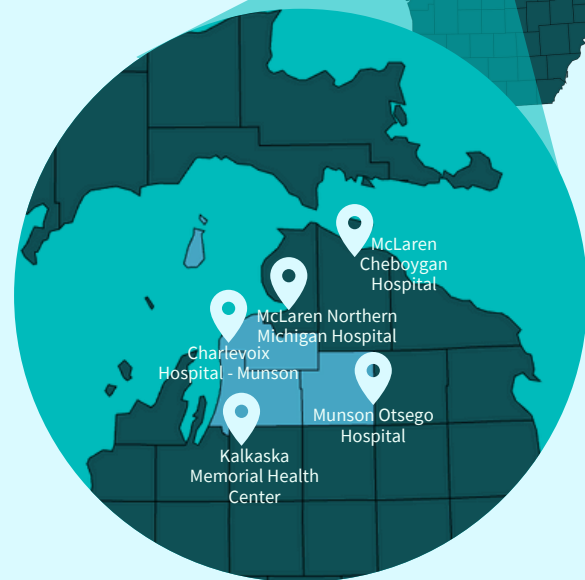


Response to Sexual Assault: Think Tank Report

Antrim, Charlevoix, and Otsego Counties

- Antrim, Charlevoix, and Otsego Counties are located in the Northeast and north central part of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan
- A portion of the reservation lands of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians are located in Charlevoix County with some tribal members residing in Charlevoix and Otsego Counties¹
- The Antrim and Charlevoix County populations nearly doubles in the summer when seasonal residents and tourists visit the area²

	Antrim	Charlevoix	Otsego
Total Population ³	23,811	26,079	25,287
Caucasian	96.7%	95.8%	96.3%
Hispanic	2.4%	2.5%	1.9%
Native American / Indigenous	1.7%	2.2%	1.4%
African American	0.9%	1.1%	1.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.7%	1.0%	1.0%



1. <https://ltbbodawa-nsn.gov>
2. Networks Northwest seasonal population study
3. U.S. Census Bureau

Community Think Tank

- The Think Tank was held on August 9th, 2023 at the local library in the town of Boyne City, Charlevoix County
- The following systems were represented:
 - local domestic violence and sexual assault program
 - law enforcement
 - prosecutor's office
 - emergency healthcare services
 - child advocacy center
 - child welfare agency
 - statewide tribal DV/SA coalition
 - community health services
- The major topics explored were:
 - 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 90 minutes in total

Sexual Assault Healthcare Services Available:

- The nearest emergency rooms are located in Charlevoix (Munson Charlevoix Hospital), Gaylord (Munson Otsego Hospital), Petoskey (McLaren Northern Michigan Hospital), Cheboygan (McLaren Cheboygan Hospital), and Kalkaska (Kalkaska Memorial Health Center).
- There are trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) available for emergency care at all five hospitals.
- There are three child advocacy centers that serve the communities in nearby counties: the child advocacy center at the Women's Resource Center of Northern Michigan (Emmet County to the north), Traverse Bay Area Child Advocacy Center (Grand Traverse County to the southwest), and Northern Michigan Children's Assessment Center (Roscommon County to the southeast).

Barriers

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

Sexual Assault Healthcare Services:

- In the past, one of the local hospital systems provided incentives to nurses who completed SANE training and provided emergency sexual assault healthcare, but those incentives no longer exist
- Emergency Departments have had difficulty locating a SANE-trained nurse on duty and available when patients have presented for care
- There has been a high turnover rate for nurses in the community, increasing the likelihood that a SANE-trained nurse may leave the community
- Hospitals in the service area currently do not have infrastructures that coordinate and support on-call SANE-trained nurses to ensure regular availability
- SANE-certification is difficult to achieve in the local community:
 - Certification requires a high number of practice hours
 - A low volume of patients makes it difficult for a SANE-trained nurse to maintain proficiency

There is no existing infrastructure in the local hospital systems to support SANE services by offering additional compensation for on-call SANE-trained nursing professionals.

Rural Community Challenges:

- Issues related to “everyone knows everybody’s business,” the physical isolation of living in a sparsely populated but large geographic area, difficulty accessing services, and limited resources were all identified as barriers
- The geographic isolation of the community plus common stereotypes and stigmas make it difficult for survivors to disclose and seek help
- There are very few resources supporting the unhoused; if a survivor needs to move locations for safety reasons, the WRCNM Safe Home is available for emergency housing and limited additional options
- When survivors have to travel significant distances to access resources immediately following an assault, there is a risk that they may change their mind during that time and decide not to access critical healthcare

Cultural Implications:

- Historical traumas have resulted in cultural and intergenerational distrust related to seeking help outside of the tribal community
- There is cultural and community stigma related to sexual assault and help-seeking: institutions outside the tribal community have systematically harmed tribal members with an attempt to erase their community and way of life
- Undocumented immigrants may have legal status concerns, putting survivors at risk of deportation and separation from their families

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 strong collaboration between Charlevoix County law enforcement and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians tribal police officers: officials in Charlevoix County participate in swearing in tribal police officers in order to bridge a working relationship and thereby allowing tribal officers to extend their authority and joint jurisdiction
- Local hospitals and law enforcement have received support from SANE nurses located in other communities in the past for pediatric medical exams
- Schools in the community have hosted safe touch and consent trainings with teachers that have resulted in disclosures from students
- Having a crime victim advocate in each county prosecutor’s office has been a “huge win” for survivors
- Local hospitals now have the tools and equipment necessary to document and assess for injuries following an assault

Next Steps

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

Reestablish the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART):

The community has had active SARTs that provided an ongoing space for stakeholders to connect and update policies and protocols related to sexual assault response. Reinstating the North and South SARTs and holding monthly meetings would allow stakeholders to strengthen their connections and have more direct communication and collaboration.

- WRCNM employs a SART Coordinator who will schedule and plan regular SART meetings
- Stakeholders should identify representative SART members for their respective agencies
- SART members contribute to a Community Collaborative Sexual Assault Response Policy and Protocol

Establish a More Formalized Communication Network for Coordinating SANEs, SANE Supervisors, and Hospital Education Coordinators:

There is a desire for the community to have consistently available specialized emergency healthcare services for survivors of sexual assault. The community is primed to explore building a more formalized network.

- The WRCNM employs a SART Coordinator who could initially lead this initiative
- Invite hospital ED directors in contributing to setting agendas and meeting times to maximize SANE staff participation
- Engage the local emergency healthcare providers and hospital administrators to understand current protocols for responding to sexual assault and explore potential mechanisms for compensating “on call” SANEs
- Resource: <https://www.forensicnurses.org/page/NoSANEInSight/>

Explore Culturally Responsive and Honoring Services:

Attendees discussed the historical and cultural traumas that may impact Indigenous and Native survivors’ as well as immigrant survivors’ willingness and ability to access services.

- Systems and organizations outside the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (LTBB) should collaborate with LTBB to educate their staff on local history and traumas inflicted on Indigenous and Native peoples
- In collaboration with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians tribal victim advocates, continue to identify culturally honoring and healing practices that can be incorporated into sexual assault services and invest in those services
- Ensure all programs in the community are aware of organizations and individuals that can provide culturally specific services when necessary (e.g., language services, disability services, local and statewide immigration law clinics)

