

2025

Community Needs Assessment



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Executive Director Sheri Wilson

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Introduction

Community Action of Southeast Iowa is dedicated to alleviating the conditions and causes of poverty by building partnerships and strengthening people through quality services. Our vision is for people in southeast Iowa to have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. We have been in operation since 1964 in southeast Iowa, providing support and meeting needs in our communities. Our agency covers the counties of Des Moines, Lee, Henry, and Louisa. We provide WIC services in these counties plus Muscatine and Washington County. For this report, we will focus on needs in the first four counties listed.

Overview and Purpose

Community Action of Southeast Iowa conducts a community needs assessment every three years in accordance with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) standards. This assessment provides an in depth look at the needs of our community, our client's needs, evaluates causes of poverty, conditions of poverty, and assesses how we as an agency may address issues in our community. This forms the basis of planning as we follow the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework to identify needs, look at desired outcomes, develop services to reach those outcomes, implement strategies, and follow through with evaluation and reporting.

Summary

There are many people facing economic hardship in southeast Iowa. Children, minorities, and single parent households are in poverty at a disproportionately high rate. The top identified community needs were in the categories of housing, brain/mental health, employment, transportation, crime, and childcare. Individual and family needs fall within the categories of housing, food, brain/mental health, employment, and financial management.

While there are various services in place to address some needs, there are improvements that could be made in structures, systems, resources, communities, and programs to address continuing needs and gaps.

Approach

Community Action of Southeast Iowa desires to have ongoing input regarding needs in our area. For this reason, we have systematic data collection occurring in at least one of our programs throughout any given year. We collect information from a variety of sources and utilize many in analyzation. The planning director is primarily responsible for the community needs assessment; however, other managers, administration staff, program staff, and the board have a hand in it as well.

In completion of this report, many assessments were freshly analyzed as listed below. Census data was accessed and compared nationally and locally. Many different areas of our community had input relating to their needs, opinions, and views, as you will see throughout this report. Agency datasets may be available as requested.

Assessments, Reports and Data Used

Superscript references throughout this document refer to data sets listed below.

1. ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey. 277 Responses: 59% Des Moines, 14% Henry, 19% Lee, 8% Louisa County.
2. 2025 ICAA Stakeholder Needs Assessment. 225 Responses: 52% Des Moines, 21% Henry, 24% Lee, 3% Louisa County.
3. 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions and Surveys. This involved an online survey, a community input session including staff, community members, business partners, social service agency providers, and interested parties. Strategic Planning Sessions were also conducted with agency management staff and the governing board. There were 54 responses to the online survey.
4. 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey: 490 Responses, mostly collected through our CSBG center clients. 62% were food pantry clients, 52% were LIHEAP Clients. Responses were from the following counties: 28% Des Moines, 9% Henry, 43% Lee, 17% Louisa County, 3% Other.
5. 2024 Head Start Community Needs Assessment Update.
6. Community Action Partnership Data Tool was utilized, which accesses the most recent American Community Survey and Census data as of June 2025.
7. Living Wage Calculator by Dr. Amy K. Glasmeier and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). <http://livingwage.mit.edu/states/19/locations>
8. HUD Office of Policy Development and Research. Fair Market Rent. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html>
9. NIFCAP Database, Fiscal Year 2024 agency client data, unless another year is noted.
10. 2023-2024 Early Head Start/Head Start End of Year Family Survey: 147 Responses.
11. Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral County Reports. <https://iowaccrr.org/data/>
12. 2024 Staff Input for Community Needs Assessment: 71 Responses.
13. 2023 Feeding America Map the Meal Gap Food Insecurity in Iowa. This measures the lack of access to enough nutritionally adequate food for household members. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/>
14. 2021 Iowa Youth Survey Special Topics Report: Mental Health Findings.
15. 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment for Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center. https://www.greatriverhealth.org/documents/2022_SEIRMC_CHNA_HIP_Final.pdf
16. Common Good Iowa Cost of Living in Iowa 2024. <https://www.commongoodiowa.org/data/cost-of-living-in-iowa/cost-of-living-in-iowa--narrative>
17. US Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2030. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>
18. National Low Income Housing Coalition. The Gap. <https://nlihc.org/gap> <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/iowa>
19. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). March 2025. <https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/iowa-GRPA-Data-Sheet-8.5-x-11-wide.pdf>
20. 2024 Annual Report Institute for Community Alliances. Iowa Finance Authority. The Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care, IA BoS CoC. <https://opportunityiowa.gov/media/5390/download?inline>
21. The State of ALICE in Iowa. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/alice-in-the-labor-force/iowa>
22. 2021 Annual Profile Mississippi Valley LWDA Iowa Workforce Development. <https://workforce.iowa.gov/media/463/download?inline>
23. United Way of Southeast Iowa 2023 Community Needs Assessment: 278 Responses.
24. Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). January 2025. <https://hhs.iowa.gov/performance-and-reports/brfss>

Population

The following chart displays the area population, those in poverty at 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and those served by our agency. Agency programs and services focus on persons who have a low income.

Report Area	Total Population, 2020 Census	All Ages # of Persons in Poverty	All Ages Poverty Rate	Population Served by the Agency in FY 2021	% of Population served by the Agency
Report Location	102,710	12,795	12.94%	14,026	13.66%
Des Moines County, IA	38,597	5,354	14.14%	6,394	16.57%
Henry County, IA	20,228	2,248	12.08%	1,977	9.77%
Lee County, IA	33,175	4,151	13.04%	4,174	12.58%
Louisa County, IA	10,710	1,042	9.87%	1,143	10.67%
Iowa	3,195,937	340,362	10.99%	14,026	0.44%
United States	332,287,540	40,390,045	12.44%	-	-

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2019-23 & NIFCAP Fiscal Year 2024 Data.

Data Specific to Poverty

The standard usage of poverty in this document is discussed in relation to 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Different programs and services offered through our agency serve people with an income up to 200% FPL, Head Start income limits are set at 100% with a few exceptions; WIC has a limit of 185% while CSBG, LIHEAP and Weatherization are at 200%. In general, our agency looks at a client's previous 30-day income history, or in some cases may use the prior year's tax return to see if they are income eligible for services.

The total poverty rate in southeast Iowa is 12.94% compared to the total Iowa state rate of 10.99%. Poverty in southeast Iowa has decreased by 0.26% from 2013-2023 while the national average of decrease has been 3.3%⁶.

2024 Poverty Guidelines

Persons in family	100%	125%	130%	135%	140%	150%	175%	185%	200%
1	\$15,050	\$18,813	\$19,565	\$20,318	\$21,070	\$22,575	\$26,338	\$27,843	\$30,100
2	\$20,440	\$25,550	\$26,572	\$27,594	\$28,616	\$30,660	\$35,770	\$37,814	\$40,880
3	\$25,820	\$32,275	\$33,566	\$34,857	\$36,148	\$38,730	\$45,185	\$47,767	\$51,640
4	\$31,200	\$39,000	\$40,560	\$42,120	\$43,680	\$46,800	\$54,600	\$57,720	\$62,400
5	\$36,580	\$45,725	\$47,554	\$49,383	\$51,212	\$54,870	\$64,015	\$67,673	\$73,160
6	\$41,960	\$52,450	\$54,549	\$56,646	\$58,744	\$62,940	\$73,430	\$77,626	\$83,920
7	\$47,340	\$59,170	\$61,542	\$63,909	\$66,276	\$71,010	\$82,845	\$87,579	\$94,680
8	\$52,720	\$65,900	\$68,536	\$71,172	\$73,808	\$79,080	\$92,260	\$97,532	\$105,440

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$5,380 for each additional person.

Population in Poverty by Gender

A greater percentage of females are in poverty in southeast Iowa than the state and national average. Females in Des Moines and Lee Counties are particularly worse off⁶.

Report Area	Male	Male Percent	Female	Female Percent
Report Location	5,499	11.23%	7,296	14.63%
Des Moines County, IA	2,300	12.41%	3,054	15.79%
Henry County, IA	1,124	11.97%	1,124	12.20%
Lee County, IA	1,593	10.18%	2,558	15.80%
Louisa County, IA	482	8.89%	560	10.90%
Iowa	152,430	9.84%	187,932	12.14%
United States	18,016,757	11.26%	22,373,288	13.60%

In fiscal year 2024, 24% of our client households were single parents; 21% of those were single parent female-headed households and only 3% were headed by males⁹.

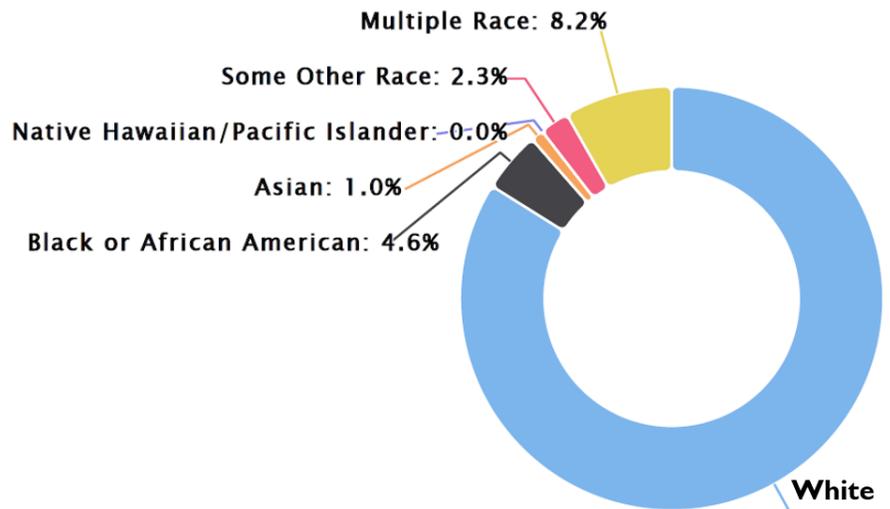
Population in Poverty by Age

Based on the 2019-2023 American Community Survey, the Iowa average of children aged 0-17 who lived in poverty was 12.7%. The rate in southeast Iowa is considerably higher at 18.5%. For those who are ages 0-4 it is 24%, for those aged 5-17 it is 16.6%, while the Iowa averages are 14% and 12% respectively. Persons over age 65 are in poverty at a rate of 9.6% in southeast Iowa compared to 8.2% in Iowa. Henry County has the highest percentage of seniors in poverty at 11.1%, while Louisa has the lowest at 6.5%. Those over age 65 made up 12% of our clients and 34% were under 18 years old⁹.

Population in Poverty by Race

Non-Hispanic whites make up 88% of the population in southeast Iowa. They have the smallest percentage of their population in poverty, however they have the largest number of persons in poverty in our area with 10,734 in poverty at a rate of 12.2%. Black or African Americans are in poverty at a rate of 26.2% representing 593 individuals. Those identifying as multi-racial are in poverty at 17.8% representing 1,055 people. Of our clients in fiscal year 2024, 23% were racial minorities.

Population in Poverty by Race, Southeast Iowa



Race of Clients FY 2024

Population in Poverty by Ethnicity

In southeastern Iowa the percentage is very close to the state and national average of those who identify ethnically⁶. In fiscal year 2024 7.5% of our agency clients identified as Hispanic/Latino. Clients in Louisa county identified as Hispanic/Latino at 27%, which is 20% higher than any of our other centers⁹.

II. Race	Number of Individuals
a. American Indian or Alaska Native	57
b. Asian	85
c. Black or African American	1810
d. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	24
e. White	10862
f. Other	122
g. Multi-race (two or more of the above)	1066
h. Unknown/not reported	0
TOTAL (auto calculated)	14026

Population in Poverty by Ethnicity					
Report Area	Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino	2024 Clients Hispanic or Latino
Report Location	851	16.61%	11,944	12.74%	7.5%
Des Moines County, IA	327	24.35%	5,027	13.76%	6%
Henry County, IA	217	21.59%	2,031	11.54%	7%
Lee County, IA	143	13.57%	4,008	13.02%	5%
Louisa County, IA	164	9.53%	878	9.93%	27%
Iowa	38,461	17.62%	301,901	10.49%	-
United States	10,467,411	16.89%	29,922,634	11.39%	-

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2019-23 & NIFCAP Fiscal Year 2024 Data.

Food Needs Data

Feeding America 2023 estimates 13.3% of the population in southeast Iowa is food insecure. Food insecure is defined as “the social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” Food insecurity is highest in Lee and Des Moines County at 14%, and lowest in Louisa County at 12%. Among children, the rate of food insecurity is even higher at 20%. It is estimated that 51% of the food insecure population is ineligible for public assistance such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, and school meals¹³.

The US Department of Agriculture 2021 estimates 28% (representing 9,889 persons) of the low-income population in southeast Iowa have low food access. This is defined as living more than half a mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store⁶.



The Iowa BRFSS Brief notes 33% of black and 27% of Hispanic Iowans, were unable to “afford more food when needed” in the past year. This is in comparison to 8% of whites²⁴.

Of school age children in southeast Iowa, as of the 2022-2023 school year, 49.4% were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (under 185% FPL) compared to the Iowa average of 41.7%⁶.

According to the American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023, 5,440 households (or 12.6%) received SNAP payments. During this same period there were 3,162 households with income levels below the poverty level not receiving SNAP payments⁶.

Our agency served 14% of the population in southeast Iowa in fiscal year 2024. We provided 8,526 food baskets to 6,136 individuals in 2,965 households. This averages to 164 food giveaways per week⁶. Pre-COVID in fiscal year 2019 we provided 4,666 food baskets, an average of 90 per week. This is an 82% increase.

Food needs have increased and those of low income face significant food insecurity.

Community Needs

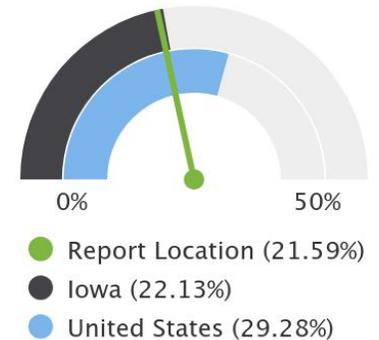
Top community needs identified with local data relate to housing, employment, and mental health. Other high community needs included transportation, crime, and childcare.

Housing

Safe and affordable housing is a need in southeast Iowa as 23% of homes have one or more substandard conditions, qualified as: lacking complete plumbing facilities (0.63%); lacking complete kitchen facilities (3.54%); with one or more occupants per bedroom; has monthly owner costs or gross rent as a percentage of household income greater than 30%⁶.

In the 2024 Stakeholder Survey, 64% of respondents do not believe there are enough safe and affordable housing units available for those of low income, and 76% believe neglected and abandoned housing and buildings are a problem. Homelessness is also an issue as 84% believe there are not enough shelter beds available². There are two short term shelters in Burlington that can house a maximum of 23 people combined and one in Fort Madison that can provide temporary shelter to six households. For 2025 in southeast Iowa, the estimated number of short term homeless singles is 330 people and 44 families. The long-term chronic homelessness is estimated at 52 singles and 3 families²⁰.

Percentage of Households where Housing Costs Exceed 30% of Income



The US Department of Health and Human Services, in recognizing Social Determinates of Health (SDOH), have identified Neighborhood and Built Environment as a key area of focus. There is a need for safe and affordable housing, hence their goal is to reduce the proportion of families that spend more than 30% of their income on housing¹⁷.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that in Iowa 25% of renters are extremely low income, and 68% of them are paying more than 50% of their income towards housing, which is a severe cost burden. The Fair Market Rent (FMR) value of a two bedroom home in Iowa is \$981. To afford this, a person would need to make \$18.86 per hour (40 hours per week, 52 weeks a year) to not pay more than 30% of their income on housing¹⁸. In southeast Iowa, 21% of whites are cost burdened compared to 39% of those identifying as black. There are significantly more renter households that are cost burdened, 58%, than those who have a mortgage, 28%. Of those who own their home and do not have a mortgage, 19% are still cost burdened⁶ (paying over 30% of their income towards housing costs including utilities, taxes, and insurance). Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two bedroom in Des Moines County, Iowa has gone from \$742 in 2017 to \$1,072 in 2025⁸. That's a 44% increase.

Our community needs safe and affordable housing.

Brain Health/Mental Health

Brain/mental health was listed as a top need in our community through the 2025 Strategic Plan Survey, 2024 Staff Survey, the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, and the United Way of Southeast Iowa 2023 Community Needs Assessment. In the 2025 Stakeholder Survey, 78% believe there are not enough mental health services for those of low income, and 49% believe there are not enough counselors that accept Medicaid in our area³.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in southeast Iowa in 2022, 15.1% of adults reported having poor mental health as compared to 12% reporting poor physical health. Over the five years from 2019 to 2023 there were 290 “deaths of despair,” qualified as: death due to intentional self-harm (suicide), alcohol-related disease, and drug overdoses. This makes the crude death rate (per 100,000 people) in southeast Iowa at 56.6, well above the Iowa rate of 43.4. Lee County carries the highest rate at 70.6 while Louisa is the lowest at 30.1. The average for the United States is 58.5⁶.

In the Iowa BRFSS Brief it is noted that three of 10 (30%) of Iowa adults with an annual household income of less than \$15,000 reported frequent mental distress. This is double the rate of the average Iowan²⁴.

The 2021 Iowa Youth Survey reports that between 27% and 36% of Iowa students, depending on the grade, reported they had felt “so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row” that they stopped doing some usual activities. The percentage was highest for 11th graders at 36%, followed by 29% for 8th graders, and 27% for 6th graders. Eleventh grade students also reported the highest rates of suicidal

ideation where almost one in four (24%) indicated they had thought about killing themselves in the past twelve months compared to 21% for participating 8th graders and 17% for participating 6th graders¹⁴.

Our community needs to support brain/mental health.

Employment

As of April 2025 the unemployment rate in southeast Iowa was 3.8% compared to the Iowa average of 3.2%. The median household income for our area is \$66,323⁶. United for ALICE reports 40.2% of people in southeast Iowa are working full time and 16.8% are working part time²¹. In fiscal year 2024 at our agency 42% of client households had employment income. This is in context that 10% of our individual clients are retired, 16% are disabled⁹, and many come to our agency seeking assistance at a time when they have lost their employment as 35% of clients noted in our ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey have had their income decrease in the past 12 months¹.

Common Good Iowa states one in six (16.6%) working households can't meet a basic needs budget and 59% of single parents can not. They state a living wage in Iowa ranges from \$11.95 for a young working couple with no children, to \$29.93 for a single parent with two children. That is just to meet a household's most basic needs of rent, utilities, food, health care, child care, clothing, household expenses, and transportation²⁰. The MIT Living Wage Calculation for Des Moines County lists the living wage for two working adults with no children at \$14.21 per hour and the living wage for a single parent with two children at \$42.14 per hour⁷.

Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) states the average annual wage for Southeast Iowa was \$48,658 in 2020, which equals \$23.39 per hour²². A household of three making the average annual wage in our area most likely would continue to struggle financially, as this is above the amount for most assistance programs. Of jobs in the Mississippi Valley IWD region, 62.2% make less than \$19.23 per hour. Among high demand occupations there are low entry level wages. Of the ten largest occupations in the region, five of them have an entry level wage below \$10.10 per hour, and only one of them is above \$16.15 per hour; which is nurses at \$24.59²².

In the 2025 ICAA Stakeholder Survey, 63% believe underemployment is an issue in our community, and 62% state there are not enough living wage opportunities². In our Staff Survey in 2024, employment was noted as the second highest community need, falling just behind housing¹².

For economic stability, employees need more than just a high hourly wage. Workers get sick or have to care for relatives and need sick leave; they need time to rejuvenate and refresh with vacation time as well as other benefits. They need the finances, or the employer provided health insurance, to avoid a health complication sending them into poverty. Workers need robust benefits through employers, including but not limited to a living hourly wage.

Our community needs living wage employment opportunities to provide economic stability for workers.

Other Identified Community Needs

Other identified community needs in southeast Iowa included transportation, crime, and childcare.

Transportation

In the 2025 ICAA Stakeholder Survey, 56% believe there is not enough daytime transportation to meet the needs of low income people, and 77% state there is not enough evening, night, or weekend transportation².

In southeast Iowa, 6% of households (2,566), have no motor vehicle. The percentage is highest in Des Moines County at 7.84% where there is a city bus system, and lowest at 4.25% in Louisa county, which is the most rural community. Overall in Iowa, 5.44% of households do not have a vehicle⁶. The Iowa BRFSS Brief reports the highest rate of unreliable transportation was reported among those with less than a \$15,000 per year household income (29%), followed by those unable to work (24%)²⁴.



There are few taxi's in operation in southeast Iowa, one regional bus system, and one city bus service in Burlington.

Few transportation options with various restrictions make transportation a significant need.

Crime

Violent crime (including murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property crime (including burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) in southeast Iowa are both much higher than the state incidence rate, though they are close to the average across the United States. According to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports 2014 and 2016, the violent crime annual rate for southeast Iowa was 425.9 (per 100,000 residents) and is highest in Des Moines County at 564.1. The property crime annual rate is 2,550.5 and is highest in Des Moines County at 3,575.8⁶. In the 2025 Stakeholder Needs Assessment, 28% believe there are not enough crime/violence prevention programs². In the 2023 United Way of Southeast Iowa Community Needs Assessment Survey, services that improve public safety and reduce crime was the top priority of four choices²³.

Childcare

Southeast Iowa needs available and affordable childcare. There is a shortage of thousands of childcare slots in southeast Iowa. In Lee County there are 4,900 children through the age of 12 and only 1,381 total childcare spaces listed with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R). According to Iowa CCR&R, a household in Des Moines County with one infant in childcare would pay 14% of their income before taxes for having their child in a licensed center. Seven percent is considered affordable according to a study from Child Care Aware of America "US and the High Price of Child Care 2019"¹¹. Childcare was a top identified need in the 2025 ICAA Stakeholder Needs Assessment, 2023 United Way of Southeast Iowa Community Needs Assessment, and the 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions.



Good child care is a key to a healthy community.

Client Needs

Each individual in poverty experiences a unique array of needs. There are however, common conditions of poverty. Common top areas of need identified in southeast Iowa fall within the categories of housing, food, brain/mental health, employment, and financial management.

Housing

Housing needs were identified as a priority in the ICAA 2025 Stakeholder Needs Assessment, the 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions, the 2024 Staff Input for the Community Needs Assessment, and the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey. In the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 32% of respondents (73) had housing needs with 45% (33) of them saying they could use help finding affordable housing, 34% (25) said they could use help making their home more energy efficient, 33% (24) said they need help making necessary home or property repairs, 29% (21) said they had family or friends staying with them that have nowhere else to stay, 15% (11) shared they have lived or are living on the streets or in a shelter. When asked what needs they were unable to get help with, housing was also listed¹. Our centers routinely get phone calls from people needing help rent assistance. Our agency has limited amounts of funding for rental assistance, however we have assisted an average of 215 households with rent assistance per year from 2019-2024⁹. Of twelve available choices of most needed resources in the 2023 United Way of Southeast Iowa Community Needs Assessment, affordable housing was the top choice²³.



Those of low income need safe and affordable housing.

Getting Food

Food was listed as a top category of need in the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey, 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions, and our 2024 Staff Input for the Community Needs Assessment.

Of respondents to the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 59% were receiving SNAP benefits, however 37% (83) said they had unmet food or nutrition needs. Of those 83 respondents, 65% (53) said they could use help having enough food at home, 51% (41) said they could use help getting food from pantries, meal sites, or food shelves, and 42% (34) said they could use help having enough nutritious food at home¹. Getting food was listed as the greatest challenge for client households in our 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey⁴. In fiscal year 2024, 53% of our clients were receiving Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits⁹. In southeast Iowa, 49% of public school children were eligible for free or reduced lunch in the 2022-2023 school year. This is higher than the state average of 42% yet lower than the national average of 54%⁶.

Despite the variety of resources available such as SNAP, school lunches, WIC, food pantries and meal sites, people continue to need assistance relating to food.

Brain/Mental Health

Brain/Mental Health was listed as a top category of need in the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey, 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions, 2023 United Way of Southeast Iowa Community Needs Assessment, 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, and our 2024 Staff Input for the Community Needs Assessment.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness states that one in five US adults experience mental illness each year, and one in 20 US adults experience a serious mental illness each year. Cost is cited as a prevailing factor for the 181,000 adults in Iowa who did not receive needed mental health care. One in 5 (20%) of the more than 2,500 people in Iowa who are unhoused have a serious mental illness. Of youth aged 0-17 in Iowa, 18% have experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences, which are linked to mental illness and substance misuse in adulthood¹⁹.

Of respondents to the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 35% (76) said someone in their household has mental health needs, and 42% (17) of those said they could use help addressing those mental health needs¹.

Brain/mental health is a vital part of a person's wholistic health and is a top need for individuals in southeast Iowa.

Employment

Employment was listed as a top category of need in the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey, ICAA 2025 Stakeholder Needs Assessment, 2025 Strategic Planning Sessions, and our 2024 Staff Input for the Community Needs Assessment.

Of respondents to our ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 34% (82) said they had employment needs, 68% (170) were working over 30 hours per week, 45% (112) were working and trying to find a better job, 39% (95) who were not working were trying to find a job, 35% (84) have had their income decrease in the past 12 months, while only 10% (24) have had their income go up¹. Historically, employment has been in the top five need categories listed in our Client Satisfaction Surveys for over the past nine years.

Individuals continue to face barriers and needs related to employment.



Financial Management

In the ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, 49% of respondents said they have financial management needs. Of these 108 responses, 78% said they do not have enough money to get through the month, 44% said they could use help in budgeting and managing money, and 26% reported they could use help in solving problems with their utility company. Common Good Iowa states one in six working households can't meet a basic needs budget¹⁶. When households are unable to meet their basic needs they may turn to friends, loans, payday or predatory loans, or credit cards to cover the basic necessities of life such as housing, utilities, food, soap, and toilet paper. This accumulation of debt plus interest can be especially difficult for those living in poverty, or on the edge, or in poverty, to climb out of this economic hole.

Financial management is a need for southeast Iowa households.

Causes of Poverty

Causes of poverty are generally things that put people in poverty or are reasons they still struggle with economic hardship. Causes of poverty may be barriers to success or where there are identified structural or community gaps. The assumption is that if the cause was fixed or removed people would no longer be in poverty.

Causes of poverty can be looked at from a community level or from an individual level. When looking at the community level, we can see how community needs that relate to housing, employment, mental health, transportation, crime, and childcare can cause people to experience economic hardship.



In a community that has unaffordable housing, a low number of employment opportunities, unmet mental health needs, a lack of reliable transportation systems, high crime rates, and few childcare slots, there will be many struggling, regardless of their individual characteristics or strengths.

Other common causes of poverty include: unaffordable housing, a lack of education/training, few opportunities, poor health/healthcare, disability, abuse, domestic violence, trauma, discrimination, availability or use of illegal substances/drugs, few informal supports, lack of formal supports, and low awareness of supports and community resources.

Conditions of Poverty

Conditions of poverty are the affects of having a low income; what is experienced as a life situation. Conditions of poverty are generally described as a way an individual or family is affected by poverty. Because people are experiencing economic hardship, they may experience conditions, affects, or life situations that result from living in economic poverty.

Common identified conditions of poverty include housing instability, homelessness, food insecurity/hunger, poor health, hopelessness, lack of resources to meet basic needs, exposure to unhealthy behaviors, and a lack of opportunity.

Programs and Services at Community Action of Southeast Iowa

Our agency board has approved the following programs and services addressing area needs and fitting with our agency mission. Programs may vary by center or location, have income guidelines, or limited funding available. For more information regarding any of our programs you can explore our website <https://caofseia.org/> or call our Central Office 319-753-0193.

* Housing

- Energy Assistance
 - LIHEAP
 - Crisis
 - Local Utilities
- Emergency Rent
- Homeless Assistance
- Furnace Repair and Replace
- Rent Reimbursement Form Assistance
- Senior Home Repair
- Weatherization

* Education/Support

- Children
 - Head Start
 - Early Head Start
- Adults
 - Family Development and Self Sufficiency Program (FaDSS)
 - Employment Counseling
 - Budget Counseling
- General Information and Referral

* Nutrition

- WIC, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children
- Food Pantry

* Other

- Hygiene Assistance
- Clothing Assistance
- Transportation Assistance
- Disaster Assistance

Resources

There are many resources available in our community. There are agencies that have programs and services to address many of the needs listed herein. A starting place for familiarizing yourself with these resources, or finding help in your area of need, can be done by visiting our website resource page. Here you will find Resource Guides listed for each of our counties, food resources, housing help, and links to assistance for adults, older adults, veterans, money resources, children/teen information, brain/mental health, substance use, and other topics. This information can be accessed anytime here: <https://caofseia.org/resources/> or by calling our Central Office Monday to Friday from 8:30am – 4:30pm to ask for verbal or paper resources: 319-753-0193.

Customer Satisfaction

Overall, our clients are very satisfied with Community Action of Southeast Iowa.

Survey Question	2024 Client Satisfaction	ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey	2023-2024 Early Head Start/Head Start End of Year Family Survey
I had a positive experience when receiving services	96% (461)	93% (158)	99% (145)
I got the information and services I needed	91% (426)	82% (124) (The issue I came in with was resolved)	99% (145) (Helped my family & met my family's needs)

Qualitative responses on our client satisfaction surveys helps to remind us that people are more than data and a service provided, each number represents a human life that has been impacted. Stories of hope, thankfulness, appreciation and positive impact are revealed as clients share what Community Action has meant to them. Below are a few client responses to the question: “How has Community Action made a difference in your life?” from the 2024 Client Satisfaction Survey, ICAA 2023-2024 Client Needs Survey, and the 2023-2024 Early Head Start/Head Start End of Year Family Survey:

- Community action has been a life saver for my family. They have helped me with utilities and food when I had no means to. They do wonderful things in this community and the people they provide services to.
- You provided support and compassion.
- They have helped me survive!
- Helped me when I was hungry. Thank you so much! It is very appreciated.
- By helping me with heating and air electric, I am better able to afford food and medical bills.
- They have provided assistance and a sense of relief during a time of hardship for my household.
- They eliminated huge amounts of stress quickly.
- Community Action has helped keep my children and I warm through winter.
- My two girls and I would be homeless if we hadn't had you.
- I would like to say that at times I feel like they have really saved my life as my challenges for everyday living are always taking a serious hit.
- Provided a program for my daughter (Head Start). Improved her life & also I can work.
- You helped me reach my goals and opened doors to more.
- Gave me help when I needed it, which is empowering.
- I'd likely be homeless without the assistance I have received from Community Action.
- You have a great program for our children.
- It has helped my family by providing affordable housing for my children and I so we can build our lives in safety.
- It has helped my children grow emotionally. They've learned a lot and love the program.
- Both of my boys have made a huge improvement with social skills.
- I was helped today. It made my day a little better.
- They have been so kind as to providing my family with food and other items of need like tampons and toilet paper. I am very grateful for that.
- WIC has filled in the nutritional gap we had.
- All the teachers were very pro-active and involved in make sure the kids progressed in learning.
- Years ago when we first moved here, we had gone three years with no furnace, killing off one oven and five small electric heaters we used to keep warm. Someone told me about the furnace program and having this furnace the past 10 or 12 years has greatly improved our lives!
- I couldn't have made it without their assistance.
- They been very helpful, I'm very thankful.

Summary

Continuance and updates are needed to support and strengthen our communities. Supports are needed to assist those who are struggling. Changes can be made by one individual, in one program or agency, in one community, in our region of southeast Iowa, at the state level, or all across our nation. Some supports exist in southeast Iowa to help people and change lives; however, there is still poverty in our communities and among our neighbors. There is room for improvement in structures, communities, and with individuals. Where we see conditions and causes of poverty, it is important we step up and do what we can to help people and change lives.