



2022

Community Needs Assessment

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program, Inc. (CDP)

PROGRAMS

- Head Start
- Housing Choice Voucher Program
 - Home Ownership Program
 - Family Self-Sufficiency Program
- Neighborhood Centers
 - Food ŞenŞe
- Weatherization



Executive Summary

Organizational Background¹

The St. Lawrence County Community Development Program, known as CDP, is a private, not-for-profit agency that serves St. Lawrence County. It is one of forty-nine agencies in a network in New York State and one of a thousand Community Action Agencies that exist in the United States.

CDP was incorporated in 1965 and operates programs and services for low-income families to assist them toward self-sufficiency. We encourage self-reliance and responsible community participation among those we serve. Through our programs, families gain access to resources and services that not only help alleviate the financial burden brought on by underemployment and an ever-rising cost of living, but also seek to ultimately move them towards self-support.

Our programs aim to offer a hand up, not a hand out.

Mission

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program is committed to encourage and assist individuals and families to attain self-reliance, dignity and self-sufficiency through education, guidance and services.

Vision

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program is a community organization that envisions equal opportunities and self-sufficiency for low-income individuals and families in St. Lawrence County

Values

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program aims to provide quality customer service to our current and potential program participants, support a work environment that fosters creativity and promotes the exploration of innovative ideas, and adhere to best practices in every aspect of the organization.

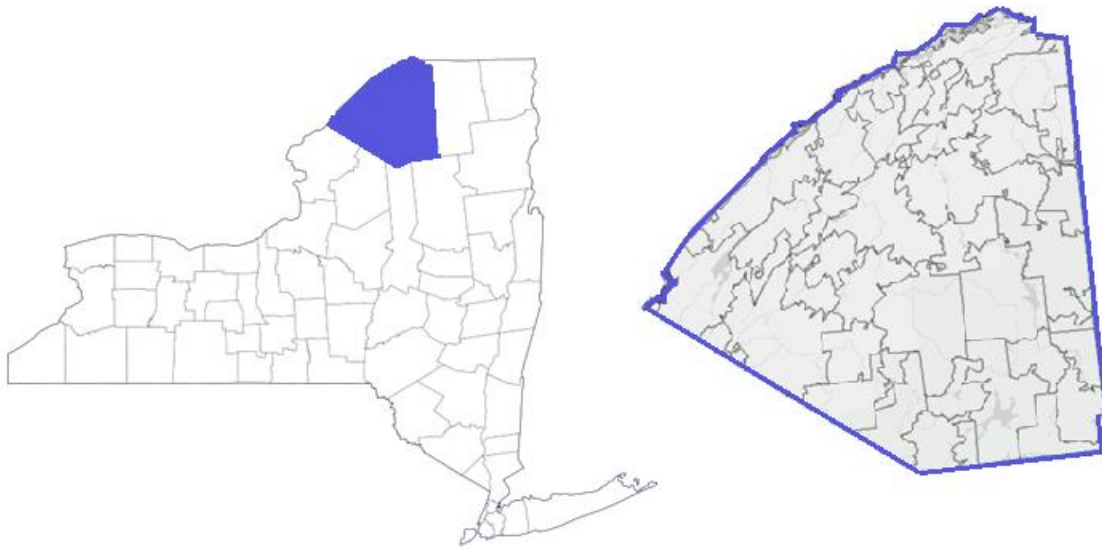
¹ [St. Lawrence Community Development Program. About Us, 2022](#)

Service Area

Located along the Canadian border in between the St. Lawrence River, the Thousand Islands regions, and the Adirondack Mountains, St. Lawrence County makes up 2,685 square miles. Within the county, there are 32 towns, 13 villages, and one city. St. Lawrence County is the geographically largest county in the state of New York and the 5th largest county east of the Mississippi River.²

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program (CDP) serves low-income individuals and families throughout St. Lawrence County. CDP is one of 49 Community Action Agencies in the State of New York.³

St. Lawrence County Community Development Program Service Area



² [St. Lawrence County Government. About St. Lawrence County, 2022.](#)

³ [St. Lawrence County Community Development Program. About Us, 2022.](#)

CDP Programs

Head Start

Housing Choice Voucher Program

- Home Ownership Program
- Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Neighborhood Center

- Food \$en\$e

Weatherization

Head Start is a federally funded comprehensive school readiness program for children between 3 and 5 years of age. Head Start has experienced, certified teachers who provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment for children, including children with special needs. Head Start children will acquire skills in math, science, literacy, language, social/emotional, physical health and development. Through play, children learn to express their thoughts and feelings, increase self-confidence, and have positive relationships with others.

Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) is a program which is funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with the purpose of providing rental assistance for income-eligible families. The ultimate goal is to provide renters with safe, affordable housing.

- **Home Ownership Program** is another program for HCVP participants. The focus of this program is to assist eligible families to purchase their first home. It allows a family to use their rental assistance voucher to make their mortgage payment.
- **Family Self-Sufficiency Program** is for HCVP participants who want to achieve economic independence. This involves personalized case management and referring families to local services.

St. Lawrence County CDP operates six **Neighborhood Centers** throughout the county. The centers are each staffed by a director and provide services to low-income families with the assistance of community volunteers; the services may be directly offered at the centers, or families may be referred to other agencies and resources as needed. Centers have food pantries and provide emergency aid if required with food, fuel, utilities, or shelter. Thrift stores with donated clothing and household items are available at the Canton and Gouverneur Neighborhood Centers.

- **Food \$en\$e**, a program provided by the Food Bank of Central New York, is a monthly food-buying co-op with no qualifications, subscriptions or requirements to participate. Anyone within the eleven counties served can utilize the service. Through the program, one has access to a monthly box of 12-15 staple grocery items at a discounted price.

Weatherization is designed for homeowners or renters to make their home more energy efficient. There are income guidelines for this program. This program provides a number of weatherization measures which include window and door replacement; attic and sidewall insulation; health and safety measures including smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; and furnace cleaning and tuning.

Secondary Data Summary

Social Vulnerability Index

As part of county-specific summaries, there are data change tables utilizing The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) model. The SVI was developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a metric for analyzing population data to identify vulnerable populations.

The SVI may be used to rank overall population well-being and mobility relative to County and State averages. The measures are grouped into four major categories: Socioeconomic Status, Household Composition and Disability, Minority Status and Language, and Housing and Transportation. The SVI can also be used to determine the most vulnerable populations during disaster preparedness and public health emergencies, including pandemics.⁴

The SVI of St. Lawrence County

Socioeconomic Status	17.6% below poverty	4.6% unemployment rate	\$52,071 median household income	11.4% have no high school diploma
Household Composition & Disability	20.1% are under 18 years old	17.4% are 65 years and older	16.2% of the population has a disability	19.0% children live in single-parent households
Minority Status & Language		8.3% of the population are ethnic/racial minority	2.6% have limited or no English proficiency	
Household Type & Transportation	17.7% of housing structures are multi-unit	9.7% have no vehicle	10.6% live in group quarters	10.4% live in mobile homes

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2016-2020

- St. Lawrence County has a higher percentage of people living below poverty than the state and national averages.
- St. Lawrence County has an unemployment rate of 4.6% which is lower than the New York rate.
- The median household income in St. Lawrence County is \$52,071 which is approximately \$13,000 to \$19,000 less than the corresponding national and state figures.

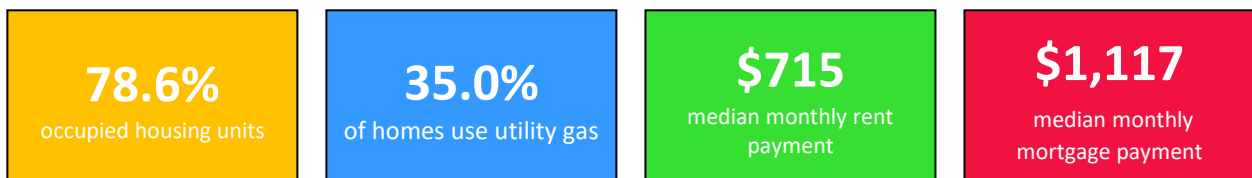
⁴ [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index.](#)

- The percentage of St. Lawrence County residents aged 25 years and over without a high school diploma (11.4%) is similar to the national percentage and slightly lower than the state percentage.
- St. Lawrence County has greater proportions of residents who are 65 years and older (17.4%) and/or living with a disability (16.2%) than the state or nation.
- In St. Lawrence County, nearly two in five children (19.0%) live in single-parent households.
- St. Lawrence County has a low proportion of residents who identify as an ethnic/racial minority (8.3%) compared to state and national averages (44.8% and 39.9%, respectively).
- Only 2.6% of residents in St. Lawrence County have limited or no English proficiency, compared to 13.1% of those in the state.
- Lower than state and national averages, 17.7% of housing structures are multi-units.
- Approximately 10.4% of housing units are mobile homes, compared to 2.3% of those across the state.
- More than one in ten of the population lives in group quarters (10.6%), compared to lower than three percent of the state and national populations.

Housing

The neighborhoods people live in have a major impact on their health and well-being. Many people in the United States live in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, unsafe air or water, and other health and safety risks. Racial and ethnic minorities and people with low incomes are more likely to live in places with these risks. In addition, some people are exposed to things at work that can harm their health, like secondhand smoke or loud noises.⁵

The housing profile of St. Lawrence County

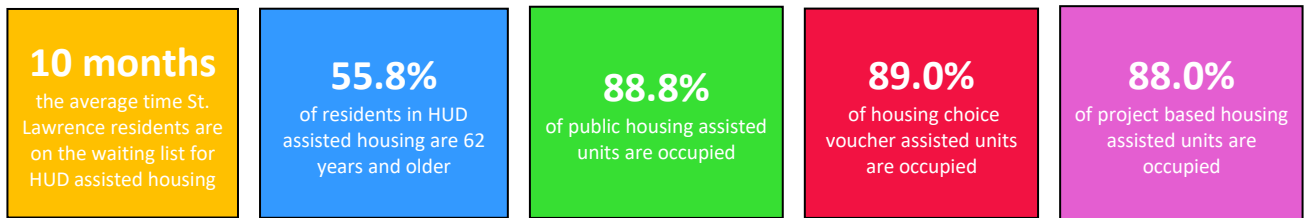


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2016-2020

⁵ [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030. Social Determinants of Health, Neighborhood & Built Environment.](#)

Housing instability encompasses a number of challenges, such as having trouble paying rent, overcrowding, moving frequently, staying with relatives, or spending the bulk of household income on housing. These experiences may negatively affect physical health and make it harder to access health care. This summary will discuss the cost of housing as well as the health effects of substandard housing and forced evictions. Certain populations may be more affected by housing instability, such as children who move frequently.⁶

The housing assistance profile of St. Lawrence County



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Assisted Housing: National and Local, Picture of Subsidized Households, 2021

Childcare

Early childhood, particularly the first five years of life, impacts long-term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Healthy development in early childhood helps prepare children for the educational experiences of kindergarten and beyond. Early childhood development and education opportunities are affected by various environmental and social factors, including early life stress, socioeconomic status, relationships with parents and caregivers, and access to early education programs.⁷

Childcare cost-burdened households indicate childcare costs for a household with two children as a percent of median household income.

The number of childcare centers per 1,000 population under age five in St. Lawrence County is half the corresponding figure for New York State.

Childcare Centers

	New York	St. Lawrence County
Number of childcare centers per 1,000 population under five	6	3
Percent of household income required for childcare expenses	30.0%	33.0%

Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. New York, 2021-2022

- Per 1,000 children under five, there are 3 childcare centers in St. Lawrence County.
- Households spend approximately 33.0% of their income on childcare expenses.

⁶ [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030. Social Determinants of Health Literature Summaries, Housing Instability.](#)

⁷ [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030. Social Determinants of Health Literature Summaries, Early Childhood Development & Education.](#)

Compared to New York state, St. Lawrence County has higher rates of children in the foster care system and admissions into foster care.

Foster Care

	New York	St. Lawrence County
Foster care children in care (per 1,000)	3.0	9.4
Foster care admissions (per 1,000)	1.3	4.3
Foster care discharges	29.6%	25.6%

Source: NYS Education Department; Office of Information; Reporting and Technology Services, 2020

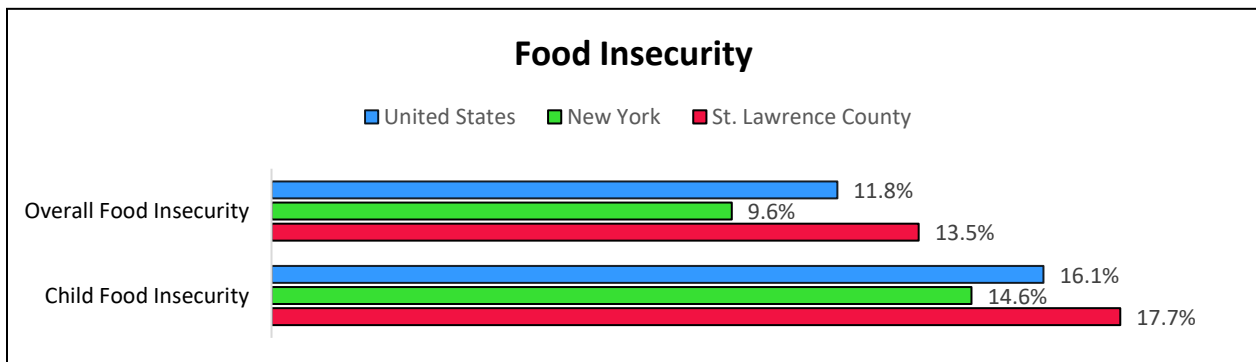
- In St. Lawrence County every 9.4 children out of 1,000 are in foster care, higher than the state average of 3 children out of 1,000.
- In 2020, St. Lawrence County had a rate of 4.3 children per 1,000 who were newly admitted into foster care, while in the state of New York the rate was 1.3 per 1,000 children.
- Approximately 25.6% of children in foster care were discharged from the foster care system and moved into a permanent home in 2020.

Food

Food insecurity is defined as the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of a lack of money and other resources. Food insecurity may be long-term or temporary. It may be influenced by several factors including income, employment, race/ethnicity, and disability. The risk of food insecurity increases when money to buy food is limited or not available. Additionally, people living in some urban areas, rural areas, and low-income neighborhoods may have limited access to full-service supermarkets or grocery stores.⁸

Compared to state and national averages, St. Lawrence County has higher percentages of overall food insecurity and child food insecurity. The average meal cost that food-insecure individuals report spending on food ranges from \$3.25 to \$3.52 in the United States, New York, and St. Lawrence County.

Food Insecurity



Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2021: An Analysis of County & Congressional District Food Insecurity & County Food Cost in the United States, 2020

⁸ [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030. Social Determinants of Health Literature Summaries, Food Insecurity.](#)

- In St. Lawrence County 13.5% of the population has food insecurity. Approximately 30.0% of the food insecure population is above the 200% poverty threshold and does not qualify for SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs, comparable to the national level.
- There are 17.5% of children in St. Lawrence County who are food insecure. There are 14.0% of children who are food insecure in the county but are likely ineligible for federal nutrition programs because they live in households whose income is above 185% poverty, which is a lower percentage than the national level.

In St. Lawrence County there are households who receive SNAP benefits.

SNAP Assistance Program Enrollment

	United States	New York	St. Lawrence County
Total households	122,354,219	7,417,224	41,925
Households receiving SNAP	13,892,407	1,057,725	6,554
SNAP authorized stores ⁹	229,142	15,521	113

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2016-2020

- In St. Lawrence County 6,554 (15.6%) households are receiving SNAP, with 113 stores that accept SNAP. Nationally, 11.4% of households receive SNAP benefits.

Qualitative Summary

The qualitative primary research methodology consisted of stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions with key community stakeholders, policymakers, and residents.

Qualitative data collection resulted in a consensus of several top areas of need that can be described as qualitative themes. Each of these qualitative themes impacts the subsequent high-level action areas. The action areas include an overview of the subject and utilize de-identified illustrative observations in italics which are representative of respondents’ consensus perspectives.

One-on-One Interviews

Twelve one-on-one virtual phone interviews were conducted, lasting approximately 30 minutes, although some community members chose to share a great deal of information and exceeded 30 minutes. These conversations provided the opportunity for:

- In-depth conversations about the strengths and challenges to receiving health care, services, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ideas for solutions to improve their communities.
- In-depth discussions about health care, social service, mental health, and other service issues with leaders, community partners, and individuals from the community.

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service. Food Environment Atlas, 2017

Focus Group Discussions

One community-wide focus group started with brief introductions, followed by participant sharing of their thoughts about select topic areas. Discussions were then narrowed down to focus on topics participants observed as the greatest concerns facing their community and what possible solutions they envisioned. Participants were encouraged to speak about their particular areas of concern, interest, or experience, as many opinions and observations were grounded in both personal and professional experiences.

Community Strengths

When asked what some of the positives and strengths that the St. Lawrence County community has to offer, many stakeholders emphasized that the community is tight-knit, and people always step in for one another when someone is in need. The diverse geography and beautiful landscape of the county makes the community unique. Community members also mentioned that many nonprofits work well together to provide resources and services to community members.

High-Level Action Areas & Observations

Listed below are the high-level observations and action areas gleaned from the qualitative data. In addition to the observations, certain actions flow naturally from the themes above. These are important to include in any planning response. The comments in the following high-level action areas are most representative of respondents' consensus in the qualitative interviews.



Access to Health Services



Childcare



Housing



Mental Health and Substance Use



Transportation

Access to Health Services

In 2019 there was one primary care physician per 1,860 residents in St. Lawrence County. In 2020 there was one dentist per 2,550 residents in the county.¹⁰ Community members voiced many concerns regarding accessing health services in St. Lawrence County. Long wait times, lack of providers within the county, quality care, and affordability are challenges stated by community members. Access to care for children is an area where community members see large gaps in care.

“For those who are low-income, health care is harder to acquire but access needs to be a priority. Illness doesn't care what your socioeconomic status is.” – Community Member

Childcare

Access to safe and affordable childcare is an essential building block to the overall quality of life for families as parents and caregivers have more opportunities to pursue a career and higher education that contribute to stability and financial security.¹¹ The childcare industry has been stunned by the pandemic, along with the overall economy. Childcare workers are hard to attract and retain, and classrooms have shuttered because of a lack of teachers, creating at times waitlists for those seeking childcare. All the while, there is pressure on childcare operators to raise wages while keeping services as affordable as possible.¹² Interviewees cite a list of challenges concerning childcare, including a lack of brick-and-mortar childcare facilities and long waitlists to get into them.

“Childcare is not affordable. Before the pandemic I put my kids in a childcare center. At the time my husband worked for the county, and we struggled financially as two well-employed individuals to put them there. The only reason we can afford it is with a second and third child, you get a discount.” – Community Member

In St. Lawrence County households are spending 33.0% of their household income on childcare.¹³ Approximately 19.0% of children live in single-parent households.¹⁴ Childcare affordability, availability, and waitlists are concerns that community members mentioned. There are also challenges in increasing the number of childcare providers in the county.

¹⁰ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. New York, 2019-2021

¹¹ Hamm, Baider, White, et.al. [America, It's Time to Talk About Childcare. October 2019.](#)

¹² [The Norwin Star, Covid Pandemic Puts Pressure On Pittsburgh Region's Child Care Services, March 2022.](#)

¹³ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. New York, 2021-2022

¹⁴ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. New York, 2016-2020

Housing

Across New York, housing prices have increased, causing many households to be severely cost-burdened. Approximately 70.0% of renters who are low-income are spending more than half of their income on housing costs.¹⁵ In St. Lawrence County the median monthly rent payment is \$715, and the median monthly mortgage payment is \$1,117.¹⁶ The vast majority of public housing, housing choice vouchers, and project-based housing-assisted units are occupied in the county.

“The cost of housing is one thing, and the other thing is there is not a lot of housing stock. Once it goes on the market, it doesn't last long. We don't have much low-income housing.” – Community Member

When asked about their top concerns, interviewees noted quality, affordable housing as a priority community challenge. Community members frequently cited a sheer lack of units, long waitlists for low-income units, and the overall affordability.

Many community members said that there are people experiencing homelessness in the county and the population is growing. According to community stakeholders, there are very few supports for those experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

“People are talking about homelessness like it is a new thing, but it is not – it is just more visible.” – Community Member

Mental Health and Substance Use

Conversations with community members have revealed that the lack of mental health access is a concern across St. Lawrence County. Approximately 16.0% of residents in St. Lawrence County have experienced 14 or more days of frequent mental distress in the last 30 days.¹⁷ Community discussions indicate that high-level needs for mental health are rooted in the lack of local mental health services, wait times, and bed shortages. Community stakeholders mentioned that people are struggling with substance use in the county.

“It is kind of shocking to see obituaries of people in their 20s and 30s, and I give credit to families that say they passed away from addiction because it brings awareness. Unfortunately, it happens on a regular basis around here.” – Community Member

Transportation

Public transportation can impact a person's health and influence health equity. Lack of transportation can cause an individual to miss their health appointments, which can cause poorer health outcomes and added health expenditures. Reliable transportation can improve stability in access to health, nutrition, employment opportunities, and social inclusion.¹⁸

¹⁵ [National Low Income Housing Coalition. New York, 2022.](#)

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2016-2020

¹⁷ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. New York, 2019

¹⁸ [Health Affairs. Culture of Health: Public Transportation in the US, 2021](#)

Because St. Lawrence County is geographically large and rural, having a public transportation system that serves all residents throughout the county is a challenge. According to one community stakeholder, it takes around two hours to get across the whole county. Unreliability, scheduling barriers, and timely access to public transportation are also themes that were heard when talking to community members.

“Transportation is extraordinarily difficult if you don't drive or are at an income level where you can't afford a car to reliably get to where you have to go.”-- Community Member

Community Survey

The purpose of the CDP community survey is to help identify the top needs of residents and the barriers/gaps that may prevent residents from accessing community resources. The survey took respondents less than 15 minutes to complete. Answers were anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was used to identify respondents.

The community survey collected results from **335** respondents. The survey was deployed from August 25, 2022, until September 14, 2022.

Ranked Transportation, Workforce Development, and Employment Needs

Workforce development is a theme that respondents identified as an area where a lot more focus is needed. Over 50% of the survey respondents said that developing more livable wage jobs is the area that much more focus is needed (52.5%). Approximately 49.4% said that a lot more focus is needed to improve access to high-speed internet and technology and 41.5% said creating technical school, trade school, or other job training options is a lot more needed.

	Much more focus or support needed	A lot more focus needed
Developing more livable wage jobs	18.9%	52.5%
Improving access to high-speed internet and technology	18.0%	49.4%
Creating technical school, trade school, or other job training options	17.0%	41.5%
Providing job growth opportunities	21.3%	39.6%
Providing soft skills education (customer service, showing up on time, etc.)	16.7%	35.9%
Making public transportation available in rural communities	19.1%	34.0%
Adding better routes and time schedules to the current public transportation system	18.7%	26.6%
Providing help with the cost of vehicle repairs	12.4%	24.8%
Providing help with the cost of vehicle insurance and regular maintenance	12.7%	19.0%

Ranked Housing Needs

Approximately 50.2% of survey respondents ranked weatherization assistance as an area with the most needed focus. Increasing programs for major housing repairs and providing help with utility assistance was also ranked as a high need. As far as developing more housing options, more senior housing options (46.8%) and increasing the number of affordable housing (42.5%) are also ranked high up on the needs where a lot more focus is needed.

	Much more focus or support needed	A lot more focus needed
Providing help with weatherization	15.0%	50.2%
Increasing programs or major housing repairs (roofs, windows, etc.)	17.2%	48.1%
Providing more senior housing options	18.3%	46.8%
Providing help with utility assistance (heating fuel, electricity, etc.)	12.9%	44.0%
Increasing the number of affordable apartments	23.2%	42.5%
Developing rental and mortgage assistance programs	17.2%	40.8%
Creating more emergency shelter beds for people who are homeless	15.0%	39.5%
Increasing programs for minor housing repairs (paint, upgrades, etc.)	13.3%	39.1%
Providing hotspots for internet access	14.2%	37.9%
Creating more shelter beds for certain populations (children, women, families, LGBTQIA, veterans, etc.)	14.5%	36.8%
Creating higher quality rental apartments and houses	21.5%	36.5%
Helping more people who are homeless to find their missing identification documents (driver's license, social security number, etc.)	12.0%	35.0%
Increasing the number of affordable houses for sale	16.9%	33.3%
Increasing the number of landlords who accept housing vouchers	10.4%	28.7%

Ranked Childcare and Early Education Needs

Over 55.2% of survey respondents ranked providing more flexible and affordable childcare options for working parent(s) as an area where a lot more focus is needed. Increasing the number of affordable childcare providers, providing more after-school programs, and increasing the number of high-quality licensed childcare providers are high areas of need where more focus or support is needed.

	Much more focus or support needed	A lot more focus needed
Providing more flexible and affordable childcare options for working parent(s)	14.9%	55.2%
Increasing the number of affordable childcare providers	16.9%	48.7%

Providing more after-school programs for school-aged children	11.8%	44.4%
Increasing the number of high-quality licensed childcare providers	16.9%	42.9%
Providing more recreational opportunities for youth	13.7%	41.2%
Providing more transportation options to childcare services	9.2%	30.7%
Mental health services for children ages 4 and younger	15.6%	28.6%

Ranked Food, Healthcare, and Mental Health Needs

Making dental care more affordable is ranked as the top need where a lot more focus or support is needed (60.9%). Substance use and mental health related resources are areas that respondents ranked as a high need.

	Much more focus or support needed	A lot more focus or support needed
Making dental care more affordable	14.6%	60.9%
Reducing the amount of opioid misuse	15.1%	59.4%
Reducing the amount of other drug misuse (heroin, cocaine, etc.)	14.1%	57.8%
Increasing the number of mental health providers in rural communities	19.3%	50.9%
Accessible sources for affordable, nutritious food	17.9%	50.0%
Expanding crisis services for mental health and substance use disorder	14.2%	49.3%
Reducing stigma associated with mental health and substance misuse	16.7%	48.1%
Increasing the number of dentists who serve Medicaid patients	14.2%	46.2%
Reducing the amount of childhood obesity	17.0%	43.4%
Reducing the amount of adult obesity	21.2%	40.1%
Increasing the number of substance use disorder providers and services	16.5%	40.1%
Increasing services for people with disabilities	18.8%	36.5%
Reducing the amount of alcohol misuse	15.1%	36.3%
Reducing the amount of smoking and vaping	12.7%	35.9%
Increasing the availability of prepared foods for seniors (Meals on Wheels, etc.)	18.4%	34.0%
Increasing the number of detox facilities	20.2%	33.3%
Expanding open hours at food pantries	17.5%	28.9%
Expanding food options for people with dietary restrictions or allergies at food pantries	15.6%	22.8%