

Willcox, Arizona Community Profile

Northern Cochise Community Hospital is located in southeast Arizona in the community of Willcox, which is situated 81 miles west of Tucson between Tucson and the New Mexico border, in northern Cochise County. Willcox is in the Dragoon Mountains, at an elevation of 4,167 feet in the high desert Sulphur Springs Valley.

Willcox is in an area steeped in Southwest and Native American cultural traditions. Willcox was founded in 1880 as a stopover for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Once this railhead was established, Willcox grew to become the nation's largest cattle shipper by the early twentieth century. Today's Willcox has diverse economic facets. It is a major agricultural, tourism, and trade and service center, with most of its commercial activity resulting from its location beside Interstate-10. In addition, for many residents Willcox is a retirement center.

Willcox's 2006 population is 3,910. Its population density is 651.8 residents per square mile of land, and the density of surrounding Cochise County is 21.9 residents per square mile. Willcox's racial makeup is 75.0 percent Whites, 1.6 percent Native Americans, 0.7 percent Blacks and 0.9 percent Asians and Pacific Islanders. Hispanics comprise 41.7 percent of Willcox's population compared to 25.4 percent of the statewide total.

The age distribution among Willcox residents is 32.0 percent less than 20 years of age, 29.8 percent from 20-44 years, 22.1 percent from 45-64, and 16.0 percent above the age of 64. In Willcox, there are 95.7 males for every one hundred females, for a female:male ratio of 1.04.



Economically, the Willcox community is less advantaged than most Arizona communities. The median income for a Willcox household is \$24,934, which is 44 percent less than the statewide figure of \$44,261. Approximately 25.9 percent of the Willcox residents live below the federal poverty line, compared to 13.9 percent of all Arizonans, and over half of the Willcox residents (54.3%) live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, compared to 33.5 percent of the statewide residents. Detailed tables profiling demographic, economic and healthcare coverage indicators at the community, county, and state-wide levels are included.

Northern Cochise Community Hospital

The community of Willcox, where Northern Cochise is located, is in a mental health care Professional Shortage Area. It has been a Critical Access Hospital since February 1, 2002.

Northern Cochise Community Hospital was organized in 1968 to provide basic medical, surgical, ambulatory and emergency room care and rehabilitation services. The hospital serves the residents of the local area as well as visitors and travelers on Interstate 10 - a population



Northern Cochise Community Hospital

encompassing a wide array of multicultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Willcox has an in-city population of 3,910 and the market area is estimated at 14,454 people.

The not-for-profit hospital operates 24 licensed acute care beds, each of which is also licensed as a swing bed. Northern Cochise also operates a 24-bed long-term care center. The future of these services has been the focus of much attention lately

because of fiscal losses due to inadequate federal reimbursements. Currently, the hospital's Board of Trustees believes that the Willcox community needs such a center and strongly desires to keep the facility open and operating.

When the Chief Executive Officer retired in 2007, Northern Cochise gained a new acting CEO. But in April 2008 the new CEO announced his decision to move out of state and the board appointed the Director of Nursing to assume acting CEO status. In July 2008 the Hospital announced its new CEO. The hospital is actively involved in the Flex Program supported Rural Performance Management (RPM) balanced scorecard benchmarking system. The hospital received a Department of Agriculture RUS low-interest loan to implement an electronic health record (HER) system, as well as a modest Flex Program subcontract to support EHR implementation.

Northern Cochise has taken the lead among Arizona Critical Access Hospitals by bringing together a variety of organizations around Willcox to build a healthier community through planning, coordination and education. The University of Arizona Flex staff and the hospital's Chief Executive Officer facilitated an initial focus group attended by community leaders and local health agencies, physicians and Northern Cochise Community Health personnel, leading to the creation of the Northern Cochise Community Health Leadership Council.

The group identified several major concerns, including financial issues, substance abuse, transportation, coordination of services and elderly issues, migrant health services, obesity, diabetes, exercise as a health factor, language barrier, smoking, professional employee pool, nutrition, lack of obstetric services and lack of preventative healthcare services. The council scored its first positive outcome by creating a directory, now available on the hospital web site, of community health care resources.

As with other Critical Access Hospitals, the first obvious impact of the program has been the improvement of overall cash flow and being paid the cost for providing care to Medicare patients. “Formerly, NCCH was being paid less than costs for Medicare. It has improved our overall cash flow,” said recently departed CEO Chris Cronberg. “However, reimbursement from other sources is still a major issue for small rural hospitals.”

CAH-designation has made a difference at Northern Cochise Community Hospital because initial funds provided to member hospitals helped offset the traditionally low reimbursement rates from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). As the number of CAHs has grown in the state, Northern Cochise’s part has decreased until it is not a real factor in offsetting the low rates from AHCCCS, Cronberg said.

The hospital has seen growth in Emergency Room visits, but administrators feel most of that is from a small increase in the population of the area. Out-patient services have remained consistent since NCCH became a CAH. “The growth we have seen has been from new services or the improvement of services we had been offering,” according to the former CEO.

Other hospital services include breast cancer screenings/mammography, case management, outpatient surgery, outpatient physical rehabilitation, swing bed services, long term care, pharmacy, laboratory, radiology, rehabilitation, respiratory care, and nutrition services.

While having the CAH designation has not had a great impact on recruiting of new staff, Cronberg suggested that receiving payment of full costs from Medicare did help the hospital keep its pay scale in line.

Technology has improved since Northern Cochise Community Hospital became a Critical Access Hospital. The installation of a Picture Archiving Communication System (PACS) in the radiology department has allowed the hospital to improve its ability to read images quickly, resulting in better patient care. In addition, since the facility became a Critical Access Hospital the hospital was able to replace some antiquated Emergency Room equipment.

Sources:

Arizona Department of Commerce, Willcox Community Profile
Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Health Systems Development
City of Willcox web page

**Northern Cochise Community Hospital, Willcox, Arizona
Willcox, Willcox/Bowie PCA, Cochise County and Arizona
Demographic, Economic Indicator, and Healthcare Coverage Profile 2006**

	WILLCOX	WILLCOX/BOWIE PCA	COCHISE COUNTY	ARIZONA
	<u>POPULATION</u>			
2006 Population	3,910	13,458	135,150	6,305,210
Population density ¹	651.8	6.7	21.9	55.5
Female % / Male %	51.1% / 48.9%	49.9% / 50.1%	49.6% / 50.4%	50.1% / 49.9%
	<u>AGE GROUP DISTRIBUTION</u>			
Age				
0-19	1,252 (32.0%)	3,746 (27.8%)	39,973 (29.6%)	1,871,275 (29.7%)
20-44	1,167 (29.8%)	3,587 (26.7%)	43,659 (32.3%)	2,295,094 (36.4%)
45-64	866 (22.1%)	3,558 (26.4%)	31,774 (23.5%)	1,318,234 (20.9%)
65+	626 (16.0%)	2,566 (19.1%)	19,744 (14.6%)	820,607 (13.0%)
	<u>RACE AND ETHNICITY</u>			
Race and Ethnicity				
White	75.0%	82.2%	76.4 %	75.7%
American Indian	1.6%	1.2%	1.1%	4.8%
Black	0.7%	0.4%	4.6%	3.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.9%	0.6%	1.9%	1.9%
Other	21.8%	15.6%	16.0%	14.5%
Hispanic	41.7%	30.0%	31.1%	25.4%
	<u>ECONOMIC INDICATORS</u>			
Economic Indicators				
Below 100% FPL	25.9%	21.1%	17.7%	13.9%
Below 200% FPL	54.3%	46.9%	40.8%	33.5%
Unemployed	7.2%	5.8%	4.7%	4.2%
Median household income	\$24,934	\$28,114	\$34,202	\$44,261
	<u>HEALTH COVERAGE</u>			
Health Coverage				
Medicare beneficiaries	14.1%	14.0%	13.6%	11.1%
AHCCCS enrollees	21.3%	20.2%	19.4%	17.4%

Source: Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Health Systems Development, Primary Care Area and Places Special Area Statistical Profiles. Adapted February 2008.

¹Residents per square mile of land