



Community Engagement

Baker County Healthcare Services

In 2023, St. Alphonsus Hospital closed its Intensive Care Unit and its Baker City birthing center. County officials and other community leaders worked with Valentine Health Advisers to look at hospital-services in Baker County. Valentine Health gave ideas for the county and healthcare providers to fill gaps in healthcare services. Valentine Health also said that the county and other community leaders should hear from more people in the county about what they want for the future of healthcare services.

The Baker County Health Department partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table in summer and fall to hear from people about the community's health care needs. They also wanted to hear what people want for health care now and in the future in the county. What people shared will help community leaders make decisions about ideas for providing healthcare and public health services.

OKT used surveys and gatherings to hear from people across Baker County. This summary tells what OKT heard.

ABOUT OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE

OKT is part of Portland State University. OKT works to give all people a voice in public decisions. We talk with people who usually aren't included in these decisions. We help people discuss state, local, and regional issues. We use many ways and many languages to learn what people think and experience. And we value the wide range of ideas and experiences that people tell us about.

HOW WE HEARD FROM PEOPLE

We used the following tools to find out what people think the county's health care needs are now and about how they want to see healthcare service gaps filled:

- Interviews
- Online and paper surveys in English and Spanish languages
- Discussions with people at community events
- Discussions with people at the Baker City Senior Center and at the Baker Middle School

We used the following tools to tell people about the surveys and events:

- Social media
- Email
- In-person outreach at events
- Flyers in different places around the county

WHAT WE ASKED PEOPLE ABOUT

First, we told people about how some hospital services have closed. We also told people that county officials and other community leaders want to hear from more people in the community.

Next, we asked people about the following:

- What people think about healthcare access in the county and what they want to be able to access more
- What barriers people think there are in the county to access healthcare services
- What kind of health information people want to know more about
- What people think about the ideas that county leaders are considering to fill healthcare service gaps
- What people might be willing to accept to be able to get the healthcare services they want for the county

During community talks, we encouraged people to share their thoughts and learn from each other. The survey also asked questions about who was taking it to better understand who we were hearing from. The survey asked about where they live, their age, their race, ethnicity or Tribe, gender, kinds of work people do, and the language they prefer to use.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

We heard from nearly 500 people. About 125 people took part in a community conversation. Additionally, 366 people shared their thoughts through an online or paper survey, and around 25 people joined individual or small group interviews. Some of these interviews took place during community events when Baker County Health Department officials set up tables and talked with residents.

WHAT WE HEARD

We heard from many people in Baker County who care a lot about the health and well-being of the community. People feel strongly about having access to different healthcare services, especially the closure of the ICU and birthing center. We heard many stories about people or their loved ones needing these services. In these talks, people's anger, sadness, and fear were clear.

When asked what they want for the future, many people in the community said they want more control over healthcare. They want a system that cares about them, their health, and the future of Baker County. Very few people want to keep the current system as it is. People especially feel strongly about bringing back the ICU and birthing center, and they also want other healthcare services in Baker County to be stable. Because some people have been sharing their concerns with leaders for a long time, many expressed frustrations and a desire to see action.

What people agreed about

- Many people want to see more local control over healthcare services.
- It is important for people to have a healthcare system that cares about them, their health, and the future of Baker County.
- Many people feel strongly about bringing back the ICU and birthing center, and they also want other healthcare services in Baker County to be stable.
- Many people expressed frustration and a desire to see action.

What people disagreed about

- People are pretty evenly divided about how to fill the healthcare service gaps.
- Many people didn't know about the options, especially forming a health district.

- People were split on forming a health district because some were unsure if people would be willing to pay a property tax for it.
- More people liked the idea of partnering with another Oregon-based health system, but they were doubtful that a new partner could provide the services Baker County needs.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

While the Baker County Health Department has helped to lead these discussions, many different groups are involved in healthcare decisions in the county. Based on what we heard, we encourage all these groups to:

- share what they've heard from community members;
- provide more details about the options being considered; and
- keep talking with the community about what those options might look like.

CONCLUSION

We talked with many people who care deeply about Baker County and want to see it succeed. Community members gave their time and effort in many ways – like putting up flyers and organizing a baked potato bar for 100 people – to make sure others could share their voices. As the county faces tough choices about healthcare, we believe the community will keep creating spaces for people to share their experiences, ideas, and opinions.