



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Needs
Assessment 2015

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INTRODUCTION

The Community Action Partnership of Mercer County (CAPMC) is proud to present the findings of its human needs assessment. CAPMC has no set agenda except to provide the greatest positive community impact through its programs. The purpose of this document is to provide an unbiased assessment of the human needs in Mercer County.

This human needs assessment combines research and data with input from service providers, stakeholders, community leaders, and others to determine the areas of need that are most pressing. The human needs assessment covers all areas of human services.

The systematic needs assessment had three parts:

- A quantitative perspective on human needs
- A qualitative perspective on human needs
- An analysis of the supply of services available to meet the identified needs and of gaps between supply of services and need for them.

The qualitative analysis of needs, supply of services, and gaps in services relied to a large extent on the knowledge and opinions of Mercer County Key Informants or “experts,” individuals who have long experience in delivering human services and/or knowledge of the problems of poverty. All participants were assured that their comments would not be attributed.



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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



METHODOLOGY

A quantitative analysis of current and future trends in Mercer County's population and socioeconomic trends is provided the foundation for the study.

Simultaneously, the qualitative element of the human needs assessment was conducted using three methods designed to gather the input of a diverse group of service providers, elected officials, service end-users, and the general public. Components of the research process included:

- **One hundred nine key informant surveys** conducted with representative of the private, public and faith based communities and service providers.(This included our Board of Directors)
- **A survey of the general public**, which asked respondents to rank unmet needs. One hundred and eleven responses were received, with the survey's availability reported in local print media, on the CAPMC website, through email blasts, radio and social media. This group included representation from the Public, Private and Low-Income sectors.
- **A focus group of 10 agency clients**

The primary source data was supplemented by third party focus groups and surveys, most notably the Sharon Regional Health System and UPMC Horizon Community Health Strategic Plans and the Head Start Needs Assessment.



PRIORITY AREAS

The following are the top five needs areas identified by survey type (in rank order):

General Population Survey Results:

1. Decrease Crime
2. Expand Employment Opportunities
3. Improve Health Care Services and Affordability
4. Improve Children's Educational Opportunities
5. Improve Senior Citizen Services

Key Informant Survey Results:

1. Increase Employment Opportunities
2. Increase Literacy
3. Increase Employment Training Opportunities
4. Enhance Family Financial Literacy Skills
5. Increase Access to Affordable Pre-School

Focus Group Results:

1. Transportation
2. Employment and Employment Skills Training
3. Housing Affordability/Neighborhood Blight
4. Education
5. Recreational Opportunities

Combined Results:

1. Increase Employment Opportunities
2. Increase/Enhance Family Literacy Skills
3. Increase Employment Training opportunities
4. Enhance Family Financial Literacy Skills
5. Improve Health Care Services/Affordability

CORE PROGRAM AREAS

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The priority areas we presently address are: Early Childhood Development (Early Head Start and Head Start); Employment and Employment Supports (Work Ready); Housing, which includes Emergency Shelter for Veterans, Housing Counseling, Senior Housing, Special Needs Housing and Property Management; and Energy, which includes Federal, and State Residential Weatherization Assistance and private utility energy education and weatherization services.

A DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF MERCER COUNTY

The following demographic trends affect human needs in Mercer County today and will do so in the future. They include:

- **LESS PEOPLE:** During a thirteen-year period, total population estimates for the report area declined by -3.52 percent, decreasing from 120,293 persons in 2000 to 116,059 persons in 2013. A significant positive or negative shift in total population over time impacts health care providers and the utilization of community services.
- **OLDER PEOPLE:** The median age is 43, higher than both the State and Nation. Over forty-seven percent (47.52) of the population is over the age of 45. The highest percentage of the population is 65 plus at 18.81%. The population 65 and over is projected to 22.7% of the total population by 2018. Health needs are being shaped by these changing demographics. As the elderly become a larger share of the population over the next 20 years the need to address chronic conditions.
- **OVER 13,000 CITIZENS ARE BEING LEFT UNPREPARED:** 11.38 percent of the county's population over the age of 25, 13,207 individuals, have less than a high school education. 12% or 91,766 individuals over the age of 16 lack basic literacy skills and are ill-prepared to take part in today's jobs.
- **INCOME IS DECLINING:** By It is expected that average household and median household income will decrease by 2.7% by the year 2018. compared to a 4.3% increase in the State and a 1.1% increase nationally.
- **15,308 MERCER COUNTY RESIDENTS LIVE IN POVERTY:** 2013 poverty estimates based on Poverty Thresholds show 14.1% of the population is poor which is above the State average of 13.7%. The percentage of children age 0-17 living in poverty is higher than the percentage of all ages living in poverty at 22.2%.
- **OVER 8,000 HOUSEHOLDERS ARE "WORKING POOR":** 8,104 householders are working poor earning below the self-sufficiency standard. 18.3% of households are above poverty but below the standard which is \$ 25.17/hr. or \$ 52,354 /yr. Above poverty individuals are more likely than those living in poverty to have less than a high school education (diploma). The assumptions are based on a two parent household with children with one adult working and access to one vehicle. (Source: Pathways PA)

1 in 4 Households are Eligible for Public Assistance

- **46% (11,605) CHILDREN ARE IN POVERTY:** This is out of a total of 25,229 children under the age of 18 in the County, Of the number eligible for Head Start Participation (5,962) 2,142 child or 36% are actually participating in early childhood programs.

17% of survey respondents indicate that there was limited availability of pre-school opportunities; The same percentage indicated that the affordability of pre- school opportunities was a moderate challenge(The average cost for childcare in the county, including toddler, pre-school, school age and before/after school care is \$ 30.91/day full time and \$ 22.10/day part time. 35% indicate that public school systems not meeting a child's educational needs is a considerable challenge.39% believed that there was a lack of knowledge related to exiting educational resources for children.

Youth: The lack and/or limited availability of youth mentoring opportunities, after school programs, recreational opportunities and difficulty accessing affordable youth programs and event were cited as moderate to considerable challenges by survey respondents.
- **7.2% of COUNTY RESIDENTS 65 PLUS ARE POOR:** As the number of elderly increase it is likely this number will increase also.

Inability to access medical care, meeting basic needs and transportation to needed services were indicated as considerable challenges by survey respondents.
- **13.5% OF ALL PERSONS 18-64 HAVE NO HEALTH INSURANCE:** The main issues here are difficulty in affording prescriptions; dental care and health insurance .Low income people often postpone seeking medical attention until health problems become aggravated creating a greater demand on medical resources. This includes reliance on emergency room services for otherwise routine medical care.

Both Per-capita and Median Household Incomes are Lower than the State and National Levels.

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS, SERVICES AND GAPS

SHELTER

In Mercer County 42.65% of occupied units paying rent (11,788) have a housing cost burden. 30 percent or more of income spent on housing costs is considered a "housing cost burden"

27.99 percent of owners with mortgages (19,172) and 12.6% of owners without mortgages (15,277) spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs.

Although not a priority area, 22% of survey respondents indicated often have difficulty paying rent or mortgages. 55% of persons surveyed indicated that the ability to afford utilities and heat is a considerable challenge.

JOBS

The County experienced an average 4.9% unemployment rate in October 2015 compared to the statewide rate of 4.6% and a national rate of 4.9%. This is out of a labor force of 52,853 individuals.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, unemployment fell from 2,675 persons to 2,588 persons, a rate change of -0.1% for the period of October 2014 to October 2015. Keep in mind that unemployment rates are calculated based on the number of persons collecting unemployment compensation and do not reflect those who have exhausted benefits and/or are no longer looking for work.

16% of persons surveyed indicated that they often found job training opportunities lacking; 37.62% found the availability of employment opportunities lacking and 44% experienced difficulty finding employment that matched their skills.

54% of All Households in Poverty are female headed Households

FOOD NEEDS

14% of our population (16,230) persons are considered to be food insecure. Food insecurity is the household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

46.89% of the total students in the County (7,375) are eligible for free/reduced price lunches.

The total number of households eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) (formerly food stamp program) is 9,788 or 21% of total households. The average monthly allocation is \$ 227.68. Of the number eligible, 6,820 or 14.77% actually receive assistance. This number is almost equally split between those below and above the poverty level and with at least one working member.



CHALLENGES

The following have been identified as the greatest challenges our community will face in the next three years in no particular order:

- Health Care
- Senior Citizen Programs
- Opportunities for Youth Outside of School
- Providing Job Opportunities
- Education
- Job Skills Training

CLOSING

The information contained in this report warrants further analysis in order to develop the strategies necessary to meet the identified needs and to respond to the challenges ahead. In addition to our core programs, CAPMC is committed to partner with other agencies and organizations not only to enhance existing services but also to “fill the gaps” either through expansion or program creation.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all statistical data taken from Community Commons Community Health Needs Assessment and/or CAAP CNA (Community Needs Assessment) support tool.

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The official registration and financial information of the Community Action Partnership of Mercer County may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.