

**Cortland County  
Health Department  
Community Health Assessment  
Focus Group Results (Phase II)**



**Public Health**  
*Prevent. Promote. Protect.*

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Cortland County Health Department

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## Background

In order for Cortland County Health Department (CCHD) and Guthrie Cortland Medical Center (GCMC) to complete the collaborative 2019-2024 Community Health Improvement Plan, NYS Prevention Agenda 2019-2024 priorities must be selected.

Following completion of Phase I of the Community Health Assessment (CHA Survey) in January 2019, it was determined that the Cortland County Health Department would organize and facilitate community focus groups throughout Cortland County as part of Phase II of the Community Health Assessment. Community focus groups would allow for continued community engagement—which is an essential building block in making an informed decision regarding what NYS Prevention Agenda priorities should be selected for the collaborative 2019-2021 Community Health Improvement Plan. These focus groups provide a platform for CCHD to discuss the results of the CHA Survey and other important community health issues in order to obtain a more detailed picture of health within the county. Significant effort would be placed on recruiting at-risk community members through partnering agencies and other community groups.

The initial planning stages for the focus groups began in June 2019, with focus group target dates throughout July and August 2019. A Focus Group Discussion Guide, comprised of 13 questions, was developed based on the CHA survey results and would be utilized at all CCHD focus groups (see Appendix A).

In early June, the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging informed CCHD that they would be completing focus groups during the same target time-frame for their agency needs assessment and four year plan. Due to their significant expertise on the aging population in Cortland County, it was determined that the best way for the CCHD to reach this at-risk population for Phase II of the Community Health Assessment would be to collaborate with the Area Agency on Aging. This subset of focus groups would be conducted in a distinctly different format from the CCHD facilitated focus groups, but would provide valuable information regarding health related concerns of the aging population in the county. These focus group discussions would emphasize what is currently working and what is needed to support “aging in place” throughout the different communities in the county. However, the CCHD would be present to co-facilitate the focus group utilizing a modified CHA Focus Group Discussion Guide.

## Methods

### Scope

From June 2019-August 2019, 22 focus groups were conducted across Cortland County. 11 of these focus groups were scheduled and facilitated by the Cortland County Health Department. An additional 11 focus groups were scheduled and facilitated by the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging in collaboration with CCHD. **132** people in total participated in the 22 focus groups.

### Recruiting Process

Email and phone call templates, focus group interest forms, and advertising materials were developed in order to streamline the recruitment process and reach as many community members and agencies as possible (See Appendix B for email template).

Initially, leaders of community agencies were contacted via email and phone calls to gauge agency interest in hosting and participating in a CCHD CHA focus group. If interest was expressed, agency leaders were asked to recruit employees and consumers to attend the scheduled focus group.

Recruitment efforts were also made at the Cortland County Worksite Wellness Coalition Meeting and Community Health Assessment Presentation in late June 2019. Approximately 55 attendees were provided CHA focus group interest forms (see Appendix C). Individuals who filled out the form were then contacted via email to attend one of two general community member focus groups hosted by GCMC in early August 2019. Community members were also recruited via the CCHD social media page.

The Area Agency on Aging was charged with scheduling and recruitment for their focus groups. Letters were sent to community members, legislatures, and other community organizations. Flyers and social media posts were also utilized in their recruitment efforts.

## Facilitation

*Facilitator:* The same facilitator was utilized for all CCHD focus groups in order to maintain uniformity. The Area Agency on Aging focus groups were facilitated by senior agency staff members and the CCHD facilitator was present to co-facilitate.

*Recorder:* A recorder was present at each focus group in order to take detailed notes.

*Focus Group Discussion Guide:* A discussion guide was developed based on the results of the CHA Survey and examples used by other county and healthcare system needs assessments in the past. The same guide was utilized across all CCHD focus groups. If necessary, the facilitator adjusted or omitted questions based on group dynamic. Examples of diversions from the designated CHA Discussion Guide include: omitting a question if it was already answered during the course of the discussion, clarifying a question for the group, and asking for clarification on a provided statement. Due to the differing nature of the Area Agency on Aging focus groups, a modified version of the CHA Focus Group Discussion Guide was used during those discussions, in addition to the discussion guide the Area Agency on Aging developed to facilitate their portion of the focus group.

## Results

Since a modified discussion guide and different facilitation techniques were utilized at the Area Agency on Aging focus groups as compared to the CCHD focus groups; the results of the CCHD focus groups and the Area Agency on Aging focus groups are presented and analyzed separately.

### Cortland County Health Department Focus Group Results

Summaries of each of the eleven Cortland County Health Department focus groups are provided in a listed format below. Table 1 displays the question aggregate overall response from the eleven CCHD focus groups. Responses were included in the Table 1 if they were mentioned more than three times across all focus groups.

#### 1. Cortland County Wellness Committee

*The Cortland County Wellness Committee is composed of Cortland County employees who are committed to fostering a healthy work environment. This focus group was conducted on 6.24.19. Male and female committee members of various ages were present.*

The County Worksite Wellness Committee members enjoy that there are many outdoor and social activities to do in Cortland County (golfing, skiing, kayaking, wine trails, bowling). The group also likes the small town feel and some participants are nostalgic about the area because they were born and raised here. Cortland is also in a good location near larger cities and towns. This geographic location is also cited as a negative for the county, as the closeness to 81 and Syracuse can allow problems to come into the community. Participants do not like the ruralness, increasing drug problem, low SES of community, or lack of accessibility to transportation and services. One participant feels that community members are losing respect for themselves and the environment. Most participants agreed with the top three areas of concern identified by the CHA survey. One person felt that access was not an issue since the city of Cortland has the hospital and rural areas have Family Health Network. The group listed Family & Children's Counseling Services, Syracuse Recovery, Beacon Center, and school systems as resources for alcohol/substance abuse. The court system also plays a role. Participants feel that waiting lists at these agencies need to be reduced and more providers need to

accept more insurance. Inpatient treatment and a directory outlining what resources are available would also be beneficial to the community. The Cortland County Mental Health Department, individual therapists, mobile crisis hotline, and law enforcement officers trained to deescalate situations are all mental health resources the group named. Participants feel that more awareness regarding available resources and more pediatric mental health and inpatient services are needed. The group also mentioned that stigma surrounding mental health needs to be reduced and that mental health should be treated as a medical issue. Group members stated that they have insurance and go to the doctor. However some barriers they mentioned that may prevent people from doing so are; cost (high copays and deductibles), knowing their health insurance won't cover the appointment, people have no time to go, there are no afterhours appointments, and lack of urgent care facilities in the area. The group stated that some issues discussed could be addressed if more jobs and decent housing were available. They also stated that there is a problem with the social services system and we should not take away needed services due to income requirements.

## **2. Youth Community Members**

*Youth community members who attended a Safe Harbour event on 7.10.19 were asked to participate in a focus group for the CHA following the event. The group consisted of female and male youth ages 13-19 years old.*

The youth community members present at this focus group enjoy the parks, activities for young kids, music scene, and people who want to make the community better in Cortland. However, they feel that the city of Cortland does not always feel safe and there are many places they would not go by themselves—especially Main Street and South Main. Participants felt that in order for a community to be healthy, resources need to be available to those who need them and there needs to be people who want to make the community better. One participant felt that getting businesses involved can improve community health. When asked about the results of the CHA survey; all youth felt that mental health is a problem and they were unsure whether or not access/cost is a concern for community members. The group stated that JUULing is a big problem and one

participant knew someone personally with substance abuse issues. The group was not aware of any resources in Cortland County that address substance/alcohol abuse related issues. They felt that there needs to be more education outside of the school system related to substance/alcohol abuse and that there are too many barriers in the school systems for youth to get help there. After some thought, the group was able to name Family Counseling Services and Family Health Network as resources in the community that address mental health problems. Participants felt there needs to be more and better mental health counseling in the community. They also stated they weren't sure what was available and that more education and awareness is needed about problems and programs in the community. Most participants were unsure of what prevents people from caring for their health. One participant stated that lack of transportation and disabilities has prevented a person they know from going to therapy and doctor's appointments.

### **3. Cortland Chenango Rural Services**

*Rural Services is a non-profit that serves the rural areas of Cortland and Chenango counties. On 7.10.19 a focus group was conducted at their office in Cincinnatus, NY. Participants were adult women and identified as staff members & volunteers of Rural Services or community members. Two participants live in Chenango County but utilize services and work in Cortland County.*

All participants enjoy the rural beauty Cortland County has to offer. They also stated that the rural nature of the area can also be a negative as there is a lack of public transportation, long response times for volunteer emergency services, lack of resources (no free clinic or mental health providers) and difficulties with community members aging in place. One participant dislikes the lack of services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. They also feel there is stigma against people with mental health issues and victims of domestic violence. Participants agreed that substance/alcohol abuse, mental health, and cost/access to health care are the most pressing concerns in Cortland County. Participants said that in the rural areas, people have to be referred outside the community for alcohol/substance abuse treatment. They stated that substance abuse counselors used to come to Rural Services regularly and they would like that

program to be implemented again. One participant suggested the need for a syringe exchange programs and Narcan training in rural areas. The group felt there was a need for shelters and emergency homes for families in crisis. Participants stated that the schools in the area have mental health counselors, but that there aren't any mental health providers in the rural areas, such as Cincinnati, for adults. Affordability (high copays), transportation, and lack of specialists were all listed as barriers to seeking health care or going to doctor's appointments. One participant felt that it is unfair that Veterans have to travel very far to see the doctor. Another stated that people in the area can be stubborn and don't think they need a doctor. The group felt that insurance and Medicaid reform is needed on the national level. They also felt that people need to be able to work but not lose services due to income eligibility. Walking paths, vegetable gardens, and herbal remedies are some of the health alternatives that participants have seen implemented recently in the rural areas to address health concerns.

#### 4. **Loaves and Fishes**

*Loaves and Fishes provides free nutritious meals daily to those in need. A focus group was conducted on 7.30.19 prior to the lunchtime meal. Male and female consumers of various ages were present.*

Consumers at Loaves and Fishes like that people in Cortland are generous and that there are many local agencies including; the Cortland Pregnancy Center, Loaves and Fishes, and the Jacobus Center. For many people, the meals they get at Loaves and Fishes may be all they eat the entire week. One participant, who identified as homeless, said that he likes that the cops don't bother him at Riverside Plaza. One participant stated she doesn't like anything about Cortland. Participants thought the most negative aspects of Cortland are the drugs, drama, and cops. The group felt that agencies/resources, Loaves and Fishes, friends, food pantries, Catholic Charities, taxis/busses, and DSS all make a community healthy. When asked about the results of the CHA survey, the group agreed that drugs are a problem. They also mentioned that there are mental health services, but people don't use them. Several participants stated they have been sober many years and that AA and NA are important resources to address alcohol/substance abuse. They wish

there was a Sunday afternoon AA meeting in the city. They also felt that there should be a place where people who need help immediately can go 24/7 (besides the hospital, which one person said you can get billed for). When asked what programs that address mental health the group was able to name; Cortland County Mental Health, Family & Children's Counseling Services, and the hospital. They also said family and friends are an important resource and that the cops in the area always ask how they can help. When asked what resources for mental health are needed the group suggested that people know the resources that are available, they just don't use them. The group feels that; money issues, drug addiction, insurance, transportation, and difficult paperwork are all barriers to caring for their health or the health of their families. They also stated that some people just don't want to go to the doctor either because they don't think they'll get the right help or because they are lazy. When asked how the problems discussed can be fixed one participant said that you can't push or force people to do anything, they need to want to.

#### 5. **The Cortland LGBTQ Center**

*The LGBTQ Center provides a safe place for LGBTQ individuals to socialize, get connected to community resources, and access to the LGBTQ lending library. A focus group was conducted at the Center on 8.2.19.*

One participant likes that Cortland County is welcoming and more diverse than you would expect. A big negative of Cortland is that there are no bookstores. Easy access to health care and feeling safe and comfortable in the community and public spaces were listed as necessities for a healthy community. When asked about the CHA survey results, one participant felt that alcohol/drug use specifically in the teen population is a concern. Also mentioned was that access to hormones for transgender individuals and concerns that physicians in the area won't understand the LGBTQ population are issues. Cortland Prevention Resources was listed as an alcohol/substance abuse resource for youth. It was suggested that there needs to be more programs geared towards adults. Mental health resources mentioned were Family & Children's Counseling Services and Cortland County Mental Health. Liberty Resources Mobile Crisis Team was listed, however, it was suggested that this program should be expanded to 24 hours. Barriers to seeking

health care or going to doctor's appointments were listed as; cost, transportation (some people don't have cars), and hesitancy because of how medical providers will treat people who are LGBTQ. When asked how problems in the community can be fixed, it was suggested that youth community members need to be taught healthy coping mechanisms because many youth speak very negatively about themselves. Increased community gatherings revolving around health were also suggested—such as a “Monday Mile” where community members can get together one day a week and walk the same route.

## 6. Access to Independence

*Access to Independence is a non-profit organization that provides advocacy and resources for people with disabilities. Male and female staff and consumers of various ages were present for the focus group on 8.5.19.*

Participants at this focus group enjoy the rural atmosphere in Cortland County, including in the city, and that agencies work together. They find it helpful that health care providers remember you and are aware of your disability. The group feels that people in the area don't know what services are available to them. They also dislike the lack of specialists and health care professionals in general, the long wait times for appointments, and large turnover rates of providers. Attempts at telemedicine in the area have been ineffective. Transportation is a serious concern for this group. The group feels that accessibility to daily living needs and medical services, walkability, reliable transportation, and access to healthy and reasonably priced foods make a community healthy. When asked about the results of the CHA survey, participants agreed but would add access to home health aides and transportation as additional major issues. One participant also feels that the community needs to recognize that there is a homeless population in Cortland and work to solve that problem. Participants stated that the jail, Family & Children's Counseling Services, and Cortland County Mental Health are working to address alcohol/substance abuse issues. The community needs an inpatient rehab, shorter waitlists, better support and follow up services, and more choices for rehab in order to address alcohol/substance abuse. They also think there needs to be more activities for people to stay clean and more stable and affordable housing. Mental health resources in the area were listed as; EDPRT

trained police force, Catholic Charities, ATI, private psychologists, and support agencies such as CAPCO and DSS. The group expressed frustration regarding the long wait lists and high turnover rates of mental health providers—you tell your story once and a few months later you have to tell it again. They also stated that insurance and cost are a barrier to seeking mental health services and that we need to work to eliminate stigma surrounding mental health. There is also limited social support in the area. Transportation and affordability (high deductibles/copays) are major barriers to seeking health care services. Some people use a family support system—but one participant mentioned that not everyone has access to that either. The group also feels that sometimes the government works against agencies, instead of acknowledging that problems exist. Participants stated that reducing cost of public transportation, increasing access to healthy foods, finding help for elderly individuals with no families, increased funding, and better hospital discharge planning could address some of the health concerns within the community.

## 7. **Community Members**

*A community focus group was held at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center on 8.6.19. This group consisted of all female community members of various ages. A few group members are employees of local human services agencies.*

Participants in this focus group like that all the agencies in the county work together and pool resources. Cortland County was a good place to raise a family and the small size allows you to build relationships with schools and neighbors, while still having your needs met. Networking in Cortland is also easy. The participants dislike the poverty in the area and feel that it is the result of trauma, mental health and substance abuse. They feel that many people do not have their basic needs met. One participant mentioned that there are not enough specialized trauma therapists in the county. The group listed COTI (Centers of Treatment Innovation), Family & Children’s Counseling Services, Beacon Center, Syracuse Behavioral Health, and Syracuse Recovery Services as resources that are working to address alcohol/substance abuse. The group stated that there are many barriers to seeking help for alcohol/substance abuse including; insurance

costs/requirements, stigma against people with addiction, provider hours, and transportation. There needs to be a detox center in the community and more training for physicians regarding substance abuse. One participant feels there are misconceptions surrounding Narcan usage that need to be addressed. Another participant in the group stated that Liberty Resources mobile crisis unit is the best thing to come to the county to address mental health and expanding the program to 24 hours would be extremely beneficial. Cortland County Mental Health and Mark Thayer were listed as important mental health resources. The group feels that the county needs a holistic trauma center with trauma informed counselors, more providers, shorter wait times, telemedicine, and reduced provider turnover rates in order to adequately address mental health in the county. Transportation, finances (unexpected bills, high copays and deductibles), overwhelming paperwork, inability to read and write, and medical debt were all listed as reasons community members don't seek health care programs and services. This group feels that a whole systems change is needed to address the health concerns in Cortland County. They feel the community needs to make social determinants of health the basis for change.

## **8. Guthrie Cortland Medical Center Employees**

*Guthrie Cortland Medical Center (GCMC) is a nonprofit 144 bed acute care facility with an attached 80 bed residential care facility. A focus group consisting of GCMC employees was conducted on 8.9.19 and included all female employees.*

This group listed the most positive aspects of Cortland County as: being near route 81, four seasons, the hometown feel and close knit community, and the sentimental attachments of raising a family here. The group does not like that large businesses have not been able to survive and that farms are struggling. They think there is a lot of poverty in rural communities and in the city of Cortland. It seems that there are more people who are struggling to access services. To this group, a healthy community is based on the school systems (making sure kids have access to food and immunizations), familial education, and making sure younger generations start life on the right foot and not graduating college with large amounts of debt. One participant said addressing social

determinants of health are important to community health. The group felt the three major areas of concern identified by the CHA survey are accurate—mental health is number one to this group and all three areas tie together. The group listed: Family & Children’s Counseling Services, Catholic Charities Halfway House, Primary Care Physicians at GCMC, Cortland County Mental Health, NA/AA, Beacon Center, and Liberty Resources as agencies who are working to address substance/alcohol abuse. They feel that alcohol/drug rehab and inpatient treatment are needed in the community. One participant stated that reimbursement rates are not high enough for facilities to provide needed services to communities. Cortland County Mental Health, Family & Children’s Counseling Services and Catholic Charities were listed as agencies working to address mental health. The group stated that the community needs more choices for mental health care, facilities and beds for pediatric mental health care, and services for people with developmental disabilities who need mental health care. Participants felt the following are barriers to accessing health care services; hours providers are available (no after hours), people do not have enough time off, and finances (copays are too high). One participant stated that some people will put off health until they have a serious condition or a minor condition exacerbates and gets worse. The group felt that in order to address the health concerns in the community we need to pressure local, state, and federal governments about regulations and reimbursement rates.

## 9. Community Members

*A second community focus group was held at Guthrie Cortland Medical Center on 8.12.19. This group consisted of male and female community members, Legislators, and agency employees.*

This focus group likes that Cortland is affordable, bikeable, safe, comfortable, and a nice place to raise a family. They feel the quality of life is high and that everyone pitches in to help. Networking is also a benefit of living in Cortland. Participants dislike the opioid crisis, loss of manufacturing/jobs, lack of accessible and convenient transportation, and the lack of low income and senior housing. One participant feels there are many people with negative attitudes and thoughts. This group thinks that looking at the social

determinants of health (healthy food options, walkability etc.), being able to age in place, and access to services and transportation in rural areas are factors that make a community healthy. When asked about the results of the CHA survey; participants thought that transportation, jail overcrowding, and daycare cost and availability are also major concerns in the county. The group was able to list: 2-1-1, Mobile Crisis Unit, chemical dependency programs, jail (as a detox center), and Beacon Center as resources for addressing substance/alcohol abuse. Participant suggested a long-term treatment center and more preventative education would help with this issue. One person mentioned that a new jail program that helps people with recovery services and rehab before resorting to jail time would be beneficial. Mental health resources that the group was able to list are: GCMC 10 bed unit, Cortland County Mental Health, Family & Children's Counseling Services, Cortland Prevention Resources, and COTI (Centers for Treatment Innovation). The group stated that high turnover of therapists due to low pay prevent people from accessing mental health services. They also stated that the area needs a child psychiatrist and more providers in the schools. Awareness and communication regarding what services are available is also needed. Lack of reliable transportation (public transit only available at certain times) and finances (high copays, high cost of medications, high cost for health insurance) are major barriers to seeking health care services that this group has seen. In order to address community health issues in Cortland, participants in this group agreed that continuing to apply for grants and having a process to use the money wisely is important. Increasing funds for the local bus system is also important to this group.

#### 10. CAPCO

*CAPCO is a community action agency that provides programs and resources that promote self-reliance and dignity. This focus group took place on 8.12.19 and included CAPCO staff and parents. All participants were female of various ages.*

Participants of the CAPCO focus group like the sense of community and closeness that Cortland provides. They also appreciate the agencies within the county and that people can get referred to the services they need. The most negative aspects of Cortland County, according to this group, are the drugs, lack of accessible transportation, poor housing, and

lack of needed healthcare services (pediatric dental and walk-in clinics). The group agreed with the areas of concern identified in the CHA survey. Narcan training, community forums, Beacon Center, AA, Family & Children's Counseling Services and Cortland County Mental Health were listed as resources that address alcohol/substance abuse. This group feels there are many barriers to seeking help for alcohol/substance abuse including; insurance (too many steps to get treatment), inability/unwillingness to follow through with treatment, and lack of inpatient care in county. The on-staff mental health specialist at CAPCO is a resource that staff and children at CAPCO can utilize. Participants in this group agreed that services in the community that address alcohol/substance abuse also address mental health. The community needs more mental health providers, an open clinic for urgent needs, and more education and acceptance of people with mental health issues in order to reduce stigma. Some barriers to seeking health care services that were mentioned are: insurance not being accepted by providers, cost (high copays), lack of transportation, long waiting lists, and turnover rate for doctors (or arriving for an appointment to find out you are seeing an NP or PA instead of the doctor). The group felt some of these issues could be addressed if we incentivized providers to come to the area and stay and continue to apply for grant funding.

#### 11. **SUNY Cortland Students**

*The State University of New York at Cortland campus is located in the city of Cortland, NY. Nearly 6,000 undergraduate and graduate students attend each semester. A focus group for SUNY Cortland students was held in the Hall of Fame Room on SUNY Cortland's campus on 8.20.19.*

SUNY students enjoy the sense of community in Cortland and the fact that there are people who want to improve the community. A negative aspect of living in Cortland is that the college students are sometimes ostracized from the community and locals may not necessarily see the benefits the college brings to Cortland County. Having a proper health care system, a good hospital, and trust in the health care system were suggestions for what makes a community healthy. One participant agrees that mental health is the number one issue in the county and that alcohol/substance abuse are concerns for college students. However, they were unable to name any resources that address

alcohol/substance abuse. College students need to be more aware of what resources are available outside of the campus community according to this focus group. Individual therapists and the wellness/counseling center on SUNY’s campus were listed as mental health resources available. The students feel there needs to be a program that is more focused on mental health rather than just a general “wellness center” that has counselors available and that there needs to be more mental health support services that do not involve counseling. Barriers to SUNY students seeking health care services are; cost, nervousness about what to expect from health care providers in town, and previous negative experiences preventing them from seeking care again. A major concern for SUNY students is the inability to be sick from class without an outside physician’s doctor’s note. Professors cannot accept notes from the campus health center. Missing class without an excuse can seriously impact student’s grades which they feel is unfair. In order to improve health in the community it was suggested that there needs to be a more focused mental health program, integrated mental health and substance/alcohol abuse programs, and more thoughtful planning when organizations hire health care workers. In addition, it was mentioned that community relations between the college, the hospital, and the community in general need to be improved.

**Table 1**

Focus Group Question	Most Common Responses
<p><i>What do you consider the most positive aspects of Cortland County? (What do you like best?)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small town/sense of community (being recognized, knowing people, forming relationships with health care workers and schools etc.)</li> <li>• Agencies/people work together</li> <li>• Rural beauty/atmosphere</li> <li>• There are many activities nearby (golf, skiing, bowling, music scene, parks etc.)</li> <li>• Nostalgia (born &amp; raised, raised family etc.)</li> <li>• Good people (generous/friendly)</li> <li>• Many local agencies (Loaves &amp; Fishes, ATI etc.)</li> <li>• Everything you need is here</li> </ul>

<p><i>What do you consider the most negative aspects of Cortland County? (What do you like least?)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drugs problem/opioid crisis</li> <li>• Access to transportation</li> <li>• Failing businesses/farms/no jobs in county</li> <li>• Low Socioeconomic status/growing poverty</li> <li>• Rural (isolated)</li> <li>• Lack of specialist health care providers</li> <li>• Lack of mental health providers</li> </ul>
<p><i>What makes a community healthy?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to services/resources</li> <li>• Fresh food/vegetable options</li> <li>• Agencies</li> <li>• Access to health care</li> <li>• Accessible transportation</li> <li>• Walkability</li> <li>• Schools/education/health education</li> </ul>
<p><i>The Community Health Assessment Survey, conducted in May 2018-January 2019 identified three major areas of concern regarding health in the community: alcohol/substance abuse, mental health, and cost/access to health care. Do you feel these are the most pressing issues within Cortland County right now? If not, please indicate what issues you think should be added to this list.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority agreed these are major areas of concern</li> <li>• Transportation is also major issue</li> <li>• Stigma (against mental health, substance abuse, LGBTQ population etc.)</li> <li>• Mental health is #1 concern</li> <li>• All three areas tie together</li> </ul>
<p><i>What resources (i.e agencies, institutions, programs) does the community have that address alcohol/substance abuse related issues?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family &amp; Children’s Counseling Services/Cortland Prevention Resources/COTI</li> <li>• Beacon Center</li> <li>• Court System/Jail</li> <li>• AA/NA</li> <li>• Cortland County Mental Health</li> </ul>
<p><i>What other resources are needed that aren’t currently available? (Alcohol/Substance Abuse)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inpatient/inpatient rehab/long term care</li> <li>• Need to eliminate insurance/cost barriers</li> <li>• Need a directory of resources/more advertisement of resources/more awareness</li> <li>• Walk-in 24 hour clinic for people in crisis</li> </ul>
<p><i>What resources (i.e agencies, institutions, programs) does the community have that address mental health related issues?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cortland County Mental Health</li> <li>• Family &amp; Children’s Counseling Services</li> <li>• Trained law enforcement/cops</li> <li>• Liberty Resources/Mobile Crisis Unit</li> <li>• Primary Care Physicians/hospital</li> <li>• Private/individual therapists</li> </ul>
<p><i>What other resources are needed that aren’t currently available? (Mental Health)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More providers/more choices of providers/need shorter waitlists</li> <li>• More education/awareness of services</li> <li>• Need to eliminate mental health stigma</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need less turnover of providers (need to incentivize them to stay)</li> <li>• Providers/agencies who specialize in childhood mental health</li> </ul>
<i>What prevents you (or your family) from caring for their health, accessing community health programs, or going to doctor's appointments?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• High deductibles &amp; copays/unexpected bills</li> <li>• Insurance—knowing it won't be covered/insurance not accepted/can't afford insurance</li> <li>• Hours providers are open/availability of appointments</li> <li>• Personal responsibility—People don't want to go/are stubborn/lazy/or wait until problem gets worse</li> </ul>
<i>How does the cost of your health care influence decisions that you (or your family) make regarding your health?</i>	This question was addressed by the previous question in the majority of focus groups. Cost is a major barrier.
<i>Do you have any suggestions as to how the problems we discussed today can be addressed or fixed in order to improve health in the community?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform needed at the state/federal level/there needs to be a "whole systems" change</li> <li>• More focus on the social determinants of health</li> <li>• We need more funding/grants</li> </ul>
<i>Is there anything anyone would like to add, or didn't have a chance to say during the discussion, that they would like to do so at this time?</i>	Responses to this question were placed in the appropriate question categories above. See individual summaries for more details.

### Cortland County Area Agency on Aging Focus Group Results

Table 2 includes a list of the modified CHA Focus Group Discussion Guide questions that were asked by CCHD at the Area Agency on Aging focus groups and the aggregate responses from all groups. Table 3 summarizes the main points that were discussed during Area Agency on Aging facilitation of the focus groups.

**Table 2**

<b>Focus Group Question</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<i>The Community Health Assessment Survey, conducted in May 2018-January 2019 identified three major areas of concern regarding health in the community: alcohol/substance abuse, mental</i>	<p>Three Major Areas of Concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement with major areas of concern (but not necessarily for elderly individuals)</li> <li>• Substance abuse, mental health, cost/access</li> </ul>

<p><i>health, and cost/access to health care. Do you feel these are the most pressing issues within Cortland County right now? If not, please indicate what issues you think should be added to this list.</i></p>	<p>are all related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance abuse/alcohol not really “seen” or not considered a problem</li> <li>• Mental health is a major problem and not targeted enough</li> <li>• There is stigma in the community</li> <li>• Navigating health care and health insurance systems can be frustrating and cause people to give up.</li> <li>• There is stigma in the community</li> </ul> <p>What Should Be Added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of housing for elderly individuals on a budget</li> <li>• Homelessness in rural areas</li> <li>• No good restaurants in rural areas</li> <li>• Tobacco usage</li> <li>• Obesity</li> <li>• Not many high paying and fulltime jobs</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>
<p><i>What resources are needed that aren't currently available? (alcohol/substance abuse)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better education/awareness on services that are available</li> <li>• More healthcare professionals and treatment agencies</li> <li>• Resources for domestic violence victims as a result of alcohol/substance abuse</li> <li>• Job placement and social support</li> </ul>
<p><i>What resources are needed that aren't currently available? (mental health)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term care options</li> <li>• Shorter wait lists</li> <li>• Less provider turnover</li> <li>• Need to eliminate stigma</li> <li>• More services needed at the hospital (including pediatric care)</li> <li>• Experts on trauma and generational poverty</li> <li>• Family support networks/systems</li> <li>• Resources to connect children to services outside of school</li> <li>• A larger mental health facility in Cortland</li> <li>• Counties should work together more to share services</li> <li>• More awareness/advertising for available resources</li> </ul>

<p><i>What prevents you (or your family) from caring for their health, accessing community health programs, or going to doctor's appointments?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation (many people rely on families and friends, bus schedules not reliable or inconvenient, Medicaid recipients can get free transportation but no one else)</li> <li>• Finances—high prescription copays/health care/insurance costs</li> <li>• Long wait times for appointments (routine and specialists)</li> <li>• Physician turnover (never seeing the same provider or seeing a PA/NP instead of physician)</li> <li>• No after hour or weekend appointments</li> <li>• Marathon has Family Health Network, but other rural areas need similar in-town clinics.</li> </ul>
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**Table 3**

<b>Focus Group Location/Description</b>	<b>Summary of Discussion</b>
<p><b>Marathon Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.26.19 was composed of Marathon community members and local government officials. Participants were all 60 years or older.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—need more single story homes in Marathon, senior housing has a long wait list</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—bus only comes to town 3x a day, some seniors don't have family members to drive them</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Food pantry is not ADA compliant, Meals on Wheels is available</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—There is no one to check on elderly individuals who don't have family in the area</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—numbers at senior center are declining, need more social respite programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scott Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.1.19 was composed of community members and people who work in the towns of Scott and Preble.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Churches have food banks, no stores in Scott or Preble</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—There needs to be a better system for checking on the elderly</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—there are not many community activities in the area besides a social card club at the Preble Hotel and a summer youth program</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Emergency Services</i>—lack of interest in volunteering, fire department in Homer no longer does “rescue calls” for helping elderly individuals get up after a fall</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cortland Community Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.5.19 was composed of Homer and Cortland community members (of various ages), city law enforcement officials, and Legislators.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—Need more affordable senior housing</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Bus in not accessible, schedule isn’t clear, there isn’t a shelter at the Homer bus stop</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Instacart and Food Sense are in Cortland and Homer, food pantrys,</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—More awareness needed about fraud phone calls targeting elderly individuals for money(form of elder abuse that needs to be reported)</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—there are many social outlets in Cortland (Senior Centers &amp; CRT), Cortland Community Center</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cincinnati Central School</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.5.19 was composed of Cincinnati community members and Cincinnati school leaders.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—There aren’t enough one-story homes in Cincinnati</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Public transportation is limited, many people rely on neighbors or Sister Kathleen.</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Unsure if grocery delivery is needed or would be useful. Rural Services has a food pantry.</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—Neighbors check on each other, but many elderly people will not ask for help.</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—there are options: bone saver program, bingo, churches. Need more social respite programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Willet Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.6.19 was composed of Cincinnati and Willet community members (most over the age of 60).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Family and friends utilized, bus is available but underutilized; some people are hesitant to volunteer to drive elderly individuals because of responsibility. Kinney drugs deliver prescriptions and mobile mammogram van comes to town.</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Groceries can be hard to get in rural areas</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—Shortage of home health aides, neighbors check on each other</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Senior Center, post office, fire station, bone saver exercise group, school newspaper for communication</li> </ul>
<p><b>McGraw Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.7.19 was composed of McGraw community members (most over the age of 60).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—McGraw needs more senior and affordable housing options</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Bus stop in town is helpful, but many people drive themselves</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Reservation system for senior center meals is inconvenient. McGraw needs a dollar general since there is only one small store in town.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Harford Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 6.7.19 was composed of Harford community members (most over the age of 60).</i></p> <p>Harford Senior Center Continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—Creamery Hills Senior Apartments are a great place to live and people are friendly and helpful. There is a waiting list.</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—There is no bus service and transportation to grocery store is expensive (~\$30 round trip). Kinney drugs delivers prescription</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Need a closer grocery store, like Walmart. Lunches and other meals are provided at Senior Center</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—Showers at Creamery Hills do not have accessible showers</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Senior Center (&amp; Joyce) are great resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Solon Sportsman’s Club</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 8.8.19 was composed of Solon community members and Legislators.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—Poor internet/cell service in the area make it difficult to access Instacart. Meals at McGraw Senior Center—breakfast should start at 7 so people can go before work.</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—Snow removal is a concern, a licensed home care agency is needed. Many people use family members for personal care needs.</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Senior Center (numbers are dwindling), four score social club, need more social events in the area.</li> <li>• <i>Emergency Services</i>—There is no knowledge on emergency plans for the town, which is a concern.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Homer Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 8.8.19 was composed of Homer and Cortland community members and Legislators of various ages.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—Need more affordable housing</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Homer village sidewalks need repair, bus routes have been fixed to be more accessible and village is planning for a bus shelter at Homers stop. Dial a ride is also a useful resource. Prescriptions can be delivered.</li> <li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—allowing take-out meals at the Senior Center would benefit home-bound seniors.</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety</i>—Area Agency on Aging offers in home services (housekeeping, personal care, case management offered).</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Senior Center needs more food variety to bring people in, there are a few walking programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Virgil Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 8.21.19 was composed of Virgil community members, clergy, and Legislators.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—there are not enough rental units or senior housing in Virgil.</li> <li>• <i>Transportation</i>—there is not enough interest in the bus or dial a ride services for them to stop in Virgil. There are a few Uber drivers but there hours aren't set and it is expensive.</li> <li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—Stairs and accessibility are concerns. Insurance advisement through AAA is beneficial and advisors should come to town during open enrollment.</li> <li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Wi-Fi is not available in many areas. Internet access and classes on how to use computers could allow elderly to stay in touch with grandchildren through Facebook etc. There is a senior club and music offered once a month, but it can be difficult to get people to come to these events. Pets can be a good socialization tool.</li> <li>• <i>Emergency Services</i>— Pastors should be added to emergency call lists if someone needs help during off hours.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Truxton Senior Center</b> <i>This focus group conducted on 8.27.19 was composed of Truxton community members.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Housing</i>—People want a 60 plus exclusive housing, too many full-waitlists, and lack of single story housing. People can't afford to retire-keep up with housing needs.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Transportation</i>—Neighbors help in assisting each other. Cortland Transit does not come out that way.</li><li>• <i>Food Accessibility</i>—</li><li>• <i>Home Safety/Health</i>—the SUNY Cortland Program that sends our students to help with projects was discussed and the group felt it was very positive. Neighbors help shovel/odd jobs. Difficulty finding a primary care doctor- this leads to people going to ER for treatment.</li><li>• <i>Socialization</i>—Neighbors help each other out in this area. Would like classes about technology, internet at the center.</li></ul>
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## Next Steps

With the completion of these important focus groups, focus areas and priorities for the new Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) will need to be determined. These priorities will be the focus over the next three years and will help to fulfil requirements for the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Prevention Agenda. The NYS Prevention Agenda is based on a comprehensive statewide assessment of health status and health disparities, changing demographics, and the primary causes of death. In order to improve the health of all communities, our health improvement strategies must target the social determinants of health. These social determinates of health will focus on five key areas: economic stability, education social and community context, health and health care and neighborhood and built environment. This puts a huge emphasis on the importance of our continued partnerships across all sectors of the community. The Cortland County Health Department and Guthrie Cortland Medical Center in collaboration with the other members of the Community Assessment Team (CAT) which include Seven Valleys Health Coalition, SUNY Cortland Institute for Civic Engagement, and the United Way for Cortland County will select these priorities and focus areas. Our combined efforts will help to enhance the health of our community.

**Appendix A****WELCOME**

I'd like to begin by thanking you for making the time to take part in our focus group discussion on health within the community of Cortland County. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I will be facilitating the discussion today. This is \_\_\_\_\_ and they will be taking detailed notes during today's discussion.

**PURPOSE AND GUIDELINES****Purpose**

Our discussion should run for approximately 45 mins. Today, we will be talking about the health issues that you feel are most important in Cortland County in an attempt to obtain a detailed picture of overall health within the community. I will be asking targeted questions, but the focus group should feel conversational and I welcome you to respond not directly to me, but to your peers within the group.

We will be using the information collected today as part of our Community Health Assessment, which will ultimately determine what health priorities public health organizations within Cortland County will be focusing on for the 2019-2021 time period. Once the Community Health Assessment is complete, and priorities have been selected, the Cortland County Health Department and Guthrie Cortland Medical Center will collaborate to produce a Community Health Improvement Plan for the 2019-2021 time period.

**Guidelines**

Before we begin, I'd like to mention a few general guidelines:

1. The answers you provide today will be confidential and you are welcome to refuse to answer a question for any reason or excuse yourself from the discussion at any point.
2. Please put any electronic devices, including cell phones, on silent.
3. Please do not hesitate to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said (there are no wrong answers).
4. I may have to end discussion on a particular topic and move on to another topic in the interest of time.
5. Please be respectful of others opinions, avoid talking over people, or participating in side conversations.

**\*\*ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS\*\***

**QUESTIONS**

**Opening Question**

1. *Let's begin by going around the table and introducing ourselves. Please state your first name (what you go by) and why you agreed to join us for our focus group discussion today.*

**General Questions**

2. *What do you consider the most positive aspects of living in Cortland County (what do you like best about Cortland County)?*
3. *What do you consider the most negative aspects of living in Cortland County (what do you like least about Cortland County)?*
4. *What do you think makes a community healthy?*
5. *The Community Health Assessment Survey, conducted in May 2018-January 2019 identified three major areas of concern regarding health in the community: alcohol/substance abuse, mental health, and cost/access to health care. Do you feel these are the most pressing issues within Cortland County right now? If not, please indicate what issues you think should be added to this list.*
  - a. *Elaborate on "access" if needed (transportation, awareness etc.)*

**In-Depth Questions**Alcohol/Substance Abuse

6. *What resources (i.e agencies, institutions, programs) does the community have that address alcohol/substance abuse related issues?*
7. *What other resources are needed that aren't currently available?*

Mental Health

8. *What resources (i.e agencies, institutions, programs) does the community have to address mental health problems?*
9. *What other resources are needed that aren't currently available?*

Cost/Access

10. *What prevents you (or your family) from caring for their health, accessing community health programs, or going to doctor's appointments?*
11. *How does the cost of your health care influence decisions that you (or your family) make regarding your health?*

**Closing Questions**

12. *Do you have any suggestions as to how the problems we discussed today can be addressed or fixed in order to improve health in the community?*
13. *Is there anything anyone would like to add, or didn't have a chance to say during the discussion, that they would like to do so at this time?*

## **CLOSING**

Thank you for participating in the focus group today. Your input has provided us with valuable insight into the overall status of health within Cortland County. We will use the information collected today to make an informed decision about the health priorities of Cortland County in 2019-2021.

**Appendix B**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
Good afternoon! My name is \_\_\_\_\_. Your name was provided to me by \_\_\_\_\_  
as a contact for \_\_\_\_\_.

I am reaching out to see if members of your organization would be interested in participating in a focus group discussion as part of the Community Health Assessment. The results of the Community Health Assessment will help the Cortland County Health Department and Guthrie Cortland Medical Center determine which priorities Cortland County will focus on for the NYS Prevention Agenda 2019-2024 cycle.

Continued community engagement is essential for making an informed decision regarding these priorities, and the members of \_\_\_\_\_ will provide an important perspective. During the focus group, which should last approximately 45 minutes, we will discuss the results of the CHA survey and ask targeted questions in order to gain a more detailed picture of the status of community health within the county.

Please let me know if you think six to ten members of your organization would be willing to participate in a focus group. Additionally, please let me know if \_\_\_\_\_ has a space in which the focus group can be hosted. We are hoping to schedule these discussions throughout the month of July.

Please feel free to call 607-758-5526 or email me directly if you have any questions regarding the process. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Best,

## Appendix C

## Community Health Assessment Focus Group Interest Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Method of Contact (please circle one):      Phone      Email

Organization (If none, please write "community member"): \_\_\_\_\_

Interest (please circle one): Hosting a Focus Group      Participating in a Focus Group      BOTH

