



Utah Community Action™

Community Needs Assessment Update 2023

Overview 2022 Assessment

Since 1965, Utah Community Action has provided a broad range of services for families and individuals experiencing poverty. To ensure the services UCA provides meet the evolving needs of the people it serves, a community needs assessment is conducted on a regular basis across the geographic and demographic segments that comprise UCA's service region.

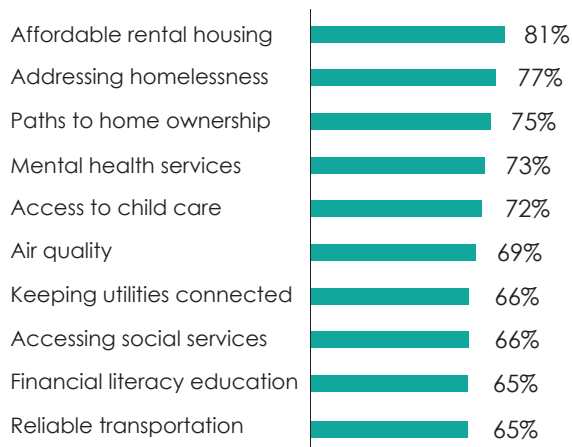
The main objective of the needs assessment is to gather representative data from a large sample of community members regarding: their needs (especially how those needs have changed since the emergence of COVID-19); their desires from service providers regarding the substance and delivery of interventions; and their awareness/perceptions of UCA and its partners.

Utah Community Action worked with Cicero Social Impact in 2022 to conduct the latest needs assessment. This 2023 report presents an update on that assessment.

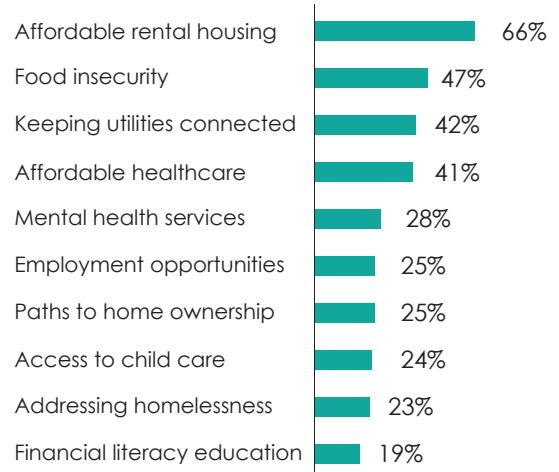
“Rental housing and ownership is so hard right now. I’m not surprised to see this as the top issue. There has been a lot of discussion on this, but there isn’t an apparent solution. Housing impacts everything. Lack of housing is very detrimental to families.”

-Focus group participant

Percentage of clients who perceive insufficient support for community needs



Percentage of clients who perceive a need to be in top five facing their community



Major Findings: Greatest Areas of Need

Community members mention the following as the community's top current needs: shelter (affordable rental housing), food security, keeping utilities connected, and affordable healthcare. These top four community needs are relatively consistent across the various age groups. However, the 18 to 25 year-old group had three different needs in their top four, which included providing opportunities for good jobs, access to child care, and services for mental health. Enabling affordable rental housing was the top community need by a significant margin, regardless of household income level. Pathways to home ownership and addressing homelessness were also in the top 10 community needs, further highlighting the crisis in housing affordability.

Root Causes of Poverty

Racial and social injustice are significant root causes of poverty. The differences in responses based on race and ethnicity highlight systemic inequity as a major factor affecting community needs. For example, the most common health-related issue over the past 12 months for individuals identifying as White or Caucasian is “experienced a mental health issue.” For all other races and ethnicities, the most common health-related issue is “not enough groceries to meet needs.”



2022 Community Needs Assessment

Actions and Updates

Addressing Housing Needs

Affordable Housing

The top need identified in the 2022 Community Needs Assessment was enabling affordable rental housing. In the past year we have continued to see housing prices increase as well as a lack in affordable housing. Utah Community Action's leadership recognizes the housing crisis our community is facing and has begun to explore developing affordable housing units.

Homeless Prevention and Diversion Services

Addressing homelessness was identified as a top ten need in the community. Utah Community Action has diversion workers in shelters across Salt Lake City to assist individuals in identifying alternative housing and resources.

Addressing Early Childhood Needs

Access to Early Care and Education

Providing access to child care was identified as a top ten need in the community. Utah Community Action's Head Start program continues to be a vital resource for the community by providing no-cost high-quality education and care for children under the age of five.

We continued to work to expand access to these services. In 2023, Utah Community Action added a new Head Start location, Bingham, in West Jordan. In addition to the new Bingham location, UCA is adding additional classrooms in Magna during 2024.

Utah Community Action is increasing recruitment efforts for Head Start to fully staff all classrooms and ensure 100% enrollment across the program. We are also creating new public and private partnerships to begin addressing early childhood needs as a coordinated system.

Addressing Operational Needs

Coordination of Services

The top recommendation to come out of the 2022 Community Needs Assessment was "coordination of services." Utah Community Action created and intake strategy committee to address the need for collaboration between services. Staff training videos were created and implemented, ensuring staff have a broad understanding of all services and the ability to connect clients to internal resources. Clients are now able to apply in person for all services and request more information, when facilities are closed signs with qr codes posted so clients can still access applications for services. All applications can be accessed online through the UCA website, through assistance through an Intake Call Center or in person. Call Center staff assist in person or on the phone helping clients to in apply for every UCA service that meets their needs creating a more holistic approach in providing services.

Mental Health Supports

Providing services to promote mental health was identified as a top ten need of the community. UCA provides a Mental Health hot-line for all Head Start families and agency staff, allowing them to connect with a licensed clinical social worker. Our Mental Health team provides open office hours and works to ensure every child and family in Head Start has access to mental health supports and resources. The Mental Health team provides resources, trainings, and professional development each month to ensure our staff have the knowledge to best meet our clients mental health needs. A variety of Mindfulness and Meditation webinars were also offered to our staff over the past year with a focus on staff's mental and physical health. We created a Health and Wellness Strategy committee that meets monthly to increase our mental health resources and to support agency staff. Finally, we offered free counseling through Advantage counseling to clients who qualified. This allowed our clients to access services for a variety of mental health concerns at no cost.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Utah Community Action recognizes that certain needs rank higher among different demographic groups. The 2022 Community Needs Assessment showed that needs such as access to childcare, fear of losing housing, and food insecurity are reported more significantly in households that self-identify as Latinx or Black compared to those who identify as White households. The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force at Utah Community Action uses the data collected from the needs assessment to inform decisions regarding services.