

Community Themes and Strengths Assessment Executive Summary

The Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA) is one of four assessments completed as part of a community health strategic planning process for Jefferson County called *Community Matters: Assessment, Visioning and Planning for a Healthy Jefferson County, Alabama*. The CTSA identifies community assets and issues, both strengths and weaknesses, important to those who live, learn, work, worship and/or play in Jefferson County, Alabama.

The CTSA is designed to answer the following questions:

- *What is important to the community?*
- *How is quality of life perceived in the community?*
- *What assets does the community have that can be used to improve the community's health?*



The CTSA Sub-committee¹ developed, implemented and analyzed results from online and paper versions of the survey instrument entitled, *Your Opinion Matters!*, and of fifteen focus groups and one community conversation conducted across Jefferson County. The *Your Opinion Matters!* survey was available in English and Spanish online through Survey Monkey from October 2018 through December 2018 in a format accessible to individuals with low vision. The link to the *Your Opinion Matters!* survey was accessible through the Jefferson County Department of Health (JCDH) website, JCDH social media platforms and a variety of community partner websites. Additionally, many community partners shared the survey link through business and personal email distribution lists. Paper surveys, available in English and Spanish, were distributed throughout JCDH health centers, community partner facilities, community events, community meetings and informal gatherings. Additionally, JCDH provided the survey verbally for individuals with low vision and low literacy, and offered interpreter services for survey completion for persons requiring sign language or speaking languages other than English or Spanish.

A total of 1,360 *Your Opinion Matters!* surveys (324 paper and 1,036 online) were received, representing more than triple the calculated sample size requirement of 384. The fifteen focus groups and one community conversation engaged over 200 individuals from urban and suburban locations, as well as individuals from special populations within Jefferson County.



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Quantitative Results

The primary process used to collect quantitative data for the Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA) from the community was the *Your Opinion Matters!* survey. The demographic profile of *Your Opinion Matters!* survey participants is shown in Figures 1-7. The survey, targeting adults, included respondents ranging from four to 88 years of age. Almost three-quarters (74.4%) of the surveys were completed by females; the percent of female county residents, however, is 52.7%ⁱⁱ. Based on race, the survey captured data from a lesser percentage of white residents at 48.7% than live in Jefferson County (53.2%ⁱⁱ). Black or African Americans, who represent 43.4%ⁱⁱ of Jefferson County's population, represented 36.4% of the survey participants. Nearly ten percent (9.5%) of survey respondents were individuals of other races, including Asian and American Indian, a percentage higher than the 3.3%ⁱⁱ of county residents self-identifying in these race categories. Slightly over 5% of survey respondents chose not to provide his or her race. Additionally, survey respondents could select more than one racial category.

By ethnicity, 8.8% of survey respondents self-identified as Hispanic/Latino although 3.9%ⁱⁱ of the county's population are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. The distribution of survey completion by individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher was substantially greater at 62.8% than the 31.8%ⁱⁱ of county residents with a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. Individuals with less than a high school education comprise 10.6%ⁱⁱ of the county's population, but represented only 1.4% of survey respondents. The percentage of county residents without health care insurance coverage is 9.2%ⁱⁱ, whereas 5.4% of survey respondents indicated having no health insurance. Of note, respondents could select more than one insurance type. Among survey respondents, 14.5% indicated having a disability, a percentage slightly lower than the 17.3%ⁱⁱ Jefferson County residents living with a disability.

The profile of the survey respondents should be considered in the evaluation of the generalizability of the data as the demographic profile of survey respondents and residents of Jefferson County vary.

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Figure 1: Age Categories of Survey Respondents

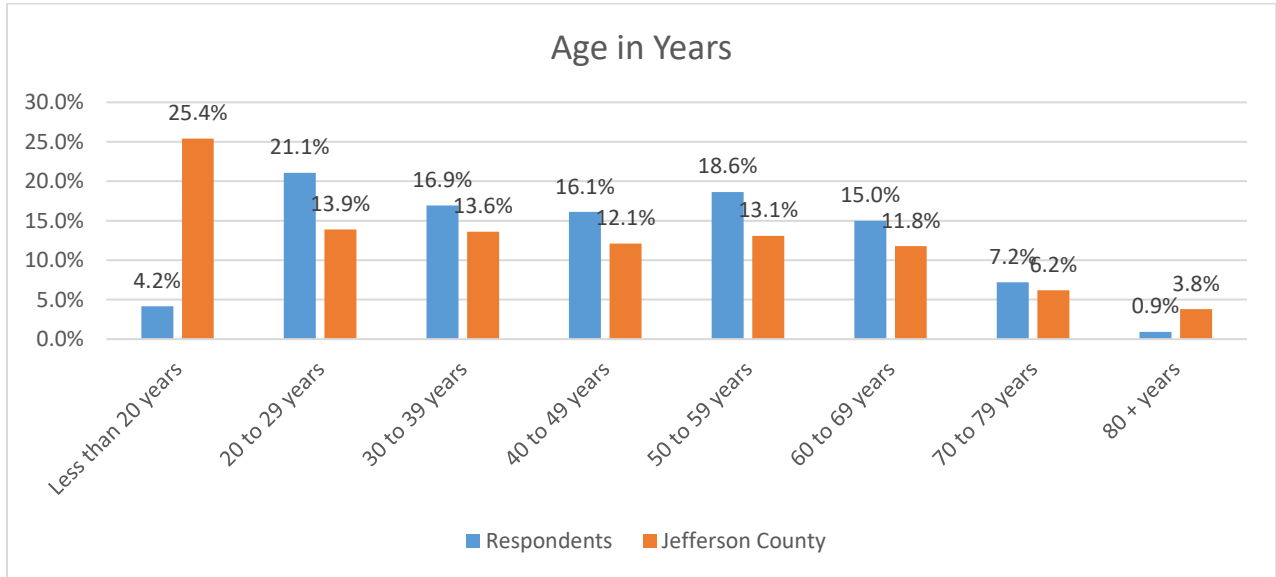
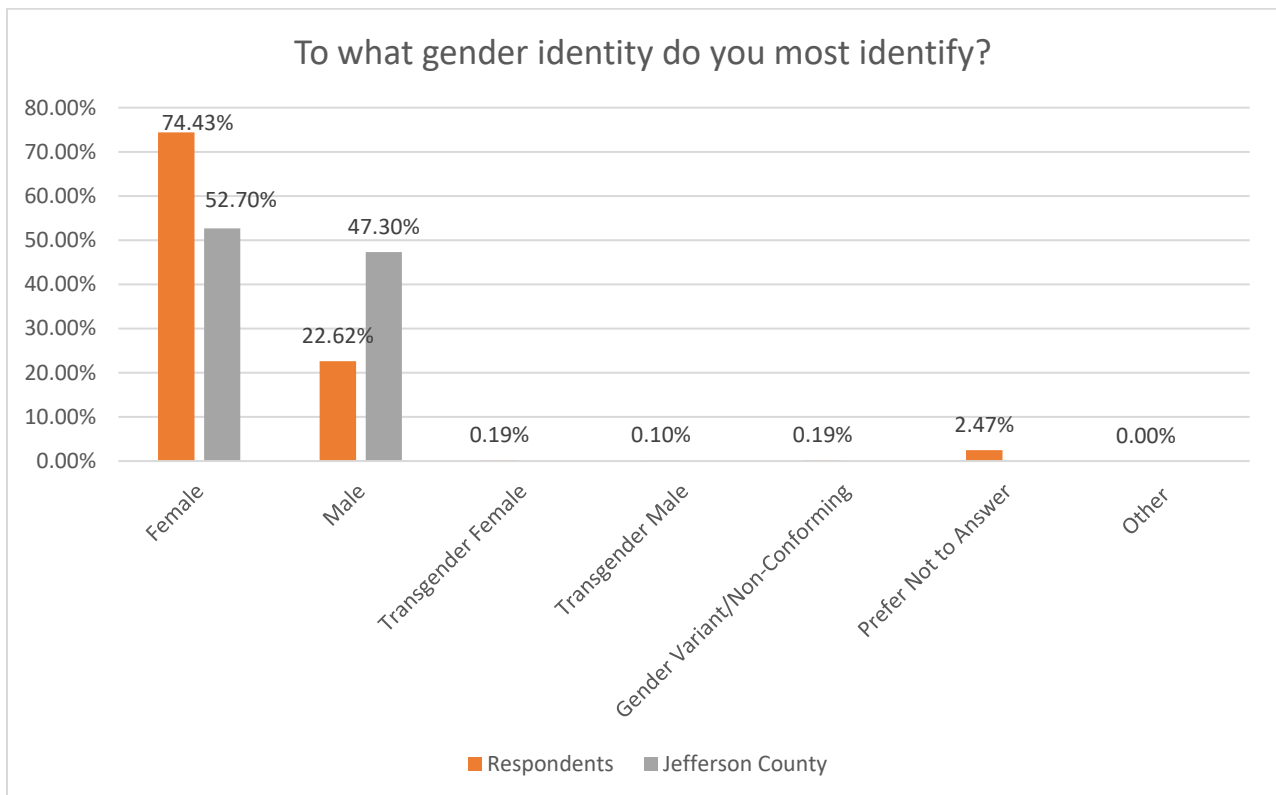


Figure 2: Gender of Survey Respondents



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Figure 3: Race of Survey Repondents

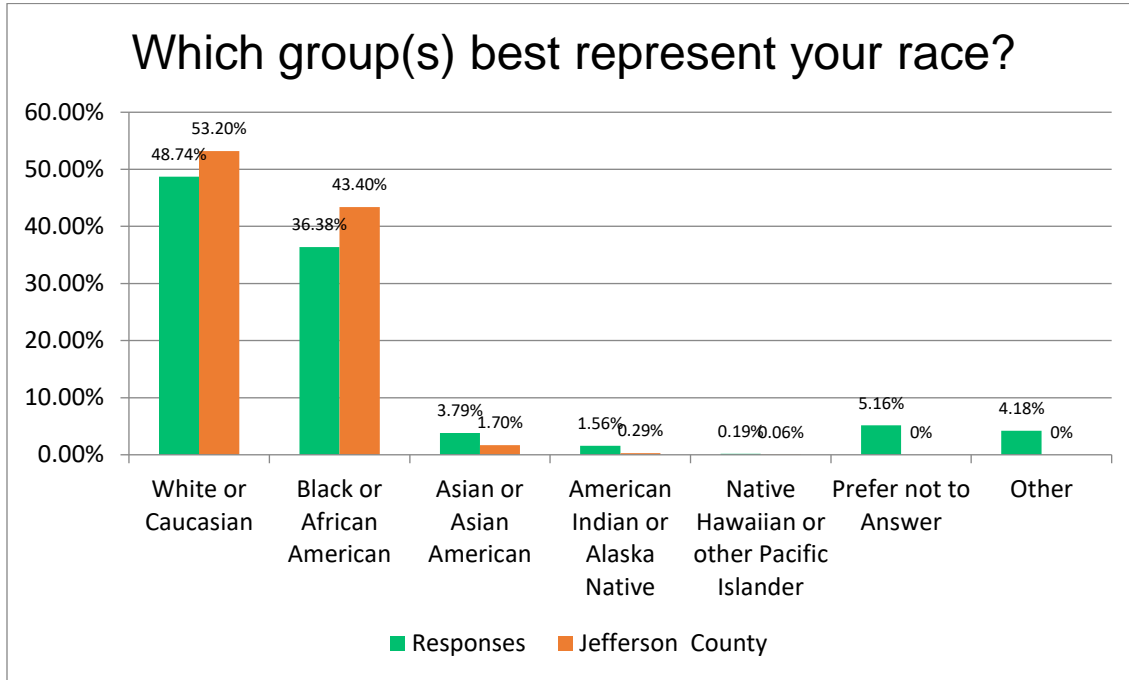
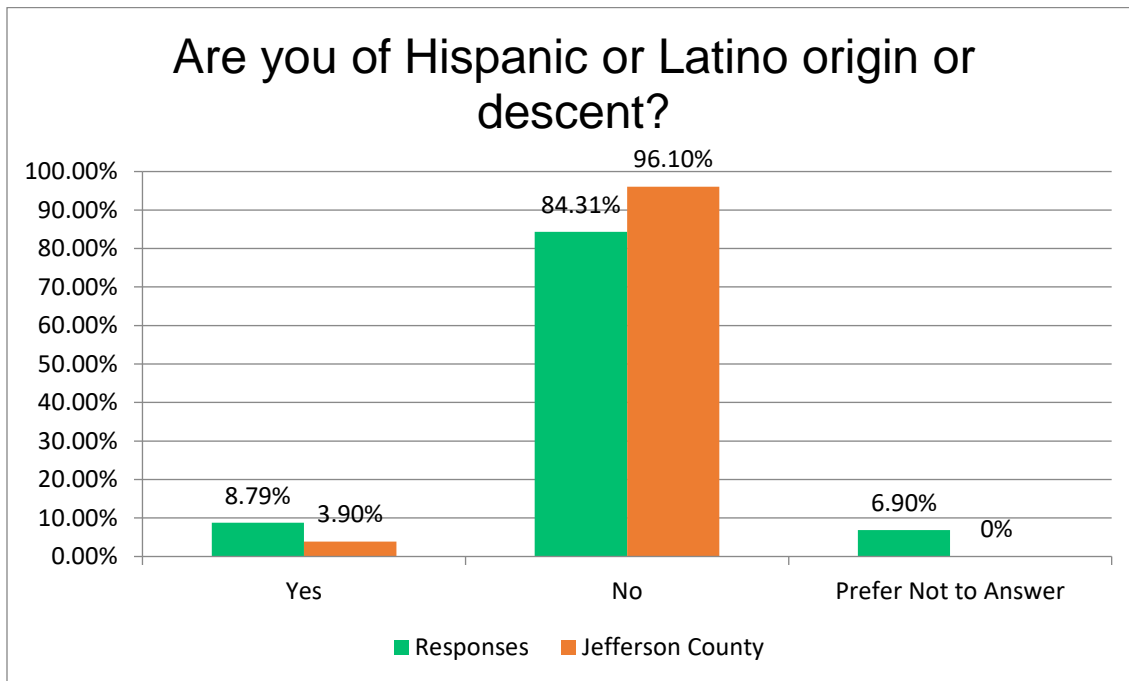


Figure 4: Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



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Figure 5: Educational Attainment of Survey Respondents

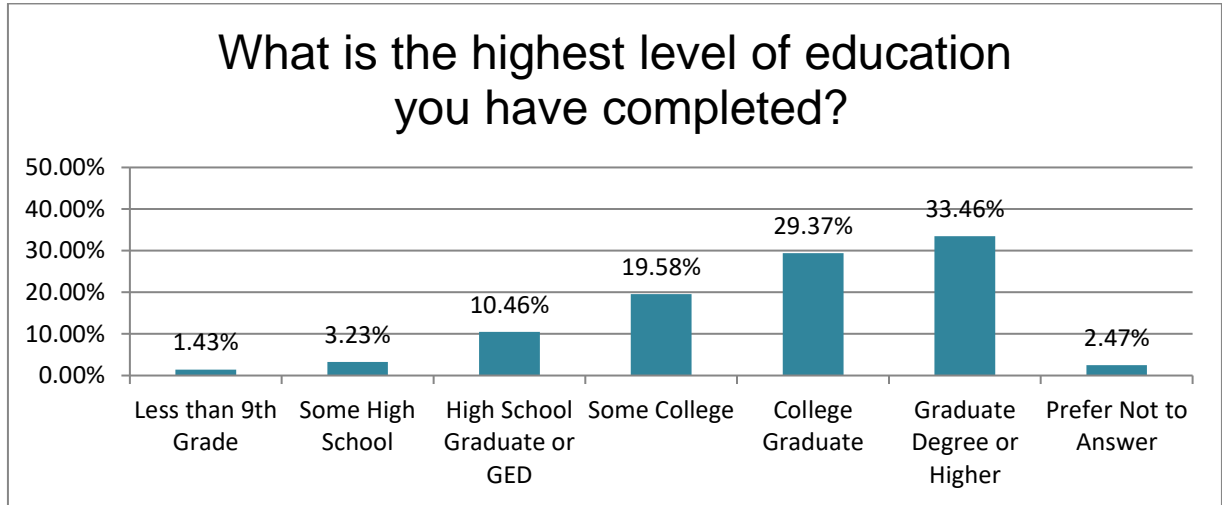
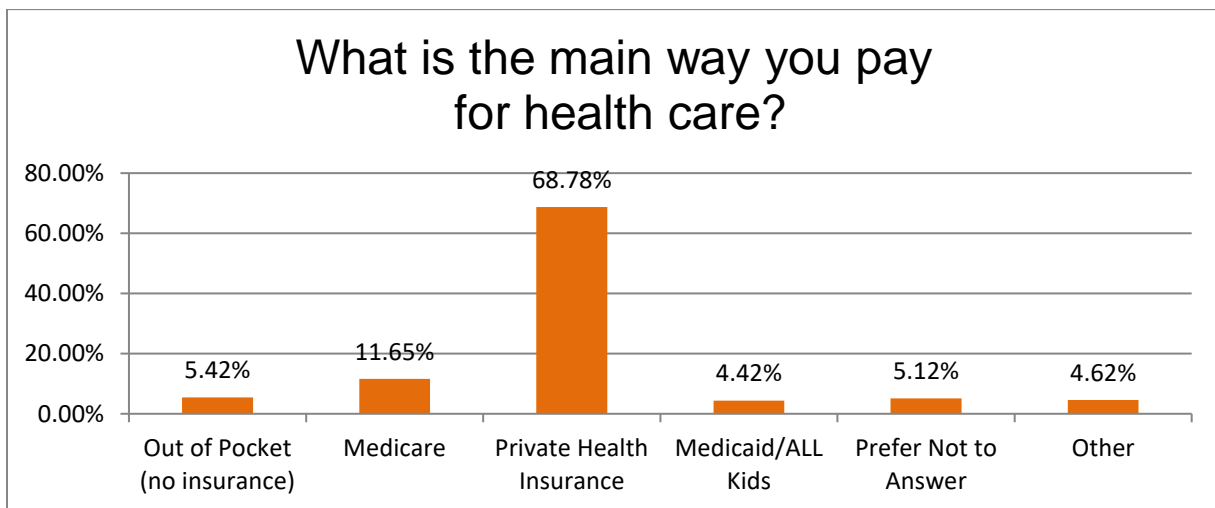
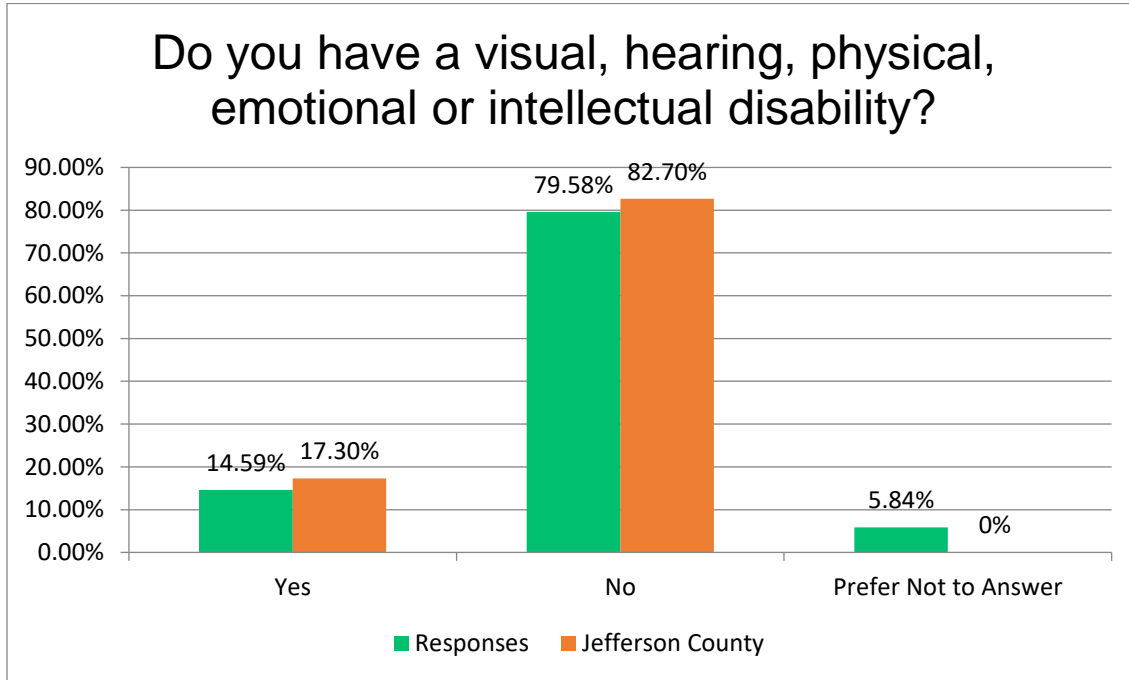


Figure 6: Insurance Status of Survey Respondents



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Figure 7: Disability Status of Survey Respondents



The *Your Opinion Matters!* survey asked questions about satisfaction within the domains of the physical environment, education, health care access, public safety, economics, the community, programs, services, support networks, quality of life and chronic health problems in Jefferson County. The survey findings indicate that Jefferson County residents are most and least satisfied with the aspects of health and quality of life identified in the Tables 1 and 2. Survey respondents were asked to rate satisfaction on a five-point Likert-type scale with a score of one (1) representing very dissatisfied, a score of three (3) representing neutral and a score of five (5) representing very satisfied.



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Table 1: Aspects of Health and Quality of Life with Highest Respondent Satisfaction Scores

Most Satisfied	Score
Higher Education: Colleges/Universities/Community Colleges	3.72
Access to Spiritual Support	3.72
Public Libraries	3.67
Access to Specialty Care	3.57
Access to Dental Care	3.56
Access to Primary Health Care	3.55
Access to Health Therapies	3.46
Access to Arts and Cultural Events	3.46
Access to Prescription Medications	3.43
Parks/Trails/Outdoor Recreation	3.43

Table 2: Aspects of Health and Quality of Life with Lowest Respondent Satisfaction Scores

Least Satisfied	Score
Control of Gun Violence	2.01
Control of Drug-related Crime	2.30
Public Transportation	2.33
Condition of Streets	2.37
Prison/Jail Re-entry Services	2.45
Neighborhood Conditions/Blight	2.46
Services for the Homeless	2.48
Condition of Sidewalks	2.49
Services for Violence Prevention and Recovery	2.52
Control of Litter/Graffiti	2.54

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Survey respondents rated the importance of each domain of health quality of life indicator. Tables 3 and 4 indicate the ten items that survey respondents rated as most and least important. Importance was rated on a three-point scale with one (1) representing low importance, two (2) representing medium importance and three (3) representing high importance.

Table 3: Aspects of Health and Quality of Life Survey Respondents Indicated as Most Important

Most Important Aspects of Health and Quality of Life	Score
Neighborhood/Community Safety	2.92
Access to Primary Health Care	2.89
Control of Gun Violence	2.89
Access to Health Insurance	2.86
Control of Drug-related Crime	2.84
Access to Prescription Medications when needed	2.83
Access to Healthy Food	2.82
Access to Specialty Care	2.80
Access to Mental Health Services	2.79
Outdoor Air Quality	2.79

Table 4: Aspects of Health and Quality of Life Survey Respondents Indicated As Least Important

Least Important	Score
Bike Lanes/Sharrows	2.14
Services for the LGBTQIA Community	2.24
Social Interaction with Your Neighbors	2.33
Services for People with Limited English Proficiency	2.43
Access to Arts and Cultural Events	2.44
Public Transportation	2.45
Availability of Community Centers/Activities	2.47
Ways to Participate in Your Community	2.47
Access to Spiritual Support	2.48
Parks/Trails/Outdoor Recreation	2.52



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The *Your Opinion Matters!* survey requested respondents identify the health conditions of most concern for Jefferson County. Respondents were able to select multiple health conditions. The health conditions most commonly identified are listed in ranked order in Table 5.

Table 5: Top Health Conditions

Condition
Obesity
Drug/Alcohol/Opioid Abuse
Diabetes
Homicide
Mental/Emotional/Behavioral Problems
High Blood Pressure
Stress
Tobacco Use
Heart Disease
STDs
Cancer

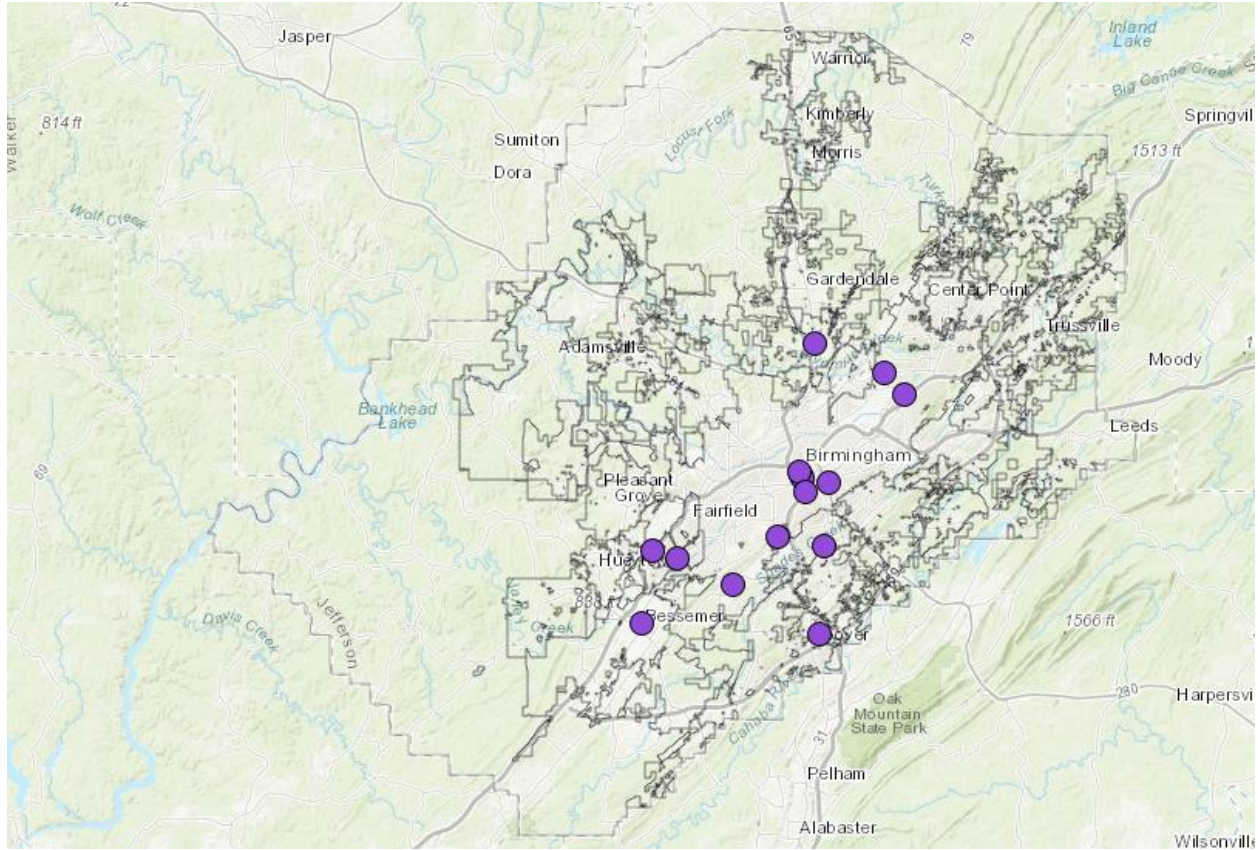
The quantitative information collected from the *Your Opinion Matters!* survey identifies the aspects of health and quality of life important to the community and categorizes the respondent's perception of quality of life in Jefferson County.

Qualitative Results

The primary process used to collect qualitative data for the Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA) was a series of fifteen focus groups and one community conversation. Focus groups were conducted by trained facilitators to obtain more detailed information concerning resident perceptions of quality of life and health including the assets, strengths and weaknesses of Jefferson County. The focus groups, conducted in urban (Birmingham, Brownsville, East Lake and Midfield) and suburban (Bessemer, Fultondale, Homewood and Hoover) locations within Jefferson County included two focus groups conducted with Spanish-speaking residents, two groups conducted with individuals living with a disability, two focus groups and one community conversation completed with the senior population, and one focus group each with formerly incarcerated individuals and the homeless population. Figure 8 displays the geographic location of each focus group.

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Figure 8: Focus Group Locations



In total, over 200 individuals provided qualitative data on health and quality of life in Jefferson County through focus groups or community conversations using standardized scripts regarding the experience of living in Jefferson County. In addition to the transcripts from the focus groups, the responses to open-ended comments from the *Your Opinion Matters!* survey were analyzed as an additional source of qualitative data.

Table 6 lists the top themes garnered through the Focus Groups and survey comments.



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Table 6: Top Themes Identified from CTSA Qualitative Data

Identified Themes
Transportation
Access to Services
Crime/Violence
Mental Health
Environmental Concerns
Affordable/Accessible Housing
Infrastructure
Education
Government and Political Leadership
Blight
Shifting Demographics
Biases
Job Opportunities and Training
Food System
Drugs/Opioid Crisis

Strengths

Transportation: Transportation is critical for supporting economic health, enabling access to physical and mental health care, and connecting individuals to social support systems. With recent improvements to some roads and bridges within Jefferson County, traffic flow and congestion in areas within the county have improved.

Access to Services: Accessible and equitable access to health care services, prescription medications, mental health services and other supportive services was identified as a key factor in health and quality of life by CTSA participants. There were many organizations and individuals within Jefferson County identified as providers of a variety of high quality and needed services to the community.

Crime/Violence: Freedom from crime and violence, especially gun violence, was an important theme among participants. Certain geographic areas of Jefferson County are perceived as having higher levels of safety than others.

Mental Health: Focus group participants emphasized the importance of good mental health and quality mental health services accessible to all who need these. Overall, participants felt that awareness of mental health needs and available services in Jefferson County has improved.

Environment: It was noted that Jefferson County has a wide variety of natural resources and a wealth of ecologic diversity contributing to the natural beauty of the county.



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Affordable/Accessible Housing: Jefferson County was identified as having a relatively low cost of living compared to other areas of the United States.

Infrastructure: With a number of highly visible construction projects in Jefferson County, there have been improvements in some parks and recreational facilities, as well as improvements to streets, sidewalks and other parts of the built environment. These improvements were seen as making these aspects of the county's infrastructure more accessible. Development of local parks and trails such as Railroad Park were noted as particular strengths for Jefferson County.

Education: Strong schools were noted to promote health and provide a place where select health interventions occur. A number of school systems within Jefferson County were described as strong and widely respected throughout the region.

Government and Political Leadership: Many of the respondents indicated personal engagement in the political process and system throughout Jefferson County and reported renewed engagement with and optimism toward the current leadership of the city of Birmingham.

Neighborhood Conditions: Many participants are actively involved in their neighborhoods and maintaining neighborhood beauty.

Shifting Demographics: Jefferson County's population is recognized as a highly diverse area. Many who contributed to the CTSA considered this diversity one of the county's greatest strengths. The University of Alabama at Birmingham was identified as local driver of cultural diversity. Many participants reported positive responses to economic development that has brought new residents to some neighborhoods like Avondale.

Preconceptions: Birmingham's history of Civil Rights activism has increased the willingness of Birmingham to confront biases more than in other areas of the Alabama and the nation.

Job Opportunities and Training: There are a number of large employers and economic drivers within Jefferson County providing jobs and training for many residents of the county.

Food System: With the city of Birmingham's recent national recognition as a destination city for food, there are many high-end restaurants bringing tourists and other visitors into Birmingham.

Drugs/Opioid Crisis: There is increasing awareness of substance abuse and its impacts among Jefferson County residents and increased opportunities to receive substance abuse assessment, referral to treatment and prevention services.



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Weaknesses

Transportation: Jefferson County's current transportation system inhibits access to jobs, education, health care and support services, especially for the poor and those with disabilities. A timely, safe and well-maintained public transit system is needed to serve all of Jefferson County. Current Birmingham Jefferson County Transportation Authority (BJCTA) bus routes are deemed inadequate in meeting the transportation needs of residents, especially those without personal vehicles, and many bus shelters need maintenance and repair. Altered traffic patterns in some areas of Jefferson County have put large trucks on smaller roads, creating increased traffic congestion and decreasing safety.

Access to Services: Without equitable access, including affordability, to quality health care and other services across Jefferson County, many people are unable to receive services, especially mental health care, childcare and prescription medications. Individuals living in the rural areas of the county report difficulty accessing these services. Specific populations, especially the Spanish-speaking population, racial and ethnic minorities, the homeless, individuals living with a disability and seniors report feeling unwelcome when accessing health care and other services in Jefferson County. Care coordination and service navigation were also noted as specific needs for seniors, the homeless, formerly incarcerated individuals and individuals with living with a disability.

Crime/Violence: Crime and violence, especially drug-related crime and gun violence, were identified as significant concerns for residents of Jefferson County. Decreased perception of safety and well-being in the areas of Jefferson County in which residents live, learn work, play and worship were noted across the county. Police visibility was considered to be inadequate. The drug epidemic is believed to be a significant driver of crime within the county.

Mental Health: Stigma related to mental health diagnoses and treatment continues to act as a barrier to receiving mental healthcare, especially among men. Location, cost and lack of mental health provider availability within the county were reported as barriers to accessing mental health services and contribute to variability in access to care across Jefferson County. Teen suicide was specifically identified as a health concern needing more visibility and intervention for prevention.

Environmental Concerns: Illegal dumping, burning of trash and debris, inadequate trash pickup, air pollution, poor indoor air quality related to smoking and asbestos, inadequate animal control, lack of safe water for drinking and recreation, and environmental contamination by sewage are issues of concern for Jefferson County. Specific concerns included the cost and lack of consistent availability of trash pick-up in some areas of Jefferson County; these factors are believed to lead to illegal dumping.

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Affordable/Accessible Housing: Disparities in cost of living across Jefferson County were identified as a weakness. These disparities disproportionately burden individuals with lower incomes, disabilities and seniors. Difficulty securing safe and affordable housing, especially for seniors, individuals with disabilities and those transitioning in or out of homelessness, was noted. Some areas of the county with affordable housing are considered unsafe and lack access to public transit. Individuals who have been formerly incarcerated or are transitioning out of homelessness reported restricted opportunities to secure permanent housing.

Infrastructure: Hazardous road conditions, including potholes, roads without shoulders, and roads too narrow for traffic patterns have increased vehicular accidents. Many streets and sidewalks throughout Jefferson County need repair. Sidewalks are not consistently available within the county or are present but inaccessible for individuals with disabilities. Infrastructure concerns include sewer and storm water issues leading to flooding, inadequate street lighting and poorly maintained cross-walks. Despite increasing technological requirements, widespread broadband access is unavailable in some areas of the county and is needed consistently throughout the county.

Education: There is a need for qualified, supported staff and faculty in all local school systems for enabling students to achieve rigorous academic standards. Disparities in school system performance within Jefferson County is a noted weakness. Access to equitable high quality school resources is inconsistent across the county. Mental health services, social services and health education, especially related to sexual and reproductive health, are lacking in local schools. Access to vocational training is inadequate to prepare individuals for many jobs. Inadequate parental education and support is thought to contribute to poor child academic success.

Government and Political Leadership: Disillusionment related to lack of unification and cohesiveness among local governments was a key concern. A lack of cohesion and cooperation among the county's municipalities and resident distrust of the political leadership were identified as significant dissatisfiers to living in Jefferson County. There is a perception that political leaders only assist the areas they serve and ignore the county as a whole.

Blight: The large numbers of abandoned houses in local neighborhoods has resulted in overgrown lots, vermin and additional pests and other safety and health hazards. Increases in the percentage of renters compared to home owners in local neighborhoods and absentee landlords were identified as factors that increase blight, illegal dumping and poor property maintenance.

Shifting Demographics: With an aging population, gentrification of select areas, and other changes in population, the population of Jefferson County is changing. For some respondents, the increasing diversity of Jefferson County's population is considered to be a weakness. Culturally and linguistically appropriate services are often lacking or inadequate to equitably serve marginalized populations.



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Biases: Discrimination based on race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, ability, age and other factors negatively affect individuals in Jefferson County. Police profiling and other practices have contributed to disparities and a lack of trust for marginalized populations. Racism, ageism, classism, gender bias and bias based on sexual orientation were reported broadly. Some populations, especially the Spanish speaking population, experience limited access to services and systematic policies that contribute to disparities in health.

Job Opportunities and Training: Certain rural areas of Jefferson County provide fewer job and vocational training opportunities for residents. The lack of jobs and training opportunities disproportionately affect those living in rural areas of the county, young people, the homeless, non-English speakers, non-US citizens and individuals with living with a disability. Low wages, difficulty finding jobs, lack of proper preparation to enter the workforce, and lack of job opportunities for individuals living with a disability were cited as particular weaknesses. With an increasing dependence on technology in Jefferson County, participants noted the need for more opportunities for job training in technology.

Food System: There is inequitable access to healthy food within Jefferson County. Some areas in the county lack grocery store access, and the “grocery tax” makes it difficult for those with limited resources to purchase healthy food. Municipality-based ordinances are limiting opportunities to make healthy foods more accessible to food insecure residents.

Drugs/Opioid Crisis: The increase in drug use, especially of opioids is believed to contribute to crime, poor mental health, neonatal abstinence syndrome and homelessness. Regional variation of drug use within the county and stigma were cited as particular concerns.

Assets

A variety of specific organizations and services were identified as particularly important to supporting the health, well-being, and vibrancy of Jefferson County. These included UAB, the Jefferson County Department of Health, Cooper Green Mercy Health Services, Children’s of Alabama, the Lakeshore Foundation, as well as a variety of nonprofit social service and religious organizations. Other identified community assets include:

- The public library system;
- Health and social service organizations (M-Power ministries, The Dream Center of the Church of the Highlands, YWCA, Firehouse Shelter, the Dannon Project, United Ability, Magic City Acceptance Center, etc.)

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- Parks and trails (Avondale Park, Railroad Park, Red Mountain Park, the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Aldridge Gardens,)
- Museums and cultural institutions (Vulcan, Birmingham Museum of Art, The Birmingham Zoo, The McWane Center)

Additional details of this Community Themes and Strengths (CTSA) assessment will be provided in the full community health assessment for Jefferson County, Alabama available on the Jefferson County Department of Health website.

The information gathered through the CTSA process will inform the identification of key strategic issues in Jefferson County and will lead to an action plan to improve health and quality of life in Jefferson County.



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ⁱ Sub-committee members included: Greg Townsend, Elisabeth Welty, Bryn Manzella, Monique Mullins, Haskey Bryant, Adriana Valenzuela, Cathy Perdue, Brian Massey, John Stone, Celida Garcia, Jan Bell, Tawanna Wright, Chris Hatcher, Ryan Parker, Sally Allocca, Maxine Starks, Terrence Brown, Catherine Alexander, Frederick Hamilton, David Smith, Chris Mackie, Brad Watson, Sandra Smith, Elizabeth Patton, Gary Edwards, Lisle Hites, and Julie Preskitt

ⁱⁱ Sources: American Community Surveys, 1 Year Population Estimates for Jefferson County, 2017.