Catron County Health Profile (2022)

Catron County, New Mexico is the largest county in New Mexico based on land mass, and the third smallest county in New Mexico based on population. The population of the county is aging, and there are many areas in which the healthcare system is lacking within this county. The main industry being agricultural lends the community to hardships, and the industry is starting to wane as a whole. Additionally, throughout researching, the underlying theme has been that this is a tight knit community that bands together every day to have a fruitful community life and help those in need within it, in ways not often seen in less rural areas.

"The population of Catron County, New Mexico in 2021 was 3,731, 0.5% down from the 3,748 who lived there in 2010. For comparison, the US population grew 7.3% and New Mexico's population grew 2.5% during that period" (USAfacts, Catron County). While the population of both the United States as a whole, and New Mexico as a state has increased significantly from 2010-2021, the population within Catron County has actually decreased about .5%. Within this community, the population is rapidly aging, compared to the rest of the United States. Of that population, 42.5% are above the age of 65(Census Profile, Census Reporter). Nationally, the average age is around 38 years old. Additionally, 24.7% of the population in Catron County is below the poverty line, which is far higher than New Mexico's percentage at 18.6%, and nearly double compared to the national average of 12.8% (Census Profile, Census Reporter). When considering the growth of the county versus the average age of the community, it is important to evaluate the overall health and healthcare of the area.

Catron county is unique, in that because of its progressively aging community, it does not face the same problems as many other rural communities in regards to the health of its young people. For example, teen pregnancy rates are very low when compared to both state and

national averages. The teen birth rate in Catron County is 4.9/1k, whereas the national average is 20.3 and the New Mexico rate is 21.9 (USNews). However, the rate of "deaths of despair" are exponentially higher in Catron County, at a rate of 94.6/100k, whereas the national rate is 47.5 and the rate for New Mexico is 78.7 (USNews). When looking at prevalence of hospital admissions, heart disease, and cancer, Catron County actually has below the national rate, or very near the normal rate of occurrence, as seen in Appendix A, figure 1.1. It is clear that where the health disparity lies in the county is with lacking access to healthcare.

In conducting research for a county profile, members of the community were asked to voice their experience with healthcare in Catron County. A local community member explained her experience, "I have lived in Catron County full time since 2011. In 2014 I started working for [redacted for privacy] and thus wanted to use the local health clinic to monitor my diabetes. I was told they wouldn't take me and I would have to find someone else. I was already on medication, but my doctor is in Texas, and I returned every 6 months to take care of it" (M.A. personal communication, Oct. 1, 2022). A local volunteer paramedic described the lack of care for the aging community, "There is a lack of hospice care and home health, especially in the northern part of the county. Some people have had phone visits for hospice, but from what I've seen they're not truly being observed. Pain is not being managed, and sometimes the family is not able to keep them clean. Every so often there will be a hospice nurse available that comes up once or twice a week, but that's rare" (M. Bartasevich, personal communication, Oct. 2, 2022). Through these interviews and many others' input, it is clear to see that lack of access to care, especially in an aging community is an ongoing, and possibly growing county crisis.

The industry in Catron County is largely agricultural, followed closely by government, and then education. Agriculture employs 19.3% of the population over 16, government employs

16.8%, and education employs 14% (Statistical Atlas). In Appendix A, figure 1.2 you can compare the industry in Catron County when compared to the state population. When looking at the agriculture heavy industry it is important to look at how that can relate to the overall health of a community. Physical labor can be correlated to better overall health when considering the amount of physical prowess required to maintain a ranch or farm. In a community with an overall increasing median age, poor access to healthcare, and lack of access to fresh foods and produce from a store, it is unique that the overall risk of heart disease is very low when compared to the rest of the country, and it could be linked to the prominent industry directly.

When considering other important community factors, it is important to shine light on the lack of access to fresh groceries. Most of the county is serviced by glorified convenience stores with very few fresh food options, most of which at a much higher cost than would be expected at a larger grocery store. Most people have at least a 50 mile commute to the closest full grocery store, with an even longer commute necessary to get to a big box store, such as Walmart. Examples of local convenience stores can be seen in Appendix B. It is important to note that because of the local ranching industry, many locals purchase meat in bulk, locally, and there is a farmers market available in the summer months. However, when looking at the age of the community, it is important to note that longer commutes to stores will become increasingly more difficult for many, and there is no system in place to aid in feeding the elderly in their own homes.

Another important factor to consider when profiling Catron County is the closeness of the community and the lack of crime. When interviewing someone who visits their family here often, the safe feeling of the community was an underlying theme. “I visit my family out this way and in my opinion I love the way that y'all's community watches out for each other.

Someone's broke down, y'all pull over even if you know you can't help. In any other county in this state I don't pull over, ever, but once I hit Magdalena I have no issue pulling over to see if I can help in some small way. When I'm out this way, I don't worry one bit about my children" (D.Morgan, personal interview, Oct. 1, 2022). When looking at the occurrence of domestic violence in Catron County, the numbers are very low compared to most of the rest of the state, with the occurrence in 2019 being 5 incidents with a population of 3578 (Caponera, 2019, pg.85). Aside from the statistical support for the lower than average rates of violent crime, there were many mentions from county members that there is a strong sense of community here, with most people helping when they can, and there seems to be a general underlying feeling of safety and community health.

When evaluating a MAPP (Mobilization for Action through Planning and Partnership) intervention for Catron County, the closeness of the community will be a benefit in aiding in finding a team and participants (Inungu and Minelli 2020). The most important issue to address is the aging community members' lack of access to healthcare. To assist this community it would be pertinent to increase the number of available health care and emergency healthcare professionals. In collecting a team, it would be important to include active community healthcare professionals, individuals needing care, and educators. Because of the lack of population influx of professionals into Catron County the suggested intervention would be to pull from the communities young people and create a system in which obtaining healthcare licensure would be possible for many of them. At many schools in communities with a local college EMT program, highschool students can be trained as EMTs for highschool class credit, and upon highschool graduation, or turning 18, students are licensed EMTs. This program is also available for youth seeking their CNA certification. Because of the severe need for EMTs and home health aides, it

will be pertinent to pull from the county's existing young population to meet this need. In New Mexico, student residents can already attend college free, so the cost to the community would be minimal, being transportation for students to the nearest community college, or the cost of bringing that class teacher to the community. The outcome of this intervention in this rural community could nearly solve the community healthcare crisis, as well as provide schooling and paid positions to young county members upon graduation from highschool, which would aid in also keeping young people in the community long term, and lowering the average age of the county to a more sustainable number.

Appendix A

Health Conditions

SCORE
N/A

METRIC	COUNTY	U.S.	PEER GROUP	STATE
Cancer Incidence Rate /100k	242.9	457.7	N/A	373.2
Heart Disease Prevalence	6.2%	6.1%	N/A	5.4%
Preventable Hospital Admissions Among Medicare Beneficiaries /100k	1,556	3,916	N/A	2,725

Figure 1.1 comparing the health of Catron county to the US and the State (USNews)

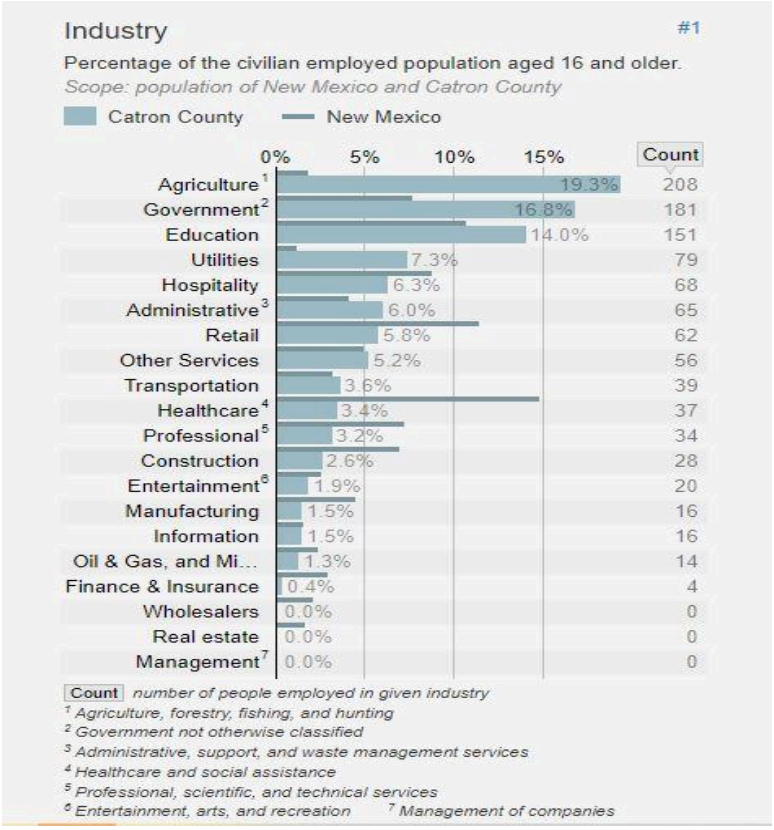

Fig. 1.2 Comparing Catron County industry to the rest of New Mexico (Statistical Analysis)

Appendix B

Examples of the Ruralness of Catron County

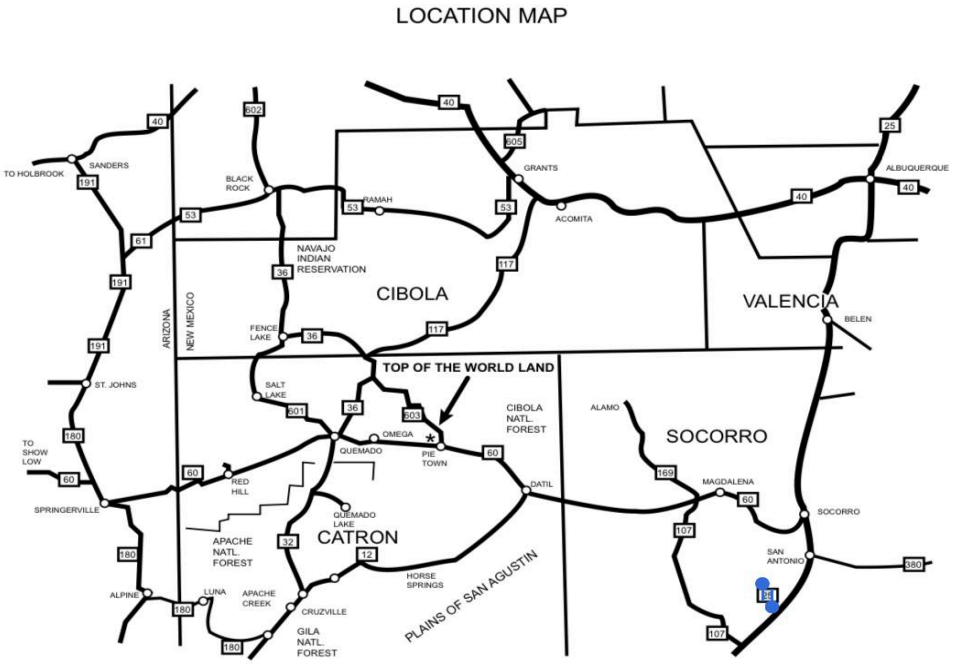

Fig. 2.1 Map of Catron and Surrounding Counties

Fig. 2.2 Apache Creek Store, located at the intersection of Highway 32 and Highway 12

Fig. 2.3 Largo Motel, Downtown Quemado

Fig. 2.4 General Store and Bar, Downtown Reserve, NM (Catron County Seat)

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