



arrowleaf[®]

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Arrowleaf Alexander/Pulaski County ROSC Council Needs Assessment July 2023

History and Demographics

Alexander and Pulaski counties form the southernmost tip of Illinois, in a region colloquially known as “Little Egypt.” The region is named such because of the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and noted parallels between the region and the Nile river delta in Egypt. The communities that arose in this area were, at one point, some of the most prosperous in the state. However, economic prosperity has long since vanished due to chronic and continued racial unrest, disenfranchisement of the people, and disinvestment in these communities. Resultantly, those who live in Alexander and Pulaski counties today experience significant, oppressive socio-economic barriers.

	Alexander	Pulaski	Illinois
Current Population (Estimate V2022)	4858	4991	12582032
Population Change 2010 - 2020	-36%	-16%	-0.14%
White	65.2%	65.7%	76.3%
Black	30.8%	29.5%	14.7%
Hispanic or Latinx	2.2%	2.8%	18%
Two or More Races	3%	3.3%	2.2%
Persons age ≥65 years	24.2%	23.8%	16.6%
Persons with a disability age <65 years (2017 - 2021)	16.6%	16.6%	7.5%
Source: United States Census Bureau QuickFacts (2022)			

Consistent with state-wide trends, the overall population for both counties has decreased in recent years, but at an accelerated rate. Between 2010 and 2020, the population of Alexander and Pulaski counties decreased by 36% (8238 to 5240) and 16% (6161 to 5193), respectively



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

(Census QuickFacts, 2022). The demographics of Alexander and Pulaski counties are unique, especially when compared to surrounding counties. Across both Alexander and Pulaski, the population is 65% White, 30% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 3% Multiracial (Census QuickFacts, 2022). For comparison, the five counties surrounding Alexander and Pulaski—Hardin, Pope, Johnson, Massac, and Union—are much less racially diverse; these five counties are $\geq 90\%$ White and $< 10\%$ Black (Census QuickFacts, 2022). In addition to racial diversity, Alexander and Pulaski are home to a comparatively large number of senior citizens. The state average for individuals who are ≥ 65 years old is 16.6%, but in Alexander and Pulaski, this percentage is over seven points higher, at 24% (Census QuickFacts, 2022).

	Alexander	Pulaski	Illinois
Civilian Labor Force (Population age ≥ 16 , 2017 - 2021)	43.3%	43.3%	65.1%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (persons age ≥ 25 years, 2017 - 2021)	12.3%	14.7%	36.2%
Persons in Poverty	21.8%	22.3%	12.1%
Median Household Income (in 2021 dollars, 2017 - 2021)	\$39,871	\$40,197	\$72,563
Source: United States Census Bureau QuickFacts (2022)			

Census data from 2017 to 2021 showed that only 43% of individuals in Pulaski and Alexander are counted in the civilian labor force, which is twenty-two percentage points lower than the state average, 65% (Census QuickFacts, 2022). An often identified barrier to quality employment is lack of higher education attainment. This is especially true in Alexander and Pulaski counties where only 12% and 15%, respectively, of individuals 25 years or older have attained a Bachelor's degree; the state average is 36% (Census QuickFacts, 2022). In addition to lower-than-state-average labor force and Bachelor's degree attainment, there are limited economic opportunities and, subsequently, elevated poverty levels in Alexander and Pulaski. The poverty rate across Alexander and Pulaski is 22%, which is nearly double the 12% state average (Census QuickFacts, 2022). Economic disparity is also apparent when reviewing median household income data. The median household income for Alexander and Pulaski was \$39,871 and \$40,197, respectively, which is over \$30,000 less than the state average \$72,563 (Census QuickFacts, 2022).

Health Outcomes and Factors



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Previously mentioned socio-economic barriers are accompanied with impacts to health and wellness of individuals in Alexander and Pulaski, as well as communities therein. Individual health behaviors, or behavioral health factors, of individuals in Alexander and Pulaski cannot be ignored. However, there are many macroscopic barriers that coincide with, and exacerbate, poor health outcomes in these counties.

Out of all 102 counties in the state of Illinois, Alexander and Pulaski counties were ranked last–102 and 101–for overall health outcomes and factors (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023). Overall measures of health outcomes and health factors consider length and quality of life, as well as health behaviors, access to healthcare resources, socio-economic factors, environment, and other such data. Life expectancy and premature death—which is defined as years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population—are significantly worse than the state average for these figures. Likewise, some of the contributing health factors, listed in the table below, reflect behavioral and systemic challenges that individuals in Alexander and Pulaski must overcome.

	Alexander	Pulaski	Illinois
Overall Health Outcomes & Factors Rank (Out of 102 counties in IL)	102	101	NA
Premature Death (Years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population; 2018 - 2020)	15,500	10,700	7100
Life Expectancy (2018 - 2020)	70.5	74	78.6
Adult Smoking (2020)	25%	23%	13%
Excessive Drinking (2020)	15%	15%	15%
Adult Obesity (2020)	44%	43%	13%
Limited Access to Healthy Foods (2019)	28%	16%	5%
Food Insecurity (2020)	17%	15%	8%
Population to Primary Care Physicians (ratio)	5500 : 1	No Data	1230 : 1
Population to Mental Health Providers (ratio)	180 : 1	2530 : 1	340 : 1



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps: [Alexander](#) & [Pulaski](#) (2023)

Adult smoking is more prevalent in Alexander (25%) and Pulaski (23%) counties, compared to 13% state average (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023). In addition to higher prevalence of adult smoking, obesity rates are also elevated. Rates in Alexander and Pulaski counties are 44% and 43% respectively, which is nearly triple the state average obesity rate, 13% (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023). Compounding smoking prevalence and obesity rates in Alexander and Pulaski are limited access to healthy foods and food insecurity. Across Illinois, 5% of people experience limited access to healthy foods and 8% experience food insecurity. However, in Alexander and Pulaski, 28% and 16% percent of respective populations do not have adequate access to healthy foods, as well as 17% and 15% are food insecure (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023). Harmful behavioral and environmental factors are further exacerbated by limited healthcare services and availability. For Alexander county, there are 5500 patients per primary care physician; no data could be obtained for Pulaski. Mental health providers (MHPs) are comparatively more accessible. In Alexander county, MHPs are more accessible (180:1) than state average ([340:1]; County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023). However, MHP access in Pulaski county (2530:1) is much more restricted (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2023).

Youth Population Data

There are four school districts across Alexander and Pulaski counties. The following table lists these school districts within their respective counties, and provides state average data for comparison.

	Alexander Co.		Pulaski Co.		Illinois
	Cairo USD 1	Egyptian CUSD 5	Century CUSD 100	Meridian CUSD 101	
Total Enrollment	271	342	347	429	NA
Graduation Rate	80%	89.5%	97%	66%	87.3%
Mobility (Transfer in/out)	19%	14.1%	12%	12%	7.60%
Truant Students	56%	11.7%	12%	54%	22.10%
Low-income	100%	100.0%	59%	97%	46.50%

Source: ISBE Illinois Report Card (2023)



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Across all school districts in Alexander and Pulaski, the average graduation rate is 83% (ISBE Illinois Report Card, 2023). However, it is worth noting that one school district from each county reported lower graduation rates, compared to districts in the same county, as well as the state average. Likewise, the data suggests an inverse relationship between graduation rates and percent of chronically truant students. Districts with higher than state average graduation rates also reported lower than state average truancy. The reverse is true for districts reporting lower than state average graduation rates; in these districts, truancy rates are more than double, compared to the state average (ISBE Illinois Report Card, 2023). Across all school districts in Alexander and Pulaski, there is a higher percentage of low-income students (89%) and higher student transfer in/out rates (14%), or student mobility, compared to the state averages (ISBE Illinois Report Card, 2023).

Youth within these school districts completed the Illinois Youth Survey (IYS; 2022). The following tables provide an overview of youth responses to substance use across 30 day and one year time periods.

Past 30-day Use (8th - 12th graders)	Alexander			Pulaski		
	8th	10th	12th	8th	10th	12th
Alcohol	8%	7%	24%	No Data	11%	26%
Binge Drinking	4%	7%	5%	No Data	2%	13%
Tobacco/Vaping	11%	24%	9%	No Data	30%	31%
Marijuana	11%	15%	5%	No Data	7%	14%
Rx Drugs (not prescribed)	10%	2%	5%	No Data	0%	0%
Used in Past Year (8th - 12th graders)	Alexander			Pulaski		
	8th	10th	12th	8th	10th	12th
Common Substances and/or Vaping	29%	34%	27%	No Data	30%	33%
Alcohol	22%	27%	27%	No Data	23%	33%



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Marijuana	19%	21%	14%	No Data	16%	24%
E-cigarettes/Vaping	14%	20%	14%	No Data	29%	17%
Illicit Drugs (Excluding Marijuana)	4%	2%	0%	No Data	2%	9%
Any Rx Drugs to Get High	4%	2%	0%	No Data	0%	4%
Rx Drugs (not prescribed)	18%	3%	6%	No Data	3%	3%
Illinois Youth Survey 2022 County Report: Alexander & Pulaski						

According to IYS (2022) responses, the most commonly used substances by 8th through 12th grade youth were alcohol, marijuana, and vaping products. It is important to note that there was no data from 8th grade students in Pulaski county. This presents a challenge in analyzing long-term substance use trends among youth in these counties. Prescription drug use (not prescribed) among 8th grade youth in Alexander county was 18%, which is reportedly higher than e-cigarette/vaping use within this age group (IYS: Alexander County, 2022). Without comparison data from Pulaski, it is impossible to determine if this is a trend of higher prescription drug use among younger students in Alexander and Pulaski, or if this is an outlier in the data.

Adult Population Data

Similar to youth population data, there is a noted lack of adult drug-use data reported from Pulaski County. Within the two most recent versions of Crime in Illinois (CII): Annual Uniform Crime Report (2020, 2021), Pulaski county was non-compliant, or failed to report crime offense rates and arrest rates across all applicable categories, including drug crime arrests. Consequently, the following table includes drug crime arrest data and percent change over a one year period for Alexander County, only.

	Alexander		Pulaski
	2021 Summary	% Change 2020 - 2021	
Total Drug Arrests	25	+79%	



arrowleaf®

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Rate per 100,000	430.4	+79%	Non-compliant/ Failure to report
Cannabis Control Act	2	-33%	
Controlled Substances Act	6	+200%	
Hypodermic Syringes/Needle Act	0	+0%	
Drug Paraphernalia Act	0	-100%	
Methamphetamine Act	17	+113%	
Source: Crime in Illinois Annual Uniform Crime Report: 2020 & 2021			

In Alexander county, total drug crime arrests and drug crime arrests per capita increased by 79%, between 2020 and 2021 (CII, 2020, 2021). Additionally, drug crime arrests related to methamphetamine doubled, while arrests related to controlled substances tripled (CII, 2020, 2021).

The Illinois Prescription Monitoring Program (ILPMP) provides greater insight on controlled substance use in Alexander and Pulaski counties. It does so by tracking data such as dispensing of controlled substances, number of patients, number of prescriptions, and other related information (ILPMP, 2023). The following table provides an overview of buprenorphine patient and prescription data in these counties.

	Alexander	Pulaski
Buprenorphine Pts/County	20	29
Pts/Capita	358.7	546.4
Buprenorphine Rx/County	233	318
Rx/Capita	4179	5992
>90MME on Avg. Day (2021) Patients per Capita	53.8	31.4



arrowleaf[®]

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Source: ILPMP Buprenorphine Dashboard (2020); ILPMP Above 90MME Dashboard (2021)

According to the most recent data, buprenorphine prescriptions, as well as overall number of patients, are slightly higher in Pulaski, as compared to Alexander county (ILPMP: Buprenorphine Dashboard, 2020). However, higher doses, or those which exceed 90 morphine milligram equivalent, are more commonly prescribed in Alexander county (ILPMP: Above 90MME Dashboard, 2021).

Resources and Support

There are few substance use resources in Alexander and Pulaski counties. This mostly includes outpatient treatment services provided by Arrowleaf and Community Health and Emergency Services (CHESI), which has clinics in both Alexander and Pulaski. Likewise, Arrowleaf is spearheading prevention efforts through ROSC and SUPS grant programming. Despite the efforts of these organizations, substance use resources and support are woefully lacking.

Gaps Across the Continuum

In Alexander and Pulaski counties, all areas of the continuum of care—health promotion, prevention, intervention/harm reduction, treatment, and recovery—are impacted by negative, macro-level factors such as limited economic opportunity and limited, or nonexistent, infrastructure. Additionally, perspectives on substance use within these counties are heavily influenced by stigma. This combination of socio-economic disadvantage and stigmatization results in barriers, not only for individuals seeking care but also for families and communities who are impacted by substance use.

Health Promotion: Health promotion enables people to control and improve their health through a variety of social and environmental interventions (WHO, n.d.). Health promotion capacity, which includes financing and infrastructure (WHO, n.d.), is severely limited in Alexander and Pulaski, as these counties are socio-economically disadvantaged. Likewise, stigma is a significant barrier for health promotion, as it deters objective reasoning regarding health and wellness within these communities.

Prevention: For substance use prevention initiatives to be successful, they must directly combat prevalent stigma with education and awareness at many different ages and education levels. Community education and awareness are powerful factors in substance use prevention. However, it is crucial that stigma reduction efforts are included to facilitate community education and awareness and reduce barriers to individuals accessing care, within Alexander and Pulaski.

Intervention/Harm Reduction: In Alexander and Pulaski, the default method of addressing substance use issues is through medical and mental health intervention for individuals with a substance use disorder. This is evidenced by a lack of harm reduction initiatives in the area.



arrowleaf[®]

Growth. Community. Transformation.

Treatment: There are many pervasive myths, not only in Alexander and Pulaski, but in the greater southern Illinois region, about addiction and substance use. In general, substance use disorders are assumed to be the fault of the individual, either as a moral failure or some inherent weakness. Consequently, the pathway from treatment to recovery can be a very isolating experience for individuals with a substance use disorder. Perspectives such as this are a by-product of lack of education and a strong component of stigma.

Beyond stigma, treatment options in Alexander and Pulaski are limited by infrastructure and local economic factors. There are no in-patient substance use treatment services in these counties. The nearest inpatient treatment center is approximately twenty miles away, located in Union County--Anna, Illinois. Accessing this resource is a barrier for individuals who have unreliable transportation.

Recovery: There is a significant lack of resources for individuals to sustain recovery. In addition to a lack of recreational activities in Alexander and Pulaski, community stigma can create barriers for recovered individuals to establish new relationships with others. Additionally, families of individuals with a substance use disorder are also impacted. There are no recovery support groups in Alexander and Pulaski counties.

Conclusion

Alexander and Pulaski are among the most socio-economically disadvantaged counties in the state of Illinois. In addition to socio-economic disadvantage, there is a high prevalence of stigma against individuals who use substances. These two factors result in significant barriers across all areas of the continuum of care. As such, there needs to be greater access to education and increased community awareness across a multitude of age ranges and education levels.



arrowleaf[®]

Growth. Community. Transformation.

References

United States Census Bureau (2022) *QuickFacts: Alexander County, Illinois; Pulaski County, Illinois; Johnson County, Illinois; Union County, Illinois; Illinois*. US Department of Commerce. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/alexandercountyillinois,pulaskicountyillinois,johnsoncountyillinois,unioncountyillinois,IL/PST045222>

University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (2023). County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>

Illinois State Board of Education (2023). Illinois Report Card. <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

University of Illinois (2022). Illinois Youth Survey. <https://iys.cprd.illinois.edu/results/county>

State of Illinois (2021). Section I – Index crime & crime rate data. *Crime in Illinois 2021 Annual Uniform Crime Report*. <https://isp.illinois.gov/StaticFiles/docs/CrimeReporting/cii/cii21/Index%20Crime.pdf>

State of Illinois (2020). Section I – Index crime & crime rate data. *Crime in Illinois 2020 Annual Uniform Crime Report*. <https://isp.illinois.gov/StaticFiles/docs/CrimeReporting/cii/cii21/Index%20Crime.pdf>

Illinois Prescription Monitoring Program (2020). *Buprenorphine Dashboard*. <https://www.ilpmp.org/CDC/buprenorphineDashboard.php>

Illinois Prescription Monitoring Program (2021). *Above 90 MME dashboard*. <https://www.ilpmp.org/CDC/above90MMEDashboard.php>

World Health Organization (n.d.). *Health Promotion*. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/about/how-we-work/programmes/health-promotion>