



2026-2029

Community Needs Assessment Executive Summary

Community Action of Orleans & Genesee's 2026–2029 Community Needs Assessment provides the data and community input needed to guide agency planning, resource allocation, and partnerships over the next three years. As required of Community Action Agencies, the assessment combines quantitative indicators with stakeholder and customer feedback to identify the conditions contributing to poverty and the opportunities most likely to improve economic security and self-sufficiency across Orleans and Genesee Counties. The assessment draws on American Community Survey 2019–2023 estimates, state and federal sources, community surveys, ongoing outreach, and 2025 client satisfaction data.

Several themes emerge clearly from the findings. The service area continues to experience population decline, particularly in Orleans County, while many residents who remain face growing economic strain. Although unemployment is relatively low, wages do not consistently cover housing, childcare, transportation, utilities, and healthcare, leaving many working households financially unstable. More than 27,000 individuals in the service area live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, highlighting the growing gap between eligibility for assistance and the actual cost of living. Housing pressure is one of the most urgent concerns: affordable rental units are scarce, rents remain high, housing stock is aging, and homelessness data suggests significant unmet need. Transportation limitations, especially in rural areas, continue to affect access to work, healthcare, food, and other essential services.

The assessment also points to persistent inequities. Poverty rates are substantially higher among female-headed households with children, and wage disparities continue to affect women's economic mobility. Food insecurity is increasing as costs rise, healthcare affordability remains a challenge, and educational outcomes in Orleans County continue to require attention, especially around graduation and dropout prevention. At the same time, the agency's direct service experience confirms both need and trust in service delivery. Client satisfaction results were very strong, with most respondents reporting respectful treatment, helpful staff, high satisfaction, and a willingness to recommend Community Action services to others. Based on these findings, the highest priorities for 2026–2029 are to increase access to safe and affordable housing, reduce utility burden, expand living-wage employment and career pathways, address the benefits cliff for low-wage workers, improve transportation access, strengthen food security, and improve access to healthcare and health-related supports. Additional priorities include supporting single-parent households, addressing homelessness, improving educational outcomes, reducing teen birth rates, and helping households manage critical costs such as vehicle and home repairs. The assessment also identifies a need to strengthen public awareness of Community Action's role and services so that residents and partners can better connect to available support. For Community Action of Orleans & Genesee, these findings reinforce the need for a coordinated, data-driven, and partnership-based response. Over the next three years, the agency will use this assessment to focus programs, pursue strategic collaborations, and direct resources toward the most urgent barriers to self-sufficiency. The agency is well positioned to build on its strong customer

relationships, broad community presence, and expanding use of data to improve outcomes for low-income residents across both counties.

Recommendations

- Develop and support affordable housing strategies (e.g., partnerships with municipalities and developers; rehabilitation programs for aging stock; landlord engagement; tenant supports) with a focus on Orleans County rent pressures and overall supply constraints.
- Expand utility affordability and energy-reduction supports (e.g., weatherization, arrears support coordination, budgeting education, and referrals to energy assistance programs) and track reductions in household energy burden.
- Strengthen workforce initiatives that lead to living-wage jobs (e.g., sector-based training, employer partnerships, credentials, supportive services) and incorporate childcare and transportation supports so work is feasible.
- Address the benefits cliff by strengthening navigation/advocacy for households near eligibility limits (including ALICE) and by using flexible funding or short-term supports to bridge gaps in basic needs.
- Prioritize services and outreach for female-headed households with children, including career advancement supports, childcare connections, and financial coaching; incorporate pay equity considerations in employer engagement.
- Improve healthcare access and affordability by expanding partnerships with providers and payers; increase health insurance navigation; and pursue initiatives that address health-related social needs (food, housing, transportation) to improve outcomes.
- Coordinate a regional food security response (food pantry/soup kitchen collaboration, shared distribution schedules, mobile or delivery options for transportation-limited households, and nutrition education) to respond to rising demand and higher costs.
- Support dropout prevention and graduation improvement in Orleans County through school partnerships (e.g., credit recovery expansion, tutoring, mentoring, and wraparound support for students facing barriers).
- Expand transportation solutions beyond route-based services by partnering with existing providers, exploring demand-response options, and improving access for remote areas to employment and essential services.
- Increase homelessness response capacity through coordinated entry participation, partnerships with shelters and housing providers, and improved local data collection to better quantify and address need.
- Expand financial literacy and stability supports (budgeting, credit-building, emergency savings strategies) and align them with key cost drivers in the area (rent, utilities, transportation).
- Prepare for potential federal/state eligibility changes by proactively communicating with clients, strengthening benefits counseling capacity, and coordinating with partner agencies to reduce service disruptions.
- Strengthen teen pregnancy prevention efforts in Orleans County through evidence-based education, referral pathways, and partnerships with schools and health providers.
- Increase Community Action brand recognition through consistent messaging, community outreach, success stories, and clear descriptions of services; track engagement and referral sources to measure impact. All program communication, media, apparel must include Community Action of Orleans and Genesee.