

Community Needs Assessment Annual Update

Purpose

Every three years, WCCA is required to conduct a Community Needs Assessment. This comprehensive assessment includes surveys, discussions, and meetings that gather information from community members. The most recent WCCA comprehensive assessment was conducted in 2022. Additionally, WCCA must conduct an annual update to meet the Head Start Performance Standards. For this reason, many elements of the yearly update are related to children and families.

Head Start Performance Standards

1302.11 Determining community strengths, needs, and resources:

(b) (5) A program must annually review and, where needed, update the community assessment to identify any significant shifts in community demographics, needs, and resources that may impact program design and service delivery. As described in paragraph (b)(4) of this section, programs should consider results from their self-assessment as required in subpart J of this part (§§ 1302.101 through 1302.103) and their annual funding application to inform this process. The annual update review must consider at a minimum: changes related to children and families experiencing homelessness; how the program addresses equity, accessibility, and inclusiveness in its provision of services; and changes to the availability of publicly-funded pre-kindergarten and whether it meets the needs of families. Programs must consider how the annual review and update can inform and support management approaches for continuous quality improvement, program goals, and ongoing oversight.

Methodology

Using the Community Action Partnership's Data Hub, WCCA staff pulled the Needs Assessment report and compared the data to the previous year. Additionally, reports from the MN Department of Human Services provided information on the number of childcare spots available. The staff discussed the results as a group. Furthermore, in September 2024, WCCA completed an assessment specifically designed to evaluate whether the Family Resource Center model would benefit Wright County families. This report is included in the supplemental information of this update.

Service Area

WCCA's Head Start Program serves the western portion of Hennepin County. These communities are also assessed. Hennepin County communities include Corcoran, Dayton, Greenfield, Hanover, Independence, Long Lake, Loretto, Maple Plain, Medina, Minnetrista, Mound, Orono, Rogers, St. Bonifacius, and Spring Park.

Significant Shifts in Community Data

An updated Community Assessment was completed in September 2024 for the Family Resource Centers process. This document's supplemental information includes information collected via surveys, focus groups, and quantitative data.

Statistically, there are several shifts in our community data. Wright County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Minnesota. Most of the shifts are in alignment with the community's general growth. The assessment team determined that the data elements called out below are relevant to this Annual Update.

Households with Public Assistance Income

The number of households with public assistance income increased 24.46% since the 2022 Community Needs Assessment. This indicator reports the percentage of households receiving public assistance income. Public assistance income includes general assistance and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), called MFIP in Minnesota. Separate payments received for hospital or other medical care (vendor payments) are excluded. This does not include Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or noncash benefits such as Food Stamps.

SNAP Payments

As reported last year, both of our service areas continue to have low utilization of SNAP benefits among households living in poverty.

Single Male Households

Many of the households in poverty continue to be led by single females. However, single male householders have increased by 31% since the 2022 Community Assessment. With 20% of poverty households led by single-male householders, Wright County surpasses the rates of 12.1% in Minnesota and 11.0% in the nation.

Unemployment Rate

Historically, Wright County has had a low unemployment rate. Reaching 3.9% in July 2024, the rate has doubled since our 2022 Assessment and is now above the state rate of 3.8%.

Housing Costs

Housing costs are on the rise, with more than 30% of households meeting the criteria for cost burden or severe cost burden – a total of 11,579 households. The number of severely burdened households has increased by 28% since the 2022 Assessment. Severely cost-burdened households

are defined as those that spend more than 50% of their household income on housing costs. Wright County had 4,139 severely cost-burdened households, according to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-year estimates. 38.87% of these households are renters, while 47.45% are owner-occupied with mortgages.

Poor Mental Health

In last year's update, 13.10% of the adult population reported poor mental health in the past month. This year, that number increased to 14.9%. Poor mental health is based on individuals who report 14 or more days during the past 30 days during which their mental health was not good.

Deaths of Despair

This indicator reports the average rate of death due to intentional self-harm (suicide), alcohol-related disease, and drug overdose, also known as "deaths of despair", per 100,000 population. Figures are reported as crude rates. This indicator is relevant because death of despair is an indicator of poor mental health. All of which have risen significantly since the 2022 Community Needs Assessment.

- Deaths of Despair (Suicide + Drug/Alcohol Poisoning): Crude Death Rate is now 29.4 (up from 27.6 in the 2022 Assessment)
- Deaths due to firearm wounds: Crude Death Rate is now 8.2 (up from 6.3 in the 2022 Assessment).
- Deaths due to Opioid Overdose: Crude Death Rate is now 6.5 (up from 4.8 in the 2022 Assessment).

Self-Assessment Results

Four outcomes of the last annual self-assessment, completed in June 2024:

1. WCCA will change the timing and structure of family engagement events to increase family attendance. WCCA wants to get more families engaged in services. Over the summer, we surveyed families to find out which days and times they prefer for events, so staff can plan events well in advance to accommodate parent schedules. Based on parent feedback, calling the "Conscious Discipline" parent curriculum portion of family engagement "Parenting Perspectives" because it is more parent friendly.
2. WCCA will develop a structure for implementing Conscious Discipline techniques in the Head Start classrooms. The Conscious Discipline (CD) program equips educators to integrate social-emotional learning, discipline, and self-regulation to spend less time policing behavior and more time teaching skills. Previously, teachers were given the CD tools, and it was their choice what to implement in their classrooms. Now, we are focusing on training all staff on CD techniques and implementing a schedule for staff to

teach children and families and promote consistency among classrooms, children, and families. We also included CD info in this year's parent calendar/handbook.

3. WCCA will support staff in understanding and effectively implementing behavior incident reports and behavior plan strategies to decrease challenging behaviors in the Head Start classrooms. Since the COVID pandemic, there has been a significant increase in children's mental health issues. This has resulted in an increase in challenging behaviors in the classroom. We want to ensure the staff is well-informed and properly trained on requesting behavior supports, and the guidelines for separation or physical restraint.
4. WCCA will streamline the health requirements process for families and staff. We want to ensure not only that families are taking their children to medical appointments, but also that we receive proper documentation of these appointments in case of any needed follow-up. The Health Coordinator met with area clinic managers to discuss expectations for completing health paperwork, including physical exams, special care plans, and special diet statements. This has already resulted in more timely responses to document requests. Family Advocates and Home Visitors started assisting parents with setting up a MyChart account to access their child's health records. Next, we intend to provide electronic physical exam forms for clinics to keep on hand when seeing clients to reduce the burden on families to remember to bring the necessary paperwork or pick up the paperwork from the clinic and return it to WCCA.

Children & Families Experiencing Homelessness

The data collected in the 2022 Community Assessment remains the most current data available. There are no known shifts in this area.

Head Start: Equity, Accessibility & Inclusiveness

WCCA strives to promote equity, accessibility, and inclusiveness throughout its practices. These practices include:

- Allowing Head Start families to enroll their children in the program that supports their child's development and meets the parents' needs. There are multiple school districts in our service area that include communities in border counties outside our service area. The families choose to send their children to our Head Start program because it better meets their needs.
- Early Head Start rotates socialization activities between day and evening or different times of the day to accommodate more families and encourage higher participation. Due to this, 74% of EHS families were able to participate in a socialization activity at least once.

- WCCA promotes consistent and fair access to services and systems for everyone, including chronically underserved populations. WCCA was recently introduced to a cultural liaison who works with the African immigrant population in our service area. With his support, we conducted a listening session with African immigrant families to find out what their needs as well as their preferred methods of communication. Additionally, WCCA recently held focus groups with members of the Hispanic community to learn more about their family needs and their preferred methods of communication. We learned that these populations prefer communication methods that we have not typically used.
- WCCA started a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) committee in 2023. The DEI committee's purpose statement is: *As a committee, we commit to be more than just ourselves. We strive to be a team that supports our organization's growth in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We will do this through Education, Involvement, Action, and Recognition.*
- Providing staff training on culture and bias. Andre Koen spoke about bias with all staff at the 2023 annual meeting. Currently, all WCCA staff are participating in the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which is an assessment for building cultural competence.
- The Head Start program translated the Head Start/Early Head Start application into Spanish and is working on translating other eligibility and enrollment documents. Since 2020, WCCA has used the Learning Genie app to communicate with and engage Head Start and Early Head Start families. The Learning Genie app can auto-translate to send and receive messages in 104 different languages.
- Encouraging father engagement. During the 2023-24 program year, 33% of families had a father engagement in some type of Head Start or Early Head Start activity. This may include participating in a home visit or conference, attending a family engagement event, participating in program governance, or participating in activities related to child development.
- Services to children with disabilities. During the 2023-24 program year, up to 29% of Head Start and Early Head Start participants had a diagnosed disability. They were receiving services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Two of our cooperating school districts provide special education services directly in our Head Start classrooms. Through state funding, WCCA Head Start is able to employ an extra center aide to float between classrooms and work 1:1 with children who need extra support. EHS collaborates with ECSE on home visits so the child can receive services and EHS staff are aware of child/family goals.
- Updated Head Start selection criteria. In 2023, the Head Start program updated its selection criteria to specify family risk factors, including parent incarceration, parent mental health, parent substance use, and parent disability. Previously these items were grouped together and identified as a "significant family need". We recognize that a family may have more than one of these risk factors and want to separate them. Based on PIR data and Community Needs Assessment data, we added "parent education less than HS Diploma/GED" to our selection criteria because many adults in our service area have less than a high school diploma or GED.

Changes in Publicly Funded Pre-Kindergarten

There are no significant changes in the availability or approach to local publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs.

Considerations for The Future

The data outlined in our annual update confirm the decisions that have been made to adjust our programming. The data regarding single-male householders with children will support our pursuit of fatherhood programs. Data on the preferred communication methods of cultural groups will help us be specific in our approach. As an agency, we will continue to assess and improve our integration of DEI principles in our service delivery model. Finally, we will continue integrating mental health support in all aspects of Head Start programming.

Supplemental Information

A digital copy of the data reviewed during this process can be found on WCCA's website or upon request. This collection of data sources is called "2024 Annual Update - Supplemental Documentation".