

# South Shore Equity in Recovery Project Brief



## Background

In 2022, the Cudahy, Oak Creek, and South Milwaukee-St. Francis Health Departments received funding through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to engage with community members and community-based organizations to better understand the broader impacts of COVID-19 across the South Shore.

Through this funding, the South Shore health departments collaborated to strengthen our understanding of the unique impact that COVID-19 continues to have on our communities, and to develop strategies to address the health inequities that exist for people who live, work, learn, and play in the South Shore. All program activities were conducted within the grant period beginning June 30, 2022 and ending May 31, 2024.

## Approach

Between 2022 and 2023, the South Shore health departments gathered insight from community members and partners to understand the broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, community priorities for health, and what our communities need to thrive. The project consisted of three phases including, 1) an online community survey, 2) focus groups and interviews, and 3) community data walk and participatory mapping events. This document presents key insights gathered throughout this project.

## South Shore Equity in Recovery Survey

Between September of 2022 and May of 2023, the South Shore health departments collected community insight through the South Shore Equity in Recovery Survey.

## Focus Groups & Interviews

Between October and November of 2022, three focus groups were held with partners representing nearly 20 community-based organizations including education, health care, mental health and substance use treatment, food pantries, children and youth with special health care needs, and agencies serving the LGBTQ+ community.

Between February and May of 2023, interviews were held with 31 residents from marginalized communities to develop a deeper understanding of the COVID-19 related disparities across the South Shore.

## Our Community, Our Voice Events

The final stage of the South Shore Equity in Recovery project consisted of four community events at which the information collected through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews was shared with the broader community. During these events, additional data was collected from community members through a data walk and participatory mapping activity.



## Definitions

**Health equity** is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.

**Health inequities** are systematic differences in the health status of different population groups.

**Marginalized populations** refers to those groups who are impacted by structural and social inequalities, such as through racism, classism, or ableism; and are more vulnerable to social, economic, and health inequities.

**Qualitative data** refers to information in the form of narratives, rather than numbers. Narratives can be collected through observation, interviews, focus groups, or storytelling.

**A data walk** is an interactive way to share data with community members.

**Participatory mapping** is a process in which community members use their collective knowledge to produce a map that represents a particular area of importance.

### South Shore Equity in Recovery Survey Results

**441** survey responses were gathered from residents of the South Shore communities of Cudahy (83/19%), Oak Creek (166/38%), South Milwaukee (138/31%), and St. Francis (54/12%).

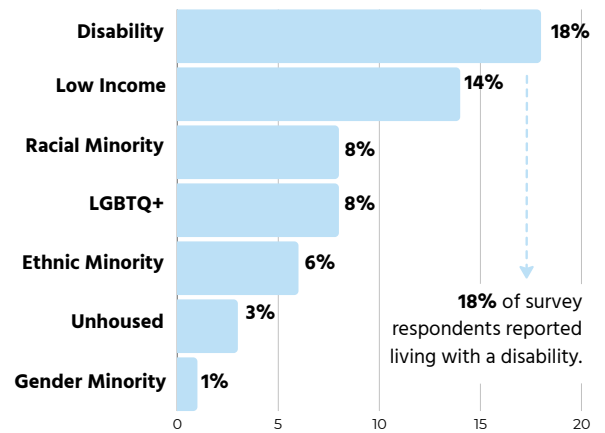
**161** of these responses (37%) were from individuals who identified as a member of at least one of the priority, marginalized groups.

### Self-Reported Health Among South Shore Residents

Overall, respondents reported that their physical (96%) and mental (96%) health stayed the same before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some groups were more likely to report worse health outcomes after the pandemic.

- **12%** of **Latinx/Hispanic respondents** reported that their physical health had worsened since the start of the pandemic compared to **3%** of non-Latinx/Hispanic respondents.
- **8%** of **unhoused respondents** reported that their physical health had worsened since the start of the pandemic compared to **4%** of housed respondents.
- **9%** of **LGBTQ+ respondents** reported that their physical health had worsened since the start of the pandemic compared to **3%** of non-LGBTQ+ respondents.

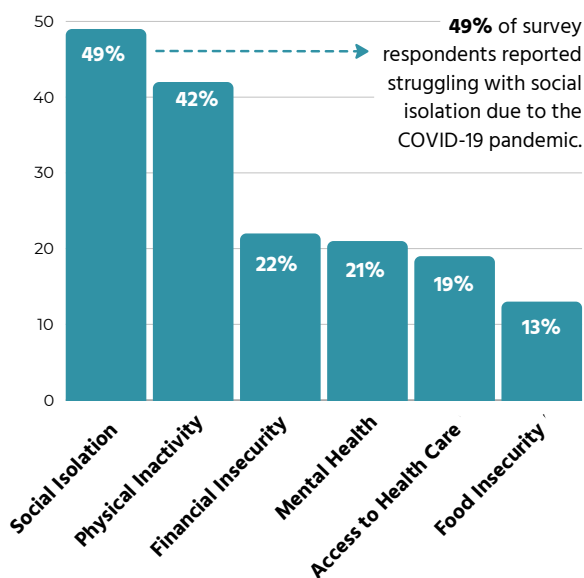
Percentage of survey respondents from historically marginalized groups.



### Broader Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Community members were asked to select the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them and their families, broadly. The top reported impacts include social isolation, physical inactivity, financial insecurity, mental health, access to health care, and food insecurity.

Top Reported Impacts of COVID-19



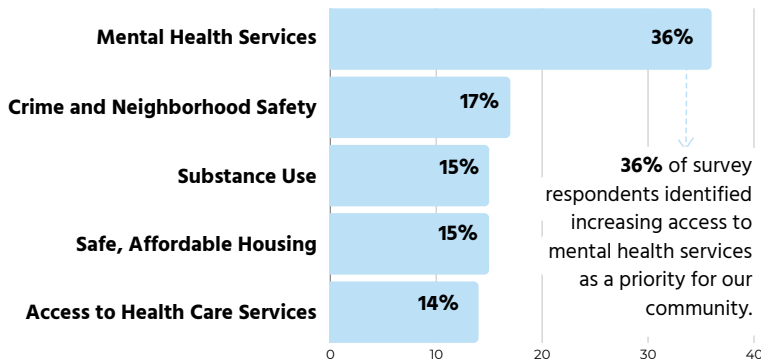
Some were **more likely** to respond that these areas were impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- Physical activity among **low-income respondents**
- Financial insecurity among respondents with **disabilities, racial/ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and low-income respondents**
- Mental health among respondents with **disabilities, racial/ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, and low-income respondents**
- Access to health care among respondents with **disabilities, racial minorities, and LGBTQ+ respondents**
- Food insecurity among respondents with **disabilities, LGBTQ+, and low-income respondents**

### Community Priorities for Public Health

Community members were asked to select their top priorities for public health. Among all respondents, mental health services, neighborhood safety, substance use, safe and affordable housing, and health care services were the top priorities to be addressed for improved health of our South Shore communities.

#### Top Reported Priorities for Community Health and Wellbeing



- **LGBTQ+ respondents** were **more likely** to identify access to safe and affordable housing as an issue needing to be addressed.
- **LGBTQ+ and Latinx/Hispanic respondents** were **more likely** to identify access to healthcare services as an issue needing to be addressed.

### Community Strengths

Community members identified the following top strengths of our community:

- Recreational Opportunities (37%)
- Neighborhood Safety (26%)
- Educational Opportunities (25%)
- Infectious Disease Control (23%)
- Safe and Healthy Built Environments (20%)

**People living with disabilities** were **less likely** to identify recreational opportunities, neighborhood safety and educational opportunities as a strength of our community.

### Community Perceptions of Health Department Programs and Services

#### Awareness of Programs & Services

- **32%** of community members who completed the survey responded that they are **not aware** of the programs and services offered by their local health department.
- **34%** of survey participants responded that they **have accessed** programs and services offered by their local health department.

#### Perceptions of Efforts to Promote Diversity, Inclusion, and Health Equity

- The majority of survey participants (**56%**) believe their local health department **does a good or excellent job** of promoting diversity, inclusion, and health equity.
- **10%** of survey participants believe their local health department **could do more** to promote diversity, inclusion, and health equity.

#### Is the Health Department Representative of the Community?

- The majority of survey participants (**60%**) believe their local health department **is representative of their community**.
- **6%** of survey participants **do not believe** their local health department **is representative of their community**.

## Key Qualitative Results



The narratives and stories collected through the three focus groups and 31 interviews with residents of the South Shore resulted in six main themes related to the health of our broader South Shore community.

## COVID-19 Impacts

People in our community shared the many ways the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their health and well-being including being socially isolated, worsened mental health, reduced physical activity, and financial insecurity.

“How do we navigate this trauma that a lot of our students and families and staff have experienced over the last couple of years?”  
- **Focus Group Participant**

“... having somebody who passed away, being a parent through all this, that's been difficult, especially when you hear that 'COVID isn't a thing, it's a hoax' ...”  
- **Interview Participant**

“I think our biggest concerns now are how do we support the community. We're all suffering from two and a half years, and we see really, you know, high rates of adverse mental health outcomes. And so I think that as we transition to this next stage of the pandemic, our focus is on keeping people safe and protected.” - **Focus Group Participant**

## Lost in Translation

People in our community identified gaps in communications as it relates to services, programs, and resources.

“I noticed with my patients, they don't know the right questions to ask. They don't have healthcare knowledge. And, you know, they end up not getting the health care they need, because they don't necessarily know the questions to ask and, or even a push for something, because they don't even know what they should push for.” - **Focus Group Participant**

“So if there's other things that we can do to help support families because this [substance use] was a long standing problem in [our community]. It's, it's there, and I think we need to do a better job of how we educate our families...” - **Focus Group Participant**

“... the messaging was saying you only need to get this vaccine if you're a man who has sex with other men. So that can be very outing for someone.” - **Focus Group Participant**

**Not Meeting Basic Needs**

People in our community expressed difficulty in meeting their basic needs.

“God forbid you need the hospital, because not everybody has insurance. And ambulance bills, you know, not everybody can afford that, so they will just not seek the help, because of the fear of the financial responsibility that they'll have.”  
 - Interview Participant

“Because everyone having the same access, and having accesses and care, just basic needs, things that you should just have as a human being, regardless of, you know, race, gender, sexual orientation, just having that access.”  
 - Interview Participant

“So part of it, I think is just having a sense of who do you call when you have a problem.”  
 - Interview Participant

**Failing to Address Equity**

Many people shared experiences of discrimination, racism, stigma, and lack of cultural inclusivity at the interpersonal and institutional levels across the South Shore communities.



“It's a very powerless feeling to be ignored or mistreated and misdiagnosed by your caregivers.” - Focus Group Participant

“I don't know anyone who looks like me here. When I first moved here, that was something I worried about. What happens if my neighbors have an issue with me being Black, because I've been the only Black person in the neighborhood before and it's really uncomfortable.” - Interview Participant

“A huge source of these poor mental health outcomes we see for youth is rejection in the school policies that don't allow them to fully express their gender identity, use their name and pronouns as they want to be referred to, and being able to participate in sports in the gender that aligns with theirs.”  
 - Focus Group Participant

“For people of color, I think some of those barriers are the disparities in health care ... which leads them to a lack of trust, when it comes to health care...”  
 - Focus Group Participant

“He looks very visibly Mexican ... He was walking with our young daughters ... three police cars swarmed him, blocked him and my two daughters, searched him because he fit a description of someone .... And my children, it affected them. And to have young children growing up afraid of the police because of their skin color, that makes me so sick to my stomach as a mother.” - Interview Participant

### Trouble Accessing Services

People in our community identified various barriers when attempting to access resources and services.

“Given the fight I'm having with services for adult children with autism, that are comorbid with psychiatric disorders, I'm having a very hard time finding services.”  
- Interview Participant

“At least by me, there's not transportation, easy transportation for people who need access to it.”  
- Interview Participant

“The forms are definitely a barrier ... We know that families that maybe previously were utilizing the free breakfast, free lunch, and now aren't, because they haven't done the forms yet.”  
- Focus Group Participant

“A lot of the disparities we see in the LGBTQ community are related to access, being able to access resources that are supportive of queer and trans identities and being gender inclusive.”  
- Focus Group Participant

### New Areas of Exploration

People in our community have the ideas to address community needs and improve engagement.

“Maybe like a culture day or something like that. Just different cultures coming out, and maybe people could understand people's backgrounds, that we're all different, but we're all human.”  
- Interview Participant

“Maybe cultural diversity education, just people to make them understand that just because he's got more melanin in his skin doesn't mean that he is any difference than anyone else.” - Interview Participant

“Have a community cleaning day. I have not seen people walk through the park and do stuff with the community as a team to clean up things.”  
- Interview Participant

“I think, also, if you have any, like specialized programs for the LGBTQ community.”  
- Interview Participant

### Our Community, Our Voice Data Walk

The South Shore Equity in Recovery project also consisted of four community events, held in each of our South Shore cities, at which the health departments shared information collected through the surveys, focus groups, and interviews with the broader community.

During these events, additional insight was collected from community members through a data walk which consisted of visual displays of key themes from the information collected through the web-based survey, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. At the Our Community, Our Voice events, attendees were given a Data Journey Passport that they took to each of the 10 data stations. At each station, participants were able to view themes and information, ask questions of staff, and respond anonymously to questions posted at each station.



### Thinking about your community, what kinds of things would help you or others be healthy?

People who attended the Our Community, Our Voice Events were asked what prevents us from being healthy and what would help them or others be healthy.

- Alcohol-free events
- Access to mental health services
- Multilingual support and resources
- Healthy food options
- Free community spaces and events
- More art in our communities
- Better public transportation
- More tree cover along streets and sidewalks
- Nutrition Classes
- Evening senior programming
- More accessibility for people with disabilities
- Support for LGBTQ+ youth

### What are the strengths of our South Shore community?

People who attended the Our Community, Our Voice Events were asked to name the strengths of our community.

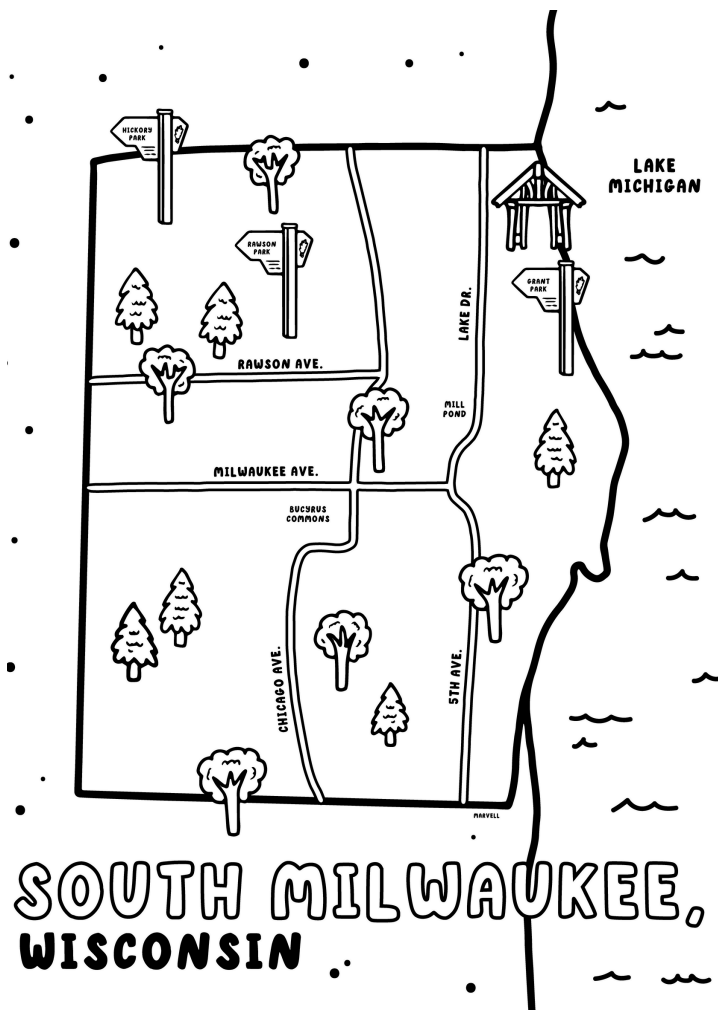
- Summer music program at the library
- Great schools
- Excellent city services and departments
- Active and dedicated health department
- Great library
- People trying to make a positive difference
- Our diversity is a strength
- Programs for kids
- Green space and parks
- Beautiful and safe walking paths
- Lots of diversity
- Neighbors look out for neighbors
- Police and fire response times
- Safe and friendly
- Well-organized recreation department



## Community Participatory Mapping

The South Shore health departments partnered with a local artist to engage attendees in a participatory mapping project during the Our Community, Our Voice events. On a large city-specific map, community members shared what their community needs are to “be healthy and thrive”.

This activity allowed participants to think more broadly about their community and environment, and the barriers to health and wellbeing.

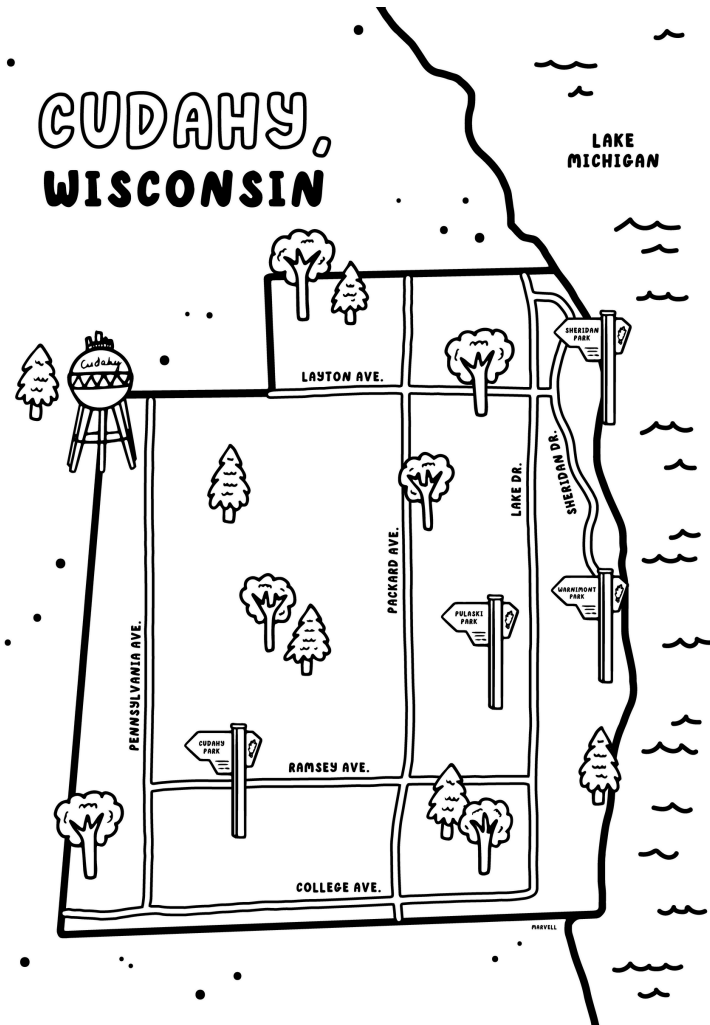


### South Milwaukee residents shared what their community needs to thrive.

- Bike repair area
- Gaga ball pit
- Get the pool working again
- County to put money aside for the parks
- Street trees for shade
- Benches in downtown
- Dog park
- Save the lagoon
- Paths for wheelchair users
- Issues with size and number of sidewalks
- Trimming of old trees on Hawthorne
- Dental help for seniors
- More mental health services
- Sex education in schools
- Affordable housing
- Homeless shelter
- Housing at Everbrite Campus
- Redeveloped Bucyrus Campus
- Hold gallery nights
- Improve businesses/empty storefronts on Milwaukee Ave.
- Utilize excess fruits/veggies in teaching food prep classes



Community Participatory Mapping

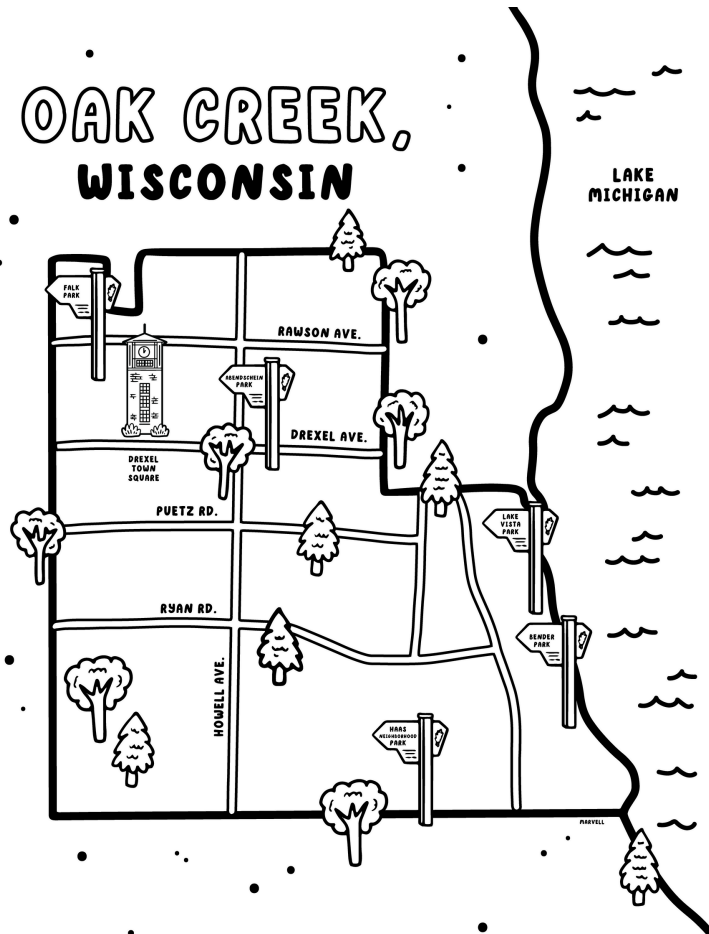


Cudahy residents shared what their community needs to thrive.

- Adult recreation - sports
- Bike lane on Lake Drive
- A walking group - challenges for miles/month
- Skatepark
- Things for teens and adolescents to do
- More summer concerts and free family events
- Fill empty storefronts with temporary art that rotates
- Gallery nights
- More diverse shopping opportunities
- More local businesses to draw in younger people
- More businesses
- More development - stores, restaurants, destination activities
- Diabetes support groups
- Mental health support groups
- Sex education at school
- Shelter for the unhoused
- More publicity for Project Concern
- Domestic violence shelter
- Resource fairs
- Assistance programs for the elderly
- Snow and lawn help
- Fix the alleys/roads
- Reduced speed and speed control design (bumps, narrower roads)
- Support for Sheridan Park
- Public bathrooms open year-round
- Community gym
- Community garden
- More robust farmers market
- Community cooking classes
- Grocery store

Community Participatory Mapping

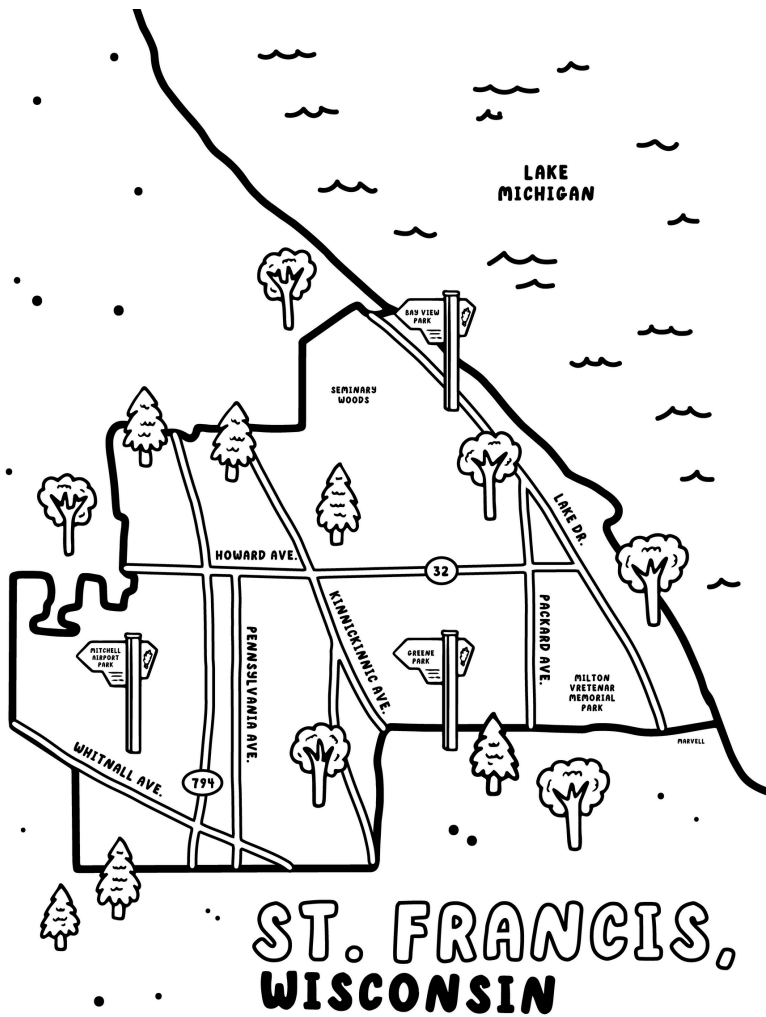
Oak Creek residents shared what their community needs to thrive.



- More pedestrian parks
- More sidewalks and pedestrian safety
- More wheelchair accessible walkways
- Parking for people with mobility issues at Drexel Court
- Public transportation (past Ryan Road)
- Safe living transition for re-entry folks
- Better traffic flow (DTS/Starbucks)
- Three-way stop at Groveland and Griffin
- More police for speeders on Oakwood

- A senior center is needed
- Lap pool
- Special needs playground
- Tennis court
- Public bike fix area/bathroom
- Local walking group
- More trail connections
- More free/affordable activities for kids
- Hold gallery nights
- MKE County to fix the boat launch
- Nature center / Preserve nature
- Take care of the wildlife
- Stop building on all the green space
- Continue to develop the park
- Create a great new community on the lake
- Cleaner community (picking up litter)
- Decrease flooding on Oakwood
- ELS classes
- Health education classes
- Sex education classes back in school
- More support for teachers
- More support for librarians
- Address racial discrimination
- Affordable housing
- Homeless shelter
- Food pantry
- More partnership with churches
- Community resources
- Mental health would be better with more moderation of community facebook groups
- Better citizen/police communication
- More diversity in the police department

Community Participatory Mapping



St. Francis residents shared what their community needs to thrive.

- Park improvements for kids
- Tennis courts
- Pickleball court
- Open bathrooms (at Greene Park)
- Bathroom on the Nojoshing Trail
- More walking paths
- Clean up trees and branches in Seminary Woods
- Bike path connecting west
- Bike trails
- Have a bike fixing area
- Bike lane on Kinnickinnic
- ADA bikes for able-bodied people to drive and ADA people to ride up front
- More walking paths
- Outdoor recreation activities
- Spots for youth to learn & hang out
- Help cleaning up trash
- Hold gallery nights
- Affordable housing
- Homeless shelter
- Keep 794
- Locally owned businesses & restaurants
- More grocery stores
- Create a downtown
- Develop the triangle
- Kwik Trip
- Food service for seniors
- Excess fruit/veggies - could be utilized in teaching food prep
- Sex education in high school
- Better parking (at Milton Vretenar Park)
- Trick or treat on Saturdays - daytime

## Next Steps

The Cudahy, Oak Creek, and South Milwaukee-St. Francis Health Departments will continue to review and incorporate all of the information, stories, and insight provided by the community through the South Shore Equity in Recovery Project into the work that we do to help keep our communities safe and healthy.

### Key next steps for the South Shore health departments include the following:



- All of the information collected through this project will be incorporated into the **2025-2029 community health improvement process** for Cudahy, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, and St. Francis. This process includes gathering feedback from community members that will help identify and address health priorities in our communities. These priorities guide the work of the health departments and collaborations with other community partners for a five-year period.



- The health departments will also incorporate the information collected from this project into department **strategic planning** to ensure we continue to prioritize the needs of our communities.



- The insights collected regarding inequities in our communities will guide ongoing **staff workshops, trainings, skill-building, and diverse partnership development** to ensure our teams are prepared to support everyone who lives, works, plays, and learns in the South Shore.



- The South Shore health departments will continue to **share the information collected with key stakeholders** including city departments, community-based organizations, and elected officials to help inform programs and services to meet the needs of our diverse community.

## Our Commitment

The Cudahy, Oak Creek, and South Milwaukee-St. Francis Health Departments recognize that community voices are critical to guiding the work that we do to promote the health and wellbeing of our communities. Therefore, we remain committed to continued engagement and conversation with our diverse community members and community partners in our shared effort to create a healthy and thriving South Shore.

