

Community Health Profile for Bridgton Maine

Presented to the Comprehensive Plan
Committee by Healthy Lakes, the local
Healthy Maine Partnership

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The report was prepared by Zoe Miller, Healthy Lakes Coalition Director with the Public Health Program (PHP) at the Opportunity Alliance. PHP's mission is "engaging communities to improve health and wellness for all." PHP supports local efforts for sustainable policies, systems and environmental changes by nurturing community leadership, convening stakeholders and providing technical assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Health plays an essential role in shaping economically vibrant and sustainable communities. Where poor health and illness create an economic burden for individuals, businesses, and local economies, community comprehensive planning must take health into account. Decisions about land use, air and water quality, transportation and open space can support physical, mental and emotional well-being. Planning that considers the availability of services and amenities that support health, as well as policies to protect these, can ensure a healthy community for generations to come, as well as a thriving economy.

The goal of this report is to provide information to assist with integrating health into community planning. The report offers Bridgton decision-makers, citizens and stakeholders with an overview of health status indicators, as well as assets for health with the community. Questions answered include: "How healthy are our residents?" and "What does the health status of our community look like?" This information can be used to identify priority community health and quality of life issues.

ACTIVE LIVING

Bridgton's downtown center is walkable and features a mix of businesses, specialty shops, and residences with numerous recreational areas located within a one mile radius and in most cases accessible by sidewalk. These amenities include: Pondicherry Park and Stevens Brook hiking trails, Pondicherry Park and Shorey Park, several public swimming beaches with water sport access, a skate park, an ice skating rink, an active town recreational center, and several playgrounds and playing fields. The only amenities the town does not have that are considered key to active living are dedicated biking paths and a public-use swimming pool.

Though most Bridgton residents rely on a personal vehicle to commute to work, nearly 10% report walking¹. Compared to 0% in neighboring Casco and Naples, this demonstrates the benefit of Bridgton's compact, walkable downtown.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Bridgton is also fortunate to have Shawnee Peak Ski Area just over five miles away from the downtown center. The ski area is a popular recreational amenity in the winter (and to a certain extent in the summer), and contributes greatly to the level of physical activity that occurs in Bridgton.

In terms of programming, Bridgton Recreation offers a variety of activities, many at the Old Town Hall building. The recreation department provides Bridgton youth and adults with a broad range of year-round recreation and sports programming options, including table tennis, fitness classes, soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, swimming, football, and lacrosse. The programming is affordably priced, and in some cases specific classes and activities are offered for free. In addition to the recreation department, the Bridgton Recreation Advancement Group (BRAG) has been instrumental in advocating for more recreational activities and amenities in the town. The group, founded in 1997, has had a hand in establishing gymnasiums, the Town Community Center, and the Bridgton skate park, and organizes an annual 3-on-3 basketball tournament.

The local Healthy Maine Partnership, Healthy Lakes, has partnered with the Lake Region School District since 2006 on childhood obesity prevention efforts. With a major grant through the U.S. CDC's Communities Putting Prevention to Work program from 2010-2012, Healthy Lakes funded the purchase of bikes, snowshoes, and fitness machines to increase students' access to and options for physical activity before, during, and after school. More recently, the Healthy Lakes HMP has provided opportunities for schools to participate in the Let's Go 5210 program and provided training for teachers to increase activity in the classroom. Bridgton Recreation also works with Stevens Brook Elementary School on the Let's Move program, providing physical activity in the morning before school.

ORAL HEALTH

Since 1963, Bridgton's public water supply, which serves a majority of residents, has been fluoridated. Community water fluoridation has proven to be a cost-effective and safe method to preventing tooth decay since 1945. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration, Bridgton is a dental Health

Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). This is the case across the region, with Casco, Harrison, Naples, Sebago, Waterford all having the designation as well. Dental HPSAs are based on a dentist to population ratio of 1:5,000. In other words, when there are 5,000 or more people per dentist, an area is eligible to be designated as a dental HPSA.

School-based/School-linked Prevention Programs at the Lake Region School District

Preventive Services: Dental hygienists from Tooth Protectors come to the schools twice a year and provide free exams and cleanings to students with MaineCare (who are not currently under the care of a dentist) and at a reduced cost for students without insurance. The response is high at the elementary schools but as the students get older, there is less participation.

Oral Health Education: Elementary Health Teachers are implementing a 4-lesson "Let's Talk Teeth" unit from the Great Body Shop Health Curriculum.

Primary Care Practices Participating in From the First Tooth

Bridgton Pediatrics is the only local pediatric practice in the community currently participating in From the First Tooth. The next closest participating PCPs are in Windham and Lewiston. Bridgton Pediatrics participated in a Quality Improvement project last year to do oral screening in the office and are applying fluoride varnish if children do not have a dental home. They are also a healthcare site of distinction that participates in the Let's Go! Program.

Engagement of Women in the Perinatal Period

Early Head Start Program (EHS): Housed in Casco, EHS provides parent education and opportunities for families to attend dental clinics and or referrals to Community Dental.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): The WIC program provides support to women and children from pregnancy through age 5. WIC counselors provide education about oral health, cleaning babies' mouths, not putting pacifiers from an adult's mouth into the child's. WIC also provides referrals for local dentists that accept MaineCare.

Maine Families: Provides home visitation services to pregnant moms and parents of young children up to 3 months. Good oral health practices are included in education for families.

Other oral disease prevention assets and activities

Head Start: The Head Start Programs in Bridgton enrolls 17 children each year. They provide oral health education to parents and children in the program as well as providing dental clinics

for exams and cleanings/fluoride through Community Dental in Portland. Children attending the clinics receive toothbrushes and toothpaste to take home. Children in the classrooms brush every day with fluoridated toothpaste.

The Let's Go! 5210 Program: The Opportunity Alliance administers this obesity prevention program for schools and child cares in Bridgton. Three of the five priority strategies apply to good oral health: Provide healthy choices for snacks and celebrations and limit unhealthy choices; Provide water and low-fat milk – limit or eliminate sugary beverages; and Provide non-food rewards.

FOOD AND NUTRITION

The Town of Bridgton has many assets in this arena. Residents can purchase locally grown produce, farm-raised meats, plants and baked goods at the Bridgton Farmers Market on a weekly basis from May through mid-November. EBT cards with SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps) and WIC vouchers are accepted by vendors, which increases access to the market by low-income community members. The market is located on Depot Street behind the Reny's store. More information on the market can be found at Bridgtonfarmersmarket.com. Community members of all ages have the opportunity to learn about gardening and grow their own fruits and vegetables at the Bridgton Community Garden, located on the grounds of the Bridgton Community Center on Depot Street. With support from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and private and public grants, the garden doubled in size from 2010-2013 to 52 raised beds, including a children's tasting garden. The Bridgton Community Center operates 24 beds which grow food for donation to local food pantries and community meals. In 2013, 400 pounds of produce went to the food pantry, senior lunch attendees or Community Kettle Dinner attendees – depending on the day of harvest. The remaining beds are rented by community members, the elementary school and Good Neighbors. Many of the rented beds also donate food.

The rate of free and reduced lunch enrollment at Stevens Brook Elementary School was 62.5% in October 2013², indicating a high number of children and families at risk for food insecurity. In February 2014, 1,130 Bridgton residents – or 22% -- received SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – formerly known as food stamps)³. Bridgton’s rate of SNAP usage is equal to Portland but higher than Naples (17%) and Cumberland County (13%).

In response to the need for food resources, Bridgton has two food pantries and two community meals. The St. Joseph’s Food Pantry distributes food once per month while the Bridgton United Methodist Food Pantry has a weekly distribution. Both pantries are run by volunteers and depend on donations. Senior lunch is held weekly at the Bridgton Community Center with an average of 50-60 attendees each week (except Lent season when it averages 30 per week for 5 weeks). A donation of \$3 per week is suggested. The Community Kettle Dinner is held weekly as well and serves approximately 60 residents each week – about 80% are regulars. No donation requested and meals are donated and prepared by local organizations and individuals. About half of volunteers qualify as low income, disabled, retired veteran/disabled. Aside from a portion of the Bridgton Community Center Director’s time, these programs are volunteer-run.

The Bridgton Hunger Task Force, a group of local residents and service providers is working to assess food insecurity in Bridgton and build a community response.

The Healthy Lakes HMP’s work with the Lake Region School District has included efforts to increase nutritious options and decrease unhealthy foods. Through the Communities Putting Prevention to Work funding, MSAD 61 hired a full-time school health coordinator, established a healthier school lunch menu, and acquired kitchen equipment and conducted trainings that enable staff to process and serve healthier foods in cafeterias. As of January 2011, all 1,700 students attending MSAD 61 schools have access to daily servings of fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the district offers healthy food and beverage options in school stores and on-site

² Free and Reduced School Lunch Report, October 31, 2013. Maine Department of Education. Available at: https://portal.maine.gov/sfsr/sfsrdev.ed534.ed534_parameters

³ Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Independence (2014). Geographic Distribution for Programs and Benefits for February 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofir/reports/2014/geo-february.pdf> on March 21, 2014.

vending machines, which now meet the Institute of Medicine's standards pertaining to nutrition content and portion size.

Healthy Lakes' SNAP-Ed Program works with the school district to offer nutrition education curriculum in schools with a free and reduced rate of 50% or higher. The SNAP-Ed Program serves Bridgton children at Stevens Brook and Lake Region Middle School. Classes include Pick a Better Snack for Kindergarten through 2nd graders and Nutrition to Grow On for grades 3-5. The SNAP-Ed Program also provides nutrition education to Bridgton residents at the Community Center, the Farmers Market, the local pantries and to teens at the Crooked River Adult and Community Education Center.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Bridgton Community Center, located at 15 Depot Street, is known as a trusted source of information by low to moderate income residents. Organizational partners also view the Center as the go-to for reaching clients. As a result, the Center serves as a cultural broker between available resources and those in need. Referrals and resources currently offered at the Center include Medicare help through Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging, free tax prep with AARP, and assistance in enrolling for health insurance through The Opportunity Alliance.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY

Bridgton has a very low rate of violent crime. According to the Uniform Crime Report for Maine, only three arrests were made for assault in 2012⁴ and none were made in 2011⁵.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Bridgton has higher rates of substance abuse arrests per capita than Cumberland County and Portland. According to the Uniform Crime Report for Maine, Bridgton Police Department made 30 arrests in 2012. Per capita, this is 5.74 arrests per thousand residents, compared to

⁴ Uniform Crime Reporting Division, State of Maine Department of Public Safety (2012). Crime in Maine. Retrieved from: http://www.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2012pdf/Crime%202012.pdf on 3/12/14.

⁵ Uniform Crime Reporting Division, State of Maine Department of Public Safety (2012). Crime in Maine. Retrieved from: http://www.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2012pdf/Crime%202012.pdf on 3/12/14.

3.22 in Portland and 1.06 for Windham. In 2011, the rate was 6.72 for Bridgton, compared to 4.55 for Portland and 1.53 for Windham. These include non-federal violations of any of the following: Maintaining unlawful drinking places, operating a still, furnishing liquor to a minor, illegal transportation of liquor, possession of liquor by a minor, and the possession, sale, use, growing, manufacturing, and making of illegal drugs.

The rate of controlled substance prescriptions per person in Bridgton is significantly higher than the state average. In 2009, Bridgton residents were prescribed 23% more Schedule II, III, and IV drugs (prescription substances which have some potential for abuse) than the Maine average⁶. Within Cumberland County, Bridgton is among the highest along with Westbrook, Harrison and Casco.

The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) is administered every other year to middle and high school students throughout Maine. Data from the 2013, 2011 and 2009 surveys shows that tobacco and alcohol use among area youth has been decreasing⁷. While this is positive, youth's perceptions about availability and consequences indicate that substance abuse prevention efforts remain important. Three-quarters of area youth reported in 2013 that it would be easy to get cigarettes. Research shows that greater access and availability of tobacco is related to higher use⁸. Two-thirds of students said they believe that they would NOT be caught by their parents if they drank alcohol. Similarly, the perception that alcohol use will go unnoticed and/or undisciplined by parents is related to higher use⁹.

Unlike alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs, marijuana use has not decreased in the area. Perceptions play an important role here also. Two-thirds of youth report that they believe their friends think it is NOT wrong for them to smoke marijuana. MIYHS data shows that high

⁶ Prescription Monitoring Program, Maine Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

⁷ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2009, 2011, 2013. Maine Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services. Some data available online at: <https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/home>

⁸ U.S. CDC

⁹ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2013. Maine Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services. Some data available online at: <https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/home>

school students who don't believe their friends think it is wrong for them to use marijuana are 9.6 times as likely to use the drug.

MENTAL HEALTH

Tri-County Mental Health Services has an office in Bridgton with a day program for adults. Despite their presence, Bridgton is a federally designated mental health professional shortage area. Mental Health HPSAs are based on a psychiatrist to population ratio of 1:30,000. In other words, when there are 30,000 or more people per psychiatrist, an area is eligible to be designated as a mental health HPSA.

CHRONIC DISEASE AND DISABILITY

Approximately 14% of Bridgton residents have a disability.¹⁰ This is slightly lower than the State average (15.6%) and slightly higher than Cumberland County (12%) and Portland (12.3%). Bridgton has about the same percentage of disabled residents as Casco (14.6%) and a significantly lower percentage than Naples (24.7%). Across all age groups, cognitive and ambulatory difficulties account for the majority of disabilities. Residents age 65 and over make up 40% of those with disabilities. Within the 65 and over group, ambulatory and hearing difficulties are the most common, followed by independent living and cognitive difficulties.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey