



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – WASHINGTON & AROOSTOOK COUNTIES

Healthy Communities

Introductory Section

There are two primary organizations working on “healthy community” issues in the Aroostook County region. One is *Healthy Aroostook, a Healthy Maine Partnership* which is a coalition of health care providers in central and southern Aroostook County, and the other is the *Power of Prevention* in northern Aroostook County.

Both of these groups seek to create individual behavioral changes that engender healthier lifestyle choices through education and awareness; as well as policy and environmental change in five areas: physical activity, nutrition, tobacco, substance abuse, and chronic disease. Some of the other areas addressed by Healthy Aroostook include [Lead](#) and [Breastfeeding](#). Healthy Aroostook works in partnership with other like-minded organizations such as Power of Prevention (another Healthy Maine Partnership), Aroostook Substance Abuse Prevention, and Community Voices. The Community Transformation Grant is also working on community health issues in Aroostook, its goal being to transform the local communities to improve health on a county level.



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Findings

- 68.1% of adults in Maine exercise less than the recommended 20+ minutes of vigorous physical activity three or more days per week.
- 37.7% of Maine adults in 2007 were classified as overweight with another 25.2% classified as obese.
- More than 71% of Maine adults consumed fruits and vegetables less than five times a day.
- 93.3% of Maine youth did not attend daily physical education classes.
- 12.8% of Maine youth are obese; and 79.6% ate fruits and vegetables less than five times a day. In Aroostook County, 69.1% of the population is considered obese with over 30% of high-school students either overweight or obese.
- The use of tobacco and alcohol is also high for high-school students. These indicators show a need to address the risk-factors for the people living and working in Aroostook County.

With a population of over 70,000 in one of the most rural counties in the state, there are challenges in getting programmatic information to the public. This affects both awareness and participation.



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Analysis and Basic Conclusions

Based on the facts discussed in the previous section there is a need to continue to address the health issues of the people of Aroostook County. However, much is already being done to address healthy communities in the region.

Funding through the Centers for Disease Control to the State of Maine provided the financial resources to reduce the health issues that Maine – and Aroostook – regularly deal with. Several groups have been working on this since 1999 and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Maine is starting to understand the need to deal with health issues as preventive rather than as corrective issues.

Another group, the Aroostook County District Coordinating Council (ACDCC) is also working to address the issues surrounding the population with their Public Health Improvement Plan. The plan takes the 10 Essential Public Health Services and breaks them down with strategies to improve upon regional results. The ACDCC has an expansive group of health-related members who meet quarterly to determine the action steps needed to deal with the problems of Aroostook County.

Transportation related to healthcare access is not adequate. Not everyone has access to public transportation or the financial resources to travel to healthcare facilities.

Reliable childcare is another problem that must be addressed. Without the availability of transportation and childcare, many younger adults are forgoing seeing their healthcare providers when needed.

Other issues include a lack of health insurance, availability of providers, and the buy-in of people who need the care. Not everyone wants to quit smoking, lose weight and eat healthier. The challenge of conveying the need for this is paired with the challenge of the people accepting the need to change their behaviors.



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Suggested Actions

- Effective communication on health issues and programs with attention to:
 - Coordination with Native American populations, K-12 education, and “special needs” populations
- More effective transportation for healthcare access
- Expansion of childcare options for patients with chronic illness and frequent medical appointments



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Implementation Already Occurring

There are ongoing trainings and workshops happening in Aroostook County in the health field.

Hospitals run “Health Fairs” throughout the region.

There is work being done in the schools and with youth in the community such as “5 2 1 0 Let’s Go” which is a program designed to raise awareness of healthy foods and reduced time in front of a screen for families.

Also Healthy Aroostook holds a Triathlon for youth between the ages of 7 and 13 at the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

There are programs designed to help seniors increase their fitness levels called “Matter of Balance”; they work with all groups to do nutrition-education such as the federally-funded Supplemental Nutrition Access Program.

The Link for Hope Coalition is educating parents and families on the dangers of substance abuse.



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Additional Resource Needs

What additional information or infrastructure is needed?

- Funding is always a key need
- Communication to the population in a manner that can be understood as well as a method that can reach the rural areas
- Programs that provide the opportunities for people who want to take part and in a method they like and in a location they can access
- Federal, state, and local policies that aid in the behavioral changes that are needed