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**2025 Rural Philanthropy Summit**  
**Revitalizing local  
journalism and community  
health**

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**We are intensely focused on making our communities better through responsible journalism and community engagement.**  
Everything we do should be measured by the test of truth and grace.





# WHAT MATTERS TO YOU?

## We are asking...

“What are the most important issues facing our community? We are listening” — Jon K. Rust, publisher Southeast Missourian  
email me at [jrust@semissourian.com](mailto:jrust@semissourian.com)

## An invitation from Southeast Missouri journalists:

## Help change our local world

Ever wonder how newspapers in our region decide some of the big stories that they work on, which can drive a community’s attention? One way is that they hold listening sessions with community stakeholders to identify what’s important. In Southeast Missouri for the past five months, staff at the Southeast Missourian — and other Rust Communications newspapers in the region — have been asking a broad range of individuals (and some groups) formal questions about their towns and the region.

**The first question:**  
“What is the most important issue facing our community? Our region?”

According to Jon K. Rust, publisher of the Southeast Missourian, the original goal was to connect with the community and identify topics for future content planning, as well as to develop a broader network of sources. It was also to make sure editorial staffs weren’t missing important stories that would help make communities better.

“Local journalism is vital to connecting communities and enhancing engagement on big issues. But it takes a lot of resources to dig deep into issues,” Rust said. “We want to make sure those resources are invested prudently in what’s important and where they’ll make a positive impact. Analyzing patterns in feedback can help us plan.”

**The second question:**  
“What is the Southeast Missourian (or the name of the newspaper asking the questions) not covering well, enough or at all... but should be?”

This question is a variant on the first one, Rust explained, but it’s specifically looking for gaps in coverage.

“Someone might identify an important issue, which we are already covering, but he or she might not think we’re doing it well. We want to hear that — to understand

where there are perceived gaps,” Rust said.

“In fact, a few people we interviewed identified what they thought were the most important issues, and it was something that we’ve reported on regularly. They just thought we weren’t digging deep enough. Or in the words of one: ‘You’re not asking the hard, follow-up questions.’ To this person, as well as others, the newspaper was doing too much reporting on what people were simply saying without investigating and getting to hard truths.”

The third question, Rust said, was not necessarily about getting to something deemed broadly important, but rather, it was to seek specific story ideas that would be meaningful in real ways to individuals.

**The third question:**  
“What kinds of stories, or even specific stories, would have the most positive impact on your life personally?”

“Some of these answers ran into more utilitarian topics,” Rust said. “For example: Many people responded that they love stories on new restaurants, new businesses, and new activities, and the more we can do, the better.”

Depending on the answer, though, the question might also delve into “kinds of stories or specific stories most positive for the wellbeing of community,” Rust added.

According to Rust, some feedback led immediately to news stories and features.

“We received great suggestions, including specific ideas,” Rust said. “So, we put our journalists on them right away. Other ideas were more involved and will take more resources than we currently have, but we’re putting together a plan on how to address them, because some critical issues were surfaced, which really need community attention and action.”

For this article Rust didn’t want to go into the big topics that emerged, although he said he will make himself available in the future for a follow-up.

“There’s nothing secret about what we’re learning. I will be happy to share our analysis. But I don’t want to quite yet, because we’d love to hear from more people, and we don’t want to bias the pool,” he said. To date, Rust said he and staff have spoken with more than 60 individuals.

“We actually ask a few more than the three questions, including some NPS [Net Promoter Score] ones. But our fourth question is always, ‘Who else do we need to ask these questions to? Who else do we need to hear from?’ And we’re still working through names identified. Really, though, we’d love to hear from everyone, especially those reading this article. What we’re not seeking is people with an ax to grind. This is bigger than that. This is ultimately about connecting people around important, meaningful topics — and exploring solutions for our community.”

If you feel compelled to answer the three main questions, Rust invites you to email him directly. His address: [jrust@semissourian.com](mailto:jrust@semissourian.com).

“You can answer the questions in the body of the email, or we can set up a time for an interview. Either one, but we would love to hear from you,” he said. “And if you don’t hear back from me via email right away, please call: (573) 388-2711.”

Few things can influence a community like a series of stories in the newspaper and online. Who knows how it can change our local world? It might just lead to something life-changing for your neighborhood, our town, our region.

**“What are the important issues facing our community?”**

— Jon K. Rust,  
publisher  
Southeast Missourian  
[jrust@semissourian.com](mailto:jrust@semissourian.com)



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# The Community Health Impact Lab

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# Media organizations in 10 Southeast Missouri counties

Southeast Missourian (Cape Girardeau County) • Daily American Republic (Butler County) • Dexter Statesman (Stoddard County) • Delta Dunklin Democrat (Dunklin County) • Banner Press (Bollinger County) • Standard Democrat (Scott County) • Prospect News (Ripley County) • Pemiscot Press (Pemiscot County) • The Weekly Record (New Madrid County) • with coverage and distribution in Mississippi county. Plus: KFVS TV, KZIM/KSIM, KRCU Public Radio, Southeast Arrow, SEMO Urban Voices.

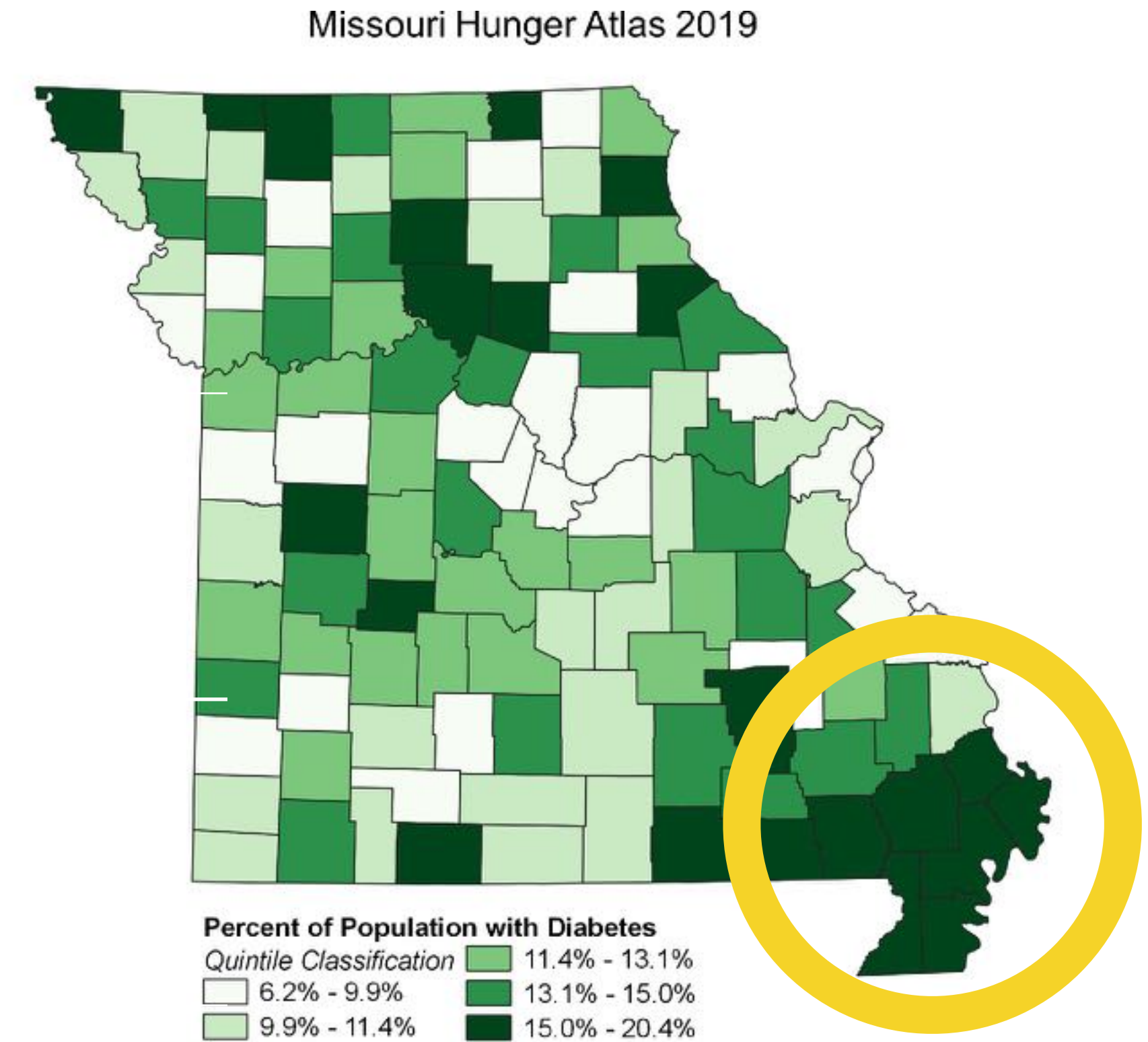




Southeast Missourians are among  
the unhealthiest in the nation

# Diabetes

## 82% worse

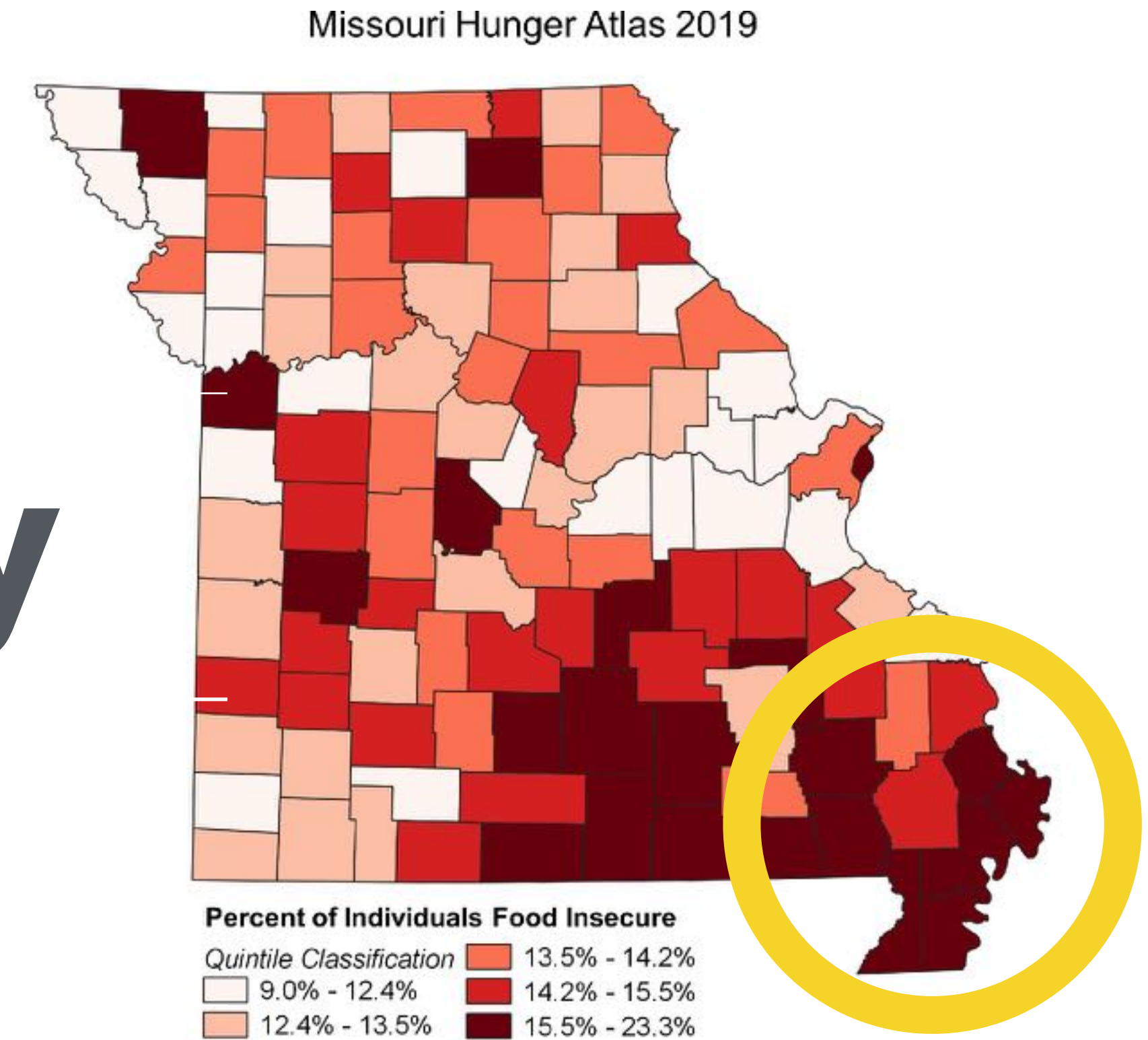


Missouri Hunger Atlas 2019. Published by the MU Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security in partnership with the MU Center for Health Policy. More information at [foodsecurity.missouri.edu](http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu).  
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# Food Insecurity

## 72% worse



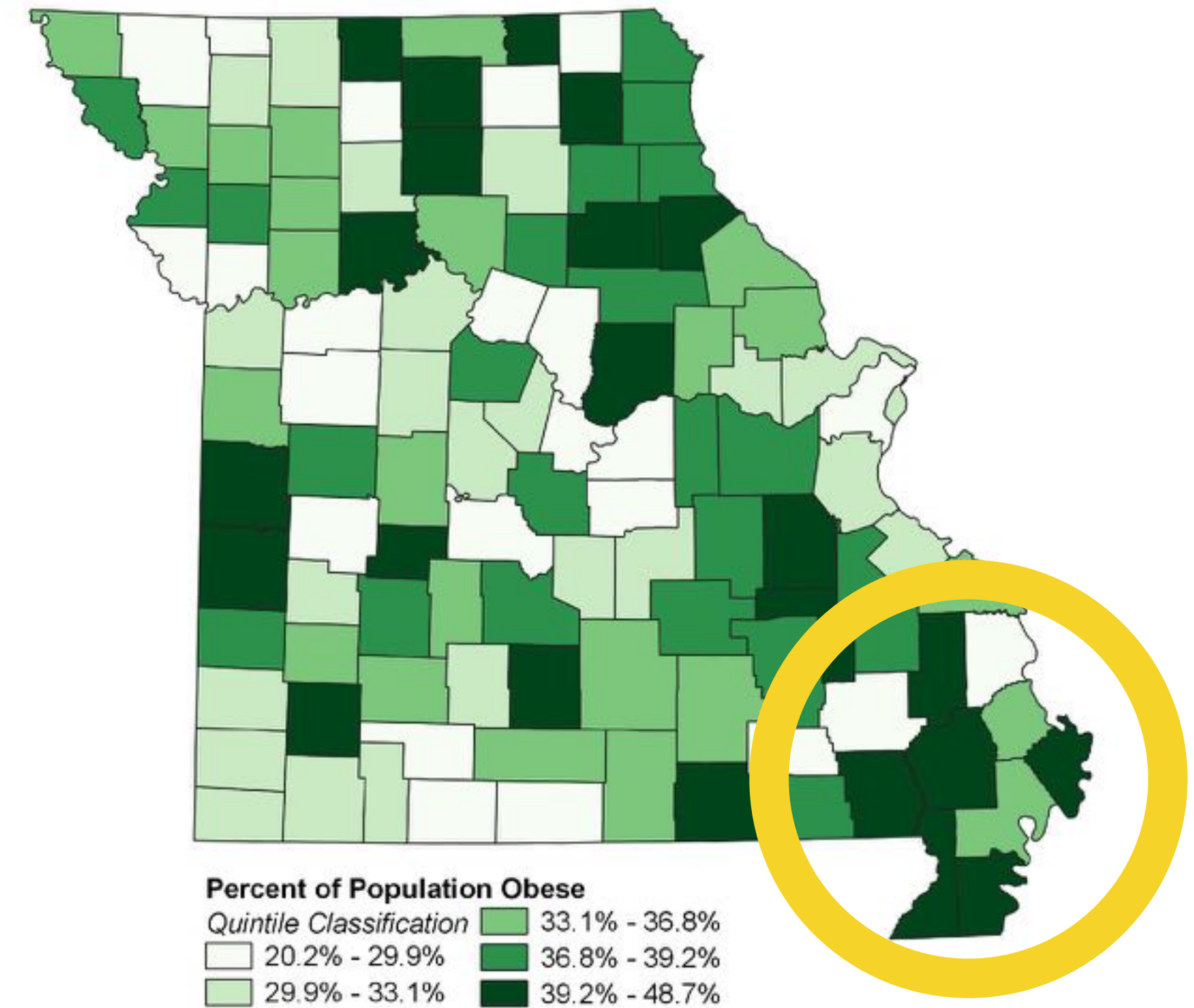
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# Obesity

## 36% worse

Missouri Hunger Atlas 2019

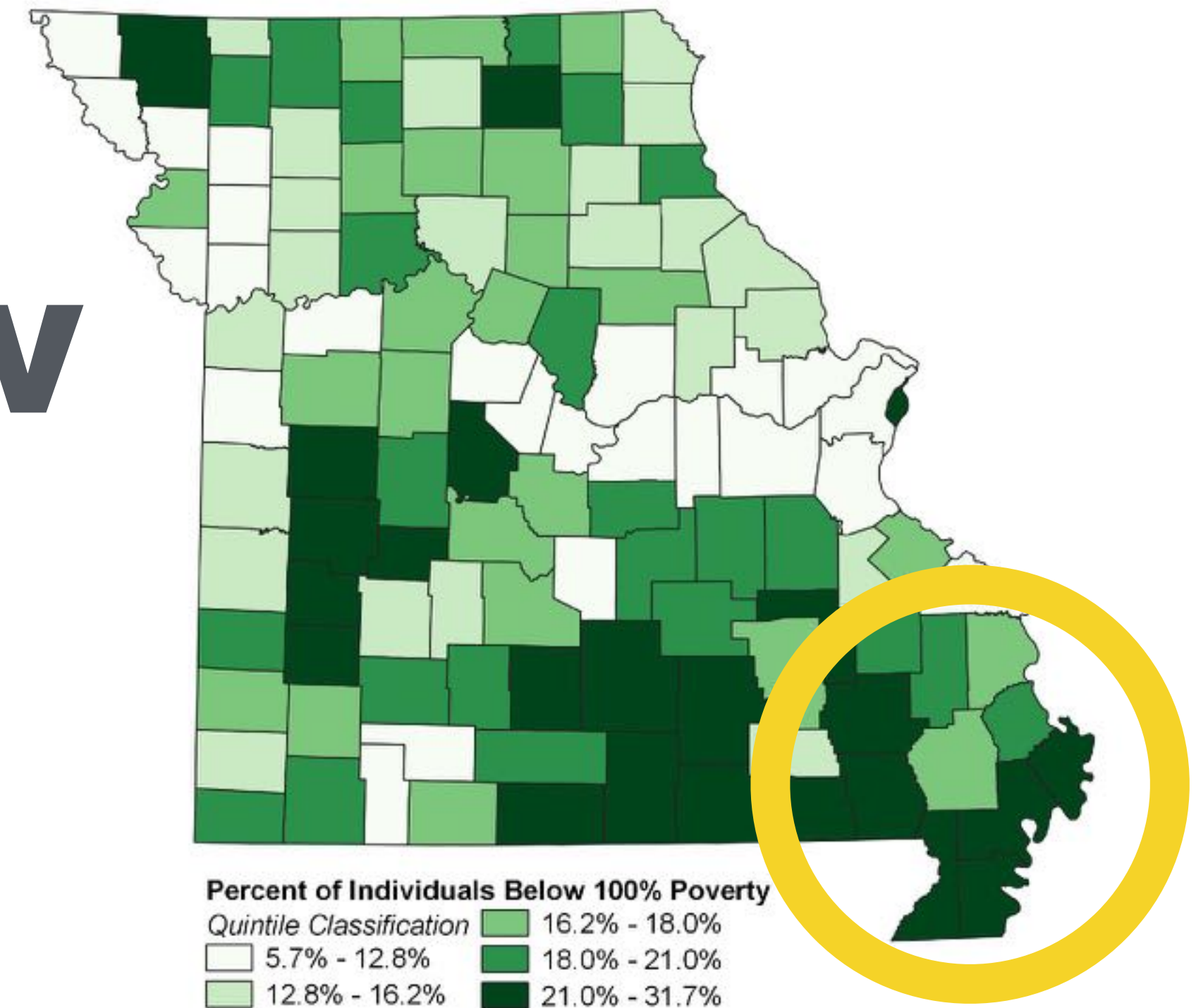


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Population below  
poverty  
2X USA avg.

Missouri Hunger Atlas 2019



Missouri Hunger Atlas 2019. Published by the MU Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security in partnership with the MU Center for Health Policy. More information at [foodsecurity.missouri.edu](http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu).  
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**a population of  
haves and  
have nots**



**A highly rural area  
marked by lack of education  
and dependence  
on government assistance**





We have some counties  
where **95%** of the students  
in school are on federal aid





Health outcomes are  
aggravated by lack of  
transportation,  
**and fewer people  
working to take care  
of those who can't.**



A person in a light blue shirt is holding a silver microphone in their right hand and a spiral notebook with a pen in their left hand. The image has a teal overlay. The text "journalism response" is centered in white, with a dark teal circle behind the word "response".

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# journalism response

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**Collaborating with anyone and everyone with expertise, passion or heart to launch a civic information campaign and community action movement to improve health in our region.**



# Numerous Listening Sessions



**Community Leaders**



**Healthcare Providers**

**School Officials**



**Social Service Agencies**





# Expanded media network



**to include SMO Urban Voices, a black-owned newspaper; KFVS TV, the local CBS affiliate; River Radio and KRCU Public Radio, which include the region's news and talk stations.**





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# our plan

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**1.**

**Investigate  
major health challenges,  
and their  
social determinants**



**2.**

**Explore how  
community health impacts  
quality of life for all,  
even the healthy**



**3.**

**Convene regular  
community summits  
on holistic and  
specific issues**



**4.**

**Engage the population  
around health equity  
imbalances**



**5.**

**Democratize the effort by providing on-going news coverage, and events, via multiple channels, free.**



# What does free mean?

- 1.** Sharing stories online without a paywall,
- 2.** Using free TMC newspapers + inserts as channels for mass engagement,
- 3.** Organizing community events for the public and stakeholders,
- 4.** Creating packages for social media, podcasts, radio, TV, text groups, community flyers and other newspapers,
- 5.** Making content available for others to run via Creative Commons.





# resources



**\$951,000** enables a three year project

- 2** Investigative Reporters (**\$144k**)
- 1** Data Visualist / Research Assistant (**\$40k**)
- 1** Community Event Organizer (**\$40k**)
  - Editing (**\$15k**)
  - Videos, Podcasts, Social Media (**\$25k**)
  - Travel / Office (**\$22.5k**)
  - Handouts, Support Materials (**\$12.5k**)
  - Fundraising / Grant writing (**\$18k**)

**\$317,000** total cost per year



# rural America









We believe it vital that community health  
is not just discussed – but that solutions  
large and small are explored and implemented.



**make the comfortable  
uncomfortable and  
spark action.**



**a trusted partner**



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# we can do this.

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**Working with/interviewed: United Way of SEMO • SE HEalth • Saint Francis Healthcare • Southeast Missouri State University • (various) County Public Health Departments • (various) Public School systems • Southeast Behavioral Hospital • (Numerous) Library officials • SEMO Redi • (Numerous) Chambers of Commerce leadership and board members • Butler County EMA • Boys and Girls Club of the Heartland • Poplar Bluff NAACP • People Organized to Revitalize Community Health • (Numerous) City Council members • (Numerous) Missouri state legislators • Congressional staff • Fresh Start Self-Improvement Center • Report for America • Kaiser Health News • Morning Star Behavioral Associates • South Side Farms • Cape Girardeau Police Department • Fathers on the Move • Show-Me Strong Kids Echo • University of Missouri • Gibson Center for Behavioral Change • Community Counseling Center • Cross Trails Medical Center • First Call for Help • (Several) Media partners • MORE**



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# Editorial Policy - Nonprofit Funding

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**The Southeast Missourian and its sister group of Rust Communications media organizations in Southeast Missouri maintain full editorial control over the stories and other content paid for by the Community Health Impact Fund.**

**The Community Health Impact Fund is a component of the Cape Area Community Foundation, a Section 501(c)(3) organization. Cape Area Community Foundation has exclusive legal control over all funds received. Accordingly, contributions to the Fund are treated for tax purposes as gifts to a Section 501(c)(3) public charity and are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.**



Questions about  
Community Health Impact  
Lab? – and then an update.



**COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPACT FUND**

*Non-Endowed Designated Fund  
Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement*

# Established Fiscal Sponsor Fund Community Foundation of the Ozarks

On Oct 27, 2023, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Inc. (the "Foundation") in partnership with the Cape Area Community Foundation determined the project (the "Project") described herein would further the Foundation's tax-exempt purposes and agreed to provide financial management and administrative support for the project. Therefore, the Foundation has created a fund for this project named **Community Health Impact Fund** (the "Fund"), and, subject to the terms of this Agreement, has decided to grant all amounts that it may deposit to this Fund, less any expenses and administrative charges as set forth below, to **Rust Communications/Concord Publishing** (the "Fund Holder"), subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. The Fund Holder shall provide the Foundation with copies of the Project's governing documents or organizational materials demonstrating its existence as an organization. The Fund Holder's officers shall act as principal coordinators of the Project. The Foundation shall retain oversight authority to ensure that the funds disbursed by the Foundation in support of the Project are used for their intended charitable purposes.
2. There will be a governing liaison committee for the Fund which will include 1) a Liaison representing the Cape Area Community Foundation, 2) the Finance Director or Equivalent of Concord Publishing House, Inc., and 3) the President of Rust Communications and 4) a member of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks staff. The Community Health Impact Committee will govern the oversight of distribution recommendations made to the Community Foundation in accordance with the policies established for the Community Health Impact Committee. These policies will be provided to the Community Foundation.
3. The Fund Holder shall use all grant funds solely for the support of local journalism and community engagement on health issues, including their social determinants, focusing on rural Missouri, Southeast Missouri, and the heartland region. Any changes in the purposes for which grant funds are to be spent must be approved in writing by the Foundation before implementation. The Foundation retains the right, if the Fund Holder breaches this Agreement, or if, in the Foundation's sole opinion, the Fund Holder's conduct jeopardizes the Foundation's legal or tax status, to withhold, withdraw, or demand immediate return of grant funds, and to spend such funds so as to accomplish the purposes of the Project. Any tangible or intangible property, including copyrights, obtained or created by the Fund Holder as part of this Project shall remain the property of the Fund Holder.
4. The Fund Holder may solicit gifts, contributions, and grants for the Fund. All grant agreements, pledges, or other commitments between the Fund Holder and any funding sources to support this Project via the Fund shall be pre-approved by the Foundation. The administration and management of any reports or other compliance measures required by funding sources to the Fund shall be borne by the Fund Holder. In the event that the Project terminates or is discontinued, and there are funds remaining in the Fund, or in the event that the Foundation determines that the Project no longer furthers the Foundation's charitable intent and purpose, the Foundation shall have the right to expend funds remaining in the Fund for its other charitable purposes.





# **PROGRESS REPORT**

**Since inception, the Fund has raised  
or received commitments  
of more than \$160,000. All local.**



# The Fund hired its first reporter in July 2024

**Hiring wasn't easy.**

SOUTHEAST MISSOURIAN

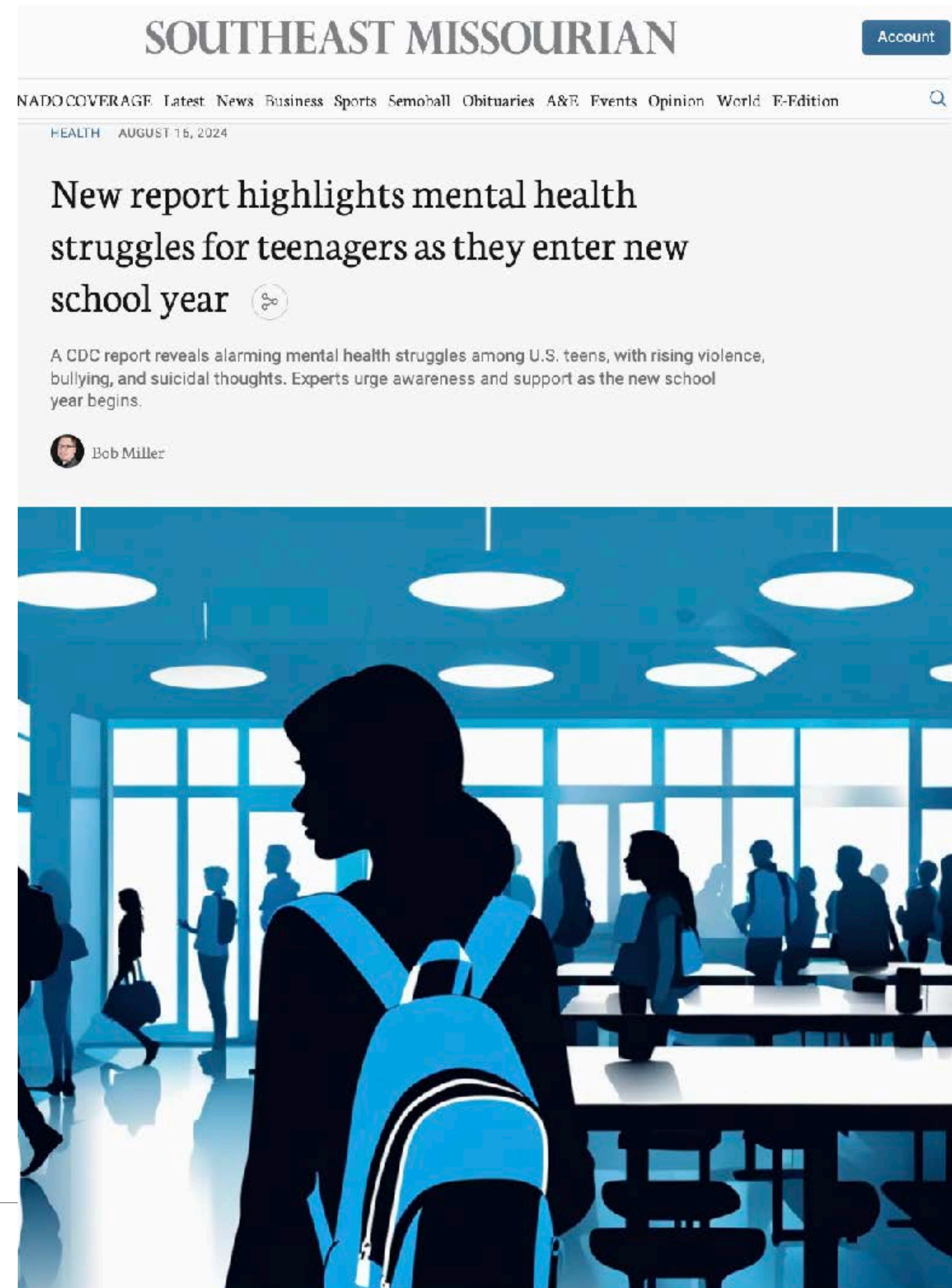
VERAGE Latest News Business Sports Semoball Obituaries A&E Events Opinion W



Bob Miller



**In first 6 months, August 2024 thru January 2025, more than 250 articles published, read by more than 200,000 people.**





More than 80 percent of local stories would not have been written and published without the Community Health Impact Fund. Stories are free to the public and shared with other media organizations.

The latest Health News, Story x +

semissourian.com/sections/health

seMissourian SeM Stories Contact AP AP Newsroom SEMissourian Type... Workspace MyChart - Billing... PubGen BUGS Stories Messenger and In...

Sunday, April 6  
47°F / Cape Girardeau

SOUTHEAST MISSOURIAN

Account

TORNADO COVERAGE Latest News Business Sports Semoball Obituaries A&E Events Opinion World E-Edition

Flood Cleanup & the Air in Your Home

Flood water can make the air in your home unhealthy.

When cleaning wear

Clean and dry your house and everything in it.

HEALTH | APRIL 3

Floods and septic tank problems: What to know

Learn how to protect your home from septic tank issues during floods. Discover essential tips from Cape Girardeau County Health Center and EPA on sealing, inspecting, and safely managing your septic system.

Bob Miller

BE READY! FLOODS

DURING

AFTER

HEALTH | APRIL 3

Floods pose health risks; here's what you can do to prepare and what to do if your home is flooded

Heavy rains in Southeast Missouri may lead to flash floods, posing significant health risks. Contaminated

ADVERTISEMENT

BRYAN JOHNSON

VOTE APRIL 8  
CITY COUNCIL  
WARD 5  
LEARN MORE



# The most-read stories

- Doctors warn of rising cases of cannabis-related illness
- Faith leaders gather to bridge gaps in mental health
- B Magazine: 2024 Difference Maker, Danah Brandel is making healthcare more accessible
- Fair food safety: Public health inspectors working all week to ensure food is safe
- SEMO-NASV names new director
- Mental health program at jail cuts recidivism
- SFMC hires orthopedic specialist
- Rural Missouri has high smoking rates
- County commission approves bonds, mental health board member
- Cape Public schools selects Auxiant for employee health services
- Carrot recall for ecoli
- Fish wash up on banks of Fredericktown creek following chemical fire
- Cape native involved in groundbreaking pediatric heart surgery
- Unraveling obesity
- Cape County Health Board candidates
- Obesity (tips for convincing the mind)
- Flu season, but norovirus may be bigger culprit for school closings
- Epic, Cape PD newest recipients of mental health tax
- Norovirus is back in full force

## Among topics of health stories published for free access

- Mental health
  - Prison inmates
  - Post-partem
  - Youth going back to school
  - Community involvement
  - Needs assessment
  - VA whole-health programs
- Obesity
  - Statistics
  - Psychology behind reasons
  - Tips
  - BMI
- Election and health
  - Local questionnaires
  - 8<sup>th</sup> District candidate positions
  - Presidential policies
  - Trump administration executive orders
- Medicaid
- Flu season outbreaks in schools
- Norovirus outbreaks in schools
- Vaccine/health misinformation
- Smoking rates
- Abortion
- Bird flu
- Sleep adjustments
- Junk food
- Marijuana risk
- Health Needs Assessment
- Safe sleep for babies
- Food inspections
- Vaccines and vaccine schedule
- Winter driving/safety kits
- Drug use
- Overdose deaths



Community engagement with health content has dramatically risen since August. Using September 2024 monthly views on [semissourian.com](https://www.semissourian.com) as baseline:

467% increase October

1,300% increase November

362% increase December

242% increase January



# **Collaborations**

**Show Me Strong Cape Girardeau Health ECHO**

**(Gun Violence, Homeless, School resources)**

**SEEDS Conference**

**Health Departments**

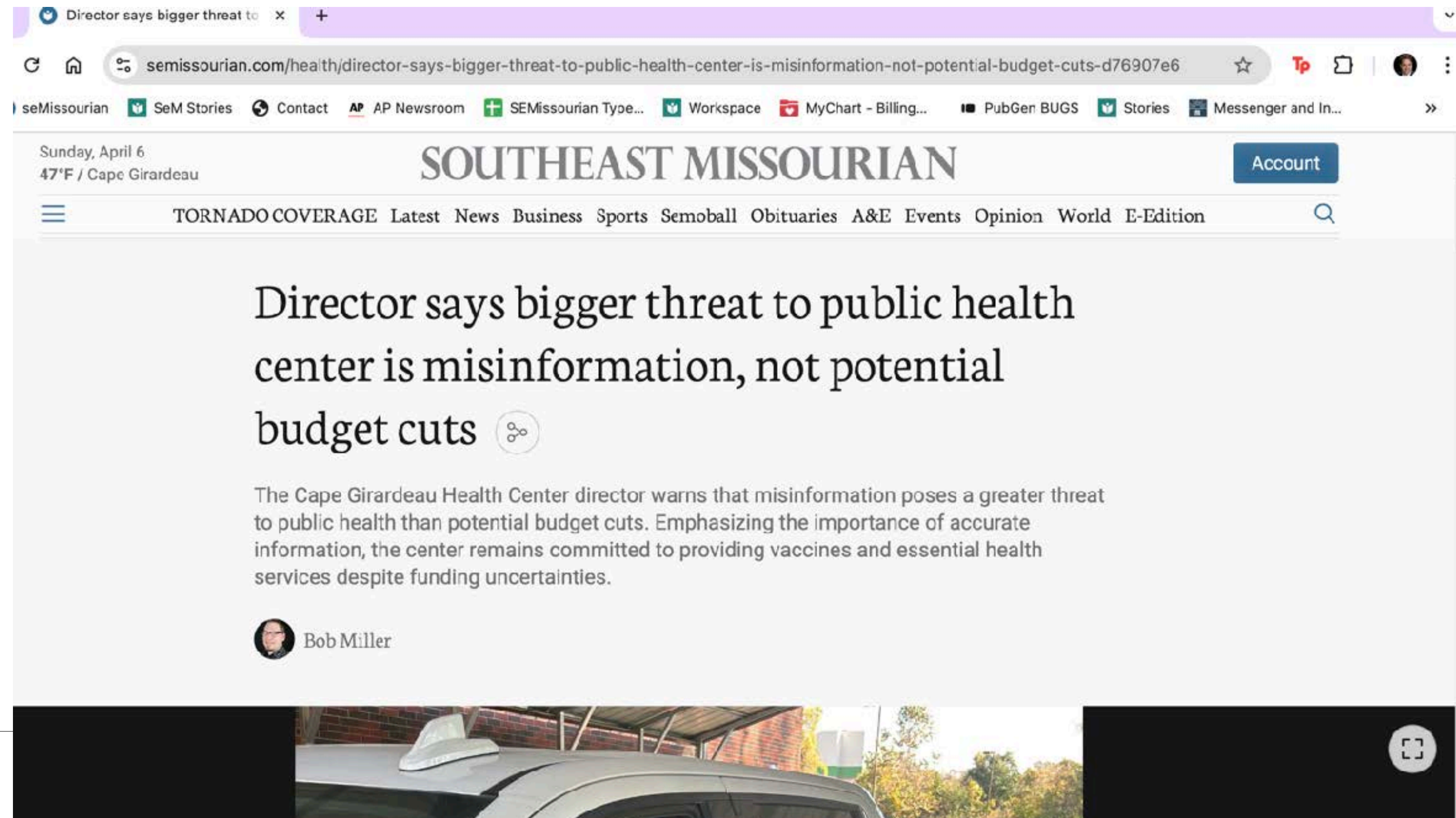
**Local Media**

**National Industry Groups**

**Report for America**



# Additional questions about Community Health Impact Lab?





# The future of local journalism

## Philanthropy has a vital role

semissourian.com/sections/health

seMissourian SeM Stories Contact AP AP Newsroom SEMissourian Type... Workspace MyChart - Billing... PubGen B

Sunday, April 6  
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## SOUTHEAST MISSOURIAN


TORNADO COVERAGE Latest News Business Sports Semoball Obituaries A&E Events Opinion

### HEALTH | MARCH 29

#### Foundation puts nearly \$50K toward youth mental health initiatives in Cape area

Community Foundation of the Ozarks, alongside the Louis L. and Julia Dorothy Coover Charitable Foundation and Commerce Trust, has allocated nearly \$50,000 to support youth mental health initiatives in Cape Girardeau, focusing on suicide prevention and mental health...

 Bob Miller




COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER \$25,000  
Twenty-five thousand & 00/100  
Donor: Regional Youth Mental Health Grant Program

### HEALTH | MARCH 28

#### Pistorio, Pleus face off in Perry County Hospital Board race

The Perry County Hospital Board race April 8 features Art Pistorio, a Navy veteran and attorney, against Roger





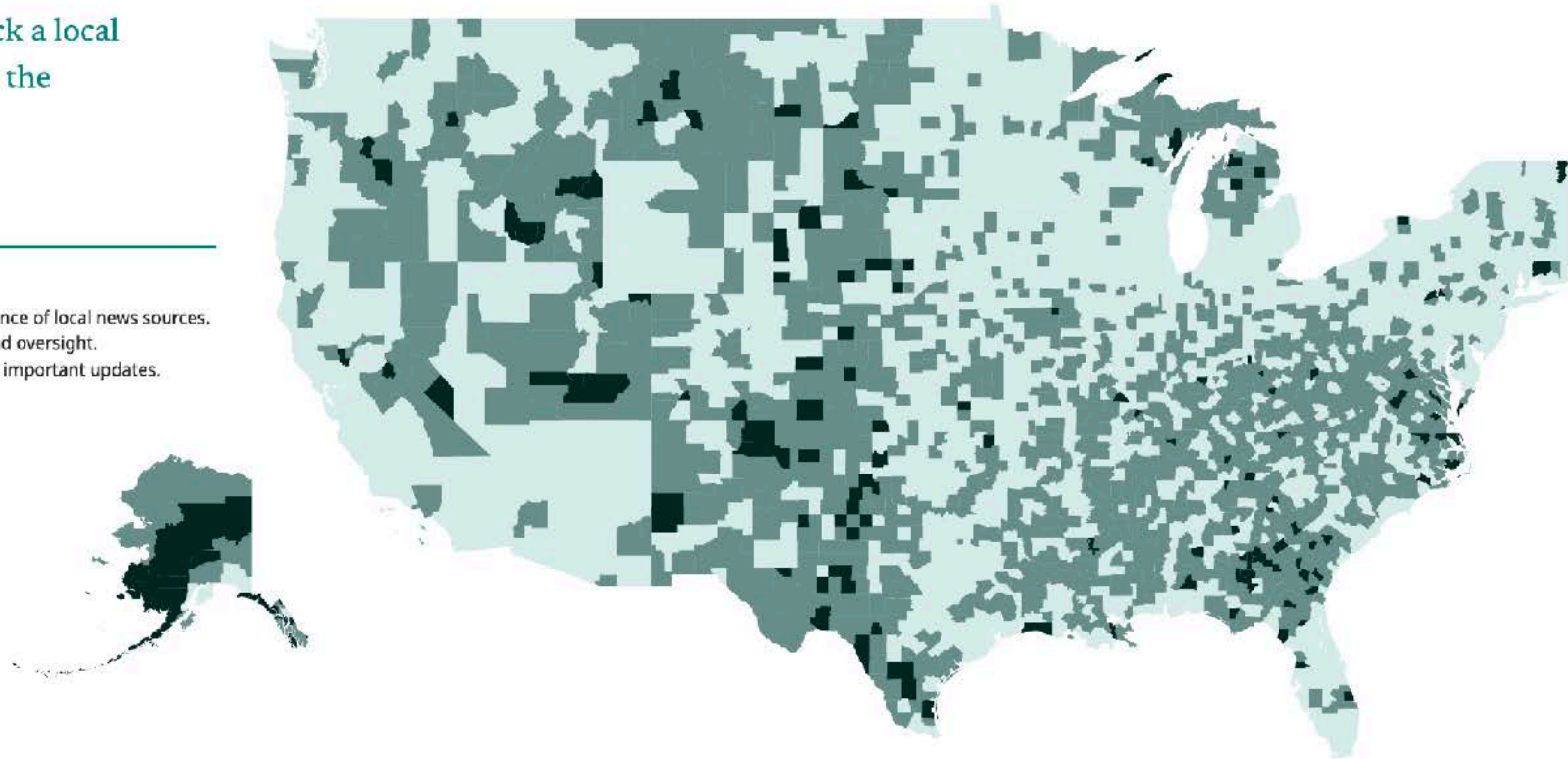
# Local journalism – especially rural journalism – is under threat

In the U.S., over 225 counties lack a local newspaper. This trend threatens the delivery of vital information to underserved communities.

## IMPACT

- Community Engagement: Diminished due to the absence of local news sources.
- Government Accountability: Reduced transparency and oversight.
- Access to Vital Information: Communities miss out on important updates.

- No Coverage
- Minimal Coverage



Half of all counties - 1,528 - have only one newspaper, usually a weekly.  
Source: UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media





HUSSMAN SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA

Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media

Research & Analysis

Innovation & Solutions

Education & Outreach

News

About

” We define a **news desert** as: ***a community, either rural or urban, with limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grassroots level.***

**The State of  
Local News  
2024**

**The  
2024  
Report**

**Maps and data**  
*Explore the local  
news landscape*

**Bright  
Spots**  
*Promising  
Models  
Lighting the  
Way*

**All the  
News  
that's  
Missing**  
*A Profile of an  
Illinois News  
Desert*

**Sustainable  
Startups**  
*Emerging local news  
outlets take varied  
approaches*

**In news deserts,  
Trump won in a  
landslide**  
*But what does this election-  
result correlation mean?*

## The Continued Growth of News Deserts

In 206 counties, where more than 3.5 million people live, there is no local news outlet consistently producing original content. News deserts share many common characteristics. The people within these counties tend to be poorer, older and less well educated than the national averages. The populations are typically smaller and less dense than in many other parts of the country. Three-quarters of news deserts are located in counties which the USDA characterizes as being predominantly rural.





Healthy communities need local news.

## Local news connects us to each other.

Like sidewalks and streetlights, local news is an essential resource for strong communities. It's how we know when and where to volunteer, what's happening in our schools and city councils, and even what to do on the weekend.

However, as once-thriving local newsrooms have shrunk and disappeared across America, this vital public resource is at risk.

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# Philanthropies Pledge \$500 Million to Address Crisis in Local News

The effort, spearheaded by the MacArthur Foundation, will give grants to support newsrooms and start-ups as concern grows over the rapid disappearance of local news outlets.

NiemanReports

Covering thought leadership in journalism

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OPINION

September 7, 2023

## The Press Forward Multiplier Effect

A commitment of a half billion dollars has the potential to help generate billions more in new support for local news



With close to two dozen funders, Press Forward is by far the largest coordinated philanthropic effort to support local news. Sven Hoppe/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

ARTICLE BY



JIM FRIEDLICH  
@JimFriedlich

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unding Local news

September 7, 2023 · 10:01 AM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

David Folkenflik

3-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



## Press Forward: A National Initiative to Support the Revitalization of Local News

September 7, 2023 | Article

SHARE ON SOCIAL



Press Forward, a coalition of 20 donors, form a national initiative to strengthen communities and democracy by supporting local news and information with an infusion of more than a half-billion dollars over the next five years. Press Forward will enhance local journalism at an unprecedented level to re-center local news as a force for community cohesion; support new models and solutions that are ready to scale; and close longstanding inequities in journalism coverage and practice. Read related [press release](#).



THE FIELD ▾

MEMBERSHIP ▾

EVENTS ▾

OUR WORK ▾

ABOUT US ▾

THE 2025 MEDIA IMPACT FORUM ▾

in  

## MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

NEWS  NEWS

# Philanthropy's growing role in American journalism: A new study reveals increased funding and ethical considerations

August 23, 2023 - Media Impact Funders



## MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS



More than half of funders said their journalism grantmaking had increased in the last five years, with roughly a third reporting funding journalism for the first time. The trend is set to continue, with more than half saying they anticipated bigger investments in the future. These philanthropic investments follow more than two decades of decline in commercial revenue for the U.S. daily newspaper industry, which peaked at **\$89 billion in 2000**.

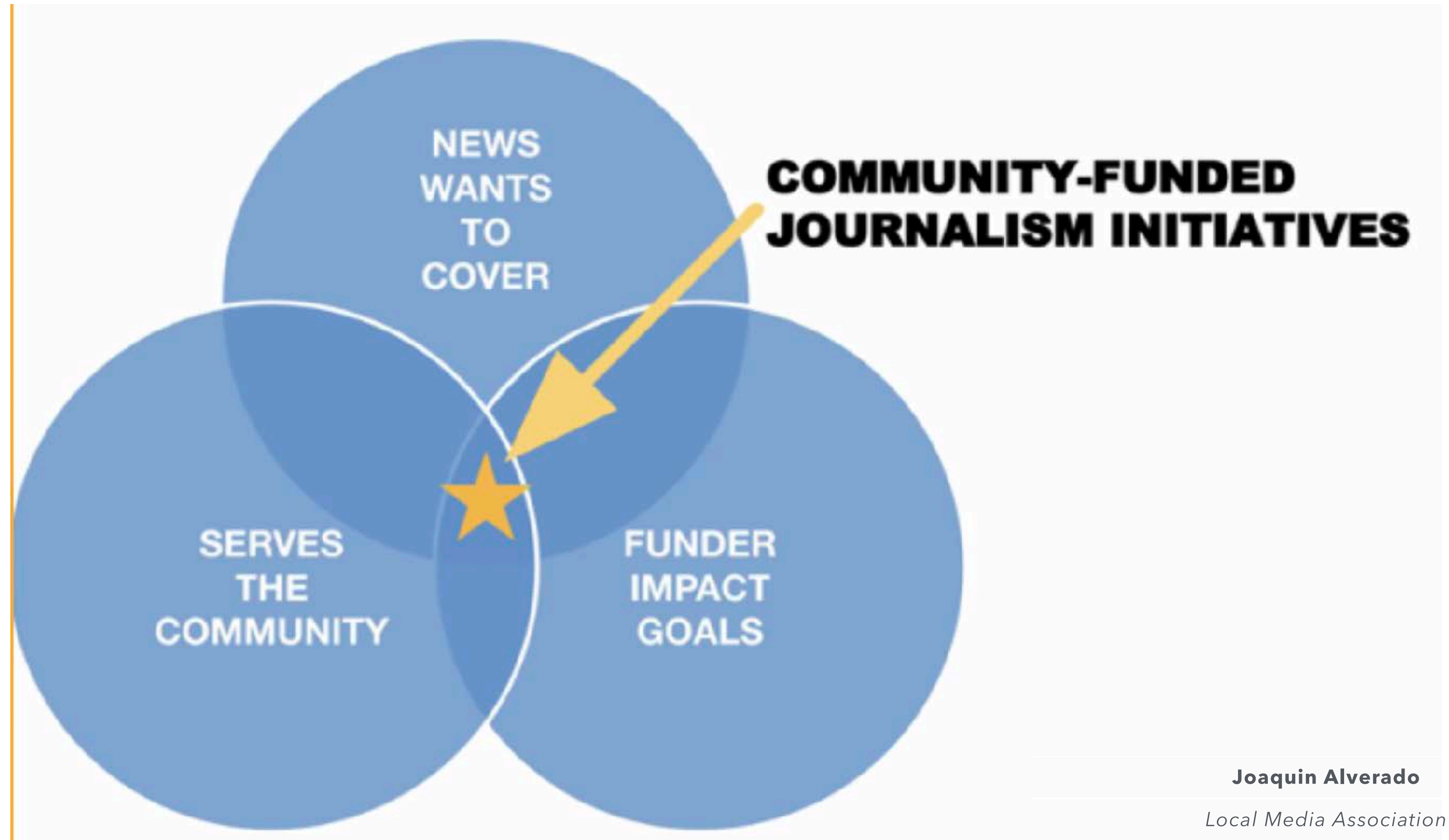
"We're seeing more and more foundations that haven't historically supported journalism move into the sector," said Vince Stehle, MIF's executive director. "But equally important, we are seeing many other foundations that have supported journalism with modest grants in past years doubling down and increasing their commitments in order to protect democracy and civic engagement in their communities."

While 64 percent of funders said they prefer to fund nonprofit journalism, most of the others said tax status doesn't matter (19%), they prefer a mix (12%), or they preferred supporting for-profit outlets (2%). Responding to a separate question, 38% of funders said they've supported a for-profit news organization in the last five years.

"Funders are drawn increasingly to the importance, the impact, and the independence of the journalism they support across a broad array of news organizations and business models," said Jim Friedlich, executive director and CEO of The Lenfest Institute. "Thankfully, there is no one-size-fits-all model for journalism funding."

Funders describe making grants in multiple areas, with 74% reporting they fund journalism that addresses a specific topic or problem and 71% saying they make investments to increase local journalism. More than 50% say they make grants to help journalists increase community engagement, produce investigative reporting, or support news organizations with fundraising and business sustainability.







# What can you do?

**Support journalism initiatives**

**Encourage local media**



## 1. Financial Support and Investment

**Focused Fund:** Launch a nonprofit or donor-advised fund focused specifically on sustaining rural journalism, pooling resources from donors, foundations, and business leaders.

**Seed Funding / Grants:** Provide grants to help newspapers modernize infrastructure, invest in digital tools, or hire staff.

**Match Advertising Dollars:** Encourage local businesses to advertise by offering matching funds for first-time advertisers or underwriters.

**Local Sponsorships:** Sponsor specific coverage areas (e.g. health, education, business).

## 2. Capacity-Building and Training

**Internship Support:** Pay for interns or fellows (especially local youth or journalism students) to work at rural papers and contribute fresh content and energy.

**Tech Partnerships:** Help newspapers partner with tech providers for website development, CRM tools, and subscription platforms.

## 3. Audience Engagement and Community Building

**Help with Subscriptions:** Create programs to subsidize or gift subscriptions for low-income or elderly residents.

## 4. Policy and Advocacy

**Advocate for Postal Rate Reforms:** Push for lower postage rates for small newspapers, which is a major cost.

**Push for Local Government Transparency Laws:** Ensure rural newspapers have access to public records and meetings – and that government is required to post public notices in their pages.

**State Laws:** Support public policy that recognizes importance of local media, including printing presses, journalist tax credits and advertising matches.









Jon K. Rust

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Rural Philanthropy  
Summit

April 11, 2025