

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY CONNECTORS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Community connectors and mental health support organizations expand the clinical care landscape and broaden what access to support looks like in Monroe County. They augment often-overloaded behavioral and mental health systems by providing services that include information and referrals, connection and social support, and healing and wellness. This assessment identified opportunities to integrate and utilize community connectors and mental health supports more widely. By doing so, we can address current unmet needs and alleviate some of the resource pressure on the formal clinical care system.

Why Focus Here?

Need for Mental and Behavioral Health Support is Pronounced: Many residents in our community experience significant stress and concerns related to mental and behavioral health and leverage community connectors for support and guidance.

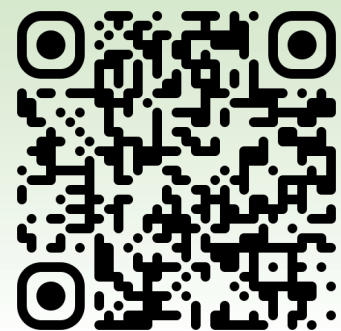
- 25% of My Health Story survey respondents in Monroe County indicated that their emotional and mental health was fair or poor¹
- 59% identified having at least one self-concern related to mental health or substance use in the past 12 months¹
- 81% used at least one non-clinically licensed support¹

Established Trust and Rapport: People seek mental health and substance use support from community connectors and organizations for various

This brief is part of a Behavioral Health Needs Assessment completed in July 2025. This is one of six issue briefs summarizing findings.

All issue briefs, along with the full assessment, are available online at commongroundhealth.org/bhna25.

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reasons. These include existing rapport with those they reach out to, convenient and comfortable settings, mutual values and beliefs, and shared identities with support givers.

Offer Multiple Pathways for Support:

Community connectors and mental health support organizations assist residents in different ways including:

- Normalizing mental and behavioral health issues by dismantling stigma and debunking myths
- Providing culturally responsive healing through traditional methods such as yoga, dance and storytelling circles, and by creating safe spaces for belonging
- Meeting people where they are within their behavioral health journey
- Acting as a “bridge” to connect people to clinical care when needed by providing resources, services and support, and assistance in navigating treatment options

Key Opportunities

Change the Culture of Care: Shifting from deficit-based models to an approach focused on mental wellness requires significant changes to the ways systems currently operate. To improve the culture of care we need to focus on:

- Embedding people with lived experience in development, implementation, and decision making
- Encouraging recovery-oriented perspectives and language
- Reducing stigma broadly throughout the community and also within clinical settings
- Integrating mental health framing throughout policy discussions and community forums

Enhance Partnerships with Clinical

Healthcare Systems: Explore areas where community-based organizations can further support clinical care efforts. Encourage collaboration and coordination between healthcare systems and community-based organizations.

Training and Assistance: Additional training and support can increase the impact that community connectors and mental health support organizations have within the communities they serve.

- Specific content areas for additional training include recognizing and understanding signs of distress, boundary setting, and culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices
- Assistance to ensure that community providers prioritize self-care and have safe spaces to continue their own healing journeys
- Support and guidance on implementing peer-models

Increase Workforce Diversity: There is continued need for more people of color in the mental and behavioral health fields. This includes roles at community-based mental health support organizations and in peer navigator programs.

“Spaces where we can bring our entire selves, take off ‘the mask,’ and not have to code-switch are incredibly therapeutic... If it reduces your stress and puts you in a place where you feel safe and nurtured, that’s healing.”

—Behavioral Health Needs Assessment Advisor

¹ My Health Story 2022, Common Ground Health.