

New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Region

2023 Q3 QUARTERLY WORKFORCE REPORT

Updated for Recovery Ready Region Plan 2025

Introduction

Welcome to the Recovery Ready Region Workforce Report.

This quarter's workforce report focuses on Region 2 developing into a recovery-ready region. A recovery-ready region describes a community that is willing and equipped to provide support and recovery services to populations with substance abuse disorder, especially in the areas of education and employment readiness. Substance abuse affects many residents of southwest Virginia and has been specifically identified as a pressing issue by the community. The New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board continues to support at-risk populations, including those with substance use disorders (SUD) and previously incarcerated individuals, through a variety of programs and partnerships. The Board's Strategic Plan details specific goals and strategies for fostering a greater understanding and welcoming workforce for these groups.

Despite recent efforts, including federally funded recovery programs and local partnerships, the region faces many challenges such as providing transportation, childcare, and more geographically uniformed services across the 13 localities. Reducing the stigma around the employment and re-entry of at-risk individuals into the community is also a major obstacle. Additionally, traditional recovery treatment may be costly and inaccessible to much of the population, highlighting the importance of local resources aimed at serving lower-income individuals and their families. This report highlights the current success of the WDB's programs and partnerships thus far in evaluating where the region stands in terms of becoming recovery-ready. Additionally, recommendations are provided to the WDB and the region for future areas of focus. Finally, this report captures other communities throughout the United States that are focusing on becoming recovery-ready and provides best practices for overcoming challenges and filling gaps in services and resource support.



Recovery-Ready Regions

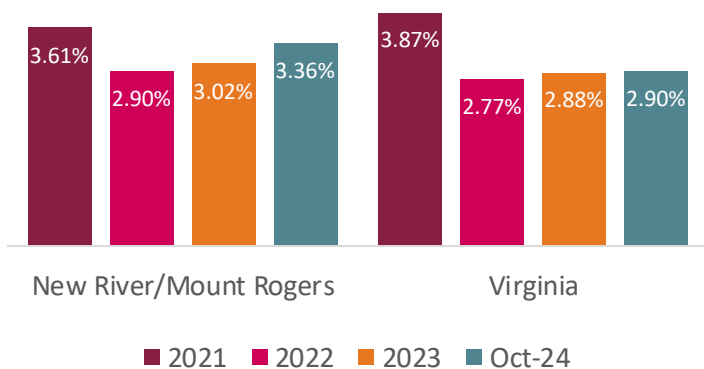
Overview

Recovery-Ready Regions aim to provide those with substance use disorders (SUD) and other at-risk populations with opportunities to safely reintegrate into communities, especially the workforce. The New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board's Pathways to a Strong and Healthy Region Program aims to ultimately create a Recovery-Ready Region. The establishment of these programs can help re-entering individuals become self-sufficient, which in turn strengthens the economy and further develops the community. Recovery-Ready employers can also benefit from a larger workforce, higher worker productivity, increased worker well-being, decreased turnover rates, and lower healthcare costs.



Statistics

Unemployment Rates



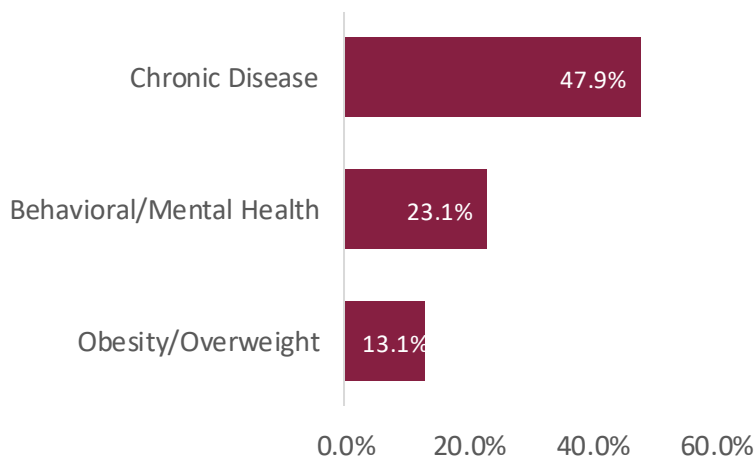
While unemployment rates have continued to decrease for the New River/Mount Rogers regions and the state of Virginia alike, substance abuse and mental health issues continue to affect communities. These two, along with access to care and chronic disease, have been named the most important health-related issues according to residents. The transformation of the New River/Mount Rogers region into a recovery-ready region may not only help facilitate the re-entry of individuals dealing with these issues but reduce the prevalence of these issues as well. Incarcerated individuals oftentimes fall victim to mental health and substance abuse issues, increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

Regional Jail Populations, November 2024



There have been slight increases in the inmate populations at the three major correctional centers in the region since 2023. However, the counties of Bland and Pulaski are missing at least 1% of their populations to incarceration.

Most Important Health-Related Issues, 2024

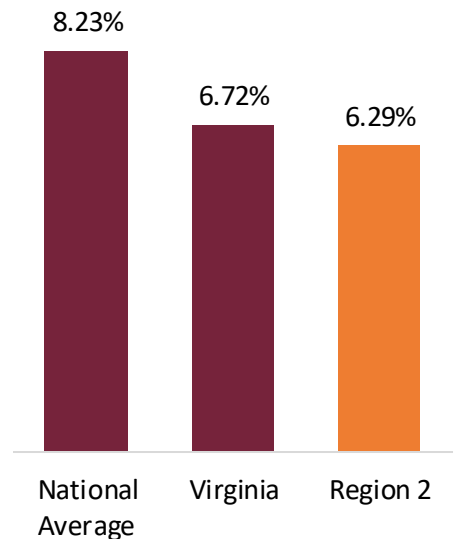


Regional Demographics

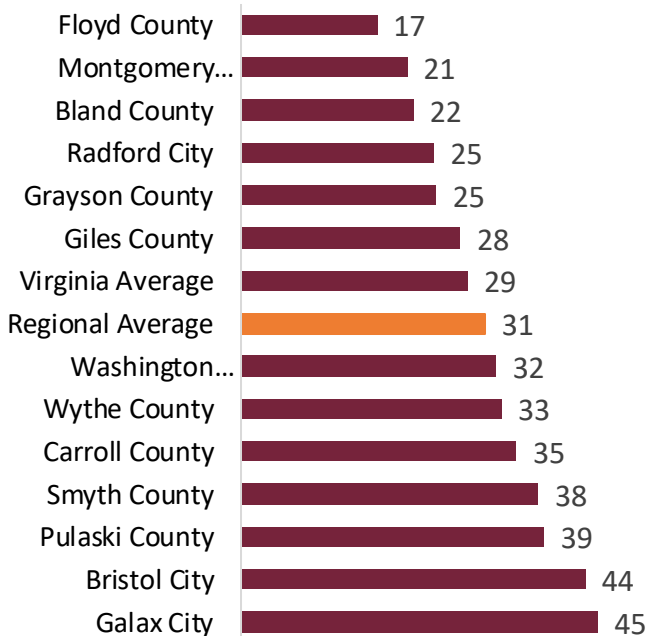
Region at a Glance:

	Median Household Income (2021)	Unemployment Rate % (Oct 2024)	Population (2023)
United States	\$75,100	3.9%	334,914,895
Virginia	\$87,200	2.9%	8,715,698
Region 2	\$60,100	3.6%	367,025

Percent Uninsured, 2021



Average Overdose Deaths per 100,000 Residents, 2022



Region 2 accounts for approximately 4% of Virginia's population. Despite Virginia's overall median household income (MHI) ranking as the 11th highest in the U.S., Region 2 lags significantly, with an MHI nearly 31% less than the state and approximately 20% less than the national average. In fact, if this region were its own state, it would rank 42nd in the nation for MHI.

Region 2's average number of uninsured citizens is slightly less than state average and significantly less than the nation. While the difference between the regional and state averages is only 0.43%, the region's total number of uninsured individuals is close to 23,075. These figures are most concerning for those seeking treatment for substance use disorders. The average base-level outpatient treatment costs \$1,750 per admission, which can be a significant financial burden for many. Additionally, the average cost of a residential rehab program is even higher, at \$57,585. This is nearly the median household income of the region, making it difficult for many to afford. It is important to note that only 83 of the 249 treatment facilities in the region operate at little to no cost, which highlights the need for more affordable options.

Virginia Recovery Statistics

- 25,609 individuals are serviced for drug rehab annually
- \$1,705 average outpatient treatment cost per visit
- \$56,456 average residential treatment cost ranging from 6-12 months

How the Workforce Board is Becoming Recovery-Ready

The recovery-ready community framework shown on the right lists the primary areas of institutional and community support. The framework is designed to describe the services and resources that provide the necessary elements to promote the successful recovery process of individuals within a community. Education and job training are critical for those in recovery to re-enter society; training programs not only help those seeking a second-chance to acquire critical job skills, but training credentials also communicate work readiness to employers.

Current WDB Programs

Pathways to a Strong and Healthy Region (POWER)

Funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) POWER Initiative, the Pathways to a Strong and Healthy Region is the primary Recovery-Ready Region program under the NRMWDB. Case managers and business services staff work with local second-chance employers, and education and training providers to ensure participants are trained with in-demand skills that are relevant to the region and adopt a strong employee disposition.

The WDB uses an integrated personnel effectiveness model to derive the skills and interests of its participants and align them with their occupational goals. POWER initiatives use alternative training methods to better suit the needs of its participants. Short-term, hands-on education is preferred over classroom/campus settings.

The program has been extremely successful in providing training, credentials, and employment to over 300 individuals of the 350 target. Partnerships, such as Ballard Health and Eagles Nest, that help train peer recovery specialists in their field, have been integral to the program's success. Initially slated to conclude in December of 2023, the program has been extended for one year to ensure that all current participants receive adequate support and services. The figure below shows the status (August 2023) and goal for participation in the POWER grant program.

84 of 100 jobseekers enrolled in program

89 of 64 individuals completed occupational training

100 of 136 Peer Recovery Specialists earned credentials

42 of 30 healthcare/human services practitioners employed



Pathways to New Beginnings

The **Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC)** program creates economic prosperity and employment opportunities for eligible residents of rural regions. The NRMWDB received a nearly \$1.5 million WORC grant in 2022 for the Pathways to New Beginnings program. The program aims to address systemic and programmatic barriers for 180 recovering and justice-involved citizens.

The NRMWDB has been inspired by Virginia Community Action Re-Entry Solution (Virginia CARES) in providing individuals, especially ex-offenders, with pre-release life skills, post-release referrals to community service providers, and help in securing employment.

In the year that the program has been active, it has received great interest, leading the board to quickly achieve enrollment targets in healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. 77 participants were enrolled in the program as of August 2023. The program will receive funding through September of 2025.

How the Region is Becoming Recovery-Ready

The NRMWRDB will continue to explore partnerships with a wide variety of community and industry organizations to promote and further encourage the development of a recovery-ready region. Local collaboration is especially important with the five community partners listed to the right. Collaboration with education and training providers facilitate connections between academic and technical training and regional demand. Adult education and literacy provide individuals with basic skills which help aid in further education and employment. Engagement with local businesses and other economic development entities is crucial for identifying current strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the region. Finally, individuals oftentimes cannot get back on their feet with just education and employment services alone. Supportive services including monetary assistance, transportation, housing, and resources for those experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual assault can drastically improve one's quality of life. It is vital that communities are fostering relationships with a variety of local partners to create a safe environment for recovering individuals and their needs.



Strategic Partnerships

The programs and organizations listed below aim to provide regional recovery support for those with SUD and other at-risk individuals. They focus on improving one or several components of a recovery ready region.

Employment	Education	Housing	Funding	Treatment
• Career and Technical Education (CTE) • Perkins Post-Secondary: Programs and services offered through New River, Wytheville, and Virginia Highlands Community Colleges • Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice • The YMCA • Healthcare Academy of Southwest Virginia • Homebuilders Institute Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Training Program • Virginia Ready Initiative • Veterans Services • Virginia Employment Commission • Appalachian Council of Innovation • Southwestern Virginia Technology Council • Second-chance employers • The SWVA Alliance of Manufacturing • Fairview Housing • Care One • NRV Recovery Ecosystem • Smyth County Drug Court • Haddassah House • Hope House			• Virginia CARES • People, Incorporated of Virginia • NRV Community Action • RESTORE Southwest Virginia • Virginia Rural Health Association • The STRONG Accountable Care Community • Investments Supporting Partnerships in Recovery Ecosystems (INSPIRE) Initiative • Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) • Appalachian Center for Hope • Ballad Health • Eagle's Nest • Habitat of the NRV • Bland Correction Center • Virginia Department of Corrections • Transfer Virtual Reality • WIOA programming • Open Door Cafe • Marion Correction Center • Southwest Regional Virginia Jail - Abingdon • New River Valley Regional Jail • Occupational Enterprises Inc.	

Challenges in Recovery-Ready Development

Regional Barriers



High-Risk Industries



Construction



Mining



Waste Management



Accommodations



Food Service

Wrap-around services are critical to a recovery-ready region as they can provide a holistic care system for populations who often lack basic resources. WDB and other organizations within the region have been working to highlight some of the most pressing challenges SUD residents endure, such as transportation, housing, and treatment access. The NRVMR region’s low population density and geographical factors make access to treatment centers and programs its biggest hurdle. Additionally, transportation services are unreliable or nonexistent and housing availability and/or suitability for those in recovery can be difficult to find.

Interviews revealed training organizations for peer recovery specialists encounter barriers in offering work experience for these populations. Peer recovery specialists work as mentors for individuals with SUD to help them effectively integrate back into the workforce. Typically, the process of becoming a peer recovery specialist is rigorous, requiring 500 of experience before credentials can be earned. However, there are limited institutions that offer the training necessary to become a specialist. In addition, the certification test is complicated to schedule, and there is no good infrastructure in place for those who fail the test and wish to try again.

Future Steps to Becoming a Recovery-Ready Region

Diversify transportation options

- Increase and improve transportation infrastructure (e.g., roads, bike paths, walkways)
- Explore the possibility of local shuttles and Cars to Work programs
- Collaboration with People, Inc.; Mountain Lynx Transit; local governments; non-profits



Grow and diversify quality housing options

- Identify and **build relationships** with landlords that have suitable recovery housing options
- Partner with organizations in the region advocating for additional housing services (e.g., Mount Rogers Community Services, PeerHelp, People Inc., etc.)



Expand and improve childcare and early education services

- Work with United Way of Southwest Virginia, faith-based organizations, and/or private providers to explore ways that affordable childcare services could be offered for individuals participating in recovery, education, and/or employment programs



Increase the availability of accessible healthcare services

- Converse with key stakeholders in healthcare to explore mobile healthcare services
- Provide access to and resources for telehealth services (internet connection, meeting space, etc.)



Reduce stigma surrounding SUD, incarceration, and mental health

- Host workshops, publish podcasts, and/or provide training materials on how to educate the public, especially employers, about the difficulties that at-risk individuals face and the support that is needed



Improve digital literacy

- Host workshops, publish podcasts, and/or provide training for basic internet use and digital skill-building
- Educate employers on the limitations of online job applications and discuss alternative options



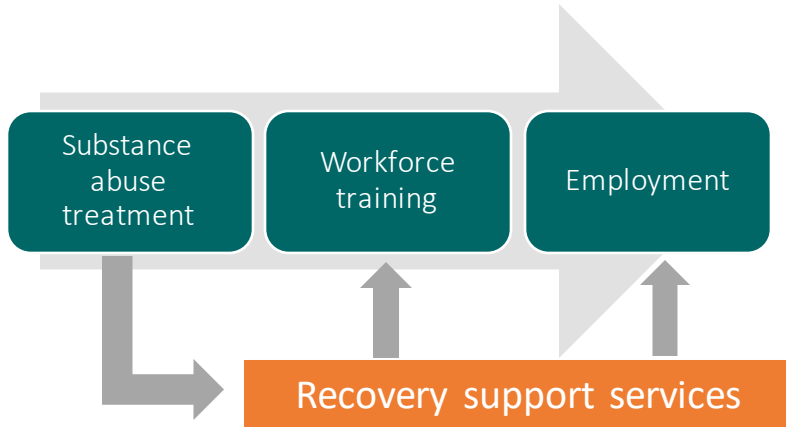
Increase the number of uniform services across the region

- Encourage recovery-ready collaboration across the region to ensure best practices and recommendations are shared amongst key stakeholders



Case Studies

Recovery Ecosystem Models



Amid regional efforts to create environments that are more supportive of individuals recovering from SUD and/or incarceration, communities have shifted towards referring to themselves as recovery-ready ecosystems to more accurately describe the wide array of resources and services offered. This also refers to the collaboration between organizations and local partners required to qualify for funding and programs.

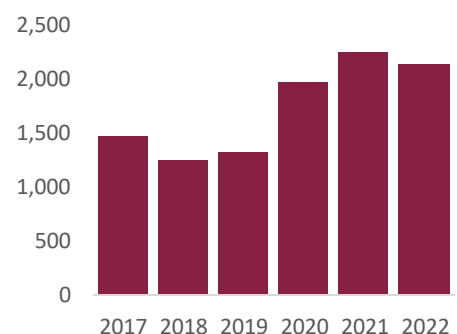
One of the main challenges posed by the drug crisis is that individuals with SUD are often removed from the region's workforce, having significant negative effects on workforce participation rates and economic growth. The Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) recovery ecosystem model on the left addresses the lengthy process required for individuals to achieve the long-term goals of re-entering the workforce and securing employment. The ARC also recognizes the importance of workforce development and recovery support services throughout this process. However, these steps require a multi-sector approach that many recovery models currently fail to address. The recovery-ready ecosystems model (RREM) on the right acknowledges the different levels at which recovery supports and challenges exist. For example, most of the recovery and re-entry support services (RSS) are housed at the community level while the policy & funding level includes federal, state, and local legislation and funding opportunities.

Certified Recovery-Ready Communities

Recovery-Ready Communities in Kentucky

Kentucky has made strides in addressing drug addiction and overdose deaths. After a 15% increase in overdoses between 2020 and 2021, the state introduced the Recovery Ready Communities Certification Program, established by House Bill 7. Managed by the Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP) in partnership with Volunteers of America, the program certifies counties based on recovery services like transportation, support, and employment.

Boyle County became the first certified in June 2023, with 18 counties now designated as "Recovery Ready" by September 2024. Efforts include overdose response training, outreach coordinators, and expanded Narcan distribution. Overdose deaths declined by 9.8% in 2023, the first drop since 2018, though challenges like fentanyl's prevalence and racial disparities persist. Kentucky continues to invest opioid settlement funds into prevention and recovery initiatives to combat addiction.





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