RURAL PULSE™ SNAPSHOT: WESTCENTRAL MINNESOTA

Rural Pulse™ is a research study commissioned by the Grand Rapids-based Blandin Foundation to gain a real-time snapshot of the concerns, perceptions and priorities of rural Minnesota residents. This initiative was last conducted in 2016 and has served to identify trends within significant, complex subject areas including the economy, education, employment and quality of life.

In completing this comprehensive research study, 1,068 telephone interviews were conducted with rural Minnesotans. The full report can be found at www.RuralPulse.org. To provide a localized perspective, study findings for West Central Minnesota are included in the following pages and contrasted with overall rural Minnesota responses. Intended to serve as a regional snapshot against full study observations, data reflects a statistical reliability of +/- 9.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Also, please note that results within regional reports do not include communities of 35,000+; these cities are grouped within metro Minnesota findings – see full report for more information.
Collaboration and Contribution
More than four in five residents in West Central Minnesota felt that they can make a positive impact on their local community, an upswing from 2016 study findings. Four in five also believed their community works together effectively.

Community Performance
West Central residents were most likely to agree that their community performed well in crime control, caring for the elderly, providing good infrastructure, adequate healthcare and accessible transportation for all. They were less likely to agree that their community did well at addressing mental health, availability of childcare, and opioids and drug abuse.

Agree Community is Performing Well
Somewhat or strongly agree

- Controlling crime: 88%
- Adequate elder care: 87%
- Good roads and other infrastructure: 87%
- Adequate healthcare services: 83%
- Accessible public transportation for all: 80%
- Lifelong learning opportunities: 78%
- Making sure that every student succeeds: 77%
- Diverse cultural opportunities and the arts: 77%
- Environmental stewardship: 76%
- Improving access to the internet: 71%
- Addressing barriers for inclusion: 70%
- Affordable housing for all residents: 68%
- Mental health issues: 64%
- Availability of childcare: 60%
- Addressing opioids and drug abuse: 58%
West Central residents’ felt their community has significantly improved since 2016 in providing good roads and infrastructure; offering public transportation for all, including the disabled; and cultural/arts opportunities.

When comparing issue significance and satisfaction, West Central Minnesotans believed that their communities are underperforming in certain areas, including addressing drug abuse, jobs and economic development, among others.

Rural Voice
About half of residents in West Central Minnesota said that the needs of rural communities are important to policymakers, a downturn from 2016 study findings. A significant percentage still did not feel rural voice is being heard.

**Issue Importance vs. Community Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Importance Mean</th>
<th>Performance Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing opioids and drug abuse</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunities</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health issues</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of childcare</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural Voice

Believe the Needs of Rural Communities are as Important to Legislators, Policymakers as Metropolitan Areas
Critical Issues
The most critical issues to address in the West Central region were said to be jobs, healthcare, drug abuse and workforce availability.

Most Critical Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West Central</th>
<th>Overall Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jobs</td>
<td>1. Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (tie) Opioids and drug abuse, Healthcare</td>
<td>2. Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Workforce availability</td>
<td>3. Opioids and drug abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (tie) Economic development, Elder care, Affordable housing</td>
<td>4. Economic development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Closing student achievement gaps</td>
<td>5. Mental health issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economic Concerns Linger, But Show Improvement
Rural Minnesotans continue to experience an evolving economy. One-quarter within the region felt that the local economy has improved within the past year, a decrease in sentiment since 2013.

Sixty percent said that there are sufficient living-wage jobs. Seventy-three percent of West Central region residents believed that communities maintain/grow job opportunities. Sixty-four percent felt economic development is active, but more could be done. A similar percent (63%) believed there is adequate workforce available for local businesses.

Adequate Number of Jobs that Pay Household-Supporting Wages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition of Community's Economy Has Improved, Compared to a Year Ago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat or much better now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community Successfully Maintains and Grows Job Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somewhat or strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of the Economy
One in four within the region said that their household income increased over the past year, a decline from 2016 study findings; job losses in the West Central region have declined since 2016 as well.

Migration
Ten percent of West Central residents said that they do not expect to live in their same community five years from now; 12 percent have considered moving to a metropolitan area – a significant decrease from 2016 study findings. Many who had considered relocation said that the search for job opportunities and quality of life were motivating factors.
Leadership

Nearly three in five West Central residents said that they have served in a leadership capacity, a significant increase from 2016 study findings. Of those who had not, more than half said that they would consider serving, if asked – a significant increase from 2016 findings.

![Bar chart showing increase in leadership roles](chart1)

Inclusion

While more than a third of residents in West Central Minnesota said that they have at least some close friends of a different race or culture, the percentage is less than for rural Minnesotans at large.

West Central residents most feel the groups that experience bias, discrimination or harassment within their community include transgender individuals, those with drug or mental health issues, gays and lesbians, recent immigrants and Native Americans.

![Bar chart showing increase in diverse friends](chart2)

Groups Most Believed to Experience Bias, Discrimination or Harassment Within Their Community

*Multiple Responses Allowed*

1. Transgender people
2. Those with drug or mental health issues
3. Gays and lesbians
4. Recent immigrants
5. Native Americans / American Indians
Nine in 10 residents of West Central Minnesota believed people in their community are able to stand up to hatred and discrimination.

**Optimism Exists**
Overall, some seven in 10 West Central region residents were optimistic about their community’s future.