2025

Community Health Needs Assessment

& Implementation Plan

Introduction

According to the Internal Revenue Service, a critical access hospital organization is required to conduct a community health needs assessment (CHNA) every three years and to adopt an implementation plan (IP). Similar to a local public health department requiring a community health assessment and community improvement plan, these assessments guide and provide an approach to prioritize local resources to meet the community's needs.

Kittson Memorial Hospital Association doing business as Kittson Healthcare collaborated closely with the Kittson Healthcare Public Health Department to meet the requirements and the deliverables of the implementation plan.

The northwest corner of Minnesota is unique in that four of the five local public health departments that make up the Healthy Quin Counties Community Health Board (CHB) and serve the region are located within critical access hospitals. This contributes to close partnerships and the ability to share finite resources to complete the assessment process.

In 2025, Andrea Swenson, Chief Executive Officer, leads Kittson Healthcare and Jeanna Kujava, Public Health Director, leads the Kittson Healthcare Public Health Department. Patrick Olson, Data Analyst of Healthy Quin Counties CHB assisted with county wide demographic and health statistical data.

Overview

Kittson Healthcare is a non-profit, non-affiliated, locally owned and operated 501(c) 3 organization that has served the community since 1922. Kittson Healthcare is a federally designated Critical Access Hospital, a state-designated Sole Community Hospital and an Essential Community Provider. Kittson Healthcare has been the sole hospital in Kittson County since January 1995.

Kittson County is considered deep rural or a frontier county and has 1,098.8 square miles of land making it the 18th largest county in Minnesota (MN) by total area. Kittson County, MN is bordered by Pembina County, North Dakota to the west, Roseau County, MN to the east, Marshall County, MN to the south and Ontario, Canada to the north.

Kittson Healthcare's primary service area includes Kittson County, a portion of northwest Marshall County and the northeastern border of North Dakota. According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (2024), the population of Kittson

County in 2024 listed 3,992 people with a decline of 5.1% in population since 2020. The 2023 MN employment rate measured 61.4% with a median household income of $69,615. Between April 2020 and July 2024, Kittson County experienced a natural population decrease of 162 people (more deaths than births), along with an estimated net migration loss of 54 people, resulting in a total population decline of 217 residents.

The poverty rate for Kittson County is 9.7% compared to 9.2% for the state of MN. When broken down by age group, 7.2 percent of children under the age of 18 and 17.1 percent of seniors aged 65 and older are living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The population of Kittson County identify primarily as the race and ethnicity of white with the next largest race and ethnicity indicating Hispanic or Latino.

Kittson County consists of a predominately agricultural-based economy and small businesses. Kittson County showed some short-term growth, placing 60th in year-over-year economic expansion, its overall progress since 2019 has been slower, ranking 78th in long-term growth. Employment in the county remains below pre-pandemic levels, indicating that the local economy has not fully recovered from the impacts of the COVID-19 recession (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic, 2024).

Amid the economic conditions, Kittson Healthcare stands out as one of the county's largest employers, with more than 160 direct hire employees. Kittson Healthcare operates a 12-bed licensed hospital offering inpatient, swing bed, observation beds and respite services. The facility provides 24-hour emergency care, endoscopy services, laboratory, x-ray, mobile diagnostic scanning (MRI and mammography), and a 64 slice CT on site. Ultrasound services are available in house and appointments are available weekly.

Kittson Healthcare provides cardiac rehabilitation services and contracts with Big Stone Therapies, Inc. for physical, occupational, and speech-language pathology services for therapy services. Rural Psychiatry Associates provides psychiatric and mental health telehealth services to nursing home residents and outpatient clinic patients. In response to past community needs assessments, Kittson Healthcare contracts with Alluma, a community mental health center for outreach mental health and mental wellness services for in person or telehealth counseling services.

Kittson Healthcare operates an attached 50-bed nursing home including skilled care, an ambulance service, an 8-bed assisted living facility and two federally designated Rural Health Clinics located in Karlstad and Hallock. Kittson Healthcare recently acquired a locally owned retail pharmacy; oversees a certified home health agency and local public health department.

Recognizing the value of receiving services locally, the following visiting providers have an established presence within the Rural Health Clinic Hallock and include; Audio Care, Dermatology, Endoscopy, Obstetrics & Gynecology, orthopedics, and a Registered Dietician certified in diabetes care and as an education specialist.

The Federal Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) has designated Kittson County, Minnesota as a geographic Health Professional Shortage Area. The specific shortage areas include primary care, mental health and dental health (data.HRSA.gov).

The closest secondary hospital is located in Thief River Falls, MN or Grand Forks, ND, which is 75 miles from Hallock. The nearest tertiary hospital is located 150 miles away in Fargo, North Dakota. Travel to these locations during the winter months can be challenging, especially for our aging population.

According to medical records data from 2021, Kittson County's two major contributors of death are heart disease and cancer. In comparison to counties of similar size, additional areas of concern identified low rates of seasonal influenza coverage, high rates of children living in poverty and high rates of alcohol impaired driving deaths.

Positive health outcomes to highlight in comparison to similar size counties identified few low birthweight infants, low rates of uninsured and high rates of High School completion (2022 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps). Having access to a critical access hospital and primary care services within the service area is essential to preventing illness and disease, managing chronic diseases while aging in place, and responding to emergencies and stabilizing patients.

Since 1986, the federal law known as the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) governs the actions of Kittson Healthcare. This law was enacted to ensure public access to emergency services regardless of ability to pay and prevent the delay of treatment. Furthermore, Section 1867 of the Social Security Act requires Medicare participating hospitals providing emergency services to provide a medical screening examination or treatment for an emergency medical condition such as active labor regardless of ability to pay. Hospitals such as Kittson Healthcare are required to provide stabilizing treatment and if unable to or by patient request implement an appropriate transfer (cms.org).

The Community Care program is available through the business office to assist individuals with paying their healthcare bills for services rendered at Kittson Healthcare. The business office is available to assist individuals with completing enrollment forms and are available for additional information about the Community Care program.

Methods

The 2025 Kittson Healthcare Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)/Implementation Plan (IP) and the joint Kittson County Community Health Assessment (CHA)/Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) process began by forming a workgroup within Kittson Healthcare led by Andrea Swenson, Chief Executive Officer and Jeanna Kujava, Public Health Director. The workgroup also included the following members Kalie Bjerke, current Hospital Director of Nurses, Kirk Sutton, previous Hospital Director of Nurses, Laura Hanson, Nursing Home Director of Nurses, Jodee Sugden, Home Health & Assisted Living Administrator, and Jen Peterson, Clinic Manager. Patrick Olson, Data Specialist, Healthy Quin Counties Community Health Board provided secondary data and Jacey Spaeth, Public Health Project Corp Volunteer assisted.

The 2025 survey questions reflected identical questions asked from the 2022 survey with a few additional questions added. This was intentional in order to create comparison data. The survey software populated the survey questions and captured zip code data. The survey tool was titled 2025 Kittson County Community Health Needs Assessment Survey. Multiple formats of the survey were created and included a QR code, web link and paper copies in order to capture a high rate of completion. A paid ad was published in the North Star News weekly newspaper and the Kittson County Enterprise followed by scheduled social media posts. The public education campaign educated the community about the importance of completing the assessment. Paper copies of the survey were provided to area senior centers or community centers located in the largest cities of Hallock, Lancaster, Karlstad, Lake Bronson and Kennedy and served as an age-friendly approach. The paper surveys also allowed for gathering input from individuals with limited technology skills or that lacked access to the internet.

Employees of Kittson Healthcare reflect each city in Kittson County. Employees were therefore engaged in the assessment process in a variety of ways. Education about the assessment process was included on the agenda of multiple monthly department manager meetings in order to garner support and department level understanding of the CHNA/CHA process and purpose. Department managers promoted survey completion and employees were encouraged to volunteer at the Kittson County Fair Booth during work time. The survey QR code and link was printed and shared by the business office in monthly billing mailings. The survey was available at the front desk of the business office and the clinic. Survey QR code and link was printed and shared via interdepartmental mailboxes at the three public school districts as well as the Kittson County Courthouse. Jacey Spaeth and Jeanna Kujava uploaded the paper survey results into the Survey Monkey software where all of the results were tabulated together and anonymous. The goal was to capture a minimum of 100 returned surveys. The survey was open starting January 2025 and closed May 2025 after achieving the goal of 104 surveys collected.

The workgroup met regularly up to monthly, provided essential feedback throughout the duration of the process and attended workgroup meetings as scheduling would allow. The workgroup made the decision to prioritize promotion of the survey tool over conducting focus groups and key informant interviews based upon staff capacity, workload and project budget.

The Public Health Corp volunteer project coordinator staff time, Foundational Public Health Capability Grant funding and Kittson Healthcare in kind staff time was utilized to support the assessment process. Kittson County Bucks were given away as a drawing at the Kittson County Fair as an incentive to vote for top health priorities. The workgroup reviewed the survey results and organized them into five priorities. Next, Jen Peterson, RN Clinic Manager included the identified priorities on the next standing medical staff meeting for discussion with the Kittson Healthcare medical providers. The Kittson Healthcare medical director and healthcare providers reviewed the five priorities, and offered feedback. There was consensus among the members of the workgroup and members of the medical staff to move forward with public engagement to reduce the five priorities down to three priorities that would then guide the implementation plan.

Using a paper vote or ballot based survey, the public voted for their top three of the five priorities selected by the workgroup and the medical staff. Through an interactive display booth at the Kittson County Fair, the public was engaged to participate. The theme was “The Path to Wellness” and included a find and seek activity for children as well as a drawing to win Kittson County Bucks for individuals who included their name and contact information in conjunction with their vote. Kittson Healthcare employees decorated a double booth space with a fun outdoor trail theme and included white lights, picnic table, stuffed animals and a fire pit display. Kittson Healthcare employees volunteered with the booth set up/take down as well as engaging the public as they visited the booth throughout the Kittson County Fair July 17-20, 2025. Over fifty-nine youth interacted by completing a find and seek activity card while one hundred and one members of the public aged 16 and older cast their vote for their priorities. The breakdown of votes consisted of some people only voting for one priority and others voting for three priorities from the options listed. The five health priority topics were Stroke, Diabetes including Obesity, Smoking including Vaping, Heart Health and Mental Health. The top three priorities

Based upon the total potential number of votes of 303, the top three priorities were calculated and determined to be:

1). Mental Health-84 votes (28% of the total votes)

2). Heart Health-68 votes (22% of the total votes)

3). Diabetes including Obesity-68 votes (21% of the total votes)

The community's most pressing concerns will guide future planning, programming, and resource allocation efforts through a coordinated hospital implementation plan and public health improvement plan.

Participant Profile and Community Alignment

As part of its 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), a convenience survey was conducted to gather local input, with 104 participants responding. When compared to the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, the 2025 CHNA sample included a higher proportion of respondents with college and graduate-level education, a greater number of older adults, and a significantly larger share of female participants. Racial and ethnic representation closely mirrored Kittson county demographics, with most respondents identifying as white and non-Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Comparing survey results with the ACS data is essential for understanding how well the participants reflect the broader community. Recognizing demographic differences helps to ensure that the voices of all residents are considered, especially those who may be underrepresented in the survey. This comparison supports more equitable decision-making by identifying whose perspectives are included and where additional outreach is needed to ensure everyone has a voice.

The 2025 CHNA survey offers valuable, timely insight into the priorities and experiences of local residents. While no single data source can capture every perspective, the inclusion of secondary data helps provide important context. The 2022 CHNA results are referenced to highlight how the population captured in the 2022 survey differs from the 2025 sample. The comparison between the 2022 CHNA and the 2025 CHNA isn't meant to evaluate one survey over another, but to highlight how differences in survey participants may affect results. Variations may reflect who responded rather than actual changes in community needs. By examining multiple data sources over time, we can distinguish real trends from data noise, leading to more accurate insights and inclusive planning.

Education

Education Attainment (Population 25 Years & Older)	2022 CHNA	2025 CHNA	ACS 2023 (5-Year Est.)
Less than high school	5%	1%	4%
High school graduate or GED	19%	12%	33%
Some college	14%	16%	35%
Associate's degree	11%	11%	14%
Trade/Vocational school*	11%	10%	

Bachelor's degree	30%	39%	21%
Graduate/Professional degree	9%	12%	7%

*ACS does not separately list Trade/Vocational school

Demographic

Age Group	2022 CHNA	2025 CHNA	ACS 2023 (5-Year Est.)
Under 18*		*	
18-24**	1%	4%	6%
25-34	10%	9%	9%
35-44	9%	20%	10%
45-54	13%	11%	11%
55-64	16%	14%	15%
65-74	27%	17%	15%
75 or older	25%	21%	7%

*ACS comparison for under 18 is not applicable, as the CHNA only includes a small subset of that age group **CHNA age group 18-24 vs. ACS age group 19-24.

Sex	2022 CHNA	2025 CHNA	ACS 2023 (5-Year Est.)
Female	72%	77%	50%
Male	27%	23%	50%

Interpretation and Trends

With the demographic context in mind, interpreting health condition data requires a careful look at how different sources align. This section compares self-reported health conditions from both the 2022 and 2025 CHNA surveys conducted by Kittson Healthcare with data from the 2022 and 2024 Health Trends Across Communities (HTAC), a statewide initiative led by the Minnesota Electronic Health Record Consortium.

Although Kittson Healthcare is not currently one of the participating health systems in HTAC, the initiative's broad methodology allows it to capture data from residents across the county. HTAC's integration of electronic health records from eleven systems statewide provides a strong foundation for identifying regional health trends. However, the absence of direct data from Kittson Healthcare means that care patterns specific to the organization may not be fully

reflected. Recognizing this distinction helps ensure that both local and statewide data are interpreted with appropriate context and used together to inform community health planning.

Overall, the results show strong consistency across datasets, offering a meaningful view of health trends in the region. However, three conditions stand out due to notable shifts in reporting: high blood pressure, mental health, and depression.

- **High blood pressure** reported by 51% of respondents in the 2022 CHNA, dropped to 36% in 2025. This decline is difficult to attribute solely to changes in outreach initiatives or survey design, suggesting that HTAC data may offer a more stable benchmark for tracking this condition over time.
- **Mental health** reporting showed a sharp decline, with 20% of respondents in 2022 indicating mental health concerns compared to just 5% in 2025.
- **Depression** remained consistently higher in the CHNA data (19% in 2025) than in HTAC (13%), pointing to potential differences in how local residents perceive or report mental health symptoms.

Other chronic conditions including asthma, COPD, stroke, and high cholesterol appeared at similar rates across both CHNA and HTAC datasets, suggesting stable patterns in the community (Minnesota EHR Consortium, 2024). These comparisons help validate local insights and support informed planning by highlighting which trends are consistent across sources and which may require further exploration or clarification.

Chronic Disease

Chronic Condition Comparison					
Health Condition	2022 CHNA Yes	2022 HTAC Yes		2025 CHNA Yes	2024 HTAC Yes
Anxiety	18%	23%		22%	24%
Asthma	9%	6%		6%	6%
Arthritis	33%	15%		18%	17%
Cancer	9%	16%		11%	16%
COPD	6%	4%		2%	4%
Depression	20%	13%		19%	13%
Diabetes	13%	12%		14%	12%
Heart Trouble or Angina	13%	7%		10%	7%
High Blood Pressure	51%	42%		36%	41%

High Cholesterol	39%	31%		31%	32%
Mental Health	20%	*		5%	*
Overweight	37%	32%**		33%	35%**
Stroke	3%	3%		4%	4.%
I have none of the above conditions	17%	***		27%	***

**** HTAC defines mental health conditions in more detail, so direct comparison may be limited. ** HTAC reports on obesity rather than overweight; interpret with caution due to differing definitions. *** HTAC does not include this metric.***

Health Behaviors and Access

While chronic conditions are critical to understanding long-term health outcomes, the broader context of health behaviors, access challenges, and lifestyle factors is equally important. These findings reveal how people experience health on a daily basis, including whether they can afford care, access nutritious food, manage stress, or stay physically active.

This information helps identify where systems and services may not be meeting community needs. For example, missed medical and dental care due to cost or availability highlights gaps in affordability and access. Unmet mental health needs and limited food options suggest opportunities for targeted support and local partnerships. Physical activity trends, especially among older adults, point to the need for age-friendly wellness programs. By addressing these everyday barriers, Kittson Healthcare and its partners can improve quality of life, reduce preventable health issues, and ensure that resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact.

The following findings from the 2025 CHNA survey provide a closer look at these everyday health experiences and highlight specific areas where action can be taken:

- **Health Status & Access**: Most respondents rated their health positively, and the majority had a primary care provider and recent medical visits. However, 1 in 5 reported missing medical care in the past year, often due to cost or perceived lack of urgency.
- **Dental Care**: While 70% had seen a dentist in the past year, 24% missed needed care, citing appointment availability, cost, and insurance barriers.

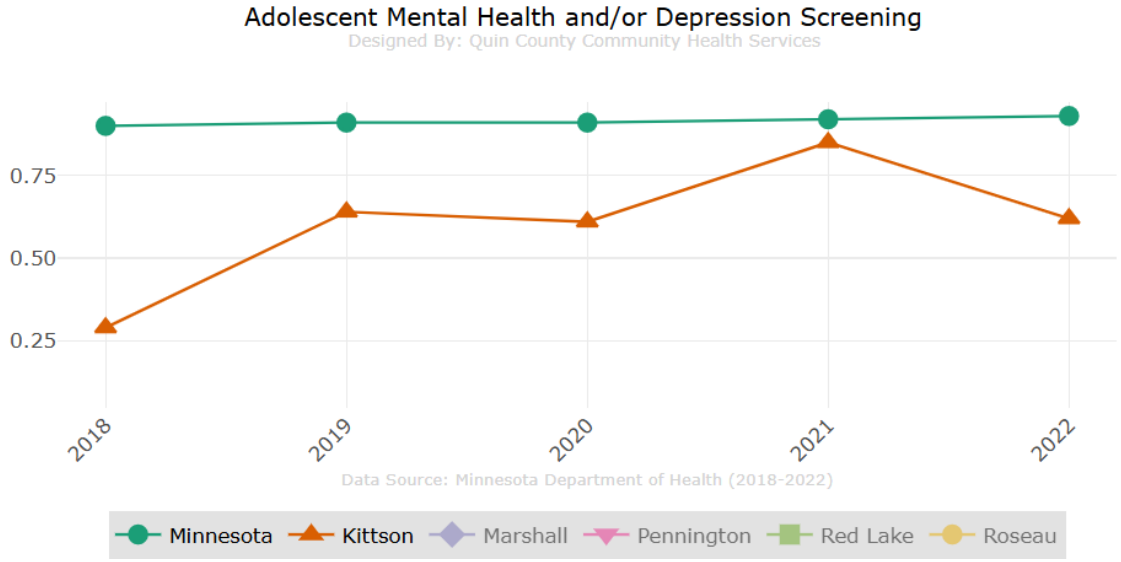
- **Mental Health**: 30% experienced symptoms like anxiety or hopelessness in the past 30 days, and 27% reported unmet mental health needs.

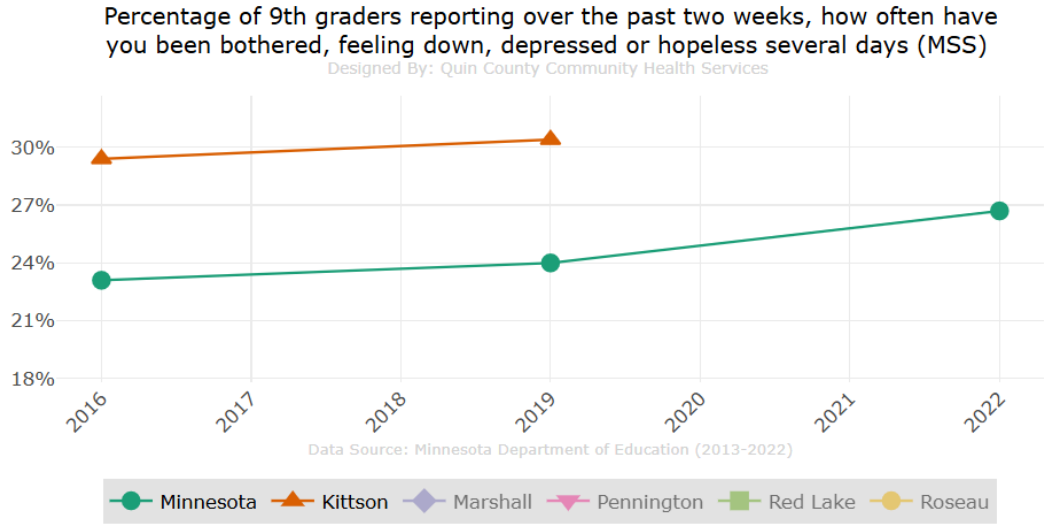
- **Nutrition & Food Access**: Many respondents consumed limited servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Food access varied, with 37% traveling over 30 miles for groceries and low engagement with farmers markets or local food sources.
- **Physical Activity**: Most respondents were physically active, though 35% reported no vigorous exercise. Notably, older adults (65+) were more likely to report general physical activity but had the lowest levels of vigorous activity, suggesting a need for age-appropriate fitness programs.
- **Substance Use**: Tobacco and cannabis use were low, while alcohol use varied, with 10% reporting frequent drinking (drinking 10 or more days in the past 30 days).

Strategic Secondary Data

To deepen understanding of the most pressing health concerns identified through the Kittson Healthcare health prioritization process, this section presents secondary data related to the top three focus areas: Mental Health, Heart Health, and Diabetes including Obesity. These priorities reflect both community input and strategic direction set by Kittson Healthcare and partners. By examining available data from state and national sources, this section provides additional context to support local planning, identify gaps in services, and guide resource allocation. The goal is to ensure that health improvement efforts are grounded in both community-defined priorities and evidence-based insights.

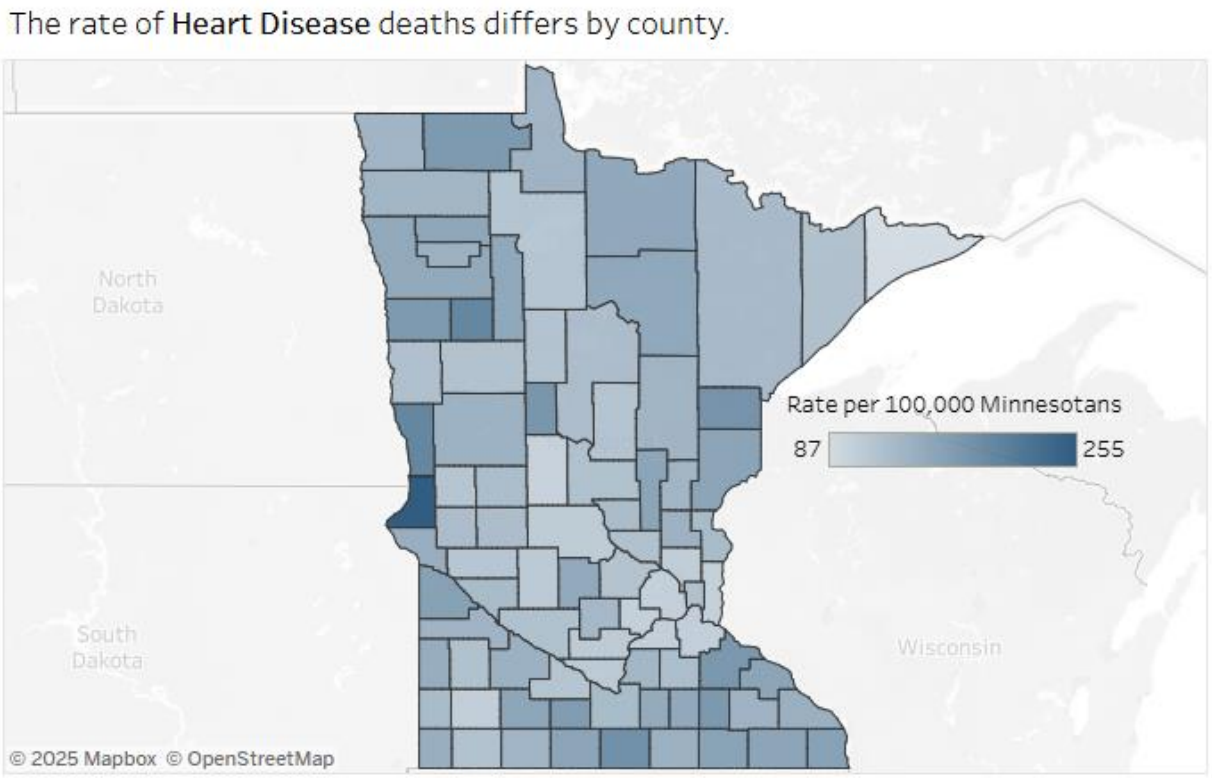
Recent data shows that adolescent mental health and depression screening rates in Kittson County have consistently trailed behind the statewide average. Early screening is a critical tool for identifying mental health concerns in youth, allowing for timely intervention and support (Healthy Quin Counties, 2024). The combination of lower screening rates and elevated reports of depression suggests that young people in Kittson County may not have adequate access to the resources and support needed to manage their mental health effectively.





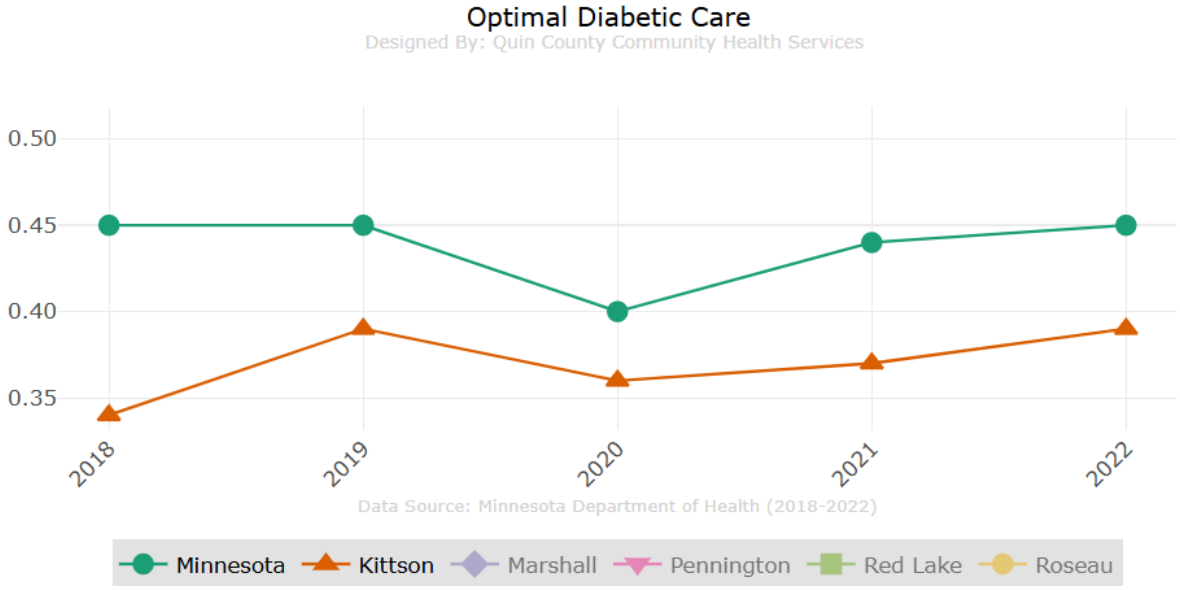
Heart disease remains a significant health concern across Minnesota, with notable variation in age-adjusted death rates between counties. From 2019 to 2023, the statewide average was 12 deaths per 10,000 residents (95% Confidence Interval 11.9 to 12.1). In comparison, Kittson County reported a higher rate of 13.8 deaths per 10,000 (95% Confidence Interval 10.2 to 17.3) (Minnesota Department of Health, 2024). Although the difference is not statistically significant, data from the Minnesota Electronic Health Record Consortium (2024) show that 48 percent of Kittson County residents had at least one condition associated with increased cardiovascular risk. This is notably higher than the statewide average of 36 percent. These risk factors include Type II diabetes, heart attack, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, peripheral vascular disease, stroke, and chronic kidney disease (Minnesota Electronic Health Record Consortium, 2024).

Local efforts to promote blood pressure control, healthy eating, physical activity, and routine screenings remain essential to reducing the burden of heart disease in the community.



**Unstable rate based on relative standard error > 30% and small counts. Rates should be interpreted with caution because they are based on a small number of deaths. In these cases, rates can change dramatically with only a small change in the number of deaths.*

From 2018 to 2022, Kittson County consistently reported lower rates of optimal diabetic care compared to the state average. Optimal care includes controlling blood pressure, maintaining HbA1c levels, taking statins if tolerated, avoiding tobacco, and using daily aspirin for those with ischemic vascular disease. While Minnesota hovered around 50 percent, Kittson ranged between 35 and 45 percent (Healthy Quin Counties, 2024). This gap highlights the need for improved access to preventive services, care coordination, and patient education to support better diabetes management in the community.

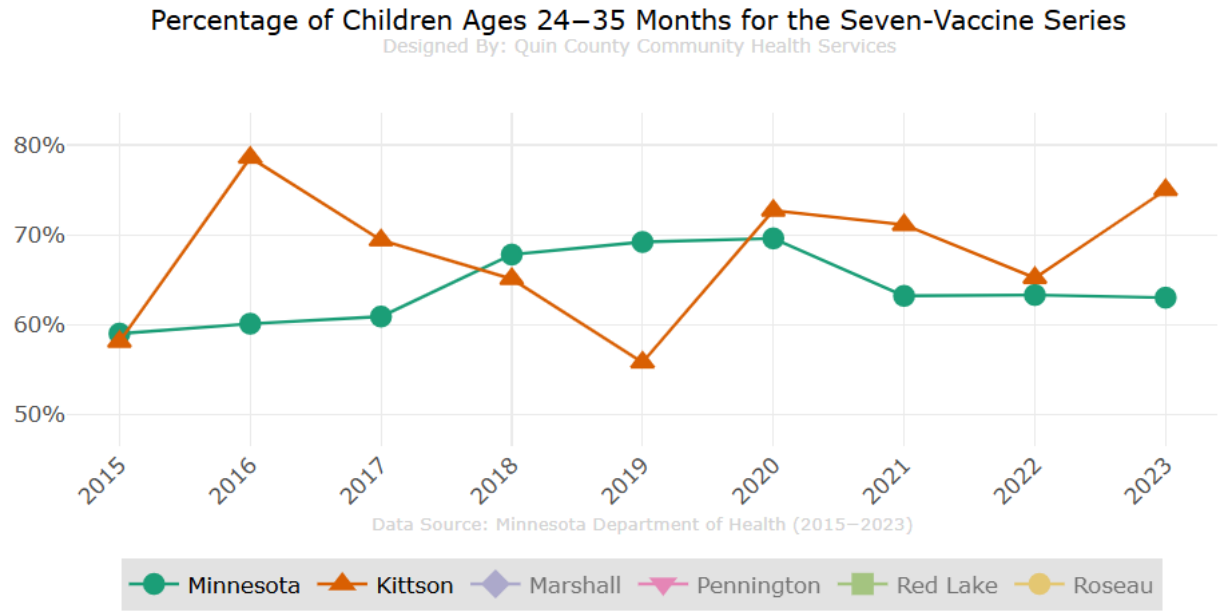


Broad Secondary Data

Exploring results beyond those suggested by the community helps provide insight into what may be missing or overlooked. While multiple key indicators were reviewed, only one stood out which was the immunization performance in Kittson County.

In 2023, Kittson County demonstrated strong performance in childhood immunization coverage. The county reported higher vaccination rates than the Minnesota state averages across several key vaccines, including those for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP), hepatitis A and B, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), pneumococcal conjugate (PCV), polio, rotavirus, and varicella. Among these, the most notable improvements were seen in DTaP, MMR, and PCV, each showing double-digit percentage increases compared to previous years (Healthy Quin Counties, 2024).

Prevention plays a vital role, especially when access to healthcare resources is limited. Although the focus often centers on areas needing improvement, this exceptional progress highlights what is possible and offers strong motivation to maintain and build upon this success. Continuing the impactful immunization efforts in Kittson County is essential for promoting long-term health outcomes and ensuring community well-being.



Implementation Strategy Recommendations

Kittson Healthcare and Kittson Healthcare Public Health Department will lead the implementation plan for improving the health of the community by monitoring and measuring progress, and impact of objectives, modify and adjust objectives as needed to align with required state standards and metrics, and identify opportunities for engaging additional partners and the community over the next three years.

While multiple health measures were investigated and will continue to be explored, the top community concerns for the 2025 implementation plan as voted upon by community members included;

- Mental Health
- Heart Health
- Diabetes including Obesity

In order to move forward, it will be essential to continue the community conversation related to improving the overall health of Kittson County. While this implementation plan has established steps toward improved health, it will require a personal commitment by each individual to engage in the process in order to achieve improved physical and mental health of Kittson County.

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