

2023 Better Wyoming

COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

RESEARCH CAMPAIGN



BETTER WYO.ORG

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Access to quality, affordable healthcare is a top priority for Wyoming voters from all walks of life. Everyone needs healthcare at some point.

For many Wyoming residents, however, healthcare is inadequate or out of reach.

As part of a 2023 campaign on behalf of affordable healthcare access, Better Wyoming spent five months conducting research on which healthcare issues most concerned our neighbors and communities.

Hundreds of Wyoming residents took part in online surveys, phone interviews, local in-person summits, and a statewide online event to share their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences.

Through this work, Better Wyoming has identified clear priorities shared by large numbers of our neighbors that can provide policymakers guidance in addressing the healthcare needs of our state.



GRASSROOTS PROCESS

1. Online survey

More than 400 Wyomingites completed an online survey distributed via social media and text messages asking about the most pressing healthcare issues for themselves and their families, their local communities, and for the state as a whole.

2. Follow-up phone calls

Each person who completed the survey received a call from a Better Wyoming organizer to further discuss their perspectives and experience.

3. Healthcare summits

Better Wyoming hosted summits in Casper, Cheyenne, and Lander with more than 100 total participants to collectively analyze local survey results and agree upon their top local concerns.

4. Issue poll

Based on the survey and summit results, Better Wyoming created a poll for its membership asking which among the Top 10 issues the Legislature should focus on addressing during the 2024 budget session. More than 250 people responded.

5. Statewide convening

Representatives from each of the summits led an online statewide convening with Better Wyoming's membership to go over the poll results and decide on a short list of issues to research and potentially champion as 2024 priorities.

“Everyone knows Wyoming is a rural state and that we’re not going to have the best medical services in the world, **but we should expect better than what we’ve got.**”

Laramie County voter



WYOMING'S BIGGEST HEALTHCARE ISSUES

Hundreds of conversations with Wyoming voters revealed that these are the top healthcare issues residents want lawmakers to address in 2024.



LACK OF QUALITY PROVIDERS

Wyoming struggles to attract and retain quality healthcare providers and specialists. As a result, it is difficult for state residents to access providers who can meet their needs.



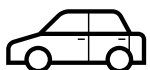
AFFORDABILITY

Whether it's the cost of insurance premiums or the cost of treatment, healthcare is simply too expensive in Wyoming.



LACK OF MENTAL HEALTHCARE

Wyoming has among the highest suicide rates in the nation, substance abuse is a serious issue, and there are far too few ways for people to get the mental health help they need.



DISTANCE TO CARE/TRANSPORTATION

Particularly in rural areas, Wyomingites often must travel significant distances to see a doctor. This is especially troublesome for people without reliable transportation.

OTHER BIG WYOMING HEALTHCARE ISSUES

The surveys and summits revealed a number of other healthcare issues that Wyoming residents find challenging and care about.

HOW TO ACCESS EXISTING RESOURCES

Even when providers exist for insured residents and resources are available for folks who need help, they are often difficult to find and access. We need a better system of information to help patients identify and access care.

LACK OF MATERNAL CARE

Three Wyoming hospitals have closed their maternity wards in recent years and in many areas, there are far too few maternal health providers.

EMS SERVICES

Wyoming residents die or incur far more serious harm than necessary while waiting for an ambulance because of our sparse and underfunded EMS system.

PATIENT ADVOCATES

Many other states have designated "patient advocates" to help people access care, navigate complicated healthcare systems, and hold physicians accountable. Wyoming does not.

MEDICAID QUALIFICATION

Wyoming has among the most stringent requirements in the nation to receive Medicaid.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL HEALTHCARE

Several Wyoming communities' primary means of accessing care are private, corporate hospitals and clinics that are unresponsive to local needs and that tend to drive away quality providers.

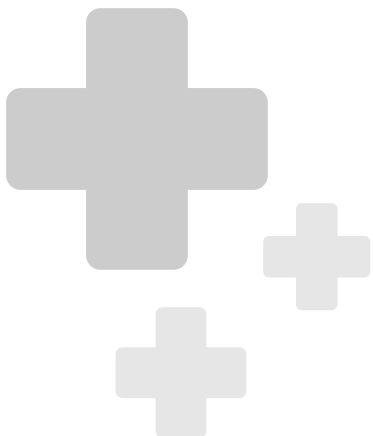
SURVEY RESULTS

Nearly 450 Wyoming residents filled out the intake survey for this campaign, which were distributed via Facebook ads as well as text messages to cell phones contained in the state voter file.

Question 1:

What is your main healthcare-related concern when it comes to yourself and your family?

- 49%** The cost of healthcare and/or insurance is too high.
- 28%** There is a lack of doctors who can address my/our specific needs.
- 12%** It's too far to travel to receive proper care.
- 8%** I (we) do not have health insurance.
- 2%** I am (we are) not sure what options there are for insurance.



“Wyoming is an unusual environment. Miles between towns, few providers and caregivers, it's hard to get them to come here. **People cowboy up and often delay treatment.**”

Survey responder

SURVEY RESULTS, cont.

Question 2:

What is the main issue that could be improved when it comes to healthcare in your local town or community?

- 33%** More providers and/or specialists.
- 31%** More affordable healthcare options.
- 25%** Mental healthcare and/or suicide prevention.
- 6%** Women's or maternal health.
- 3%** Access to telehealth.
- 2%** EMS services

Question 3:

What is the main area that is important to you when it comes to creating a stronger statewide healthcare system in Wyoming?

- 34%** Decreasing the number of uninsured people.
- 25%** More quality local healthcare providers.
- 20%** More affordable care.
- 11%** Rural hospitals with more/better services.
- 6%** Better mental health services.
- 4%** Creating good-paying healthcare jobs.

LOCAL SUMMIT ISSUES

Better Wyoming hosted three local healthcare summits as part of this campaign. They took place in Cheyenne, Casper, and Lander. At each summit, participants were asked to identify the three most pressing healthcare issues in their county.

Laramie County

1. AFFORDABILITY

Whether they are insured, uninsured, or underinsured, healthcare is simply too expensive for local residents. Many folks have to make the choice to only seek care when it's an absolute emergency, travel far distances for affordable care, or, not at all.

2. LACK OF QUALITY PROVIDERS

Cheyenne struggles to attract and retain quality healthcare providers and specialists. As a result, it is difficult for residents to access providers who can meet their needs.

3. HOW TO ACCESS EXISTING RESOURCES

Even when providers exist for insured residents and resources are available for folks who need help, they are often difficult to find and access. We need a better system of information to help patients identify and access care.



LOCAL SUMMIT ISSUES, cont.

Fremont County

1. LACK OF MENTAL HEALTHCARE

Fremont County and the Wind River Reservation face acute issues when it comes to mental health, substance abuse, and suicide prevention. These are linked to other serious issues in the area, such as homelessness.

2. WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES

There is a desperate need for maternal and reproductive health services in this area due to a lack of providers. Many residents face unacceptable wait times or challenging travel to receive care.

3. AFFORDABILITY

Whether they are insured, uninsured, or underinsured, healthcare is simply too expensive for local residents. Many folks have to make the choice to only seek care when it's an absolute emergency, travel far distances for affordable care, or, not at all.

Natrona & Converse Counties

1. AFFORDABILITY

There is a large underinsured population in both counties who have no or restricted access to basic healthcare. Many folks also could either not afford care they received and are now in debt and/or were able to afford the prior authorization amount, but were then required to pay even more for the service.

2. MEDICAID QUALIFICATIONS

Wyoming's Medicaid qualifications are among the strictest in the nation, since the Legislature has refused to expand the program. Meanwhile, the Department of Health has begun disenrolling Medicaid recipients as part of the "unwinding" of the public health emergency, even if they still qualify for coverage.

3. COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

Certain private health entities seem to have a monopoly on healthcare in Natrona county, which means those entities have control of the price of care, quality of care, providers, what insurance coverage is accepted, and more. Residents want more opportunity for accountability, collaboration, and feedback.

BETTER WYOMING: ABOUT US

Better Wyoming is a group of Wyomingites working to improve our lives, communities, and our beloved home state.

We talk to our neighbors and listen to people's needs and hopes, and then bring them together to advocate for change at the state and local level on behalf of policies that provide concrete benefits.

We educate people about important issues, train them to be community leaders, and mobilize them to participate in the decision-making process that impacts their lives.

Our goal is to ensure that every Wyomingite and their family—no matter who they are—has the opportunity to lead a prosperous, happy, and productive life.

