

Seeking Signals of Well-Being

Natalie Bomstad, Health and Well-Being Signals Team

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” - The World Health Organization

The foundation of a vibrant, thriving future is one in which our people and places are both healthy and well. Envision’s Health and Well-Being Signals Team takes a multi-dimensional, holistic approach to health and well-being, similar to the World Health Organization’s definition. Our domain map focuses on five core elements that seek to build a proactive culture of health and well-being across Northeast Wisconsin:

1. Physical Well-Being
2. Mental Well-Being
3. Social Well-Being
4. Environmental Well-Being
5. Clinical Care

Based on this multi-dimensional approach to health and well-being, our team scans for signals within each of those five domains. From hunger to mental health, access to clinical care, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, community design, an aging population, social determinants of health, changes in healthcare payment models, or belonging and inclusion, we explore all these signals and more as they relate to potential futures of health and well-being in our region. Finally, across all these dimensions, we focus on historical and current health disparities and inequities, policies, practices, and systems that contribute to health and well-being. Each team member is currently scanning for signals in all five areas.

As we scan, we also seek a deeper understanding of what is currently happening in our own community. Our goal is to develop *keywords* we can use to further determine signals to watch. One such study is the *Wello Community Health and Well-Being Survey*, a community survey conducted every two years for residents of Brown County, Wisconsin.

The most recent results from the 2023 survey help further our efforts. The survey includes local measures for physical, mental, social and environmental well-being, providing our signals team with a starting point. One question, called the Cantril Ladder, asks people to identify on what step of a ladder (zero being the worst and 10 being the best possible life) respondents feel they are today. The results are broken into three categories: thriving, struggling, and suffering. The survey showed 58% of respondents were thriving, 34.3% were struggling, and 7.7% suffering.

Then the survey asks where you see yourself on the ladder five years from now. The results are once again placed in one of those three categories. Respondents reported as follows: 75.5% would see themselves thriving, 20.5% would see themselves struggling, and 4% would see themselves suffering.

Wello also reported differences in responses by demographics. The data showed 43.2% of non-White respondents identified themselves as currently thriving, while 65.7% of White, non-Hispanic respondents felt they were thriving. We saw a similar disparity within the LGBTQ+ community with 49.7% of respondents reporting they were thriving versus 59.4% of non-LGBTQ+ respondents thriving.

Looking five years into the future, across those same demographics, we saw a commonality - a feeling of hope. For both non-White and White, non-Hispanic respondents, people who said they see themselves thriving in five years increased to 75.5%. A similar increase for the LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ groups was reported with the percentage increasing to 75.4% for LGBTQ+ respondents and 76.2% for non-LGBTQ+ respondents.

Why are those results important, and how do they relate to the identification of *signals*? According to Gallup research (Gallup, 2009), people in the “thriving” category are more likely to be happy and to report fewer sick days and fewer personal health problems. Those who are “struggling” are more likely to report worrying about money, are more stressed, and have more than double the number of sick days compared to those who are “thriving.” Those in the “suffering” category are more likely to lack access to food, affordable and safe housing, and healthcare. This community question both identifies specific areas where we can dig deeper to seek signals and identify trends and also points to the importance of future efforts that center on belonging and inclusion.

As our team matures in its work, we look forward to sharing more signals and trends to support a thriving future of wellness in Northeast Wisconsin.