

Full Report
2021 Community Needs Assessment
Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority

Message from DCEA's Executive Director and Board Chair

Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority is pleased to present its *Report on the Community Needs Assessment*. We are grateful to the clients, board members, partners, community residents, and staff members who contributed to the assessment process. The assessment results will help the agency and our partners to address the most urgent needs in our communities.

Kay Hale, Executive Director

Rene Tabor, Chair, Board of Directors

Executive Summary

From March, 2019, to March, 2020, DCEA conducted a comprehensive assessment of the needs of low-income residents in its service area and of the overall needs and assets of the communities served. East Tennessee counties served by DCEA's Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) programs are Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Monroe, and Sevier. Non-CSBG counties in Tennessee are Anderson, Blount, Bradley, Carter, Claiborne, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Knox, Loudon, McMinn, Morgan, Overton, Polk, Putnam, Rhea, Roane, Scott, Sullivan, Unicoi, Union, Washington, and White. Non-CSBG counties in Kentucky are Harlan and Bell.

Planners compiled and analyzed relevant statistical data in seventeen categories –population, poverty, workforce characteristics and economic conditions, homelessness, housing costs and conditions, public assistance income, education, child care, nutrition, transportation, health, teen pregnancy, adverse childhood experiences, violent crime, single parents, elderly population, and disability. Focus groups, brainstorming, and written surveys were used to elicit feedback from community residents (general public) and DCEA's board members, staff, clients, and partners.

Data analysis and the creation of the full assessment report took place between April 15 and June 30, 2020. The report was approved by the Executive Director on December 9, 2020.

Key Findings

Poverty in CSBG Counties: In the CSBG counties, poverty decreases with age. Children and youth have the highest poverty rates; seniors have the lowest rates. Cocke has the highest poverty rate for seniors age 65 and older (13.2%). Cocke's poverty rate for children under age 5 (47.9%) is more than twice the state and national rates.

Poverty in Non-CSBG Counties: Poverty also decreases with age in the non-CSBG counties. In the non-CSBG counties, children and youth have the highest poverty rates. Seniors have the lowest poverty rates. Bell has the highest percentage of children under 5 in poverty (53.2%). Harlan has the highest poverty rate for seniors age 65 and older (19.9%).

Unemployment Before and During the COVID Crisis: On average 15.1% of the workforce in the non-CSBG counties were unemployed in April, 2020, compared with 3.7% in 2019. 20.7% of the workforce in the CSBG counties were unemployed during the COVID-19 crisis in April, 2020. The annual unemployment rate for the CSBG counties averaged 3.2% in 2019.

Educational Attainment: 11% of adults in the non-CSBG counties age 25 and older and 27 percent of adults age 25 and older in the CSBG counties have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Counties in Economic Distress: The Appalachian Regional Commission designates one CSBG county as economically distressed (Cocke). Five non-CSBG counties are classified as economically distressed (Hancock, Morgan, Scott, Bell, and Harlan). To be designated as distressed, counties must have median family incomes no greater than 67% of the U.S. average and a poverty rate that is 150% or greater of the U.S. average.

High Priority Needs

Participants in the community needs assessment identified high priority needs in both CSBG and non-CSBG counties:

1. Mental health/substance abuse prevention and/or treatment services
2. Affordable transportation
3. Affordable health insurance/health care and/or improved health and nutrition services, including access to food
4. Affordable housing for all age groups, including assistance with rental/mortgage costs
5. Affordable child care
6. Financial literacy education to help people learn to manage their money
7. Assistance in enrolling/completing postsecondary education
8. Additional and more conveniently located adult education and ESOL programs