person accounts of local African Americans. More videos can be seen on the Austin Revealed YouTube page.

Watch the Series



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