

GUIDING THE KENNEBEC VALLEY FORWARD



Report to the Community

Kennebec County Community Research & Analysis

Prepared for United Way of Kennebec Valley
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Executive Summary

United Way of Kennebec Valley (UWKV) worked with Plimpton Research to conduct a community research and analysis project designed to identify the region's strengths and most pressing needs in the organization's priority areas of health, education, and financial stability. The project began with a set of white papers presenting quantitative data (e.g., demographic and economic statistics). Staff and volunteers conducted a community survey and a set of community conversations to collect qualitative information (e.g., community member perceptions and preferences). This report summarizes all the findings and is intended to inform UWKV's Goal-Setting Council as it works to develop measurable and achievable community goals and to identify performance measures to track future progress.

Historically, UWKV has served 20 towns in Southern Kennebec County. In August 2021, UWKV expanded to serve all 29 towns in Kennebec County, comprised of 123,500 residents, and supports a wide range of health and human services nonprofits in the region. The data in this report was collected and analyzed prior to UWKV's expansion and thus focuses on Southern Kennebec County, UWKV's previous catchment area. However, the Goal-Setting Council will develop community goals for all of Kennebec County.

Community Survey

The survey of nearly 700 community members included residents of Kennebec County and neighboring communities as well as commuters who work in the region. Members of Kennebec County's communities value many aspects of their region and are quite optimistic about its future.

- The survey found that most community members (56%) think the region's vitality is moving in the right direction. Younger respondents, males, and Arabic speakers were more optimistic than average about the region's vitality.
- More than three in four respondents (83%) indicated that they are likely to recommend the region to a friend as a place to live, work or play. Male respondents, those age 65 and older, and those without a college degree are more likely than average to recommend the region to a friend.

Survey respondents rated the importance of 17 community issues. The results suggest that all of the issues are considered important to community members, but seven issues emerged as *very important* to strong majorities of residents:

1. Job opportunities (77%)
2. High quality schools for children (76%)
3. Access to affordable healthy food (76%)
4. Health care services (73%)
5. Public safety (72%)
6. Reasonable cost of living (72%)
7. Mental health services (69%)

Female survey respondents tended to rate community issues *very important* at higher rates than male respondents, particularly housing and inclusiveness. 71% of younger respondents (under age 35) rated child care *very important*, compared with a 59% average. Older residents were more likely than average to rate community engagement, housing, and transportation as *very important* community issues.

To learn about community members' aspirations in UWKV's three priority areas, the survey asked three open-ended survey questions: "When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in health / education / financial stability look like?" We categorized topics mentioned in all of the answers to identify the most common priorities and suggestions.

Descriptions of success in health most commonly included ideas about improving **access to health care**. Many respondents mentioned affordability of health services, access to recreation and outdoor activities, improving prevention of illness and disease, and food security as top priorities in health.

In education, **high quality education for all ages** was the most common theme in survey responses. Many respondents also mentioned accessibility of education, the importance of higher education, and expanding adult education and vocational training options.

In financial stability, **jobs and employment issues, particularly the number and quality of jobs** in the region, was the top theme in survey responses. Many respondents also mentioned local businesses and downtowns and affordable housing in their visions of success in financial stability.

There were three overlapping themes commonly mentioned across all three domains:

- Accessibility of health care, education, and transportation
- Affordability of health care, early childhood, adult and higher education, and housing
- Quality of health care providers and services, education, jobs, and housing stock

Community Conversations

UWKV facilitated five community conversations with 62 community members in May and June 2021. The groups included community members representing:

- Augusta
- Gardiner
- New Mainers
- Winthrop
- A teleconference open to members of all communities in Kennebec County

Each discussion was guided by four questions:

1. What are some of the best places or programs that make this community a safe, healthy, good place to live?
2. What kind of community do you want this to be in 10 years?
3. What keeps us from having the community we want?
4. What needs to happen to get us there?

Common themes from discussions of **community assets** include specific cultural, health and social services organizations; the area's geographic location within Maine; having the state capitol, abundant outdoor recreation areas and green spaces; public safety, health and social services agencies and institutions; and engaged community members.

While members of different communities in the region shared some of the same opinions about community strengths, differences also emerged. People from all parts of the region enjoy proximity to the capitol, the nearby lakes region, the Kennebec River Rail Trail and many of the same outdoor

spaces, as well as being within an hour's drive of Greater Portland and Bangor. But differences also emerged:

- Residents of some towns spoke of vibrant and diverse downtowns and local businesses, while others wished for more diverse local businesses and fewer empty storefronts.
- Some communities feel they are seeing an influx of young families while others are experiencing fewer young people and children living in town.
- Residents of Augusta and neighboring towns said that broadband service and speed are strong, while outlying community members named universal broadband access as an important ten-year aspiration.
- New Mainers had some similar discussion themes such as valuing the public schools and public safety in the region. Transportation challenges and adequate housing were more pronounced in this discussion than in any of the others. Members also said that they would like to see:
 - More adult education options
 - An accessible performing arts center
 - More local businesses offering groceries, restaurant food, and clothing that reflect their home cultures.

Themes from the discussions of **community aspirations** include:

- Make the region a desirable, supportive place for families with children, retirees, and all ages
- Continue to improve the public school system
- More affordable, accessible mental health services. Prevent and address substance use disorder.
- More diversified, thriving downtowns
- More engaged, active community members getting involved in public service and volunteering

The most common themes in the discussion of **barriers to achieving community goals** were the cross-cutting issues of jobs, housing, and transportation. Some community members also spoke of lack of awareness of community resources and assets.

- Community members see deficits on both sides of the **jobs** equation in the region. There are not enough high-quality jobs, and there are not enough qualified, available workers to fill some jobs.
- Community members see **housing (stock, quality, and affordability)** as a key issue that needs improvement.
- Community members spoke of **transportation** as a barrier to accessing jobs, education and training, health care, and recreational and cultural opportunities. Transportation was also mentioned as a particular barrier for seniors, presenting a challenge in getting to health care appointments and contributing to isolation.

In discussing **how to achieve community aspirations**, many participants said that top-notch schools, arts and cultural institutions, robust local businesses, and community engagement are among the ways to achieve their vision for a successful future in the region. Discussion participants commonly mentioned that:

- Health and social services are needed to help all community members share in community prosperity.
- Organizations and sectors working together, the valuable contributions of volunteers, and the power of community engagement are keys to creating positive change.

- Collaborating with regional and town officials and organizations is important.
- The region needs economic development. Suggestions include establishing a business incubator and streamlining regulations to remove barriers to starting a new business.

Some of the discussions touched on the important roles that UWKV can and does play in promoting success in the region, including convening partners across sectors and towns, providing ways for businesses to support community aspirations, and promoting and sponsoring community engagement and volunteerism.

White Papers

Four white papers completed in February 2021 provide context for the goal-setting work and the qualitative data collection. With guidance from UWKV and the Goal-Setting Council, we investigated thirty-five topics in the areas of a county overview, health, education, and financial stability. Selected findings are summarized in this report, including:

- **Population:** In 2019, Kennebec County's population stood at 122,302 people, up slightly from 122,076 in 2010. The county's population dropped from 2010 to 2015 but has since rebounded. Statewide, the population has grown slightly despite deaths outnumbering births since 2013, thanks to in-migration from other countries and other parts of the U.S. Since the white papers' publication, the 2020 U.S. Census data demonstrates that the Kennebec County population has increased to 123,642.
- **Race and ethnicity:** About 96% of Kennebec County residents are white, just above the state average of 94%. Nearly 2% of the county's population is Hispanic or Latino, and about 1% each are Asian and Black or African American.
- **Recent immigrants:** The Capital Area New Mainers Project (CANMP) estimates that about 100 families, including roughly 525 people from other countries, have moved to Augusta since 2015. Most recent immigrant families are living in southern parts of Augusta. CANMP staff expect five to seven new immigrant families to move to Augusta each year going forward.
- **Health care providers:** Kennebec is among the top 10% of counties nationally for the number of primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers per population. In spite of this, community research efforts have identified significant barriers to adequate care and issues with the health care system—like cost, physician training, and referral structures—that prevent many people from having access to adequate health care treatment.
- **Infant mortality rates:** From 2012-2016, Kennebec County had 7.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, up from 5.4 in 2007-2011. This was higher than both the Maine average of 6.5 and the national average of 5.9. Most infant deaths are due to being born too early.
- **Middle school and high school mental health:** In 2019, about one-quarter of Kennebec County middle and high school youth report symptoms of depression—feeling sad and hopeless enough that it interferes with everyday activities. 20% of county middle school students reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months.
- **Substance use disorder and overdose deaths:** The most dramatic trend in the measures we reviewed is the increase in drug poisoning deaths. From 2009-2011, there were 12 drug poisoning deaths per 100,000 population in Kennebec County. This increased to 21 in 2014-2016 and 35 in 2016-2018. National data suggest that the increase has continued.
- **Poverty:** Kennebec County had an official poverty rate of 12.8% in 2019, one point higher than the state rate of 11.8%. Augusta's poverty rate was much higher, at 18.8%.

- **Housing:** Households paying more than 30% of their income for housing are considered “cost burdened.” Nearly one-half of renters (47%) and one-quarter of homeowners (24%) in Kennebec County are cost burdened. There is a jobs-housing imbalance in Augusta, limiting the ability for some people who work in the city to live in the city, and limiting the ability of some people who live in the city to work in the city.
- **Preschool enrollment:** The share of four-year-olds enrolled in public prekindergarten in Kennebec County (54%) is above the Maine average of 47%, and Maine outperforms the U.S. and New England on this measure.
- **High school graduation:** Kennebec County’s four-year high school graduation rate of 86% is two points below the state average of 88%. Both in the county and in Maine, students from low-income families graduated on time at rates about ten points lower than the average.
- **Higher education attainment:** Given the concentration and mix of employers in Kennebec County, it is surprising that higher education attainment in the county is 38%, three points below the state average of 41%.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of our community data collection and analysis depict a region with many valuable assets and well-informed, caring community members, as well as some challenging areas for improvement. While there is consensus on broad goals and values, there are some important differences across the region. How to best address the critical challenges of jobs, housing, and transportation is not necessarily clear.

There is a consensus that the region would benefit from a larger, younger, more diverse population. Becoming a destination and keeping more young people in the area emerged as top aspirations for Kennebec County community members. The most common suggestions for getting there are to develop a top-notch public education system; support the creation and expansion of local businesses; increase the quality and quantity of job opportunities; and expand the region’s housing quality, stock, and affordability.

The Goal-Setting Council can use values that emerged from the community data collection to help guide its work.

- 1) Top issues that the most community members consider very important—job opportunities, high quality schools, access to affordable healthy food, health care services, public safety, and a reasonable cost of living—are things that directly affect all community members.
- 2) Participants’ aspirations for a successful future in UWKV’s priority areas shared three common themes:
 - **Accessibility** of health care, education, and transportation
 - **Affordability** of health care, early childhood, adult and higher education, and housing
 - **Quality** of health care providers and services, education, jobs, and housing stock
- 3) Boosting the region’s appeal to women, younger residents, and those with college degrees—groups less likely to recommend the area to friends—is a promising area of opportunity.
- 4) Region-level planning is needed on cross-cutting issues like economic development, housing, substance use treatment, and transportation.

Survey respondents and conversation participants often spoke of the importance of community engagement, both among individuals and organizations in all sectors. UWKV plays an important role in the region supporting essential services, convening key players across sectors and towns, and encouraging and facilitating community engagement. By continuing and expanding this work, UWKV and its partners can contribute to developing and advancing strategies to address community aspirations.

Project Overview

Covering 867 square miles, Kennebec County is the tenth largest of Maine's 16 counties by area and the fourth largest in population. Kennebec County is bordered by Androscoggin, Franklin, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Somerset, and Waldo Counties. In August 2021, United Way of Kennebec Valley (UWKV) expanded to serve all 29 towns in Kennebec County, comprised of 123,500 residents, and supports a wide range of health and human services nonprofits in the region. The data in this report was collected prior to UWKV's expansion and thus focuses on Southern Kennebec County, UWKV's previous catchment area.

Southern Kennebec County includes Maine's capitol city of Augusta, the location of many employers such as state agencies, the headquarters of statewide organizations, law firms, financial institutions, other associated businesses, and the University of Maine at Augusta. The city is also the home of MaineGeneral Health, the county's largest private employer, and many other health care providers. With a population of 18,605 people, Augusta is Maine's 12th most populous city.

UWKV hired Plimpton Research for this community research and analysis project designed to identify the region's most pressing needs in the organization's priority areas of health, education, and financial stability. The project included presenting quantitative data (e.g., demographic and economic statistics) in a set of white papers and collecting qualitative information (e.g., community member perceptions and preferences) through a community survey and a set of group conversations.

Data Collection & Analysis

UWKV staff and volunteers conducted a community survey and a set of community conversations to collect qualitative information (e.g., community members' perceptions and preferences) in April, May, and June 2021. The survey was conducted online and by paper and pencil and offered in Arabic and English. UWKV partner nonprofit organizations across the county helped get the word out and encourage constituents to complete the survey. The questions addressed priority issues in the community and visions for a successful future, as well as basic demographic information. A total of 696 community members, both residents of Southern Kennebec County and commuters, completed the survey. Staff and volunteers also facilitated one virtual and four in-person community conversations, taking detailed notes, and recording the sessions to generate transcripts detailing all of the topics discussed and many verbatim quotes. These discussions explored four questions about the region's strengths, visions for the future, barriers, and ideas about how to ensure success. Three of the groups focused on recruiting members from specific geographic parts of the region, one targeted recent immigrants to Augusta, and one provided a virtual forum for all community members. A total of 62 community members took part in a community conversation. Ultimately, 758 people connected to Kennebec County contributed to the qualitative data collection.

Plimpton Research analyzed the conversation and survey data to gain insight into community members' priorities for the region, insights into problem areas, and promising suggestions for working toward community goals. We used Microsoft Excel and Access to tabulate survey responses. Demographic information from participants allowed us to explore correlations in the response patterns by gender, age, education level, language, and race/ethnicity. To analyze the community conversation transcripts, we coded for themes in the discussions using QDA Miner software. Transcripts from the different geographic parts of the region and the New Mainer group were helpful for discerning different assets, concerns, and priorities across the region.

COVID-19 Impacts

The months prior to our study have been marked by the economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. We know that jobs and incomes have been disrupted for many people. The impacts have not been equally distributed, and different groups of people, geographic areas, and industries have faced dramatically different impacts. UWKV's own 211 Maine call data provide an example. 211 is a free, confidential information and referral service that connects people to local services statewide. Local 211 call volume more than doubled from 2,043 total calls in 2019 to 5,426 calls in 2020. The top reason for 211 calls in 2020 was COVID-19 control. 211 fielded 2,537 COVID-19 control calls from Kennebec County, more than the total number of 211 calls for any reason in 2019. We acknowledge that our study's results, and even our data collection methods, have been affected by the pandemic's disruption.

This report summarizes all of the findings and is intended to inform UWKV's Goal-Setting Council as it works to develop measurable and achievable community goals and to identify performance measures to track future progress.

We are grateful to the staff of UWKV, members of the Goal-Setting Council, and the many community members who took time to complete the survey or to participate in community conversations.

Community Survey

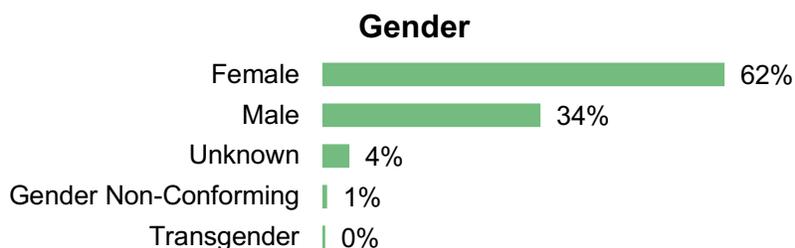
UWKV conducted a survey of Kennebec Valley community members in April, May and June of 2021. Community members had the option of responding online or completing a paper and pencil survey, and the survey was offered in English and Arabic. Nearly 700 community members participated in the survey. The survey sample is different from the overall Kennebec County population: female residents are overrepresented, the survey sample is more racially/ethnically diverse, and a higher proportion of survey respondents hold college degrees than in the population.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The survey asked several questions about participants' demographic characteristics to allow for analysis of response patterns. Please see the Appendix for detailed tables.

Gender

96% of survey respondents reported their gender. Most survey respondents—62%—are female, 34% are male, 1% are gender non-conforming, and a few respondents are transgender. As with many surveys, women are overrepresented in our sample. Kennebec County's population is 51% female and 49% male.

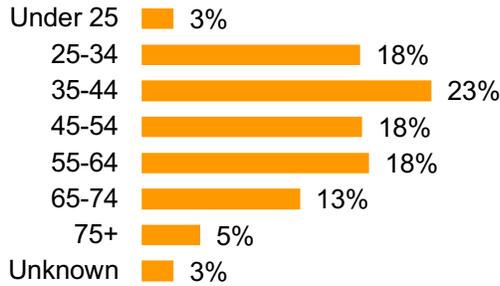


Age

97% of those completing the survey reported their age. About three in five respondents (59%) fall into the middle age category of ages 35 to 64. About one in five survey respondents are under age 35 (21%) and over age 65 (18%). The age distribution of survey respondents is close to the population as a whole, with slightly more middle-aged respondents and fewer young adults and seniors.

- 59% of survey respondents are ages 35-64, compared with 53% in the population.
- 21% of survey respondents are age 65 or older, compared with 25% in the overall population.

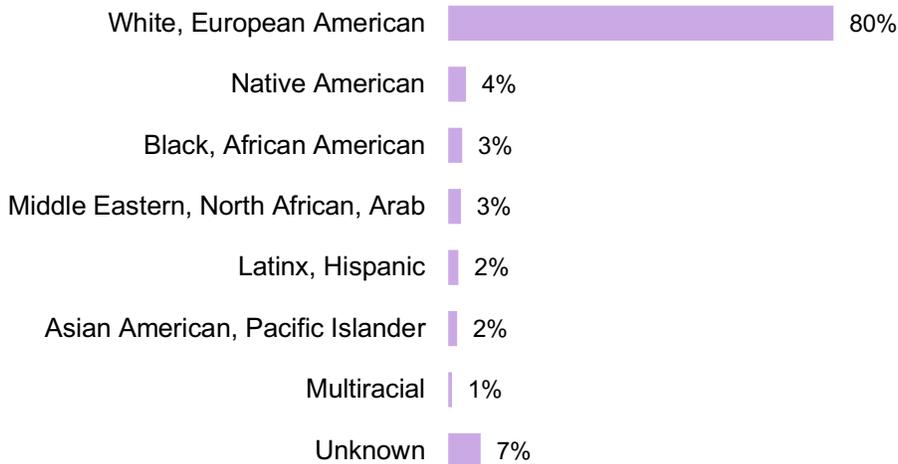
Age Group



Race/Ethnicity

93% of survey respondents reported their race. Community members participating in the survey are more racially and ethnically diverse than the community as a whole. 80% of survey respondents are white or European American (compared with 96% of Kennebec County’s population), 4% are Native American, 3% each are Black and Middle Eastern, 2% each are Asian American/Pacific Islander and Hispanic, and 1% are Multiracial. UWKV intentionally oversampled the Arab population of recent immigrants in order to gather robust information from that small, unique group of residents.

Race and Ethnicity

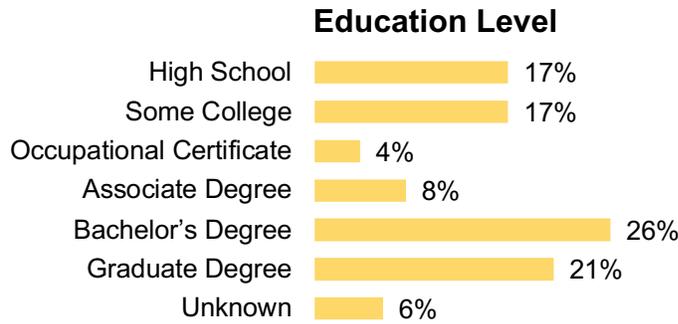


Note: Some respondents chose more than one race/ethnicity, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

Education Level

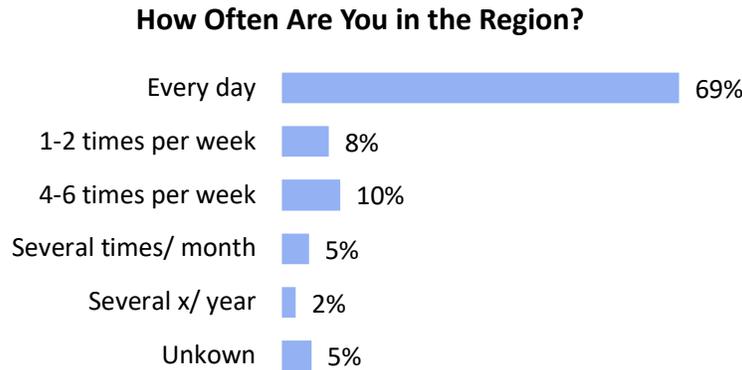
94% of survey respondents reported the highest level of education they have completed. As shown below, 17% of respondents have a high school diploma only, 17% have completed some college, 4% hold an occupational certificate, and 55% hold an associate or higher degree. The survey sample is

more educated than the region’s population; only 38% of Kennebec County residents hold an associate or higher degree.



How Often Respondents Are in the Region

95% of survey respondents answered a question about how often they are in the region. More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents are in Southern Kennebec County every day, and another 10% are there 4-6 times per week. 8% of respondents are in the region 1-2 times per week, and 7% are there only several times per month or per year.



Where Participants Live

95% of survey respondents reported the town they live in. 87% of participants live in Southern Kennebec County, with 36% residing in Augusta, 8% in Gardiner, and 7% in Winthrop. Two respondents are homeless and staying the region. 5% of respondents live just outside Southern Kennebec County, and 2% are commuters. The commuters live in Cumberland, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Somerset, and Waldo Counties.

Survey Language

98% of respondents completed the English language survey, and 2.4% (17 respondents) completed the survey in Arabic.

Perceptions of the Region

Vitality

The survey first asked, “Thinking about the vitality of the Southern Kennebec County region, would you say it is: Moving in the right direction, Staying about the same, or Going in the wrong direction?”

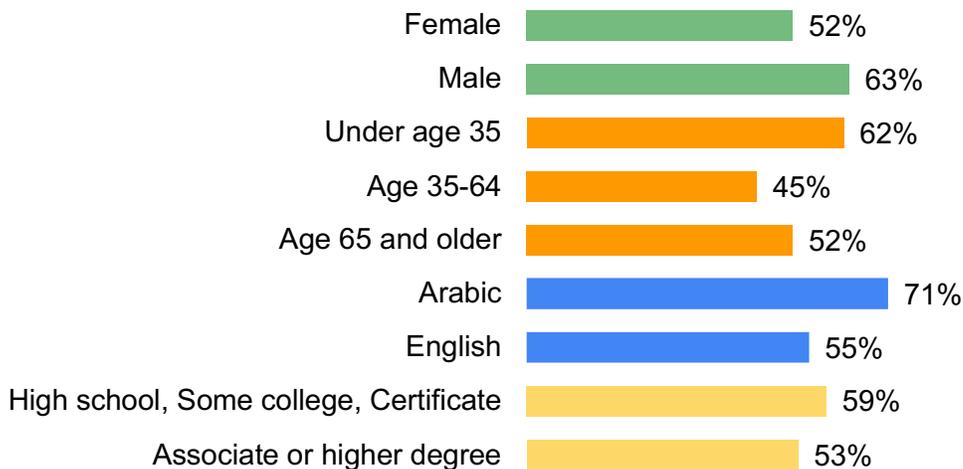
A majority of survey respondents (56%) say that the region is *moving in the right direction*. About two in five (39%) indicate that the region is *staying about the same*, and only 6% say it is *going in the wrong direction*.

Most survey respondents say that the vitality of Southern Kennebec County is moving in the right direction



Male community members, younger and older people, Arabic speakers, and respondents who do not hold a college degree were more optimistic than average about the region’s vitality, as shown in the following chart.

The region's vitality is moving in the right direction



- Male respondents (63%) were more likely than females (52%) to say the region is moving in the right direction.

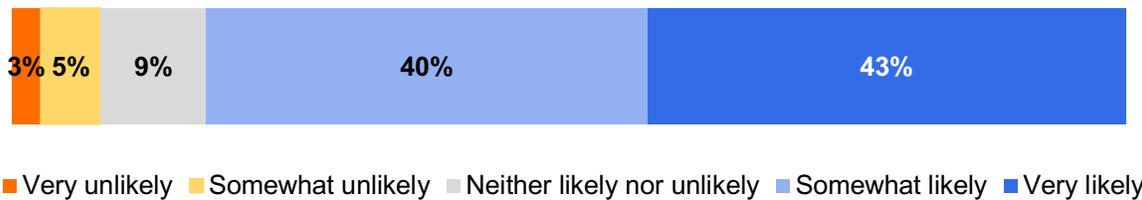
- Respondents under age 35 (62%) were the most optimistic about the region’s vitality, and residents ages 65 and older (52%) were more likely than middle-aged respondents (45%) to say the region is moving in the right direction.
- The small number of respondents who completed the survey in Arabic were more likely (71%) to say the region is moving in the right direction than were English language respondents (55%).
- Respondents who have completed high school, some college, or an occupational certificate were slightly more optimistic about the vitality of the region than were those who hold a postsecondary education degree.

Recommending Southern Kennebec County

The survey asked, “How likely are you to recommend the Southern Kennebec County region to a friend as a place to live, work or play?”

The vast majority of respondents (83%) indicated that they are likely to recommend the region. 43% are *very likely* and 40% are *somewhat likely* to recommend it, while 9% are neutral, and only 5% are *somewhat unlikely* and 3% *very unlikely* to recommend Southern Kennebec County to a friend.

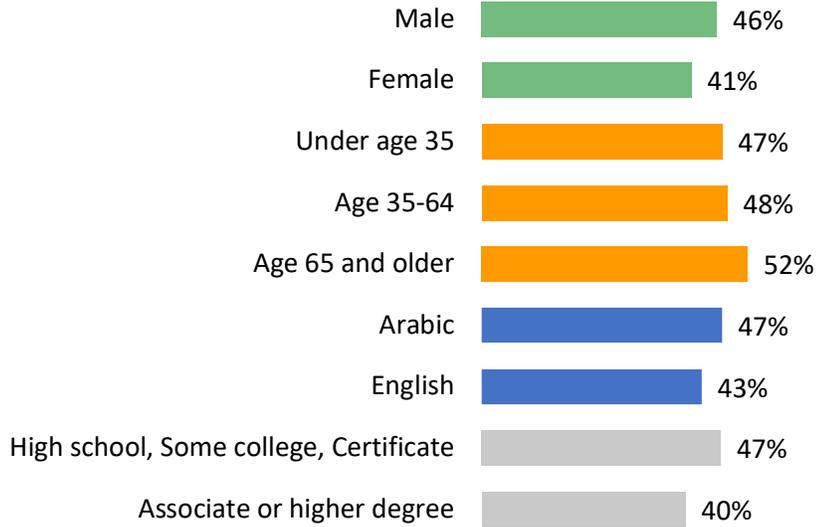
83% of survey respondents would recommend Southern Kennebec County to a friend as a place to live, work or play



Examining the proportion of respondents indicating that they are *very likely* to recommend Southern Kennebec County reveals some differences. Also, perceptions of the region’s vitality are not perfectly correlated with the likelihood that respondents would recommend the area to friends.

- Gender: As with perceptions of the region’s vitality, male respondents are more likely than women to say they are *very likely* to recommend the region to a friend.
- Age: While younger respondents had more optimistic perceptions of the region’s vitality than middle aged and older residents, only 38% of those under age 25 say they are *very likely* to recommend the region to a friend, compared with 48% of middle-aged respondents and 52% of those ages 65 and older.

Very Likely to Recommend the Region to a Friend



- While Arabic language respondents were much more likely than English speakers to say that the region’s vitality is moving in the right direction, the two groups are not significantly different in the likelihood that they would recommend the region to a friend.
- Only 40% of respondents with a college degree indicate that they are *very likely* to recommend the region to friends, significantly lower than the 47% of respondents with high school, some college, or an occupational certificate.

Top Priority Community Issues

The survey presented a list of 17 issues, asking respondents, “Please rate how important these community issues are for you” with the answer options: *Very important*, *Somewhat important*, *Neutral*, *Somewhat unimportant* and *Unimportant*.

Respondents generally rated all of the issues presented as *somewhat important* or *very important*. Comparing the proportions rating each issue *very important* enables a comparison of top community priorities.

Three issues were rated *very important* by more than three-quarters of survey respondents:

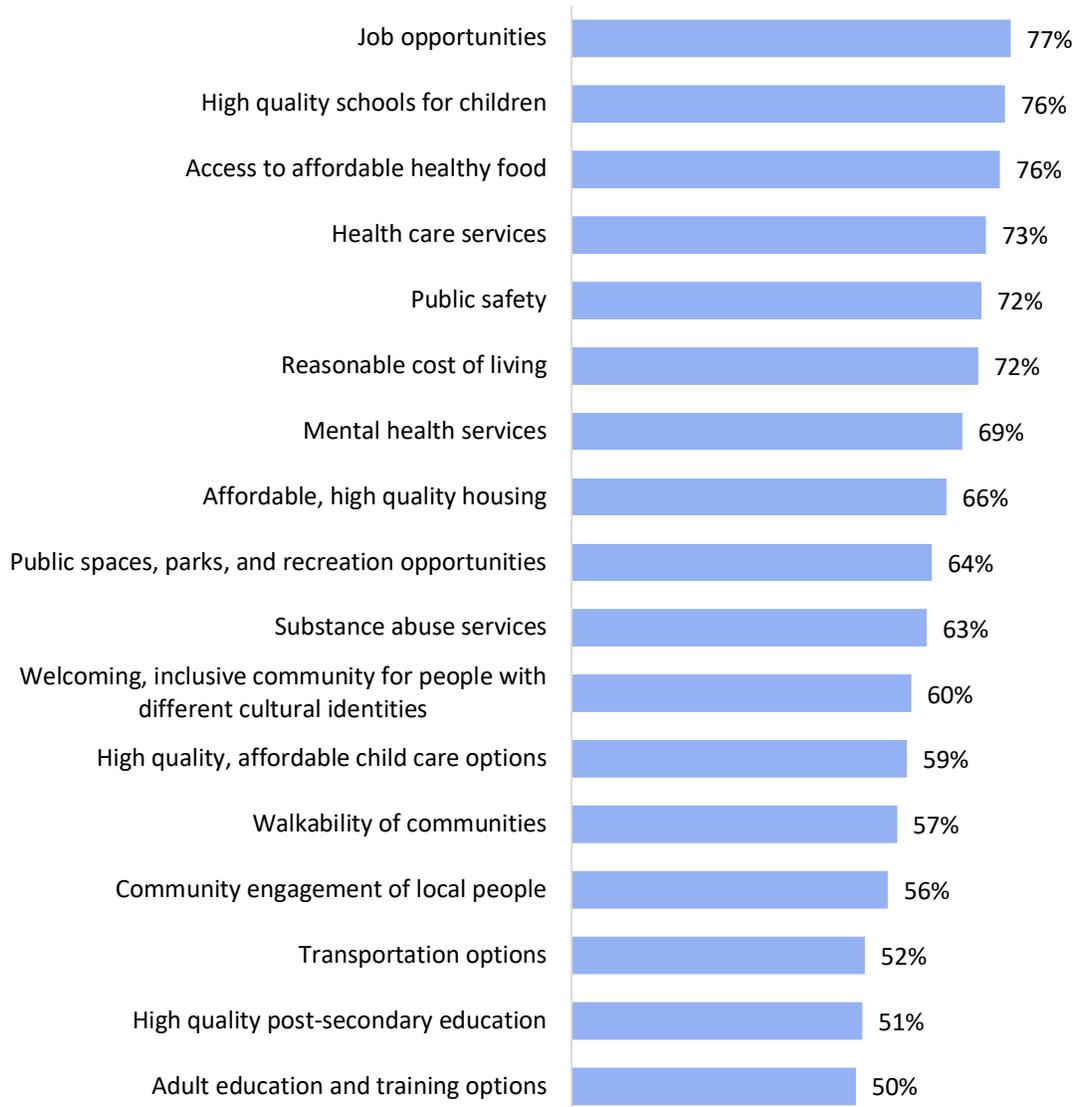
1. Job opportunities (77%)
2. High quality schools for children (76%)
3. Access to affordable healthy food (76%)

More than two-thirds of respondents rated another four issues *very important*:

4. Health care services (73%)
5. Public safety (72%)
6. Reasonable cost of living (72%)

7. Mental health services (69%)

Community Issues Considered *Very Important*



Issues rated *very important* by one-half to two-thirds of community members include:

8. Affordable, high quality housing (66%)
9. Public spaces, parks, and recreation opportunities (64%)
10. Substance abuse services (63%)
11. Welcoming, inclusive community for people with different cultural identities (60%)
12. High quality, affordable child care options (59%)
13. Walkability of communities (57%)
14. Community engagement of local people (56%)
15. Transportation options (52%)
16. High quality post-secondary education (51%)
17. Adult education and training options (50%)

Demographic Differences

There were several differences in ratings of the importance of community issues among demographic groups. Female survey respondents were more likely overall to rate community issues *very important* than were male respondents. The largest differences were:

- 73% of women consider **Affordable, high quality housing options** to be *very important*, compared with only 55% of men.
- 68% of women rated **Welcoming, inclusive community for people with different cultural identities** as *very important*, compared with less than half (46%) of men.

Survey respondents of different ages had different response patterns regarding the importance of some issues. While respondents of all ages value jobs, schools, health services, community inclusiveness, and public safety similarly:

- Older residents were more likely than those under age 64 to rate **Transportation options as a very important** community issue (65% compared with the 52% average).
- Seniors (71%) were also more likely to say that **Affordable, high quality housing options** is a *very important* issue, while respondents under age 35 (62%) were less likely than the 66% average of respondents rating housing as a *very important* community issue.
- The youngest residents are much more likely (71% of those under age 35) than average (59%) to rate **High quality, affordable child care options** as a *very important* community issue.
- Older residents tend to rate community engagement as more important, with 47% of those under age 35, 57% of those ages 35-64, and 61% of seniors rating **Community engagement of local people** as *very important*.

Ten-Year Aspirations for Success

The survey included three open-ended questions aimed at learning about community members' aspirations for Southern Kennebec County's future. We categorized topics mentioned in all of the answers to identify top priorities. Selected responses are quoted in this report to illustrate these common themes.

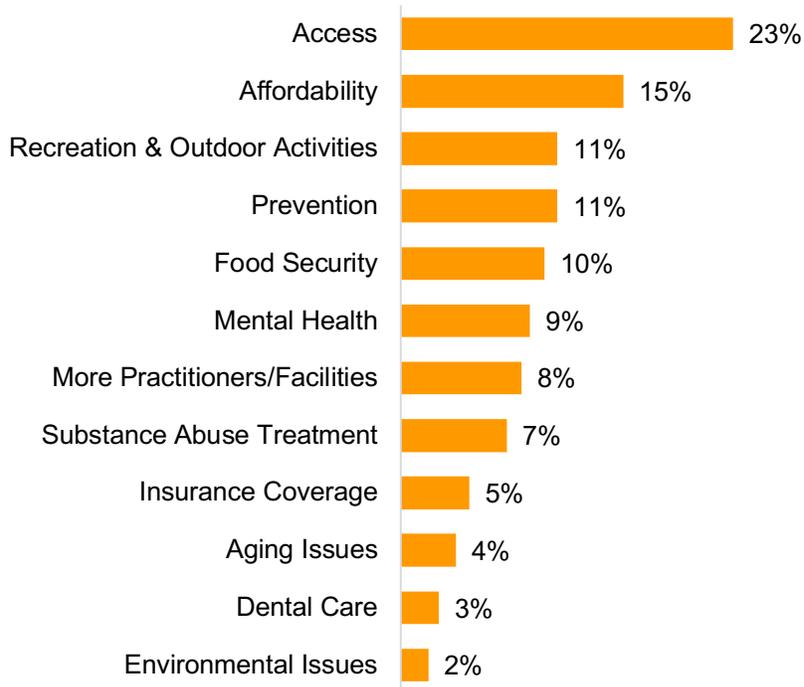
Health

The first open-ended question in the survey was, "When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in health look like?"

Top themes in the responses are accessibility, affordability, places to get outside, healthy lifestyles that prevent disease, healthy food available to all residents, and comprehensive, high-quality health care services. **Access to health care** was the issue mentioned most often, by nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents, as part of community members' vision for a successful future in health.

Many respondents praised the health services currently available in the area, but many hope for improvement in the range of specialists practicing locally, the quality of emergency room services, accessibility of mental health services, and more substance abuse treatment options. Prevention was a common theme, as were issues of outdoor recreation areas, walkability and accessible transportation.

What Does Success in Health Look Like?



The following chart shows the prevalence of 12 issues mentioned most commonly in survey responses. The quotes below illustrate respondents’ visions and suggestions. Many responses touched on multiple themes. Some quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Access

- “Open access to preventative medicine and checkups for all residents”
- “Better public transportation system so that people could travel to the health services”
- “The children who are born this year will have easy access to health and dental care (perhaps even in our schools), are able to easily find ways to recreate within walking distance of their home and have opportunities for meaningful connection with caring adults. Adults can secure health care when needed and are able to get mental health or substance use disorder care easily and without stigma.”
- “Need more access for communities away from large populations”
- “Welcoming communities with diverse representation and secure fundamental life resources for the most vulnerable”

Affordability

- “Increasing our resources and programs as well as financial help for people with mental health, alcohol and substance abuse problems to be able to get the help they need.”
- “A community where access to affordable care in all aspects of life is available to all community members, not just the most wealthy and impoverished.”
- “More people having better affordable access to programs like health care, child care, etc.”

Recreation and Outdoor Activities

- “Plenty of open spaces and trails for people to access the outdoors.”
- “Residents of all ages can safely walk, recreate, and exercise within 10 minutes of their home.”
- “Option and availability of excellent quality public parks, trails, and other recreation opportunities, walkability of communities”

Prevention

- “Affordable access to health care with robust community prevention programming”
- “Better access to natural health and prevention of illness”
- “Easy access to affordable preventive health care options, outdoor spaces for all to easily access...Community programing for health education across the lifespan.”

Food Security

- “Healthy locally grown regenerative organic foods are affordable and available from small locally owned co-ops.”
- “Children and seniors are still going to bed hungry, and some communities have no safe places to walk or play. We can do better.”
- “There are no families living in poverty and no family is cold in the winter or without food.”

Mental Health

- “Overdose stats down because we are handling substance use disorder as a public health issue versus a criminal one. Mental health calls utilizing mental health professionals with law enforcement as backup.”
- “We absolutely also need to take into account the lack of mental health services in the area and the impact of economic instability on people's mental and physical health.”

More Practitioners/Facilities

- “More available doctors in most practices. It has been extremely hard for my family to find physicians, even general practitioners.”
- “There are more options for walk-in clinics.”
- “We already have a world class hospital and cancer center. Improve our trauma center services along with opioid response and treatment.”

- “We need more specialty practices in the area and more affordable dental care options for adults. Cancer Center is a great space in Augusta! Love to see it grow.”

Substance Abuse Treatment

- “Fewer people suffering from substance use disorder and more resources for those who are.”
- “Mental health and substance use disorder services available. Stigma eliminated or greatly reduced.”

Insurance Coverage

- “People in the community having insurance, and lower co-pays for drugs and medical/health expenses”
- “Insurance coverage for all. Dental insurance for all.”

Aging Issues

- “Residents can age in place, and residents of all ages can safely walk, recreate, and exercise within 10 minutes of their home.”
- “More senior housing”

Dental Care

- “More dentists, adult dental care for MaineCare”
- “Sufficient numbers of family health care providers, dentists and advanced care nurses”

Environmental Issues

- “A focus on environmental issues because pollution is linked to health.”
- “Replanting trees and preserving and creating green spaces! Green public transportation.”
- “More solar harnessing, wind harnessing and tidal generation of electricity.”

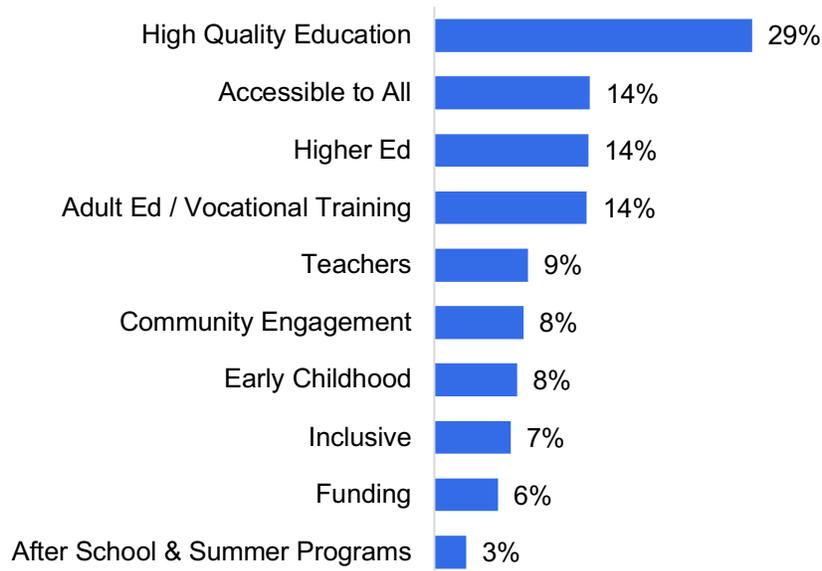
Education

The second open-ended question was, “When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in education look like?”

We identified ten themes in respondents’ vision for success in education. High quality education was the top theme, with 29% of respondents mentioning it. Many equate high quality public education as an important element of making Southern Kennebec County an attractive destination and key to retaining younger people in the area. Accessibility of education at all levels was mentioned by 14%

of respondents, as were higher education and adult education or vocational training for older youth and adults.

What Does Success in Education Look Like? (% of responses mentioning)



High Quality Education

- “We need life skills education as a standard in K-12. Offering STEM is fine but we still need folks to bake the donuts. We need more trade school options. State colleges should be subsidized for residents.”
- “Same as now. Schools seem great.”
- “Dropout rates below other counties; college students wanting to attend our schools; schooling that includes arts and sports.”
- “High rate of literacy, high school graduation and college participation, thriving community colleges with appropriate job training programs.”
- “High quality educational institutions, with school choice and options for student advancement.”
- “Students are at or above national averages in performance, internships are promoted in high school to help students decide if college is the right path and help determine what might be of interest to them, technical skills get the same level of financial support and respect as college educations.”

Accessible to All

- “Affordable and accessible child care, early childhood education, and positive out of school opportunities.”
- “Debt free opportunities to pursue postsecondary education and trades exist for all students with interest, regardless of their parents’ income.”

- “Literacy programs. Accessibility to community college and TRADE SCHOOLS (I wish I had done this instead of four-year university).”

Higher Ed

- “More recruiting within the state for students to attend universities and colleges.”
- “We need more universities and technical institutes.”

Adult Ed / Vocational Training

- “Increasing education on the job would really benefit companies and more people would be applying if they could learn while they earned.”
- “Adult education programs that are responsive to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion.”
- “Support for students entering vocational schools, as well as college. Affordable, high-quality preschool.”

Teachers

- “It has a strong teaching staff, from primary school to secondary school, and the quality of education is high.”
- “Schools with adequate budgets. Teachers receiving professional development frequently. Ties between schools and their communities. Appropriate teacher to student ratios.”
- “Attracting competent young people to the teaching profession is key. We spend a lot on facilities, resources, etc., but without good teachers it's all for naught. The key is higher pay.”

Community Engagement

- “Community support of our schools, not just funding but parent/community volunteers”
- “Public school districts that exhibit top quartile test scoring, high placement to college and trade schools, and higher student engagement with nonprofits, community organizations, and local businesses (including internships)”

Early Childhood

- “Availability of high-quality early learning/daycare—sets the foundation for K-12 education and creates a stronger workforce”
- “I feel that these younger years in school are what pave the way for the rest of a child’s life and if they don’t get the proper education and love at a young age then they will struggle in life.”
- “Improved graduation rates. Increased access to PUBLIC early childhood education beginning at age three.”

Inclusive

- “New public education leaders please. Staff treat Arabic kids badly and does not understand some of their problems. Parents are doing their best to raise their kids in the right way.”
- “Flexible, inclusive schools with successful students...preparing students for a variety of life/career paths.”

Funding

- “More funding for public schools and better transportation to after-school and summer enrichment programs.”
- “Improved funding, more teachers, schools with gardens and cleaner food choices. More school community engagement.”

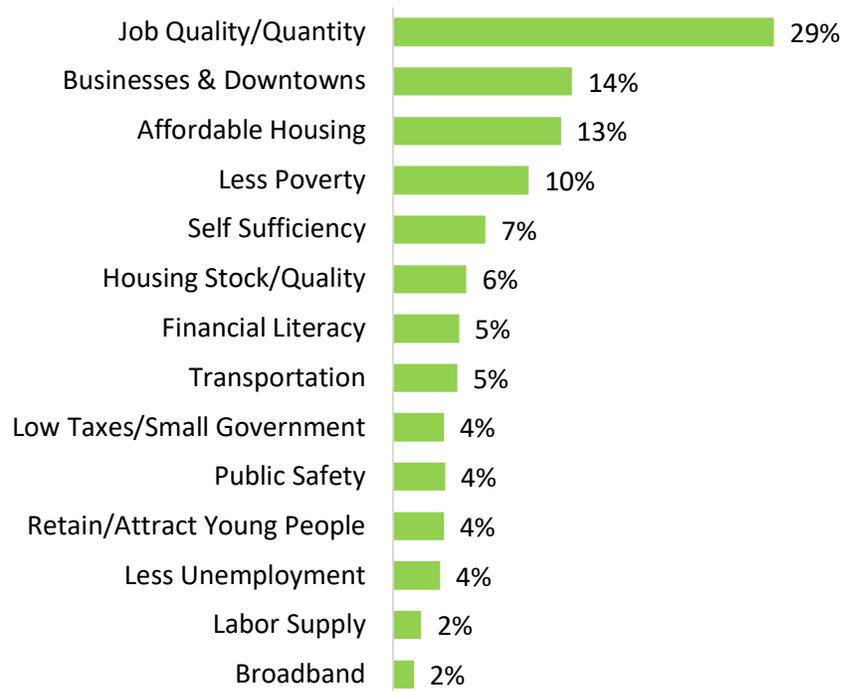
After School and Summer Programs

- “Good after school programs for kids”
- “Important programs like sports and after school programs do not get cut.”
- “Additional winter recreation opportunities; higher paid teachers; lower taxes”

Financial Stability

The final open-ended question asked, “When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in financial stability look like?” Fourteen top issues emerged as themes in community members’ vision for success in financial stability. Jobs and employment issues, particularly the number and quality of jobs in the area, was by far the most-mentioned theme, with 29% of respondents touching on it. Healthy businesses and vibrant downtowns were the second most common theme (14%), and affordable housing was third (13%). We categorized labor supply as a separate issue from jobs; 2% of survey respondents specifically mentioned this.

What Does Success in Financial Stability Look Like?



Job Quality/Quantity

- “Jobs that pay a living wage; people would not have to choose between paying bills or eating”
- “Jobs offering better wages with benefits that people need. Childcare services, more paid time off with family.”
- “It looks like jobs that pay more than a minimum wage and that offer regular predictable schedules. People can’t improve their lives if their work schedule changes every week.”

Businesses and Downtowns

- “Success is only successful until the next pandemic. The economy needs to diversify, not rely on the one trick ponies of bars and designer beers. We can look to the arts and outdoor activities to attract tourism. We must have affordable housing for service jobs.”
- “Most people able to afford a home or rent, well trained population, lots of smaller local businesses doing well, at the expense of big box stores and national chains.”
- “No empty storefronts, healthy small businesses”
- “Greater variety of businesses—not just service industry and state job dominant. Bring in more companies that would normally gravitate to the Portland area, so people don’t have to commute an hour for a good job.”
- “Increased business and community collaboration to expand on our local economy”

- “A vibrant downtown area with no empty stores/windows...people wanting to come to Augusta for work and to live. A cleaned-up Mt. Vernon Street (Augusta), houses in better repair and cleaned up streets.”

Affordable Housing

- “Please, please, please keep property taxes as low as possible. Otherwise long-term residents have to sell their homes and don't know where to move to.”
- “Affordable housing options are available for everyone.”
- “More families are able to buy houses and move away from renting. Fewer families are living in poverty.”

Less Poverty

- “There are no families living in poverty and no family is cold in the winter or without food. Public safety systems are adequately funded. Business are thriving and paying a reasonable wage to employees. The unemployment rate is low to non-existent.”
- “I think that the stimulus package is helping the poor get out of poverty and it needs to continue. Being a young single mother of two is really hard...when my kids’ daycares had to close because of Covid or one of my kids had to miss school.”
- “Provide local county grants for residents that don't necessarily qualify for state aid.”

Self Sufficiency

- “Lifting people up to make it on their own is the best gift of all.”
- “Employment opportunities for all. Encouraging those that can to work. Self-reliance stressed with a willingness to help those that help themselves. People should not be penalized (loss of benefits) for working or being married.”

Housing Stock/Quality

- “Affordable housing, improvements in apartment buildings, holding landlords accountable for improvements”
- “More home buying options for those who have low credit but hold steady jobs”

Financial Literacy

- “More people having bank accounts, understanding and utilizing financial tools. People better trained to be employees so they can make money.”
- “Everyone having jobs that sustain them and the ability to make educated decisions around their money and financial future.”

Transportation

- “Increased access to jobs via more robust transportation options”
- “People owning homes and vehicles, thriving businesses”

Low Taxes/Small Government

- “No homeless people, no people just getting by. Lower taxes and let people keep more of their money, and teach kids about working hard, saving money and entrepreneurship.”
- “Lower housing prices for good quality homes, less dumpy apartment buildings, better roads, high paying jobs, smaller government, work for welfare mandates, low unemployment, less welfare”

Public Safety

- “No more slum areas, safe neighborhoods, no hunger”
- “Public safety systems are adequately funded.”

Retain/Attract Young People

- “A place where young people can live and work directly out of college. High quality entry-level jobs, affordable apartments, affordable child care, interesting and exciting local businesses.”
- “We need to start making our region and our state more appealing to our young people or they will continue to flee for better opportunities and living in other states.”
- “Happy, successful children involved in the community, excited about and engaged in school with opportunities to shine in the areas in which they excel, and hopefully encouraging them to remain in this area after graduating through competitive secondary education and growth in sustainable employment.”

Less Unemployment

- “\$15/hour or more minimum wage and unemployment below 2%.”
- “Business are thriving and paying a reasonable wage to employees. The unemployment rate is low to non-existent.”

Labor Supply

- “Businesses would not have to hire outsiders to fill jobs that Mainers are educated to do due to excellence in preparing of future workers.”
- “There are plenty of good paying jobs and enough qualified people to fill positions, as well as opportunities for people to gain skills in order to attain those jobs.”

Broadband

- “100% access to robust broadband service, subsidized for low-income folks.”

Summary Observations

There were three crosscutting themes commonly mentioned in community members’ descriptions of success across the areas of health, education and financial stability:

- **Accessibility** of health care, education, and transportation
- **Affordability** of health care, early childhood, adult and higher education, and housing
- **Quality** of health care providers and services, education, jobs, and housing stock

As illustrated in many of the quotes, some themes were often mentioned in all three areas, and many survey respondents spoke of similar issues across the three responses. For example, food security came up in visions for success in health, education, and financial stability. Affordable housing was mentioned in responses about all three topics. The need for improved transportation options came up in responses about health and financial security.

Community Conversations

UWKV facilitated five community conversations with 62 community members in May and June 2021. The groups included community members representing:

- Augusta
- Gardiner
- New Mainers
- Winthrop
- A teleconference open to members of all communities in Kennebec County

Participant Demographics

Community conversation participants were asked to complete a short demographic survey, and 47 people (76% of all participants) provided responses. About two in three participants (64%) are female and just over one-half (55%) are age 55 or older. Two-thirds of the conversation participants are white, 26% are Middle Eastern, and one participant each are Black, multiracial, and Native American (see the following table).

Characteristics of Community Conversation Participants

	Number	%
Gender		
Female	30	64%
Male	17	36%
Age		
Under 35	7	15%
35-54	14	30%
55+	25	55%
Race/Ethnicity		
White, European American	31	67%
Middle Eastern, North African, Arab	12	26%
Black, African American	1	2%
Multiracial	1	2%
Native American	1	2%

Each discussion was guided by four questions:

1. What are some of the best places or programs that make this community a safe, healthy, good place to live?
2. What kind of community do you want this to be in 10 years?
3. What keeps us from having the community we want?
4. What needs to happen to get us there?

1. What Makes Southern Kennebec a Good Place to Live

The first guiding question for the community conversations was, “What are some of the best places or programs that make this community a safe, healthy, good place to live?” In Augusta, community members listed assets like the Augusta Civic Center, MaineGeneral Hospital, the Maine State Library and Maine State Museum, Mill Park, and Viles Arboretum. Participants mentioned other assets around the region like the Gardiner Coop, Johnson Hall Theater, and the fairgrounds in Pittston. Several community members spoke of their downtowns and town public libraries as important assets.

Common themes from discussions of this question include the area’s geographic location within Maine, having the state capitol, abundant outdoor recreation areas and green spaces, public safety, health and social services agencies and institutions, and engaged community members. The following quotes illustrate the range of topics discussed, as well as insights and suggestions from the conversations. Quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Geographic Location and Proximity to State Capitol

“There is a very high quality of life in this area, especially for a rural region. We have an unusual array of assets, the State Capitol, several colleges, some strong chambers of commerce, a number of good performing Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs. And there’s the enormous amount of water and lakes that are around us.”

“Southern Kennebec County is a little bit urban, if you will, with the state Capitol and Gardiner ...and then it's a very short drive to Mount Vernon, Fayette, very rural areas like Wayne with beautiful farmland, landscapes and also access to more of the outdoors. It's very beautiful. So I think it definitely looks like a good place to live.”

Outdoor Recreation and Green Spaces

Many community members said that the area is rich in open spaces and outdoor recreation options. One area for improvement is that winter recreation activities are less accessible to some residents. The New Mainers conversation in particular surfaced the idea that recent immigrants to the area would like more accessible ways to get outside and have fun in the winter.

- “One of the things I enjoy most about this area is the Kennebec River Rail Trail....The natural surroundings of this area help contribute to making it a great place to live.”
- “Having the dog park is phenomenal.”

Public Safety

Many area residents appreciate the public safety and low crime in Southern Kennebec County. Participants had only positive things to say about the police and fire departments.

- “This area is pretty safe as far as crime goes.”

- “The police department's doing very good job. When we first came here, when we had an issue, if the police didn't know how to deal with that issue, they were supportive with helping and doing whatever we need.” [New Mainer group member]
- “We've got a really, really good police department and fire department. Our Public Safety's awesome.”

Vibrant Social Service Organizations and Health Services

All of the community discussions touched on health care and social services providers that Southern Kennebec community members value.

- “We are in a community that has a hospital system, and they have definitely diversified so people all over the area can have access, with things like virtual care.”
- “We have this...Cooking Matters program where each group [of SNAP clients] prepares a recipe together and then they go home with a bag full of groceries to be able to do it themselves at home...It's super popular, something about people getting together and cooking. We also offered it at the Kennebec County Jail with a subset of the population that was transitioning out. On their release day, we gave them cutting boards and knives, basic herbs and spices. It was really great.”

Community Engagement

Several community members named engaged community members as an asset in the region. Examples include volunteers who serve on boards and commissions, coach youth sports, volunteer in schools, and maintain recreational areas. Community engagement encompasses individuals volunteering and engaging in public service as well as businesses and organizations contributing to efforts that benefit the community at large.

- “I think about the youth recreation facilities, all that, all this stuff on the Piggery Road [Athletic] Complex (Augusta), and the hockey leagues that my son was involved in and softball programs for my daughter and the soccer programs, all made possible by volunteers.”
- “School boards and town, council, city counselors, the gems are many in their community because they do an awful lot of work for no money. And they're putting up with an awful lot of frustration.”

Similarities and Differences among Towns

While members of different communities in the region shared some of the same opinions about community strengths, differences also emerged. People from all parts of the region enjoy proximity to the capitol, the nearby lakes region, the Kennebec River Rail Trail and many of the same outdoor spaces and being within an hour of Greater Portland and Bangor. Differences across communities include:

- 1) Some town residents spoke of vibrant and diverse downtowns and local businesses, while others wished for more diverse local businesses and fewer empty storefronts.

- “I’ve worked in Gardiner for 30 years and I have seen such a tremendously positive change. When I first started working here, walking on Water Street after five o’clock you took your life in your hands. It was dark, it was creepy. And now it’s a vibrant downtown with restaurants. It’s a much nicer, welcoming community than it was 30 years ago.”
 - “We have the co-op farmers, farmer’s markets... there’s Cushnoc [Brewing Company]. It has been a great success. The last few years, the craft brew industry is where the thing is, or we’re seeing a lot of these microbreweries.”
 - “How do you find a place to put a restaurant downtown, you know, that’s not a pizza shop and not a sandwich shop? I mean, we have plenty of those, and they’re all really good. But there is that lack of a place to just sit down and have a meal.”
 - “I’d like to see a more diversified Main Street, things like a sandwich shop that isn’t a big box chain.”
- 2) Some communities feel they are seeing an influx of young families while others mentioned aging populations and seeing fewer young people and children living in town.
- “When we built the new high school [in Winthrop], we put an addition on to the middle school, because we were sure people would move here because we had the new high school. And they literally shuttered that addition to the middle school because we didn’t have enough students to fill those classrooms.”
 - “West Gardiner is seeing that growth because people are able to easily access their jobs from anywhere, it’s still close to 295, and the houses are still affordable. So we’re seeing, we won’t call it a boom yet, but certainly it’s an increase in our populations as a result, which is why we have to make sure we have a really good education system to further attract people.”
- 3) Residents of Augusta and neighboring towns said that broadband service and speed are strong, while outlying community members named universal broadband access as a ten-year goal.
- “In 10 years for us to have broadband everywhere...and available at a speed that is really, truly effective for business, school, and work.”
- 4) **New Mainers** had similar discussion themes in that they value the public schools and public safety in the region. Transportation challenges and adequate housing were more pronounced in this discussion than in any of the others. Members also said that they would like to see:
- More adult education options
 - An accessible performing arts center
 - More local businesses offering groceries, restaurant food, and clothing store options that reflect their home cultures.
- Culturally specific suggestions included:
- Fitness classes specifically for women; a separate place or time for women and men to exercise; single-gender swimming pool times
 - Laws to allow marriage to more than one person
- “The school staff are within reach. Which means they’re always there. Whenever you call. They’re helpful.” (One survey response offered an opposing view)
 - “Public safety is strong, and the police have been helpful to the community.”
 - “Remove barriers to starting businesses like high rental costs for commercial property.”
 - “Share information and education on local and state government, how to influence policies, opportunities to get involved.”

- “It’s still hard to find ethnic food. We have enough families here now, enough demand for stores to stock more ethnic foods.”

2. Ten-Year Aspirations

The second guiding question was, “What kind of community do you want this to be in 10 years?” Themes from the discussions of community aspirations include:

1. Make the region a desirable, supportive place for families with children, retirees, and all ages
2. Continue to improve the public school system
3. More affordable, accessible mental health services. Prevent and address substance use disorder.
4. More diversified, thriving downtowns

Make Southern Kennebec County a destination

Many community members say that the area needs more people and expressed the desire to attract and retain more young people. Ideas raised include capitalizing on the area’s desirable aspects to attract people who can work remotely and investing in community assets that will convince people raised in the region to settle here permanently.

- “I want us to be a destination. This is a place that people from away want to move to because of the community, and because of the school district.”
- “Having younger families and seeing little kids around just makes a community a lot more fun”
- “I’d like to see an increased, more diverse population.”
- “The New Mainers that are coming are the ones that are going to be full of fire, interested, motivated, and we need to be ready to tap into those. They could be coming with their five-year-olds or they could come here 32 years old to get a job.”
- “I think a really livable community should be welcoming to all ages. So a great place to live for kids and young, young families, as well as people who are retired and older, they're trying to age in place. So making sure the supports are in place for all ages.”
- “In 10 years I think we want a community with stronger housing and better jobs, transportation and child care. Those are some of the key issues, those four. Surely if we have that, then our kids will want to raise their kids here.”
- “People coming to Maine who can telecommute, there's an opportunity there for sure. You want it to be a younger community. I'd like to see a higher median income as well. More arts and culture, more nighttime activities other than bars, and more multicultural businesses would help keep the younger population here.”
- “We have the capacity for more people. Elementary schools have closed in the last few decades.”
- “This should be a place where our kids will want to stay and raise a family. So that means good schools. We don't necessarily have to have a lot of industry. You’ve got to think about, if you can work from anywhere, where do people want to go. They want to go where they can afford to live, get housing, good health care, and good schools.”
- “Arts and cultural programs, a healthy environment for artists, can make communities really vibrant in ways that aren't often recognized.”

Build on the strength of the region’s education institutions

While the area’s public schools were mentioned by many as assets, there were many suggestions about how the schools and education options for all age groups could improve.

- “I’d like to see computer science taught at all the grade levels, and coding clubs. We’re a little lacking in some of these 21st century skills across our schools.”
- “Are we doing the best we can for our students in this community? What skill sets are they missing out on?”
- “My biggest struggle, coming from a big city in Morocco, is the lack of arts education. I went to music school. And when I came here, I wanted to find something like that. But there was nothing like that. We know that the schools have cut back drastically when it comes to music. We need more music programs. I know the Snow Pond Academy is very helpful, but it’s hard to get there without a car.”
- “It would be great if we could get a more balanced education system, to where everybody doesn’t need a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree. High school guidance should work to really help kids learn about all the options and find out what they want to do after graduation.”
- “Any adults who want to be in the workforce have some credential beyond high school. All of us have to become lifelong learners to stay in the workforce.”
- “Rural economies that have done well have done it with arts and education as their foundation. We need to keep building on those assets.”

Prevent and address mental health and substance use issues

Many participants spoke of substance use and mental health issues together. There was a consensus that the area needs more affordable, accessible, effective services. Eliminating social stigma associated with mental health and substance use treatments was suggested by several members.

- “In 10 years, I hope we get some sort of grip on substance abuse that exists in every town. It is eye opening. I think the community can’t thrive until it heals the wounds of the most marginal of their residents. I would like us all to look at that. I think our mental health resources is where you begin to fix that.”

More diversified, thriving downtowns

One of the biggest differences expressed in conversation topics was the range of satisfaction with downtowns and local businesses. Residents of a few towns spoke of their downtowns as assets and points of pride. Most towns and the city of Augusta elicited discussions about how to improve the downtowns, the need to fill empty storefronts and revive old buildings, and a desire to attract and support more diverse local businesses.

- “I want to see a vibrant, recreational and creative downtown.”
- “A community where old buildings are repurposed. Invest in unused, old buildings.”

Adequate affordable housing

- “Transportation, and everybody housed and in safe quality housing. Quality affordable housing.”
- “I think in terms of marketing, we have positive attributes. We’re attractive. But when they get here, they need a place to live. So affordable housing, you can't emphasize it enough.”

More community engagement and better civics education

Although participants spoke highly of community volunteers in the region, many said that more people need to get involved, and residents need better information and support to get involved in creating the community they want.

- “Active, engaged citizenry, right? You need people to step forward that have the same shared vision and values to make all this happen.”
- “Include our kids in important conversations about their community and offer them opportunities to get involved.”
- “In public schools, we need to bring back more civics education, understanding the function of how government works, fundamental things about being a citizen, understanding how the three branches of government operate... This is how the judicial branch operates, here's how the legislative branch operates. Here's how a school board functions.”
- “People say ‘The city should do this, the city should do that.’ It’s the people within the city who make things happen. Get people off the couch! More community effort on a large scale.”
- “The [college students I teach] don't know about civics... They have not had any serious formal education in middle and high school on government... I think that some renewed emphasis with kids on community and what is your community, what makes it work would be valuable.”
- “I want more people who have the resources and the commitment to do the community engagement stuff. Whether that's run for the City Council or the school board or the planning board or the Board of Directors of the Little League system, or the board of the United Way, or the many nonprofit boards in this city.”
- “One thing I see as a problem is lack of volunteerism. People just don't step up like they used to. People will say what should be different, but they don't want to get involved in fixing it. I wonder if some of it is lack of communication, of what's available to volunteer.”

3. Barriers to Achieving the Goals

The third topic for the community conversations was prompted by the question, “What keeps us from having the community we want?” The most common themes in this part of the discussions was the cross-cutting issues of jobs, housing, and transportation. Some community members also spoke of lack of awareness of community resources and assets.

Jobs and the Labor Market

Community members see deficits on both sides of the jobs equation in the region. There are not enough high-quality jobs, and there are not enough qualified, available workers to fill some jobs.

- “In the last couple years we’ve found out the importance of job opportunities with living wages and child care that workers can afford.”
- “Young people go away because they can get paid a lot more doing similar jobs than they would get paid here.”
- “The labor market is really a difficult thing right now. I know that when we presented our town budgets the other night, seven different departments in Winthrop, we’re all saying that that’s one of the toughest challenges. I know the fire department and EMAs and police are all struggling to try to find qualified people to fill positions.”

Housing

Southern Kennebec County community members see housing (stock, quality, and affordability) as a key issue that needs improvement.

- “Affordable housing has different connotations. And that’s fine. We need to sort of even out the dumbbell, if you will, and have more middle income, family housing, starter homes for people that come out of apartments.”
- “We have enough land; we just need some investors. I’d say income is a barrier for people to spend here and also to invest. No, we don’t have a lot of people investing in new housing, because they can’t afford it.”

Transportation

Community members report that Augusta does not have a robust public transit system. This deficit came up in several of the conversations and was an especially significant barrier discussed in the New Mainers group. Community members spoke of transportation as a barrier to accessing jobs, education and training, health care, and recreational and cultural opportunities. Transportation was also mentioned as a particular barrier for seniors, presenting a challenge in getting to health care appointments and contributing to isolation.

- “Augusta, by Maine standards, is a good size community but by national standards, the economics just aren’t here for a robust public transportation system. Not that it couldn’t be better...A healthy community has a full spectrum of housing and socioeconomic demographics. It’s got the bell curve of the rich and then the middle class and the poor, and unfortunately at Augusta it’s kind of out of kilter.”
- “Driver’s ed is expensive, and they don’t teach it in school.”
- “Access to transportation. Lots of people want to get places, they can’t afford to buy a car, they can’t afford driving lessons to get their license and drive on their own.”

Awareness/Getting the Word Out

Participants in several of the conversations mentioned the need to get information out to more residents more regularly about good things happening in the region and how to support them.

- “It's a great community, but sometimes I think we are a little too humble. We need to do a better job of advertising all the great things we have been discussing. We're the best kept secret in Southern Maine.”
- “You need to build that positive mindset in social media about your community.”
- “Are we getting on social media platforms? Exactly. Part of what we do with the Day of Caring (student volunteer program) at United Way is the idea of getting the kids to think about their community in a different way.”

4. How to Achieve Community Aspirations

Finally, participants were asked to discuss the question, “What needs to happen to get us there?” Many said that top-notch schools, arts and cultural institutions, robust local businesses, and community engagement are among the ways to achieve their vision for a successful future in the region. Some participants spoke of a need for region-level planning on cross-cutting issues like economic development, housing, substance use treatment, and transportation.

Health and Social Services

Community members spoke of health and social services needed to help all community members share in community prosperity.

- “Working to lift people out of poverty and advocating for a livable wage. Organizations like Good Shepherd Food Bank have been really great.”
- “The District Attorney's office, I think that's probably another partner that would be beneficial to work with on some of these initiatives. [The DA has] been very supportive in helping us implement alternative sentencing programs, especially for young adults.”
- “Service locations such as food banks, warming center and shelters to be more accessible. Transportation services.”

Civic Education, Collaboration and Creativity

Discussion participants value organizations and sectors working together, speak highly of the contributions of volunteers, and believe in the power of community engagement to create positive change.

- “I think Augusta really pays attention to trying to work together. A lot of groups said, ‘We'll raise the money for Cony,’ went all in on that. And they did the same for the library, groups agreed not to compete for dollars. In the end there's a beautiful school and a beautiful library.”
- “A lot of people worked really hard to clean up the river. And they did. It took federal, state and local levels working together. We want to keep it that way... We should work together,

we should continue that positive change.” “What do you think drove that change?” “People moving here.”

- “The fact that the Gardiner Thrives Coalition works with the school districts to ensure that the voices of the students are heard, and they are involved in meeting their needs. So that’s another huge service. And we also have the Alliance that works on substance use prevention.”
- “The Winthrop Food Pantry is a pretty powerful program with a lot of volunteers. The Winthrop Y with the youth sports and the after-school program, the real relationship between the Y and the town, that we also serve as the municipal recreation department. It’s in the school policies that the Y has access to the school facilities when the school is not using them.”
- “If there was anything positive about the pandemic it’s that people did start to say, how can I help. It’s true, how can I support my neighbor so we can build on that little bit of positive energy.”

Municipal Policies and Investments

The importance of collaboration with regional and town officials and organizations—and the key role the public sector plays in addressing community issues—came up in several community discussions.

- “Influencing government action or town action, to promote some of the things that would allow people to stay, settle here, and age in place. That is definitely policy, government policy, public policy that has to be creatively worked through.”
- “I would really like to see the municipal leaders hearing this, the results of this, and because I feel like they share a unique power to be able to make it happen. And to show support for this vision and next steps. So not only municipal leaders, but school board members, superintendents, decision makers, who can really help promote and make it happen.”
- “The city could do a better job of getting all this information out. In the latest budget we funded a full-time public relations position in city government. A good project for them is getting the word out about the positive stuff going on in this community that is sometimes the best kept secret. And the ways people can get involved and contribute.”

Economic Development

Many participants in the discussions mentioned the need for economic development in the region, and some shared suggestions such as establishing a business incubator and streamlining regulations to remove barriers to starting a new business.

- “It’s all going to be little bits and pieces. One little small business here. One little affordable housing project there. Slowly build and build.”
- “Being a mill town drove the economy for a century. Losing this was traumatic and frightening.”
- “We need to be more business friendly. Whether it’s space or having incubator type programs. There’s still a lot of space in the Mill and open space still in Main Street and if people are looking to start a business, we should help provide cheap space. We should streamline and speed up the process with the zoning and planning board. Look at what are the hiccups that are stopping businesses from being able to come in and start and succeed?”

Why are restaurants turning over? Well, it's zoning, because a grease traps, right? So let's make it easier and get rid of some of those barriers.”

- From the Winthrop conversation: “It's exciting to see Freckles Salvage. We seem to be finding our niche with secondhand stores and upcycling. There are a number of those businesses in town.”

Advice for UWKV

A number of observations from the community conversations speak to the important role UWKV can and does play in promoting success in the region. Convening partners across sectors and towns, providing ways for businesses to support community aspirations, and promoting and sponsoring community engagement and volunteerism.

- “We need leaders to do things like this to convene people, but then take it to the next step, like how do we put it into motion, and connect the partners who could be doing the work? Whether it's support from businesses or people with the expertise to make it happen.”
- “Positive engagement with staff of companies that would be very willing to help. If United Way could encourage companies to pay people to serve or promote more service opportunities. That would be a way to build community, having businesses be more engaged, not just financially.”
- “United Way can help connect communities, you're serving a lot of agencies that are in these different communities, and how you can help be that connector. I think we have to figure out a way for people to understand that. We've got to be better as a collective, because we're all going like, here's the problem. This isn't going to work without moving together in the same direction. We need to do a better job of making sure people know about the resources we have, and what we still need....I hope that people will start considering how to help connect some of those dots.”
- “How do you find common ground on what we all think would get us to that vision? And again, and you know, all of these municipal governments run on a shoestring. So I think having the support to be able to convene people and pay for their time to do the work.”

Summary of White Papers

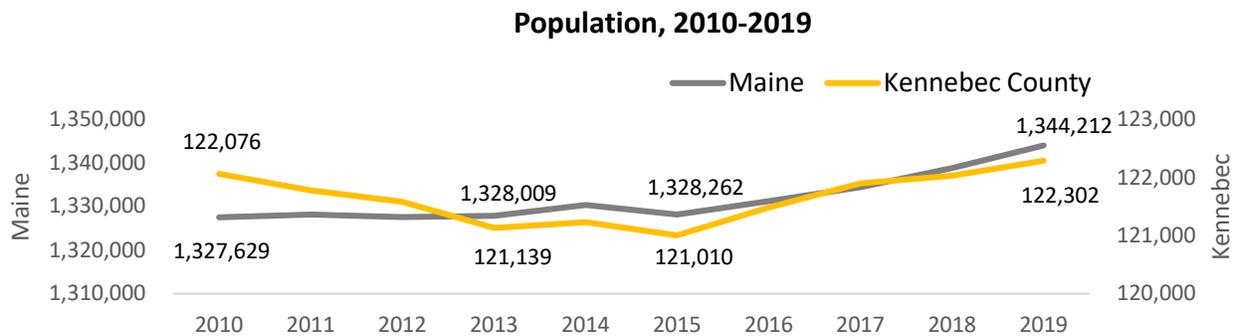
This project began with a set of four white papers designed to provide context for the goal-setting work and the qualitative data collection. With guidance from UWKV and the Goal-Setting Council, we investigated thirty-five topics in the areas of a county overview, health, education, and financial stability (see the full list of topics in the Appendix). Here we present key findings from that research, published in February 2021.

Kennebec County Overview

Population

In recent years, Maine has become the oldest state in the U.S., with a median age of nearly 48 years. Our birth rate is declining, and since 2013, deaths in Maine have outnumbered births each year. However, the state's population has continued to grow slowly, thanks to in-migration from other countries and other parts of the U.S.

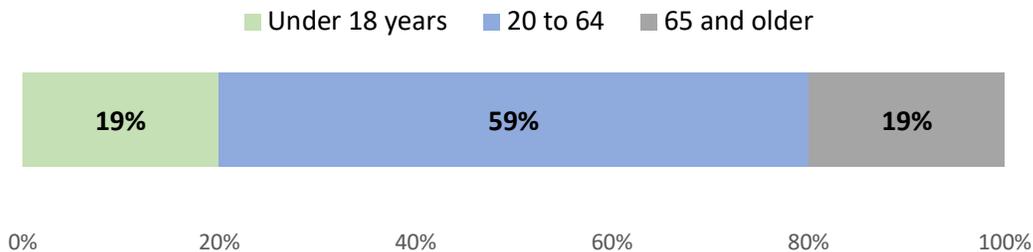
In 2019, Kennebec County's population stood at 122,302 people, up slightly from 122,076 in 2010. The county's population dropped from 2010 to 2015 but has since rebounded (see the following chart). Kennebec has just under one-tenth of Maine's population.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Annual Estimates

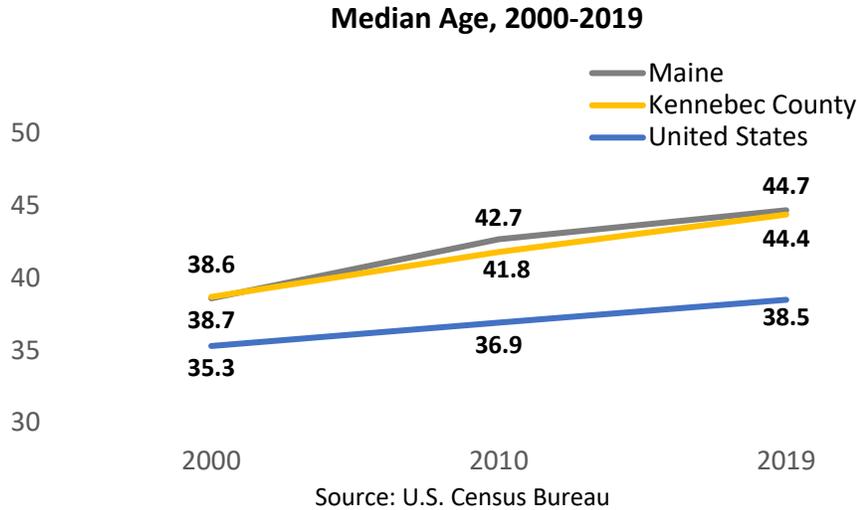
Kennebec County's age distribution is similar to that of the whole state, with about one-fifth (19%) child residents, about one-fifth (19%) seniors, and three-fifths (59%) adults ages 20-64, as shown below. The median age in Kennebec County (44.4 years) is just below the state median of 44.7, but well above the national median age of 38.5 years.

Age Distribution of Kennebec County's Population, 2015-2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Since 2000, the gap between the national and state/county median ages has grown, as shown in the following chart.



Gender and Sexuality

Overall, 51% of Kennebec County’s population is female and 49% is male. It is likely that nonbinary gender identities will be represented in Census and other official data sources in the near future. Schools are already beginning to offer gender categories other than female and male in data collection forms.

LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning, terms used to describe sexual orientation or gender identity. The Movement Advancement Project estimates that 5% of Maine adults are LGBTQ, and that Maine’s LGBTQ population over age 12 numbers 60,000 people.

Race/Ethnicity

About 96% of Kennebec County residents are white, just above the state average of 94%. Nearly 2% of the county’s population is Hispanic or Latino, and about 1% each are Asian and Black or African American.

Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2015-2019

	Kennebec County	Maine
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.5%	0.6%
Asian	0.9%	1.1%
Black or African American	0.9%	1.4%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	1.6%	1.7%

Languages Spoken at Home

In Kennebec County, nearly 96% of residents typically speak only English at home. Among the 4% of residents who speak other languages at home, 0.8% speak Spanish, 2.5% speak other Indo-European languages, and 0.8% speak Asian language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-2019).

In the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, the proportions of students reporting that anything other than English is spoken at home were:

- 6% of high school students at Cony and
- 2% of Gardiner Area High School students.

Recent Immigrants

The Capital Area New Mainers Project (CANMP) estimates that about 100 families including roughly 525 people from other countries have moved to Augusta since 2015. Sixty of the families are from Iraq, 20 are from Syria, and 20 are from other countries including Afghanistan, Morocco, Rwanda, and Mexico. Most recent immigrant families are living in southern parts of Augusta. CANMP staff expect five to seven new immigrant families to move to Augusta each year going forward.

People with Disabilities

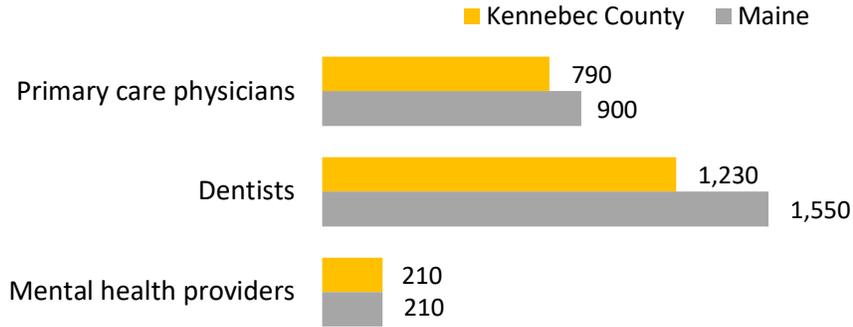
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that about 22% of adults in Maine have some type of disability. Assuming the same rate as the state average, Kennebec County has about 21,000 disabled adults. Statewide, about 11% of adults have cognition disabilities and 10% have mobility disabilities.

Health

Area Strengths

Health care providers: Kennebec is among the top 10% of counties nationally for the number of primary care physicians, dentists, and mental health providers per population. In spite of this, community research efforts have identified significant barriers to adequate care and issues with the health care system—like cost, physician training, and referral structures—that prevent many people from having access to adequate health care treatment.

Health Care Providers per Population

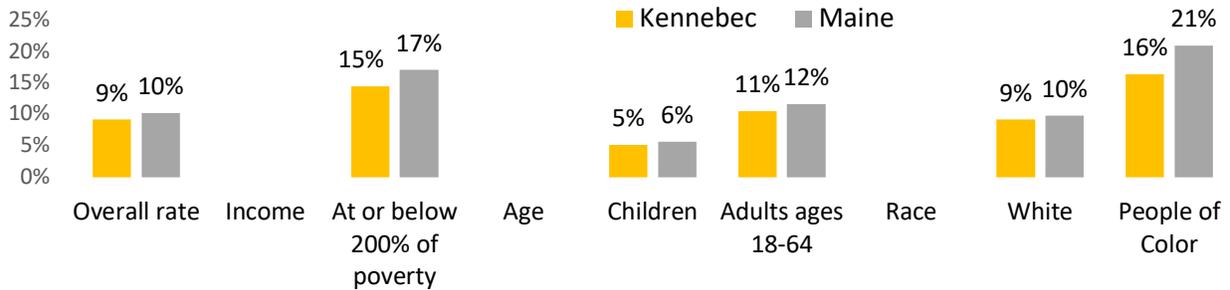


Source: County Health Rankings

Child immunization: Maine Children’s Alliance reports that Kennebec has the highest rate in Maine for immunization of children ages 18-35 months. **80% of Kennebec County children ages 24 to 35 months had received all necessary immunizations.** The Maine and U.S. averages are both 70% of children fully immunized, ten points lower than in Kennebec County.

Health insurance coverage: Among residents under age 65 in Kennebec County, fewer than one in ten (9.2%) do not have health insurance. The state average is 10.2% uninsured, and the national average is 10.0%. 5% of Kennebec County children are uninsured.

People without Health Insurance Coverage, 2018



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Small Area Health Insurance Estimates; Prosperity Now

Areas of Concern

Infant mortality rates: Kennebec County’s infant mortality rate is above the Maine average. From 2012-2016, Kennebec County had 7.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, up from 5.4 in 2007-2011. This was higher than both the Maine average of 6.5 and the national average of 5.9. Several Maine agencies and funders collaborated on a 2020 report authored by Qualidigm investigating the causes of infant mortality. The study found that most of the infant deaths in Maine and in the U.S. are due to being born too early. Risk factors for premature birth include multiple pregnancy, short pregnancy

interval, tobacco use, other substance use, obesity, and chronic conditions such as diabetes, maternal infections, and stress.

The report found evidence in Maine of “fragmentation in the continuum of care, a lack of coordination across components, and barriers to services, particularly in rural areas.” Key opportunities for improvement include:

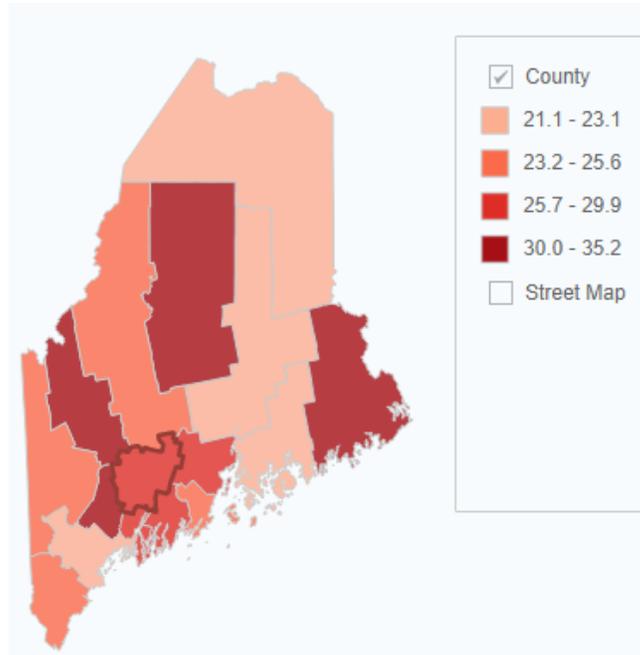
- Improved access to primary care for women before and between pregnancies
- More perinatal screenings
- Enhanced mechanisms to ensure risk-appropriate care
- Improved access to mental health services
- New models of care for women with substance use disorder
- Ensuring that all families who qualify for programs like Public Health Nursing, Maine Families and WIC enroll in these programs.

Middle school and high school mental health: A substantial share of middle and high school youth report symptoms of depression—feeling sad and hopeless enough that it interferes with everyday activities. Kennebec County is among the top 10% of U.S. counties in terms of mental health care providers per population, but more should be done to improve awareness, reduce stigma, and link people with appropriate treatment.

Another MIYHS question is, “During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?” In 2019:

- **20% of Kennebec County middle school students** answered yes, the same as the Maine average.
 - 26% of students at Gardiner Regional Middle School indicated that they considered attempting suicide in the past year.

Proportion of Maine Middle School Students who Felt Sad or Hopeless, 2019



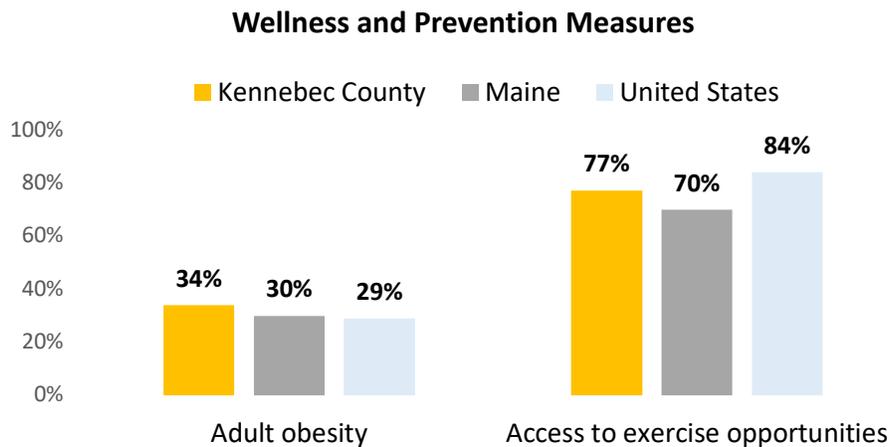
Source: Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

Substance use disorder and overdose deaths: The most dramatic trend in the measures we reviewed is the increase in drug poisoning deaths. Three multiyear estimates for Kennebec County also show a marked increase. From 2009-2011, there were 12 drug poisoning deaths per 100,000 population in Kennebec County. This increased to 21 in 2014-2016 and 35 in 2016-2018. The state trend is similar, increasing from 11 deaths in 2012 to 34 in 2017 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). In 2014, there were 416 emergency medical service overdose responses per 100,000 population in Kennebec County, well above the state average of 392 (KVCAP Community Needs Assessment).

The Shared Community Health Needs Assessment community engagement process identified several urgent substance abuse prevention and treatment needs:

- Intensive outpatient treatment
- Primary care treatment
- Recovery services/coaches
- More inpatient beds
- Education in schools
- Facilities for the uninsured

Wellness and prevention: Excess body weight increases the risks of some of the chronic diseases—diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and asthma—that are contributors to premature death. Obesity is defined as a body mass index of 30 or greater. According to County Health Rankings, 34% of Kennebec County adults were obese in 2016. This is higher than the Maine average of 30% and the national average of 29% of adults who are obese.



Source: County Health Rankings

Financial Stability

Area Strengths

Income and Wages: Kennebec County is close to the state average and near the middle of the Maine county range for median incomes and wages. Median household income in Kennebec County was \$52,929 in 2018, about 5% below the state median of \$55,425.

The “living wage” is the hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support his or herself and their family, assuming full-time work of 2,080 hours per year. The living wage covers typical food, child care (if applicable), medical, housing, transportation, and other expenses. The median hourly wage in Kennebec County was \$19.15 in 2019, which exceeds the living wage for single adults and families with two working adults (but not for a single adult with a child).

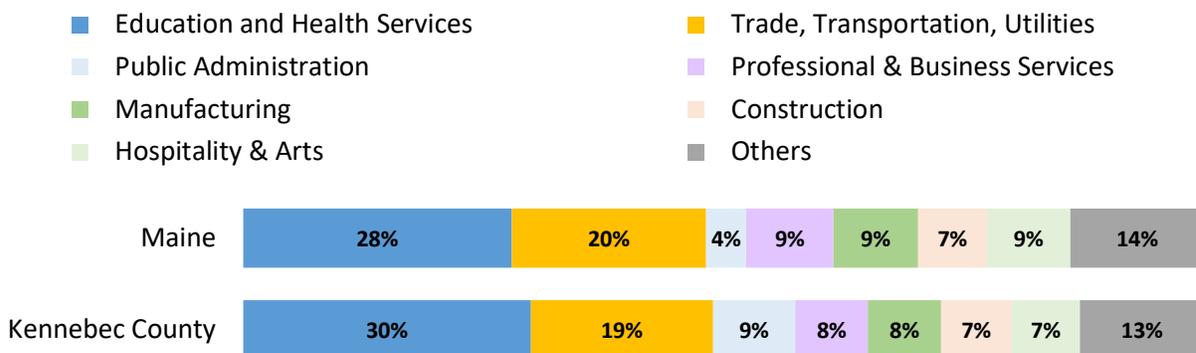
Living Wage and Median Wages Per Worker

Living wage	Kennebec County	Maine
One adult, no children	\$ 12.01	\$ 12.48
One adult, one child	\$ 24.59	\$ 25.63
Two adults (both work), two children	\$ 16.24	\$ 16.76
Annual median wage	\$ 38,297	\$ 38,370
Hourly median wage	\$ 19.15	\$ 19.19

Sources: MIT Living Wage Calculator, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Jobs: Augusta is an employment center with many education, health, and public administration jobs.

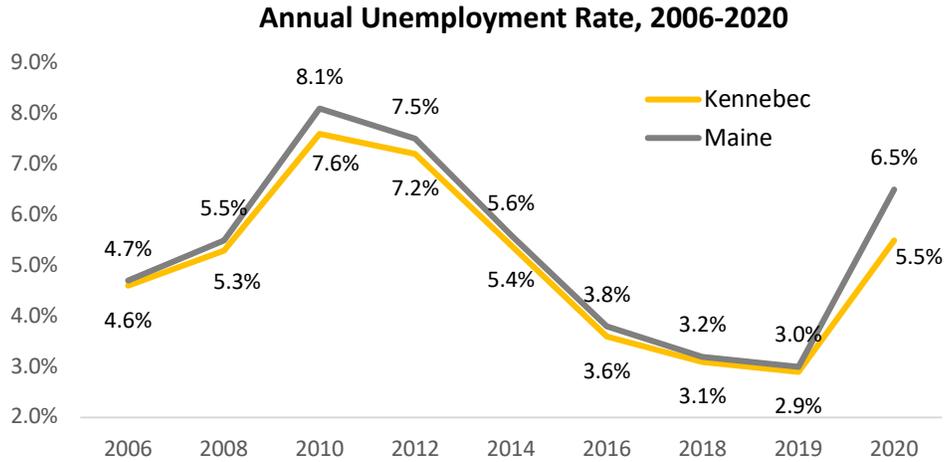
Top Industries: Share of Total Employment, 2015-2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 5-Year Estimates

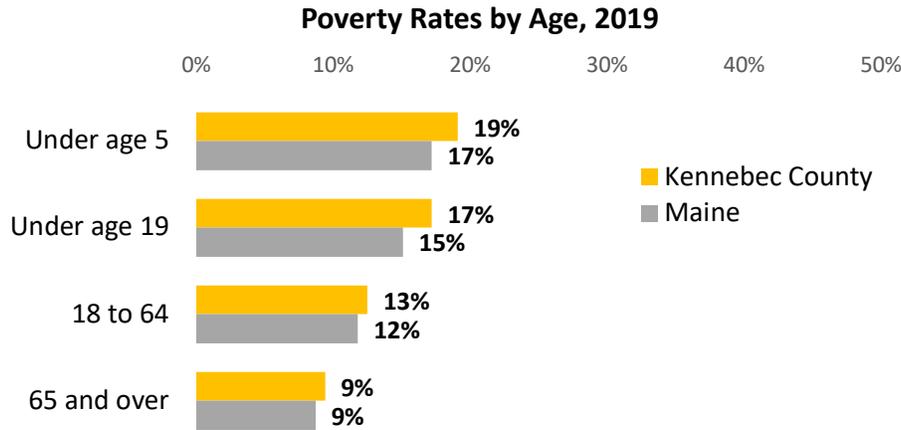
Areas of Concern

Unemployment: 2020 unemployment rates were 5.5% in Kennebec County and 6.5% in Maine. Kennebec County experienced a less severe spike in unemployment than the state as a whole from 2019 to 2020—from 2.9% to 5.5%, as shown below. Current unemployment rates are still below the Great Recession peaks of 8.1% for Maine and 7.6% for Kennebec in 2010.



Source: Maine Department of Labor

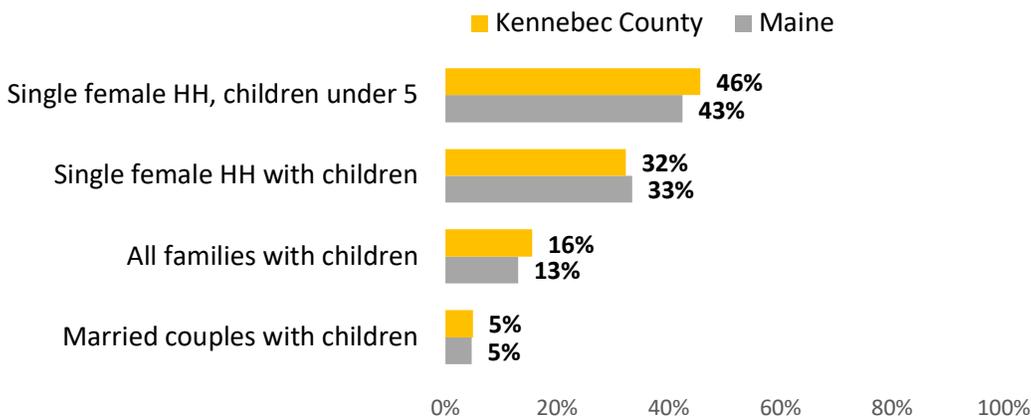
Poverty: Kennebec County had an official poverty rate of 12.8% in 2019, one point higher than the state rate of 11.8%. Augusta’s poverty rate was much higher, at 18.8%.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Poverty rates vary widely by age, household composition, and race/ethnicity. As shown above, younger people tend to have higher poverty rates. Families have higher than average poverty rates, especially single parent-headed families. In Kennebec County, 46% of families with single female household heads and children under five were poor in 2019. The Maine rate was nearly as high at 43%. In Kennebec County, *Prosperity Now* estimates that 19% of people of color are living in poverty, compared with 9% of white residents.

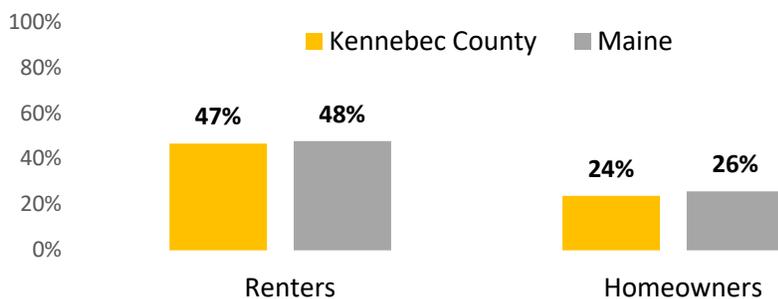
Poverty Rates by Household Composition, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Housing: Households paying more than 30% of their income for housing are considered “cost burdened.” Nearly one-half of renters in Kennebec County (47%) and Maine (48%) are cost burdened. About one-quarter of homeowners are cost burdened, 24% in Kennebec and 26% in Maine.

Cost Burdened Households, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

A recent Augusta Housing Authority report found that 3,000 households in the City of Augusta alone struggled to pay for housing in 2019, roughly one-third of Augusta’s more than 9,000 households. Housing issues identified in the city include:

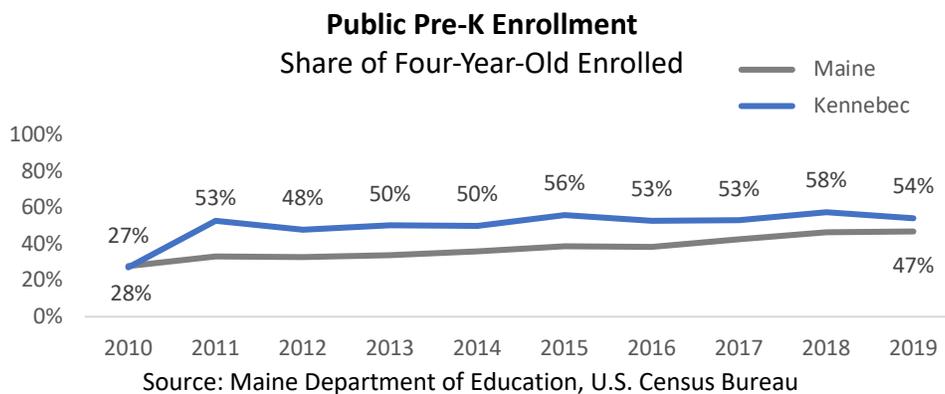
- Insufficient housing inventory exists for small (studio and one-bedroom) and large (four or more bedrooms) sized units to house individuals living alone and larger families migrating to the region and city;
- The region’s housing stock is sited in a way that requires access to multiple vehicles per household, limiting household ability to pay for housing;
- Housing stock is older and in need of investment to ensure that units are safe, energy efficient, and up to current code;
- Some below-market affordable units are at risk of being lost as use restrictions expire in the next ten years;

- There is a jobs-housing imbalance in Augusta, limiting the ability for some people who work in the city to live in the city, and limiting the ability of some people who live in the city to work in the city.

Education

Area Strengths

Preschool enrollment: The share of four-year-olds enrolled in public prekindergarten in Kennebec County (54%) is above the Maine average, and Maine outperforms the U.S. and New England averages on this measure. According to Educate Maine, “High-quality pre-K greatly influences children’s academic and social-emotional development and improves readiness for kindergarten, setting the stage for later success in school. While Maine has made significant progress expanding pre-K participation, only 9% of Maine’s 4-year-olds are enrolled in full-day, five-days-per-week programs.”



Areas of Concern

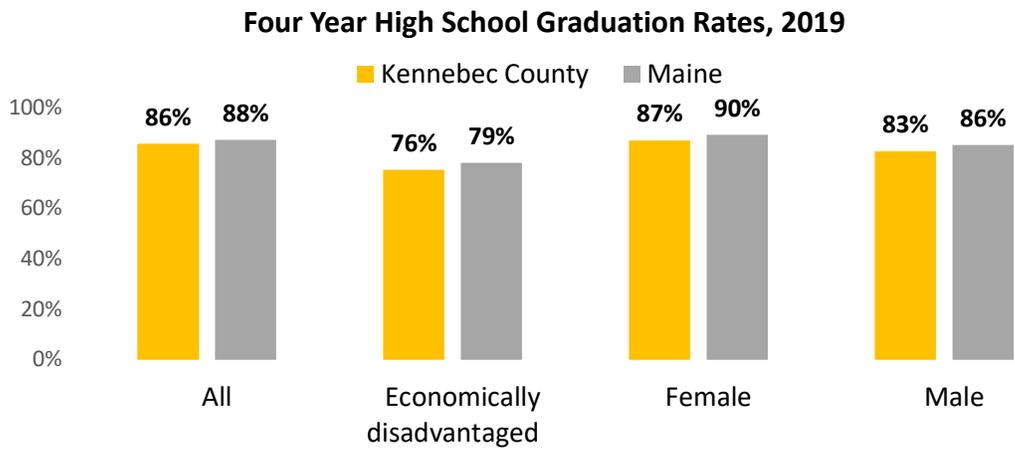
Child care: High-quality early childhood education has been shown to improve school readiness and to have positive impacts on long-term outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, employment, and earnings. Maine does not have comprehensive comparative data on early childhood education and care for infants and toddlers at the county or community level, but community data collection efforts have identified accessibility, affordability, and quality of child care for infants and toddlers as perennial issues adversely affecting family self-sufficiency.

Both in Maine and in Kennebec County, only 14% of licensed child care providers that voluntarily enrolled in the rating system were high quality as defined by the state agency.

Student test scores: Although Kennebec is below the state average in 4th grade reading assessment scores, proficiency rates improved from 50% in 2018 to 54% in 2019. Results in 8th grade were less

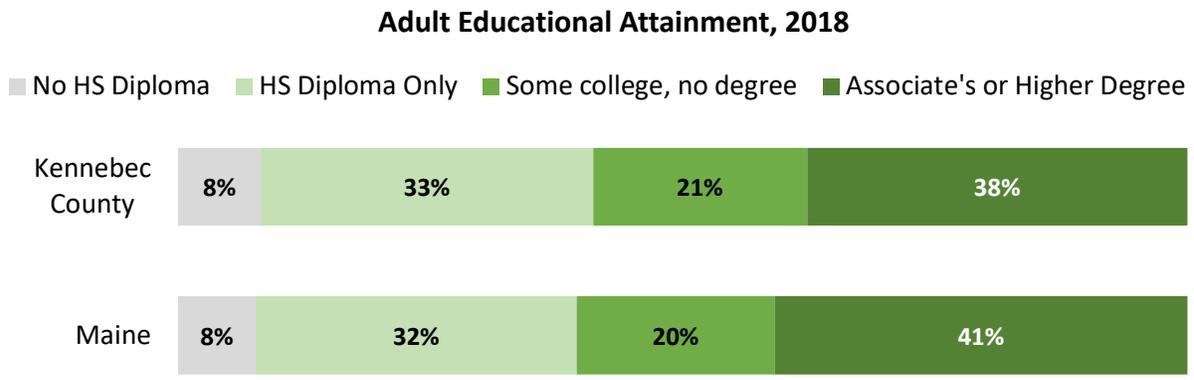
promising; 35% of Kennebec County 8th graders scored at or above state expectations in math on the 2019 Maine Educational Assessment, even lower than the state average of 36%.

High school graduation: Kennebec County’s four-year high school graduation rate of 86% is two points below the state average of 88%. Both in the county and in Maine, students from low-income families graduated on time at rates about ten points lower than the average. Female students had higher graduation rates than male students by several points.



Source: Maine Department of Education

Higher education attainment: Given the concentration and mix of employers in Kennebec County, it is surprising that higher education attainment in the county is 38%, three points below the state average of 41%.



Source: Maine Department of Labor, County Economic Profiles

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of our community data collection and analysis depict a region with many valuable assets and well-informed, caring community members, as well as some challenging areas for improvement. While there is consensus on broad goals and values, there are some important differences across the region. How to best address the critical challenges of jobs, housing, and transportation is not necessarily clear.

Survey respondents and conversation participants often spoke of the importance of community engagement, both among individuals and organizations in all sectors. Some suggested that civic education is not adequate, many citizens do not understand their role as citizens or how public institutions work, too many people do not know how to get involved, and it is difficult for many residents to find time to contribute to community efforts. Some survey comments reinforce this, with respondents simultaneously advocating for smaller government/less taxes and additional public investments or policies. A similar tension shows up in suggestions about jobs and the labor market, such as advocating both for better wages and lower costs for businesses.

There is a consensus that the region would benefit from a larger, younger, more diverse population. This is consistent with population trend data showing the state and the region aging and relying on newcomers for growth. Becoming a destination and keeping more young people in the area emerged as top aspirations for Kennebec County community members. The most common suggestions for getting there are to develop a top-notch public education system; support the creation and expansion of local businesses; increase the quality and quantity of job opportunities; and expand the region's housing quality, stock and affordability.

The Goal-Setting Council can use these values that emerged from the community data collection to help guide its work.

- 1) Top issues that the most community members consider very important—job opportunities, high quality schools, access to affordable healthy food, health care services, public safety, and a reasonable cost of living—are things that affect all community members.
- 2) Participants' aspirations for a successful future in UWKV's priority areas shared three common themes:
 - **Accessibility** of health care, education, and transportation
 - **Affordability** of health care, early childhood, adult and higher education, and housing
 - **Quality** of health care providers and services, education, jobs, and housing stock
- 3) Boosting the region's appeal to women, younger residents, and those with college degrees—groups less likely to recommend the area to friends—is a promising area of opportunity.

UWKV plays an important role in the region supporting essential services, convening key players across sectors and towns, and encouraging and facilitating community engagement. By continuing and expanding this work, UWKV and its partners can contribute to developing and advancing strategies to address community aspirations.

Appendix

I. Survey Questions

1. Thinking about the vitality of the Southern Kennebec County region, would you say it is:

Going in the wrong direction
Staying about the same
Moving in the right direction

2. How likely are you to recommend the Southern Kennebec County region to a friend as a place to live, work or play?

Very likely
Somewhat likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Somewhat unlikely
Very unlikely

3. Please rate how important these community issues are for you:

Very important / Somewhat important / Neutral / Somewhat unimportant / Unimportant

Reasonable cost of living
High quality, affordable child care options
High quality schools for children
High quality post-secondary education
Adult education and training options
Job opportunities
Public safety
Public spaces, parks, and recreation opportunities
Walkability of communities
Welcoming, inclusive community for people with different cultural identities
Community engagement of local people
Affordable, high quality housing
Access to affordable healthy food
Health care services
Mental health services
Substance abuse services

4. When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in health look like?
5. When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in education look like?
6. When you think about Southern Kennebec County 10 years from now, what does success in financial stability look like?

Gender:

- Female
- Gender Non-Conforming
- Male
- Transgender

Age:

- Under 25
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

How do you describe yourself? (Check all that apply)

- Asian American, Pacific Islander
- Black, African American
- Latinx, Hispanic
- Middle Eastern, North African, Arab
- Multiracial
- Native American
- White, European American

What is your highest level of education?

- High School
- Occupational Certificate
- Some College
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Degree

Where do you live?

[Town Name]

How often are you in the Southern Kennebec County region?

- Every day
- 1-2 times per week
- 4-6 times per week
- Several times per month
- Several times per year

II. Survey Respondent Characteristics

Gender	Number	%
Female	431	62%
Male	234	34%
Unknown	29	4%
Gender Non-Conforming	5	1%
Transgender	3	0%
Total	696	

Age Group	Number	%
Under 25	18	3%
25-34	123	18%
35-44	163	23%
45-54	124	18%
55-64	128	18%
65-74	89	13%
75+	33	5%
Unknown	18	3%
Total	696	100%

Race/Ethnicity	Number	%
Asian American, Pacific Islander	13	2%
Black, African American	20	3%
Latinx, Hispanic	15	2%
Middle Eastern, North African, Arab	18	3%
Multiracial	5	1%
Native American	26	4%
White, European American	557	80%
Unknown	42	6%
Total	696	

Highest Education Completed	Number	%
High School	121	17%
Some College	119	17%
Occupational Certificate	30	4%
Associate Degree	53	8%
Bachelor's Degree	180	26%
Graduate Degree	148	21%
Unknown	45	6%
Total	696	

Where Survey Respondents Live

Town	Number	%
Albion, Benton, Clinton	0	
Augusta	250	36%
Belgrade	5	1%
Chelsea	16	2%
China	2	0%
East Vassalboro	13	2%
Farmingdale	26	4%
Fayette	6	1%
Gardiner	56	8%
Hallowell	23	3%
Litchfield	12	2%
Manchester	24	3%
Monmouth	9	1%
Mount Vernon	2	0%
Oakland	4	1%
Pittston	13	2%
Randolph	8	1%
Readfield	13	2%
Rome	1	0%
Sidney	16	2%
South China	10	1%
Vassalboro	1	0%
Vienna	1	0%
Wayne	5	1%
West Gardiner	24	3%
Windsor	9	1%
Winslow	7	1%
Winthrop	50	7%
Homeless, staying in the region	2	0%
Live in Southern Kennebec County	608	87%
Just outside Southern Kennebec County	36	5%
Commuter	14	2%
Summer Resident	1	0%
Residence Reported	659	95%
Residence Unknown	36	5%

III. Full List of White Paper Topics

Overview

- Population
- Age
- Gender and Sexuality
- Covid Context

Health Measures

- Premature Death
- Health Insurance Coverage
- Health Care Access
- Providers
- Infant Mortality Rates
- Low Birth Weight
- Child Immunizations
- Youth Mental Health
 - Depression
 - Considered Suicide
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Adult Mental Health
- Mentally Unhealthy Days
- Domestic Violence
- Overdose Deaths
- Wellness and Prevention
 - Adult Obesity
 - Access to Exercise Opportunities

Education Measures

- Child Care
- Public Prekindergarten
- 4th Grade Reading Proficiency
- 8th Grade Math Proficiency
- High School Graduation
- Adult Literacy
- Educational Attainment of Working-Age Adults
- Workforce Certifications
- CareerCenters

Financial Stability Measures

- Income
 - Median Household Income
 - Income Sources
- Wages
- Unemployment Rates and Trend
- Employment: Top Industries
- Poverty
 - Supplemental Poverty Measure
- Housing

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About United Way of Kennebec Valley

United Way of Kennebec Valley (UWKV) is a nonprofit organization that unites all people and resources to improve lives in our community. In August 2021, UWKV expanded its region to serve all of Kennebec County—unifying United Way efforts within the county for the first time. United Way partners with 46 local programs to provide a better quality of life for people experiencing emergencies, hardships and personal challenges in our communities. Since 1955, UWKV has been combining forces with Kennebec Valley nonprofits, companies, government agencies and individual donors to address our area’s most pressing challenges. In 2021, UWKV launched a 10-year, cross-sector goal development process in Kennebec County to help all people thrive.

About Plimpton Research

Plimpton Research provides policy-oriented research and analysis services. Based in Maine, the company offers expertise in education and community, workforce, and youth development.