

Economic Security in Allegheny County: 2021 Community Needs Assessment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From May through August 2021, Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) engaged in a comprehensive needs assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to determine how DHS can best address the needs of individuals and families living in poverty and promote stability and economic security using Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funds (see below for more detail) and other flexible funding across the agency. The assessment included collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from community members and service providers.

Key Findings¹

1. The incidence of poverty varies widely by family structure, race, ethnicity, education and employment. The rate of poverty is more than double the County average among single mothers, Black and multiracial residents, and those with less than a high school degree.
2. Need remains persistently high in McKees Rocks and Stowe, sections of Penn Hills and Wilkinsburg, much of the Monongahela River Valley, and sections of Harrison Township.
3. Less than half of survey respondents were satisfied with their ability to meet their family's everyday basic needs.
4. Wages are insufficient to cover many working families' basic needs expenses.
5. While most unemployed survey respondents are interested in becoming employed, nearly all report barriers to employment. Top barriers include difficulty accessing child and dependent care, transportation to a job, housing, and mental health care; lacking the skills and training for available jobs; and finding high quality jobs.
6. All stakeholders (community members, human services providers, workforce providers, and Community Services Advisory Council members) identified basic needs as the highest-priority area for investment to promote economic security.
7. Stakeholders identified various needs and gaps in Allegheny County's economic security service array, including addressing the basic needs of extra income, rent and utility assistance, food and housing; and promoting wealth-building goals including paying off debts and growing savings. In some cases, needs varied by employment status and race.

1 Findings 1 and 2 are primarily based on American Community Survey data from the Census Bureau, while findings 3-7 incorporate primarily data collected from focus groups and surveys (see **Methodology** section for more detail).

BACKGROUND

Individuals and families living in poverty encounter a variety of challenges accessing employment, job training, transportation, housing, and childcare, challenges that impact people's progress towards stability and economic security. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) was created to address these needs and alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act of 1981 and its reauthorization in 1998 stipulate the mission and purpose of the funding: to meet identified individual and community needs that promote self-sufficiency, family stability and community revitalization. CSBG funds are provided to Community Action Agencies (CAA) across the country who work in partnership with other community-based organizations to leverage other funds and resources to impact the causes and conditions of poverty.

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for providing and administering publicly funded human services to Allegheny County residents. The Office of Community Services (OCS), a program office of DHS, is the CAA for Allegheny County, excluding the City of Pittsburgh. A team of individuals and agencies, including OCS staff, contracted agencies, the Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC)², and community partnerships contribute to the success of CSBG programming in Allegheny County. For a list of CSAC members, see **Appendix A**.

In January 2015, the federal Office of Community Services released a set of standards designed to ensure CSBG entities effectively serve families and communities. Public CSBG entities follow 50 standards, which are categorized in three thematic categories: maximum feasible participation, vision and direction, and operations and accountability. A portion of these standards, detailed in **Figure 1**, require CSBG entities to engage in a community needs assessment. Between May 2021 and August 2021, DHS staff and other CSBG stakeholder agencies engaged in an extensive assessment to comply with these standards.

2 The CSAC is comprised of fifteen (15) persons who are residents of Allegheny County. Per CSBG legislation, membership is comprised of one-third (1/3) members to be appointed by the County Executive; one-third (1/3) members who have been nominated and approved by the CSAC who represent the interests of low-income

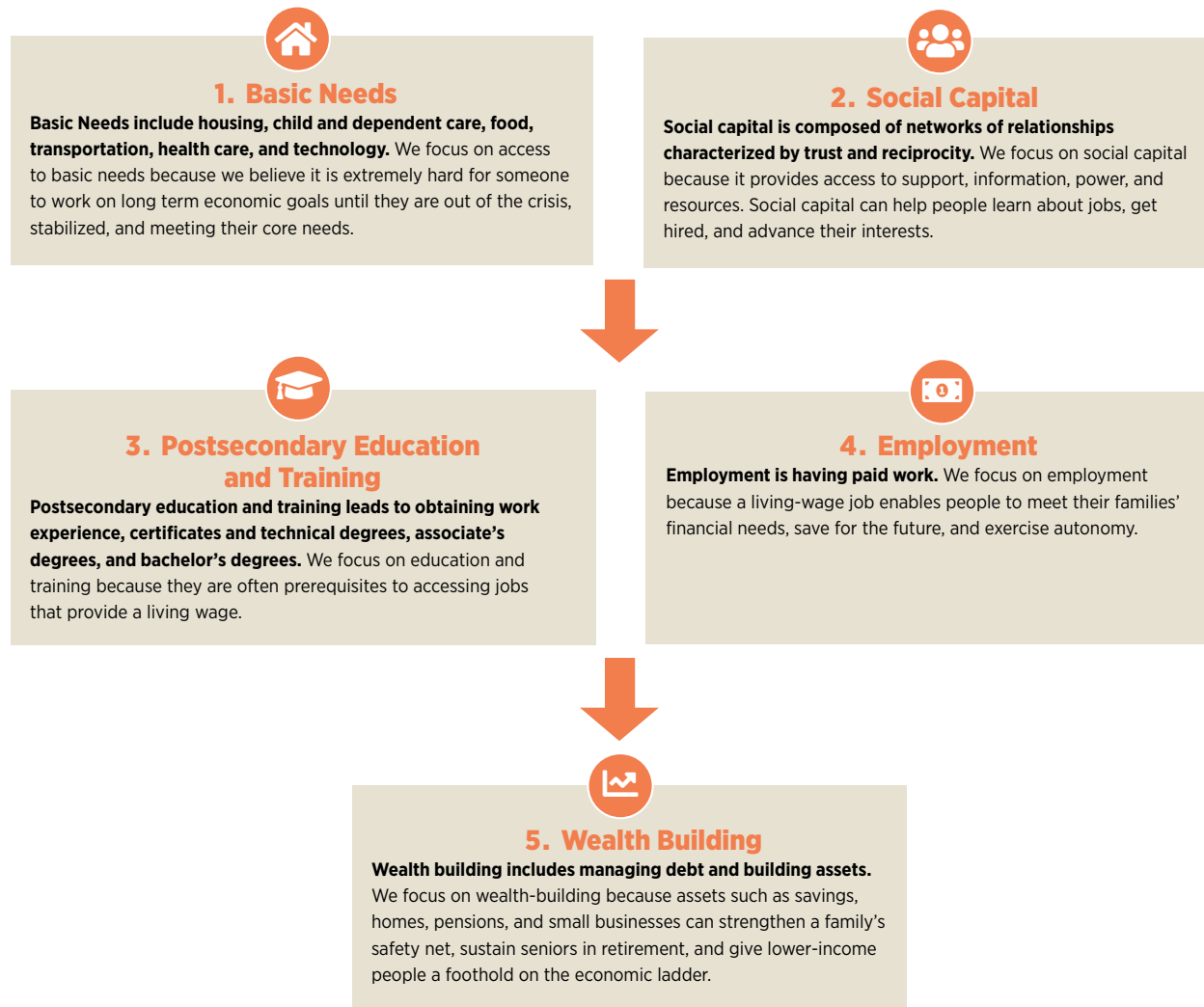
persons; one-third (1/3) members who have been nominated and approved by the CSAC who represent service providers, business, education, housing, employment, and health care and who have an interest in helping low-income persons become more self-sufficient. For a list of CSAC members, see **Appendix 1**.

FIGURE 1: Selected Needs Assessment Standards for Public CSBG Entities

Standard 2.2	Department utilizes information gathered from key sectors of the community in assessing needs and resources. This would include at a minimum community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions.
Standard 3.1	Department conducted an assessment and issued a report within the last 3 years.
Standard 3.2	Department collects and includes current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for the service areas in the community assessment.
Standard 3.3	Department collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area in the community assessment.
Standard 3.4	Community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.
Standard 3.5	Tripartite board/advisory body formally accepts the completed community assessment.

In addition to meeting the Organizational Standards, the purpose of this community needs assessment is to guide DHS in planning for and implementing services and strategies to promote economic security, which DHS defines as “having the resources necessary to pay one’s bills, be resilient to financial shocks, and be on track to meet one’s financial goals.” In 2021, DHS began developing an Economic Security Theory of Change. The Theory of Change was created to guide not only CSBG-funded programming, but also other programming within OCS and across DHS. DHS stakeholders from the Office of Analytics, Technology, and Planning (ATP) and OCS reviewed research, defined terms, and engaged in design exercises to arrive at the Theory of Change shown in **Figure 2**. The theory of change consists of five major pillars: basic needs, social capital, postsecondary education and training, employment, and wealth building. These pillars build on each other towards the attainment of economic security. DHS sought opportunities to validate the Theory of Change by aligning primary data collection and involving stakeholders addressing these five pillars within the context of the needs assessment.

FIGURE 2: Economic Security Theory of Change (June 2021 Draft Version)



METHODOLOGY

The assessment included collection and analysis of qualitative data (e.g., interviews, open-ended survey questions, and focus groups) and quantitative data (e.g., demographics, mapping and surveys). **Figure 3** summarizes data collection approaches by stakeholder group. Most participants in the needs assessment participated under the condition of confidentiality. Therefore, participant lists are not included. Participant numbers are shared here, and a list of CSAC members is included in **Appendix A**.

FIGURE 3: Methodology Summary

GROUP	DESCRIPTION OF GROUP	PARTICIPATION METHOD	# PARTICIPANTS
Community Members	Residents of Allegheny County. See Table 1 , Respondent Demographics and Figure 5 .	Interviews	9
	Respondent Zip Codes for summary statistics describing participants	Web survey	179
Human Services Providers	DHS-funded service providers including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions	Poll at DHS Provider Briefing	75
Workforce Providers	Service providers of job search and placement assistance, career counseling, training	Focus Group	9
Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC)	Representatives of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, educational institutions, and service recipients. See Appendix A to learn more about the CSAC	Focus Group	9

In May 2021, DHS assembled a multidisciplinary steering committee and project team to conduct the needs assessment. Representatives included:

- Office of Community Services leadership and representatives from Self-Sufficiency, Family Center, Early Learning Resource Center, and Housing and Homelessness programs
- Office of Analytics, Technology, and Planning representatives from the Analytics, Planning, and Client Experience teams
- Office of Equity and Engagement

This team created and oversaw the assessment plan. Members of the Analytics and Planning teams conducted secondary data collection from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) and Allegheny County Data Warehouse. The team used ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates and 2018–2020 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (PADHS) Unemployment Insurance earnings data for DHS clients.³ Members of the Planning and Client Experience teams conducted primary data collection over the course of three months, from June–August 2021, as detailed in **Figure 4**.

3 DHS serves approximately 200,000 clients each year through services for older adults, mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment services, child protective services, outreach and prevention services, emergency shelters and housing for the homeless, non-emergency medical transportation, and referrals for developmental supports.

FIGURE 4: Primary Data Collection Timeline

		JUNE 2021				JULY 2021				AUG 2021			
		WEEK OF 6/7	WEEK OF 6/14	WEEK OF 6/21	WEEK OF 6/28	WEEK OF 7/5	WEEK OF 7/12	WEEK OF 7/19	WEEK OF 7/26	WEEK OF 8/2	WEEK OF 8/9	WEEK OF 8/16	WEEK OF 8/23
Clients	Develop and review interview questions/ protocol	✓	✓										
	Recruit Interview participants			✓	✓								
	Interviews				✓	✓	✓						
	Develop Survey						✓	✓	✓				
	Conduct Survey								✓	✓	✓	✓	
Workforce Providers	Develop focus group protocol						✓	✓					
	Conduct focus group									✓			
Human Services Providers	Develop briefing agenda, poll									✓			
	Poll at Provider Briefing										✓		
CSAC	Conduct Focus Group												✓

First, DHS conducted semi-structured interviews with nine community members over the phone to learn more about their financial experiences, needs and goals. DHS recruited these community members using flyers and palm cards distributed by DHS providers. DHS used the themes of their responses to create the community-wide survey. Interview participants were thanked for their participation with \$15 gift cards. A summary of interview themes can be found in **Appendix B**.

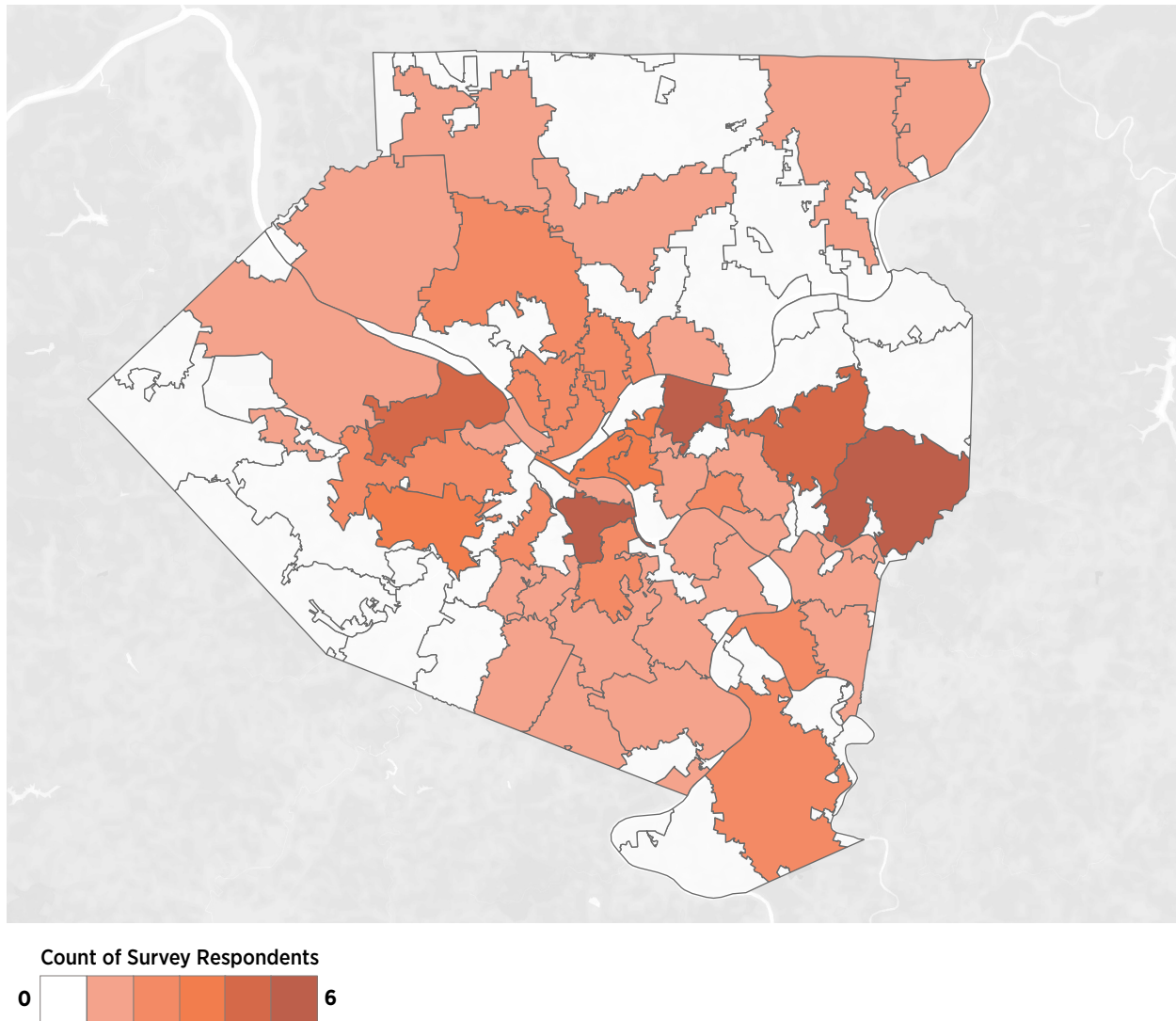
Second, DHS developed a community-wide survey to ask a larger sample of residents about their financial and employment status, needs and goals. A list of community survey questions can be found in **Appendix C**. The web-based survey could be accessed via a link, QR code, or text message. DHS distributed the survey using a wide variety of methods, including flyers, palm cards, social media posts, an announcement at the DHS Provider Briefing, and an email message to all DHS providers. DHS providers distributed the survey materials to community members electronically and at events such as emergency food distributions. The survey was open for one month, from 7/22/21 to 8/21/21; 179 community members completed the survey. Responses to demographic questions were optional to maximize response rates, and the demographics of respondents who chose to share is included in **Table 1** and **Figure 5**. Black, Hispanic or Latinx, and female respondents, and respondents with disabilities were represented in the survey respondent sample at a higher rate than the Allegheny County population.

TABLE 1: Respondent Demographics

Total Respondents	179
Working Age Respondents	169
Provided Race	106
White	57%
Black or African American	29%
Prefer to self-describe	7%
Asian	5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1%
Provided Ethnicity	112
Not of Hispanic or Latinx origin	90%
Hispanic or Latinx origin	10%
Provided Age	112
18 to 24	4%
25 to 34	19%
35 to 44	29%
45 to 54	17%
55 to 64	21%
65+	9%
Average Age (Years)	46
Provided Disability Status	100
No disability	69%
Disability	31%
Provided Gender	110
Female	69%
Male	26%
Gender Diverse	2%
Transgender Male	<1%
Prefer to self-describe	<1%
Non-binary	<1%
Provided Number of Children	112
None	35%
1	26%
2	19%
3	10%
4 or more	11%
Provided Parenting Status	63
Single parent	46%
With a spouse or partner	40%
With a family member	14%

While the survey did not cover all county zip codes, respondents resided all over Allegheny County, as shown in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5: Count of Survey Respondents by Zip Codes



Then, DHS conducted two semi-structured focus groups with representatives of community-based organizations, one with workforce providers and the other with CSAC members, in August 2021. Workforce provider focus group questions can be found in **Appendix D** and CSAC questions can be found in **Appendix E**. CSAC members were asked to react to some preliminary community survey findings. The planning team facilitated the focus groups and conducted thematic analysis.

Finally, DHS's network of contracted human services providers were engaged at a regularly scheduled provider meeting in August 2021. Providers were briefed on the needs assessment and asked to participate in two live polling questions (found in **Appendix F**), and their open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis.

ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Demographic Profile and Key Economic Indicators in Allegheny County

Allegheny County is home to over 1.2 million residents. A demographic profile of Allegheny County appears in **Table 2**, reflecting 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates (all estimates included in this section of the report and the following two sections, "Geographic Distribution..." and "Diving Deeper into Labor Force..." are 2018 ACS 5-Year estimates unless otherwise noted). In the five-year period leading up to 2018, the county's population remained stagnant. Recently released 2020 Census data, however, shows that over the past ten years, the county's population grew by 2%, or approximately 27,000 people, to 1,250,578.⁴ Allegheny County became less White (76% White, a decline of 6%) and more Asian (5% Asian, an increase of 2%) and Hispanic (3%, an increase of 1%).⁵ Other notable changes include an increase in educational attainment (the proportion of residents with a Bachelor's degree increased by 5% since 2013) and an increase in full-time employment (the proportion of residents working full-time increased by 2% since 2013).

4 US Census Bureau. (2021, August 26). 2020 Population and Housing State Data. Census.gov. Retrieved from [here](#).

5 Ibid.

TABLE 2: Allegheny County Population and Demographics (2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates)

Total Population	1,225,561
Population for whom poverty status is determined	1,192,733
Income as a Percent of Federal Poverty Line	
Under 50%	6%
50% to 99%	6%
100% to 124%	4%
125% to 149%	3%
150% to 184%	5%
185% to 199%	2%
200% and over	73%
Population 16 and over	990,741
Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin	
White	85%
Black or African American	12%
American Indian and Alaska Native	<1%
Asian	4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	<1%
Some other race	<1%
Two or more races	2%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	2%
Language spoken at home	
Speak only English	93%
Speak a language other than English	7%
People with a Disability	16%
Sex	
Male	49%
Female	51%
With own children under 6 years only	6%
Females with children 6 to 17 years only	13%
Females with both children under 6 years and 6 to 17 years	4%
Females with no children	78%
Work Experience	
Worked full-time, year-round in the past 12 months	45%
Worked part-time or part-year in the past 12 months	24%
Did not work	32%

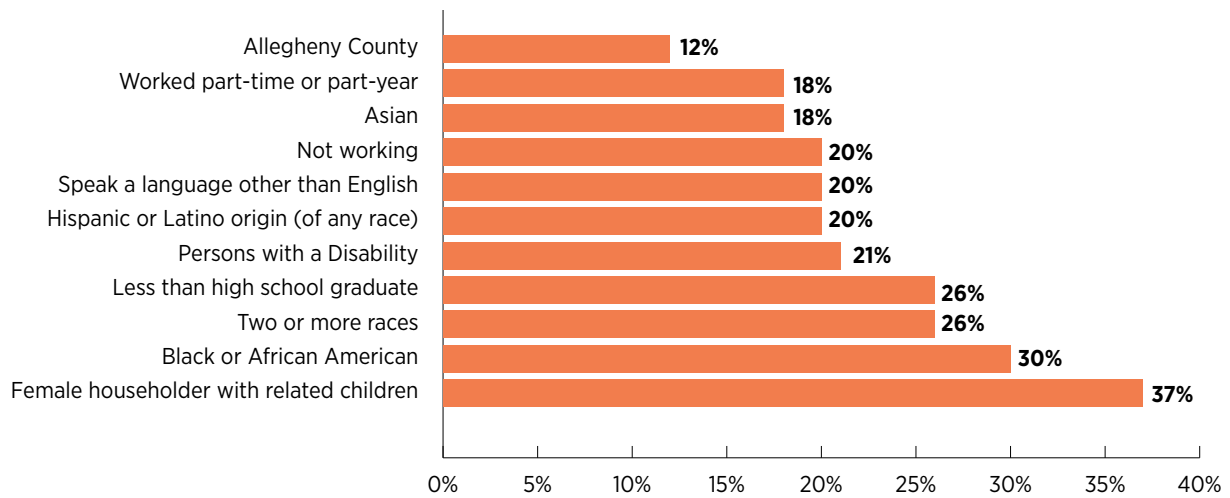
Population 25 to 64 years	661,400
Education	
Less than high school graduate	4%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	23%
Some college or associate's degree	27%
Bachelor's degree or higher	45%
Households	537,960
Families	304,137
Female householder, no husband present	19%
With related children of the householder under 18 years	10%

Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates Tables S1501 S1701 C17002 S2301 S1101 S1601 DPO3 and Public Use Microdata

The poverty rate in Allegheny County is estimated to be 12.1%, a decrease of .8 percentage points from an estimated 12.9% in 2013. The poverty rate is calculated using the federal poverty level, which is based on household size and updated yearly by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In 2018, the federal poverty level for an individual was \$12,140. The incidence of poverty varies widely by family structure, race, ethnicity, education and employment, as shown in **Figure 6**. The rate of poverty is more than double the county average among Black residents, multiracial residents, and those with less than a high school diploma. Female householders with related children experience poverty at a rate more than triple the county average. These findings are consistent with the recent report *Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race*, which finds that Pittsburgh's Black adult women are five times more likely to live in poverty than White adult men.⁶

6 Howell, Junia, Sara Goodkind, Leah Jacobs, Dominique Branson and Elizabeth Miller. 2019. "Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race." Gender Analysis White Papers. City of Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission.

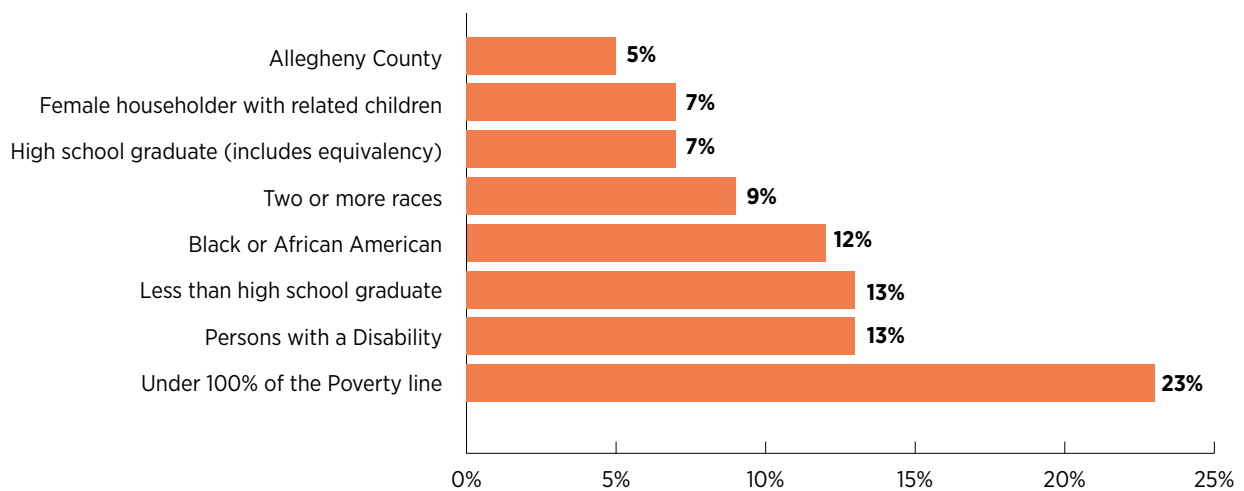
FIGURE 6: Poverty Rates by Group, 2018 5-Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates Tables S1501 S1701 C17002 S2301 S1101 S1601 DPO3 and Public Use Microdata

Unemployment is highest among residents living in poverty, at 23%. Unemployment varies by disability status, education, race, gender, and parenting status. The countywide unemployment rate decreased by 2.6% over the five years leading up to 2018, to 5.3%.

FIGURE 7: Unemployment Rates by Group, 2018 5-Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates Tables S1501 S1701 C17002 S2301 S1101 S1601 DPO3 and Public Use Microdata

In July 2021, Allegheny County’s 6.3% unemployment rate was significantly improved from the COVID-19 high of 15.9% in April 2020 but had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.⁷ Workers in certain industries such as food services, entertainment and retail were most affected by COVID-19 and will continue to be most affected in the long-term. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that due to pandemic-induced trends such as increased telework, weaker business travel, increased online shopping, and expanded contactless ordering, some low-wage jobs in highly affected industries will not return.⁸ These projections, along with the share of residents employed in these sectors, are shown in **Table 3**. DHS clients are employed in these affected sectors at rates two to five times higher than the county’s population. Low-wage workers (earning less than \$25,000 annually) and those with less than a high-school education are unlikely to recover to pre-pandemic employment until the end of 2024.⁹

TABLE 3: Difference in percent changes in employment between pre-pandemic and two recovery scenarios, by industry, 2019–29

INDUSTRY	% OF ALL EMPLOYED ALLEGHENY COUNTY RESIDENTS	% OF ALL EMPLOYED DHS CLIENTS	CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT: MODERATE IMPACT SCENARIO	CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT: STRONG IMPACT SCENARIO
Accommodation and Food Services	6.8%	38.7%	-5.7%	-10.1%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2.2%	4.3%	-0.8%	-5.2%
Retail Trade	10.8%	30.9%	-2%	-4.9%

Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates Table S2403, Pennsylvania (PA) Unemployment Insurance (UI) records for Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) clients between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2020, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021 Projections

Regionally, the employment recovery of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is expected to lag behind other metropolitan areas in the coming years, based on its slower year-over-year job growth. While the Pittsburgh region gained about 57,800 jobs between June 2020 and June 2021, a 6% increase over the year, this fell below the benchmark average of a 7% gain for this period among similar MSAs.¹⁰

Geographic Distribution of Need within Allegheny County

Just as indicators of need vary greatly across demographic groups, they also vary greatly across neighborhoods and municipalities. Decades of research show that place matters in determining the long-term life outcomes of individuals, particularly for younger children. Community-level factors such as residents’ average poverty rate, number of residents without a high school diploma, rate of unemployment, frequency of single parenthood,

7 Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (2021, September 1). Unemployment rate in Allegheny County, PA. FRED. Retrieved from [here](#).

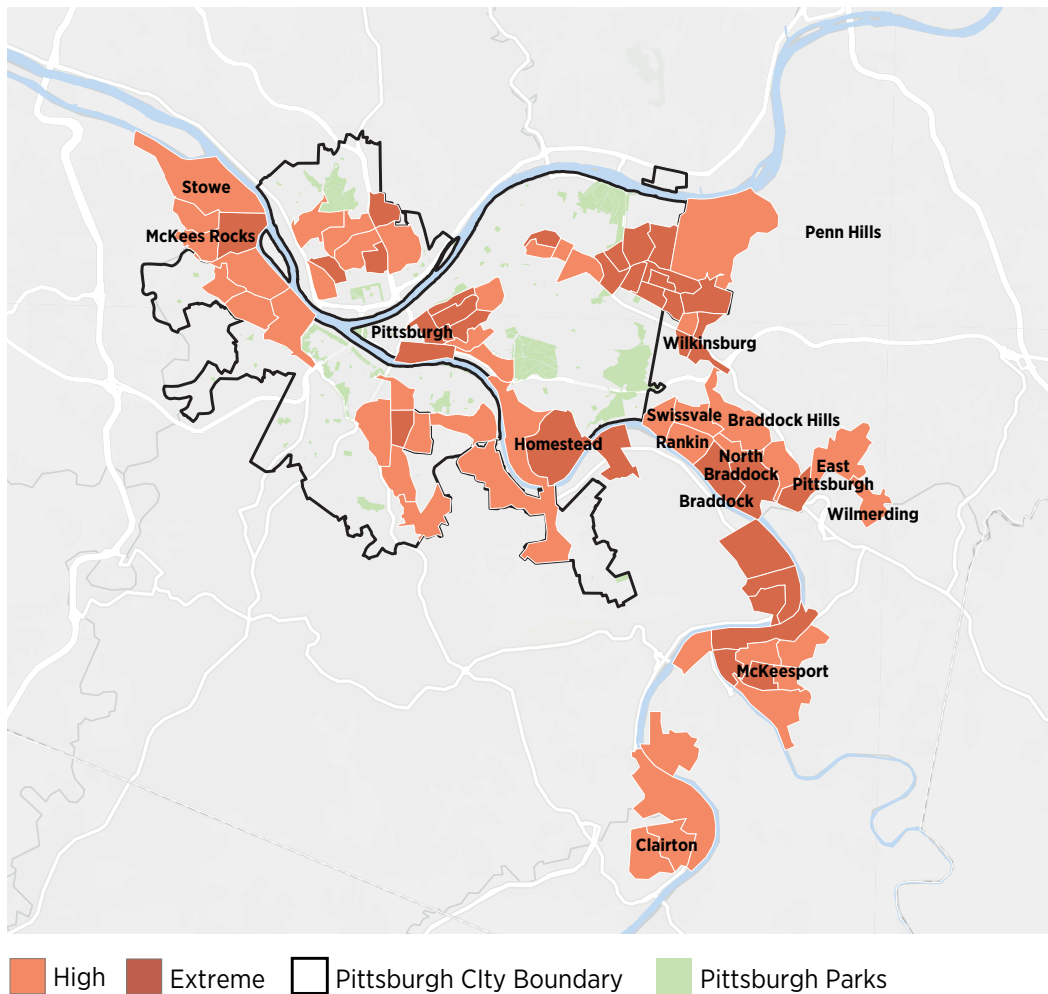
8 Lindsey Ice, Michael J. Rieley, and Samuel Rinde, “Employment projections in a pandemic environment,” Monthly Labor Review, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2021, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2021.3>

9 André Dua, Kweilin Ellingrud, Michael Lazar, Tucker Van Aken, Ryan Luby, and Sanjay Srinivasan, “Achieving an inclusive US economic recovery,” Public and Social Sector Insights, McKinsey & Company, February 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/achieving-an-inclusive-us-economic-recovery>

10 Pittsburgh Today. (2021, July 16). Year-Over-Year job Growth June 2020 to June 2021. Pittsburgh Quarterly. Retrieved September 15, 2021, from [here](#).

and community gun violence play a key role in linking place to outcomes. Allegheny County’s most recent Community Need Index analysis shows that outside of the City of Pittsburgh, need remains persistently high in McKees Rocks and Stowe, sections of Penn Hills and Wilkinsburg, and much of the Monongahela River Valley, as shown in **Figure 8**.¹¹ Harrison Township, in the most northeastern section of the county, is not pictured.

FIGURE 8: High and Extreme Need Allegheny County Census Tracts, 2014–2018



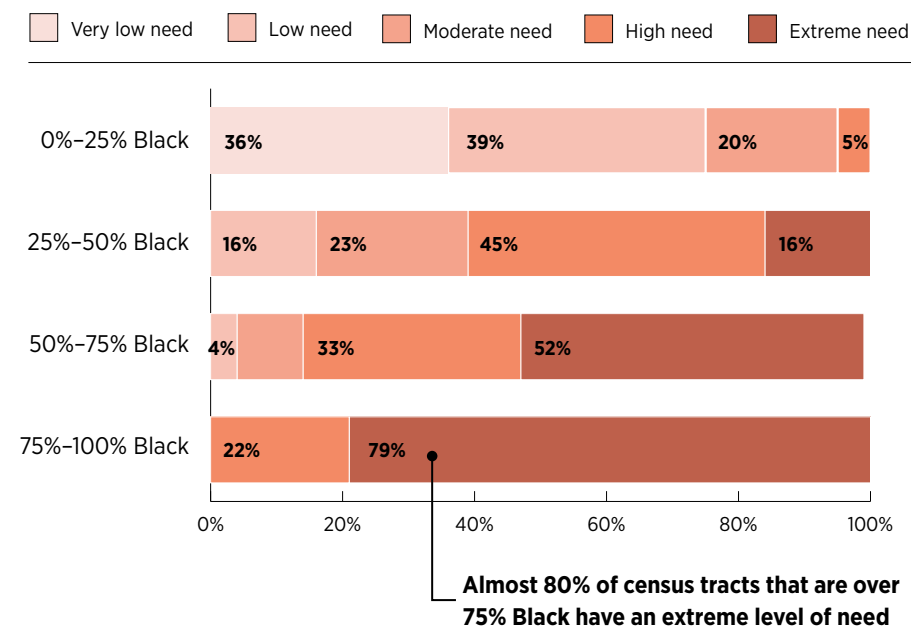
Source: Calculations based on data from 2014–2018 ACS estimates and 2014–2018 911 dispatches via ACES

11 Allegheny County Department of Human Services. (2021). The Allegheny County Community Need Index: Update for 2021 with a Focus on the Connection between Race and Community Need. Retrieved from [here](#).

In extreme need communities, 39% of families live in poverty (thirteen times the average rate in the lowest-need areas) and 46% of men are unemployed (more than triple the average rate in the lowest-need areas). The highest- and lowest-need communities differ greatly on other important economic measures as well. On average, almost half of households (46%) in extreme need communities lack access to a vehicle, compared with just 8% in very-low-need communities.¹² About one third of households (34%) lack access to the internet in extreme need communities, compared with just 9% in the lowest-need areas.¹³

Race and community need are deeply intertwined due to the residential segregation caused by nearly a century of systemic, institutional, and interpersonal racism and exclusion, ranging from racist housing, lending and land-use policy to White flight, urban renewal and the war on drugs. Census tracts in Allegheny County with a higher proportion of Black residents tend to have higher relative need while census tracts with a higher proportion of White residents tend to have lower relative need, as shown in **Figure 9**.

FIGURE 9: Tract Level of Need by Proportion of Black Population



Source: Calculations based on data from 2014–2018 ACS estimates and 2014–2018 911 dispatches via ACES

12 ACS 2018 5-year estimates Table B25044.

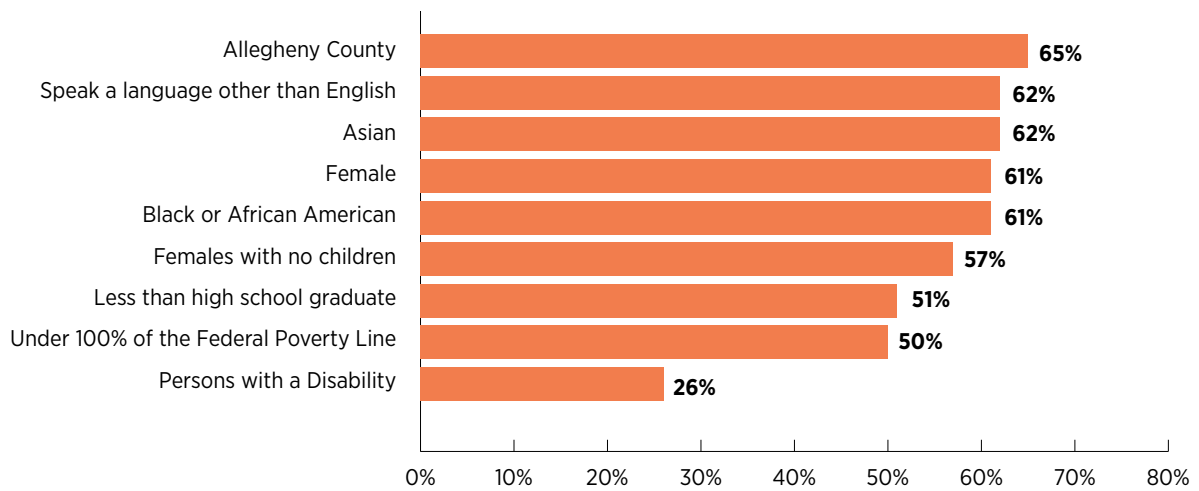
13 ACS 2018 5-year estimates Table B28002.

Diving Deeper into Labor Force Involvement and Experiences of Allegheny County Residents

Labor Force Participation

In Allegheny County, an estimated 65% of residents aged 16 and older participate in the workforce. About half of people living in poverty (50%) are participating in the workforce. Workforce participation also varies by disability status, education, gender, race and language spoken, as shown in **Figure 10**. While workforce participation increased slightly over the five years leading up to 2018 (from 64.1% to 64.7%) at the county level and to varying degrees across demographic groups, participation declined among those with less than a high school degree and Asian residents. Nationally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, women disproportionately left the labor force, and Black women left the labor force at nearly twice the rate (5.6%) of White women (3%).¹⁴ An estimated 12,800 women over age 20 exited the labor force in the Pittsburgh region between October 2019 and October 2020.¹⁵

FIGURE 10: Labor Force Participation Rate by Group, 2018 5-Year Estimates



Source: ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates Tables S1501 S1701 C17002 S2301 S1101 S1601 DP03 and Public Use Microdata

Using data from the Allegheny County Data Warehouse and 2018–2020 PA State Unemployment Insurance records, we find that DHS clients’ labor force participation is similar to the county average. In any given quarter from 2018 through 2020, an estimated 62–70% of clients participated in the labor force. In August 2021, 71% of working-age community survey respondents reported being employed and an additional 22% are unemployed and looking for a job.

14 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) Labor Force Dropout February 2020–February 2021

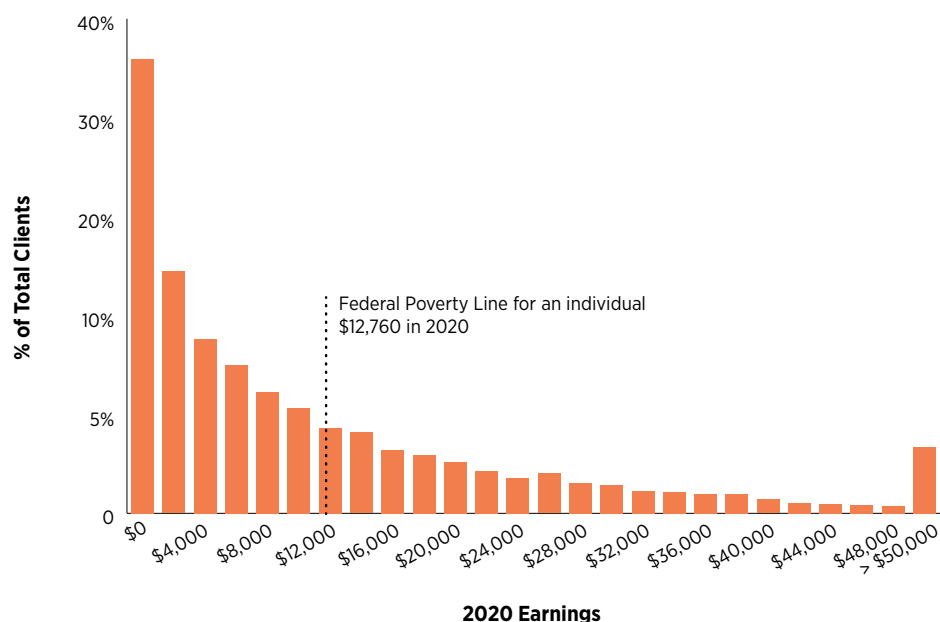
15 Fourth Economy. (Dec 2020). Pulse Report for Children and Families. United Way of SWPA, Poise Foundation, Allies for Children. Retrieved from [here](#).

Most employed working-age survey respondents (74%) have had their job for more than a year. The most common type of employment was full time (61%) followed by part time (27%). Nine percent of working-age employed respondents identified as underemployed in a job that does not utilize their experience.

Wages

Most employed DHS clients have earnings that fall below the federal poverty line for an individual, as shown in **Figure 11**. Thirty-one percent of working-age community survey respondents who are employed stated that they are looking for a new job, and the majority of those seeking a new job (68%) cited low pay as a key reason.

FIGURE 11: Distribution of total 2020 earnings among DHS clients with nonzero earnings in the year



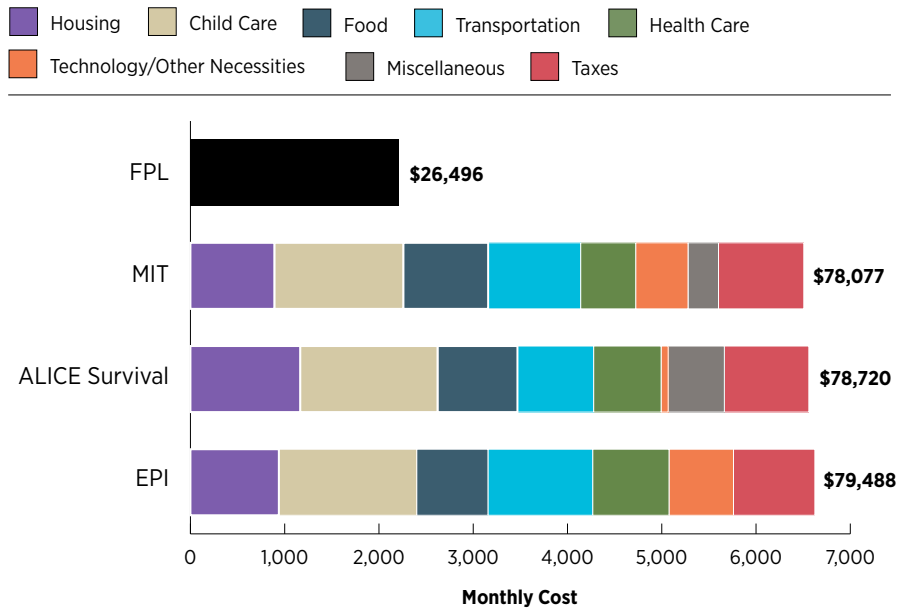
Source: Calculations of Pennsylvania (PA) Unemployment Insurance (UI) records of Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) clients between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2020

Wages have remained stagnant in low-wage jobs. Between 2009 and 2018, the bottom 90% had wage growth of just 6.8%, compared to 19.2% for the top 0.1%.¹⁶ Wage growth is not keeping up with the cost of living in Allegheny County. **Figure 12** shows the cost of meeting a family of four’s basic needs (housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, technology/other necessities taxes) as estimated by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), and United Way. A family of four with an income at the

16 Mishel, L., & Kassa, M. (2019, December). Top 1.0% of earners see wages UP 157.8% since 1979. Working Economics Blog. Retrieved from [here](#).

Federal Poverty Line of \$26,496 faces a shortfall of over \$50,000 just to meet their family’s basic needs in Allegheny County.

FIGURE 12: Comparison of Poverty Threshold with the Cost of Living in Allegheny County



Source: MIT Living Wage Calculation for Allegheny County (2020), ALICE Survival Budget for Allegheny County (2018), Economic Policy Institute Family Budget for Allegheny County (2018)

Accordingly, less than half (49%) of all working-age community survey respondents were at least moderately satisfied with their ability to cover their family’s everyday basic needs expenses. Among employed working-age respondents, only 51% were at least moderately satisfied with their ability to cover their family’s basic needs expenses, suggesting that the wages of 49% of employed respondents do not meet their family’s basic needs.

FIGURE 13: Satisfaction with ability to cover everyday basic needs expenses, by employment status



Source: 2021 Community Needs Assessment Survey Data

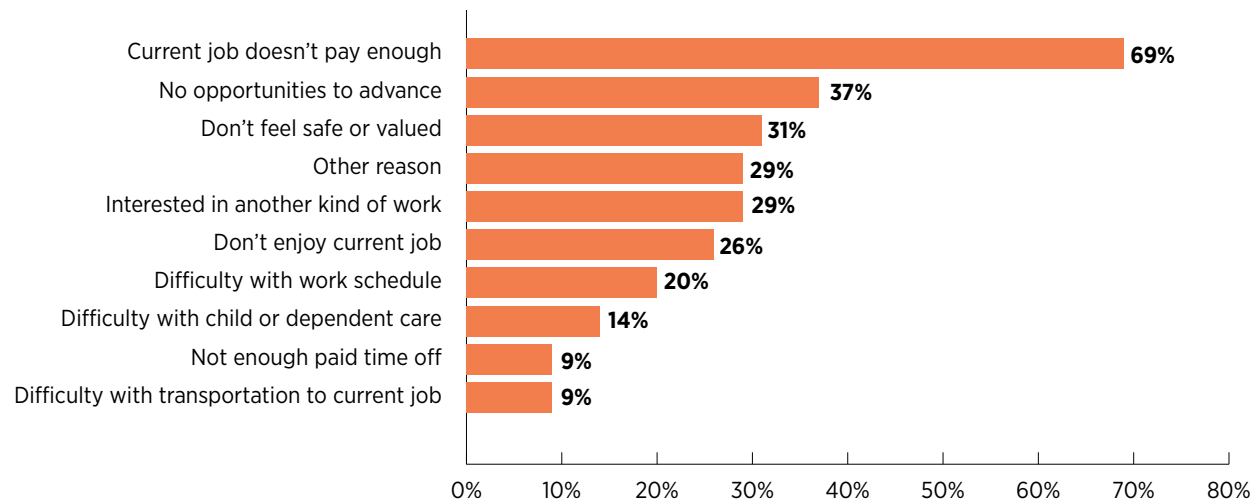
Finally, we find that among DHS clients, Black males have had the lowest earnings in every quarter since 2018.¹⁷ This is consistent with the report *Pittsburgh’s Inequality Across Gender and Race*, which finds that Black men working full time make only 70 cents to every dollar made by White men. Unlike the DHS client sample, the report finds that Black women working full time had even lower earnings, at 63 cents to every dollar made by White men.¹⁸

Job Satisfaction

A majority of employed working-age respondents (69%) intend to stay in their current jobs as of August 2021. While low wages are a key motivator for the 31% who are looking for new jobs, other motivators play a role too, as shown in **Figure 14**. These include workplace factors such as a lack of opportunities to advance (37%), not feeling safe or valued (31%), and difficulty with work schedule (20%), as well as personal factors like interest in another kind of work (29%).

“Another key component is job quality (beyond wages). People seek jobs that offer stable and manageable work schedules, healthcare/benefits, professional development/growth opportunities.” – CSAC MEMBER

FIGURE 14: Percentage of Respondents Seeking a Different Job, by Reason



Source: 2021 Community Needs Assessment Survey Data

17 Calculations of Pennsylvania (PA) Unemployment Insurance (UI) records of Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) clients between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2020.

18 Howell, Junia, Sara Goodkind, Leah Jacobs, Dominique Branson and Elizabeth Miller. 2019. "Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race." Gender Analysis White Papers. City of Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission.

In a recent focus group with parents conducted by Partner4Work, participants also voiced that wages were the most important job factor. When asked what would make the biggest difference in helping them gain a job or maintain employment, they ranked highly paid sick time/family leave, employer-provided medical benefits, and a consistent work schedule.¹⁹

Employed respondents looking for a new job had a variety of requests for assistance, varying widely based upon their individual situations. A handful of respondents sought help finding higher paying opportunities. CSAC members stressed the need to help low-income workers navigate benefits cliffs when seeking higher-wage positions. A benefits cliff describes the abrupt and often unexpected decrease in public benefits that can occur with a small increase in earnings, leaving the individual financially worse off.

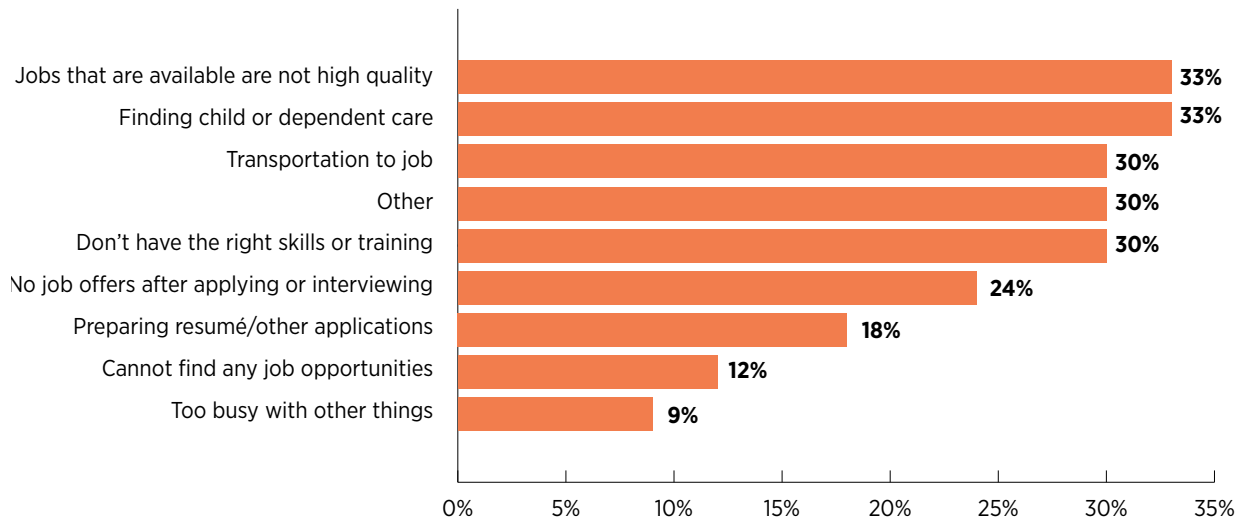
Experiences of People Who Are Unemployed

Thirty-four percent of working-age community survey respondents were not working in August 2021, many of whom (56%) lost their jobs due to COVID-19 (representing 19% of all working-age respondents). Most unemployed respondents (69%) are interested in becoming employed, and most (54%) have recently gotten assistance looking for work. However, most of the respondents looking to become employed have been unemployed for over a year (67%) and may face significant barriers to employment.

Nearly all unemployed respondents who are interested in becoming employed (92%) reported a variety of challenges in doing so, detailed in **Figure 15**. Respondents reported logistical challenges accessing child and dependent care and transportation to a job. Respondents also reported challenges with lack of skills and training for available jobs and finding high quality jobs.

19 Partner4Work, in partnership with Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS). (2021). Voices of Pittsburgh Working Parents.

FIGURE 15: Percentage of Respondents Experiencing Challenges



Source: 2021 Community Needs Assessment Survey Data

When asked to name the single most important thing they need assistance with to find employment, respondents most commonly requested help finding the right job opportunities including those that meet their preferences and needs, such as working from home or working with a disability. A smaller number of respondents cited assistance with transportation and/or childcare (about 20% citing each). Respondents who elaborated on their transportation needs cited a need for funds to cover the costs of owning a car such as gas, repairs, insurance and loans.

Workforce providers emphasized that job seekers must have systemic supports in place to obtain and maintain employment. They named housing, mental health support, internet and technology access, childcare and transportation and stressed that housing and mental health were both the most challenging and critical to address. Housing instability and unaddressed trauma prohibit clients from being able to engage in workforce development services and the job search process. Due to workforce funding restrictions, the workforce system is unable to provide housing and mental health supportive services to job seekers. Further, providers' work with clients facing these challenges often can't be counted toward their funding benchmarks related to employment and retention. Providers are willing to work with clients toward these "unfunded outcomes," as long as the client remains consistently engaged. Some clients, however, "drop off the radar."

Workforce providers also shared occasional challenges addressing job seekers' childcare and transportation needs. They reported encountering long waitlists when contacting the Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), delaying the client's timeline to engage in workforce development. Parent participants in a recent Partner4Work

focus group shared that childcare is particularly challenging during a job search. Since the childcare subsidy can only be used during active employment, this leaves some parents without an affordable option to use for job interviews.²⁰

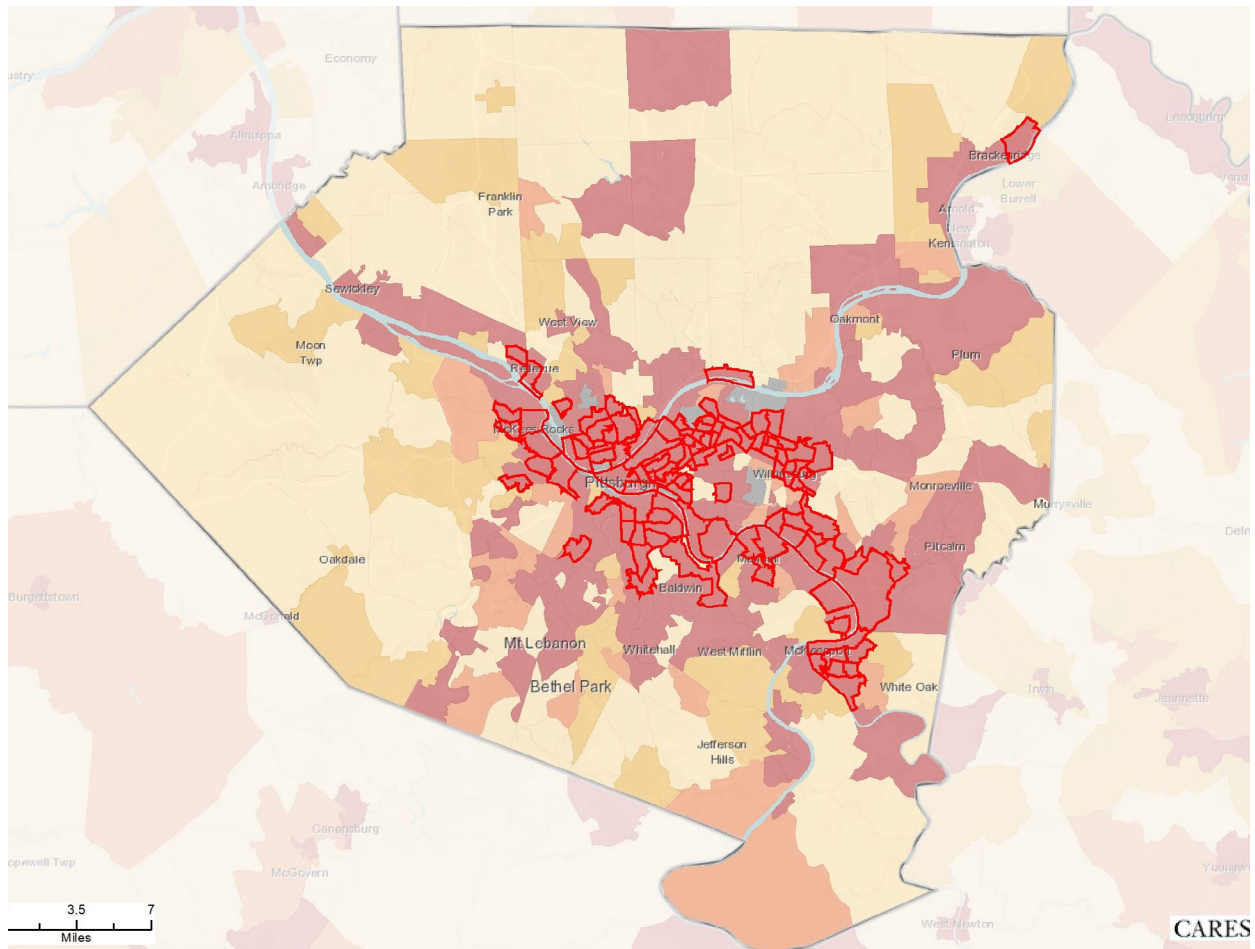
In the transportation realm, providers found success connecting clients with bus passes but found addressing car-related needs, such as car repairs and loan payments, challenging. CSAC members echoed that transportation to work is an issue. They suggested that DHS fund and expand transportation subsidies while also finding ways to bring services to people and communities with limited transportation access.

While 79% of jobs in Allegheny County are located within a half mile of public transit, only 14% of households making less than \$50,000 live within a half mile of high-frequency full-day transit.²¹ In areas that are less accessible by public transit, vehicle access becomes more important. **Figure 16** shows vehicle access across Allegheny County. In the tracts outlined in red, more than one in five households do not have access to a vehicle. All extreme and high need tracts outside of the City of Pittsburgh have lower levels of vehicle access.

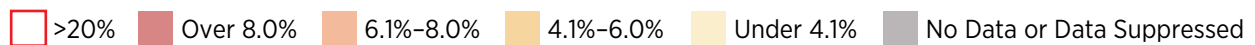
20 Partner4Work, in partnership with Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS). (2021). Voices of Pittsburgh Working Parents.

21 Center for Neighborhood Technology. (n.d.). AllTransit Fact Sheet for Allegheny County. AllTransit. Retrieved from [here](#).

FIGURE 16: Households with No Vehicle, Percent by Tract



Households with No Vehicle, Percent by Tract, ACS 2015–2019



Source: ACS 2019 5-Year Estimates

Although both workforce providers and CSAC members cited the importance and success of addressing internet and technology access needs, only 7% of community survey respondents cited this need. Among unemployed working-age respondents, the proportion with this need dropped to 5%. Providers stressed that it takes significant agency staff capacity to assist people without technology access in signing up for assistance programs, and that there needs to be a longer-term solution to sustainable internet and technology access.

Respondents who are unemployed and not currently interested in employment most commonly named improving their physical health as their priority. Respondents mentioned managing disabilities and chronic conditions.

Job Retention

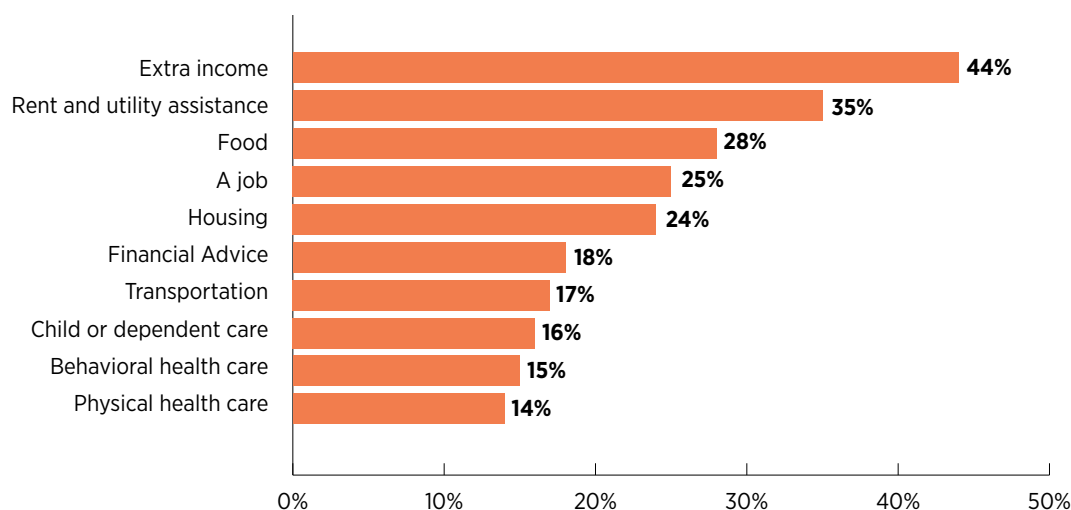
Workforce providers and CSAC focus group participants shared the importance and challenge of job retention. Twenty-seven percent of employed working-age community survey respondents have had their current jobs for less than a year. Although most workforce providers are able to offer 12 months of retention support to clients, they still see retention support as a gap in Allegheny County’s workforce system. Specifically, they see a need for strategies to mitigate risk to employers, especially those employing new training program graduates, perhaps through wage splitting, internships, or on the job training.

Needs and Gaps in Allegheny County’s Economic Security Service Array

Most Common Needs

Respondents were asked to choose which needs were most urgent for them, and results are shown in **Figure 17**.

FIGURE 17: Needs, by Percentage of Respondents Ranking as Most Urgent



Source: 2021 Community Needs Assessment Survey Data

Most of the ten highest-ranked urgent needs related to basic needs. Extra income, rent and utility assistance, food and housing topped the lists of between a quarter and half (24-44%) of all respondents. Likewise, both DHS human services providers and CSAC members ranked basic needs as the highest-priority area for DHS investment. Employment was also ranked highly by a quarter (25%) of respondents.

#1: Extra Income

Respondents who expressed an urgent need for extra income envisioned using it for everyday household expenses, monthly bills, deferred car or home maintenance, debt, or savings for an emergency or home purchase. Most described the assistance that would be most helpful as extra cash on a monthly basis, but some described a raise or a better paying job.

“The money I need near the end of the month (I get paid once a month) is for everyday expenses like food and gas...”

“...Money to be put towards a car and a new computer, which broke the first week of the quarantine in 2020.”

CSAC members highlighted that this need is especially great among seniors and people receiving Social Security. A universal basic income was one of the most commonly proposed ideas by human services providers.

#2: Rent and Utility Assistance

Respondents with an urgent need for rent and utility assistance requested financial assistance to catch up on overdue rent, mortgage and utility bills. They requested rapid assistance, or as one respondent put it, “real help in real time.” CSAC members highlighted this need and spoke to the gap between the short-term or COVID-19-related assistance that is available and the long-term needs that exist.

#3: Food

Respondents with an urgent need for food described insufficient funds to purchase food and difficulty making their food last for the month. Most respondents requested additional funds for purchasing food, while a few cited the need for more affordable food options.

“I make too much money...to obtain public assistance but just barely have enough left over after rent and bills for the bare minimum.”

#5: Housing

Respondents with an urgent need for housing had varying situations. While some sought assistance pursuing home ownership, others were experiencing housing instability and having difficulty finding suitable rental housing for their unique needs (affordability, transportation access, accepting Section 8, accepting people with criminal records). Expansion of affordable housing options was one of the most common ideas shared by human services providers.

#10: Physical Health Care

Members of the CSAC were surprised to see that relatively few individuals (14%) ranked health care as an urgent need. They highlighted that unmanaged health issues are a foundational barrier to work. Dental insurance was also highlighted as a major gap, as Medicaid does not cover dental. A 2021 Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank Survey of over 1,200 callers and visitors found a higher percentage of individuals reporting unmet healthcare needs, at 22%.

Needs of Employed vs. Unemployed Residents

Employed and unemployed respondents largely agreed on their top urgent needs with one major difference. For employed residents, financial advice ranked #4 with 24% of respondents ranking it as an urgent need, while for unemployed residents, financial advice ranked #14, with only 7% of respondents ranking it as an urgent need.

Needs of Black vs. White Residents

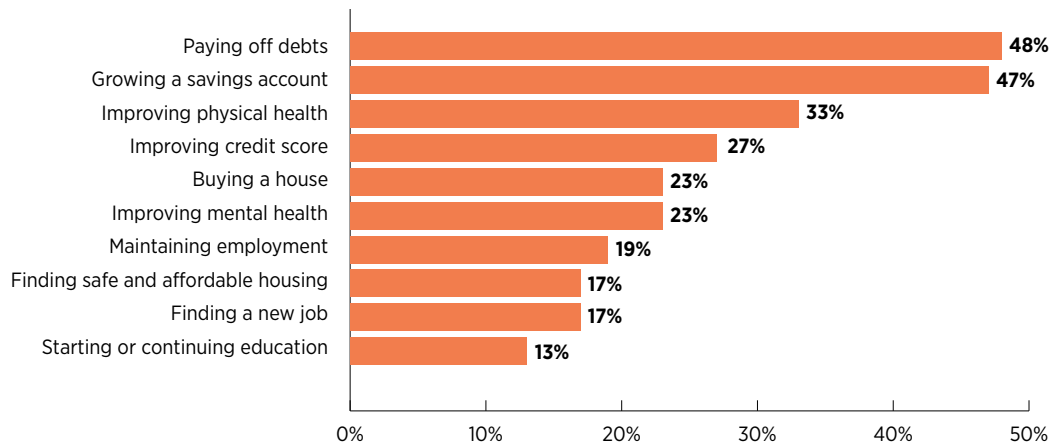
Black and White respondents agreed on many of their top urgent needs with a few differences. Black respondents reported needs for skills and training and child and dependent care more frequently (16% and 19% of respondents, respectively) than White respondents (5% and 12%, respectively). White respondents reported urgent needs for supportive relationships and behavioral health care more frequently (22% of respondents for each) than Black respondents (10% and 6%, respectively).

Goals on the Path to Economic Security

Most Common Goals

Respondents were asked to choose which goals were most important to them, and results are shown in Figure 18.

FIGURE 18: Top Ten Goals, Ranked as Most Important



Source: 2021 Community Needs Assessment Survey Data

Nearly half of all respondents ranked wealth-building goals, including paying off debts and growing a savings account, as most important to them. Other wealth-building goals, including improving credit score and buying a house, were also ranked highly (by 27% and 23% of respondents, respectively).

#1: Paying off Debts

Respondents with a goal to pay off debt shared that being debt free would improve their ability to cover their monthly bills. Respondents also envisioned a sense of relief, comfort and freedom. Many respondents felt unsure about what would help them reach this goal. The most common idea regarding what would be most helpful was direct financial assistance to pay down the debt balance.

“More money going to basic needs, not paying off high credit card payment”

#2: Growing a Savings Account

While some respondents with a goal to grow a savings account shared about future purchases they would like to make, most sought the sense of security and safety that would come from having an emergency fund. Most respondents were unsure what type of assistance would help them reach their savings goals.

“My savings account has less than a thousand. I want it to cover more than just a bounced check.”

#4: Improving Credit Score

Respondents with a goal to improve their credit score shared their desire to become eligible for loans or lower cost loans. Many equated improving their credit score with paying off debts. The most commonly requested form of assistance to achieve this goal is financial counseling.

#6: Buying a House

Respondents with a home buying goal shared that achieving this goal would mean living in a more desirable neighborhood, better meeting the needs of their children, and/or feeling a sense of financial security.

Goals related to basic needs were also frequently ranked highly. Thirty-three percent of respondents ranked improving their physical health highly, and 23% ranked improving their mental health highly.

#3: Improving Physical Health

Respondents with a goal to improve their physical health most commonly spoke about managing chronic conditions and losing weight. Respondents mentioned a variety of things that would help them achieve this goal including finding the right doctor and access to affordable food and opportunities to exercise.

#5: Improving Mental Health

Respondents with a goal of improving their mental health described continuing or beginning treatment and seeking stress relief and stability. Respondents described free or affordable and readily available behavioral health care as most helpful. CSAC participants noted that while free clinics do exist, they have limited availability and long waiting lists.

#10: Education

Members of the CSAC were surprised to see that relatively few individuals (13%) ranked education as an important goal, and even fewer (9%) ranked skills and training as an urgent need. CSAC members viewed education and training as fundamental to obtaining living wage jobs. They shared that past educational trauma, fear of failure, prohibitively high costs, and improvements in the job market can all be deterrents to participation in education and training. They shared ideas around tuition assistance/scholarships and mentorship to overcome these barriers. Expanded access to training programs was one of the most common ideas shared by human services providers.

Goals of Employed vs. Unemployed Residents

Employed and unemployed respondents largely agreed on their most important goals with one major difference. For employed respondents, paying off debts ranked #1 with 58% of respondents ranking it as an important goal, while for unemployed respondents, paying off debts ranked #10 with only 18% of respondents ranking it as an important goal.



“Freedom from lazy landlords and bad neighborhoods, boost in self-confidence, happiness for me and my family”



“My health is bad because I have trouble managing my diabetes.”



“...If there [were] resources available in the community that [were] free, then this would [improve] the individuals' quality of life a thousand fold...”

Goals of Black vs. White Residents

Black and White respondents largely agreed on their most important goals with a few differences. For Black residents, finding safe and affordable housing ranked #2 with 26% of respondents ranking it as an important goal, while for White residents, it ranked as #9 with 15% of respondents ranking it as an important goal. In addition, for Black residents, starting a business ranked #5 with 16% of respondents ranking it as an important goal, while for White residents, it ranked #11 with only 3% ranking it as an important goal.

AUTHOR

Kara McFadden

ANALYSIS

Ben Schenck and Seth Chizeck

APPENDIX A

APPENDICES

Appendix A. List of Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC) Members

NAME	CATEGORY	OFFICE/COMMITTEE	TERM*
Lynn Tatala, MPA, MSW Coordinator, Project ELECT Allegheny Intermediate Unit	SLI		12/2020 to 12/2022
Karen Clunas Customer Relations, Peoples Natural Gas	SLI	Vice-President	09/2020 to 9/2022
Mary Frances Pilarski Health Care for the Homeless Veterans Program VA Pittsburgh Health Care System Veterans Recovery Center	SLI	Secretary	06/2020 to 06/2022
Mike Selep Manager, Universal Services	SLI		09/2020 to 09/2022
Stephanie Eson Human Services Center Corporation	SLI	President	12/2019 to 12/2021
Cynthia Moore Clairton Cares and PA Health and Wellness	P		01/2019 to 12/2021
James Ritchie Port Authority Allegheny County	P		01/2019 to 12/2021
Andrea Horton-Mericli Literacy Pittsburgh	P		01/2019 to 12/2021
Dillon Moore Partner4Work	P		01/2019 to 12/2021
Laura Zinski Mon Valley Initiative	P		01/2019 to 12/2021
TalainaMaria Peterson	RLI		06/2021 to 06/2023
Jeannea Marie McDonald	RLI		12/2020 to 12/2022
Bill McDowell	RLI		09/2019 to 09/2021
Dee Lanier	RLI		08/2021 to 08/2023
Anna Hudson	RLI		06/2021 to 06/2023

*Term is from the first day of the month at the beginning of the term to the last day of the month at the end of the term.

- P = Political Appointees
- RLI = Representative for Low-Income Persons
- SLI = Services for Low-Income Persons

Membership of the CSAC shall be comprised of fifteen (15) persons who are residents of Allegheny County. Membership as per CSBG legislation is comprised of one-third (1/3) members to be appointed by the County Executive; one-third (1/3) members who have been nominated and approved by the CSAC who represent the interests of low-income persons; one-third (1/3) members who have been nominated and approved by the CSAC who represent service providers, business, education, housing, employment, and health care and who have an interest in helping low-income persons to become more self-sufficient.

APPENDIX B

Appendix B. Community Interview Summary**Economic Security Community Needs Assessment 2021**

From July 3rd through 18th 2021, the DHS Client Experience Team spoke on the phone with 9 clients to learn more about their financial experiences, needs, and goals. DHS used their answers to create a community-wide survey. Clients were thanked for their participation with \$15 gift cards.

We asked about the follow topics and heard these recurring themes (number of respondents citing each theme in parentheses):

Financial Impact of COVID**Job loss (4)**

“Right after COVID started both my jobs as a Real Estate Agent and a Nail Technician shut down. I wasn’t able to get (UC) Unemployment Compensation because I was considered self-employed.”

“Due to COVID my husband was laid off, I still had my job at UPMC. But I lost it after being diagnosed with mental illnesses.”

Increased cost of living (4)

“All my bills went up because my children were home. Due to school being out the Essentials program cut off the extra services, which made me have to pay more for internet for my kids.”

Can’t save money (2)

“It made a big change, it’s just real hard right now. Before I could get a good job, find a place and I can’t save money. Now it’s hard for me to find another good paying job, a decent place to live and save money.”

Couldn’t pay bills (2)

“My husband lost his job, we had to turn in one of our cars, because we couldn’t sell it for what we owe on it, and we’ve had to file bankruptcy. COVID destroyed us financially, we’ve spent all our savings...”

Most Common Resources Used During COVID

- Grants (for rent and utilities) (8)
- Government programs (8)
- Help from family (7)
- Unemployment Compensation (6)

Goals**New job (4)**

“After my kids go back to school in the fall, I’m going to get a new job.”

Organize finances/bills (2)

“I’m trying to improve things by reorganizing bills, not spending money...”

APPENDIX B

Barriers/Obstacles to meeting my goals

Not able to get in touch with/find resources/supports I need (2)

"I have been trying to get things organized for a year, but I haven't been able to find the resources that can help me and they keep telling me we don't qualify for food stamps. First it was because my husband was receiving to much when he was on UC. Now that he's been cut off of UC, they are still telling us we don't qualify for Food Stamps. We can't understand why, because the explanations they give us don't make sense."

Childcare (2)

"The obstacles I'm facing right now are childcare, because I live in a whole different neighborhood than where I lived before."

Not appreciated/treated well by employer (2)

"I don't know how I work there so long under those bad conditions."

Needs (All)

- Transportation (1)
- Job (1)
- Afterschool program/Childcare (1)
- Legal help (1)
- Financial advisor (1)
- Savings (1)
- Mental health (1)
- Help with child's medical needs (Autism) (1)

APPENDIX C

Appendix C. Community Survey Questions

Participants completed this survey on Qualtrics, a web survey platform. A simplified text version of the web survey is included below.

Financial Status

1. How satisfied are you with your ability to cover your everyday basic needs expenses recently?
2. Which of the following best describes your employment status right now?
3. What impact has the COVID-19 Pandemic had on your **current** employment status?
4. Besides income from employment (if you are employed), how have you been covering your everyday expenses recently?
5. Overall, how often do you worry about your financial situation?

Employment**6. Unemployed – follow up questions**

- You reported being unemployed. Is finding employment something that you are interested in at this time?
- About how long have you been unemployed?
- Overall, how important is finding employment to you at this time?
- Recently, has anyone (a friend, family member, or someone with an agency) assisted you in looking for work?
- Please tell us about your experience with someone assisting you in looking for work. Who assisted you? What did they do? How helpful was it?
- What are the biggest challenges that you face in finding employment?
- What is the most important thing that you need assistance with to find employment?

6. Employed – follow up questions

- You reported being [Choice from Question 2]. At this point in time, are you looking for a different job?
- How long have you had your current job?
- Overall, how important is finding a different job to you?
- Why are you looking for a different job?
- What is the most important thing that you would like assistance with in finding a different job?

APPENDIX C**Needs**

7. In the list of needs below, please select the three needs that are most urgent for you right now.

- Child or dependent care
- A job
- Skills and training
- GED or college preparation
- Extra income
- Financial advice
- Transportation
- Behavioral health care
- Physical health care
- Rent and utility assistance
- Supportive relationships
- Housing
- Food
- Resolve legal issue(s)
- Access to internet or a device
- Assistance with affordable healthcare
- Disability specific assistance
- Other: _____

8. Recently, has anyone (a friend, family member, or someone with an agency) assisted you with any of these three things?

9. Please tell us about this experience. Who assisted you? What did they do? How helpful was it?

Need Detail**10. Need 1 Detail**

- You said [Need] is an urgent need for you. Please explain what this need looks like for you.
- What kind of assistance would be helpful to meet this need?

10. Need 2 Detail

- You said [Need] is an urgent need for you. Please explain what this need looks like for you.
- What kind of assistance would be helpful to meet this need?

APPENDIX C**10. Need 3 Detail**

- You said [Need] is an urgent need for you. Please explain what this need looks like for you.
- What kind of assistance would be helpful to meet this need?

Goals**11. In the list of goals below, which three are the most important for you?**

- Buying a house
- Getting a driver's license
- Improving credit score
- Maintaining employment
- Finding a new job
- Finding safe and affordable housing
- Starting or continuing education
- Growing a savings account
- Paying off debts
- Securing good child or dependent care
- Improving physical health
- Improving mental health
- Starting own business
- Other _____

Goal Detail**12. Goal 1 Detail**

- You said [Goal] is an important goal for you. Please describe what achieving this goal would look like for you.
- What are the things that we can help you with to achieve this goal?

12. Goal 2 Detail

- You said [Goal] is an important goal for you. Please describe what achieving this goal would look like for you.
- What are the things that we can help you with to achieve this goal?

12. Goal 3 Detail

- You said [Goal] is an important goal for you. Please describe what achieving this goal would look like for you.
- What are the things that we can help you with to achieve this goal?

13. We really appreciate you taking the time to help us understand your goals and the challenges you are facing. Your responses will help us understand where to direct resources to best serve the needs of people in Allegheny County. If you have any other thoughts you'd like to share, you can do so in the text box below.

APPENDIX D**Appendix D. Workforce Focus Group Questions****Awareness**

1. How do most clients end up learning about you/finding you?
2. Mix of outreach either through individuals or organizations — which is more successful?
3. What are the barriers to creating awareness of your program among your target clients?
4. What has been helpful or would be helpful to address those barriers? (technology, targeted marketing, job readiness)
5. Do you have trouble filling your slots? Is there a pattern (target population or age group)?

Access

6. Thinking of clients who applied but didn't enroll, or started but did not complete the program: What are the most common barriers to enrollment or completion (digital, geographic, other)?
7. What type of interventions have you used to help mitigate drop out amongst clients? Do you need additional resources to help with retention?
8. Do you often have to turn clients away due to program eligibility restrictions or not having enough slots? If so, please describe. (how often? What does that look like when it happens?)

Readiness

9. How would you describe a client who is a good fit for/likely to be successful in your program and become employed? What resources, skills, knowledge, or mindsets do they have in place?
10. How do you respond when a client does not possess/have access to these? Are you able to connect people to the supports they need?
11. What has been helpful or would be helpful to increase clients' chance of success in your program? Are there gaps there that you're not able to fill?

Other

12. Are there any issues to finding employment for those who complete your program? Are your clients able to retain employment once they acquire a job? If not, why?
13. We talked about client awareness, access, and readiness. Are there any other gaps in workforce services or supports in Allegheny County that we didn't address yet today?
14. Can you think of any other ways that DHS could enhance clients' success in achieving their workforce goals?

APPENDIX E**Appendix E. Community Services Advisory Council (CSAC) Focus Group Questions****Individuals**

1. Here are what residents said are their most urgent needs to achieve economic stability and security. Would you add anything to this list/what's missing?
2. Think of the last time you attempted to connect a resident with [reference need]. Was it successful, why or why not? What barriers did you encounter, if any?
3. Here are what residents said are their most important goals to achieve economic stability and security. Would you add anything to this list/what's missing?
4. Think of the last time you attempted to connect a resident with [reference goal]. Was it successful, why or why not? What barriers did you encounter, if any?

Community

5. What do you see as the strengths, in terms of services and resources that promote stability and economic security, in the community you serve?
6. Where should DHS invest to move individuals and families toward economic security?
7. What's missing from our service array or should be expanded to move individuals and families toward economic security?

APPENDIX F

Appendix F. Human Services Provider Poll Questions

1. Where should DHS invest to move individuals and families toward economic security?
2. What's missing from our service array or should be expanded to move individuals and families toward economic security?