



NORTHEAST IOWA COMMUNITY ACTION CORPORATION (NEICAC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

Introduction

America was built on the promise that every family should have the opportunity for success. Whether our neighbors are experiencing a temporary setback or face a continuous challenge to meet their basic needs – too many struggle to achieve a good quality of life. On a national level, nearly 40 million people are still living in poverty, and even more are just one missed paycheck away from hardship. We believe everyone should be able to take care of their families and have an equal opportunity at success. Community Action Agencies serve 99% of all American counties across the nation with life-changing services to help families achieve stability. We bring together people and resources to address the specific causes of poverty in our communities, working with private and public partners to identify pressing needs as well as community strengths and to mobilize the most effective resources to address needs and invest in community assets.

Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) is a private, nonprofit Community Action Agency that began in 1965 and continues today to provide the support and resources to improve the stability and quality of life for individuals and families with limited resources. We assist those living in the northeast Iowa counties of Allamakee, Bremer, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard & Winneshiek with programs serving all stages of life. Our work enables individuals and families to live, work, and contribute to their communities. NEICAC is locally controlled and represented by the private, public, and low-income sectors of our communities.

NEICAC works with our local, state, and nationwide agencies to pursue community-wide solutions to barriers holding families back from success. In addition, our work and service to clients positively impact the community's economy. In Program Year 2023, NEICAC provided services and programs to nearly 11,000 individuals with \$4,722,589 in financial assistance.

Mission

Through dynamic partnerships, quality family services, advocacy, and education, NEICAC advances community development and improves social and economic conditions for individuals and families with limited resources.

Vision

Create inclusive communities with equitable access to resources and opportunities where all individuals and families thrive.

Values

Growth, Adaptability, Respect, Responsiveness, Compassion, & Collaboration

NEICAC PROGRAMS

LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



FAMILY DEVELOPMENT &
SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

HOUSING PROGRAM

WEATHERIZATION
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CHILD & ADULT CARE
FOOD PROGRAM



HEAD START

EARLY HEAD START

CRISIS ASSISTANCE



FOOD PANTRIES

TRANSIT

DISASTER ASSISTANCE



Purpose

The NEICAC Community Needs Assessment serves several purposes – supporting agency planning and identifying community needs, population, and resource gaps. The assessment also educates our communities, partners, and other stakeholders about the causes and conditions of poverty and the role of our work to address it.

Methodology

The [Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation \(NEICAC\) Community Needs Assessment Committee identified data sources](#) to inform this comprehensive community needs assessment report. Iowa Community Action Association staff sorted and analyzed the data, ascertaining key family-level and community-level findings in a variety of domain areas (listed below) that are present in NEICAC’s seven county core service area of Allamakee County, Bremer County, Chickasaw County, Clayton County, Fayette County, Howard County, and Winneshiek County.

The following report includes statistics and graphics from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 5-year estimates, survey results from NEICAC’s Customer Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey (2023-2024), NEICAC’s Community Stakeholder Community Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey (2022), as well as other program and community data. The Community Stakeholder Community Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey was sent to community partners in NEICAC’s service area, NEICAC governing board members, Head Start advisory council and policy council members, and agency staff. Data are cited when used from sources other than the ACS.

DOMAIN AREAS



KEY FINDINGS

CLIENT & COMMUNITY NEEDS



Communities need more affordable, quality childcare options for families in NEICAC's service area.

There are fewer childcare providers entering the field, while many are retiring or finding work in other industries, leaving more young children in need of care than there are childcare slots available. In addition to a lack of affordable childcare options, there is also a lack of childcare options regardless of family income. This demonstrates the need for education supports and incentives to draw more people into the childcare field.



Families need more access to food.

In NEICAC's service area, 9.53% (3,084) of the population with low income have low food access, with Howard County having 37.81% of its population with low income with low food access. Low food access is defined as living more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.



Individuals & families need access to computers and phone service.

The percentage of households that do not own or use any type of computer, including desktop or laptop, smartphone, tablet or other portable wireless computer, and some other type of computer, is higher than the state average (8.30%) in all but one of NEICAC's counties; and 604 (1.27%) housing units lack telephone service. This is more than the state average of 1.11%.



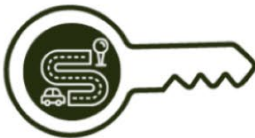
Individuals need help finding employment and/or better employment.

The lack of childcare options can present challenges for parents to obtain and maintain employment. In addition, the difficulty of attracting larger businesses to NEICAC's rural service area results in fewer work options and, at times, lower wages.



Individuals & families need additional affordable housing options, home repair services, and other housing resources.

Data indicates several factors affecting current housing conditions, including lack of affordable housing units, overpriced rentals, aging housing stock, home repairs as a barrier to purchasing homes, high property tax, lack of homeless shelters, housing purchased for vacation rentals, and high-cost housing market driving people from the community.



Individuals have transportation needs, specifically in Clayton, Fayette, and Howard Counties.

Clayton, Howard, and Fayette counties show the highest number of households with no motor vehicle. In addition, customers indicate they could use help with getting a dependable vehicle, repairing a household's vehicle, and getting to and from appointments or errands.



Individuals need health insurance.

The lack of health insurance is a key driver of health status and is a primary barrier to healthcare access. The percentage of the population age 0-18 and 18-64 without health insurance is greater in five of NEICAC's counties than the state average.



When compared to access across the state, the community may need additional healthcare providers.

Data shows that there are less providers in NEICAC's service area per 100,000 population than the state average for all three of these fields.

KEY FINDINGS

AGENCY NEEDS



NEICAC needs to create consistent communication processes and resources which also align with individual employee styles.

Various agency departments provide policy and procedures updates in their own way and could benefit from a whole agency, intentional, change management approach. When surveyed, 67.2% of NEICAC employees feel their opinions are valued by others. Comments from those that do not feel their opinions are valued include changes not being discussed with staff until after the change has already been decided and the desire of wanting to be asked their opinion to help inform a process prior to the change.



The agency needs to recruit and retain additional, qualified staff specifically in Head Start and Transit programs.

NEICAC data shows consistent turnover concerns for Transit Drivers and Head Start (30-hour) Co-Teachers and Substitutes. The challenges of these positions as part-time hours without full time benefits, accompanied with a shrinking of the workforce and Early Childhood educational pursuits (Head Start) has contributed to this.



NEICAC needs an action plan that puts focus on the proactive, long-term financial sustainability of the agency.

As NEICAC begins the fiscal year 2024, additional COVID funding for most programs has reached its expiration point. NEICAC programs are working with pre-COVID funding level formulas and post-COVID customer needs and agency expenses. The growth of agency expenses and fewer funds for direct assistance will create the necessity for proactive decisions.



NEICAC needs to educate service area communities on agency programs offered and the connection of these individual programs to the NEICAC umbrella.

Strides have occurred to enhance the NEICAC brand awareness and community education, but data pulled from customer, stakeholder and employee surveys indicate further efforts are necessary to educate our communities on the overall agency and its programs.

Data Specific to Poverty

Information provided in the NEICAC Community Needs Assessment will indicate populations **at or below 100%** of the federal poverty level by gender, ethnicity, race, and age. It's important to note that the data is specific to the population at or below 100% of poverty, whereas NEICAC serves individuals both above and below 100% of poverty.

GENDER

During the program year 2023, NEICAC served 4,876 males, 5,930 females, four Other, and four Unknown/not reported. In the NEICAC service area, the average rate of poverty for females is 10.24% and 8.57% for males. Although the service area average falls under both the state and national average for females and males in poverty, Allamakee, Clayton, and Fayette Counties are slightly higher than Iowa's average for females and notably higher than Iowa in Clayton and Fayette counties for males in poverty.

AGE

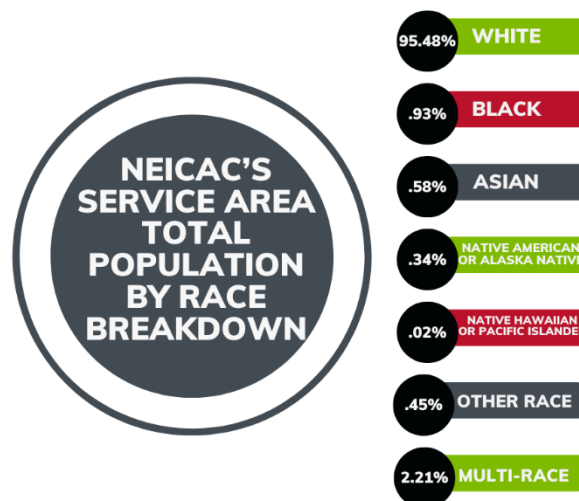
In NEICAC's seven-county service area, 11.01% (2,811) of children aged 0-17 are living in households with income below the federal poverty level. Three counties have a higher number of children living in poverty than the state average (13.03%): Allamakee County (13.90%), Clayton County (14.92%), and Fayette County (14.70%). Whereas, Chickasaw County has the lowest percentage in NEICAC's service area, with 3.80% of children aged 0-17 living in poverty.

The percentage of children age 5-17 living in poverty in NEICAC's service area was 11.4%; the state average was 12.4%. Two counties were above the state average: Clayton County (16.9%) and Fayette County (15.1%).

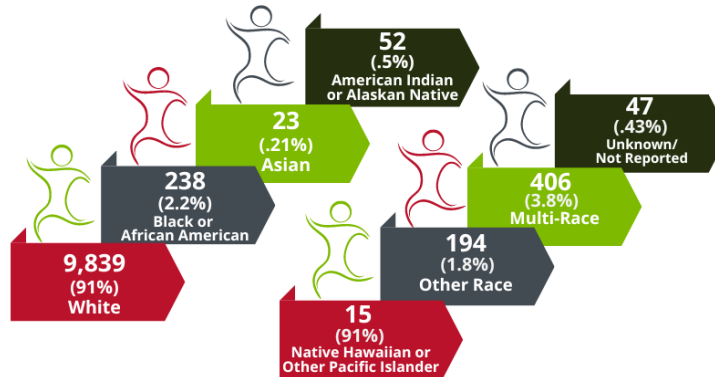
The percentage of persons age 65 and up living in poverty in NEICAC's service area was 7.3%, matching the state average. However, three counties have a higher percentage of persons age 65+ living in poverty: Chickasaw County (7.9%), Clayton County (13.8%), and Winneshiek County (7.4%).

RACE

Census data indicates that Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and Black or African American individuals residing in the NEICAC service area have a significantly higher poverty rate when compared to other races. They are also notably higher than both Iowa and national averages.



ACCORDING TO NEICAC'S FY2023 CSBG CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS, NEICAC SERVED:



ETHNICITY

In reviewing data for the population by ethnicity, the highest number of Hispanic or Latino populations reside in Allamakee County communities, but when compared to NEICAC's other counties, the poverty percentage rate for Hispanic or Latino populations is higher in Clayton and Winneshiek Counties. 7.19% of Allamakee's population is Hispanic or Latino, while the remaining NEICAC service area counties are lower, all below 3%.

In NEICAC's service area, 748 individuals who are Hispanic or Latino are at or below 100% of poverty. NEICAC served 1,070 Hispanic or Latino customers, which demonstrates the variance of programs with eligibility criteria up to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Several domains show a higher population of individuals in poverty residing in Allamakee, Clayton, and Fayette Counties. Household income and poverty populations by age, gender, ethnicity, and race, in addition to NEICAC services data, show that individuals in those communities have demonstrated a need. To address, NEICAC has increased access to services in these counties with additional staffing and increased physical presence in these county communities. Bilingual staff have also allowed our agency to communicate with and better serve those Hispanic or Latino populations who need assistance in interpreting and translation.

Customer Satisfaction Data

A recent Service Recipient Feedback survey was completed by 778 customers, with a notable 100% saying they had a positive experience when receiving services. Based on their interaction with staff, 773 respondents said they would be likely or very likely to recommend NEICAC services to someone they know, four were somewhat likely, and one respondent said not likely. When asked for suggestions to increase satisfaction, comments included more hours, more funding, rent assistance, more advertising, additional staff to assist customers, and allowing more pantry visits.

