Focused Outreach to Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego Counties

OVERVIEW FOR SOUTH CENTRAL REGION LIBRARY COUNCIL
HOSPITAL LIBRARY SERVICES PROGRAM

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Focused Outreach Model

As part of our 2021-2026 Cooperative Agreement with the National Library of Medicine, we are conducting outreach to specific rural counties in CT, ME, MA, NH, NY, RI, and VT. Rural Health is one of our Regional Priorities for this Cooperative Agreement. These counties were identified as medically underserved. The goal is to introduce, or re-introduce, the Network of the National Library of Medicine as a source of training in health information resources and funding for health-related projects. In addition, this provides an opportunity for us to learn more about the health information access needs and priorities of the communities we serve, providing valuable insight for our work and to bring back to the National Library of Medicine.

The process outlined below provides NNLM with a snapshot of the health needs and health information seeking behaviors of partners and the communities they serve. This information may not reflect the whole Focused Outreach geographic area but does represent what partners are seeing on the ground at this time.

STEP ONE

Conduct interviews with librarians, educators, public health workers, and others involved in health information outreach. Note: our work focuses on health information resources and delivery rather than healthcare itself. Our focus includes access to the internet and technology devices.

STEP TWO

Search available data for local health information priorities. Data supports and expands on the health concerns shared in the interviews. Sources could include Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data, Community Health Needs Assessments, local newspapers, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings, Rural Health Information Hub, United States Census, United States Environmental Protection Agency, and other sources.

STEP THREE

Offer training on National Library of Medicine resources. MedlinePlus for consumer health information, PubMed for medical journal articles, ClinicalTrials.gov for clinical trials information, and Bookshelf for freely available online biomedical books. Promote national training and regional funding opportunities.

STEP FOUR

Report on findings to our interviewees, the Regional Office (Region 7), and the National Library of Medicine User Experience Program (UEP).

Focused Outreach to Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego Counties, New York

The combined population of Chenango, Delaware and Otsego counties is about 150,000 people. Across the three counties, there are two cities, 64 towns, and 24 villages. These counties are in the Southern Tier of Upstate New York, with the Delaware River being the boundary between Delaware County and Pennsylvania. The three counties are west of Albany, southeast of Syracuse, and northeast of Binghamton. Cooperstown, home of the National Baseball Hall Fame and Museum, is in Otsego County. The eastern most part of Delaware County is in the Catskills.

BASELINE MEMBERSHIP DATA

Organizational membership is required to apply for funding from NNLM. In May 2024, there were 10 existing members across the three counties. Of these, four were hospitals or health-based organizations (Bassett Medical Center, Chenango Health Network, Margaretville Hospital, Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety), five were public libraries and one was a college library. Only one member was in Chenango County with four in Delaware County and five in Otsego County.

The liaisons that were listed in the membership directory were outdated in most cases. Through our outreach, we were able to update six of the 10 existing members and add two new members, the Four County Library System and Sidney Memorial Public Library.

INTERVIEWS

We connected with the South Central Regional Library Council (SCRLC), one of nine councils comprising the Empire State Library Network. SCRLC serves 14 counties in Upstate New York, including Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego. SCRLC provided contact information for library staff at hospitals, public libraries, colleges, and the regional public library system.

At this point, the team divided contacts and planned follow-up.

We met virtually with the Four County Library System. They shared health information needs in the area as well as helped us make some connections to local public libraries. We attended a meeting of the Hospital Library Services Program advisory group for the South Central New York Region. In the last week of September and first week of October 2024, we held in-person site visits and several interviews with eight public libraries, one college library, and one hospital library. We also dropped materials off at two other public libraries. One of the libraries was in a city, while the others were in towns or villages, each of which was located near other resources such as businesses, schools, or other town facilities.

HEALTH TOPICS

Health topics identified during the 12 interviews include:

- Social Determinants of Health
  - Access to healthy food
  - Housing costs
  - Housing availability
  - Transportation
  - Lack of health care providers
- Mental Health
  - Stress Reduction
  - Substance Use Disorder
  - Homelessness
  - Domestic violence
- Accessibility
  - Quiet tents in public libraries
  - Support for college students diagnosed with ASD, ADHD
- Environmental Health
  - Long-term impact of floods
  - Water quality (high levels of manganese)

Figure 1. Farmers market in Delhi

SAMPLE OF SUPPORTING DATA

The [Community Health Needs Assessment for Delaware County](#) makes note of housing issues as it pertains to mental health.

Local news covered [the closure of a supermarket](#) in Sidney, limiting food access to the community.

[Rural Health Information Hub](#) charts the significant lack of primary care, dental care, and mental health care in the region.
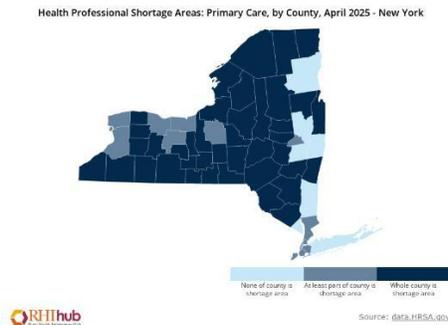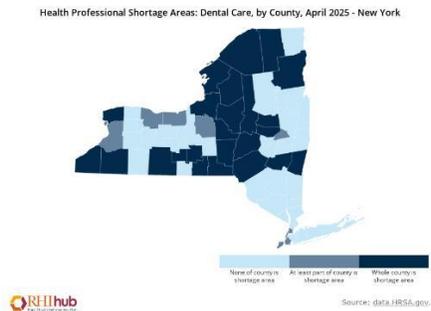

Figure 2. Shortage of Primary Care
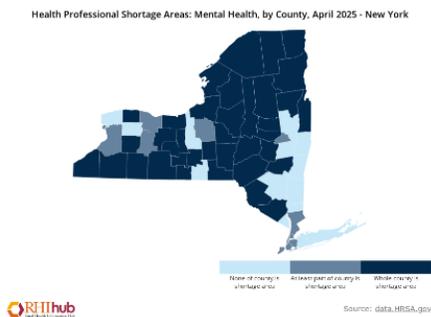

Figure 3. Shortage of Dental Care

Figure 4. Shortage of Mental Health Care

The [Community Health Needs Assessment for Otsego County](#) and Delaware County identify addressing opioid misuse and suicide prevention in their action plans.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) names Delaware County households as vulnerable to flooding.
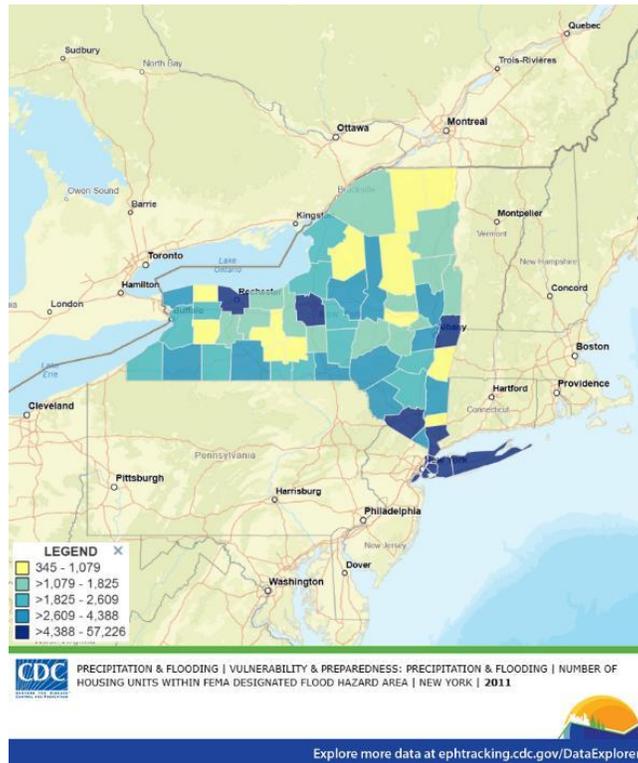

Figure 5. Delaware County Households at Higher Risk

This [2023 article published in Medium](#) gives an in-depth look at the impacts of flooding in Sidney, New York. Sidney is in Delaware County.

This local news report highlights additional [water concerns in Sidney](#). The village experiences high levels of naturally occurring manganese in its water systems.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Our interviews include questions about access to the internet and technology devices. Telehealth continues to be utilized in these counties due to a lack of local providers. Several libraries talked about the telehealth kits that were distributed through South Central Regional Library Council, a program that was funded by NNLM in 2022. The kits included a Chromebook, headset, hotspot, mouse, and carrying case. Library staff commented that, despite the interest in and the use of telehealth in the region, the kits rarely circulate. One librarian suggested that many residents may have upgraded their technology with Economic Impact Payments that United States citizens received during the pandemic.

Technology classes offered by public libraries are generally not well attended. Libraries have more success by offering these classes offsite at local Councils on Aging. At some public libraries, staff provide 1:1 assistance with technology, which includes helping patrons access their patient portals. In public libraries, patrons come in to print documents more often than they come in to use the computers.

At SUNY Delhi, many students do not have laptops or smartphones that have the capacity to handle coursework applications. Library staff noted that these students come into the library to use the computers. The Resnick Library is conveniently located in the same building as the Writing Center and Math Center.

Since the pandemic, there has been a decrease in hospital staff coming into the Bassett Medical Center library to use the computers. Staff who come into the library seem to be doing charting rather than conducting literature searches.

In context, the report Availability, Access and Affordability: Understanding Broadband Challenges in New York State. September 2021 (New York State Comptroller) states that broadband availability rates were lowest in regions with greater shares of population living in areas classified as rural: North Country, Southern Tier, and Mohawk Valley. Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego counties are in the Southern Tier.

NYS Region	Population	Population Without Broadband	Percentage of Population Without Broadband	Percentage of Population Living in an Area Classified as Rural
North Country	415,678	20,914	5.0%	64.2%
Mohawk Valley	483,086	18,569	3.8%	47.2%
Southern Tier	628,855	19,569	3.1%	47.9%
Western NY	1,377,094	30,041	2.2%	20.2%
Long Island	2,833,525	61,231	2.2%	1.5%
Finger Lakes	1,200,799	20,877	1.7%	26.5%
Mid-Hudson	2,323,774	30,349	1.3%	15.5%
Central NY	772,749	9,549	1.2%	31.2%
Capital Region	1,081,179	6,198	0.6%	28.4%
New York City	7,860,674	30,762	0.4%	0.0%

Note: Based on a 25/3 Mbps standard relied on by the Federal Communications Commission.

Source: Office of the State Comptroller analysis of Federal Communications Commission, *Fourteenth Broadband Deployment Report*, January 19, 2021

Figure 6. Lack of broadband in the Southern Tier

Population Data: Three Distinct Towns

Each town we visited was different. This Census data gives a brief look at the differences between this **sample** of three towns.

TOWN	POPULATION	MEDIAN AGE	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	POVERTY CHILDREN	POVERTY OLDER ADULTS	FOREIGN BORN	VETERANS
Cooperstown	2113	41.5	$70,179	4%	12%	16.9%	4.2%
Delhi	3185	21.1	$60,521	11%	13%	3.4%	2.9%
Sidney	3865	31.4	$49,226	30%	19%	0.5%	6.3%

Figure 7. Census Reporter Data 2023

Cooperstown, home to the Baseball Hall of Fame, is a tourist and retiree destination. Cooperstown has a higher percentage of foreign-born residents, many of whom work at Bassett Medical Center, a 180-bed acute care facility affiliated with Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons. In addition to foreign-born clinicians and faculty, Bassett Medical Center is recruiting nurses from Jamaica and the Philippines due to a nursing shortage.

Delhi has a higher percentage of young people due to the student body at SUNY College of Technology at Delhi. Many students come to Delhi from New York City and Long Island.

SUNY College of Technology at Delhi:
- 3058 students (Fall 2024)
- 34% NYC/Long Island
- 10% Southern Tier (local)
- 4% out-of-state
- 17% Black, non-Hispanic
- 18% Hispanic

Sidney has the highest poverty rate for both children and older adults. There are substantially fewer foreign-born residents, and the highest rate of veterans among the three towns. Local news outlets describe the empty storefronts downtown and the complications arising from New York's Section 8 Emergency Housing Voucher Program. After 180 days, people who were formerly staying at the local Super Eight Hotel will find themselves unhoused.

Figure 8. Public art in Sidney, NY

INFORMATION NEEDS OF DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

We conducted interviews at Bassett Medical Center Library, Canon Free Library, Cherry Valley Memorial Library, Guernsey Memorial Library, Harris Memorial Library, Resnick Library at SUNY Delhi, Sherburne Public Library, Sidney Memorial Library, Worcester Free Library, and the Village Library at Cooperstown. We learned about the specific needs for these demographic categories.

- Children
  - Some public libraries are serving homeschooling families.
- Teens/Young Adults
  - Many students at SUNY Delhi are first generation college students.
  - Students need support in learning about preventative health screenings.
- Adults/Older Adults
  - Arthritis
  - Chronic illness
  - Heart disease
  - Joint replacements
  - Kidney disease
  - Lyme disease
  - Not wanting to go to the doctor

ACTIVITIES GENERATED THROUGH FOCUSED OUTREACH

- Speaker event *Managing Chronic Conditions* for the public. Partnership between Harris Memorial Library and Bassett Medical Center.
- Library staff development. *NNLM Resources and MedlinePlus Training* webinar delivered through the Four County Library System.

PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH FOCUSED OUTREACH

- Collection Improvement funding for Sydney Public Library.
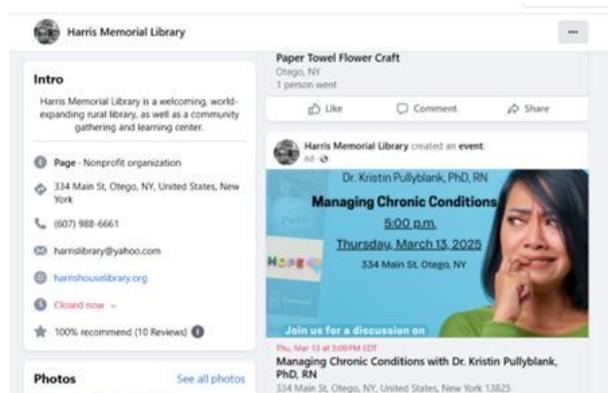- Collection Improvement funding for Four County Library System.

Figure 9. Harris Memorial Library social media

Lessons Learned

After four years of Focused Outreach during this cooperative agreement (2021-2026), we see patterns in the ways that rural looks different in different parts of the region. Although all rural areas have reported access and transportation issues, communities in more northern counties in New York, Vermont, and Maine travel further for services than communities in southern New England—3+ hours versus 1-2 hours. For communities that rely on seasonal tourism, resources and services may be more available during tourist season. Tourism may lead to other issues, such as pricing out year-round residents.

When asked about the health needs of their communities and accessing health information online, interviewees often mention social determinants of health (e.g. housing and transportation) rather than specific health conditions or topics.

OVERALL THEMES

We continued to hear about issues related to the cost of living, especially as it relates to housing and people's ability to live where they work. Interviewees talk about access to healthcare, especially specialized services. Issues with connecting to the internet, including cost and connectivity issues, lead to the use of libraries and community-based organizations for internet access. We hear about concerns with privacy in libraries for community members, especially with regards to looking up health information and providing technical assistance for people using their own devices to access the library's internet connection.

HEALTH TOPICS

We continued to hear about the need for information on mental health, substance use, environmental health (particularly with regards to water contamination), and older adult health. Interviewees want more education and support for improving services for patrons with ASD, ADHD, traumatic brain injury, and dementia. Some interviewees mentioned domestic violence. Concerns about date rape, child abuse, and mass shootings were mentioned in separate interviews.

We also learned about networks in rural areas which support different aspects of health such as networks of library directors, networks of social service providers, collaborative efforts between regional offices, and asset mapping funded by the CDC.

BEST PRACTICES FOR FOCUSED OUTREACH INTERVIEWS

- Limit to 2-3 interviews per day.
- Reach out to members and non-members.
- Sometimes drop-in visits work.
- Virtual interviews are an option.
- Bring MedlinePlus materials, graphic medicine books, and Citizen Science kits.
- Be ready to talk about funding and training (handouts, ideas for funding).
- Specialized funding for FO partners: collection development, professional development, technology purchases, one-off programming (might need IRB approval), air quality monitors, lightboxes, citizen science kits.
- Be ready to offer in-the-moment MedlinePlus demonstrations, future virtual training, and the potential for attending a regularly scheduled meeting to demonstrate MedlinePlus.

Figure 10. West Branch Delaware River

Appendix: National Initiatives and Regional Priority Areas

NATIONAL INITIATIVES
- Bridging the Digital Divide
- Confronting Health Misinformation
- Environmental Determinants of Health

REGIONAL PRIORITY AREAS AND COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST
- Academic Libraries
- Graphic Medicine
- Hospital Libraries
- Multilingual and Multicultural Health Information Resources
- Public Health
- Rural Health
- Substance Use Disorders

Selected Bibliography Links

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Disproportionate Floods Impact Sidney, New York. Medium, December 2023

Filipino Nurses Fill Critical Jobs as Workforce Shortage Intensifies, Marketplace, September 2023

Friends of the Village Library of Cooperstown's "Welcome Home Cooperstown" Program, Community Foundation of Otsego County, 2023

National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network Data Explorer

Otsego County Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Service Plan 2022-2024

Rural Health Information Hub New York Chart Gallery

Sidney Merchants See a Village in Decline, Catskills Today Reporter, June 2024

SUNY Delhi Fast Facts

This Popular Sidney, New York Grocery Store is Closing, WNBF News Radio, October 2022

Village of Sidney Set to Clear its Water of Manganese, WBNG Channel 12 News, August 2024