COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS

2021 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ISSUED NOVEMBER 10, 2021
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Executive Summary

Community Needs Assessment Overview

Pierce County Human Services Department (PCHS) Community Action Programs (CAP) took on this 2021 Community Needs Assessment (CNA) to better understand the needs of our communities and gaps in services provided in Pierce County. This assessment also fulfills the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) requirement to complete a detailed needs analysis of the communities served by grantees every three years.

The CNA gathers information from Pierce County residents as well social service providers on topics that range from social and economic issues, to health and transportation, and everything in between. The information gathered and analyzed will assist PCHS in understanding the everchanging needs of the communities served and aide in making programmatic changes and improvements.

PCHS Community Action Programs

Our Community Action Programs division began in 1970 as a Community Action Agency (CAA) through the Community Services Block Grant. CSBG is a national program that was founded by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight poverty by providing services and supports that promote self-sufficiency and address the root causes of poverty. Federally designated Community Action Programs address anti-poverty issues with a focus on local community needs. PCHS CAP is one of 30 CSBG programs in the State of Washington and over 1,000 nationwide. PCHS CAP provides an array of services to support economic self-sufficiency.

Energy Assistance Program (EAP)

The Low Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) was first established through congress appropriations to the Department of Health and Human Services in 1981 to assist low-income households by paying a portion of their energy bills and providing conservation education.

Puget Sound Energy also provides funds to assist their low-income customers by paying a portion of their energy bills.
Low Income Water Assistance Program (LIWAP)

LIHWAP will assist low-income households by paying a portion of their drinking and wastewater bills. This program was created this year by the state Department of Commerce and started serving clients in October.

Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)

WAP was created by the Department of Energy in 1976 to assist low-income families in making their homes healthier, reducing their carbon footprint, reducing heat loss, and saving money on heating bills, through adding insulation, sealing cracks, and making other changes.

Minor Home Repair (MHR)

Minor Home Repair provides health and safety repairs for income-eligible households that allow residences to stay in their homes. The repairs range from furnace and roof repair or replacement to plumbing repairs and minor carpentry.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

ECEAP is a state funded preschool program that provides free comprehensive early learning programming to income-eligible children three to five years of age. PCHS CAP is funded by Puget Sound Educational Service District who is a contractor of the state Department of Children Youth and Family Services. There is a focus on family supports as well, including services including referrals to food banks, furniture banks, mental health consultations, and many others.

Tribal ChildReach

ChildReach is a partnership with the Puyallup Tribe to provide early childhood developmental screening, referrals, and consultation for children age birth to six.

PCHS Community Action Program Service Area

The PCHS Community Action Program service area consists of all the areas outside of Tacoma City limits including unincorporated Pierce County. ECEAP serves three hundred children and their families through seven sites in six school districts. The sites are in Sumner, Bonney Lake, Buckley, Orting, Eatonville, South Hill, and University Place along with two dual language classes English/Spanish in South Hill and Sumner.
Key Findings

In our review of the data collected, we noticed four areas that stood out to us. These include social services, housing, transportation, and an information gap.

Social Services

The provider survey was created to determine what services were being provided in the area and what service providers consider the highest needs to be. We also anticipated that some community members completing the community survey would have immediate needs or requests for assistance, so we also created and distributed with the survey this resource list, (Appendix A)\(^1\)

The workgroup's expectation was to find communities without any services and struggled about how to address any immediate needs expressed in the survey. The workgroup decided to address this issue as part of the analysis of the provider survey prior to the release of the community survey. The workgroup was pleasantly surprised to find each community within Pierce County had resources. This does not imply equity throughout the county – there are resource rich and poor areas and challenges and barriers to access. However, this means an opportunity to partner with another provider to enhance programming, services, supports and access exists within most, if not all, local communities.

The workgroup's hypothesis was the pandemic had a negative impact on services in general throughout Pierce County. However, the pandemic did not seem to impact services. In most cases providers report it was an opportunity to think about expansion or to provide existing services in a different way.

Survey Results Comparison

The community and provider surveys asked several similar questions to assess if there were shared opinions and views. One of the shared questions asked respondents to list the three top community needs. Below is the analysis of that question as it relates to shared items; other needs are shared in the data analysis and results section of this this report.

\(^1\) Resources list in the appendix
Included under housing is homelessness support and prevention, mortgage and rental assistance, affordable housing, home repair and maintenance, and youth housing services. Seeing housing identified as a shared need is not surprising given the need for affordable housing and other supports that already existed and was exacerbated by the pandemic.

There was confusion expressed about eligibility requirements, and frustration expressed about access and delay in receiving assistance. Participants openly shared their stories of anxiety and fear of being homeless any day and not knowing what supports they were eligible for or if help would arrive in time.
The Community Development Division of PCHS provides and/or funds housing supports and services in Pierce County. This community data will be shared with the Community Development Division. The division is actively engaged in the work related to Resolution 2021-30s passed by Pierce County Council in March 2021 to develop a plan to end street homelessness; the Committee has developed an End-Homelessness-Action-Plan (piercecountywa.gov) and implementation of said plan is underway.

Transportation

PCHS allocates a small amount of State CSBG funding to aid in the development of new transportation partnerships and opportunities. The transportation needs we exposed include increasing opportunities for bus service, assistance with purchasing gasoline, and making repairs.

Access seemed to be a specific challenge for those in rural areas where public transportation options do not exist or are scarce and may not support activities like employment.

As more people travel south from King County to seek more affordable cost of living, this will have a continued impact on all resources. There were 19,285 people who moved from King County to Pierce County and 11,676 who moved from Pierce to County between 2014-2018. This is a net gain for Pierce County of 7,609 people. We have seen this trend continue in recent years.

There are several improvements happening to help support the growing population throughout the county. The Pierce County Coordinated Transportation Coalition, supported by the Community Development Division, released a 2021

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2Thousands of people left King County during peak of Seattle boom, new data shows | The Seattle Times
Transportation Survey (2021 Transportation Survey | Pierce County, WA - Official Website), used to inform the next 5-year strategic plan. The relevant data from this Community Needs Assessment will be shared with our Community Development Division and CAP will also participate in creating their 5-year strategic plan.

**Information Gap**

In both surveys there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the services already available. This lack of knowledge was most obvious in the question that asked about the top three needs.

There were several people who listed utility assistance as a top need. Utility assistance is a program offered by CAP and other divisions within Human Services, as well as by the Metropolitan Development Council (MDC).

There are current services that address most of the needs expressed in the chart above. This begs the question, “where is the disconnect?” Is it a matter of the benefit cliff, a lack of awareness of community resources, or ineligibility due to income? The CNA Workgroup plans to hold focus groups beginning in early 2022 to better understand this so we can determine CAP’s role in meeting the need.
Introduction

Community Needs Assessment (CNA) Overview and Purpose

Pierce County Human Services Department (PCHS) Community Action Programs (CAP) formed a workgroup to complete this CNA. The members of the workgroup are current CAP staff, including our Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) certified implementer, to ensure compliance with ROMA principles. Members of our Citizen’s Advisory Board (CAB) also participated in reviewing survey documents and received updates throughout the CNA process.

The workgroup developed a timeline, goals and overall approach. This included a review of the previous two CNAs completed in 2015 and 2018. The 2015 CNA was done in partnership with Metropolitan Development Council (MDC) and was a comprehensive community data collection, review and survey effort. The 2018 CNA surveyed current clients and took more of a self-assessment approach. Here is a link to the Community Needs Assessment completed in 2018.

Goals

The goals of the 2021 Community Needs Assessment were to:

1. Assess if and how well Community Actions Program and other divisions within Human Services are meeting current needs of the communities served.

2. Identify gaps in services and barriers to accessing available services.

3. Explore CAP’s role in filling the identified unmet community needs.

Human Services Department

Human Services provides essential assistance to vulnerable populations in Pierce County. Pierce County Human Services (PCHS) believes that structural and institutional racism is destructive to everyone in our community and that diverse work groups create better outcomes. We strive to reflect all the people we serve in our staffing, our messaging, and our program delivery, and we focus on specific efforts to eliminate structural and institutional racism in our department and our community. Our vision is: Empowered individuals, healthy families, and thriving communities, and our mission is to work to ensure all of Pierce County has equitable access to community-based services that respect each person’s unique experience.
In addition to CAP, Human Services is home to the Aging and Disabilities Resources Division, Behavioral Health Division, Community Development Division, Fiscal and Administration Division, and Veterans Assistance Programs Division.

**Community Action Programs**

Pierce County Community Action Programs Division, in existence since 1970, seeks to embody our nation’s spirit of hope, change people’s lives, and improve communities here in the South Sound. We work hard to stay up to date on the latest best practices to empower low-income individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency. We are committed to strengthening, promoting, representing, and serving our communities to assure that issues of poverty are effectively presented and addressed. Pierce County Community Action Program helps residents with early education, energy assistance, minor home repair, home weatherization, waste and drinking water assistance.

**CAP Eligibility Criteria**

Each program in CAP has its own set of eligibility requirements based on their funding source(s). Regardless of their individual funding source requirements, every program collects demographic information related to the CSBG “All Characteristics Report.” This is the detailed data collection tool used in this report for analyzing client data over the past three years.

1. Our Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) provides free comprehensive preschool and wrap around services to over three hundred children three to five years of age and their families through seven sites in six school districts. The sites are in Sumner, Bonney Lake, Buckley, Orting, Eatonville, South Hill, and University Place along with two dual language classes English/Spanish in South Hill and Sumner. Eligibility for ECEAP is based on income and other family factors:³

   - Children from families at or below 110% of the FPL are eligible for ECEAP enrollment.
   - Up to 10% of children can be from families above the income eligibility, or “over income.” “Over income” students are accepted if they:
     - Qualify for school district special education services, or

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³ Chapter 110-425 WAC.
- Have risk factors that could impact their kindergarten readiness or performance.

2. The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) pays heating bills directly to utility companies for eligible applicants. EAP makes energy bills more affordable for those who experience a high energy burden by reducing late payments and disconnections for those who are eligible. Applicants must live in Pierce County but outside of the city limits of Tacoma and must have an income that falls at or below the 150% federal poverty guidelines threshold.

3. The Weatherization Assistance Program provides energy analysis, attic insulation and venting, crawl space insulation and venting, side-wall insulation, furnace repair or replacement, heating duct insulation, water heater and water pipe insulation, and blower door guided air sealing. This program helps low-income families reduce their energy bills by making their homes more energy efficient. Applicants must live in Pierce County but outside of the city limits of Tacoma. They also must have an income that falls at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines threshold and own or rent a home duplex, triplex or apartment built before 1984 or is gas-heated, and built before 1990 and mobile homes built before 1992.

4. Our Minor Home Repair Program is funded through a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The program provides home repairs to income eligible homeowners in the form of a grant. Participants must reside in Pierce County - outside the city limits of Tacoma, Lakewood, and Bonney Lake. In addition, households must have an income below 80% Area Median Income (AMI) and own their own home, and it must be owner occupied.
Our Service Area

We serve the residents of Pierce County, outside the city limits of Tacoma. Tacoma receives similar funding and provides similar services to their residents through the Metropolitan Development Council.

Population

- United States: 324,697,795
- Washington State: 7,404,107
- Pierce County: 877,013
- Our Service Area: 661,961

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Service Area Demographics

We analyzed data collected to create a profile of who completed the Community survey and who we serve. Detailed below is an analysis of the data.

Gender

Pierce County is evenly split using the categories of male (49.87%) and female (50.13%). CAP clients served through our programs are also evenly split in these categories. We asked an open-ended question on the community survey to get a more accurate depiction of our survey respondents gender identity. We discovered that had more respondents who identified as female which did not reflect what we know of the population of residents. In addition to 224 male and 546 female, we also had 5 individuals identify as “x”, cis-female, non-binary or simply “other”. Eight respondents chose not to answer this question or listed N/A.

Age

Clients Served

The households served by CAP programs over the last three years included an average of 2306 children age 0 – 17. Household members 18 to 59 averaged 1152, and seniors age 60 and above averaged 767. There are an average of 2513 household members for whom we do not have age data.

Community Survey Results

The highest number of survey respondents, 383, were in the 18-59 age bracket and 399 who were age 60 and above. Seven people chose not to answer this question. The survey did not collect information on the age of household members.

Service Area

The median age in Pierce County is 36 years. For those who identify as male, the median age is 34.9. For those who identify as female, the median age is 37.4. This data is similar to both Washington State with a median age of 37.7 and the United States median age of 38.1.⁵

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⁵ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19.
Race

Clients Served

The clients we serve self-identify their race with 37.56% selecting White. The next highest category is Multi-Race at 9.34%, followed by Black or African American at 8.71%.

Community Survey Results

However, 69.71% of survey respondents indicated they identify as white. Of the remainder 5.96% indicated Multi-Race followed by Black or African American at 4.82%
**Service Area**

However, 75.4% of residents within our service area are identified as white and 5.5% identified as Asian. In these two categories, the percentage of our clients served fell below that of the service area.

**What Does this Mean?**

*Overall, we appear to be equitably serving Pierce county residents. We have certain areas of the community where we would like to increase our recruitment efforts because other needs assessments and saturation studies show a high number of eligible households and our data also shows a low number of households served in those areas.*
Ethnicity

Clients Served

The clients we serve self-identify their ethnicity as 10.52% Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin, while 54.09% identified as not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin. A large portion, 36.04% of clients, chose not to respond to this question.

Community Survey Results

An even larger percentage of survey respondents (72.5%) identified as not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin compared with just 5.45% selecting Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin and 22.05% not responding.

Service Area

For our service area, 89.38% identified as not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin compared with 10.62% selecting Hispanic.

Immigration Status

Several CAP programs serve families who report lacking the proper documentation to establish their immigration status. We acknowledge this a barrier to access and there is limited unrestricted or flexible funding to support families/individuals who fall into this category. As a workgroup, we intentionally did not include questions surrounding immigration or citizenship status as a strategy to prevent alienating some respondents.

Languages

Like the rates indicated below for Pierce County in the Community Needs Assessment Tool, English and Spanish were the top languages reported as part of the community survey. Languages reported on the survey also included Korean, Japanese, Cambodian, Tagalog, Dutch, Russian, and American Sign Language.

The provider survey also indicated that services are provided in these same languages or they provide access to translation services.

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6 https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1601&g=0500000US553053 (US Census 2019 ACS 5-Year Survey (Table S1601)).
Poverty Levels

We asked the question: how many people live where you stay? We then followed up by asking if their household income was over or under 200% of the federal poverty amount for their household size. Just under 75% of survey respondents stated they were above the income limit listed.
When we look at the historical data for the past three program years, we find that 45.95% of our clients are at or below the poverty level. Another 16.81% are between 101% and 200% of the poverty level. Since we began collecting the data for comparison we are not identified any significant changes or trends.

The number indicated in the Unknown/Not Reported category represents clients who received energy assistance through Puget Sound Energy, which has separate income categories. It also includes children who received a developmental screening through our ChildReach program, which does not collect demographic information.
Household Size

There are 239,013 households reported in our service area. An additional 84,382 are located within the city limits of Tacoma. We served an average of 6542 households each year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five</th>
<th>Six or More</th>
<th>Unknown/Not Reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>2231</td>
<td>1201</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>1631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>1153</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 CNA Survey</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the families we served over the past three years, the majority are single person households. Households of two or three people are the next highest groups.

In the community survey responses, two person households were the highest reported, followed by single person households and those with three or four family members.

**Family Types**

Our client data indicates that most of our clients are single people. The next highest category are families who have a female single parent, followed by two parent households.

Survey responses indicated that most of the families were two adults and no children or single adults. Of those who reported “other,” this number included 16 households that specifically indicated they had adult children residing with them.
**Veterans Status**

On average we serve 337 households that indicate someone in the home is a Veteran. Another 6 families indicate they have a household member who is actively serving in the military. These numbers reflect that Pierce County has one of the largest Veteran populations in the state. There were 116 survey respondents who indicate they are a Veteran. Some of the Veterans reflected in this number state they are unaware of resources available to them in the community. Where provided, we shared those names and contact information with our Veterans Services Division.

**Employment**

The majority of our clients over the past three years have been retired. The next highest categories were employed full Time and employed part-time. This was also true for our survey respondents.
**Education**

Most clients indicated they have a high school diploma or GED. For survey respondents the highest category was a 2- or 4-year degree.

Client data is separated into two age brackets. The first is for household members between the age of 14 and 24. The second is for household members 25 and older. Information on children under 14 is not collected at this time. There were many respondents who chose not to provide their education level, most often because they did not think it relevant to determining community needs.

This information should be considered as we explore addition of any other programs.

**Housing**

Most clients served by CAP program rent their homes. In contrast, homeowners made up the largest group of survey respondents. There is a lot attributed to
homeowners most notably financial stability. This along with several other factors could influence what you identify as gaps and needs within your community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Own</th>
<th>Rent</th>
<th>Other Permanent Housing</th>
<th>Homeless (Living with others)</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unknown / Not Answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Client Average</strong></td>
<td>2069</td>
<td>4157</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Responses</strong></td>
<td>492</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outreach Efforts**

CSBG requires us to gather feedback and input for this assessment from more than just the community members in a process they call Maximum Feasible Participation. We faced some challenges in being able to accomplish this due to most businesses and institutions being closed to the public in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the sections below we attempted to address this challenge.
Maximum Feasible Participation

In addition to the community survey we published, we reached out to providers, agencies, businesses, and coalitions in the categories noted below, asking them to participate in our Community Needs Assessment.

Of the 142 inquiries we sent out, 71 responded to the survey, and 40 of those agreed to help distribute the community survey either by sharing a link to the electronic survey or by requesting and distributing paper surveys.

Methodology

The CNA workgroup determined the best way to complete a comprehensive assessment was to gather information from human services providers in Pierce County as well as Pierce County residents. Guidelines and restrictions developed in
response to the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated any in-person engagement and collection of data.

The workgroup decided to use surveys as the data collection approach. The survey questions were informed by the current programs being offered by CAP as well as by reviewing questions from other CAP agencies.

CAP staff sought input from, and shared progress with, Human Services Department Leadership during monthly meetings, in monthly one-on-one meetings with the Department Director, and in written progress reports to the Pierce County Executive and his Cabinet members. Staff also sought input and participation from the Citizens Advisory Board membership. All of this feedback and input was shared with the CNA Workgroup and some of the ideas are incorporated herein.

**Provider Survey**

The first tool we developed and distributed was the provider survey, which served three main purposes: 1) Determine what providers see as needs and gaps in the community; 2) Develop resource awareness, pre- and post- COVID; and 3) Increase outreach efforts. Embedded in the survey was also a request for assistance with distribution of the community survey.

Through the provider survey, a resource list was developed and offered to residents as part of the community survey. The provider survey was distributed to over 140 community partners, was comprised of nineteen questions, and took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The first sixteen questions included some demographic information, asked providers about the types of services they provided (housing assistance, navigators, employment services, etc.), the communities by zip code they served, how clients communicated with them and vice versa, what languages services are offered in, and the impact of the pandemic. The last three questions asked the provider if they would be willing to distribute the community survey, and if so, who should be contacted and provided an opportunity for additional comments.

The survey was distributed via email that included a link to the online survey. The time to complete the survey was initially 2 weeks, but later extended to a month to give providers enough time to participate. During the month the survey was open, we sent two reminders to participate. There were 140 surveys sent out. The provider surveys were only provided in English. The providers represented community-based and faith-based organizations, private and public sectors,
educational institutions, and Tribes – Federally and non-Federally recognized. A sample survey can be found in appendix A.

Community Survey

The community Survey was comprised of fifty-five questions and took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. The survey was distributed electronically as well as in hardcopy form.

The community survey was also promoted via radio interviews, on social media, and with targeted postcard mailings. Postcards were mailed to zip codes with a high population of families and individuals who met the income eligibility criteria for the programs provided by CAP. Postcards were sent out to about 22,000 people in the first mailing and another 22,000 people in the second mailing. These had a link to the website to access all languages as well as a phone number to call to request a paper survey. Additionally, paper copies were delivered to providers that requested it on the provider needs assessment. The survey was translated into Korean, Spanish and Russian, the three most common languages for Pierce County as determined by our communications team.

The survey focused on the goals of the CNA and asked demographic information to help identify residents who would be eligible for services. There was an opportunity to also identify current and former clients. The survey had several open-ended questions to give opportunities for respondents to share their unique input.

The survey was initially released from June 15th to July 31st and then extended to August 31st because there was little or no representation from specific zip codes where CAP has struggled with outreach and service provision. The additional time allowed for target outreach using social media and post card mailings. The survey asked questions about access, barriers to access, impact of pandemic, and the topics listed below:

- Employment
- Childcare
- Monthly Bills
- Education
- Parenting Supports
- Food Security
- Housing
- Transportation
- Special Needs/Disabilities
- Mental Health/ Wellness
- Substance Abuse Supports
- Healthcare
Survey Results and Data Analysis

The community survey was completed by 809 county residents, including those who live within Tacoma City limits. The results from 125 residents who live within the City of Tacoma are not represented in this report because the catchment area for most of the services provided by our CAP does not include the City of Tacoma. It is impossible to produce a response rate for the community survey because of the mixed media approach to distribution. It was likely that residents received multiple requests to complete the survey.

The provider survey was distributed to over 140 community partners; of those, 78 were completed. That is a response rate of 55%.

There was a lot of qualitative data due to the “other” option and supplemental narrative responses to most of questions for both surveys. This provided an opportunity to hear directly about needs from respondents in their own words. The consequence of this approach was staff had a lot of data to analyze and categorize to identify trends.

As mentioned earlier in the report, both surveys included a question about unmet needs. Our analysis determined that there was some alignment in identification of unmet needs, creating some level of consensus around need. The question about how to address these needs remains, however, and this report shares work underway by CAP and other programs to address the needs identified.

Staff have not completed analysis of all data collected from these surveys but will continue to analyze data and use it in connection with Focus Groups scheduled for early 2022.

Energy Assistance

This was a gap/unmet need identified in both surveys. This was initially surprising because CAP has a program that serves over 6,000 residents who live outside Tacoma city limits each year. The workgroup discovered that nationally, only one in five eligible families apply for energy assistance (a 20% saturation rate). There are several hypotheses about why this occurs:

1. Lack of consistent and innovative outreach and marketing of this program an anti-poverty measure.
2. People wait until they are in crisis (receiving a shut-off notice) before they seek supports.
3. People do not think that they are eligible because they are current on their payments.

The new water program is scheduled to start in October 2021. CAP has been working with water companies to get their clients enrolled and are surprised at how many qualify for energy assistance who have not applied.

**Behavioral Health and Wellness**

Respondents shared struggles with affordability of and access to behavioral health services. There were 110 people who listed health care services as a gap/need and of those, 45 listed access to behavioral health as a gap. Many of the 45 indicated specifically a lack of access to behavioral health services for young children. This is not surprising because the need existed prior to, and had been exasperated by, the pandemic. Adolescents and young adults have struggled, as evidenced by the increase in health claims, intentional self-harm, overdoses, substance use disorders and mental health diagnosis.7

The need for additional behavioral health supports was also recognized by the Pierce County Council, who in December of 2020 passed Ordinance No. 2020-138s (pierce.wa.us). This ordinance approved the collection of a portion of sales taxes to provide funds for mental health and substance abuse services. PCHS was tasked with developing a Behavioral Health Improvement Plan (BHIP). The six-year plan, pending council approval, uses data (like a recent survey of behavioral health providers) to inform funding priorities that will build a solid infrastructure while still meeting immediate needs. The plan was developed in collaboration with the Behavioral Health Advisory Board.

The funding priorities identified in the BHIP are: Prevention, Community Education, Early Intervention and Screening, Outpatient and Community Based Services, Crisis and Inpatient Services, Service for the Justice Involved and Other Priority Areas (including Housing Supports and Single-Entry Point). CAP will work with the Behavioral Health Division as they implement the BHIP to see where opportunities of collaboration exist. This is also a topic we will explore in next year’s focus groups. The table below indicates the Plan’s major milestones over the next six years.

## Behavioral Health Improvement Plan Timeline

### Year One: (First six months) July 1 to December 31, 2021
- Convene Pierce County BH Advisory Board—June 2021
- Release stakeholder survey—July 2021
- Finalize contract negotiation/execution for programs previously authorized under the BH Tax—July-August 2021.
- Begin meeting with Performance Audit Committee—August 2021
- Draft BHIP to BHAB for comment—August 2021
- Updated draft BHIP to BHAB for approval—September 2021
- Submit BHIP to Council for approval—October/November 2021

### Year One: (Second six months) January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022
- Finalize auditing, quality assurance, and quarterly reporting process.
- Update existing Pierce County funded BH contracts to include more performance-based payments. Require output and outcome metrics in all amendments and new contracts.
- Early 2022: Release RFP based on the BHIP needs assessment and six-year plan.
  - Programs funded through existing programs may apply for BH Tax funding during this time too.
  - **Contracts awarded will have effective dates of June 30, 2022 through December 31, 2023.**

### Year Two: July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023
- Review outcomes and metrics for existing programs and make decisions about continued funding. Determine available funds and funding targets for the coming year.
- Adjusts metrics and reporting based on program experience and community needs.
- Spring 2023: Release RFP for CY 2024 programs.

### Year Three: July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024
- Performance Audit Committee biennial audit for BH Tax.
- July-September 2023: Complete biennial update the BHIP based on stakeholder and BHAB input and program experience.
- Review outcomes and metrics for existing programs and make decisions about continued funding. Determine available funds and funding targets for the coming year.
- **Summer 2023**: Funds awarded for calendar year 2024 funds and placed into 2024 budget.
  - Contracts for established programs could be two year-contracts starting during this budget cycle.

- **Adjusts metrics and reporting based on program experience and community needs.**
- **Spring 2024**: Release RFP for CY 2025 programs.
- **Summer 2024**: Funds awarded for calendar year 2025 funds and placed into 2025 budget.
  - Contracts for established programs could be two year-contracts starting during this budget cycle.

### Year Four: July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025

- Review outcomes and metrics for existing programs and make decisions about continued funding. Determine available funds and funding targets for the coming year.
- Adjusts metrics and reporting based on program experience and community needs.
- **Spring 2025**: Release RFP for CY 2026 programs.
- **Summer 2025**: Funds awarded for calendar year 2026 funds and placed into 2026 budget.
  - Contracts for established programs could be two year-contracts starting during this budget cycle.

### Year Five: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

- Performance Audit Committee biennial audit for BH Tax.
- July-September 2025: Complete biennial update the BHIP based on stakeholder and BHAB input and program experience.
- Review outcomes and metrics for existing programs and make decisions about continued funding. Determine available funds and funding targets for the coming year.
- Adjusts metrics and reporting based on program experience and community needs.
- **Spring 2026**: Release RFP for CY 2027 programs.
- **Summer 2026**: Funds awarded for calendar year 2027 funds and placed into 2027 budget.
  - Contracts for established programs could be two year-
contracts starting during this budget cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Six: July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Performance Audit Committee comprehensive assessment of BH Tax.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Deadline to extend sunset of taxing authority: October 1, 2027</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Review outcomes and metrics for existing programs and make decisions about continued funding. Determine available funds and funding targets for the coming year.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Adjusts metrics and reporting based on program experience and community needs.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Spring 2027: Release RFP for CY 2028 programs.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Summer 2027: Funds awarded for calendar year 2028 funds and placed into 2028 budget.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contracts for established programs could be two year-contracts starting during this budget cycle.**
The blue bars in this chart reflect data presented in the executive summary section of this Community Needs Assessment. As the data shows, the largest need reported by respondents is rental assistance and affordable housing. As mentioned previously, this is not surprising given these needs were high prior to the pandemic and have been exacerbated and/or highlighted by the pandemic. CAP has a small rental assistance program that offers a maximum benefit of $1000, which for most renters does not reflect even half of their monthly rental cost. CAP coordinates with the Community Services Division to ensure that clients who are better served by their more robust rental assistance program are routed to them.

Several survey respondents expressed frustration at the process for accessing rental assistance and the length of time it was taking for benefits to be dispersed. These were shared with the CSD and led in part to the creation of an application portal. This portal tracks applications as they are processed, allowing individuals to find current information about their application. CSD expended $51million between March 2021 and September 2021 in rental assistance.
There are several other funded initiatives implemented in 2020 and 2021 to support people who are currently housed, in temporary housing, or experiencing homelessness. Some of those initiatives were expanding shelter opportunities to include hotel/motel and inclement weather options, and funding expanded hygiene and sanitation stations that included showers, laundry facilities, clean clothing, lunches, and access to other community services.

Home repair is also identified as a housing-related need in the chart above. CAP's Minor Home Repair serves about 110 households annually. The repairs range from roof replacement to minor carpentry repairs. It is unclear if the 48 people who listed this as a need would meet the eligibility criteria of the program.

**Food Security**

![Bar Chart]

There were approximately 115 respondents who listed food security as need. This is not surprising given the impacts of the pandemic: According to a study done by the University of Washington and Washington State University, Washington residents reported an increase in food insecurity and food assistance since the beginning of the pandemic.\(^8\)

In the study, 10% of Washingtonians reported food insecurity prior to the pandemic and 27% reported food insecurity during the pandemic. There was also an increased need for food assistance over the same period.

\(^8\) [WAFOOD2 intro brief9 20210701 v2 (uw.edu)]
Prior to the pandemic, 29% of Washingtonians accessed food assistance. That increased to 33% according to the results of the first survey (6/18/20-7/31/20) and further increased to 42% when respondents completed the second survey (12/4/20-1/31/21). The results of the third survey are pending.

CAP is working to help address food access and quality by participating as a member of the Regional Food System Partnership Steering Committee. This steering committee was established by the Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC) upon being awarded a United States Department of Agriculture Regional Food System three-year Grant. The committee’s charge is to develop and strengthen the Puget Sound food system to support farmers and ranchers, and those who harvest, prepare, pack, and distribute food to the consumers. The overall goal is to increase access to quality affordable and fresh food for all with an intentional focus on those furthest from opportunity.

**Pandemic Impact**

This community needs assessment was conducted during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expectation was that the data would reflect the continued impact of the pandemic and this hypothesis was proven wrong. The areas where we expected to hear respondents report lasting impacts of the pandemic were childcare, employment, monthly bills, parenting supports and substance abuse. We were surprised to see that there were very few respondents who reported continued impacts of the pandemic in these areas. This led the workgroup to several hypotheses:

- The financial and services responses to the pandemic established in 2020 largely addressed immediate needs.
- Pierce County residents had adapted by choice or circumstance.
- The need existed prior, and the pandemic just further highlighted the situation.
- The respondents who chose to complete the survey were less impacted by the pandemic.
- The moratorium on evictions and utility shutoffs had an impact on when people in needed reached out for support.

The workgroup will use focus groups to test these hypotheses so we can have a better understanding of the initial and lingering impacts of the pandemic.
Conclusion

During the analysis of the data, a general profile of a respondent began to emerge, and we have attempted to show that profile in the demographic section of this report. Our CAP serves residents who are at below 200% federal poverty level (FPL) or at or below 80% of area median income (AMI). In contrast, almost 75% of survey respondents stated their income was above 200% FPL. Since most of our respondents were above our income eligibility thresholds, we believe that impacted the data collected and our analysis.

The survey data we collected confirmed many of our assumptions and uncovered many surprises, as detailed in this assessment. Overall, the data highlighted the need for improved cross collaboration and referral within Pierce County Human Services.

Our efforts to better understand and use the data reported on here to inform programming will continue after this report is completed. Over the next two years we will use this data and any other subsequent information gathered as a self-assessment tool that will better position us to detail growth and challenges in the next Community Needs Assessment.
Community Needs Assessment Report Issued

This Community Needs Assessment is dated November 3, 2021.

The assessment is shared with the community and agency stakeholders, as well as with partner organizations, other sectors, and the community at large. The report is distributed as follows:

- Posted on the agency website.
- Posted on the agency's Facebook page.
- Sent electronically to Department of Commerce and Partner Agencies.
- Printed in hard copy for the Department of Commerce.
Lessons Learned

As the workgroup began the data analysis, we noted things that we would do differently. This section captures lessons learned to inform our continuous improvement process.

1. The most important lesson is the need for expanded and sustained community outreach and relationship development.
2. The profile of our survey responder was not indicative of who would be eligible or most benefit from the services that we provide. This led us to conclude that we need to better engage Pierce County residents and communities who are eligible for our services.
3. The need to refine and test questions was highlighted as we discovered that many responses, we received were not what we were expecting, such as the question asking about top three needs (what we received was individual needs vs. community need).
Next Steps

Focus Groups
As we begin our plan to use this needs assessment in our decision making, the workgroup wants to be confident in our analysis and interpretation of the data. We also acknowledge we may not have reached those furthest from opportunity and whose voices may not often be heard. This gives us an opportunity to seek out a broader cross-section of Pierce County residents by holding focus groups. Some of these groups may meet multiple times and be part of the next CNA process. Once finalized, the focus group topics, dates, times, and format will be marketed via CAP webpage and social media outlets.

Human Services All Staff Meeting and/or CAP All Staff Meeting
The workgroup is looking forward to sharing the data collected and analyzed with the full Human Services Department. Humans Services’ staff do great work in their individual programs that benefits the residents of Pierce County. However, many of our own staff are unaware of everything we have to offer each other’s’ clients. If we want to improve our outreach, one of the best places to start is within our own department.
Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge our community partners who assisted with distribution of our Community Needs Assessment survey, our very involved work group members, and our key partners in this work:

Citizen’s Advisory Board Members

Susan Johnson, Council Position 2, City of Milton
Sherry Martin, 2021-2022 Chair, Citizen’s Advisory Board
Adrienne Wilson, 2021-2022 Vice Chair, Citizen’s Advisory Board

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Makaila Chames
Margi Rudy
Nelly Mbajah

Community Partners

Bonney Lake Senior Center
Boys and Girls Club of South Puget Sound
Catholic Community Services
Centro Latino
Children’s Home Society of Washington - Key Peninsula
Community Connection Place
Comprehensive Life Resources
Consejo Counseling and Referral Service
Emergency Food Network
Families Unlimited Network

My Sisters Food Pantry & Clothing Bank
Orting Senior Center Organization
Our Savior Lutheran Church, Backpacks 4 Kids
Peninsula School District Evergreen ECEAP
Pierce County Library System
Puget Sound Educational Service District (PS ESD)
Puyallup Valley St. Francis House
Safe Streets Campaign
Spana-Park Senior Center
St. Andrew Emmanuel Food Panty
Appendices

A. Survey Forms

2021 Client Community Needs Assessment

By completing this survey, you will be helping us to better understand our community needs, the resources available and the services that are still needed. This information will help us to work together to address services that are needed the most. You will be asked questions that include education, employment, housing, healthcare, and other basic needs. This will take approximately 15-15 minutes of your time. There are no risks to you for participating in this study, and no penalty for not participating.

1) Today's date: ____________________________

2) What is your age? ____________________________

3) What is your gender? ____________________________

4) Last year you completed in school?

□ Grade 0-8  □ 12th Grade + Some Post Secondary School

□ Grade 9-12 Non-Graduate  □ 2 or 4 year College Graduate

□ High School Graduate/ GED  □ Graduate or Other Post Secondary School

□ Other - Please specify: ____________________________

5) Which of our Community Action Programs have you worked with in the past 12 months?

□ ChildReach Tribal Screening  □ Home Repair

□ ECEAP Preschool  □ Weatherization

□ Energy Assistance  □ None of the above

6) Which of the other programs offered by our Human Services Department have you worked with in the past 12 months?

□ Aging & Disability Resources  □ Rental Assistance (COVID-19 Response)

□ Community Development Corporation  □ Transportation

□ Developmental Disabilities  □ Veteran Assistance Program

□ Mobile Resource Center  □ None of the above

□ Other - Please specify: ____________________________
B. Resource List

https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7461/CNA-Resources