

COMMUNITY **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY,
MASSACHUSETTS

2024

Brookfield
Charlton
Dudley
East Brookfield
Millbury
North Brookfield
Oxford
Southbridge
Spencer
Sturbridge
Warren
Webster
West Brookfield



CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	2
I. Introduction	4
II. Community Needs Assessment	5
Methodology.....	7
III. Secondary Data: Environmental Analysis	8
Demographic Profile: Collaborative Service Area.....	9
The Social Vulnerability Index.....	10
Social Determinants of Health Key Findings.....	13
IV. Qualitative Research.....	24
Community Strengths	25
Qualitative Themes	26
Qualitative Action Areas	30
V. Access Audit.....	39
VI. Resource Mapping	42
VII. Surveys.....	45
Community Survey.....	45
Community Partner Survey.....	62
VIII. Needs Identification.....	66
Potential Strategies and Recommendations	67
IX. Conclusion.....	70
X. Appendices.....	71
Appendix A: Supplementary Secondary Research.....	71
Appendix B: Stakeholder Interview Guide.....	98
Appendix C: Community Survey	101
Appendix D: Community Partner Survey	113

SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY

2024 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS: Executive Summary

How were the needs identified in the Southern Worcester County community?

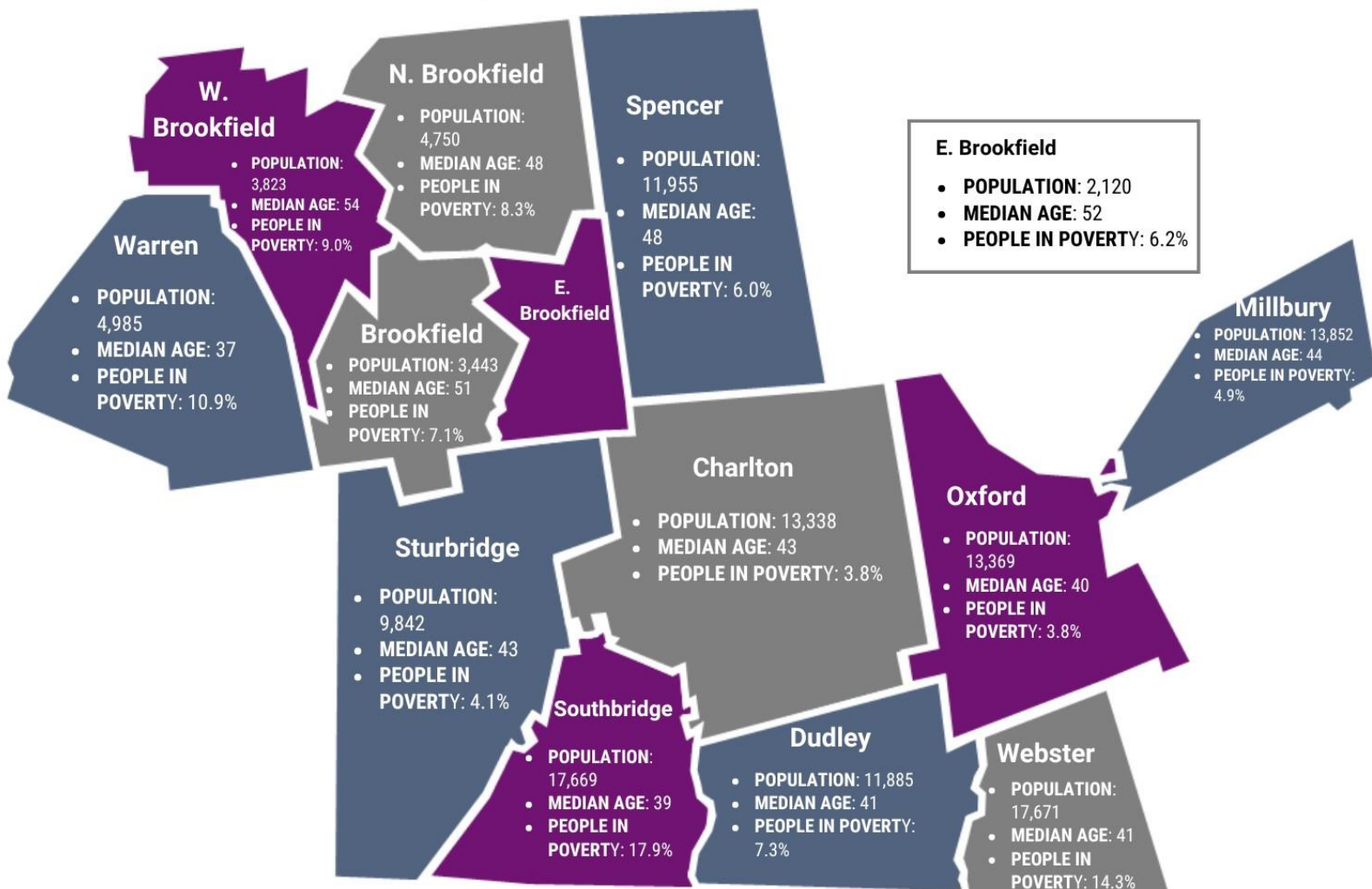
In 2024, a collaboration of service providers and organizations partnered with Crescendo Consulting Group, funded by a Greater Worcester Community Foundation grant, to conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment.

This assessment identified gaps in services and resources related to the social determinants of health, including economic stability, education, and housing, and identified the most pressing needs of community members, helping to provide a roadmap for addressing the region's priorities.

An environmental analysis of a selection of 13 Southern Worcester County towns was conducted using research collected from local and national data banks. Community input was gathered through in-depth personal interviews with stakeholders throughout the towns and South County, focus group discussions, and two community surveys.

Those participating in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups included community members from all towns, representatives from service providers, as well as town and county leadership.

Collaborative Service Area Demographics by Town



What needs were identified in the Southern Worcester County community?

The Southern Worcester County Community Needs Assessment highlighted several key challenges impacting the region. Broad themes that emerged include a lack of accessible resources, limited coordination between organizations, high living costs, and social inequities within the community. These overarching issues provide important context for understanding the specific needs that were identified.

The community needs, gathered from comprehensive research, have been grouped into six main categories:

Root Causes include limited community awareness of services and systemic issues related to financial instability.

In the area of **Housing**, there is a significant need for financial assistance with rent, utilities, and an increase

in affordable housing options.

Health and Behavioral Health needs include access to affordable care for seniors and individuals with disabilities, as well as expanded behavioral health services and mental health support.

For **Basic Needs**, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and employment opportunities are critical gaps.

Childcare and Youth services are limited, with many families facing challenges finding affordable and accessible childcare and after-school programs.

Lastly, **Community Equity** needs include more multilingual services and efforts to promote diversity and inclusion across the region.

SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY NEEDS



ROOT CAUSES (SYSTEMIC ISSUES)

- **Awareness** of available services and resources
- Programs for **financial stability** to reduce poverty



HOUSING

- Financial assistance for **housing** and **utilities**
- **Affordable housing** for working, low-income families



HEALTH & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Care for **seniors** and those with **disabilities**
- More **providers** accepting all **insurances**
- Substance use **prevention** and mental health **awareness**



BASIC NEEDS

- **Food pantries**, meal programs, delivery services
- **Employment services** and vocational training
- Expanded **transportation**



CHILDCARE & YOUTH

- Affordable **after-school** and **summer** childcare programs
- Accessible, **affordable quality childcare** with extended hours



COMMUNITY EQUITY

- **Multilingual** services and programs
- Education on **diversity** and **equity**

What happens with this information?

The identified needs from the community needs assessment were reviewed with the project Steering Committee.

In collaboration with the Steering Committee, community partners, municipal leaders, town officials, and legislators, these needs will be discussed and shared at community forums.

A list of sample strategies and recommendations to address the high level identified needs is contained within the report. Moving forward, it is crucial to leverage the insights from this assessment to implement targeted strategies that address service gaps and better meet the needs of those in Southern Worcester County.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified pre-existing barriers faced by the most vulnerable populations in many communities, leading to increased demands for essential services such as emergency food, housing, and health care. These challenges disproportionately affected low-income individuals, minority populations, and women.

In response, the Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. (WCAC), in collaboration with various community partners, applied for and received a grant from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. This initiative, focusing initially on Southern Worcester County with a particular emphasis on Southbridge and Webster, aims to address these urgent needs by reimagining a coordinated care system for shared clients.

The primary goal of this initiative was to streamline access to resources and deepen referral systems to support true economic self-sufficiency. By leveraging resources and interventions among organizations, this collaboration of community organizations sought to enhance relationships and understanding of each partner's strengths, thereby moving consumers from crisis to thriving more efficiently and effectively.

To achieve this, these organizations hoped to identify and address internal barriers that hinder clients' ability to navigate services, looking to establish future solutions through improved policies, processes, and practices.

As a foundational step, the partners convened and agreed to engage a research partner to conduct a comprehensive and collaborative community needs assessment for the region utilizing a Social Determinants of Health framework, incorporating local and relevant secondary data, and engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, with a focus on equity.

Through this collective effort, these organizations aim to create a sustainable, coordinated system of care that addresses the immediate and long-term needs in the unique Southern Worcester County community.

The insights gained from this assessment will not only empower these partner organizations to collaborate more effectively but also identify critical service gaps that need to be addressed. While better coordination is vital, the findings underscore the need for concrete actions to tackle broader systemic issues. Addressing these challenges will require ongoing commitment and targeted strategies to ensure a brighter and more equitable future for all residents in Southern Worcester County.

II. COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

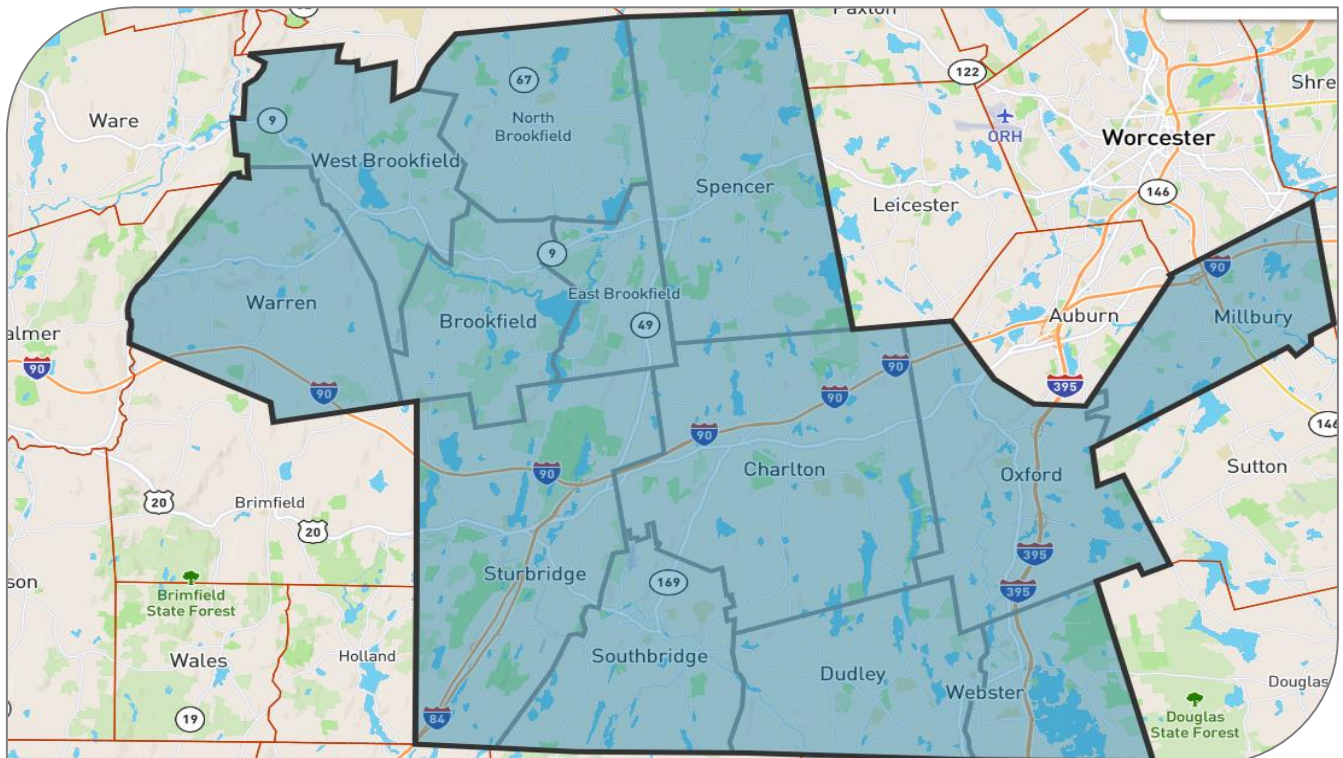
Between January 2024 and August 2024, Crescendo Consulting Group (“Crescendo”) worked in collaboration with community partners and service providers in the Southern Worcester County area (“South County”, “Southern Worcester County Service Area”, “Collaborative Service Area”) to conduct a Community Needs Assessment. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used to evaluate perspectives and opinions of community stakeholders.

The Community Needs Assessment provides a critical process that examines prevailing issues and conditions related to health and basic needs, while identifying resources and opportunities to meet specific community needs.

A Community Needs Assessment:

- Establishes a profile of a community, noting both needs as well as community resources.
- Determines the needs in a community that can be addressed and the population that is most impacted by the need.
- Includes both quantitative and qualitative data to assist in identifying needs in the community.
- Assists agencies in determining the outcomes and strategic planning they strive to achieve based on the identification of needs at the individual, family, community, and agency levels.

TOWNS IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY SERVICE AREA



About The Collaborative

Service Area

The Steering Committee of the Southern Worcester County Collaborative Community Needs Assessment consisted of representatives from social service agencies and community partner organizations working in and around a defined service area of 13 towns:

- Brookfield
- Charlton
- Dudley
- East Brookfield
- Millbury
- North Brookfield
- Oxford
- Southbridge
- Spencer
- Sturbridge
- Warren
- Webster
- West Brookfield

Community Partners

Representatives from the following community organizations participated in the Steering Committee meetings and community engagement activities:

- Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
- Greater Worcester Community Foundation
- KIVA Centers
- MassHire Central Region Workforce Board
- Old Sturbridge Village
- Office of Sen. Ryan Fattman
- Open Sky Community Services
- Parent/Professional Advocacy League
- Southbridge Community Connections Coalition
- Southbridge Family Resource Center
- Wayside Youth & Family Support Network
- Worcester Community Action Council
- YMCA
- You Inc (Seven Hills Foundation)

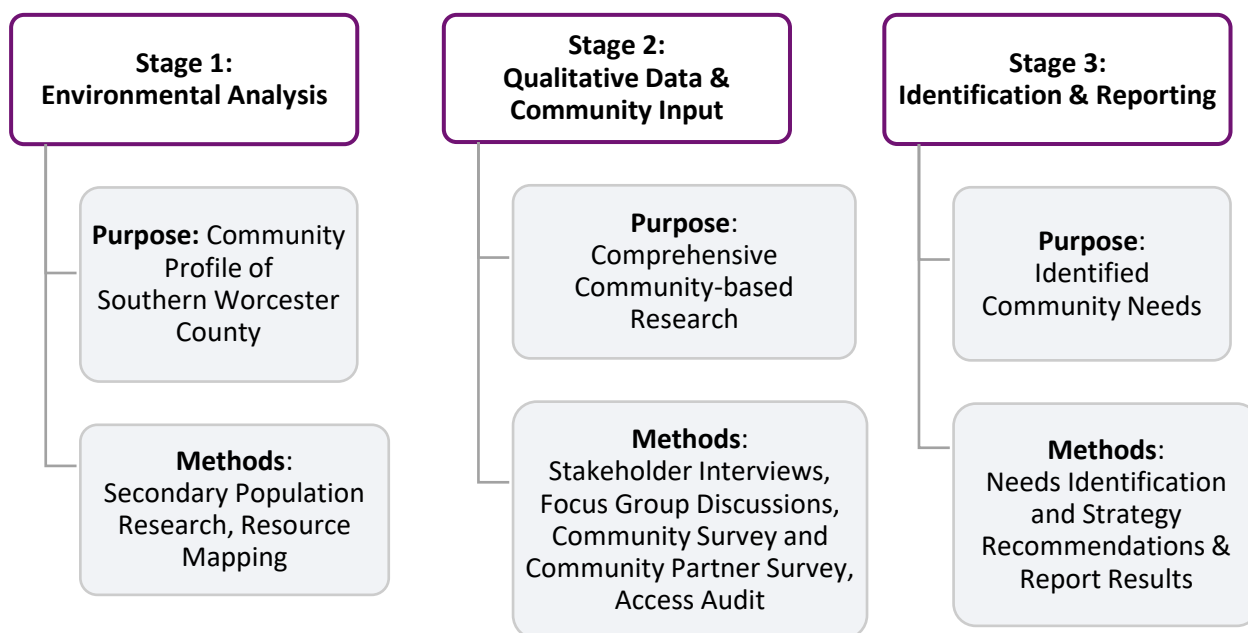
Equity Champions

To ensure an equity-focused approach, the Community Needs Assessment engaged Equity Champions to actively involve diverse community members and amplify various voices throughout the process.

These Equity Champions participated in Steering Committee meetings, facilitated community survey distribution, and reviewed written materials to maintain an equity perspective. Their involvement was crucial in making the assessment inclusive and culturally sensitive.

Methodology

Results of the major research activities employed in this Community Needs Assessment include secondary data research, community surveying, conducting primary qualitative interviews with stakeholders and in focus groups, and conducting a needs identification process, all of which are explained in more detail below.



Secondary Population Research provided a critical insight into demographics of the Southern Worcester County service area towns and benchmark geographic areas, social determinants of health, and behavioral health-related measures, among many others.

Resource Mapping involves using geographic analysis to visually identify the distribution of community services and highlight gaps in resource availability across the region.

Qualitative Research included 27 one-on-one stakeholder interviews, 8 focus groups, and 2 community events, speaking with a total of 83 participants.

A **Community Survey** was conducted via SurveyMonkey to evaluate and address healthcare, housing, food insecurity and other needs, gaps, and resources in the community. The survey included high-level themes that emerged from secondary data analysis, qualitative research, and other research activities. Over 500 responses were collected and 416 were analyzed.

An **Access Audit** provided insights into access to care barriers and challenges experienced by Southern Worcester County residents when accessing services and resources.

The **Needs Identification and Strategy Recommendation Process**. Crescendo reviewed the identified needs of the community from all quantitative and qualitative data and provided strategies and recommendations for addressing the needs.

III. SECONDARY DATA: ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Secondary data provides an essential framework from which to better understand the fabric of the community. This analysis highlights sociodemographic factors, social determinants of health, behavioral health risk factors, and other key indicators to further guide the development of effective strategies to meet evolving needs.

The following data was primarily gathered from the United States Census Bureau 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) Five-year Estimates, the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Massachusetts Department of Education among others.

For additional, comprehensive data, please see the data tables in Appendix A. The following pages show key findings and high-level summary data.

American Community Survey: *Five-year Estimates*

There is an intentional purpose in using five-year data estimates compared to one-year data estimates.

Five-year estimates are derived from data samples gathered over several subsequent years and provide a more accurate estimate of measures, especially among numerically smaller high-risk populations or subgroups, compared to one-year estimates, which are based on more limited samples with greater variance.

Source: <https://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html>



To dive deeper into the following census metrics, and for more data, and view it by town, visit the Worcester County Insights online data dashboard:

www.worcestercountyinsights.org

Collaborative Service Area Demographic Profile

Total
Households
50,321

Population by Age



Age Under 18
20.7%



Age 18-64
61.4%



Age 65+
17.9%



Median Age
43.5

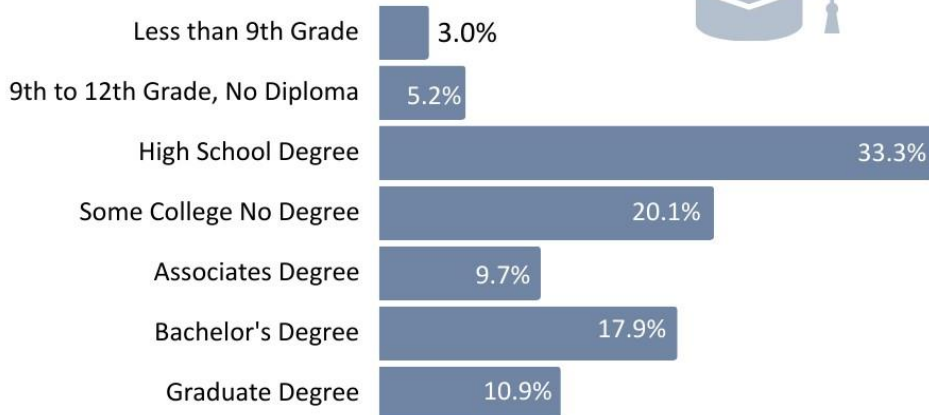


86.5%
White

10.0%
Hispanic / Latino

13.0%
Speak a Language Other
than English at Home

Education



Nearly **40%** of the Collaborative Service Area residents have **earned a degree**.



Median Household
Income
\$88,946



Households Below
Poverty Level
9.6%



Population Living
with a Disability
15.1%



Veterans
7.7%

Population Change



2010
124,872



2022
128,702



2031
134,255

Employment

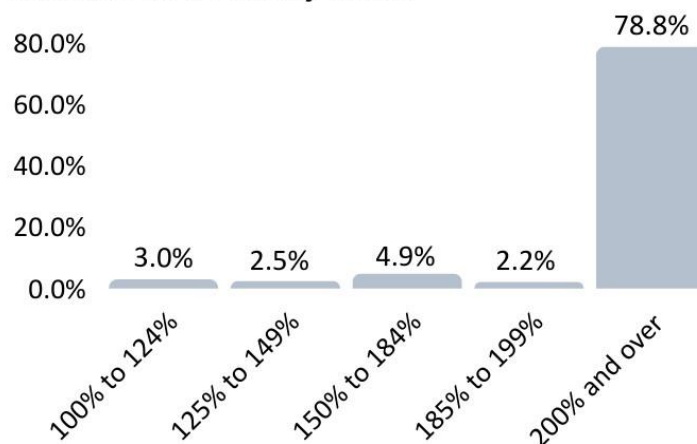
Top Industries

Office and Administrative Support	9.4%
Management	9.1%
Sales	8.7%
Education, Training, and Library	5.9%

Unemployment Rate
6.3%

Average Commute Time
31.0 minutes

Income to Poverty Ratio



The Social Vulnerability Index

The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) was developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a metric for analyzing population data to identify vulnerable populations. The SVI may be used to rank overall population well-being and mobility relative to county and state QA data. The SVI can also be used to determine the most vulnerable populations during disaster preparedness and public health emergencies, including pandemics.¹

For example, during a public health emergency, such as a pandemic, the SVI score of a particular region can be instrumental in guiding response efforts. Using SVI data, targeted interventions can be implemented, including providing multilingual public health messaging, offering financial assistance to vulnerable households, and deploying mobile units to isolated areas with high-risk individuals, such as those with low socioeconomic status. Tailoring responses through the lens of SVI allows specific needs of at-risk communities to be met, fosters resilience, and reduces health disparities.

The SVI measures are grouped into four major categories:

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS	Population Living in Poverty Unemployed Population Population with No High School Diploma
HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION & PEOPLE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY	Age 65 & Over Age Below 18 Population Living With a Disability Single-Parent Households
MINORITY POPULATION & LANGUAGE	Minority Population Population Who Speaks English Less than Very Well
HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION	Multi-Unit Housing Structures Mobile Homes Crowding Population With No Vehicle

¹ Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index.

EXHIBIT 1: SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX

		United States	MA	Worcester County	Worcester, MA	Southern Worcester County ²
Socioeconomic Status	Population Below Poverty Level	12.5%	9.9%	10.0%	19.5%	8.6%
	Unemployment Rate	5.3%	5.3%	5.6%	6.6%	6.3%
	Median Income	\$75,149	\$96,505	\$88,524	\$63,011	\$88,946
	No High School Diploma	10.9%	8.8%	8.6%	14.1%	8.1%
	Uninsured Population	8.6%	2.7%	2.5%	3.4%	2.1%
Household Composition & Disability	Under Age 18	22.1%	19.6%	20.8%	19.5%	20.7%
	Age 65+	16.5%	17.1%	16.2%	13.3%	17.9%
	Living with a Disability	12.7%	11.7%	12.5%	14.6%	14.9%
Minority Status & Language	Minority Population (BIPOC) ³	41.1%	31.1%	26.6%	48.2%	16.8%
	Limited or No English Proficiency ⁴	8.2%	9.6%	7.8%	16.8%	4.3%
Housing & Transportation	Mobile Homes	5.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.5%	1.5%
	No Vehicle	8.3%	11.9%	8.7%	16.5%	8.0%
	Overcrowded Housing Units ⁵	3.4%	2.2%	1.9%	3.4%	1.2%
	Group Quarters ⁶	2.4%	3.3%	3.1%	6.8%	1.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

² Data in this column reflects the 13 towns in the Southern Worcester County Service Area.

³ According to the Census Bureau ACS, this dataset represents Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The data values were calculated by taking the total population minus the white (not Latino, not Hispanic) population. The CDC continues to use the term "minority" in their SVI calculations.

⁴ According to the Census Bureau ACS, this dataset represents the count of people by ability to speak English less than very well. Ability to speak English less than very well are those people who speak a language other than English at home and people who speak English less than very well. The people being counted are age 5 and over.

⁵ According to the Census Bureau ACS, this dataset represents the total overcrowded housing units; the data values were calculated by counting all occupied housing units with more than one person per room.

⁶ The Census Bureau "classifies all people not living in housing units as living in group quarters. A group quarters is a place where people live or stay, in a group living arrangement, that is owned or managed by an entity or organization providing housing and/or services for the residents"



Worcester County

2022 Statewide Overall SVI Score:

0.69

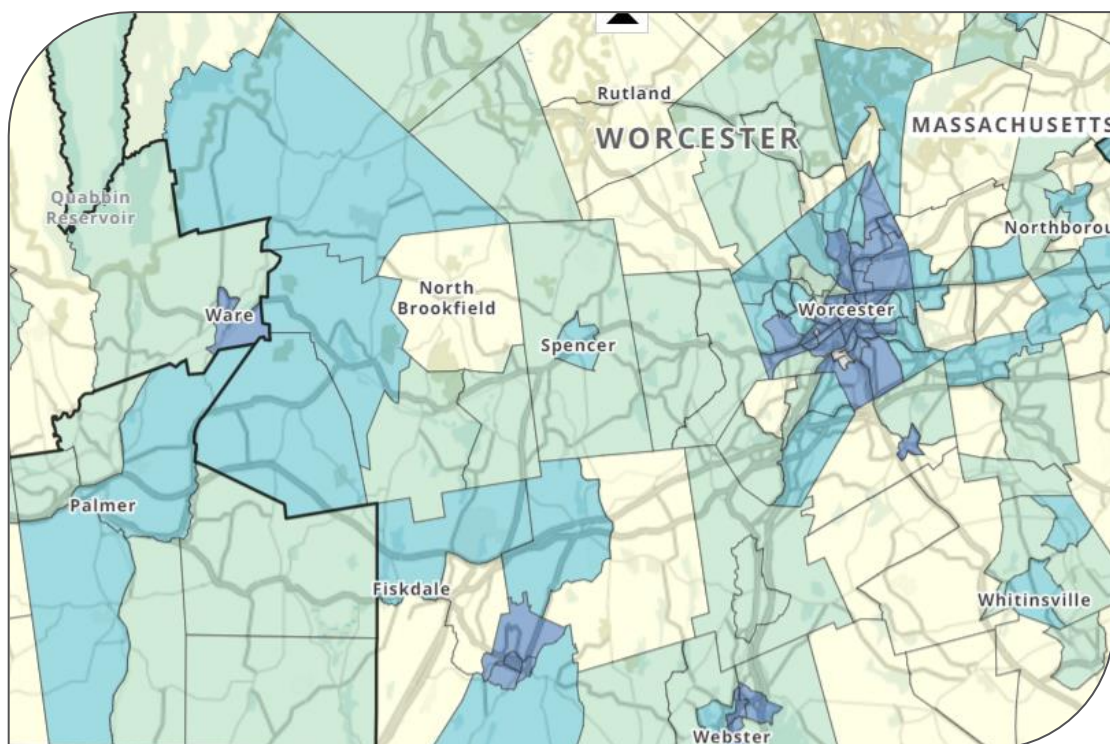
Possible scores range from 0 (lowest vulnerability) to 1 (highest vulnerability).

A score of **0.69** indicates a **MEDIUM-HIGH** level of vulnerability.

*For more information,
visit:*

**CDC/ATSDR Social
Vulnerability**

EXHIBIT 2: SVI MAP OF WORCESTER COUNTY, BY CENSUS TRACTS



Source: CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index

Level of Vulnerability			
Low	Low-Medium	Medium-High	High

The CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index County Map identifies vulnerability levels of at the census tract level within Worcester County. Though the county has census tracts with a range of social vulnerability levels, the city of Worcester itself has high levels of concentrated vulnerability compared to other census tracts in the county. However, there are pockets of South County, notably around Southbridge and Webster, with levels of high vulnerability comparable to the city of Worcester itself.

Social Determinants of Health Key Findings

In addition to collected key demographic secondary data, research in this Community Health Needs Assessment looks at the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). Social Determinants of Health include a wide range of factors, including, but not limited to, income, education, job security, housing, basic amenities, the environment, social inclusion and non-discrimination, and access to quality, affordable health care. These conditions “contribute to wide health disparities and inequities.”⁷



The following secondary research sections includes key findings related to Social Determinants of Health in Worcester County and the Southern Worcester County Collaborative service area.

Social and Community Context

Resources in the area are limited. Residents need to travel outside of town to shop for basic necessities, and many do not know where to go to seek services or get help. This issue is further complicated by an influx of immigrants in the area, some of whom do not speak English as a first language.

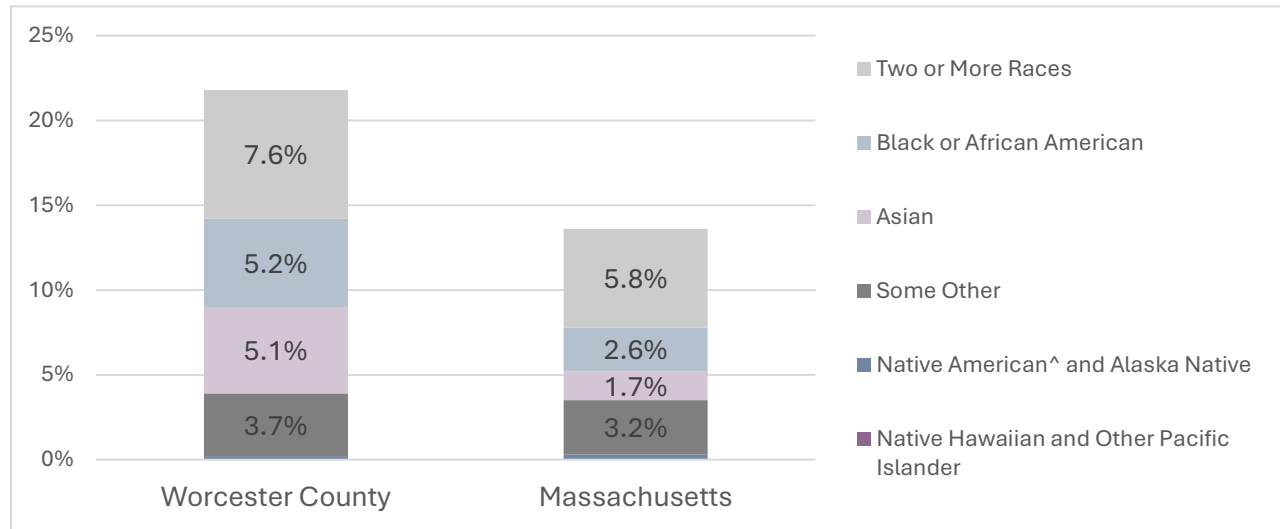
Focusing resources and services on efforts welcoming immigrants, refugees, and new Americans is more than being tolerant or friendly, according to Welcoming America, a nonprofit focused on helping communities become truly inclusive and supportive for all members. The result is a thriving community that “embraces, harnesses, and fully leverages the contributions of all residents.”⁸

Worcester County has a notable percentage of residents who are two or more races as well as populations that identify as Black or African American (5.2%) and Asian (5.1%), both of which are higher compared to state levels (2.6%, 1.7%, respectively).

⁷ Healthy People 2030: Social Determinants of Health. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>

⁸ What is Welcoming? – Welcoming America

EXHIBIT 3: POPULATION BY RACE, BREAKDOWN OF NON-WHITE POPULATION IN WORCESTER COUNTY



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

^ The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

Population that Speaks Spanish

Worcester County

9.1%

Collaborative Service Area

6.8%



Foreign-Born Population

Worcester County

13.4%

Collaborative Service Area

5.9%

In Worcester County, Massachusetts, the majority of the population is White and speaks English. However, approximately one out of 10 people in the county are foreign-born and speak a language other than English, with Spanish being the second-most prevalent language.

One out of 10 people in the Collaborative Service Area (13.0%) speak a language other than English



One out of five people in Worcester County (21.2%) speak a language other than English



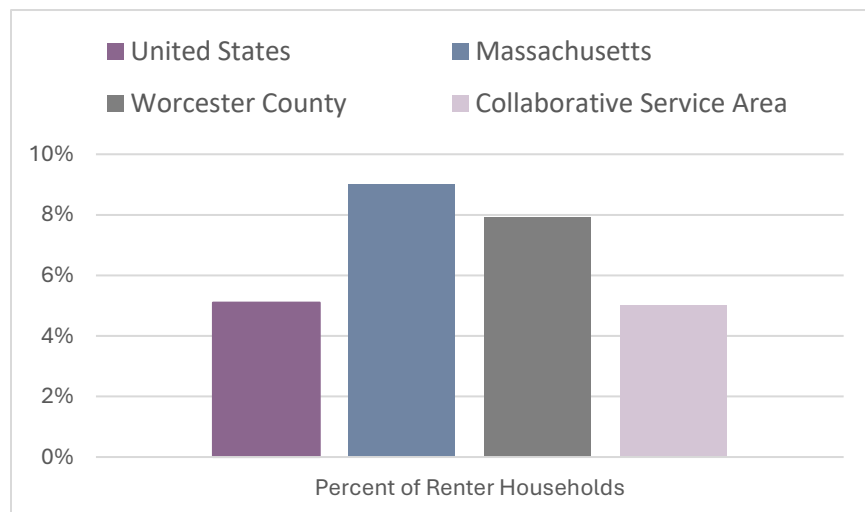
Neighborhood and Built Environment

The neighborhoods people live in have a major impact on their health and well-being. The physical environment includes housing and transportation, parks and playgrounds, and the chances for recreational opportunities.⁹

Housing

Difficulties with housing can serve as a primary source of stress and can be a direct barrier to the well-being for members of the community. When housing is unaffordable, scarce, or poorly maintained, it undermines community cohesion, contributing to increased stress, instability, and isolation, exacerbating health disparities and ultimately harming overall quality of life.¹⁰

EXHIBIT 4: RENTER HOUSEHOLDS THAT RECEIVE PROJECT BASED HOUSING ASSISTANCE¹¹



Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development Picture Subsidized HH 2021

National Low Income Housing Coalition 2024



Median Household
Income
\$88,524



2 Bedroom Fair Market
Rent
\$1,635



Annual Income Needed
to Afford 2 Bedroom
FMR
\$65,400

In Worcester County, Massachusetts, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,635. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities - without paying more than 30% of income on housing - a household must earn **\$5,449.60** monthly or **\$65,395.20** annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into:

\$31.44

Hourly Housing Wage



120

Work hours per week at
minimum wage to afford a
2-bedroom rental (at FMR)



2.1

Number of full-time jobs at
minimum wage to afford a
2-bedroom rental (at FMR)

Source: NLHC, Out of Reach 2023

⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation, *Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health & Health Equity*, 2018

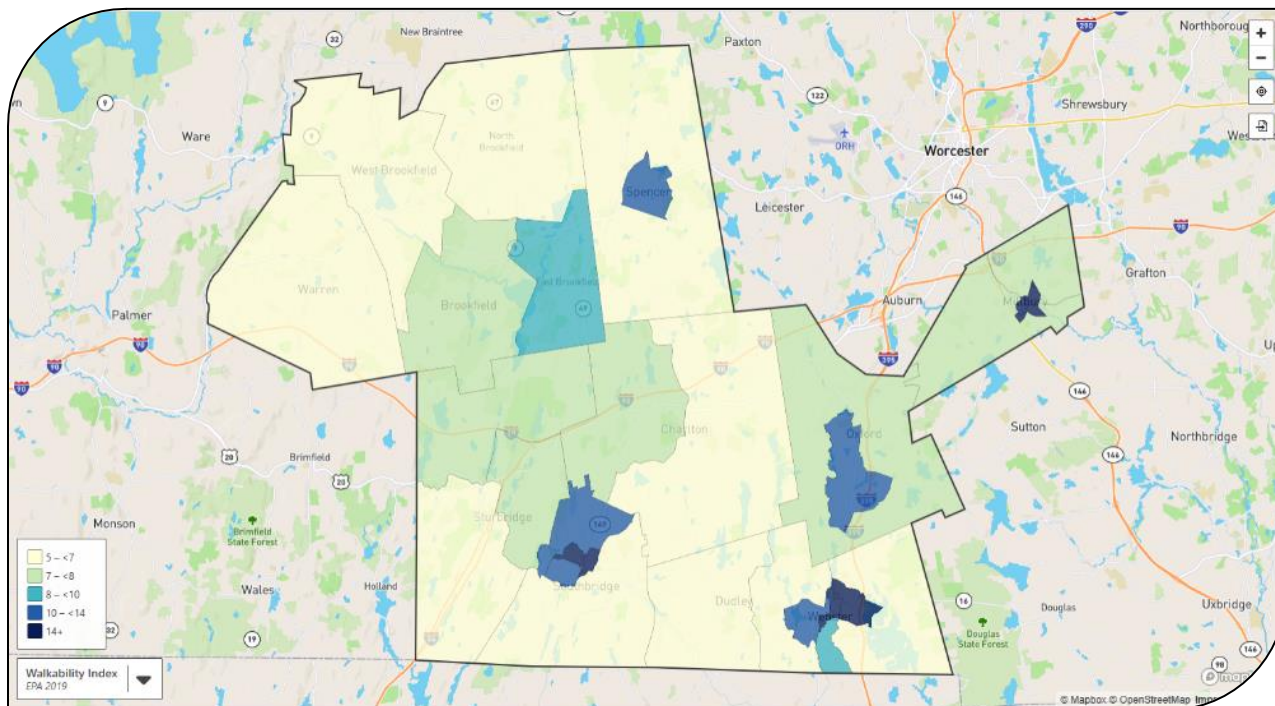
¹⁰ Healthy People 2030: Social Determinants of Health. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/neighborhood-and-built-environment>

¹¹ Project based housing assistance includes Public Housing, Moderate Rehabilitation, Project Based Section 8, RentSup/RaP, S236/BMIR, 202/PRAC, and 811/PRAC.

Transportation

Having accessible, reliable, and safe transportation is essential for people to reach health care, employment, education, social activities, and community involvement. When public transit is inaccessible, it leaves behind those who depend on it, such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those who are unable to afford a personal vehicle.¹²

EXHIBIT 5: WALKABILITY MAP OF THE COLLABORATIVE SERVICE AREA BY CENSUS TRACT



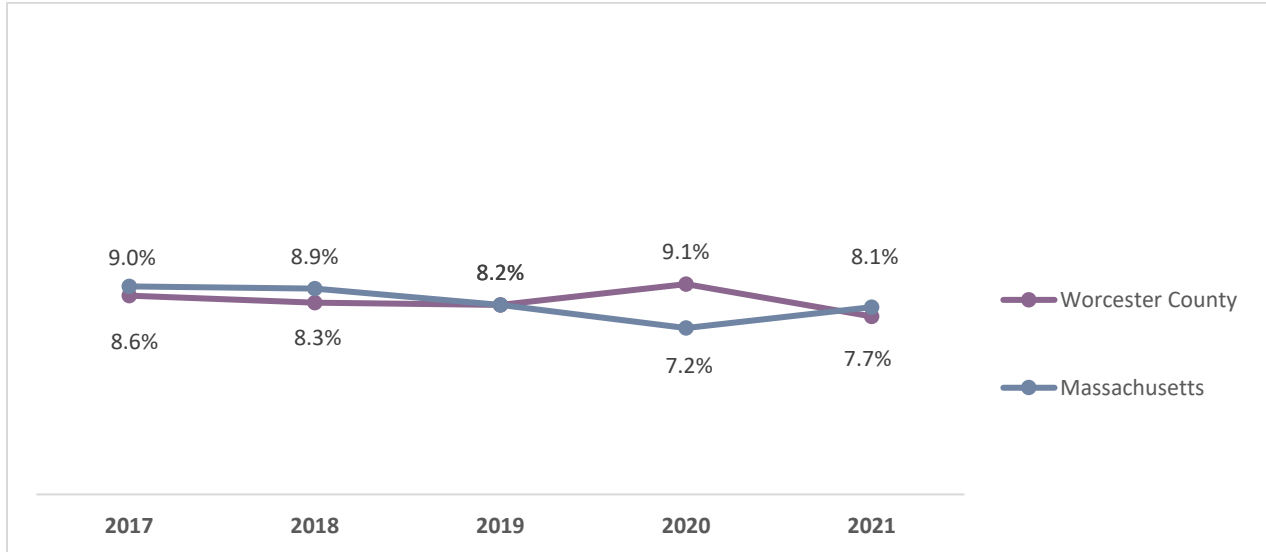
Very few areas of the Southern Worcester County service area are considered walkable. The Walkability Index from the Environmental Protection Agency ranges from 1-20, with lower values (yellow-shaded areas in Exhibit 5) being less walkable locations and higher values (dark blue-shaded areas in Exhibit 5) being more walkable. Small areas within certain South County towns are walkable, but without public transportation or a personal vehicle, travel within the area is difficult.

¹² Healthy People 2030: Social Determinants of Health. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>

Food Access

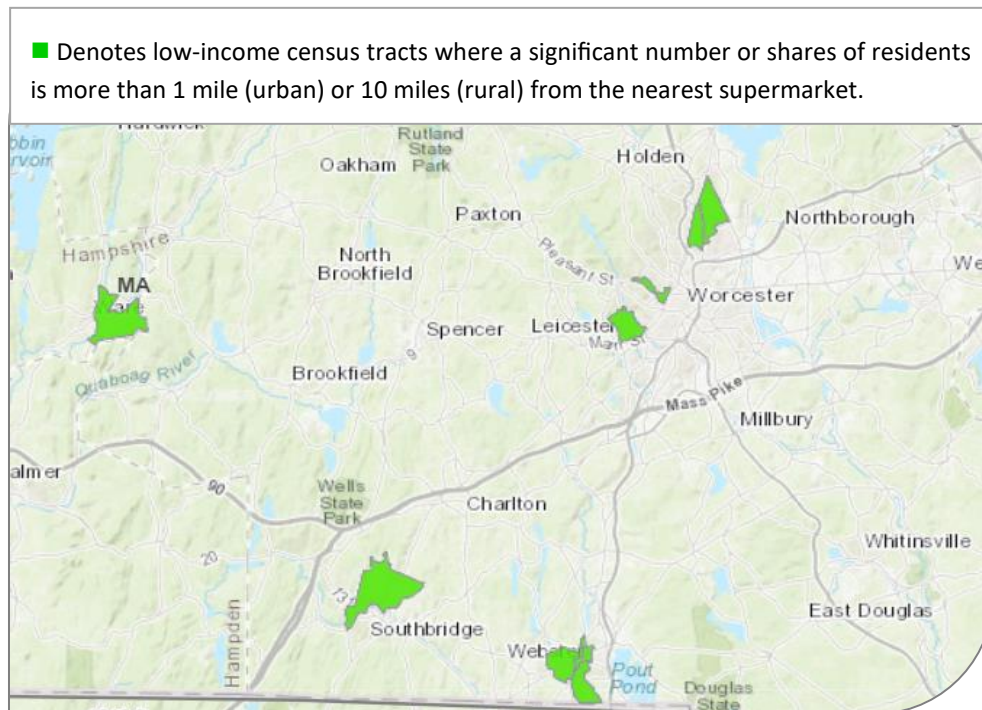
The rates of food insecurity in Worcester County have been decreasing, but there are pockets of food deserts around southern Worcester County where a significant number of residents live a significant distance from a supermarket.

EXHIBIT 6: FOOD INSECURITY RATES



Source: Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap, 2021

EXHIBIT 7: FOOD DESERTS IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Services. Food Access Research Atlas, 2023

Health and Health Care

Equitable, affordable, and available access to needed healthcare services is a critical component of ensuring positive outcomes for a population. Unfortunately, many people do not receive the physical or behavioral healthcare that they need, whether due to unaffordability or unavailability.

Availability and access to healthcare can be impacted by a lack of providers in the area, limited transportation options to get to appointments, stigma, or insurance barriers.

Physical Health

In Worcester County, there's a high ratio of people per healthcare providers, including primary care physicians (PCPs), dentists, pediatricians, and OB/GYNs, indicating a shortage of providers based on the number of people. To put this in perspective, the ratio of people per dentist in Worcester County is nearly double the ratio of people per dentist in the state of Massachusetts.

Nearly 10% of adults in the county report that their physical health was 'not good' for 14 or more days in any given month and more than 20% of the population has at least one of the following chronic health conditions: Arthritis; depression; high blood pressure; high cholesterol; and obesity.¹³

1 in 10

adults in Worcester County (9.5%) report having **poor physical health** on more than 14 days in a month



Worcester County Leading Cause of Death:

Cancer

Death Rate: **177.0**

1 in 3



adults in Worcester County are **obese**.

Obesity-related conditions, like heart disease and diabetes, are among the leading causes of preventable, premature death.

Collaborative Service Area Uninsured Population: **2,731 (3.6%)**

Worcester County Ratio of People per Providers



Primary Care Provider

711: 1

Massachusetts 627: 1



Dentist

1,842: 1

Massachusetts 982: 1



Pediatrician

601: 1

Massachusetts 415: 1



OB / GYN

4,598: 1

Massachusetts 3,214: 1

Behavioral Health

Compared to the state, Worcester County has higher levels of population who reported poor mental health days, fair or poor health, current smoking prevalence, and drug overdose deaths.

EXHIBIT 8: HEALTH STATUS, 2021

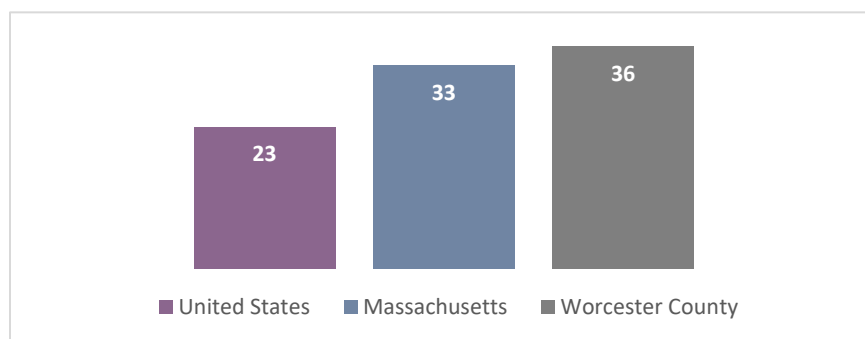
	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Poor Mental Health Days	15.2%	13.8%	16.5%
Fair or Poor Health	15.2%	11.3%	12.7%
Binge Drinking	16.7%	17.5%	17.1%
Current Smoking Prevalence	12.8%	10.8%	13.4%

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021 | County Health Rankings, 2018 – 2020

In Worcester County, there is one mental health provider per 421 people, compared to one provider for 307 people at the state level. Communities with a shortage of mental health providers are more likely to experience higher rates of drug overdose deaths due to several interconnected factors.

Worcester County had a higher drug overdose death rate compared to both the state and national average.

EXHIBIT 9: DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS, RATE PER 100,000, 2021



Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021 | County Health Rankings, 2018 – 2020

Research has shown that without adequate access to mental health care, individuals struggling with underlying conditions such as depression, anxiety, or trauma may not receive the support they need to manage their mental health. This can lead many to self-medicate with substances, increasing their risk of addiction and overdose.¹⁴

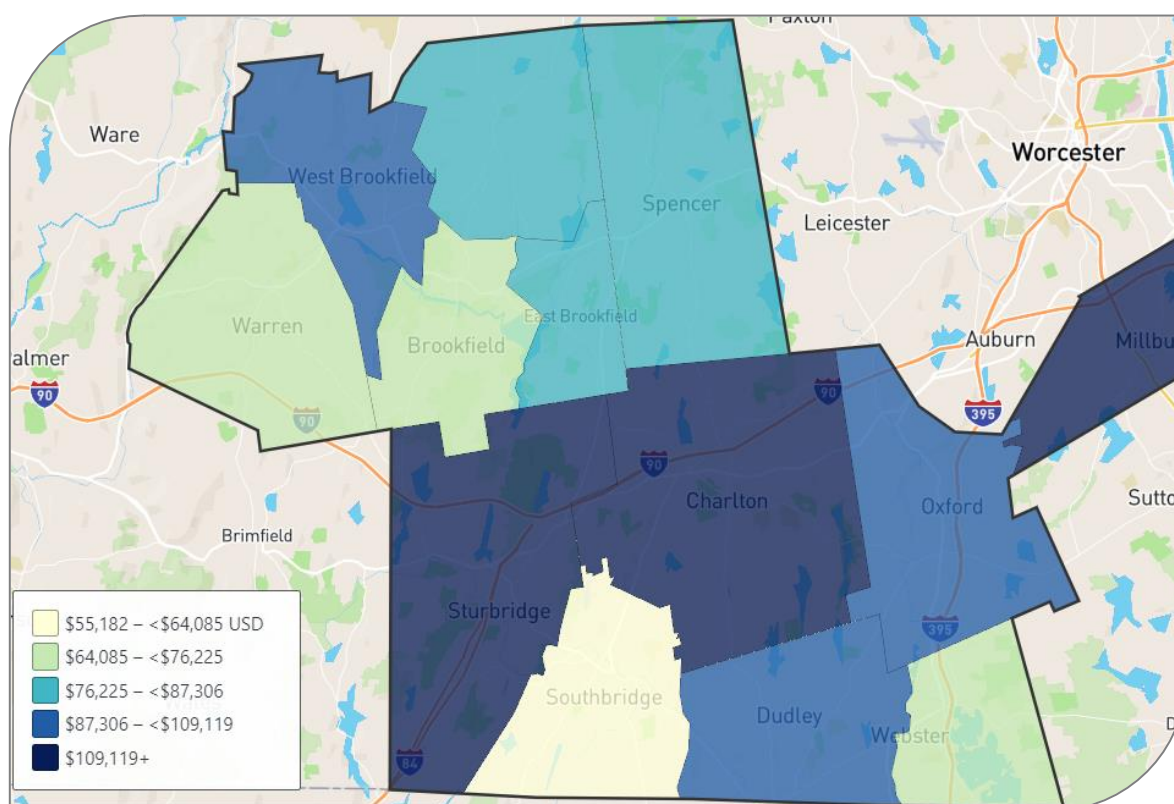
¹⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "Behavioral Health Barometer: United States, Volume 6," 2020. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/behavioral-health-barometer-volume-6>

Economic Stability

People living in poverty are less likely to have access to healthcare, healthy food, stable housing, and opportunities for physical activity. Research suggests that low-income status is associated with adverse health consequences, including shorter life expectancy and higher death rates for the 14 leading causes of death, among other poor health outcomes.¹⁵

Massachusetts has the fourth highest median income in the country. Of the 14 counties in Massachusetts, Worcester County's \$88,524 median income is the eighth highest in the state.

EXHIBIT 10: MEDIAN INCOME IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY COLLABORATIVE SERVICE AREA

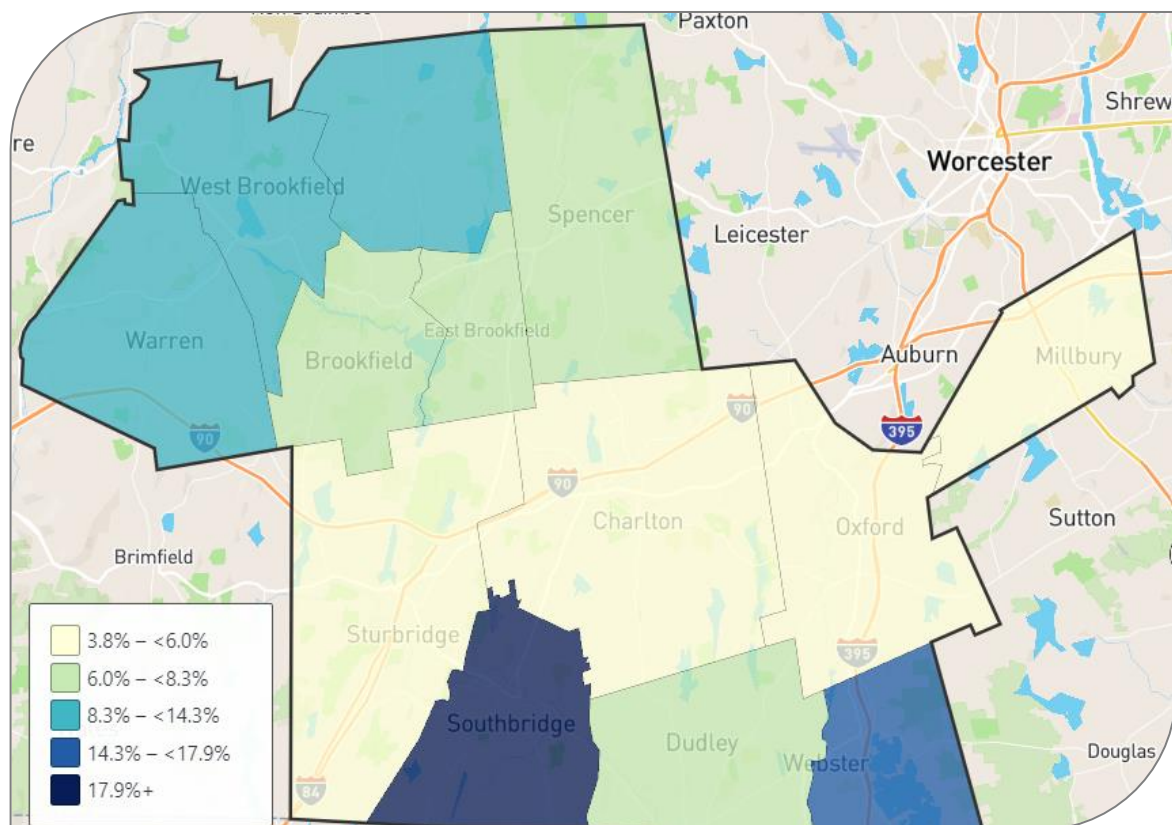


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

Despite the generally high median incomes in the state and region, economic disparities exist across the different towns in the Southern Worcester County Collaborative Service Area. From one town to the next, there are drastic differences, with median incomes more than doubling between certain towns.

¹⁵ American Academy of Family Physicians, Poverty & Health. *The Family Medicine Perspective*, April 2021.

EXHIBIT 11: POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LEVEL IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY COLLABORATIVE SERVICE AREA



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

Annual costs for a family of 3 in Worcester County: 97,803.¹⁶
Median Household Income: \$88,524¹⁷

The differences in median income are also evident in the percentage of each town's population living at or below the federal poverty level. South County towns with lower median incomes have higher percentages of residents living in poverty.

As the cost of living rises nationally, financial pressures are expected to increase, potentially exacerbating these socioeconomic disparities between South County towns.



Living wage for a family of 3 in Worcester County:

\$38.84

Minimum wage in Massachusetts:

\$15.00

Living wage for a 3-person family in Worcester County is about 2.6 times higher than the minimum wage in MA.

MIT Cost of Living Calculator

¹⁶ Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator, January 2023

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

Education

The school districts in Southern Worcester County are organized with a mix of regional and town-specific arrangements, ensuring educational services are available to all students within these communities. Each district has a unique composition of student populations, underscoring the specific and varied needs of each school.

EXHIBIT 12: SELECTED STUDENT POPULATIONS, 2023-2024

School District	Students with Disabilities ¹⁸	Students with High Needs ¹⁹
Massachusetts	20.2%	55.8%
Brookfield	12.2%	44.6%
Dudley-Charlton	19.0%	45.6%
Millbury	22.2%	48.6%
North Brookfield	21.7%	59.4%
Oxford	23.3%	57.1%
Quaboag Regional (Warren, West Brookfield)	24.3%	53.9%
Southbridge	26.9%	87.7%
Spencer-East Brookfield	24.3%	20.2%
Sturbridge	16.8%	38.2%
Tantasqua Regional (Brimfield, Brookfield, Holland, Sturbridge, Wales)	14.3%	20.2%
Webster	25.4%	80.4%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles

¹⁸ Students with disabilities, as defined by the Massachusetts Department of Education, are enrolled students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as of October 1.

¹⁹ Students with high needs, as defined by the Massachusetts Department of Education, are students who are designated as either low income, EI/former EI, or a student with disabilities. A former EI student is a student not currently an EI, but had been at some point in the four previous academic years.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides detailed school and district profiles for each school. This includes students that meet or exceed expectations on the standardized state MCAS test students are required to complete. These tests are used to measure student performance, school and district accountability, and to ensure that all students are meeting the state's educational standards at varying points in their academic careers.

Looking at how students scored on English Language Arts standardized tests in early and middle childhood provides essential data into educational effectiveness and students' literacy development across the different school districts.

EXHIBIT 13: STUDENTS 'MEETING OR EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS' ON ELA MCAS TESTS, 2023-2024

School District	3 rd Grade	6 th Grade	8 th Grade
Massachusetts State Average	44%	42%	44%
Brookfield	59%	31%	ND
Dudley-Charlton	44%	37%	46%
Millbury	47%	33%	38%
North Brookfield	23%	36%	12%
Oxford	42%	25%	35%
Quaboag Regional (Warren, West Brookfield)	33%	44%	26%
Southbridge	8%	17%	14%
Spencer-East Brookfield	28%	26%	21%
Sturbridge	57%	56%	ND
Tantasqua Regional (Brimfield, Brookfield, Holland, Sturbridge, Wales)	ND	ND	48%
Webster	18%	26%	21%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Profiles



IV. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Overview

The qualitative primary research stage of this Community Needs Assessment included one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders and community members in the Southern Worcester County service area.

The interviews provided an opportunity to have an in-depth discussion about community needs, physical and mental health care, and service issues with community leaders and professionals.

The focus groups enabled the participants to highlight areas of consensus and to compare differences as to what they see as the biggest needs facing the community.

Participation

The interviews and focus group discussions covered participants' broad perceptions of community needs, as well as more detailed areas of need.

In total, across both qualitative research stages, over 80 individuals provided input from the following segments and others:

- Healthcare Organizations
- Governmental Organizations
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Municipal Leaders
- Community Partners
- Educators

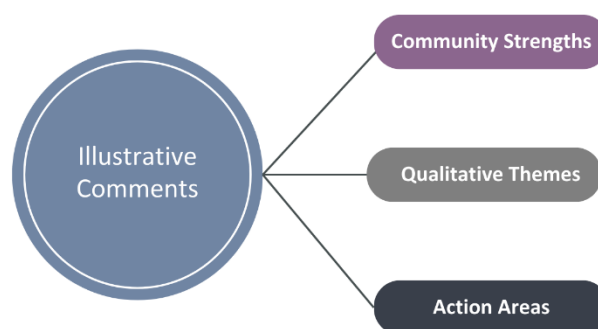
Please note that these categories are not mutually exclusive for some individuals.

Results

The combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions provided information on the **Community Strengths** in Southern Worcester County.

These qualitative discussions also identified **Qualitative Themes**, which represent cross-cutting challenges that impact all subsequent need areas. Each theme sheds light on systemic issues that shape various aspects of community life.

Following the themes, the **Qualitative Action Areas** outline the main areas of focus, based on consensus from respondents. In some cases, the observations highlight examples of potential intervention.



Community Strengths

For this Community Needs Assessment, it is important to highlight the strengths that Southern Worcester County residents see in their community and to recognize programs and services seeing success in addressing community needs.

The community values the dedication of local organizations and agencies, including police, fire, and EMS services. Residents also appreciate the efforts of community organizations, acknowledging the financial and operational limitations faced by nonprofits and social service agencies. As one community member put it, 'We know they're doing their best with what they have.'

Several participants cited the growing diversity of the Southern Worcester community as a positive attribute to the area. Many community members mentioned that there is an "internal pride in the community" filled with close-knit families and neighborhoods. There is a small town feel to the area which residents greatly value.

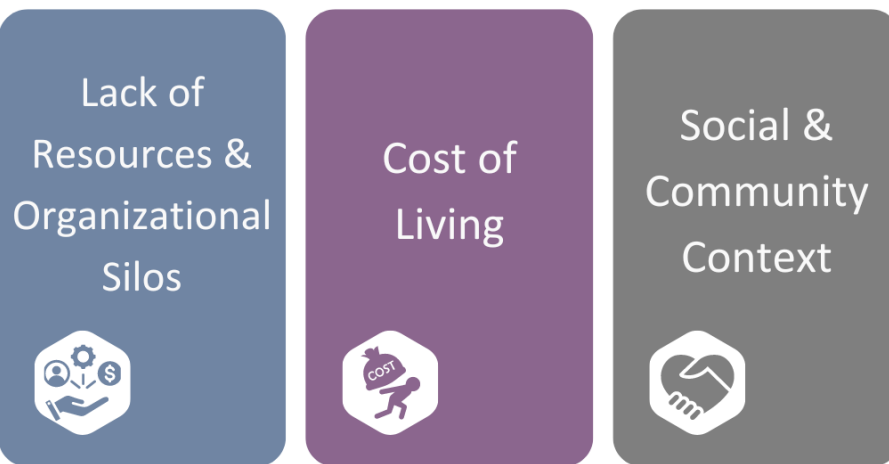
Additional strengths identified by community members include the following:

- "I love this community so much. I've made this a career choice because I want to see this community get better."
- "When there's a problem, the community tries to come together to solve the problem"
- "The networking among different service providers is robust. There's a sense of everyone forming a net to find the best services for everyone. People are generous in making referrals to other organizations - it's very impressive."
- "I value the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. In Worcester there's a lot of opportunities for organizations to come together to make things happen."
- "I love the town and it's so diverse."
- "The people are inclined to help each other. Businesses are very generous."
- "Small town, you know everybody, the community leaders rally together."
- "You are seeing people put in more effort to have more diversity."
- "There's a lot of family-owned businesses. It's really nice to see that continuing and people still taking that in value."
- "We do value our privacy, but we do a lot of things for each other."
- "I feel like if it really came down to it, people have open arms really."
- "There's a country feel without being cut off from services like banks, grocery stores, and medical services."

Qualitative Themes

The following three *Qualitative Themes*—**Lack of Resources and Organizational Silos, Cost of Living, and Social and Community Context**—represent overarching issues that emerged across all areas of the qualitative research. These themes were derived from stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions and reflect recurring challenges and barriers that impact residents throughout the Southern Worcester County region.

The *Qualitative Themes* are broad, cross-cutting challenges that affect multiple aspects of community life and service delivery. These themes provide essential context for understanding the systemic issues that contribute to the more specific needs and priorities identified in the later sections of the report.



Lack of Resources & Organizational Silos

The 13 towns of the Southern Worcester County service area are each unique microcosm communities. They are insulated and isolated rural towns, making delivering resources, services, and information challenging for many agencies and organizations.

Participants shared that most services are concentrated in Worcester and there is no one central entity in the county or southern part of the county. The service area was cited as having a “huge lack of resources” in general and was even cited as a “black hole” for resources especially for communities that experience general poverty. Many participants wished for a type of community resource center to better identify local services. The isolated nature of these small towns makes it challenging for social service organizations and nonprofits to coordinate resources and engage community members. These barriers can create organizational silos, making it harder to address community needs effectively and direct resources where they are most needed.

Organizations are also under-resourced, facing challenges with funding, staffing, and the growing needs of the community. While Southern Worcester County has a range of social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community support, including an active faith community, the demand for aid often exceeds the available resources.

Voices from the Community

- “There are so many needs and a lack of resources for everything. There is nothing in Southern Worcester County outside of Worcester.”
- “The isolated and insular communities make it difficult to spread the word about resources. Many agencies use social media and other forms of digital marketing and communication to advertise their services. However, many community residents reported that they rarely learn about resources from social media and digital marketing efforts.”
- “The South County portion of Worcester County is an end-resourced area. Resources and services exist in the city of Worcester, but as many community residents and service providers reported during this needs assessment, those resources don’t trickle down into the town of South County.”
- “Lack of resources is the number one issue. We started calling ourselves Urban-rural because we have an urban population but a rural setting. We don’t have the community resources for the town and the town doesn’t have the budget to support what families and children need so we relied on getting people out of town to get resources and it’s not sustainable.”

Cost of Living

While the cost of living has been slowly increasing over time, the COVID-19 pandemic, affordable housing crisis, and the record-high inflation over the recent years has created the perfect storm which has greatly impacted peoples' wallets and budgets.

The rising costs of living have been felt locally in Southern Worcester County where families struggle to cover necessities, like put food on the table, keep a roof over their head, heat and light their homes, put gas in their car to commute to work, or cover healthcare costs.

The Worcester Community Action Council provides a vital utility financial assistance program that supports many families in the area. While the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program and Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher program offer valuable assistance with rental and housing expenses, residents often face challenges with eligibility requirements and long waitlists.

Some participants expressed frustration with economic programs designed to help empower individuals out of poverty claiming "assistance programs perpetuate poverty because they provide assistance up until someone gets a job and then the assistance is cut off. Assistance needs to continue for up to 6 months after someone gets a job to help them catch up."

Community members have also raised concerns about the impact of high living costs on youth, who may be unable to participate in enriching extracurricular or recreational activities. Many families are stretched thin to cover basic necessities, leaving little room for these valuable opportunities.

Voices from the Community

- "This is an economically disadvantaged population, the high costs of utilities can mean the difference between eating and not eating."
- "People are moving here [to South County] from Worcester because they think it's cheap, but when they get here, they're finding it's actually not more economical because they have a longer and more expensive commute and they have to go to Big Y for groceries, which is more expensive."
- "It used to be that the rent voucher would cover the housing and the rest of my paycheck could go to food, my car, all the other things. But today, the voucher doesn't cover enough of my rent."

Social & Community Context

As Massachusetts has increasingly become home to immigrants and refugees, the cultural landscape of some small towns in South County has evolved.²⁰ Long-term residents have noted a rise in diversity and, in some cases, an increased demand for resources to support this growing immigrant and minority population.

These community members often face similar challenges to their neighbors, including issues with childcare, food insecurity, housing, transportation, and employment. New Americans or refugees may also be learning English as a second language, which can create barriers to accessing services, and they might have a limited social support network.

This expanding diversity is an asset to the community. However, there are concerns about resource allocation and transparency. In communities where resources are already limited, the growing population may be perceived as putting additional strain on an already stressed system, potentially leading to community tension.

Voices from the Community

- “There has been tension between neighbors because people who are recently arriving to the area are receiving benefits that long-term residents never had and it’s creating discrimination and distrust of new community members.”
- “The biggest target in the past year has been the refugee community. This area is not welcoming at all. If people don’t speak clear English, people get really angry.”
- “Now with the influx of immigration in this part of Massachusetts, we’re seeing a disconnection in resources. We are seeing some people who are immigrants and staying in shelters are receiving certain stipends and housing benefits that the people who live here and were born here are not receiving or have access to. There’s no equality across the board for everybody with services.”

²⁰ <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/massachusetts-new-england-migrant-surge/>

Qualitative Action Areas

The following six *Action Areas* were identified during the qualitative research phase, based on the recurring *Qualitative Themes* from stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions: **Behavioral Health Services, Health Services, Food Access, Housing, Transportation, Child Care and Education.**

Each *Action Area* in the following sections provides an overview of the subject, along with de-identified examples to illustrate key observations. These areas represent the initial insights gathered solely from the qualitative data and are meant to guide the development of broader strategies discussed later in the report.



Each *Qualitative Theme* discussed in the previous section — Lack of Resources and Organizational Silos, Cost of Living, and Social and Community Context — applies universally to the following *Qualitative Action Areas*.

For example, the lack of resources impacts everything from healthcare access to housing security, while the rising cost of living influences both economic stability and mental health. In the sections that follow, these themes help frame the specific action areas, illustrating how fundamental, systemic challenges are woven into the fabric the community needs, as identified directly by community residents.

Behavioral Health Services

Addressing behavioral health is crucial for improving overall community well-being and reducing the burden of mental health disorders and substance abuse.

Behavioral health services are a great need in the service area identified by community stakeholders and residents. Community members cited a lack of a pathway to care as those in need of behavioral health services and there are deep rooted trust issues with family agencies. Local law enforcement are often the primary resource in a crisis situation, leading to a lack of follow up and appropriate treatment. Youth mental health was brought up in many conversations with community members as an area of concern. Many children are still recovering from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and there are few therapists in the South County area for youth.

Voices from the Community:

- “There's a lack of treatment programs and a lack of care. There are some programs, and there are few therapy options for patients with dual diagnoses. There aren't enough therapists to refer people to and there's no easy solution for a lack of therapists. Sometimes there's a months-long wait for a patient to get an appointment.”
- “There needs to be more mental health services. Mental health is the root cause of so many issues in the community. There aren't enough providers or places for people to go. There are inequities between people who have private insurance and those on MassHealth.”
- “There's a lack of resources [for mental health] besides the police and there's usually no follow-up. So, what happens is someone is brought to the hospital, is released because there's nothing the hospital can do, and then the police get called again, leading to a perpetual cycle.”
- “The number one trend in children and families in the increase in mental health needs. It's been an uphill climb. The need for clinicians is crazy and the turnover is very high. Children will get a clinician for a year and then they are gone, then they are on a waitlist or get transferred, if they are lucky.”
- “A lot of our kids come with a lot of trauma and parents who have substance use disorders. We have a lot of kids who are under care of grandparents because their parents have overdosed or are substance users.”
- “Mental health issues have exploded since COVID, domestic violence [incidents] related to substance abuse and mental health have increased.”

Health Care

Ensuring access to quality health care is essential for preventing and managing illnesses, promoting wellness, and improving overall health outcomes within the community.

The access and quality of health care varies within the Southern Worcester County area. Some members of the Southern Worcester County community expressed that they did have access to primary care, but the quality varied greatly. For others, seeing a primary care doctor could take six months to a year to get an appointment.

Telehealth has recently been able to fill in the gaps for some that are unable to schedule an in-person visit. However, there are barriers to virtual visits, such as navigating digital platforms and requiring stable internet access, and these visits may require out-of-pocket costs. Additionally, some people do not feel these visits can address all their issues.

Voices from the Community:

- “In Southbridge I know there’s a lack of specialty health care. Some primary care offices are booking out six months to a year. The waitlists have increased in the past three years.”
- “You can see a doctor, but you get what you get. The quality might not be great, but at least you can see someone.”
- “There is a health care desert around here. There is no labor and delivery anymore, and they have no pediatric doctors. We all have to go to UMASS/Worcester and that’s an hour drive.”
- “I just did my first virtual primary care health appointment which met my personal needs. But a virtual visit is not a real thing - the provider I met with was in [the mid-west.] In person contact can’t be replaced.”
- “There used to be a satellite medical and dental facility in the area that was helpful for people to get to, but it has since closed.”

Food Access

Community members and families in Southern Worcester County struggle to access nutritious food. Many have noted the rising cost of food, with some stating, "sometimes people can't afford groceries on top of their other bills."

Food insecurity is a significant challenge, and community members observed that when individuals are preoccupied with where their next meal will come from, "they can't focus on making other improvements in their lives." While grocery stores, food pantries, and community fridges are available, residents without transportation face difficulties accessing these resources and bringing food home.

Massachusetts schools offer free breakfast and lunch for all students, but those who rely on these meals may go hungry during school breaks.²¹ Local organizations, such as Cops & Kids in Southbridge, which partners with Project Bread to provide free meals to children, work to address food insecurity, but many community members still face ongoing challenges.²²

Voices from the Community:

- "People are struggling to access food. There are food banks but they're only open on certain days. If people miss the day that the food bank is open, they're out of luck."
- "There's an emergency food pantry and a community fridge in Southbridge, but those only work if people can physically access them. SNAP benefits aren't enough to cover the rising food costs. [Some agencies] offer gift cards for groceries."
- "The amount people who receive SNAP, and the amount that is allocated to them, it's not feasible."
- "Some people are able to apply for food stamps, but it's a long and complicated process. The food pantries are low on food. The food that they do have isn't always good for someone who is homeless, like the cans need to have pop tops and there can't be food that needs to be cooked."
- "Food insecurity's a problem here. There are some [helpful] programs where you can go once a week and get a meal with the fixings and the recipes for a dollar per person in the household."

²¹ <https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healey-joins-legislative-leadership-to-celebrate-permanent-universal-free-school-meals>

²² <https://www.ci.southbridge.ma.us/358/Cops-Kids>

Housing

Safe, affordable, and stable housing is fundamental for physical and mental health, economic security, and overall quality of life in a community.

One of the most apparent challenges in the Southern Worcester community is affordable housing. Several participants cited a lack of options for housing insecure individuals and families. There are few shelter options outside of the city of Worcester, and those that do exist have a poor reputation among community members. While unsheltered individuals exist in the South County communities, it is largely a hidden issue.

Housing stock was cited as “non-existent” in the area and some residents expressed doubt about actions being taken to address the housing issue, such as building affordable housing. Community residents additionally expressed frustration over the long wait lists for housing programs, sometimes being told it could be up to 8 to 10 years for an apartment. Housing is becoming largely out of reach for many, with rental and home ownership costs ballooning in recent years.

The population mentioned the most frequently in conversations were older adults within the Southern Worcester area. Older adults are presented with additional housing challenges because of their fixed income. Adults with disabilities were similarly mentioned as being particularly disadvantaged in terms of housing options in the area.

Voices from the Community:

- “One thing that’s lacking here is temporary housing and shelters. I see abandoned buildings and decaying buildings. They could be turned into at least a temporary shelter.”
- “There’s a shelter in Worcester and I’ve heard not good things about it. I was homeless for a while, and I couldn’t go to [shelter] because of certain reasons. I was very anxious and worried people would steal my medications because I’ve heard of that happening to people. And if you don’t have temporary housing or safe shelters, people can’t sleep. Sleep is a necessity, and it shouldn’t be so hard for someone to achieve that.”
- “I don’t think it’s that the community wouldn’t be open to more affordable housing, it’s more that the town is so populated as it is. So, if we were to build more units, where is open for us to use? And then - is it accessible for people? Do people have to drive or is it within walking distance?”
- “There is no senior housing. I’ve talked to the seniors in East Brookfield and asked what their plan is, and they have to move to Spencer, [even though] they’ve lived in East Brookfield their entire life. They don’t want to move out

of East Brookfield. But it's hard staying because there isn't available, affordable housing in East Brookfield."

- "The biggest service missing is housing... rents have doubled. It's the cost of housing and how much everything else [costs] - utilities, water, sewer. People have lived in a house most of their life and then they have to move out because they're living on a fixed income. Social Security [only covers] so much."
- "There are no housing options for elderly or disabled, utility and rent costs have doubled."
- "For a 3-bedroom apartment, it's about \$2,800 around here and [rental assistance programs] don't cover more than \$1,300-\$1,500 for a 3-bedroom. There's a gap between what it costs and what the [programs] covers."
- "There's a lot of homelessness that is happening in this town and people don't realize it because it's hidden."



Transportation

Transportation is one of the main barriers to access services in almost every community, but especially for rural communities that lack public transportation infrastructure. Southern Worcester County has few public transportation options, including the currently fare-free Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), which has routes that extend through Brookfield, Southbridge, and Webster. The WRTA also offers ADA-compliant paratransit services for individuals with disabilities across its 37-community service area.

Despite having some public transportation, South County residents are largely dependent on personal vehicles.

Transportation is a barrier for people to seek employment opportunities. The current bus schedule runs on a limited schedule; if a person works a job outside of the bus schedule hours, it can be difficult for that person to find and maintain employment without reliable transportation.

Similarly, transportation can be a barrier to childcare. If a parent is reliant on a fixed route public transportation schedule to get to work on time, but that time is before the childcare facility is open, it limits the options for childcare.

Additionally, if public transportation to a childcare facility is unavailable, parents need a personal vehicle or need to live within walking distance of a childcare facility. As a result of these barriers, many people living in this community rely on personal vehicles, but this is not a completely effective solution to overcome the public transportation barrier. As one community member noted, a person may have a vehicle but may not be able to afford gas or insurance.

Community members highlighted the need for transportation services within the Southern Worcester community. Existing transportation methods do not meet the needs of the community and participants expressed concern over the cost of existing transportation methods such as Uber and taxi cabs.



Limited public transportation can be a major barrier for **employment**. If a person works a job **outside of the standard bus schedule hours**, maintaining that job may be **impossible**, if they were even hired in the first place. Employers may be hesitant to hire someone without reliable transportation in a rural area that is largely car dependent.

Voices from the Community:

- “If you don’t have a car, it’s really hard to get around. People will call the ambulance to get them to appointments, but [there aren’t] enough workers for the ambulance.”
- “Transportation is definitely a challenge for families within the southern Worcester County area if you’re going from one part of the southern county to another.”
- “People use the city bus, by 9:00 a.m. there’s lines to get the bus into Worcester. I’ve seen workers, I’ve seen kids. It’s awesome that it’s free because it’s really needed.”
- “A neighbor ride program would be amazing. We don’t have volunteers to drive, not even give rides at a flat rate even just \$20, but there’s no one to do that... I think people would trust it. The big thing is if it [is recommended by a trusted source], seniors will use it. It’s something needed.”
- “Transportation is still an issue. When the weather’s good, I can bicycle to some places. But I don’t want to go on all the roads. They’ve put a bike lane on a couple roads. It’s not a walkable community at all.”
- “If you want to go to Worcester for something that isn’t a [medical] appointment- how do you get there? Or if you want to go to something in the evening, the bus isn’t running.”
- “Kids get to Head Start through parent transportation or walking [...] or parents bring their children on bikes. But those who want to [go] figure out a way. Resources are limited no matter what.”



Child Care and Education

High-quality childcare and education are foundational for child development, academic success, and future economic stability, benefiting both individuals and the broader community.

Southern Worcester County residents identified all aspects of childcare as a major challenge for families. Some parents have difficulty with long wait lists to get a childcare slot. Other families have found no affordable childcare or daycare options, especially for infants, children with disabilities, and families with multiple children.

Many participants expressed the desire for more options for after school, weekend, and summer care programs. Childcare, afterschool, and summer programs do exist, but affordability, transportation, and awareness of availability act as barriers in the community.

Lack of childcare can have impacts on other aspects of a family's well-being. For example, in the Head Start Family Winter 2024 Survey, nearly 30% of respondents who were not currently working reported childcare as a barrier that prevented them from working.²³

In addition to childcare challenges in the community, quality education is a concern in parts of Southern Worcester County. In particular, Southbridge Public Schools is in receivership due to its chronically underperforming status.²⁴ Community participants mentioned this as a source of tension in the town and reported that some families in the Southbridge School District may opt to send their students to neighboring school districts in South County.

Voices from the Community:

- “We need affordable after school and summer programs for kids. I still work after 3:00pm and in the summertime, I need some place safe for my kid to go so they’re not sitting around on their phone all day.”
- “I wanted to enroll my daughter in daycare, but I was told the waitlist was 2 years. By that time, she’s going to be ready for preschool. I guess I need to start looking at preschools now.”
- “There's a lack of affordable, quality childcare. There are no funds to help subsidize childcare. It costs about \$2,000 a month and I can't afford that.”
- “The school system in Southbridge is in receivership and as a result, the families that can afford it are sending their kids to schools in other towns like Warren, Dudley/Charlton, Sturbridge. The children who are left behind in the schools are the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged.”

²³ Report for 2023-24 Head Start and Early Head Start Family Survey

²⁴ <https://www.doe.mass.edu/level5/districts/level5districts.html>

V. ACCESS AUDIT

Phone-based access audits serve as an effective tool to evaluate how easily community members can access healthcare services across the Collaborative's service area, with a focus on assessing access rather than profiling specific sites. The main aim of these audits is to gain a thorough understanding of practical access to healthcare and other vital services, as well as to identify barriers faced by individuals seeking care and services. The findings from these audits offer valuable insights into existing gaps in access, strategies for improvement, and variations in service delivery.

Crescendo conducted calls to 15 facilities within the Southern Worcester County service area, which covered a diverse array of services including behavioral healthcare, primary care, child care, and community assistance programs. The facilities included in the audit are:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. South County Pediatrics | 9. You, Inc. Southbridge Family Resource Center |
| 2. Renaissance Medical Group | |
| 3. Harrington Hospitals | 10. Worcester Community Action Council |
| 4. Seven Hills Foundation | 11. Tri-Community YMCA |
| 5. Spectrum Health Services | 12. Open Sky |
| 6. Tri Valley Inc | 13. Parent/Professional Advocacy League |
| 7. RCAP Solutions | 14. MassHire-Southbridge Career Center |
| 8. Department of Transitional Assistance | 15. Guild of St. Agnes (Charlton) |

Phone audits were conducted at different times within standard business hours from Monday to Friday in mid-June.

Successful contact with facility.

Out of the 15 calls placed, two instances resulted in the caller being promptly connected to a staff member without encountering a phone tree. Among the remaining 13 facilities, nine calls required navigating through a phone tree system before reaching a staff member. In the case of the other four facilities, the caller was initially connected to a staff member but was subsequently transferred to another department and asked to leave a voicemail.

Ability of facility to accept new patients/clients.

Among the eight healthcare and resource organizations we contacted, four are currently open to accepting new patients or clients seeking healthcare services or participating in community programs. Regarding specific behavioral healthcare services for pediatric mental health, neither

of the two facilities we contacted are accepting new patients. Additionally, they offer same-day services, contingent upon the patient's insurance coverage.

Neither of the two childcare facilities we reached out to are currently admitting children, but they do provide options for joining a waitlist with the possibility of enrollment in the fall.

Ability of facility to answer questions and refer caller elsewhere when desired services were unavailable.

Most facilities offered the names of different facilities/organizations, additional community resources, and contact information for other services in the area. Overall, the facilities had extremely helpful and kind personnel answering the phone lines and offering a pleasant and informative client experience.

One childcare site in particular spent about 15 minutes thoroughly explaining the program's cost, hourly schedule and additional services, noting the caller's contact information to be placed on the wait list.

Another site providing assistance to parents of children with behavioral health needs spent about 15 minutes welcoming the caller to the area, sharing in detail the numerous programs and support groups for parents with children on the spectrum and, when asked about Spanish-speaking services, the attendant continued the rest of the conversation in Spanish, making the caller feel welcomed and at ease. The conversation concluded with the attendant requesting the caller's information so that they may send a community resource guide. The staff member further shared that she understood that moving was not easy from her own personal experience, but that community makes it much easier, "Si, se puede."

How staff inquiries help to determine prospective patient's needs.

During the initial moments of each phone call, the majority of staff members inquired about the caller's specific needs, location, and insurance coverage. Facilities that had age limits or specific requirements asked the caller about the intended client and their age. If the caller did not meet the facility's criteria, alternative options were suggested. This approach ensured that callers received tailored information and appropriate referrals based on their circumstances and the facility's capabilities.

Ease of speaking with a person.

Connecting with a staff member at many of the facilities proved challenging, as only two of them immediately connected the caller to a staff member. The remaining facilities had intricate phone systems with multiple options, necessitating extension numbers and directing callers to various departments. In three cases where a staff member initially answered but couldn't address the caller's inquiries, the caller was transferred to another staff member who was

unavailable. Furthermore, in one instance, the call was unexpectedly disconnected. These experiences underscored the difficulties faced in navigating communication and accessing information smoothly across the facilities.

Language offerings.

Having adequate language accommodations ensure that non-English speaking individuals can access necessary information and services effectively within facilities.

Out of the facilities we contacted, eight provided phone system options in languages other than English, including Spanish and at one site, Portuguese.

During one audit conducted entirely in Spanish, the staff member effectively understood the caller's needs and directed them to the relevant services.

Among the healthcare facilities contacted, two have clinicians who are fluent in Spanish. One site mentioned that while they don't have bilingual providers, they do have Spanish-speaking staff available on-site to assist.

Additionally, another facility offers translation services through telephone interpretation on-site.



VI. RESOURCE MAPPING

In April 2023, a collaborative effort between YOU, Inc. Southbridge Community Connections and YOU, Inc. Southbridge Family Resource Center—both affiliates of the Seven Hills Foundation—along with the Worcester Community Action Council, resulted in the compilation of a comprehensive resource guide for Southern Worcester County.

The **Southern Worcester County Family Guide** was developed to simplify access to essential services for providers, caregivers, and families living and working in the region. To further enhance this resource, Crescendo utilized the information from the Southern Worcester County Family Guide to create an ArcGIS visual map that detailed the geographic distribution of community resources.

The Resource Mapping process was a key element in the Community Needs Assessment, as it provided a spatial analysis of service availability across Southern Worcester County. By visualizing resources on a map, we gained critical insights into where services are concentrated and identified significant gaps in access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

This geographic analysis allowed us to better understand the spatial dimensions of the challenges families and individuals face when seeking resources, especially those related to health care, behavioral health, childcare, housing, and food access.

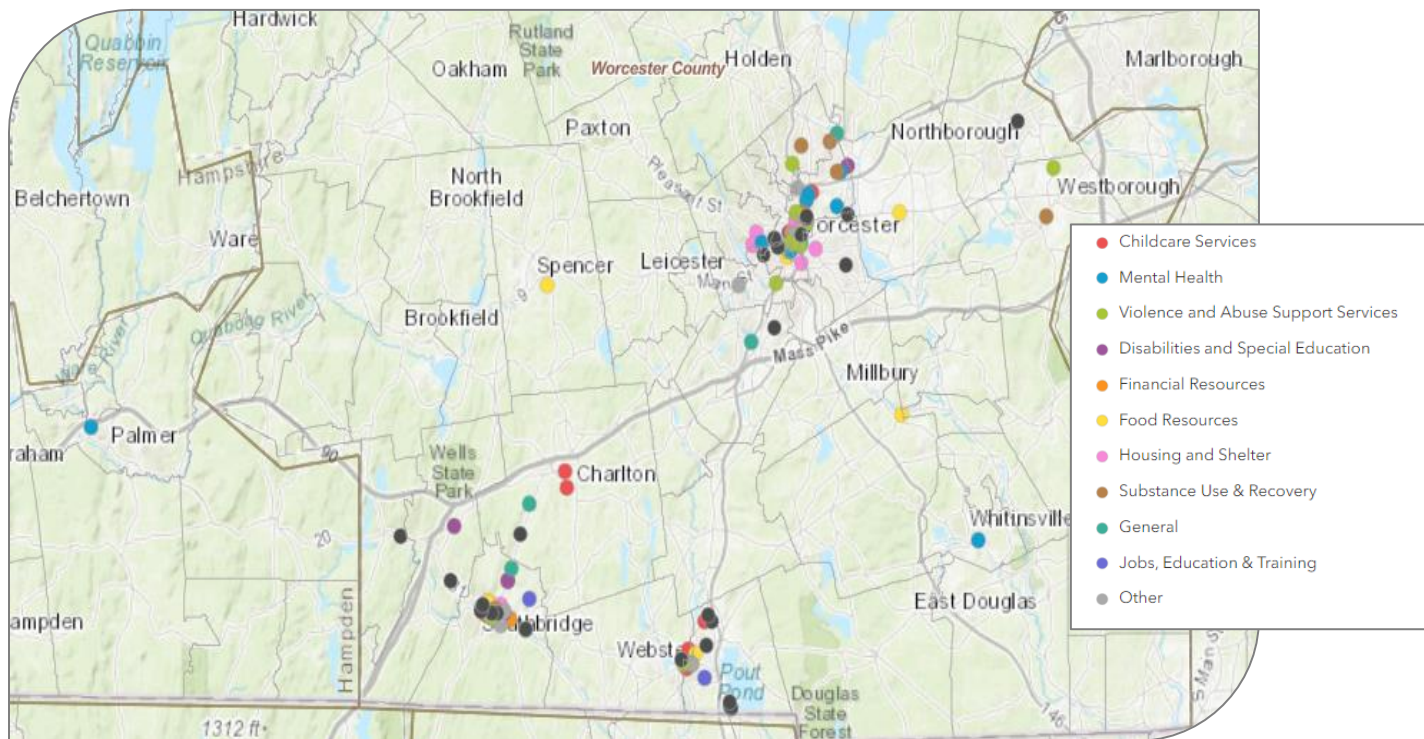
Two primary findings emerged from the Resource Mapping process: **Diverse Resource Availability** and **Income Disparity Insights**. These findings not only underscore the uneven distribution of services but also reflect the broader social and economic inequalities present in the region.

Diverse Resource Availability

The map shows a wide range of services, including behavioral health, childcare, food access points, healthcare, and housing support. These services are concentrated in areas with the highest needs, such as Worcester, Southbridge, and Webster.

While clustering of services can enhance collaboration among organizations, certain regions of Southern Worcester County, like Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, West Brookfield, Spencer, and Warren lack many essential resources listed in the guide.

EXHIBIT 14 : MAP OF RESOURCES IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY



Link to interactive map: <https://arcg.is/OWWzDu>

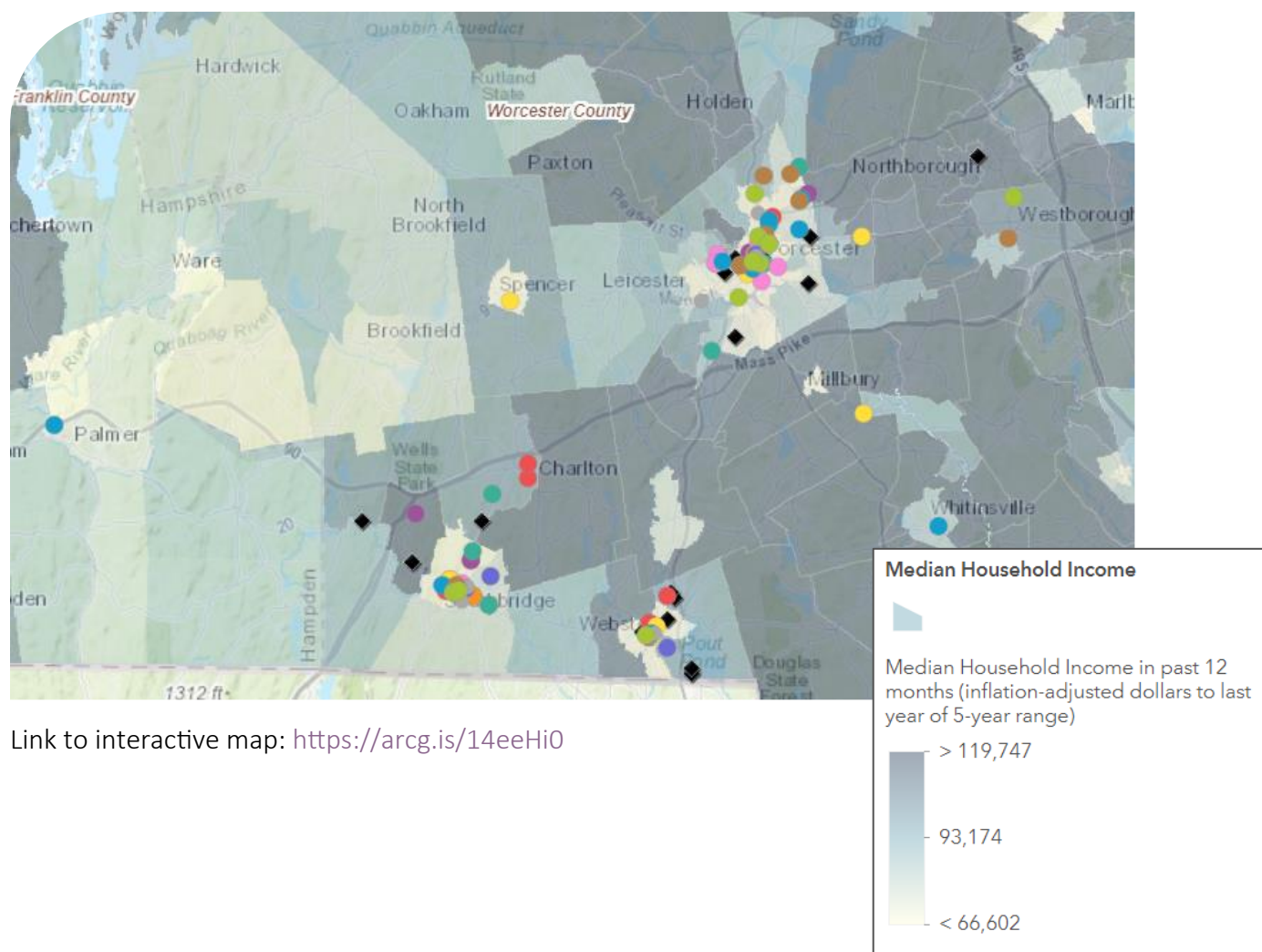
Income Disparity Insights

By overlaying median household income data by census tract onto the map, it is possible to identify pockets of unmet needs within Southern Worcester County.

Although Southbridge and Webster generally have lower median household incomes, a closer look at census tract data reveals areas of disparity within towns that have higher overall incomes.

Residents in these lower-income tracts may face barriers to accessing services due to transportation issues, lack of awareness, and stigma associated with seeking assistance in more affluent areas.

EXHIBIT 15 : MAP OF RESOURCES AND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY²⁵



Link to interactive map: <https://arcg.is/14eeHi0>

²⁵ This map shows median household income in by census tract in Southern Worcester County using data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates. Areas with darker shading represent higher median income and areas with lighter shading represent lower median income. Amounts are presented in USD.

VII. SURVEYS

Community Survey

The purpose of the community survey was to enable a greater share of people, especially the most vulnerable, living and working in the Southern Worcester County service area to share their perspectives on the greatest needs affecting their community.

Methodology

The community survey was made available online and via print copies in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Arabic from May 7 through July 15, 2024. The questionnaire included closed-ended, need-specific questions, open-ended questions for community members to provide input, and demographic questions. Invitations to participate were distributed by Steering Committee partners and Equity Champions through channels including website advertisements, social media posts, text messages, outreach at community events, and flyers posted in communal locations.

In total, there were 416 valid survey responses, the vast majority of which (94.5%) were to the English language survey. Special care was exercised to minimize the amount of non-sampling error through the assessment of design effects (e.g., question order, question-wording, response alternatives). The survey was designed to maximize accessibility in evaluating respondents' insights with regards to an array of potential community needs. See Appendix C for the survey instrument.



While the survey served as a practical tool for capturing insights of individuals across Southern Worcester County, this was not a random sample. Findings should not be interpreted as representative of the full population. Additionally, sample sizes of demographic subpopulations are not large enough to consider samples to be representative of the broader populations from which responses were received. Differences in responses have not been tested for statistical significance as part of this assessment.

Respondent Demographics

Among valid responses to the community survey (n=416), the majority of respondents completed the survey in English (94.5%).

EXHIBIT 16: LANGUAGE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
English	94.5%
Spanish	4.8%
Portuguese	0.5%
Arabic	0.2%
Haitian Creole	0.0%

Survey respondents' towns of residence were spread throughout Southern Worcester County. The most frequently reported towns of residence are Southbridge (26.4%) and Webster (14.2%).

EXHIBIT 17: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENT TOWNS OF RESIDENCE

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
TOWNS OF RESIDENCE	
Brookfield	3.1%
Charlton	6.5%
Dudley	8.2%
East Brookfield	1.4%
Millbury	6.0%
North Brookfield	6.0%
Oxford	6.3%
Southbridge	26.4%
Spencer	9.4%
Sturbridge	2.6%
Warren	2.6%
Webster	14.2%
West Brookfield	2.9%
Other*	4.1%
No response	0.2%

*Other towns: Holland, Leicester, Monson, New Braintree, Palmer, West Warren, Worcester

Four in five respondents (78.9%) identify as female and similarly four in five (78.9%) identify as White or Caucasian. One in five (19.6%) identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. With regards to age, nearly half of respondents (47.3%) clustered in the 25 to 44 age group.

EXHIBIT 18: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
GENDER	
Female	78.9%
Male	17.5%
Transgender man	0.3%
I prefer not to say	3.3%
RACE	
White or Caucasian	78.9%
Black or African American	6.7%
Asian or Asian American	2.4%
Native American or Alaska Native	1.2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.3%
Two or more races	4.6%
I prefer not to say	5.8%
ETHNICITY	
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	19.6%
Not Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	71.2%
I prefer not to say	9.2%
AGE	
Under 25	2.1%
25 to 34	20.2%
35 to 44	27.1%
45 to 54	17.8%
55 to 64	14.2%
65 and older	19.9%
I prefer not to say	1.8%

Survey respondents have varied educational backgrounds. One in four respondents report having a high school diploma or equivalent (25.0%). One in three report having an Associate's or Bachelor's degree (34.1%). Nearly one in 10 respondents (9.1%) identify as LGBTQIA+.

EXHIBIT 19: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENT EDUCATION LEVEL AND LGBTQIA+ STATUS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
EDUCATION (HIGHEST LEVEL ATTAINED)	
Less than high school or equivalent	3.9%
High school diploma or equivalent	25.0%
Some college	21.4%
Technical or trade school	5.4%
Associate's degree	15.1%
Bachelor's degree	19.0%
Graduate or professional degree (Master's, PhD, MD, etc.)	8.1%
I prefer not to say	2.1%
LGBTQIA+	
I identify as LGBTQIA+	9.1%
I do not identify as LGBTQIA+	84.2%
I prefer not to say	6.7%

The median household income reported by respondents falls in the \$25,000 to \$34,999 range, which is notably lower than the median household income estimated for the Collaborative Service Area (\$88,946).²⁶ Among respondents, the median household size is three, and the most common household sizes are two (23.8%) and three (22.3%).

EXHIBIT 20: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Less than \$10,000	11.2%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6.3%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	13.9%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	14.5%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	20.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	11.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	5.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3.0%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1.5%
\$200,000 or more	0.6%
I prefer not to say	10.6%
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	
1	19.3%
2	23.8%
3	22.3%
4	17.2%
5	9.9%
6	3.6%
7	1.8%
8 or more	2.1%

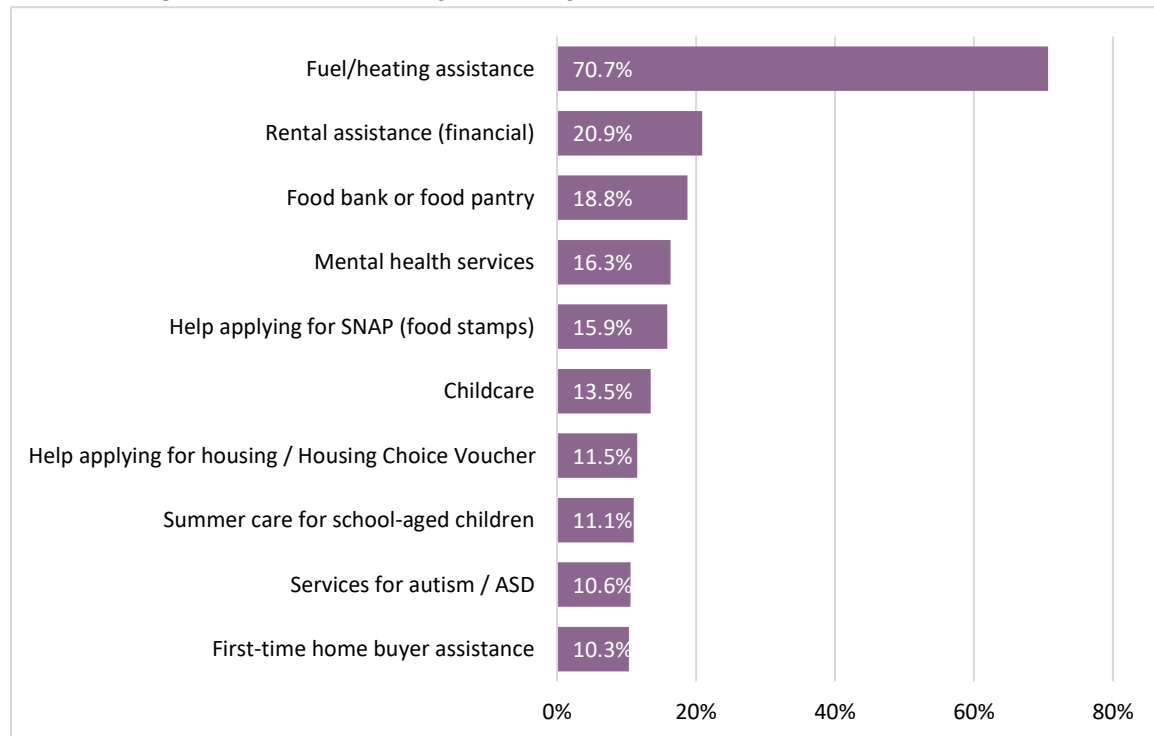
²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, 2017-2021.

Key Findings

Basic Needs and Community Resources

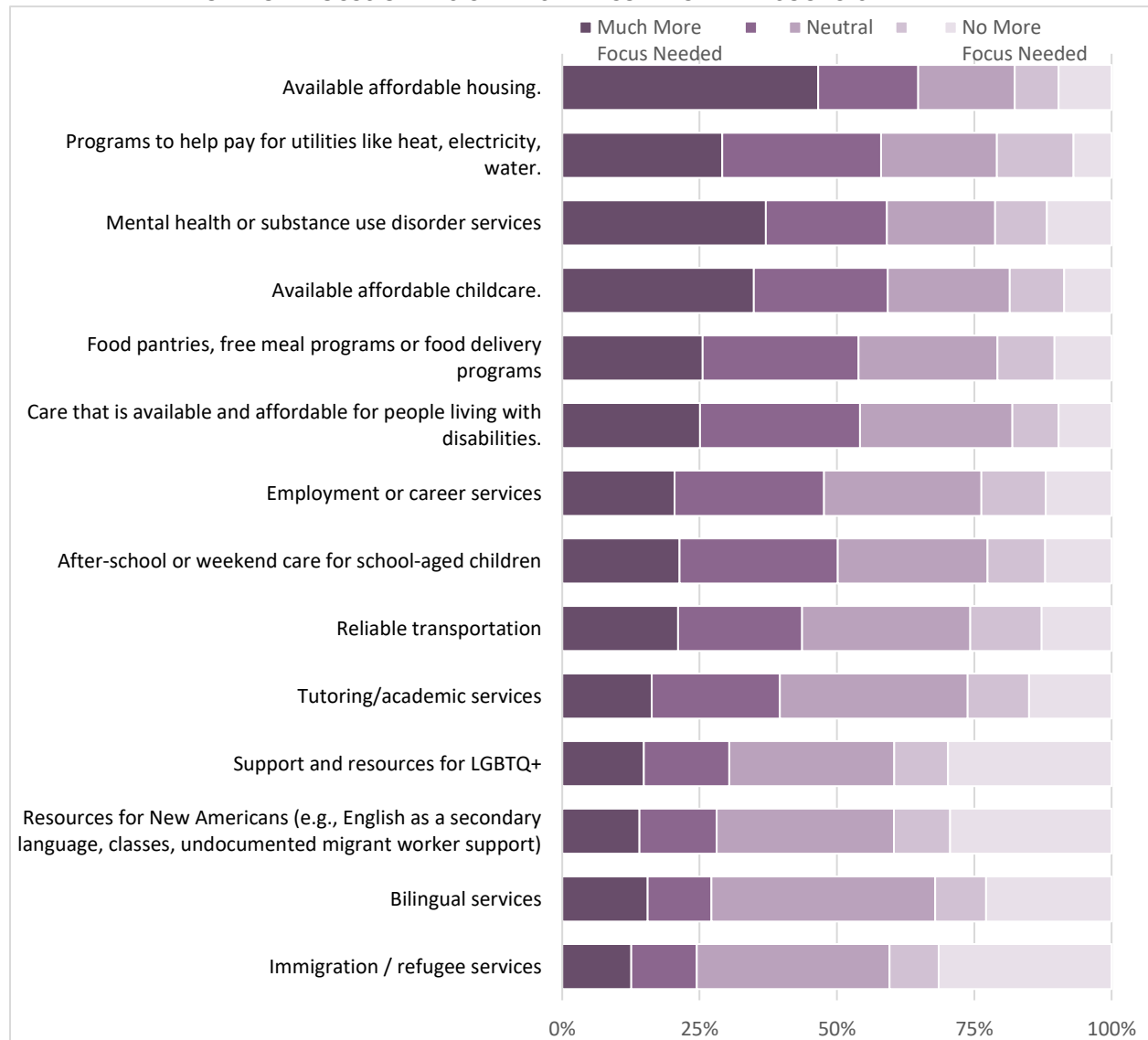
When asked which services respondents have needed help with in the past year, respondents top 10 needs fell within the categories of Food/Shelter, Healthcare and Wellbeing, and Age-Specific Needs. Most commonly, respondents reported needing **fuel/heating assistance** in the past year (70.7%), followed by **financial help with rental assistance** (20.9%).

EXHIBIT 21: TOP TEN IDENTIFIED NEEDS IN THE PAST YEAR



Respondents identified **housing-related needs**, including **available affordable housing** (58.9%) and **programs to help pay for utilities like heat, electricity, and water** (54.1%) as among the top basic needs in need of either much more focus or more focus in Southern Worcester County. The category **mental health or substance use disorder services** (51.9%) was identified as the third highest basic need in need of either much more focus or more focus in the community.

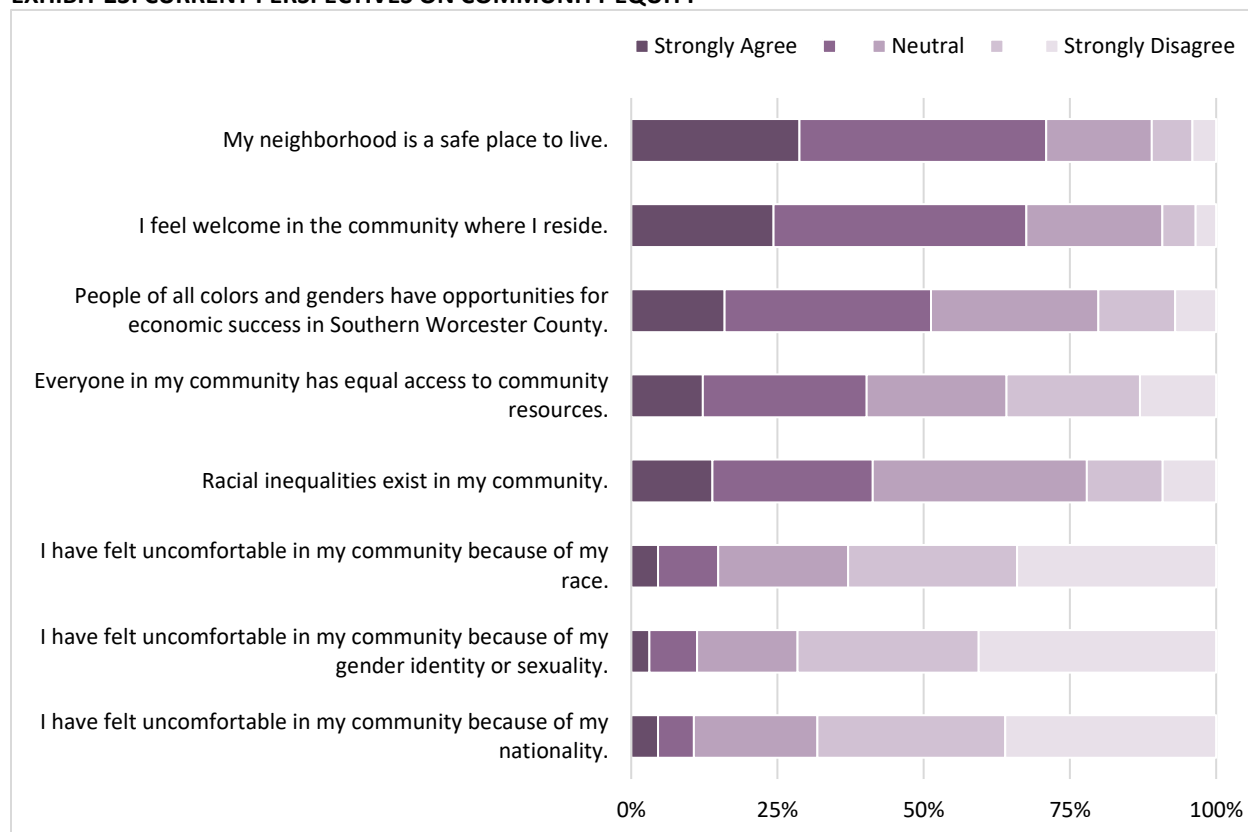
EXHIBIT 22: NEED FOR MORE FOCUS ON BASIC NEEDS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Community Equity

More than two-thirds of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that their **neighborhood is a safe place to live** (70.4%). Similarly, two-thirds of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel **welcome in the community where they reside** (66.5%). However, it is still notable that some respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they **feel uncomfortable in their community because of their race** (13.1%), **gender identity or sexuality** (9.7%), or **nationality** (9.4%).

EXHIBIT 23: CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY EQUITY



Important to keep in mind when reading this section:

15% of survey respondents identified as **people of color**.

9% of survey respondents identified as **LGBTQIA+**.

How can your local community improve its diversity and inclusion of all community members regardless of color, gender, sexual identity, culture, nationality, and religion?



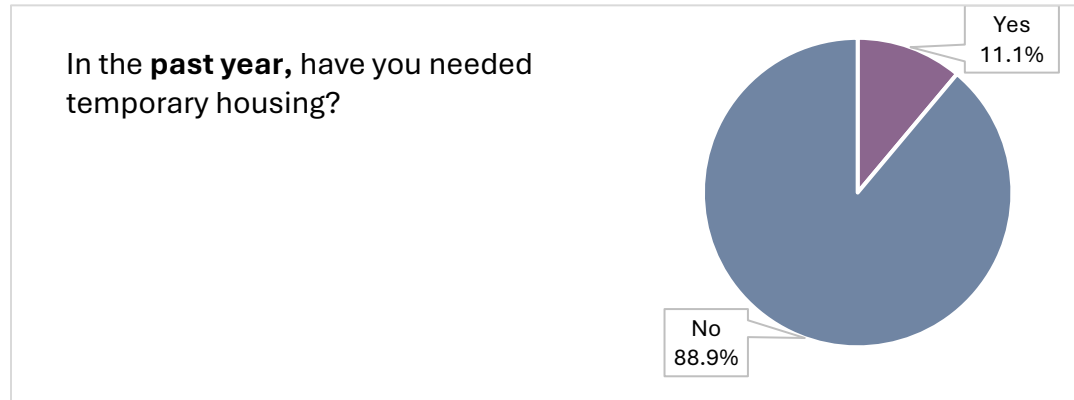
SAMPLE QUOTES:

- *“Educate the community on the importance of diversity and its importance on society.”*
- *“Encourage participation in local government and boards to validate the experience and address the needs of the varied population.”*
- *“Provide more bilingual services. Have more services in other languages.” [Translated]*
- *“Offer more for people who are in the LGBTQ community.”*
- *“Don’t judge people by their culture and nationality.”*
- *“Provide meaningful places for kids to gather and build relationships amongst their neighbors.”*
- *“Have events that cater to a wider variety of people.”*
- *“I believe educational opportunities/more open conversations can help. More community engagement can help.”*
- *“More representation of diversity in positions that are seen...school department, church leadership, town government.”*
- *“Hold inclusive events run by BIPOC, folks with disabilities, LGBTQ+ community, and others.”*
- *“Celebrations of different cultures and customs.”*

Housing and Shelter

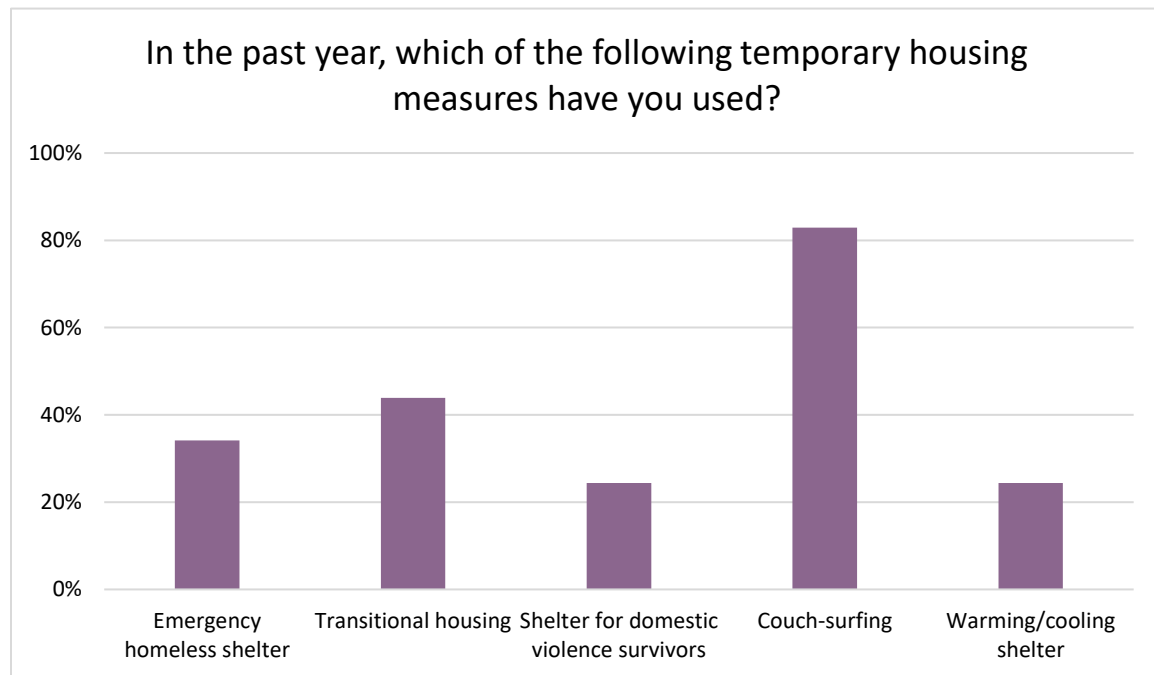
One in ten respondents (11.1%) reported needing **temporary housing** in the past year.

EXHIBIT 24: NEED FOR TEMPORARY HOUSING



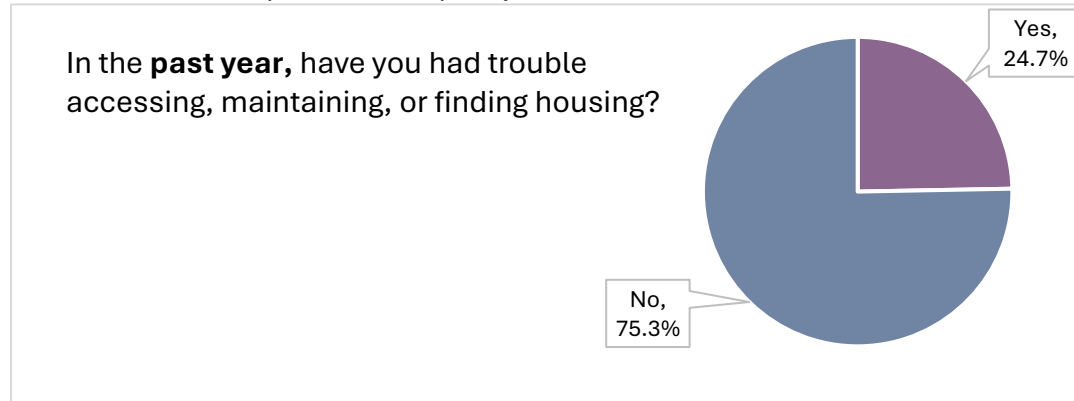
Among respondents who reported needing temporary housing in the past year, the majority relied on **couch-surfing** (e.g., staying with a friend/family member/neighbor; 82.9%).

EXHIBIT 25: TYPES OF TEMPORARY HOUSING USED



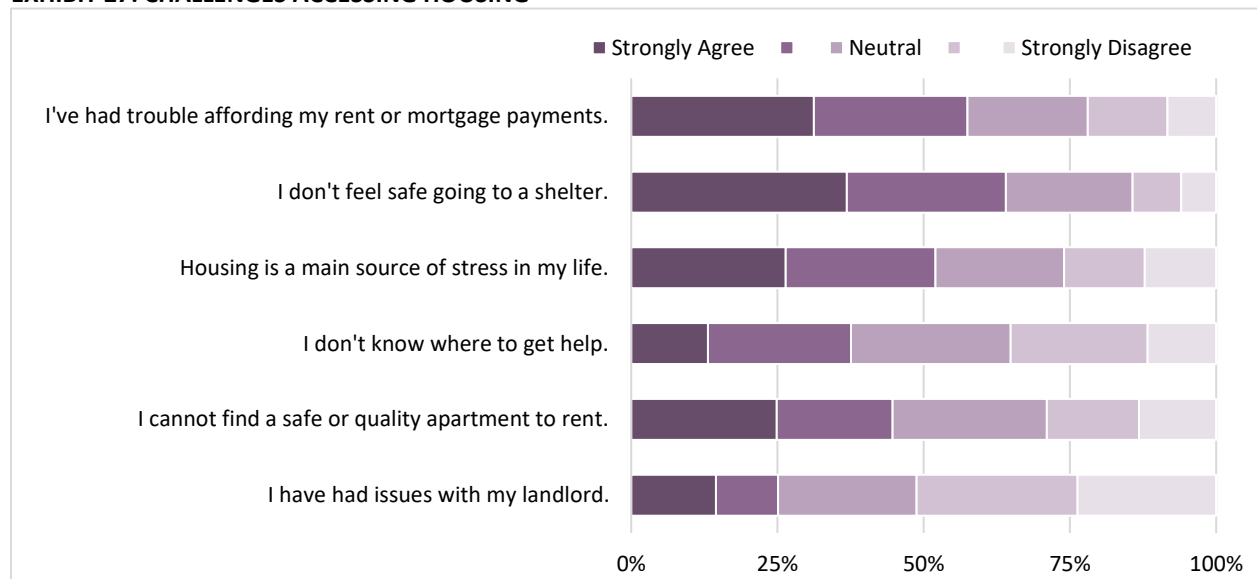
One in four respondents (24.7%) reported having trouble accessing, maintaining, or finding housing in the past year.

EXHIBIT 26: ACCESSING, MAINTAINING, AND/OR FINDING HOUSING



About half of respondents (48.1%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they've had **trouble affording rent or mortgage payments** and more than one-third of respondents (35.7%) either strongly agreed or agreed that **housing is a main source of stress in life**. More than one-third of respondents (38.8%) **don't feel safe going to a shelter**.

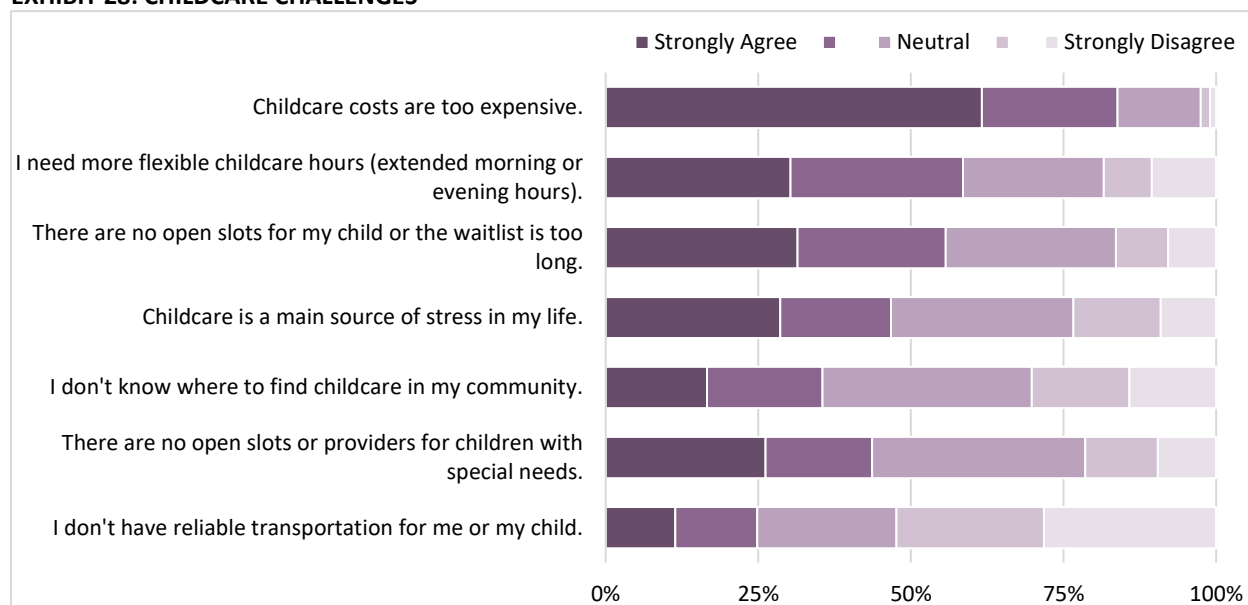
EXHIBIT 27: CHALLENGES ACCESSING HOUSING



Childcare and Education

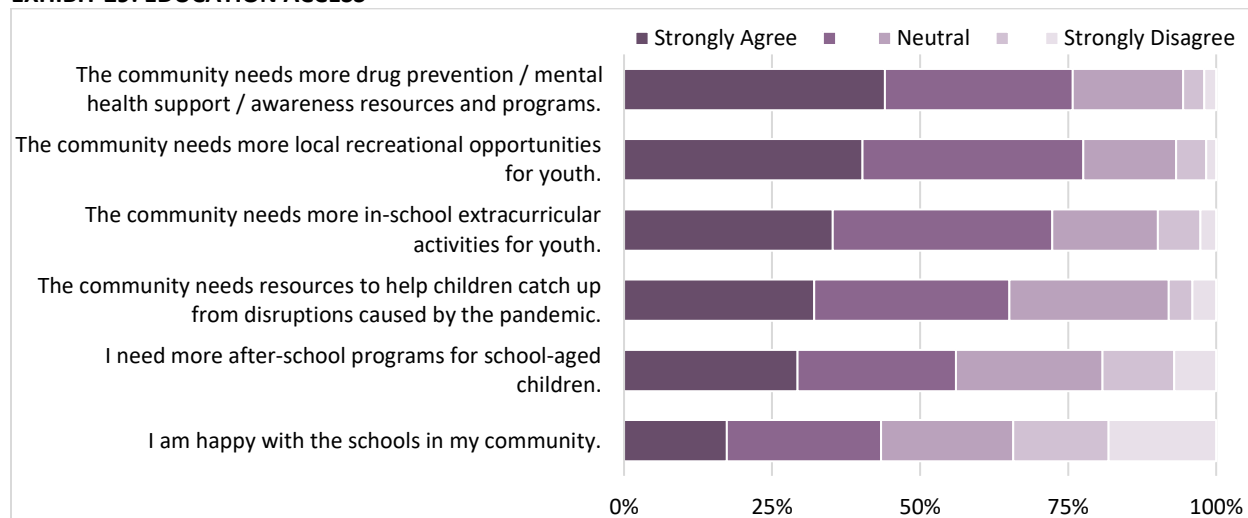
One in three respondents (32.3%) reported they have children that need childcare. The most commonly identified childcare challenge was that **childcare costs are too expensive** (49.7%). The second most commonly identified childcare challenge was the **need for more flexible childcare hours** (26.6%), followed by **lack of open slots or lengthy waitlists** (23.3%).

EXHIBIT 28: CHILDCARE CHALLENGES



One in two respondents (50.7%) reported they have school-aged children. More than half of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the community needs more **drug prevention/mental health support/awareness resources and programs** (58.6%) and/or more **local recreational opportunities for youth** (56.1%).

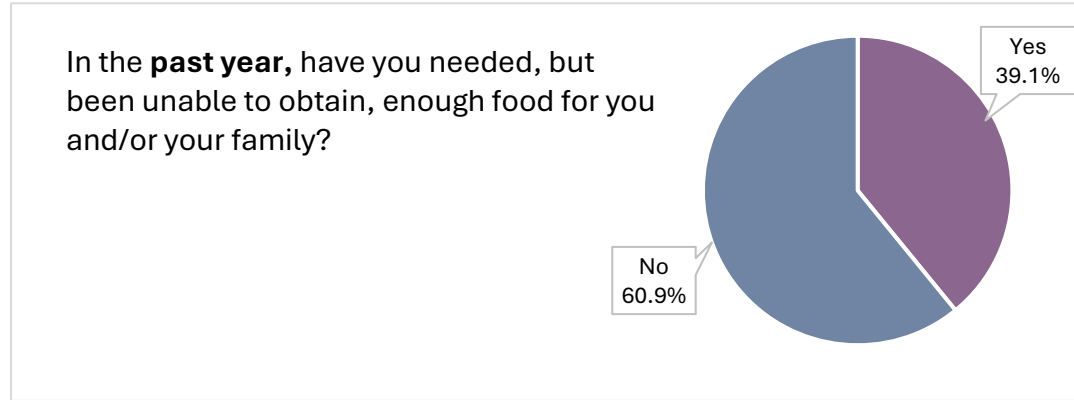
EXHIBIT 29: EDUCATION ACCESS



Food Access

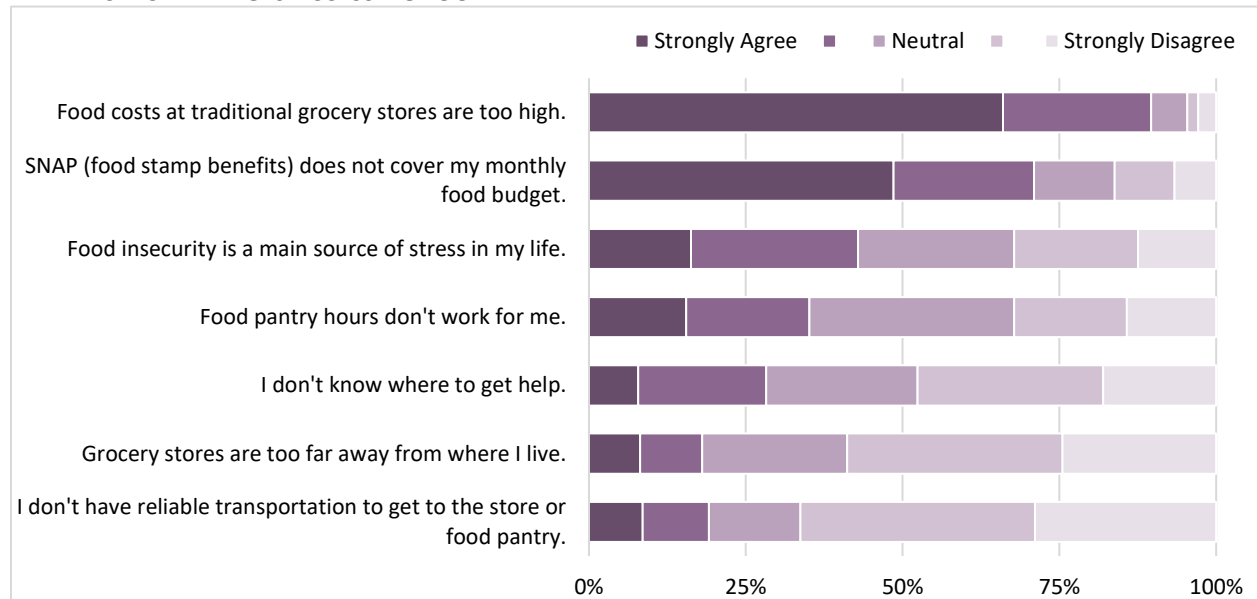
Two in five respondents (39.1%) reported needing, but being unable to obtain, enough food for themselves and/or their family in the past year.

EXHIBIT 30: ACCESS TO FOOD



Most respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that **food costs at traditional grocery stores are too high** (87.6%). Almost half of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that **SNAP does not cover their monthly food budget** (48.4%).

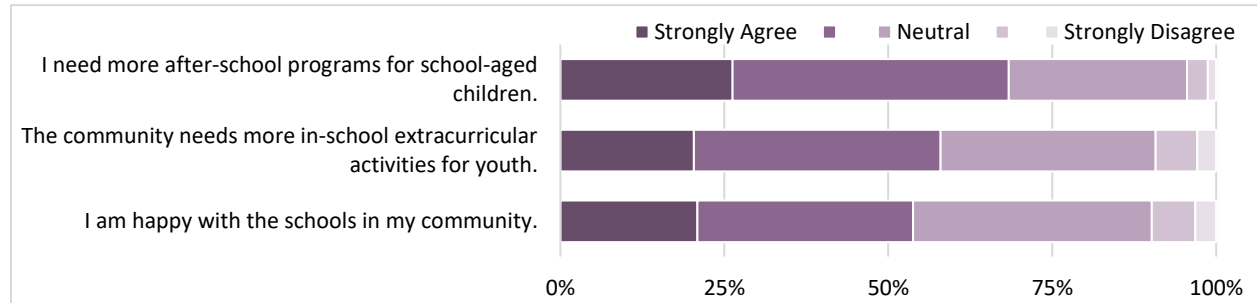
EXHIBIT 31: CHALLENGES ACCESSING FOOD



Community Involvement

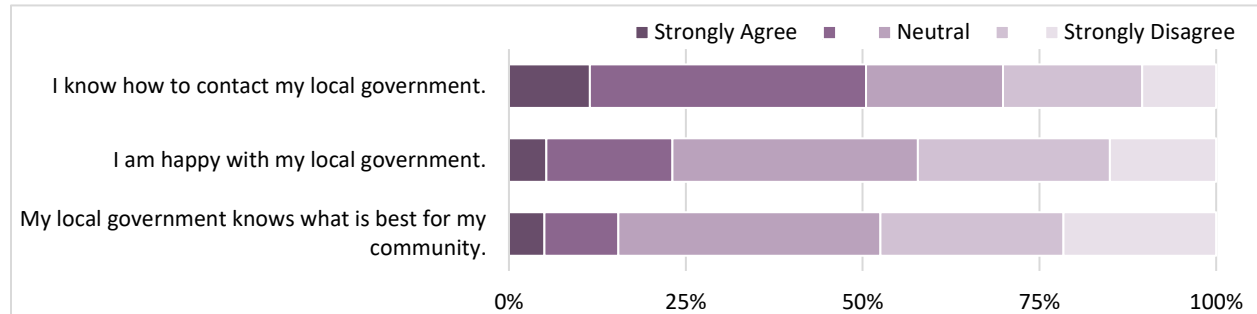
Two in three respondents (64.3%) either strongly agreed or agreed that there is a need for more **after-school programs for school-aged children**. One in two respondents (50.6%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they are **happy with the school in their community** and one in three respondents (30.1%) were neutral to the schools in their community.

EXHIBIT 32: COMMUNITY EVENTS



Two in five respondents (39.3%) either **strongly disagreed or disagreed** that the **local government knows what is best for the community**.

EXHIBIT 33: LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Are there any other needs of Southern Worcester County residents that you think are important for us to know?



SELECTED THEMES & SAMPLE QUOTES:

- **Affordable Housing:** Many respondents express concerns about the cost of housing, emphasizing the need for more affordable options, as well as the need for safe housing.

“Address the safe housing issue. People who are looking for safe decent sanitary affordable housing are forced into high crime unsafe neighborhoods because of their income bracket.”

- **Finances:** There was a notable focus on the financial burdens individuals are experiencing when trying to make ends meet in daily life.

“Everything is expensive, and the salaries are not enough.” [Translated]

- **Health Care Services:** Access to behavioral health care and physical health care was frequently brought up, including specialty behavioral health care (e.g., for Autism Spectrum Disorder).

“We need accessible, high-quality medical services, including preventive health care and long-term care. And mental health support and resources to cope with issues such as stress, anxiety and depression. For a diagnosis for Autism, all doctors are a year waiting list.”

- **Seniors:** Multiple statements emphasize the need for more services and programs for seniors, including financial aid, housing, social and health support, and transportation.

“More help for seniors at home, or help so they can continue living at home instead of assisted living or long term care facilities.”

- **Transportation:** Many respondents call for public transportation, including increased availability and enhancing transportation options.

“There’s a lack of affordable and accessible public transportation.”

What do you consider to be South Worcester County's greatest strength in providing services or resources to its residents?



SELECTED THEMES & SAMPLE QUOTES:

- **Application Processes:** Respondents frequently mentioned the quality and timeliness of the application processes for various services, as well as the ease of receiving help in completing applications.

"The availability of the customer service reps to assist in filling out forms. I can always reach somebody by phone or email."

- **Communication about Resources:** The strength of communication was often shared, especially regarding the use of flyers and emails to share information with the public.

"The fact that the emails with all programs and events are sent out all the time is absolutely wonderful!"

- **Employees and Volunteers:** Many respondents praised the kind treatment and help they've received from employees and volunteers when seeking services.

"They are very helpful and thoughtful. No judgment and treated fairly every time I call with questions."

- **Utilities Assistance:** Fuel assistance and energy assistance were frequently highlighted as impactful resources to respondents' daily lives and overall well-being.

"They've helped us so much, heating our home and helping with summer time bills (cooling, electricity, water bill, etc.)."

- **Vulnerable Populations:** The availability of services for immigrants, refugees, and single parents was frequently cited as strengths contributing to the quality of life in the community.

*"Being able to be all inclusive and make service information available multilingually."
[Translated]*

What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's largest gap in services or resources provided to its residents?



SELECTED THEMES:

- **Access to Services:**
 - Need for public transportation or programs that provide transportation to families and seniors.
 - Calls for interconnectedness across communities to improve access to services in different towns.
- **Community Services:**
 - Requests for case management and follow-up, especially for residents whom English is their second language.
 - Mentions of a need for more funding for existing services and reducing current gaps in services (such as lack of shelters, veteran services, and employment assistance).
- **Financial Assistance:**
 - Concerns about the growing income gap and service eligibility requirements.
 - Need for services for individuals who are over program income guidelines yet struggling to make ends meet.
- **Housing Affordability:**
 - Numerous mentions of the need for affordable housing options.
 - Complaints about rising housing costs, including rent and property taxes.
- **Mental Health Services:**
 - Concerns about the lack of mental health facilities and resources.
 - Need for transportation to access mental health services.

Community Partner Survey

The purpose of the community partner survey was to enable a greater share of community partners working in and around the Southern Worcester County service area to share their perspectives on the greatest needs affecting their community and their organization from an operational perspective.

Methodology

The community partner survey was made available online from May 7 through July 15, 2024. The questionnaire included closed-ended, need-specific questions, open-ended questions for community partner participants. Invitations to participate were distributed by Steering Committee members, Equity Champions, and Crescendo.

In total, there were 26 valid survey responses from 17 different community organizations including social service providers, workforce development agency, libraries, and educational institutions. See Appendix D for the survey instrument.

Limitations

Despite the survey's design to capture a broad range of insights, the response rate was limited. Consequently, the sample size is not sufficiently large to be representative of all community partner programs and organizations in Southern Worcester County. This limitation means the results should be interpreted with caution and should not be generalized to the entire population of community partners in the area.

Use of Survey Results

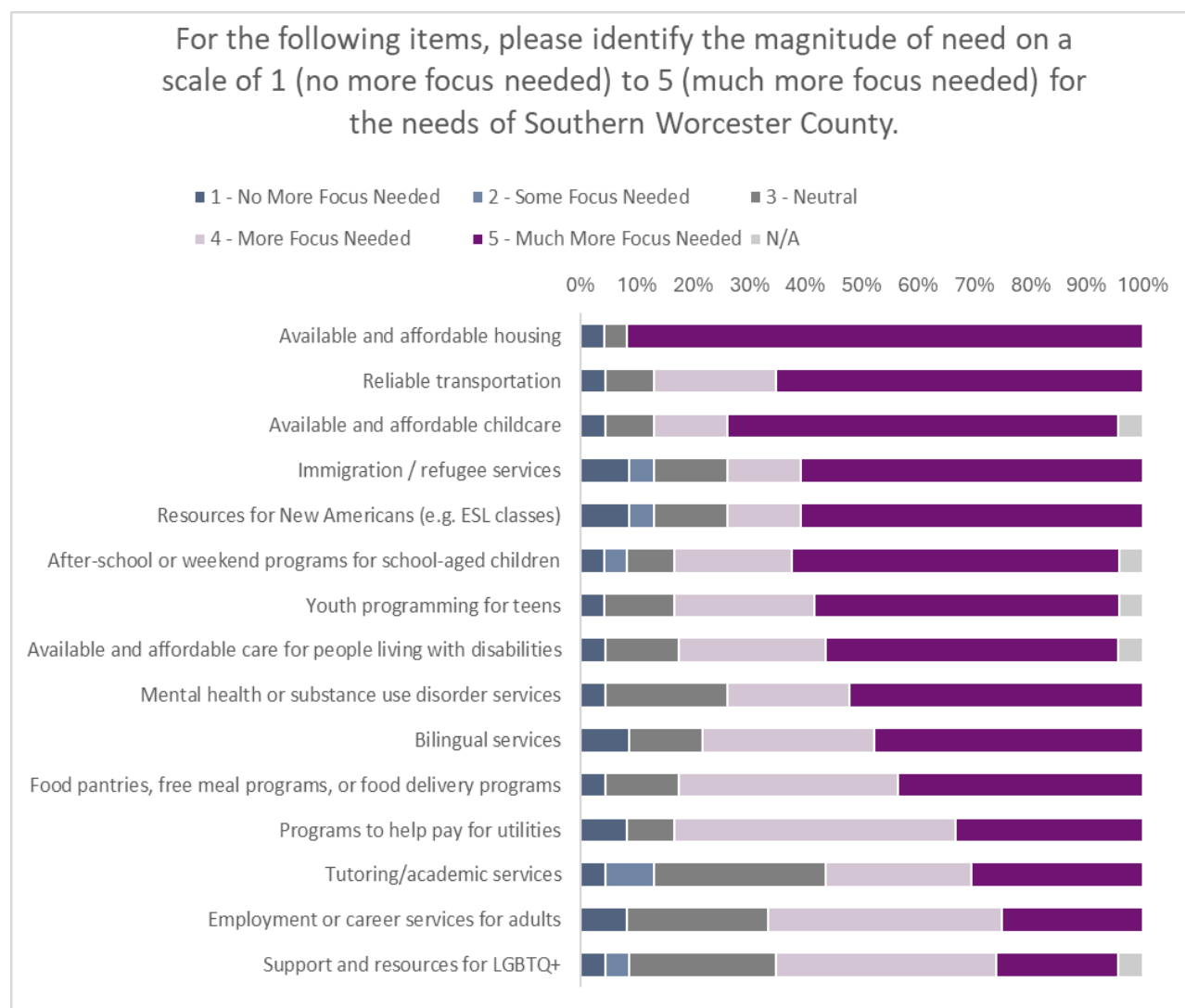
Given the limited response rate, only select portions of the survey results are included in this Community Needs Assessment report. These include qualitative responses to open-ended questions where community partners shared their detailed thoughts. The inclusion of these responses aims to provide valuable insights while acknowledging the survey's limitations. It is crucial to understand that these findings reflect the perspectives of a subset of community partners and do not represent the full spectrum of organizations in Southern Worcester County.

Key Findings

Community partner respondents identified **available affordable housing** (91.7%) as among the top basic needs in need of either much more focus or more focus in Southern Worcester County. The categories **reliable transportation** (86.9%) and **available and affordable childcare** (82.6%) were identified as the second and third highest basic need in need of either much more focus or more focus in the community.

Community partners identified **immigration / refugee services** and **resources for New Americans** (73.9%) in need of either much more focus or more focus in Southern Worcester County. This is significantly higher than the general community.

EXHIBIT 34: NEED FOR MORE FOCUS ON BASIC NEEDS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES



What do you consider to be South Worcester County's greatest strength in providing services or resources to its residents?



SELECTED THEMES & SAMPLE QUOTES:

- **Collaboration:** Respondents mentioned the strength in providing services and resources to its residents lies in its robust and integrated community network that emphasizes collaboration among various sectors.

"The region benefits from a strong coalition of local government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and healthcare providers, all working together to address the diverse needs of the population. This collaborative approach ensures that residents have access to a wide range of services, including comprehensive healthcare, quality education, and social support systems. Additionally, the county's commitment to community engagement empowers residents to have a voice in the development and implementation of programs and services. The presence of numerous community centers and outreach programs further strengthens social cohesion and ensures that even the most vulnerable populations are reached. With a focus on inclusivity and adaptability, Southern Worcester County is able to effectively respond to emerging challenges and provide tailored support that enhances the overall well-being and quality of life for its residents."

"We have strong collaboration and supports for each other."

- **Commitment to Service:** Respondents praised the passion of community organizations and their willingness to provide aid in any form within their capacity.

"The passion of local residents and providers. When a need arises, many local entities -- churches, nonprofits, etc. -- attempt to meet the need on a small, individual scale."

"The faith community really steps in and to try to help fill gaps. Also that people do see the needs and are trying to figure out how to meet them."

- **Diverse Service Offerings:** Respondents noted the variety and diverse types of services available in the Southern Worcester County area.

"There is a high concentration of services/supports in the Southbridge area and this community has access to many of the services needed."

"The service providers are well trained and knowledgeable. There are many different types of services are available."

What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's largest gap in services or resources provided to its residents?



SELECTED THEMES & SAMPLE QUOTES:

- **Affordable Housing and Cost of Living:** Respondents noted high costs of living place significant financial strain on families, making it difficult for many to achieve stability. The limited availability of affordable housing options exacerbates this issue.

"Southern Worcester County's largest gap in services and resources provided to its residents is the overwhelming cost of living, particularly in the realms of housing and childcare. The skyrocketing expenses in these areas place a significant burden on families, making it difficult for many to achieve financial stability and maintain a decent quality of life. The high cost of housing, coupled with limited affordable options, forces many to allocate a substantial portion of their income to rent or mortgage payments, leaving little for other necessities."

- **Transportation and Access to Services:** Respondents pointed out inadequate public transportation as a major barrier, preventing residents from accessing essential resources and services. Long travel times to reach support centers and the lack of accessible service locations are recurring concerns.

"Families are very nervous to travel outside of the towns they live in with hinders them to receive services."

"Transportation and access to services that exist as well as having locations that are more accessible to folks without transportation/living outside of Southbridge"

- **Gaps in Mental Health Services and Childcare Support:** Respondents highlighted a noticeable lack of mental health support, especially for individuals with intellectual disabilities and ASD. Additionally, the high cost of childcare makes it prohibitive for working parents to afford quality care for their children, including enriching, extracurricular activities.

"There's a lack of mental health support for individuals with intellectual disabilities and ASD"




"Keeping staff, Mental Health Workers Pay, Providers/Doctors leaving, insurance changing."




VIII. NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

The needs outlined below are the culmination of all research activities conducted during the Community Needs Assessment for Southern Worcester County. These needs were derived from an in-depth synthesis of multiple data sources, including secondary demographic and health data, qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews and focus groups, survey responses from residents and community partners, an access audit evaluating ease of service use, and a comprehensive resource mapping process.

The research and analysis identified a wide array of needs, but the most pressing issues were categorized into six primary groups: Root Causes, Housing, Health and Behavioral Health, Basic Needs, Childcare and Youth, and Community Equity. These categories emerged as the most critical areas where immediate action is necessary to address systemic barriers and improve the overall well-being of residents. While there are certainly additional needs in the community, the following are the top priorities that rose to the surface through this comprehensive process.

Each need listed in the table below represents actionable opportunities for intervention, as further detailed in the "Potential Strategies and Recommendations" section of this report. These findings not only reflect the current state of the community but also provide a roadmap for targeted strategies to address the most significant gaps and challenges identified during the assessment.

Category	Identified Need
Root Causes (Systemic Issues) 	Community awareness of service and resource availability and accessibility.
	Programs to increase individual and familial financial stability to break the cycle of generational poverty.
Housing 	Housing financial assistance, including assistance that helps community members struggling to pay their rent or mortgage and programs to help pay for utilities.
	Equitable, affordable housing opportunities for working class and middle-class community members and increased availability of low-income housing for community members experiencing housing instability.
Health and Behavioral Health 	Available and affordable care for people living with disabilities and seniors.
	Additional in-person behavioral health care providers, including those that accept a wide range of insurances (Medicaid, MassHealth, private, etc.).
	Substance use prevention and mental health awareness.

Category	Identified Need
Basic Needs 	Food pantries, free or reduced cost meal programs, or food delivery programs.
	Employment and career services or vocational training that match community residents with existing opportunities or needs within Southern Worcester County.
	Expanded transportation options with extended hours and pick-up locations within Southern Worcester County for working adults and families.
Childcare and Youth 	Affordable after school, weekend, and summer childcare and local recreational opportunities for youth, including in-school extracurricular activities.
	Available and affordable quality childcare with extended morning and evening hours.
Community Equity 	Multilingual services and programs.
	Community education on the importance of diversity and its positive impacts on society.

Potential Strategies and Recommendations

Root Causes (Systemic Issues)

- Enhance collaboration between organizations and services by breaking down silos that inhibit cooperation, shared services, and referrals.
- Organize regular community resource fairs where residents can learn about and connect with local services and organizations.
- Redesign programs to empower residents to rise out of poverty. This includes addressing the growing income gap and revising service eligibility requirements to support individuals who exceed program income guidelines but still struggle to make ends meet.
- Design or develop a multilingual and multifaceted community health worker and social service mobile unit to serve as a single point of entry where community residents can receive assistance understanding and enrolling in services and benefits.

Health and Behavioral Health

- Develop programs that offer personal care assistants, home modifications, and assistive technologies to support independent living.
- Increase the number of mental health professionals and services available within schools.
- Implement evidence-based substance use prevention programs in schools.
- Implement community wellness programs that focus on mental health literacy, healthy aging, and regular health screenings.

Housing

- Develop and expand programs that provide financial assistance for rent, mortgage, and utilities to prevent housing instability.
- Expand the availability of low-income housing through public-private partnerships and housing subsidies.
- Establish additional financial programs that can help first time home buyers.

Basic Needs

- Support the development of community gardens and farmers' markets that accept food assistance benefits in every town.
- Advocate for local policies that support the creation of livable wage jobs, ensuring residents can afford basic needs.
- Explore federal or state grants for rural transit assistance programs and initiatives that can reach Southern Worcester County residents outside of WRTA fixed transit routes.
- Ensure residents are aware of existing transportation options and how to access them.

Childcare and Youth

- Advocate for policies that increase funding for childcare subsidies, making childcare more affordable for working families.
- Support the development of childcare programs with flexible hours to accommodate the schedules of working parents.
- Establish and expand centers that offer free or low-cost recreational activities for all ages and physical ability levels, promoting physical and mental well-being.

Community Equity

- Implement community education campaigns designed to decrease stigma and increase empathy for individuals from all backgrounds.
- Encourage diverse community participation in local government and boards to validate experience and better address the needs of the varied populations.
- Hold inclusive events run by BiPOC, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ community, and provide meaningful, safe places for neighbors to gather, build relationships, and learn about cultures that are different than their own.



IX. CONCLUSION

This Southern Worcester County Community Needs Assessment has highlighted significant social service challenges in this distinctive region of Massachusetts. Worcester County is home to a diverse array of community-based organizations, such as the Worcester Community Action Council, Open Sky, Parent Professional Advocacy League, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Seven Hills Foundation, Kiva Centers, and numerous others. These groups are dedicated to enhancing the daily lives of South County residents, fostering a true sense of community empowerment.

Despite the wealth of resources and community strengths, there are areas within the county where critical needs remain unmet. Residents, particularly those with lower socioeconomic status, often struggle to meet basic necessities due to various systemic barriers.

Services available in the broader Worcester County frequently do not extend beyond their immediate geographic areas, leaving the isolated communities of South County feeling disconnected from essential assistance. The increased demand for services across a wide spectrum necessitates a collaborative approach among the various agencies and organizations in South County. By working together, they can effectively address the unique needs of this rural community facing urban challenges.



X. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Supplementary Secondary Research

Demographics

EXHIBIT 35: MEDIAN AGE PERCENT CHANGE, 2010 TO 2022

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Median Age (2010)	37.2	39.1	39.2	ND
Median Age (2022)	38.5	39.8	40.2	43.5
Percent Change (2010-2022)	+3.5%	+1.8%	+2.6%	ND

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010 One-year Estimates | U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 36: PROJECTED PERCENT CHANGE IN POPULATION, 2010 TO 2031

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Total Population (2010)	308,745,538	6,547,629	798,551	124,872
Total Population (2022)	331,097,593	6,984,205	858,898	128,702
Percent Change (2010-2022)	+7.2%	+6.7%	+7.6%	+3.1%
Total Population (2031)	363,255,837	7,376,427	917,599	134,255
Percent Change (2022-2031)	+9.7%	+5.6%	+6.8%	+4.3%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010 One-year Estimates | U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 37: POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Under 18	22.1%	19.6%	20.8%	20.7%
18 to 64	61.4%	63.3%	63.0%	61.4%
65 and Over	16.5%	17.1%	16.2%	17.9%
Under 5	5.7%	5.0%	5.2%	4.6%
5 to 9	6.0%	5.2%	5.5%	6.0%
10 to 14	6.5%	5.7%	6.3%	6.1%
15 to 19	6.6%	6.6%	6.8%	6.6%
20 to 24	6.7%	7.0%	6.7%	5.8%
25 to 34	13.7%	14.1%	12.9%	11.5%
35 to 44	12.9%	12.6%	12.5%	12.0%
45 to 54	12.4%	12.8%	13.5%	14.2%

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
55 to 59	6.5%	7.1%	7.4%	8.0%
60 to 64	6.4%	6.7%	7.0%	7.4%
65 to 74	9.7%	10.0%	9.7%	10.4%
75 to 84	4.8%	4.8%	4.5%	5.1%
Over 85	2.0%	2.3%	2.0%	2.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 38: POPULATION BY RACE (ALONE)²⁷

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
White	65.9%	72.7%	78.2%	86.5%
Two or More Races	8.8%	8.0%	7.6%	5.8%
Some Other	6.0%	5.0%	3.7%	3.2%
Black or African American	12.5%	7.1%	5.2%	2.6%
Asian	5.8%	7.0%	5.1%	1.7%
Native American ²⁸ and Alaska Native	0.8%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 39: POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Hispanic	18.7%	12.6%	12.5%	10.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 40: POPULATION BY SEX

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Females	50.4%	51.0%	50.3%	50.9%
Males	49.6%	49.0%	49.7%	49.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

²⁷ Race (Alone) population is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as people who responded to the question on race by indicating only one race, or the group who reported only one race. Source: <https://www.census.gov/glossary/?term=Race%20alone>

²⁸ The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

EXHIBIT 41: LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME (PEOPLE OVER AGE 5)

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
English Only	78.3%	75.5%	78.8%	87.0%
Spanish	13.3%	9.5%	9.1%	6.8%
Asian-Pacific Islander	3.5%	4.4%	3.1%	0.8%
Other Indo-European	3.7%	9.1%	6.7%	4.4%
Other	1.2%	1.5%	2.3%	1.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 42: FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION²⁹

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Naturalized US Citizen	7.1%	9.6%	7.2%	3.8%
Not US Citizen	6.5%	8.0%	6.2%	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

People Living With a Disability**EXHIBIT 43: POPULATION LIVING WITH DISABILITY BY AGE**

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Total Population Living with a Disability	41,941,456	820,525	106,970	19,223
Percent of Total Population Living with a Disability	12.9%	11.9%	12.6%	15.1%
Age Under 5	0.7%	0.8%	1.0%	1.5%
Age 5 to 17	5.9%	6.3%	5.7%	5.7%
Age 18 to 34	7.2%	6.8%	8.3%	10.6%
Age 35 to 64	12.4%	10.5%	11.8%	13.3%
Age 65 to 74	24.1%	20.1%	21.0%	25.4%
Age 75 and Over	46.9%	45.8%	47.6%	52.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

²⁹ Foreign-born population is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as people who are not U.S. citizens at birth. This includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as foreign students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees and asylees), and persons illegally present in the United States. Percentages displayed are out of the full 100% population for each geography (e.g., 7.1% of the U.S. population is naturalized U.S. citizens).

EXHIBIT 44: POPULATION LIVING WITH DISABILITY BY TYPE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Vision Difficulty	2.4%	1.9%	1.8%	2.2%
Hearing Difficulty	3.6%	3.1%	3.4%	4.4%
Cognitive Difficulty	5.0%	5.0%	5.3%	6.3%
Ambulatory Difficulty	6.3%	5.4%	5.7%	6.8%
Independent Living Difficulty	4.5%	4.4%	4.7%	6.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 45: POPULATION LIVING WITH DISABILITY BY RACE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	11.9%	12.1%	13.6%	26.8%
Some Other Race	9.7%	12.3%	13.4%	18.5%
Two or More Races	10.7%	10.9%	13.1%	16.5%
White	13.6%	12.4%	13.1%	15.0%
Native American ³⁰ and Alaska Native	16.0%	18.8%	17.5%	14.7%
Asian	7.6%	6.2%	6.1%	14.4%
Black or African American	14.2%	12.9%	9.4%	10.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 46: POPULATION LIVING WITH DISABILITY BY ETHNICITY

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Hispanic or Latino	9.6%	12.6%	13.7%	16.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

³⁰ The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

Social Determinants of Health: Economic Stability

EXHIBIT 47: POVERTY PERCENT CHANGE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Total Households Below Poverty Level per household (2010)	13.1%	11.2%	10.3%	9.4%
Total Households Below Poverty Level per household (2022)	12.4%	10.8%	10.6%	9.6%
Percent Change (2010-2022)	-5.5%	-3.3%	+3.2%	+1.9%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010 One-year Estimates | U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 48: PERCENT OF POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
People Below Poverty Level	12.5%	9.9%	10.0%	8.6%
By Race				
Native American ³¹ and Alaska Native	22.6%	20.5%	32.1%	19.4%
Asian	10.1%	10.9%	10.6%	5.9%
Black or African American	21.5%	16.9%	15.6%	15.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	17.0%	20.0%	22.4%	0.0%
Some Other Race	18.6%	20.1%	19.7%	14.1%
Two or More Races	14.8%	16.1%	16.0%	17.4%
White	10.1%	7.7%	8.5%	7.6%
By Ethnicity				
Hispanic or Latino	17.2%	21.3%	20.3%	20.7%
By Age				
Age Under 5	18.1%	12.6%	12.7%	8.9%
Age Under 18	16.7%	11.8%	11.8%	10.2%
Age 18 to 64	11.7%	9.4%	9.6%	7.9%
Age 65 and Over	10.0%	9.9%	9.2%	8.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

³¹ The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

EXHIBIT 49: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME PERCENT CHANGE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Median Household Income (2010)	\$52,762	\$65,981	\$69,506	\$65,716
Median Household Income (2022)	\$75,149	\$96,505	\$88,524	\$88,946
Percent Change (2010-2022)	+42.4%	+46.3%	+27.4%	+35.3%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2010 One-year Estimates | U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 50: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY GEOGRAPHY

Geography	Median Household Income, 2022
Charlton	\$113,896
Sturbridge	\$113,427
Millbury	\$109,119
<i>Massachusetts</i>	<i>\$96,505</i>
Oxford	\$96,481
West Brookfield	\$89,112
<i>Collaborative Service Area</i>	<i>\$88,946</i>
<i>Worcester County</i>	<i>\$88,524</i>
Dudley	\$87,306
North Brookfield	\$80,380
East Brookfield	\$77,122
Spencer	\$76,225
<i>United States</i>	<i>\$75,149</i>
Brookfield	\$71,122
Webster	\$70,644
Warren	\$64,085
Southbridge	\$55,182

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 51: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY RACE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Two or More Race	\$70,596	\$73,075	\$66,156	\$106,816
Black or African American	\$50,901	\$67,044	\$70,034	\$103,168
Asian	\$107,637	\$118,767	\$119,329	\$98,701
White	\$80,042	\$102,701	\$91,164	\$86,778
Other Race	\$61,851	\$58,832	\$61,535	\$76,685
Native American ³² and Alaska Native	\$55,925	\$60,146	\$62,631	ND
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	\$76,568	\$83,090	\$52,308	ND

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 52: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY ETHNICITY

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Hispanic or Latino	\$64,936	\$59,292	\$57,914	\$90,205

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 53: HOUSEHOLDS WITH PUBLIC ASSISTANCE INCOME³³

United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
2.7%	3.3%	3.5%	3.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

³² The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

³³ Public assistance income is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as income that "provides cash payments to poor families and includes General Assistance and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1997. Public assistance income does not include Supplemental Security Income (SSI), noncash benefits such as Food Stamps/ SNAP, or separate payments received for hospital or other medical care. To qualify for public assistance benefits, the income and assets of an individual or family must fall below specified thresholds. However, unlike AFDC benefits, TANF benefits are time-limited, require most adult recipients to work, and give states increased flexibility in program design."

EXHIBIT 54: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Office and Administrative Support	10.3%	9.1%	9.7%	9.4%
Management	10.4%	12%	11.3%	9.1%
Sales	9.1%	8.2%	8.3%	8.7%
Education, Training and Library	5.9%	7.1%	6.8%	5.9%
Construction and Extraction	4.7%	4.1%	4.3%	5.7%
Production	5.2%	3.6%	4.7%	5.4%
Business and Finance	5.5%	6.7%	5.5%	5.2%
Healthcare Support	3.1%	3.2%	3.7%	4.8%
Health Diagnosis and Treating Practitioners	4.1%	4.7%	4.5%	4.2%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	2.9%	2.1%	2.7%	4.2%
Food Preparation and Serving	5.0%	4.4%	4.2%	4.1%
Transportation	3.6%	2.8%	3.2%	4.0%
Material Moving	3.6%	2.3%	2.9%	2.9%
Personal Care and Service	2.4%	2.6%	2.8%	2.9%
Health Technologist and Technicians	1.9%	1.8%	2.1%	2.7%
Building, Grounds Cleaning, and Maintenance	3.3%	2.9%	2.7%	2.6%
Computer and Mathematical	3.3%	4.5%	3.8%	2.4%
Architecture and Engineering	2.0%	2.5%	2.7%	2.3%
Community and Social Service	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%	1.6%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media	2.0%	2.2%	1.6%	1.5%
Fire Fighting and Prevention	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.1%
Law Enforcement	0.9%	0.8%	1.0%	1.1%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1.0%	2.2%	1.7%	0.9%
Legal	1.1%	1.4%	0.8%	0.7%
Farming, Fishing and Forestry	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 55: MONTHLY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED), JANUARY 2023-DECEMBER 2023

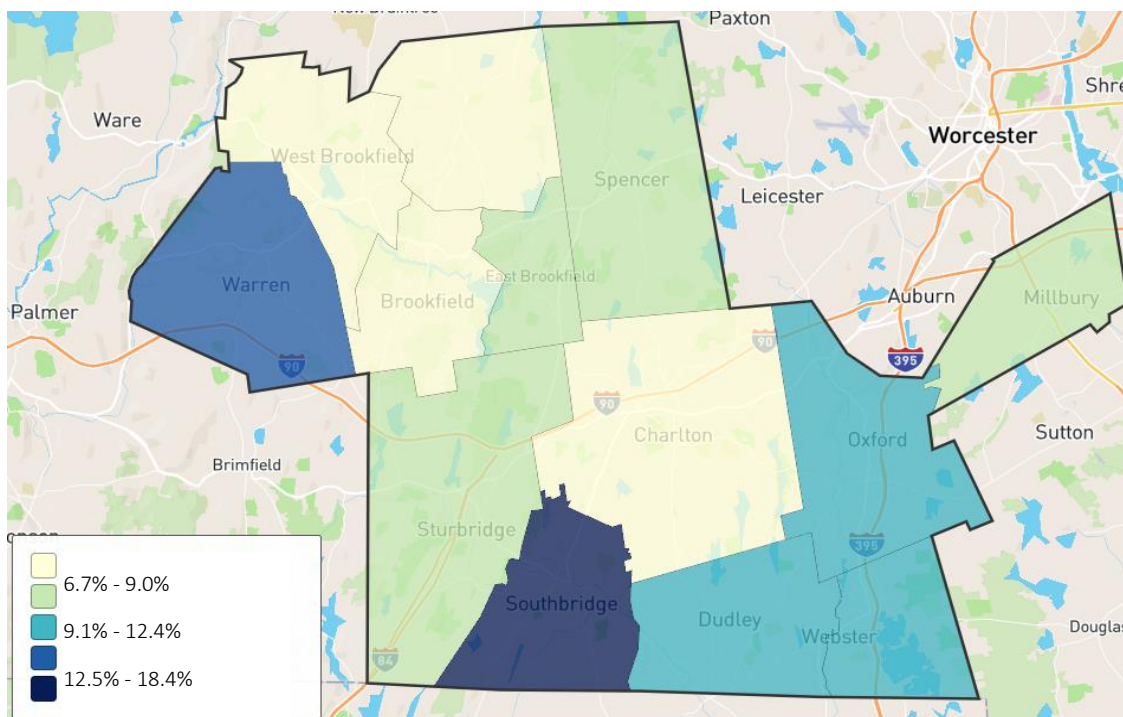
2023	Jan	Fab	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Worcester County	4.3%	4.5%	4.1%	2.5%	2.3%	2.9%	3.0%	3.0%	2.6%	2.7%	2.9%	3.6%
Massachusetts	4.1%	4.2%	3.9%	2.4%	2.3%	2.8%	2.9%	2.9%	2.5%	2.6%	2.8%	3.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics Information and Analysis

EXHIBIT 56: HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP

United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
11.5%	12.9%	14.1%	14.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 57: MAP OF HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SNAP³⁴

³⁴ In instances in which there is more than one area shaded the same color in the map of households receiving SNAP, the range of values is presented. In instances in which there is only one area shaded a certain color, the specific value is presented.

Social Determinants of Health: Health Care Access and Status

Access

EXHIBIT 58: HEALTH CARE PROVIDER RATIO (PEOPLE PER PROVIDER), 2023

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Primary Care Physician	959:1	627:1	711:1
Primary Care Nurse Practitioner	1,251:1	982:1	1,539:1
Dentist	1,657:1	1,208:1	1,843:1
Mental Health Provider	612:1	307:1	421:1
Pediatrician	860:1	415:1	601:1
OB/GYN	3,762:1	3,214:1	4,598:1
Midwife and Doula	12,073:1	11,804:1	17,289:1

Source: National Plan & Provider Enumeration System NPI, 2022. <https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Administrative-Simplification/NationalProviderStand/DataDissemination>

EXHIBIT 59: UNINSURED POPULATION

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Uninsured Population	28,315,092	185,907	21,206	2,731
Health Insurance Coverage Under Age 6 - Uninsured	4.4%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%
Health Insurance Coverage Age 6 to 18 - Uninsured	5.7%	1.6%	1.3%	0.5%
Health Insurance Coverage Age 19 to 64 - Uninsured	12.2%	3.7%	3.5%	3.2%
Health Insurance Coverage Over Age 65 - Uninsured	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
People with Private Health Insurance ³⁵	74.0%	76.1%	75.1%	74.6%
People with Public Health Insurance	39.3%	37.8%	38.4%	40.4%
Children Aged 18 and Under with a Disability - without Health Insurance	3.9%	0.9%	1.1%	2.5%
Adults Aged 19 to 64 with a Disability - without Health Insurance	10.1%	3.0%	2.7%	3.1%
People in Labor Force without Health Insurance	11.5%	3.5%	3.3%	3.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

³⁵ Percents for people with public and private insurance can add up to more than 100% because of multiple health plans.

Health Status

EXHIBIT 60: BIRTH RATE (RATE PER 1,000 PEOPLE), 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Birth Rate	11.0	9.9	10.1

Source: CDC WONDER Natality Birth Rate, 2021 <https://wonder.cdc.gov/>

EXHIBIT 61: DEATH RATE (RATE PER 100,000 PEOPLE), 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Death Rate	10.4	9.0	9.0

Source: CDC WONDER Causes of Death, 2021. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/>

EXHIBIT 62: LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH (RATE PER 100,000 PEOPLE), 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Cancer	146.6	137.4	177.0
Heart Disease	173.8	134.0	166.2
Accidents / Unintentional Injuries	64.7	60.8	69.6
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	34.7	26.9	43.2
Alzheimer's Disease	31.0	17.7	22.7
Diabetes	25.4	17.3	20.9
Chronic Liver Disease / Cirrhosis	14.5	10.9	12.3
High Blood Pressure / Related Kidney Disease	10.7	8.2	9.5
Birth Defects	3.1	2.1	2.4
Condition Originating Around Time of Birth	3.7	2.6	ND

Source: CDC WONDER Causes of Death, 2021. <https://wonder.cdc.gov/>

EXHIBIT 63: SUICIDE DEATHS, RATE PER 100,000

	Worcester County - Overall	Massachusetts - Overall	Massachusetts – Youth Age 15-24
2017	10.0	10.0	8.9
2018	9.6	10.5	8.2
2019	10.7	9.3	7.3
2020	8.8	8.7	6.9
2021	8.3	8.5	7.5

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System, 2017-2021

EXHIBIT 64: CHRONIC HEALTH INDICATORS, 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Arthritis	22.2%	21.8%	23.1%
Asthma	9.7%	11.8%	11.7%
Cancer (excluding skin cancer)	6.0%	6.3%	6.5%
Chronic Kidney Disease	2.7%	2.6%	2.6%
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease	5.7%	5.3%	5.7%
Depression	19.8%	19.2%	22.1%
Diabetes	9.9%	7.8%	8.4%
Heart Disease	5.2%	3.0%	4.9%
High Blood Pressure	29.6%	26.5%	26.1%
High Cholesterol	31.0%	31.2%	29.0%
Obesity	33.0%	27.0%	31.2%
Stroke	2.8%	2.2%	2.5%

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

EXHIBIT 65: HEALTH STATUS, 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Poor Physical Health Days ³⁶	10.3%	8.4%	9.5%
Poor Mental Health Days ³⁷	15.2%	13.8%	16.5%
Fair or Poor Health	15.2%	11.3%	12.7%
Binge Drinking	16.7%	17.5%	17.1%
Current Smoking Prevalence	12.8%	10.8%	13.4%
Drug Overdose Deaths (rate per 100,000 people)	23.0	33.0	36.0

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021 | County Health Rankings, 2018 – 2020

³⁶ Adults who report that physical health was “not good” for 14 or more days in any given month.³⁷ Adults who report that mental health was “not good” for 14 or more days in any given month.

EXHIBIT 66: HEALTH STATUS (RATE PER 100,000 PEOPLE), 2021

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
HIV Prevalence	382.2	349.9	275.0
Primary and Secondary Syphilis	19.1	12.3	7.1
Gonorrhea	252.0	136.4	82.6
Chlamydia	582.7	446.3	310.8
Tuberculosis	2.7	2.5	1.5
Hepatitis A	1.7	0.3	ND
Acute Viral Hepatitis B	0.6	0.2	ND
Acute Viral Hepatitis C	1.6	2.3	ND

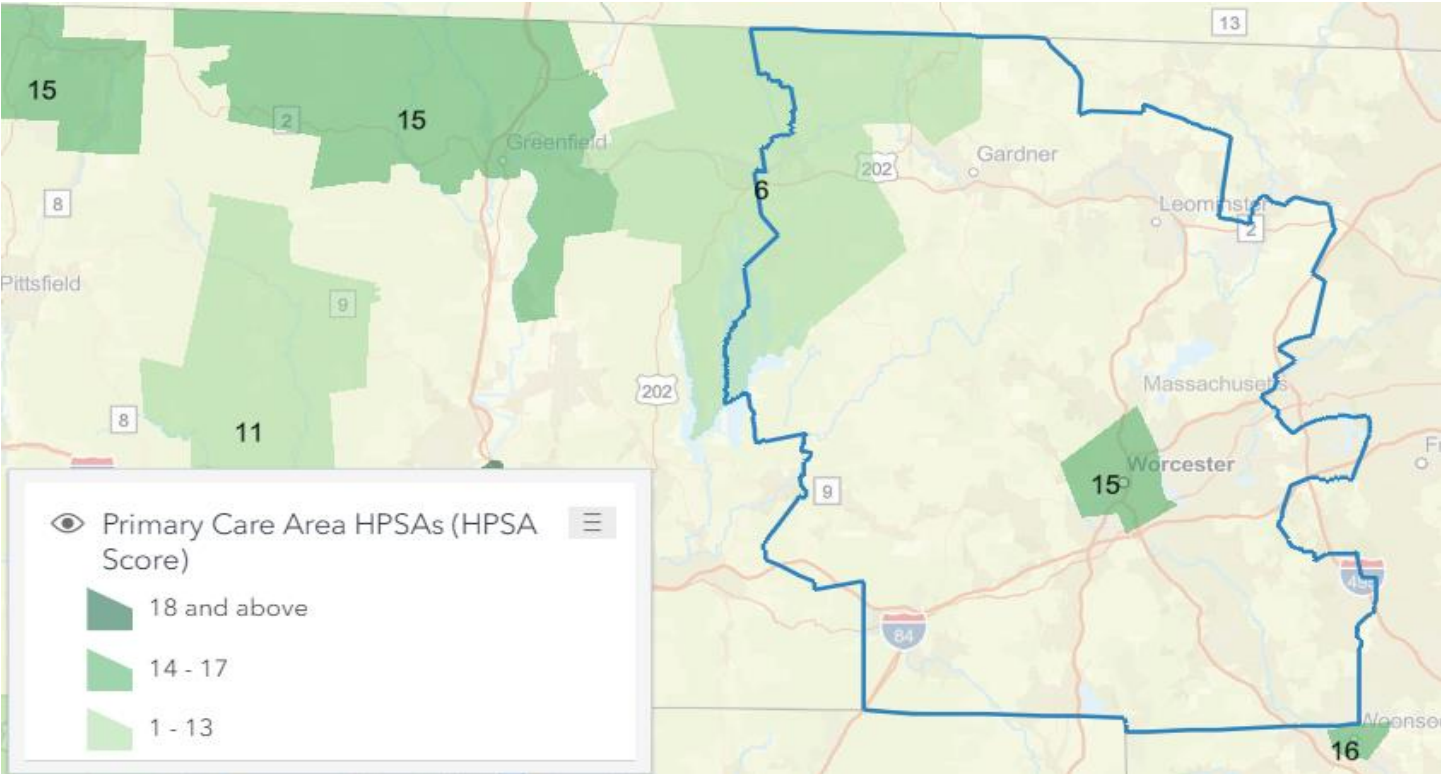
Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention AtlasPlus, 2021

EXHIBIT 67: MATERNAL AND FETAL HEALTH

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Infant Mortality Rate (infant deaths per 1,000 live births)	6	4	5
Low Birthweight (percentage of live births with birthweight < 2,500 grams)	8.0%	7.0%	7.0%
Teen Birth Rate (per 1,000 females aged 15-19)	19	8	10

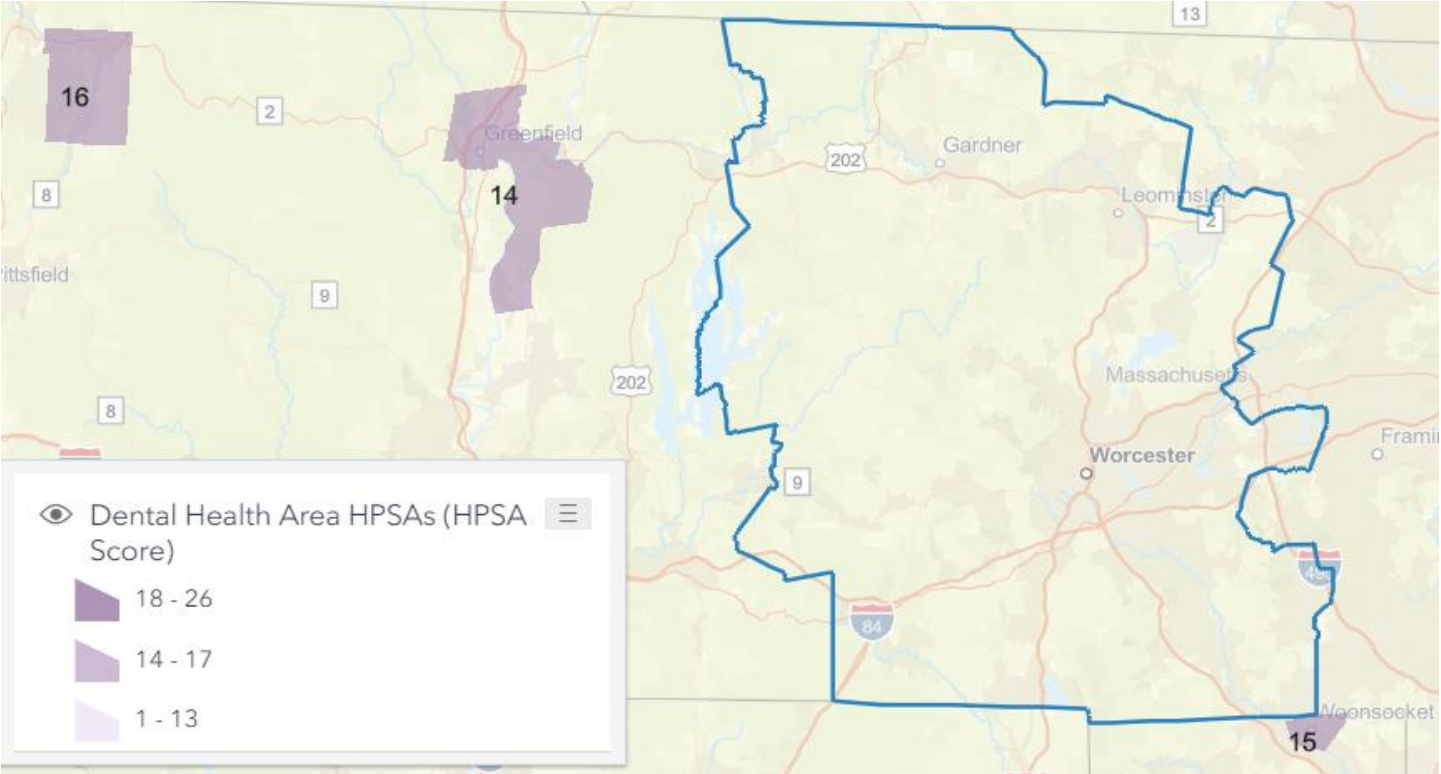
Source: County Health Rankings, 2014-2020

EXHIBIT 68: HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SHORTAGE AREA, PRIMARY CARE AREA HPSAS³⁸



Source: Health Resources & Services Administration

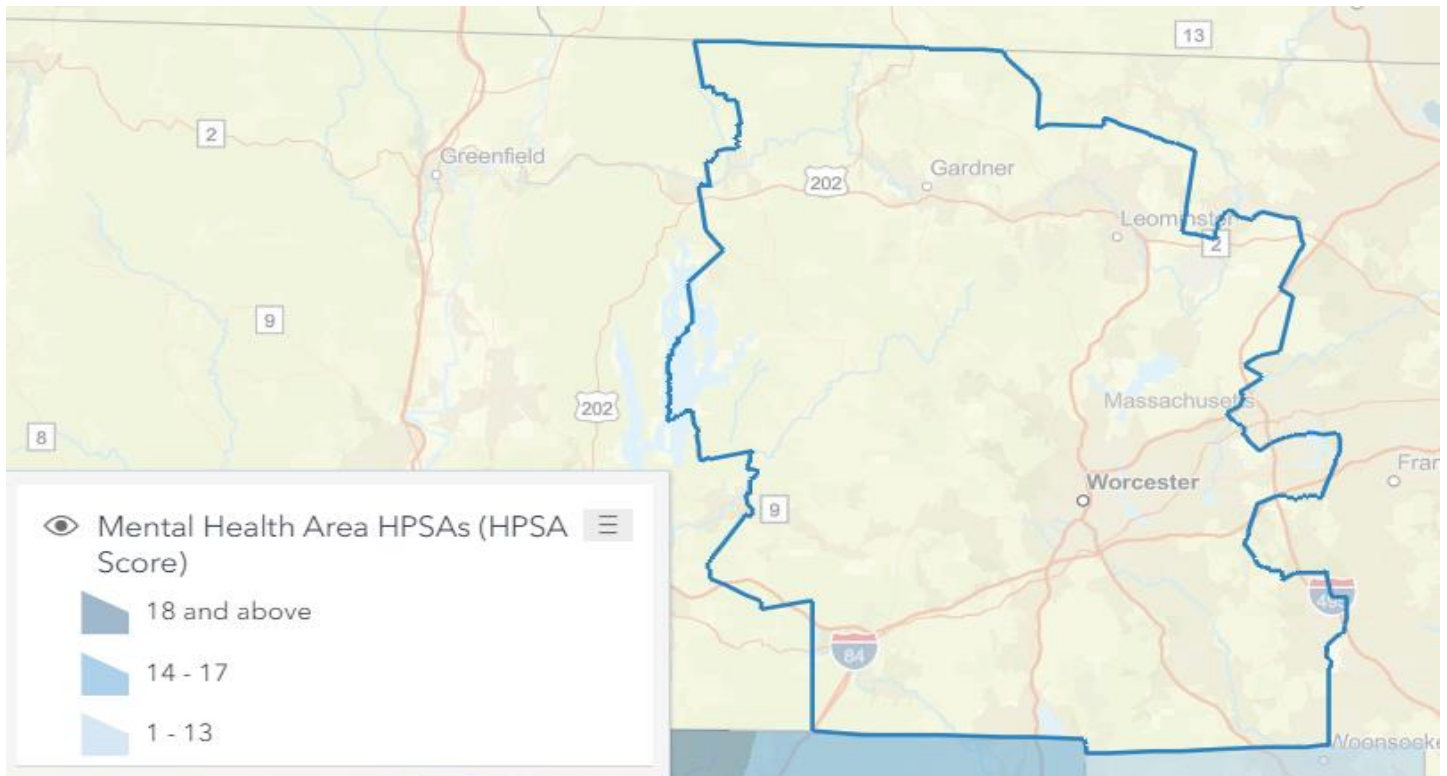
EXHIBIT 69: HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SHORTAGE AREA, DENTAL HEALTH AREA HPSAS



Source: Health Resources & Services Administration

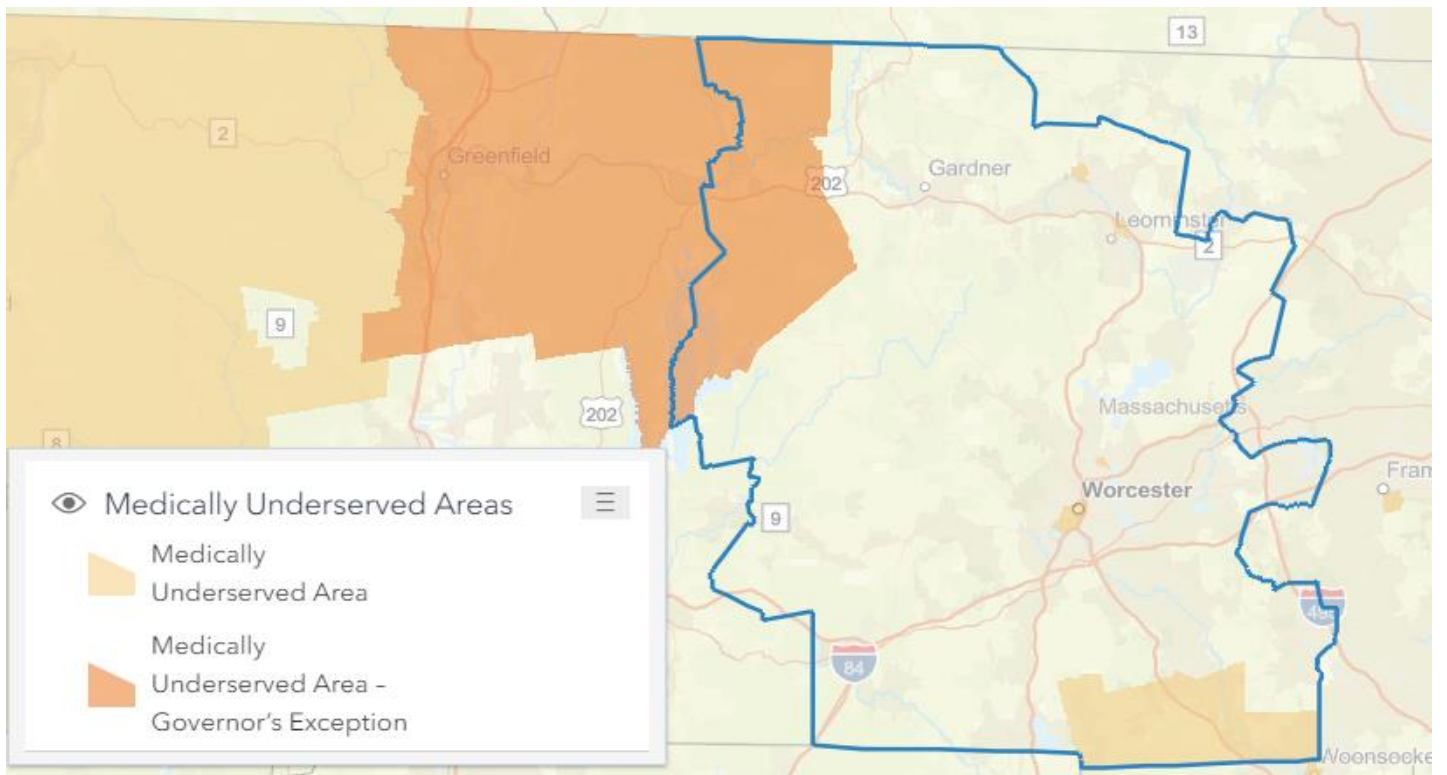
³⁸ The Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) Score was developed by the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) in determining priorities for assignment of clinicians. The scores range from 0 to 26 where the higher the score, the greater the priority.

EXHIBIT 70: HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SHORTAGE AREA, MENTAL HEALTH AREA HPSAS



Source: Health Resources & Services Administration

EXHIBIT 71: MEDICALLY UNDERSERVED AREAS



Source: Health Resources & Services Administration

Behavioral Health

EXHIBIT 72: MASSACHUSETTS SUBSTANCE USE AND PERCEPTIONS OF GREAT RISK, 2021 AND 2022

	Age 12+	Age 18+	Age 26+	Age 12-17	Age 18-25
Illicit Drugs					
Illicit Drug Use in the Past Month ³⁹	20.8%	21.7%	19.5%	10.0%	35.2%
Marijuana Use in the Past Year	28.4%	29.7%	26.7%	13.0%	48.4%
Marijuana Use in the Past Month	19.7%	20.8%	18.7%	7.6%	33.4%
Perceptions of Great Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month	14.7%	14.5%	15.6%	16.7%	7.8%
First Use of Marijuana in the Past Year among Those at Risk for Initiation of Marijuana Use	3.6%	3.4%	1.8%	4.8%	12.7%
Illicit Drug Use Other Than Marijuana in the Past Month	3.7%	3.9%	3.6%	1.9%	5.5%
Cocaine Use in the Past Year	2.4%	2.6%	2.2%	0.2%	5.0%
Perceptions of Great Risk from Using Cocaine Once a Month	61.9%	63.1%	64.6%	48.8%	53.6%
Heroin Use in the Past Year ⁴⁰	--	0.8%	0.9%	--	0.3%
Perceptions of Great Risk from Trying Heroin Once or Twice	81.1%	83.2%	84.0%	56.3%	77.9%
Hallucinogen Use in the Past Year	3.0%	3.1%	2.3%	1.0%	8.1%
Methamphetamine Use in the Past Year	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.1%	0.4%
Prescription Pain Reliever Misuse in the Past Year ⁴¹	2.7%	2.8%	2.9%	1.7%	2.6%
Opioid Misuse in the Past Year	3.3%	3.4%	3.5%	1.7%	2.9%
Alcohol					
Alcohol Use in the Past Month	53.4%	57.4%	56.7%	8.0%	61.7%
Binge Alcohol Use in the Past Month ⁴²	23.2%	24.8%	22.8%	4.1%	37.2%

³⁹ Illicit Drug Use includes the misuse of prescription psychotherapeutics or the use of marijuana (including vaping), cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or methamphetamine. Illicit Drug Use Other Than Marijuana includes the misuse of prescription psychotherapeutics or the use of cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or methamphetamine. Illicit Drugs Other Than Marijuana excludes respondents who used only marijuana but includes those who used marijuana in addition to other illicit drugs.

⁴⁰ Estimates for youths aged 12 to 17 are not available for past year heroin use because past year heroin use was extremely rare among youths aged 12 to 17 in the 2021 and 2022 NSDUHs. As a result, estimates for people aged 12 or older are also not produced.

⁴¹ Prescription pain relievers are a type of prescription psychotherapeutic. Misuse of prescription psychotherapeutics is defined as use in any way not directed by a doctor, including use without a prescription of one's own; use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told; or use in any other way not directed by a doctor. Prescription psychotherapeutics do not include over-the-counter drugs.

⁴² Binge Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks (for males) or four or more drinks (for females) on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

	Age 12+	Age 18+	Age 26+	Age 12-17	Age 18-25
Perceptions of Great Risk from Having Five or More Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Once or Twice a Week	40.9%	41.5%	42.3%	34.2%	36.6%
Alcohol Use in the Past Month ⁹ (People Aged 12 to 20)	23.2%	--	--	--	--
Binge Alcohol Use in the Past Month (People Aged 12 to 20)	11.5%	--	--	--	--
Perceptions of Great Risk from Having Five or More Drinks of an Alcoholic Beverage Once or Twice a Week (People Aged 12 to 20)	34.2%	--	--	--	--
Tobacco Products					
Tobacco Product Use in the Past Month ⁴³	15.6%	16.7%	17.1%	3.2%	14.0%
Cigarette Use in the Past Month	12.2%	13.1%	13.7%	1.4%	9.5%
Perceptions of Great Risk from Smoking One or More Packs of Cigarettes per Day	72.7%	73.2%	74.0%	66.6%	68.3%

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | National Survey on Drug Use & Health State-Specific Tables, 2021 and 2022

EXHIBIT 73: MASSACHUSETTS SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER IN THE PAST YEAR, 2021 AND 2022

	Age 12+	Age 18+	Age 26+	Age 12-17	Age 18-25
Substance Use Disorder	18.3%	19.2%	17.4%	8.1%	29.9%
Alcohol Use Disorder	11.6%	12.3%	11.4%	3.3%	17.9%
Alcohol Use Disorder (People Aged 12 to 20)	6.7%	ND	ND	ND	ND
Drug Use Disorder	9.6%	9.7%	8.1%	8.6%	19.5%
Pain Reliever Use Disorder	1.6%	1.6%	1.8%	0.9%	0.9%
Opioid Use Disorder	2.1%	2.2%	2.4%	0.9%	1.0%

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | National Survey on Drug Use & Health State-Specific Tables, 2021 and 2022

⁴³ Tobacco Products include cigarettes, smokeless tobacco (i.e., snuff, dip, chewing tobacco, or snus), cigars, or pipe tobacco.

EXHIBIT 74: MASSACHUSETTS MENTAL HEALTH MEASURES IN THE PAST YEAR, 2021 AND 2022

	Age 12+	Age 18+	Age 26+	Age 12-17	Age 18-25
Any Mental Illness ⁴⁴	ND	23.2%	21.2%	ND	35.2%
Serious Mental Illness ⁴⁵	ND	5.9%	4.9%	ND	12.4%
Major Depressive Episode ⁴⁶	ND	8.5%	7.0%	19.2%	18.0%
Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide ⁴⁷	ND	4.4%	3.0%	12.2%	12.7%
Made Any Suicide Plans	ND	1.2%	0.7%	6.3%	4.2%
Attempted Suicide	ND	0.5%	0.3%	2.9%	2.0%

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | National Survey on Drug Use & Health State-Specific Tables, 2021 and 2022

EXHIBIT 75: MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH SUICIDE

	Total	Female	Male
Seriously considering suicide, past year	18.4%	25.1%	11.5%
Making a suicide plan, past year	14.4%	17.7%	10.0%
Attempting suicide, past year	7.6%	9.6%	5.5%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Department of Public Health. n.d. "Health & Risk Behaviors of Massachusetts Youth, 2021." *Health and Risk Behaviors of Massachusetts Youth, 2021*. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/health-and-risk-behaviors-of-massachusetts-youth-2021/download>.**EXHIBIT 76: MASSACHUSETTS ADULT SUICIDE RATES, 2021**

	Total	Female	Male
All ages and races	13.3	4.0	8.5
White, non-Hispanic	10.2	4.7	16.1
Black, non-Hispanic	5.9	ND	10.8
Asian, non-Hispanic	5.5	4.1	7.0
Hispanic	4.8	2.0	7.5
Other/unknown race/ethnicity	8.5	ND	ND

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Injury Surveillance Program, BCHAP, UMass Donahue Institute, and U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2023. "Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System." <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2021-mavdrs-suicide-data-table-pdf/download>.

⁴⁴ Mental Illness aligns with Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM-IV) criteria and is defined as having a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder, other than a developmental or substance use disorder. Estimates of serious mental illness (SMI) are a subset of estimates of any mental illness (AMI) because SMI is limited to people with AMI that resulted in serious functional impairment. These estimates are based on indicators of AMI and SMI rather than direct measures of diagnostic status.

⁴⁵ Mental Illness aligns with Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition criteria and is defined as having a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder, other than a developmental or substance use disorder. Estimates of serious mental illness (SMI) are a subset of estimates of any mental illness (AMI) because SMI is limited to people with AMI that resulted in serious functional impairment. These estimates are based on indicators of AMI and SMI rather than direct measures of diagnostic status.

⁴⁶ Major depressive episode (MDE) is based on the DSM-5 definition, which specifies a period of at least 2 weeks when an individual experienced a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities and had a majority of specified depression symptoms. There are minor wording differences in the questions in the adult and adolescent MDE modules. Therefore, data from youths aged 12 to 17 were not combined with data from adults aged 18 or older to produce an estimate for those aged 12 or older.

⁴⁷ The adult and youth suicide questions are in different sections of the questionnaire and have different response options. Because of this, data from youths aged 12 to 17 were not combined with data from adults aged 18 or older to produce an estimate for those aged 12 or older.

EXHIBIT 77: MASSACHUSETTS TEEN BIRTH RATES BY DEMOGRAPHICS, 2021

	Ages 15-17		Ages 18-19		Combined Ages 15-19	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
State Total	314	24.0%	994	76.0%	1,308	100.0%
Native American ⁴⁸ / Alaska Native Non-Hispanic	5	1.6%	6	0.6%	11	0.8%
Asian/ Pacific Islander Non-Hispanic	11	3.6%	16	1.6%	27	2.1%
Black Non-Hispanic	50	16.2%	133	13.5%	183	14.1%
Hispanic	198	64.1%	571	57.9%	769	59.4%
White Non-Hispanic	44	14.2%	253	25.7%	297	22.9%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Injury Surveillance Program, BCHAP, UMass Donahue Institute, and U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2023. "Massachusetts Violent Death Reporting System." <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2021-mavdrs-suicide-data-table-pdf/download>.

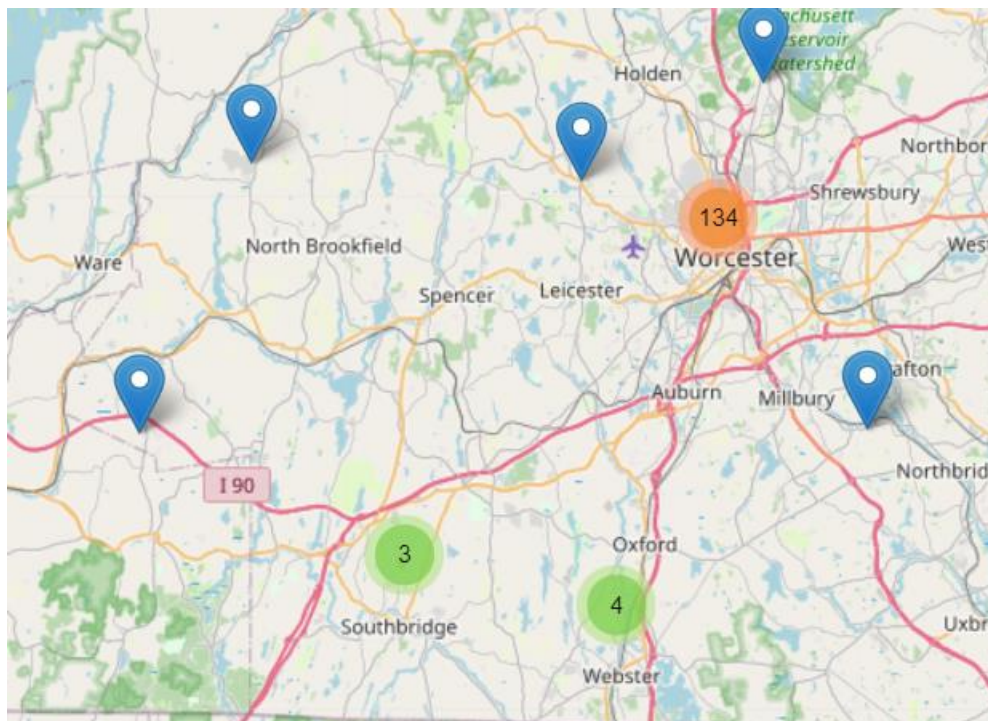
Social Determinants of Health: Social and Community Context**EXHIBIT 78: ANNUAL TREND OF VIOLENT & PROPERTY CRIMES, 2012-2023**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Violent Crime, Rate per 100,000 people											
Massachusetts	407.0	406.4	395.1	389.9	380.7	354.3	340.3	328.7	308.8	301.1	322.0
United States	387.8	369.1	361.6	373.7	397.5	394.9	383.4	380.8	398.5	387.0	380.7
Property Crime, Rate per 100,000 people											
Massachusetts	2,156.8	2,046.2	1,857.6	1,688.4	1,559.7	1,427.6	1,273.6	1,180.6	1,053.2	1,000.3	1,070.1
United States	2,868.0	2,733.6	2,574.1	2,500.5	2,451.6	2,362.9	2,209.8	2,130.6	1,958.2	1,832.3	1,954.4
Hate Crimes											
Massachusetts	290	351	376	411	394	434	361	382	388	412	433

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime Data Explorer. 2022

⁴⁸ The Massachusetts Department of Public Health uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

EXHIBIT 79: GUN VIOLENCE ARCHIVE, SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY INCIDENTS 2018-2021



Source: Gun Violence Archive, Atlas of American Gun Violence

EXHIBIT 80: NUMBER OF PEOPLE INCARCERATED PER 100,000 RESIDENTS AGED 15 TO 64, 2015-2019

Rate per 100,000 Residents Aged 15 to 64	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Worcester County	363	360	354	303	288
Massachusetts	434	429	419	384	370
United States	1,020	1,009	1,004	992	976

Source: Vera Institute of Justice. Incarceration Trends, 2015-2019

EXHIBIT 81: RATES OF REPORTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, 2018-2022

Rate per 1,000 Residents	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Worcester County	5.0	4.7	4.2	4.2	3.9
Massachusetts	4.1	4.1	4.5	4.5	4.6

Source: Impact MetroWest, impactmw.org

Social Determinants of Health: Education

Education is not only about the schools or higher education opportunities within a community, but also includes languages spoken, literacy, vocational training, and early childhood education.⁴⁹ Some children live in places with poorly performing schools, and “the stress of living in poverty can affect children’s brain development, making it harder for them to do well in school.”⁵⁰

EXHIBIT 82: HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Population 25 and Over	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Less than 9th Grade	4.7%	4.3%	3.4%	3.0%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	6.1%	4.5%	5.2%	5.2%
High School Degree	26.4%	22.9%	26.7%	33.3%
Some College No Degree	19.7%	14.8%	17.4%	20.1%
Associates Degree	8.7%	7.6%	9.0%	9.7%
Bachelor's Degree	20.9%	25.1%	22.4%	17.9%
Graduate Degree	13.4%	20.8%	16.0%	10.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 83: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER BY RACE

Population 25 and Over	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	18.7%	40.5%	37.6%	100.0%
Asian	56.3%	63.4%	62.8%	48.8%
Black or African American	24.0%	30.3%	34.1%	34.1%
White	36.5%	48.3%	38.6%	29.2%
Native American ⁵¹ and Alaska Native	15.8%	24.4%	20.0%	17.7%
Two or More Races	28.3%	33.5%	28.1%	16.7%
Some Other Race	14.8%	18.9%	18.1%	14.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

⁴⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation. Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health & Health Equity (2018). <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/beyond-health-care-the-role-of-social-determinants-in-promoting-health-and-health-equity/>

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030. Social Determinants of Health, Education Access & Quality. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/education-access-and-quality>

⁵¹ The Census Bureau uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

EXHIBIT 84: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER BY ETHNICITY

Population 25 and Over	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Hispanic or Latino	19.1%	22.4%	18.2%	16.4%

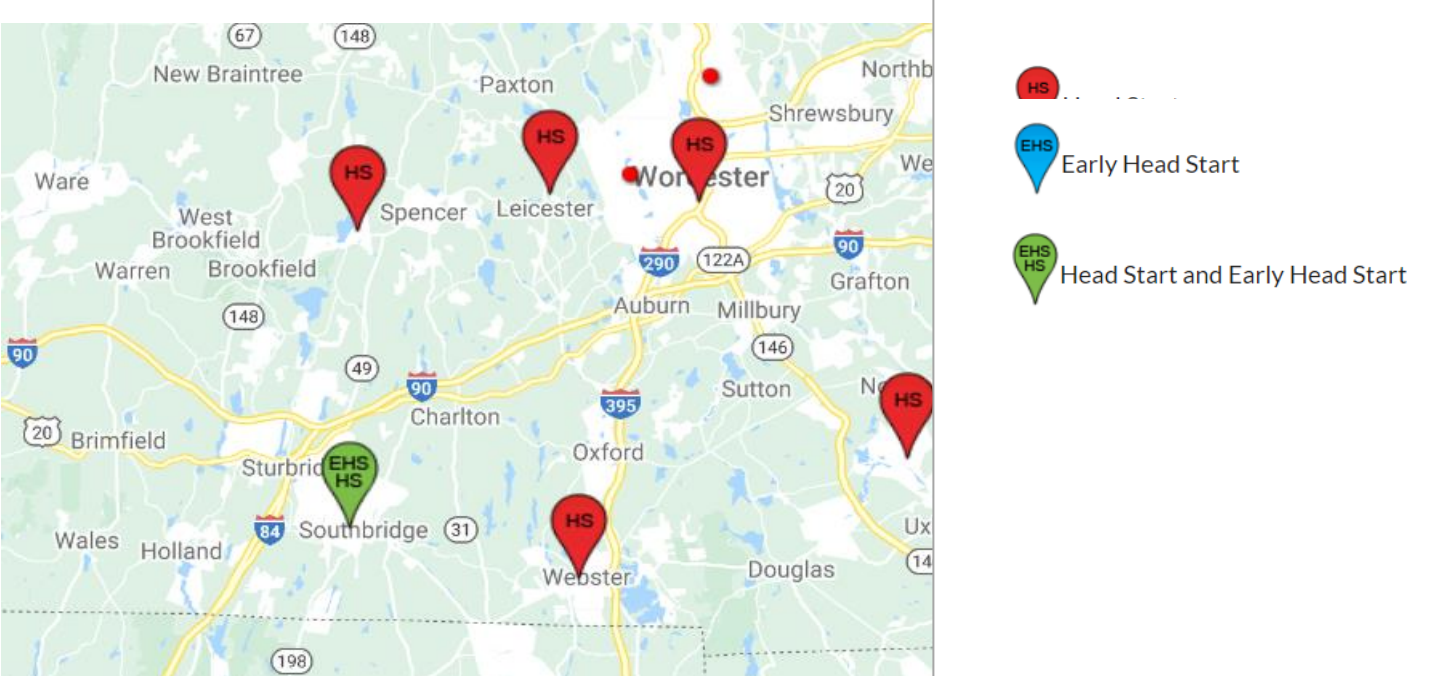
Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 85: NUMBER OF CHILD CARE CENTERS

United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
77,383	2,107	191	15

Source: U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns 2021. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cbp.html>

EXHIBIT 86: HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START LOCATIONS IN SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY



Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families. Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, Head Start Center Locator (February 29, 2024)

EXHIBIT 87: STUDENTS ‘MEETING OR EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS’ ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDIZED TESTS, 2023

School District	3 rd Grade	6 th Grade	8 th Grade
Massachusetts	44%	42%	44%
Brookfield	59%	31%	ND
Dudley-Charlton	44%	37%	46%
Millbury	47%	33%	38%
North Brookfield	23%	36%	12%
Oxford	42%	25%	35%
Quaboag Regional (Warren, West Brookfield)	33%	44%	26%
Southbridge	8%	17%	14%
Spencer-East Brookfield	28%	26%	21%
Sturbridge	57%	56%	ND
Tantasqua Regional (Brimfield, Brookfield, Holland, Sturbridge, Wales)	ND	ND	48%
Webster	18%	26%	21%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Report Cards

EXHIBIT 88: HIGH SCHOOL 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2022

School District ⁵²	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American ⁵³ or Alaska Native	White	National Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic/Latino
Brookfield	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Dudley-Charlton	ND	ND	100.0%	ND	93.0%	ND	ND
Millbury	100.0%	ND	80.0%	ND	87.5%	ND	ND
North Brookfield	ND	ND	ND	ND	74.1%	ND	ND
Oxford	ND	ND	92.3%	ND	87.7%	ND	ND
Quaboag Regional (Warren, West Brookfield)	ND	ND	88.9%	ND	83.8%	ND	ND
Southbridge	ND	ND	68.9%	ND	73.5%	ND	ND
Spencer-East Brookfield	ND	ND	33.3%	ND	78.0%	ND	ND
Sturbridge	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Webster	66.7%	ND	61.8%	ND	77.4%	ND	88.9%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, School and District Report Cards

⁵² Graduation rates by race are unavailable for cohorts with less than 6 students.⁵³ The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses the term 'American Indian' for this racial category. In an effort to promote inclusivity and respect for all identities, this category has been renamed for the purposes of this report to better reflect the preferences of the community.

Social Determinants of Health: Neighborhood & Built Environment

Housing Affordability

EXHIBIT 89: HOUSING COSTS & HOME VALUE

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County
Housing Tenure			
Owner Occupied Units	65.2%	62.2%	63.6%
Renter Occupied Units	34.8%	37.8%	36.4%
Monthly Owner Costs >30% of Household Income			
Housing Units with a Mortgage	27.9%	30.3%	27.5%
Housing Units Without a Mortgage	14.7%	19.9%	21.2%
Rental Costs			
Gross Rent as Percentage of Household Income	51.9%	53.4%	52.8%
Median Rent	\$1,300	\$1,634	\$1,323

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 90: NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION HOUSING WAGE, 2023

	Massachusetts	Worcester, MA HMFA ⁵⁴
2-bedroom fair market rent (FMR) ⁵⁵	\$2,165	\$1,635
Hourly wage necessary to afford 2-bedroom FMR	\$41.64	\$24.12
Annual income needed to afford 2-bedroom FMR	\$86,613	\$65,400

Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2023

EXHIBIT 91: RENTER HOUSEHOLDS THAT RECEIVE PROJECT BASED HOUSING ASSISTANCE⁵⁶

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Percent of Renter Households	5.1%	9.0%	7.9%	5.0%

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development Picture Subsidized HH 2021

⁵⁴ Worcester, MA HMFA, as defined by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, includes the following towns: Auburn, Barre, Boylston, Brookfield, Charlton, Clinton, Douglas, Dudley, East Brookfield, Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, North Brookfield, Northborough, Northbridge, Oakham, Oxford, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, Sterling, Sturbridge, Sutton, Uxbridge, Webster, West Boylston, West Brookfield, Westborough, and Worcester.

⁵⁵ Fiscal Year 2023 Fair Market Rent

⁵⁶ Project based housing assistance includes Public Housing, Moderate Rehabilitation, Project Based Section 8, RentSup/RaP, S236/BMIR, 202/PRAC, and 811/PRAC.

Housing Insecurity

EXHIBIT 92: CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN MASSACHUSETTS, 2021

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Children in Out of Home Placement	9,597	9,631	8,809	8,414	8,464

Source: Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, Annual Report FY2021

EXHIBIT 93: ANNUAL POINT IN TIME COUNT FOR MASSACHUSETTS

	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Unsheltered
Households without children	3,842	910	1,299
Households with at least one adult and one child	3,832	177	1
Households with only children	18	1	2
Total Homeless Households	7,692	1,088	1,302

Sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Exchange. CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, 2023

Transportation and Internet Access

EXHIBIT 94: TRANSPORTATION

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Mean Travel Time to Work (in minutes)	26.7	29.4	29.3	30.9
Workers Commuting by Public Transit	3.8%	7.6%	1.5%	0.6%
Workers who Drive Alone to Work	71.7%	64.2%	73.5%	80.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

EXHIBIT 95: BROADBAND

	United States	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Collaborative Service Area
Household Without Internet Access	9%	7.1%	7.2%	8.8%
Number of Internet Providers (2021)	3,003	39	16	ND

Sources: Federal Communications Commission Fixed Broadband Deployment Data 2021 | U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018-2022 Five-year Estimates

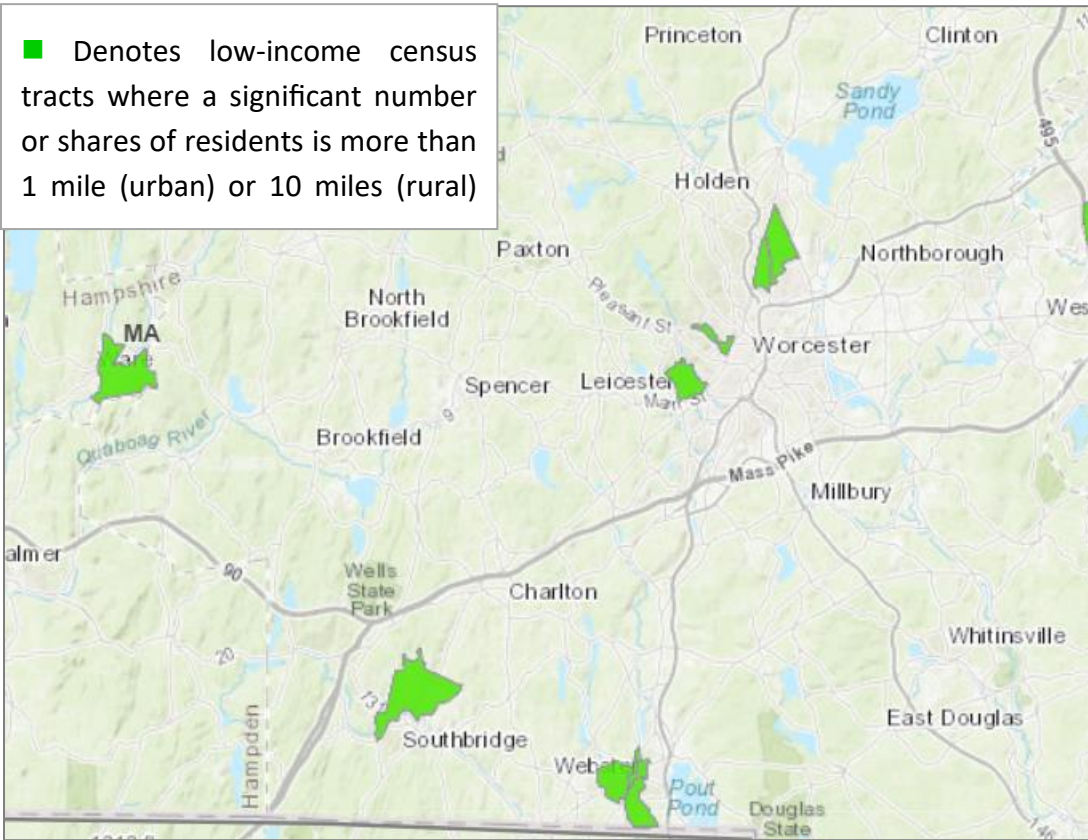
Food Insecurity

EXHIBIT 96: FOOD INSECURITY RATES

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Worcester County	8.6%	8.3%	8.2%	9.1%	7.7%
Massachusetts	9.0%	8.9%	8.2%	7.2%	8.1%

Source: Feeding America. Map the Meal Gap, 2021

EXHIBIT 97: FOOD DESERT



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Services. Food Access Research Atlas, 2023

Appendix B: Stakeholder Interview Guide

Greetings,

Worcester Community Action Council and other community organizations in collaboration with Crescendo Consulting Group, are launching a Collaborative Community Needs Assessment, to learn more about community strengths, challenges, and the greatest needs of individuals, families, and vulnerable communities in the Southern Worcester County region. As a community member, we are interested in your perspective on ideas and potential opportunities to address identified challenges. **This is an opportunity for us, as research partners, to learn more about your community.**

While I will be taking notes, **please consider our conversation confidential.** The discussion will include questions from a few broad categories and will take less than 30 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Strengths & Challenges

1. To start with, what do you like about living or working in your community? (things to do, parks or other outdoor recreational activities, a strong sense of family, cultural diversity)
2. Generally, what are some challenges to living here for individuals, families, single parents, and/or low-income communities?

Social Determinants of Health

Education

Head Start, Early Childhood Education & Childcare

3. Is it easy for families to find affordable, quality childcare? What are some of the challenges and/or barriers?
4. Are there specific locations/geographic areas where childcare or other early childhood programs and services education needs are greater?
5. What are the greatest challenges for families with complex needs such as learning disabilities or other special needs regarding childcare and early childhood programs and services?
6. What is your general perception of the ability of the area to meet Early Childhood services and education for those prenatal to age 5 in the area? Probe: multilingual and/or low-income families, children with developmental or physical disabilities

Impacts of COVID-19 on children and youth

7. What is being done to help children catch up from disruptions caused by the pandemic?
8. How has the pandemic affected the behavior of children in school settings?

Neighborhood & Built Environment

Housing

9. What are the main difficulties with accessing and maintaining affordable, adequate, and safe housing in your community? (Root causes of housing challenges, systemic issues and barriers, people at risk of becoming homeless or those currently experiencing homelessness)
10. For people experiencing homelessness or housing instability, what are available shelters and services in your community? What services are needed in your community to better meet people's needs?
11. To what degree do community members struggle with utility bills and/or home maintenance needs like weatherization? What programs are available to help people? How can programs be designed to be equitable?

Access to Food

12. To what degree are community members/families struggling with access to nutritious food? What are some resources or services that work well?
13. Besides free lunch programs, are there any programs dedicated to helping food-insecure children and older adults specifically?

Economic Stability

14. What resources or programs are available to help empower people out of poverty in your community?
15. What resources or programs are available for struggling families that don't meet poverty qualifications?

Transportation & Broadband

16. To what degree do families struggle with accessibility or affordability of broadband/internet access or technology?
17. How reliable is public transportation in your community?

Social & Community Context

Community Safety & Vulnerable Communities

18. To what extent is community violence an issue (that you are aware of) in your community (gun violence, domestic violence, hate crimes)?
19. Do you think the community is accepting of new members of the community [Examples: New Americans, refugees]?
20. Do you think the community is supportive and accepting of the LGBTQ+ community?

At-risk Children

21. Are you aware of the need for foster care services? Is this a growing, contracting, or stable issue?
22. What are some of the biggest needs for New American families in the community? [Examples: English as a secondary language, undocumented or migrant worker support, general assistance, immigration, civic engagement, and community involvement]

Health Care

23. Do people struggle to access primary, pediatric, and/or geriatric care services (adults, pregnant women, children, older adults)?
24. To what degree do healthcare providers care for patients in a culturally sensitive manner?
25. Describe the behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder) care services for children and families in your area. What about adults?
26. Are there behavioral health resources within the local school system?

Enhancing Communications & Information

27. Do you think that the community is aware of Worcester Community Action Council and the services they provide? How do they typically hear about services?
28. What are the challenges to greater awareness and understanding of the availability of services and ways to access them? What might help overcome the challenges?

Closing Questions

29. If you could personally solve one issue in your community, what would it be?
30. Is there anything else we have not talked about today that you think is important for us to know?

Appendix C: Community Survey



The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the needs of individuals and families living in Southern Worcester County, including the strengths, resources, and ways to address needs identified as part of a Community Needs Assessment. All responses are confidential.

If you would like to be entered to win one of ten \$100 gift cards, please enter your contact information at the end of the survey.

1. Please select the South County town in which you live, or write-in the town where you live:

- Brookfield
- North Brookfield
- Warren
- Charlton
- Oxford
- Webster
- Dudley
- Southbridge
- West Brookfield
- East Brookfield
- Spencer
- Other: _____
- Millbury
- Sturbridge

If you have any questions about the survey or community needs assessment, please contact Nicole Hallas at our research partner, Crescendo Consulting Group, at nhallas@crescendocg.com.

Need for Community Resources

2. Select which services you have needed help with during the past year. Please include services you have received and services you have not received but still needed help with. (Select all that apply)

Food/Shelter

- ☐ Rental assistance (financial)
- ☐ Emergency shelter
- ☐ Homelessness services
- ☐ Fuel/heating assistance
- ☐ Food bank or food pantry
- ☐ Meals on Wheels
- ☐ Help applying for housing / Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8)
- ☐ Help applying for SNAP (food stamps)
- ☐ First-time home buyer assistance (financial or education)

Age-Specific

- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ After school or weekend care for school-aged children
- ☐ Summer care for school-aged children
- ☐ Tutoring or academic help
- ☐ Senior/elder services

Career and Employment

- ☐ Help finding a job that pays well
- ☐ Help applying for unemployment benefits
- ☐ Job skills training

Healthcare and Wellbeing

- ☐ Services for autism / ASD
- ☐ Services for developmental and intellectual disabilities
- ☐ Mental health services
- ☐ Substance use disorder treatment
- ☐ Case management
- ☐ Disability resources
- ☐ Help applying for health insurance / MassHealth
- ☐ Help applying for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

BIPOC / Bilingual / New American

- ☐ Interpreter services or translator
- ☐ Immigration or refugee services (e.g. Applying for green card, citizenship application, etc.)
- ☐ ESL classes

General Services

- ☐ Veteran services (e.g. transition services, VA healthcare, VA loans)
- ☐ Clothing assistance
- ☐ Other (please specify):

3. For the following items, please identify the magnitude of need on a scale of 1 (no more focus needed) to 5 (much more focus needed) for the needs of Southern Worcester County.

	1 No More Focus Needed	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Much More Focus Needed	I Don't Know
Programs to help pay for utilities like heat, electricity, water.						
Available affordable housing.						
Care that is available and affordable for people living with disabilities.						
Available affordable childcare.						
Mental health or substance use disorder services						
Food pantries, free meal programs or food delivery programs						
Reliable transportation						
Bilingual services						
Immigration / refugee services						
Resources for New Americans (e.g., English as a secondary language, classes, undocumented migrant worker support)						
Support and resources for LGBTQ+						
Tutoring/academic services						
After-school or weekend care for school-aged children						
Employment or career services						

4. What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's greatest strength in providing services or resources to its residents?

5. What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's largest gap in services or resources provided to its residents?

Community Equity

Equity means making sure everyone gets what they need to have a fair chance to do well and succeed in their community.

6. For each of the following items about equity in Southern Worcester County, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
Everyone in my community has equal access to community resources.						
Racial inequalities exist in my community.						
People of all colors and genders have opportunities for economic success in Southern Worcester County.						
My neighborhood is a safe place to live.						
I feel welcome in the community where I reside.						
I have felt uncomfortable in my community because of my race.						

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I have felt uncomfortable in my community because of my nationality.						
I have felt uncomfortable in my community because of my gender identity or sexuality.						

7. How can your local community improve its diversity and inclusion of all community members regardless of color, gender, sexual identity, culture, nationality, and religion?

Housing and Shelter

8. In the past year, have you needed temporary housing (i.e. emergency shelter, couch-surfing, church)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question 10)

9. In the past year, which of the following temporary housing measures have you used? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Emergency homeless shelter
- ☐ Transitional housing
- ☐ Shelter for domestic violence survivors
- ☐ Couch-surfing (e.g. staying with a friend/family member/neighbor)
- ☐ Warming/cooling shelter
- ☐ Other: _____

10. In the past year, have you had trouble accessing, maintaining, or finding housing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (skip to question 12)

11. For each of the following items about challenges accessing housing, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I don't know where to get help.						
I've had trouble affording my rent or mortgage payments.						
I don't feel safe going to a shelter.						
I have had issues with my landlord.						
I cannot find a safe or quality apartment to rent.						
Housing is a main source of stress in my life.						

Food Access

12. In the past year, have you needed, but been unable to obtain, enough food for you and/or your family?

☐ Yes

☐ No (skip to question 14)

13. For each of the following items about challenges accessing food, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I don't know where to get help.						
Food costs at traditional grocery stores are too high.						

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I don't have reliable transportation to get to the store or food pantry.						
Grocery stores are too far away from where I live.						
Food pantry hours don't work for me.						
SNAP (food stamp benefits) does not cover my monthly food budget.						
Food insecurity is a main source of stress in my life.						

Childcare and Education

14. Do you have children that need childcare, whether or not you are able to access childcare?

☐ Yes

☐ No (skip to question 16)

15. For each of the following items about childcare challenges, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I don't know where to find childcare in my community.						
Childcare costs are too expensive.						
I don't have reliable transportation for me or my child.						
I need more flexible childcare hours (extended morning or evening hours).						

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
There are no open slots for my child or the waitlist is too long.						
There are no open slots or providers for children with special needs.						
Childcare is a main source of stress in my life.						

16. Do you have school-aged children?

☐ Yes

☐ No (skip to question 18)

17. For each of the following education topics, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I am happy with the schools in my community.						
I need more after-school programs for school-aged children.						
The community needs more in-school extracurricular activities for youth.						
The community needs more local recreational opportunities for youth.						
The community needs more drug prevention / mental health support /						

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
awareness resources and programs for youth.						
The community needs resources to help children catch up from disruptions caused by the pandemic.						

Community Involvement

18. For each of the following items about community events in Southern Worcester County, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I want more community events that allow me to get to know my neighbors.						
I want more community events for families.						
More community events would help me feel connected to my neighbors.						

19. For each of the following items about local government in Southern Worcester County, please rate these statements on a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree).

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I know how to contact my local government.						

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I am happy with my local government.						
My local government knows what is best for my community.						

20. Are there any other needs of Southern Worcester County residents that you think are important for us to know?

About Me

I identify as:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender man / Trans man
- ☐ Transgender woman / Tran woman
- ☐ Genderqueer/gender nonconforming, neither male nor female
- ☐ Other gender category
- ☐ I prefer not to say

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18 to 24
- ☐ 25 to 34
- ☐ 35 to 44
- ☐ 45 to 54
- ☐ 55 to 64
- ☐ 65 or older
- ☐ I prefer not to say

What is your race? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Asian or Asian American
- ☐ Native American, First Nation, or Alaska Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Two or more races
- ☐ Other race: _____
- ☐ I prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ Hispanic / Latino / Latina / Latinx
- ☐ Not Hispanic / Latino / Latina / Latinx
- ☐ I prefer not to say

Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I prefer not to say

What is your annual household income?

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000 to \$14,999
- ☐ \$15,000 to \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 to \$199,999
- ☐ \$200,000 or more
- ☐ I prefer not to say

How many people live in your household?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8 or more

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Less than high school or equivalent
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Technical or trade school
- ☐ Associate's degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Graduate or professional degree
- ☐ I prefer not to say

Gift Card Drawing

If you would like to be entered into a drawing for one of ten (10) \$100 gift cards, please provide your contact information below. Your survey and contact information responses are kept separately.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Appendix D: Community Partner Survey



The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the community resources, social service agencies, and non-profits serving and addressing the needs of individuals and families living in Southern Worcester County. This survey will gather information about the organization that you work for and ask your opinion on strengths, resources, and ways to address needs of those in the community. All responses are confidential.

Please complete the survey before Friday, May 31st, 2024, at 5:00pm.

For the purposes of this community needs assessment, **Southern Worcester County** is defined as the following towns:

- Brookfield
- Charlton
- Dudley
- East Brookfield
- Millbury
- North Brookfield
- Oxford
- Southbridge
- Spencer
- Sturbridge
- Warren
- Webster
- West Brookfield

If you have any questions about the survey or community needs assessment, please contact Nicole Hallas at our research partner, Crescendo Consulting Group, at nhallas@crescendocg.com.

Agency/Organization Information

1. What is the name of the organization or agency that you work for?

2. Where is your organization or agency headquartered?

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Oxford | <input type="checkbox"/> West Brookfield |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charlton | <input type="checkbox"/> Southbridge | <input type="checkbox"/> Worcester |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dudley | <input type="checkbox"/> Spencer | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Sturbridge | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Millbury | <input type="checkbox"/> Warren | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Webster | <hr/> |

3. If your organization is headquartered outside of one of the Southern Worcester County towns, is there a physical satellite office within South County?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (skip to question 5)

4. In which Southern Worcester County towns does your agency or organization have a satellite office?

(Select all that apply)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Oxford | <input type="checkbox"/> West Brookfield |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charlton | <input type="checkbox"/> Southbridge | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dudley | <input type="checkbox"/> Spencer | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Sturbridge | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Millbury | <input type="checkbox"/> Warren | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Webster | <hr/> |

5. What town(s) does your agency or organization serve in Southern Worcester County? (Select all that apply)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Southbridge | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charlton | <input type="checkbox"/> Spencer | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dudley | <input type="checkbox"/> Sturbridge | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Warren | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Millbury | <input type="checkbox"/> Webster | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Brookfield | <input type="checkbox"/> West Brookfield | <hr/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oxford | | |

6. In what ways does your agency or organization deliver services to the people in Southern Worcester County?

- ☐ In-person
☐ Online
☐ Telephone
☐ Other (please explain):

☐ I don't know

7. What services does your organization/agency provide? (Select all that apply)

Food/Shelter

- ☐ Rental assistance (financial)
- ☐ Emergency shelter
- ☐ Homelessness services
- ☐ Fuel/heating assistance
- ☐ Food bank or food pantry
- ☐ Meals on Wheels
- ☐ Help applying for housing / Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8)
- ☐ Help applying for SNAP (food stamps)
- ☐ First time home buyer assistance (financial or education)

Age-Specific

- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ After school or weekend care for school-aged children
- ☐ Summer care for school-aged children
- ☐ Tutoring or academic help
- ☐ Senior/elder services

Career and Employment

- ☐ Career services
- ☐ Help applying for unemployment benefits
- ☐ Job skills training

Healthcare and Wellbeing

- ☐ Services for autism
- ☐ Services for developmental and intellectual disabilities
- ☐ Dental care
- ☐ Medical care
- ☐ Reproductive health
- ☐ Mental health services
- ☐ Substance use disorder treatment
- ☐ Case management
- ☐ Disability resources
- ☐ Help applying for health insurance / MassHealth
- ☐ Help applying for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

BIPOC / Bilingual / New American

- ☐ Interpreter services or translator
- ☐ Immigration or refugee services
- ☐ ESL classes

General Services

- ☐ Veteran services
- ☐ Clothing assistance
- ☐ Other (please specify):

8. What hours are your organization or agency open?

- ☐ Weekdays, business hours
- ☐ Weekdays, extended morning or evening hours
- ☐ Weekends
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ I don't know

9. Does your organization accept insurance?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes – Private Insurance (e.g. Aetna, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Cigna, Fallon, United, etc.)
- ☐ Yes – Medicare
- ☐ Yes – MassHealth / Medicaid
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ I don't know

10. How long does your agency provide assistance to someone in need?

- ☐ Help offered on one-time basis
- ☐ Help available as long as person qualifies
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

11. What population(s) does your organization or agency serve? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Infants (under 1 year)
- ☐ Children (Age 2-5)
- ☐ School-aged Children
- ☐ Young Adults
- ☐ Adults
- ☐ Seniors
- ☐ Families / Parents
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ I don't know

12. For the following items, please identify the magnitude of need on a scale of 1 (no more focus needed) to 5 (much more focus needed) for the needs of Southern Worcester County.

	1 No More Focus Needed	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Much More Focus Needed	I Don't Know
Programs to help pay for utilities like heat, electricity, water						
Employment or career services for adults						
Available and affordable housing						
Available and affordable care for people living with disabilities						
Reliable transportation						
Mental health or substance use disorder services						

	1 No More Focus Needed	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Much More Focus Needed	I Don't Know
Food pantries, free meal programs or food delivery programs						
Bilingual services						
Immigration / refugee services						
Resources for New Americans (e.g., English as a secondary language, classes, undocumented migrant worker support)						
Support and resources for LGBTQ+						
Available and affordable childcare						
Tutoring/academic services						
After-school or weekend recreation for school-aged children						
Summer programs or childcare for school-aged children						
Youth programming for teens						

13. What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's greatest strength in providing services or resources to its residents?

14. What do you consider to be Southern Worcester County's largest gap in services or resources provided to its residents?

15. Thinking about your organization and the services it provides, what do you need to better serve your community? (check all that apply)

- ☐ More staff
- ☐ Start up / seed-funding
- ☐ Sustainable funding source
- ☐ Additional staff training
- ☐ More collaboration with community partners
- ☐ Changes to regulatory requirements and/or policy
- ☐ Leadership succession planning
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

16. Has your organization had difficulty hiring or retaining staff over the last 3 years? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Yes, difficulty hiring staff
- ☐ Yes, difficulty retaining staff (e.g. high staff turnover)
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

17. For the following items, please identify on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) items that relate to inter-agency collaboration with the agencies and organizations providing services to people living in Southern Worcester County:

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3 Neutral	4	5 Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I would find an up-to-date centralized South County resource guide helpful.						
I would like more inter-agency meetings to discuss broad community issues.						
I would like more opportunities for relationship building between community partner organizations.						
I understand the work being done by community partner organizations other than my own.						
I would like to learn more about community partner organizations other than my own.						