

RWJF Culture of Health
5-Year Community Landscape Report

Adams County, Mississippi



About the Sentinel Communities Surveillance Project

The [Sentinel Communities Surveillance project](#) began in 2016 and has been monitoring activities related to how a [Culture of Health](#) has been developing in each of 29 diverse communities around the country. The purpose of the project is to learn more about how each community is working within its own historical context and current landscape to communicate about health and well-being, develop systems that promote health, and address health equity. Information on each Sentinel Community's work is summarized in community [reports](#), as well as cross-community [insights reports on emerging themes](#), such as the role of anchor institutions, the experience of small and rural communities, how communities are promoting health equity, and community narratives related to health, well-being, and equity.

This community landscape report follows from a [snapshot report](#)¹ (released in 2017) and a [community portrait](#)² (released in 2018) for Adams County, Miss., and provides a summary of the community's journey toward health, well-being, and equity over the past five years. The report is not intended to comprehensively describe every organization or action underway in Adams County, but rather focuses on key insights, opportunities, and challenges.

About This Report

The information in this report was obtained using several data collection methods, including key informant telephone interviews, an environmental scan of online and published community-specific materials, review of existing population surveillance and monitoring data, and collection of local data or resources provided by community contacts or interview respondents. Interviews were conducted with individuals in the community representing organization types (for example, grassroots, government, for-profit) working in a variety of sectors (for example, health, business, education, faith-based, and environment). Sector mapping was used to systematically identify respondents in a range of sectors that would have insights about community health and well-being to ensure organizational diversity across the community. We also asked original interviewees to recommend other individuals to speak with in an effort to supplement important organizations or perspectives not included in the original sample.

A total of 27 interviews were conducted between early 2017 and early 2022 for this report, with 10 interviews conducted in 2017, another 10 in 2021 and 2022, and the remaining interviews conducted intermittently to obtain brief updates in the intervening years. All interviews (each about 60 minutes long) were conducted using semi-structured interview guides tailored to the unique context and activities taking place in each community and to the role of the respondent in the community. Interviews conducted after spring 2020 also covered the impact of COVID-19 on the community and the community's response. Individuals who participated in a key informant interview are not identified by name or organization to protect confidentiality, rather they are identified as a "respondent." Information collected through environmental scans includes program and organizational information available on internet websites, publicly available documents, and media reports. Population surveillance and monitoring data were compiled from publicly available data sets, including the American Community Survey (ACS), Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), County Health Rankings (CHR), and other similar federal, state, and local data sources.

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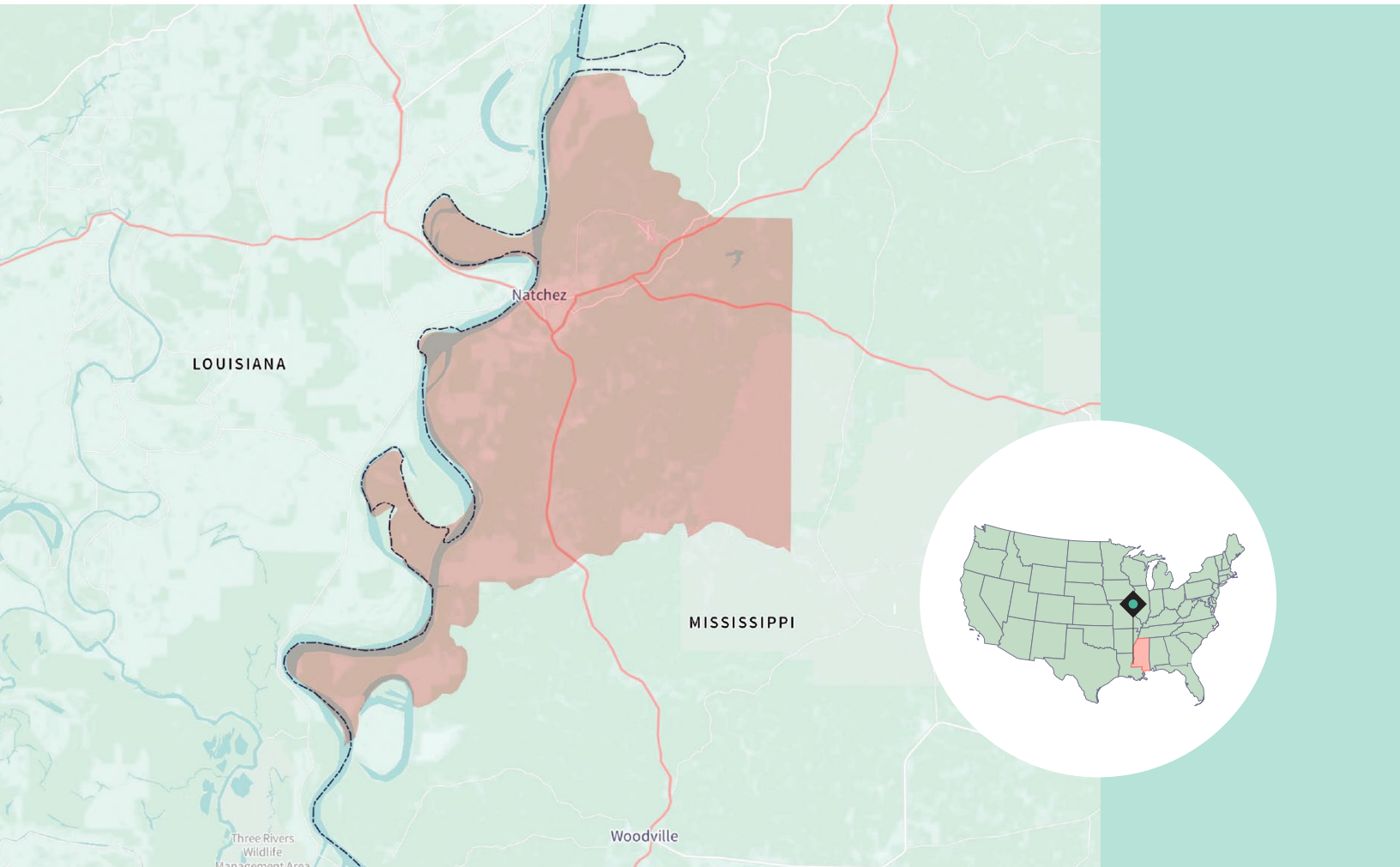
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Introduction

Adams County's focus on health has largely remained unchanged over the past five years, though there are some notable areas of progress. There is continued awareness about key health issues facing the county, such as the high prevalence of chronic health conditions (e.g., diabetes) and concerns about lack of healthcare access, but this has not translated to sustainable health investments or measurable improvements in health outcomes. While the county benefitted from a recent Health Impact Assessment (HIA) that documented concerns about health inequity, this focus has not meant large shifts in local conversations about what is driving those inequities,

such as social determinants of health or a holistic approach to health and well-being. While health is not an explicit or centering priority of the county, there are efforts to address equity more broadly, particularly as it relates to economic revitalization and workforce development. Further, new political leadership and community inputs have spurred a greater focus on addressing the racial legacy of the region and the tensions that exist between the Black and White communities. Some of this work on economics and racial legacy could be leveraged in movements to advance health equity, though to date, those links have not been made clear.

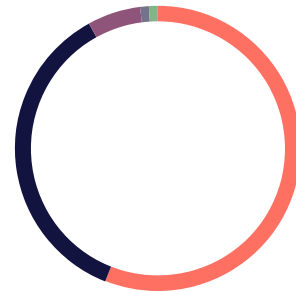
Community Overview

Situated on Mississippi’s southwestern border, Adams County is a mostly rural region, which has historically been a center for trade along the Mississippi River. The city of Natchez, named for the Indigenous mound-building tribe that initially inhabited the land, is the county seat and is home to nearly half of the county’s residents.⁴ It is the oldest town along the Mississippi River and is well-known for its historic mansions and growing cultural tourism industry. For many years, there was little mention of the history and experiences of Adams County’s Black population, but more recently, this information has been incorporated into local tours as the community continues to grapple with its difficult history within the slave trade. In the 19th century, Natchez had one of the first slave markets in Mississippi and the second largest market of enslaved people in the South.⁵ Further, the legacy of racial segregation established during the Jim Crow era persists. Some community members have taken steps to reconcile the history of Adams County and its role in the slave trade, but tensions between the Black and White populations remain.

Beginning in the 19th century, manufacturing became one of the leading industries in Adams County.⁵ But as various sawmills and factories left the area, unemployment rose and residents experienced a dearth in economic opportunity, especially for the community’s Black population. There are stark inequities in poverty rates, with nearly 37 percent of Black residents living in poverty compared to roughly 19 percent of White residents.⁶ Natchez’s recent Democratic mayors have committed to addressing these issues of inequity, with some consideration of addressing the region’s past. This has represented some evolution of who is included in leadership and a more expansive set of voices in the discussion of community needs. Darryl Grennell, a former county supervisor and former professor at Alcorn University, served as mayor beginning in 2016 with the aim of rebuilding the economy and bringing jobs to the community. In July 2020, Dan Gibson was elected mayor and has worked to carry on a similar mission to address economic inequities and build stronger community ties between the county’s Black and White populations. Adams County has been working to uplift a struggling public education system and outcomes for youth, yet with low graduation rates and limited opportunities for employment, little has changed over the past five years. Adams County residents also face high rates of diabetes, smoking, infant mortality, and obesity.⁷ In addition, there has long been a shortage in healthcare professionals in the county, which was spotlighted as a barrier in the county’s attempt to provide vaccinations to residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, impeding the community’s ability to vaccinate the population at a swift pace.⁸

FIGURE 1. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS FOR ADAMS COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI³

POPULATION **270,871**



■ BLACK	56.3%
■ WHITE*	36.2%
■ LATINO	5.8%
■ ASIAN	0.6%
■ TWO OR MORE RACES	1.1%
■ OTHER RACE	0.8%
■ AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	0.3%
■ NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER	0.0%

MEDIAN INCOME **\$29,936**

10.1%
UNEMPLOYMENT
RATE

50.1%
CHILDREN IN
POVERTY

15.1%
UNINSURED

* Percentages of population by race/ethnicity may add up to more than 100 percent because categories are not mutually exclusive.

Data as of 2019.

Adams County's Journey to Promote Health, Well-Being, and Equity

COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Adams County's capacity to address health and well-being is anchored by its main hospital, Merit Health Natchez, and supported by a network of small federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). Efforts to promote population health and well-being are largely spearheaded by motivated community members. Furthermore, much of Adams County's efforts around improving well-being revolve around ensuring the economic vitality of the community. In its history, health-focused initiatives in Adams County have been bolstered by private organizations external to the community, yet there have been relatively fewer of these types of organizations and external investments playing a role in Adams County in recent years.

Over the past five years, a small number of healthcare organizations in Adams County have sustained a commitment to providing medical care to community members, with slowly growing efforts to proactively address broader public health and social issues.

- Merit Health Natchez continues to provide medical care to residents and has hosted a community health and safety fair to provide health screenings and promote healthy behaviors.⁹ In the area of mental health, Merit Health also donated Southwest Mississippi Mental Health, an 8-bed crisis stabilization center, opened in October 2021.¹⁰
- Jefferson Comprehensive Health Center serves as another key healthcare provider, particularly for community members who are under- or uninsured. In recent years, the health center has expanded its reach by implementing school-based clinics in three school districts within the county and received federal funding for treatment of opioid abuse.¹¹
- The Southwest Wellness Association of Mississippi¹⁰ was established to step beyond healthcare and to provide a multi-pronged approach to tackling some of Adams County's pressing social issues by engaging disadvantaged youth, assisting individuals involved in the court system to re-enter and acclimate to society, and training those individuals for jobs in the tourism industry.

The private sector continues to emphasize economic revitalization and workforce development in tourism and film as a means of influencing community well-being.

- Developed in 2010 through a partnership among the Business and Civic League, the Chamber of Commerce and Natchez Now, Natchez, Inc., has been a critical asset in Adams County's economic development.¹² Further, the Natchez-Adams County Economic Development Council aims to foster relationships and develop strategies among local economic leaders to encourage diverse economic growth, job creation, and enhanced quality of life in Adams County.¹³

- As the tourism industry has expanded in Natchez, Visit Natchez (Natchez's Office of Tourism) set new priorities around diversity, equity, and inclusion and played a crucial role in attracting visitors to the area.¹⁴
 - In conjunction with the burgeoning tourism industry, Film Natchez is paving the way for a growing film industry¹⁵ and a new Film Natchez Office.¹⁶ Collaboration between the National Parks Foundation and Film Natchez has resulted in a new vision for Natchez tourism that revolves around highlighting the Forks in the Road Slave Market site and other new parks related to the Civil Rights era.
- Long-standing community-led efforts drive priorities around improving quality of life, and those priorities tend to focus on economic development for residents.**
- FOR Natchez,¹⁷ a community-based nonprofit, developed a master plan to spur economic development and improve the built environment in downtown Natchez, particularly for Black-owned businesses. As a result of this Natchez master plan, the Downtown Natchez Alliance was established to oversee the implementation of the master plan, guide its efforts, and serve as the official entity for the Mississippi Main Street Association.¹⁸
 - The Historic Natchez Foundation provides education, undertakes various restoration projects of historical sites, and spearheads initiatives that highlight the county's complicated past around race and slavery.¹⁹

Adams County has historically been supported by external organizations and investments to address health issues, yet in recent years these investments have generally declined, except for COVID-related funding.

- In prior years, Adams County received funding from organizations such as Humana and the Clinton Foundation to promote healthy behaviors and address various health conditions, however, funding has not been maintained.²
- Regarding COVID, the county received nearly \$6 million in Local Fiscal Recover Funds. These funds are intended to support urgent COVID-19 response, immediate economic stabilization for businesses and families, and to address systemic public health and economic challenges.²⁰ Adams County also received nearly \$6 million and the city of Natchez has received \$3.2 million in federal aid through the American Rescue Plan.²¹

MAJOR INITIATIVES FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

In 2017, Adams County was a community that was largely supported by external funding and initiatives that allowed the community to address chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, as well as raise awareness around maternal and child health. Yet over the past five years, funding for many large-scale health initiatives have come to an end with little sustainability to allow efforts to continue. Though specific health-focused initiatives are less common, there remains a strong focus on

economic revitalization of the county. This has been coupled with efforts to train the workforce and prepare individuals for different types of jobs, particularly as the community faces a shifting landscape of industries in the community.

Large-scale initiatives supported by external funding have raised awareness around chronic health conditions and served as a starting point for promotion of healthy behaviors.

There have been efforts to invest in local health action, particularly prior to the last five years. For instance, in an effort to use arts and culture as a means of community building, civic engagement, and economic development, the Louisville-based IDEAS xLAB partnered with a range of community-based organizations, community members, and local businesses for Project HEAL (Health, Equity, Art, Learning) Natchez initiative.²² The initiative from 2016 affected varying levels of health and well-being by fostering an increased sense of belonging and ownership of place for Black residents, encouraging individuals to consider more inclusive ways to shape policies and systems, as well as relationship- and trust-building among individuals, businesses, and nonprofits.²³ As referenced earlier, the Humana Foundation, the Clinton Health Matters Foundation, and the City of Natchez collaborated to develop the “Natchez and Adams County Blueprint for Action” in 2014.²⁴ This plan initiated programs that focused on key health priority areas, including diabetes, heart disease, and maternal and child health. Though these programs were generally deemed successful, a lack of sustained funding has caused these efforts to dwindle and few long-term outcomes to be realized.

In recent years, the County Health Impact Assessment (see Spotlight box) established new health priorities, was supported by external funders, and administered through the health department via the Historic Natchez Foundation. However, stakeholders noted that outside of COVID-19 efforts, there are still few current health-focused projects to address the findings and to make a meaningful difference in the persistent high rates of obesity, diabetes, and infant mortality, as well as significant racial and ethnic health disparities.

Efforts to improve well-being in the county have generally centered around preparation for the workforce and economic well-being of the community.

Natchez, Inc. and the local government have made significant strides over the past five years to bring new businesses and bolster work opportunities in various industries. For instance, the county brought Velocys, a renewable fuel company, and Delta Fuel, a southern energy company, which were expected to bring roughly a hundred jobs in total to the area. Natchez has plans to hire a director of workforce development to spur connections between workers and job opportunities.²⁶ In addition, local universities have played a pivotal role in workforce development efforts. The ACT Work Ready Program, implemented through a partnership between Alcorn State University and Concordia Parish, and the Natchez Entrepreneur Academy, created by Natchez, Inc and Alcorn University, prepare community members for new roles in the business field.²⁷ The city of Natchez has made significant updates to its downtown by establishing a new farm-to-table restaurant and undergoing renovations on the historic Eola Hotel.²⁸ The county has worked to draw more people (particularly young people) to the area through programs such as the Shift South Initiative by Natchez Inc., which has encouraged people to work remotely by providing a \$6,000 incentive to move to the city.²⁹



**SPOTLIGHT ON THE COUNTY'S HEALTH
IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Adams County's Health Impact Assessment (HIA), a product of the Adams County Civil Rights Project (ACCRP) led by the Historic Natchez Foundation, the ACCRP aims to “increase the profile of African-American heritage in the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of the Natchez and Adams County.” The Health Impact Project, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts, provided a grant to the Mississippi Department of Health to administer the HIA. Completed in the fall of 2019, the HIA presents recommendations and findings for how the community can advance health and well-being through a health equity lens.²⁵

The completion of the HIA demonstrated that local leaders recognize the need for action and represented a significant shift toward large-scale collaboration around health equity. The initiative was beneficial in sparking conversations around health and local racial dynamics and has been the spark that led to the implementation of two new monuments to honor Black/African American history in Natchez. Follow-up work included a workshop called “From Heritage to Health: A community, trust-building, and equity workshop” conducted by the HIA Project Steering Committee and Sustainable Equity, LLC. However, despite its successes, the efforts of the HIA have not seemed to translate into policy or systemic change within the community. In addition, only a portion of the community was involved in this work, and little has changed in terms of how most community members define and approach health and health equity.

Some initiatives have evolved to catalyze important conversations among community members and allowed them to grapple with the racial history of Adams County, though these efforts have not yet engaged all community members.

The Natchez Trace Parkway (part of the U.S. National Park Service), a 444-mile recreational road and scenic drive where people can hike, bike, horseback ride and camp, has been well-maintained and expanded over the years – providing Adams County residents and visitors with extensive outdoor recreational space. The National Park Service recently encompassed a historical slave market site —Forks of the Road— with plans to turn it into a memorial. This expansion of the work of the National Parks Service has led to greater discussion in the community around race relations, though there is progress to be made to engage all community members. Furthermore, the community has established the Proud to Take a Stand Monument to honor the men and women of Adams County who fought for Civil Rights in 1965 and were wrongfully incarcerated during an incident called the Parchment Ordeal.³⁰ Natchez city and the Historic Natchez Foundation established a committee that plans to erect a monument to honor the more than 3,000 U.S. Colored Troops that fought at Fort McPherson in Natchez.³¹ These efforts have not only opened a dialogue for community members around the role of Black/African American people in the town's history and brought new voices to the conversation about topics such as how legacy issues have influenced current problems with economic inequity, but these efforts also have allowed current residents to learn about their own family history.

HEALTH PRIORITIES AND NARRATIVE

How stakeholders in a community think and talk about health and well-being, including ways in which health is promoted as a shared value, undergird the types of approaches leaders and organizations use to promote health and well-being. In Adams County, there have been slight shifts in how people think about and approach health, though long-held cultural norms about health and healthcare being the same continue to influence beliefs and behaviors around health. While some community members recognize the connection between social factors that affect health such as education, housing, and economic well-being, many hold a narrow view of what health and well-being entails with a particular dominance of the role of personal responsibility in determining health outcomes.

Health Narrative in 2017

In 2017, the efforts to promote health in Adams County largely revolved around chronic health conditions and acute care, but not always with the commensurate investment. In the area of acute care, the local dialogue was primarily focused on “uninsurance” and a lack of healthcare access. This was particularly true for the Black community. Since the state of Mississippi has not taken the steps to expand Medicaid, access to health insurance was a core issue for local leaders and advocates. Relatedly, local health conversations centered on the cost of healthcare and the ability to see the doctor for either preventive or acute care because of a lack of financial resources. In the area of chronic health issues, concerns about obesity, hypertension and diabetes remained a priority rhetorically, but stakeholders noted that there remains little momentum to address these issues: “I don’t hear a lot about health in the news here.” As a result, there was minimal, broad-based support from the local government or the community to address health issues.

While health was not a focal point for the community, the core narrative for the community has been around economic equity issues and the flight of the county’s younger generation due to lack of work opportunities. This focus on bringing people back to the community, and concerns about loss of intellectual capital (e.g., “brain drain”) and the the related economic impact (i.e., if people leave, vacant properties will rise) has permeated the county’s predominant narrative, with no explicit link to health.

Evolution of the Health Narrative

Over the past five years, the health focus has primarily remained the same, however there is some increased discussion of the role of nutrition and physical activity and the links to the chronic health concerns of the county, as well as a growing investment in mental health. For instance, there is greater acknowledgement of the importance of diet in maintaining good health, though many in the community are slow to make changes to their current established behaviors. One local restaurant owner, who oversaw the Soul Food Fusion Festival, has now spearheaded a movement to teach community members how to cook southern food with healthier ingredients, through the African Heritage School of Cooking. Despite these points of progress, stakeholders noted that topics such as food are deeply engrained in Natchez culture and remain a difficult issue to address in households. A community



SPOTLIGHT ON COVID-19

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Natchez was a leader in preparing for the first wave by being the first city in the state to create a COVID-19 taskforce.³² Spearheaded by the city’s mayor, Darryl Grinnell, a former professor of biology at Alcorn State University, the 15-member taskforce brought together the CEO of Merit Health Natchez, local physicians, the superintendent of schools, director of the Natchez emergency management, the police chief and others.³³

Though the taskforce disbanded in May of 2021 for a short period of time, the infrastructure remained in place for the group to reconvene to address additional COVID-related issues. For example, when the Delta variant began to spread, the group worked together to promote vaccinations and combat misinformation being shared on mainstream and social media.³²

member noted, “Many people around here want to see things stay the same and that would involve eating the same things and doing the same things.”

Related to nutrition, physical activity has grown in priority locally since 2017, concurrent with some of the investments in parks and recreation noted earlier. The Natchez Trace Parkway continues to be an option for community members to use for exercise and recreational space, though it tends not to be used by all members of the community. The city is working to make outdoor space and recreational areas more of a priority by requesting funding to upgrade six local parks.³⁴ There are at least two new gyms in the community and people cite increased gym attendance, at least anecdotally.

There is a beginning awareness about mental health. For instance, Y’all Means All Natchez, a community organization focused on diversity and LGBTQ+ rights, has held conversations about the value of mental health. As noted earlier, Southwest Mississippi Mental Health, an eight-bed crisis stabilization center, opened in October 2021 after several years in the making.¹⁰ The Southwest Mississippi Health Complex was awarded a \$2.9 million grant to target children and adults suffering from serious emotional disturbance and mental illnesses.³⁵

While progress is slow in expanding health conversations, there has been some notable promise spurred by COVID-19. For example, some stakeholders described that COVID-19 has started conversations about the risk factors behind the virus and the value of taking care of oneself. However, this still generally maps to a personal responsibility mindset (rather than a community orientation) for health, as one stakeholder commented, “People believe they have the right to treat their body the way they want to, particularly in Adams County.” Healthcare organizations and the local government appear to approach health in this way as well, and despite some efforts like the Southwest Wellness Association of Mississippi noted earlier, there is little focus on the value of public health, as one community leader described regarding the views of their peers, who represent local leadership, “We’re not going to get in the business of improving individual lives with our policies. People need to be left alone to make their own decisions.”

ADAMS COUNTY'S APPROACH TO HEALTH EQUITY

In brief, health equity is the idea of everyone having a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible, though community perspectives and approaches vary. Through the lens of health equity, communities shape and form values about who has access to health-promoting resources and how health is prioritized for population subgroups. Over the past five years, the concept of health equity has only somewhat taken hold within Adams County. Though there have been some efforts to summarize health equity issues via the HIA and conversations to acknowledge the racial legacy issues of the region, the county has not achieved greater progress in terms of collaboration and action around health equity to influence policy and systems change.

Health Equity in 2017

In 2017, Adams County had not adopted a health equity or social determinants of health framework. Conversations about health equity were rare, though there were efforts to start the conversation through initiatives such as Project HEAL Natchez, described earlier. Stakeholders noted that people locally acknowledged that health disparities existed, but it still took external efforts such as Project HEAL or the investment from the Clinton Foundation to provide resources to operationalize and address inequities, making sustained progress to advance health equity difficult.

The definition of health equity in Adams County also has been heavily intertwined with the economic well-being of the community. As noted in the context of health narrative, conceptualizations of health equity largely revolved around health insurance and how many community members often cannot afford services. Since there was not enough political will for Medicaid expansion in the state, local advocates were challenged to address health equity issues. Adjacent to health equity, there is more focus locally on economic and educational equity, which can influence health equity, but is not explicitly linked. For instance, mayoral races tend to focus on workforce development, efforts to draw companies to the region, and Black/White disparities in school conditions and educational outcomes.

Evolution of Approach to Health Equity

Over the past five years, the conversations that focus directly on health equity have not markedly increased in the county, though there is slight movement. Community members that were involved in the Adams County HIA (see Spotlight box on page 4) developed a definition of health equity for the community, yet those individuals remain the main constituents who continue to engage in discussions about health equity. The HIA was useful in describing how health equity is addressed in silos, which limits the effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration to advance health equity. A stakeholder noted, "I think it might be that people don't really understand how health relates to what they're doing—mainly in White-led orgs/groups."

The HIA also was a starting point for outlining gaps in the ability to track health data consistently by race/ethnicity and connecting information on chronic diseases with data on socioeconomic variables. For instance, the HIA has a section that specifically links "heritage" or legacy policies that reinforced discrimination with modern-day socioeconomic outcomes.

Despite the progress of the HIA to link structural factors and health and economic outcomes, the assessment noted the difficulty to monitor these outcomes over time due to poor data infrastructure locally. Unfortunately, insights from the HIA, while noteworthy, also have not fully translated to real action on behalf of health equity.

As noted earlier, while not explicitly about health equity, there has been some increase in the conversations about the underlying issues of the racial legacy in the region. Enhanced dialogue around race and disparities and efforts to make these conversations less taboo can be considered a crucial step in Adams County's journey to advance health equity. While race remains a challenging topic, the Proud to Take a Stand Monument, described earlier, represents steps towards that expanding dialogue about the role of race. Further, local political shifts suggest greater interest in shifting power structures, elevating community voice, and unifying the community. A community organization leader noted, "Politicians have been voted in who want to help the entire community and not just a segment of the community. [There's a] more hopeful feel from the community in terms of where we're going."

Factors That Influenced Adams County's Journey

Efforts to promote health and well-being have generally been guided by external funding and a segment of motivated community members who are dedicated to improving the quality of life for Adams County residents. Yet with little political will, limited resources, and a need for increased data capacity, Adams County continues to face challenges in making significant impacts in health and health equity.

FACILITATORS

- In past years, external funding has been a key area of support for community initiatives that aim to promote health and well-being in Adams County. Though currently there are few efforts to bring in new funds, community champions that were part of those efforts have the expertise to do so in the future and advance what was done through Project HEAL or the HIA.
- New leadership in Natchez coupled with greater input by community members has led to some movement in changing power structures. One key informant stated, "The energy that moves this city forward in the next decade is not going to look like it did 20 years ago. It will not just be the people who have all the power."
- Though Adams County continues to be siloed in its approach to addressing health issues, the community's response to COVID-19 and its work on the HIA provide opportunity that collaboration could be possible among different sectors.

- Adams County has leveraged the strength of its historic preservation community. This group has not only been working to address the county's past and surface dialogue among community members (e.g., efforts on civil rights monuments), but also attracting visitors and growing the film industry to generate economic development in the county.

BARRIERS

- Adams County is experiencing a declining population and has struggled to retain its young people. This has resulted in various issues such as brain drain, a declining housing market, and negative effect on the local economy.
- There is a lack of political will to make health a shared value and disagreement within political structures at local and county levels about how limited funds and resources should be used for community or public health.
- Despite efforts to unite the community, there is still a rift in the community where some community members view some issues to be a "Black issue" or "White issue." Furthermore, some community members remain uncomfortable discussing race relations and Adams County's complicated history.
- There remains a strong need for increased and more robust data collection. Currently, there seems to be little data capacity in the community to consistently track health and associated inequities.

Conclusion

Adams County has been moving slowly to address health issues in the community, which includes broadening the focus on health topics beyond health insurance and access to care only and increasing the focus on health equity. The county continues to be strongly affected by the state's decision to not expand Medicaid, a critical issue that community members cite as deterring individuals from seeking healthcare to address persistent chronic health issues (e.g., hypertension, obesity). While access to care continues to be a challenge, the county has attempted to make some investments to improve nutrition and physical activity supports, two key factors underlying those chronic health conditions. However, the focus on health and health equity remains minimal compared to other foci of the county, predominately economic and education equity. The lack of a comprehensive approach to health, despite the work of Project HEAL, the Clinton/Humana effort, or the HIA, remains a stumbling block to more sustained efforts to address health as part of the county's priorities rather than simply the work of a few local leaders and community organizations.

Despite these challenges, there are areas of optimism, particularly as it relates to positive change in the county's interest to address longstanding racial dynamics and discuss the history of the slave trade. Coupled with optimism about new political leadership, this could provide an opening for connecting racism to health equity, though not yet realized. Adams County will need to tackle this lack of holism when it comes to health, given its reliance on an individualistic and personal responsibility framework, potentially impeding a broader commitment to shared, community-wide health investments. Going forward, it will be important to track how Adams County is or is not making the connection between its racial history and health inequity, and the extent to which the county begins to assume a social determinants of health-centric approach rather than a healthcare-centric approach. This will require collaborations among the healthcare system, local government, and community-based organizations, which has not been sustained yet in many notable ways. As Adams County contends with these challenges, other communities facing similar difficulties can learn what happens to the health narrative and investment in places with entrenched views of health issues, limited resources, and a slower pace to advance health equity. Future research could consider what it takes to make progress in communities which prioritize economic development, and how health can be a more explicit part of that focus.

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