



**Community Action Council
of Howard County**

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DECEMBER 2023

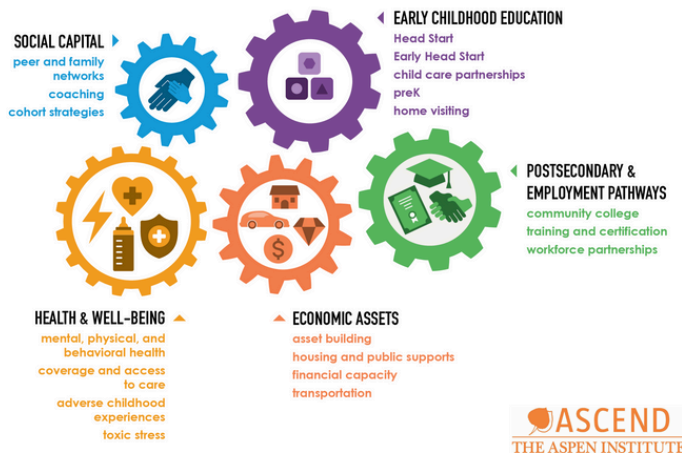
Background

- Community Action Council of Howard County’s (CAC) last community needs assessment: Board approved in 2020.
- The current Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment: Conducted July through October 2023 by CAC staff and a contracted provider.
- The assessment design aligns with Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Organizational standards and is a resource to develop CAC’s updated three-year strategic plan.
- The purpose of this assessment:
 - Ascertain critical needs in Howard County, Maryland as identified by community members, stakeholders, community partners, and service providers, enabling CAC to update and adapt programs and services to best meet community needs.
- The completed assessment was also evaluated against the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS) “Checklist for Monitoring Community Needs Assessments for State CSBG Offices” to ensure full compliance with authorizing bodies’ expectations.

Methodology

- CAC used a metanalysis approach to community data, reviewing multiple verified data sources to understand the complete Howard County profile.
- Qualitative data was collected from clients and partners through an online and paper survey.
- Focus group and in-depth survey data was collected by CAC’s community partners for their community needs assessment, and rather than duplicate efforts, CAC used those results to contribute to this updated community needs assessment.





- Surveys were facilitated in a variety of settings to reach a diverse group of respondents.
- Both qualitative and quantitative data have been aligned with the 2-Generation Social Determinants of Health frameworks.

The Planning and Program (P&P) Committee convened on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, to review the first draft of this community needs assessment with a three-fold purpose:

- Analysis of data contained in the full report.
- Identification of the root causes and conditions of poverty in Howard County.
- Discussion of services CAC should stop, start, or continue.

Causes of Poverty in Howard County

- **Housing and the financial condition of the family:**
 - Suggestion for CAC: Continue supporting families with financial management through relationships with community partners like Making Change, building other relationships for this service in the County.
- **Physical and Mental health:** Complex physical and mental health needs combined with a lack of insurance coverage for mental health services has a direct economic impact on Howard County citizens.
- **Food security is directly tied to health. Without adequate, healthy food, physical and mental health suffers.**
 - Suggestion for CAC: Begin to facilitate discussions for a road map to address physical and mental health issues, being sure to include the Horizon Foundation to support community efforts to overall family physical and mental health. Join discussions already in progress.

Conditions of Poverty in Howard County

- **Inequities:** The demographics of poverty don't match the overall demographic composition of Howard County. This indicates disproportionality such that historically marginalized groups continue to suffer from the conditions of poverty in the County.
- **Housing:** As noted throughout the data in this assessment, the high cost of housing in Howard County is likely the most impactful condition of poverty in the County. These costs lead families to choose to pay rent rather than pay for food, leading to food insecurity, a clear cause of poverty in the County.
- **Absence of a livable wage:** Employment in Howard County requires a livable wage. As of January 2024, Maryland's minimum wage will be raised to \$15 per hour. Individuals must make close to \$23 hourly to maintain self-sufficiency.
- **Services cliff:** To live in Howard County, households must earn a higher wage than the income threshold of many needed services. The gap between the Federal poverty level, the eligible income threshold, and the actual earnings needed for self-sufficiency means families are ineligible for services.
- **Single mother families:** According to CAC's own data, single mothers are more likely to be adversely impacted by the conditions of poverty in the County.
 - Suggestion for CAC: CAC should escalate single mothers as a critical ongoing priority for services and targeted programs.
- **Lack of affordable childcare:** Howard County lacks affordable childcare for children from birth through elementary school. The costs of childcare may often be more than the cost of housing. Lack of childcare means parents cannot work, thereby contributing to the causes of poverty.
 - Suggestion for CAC: Seek to address the lack of affordable, low cost, and free childcare for eligible families.
- **Navigation of Service Providers:** Howard County is home to 1,673 nonprofit providers across various service and focus areas. Finding the correct place to start proves challenging for individuals in need.
 - Suggestion for CAC: CAC must collaborate and seek to add to the efforts of providers in spaces CAC does not operate and lead conversations on sustainability and creation of navigable pathways for Howard County citizens.

Gap Analysis: Howard County

- Affordable Childcare
- Housing
- Asset Building (Financial Literacy)
- Transportation
- Coordinated Systems
- Advocacy efforts



Identifying Howard County's Top Three to Five Priorities

The P&P Committee of the CAC Board identified the following priorities in the Howard County community for CAC to address:

1. Affordable high quality early childhood education. Birth to five years old is a must to contribute to family asset building, financial management, and wage growth.
2. Food access and security.
3. Affordable housing.
4. Energy and utilities assistance.
5. Physical and mental health with an emphasis on resilience.

The Committee also noted the need to address financial management, credit recovery, and credit building with clients.

Join CAC in Making a Difference:

- Support coordinated systems to address social and economic mobility.
- Support co-advocacy for policy and statute change.
- Support co-advocacy for sustainable funding to support long term change.
- Support collaboration between non-profits.
- Support implementing best practices from outside of Howard County.
- Support CAC's community impact through volunteer engagement.
- Support CAC's mission through direct financial donations.

Our Mission

“To diminish poverty and enable self-sufficiency for all Howard County individuals, families, and children in need.”

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