

Introduction

This report describes the results of a mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention assessment provided to community members in Brookings County. Brookings County is comprised of 28,784 residents between the communities of Brookings, Aurora, Elkton, Volga, White, Sinai, Bushnell, and Bruce. 20% of Brookings County residents are 18 and under, 13% are 65 and older, leaving the majority of the population being between the ages of 19 and 64.

A key goal of this community prevention needs assessment is to identify how Brookings Area United Way (BAUW) can continue to better support mental health, substance misuse services and suicide prevention efforts in Brookings County. BAUW created a community prevention assessment survey and analyzed the data to identify gaps, successes, and suggestions from the community for future prevention efforts to build a healthier Brookings County.

The assessment was completed using various questions that were selected to gain input from the general public on perceptions of prevention efforts and service accessibility in Brookings County, along with publicly available data. The assessment was administered to Brookings County residence in the Spring of April 2025. There were 118 responses collected over a 2-week period. The survey was provided in digital format and paper copies to local agencies and businesses, through email, newsletter, flyers, and on social media.

Based on the analysis of the data and input from the community, the following key findings were identified:

- *Mental health challenges, suicide, and/ or substance use challenges significantly affect Brookings County residents.*
- *Gaps in awareness for local treatment, support resources, and prevention opportunities in Brookings County.*
- *Brookings County residents are seeking specific intervention services and/or prevention efforts in their communities.*

The sections that follow, detail the findings from the April 2025 community prevention needs assessment, including Brookings County residents' awareness and presentations of local mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention efforts. The report concludes with a summary of the findings and next steps that could guide Brookings Area United Way's prevention planning and actions.

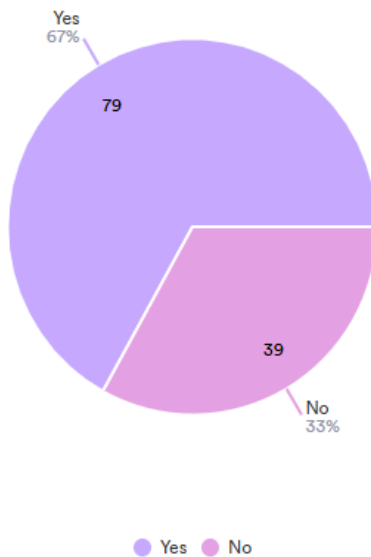
Community Findings

Mental health challenges, suicide, and/ or substance use challenges significantly affect Brookings County residents.

The graph below presents survey results from 118 respondents in Brookings County regarding the impact of substance use and suicide. The left pie chart shows that 67% have been personally affected by substance use issues—either themselves, their family, or someone they know. The right pie chart reveals that 68% have experienced the loss of someone to suicide within their social or family circles.

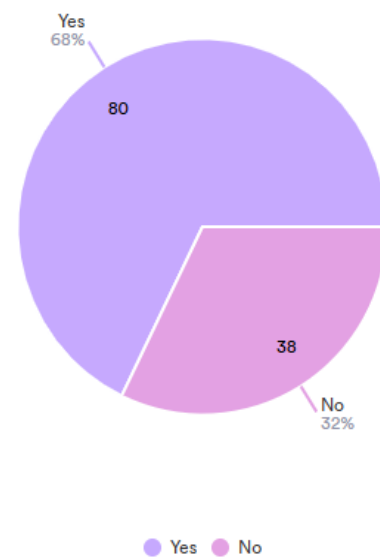
Have substance use issues personally affected you, your family, or someone you know?

118 Responses



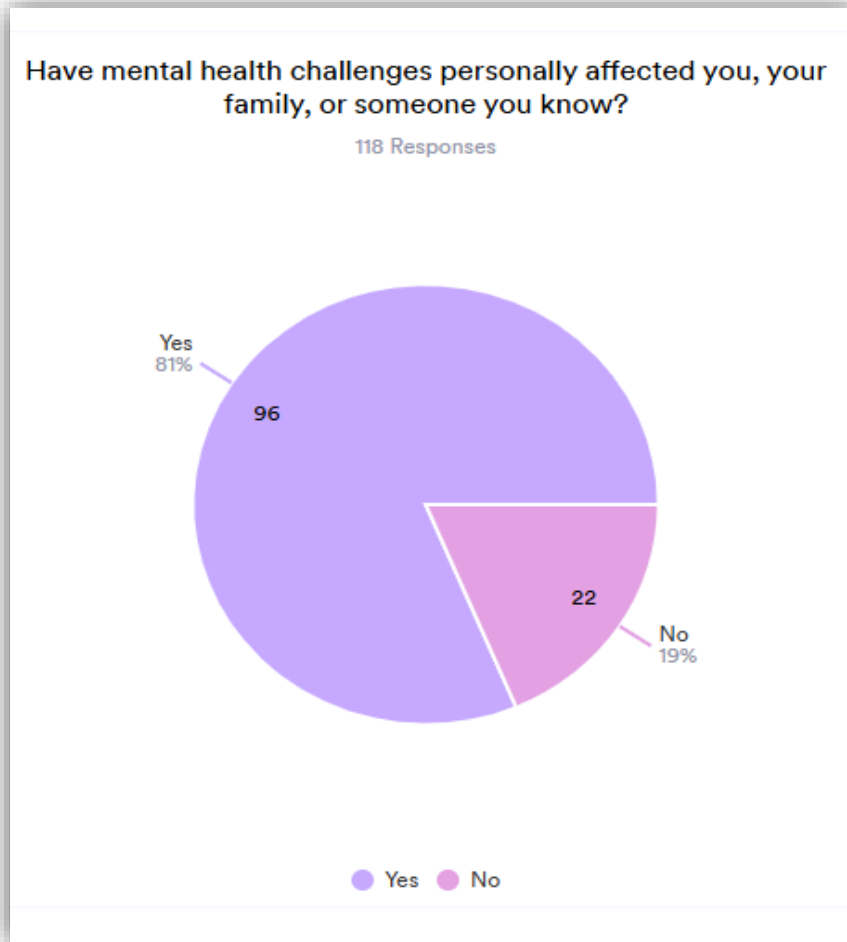
Has the loss of someone to suicide affected you, your family, or someone you know?

118 Responses



These results highlight the significant and widespread impact of substance use struggles, and suicide impact within the Brookings County community. With over two-thirds of respondents reporting direct personal connections to these issues, it's clear that these challenges are not isolated incidents but community-wide concerns that warrant urgent attention, support systems, and prevention efforts.

A striking 81% of the survey respondents in Brookings County reported that mental health challenges have personally affected them, their families, or someone they know. This high percentage underscores the profound and pervasive impact of mental health issues in the community.



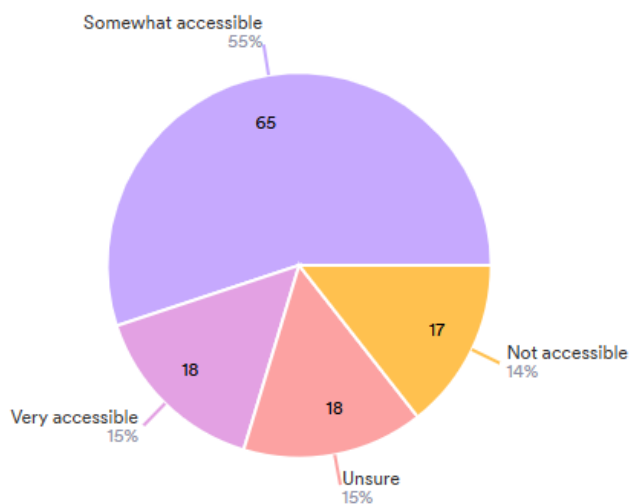
When combined with earlier data showing that 67% have been affected by substance use and 68% by suicide loss, it becomes clear that mental health, substance use, and suicide are deeply interconnected challenges facing a significant portion of Brookings County residents. These findings emphasize the urgent need for increased mental health resources, community-based support systems, and proactive prevention strategies to address this widespread concern.

Gap in awareness for local treatment, support resources, and prevention opportunities in Brookings County.

The survey responses highlight a noticeable gap in awareness and perceived accessibility of mental health and substance use resources in Brookings County. While the majority of respondents view treatment services (55%) and training opportunities (52%) as “somewhat accessible,” a significant portion remains uncertain—15% in both categories responded “unsure.” Additionally, 14% reported treatment services as “not accessible,” and 10% said the same for training opportunities.

How accessible are mental health and substance use treatment services in your community?

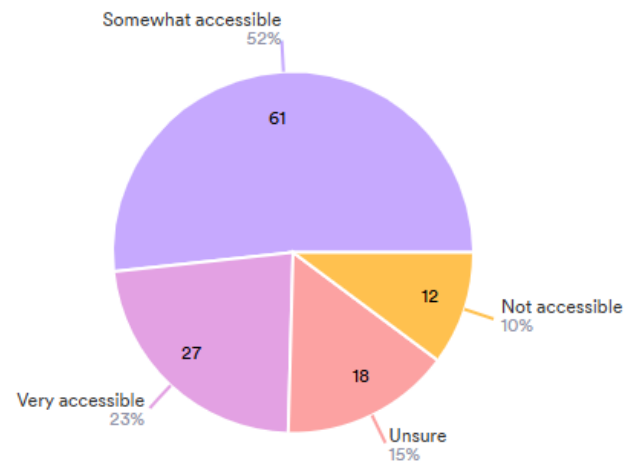
118 Responses



● Somewhat accessible ● Very accessible ● Unsure ● Not accessible

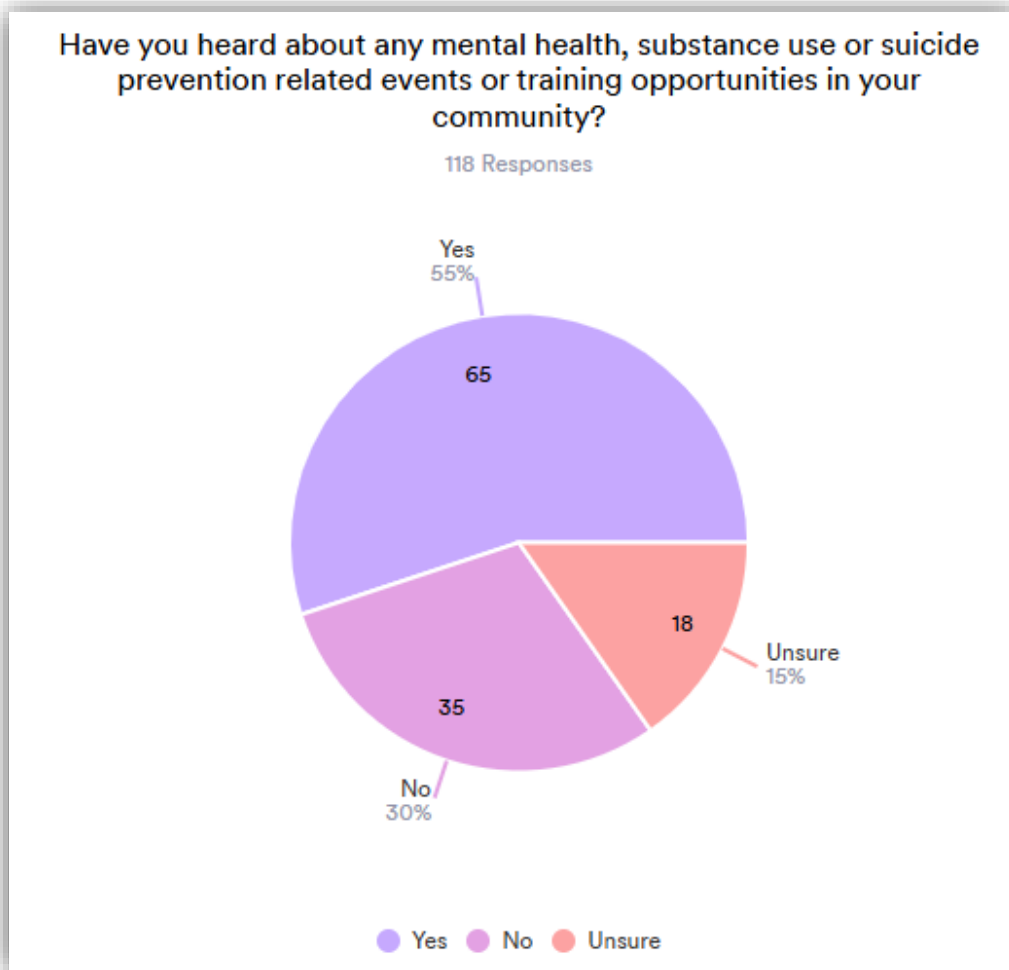
How accessible are mental health, substance use, or suicide prevention trainings and learning opportunities in your community?

118 Responses



● Somewhat accessible ● Very accessible ● Unsure ● Not accessible

These findings suggest that even though resources may exist, many residents either don’t know about them or find them difficult to reach. In addition, a slight majority (55%) of Brookings County residents have heard about mental health, substance use, or suicide prevention-related events or training opportunities, a significant portion remain uninformed or uncertain. Specifically, 30% reported not having heard of any such efforts, and 15% were unsure.



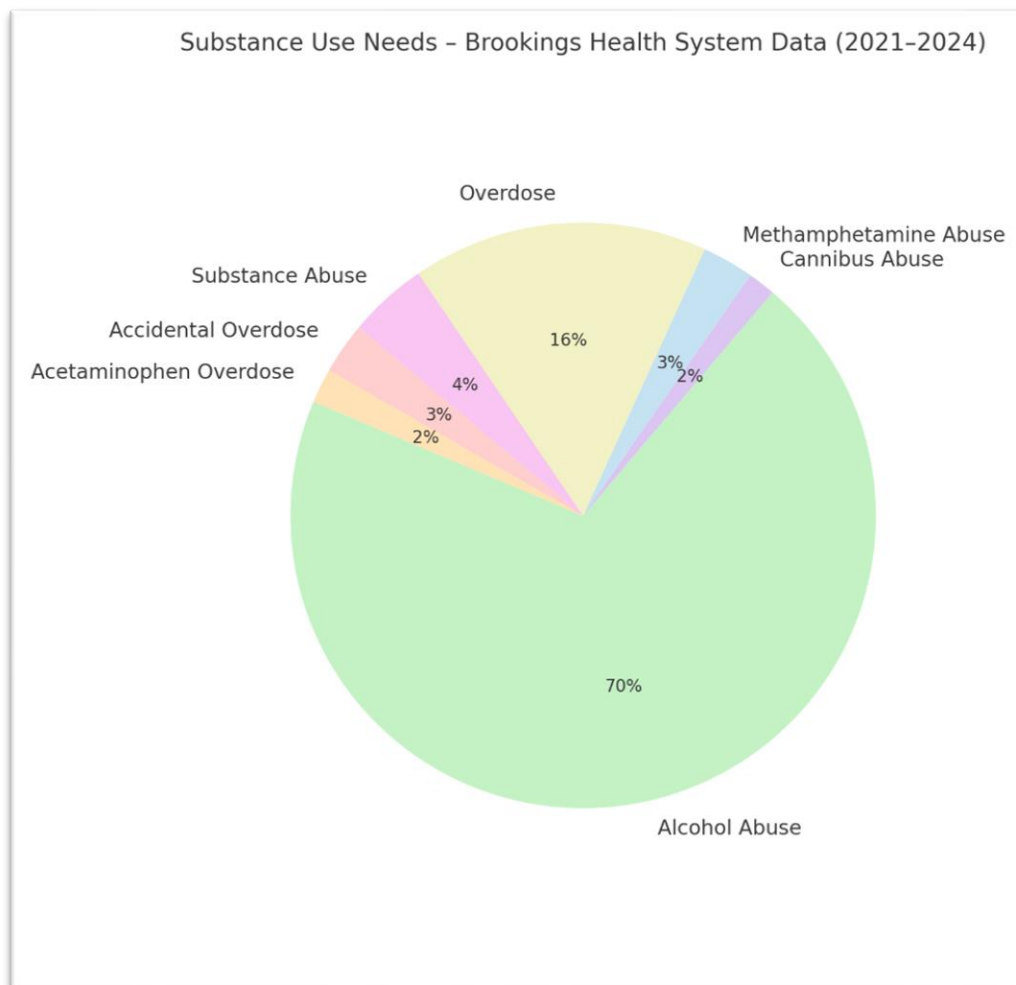
This indicates a notable gap in community awareness, suggesting that current outreach and communication strategies may not be effectively reaching all residents. This lack of clarity and awareness presents a barrier to care, reinforcing the need for better outreach, clearer communication, and enhanced visibility of local support systems and educational initiatives. Addressing this gap is critical to ensuring broader community engagement and support in prevention-related initiatives.

Brookings County residents could benefit from increased intervention services and/or prevention efforts in their communities.

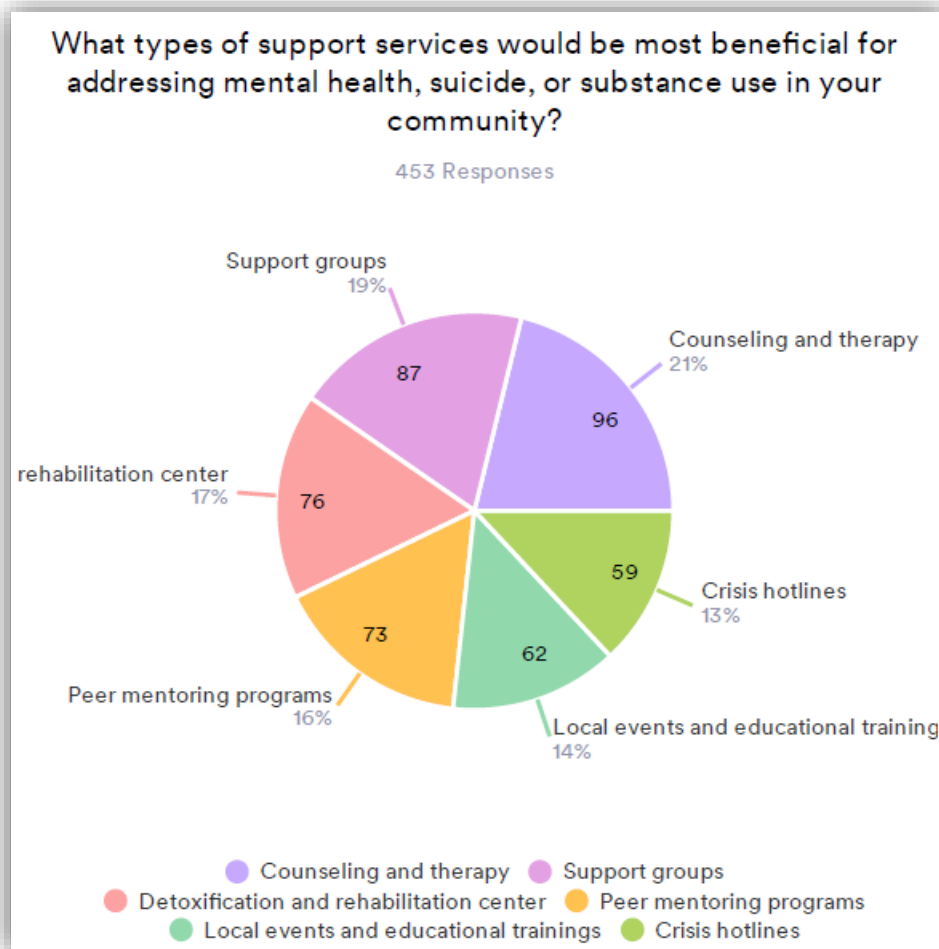
Despite the clear demand for support services, Brookings County currently faces significant gaps in these areas. Notably, there are little to no support groups available locally, leaving residents without peer-based avenues for shared recovery and emotional support. The county also lacks a dedicated detoxification or rehabilitation center, meaning individuals struggling with substance use must seek care outside the area. Additionally, peer mentoring programs are either absent or

extremely limited, further isolating those in need of guidance from individuals with lived experience. Compounding these challenges is the limited number of mental health and addiction service providers available in the county, making it difficult for residents to access timely and adequate care.

Access to timely and adequate care is a priority for the county as according to substance use trends based on clinical impression data from the Brookings Health System (2021-2024), the overwhelming majority of reported cases—70%—involve alcohol abuse, highlighting it as the most urgent public health concern. Overdose incidents, including both accidental and unspecified, account for 22% of the total, further emphasizing the need for overdose prevention and harm reduction efforts. Methamphetamine abuse (3%), cannabis abuse (2%), and other substance-related issues such as acetaminophen overdose and general substance abuse (6% combined) also represent notable challenges.



This data reveals a continued need for prevention and treatment services in Brookings County, especially in alcohol intervention, overdose response, and support for diverse substance use issues. Additional data from the assessment and written suggestions from county residents indicated that there is a high level of interest across various categories suggests that residents recognize the complexity of mental health and substance use challenges and the need for both clinical and community-based responses.



Given that Brookings County has limited local resources—such as a lack of a detox or rehab center, few support groups, and minimal peer mentoring infrastructure—the community’s call for increased prevention and intervention services is both timely and necessary. Expanding these efforts could significantly reduce the incidence of mental health crises, substance use, and suicide, while strengthening community resilience.

Community Resource Consideration

Brookings Area United Way (BAUW) is a uniquely positioned organization within Brookings County, offering a comprehensive model that combines funding for local nonprofits with the delivery of community programs and initiatives. No other agency in the county operates with this integrated approach. In contrast, Brookings Behavioral Health and Wellness serves as the county's only accredited prevention site, providing outpatient mental health and substance use treatment services alongside targeted prevention efforts for its clients. Unlike Brookings Behavioral Health and Wellness, BAUW does not offer direct clinical or outpatient treatment. Instead, its primary role in prevention includes offering educational opportunities, training sessions, and access to informational materials and resources that support the well-being of Brookings County residents across all age groups.

If approved to be an accredited community prevention site in Brookings, BAUW would be able to continue to provide and expand community prevention efforts, including but not limited to: Question, Persuade, Refer suicide prevention training, Mental Health First Aid training, Opioid Response and Naloxone Presentations, Quit Kit assembly and distribution, Communities That Care youth prevention framework, and prevention events like Stronger Together, and other efforts ran by our community initiatives for Brookings County residents, families, and youth.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data, combined with community feedback, reveals that substance use, mental health challenges, and suicide loss have had a significant impact on residents of Brookings County. These issues are widely recognized as priorities, with the majority of survey respondents rating them as either "significantly" or "somewhat" important. Additionally, over half of respondents indicated limited awareness of current prevention efforts and available support services within the county. Many also identified a critical need for enhanced access to care providers, the development of a local detoxification and rehabilitation center, and the sustained expansion of educational prevention initiatives and service awareness efforts across Brookings County.

Increased prevention efforts in Brookings County could provide substantial benefits for the community. By investing in early intervention, community education, and accessible support structures, the county could reduce the incidence and severity of mental health crises and substance use disorders. Programs such as peer-led initiatives, local support groups, and educational events can foster a sense of belonging and empowerment, while improved access to professional care can lead to earlier diagnosis and more effective treatment. Ultimately, prioritizing prevention could enhance overall well-being, reduce healthcare costs, and strengthen the social fabric of Brookings County.

Next Steps

We hope this data will help support the case for Brookings Area United Way to pursue accreditation as a community prevention site, addressing existing gaps in mental health and substance use awareness, prevention, and treatment services, as well as suicide prevention efforts in Brookings County. These findings will be shared with the Brookings County Mental Health Coalition to further explore how the coalition and other local prevention initiatives can effectively respond to the identified needs and recommendations of county residents.

Appendix A – References

1. Brookings Area United Way. Community Prevention Needs Assessment. (2025, April). Brookings County, SD.
2. Brookings Health System. (2025, April). Brookings County, SD.