

# **Greater Phoenixville Area Community Health Assessment Executive Summary**

**August 2017**

**Commissioned by the  
Phoenixville Community Health Foundation**

# Greater Phoenixville Area Community Health Assessment: Executive Summary

August 30, 2017

The Phoenixville Community Health Foundation commissioned a Community Health Assessment to better understand the health of our community and to inform our efforts to continually improve people's health and wellness.

We are pleased to report that, overall, the health of the people in our community is generally very good, and most people have access to the resources, services, and support they need to live healthy lifestyles and to address health issues as they arise. At the same time, disparities in health status and access persist, and they typically reflect disparities in socioeconomic status and occur along ethnic and racial lines.

Phoenixville continues to undergo significant change, as reflected in the recent and continuing economic revitalization. While this trend offers significant opportunities for many, it also places strain on individuals and households already struggling to pay for housing. It is no surprise that housing affordability emerged as a significant issue that directly influences health.

Our community, like so many across the country, is confronting challenges related to mental health and wellness, addiction, and maximizing the potential to prevent health issues. These three areas offer for the Greater Phoenixville area to continually improve the health of our community members, and point to strategies and efforts for service providers and community institutions.

The Phoenixville Community Health Foundation is pleased to share this Executive Summary of the report and the full report with the community in the hope that it sparks conversation and assists with the development of strategies to address health issues and create more opportunities for people to improve their health.

Sincerely,

Louis J. Beccaria, Ph.D.  
President/CEO  
Phoenixville Community Health Foundation

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## Introduction

The Phoenixville Community Health Foundation commissioned a Community Health Assessment to understand the health status, assets, and needs of people in the greater Phoenixville community. The assessment identifies:

- Health and wellness needs
- Obstacles to health and wellness
- Resources and opportunities to address health and wellness needs and to improve the health of people in the community
- Recommendations for addressing and preventing issues that affect individuals' health

## Key Findings

- Trends and issues in the Greater Phoenixville Area reflect **trends and issues** at the national, state, and county levels, including Chester County's ranking as the healthiest county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. However, **Phoenixville Borough** has a higher level of health concerns, risks and disparities in outcomes than the surrounding region.
- The community is operating from a **position of strength** in terms of individual and household assets and status (e.g., income, education), and resources in the community (e.g., service providers, access to healthy food).
- Exploring strategies to address **health inequities**, which commonly occur along lines of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and citizenship status, offers potential to address disparities in health status and outcomes.
- Addressing **social determinants of health** is an opportunity to improve root causes of health issues and to address the roots of health inequities; **housing affordability** is an urgent issue in Phoenixville, and is expected to escalate as the community's economic revitalization continues.
- The following areas need more resources and strategy development; in each, the community is experiencing a growing need for services even as the current level of services is inadequate:
  1. **Mental health:** Awareness; access to specialists; support for general practitioners, who are typically the first point of contact for people in need; resources targeted for youth.
  2. **Addiction:** Prevention and treatment resources, particularly related to opiates/opioids.
  3. **Prevention:** Numerous health issues are preventable and often result from individual choices (e.g., obesity, heart disease, diabetes, nutrition, exercise); investing in more prevention efforts will yield an outsize impact.

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- Underlying the findings is a sense of **uncertainty and fear** related to the potential for significant government policy changes, specifically related to health insurance, immigration, and government spending. With so many unknown variables, the community would benefit from strategies and efforts to position community institutions and providers to be nimble and able to respond to expected and unexpected changes.

### Project Methodology

The Community Health Assessment includes analysis of data from secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data sources included:

- Chester County RoadMAPP to Health
- U.S. Census
- American Community Survey
- Chester County Hospital Community Health Assessment 2016
- Chester County Fund for Women & Girls Blueprint Update 2016
- County Health Rankings
- Pennsylvania Department of Health Statistics
- Chester County Department of Health
- Chester County Community Health Snapshot
- Chester County Department of Community and Economic Development
- 2015 Pennsylvania Youth Survey
- State of Obesity Report
- American Heart Association
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

In addition, primary data was collected through:

- 15 key informant interviews with members of the Greater Phoenixville community, representing public and private institutions
- Nine focus groups organized along issue or population areas, with a total of 44 community members participating in focus groups
- An online survey completed by 241 individuals

Analysis of the secondary and primary data sources reveal and reinforce similar findings and trends regarding areas of need in the community.

### Demographics of the Greater Phoenixville Area

Chester County is the seventh largest county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with a population of 515,939 residents. The median household income in Chester County was \$90,503 in 2015, which represents a 6.01% growth from the previous year.

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Additionally, there were 270,111 residents in Chester County with jobs in 2015, which is a 1.29% growth from the previous year. The largest communities by population in Chester County are the Borough of West Chester, the City of Coatesville and the Borough of Phoenixville.<sup>1</sup>

The Greater Phoenixville area of northern Chester County, Pennsylvania includes Phoenixville Borough, East Pikeland Township and Schuylkill Township, which together comprise the geographic region of the Phoenixville Area School District (PASD). PASD consists of three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school.

While the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation serves 19 townships in both Chester and Montgomery Counties, the clear majority of its investments are made in the Greater Phoenixville area, primarily in Phoenixville Borough, the location of Phoenixville Hospital. Phoenixville Borough has a higher unemployment rate, higher number of people accessing public assistance and SNAP benefits, and more individuals living in poverty than much of the surrounding region, which corresponds to higher rates of chronic disease, other health problems, negative social determinants of health and healthcare access issues. When data comparisons are made to other townships within the Foundation's service region, similar themes and patterns emerge. Therefore, the Community Health Assessment findings are applicable to the Foundation's entire service region. Moreover, granular data is not accessible for all 19 townships. As such, data in the full report is organized and presented by Community Health Assessment Focus Communities: Phoenixville Borough, East Pikeland Township, and Schuylkill Township.

### Community Health Assessment Focus Communities

<b>Focus Communities</b>	<b>Population in 2015<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Zip Codes</b>	<b>Key Municipalities</b>
Phoenixville Borough	16,562	19460	Phoenixville
East Pikeland Township	7,308	19460	Valley Forge
Schuylkill Township	8,565	19425, 19442, 19460, 19475	Kimberton

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey

<sup>2</sup> American Community Survey

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## Health and Wellness in the Greater Phoenixville Area

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 2017 County Health Rankings, Chester County is the healthiest county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> This achievement is due in no small part to the health systems, organizations, providers and advocates that contribute to the health and well-being of Chester County residents.

Residents of the Greater Phoenixville Area benefit from community health assets that include the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Phoenixville Hospital, close proximity to Valley Forge National Historical Park and the Perkiomen and Schuylkill River trails, a thriving local economy, access to healthy and fresh foods, a philanthropic business community, and a rich tapestry of nonprofit and faith-based organizations that create a safety net of services for vulnerable families and individuals.

Despite these extraordinary assets, some residents of the Greater Phoenixville Area still face significant health challenges, especially youth, seniors, people of color, and low-income households. Heart disease, cancer, obesity, depression and opioid addiction are growing concerns among all populations and should be the primary focus of prevention and service efforts to maintain or improve the health of residents in the Greater Phoenixville Area, along with efforts to address social determinants of health.

## Adult Health

Adults in the Greater Phoenixville Area are confronted with a wide variety of physical, mental and behavioral health concerns. Key findings related to adult health outcomes and behaviors in Chester County and specifically the Greater Phoenixville Area as of 2015 include the following:

- Heart disease, cancer and strokes were the leading causes of death.
- Level of education attained was positively correlated with better health outcomes.
- Disparities in health outcomes exist in Phoenixville Borough, primarily related to income but also likely related to race/ethnicity, citizenship status, and educational attainment, as compared to rest of the Phoenixville Area as well as much of Chester County.
- 59% of adults in Chester County were overweight or obese.
- 20% of adults did not perform any leisure time physical activity (as opposed to work-related) in any given month.
- 32% of adults experienced one or more poor mental health days in any given month.
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- Nearly half of adults (42%) were current or former smokers (tobacco).
- 16% of adults had been diagnosed with some sort of depressive disorder in their lifetime.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)

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- Opioid abuse is a local, statewide and national concern.
- Food access is a challenge for some residents based on income and/or transportation.

### Children and Adolescent Health

The major health challenges facing children and youth in the Greater Phoenixville Area are related to obesity, mental health and behavioral health. Key findings from national, state, county and municipal data analysis include the following:

- Approximately one-third of children in the United States are obese or overweight, and rates are higher for Latino and black children.
- Depression among adolescents and young adults is increasing dramatically without a corresponding increase in the number of treatment options.
- Over 30% of students in the Phoenixville Area School District feel sad or depressed most days of the year in 2015.
- Over 13% of students in the Phoenixville Area School District seriously considered attempting suicide in 2015.
- Many students in the Phoenixville Area School District have used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and prescription drugs beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Alcohol is the most used substance.
- Approximately 10% of students in the Phoenixville Area School District experiencing bullying by peers in 2015, likely including cyberbullying.

### Housing Affordability in the Greater Phoenixville Area

Where you live can greatly influence your health and wellness. The availability of safe, decent and affordable housing is critical to the health of families and communities. Like most communities in Pennsylvania, housing affordability in Greater Phoenixville is a challenge for low-income and working families and individuals, including seniors and people with disabilities. In Chester County, there are less than 30 affordable and available rental units per 100 extremely low income households.<sup>4</sup> In addition:

- 12% of households are living on \$ 24,999 or less.<sup>5</sup>
- The housing wage is \$ 23.20 per hour, the wage needed to afford the rent of an average two-bedroom apartment while the minimum wage is \$7.25.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 2016 State Housing Profiles: Pennsylvania; NLIHC; 3/1/2015;  
[http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/SHP\\_PA.pdf](http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/SHP_PA.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> American Community Survey

<sup>6</sup> Out of Reach 2016; Pennsylvania; National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC);  
[www.nlihc.org/oor/pennsylvania](http://www.nlihc.org/oor/pennsylvania)

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In Greater Phoenixville, 41% of renters and 31% of homeowners with a mortgage spend 30% or more of their monthly income on housing. In Phoenixville Borough, whose percent of renters is nearly double that of Chester County as a whole, 46% of renters spend 30% or more of their monthly income on rent. Furthermore, over 50% of housing units in the Borough were built no later than 1959.<sup>7</sup> Given that housing affordability is anticipated to become a more pressing issue as a result of local economic revitalization, housing affordability will play be an increasingly important issue to address.

### Community Perception of Health and Wellness Priorities

Community perceptions of health and wellness priorities were gathered through key informant interviews, focus groups, and a survey. The common themes that emerged across the three data sets include:

- Overall health is perceived as good to very good, though disparities exist, and they are most often rooted in socioeconomic disparities.
- The economic revitalization of Phoenixville is affecting – and has the potential to significantly affect – the health of people as housing is increasingly more expensive, causing many people to move out of the area, to spend an unsustainable portion their income on housing, and/or to live in substandard conditions, all of which affect their health status.

Perceptions among community members affirm the findings from the secondary data, including issues of importance, health practices and status, and resources in the community.

### Conclusion

A review of secondary data and primary data collected through the Community Health Assessment process affirms:

- People in the Greater Phoenixville area generally enjoy good health and access to resources that support good health.
- Obesity and related chronic diseases, depression, substance use and housing affordability are critical health concerns.
- Disparities in health exist, and are often rooted in social determinants of health.
- Phoenixville benefits from strong resources and support for addressing health issues, and they are well-positioned to respond to emerging needs and priorities.

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<sup>7</sup> American Community Survey