



**Expanding the Public Health Workforce within the
Disability Networks Initiative**

Community Survey Report

August 1, 2023

Our mission is to provide support to persons with disabilities throughout their lifespan so they can achieve their highest level of independence in their community.

Leadership Message

On November 10, 2021, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) announced a \$150 million investment to expand the public health workforce within the aging and disability networks. The purpose and intent of the funds distributed through ACL was intended to “*Expand the Public Health Workforce within the Aging and Disability Networks.*” The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provided funding to recruit, hire, and train public health workers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future public health challenges.

As trusted members of their communities and providers of services that support older adults and people with disabilities in every community across the country, the aging and disability networks play an essential role in public health. Centers for Independent Living (CIL’s) are primary partners in the aging and disability networks providing a variety of services that directly support public health, such as health and wellness education and information, counseling, case management and assistance with accessing health care services. CIL’s offer experience and unmatched knowledge of the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, making CIL’s critical partners with the public health system by providing technical assistance and guidance on meeting the unique needs of people with disabilities.

As a result of this initiative, DAWNcil envisioned a plan to support the counties of Morris, Sussex and Warren by partnering with experts in the field of public health to foster a partnership that would not only identify barriers to the public health system but also to create a methodology for eliminating those barriers. The goal was to provide technical assistance regarding the needs of the disability community to the existing public health workforce and to build the capacity of those individuals entering the field of public health. These efforts were accomplished via several methodologies, including informational webinars, completion of a local needs assessment and creation of a resource library available to public health workers and service providers.

The results of these efforts are documented in the following pages. Without the support of several key partners, this initiative could not have been successful. I take this opportunity to thank Laura O’Reilly, R.N., MSM FTG Principal and Founding President, BE WELL! &THRIVE. Laura’s expertise and leadership guiding the project was critical in accomplishing the goals of this initiative. I also would like to thank Albania Martinez-Bojos, a master’s level public health student. Serving as an intern on this project, Alby will be able to bring this initiative with her as she enters the field of public health.

Carmela Slivinski

Executive Director
Dawn Center for Independent Living

Expanding the Public Health Workforce within the Disability Networks Initiative

DAWN Center for Independent Living (DAWNcil), a non-profit organization serving Morris, Sussex, and Warren Counties, NJ, is one of 12 Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) in the state of NJ chosen by the Administration on Community Living to participate in the Expanding the Public Health Workforce within the Aging and Disability Networks.

DAWNcil has enacted activities with human services and public health professionals to prevent, prepare for, and respond to future health challenges of individuals with disabilities. These activities provide a framework for public health to develop cultural competency skills to protect and promote the health of people with disabilities.

102 individuals with a disability or functional limitation or a care provider took part in a survey to identify barriers to public health activities.

This report aims to provide information that can inform local health departments of ways to meet the unique needs of older adults and people with disabilities in their communities.

Public Health Access for Disabled Persons: An Analysis

1. **Purpose:** Health disparities and secondary conditions can be the result of inaccessible healthcare and public health services, lack of knowledge among public health professionals about specific differences among people with disabilities, and limited knowledge about ways to provide accommodations. This survey aims to show barriers individuals with disabilities and functional limitations experience accessing public health services in the community. The results will be shared with public health departments in Morris, Sussex, and Warren Counties. We aim to foster collaboration with DAWNcil and local public health to develop an inclusive public health workforce.
2. **Methodology:** Human services and direct support professionals who attended DAWNcil's Public Health Inclusion webinars were invited to complete an online survey which was carried out by means of a questionnaire. The survey was shared within DAWNcil's network via email and via a direct link to the survey posted on DAWNcil's website. Other external networks such as The Supportive Housing Association, and colleagues and clients of disabilities services professionals took part.
3. **Demographics:** 102 responses were received for this survey. The demographic data of the survey respondents show out of 102 respondents, 50.98% identified themselves as a person with a disability or functional limitations, 48.04% identified themselves as not having a disability or functional limitation, and 47.52% identified themselves as a support person or caregiver to a person with a disability or functional limitation. The respondents provided answers on behalf of the person surveyed (person with a disability or functional limitation), and not on behalf of themselves as care providers. The people surveyed ranged in age from 16 to 85 years old. 25% were between 35 and 41 years, 19% were between 35 and 40 years, 18% were between 55 and 64 years, and 16% were between 65 and 74 years. 63% were female, 34% were male, and 3% declined to identify gender. 76% identified as White or Caucasian, 8% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 6% identified as African American or Black, 3% identified as Asian, and the remaining 7% identified as other or declined to identify. 46% of the people surveyed were single, 23% of respondents did not answer this question on behalf of an individual with a disability, and 15% identified as being separated or divorced. 58% live independently, 32% live with family or friends and 7% live in supportive housing. 54% live in Morris County, 16% live in Sussex County, 8% live in Warren County. The remaining 22% live in 8 other New Jersey Counties.
4. **Key findings:** Survey respondents who identified as having a disability reported having one of the following disabilities or limitations:
 - Hearing impaired/ hearing loss
 - Autism
 - I/DD
 - PTSD
 - Physical mobility limitations

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20% of the participants reported that they have barriers to transportation. 80% have reliable transportation. 49% know where the local or county health department is located. 42% of the participants attended public health events. 15% of those who attended public health events needed accommodation. 39% of those who needed accommodation had their needs met. 81% are signed up with Register Ready. 59% receive communications from the local health department.

Supporting data is on charts and graphs starting on page 7.

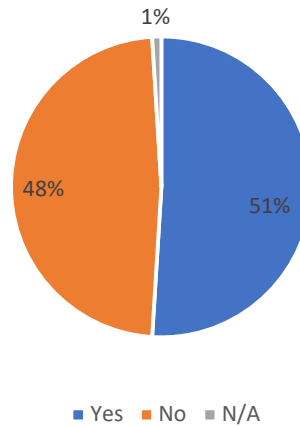
5. Anecdotes: A few respondents pointed out that many doctors' offices are not equipped to care for people with a disability or functional mobility: "Lack of accessibility at all levels: intake, building access, web/information access, accessible exam spaces and equipment, scales, etc." Additionally, other respondents highlighted the long wait and the challenges of scheduling appointments and finding providers who accept their medical plan: "Long wait for appointments. Difficulty getting to appointments and Limited doctors accept Medicaid." The health Center does not have a fragrance/scent free policy, such as the CDC".
6. Quotes and Anecdotes: Respondents said that "Many doctors' offices are not equipped to care for people with a disability or functional mobility"; " There is a lack of accessibility at all levels."; "There was no access to information, accessible exam spaces and equipment, scales, etc." Other respondents highlighted the long wait and the challenges of scheduling appointments and finding providers who accept their medical plan within healthcare systems.
7. Limitations: Most of the people who took part in the survey reside in Morris County, therefore, there is a larger sampling of barriers among Morris County residents. However, Morris County has 10 health departments serving 39 municipalities and samples were received from multiple municipalities. Participation in Sussex and Warren Counties was not as substantial, primarily due to the nature of the rural communities each with a county health department, making it more difficult to reach those community members. Feedback was not received from individuals that are visually impaired or blind. However, recommended accommodations will take into consideration the needs of individuals with vision loss. There was an electronic survey via Survey Monkey. No paper surveys or interviews were utilized in gathering the responses.
8. Conclusion: This survey found real barriers that individuals with disabilities and functional limitations experience with access to community wellness and public health services in the community. Many participants faced challenges due to limited knowledge about health departments. Furthermore, they faced communication barriers, and a lack of providers who understood their needs. The findings of this survey provide valuable insights into needed improvements on the local level that can be

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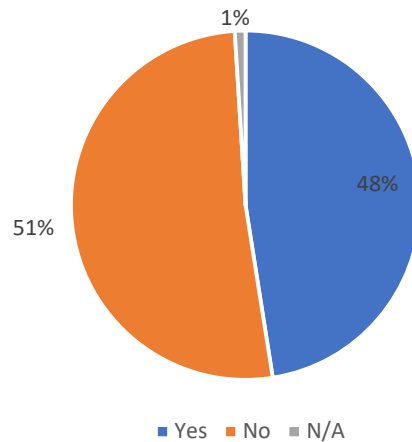
addressed on the local level. It is recommended to create inclusive approaches in how public health professionals and local health departments deliver services in the community and reach and communicate with individuals with disabilities within their community, promoting participation in Register Ready and signing up to receive local public health communications. DAWNcil will hold meetings with Public Health Academia and Health Officers in Morris, Sussex, and Warren Counties to share our findings, and direct them to DAWNcil resources for ongoing communications, and to foster a sustainable process for inclusion of people with disabilities and functional limitations in public health practice. Through this effort, the goal will be to create strategies to reach community members in rural communities who have a disability or functional limitation. This includes Public Health partnering with transportation services for those who need reliable transportation, and routine public health staff training to address the physical needs and built environment, and sensory, emotional, and behavioral, and communication needs.

Public Health Access for Disabled Persons: Charts and Graphs

Person who has a disability or functional limitations



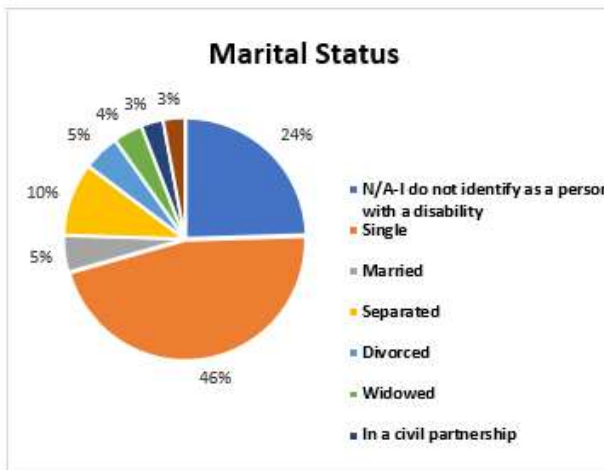
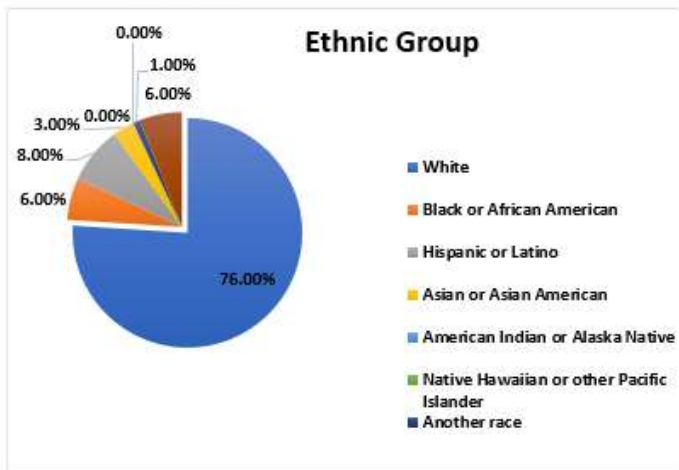
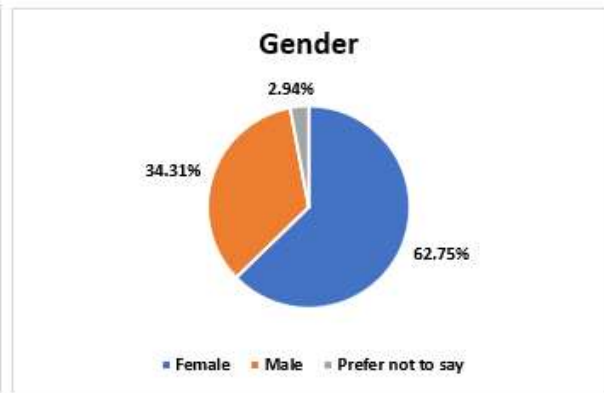
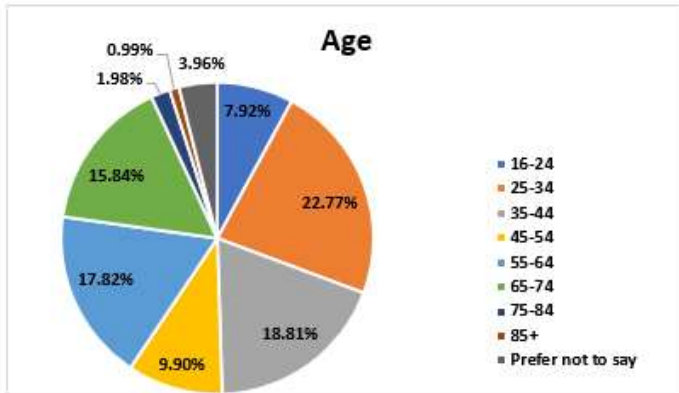
Support person/caregiver



In addition to what is revealed in the above charts, the survey data tell us the following:

- About 22.77% of the respondents were in the 25-34 age group.
- 62.75% were female.
- 76% identified themselves as being of white ethnicity.
- 46% are single.

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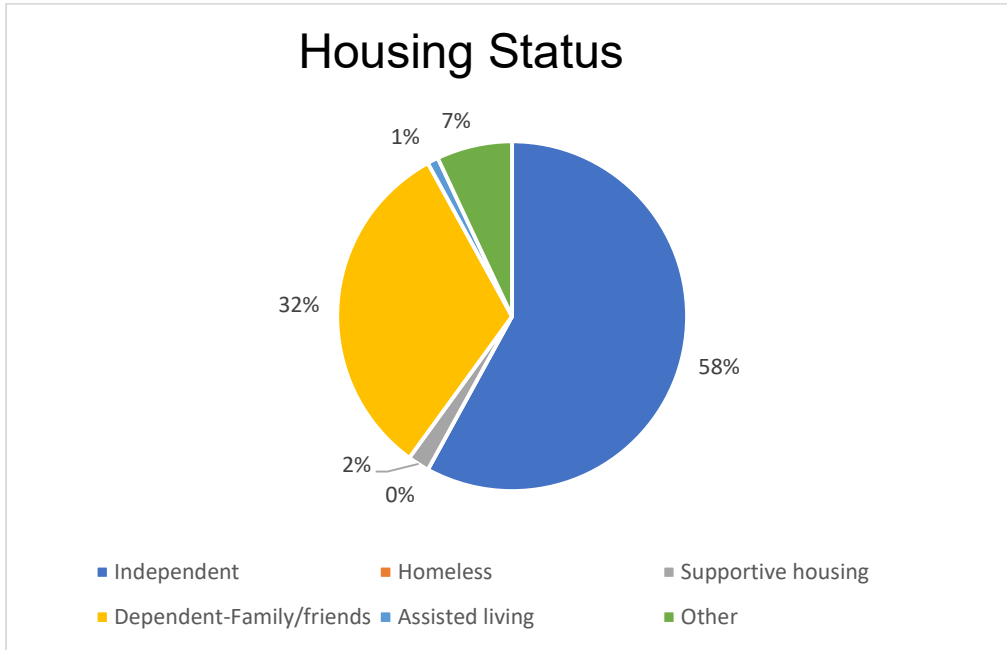


Disability/Functional Limitations Reported

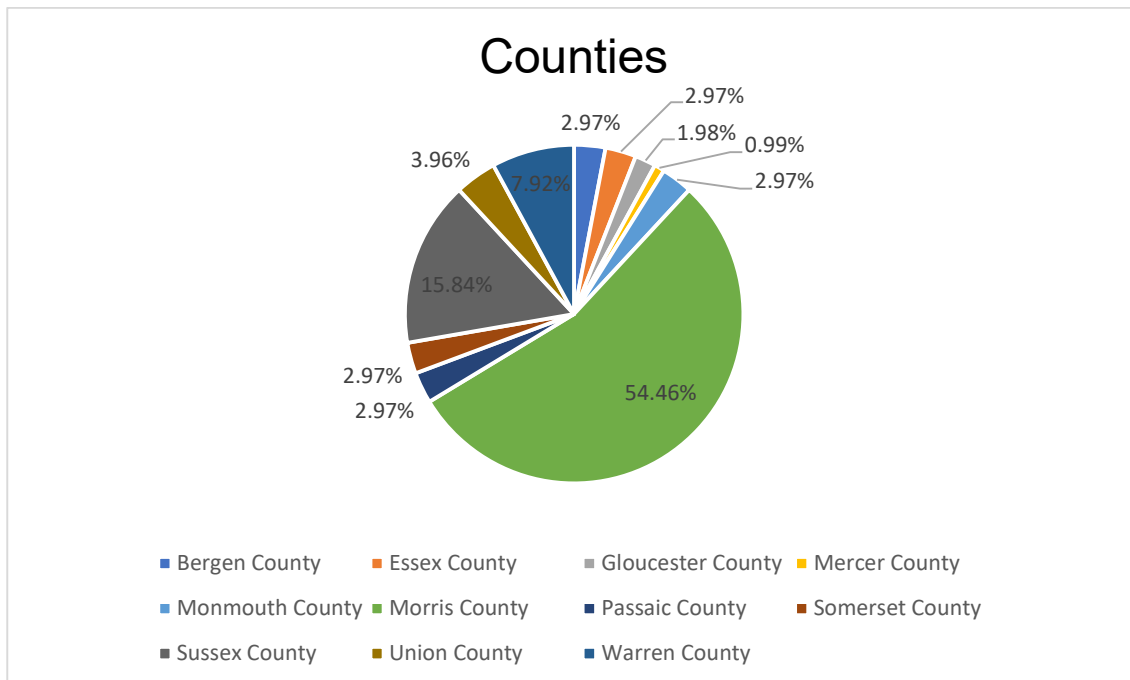
Autism
Hearing impaired/loss
Person with disability since birth
I/DD
Physical mobility limitations
ADHD
Parkinson's Disease
PTSD
Gait and balance disorder
Wheelchair User
Cerebral Palsy

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Current Housing Status



Where They Live: County



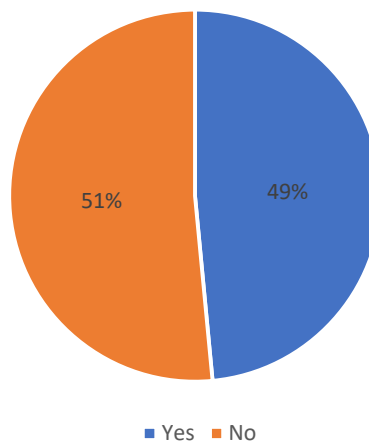
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Where They Live: Town

Alpha	Jefferson Township	Pompton Plains
Basking Ridge	Kinnelon	Randolph
Belvidere	Ledgewood	Ridgewood
Blairstown	Linden	Riverdale
Boonton Township	Long Hill	Sparta
Branchburg	Long Valley	Stanhope
Butler	Mendham	Stirling
Caldwell	Mine Hill	Stockholm
Cedar Knolls	Montclair	Succasunna
Denville	Montville	Tinton Falls
Dover	Morris Plains	Vernon
Flanders	Morristown	Wantage
Franklin	Netcong	Warren
Freehold	Newfoundland	West Windsor/Princeton
Hackensack	Newton	Westfield
Hackettstown	Oak Ridge	Whippany
Haledon	Parsippany	Woodbury
Hamburg	Paterson	Woodland Park
Irvington	Phillipsburg, NJ	Woolwich Township

Know The Location of The Local Health Department

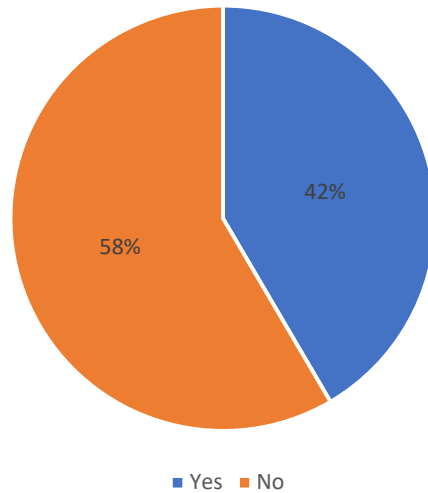
Know where the local office of public health is located



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Have Attended a Public Health Event in Their Community

Have attended a public health event

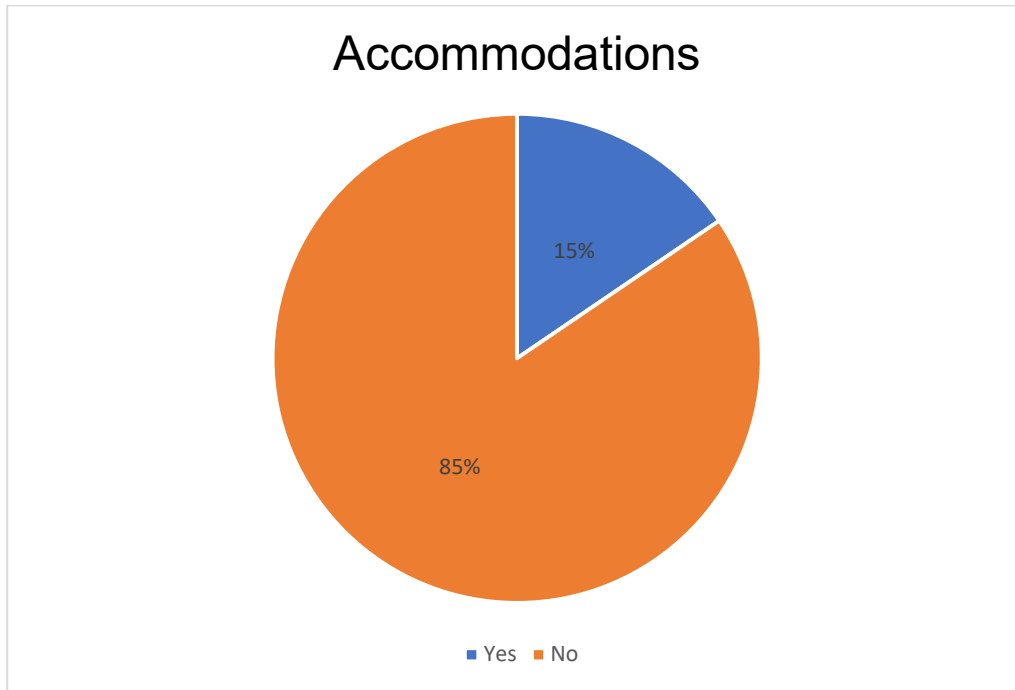


Public Health Events Attended

Blood drive
Blood pressure screening
COVID clinic
Events for veterans
Flu vaccine drive
Health & Wellness fairs
Nutrition Education fairs
Senior Expos

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Needed Accommodation for Public Health Event

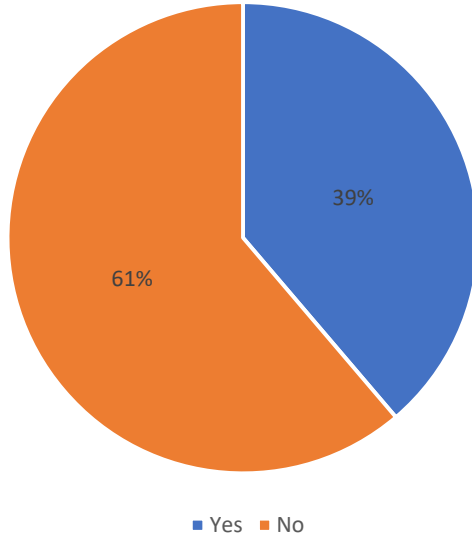


Type of Accommodations Requested

Assistance filling out application
Wheelchair accessible location
Help with driving to location
Emotional support
Fragrance/scent-free policy
Captions or sign language
Guide to navigating the event
Wheelchair

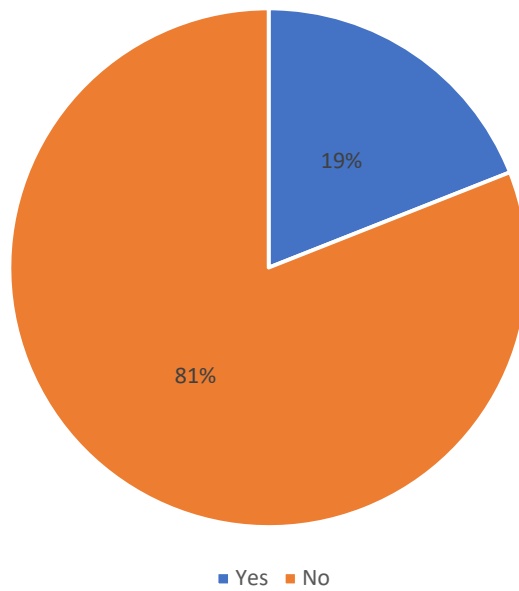
Accommodations Were Available

Accommodations available



Registered With NJ Register Ready

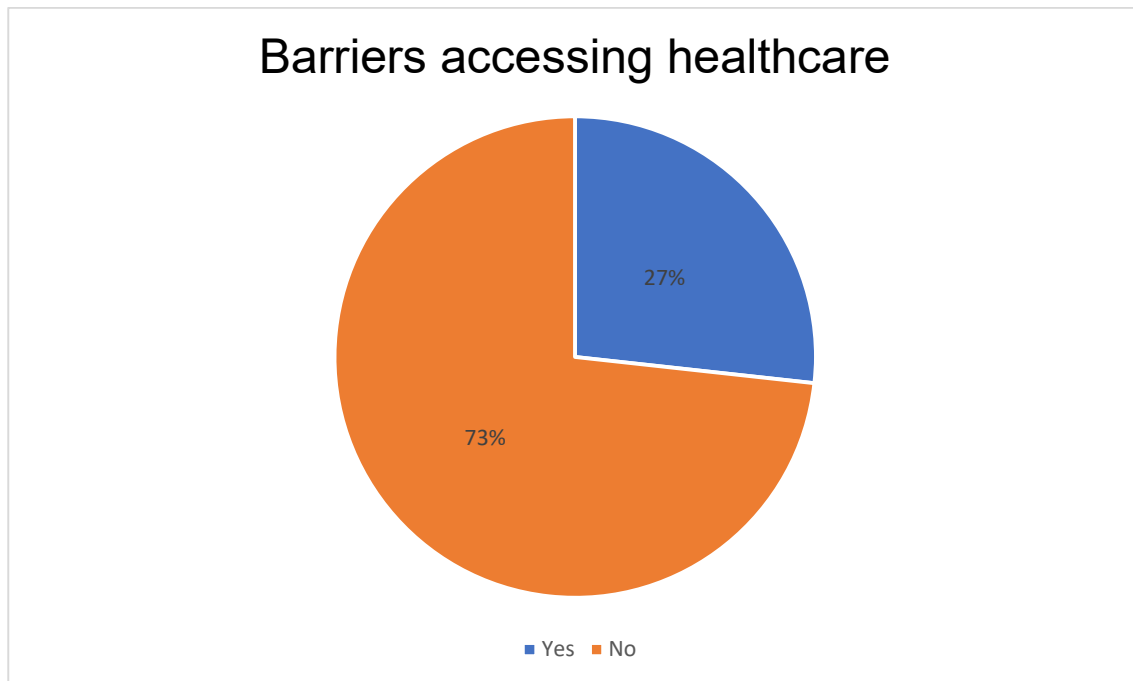
NJ Register Ready



Receives Alerts and Notifications from Municipality or Health Department



Have Barriers Accessing Healthcare



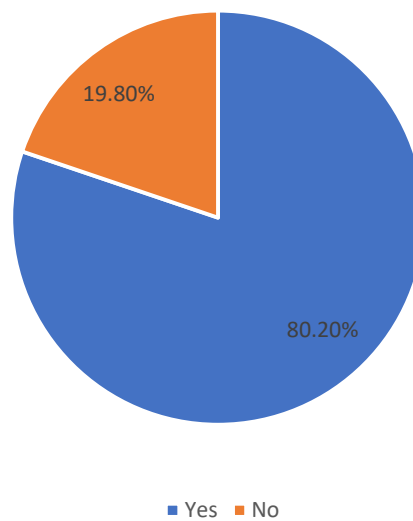
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Types of Barriers to Accessing Healthcare

Medicaid participation by providers
Finding local providers
Offices don't have a Hoyer lift
Wheelchair accessible door size
Number of providers with special needs experience is limited
PTSD
Readily available and affordable transportation
Lack of health centers with no fragrance/scent-free policy
Communication
Need VA care but do not know where to start
Lack of movement disorder specialists
Terrified of driving
Financial barriers

Have Reliable Transportation

Reliable transportation?



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Type of Transportation Used

Family driver
Own car
Public transportation
Rideshare/access link/accessible van
Uber
Walk

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For more information, please contact Carmela Slivinski, Executive Director at
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