ANCHOR POINT

# Supporting Mental Health, Safety, and Resilience in Fishing Communities

## ROUTINE SERVICE: REIMAGINED

### Building community-based safety nets for workers in heritage industries through health care, networking, and training

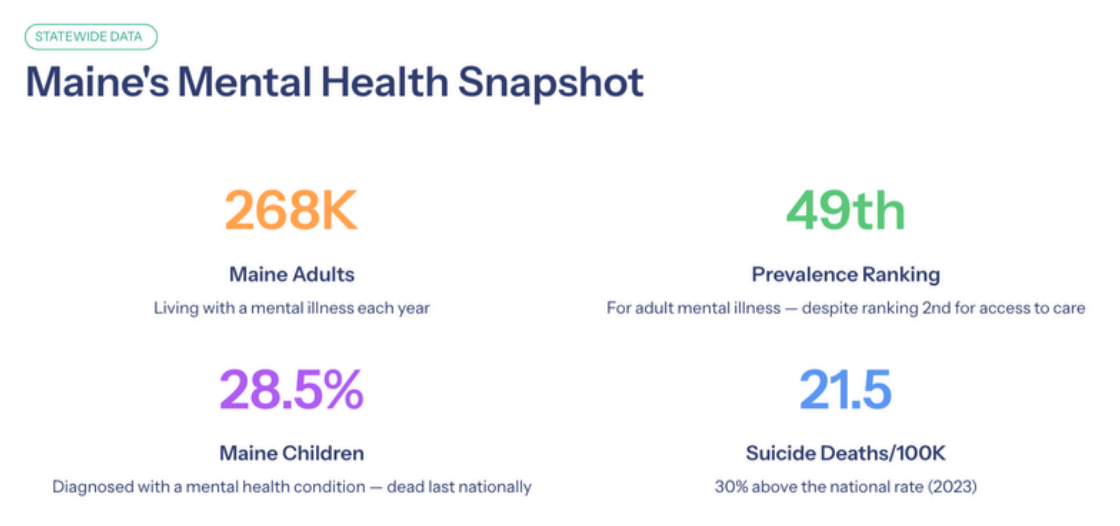
**By Jessica Gribbon Joyce**
**Program Manager for the Local Catch Network**

The Maine Land, Sea and Forest Wellness Forum, hosted by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, offers professional development and networking opportunities for service providers who care about physical and psychological health for those who work in Maine's heritage industries. The health and wellbeing of farmers (of the land and sea), fishermen, and foresters are at the center of this event.

On September 9, I attended the second annual forum in Hallowell, Maine. The keynote speaker, Jennifer Thompson, who is the executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maine, shared some staggering statistics framing mental health in Maine: We are ranked 49th in the nation for adult mental illness, despite ranking second for access to care (according to the State of Mental Health in America report).

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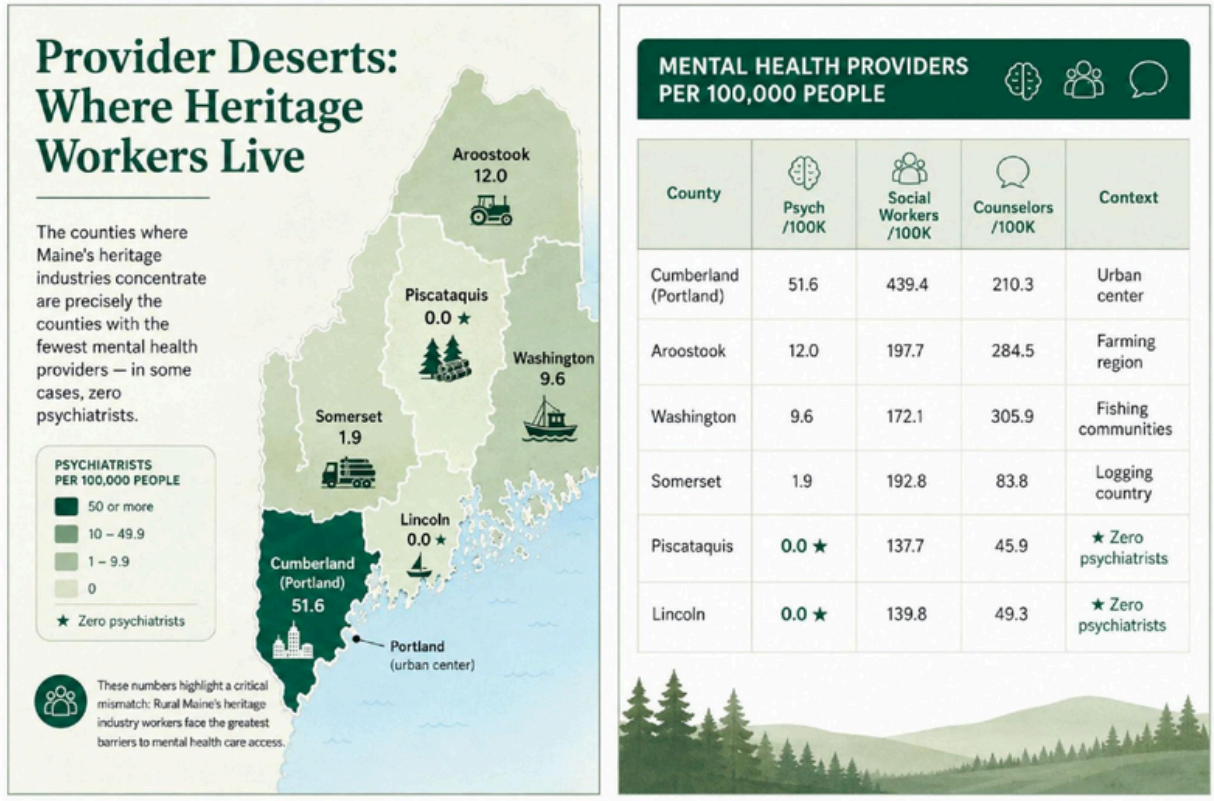

**Jennifer Thompson, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, presented statewide data at the Maine Land, Sea and Forest Wellness Forum.**

Maine's rate of deaths by suicide was 30 percent above the national average in 2023. She talked about "provider deserts" in rural areas (see image on the following page), and that only 14 percent of the documented need for mental health care professional is met by the current provider network.

Thompson also shared that heritage workers lead the nation in suicide risk: "Logging and fishing workers face rates that dwarf every other occupation," up to five times higher than average for male workers and vastly higher than white-collar professions (suicide rates per 100,000 male workers by occupation, as referenced in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report from December 2023). Risk factors also include living in rural communities, being self-employed and/or a seasonal worker, and being uninsured.

Madeline Zenir, research coordinator at the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety, shared her work across the fishing industry in the Northeast, including distributing more than 1,000 life jackets throughout New England in partnership with the Fishing Partnership Support Services, the Man Therapy campaign with Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, a study on sleep deprivation at sea, participatory ergonomics with the lobster fishery, and Fishing Forward podcast we highlighted in the September Anchor Point column.

# ROUTINE SERVICE: REIMAGINED




| County | Psych /100K | Social Workers /100K | Counselors /100K | Context |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cumberland (Portland) | 51.6 | 439.4 | 210.3 | Urban center |
| Aroostook | 12.0 | 197.7 | 284.5 | Farming region |
| Washington | 9.6 | 172.1 | 305.9 | Fishing communities |
| Somerset | 1.9 | 192.8 | 83.8 | Logging country |
| Piscataquis | 0.0 ★ | 137.7 | 45.9 | ★ Zero psychiatrists |
| Lincoln | 0.0 ★ | 139.8 | 49.3 | ★ Zero psychiatrists |

**Thompson's presentation included information on provider deserts, including the paucity of mental health care workers in places where farmers, fishermen, and forestry workers live.**

The power of peer networks was also a topic of conversation, and I learned about Farm First Vermont, a state sponsored nonprofit program designed to provide Vermont's farming community with the support, information, and resources needed to help reduce stress. They have a peer network where they train farmers in listening and problem-solving skills to support other farmers through hard times.

The more I have learned about farming (and farmers), the more parallels I see to the fishing and aquaculture industries. Having events like this forum provides exchanges not only across these natural resource industries, but also for the service providers who support them. It was a learning exchange that broadened my horizon for how LCN can support our members on the path to wellbeing and resilience.

# ROUTINE SERVICE: REIMAGINED



### Fishing

**Stressors:** Dangerous work environments, licensing pressure, dock culture, and grief from loss of fellow workers.

**Entry Points:** Harbormasters, lobstermen's associations, and Maine Sea Grant — embedded, credible messengers.

**Thompson's presentation included a note that stressors and needs vary among participants across heritage industries, so the solutions should not be assigned as if one size fits all.**

Other panel discussions included farm employee retention, mobile health care, access to insurance, stress mitigation, ergonomics, and suicide prevention. Attendees consisted of service providers working in these industries who support physical and mental health needs, as well as healthcare practitioners, industry professionals, municipal leaders, policymakers, and providers with insurance, finance, healthcare, or legal expertise.

This event had financial support from Cultivemos, the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) Northeast, which is funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The National Young Farmer's Coalition is currently the lead organization for this network. Check out the FRSAN program for more information on other regional FRSAN programs and lead institutions for each region. If your state is interested in hosting a similar event, please contact Leslie.Forstadt@maine.edu for more information on the forum.

## ABOUT ANCHOR POINT

Anchor Point is a collection of resources supporting mental health, safety, and resilience in fishing communities. If you have suggestions for resources accessible to fishermen, harvesters, and fishing community members, please reach out to us at info@localcatch.org.