



THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Allegan County, MI Community Livability Report

2019



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Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Allegan County 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 12



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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Allegan County. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

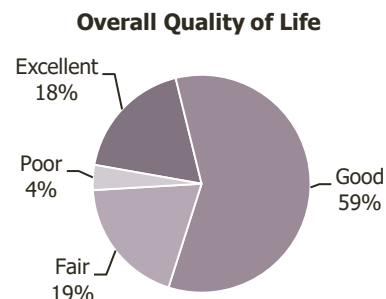
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 293 residents of Allegan County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Allegan County

About three-quarters of residents rated the quality of life in Allegan County as excellent or good. This was similar to ratings given in other communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

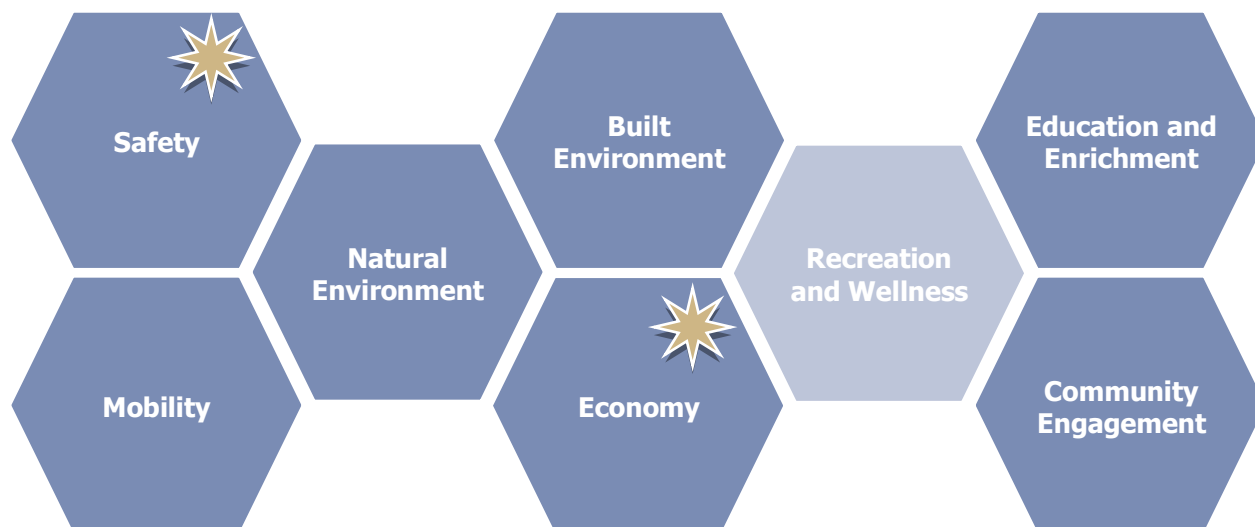
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Allegan County community in the coming two years. These facets, as well as most other facets of community livability, were rated similar to the national benchmarks with the exception of Recreation and Wellness, which was rated lower. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Allegan County’s unique questions.

Legend

- Higher than national benchmark
- Similar to national benchmark
- Lower than national benchmark

- * Most important



Community Characteristics

What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Allegan County, three-quarters rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Allegan County as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

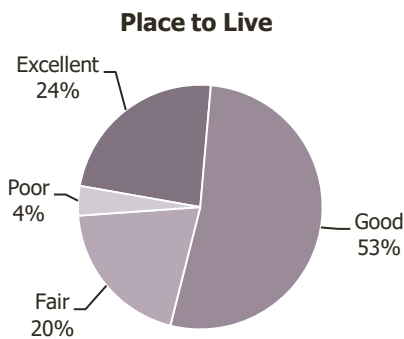
In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Allegan County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Allegan County and its overall appearance. About 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, while three-quarters gave favorable marks to Allegan County as a place to raise children. Roughly 6 in 10 respondents awarded positive reviews to Allegan County as a place to retire and the overall appearance of the County, while 4 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall image of the County. These ratings were similar to those given in other communities across the nation except for overall image, which was lower.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Broadly, ratings for most aspects of community characteristics

tended to be similar to the national benchmarks. In Safety, about 9 in 10 residents reported feeling very or somewhat safe in their neighborhood and in Allegan County's downtown/commercial areas, and 8 in 10 rated the overall feeling of safety in the County as excellent or good.

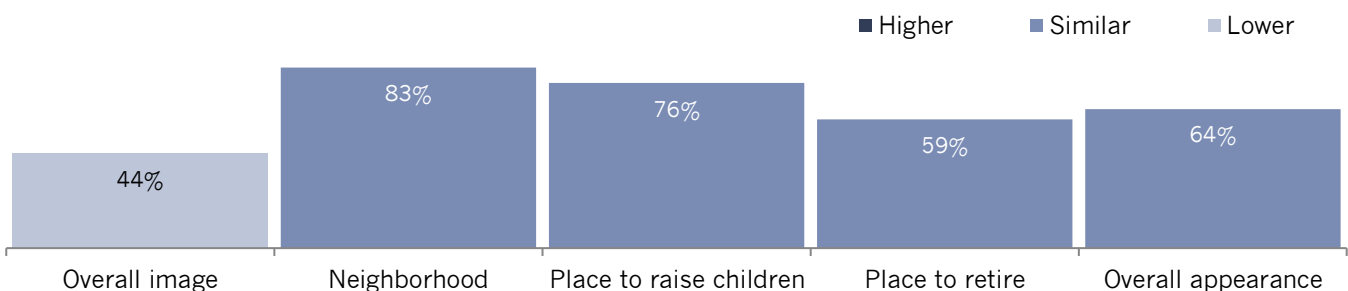
Ratings particularly stood out in the facet of Mobility: at least 7 in 10 residents gave positive scores to ease of travel by car, public parking, and traffic flow on major streets, and these ratings were all higher than those given in other communities nationwide. Further, 8 in 10 residents gave favorable marks to the overall ease of travel in the County.

Other aspects that received a large proportion of excellent or good ratings from residents included overall natural environment, cleanliness of the County, air quality, opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities, and K-12 education. These ratings were similar to the national benchmarks. Conversely, ratings for several aspects across the different facets of community livability were lower than average, particularly within the facet of Recreation and Wellness.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark



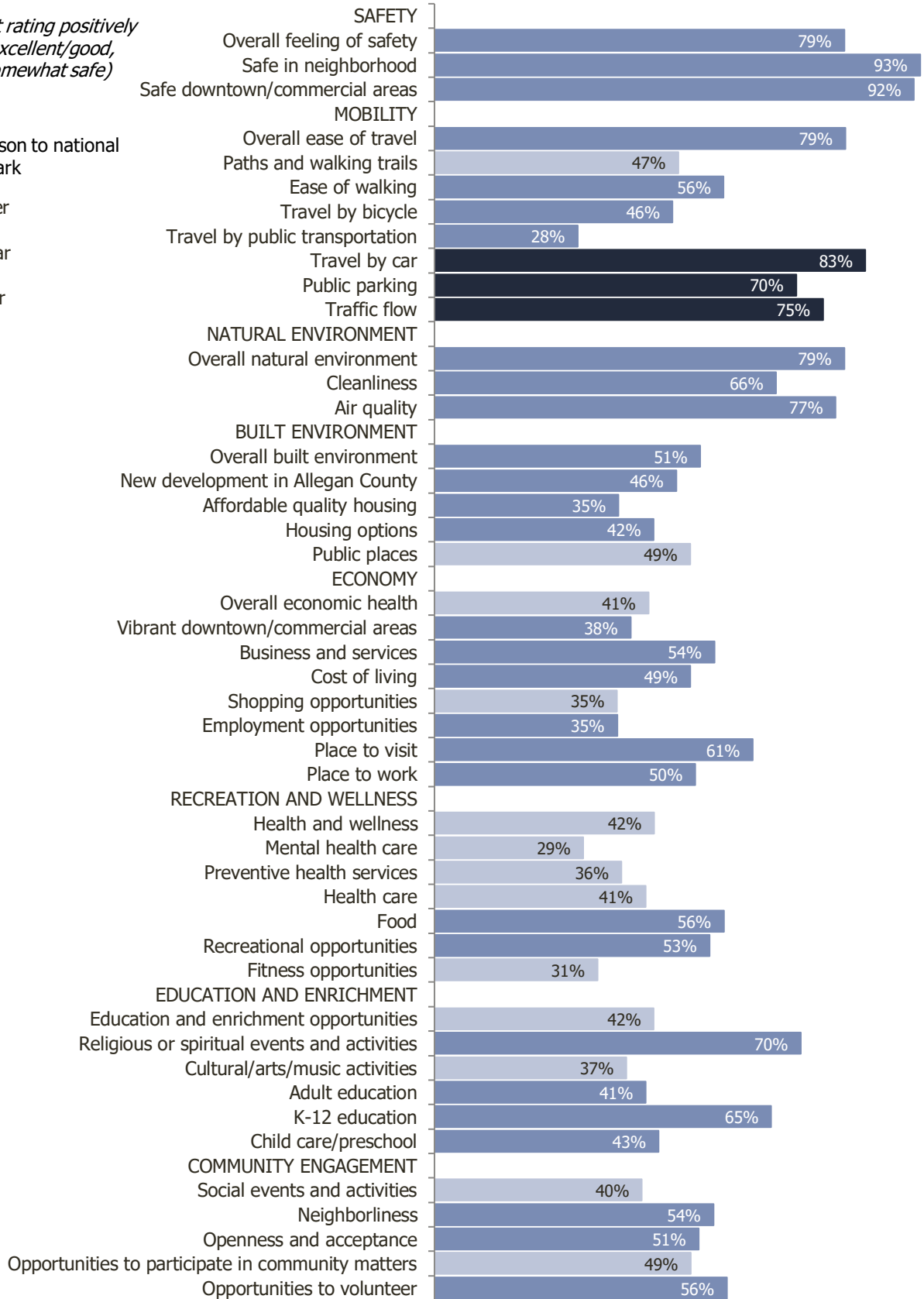
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

Percent rating positively
(e.g., excellent/good,
very/somewhat safe)

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

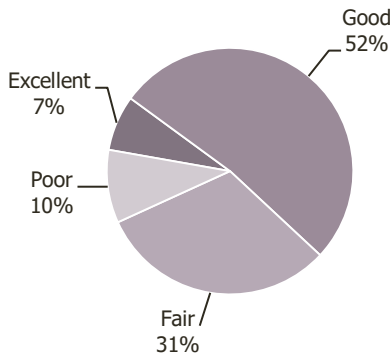
How well does the government of Allegan County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Allegan County as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the County (which was lower than the national benchmark) while 3 in 10 gave favorable marks to the services provided by the Federal Government (which was similar).

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Allegan County’s leadership and governance (see figure at bottom of page). About 7 in 10 residents were pleased with the customer service provided by County employees, while roughly half gave excellent or good marks to the remaining aspects of government performance. These ratings were similar to those given in other communities across the country.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Allegan County. Most services received ratings similar to the national benchmarks. The top-rated services, with at least 7 in 10 residents awarding high scores, were Sheriff, fire, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention, fire prevention and fire education, garbage collection, sewer services, County parks, and public libraries. Seven services received lower than average ratings; these were emergency preparedness, street repair, street lighting, cable television, recreation programs, recreation centers and health services.

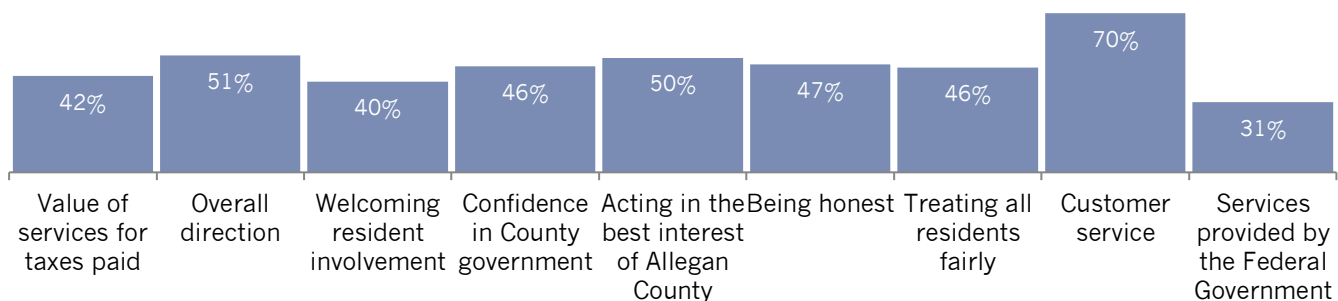
Overall Quality of County Services



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



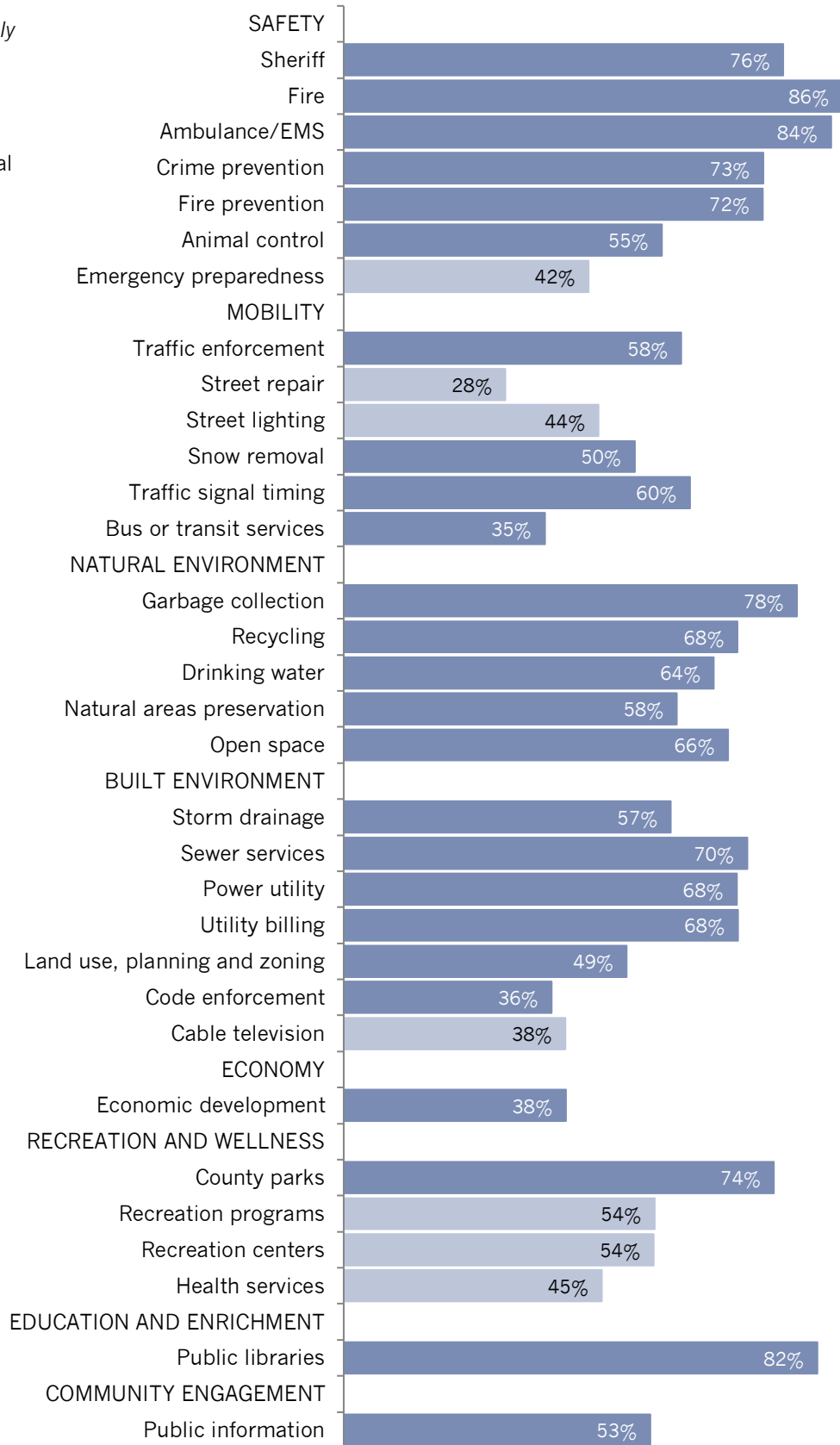
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

Percent rating positively
(e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



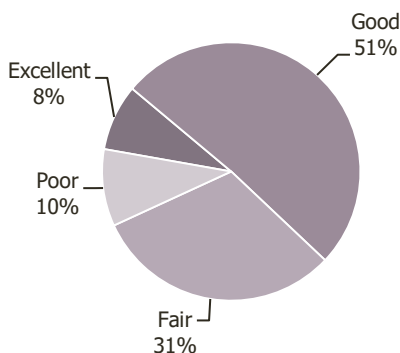
Participation

Are the residents of Allegan County connected to the community and each other?

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About 6 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in the County, while 8 in 10 would recommend Allegan County to someone who asked and nearly 9 in 10 planned to remain in the County for the next five years. These ratings were similar to the national benchmarks. However, only 3 in 10 residents had contacted the County in the 12 months prior to the survey, which was a lower proportion than observed in other communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Rates of participation tended to vary widely across the different facets of community livability, making the comparisons to the benchmarks useful for interpreting the results. Generally, most levels of participation tended to be similar to those observed in other communities across the nation. Residents in Allegan County were more likely than those who lived elsewhere to have not observed a code violation, but less likely to have used public transportation or walked or biked instead of driving, used County recreation centers, attended a County-sponsored event, or watched a local public meeting.

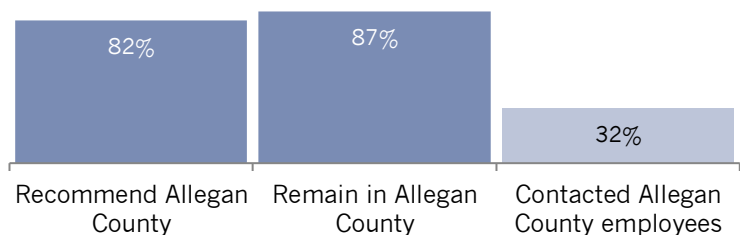
Sense of Community



*Percent rating positively
(e.g., very/somewhat likely,
yes)*

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



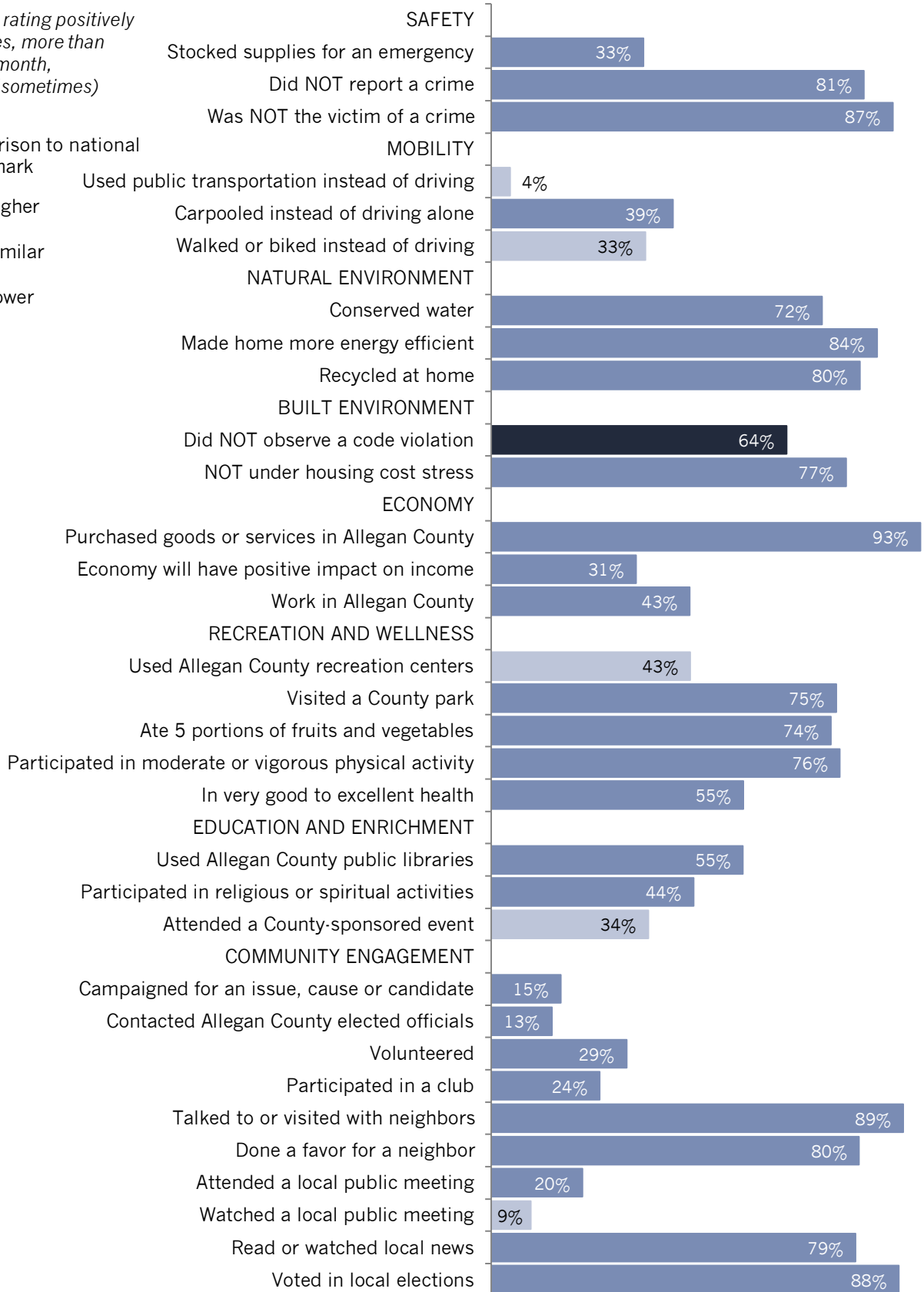
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively
(e.g., yes, more than
once a month,
always/sometimes)

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



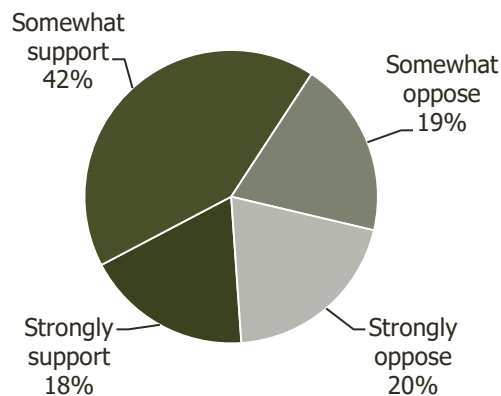
Special Topics

Allegheny County included five questions of special interest on The NCS. Topic areas included restoring a County tax limitation, various issues of concern in the County, aspects of child care and sources of information about the County.

Residents were asked about their level of support for or opposition to restoring a 1965 tax limitation of 5.7 mills to its present-day value. About 6 in 10 residents supported restoring the tax limitation to its original value if the additional funds were used to expand public services and reduce public debt, while 4 in 10 opposed restoring the value of the tax.

Figure 4: Resident Sentiment Toward Restoring Tax Limitation

In 1965, Allegheny County voters established a tax limitation of 5.7 mills for County services. Due to State tax formulas, in 2019 the limitation has been reduced to 4.54 mills. Please indicate whether you would support or oppose restoring the tax limitation to 5.7 mills if the County were to use the additional funds to maintain or expand public services and reduce public debt? (The additional yearly cost to taxpayers would be up to \$57.97 for a home with market value of \$100,000).

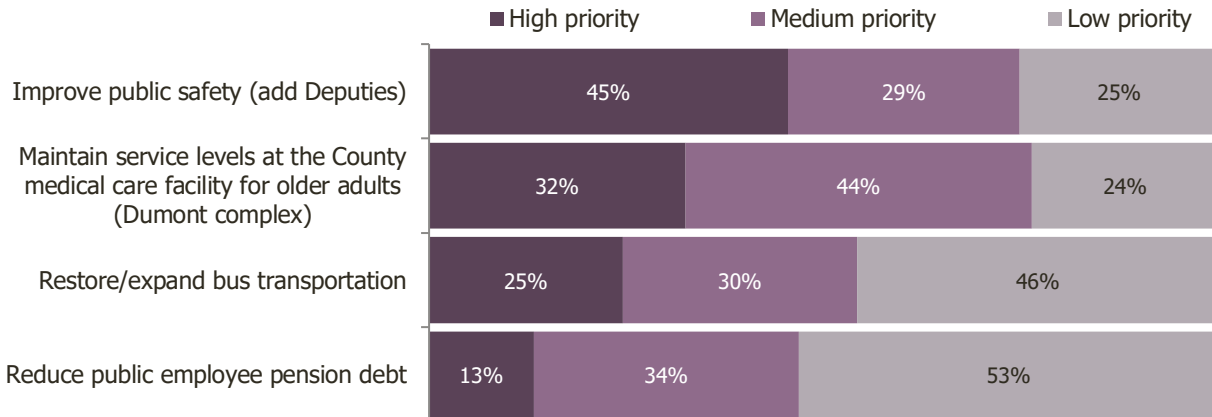


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Residents were also asked to indicate how they would prioritize the use of the additional funds garnered from restoring the tax limitation, if they were in support of doing so. Residents were most likely to rate improving public safety or maintain service levels at the County medical care facility for older adults as a high or medium priority, and least likely to support using the tax revenue to reduce public employee pension debt.

Figure 5: Prioritization of Additional Tax Funds

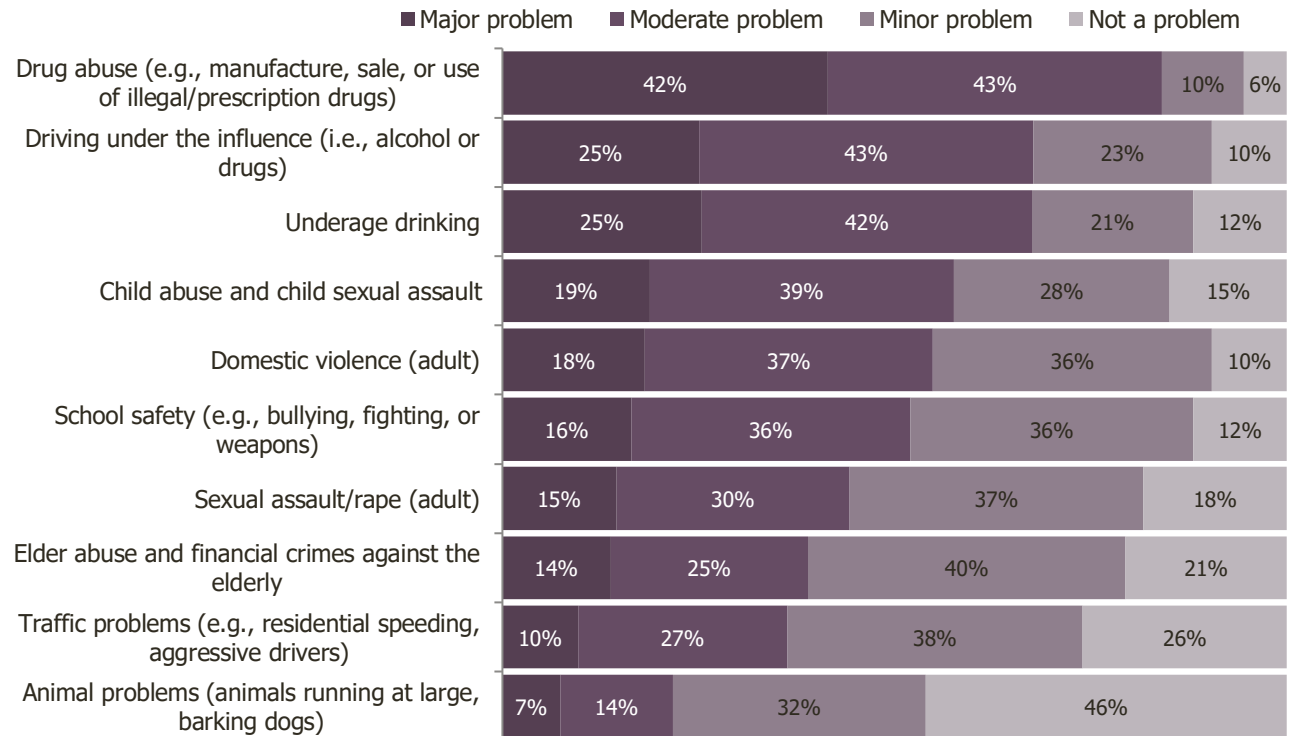
If you support restoring the tax limitation to 5.7 mills, please indicate how you would prioritize the use of the additional funds:



When asked to indicate how much of a problem, if any, they felt a variety of issues were in Allegan County, residents were most likely to rate drug abuse as a major or moderate problem (85% of residents). About two-thirds of residents rated driving under the influence or underage drinking as a major or moderate problem. Residents were least likely to rate animal problems as a problem in the County; only 2 in 10 did so.

Figure 6: Degree of Issues in Allegan County

How much of a problem, if at all, do you think these issues are in Allegan County?

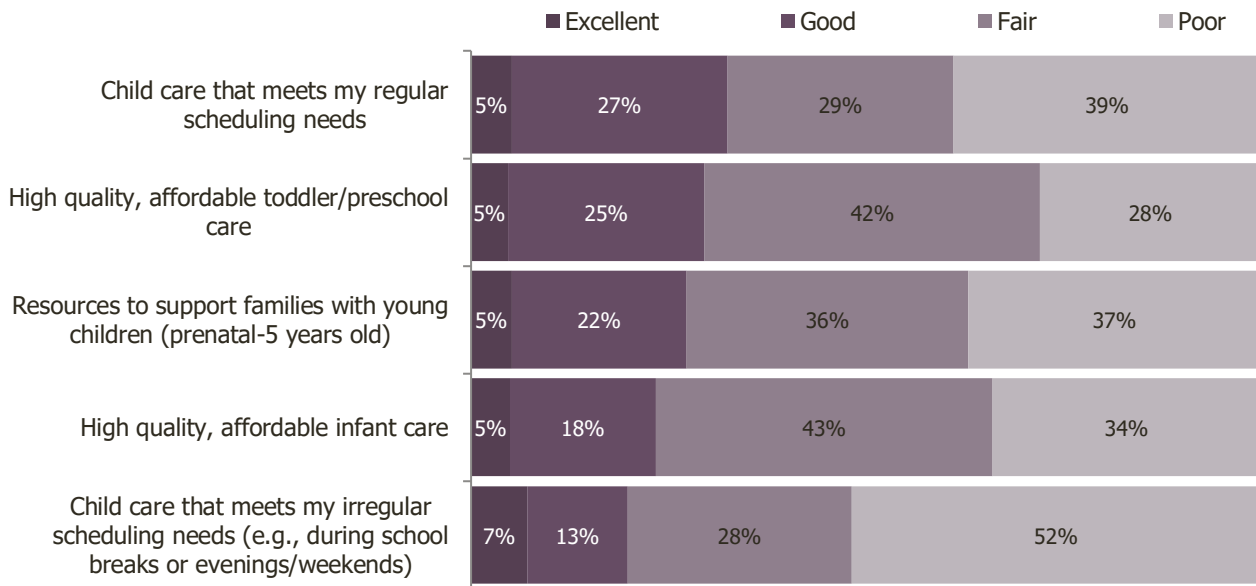


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Most residents gave lower quality ratings to various aspects of child care in the County; the top-rated aspect, child care that meets my scheduling needs, was positively rated by just one-third of survey respondents. It is important to note that at least 6 in 10 respondents marked “don’t know” when asked to rate each of these items (for full frequencies of responses see the *Technical Appendices Report* under separate cover).

Figure 7: Aspects of Child Care in Allegan County

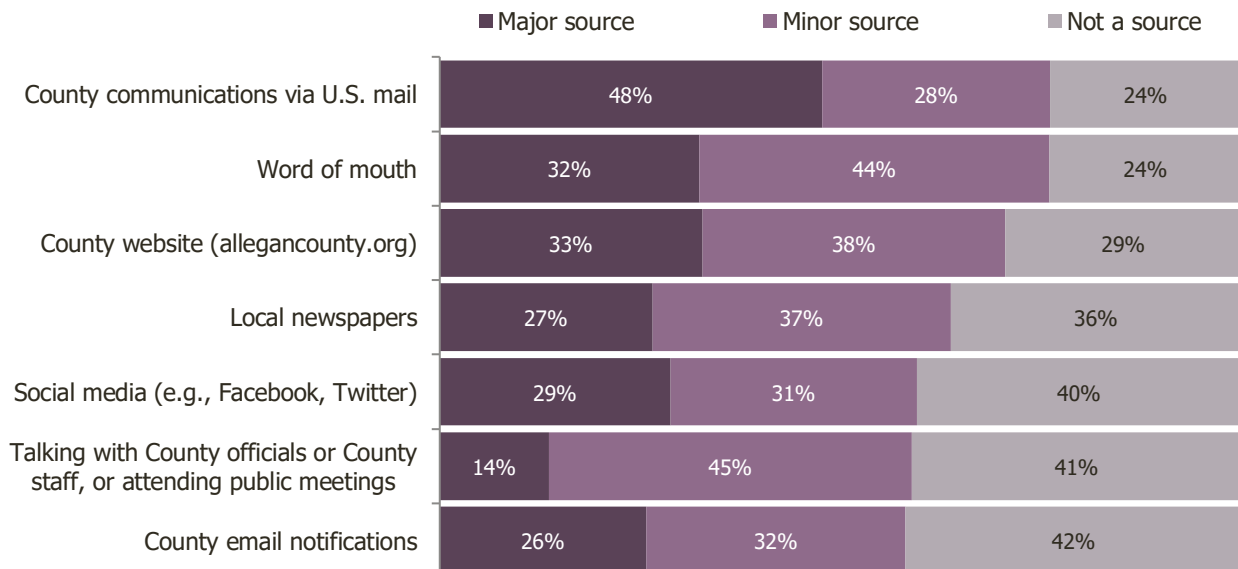
Please rate each of the following aspects of child care in Allegan County:



The final special-interest question on the survey asked residents to indicate the degree to which they utilized a variety of information sources about the County. Residents were most likely to indicate using County communications via US mail (76%), word of mouth (76%) and the County website (71%) as major or minor sources of County information. About two-thirds of residents used local newspapers to obtain County information and about 6 in 10 utilized social media, talking with County officials or staff, or County email notification.

Figure 8: Sources of County Information

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the County government and its activities, events and services:



Conclusions*

Allegan County residents enjoy a positive quality of life.

About three-quarters of residents rated the overall quality of life in Allegan County and the County as a place to live as excellent or good. About 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, while three-quarters gave favorable marks to Allegan County as a place to raise children. Roughly 6 in 10 respondents awarded positive reviews to Allegan County as a place to retire and the overall appearance of the County. About 6 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the sense of community in the County, while 8 in 10 would recommend Allegan County to someone who asked and nearly 9 in 10 planned to remain in the County for the next five years. These ratings were similar to those given in other communities across the nation.

Safety is important to residents.

Survey respondents indicated that Safety would be an important focus area for the County in the next two years, and ratings within this facet tended to be positive and similar to national averages. About 9 in 10 residents reported feeling very or somewhat safe in their neighborhood and in Allegan County's downtown/commercial areas, and 8 in 10 rated the overall feeling of safety in the County as excellent or good. At least 7 in 10 residents awarded favorable reviews to the Sheriff Department, fire services, ambulance/EMS, crime prevention, and fire prevention and fire education, and these ratings were similar to those given elsewhere. However, only 4 in 10 residents gave excellent or good scores to emergency preparedness and this rating was lower than average. When asked to indicate how they would prioritize the use of additional funds garnered from restoring a tax limitation its present-day value, about three-quarters of residents rated improving public safety (adding Deputies) as a high or medium priority.

The Economy is also a resident priority.

Residents also indicated that Economy would be an important area of focus in the coming years. About 6 in 10 residents awarded excellent or good marks to the County as a place to visit, while about half gave favorable scores to the overall quality of business and service establishments, cost of living and Allegan County as a place to work. However, only about 4 in 10 gave positive ratings to the overall economic health of the County and shopping opportunities, and these ratings were lower than those given elsewhere.

Recreation and Wellness is an area of opportunity for the County.

Ratings within the facet of Recreation and Wellness tended to be lower than those given in other communities across the nation. About 4 in 10 residents or less gave positive ratings to health and wellness opportunities, fitness opportunities, or the availability of affordable quality health care, mental health care, and preventive health services; these ratings were lower than the national benchmarks. Further, about half of residents gave favorable reviews to recreation programs, recreation centers, and health services, and these ratings were also below average. Thus, Recreation and Wellness may also be considered an area of focus for the County in the coming years.

*Please note that the Conclusions section of this report was written by National Research Center analysts and do not necessarily reflect the perspectives of Allegan County staff or elected officials.