

Rural Case Study

Okchamali is a fictional rural county located in one of the Central Great Plains states in the United States. The county has a population of 14,000 residents living within its 770 square mile radius. Over 99% of the population in Okchamali are U.S. citizens and the 5 largest racial/ethnic groups are White (Non-Hispanic/Latino) (60%), American Indian & Alaska Native (Non-Hispanic) (19%), Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) (11%), two or more races (8%) and Hispanic or Latino (5%).

Most of the adult population (83%) in Okchamali County has at least a high school diploma or higher and 18% of adults under the age of 65 have a disability. While 22% of the population is over the age of 65, 25% of the population is under the age of 18, and about 30% of those are under 5 years of age. Nearly 40% of children live in single-parent households, and 84% of households with children report experiencing poverty.

The overall poverty rate is 19.5% and the unemployment rate is over the national average at 4.8%. The majority of those living in Okchamali County work in the following sectors: 1) Health care & social assistance 2) Retail & food service 3) Manufacturing 4) Construction and 5) Farming fishing and forestry. Because of the rural setting, 8.1% of workers commute over 60 minutes, more than the state average of 4.7%. Most households report having a vehicle, but 7.8% of residents do not. While over 80% of households report that they have a computer in the home, 34% report not having a stable broadband internet connection.

Hunger & Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is reported by 21% of the population (about 3,050 residents). While 65% of the county is below the threshold to be eligible for SNAP benefits and 76% of children in Okchamali are eligible for free and reduced-price meals at their schools, 28% of households report that their income is above the % poverty threshold to be eligible for federal nutrition benefits. According to various reports by several nonprofit think tanks, Okchamali county has a Food Environment Index Score of 3.77 (out of 10). This lower score indicates that the availability of unhealthy food is higher than the availability of healthy food in a community.

There might be several reasons for this. Despite spending less on food every week compared to the state average, 54% of residents have no access to large-scale grocery store chains and 48% of the population have low access to small or medium grocery stores, meaning they live more than 10 miles away from their nearest grocery store. While 27% of county residents report having limited access to healthy foods, many Okchamali residents have more access to LOCAL food outlets (like country food markets and farmer's stand); about 3 times more than the rest of the state and about 1.5x more than the national average.

Health

According to County Health Rankings, Okchamali County ranks among the lowest (0-25%) both in their state and in the US when it comes to health factors and health outcomes. Nearly 30% of adults report being in poor or fair health and the same percentage also report smoking. Nearly 43% of residents report not getting sufficient sleep and 14% report engaging in excessive drinking regularly. As far other health behaviors, 35% of adults don't have consistent access or opportunities to engage in regular physical activity, and 42% percent report not exercising altogether. Heart disease affects 9.3% of the population and 10.5% of county residents report having diabetes.

When it comes to health insurance coverage, 23% of the population does not have health coverage, and 39% of those with coverage are on either Medicaid or Medicare. In the last few years, preventable hospital

admissions among Medicare beneficiaries were at twice the rate of the national average. While it is good news is that 75% of the county reported having a recent preventative care visit with a medical provider, the average primary care physician sees about 2,400 individual patients per year and dentists see about 2,900 individual patients per year. Mental health providers in the area have a caseload of about 120 clients.

Local Health Initiatives

The Okchamali County Health Department has several initiatives that engage families in addressing infant, child, and maternal health. Some examples include:

- A family support program offering home-based services by public health nurses to mothers expecting their first child
- An early intervention program designed to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays
- WIC is a federally funded program that provides nutrition education and supplemental food
- Setting up families with counselors to provide educational and counseling services
- Partnering with the Boys and Girls Club After School Program in implementing a national evidence-based public education outreach program designed to help children 8–13 years old stay at a healthy weight through improving food choices, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time.

The Health Department also partners with the State Department of Education to provide technical assistance to public schools so they can establish a Healthy & Fit School Advisory Committee, an advisory group of at least six individuals who represent segments of the community (teacher, coach, student, administrator, parent, school nurse, health care professional, community member, food service personnel, custodian, school bus driver, school secretary, school counselor). The group acts collectively to provide advice to the school regarding school health issues. A Senate Bill passed in 2004 requires each public school in Oklahoma to establish one of these committees.

Okchamali Nation

Okchamali County is also part of the Okchamali Tribal Nation, and tribal members account for 19% of the county's population. The largest single business operation in the Okchamali Nation is the Resort and Entertainment Center of the same name in an adjacent county. Other businesses in the Okchamali Nation's portfolio include several travel plazas, a printing company, a food distribution market, a transportation company, a daycare with a Headstart Center, and several senior living developments.

There are three tribal-run wellness centers located in Okchamali County located about 30 miles apart from each other, which include a state-of-the-art Diabetes Wellness Center (DWC) where they have an Endocrinologist and four Mid-level Providers to provide care in the treatment of diabetes and related illnesses. The DWC also hosts an accredited education program through the American Association of Diabetes Educators with seven Certified Diabetes Educators and two Registered Dietitians. Other services provided by these wellness centers include on-site pharmacy education, fitness coaches, dental services, and Diabetic Retinal screenings.