



2019

NH YOUNG
ADULT
ASSESSMENT

Sullivan County

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2019 NH YOUNG ADULT ASSESSMENT: SULLIVAN COUNTY

INTRODUCTION

Considering young adults as a unique population of study recognizing their risk and their promise. Young adults are our future leaders, parents, entrepreneurs, tradespeople, and workforce; yet they also engage in risky behaviors at a higher rate than those younger or older and are often a measure of the health of our communities.

Understanding the roots of their behaviors and perspectives can shed important light on the driving forces for social, economic and physical well-being. What are they concerned about? What is motivating them? What challenges them?

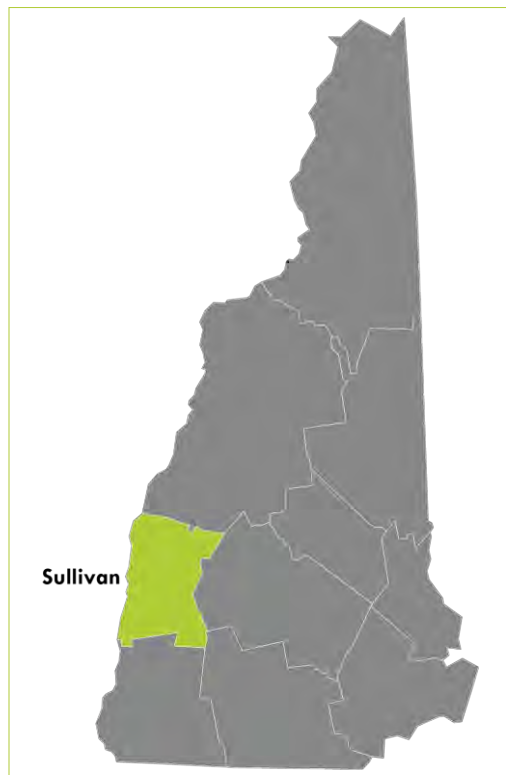
However diverse their experiences are, young adults today, are in a defining stage of their lives as they transition from adolescence and dependence to adulthood and independence. We know from brain research that they are still developing physically, psychologically and socially through the age of 25, with the most complex executive functioning forming in late adolescence just as they are leaving home, attending college, considering trades and careers, and forming lasting friendships. By asking young adults to share their stories, thoughts and perspectives they provide us with a glimpse of the future. That they are exposed to factors that increase their risks of harm and behavioral health problems is worthy of our attention, our study and our action.

In fall 2019, the state of New Hampshire administered a statewide survey assessment of the young adults between the ages of 18-30 who currently reside in the state. The results of that assessment contributed to Voices of New Hampshire's Young Adults Assessment Report that was completed in 2020.¹ Subsequently, the NH DHHS Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services (BDAS) requested that the data be analyzed at the county level in order for local policy makers and planning entities to incorporate the unique voices of young adults in their county into any data-informed strategic plans. The following summary reflects the responses of young adult respondents who indicated that they reside in one of the Sullivan County communities.

ABOUT SULLIVAN COUNTY

Sullivan County, located in the southwestern part of the state, is made up of one city (Claremont) and 14 towns (Acworth, Charlestown, Cornish, Croydon, Goshen, Grantham, Langdon, Lempster, Newport, Plainfield, Springfield, Sunapee, Unity and Washington). Visitors come to Sullivan County not only for lake activities at Lake Sunapee in the summer, but also foliage in the fall, skiing in the winter and hiking and biking in the spring.

According to the 2020 Census, the population in Sullivan County is 43,267 (3.1% of the NH population). College-aged youth (18-24) comprise 6.8% of the county's population. The median age in the county is 46.3. The median household income in Sullivan is \$63,518 (ranking eighth in the state). Just under one-third (28.1%) of the population in the county have a Bachelor's degree or more. The unemployment rate in the county is 5.4%, below the state's rate of 6.7%. The



¹ <https://drugfreenh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-Voice-of-NHs-young-adults.pdf>

manufacturing industry makes up 22.2% of the jobs in the county followed by retail trade (17.1%) and healthcare and social services (9.7%) jobs. (Table 1)

Table 1 Sullivan County Population-Level Data	
Population:	43,267
College-aged youth (18-24):	6.8%
Median Age:	46.3
Unemployment Rate:	5.4
Top 3 Industries:	Manufacturing (22.2%) Retail Trade (17.1%) Healthcare and Social Services (9.7%)
Median household income:	\$63,518
Education (Bachelor's or More):	28.1%
Source: StatsAmerica USA Counties in Profile https://www.statsamerica.org/USCP/	

These population and economic factors are important to consider when interpreting the results that are presented and planning policy or approaches for the young adult population in the county.

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

This county-level report has been informed by discussions with those interested in planning strategic activities and efforts, including young adults themselves, to focus on all that NH's young adults bring to the state and the challenges they are facing. The Voice of NH's Young Adults Assessment, statewide and county-level reports was created by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. and made possible by funding from the NH DHHS Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services (BDAS).

Please note that throughout this report, you will see county-level results alongside the statewide results. In instances where the county sample size is too small² data are suppressed to protect the identity of individual respondents and ensure reliability of results. In these instances only statewide results were included. First, we provide an overview of who responded to the survey

² Suppression standards are based on NH DHHS protocols where frequencies are excluded when the numerator is less than 5 ($n \leq 5$) and the denominator was < 60 .

SULLIVAN COUNTY'S YOUNG ADULT RESPONDENTS

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

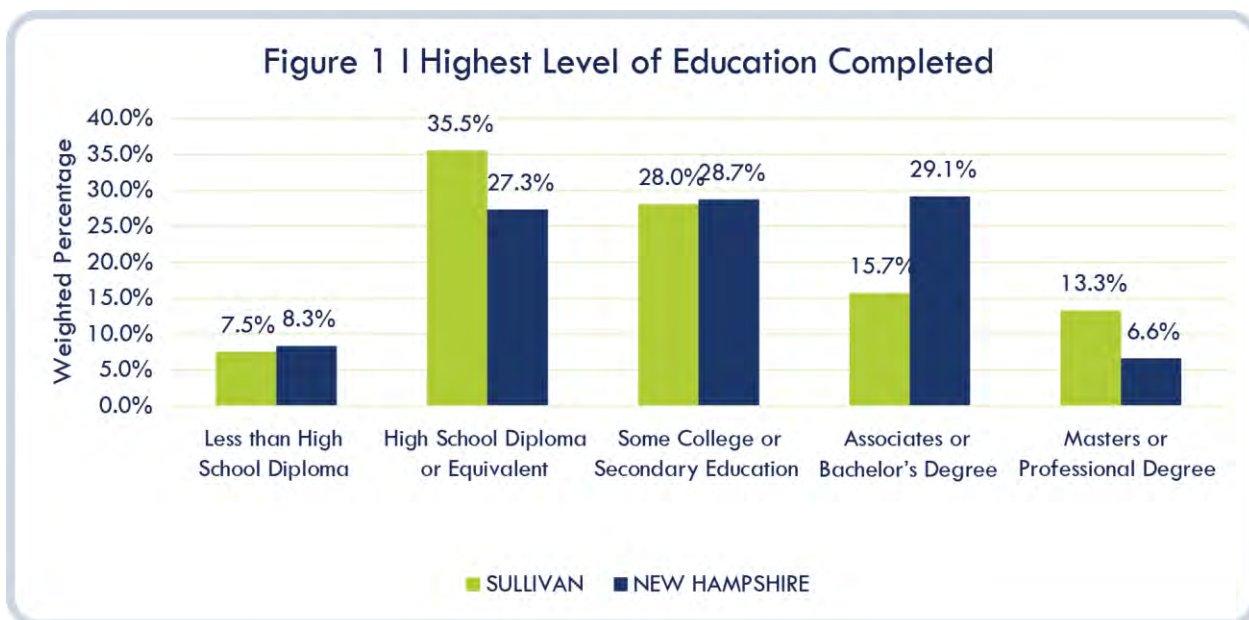
The survey respondents ranged in age from 18–30, and as seen in Table 2 below, the distribution across age ranges and other demographics closely mirrored the statewide sample. However, the sample in Sullivan County was slightly older than the statewide sample with 43.0% of the sample reporting being between the ages of 26-30 compared to the state (37.4%).

Table 2 Survey Respondent Demographics				
	Sullivan County		New Hampshire	
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Percentage (Weighted %)	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Percentage (Weighted %)
Age Range				
18-20	34	19.3%	753	24.2%
21-25	28	37.7%	922	38.4%
26-30	43	43.0%	1019	37.4%
Gender Identity				
Cisgender Male	22	49.0%	495	49.7%
Cisgender Female	58	46.1%	1585	46.6%
Gender Minority	**	**	85	3.7%
Race				
People of Color	**	**	161	6.9%
White	92	89.1%	2335	86.8%
Multi-Racial	7	6.9%	108	6.3%

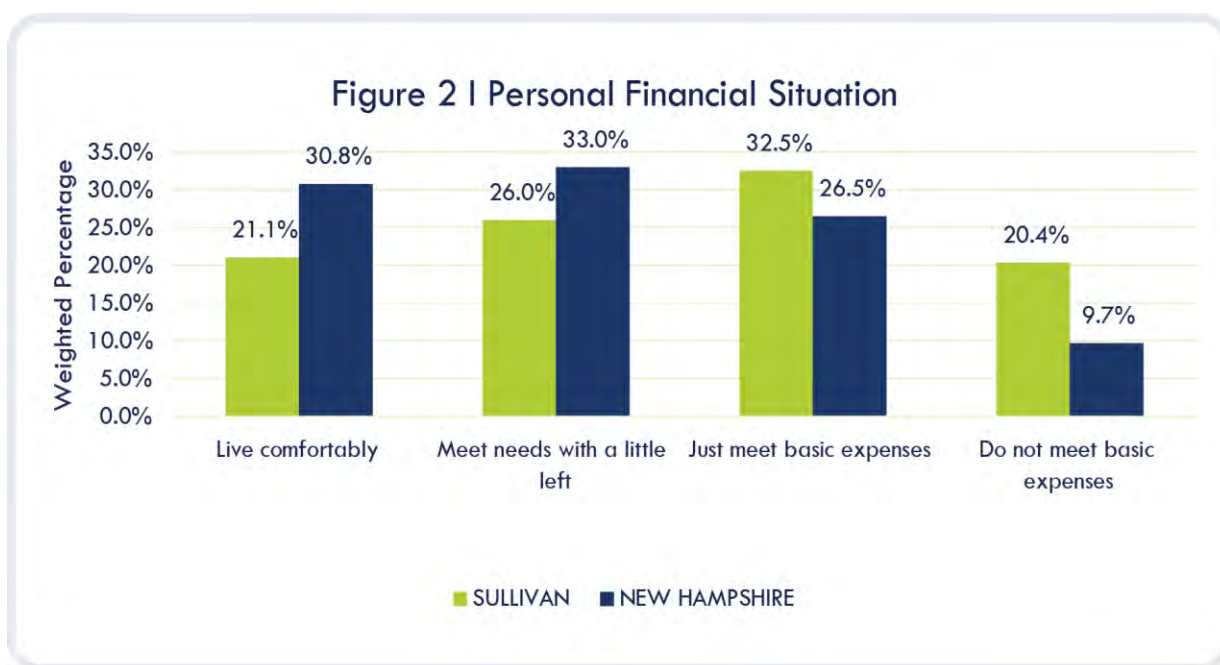
As Table 3 shows, the largest group of respondents said they were working full-time or were self-employed (53.1%) which is higher than the statewide sample (42.3%). Another 5.8% said they were working part-time. Just over a quarter of the respondents said they were students or working and going to school (26.8%). Eleven percent (11.2%) indicated that they were not a student nor were they working.

Table 3 Current Student and Employment Status				
	Sullivan County		New Hampshire	
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Percentage (Weighted %)	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Percentage (Weighted %)
Student	16	12.5%	304	10.2%
Student & Working	17	14.3%	637	22.0%
Working FT/SE	52	53.1%	1034	42.3%
Working PT	5	5.8%	261	9.4%
Not Student, Not Working	13	11.2%	338	11.9%
Not Student, Unknown Working	**	**	112	4.2%

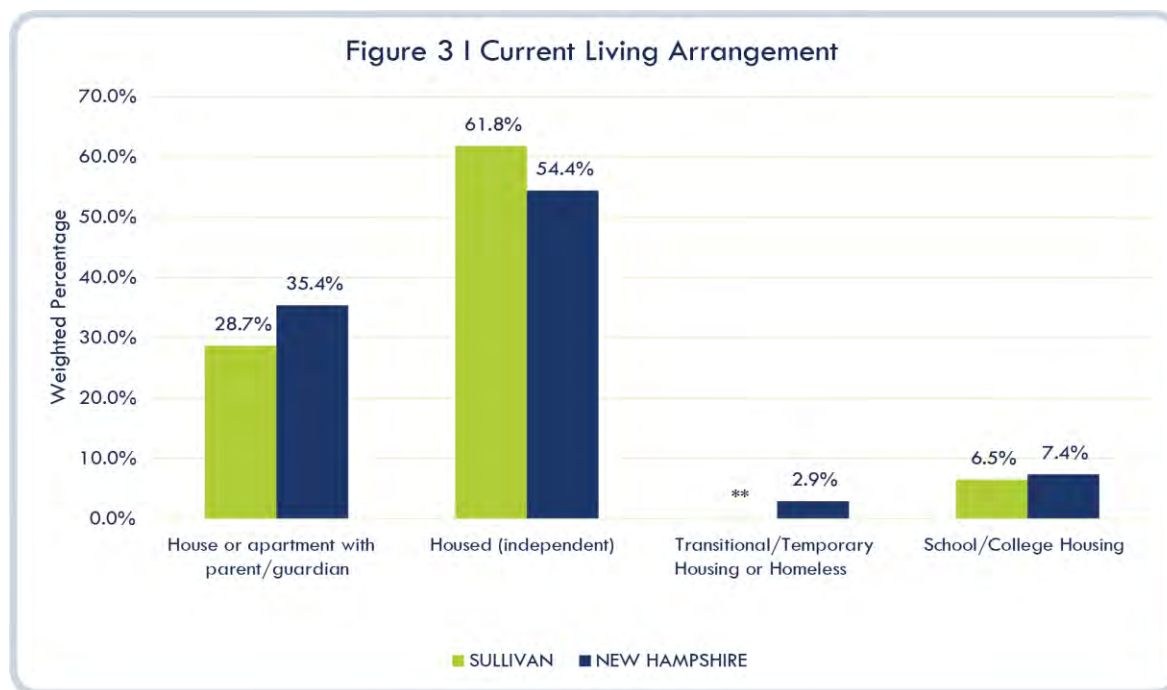
As seen in Figure 1 below, Sullivan County had more young adults who indicated the highest level of education they completed was a high school diploma or equivalent (35.5%) compared to the statewide sample (27.3%). Inversely, there were fewer individuals with an Associate's or Bachelor's degree than the state (15.7% and 29.1%, respectively).



When looking at the financial situation of respondents, young adults in Sullivan County are more likely to “just meet” or “not meet their basic needs” (52.9%) when compared to respondents statewide (36.2%). Conversely, their statewide peers were less likely to indicate they live comfortably or meet their needs with a little left over. (Figure 2)



Sullivan County respondents' current living situation also varied slightly from the statewide sample (Figure 3) with more young adults from the county living independently (61.8%) than their peers statewide (54.4%).³



These demographic and descriptive differences are important to consider when discussing strategic approaches to addressing the needs of young adults in the county. During the analysis of the statewide data, three recurring themes emerged which hold true for Sullivan County young adults as well.

RECURRING THEMES

The survey included seven open-ended questions that provide more information to help interpret the quantitative survey items. While responses to these questions are explored separately within subsequent sections, three prominent themes emerged. These recurring themes provide an understanding of the most salient areas of risk and resilience for young adults in NH:

1. **Personal finances.** Young adults throughout the survey spoke about personal finances. Opportunities to build a career and earn an income to support themselves and their families was a common source of excitement and hope for the future. On the other hand, young adults overwhelmingly voiced frustration with the high cost of living in NH, low wages, and college tuition costs (including “crippling” student debt). Many young adults felt that these financial issues presented significant barriers to accomplishing their goals. Sub-themes included: money and education (particularly student debt); job opportunities/livable wage; cost of living; and cost of college.

YAA OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

1. What are you and other young adults living in NH excited about?
2. What is frustrating to you and other young adults living in NH?
3. What negative impacts of alcohol or drug misuse do you see among people your age?
4. What, if any, new or emerging substance use issues are you seeing around you?
5. Please comment about what gives you a sense of hope about the future?
6. What, if anything, is blocking you from reaching your future goals?
7. What do you think young adults like you can do to help address problems with substance misuse?

³ It should be noted that the electronic format and recruitment strategies of this survey may have resulted in a sample that is underrepresented by the highest risk populations: namely those in transitional (temporary) housing or homeless.

2. **Community and social support.** The importance of social support in young adults' lives was made clear throughout the open-ended responses. Relationships and connection to the community were often mentioned when discussing excitement and hope for the future. This included excitement about NH's natural environment and the ability to participate in outdoor recreation, connection and support from family and friends, and hope for their children's future. At the same time, young adults also spoke of frustrations with social support and a dearth of community resources and activities. In particular, they mentioned a lack of opportunities to socialize with peers of similar age and develop relationships with boyfriends/girlfriends, as well as strained relationships with children and parents as barriers to meeting future goals. Sub-themes included: family; friends; children; and community.
3. **Political and social policy.** Young adults were excited and hopeful about their voices being heard, generational changes and the increased involvement of young adults in government and politics, and the possibility of affecting positive change, particularly in areas of environmental policy and diversity and inclusion. However, this was also a pervasive source of frustration and hopelessness - many young adults voiced concern because of the political climate, lack of tolerance and open-mindedness, and insufficient attention to creating a sustainable future. Sub-themes include: governmental and social impact; generational changes; political climate and leaders; environmental issues; and diversity/tolerance.

WHAT YOUNG ADULTS ARE EXCITED AND FRUSTRATED ABOUT

SOURCES OF EXCITEMENT

When asked what they are excited about, young adults living in Sullivan County gave a variety of responses that resulted in the identification of three main themes:

1. physical environment and local activities;
2. financial future; and
3. future and impact.

The word "nothing" plays a prominent role in their open-ended response to the question of what they are excited about and indicates that many young adults felt a lack of excitement in their lives. This is echoed in the qualitative responses, further below, where these same themes are found as sources of frustration.

Physical Environment and Local Activities

The physical environment of New Hampshire and local activities offered were by far the largest source of excitement for young adults in Sullivan County. Many shared excitement for the weather/seasons or beauty of the landscape, while others mentioned the outdoor activities popular in the area such as hiking, biking, and climbing.

- » *"I personally am excited about the community activities that I usually see advertise, there's a nice safe place to hang out as well that I think that kids in school would benefit from going to after school ends for the day. Anything that protects the environment."*
- » *"Hiking in the woods."*
- » *"The snow around the holidays."*

Financial Future

Excitement about job and career opportunities, financial advancement opportunities and the future of the economy at large are indicative of the optimism often seen at this developmental age. However, many of the respondents stated their concern or frustration with attaining those milestones

- » *"I'm not sure what other young adults are excited about... I'm excited to see new and better job opportunities in the future. I'm excited to see schools improving how they educate our children."*
- » *"Making a successful go of it on our own."*
- » *"The potential to be our own people and being independent and successful."*
- » *"Creating a family, getting good jobs, and being happy."*

Future and Impact

Those who commented about their future had a wide range of responses from specific events or milestones as sources of excitement in the future to having nothing to look forward to in the future. One respondent simply wrote that they are looking forward to “change”.

- » *“Making a future for our kids.”*
- » *“Moving on to bigger things in college and beyond.”*
- » *“Up and coming growth.”*

SOURCES OF FRUSTRATION

Respondents were asked about what is frustrating to them and other young adults living in NH. Aligning with the overall responses from the state, three major themes emerged from the responses in Sullivan County, including:

1. money and education;
2. physical environment and local activities;
3. the epidemic of addiction in NH.

Money and Education

Financial frustrations rank among the most common for NH young adults. Frustrations about low wages, the high cost of living, especially rising housing costs, and a lack of quality job opportunities made up the vast majority of responses. This is in stark contrast to those who felt excitement about entering adulthood and the possibility of future careers and financial stability, including excitement about the growing industries in NH that bring new and varied opportunities to the state.

- » *“Most of the residents are barely getting by, which leads to escapism like drugs. The people in power keep lining their own pockets and pretending not to see the rest of us. It's gotten so bad that people are choosing homelessness and poverty over being abused by city councils and corporations. If we had the means many of us would just leave the state all together.”*
- » *“Maternity leave sucks, and the cost of living is horrible compared to what we're making.”*
- » *“NH is a beautiful place to live. But the cost of living is very high.”*
- » *“Rent goes up and jobs don't want to pay more. Rent plus utilities for me is over \$2,000 A month. I make \$600 a week, which leaves little left or any left for anything else. I'm lucky to have my phone bill paid and groceries after everything. But the state says I make too much for assistance. If I quit my job, I could get all the help in the world. Backwards.”*
- » *“Money. And just life in general. So many of us did EVERYTHING right. We have the education; hell, I even paid off my loans. We work hard, we send out applications, and we get back bupkis. People scorn us and yell at us for working fast-food and retail, say it's our own fault we can't afford anything when we work there, but refuse to hire us anywhere else. And it's HARD. Why should we care about anything else when we're putting all our time and energy into just staying above water?”*

Physical Environment and Local Activities

While local activities and the natural environment provided a source of excitement for many young adults in NH, several others referenced New Hampshire's location and weather as common sources of frustration. Respondents mentioned the cold, lack of sunlight, and the remoteness of the state as frustrations with the natural environment. Some also mentioned the lack of attention to the global issue of climate change as a source of frustration. The frustrations in Sullivan County were distinct in referencing the rurality of the county and its distance from resources.

- » *“For I live currently, I find the lack of things to do slightly frustrating. To go anywhere like the movies or something would be a good few hours drive.”*
- » *“There's nothing to do around here.”*
- » *“Snow.”*

The Epidemic of Addiction in NH

Young adults in NH voiced frustration with the epidemic of addiction in the state and a lack of laws and resources to address the problem. Several young adults also mentioned being frustrated that recreational marijuana is not legal in NH. Others point out the interplay between the low wages/high cost of living in NH and high rates of drug misuse among young adults in the state.

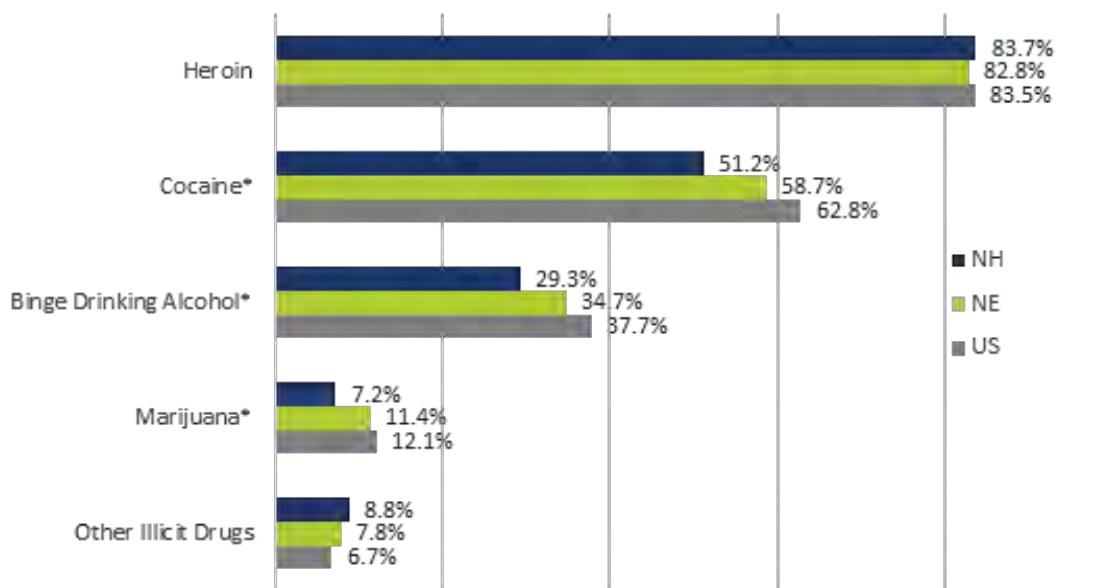
- » “The drug problems in our area.”
- » “Seeing people my age doing drugs.”
- » “The drug crisis.”

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE

HARM RELATED TO SUBSTANCE USE

It is well established in the field that there is a correlation between perception of harm and substance use behavior. As the perception of harm goes down, misuse increases. According to the 2018 NSDUH data, NH young adults reported significantly lower perception of great risk of harm from use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine, than their peers in the northeast states and across the country.

FIGURE 4 | Perception of Great Risk of Harm Related to Substance Use
(2018 NSDUH: Age 18-25)



In Sullivan County, the highest percentages perceived great or moderate harm related to use of synthetic marijuana (74.3%), the use of electronic vaporizing products (67.3%), and binge drinking alcohol (67.2%). With the exception of 'use vapor products regularly', the county's young adults held a lower perception of harm regarding certain substance behaviors. (Table 4)

Table 4 | Risk of Harm Regarding Certain Substance Behaviors (Great/Moderate Risk)

	Belknap	New Hampshire
	<i>Frequency (Unweighted n)</i>	<i>Frequency (Unweighted n)</i>
one or two drinks of an alcoholic beverage (including beer, wine, or liquor) nearly every day	43.2%	46.6%
five or more drinks of an alcoholic beverage once or twice a week	62.7%	67.4%
use marijuana (including pot, weed or cannabis) regularly	15.2%*	27.1%
use synthetic marijuana (including Spice Herbal Smoke Blend, Genie, Skunk, K2, etc) nearly every day	72.7%	76.2%
use electronic vapor products regularly	58.4%	64.2%
Not Student, Unknown Working	11	112
<i>*Statistically significant difference from New Hampshire based on 95% confidence interval</i>		

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SUBSTANCE USE

CONSEQUENCES OF SUBSTANCE USE

Respondents were asked about the negative impacts of alcohol or substance misuse that they see among people their age. Four major themes emerged from their responses, including:

1. addiction;
2. loss, especially evident in weakened social supports and decreased job security;
3. health consequences; and
4. impaired judgement and decision-making.

When asked what they saw as potential negative consequences of substance use, young adults in Coos County mentioned several topics including:

- » *Loss: Weakened Social Support and Decreased Job Security;*
- » *Addiction; and*
- » *Health Consequences*

Loss: Weakened Social Support and Decreased Job Security

Many of the young adults in Coos County cited weakened social supports as a negative impact of using substances. This included experiences such as experiencing homelessness and job loss, and even loss of relationships and custody of children as a result of use.

- » *"Homelessness."*
- » *"I've seen lives ruined and my peers in and out of jail as well as homeless."*
- » *"People I've graduated with have gone to jail for drug use. Others have lost their license from a dui."*
- » *"In my town a lot of the people my age are using drugs and alcohol a lot. I see it impact their children a lot and they are homeless all the time or moving from apartment to apartment after being evicted. They never use their money on what they should it always goes to their drugs and alcohol."*

Addiction

Respondents cited several negative consequences of substance use involving misuse and the development of addictions and substance use disorders. Several of these references mentioned misuse in the form of binge drinking, overdoses, and using substances as a way to cope with emotions.

- » *"Alcoholism is very prevalent and people are not coping well with their lives."*

- » *“Dependency problems, sexual assault victims, wasting money.”*
- » *“It’s consuming their lives. All they want to do is get drunk and high.”*

Health Consequences

Often related to the misuse of substances, were the health consequences that respondents mentioned. Overwhelmingly, young adults mentioned death as a consequence of substance use, along with overdose, depression, brain damage and other health issues.

- » *“I see mental illness on the rise with the use of it as well as aggression when something doesn’t come out right, someone I knew tried to kill someone because of drugs.”*
- » *“The number of health problems and idiocy I see... one person asked if they could vape INDOORS. In a public f-ing building! NO. No, it’s--no.”*
- *“Physical, mental health decline, no ambition, no self-respect, no morals and lack of work ethic.”*

EMERGING SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES

WHAT YOUNG ADULTS ARE SEEING

When asked about new or emerging substance use issues that they are seeing in New Hampshire, young adults from Coos County reflected on the most frequently used substances that they witness or hear about. One substance that was overwhelmingly mentioned: vaping/juuling/vape pens

The Sullivan County results differed slightly from the results of the state at large, which mentioned heroin as the second most common emerging substance. While the opioid crisis is well documented, research on vaping and e-cigarette use has been slower to emerge, particularly given that national surveys were not quick to add questions to surveys for several years after the product was introduced. However, a 2019 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that young adult e-cigarette use trends had significantly increased among never and former smokers in every demographic subgroup except Hispanics and particularly among lower income young adults⁴.

The following three substances were also commonly mentioned by respondents, but less frequently:

1. heroin;
2. bath salts; and
3. methamphetamine.

Finally, much like the rest of the state, many young adults in Sullivan County remarked on a lack of new trends either because their social circles do not include people who use substances or they are seeing “the same old” substances in their communities.

Vaping/Juuling/Vape Pens

Vaping was overwhelmingly mentioned as an emerging substance. Young adults spoke about how it was becoming more widespread among youth (middle and high school), the growing addiction among young people, serious health consequences and death from vaping, and using THC in vape cartridges or “black market pods”.

- » *“The nicotine juul epidemic is on the rise. Just when cigarette use was starting to go down this raises*
- » *“Vaping in younger people.”*
- » *“People don’t seem to understand that vaping is BAD. It’s bad, people! YOU CAN’T DO IT IN A LIBRARY OR COURTROOM.”*

Other Substances

While mentioned less frequently than vaping, several young adults brought up the following substances:

- » *“Just a continued struggle with meth and opiates.”*

⁴ Dai H, Leventhal AM. Prevalence of e-Cigarette Use Among Adults in the United States, 2014-2018. JAMA. 2019;322(18):1824–1827. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.15331

- » “Bath salts.”
- » “Xanax. OxyContin.”
- » “Vapes, marijuana, alcohol.”
- » “There aren’t any new drugs being used. Bath salts was the last one that I had heard of being used.”

No New Trends Observed

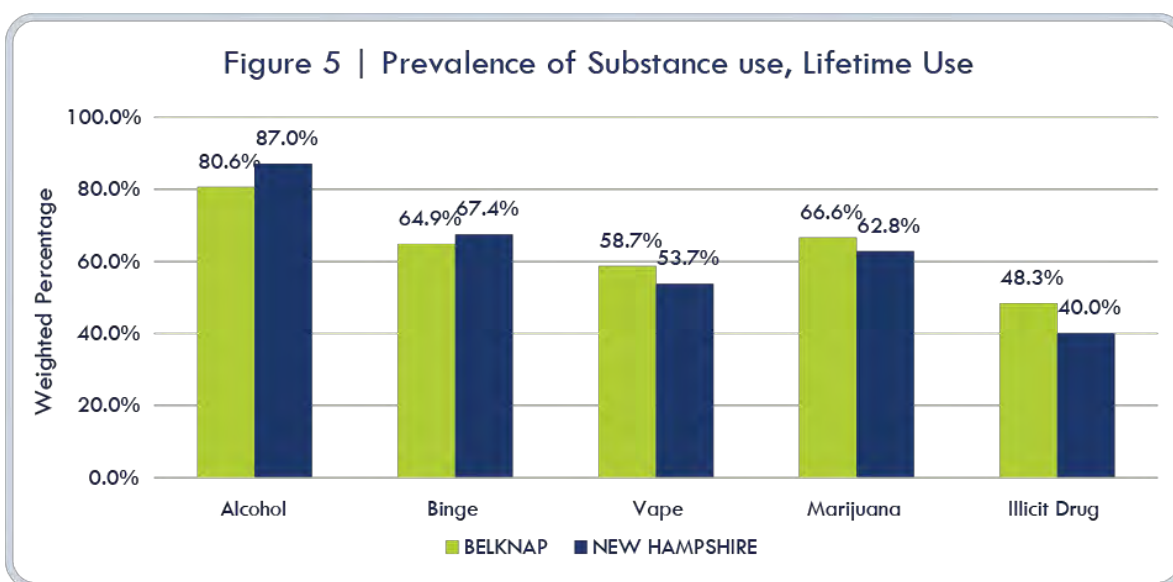
Many participants noted that they had not observed any new or emerging trends. Several remarked that they were seeing the “same old” substances and issues, primarily heroin; however, marijuana and Adderall were also mentioned.

- » “I haven’t seen any new issues.”
- » “None at the moment, just the same old stuff on repeat.”

YOUNG ADULT EXPERIENCE WITH SUBSTANCE USE

LIFETIME USE

Perceived risk of harm, discussed above, plays a predictive role in self-reported use of substances. Figure 5 presents the percent of respondents who indicated they had used the listed substance at some point in their lifetime. Eighty-eight percent (87.7%) had one or more drinks of alcohol in their lifetime. Nearly three quarters (74.4%) indicated they consumed five (5) or more drinks of alcohol in one sitting (Binge).

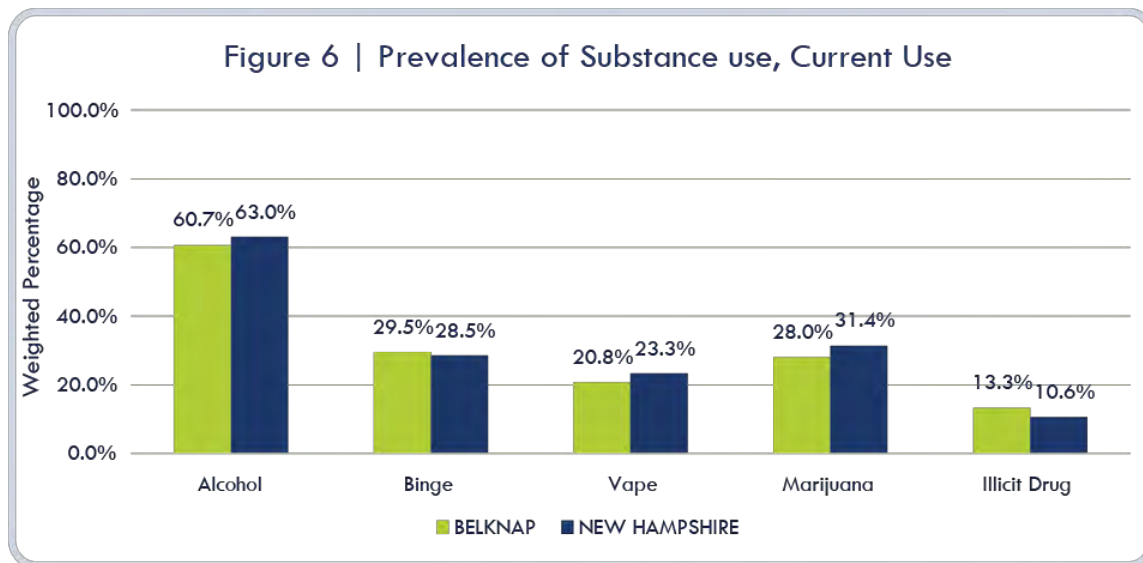


The “Illicit Drug” category includes illegal substances such as club drugs (used by 28.9% of young adults in the county), non-prescription use of prescription drugs (20.7%); synthetic marijuana (19.4%); and cocaine (19.0%). (Table 5)

Table 5 Prevalence of Illicit-Drug Substance use, Lifetime Use		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Synthetic marijuana	26.7%	18.4%
Other synthetic drugs	12.9%	11.8%
Inhalants	15.6%	8.3%
Cocaine	27.0%	20.8%
Club drugs	25.3%	24.2%
Methamphetamine	11.3%	7.0%
Non-prescription use of prescription drugs	36.8%	25.0%
Heroin	9.7%	6.5%

CURRENT USE

Respondents were then asked about substances they had used in the past 30 days (current use). In the 30 days leading up to the survey, sixty percent (59.5%) of county young adults indicated they had at least one drink of alcohol and nearly one third (28.4%) had binged on alcohol. They reported lower rates of vaping, marijuana and illicit drug use than their peers statewide (17.9% and 23.3%, respectively). (Figure 6)



When looking at the break down of specific illicit drug use, the sample was too small for analysis however, we are including the statewide results for reference. (Table 6)

Table 6 Prevalence of Illicit-Drug Substance use, Current Use		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Synthetic marijuana	**	2.7%
Other synthetic drugs	**	1.0%
Inhalants	**	0.7%
Cocaine	**	2.9%
Club drugs	**	2.3%
Methamphetamine	**	1.7%
Non-prescription use of prescription drugs	7.5%	4.5%
Heroin	**	1.4%
**Suppress due to low sample size		

AGE OF FIRST USE

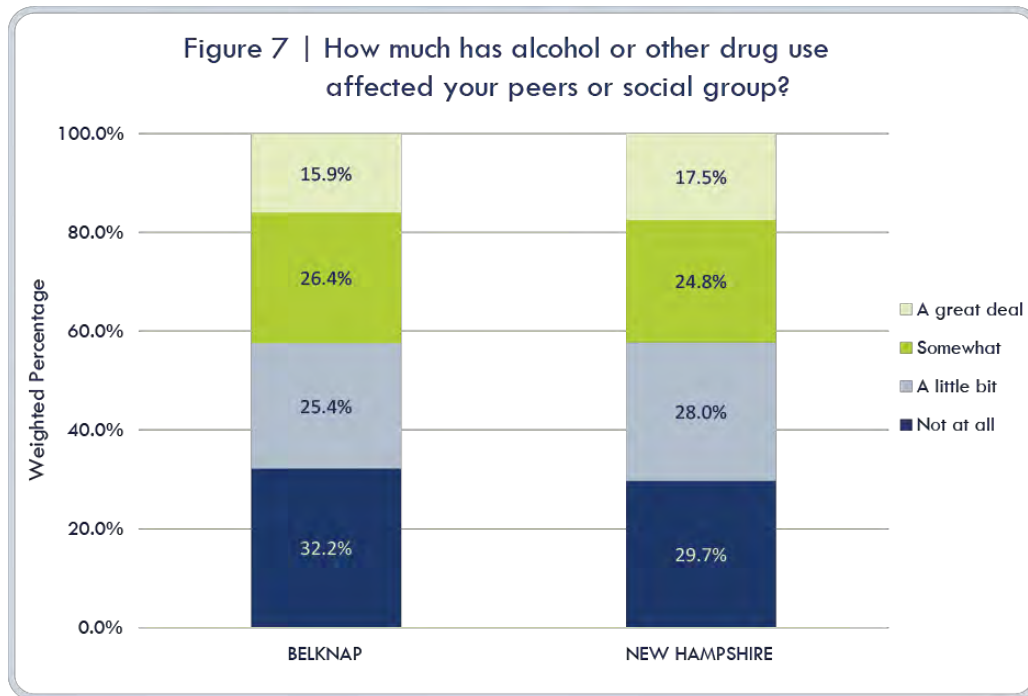
It is well researched that the younger an individual is when they first start using any substance, the higher their risk for developing substance misuse or addiction as they age. Over one-third (35.5%) of Sullivan County young adults indicated that their first use of alcohol was before the age of 15. (Table 7)

Table 7 Percent whose Age of First Use of Substances was Less than 15 Years Old		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Alcohol	23.7%	22.8%
Binge	13.7%	10.1%
Marijuana	29.5%	24.9%

Among those who had ever used, we examined the age respondents began using substances. Alcohol had a higher proportion of those who started using before the age of 15 (35.5%). Other substances (marijuana, illicit drugs) analyzed had to be suppressed due to the limited sample size from the county. It is worth noting that more young adults in Sullivan County indicated they started using and bingeing alcohol before the age of 15 than their peers statewide.

IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE USE ON PEER/SOCIAL GROUPS

When asked about the impact of alcohol and other substances on their peers or social group, most (49.1%) noted little, if any impact. However, 34.1% noted “somewhat” of impact on their peers, more than peers statewide (24.8%). There was very little variation from the statewide sample for those indicating alcohol or drug use impacting their peers or social group “a great deal”. (Figure 7)



DECISION MAKING ABOUT USE

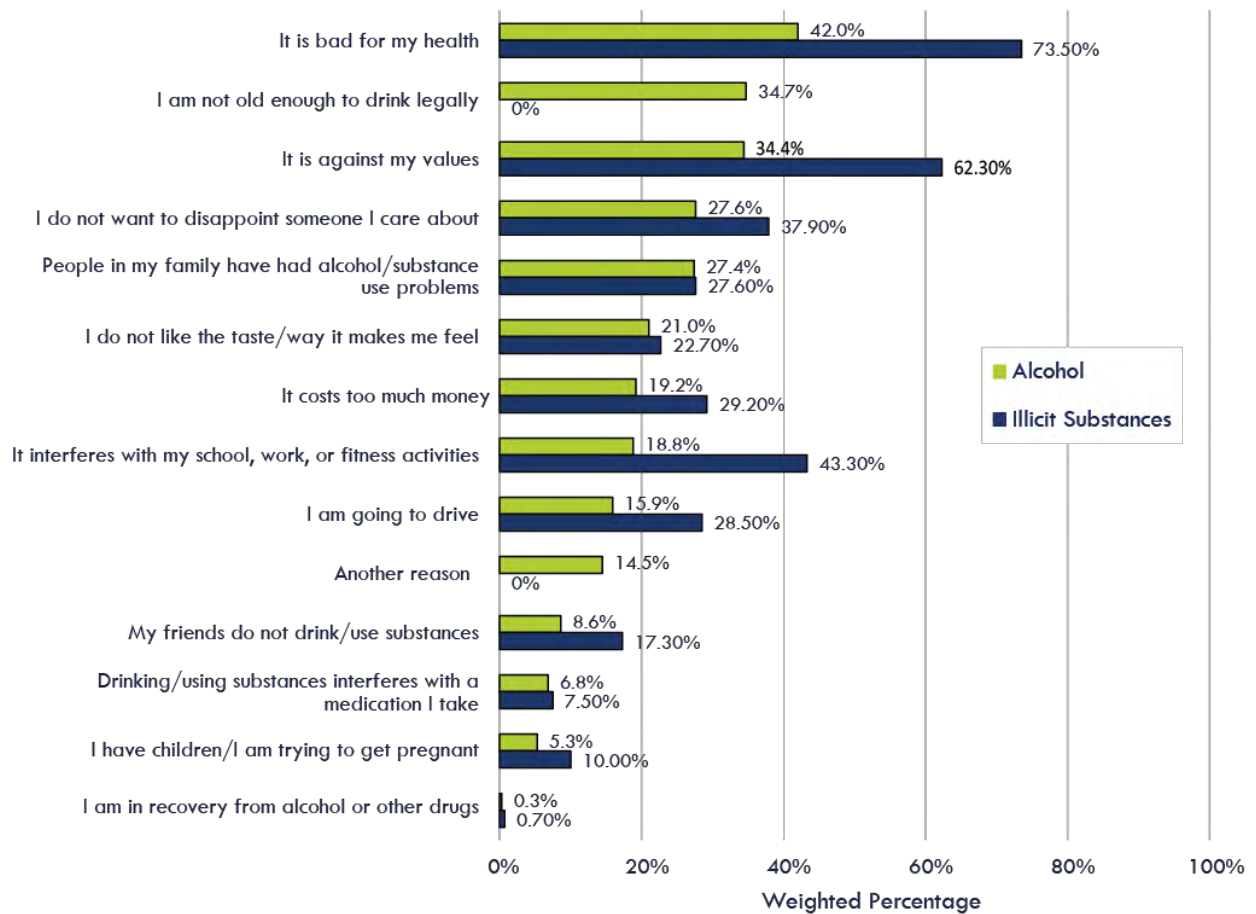
It is informative to consider the reasons an individual chooses not to use alcohol or illicit drugs. The survey contained a list of 12 plausible reasons for abstaining from alcohol, and repeated the same list for abstaining from illicit substances. The alcohol list had an additional reason of being under the legal drinking age. The county sample was insufficient for analysis by county, therefore the statewide data are presented below.

Abstainers

Statewide, there were 838 respondents who never used marijuana or illicit substances, who provided reasons why they never tried these substances. Similarly, 348 respondents provided reasons for never trying alcohol. (Figure 8)

When looking at the other reasons given for abstaining, almost twice the amount of respondents said that it was against their values to use illicit drugs compared to alcohol (62.3% versus 34.4%), or that it will interfere with school, work, or fitness activities (43.3% versus 18.8%). A little over a quarter of young adults report that they do not drink alcohol because either they do not want to disappoint someone they care about (27.6%) or people in their family have had alcohol problems (27.4%). A similar percentage report family members having substance use problems as a reason for not using illicit drugs (27.6%). However, a greater number of young adults choose not to use illicit drugs because they don't want to disappoint someone they care about (37.9%). Interestingly, fewer young adults report that their friends abstaining from substances is a reason why they choose not to use alcohol (8.6%) or illicit drugs (17.3%). It may be that peer influence is a greater motivator for substance use than abstinence. Less than 1% indicated their reason for not using was because they were in recovery.

Figure 8 | Reasons for Not Using Alcohol or Illicit Substances (Statewide Data)



Importantly, among those who had problems with alcohol or other drugs, more Sullivan young adults sought help (8.3%) than the statewide sample (6.7%). (Table 8)

Table 8 Seeking Help for Problems Related to Alcohol or Other Drugs (past 12 months)		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Yes	2.8%*	6.7%
No	64.2%	64.9%
Not Applicable	33.1%	28.4%
*Statistically significant difference from New Hampshire based on 95% confidence interval		

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PERCEPTION OF PHYSICAL HEALTH

Self-reported health can be used as a proxy for overall well-being. While a majority of Sullivan County's young adults (55.2%) felt "good" or "excellent" about their general health this was significantly lower than their statewide peers (70.1%). Forty-two percent (44.8%) rated their health as "fair" or "poor". Research has linked poor perception of health with higher rates of morbidity and mortality as well as an increase in mental health symptoms.

Table 9 Self-Reported Health		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Poor/Fair	41.7%*	25.7%
Good/Excellent	58.3%*	70.1%
*Statistically significant difference from New Hampshire based on 95% confidence interval		

MENTAL HEALTH

Two questions about mental health symptoms (having little interest/pleasure in doing things and feeling down, depressed or hopeless) make up the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2), a self-administered screening tool commonly used by healthcare professionals. The authors identify a cut-off score of three for screening for depression (range = 0-6 for two questions combined). An individual's mental health is directly connected with their sense of well-being.

Table 10 Depression Symptoms (PHQ2 >= 3)		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
No	69.6%	73.9%
Yes	30.4%	26.1%

Overall, about a third of young adults (28.5%) in the county report little interest or pleasure in doing things and feeling down, depressed or hopeless on several days in the past two weeks, slightly higher than the 26.1% statewide. (Table 10)

Nearly ten percent (9.3%) of young adults report persistently poor mental health (nearly every day). Twelve percent (12.3%) county young adults reported having seriously attempted suicide during the past 12 months. (Table 11)

Table 11 Suicide Ideation (past 12 months)		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
No	19.8%	17.1%
Yes	80.2%	82.9%

SOCIAL SUPPORT

When prompted about who they would turn to if they needed to talk to someone about a serious problem, the vast majority (90.3%) indicate they had someone to turn to. However, 8.7% of the county's young adults reported having no one, warranting a closer look to understand how they can be connected/reconnected with a support network. Statewide, the thirty-one percent (31%) of young adults who reported having no one to talk to had serious thoughts of attempting suicide, compared to 13.2% of young adults who did have someone to talk to.

Table 12 Presence of Social Support		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
Have Somebody	92.5%	92.0%
Nobody	6.0%	6.6%
Nobody and Someone	**	1.4%

**Suppress due to low sample size

The most common source of social support reported by Sullivan County young adults are significant other (51.5%), followed by friends (46.6%), and a parent/guardian/caregiver (39.8%). (Table 13)

Table 13 Sources of Support		
	Belknap	New Hampshire
	Frequency (Unweighted n)	Frequency (Unweighted n)
My friends	59.7%	58.7%
Significant other	53.7%	51.3%
Parent/guardian/caregiver	47.8%	44.5%
Other family members	26.1%	28.2%
Some other person	25.4%	23.4%

HOPE

WHAT GIVES YOUNG ADULTS A SENSE OF HOPE

Young adults were asked about what gives them a sense of hope for the future. Three main themes emerged from the statewide responses that were also echoed among Sullivan County young adults. The three themes are:

1. community and social support;
2. money and education; and
3. making an impact in the future.

Although hope resonated throughout young adult responses, many also voiced feelings of hopelessness. These quotes are included within each theme to provide a sense of the pervasiveness of hopelessness among young adults in New Hampshire and Sullivan County. Still, in the midst of hardship, several young adults found optimism and hope for the future.

It is important to note that some young adults felt that motivation, persistence, and hard work will get you where you want to go, not hope. Personal accomplishments often led to an increase in self-confidence to obtain future goals. For example, one respondent noted, *“There are young people and entrepreneurs who want to develop and grow in communities in NH.”*

Community and Social Support

Young adults mentioned children and family most often relative to their sense of optimism. Most young adults generally mentioned children as a source of hope, but some spoke of them as the next generation for whom the world would be better. They noted a desire to provide their children with a good life, and their children providing the motivation to “do better”. When young adults spoke of feelings of hopelessness or difficulty, it was often their children who helped them to “keep going”.

- » *“My daughter gives me a sense of hope about the future. I want to be able to give her everything that I can which means me and my partner are working harder and harder.”*
- » *“My daughter.”*
- » *“My desire to better myself. And my need to provide a positive role model for my children.”*

When referencing family, young adults spoke of the support from their current family, especially parents and partners/spouses, as well as their dreams of a future family.

- » *“I now have a boyfriend and am looking forward to starting a family and having our own house.”*
- » *“I just recently moved out of a toxic family home and currently live with my boyfriend I have a sense of hope that I’ll be able to find a job at some point and overall become a better person as I learn about life as I never had any opportunity to.”*

Some young adults also spoke of the support they receive from friends and their participation in their communities.

- » *“A close community.”*

Money and Education

Many young adults mentioned hope for increased job opportunities and satisfaction after graduating college, ultimately leading to more independence, financial security, and moving along a career pathway.

- » *“Better job opportunities.”*
- » *“Finishing school and getting degree.”*
- » *“I hope that people come to terms with the reality impoverished people live in and people begin to see the healthcare they deserve.”*

Making an Impact in the Future

Young adults in Sullivan County felt a deep sense of hope in the possibilities of the future and their role in creating change. The types of change cited by respondents ranged from political and cultural change, to scientific advancements

and climate change. Many simply expressed that the idea of their generation making an impact on the future at all inspired hope, with one saying: “I am excited to bring my opinions and thoughts to the table, to become a change maker in the world.”

- » “There is no hope. The planet will adapt and survive, but it’ll kill us to do it. On top of that the ‘leaders’ are killing the rest of us slowly anyway.”
- » “Greta Thunberg, dismantlement of our current government system, burning the patriarchy.”
- » “Activism.”
- » “The people I see who want to make a difference will make a difference.”

To some respondents, the future was a source of hopelessness, with some responding that they had nothing for which to be hopeful. Some respondents provided short answers such as: “nothing really” or “literally nothing”.

- » “There is no hope. The planet will adapt and survive, but it’ll kill us to do it. On top of that the ‘leaders’ are killing the rest of us slowly anyway.”

BARRIERS

CHALLENGES TO REACHING GOALS

When asked what was blocking them from reaching their goals, young adults living in Sullivan County gave a variety of responses that resulted in the identification of three main themes:

1. money and education;
2. physical and mental health; and
3. innate barriers.

While these are explained in greater detail below, there were several additional barriers mentioned less often but which are worth noting, including: discrimination around race, class, and gender identity; the political climate and lack of attention to environmental issues; and relationships (or lack thereof) with parents, boyfriends/girlfriends, and children. Of particular interest are barriers mentioned among those in recovery, including shame, fear of relapse, and efforts to maintain sobriety.

Money and Education

Overwhelmingly, young adults spoke about “not making enough money” as a barrier to reaching their goals. Most mentioned low salaries, a lack of job opportunities, high cost of living, and insufficient affordable housing in New Hampshire. Young adults voiced frustration with living month-to-month, noting the difficulty in “getting ahead” financially because of monthly bills and past debts for education and healthcare. Access to affordable housing for the young adult workforce has been identified by several state initiatives over the last several years, including the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority⁵.

- » “Financial stability.”
- » “Currently the cost of childcare.”

“I have applied to an average of 2 full-time jobs a month for the past 18 months (about 40 jobs), received 6 interviews, and am still working part-time at two different jobs because people are either hiring internally or hiring people with more experience in the things I cannot GET experience in until I get a full-time job. I have a degree, I’m working part-time in the field, I’m doing all I can. I can’t volunteer anywhere, join a class, etc. when my schedule is so erratic and (including commute time) could have me working between 28-55 hours a week, including commute time. When I’m not there, I’m trying to stay on top of cleaning and other things, or resting my aching feet. Further, those two jobs? I pay rent, utilities, and insurance every month. \$200 a month for all groceries (including cleaning products) has me policing everything I eat and how often I do dishes/etc. I’m not even going to try to have children when I can barely support myself. And I’m lucky to set aside \$20/month for future savings, which vanishes if I’m sick and miss work; how am I supposed to buy a house, or furniture, or save for retirement on that?”
— Sullivan County Young Adult

⁵ New Hampshire Housing, 2019, Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019.

- » *“Money (bills, expenses, rent, not enough pay).”*
- » *“Not being paid enough, cost of living being too high, high medical bills, no access to affordable higher education.”*

For many young adults, a large source of this financial strain is from “crippling student loan debt”. They cite loan repayment as a barrier to reaching future financial goals such as owning a home or starting a family.

Young adults mentioned that the cost of college makes it unattainable and, therefore, a barrier to reaching future goals. New Hampshire has one of the highest in-state tuition costs, due in part to low state investment in public higher education. In 2016, state support for higher education was \$93 per person, far behind the next-lowest state, Pennsylvania, which allocated \$139 per person for higher education and in stark contrast to the national average of \$289 per person⁶.

Physical and Mental Health

Mental health is a common barrier for many young adults, especially anxiety and depression. New Hampshire young adults expressed concerns mirrored by their peers nationally. According to an analysis of NSDUH data, “more U.S. adolescents and young adults in the late 2010s, versus the mid-2000s, experienced serious psychological distress, major depression or suicidal thoughts, and more attempted suicide¹²,” a trend not seen in older populations. In the NH, young adults also mentioned physical health limitations, such as chronic illness and physical disabilities as concerning. A lack of access to affordable healthcare exacerbates these issues for many.

- » *“I struggle with severe depression and anxiety, leaving the house by myself is very difficult which currently makes it a struggle to find a job.”*
- » *“Nothing besides depression.”*
- » *“Permanently disabled with no help. Every single time I make progress some ‘leader’ comes along and rips it away. Every. Time.”*

Innate Barriers

Several young adults identified most with innate barriers, such as a lack of motivation, goals, and self-discipline, as standing in the way of reaching their goals. Many young adults specifically spoke about self-esteem as an innate barrier, including self-confidence, fear of failure, and cautiousness.

- » *“Not knowing the steps to meet my goals.”*
- » *“Little motivation.”*
- » *“Nothing, since I don’t have any.”*
- » *“Many times, I block myself.”*

YOUNG ADULTS ROLE IN ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE MISUSE IN NH

THOUGHTS ON SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Young adults were asked what they think others like them can do to help address problems with substance misuse. Three major themes emerged:

1. communication and relationship-building;
2. prevention and education; and
3. treatment and resources.

Communication and Relationship Building

Young adults gave many suggestions about how to help those struggling with substance misuse. A large portion spoke about the importance of communication, including speaking up and talking with friends and family who may be

⁶ Carson, Jessica A., "Mapping the Food Landscape in New Hampshire" (2019). The Carsey School of Public Policy at the Scholars' Repository. 372.

struggling, being a safe space to listen if a friend needs to talk, and parents having more open discussions about substance use with their children.

- » *“Be open about struggles and positive coping mechanisms.”*
- » *“Talk to friends.”*
- » *“Talk openly about the problem.”*
- » *“Raise awareness. Parents need to do a better job educating their children.”*
- » *“What I do is I tell anyone who will listen what I know about them and what I know they can do to you. All my nieces and nephews have gotten the speech from me about substance abuse.”*

Additionally, young adults spoke about the importance of encouraging community connection and relationship-building so that people feel less isolated. They felt that this would help reduce the stigma around substance use and seeking treatment, ensuring that those who are struggling know that they are not alone or being judged.

- » *“Not be judgmental. Learn the best way to help people who need it.”*

Prevention and Education

Education was mentioned often as a way to address substance use. Young adults gave several suggestions for education/prevention strategies, including starting in schools at younger ages; marketing, public health campaigns and education that provide facts and statistics rather than scare tactics about substance misuse and its harmful effects; peer education and sharing of personal experiences; and increasing knowledge about the connection between addiction and mental health.

- » *“Become more educated about the substances.”*
- » *“More information on them in school, less having it around.”*

Several young adults also spoke about the importance of supporting affordable alcohol and drug free activities in the community, and encouraging these healthy alternatives among friends.

- » *“Share facts, reduce peer pressure, find positive outlets for stress.”*
- » *“By supporting sober fun and sober habits, maybe starting sober groups as options for those in recovery.”*

Treatment and Resources

Several young adults mentioned the need for additional and affordable services and programs in the community to address substance misuse, including addressing the underlying issues of mental health services, job opportunities, and affordable housing. Peer support was also provided as a promising practice to help young adults. Some young adults mentioned harm reduction strategies such as safe injection sites.

- » *“More teen centers and mentoring programs.”*
- » *“Maybe put stricter dispensing enforcements for controlled substances like oxycodone and alprazolam to counter act the skyrocketing rates of addiction and overdose?”*

Several young adults also spoke about the importance of getting involved in the community and advocating for services, as well as being aware of the signs of substance use and promoting resources in the community to help friends/family who may be struggling.

- » *“Advocate for more substance abuse recovery programs.”*

A few young adults spoke about the importance of educating our political leaders to raise awareness and affect policy change to create programs and services that address the root causes of substance misuse.

- » *“Kick out the leaders, take over, start everything from scratch with some form of actual democracy and give people a chance to actually live rather than just survive.”*

NEXT STEPS

Asking young adults about their experiences, impressions living in New Hampshire communities is only a starting point. At the beginning of this report, we articulated a hope that the assessment data collected would help us understand what young adults are concerned about, what is motivating them, and what challenges them. We have learned that they enjoy the outdoors and close-knit communities, that they enjoy their friends and family, and that they have a desire to work, to launch businesses, and to play a more impactful role in politics and state leadership. These are areas to continue to invest in to support young adults in their livelihoods.

We have also learned that young adults continue to be challenged by the high cost of housing and higher education that lead to their migration to neighboring states and beyond. We have learned of the significant limitations to their progress and promise due to low wages; problems accessing affordable health care; continuing alcohol, tobacco, vaping, marijuana, opioid and other drug problems; and a sense of hopelessness related to environmental threats and political discord.

By and large young adults are motivated by connection -- to communities, to geo-political causes, to decision-making, to friends and family, to the natural world, and to each other. Through sharing their experiences and perceptions, young adults have provided information that may be used by leaders, policy makers, service systems, and stakeholders to develop policies, practices and programs to improve wellness and opportunities for a high quality of life and sense of wellbeing.

Our call now, along with young adults themselves, is to build a future with them that, among other outcomes, will increase their educational opportunities and financial stability, engage them meaningfully in policy and politics, support their families, provide accessible and affordable health care and housing, address multiple substance misuse and mental health problems, protect the environment and natural resources, and recognize and channel their innate strength and sense of responsibility.

By doing so we will honor the survey participants who represented their peers well in their detailed, genuine and eloquent responses, reflecting thoughtful commitment to their futures. Our counties and state will do well to give their responses more meaningful reflection and committed action to improve their promise and their vitality in every walk of life and in every community.

In response to the findings of the Young Adult Needs Assessment, the NH Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services has been building the infrastructure to support the health and wellness of NH young adults. This infrastructure includes media campaigns, public health efforts focused on the young adult population and the Drug-Free NH website.

Media campaigns reaching young adults include [Binge Free 603](https://bingefree603.org/binge-free-603/)⁷ and [Today Is for Me](https://todayisfor.me/)⁸. [Young Adult Strategies Coordinators](#)⁹ in most regions of the state are public health professionals actively working to support and connect young adults to strategies that promote healthy living, lifelong learning, and emotional wellbeing. In addition Drug Free NH hosts a [young adult webpage](#)¹⁰ that connects people to resources, support, and services to develop healthy solutions. It is a destination for young people looking for resources and opportunities that can promote career, family and well-being including, current information about living, learning, and connecting and resources for someone in a crisis.

⁷ <https://bingefree603.org/binge-free-603/>

⁸ <https://todayisfor.me/>

⁹ <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/prevention.htm>

¹⁰ <https://drugfreenh.org/i-need-help/for-young-adults/>

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO TAKE ACTION INCLUDE:

- ☐ *Broaden social emotional learning approaches in schools so that all children have public access to behavioral health services.*
- ☐ *Affirm, protect, and support the identity of all young people.*
- ☐ *Advocate for a fair and livable wage – increase the minimum wage.*
- ☐ *Increase opportunities to explore the trades through apprenticeship and other on-the-job training.*
- ☐ *Support opportunities through law enforcement and the courts for young people to apologize and restore justice for mistakes they made.*
- ☐ *Increase access to affordable health care including mental health counseling and treatment for substance misuse.*
- ☐ *Support a strong public health system that emphasizes prevention, early intervention with evidence-based strategies.*
- ☐ *Strengthen and support young families with programs like HeadStart, Home Visiting, and Family Resource Centers.*

Our city, towns, counties and state will do well to give the responses from the over 3000 young adults who completed the statewide survey more meaningful reflection and committed action to improve their promise and their vitality in every walk of life and in every community.

METHODS

SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The goals of the 2019 assessment were to:

1. Identify substance use prevalence among 18-20, 21-25 and 26-30 year old young adults;
2. Identify attitudes related to misuse of alcohol, marijuana and other substances that could inform a strategic response by the state and other stakeholders; and
3. Understand factors that influence beliefs and behaviors of young adults in New Hampshire.

An online survey was developed in consultation with BDAS and other experts in the field and administered through Survey Gizmo. The survey was promoted and distributed through the following channels, explained in greater detail in the “Social Media Design and Methods” section below:

- » *social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, Google);*
- » *email lists and listservs managed by community-based prevention specialists, coalitions, providers and secondary schools, and large employers;*
- » *postcards and flyers with a URL and QR code distributed to partners across the state; and*
- » *two young adult online survey panels contracted to promote and collect surveys from their young adult members.*

The data collection period was October to December 2019. The criteria for being included in the survey was the respondent had to currently reside in NH and be between the ages of 18-30. A total of 2,694 survey responses are included in the results discussed in this report. Two \$50 Visa gift cards were given to respondents via lottery weekly while the survey was being fielded, and two \$250 Visa gift cards were given via lottery at the end of survey data collection.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Except for the description of the demographics of the sample, all analyses are weighted, and performed using SAS 9.4. Using similar methods to the 2019 Young Adult Assessment statewide report, the primary analyses were weighted frequency distributions and cross tabulations to examine differences by each county in comparison to the state average. Weighted 95% confidence intervals were computed around percentages (Wald type, normal approximation); although not shown in the report, the confidence intervals were used to identify significant differences between the county and state estimates. Significant differences are identified with an asterisk within the tables. In order to ensure confidentiality and reliability of the data, estimates were suppressed if the numerator was less than five (5) or the denominator was less than 50.

Post-Stratification Weights

Using similar methods to those used in the 2015 NH YAA, post-stratification sampling weights were calculated using age (age groups included 18-20, 21-25, and 26-30), gender identity (adjusting for cis-gender male, cis-gender female, and non-binary), and county to improve representativeness of the NH Young Adult Assessment (YAA) sample to the NH young adult population.¹¹ Given that only binary gender categories were available for our population-level estimates, weights were adjusted to account for those with non-binary gender identities in the 2019 YAA sample. Specifically, the following was used to calculate the post-stratification weights (repeated for each county):

Population counts for each county:

- » *N11 (age 18-20, gender cis-male)*
- » *N12 (age 18-20, gender cis-female)*
- » *N21 (age 21-25, gender cis-male)*
- » *N22 (age 21-25, gender cis-female)*
- » *N31 (age 26-30, gender cis-male)*
- » *N32 (age 26-30, gender cis-female)*
- » *Sample sizes for each county:*

¹¹ For population-level estimates we used the following: <https://census.missouri.edu/population-by-age/>

- » S11 (age 18-20, gender cis-male)
- » S12 (age 18-20, gender cis-female)
- » S13 (age 18-20, gender non-binary)
- » S21 (age 21-25, gender cis-male)
- » S22 (age 21-25, gender cis-female)
- » S23 (age 21-25, gender non-binary)
- » S31 (age 26-30, gender cis-male)
- » S32 (age 26-30, gender cis-female)
- » S33 (age 26-30, gender non-binary)

The weights are calculated as:

Table 14 Weight Calculations			
	Cis-Gender Male	Cis-Gender Female	Non-Binary
18-20	$wt11 = (N11/S11)*adj1$	$wt12 = (N12/S12)*adj1$	$wt13 = (N11 + N12)/ (S11+S12+S13)$
21-25	$wt21 = (N21/S21)*adj2$	$wt22 = (N22/S22)*adj2$	$wt32 = (N21 + N22)/ (S21+S22+S23)$
26-30	$wt31 = (N31/S31)*adj3$	$wt32 = (N32/S32)*adj3$	$wt33 = (N31 + N32)/ (S31+S32+S33)$

$$adj1 = ((N11 + N12 - (wt13*s13))) / (N11 + N12)$$

$$adj2 = ((N21 + N22 - (wt23*s23))) / (N21 + N22)$$

$$adj3 = ((N31 + N32 - (wt33*s33))) / (N31 + N32)$$

Qualitative Coding and Data Analysis Methods

The survey included seven open-ended questions that provide context to the quantitative analysis. These seven questions included:

1. What are you and other young adults living in NH excited about?
2. What is frustrating to you and other young adults living in NH?
3. What negative impacts of alcohol or drug misuse do you see among people your age?
4. What, if any, new or emerging substance use issues are you seeing around you?
5. What gives you a sense of hope about the future?
6. What, if anything, is blocking you from reaching your future goals?
7. What do you think young adults like you can do to help address problems with substance misuse?

All open-ended responses were imported into Qualitative Data Analysis software - NVivo 12 (QSR International) - for data analysis. All closed-ended responses remained linked to the qualitative data in NVivo in order to complete subgroup analyses by county. Two coders initially independently coded the first 20-25 responses for each question. This process ensured reliability between coders and informed a preliminary codebook that included inductive codes that emerged from the data. An additional 20% of the responses for each question was divided between the two coders (n=298 to 364 responses). Inductive, open coding was used at this stage and responses were allowed to fall into more than one code. In order to reduce bias and increase reliability, the two coders met regularly to review memos that included coding questions and other emerging insights.

Next, the coders condensed the codebook by removing or re-coding any codes that were used infrequently. They then began to identify relationships among the open codes, grouping common codes to create conceptual categories. The final step in the coding process included focused coding to validate the final codes and coding structure. Every tenth response for each question was coded until reaching the end of all responses. In this way, another 10% of the responses for each

question was coded (n=119 to 146 additional responses). In total, an average of 469 responses were coded per question.

After this stage both coders agreed that they had reached saturation and began data analysis. Thematic analysis was used in an iterative process to identify major themes for each question. NVivo was then used to auto code using these existing patterns. In this process, NVivo compares each text passage – for example, sentence or paragraph - to content already coded. If the content of the text passage is similar in wording to content already coded, then the test passage will be coded similarly. Pattern-based auto coding was used because of the large volumes of textual content from the surveys. A series of matrix queries were run for each question to discover how conceptual categories and subcategories differed by county.

