



**River Region United Way**

# 2020

## COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Three-Year Review:  
Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon &  
Montgomery Counties  
(2017-2019)

In cooperation with the  
Center For Public Service

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Community Partner:

RRUW's 2020 Comprehensive Needs Assessment Report is the culmination of three years of work by members of the River Region United Way Community Impact Council, Troy University Center for Public Service and United Way staff. On behalf of the River Region United Way Board of Directors, I want to thank each and every participant in this assessment on both sides of the process – surveyors as well as those surveyed. I also want to thank Dr. Bernadette Chapple who represented Troy University as a key player in the compilation and translation of the data found in this comprehensive report.

The information shared herein is supported by information from national data banks, as well as local findings from respondents in the five counties of the River Region: Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery counties. Recipients of services from human service agencies, our donors, as well as local city and county leadership were surveyed to collect these findings from 2017 to 2019. Several issues of key concern were uncovered in this process in each county and are shared in this report.

It is our firm belief that once problems are uncovered, solutions can be found and it is RRUW's intent to become part of the solution-finding process. We will do this by directing resources to meet identified needs and collaborating with area community partners who are ready to get to work to meet those needs. This report will be used as a tool to help direct resources to areas of greatest need by those committees assigned with that task.

It is my fervent hope that you will be able to see from the following report where our community partners' efforts are working and where we might need to bridge the gap between services offered and services needed.

As always, community needs outweigh resources and particularly now, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, we are asked to perform high standards of service with fewer resources. Keeping this challenge in mind, RRUW wants to go on record with great appreciation for every donor dollar and every volunteer hour contributed as we work together, collaboratively, to be the hand raisers, the game changers and the problem solvers in the River Region.

In the weeks, months and years ahead, you will hear us speak of BOLD GOALS. These goals will be long-range community-based initiatives and collaborations with other partners to solve big community problems. This Bold Goal Coalition will achieve its goals by aligning partners, resources and agendas. We will address disparities in **health, education, financial stability and basic needs**. Workgroups, represented by key regional leaders from various industries and organizations, will identify and address specific needs. Collectively, each group will foster positive change within our communities by examining root causes, establishing measurable goals and aligning current efforts. I hope you will make every effort to become part of the Bold Goal Coalition as we work together for the common good.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ronald A. Simmons".

Ronald A. Simmons, IOM  
President and Chief Executive Officer

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**LIVE UNITED**

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# **2020 RIVER REGION UNITED WAY (RRUW) COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**



River Region United Way is a locally based nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening lives, helping people, and improving community conditions in Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery counties in the Alabama River Region.

With our community partners, we work to create real, lasting change. We support community programs and initiatives that help those in need and support our goals of finding solutions to the most critical ones.

River Region United Way believes that everyone should have the opportunities for a good life, and that the building blocks for that life are education, income, and health. Our goals and work in the community are centered on these key impact areas.

LIVE UNITED is our call to action for the entire community. We believe our communities, working together, can achieve more than any single person or organization could alone. And we

are advancing the common good in the River Region by providing ways for people to give, advocate, and volunteer in support of our work.

With origins dating to 1923, the Community Chest of Montgomery (our original name) has a long history of supporting communities in the River Region. Through our affiliate agencies, we provide over \$100 million in goods, services and economic impact to our community.

River Region United Way regularly conducts needs assessments which we share with a variety of county, municipal and non-profit agencies to facilitate collaboration and bring about positive and lasting change. Our studies have led to the establishment of Health Services, Inc. (1963), Goodwill Industries (1966), the Information and Referral Service (1977), the Montgomery Area Food Bank (1986), Success By Six (1992) and many others.

We invite you to **LIVE UNITED** with us - get involved by giving, advocating, and volunteering for the causes and issues that you care about and want to help improve. When you reach out a hand to one, you can influence the condition of all. It takes all of us working together to create a brighter future for our River Region.

For nearly 100 years, River Region United Way has partnered with individuals, companies, organizations, foundations and area health and human service providers to advance the common good in our five-county River Region. We are grateful to all our supporters who give so generously of their time, talents and resources.

**The mission of River Region United Way is to improve lives and strengthen our communities by identifying needs and solving critical problems.** We do this by addressing the causes of issues identified in the community needs assessments we conduct, and by creating lasting and sustainable changes in community conditions.

### **COVID-19 Impact Statement**

*Over the past three years the RRUW has completed a community needs assessment to outline the needs of the five-county service area. The methodology included RRUW Community Impact Council members administering surveys via drive-through portal, online surveys and in-depth in-person interviews. This methodology is accomplished in the fall of each year. In keeping with the ORDER OF THE STATE HEALTH OFFICER SUSPENDING CERTAIN PUBLIC GATHERINGS DUE TO RISK OF INFECTION BY COVID-19 and the Alabama Mask Mandate through early December 2020, the RRUW made the decision to suspend the annual community needs assessment process and instead draft a three-year comprehensive report to identify the most prevalent community needs across the River Region.*

# Service Area Overview

## INTRODUCTION

River Region United Way (RRUW) envisions this community needs assessment will be used as an actionable and strategic tool in developing necessary programs, making educated funding decisions, and gaining a better understanding of the challenges, strengths, limitations, and opportunities facing the River Region. History has shown that the River Region is an information-driven community that comes together and responds to unmet needs when provided with a compelling, verifiable case for change.

The focus of the report is to provide a snapshot of the five counties the RRUW serves: Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery. Data included in this report is from community needs assessments completed in 2017 in Autauga and Elmore counties, 2018 in Lowndes and Macon counties, and 2019 in Montgomery County. United States Census Bureau data is also included in this report for each of the five counties with an emphasis on the four critical community needs: Health, Education, Financial Stability, and Basic Needs. Additionally, data from the Community Needs Survey from each county is included to shape the strategic planning process of RRUW to better service its counties for the 2021 fiscal year planning cycle.

The River Region United Way currently focuses on funding over 85 programs in 35 area nonprofit community partners addressing Education, Health, Financial Stability and Basic Needs.

### Impact of COVID-19 in the River Region Service Area

Nearly 95 percent of nonprofits globally say they have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 according to a report by the Charities Aid Foundation of America. Their most recent survey indicates revenue declines are expected to drop among charities by at least 21 percent over the next twelve months. RRUW must take these possible revenue declines into consideration when reviewing COVID-19 impact on its market giving. Factors affecting resources include the national economy, as well as unemployment directly resulting from COVID-19 business restructuring.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world, and the five-county service area for the River Region United Way is no exception. [Table 1](#) provides a snapshot of the impact of COVID-19 on the RRUW service area by county.

SERVICE AREA	CASES	TOTAL TESTED	DEATHS
Autauga	4,645	20,039	50
Elmore	7,059	35,072	86
Lowndes	1,003	3,451	33
Macon	1,048	5,864	35
Montgomery	17,281	79,478	281

**Table 1**

*\* Alabama Department of Public Health Division of Infectious Disease and Outbreaks COVID-19 Dashboard Current as of January 6, 2021 (Updates made daily)*

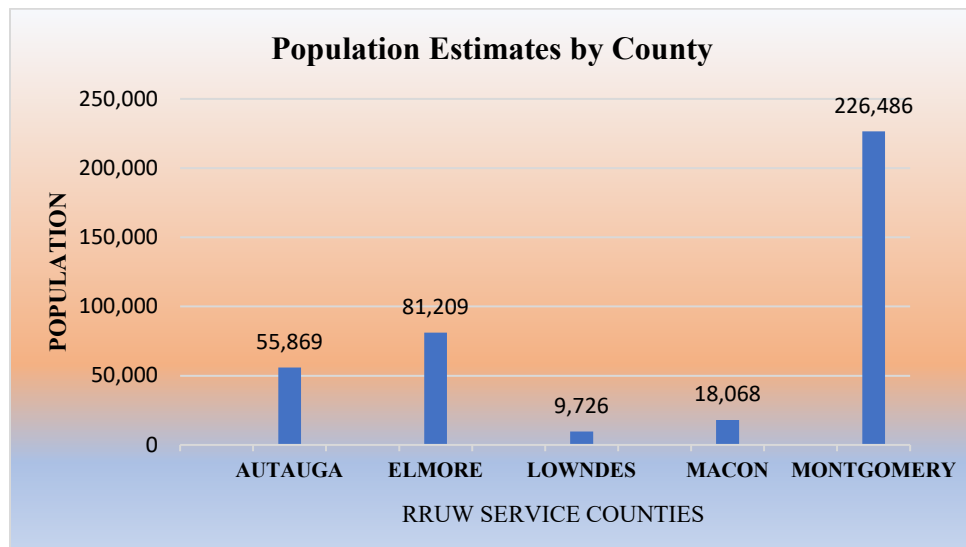
*\* Total Tested also includes those tested in Alabama that may not reside in Alabama*

## Impact of COVID-19 (cont.)

According to the Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, the pandemic has “knocked financially insecure Alabamians on their backs and widened the racial prosperity gap.” In a recent survey of 389 financially insecure Alabamians from 32 counties, “Black Alabamians had the highest death rates of any racial or ethnic group in the state...” and were disproportionately exposed to the pandemic’s other dangers from job loss to food insecurity and homelessness. (See “Flattened: How the COVID-19 Pandemic knocked Financially Insecure Alabamians on their Backs and Widened the Racial Prosperity Gap.”)

## RIVER REGION POPULATION

The River Region United Way has an estimated 391,358 residents across the five counties. Of the nearly 392,000 residents, 21% are under the age of 18, 20% are over the age of 65, and 49% of the population are employed in non-military, non-federal government positions. *Figure 1* lists the population by county and *Table 2* lists Female and Male population percentages by county and the corresponding Median Age for each county.



*Figure 1*

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2018

SERVICE AREA	FEMALE POPULATION %	MALE POPULATION %	MEDIAN AGE
Autauga	51.5%	48.5%	37.8
Elmore	51.7%	48.3%	38.6
Lowndes	53.0%	47.0%	41.6
Macon	54.5%	45.5%	38
Montgomery	53.0%	47.0%	36.2

*Table 2*

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

\*United States Census Bureau released in the American Community Survey in December of 2019 ~ Median Age

## River Region Population (cont.)

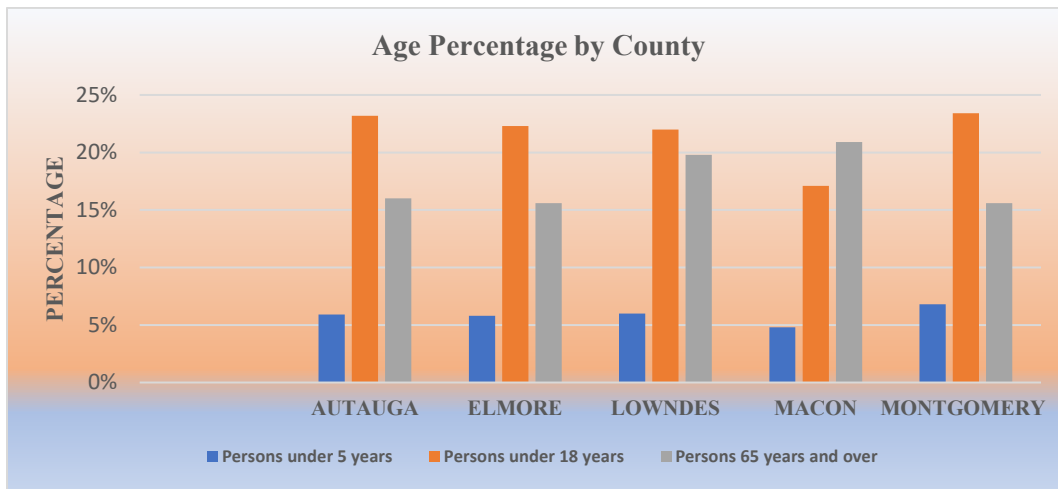


Figure 2

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

## RIVER REGION DIVERSITY

United States Census Bureau data (2019) was used to provide race and ethnicity, median age, and household income levels for this section.

The River Region is home to two military installations: Gunter and Maxwell Air Force Bases. RRUW has embraced both of these local military installations as community partners and recognizes the role these installations play in its diversity and economic impact, as well.

### Autauga County

- 3.95 times more White (Non-Hispanic) residents than any other race or ethnicity
- Median age of 37.8 and a median household income of \$58,786
- As of 2018, 2.02% of residents were born outside of the country (1,110 people)

### Elmore County

- 3.47 times more White (Non-Hispanic) residents than any other race or ethnicity
- Median age of 38.6 and a median household income of \$59,347
- As 2018, 1.78% of residents were born outside of the country (1,450 people)

### Lowndes County

- 3.03 times more Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) residents than any other race or ethnicity
- Median age of 41.6 and a median household income of \$30,833
- As of 2018, 0.03% of residents were born outside of the country (32 people)

### Macon County

- 5.24 times more Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) residents than any other race or ethnicity
- Median age of 38 and a median household income of \$32,074
- As of 2018, 1.05% of residents were born outside the country (201 people)



## River Region Diversity (cont.)

### Montgomery County

- 1.66 times more Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) residents than any other race or ethnicity.
- Median age of 36.2 and a median household income of \$47,990.
- As of 2018, 4.68% of residents were born outside the country (10,600 people).

SERVICE AREA	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	ASIAN	2 OR MORE RACES
Autauga	73.8%	20.1%	3.0%	1.2%	1.9%
Elmore	73.1%	21.2%	3.2%	0.8%	1.8%
Lowndes	25.1%	72.4%	1.9%	0.5%	0.7%
Macon	16.5%	80.4%	1.9%	0.6%	1.4%
Montgomery	32.7%	59.3%	3.7%	3.3%	1.5%

Table 3

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

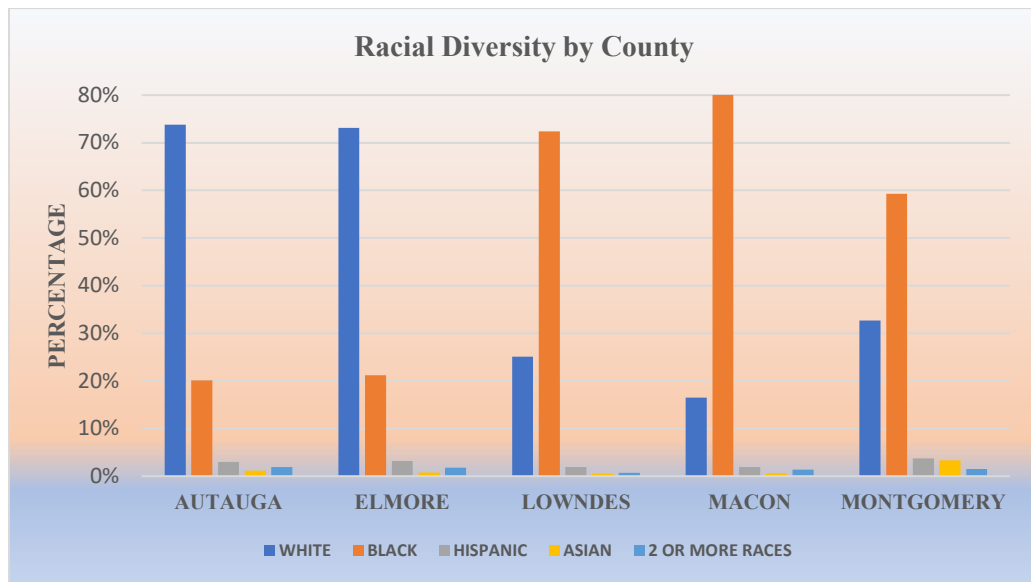
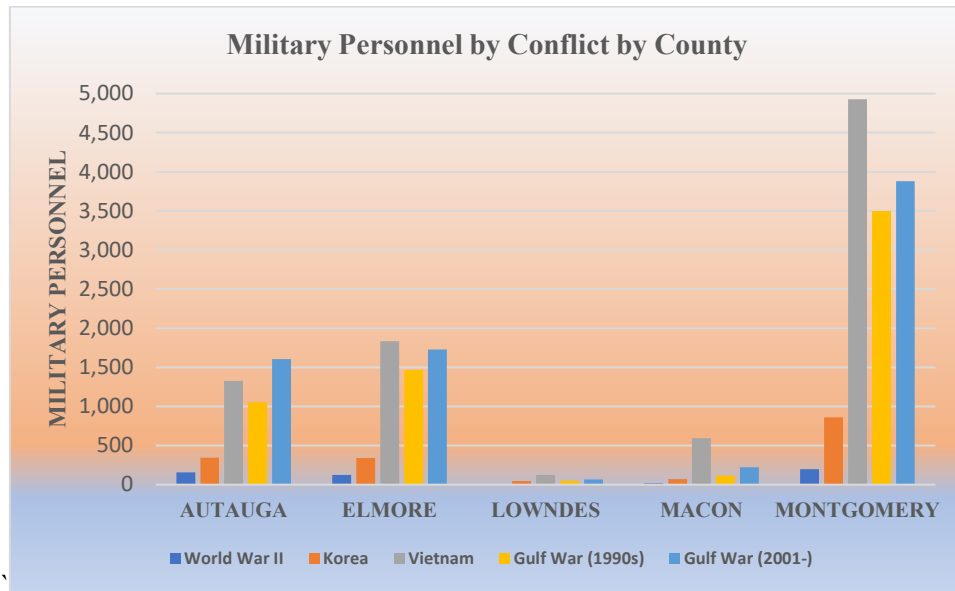


Figure 3

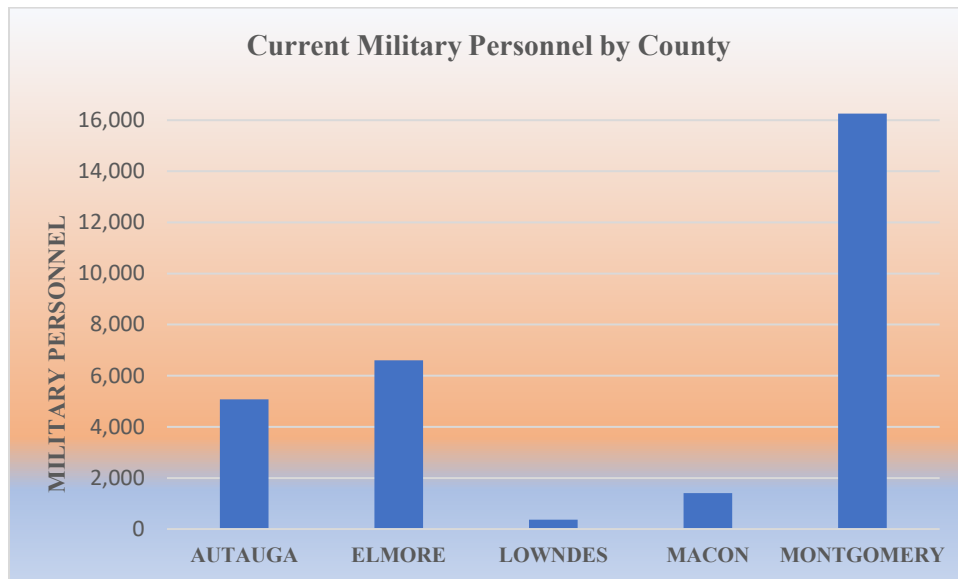
\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

## MILITARY IMPACT – Veterans and Current Military Personnel

The River Region has a large military community, both active and retired. *Figure 4* represents military personnel by Conflict and by County. As these populations retire here and age, their needs will change in areas such as healthcare.



*Figure 4*  
\*Data from the Census Bureau [ACS 5-year Estimate](#)



*Figure 5*  
\*Data from the Census Bureau [ACS 5-year Estimate](#)

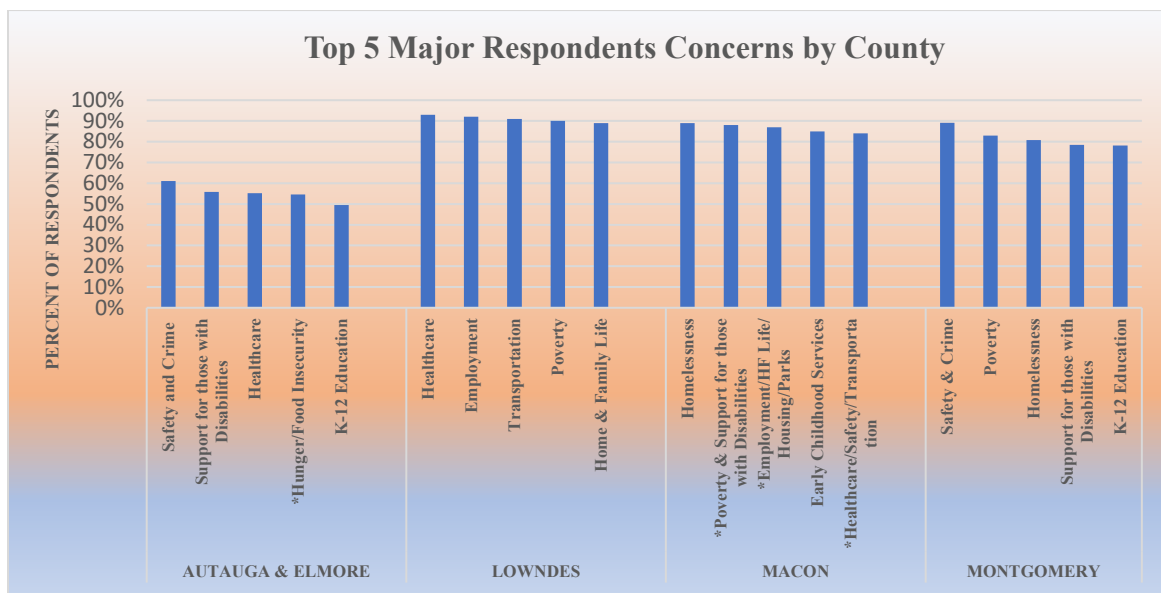
## RRUW SURVEY RESPONDENTS (2017-2019)

River Region United Way (RRUW) has conducted three community-wide needs assessments over the past three years. In 2017, the focus was on Autauga and Elmore Counties. In 2018, the emphasis was on Lowndes and Macon Counties. The 2019 report focused on Montgomery County. In survey total, there were 541 River Region citizens who participated in these results.

The purpose of this community needs assessment survey was to obtain information that could be used by the RRUW, through its Community Impact Council review, to potentially provide support to community partners that coordinate and provide services to persons in all five counties. The services provided would be in those areas that are assessed to be of greatest concern in the county (*Figure 6*) in tandem with those services which are believed to be currently adequately done (*Figure 7*) and conversely those services which are believed to be currently NOT adequately done (*Figure 8*).

RRUW SERVICE AREA	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Autauga	93
Elmore	80
Lowndes	89
Macon	75
Montgomery	204

**Table 4**  
 2017 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Autauga and Elmore Counties  
 2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Lowndes and Macon Counties  
 2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Montgomery County



**Figure 6<sup>1</sup>**  
 2017 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Autauga and Elmore Counties  
 2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Lowndes and Macon Counties  
 2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Montgomery County

**RRUW Survey Respondents (cont.)**

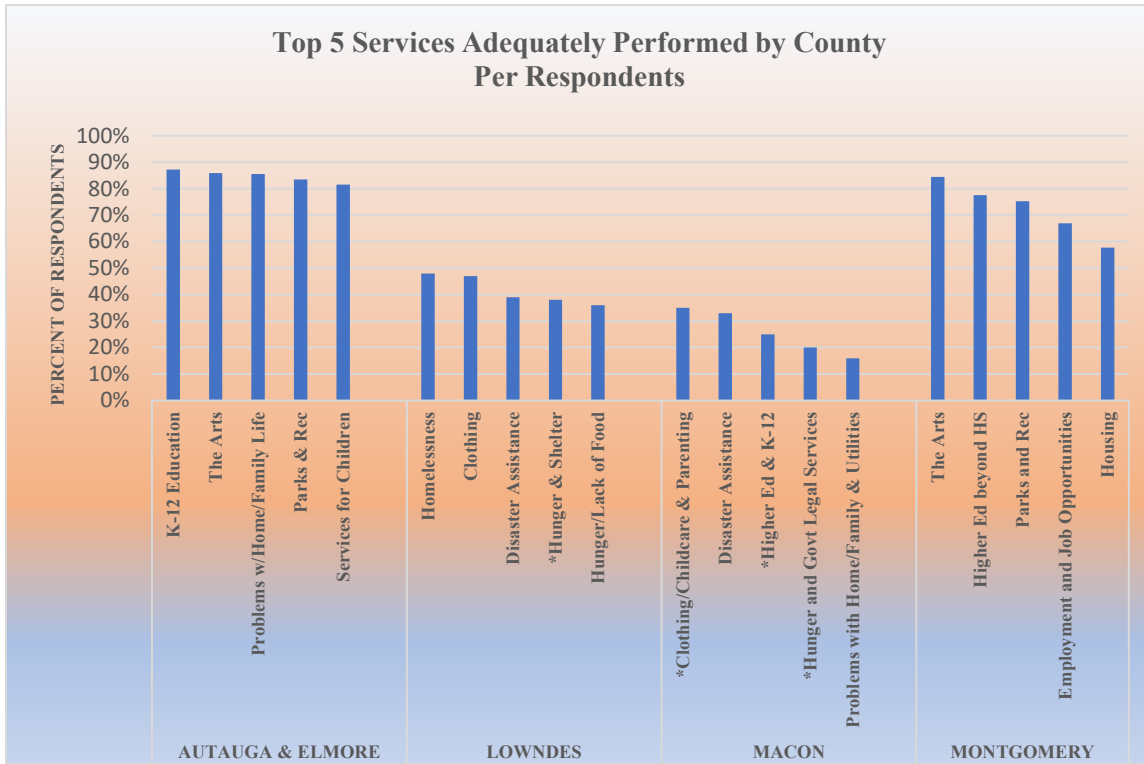


Figure 7<sup>1</sup>  
 2017 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Autauga and Elmore Counties  
 2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Lowndes and Macon Counties  
 2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Montgomery County

## RRUW Survey Respondents (cont.)

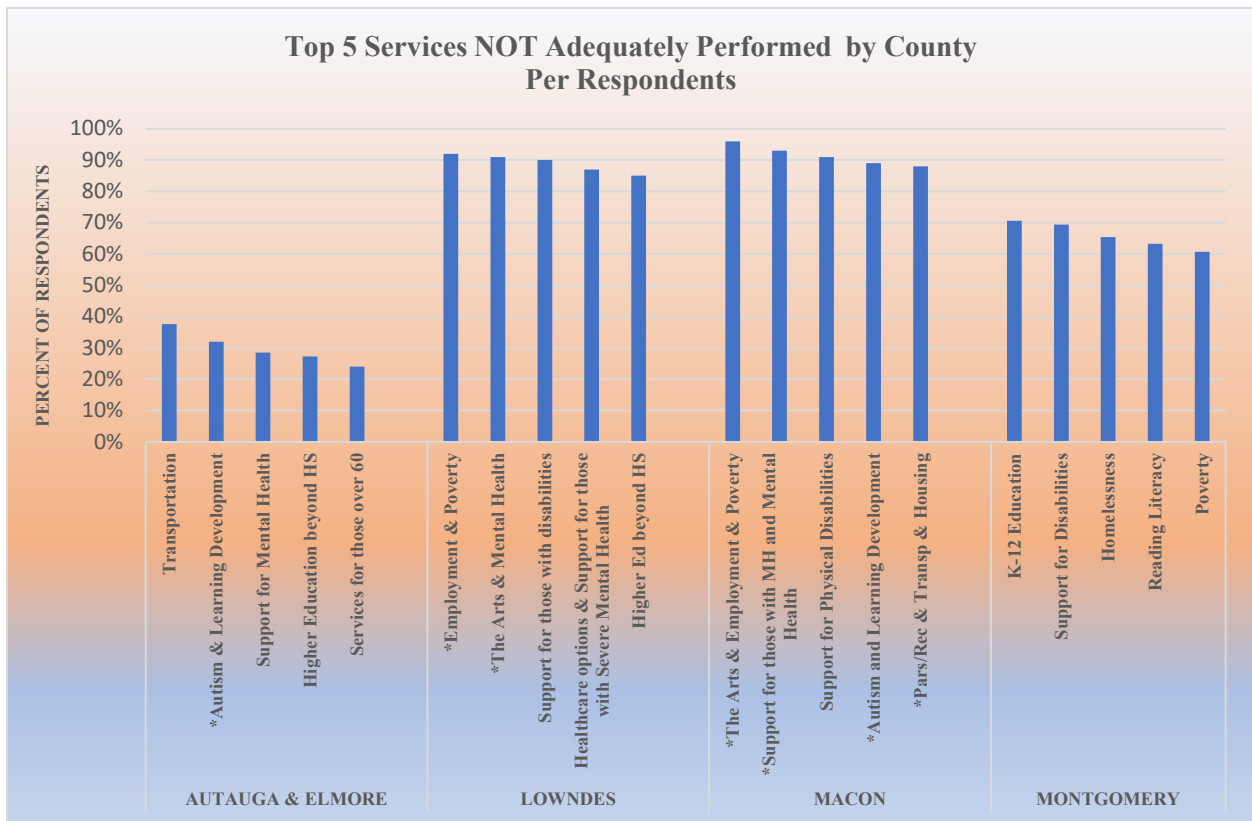


Figure 8<sup>1</sup>

2017 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Autauga and Elmore Counties  
 2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Lowndes and Macon Counties  
 2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment – Montgomery County

In the final analysis, those responding to these needs assessments see positive things being done by several community partners and programs, but perhaps not enough to cover all important needs. There remains considerable personal concern and belief that what is being done is not adequately supported by the current community service providers in each county.

# HEALTH

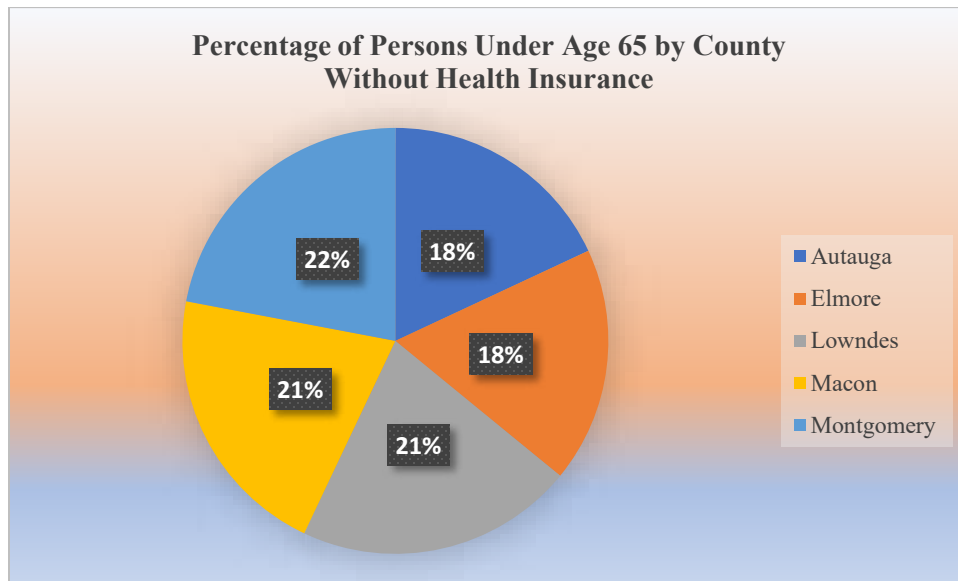
Survey respondents identified general health care as a major area of concern; this is echoed in the belief that health care in each county is not adequately provided. Table 5 lists health care data by county as documented by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2019.

HEALTH CARE	Health Coverage	Employer Plans	Medicaid	Medicare	Non-Group Plans	Military or VA Plans
Autauga	92.9%	46.6%	14.1%	11.1%	15.4%	5.58%
Elmore	91.8%	48.8%	12.8%	9.95%	15.9%	4.37%
Lowndes	90.8%	31.2%	30.8%	14.3%	12.5%	1.94%
Macon	91.9%	39.2%	21.9%	13%	16.3%	1.6%
Montgomery	89.5%	41.8%	20.2%	9.51%	14.3%	3.57%

**Table 5**

*\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019*

Figure 9 lists by county the percentage of people without health coverage under the age of 65.



**Figure 9**

*\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019*

## HEALTH (cont.)

Table 6 lists the leading health risks for each county within the RRUW service area by year for 2017 and 2018. Macon County has the highest prevalence of Adult Obesity at 47.8% in 2018. Montgomery County has the highest rate of HIV diagnoses in Alabama, at 72 per 100,000 people.

HEALTH RISK	Adult Obesity 2017	Adult Obesity 2018	Diabetes 2017	Diabetes 2018	Smoking 2017	Smoking 2018
Autauga	34.1%	36.4%	13%	12.4%	20.1%	19.1%
Elmore	35.4%	36.5%	13.4%	13.2%	18.5%	19.6%
Lowndes	45.1%	46.2%	23.5%	20.3%	22.5%	22.4%
Macon	44.7%	*47.8%	18.4%	19.8%	22.1%	21.8%
Montgomery	34.8%	36.8%	13.5%	13.2%	20.9%	19.6%

Table 6

\*DATA USA Health Risks, 2017-2018

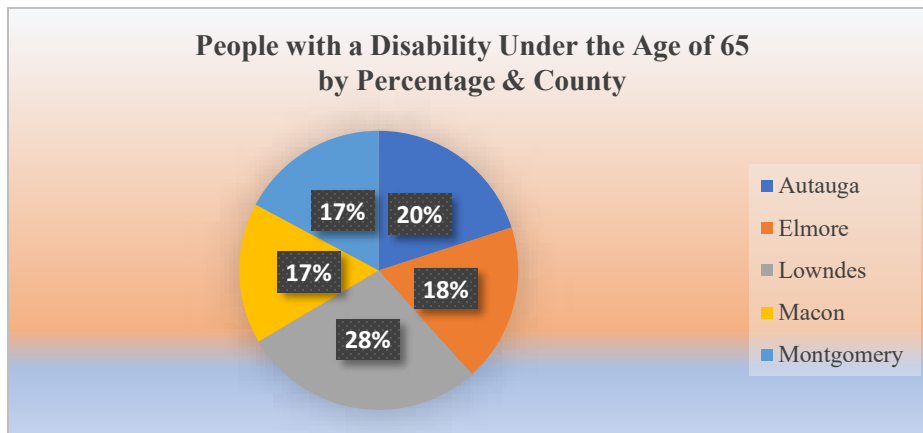
Table 7 represents the number of patients by county to the number of Primary Care Physicians per year on average according to the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau data. Access to Healthcare was consistently identified as both an area of concern and a service that was not adequately done.

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS TO PATIENT RATIO BY COUNTY	PATIENTS BY PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS
Autauga	2,214:1
Elmore	3,394:1
Lowndes	10,458:1
Macon	2,729:1
Montgomery	1,171:1

Table 7

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

There is concern for those with disabilities and the associated belief that support for those persons with severe mental and physical disabilities, and those with autism and learning disabilities is inadequate. There seems to be an underlying belief that more programs and services could be provided to deal with mental and physical health concerns, but more specifically in the area of mental health.



*Figure 10*

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

## MENTAL HEALTH

Continued gaps in mental health services are caused by the lack of available funds and capacity to address the overwhelming demand. The increased need is driven by increased stress, anxiety, substance abuse, trauma from abuse or violence, economic hardship, bullying, family distress and inadequate coping skills. Basic health services that are accessible seven days a week are crucial for long-term wellness.

Mental Health was identified by respondents as being a major concern that is not adequately addressed. Table 8 represents the ratio of patients to a mental health provider by county.

MENTAL HEALTH PATIENT TO PROVIDER RATIO BY COUNTY	PATIENTS TO PROVIDERS
Autauga	7,917:1
Elmore	9,089:1
Lowndes	10,458:1
Macon	271:1
Montgomery	884:1

Table 8

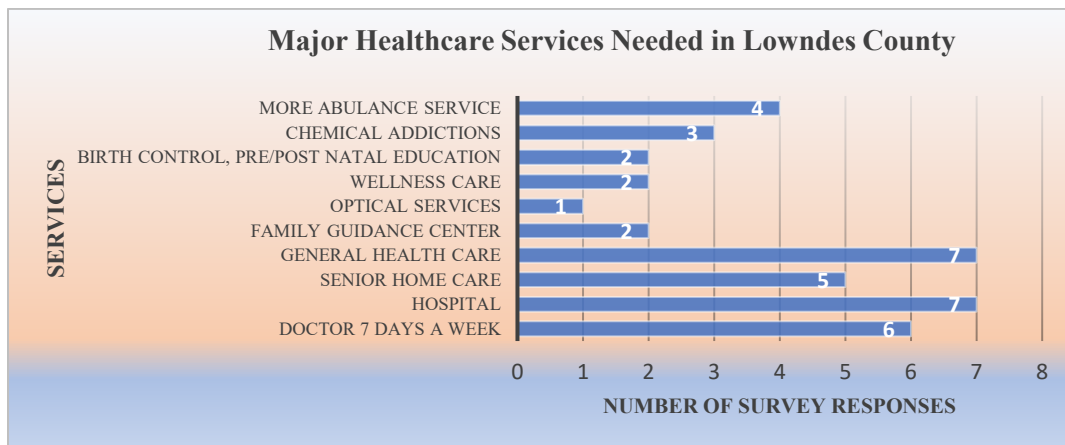
*\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019*

The respondents in this study were asked specifically which RRUW community partners or services currently were doing the best job of service provision, and which community partners or services should be added in the River Region. Two counties emerged that shared a strong interest in services that they would be interested in seeing in their communities. Both Lowndes and Macon counties identified Healthcare services as an added benefit to their respective communities. More specifically, Lowndes County indicated general healthcare services, hospital services, doctor available seven days a week, senior services, the need for a family guidance center, ambulatory services, chemical addition services, pre/post-natal services, wellness care and optical services.

## GREATEST HEALTHCARE DISPARITIES

### Lowndes County

In the area of Healthcare Services, the majority of the 89 survey respondents cited both General Healthcare and Hospital Services as the most needed services for Lowndes County. See *Figure 11* below.



*Figure 11*

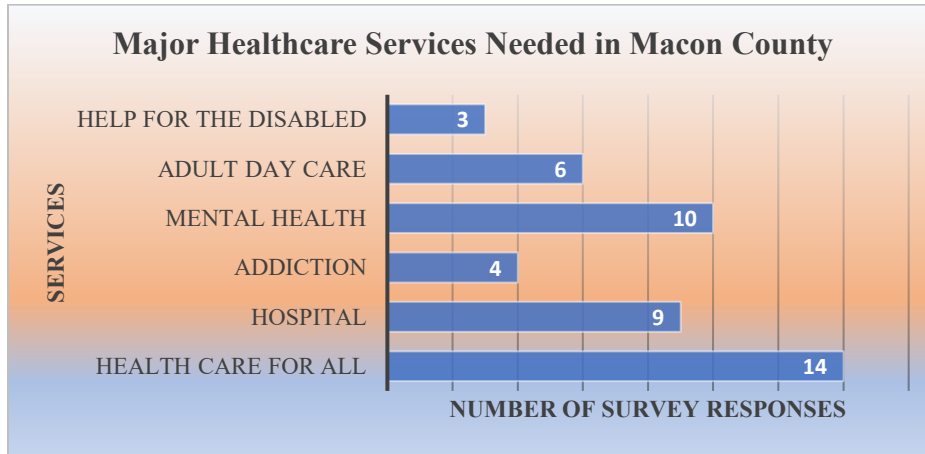
*\*2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment Respondent Data*



## Greatest Healthcare Disparities (cont.)

### Macon County

Macon County respondents identified both Healthcare for all and Mental Health as the top two healthcare services to be added. *Figure 12* represents a detailed list of Healthcare Services 75 survey respondents would like to see added for Macon County.



*Figure 12*  
\*2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment Respondent Data

# EDUCATION

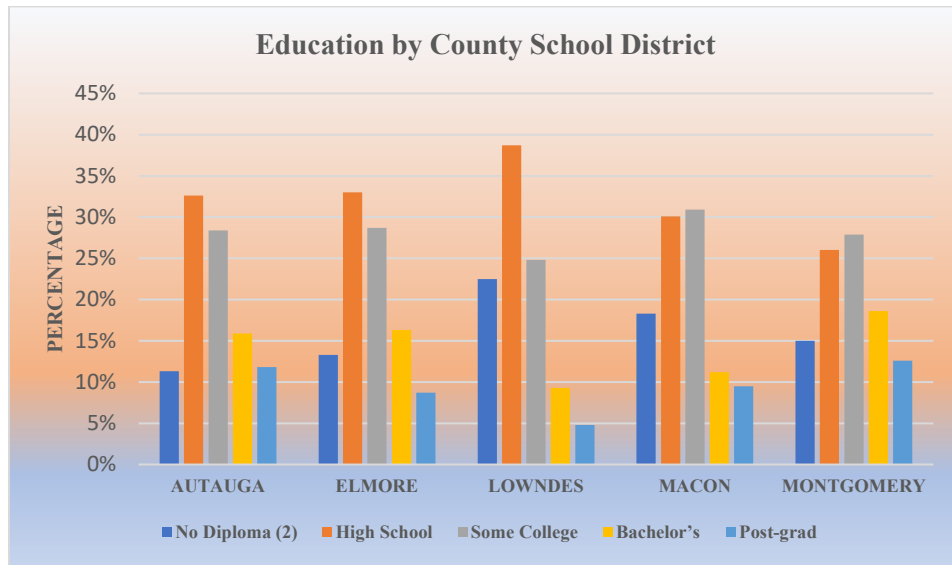
Education is a cornerstone for success in both work and life. Education also benefits the whole community. High school graduates have higher earning potential, contribute more to their local economies, more engaged in their communities, and more likely to raise children who also graduate on time. An educated workforce establishes economic stability as it draws employers.

RRUW adopts a comprehensive approach to education that spans all the way from cradle to career. [Table 9](#) and [Figure 13](#) provide education data by county for K-12 School Districts, High School Education and Higher Education. Specific concerns include the percentage of students not completing high school. See [Figure 13](#).

K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT BY COUNTY	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	STUDENT POPULATION	STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO
Autauga	15	9,247	18:1
Elmore	18	13,151	20:1
Lowndes	8	1,436	15:1
Macon	7	1,872	16:1
Montgomery	55	29,433	17:1

**Table 9**  
\* 2021 K-12 Enrollment Primary Teacher Count

According to the *Public School Review* (2020-21 data), there are a total of 103 public schools in the River Region, serving a total of 55,139 students. The Alabama public school student to teacher ratio is 18:1.



**Figure 13**  
\* U.S. Census Bureau (2018). American Community Survey 5-year estimates.<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>No high school diploma or equivalency

## PRE-K IMPACT IN ALABAMA

According to the Alabama School Readiness Alliance, “The early years of school through the 3rd grade are a critical time in a child’s brain development. These early years provide a window for developing a foundation for sustained success. Problems that emerge during the early years are more difficult to address later on. High-quality pre-k programs provide opportunities to address gaps in early child development and to improve school readiness.”

“Students who attended the First Class Pre-K program in Alabama are more likely to be proficient in reading and math compared to other students – and this academic advantage persists over time.” This is the key finding of an ongoing study of Alabama First Class Pre-K conducted by researchers from the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, the UAB School of Public Health, and the UAB School of Education. This research was funded by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education.

Key findings included:

- students who received First Class Pre-K were more likely to be proficient in reading and math compared to students who did not receive First Class Pre-K
- the academic benefit of First Class Pre-K persisted through the middle school years and did not fade out, or decrease, over time

These findings add to previous findings that showed students receiving Alabama First Class Pre-K:

- demonstrate higher readiness for kindergarten
- are less likely to be chronically absent
- are less likely to be held back a grade
- are less likely to need special education services in K – 12

All of these measures produce savings to the education system that recur year after year as students progress through school.

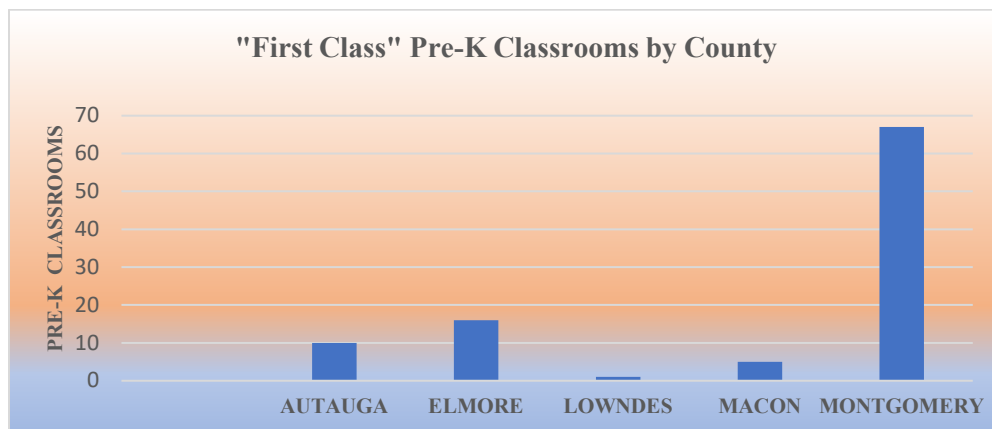


Figure 14

\* Alabama’s Pre-K Results, Alabama Alliance on Preschool Readiness 2020  
Autauga – 12, Elmore – 16, Lowndes – 2, Macon – 5, Montgomery - 67

## HIGHER EDUCATION

Figure 15 represents the percentage of the five-county population with a high school diploma or higher, households with a computer, and households with a broadband internet subscription. These factors have had a significant impact on learning options during COVID-19.

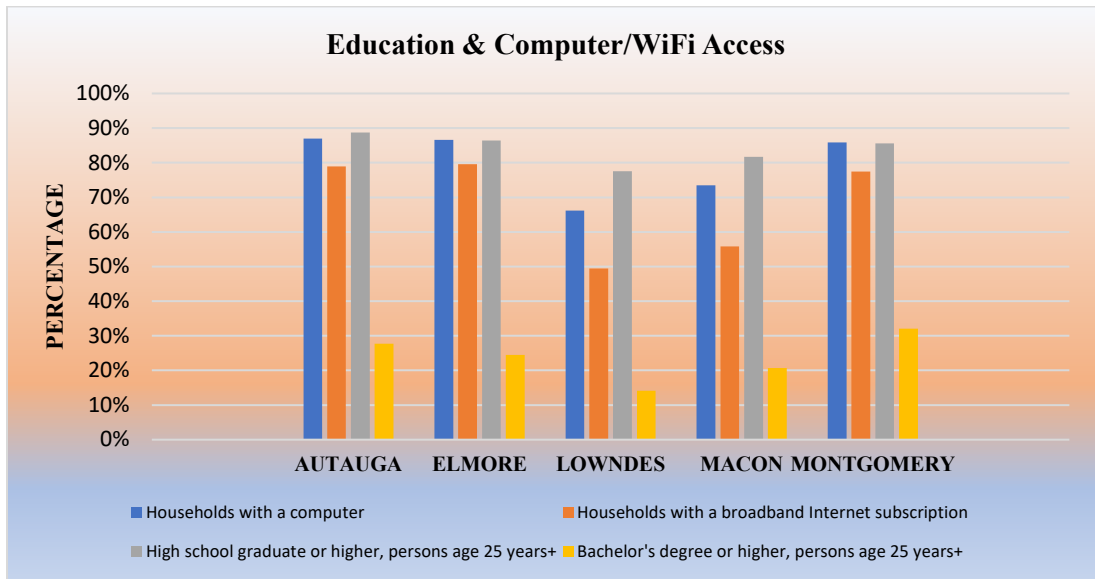


Figure 15

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019

# FINANCIAL STABILITY

Data based on United States Census Bureau data for period 2017-2018:

## Autauga County

- Population grew 0.298%
- Median household income grew 6.27%
- Median property value is \$147,900
- Homeownership rate is 74.9%.

## Elmore County

- Population grew a 0.275%
- Median household income grew 7.94%
- Median property value is \$161,100
- Homeownership rate is 73.7%.

## Lowndes County

- Population declined -1.22%
- Median household income grew 3.52%
- Median property value is \$66,300
- Homeownership rate is 73.7%.

## Macon County

- Population declined -1.57%.
- Median household income declined -0.724%
- Median property value is \$79,500
- Homeownership rate is 65.7%.

## Montgomery County

- Population declined -0.08%.
- Median household income grew 3.1%
- Median property value is \$127,500
- Homeownership rate is 58.6%.

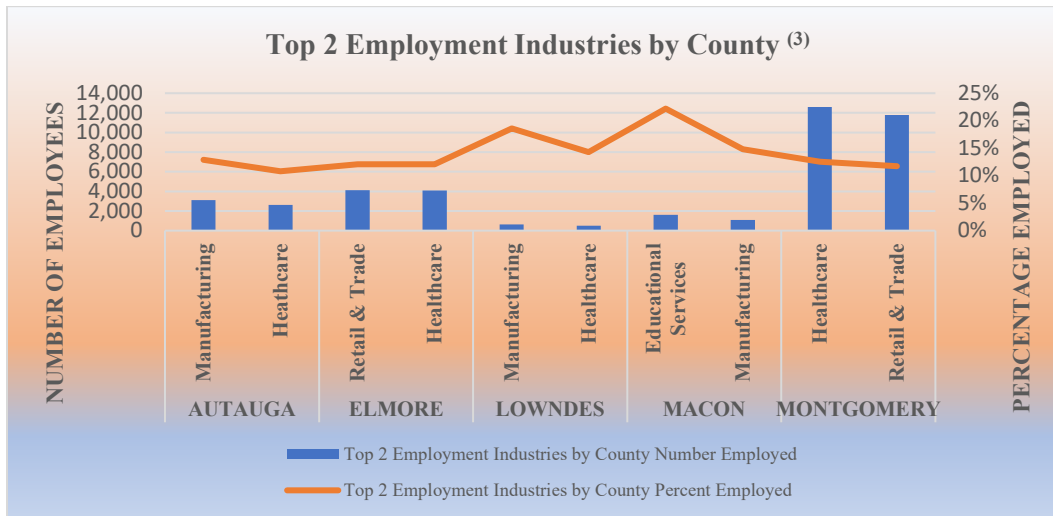
HOUSEHOLDS BY COUNTY	HOUSEHOLDS	PERSONS PER HOUSEHOLD	LIVING IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD
Autauga	21,115	2.59	86.0%
Elmore	29,143	2.63	85.7%
Lowndes	4,180	2.43	89.4%
Macon	7,637	2.19	90.5%
Montgomery	89,835	2.45	79.5%

Table 10

*\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019*

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY BY COUNTY

The economy of the five county RRUW service area employs a total of 169,650 people. The top two leading employment industries by county are represented in *Figure 16*.



*Figure 16*

\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pre COVID-19 Data

### Autauga County

- Economy employs 11,397 people
- Largest industries – Manufacturing (3,123), Health Care & Social Assistance (2,605) and Public Administration (2,473)

### Elmore County

- Economy employs 14,980 people
- Largest industries – Manufacturing (3,123), Health Care & Social Assistance (2,605) and Public Administration (2,473)

### Lowndes County

- Economy employs 1,883 people
- Largest industries – Manufacturing (642), Health Care & Social Assistance (494) and Retail Trade (417)

### Macon County

- Economy employs 4,877 people
- Largest industries – Education Services (1,617), Manufacturing (1,078) and Health Care & Social Assistance (904)

## **Employment By Industry By County (cont.)**

### **Montgomery County**

- Economy employs 104,325 people
- Largest industries – Health Care & Social Assistance (12,589), Retail Trade (11,786) and Manufacturing (11,600)

Males in Alabama have an average income that is 1.44 times higher than the average income of females, which is \$40,615.

# BASIC NEEDS

Statistically, Alabama is the fifth poorest state in the United States, according to a new report by an Alabama nonprofit, *Alabama Possible, Barriers to Prosperity: Data Sheet 2020*. Statewide, about 18.5 percent of Alabamians live below the federal poverty line, but the percentage varies widely by county. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Black Belt counties, which includes Lowndes and Macon, have the highest rates of poverty while metro areas have the lowest. At 26.6% and 29.3%, Lowndes and Macon counties, respectively, are two of the poorest counties in the state of Alabama (U.S. Census Bureau Data for 2019). Both Lowndes and Macon counties while somewhat different in their population characteristics, are really quite similar. Both counties: a) have relatively lower family and per capita income and b) have a high percentage of persons in poverty.

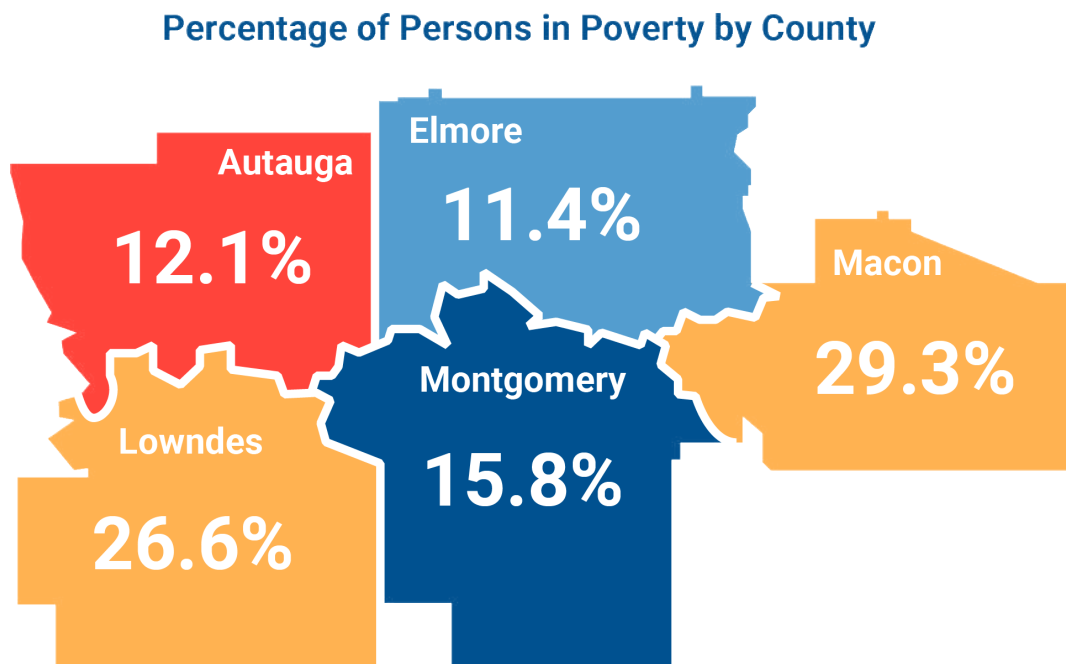


Figure 17  
\*United States Census Bureau data for 2019

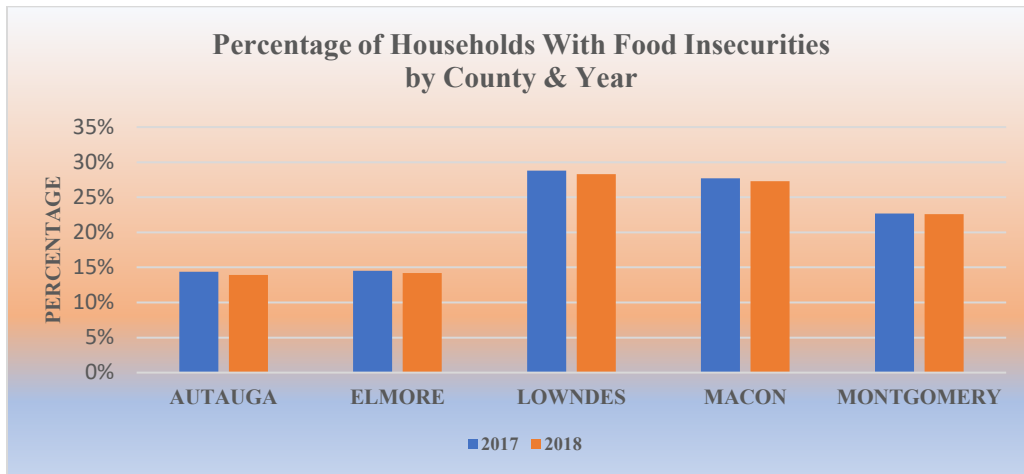
## PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITIES

Food insecurity and hunger are closely related but distinct concepts. Food insecurity refers to a lack of available financial resources for food at the level of the household, while hunger refers to a personal, physical sensation of discomfort. A food desert is an area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food, in contrast with an area with higher access to supermarkets or vegetable shops with fresh foods, which is called a food oasis. The designation considers the type and quality of food available to the population, in addition to the accessibility of the food through the size and proximity of the food stores.



### Prevalence of Food Insecurities (cont.)

As noted in *Figure 18*, Lowndes and Macon counties were found to be areas of the River Region where food insecurity was the greatest due to food deserts and lack of resources to make nutritious food choices.



*Figure 18*

*\*United States Census Bureau estimates the following county populations as of July 1, 2019*

### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is also listed as a basic need that remains unmet. In *Figure 19*, the commute time is graphed by County compared to the national average.

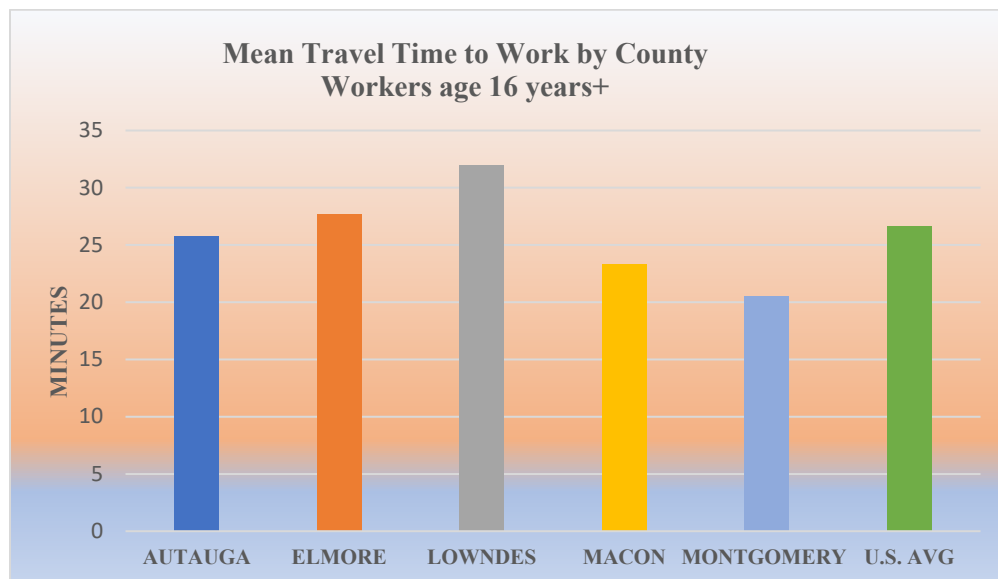


Figure 19

\*Data from the Census Bureau [ACS 5-year Estimate](#).

## Transportation (cont.)

Commute and automobile ownership data by county:

### **Autauga County**

- Most people commute by car alone
- Average commute time is 25.1 minutes
- Average car ownership is 2 cars per household

### **Elmore County**

- Most people commute by car alone
- Average commute time is 27 minutes
- Average car ownership is 2 cars per household

### **Lowndes County**

- Most people commute by car alone
- Average commute time is 31.7 minutes
- Average car ownership is 2 cars per household

### **Macon County**

- Most people commute by car alone
- Average commute time is 23 minutes
- Average car ownership is 2 cars per household

### **Montgomery County**

- Most people commute by car alone
- Average commute time is 19.8 minutes.
- Average car ownership is 2 cars per household
- 1.5% of the workforce has “super commutes” in excess of 90 minutes

# CONCLUSION

The River Region United Way (RRUW) acknowledges that many chronic community needs never rise to the level of public awareness where they would be found on a formal needs assessment. Understanding this, the RRUW and volunteers who serve on our committees are aware that the entire spectrum of needs are to be considered when addressing community problems.

Many needs are common across the River Region. This assessment confirms many of the previously identified issues facing River Region residents across our entire five county footprint. For that reason, we will also be seeking program applications from our network of community partners who provide services and solutions that address the needs of every person in every community. In some situations we will open grants to any qualified, nonprofit organization which meets an identified need as determined by the Community Impact Council.

Finally, every relationship requires collaboration to be successful and to achieve common goals. Creating positive community change is exactly what has been happening in the River Region for years, as all our human service agencies work in partnership to assist the most vulnerable in our communities. As evidenced by this RRUW county-level data, collaboration among community partners has never been more important than it is today as we seek to address the inequities of the River Region in Health, Education, Financial Stability and Basic Needs.

**For more information, contact:**

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## APPENDIX

1. 2017 RRUW Community Needs Assessment Results: Autauga and Elmore Counties
2. 2018 RRUW Community Needs Assessment Results: Lowndes and Macon Counties
3. 2019 RRUW Community Needs Assessment Results: Montgomery County

## REFERENCE LIST

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