

Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report

*New Jersey Health Quality Institute
In Partnership with the New Jersey State League of
Municipalities
Funded by Walmart*



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Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report

Building Stronger Communities Through Mental Health

Across New Jersey, communities are taking action to support the mental health and well-being of their residents.

Through the [Mayors Wellness Campaign](#) (MWC), a statewide community health initiative of the [New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute](#) (Quality Institute), municipal leaders are working with together with community partners to create healthier places for residents to live, work, play and age. They are creating solutions that reflect the unique needs of their residents.

As mental health concerns continue to rise across the country, many communities are searching for ways to expand education, reduce stigma, and strengthen support systems outside of traditional health care settings.

The [Community Mental Health](#) Initiative was launched to help municipalities respond to those growing concerns. Through funding and technical assistance, the initiative supports communities developing programs tailored to the needs of their residents.

This report highlights the work municipalities completed through the 2024-2025 Community Mental Health grant period and demonstrates how local leadership can improve community well-being.



Why This Initiative Matters

Communities across the United States are facing rising mental health challenges. **A national survey found that nine in ten Americans believe the country is experiencing a mental health crisis, and many residents report difficulty accessing care.**

In New Jersey, municipal leaders consistently identify mental health as one of the most pressing issues affecting their communities. Through surveys and focus groups conducted by the Mayors Wellness Campaign, mayors report growing concerns about youth mental health, substance use, and social isolation.

Access to clinical services remains limited in many areas. As a result, communities are increasingly turning to education, prevention, and early intervention programs to support residents and connect them with resources.

The demand for local mental health initiatives is clear:

47

47 municipalities applied for funding in this grant cycle.

Communities requested more than \$845,000 in program funding.



Municipal leaders cited youth mental health, stigma reduction, and community connection as top priorities

The Community Mental Health Initiative was created to help municipalities respond to these challenges through locally driven solutions.

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Supporting Community-Led Solutions

In 2024, the **Mayors Wellness Campaign** awarded **\$127,500** in grants to **11 municipalities across New Jersey** to support community mental health initiatives between **November 2024 and October 2025**.

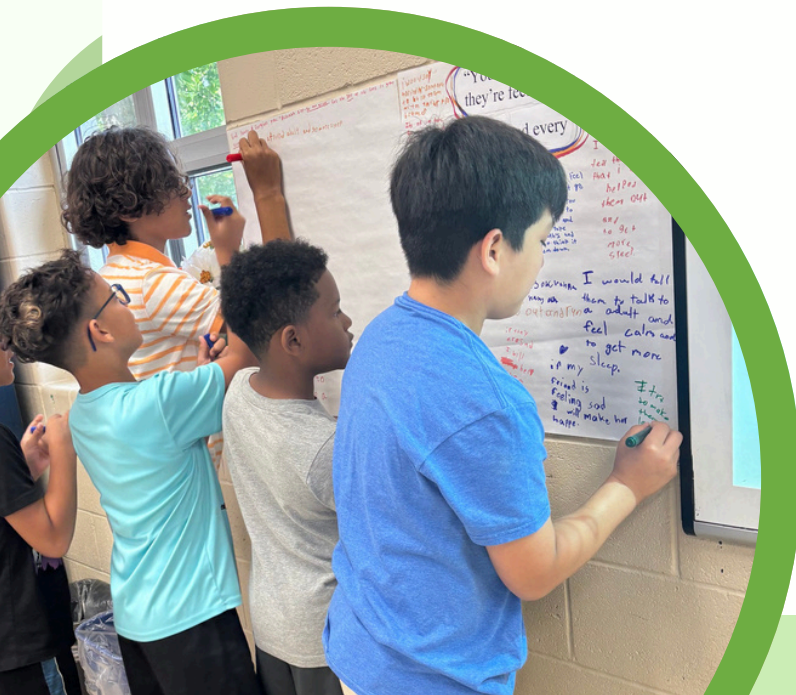
The grants were funded by Walmart and in partnership with the [New Jersey State League of Municipalities](#).

Municipalities participating in the initiative designed programs that reflected the needs and priorities of their communities. Programs focused on expanding mental health education, strengthening coping strategies, and connecting residents with available resources.

Funding supported initiatives that addressed:

- **Mental health education and awareness**
- **Substance use prevention**
- **Youth mental health**
- **Support for older adults and caregivers**
- **Reducing stigma around mental health**
- **Intimate partner violence**

Municipalities developed programs tailored to their communities, partnering with local schools, nonprofit organizations, health providers, libraries, and faith-based groups to deliver programming and connect residents with resources.



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Statewide Impact Snapshot

Initiative Highlights:

\$127,500

Total grant
funding awarded

47

Municipalities
applied for funding

11

Municipalities
funded across NJ

12

Months grant
implementation period

Residents reached:

Nearly 4,000 residents reached through programming statewide.

4,000

1,000

Youth & students
through school-based
programs & youth
workshops

300+

Older adults through
senior wellness
programming &
support groups

2,500+

Community members of all
ages, backgrounds, & abilities
through workshops, wellness
programs, screenings &
outreach events

Programs Delivered:

Municipalities organized a wide range of activities including:

70+

Workshops &
wellness sessions

10+

Large community events
such as mental health
fairs and awareness walks

20+

Youth-focused programs

Training & Prevention:

700

Students participated
in youth prevention
programs

480+

Residents trained in
mental health awareness,
peer support, & crisis
response strategies

25

Residents
screened for
depression &
anxiety

5

Residents referred
for additional
behavioral health
services



Partnerships that Strengthened Impact:

Programs were implemented through collaboration with 40+ community organizations, including:

- **Schools and school districts**
- **Health care and behavioral health providers**
- **Libraries and community centers**
- **Faith-based and non-profit organizations**
- **Municipal departments and first responders**

These partnerships helped expand outreach, bring specialized expertise into programming, and connect residents with resources.

Communities Leading the Work:

The following municipalities implemented programs through the grant:

Asbury Park
Cranbury
Elizabeth
Livingston
Paterson
Perth Amboy
Plainfield
West Orange
Wildwood Crest
Woodlynne



Each community developed programs that reflect local priorities and strengths, demonstrating how municipal leadership can drive meaningful improvements in community health.

Community Leadership in Action

Across the state, municipalities demonstrated how collaboration and local leadership can strengthen mental wellness.

Programs reflected the diversity of communities across New Jersey, engaging residents through workshops, community events, prevention programs, and wellness activities.

Several themes emerged across communities.

Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships were central to the success of these initiatives. Municipal leaders collaborated with schools, libraries, nonprofit organizations, health providers, and grassroots organizations to deliver programs and expand outreach.

Meeting Residents Where They Are

Programs were hosted in “community living rooms” such as libraries, senior centers, schools, and recreation facilities. These settings created welcoming environments where residents felt comfortable participating.

Engaging Diverse Communities

Municipalities designed programming for specific groups including youth, older adults, families, and underserved communities who may face barriers to accessing traditional mental health services.

Creative Approaches to Mental Health

Communities used innovative approaches to engage residents, including art workshops, storytelling, cooking programs, wellness classes, and community events that connected mental health with culture, creativity, and physical activity.

The community profiles that follow highlight these efforts and the impact they had on residents across New Jersey.



MWC Community Mental Health Initiatives



City of Asbury Park

Blue Bishops Living Well Initiative

Inspired by the Blue Zones™ movement, the Blue Bishops Living Well Initiative brought residents together through food-centered programming that connected culture, nutrition, and emotional well-being.

Programs included storytelling workshops, community meals, produce distribution, and autism-inclusive programming.

Community Impact:

- Engaged over **400 residents** in programming
- **Expanded inclusive programming** for families and youth with autism
- **Increased engagement** among New American residents and diverse community groups
- **Strengthened collaboration** among community organizations and local institutions
- **Increased awareness** of the relationship between nutrition, culture, and mental health

Community leaders also noted that the **initiative created new partnerships among organizations** that had not previously collaborated.

Story from the Community

The most positive and dramatic shift seen was that the Asbury Park Library sees itself now as a leader of food justice in the community. One staff member in his 40s shared he never ate fresh vegetables before this year and seeing it show up each week. Hearing about food and cooking stories gave him the courage to try new produce and learn from his community. This increased morale amongst the staff and brought the team closer together.

Community Partnerships

- [Asbury Park Public Library](#)
- [Jai At Play](#)
- [Project Write Now](#)
- [City of Asbury Park](#)
- [Fernbrook Farms](#)
- [KYDS](#)



I had never eaten fresh vegetables before participating in the program.

— Asbury Park Public Library staff member



*Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report***City of Elizabeth***Mental Health is for Everyone Initiative*

Elizabeth expanded access to mental health education through community workshops and group discussions. Workshops were facilitated by a licensed social worker and addressed topics such as grief, social media and mental health, substance use, bullying, and strategies for managing stress. Participants were also offered free access to online therapy through the [Talkspace](#) platform, expanding pathways to professional mental health support.

Community Impact:

- **Learned strategies** for managing stress, grief, and family challenges
- **Strengthened communication and emotional regulation skills**
- **Increased awareness of the impact of social media on mental health**
- **Connected with** supportive individuals and mental health resources in their community
- **50 residents received access to [Talkspace](#)** for online therapy

Community Partnerships

- [Elizabeth Board of Education](#)
- [Stephen Sampson Senior Center](#)
- [Jefferson Park Ministries](#)
- [Trinity Christian Center](#)



*Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report***City of Perth Amboy***Community Mental Health Awareness Initiative*

Perth Amboy engaged residents through workshops, creative activities, and community outreach focused on emotional well-being. Workshops incorporated interactive discussions, creative activities, and mindfulness-based exercises designed to help youth and families explore emotional well-being and develop practical coping strategies.

Community outreach events also helped connect residents with prevention resources and information about available mental health services.

Community Impact:

- **450+ residents reached through workshops and outreach events**
- **100+ youth engaged in discussions about emotional well-being and peer support**
- **Helped families explore strategies for communication and stress management**
- **Increased awareness of local mental health resources and prevention services**

Community outreach also helped expand the visibility of available resources. During the Devyn Sanchez Memorial Walk, **program leaders shared mental health and prevention information with more than 100 residents and families.**

Community Partnerships

- [Perth Amboy Municipal Alliance](#)
- [Perth Amboy Office of Recreation](#)
- [Perth Amboy Office on Aging](#)
- [Perth Amboy Police Department](#)
- [Middlesex College – Perth Amboy Center](#)
- [Bayside Family Success Center](#)



Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report

City of Plainfield

Embracing Mental Wellness as a Community

Plainfield supported residents in exploring mental wellness through creative expression, movement, and conversation. Programs included art workshops, aromatherapy candle-making workshops, hikes, pickleball gatherings, and mindfulness activities that encouraged residents to reflect on their mental wellness while connecting with others.

Youth engagement was also a key focus. A series of mental health workshops were included in the [Plainfield Summer Youth Employment Program](#) which reached 125 young people, helping participants build self-awareness and learn strategies for managing stress and emotional challenges.

Community Impact:

- **175+ residents participated in mental health conversations and activities**
- **125 youth reached through Summer Youth Employment Program**
- **Hosted 10 events linking creative expression, movement, and mental wellness**
- **85% of participants improve their understanding of stress management**

Community Partnerships

- [Good Soil Collective](#)
- [Grits & Grit](#)
- [Doses of Well](#)
- [Ellie Mental Health](#)
- [Grounds for Sculpture](#)
- [Plainfield Senior Citizens Service Center](#)
- [Plainfield Parks & Recreation](#) and [Plainfield Action Services](#)

“The leadership and mental health sessions helped me understand my value and how to manage stress without shutting down.”

— Youth participant, Plainfield Summer Youth Employment Program

An older adult participant in the Chlorophyll & Chill program shared that her terrarium now “reminds me every day to breathe and care for myself.”



Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report

Cranbury Township

Teen Mental Health First Aid for Sophomores

For the second year in a row, Cranbury implemented [Teen Mental Health First Aid](#) (MHFA) in collaboration with Penn Medicine. This provided all sophomores at Princeton High School high school students with tools to recognize signs of mental health and substance use challenges and learn how to support themselves and their peers.

Community Impact:

- **Delivered 14 classroom sessions using the Teen MHFA curriculum**
- **Trained 350+ students in Teen MHFA engaged sophomore students during their scheduled health classes**
- **Students reported a stronger understanding of recognizing signs of distress, comfort discussing mental health topics and seeking help from trusted**

Community Partnerships

- [Princeton High School](#)
- [Penn Medicine Medical Facility in Plainsboro](#)
- [Cranbury Municipal Alliance](#)
- Cranbury MWC leaders and local educators



*Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report***Livingston Township***Community Mental Health Education Initiative*

Livingston implemented a series of educational programs focused on youth mental health, substance use awareness, and community education.

A key component of the initiative was the [Arrive Alive DUI simulator](#), which provided hands-on education for the entire sophomore class at Livingston High School about the dangers of impaired and distracted driving and its broader impact on community health.

Programming also included [Adult MHFA training](#), a virtual presentation on technology and mental health, and the distribution of educational materials on stress management, grief, and substance use at community events.

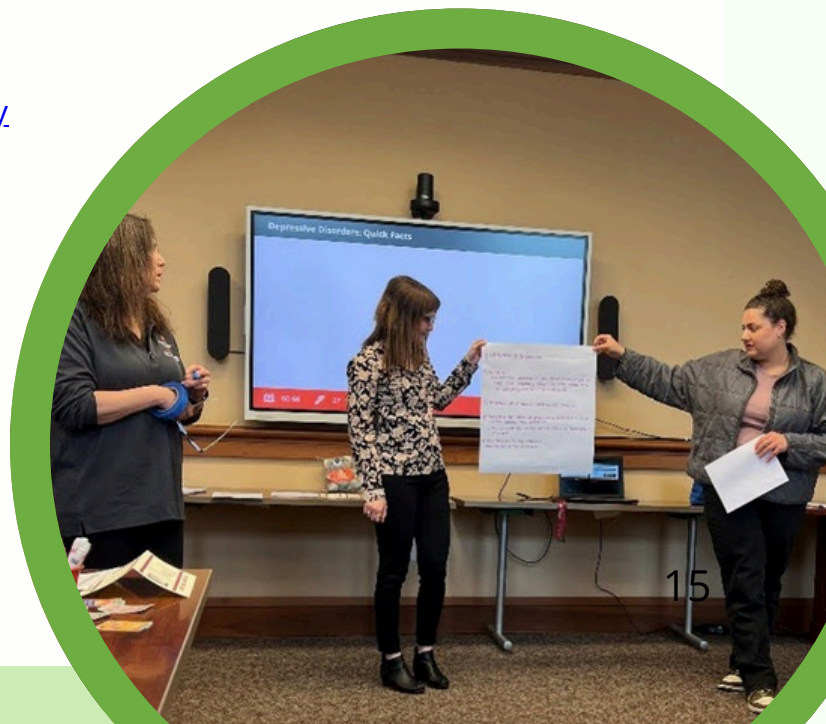
Community Impact:

- 507 high school sophomores participated in the Arrive Alive simulator
- 16 parents attended 2 mental health education workshops on Bullying
- Trained 8 adults through Mental Health First Aid
- Distributed over 200+ educational materials on mental health and substance use prevention at community events
- Provided 50+ homebound older adults crafts, greeting cards and check-in conversations to reduce social isolation

Survey results showed that **84.5% of participant students reported they would never drive distracted after completing the simulator experience**, and many participants identified education as the most effective way to prevent impaired driving.

Community Partnerships

- [Mental Health Association of New Jersey](#)
- [Jewish Family Service of MetroWest](#)
- [Arrive Alive Tour](#)
- [Livingston Police Department](#)
- [Livingston Recreation Department](#)



*Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report***City of Paterson***Community Mental Health Awareness Initiative*

Paterson brought residents together through large-scale community events and increased awareness of mental health resources, reduced stigma, and connected residents with support services.

Two major events anchored the initiative: a community Mental Health Fair and a Domestic Violence Awareness Walk.

Community Impact:

- **80+ residents attended the Mental Health Fair**
- **100+ participants joined the Domestic Violence Awareness Walk**
- **Connected residents with 20+ behavioral health and social services agencies, creating opportunities for screenings, referrals, and direct engagement with providers**
- **80+ older adults attended a senior wellness picnic**

Community Partnerships

- [Casa de Amor](#)
- 20+ behavioral health and social service agencies
- [City of Paterson Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Paterson Police Department](#) and [Department of Public Works](#)
- [The Dominican Republic Consulate](#) and other community organizations

“*During the Domestic Violence Awareness Walk, many participants shared that it was the first time they felt safe speaking about their experiences with mental health and domestic violence in a public community setting.*”

Events like these create space for residents to connect with one another, discuss their experiences, and support one another while strengthening awareness of mental health resources.



*Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report***Township of West Orange***Senior Mental Health Support Program*

West Orange reduced social isolation among older adults through support groups, mindfulness-based art activities, and facilitated discussions about aging and emotional well-being. Programming was delivered in partnership with the [Mental Health Association's Suicide Prevention Services](#), which provided evidence-based mental health education, facilitated discussions, and resources for older adults.

Programs included support group discussions, mindfulness-based art activities, book discussions, and interactive workshops that helped participants explore coping strategies and share experiences related to aging and emotional well-being.

Community Impact:

- **117 older adults participated in mental health and wellness programming**
- **Completed a 4-session series support group focused on aging, identity, and life transitions**
- **Completed a 4-session series based on mindfulness and art that encouraged creative expression and stress reduction**
- **Hosted 6 additional intergenerational opportunities for teens and older adults to connect through shared activities**

Community Partnerships

- [Mental Health Association \(MHA\)](#)
- [West Orange Department of Senior Services](#)
- [West Orange Public Library](#)
- [Toby Katz Community Center](#)
- [Rock Springs Golf Club](#)
- [Zufall Health](#)



These events particularly focused on older adults. An underlying theme that emerged from participants was comradery, feeling seen and not feeling alone.

Another resident shared that the Mindful Art sessions were “calming, creative, and encouraged me to think about my emotions.”

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Borough of Wildwood Crest

Community Wellness Workshops through Breathe for Change

Wildwood Crest's provided residents with accessible opportunities to explore mindfulness, movement, and stress reduction through weekly wellness programming grounded in the Breathe for Change curriculum.

Two primary programs formed the foundation of the initiative: a Wellness Workshop for adults and older adults and a Fit Kids program for children. The adult workshop combined gentle yoga, stretching, breathwork, meditation, sound therapy, and journaling. The youth program incorporated dance, aerobics, yoga, and mindfulness activities.

Community Impact:

- 257 residents participated in the adult Wellness Workshop
- 235 children participated in the Fit Kids program
- Residents reported improvements in relaxation and stress management
- Created opportunities for residents to build social connections while participating in healthy activities.

Community Partnerships

- [Crest Memorial School](#)
- [Wildwood Crest Recreation Department](#)
- Local churches and civic organizations
- Local medical offices
- Local veterans organizations



I had never done yoga prior to the Wellness Workshop. Arthritis has been a challenge for several years. I was encouraged to attend the program, and it has brought joy and friendships into my life. I look forward to Tuesday evening and learning techniques for movement, calm, and collaboration. A great teacher, and people like me, aging gracefully and joyful, is possible. Thank you for sharing this with us.

— Older Adult Participant

I am grateful for the opportunity to have a free activity for my daughter. I have four kids, and organized activities are not accessible for us because of the cost.

— Parent of youth participant



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Woodlynne

Community Integrated Substance Use and Mental Health Program

Woodlynne implemented a program addressing the intersection of mental health and substance use through education, screenings and prevention initiatives. Developed in partnership with Evercare Behavioral Health, the program incorporated evidence-based practices including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and Medication-Assisted Treatment to support residents struggling with substance use and mental health challenges.

Community Impact:

- Hosted 2 community mental health and substance use awareness workshops reaching 40 residents
- Conducted mental health screening events for 25 residents, with 5 individuals referred for further care
- Delivered 4 fitness and wellness sessions promoting stress reduction and improved mood
- Trained 280 community members through peer support and crisis response workshops
- Engaged 350 residents during the National Night Out mental health awareness event

Community Partnerships

- [Evercare Behavioral Health](#)
- [Woodlynne Fire Department](#)
- [Woodlynne School District](#)
- [CEO Group](#)
- [Staples](#)
- [Chick-fil-A](#)
- Woodlynne Borough leadership and staff



"This was the first time someone actually asked how I was feeling. I'm now getting the help I need."

— Participant in Woodlynne screening program

Another participant who received treatment after a screening shared:

"I've reconnected with my daughter. I'm working again. I never thought a free screening in the community would change my life, but it did."





**MWC
Community
Mental Health
Initiatives**



Community Mental Health Initiative 2024-2025 Impact Report

Looking Ahead

The Community Mental Health Initiative demonstrates the power of local leadership and community collaboration in addressing complex health challenges.

Across New Jersey, municipalities are developing innovative programs that expand mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and strengthen connections among residents. By working together with local organizations, schools, and healthcare providers, communities are building stronger support systems and expanding access to mental health resources.

The momentum of this work continues to grow. Through our ongoing partnership with the Walmart Foundation and the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, **nine communities were awarded \$85,000 in grants for the 2025–2026 cycle to continue advancing local mental health initiatives.**

Learn more about the 2025–2026 grant recipients in our [press release](#).

Learn more to Connect, to Participate, to Sponsor, or to Fund:

For more information about the MWC, or future participation opportunities:

- Katie Bisaha, Program Officer, kbisaha@njhcqi.org

For Sponsorship and Funding:

- Virginia Tesser, Senior Engagement Manager, vtesser@njhcqi.org.



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