

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2022

COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP OF NORTHWEST MONTANA

CAPNM provides social services and advocacy together with local partners to alleviate poverty, improve lives and strengthen communities in Flathead, Lake, Lincoln and Sanders Counties.



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INTRODUCTION

Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana (CAPNM) opened its doors in 1976 to serve the communities of Flathead, Lake, Lincoln and Sanders Counties. Since opening, the agency has been committed to alleviating poverty, improving lives, and strengthening communities. CAPNM believes that measurable outcomes come from the cyclical process of effective planning. This process begins with the comprehensive and ongoing assessment of community needs. As such, CAPNM completes a tri-annual community needs assessment. This evaluation is required as a recipient of Community Services Block Grant funding.

The rural nature of the area creates some inherent barriers to those served, such as limited access to public transportation, limited supportive services for employment and limited housing stock. Additionally, Flathead County serves hotspot destination area for tourism, which impacts housing and cost of living for the area while areas such as Lincoln County have a fluctuating extraction based economy that impacts community vitality tremendously. As a result, CAPNM must be a dynamic agency with a strong emphasis on data driven, intentional planning to best meet the changing needs of the community. It is critical that CAPNM utilizes information gleaned from the community needs assessment for the purpose of networking, planning and strategically providing services. CAPNM seeks to address community needs through a variety of resident-oriented strategies and initiatives that promote self-reliance and empowerment.

There are many reasons why assessment of current needs is imperative, these include:

- 1.) Identify ongoing or emerging trends.
- 2.) Evaluate the intersection of economic factors impacting people with limited incomes and access to resources available.
- 3.) To provide education to the community residents and leaders.
- 4.) To prioritize resources to areas with the greatest level of need.
- 5.) To determine agency role in addressing causes and conditions of poverty in the areas served.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Surveys were made available online and advertised as available through agency email, Facebook and agency website. The survey received 455 completed online results. The online results include both customer data, as well as stakeholder feedback. Additionally, 100 paper copy surveys were sent out to a randomized list of those served through CAPNM programs, as well as hard copies placed in numerous areas frequented by clients and partners.

In a parallel process, Town Hall meetings were completed to gather community input. The Town Hall meetings were done in outlying communities within the CAPNM service area.

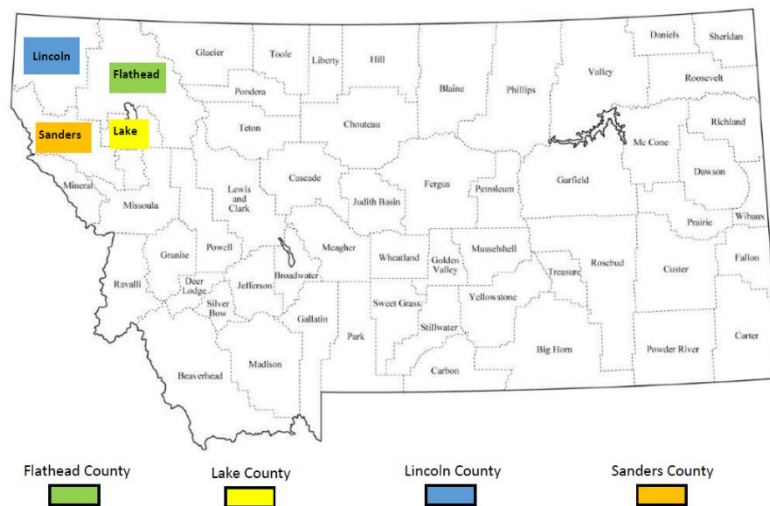
Once the survey window ended, analysis of survey responses took place to identify areas of focus for further exploration. At this time key informant interviews and targeted outreach took place in each of the counties covered by CAPNM to gather qualitative data to help provide context, support for the quantitative results.

Additional information gathered from anonymous client satisfaction surveys. Internal tracking of program activity, referral activity, and inquiries were reviewed from program records. Further state and national data was gathered to assist with full analysis of data.

A summary of local providers within the CAPNM service area is included for reference in relation to the top identified community needs

COMMUNITY INTRODUCTION

The community assessed in this document, related to the below information, is defined as the following: Flathead County, Lake County, Lincoln County and Sanders County located within northwest Montana.



Northwest Montana Human Resources dba Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana (CAPNM) is a Community Action Agency (HRDC District X) serving Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders counties in Northwest Montana since 1976. Lincoln and Sanders are frontier Counties (fewer than 6 people per square mile) with limited employment opportunities and low wages. While Lake and Flathead are designated as rural Counties. The U.S. Census Bureau cites the population within the service area (2021 estimate) as 173,971. Within this region 27,400 individuals or 15.75% live in poverty; per 2021 Census estimate data, the national poverty rate is 11.4% (12.4% average for Montana). The Lake County poverty rate was 18.3%, Sanders 16.3%, Lincoln 18.3% and Flathead 10.5%. Earnings in the service area tend to be close to or below the median household income based upon 2021 Census data. For example, the

median household income in Lincoln County is 30% below the statewide average and 39% lower than the national median household income average. In contrast, Flathead County is 2% higher than the state average and 11% lower than the national average. Additionally, unemployment rates within these areas are at or above state/ national averages.

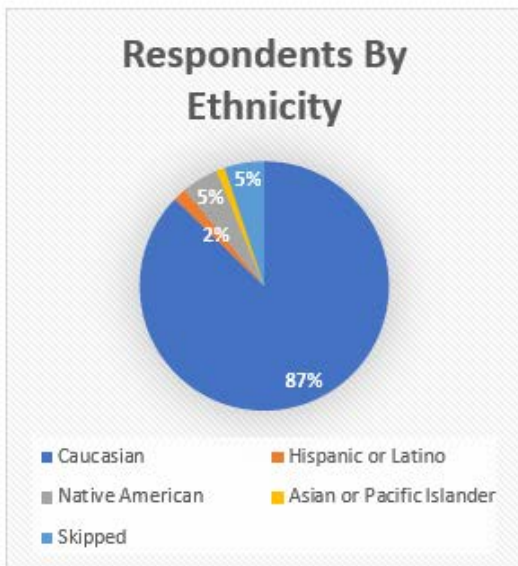
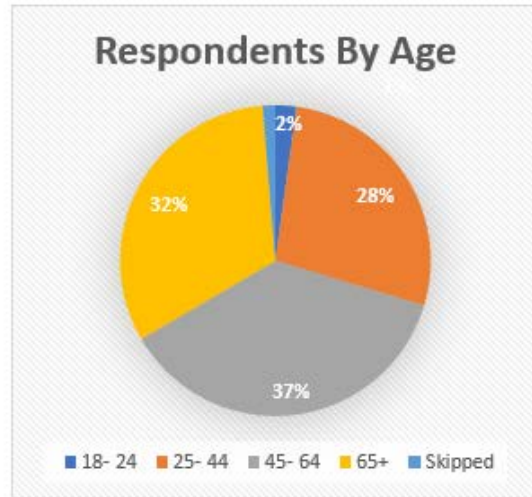
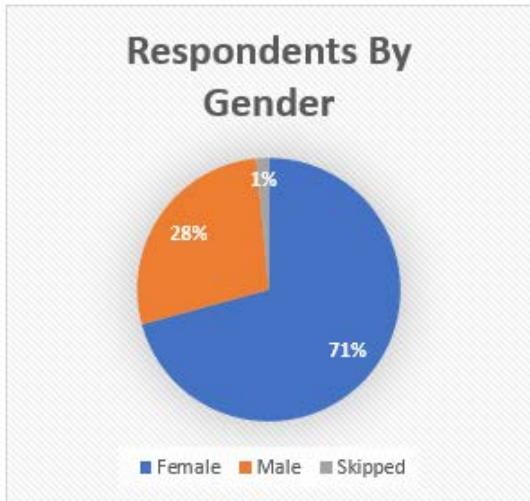
	Flathead	Lake	Lincoln	Sanders	Montana	US
Population	108,454	32,033	20,525	12,959	1,104,271	331,893,745
Number of Households	39,925	11,869	8,622	5,281	436,048	122,354,219
% of Renter Households	26%	28%	20%	23%	30%	28%
Homeownership rate	74%	72%	80%	77%	69%	64%
% of population under 18 yrs	21.7%	23.3%	18.5%	16.9%	21.3%	22.2%
% of population 65+ yrs	20.5%	23.4%	29.9%	32%	19.6%	16.8%
% of population living in poverty	10.5%	18.3%	17.9%	16.3%	12.4%	11.4%
Median household income	\$57,763	\$52,169	\$39,820	\$42,284	\$56,539	\$64,994
% of population with a broadband subscription	84.7%	78.5%	77.7%	75.9%	83.3%	85.2%
% of residents over 16 in the workforce	62.8%	57.7%	47.3%	43.8%	63.2%	63%
Population per square mile	20.5	20.9	5.4	4.5	7.4	93.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: UNITED STATES." Census Bureau QuickFacts July 1, 2021. National Low-Income Housing Coalition: Out of Reach 2022 Montana.

Analysis of agency services revealed that in 2021 6% of all households in Flathead County participated in CAPNM programming, 14% in Lake County, 13% in Lincoln County and 13% in Sanders County. An annual evaluation of services provided at the county level is completed by CAPNM in order to track any program variances. A zip code analysis of participants receiving services is done biennially, including an assessment of services delivered and community poverty rate. This helps with targeting outreach and tracking new or emerging trends.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

This section of the assessment will focus on providing an overview of the demographic characteristics and socio-economic factors reported by those surveyed, followed by analysis of the top noted family and community needs coupled with local secondary data and local key informant interviews. The needs assessment shall conclude with a summary outlining results.

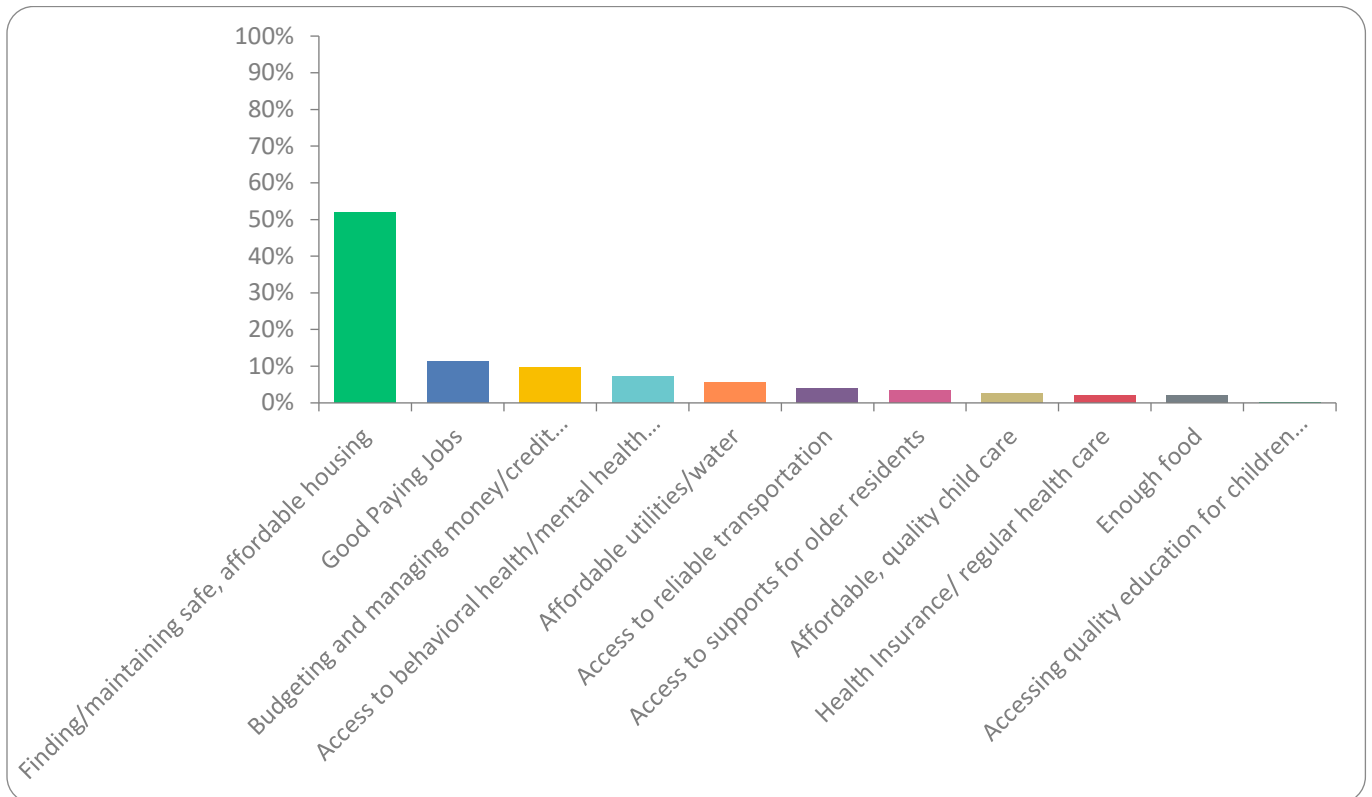


The needs assessment survey was completed by 455 individuals, in addition to targeted key informant interviews for qualitative data collection and Town Hall Meetings.

Demographically, respondents were generally Caucasian (87% of respondents; 88% of CAPNM participants in 2021), female (71% of respondents; 56% of CAPNM participants in 2021), between the ages of 45- 64 years old (37% of respondents; 26% of CAPNM participants in 2021) who report being single with no children (39% of respondents; 58% of CAPNM participants in 2021).

Further relational analysis of poverty and gender, poverty and age, and poverty and race/ ethnicity of survey respondents is located in Attachment (A).

OVERALL FAMILY LEVEL CHALLENGES AND NEED SUMMARY



#1 FAMILY LEVEL CHALLENGE:

Finding and maintaining, safe affordable housing:

52% of all respondents report that finding and maintaining safe affordable housing was the top family level need. (60% of respondents are homeowners, 29% are renters and 11% are doubled up, in a motel or homeless).

- Demographically, female respondents in one-person households without children reported lack of finding and maintaining housing as the top family level need. 44% of those have incomes below \$22,000 (or below 50% AMI).
- Of the respondents who reported housing as the primary family level barrier, 80% indicated that a lack of community housing stock for safe and affordable units was the cause of the need.

- Per 2020 US Census, Kalispell is the fastest growing micropolitan area in the United States based upon the sharp increase in population over the past decade; this is where the main office for CAPNM is located.
- According to the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce CEO in February of 2022, more than 50% of Flathead County renters are spending 30- 50% of monthly household income on rent. This is higher than communities of similar size or national norms.
- The Montana Budget and Policy Center reports that 32% of renters in Flathead County are living in poverty, 46% in Lincoln County, 43% in Sanders and 35% in Lake County.
- Rising home purchase prices (average sale price of a home in Flathead County in January 2020 was \$426,474 versus \$831,544 in August of 2022). Similarly, a spike in prices can be found in Lincoln, Lake and Sanders County. For example, in Sanders County the average sales price for a home was \$219,075 in January of 2020 but as of August 2022 price was up to \$651,952 (or a 198% increase in average home price in an area that has only seen a 10% increase in per capita income over the past 4-years).
- CAPNM has seen a significant decrease in participation in Homebuyer Education and an increase in services for those with rental housing needs.
- The Flathead Beacon published an affordable housing article in February 2022, in which local mortgage lender was quoted as indicating that first time buyers were decreasing due to the skyrocketing purchase costs that would leave them paying 50- 80% of gross monthly income if they were to purchase. This has resulted in families remaining in the rental market, who would have historically been primed to buy a home.
- Town Hall participants in Libby reported that housing is so tight that people are renting commercial spaces to live-in at times. A Job Service employee indicated that many people are moving to the area to build homes, so while building they are living in rental units that would traditionally go to working households in the community. This has resulted in increased pressure on the already tight rental market, leading to housing instability for households within the community.
- Key informant interview in April of 2022 was completed with a therapist specializing in elder services who indicated that their caseload has seen a dramatic increase in multi-generational households due to lack of housing, which has led to increased stress for those she serves. Space becomes tighter and demand on resources larger.
- The Point in Time data completed by the Montana Continuum of Care Coalition released data in August of 2022 showing that Flathead County has 20.1% of the statewide total homeless population. Other data elements from the PIT count worth paying attention to:
 - CAPNM services area has the highest number unsheltered population experiencing homelessness in the State of Montana (32%).
 - CAPNM services area has the highest number of persons experiencing homelessness with disabling conditions in the State of Montana (23%).
 - CAPNM service area has 20% of the statewide chronically homeless population but only 3% of the permanent supportive housing units designated for the chronically homeless in the state.

- Call activity and referrals made by the CAPNM receptionist were tracked for 2021. Housing was the top recorded service in which people sought assistance. Of the 7,756 points of contact recorded, 57% (4,731) were related to housing assistance for those experiencing housing instability. (Utility Assistance and Weatherization inquiries were the second most common, with 2644 points of contact or 32% and Employment/ Training had 914 inquires) Attachment (B) contains additional agency inquiry summary information.
- Customer surveys covering CNA review period for those who received services show that 50% came to the agency seeking housing assistance (26% sought Low Income Energy Assistance Program and Weatherization services, 5% for Employment and Training, 19% of other services including use of public computer).
- Survey respondents noted specific issues with landlords not following Montana Landlord Tenant law and particular concerns regarding living situations in which the tenant owns their mobile but rents the mobile lot it sits on. Specifically concerns over increasing lot rent and passing along fees without explanation to tenants, who are then at risk of losing their mobile home if they cannot make the increased lot payments (mobiles are often older and unable to be moved easily as it is expensive/ often older mobiles have structural integrity issues that make them poor candidates to hit the road; at times this results in the landlord keeping the mobile as it is 'abandoned' due to lot eviction but inability to relocate privately owned unit).
- Respondents report that "Housing is beyond a CRISIS."

Current Community Resources Available: Volunteers of America (Veteran Families), Neighbors in Need (small utility assistance), Ray of Hope (limited benevolence fund to assist with housing expenses), Helping Hands (limited funding for small assistance to Lake County households), United Way (COVID-19 related assistance for all 4 counties served by CAPNM), Ronan Housing Authority, Whitefish Housing Authority, Salish Kootenai Housing Authority. Temporary shelter is available for households who are homeless in Flathead County, as well as transitional housing options. Homeless shelters are not available in Sanders, Lake or Lincoln County, however emergency options for those fleeing domestic violence are available within the community. Montana Emergency Rental Assistance (MERA) is a new program that has started since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to offset or cover costs associated with housing. NeighborWorks and Montana Board of Housing for homebuyer or home purchase supports.

#2 FAMILY LEVEL CHALLENGE:

Employment:

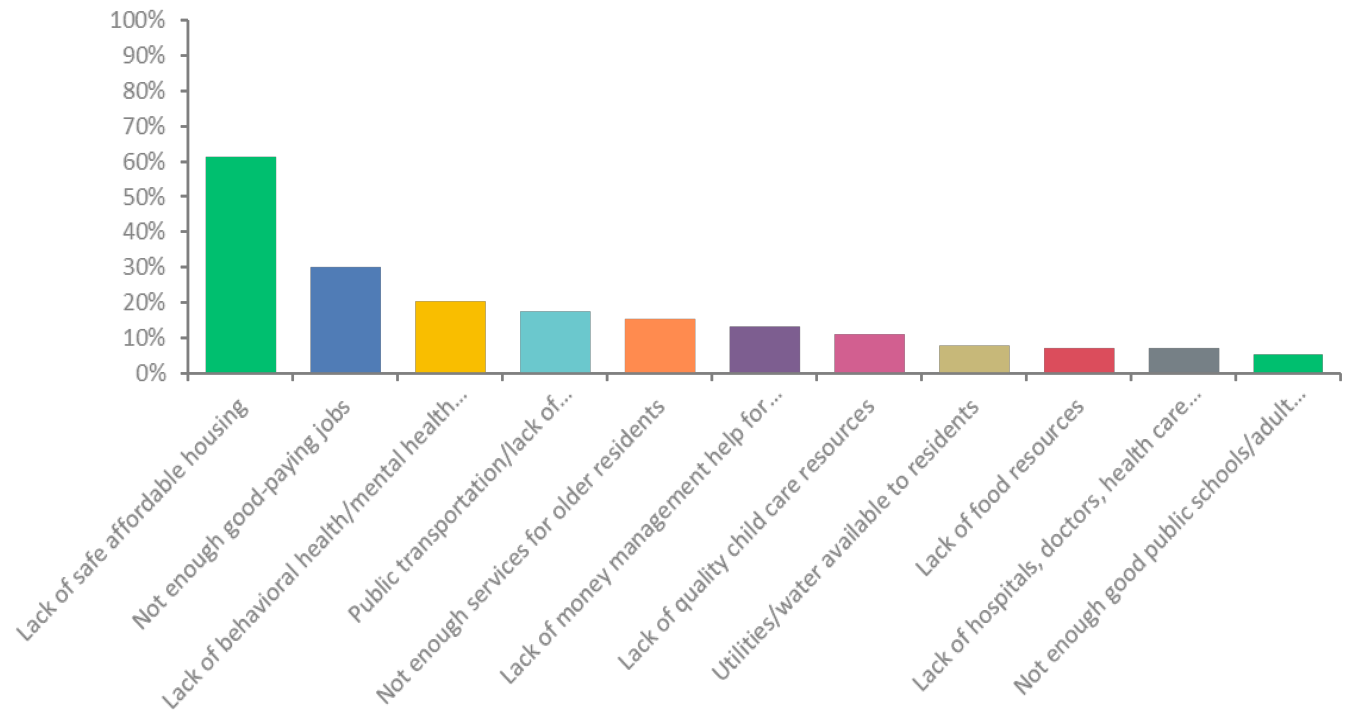
11% of respondents have identified that access to good paying jobs was the top challenge facing families and individuals.

- Respondent demographic citing employment issues as top family level challenge were largely from married homeowners from Lincoln County between 25- 44 years old.

- Labor Force Participation tracked by the Montana Department of Labor and Industry shows that within the 2020 recession recovery period there was an average job gain of 4,267 per month versus the 2008 recession recovery which had 488 per month.
- Respondents and key informants repeatedly indicated that jobs were plentiful, but the average wages were not sufficient to cover housing and other related living expenses. As of 09/18/22 there were 2,077 jobs open in the CAPNM service area, with statewide average wage for open positions of \$18.29/ hour. Modest per capita income increases ranging from 10- 24% have occurred over the past 10 years within the service area, the gradual increased income has not kept up with rapid increased cost of living throughout the region.
 - Interviews with Job Service staff in Lincoln County indicated the following: “Our county unemployment rate is down from previous years as there are jobs available for job seekers, the issue is that wages for most entry level positions are not sufficient enough to cover housing and other costs related to securing a place to live. Rent has risen sharply in our area and is not in pace with current wage rates for most entry level jobs here. Rental units are very limited and most have long waiting lists for potential renters. With rent in the range of \$1000+ for even small houses\apartments, it is very difficult for someone earning \$10 per hour and averaging 40 hours per week to even make their rental obligations along with other associated housing costs. We are seeing applicants seeking services to assist with finding a second job just to make ends meet.”
 - 55% of the respondents who noted good paying jobs as the top barrier were from Lincoln County. 25% from Flathead County, 12% from Sanders and 8% from Lake.
 - School District Superintendent in Flathead County indicated that new employees are struggling with the cost of living in northwest Montana (school staff survey says “Can’t eat the scenery.”). The following information was shared:
 - Decrease in number of people accepting benefits to help offset housing expenses.
 - Teachers are doubling up living situations, with as many as four educators or school employees per home to help decrease expenses. This has resulted in staff moving further and further out of town, but now staff are battling increased gas prices.
 - The school district is aggressively working to help create solutions to address the issues impacting teachers, including starting two childcare centers that operate at an affordable rate to help decrease child care expenses.

Current Community Resources Available: Vocational Rehabilitation (State of MT retraining and job skill development activities), Job Service (resume classes, employment experts), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult Program, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Youth Program, Supported Employment. Vocational training programs are offered through Flathead Valley Community College, Salish Kootenai Community College.

COMMUNITY LEVEL CHALLENGES AND NEED SUMMARY



#1 COMMUNITY LEVEL CHALLENGE:

Lack of safe, affordable housing:

61% of all respondents report that finding and maintaining safe affordable housing was the top community level need. (54% of respondents are homeowners, 30% are renters and 16% are doubled up or homeless).

- Demographically, single female respondents between 25- 64 years old with an annual income under \$34,000 who reported lack of finding and maintaining housing as the top community level need.
- Per National Low-Income Housing Coalition 2022 Montana Housing profile, Montana is short 18,538 affordable and available rental homes for tenants below 30% of Area Median Income (or extremely low income).
- Key informant interviews with housing experts in Sanders and Flathead County both reveal a community patterns of inventory constraints on housing units. Specifically, in Sanders County, it was noted that the community has few subsidized units but these will be going to the open market shortly, leaving a deficit of affordable units; currently Sanders County only has .14% of the state total of Low-Income Housing Tax Credit units. Flathead has 11.2%, Lincoln has .53% and Lake has 5.2%. Given the higher than average poverty rates, there is a low inventory of deed restricted affordable units within the CAPNM service area.

- Experts interviewed in outlying communities noted that infrastructure, such as public septic, are huge barriers for developers seeking to build additional units.
- Key informants all indicated that their communities had pushback with expansion of affordable housing. One expert in Sanders County called it “an anti-affordable housing effort with respectfully hateful pushback.”
- Lack of community inventory related to family units for those experiencing homelessness was noted in Flathead County, where a faith-based shelter system indicated that they have seen a sharp rise in households seeking shelter versus singles.
- Key informants indicated that communities are lacking ‘handymen’ someone who is able to cover multiple aspects of home repair or maintenance, nor do they have resources to pay for said repairs. As a result, homes become deteriorated and it places burden on the community.

Current Community Resources Available or in process: Sanders County Community Housing Organization is working on a 12-unit build in Noxon. CAPNM has 17-studio units in the pipeline to quickly address housing needs within the next year, and one pending Low-Income Housing Tax Credit build in Libby Montana (frontier community) with a placed in-service date in 2024. Samaritan House in Kalispell is pursuing a 12-unit build in Kalispell for families to start construction in 2024. One LIHTC project is currently in construction phases in Kalispell that will result in 114 market rate units and 24 low-income units will be completed in 2024.

#2 COMMUNITY LEVEL CHALLENGE:

Employment:

30% of respondents report the community lacks good paying jobs.

- One interesting note during a key informant interview, was that while jobs are available, they are seeing an increase in people with active substance use disorders, which impacts desire for employment. Issues impacting employee pool were further discussed. There are some who indicated that with the lack or limitation of community based behavioral health services it leads to deteriorated capacity to gain employment.
- Respondents note that while at in some areas, such as Lincoln County, there are some wages that have had slight raises, however there are no benefits attached to the wages, which creates additional barriers for employees.
- During Town Hall discussions in Lincoln and Sanders Counties, it was noted that local efforts to attract new employers are not aggressive enough and that zoning or codes will sometimes deter a new business from forming (one business owner was speaking specifically about his small café, which ended up going out of business as he could not afford to adapt to the new regulations imposed. He indicated that in a small community, gathering places such as cafes, help serve as a place to keep an eye on neighbors, take care of each other).
- Repeatedly with key informant interviews in Sanders, Lincoln and Flathead County it was noted that there are hiring issues as nobody is able to pay for housing or cost of living. One respondent in Lincoln County indicated that the local medical system had hired a medical doctor recently.

This doctor moved to the community, with temporary lodging for 90 days but ended up leaving the community as they could not find housing needed in order to fulfill the position.

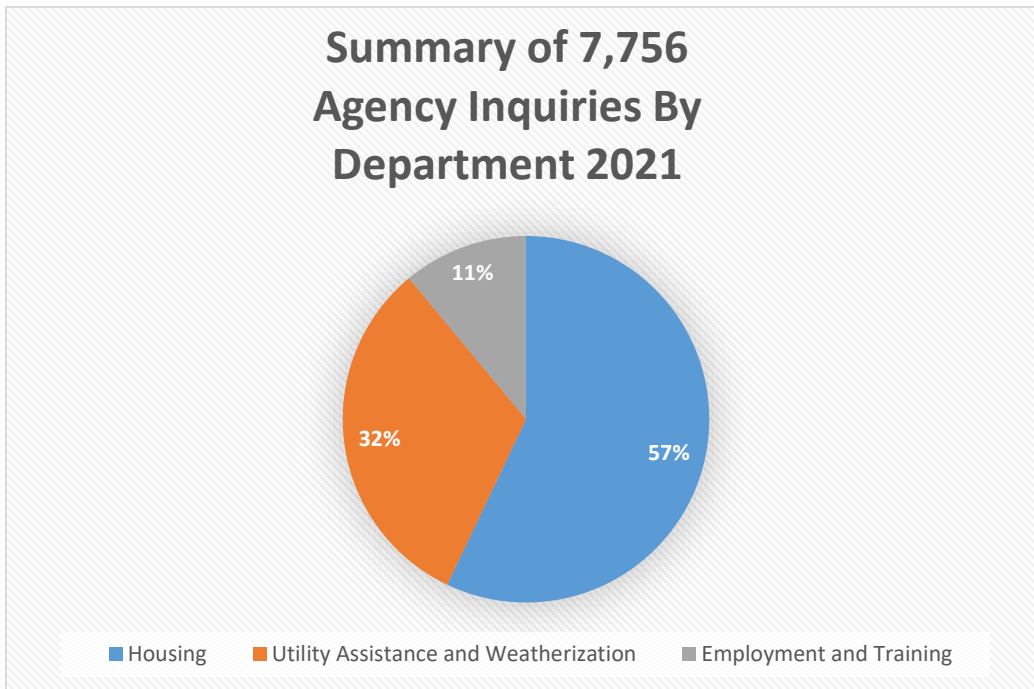
SUMMARY:

Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative needs assessment data yielded clear results. Housing security and lack of adequate employment opportunities are the top barriers facing at both the family and community level. The causes of poverty and the impact of those causes on the identified needs were evaluated. Specifically, low literacy rates, low educational achievements and a lack of access to training based upon employer needs were evaluated. These were all noted as barriers to self-sufficiency that impact the CAPNM service area. Additionally the conditions of poverty such as lack of affordable housing were examined. While these are the top items reflected as needs at both the community and family level, it must also be noted that additional needs such as barriers to transportation, utility and water bill expenses, lack of schooling and lack of money management were noted. Many of the additional needs identified are related to or impacted by housing and employment. Most are found to be causes and conditions of poverty when evaluated.

CAPNM works to provide programming and partnerships to help support households in obtaining or maintaining safe, affordable housing. Additionally, work is done in programs such as Low Income Energy Assistance Program, which help reduce the energy burden of households, thus allowing for more of the household income to be directed towards housing expenses. From homelessness to homeownership and beyond, CAPNM has created a service menu with housing resources for community members. On the community level, the agency owns 6 apartment complexes with long-term commitments to keep the units affordable. The agency also works with community partners to streamline services in order to reduce duplicative efforts and increase efficiency. Projects such as Housing is Healthcare, Homebuyer Education and Institutional Release Program are built upon collaborative partnerships within the community. Leveraging existing community resources to optimize services makes sense for those

Employment and Training services are offered through CAPNM, as well as partnerships with the Job Service. The underlying cause of poverty noted in regards to lack of living wage job, was noted to be lack of education and limited employment sectors. CAPNM currently operates the Pathway's program which allows for continued education, assistance with obtaining a high school equivalency degree and access to specific vocational certification programs such as 'Certified Nursing Assistant'. Additional elements of support provided by the agency, includes tools needed for employment (i.e. – supplies, obtaining identification, work appropriate clothing, bus vouchers).

The survey completed online helped customers provide input as to how CAPNM can best serve the community moving forward. The top noted areas were in publicizing services more and building additional community partnerships to assist with delivering services. In doing so, it would allow for strategic growth and maximizing impact. In addition to using this survey data to help with future planning, CAPNM has evaluated internal capacity, current programming and the agency mission as a step towards future planning.

Attachment (A):**Data Sources**

- *U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: UNITED STATES.* Census Bureau QuickFacts [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Montana; Flathead County, Montana; Lincoln County, Montana; Sanders County, Montana; Lake County, Montana; United States](#)
- *National Low-Income Housing Coalition: "Out of Reach 2022: Montana"* [Montana 2022 OOR.pdf \(nlihc.org\)](#)
- *National Center for Education Statistics: "State and County Estimates of Low Literacy"* <https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx>
- *"2019 Cost Burden Report: Half of Renter Households Struggle With Affordability"* Salviati, Chris <https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/cost-burden-2019>
- *National Low Income Housing Coalition: 2020 Montana Housing Profile* https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/SHP_MT.pdf
- *CAPNM Customer Survey results, 2021 Annual Report (CAPNM data), Referral and inquiry assessment (internal), COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment CAPNM*
- [The Rippling Effects of High Housing Costs - Flathead Beacon](#)
- [Montana Rental Housing Affordability Map \(mbpc.netlify.app\)](#)
- *Montana Continuum of Care Coalition "Needs & Gaps Data, MT CoC (from the 2022 Point-in-Time data and Housing Inventory)."*
- [Flathead County Stats – Montana Regional MLS, LLC \(406mls.com\)](#)
- [Experts, data: Pandemic worsened western MT's affordable housing crisis \(missoulian.com\)](#)
- [B19301: Census Bureau Table](#)