



DENVER COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

August 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Process

Denver County's Department of Human Services (DHS) contracted with JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) to conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment to identify community needs, barriers, and assets of lower-income residents in Denver County in relation to the nine federal objectives of the CSBG:

- Employment
- Education and cognitive development
- Income, infrastructure and asset building
- Housing
- Health and social/behavioral development (including nutrition)
- Civic engagement and community involvement
- Services supporting multiple domains
- Linkages
- Agency capacity building

The needs assessment consisted of an environmental scan and landscape analysis and a collection and analysis of customer satisfaction and experience data. The environmental scan and landscape analysis reviewed all existing data related to low-income and the CSBG objectives that is relevant in the context of Denver. The customer satisfaction and experience data collection gathered primary data from low-income community members and those that provide services within the areas of the CSBG objectives. All data was reviewed and analyzed to determine what the most pressing needs are for low-income individuals in Denver and how to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower people with low incomes in the most effective way possible.

Analysis

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Each relevant statistic or table was analyzed to determine needs and most effected populations related to poverty in Denver.

QUALITATIVE DATA

All qualitative data was analyzed using text categorization and keyword extraction text analysis techniques. Keyword extraction identifies and extracts relevant and important words or phrases from text to develop keywords that can then serve as the categories or labels to use text categorization to sort text into categories based on their content to organize and develop themes. These techniques were used to understand the spectrum of needs, develop common themes, and identify assets as well as gaps within the context of the nine federal CSBG objectives.

Findings

SERVICE AREAS WITH THE HIGHEST NEEDS

- **Housing:** this is the largest need in Denver. There is not enough affordable housing and there is a rapidly growing population of unhoused individuals in Denver. If people do not have housing, their ability to do anything else that could help their situation or positively influence their lives is negligible.
- **Employment:** more supportive employment services are needed that provide skills development. Many people see this as the only way out of poverty and to maintain stable housing but do not have the supports to create employment opportunities for themselves.

- **Support Services:** Support services are critical to accessing resources and services but there is far more need than availability of service providers. Navigating the systems to get support is difficult in itself so people have to rely on navigators and case managers but all organizations seem stretched too thin.
- **Health:** there is an overwhelming need for mental health services and not enough supply. There are many barriers to accessing healthcare services and individuals are unaware of affordable services but there is also not enough capacity to meet demand for free or affordable healthcare services.
- **Education:** there is a need for ongoing adult education as well as a concern around school safety that the community is uncertain how to address

NEIGHBORHOODS WITH THE HIGHEST NEEDS

- **The central westside of Denver:** College View – South Platte, Ruby Hill, Athmar Park, Westwood, Valverde, Barnum, Barnum West, Villa Park, Sun Valley, and Lincoln Park
- **The North and Northwest of Denver:** Globeville, Elyria-Swansea, Clayton, Montbello, and Gateway-Green Valley Ranch
- **East side of Denver:** East Colfax, Windsor, and Kennedy

PERCEPTIONS OF DHS AND CSBG

- DHS is recognized and there is awareness of it as an entity, very few clients/community members are familiar with the CSBG
 - Service providers have more awareness of CSBG, most because they have worked or still work at an organization that has received CSBG funding
- DHS is perceived as understaffed and underfunded with a need for systems that produce more consistency in information provided and reduced call wait times
- Individual DHS staff are appreciated and service providers find them very supportive but find the systems used limit the amount of support they can offer to organizations
- CSBG grantees deeply appreciate the non-restricted nature of CSBG funding but find it to be a very small amount for the administrative work that goes into it
- There is awareness of DHS benefits but many barriers to accessing benefits and services, especially when it comes to the digital divide and needing to have a phone and connectivity which low-income people do not reliably have
- DHS is seen as making an effort to be culturally responsive but is limited in the amount of language services that are truly available and in creating programming that is truly culturally responsive

OPPORTUNITIES

- The biggest needs related to addressing affordable housing and how to increase the amount, affordability, or reduce the cost burden, however, that is outside the scope of what DHS does so there is an opportunity to educate and grow awareness about what DHS can address
- Many opportunities suggested pointed to providing technology and technology navigation so people can have access to benefits and services
- Many opportunities were seen in providing additional, tailored support to individuals in a trauma-informed way

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF DENVER COMMUNITY

Amongst service providers and community members, all were familiar with Denver Human Services (DHS) but only a handful of service providers were familiar with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). When queried about DHS, most provided their experience with DHS as an entity. Programs they had utilized or heard of included:

- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)*
- Medicaid and Medicare
- Section 8*
- SNAP

*Note: Section 8, now called the Housing Choice Voucher, is administered by the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) not DHS. The WIC program is administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service, not DHS. However, both were noted by community members when describing programs they had utilized or heard about.

CAPACITY TO MEET NEEDS

Overall, DHS is perceived as understaffed and underfunded. There is far more need than capacity to provide services for everyone who is eligible. Many shared that there are inconsistencies in the information provided when asking questions. Many shared that you can get a different story from different people when you call DHS and that staff are not on the same page as far as deadlines and information. One participant recalled “getting four different dates and times from four people” when calling about a question. Many attributed the discrepancies to being overworked.

Beyond the capacity issues and inconsistencies, all participants commented on the exceptionally long wait times when calling DHS. With limited in-person services and transportation as a barrier, phoning DHS is the most common way to access them and participants described having to wait as much as an hour before connecting to DHS staff and then not being able to get their questions answered. One service provider shared that they have seen a lot of people lose their benefits because of long wait times to get through on the phone and also language barriers. They shared that not only is there no one to answer questions, if you walk in, no one will help you. Another service provider described how communication is an issue and you need to find the right person to talk to and then have that person stick around long enough to maintain a relationship. They did note that once they have found the right person, “working with them is super easy.”

CAPACITY TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

CSBG

Overall, service providers felt that DHS CSBG staff were valuable assets and as supportive as possible of their programming and services. One service provider shared that the amount of administrative work and effort to apply for funding was almost not worth the amount granted through CSBG and that there is an onus on service organizations to find supplemental funding. They also noted that it was better when e-logic was funded because all reports were pulled and standardized and that there was a loss in the collaboration and cohesion amongst CSBG grantees that they attributed to the startup of the Department of Housing Stability (HOST) which caused the DHS team to split up across programs.

DHS

Service providers had mixed sentiments about DHS’ capacity to support their organization. Many felt that DHS is understaffed and does not have the capacity to partner effectively. It was shared that “it seems like they are incredibly overtaxed and disorganized about who to contact to get clients services they need.” One provider shared that “figuring out the financial status of applications for those in long-term care is difficult to impossible.” However, most service providers shared that overall, DHS staff are trying their best and it is a flawed system, not the employees.

Staff from the Denver Library shared two successful supports provided by DHS: the navigation trainings provided to the Denver Library were seen as invaluable and the partnership with Denver's mobile libraries being welcome to co-locate with the mobile food pantries.

KNOWLEDGE/ACCESSIBILITY OF PROGRAMS

There was a varied response to the knowledge of DHS programs. Some felt that people know where and what the programs are and that if you want to find help you can. Others felt that they had never heard of DHS programs and services and that "if it's supposed to be for the community, why doesn't the community know about it?"

Nearly all participants believe DHS programs are not accessible. Many expressed that there are too many qualification limitations that don't factor the cost of living in, there are language or literacy barriers and digital and technology barriers to go online and apply, and it is burdensome and difficult to navigate the application process. There is a common sentiment shared that programs are only accessible with individualized support for people who are already struggling to make ends meet. One unhoused individual shared that "when you're out in the streets it is so hard, getting up and walking around when it is freezing outside and finding a place to be for the day, like the train, and then if security sees you they give you a ticket and if you get a second ticket, it's really expensive, then they kick you off and can put out a warrant for your arrest. You are so depressed it is really hard to do anything, let alone try to navigate systems." There is also an understanding that people that need benefits and services the most have trouble maintaining same phone number, address, etc. so enrolling and renewing is impossible for some people.

Some service providers shared that Peak has continually improved and can be wonderful but it requires a baseline of access with internet, device, and a baseline of technical skills to use the website. There is also a lot of uncertainty for populations that have trouble with document management about whether documentation that is mailed or emailed is important and requires action or if it is just an update.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Many felt that DHS is improving but there are still many limitations to being culturally responsive. Spanish speakers have less barriers because there is usually translation or interpretation available in Spanish but other languages face barriers. One service provider shared that DHS advertises translation and interpretation services but several clients have been unable to get translation or interpretation in other languages. They also mentioned that it is confusing for non-English speakers that all paperwork still says the old DHS physical address so every day they "see people standing outside the building with their paperwork and the building is closed and there is no clear indication that they need to go to the new building." They also shared that the website has a ton of outdated information that makes it very confusing and difficult to decipher.

Some described that staff are trained to be culturally responsive and the intent is there but it fails in implementation because of the internal systems at DHS being task-based rather than having a caseworker. Some shared that DHS seems better than some places in terms of having staff that look like the community they are serving and they should continue hiring peer mentors who understand the people coming in for services and who look like them.

CSBG-GRANTEE EVALUATIONS

All CSBG grantees were asked to share any customer satisfaction and evaluation data they had gathered. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Employment Services and Sun Valley Kitchen's No Cost Grocery Program were the grantees who had collected and shared their data. From the data shared, clients are very satisfied and appreciated the services offered and utilized. Areas for improvement identified were related to logistics and language accessibility.

The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Employment Services had a 100% rate of overall satisfaction. When asked what could be improved, many clients reported nothing but a few noted wishing there was more funding, more staff, having more people of color, having in-person job fairs, and having additional support with housing.

Sun Valley Kitchen’s No Cost Grocery Program clients reported a variety of benefits from program participation including: eating more fruits and vegetables, reduced stress about having enough food, spending less money on food, eating fresher foods, and increased wellbeing. They also report improved economic security as a result of participating in the No Cost Grocery Program. Clients think the food provided is of high quality and they appreciate the variety of foods offered. Those surveyed also felt that “without a doubt, they feel it [the food] meets their needs,” with 82% of respondents noting that Sun Valley Kitchen provides them with enough fresh, nutritious food to keep them and their family healthy.ⁱ Nearly all (97%) clients feel they are treated with dignity and respect and the majority (84%) said they are comfortable talking with staff about their cultural or religious food preferences and/or dietary restrictions.ⁱⁱ The only things clients reported could be improved were offering more meat/fish, rice, and canned good as well as improving the line logistics and additional language accessibility programming.

Approach for Collecting, Analyzing, and Reporting Customer Satisfaction Data

Customer satisfaction data was collected through CSBG-funded service providers as well as directly from community members. Currently funded CSBG grantees were asked to share any customer satisfaction data collected including customer satisfaction reports, reflections from service provider staff, and site visit findings related to service gaps and customer needs. In addition, all community members that were interviewed or participated in a focus group were asked to provide input on low-income services they have accessed and specifically those funded by CSBG, if they were aware of the funding source of the services they utilized.

Two CSBG grantees, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless: Employment Services and Sun Valley Kitchen, shared their Customer Satisfaction and Evaluation data. All quantitative data included in these reports was analyzed and reported as well.

All quantitative data from customer satisfaction and evaluation reports were reviewed and metrics relevant to satisfaction or improvement are included in this report. All qualitative data was analyzed using a combination of text analysis techniques to generate an overall understanding of customer satisfaction. Sentiment analysis, text categorization, and keyword extraction were the techniques used to understand the spectrum of overall satisfaction, develop common themes, and identify assets as well as gaps within the CSBG services.

One limitation of the approach for collecting customer satisfaction data is that community members are generally unaware if the programming or services they have accessed or utilized are funded by CSBG or by DHS. As a result, when speaking with community members, many spoke to perceptions of DHS as an entity rather than CSBG funded programming and services.

All data collected and analyzed is reported to the tripartite board/advisory body for review and recommendations.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA COVERED BY THE ASSESSMENT

Geographic Area

This needs assessment covers the City and County of Denver in Colorado. Denver is the center of the Front Range Urban Corridor between the Rocky Mountains to the West and the High Plains to the east (Figure 1).ⁱⁱⁱ Denver County is comprised of 11 districts (Figure 2) and 78 neighborhoods (Figure 3).^{iv}

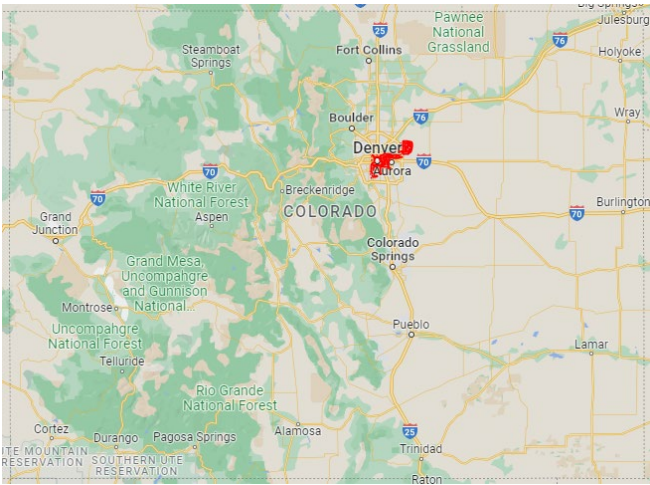


Figure 1. Denver County Map, 2023^v

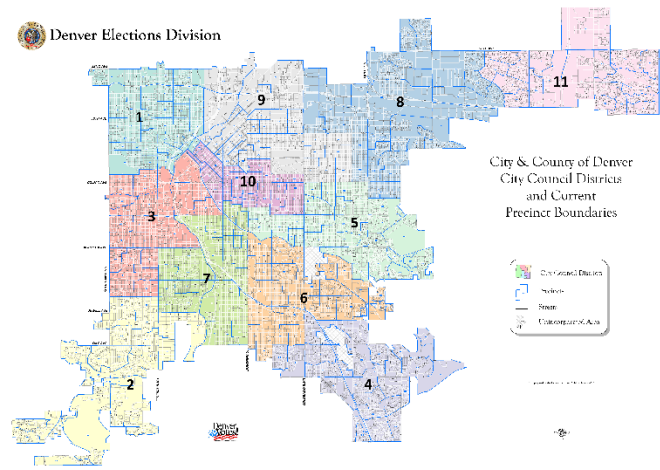


Figure 2. Denver County Districts, 2023^{vi}

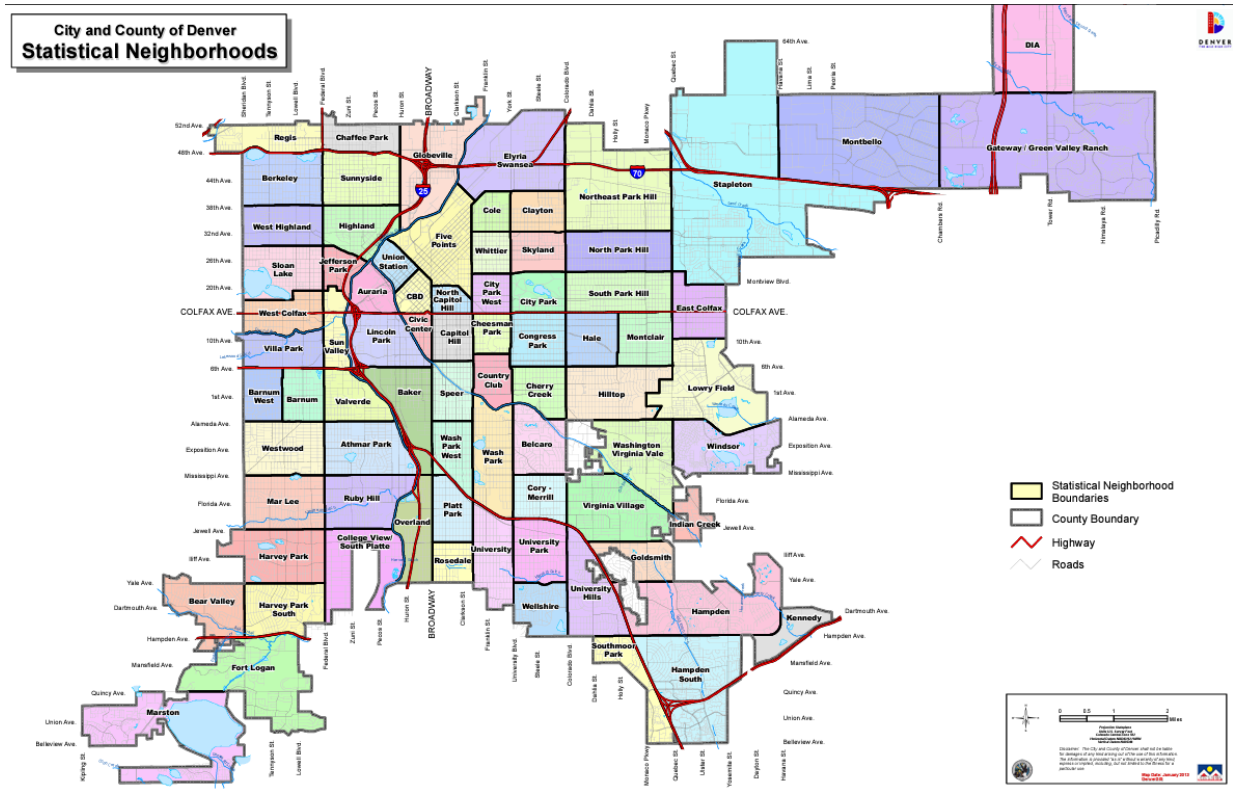


Figure 3. Denver County Neighborhoods, 2023^{vii}

Main Population Centers

Denver is the most populous city in the state of Colorado.^{viii} It covers a total of 153.08 square miles and has a population density of 4,674/square mile.^{ix} Denver is a metro area and as a whole, is a population center with neighborhoods closest to the city center being denser.^x

Service Area Communities

Denver County is primarily urban though some neighborhoods have more of a suburban feel.^{xi} However, all neighborhoods are in proximity to the city center, have businesses, cultural institutions, and other urban amenities – though the accessibility and quality of amenities varies greatly based on the concentration of low-income and other marginalized populations.^{xii} The Denver Human Services Index for 2023 utilizes 16 key indicators, including health, education, and community indicators, by neighborhood to highlight the neighborhoods with the highest needs which aligns with the areas with the highest concentration of low-income

and marginalized populations. The summary index map (Figure 4) depicts the neighborhoods with the highest needs in Denver County.

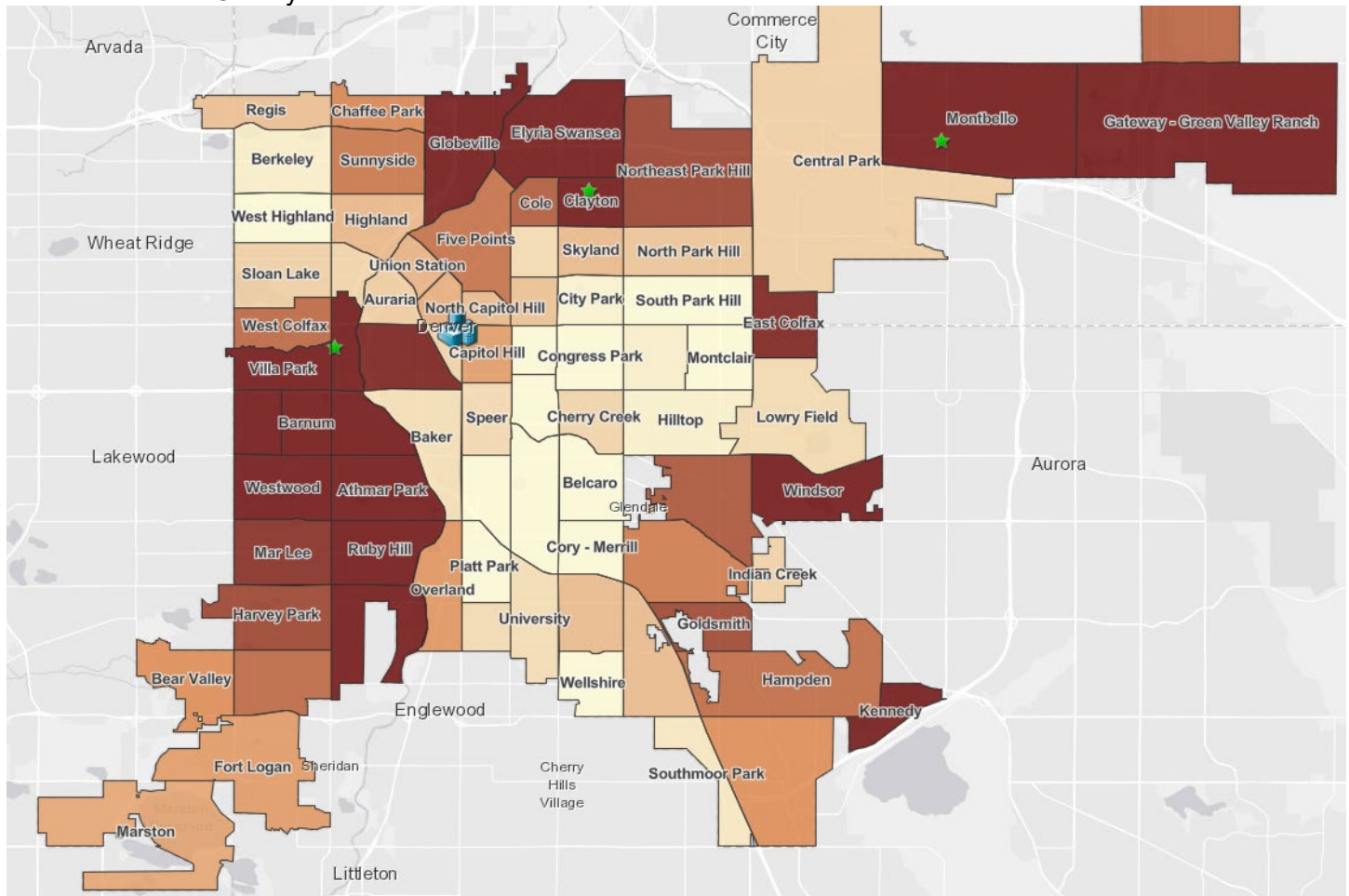


Figure 4. DHS Index 2023 Map of Concentrated Need, 2023^{xiii}

The neighborhoods identified as highest need include:

- The central westside of Denver: College View – South Platte, Ruby Hill, Athmar Park, Westwood, Valverde, Barnum, Barnum West, Villa Park, Sun Valley, and Lincoln Park
- The North and Northwest of Denver: Globeville, Elyria-Swansea, Clayton, Montbello, and Gateway-Green Valley Ranch
- East side of Denver: East Colfax, Windsor, and Kennedy

Geographical Factors

Denver has a spread-out suburban layout which poses challenges for low-income individuals. Low-income individuals face transportation-related barriers due to limited public transportation options and unaffordable alternatives. Certain neighborhoods in Denver lack access to quality services and resources within their own neighborhood and without reliable or affordable transportation options, cannot access them elsewhere. Several neighborhoods lack affordable and/or nutritious food options forcing residents to rely on convenience stores. Other resources such as health care, schools, recreational areas, etc. are often limited as well, being underfunded due to high concentrations of poverty in specific neighborhoods, exacerbating the existing disparities and contributing to generational poverty.

Travel limitations are even worse in neighborhoods bordered or intersected by major roads, highways, and rivers. The Globeville, Elyria-Swansea (GES) neighborhoods bordered by Colorado Boulevard, the South Platte River, and 40th Avenue has a major interstate, i-70, running through it making it difficult to safely travel by foot. Sun Valley is bordered by Federal Boulevard, 6th avenue, and the Platte River, geographically isolating the

majority of residents. Montbello is further from the city center and is sprawling, making transportation a necessity for access even within the neighborhood itself.^{xiv}

Denver is located in the central part of Colorado and is situated at the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains and the western edge of the Great Plains.^{xv} Denver's nickname is the "Mile-High City" due to its elevation being 5,280 ft above sea level.^{xvi} Because of its proximity to the mountains and sunny climate, Denver has gained a reputation as being an outdoor-oriented city.^{xvii} Denver's central location within the US, along with its positioning at the crossroads of major highways (interstates 25 and 70) as well as Denver International Airport being the 3rd busiest airport in the world, has contributed to it being a transportation hub.^{xviii, xix} All of these factors have led to Denver attracting high-earners, which fuels the rising market rates for real estate and other costs of living, making it even more difficult for low-income individuals to live and affordably and access services.^{xx}

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Existing Resources

Currently, Denver has a multitude of low-income resources (Appendix 1). However, these organizations are understaffed and underfunded. As a result, there is limited opportunity for collaboration creating a fractured and siloed system. This in turn makes navigating resources and systems extremely difficult for low-income individuals and service providers alike.^{xxi}

An effort was made to document the funding sources dedicated to each service area in Denver but the search itself revealed how fractured and piece-meal the funding is for organizations providing services to low-income individuals. A list of some significant grants and projected funding for 2023 includes:

Program	FY 2023 Funding
Community Development Block Grant	\$3,300,000,000.00
Dept. of Housing Stability (HOST)	\$254,000,000.00
Healthy Food for Denver's Kids	\$16,000,000.00
Food Pantry Assistance	\$14,000,000.00
Digital Navigator Program	\$1,700,000.00
Low Income Energy Assistance Program	\$87,500,000.00

Non-existent and Limited Resources

Though many service providers and resources exist, it is clear that service provider agencies are stretched thin due to funding and growing need within Denver.^{xxii} Many community members described the desire for additional staff and support within existing programs and that often there are limitations due to funding, staff capacity, and the overwhelming need being far greater than what is available.^{xxiii} Service providers themselves echoed this while describing how their program could not exist without piecing together several different funding sources and the added difficulty of maintaining competitive salaries and benefits in Denver's market to recruit and retain staff and also having funds left to support client needs.^{xxiv}

Housing was identified as the most limited, almost to the point of non-existent, resource and the biggest need in Denver. Every service provider and community member reported affordable housing being scarce, if not impossible to access.^{xxv} Another common theme was the limited amount of navigation services. Community members noted the barriers that exist due to not knowing what resources exist, how to access them, and maintaining enough stability to navigate them.

Additional limited resources included adult literacy education, digital equity and navigation services since the majority of benefits and services are found and enrolled in online, and culturally adaptable resources for immigrants and refugees.

Community Resources Survey

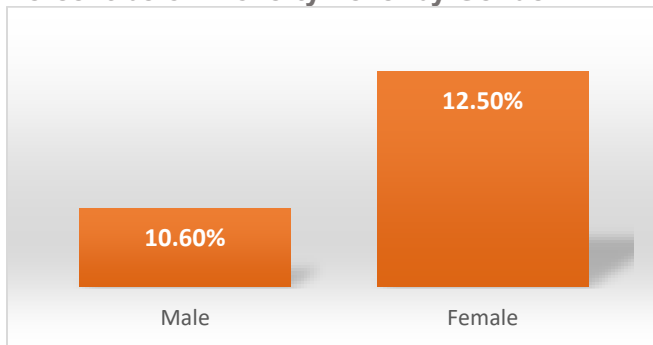
Customers were asked about community resources through questions in focus groups and key informant interviews that asked specifically about what resources they knew of, had accessed, and were available as well as those they felt were limited or non-existent.

DATA ANALYSIS

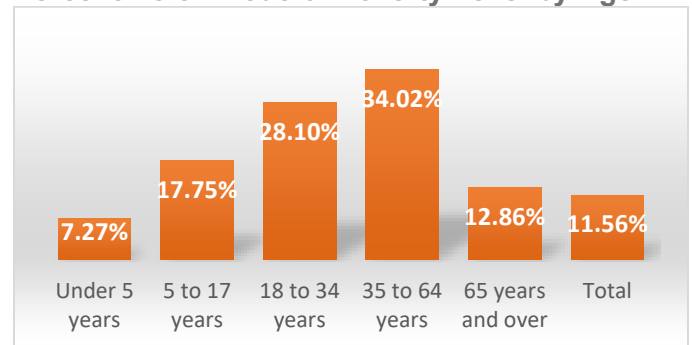
Poverty and its Prevalence

Denver County has a total population of 713,252 and 26% of the population is below 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL).^{xxvi,xxvii} There is a larger percentage of females below poverty and people ages 35-64 years below poverty. Black or African Americans makeup the highest percentage below the poverty level by race and Hispanic or Latinos by ethnicity. For persons with disabilities, youth makeup the largest percentage below poverty. Of those uninsured, adults make up the largest percentage of those below poverty.

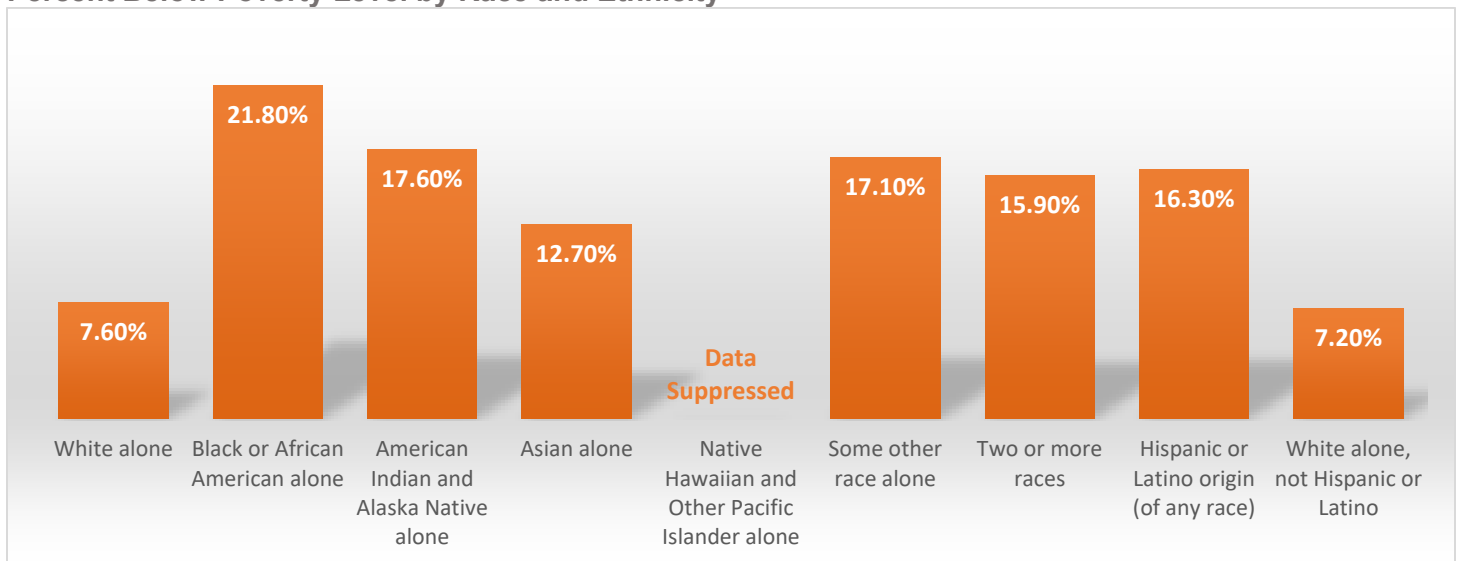
Percent below Poverty Level by Gender^{xxviii}



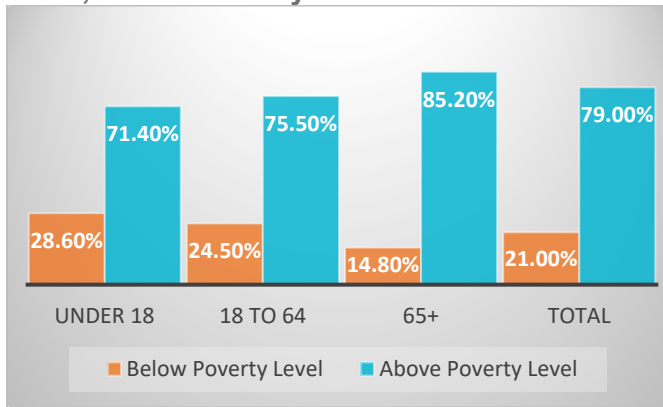
Percent Below Federal Poverty Level by Age^{xxix}



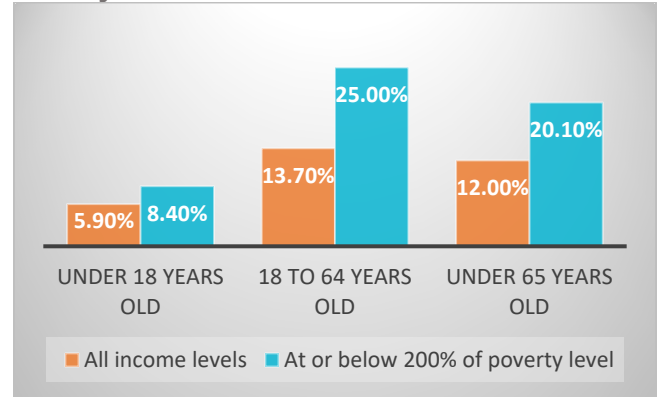
Percent Below Poverty Level by Race and Ethnicity^{xxx}



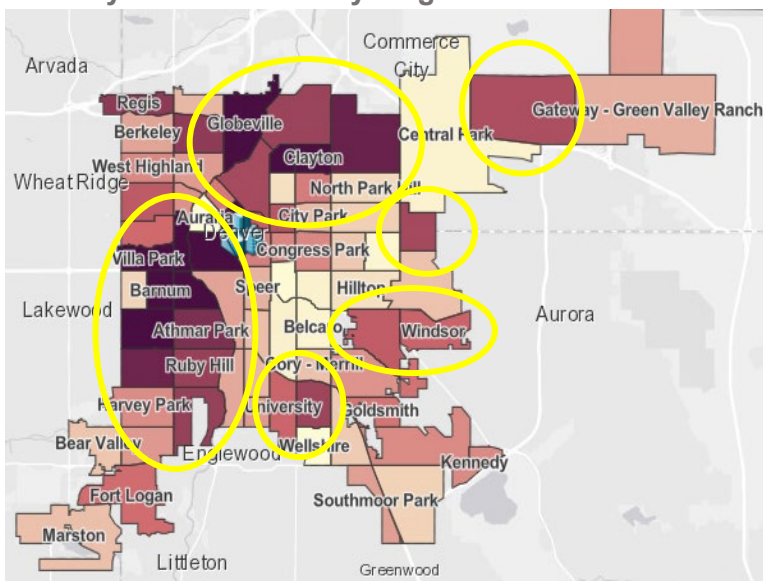
Persons with Disabilities by Age and by Poverty Level, Denver County^{xxxii}



Uninsured by age and poverty level, Denver County^{xxxii}



Poverty concentration by neighborhood^{xxxiii}



The highest concentration of low-income individuals and families are on the borders of the county.

As Denver has grown exponentially over the past decade, it has driven low-income residents to struggle to continue residing there.^{xxxiv} Denver is in the camp of metro areas attracting higher-earning households, while seeing lower-income older households move away.^{xxxv} The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the struggle to afford residing in Denver, and disproportionately harmed low-income households.^{xxxvi} The pandemic's associated recession amplified preexisting employment inequalities making low-income individuals more likely to experience difficulty paying bills, rent or mortgage payments, medical expenses, and struggle with accessing food.^{xxxvii}

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was gathered in the context of the nine federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) objectives to better understand community needs as they relate to the elimination of poverty within the neighborhoods of Denver County. The sources and data collected is described below as well as the findings from the analysis.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS) DATA

The ACS data was queried for Denver County for all data related to poverty. Each relevant table was analyzed to determine the largest percentages of low-income populations by various demographic categories to better understand the populations most effected by poverty.

ACS data was also queried for Denver County for unemployment and educational attainment level data. This data was analyzed to determine which neighborhoods have higher unemployment rates and educational attainment levels in relation to poverty levels.

US CENSUS BUREAU DATA

All US Census Bureau Data analyzed was American Community Survey data and the data collected and analyzed is described above.

COLORADO STATE DEMOGRAPHER OFFICE CSBG AGENCY DATA RESOURCE

The Community Services Black Grant Dashboard for the City and County of Denver Department of Human Services was used to review all indicators in the report. Data was analyzed to determine noteworthy populations disproportionately affected by poverty, understand the benefit enrollment and utilization statistics, and to understand the intersection of poverty amongst different demographics.

COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP NATIONAL DATA HUB

The Community Action Partnership National Data Hub was used to run a report for Denver County on all included indicators. Data was analyzed for indicators related to poverty, benefits, food access, employment, education, social and economic factors, and health behaviors to understand where the greatest needs were and which populations are disproportionately affected by poverty.

INTERNAL CUSTOMER QUANTITATIVE DATA

No internal customer quantitative data was gathered beyond the satisfaction scores shared from CSBG grantees.

PARTNER AGENCIES CUSTOMER QUANTITATIVE DATA

This needs assessment utilized the quantitative data collected by current CSBG grantees to analyze customer satisfaction scores. The data was collected through program Customer Service and Evaluation reports and analyzed to determine overall satisfaction rates with the program. Those findings are reported in the customer satisfaction data section of this report.

OTHER QUANTITATIVE DATA

Other sources used for data collection included:

- The Denver Human Services Data Library to analyze indicators related to poverty, education, housing, and need within Denver
- The Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2023 Living Wage Calculator to determine Denver's living wage and analyze it in comparison with minimum wage rates
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics to gather and analyze unemployment data
- The Colorado Children's Campaign to understand learning loss associated with the pandemic
- The Colorado Health Institute Colorado Health Access Survey to analyze health health-related, and health-access data
- The Metro Denver Homeless Initiative to analyze the point-in-time count for homeless individuals in Denver
- The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Annual Report to understand factors related to homeless in Denver
- The Food Trust to review and analyze data related to SNAP and closing the gap in Denver
- A variety of reputable news sources that reported data on poverty, housing, education, income, health, or the market effecting low-income individuals in Denver

QUANTITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

Employment

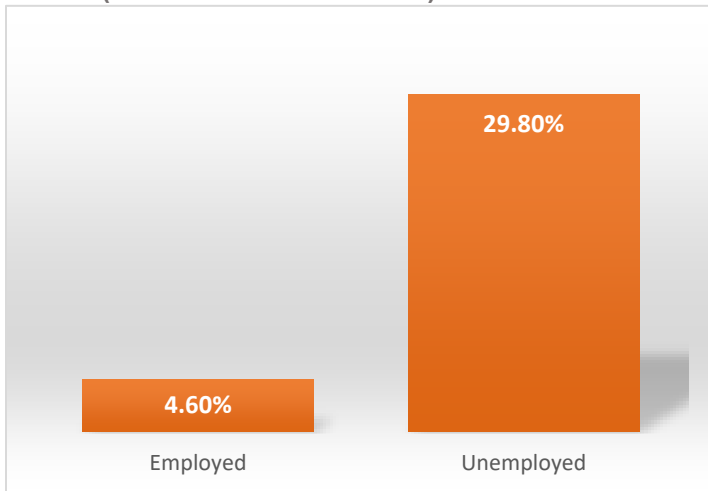
Denver County Minimum Wage and Living Wage

Minimum wage	\$17.29 per hour^{xxxviii}
Living wage for single adult with no children	\$20.25 per hour^{xxxix}
Living wage for single adult with 1 child	\$42.02 per hour^{xl}

Percent of Coloradoans in low-wage jobs* **27.2%^{xli}**

*Low-wage job is defined as one paying less than what a full-time worker who supports a family of four would need to earn to live above federal poverty level.

Percent below poverty level by employment status (civilian labor force 16+)^{xliii}



There is a minimum of a **\$2.96** discrepancy between minimum wage and a living wage that drastically increases to **\$24.73** and only climbs as the family grows. Those making minimum wage in Denver are forced to “debate between paying for rent, food, or taking kids to school.”^{xliii}

15.4% of Denver residents lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic^{xliiv}

Denver County unemployment rate **2.8%^{xlv}**

High percentage of **unemployed** individuals below poverty level

Neighborhoods with significantly higher unemployment rates^{xlvi}

Sun Valley 27%

Lincoln Park 9%

Villa Park 7%

Barnum 7%

Northeast Park Hill 9%

Clayton 7%

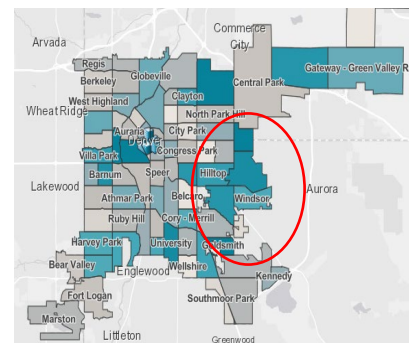
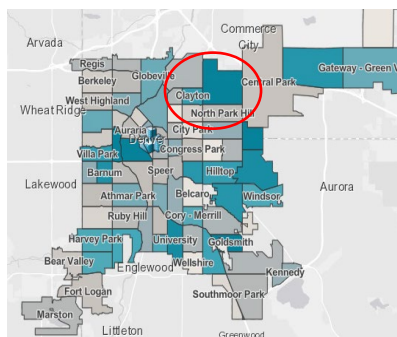
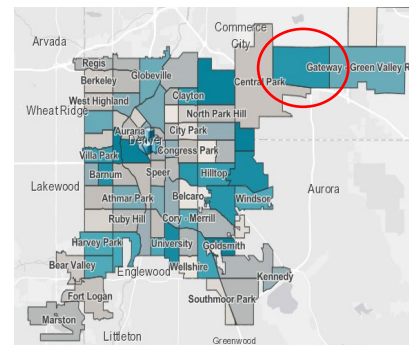
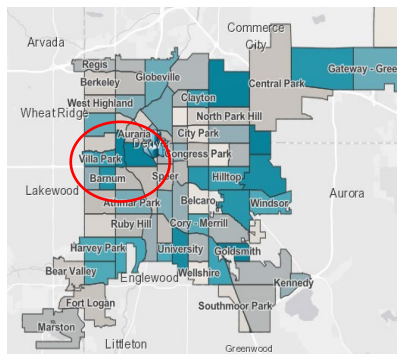
Montbello 7%

East Colfax 8%

Goldsmith 8%

Lowry Field 7%

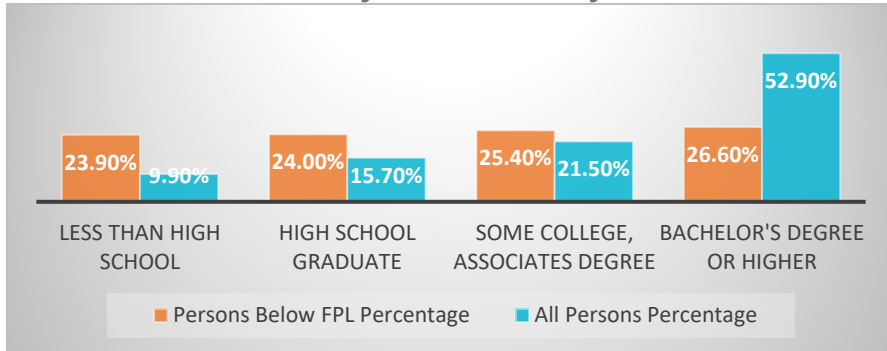
Washington Virginia Vail 7%



Though Denver’s unemployment rate is low, private sector employment and its effect on the economy creates issues for low-income individuals. Companies with national and global presences continue to choose Denver for their headquarters and offices.^{xlvii} For tech startups, Colorado is seen as somewhere with the benefits of a lower cost of living and a less competitive job market than areas like San Francisco, Washington DC, and New York.^{xlviii} Colorado ranks 4th in the nation for attracting high earners – in 2020-2021, Colorado had a net gain of 2,052 people earning over \$200,000 a year.^{xlix} This fuels the rising market rates for housing and other costs of living within the city, pricing out more and more individuals from living in Denver and making it even harder for low-income individuals to live.

Education and Cognitive Development

Educational Attainment by Federal Poverty Levelⁱ



Lower percentage of people below FPL with **Bachelor's Degree or Higher** compared to all people

In Colorado, there was over a **5%** decrease of high school graduates that enrolled in postsecondary education in the fall after graduation from 2019 – 2020.ⁱⁱ

In Denver Public Schools from 2020 – 2021ⁱⁱⁱ:

Students lost an average of **17** weeks of learning in math

Students lost an average of **11** weeks of learning in reading

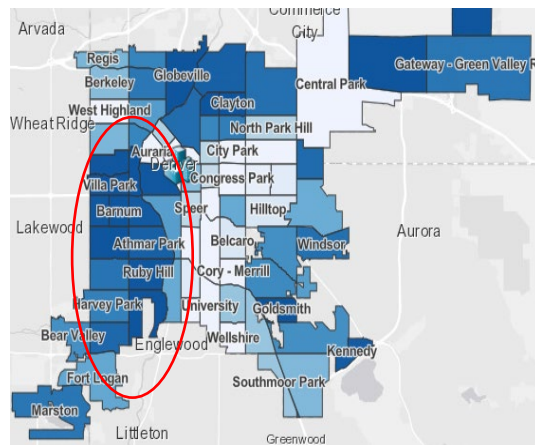
An estimated amount of **\$124,578,440** would need to be spent for tutoring in math

An estimated amount of **\$54,852,426** would need to be spent for tutoring in reading

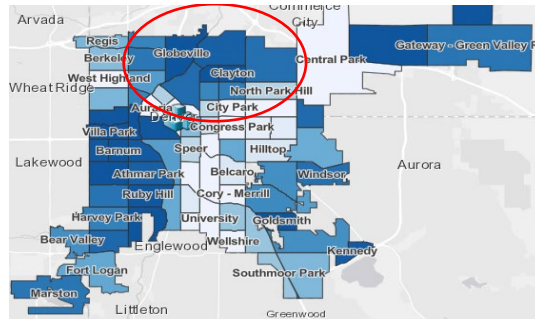
Beyond academic loss, youth also “have not been developing those relational skills that are necessary for being in group settings and handling frustration and self-regulation.”^{liii}

Neighborhoods with high percentages of **3rd grade students not reading at grade level^{liv}** and **Adults with no high school diploma^{lv}**

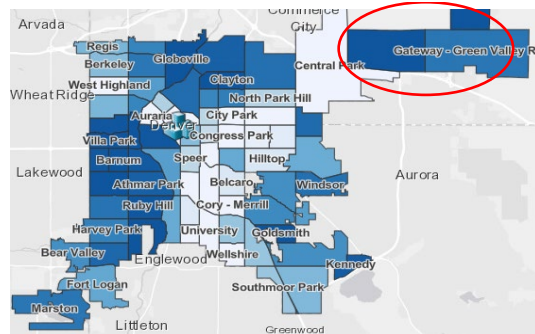
Villa Park	60%	31%
Barnum West	53%	26%
Barnum	57%	29%
Sun Valley	65%	37%
Valverde	53%	27%
Athmar Park	52%	26%
Ruby Hill	54%	28%
College View	55%	26%



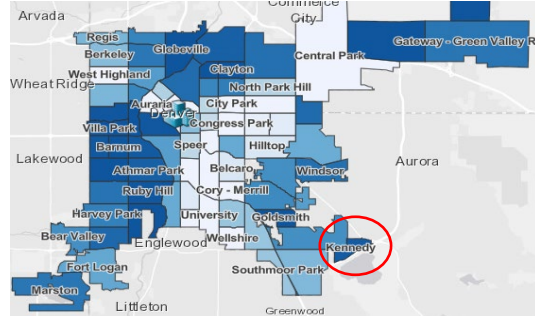
Globeville	60%	30%
Elyria Swansea	52%	43%
Cole	56%	22%
Clayton	58%	25%



Montbello 56% 31%



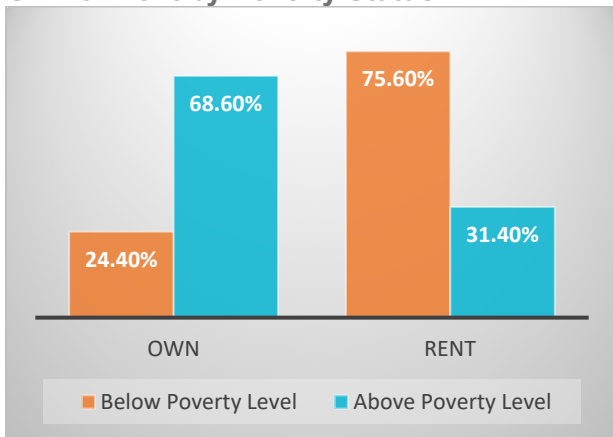
Kennedy 53% 23%



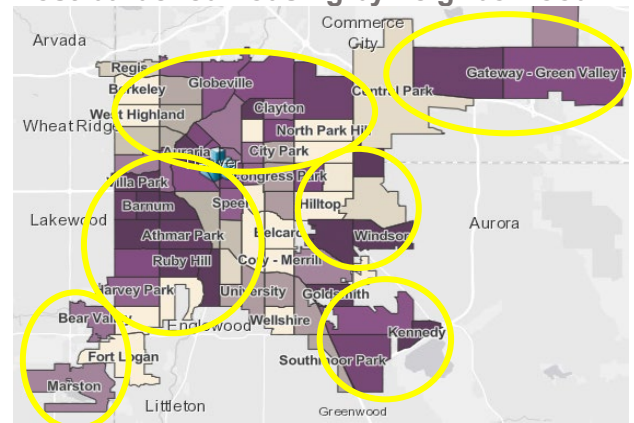
Housing

Denver County's median sales price for a home increased **46.2%** in the last five years^{lvi}

Own or Rent by Poverty Status^{lvii}



Cost-burdened housing by neighborhood^{lviii}



Along with Denver's growth, the pandemic resulted in **20.6%** of Denver residents struggling to pay their rent or mortgage.^{lix} When the nationwide, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) emergency eviction moratorium lifted in 2021, evictions skyrocketed.^{lx} Denver County Court received **8,879** eviction filings

in 2022, more than in 2020 and 2021 combined.^{lxi} In just the month of May 2023, **1,216** eviction cases launched in Denver. If the trend continues as it has been going this year, Denver will hit nearly **13,300** eviction filings in 2023.^{lxii}

Not only are evictions devastating but they “drive generational poverty.”^{lxiii} The loss of shelter, even for brief periods, often causes unemployment, educational disruptions, and food insecurity for families.^{lxiv}

For nearly **30%** of people experiencing homelessness in Denver, the inability to pay rent or mortgage is what led them to homelessness, with nearly **26%** of those being evictions or requests to leave their homes.^{lxv}

People experiencing homelessness in Denver County **4,794**^{lxvi}

Housekeys Action Network Denver (HAND) Price of Affordable Housing Survey Results^{lxvii}

Affordable Housing Price Cross-Comparison
In this survey, there were three questions that revealed answers about specific prices for affordable housing.

2022 HAND Housing Survey - "Price of Affordable Housing" Questions Cross-Comparison			
Price range	"What does affordable housing mean to you?" (n=110)	"What price would housing need to be for you to afford it?" (n=586)	"When you hear the government talk about affordable housing, what do you think they mean?" (n=26)
Free (\$0)	29.1%	16.7%	26.9%
\$1-199	6.4%	13.1%	11.5%
\$200-399	13.6%	21.2%	3.8%
\$400-599	10.9%	17.7%	7.7%
\$600-799	14.5%	10.1%	0
\$800-999	6.4%	9.6%	15.4%
\$1000-1199	10.9%	5.8%	3.8%
\$1200-1399	6.4%	2.7%	3.8%
\$1400-1599	0.9%	1.9%	15.4%
\$1600-1799	0.9%	0	0
\$1800-1999	0	0.2%	3.8%
\$2000-2199	0	0.3%	0
\$2200-2399	0	0	0
\$2400-2599	0	0.2%	3.8%
>\$2600	0	0.5%	3.8%

A screenshot from the Housekeys Action Network Denver's (HAND) 2023 report, "Pipe Dreams and Picket Fences." Photo courtesy of HAND

Survey respondents noted that there are also factors beyond cost that are important including safety, autonomy (privacy and hosting guests), and amenities like climate control and private bathrooms. They report fear of theft and threats to physical safety within shelters and supportive housing programs.^{lxviii}

Between September 2021 and January 2022, **only 77** individuals out of 1,000 names pulled in Denver's housing lottery successfully found eligible housing and redeemed HUD vouchers. Nearly **20,000** individuals had originally applied for that housing lottery.^{lxix}

A reliance on the private sector has developed to help generate affordable housing. Federal and state Housing Tax Credits provide a significant source of equity. However, there have been instances where private sector involvement has exacerbated the housing

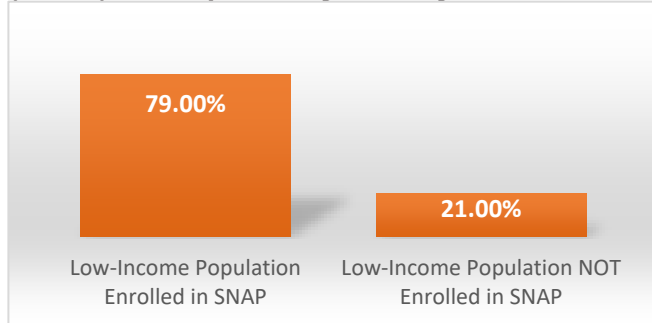
issue rather than address it. An affordable housing development, Vina Apartments in Denver's Elyria-Swansea neighborhood, that was part of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program is one example. Individuals moved into the affordable housing development and within one year of being there, their rent was hiked up more than 12%. HUD rent limits typically increase an average of 5% annually but in 2022, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) increased maximum rent limits by 11%-12% and when new rents are published, property owners have the discretion to increase rents as long as they are below HUD's maximum limits. This left many scrambling or unable to pay rent.^{lxx}

Another example was in Sun Valley where a Choice Neighborhood Initiative grant was used to incentivize bringing in private developers to build market-rate units alongside affordable ones. This would triple the number of affordable housing units available; however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, what promised to be a national model for low-income neighborhood transformation resulted in displacement of residents, due to construction, and initiatives that never happened. These

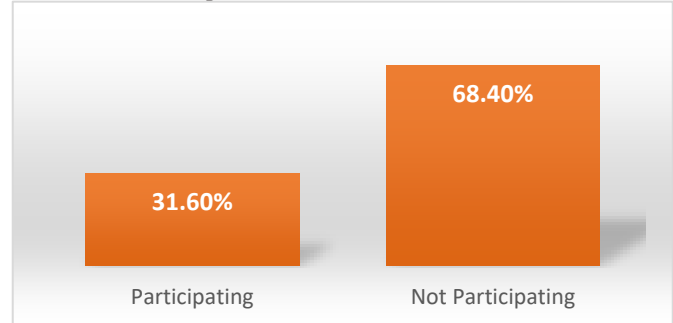
communities become fragmented due to displacement and market-rate units become the dominate housing. The growing reliance on the private sector has created scenarios where an ambitious plan is created but there is no guaranteed fundings to follow through.^{lxxi}

Health and Social/Behavioral Development

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation by Poverty Status^{lxxii,lxxiii}



Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Participation, Denver County^{lxxiv}



Nationally, **8.7%** of people who have incomes below the poverty level report severe psychological distress.^{lxxv}

Depression and anxiety are up to **3 times as likely** for people with low incomes.^{lxxvi}

The pandemic took a harsh toll on mental health, especially youth, with **more than one-third** of kids having feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness.^{lxxvii} And it is known that those with lower incomes are more likely to experience poor mental health.^{lxxviii} In addition, adverse childhood experiences were high before the pandemic for low-income areas but the crisis is compounded by a shortage of school staff and mental health professionals post-pandemic.^{lxxix}

In 2022 in Denver County, **17%** of people reported needing mental health care/counseling services but could not get it.^{lxxx}

Many barriers to care exist but cost is one of the largest. Because of cost in Denver County^{lxxxi}:

14% of residents did not get care needed

9.5% did not fill a prescription medication

14.3% did not get specialist care

19.9% did not get dental care

13.5% had problems paying or were unable to pay medical bills

9.6% ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food

Though low-income individuals may qualify for Medicaid, **9.9%** of Denver residents reported being told by a doctor's office or clinic that they weren't accepting patients with their insurance.^{lxxxii} There are also **19.4%** of residents in Denver County that are uninsured.^{lxxxiii}

Qualitative Data

In order to center the community within the needs assessment, qualitative data was gathered through community service providers, stakeholders, and members through focus groups and individual interviews.

Six in-person focus groups were held across Denver in neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income individuals including: Sun Valley, Harvey Park, Elyria-Swansea, Montbello, Kennedy, and Five Points (at a homeless shelter). An additional four interviews were conducted with unhoused individuals to accommodate for

lack of transportation and collective availability for that population. A total of 52 community members were included in focus group discussions or interviews.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted with individuals working with the low-income population in Denver with representation from Nourish CO, the African Community Center, Sun Valley Youth Center, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Villa Park Neighborhood Association, Bayaud Enterprises, Immigrant and Refugees Programming, Earthlinks, The Denver Library, Denver Health, and the CSBG Advisory Board.

The information from focus groups and key informant interviews were gathered through a guided facilitated discussion (Appendix 2) and documented via notetaking. The notes were then analyzed using text categorization and keyword extraction text analysis techniques to understand the spectrum of needs, develop common themes, and identify assets as well as gaps within the context of the nine federal CSBG objectives.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION DATA

All interviewees and focus group participants were asked to provide input on the perception of low-income services, and specifically CSBG services if they were aware of them. They were asked about the capacity to meet the needs of the community, particularly those in poverty, the capacity to support service providers' work, the knowledge and accessibility of the programs and services, and the cultural responsiveness of the programs and services. The results showed that CSBG programs that collected customer satisfaction data, including Sun Valley's No Cost Grocery Store and the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Employment Services programs, had very high client satisfaction scores. Those familiar with CSBG were also very grateful for the DHS CSBG program administration staff.

The majority of the general public were unfamiliar with the CSBG program itself and provided input based on DHS as an entity. Many shared that DHS was understaffed and underfunded. They experienced long wait times for phone calls to be answered and inconsistent information shared once they did get a hold of someone. Many shared that they felt this was due to a structural issue and not the individuals themselves.

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH LOW-INCOME FOCUS GROUPS

All 52 focus group participants and unhoused interviewees were low-income and included both customers and non-customers. Data was gathered by asking a series of questions to guide the discussion (Appendix 2). Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and the number of participants ranged from six to eleven participants. Each interview with the unhoused individuals lasted approximately 45 minutes and followed the same discussion guide as the focus groups.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The 15 interviewees were asked a series of questions to guide the discussion (Appendix 2). Each interview was conducted via zoom and took approximately 45 minutes.

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

The community was surveyed through the focus groups and individual interviews. No mass-survey was conducted in order to be responsive to community members expressing feeling over-surveyed and seeing little change.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

All focus groups included individuals and families with low-income, described above.

OTHER COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

No other community needs assessments were used to supplement the qualitative data gathered through this needs assessment.

OTHER QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data from other trusted news and institutional sources were used to supplement qualitative data gathered if additional research or explanation was needed.

QUALITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

Areas of Most important Need in the Denver Community

Each focus group and interviewee were asked to vote for the top three areas of most important need for people experiencing poverty from a list including 7 of the CSBG federal objectives and an option for other. Linkages and agency capacity building were not included because they were asked about in the context of perceptions of DHS and CSBG.

Across all focus groups and interviewees, the areas ranked by **most important need** were:

1. Housing
2. Employment
3. Support Services
4. Health
5. Education
6. Other
7. Income, infrastructure and asset building and Civic Engagement and Community Involvement

There were two focus groups who did not select housing as the number one need, one chose employment and one chose health with both choosing housing as the second most important area of need. There were also two interviewees who chose housing as the second most important need and employment and health as the top need. The interviewees both expressed that housing is a dire need in Denver but DHS did not have enough funding or capacity to be able to make a difference. It is also noteworthy that five out of the seven focus groups generated ties for their second or third area of importance and many interviewees struggled to choose just three because there are high levels of need across the different areas and they are all interrelated. Participants were asked to expand on needs, service gaps, and assets related to the prioritized areas. The top areas that emerged include the data collected is summarized below.

Service Needs in Denver Community

Housing

Housing was the number one need identified. The overarching themes and key points shared in relation to housing were:

AFFORDABILITY AND HOUSING COSTS ARE MAJOR CONCERNS

The primary concern around housing is the ability to afford it due to rising costs. Housing costs are outpacing income and Denver's growth and gentrification has led to a dramatic spike in the rental and real estate markets. Denver had already gentrified and then was supercharged during COVID – the few areas where there was affordable housing has been taken over. Many expressed concern that housing costs are a significant portion of income, even for individuals with degrees and jobs. In addition, inflation and the increased cost of living have put further stain on housing affordability. One community member noted that there is even reluctance to maintain living spaces when it is needed because of a fear that it will increase rent. The fear of being priced out of housing leaves individuals facing significant stress and having to choose what basic needs to prioritize.

THIRD PARTY MANAGEMENT CREATES ADDITIONAL BURDEN AND BARRIERS

There is recognition that third party management of housing has made qualifying for and maintaining housing much more difficult. Third party management systems often include unexpected hidden fees such as carpet cleaning or pet fees that very low-income individuals struggle to pay and then are left with landlord debt. Many focus group participants noted that once this cycle begins, it is extremely hard to qualify or access housing because the unanticipated and unaffordable landlord debt follows them and it becomes a cycle that perpetuates itself and drives individuals into further poverty and an inability to find or qualify for housing. Many also feel that affordable housing is not safe or stable. They are often not only in unsafe neighborhoods but some shared their housing has mold, chipped paint with lead, and plumbing issues that go unaddressed by management. There is also a perception that third-party management companies are responsive to the market, raising rent at the maximum rate allowable. There is a call for accountability of management companies and corporations providing affordable housing with an emphasis on maintaining affordable housing and ensuring it benefits tenants, not just profit. There is the feeling that there are no incentives to provide truly affordable housing or deterrents from it climbing into an unaffordable range.

UNATTAINABLE HOUSING IS A BIG ISSUE

There is not nearly enough affordable housing for the amount of need in Denver. The lack of affordable housing has created exceptionally long wait lists with no other options for those in poverty. One service provider noted that the waitlist for a single man reentering society from prison to get affordable housing is 1.5 years long.

Eligibility criteria was discussed frequently with a notion that it is impossible to qualify for housing. There is a perception that the elderly and Veterans are the only populations able to access benefits and housing. Equity is called into question with who takes precedence in receiving support with several individuals sharing that refugees and immigrants, as well as Hispanic and Latino populations have access to benefits but African American and Black people are invisible and left without any support.

There are also barriers around awareness and knowledge of housing support and resources. Many stated that the only way individuals find out about resources is through word-of-mouth. There are also barriers in terms of access. Several shared how an individual needs to have a working phone in order to access housing resources and support. Those in poverty often cannot afford phones and mobile support programs provide “trash” phones that are often shut off at the end of the month because their plan runs out. Without a way to reach individuals and without a way for them to call and access benefits, a phone becomes a large barrier in accessing support services. Application fees are also a barrier. They can be unaffordable and more often it is held for a few days and individuals may not go back for it. This results in individuals being able to participate in 2-3 application processes before it becoming unaffordable.

UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS ARE INCREASING AND FACE BARRIERS

All focus group participants and interviewees mentioned the increasing number of unhoused individuals and the extreme deficit of housing and supportive resources available in Denver. The overwhelming need for affordable housing was discussed in the context of how stable housing is a prerequisite to nearly all other services and the ability to thrive. Participants noted that if people do not have housing, their ability to do anything else that could help their situation or positively influence their lives is negligible. Participants described the need is also much higher than reported due to “invisible housing” for those people couch-surfing or living in their cars.

Participants also shared the perception that the majority of unhoused people are a product of generational poverty or unaddressed mental health needs. Of those who were interviewed who are unhoused, all attributed their homelessness to mental health and/or physical challenges that were never addressed and the inability to navigate systems in order to get mental health support. One participant shared that being unhoused exacerbates mental health issues and strips away all hope and humanity from individuals, leaving them without any drive to access support. This individual shared that “when you’re sleeping in an alley in the winter and it’s freezing, and uncertain of the time of day, you’re going to lose your meds and it kills the ambition of the spirit. People get caught up in it and give up, they aren’t even living, they’re just existing. There is almost no option

other than to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.” This can turn into addiction which then layers on additional complications and stressors in order to access support services. There is also a sentiment of feeling invisible, worthless, and forgotten. One individual shared that “when you’re homeless everything is against you.” which leaves individuals feeling like there are no services or supports out there for them and an uncertainty and fear when being approached.

HOMELESSNESS ITSELF IS A BARRIER TO ACCESSING SERVICES AND BENEFITS

Many participants explained the inability to access or maintain benefits while unhoused because it is impossible without stability. Service providers shared that the majority of extremely poor unhoused are unable to successfully manage documentation to keep benefits once they get them. Unhoused individuals do not have a physical place to keep important documents to maintain benefits, recertifications, or a stable address or phone to be contacted. A lot is lost when living out of a car or on the street. It was also shared that it is difficult for people in transition who have experienced severe trauma to remember passwords or email addresses so they have to start from scratch.

TEMPORARY AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING HAS MAJOR DRAWBACKS

Community members also shared the drawbacks of temporary, transitional, and/or sober living housing. One unhoused individual described how these housing units are often built in an environment where “they never have peace, quiet, beauty or serenity – there are no trees and birds and light,” often being by train tracks or next to major highway underpasses. They are also often located in food deserts and have rules or regulations that are perceived as “piddly stupid things” such as signing in and not eating in your room that can count against you and ultimately kick you out of the housing facility. It was also noted that this housing is often in a “rough area” where relapse or delinquent behavior is more likely. Beyond these, participants noted that though temporary housing is needed, it does not help address the larger issue of poverty and does not translate into stable housing. One participant shared that “you often enter these housing facilities with nothing, no shoes, no phone, no ID, so you need help feeling like a human being again and needing to feel safe there.” Without additional support, many shared that temporary, transitional, and/or sober living housing is just a short-term, immediate fix.

SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

When asked about successful programming or services participants shared:

- The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless provides amazing support
- Access to food and nutritional support is crucial for unhoused individuals and programs like Sun Valley Kitchen should continue to be funded
- The Village Collaborative has done amazing work – The Denver Library works with them to get a hotspot and laptop for individuals to access information and resources
- Supported transitional housing is transformative to the people who live there
- South Street Clinic has been wonderful
- Urban Peak

When asked about opportunities and recommendations participants said:

- There needs to be better rent control to mitigate rising rent costs
- A comprehensive approach is essential so an individual does not have to navigate several resources and systems themselves but is instead provided through a collaborative effort that streamlines all supports
- Increase the number of lottery spots for Section 8 housing assistance
- Provide support and assistance with paperwork and technology to access services and housing
- Rent subsidies

Employment

Employment was the second most important need identified. The overarching themes and key points shared in relation to employment were:

JOB SEARCH AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ARE NEEDED

Employment counseling and workforce development are essential for individuals in poverty. There is a need for programs that provide guidance on job searching, resume building, and interview preparation. There is a large emphasis placed on not just finding a job but building a meaningful career aligned with people's passions. There are programs that provide these services in Denver but there is inadequate staffing and resources to meet the need and effectively support individuals.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES ARE NEEDED

One individual shared that they had too much anxiety to leave the house and struggled with maintaining employment because of severe OCD and depression. This is something that eventually led to being unhoused. Their connection to the supportive work programming offered through Bayaud is what allowed them to work while getting support to manage their mental health. In addition to mental health support, technology support is essential. Technology has become a barrier to employment opportunities. Especially post-pandemic, the shift to virtual settings for applications, interviews, and resources about employment has made it difficult for those without devices and connectivity and a baseline knowledge of how to navigate. Digital navigation support and helping procure devices and connectivity for individuals is a large need in Denver.

LIVING WAGE

Focus group participants were also asked about the living wage if employment or income was brought up as a prioritized need. Living wage did not seem to be a concern for the majority. There was the feeling that individuals need to be able to maintain employment and have stability before worrying about a living wage. Many felt that education and employment would lead to living wage jobs but finding the support to further education or supported employment services was the critical need to address first.

SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

When asked about successful programming or services participants shared:

- The Crossing (a Christian program) supported spiritual health on top of everything else
- St. Francis Center
- Bayaud is awesome – you can be on a work crew and get exercise and cash in your pocket. It helps you get used to working again and being accountable and responsible.

When asked about opportunities and recommendations participants said:

- More funding for social enterprises to assist people with getting work experience within employment support organizations
- Mentoring groups
- Create opportunities for lived experience, not just formal education

Support Services

Support services was the third most important need identified. The overarching themes and key points shared in relation to support services were:

LACK OF UNRESTRICTED FUNDING

There is limited funding to help with all of the small expenses someone needs to be successful. CSBG grantees shared that one amazing thing about the funding is that it has very little restrictions so can be used to fill those gaps that may seem small but can make big differences in someone's success. For example, often individuals need money for certification or licensing to further their career prospects or funds to help people manage applications, holding fees, and first month deposits. There is also a large need, especially among the

unhoused population to have funds for replacement documents like drivers license, birth certificates, etc. Service providers felt that having more unrestricted funding would allow them to provide more comprehensive support to individuals rather than run into issues with relatively small expenses that add up quickly for low-income individuals.

LACK OF CAPACITY

Though not all participants directly identified support services as a need, nearly all eluded to the need for individual tailored support. Participants shared that navigating the systems is nearly impossible without support and that case management or navigation services are critical to success. Service providers also noted that everyone is tapped when trying to refer to services. There is no bandwidth and that also causes service provider staff to get burnt out and leave, perpetuating the issue of not enough capacity.

COORDINATION OF SERVICES

Currently, we have a system where if someone gets connected, it feels like happenstance rather than a plan. All participants shared that navigating the system is super hard. Service providers noted that keeping up to date on what is available and who has capacity to handle a referral is really hard and in order to really be aware of it, it would require attending 40 hours of coalition meetings. From both customer and service provider perspectives, there is a deep need for there to be more streamlined systems and information around benefits and resources so they can be utilized rather than all of the resources being put towards navigating and finding them.

SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

When asked about successful programming or services participants shared:

- The resource navigation team at the Denver Library
- The Denver Library Mobile services bringing library services to encampments has been really successful

When asked about opportunities and recommendations participants said:

- Have digital navigators at DHS, Denver Housing Authority (DHA), Denver Health, etc. – anywhere that relies primarily on sharing information and having enrollment/scheduling virtually

Health

Health was the fourth most important need identified through data collection. The overarching themes and key points shared in relation to health were:

MENTAL HEALTH

Participants all discussed the prevalence of mental health needs, especially for unhoused individuals. Several focus groups discussed that the majority of people living on the street or in encampments have untreated mental health issues. They also shared that mental health services are not accessible – there are waiting lists that are months and months long. In addition to limited capacity, there is inadequate support for individuals who need mental health services. There is a perception that services are extremely expensive and little awareness of programs that provide free or sliding fee scale mental health care. There is also very limited knowledge about where to go and what services are offered. The one positive shared about mental health is that awareness and acceptance has grown, making it less stigmatized.

ACCESSIBILITY

Many service providers mentioned capacity is a huge issue for low-income people accessing healthcare services. The availability of affordable healthcare services may be limited or not exist in the local area. Residents of Montbello described how the availability of services has declined there and how they now have to go across town to see a doctor. There are also many barriers to access. Transportation is a barrier to accessing healthcare appointments with concerns about neighborhood safety and limited or no affordable transportation options. There was mention that there is no access to reliable transportation, especially for early

morning appointments. Affordability is also a barrier. There is a perception that healthcare is expensive. Having insurance does not always guarantee access to specialists. With the Public Health Emergency ending, many who many have had Medicaid might suddenly no longer have it and then they can't get care. Service providers shared that providers that accept uninsured patients are at capacity so they are having to turn people away. Medication costs are also often unaffordable.

SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

When asked about successful programming or services participants shared:

- Mobile health units (think they are from Denver Health) come to community events
- Free bus rides during the summer help address transportation barriers

Education

Education was the fifth most important need identified through data collection. The overarching themes and key points shared in relation to education were:

ONGOING ADULT EDUCATION IS NEEDED

There is a need for ongoing adult education. Often workforce and life readiness education wasn't provided in tradition schooling system or prison. There is also a big hole in terms of adult literacy and very few organizations are working to provide that. One service provider shared that often while providing digital navigation support, they will be helping in navigating to a website and then have the realization that the individual can't actually read the website.

ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There is also a need for educational programs that are accessible and safe. Service providers noticed that COVID set people, especially youth, back for cognitive growth and development. There is a perception that local schools are reeling and they are unable to focus on things that matter like classroom safety and quality education. Classroom safety emerged as a concern for many community members and service providers and not knowing how to handle that.

SUCCESSFUL SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

When asked about successful programming or services participants shared:

- Having more online education opportunities has been wonderful but only if the digital literacy and devices are available to access it

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Perceptions (A Federal Program Administered by DHS Services)

All focus group participants and interviewees were familiar with SNAP. Each were questioned about barriers to SNAP enrollment, trends, and any successful programming or services that helped with SNAP enrollment. Participants shared:

BARRIERS TO SNAP ENROLLMENT

- The process to apply is very hard; it took two weeks, it is a lot of computer forms and a phone interview
- People don't know if they qualify
- People don't have the technology needed to apply
- People don't have a consistent mailing address to apply and maintain the benefit
- Mental health conditions like anxiety prevent people from applying and they need the support of someone to walk them through the whole process
- There is a perception that is you apply for it as an immigrant, it could compromise your status
- Distrust of a government system because of historic racism

- It is a nutrition program that isn't suited to different cultures to let them thrive in their own culture

TRENDS

- Food banks are a preferred alternative to SNAP because of reduced barriers and providing more and higher quality food than people are able to access with SNAP
- SNAP doesn't provide nearly enough to make it worth enrolling, it has not kept up with inflation and cannot provide enough food for a family
- SNAP is seen as "a joke, providing a few cents and wishing you good luck"

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING OR SERVICES OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTS

- Case managers that can help walk individuals through and assist with computer applications
- Food banks or food pantries are a great resource and you get your food immediately, you don't have to wait
- Growhaus food boxes
- Our Lady of Grace Food Pantry
- Food Bank of the Rockies

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the Denver Community

Equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging are cross-cutting and was a lens used throughout all data collection and analysis for this assessment. JSI consciously considers that programs and research are not implemented in a vacuum and can be impacted by implicit biases. It is clear that systemic racism and the marginalization of low-income and impoverished people is the underlying generator of poverty. In order to gain perspective on how community members and service providers see or experience inequities, discrimination, and disinculusion, all focus groups and interviewees were asked about marginalized populations and additional barriers to accessing programming and services. The following were identified as populations that are disproportionately affected by additional barriers and lacking services and support:

NON-CITIZENS AND THOSE WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Non-English speakers or those who speak English as a second language, particularly for undocumented individuals, have additional barriers to accessing services. Language barriers hinder access because there is no mechanism to find or understand information. There is a lack of access to interpreters and translators which makes it difficult to understand and navigate systems. Fear is very prevalent among immigrants. There is a perception among the immigrant and refugee community that nobody wants to give you a chance. There is also a feeling that "Americans want you to forget about your culture and think like an American, speak like an American, and try to blend in. The children of immigrants and refugees aren't taught about their original culture because they feel they have better chances of succeeding if they blend in."

RACIAL INEQUITIES

In both job and qualification applications, information like race, and, and ethnicity are perceived as affecting decisions about hiring and eligibility. Black individuals feel that they are at the very bottom and that refugees and immigrants, especially Hispanics have an advantage in getting benefits. Many also spoke to the distrust, particularly of Native Americans and African Americans/Blacks, of systems created by the very government that historically mistreated them.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

All participants noted the extreme disadvantage for individuals without a baseline knowledge of technology use, a device, and connectivity. Nearly all resource information and application/scheduling is housed online and many do not have devices, connectivity, or the knowledge to use them. Trying to get residents connected

and providing technology education to residents is a key factor in getting people in more stable situations because there is no way to manage benefits, pay rent, etc. unless you are online.

Information from Key Sectors of the Community

Information was gathered from key sectors of the community to ensure all areas of need, service gaps, and assets could be identified for Denver.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Staff from many of the community-based organizations in Denver working with low-income people were interviewed. Many CBOs were also partners to help recruit focus group participants or provide physical space to host focus groups as well as provide input on how to make the focus groups accessible, convenient, and culturally welcoming. CBOs included: St. Francis Center, Commun, FAVA (Families against violent acts), Sun Valley Kitchen and Community Center, African Community Center, Sun Valley Youth Center, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, Bayaud Enterprises, and Earthlinks.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The Church in South Denver and Jewish Family Service were partners in focus group planning, logistics, recruitment, providing physical space, and providing input on how to make the focus groups accessible, convenient, and culturally welcoming. Jewish Family Service is a non-profit that serves regardless of religious beliefs and functions as a non-profit.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Information from the private sector including Business Insider as well as local and national news reports on the Denver housing market, private third-party ownership and management of affordable housing projects, as well as on the job market in Denver were drawn from in the environmental scan and landscape analysis for the needs assessment. This information and its effects on low-income individuals are included in the qualitative findings of this needs assessment report.

PUBLIC SECTOR

Staff from Denver Human Services, the Denver Public Library, and Denver Health were interviewed. In addition, Denver Human Services staff was integral in supporting and guiding the needs assessment analysis to ensure all areas of need were assessed and all barriers were minimized for gathering community and service provider input.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Information from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Denver was gathered during the environmental scan and landscape analysis for the needs assessment. Information on educational needs and impacts for those in poverty was gathered and is included in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this needs assessment report. Denver Public Schools were invited to participate in a key informant interview but were unable to due to lack of response.

ROMA Certified National Trainer Review/Feedback Received

All organizational standards were met per a ROMA Certified National Trainer Review.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS OF POVERTY

Causes of Poverty

HOUSING

Denver's main cause of poverty is the growing unaffordability of housing. The growth and gentrification of Denver have made affordable housing almost non-existent and housing costs far most burdensome than ever before. The rising costs cascade into creating barriers to maintaining stable housing. For those on the cusp of poverty, the rising costs have forced them to choose between basic life needs and/or has priced them out of their homes.

COST OF LIVING

The cost of living in Denver is another cause of poverty. Along with the rising housing costs, inflation and Denver's market has made basic life necessities unaffordable and inaccessible. As a result, service organizations do not have enough capacity to meet the overwhelming need that exists in Denver when it comes to supported employment services, education, food and nutrition, and physical and mental health.

ACCESS

Denver's layout and the residual effects of the pandemic has created barriers to self-sufficiency as well as access to resources. Because Denver has a spread-out suburban layout, physical distance and transportation are barriers to accessing services. Public transportation is limited and can be unreliable or inaccessible and there are no other affordable transportation options. The pandemic also resulted in the reduction of services in many low-income neighborhoods making transportation critical to accessing services.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Another result of the pandemic was the shift to organizations sharing information and providing access almost entirely through virtual means. This is a massive barrier for extremely low-income individuals who do not have access to a device and connectivity. There is also a barrier for those without a baseline knowledge to navigate virtual platforms or use the web. This is also a barrier for individuals who have low or no literacy or do not speak English.

DISCRIMINATION

The data show that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), women, and people with disabilities are disproportionately in poverty in Denver. Community members and service providers echoed this for BIPOC individuals with many in the focus groups as well as service providers describing the added difficulties and biases those individuals face in addition to being in poverty.

Conditions of Poverty

CONCENTRATION OF POVERTY

Though Denver as a whole has become more unaffordable, there are neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income individuals. These neighborhoods have less resources, more barriers to access, and as a result perpetuate generational poverty. Often affordable housing will exist within these neighborhoods which are often food deserts, are crowded by construction or are near train tracks and major highways, and are on the borders of Denver County.

DISPLACEMENT

Because of Denver's growth, even areas that are traditionally low-income have undergone gentrification. This is driving up the cost of living within neighborhoods and displacing residents. It has also created a market for third party management companies to manage affordable housing units. This has resulted in rent raises beyond what individuals can afford and there are also reports of management neglecting safety issues such as mold, chipped paint with lead, and safety on the property from violence and drugs.

The continuous rise of housing has also resulted in higher eviction rates. Denver is on track for almost a 50% increase in eviction filings for 2023 compared to 2022.^{lxxxiv} Evictions are known to drive generational poverty and the loss of shelter, even briefly, often causes unemployment, educational disruptions, and food insecurity for families.^{lxxxv}

HOMELESSNESS

Due to the lack of affordable housing, many individuals end up homeless. Even affordable housing itself has become unaffordable for many, being unable to keep pace with raising rates for rent and ultimately, end up homeless.

LACK OF WORTH

Unhoused individuals feel invisible, worthless, and lack hope. Untreated mental health issues are common amongst unhoused individuals. People cannot access services and benefits without stability and there is an undue burden placed on the person who is already struggling to find help.

LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Those in poverty are unable to get needed healthcare and especially mental healthcare. Low-income neighborhoods have lost many of the physical provider spaces after the pandemic and face barriers when it comes to traveling for care. In addition, providers that accept uninsured or underinsured individuals are at capacity and are having to turn individuals away. This leaves those in poverty without any ability to access healthcare and mental health services and it is a critical need given the heightened stress poverty poses on mental health.

LACK OF EDUCATION

Those in poverty face barriers to higher education. Higher education is generally required for higher paying jobs but higher education is unaffordable and as a result, it is difficult to find living-wage employment. This perpetuates the cycle of generational poverty as well.

NEEDS STATEMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Family Level Needs Statements

- Individuals and families need affordable housing and/or services that help with housing costs in Denver County.
- Individuals and families need both in-person navigators and less complicated systems to help navigate resources, benefits, and needed services. This is needed both internally and externally.
- Individuals and families need help with technology to access benefits and services.

Agency Level Needs Statements

- DHS and other service agencies need additional funding to provide services to low-income individuals in Denver.

- DHS and other services agencies need additional funding for staffing so that they can employ and retain employees to provide the needed services.
- DHS needs new systems for information-sharing and improving response time to customers.
- DHS needs streamlined sources of information around funding available to different community organizations who work on poverty alleviation in Denver.

Community Level Needs Statements

- Denver lacks sufficient affordable housing.
- Denver needs a streamlined and accessible system to share information on the different resources available in the community to low-income individuals and service providers.
- Denver needs additional resources to be invested in neighborhoods with high concentration of low-income individuals.

APPENDIX 1

CURRENT LOW-INCOME RESOURCES IN DENVER COUNTY

Education	
CDE Adult Education	Education
CO Department of Education (CDE)	Education
DPS Enrollment Guides	Provide proof of age, address, immunization record to enroll
Universal Preschool Program	Eligible families receive 15+ free hours of preschool/week starting Fall 2023
Employment	
Centro Humanitario	Day labor center
CommunityWorks	Empowering the unemployed and those with barriers to employment to become self-supporting through job preparation and placement
Denver Public Library Reentry Support	Denver Public Library offers resources, tools, and services to help support reentry and applying for jobs.
St Francis Center Employment Services for Reentry	Participants come from day shelter programs, drug and alcohol programs, parole and corrections transition services, and other community organizations to develop skills, gain experience, and connect with full-time employment with an aim to end the cycle of poverty.
The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Employment Assistance Programs	CDHS offers different employment assistance programs to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, those in reentry, refugees, and at-risk populations.
Food and Nutrition	
CO SNAP	Emergency allotments ended 3/2023
Denver Food Assistance Programs	Hunger free hotline
Denver Food Pantries	Food assistance
Food Bank of the Rockies	Find food
Food, Cash, Medical Assistance	Apply for SNAP and other benefits on PEAK
Mobile Food Pantry (DHS & Food Bank of the Rockies)	Held Monthly at Empower Field and DHS East Office
Tasty Food	Free meals during school break youth ages 5-18
Health	
CO Community Health Network	20 CHCs in CO Safety Net
CO Crisis Services	Mental health, substance use, emotional crisis support line
DDPHE	Health resources
Denver Health CHCs and SBHCs	Health care and social determinates of health resources
Denver Health Financial Assistance Program	Lower cost medical and dental services at Denver Health for patients who do not qualify for Medicaid, CHP+, CICP; flat fee copay
Denver Health Mental Health Services	

Tepeyac Community Health Center	Healthcare and social determinants of health services
Housing	
Affordable Home Ownership Program	Reqs: Must be within housing income limits & maintain housing payment =<35% of household income
Denver Housing Authority	Waiting list ~6-12 months
Denver Housing Choice Voucher Rental Assistance	
Dept of Housing Stability (HOST)	Multilingual and confidential service that connects individuals to critical resources including food, shelter, rental assistance, childcare, and more; dial 2-1-1 or text zip code to 898-211
HOST Free Circulator Bus	Loop of several shelters, M-F 8:30am-3:30pm
Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)	Support winter heating costs
Urban Peak	Unhoused population
Warren Village	Unhoused and unstably housed
Legal Services	
Centro San Juan Diego	Free walk-in legal consultations 1st & 3rd Weds 5-7pm
CO State Public Defender	Legal
Multiple Services	
211 Help Center	Multilingual and confidential service that connects individuals to critical resources including food, shelter, rental assistance, childcare, and more; dial 2-1-1 or text zip code to 898-211
African Community Center	Refugees and immigrants
Bayaud Enterprises	Mental health support, showers, laundry, food pantry
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless	Housing, healthcare, and employment support
Denver Resources Directory	Resources
Focus Points Family Resource Center	Education, support services, skills building
Hope Communities	Housing, education, support services
Jewish Family Services	Aging, mental health, disabled, employment, housing
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains	Adoption, disaster response, foster care, older adult, family support & education, and refugee & immigration services
Montbello Organizing Committee	Community group
Servicios de La Raza	Mental health, employment, youth engagement, reentry programs, survivor services
Somali Community Center	Refugees and immigrants
Denver Public Library Community Assistance Program	Resource list
Commun	Food sovereignty, mental health, community building, economic vitality, community center

APPENDIX 2

Denver CSBG Community Needs Assessment – Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

Welcome, Introduction, Background

Welcome

Good [Morning/Afternoon]. Thank you so much for joining me today for this interview.

Zoom Tech

Before we get started, I want to let you know that if you'd like to see closed captions on Zoom, click "Live Transcription" at the bottom of your Zoom window. Then click "Show Subtitles" (also at the bottom of your Zoom window) and the live transcription will show up.

Background & Purpose

This interview will take about an hour, including this introduction. Before we jump into the discussion, I want to share some background information with you.

I know you received emails from JSI, but I want to take a moment to introduce myself. [*Share your name, pronouns and title.*] I'll also give you a chance to introduce yourself at the beginning of our conversation in just one moment.

Before we dive into the interview, I want to share a bit about who we are and what we are doing with Denver Human Services. JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. is a nonprofit public health consulting organization that works domestically and globally with the aim to build stronger health systems and healthier communities, and we focus particularly on health equity. I am based out of our Denver office.

Our role with Denver Human Services (DHS) is to conduct a Community Needs Assessment to assist DHS in establishing priorities for the management of the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG). CSBG is a federal funding allocation from the United States Department of Health and Human Services. These funds are distributed to states and then administered by local entities including the City and County of Denver. CSBG funding supports projects that reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower people with low incomes. This Community Needs Assessment aims to address the current unmet needs and future needs of persons living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in the City and County of Denver.

Confidentiality & Our Process

I want to emphasize that this interview is confidential. Your individual responses will not be shared with anyone, but instead analyzed together among other interviews to provide overarching themes and insights. We will not share any identifiable information with anyone else except for the JSI team. No one's name will be identified in any report or shared with anyone at DHS. If we share any quotes, they will be anonymous unless we get your permission to attribute your name to the quote.

For our analysis, we take all of our interview and focus group responses and analyze them collectively for themes. Rather than reporting what specific people said, we see if multiple people are reporting similar experiences or ideas. If multiple people share something with us, then we report it as a theme. After we analyze the interviews and focus groups, we will create a Community Needs Assessment Report for DHS that will be used to inform future decisions.

Do you have any questions about our process or the confidentiality piece?

I will be taking notes during the interview, but these will not be shared with anyone at DHS directly. I will also record the interview for my note-taking purposes, if that is alright with you?

The confirmation email for this interview included a consent form. Did you have a chance to fill that out prior to our meeting today?

[If no:] That's okay, I can go ahead and drop that link in the Zoom chat now so you can quickly complete that.

Please know you are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may leave the interview at any time if you so choose.

Questions

Do you have any questions for me before we start the interview?

Please feel free to ask me any questions at any point during the interview. If you need clarification or need me to repeat a question, that is totally fine.

Note that there are not any scheduled breaks, but please feel free to let me know if you need to self-break at any time.

If it's alright with you, I will begin recording now.

[Begin Zoom Recording]

Interview Questions

Interviewee Info

Let's get started. This is an opportunity for us to learn more about you and your work.

1. Please briefly describe your organization, role, service area focus, and client population.

Most Important Need

I'd next like to ask you some questions about your perceived needs of people experiencing poverty in the City and County of Denver.

2. Of the following areas, please tell me what the top three areas of most important need are currently for people experiencing poverty. I'm also going to pull this up on my screen so you can follow along as I read them:

[Share screen showing this list]

- Employment
- Education and Cognitive Development

- **Income, Infrastructure, and Asset Building**
 - includes financial education, benefits coordination, savings accounts, retirement accounts, tax support, small business development
- **Housing**
- **Health and Social/Behavioral Development**
 - includes nutrition, food/meals, mental health, substance abuse counseling/support
- **Civic Engagement and Community Involvement**
 - includes leadership training, voter education and access, citizenship classes, volunteer training
- **Support Services**
 - includes case management, eligibility determinations, referrals child care, legal services, transportation services, and others
- **Other**
 - For example emergency management/disaster relief

Great, thank you! Based on your answers, I'd like to ask you a few more questions about those areas of need.

Area 1 of most important need

For [AREA 1]:

3. What do you think is the most important unmet need related to [AREA 1]?
4. Do you feel there are ways the community's need related to [AREA 1] has changed over the past three years? And in which ways have they changed?
5. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need in this area—for better or for worse?
 - a. Probe: local, regional or national trends
6. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted [AREA 1] that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?

Area 2 of most important need

For [AREA 2], I'm going to ask you the same series of questions:

7. What do you think is the most important unmet need related to [AREA 2]?
8. Do you feel there are ways the community's need related to [AREA 2] has changed over the past three years? And in which ways have they changed?
9. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need in this area—for better or for worse?
 - a. Probe: local, regional or national trends
10. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted [AREA 2] that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?

Area 3 of most important need

Next, [AREA 3], I'm going to ask you the same series of questions:

11. What do you think is the most important unmet need related to [AREA 3]?
12. Do you feel there are ways the community's need related to [AREA 3] has changed over the past three years? And in which ways have they changed?
13. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need in this area—for better or for worse?
 - a. Probe: local, regional or national trends
14. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted [AREA 3] that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?

Populations who are marginalized

Thank you for your answers related to those three areas. In terms of accessing services for all of the areas on that list,

15. What are the unique challenges or barriers in accessing services for populations who are historically and presently marginalized, such as agricultural and seasonal workers, racial/ethnic groups, people who live with a disability, housing insecure children and adults, those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals, youth, or older adults?

DHS Perception & Opportunity

Finally for my last series of questions, I'd next like to ask you about your perception of Denver Human Services.

16. Are you familiar with Denver Human Services (DHS)? If yes, how?
17. Are you familiar with DHS's Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program? If yes, how?

18. What is your perception regarding:

[Note for facilitator: if they answer "yes" for question 17, probe each of the following questions about CSBG specifically]

- a. DHS's capacity (or ability) to meet the needs of the community, particularly those in poverty
 - b. DHS's capacity (or ability) to support your organization's work
 - c. The knowledge or accessibility of DHS's programs and services
 - d. Cultural responsiveness of DHS's programs and services
19. What do you think are 2-3 most promising opportunities for DHS to address poverty over the next 3 years?
 20. What are your community's greatest strengths when it comes to poverty reduction or resiliency that DHS could continue to draw from?

Closing

Thank you so much! Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Do you have any further questions for me?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview and share your insights with me. Please reach out via email if you have any questions or concerns that come up about this assessment, or to Amber Stenson at DHS if you'd like to contact them directly or want more information about CSBG. I'll share both of our emails in the Zoom chat right now.

[Share name: email address; Amber Stenson: Amber.Stenson@denvergov.org in Zoom chat]

Again, I appreciate you sharing openly; your input is vital to our work with DHS.

Denver CSBG Community Needs Assessment – Focus Group Guide

Welcome, Introduction, Background

Welcome

Good [Morning/Afternoon/Evening]. Thank you so much for being here today for this conversation.

Background & Purpose

We will be here for about an hour and a half, including this introduction. Before we jump into the discussion, I want to share some background information with you.

I am [*Share your name, pronouns.*] I'll also give you a chance to introduce yourselves in just one moment.

Before we dive in, I want to share a bit about who we are and what we are doing. JSI Research and Training Institute, Inc. is a nonprofit public health consulting organization that works domestically and globally with the aim to build stronger health systems and healthier communities, and we focus particularly on health equity. I am based out of our Denver office.

We are working with Denver Human Services (DHS) to have a conversation with communities in Denver about what would help reduce poverty and what is most needed right now. DHS provides funding through a federal grant program called the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to help reduce poverty. The information we gather from this and other conversations around Denver are going to help determine what the priorities should be for the CSBG funding for the next three years.

Confidentiality & Our Process

I want to emphasize that this discussion is confidential. Your individual responses will not be shared with anyone, but instead will be summarized and analyzed with other focus groups to provide overarching themes and insights. We will not share any identifiable information with anyone. No one's name will be identified in any report or shared with anyone at DHS. If we share any quotes, they will be anonymous.

Do you have any questions about our process or the confidentiality piece?

We will be taking notes during the conversation, but these will not be shared with anyone outside of JSI.

Please know you are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may leave at any time if you so choose.

Questions

Do you have any questions for me before we start the interview? Anything you need in terms of accessibility?

Please feel free to ask me any questions at any point during the interview. If you need clarification or need me to repeat a question, that is totally fine.

Note that there are not any scheduled breaks, but please feel free to take any as needed.

Interview Questions

Participant Info

Let's get started. This is an opportunity for us to learn more about you.

1. Please briefly introduce yourself and let us know how long you've lived in Denver.

Most Important Need

I'd next like to ask some questions about the needs of people experiencing poverty in the City and County of Denver.

2. Of the following areas, please tell me what the top three areas of most important need are currently for people experiencing poverty.:

[Hang list on wall and vote with post-its]

- Employment
- Education
- Income, Infrastructure, and Asset Building
 - includes financial education, benefits coordination, savings accounts, retirement accounts, tax support, small business development
- Housing
- Health
 - includes nutrition, food/meals, mental health, substance abuse counseling/support
- Civic Engagement and Community Involvement
 - includes leadership training, voter education and access, citizenship classes, volunteer training
- Support Services
 - includes case management, eligibility determinations, referrals child care, legal services, transportation services, and others
- Other
 - For example emergency management/disaster relief

Great, thank you! Based on your answers, I'd like to ask you a few more questions about those areas of need.

Area 1 of most important need

For [AREA 1]:

3. What do you think is the most important unmet need related to [AREA 1]?
4. Do you feel there are ways the community's need related to [AREA 1] has changed over the past three years? And in which ways have they changed?
5. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need in this area—for better or for worse?

a. Probe: local, regional or national trends

6. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted [AREA 1] that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?

SNAP enrollment barriers

7. Are you familiar with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)? Some people refer to this as food stamps (estampillas).

Question: recently they reduced the funds, right?

[If no, describe: SNAP is part of a federal nutrition program to help low-income households purchase food. It provides a monthly benefit, determined by income, resources, and household size, that can be used to purchase food and other essential items like diapers and medication.]

There is a gap between the number of people who qualify for SNAP and the number of people who enroll in the program; I'm going to ask you a similar series of questions but in relation to SNAP:

8. What do you think is the biggest barrier to SNAP enrollment?
9. Have the community's needs related to SNAP changed over the past three years? If so, in which ways?
10. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need for SNAP—for better or for worse?
- a. Probe: local, regional or national trends
11. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted SNAP enrollment that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?

[PROBE: Living wage jobs if employment, income, or affordability of living is brought up]

12. What do you think is the most important unmet need related to living wage jobs?]
13. Do you feel there are ways the community's need related to living wage jobs has changed over the past three years? And in which ways have they changed?
14. What recent changes or trends in the community have influenced the community's need for living wage jobs—for better or for worse?
- a. Probe: local, regional or national trends
15. Have you observed any efforts that have meaningfully and positively impacted living wage jobs that you would like to see continued or amplified? If yes, can you please describe those efforts?]

Populations who are marginalized

Thank you for your answers so far. In terms of accessing services for all of the areas on that list,

16. Are there unique challenges or barriers in accessing services for you? (Identify factors to prompt thinking based on FG population: For example: the language you speak, your housing situation, your race/ethnicity, your status as a citizen, the type of work you do, your age, etc.)?

DHS Perception & Opportunity

Finally for my last series of questions, I'd next like to ask you about your thoughts on the current services available for low-income individuals and families.

17. Do you currently access any resources or services for low-income individuals or families, and if so, which ones?

a. Probe: Any DHS-specific programs?

18. What do you think about:

a. The programs' capacity (or ability) to meet the needs of the community, particularly those in poverty

b. How well-known and accessible are the programs and services

c. Are the programs and services aligned with the cultures of the people being served (i.e. language, food used/provided is in line with cultural traditions, cultural values are respected)?

19. What do you think are 2-3 most promising opportunities for programs to address poverty in Denver over the next 3 years?

20. Are there any existing people, programs, services, or resources that have helped your community with poverty reduction?

Anything else?

Closing

Thank you so much! Those are all of the questions I have for you today. Do you have any further questions for me?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this conversation and share your insights with me.

Again, I appreciate you sharing openly; your input is vital to our work with DHS. We will be sharing the summary of results in a flier format so you can see how what you shared is going to help guide how DHS will plan to use their CSBG funding.

ⁱ Sun Valley Kitchen. (2023). Evaluation Final Report.

ⁱⁱ Sun Valley Kitchen. (2023). Evaluation Final Report.

ⁱⁱⁱ New World Encyclopedia. (2022). Denver, Colorado. Retrieved from https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Denver,_Colorado

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