

# Cowlitz County Community Report Card

# 2017

## Dear Community Members,

The 2017 biennial Cowlitz County Community Report Card continues our work looking at the community through the lens of social determinants of health. This year, the Board has determined we will focus our primary work on two of the determinants: Education and Economy. For the purpose of the report card, we are continuing to report on additional determinants such as Social Cohesion, Health, Housing and Access to Healthy Foods.



Our report card is meant to inspire our residents, communities, and policy makers to take action. As you read the report card, review the data and consider the challenges facing us. Take a moment and ask yourself, "What can I do?" I encourage you to get involved, join a community effort to address an issue that is important to you, engage with your elected officials to share your concerns and ideas, or run for elected office and work to create a better and healthier community.

**Our community is improved when we all step up to do our part; please join us in making Cowlitz County a healthier community.**

*Ilona A. Kerby*  
Executive Director, Pathways 2020 Board Chair,  
Lower Columbia CAP Executive Director

## Economy

The backbone of the economy for many years has been manufacturing, timber and construction. With the last recession, manufacturing took a hit and has slowly rebounded, but automation, increased production and other economic factors mean there are still more than a thousand fewer jobs than previously existed. However, this economic recovery is starting to give way to a hope of economic vitality. Projects proposed for the Ports of Longview, Kalama and Woodland can bring more than \$4 billion in new construction, 3000 construction jobs and 400 family wage jobs once the plants are operational. Permitting these projects is arduous, though, as our environmental and regulatory standards are some of the strictest in the nation. The balance between creating jobs and protecting the environment must be an issue that is addressed and applied fairly.

For many years the unemployment rate locally has been steadily 2% higher than the state average of 5.2%. This trend continues, but doesn't take into account the underemployed or those who work part-time – more than 10% of those with jobs.

Our local citizens have earned fewer four-year college degrees than the state average, but we have more with 2-year degrees and job specific training. Lower Columbia College and local high schools continue to collaborate to provide career training outside of a college degree track. A concern by many local business people is the number of young adults who live in the County. Many leave for college and never return, not seeing future opportunities locally. This means nearly 1/3 of our local workers are over the age of 55. When these workers retire, the question can be raised about whether younger workers will be here to take their place.

Cowlitz County's average hourly wage compares well with the state average, but our median yearly salary is considerably lower. Poverty continues to affect significant numbers of families and individuals locally. Housing, food, health care and transportation all require money. The poor are faced with difficult decisions about how to prioritize their spending. Many go without in certain areas, and this is a contributing factor to adverse childhood experiences leading to possible trauma, trouble at school and mental health needs. This shows how all the areas are intertwined and improvement in one area is felt in all of them.

## How Will We Respond?

Our vision for 2020 is that people living in Cowlitz County see themselves as part of an interlocking fabric of family, neighborhood, work, and community. This fabric fosters community partnerships that provide the support each person needs to be a healthy and contributing member of the community. In return, individuals have the opportunity to give back to the community by aiding others and by acting as responsible citizens.

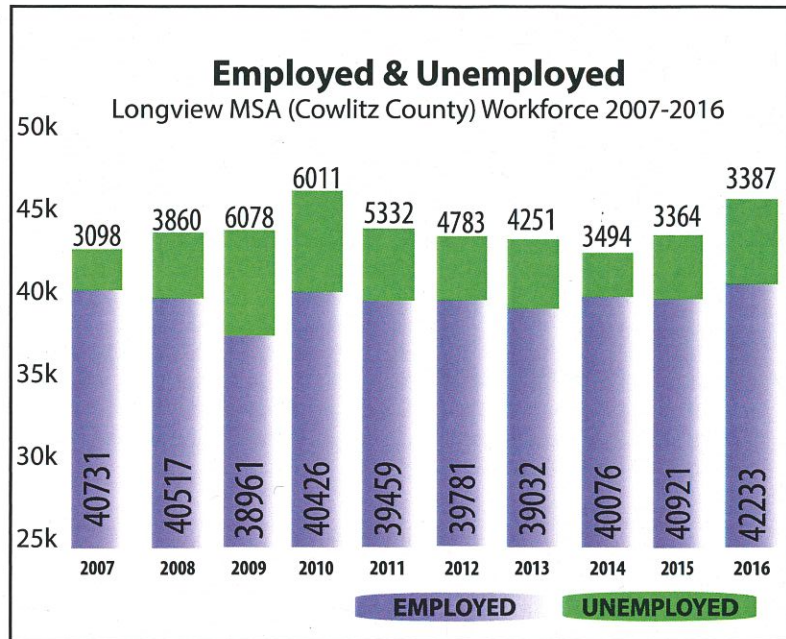
Based on the framework of Social Determinants of Health, the Pathways 2020 Board will focus its work on Education and Economy – Jobs and Wages.

We recognize those local agencies already working diligently to improve economic security and education for all ages. We applaud that work and we will become involved only when asked and if we have the necessary resources. The highlight of our work will be to support collaborative efforts. We will focus on policy, systems, and environmental change in our work to improve the health of our communities.

In this vein we will continue our efforts to support early learning and literacy, as well as job training and development for unemployed and underemployed youth and adults. An engaged citizenry promotes change at the grassroots level and we embrace it as a valuable tool.

Ensuring Cowlitz County is an attractive community for economic development and retention requires quality of place. Along with education and economic development, we need local amenities that support families and a healthy community. Pathways 2020 will continue efforts for active lifestyles, healthy eating, and cessation from tobacco and illegal drugs.

As an active and contributing member of the community, Pathways 2020 will continue to keep an eye on community trends, encourage local solutions, and celebrate our successes.



## Port of Kalama Success

Our three ports are showing signs of economic vitality and growth through large and small projects. One project gathering much local interest is the McMenamins restaurant and hotel being built on the Columbia River at the Port of Kalama. One of the values of this project is that it is highly visible and offers encouragement that we have the growing and rebounding economy. Designed with a Hawaiian theme the restaurant and hotel will reflect the early settlers of Kalama. It provides not only a new venue for local residents but will help attract business and tourists to the community.



# Education

The value of education can be seen in the impact it has on the other social determinants of health. Education can lead to a diverse economy, higher wages and income, access to better housing, improved healthcare and participation in neighborhood and community organizations.

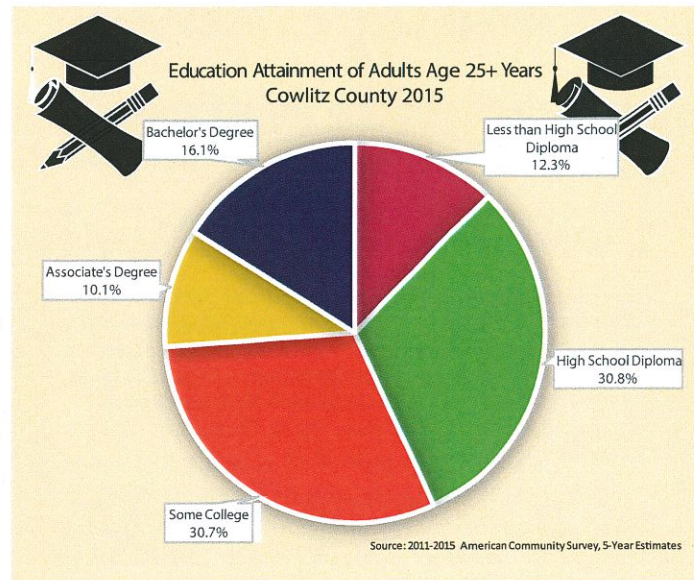
One of the bright spots in education has been the rising graduation rates, with the school districts making significant improvement over the past six years. This is good news because in Cowlitz County, 23% of those without a high school diploma live in poverty and earn nearly \$15,000 or less annually than those who graduated high school and have some college training. Additionally, in Longview, 62% of those graduates went on to post-secondary education, with Toutle and Kelso not that far behind. The remaining schools reported less than 50% of their students moving on to additional school or training.

The 2015-2016 school year saw a reversal in the trend of declining school enrollment, with an increase county-wide. An issue for all school districts is the number and condition of facilities. Smaller class sizes mean a need for additional classrooms. Longview School District is considering a bond in excess of \$100 million to replace two older schools and make repairs and improvements to others. Financing for facilities will be an ongoing issue for all our school districts.

Lower Columbia College is another bright spot in our community. Through their University Center, five universities are represented on campus, and students can earn 13 different Bachelor's Degrees or 3 Master's Degrees. This is a huge benefit to working adults who can now continue their education without the need to relocate or travel to another campus.

Preschool children benefit from Lower Columbia College's Head Start/ECEAP Program, where 47% of eligible three and four year-olds are provided with a quality child development program. As good as that is, it still means more than half of eligible children are not served. Head Start also works with the parents of their students, emphasizing education. This past year 27% of Head Start parents had not completed high school.

Issues of homelessness also affect students in our public schools. Nearly 5% of children locally, most attending school in Longview, are homeless. This is usually a result of job loss, low income, family violence or poor health, but it affects all the social determinants of health. Our school superintendents have noted that when a student's physical and emotional needs are met, their ability to learn and thrive is much higher than those lacking in those areas.



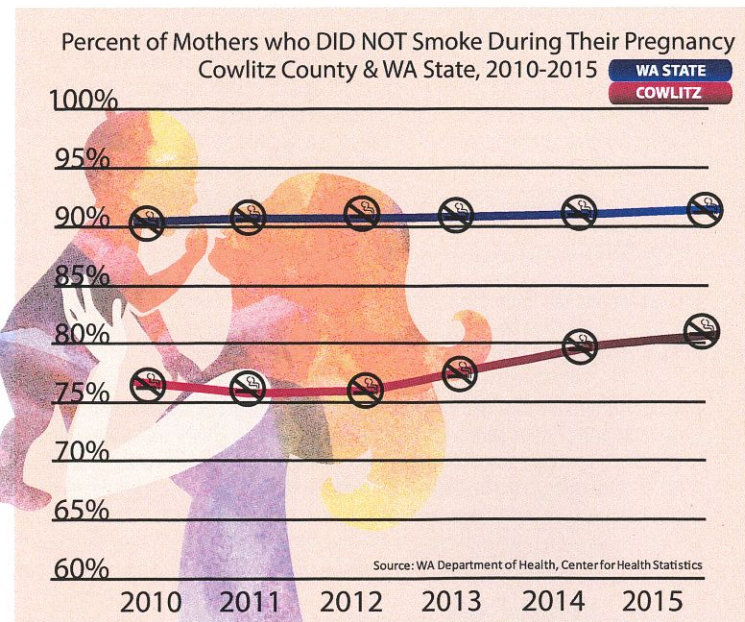
# Health

Individual choices impact the need to use healthcare services. Cowlitz County has made steady progress in improving the rate of adults who do not smoke and pregnant women who quit smoking during pregnancy. 90% of local children are fully immunized when they enter kindergarten.

The Affordable Care Act has made a large impact on the number of individuals who have health insurance and now receive health care. Three years ago 16% of our adults were without health insurance and today, because of the Affordable Care Act, that rate has improved to just 8%.

Children in the community benefit from the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) dental program offered by Lower Columbia College Head Start and the Cowlitz County Health and Human Services Departments. Since its inception in 2007, the program has served more than 10,000 children under the age of six. Since 1999, the University of Washington Dental School has offered quarterly dental clinics for children on Medicaid and their family members who are without dental insurance. With the support of the Community Health Partners, Kaiser Permanente, FISH, and PeaceHealth more than 3,330 patients have received free dental care with 34,440 volunteer hours

But our health is far from perfect. The Affordable Care Act has meant more patients to be seen by the few medical providers in the county, causing delays in getting services for some. Cowlitz County still has higher rates of death from unintended injury, diabetes or COPD than the state. While fewer teenage girls under 18 are becoming pregnant, there's still further work to be done to support this population. The STD rate for adolescents under 20 years is 40% higher than Washington State.



## Castle Rock Blooms



**How do you revitalize a tired timber town?** For the City of Castle Rock, the answer is flowers . . . lots of flowers! For the past five years Castle Rock has stood as an example of social cohesion demonstrated as a number of public-private partnerships brought life back to the community. Volunteers of all ages joined with supportive city officials to make Castle Rock an America in Bloom city, which meant planting hundreds of tulips and other flowers throughout town, working with businesses and local government to maintain them, and creating pride throughout the community. This garnered the Castle Rock Bloom Team national recognition for its containers, hanging baskets and floral displays. City streets and sidewalks were upgraded, including the addition of free Wi-Fi through grant money, and many previously empty store fronts have since been filled. Castle Rock High School students help grow many of the plants in their school and community garden, donating more than 12,000 pounds of food to the senior center last year. The students develop self-esteem and academic success and the extra nutrition gives residents access to healthy foods and reduces the strain on their pocket book. Every year more than 100 volunteers show up for the city's cleanup day, demonstrating how civic pride and a sense of community brings people together in a way that positively impacts several of the social determinants of health.

# Healthy Foods

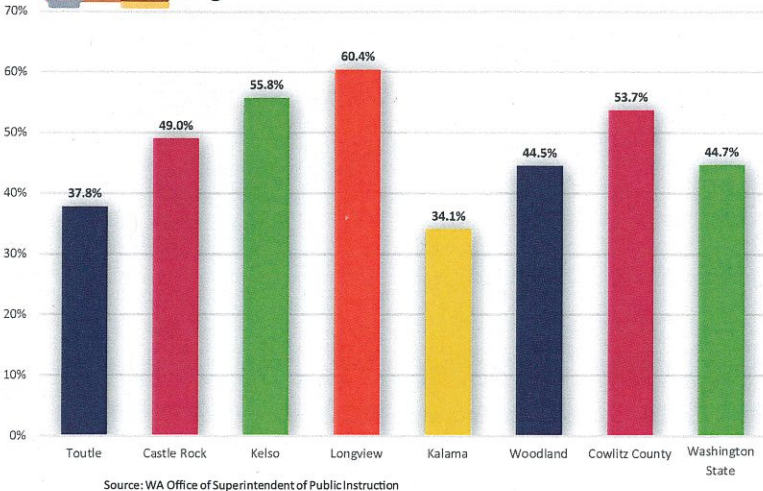
In Cowlitz County, while we have a significant number of people facing food crises, we are also fortunate to have programs like SNAP, FISH, farmer's markets and school lunches. County-wide there is a strong commitment to donating food to a variety of agencies, including CAP's Help Food Warehouse. Lines for the monthly Food Lifeline distribution in the Highlands neighborhood start to form an hour before the truck arrives. Access to food is also provided to low-income and homeless families by a number of faith-based organizations and volunteer groups such as Stone Soup and Belly Brigade.

Locally, our food insecurity ranking is higher than the state average, with nearly 30% of adults receiving SNAP benefits (food stamps). More than half of school-aged children receive free or reduced lunches. In three schools, more than 90% of the children receive free or reduced meals.

Even with the availability of food, good nutrition and education on the subject remains a challenge. The local obesity rate is nearly 40% for adults and 18% in 10th grade students according to the Healthy Youth Survey, which has concluded that overweight and obese children tend to do more poorly in school than those at a healthy weight. This also leads to a higher than average number of deaths due to diabetes in Cowlitz County. As the community seeks answers to preventing hunger, there must also be an effort to improve the quality of food people receive and to promote active lifestyles.



**Percent of Cowlitz County K-12 Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunches 2016**



# Housing

Safe and affordable housing is an integral part of a healthy community. For business executives to families on fixed/low incomes, the quality, availability and choice of housing is severely limited in Cowlitz County. Business people new to the area often end up in Clark County where there is a wider availability of choices. Families, whose economic situation improves, are not able to make an equal improvement in their housing status. This causes a ripple effect, as units are not then freed up for those on the next rung down on the economic ladder.

At the current minimum wage, individuals in our community need to work 52 hours every week to afford a basic two-bedroom unit. Forty-eight percent of local renters pay at least 30% of their gross income to pay for rent. 1200 families pay more than 50%. First time home buyers meet significant challenges both affording and finding appropriate housing.

On the horizon locally, are three significant billion-dollar construction projects. Each could bring in at least one thousand construction workers. The jobs to maintain the plants will grow the workforce, but those workers may end up looking outside the area to meet their housing needs.

Homeless families are appearing at local social service providers in increasing numbers as the continued housing shortage and increased rents make it difficult for lower wage workers to secure and maintain housing. Currently seven agencies in Cowlitz County provide emergency or traditional housing support.

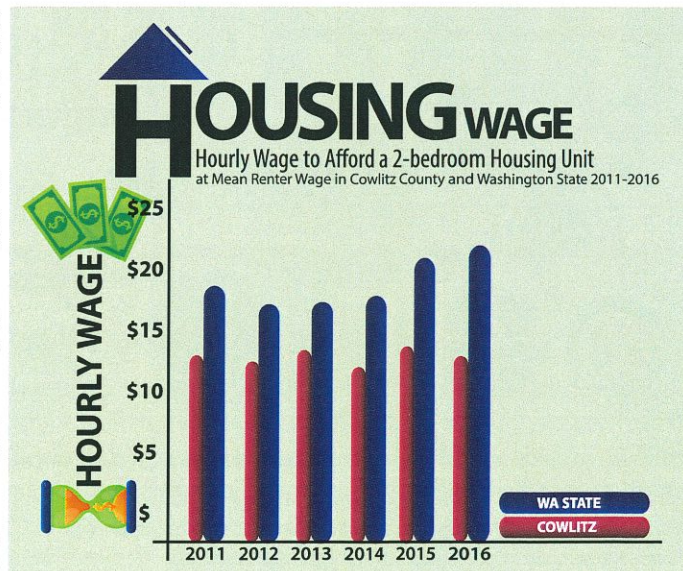
With two new apartment buildings planned for Longview a movement to provide additional housing has slowly begun. A program exists to train youth to repair homes in South Kelso in collaboration with Lower Columbia CAP, Goodwill Industries, and Workforce Southwest Washington. This one project will bring multiple benefits through employment opportunities for youth, safe housing for residents, and stronger neighborhood cohesion.

# School Garden Success



**"I didn't know you could eat plants,"** one boy proclaimed after participating in an activity with Lower Columbia School Gardens, demonstrating how the program successfully teaches students about good nutrition, the science of gardening and the results of hard work. The kids don't realize all they're learning, however. To them it is a fun opportunity to be part of garden clubs, harvest festivals and to eat and prepare the food they have grown. Addressing the challenges of food insecurity and poor student nutrition habits is not easy, but it has found success with Lower Columbia School Gardens.

Expanding from one garden in 2002, to 17 in Longview and Kelso. Plans are in the works for every elementary and middle school to have a garden. The curriculum provided to the schools focuses on gardening, nutrition, and academic success. The program currently benefits 3000 elementary school students and their teachers, with more than 400 volunteers contributing 12,000 hours of service to school gardens in 2016. Additionally, thousands of pounds of harvested crops have been shared with families, FISH, Community House and Emergency Support Shelter. Students can be seen tending the gardens, participating in cooking classes, managing produce sales and preparing artisan pizzas at the Summer Concert at the Lake series. The investment in school gardens is paying off with knowledgeable kids, healthier families, self-reliance and access to good nutrition.



# Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is the bonds that hold society together, usually through common values, beliefs and behaviors. It can be seen through cooperation by different community groups especially when working toward something that benefits the community at large. On the individual level it is expressed in how much an individual feels his behavior/work can influence the neighborhood/community around him as well as being recognized and appreciated for his work.

This sense of cohesion can come from participating in neighborhood groups, churches, running for political office, registering to vote and voting or being a volunteer. It means an individual can take their concerns to a body and know that they'll be listened to and respected. It creates protective factors for children as their families are more connected with public schools.

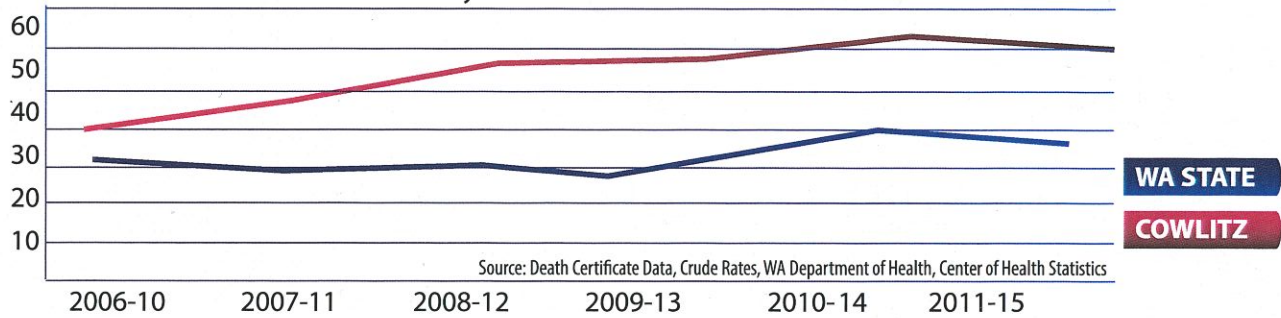
Two groups that are experiencing success organizing their neighborhoods include the Highlands Neighborhood Association and the South Kelso Neighborhood Association. Taking the concerns and needs of their neighbors, they're able to organize activities and projects to meet those needs and support the individual family. In South Kelso the work of the Community Health Advocates is providing a different support for the neighborhood by taking neighborhood concerns on marijuana use by youth and immigration issues and connecting these families to support resources.

When we look at neighborhoods in Cowlitz County there are issues of concern. For example, Cowlitz County has the highest number of adults in the Washington State corrections system than any other county in the state. The 2,172 individuals is nearly 2% of the population and more than double the second highest County. When family members are incarcerated the impact is felt on all family members, especially children. County residents also face higher levels of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect than the State of Washington average. Successful programs like the Emergency Support Shelter provide both resident counseling as well as support the battered family. The cycle of violence, however, strains community resources, law enforcement and the courts, and the health and well-being of the community.

Participation in the community through voting provides an interesting paradox. On average, Cowlitz County does a better job than other communities in registering people to vote. On the other hand, Cowlitz County has one of the lowest rates, in the state, of those registered voters who actually vote.

## 5 Year Alcohol & Drug Related Mortality Rates

Cowlitz County & WA State 2006-2010 to 2011-2015



This report card serves as a summary of data and information that has been collected by Pathways 2020. An expansive report card found at [cowlitzcommunityreport.org](http://cowlitzcommunityreport.org) or the on the webpage [pathways2020.org](http://pathways2020.org). This system allows for the inclusion of more timely data as well as being cost-effective.

In the summary you are reading information sources for the data used is found on the webpage in each of the six social determinants of health. This report card is using QR technology that allows the reader to scan the QR code for immediate access to the electronic report card. The summary is just that high points or low points identified by Pathways 2020 and a deeper analysis and statistical information are available electronically.

## Thank you to our sponsors!



## This report card was made possible by the planning team led by

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Chair: Dian Cooper, Cowlitz Family Health Center                    | Production of the report was led by              |
| Michael O'Neill, Cowlitz County Health & Human Services Departments | Keri Verhei of onthemark associates              |
| Ilona Kerby, Lower Columbia Community Action Program                | Michelle Grendahl Cowlitz AmeriCorps Network     |
| Chris Skaugset, Longview Public Library                             | Joelle Wilson, Nine Acres Enterprises            |
| Cowlitz County Sheriff Mark Nelson                                  | Webpage development by Jason Rogen, Compass Lane |
| Chere Weiss, PeaceHealth Community Outreach                         |  |
| Sharon Weinhold, Cowlitz Community Network                          |  |
| Paul Youmans, Pathways 2020   |  |