

# Access to Health Care in Florence County

Florence County Health Department | 2022 Report

According to the Federal government's long-term health plan *Healthy People 2030*, Health Care access and quality are a social determinate of health. "Social determinates of health are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks". This report will assess the availability of care as well as barriers to care for our population.

## Review of Data

An Access to Care Coalition was formed in fall of 2014. Members include representatives of the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), Florence County Human Services, Florence School District, Primary Care, Behavioral Health, Oral Health, Economic Development, and Emergency Medical Services. Pharmacies and Veteran Affairs representatives have since joined the coalition. The report is a result of discussions and contributions from these coalition participants. Tools used include the County Health Rankings, US Census American Community Survey, and map analysis. Due to the geographic location, health insurance status, and transportation barriers in our rural community, FCHD also utilizes annual surveys of target populations to better understand vulnerable community members.

## Availability and Gaps in Services

Florence County covers 488 square miles and has a population of 4,023 living in eight townships. On the northeastern side of the county, near the border of Iron Mountain, Michigan, are the towns of Florence, Commonwealth, Fern, Homestead and Aurora. In the western part of the county near the border of Iron River, MI are Long Lake and Tipler. In the south is the town of Fence.

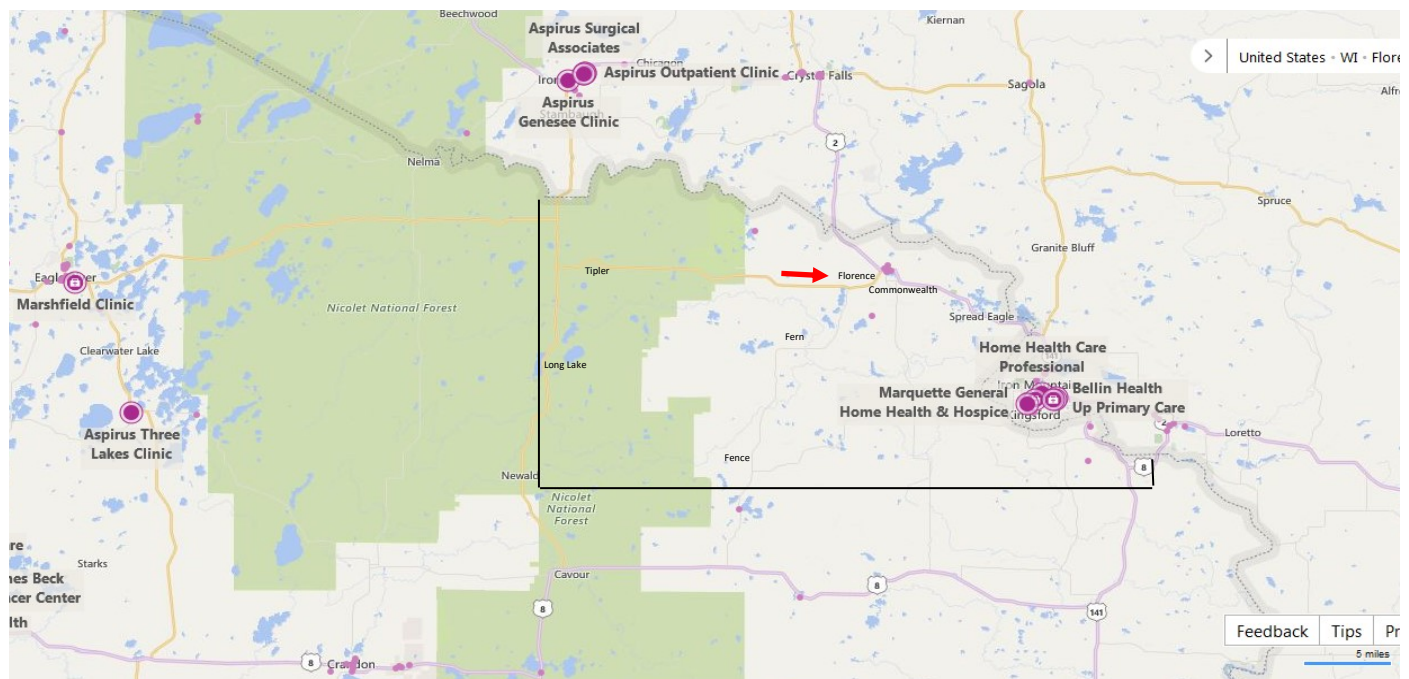
The patient provider ratios for Florence County in the following three categories show the jurisdiction a health care shortage area:

Primary Care Physicians 2,150:1

Mental Health Providers 4,300:1

Dentists 4,300:1

The map below shows the geographic distribution of providers.



There are no hospitals, mental health care facilities, or dentists in Florence County. There is one Medical Clinic with several Health Care Practitioners located in the town of Florence. The clinic is the closest for residents of the towns in the eastern part of the county Florence, Commonwealth and Fern. The Clinic now holds a satellite Pharmacy as well. Florence County also has one private Mental Health provider who also provides some school based mental health services.

There are several health networks with hospitals and other services across the border in Iron Mountain, Michigan including Dickinson County Healthcare Systems (which recently transitioned to Marshfield Clinic), Marquette Medical Center, and Bellin Health, with many providers housed under one roof. The Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital is available to veterans and is also located in Iron Mountain. These providers are 5 to 10 miles away from Florence County residents living in the Town of Aurora and Homestead. Residents in the western part of the county are closer to Aspirus in Iron River. For most residents of Fence, the nearest provider is Ministry Health in Laona, WI.

As mentioned previously, the county has Clinical Preventative Services and EMS/Rescue Squads, however residents must travel outside the county or across the border to Michigan for most services. Depending on the region of the county, this could be a very short drive or up to 20 miles one way.

Emergency Departments are located in Iron Mountain, Iron River and Eagle River hospitals.

Ambulatory care, inpatient care and chronic disease care are available at those locations as well.

Dental Care is available in Iron Mountain for insured or cash only patients. The nearest Medicaid Dental provider is located over 1 hour away in Lakewood, Rhinelander, or Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin.

Mental Health Care can be obtained through the Marinette County ADAPT clinic, or various private practices most located in Iron Mountain, MI.

## Conclusions

### Too Expensive/Uninsured or Underinsured

Assessing responses from surveys and focus groups, when responding to the question “In the past 12 months, have you ever needed to see a doctor but did not?”, the most cited answer was that care was not affordable. Respondents listed high deductibles, high co-pays and no prescription coverage as main concerns. In addition the 2022 County Health Rankings noted Florence County uninsured rate at 8% whereas the state of Wisconsin was 7%.

### Lack of Transportation

#### Non-urgent Care

Rural areas create geographical barriers for community members; especially those with low income. As evidenced by the map on the first page, many of our residents in outlying areas need to travel 20 miles or more to obtain healthcare. This can be a hardship for families who don't have access to a reliable vehicle or are challenged by high fuel prices. Florence County lacks public transportation infrastructure, which contributes to lack of access in getting non-emergency care. According to Healthy People 2030 people without insurance are less likely to have a primary care provider and they may not be able to afford the health care services and medications they need. Therefore, people may not receive recommended services such as cancer screenings because they do not have a primary care provider. They may also live too far away from primary care providers creating barriers to care.

## Emergency Care

There are three volunteer rescue squads in the county based in Florence, Long Lake/Tipler, and Aurora/Homestead. However, due to lack of volunteers in the outlying areas of Long Lake/Tipler, more calls are being sent to Integrity Ambulance which translates into longer response times. Sheriff's Department dispatchers are able to send out the nearest squad in response to a 911 call. Agreements with neighboring counties and Michigan-based Integrity Ambulance can be called upon to provide emergency care and transport to the nearest hospital.

## Dental Care

As noted above, Florence County is in a health care shortage for dentists. In addition, there is a barrier to care in neighboring Michigan. As a border county, Michigan Dental providers will not accept WI Medicaid due to the low reimbursement rate. Medicaid recipients experience an additional barrier to care related to the low reimbursement by having to travel an hour or more for dental services. This creates economic hardships for working parents/students/adults who may not have the ability to take paid time off. The travel distance in our rural area and lack of public transportation to care frequently leads to delayed dental routine services.

## Emerging Issues

One of the upcoming changes in the structure of dental care in Florence County will be through a partnership with a Federally Qualified Health Care Center (FQHC). School based Dental Care Services had to be discontinued for a couple years. As in other years, Health Care Professionals were in high demand. This resource which will provide screenings, varnishes, and dental sealants will decrease barriers to care especially for the Medicaid Student population. Approximately 50% of the Student body is currently on Medicaid. This change in structure will significantly decrease barriers for dental care for students. However, this barrier for adults on Medicaid (disabled, poverty) continues to be an emerging issue related to access to care.

Florence County has made recent improvements in behavioral health. The mental health services provided through telemedicine to a hospital in another region allows participants easier access and potentially, avoids stigma with seeking behavioral health support. Issues that impact access were collaboratively assessed, Florence County was able to create a telehealth mode of service to offer adults online access through the human service department. Mental Health needs have continued to increase significantly related to the Pandemic. Issues related to access for behavioral health services are a priority need in our rural community.