

HEALTH IN OUR PARISH

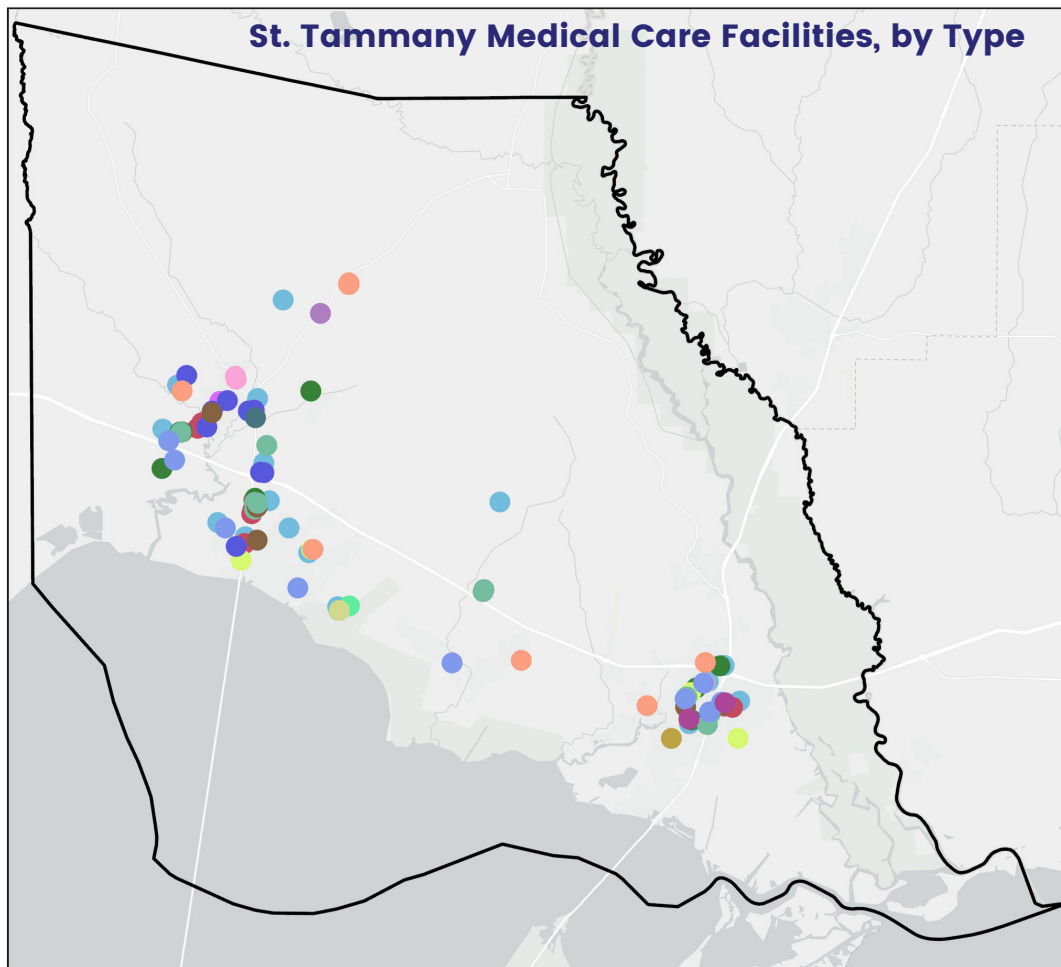
Community Healthcare Sites

St. Tammany Parish is home to many excellent health care resources and services; yet residents in some parts of the Parish continue to experience barriers to accessing healthcare.

Geographically, the majority of community healthcare sites are located in the southern portion of the parish, which may create transportation challenges for those residing in the northern portions of the Parish.

The 2018 Community Needs Assessment noted a need for more Federally Qualified Health Clinics (FQHCs), and since its publication the Parish has been successful in increasing the number of FQHCs from one to three. This improves health care access for socially vulnerable residents and residents with low- to moderate-incomes.

Map 9.



St. Tammany Care Facilities

By Type

- Adult Brain Injury
- Adult Day Health Care
- Adult Residential Care
- Ambulatory Surgical Centers
- Behavioral Health with Beds

- Community Mental Health Center
- End Stage Renal Disease
- Federally Qualified Health Center
- Home and Community Based Service Provider (with Capacity on Site)
- Hospice
- Hospital1
- Hospital2

- Intermediate Care Facility/Developmentally Delayed
- Nursing Home
- Pain Management Clinics
- Parish Health Unit
- Pediatric Day Health Care
- Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities

- Rural Health
- School Based Health Center
- Therapeutic Group Home
- <all other values>
- ▭ St. Tammany Parish

Source: Louisiana Department of Health. (2022). ArcGIS Online.



Barriers to Access

A 2021 joint Community Health Needs Assessment by the Northshore, Ochsner, Slidell Memorial, and St. Tammany Health Systems facilities indicated that, from a geographical perspective, “Barriers to care in the community include insurance issues (limited options based on payor, uninsured rates), lack of reliable transportation, lack of access to pediatric specialists and providers in more rural areas, and operational issues such as location and hours” [32].

More generally, this study “revealed six key concerns in the Northshore community:

- Access to and continuity of care,
- Mental and behavioral health,
- Health equity and discrimination in healthcare,
- Education and health literacy,
- Infrastructure, and
- Poverty” [33]

More acutely, this study also noted a high prevalence of “mental health conditions, substance abuse, addiction, excessive alcohol use, and trauma” with limited mental and behavioral health resources. Although the Parish has made substantial investments to improve residents’ access to mental and behavioral health services, these needs persist and are further compounding hardships when present within socially vulnerable and low- to moderate-income communities.

Most Substantial Barrier to Access: Health Insurance Disparities

The Northshore Community Needs Assessment cites access to affordable health care as a major issue for the Parish and the Northshore more generally. This can be attributed to rising health insurance costs leading to underinsured or uninsured residents. Although St. Tammany has a higher overall rate of insured people as compared with other parishes in the area, some residents are unable to access doctors or clinics who accept their insurance and there remains a disparity between white and black residents who are uninsured [34].

When disparity in health insurance coverage is coupled with other layers of discrimination (such as age, race, sexual orientation, or income), discrimination in health care can significantly alter the ability of some residents to receive quality health care services [35].



Source:iStock
Image Description: Doctor and patient

[32] Louisiana Public Health Institute. (2021). Northshore Area 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment.

https://www.slidellmemorial.org/assets/CHNA_Northshore_12-23-2021.pdf

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.



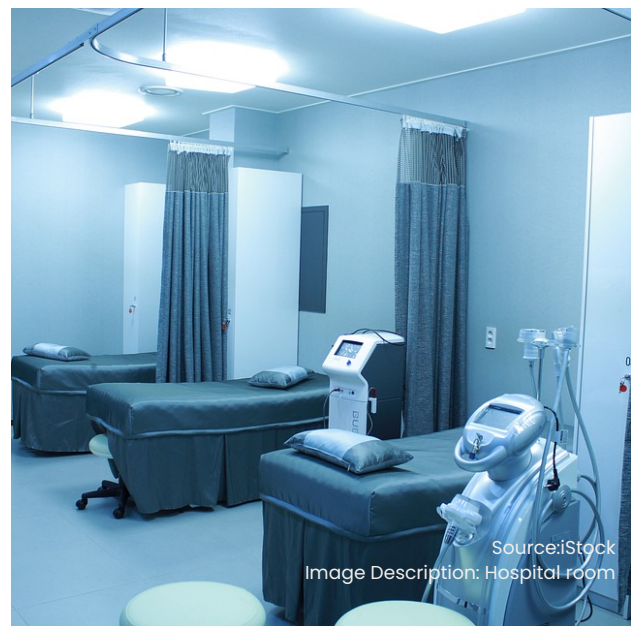
Urgent Need: Mental and Behavioral Health Care Services

In recent years, St. Tammany Parish has made great strides in the provision of improved mental and behavioral health services, specifically through the addition of the Safe Haven facility, which provides a behavioral health network of care for individuals in need.

In light of this achievement, there remains significant, urgent, mental and behavioral health needs requiring attention. Specifically, the suicide rate in St. Tammany continues to climb and exceeds state averages and the rates within neighboring parishes. The suicide death rate cited in the Northshore Community Needs Assessment in St. Tammany was 17 suicide deaths per 100,000 – higher than the state at 15 and exceeding prior years' levels. Qualitative analysis within the Northshore Community Needs Assessment showed that stress, isolation, anxiety, and depression have a pronounced impact on children and the aging population and that these conditions are tied to a widespread pattern of substance abuse across the Parish.

Further emphasizing the urgency of this matter, St. Tammany has one of the highest drug overdose death rates among parishes in the area, at 35 deaths per 100,000 residents, far exceeding the state average. These trends indicate an acute need for additional mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services in the Parish beyond what is currently offered, as well as services in schools and community service venues that can identify potential patients struggling with mental health challenges or addiction.

Finally, qualitative studies in the Parish underscore the need for different pathways to addiction services or mental health care, as many patients struggling with these issues can feel a stigma associated with seeking this type of supportive health care service and may need at-home care or other healthcare venues that “meet them where they are” in a way that maintains individual dignity and privacy.



Source:iStock
Image Description: Hospital room

Urgent Need: Federally Qualified Health Clinics and Free or Low-Cost Community Clinics

The three existing federally qualified health clinics (FQHCs) are concentrated in the southern portion of the parish and located in the densely populated areas. Because the Parish recognizes three FQHCs are not sufficient to meet growing healthcare needs, a major focus of St. Tammany's approach to the administration of the Action Plan will be to **attract additional FQHCs and to target specific populated areas with a significant proportion of socially vulnerable or low- to moderate- income households to spread awareness of the FQHC services and the benefits of regular, preventative health care services.**

Free or low-cost community clinics serve a critical demand within the health care system as some residents may have insufficient health coverage (catastrophic plans with high deductibles) or may not be enrolled in publicly subsidized health insurance coverage. These residents, as well as those residents experiencing transient tenancy or homelessness have a high demand for health care services with a low barrier to entry. There are only two sliding-scale based clinics currently in St. Tammany Parish, which are both located in Slidell (e.g., St. Tammany Community Health Center and The Good Samaritan Ministry) [36].



Health Care + Wellness Strategies

The National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics notes that free or charitable clinics serve a critical role in the community and have seen increased demand since 2020 [37]. These facilities are specifically equipped to support screening, referral, and follow-up with clients to link residents with non-medical social need assistance, which can help address social determinants of health other than immediate medical needs [38].

According to a search of their directory, there are 0 free or charitable clinics within 10 miles of Mandeville or Bush, LA, however Mississippi and New Orleans are served by numerous free or charitable clinics [39].

- Funding for Safe Haven campus improvements and expansion to capacity
- Increased training and provision of services for overdose treatment by first responders and within Parish facilities
- Education programs to combat suicide rates



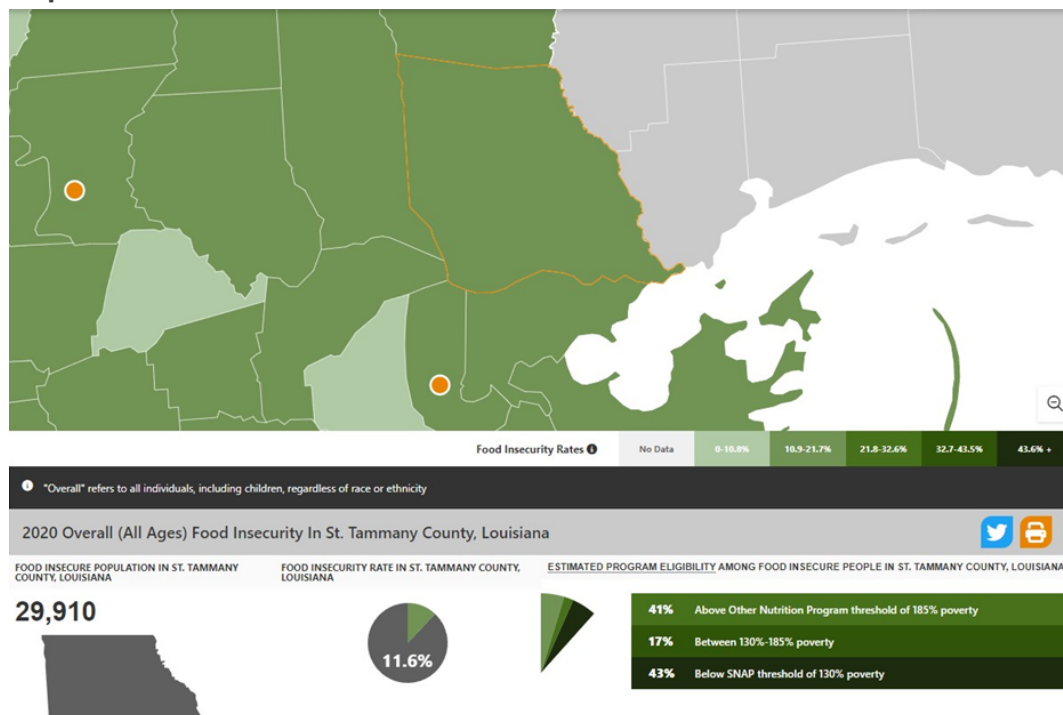
Food Insecurity and Hunger

Although the average household income in St. Tammany may be relatively high compared to area averages, many households and neighborhoods in the Parish experience intense or concentrated poverty and the related issue of food insecurity. Food insecurity is “a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life” [40]. If a household or individual is experiencing food insecurity they may not be able to afford food due to long-term or short-term issues. They may be in an area where healthy food is prohibitively expensive or far away and they may lack transportation or mobility to buy groceries. Some families may also experience acute financial crises that can impact their ability to

buy food such as a lay-off, a major health expense, or eviction from their home. All of these dynamics can lead to adults and children who don’t have access to their next meal [41].

The Northshore Food Bank serves approximately 8,000 people per year between St. Tammany and Washington Parishes [42]. Feeding America, a national nonprofit focused on hunger relief in the U.S. estimates that approximately 11-12% of St. Tammany Parish residents experience food insecurity with an annual food budget shortfall of approximately \$16.5 million [43].

Map 13. Overall Food Insecurity in St. Tammany, 2020



Source: Feeding America. (2023). <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/louisiana/county/st-tammany>

[40] Feeding America. (2023). Food Insecurity. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>
 [41] Ibid.
 [41] Louisiana Healthcare Connections. (2019, June 6). Northshore Food Bank feeds 8,000 per year with local support. <https://www.louisianahealthconnect.com/newsroom/northshore-food-bank-feeds-8-000-with-local-support.html>
 [42] Feeding America. (2023). 2020 Overall Food Insecurity in St. Tammany. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/louisiana/county/st-tammany>



Louisiana has the highest rate of food insecure children in the nation, which is an alarming statistic, and neighboring Washington Parish ranks 16th in the state for highest rate of food insecurity among children [43]. Programs like the Northshore Food Bank’s “Feed the Gap [44]” program and the “Summer Stock” program can make significant progress against food insecurity by aligning families with children on free/reduced meal programs and food bank resources and can help families with sudden financial upset or families struggling with underemployment and cost of living. Approximately 44% of St. Tammany Parish public school enrollees are on free/reduced meal programs, indicating an intense need for food aid specifically targeted toward families with young children [45].

According to the Northshore food bank, residents in the Parish have struggled with the high cost of living and the food banks can see supplies dwindle during the summer when schools are not in session or when fewer churches and community groups hold food drives [46]. Leadership at Northshore food bank has also stressed the fact that residents may feel a stigma associated with seeking food aid or may not be aware of resources available, which indicates that the investment of CDBG funds or community resources could further connect residents in need of food aid to these resources via social media, community engagement, or door-to-door interactions.



Image Credit: Grant Therkildsen
Image Description: North Shore Food Bank

[43] Stacker. (2022, September 13). Parishes with the highest rate of food insecurity in Louisiana. <https://stacker.com/louisiana/parishes-highest-rate-food-insecure-children-louisiana>

[44] Feeding America. (2018). Map the Food Gap 2018. www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/map-the-meal-gap/2016/overall/LA_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2016.pdf

[45] Louisiana Healthcare Connections. (2019, June 6). Northshore Food Bank feeds 8,000 per year with local support. <https://www.louisianhealthconnect.com/newsroom/northshore-food-bank-feeds-8-000-with-local-support.html>

[46] Krieger, K. (2022, July 15). Paint St. Tammany orange by putting more food on more tables. Times-Picayune. https://www.nola.com/news/communities/st_tammany/paint-st-tammany-orange-by-putting-more-food-on-more-tables/article_a0cd0b3c-036c-11ed-b7bd-db8a347e6029.html

