



Surry County Office of Substance Abuse Recovery

INSPIRE Local Data Report

INTRODUCTION

This report examines economic conditions, the prevalence of diseases of despair, and drug-related arrests in Surry County, North Carolina. It builds on the *Surry County Strategic Plan for Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care* by updating selected data points and trends identified in the plan. All new data not originally included in the strategic plan are outlined in red. In some cases, slightly outdated figures from the plan have been replaced with more recent data to provide a more accurate picture of local needs.

REPORT

Economic Indicators

Labor Force Participation

The labor participation rate in Surry County has slightly risen since 2020 (56.7%), and it reached 57.9% in 2023 (Table 1). Despite this modest growth, the county continues to lag behind both North Carolina and U.S. averages, which remain above 62%.

Table 1. Labor Force Participation Rate Among Population Aged 16 Years and Older
(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020-2023)

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Surry County	56.7%	57.8%	57.5%	57.9%
North Carolina	62.4%	62.6%	62.6%	62.7%
United States	63.4%	63.6%	63.5%	63.5%

Unemployment

Surry County has maintained a relatively low unemployment rate compared to the state and nation, standing at 3.3% in 2024 (3.6% in North Carolina, 4.0% in the United States) (Table 2).

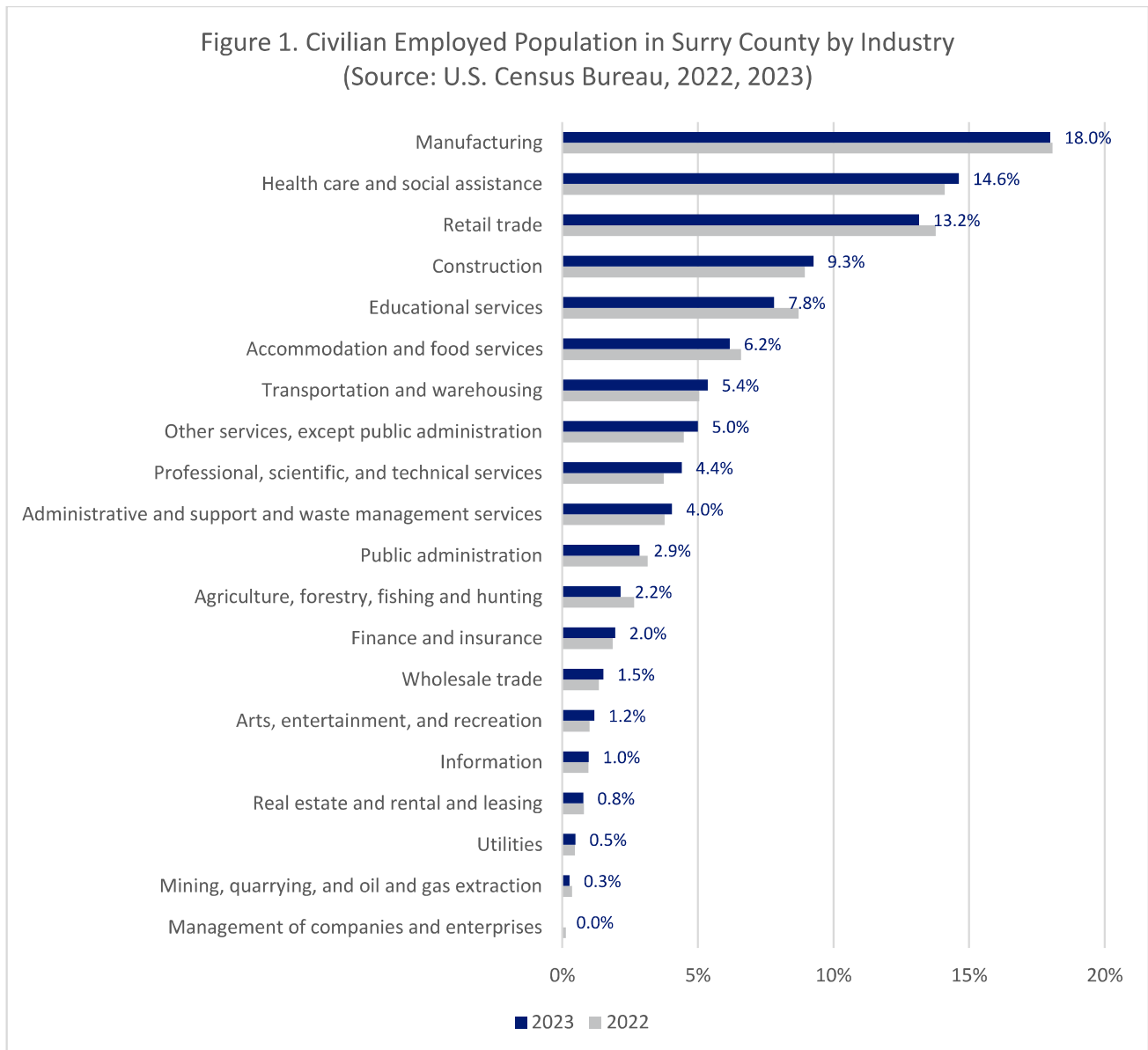
Table 2. Unemployment Rate (Source: PTRC Digital CEDS, 2025)

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surry County	4.6%	3.5%	3.2%	3.3%
North Carolina	4.9%	3.7%	3.5%	3.6%
United States	5.3%	3.6%	3.6%	4.0%

Last Updated: 07/15/2025

Industry

According to the 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, the civilian employed population for individuals 16 years and over was estimated to be 31,960. As displayed in Figure 1, the largest employment sectors in Surry County in 2023 were manufacturing (18.0%), health care and social assistance (14.6%), and retail trade (13.2%). Since 2022, the proportion of individuals employed in manufacturing has remained relatively stable, while health care and social assistance saw a slight increase (+0.5%) and retail trade experienced a small decline (-0.6%). Other notable changes include declines in educational services (-0.9%) and growth in professional, scientific, and technical services (+0.7%).



Diseases of Despair

Overdose Data

Surry County has experienced a steady decline in overdose emergency department (ED) visits since 2019, reaching 131.5 visits per 100,000 in 2024 (Table 3). In contrast, ED visits in North Carolina *increased* from 2019 to 2023 before sharply dropping to 114.4 in 2024.

Drug overdose death rates increased in both Surry County and the state between 2019 and 2023 (Table 4). However, by 2024, both locations saw a notable decline in deaths. As of 2024, the overdose death rate in Surry County is 29.4 and is slightly lower than the state rate of 29.7.

Over the past six years, the proportion of overdose deaths involving illicit opioids in Surry County has fluctuated, peaking at 75.8% in 2022 before falling to 57.1% in 2024 (Table 5). Statewide, illicit opioids have been involved in over 70% of overdose deaths each year since 2020.

Table 3. Drug Overdose Emergency Department Visits Per 100,000 Residents (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surry County	199.2	186.3	183.8	181.9	162.3	131.5
North Carolina	116.3	142.9	158.3	158.8	161.8	114.4

Table 4. Drug Overdose Deaths Per 100,000 Residents (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surry County	25.1	28.0	43.5	46.2	50.4	29.4
North Carolina	22.4	31.6	38.2	40.6	41.0	29.7

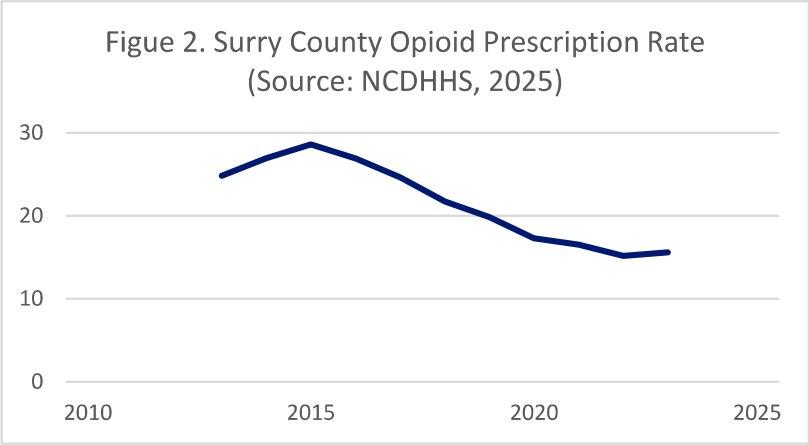
Table 5. Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Illicit Opioids (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surry County	55.6%	65.0%	51.6%	75.8%	75.0%	57.1%
North Carolina	60.8%	72.6%	77.1%	78.3%	76.9%	74.4%

Opioid Prescriptions

From 2019 to 2022, the percentage of patients receiving opioid prescriptions steadily declined in both Surry County and North Carolina (Table 6). In 2023, prescription rates rose slightly above that of 2022. Throughout this five-year period, Surry County consistently reported higher prescription rates than the state average.

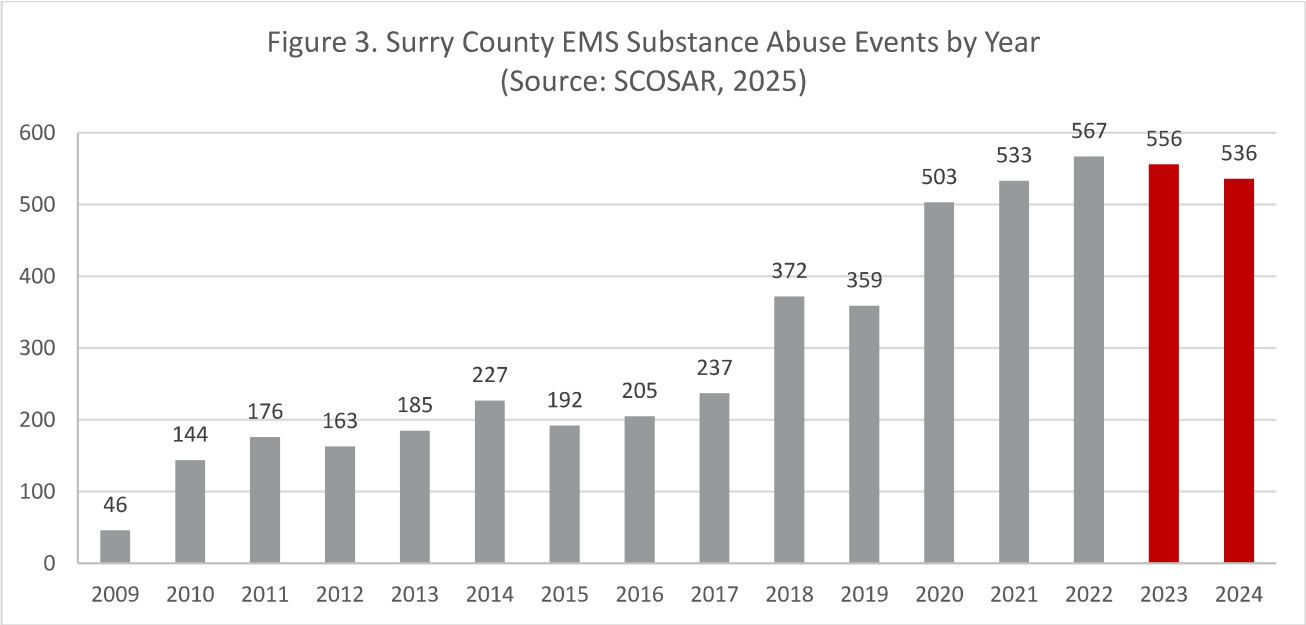
Table 6. Percent of Patients Receiving Opioid Prescriptions (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Surry County	19.8%	17.3%	16.5%	15.2%	15.6%
North Carolina	15.3%	13.7%	12.8%	11.8%	11.9%

Opioid prescriptions in Surry County peaked around 2015 and have steadily declined since. Recent data from 2022 and 2023 suggest that the previous downward trend may be stabilizing (Figure 2).



Emergency Medical Services Substance Abuse Events

The number of Surry County emergency medical services (EMS) substance abuse events has substantially increased over the past 15 years, rising from just 46 incidents in 2009 to over 500 annually since 2020 (Figure 3). Since their peak in 2022 (567 events), substance abuse events have slightly declined. A total of 536 events were recorded in 2024.



Alcohol-Attributable Deaths

From 2019 to 2023, Surry County reported higher alcohol-attributable death rates than the state average (Table 7). The county’s rate has followed an upward trend since 2019, peaking at 69.3 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2022. In 2023, the rate declined to 64.1 but remained well above North Carolina’s rate of 53.8.

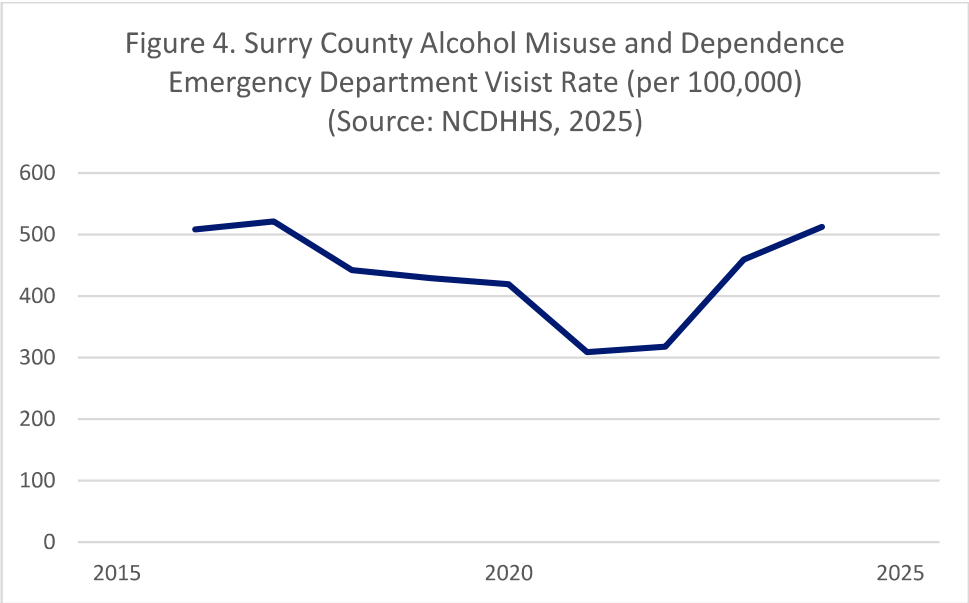
Table 7. Alcohol-Attributable Deaths Per 100,000 Residents (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Surry County	60.0	60.5	67.5	69.3	64.1
North Carolina	46.5	53.8	56.8	55.6	53.8

Alcohol Misuse and Dependence Emergency Department Visits

The estimated rate of emergency department (ED) visits related to alcohol misuse and dependence in Surry County declined from 2019 to 2021, reaching a low of 308.7 visits per 100,000 residents (Table 8). Starting in 2022, however, the rate began to rise, and in 2024, the county recorded a new high of 512.2 visits per 100,000.

Table 8. Alcohol Misuse and Dependence Emergency Department Visits Per 100,000 Residents (Source: NCDHHS, 2025)						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Surry County	308.0	418.9	308.7	317.6	459.0	512.2
North Carolina	628.1	609.8	555.5	566.3	603.8	628.3

The V-shaped trend depicted in Figure 4 indicates that, after a period of decline, Surry County experienced a resurgence in alcohol-related health emergencies.



Drug Arrests

Although the rate of drug possession arrest rates in Surry County have fluctuated in recent years, the county’s rate has remained consistently higher than North Carolina’s drug possession arrest rate since 2021 (Table 9).

Table 9. Drug Arrest Rate (Per 100,000), 2020-2023 (Source: North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, 2025; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020-2023)					
Arrest Category	Location	2020	2021	2022	2023
Possession	Surry County	267.0	355.5	291.2	368.3
	North Carolina	334.3	328.2	289.0	281.3

Notes:

(1) The drugs involved in these arrests include opium or cocaine, marijuana, synthetic narcotics, and "other dangerous drugs."

(2) Arrest rates were calculated using arrest counts from the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

CONCLUSION

Surry County shows promising signs of economic recovery alongside important progress in addressing opioid-related harms. The county’s unemployment rate remains below the state average, and labor force participation has gradually increased each year. In the area of behavioral health, both opioid-related overdose deaths and emergency department visits have declined in recent years. This trend may be associated with the county’s steadily decreasing rate of opioid prescriptions.

Nevertheless, substance use and its consequences remain pressing concerns. From 2019 to 2023, Surry County reported higher alcohol-attributable death rates than the state. Although the rate declined slightly in 2023, it currently lies above the state average. Emergency department visits related to alcohol misuse have also continued to rise, reaching a new high in 2024. Arrests for illegal drug possession have also generally increased between 2020 and 2023 and continue to outpace state rates. Given the recent data, sustained advocacy is needed to support ongoing economic development and to reduce negative outcomes related to substance use in Surry County.

WORKS CITED

- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025a). *North Carolina Alcohol and Related Harms Data*. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/programs/chronic-disease-and-injury/injury-and-violence-prevention-branch/north-carolina-alcohol-use-and-related-harms-prevention/data>
- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2025b). *North Carolina Overdose Epidemic Data*. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/programs/chronic-disease-and-injury/injury-and-violence-prevention-branch/north-carolina-overdose-epidemic-data>
- North Carolina Health Data Portal. (2022). *Employment – Job sectors, Largest* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://ncdataportal.org/community-health-needs-assessment>
- North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. (2025). *Summary Statistics*. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.ncsbi.gov/Services/SBI-Statistics/Crime-Statistics/Summary-Statistics>
- PTRC Digital CEDS. (2025). *BLS Unemployment Data* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://ptrc.digitalceds.com/?page_id=2440
- Surry County Office of Substance Abuse and Recovery. (2025). *Surry County Emergency Medical Services Substance Use Events Data Book*. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://infogram.com/ems-data-book-master-1h7g6k0jyp5po2o?live>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020a). *2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected economic characteristics* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2020.DP03?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2020b). *2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: Demographic and housing estimates* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2020.DP05?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2021a). *2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected economic characteristics* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2021.DP03?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2021b). *2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: Demographic and housing estimates* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2021.DP05?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2022a). *2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected economic characteristics* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP03?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022b). *2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: Demographic and housing estimates* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP05?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022c). *2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S2403: Industry by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2403?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023a). *2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected economic characteristics* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2023.DP03?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023b). *2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: Demographic and housing estimates* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2023.DP05?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023c). *2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S2403: Industry by sex for the civilian employed population 16 years and over* [Data table]. Retrieved June 10, 2025, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S2403?g=010XX00US_040XX00US37_050XX00US37171