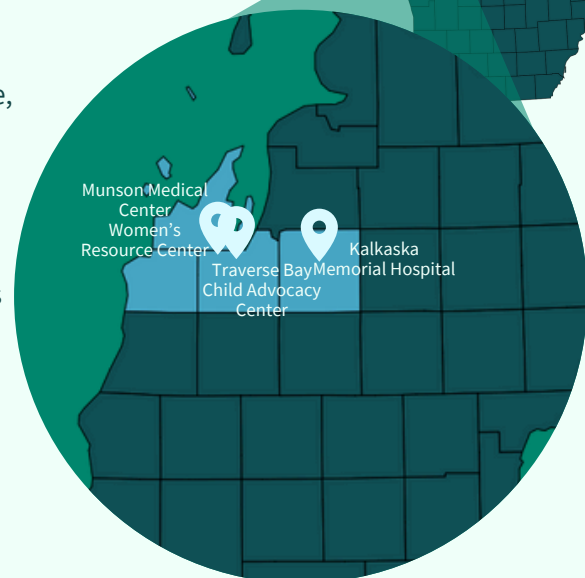


Response to Sexual Assault: Think-Tank Report

Grand Traverse Region

- The Grand Traverse Region is located in the northwestern lower peninsula of Michigan. For the sake of this report, this includes Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau Counties.
- The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, a federally-recognized Sovereign Nation is primarily located in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties, and serves a 6-county region.¹
- The Grand Traverse Region welcomes many seasonal residents and tourists from June - August. According to one study in 2022, the region's population increased by 75% between January/February and July.



Total Population ³		n = 155,818
Caucasian	95.49%	n = 56,058
Native American/Indigenous	2.06%	n = 2,609
African American	1.41%	n = 809
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.04%	n = 512
Hispanic	3.31%	n = 1,194

1. <https://gtbindians.org>
2. Networks Northwest seasonal population study
3. U.S. Census Bureau

Community Think Tank

- The Think Tank was held on Thursday, February 15, 2024, at the Women's Resource Center in Traverse City, Grand Traverse County
- The following systems were represented:
 - Domestic and sexual violence services provider
 - Law enforcement
 - Local tribal court
 - Emergency healthcare services
 - Children's advocacy center
 - Child welfare agency
 - Community health services
 - Education
 - Prosecutor's office
- The major topics explored were:
 - What are the barriers to survivors getting critical healthcare services after a sexual assault?
 - What are the facilitators to survivors accessing services after an assault?

Sexual Assault Services :

- The nearest hospitals are the Munson Medical Center (Grand Traverse County) and Kalkaska Memorial Hospital (Kalkaska County).
- There are six Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)-trained RNs and one SANE-pediatric (SANE-P) providing services located at Munson Medical Center in Traverse City, Grand Traverse County.
- There are four SANE-trained nurses at Kalkaska Memorial Hospital and hospital staff are developing policies/procedures to provide better access to SANE services.
- Traverse Bay Child Advocacy Center serves the region and is located in Grand Traverse County.
- The Women's Resource Center (WRC), also located in Traverse City, is the only agency in the region providing on-call support and advocacy for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault including a 24-hour crisis line, emergency shelter, transitional housing, one-on-one and group support, and financial assistance.

Barriers

Several barriers for accessing services were identified by Think Tank participants, some of which are specific to rural, tribal, and tourism communities like Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau Counties, some related to societal norms, and some related to common infrastructure and systemic challenges in sexual assault response work.

Rural Community Challenges:

Rural communities rarely provide a sense of anonymity for those seeking out services, in some instances putting survivors at greater risk.

- Attendees identified a number of issues related to serving rural communities. In particular, many residents must travel long distances to access services. The issue is further compounded for those with little to no consistent transportation.
 - In certain instances, law enforcement can provide transportation and the WRC can provide survivors with financial support for transportation assistance.
 - While there is some public transportation across the communities, it must be planned.
 - Ride share and taxi services are rarely available.
- Rural communities rarely provide a sense of anonymity for those seeking out services, in some instances putting survivors at greater risk.
- Healthcare providers and other community-service agencies continue to be challenged due the increased need for supportive services during the summer season and due to overall staffing shortages.

Healthcare Systems Barriers

- In order to become SANE-certified, a SANE-trained nurse must complete 300 approved hours that include:
 - Providing direct patient care as a SANE
 - Taking on-call shifts to respond to patients as a SANE
 - Teaching/precepting SANEs
 - Providing direction/consultation on SANE issues/cases
 - Participating in peer review of SANE cases
- In a rural-serving community, and with continued staffing shortages, it is difficult for nurses to meet the above requirements.
- The union requirement at Munson Medical Center limits the pool of SANE-trained/certified nurses who can provide services.
- Kalkaska Memorial Hospital staff are developing policies/procedures to provide better access to SANE services.

Working in a rural community presents unique challenges for SANE-trained nurses to meet the requirements to become SANE-certified.

Cultural Implications:

- In the native/tribal/indigenous community, historical traumas have resulted in cultural and intergenerational distrust related to seeking help outside the community.
- Within some religious communities there are specific cultural barriers that exist, barring survivors from seeking help.
- Like many other communities there is a cultural stigma and lack of awareness about sexual violence and help-seeking compounded with an overall general distrust of the government and healthcare providers.

Strengths

Community Collaboration, Improved Services:

Attendees identified a number of things that were working well in the community in the service of supporting survivors of sexual assault, many of which focused on systems collaboration.

- There is a history of positive collaboration between Munson Medical Center and the Women's Resource Center regarding service provision and support for survivors of sexual assault.
- The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians has strong relationships with several agencies in the community. In particular with law enforcement. For example, the tribal police and state police have been cross-deputized to be able to collaborate and serve the broader community. While there has been a history of fraught relationships between the tribe and community agencies and law enforcement, they have been improving, with more room to improve.
- The SANEs at Munson Medical Center have infrastructure in place to improve coverage when a patient presents for a SANE exam and they have strong working relationships with community organizations and law enforcement.
- Local law enforcement have received good training related to trauma-informed responses.

Next Steps

The following are recommended actionable steps for the community to take to help improve the coordinated response to sexual assault.

Implement Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs):

Communities with active SARTs are able to provide ongoing space for stakeholders to connect and discuss challenging issues related to sexual assault response. Creating a SART and holding monthly meetings would allow these stakeholders to reestablish their connections and open lines of communication between agencies, departments, and services for survivors.

- Identify who is responsible for scheduling and planning regular SART meetings.
- Re-distribute the SART protocol to community stakeholders.
- Establish a monthly meeting time and place.

Resources:

<https://www.nsvrc.org/sarts>

https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/sartkit/

<https://www.safeta.org/page/ISAACsart1>

Further explore opportunities to develop free-standing SANE services and/or expanding existing SANE services:

The Think Tank identified the following opportunities to improve services for survivors of sexual assault. These included:

- A standalone sexual assault healthcare program that broadens access to adult *and* pediatric victims and survivors that is survivor-centered, trauma-informed and enhances access to services for survivors; and
- A more formalized relationship between advocacy services and the existing healthcare services in the community to help further develop and support emergency, on-call SANE and advocacy services by ensuring consistent on-call services across emergency healthcare providers.

These opportunities have the same starting point of bringing together community advocacy organizations, such as the WRC and Traverse Bay Child Advocacy Center, along with healthcare system administrators, their ED directors, and current SANEs.

Resources:

<https://www.forensicnurses.org/page/ExamDetails/#eligibility>

<https://www.forensicnurses.org/page/NoSANEInSight/>

