

Community Conditions: ConnectWell CIE Ideas- Key Themes

COMMUNITY CONDITIONS	
What is ConnectWell CIE? ConnectWell CIE of East Central Ohio partners with local agencies, providers, and community members to link individuals with housing, food, transportation, healthcare, legal aid, and other essential resources. The initiative focuses on whole-person care – removing barriers, fostering collaboration, and creating a healthier, more connected community for everyone.	GOAL: Strengthen Stark County's Care Coordination Network by Reducing Barriers to Access.
What Will Success Look Like? - Increased Healthcare Access: create a coordinated healthcare & non-medical services delivery system. - Facilitates Close-Loop Referrals: ensures seamless transitions between care providers and community-based organizations. - Availability of Comprehensive Data: identify unmet needs, emerging trends, and intervention efficacy. - Enhanced Community Collaboration: build a stronger "community of care."	Objectives - Increase the number of secured partner agencies utilizing ConnectWell CIE by 75. - Increase the number of partner agencies sending and/or accepting referrals consistently by 50. - Increase the percentage of resolved referral (closed loop) cases by 14%.
Supporting Data 66% of respondents rated access to health care as a moderately or very serious problem facing Stark County (2025 CHA p. 14) 31% of respondents do not believe Stark County has the needed program or resources to address health-related issues (2025 CHA p. 146) 71% of respondents don't believe the community knows about the health services and options that are available to them (2025 CHA p. 116)	
 ConnectWell CIE OF EAST CENTRAL OHIO  an affiliate of Goodwill Industries	

1. Improve Resource Navigation and Connection

Participants consistently noted that many services already exist, but residents often struggle to find, understand, or access them. Suggestions included:

- Prioritizing referrals and connections between organizations.
- Creating and distributing a Stark County resource or "street card" in multiple languages.
- Developing best-practice guidance for agencies to improve coordination and referrals.
- Providing vetted interpreter services to serve non-English-speaking residents better.

2. Expand Access to Healthy Food

Food access was identified as a major community need, particularly in Alliance. Participants recommended:

- A food pantry or affordable grocery option with regular hours.
- Permanent or pop-up fresh food markets in downtown Alliance.
- Community gardens utilizing city land bank properties unsuitable for housing. (Canton City)
- Expanding neighborhood blessing boxes to ensure every community has access to emergency food resources.

3. Bring Services into Neighborhoods

Attendees emphasized the importance of meeting residents where they are by creating more accessible, community-based opportunities, including:

- Community health days that provide transportation to locations offering healthcare, food assistance, and support services.
- Community access points where multiple resources can be available in one place.
- Library partnerships provide health and social needs navigation, educational programming, and trusted spaces for support.

4. Support Older Adults and Reduce Social Isolation

Participants identified opportunities to improve both health and social connectedness among older adults through volunteer programs that:

- Connect older adults to meaningful service opportunities. (blanket making, pantry volunteering, etc.)
- Support activities such as food delivery, home improvement projects, and community service.
- Build relationships while addressing community needs.

5. Address Family and Childcare Needs

Attendees also recognized the importance of access to childcare, recommending additional funding and resources to support childcare services in healthcare and community settings.

Community Conditions Story- Key Themes

COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

GOAL: Advance Coordinated, Equitable Community Conditions That Support Health, Stability, and Social Connectedness Across the County.

Provider/Agency Focused Objectives

- Enhance patient care coordination.
- Increase awareness and utilization of available community health/social service resources and training.
- Improve AI practices within community agencies.
- Increase the ratio of population mental health providers from 320:1 to 300:1.
- Strengthen and sustain access to maternal health services across Stark County by supporting collaboration, workforce retention, and community awareness of existing maternal health resources.

Supporting Data

- 48% of respondents believe that there are not enough mental and behavioral health providers in the area (2025 CHA p. 161)

Community Focused Objectives

- Host open discussions on community conditions to share resources, identify gaps, and identify community-based strategies to address issues.
- Identify at least two community access hub sites in high-need areas to provide centralized, in-person navigation and service connection.
- Increase the number of community health workers, peer supporters, and navigators located in high-need areas by 20%.
- Research, secure funding, and implement a mobile kiosk pilot project.

Supporting Data

- 57% of respondents think Stark County residents do not have transportation for appointments when needed (2025 Community Partner Survey)
- 66% of respondents rated food insecurity as a moderate or very serious problem facing Stark County (2025 CHA p. 18)
- 21% of respondents either do not have housing or have housing but are worried about losing it (2025 CHA p. 220)

1. Housing Instability and Unsafe Living Conditions

Many stories illustrated how housing conditions directly affect mental health and emotional well-being. Participants described:

- Families are becoming homeless despite paying rent because landlords failed to make necessary repairs.
- Older adults living in homes needing significant repairs.
- Unsafe living conditions, including pest infestations and deteriorating housing.

These experiences created stress, uncertainty, and feelings of helplessness, often compounding existing physical or mental health challenges.

2. The Hidden Trauma of Children and Families

One participant recalled a child staying in a shelter who saw a staff member wearing a bandage and asked, “Does your daddy hit you too?” The comment revealed the child’s exposure to violence and trauma. Because support was available, the family was connected to services and assistance, demonstrating how early intervention and compassionate responses can make a lasting difference.

3. Challenges Facing Older Adults and Caregivers

Several stories highlighted the struggles experienced by older adults, including:

- Declining health and increasing medical needs.
- Limited transportation options for appointments and daily activities.
- Dependence on family members and caregivers for support.
- Social isolation and difficulty maintaining their homes.

Participants emphasized that both older adults and their caregivers often face these challenges with limited community support.

4. Access to Food as a Mental Health Issue

The closure of Stark Fresh in Alliance was repeatedly mentioned as a significant loss. Participants described the north end of Alliance as a food desert, leaving residents without access to affordable, fresh food. The lack of basic necessities contributes to stress, anxiety, and diminished quality of life.

5. Community Support Makes a Difference

While many stories highlighted barriers, they also demonstrated the importance of caring individuals, providers, family members, and community organizations. Whether through connecting a family to services, assisting an older adult, or supporting someone facing difficult circumstances, participants emphasized that timely intervention and compassionate support can significantly improve outcomes.

Community Conditions Ideas- Key Themes

1. Improve Neighborhood Conditions to Support Well-Being

Participants emphasized that the physical environment plays a direct role in mental health and community safety. Suggested improvements included:

- Cleaning up vacant lots and abandoned properties
- Regular trash removal and lawn maintenance to improve neighborhood appearance and safety
- Addressing blight as a foundation for restoring community pride and stability
- Using environmental improvements as a first step toward reducing stress and isolation

2. Increase Access to Safe and Stable Housing

Stable housing was identified as a critical entry point for mental health support. Participants highlighted the need for:

- Emergency housing options for individuals and families in crisis
- More immediate, accessible shelter resources connected to support services
- Housing stability as a protective factor for mental health and recovery

3. Build Trust Through Community-Based Engagement

Attendees stressed the importance of meeting people where they already feel safe and connected, particularly for immigrants and other underserved populations. Recommendations included:

- Creating engagement opportunities within trusted community spaces (e.g., cultural centers, faith-based settings, neighborhood hubs)
- Designing programs that strengthen social connection before introducing formal services
- Using trusted messengers and community leaders to reduce stigma and increase awareness of mental health resources

4. Strengthen Connection Between Community Life and Resources

Participants highlighted the need to better link everyday community spaces with access to support services by:

- Embedding outreach and resource connection into existing neighborhood activities
- Creating opportunities for relationship-building that naturally connect residents to help
- Ensuring services are approachable, visible, and culturally responsive

Community Conditions Gaps- Key Themes

1. Mistrust and Underutilization of Services

Participants highlighted that mistrust of insurance systems, physicians, and government agencies continues to contribute to the underutilization of available services. This distrust can prevent individuals and families from seeking care even when services exist.

2. Neighborhood Safety and Environmental Conditions

Specific communities, such as Skyline Terrace, were identified as experiencing ongoing safety concerns, including gun violence and poor environmental conditions. Participants noted that these issues directly affect well-being and limit residents' ability to safely access resources like grocery stores and community services.

3. Geographic and Eligibility Barriers

Participants pointed to communities like Smith Township and areas near Alliance that fall into complex jurisdictional boundaries. Residents may be geographically closer to services in one county but are not eligible for those resources, while also facing transportation challenges to access services in nearby cities such as Youngstown.

4. Gaps for Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities were identified as an underserved group whose needs are not fully captured in current data. Participants noted this gap also significantly impacts older adults, particularly those on fixed incomes, who may face compounded barriers related to mobility, access, and support services.

Mental Health: Special Populations

Story- Key Themes

MENTAL HEALTH

GOAL: Promote Mental Well-Being and Social Connection Across the Lifespan, Focusing on Special Populations.

Child & Adolescent Focused Objectives

- Trauma-informed care presentations for parents and educators of children 0-8 years of age will increase by 20%.
- The percentage of parents/guardians who "often" or "sometimes" set device limits will increase from 71% to 80%.
- Create opportunities for adolescents to lead peer-to-peer efforts to improve digital wellness and mental well-being.
- Expand integrated healthcare for adolescents.
- Increase the number of trauma-informed adults.

Supporting Data

- 28% of respondents either never or rarely limit their children's use of digital devices for non-school-related purposes (2025 CHA p. 236)

Adult Focused Objectives

- Improve immigrant/immigrant family's mental health and well-being.
- Community connections with older adults will increase by 20% through community program engagement.

Supporting Data

- 86% of respondents rated mental health as a very or moderately serious problem in the county (2025 CHA p. 38)
- 25% of respondents had more than 11 days in the past month when their mental health was not good (2025 CHA p. 151)
- 20% of respondents see or talk to people they care about or feel close to less than once a week (2025 CHA p. 157)
- 68% of older adults felt that not knowing what services are available in their community was a problem facing older adults (2025 CHA p. 53)
- Older adults are facing loneliness and stigma around mental health. They're afraid of seeking help for their mental health (2025 CHA p. 53)
- 38% of respondents believe immigrants are NOT adequately served by local health services (2025 CHA p. 115)

1. Mental Health Needs Compounded by Limited Access

Participants described clients whose mental health conditions are worsened by difficulty accessing basic resources and support systems. They emphasized that listening and providing human connection are often just as important as connecting individuals to formal services.

2. Barriers Facing Immigrant Communities

Immigrants were identified as a population experiencing high levels of anxiety, PTSD, and loneliness. Participants noted that many individuals are unaware of available resources, feel embarrassed to seek help, or fear pursuing services due to cultural or immigration-related concerns.

3. System and Eligibility Barriers in Care Settings

A specific example highlighted a patient who was denied healthcare services in a nursing home due to residency status, despite having significant physical needs. This reflects broader systemic barriers that can limit access to both physical and mental health care.

4. Social Isolation Among Older Adults

Participants shared experiences of older adults who were initially concerned about cognitive decline but were found to be experiencing loneliness. Many of these individuals face challenges such as limited transportation, lack of digital literacy, and difficulty accessing information about available social activities and support services.

Mental Health: Special Populations

Ideas- Key Themes

1. Expand Immediate and Non-Crisis Mental Health Access

Participants emphasized the need for accessible mental health services outside of traditional emergency or crisis systems. Suggestions included:

- Creating more accessible, non-emergency pathways for mental health support
- Providing free mental health services regardless of insurance or ability to pay
- Expanding community-based or walk-in support options to reduce barriers to care

2. Strengthen the Mental Health Workforce

Participants highlighted workforce shortages as a major barrier to care and recommended:

- Increasing the ratio of healthcare and mental health providers to patients
- Improving pay to recruit and retain qualified professionals
- Expanding capacity to reduce wait times and improve continuity of care

3. Improve Access for Individuals with Complex Needs

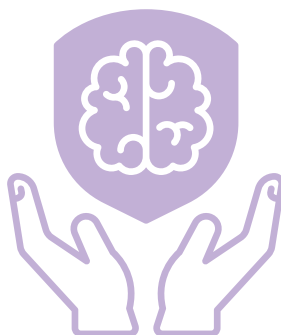
Special attention was given to individuals with dual diagnoses and disabilities. Participants recommended:

- Expanding specialized mental health services for individuals with disabilities and co-occurring conditions
- Ensuring services are tailored to meet complex and layered needs within the community

4. Increase Collaboration Across Agencies

Participants emphasized the importance of breaking down silos between organizations to improve care coordination by:

- Strengthening collaboration among providers, agencies, and community organizations
- Creating more integrated systems focused on community-wide outcomes rather than individual agency efforts



Mental Health: Special Populations

Gaps- Key Themes

1. Non-Native English Speakers

Participants expressed concern that community surveys and outreach efforts may not adequately reach individuals whose primary language is not English. If surveys, resources, and communications are not available in multiple languages, these residents may be excluded from community needs assessments and decision-making processes.

2. Older Adults and Seniors on Fixed Incomes

Attendees highlighted the challenges faced by older adults, particularly those living alone on fixed incomes. Concerns included:

- Chronic health conditions and disabilities.
- Mental health impacts related to health changes, such as stroke or declining mobility.
- Housing issues and poor living conditions.
- Social isolation and limited support networks.
- Dependence on family members or caregivers for transportation and daily needs.

Participants emphasized that these experiences are often hidden and may not be fully reflected in existing data.

3. Transportation Needs Among Seniors

A significant gap identified was access to affordable and reliable transportation for older adults. Participants noted that transportation needs extend beyond medical appointments and include:

- Grocery shopping.
- Running errands.
- Social activities and community engagement.
- Access to essential services.

4. Individuals with Disabilities

Participants also identified individuals with disabilities, including those receiving waiver services or living in group homes, as a population that may not be adequately represented. Their unique healthcare, transportation, social, and support needs may not be fully captured through traditional data collection methods.

MENTAL HEALTH

GOAL: Strengthen Suicide Prevention and Reduce Barriers for Seeking Services.

Suicide Prevention Objectives

- Decrease the suicide rate in Stark County from an average age-adjusted rate of 14.97 to 13.97 per 100,000.
- Increase the percentage of mobile crisis team encounters resolved in the field without ER or police transport from 49% to 55%.

Supporting Data

- 35% of respondents felt sad or hopeless for more than two weeks in the past year (2025 CHA p.151)
- 11% of respondents seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months (2025 CHA p. 154)
- Among respondents whose family member or close friend needed drug or alcohol treatment services during the past year, 21% reported difficulty accessing treatment in a timely manner (2025 CHA p. 178)

GOAL: Reduce Substance Use in Stark County.

Substance Use Disorder Objectives

- Reduce drug overdose deaths with focused implementation in census tracts and populations experiencing higher overdose rates.
- Decrease the percent of people who report using tobacco products from 36.5% to 31.5% in the City of Canton.
- Provide MAT prescribing management training and technical assistance to primary care providers in Stark County regarding initiating or expanding MAT services located in or serving high-overdose rate and medically underserved communities.
- Increase the percentage of individuals who stayed engaged in treatment or recovery services post-jail via their jail liaison from 29% to 58%.

Supporting Data

- 97% of respondents felt that illegal drug use was a serious issue in Stark County (2025 CHA p. 39)
- 36.5% of Canton City respondents indicated that they use tobacco products every day, 11% higher than the county average (2025 CHA p. 164)
- In 2025, there were 85 drug overdose deaths, a 18% decrease from 2024 (Overdose Dashboard)

Mental Health: Suicide Prevention Story- Key Themes

1. Recovery Requires Ongoing Support

Participants shared stories demonstrating that recovery is possible when individuals have access to consistent treatment, medication, and supportive services. One story described a loved one who maintained sobriety for several years, built a family, secured housing, and advanced in a career through an apprenticeship program. However, when those supports became inaccessible, the individual relapsed and ultimately passed away. These experiences highlight the importance of maintaining long-term access to mental health treatment, recovery services, medication, and supportive relationships.

2. Housing and Basic Needs Affect Recovery

Participants also described individuals struggling with substance use while facing significant housing and financial challenges. One example involved a woman cycling in and out of rehabilitation while living in a property requiring substantial repairs. Although she had housing, the physical, emotional, and financial demands of maintaining it created additional stressors that affected her well-being. These stories illustrate how unmet basic needs, including safe and stable housing, can complicate recovery and mental health outcomes.

3. Mental Health and Substance Use Are Closely Connected

Participants emphasized that mental health treatment, medication, recovery programs, and community support can save lives. The stories shared reflected the interconnected nature of mental health, substance use, housing stability, employment, and social support.