

# **Albemarle County Human Needs Assessment 2023**

## **Introduction**

The 2023 Albemarle County Human Services Needs Assessment constitutes an attempt to understand the needs of Albemarle County community members and the existing resources and strengths to address these needs. The Assessment is created by reviewing data in broad categories of community well-being, critical partner interviews, and conversations with internal expert providers within the Department of Social Services. While substantial data is reviewed and considered, data points selected for inclusion in the assessment are intended to be representative or emblematic of larger pools of information. This assessment is not a full scale discussion of all available community-level data though future iterations may be expanded to include additional categories or larger scope of analysis. Finally, this community benefits from a number of organizations gathering and reporting out on community well-being. As a result, this assessment draws heavily on existing reports including The Orange Dot Report, data from the regional Criminal Justice Planner, the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP), Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless Point-in-Time Count, Charlottesville Area Alliance annual reports, the Comprehensive Regional Housing Study and Needs Assessment, United Way Asset-Limited Income-Constrained Employed (ALICE) report, and many others.

## **Ways to use a Human Services Needs Assessment**

Human services needs assessments may be used in multiple ways. Localities use them to keep track of chronic community conditions and to identify emerging trends. They may be used to monitor and report out on changes in a given category of well-being, particularly after a service intervention, significant investment, or relevant policy change has occurred. Human services needs assessments may be used to inform strategic-planning, demonstrate need to external funders, and clarify legislative advocacy agendas. Finally, they may be used to determine priorities for funding and policy activities, as is recommended in this assessment.

## **Alignment with the Albemarle County Strategic Plan 2024-2028**

The Albemarle County Strategic Plan for 2024-2028 reflects a deep interest in the well-being of Albemarle County community members in the six broad goals:

- 1) Nurture a safe and healthy community.
- 2) Design programs and services that promote an equitable, engaged and climate-resilient community.
- 3) Invest in infrastructure and amenities that create connection, opportunity and well-being.
- 4) Encourage a vibrant community with economic and recreational opportunities that serve all community members.
- 5) Support exceptional educational opportunities.

- 6) Recruit and retain engaged public servants who provide quality government services to advance our mission.

This assessment is strongly aligned with the broad intention of the new strategic plan and specifically responsive to:

**Safety & Well-being Goal #1:**

- *1.1 Support community safety through highly responsive services*
- *1.2 Enhance and develop human services initiatives to assist community in accessing existing resources*

**Resilient, Equitable and Engaged Community Goal #2:**

- *2.3 Foster community partnerships and engagement around county priorities*

**Quality of Life Goal #4:**

- *4.3 Implement Housing Albemarle*

**Context**

This assessment draws upon data and reports that were conducted in relative recent history in order to provide the most relevant context. It is important to note that the post-pandemic context is uncharted territory in many ways: most community-based service providers are significantly under-staffed and it is not at all clear how to recruit and retain staff in this new world of work, the substantial Federal resources funneled into this community in the form of CARES Act and ARPA are now ‘unwinding’, the economic landscape is highly uncertain which demands a heightened vigilance for individuals, families, localities and systems of care. Community-based providers and staff in the Department of Social Services report that families and individuals presenting for services have a more acute need and a more complex set of interconnecting need than has been the case in recent years. This calls for a more concentrated and coordinated effort to resolve needs. It is also important to note that the burdens described in the datasets below are not shouldered the same across demographics in our community. With few exceptions, people of color, and particularly members of the Black community, are disproportionately impacted by the concerns and challenges that follow. This calls for the inclusion of culturally responsive services in our collective responses as a baseline.

## Financial Need

While a significant majority of families in Albemarle County do not struggle with financial need, many families in Albemarle County struggle making ends meet. There are two populations that are of particular concern – those that live at or below the Federal definition for poverty, and those that are working but limited by income and assets. The overall poverty rate for Albemarle County is 7.67% or just under 8,000 households. There are 22,353 children in the county and 8.2% of them live in poverty. There are 22,416 individuals over 65 years of age and 7.0% of them live in poverty.

The October 2022 ‘Orange Dot Report 5.0’, a study of family self-sufficiency in the Charlottesville region, produced by Piedmont Virginia Community College reported that 9,413 families, or 14% of area households, do not earn enough to afford the essentials of life including food, housing, clothing, utilities or the resources needed to work traditional jobs, including transportation or childcare. This represents a 25% reduction in the number of families similarly struggling, which is promising news overall. For Albemarle County, there are 2,614 households that meet the Orange Dot criteria for inclusion. Of these 2,614:

- 22% earn between \$0 and \$14,999 in annual income
- 78% earn between \$15,000 and \$34,999 in annual income

Authors of The Orange Dot report assert that \$35,000 per year is the income threshold required to meet basic needs in this region.

<https://virginiaequitycenter.github.io/orange-dot/OrangeDot5-0.html>

United Way studies and tracks families that are struggling financially but do not meet the federal definitions for living in poverty. This group, called ALICE – Asset-Limited Income-Constrained Employed, serves as a proxy for families of concern across the country. United Way reports the following data for Albemarle County for calendar year 2021:

% of households identified as ALICE: 32% (higher than state average of 28%)  
% of households in poverty: 7% (lower than state average of 10%)

Not all families experience financial struggle the same:

- A disproportionate percentage of ALICE households are Black, Hispanic or multi-racial
- A disproportionate percentage of ALICE households are headed by single adults
- A disproportionate percentage of ALICE households have heads of household under 25

In Albemarle County, the highest percentage of households meeting the ALICE definition (58%) lives in Jack Jouett District while the highest number of households meeting the ALICE definition (8,524) live in the Scottsville District.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/virginia>

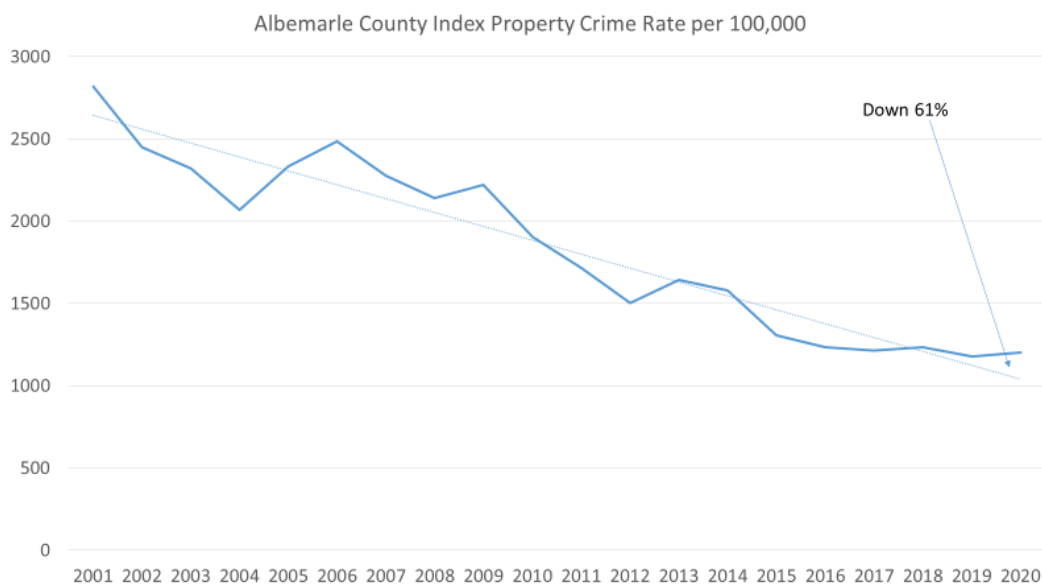
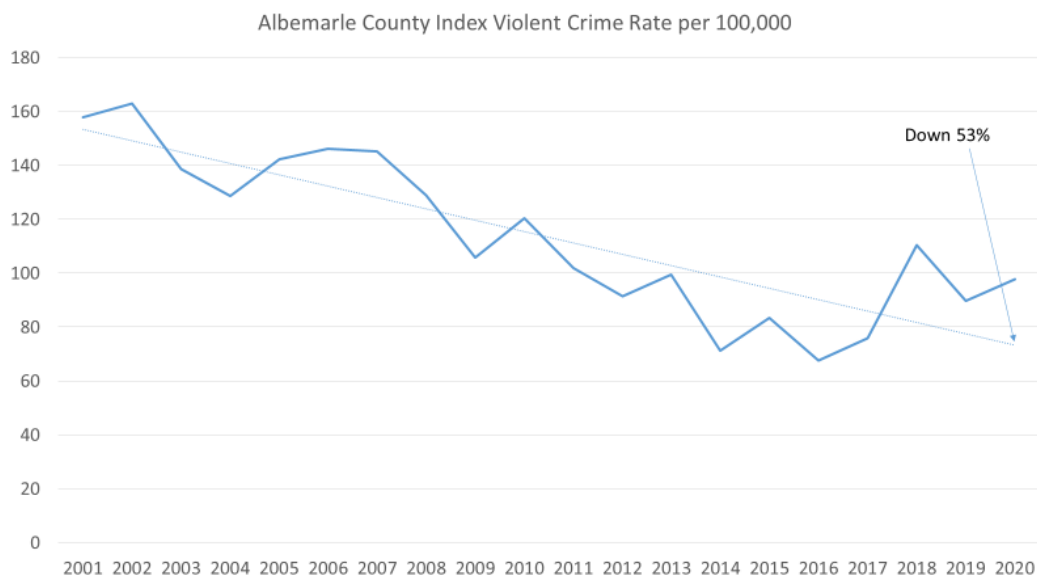
Feeding America tracks data on food insecurity rates by locality. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle. Food insecurity in Albemarle County is improving. The table below reflects people and percentage of the population of the county experiencing food insecurity:

2016 – 9,290/9%
2017 – 9,520/9.1%
2018 – 8,890/8.4%
2019 – 9,200/8.6%
2020 – 8,310/7.6%
2021 – 7,570/6.8%

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/overall/virginia/county/albemarle>

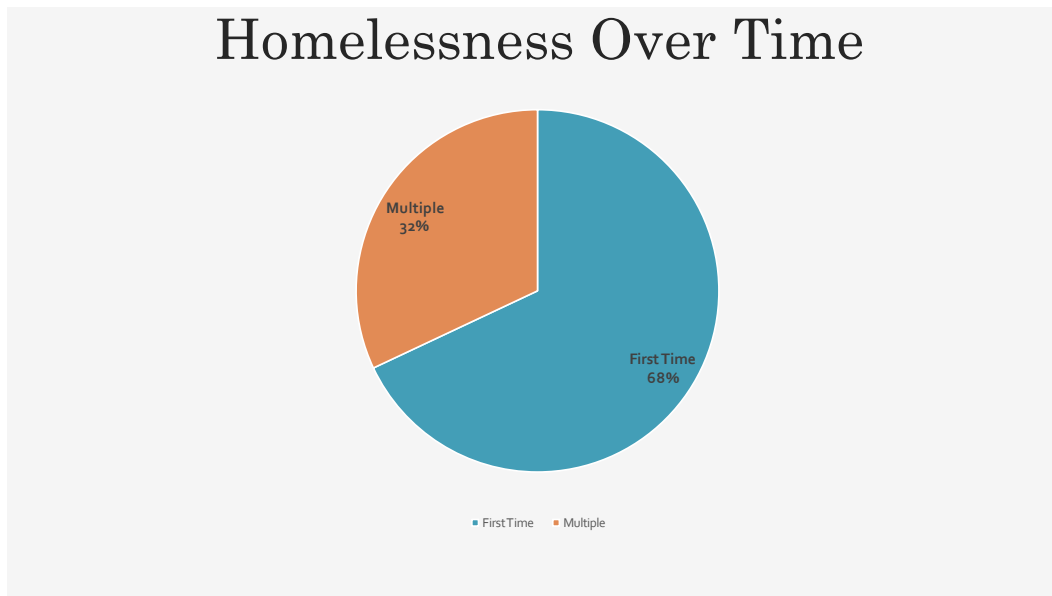
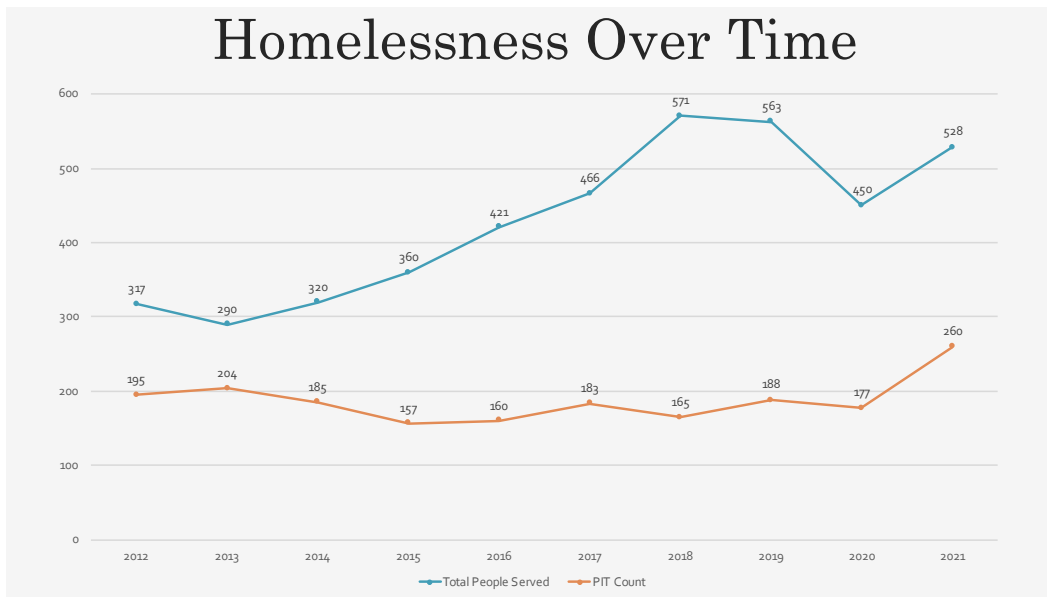
## Criminal Justice

Consistent with a national long-term trend, Albemarle County has experienced a decrease in property and personal crime over the last ten years. Criminal Justice Planner Neal Goodloe presented 'An Overview of Crime and Incarceration Rates in the Community Criminal Justice Board Jurisdictions' at the quarterly meeting of the Jefferson Area Community Criminal Justice Board on November 9, 2022. This report revealed a national reduction of 29% in the index violent crime rate and a reduction of 53% in Albemarle County in the last ten years. Similarly, index property crime rates fell nationally by 46% and in Albemarle County by 61%. Interestingly, the narcotics-related crime rate increased over the same period by 25%. Not surprisingly, given this trend and efforts to create jail avoidance programming, jail intakes fell by 32% between 2013-2023 while average length of stay in the jail increased.



## Homelessness

The Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless (BRACH) serves as the required lead agency for this region's continuum of care. In this role, BRACH conducts an annual count of people experiencing homelessness, called the Point-in-Time Count, generally in January. This count serves as the basis for longitudinal data for the homelessness system of care and includes information on individuals and families, types of services used, and demographic characteristics. After a sustained period of decline, largely due to improved coordination, additional resources, and additional permanent supportive housing units, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased substantially since 2020 with a majority (68%) of people experiencing homelessness for the first time.



## Housing

Like most localities in the region, Albemarle County is facing a shortage of affordable housing. Median home sales prices continue to rise and households pay increasingly higher percentages of their monthly income on housing costs. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines any household paying more than 30% of their monthly income on housing as 'housing cost burdened' and any household paying more than 50% towards housing as 'severely housing cost burdened'. According to Housing Forward Virginia, over 10,000 households in Albemarle County are so burdened:

- 5,535 households pay between 31% - 50% household income on housing
- 5,089 households pay over 50% household income on housing
- 17% of owner-occupied units are housing cost burdened
- 42% of renters are housing cost burdened

The Comprehensive Regional Housing Study and Needs Assessment developed by Partners for Economic Solutions for Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission in 2019 forecast the need for 10,070 units of affordable housing to meet the predicted needs in 2040 as follows:

- 23% serving households earning less than 30% area median income
- 31% serving households earning between 30% and 50% area median income
- 36% serving households earning between 50% and 80% area median income
- 10% serving households earning between 80% and 100% area median income

### Average cost of housing in Albemarle County

**Median Household Income 2023 = \$123,300**

The median household income is the middle of the income range - half of county households earn more than the median and half earn less than this amount. Assuming a 30-year, 6.0% fixed rate mortgage, with a \$25,000 down payment, and a monthly debt of \$1,000, a family earning the median household income can afford to purchase a home for \$393,000.

**Median Homes Sale Price 1st Quarter 2023 = \$458,798\***

This is 16% higher than the amount a family earning the median household income can afford.

\*Source: Charlottesville Area Association of Realtors 1st Quarter 2023 Home Sales Report

**Housing Wage\* = \$26.94/hour or \$56,040 annually**

The housing wage represents the hourly wage a full-time worker must earn in order to afford to rent a modest 2-bedroom apartment with rent costing no more than 30% of the worker's income. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that, today, a modest 2-bedroom apartment in Albemarle County rents for an average of \$1,401 per month. 62% of people working in Albemarle County earn less than the housing wage.

\*Housing Wage = ((avg. 2-BR rent/.3)\*12 months)/2,080 hours

<https://housingforwardva.org/toolkits/sourcebook/affordability-costburden/>  
<https://tjpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CVRHP-Housing-Needs-Assessment-Packet-web.pdf>

## Behavioral Health

The Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition (MHWC) serves as this region's convening and coordinating service. MHWC collects and shares regional data on need, access and use of area behavioral health services, advocates for practice and policy changes at the local and state level, and promotes a healthy coalition by examining disparities. MHWC worked with the Blue Ridge Department of Public Health to share behavioral data in the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) assessment process and helped to develop recommendations for action in the Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIP).

Blue Ridge Health District MAPP/CHIP Mental & Behavioral Health Goals for 2023-2025 include:

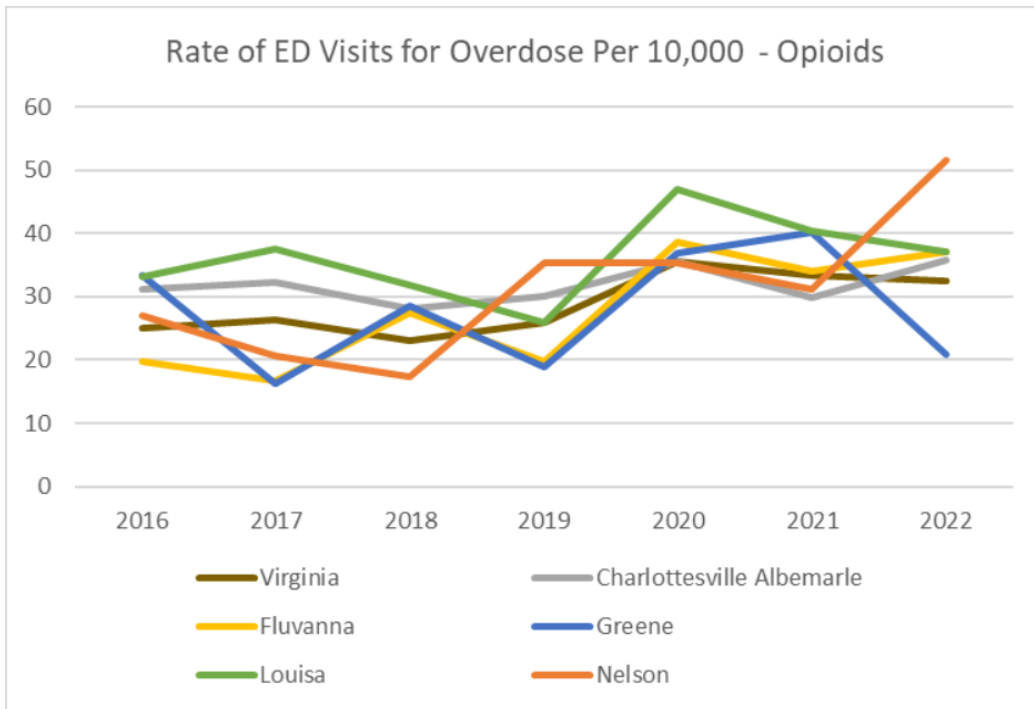
- Expand capacity for racially & culturally responsive behavioral health care
- Increase access to care
- Promote policies, systems, and environments that improve behavioral health & wellness

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/blue-ridge/chip-mental-health/>

Albemarle County Police and Fire Rescue respond to a significant number of calls for service involving mental health or substance abuse concerns. These calls are increasing in frequency:

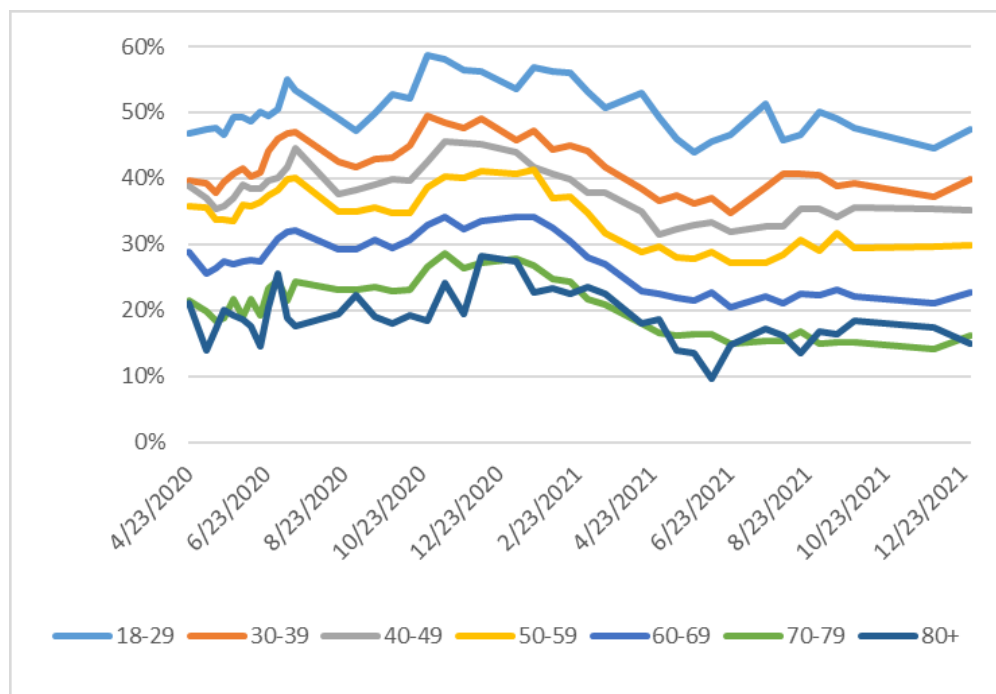
- For calendar year 2021, mental health calls for services are up 8% compared to the average of calls for service in the last 3 years.
- Suicides are up 31% from 2020 and 110% from 2019.
- ACPD has responded to over 700 behavioral health calls in calendar year 2021 involving over 2,200 hours of officer time in the process.
- ACFR has responded to behavioral health calls as follows:
  - Psychiatric Problem:
    - 2018 = 62 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2019 = 77 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2020 = 62 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2021 = 99+ calls for service from dispatch
  - Overdoses Poisoning:
    - 2018 = 133 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2019 = 141 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2020 = 141 calls for service from dispatch
    - 2021 = 166+ calls for service from dispatch





Virginia Department of Health

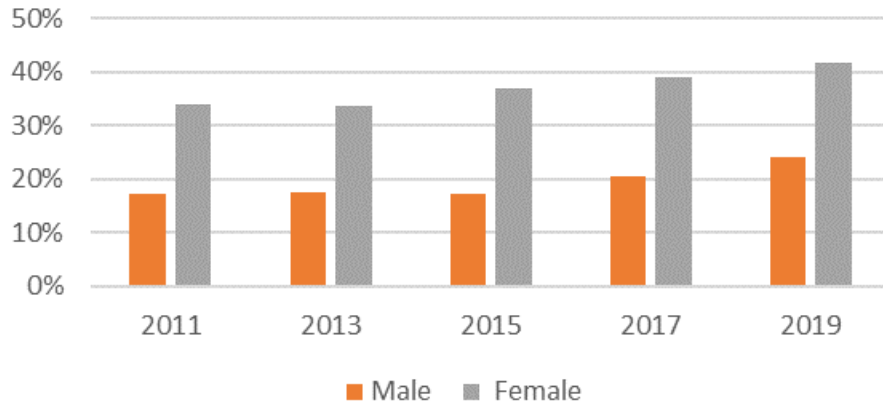
Local data on behavioral health mirrors state data collected by the Centers for Disease Control Pulse Survey showing that younger adults experience symptoms of depression and anxiety at higher rates than other age groups:



Local providers have raised the alarm about an increase in the number of teens experiencing anxiety and depression, maxing the capacity of community-based providers and reflected in

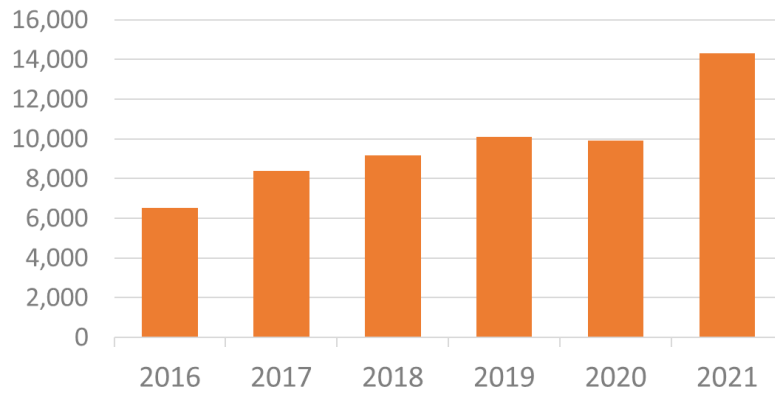
school-based efforts to improve assessment processes and expand peer support resources. This experiential data is also mirrored by state data:

### Percentage of Virginia High School Students Who Felt Sad or Hopeless by Gender



Virginia Youth Survey

### Number of ED visits related to suicidal thoughts, self-harm, & suicide attempts among Virginia youth aged 9-18 years



Virginia Department of Health

‘The Sequential Intercept Model Mapping Report for Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville’ developed by Policy Research Associates, Inc, on behalf of the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services office in August 2022, recommended:

- Establish crisis receiving center options without barriers to entry
- Stabilize workforce recruitment and retention across behavioral health and criminal justice systems
- Expand mobile crisis options

- Increase short and long-term housing options for individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders

Additional sources of data on community well-being & capacity:

<http://jlarc.virginia.gov/landing-2022-csb-behavioral-health-services.asp>

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/data-policy-funding/data-reports/data-collection/special-education>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/virginia/albemarle-county#overview>

<https://charlottesvilleareaalliance.org/2019-survey-results/>

## Discussion and the role of Albemarle County

Data presented in this inaugural human services needs assessment constitute broad categories of community well-being. This community is rich with services and initiatives in every category. There are convening organizations and providers actively engaged in understanding the nuanced needs of community members and creating appropriate community interventions.

Albemarle County has a role to play in many of these efforts:

- Staff serve on coalitions and problem-solving teams
- Funding through the Agency Budget Review Team supports community nonprofit providers
- Housing Albemarle promises to impact local development of affordable housing
- The Housing Fund supports nonprofit developers in their efforts to build deeply affordable and permanent supportive housing units
- The Human Services Alternative Response Team (HARTs) will provide an alternative to traditional emergency service response to behavioral health calls for service
- Albemarle County partners with providers in the pursuit of funding from state and Federal sources including the Virginia State Opioid Abatement Authority, the Community Development Block Grant, the Department of Environmental Quality, and many others

The recommendations that follow represent additional opportunities for Albemarle County to positively impact community members in need. All are selected because the need is on the rise and the local capacity is at or beyond the limit.

## Recommendations

- 1) After a significant, steady period of decline, the number of people experiencing homelessness has risen in the last two years. While likely a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to identify which causative factor is most relevant. The Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless is working to create additional emergency shelter resources to respond to this rise in the number of people in need, with many stakeholders in this community engaging in conversation on the need for a year-round, bricks and mortar emergency shelter. Additional permanent supportive housing beds in the Premier Circle project will positively impact the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness. (*The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines 'chronic homelessness' as a period of 12 continuous months and a disabling condition.*) While few social and housing interventions in this region have sufficient capacity to respond effectively to the need *and* solve the concern, families experiencing homelessness are profoundly vulnerable with limited family-friendly, safe resources in the continuum of care. Families experiencing housing instability with young children are at higher risk of involvement in other systems of care, including child welfare.

**Recommend prioritizing services for families with children experiencing housing instability and homelessness.**

- 2) In the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 10 adults in the United States reported experiencing a mental health condition. In 2022, 4 in 1 reported the same. This concerning shift is even more evident in younger adults and youth. It is clear that the pandemic experience increased and exacerbated behavioral health challenges for us all. Recommendations for improvements in hospital and community-based behavioral health services were included in the Community Health Improvement Plans developed by the Blue Ridge Department of Health, and in the UVA President's Working Group on Public Health. A new child and adolescent behavioral health clinic, developed by Sentara Hospital and the University of Virginia health system, is a welcome addition to this community's service array. Region Ten and Albemarle County Public Schools have partnered to develop mental health literacy and peer supports. Despite these developments, there are insufficient community-based behavioral health services for adolescents experiencing mental health challenges.

**Recommend prioritizing community-based mental health services for teens.**

**Recommend funding spots for Albemarle County youth to participate in evidence-based positive youth development programming at Community Attention Youth Internship Program (CAYIP) and Teens Give.**

**Recommend continued support of alternative response team (HARTs) and coordination of efforts with Region Ten's proposed expansion of the crisis receiving center and mobile crisis response.**

- 3) Despite a long-term pattern of reduced personal and property crime in this region, reflective of a long-term national trend, gun violence has become a local concern. Since the beginning of September 2022, 23 people have been injured and 13 people killed as a result of gun violence. The chiefs of police from Albemarle, Charlottesville and the University of Virginia have established regular information-sharing and communication strategies to respond in a coordinated way. Leadership from Albemarle County, City of Charlottesville, and the University of Virginia have jointly created a Community Safety Working Group to develop recommendations for this community on ways to respond to and prevent violence.

**Recommend continuing to participate in information-sharing and strategy-development activities with regional partners and preparing to support Working Group recommendations.**

- 4) While this region boasts many community-based providers, family and youth development services, and a robust mandated safety net service array, stakeholders and consumers universally report difficulty in navigating this diverse system of care. Indeed,

the most consistent concern identified during internal Department of Social Services focus groups, and in stakeholder interviews, was lack of navigation assistance. This was particularly true in two common situations:

- Individual or family needs extra help in completing applications for service
- Individual or family does not qualify for mandated service but is nevertheless in significant need

Because existing community providers are consistently understaffed, or already beyond their caseload capacity, they must prioritize those individuals or families that meet requirements for service. Community data and provider experience make it clear that there is a substantial opportunity to support individuals or families that need extra help but are not yet in such need that the system is required to provide care. The help that is needed in these cases is not professional or clinical care but straightforward navigation assistance. It should not be surprising that the system of care is overwhelming to community members already struggling in some way. Helping these families find their way to a needed service not only supports a highly vulnerable household but could help avoid the need for deep-end, more expensive services that do not prioritize personal agency. Some examples that were shared during discussions:

- Assisting families with applications for housing voucher and benefit programs
- Helping seniors and/or family members negotiate the insurance, service and housing options while aging
- Problem-solving challenging situations that do not meet the requirements for Adult Protective Services
- Supporting housing voucher holders in their search for affordable housing and landlord communication
- Assisting in follow up after a HARTs team contact or a HUMAINS referral

**Recommend investing in navigation services, internally and externally, with a priority for seniors that are in need but do not meet the criteria for an open Adult Protective Services case.**