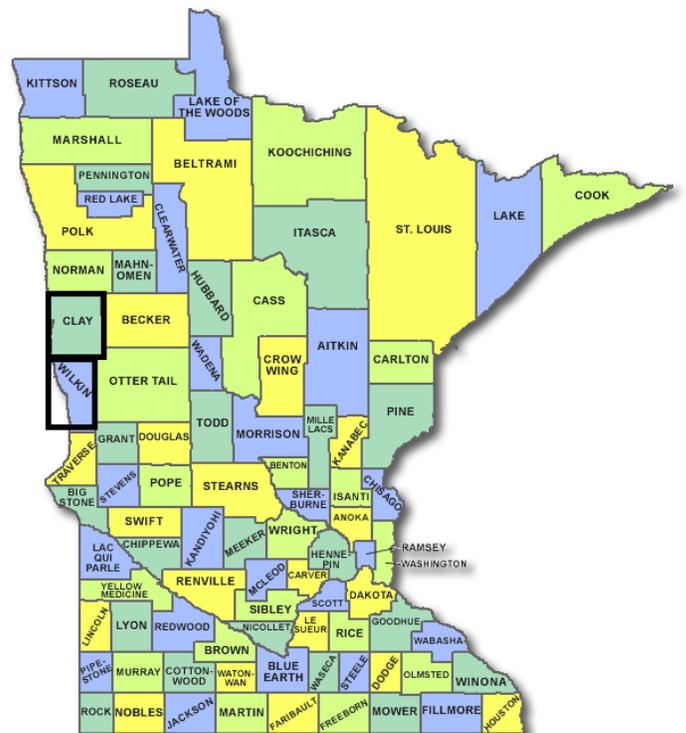


Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership 2017 Community Needs Assessment

Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership is part of a nation-wide anti-poverty network and our promise is that “Community Action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.” Our mission is to “Eliminate Poverty, Empower Families and Engage Communities.” In an effort to identify the causes and conditions of poverty in the communities we serve, we conduct an assessment of community needs once every 3 years. **This Community Needs Assessment** identifies the strengths and resources available in the **community** to meet the **needs** of children, youth, seniors, individuals and families.

The **assessment** focuses on the capabilities of the **community**, including its citizens, agencies, and organizations. This assessment was completed in March of 2017 and includes an analysis of the trending changes in demographics of the communities we serve as well as an in-depth review of the services, gaps, and needs. Methods used to collect the data for this assessment include a compilation of quantitative data as well as qualitative data collected through a survey of current customer and community partners as well as focus groups.

This assessment includes the Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership primary service area of **Clay and Wilkin Counties in West Central Minnesota**. The total population of the service area is **68,810** which has grown over 14% over the last 14 years. Within the 2-county service area, over 90% of the population resides in Clay County primarily within the regional hub of the city of Moorhead. The remaining communities are defined as rural in nature with populations of 4,000 people or less. **The needs within these communities vary widely** as Moorhead residents tend to have closer proximity to employment, shopping, and transportation. The population within the city of Moorhead has a higher percentage of younger household heads and working poor, as well as a higher rate of households experiencing homelessness. **The rural areas within Clay and Wilkin County are facing a declining population** as they are experiencing a reduction in employment, difficulty with transportation and an overall aging population. Within both counties, the **unemployment rate is lower than the national average**, and has been steadily declining over the past 5 years. At the same time, **poverty rates have increased an average of 3.5%** over the past several years. Median household income is below the Minnesota Average by almost 10%. Detailed information on the changing trends and demographics within the region are included in this assessment.



Summary of Community Needs Identified

Through the 2017 Community Needs Assessment several key trends were identified that are critical indicators of the causes and conditions of poverty in our community. Through an assessment of community-level data, 5 key indicators of community changes have been identified as having a significant effect on the causes and conditions of poverty in our community.

1. **Shifting Population** – The population within the 2 county service area is shifting to the regional hub of Moorhead. The city of Moorhead is one of the top 10 fastest growing cities in the state of Minnesota. The population of Clay County grew 17.61% from 2000 to 2014, while the population of Wilkin County declined by 8.08% during the same time frame. This is consistent with statewide population shifts to regional population hubs.
2. **Aging Population** – Within the 2-county region that Lakes & Prairies serves, there are currently over 8,200 people aged 65 and older. By 2030 that number is projected to double. While the total number of seniors that fall within this age group is higher in Clay County, the percentage of the overall population is much higher in Wilkin County. 12% of the total population of Clay County is seniors over age 65, while 18% of the total population of Wilkin County is 65+.
3. **Lack of Affordable Housing** - The **residential vacancy rate is dangerously low at 1.3%**, compared to the statewide average of 4% and a “healthy” vacancy rate of 5%. In addition, over 56% of Clay County and 33% of Wilkin County renters are considered “cost burdened” paying more than 30% of their income towards housing.
4. **Unemployment** – There is a significant labor skills gap between available jobs and the labor market. The unemployment rate in the area continues to decline and the number of available jobs is projected to outnumber skilled workers by 2020.
5. **Inequality of Poverty** – Poverty rates among minority populations are disproportionate to the population. Within our service are 27.7% of Hispanic/Latino population, 38.1% of Black population, and 52.3% of the Native American population are living below the poverty line. This is especially shocking given that the poverty rate among the White population is only 10.7%. These significant disparities between outcomes and opportunities must be addressed.

In addition to the changing demographic trends in our community, this assessment also included community-level data collected from low-income individuals in our community. According to this assessment the highest areas of need identified were:

1. **Transportation** – Reliable, accessible transportation is a barrier especially for those residing in the rural areas of Clay and Wilkin County.
2. **Child Care**- High quality, affordable childcare is unobtainable for many families.
3. **Education & Training** – Households lack the education required to obtain family sustaining wages.
4. **Living Wage Employment** – While the unemployment rate is very low, many entry level positions do not pay a living wage.
5. **Affordable Housing** – The cost of rent has outpaced the wages leaving housing unaffordable for far too many families.

The data collected through this assessment of community needs will be utilized to guide the strategic planning and direction of Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership programs, resources and services over the next three years. Assessment information will be updated annually as community resources, needs and gaps change over time.