



# Community Health Assessment 2025-2028



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# Executive Summary

## A Changing Community

The 2025 Park County Community Health Assessment (CHA) presents a comprehensive look at the health and well-being of our residents, highlighting both persistent challenges and emerging concerns. This year's assessment reveals significant shifts in the local landscape, most notably a growing population, mainly of older residents, and a steep rise in the cost of living. These changes are placing increased pressure on working families, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes. These stressors ripple across the whole community, making it hard for young people and families to get established in our communities.

Through a combination of data analysis and direct community engagement, several priority health issues have emerged. These include behavioral health concerns including substance use, social isolation, anxiety, access to affordable healthcare, and—critically—housing stability. The rising cost and limited availability of housing are affecting residents' physical and mental health, access to services, and overall quality of life.

Rather than relying solely on surveys, this CHA centers the voices of those with firsthand knowledge of community needs, including workers in hospitality, law enforcement, social services, and construction. Their insights, along with those of long-time and new residents, provide a clearer picture of the barriers to health and the opportunities for collective action.

This report is intended to inform local decision-makers, community organizations, and residents as we work together to build a healthier community for everyone.

## Key Findings

- **Housing instability** has emerged as a critical health issue. Many residents face high housing costs, substandard living conditions, or risk of displacement, all of which contribute to stress, poor health outcomes, and limited access to services.
- **Social determinants of health**—including income, food insecurity, and limited transportation—are deeply interconnected with health disparities, preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence or opportunity.

“ **If you can't get your basic needs met, you are not meeting any other needs** ”

*Park County Community Member*

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# Part 1

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## OUR FINDINGS

This section outlines the work performed to conduct the 2025 Park County Community Health Assessment and findings.

# KEY FINDINGS



## Housing

Housing instability is emerging as a critical health issue affecting the well-being of many in Park County. The shortage of affordable housing options has led to increased stress and uncertainty among residents, compounding existing challenges related to health and financial security.



## Healthcare Access

Barriers to healthcare access persist, especially in rural areas where transportation challenges, provider shortages, and limited facilities make it difficult for residents to receive timely and adequate care.



## Children and Older Adults

Changing demographics have led to an increased median age in Park County. This, coupled with housing affordability challenges, has resulted in a dwindling workforce population. Consequently, older residents face issues of loneliness and affordability, while families struggle with a lack of childcare. Both groups face difficulty with healthcare, and other essential services.



## Mental Health

Many residents are struggling to meet fundamental needs like housing, food, and job security. When coupled with barriers to accessing healthcare services—particularly in behavioral health—these issues contribute to ongoing challenges related to depression, substance use, anxiety, and elevated suicide rates.

## Our

# Methodology

“The finish line keeps moving. All you can do is work extra jobs.”

Park County Small Business Owner

The 2025 Park County Public Health Assessment seeks to draw insight to our community's health needs. This year, two trends stood out: a notable change in population demographics and sharp increases in the cost of living.

These changes appear to disproportionately impact working-age residents—both long-time community members and newcomers—as well as individuals of all ages living on fixed incomes, such as those relying on Social Security or retirement benefits.

To better understand how these shifts are affecting daily life, the Park County Health Department developed a qualitative interview approach. Rather than distributing a large-scale survey—which often misses individuals with limited internet access or fewer resources—we prioritized direct, in-person conversations.

Our hope is that the insights in this 2025 CHA will support informed decision-making and inspire collaborative action, helping to make Park County a healthier place for everyone.



### ● 01. Review Existing Data

Key data sources including the U.S. Census, Headwater Economics, and Kids Count provided insight and context to the findings from the 2022 Community Health Assessment. Data sources are noted in text and listed at the end of the report.

### ● 02. Conduct in-depth interviews

Outreach to individuals with deep insight into the challenges facing working families, particularly in Park County's largest employment sectors like hospitality, tourism, food service, law enforcement, construction, and real estate.

### ● 03. Solicit Feedback











Community Health Assessment findings were shared with stakeholder groups for feedback and will be used to inform the community health improvement plan.

# Existing Data Review

Park County Public Health started the community health assessment process by reviewing existing data, this included national and state data sources including the U.S. Census, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and Headwaters Economic Survey. The health department also had a significant amount of data collected locally such as the Park County Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey (Park County Public Health), Supporting Thriving Youth in Park County, and We Will Park County, just to name a few.

**Primary Data-** Data collected by the Park County Public Health Department (Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey, Key informant Interviews)

**Secondary Data-** Data collected by other sources

Priority Areas	Park County Public Health (Primary)	Secondary Data Sources
Housing		
Mental Health		
Children and Older Adults		
Healthcare Access		
Food Security		

Park County Community Health Assessment

# Key Informant Interviews

2025



## 25

### Key Informant Interviews

Engaging Conversations with Park County Residents and organizations from around the county. (Several examples below)

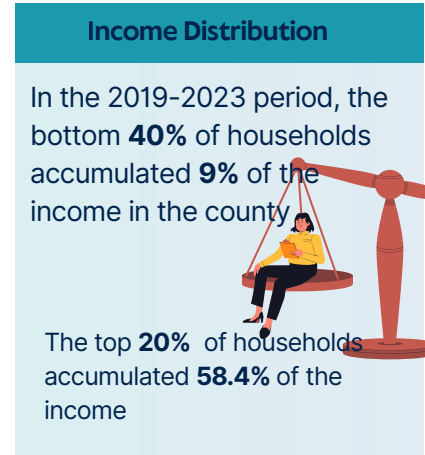
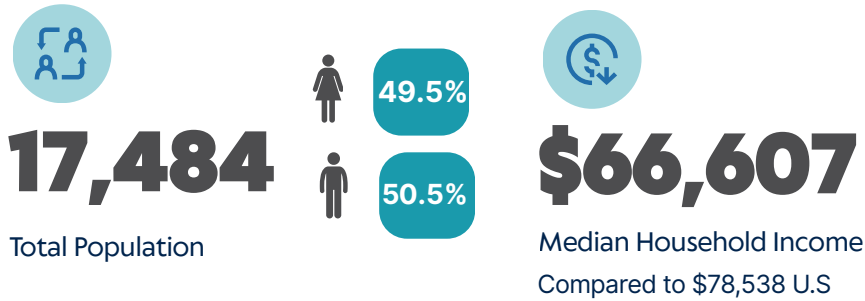
## Housing

Named Top Concern

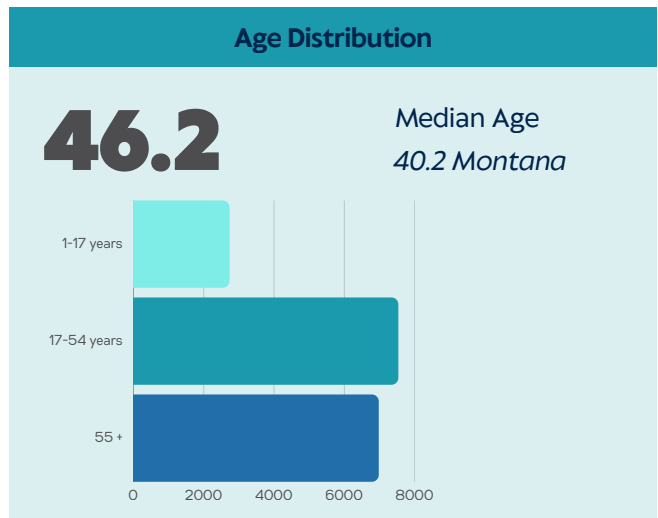
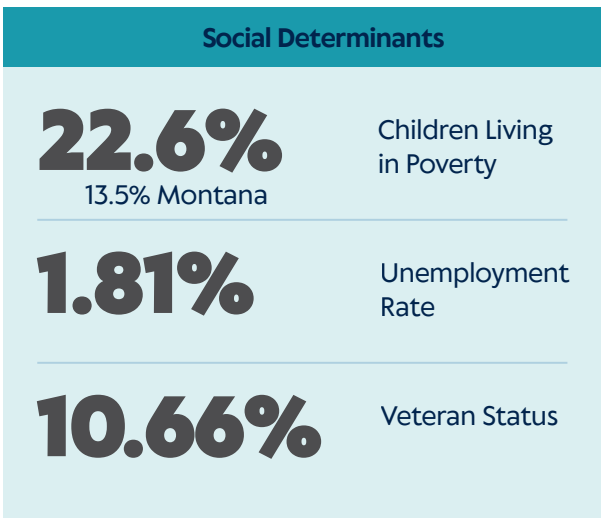
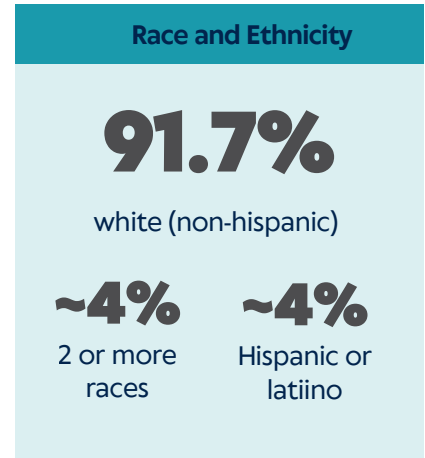
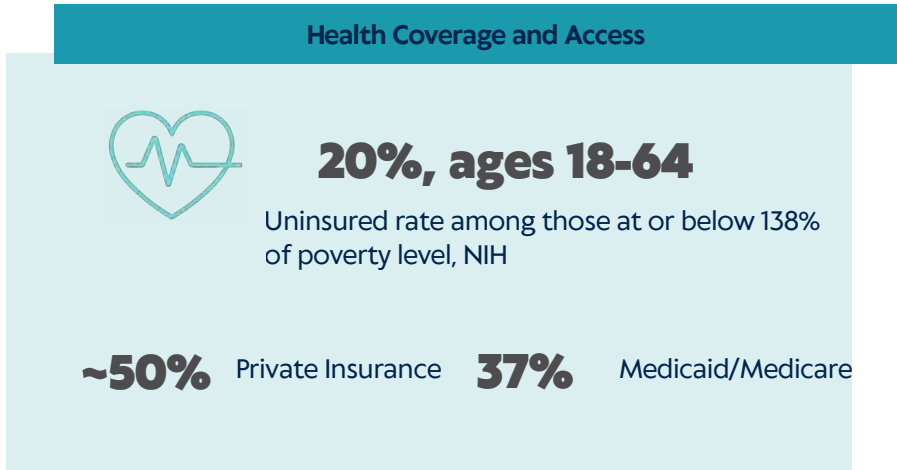


- Community Closet
- Park County Realtors
- Local Business Employees
- Office Workers
- Area Resorts
- Law Enforcement and Court staff
- Livingston Food Resource Center
- Park County Drop-In Center
- Gardiner Food Pantry
- Local residents

# DEMOGRAPHICS



Montana DPHHS and Headwaters Economics



# Priority Area- Housing

“ I don't know of a single person who is renting right now that feels good about it. Any single little thing changes, a medical bill, an increase or added expense of any kind and they are instantly broke with no way out ”

Park County Business Owner



Housing instability in Park County has become a significant public health concern, affecting both physical and mental well-being across the population. The county faces a critically constrained supply of both rental and for-purchase housing, which has led to rising costs and limited availability—especially for low- and moderate-income households. 50% of Park County renter households are cost burdened, meaning they are spending more than 30% of their income on housing, leaving less for expenses like food, childcare, utilities and healthcare.

This shortage contributes to chronic stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly among working families, older adults, and individuals living on fixed incomes. Substandard housing conditions, such as poor insulation, overcrowding, and lack of accessibility, further exacerbate health risks, including respiratory issues and increased fall hazards for seniors. The lack of affordable housing also forces some residents to live farther from essential services, increasing transportation barriers to healthcare, employment, and education.

Additionally, the growing prevalence of short-term rentals has reduced the stock of long-term housing, intensifying displacement pressures. These housing challenges not only undermine individual health but also strain local healthcare systems, social services, and workforce stability—making housing a foundational issue for community health and equity in Park County.



## Median Home Price

The median home price is over **\$540,000**, significantly higher than the state average

## Short-term rentals

Over **6%** of the housing stock is used for short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb), reducing availability for long-term residents

## Limited Rental Options

Affordable rental units are scarce, and many renters face difficult qualifying criteria and unreliable or very expensive lease conditions

## Housing Burden

Many households spend more than **30%** of their income on housing, exceeding the threshold for affordability

## Older adults at risk

Nearly **46%** of Park County's population is over 50, many of whom are "house rich and cash poor," struggling with property taxes and downsizing options



# Priority Area- Healthcare Access

Access to healthcare in Park County remains a significant public health concern, particularly for rural residents, low-income families, and older adults. While Livingston HealthCare and Community Health Partners/OneHealth provide essential services, many residents still face barriers to timely and affordable care. The county's rural geography contributes to long travel distances for specialty services, and provider shortages—especially in behavioral health and geriatrics—limit availability. As of 2023, per Livingston Healthcare, about 1 in 10 Park County residents under 65 are uninsured. Among the 18-64 year-olds living in poverty, the number of uninsured is closer to 2 in 10, or 20%. This may reflect our high numbers of seasonal workers in retail, hospitality, and recreation that rarely receive employer provided benefits.

Cost remains a major barrier, with limited insurance networks and high deductibles discouraging preventive care and early treatment. Behavioral health access is particularly strained, with long wait times and limited local providers, despite mental health being identified as a top community concern.

These access challenges contribute to delayed diagnoses, unmanaged chronic conditions, and increased reliance on emergency care—placing additional strain on local health systems and widening health disparities. Addressing these gaps is essential to improving overall health outcomes and ensuring care for all Park County residents.



## Provider-to-Population Ratio

Park County has a **lower-than-average** ratio of primary care providers per capita compared to national benchmarks, contributing to longer wait times and limited access



## Transportation Barriers

- Many residents in rural areas like Shields Valley and Gardiner face long travel distances to reach care.
- Public transportation options are limited, creating barriers for those without personal vehicles.



## Behavioral Health Access

- Identified as a top concern in community assessments.
- Limited number of local **mental health providers** and long wait times for services



## Uninsured Rate

Park County's overall uninsured rate is estimated to be **slightly higher** than Montana's overall insured rate of **8.4%**, due to its aging population and seasonal workforce

# Priority Area- Children & Older Adults

Through the community health assessment process, it became evident that children and older adults were more negatively impacted by the evolving economy of Park County. The decline in the working-age population has resulted in the following challenges.

Children and older adults are recognized as priority populations in Park County due to their unique vulnerabilities and the disproportionate impact of social determinants of health on their well-being. For children, early life experiences—including access to healthcare, stable housing, nutritious food, and safe environments—play a critical role in shaping long-term health outcomes. In Park County, community health initiatives have focused on improving access to behavioral health services, school-based care, and family support programs to address rising concerns around youth mental health and developmental needs.

Older adults, who make up nearly a quarter of the county's population, face challenges related to aging in place, fixed incomes, and limited access to specialized care. Many live in rural or isolated areas, increasing their risk of social isolation, transportation barriers, and unmanaged chronic conditions. Public health efforts in the county have prioritized home-based services, fall prevention, and access to affordable housing to support healthy aging.

By focusing on these populations, the Park County community aims to reduce disparities and build a more inclusive, resilient community.



## Children

Population under 18: Approximately **18% of the total population** (about 3,150 children)

- Child poverty rate: **23% of children live below the federal poverty line**—nearly double the overall county rate of 13.1%
- Health insurance: A significant portion of children are enrolled in Medicaid or Healthy Montana Kids (CHIP), **indicating reliance on public health coverage**
- Early childhood services: Park County has limited licensed childcare slots and long waitlists, especially in rural areas, and costs that are out of reach for many families.

## Older Adults

Population age 65 and older: **Roughly 23% of the population** (about 4,000 residents), higher than the state and national averages

- Households with seniors: **34.1% of households** include someone age 65 or older
- Aging in place challenges: Many older adults live in homes that are unaffordable, inaccessible, or too large for their needs, increasing risks of isolation and injury
- Access to care: Seniors in rural areas face transportation barriers and limited access to geriatric and specialty care



# Priority Area- Mental Health

Mental health is a top public health concern in Park County, where residents face a combination of geographic isolation, limited provider availability, and rising social stressors. Community input and health assessments consistently identify mental health and substance use as urgent issues.

Access to behavioral health services is limited, with long wait times and few local providers, especially in rural areas. The stigma surrounding mental illness, combined with transportation and cost barriers, further prevents many individuals from seeking timely care.

These challenges are compounded by Montana's persistently high suicide rate—among the highest in the nation—which underscores the need for expanded prevention, early intervention, and crisis response services in Park County.



## Mental Health

- Montana ranks **2nd in the U.S. for suicide deaths**, with a rate of 32 per 100,000 people (2022).
- Park County residents report high levels of stress and anxiety, especially related to **housing, cost of living, and access to care**.
- Behavioral health provider shortages are a major barrier; many residents must **wait weeks** or travel long distances for care.
- Youth mental health is a growing concern, with increased reports of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among teens.
- Montana BRFSS data shows that nearly **8% of adults** report frequent mental distress (**14+ days of poor mental health** in the past month)



# Part 2

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## IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE

This section provides insight and background to relay the importance and significance of the assessment findings.

# WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

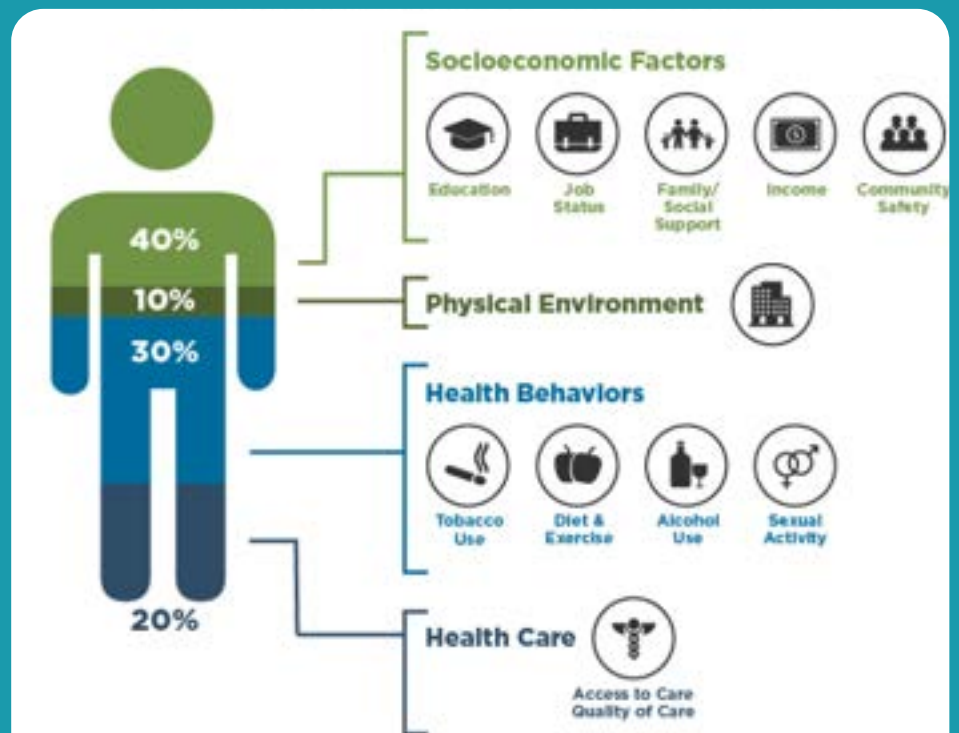
Public health is an important field that works to keep communities and populations healthy. Its main goals are to prevent diseases, extend life, and promote good health through organized efforts. This includes actions by society, organizations, communities, and individuals.

Public health involves many activities, such as tracking diseases, educating people about health, vaccination programs, and encouraging healthy lifestyles. It also aims to reduce health differences among groups and make sure everyone has access to healthcare.

Public health looks at how things like the environment and social factors affect health. It plays a big role in making policies that impact people's well-being. Through research, advocacy, and working with communities, public health tries to create healthier environments and help individuals lead healthier lives, especially those with fewer resources.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Throughout history investing in public health is one of the most beneficial commitments a community can make. By focusing on early prevention, which is comparatively low-cost, we can avert severe and costly healthcare issues in the future.



Source: Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, Going Beyond Clinical Walls: Solving Complex Problems (October 2014)

Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, 2014

Adapted from The Bridgespan Group

# WHAT DETERMINES “HEALTH”?

The health of individuals and communities is influenced by various non-medical factors that impact life expectancy and the quality of life of people in a population. These are known as **social determinants of health**. Understanding these determinants is crucial, as they can both create and **PREVENT** health disparities—differences in health outcomes between groups within a community. Below are some key factors that influence health.



## Socioeconomic Status

Income, education, and occupation greatly influence health outcomes. Higher incomes typically lead to better healthcare access, healthier lifestyles, and improved living conditions, while lower incomes create barriers to quality healthcare, nutritious food, safe housing, and education.



## Educational Opportunities and Standards

Higher levels of education are associated with better health outcomes due to increased health literacy, better employment prospects, and access to resources for healthier lifestyles



## Healthcare Access

Factors such as health insurance coverage, proximity to healthcare facilities, availability of primary care providers, and affordability of services significantly influence an individual's ability to seek timely medical care, preventive services, and treatment for chronic conditions.



## Neighborhoods

Access to green spaces, safe housing, clean air, and reliable public transportation enhances well-being, while pollution, limited fresh food access, high crime rates, and poor infrastructure can increase chronic diseases and mental health issues



## Social Determinants of Health

These are just a few of the factors which determine the health a community. Understanding a community's strengths and areas of improvement is critical in making impactful decisions for the future.

# CONCLUSION

Park County is currently grappling with numerous challenges that appear daunting, if not insurmountable. We are fortunate to have many organizations already working on these issues. These issues touch all of us, newcomers and the many who have nurtured this beautiful area for generations.

So how do we do better? As a community, we can build on successful programs and ensure sufficient resources for work to continue. We can share resources to increase efficacy and prevent redundancy in actions. We can work to fill gaps and build bridges that will lead us to a stronger foundation in housing, food security, early childhood programs, mental health, and social networks. At the very root, it is the human connection that makes a difference.

## Next Steps

### Focus on combining community efforts

- Encourage collaboration among groups working on similar issues
- Work as a community to gain consensus on priorities and coordinate on funding requests

### Advocate

- Can we do a better job of telling others about the needs facing Park County?
- Develop an advocacy group to talk to local government, our representatives at the state and national level and local community groups and funders about our concerns in Park County.
- Foster connections with those who might not be aware or hold other views on these issues.



# Our Mission

To promote and protect public health while preventing disease through education, development and implementation of community health services in Park County.



# Our Guiding Principles

- 1** Evidence-based practices.
- 2** Collaboration and communication among community members and partners.
- 3** Education and outreach.
- 4** Empowering community members to make healthy choices.



Please let us know if we have missed your organization! We want everyone included.

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

## **Mental Health Services**

Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988

NAMI Montana – Park County Mental Health Resource Guide: Offers a comprehensive list of mental health providers, crisis lines, addiction services, and veteran support

Community Health Partners/One Health. Clinic services, sliding scale and Community Pharmacy. 406 222-1111

Livingston Healthcare, clinic, hospital and emergency services. 406 222-4145

Park County Health Department – Local mental health initiatives and crisis support information, 406 222-4145

Park County Drop-In Center: A safe space for adults with mental health or co-occurring disorders to access services and socialize. 406 600-8332

Rural Resilience, serving mental health needs of students and families in Park County rural schools. [contact@ruralresiliencemt.org](mailto:contact@ruralresiliencemt.org)

Mobile Crisis Response Team, [livingstonmontana.org](http://livingstonmontana.org)

## **Housing & Financial Assistance**

Montana Fair Housing: Legal support for housing discrimination issues – 1-800-929-2611.

HRDC: Offers housing support, weatherization, and energy assistance programs, Park County Housing Coalition, [hellolivingston@thehrdc.org](mailto:hellolivingston@thehrdc.org), 406 333-2537

ASPEN, support services for victims of domestic and sexual violence, 406 222-8154

Warming Center Livingston, seasonal 406 333-2537

## **Food Assistance**

Livingston Food Resource Center, serving Livingston, Emigrant and the Shields Valley, school Backpack Program and Summer Lunch Program. Volunteers are always needed. 406 222-5335

Gardiner Food Pantry, groceries and senior meal deliveries in the Gardiner area. 307 250-5853

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program): 1-888-706-1535.

Meals on Wheels: serves Livingston and Shields Valley, 406 333-2490.

Loaves and Fishes, pay as you can dinner nightly in Livingston, 406 222-4824

Farm to School of Park County, [f2spsc.org](http://f2spsc.org), 406 219-8586

## **Child & Family Services**

Big Brothers Big Sisters: Mentorship for youth – [bbbs-bigskycountry.org](http://bbbs-bigskycountry.org), 406 222-1930

Park County Early Childhood Coalition, Learning Partners, CHP/OneHealth, 406 922-0846, ext. 846

CASA of Park County and Sweet Grass Counties: Advocacy for children who are victims of child abuse or neglect – [casajd6.org](http://casajd6.org).

Gallatin Valley United Way, Child Connect Network, Childcare referrals and financial assistance – [greatergallatinunitedway.org](http://greatergallatinunitedway.org)

Livingston-Park County Library, parent/child programs, bookmobile services countywide, school-based literacy programs. 406 222-0862

Links for Learning, afterschool and summer program for elementary school children. [friendsoflinks.org](http://friendsoflinks.org)

Park City County Health Department, WIC, Diaper Depot, public health nurse. 406 222-4145

Livingston Recreation Department, sports, classes, camps, 406 223-2233

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch 406-222-6490

## **Senior & Disability Services**

Counterpoint: Services for adults with disabilities including housing, employment, and transportation – [counterpointinc.org](http://counterpointinc.org)

Park County Senior Center, "The Hub", social activities, fitness center, low-income apartments for seniors. 406 333-2276

Angel Line, provides transportation services to seniors over 60 406 222-4668

Shields Valley Senior Center, [shieldsvalleyseiorcenter@gmail.com](mailto:shieldsvalleyseiorcenter@gmail.com), 406 578-2243

## **General Help**

Montana 2-1-1: A 24/7 helpline for connecting with local services including housing, food, mental health, and more – just dial 211 or visit [montana211.org](http://montana211.org)

Hospital Services

Livingston Health Care- Livingston HealthCare (LHC) is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital providing 24-hour emergency and surgical services, short-term inpatient rehabilitation, and a full range of outpatient diagnostics and treatment. The medical center includes a multi-specialty physician practice, outpatient rehabilitation therapies, home-based services, and access to visiting specialists. LHC serves residents and visitors across Park County and the surrounding region through its main medical center, Urgent Care, and satellite clinic locations.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Thank you for your support!*



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