

Pickens County Plan

Fiscal Year 2027

Executive Summary

Pickens County continues to deliver high-quality outpatient behavioral health and substance use services. In calendar year 2025, a total of **1,775 clients** were served, representing a **2% increase** from the previous year.

Behavioral Health Services of Pickens County (BHSPC) successfully relocated to Easley, South Carolina, centralizing services and improving access for the community. The agency continues to implement innovative programming within the Pickens County Detention Center through SCORF funding. These services include screening, assessment, treatment, overdose education and prevention, judicial case management, peer support, and post-release follow-up by a community paramedic.

BHSPC also provides school-based services in **22 schools**, ensuring access for children and adolescents. In FY2026, BHSPC established an in-house drug screening laboratory to improve efficiency and expand funding opportunities.

Prevention remains a cornerstone of BHSPC's work. The agency maintains strong community partnerships and supports its Youth Board, now in its third year of producing the "*But They Don't*" podcast. Episodes are publicly available, and plans are underway to expand into video podcasting.

Clinical services remain strong, with **over 77% of clinical staff licensed or actively pursuing licensure**. All newly hired unlicensed staff have been with the agency for less than one year. Clinical development is led by an on-staff Clinical Supervisor, who also serves as an adjunct professor at Clemson University. All clinicians are trained and regularly evaluated in at least one evidence-based practice.

Needs Assessment Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Pickens County conducted a comprehensive, multi-source needs assessment utilizing OSUS county profile data, Just Plain Killers data, service utilization trends, stakeholder interviews, and community feedback to identify key substance use challenges.

Quantitative Data Findings

1. Overdose and Mortality Trends

Opioid-related overdoses remain a leading cause of preventable death in Pickens County. Although there has been a **39.1% reduction in opioid-involved overdose deaths**, this issue remains a top priority.

ODMap 2025 Data:

- 145 suspected overdoses
- 8 fatal overdoses
- Naloxone administered in 101 cases

Historical Trends:

- Overdose deaths increased from 26 (2020) to 41 (2021)
- 40 overdose deaths recorded in 2023 (ranked 14th statewide)
- 18 involved fentanyl
- Pickens County ranks 12th out of 46 counties for overdose rates
- 215 opioid overdose deaths between 2015–2022

Additional trends include a **15% increase in opioid-related hospitalizations** and a **9.5% increase in prescription rates**. Non-fatal overdoses have decreased by **37%**.

Fentanyl remains a critical concern. As noted by a youth participant:
"You don't know what you're getting if you buy it off social media."

2. Treatment Utilization

- Admissions for opioid and stimulant use disorders decreased by **14.47%** (primarily stimulant-related)
- Opioid admissions remained stable (125 vs. 127 prior year)
- Alcohol accounts for **15.48%** of admissions
- Marijuana/synthetic cannabinoids: **18.3%**
- Tobacco: **20.48%**

Co-occurring disorders are highly prevalent:

- 60% of clients had a primary substance use diagnosis
- 40% had a primary mental health diagnosis
- 36.7% of substance use clients had co-occurring mental health conditions

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT):

- 147 patients served (10.9% decrease from prior year)

Access Challenges:

- Up to a two-week wait for non-priority assessments
 - Increased child and adolescent referrals contributed to delays
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3. Youth Substance Use

Early substance use remains a concern, particularly vaping and alcohol.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS):

- 38.5% have used e-cigarettes
- 16.7% currently use e-cigarettes
- 19.2% currently drink alcohol
- 14.7% currently use marijuana

Community Trends:

- High access to vaping products
 - Low perceived risk among youth
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4. Upstream Drivers of Health

Socioeconomic factors significantly impact outcomes:

- Median household income: \$61,064 (11% below state average)
- Poverty rate: 16.8%–17.2% (above state average of 13.9%)
- 71.7% of BHSPC clients earn below \$50,000 annually
- 26% earn below \$10,000

Additional barriers include:

- Lack of affordable housing
 - Food insecurity
 - No public transportation
 - Rural access challenges
 - Unemployment rate: 5.1% (December 2025)
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Qualitative Data Findings

Data sources included stakeholder surveys, staff feedback, community forums, and patient satisfaction surveys.

Key Themes

Transportation

- Lack of public transportation remains a major barrier

Workforce Strain

- Increasingly complex client needs
- High rates of co-occurring disorders and suicidality
- Administrative burden limits clinical time

Training and Retention

- Non-competitive wages impact retention
 - Ongoing need for onboarding and training
 - Limited workforce interest in child and adolescent services
 - Need for community education on emerging substances (e.g., “gas station drugs”)
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Capacity Assessment

Internal Strengths

- Established outpatient, IOP, and MAT programs
- 20 clinical staff (licensed or in process)
- Peer support, case management, and medical providers
- Electronic health record system

Internal Gaps

- Non-competitive salaries affecting retention
 - Workforce shortages, especially in youth services
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External Community Capacity

Strong partnerships exist with:

- Law enforcement
- Hospitals and emergency departments
- Schools
- Probation and juvenile justice
- Recovery organizations

BHSPC leads **Bridge Pickens**, a collaborative initiative supported by the Center for Rural and Public Health to expand access to housing, healthcare, food, and social services.

External Community Gaps

- No public transportation
 - Limited recovery and transitional housing
 - Rural access challenges
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Implementation Plan

Priority 1: Overdose Reduction

- Expand naloxone distribution and education
- Strengthen community partnerships
- Continue community paramedic program

Priority 2: Treatment Access

- Implement same-day/next-day access
- Expand telehealth and mobile outreach
- Strengthen peer and case management services
- Streamline assessment processes

Priority 3: Youth and Family Services

- Implement evidence-based school prevention programs
- Expand parent education initiatives
- Continue Youth Board efforts:
 - Community events
 - Social media outreach
 - Podcast expansion
 - Youth vaping conference

Priority 4: Health Opportunities & Rural Access

- Launch Bridge Pickens initiative
 - Deploy community health workers
 - Improve access to housing, food, and healthcare
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Evaluation Plan

Pickens County will conduct **bi-annual performance monitoring** using:

Process Measures

- MAT/MOUD enrollments
- Outreach events conducted
- Individuals served
- Prevention programs delivered

Outcome Measures

- Reduction in overdose incidents
- Increased client and staff retention
- Decreased youth substance use rates
- Increased successful discharges

TREATMENT County Plan

Fiscal Year 2027

1. Needs Assessment: SABG-Funded Treatment and Recovery Support Services

Behavioral Health Services of Pickens County (BHSPC) utilizes a combination of **quantitative and qualitative data** to identify the needs of priority populations served through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG).

Services Funded by SABG:

- Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)
- Outpatient Treatment (Level 1)
- Child and Adolescent Services

In **Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25)**, BHSPC served **1,660 clients**. Client funding sources included:

- 31% Medicaid/MCO
- 13.8% Grant-based
- 21.2% Private Insurance
- 22% Self-Pay
- 12% Other

Referral Sources:

- Self-referrals
- Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon Services
- ADSAP

Adult Outpatient Services:

- The Community-Based Treatment (CBT) Outpatient program admitted **1,247 adults** over the age of 18 for Level 1 Outpatient services.
- BHSPC continues to see an increase in adults needing mental and behavioral health treatment, particularly for psychiatric care not covered by the local Mental Health Clinic. Expansion of local MH providers and a nearby FQHC has helped address this need.

Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP):

- IOP provides education on health issues, communicable diseases, HIV, TB, and STDs.

- Partner organizations (AID Upstate and DPH) provide free testing for clients.
- The IOP program implements components of the **Matrix Intensive Outpatient Model** and **BPSSEM**.
- Total IOP clients in FY25: **211** (a decline from 265 in FY24).

Child and Adolescent Services:

- FY25 admissions: **200 clients/young adults (age 18 and under)**, a reduction from the previous year, partly due to reduced clinical staffing.
- Services include individual, family, and group counseling in schools and on-site at BHSPC.
- The Pickens County School District continues to request expanded services for this population. To meet demand, additional trained child and adolescent clinicians are required.

2. Agency Resources for SABG-Funded Treatment and Recovery Services

Internal Capacity

BHSPC currently employs **52 staff members**, including:

- 42 Full-time (including 2 Prevention Specialists)
- 4 Part-time, including 2 part-time medical prescribers for the MAT program
- 3 contracted counselors and 1 contract Peer Support Specialist (through FAVOR)
- Contracted Quality Assurance Specialist, Lab Director, and lab consultant

Clinical Staff Requirements:

- All clinicians must hold a **Master's degree in Human Services**
- All are required to pursue **Addictions Counselor Certification (APSC)**
- Ongoing supervision provided by Certified or Licensed Clinical Supervisors
- Weekly trauma-specific and adolescent-specific supervision for relevant populations
- Training in **Evidence-Based Practices**: CBT, MI, EMDR, ACT, IFS, DBT, TREM, ACRA, TF-CBT, etc.
- Annual fidelity monitoring to ensure quality treatment

External Capacity

- **Legal & Collaboration Agreements:**
 - BAAs/MOUs with legal representatives, Pickens County, Sheriff's Department, FAVOR, Mental Health, School District, Prisma Easley, AnMed Cannon, MUSC, and Clemson University

- **Contracted Services:** janitorial, IT, cyber liability, maintenance, etc.
 - **Community Outreach:** health fairs, prevention events, social media, and collaborative initiatives
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3. Unmet Service Needs and Capacity Gaps

Psychiatric Services:

- Mild to moderate psychiatric needs are underserved due to limitations at the local Mental Health Clinic
- Suicide rate in Pickens County increased by **24.4%**, one of the highest in South Carolina
- BHSPC initiated the **Zero Suicide initiative** to improve screening, treatment, and monitoring

Child and Adolescent Services:

- Increased demand in schools: 256 referrals received since June 2025
- Limited staff (3 full-time/part-time clinicians, including department supervisor)
- Difficulty recruiting qualified child and adolescent clinicians
- Temporary gaps in service due to hiring and program capacity limitations

Workforce Challenges:

- High staff turnover due to compensation and client caseload demands
- Financial constraints limit the ability to hire specialized staff

Collaborations:

- Partnership with a local FQHC assists patients with psychiatric needs, but challenges remain for high-risk, complex clients
 - School-based services require additional clinicians to meet rising demand
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4. Attention to Priority Populations and Substances

BHSPC serves primarily **underserved populations**:

- Sliding scale fee structure ensures access to affordable care
- Priority populations:
 - IV drug users
 - Pregnant women with substance use disorders
 - Individuals in psychiatric or emotional crisis

- Individuals with current or historical suicide risk

Service Approach:

- Clinicians conduct immediate screening and engagement upon presentation
- Safety planning, Narcan distribution, referrals to detox, and follow-up care are provided
- Medical evaluation and MAT initiation occurs ideally within 24–48 hours for high-risk individuals

Collaboration with Justice System:

- Contracts with State and Federal probation services
- Engagement of incarcerated individuals through the local Detention Center

Women and Children:

- Decline observed in female clients over the past year
- Efforts ongoing to connect women and children with treatment services through individualized care, Department of Social Services, and local medical partners
- Continued attention to substance use in women and children, particularly where current referral processes limit access to treatment

PREVENTION County Plan

Fiscal Year 2027

Needs Assessment: SUBG-Funded Treatment and Recovery Services

Behavioral Health Services of Pickens County (BHSPC) identifies agency needs related to the **Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant (SUBG)** through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. This assessment focuses on **priority substances**, including alcohol and tobacco, as well as other substances based on local trends (e.g., marijuana, opioids, stimulants).

To address data gaps, BHSPC references findings from:

- 2021 South Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- 2024–2025 County Profile data
- ODMAP overdose data
- Hospital and emergency department records
- Local and state surveys

Alcohol Use & Prevention Priorities

Youth alcohol use remains a primary concern, particularly underage consumption and related consequences. Law enforcement, including county, municipal, and college police, continue to face challenges due to normalization of alcohol use in the community.

Key Findings:

- **2020 CTC Survey:**
 - 19% of youth (n=1,704) reported lifetime alcohol use
 - 28% believed drinking at their age was “not wrong at all” or “a little wrong”
 - 12% reported drinking as a central part of school social life
- **2021 SC YRBS:**
 - 19.2% reported current alcohol use
 - 14% rode in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking
- **2024 Community Survey:**
 - 29% identified teen alcohol use as a significant problem
 - 16% reported alcohol is “not difficult at all” to obtain
 - 51% indicated teens can easily get someone older to purchase alcohol

Adult Alcohol Use:

- 407 emergency department visits for alcohol use disorder in 2023 (AnMed CHNA)
- DUI arrests increased **17.5%** (FY2024 County Profile)

Community Perspectives:

- Youth focus group: “Alcohol use in schools is very normal... Parents don’t care.”
- Community survey: “Alcohol abuse seems easily excused among youth and adults.”

Trauma Link:

- 80% of Pickens County residents reporting binge drinking had experienced **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**
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Youth Nicotine & Vaping Trends

Nicotine and e-cigarette use among youth remain concerning, with rising vaping rates and retail accessibility issues.

Key Findings:

- **2020 CTC Survey:**
 - 34% borrowed a vape in the past 30 days
 - 22% paid someone to purchase e-cigarettes
 - 27% perceived vaping as “not wrong at all” or “a little wrong”
- **2021 YRBS:**
 - 38.5% reported ever using an e-cigarette
 - 16.7% reported current use
- **2024 Community Survey:**
 - 52% agreed youth can easily get someone older to buy nicotine products
 - 68% rated youth tobacco/vaping use as a major community problem

Community Concerns:

- Retail access and enforcement issues persist despite Synar compliance checks
- School policy changes limit SROs’ ability to issue citations
- Social media normalizes vaping (“TikTok glamorizes vaping”)

Adult Trends:

- Adult e-cigarette use increased 62.5%
 - Nicotine-related hospitalizations rose 7.3%
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Opioid & Prescription Drug Misuse

Opioid misuse remains a critical public health issue.

ODMap 2025:

- 145 suspected overdoses (8 fatal)
- Naloxone administered in 101 cases

Historical Trends:

- Overdose deaths: 26 in 2020 → 41 in 2021 → 40 in 2023
- 18 deaths involved fentanyl
- Pickens County ranks **12th out of 46 counties** for overdose rates
- 215 opioid-related deaths from 2015–2022
- Opioid-related hospitalizations increased 15%
- Prescription dispensing increased 9.5%

Community Perceptions (2024 Survey):

- 35% identified prescription drug misuse as a significant adult problem
- 31% identified it as a problem among teens

Youth Data:

- 13.5% reported misuse of prescription pain medications (YRBS 2021)
- 23% found it “very easy” or “sort of easy” to obtain prescription pain relievers (CTC 2020)
- Sources: 37% family, 26% friends, 15% perceived little or no harm

Fentanyl Concerns:

- Youth focus group: “There’s fentanyl in everything... you don’t know what you’re getting.”

Kratom & 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) Products

- Environmental scans show widespread retail availability near checkout counters in gas stations, convenience stores, and vape shops
 - Products marketed as mood enhancers, energy boosters, or pain relief
 - Enforcement challenges exist despite the **SC Kratom Consumer Protection Law**
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Suicide & Co-Occurring Risk Factors

- FY2024 County Profile: Suicide rate increased **24.6%**
 - 2023 ED visits (AnMed CHNA):
 - 461 for suicide/self-inflicted injury
 - 393 for substance use disorder
 - ACEs are strongly correlated with substance use behaviors:
 - 78% of current smokers and 72% of former smokers reported ACEs
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Marijuana and Methamphetamine Use

- 2024 Community Survey: 68% identified methamphetamine as the top substance concern
 - 2021 YRBS: 14.7% of students reported current marijuana use
 - Community attitudes toward marijuana legalization:
 - 44% support medical use
 - 20% neutral regarding recreational use
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This assessment highlights the **critical needs in Pickens County** for alcohol and tobacco prevention, opioid and prescription drug misuse intervention, youth vaping, and emerging substances like fentanyl and kratom. Findings underscore the need for **integrated, evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery services** to address substance use and co-occurring mental health concerns across youth and adult populations.