



2021-2022

Data
Action
Resource
Team

Central Virginia Community Report

FULL REPORT

DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP BY



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

Executive Summary

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 Central Virginia FAACT Annual 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.
- Centra Health provided qualitative data regarding the trends observed in the health system recently.

Trend analysis was performed on EMS data from 2020-2021 to define major shifts in overdose incidents in Virginia before observing trends in EMS emergencies, unemployment rates and VSP arrests at the identified change points to understand noteworthy interactions within Central Virginia. Considering local population metrics, trends, and available resources, The FAACT Team's recommendations are as follows:

1. Meet with the FAACT Analyst dedicated to the region to identify and onboard regional datasets that will provide a comprehensive and accurate view on how the region handles the addiction epidemic.
2. Utilize the data on the platform, as well as any local datasets identified, to develop advanced analyses that will provide pointed solutions to the region's most pressing issues.
3. Focus on creating education initiatives to ensure the younger population fully understand the consequences of substance use and their treatment options.

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Summary Analysis

Substance Use

- Amphetamines and methamphetamines have become the most prevalent substance in the region over the last few years. Those substances have been involved in a higher percentage of arrests, about 20% in 2020 and 2021, and are being used more by students who, historically, rarely used them.
- Due to the recent change in marijuana-related laws, the substance has been normalized for many individuals resulting in more openness around the use of it. There's been an increase in the number of students using the substance, especially with the rise in popularity of vapes, despite it still being illegal for them which is resulting in more disciplinary issues. Additionally, since police are less likely to search the drug, there's been an increase in individuals lacing marijuana with other substances, like PCP and opioids.
- Alcohol sales increased about 20% during the pandemic which likely contributed to the rise in alcohol-related cases handled by the Department of Social Services.

Mental Health

- There was an increase the length of time individuals involved in emergency custody orders and temporary detention orders need to be supervised by law enforcement. The increase was caused by the higher service demand in hospitals due to the pandemic which exacerbated the staffing shortages also experienced by law enforcement during that time.
- There's been a significant increase in the number of children dealing with mental health issues, like anxiety, depression, and trauma, because of the pandemic which has resulted in more disruptive behaviors in schools.

COVID-19

- There was a significant decrease in substance related arrests during 2020 and 2021 likely caused by the pandemic and recent marijuana related policy changes.
- There was a spike in the unemployment rate between April and October 2020 as a result of the pandemic. Consequently, there was also a spike in fraudulent claims filed which were difficult to identify because of the huge volume of claims and change from an in-person to virtual process.
- There was an increased demand for mental health and treatment services as well as staffing shortages leading to waitlists for individuals to get the treatment they needed.
- Some positive impacts of the pandemic included the increase in access to care with telehealth and the significant drop in individuals experiencing homelessness because of the many programs and relief funds provided in response to the pandemic.

Demographics

- 20–29-year-olds and 30-39-year-olds are the most impacted age groups and females are the most impact gender when analyzing opioid related emergencies in the region.

Gaps

- Some gaps in services identified include the following: detoxification services, residential treatment for adolescents, recovery housing for men and women, sustainable transportation system, affordable childcare, and outpatient substance use counseling.

The Urgency for a Revolutionary



FAACT, a cross-agency cloud-based data sharing platform, was designed to mitigate the opioid and substance abuse crisis as well as generate valuable insights about the contributing factors to Commonwealth opioid and substance abuse that leads to overdoses.

The platform actively collects data from agencies and organizations across Virginia to provide local governments and community organizations with pertinent and targeted information that helps decision makers in the Public Safety, Public Health and Community Service sectors improve outcomes by decreasing overdoses and combating the addiction epidemic in their neighborhoods.

FAACT Regional Partners

The FAACT team recognizes that to help individuals across the Commonwealth better address the addiction epidemic, they need to understand the unique problems each region is facing. Therefore, the team is committed to working with regional partners to ensure they

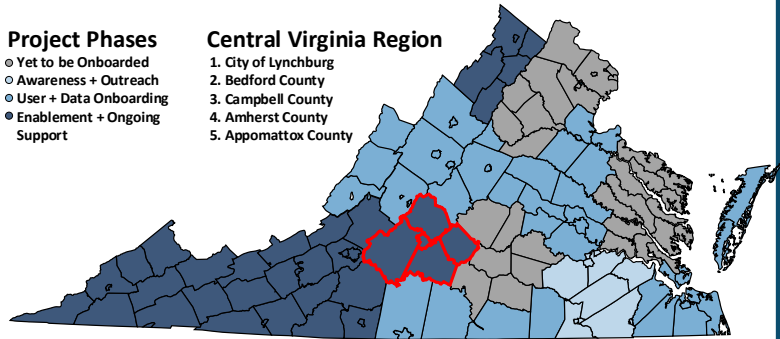
have access to the information they need to make data driven decisions. In the Central Virginia region, those partners include Horizon Behavioral Health and the Data to Action Resource Team (DART). In 2020, it became apparent that there is a tremendous need to better understand how societal factors are impacting substance use, mental illness, and suicide in Central Virginia. As a result, Horizon Behavioral Health in partnership with CIT launched the Data to Action Resource Team (DART) on May 25, 2021. DART is made up of individuals representing multiple sectors including health, law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), behavioral health service providers, business community, housing, FAACT, etc. 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.

Project Phases

- Yet to be Onboarded
- Awareness + Outreach
- User + Data Onboarding
- Enablement + Ongoing Support

Central Virginia Region

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



Centra Hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment

In 2021, Centra Hospital released a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for the City of Lynchburg region as well as Bedford County. Within the assessment, a 2021 Prioritization of Needs for each region was provided that was created using responses from a Community Health Survey made available to residents in the area as well as Stakeholder Focus Groups. For the City of Lynchburg, Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders & Access to Services ranked number 2 in the list while it ranked number 1 in Bedford County. This further supports the mission of DART and the need for it in the region as the residents themselves are acknowledging the severity of the problem.

Data Onboarded and Developed

Regional datasets are onboarded to provide a more holistic view of the addiction epidemic in a community. Within Central Virginia, student discipline data was shared with the FAACT team by Mac Duis, the Chief Operating Officer for Bedford County Public Schools. Using the information, an application was developed, accessible only to Mac, that allows him to perform his own self-service analytics. In addition to the discipline data, 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.

Data to Action Resource Team (DART)

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 9 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.

FAACT Central Virginia Performance

Survey Responses	Report Users	Dashboard Users	Datasets Onboarded
13	7	2	6

What's Next for FAACT in Central Virginia

FAACT objectives for FY'22 are as follows:

- Accomplish complete geographic coverage of the region by doubling the number of platform users and onboarding at least 1 dataset from each locality
- Continue to support regional partners by providing customized reports with more pointed solutions answering their specific business questions
- Increase the number of analytics that cross domains to provide more comprehensive understanding of trends by incorporating local data into reports and applications
- Develop a more substantial portfolio of advanced analytics and the capability for end users to engage those models in their regular activities, planning and decision making

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 2020 and 2021. 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 first in a series of annual reports with this year's analyses (FY'21) based on data from 2020-2021.

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>.

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.

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.

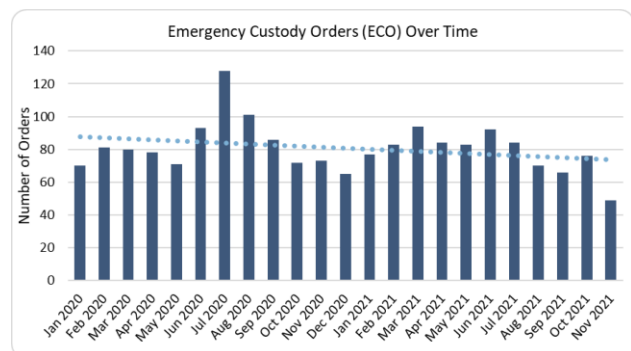
There were two statistically significant changes in **opioid-related emergencies** in Virginia between January 2020 and April 2021. In **July 2020**, there was a downswing in incidents while there was an upswing in **January 2021**. When comparing data for Central Virginia to the statewide trends, it was determined that there were no corresponding trends within overdose or arrest data in the region.

Horizon Emergency Custody Order (ECO)

The Horizon Emergency Custody Order data provides a monthly breakdown of ECOs from January 2020 to November 2021. 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?

Between January 2020 and November 2021, there was an overall decreasing trend in emergency custody orders. More specifically, there was a decrease of about 30% during that time period. Of all the months, July 2020 had the highest number of ECOs at 128 which was 58% higher than the monthly average of 81. November 2021, on the other hand, had the lowest number of emergencies at 49 which was 40% lower than the monthly average. In general, the decreasing trend in emergency custody orders between 2020 and 2021 is encouraging as it means less individuals are in need of court interference when it comes to hospitalization or mental health treatment.



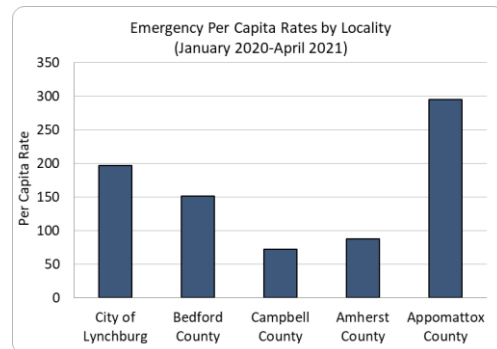
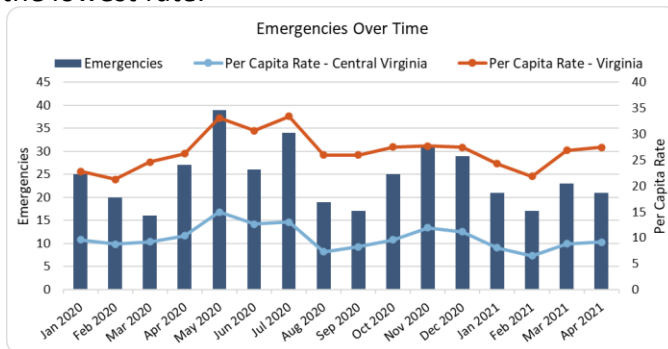
² Temporary Detention Orders. In Magistrate manual (pp. 6–4). essay.

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.

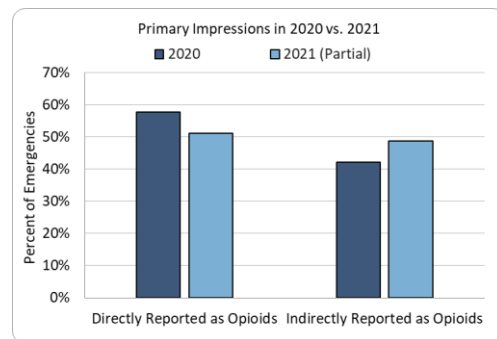
What was the trend in emergency responses for overdose incidents?

Between January 2020 and April 2021, there was an overall decreasing trend in opioid related emergencies in the region, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The Central Virginia health district also consistently had a significantly lower per capita rate than Virginia during that time period as well as the 4th lowest rate out of the 35 health districts in the state. Additionally, within the region, Appomattox County had the highest emergency rate relative to the county's population size followed by the City of Lynchburg while Campbell County had the lowest rate.



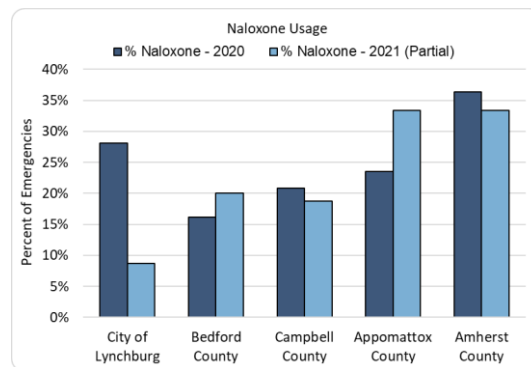
How have the trends in primary impressions recorded by EMS providers changed over time?

In 2020, about 57.8% of primary impressions were directly reported as opioid-related while only 51.2% were in 2021, which is equivalent to a 6.6% decrease. Ideally there'd be an increase in the percent of impressions directly reported as opioid related in the remainder of 2021 as that would indicate the paramedics can more quickly identify an emergency as opioid related resulting in a patient getting the necessary treatment quicker.



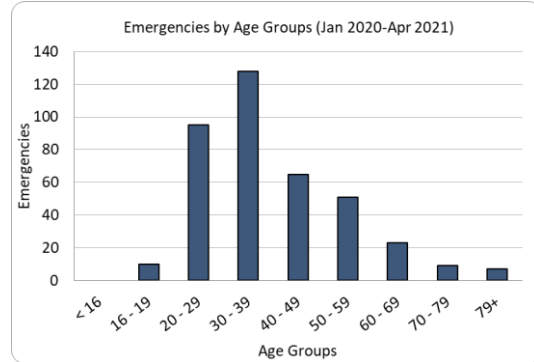
How does naloxone usage compare to the total number of opioid emergencies?

Roughly 23.08% of incidents in the region had naloxone administered. There was a decrease in naloxone administrations from 2020 (24.03%) to 2021 (19.51%). Within the region, Amherst County reported the highest usage of Naloxone (36.36% in 2020, 33.33% in 2021) while Bedford County reported the lowest in 2020 (16.13%) and the City of Lynchburg in 2021 (8.07%).



What was the demographic breakdown of EMS incidents?

In 2020 and 2021, the 30-39-year-old age group accounted for the highest number of emergencies which was equivalent to about 33.0% of the total. However, this is a shift from the prior 2 years when 20-29-year-olds were the most impacted age group as they were involved in the highest number of emergencies. Despite the shift, 20-29-year-olds and 30-39-year-olds have consistently been among the most impacted age groups as they tend to account for a significantly higher percentage of opioid related emergencies than expected based on the general population breakdown in the region.

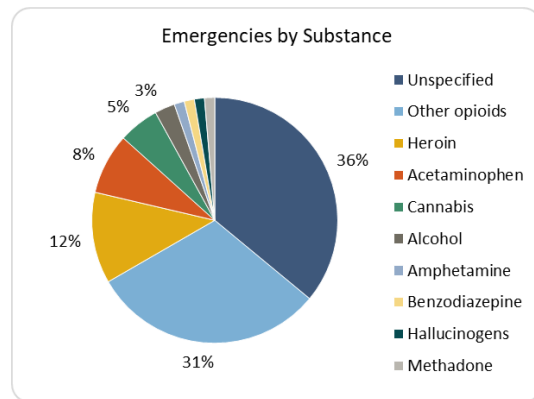


Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services (BREMS)

The Blue Ridge Emergency Medical Services provided emergency data specific to the Central Virginia region for June-November 2021. This dataset differs from the statewide EMS information since it includes incident data for overdoses involving any substance, rather than only opioids.

What were the most common substances involved in overdoses ?

Between June and November 2021, the most common substance involved in overdoses reported to EMS was unspecified followed by other opioids. However, it's expected that a large percent of overdoses would include unknown substances since it can be difficult for paramedics to identify the cause of an overdose in such a short time period. Of the substances that were identified though, it appears that opioids are the most prevalent substance in the Central Virginia region. They accounted for approximately 42% of



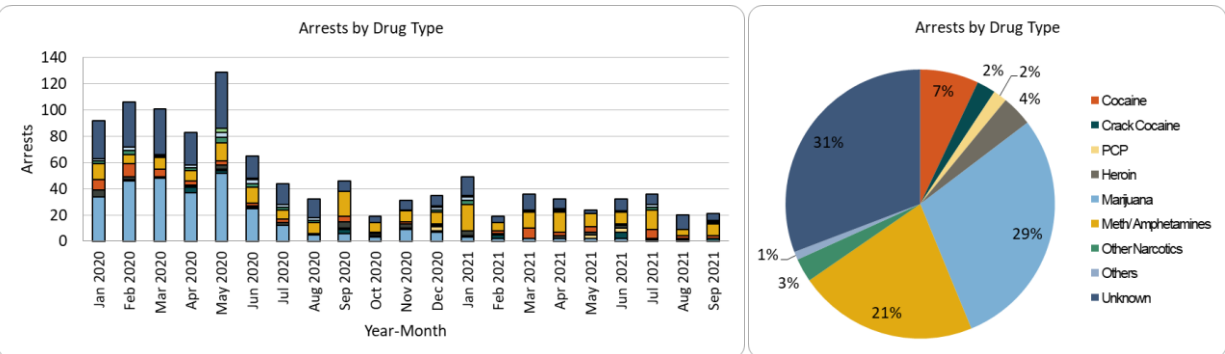
Overdoses during the time period of interest and therefore are the most cause for concern.

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?

During 2020, substance related arrests dropped significantly during the second half of the year. More specifically, there was a 63.7% drop in arrests between the first 6 months and last 6 months of the year. Additionally, arrests dropped another 8.2% between the second half of 2020 and first half of 2021. However, this significant decrease was likely caused by recent policy changes related to marijuana since it accounted for over 40% of arrests in the first half of 2020 but dropped to about 20% in the second half of the year and 6.8% in the first half of 2021. Since marijuana arrests are likely to account for only a small percentage of arrests moving forward, the next most common substances of concern for the region would be unknown (31%), methamphetamines/amphetamines (21%), cocaine (7%), and heroin (4%).

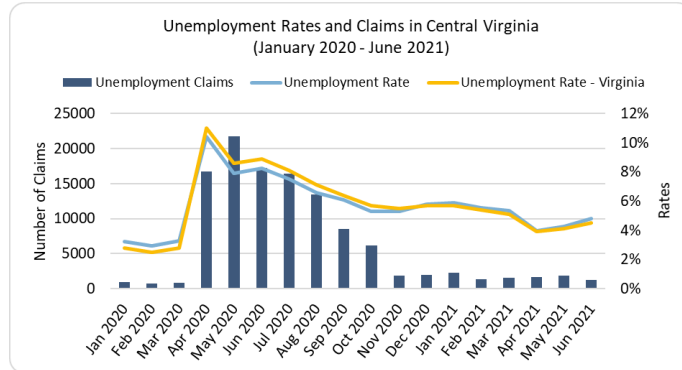


Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)

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

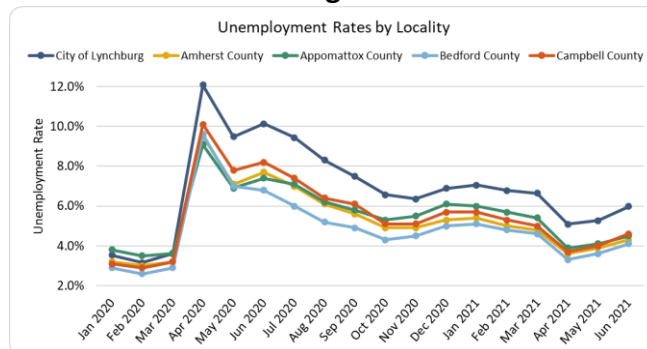
What were the unemployment rates in Central Virginia?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the unemployment rates remained fairly consistent in the region. It ranged from 2.9%-3.2% but was always higher than the states rate which ranged from 2.5%-2.8%. However, there was a significant spike in unemployment between March and May 2020 corresponding with the beginning of the pandemic. While the spike in the region mimicked that of the state, between April and November 2020, Central Virginia had a slightly lower rate than Virginia for the first time in over 20 years. Therefore, although rates were hitting an all time high in 2020, the region managed to have a lower unemployment rate than Virginia with rates seemingly returning to normal during the first half of 2021.



How do unemployment rates compare between localities in the region?

Within Central Virginia, the unemployment rates for each locality aligned closely to the trends for the region as a whole as well as the state. The rates remained fairly consistent during the first few months of 2020, there was a considerable spike between March and May with the rates starting to return to normal in early 2021. Prior to COVID-19, Appomattox County had the unemployment rates from January to March. However, in April 2020, the City of Lynchburg experienced one of the largest spike in rates and consistently had the highest rate for the remainder of 2020 and early 2021 indicating the city's workforce was impacted the most by the pandemic.

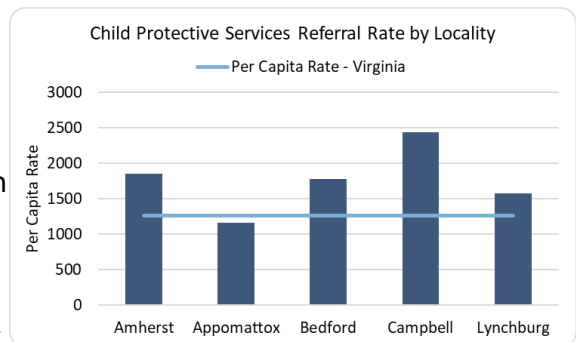


Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS)

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.

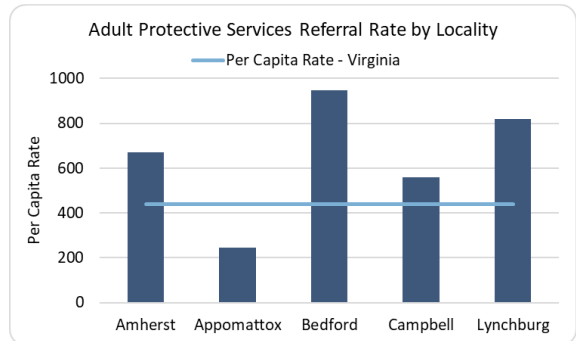
Which locality in Central Virginia had the highest number of CPS referrals?

During state fiscal year (SFY) 2020, there were 4,808 Child Protective Services (CPS) referrals in Central Virginia. Within the region, Bedford County had the highest number of referrals (1,406) followed by Campbell County (1,338) then the City of Lynchburg (1,292). However, once population size was taken into account, Campbell County had the highest referral rate followed by Amherst County then Bedford County. Conversely, Appomattox County had the lowest number of referrals and the lowest per capita rate in the region. Additionally, it is the only locality with a lower rate than the state which had a rate of 1,265 referrals per 100,000 residents during SFY 2020.



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

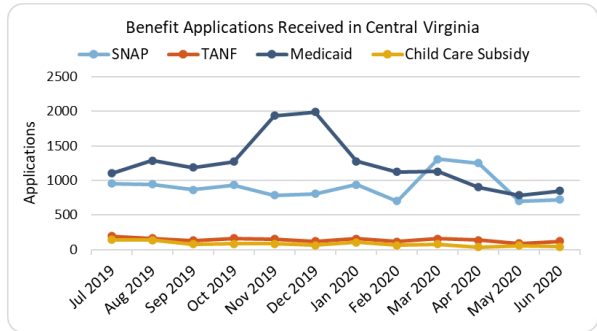
In SFY 2020, there were 1,978 Adult Protective Services (APS) referrals in Central Virginia. Similar to the CPS referrals, Bedford County had the highest number of APS referrals with 749 of them. Following Bedford, the City of Lynchburg had the second highest number of referrals (672) then Campbell County (306). When population size was considered, Bedford County had the highest referral rate followed by the City of Lynchburg, then Amherst County. Additionally, Appomattox County had the lowest number of APS referrals and lowest referral rate. It was also the only locality with a lower rate than the state which is consistent with the trends seen in the previous question focused on CPS referrals.



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

What is the most common benefit program in Central Virginia?

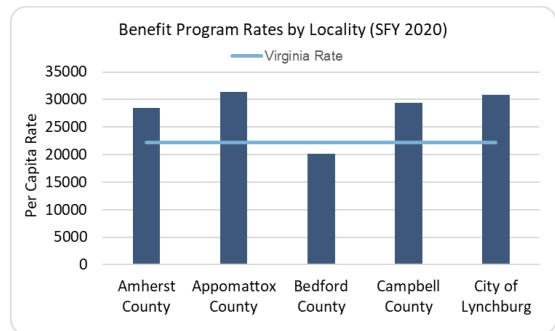
During SFY 2020, Medicaid was the benefit program applied to most frequently by residents in the Central Virginia health district month after month, with the exception of March and April 2020. During those 2 months, there was a spike in SNAP applicants and the program became the most sought-after benefit in the region. This was likely caused by COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a



significant rise in unemployment in the region prompting more individuals to seek financial assistance from government programs. With regards to the other programs, there was no significant changes month to month. The number of applicants for TANF and Child Care subsidy benefits remained consistent throughout SFY 2020 and seemed unaffected by the pandemic. Additionally, it looks like there is a spike in Medicaid applications between November and December 2019. However, that aligns with the open enrollment period and is likely a seasonal trend, rather than an anomaly.

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

Within the Central Virginia region, Appomattox County had the highest number of benefit program clients relative to the county's population size followed closely by the City of Lynchburg, Campbell County, and Amherst County. Additionally, all those localities had a higher rate of benefit clients than the state. Bedford County, on the other hand, has a significantly lower rate than the other localities as well as the state which aligns with the fact that the county also consistently has the lowest unemployment rate in the region.



Central Virginia Continuum of Care (CVCoC)

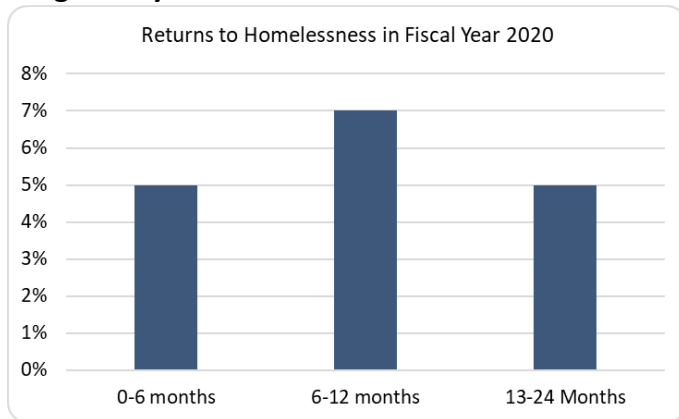
The Central Virginia Continuum of Care (CVCoC) data contains information related to homelessness in the region from October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020, as well as comparisons to similar metrics for the United States. Lack of housing and homelessness are social determinants of health that contribute to the health disparities and health inequities related to substance use and mental illness. Substance use and mental illnesses are both causes and results of homelessness. 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 2020?

During fiscal year 2020, 462 individuals in Central Virginia were in emergency shelters (ES), transitional housing (TH), or permanent homes (PH). That's equivalent to a decrease of about 30.7% from the previous year.

Additionally, of individuals who leave homelessness approximately 5% are likely to experience additional spells of homelessness within 6 months compared to 7% in 6-12 months, and 5% in 13-24 months.

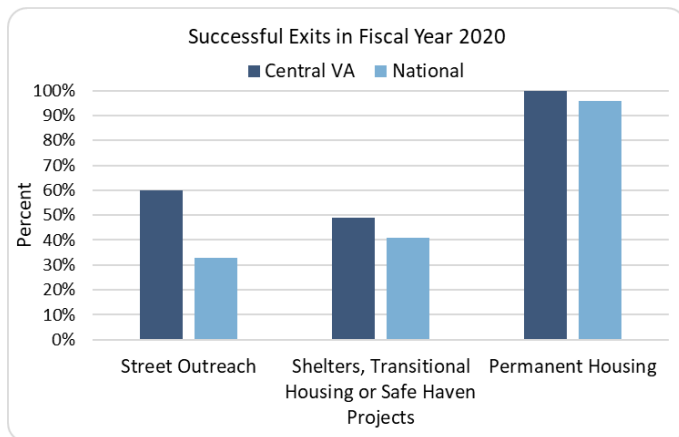
However, in 2020, approximately 17% of individuals returned to homelessness which was about 3% less than the national average.



What percent of individuals experiencing homelessness had successful exits in 2020?

In Central Virginia during fiscal year 2020, 60% of exits from street outreach projects successfully resulted in a shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven project placement. That's almost double the national average of 33%. Additionally, approximately 49% of exits from shelters, transitional housing or safe haven projects resulted in a permanent housing placement which was about 8% higher than the national average.

Lastly, 100% of individuals in permanent housing successfully remained in the placement setting or exited which is approximately 4% higher than the national average in 2020. Therefore, Central Virginia has overall higher exits that are considered successful when compared to the entire United States.

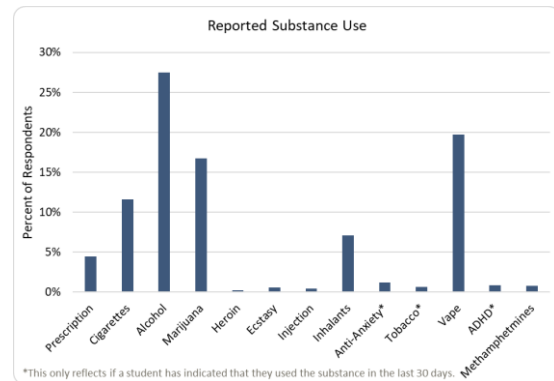


Lynchburg Youth Survey (LYS)

The Lynchburg Youth Survey is based on the Center for Disease Control Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey which is designed to allow for the examination of the status and trends in health behaviors of youth in 8th, 10th and 12th grade.

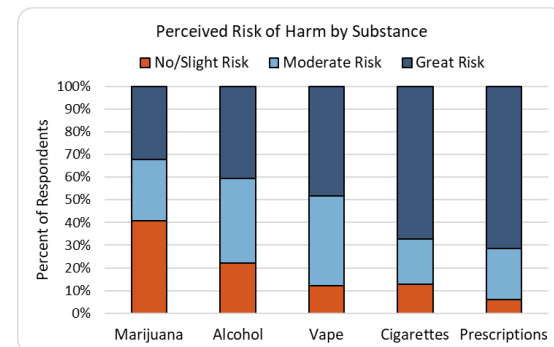
What is the most common substance used among students in the City of Lynchburg?

In 2020, approximately 41% of survey respondents indicated some sort of history of substance use which ranged from trying a substance once to using it on a regular basis. The most common substance used by students was alcohol, followed by electronic vapes, then marijuana. The least common substance used was heroin, which had only been tried by 0.22% of respondents.



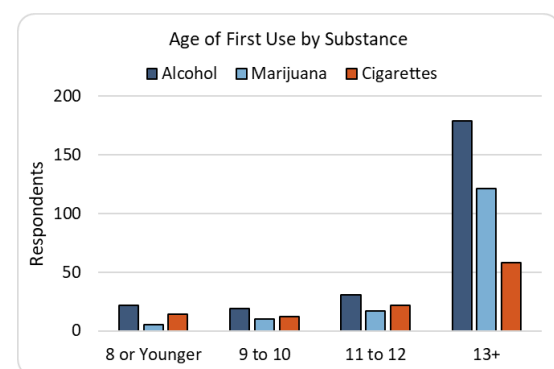
What are the students' perceived risk of harm for those who use substances?

When asked if they think people risk harming themselves when using substances on a regular basis, most respondents indicated they believed there was a risk regardless of the substance. Of the substances, prescription drugs had the highest percent of students, about 72%, identify it as a great risk for harm. Marijuana, on the other hand, is perceived as the one with the least likelihood of causing harm for those using it on a regular basis as indicated by 41% of the respondents. Considering alcohol and vapes have a lower percentage of respondents who perceive them as low risk, but they are the most tried substances as seen in the previous question, it appears students are not risk adverse since they've acknowledged the negative effects but continue to use the substances.



At what age do students typically start using substances?

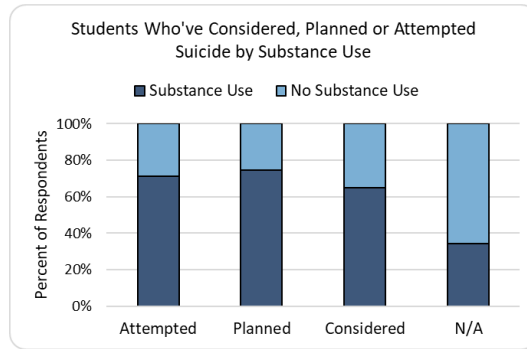
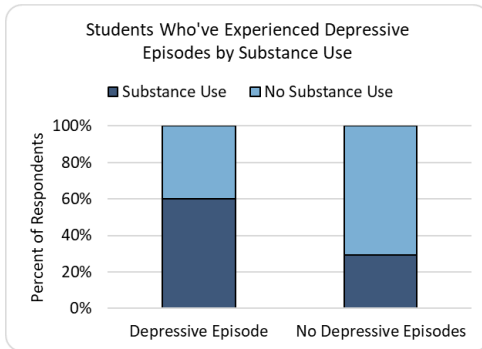
The most common age of first use for survey respondents was 13 or older. More specifically, approximately 20% of respondents indicated an age of first use for alcohol as 13 or older, 13% for marijuana, and 6% for cigarettes. Additionally, of the students who used cigarettes, 45% indicated an age of first use under 13 years old which is significantly higher than the 29% for alcohol and 21% for marijuana and likely cause by the fact that cigarettes are easier for a child to access.



Therefore, it can be concluded that the students who use cigarettes typically start at a younger age than those who use alcohol or marijuana.

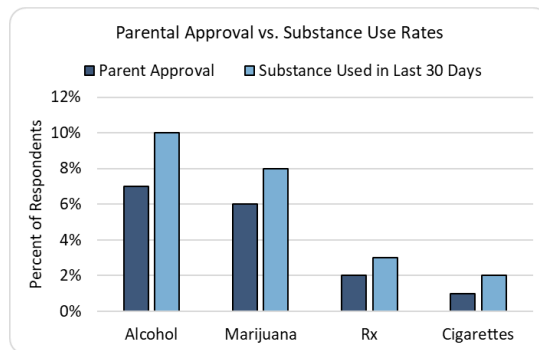
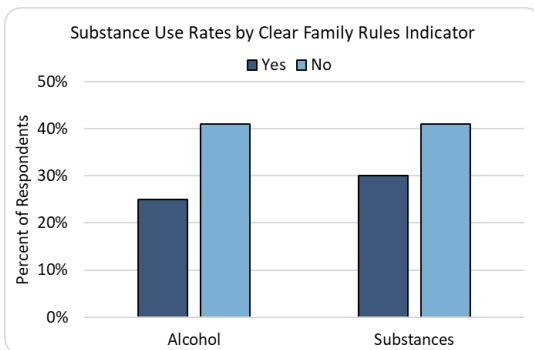
Does depression have an impact on substance use among students in Lynchburg?

In 2020, approximately 38% of survey respondents admitted to feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks or more in the past 12 months. Of the students who've experienced a depressive episode, 60% have indicated some sort of substance use which is significantly higher than the 29% of students who haven't experienced a depressive episode. Additionally, approximately 18% of respondents admitted to considering, planning, or attempting suicide. Comparing those students who've at least considered suicide to those who haven't, a much larger percentage of them have some sort of substance use history. Therefore, it's clear that there is a correlation between substance use and depression for students in Lynchburg.



Does parental approval have an impact on substance use among students?

In Lynchburg, about 82% of survey respondents indicated there were clear family rules about alcohol and drugs in their house. However, focusing on only students who've admitted to using substances, it's apparent that whether there are clear rules at home has an impact on the substance use rates for students. There are lower percentages of substance use for students who've stated there are clear rules about substances and alcohol among their families. Additionally, from the Parental Approval vs. Substance Use Rates chart, it can be determined that there is a correlation between the percent of students who believe their parents don't think a substance is bad at all and the percentage of students who've used the substance in the last 30 days. Furthermore, if a parent approves of a substance, there's a higher chance they'll have it in their home, making it more accessible to their child which increases the likelihood of them trying it. Therefore, a parent's approval of a substance and whether they clearly state their views to their child does influence the percent of students who've admitted some sort of substance use.



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 a small focus group of supervisors from a variety of different departments reported out by the Outpatient Program Manager within Horizon.

How has substance use and mental health impacted your organization's work? What impact does substance use and mental health have on your organizations service delivery?

Over the past year, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the services provided by Horizon Behavioral Health and exacerbated the need for mental health and substance use treatment for children, adolescents, and adults. As a result of the increased need for services, there was also a workforce shortage which was already a problem prior to the pandemic but was only made worse by it. However, as a Community Service Board, Horizon is required to offer an appointment for services through the admissions department as well as offer an appointment 10 days after an admission. Therefore, protocols are in place to link clients to treatment as quickly as possible despite the challenges faced in the last year.

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

There's been an increase in overdoses similar to what's been experienced across the Commonwealth as well as the country. Specifically in Central Virginia, there's been an increase in opioid and methamphetamine use. Additionally, there's been an increase in referrals from child welfare agencies related to parents in need of addiction treatment and co-occurring mental health treatment which isn't unusual since about 80% of cases are linked to parental substance use. Regarding adolescents, there's been an increase in methamphetamine use, which was not a significant problem 3 or 4 years ago, as well as increased use of cannabinoids.

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

Over the past year, there's been an increase in anxiety and depressive disorders among children and adolescents that have manifested largely in the school system where students are struggling academically, socially, and emotionally. More specifically, there was about a 20% increase in the number of clients receiving school-based therapy in 2021 compared to prior years. Nationally-speaking, less than half of students who meet diagnostic criteria for mental health or substance use disorders receive the help they need so that's been a major focus for Horizon Behavioral Health. Lastly, there's been an increase in the number of referrals for children under the age of 5, specifically related to aggression and sexual aggression, so younger children are presenting with more mental health related problems.

Has your organization observed any trends in demographics related to substance use or mental health?

There's been a 9% increase in services for children ages 0 to 17 between 2020 and 2021. However, the other demographic data has remained relatively consistent during that time period.

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

Yes, Horizon Behavioral Health has experienced an increase in the number of admissions and referrals over the last year across all ages for both mental health and substance use disorders. Additionally, Horizon has a community-based program designed around family-based intervention for adolescents that have conduct or behavioral issues. The number of referrals for that program has almost doubled and it provides intensive services to families in their homes and communities.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

Some of the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic include increases in the number of individuals with anxiety, trauma, and grief. Additionally, within the younger population, the effects of isolation, both social and physical, have had a significant impact on mental health leading to disruptive and negative behaviors observed in schools. Similarly, for adults struggling with mental health or substance use, the isolation reduced their social connections which is so important when going through treatment or recovery because building communities of support are critical for success. Despite the many negative impacts of the pandemic, there were some positive outcomes from it. One positive impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on service delivery was the increased access to treatment through the provision of telehealth. While it was around prior to the pandemic, it became much more available in 2020 which allowed clients with previous access barriers to access therapy and case management services assuming they had a stable internet connection. The increased access to services had a positive impact across the board especially in rural areas where transportation can be an even greater challenge since there aren't public transit systems.

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

The change in marijuana laws has made the substance much more present in the community which is evident by the fact that individuals can smell it at public events or shopping areas around town. As a result, it's become normalized for not only adults to use but also adolescents which has led to an increase in referrals for substance use treatment since some schools refer to Horizon when there is a substance use related disciplinary issue. There's been a rise in disciplinary issues in school that are averaging out to at least 2 referrals each week from students vaping marijuana in schools. Additionally, for substance use programs, some referral sources will not monitor for marijuana use any longer while others require clients not to use it, similar to alcohol, even though it's legal since it can impact their ability to meet their daily living activities. Overall, there are mixed views of marijuana across the community with it becoming much more present across all ages.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

Horizon Behavioral Health regularly looks for ways to improve collaboration with partners in order to close gaps in services within the community by using the Community Needs Assessment and feedback from stakeholders. Some of the services individuals are looking for include detoxification services, residential treatment for adolescents, recovery housing for men and women, sustainable transportation system across all localities, and affordable childcare. Those are a few areas that Horizon likes to highlight and work to improve. Additionally, those in the organization want to work to reduce the stigma around mental health and substance use by facilitating conversations with community members and partnerships with agencies in order to make interventions as early as possible within a person's life.

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 organizations work?

When arriving at a scene, the first responders need to initially make sure the scene is safe and then try to gauge what substance an individual is on as well as how long they've been on it to give them the best medical help they can. However, in recent years, it's been difficult to secure scenes with the uptick in violent crimes and different levels of mental health disorders that have turned violent. The first responders often have to work with the local sheriff's office to diffuse the situation so they can get to the patient and address their needs. But recently, they've been needing to address psychological needs a lot more before any treatment can be administered. Furthermore, a lot of parameters go into a primary and secondary impression because calls being responded to are rarely black and white. The first responders need to have a differential approach and use clues at the scene to make decisions because often patients who are unconscious or in an altered state aren't capable of providing a full and accurate picture of what's happening.

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

Overall, there was no significant increase or decrease in substance use and mental health related calls compared to previous years. However, historically, as summer ends and it enters the holiday season, there is an increase in mental health related calls that are related to suicide ideation and attempts as well as overdoses and substance use. While 2021 data is incomplete due to a change in systems, it's expected that there would be no change in this trend. Additionally, a couple of years ago, a majority of mental health and substance use related calls came from the City of Lynchburg, but now they are relatively evenly distributed among the surrounding counties when looking at per capita rates. Regarding substances, most overdoses are classified as unspecified substances, as it can be hard to identify what exactly a patient took, followed by opioids.

Has your organization noticed any trends in demographics related to substance use and/or mental health in service utilization?

The average age of individuals involved in calls is between their late 20s and late 30s with approximately a quarter of calls involving younger adults between the ages of 12-20. Additionally, about 70% of calls involved females which is consistent with historical trends while the distribution of calls was relatively even across all races. When it comes to specific calls, such as suicide related, it's widely spread across different demographic groups from juveniles to the elderly.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

The pandemic did cause an increase in calls so there was a big organizational effort to get all of them answered and individuals transported properly as needed. However, it also brought awareness to a lot of providers about the importance of personal protection equipment and the steps required to keep everyone safe. So, although COVID-19 was a difficult time, it ensured that the organization will be prepared if something like it happens again. Additionally, it also brought their teams together across the region in order to have a proactive and united approach to the situation as opposed to a reactive one.

Virginia State Police

The information summarized in this section was provided by a Special Agent and Task Force Coordinator in the Virginia State Police.

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

Substance trends and increases tend to come in waves so it can be difficult to identify the most pressing issue. However, recently, methamphetamines have been becoming extremely prevalent in the region. The presence and availability of the drug can be best explained by the significant drop in price over the last 6-7 years. In 2015, an ounce of methamphetamines was about \$1,200 whereas, today, it can be bought for about \$300-\$400. This is very telling because the fact that the price of it dropped so drastically in such a short period of time is an indication that the market has been flooded with the substance. Furthermore, with the rise in methamphetamines in the region, there has also been a rise in individuals using heroin as well since there tends to be a strong correlation between the two throughout the state. Lastly, there has been an increase in the number of substances cut with another substance, like cocaine mixed with fentanyl. About 1 year ago, synthetic marijuana, known as K2, was resulting in a lot of emergency custody orders but that has since dropped off.

Local Law Enforcement

The information summarized in this section was provided by a Lieutenant from Lynchburg Police Department, a Sergeant from Bedford Police Department, a Lieutenant from Bedford County Sheriff's Office, and an Investigator from Amherst County Sheriff's Office.

Has your organization observed any new increase of substances related to arrests?

Methamphetamines and heroin are the substances most often involved in arrests within the region with the City of Lynchburg also experiencing a lot of cocaine related incidents. However, one increasing trend experienced in Central Virginia is the number of substances that are laced. Local law enforcement has witnessed a rise in marijuana being laced with PCP, opioids, and methamphetamines as well as counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl. Additionally, there have been many instances where individuals think they are using methamphetamines or heroin, but there ends up being a large percentage of fentanyl mixed in.

What has been your organizations experience with temporary detention orders (TDO) and emergency custody orders (ECO)?

The major problem facing law enforcement when it comes to ECOs and TDOs is the length of time spent with these individuals has increased. Previously, police would pick up individuals and drop them off, however, now they must wait hours, sometimes days, for beds to open up in hospitals during which the individuals need to be supervised at all times. This also exacerbated the staffing problems faced by smaller police departments during the pandemic since there may have to be multiple officers attending to a combative individual at once. In addition to the length of time increasing, the number of ECOs and TDOs have skyrocketed in most localities as well as drug-related incidents. Virginia is one of the only states where law enforcement must respond to a call and, if the person needs mental health services, take them to the hospital and stay with them until a bed becomes available. In other states, like Maryland, law enforcement officials can drop the individual off because hospital's have their own systems in place to watch them, so police resources aren't required for already understaffed organizations.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

COVID-19 had a negative impact on police services. Overall, arrests were down due to the smaller staffs and less officer-initiated contact with the public. Additionally, staffing was significantly impacted with officers often working with less-than-optimal numbers resulting in individuals being pulled off their specialized units and away from their responsibilities to answer calls.

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

The law changes have not clearly identified the state's regulations on marijuana which has caused law enforcement to focus more on controlled substances. However, it has tied officers' hands in some cases as they can no longer use the smell of marijuana as a reason to search suspicious vehicles. This has led to the increase in laced marijuana as suspects have admitted to lacing the substance since it's no longer searched or confiscated by law enforcement.

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

There's been an increase in mental health related issues within the schools whether it's related to problems at home or drug use. Anxiety and depression have increased significantly in schools because of COVID and the fact that students feel like they are being cheated out of the best years of their lives. This is really taxing the counselors as well because of the increased number of students who are in need of their services.

Virginia Employment Commission

The information summarized in this section was provided by a Workforce Services employee from the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC).

How has substance use and mental health impacted your organizations work?

One big issue faced by unemployed clients is that they aren't passing drug tests. Employers would offer them employment if it weren't for a failed test.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

The biggest impact COVID-19 had on service delivery for VEC is that customers couldn't be helped in person. Virtual interviews and phone interviews were conducted to try and increase interaction with the clients, but it was still somewhat of a challenge to fully understand what the client needed and how best they could be served. Additionally, VEC employees work with clients to find out what they need besides financial support that will help them become more self-sufficient. That help includes referring clients to employment trainings so they can improve their soft skills, like resume building and interview prep, so they are better prepared for the job search. However, clients tend to be more receptive to employment help when discussing them in person so offices opening has helped increase referrals for the agency. Lastly, another problem faced due to the pandemic was an increase in fraudulent claims because of the spike in claims volume and the move to virtual services. Many individuals were having their information stolen on the internet so when they went to file a claim, one had already been filed in their name with their social security number which was made easier to do since everything was online during the height of the pandemic. This led to a delay in accessing benefits they were entitled to, so individuals had trouble getting the help they needed in a timely manner since they then had to go through the process of proving they are who they say they are by providing identifiable information like a picture ID. Once that information is provided, it's sent to the Fraud Department in Richmond where the case is investigated which can take a while due to the large number of claims filed during COVID-19.

Please provide the unemployment rates for Central Virginia for the following months:

January 2020, July 2020, January 2021, July 2021, January 2022.

The unemployment rate in January 2020 was 3.3% and then jumped to 8.0% in July 2020. In January 2021, the unemployment rate was 5.1% and it dropped to 4.3% in July 2021. Lastly, in January 2022, the unemployment rate was estimated to be 3.7%.

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

Yes, while many programs experienced a drop in the number of referrals, there was a significant increase in the number of unemployment claims and inquiries. Prior to the pandemic, there was an average of about 2,000 unemployment claims a week statewide. But, during the pandemic, there was a huge increase. There was even one week where there were almost 150,000 claims because many companies had to shut down or cut the number of employees they had, or individuals had to stay home and care for someone suffering from COVID-19. Employees at VEC had a hard time handling the volume of calls they were receiving but the numbers have started to return to normal since the state has opened up again. However, the problem faced by employers now is that job seekers aren't as willing to go back to work. Whether it's hesitancy or fear due to COVID or some other reason, individuals aren't applying to jobs they would be eligible for or showing up for interviews despite the many job openings in the area.

Are there specific demographics that have been most impacted by unemployment?

The black population has been most impacted by unemployment in the Central Virginia region and not just impacted by the number of jobs but by the pay offered for jobs. This has been exacerbated in the last 10 years by the fact that manufacturing jobs are moving out of the area which were good paying jobs that didn't require a lot of education. As a result, many individuals end up working in the service industry which doesn't pay a livable wage. This makes it hard to advance in a job because if people aren't paid a livable wage, they can't afford a better education, which is required for most well-paying jobs. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic made jobs even scarcer since employers had to let a lot of people go. Then, when the state started opening up again, they were slow to hire because they thought they could make do with smaller staff sizes since they did so during the pandemic. However, recently, hiring has been on the rise and there are a lot of job openings in the region which will hopefully bring the unemployment rate down.

Are the educational programs and services you help your clients access one of the best resources available through your organization?

Yes, because they can help clients get a job. However, if they don't have the skills needed to perform the require tasks, they won't be able to keep the job. Without the education and skills needed, it would likely be a constant revolving door for clients, getting a job, not being able to keep it then looking for a new job. It's very important that job seekers know how to look for employment, fill out a resume, and prepare for interviews to be successful as well as go through training programs for those who are qualified, like learning basic nursing skills or becoming a certified truck driver. However, the training programs are meant to get individuals started and hopefully give them the tools they need to move further into their careers or explore more education. Additionally, the training being sponsored by VEC needs to be related to the needs of the local economy so there's a lot of communication with businesses in the community to understand what type of openings are available.

How can the public perception of unemployment benefits be shifted back to a resource meant to assist individuals, not replace a regular salary?

Unemployment benefits were put in place to assist individuals and provide the basic necessities to help connect to a job. Recently, especially during the pandemic, there's been a shift where individuals believe they are entitled to the money and that it should replace their income. To combat this mindset, Illinois has changed the name within the state from unemployment benefits to "back to work money". This could help individuals understand that the money should be used as a means to find a job, not live off it long term. Additionally, many individuals believe they're paying for unemployment when businesses are taxed for it. The taxes paid are then consolidated by the federal government and redistributed based on the needs of the state. A better understanding of the funding source for unemployment benefits could also help shift people's mindset away from the belief that they are owed the money even if they don't meet the required qualifications.

Department of Social Services

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Assistant Director of Amherst County Social Services and the Director of Bedford County Social Services.

How has substance use and mental health impacted your organizations work?

Substance use and mental health have had a significant impact on the work done by the Department of Social Services since a large percentage of cases tend to involve problems related to one or both, especially since substance use tends to be directly attributed to mental health. Within Amherst County and the surrounding region, methamphetamines have been extremely prevalent as well as alcohol, heroin, and other opioids. Those in DSS try their best to get individuals involved in their cases connected to the best services possible to hopefully make an improvement in their lives as well as provide them with stability. Within Bedford County, there's been an increase in juveniles using substances as well as an increase in Substance Exposed Infants. Additionally, more staff have sought counseling due to concerns of secondary trauma, and many have left the agency because of the stress of the job.

What impact does substance use and mental health have on your organizations service delivery?

There hasn't been any major changes in substance use trends in the last few years. Historically, it's been a significant problem and it continues to be. More specifically, for about the last 10 years, drugs, especially methamphetamines, have been an issue for the county but it hasn't been getting better or worse, it's remained consistent. Additionally, each fiscal year, the Virginia Department of Social Services allocates money specifically for substance use to each jurisdiction indicating that it's not only a problem in the region, but across the state. One problem that has significantly impacted service delivery is the increase in caseload. Because of it, there has been an inability to provide the intensity of services and case management needed to best suit the client's needs.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

As a result of the pandemic, individuals are waiting a much longer amount of time for an evaluation and services in the hospital. This is preventing them from getting the treatment they need as quickly as possible. Long wait times continues to be a problem despite the lift of COVID restrictions and return to normal. Additionally, liquor stores are selling approximately 20% more alcohol which is likely contributing to the number of alcohol-related cases seen by DSS. Lastly, telehealth was often not adequately addressing the needs of the client. Receiving treatment virtually has allowed clients to use “technical issues” as an excuse for not participating or they are more likely to be under the influence during services.

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

The change in marijuana laws has caused a spike in the number of parents growing the substance, or at the very least, the number of parents willing to admit they are growing it. Child Protective Services workers are experiencing a larger number of home visits where they see marijuana growing on the property. It’s likely been going on for a while but is no longer being hidden from them. The law states that marijuana is supposed to be kept out of the public and away from children but, because of the decriminalization or lack of understanding of the specifics, parents have become much more relaxed about it. As a result of this more relaxed mindset, more children are consuming THC products and needing medical treatment because of it. Additionally, since law enforcement can no longer arrest individuals for it, it’s much harder to get a drug prosecution for violations related to it.

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

There has been an impact on the number of mental health related cases handled by DSS over the last year. Many parents have relinquished care because they can’t handle the mental health crisis and the problems being faced by families. As for the children, there’s been a spike in the number of them with mental health illnesses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and it’s likely going to affect them for the rest of their lives. Within Bedford County specifically, there’s been an influx of referrals with March 2022 having the highest number of CPS and APS complaints ever filed at Bedford DSS.

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

There’s been a lot of new trends observed that were substance use related including a rise in fentanyl use because it’s being laced in other drugs, increase in polysubstance use, and increase in methamphetamine use. As a result of the rising substance use in the region, there’s also been an increase in substance related domestic violence incidents and Substance Exposed Infants with withdrawal symptoms.

What factors do you perceive is contributing to the substance use and mental health problem in the community?

The inability of people to deal with current economic stressors as well as the significant change in routine and social life due to COVID-19 have contributed a lot to the problems faced by the community.

Miriam's House

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Director of Housing Services at Miriam's House.

How has substance use and mental health impacted your organizations work?

One service offered by Miriam's House is Permanent Supportive Housing which focuses on getting people experiencing chronic homelessness into housing and provide rental assistance as well as supportive services for as long as an individual needs. The vast majority of individuals utilizing this service are struggling with a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or both. This program differs from others offered by Miriam's House because it's a long-term solution for individuals with a disabling condition that will likely need support for an extended period of time, rather than a couple of months to get back on their feet. Through this program, there is long-term engagement with the clients which increases the likelihood of them utilizing the voluntary services provided, like mental health resources, resulting in better outcomes.

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

The number of people who became homeless between 2019 and 2021 was cut in half as a result of the protections that were established during the pandemic including the eviction moratoria, rent relief, stimulus money, child tax credit, and an increase in unemployment benefits. However, despite the overall decrease, those who did become homeless during that time period were inherently more vulnerable and had less resources to start with which is why they became homeless despite the programs put in place. More specifically, prior to COVID-19, approximately 34% of clients served by Miriam's House reported having a mental illness or substance use disorder. During the pandemic, that percentage jumped to 52% indicating that the population was severely impacted by COVID-19.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

Community First, the rapid rehousing program run by Miriam's House, helps rehouse homeless families and youth as quickly as possible by helping place them in a rental unit of their own. This program was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, the housing wait was about 28 days from the time someone was enrolled to the time they were placed in permanent housing with a lease signed. As a result of the pandemic, the average wait time went up to 64 days because the housing market was so tight. However, despite the many negative effects of COVID-19, there were some positive impacts of the pandemic. As a result of it, there was an overall mindset change with people understanding the importance of housing when it comes to healthcare and how people who are housed can generally stay healthier. The state and federal government offered a lot more resources to address homelessness, like housing vouchers and additional funding for rental assistance, which allowed the organization to serve more individuals they wouldn't normally be able to help or weren't normally eligible for services.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

One major gap in homeless services provided to the community used to be that there was no one dedicated to individuals on the street, services were only provided to those in shelters or seeking out help. However, Miriam’s House has been working to address that problem through the Street Outreach Program, also known as Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement, which started in 2018. This program aims to fill that gap and served about 60 individuals in the first year and jumped to 115 individuals by 2021. This growth is not necessarily a result of more individuals becoming homeless but likely partially due to a growth in the program and individuals being more aware of it. However, there have been some shelter closures in the last year that may have also contributed to the increase in individuals sleeping outside.

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 organizations work?

Substance use and mental health continue to impact the YWCA as there has been more and more domestic violence victims coming in with addictions and severe mental illness. Currently, there are about 65% of sheltered clients with a mental illness and about 70% deal with addictions. This can make it very challenging to serve clients as it can be difficult to separate chronic illness from domestic violence. Additionally, if the mental illness or substance use disorder is not properly addressed or treated, the client will likely fall into a cycle of victimization.

What impact does substance use and mental health have on your organizations service delivery?

The YWCA DVPP meets people where they are and often that means untreated mental illness, history of non-compliance with medications, and suicide ideations. While the staff is trained to work with those populations, they are not mental health providers. If they are not able to get clients into services, the likelihood of them moving forward free of violence is little to none.

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

There has been an increase in victims coming into the shelter who have already lost custody of their children due to the children's exposure to the parent's addiction.

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

While there has not been an increase in domestic violence victims needing shelter, the reason shelter is needed has been because the violence experienced has become extreme early in the relationship. Additionally, there has been an increase in requests from homeless people seeking shelter. While they are not a homeless shelter, they do try to accommodate as best they can but, helping victims of domestic violence remains the number one priority.

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

Of the 65% of sheltered clients with mental illness, most are reported to have a case manager or counselor assigned to them. However, most report that they have not had contact with the service provider in months, even years, and that they were not aware of the situation they are currently in. When the YWCA DVPP case managers try to contact the service provider, they are told it will be months before they can be seen. This is the same with addiction. Currently, there is no way for a victim to receive services for addiction without having to wait weeks or even months for it with some trying to go through an emergency department but are turned away immediately.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics related to substance use and/or mental health?

There has been an increase in sheltered children, ages 9-16, cutting and having a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Historically, YWCA has never seen these levels of trauma. These situations require rapid response to get individuals into the services they need so families can successfully move forward, especially when dealing with violence.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

While the services never stopped during the pandemic, the staff did experience more burnout due to staffing issues and having to be constantly exposed to people who were at high risk for COVID-19. Additionally, the number of individuals requesting housing dropped slightly. But the pandemic was especially bad for domestic violence victims when the stay-at-home order went into effect because there was no longer a safe place for them to reside. Furthermore, there was an increase in the number of children who were sexually assaulted and a tremendous increase in the amount of physical violence that occurred during the first year of COVID-19. However, one silver lining was that more domestic violence victims were able to be housed because of the funding provided as a result of the pandemic.

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

About 90% of sheltered clients admit to using marijuana now that it is legal.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

There are gaps in accessible services for people with mental health and substance use disorders. Most providers are still working from home and, thus, the services are not adequate to serve such a severe issue. Some are still offering phone or virtual appointments but that does not allow them to fully recognize the condition of the patient.

What factors do you perceive are contributing to the substance use and mental health problem in our community?

The trauma many endured during the pandemic including the lack of human contact, lack of services, fear of contracting COVID-19, and the loss of loved ones has contributed to the growing mental health and substance use problem in Central Virginia.

Public Schools

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Supervisor of Student & Family Services from Amherst County Schools as well as the Director of Student Services and District Students & Family Support Specialist from Appomattox County Schools.

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

There's been an increase in marijuana use in schools because of the recent law change. More specifically, the availability of vapes has contributed to the rising problem as THC vapes are spiking in use. As a result of the rising use and possession of the substance, more students are receiving long term suspensions which is likely impacting their academic experience.

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

Since the start of the school year, there has been a significant spike in mental health related episodes and assessments experienced by the school. Within the first 30 days of the year, there were over 200% more threat assessments done compared to the 2019-2020 school year. Additionally, there's been an increase in bomb threats and mental health related issues, like suicidal tendencies, throughout the schools. It's been a significant challenge to address these problems because there are waiting lists everywhere for mental health services. Teachers are doing the best they can, but they aren't mental health providers and, therefore, are not equipped to handle these issues. Teachers are emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted and struggling to keep up with the students as are the parents who want to get their children the help they need.

Have you or your organization observed any trends in demographics related to substance use and/or mental health?

Starting with the youngest population in schools, most problems faced in the elementary schools are parent related. Parents fail to acknowledge the issues of their children and neglect them. Regarding middle schoolers and high schoolers, most of the problems are truancy based. Students don't do what they're supposed to do and are very defiant. Furthermore, there tend to be more females involved in incidents than males. Recently, in Appomattox County, a couple of girls received criminal charges that might be mental health related. However, Tik Tok has also been a major issue within the schools and is likely a contributor to disruptive behavior among middle school and high school students. Lastly, there has recently been an increase in the number of kids in foster care with behavioral concerns. There aren't a lot of resources available for that population of students so there needs to be more focus placed on them to ensure they're doing well and getting any help they may need.

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

The newest trend related to substance use experienced by schools is the rise in vaping among students. It's become so prevalent that primary and elementary school children are going to school with vapes. It's unclear where they are getting them from, but the students are likely getting them from a family member. Additionally, there's been a rise in marijuana

and methamphetamine use among the students which is similar to the substances used by the parents. Most of the parent substance use has remained consistent throughout the years but there has been an increase in alcohol consumption.

What impact, positive or negative, did the COVID-19 pandemic have on service delivery?

COVID-19 has caused a spike in mental health related issues in the schools throughout the region. Because of the necessary social distancing and remote learning, reintegrating into large crowds has been a struggle for a lot of children who now have high anxiety due to a lack of socialization. Furthermore, they went back to eating lunch in the cafeteria this year which resulted in multiple kids having breakdowns because they weren't comfortable around that many people. There is also an increase in phone usage in classes which is hindering learning. Additionally, there's been a rise in the number of kids with suicide ideations. But there are long waiting lists for mental health services, so, by the time they can receive help, critical time has passed with the students expected to continue doing their normal activities. The teachers continue to help students as much as they can but until the student's behavior and mental health issues are addressed, they won't be able to learn properly which will have long term impacts on them as they grow up.

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

As mentioned previously, the change in marijuana laws and COVID-19 have had a significant impact on substance use and mental health problems within the school. But in addition to those recent influences, the availability of vapes has also contributed to the rise in substance use. Vape stores are popping up all over the community which is making accessibility to them almost a non-issue. Therefore, with the rise in accessibility to vapes and the legalization of marijuana, there has been a rise in the younger population using vapes, specifically ones that contain TCH. As a result, more students are bringing them to school leading to a rise in substance-related disciplinary incidents that often end up impacting their academic experiences.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

One area that can be improved upon is the communication and information sharing that happens between schools and service providers. As of right now, it's very limited which makes it difficult for teachers to understand what's going on with the student and how best to help them. If a stronger partnership was built between schools and service providers, a student's problems could better be addressed across the board which could, in turn, help lower the number of behavioral and mental health related problems experienced within the schools.

Centra Health

The information summarized in this section was provided by the Senior Director of Nursing Operations Psychiatry & Behavioral Health and a Provider from Centra Health.

How has substance use and mental health impacted your organizations work?

COVID-19 caused a lot of restrictions that impacted the ability to give patients the level of treatment they needed. Centra couldn't take as many patients, had to discharge them quicker than usual, limit services due to isolation requirements, and reduce the facilities that take in mental health cases.

What impact has substance use and mental health had on your organizations service delivery?

There has been an increase in requests related to transportation needs around substance use and mental health. Additionally, the emergency rooms have been packed but there's been staffing shortages so there's been a lot of barriers to providing care to patients since the pandemic started. Lastly, there's a huge lack of state facilities with open beds, especially for psychiatric patients, so it can be very challenging to get patients the help and treatment they need.

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

The organization has observed more relapses, particularly with alcohol, due to the lack of in-person alcohol anonymous and narcotics anonymous meetings. So overall, the lack of peer support due to COVID and the restrictions put in place because of it has caused an increase in substance use. Additionally, there's been an increase in homeless patients as well since the community lost a homeless shelter and now relies solely on the Salvation Army which is a for-profit organization with many restrictions that often prevent patients from being able to receive services there. Lastly, there's been an increase in mental health diagnoses, and the need for outpatient services among the youth population will likely continue to be a major problem in the community.

Has your organization observed any changes in the number of referrals and admissions over the last year?

Yes, there's been an increase in the number of individuals seeking Centra Health services. Because of the increase, there are waitlists on a lot of the outpatient services offered as well as an increase in the alumni and residential services. As a result, relapses have been more common, but it's been difficult connecting patients to services due to the shortage of providers and therapists.

Has your organization observed any trends in demographics related to substance use?

There's been an increase in requests from the black population in the community as well as an increase in youth seeking services. It's great that more individuals are reaching out for help but unfortunately there are barriers to being able to provide all the services to people as they need them because of the staffing shortages.

What impact, positive or negative, did COVID-19 have on your organization’s services?

COVID-19 has made care more difficult with staff and patients very stressed out about the additional cleaning, masking, monitoring, and social distancing requirements. Additionally, the pandemic is causing patients to miss treatments which is resulting in more frequent relapses. Initially in residential services, if a patient tested positive for COVID, they were sent home. However, Centra has tried to find a way around that, like using iPads, since taking someone out of treatment is not ideal. Lastly, there have been a lot of challenges in the geriatric unit with family visitations. Some patients are in care for long periods of time and it’s important for both the patient and family to see each other. There was no visitation and strict restrictions on it for a long time, but it’s been reopened and resulted in great outcomes for the patients.

What impacted has recent changes in marijuana laws had on your organization?

There hasn’t been a big impact on the organization because of the law change. It is noted on their records if a patient tests positive for marijuana. However, that only requires an additional substance be added to their treatment plan. From a provider standpoint, there is a lot of emerging data to support the use of different marijuana related products for pain and anxiety, but the information is very restricted by the Board of Pharmacy.

Are you aware of any gaps in the services?

One gap is the data being released by the Board of Pharmacy around marijuana related product use in pain and anxiety management. Additionally, there’s a gap in outpatient substance use counseling, virtual treatment, and men’s and women’s supportive living. While Centra offers residential services, the ideal clinic pathway would be for patients to step down to a supportive service living following the 30-day residential treatment. However, there is a lack of that type of resource in the service area.

What factors do we perceive as contributing to substance use and mental health?

The huge homelessness crisis, COVID-19, and barriers to employment are all contributors to the substance use and mental health crisis in the region.

Conclusion

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 believe there is information that is missing or that can further substantiate this report. 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/>.