

Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County: Community Strengths and Needs Assessment 2020



The **Improve** Group

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About the Assessment

Purpose

Community Action Partnership-Hennepin County (CAP-HC) completes a community strengths and needs assessment and strategic plan every three years to ensure that their organizational planning emerges out of a clear understanding of current community needs and strengths. This community assessment has been incorporated into CAP-HC's current strategic planning.

About Hennepin County

Hennepin County is comprised of 45 cities, including Minneapolis and surrounding cities and suburbs. The county has an estimated population of 1,259,248¹ and covers 554 square miles.² The population density in Hennepin County is variable across its geography, with most densely populated areas in the eastern part of the county (Minneapolis and inner-ring suburbs), moving to less densely populated areas to the west and north.

For more information on Hennepin County, see "Appendix D: Community Profile" in the appendix supplement.

Research Questions

CAP-HC created the following research questions³ to guide the assessment:

- What does poverty look like in Hennepin County? Who experiences it?
- What are key factors that contribute to poverty?
- What do we know about burdens and barriers, needs and concerns experienced by people with low incomes in Hennepin County?
- What do we know about assets and strengths of low-income individuals and communities in Hennepin County, and how can these be leveraged?
- What gaps or opportunities are there in services and programs?
- What solutions could better meet the needs and build on the assets of low-income individuals and communities?

¹Sources: Hennepin County website <https://www.hennepin.us/your-government/overview/overview-of-hennepin-county>; Population estimate based on 2018 ACS 1-year estimate, U.S. Census Bureau.

² Source: Census Reporter <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US27053-hennepin-county-mn/>

³ With minimal guidance from The Improve Group

Methodology

The Improve Group used a Community Responsive ApproachSM (CRA) for this project. CRA recognizes the complexities of each community, while using methods that respect community members and aim to incorporate voices from a wide variety of stakeholders. Accordingly, this work included multiple avenues for providing input and engaged stakeholders using a variety of intentional methods, including working with community liaisons, offering multiple methods of data collection, and providing opportunities for input in multiple languages.

Data Collection

Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County contracted with The Improve Group to gather information from multiple sources:

- Phone interviews with community organization and service provider employees from community-based organizations and nonprofits, public sector organizations and county services, private businesses, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations
- Paper and electronic surveys offered in English, Somali, and Spanish and administered via mail, online, or in-person at service provider offices to residents of Hennepin County experiencing poverty or living with low income
- Workshops offered in English, Somali, and Spanish for community members experiencing poverty or living with low income

The Improve Group partnered with four community member liaisons, who conducted outreach, facilitated the workshops, and provided feedback on protocols, workshop design, and workshop locations.

Survey respondents, workshop participants, and community liaisons were all compensated for their collaboration.

Analysis

The Improve Group conducted both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Quantitative survey analysis was completed in the statistical software packages R and SPSS. Analysis included running frequencies of responses in R and crosstabs in SPSS. For qualitative analysis, survey open-ended questions were coded in Microsoft Excel to form themes, which were combined with themes from analysis of interview and workshop data identified through collaborative workshopping by The Improve Group.

Demographics of Respondents and Participants

Just over half of the survey respondents are living under 100 percent of the federal poverty level, and 92 percent of survey respondents are living at or under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. More than 9 out of 10 do not have an income that meets the average cost of living (per DEED – Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development).

Data Source	Number of Participants/Respondents
Survey	697 respondents
Workshop	74 participants (over 3 workshops)
Interviews	15 organizations

Please see "Appendix A: Expanded Methodology" in the appendix supplement for a more detailed methodology discussion. Detailed demographics are in "Appendix B: Demographics."

Note on Report Language

Throughout the report, "community organization employees" refer to interviewees. "Community members" refer to survey respondents and workshop participants and is used when findings refer to or are relevant to both of these group simultaneously.

Most Frequent Unmet Needs

To better understand the current needs of community members, The Improve Group provided survey respondents with a list of services and asked which services they are currently receiving, which services they need but are not receiving (unmet needs), and which services they do not need. This section highlights the most frequently reported unmet needs. The following section of the report describes barriers to services. While unmet needs and barriers to services and support intersect, there is a distinction in how the terms are used in this study: the term “barriers” refers to obstacles preventing participants from fully accessing specific existing services, while “unmet needs” refers to participants’ specific service needs that are not being fulfilled, which may include or intersect with barriers to access. Lastly, while the unmet needs listed below rose to the top, there are several important overlapping challenges, unmet service needs, and barriers that greatly impact community members, which will be detailed in the coming sections.

The most frequently reported unmet service needs are in the areas of:

Transportation



45% of survey respondents say they need but don’t receive financial help for car repairs.

Financial Wellness



36% of survey respondents say they need but don’t receive savings and/or tax support.



30% of survey respondents say they need but don’t receive financial literacy and/or planning support.

Housing



35% of survey respondents say they need but don’t receive help with home maintenance and repair.



33% of survey respondents say they need but don’t receive help with utilities such as their energy or water bill.

“[You] never have enough money for everything you need to even be able to live a basic life. Always trying to make ends meet and having to take away money from bills to get household necessities.”-Survey respondent

“My most pressing concern is how [to] better to use my money, how to get additional money.”-Survey respondent

“[I have] worries about the cost of home repairs and finding people I can trust to come into my home. [I] also worry about car repairs and maintenance...Property tax keeps going up. [I] went on Medicare on December 1st, 2019, and the cost of my health insurance has more than doubled.”-Survey respondent

Barriers to Access

The Improve Group asked survey respondents to identify barriers to a variety of topics (e.g., health and wellness, education, transportation) in addition to asking interviewees and workshop participants about barriers to services. These quantitative and qualitative data were then analyzed. The data reveal the complexity of access as the following services not only prevent access to other services but also may be difficult to access themselves.

Transportation

Cost of car ownership, including costs such as insurance and maintenance, is a barrier for over half of survey respondents.

Just over half of survey respondents report they drive their own vehicle for transportation, and a similar number of respondents say that cost of car ownership is a barrier. There is little difference across demographic groups (age, gender, race/ethnicity, or geographic location) of the share of respondents who note cost of car ownership as a barrier.



Of workers age 16+ in Hennepin County

- 81% take a car, truck, or van to work
- 7% take public transportation to work

2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau



Cost of public transit is a barrier for about 1 in 5 survey respondents.

Just over 1 in 4 respondents report that they need financial help with public transit fares but are not currently receiving it. This need is greatest among respondents age 18-34, and among respondents identifying as Black or African American, American Indian or Native American, Asian American or Asian, and Hispanic or Latinx.

- 45% of survey respondents take public transit for transportation.
- 21% of survey respondents say cost of public transit is a barrier.
- Approximately 1 in 5 respondents experience barriers in length/time of commute (19%), location of transit stops (19%), and/or transit schedule (18%).

"My friend and I each had to borrow a dollar for the bus fare to come to this workshop."
– Workshop participant

"There are no transportation options...close to my home."–Survey respondent

"[A pressing concern is] not enough income to provide everything we need like food [and] public transportation to get through the month."–Survey respondent

Navigating the suburbs using public transit is very time consuming.

Workshop participants and interviewees report long commute times and too few routes when taking public transit in, to, or from the suburbs. This is especially an issue for people who move to the suburbs to obtain more affordable housing but then experience obstacles getting to work or to support systems like family, friends, and doctors.

"To get your child to summer camp then to work takes two hours. The solution is to have more affordable housing closer to services." – Service provider



Approximately 3 in 10 survey respondents report that a health condition (including disability) is a transportation barrier.

Health condition as a barrier is most frequently reported among survey respondents age 55 and older, with no significant difference in gender, race or ethnicity.

"I know someone who rides metro mobility every day, and she has to be on the bus three hours just to get somewhere." – Workshop participant

Employment and Financial Wellness

While the unemployment rate for Hennepin County is low overall, multiple barriers prevent people experiencing poverty or living with low income from obtaining and maintaining employment they need to earn a living wage. Tied to employment is financial wellness—barriers to this lead to financial stress and difficulty managing money. Challenges related to employment and financial wellness both lead to financial insecurity.



The Hennepin County unemployment rate is 2.6% as of December 2019.

MN DEED, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Support for saving, taxes, and financial literacy are community needs.

As noted earlier, 36% of survey respondents say they need but do not receive support for saving and/or taxes, while 30% of survey respondents say they need but do not receive assistance with financial literacy. These needs are also cited by workshop participants and community organization leaders.

“Creating further programs that would give financial education [would better support the Hennepin County community]. Something as simple as budgeting and balancing a checkbook or developing a savings programs—like a bank. That’s where I see the biggest opportunity.” -Community organization employee

Survey respondents most frequently report health condition including disability (36%) as a barrier to employment.

Survey respondents describe struggling to find jobs that will accommodate health conditions and disabilities or having to work limited hours due to living with a disability and being unable to attend to the demands of the job for the required number of hours. Community organization employees also note that living with disabilities and health conditions can also make it harder to keep jobs.

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Low wages are one of the largest barriers facing community members.

Participants across data collection methods describe increasing struggles to pay for their needs as the cost of living climbs and wages remain stagnant. The federal poverty level is lower than Minnesota DEED's level for cost of living, and while 92% of survey respondents are at or under twice the federal poverty level,⁴ a full 96% of survey respondents' incomes do not meet the average cost of living for their household in Hennepin County.⁵

- Approximately 1 in 4 survey respondents report that jobs do not pay enough.
- 3 in 10 Hispanic/Latinx respondents report language barriers as an obstacle to employment, as do workshop participants and community organization employees.
- Survey respondents and community organization employees describe the fear that increasing wages may lead to losing benefits and services, while those same wages are not enough to compensate for the benefits and services lost.

Other barriers to employment include lack of transportation and a need for further job training and skills.

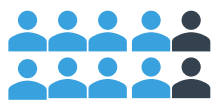
"[My concern is] not being recognized as a human being just like any other citizen and not having the opportunity and ability to earn livable wages so that I can provide my family with the same advantages." -Survey respondent

"[A pressing concern is] Living on a fixed income and then when you get a part time job you can be making too much, and then they want to cut your food stamps or cash assistance." -Survey respondent

⁴ 51% of survey respondents are under 100% of the federal poverty level.

⁵ Calculated using Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development cost of living calculator: <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/col/>

Housing



Approximately 8 out of 10 survey respondents are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their household income on housing.

"My biggest concern is always struggling to pay my rent let alone my utilities. My rent is thirty percent of my income. Yes, that seems low, but I'm a single mom of two young boys. It keeps adding up."

– Survey respondent

Almost half of survey respondents (44%) report that cost of rent or mortgage and cost of utilities are barriers.

Overall, of survey respondents:

- 41% age 18-54 and 22% age 55+ need help with utilities (energy or water bills, etc.) but are not receiving it.
- 32% age 18-54 and 38% age 55+ need help with home maintenance and repair but are not receiving it.
- The same percentage, 26%, for each age group 18-55 and 55+ need help with homeowners' support but are not receiving it.

Community members explain that rent costs increasing more quickly than their income is a challenge. Other factors like prior eviction, criminal records, and not qualifying for subsidized housing compound the challenge of rising rents. There is little difference in responses about housing across demographic groups, aside from more renters being younger respondents, and more homeowners being older respondents.

"Not having the necessary budget to cover all my expenses, not having more options for housing due to my income [are concerns]." -Survey respondent

"I cannot afford home maintenance and utility bills." -Survey respondent



In Hennepin County, the homeownership rate is

- 39% for Indigenous and people of color households
- 22% for Black households
- 75% for White households

Minnesota Housing Partnership

In Hennepin County, being cost-burdened, or spending more than 30% of your income on housing, affects

- Approximately 1 in 3 households
- Just under half of renters

2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Participants across all data collection methods describe challenges with poor quality housing and conflicts with landlords.

30% of survey respondents need help with renters' support but are not currently receiving it.

Community members describe situations in which rental units are not maintained, and landlords are not responsive to repair requests. Some participants describe situations in which renters do not report poor housing conditions due to fear of retribution from landlords.

"Because of fear, many people do not contact the number where you can complain about housing situations." -Workshop participant

"Many people are scared. The landlords sometimes threaten immigration."
-Workshop participant

"People that rent [their homes] are very abusive... where I've lived, there is no privacy and [they] say you can't do this or that—they think the person who is renting doesn't have the right to privacy."-Workshop participant

Housing challenges and instability contribute to the cycle of poverty.

Multiple uncertainties around housing can contribute to stress and negatively impact health and wellbeing, which can have negative ripple effects in other areas of life such as employment. For example, participants describe not knowing if and when their rent will be raised to an unaffordable level, challenges with poor quality housing, and conflicts with landlords.

"Not having access to better housing impacts mental health and safety of the whole family." – Workshop participant

"My main concern is rising rental costs. I cannot control my landlord's greed. I'd like to, but I cannot. This worries me to no end." – Survey respondent

"There's a particular difficulty of lifting generationally impoverished families out of poverty. You see multiple generations in a shelter—people adapt to the situation if they're in it long enough."-Community organization employee

Education and Training

The two most frequently reported barriers to education and training by survey respondents are cost (tuition or fees) at 28%, and health condition including disability at 27%.

There are no large differences by race/ethnicity or gender in the frequency of reporting these barriers. Health condition including disability is a more frequently reported barrier by survey respondents age 45 and older.

“The price of workshops and programs that people need to attain skills and information to come into their power are priced out. So, people don’t have those opportunities because of the cost.”

– Community organization employee



Of people age 25+ in Hennepin County

- 98% of residents who identify as White Non-Hispanic have at least a high school diploma or equivalent degree
- About 82% of people who identify as Black/African American have at least a high school diploma or equivalent degree
- About 67% of people who identify as Latinx have at least a high school diploma or equivalent degree

2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Survey respondents also cite not having the time (15%) or needed transportation (14%) as barriers to accessing education or training.

There were some differences by race/ethnicity: Latinx respondents most frequently report scheduling barriers, and American Indian or Native American respondents most frequently report transportation barriers.

Overall, of survey respondents:

- 25% need help with tuition assistance but are not currently receiving it.
- 22% need help with job training/education but are not currently receiving it.

Childcare and Youth Programming

A shortage of affordable childcare and difficulty obtaining subsidies are cited as barriers to childcare.

- Community organization employees describe the cost of childcare as a large barrier and add that parents/guardians may struggle to find childcare which fits irregular working hours.
- 14% of all survey respondents need help with childcare but are not currently receiving it. This need is more frequently reported by respondents under age 35, with 36% of people age 25-34 describing help with childcare as an unmet need.
- Community organization employees report that childcare assistance is often unavailable if the parent/guardian is at home or not working. There is a need for childcare that allows parents time to take care of themselves and their health outside of working hours.
- Workshop participants note many jobs pay less than their monthly childcare costs, leading many people to stay home with their kids rather than work.



In the Twin Cities metro, the average cost of childcare ranges from

- \$150 per week for school-age children
- \$342 per week for infants

Child Care Aware of Minnesota, Cost of Care comparisons

"The cost of childcare is...expensive and [there is] not enough childcare assistance for people who need it." - Community organization employee

"More childcare options that are [independent] from parents' employment is needed...If [the] parent is experiencing a mental health crisis, they wouldn't have enough money to pay for childcare, and our traditional system would make childcare assistance unavailable because the parent is at home. But, in my mind, there is no greater need for the parent for their recovery and health, and their child at that time really needs to go to high quality childcare to ensure they are still getting learning opportunities and stimulation."

-Community organization employee

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Costs associated with raising children are a barrier.

Community organization employees say the cost of diapers and formula is too high for many parents. They note that diaper banks and similar resources, while valuable, are under-resourced and few other options exist. Survey participants express stress about their ability to create a safe and happy environment for their children due to financial strain.

"[I'm worried about the] impact of poverty on our children's well-being, living in poor housing conditions or deterioration of homes, multiple children in one bedroom."

-Survey respondent

"[Pressing concerns are] daily expenses such as diapers, wipes, food and clothing for growing children."-Survey respondent

Enrollment obstacles are a barrier to accessing childcare for children with special needs or who are living with disabilities.

"My daughter is six, and I have a friend who has a child who is eleven, but when I try to enroll them in programs, they say, no, they cannot enroll them. There is a lot of discrimination. There are horrible barriers for people who have children with special needs, and the parents are stressed because we have sick kids who we have to take here and there."-Workshop participant

Interviewees and workshop participants express a need for more youth programming.

- Community organization employees speak to a need for job training and transportation assistance aimed at youth involved in extracurriculars.
- 41% of survey respondents ages 25-34 need help with afterschool or summer care/activities but are not currently receiving it.

"[A pressing concern is] helping out youth with more programs to keep them off the streets."-Survey respondent

"Support us more—the kids are the future. If we don't invest in the children, what's going to happen to our future? Kids' programs are really expensive. Invest in kids' programs so they are most accessible."-Workshop participant

Health and Wellness

It is impossible to separate the topics of general health, mental health, and medical coverage because they all affect one another. However, for the sake of clarity, study findings are divided into the two broad categories of general health/medical coverage and mental health.

General Health and Medical Coverage

While 86% of survey respondents report that all members in their households have health insurance, navigating the system can be challenging.



In Hennepin County

- 6% of people are uninsured
- 13% are on Medicaid/means tested coverage alone
- 3% are on Medicare alone
- 23% say it is very or somewhat difficult to pay for health insurance, co-pays, and deductibles

2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Community organization employees and survey respondents describe the health insurance system as a barrier to receiving healthcare. People struggle to stay on benefits, navigate insurance systems, and find healthcare covered by their insurance plans. Interviewees suggest that community members may avoid seeking healthcare because the paperwork and insurance are too burdensome and confusing.

- **20%** of survey respondents need help with health insurance but are not currently receiving it. This need is greatest among Hispanic/Latinx respondents (41%), and there are no major differences by age or gender overall.

Cost of treatment and medication, even with insurance, is a barrier to health and wellness.



Almost 3 in 10 survey respondents say the cost of insurance and cost of treatment and/or medications, even with insurance, are barriers.

Cost of healthcare, especially medication, emerged as a major theme in survey responses. Many people expressed stress over the financial choices they are forced to make when faced with unaffordable, but necessary, medications.

"[A pressing concern of mine is] when [I am] unable to care for my health condition due to [the] possibility of not being able to pay certain bills."-Survey respondent

"Everything costs so much; [there's] not enough to pay for medicine."-Survey respondent

"Health insurance is a joke. Knowing we have insurance but using it is too costly."
-Survey respondent

Health challenges are a barrier to employment and productivity in daily life activities, such as home maintenance.

- Survey respondents share that they struggle with home upkeep tasks as a result of disability or health issues.
- Survey respondents note “health condition including disability” as primary barrier for both employment (36%) and transportation (29%).

1 in 5 survey respondents report they need help with a disability but are not currently receiving it

36% of survey respondents age 65 and older report they need help with senior services but are not currently receiving it

“[A pressing concern is] that I’m going to become homeless because I’m disabled according to the state but not to the fed [sic] yet. [I’m] currently in appeal for social security disability. I cannot afford rent and bills.”-Survey respondent

“[The] only transportation bus is from MM (Metro Mobility). I have to call a day before, [and] I can't always do that. Things come up all the time that I need a ride that day. [There are] no city buses in Excelsior.”-Survey respondent

Mental Health

People living with a mental health condition experience added barriers to staying housed, employed, and in managing daily challenges.

- Community organization employees note that mental health problems may go undiagnosed due to irregular health care.
- 16% of survey respondents report they need help with mental health but are not currently receiving it.

“[I’m concerned about] paying bills, not enough food, not making enough money to survive on. [About] Stress, depression, anxiety, and fear of losing what we have and being homeless.” -Survey respondent

Living with a mental health condition can contribute to poverty, while poverty increases trauma and can negatively impact mental health. Moreover, there is a need for more accessible and culturally relevant mental health, substance abuse, and trauma recovery services.

- Cost, language, and lack of culturally competent and **culturally specific services** heighten barriers to accessing mental health care.
- Community organization employees and survey respondents address the need for **more therapists of color** to dismantle cultural stigma of mental health care.
- **Language barriers** increase challenges in finding mental health care.
- Workshop participants note a broad need for **preventative** mental health services that help people before they enter a crisis state.
- Community members express **feeling hopeless, stressed, and powerless** in the face of financial burdens.

"[You are judged and stigmatized] as soon as you got someone with mental health because of whatever, we tell them they crazy, and then they don't get help. And because of their behavior, clinics don't want to deal with them either because they don't know how."-Workshop participant

"It is so stressful—daily I make a list of what money we have and what needs to be paid first and what can wait that has the least late payment fees."
-Survey respondent

Food and Nutrition

Across data sources, food shelves are recognized as community resources, although survey respondents identify limited options at food shelves as a problem.



In Hennepin County...

- 47,000 households receive food stamps/SNAP benefits

2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

- Just under half of survey respondents (44%) use food shelves.
- Survey respondents report finding food options which are healthy, meet dietary needs or restrictions, and are culturally relevant as problems at food shelves.

Over half (55%) of survey respondents use SNAP/EBT, but the level of benefit they receive does not fully meet their needs.

Survey respondents share that they cannot afford healthy food options with their food assistance benefits. Respondents say the funds are not substantial enough to feed their families, and, even combined with food shelves, they are often unable to get enough to eat.

"If I work, I get cut off from SNAP benefits. [The] food shelf only helps a little. Food choices on food shelf [are] so unhealthy and [there is a] limited amount. Food insecurity affects health, school, work, stress...everything" -Survey respondent

"[A pressing concern is] Not receiving enough food stamps for the whole family and not enough halal food shelves/pantries around [the] Minneapolis area." -Survey respondent

Approximately 1 in 4 survey respondents report that they often run out of food, and a similar share report they need help with food assistance but are not receiving it.

Community members report high costs for food and other basic supplies, such as toilet paper and soap, and that food and medicine are the most likely items to be cut when money runs short. Additionally, community members and community organization employees report food deserts throughout Hennepin County, making it difficult to access grocery stores with healthy, affordable food.

"[A pressing concern is] having everyday items like toothpaste, soap, just small stuff. Food is a big one."-Survey respondent

"It's hard to pay bills and to have enough to buy food. Some months I don't buy food at all, no money left."-Survey respondent

Safety

While approximately half of survey respondents (45%) report feeling “relatively safe” where they live as a community strength, workshop participants, interviewees, and survey respondents all describe violence in communities as a problem.

Community members report that most affordable housing is in areas that feel unsafe. They suggest neighborhood safety could be improved by implementing simple measures such as more streetlights and neighborhood watch programs.



In 2018, the crime rate per 100,000 residents in Hennepin County was

- 3,050 reported serious crimes
- 2,681 reported property crimes reported
- 369 violent crimes

Minnesota Department of Public Safety, U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates, as reported by MN Compass

Community members and community organization employees alike have conflicting views over policing—some people want greater police presence to feel safer, while others would feel safer without a police presence.

- Some community members note feeling unsafe in the community and wanting more of a police presence, like when using public transportation. However, other community members and community organization employees express feeling less safe with a police presence due to racial profiling and disproportionate incarceration rates of black and brown people.
- Discussions around policing also included a need for existing police forces to be more involved in their communities when not on duty and to work in a more collaborative way with communities to resolve issues.

Key Factors that Reinforce Barriers to Access in Hennepin County

According to the 2017 ACS 5-year estimates, approximately 180,000 individuals and 27,000 families (these are not mutually exclusive categories) in Hennepin County—or 15% of the county's population—are living under 125% of the federal poverty level (\$26,663 for a family of three). However, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, in Hennepin County, the yearly cost of living (to meet basic needs) is approximately \$61,464 for the average family size of three. The Improve Group asked survey respondents and workshop participants the top three reasons they are unable to meet their basic needs, and asked interviewees what they saw as key contributors to poverty in the Hennepin County Area. Below is an analysis of these data.

Systemic Oppression and White Supremacy

Historical and systemic oppression upheld by white supremacy maintain systemic oppression and contribute to intergenerational poverty.

"A lot of times there were families who were impacted by something that tore them down for a period of time, [and] we really need to reckon with this as a community: we had policies in place that made it absolutely no accident that these groups are struggling today." - Community organization employee

"Another factor is white supremacy – when it comes to nonprofits, a lot of philanthropists and investors tend to invest less or not at all in black-led organizations and nonprofits, which affects the ability for organizations...to function at a high level and be most impactful." -Community organization employee

Criminal records are a barrier to obtaining employment and housing.

Greater support for people with criminal records, especially in finding employment and housing, is identified as a need by community organization employees. Workshop participants and community organization employees describe how arrests related to mental health make it more difficult for people to get the help they need and access services, housing, and employment.

"The judicial and criminal systems – [the] prison pipeline is something that continues to go on in African American communities...We're stuck in a system [where] that's the way it is right now." - Community organization employee

"It starts with education, if you don't get [a] proper education or get a criminal record, those mire you in poverty. You get deeper without decent housing. All of this stems from [being in an] inequitable society and a focus on profit."
-Community organization employee

Health, Housing, and Low Wages

Health, housing instability, and cost of living are cited as reasons community members experiencing poverty are unable to meet their basic needs.



Just over 1 in 3 survey respondents report that challenges with health, including mental health, behavioral health, or disability, is a main reason for not having resources or access to basic needs.

High cost of living, low wages, and instability in housing are also reported by survey participants, community organization employees, and workshop participants as reasons why community members experiencing poverty are unable to meet their basic needs.

"[I] can't afford basics like shoes, clothes, medicines due to just paying bills—zero else."

-Survey respondent

"If you don't have a job that pay sufficiently, you end up living in a place that is less safe...We want places that are more affordable and in good condition, with rent control." -Workshop participant

"People's mental health is of critical importance. Someone can be ticking along, has a job, covers basic bills, and then hits a health issue or goes through a life transition, and they need to know there are successful ways to navigate these life challenges..."

-Community organization employee

"There are lots of studies which indicate the importance of supporting families early, reducing ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and supporting families to stay intact. We know children who experience trauma are less likely to graduate without additional supportive services. Access to a healthy start in life, education, and supportive communities are really key." -Community organization employee

"Lack of affordable housing is [a cause of poverty]. Instead of helping North Minneapolis get safer, property prices keeping going up and they are being driven out of those neighborhoods." -Community organization employee

"I fear losing my apartment or car if I cannot pay each month. I don't have family and [have] almost zero help when it comes to my son, so I'm very limited in how many hours I can work and if my son gets sick and I miss work—I don't have ways of making up my time. Not being able to work my full 80 hours cuts me short on a lot each month."

-Survey respondent

"[A pressing concern is I am] not able to afford a life of my choosing. Being in the poverty cycle. Being able to meet the bare minimum to survive." -Survey respondent

Community Strengths

During all methods of data collection, The Improve Group asked participants to identify the biggest strengths of their respective communities, the communities within which they live, or the communities which with they work. While no single answer choice surfaced as a strength for a majority of survey respondents, which is unsurprising given the diverse communities and geographies within Hennepin County, there were themes about community strengths that emerged across all data collection methods.

Resilience

Community organization employees, workshop participants, and survey respondents all highlight a sense of community and resilience as strengths of the communities in which they either live or work.

- Approximately 30% of survey respondents chose “community members and/or families help one another” as community strength, placing it among the top four strengths.
- Community organization employees and workshop participants frequently describe the resilience of community as a strength.

“People are proud of the way they take care of each other. They’re proud of the assets built in the community, both physical assets and the way that people have gone on to do better than the generations before them.”-Community organization employee

“If there’s a necessity in a group, everyone unites to help the family and the situation. If something happens like natural disaster in their country, the Latinx community comes together to help.”-Workshop participant

“[The community is] very resilient. They are experts who can help themselves. If they don’t have enough money for daycare, they will find a free resource...They rely on neighbors, someone from the coffee place or grocery store.”

- Community organization employee

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Workshop participants and community organization employees also note a feeling of community pride, and suggest two possible contributing factors: support within the community and taking care of the neighborhood.

As noted earlier, approximately half of survey respondents report a strength of their community is that they “feel relatively safe” where they live. However, only 10% of survey respondents elected “I feel like members of my community are heard and respected” as a strength.

“We always have good communication in the neighborhood. I feel safe because we have good communication in the neighborhood. Everyone knows everyone.”

-Workshop participant

“Although there is always room for improvement in all communities, I feel that my community is very safe. I know my neighbors, and I am very alert to all my surroundings. I communicate with my neighbors on a daily basis. We all get along and we help each other or anyone in need. I can honestly say I love my community and the people who make up our community.”-Survey respondent

“The community is proud of the cleanliness of where they live. That’s phenomenal.”

- Community organization employee

Resource and Service Availability

Community organization employees, workshop participants, and survey respondents all note resource availability and sharing as a community strength.



Approximately 1 in 3 survey respondents note resource availability, such as access to community or government programs and public transit, as a community strength.

- Community organization employees and workshop participants also highlight resource availability; whether through community members, government programs, or a network of nonprofits and organizations; as a strength in the community.
- Approximately one-third of respondents cite accessing support from government programs and transport as strengths.

"Families and community members support each other by sharing resources and information. I connect easily with members of my community."-Survey participant

"Human service department, homeless services, the way they do food stamps, go into shelters—nonprofits give a lot of services to get people back on their feet, to go from homeless to homeowners. Minneapolis...is a place for second chances. The services are good."- Community organization employee

"[T]here are programs to support us with guiding us with services—[like] how to enroll kids in schools."-Workshop participant

"We have good services—police, libraries and transportation."-Survey respondent

"It seems that they have enhanced the frequency [and] the schedules of the buses, and it's become better. The C line is a real good line." -Workshop participant

Opportunities for Action

After collecting ideas on the community's biggest strengths, The Improve Group asked participants to brainstorm ways these strengths could be used to improve their communities. Across data sources, themes about building on community connections and resources emerge.

Community-driven solutions

Solutions should come from within the community and build on community strengths.

Community organizations commonly note that community resilience should be highlighted while further **developing self-advocacy** so **community-created solutions drive change**, as opposed to solutions created by outsiders to the community who may not fully understand or be able to see appropriate, potential, and/or existing solutions due to their proximity. Additionally, some interviewees and survey participants suggest that **building entrepreneurship in communities** could be a powerful tool for residents to build their own solutions.

Community members want more opportunities to connect with each other in meaningful ways that can help improve their communities.

Across sources, community connections are recognized as a major strength. There is a desire in the community to reinforce these connections and use them to improve their communities. Survey respondents suggest that community decision-making meetings, group volunteer events, and neighborhood watch programs would both build connections and improve the community. Workshop participants also suggest that community gardens could help fulfill these goals.

"There are many instances where people feel supported by their community. However, many activities are not properly shared with the community and attempts to connect are missed. There are a lot of activities available; people just do not know they are out there."-Workshop participant

"[Our community garden can further improve our community by] trying to get more people involved in planting or harvesting—it's a pretty big plot. There's a lot of different ethnicities in the neighborhood: Somalis, Hispanics, and Asian families all live in the neighborhood, so they get the garden going with stuff I've never tried. That would be nice to be able to try the food that they grow: canvas the neighborhood, tell everyone there's a lunch, help people know what's going on... We do it together as a community. People build friendships." - Workshop participant

Suggestions for service providers

Participants in the study suggest ways that services could be more responsive and accessible to the people they serve.

- **Collect community input more often.** Community members and community organization employees explain this will help organizations be more responsive to client needs and stay connected to the communities they serve. This is a suggestion for organizations generally and for CAP-HC specifically.
- **Phase out services and supports more slowly.** Community organization employees note the importance of gradual phasing out of services to ensure clients reach true stability. This is also reflected in community members' concerns regarding being cut off services due to increased wages, which will not compensate for benefits lost.
- **Increase community outreach, in multiple languages.** Many community members know that services exist, but not how or where to access them. This is a suggestion for service organizations in general as well as CAP-HC specifically.
- **Increase navigation for services, in multiple languages.** Navigating application processes to receive services is often difficult and complex. Across data sources, respondents suggest organizations could do more to guide applicants through processes in addition to streamlining applications.
- **Provide resources and materials in multiple languages.** Providing resources and materials, such as brochures and leases, in multiple languages will help community members better navigate an already complex system.
- **Greater collaboration between service providers.** Community organization employees suggest better coordination and collaboration could strengthen community assistance. Focusing on joint outcomes and sharing finances or grant resources could help organizations collaborate for the good of their clients. Additionally, collaborations could be more responsive by including service recipients.
- **CAP-HC could improve** by sharing more data, striving for greater transparency, and creating more partnerships with a wider variety of organizations.

"I have struggled a lot with the limited Spanish-speaking services. They believe that sometimes things are fine because something is translated, or someone knows how to speak Spanish, but if the person does not know how to navigate something, that does not necessarily mean it will be successful. It is worrisome. Sometimes the translations are confusing or inaccurate. I get scared to put [down] something that could create problems later."

-Workshop participant

"Another barrier people with low income experience is not having someone who understands the lived experience to help them navigate the complex systems they have to engage with."-Community organization employee