

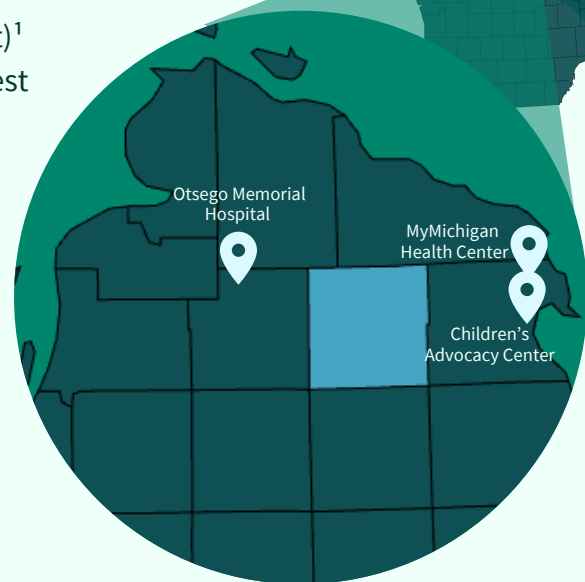
Response to Sexual Assault: Think Tank Report

Montmorency County Community

- Montmorency County is 352,019 square acres (86% covered by forest)¹
- There are no hospitals located in Montmorency County and the closest emergency rooms are in neighboring counties (Alpena and Otsego), both located 30-40 miles from the center of Montmorency County
- The total population is 9,265 people²

Caucasian	96.4%	n = 8,936
Native American/Indigenous	1.5%	n = 141
African American	1.4%	n = 133
Hispanic	1.3%	n = 118
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.6%	n = 55

- 63.3% of the population is 45 years or older (n = 5,865)
- 2021-2022 Graduation Rates:³
 - 95.0%, dropout rate: 5.0% (Atlanta Community Schools)
 - 71.4%, dropout rate: 25.0% (Hillman Community Schools)
- Teen pregnancy rate for 15 to 19-year-olds in 2021 was 40.9%⁴



1. montcounty.org

2. Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

3. MI School Data (2022)

4. Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics, MDHHS and the count of pregnancies provided by 2021 Files of Induced Abortions Occurring in Michigan and 2021 Michigan Resident Live Birth Files, Division for Vital Records & Health Statistics, Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Community Think Tank:

- The Think Tank was held on August 8, 2023
- 7 people attended the meeting:
 - 3 from a local domestic violence and sexual assault program
 - 2 from hospital SA services
 - 1 from community health services
 - 1 statewide funding representative
- There was no representation from law enforcement or prosecution at the meeting
- Major topics:
 - What are the barriers to survivors getting critical care after a sexual assault?
 - What are the facilitators to survivors accessing services after an assault?
- The meeting lasted 120 minutes in total

Services Available:

- There were currently no sexual assault healthcare services in Montmorency County
- Anyone requiring emergency healthcare services must travel to a neighboring county (15 to 60 minutes of travel)
 - MyMichigan Health Center Alpena of Alpena County has one certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)
 - Munson Healthcare Otsego Memorial Hospital of Otsego County has no SANEs
- Closest child advocacy center: Children's Advocacy Center of Northeast Michigan in Alpena County
- There are two state police posts in the counties to the east (Alpena County) and to the west (Otsego County)
- The Sheriff's Office of Montmorency employs 15 law enforcement officers

Barriers

Several barriers for accessing services were identified by Think Tank participants, some of which are specific to rural communities like Montmorency County, some related to societal norms, and some related to common infrastructure and systemic challenges in sexual assault response work.

Sexual Assault Healthcare Services:

- There are no direct sexual assault healthcare services located within Montmorency County
- People are unsure of where to go when they need help
- They must be able to transport themselves to the emergency department (ED) in a different county
 - This required either resources (e.g., owning a reliable car, ability to pay for gas or a ride service, etc.), or disclosure to a friend or family member who can help transport them
- For those who make it to the ED, it was not guaranteed that a trained SANE will be on call; given that only 2 SANEs were affiliated with this ED
- When accessing ED services following a sexual assault, survivors must go through the standard triage process, which generally is not set up to be trauma-informed
- The ED is chaotic and the waiting room does not provide privacy for potential patients and their families
- When a SANE is not available, ED staff may be reluctant to provide care

There is no existing infrastructure to compensate or incentivize SANEs for providing specialized care. In turn, there is no support for nurses to pursue SANE training within local healthcare systems.

Law Enforcement Services:

- The rural communities law enforcement serve are particularly challenging settings
- Officers may have many personal connections throughout the small community
 - The likelihood of survivors and perpetrators being close friends and/or family increases
 - Some community members may be identified as habitual offenders or habitual reporters
- Some law enforcement officers may have reputations for being unhelpful, which may:
 - Discourage community members from making reports
 - Create an environment where survivors are accused of “cop shopping” if they speak to multiple LE officers when trying to find one who may be more responsive and/or helpful
- Law enforcement is regularly understaffed and lacks the time and support for ongoing education related to responding to sexual assaults from a trauma-informed and survivor-centered perspective

Strengths

Existing Capacity to Respond to Sexual Assault:

- There is a new victim advocate at the prosecutor’s office within Montmorency County who has been working collaboratively with Hope Shores Alliance, including making referrals for survivors
- There are other collaborative relationships outside of Montmorency County that can help provide the framework and support for building similar relationships within Montmorency County
 - There are collaborations between the SANEs at the hospital in Alpena County that have helped improve responses and services to child sexual assault and abuse survivors
 - There are two sexual assault response teams (SARTs) in neighboring communities with on-call victim advocates who are able to help provide services in Montmorency County
 - Both the local Department of Health and Human Services of Montmorency County and the SARTs are able to assist with transportation to emergency departments in the area

Next Steps

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

Focus on Community Outreach and Education:

There is a desire to build a stronger connection to the sheriff's department, prosecutor's office, and organizations serving Montmorency County.

- **Advocates + Law Enforcement:** Advocates and community responders from Hope Shores Alliance could reach out to the Sheriff's Office and meet the law enforcement officers
 - Determine who might be interested in championing ongoing education and response efforts related to sexual assault
 - Develop an easy to use, accessible protocol for law enforcement to have on hand and include specific steps to follow when responding to sexual assault cases, including connecting survivors to appropriate resources
- **SANEs, Advocates + Montmorency County Prosecutor's Office:**
 - Local SANEs can work with Montmorency County prosecutors to enhance communication and establish opportunities for mutual education about their respective roles
 - Capitalize on the existing collaboration with the crime victim advocate from the prosecutor's office and explore shared learning opportunities and encourage continued referrals to support survivors
- **Sexual Assault Response Team (SART):** Hope Shores Alliance is poised to help support the development of a Montmorency County SART or bring Montmorency County stakeholders into the existing SARTs
 - Help stakeholders clarify what their roles are in terms of sexual assault response, what their limitations are in those roles, and how and when to reach out to others for continued and seamless support for survivors
 - A community protocol could be created for stakeholders, identifying these supports as well as how to navigate the unique challenges of responding to sexual assault in a rural community

Build Additional Infrastructure for SANEs and More Localized Sexual Assault Services

At the time of the Think Tank, the limited infrastructure for the two SANEs left major gaps in the availability of trauma-informed, specialized services when survivors of sexual assault present at the local emergency department for healthcare.

Recently, Hope Shores Alliance was awarded funding by the Office for Violence Against Women (OVW) to create a SANE training connection to Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and Haven of Pontiac to develop an on-call SANE team in Alpena and surrounding communities, including Montmorency County. In addition, Hope Shores Alliance is partnering closely with My Michigan Health Center of Alpena to obtain designated space for the SANE team to provide emergency care, Sexual Assault Forensic Exams, follow-up care and for survivors of sexual assault.

