



This update to the Downeast Community Partners Community Needs Assessment was completed in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

I. Background

This Community Assessment Update is in response to a global health pandemic that has not only affected every community in the United States but has also led to the most significant economic disruption since the Great Depression. This assessment is an initial effort to capture some of the emerging needs in the community as well as to forecast how those needs may evolve over the coming weeks and months.

Because of the urgent and widespread needs affecting all sectors of the community, this Community Assessment update is intended to provide some initial information to describe the scope of this crisis on our community and to support the many different responses that will be required to address emerging, evolving needs. It is likely that as needs evolve, some of those needs will not be captured in this update and therefore some necessary community responses may not connect to the needs identified in this document.

The *community* assessed in this document, related to the below information, is defined as the following:

Washington and Hancock Counties, State of Maine

The needs assessed will inform services to those affected by the crisis. It is significant to note that Congressional action will permit FY20 and special supplemental CSBG funding to serve families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (as defined by [the US Census Bureau](#)).

The following table illustrates how the 200% eligibility standard will expand the number of local residents eligible for services:

	# below 125% <i>(CSBG standard)</i>	# below 200% <i>(updated CARES standard)</i>	Additional # eligible to be served <i>(# below 200% - # below 125%)</i>
Population in Hancock County	8,475	16,526	8,051
Population in Washington County	1,544	7,740	6,196

Specific programs or strategies will target the demographic groups most affected.

National, State and Local public health crisis

State and local health authorities responded to the outbreak by placing restrictions on travel, business and recreation that have had a number of impacts on the community.

As a result of this unprecedented public health crisis, Downeast Community Partners is updating its Community Assessment because there is currently a significant impact on the community, and a number of short-, intermediate- and longer-term impacts are expected.

II. Immediate impacts on the community

The immediate impacts of COVID-19 have been felt across all sectors of society. In particular, some of the greatest impacts relevant to the Community Action Network have been in the areas of health, education, employment, human services provision, and community resources. In this community, areas of highest vulnerability are in those communities with seasonal employment, highly reliant on the tourist and fishing industries, and a high proportion of older residents.

Nationwide, early data suggest that the following groups have experienced disproportionately higher rates of infection and/or complications/death as a result the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Males
- Individuals 65+ years old
- People of color, particularly African Americans and Native Americans
- People with underlying health conditions (especially, lung disease, asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, liver disease, severe obesity, and individuals with immunocompromised conditions)

Due to the high proportion of older residents in these two counties, a significant outbreak could greatly affect our vulnerable populations.

The following outlines some of the critical areas of impact to the local community thus far:

- Health impacts:
 - Individuals over 65, especially those with underlying health conditions have been shown to be at particular risk for severe health implications from COVID-19. Those in congregate settings (e.g. nursing homes) are a particular concern in this community.
 - Females over 64 comprise 12.7 of the population in our service area, with males over 64 comprising 9.8%
 - Behavioral health resources will need to be available in new and increased ways to deal with the many different stressors/traumas caused by the pandemic, especially its impact over an extended time period.
 - Nutrition for school-aged children previously accessing free/reduced breakfast, lunch, and snacks is impacted as many are now removed from that food source due to school closures.
 - 50.54 percent of children in our service area were eligible for free or reduced lunches in the 2016-2017 school year, which is higher than the national average.
- Employment impacts:
 - Employment impacts of the pandemic have been immediate and profound. Anecdotal information as well as early data about unemployment claims from March confirm a significant

emerging need in the area of employment.¹ Local indicators show that national patterns of unemployment are being seen in this community. According to the US Department of labor, unemployment for the past year grew from 5.79% to 6.23%. This has had a profound effect on Washington County.

- Individuals in the educational field – especially teachers and assistants in Head Start and Early Head Start as well as other early childhood care settings – are working remotely due to school shutdowns. Lower-wage workers in these fields are more vulnerable to layoffs and/or may lack the technology resources in their home to work remotely.²
- Individuals in many sectors of the economy – but particularly the service sector, the retail sectors, gig economy, and others most affected by quarantine policies – are currently experiencing sudden and unexpected unemployment. Some are unaware of resources available to them and their families as they are experiencing unemployment for the first time. ³
- Educational impacts:
 - Closings of public schools in the Community Assessment area are having an immediate impact on children’s education. Children with less access to resources (broadband internet, computers/tablets, technology expertise, language barriers, etc.) are most at-risk for suffering learning loss during a potentially protracted period of school closure.
 - Caregivers of school-age children must secure day care arrangements for their children or sacrifice employment to care for their children. These same caregivers are also expected to be primary teachers for their children during the period of the closure. Parents with limited resources face numerous challenges as a result of this situation and educational outcomes for their children will be affected.⁴
- Community resource impacts:
 - The impacts of COVID-19 on community resources are numerous and include a reduction in the availability of resources (access to group activities, commercial services), a scarcity of some resources (health care, food and emergency supplies) and/or needs for resources that have not previously been required in this community in any significant capacity.
 - The broad impacts of COVID-19 on this community have created an even more urgent need for coordination and collaboration of resources among the public sector, the public health sector, first responders, educators, the business community, the faith community and many others. DCP plays an important role convening organizations, people and resources to support families.

III. Anticipated near- and long-term impacts--Summary

The needs above are already established through initial data and anecdotal reports from customers, staff, board members and community stakeholders. Based on these already-observed events, it is likely that there will be near-term (1-3 months) and longer-term (greater than 3 months) impacts that that require immediate planning. A partial, but not complete, list of the anticipated impacts include:

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/05/13/what-weekly-unemployment-claims-reveal-about-the-local-impacts-of-the-covid-19-recession/>

² <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/11/830856140/teaching-without-schools-grief-then-a-free-for-all>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/27/young-workers-likely-to-be-hard-hit-as-covid-19-strikes-a-blow-to-restaurants-and-other-service-sector-jobs/>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/17/why-covid-19-will-explode-existing-academic-achievement-gaps/>

- *Exacerbated housing issues:* Due to the immediate economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, renters face one or more months where they may lack the funds to pay rent; homeowners with a mortgage may miss mortgage payments.
- *Prolonged employment issues:* Sudden layoffs and other employment disruptions are being addressed by emergency response measures; however, it is anticipated that long-term recovery efforts will be required to help customers reconnect to the workforce, particularly those for whom employment assistance has not previously been required.⁵
- *Prolonged agency capacity issues:* Policies limiting in-person staff/customer interactions may be in place for an extended period of time and agencies will need to maintain remote work and remote customer-interaction infrastructure to be responsive to these needs in a more sustainable capacity.
- *Prolonged community resource/coordination issues:* The short-term community coordination needs cited in this Assessment are presumed to continue into the long-term. Current conditions may persist for an extended period; recovery efforts will require coordination; ongoing community preparedness to guard against a future outbreak will also require ongoing convening and new community readiness strategies based on what is shown to be effective during the current crisis.⁶
- *Prolonged Food Insecurity:* An initial survey of community members from both counties reveals the primary concern of citizens currently surrounds food insecurity and job loss. This job loss leads to concerns about meeting basic needs such as Housing and Utilities, as well as other household expenses.
- *Transportation* remains a barrier during this time of uncertainty. Clients practicing social distancing are challenged to get to medical appointments, pharmacies, grocery stores and/or food pantries and other basic necessities.
- *Elder Isolation:* The isolation of our aging communities can be a real concern and health issue as the isolation caused by social distancing continues. Many elder citizens do not have adequate support systems and check-in services or in-home care as needed.

⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-covid-19-will-change-the-nations-long-term-economic-trends-brookings-metro/>

⁶ <https://centerforcommunityinvestment.org/blog/reimagining-strategy-context-covid-19-crisis-triage-tool>