

1999 Community Needs Assessment

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Summary of Major Findings

The University of Delaware's Center for Community Development and Family Policy has carried out a community needs assessment for the State of Delaware to identify the major social and economic issues that are affecting communities, neighborhoods, and families within the state and to gain insight into how these issues can be effectively dealt with in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors.

The community needs assessment employed a combination of methods including 1) a review of existing studies and reports on social and economic problems in Delaware, 2) the collection and analysis of secondary data on Delaware social and economic problems, and 3) the collection of new data through household and service provider surveys and focus group meetings. The final product identifies the major social and economic problems facing families, neighborhoods and communities in Delaware with recommendations for policy strategies that can effectively reduce the problems identified. Our major findings are discussed below.

Population, Social and Economic Trends at the State Level

Many factors will trigger growth in Delaware's social and economic service needs in the 2000s. By the year 2020, more people will live in Delaware, and the largest group - today's baby boomers - will be over 65. Within the state, the greatest rate of population growth is expected in Sussex County.

Changes in the size of age cohorts will have a significant impact on the types of services needed in the community. The services needed by older individuals differ considerably from the services needed by children and youth. As a result, more people will need assistance from professionals for medical care, child or elder care, and daily living assistance.

Other trends of the recent past are likely to continue: more people will move to the state from other places; more people will remain single; people will marry later; married couples will have fewer children; and many marriages will end in separation or divorce.

One out of every four people in Delaware is a child, and more than a third of the recent births in our state (1993-1997) were to single women. According to the 1990 Census, female-headed families in Delaware accounted for nearly one in five of all families with children. More than half of female-headed households in the state are in poverty. These trends have life-long ramifications for these mothers

and their children. For example, a greater proportion of children are at risk of growing up in poverty and more children will be without health care coverage. Other issues identified by KIDS COUNT/FAMILIES COUNT in Delaware include low-birth weight babies, substance abuse by children of middle school age, and children in out of home care.

An important issue for decision-makers in both the public and nonprofit sectors is the location of the most severe social and economic needs in the state. In 1997, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services conducted an analysis to determine where services should be targeted. Priority areas were identified and ranked at the census tract level. Tracts with the highest aggregate rankings for relevant social and economic indicators in New Castle County are located in and around Wilmington, in Claymont, in Newark (largely because of the number of students living around the University), in the Route 40 corridor, and in Middletown. The areas of greatest need in Kent and Sussex Counties are in the greater Dover area, Smyrna, Harrington, around Milford, Rehoboth and Georgetown, and much of the western part of Sussex County.

The proportion of the state's population that is employed (either part-time or full-time) has been rising, largely because of the increase in the employment rate among females. However, this major source of new labor market entrants is gradually diminishing. Between 2000 and 2020, as the baby boomers retire, the employment rate will fall. However, preferences for work may also change with longevity and the baby boomer cohort may work longer at least on a part-time basis.

While labor force participation rates are changing along with the age structure of the population in Delaware, there are other long-term shifts occurring in the structure of the labor market. Manufacturing employment has been declining, while service sector employment has been growing rapidly and surpassed manufacturing in 1987. As the size of each sector changes, job opportunities also change for those sectors. More than half of all jobs in the retail trade and personal services sectors are part-time. Part-time workers in jobs without benefits are likely to increase demand for social and economic services from public and nonprofit sector providers.

Social and Economic Needs at the Neighborhood Level

There is a pattern of race, age, and geographic location associated with the likelihood of reporting one or more neighborhood problems. Statewide, close to one-quarter of the survey respondents stated that there are social and economic problems in the area where they live. Hispanic respondents are more likely to

report neighborhood problems than either African American or white respondents. Households headed by someone age 18-59 are also much more likely to report neighborhood problems than those headed by a person over age 60. Just under 15 percent of suburban New Castle County and Kent County respondents reported neighborhood problems as compared to about one third of Wilmington respondents and more than half of the Sussex County respondents.

Race, age, and geographic location are also associated with variation among respondents on the types of neighborhood problems reported. Thus, African American respondents are more likely than others to identify basic needs, health care problems, problems with alcohol use, drug abuse, and unemployment as neighborhood problems.

Statewide, a majority of respondents who perceive neighborhoods problems identify lack of recreation and cultural activities as a problem in their neighborhood. About half of those who said there are problems in their neighborhood identify drug abuse, problems with alcohol use, poor public transportation, problems with youth, problems facing older people, and child care for working parents. Households headed by a respondent age 18-59 are the most likely to identify teen pregnancy, child care for working parents, and crime/victim's services as neighborhood problems.

Social and Economic Needs at the Household Level

Compared to reports of neighborhood problems, more respondents report household problems than reported neighborhood problems and there is much less variation in reporting household problems among respondents in the four geographic areas. Close to one in three respondents report household problems while less than a quarter report problems in the area where they live. The groups that are most likely to report one or household problems are African Americans, those under the age of 60, and those with annual income less than \$20,000.

One-quarter of suburban New Castle County respondents report having household problems as compared to about one-third of Kent County, Sussex County and Wilmington respondents. In contrast to the neighborhood level findings, there is less variation among respondents on the type of household problem reported in the four geographic areas. With the exception of housing repair and paying utilities, well below 10 percent of the respondents from all four geographic areas report specific household problems. Statewide, the most frequently reported household problem is housing repair. The next three leading problems are paying utilities, paying rent, and transportation.

Perceptions about Services

There is very little agreement between household respondents and service providers about the barriers to receiving services. Slightly more than a third of the household respondents report difficulty getting help and most frequently cite red tape as the reason why people have difficulty in getting help from health and human service organizations followed by the belief that services will not help, agency staff unpleasantness, the distance to services, and lack of child care.

Virtually all of the provider respondents identified at least one barrier to service but mentioned very different barriers than the household respondents. Lack of knowledge about availability of services, lack of transportation, lack of knowledge about how to locate services, dislike of going to outsiders for help, and language and cultural barriers were the barriers identified by service providers. By a considerable margin, lack of knowledge about the availability of services was considered to be the most important barrier to service.

Specific Community Problems

Drug abuse, alcohol problems, and crime were among the top five neighborhood problems identified by household survey respondents. Substance abuse was mentioned much less frequently by focus group participants, while the criminal justice system rather than crime was an important issue for focus group members.

Drug abuse

By a considerable margin, the highly publicized and seemingly intractable problem of drug abuse is the most important neighborhood concern expressed by Delaware households. However while more than a third of household respondents with neighborhood problems said that drug abuse was the first or second most serious problem in their neighborhood, it was ranked 11th among 14 possible problems found in their homes. One half of the service provider respondents indicated that the need for substance abuse services somewhat or substantially exceeded the supply.

Alcohol Problems

Alcohol abuse is reflected in a host of misfortunes including babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome, car and boat accidents, high school dropout rates, divorce statistics, and serious crimes. Recognizing the far reaching effects of alcohol-related abuse, more than half of the household respondents cited it as a serious neighborhood problem, second only to drug abuse. None of the household respondents identified alcohol abuse as a problem in their own homes. It is likely that some service providers included alcohol in their definition of substance abuse and perception that the need for these services somewhat or substantially

exceeded supply.

Crime

About 15 percent of the household respondents ranked crime among the top three neighborhood problems. Residents of the City of Wilmington and Sussex County more often identified this among the top five neighborhood problems in the areas where they live.

Poor Public Transportation

Poor public transportation was among the top five neighborhood problems reported by household survey respondents and focus group participants shared this concern. Employment opportunities and social and economic service programs mean little if the people who need them cannot gain access to them, and in rural and low-income communities, transportation is a special consideration. Overall, about a quarter of the household respondents saw poor public transportation as among the top three neighborhood problems. Access to transportation was also among the top five household problems identified by household respondents. Transportation was also among the top three community problems for focus group participants in the City of Wilmington, suburban New Castle County and Sussex County. Kent County participants stated that public transportation is not available to help people get to work. Sussex County participants said that the lack of public transportation severely limits peoples' ability to get to work and welfare recipients' ability to meet job search requirements. It was also indicated that the eastern part of the county has limited public transportation while the western part of the county is not served and no bus service is available between Sussex County and Kent County. More than half of the service providers believed that the need for transportation was somewhat or substantially greater than the supply and nearly two-thirds ranked lack of transportation as among the top five service barriers for their clients.

Lack of Recreational and Cultural Activities

Not enough recreation and cultural activities was also cited by household respondents as one of the top five neighborhood problems but this issue was not mentioned at all by the focus group participants. Although frequently cited as an area problem, neither household respondents nor focus group participants generally viewed lack of recreational and cultural activities among the most serious of social and economic problems. About a quarter of the service providers believed that the need for recreational and cultural activities was somewhat or substantially greater than the supply.

Housing

The lack of affordable housing for thousands of Delawareans is one of the state's most visible unmet needs. Household respondents identified housing (in poor condition, crowded, too expensive) among the most serious neighborhood

problems. Housing was among the three most important neighborhood problems reported by household respondents from suburban New Castle County, the City of Wilmington, and Kent County. The most frequently reported household problem by household respondents was housing repair, followed by paying utilities, and paying rent or mortgage. Housing repair was also among the most serious household problem cited by household respondents and maintaining and repairing their homes was the most important household problem facing respondents in households with members aged 60 and over.

Focus group participants identified affordable housing and homelessness among the most serious neighborhood problems. New Castle County and Wilmington focus group participants raised the issue of the quality of senior housing. Kent County focus group participants identified affordable housing and homelessness among the top three community problems. Sussex County focus group participants pointed out that many homes in the county lack indoor plumbing and rely on contaminated water and sewer systems.

Problems facing older people

As the population ages, the need for a restructured senior service delivery system becomes more apparent, with an emphasis on personal care and assistance with daily living for the elderly. As baby boomers age and families grow smaller, there will be more older people who need support and assistance and fewer family members to fill the traditional role of providing this care. About half of the household respondents citing neighborhood problems viewed problems facing the elderly as a problem in their neighborhood. Problems facing older people were ranked among the most important neighborhood problems by household respondents across the state. Suburban New Castle County, Kent County and Sussex County respondents ranked problems facing the elderly among the three most important neighborhood problems.