

## CONTACT

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## ***Mental Health Issues Top Residents' Concerns, Analysis Finds Residents also worried about cancer, alcohol/drug abuse, clean air and water***

*Results pulled from updated analysis of ongoing survey that solicits feedback about health perceptions*

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. (March 29, 2023) – In a new analysis, Suffolk County and Nassau County respondents both note their greatest health concern for their community is mental health depression/suicide. The previous two years cancer was the prevailing concern among communities. These results are the product of an analysis of community health data collected by the [Long Island Health Collaborative](#) (LIHC). The data were collected January through December 2022 using the [Community Health Assessment Survey \(English Version\)](#) and [Spanish version](#), an ongoing survey that collects primary data about Long Islanders' health concerns for themselves and their communities. The data is used by hospitals, county health departments, community-based organizations and other social and health services providers to offer programs that best meet the needs of local communities.

Drugs/alcohol abuse followed by cancer were the second and third issues of most concern among the community in Suffolk County. These were the same results seen in Nassau County, but flipped. In the 2021 analysis, the drugs/alcohol abuse issue ranked second in Suffolk County and third for Nassau County. The community concern in Nassau County that ranked second in last year's analysis was heart disease/stroke.

When asked **what are the biggest ongoing health concerns for yourself**, mental health depression/suicide topped the list for Suffolk while obesity/weight loss issues topped the list for Nassau. The previous year's analysis revealed cancer and heart disease/stroke respectively, as the top concerns for individuals' health.

Not surprisingly, when asked **what health screenings or education/information services are needed in your community**, mental health/depression topped the list for residents in both counties. Other screenings and education sought include cancer screenings and blood pressure checks, information related to nutrition and physical activity, as well as drug and alcohol services.

When asked **which is MOST needed to improve the health of your community**, Suffolk residents said mental health services, while Nassau residents said clean air and water. Mental health services ranked second for Nassau while clean air and water ranked fourth for Suffolk. In last year's analysis, mental health services ranked first for both counties.

It is not surprising that communities are clamoring for mental health services and screenings. Epidemiologists and mental health providers have noted a marked increase in the incidence of

depression, anxiety, and suicide since the pandemic began three years ago. Especially hard hit are teens and young adults. According to [data](#) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), in 2021 more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year.

Many mental health issues persist and become chronic. As is the case with other chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and many cancers, good lifestyle habits, such as proper [nutrition](#) and adequate [physical activity](#), help individuals better manage their chronic conditions. Unhealthy diets and lack of exercise are modifiable risk factors. This is why the Long Island Health Collaborative and its partners support access to affordable and nutritious foods and encourage residents of all ages to walk. Numerous studies support the physical and mental health benefits of walking. The LIHC's public awareness campaign – [Live Better](#) – promotes the importance of nutrition and physical activity to better manage and/or prevent chronic diseases.

Residents in both counties continue to see obesity/weight loss as a major personal health concern. This issue has consistently appeared in the top five rankings for the past five years, either as an individual concern and/or a concern for community health. Obesity is a prevailing risk factor for almost all chronic diseases.

Individuals are encouraged to complete the Community Health Assessment Survey [online](#). To date, about 15,000 individual surveys have been collected and analyzed since 2013. These analyses offer a window into this region's healthcare landscape.

“Our data analyses are excellent resources for researchers, grant writers, physicians and anyone involved in providing healthcare and social services,” said Janine Logan, director of the Long Island Health Collaborative, “but a member of the general ‘population’ can get a sense of the burden of disease in their communities by viewing the zip code level data. A healthier community leads to a more robust local economic infrastructure and prosperity. Health is the undervalued connector.”

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#### **About the Long Island Health Collaborative**

The [Long Island Health Collaborative](#) is a partnership of Long Island's hospitals, county health departments, physicians, health providers, community-based social and human service organizations, academic institutions, health plans, local government, and the business sector, all engaged in improving the health of Long Islanders with a focus on the reduction of chronic diseases. The LIHC initiative is overseen by the [Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council](#), the association that advocates for Long Island's hospitals.