



2023-2024

FULL REPORT

Central Virginia Community Report

Data
Action
Resource
Team

DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP BY



www.horizonbh.org/services/data-action-resource-team/

Executive Summary

In 2020, it became apparent that there is a tremendous need to better understand how societal factors are impacting substance use and mental illness in Central Virginia. As a result, Horizon Behavioral Health (Horizon) in partnership with the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), and the Central Virginia Addiction and Recovery Resources (CVARR) coalition launched the Data to Action Resource Team (DART) on May 25, 2021. DART is made up of individuals representing multiple sectors including behavioral health, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), economic development, housing, law enforcement, public schools, social services, etc. DART relies on the Framework for Addiction Analysis and Community Transformation (FAACT) for support with analyzing quantitative data from the FAACT dashboard and structuring the DART report. DART is committed to collecting and analyzing data to identify trends, contributing factors, and overall impact of substance use and mental illness in Central Virginia: Lynchburg City, Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell counties.

Horizon Behavioral Health

Horizon Behavioral Health supports and promote the health, independence and self-worth of individuals and families in Central Virginia by providing a continuum of community-based treatment, prevention, early intervention, and aftercare services for persons affected by mental health, intellectual disabilities, substance use and co-occurring disorders.

Crisis Intervention Team

Crisis Intervention Team programs work in conjunction to promote and support collaborative efforts to create & sustain more effective interactions among law enforcement, mental health care providers, individuals with mental health disorders and/or substance use disorders as well as their families and communities. They provide timely identification of mental health & substance use crisis and provide diversion from the Criminal Justice System and streamlined access to behavioral health treatment services.

Central Virginia Addiction and Recovery Resources Coalition

The Central Virginia Addiction and Recovery Resources Coalition (CVARR) has built a cross-sector alliance of community partners to address substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery in Central Virginia. CVARR's primary goal is to unite local community members and organizations in identifying gaps in services, prioritizing resources, raising awareness, and reducing the impact of use on individuals, families, and the greater community.

Framework for Addiction Analysis and Community

The Framework for Addiction Analysis and Community Transformation (FAACT) is the Commonwealth of Virginia's premier data analytics platform to tackle the Opioid epidemic and is spearheaded and implemented by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). It consolidates on a single platform national, commonwealth, and local data resources to help its users address the rising tide of addiction in Virginia. The FAACT team is committed to working with regional partners to ensure they have access to the information they need to make data driven decisions.

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Summary Analysis

Overall Trends

- Emergency Custody Orders (ECOs) peaked in March 2022 and declined in November 2023, indicating a 45.9% overall decrease.
- Emergency responses for overdose incidents peaked in April 2023, reflecting periodic spikes in overdose cases.
- Opioid-related impressions decreased from 43% in 2022 to 39% in 2023, suggesting slight improvement in the opioid crisis.
- Naloxone usage in opioid emergencies dropped from 31% in 2022 to 20% in 2023, indicating a shift towards other intervention strategies.
- Drug-related arrests for meth/amphetamines increased significantly in 2022, while heroin and marijuana arrests declined by the year's end.
- Lynchburg consistently had higher unemployment rates in 2023, peaking at 5.2% in August.
- Homelessness trends: 524 individuals used emergency shelters in FY22, with a 33% increase in FY23, and 14% returned to homelessness within 24 months.
- Successful exits from homelessness: 66% of exits from shelters led to permanent housing in FY23, significantly above the national average.
- Medicaid was the most utilized benefit program in 2023.
- Lynchburg had the highest CPS referrals in the region in SFY 2023, and Bedford had the highest per capita adult protective service referrals.

Demographics

- The 30-39 age group was the most impacted, accounting for 28% of total emergencies, followed by the 40-49 age group accounting for 24% of incidents.

Gaps (Qualitative Data)

- There is a significant need for recovery residences for men, crisis stabilization programs, and detoxification services, consistently highlighted in community health assessments.
- A shortage of service providers leads to long waiting lists for essential services, including counseling, psychiatry, and Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP) for juveniles.
- There is a noticeable gap in public awareness regarding available help and the dangers associated with certain substances, hindering preventive measures and early intervention.
- Prolonged wait times for mental health services prevent timely intervention, negatively impacting individuals in need of urgent support.
- The reduction in crisis stabilization programs leaves students and community members without immediate support, resulting in delays in receiving necessary care.

Data Onboarded and Developed

Regional datasets are onboarded to provide a more holistic view of substance use and mental health challenges in a community. Behavioral Health, public schools, law enforcement, youth survey, homelessness, local EMS and social services data has been onboarded and incorporated into this report at the request of DART members. We are hopeful that the data gathered by DART will help to educate and inform the community, assist with identifying and prioritizing needs; aid in developing action plans to address contributing factors; and help determine and gain the resources needed to address challenges related to substance use, mental illness, and suicide in Central Virginia.

The Data to Action Resources Team Central Virginia Community Report analyzes a variety of data sources to better understand the effect of substance use disorder on communities.

- Horizon Behavioral Health data which includes emergency custody order (ECO) information as well as general trends observed by staff members.
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) data displays the breakdown of individuals involved in opioid-related incidents and when the incidents were occurring most frequently.
- Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services (BREMS) data which contains reported overdose emergencies in the Central Virginia region.
- Virginia State Police (VSP) Incident Based Reporting (IBR) and local law enforcement data which showcases the trends in substance related arrests.
- Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) data provides insight into the trends in unemployment rates and claims.
- Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) data contains information related to Child Protective Services as well as a variety of benefits available to residents.
- Central Virginia Continuum of Care (CVCoc) and Miriam's House provides data related to homelessness in the region as well as comparisons to national averages.
- Lynchburg Youth Survey (LYS) and Public Schools data was analyzed to examine the status and trends in health behaviors of youth in 8th, 10th and 12th grade.
- YWCA – Central Virginia provided qualitative data related to the trends in domestic violence over the last few years.

How This Report is Organized

This report covers analysis of each individual data source to describe statistics and identify trends within the Central Virginia VDH Health District between 2023 and 2024. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly half of individuals experiencing substance use disorders will experience a co-occurring mental health disorder.¹ Though we know that substance use and mental health outcomes are highly interdependent, and their collective impact creates an increased risk for individuals, this report analyzes substance use and mental health independently. This report serves as the second in a series of annual reports with this year's analyses (FY'24) based on data from 2023-2024.

Three FAACT Applications Analyzed

Utilizing data that the project has onboard as part of its mission, analytical assessment of data provided by VDH, specifically EMS incident data, as well as VSP, VEC and a variety of local datasets was conducted.

¹ National Institute of Mental Health (2021). Substance Use and Co-Occurring Mental Disorders. Retrieved August 9, 2021, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/substance-use-and-mental-health>.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The following section of this report is utilizing quantitative data provided by a variety of local organizations within the community as well as commonwealth-wide agencies in order to understand relevant trends occurring in the Central Virginia Region.

Change-point analysis on EMS data and corresponding trends in other datasets:

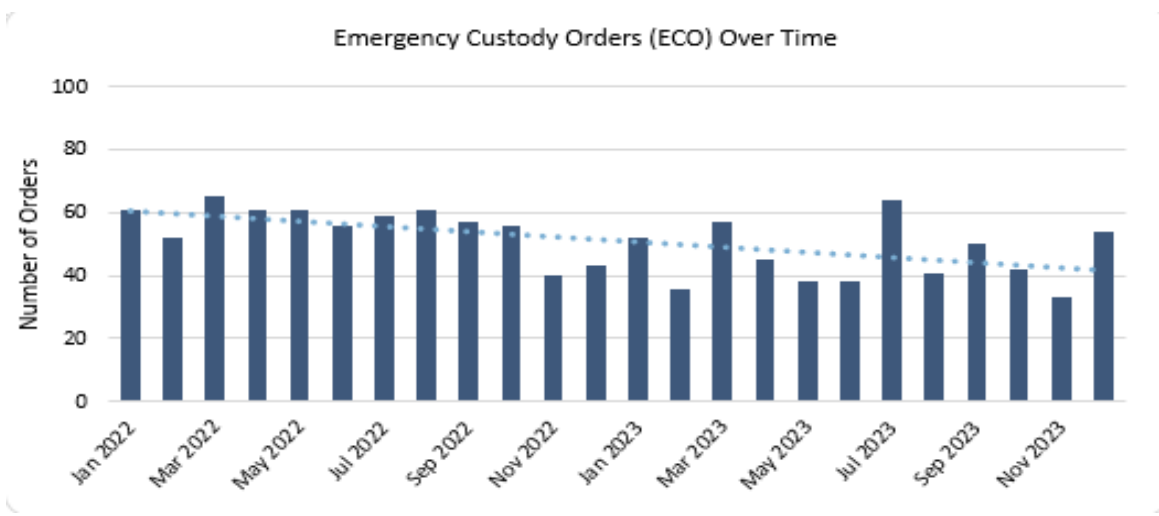
Change-point analysis is used to identify significant changes in the linear trends within data over a certain period. Using this methodology, an analysis was conducted on EMS incident data to define major shifts for the Commonwealth before observing trends in other data sources at the regional level for the identified change points to understand noteworthy time shifts and trends.

Horizon Emergency Custody Order (ECO)

The Horizon Behavioral Health Emergency Custody Order data provides a monthly breakdown of ECOs from January 2022 to December 2023. Emergency custody orders result in a meeting between a professional mental health evaluator and a person with a suspected mental illness in order to determine whether hospitalization or treatment is needed as well as if the situation meets the statutory criteria for issuance of a temporary detention order.²

What was the trend in emergency custody orders over time?

From January 2022 to December 2023, Emergency Custody Orders (ECOs) showed significant fluctuations. They peaked at 65 in March 2022 and subsequently dropped by 32.3% to 40 in November 2022. Over the next year, they further decreased, reaching a low of 33 in November 2023, marking a 45.9% decline from the 2022 peak. This overall downward trend in ECOs suggests a reduced need for court-mandated interventions in hospitalizations or mental health treatments



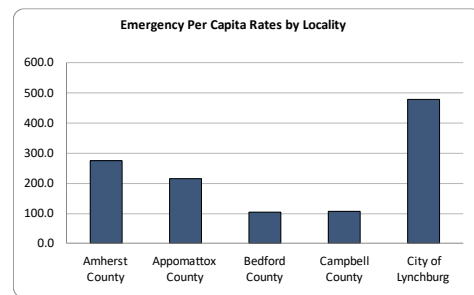
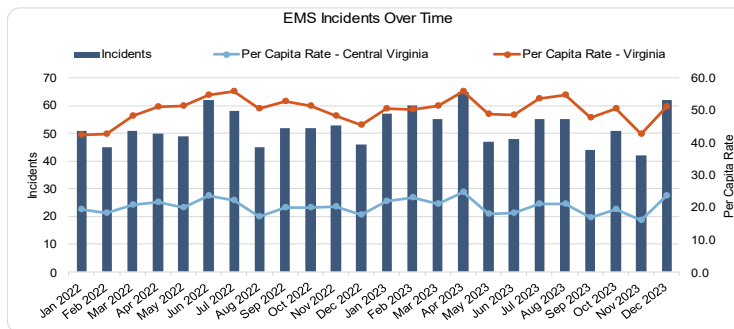
²Temporary Detention Orders. In Magistrate manual (pp. 6–4). essay.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

The Emergency Medical Services Application is a self-service dashboard that provides users with statewide data for drilling into emergencies involving opioids, including overdoses and naloxone administration.

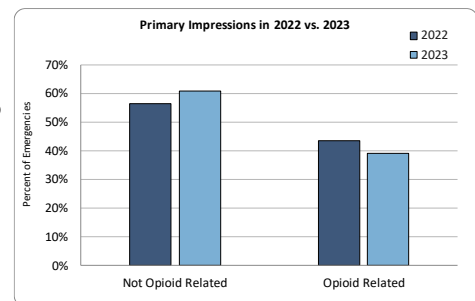
What was the trend in emergency responses for overdose incidents?

In 2022, the trend in emergency responses to overdose incidents in Central Virginia demonstrated a significant fluctuation in monthly incidents. In 2023, the highest number of incidents recorded was in April (65 incidents), with the per capita rate peaking in April (24.8) and remaining relatively stable thereafter. This indicates a consistent need for emergency responses in Central Virginia throughout the year, with periodic spikes suggesting episodic increases in overdose cases.



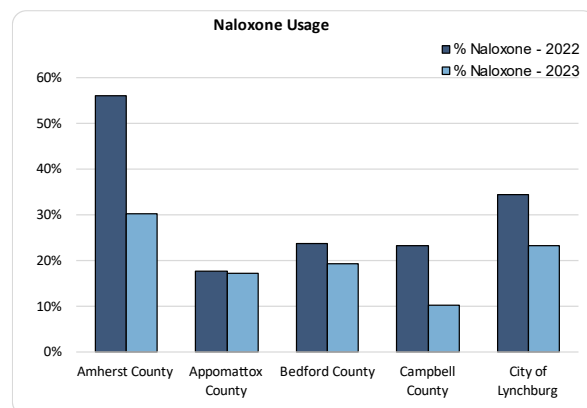
How have the trends in primary impressions recorded by EMS providers changed over time?

Over the course of 2022 to 2023, there was a notable shift in the primary impressions recorded by EMS providers regarding opioid-related incidents. In 2022, 43% of primary impressions were related to opioid incidents, which decreased to 39% in 2023. This indicates a slight improvement in the opioid crisis, possibly due to enhanced preventive measures or better public awareness and treatment availability.



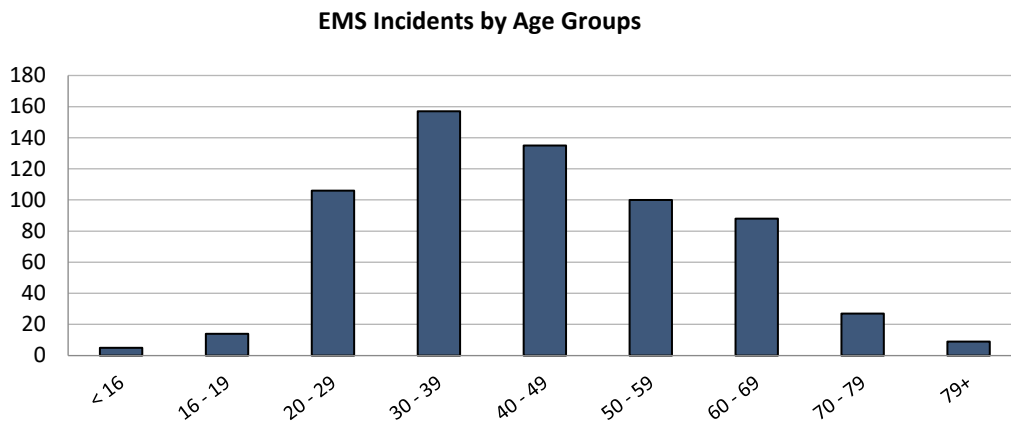
How does naloxone usage compare to the total number of opioid emergencies?

Naloxone usage in emergency responses has shown a decline from 2022 to 2023, suggesting either a decrease in the severity of opioid overdoses or an improvement in other treatment methods. The overall decrease from 31% in 2022 to 20% in 2023 across all measured localities suggests a broader trend of decreased reliance on Naloxone during opioid-related emergencies, which could be indicative of a shift towards other intervention strategies or a decrease in opioid overdose severity.



What was the demographic breakdown of EMS incidents?

In 2023, the 30-39-year-old age group continued to be the most impacted, contributing to approximately 28% of the total emergencies. This maintains the pattern observed in previous years, where the 30-39-year-olds consistently stood out as the most affected demographic. The 40-49-year-old age group also remained significantly affected, representing around 24% of the incidents. These trends reflect a higher contribution of these age groups to opioid-related emergencies compared to their proportional representation in the general population, underscoring the need for tailored strategies to address EMS incidents effectively within these demographics.

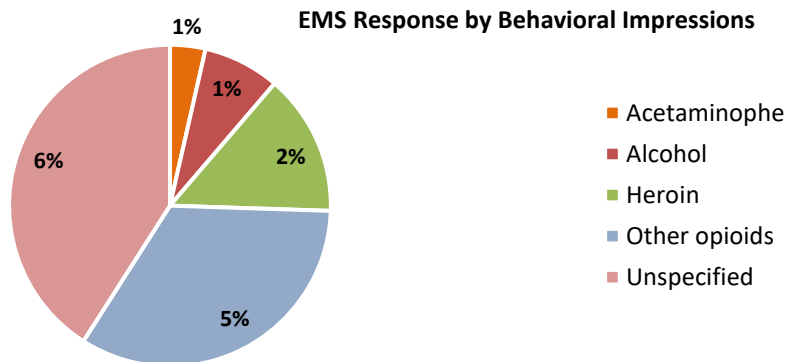


Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services (BREMS)

The Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services provided emergency data specific to the Central Virginia region for 2023. This dataset reported on regional EMS responses by behavioral impressions. The analysis below focused on overdose-related impressions.

What were the most common substances involved in overdoses ?

Of all EMS responses by behavioral impressions (2,302) in 2023, the most common substances involved in overdoses were "Unspecified" substances, accounting for 6% of cases. Following this, "Other opioids" were involved in 5% of overdose cases, making it the second most common substance associated with overdoses. Heroin, Alcohol, and Acetaminophen were less frequently involved, with 2%, 1%, and 1% respectively.

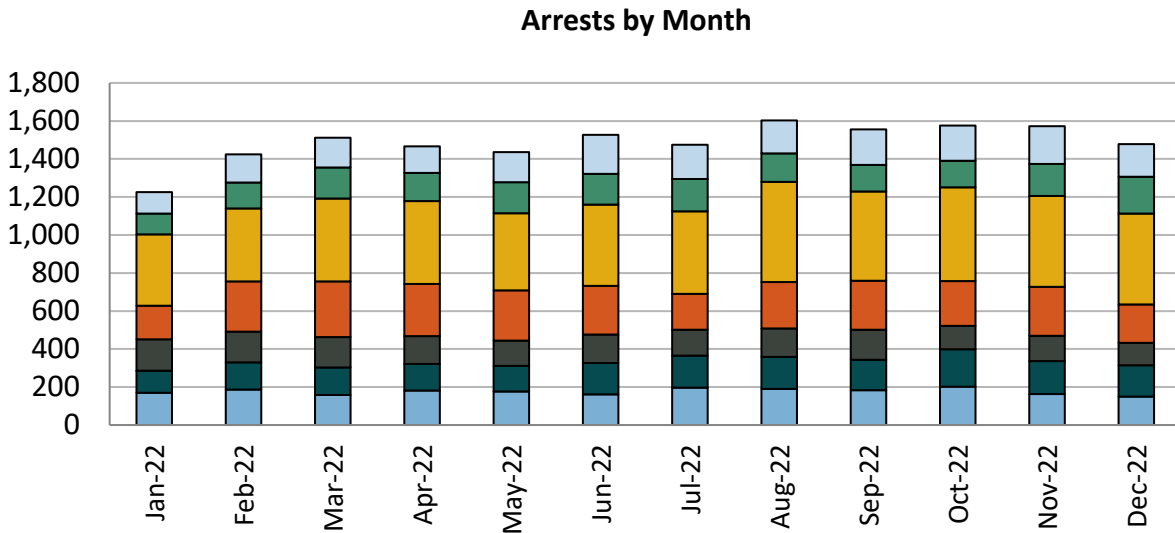
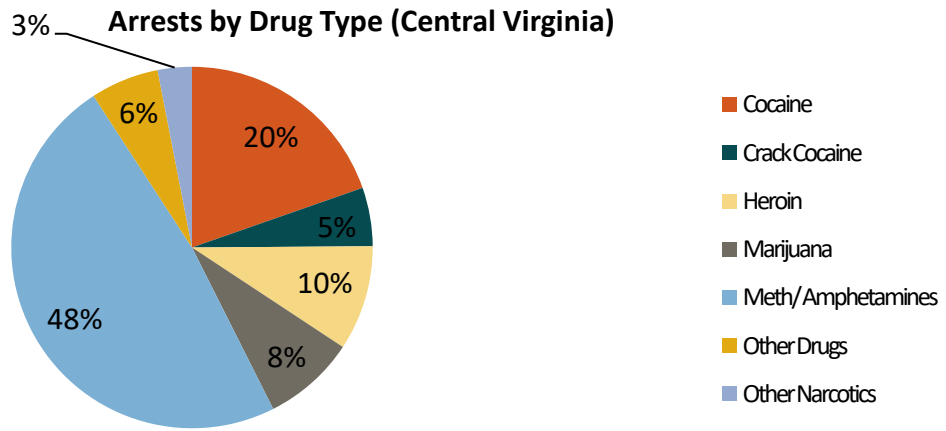


Virginia State Police (VSP) Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) System

The Virginia State Police's Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) System is a self-service dashboard that lets users analyze substance related arrests.

What was the trend year over year in drug-related arrests?

In 2022, drug-related arrests in Central Virginia exhibited varying trends. Cocaine-related arrests peaked in July at 9% of the annual total, followed by a 14% decrease by December. Crack cocaine arrests were highest in October, accounting for 11% of the year's total, with a 24% increase from January to October. Heroin-related arrests were highest in January at 10% but declined by 28% by December. Marijuana arrests peaked in March at 10%, then dropped by 32% by December. Meth/amphetamines-related arrests saw their peak in August, representing 10% of the total, with a 41% increase from January. Arrests for other drugs peaked in December with a substantial 78% increase over the year. Other narcotics arrests were highest in June at 10%, with an 82% rise from January, followed by a 17% decrease by December. Overall, significant fluctuations were observed, with the largest increases in arrests for meth/amphetamines and other drugs, and notable declines for heroin and marijuana arrests by the year's end.

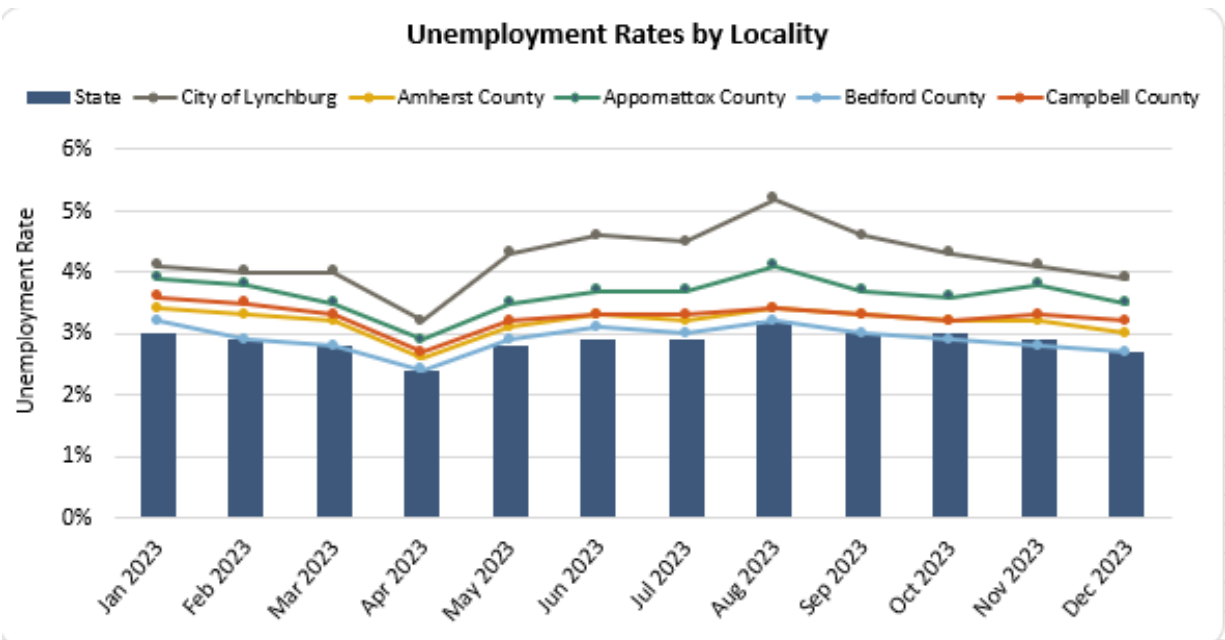


Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)

The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) is a self-service dashboard that lets users analyze details related to unemployment rates and claims.

What were the unemployment rates in Central Virginia?

In 2023, unemployment rates in Central Virginia varied across localities, generally ranging from 2.60% to 5.20%. The City of Lynchburg typically experienced higher rates, peaking at 5.2% in August, while other counties like Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell showed lower rates, often aligning closer to the state average, which fluctuated around 2.70% to 3.20%.



How do unemployment rates compare between localities in the region?

Throughout 2023, the City of Lynchburg consistently registered higher unemployment rates compared to the other localities in Central Virginia. For example, in December 2023, Lynchburg had a rate of 3.9%, compared to lower rates in counties like Bedford (2.70%) and Amherst (3.00%). Generally, rates in the counties were closer to or below the state average, indicating a less volatile job market compared to Lynchburg.

Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS)

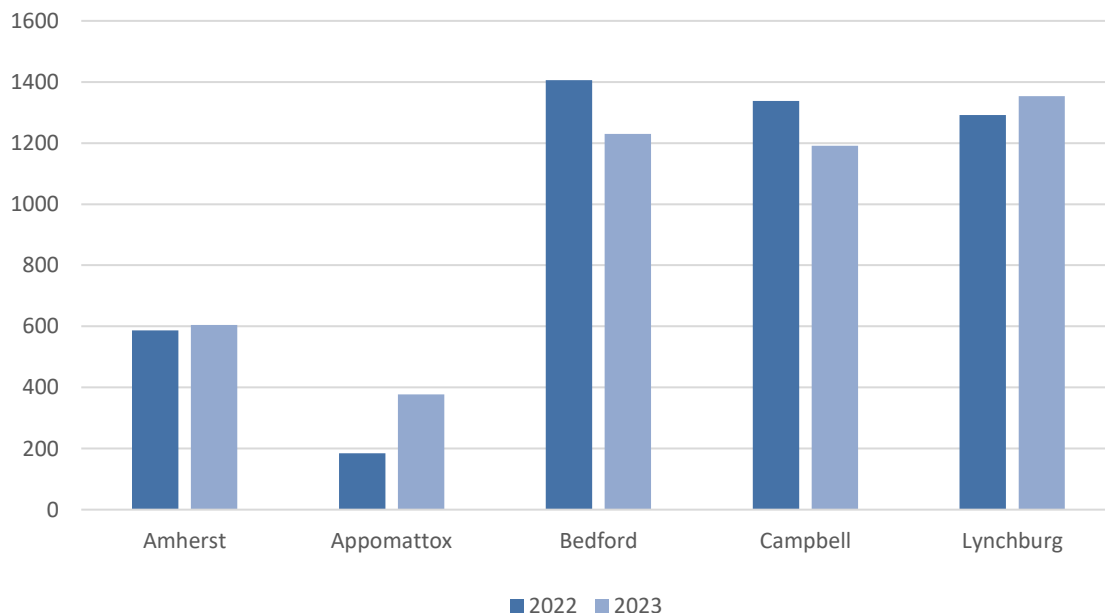
The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) contains data that includes information related to child protective services as well as a variety of different benefits residents could receive.

According to a study published on American Psychiatric Association Publishing, Child Protective Services (CPS) contact is eight times more likely for parents who have a serious mental illness, and the risk of a change in living arrangement is 26 times higher.³ Also, substance use disorders can share correlation with Child Protective Services contact. Nationally, an increase in overdose deaths and substance use hospitalization rates share a common relationship with increased rates of foster care entries. With research showing a correlation between health disorders and protective services and foster care, it is necessary that this data is displayed in this report.

Which locality in Central Virginia had the highest number of CPS referrals?

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2023, Lynchburg had the highest number of Child Protective Services (CPS) referrals in Central Virginia, with a total of 1,354. While this number may suggest a higher demand for CPS services, it is important to consider population density when interpreting these figures. Lynchburg serves a larger population compared to surrounding counties, which naturally leads to a higher number of referrals. Similarly, Bedford, with 1,230 referrals, and Campbell, with 1,191 referrals, have larger populations, contributing to their higher referral counts. In contrast, Amherst and Appomattox counties, with 605 and 377 referrals respectively, serve fewer individuals, which is reflected in their lower referral numbers.

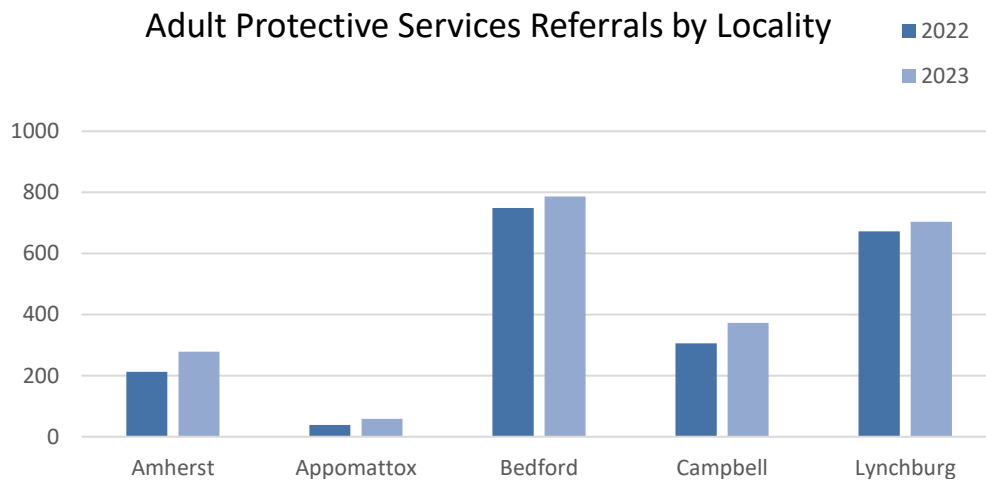
Child Protective Services Referrals by Locality



³ Mental Illnesses: Results From a National Survey. *Psychiatric Services*, 70(3), pp.202-208.

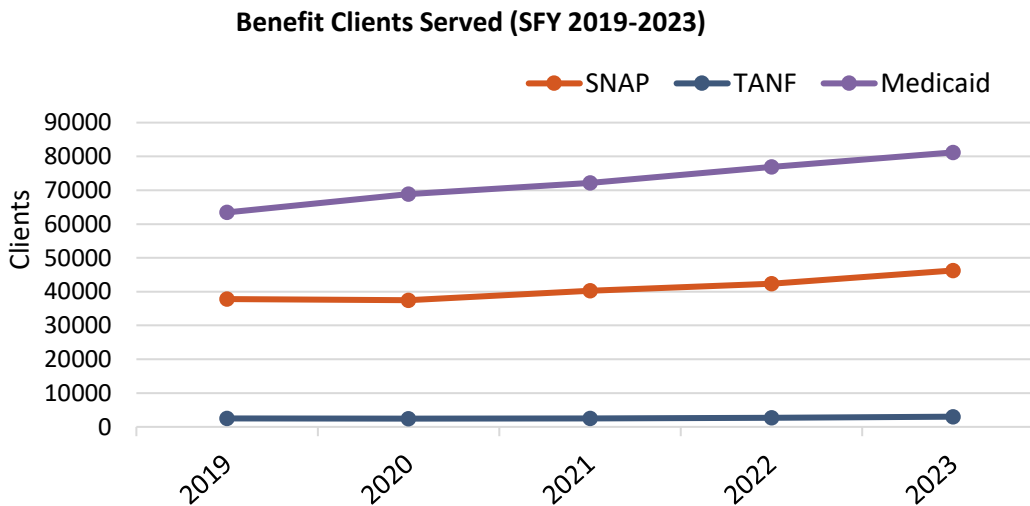
Which locality in Central Virginia had the highest number of APS referrals?

For Adult Protective Services (APS) referrals in Central Virginia, Bedford recorded the highest number of referrals, with a total of 787. While this figure may suggest that Bedford faces more critical issues related to the welfare of vulnerable adults, it's important to consider population size and density when interpreting the data. Bedford serves a larger population than some of the surrounding counties, which naturally contributes to its higher referral numbers. Lynchburg, with 704 referrals, and Campbell, with 373, also serve larger populations, which helps explain their higher referral counts compared to Amherst (279) and Appomattox (58), which have smaller populations.



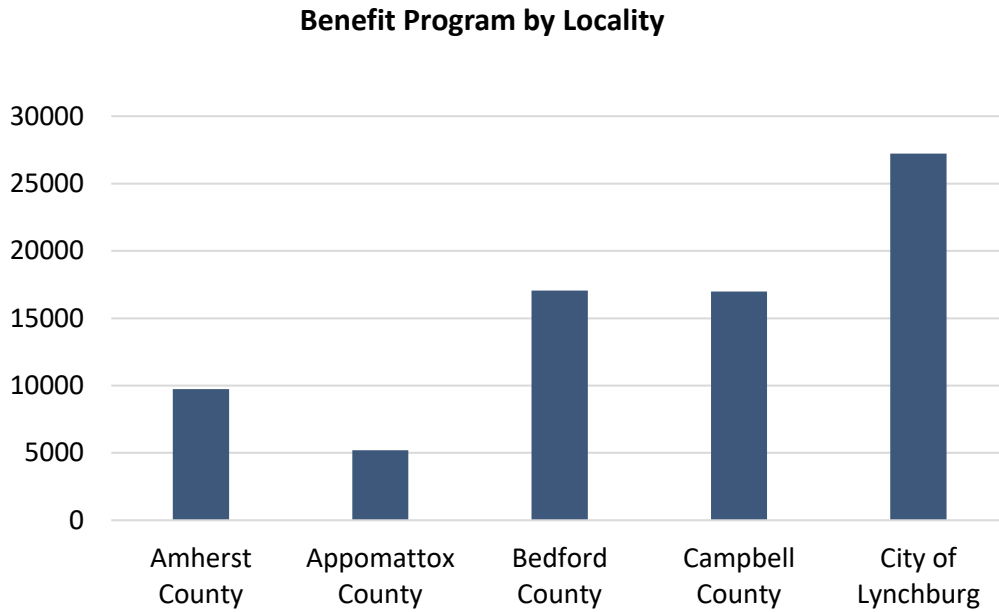
What is the most common benefit program in Central Virginia?

During the analyzed period (2019- 2023), the Medicaid program is the most common benefit program in Central Virginia, consistently having the highest number of participants compared to SNAP and TANF from 2019 to 2023. In 2023, Medicaid participation reached 81,189, significantly higher than SNAP's 46,261 and TANF's 3,021.



Which locality relies on benefit programs the most in the region?

In the context of benefit program utilization within the Central Virginia region, the City of Lynchburg had the highest number of benefit program clients and emerges as the locality relying most extensively on such support systems. A significant number of 27,222 individuals from Lynchburg sought assistance through various benefit programs.

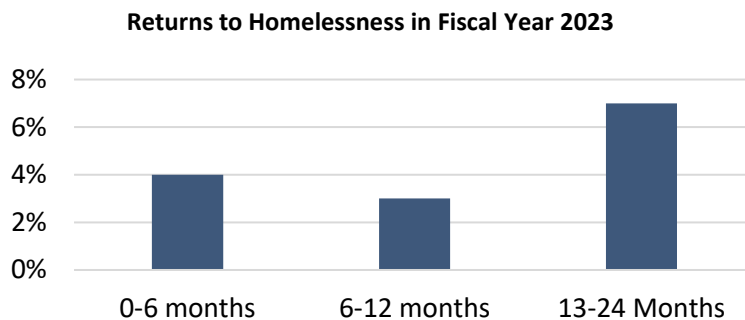


Central Virginia Continuum of Care (CVCoC)

The Central Virginia Continuum of Care (CVCoC) data contains information related to homelessness in the region during fiscal year 2023, as well as comparisons to similar metrics for the United States. Lack of housing and homelessness are social determinants of health that contribute to the health disparities and health inequities related to substance use and mental illness. Therefore, since homelessness and health disorders are interlinked, data about homelessness and housing is necessary to show within this report.

How many individuals were homeless during fiscal year 2023?

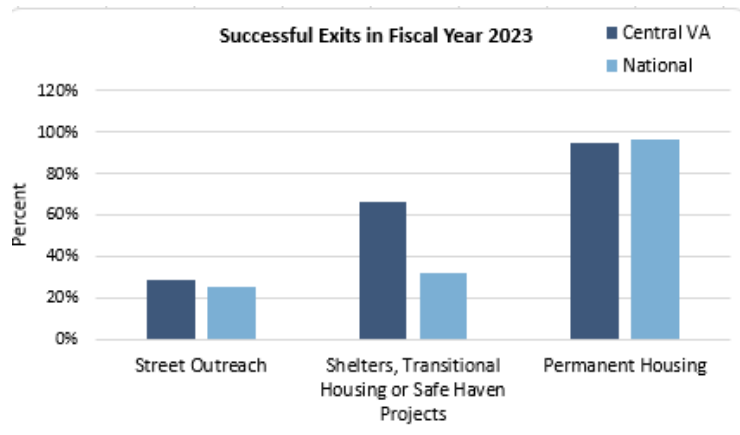
In fiscal year 2022, 524 individuals in Central Virginia used emergency shelters (ES) and permanent homes (PH), increasing by 33% in FY23. Regarding returns to homelessness, 7% experienced it within the first 6 months of FY22, decreasing to 4% in FY23. For the 6–12-month period, returns rose slightly from 2% to 3%, and for the 13–24-month period, from 6% to 7%. Overall, about 14% faced homelessness again within 24 months in Central Virginia, which remained slightly below the national average by 4%.



What percent of individuals experiencing homelessness had successful exits in 2023?

In Central Virginia during fiscal year 2023, 29% of exits from street outreach projects successfully transitioned into shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven projects, slightly above the national average of 25%. Additionally, 66% of exits from shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven projects led to permanent housing placements, more than double the national average of 32%.

Furthermore, 95% of individuals in permanent housing successfully maintained their placements or transitioned out, closely aligning with the national average of 96%. These figures reflect Central Virginia's strong performance in facilitating successful exits from homelessness initiatives compared to national trends.

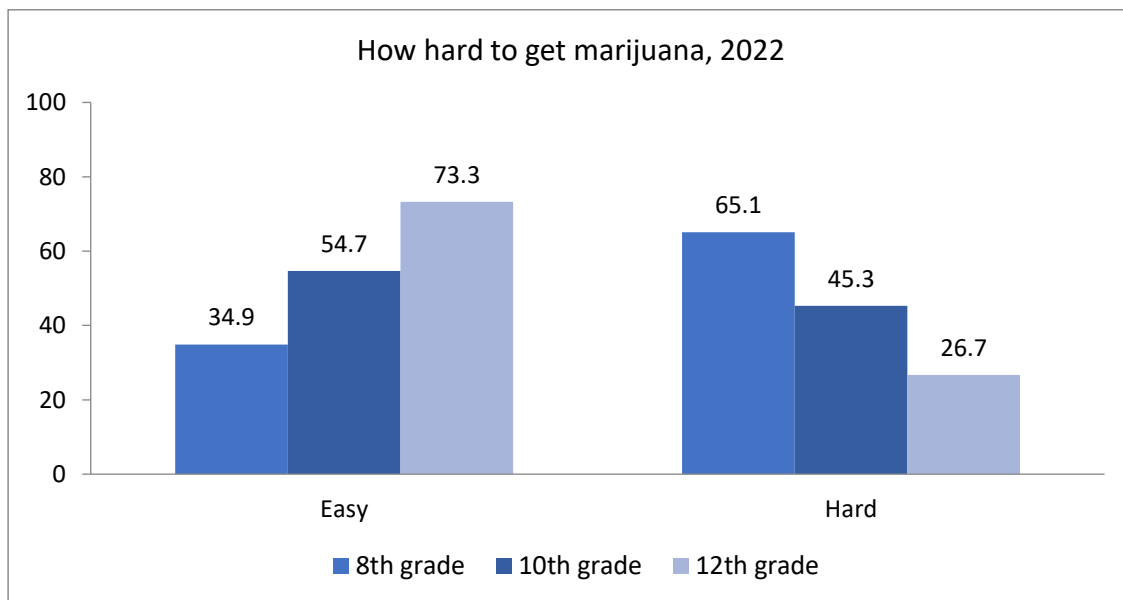
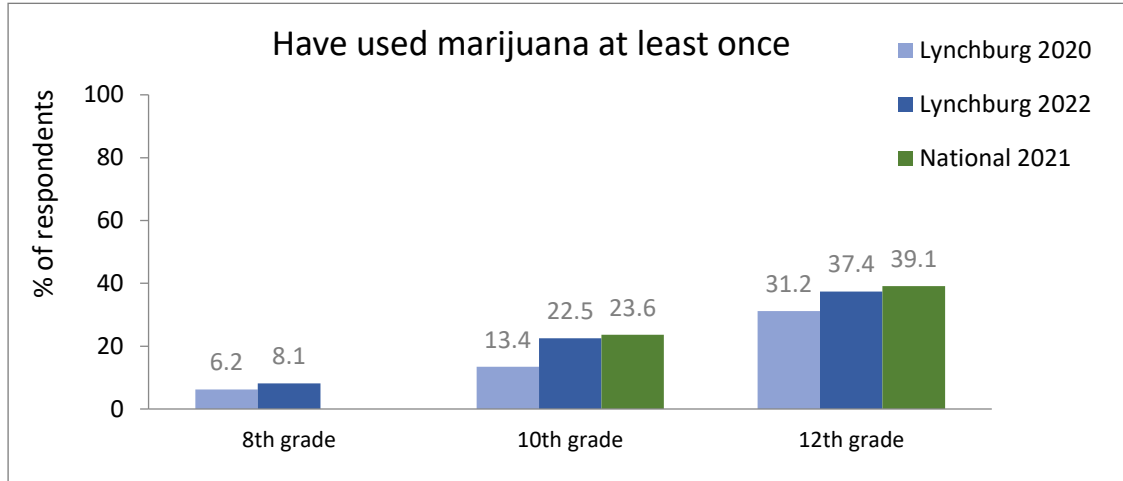


Lynchburg Youth Survey (LYS)

The Lynchburg City Schools has been surveying youth in the school district since 1999. The survey is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) with some minor modifications according to local interest. The LYS was administered to Lynchburg City Schools 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in Fall 2022 and is administered every two years.

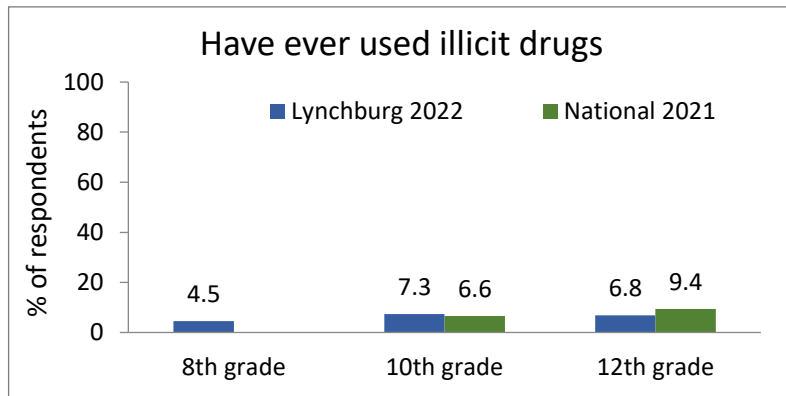
Survey questions related to marijuana use?

An average of 22.7% of Lynchburg students across all grades reported having tried marijuana, with 12th graders demonstrating the highest percentage at 37.4%. The most frequently reported age of first marijuana use for Lynchburg youth was 13-14 years old (6.1%). The percentage of Lynchburg students who reported trying marijuana before the age of 13 is similar across Lynchburg (5.5%) and National (5.1%) data. The percentage of Lynchburg youth who reported using marijuana in the past 30 days increased alongside grade level but remained relatively lower compared to National averages. The most common method of consumption was smoking.



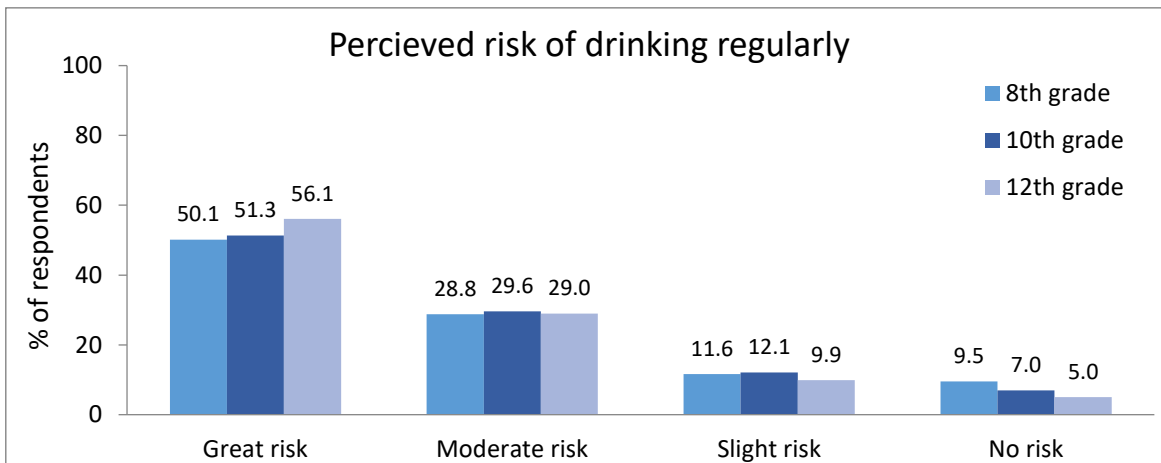
Survey questions related to illegal drugs use?

While the vast majority of Lynchburg students reported never having tried illicit drugs (93.7% across all grades), a small number of students reporting using illicit drugs in the past month (1.5% for inhalants and <1% for all other drugs surveyed). The most commonly reported illicit drug used across all grades was “sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling paints or sprays to get high (huffing)” (4.5% of 8th graders, 6.4% of 10th graders, and 5.4% of 12th graders reported having ever done so). As grade level increased, students were more likely to report being offered drugs both at school and in their community. Across grade level, Lynchburg students reported being offered drugs at about the same rate (e.g., 5.3% of 8th graders reported at school, and 5.6% of 8th graders reported in the community).



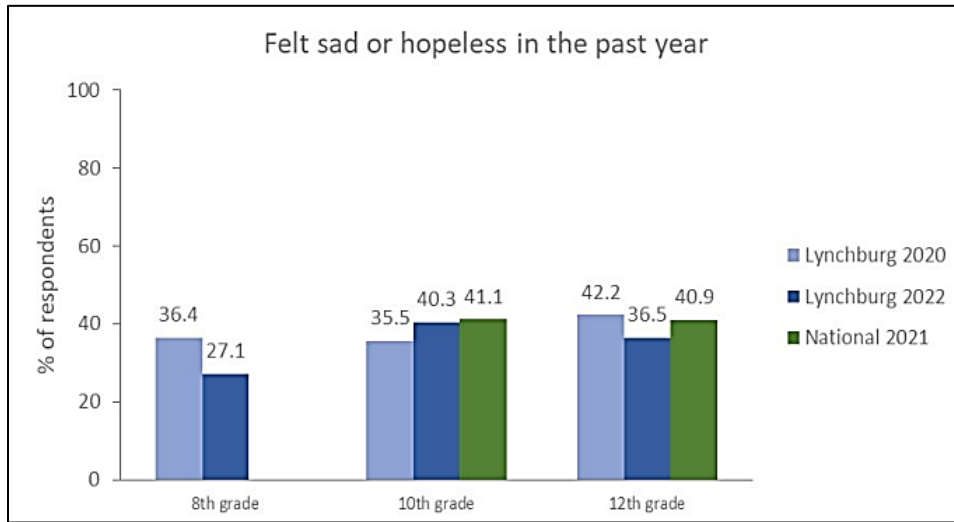
Survey questions related to alcohol use?

Most students in Lynchburg (64.9%) have never had an alcoholic drink, which is higher than the National average (52.9% never had a drink). On average 10.9% of Lynchburg students across all grades reported having ever tried alcohol. The portion of Lynchburg youth who reported drinking at least once in the past 30 days increased with age, with 3.1% of 8th graders, 11.1% of 10th graders, and 18.6% of 12th graders reporting consumption in the past month. While there is no data to compare 8th grade students, the portion of Lynchburg 10th and 12th graders who reported drinking at least once in the past month was lower than that of National youth.



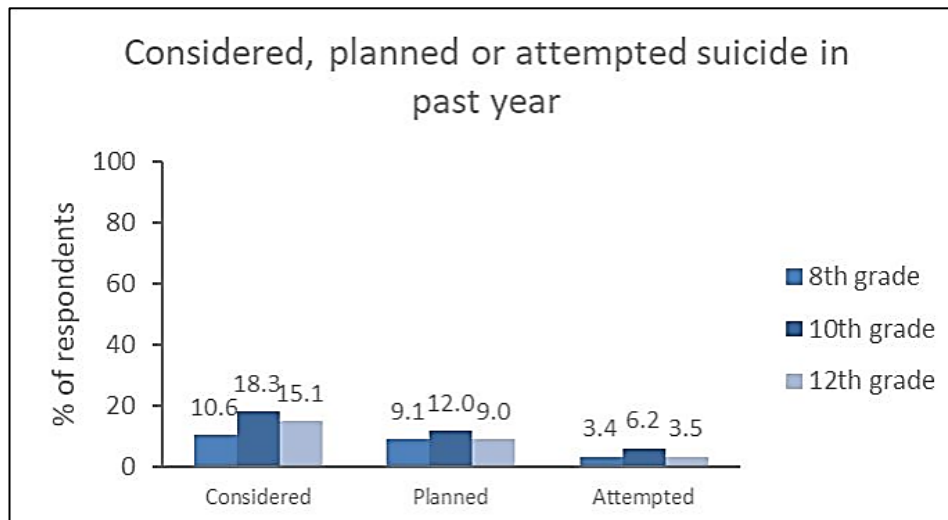
Survey questions related to feeling sad or hopeless in the past year?

Across all grade levels, 34.7% of Lynchburg youth reported experiencing feelings of sadness and hopelessness over the past year. While the percentages were slightly higher among 10th and 12th graders, they still remain below the national average for these age groups. Despite this, the data highlights a concerning trend in emotional well-being among students, particularly in the older grades. Efforts to address these feelings of sadness and hopelessness remain crucial as students navigate academic and social pressures.



Survey questions related to considered, planned, or attempted suicide in the past year?

Overall, 14.7% of Lynchburg students reported having considered suicide in the past year, with 10.1% making a plan and 4.7% attempting suicide. While these percentages are concerning, there was a decrease in all three categories compared to 2020. Despite this decline, the data still supports the need for continued attention to students' mental health across all grade levels. Efforts to provide resources and support for students experiencing suicidal thoughts remain essential, particularly as they navigate the pressures of adolescence.



Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Overdose Data

The Virginia Department of Health Overdose Data (2023) data reveals significant regional disparities in overdose-related health issues across Virginia and its counties. Overdose death rates for all drugs and opioids are notably high in Lynchburg, surpassing the state average, indicating a critical area for intervention. In contrast, Appomattox and Campbell show lower meth-related death rates, suggesting less prevalence. Emergency department visits for all drugs are particularly elevated in Amherst, highlighting a strain on local healthcare resources. Overall, these figures underscore the need for targeted public health strategies and resource allocation to address opioid addiction effectively in the most affected regions.

VDH Overdose Data (2023)	Virginia	Amherst	Appomattox	Bedford	Campbell	Lynchburg
Overdose Deaths Rate 2023 - All Drugs	28.9	22.2	11.9	27.2	9.1	24.9
Overdose Deaths Rate 2023 - Opioids	23.6	19	6	19.8	9.1	25.2
Overdose Deaths Rate 2023 - Meth	6	3.2	11.9	19.8	3.6	6.3
Overdose Deaths # 2023 - Fentanyl	22.1	19	6	18.6	9.1	24
ED Overdose Visits 2023 - All Drugs	21.2	35	28	20.6	16.1	37
ED Overdose Visits 2023 - Opioids	11	16.6	12.5	7	6.6	15.3

**Rate = Per 100,000 Individuals

Qualitative Data Analysis

The following section of this report is utilizing qualitative data provided by key informants from a variety of local organizations within the community in order to understand relevant trends that are not captured in the data they are able to share.

Horizon Behavioral Health

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Director of Grants and Programs at Horizon Behavioral Health. The data was captured through several of the programs and staff at Horizon.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

Substance use and mental health issues have significantly impacted the organization's work by increasing the demand for services. Coupled with the difficulty in recruiting and hiring staff, this has led to delays in meeting the needs of clients. Workforce shortages remain a primary challenge, affecting the organization's ability to provide timely outpatient services. Ongoing challenges including but not limited to the opioid epidemic, social media effects, and increased isolation, has further stressed the organization.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The organization's service delivery has been impacted in two main ways. Firstly, there is a need to be flexible and adaptive to changing funding sources and specific subpopulations requiring clinical focus. This includes implementing work-from-home procedures and adjusting staff schedules to meet client preferences for in-person or telehealth services. Secondly, there is a high rate of no-shows and non-attendance, which is a common issue in community behavioral health and requires ongoing strategies to best utilize available resources.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

The organization has observed an increasing number of young adults presenting for both mental health and substance use services. This includes a critical target population of 18 to 25-year-olds with substance use disorders. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of homeless adults being referred for mental health services. New trends include increased use of vaping devices among adolescents for both nicotine and marijuana, higher referrals from schools due to substance-related paraphernalia, and a rise in fentanyl use due to the scarcity of heroin. Continued methamphetamine use, multigenerational usage, and combined use of stimulants like PCP and cocaine have also been noted.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

The organization has noticed heightened anxiety, depression, and trauma among clients, influenced by social media, pandemic-induced isolation, and the current political and social climate. This reflects an overall increase in mental health issues, with individuals feeling more stressed and adrift due to these external pressures.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

There has been an increase in the number of young adults and older adults (50s and 60s) being referred for services. This may be partly due to recent changes allowing licensed professional counselors (LPCs) to bill Medicare, leading to more older adults seeking services.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

The organization has observed an increase in the use of vaping devices among teens across all races, classes, and socioeconomic statuses. There has also been an increase in referrals for younger students for both mental health and substance use services. Additionally, there is a noticeable trend of pregnant and postpartum women using substances like marijuana, influenced by its legalization and perceived safety.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity, etc.)

The primary factor impacting service delivery in 2023 has been the workforce shortage. However, there has been a positive development in the Medicaid authorization process for one community-based program, which has decreased wait times.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have led to some clients struggling to understand that marijuana use is not permitted in Horizon treatment programs. Societal acceptance of marijuana use has made it harder to exclude it from treatment programs, and many clients, especially younger ones, continue to use marijuana even while in treatment for other substances. Referral sources are also less likely to prohibit marijuana use due to its legal status, necessitating ongoing client education on its risks and potential for dependency.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

There are significant gaps in services, particularly the need for a recovery residence for men, crisis stabilization programs, and detoxification services. These gaps have been consistently reflected in community health needs assessments and provider surveys, indicating a pressing need for these resources.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Contributing factors include peer pressure among youth, the desire to belong or identify with peers, poverty, and the availability and ease of access to substances. Economic factors like high living costs, stagnant wages, and inflation, as well as political division and family system challenges, also play a role. The increasing social acceptance and availability of marijuana further contribute to these issues.

Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Regional Director and Performance Improvement Specialist from the Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services Council.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

The Blue Ridge EMS Council's work has been impacted by substance use and mental health primarily through indirect means such as medication improvement and stocking issues. While the Council itself is not directly affected, it acts as a representative for local EMS agencies. Substance use have consistently been a problem that affects EMS systems by increasing call volumes and causing delays in care. Calls involving substance use and mental health often necessitate the presence of law enforcement, which can extend response times. The necessity to stage in safe areas before responding to potentially dangerous scenes further contributes to these delays, ultimately straining the EMS system and affecting overall service delivery.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

Substance use and mental health issues significantly impact service delivery within the EMS system. Such calls typically involve more complex and time-consuming situations compared to routine medical emergencies. For instance, EMS providers may need to wait for law enforcement to secure a scene before they can provide care, leading to extended response times. This is particularly problematic in smaller counties where a single medic unit might be tied up with a substance abuse call, leaving the area without adequate coverage for other emergencies. This scenario illustrates how substance use and mental health issues can drive up call volumes and cause delays in care for other patients, thereby stressing the overall EMS system.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

New trends related to substance use have been observed, showing a decrease in opioid use over the past year, with numbers down by approximately 8%. Despite this positive trend, there have been troubling incidents in schools involving younger children inadvertently bringing drugs to school. An example is elementary-aged children bringing fentanyl-laced gummies, leading to significant responses from EMS and straining local resources. Additionally, there have been increases in the use of vape pens and delta-8 THC products among school-aged children, indicating a shift in substance use patterns within younger demographics.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

A new trend in mental health has been observed, showing a decrease in mental health-related calls by about 10%. This reduction may be attributed to a societal shift towards greater acceptance and willingness to seek help for mental health issues, leading to more calls related to anxiety rather than severe crises. While the overall volume of mental health calls has decreased, there remains a notable increase in significant mental health issues and suicides during the holiday season. EMS providers, who often encounter patients in the midst of severe crises, have noted this seasonal uptick.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

There has been a slight decrease in the number of calls related to mental health and substance abuse over the past year. While the exact trends are difficult to determine due to the nature of EMS data, there is a general observation that calls for these issues have trended down slightly in 2024 compared to 2023. However, the volume of calls remains significant, and the EMS system continues to face challenges in addressing these emergencies effectively.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location. Etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

Trends in demographics related to substance use and mental health have been observed. There has been an increase in youth mental health issues, with more students requiring psychiatric evaluations. Middle-aged white women, particularly those aged 35 to 45, are more frequently involved in mental health calls, while substance use calls tend to involve younger white men, aged 25 to 35. These demographic trends highlight specific groups within the community that are experiencing higher rates of mental health and substance use issues, necessitating targeted interventions and support.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

Several factors in 2023 impacted service delivery. Capacity issues at hospitals, especially larger ones, resulted in EMS units waiting outside hospitals for extended periods, sometimes up to 16 hours. This situation arose due to a law called EMTALA, which mandates that patients must be seen by a physician once they are within 250 feet of a hospital. The inability to transfer patients to other facilities during these long waits strained EMS resources and challenged the provision of timely care. While this issue was more prevalent in other parts of the state, it still had an impact on EMS services in the Lynchburg area.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have had a noticeable impact, particularly in schools. With the legalization of marijuana, its accessibility has increased, and reports indicate it is widespread among students. Cases have been noted where marijuana is mixed with other substances, complicating the situations EMS providers must handle. For example, an incident involved a student who consumed a brownie laced with substances other than marijuana, leading to severe health issues. Such instances highlight the challenges posed by the new marijuana laws, particularly in detecting and responding to substance use in schools.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

Several gaps in services have been identified. EMS providers often lack the knowledge and resources to connect patients with appropriate services, especially in emergencies where time is limited. Handouts provided to patients have been helpful, but there is still a need for better training and resources for EMS providers. The Community Paramedicine group at Central Health has been instrumental in bridging these gaps by checking on patients post-discharge and providing necessary resources and support, thus helping to ensure continuity of care.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Several factors are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in the community. The legalization of marijuana has made it more accessible, especially to children. Economic stress and financial difficulties have also played a role, causing increased stress within families and leading some individuals to turn to substances as a coping mechanism. Additionally, the annual increase in call volumes further strains the EMS system's ability to provide comprehensive care to all patients. These factors, combined with the persistent challenges of addressing mental health and substance use issues, highlight the ongoing need for targeted interventions and support within the community.

YWCA – Central Virginia

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Senior Director of Victim Services for YWCA in Central Virginia.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

It was noted that mental health issues can cause significant disruptions within the house, especially when the issues are severe. For instance, individuals with serious mental health problems may have behaviors that are concerning to others within the house. Substance use also remains a consistent issue, causing intimidation and necessitating increased monitoring of individuals. Immediate referrals to external organizations like Horizon are often required for those dealing with substance use or severe mental health issues.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The presence of individuals with substance use and mental health issues can create a disruptive environment, making it difficult to maintain a stable and safe living situation for all residents. This has led to the necessity of quick referrals to external services to manage these issues. Additionally, the organization sometimes has to limit the number of intakes to avoid overburdening the staff, especially when resources are stretched thin.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

While specific new trends in substance use were not detailed, it was mentioned that substance use remains a consistent problem, impacting the overall environment and necessitating referrals to organizations like Horizon.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

A notable trend observed is the difficulty faced by individuals with schizophrenia, particularly when they are unmedicated. These individuals often exhibit concentrated and disruptive behaviors, which can cause significant issues within the house. There is also an increasing number of people coming in without medication or having not seen a healthcare provider in a long time, requiring immediate referral back to the hospital for stabilization.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

The number of referrals, admissions, and calls has remained relatively stable, averaging between 180 and 200 annually. However, with the opening of a new house in Altavista, there is an expectation of an increase in the number of people they can serve.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

There has been an observed increase in the number of men seeking services, which could be attributed to a more accepting society. Additionally, there has been a rise in the number of elderly individuals (over 60 years old) seeking assistance over the past year.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

A major internal change in 2023 was the departure of a key staff member, which temporarily impacted the number of people the organization could serve. The lack of sufficient staff led to a temporary halt in new intakes to avoid overburdening the remaining case manager. Additionally, the organization faces ongoing challenges due to the limited number of homeless shelters and resources in the area, which affects their ability to meet the needs of all individuals seeking help.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

There was no specific mention of the impact of recent marijuana laws on the organization in the provided responses.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

A significant gap identified is the lack of affordable housing, particularly for single individuals. Many clients struggle to find housing due to low income and high rent costs. There is also a lack of follow-up services to ensure clients are paying rent on time and maintaining their housing, which can discourage landlords from renting to them.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Contributing factors include the lack of stable housing options, the limited number of shelters, and insufficient resources in the area. Additionally, some clients have a history of damaging property or not paying rent, which complicates their ability to secure housing. Substance use and unmedicated mental health issues further exacerbate these challenges.

Central Virginia Health District

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Health Educator at Central Virginia Health District.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

It has been observed that there is an increased interest in receiving services through the Health Department. Although a dedicated mental health program is currently not available, individuals with co-occurring disorders are accommodated as long as their mental health issues are not severe. This highlights a significant area for development within the organization's work, indicating a pressing need to establish a comprehensive mental health program.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The organization has adapted its service delivery to address the challenges posed by substance use and mental health issues. The inclusion of the Bedford Department of Corrections in the partnering for Recovery program and the adaptation of the Amherst County Reentry Program to continue providing classes to inmates exemplify these changes. These efforts reflect the organization's commitment to accommodating the needs of individuals affected by substance use and mental health issues within the community.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

In the Lynchburg community, it has been reported that participants frequently test positive for polysubstance use without being aware of the contamination in their substance of choice. This trend underscores the complexity and risks associated with substance use, highlighting the need for increased awareness and preventive measures.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

It has been noted that individuals with co-occurring disorders in the program require more access to housing, employment, and proper local resources. The absence of a dedicated mental health program further emphasizes the critical need for these support services. This trend indicates the importance of implementing a comprehensive mental health program to better serve the community's needs.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

There has been a noticeable increase in the need for treatment, particularly concerning family treatment and DSS cases. This rise in demand suggests growing challenges in addressing substance use and mental health within the community, underscoring the need for enhanced support and resources.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

A greater prevalence of methamphetamine use has been observed in both Bedford and Lynchburg. However, no specific demographic trends beyond this geographic association have been identified. This points to a need for more detailed demographic analysis to better understand and address the substance use and mental health issues amongst different subgroups of the population.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity, etc.)

The most significant impact on service delivery has been the increased need for funding to support planned initiatives and known service needs in the community. This reflects broader issues of resource allocation and financial constraints faced by the organization. The necessity for adequate funding is paramount to effectively address the challenges posed by substance use and mental health issues.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have provided the organization with a greater need to educate the community on the topic. This suggests an evolving role in community education and awareness efforts related to substance use, highlighting the importance of proactive engagement and information dissemination.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

Several gaps in services have been identified, including a lack of detox services, a need for more peer support positions with a living wage, and barriers such as barrier crimes preventing the hiring of qualified peers. Additionally, there is a need for a program that offers earlier prevention education and parenting skills classes. These gaps indicate areas for improvement in service delivery and support systems, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and accessible services.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

It has been perceived that the slow adaptation of current evidence-based practices, along with the need for increased education, participation, and collaboration among community partners, are contributing factors to substance use and mental health problems. These systemic issues highlight the need for a more cohesive and proactive approach to addressing these challenges, emphasizing the importance of community-wide efforts and support.

A Focus on Recovery Data

On August 12, 2023, the Central Virginia Health District , in collaboration with CVARR and Horizon Behavioral Health, conducted focus groups to explore the factors influencing substance use and recovery among residents in the service area. The analysis of the data revealed five key themes:

Social Climate and Pressure: Many participants reported that their continued substance use was strongly influenced by their social relationships, highlighting the need for interventions that address the social dynamics of substance use.

Community Disdain and Lack of Respect: The pervasive negative stigma surrounding substance use and recovery was identified as a significant barrier to recovery, indicating the need for community-wide efforts to reduce stigma and promote respect for those in recovery.

Personal Motivation and Accepting Responsibility: Participants acknowledged that the availability of resources alone is insufficient without the individual's motivation to quit. This finding emphasizes the importance of fostering personal responsibility and motivation as part of recovery support programs.

Having Social Support Systems: The necessity of social support systems, such as groups that provide camaraderie and companionship, was a common theme. These systems were seen as essential for overcoming isolation and supporting recovery.

Focusing on Mental and Spiritual Health: Participants underscored the importance of addressing mental health and trauma, as well as accessing mental health resources such as counseling, in supporting recovery. This highlights the need for a holistic approach that includes both mental and spiritual health in recovery programs.

Bedford County Social Services

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Family Service Manager at Bedford County Social Services.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

Substance use and mental health have significantly impacted the organization's work. It is rare to encounter substance abuse in isolation; it is more common to see individuals self-medicating with substances as it is often cheaper and faster than seeking psychiatric help. One major issue is the use of methamphetamine. This has created challenges in helping individuals achieve stability without illegal drugs. Staff experience frustration from repeatedly explaining situations to families who struggle to comprehend due to their health issues. The prolonged exposure to a family member's mental health and substance abuse problems also causes normally healthy family members to make irrational decisions or withdraw support, complicating service delivery.

What impact does substance use and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

Substance use and mental health issues frequently affect clients' ability to commit to services, leading to missed or canceled appointments. This results in clients being dismissed from services and having to start over, perpetuating a cycle of instability. Mental health and substance abuse recovery times are substantial, often requiring children to be placed in foster care for extended periods. An increase in kinship care has been observed, where families take on children for long periods, creating financial burdens. The organization is also seeing a rise in domestic violence cases linked to substance abuse.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

A significant uptick in fentanyl use has been observed, with some individuals using it multiple times daily. Alarming trends include children, as young as two years old, testing positive for heroin, meth, and fentanyl through hair follicle tests. Multiple overdoses continue to occur, with some cases requiring extensive medical intervention. The use of Narcan, while lifesaving, does not eliminate addiction, resulting in individuals continuing use post-recovery.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

Anxiety among very young children, including those in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade, has increased. There is a notable rise in hospitalizations among youth, with some experiencing long stays in emergency rooms due to a lack of placement options. Serious mental health issues, such as increased cases of fire setting and animal cruelty among children, have been reported. Paranoia is also on the rise among both adults and youth, with staff being falsely accused of various actions.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of Referrals, Admissions, and Calls over the past year?

In 2023, Bedford County reported 732 victim children in child abuse complaints, a substantial increase from previous years. This surge is primarily attributed to mental health and substance abuse issues. An increase in domestic violence cases linked to substance use has also been noted, with instances of individuals engaging in affairs to obtain narcotics, leading to violent confrontations.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location. Etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

The organization has observed mental health issues emerging in younger children, with substances being more accessible in schools. There is an increasing rate of sexting among teens, leading to further mental health issues due to fear of punishment. The accessibility of substances and the rising number of substance-exposed infants due to pregnant women using THC for nausea control have also been noted.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

Lingering effects of COVID-19 have exacerbated anxiety in children due to missed school time. A shortage of service providers and insufficient funding outside Medicaid create significant barriers to accessing mental health services. The high cost of counseling for those without Medicaid coverage further limits service accessibility.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

The popularity of THC gummies has increased concerns, as these products are appealing to children. There have been multiple reports of young children ingesting gummies and experiencing adverse effects. Substance-exposed infants to THC are also on the rise, with potential long-term effects yet to be fully understood.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

There are not enough service providers to meet the community's needs, resulting in long waiting lists for counseling, psychiatry, and general medical services. Services for juveniles, particularly Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP), are limited, creating challenges for teens who require these services.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Easy access to substances, delayed treatment due to waiting lists, lack of funding, fear, and stigma all contribute to substance use and mental health problems. There is a lack of community support for those struggling with these issues, unlike the support typically seen for physical health problems like cancer. Losing children does not seem to be a significant motivator for seeking help, as evidenced by low participation in family treatment programs compared to adult drug dockets. Increasing numbers of parents are failing to show up for visitations with their children, exacerbating mental health issues for both the parents and their children.

Campbell County Social Services

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Assistant Direct and team of Supervisors at Campbell County Social Services.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

Substance use and mental health issues have affected Campbell County Social Services (CCSS) across all the populations they serve. Most Child Protective Services (CPS) cases involve some form of substance abuse, which can lead to foster care situations. Substance use and mental health issues also impact the eligibility for various services and the housing program, demonstrating a widespread influence on the organization's work.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

While the delivery of services itself is not directly hindered, the effectiveness of these services is impacted by the lack of resources and lengthy waiting lists for referrals to external facilities such as Horizon. This shortage of available resources delays progress for the families CCSS works with, despite their efforts to provide support and referrals.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

The most prevalent substance from Campbell County Social Services clients is methamphetamine, followed by some use of fentanyl and cocaine. These trends highlight significant substance use issues within the community that CCSS is continually addressing.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

CCSS has not observed new trends in mental health challenges, but they continue to face significant barriers in accessing services. Many individuals with mental health issues also engage in self-medication, leading to co-occurring substance abuse problems. The rural nature of the community exacerbates these challenges due to limited service availability and transportation issues.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

The number of referrals, admissions, and service calls has remained relatively consistent compared to previous years. While there was an uptick in activity following the COVID-19 pandemic, it has since leveled out, though fluctuations can occur unexpectedly.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

CCSS has not identified specific demographic trends but notes that substance use and mental health issues are widespread across various age groups, from teenagers to the elderly. The primary challenge is not demographics but rather the lack of providers, lengthy waiting lists, and the timeliness of follow-through.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

CCSS did not report specific factors from 2023 that impacted service delivery beyond the general lack of resources. The department provides a range of services, including Medicaid, food stamps, and child protective services, and refers individuals to external resources when necessary. They strive to assist all eligible individuals and offer additional support when possible, despite resource constraints.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have not led to an increase in individuals seeking help for marijuana use. Instead, clients often downplay the significance of marijuana use, treating it as a norm. This attitude is particularly concerning for CPS cases, where parental marijuana use can impact parenting capacity and children's safety.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

CCSS is aware of several gaps in services, particularly related to state mandates and income eligibility criteria. These restrictions can prevent individuals from receiving needed support. The department strives to fill these gaps by providing resource directories and leveraging grants, such as the Fatherhood Initiative Grant, to support those who may not qualify for state assistance.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Several factors contribute to substance use and mental health challenges in Campbell County. The 29 corridor and 460 highways bring in people from different regions, including college students, which may contribute to these issues. The rapid growth of the county also strains available resources. Additionally, many community members turn to substance use to cope with life's stressors, leading to cycles of abuse. CCSS works to build trust and provide support to help individuals escape these cycles.

Lynchburg City Schools

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Director of Student Support Services with Lynchburg City Schools.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

Substance use and mental health issues have significantly impacted the organization's work. This year, there have been 177 discipline referrals for substance-related incidents, with 133 of those related to tobacco vaping, 30 related to drug possession or controlled substances, and five for alcohol. Compared to last year, there has been an increase in these incidents, reflecting a national trend. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that substance use among students is higher than what is reported through disciplinary actions, suggesting that many instances go undetected. Additionally, threat assessments for self-harm and other threats have reached 306 cases in six months, with 68% of these involving elementary students. This rise, particularly among younger students, shows that mental health issues are becoming more prevalent and severe.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The impact of substance use and mental health issues on service delivery is profound. The increase in discipline referrals and threat assessments has placed a significant strain on school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Elementary students have been exhibiting alarming behaviors, such as threatening self-harm or harm to others when frustrated. This has led to the development of new protocols, such as updating threat assessments for students who repeatedly make such threats, to better manage their behavior and provide appropriate support. The organization has also implemented new services and programs to address these issues, including psycho-educational substance addiction groups and social-emotional behavior supports.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

New trends related to substance use include a high number of incidents involving tobacco vaping, which constitutes the majority of substance-related discipline referrals. Another concerning trend is the increasing prevalence of drug possession among students, with 30 cases being reported at the time of this report out. Additionally, the legalization of marijuana has led to challenges, as parents often mistakenly believe it is legal for minors, contributing to increased use among students.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

In mental health, there has been a significant increase in threat assessments, with a notable rise in self-harm and threats among elementary students. This trend indicates that younger children are increasingly struggling with mental health issues and are using threats as a way to express their frustration and distress. The organization has responded by implementing new protocols and support systems to address these behaviors more effectively.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

The organization has observed an increase in the number of referrals for substance use and mental health issues. Last year, there were fewer discipline referrals compared to the current year, where 177 cases have already been reported. Threat assessments have also increased significantly, indicating a rise in mental health concerns among students.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

Substance use incidents have been most prevalent among 10th-grade students, with 45 incidents, followed by 8th-grade students with 32 incidents, all of which involved males. Economic status appears to play a role, with incidents distributed evenly between low-income and higher-income students. The ability to access substances seems to be influenced by economic means, with those from higher-income backgrounds having more access.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

In 2023, the organization received significant funding through grants, including an \$8.4 million grant for school-based mental health services and an additional \$400,000 grant. This funding has allowed for the expansion of services, including bringing in agencies to work with students, providing social-emotional behavior support, and implementing substance addiction groups. However, challenges remain, particularly in finding the time within the school schedule to conduct these programs without detracting from academic instruction.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have created confusion among parents, leading to an increase in marijuana use among minors. Parents often believe that because marijuana is legal for adults, it is also permissible for their children, which has contributed to higher incidents of marijuana use in schools.

This misunderstanding necessitates ongoing education and enforcement efforts to address the legal and health implications for minors.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

Service gaps remain, particularly in the availability of detox services and peer support positions with adequate wages. The organization also faces barriers in hiring due to crimes that disqualify candidates. There is a need for more psycho-educational groups in middle and high schools to address substance use, but time constraints within the school day pose a significant challenge. Despite new programs and increased funding, waiting lists for services indicate that demand still exceeds capacity.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Several factors contribute to substance use and mental health problems in the community. The slow adaptation of evidence-based practices, a lack of comprehensive community collaboration, and economic disparities are significant contributors. Anxiety remains a major issue affecting both students and their families, impacting school attendance and behavior. Additionally, the increased availability and normalization of substances like marijuana have exacerbated these issues, highlighting the need for more targeted education and intervention efforts.

Amherst County Public Schools

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Director of Student and Family Wellness with Amherst County Public Schools.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

The organization's work has been significantly impacted by substance use and mental health issues. This year, there has been a continued increase in substance abuse, with a notable incident in December involving fentanyl contamination at an elementary school. Additionally, elementary students have been found with THC vapes, often without knowing the contents. This trend reflects an increase in substance use incidents within schools, with offenses rising from 40 last year to 30 in the first semester of this year, projecting a potential total of 60 offenses.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

Substance use and mental health issues have profoundly impacted service delivery. The organization has seen increases in threat assessments, anxiety, and depression among students. Truancy cases are often linked to drug use at the high school level and parental substance abuse at the elementary level. Despite COVID-19 funding for contracted services, challenges persist in securing qualified providers, and as funding diminishes, the organization struggles to match resources with growing needs.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

New trends in substance use include younger students being exposed to substances. Incidents involving elementary students with THC vapes and accidental fentanyl exposure highlight the increasing infiltration of community substance use issues into schools. This shift to younger demographics indicates a need for targeted preventive measures and education.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

There has been an increase in threat assessments, anxiety, and depression, particularly among youth who were previously healthy. This consistent rise in mental health issues highlights the persistent and growing need for mental health resources and support within the school system.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

Compared to last year, there has been a marked increase in substance abuse offenses and related disciplinary actions. Last year, the organization recorded 40 substance abuse offenses, a significant rise from the usual 17 to 20. This year, with 30 offenses already in the first semester, the trend suggests a further increase, with projections indicating potentially 60 offenses by year-end.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

Substance use has been observed in younger students, with incidents involving elementary school children using vapes and other substances. There have been cases of children as young as first grade vaping on school buses. This shift to younger demographics indicates a worrying trend of early exposure to substance use, necessitating targeted preventive measures and education.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

Staffing shortages and funding issues have been major factors impacting service delivery. While COVID-19 funding initially provided for contracted services, the challenge has been in securing qualified providers. As the funding starts to decrease, the ability to offer these services is further compromised. This mirrors last year's difficulties, where staffing shortages hindered timely access to crisis services and led to long waiting lists. The ongoing economic challenges and limited resources continue to affect the organization's capacity to meet the community's needs.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have led to increased incidents of students, particularly younger ones, bringing marijuana-related products to school. This year has seen elementary students unknowingly bringing THC vapes and other marijuana-infused products into schools. This reflects the need for enhanced educational efforts about marijuana and its effects, especially targeting younger demographics.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Substance use and mental health problems in the community are influenced by several factors, including the slow adaptation of evidence-based practices and a lack of community-wide collaboration. Anxiety remains a significant issue contributing to truancy and other behavioral problems. The need for comprehensive family-centered interventions and better access to crisis services are critical to addressing these problems. Economic challenges, such as funding shortages and staffing issues, further exacerbate these issues, highlighting the need for a more cohesive and well-supported approach to community health.

Appomattox County Public Schools

The information summarized in this section was provided by the District Student & Family Support Specialist with Appomattox County Public Schools.

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

It was noted that substance use and mental health challenges are significant barriers impacting the organization's work. These issues have often led to emergency situations that require immediate medical attention. The increase in both substance use and mental health crises has made the management of these issues more complex and demanding.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The organization has observed that the rising trend in substance use, particularly vapes laced with mushrooms, has increased the number of possession referrals from School Resource Officers (SROs). Additionally, there has been an increase in serious mental health crises, with more students entering residential care and experiencing extended acute care stays. The return of students from hospitalizations with complex mental health diagnoses has further strained the service delivery. The number of behavioral referrals and suspensions has also risen, necessitating more referrals to outpatient insurance-funded programs.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

Yes, new trends related to substance use include a noticeable increase in the use of vapes, some of which are laced with mushrooms. There has also been a higher number of possession referrals related to vapes. Another significant trend is the increased prevalence of marijuana in the form of edibles.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

New trends in mental health observed by the organization include a higher number of serious mental health crises and an increase in students entering residential care. There has also been a rise in the number of students returning from hospitalizations or residential stays with complex mental health diagnoses, leading to more behavioral referrals and suspensions.

Has your organization observed any change in the number of referrals/admissions/calls over the past year?

Yes, there has been an increase in the number of referrals, particularly related to substance use and behavioral issues. More referrals have been made to outpatient insurance-funded programs. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of behavioral referrals and suspensions.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

The organization has noticed higher trends in substance use and mental health challenges among high school males. No specific trends related to age or race were observed.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity, etc.)

Social, environmental, and economic factors such as funding and location have significantly impacted service delivery. The lack of providers and available resources for treatment in Appomattox has been a major issue. While more services have been provided on campus over the past year, it is still insufficient to meet the students' needs. The sharing of vapes, edibles, and other substances among students has also increased, presenting new challenges.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have made marijuana more accessible, particularly in the form of edibles, which have become widespread. This increased accessibility has led to a rise in substance use incidents within the schools.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

Yes, there are gaps in services, especially in providing support for vapes and other substances. There is a lack of available resources for treatment in Appomattox, largely due to funding and location constraints. Additionally, the availability of trained providers to service all areas in Appomattox is limited.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

Contributing factors to substance use and mental health problems in the community include the lack of resources and trained providers, as well as the increased accessibility of substances like marijuana and synthetic drugs. There has also been an observed increase in violence among students, which may be related to these challenges. The sharing of substances between students, whether in school or on school buses, is also a growing concern.

Law Enforcement

The information summarized in this section was provided by a Lieutenant at Lynchburg Police Department and Appomattox County Sheriff's Office, as well as an Officer at Bedford Police Department.

Lynchburg Police Department

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

The Lynchburg Police Department has experienced a significant impact from substance use and mental health on their operations. This includes an increased need for training and the use of Narcan, as well as the necessity for more manpower and overtime hours to support mental health issues, particularly in relation to Emergency Custody Orders (ECO) and Temporary Detention Orders (TDO).

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The impact of substance use and mental health on the Lynchburg Police Department's service delivery has been profound. The department is implementing a new initiative in collaboration with Horizon Behavioral Health to introduce an Officer/Mental Health Clinician Co-Responder program. This program aims to reduce emergency custody orders, temporary detention orders, and inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations by providing comprehensive support to individuals in crisis. The presence of trained clinicians allows for more accurate needs assessments and alternatives to immediate hospitalization, which improves overall service delivery.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

The Lynchburg Police Department has observed a significant shift from the distribution of methamphetamines to the distribution of pressed fentanyl pills. There has also been an increase in fentanyl being used as a cutting agent in various other illegal narcotics, complicating the tracking of overdose data.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

The Lynchburg Police Department has noted the importance of implementing their new Co-Responder program. This initiative highlights the need for better handling of mental health crises by pairing law enforcement officers with trained mental health clinicians, aiming to provide more holistic and effective support to individuals in crisis.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location. Etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

The Lynchburg Police Department's data shows variations in overdose incidents by race and sex over the years. According to data, white males in Lynchburg have a higher prevalence of overdoses. These numbers have changed over the years, indicating trends in demographics related to substance use.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

Recent changes in marijuana laws have led to an increase in DUI-D (Driving Under the Influence of Drugs) due to marijuana use. This necessitated the training of an expert in drug detection to handle cases of driving impairment effectively. The department has trained drug detection experts, which has significantly improved the procedures for DUI-D arrests and successful prosecutions in court.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

The Lynchburg Police Department's responses highlight the need for more comprehensive and holistic approaches to mental health crises, suggesting a gap in services that the new Co-Responder program aims to address.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

The Lynchburg Police Department did not explicitly mention specific factors contributing to substance use and mental health problems in the community. However, the overall increase in substance use incidents and mental health crises suggests underlying social, economic, and possibly environmental factors at play.

Bedford Police Department

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

The Bedford Police Department (BPD) has observed that substance use and mental health issues have significantly influenced their work. The department emphasizes the importance of having peer support systems and chaplains available to assist with mental health situations that arise within the community. They also highlight the need for promoting self-care among officers due to the nature of the traumatic incidents they frequently encounter.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

Substance use and mental health have a profound impact on BPD's service delivery. The department has been actively involved in promoting naloxone education to ensure the community knows how to access and use this life-saving drug. Additionally, BPD is working to improve mental health awareness among community members. The department also faces prolonged waits to get individuals into mental health services, which impacts their ability to provide timely support.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

The Bedford Police Department has identified several new trends related to substance use. Methamphetamine is currently the most prevalent substance in Bedford in terms of arrests and usage. The department has also detected a presence of fentanyl in nearly every substance seized and tested. Furthermore, there has been an increase in vaping among middle school students and the use of gummies among high school students.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to mental health?

BPD has noted that mental health awareness is low among community members. To address this, the department is increasing their efforts to communicate with the community about mental health issues in hopes of raising awareness and improving overall mental health support.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

The recent changes in marijuana laws have had a positive impact on BPD's relationship with the community. These changes have facilitated more open communication between the police and community members, potentially improving trust and cooperation.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

BPD has identified several gaps in services. These include a lack of awareness among the general public about available help or support services and the dangers of certain substances. Additionally, there are prolonged waits to get individuals into mental health services, which hinders the ability to provide timely and effective support.

Appomattox County Sheriff's Office

How has substance use, and mental health impacted your organization's work?

Substance use and mental health issues have produced significant challenges for the Appomattox County Sheriff's Office in maintaining patrol staffing. Dealing with Emergency Custody Orders (ECO) and Temporary Detention Orders (TDO) frequently requires deputies to stay beyond their 12-hour shifts or respond from home while off-duty. This strain on staffing affects the overall operational capacity of the office.

What impact does substance use, and mental health have on your organization's service delivery?

The strain on maintaining patrol staffing to answer emergency calls for service is substantial. Deputies are routinely negatively impacted in their rest and recovery off duty due to having to respond to ECOs and TDOs, which often occur during the night. The transportation required for TDOs can take deputies as far as 2-4 hours in one direction, further exacerbating fatigue. Additionally, these demands prevent deputies from conducting investigations and engaging in law enforcement duties due to limited patrol staffing.

Has your organization seen any new trends related to substance use?

There has been a general increase in fentanyl use observed by the Appomattox County Sheriff's Office.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics (age, grade, gender, race, location, etc.) related to substance use and/or mental health?

There appears to be an increase in incidents involving substance abuse and/or mental health issues among juveniles. This trend includes the use of marijuana/THC products, such as edibles and vapes, as well as alcohol, mushroom products, and fentanyl.

Were there any social, environmental, or economic factors in 2023 that impacted your service delivery? (e.g., COVID, funding, capacity etc.)

A significant factor impacting service delivery in 2023 has been the lack of sufficient staffing within the Appomattox County Sheriff's Office.

What impact have recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

The recent changes in marijuana laws seem to have led to a significant rise in marijuana use among juveniles, including incidents occurring at school.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to substance use and mental health problems in your community?

The increased availability and cheaper cost of methamphetamine and fentanyl are perceived as contributing factors to substance use problems. Additionally, changes in marijuana laws are also seen as contributing to these issues within the community.

Central Virginia Addiction and Recovery Resources Coalition

The Central Virginia Addiction and Recovery Resources Coalition (CVARR) has established a collaborative network of community partners aimed at addressing the pervasive issue of substance misuse and its associated impacts within the Central Virginia region. Through a unified mission and vision, CVARR's efforts focus on reducing substance use by fostering action, education, and collaboration. The coalition achieves these objectives by gathering and disseminating community-focused data, which is instrumental in shaping the coalition's workgroups and partnerships.

Community Conversations Data

During the summer of 2023, CVARR partnered with Lynchburg Parks and Recreation to facilitate "Community Conversations on Substance Use." These sessions provided a platform for individuals, families, and neighborhoods directly affected by the substance misuse epidemic, particularly related to fentanyl, to voice their concerns. The data collected from these discussions highlighted several substances causing significant concern in the community, including fentanyl, marijuana, methamphetamines, kratom, and "Za-Za." The reasons behind substance use were identified as boredom, stress management, peer pressure, and economic struggles. However, several barriers to treatment were also noted, such as a lack of knowledge about available resources, uncertainty, persistent stigma surrounding substance use, and limited access to detoxification units within the community. These findings underscore the critical need for enhanced education, resource accessibility, and stigma reduction efforts.

Youth and Parent Focus Groups Data

During the Fall of 2023 focus groups targeting youth and parents in Lynchburg were conducted to prevent the negative consequences of youth substance use. The discussions revealed that parents place high value on awareness, support, and educational opportunities related to substance use. Mental health concerns, stress, and inadequate coping skills were identified as primary reasons driving teens to use substances. Furthermore, it was noted that youth often turn to substances as a means of escaping reality and coping with strong emotions.

The focus groups also highlighted that the legalization and over-the-counter availability of certain substances have contributed to a reduced perception of harm among youth. Access to alcohol at home is common, and marijuana is readily accessible for those who can afford it. Additionally, youth expressed a need for meaningful connections with adults, emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships in preventing substance use.

Treatment Provider Survey Data

In an effort to gather data on treatment needs and identify gaps as perceived by providers, CVARR conducted an electronic survey among substance use service providers in Central Virginia. Out of the 21 surveys distributed, 8 were returned. The survey responses revealed several critical service needs, including:

Housing: There is a significant demand for recovery and transitional housing, which are essential for individuals in early recovery stages.

Inpatient Treatment: Providers identified a need for increased access to detoxification services, crisis stabilization units, and short-term residential treatment (30 days), indicating gaps in the current treatment infrastructure.

Emerging trends in substance use were also noted, with fentanyl, PCP, cocaine (and other stimulants), methamphetamine, alcohol, and marijuana/THC being identified as substances of concern. Providers highlighted several barriers to effective treatment, including transportation issues, the complexity of client cases (particularly those involving co-occurring substance use and chronic mental health issues), tele connectivity challenges in rural areas, and funding constraints.

Conclusion

The Data to Action Resource Team (DART) was initiated by Curtis Jones, Prevention Specialist and State Opioid Response Grant Coordinator, at Horizon Behavioral Health. DART meets on the second Tuesday of every month at 10 AM. If you or your organization have any inquiries or are interested in becoming members of DART, please contact Curtis Jones at (434) 477-5042 or Curtis.Jones@HorizonBH.org.

Central Virginia Region

1. Amherst County
2. Appomattox County
3. Bedford County
4. Campbell County
5. Lynchburg City



The goal of this DART Report is to utilize the data to educate and inform the community, assist with identifying and prioritizing needs; aid in developing action plans to address contributing factors; and help determine and gain the resources needed to address challenges related to substance use and mental illness in Central Virginia. Please contact Horizon Behavioral Health's Prevention and Wellness Services – Program Manager, at 434- 477-5464 if you would like to contribute data and/or information that can further substantiate future reports. DART would also like to know if you found this report helpful and were able to use it in any way, including informing the community, securing funding or expanding services offered by your organization. More information about this report and the Data to Action Resource Team can be found at <https://www.horizonbh.org/services/data-action-resource-team/>.

