
WARREN-FOREST COUNTIES ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL, INC

2021 Community Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

Purpose | The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (EOC) is a private, non-profit Community Action Agency. The EOC, as part of a 43-agency network of Community Action Agencies covering the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, utilizes available funding to provide programs and services focused on reducing the number of individuals and families living in poverty within our community. Since its inception, the EOC has worked tirelessly to empower individuals and families to obtain an improved economic position through services offered while instilling an attitude of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. At present, the EOC has approximately 60 full-time employees, with an annual operating budget of nearly \$5 million. The Board of Directors responds to the needs of the local community through its approved program agenda currently offering over 20 programs and services to low-income families and individuals. Our mission is to work within the communities of Warren and Forest County to eliminate the barriers that keep people from achieving their potential.

The Community Needs Assessment for 2021 has been completed in accordance with Agency standards and allows the Agency and Board to strategically plan for future endeavors and needed programming within the community. Assessing the needs of the two-county service area helps ensure that the programs and services we offer are truly addressing the unique needs of low-income individuals and families in our community. Further, this assessment guides future planning initiatives by identifying current needs as identified through quantitative and qualitative analysis, gaps in service for the community, and emerging trends which may impact the community.

Methodology | Data and findings presented within the 2021 Community Needs Assessment was amassed in three ways. Demographics and statistical information was gathered from sources which include, but are not limited to, the U.S. Census Bureau, Northwest Regional Commission Skills Gap Analysis, American Community Survey (ACS), the Pennsylvania Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), the Pennsylvania State Data Center, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal, state, and local government sources. The Agency has also held multiple focus group discussions at Agency professional days and planning sessions. This has allowed front line staff to regularly discuss barriers clients are facing, problems in addressing those barriers, and continually define our target population within the community. A final measure used in obtaining data included the distribution and collection of survey responses to social service providers, front line staff, community stakeholders, Board members, and clients using Survey Monkey.

Needs Assessment Findings | The methodology employed worked to identify both separate and interrelated issues facing the community. In general, these needs represent the greatest barriers for low-income individuals and families seeking to become self-sufficient in Warren and Forest Counties. The areas of greatest concern as identified through surveys, focus groups, and observations from front line staff include the following:

1. Employment Options and Job Security
2. Adequate and Affordable Housing
3. Child Care (Affordability and Options)

4. Cost of Living
5. Activities for Young Children / Families (Ages 0 to 10)
6. Mental Health Services
7. Activities for Youth (Ages 11 to 18)
8. Substance Abuse and Addiction
9. Infrastructure
10. Community Leadership

These identified issues relate largely to the quality of life, particularly for vulnerable and low income individual and families. They are also not single issues but rather a listing of interrelated concerns stemming from realities facing the community. The service area is experiencing a slow and long-term population decline, a growing elderly population, decreasing numbers of young adults and families, aged housing stock, economic dislocation, a growing unskilled / uneducated work force, lower than average wages, a strained medical system, and a continuously rising poverty rate. The top ten listing of concerns as identified by the community can be distilled into areas of need which should be addressed in order to secure the long term health of the community as a whole. These are:

1. Employment and Workforce Development
 - a. The community lacks employment opportunities for entry level employees which pay a living wage. The current estimated living wage for a single individual is \$10.58 per hour for 40 hours weekly. There are opportunities available which pay a living wage for a single person however once the household is 2 or more persons it becomes more challenging to find true, living wage opportunities that pay enough and offer full time hours. Added barriers, like child care and transportation, can further compromise the ability of a multi-person household to earn a true living wage.
 - b. People lack the needed soft skills to maintain employment. This has been reported by staffing agencies and employers as they continue to struggle to hire employees which fulfill the job requirements and maintain the position past a probationary period.
 - c. People lack the needed education and/or job skills to secure better employment. This is largely due to a lack of access to programs and services which would address this combined with the pervasive mentality of the area that, particularly among low income and vulnerable households, apathetic and lacking in motivation to improve their own situation. This is true even when help and assistance is available.

2. Housing

- a. The community lacks affordable housing; particularly for low income and vulnerable populations requiring more than one bedroom. Utilities and location also factor in as access to transportation can limit where a household can reside in order to still participate in services and remain stably employed. Many low income / vulnerable households don't have access to transportation and carry back utility arrearage
- b. The community lacks emergency shelter options for homeless households. Budget Lodge and Holiday Inn (Now the Days Inn) participate in voucher programs but most agencies administering vouchers are limited to a single night.
- c. The community lacks adequate homeless services to serve the need. As a rural area, homeless counts are significantly less than urban counterparts. Often available funding goes to larger areas and creating a situation where in order to provide services; Warren and Forest County providers need to be part of regionalized homeless programs. This limits ability to help meet the true demand for homeless prevention and re-housing.
- d. People do not have the resources to complete needed repairs for the safety and upkeep of the home. Homeownership is decreasing and many who have paid off their homes are living on fixed incomes. The costs associated with maintaining a safe home are often unsustainable for homeowners in the area.
- e. The community lacks housing options for families needing 3 or more bedrooms. Those who are in a position to purchase a home can do so and often will spend less per month on housing than a renter. Most low income families however, are not in a position to purchase homes and rentals they can afford are not adequate to meet the needs of the household. Safety, location, and affordability are all factors which need to be considered often further limiting families with additional barriers such as transportation.
- f. The cost of rent / mortgage is too high for low income families and there are not enough subsidized options to meet the demand. For many, cost of purchasing would be less than monthly rental charges however poor credit, inability to have a down payment, and no financial management skills to help save / plan for future costs continues to put this goal out of reach.

3. Family Supports and Programming.

- a. The community lacks engaging, healthy activities for children ages 0 to 10. This was further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and shut down. In fact, in focus group discussions it was observed that overall health – both mental and physical – declined for many due to financial and travel restrictions, even fewer options, and increased stress on the family.

- b. The community lacks programming and activities for children ages 11 to 18. This age group was also even further impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as many activities were cancelled or postponed. The lack of social interaction and activity in an already limited area negatively impacted physical, mental, and emotional health.
- c. Families, and by extension children in the household, do not have needed life skills to be self-sufficient.
- d. Families lack a community support system to help with things like emergency child care, transportation, etc.
- e. Youth who are not able to “pay-to-play” are excluded from sports and other activities.
- f. The community lacks adequate affordable child care options. Limited options are available in the area that can be used with the child care subsidy program. This is even more true for those with infants as available slots are limited if you need to use the subsidy.
- g. The community lacks child care options for parents working second and third shift. For low income households that lack child care for these shifts this reality limits the ability of the household to improve their situation as it is common for these employers to begin new employees on second or third shift.

4. Mental Health Services

- a. The community lacks adequate services to meet the demand. Wait times are, at minimum, 6 weeks to have an intake. After the initial intake there are typically 2-4 more weeks before an appointment. In addition, many in need cannot access or pay for services.
- b. The community does not have enough providers to adequately serve the area. The area has a difficult time attracting professionals. In recent years more private practices have opened in the area however despite multiple providers the demand for services has resulted in continued long wait lists and times before services can be accessed.
- c. People do not seek services due to negative stigma attached to mental health.
- d. People in crisis do not get services when needed due to long wait times.
- e. People do not get access to services proactively. Far too often people receive services only after a crisis or situation which forces them into services such as probation or admittance to a facility for a mental health crisis.
- f. The community lacks proper education to alleviate negative stigma.

- g. People do not access services due to long wait times. This issue has only gotten worse due to the Covid-19 pandemic as social distancing, quarantine, and other massive changes to everyday life impacted mental health in all age groups.
- h. People do not access services due to lack of awareness of available programs.

5. Substance Abuse and Addiction

- a. The community lacks in patient treatments. The only services available to those with addiction are outpatient services. These are not always enough to truly help someone struggling. Those who choose an in-patient program are limited on what services are available to them so that they can continue their recovery due to the limited outpatient options and long wait times for counseling.
- b. The community does not have enough providers and treatment options to meet demand. The Covid-19 pandemic had the observed impact of increasing the number of people struggling with substance abuse. This issue will only be further highlighted as the community tries to move towards a “new normal.”
- c. People are on the wait list for too long and cannot access services. (up to 1-2 years). This is an increasing issue. When people are ready to accept help – help needs to be there.
- d. People do not seek out services due to negative stigma.
- e. People do not access services due to lack of awareness of available programs.

Secondary, but interconnected issues that impact addressing these barriers, include promoting education and pursuit of post-secondary options, financial literacy, life skill development, and transportation. These needs can be summarized as follows:

1. People do not value and lack support to pursue post-secondary education. These barriers are in addition to the cost of post-secondary education and the means to leave the area to pursue it.
2. People lack basic budgeting, saving, and money management skills. As an experienced HUD Housing Counseling Agency the EOC has observed that too often people who lack these skills are also apathetic in regard to obtaining them. Counseling services are free however; it is difficult for people to value these services and have enough buy in that they truly participate and take advantage of counseling by highly trained counselors.
3. People lack an understanding of credit and often have poor or no credit. This impacts the ability to make major purchases which could assist in obtaining true, long term stability such as reliable transportation or purchasing their own home versus continuing to rent.
4. People do not have access to reliable and safe transportation. TAWC has added routes but not many. Access to own, independent transportation and maintaining that transportation remains an issue.

5. People lack basic life skills to be self-sufficient (knowledge of hygiene, home upkeep, budgeting, nutrition, planning ahead, etc.).

Employment & Workforce Development | Employment has regularly been a concern for Warren and Forest Counties however, the situation is again changing due to other demographic trends and realities. The community has had no new, major employers moving into the area. Targeted Pet Treats, LLC is the one anomaly having moved into the within the last 5 years and creating jobs in the manufacturing sector. Conversely, Blair, a major employer in the area for decades had a mass layoff at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. A year later, in March 2021, the company closed the distribution center in Irving, PA which resulted in another 350+ jobs lost. The company opted not to renew their lease for the distribution complex due to costs associated and location. There has not been any movement or interest by another company to lease this space leaving a large vacancy and loss of stable employment. Projected growth within top industries remaining in the area is minimal. Anticipated job openings are primarily due to an aging work force which, in 2015, was predicted to retire within the next ten years. This prediction is starting to become a reality as these workers begin leaving multiple professional positions open among area employers. Not only is there a lack of qualified candidates able to fill these positions but, employers in general are struggling to fill positions from entry level up now that they have re-opened or are trying to move back to normal business hours following the COVID pandemic related shut down in 2020 and 2021. What was once a growing trend observed among employers has become a frustrating reality as qualified applicants fail to respond to job posts or, those brought in for interviews are not viable candidates. Recruiting to the area is also proving difficult and discussions facilitated by the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry have focused on both workforce development and partnerships among employers to recruit qualified candidates to the area. While the area has recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts it lacks in retail options, the location is remote and isolated, wages are depressed, and it is difficult to compete with other areas in terms of events, entertainment, and culture.

Low educational attainment, generational poverty, disinterest, and lack of importance placed on post-secondary education has led to a situation where the existing work force is largely, unskilled and highest level of educational attainment is typically a high school diploma or GED. While on-the-job training is possible, social service agencies, organizations, and providers are observing a general lack of motivation and apathy among their often shared clients. Clients often claim they want “a career” and not just “a job” yet are unwilling to acquire the needed skills or training. This lack of motivation is further compounded by the lack of soft skills needed to obtain and maintain good employment within the area. These include, but are not limited to, punctuality, self-motivation, and reliability. Other contributing barriers to employment, particularly for the population served, include:

1. Reliable transportation to find, obtain, and maintain employment.
2. Restricting their job search to areas close to their home due, typically, to transportation barriers. This is very limiting for those living outside of downtown Warren which has a wider range of potential employers than outlying areas such as Clarendon, Sheffield, or Youngsville.
3. Lack of affordable child care.

4. Unable to find child care during second and third shift employment opportunities which typically are closer to living wage positions.

Other observations include claims that job seekers are unable to find jobs in the area while conversely, employers state they have openings and are unable to fill them with qualified employees pointing toward a need for greater efforts on promoting post-secondary education, vocational training, and supporting workforce development efforts. This was already an issue prior to the COVID pandemic and as restrictions have lifted in 2021 employers are finding that this problem has only continued to worsen. Few applicants are applying for available openings and those who are applying are not always qualified. The area also still has a lack of employment opportunities which pay a living wage. Even though the service area has a lower cost of living, assessment findings indicate that there are many people who may be working yet are still not able to cover their basic needs. In these households, the cost of living has been identified as too high and the households continually struggle to pay rent/mortgage, utilities, childcare, food, and so on. In the service area, wages are lower when compared to other locations. People are often underemployed, unable to obtain a full time position, employed in temporary/seasonal positions, or not being paid a living wage with benefits. This phenomenon partially explains why the unemployment rate for the area is relatively low yet the poverty rate continues to increase and survey respondents continue to identify cost of living as an issue.

Housing | Housing has long been an identified need which has continued to progress in both size and scope over the last several decades. The first is a lack of subsidized and supportive housing options in the area which is plagued by generational poverty, population decline, and little to no economic growth. People struggle to find and keep affordable housing. Those coping with additional barriers such as a mental health diagnosis, disability, addiction, or being a single parent are further burdened. These more vulnerable cohorts within the population continue to grow placing a greater demand for expanded services to the area yet funding remains stagnant or has been eliminated. The local Housing Authority stated the following in 2015:

“There has been a noticeable increase within the last three years in housing for young/disabled persons. A 19% increase has been observed at The Towers (subsidized housing). The primary disability identified is mental health with physical disabilities representing less than 5% of those being housed.”

A long waiting list for subsidized housing regularly forces low-income individuals and families, regardless of situation, to obtain non-subsidized housing. In Warren and Forest County, finding suitable housing that meets the needs of the family and remains affordable is a problem which impacts many households regardless of socioeconomic status. Low-income and vulnerable households are further challenged with the cost of utilities and security deposits and being confined to a specific search area due to lack of transportation. Apartments rarely include utilities in the rental cost and thus, an additional household expense is added to an already struggling household who may already be carrying past utility debts. Last, the age of the housing stock in the service area is older than what is typically found elsewhere. This presents challenges for both owners and renters, particularly low-income households, as the cost to maintain and heat older homes can be significantly higher. Unmaintained homes have resulted in an increase of unsafe rental options.

The major housing concerns as identified through survey responses further describe the housing crisis within the community for individuals and families:

1. Cost of rent / mortgage is too high when compared to household incomes.
2. Unable to save for security deposits and other moving costs.
3. Housing is in need of repairs which are unaffordable.
4. Housing is not big enough for the family. This is particularly true when finding a suitable rental that meets all needs for the family. There are very few 3 bedroom options. Households in need of more than two bedrooms often find it nearly impossible to find a rental.

In 2018, housing programs in the area underwent some major changes as the Agency lost funding for the area's only emergency shelter. This resulted in a decrease from the original 9 units to 3 units dedicated as shelter for homeless individuals and families. Around that same time; 8 units that had been designated as transitional housing for domestic violence survivors were converted to permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals with a mental health or physical disability. The 6 former emergency shelter units are now being utilized to serve the need for re-entry transitional housing within the community. The loss of the emergency shelter has left a marked need within the community as families and individuals who are homeless or facing homelessness are left with few options for shelter as they seek permanent options. Due to the lack of funding; it has not been possible to find another solution or additional space beyond vouchers for a few of the area hotels. In the first five months of 2018 when the shelter transitioned from 9 units to 3 units there were 94 applications from homeless individuals and/or families. Only 12 households were able to be assisted. In a typical year, the Agency will serve 25 to 30 households in the 3 dedicated shelter units. This represents less than 30% of the total applicants for shelter. There are programs available to area homeless individuals and families such as Rapid Rehousing funded through the Emergency Solutions Grant however; a lack of affordable, safe rental units in the area still poses a barrier as the household can be approved but will still need to actually find suitable housing. The other caveat with this program is that to be eligible for security deposit and rental assistance the home needs to pass a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection. This can create an additional barrier. Households needing three bedrooms also typically need longer time to find and safe, secure housing.

Family Supports & Programming | Multiple identified needs facing the community can be grouped under a broader title of family supports and programming. Child care, or the lack of affordable options and ones that work for second and third shift workers, is a barrier for adult parents and caregivers in terms of employment and pursuing education/training beyond high school, and can prohibit those from committing to GED programs offered via Forest-Warren Hi-Ed Council. The lack of a GED or high school diploma in a small, rural area with limited employment options is even more limiting as there are only a handful of employers willing to hire people without a GED / high school diploma. Typically, these employers do not pay a living wage causing long term financial strain and erecting a nearly insurmountable barrier. Suppressed wages, lack of economic recovery, and rising poverty contribute to making access to child care a major barrier which can negatively impact the household's ability to become self-sufficient. There are options available, however, finding child care when working non-traditional hours is often a

challenge if friends and family are not an option. As aforementioned, the cost of child care can sometimes be prohibitive if a parent or caregiver cannot earn enough to outweigh the added expense. Those households with infants face long waiting lists and limited openings making it difficult for a parent to go back to work after the birth of a child. In households that are already financially stressed the loss of income can deepen the crisis.

In addition to the lack of child care options, a large number of survey respondents as well as focus group discussion, point toward the lack of activities and options for young children and their families. The situation does not improve much with older children or youth ages 11 to 18. There are outdoor parks and playgrounds as well as a community pool however recreational, sport, and club opportunities are pay-to-play. Lower income and economically disadvantaged children are more and more frequently unable to participate and there are no other options available to them. In later years this can open the door to trouble. At the middle and high school level, area sports teams have transitioned into pay-to-play teams as well. Even for families where both parents / caregivers work, the cost to participate added to the cost of equipment can prove too costly leaving children with few options in terms of constructive ways to spend time. At the family level, there is a lack of places offering an experience or activity for the family to participate in. Unless the family can travel, access to museums, zoos, indoor entertainment such as laser tag or even arcades, is non-existent. The area even lacks retail options. These are largely limited to discount retailers like Walmart and Ollie's Bargain Outlet or smaller retail locations like Dollar General.

Families also lack basic life skills making them more vulnerable to crisis and health issues. In the past five years there is a noticeable increase in families who lack the ability to meal plan, budget, prepare healthy food options, maintain the home, schedule and attend necessary appointments, write a resume, or perform a simple job search. This lack of basic life skills in parents / caregivers, over time, extends to the youth within the family. As these children transition out of high school we are finding more and more that they are unprepared for how to live and work successfully on their own. The Agency is seeing more transitional age youth (ages 18 to 24) parents and individuals applying for programs and in need of employment, budgeting, Head Start, and housing services. Once staff begin working with this age cohort it quickly becomes clear that there is a lack of life skills which extends to cleaning and maintenance of the home, hygiene, meal planning, cooking and preparing food, budgeting, parenting, and how to both find and keep employment.

Mental Health Services | In the Community Health Needs Assessment completed by Warren General Hospital in 2016, psychosis was listed as the top reason for admission to the hospital. In 2019 this was still the case. Knowing that mental health crisis only deepened for many due to the pandemic; it is unlikely that this changed. In fact, the need for mental health services in the face of crisis only increased. This has become a reality in our community and sadly, the lack of adequate mental health services and access to these services to serve the demand in the area is a large part of this issue. Several interconnected factors also contribute to mental health being identified in our survey and through focus group discussions as an issue, and the Agency in some capacity, may need to consider ways it could actively assist in addressing. Warren General Hospital stated that the hospital is the primary service provider for behavioral health. This can also be seen in combined visit data to Warren Medical Group offices where anxiety and depression have continuously been in the top 10 listing of what people are going to the doctor about. At the Warren County Human Services summit held in 2018 both service providers and families indicated that long wait times, particularly for those families in crisis, were a major issue which long term damages trust in the system.

Standard wait time for an initial appointment for mental health services is anywhere from 30 to 60 days. Post-pandemic this has become closer to 60 days or more.

Other concerns impacting the treatment of mental health and provision of services included:

1. Providers are dealing with decreasing funding with increased demand for services. Additionally, there is greater demand on time for providers due to the amount of paperwork required. This takes away from actual treatment and care of the individual. Secondary, it also decreases the number who can be served.
2. Many clients struggle with a lack of transportation, child care, and the ability to request time off from work in order to attend an appointment. If a family is juggling needs and in crisis already the threat of losing their job, income, etc. may be too great to risk and they fail to address the underlying mental health issues.
3. Youth are also in need of services as a growing number of children are battling lack of parenting, generational poverty, drug abuse and/or mental health issues with parents. Ideally, it would be better to have a system which could reach these at-risk youth before it is due to court order, school behaviors, etc.
4. Long wait times have created a negative stigma for human service and mental health providers.
5. Lack of services outside normal business hours when crisis can occur 24/7.
6. No transitional services for youth out on probation who are unable to return home but lack life skills to manage alone.
7. Students have to be placed outside of the county due to a lack of a residential system / transitional housing here that serves those under 18.
8. There is a huge, negative stigma surrounding mental health issues to the extent that clients will deny they need help which often worsens a crisis. In some instances, clients will refuse to enter certain provider buildings due to the stigma and negative connotation.
9. Families need support and assistance with navigating the system.

Substance Abuse and Addiction | During the Human Services Summit, the issue of drug / alcohol abuse was raised. Similar to mental health services, there is a lack of providers and treatment options in the area, a negative stigma / connotation, long waiting lists, lack of insurance, and lack of support systems which all contribute to this issue. According to the Forest-Warren Human Services 2018 Treatment Plan for the two-county service area “an estimated 3,143 persons age 12 and older may need treatment services in the two-county area.” The most common need for treatment was alcohol abuse followed by heroin or prescription opioids. The most significant emerging problem identified by Forest-Warren Human Services is the resurgence in the use of Methamphetamine. Note that this is only a reporting on those who have been identified within the system typically because of issues being identified by other family members, the criminal justice system, or other providers within the human services network. In the survey response for this assessment and focus group discussions; substance abuse and addiction was identified as a growing concern within the service area. This issue has been fueled by the pandemic where poor mental health, additional

funds that the household did not anticipate, and having life essentially grind to a halt pushed more into an unhealthy pattern of coping through substance abuse.

Specifically identified by the community were the following observations:

1. There are no local youth rehab services and no in-patient services for those needing treatment. Outpatient services are limited.
2. Drug and alcohol treatment providers are especially shorthanded to meet the growing problem within the area. Funding is also an issue.
3. Need to bridge the gap between legal and medical drug courts.
4. There is only one addiction specialist locally who does accept insurance which can be an additional barrier preventing a client from seeking treatment. The next closest options are Erie and Clarion and these providers only accept cash. Transportation and cost can both be issues.
5. There are 150 people on the Drug and Alcohol waiting list at the time of the Human Service Summit and they typically stay on this list for 1 to 2 years before a space for treatment opens. At this point it can be too late. When a person struggling with addiction is ready to accept help it needs to happen immediately.
6. Negative stigma and lack of support for families impacted by a person's drug / alcohol abuse.

In the 2017 to 2018 school year, teachers and classroom aides in the Head Start program had a higher than normal experience with children impacted by a parent or caregiver's drug use. This prompted the program to have opioid abuse training for staff so that they could identify issues and properly address them. This was also noted during the human services summit where it was observed that a growing number of children in the service area are impacted by drug and alcohol abuse.

Transportation is an underlying problem within the service area which often becomes a barrier to self-sufficiency for low-income households. In the five needs specified above, transportation heavily factors into a household's ability to address barriers like housing, employment, and seeking out needed services. There is only one means of public transportation within Warren County and no public transportation options in Forest County. Both counties are rural with roadways that often follow the natural terrain of the area and geographic features of the area. Further, there are no major highways or interstates which lead directly to either county. Compounding all of this is the cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle. Households typically rely on having transportation in order to get to medical appointments, run errands, and most important, to get to and from work. Low-income and households that are struggling often have difficulty in securing reliable transportation. This struggle is two-fold. A household lacks the credit history and down payment to purchase a vehicle at a price that is affordable. Second, a household which is already struggling is unable to maintain a vehicle and keep it in good working order long term. Public transportation in Warren County is restricted to a bus system. Multiple routes are offered but these are limited in where they go and on what time schedule. All buses cease running after 6pm so those needing transportation after this time are unable to use the bus system. The lack of reliable transportation and the ability to afford it affects multiple areas of

a person's life. Service providers cite transportation as an issue for clients trying to maintain / obtain employment, follow up with necessary medical appointments or services, attend job skill training / GED classes /certification classes, and participate in needed programs or services which may include drug and alcohol counseling, mental health, behavioral, probation, or early intervention services for children.

Summary of Findings | Housing, employment, and transportation have long been the repeated problems plaguing the area. While programs and services exist to address these issues they are generally multi-faceted problems where no one solution can provide the needed outcome. This assessment also encompasses the need for family supports, mental health, and substance abuse and addiction services. The following is a listing of suggested actions that the Agency can take to either directly or indirectly address the identified needs.

- The Agency administers multiple housing programs in an effort to fill needed gaps within affordable housing as well as services for those in a housing crisis. In particular, the Agency has focused on providing affordable, permanent housing for individuals with a diagnosed mental health condition and currently has 14 buildings with 43 rental units. These typically, once filled, remain occupied leaving few vacancies throughout the calendar year. In situations where tenants do leave; vacancies are quickly filled by applicants on a waiting list maintained by a Housing Advisory Board. The Agency also administers the PATH program targeted at providing services to individuals with a serious mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. These programs should be continued and expanded if funding allows in order to meet this need for vulnerable populations within the service area. Annually, the Agency typically works to expand affordable, safe, and permanent housing options by, at minimum, one unit.
- Homeless services for individuals and families in the service area are limited. The Agency lost funding for operating the community's only 9-unit emergency shelter in March 2018 and reduced operation to 3 available shelter units. The largest service for households in crisis is the Rapid ReHousing and Homeless Prevention programs administered by the Agency who is a sub-grantee for the regional grant applicant, Lawrence County Community Action Partnership. This program is limited to households that meet the definition of homelessness as described by the Emergency Shelter Grant and there is a fixed number of households that can be assisted once approval is granted by Lawrence County per each program year. In past years the allotted number of available slots for assistance through these programs has ranged between 20 to 30 total households. In response to additional funding during the pandemic this number was able to be doubled. Expanding this program indefinitely would be beneficial to households in the area as it would help to quickly facilitate the re-housing of households in the 3 available shelter units which opens these units to other in-need families and/or individuals. Pre-pandemic the Agency was able to house homeless families in 2-4 weeks. The lack of available rentals drastically impaired this.
- The Agency, responding to a need frequently brought up by community stakeholders and the Warren County Probation and Parole launched a re-entry transitional housing program utilizing six of the former shelter units at the Faith Inn in downtown Warren. This had long been identified as a need within the community and the Agency should seek to find additional funding sources and partnerships to sustain the

program. In particular, those hard to place individuals who are listed on Megan's Law as sex offenders are still identified as a group needing a transitional housing option.

- Housing affordability is another aspect of the housing problem. Utility assistance, rental assistance, and weatherization programs are all offered through the EOC which can help a household sustain their living situation. Additionally, the Agency should seek partnerships or opportunities that would assist homeowners with needed repairs to homes and boost outreach efforts to build participation numbers in the Agency's Financial Coaching / Budget Counseling program to assist households with building credit, establishing savings accounts, setting up household budgets, and setting financial goals.
- There are no new employers in the area however, jobs do exist. A major problem being identified by employers and service providers is the lack of motivation and soft skills. This is particularly true of the younger age cohorts which will need to be prepared to replace older workers as they retire in the next 10 years. The EOC should continue to explore partnerships and programs which would build on soft skills for job seekers and look for ways to partner within the community on workforce development initiatives. Additionally, seeking out opportunities to be a partner in programming targeting youth who are not yet able to work would be ideal.
- Surveys indicated that major barriers to obtaining a GED include lack of transportation, the time/days that the GED class is offered, and childcare issues. The Agency can work to bridge this barrier by providing study materials and linkages to other partners as well as identifying households where this truly is a barrier that they would want to overcome.
- Transportation is difficult in that it ultimately becomes an affordability problem and is an underlying issue impacting larger barriers of employment, access to services, and housing. Low-income households cannot afford to maintain reliable transportation however; not having reliable transportation puts their jobs at risk or limits where they are able to work. Both scenarios negatively impact the household income. The pandemic has created a potential new issue as many household purchased vehicles utilizing additional fund available to the households. As these funds disappear the costs of ownership will remain and may become unsustainable for the owner.
- Families lack support as well as programming / activity options for children ages 0 to 18. Looking at children 0 to 10 there are extremely limited programming options and activities for children to participate in. On weekends or when not working, families lack places to take children where there are engaging, healthy activities for the entire family. Low-income families lacking disposable income and facing transportation barriers are further burdened making activity outside the home even more limited. Supports such as affordable child care are also lacking in the area which can further impact a parent or caregivers ability to work, further education or training, and attend appointments for other services such as mental health, etc.
- Youth, ages 11 to 18, also lack activities that are engaging, healthy, and beneficial. The area is facing generational poverty and families with parents / caregivers who are unable to instill needed life skills into children. As children age and leave the home they are ill equipped to be self-sufficient and there is a growing

demand for services and programming from the 18 to 24 age cohort remaining in the area. Sports activities through school are all pay-to-play or are through the YMCA which also requires a fee. This makes these activities unattainable for youth and there are no other options for them to occupy their time when not in school. Survey responses also indicate a lack of support, lack of income, and little value for higher education among families in the target population. This indicates that children growing up in low-income households are less likely to graduate from high school and pursue college. If they do pursue college, they lack a support system at home to help them be successful and complete a degree program. This is creating a lower educated and unskilled work force in the area unable to fill the open jobs at area employers above entry level.

- There are parallels between the needs / gaps associated with accessing mental health and substance abuse / addiction services. While the Agency does not offer professional services of this type these are issues impacting our clients and their ability to become self-sufficient. The Agency should seek out ways to partner and play a role in improving these services for all mutually shared clients. One potential idea could be in being an educational resource and helping remove the stigma of seeking treatment for mental health and / or substance abuse addiction services. Another strategy the Agency could consider employing would be to identify and more intensively case manage households in crisis that demonstrate mental health and/or substance abuse to ensure that they understand, accept, and participate in recommended services.
- Often the focus is on Warren County. The assessment clearly shows that Forest County shares similar trends, characteristics, and needs however there is a much smaller number of clients accessing services and programs offered by the Agency who live in Forest County. The Agency should review this issue and seek out ways to bring our programs and services to Forest County. The Agency should consider ways in which it can more visibly establish a presence in Forest County. This is particularly true as we are able to provide services in non-traditional face-to-face ways. Better advertising of available services is another avenue to consider.

Identified Social / Demographic Trends | Analysis of most recent data combined with survey findings and focus group sessions have identified the following trends further describing rural Warren and Forest Counties:

- Steady, slow decline in overall population with shrinking numbers of children and adults in the 20 to 34 age range. As these age cohorts decline; the 65 + age cohort is growing and will ultimately place a greater demand on the area due to need of services.
- A growing number of households, particularly those with children, living in poverty or struggling and can be classified as the “working poor.”
- The impact of generational poverty on individuals has resulted in a growing number of clients seeking services who demonstrate a lack of motivation and apathy toward their situation. Clients with this attitude can often become confrontational and upset while demanding assistance. The impact is also being observed in youth growing up in households with generational poverty who become adults that are unable to break the cycle.

- Strains on the medical system due to a shortage of providers including primary care physicians, dentists, and specialists. This is especially true in Forest County where residents regularly need to seek treatment outside the area.
- Long wait times to access needed mental health services. This is true even for those households who need services and are in crisis.
- Lack of adequate substance abuse / addiction services to meet the demand within the area. There is also no proactive programming which helps intervene before it is intervention due to engagement with the criminal justice, court, school, or social service providers.
- Lack of transportation to available service for clients in need of those services. Access to transportation also impacts employment, housing, education, and job skill training.
- Pronounced substance abuse problems within the area and resurgence of methamphetamines. Top issues are alcohol and heroin / opioid use.
- A relatively high number of children with disabilities including developmental, challenging behaviors, and mental health within the service area. While the population of children and enrollment to the school district is declining the number of children needed intervention services, special needs programming, and/or IEPs is growing and higher than typical rates in other areas.
- People “falling through the cracks” because of a lack of awareness regarding available organizations and programs, or because of unnecessarily narrow restrictions (i.e. household income or definition of a disability) which disqualifies them for services. This could also include lack of insurance coverage for needed mental health or substance abuse services.
- People “falling through the cracks” due to a lack of education and the negative stigma / connotation associated with mental health, substance abuse, and social services. For some in the area, the stigma has become so intense that they will not even enter a building to apply for services.
- An abundance of social service providers and volunteer organizations that are ready to help low-income families, but often are restricted by funding considerations, data entry / paperwork demands, and a lack of coordinated, long-term planning.
- Lack of services for homeless individuals or families.
- Lack of employment opportunities for low-skilled, entry level workers which offer living wage, full time hours, and benefits.
- Growing number of families who view the cost-of-living as too high for the area due to lack of living wage employment, stagnant wages, underemployment, increasing rent/mortgage, lack of childcare which restricts ability of parents/caregivers needing to work, and lack of affordable housing options.

Within this environment, the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council has continued to maintain its services. Guided by our diverse Board of Directors, the agency will continue to try new, innovative strategies and seek out recommendations which continue to focus on creative planning and streamlining the service delivery.

A general description of the service area and a detailed accounting of current demographics and statistical information is explored in Section I and Section II. Gaps in services as well as a complete analysis of current program

offerings by the agency are provided in detail in Sections III and IV of the Needs Assessment. Section III focuses more intensely on findings from surveys and focus groups as well as general discussion and interviews with service providers. Information provided through other sources, like the Community Health Needs Assessment, Human Services Summit, and Drug / Alcohol Treatment Plans for the service area are also incorporated into this section. Section IV looks specifically at the programs and services offered by the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council. Outcomes and performance indicators as well as suggestions for improved service delivery are also discussed in this section.

Section I | Community Overview

Predominately rural, Warren and Forest Counties are located in northwest Pennsylvania. In both counties, a significant portion of all available land is either State Park or National Forest. This largely contributes to the isolated, rural nature of the area. In Warren County, the Allegheny National Forest covers approximately 119,000 acres or 26% of the total acreage. Forest County, in comparison, has dedicated 43.5% of its acreage to the Allegheny National Forest and the Cook Forest State Park. Consequently, the population density found across both counties is significantly lower than the 284 persons per square mile found on average throughout the State of Pennsylvania. Warren and Forest Counties, both noticeably smaller, have a population density of 43 and 17 persons per square mile respectively. There is no easy way in or out of the area via a major interstate or thruway. In fact, the highway system follows the topography of the Appalachian Plateau, winding steeply through wooded hillsides and often parallel to the county's creeks and the Allegheny River. Geographically, the Warren County School District is the second largest school district in the state spanning 884.13 square miles but, as mentioned, a large portion of this area is uninhabited.

Typical of rural areas in the traditional "rust belt" states, Warren and Forest Counties have experienced significant population loss over the past several decades, as jobs, especially those in the formerly well-paying manufacturing sector, move elsewhere. Overwhelmingly, service sector jobs have filled this void while offering lower pay and fewer benefits. This scenario creates long-term social and economic strains for remaining families in the area. In particular, this impacts lower income families dependent on Head Start and similar services available through the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council and/or other area social service providers. Demand for these types of services and programming continues to grow in the community while funding remains the same, or worse, disappears all together.

The City of Warren (also the county seat) is located along the Allegheny River and Conewango Creek. It is the only city and most populated location in the two-county area. It serves as the headquarters for the Allegheny National and the Cornplanter State Forests. The Allegheny Reservoir and Kinzua Dam are located in close proximity to the City and are within Warren County. Warren includes a twenty-eight block Historic District, the largest in State of Pennsylvania, with various entities committed to preserving designated historic structures as the once industry based economy shifts toward one focused on attracting tourism. The County has become well known for its year round outdoor recreation which includes hiking, cycling, boating, fishing, and hunting. Of note, the section of the Allegheny River running from the Kinzua Dam to the City of Warren has been designated a "Recreational Waterway" by the United States Congress. In recent years, County leaders have considered various ways to capitalize on this acknowledgment and draw tourists to the area to help boost the local economy.

Under Pennsylvania law, Warren County is comprised of three types of incorporated municipalities. Warren is the sole City. There are then five boroughs: Bear Lake, Clarendon, Sugar Grove, Tidioute, and Youngsville. Smaller than a borough; there are twenty-one recognized townships which include: Brokenstraw, Cherry Grove, Columbus, Conewango, Deerfield, Eldred, Elk, Farmington, Freehold, Glade, Limestone, Mead, Pine Grove, Pittsfield, Pleasant, Sheffield, Southwest, Spring Creek, Sugar Grove, Triumph, and Watson. Akeley, Lander, and Torpedo are not incorporated yet but are considered part of Warren County.

Forest County holds the distinction of being the least populous county in the state with nearly 50% of all available acreage designated as State Park and National Forest. Forest County is famous as a rural retreat touting itself as “Pennsylvania’s Best Kept Secret.” There are no traffic lights, four lane highways, radio stations, or even a daily newspaper. Similar to Warren County, Forest County markets itself as a tourist destination for the outdoor enthusiast offering scenic views, year round outdoor recreation, hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and hunting. For residents of Forest County, the economy revolves around natural resources including timber, gas and oil. The 2004 construction of the State Correctional Institute – Forest in resulted in one of the largest population booms in the State of Pennsylvania between 2000 and 2013 with a 55.60% net change. Population growth since this point in time has begun to slowly decline further indicating that this was an anomaly and not a long term trend.

Estimates from the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (2015 to 2019) place the population of Warren County at approximately 39,756 persons and 7,313 persons in Forest County. The change in population when comparing the U.S. Census from 2000 and 2010 was a -4.67% (Warren County) and 56.07% (Forest County) net change. When looking at the most recent estimates available via the above referenced American Community Survey; the change in population between 2000 and 2019 for Warren County is -9.36%. This shows continued population decline for Warren County at a slightly faster rate than between 2000 and 2010. In Forest County the overall change between U.S. Census data from 2000 and the more recent population estimate from the 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey is 47.86%. This is a lower percentage than the 56.07% change seen when comparing the 2000 to 2010 U.S. Census data which supports the conclusion of a population “boom” which corresponded with the construction of a state correctional facility. The population has resumed an overall decline in year round residents. In comparison, the State of Pennsylvania experienced an overall 4% increase in population during this same time period. The population, both historically and at present, is homogenous in its ethnic composition and is predominately white. Data from the American Community Survey, which averages information collected between 2015 and 2019, describes the population as 93.3% white, 4.4% Black, 0.4% Asian, 0.14%, and 1.3% mixed race. There is little to suggest that the overly homogenous ethnic composition of the area population will change dramatically at any point in the future.

The median household income in Forest County is \$39,717 with per capita income at \$15,245 and the average family income reported as \$56,564. In Warren County the median household income is \$50,250 with per capita income at \$28,230 and the average family income reported as \$74,416. An earner is defined as someone 15 years of age or older receiving any type of income (wages, salaries, benefits, or other) while per capita income is best defined as the total personal income in an area divided by the number of people in the area. This is based on the most recent data released by the American Community Survey for 2014-2018. Recent data looking at the poverty rates among households in the Warren and Forest County service area put this information in perspective. In looking at the total population with an income at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines approximately 29.58% of the population is in this category. Typically, the focus is on those living in extreme poverty or below 100% of the FPIG however this can be misleading. The poverty line is defined as the level of income below which one cannot afford to purchase all needed resources and necessities. It is estimated that in order to afford all the basics comfortably a household would need to earn two times the amount listed for 100% FPIG. This would then mean that households earning at or above 200% FPIG are likely able to afford needed expenses and necessities without putting additional

stress on the household. Therefore, looking at the 29.58% of the population earning at or below 185% provides a better understanding of the number of households in the service area who struggle or experience economic hardship. There would be very little or no discretionary income for this segment of the population. The percentage of the total population throughout Pennsylvania living at or below 185% is estimated to be 25.84% which is slightly less than the service area. In Warren and Forest Counties it is further worth noting that for all persons aged 0-17, 30% in Forest and 23.2% in Warren County respectively were reported as living at or below the poverty line (100% of poverty). The State, by comparison, reports that 12% of all persons aged 0-17 are living in poverty during this same time frame. This is a clear indication that families are more likely to struggle or live in poverty in the service area than adult only households.

Section II | Demographics

POPULATION | The two-county service area spans 1,329 square miles. Warren County is 898 square miles and Forest County is 431 square miles. A substantial portion of available acreage in both counties is designated as either the Allegheny National Forest in Warren County or the Allegheny National Forest and Cook State Forest in Forest County. The most populated location in both counties, the City of Warren, is the lone city in the rural, two-county service area. According to the most recent data released by the American Community Survey and US Census Bureau the total population of the two-county service area³⁶ is estimated at 47,069 people. This is a -3.56% change since 2000. Of these, an estimated 39,756 people reside within Warren County (-9.36% change since 2000) and an estimated 7,313 in Forest County (47.86% change since 2000). The large influx of persons in Forest County is largely attributed to the construction of the State Correctional Institute – Forest (SCI – Forest) in Marienville. Construction was completed in 2004 housing an average inmate population of 2,200 and employing just over 600 people. After an initial population boom immediately following the completed construction; data shows that the population has resumed a slow decline. There was a 55% net change between 2000 and 2010. The estimated net change from the 2019 American Community Survey is 47.86% which points toward the reemerging trend of a slow population decline since 2000.

Table 1: Population Change 2000-2019

County	Census 2000 Population	ACS 2019 Population	Population Change	% Change
Forest	4,946	7,313	2,367	47.86%
Warren	43,863	39,756	-4,107	-9.36%
Report Area	48,809	47,386	-1,740	-3.56%
Pennsylvania	12,281,054	12,791,530	510,476	4.15%
National	281,421,906	324,697,795	43,275,889	15.38%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Population Division, Census 2000. American Community Survey. The American Community Survey 4-year data is a 4-year average of data collected from 2015 through 2019. Decennial Census.

Previous data released by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) included an estimate for the next US Census year in 2020 which anticipated the continued slow decline in overall population for defined service area. Age distribution was predicted to stay relatively constant with the exception for the being a 3% increase in the 65 and older cohort while all other shifts were within a 1% change up or down. This scenario is a result of the baby boomers aging into the 65 and up cohort by this point in time. Anticipated losses were primarily in those aged 40 through 59.

According to the American Community Survey, an average of data collected between 2015 and 2019, in the two-county area the ratio of males to females is nearly even. Females make up nearly 47% of the population while males comprise the remaining 53%. These numbers are slightly skewed when looking at the ratios per county due to the

disparity between males and females in Forest County due to the presence of the correctional facility. Recall that the State Correction Institute in Marienville was the cause of a population “boom” for the area. It is also the reason why there are significantly more males than females as the inmate population is largely male and skews ratios within certain age cohorts. When looking only at Warren County recent data indicates that of the current population 50.09% is male and 49.91% is female. By contrast, in Forest County the current population which includes the primarily male inmate population is 78.49% male and 21.51% female. The nearly even ratios of males to females for both counties remain stable with little, if any, fluctuation even as the overall population continues to decrease in both counties.

The following charts, composed utilizing the American Community Survey data from 2014 to 2018, further describe the male to female ratio by age grouping. In all cohorts for Warren County, the ratio of males to females is close to 50/50 except for the 65+ age group. In this instance, females comprise 55% of the cohort and males the remaining 45%. This is typical for this cohort due to anticipated life expectancy rates for males and females. The ratios are skewed in Forest County when looking at the 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54 age cohorts. In these instances males outnumber females by wide margins and can be attributed to the inclusion of the male inmate population at SCI – Forest. As an example, in the 25 to 34 cohort, males outnumber females 1,395 to 48.

Table 2: Population by Gender 2015-2019

County	0 to 4		5 to 17		18 to 24		25 to 34	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Forest	83	71	393	238	514	21	1,395	48
Warren	985	1,002	2,948	2,805	1,506	1,316	2,118	1,926
Report Area	1,068	1,073	3,341	3,043	2,020	1,337	3,044	1,926
TOTAL	2,141		6,384		3,357		4,970	

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 Data Release, December 2020. The 2019 American Community Survey 5-year data is a 5-year average of data collected from 2015 through 2019.

County	35 to 44		45 to 54		55 to 64		65 and Up	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Forest	972	80	559	321	573	442	773	774
Warren	2,072	2,048	2,784	2,721	3,357	3,286	3,676	4,751
Report Area	3,044	2,128	3,343	3,042	3,930	3,728	4,449	5,525
TOTAL	5,172		6,397		7,658		9,974	

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 Data Release, December 2020. The 2019 American Community Survey 5-year data is a 5-year average of data collected from 2015 through 2019.

Table 2 also shows the age distribution across the two-county service area. An aging population in both counties with the majority of those living in the area being 45 and up is a clear trend. Those 65 and older comprise 21% of the entire population. The next two largest cohorts, those 45 to 54 and 55 to 64, supports the established trend of an aging population with decreasing numbers of families. Since the US Census data released in 2000, cohorts for 0 to 4, 5 to 17, 18 to 24, and 25 to 34 have all experienced slow declines over the last decade. The sharp drop when moving from the 5 to 17 to the 18 to 24 cohort can be attributed to younger people moving out of the area after graduation from high school. It is likely that those pursuing higher education leave the area and pursue employment elsewhere upon earning a degree due to the lack of new industry or jobs in the area and the absence of colleges or universities in either county offering 2 and 4 year degrees. Looking at the drop in males and females as you move from 5 to 17 to the 18 to 24 cohorts shows that the numbers decrease by nearly 50%. This is partially due to the aforementioned reasons of high school graduates likely leaving to pursue employment or higher education elsewhere and moving to a smaller age range. In Forest County the number of males as you transition from 5 to 17 to the 18 to 24 cohort actually increases. This is due to the addition of incarcerated males to the cohort. This increase is also noticeable for males as you move from 18 to 24 to 25 to 34. Wages in both counties are lower than other areas across the state making the prospect of moving away from Warren or Forest Counties upon graduation more appealing to young adults beginning a career.

The slow, continued decline in the number of children under the age of 18 indicates that fewer families with children are living and working in Warren and Forest Counties than there have been historically. Data collected by the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council indicates that families with young children are more apt to use various programs and services such as Head Start, emergency rental assistance, utility assistance, or Pre-K Counts than households without children. The high rate of poverty experienced among those 0 to 17 in the service area is a clear indication that households with children are more likely to experience financial strain when trying to meet all the basic needs for the household. The elderly (those 65 and older), people with serious mental illness, disability, single parents – particularly females, or those struggling with chemical dependency issues are among other identified vulnerable populations within the community more likely to access different programs offered by ours and other social service agencies. Recent data collected from the American Community Survey show that the area has higher percentage of non-institutionalized persons with a disability. 7,298 of the estimated 42,757 persons, or 17% for the entire service area, have a documented disability. As a comparison, 13.97% in all of Pennsylvania and 12.62% in the United States have a documented disability. The breakdown by county is 16.02% in Warren County and 28.44% in Forest County. High percentages of those with a disability strains local resources and services in an area that is already limited in both. A survey of the starting wages for entry level positions indicates that individual adults can earn a living wage and live self-sufficiently as long as they can maintain a position long term.

The following conclusions can be made of the population in Warren and Forest Counties:

1. Adults in the 18 to 34 age range, and to a lesser extent the 35 to 44 range, are migrating outside of the Warren-Forest community. The primary driver behind this trend, given age and opportunities within the service area, is that these people are moving to pursue higher education and/or seek out better paying employment opportunities elsewhere.

2. Long term, this trend will result in a continued, slow decline in the overall population, particularly young adults and families with children. As this happens the senior population, those 65 and older, will continue to comprise 20 to 25% of the total population within the service area.
3. The largest cohort within the population is the aging and/or elderly. The 65+ cohort comprises roughly 20% of the population in the service area with the 55 to 64 closely following. These populations, particularly the 65 and up, are more likely to require social services in order to meet all of their basic needs as they likely have fixed incomes. Those who are homeowners ultimately reach a point where they cannot afford upkeep, maintenance, repairs, and increasing utilities associated with owning a home. Service providers in the service area, including the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, have been observing an increased demand for services coupled with decreased or stagnant funding for all available programs. As an example, the Agency frequently sees clients in this age cohort applying for programs on an annual basis as they do not have enough income to sustain themselves each year. Further, frontline staff report increasing phone calls from individuals needing assistance with home repairs, property taxes, and replacing appliances as the costs associated with maintaining their home become unmanageable on a fixed income.
4. There is a larger percentage of the population not in an institutional setting with documented disability. This is likely a serious mental illness or physical disability creating an obvious, vulnerable cohort within the population likely on low or fixed incomes, with limited resources, and in need of supportive services in order to remain stable.

Race demographics across the two-county area show the population as predominately white. The homogenous composition of the population is not new and is merely a continuing trend. There are no known outside influences that would affect a noticeable change. There are few, if any, migrant workers in the two-county area. In addition, there are no new industries or jobs moving into the area that would result in an influx of new people to the community. In fact, the area experienced a significant loss as the Irvine Distribution Center for Bluestem Brands (Blair) announced they would be closing the location in April of 2021 which resulted in a loss of 250+ jobs. These losses were after several large layoff which occurred at the onset of the COVID pandemic and throughout the months of shut down. By the summer of 2021, this situation had appeared to reverse itself in that many remaining employers began hiring again however; a lack of qualified applicants and oft cited staff shortages continued to plague the area throughout the latter half of 2021.

The recent American Community Survey data from 2015 to 2019 reports the two-county population as 93.3% white, 4.4% Black, 0.4% Asian, and 1.3% as multiple races. The homogenous nature of the two-county service area's population is not new. The one anomaly which impacted race demographics would be an observed change that can be attributed to the State Correctional Institute – Forest in Marienville. Once construction was complete there was a noticeable and documented increase in the Black population; specifically black males living in Forest County. Data from the 2000 US Census reported 113 Black people living in Forest County. Data collected after the construction and opening of the prison, reported a dramatic increase. The most recent data from American Community Survey estimates 1,888 males and 5 females. Race demographics from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for the

State Correctional Institute – Forest (SCI Forest) report that the inmate population is generally over the 2200 person max capacity with over 50% of the inmates reported as being Black.

POVERTY | The number of persons within the two-county area living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines is estimated to be 5,580 according to the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey for 2015 to 2019. This is equivalent to 13.09% of the population.

Based on the threshold set by the Federal Poverty Guidelines, the poverty rate determined for an area can be misleading and often presents a more positive picture of the area than what may be occurring in reality. In order to understand this phenomena one must first understand how the poverty rate is calculated. The rate is determined using an antiquated formula based on the estimated cost of food and assumes that a household spends one third of available resources on this basic necessity. For example, the government takes the estimated cost to feed a family of four for one year and breaks that number down into a monthly cost. The monthly estimated food cost is then multiplied by 3 with the result representing a household at 100% of poverty. Using this calculation method in present times provides an inaccurate measure as it neglects other basic necessities including housing, childcare, transportation, and health care which can often place greater demands on a family’s resources. A more accurate calculation would set food costs at one fifth of the household budget. Taking this into consideration; the poverty line is base standard of measure used primarily when determining eligibility for services / programs. In reality, only considering the reported number of households at or below 100% of the FPIG can underestimate the number of households in an area struggling to meet basic needs. Typically, a household living at 100% of poverty (the established poverty threshold as determined by the Federal Poverty Guidelines) would need to make two times the amount of income in order to meet the basic needs of food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, and clothing. Therefore, looking at all households earning below 200% of the FPIG provides better clarity on the number of households likely to struggle throughout the year in Warren and Forest Counties. Table 3 is provided to show the most recent poverty guidelines released by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services in January 2018 and represent a household at 100% of poverty.

Table 3: Federal Poverty Income Guidelines, 2021

County	Family / Household Size	Family of 1	Family of 2	Family of 3	Family of 4	Family of 5	Family of 6	Family of 7
Pennsylvania	Poverty Guideline	\$12,880	\$17,420	\$21,960	\$26,500	\$31,040	\$35,580	\$40,120

Source: Annual Update of the Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines, January 2021.

In Warren and Forest Counties, children under the age of 18 have a high percentage living at or below the poverty threshold of 100% FPIG (Table 4). This indicates that families and/or households with children in the two-county service area are more likely to face financial hardship and struggle to meet basic needs each month. In the report area an average of 22.10% of children under 18 are living at or below the poverty threshold. Looking closer at each county; this translates into 30% in Forest County and 23.2% in Warren County (Table 4).

Table 4: Poverty, Children Below 100% FPIG

County	Total Population at 100% of FPIG	Population Age 0-17	Poverty Rate, Age 0-17	Population Age 5-17	Poverty Rate, Age 5-17
Forest	1,196	185	30%	110	23%
Warren	5,153	1,699	23.2%	1,124	21.3%
Report Area	6,349	1,884	22.10%	1,234	19.33%
Pennsylvania	1,481,193	426,395	16.5%	300,187	15.9%
National	39,490,096	12,000,470	16.34%	8,258,906	15.39%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Small Area Income & Poverty Estimate, 2019. Source geography: Tract

The poverty rate when looking at the population as a whole is shown in Table 5 for those living at or below 100% the Federal Poverty Income Guideline (FPIG). When looking at the poverty rate for those living at or below 100% we find that the rate is slightly higher than the 12.43% for the state. In Forest County the difference is greater with 18.01% in Forest County living at or below 100% FPIG in comparison with the 12.43%. The most recent average for the United States is 13.42%. It should be noted that these rates were estimated prior to COVID 19 and the pandemic related shut downs. The combined service area has a slightly higher rate of poverty for households living at or below 125% and those at or below 185% than the state. Future estimates may better indicate how the pandemic may have impacted the service area, state, and national poverty rates and whether it was an anomaly for one or two years of reporting or initiated a long term impact. It is important to look more closely at different levels of income since we know that the reality of the situation is that those in households earning at or below 200% are likely to struggle some or all of the time with affording all basic needs. They are also less likely to be in a position where they can handle an unexpected event or crisis. This may include emergency housing repairs, fluctuating utility bills, medical crisis, loss of hours at employment, or major car repairs. Tables 6 through 8 are provided to show poverty rates for those household living in extreme poverty and earning less than 50% of the FPIG, households earning at or below 125%, and those earning at or below 185%. When taking all of these into consideration we find that nearly 30% of all households in the service area struggle financially either all or part of the year and are likely to need emergency crisis programs and / or other supports to help alleviate financial hardship.

Table 5: Poverty Rate – Population Below 100% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population In Poverty	Percent Population in Poverty
Forest	3,613	654	18.10%
Warren	39,012	4,926	12.63%
Report Area	42,625	5,580	13.09%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	1,539,183	12.43%
National	316,715,051	42,510,843	13.42%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release, December 2020.

Table 6: Poverty Rate – Population Below 50% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population with Income at or Below 50% FPL	Percent Population with Income at or Below 50% FPL
Forest	3,613	257	7.11%
Warren	39,012	1,878	4.81%
Report Area	42,625	2,135	5.01%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	693,930	5.61%
National	316,715,051	18,957,462	5.99%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release, December 2020.

Table 7: Poverty Rate – Population Below 125% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population In Poverty	Percent Population in Poverty
Forest	3,613	845	23.39%
Warren	39,012	6,608	16.94%
Report Area	42,625	7,453	17.49%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	2,009,554	16.23%
National	316,715,051	56,269,559	17.77%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release, December 2020.

Table 8: Poverty Rate – Population Below 185% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population with Income at or Below 185% FPL	Percent Population with Income at or Below 185% FPL
Forest	3,613	1,281	35.46%
Warren	39,012	11,327	29.03%
Report Area	42,625	12,608	29.58%
Pennsylvania	12,369,671	3,418,878	25.84%
National	316,715,051	89,440,015	28.24%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release, December 2020.

Reviewing older data for households, and not individuals, in poverty and overall rate change from past reporting years provides a clearer understanding of the current situation faced by households in Warren and Forest Counties. Table 9 provides the total number of households in poverty based on the poverty thresholds established by the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The total number of households used in this table is reported as 18,954 for the two-county area

with 2,311 identified as living at or below 100% of poverty. This equates to 12.19% which is the same as the rate reported at the state level.

Table 9: Households in Poverty, 2015 – 2019

County	Total Households	Households in Poverty	% Households in Poverty,
Forest	1,839	305	16.6%
Warren	17,115	2,006	11.7%
Report Area	18,954	2,311	12.19%
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	612,247	12.1%
National	120,756,048	15,610,142	12.9%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Data Release, December 2020.

Table 10 breaks down family types for households living in poverty defined as at or below 100% FPL. The most recent data shows that in single parent homes; single mothers have a greater likelihood of living in poverty than their male counterparts. In reviewing Agency program data for 2018, 2019, and 2020; single mothers were the most common household type applying for housing and emergency services administered by the Agency. These programs would include utility assistance, the Homeless Assistance Program, Rapid ReHousing, Faith Inn Emergency Shelter, and Homeless Prevention. Both reported data shown in Table 10 and Agency program specific data support the statement that, similar to other areas of the country, single mother households are a vulnerable segment within the population likely to access and need multiple social services simply to survive. In any community, single parents often need to rely on a social network, relatives, and close friends for needed support in order to work full time and meet all basic needs. This trend partially explains the higher than average percentage of children living at or below the Poverty Threshold in Warren and Forest Counties. However, it should also be noted that there are significantly more non-family or single person households (54%) living in poverty than those households with multiple persons (i.e. two adults, one adult + one child, two adults + one child, etc.). This could be a result of several factors including an aging population, lack of well-paying jobs, and the slow, continued overall decline in the number of families.

Table 10: Households in Poverty by Family Type, 2015 – 2019

County	Total Households, 2015-2019	Total Households in Poverty	Non-Family Households in Poverty - Including Persons Living Alone	Married Couples in Poverty	Male Head of Household in Poverty	Female Head of Household in Poverty
Forest	1,079	305	162	97	5	41
Warren	11,079	2,006	1,095	419	172	320
Report Area	12,158	2,311	1,257	516	177	361

United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 Data Release, December 2020.

Child care, or rather the lack of reliable, affordable child care options, is likely a significant factor contributing to a high percentage of area children living in poverty. Households with children, in particular single parents, who also lack support of local family or friends, may not be able to maintain adequate full time employment due to the lack of consistent, reliable childcare. Cost and the time of day largely contribute to this issue as there are no child care options for second and third shift workers unless you have friends or family that will watch your child. In two parent households it is often true that the cost of childcare, particularly for non-school age children, is too much to justify both parents working. Thus, the household attempts to remain self-sufficient on only one income which is nearly impossible for low-income families in an area that lacks living wage opportunities. For many in the area, skill level, lack of reliable transportation, and educational attainment further limit available employment options which pay over minimum wage and offer benefits. It has long been observed and documented that the area has stagnant, depressed wages and lacks opportunities that pay a true living wage. This has become painfully clear in 2021 as pandemic related restrictions lifted and employers could resume normal business activity and hours. Many households found that the offered wages for available openings are not a true living wage as they face increasing costs for goods and services.

EMPLOYMENT | Data released in August 2021 and shown in Table 12 states that Warren County's unemployment rate is 6.1% and Forest County's rate is 6.9%. In that same reporting period the State of Pennsylvania had an unemployment rate of 6.1%. While these rates are noticeably higher than past reporting years where the unemployment rate was less than 5% it should be noted that they reflect a sharp drop as the local economy re-opens following COVID 19 pandemic related shut downs. Despite the downward trend for unemployment rates; the area still has observed increases in poverty rates for area households. This supports the continued need for programs/services for local, low income households, individuals, and the working poor. When comparing April 2021 data with August 2018 there was the expectation that the unemployment rate would be higher as the economy is still slowly recovering from pandemic related shut downs and job loss in 2020. It was also noted that the overall labor force for counties in the service area, Pennsylvania, and the United States has decreased from 2018 with a greater number unemployed in 2021 than in 2018. Long term unemployed and baby boomers leaving the labor force could potentially account for this. There have also been noticeable losses in the health care and education fields in response to job related stresses and burn out in 2020 as the COVID pandemic impacted these career fields in ways not previously considered.

Discussions with local employers indicate persistent, deep rooted problems plaguing the two-county area. Some examples which negatively impact the available labor force in the area include underemployment, large numbers of temporary workers, depressed wages, low educational attainment, lack of a skilled work force (basic soft skills), and limited options for those lacking skills / education. Prior to 2020, area employers had noted an increased difficulty in attracting qualified applicants when advertising for openings. Post the pandemic related shut downs this reality appears to have worsened with more employers reporting increased difficulty finding qualified applicants or in some cases applicants at all. Area employers continue to struggle to find employees for entry level positions with necessary soft skills, motivation, desire to work, ability to pass basic math test, and ability to pass a drug test. As a result, many employers in the manufacturing industry needing entry level employees turn to employment agencies like Quickstaff for temporary workers to fill these openings. Area employers, in the last 1 to 2 years, have reported expanding their search area and utilizing an employment agency in adjacent Chautauqua County, New York due to exhausting the

available labor pool enrolled with Quickstaff. Utilizing employment agencies allows the company to save on overhead and if adjust the work force in manufacturing jobs to meet supply chain demands.

Table 12: Employment / Unemployment Rate, April 2021

County	Labor Force	Number Employed	Number Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Forest	1,762	1,626	136	7.7%
Warren	18,210	17,096	1,114	6.1%
Report Area	19,972	18,722	1,250	6.3%
Pennsylvania	6,222,697	5,840,793	381,904	6.1%
National	161,459,754	152,164,542	9,295,213	5.8%

Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, April 2021.

Table 13 illustrates the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the unemployment rate by comparing April 2020 at the peak with April 2021. The rate in 2020 for Forest County was 17.6% and in Warren County was 13%. These are sharp increases from recorded rates below 5% prior to the pandemic. April 2021 indicates economic recovery but not a full recovery with rates dropping yet still above 5%. Table 14 shows the unemployment rate changes over a 13 month time period. While the unemployment rate nationally also peaked in April 2020; it has steadily decreased over the last thirteen months with small, incremental drops from October 2020 through April 2021. Conversely, the service area of Warren and Forest County had a steady decrease until November 2020 before jumping back up to throughout February 2021. This time frame corresponds with peak infections and community spread in Warren and Forest County. In addition, schools were closed for in person instruction which created a challenge for working parents that may account for some of the increase. The rate began dropping again in March 2021.

Economic recovery seen at national or even state levels do not tend to impact the local economy within the service area. Any recovery tends to be slow while wages remain low. Job seekers also struggle to secure full time positions where they can rely on regular hours of 35 to 40 per week. This typically means that those who are employed may not have benefits such as employer health insurance plans, paid time off, or vacation days. These benefits are especially important to those with children or dependents. In Forest County, from April 2020 to April 2021 the unemployment rate ranged between 6.2% at the lowest point in October 2020 and a high point of 17.6% in April 2020. In Warren, where there are more employment options and easier access to employers, the lowest point was 5.5% in October 2020 and the highest point of 13% in April 2020. Past swings in unemployment rates for Warren County likely pair with points in time when larger employers like Targeted Pet Treats hire large numbers to increase production or lay off large numbers of employees. There are also cyclical periods of mass layoffs for those employed by the oil and gas industry. In Table 13, we know that the highest rate of unemployment recorded corresponds with the peak of the pandemic related shut down when only essential workers were employed. This number began trending down until spiking again in November 2020 through January 2021 before beginning to again fall. This could likely be related to the closure of schools during this window and the mandatory move from in person instruction to all virtual instruction due to the recorded community spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Table 13: Average Monthly Unemployment Rate, April 2020 – April 2021

County	Apr 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021
Forest	17.6%	13.4%	13.1%	14.1%	10.7%	6.9%	6.2%	7.5%	8.8%	10.2%	10.8%	10.5%	7.7%
Warren	13.0%	10.8%	10.7%	11.6%	8.7%	5.8%	5.5%	5.7%	6.7%	8.3%	8.0%	7.6%	6.1%
Report Area	13.4%	11.1%	10.9%	11.8%	8.8%	5.9%	5.5%	5.9%	6.9%	8.5%	8.3%	7.8%	6.3%
Pennsylvania	15.9%	13.7%	13.2%	13.5%	10.2%	7.0%	6.4%	6.5%	6.9%	8.0%	7.9%	7.3%	6.1%
National	14.4%	13.0%	11.2%	10.4%	8.5%	7.7%	6.6%	6.4%	6.5%	6.8%	6.6%	6.2%	5.8%

Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

It is important to understand that the unemployment rate is not determined simply by looking at the number of people shown to be collecting unemployment insurance benefits as this would not provide an accurate description of the situation. This is due to several factors including the fact that some people are still unemployed once benefits run out, others do not qualify for benefits, and some delay or never apply for benefits. Therefore, data on unemployment insurance benefits is not used in determining the unemployment rate for an area. Instead, a monthly survey using a sample of the population is conducted. At the national level, one fourth of all households in the survey are rotated each month to avoid interviewing a single household more than 4 consecutive months. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics this process ensures that approximately 75% of the sample remains the same from month to month while 50% remains the same for a year. This method enhances the reliability of all reported data.

The survey which is used groups people into three main categories: employed, unemployed, and those not considered part of the labor force. The minimum age to be counted is 16 and there is not a maximum age. Those who are institutionalized (i.e. correctional facility or retirement home) are not included as part of the labor force. If a person did any work and received pay or profited from the work they are considered employed. This includes those working part time, temporary, or seasonal jobs. Those categorized as unemployed are not currently working, could take a job if offered, and have actively been pursuing employment. The rate itself is assessed by looking at the labor force and not the total population of an area. That is, the total when the number of employed versus unemployed persons is added together.

2020 and 2021 are outliers which did not follow the long running trends for the area. It is likely that this is exclusively due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The area had reached a low unemployment rate prior to the pandemic which was 3.9% in Warren County and 5.9% in Forest County in April 2019. When the economy was shut down in response to the pandemic the area, similar to what was experienced across the nation, had a major spike in the unemployment rate. In Warren County the rate rose to 13% and in Forest County it rose to 17.6%. As the economy slowly reopened the rate began decreasing however it has not yet reached pre-pandemic rates. By summer 2021, many employers had multiple job openings yet all who responded to survey requests and phone inquiries stated that they were having trouble finding job candidates to fill these openings. As a result, despite loosening restrictions area businesses, particularly smaller ones, are still not able to resume normal operations due predominately to staffing issues.

Focus group sessions held in Spring 2021 touched on employment throughout the community. The heavy job losses and unemployment spike at the onset of the pandemic were discussed by all focus groups indicating that employment remains a consistent concern for residents. The Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry sent out a survey at the onset of the pandemic and follow up questions as businesses continued to be impacted to document major changes experienced by larger employers and local manufacturers. Listing of significant, permanent layoffs included:

- 90 permanent from one location
- 52 from another location
- 26 from another larger employer
- 200 terminations in April from Blair/Bluestem workforce including many administrative positions
- 280 permanent positions lost in April 2021 from the closure of the Bluestem Distribution Center (non-covid related)

Additionally, the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry noted that during 2020 some local employers went to a shared work program model which allowed the available hours to be spread-out through the company's workforce. While this keeps more people employed; it impacts total working hours for an individual which can result in a loss of paid, hours by 15 to 20%. This reality, paired with the permanent loss of 368 jobs right at the onset of the pandemic from major employers had a significant impact which aligns with the spike in the unemployment rate recorded in April 2020. Currently, the rate is falling closer to the pre-pandemic levels however it has been observed that there are a larger than normal number of job openings which indicates that more of the available labor force could be working yet aren't applying for available openings. At the same time, employers are stating that they are not receiving many applications or are unable to find qualified candidates. A concern brought up in focus groups with parents in low-income households, area providers, Agency staff, and Head Start policy council was that many households receiving additional funds through the American Jobs and Recovery Act found that they were better off than they were prior to the pandemic when working. It was further observed that households benefiting from available, monthly stimulus and unemployment appeared to lack motivation to secure employment until fall 2021 when these benefits will expire. At this point, focus groups expressed concern about employment availability as they have already observed businesses changing hours, operations, and making adjustments due to staffing issues. Should some of these adjustments become permanent there was concern that fewer jobs will be available when benefits end.

The continuous increase in the number of people living in poverty since the 2010 census indicates that there are persistent problems with the employment situation that are not always clear when looking solely at the unemployment rate. The first item to consider is that the estimated civilian labor force for Warren County in June 2015 was 19,800 people. The estimated labor force for April 2021 shows a decrease from 2015 to 18,210. Current data indicates that less than half the total population is actively ready to, seeking employment, or working. Recall that the labor force combines those employed and those unemployed. Of those employed, the number does not differentiate between those working part-time, temporary, or seasonal hours. It further includes anyone 16 years of age and above so it can be assumed that an unknown portion of the employed population is not head of household or earning money to pay for basic necessities. According to the U.S. Census bureau; 63% of the total U.S. population

are considered part of the available labor force but in the service area a significantly smaller percentage of the population comprises the local labor force. Only those actively seeking employment are considered unemployed while those passively looking, out of work for an extended period of time, or unable to work are determined to be outside of the labor force. This could partially explain why poverty is rising as the majority of the population, including those not counted within the current labor force, include the fastest growing age cohort of those 65 and older, disabled persons, and other vulnerable segments of the population who typically struggle to meet all basic needs and are likely unable to be fully self-sufficient. It is further likely that among those who are employed; part-time or inconsistent hours, temporary work, seasonal work, low wages, and low educational attainment for better paying positions are all barriers to long term financial security for households in the service area. Another factor not yet discussed in this reporting is the location of jobs compared to where people live. Transportation is a huge barrier in the two-county area due to the rural nature and natural topography, few employment options outside of downtown Warren, Marienville, and other more populated areas, unreliable personal transportation, and limited public transportation options all create additional barriers for area job seekers. Where people live, even in a smaller geographic service area, can drastically impact employment options and ability to maintain steady employment.

The rising poverty rate predominately tells us that many area households are still not able to afford basic necessities even if working. Focus group discussions as well as surveys support the observation that there is growing number of “working poor” households continuously in need of assistance. It has become increasingly common in the service area for households to have two income earners yet still struggle to afford food, shelter, clothing, and health care. In looking at both employment and the potential estimated labor force within the service area this scenario could be attributed to a combination of the following:

1. Primary income earners are unable to find and maintain employment with a true, living wage.
2. Employed persons are underemployed and / or working part time hours where they lack access to benefits such as employer provided healthcare.
3. Employed persons are working inconsistent hours. During the height of the pandemic they may also have had reduced hours due to hour sharing which was beneficial in keeping more people working however reduced household incomes overall.
4. A growing number of people actively seeking work are being employed through temporary staffing agencies like Quickstaff and will work consistently for 30 to 90 days before losing that income if not picked up for full time status. Focus group discussions also touched on an observed shift among area employers utilizing staffing agencies outside of the service area for temporary workers. Primarily, employers have begun using temporary staffing agencies located in neighboring Chautauqua County in New York State.
5. A growing number of people in the service area entering the work force lack the basic soft skills and education to obtain higher earning positions. They often are able to find work but frequently struggle with remaining successfully employed thus resulting in an inconsistent work history which ultimately becomes another barrier to employment. At the same time; older employees within the labor force holding higher level positions are nearing retirement.

Based on number of employees, the top 10 employers in Warren and Forest Counties are shown in the following charts with a side-by-side comparison of the first quarter in 2018 and the fourth quarter of 2020. There was only one change from 2018 to 2020 with the Federal Government and Forest County switching places as the 6th and 7th largest employers in the area. The current list also shows a mix of timber/natural resources, civic, county, or government work, education, and service. It should be noted that the more current top 10 employers predominately are ones which likely require a certain level of education beyond a high school diploma or GED, specialized training, or specific job skills that would limit the options for lower income workers less likely to meet these requirements. The top industries in Forest County, based on this listing, would be justice / public order, residential mental health facilities, nursing care facilities, government, elementary and secondary schools, administration of environmental programs, and timber.

2018 Top Employers – 1 st Quarter	2020 Top Employers – 4th Quarter
State Government	State Government
Cornell Abraxas Group OS LLC	Cornell Abraxas Group OS LLC
Northwest Hardwoods Inc	Northwest Hardwoods Inc
Omni Manor Inc	Omni Manor Inc
Forest Area School District	Forest Area School District
Forest County	Federal Government
Federal Government	Forest County
Joseph Muccio Transportation LLC	Joseph Muccio Transportation LLC
Taylor Diversion Programs Inc	Taylor Diversion Programs Inc
Fair Winds Cabins, Inc	Fair Winds Cabins, Inc

Data Source: Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. Source Geography: County

A skills gap analysis for the entire northwestern Pennsylvania region was released in June 2015. In the Northwest Regional Commission Skills Gap Analysis it was estimated that there are 2,294 workers in the Forest County work force with 2,172 employed. The current estimated work force from the Bureau of Labor Statistic from August 2021 is 1,800 with 1,700 employed. This is noticeable drop from the estimate used in the skills gap analysis and points toward losses within the available work force. It was estimated in 2015 that half of those employed were older workers likely to retire over the next ten years. Depending on skill level, this may already be impacting the number of available workers in Forest County for these jobs. As this continues, employers will need to seek employees willing to commute or attract new people to the area. If this is not a workable solution employers may leave the area.

According to the Skills Gap Analysis, in 2015 the top employers included office and administrative support occupations, community and social services, protective service occupations, construction and extraction, and transportation and material moving. Among those occupations projected to have the greatest job growth through 2019 approximately 80% of these openings will require a high school diploma or equivalent. Some form of on-the-job training will be required for about 80% of openings while 17% of available future openings will require a Bachelor’s Degree or higher. This prediction seems in line with what is happening currently when looking at the top employers for the county.

Forest County was identified as a net exporter of workers. This means that of the work force living in Forest County, an estimated 2,481 commute to occupations outside of the County while 1,129 workers commute into the County. Further, this means that only 340 persons comprising the work force actually work in Forest County. The majority of commuters out of the county work in neighboring Clarion, Venango, and Crawford. Those commuting to Forest County for work are coming from Clarion, Warren, and Jefferson. Wages in Forest County are significantly lower in all industries than what is typically found across the state. It can be further assumed that, on average, wages in rural Forest County are also lower than the average at the National level. This reality makes attracting new, younger employees to the County to both live and work difficult.

Warren County has a nearly identical scenario though the size of the labor force is significantly larger (19,176 people). The table below compares the top employers in the area by comparing data from the fourth quarter in 2014 with the top employers during the 1st quarter of 2018.

2018 Top Employers – 1st Quarter	2020 Top Employers – 4 th Quarter
Blair Payroll LLC	Northwest Bank
Northwest Bank	Warren County School District
Warren County School District	United Refining Company
United Refining Company	State Government
State Government	BLST Operating Company LLC
Warren General Hospital	Warren General Hospital
Whirley Industries, inc.	Walmart Associates Inc.
Rouse Estate	Rouse Estates
Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	Whirley Industries Inc
Superior Tire & Rubber Corporation	Superior Tire & Rubber Corporation

Data Source: Pennsylvania Department of Labor & industry. Source Geography: County.

The number of employers in the area has remained relatively consistent throughout the last decade. There has been one new major employer in the last five years, Targeted Pet Treats, LLC, which was listed as the 13th largest employer in 2018. While it was not one of the top 10 employers in the 4th quarter in 2020 the standing on the list has likely changed in 2021. BLST Operating Company LLC (Bluestem, the parent company for Blair) significantly decreased its' presence in Warren County in 2021 with the closure of the Bluestem distribution center. In April 2021 nearly 300 employees at the distribution center were laid off. Some were given the option to relocate which would mean a loss to the overall population as well as the job.

Another potential loss facing the area in the future could be available jobs in education. In a Warren Times Observer article from May 25, 2021 there was discussion regarding local school taxes due to the increasing budget needs in the face of a decreasing tax base. The school board consensus was that continually increasing the tax was just a temporary band aid as projected enrollment indicates that the district is losing approximately 200 kids per year. Within a decade, the Warren Area High School located in the most populated part of the county, will be graduating less than 100 students each year. Decreasing enrollment and class sizes suggests that within the next decade the school district will need to consolidate in some way so as to better serve the students with available resources. As this occurs; the district as a whole will not need to employ as many people as it does currently.

Wages in Forest County are, on average, slightly higher than adjacent Warren County. This reality is likely due to the major employers being State or federal jobs. In Warren County the wages are lower on average than what is typically recorded for Pennsylvania and in the northwestern region of the state. The discrepancy is significant when the average annual wage in Pennsylvania is \$63,700 and only \$42,588 in Warren County. The suppressed wages and stagnant economy partially explain some of the challenges local employers face when working to attract higher level specialty or professional workers.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development in 2015 provided a breakdown in the number of employees by occupation for Warren County as well as a prediction, based on available data at that time, on the size of the labor force in the year 2020. Looking first at employment, of those working in Warren County in 2015, the largest numbers of jobs were in administrative positions. This occupation was followed by production, sales, management, health services, food service, and education. Comparing the top employers from the time that these predictions were made to the top employers in the 4th quarter of 2020 indicates that very little has changed in terms of where people work. The 2015 predictions regarding the size of the labor force have come to fruition and there has been a decrease in overall labor force. The prediction for Forest County also indicated a decrease in the overall work force which has proved true. Given the age distribution in the area it is likely that the predicted decrease in the labor force is due to older employees leaving the work force as they age and opt to retire. The overall population size for the area has also decreased. Both factors would contribute to the lower number of unemployed persons as this figure is determined by the estimated number of people actively looking for employment. Those who have moved out of the area or retired and left the work force would not be considered unemployed.

Findings from the Northwest Regional Commission Skills Gap Analysis by Thomas P. Miller & Associates backs up these predictions while providing an additional level of detail. Within the section of the report dedicated to Warren County the following statement can be found:

“The largest broad industry sectors in Warren County are Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Transportation & Warehousing. Both Manufacturing and Retail Trade lost a significant number of employees between 2004 and 2009 but have begun to rebound since 2009. Within these broad categories, the largest industries are Warehousing & Storage, Education & Hospitals (Local Government), and Depository Credit Intermediation. Among these, Warehousing & Storage has highest projected growth and should add 170 jobs to the County over the next five years.”

Additionally, the report identified office and administrative support, transportation and material moving, sales and related occupations as the top employment industries in the area. Transportation and material moving are projected to add over 110 jobs to the area. All occupations are predicted to have high annual openings which are most likely due to older employees, which make up a significant portion of the work force, retiring. The older segment of the work force is estimated to account for approximately 6,035 employed persons as of 2014. In the next 10 years it is anticipated that these people will retire and sustainable planning for workforce development in Warren County will be needed. Almost half of the jobs in the area require a high school diploma or equivalent, over one quarter of high demand jobs require a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, and only 20% are low-skill positions. As older workers retiring from these higher skill positions retire a qualified workforce to replace is needed. Currently, in the wake of the pandemic, this scenario is becoming a reality as employers work to recover from Covid related shut down, the work force has decreased, and it is difficult to find qualified individuals to fill empty positions. It is unclear whether or not employers will have an easier time filling available job openings when American Job and Recovery Act benefits such as additional unemployment and stimulus funding expires.

In several meetings spearheaded by the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry, which included Human Resource representatives from major area employers including Ellwood National Crankshaft, Northwest Bank, Warren County School District, Warren General Hospital, McKissock, Betts industries, Targeted Pet Treats, Quick Staff, Rouse Estates, and West Penn Oil Company, the difficulty in filling employment openings had been present prior to the pandemic. This was being seen at all levels. In general, when advertising for a position requiring specific knowledge, skill sets, and education, employers were receiving fewer resumes and of those, even fewer from applicants that met basic job requirements. Prior to the pandemic discussion and efforts were made to recruit people to the area which was also a struggle. When seeking to fill the entry-level positions employers stated that it is increasingly more difficult to find candidates who are able to complete basic math tests, have needed soft skills, can pass a drug test, or do not have a criminal record. The emerging trend is that a large proportion of youth and young adults entering the work force from the 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 year old cohorts increasingly do not possess the skills and/or education needed to be successful in the available job market. This reality is still true post pandemic related shut downs but even fewer people are applying for available openings.

The Northwest Regional Skills Gap Analysis which delved into the employment picture in each county more closely found that Warren County was a net exporter of workers. This meant that an estimated 12,400 people at the time of the report’s publishing travel outside of the county to work while less than 4,000 remain local to work inside the county. This has become a common trend for counties in Northwestern Pennsylvania; particularly for the more rural areas. Of the estimated 12,500 workers employed within Warren County it is believed that approximately 8,800 of those reside in the county. This is equal to 71%. The remaining 29% of the workforce commutes, in general, to Erie and

Venango Counties in Pennsylvania or neighboring Chautauqua County in New York State. It was reported in surveys and social media questions that a common reason beyond the lack of available options for who employees seek employment outside of Warren County was due to wages. Even taking into account the cost of travel; it is more advantageous to pursue employment elsewhere due to higher wages. The minimum wage, for example, is still \$7.25 in Pennsylvania however, those with reliable transportation can work an entry level job in neighboring New York State where the minimum wage is now closer to \$15 per hour. This is a significant income boost for those with lower educational attainment and limited job skills.

Focus group sessions completed as part of the 2015 Skills Gap Analysis identified some key points to further note regarding Warren County. First, there is a negative perception among both parents and students regarding career paths in manufacturing and vocational training. The belief is that a four-year college degree is needed to be successful. However, generational and situational poverty in the area makes it difficult for people to see past their current situation. Potential students do not want to travel and/or have a limited perception as to how widening travel requirements will increase employment opportunities. The low cost of living in the area is one factor influencing the depressed wages which add to difficulty in recruiting professionals. It can also make it difficult to attract those younger adults who grew up in the area and moved away to pursue higher education back to the area. A final observation of focus groups was the lack of soft skills and lower math aptitudes among the work force. The poor soft skills, attendance, punctuality, responsibility for actions, self-motivation, and dependability, are also observed by employers and social service agencies / providers in the area. These observations continue to be true in 2021. There is very little value placed on higher education which would be necessary as older workers who have held positions for many years retire and exit the work force. There are few potential candidates locally that can replace these people. An additional observation to note regarding education and, in particular, pursuing higher education is that many in our target population indicate that cost, lack of support from friends/family, lack of childcare options, feeling unprepared, and lacking local resources were all listed as barriers to higher education. In our 2018 Needs Assessment Survey the impression or reality of those completing the survey was that the cost of living is actually a pressing need / concern for the area. Many also went on to state that their rent / mortgage is too high and often unaffordable so while the outside perception may be that the cost of living in the service area is low; the reality for many is that it is too costly and households consistently struggle to meet all basic needs. These questions have been asked again in 2021. Overall, the answers have remained consistent however, the difficulty in securing affordable housing in the area continues to be a barrier for vulnerable households. At this socioeconomic level, households do not feel like the cost of living is truly that low. In fact, the reality is many jobs for which they are qualified do not pay true living wages and these households are faced with rising housing, food, and utility costs making the possibility of true self-sufficiency out of reach.

There is one Workforce Investment Board (WIB) serving northwest Pennsylvania in accordance with the Workforce Investment Act. Counties served, in addition to Forest and Warren, includes Erie, Venango, Clarion, and Crawford. The WIB directly served both employers and job seekers through the Northwest PA CareerLink, a collaborative system involving partner agencies throughout the six counties served. The role of the physical CareerLink centers was to facilitate communication, provide information (including resumes and job postings), and offer a multitude of assessment, training, and educational services. Beginning in July 2017 multiple physical CareerLink locations closed with the intention of moving to a mobile service delivery model for clients. The only physical CareerLink locations are

in Oil City, PA and Erie, PA. As transportation is often a barrier for those likely to benefit from these services this is a loss for the area. Prior to closing the Warren location clients were able to job search, apply for unemployment benefits, attend training, work with key staff, obtain assistance with vocational training programs, participate in Title I employment programs which included the displaced worker program for those 55 and over, TANF, In-School, and Out-of-School Youth. The only remaining service that was provided via CareerLink which is still utilized by area job seekers and employers is the Job Gateway site. Users can create an account, upload their resume, and apply for employment in a similar fashion to how Indeed.com or other job search sites. Job Gateway is specific for the region. While services are still available to residents of the area; it is felt that many do not access these due to the loss of a physical location. In fact, for an extended amount of time the contact for CareerLink would spend one day each week at the Forest Warren Human Services building to be available for anyone needing employment services. This is now by appointment due to a lack of interest and area job seekers not utilizing the service.

Income | Wages, on average, in Warren and Forest County are lower than in most other areas of Pennsylvania. The following chart showing income levels in Table 14 is a good illustration of this. Shown below is a comparison between Forest County, Warren County, the State of Pennsylvania, and at the national level for the median household, per capita, and average income per earner. As an example, the median household income in Pennsylvania is \$61,744 but in Warren County the average is \$50,250 and even more significant in Forest County with the reported median income of \$39,717. The lower earnings and wages are also illustrated by Table 15 which shows the average and median family income and Table 16 which shows the per capita earnings. In all cases, households and individuals in Warren and Forest Counties earn less than those performing similar jobs in other parts of the state and country. This reality paired with the lack of new employers entering the area, larger employers like the Bluestem Distribution Center leaving the area, and generational poverty are barriers that could prove challenging to overcome.

Table 14: Income Levels

Report Area	Median Household Income	Per Capita Income	Average Income Per Earner
Report Area	No Data	\$26,213	\$35,328
Forest County	\$39,717	\$15,245	\$25,379
Warren County	\$50,250	\$28,230	\$36,759
Pennsylvania	\$61,744	\$34,352	\$46,454
United States	\$62,843	\$34,103	\$48,350

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014-18. Source geography: Tract

Table 15: Median Family Income

Report Area	Total Family Households	Average Family Income	Median Family Income
Report Area	12,158	\$72,831	No Data
Forest County	1,079	\$56,564	\$46,444
Warren County	11,079	\$74,416	\$62,905
Pennsylvania	3,236,352	\$102,124	\$78,521
United States	79,114,031	\$103,863	\$77,263

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-19. Source geography: Tract

Table 16: Per Capita Income

Report Area	Total Population	Total Income (\$)	Per Capita Income (\$)
Report Area	47,069	\$1,233,816,100	\$26,212
Forest County	7,313	\$111,489,400	\$15,245
Warren County	39,756	\$1,122,326,700	\$28,230
Pennsylvania	12,783,977	\$385,267,248,100	\$30,136
United States	324,697,795	\$11,073,131,694,900	\$34,102

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-19. Source geography: Tract

The US Census Bureau uses three types of estimates in looking at income within a designated geographic area such as a country, state, or county. They are the median household, per capita, and average income. Median income is the amount earned by a household at which point half of the households in that area earn more and half earn less. Per capita income is quite different. With this estimate, all income earned by individuals 15 years or older in an area, including wages or salary; net self-employment; interest, dividends, or net rental or royalty income; income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor, or disability pensions; and all other income sources, is divided by the total population. Income that is excluded from this calculation would include capital gains, money from the sale of property, food stamps, public housing subsidies, medical care, employer contributions for individuals, etc.; withdrawal of bank deposits; borrowed funds; tax refunds; exchange of money between relatives living in the same household; gifts and lump-sum inheritances, insurance payments, and other types of lump-sum receipts. The third and final measurement is average income per person. This looks at only earned income, wages, and salary. Current estimates for these data points were provided in Tables 14 through 16. In all cases, the service area lags behind the State of Pennsylvania and national figures in terms of income and earnings. As stated, wages are depressed in this area, poverty is worsening –

particularly generational, and families are fast becoming a very vulnerable segment of the community while struggling repeatedly throughout the year to meet all basic needs. Table 17 (below) further breaks down this reality by showing the median income with and without children across multiple family types.

Table 17: Median Family Income by Family Composition

County	Married Couple Families without Children	Married Couple Families with Children	Single Males without children	Single Males with Children	Single Females without children	Single Females with Children
Forest	\$48,125	\$75,000	\$29,167	\$44,375	\$38,550	\$18,173
Warren	\$66,494	\$77,092	\$62,500	\$32,297	\$44,000	\$25,987
Pennsylvania	\$86,285	\$105,032	\$61,103	\$46,685	\$51,196	\$29,017
National	\$87,825	\$99,977	\$60,918	\$45,116	\$51,144	\$28,993

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

As shown in the table above, not only are households earning a significantly lower median income than their counterparts across the state as a whole and at the national level. The disparity between the median income at the state level and in Forest County for a married couple without children, as an example, is \$48,125 and \$86,285 at the state level. The median income is \$66,194 in Warren County which is still approximately \$20,000 less than what similar household compositions throughout the state are averaging. This has a significant impact on households locally despite the perception that the cost of living is more manageable. Households with children struggle as well and experience a similar disparity in income compared to household compositions of the same type at both state and national levels. In all scenarios households in the service area earn less. In Warren and Forest County, one driving factor behind this reality could be the lack of affordable childcare options and no options for parents who don't have friends or family to cover for second or third shifts at area employers. In fact, childcare and transportation are frequently cited barriers to employment. In some situations this can mean it is challenging to have any job and in other situations it can be the reason for working part time or less hours than is ideal to meet the needs of the household.

The estimated living wage for Warren and Forest County is shown in Table 18. The living wage is the estimated amount needed in order to afford all basic needs. In both Warren and Forest Counties the living wage is estimated as slightly lower than in the more populated and urban areas throughout Pennsylvania. In general, the sentiment is that the service area which includes both Warren and Forest Counties has a low cost of living however when taking into account the lower than average wages and employment struggles our majority of survey respondents listed the cost of living as one of the top 5 issues facing the area. Many households still struggle to find safe, affordable housing and full time employment offering a true living wage with benefits. This has resulted in an increase in families classified as "working poor". This term refers to working families still unable to meet basic needs without some form of assistance including, but not limited to, cash assistance (TANF), WIC for households with children 5 and under, and/or food stamps (SNAP). The figures in Table 18 were compiled using the assumption that in two adult households one adult is staying home with the children, there are no child care costs, and the family only has access to one vehicle. It should be noted that many area employers, including larger employers such as Whirley's Drinkworks, have starting wages that are much

closer to the listed poverty wage rather than a true living wage. Additional wage estimates can be found at <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties> for a scenario where both adults in the household work.

Table 18: County Hourly Living Wage, 2021

County	One Adult	One Adult, One Child	One Adult, Two Children	One Adult, Three Children	Two Adults*	Two Adults, One Child*	Two Adults, Two Children*	Two Adults, Three Children*
Forest								
Living Wage	\$12.28	\$24.86	\$31.07	\$39.53	\$19.83	\$23.85	\$27.26	\$28.91
Poverty Wage	\$6.18	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$14.75
Minimum Wage	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25
Warren								
Living Wage	\$12.57	\$24.64	\$30.68	\$39.14	\$20.13	\$23.79	\$27.21	\$29.03
Poverty Wage	\$6.13	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$8.29	\$10.44	\$12.60	\$14.75
Minimum Wage	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25	\$7.25

Source: Living Wage Calculator compiled by MIT.edu

Additional sources of household income may include Supplemental Security Income, county assistance funding or temporary assistance to needy families (TANF), and food stamps (SNAP). Reporting for the area however, shows a relatively small segment of the total population using these and other mainstream programs. Tables 19 through 23 explore the topics of TANF/General Assistance, Medicaid, and SNAP in greater detail. These are all income eligible programs and speak to the number of households who are unable to meet these needs themselves.

Table 19: Number of Individuals Eligible for County Assistance Funding

Report Area	Total Population	Persons Elig. For Med. Assist	% of Population Eligible	Receiving TANF	% of Population Receiving TANF	Eligible for SNAP	% Eligible for SNAP
Forest	7,321	1,111	15.18%	11	0.15%	677	9.25%
Warren	40,025	9,008	22.51%	233	0.58%	5,743	14.35%
Report Area	47,346	10,119	21.37%	244	0.52%	6,420	13.56%
Pennsylvania	25,568,454	5,660,568	22.14%	296,580	1.16%	3,726,341	14.57%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source geography: Tract.

Overall percentages for those eligible to receive medical assistance, TANF, and SNAP are similar or close to the percentages statewide. This percentage does NOT include those households receiving Social Security benefits which include Social Security Disability (SSD), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Social Security Income (SSI). Many

households in the service area rely solely on Social Security income in some form and are considered low or extremely low income yet do not receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) or general cash assistance. TANF actually, despite popular public perception, does not benefit a significant number of households in the area.

Table 20: Population Receiving Medicaid by Age Group, Percent

County	Under Age 18	Age 18-64	Age 65+
Forest	54.93%	25.30%	7.51%
Warren	36.86%	13.98%	13.91%
Report Area	38.24%	14.68%	12.97%
Pennsylvania	36.56%	15.30%	11.99%
National	38.23%	14.65%	13.76%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source geography: Tract.

In the service area there are, overall, a higher percentage of the total population receiving Medicaid in Forest County as compared with the average in the State of Pennsylvania and a fractionally higher percentage receiving Medicaid in Warren County. Interestingly, there has been a decrease in children relying on Medicaid in both Warren and Forest Counties from reported 2018 percentages yet an increase in the percentage of those under 18 reported at the state level. There was an increase from 2018 for the 18 to 64 range in Forest County and the state but rates remained relatively the same in Warren County. Looking closer at Table 20 where this segment of the total population has been divided by age we can easily see that a high percentage of children in Forest County rely on Medicaid. There is also a higher than average percentage in the 18-64 age grouping (25.30% compared to 15.30% for Pennsylvania). In Warren County the percentage of children is roughly the same as at the state level, slightly lower (approximately 1%) in the 18-64 group than the state, and about 3% more seniors in the 65 and over category who utilize Medicaid.

Data on the number of uninsured reported on in past years showed a high percentage which dropped significantly to a low of 6% being uninsured in the report area. The lowest rate of uninsured persons occurred in the years following 2014 when most aspects of the Affordable Healthcare Act were put into place. In the Community Health Needs Assessment completed by Warren General Hospital and released in 2019 surveys were used to review the socioeconomic realities of the area and the impact on overall community health. When asked about insurance coverage, 4% were uninsured, 38% had Medicare, 38% had private insurance, and Medical Assistance was reported for 17%. Those surveyed seeing Primary Health Network physicians reported that 27% had Medical Assistance and 17% were uninsured. It should be noted that the Warren, PA Primary Health Network location has since closed permanently which is a likely loss for the area; particularly those without insurance. In the survey responses conducted as part of the Community Health Needs Assessment it was very evident that those respondents accessing services at the Primary Health Network had greater socioeconomic barriers which impacted their health and the ability of providers to treat. These included limited financial resources as barriers to care and food opportunities. Overall, this group also had lower graduation rates and /or did not have a GED and had a higher rate of unemployment than what was reported when looking at the entire County population. Last, this surveyed group also reported a diminished ability to read and comprehend health related information and materials. Even with improving trends for health insurance coverage the

observation that the working poor are being lost was an identified environmental factor impacting the overall health of the community. The cost of services, the disappearance of health offerings available to more vulnerable segments of the population, for-profit competition, limited providers accepting medical assistance, and the observation that patients neglect to continue treatment or provided care plans due to costs are all examples of how the more vulnerable socio-economic groups in the service area are being impacted or lost in the system until experiencing health related crisis at which point they may or may not be able to access needed care.

SNAP or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is another indicator of the economic reality of an area. In Table 23 the percentages of households receiving SNAP benefits is shown. The reported percentage is higher in Forest County than both state and national levels as well as neighboring Warren County. In contrast the reported percentage in Warren County were slightly lower than the average for Pennsylvania but slightly higher than at the National level. In 2018, according to Hunger and Poverty in Pennsylvania from Feeding America, there were 4,530 food insecure people in Warren which equates to 11.3%. Of the 11.3%; 31% were above other nutrition program income eligibility thresholds of 185% poverty. There were 12% between 160% and 185% and the remainder were below the SNAP threshold of 160%. In Forest County there were 1,080 food insecure people which equates to 14.7%. Of the total percentage 66% were above the 185% of poverty threshold for income eligibility.

When 2018 survey respondents were asked to rank the top 5 needs within the community the cost of living (as being too high) was ranked as the fourth greatest concern and issue impacting the community. This has a wide ranging impact but essentially supports the stagnant, economic reality described within this assessment where households, particularly more vulnerable cohorts within the population such as families with children, single parents, those with mental health and/or other physical disability, and those households on fixed incomes face difficulty throughout the month in affording all basic necessities. Additional past survey results indicated that the following statements were the top three issues related to nutrition for survey respondents in 2018:

1. Cost of nutritious food items (fresh fruit and vegetables, meats, milk, etc.) is too high.
2. Household does not have enough income to purchase food all month.
3. Household lacks enough food for the month.

The age group identifying these issues most frequently was adults aged 25 to 34 which are those adults likely to have households with children. In 2020, when the pandemic closed down the economy, supply shortages and rising costs of food, particularly meat, was one of the most frequently cited problem. In the first few weeks of the pandemic area food pantries were wiped out and supply shortages at grocery stores impacted residents. This reality exacerbated already stated issues including cost, lack of income, and lack of food. In fact, at the time of this writing, food costs continue to rise and quarantines due to exposure or infection, continue to be a burden for households throughout Warren and Forest Counties.

Table 23: Households Receiving SNAP by Poverty Status (ACS)

	Total Households	Total Households Receiving SNAP	Percent	Income Below Poverty	Income Above Poverty	Family has at least 1 Working Member	Age 60 and Older
Forest County	1,839	302	16.42%	158	144	90	151
Warren County	17,115	2,119	12.38%	913	1,206	1,034	714
Report Area	18,954	2,421	12.77%	1,071	1,350	1,124	865
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	671,089	13.28%	308,607	362,482	319,065	243,704
United States	120,756,048	14,171,567	11.74%	6,707,025	7,464,542	7,619,407	4,796,611

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: County

The final chart in this series relates to free and reduced lunch programs at the local school districts. In both counties, the number of students eligible for and enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program is greater than what is recorded at the state level. In the last decade, as the area experiences a trend of increasing numbers of households in poverty it has also had a corresponding trend of an increasing percentage of enrolled students being eligible for free lunches. Several area school buildings qualified for free lunch for the entire school population regardless of household income due to the percentage of disadvantaged children. Table 24 shows the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2019-2020 and includes public, private, parochial schools, and residential child care institutions. Out of 4,883 children there are 3,095 students eligible. The growing number of eligible students supports the observation that families in the service area are more likely struggle with affording all basic needs than in other areas. This also points toward generational poverty and the reality that the younger adults staying in the area after high school and likely to have children entering the school system are more likely to depend on various programs and services to help them attain all necessities each month as they are more likely to have low levels of educational attainment, difficulty finding a living wage job and keeping that employment, and be part of the growing cohort of “working poor”. Note that the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunches in both Warren and Forest Counties is greater than the percentage statewide.

Further describing this topic in the report area; projections for 2021 food insecurity in Warren and Forest Counties from Feeding America were 19% and 27% of all children in Warren and Forest Counties respectively. Food insecurity refers to those children in households that reported they had limited food or uncertain access to adequate food at some point or multiple points throughout the year. This was supported by focus group discussions which indicated that frequently the family did not have enough money (earned income or SNAP) to acquire food for the entire month prior to the pandemic and supply issues plus rising costs continued this trend. Focus groups also stated that the additional assistance from the stimulus funding and unemployment had helped offset the costs of rising food prices. However, in all focus group discussions participants raised the question of what would happen when the additional

assistance was gone. It was observed that many families had become very reliant on the funding but lack the ability to truly plan ahead. Throughout the pandemic, the school district provided free meals to all enrolled children each day. In addition, children enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade were issued EBT cards sent to families that were pre-loaded with an amount for breakfast and lunch costs each day for all days children were out of school due to the pandemic as a way to ease additional cost burdens on families from children being home.

Table 24: Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch

Report Area	District	Type	Enrollment	Free Lunch Eligible	Free Lunch Enrollment	Reduced Lunch Eligible	Reduced Lunch Enrollment	Free and Reduced Lunch Enrollment
Forest	Forest Area School District	A	418	317	75.84%	0	0%	75.84%
Forest	Taylor Diversion Programs, Inc.	D	34	34	100%	0	0%	100%
Warren	Tidioute Community CS	A	305	264	86.56%	0	0%	86.56%
Warren	Warren County School District	A	4,126	2,395	58.05%	85	2.06%	60.11%
Report Area	No data	No data	4,883	3,010	61.64%	85	1.74%	63.38%
Statewide	No data	No data	1,744,344	899,518	51.57%	47,252	2.71%	54.28%

Data Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Source geography: County.

In summary, wages across Warren and Forest County are low and have stagnated compared to wages at state and national levels. While it is true that the cost of living in this area is less, people are still hard pressed to secure employment where they can earn a living wage, full time hours, and benefits thus not requiring some additional type or form of assistance. Families with children, even those with two wage earners, appear to face greater financial strain while working to attain all of the basic necessities for the household. This helps explain, for example, why both the percentage of those living in poverty as well as receiving free or reduced lunches continues to rise while unemployment levels typically, have been relatively low.

The top employers and types of industry present in the service area have remained largely unchanged. There is nothing to indicate that new business or job opportunities with the potential to create a large number of new, well-paying employment options will move into either Warren or Forest Counties. With the aging population, more skilled jobs and professional positions are becoming available for younger age cohorts as older workers and those from the baby boomer generation retire and exit the workforce. While this creates some opportunity, it is equally as likely that qualified replacements for these openings are not already living in the service area and qualified replacements would need to be recruited. This is the reality that employers in the area were encountering prior to the COVID-19 pandemic when advertising for openings and found that they are unable to attract qualified applicants. This was made clear at meetings orchestrated by the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry in 2018 where discussions have

revolved around recruitment, education, and workforce development as well as other issues impacting local employers. Recall that area employers had been hard pressed to find qualified employees who have the required level of education, experience, skill set, and can pass a drug test. Secondary to these issues; it was difficult to find employees who are self-motivated and genuinely want to work. These realities have only worsened in time and in particular post pandemic related shut downs. As restrictions lifted in spring 2021; area employers began to resume pre-shutdown hours and activities which resulted in a large amount of job postings. We know from looking at the unemployment rate which fell in connection to loosening restrictions that many did return to work however; the rate was still higher than the pre-pandemic low of just under 5%. Even with many returning to work there were permanent job losses like those at Blair / Bluestem during 2020 and 2021. Employers throughout the area, much like those across the country, continue to experience staff shortages and difficulty filling positions which negatively impacts the employer's ability to provide the same level of services, maintain former business hours, and recover financially from lost profits.

HOUSING | A lack of suitable affordable housing in the area is a common and continuously growing concern among clients, social service agencies, community stakeholders, and organizations. This is likely due to a combination of factors which include aging housing stock, the cost of upkeep to maintain older homes, limited subsidized housing options, lack of living wage jobs which make affordable housing difficult to secure long term, and an aging population more likely to be living on fixed incomes or no longer living independently. An emerging trend over the last decade is a growing number of property owners who live out-of-state and rent the homes to local families. In these instances two things tend to occur: houses are not maintained as they should be and rent is based on Fair Market Rates which are often too high for lower income individuals and families. Additionally, the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program has been closed to new applicants for the majority of the last 5 years. Very occasionally the list will open and one or two people from the waiting list will receive a voucher. In Forest County, a location known for recreation and outdoor enthusiasts, many of the vacant properties are not for rent. This is usually due to the properties being designated as seasonal or vacation homes for people living outside of the county. This may include hunting camps and smaller homes or cabins.

Survey respondents in 2018 overwhelmingly indicated that rent/mortgage costs were too high. The second highest need based on survey respondents was a lack of adequate and affordable housing. When asked for in depth about housing issues facing the service area the top three identified concerns were the cost of rent and/or mortgage being unaffordable to the family, inability to save needed funds for a security deposit, and that the housing is in need of repairs that the household cannot afford. In 2021 focus group discussions listed the lack of livable and affordable housing as one of the biggest struggles prior to the pandemic. In the midst of the pandemic the lack of affordable housing became very clear – particularly for families or households needing more than 2 bedrooms. The following tables provide a clearer understanding of the housing situation in both Warren and Forest Counties.

Table 25 provides information on the number of housing units and the median year for when the structure was built. The median age for a house in Warren County is listed as 1959 which is a few years older than the median age in Pennsylvania and nearly 20 years older than the average in the United State. Table 27 provides greater understanding of the age of housing stock within the service area. Older homes can be more costly to maintain, keep in habitable condition, repair, and heat efficiently. This is especially true for renters and homeowners living on a fixed budget. This could also apply to homes occupied by those working yet still struggling to meet basic needs for the household.

Additionally, the growing trend of out of town property owners who rent to local families has corresponded with apartments or rental houses in need of maintenance and repair in order to remain safe.

Just over 54% of the homes in Warren County were built prior to 1960. The national average is just shy of 30%. Due to age and the lack of regular maintenance and upkeep for many homes in the area weatherization is a highly sought after program. However, problems persist with large numbers of homes being deferred due to water infiltration issues or other circumstances which need to be addressed prior to weatherization. This creates a situation where often, you have a homeowner who is unable to do the work needed to make the home eligible due to cost and the condition of the home continues to deteriorate while energy costs continue to rise. The decreasing overall population makes the demand for new housing construction low to non-existent while the increasing situation of generational poverty, low / stagnant wages, and increasing numbers of working poor increases the demand for affordable housing as available housing stock continues to age and fall into disrepair.

Table 25: Housing Units Age

Report Area	Total Housing Units	Median Yr Built	Built After 2000	Built 1980-1999	Built 1960 - 1979	Built Before 1960
Forest County	8,608	1972	735	1,525	3,936	2,412
Warren County	23,629	1959	1,729	4,156	5,748	11,996
Report Area	32,237	No data	2,464	5,681	9,684	14,408
Pennsylvania	5,693,314	1963	637,398	1,091,801	1,281,988	2,682,127
United States	137,428,986	1978	26,276,812	37,527,914	35,404,384	38,219,876

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source geography: County.

As shown in the above table there was a significant drop in construction of homes between pre-1960 and 1960-1979. Very few homes in the area have been built after 2000 and the increasing incidence of generational poverty, an aging population, working poor, low wages, out-of-town landlords, and growing population of low-income renters has resulted in a situation where many homes, and especially older homes, simply aren't maintained. This makes it difficult for the homes to qualify for weatherization or other programs under that umbrella which may help address energy costs. The Agency's observations for the service area, as well as adjacent Venango County which the Agency also provides weatherization services to, indicates an increasing the number of homes with issues that need to be addressed but the household lacks the means to complete needed repairs / updates. In total, 77% of all homes in Warren County and 73% of those in Forest County were built prior to 1979. When reviewing the number of homes in the area with one or more substandard conditions the report area has a lower percentage than counties located in the eastern half of the state. However, when looking at homes lacking complete plumbing, kitchen, and telephone service the percentages for the service area are higher than state and national levels. This could be due to the abundance of older homes who are more likely to be in need of massive rehabilitation / updates in order to remain habitable, out of town landlords, and the cost of repairs to homeowners living on fixed or low incomes.

Table 26: Substandard Housing

County	Total Occupied Housing Units	Occupied Housing Units with One or More Substandard Conditions	Percent Occupied Housing Units with One or More Substandard Conditions
Forest County	1,839	393	21.73%
Warren County	17,115	3,132	18.3%
Pennsylvania	5,119,249	No Data	No Data
National	122,802,852	No Data	No Data

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

Table 27: Substandard Housing (Households Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities)

County	Total Occupied Housing Units	Housing Units Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities	Housing Units Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities, Percent
Forest County	1,839	31	1.69%
Warren County	17,115	182	1.06%
Pennsylvania	5,119,249	19,276	0.37%
National	122,802,852	461,279	0.38%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

Table 28: Substandard Housing (Households Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities)

County	Total Occupied Housing Units	Housing Units Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	Housing Units Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities, Percent
Forest County	1,839	1,048	12.17%
Warren County	17,115	2,115	8.95%
Pennsylvania	5,119,249	49,170	0.96%
National	122,802,852	1,024,314	0.83%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau collected as part of the American Community Survey 76.9% of the population lives in owner-occupied home. The median value is \$98,000 which translates into a median mortgage cost of \$984 per month. In Forest County there is an even greater percentage of 83.9% living in owner-occupied homes. The median home value is \$95,900 which is slightly less than Warren County and translates into a median mortgage cost of \$846 per month. Compared to census data from both 2000 and 2010 the overall number of homeowners versus renters has stayed relatively steady.

Aging housing needs to be properly maintained to ensure that it is safe and healthy. This is not typically the case in the service area where many homes have not and are not being maintained in the way that they should be. This leads to a greater problem as homes are condemned and no longer habitable after years of neglect. Additionally, this means that there are likely many households within our target population who live in less than ideal places. This may be particularly true in Forest County where it is common for families or individuals to live in hunting camps that may lack many typical amenities, adequate insulation, space, and so on. While they do have shelter; there may still be health and safety concerns impacting the individual or family. As an example, the Agency in recent years had noticed a lack of accessible housing options for more vulnerable populations and specifically, those who had a physical disability as well as a serious mental health condition. This has led to an effort by the Agency to continually add units to the permanent, supportive housing programs which meet all current ADA guidelines and can be utilized by a client who would otherwise struggle to find suitable and affordable housing. This has been done through a combination of new construction projects as well as rehabilitation / renovation of existing properties within the service area.

Tables 29 provides insight into the housing vacancy rate. In the service area, the vacancy rate for “other” is significantly higher than the reported rate nationally or at the state level. In Warren County it is 24% compared to 8% at the State level and an even larger percentage when comparing Forest County with the rest of the state. Forest County’s rate for “other” vacancies is 77%. This tells us that there is a larger than average pool of vacant properties however, they are not available for rent for some reason. Other vacancies is described as seasonal, recreational, or occasional use properties. This could also be due to housing which has fallen into disrepair and is not habitable. Due to the prominent and growing need for affordable, safe, permanent housing in the service area it could be beneficial to identify these vacancies and see if they could be repurposed to meet this need. In Forest County, where the vacancy rate is 77% compared to 7% at the state level, there is an additional factor that should be considered when looking at “other” vacancies. Forest County is marketed as a recreational area and boasts a large number of housing units due to the volume of temporary, recreational, or vacation units heavily used in summer and for hunting seasons. Many of these units may only be used for 1 to 2 months out of the year and are therefore considered vacant in compiling the data for the American Community Survey. In Warren County, the vacant housing listed as “other use” may be recreational in nature but could also be bank owned property, condemned, or otherwise inhabitable as homeless or nearly homeless families and individuals often find that there are not a lot of available rental units in the area. This became an even greater issue at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as those in need of housing had extremely limited options available to them due to the lack of rentals and the eviction moratorium.

Table 29: Housing – Vacancy Rate

County	Total Housing Units	Vacant Non-Rental	Vacant Non-Rental Rate	Vacant Rental	Vacant Rental Rate	Vacant Other	Vacant Other Rate
Forest County	8,608	40	0.46%	85	0.99%	6,644	77.18%
Warren County	23,629	331	1.40%	381	1.61%	5,802	24.55%
Pennsylvania	5,693,314	85,783	1.51%	114,003	2.00%	440,422	7.74%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: County

In Table 29 it is important to note that there are more available rental units in both Warren and Forest Counties than at the state and national reporting levels. This is likely due to a culmination of factors already listed which all impact the health of the housing market in an area. These factors include, but are not limited to, rents becoming unaffordable for low-income and vulnerable households, declining population, stagnant wages, no new industry / business entering the area, and units not meeting the needs of the household. In the 2018 Community Needs Assessment, 52% of survey respondents indicated that it was difficult to find an apartment that was affordable, accommodated the needs of the family, and had a location that also met the needs of the household. Location was often a factor due to transportation barriers that made downtown rental locations ideal. The Agency, through working with homeless and vulnerable households, has found that it is increasingly more difficult to find 2 or 3 bedroom options that are affordable for the family. Further complicating this issue is the fact that transportation for many families in the area is also an issue creating high demand for locations near employment opportunities. The majority of employers are located in and around the downtown areas making apartments in town where there is easier access to public transportation routes or locations are within walking distance to employers highly desirable locations. As a result, rental prices in areas like downtown Warren, have increased and for low-income individuals and families can be out of reach leading to continuous housing instability. Wages have not increased in the area and are already lower than average across the state and nation. For families, particularly lower income or otherwise vulnerable populations within the community, finding housing that is safe, affordable, large enough, and in a location that will work for other needs (i.e. employment) continues to become an increasingly difficult task. Additionally, in a small, rural area like Warren and Forest County, there are limited landlords and property managers. Families and/or individuals can quickly find that they have become marked as problem tenants making it even more difficult to find and secure permanent housing solutions.

The covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing issues with rental housing; particularly in the more populated Warren County. Due to the eviction moratorium; there were very few units available for rent. Tenants were staying put and a portion of those were not able to pay their rent. Landlords during this time found themselves in situations with non-paying tenants and increased financial burden. While rental assistance did eventually alleviate the financial strain for landlords there have been noticeably fewer available rentals since the onset of the pandemic. This has become a crisis for families in particular as there are very few, and often no, units with more than 1 bedroom available. During this same time the cost of homes for purchase increased and has led to inflated home prices putting the possibility of

purchasing a home even further out of reach. These issues were typically the first which came to mind in various focus group discussions as the pandemic made the need for affordable housing clear.

Housing burden is assessed by the American Community Survey on a continual basis. Housing burden is a term that applies to both renters and owners and refers to the percentage of household income being used for rent or mortgage. Data regarding the housing burden in the service area is shown in Table 30 for renters and Table 31 for Owners. Paying more than 30% of the household income is considered a “housing-cost burden” and is a likely indicator that the household struggles financially to meet all basic needs. When assessing this data point we find that the service area has a lower percentage of renters carrying a housing-cost burden than reported at state and national levels. This is not to say that rent, mortgage, or other housing related cost is not an issue. In fact, focus groups and survey responses indicate that finding affordable housing is one of, if not the, top issue in the area for low-income and vulnerable households. This is only becoming more apparent as rental costs and utilities increase. While hourly rates for area employers has increased, particularly in 2021, it is not enough to keep pace with rising costs of living. When considering Table 31 note that a larger number of owners do not have a mortgage compared with the number that do. This is true in both Warren and Forest County and could be due to the largest cohort within the population being those individuals 65 years of age and older who could have already paid off their homes. As this group continues to age there will likely be available housing for sale but it is unclear what the likely pool of future buyers will be.

Table 30: Housing-Cost Burden (Renters)

County	Total Housing Units	Occupied Units Paying Rent	30 Percent or More of Income Paying Rent	Percent of Renters Spending 30 Percent or More Income with Rent
Forest	1,839	296	101	34.12%
Warren	17,115	3,958	1,251	31.61%
Report Area	18,954	4,254	1,352	31.78%
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	1,572,128	692,584	44.05%
National	120,756,048	43,481,667	20,002,945	46.00%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

Table 31: Housing-Cost Burden (Owners)

County	Total Housing Units	Owners with Mort.	30 Percent or More Income with Mort.	Percent of Owners Spending 30 Percent or More Income with Mort.	Owners without Mortgage	30 Percent or more of Income without Mortgage	Percent of Owners Spending 30% or More of Income without Mortgage
Forest	1,839	498	170	34.14%	1,045	87	8.33%
Warren	17,115	6,200	1,154	18.61%	6,957	687	9.87%
Report Area	18,954	6,698	1,324	19.77%	8,002	774	9.67%
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	2,092,266	520,428	24.87%	1,388,712	204,340	14.71%
National	120,756,048	48,416,627	13,400,012	27.68%	28,857,754	3,846,938	13.33%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

To summarize, the housing stock in the service area is older than that typically found in other areas of the state as well as nationally. Older houses present a unique set of challenges and are often more expensive to properly maintain as well as heat/cool due to inadequate insulation, drafts from settlement, non-insulated windows, and other myriad reasons. While the housing cost burden is not out of line than what other areas experience, the wages earned in this area are also not as high as what one might earn outside of the two counties. Finding safe, affordable, and suitable housing is a frequently cited problem in the area and has only become more challenging throughout the pandemic. A lack of affordable housing options in the area has steadily grown to become a major issue. The housing issues faced by an increasing number of households is the result of several interrelated problems. The first is a lack of subsidized and supportive housing options which adequately meets the demand. The community is plagued by generational poverty, population decline, and little to no economic growth. People struggle to find and keep affordable housing which is safe and meets the needs of the family. Those with additional barriers such as a mental health diagnosis, disability, or addiction are further burdened. The local Housing Authority stated the following in 2015:

“There has been a noticeable increase within the last three years in housing for young/disabled persons. A 19% increase has been observed at The Towers (subsidized housing). The primary disability identified is mental health with physical disabilities representing less than 5% of those being housed.”

A long waiting list for subsidized housing regularly forces low-income individuals and families, regardless of situation, to seek out and obtain non-subsidized housing. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program is difficult to access due to a lack of vouchers. The list was opened briefly within the last 2 years when additional vouchers became available. It is, however, closed once more which forces people to find housing without having the voucher to subsidize rental costs. Wait list times at the Housing Authority for low-income individuals and families can vary and has, in the recent year, been as fast as 4 months or as long as 7 months. Available units at the Housing Authority tend to be few

and far between. Clients can only be put on the waiting list if they have a good rental history, clean background check, and do not already owe the Housing Authority for back rent or damages.

When pursuing non-subsidized options, finding suitable housing that meets the needs of the household and remains affordable can become an insurmountable challenge which can result in a household continuously facing eviction and homelessness. This is particularly true for the more vulnerable members of our community such as those with a mental health diagnosis, physical disability, and/or chemical dependency. As stated in the section describing the area population, both Warren and Forest Counties have a higher percentage of persons with documented disabilities including mental illness and/or physical disability than at either the state or national levels which places further strain on an already taxed system. The average rent for a one bedroom apartment typically falls between \$550-\$600 and \$650-\$750 for a two bedroom. In most situations, utilities are not included in the rent. This reality can add an additional barrier for families or individuals unable to establish new utility service due to poor history or large balances still owed. Fair market rates for the area include utilities and are \$594 for a one bedroom and \$724 for a two bedroom in Warren County. In Forest County the rates are slightly different at \$541 (1BR) and \$719 (2BR) respectively. The lack of available options creates additional problems when struggling families have left their housing owing money to the landlord or on bad terms. In a small area where there are a limited number of options, a family can quickly find itself struggling to secure adequate housing at an affordable cost due to a negative reputation with the limited number of landlords/property managers in the service area. While on the surface rent in the area is cheaper than most other areas, particularly more urban or suburban areas, respondents from surveys, our own observation, and focus groups have indicated that a growing number of working poor and low-income households find that the cost of living is too high.

Education | There are two school districts within the service area. The Warren County School District is the second largest in the state in terms of geographic area. There are four high schools, five middle schools, and six elementary schools serving the area. The school district was ranked in the bottom 50% of all 614 public school districts throughout Pennsylvania in 2017-2018 based largely on reading and math proficiency score. The district's graduation rate has decreased from 91% to 88% over five school years. Neighboring Forest County has a school district comprised of two junior/senior high schools and two elementary schools. In Warren, the district uses 4 distinct attendance areas: North, Central, East, and West. There is also a Learning Enrichment Center available to gifted students with enrichment programs for those who qualify. In addition, the Warren County School District also offers to students in grades 10 through 12 the opportunity to attend either a morning or afternoon session at the Warren County Career Center which is the area's vocational-technical school which seeks to provide students with hands-on training and technical instruction with the intent of preparing them for local industries. In terms of enrollment, both school districts have small class sizes and total numbers of enrolled students. This is not atypical in more rural locations like Warren and Forest Counties however it is worth noting that both counties have experienced declining enrollment as the number of children and families in the area continues to slowly decrease.

The total public school enrollment, as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, for Kindergarten through High School in Warren County was 4,117 for the 2019-2020 school year and 4,009 for the 2020-2021 school year. This marks a decrease from the 5,240 enrolled in the 2013 and 2014 school year. This also represents a nearly 50% decrease from the 8,301 enrolled in Kindergarten through grade 12 as reported by the US Census, 2000. The

Department of Education predicts that there will be 3400 students enrolled by the 2030-2031 school year. This continued, steady decline paired with a decreasing tax base unable to support the school infrastructure, physical buildings, and staffing are all issues the district will need to address in the next few years as the current model is unsustainable. Table 32, shown below provides insight into early education and services for the 2015-2016 school year. There were 2,123 children aged 0-4 in the service area. This breaks down to 64 children ages 0-2 and 73 children ages 3-4 in Forest County and 1,152 children ages 0-2 and 834 children ages 3-4 in Warren County. From that total, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reported that 411 children ages 3-4 were served by early childhood education program. Additionally 222 children ages 0-2 received services. Children and families account for a significant part of the area’s declining population. Projections indicate a continued decline in enrollment as the number of children and families continues to decrease across the service area.

Data from Forest County shows similar trends in declining enrollment as the overall population of school age children continues to decrease. Unlike Warren County, there are no private schools in Forest County as there is not a population to support one. In 2016-2017 there were a total of 447 students enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is reporting a total of 396 students enrolled county wide for the 2020-2021 school year and projects that by 2030-2031 there will be 298. While there is not a dramatic drop you can note the continued decline in the number of students enrolled. This reality, when taking into consideration the number of buildings that are maintained and utilized as part of the school districts, staffing, overhead, and student transportation costs coupled with a declining tax base creates a situation that can no longer be ignored as changes will need to occur. In both the Warren and Forest County School Districts over 50% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. Further, in Warren County, 22% are receiving special education services which is 4% higher than the state average. This is an added challenge faced by the district. Forest County School District has similar statistics with 19% receiving special education services.

Table 32: Early Childhood Programming and Head Start Participation

	Children Ages 0-2	Children Ages 3-4	Served Ages 0-2	Served Ages 3-4
Forest County	64	73	10	31
Warren County	1,152	834	212	380
Pennsylvania	418,384	299,039	97,986	138,445

Data Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Source geography: County

Observations from the Special Education Plan Report (7.1.2019-6.30.2022) by the Warren County School District supports the observations made by the Warren Head Start program regarding an observed increase in mental health and disruptive behaviors in children that require additional services which may include, but are not limited to, an IEP. It is unclear whether the pandemic, virtual schooling, and shut down will have impacted this by even further increasing the observed number of students with mental health and disruptive behaviors beyond the norm. Within the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card the following statement can be found: “The district has engaged in ongoing evaluation of needs at Youngsville Elementary Middle School and Warren Area Elementary Center in response to the increase in mental

health and behavioral needs of our children.” Overall enrollment and student population has decreased 18.642% since 2007-2008 while the special education enrollment has increased by 3.5% across the number of total enrolled. This leads to already referenced challenges for future planning and points toward some of the challenges being faced by families within the target population. This has been observed by front line staff when working closely with families in housing and Head Start programs in particular. In some cases, the reality of the household’s situation and continuous cycle of crisis can be the catalyst impacting the child. In other cases, the child’s challenges can be an added stressor for a household with limited resources.

The following list has been taken from the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card and indicates the steps taken by the district to address the needs of the students at the elementary level. In particular, these interventions which are actively being implemented in the current school year are in response to the increased need for special education services for the growing number of children attending the central attendance area (Warren Area Elementary Center) and Youngsville Elementary Middle School. It can be anticipated that, based on the current trend, these services will later expand to some degree into Sheffield and Eisenhower Elementary schools.

1. Behavior support specialist (contracted by the school district from the Achievement center) working with the teacher and students on behavior and classroom management strategies.
2. District instructional coach providing behavior and instructional support to the classroom teacher.
3. CSBBH (Beacon Light) mental health support to individual students.
4. Additional full time teacher added to the classroom for a period of time to support student behavioral needs.
5. Building and district level administrative support for the classroom teacher and students.
6. Dean of Students actively working with students individually, small group, and classroom.
7. Check-in, check-out with school counselors, Dean of Students for individual students who need of additional behavior support.
8. School counselor provides weekly classroom lessons regarding social skills/appropriate behavior.
9. Child Study Team meetings to develop positive behavior intervention plans to support both behavioral and academic needs of individual student.
10. Special Education screenings and evaluations conducted; supports put in place for qualifying students.
11. SWPBIS lessons taught to every classroom in the school regarding building procedures and behavior expectations.

For younger children, ages 3 to 4, the school district coordinates services with the Intermediate Unit #5 Early Intervention program as children make the transition into Kindergarten. Services identified in Individual Education Plans (IEP) are tailored to the needs of each child and are typically provided by staff at the Warren Intermediate Unit #5. An IEP could include Speech/Language Support, Occupational and/or Physical Therapy, Assistive Technology,

Transportation, or other identified services within the IEP. Children requiring intervention prior to pre-school age can be referred to the Birth to Three Early Intervention Program offered through Forest-Warren Health & Human Services. Services are generally identified via the child's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and may include, but are not limited to, special instruction, speech, physical, and occupational therapy. Often, these types of services are provided in the home or at a day care setting. Information on the number of children accessing services through the Birth to Three Early Intervention Program and the Intermediate Unit #5 Early Intervention Program can be found in tables 37 and 38. While the number of children referred for Early Intervention have been higher the last three reporting years; it is not significantly higher. The Warren County Head Start program is the largest early childhood education provider in the area and has observed a noticeable increase in the number of children who are referred for assessment and potentially services based on classroom observation. In keeping with the same trend identified at the grade school level; the program is observing a rising number of children with disruptive behaviors and/or mental health issues. One identified issue in trying to proactively address this trend is the wait time between when a child is referred for assessment and potential intervention and when the assessment actually takes place. At times the wait has been several months before a child can even be assessed which can create further issues for children who would greatly benefit from intervention.

In an effort to counteract the trend of increasing numbers of children with emotional disturbance, disruptive behaviors, and mental health the Head Start program implemented Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS). This approach integrates classroom practices supported by coordinators and administration which include preventative and responsive approaches that can be used with the class as a whole or intensified to support a smaller group or even individual students. Teachers and classroom aides are provided with needed supports to ensure implementation in the classroom while regular collection and assessment of data allows for fluid decision-making as patterns, strengths, and needs are identified. The PBIS model allows the teacher and proactive classroom management to change, adapt, and flex to meet the needs of the students and create a wholly more positive and productive atmosphere. The Head Start program also introduced and began implementing PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) into the classrooms several years ago. This strategy is integrated directly into the classrooms and taught from the first day of class in an effort to enhance areas of social-emotional development including self-control, self-esteem, friendships, and interpersonal problem solving while working to reduce aggression and other behavioral problems. Since implementing the program has observed the same trends in the number of students identified as potentially needed intervention or services however, the proactive implementation of PBIS and PATHS has resulted in a decrease in challenging behaviors resulting in more positive learning environments. The program makes every effort to seamlessly transition children into Kindergarten however, services and interventions which were in place throughout PreK are not always carried through and begin the first day of Kindergarten.

In the 2020 to 2021 school year, the Head Start program in Warren County also created a new position to coordinate mental health and emotional support needs for enrollees. Due to the increasing numbers of children presenting with this issue as well as the delay in receiving services until months after a referral has been made; this position was created to identify children, advocate, and work with families to ensure evaluation and interventions happen faster for the overall well-being of the child.

Table 33: B-3 Special Education Services in Warren County, 2011-2018

School Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
# of Children	143	138	161	132*	149 (active) & 18 (tracking)	161 (active) & 24 (tracking)	159 (active) & 25 (tracking)

Source: Warren-Forest Counties Head Start; Forest-Warren Human Services Early Intervention Program

The Warren Head Start program, the sole Head Start program within the two county service area, has made additional observations regarding the Special Education needs within their particular target population of 3 and 4 year olds. On average, at the onset of the school year there are typically 10-15% of enrolled students with an identified problem whom have been professionally diagnosed with a disability. However, there has been an observed trend of an increasing number of children who may not have a diagnosis but who do have challenging behaviors requiring more individualized instruction and / or interventions throughout the school day. In the 2016 to 2017 school year almost 8% of enrolled children started the school year with an IEP in place but 16% had one in place by the end of the school year. In the 2017 to 2018 school year 11% of enrolled students had an IEP prior to enrollment. An additional 16 children were referred for services and had IEPs in place before that school year ended. This resulted in a total of 18% of all enrolled children. The most recent school year, 2020-2021, 20% of the enrolled students were eligible to receive special education or related services and had individualized plans (IEPs) established. It is becoming increasingly common that once the school year begins, challenging behaviors are being identified and additional children are being diagnosed with a disability requiring Special Education services. Local mental health providers can be accessed by the family for children lacking an IEP but who have been identified as having a challenging behavior. However, it should be noted that focus group discussions and surveys revealed that mental health services, even with a referral, are difficult to access due to long wait times. In some instances, recommended providers such as Sunrise Collaborative in Warren, PA, are no longer accepting new patients on their wait list due to the length.

Forest County has no typical preschools. There is a K4 and IU6 program offered through the school district. The IU6 program of Forest County, similar to IU5 in Warren County, had no children enrolled for the 2014-2015 school year. Subsequent years have seen low enrollment as well. In the 2013 – 2014 school year, there were 4 children enrolled and therefore, typical 3-year-olds were being brought into the classroom in a reverse mainstream process. This is the result of significantly lower numbers than what was reported in January of 2014. The data collected for the 2014-2015 school year indicated that there were 30 less students requiring services. The K4 program also moved 3-year-olds into the classroom to bring the total class size to 18 students. This pattern has persisted and will likely continue as there is no reason to believe that the area will experience an influx of new residents due to location and lack of employment opportunities. Due to the low numbers of students, those requiring services are transported to North Clarion.

Educational attainment for the area is low which can have long term negative effects on the service area work force and the ability of households to be self-sufficient in an area with little to no economic growth, stagnant wages, and few opportunities for low education / low skill workers. Table 34 provides information on the level of educational attainment in the services area. It is calculated for persons over 25 and averages data collected between 2015 and 2019. The area, when combined, reports that 8.8% of adults over age 25 do not have a high school diploma which is

less than the nearly 12% nationally and 9.48% statewide. When breaking this number down, however, we find that the percentage in Forest County is substantially higher at 17% while Warren County is 7.11%. A more eye-opening data point is the number of adults who ONLY have a high school diploma. At the national level this is true for 26.96% of adults and 34.59% in all of Pennsylvania. In Warren County, 45.44% of adults over 25 and in Forest County 57% of adults over 25 have only a high school education. This is much higher in both counties than at either the state or national level and is a contributor to the increasing generational poverty, “working poor”, and lack of new, good paying jobs as there is not a significant and skilled workforce to support new employers. Further, existing employers have cited more and more frequently the challenge of finding qualified, experienced candidates to fill positions above entry level and that require a college degree. In Forest County there is a smaller percentage of the population with college degrees than at any other level. In Warren County, there is a greater percentage of adults with two-year college degrees however, there is a smaller percentage of adults with Bachelors or graduate/professional degrees than both state and national levels. While this reality of low educational attainment has a lasting and negative impact on the service area; it also lends weight to the belief that those youth who graduate and pursue a college degree are not returning to the area to work upon graduation which, over time, has created an increasingly unskilled and less educated work force. This also has impacts to the health and self-sufficiency of the household. The inmate population at the State Correctional Institute – Marienville may skew the data points in Forest County. In particular, it may be falsely inflating the percentage of people without a high school diploma.

Table 34: Educational Attainment

County	Over Age 18 and no HS Diploma	No High School Diploma	High School Only	Some College	Associates	Bachelors	Graduate or Prof.
Report Area	9.77%	8.80%	47.49%	16.74%	9.41%	11.51%	6.05%
Forest County	18.37%	17.04%	57.43%	13.47%	3.99%	5.14%	2.94%
Warren County	8.02%	7.11%	45.44%	17.41%	10.53%	12.82%	6.69%
Pennsylvania	9.77%	9.48%	34.69%	15.93%	8.47%	19%	12.43%
National	10.07%	11.99%	26.96%	20.42%	8.48%	19.78%	12.36%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source geography: Tract

The dropout rate for both Warren and Forest Counties is lower than average at under 2% with the exception of Warren Area High School. Most recent data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicate that the drop out rate has increased slightly to 2.44% from past reporting years. This could be due to shifting demographics in the central population area. Data from the most recent graduating class, which includes charter school information shows the total number of students within both school districts who move on to pursue post-secondary education at the collegiate level. It should be noted that the average for the entire state is 61.69%. In Forest County, which has an exceptionally small graduating class that ultimately skews the number 39% of those graduating in 2019-2020 school year opted to pursue college. In Warren County, 51% of the graduating class planned to pursue college degree programs. In reviewing the data it seems likely that the area will continue to see a growing population of people entering the work force without a college education. In fact, the Warren County School District recently invested in

expanding options at the VOTECH (Warren County Career Center) to focus on trades that can be utilized by remaining area employers. Due to lower wages and lack of well paying, professional level jobs found in the area, it further seems likely that young, high school graduates who do leave the area to pursue college degrees are less likely to return to Warren or Forest Counties for employment upon graduation.

Further complicating the issue; the growing generational poverty in the area has led to an apathetic attitude toward education. Pursuing a college degree is not valued or encouraged by a growing number of families. In instances where a graduating senior is interested there seems to be ever present barriers of not having support from the family unit when they are at college, lack of funds, and no or limited transportation. Survey responses supported this observation with the following being listed as the top barriers to education:

1. Lack of tuition money and unwillingness to obtain student loans.
2. Lack of transportation.
3. Lack of support from friends and family.
4. Feeling unprepared for college. Graduates from the area high schools and parents have both reported not being at the expected level in subjects; even if the student had been in advanced classes. Without strong support at home it is often difficult for students to continue leaving them feeling overwhelmed and frustrated.

Childcare and Early Childhood Education | Data provided by the Department of Human Services' Early Learning Resource Center serving both Warren and Forest Counties indicates that during the 2018-2019 school year there are currently 151 children in Warren County who are receiving a subsidy. There are only 4 children in Forest County. This is partially due to the smaller population of children and that there are no approved providers. The subsidy provided by the Early Learning Resource Center can only be used for child care at an approved facility. In past years, families had been able to utilize the subsidy for friends / family however, this changed in 2016 and was no longer an option. This creates a barrier for families as openings at registered and approved providers are limited and even more so if you need care for an infant. According to the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children only 44% of child care capacity / providers in Warren County meet high quality standards. There are no high quality providers in Forest County. Currently, there is not a waiting list for either Warren or Forest County. However, in survey responses, child care availability / options was the third highest ranked need identified by 126 survey responses. The pandemic and other factors have impacted the childcare industry creating additional strain and barriers for parents needing this service. Compared to the 2018-2019 school year, across 9 counties served, there were 300 less children needing a subsidy. This is the result of multiple factors including family members not returning to the work force, fewer available slots at existing childcare centers due to COVID restrictions, and difficulty finding and retaining qualified employees.

Other comments pertaining to child care which ranked high as a need / priority included:

1. I cannot find child care during the hours I need for employment (no providers in the area who will care for children during second or third shift).
2. I cannot find affordable child care that would allow me to work.

3. I cannot find affordable child care so that I could pursue further education.

According to the Pennsylvania Departments of Education, in Warren County, there are a total of 17 licensed facilities providing child care services with a combined ability to serve a maximum of 814 children. This marks a decrease in licensed facilities from 22 to 17 and reduced capacity for the area since the last assessment in 2018. There are 9 child care centers and 8 family child care homes. Forest County, by comparison, has only one licensed family child care in a home with the capacity to serve 6 children. By definition, a day care center is defined as a child care facility where 7 or more children who are not related to the operator receive child care. A family child care home is defined, by contrast, as a home where 7 to 12 children unrelated to the caregiver receive care. Last, a group child care home is one where 7 to 12 children of varying age or 7 to 15 children from 4th grade to 15 years old and are not related to the operator receive care. There are no group child care homes in the service area. In addition to the licensed child care centers, additional options exist for families. These would include non-licensed options or having friends or family members care for children while the primary caregiver is at work. When using a non-licensed option however, the childcare subsidy cannot be used which can create a very real financial barrier related for a household that may already be struggling to meet basic needs.

In addition to a selection of child care providers, Warren County has several preschool programs as well as a Head Start program. All programs and enrollment information on the past enrollment years through 2019 plus the current school year are provided in Table 35. The area Head Start program is the largest provider and the only program requiring teachers to have a four year degree in education with certification or experience in early childhood educations. Classroom aides are required to have, at minimum, the Child Development Associate credential (CDA). Beginning in 2018-2019, the Head Start program became the lead agency for PreK Counts, a state-funded early childhood education program, in Warren County which provides 26 children with a high-quality, evidence based curriculum program. In past years the Agency offered PreK Counts to 20 students while Jefferson DeFrees Family Center oversaw provision of services to the remaining 6 children. When the grant was submitted for the next funding cycle Jefferson DeFrees Family Center opted out. In the 2021-2022 school year an additional 18 slots were funded for expansion of the PreK Counts program. This additional class is also under the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council.

The number of young children and families is slowly declining as evidenced by the 18% decrease in enrolled students in the Warren County School District and the shrinking numbers in Forest County School District. Based on the estimated population of 3 and 4 year olds eligible for early childhood programs (approx. 850 children) the number of children attending is slightly over 60%.

Table 35: Preschool Enrollment in Warren County

Program	2016 to 2017		2017 to 2018		2018 to 2019		2021-2022	
	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds
Creative Preschool	16	18	16	20	23	16	ND	ND
Imagine Preschool	18	22	10	14	20	14	16	16
Jefferson DeFrees	20	17	17	22	16	23	11	10
Jefferson DeFrees PKC			6		6			
North Warren	12	11	19	17	13	17	9	0
Rouse Children's Center	20	11	18	9	15	18	12	12
Russell United Methodist	9	10	7	14	10	11	8	10
YMCA	25	29	30	30	26	26	12	14
Head Start PreK Counts (PKC)	17	16	13	7	4	17	22	25
Tidioute Charter	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12
Don Mills Achievement Preschool	7	9	10	10	5	21	4	4
St. Joes	13	11	10	15	11	8	ND	ND
Head Start	84	110	86	110	85	117	99	91
TOTALS	243	274	246	286	228	323	193	194
	517		532		551		387	

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC and Head Start

The COVID 19 pandemic not only impacted traditional schools but preschool and early education programs as well. As evidenced by numbers, overall enrollment has decreased. This could be due to several factors including, but not limited

to, parents out of work and home with their kids, decreased preK scholarship funding available, elimination of preK programs (i.e. Ruth Stitt Center PreK in Sheffield), and not wanting younger children to either be exposed or follow safety precautions such as mask wearing.

Transportation | Warren and Forest Counties are extremely rural counties with a large portion of land designated as either state or national forest. Neither county is easily accessed by major interstates or highways. Roads and highways typically follow the terrain and topography of the Appalachian Plateau. It is common for roadways to wind through steeply wooded hillsides or run parallel to the county creeks and / or the Allegheny River. This situation, as well as having limited public transportation, is a primary contributing factor to transportation being a major barrier for low income individuals and families. The cost of owning and maintaining a single vehicle is often prohibitive for households already struggling to meet basic needs. It is common for a family to only have one vehicle, limited access, or no vehicle. Often in these cases, where the household has a vehicle, it is older, unreliable, and eventually, unsafe. Access to transportation may limit where one is able to work and further compromise a household's ability to earn a living wage by reducing the number of available employment options. The top four survey responses in regard to transportation in the area all related to costs associated with purchasing, owning, and maintaining a vehicle. They include:

1. Inability to purchase reliable vehicle due to poor or no credit.
2. Unable to save money to be used as a down payment for a vehicle.
3. Unable to maintain a vehicle and keep in good working order.
4. Cost of gas in order to travel.

This barrier can often impact or limit where a family or individual lives and works. The majority of the jobs suitable to people with low educational attainment and skill sets are in and around downtown Warren. People with unreliable or no transportation are limited to living closer to jobs and have fewer options – particularly if more than one bedroom is needed – and higher rents to contend with. Individuals and families that opt to live in more rural towns and area outside of the downtown area are often able to secure a more affordable housing option but are severely limited in terms of employment options, grocery shopping, and access to services and providers if transportation is an issue.

In focus group sessions conducted by the Agency in preparation for the needs assessment it was revealed that extra funding available to households during the pandemic led many to purchase vehicles. On the surface, this is a good thing as we know that transportation is a major barrier that can assist households working to overcome housing, employment, and other barriers. However, there was significant concern expressed that there was a number of households utilizing extra unemployment and stimulus benefit monies not typically available to the household to cover the car payments, maintenance, insurance, and costs for gas. The consensus was an overall concern that households were in situations where they were relying on extra income that would not always be available while at the same time potentially ignoring other household expenses. It was also observed that the costs of food, household supplies, and gas are all increasing which would also add significant financial stress to households once stimulus funds were no longer part of the monthly household income.

There is only one form of public transportation in Warren County. The Transit Authority of Warren County (TAWC) was organized in 1979 and began operation in 1980. TAWC bus service tries to best serve the needs of the community by providing several variations on services with available resources. In the past, TAWC has reconfigured available routes and times based on client feedback to address transportation needs in the service area to the best of its ability. Currently, TAWC has a fixed route service available to everyone, a shared ride service for those 65 years and older, a complimentary paratransit service for persons with disabilities, and a medical assistance transportation program. In Warren County less than 1% of the work force depends on public transportation to get to work (Table 43). Public transportation in Forest County is non-existent. Approximately 81% of workers use their own transportation to get to work in both counties. This is about 4% higher than the national and state averages and could partially be due to the fixed routes and limited schedule offered through the TAWC system. As an example, TAWC buses stop running at 6pm therefore workers scheduled to work second or third shift or those not on a regular 9am to 5pm schedule may not be able to use the bus system to get to and from work. Depending on public transportation with children would further complicate the situation making it a far less ideal solution to transportation in the service area for working families. Forest County offers public transportation to eligible residents on a sliding fee scale. This service is by appointment only and operating hours are between 5am and 5pm Monday through Friday.

Over half of the work force in Warren County commutes between 10 and 30 minutes to work. Of the remaining work force, approximately 21% travel more than 30 minutes while nearly 24% live within 10 minutes. Forest County, by contrast, has around 35% of the work force commuting to work more than 30 minutes away. Additional information regarding estimated commute times can be found in Table 36 and Table 37. There have not been any new employers in the area or other events / occurrences which would dramatically alter any of these data points since the release of this information.

Table 36: Method of Transportation to Work

County	Workers 16 and Up	Method of Transportation to Work (Percent)					
		Drive Alone	Carpool	Public Transportation	Bicycle / Walk	Taxi / Other	Work at Home
Forest	967	79.9%	5.1%	0.1%	8.4%	1.6%	5.0%
Warren	17,845	81.4%	10%	0.5%	3.8%	1.0%	3.3%
Report Area	18,812	81.3%	9.7%	0.5%	4.0%	1.0%	3.4%
Pennsylvania	6,081,077	75.9%	8.5%	5.6%	4.1%	1.0%	4.9%
National	152,735,781	76.3%	9.0%	5.0%	3.2%	1.3%	5.2%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Source geography: County

Interestingly, it is worth noting that when comparing “work at home” numbers with what had been previously reported in an early data release that there is an observable increase in the percentage of workers whom this applies to. This shift was already happening prior to the pandemic and shut down. In an area where childcare and transportation continue to be barriers to working; there could be a growing push for greater flexibility within the work environment. This would be particularly true for working parents who found that greater employment flexibility allowed for easier management of the household schedules.

Table 37: Travel Time to Work, 2015-2019

County	Workers 16 and Up	Travel Time to Work (Percent of Workers)				Average Commute Time Minutes
		Less than 10 Minutes	10 to 30 Minutes	30 to 60 Minutes	More than 60 Minutes	
Forest	919	22.52	40.91	23.72	12.84	No data
Warren	17,249	23.72	54.54	17.54	4.20	19.98
Report Area	18,168	23.66	53.85	17.85	4.63	18.42
Pennsylvania	5,783,357	12.90	48.29	29.43	9.37	27.21
National	144,837,205	12.25	49.22	29.18	9.35	26.94

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Source geography: County

Nutrition | There are no traditional food pantries in Warren or Forest Counties however emergency food boxes can be obtained through the Salvation Army in both Warren and Forest Counties for crisis situations.. Low-income households in the service area rely primarily on SNAP, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Produce Express offered through the regional Second Harvest Food Bank, and Meals on Wheels for eligible seniors delivered to homes or centers through the Area Agency on Aging for any type of nutritional assistance. The school district provides a backpack program which parents can request via a school year needs assessment or through the guidance office at the school. This form, sent home with the student, is a way of managing the distribution of donations to the school and families. Parents or caregivers can indicate if they needs food each Friday through the backpack program as well as school supplies, a Thanksgiving food box, clothing, winter gear, or school supplies. Additionally, St. Joe’s provides meals on specified days/times each week. The lack of a larger network of resources for food insecurity or scarcity became clear during the pandemic when the few places with emergency food were quickly emptied. At that same time, a crisis due to supply and demand as people began to panic buy and the supply chain on food and other items was drastically interrupted. Families on a set budget were unable to but in surplus and as shelves emptied they found themselves unable to re-stock as they ran out of staples and basic food items. Near the end of 2021, the supply is, in general, better however the cost of items is continuously rising.

The area WIC Office, like WIC locations nationwide, exists to support low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women and their infants and children in obtaining nutritious food. This is done through supplemental food vouchers, programming to promote healthy eating, meal planning, and prep, and referring women to other appropriate agencies for programs and services which they may be eligible for. It has been estimated over the last 3 school years by the WIC Program of Warren County that approximately 50% of all Head Start children received services under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Additional data provided at that time estimated that each month there are approximately 850 participants in WIC services. An additional assessment of nutritional needs facing low income families by the local WIC office included the following statement provided as part of a survey response:

“Families with young children receiving services typically lack basic parenting skills and exist within an unstable family environment. Poverty and parents working low wage jobs with little to no benefits are still unable to meet basic needs even with BOTH parents working. Parents lack knowledge and

skills when it comes to basic cooking, food preparation, and budgeting. There is a noticeable increase in the use of pre-packaged, instant food items which are less costly for the family but not as nutritious.”

This observation made by the WIC office is further corroborated by Head Start staff. Limited or unreliable transportation often further limits access to supermarkets. This trend has encouraged a reliance on convenience stores and similar options where foods tend to be more expensive with a limited selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. The limited area food banks have a tendency to supply cheap and easy-to-store food. Vending machines, area restaurants, and especially fast food restaurants tend to not supply fruit or vegetables. Further compounding the issue, lower income parents with one or more jobs tend to have little time for cooking and are more likely to view fruits and vegetables as too time consuming to prepare. For some of the same or similar reasons, fast food chains hold greater appeal for many families on the go. In recent years, fast food chains have begun offering a few healthier options. In reviewing behavioral risk factors, the CDC reported that in the Warren and Forest County service area 79% of adults are consuming an inadequate amount of fruits and vegetables. This is higher than reported state and national averages however, it is not surprising when considering the social and economic realities of the area. Cost, transportation, lack of knowledge, and access all play a role. The need for better nutrition is clear when considering the rising numbers of childhood obesity and the identification of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease as the major health problems facing the service area population.

Despite rising poverty rates and lower wages, the number of households receiving SNAP is fractionally smaller than what is found at the state level. This information can be found in Table 38. Produce Express, offered through the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern PA (located in Erie, PA / Erie County) is a monthly distribution of nutritious, fresh, healthy produce to a limited number of needy families. This program requires households to sign up on a monthly basis. Limited spaces are available each month so sign-ups are on a first come, first served basis. The Agency administers applications and sign-ups for one of the multiple pick up locations throughout Warren County. Table 42 shows food insecurity among all area households. Tables 39 and 40 look at food insecurity among all households and then children in households which receive benefits like SNAP and those who are in ineligible households. Food insecurity refers to the experience of not knowing if you will have food and/or not knowing when you will be able to purchase food. Since the onset of the pandemic there have been increased efforts to address food insecurity. Included in tables 39 and 40 are the projected percentages for 2020 taking into account Covid related impacts. Focus groups and surveys all reported access to and availability became primary concerns and the projected increases reflect that reality. At the onset of the pandemic both the Warren and Forest County School Districts ensured that meals were available for pick up during shut down to all families. The Head Start program also did this. On Fridays when school was in session, all students brought home a weekend bag of food which typically included some milk, juice, two entrees for lunch, fruit and/or vegetable, and a protein. This practice was continued for the entirety of the 2020 and 2021 school year. Additionally, agencies like the Warren Forest Counties EOC provided emergency funds to food pantries to restock depleted supplies. In other areas, the community formed private groups for, essentially, neighbors to help neighbors by sharing and exchanging goods to ensure all had what they needed in terms of basic essentials.

Table 38: Households Receiving SNAP by Poverty Status (ACS)

Report Area	Total Households	Total Households Rec. SNAP	Percent	Income Below Poverty	Income Above Poverty	Family Has at Least 1 Working Member	Age 60 and Older
Forest County	1,839	302	16.42%	158	144	90	151
Warren County	17,115	2,119	12.38%	913	1,206	1,034	714
Pennsylvania	5,053,106	671,089	13.28%	308,607	362,482	319,065	243,704
United States	120,756,048	14,171,567	11.74%	6,707,025	7,464,542	7,619,407	4,796,611

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-2019. Source geography: Tract.

Table 39: Food Insecurity Rate

County	Food Insecure Population, Total	Food Insecurity Rate (2019)	Projected Increase 2019 to 2020 (Covid)
Forest	1,080	14.7%	20%
Warren	4,670	11.7%	23%

Source: Feeding America. 2019. Source geography: County

Table 40: Food Insecurity – Food Insecure Children

County	Food Insecure Children, Total	Child Food Insecurity Rate	Child Food Insecurity Rate Projected Change 2019-2020
Forest	210	26.4%	20%
Warren	1,790	17.2%	28%

Source: Feeding America. 2019. Source geography: County

Table 41: Food Insecure Population Ineligible for Assistance

County	Food Insecure Population, Total	Percentage of Food Insecure Population Ineligible for Assistance	Food Insecure Children, Total	Percentage of Food Insecure Children Ineligible for Assistance
Forest	1,150	52%	210	30.95%
Warren	5,050	28%	1,790	25.98%
Report Area	6,200	32%	2,000	27%
Pennsylvania	1,808,660	36%	564,440	33%

Source: Feeding America. 2014. Source geography: County

The above charts support the observation that families with children in this area are more prone to financial struggles. Additional support for this statement which also contributes to the overall picture of nutrition in the area are the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Between 2010 and 2016 the number of enrolled students increased by 10% in Warren County and 13% in Forest County. While this number has consistently trended upward the

overall enrolled population has decreased and just over 50% of students in the service area are considered economically disadvantaged. The increasing number of students eligible for free / reduced lunch while the overall enrolled population shrinks supports the observation that families with children who remain living and working in Warren and Forest County struggle to have adequate income for all basic needs. In Focus Group sessions this sentiment was often echoed with those participating noting that a culmination of factors made the cost of living unsustainable. Some of the recorded comments included the observed impact of inflation on food and gasoline, low wage jobs, remote area, and businesses and industry leaving without viable replacements. At the time of the focus group sessions it was also brought up that there was a growing unease and concern that many people were not working despite a growing pool of potential employment opportunities. Participants voiced in each of three focus groups that many wondered if families and individuals would be able to manage without the added pandemic benefits that they had been receiving. Going a step further; once the extra funds were gone several expressed concern that jobs would no longer be available.

Health Care | It can be difficult to attract physicians and specialists to rural counties. Warren and Forest County are no exception. Both counties have a lack of specialists and inadequate numbers of providers to effectively serve the area. Adding to this issue is a severe shortage of providers which accept medical access cards. Warren County, since the time of the last needs assessment, briefly had one federally qualified health center or FQHC. This facility was not able to stay open however. In general, a FQHC is any organization receiving grants under section 330 of the Public Health Service Act and qualify for enhanced reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid among other benefits. In Warren County, there are 2 hospitals and 3 nursing facilities which accept Medicare and Medicaid. Forest County has no hospitals and boasts only 1 nursing facility and 1 rural health clinic which accept Medicare and/or Medicaid.

In Table 42, the number of primary care providers for the service area is shown. Doctors classified as “primary care physicians” by the American Medical Association include: General Family Medicine MDs and DOs, General Practice MDs and DOs, General Internal Medicine MDs, and General Pediatrics MDs. Physicians age 75 and over as well as physicians practicing sub-specialties within the listed specialties are excluded. While the State of Pennsylvania is able to average 81 providers per every 100,000 persons which is better than the National Average of 76.7 for every 100,000 persons; Warren and Forest County have noticeably smaller ratios. The average in Warren County is 47.88 and Forest County has 0. Averaging the two counties together, the service area has 40.4 physicians for every 100,000 persons. This can make it difficult to secure a primary care physician as the practice may not be accepting new patients. It should also be noted that not all providers in the area accept medical assistance which further limits available provider options for low-income families and individuals. Transportation is also a barrier for many in this area and the reality is that in order to receive care you need to be able to arrange transportation or have access to it. This reality contributes to a greater demand on emergency care workers for minor aches / pains, colds, or other illness not typically classified as an actual emergency. It should also be noted that all of the aforementioned statistics represent a decrease in medical providers.

In the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by Warren General Hospital, key stakeholders largely representing the private sector were surveyed and participated in a focus group session to obtain information, knowledge, and ideas about the impact of health services and care within Warren and Forest Counties. The observations by this group included access to healthcare from residents and in particular, a lack of clarity in options

covered by insurance and the lack of access to medical specialists. Additional observations included an increase in substance abuse and alcoholism extending to employees in leadership and staff line level, a growing concern pertaining to behavioral and mental health needs, and that workplace healthcare may be perceived as an alternative to primary care resources within the community. When further asked what environmental factors stakeholders felt were impacting community health the following responses were provided:

- Shrinking population base with an aging demographic is perceived to be a by-product of the loss of the manufacturing base in Warren County while the population as a whole continues to steadily decline. There is a noticeable lack of employable residents, lack of skilled labor, and growing drug dependence.
- The impact of technology in the community and local business; in particular connecting with telephone cell services.
- Healthcare literacy.
- Lifestyle choices including high smoking rates, high use of alcohol, obesity, lack of healthy food options on area menus, and lots of fast / fried food options
- Growing mental health concerns
- Gap between individuals related to socio-economic disparities. The working poor often get lost in the gap, root causes of medical issues are not being identified, drug testing, and education of health alternatives were all listed as examples.
- There is a perception that patients do not follow medical direction due to cost, access, or other personal decision.

Area physicians surveyed for the 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment by Warren General Hospital were asked what the top concern in terms of patient care was for Warren County residents. The response listed the lack of primary care providers as the second concern with the availability of medical specialists now moving up as the primary concern. This question was then restated in relation to what physicians saw as barriers within their practice. 42% responded that access to specialists was the greatest obstacle in providing care. 24% felt that the low number of primary care physicians was the top issue. When asked about clinical trends the overwhelming response was diabetes and obesity. These two issues often went hand in hand. Tobacco use, dental concerns, drug dependence, and mental health were also listed.

A summary of the Physician Focus Group survey from the Community Health Needs Assessment reads as follows:

“The overall trend was very consistent across the board. Medical providers characterized current challenges in Warren County to be representative of three categories: Attention to wellness and self-care especially with regard to the cardiac related challenges that their patients are encountering; healthcare literacy and decision-making. Confusion with the current landscape in insurance offerings between Highmark and UPMC; Patient accountability; unnecessary medical specialty referrals to services outside Warren County. Patient’s ability to afford transfer of poverty and elderly patients (to include primary care and cardiac care).

The first concern mentioned the most was the ability to work with residents understanding the impact of obesity. It is closely correlated with diabetes and cardiac related issues with patients.

This is validated with Warren County having the second highest risk of diabetes in the Commonwealth out of 67 counties. Warren is also ranked tenth highest in cardiac disease. There were several requests for additional nutritional services for referrals.

With the largest growing populations being the elderly and those in poverty, there are educational needs directly related to health care literacy. These groups are not completely aware of existing assistance within the community and often have to leave the community for specialty services. This travel burden diminishes compliance and in turn causes greater dependence on the non-traditional care providers. The use of the Emergency Care Center at Warren General Hospital is now reflecting a multi-generational dependence on this resource as their source of primary and specialty care.

When asked for recommendations to eliminate the concerns listed in the body of the survey, there were consistent trends. Providers felt an increase in the number of medical specialists would assist in the growing need for management of chronic disease processes. According to respondents, there is a growing concern that drug dependence is slowly becoming a new problem with younger populations as they are accessing the healthcare system. This is another clinical area that is validated by being the seventh highest county in the Commonwealth with health issues related to chronic respiratory ailments. Tobacco related problems are growing significantly from prior years.”

Responses from residents within the community supported the observations of the community leaders and physician focus groups. Primary concerns were the lack of options and access to primary care providers and specialists. When asked what services area residents would like to see offered the largest response was for an increased availability of specialists. It should also be noted that Cardiology was the most requested service. Cardiology was also noted by providers and community leaders. The next category listed by residents was a desire for more prevention and wellness care programs. This would relate to wellness, preventative health care, weight loss, and nutrition. 10% of respondents indicated that they waited to receive care due to cost.

Table 42: Access to Primary Care

County	Total Population, 2017	Primary Care Physicians, 2017	Primary Care Physicians, Rate per 100,000 pop.
Forest	7,317	0	0
Warren	39,679	19	47.88
Report Area	46,996	19	40.4
Pennsylvania	12,787,641	10,353	81
United States	324,985,539	249,103	76.7

Note: This indicator is compared with the state average. Source: US Department of Health & Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, [Area Health Resource File](#). 2017. Source geography: County.

Table 43 further supports the identified need of a lack of providers by showing the estimated percent of adults who reported a lack of any regular doctor. The percentage reporting that they had no regular doctor was higher than the

state average but better than the national average. There was no data for Forest County as there are no primary care physicians forcing residents in this portion of the service area to travel outside Forest County to Warren or other neighboring locations in order to receive care. This likely results in residents waiting prior to seeking out care which explains the significantly higher than average discharge rates from hospitals for preventable events shown in Table 48. A preventable hospital event is defined as “those conditions that are ambulatory care sensitive (ACS) and include pneumonia, dehydration, asthma, diabetes, and other conditions which could have been prevented if adequate primary care resources were available and accessed by those patients.” Table 49 further supports the identified need of a lack of providers – mainly primary care physicians but also specialists. In this table both Warren and Forest Counties are shown to have a higher percentage of the populations self-reporting that they have poor or fair health when asked to choose between excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor. Not only is more care needed to address the health issues impacting the area but this further explains why one of the top responses by the service area resident focus group in the Health Needs Assessment was a desire for more prevention and wellness care programs relating to overall wellness, preventative care, weight loss, and nutrition.

Table 43: Adults Without a Consistent Source of Primary Care

County	Survey Population (Adults Age 18+)	Total Adults Without Any Regular Doctor	Percent Adults Without Any Regular Doctor
Forest	No data	No data	No data
Warren	39,624	5,318	13.42%
Report Area	39,624	5,318	13.4%
Pennsylvania	9,777,605	1,244,908	12.73%
United States	236,884,668	52,290,932	22.07%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Additional data analysis by CARES, 2011-12.

Table 44: Preventable Hospital Events

County	Total Medicare Part A Enrollees	Ambulatory Care Sensitive Condition Hospital Discharges	Ambulatory Care Sensitive Condition Discharge Rate
Forest	846	69	82.2
Warren	6,231	296	47.6
Report Area	7,077	366	51.8
Pennsylvania	1,185,487	61,097	51.5
United States	29,649,023	1,479,545	49.9

Source: Dartmouth College Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice, Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care. 2014. Source geography: County.

Table 45: Poor General Health

County	Total Population Age 18	Estimated Populations with Poor or Fair Health	Crude Percentage	Age-Adjusted Percentage
Forest	6,588	2,009	30.5%	28.1%
Warren	32,996	6,038	18.3%	16.7%
Report Area	39,584	8,047	20.3%	18.6%
Pennsylvania	9,857,384	1,518,037	15.4%	14.2%
United States	232,556,016	37,766,703	16.2%	15.7%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Accessed via the [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). US Department of Health & Human Services, [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). 2006-12. Source geography: County.

Access to mental health care providers is shown in Table 46. Similar to primary care access, the ratio of providers to those who need services is less than state and national rates. This reality is a concern echoed during a 2018 Warren County Human Service summit where both service providers and families indicated that long wait times, particularly for families/individuals in crisis, were a major issue which has resulted in distrust in the available system of care by those who need it most. In the Community Health Assessment completed by Warren General Hospital it was discussed that the hospital has often become the primary service provider for behavior health needs. This is supported by looking at combined visit data to Warren Medical Group offices where anxiety and depression have continuously ranked in the top 10 listing of what patient complaints are when attending appointments with their providers. Standard wait times for mental health services can be anywhere between 30 and 60 days. In recent years, particularly with increased demand for services due to the pandemic, the wait time has increased.

Long wait times for care when trying to access mental health services is a frustration shared by Agency staff as they work with families facing crisis situations. Frequently we will have near homeless or homeless families and/or individuals in need of mental health services who cannot get an intake appointment for 30 to 60 days. More often than not, the appointment is set for 60 days at which point they have often left our program and once again go without needed services. The Agency also provides early childhood education services through the Head Start program. As the program focuses on the family unit as a whole, in order to be successful the program relies on the ability to effectively and consistently provide needed mental health services to students, families, and staff. Currently, this is handled through partnership agreements with seven local mental health agencies which includes the local school district. However, consistently due to schedule conflicts and being overwhelmed with demand these agency are unable to provide services for referred enrollees or family in a timely manner and sometimes, not at all. This is a growing concern as staff reports and classroom data show that an increasing number of children exhibit more and more evidence of stress in the classroom, with significant number exhibiting either withdrawn, aggressive, or “out-of-control” behaviors that are challenging and have at time threatened the overall environment of the classroom. This trend is continuing as these children enter the school system in Kindergarten. In fact, throughout 2016-2017 the special education department in the Warren County School District engaged in “ongoing discussion with the Board of Education and Superintendent regarding the increasing need of services to support mental health needs of children in our schools. In 2017, an additional school psychologist was hired.” According to the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card; the district has

also moved forward with other behavior intervention programs to meet increasing need particularly at Warren Area Elementary Center and Youngsville Elementary Middle School.

Table 46: Access to Mental Health Providers

County	Estimated Population	Number of Mental Health Providers	Ratio of Mental Health Providers to Population (1 Provider per x Persons)	Mental Health Care Provider Rate (Per 100,000 Population)
Forest	7,517	4	1,879.3	53.2
Warren	40,703	44	925.1	108.1
Report Area	48,220	48	1,004.6	99.5
Pennsylvania	12,782,379	21,927	583	171.5
United States	317,105,555	643,219	493	202.8

Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, County Health Rankings, 2018. Source geography: County

Additional top rated concerns, identified during the 2018 Warren County Human Services Summit, which support and also contribute to those already described include:

1. Providers are faced with decreasing funding and an increased demand for services. Additionally, there is greater demand on time for providers due to the amount of paperwork now required due to various funding sources, state and federal regulations, and/or insurance billing. This paperwork takes away from actual treatment time and care with the individual.
2. Many clients struggle with a lack of transportation, child care, and the ability to request time off from work in order to attend needed appointments. If a family is juggling needs and in crisis already the added threat of losing their job, income, etc. may be too great to risk which results in families choosing to not address underlying mental health issues. While this can sometimes be a short term solution; long term the issues persist creating continued crisis and problems.
3. Youth, as observed in classroom settings, are in need of mental health services as a growing number of children in the service area combat a lack of parenting, drug abuse and/or mental health issues with parents, and generational poverty. In an ideal situation, it would be beneficial to have a system in place which could identify and reach at-risk children before it is due to court order, school behaviors, etc.
4. Long wait times have created a negative attitude toward human services and mental health providers by those in need of services. This has led to growing distrust and increases the likelihood that clients are resistant to the idea of seeking out services when suggested and will typically wait until crisis, court order, or behavior issues at school, etc. Compounding this issue is the negative stigma surrounding mental health issues. Providers have observed a growing trend of clients denying they need help which often worsens a crisis situation. In some instances, clients will refuse to enter certain provider buildings simply due to the negative

connotation and stigma associated with them. In an area with already limited providers and resources; this only worsens the growing issues.

5. Service provision outside typical business hours is extremely limited in the area. There are very few options for those in crisis which can occur 24/7.
6. The area has no transitional services available for youth aging out of the system or out on probation who are not able to return home yet still lack viable life skills which would allow them to be self-sufficient and manage without additional help from some source.
7. Students at-risk or in-crisis must be placed outside the service area due to a lack of residential system / transitional housing for those under 18 years of age. This can exacerbate the crisis within a household or for that student while also adding a financial burden to the County which it cannot afford.
8. Families need support and assistance with navigating the system.

Access to affordable health insurance is a key driver of access to health care in the service area. In Warren and Forest County, the number of providers in the area is already more limited than elsewhere. Add to that, not all providers accept medical assistance. This situation, as previously mentioned, has led to overuse of the local Emergency Care Center for minor medical issues rather than emergencies which in turn, compromises the level of care for true emergencies and is more expensive. Table 51 shows the numbers of uninsured persons living in Warren and Forest County. The average for the state is approximately 7.6% of the population as of 2016. The average percentage for both Warren and Forest County are lower than the 7.6% at the state level. Looking at the national level, the State of Pennsylvania and the service areas both have significantly lower numbers. While this statistic should be taken as a positive sign it is prudent to note that this data was collected after the Affordable Care Act went into effect. Under the Affordable Care Act, the State of Pennsylvania expanded Medicaid which likely contributed to the drop in numbers of uninsured. This is clearly illustrated by the sharp decrease in the uninsured population between 2014 and 2015. In 2014, the percentage of uninsured persons in Warren County was 11.1% and in Forest County 12.9%. In 2015, the uninsured rate dropped to 8% in Warren County and 8.5% in Forest County. These percentages dropped again by about 1% in 2016. It is unclear at this time if the rate is again rising or has remained low.

Table 47: Uninsured Population Age 18 to 64, Percent by Year, 2010 through 2016

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Forest	16.1%	15.5%	16.2%	16.4%	12.9%	8.5%	7.2%
Warren	14.8%	14.9%	14.4%	13.6%	11.1%	8%	7%
Report Area	14.96%	14.94%	14.57%	13.9%	11.3%	8.07%	7%
Pennsylvania	14.54%	14.32%	13.97%	13.83%	11.87%	8.85%	7.59%
National	21.52%	21.11%	20.76%	20.44%	16.37%	13.21%	12.08%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, 2016. Source geography: County.

Table 48 looks at the total population of the service area and the numbers of people who have health insurance through employers or other means versus those who rely on Medicaid or other means-tested public health insurance. Table 53 has been provided to show the relative percentage of the population, organized by age group, who have insurance through Medicaid (or other means-tested public health insurance). As the table shows a majority of the population under age 18 utilize public health insurance in Forest County. In Warren County, for this same age group, the percentage enrolled is comparable to state and national percentages. The estimated numbers of people age 18 to 64 who utilize public health insurance in both counties is higher than state and national estimates. When looking at the senior population, the percentage is lower in Forest County and higher in Warren County than state and national averages. What is important to note, is that overall a larger number of people across all age groups in the service area rely on public health insurance and represent the more vulnerable people within the service area likely to have additional health access, health status, and social support needs.

Table 48: Population Receiving Medicaid

County	Total Population (for Whom insurance status is determined)	Population With Any Health Insurance	Population Receiving Medicaid	Percent of Insured Population Receiving Medicaid
Forest	3,622	3,482	857	24.61%
Warren	39,135	37,070	7,342	19.81%
Report Area	42,757	40,552	8,199	20.22%
Pennsylvania	12,587,348	11,872,063	2,455,659	20.68%
National	319,706,872	291,458,259	64,716,091	22.20%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

Table 49: Population Receiving Medicaid by Age Group, Percent

County	Under Age 18	Age 18 to 64	Age 65
Forest	54.93%	25.30%	7.51%
Warren	36.86%	13.98%	13.91%
Report Area	38.24%	14.68%	12.97%
Pennsylvania	36.56%	15.30%	11.99%
National	38.23%	14.65%	13.76%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source Geography: Tract

The top three causes of death in the two-county service area have consistently remained Diseases of Heart, Cancer, and Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease. Recall that according to the Community Health Needs Assessment, Warren General Hospital surveys and focus groups indicated that there was a lack of specialty care providers in Warren and Forest Counties. Cardiologists in particular were identified as a medical need for the area. If a person was in need of specialty care it is most likely that that person would need to travel to Erie, PA for care. Table 54 shows the top five

leading causes of death for Forest and Warren Counties respectively.

Interestingly, the rates and incidence of cancer, heart disease, and high blood pressure are all higher than state and national levels. While it is unclear exactly what leads to this there are potentially some environmental factors as well as health risk behaviors more prevalent in the service area which contribute to this reality. As an example, the incidence rate for breast cancer in 2014 in Warren County is 143 per every 100,000 people. It is 129.8 for the State of Pennsylvania and 123.5 at the National level. The percentage of adults with heart disease is 6.4% which is 2% higher than the National percentage and nearly 1.5% higher than the State percentage.

Table 50: Top Five Leading Causes of Death – Forest County

Rank	Cause of Death	Total Number
1	Heart Disease	25
2	Cancer	17
3	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	8
4	Intentional Self-harm (suicide)	5
5	Influenza & Pneumonia	4

Table 51: Top Five Leading Causes of Death – Warren County

Rank	Cause of Death	Total Number
1	Heart Disease	124
2	Cancer	121
3	Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	33
4	Stroke	21
5	Accidents	20

Source: 2017 Death Statistics, Pennsylvania Department of Health

The service area has a higher rate of people engaging in behaviors such as high alcohol consumption and smoking which increase health risk factors. Additionally, the current risk assessment provided in part by Drug and Alcohol located within Forest Warren Human Services notes that cultural attitudes toward both use and abuse of alcohol and tobacco are lax. These behaviors are deemed normal parts of the area culture. The risk, by area residents, is viewed as low and the behaviors are widely accepted. In fact, in Warren County, alcohol was identified as the drug of choice. Tables 52 and 53 illustrate admitted usage of alcohol and current smokers. Table 54 refers to those over 18 who self-report heavy alcohol consumption which is defined as 2 drinks per day for males and 1 drink per day for females. Excessive drinking could contribute to increased risk for health issues like cancers and untreated mental and behavioral health needs. Both examples have already been noted as top health concerns negatively impacting the area as well as issues exacerbated by the pandemic.

Table 52: Alcohol Consumption

County	Total Population Age 18	Estimated Adults Drinking Excessively	Estimated Adults Drinking Excessively (Crude Percentage)	Estimated Adults Drinking Excessively (Age Adjusted Percentage)
Forest	6,588	no data	suppressed	suppressed
Warren	32,996	7,094	21.5%	24.3%
Report Area	39,584	7,094	21.5%	24.3%
Pennsylvania	9,857,384	1,705,327	17.3%	18.7%
National	232,556,016	38,248,349	16.4%	16.9%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#). Accessed via the [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). US Department of Health & Human Services, [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). 2006-12.

Table 53: Tobacco Usage - Current Smokers

County	Total Population Age 18	Total Adults Regularly Smoking Cigarettes	Percent Population Smoking Cigarettes (Crude)	Percent Population Smoking Cigarettes (Age-Adjusted)
Forest	6,588	2,207	33.5%	29.6%
Warren	32,996	8,876	26.9%	30%
Report Area	39,584	11,083	28%	29.9%
Pennsylvania	9,857,384	1,961,619	19.9%	20.8%%
National	232,556,016	41,491,223	17.8%	18.1%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#). Accessed via the [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). US Department of Health & Human Services, [Health Indicators Warehouse](#). 2006-12.

A final component of health care in Warren and Forest Counties is access to dental care. In the two-county service area there was, until December 2018, only one dentist accepting the medical access card. The average dentist would see approximately 1,000 patients in the course of a typical year. One area dentist accepting the medical access cards works for the Primary Health Network in Warren and sees twice the normal amount averaging 2,000 patient visits per year. The second dentist formerly also worked at the dental clinic and left that practice to open a private practice. Being familiar with the high need and demand, particularly for children in the area, he has elected to still accept the Medical Access card. This makes it difficult to schedule an appointment if one of these is your only option. According to the Head Start program in Warren County, it can often take an average of 9 months to as long as a year to schedule an appointment at the dental clinic. It is also standard that a regular cleaning and x-rays would need to occur at separate appointments due to the overwhelming demand. Specialty work, particularly for children, is often referred to Erie, PA. According to Head Start, for low-income families already struggling with transportation or other issues, the need for scheduling multiple appointments increases the risk that the child may miss one or both. Children who miss appointments have to then wait another year before they can get an appointment rescheduled. Table 54 provides information on access to dental care for the service area. Note that similar to medical doctors; there are no dentists practicing in Forest County forcing residents to travel outside the County to access care. In Warren County there are

15 dentists listed as of 2019 which puts the rate of dentists per 100,000 people over 20 points below the State and National rates. While no data is present for Forest County due to a lack of practicing dentists the percentage of adults in Warren County who have not had a recent dental exam is 35.6%. This is 7% higher than the State rate and 5% higher than the National rate. This is shown in Table 54.

Table 54: Dentists

County	Dentists	Dental Hygienists	Dentist Professionals per 1,000 persons
Forest	1	0	0.14
Warren	15	38	1.33
Report Area	16	38	1.15
Pennsylvania	8,214	8,229	1.29

Source: US Department of Health & Human Services, US Census Bureau. Pennsylvania Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. Source geography: County.

Table 58: Dental Care Utilization

County	Total Population (Age 18)	Total Adults Without Recent Dental Exam	Percent Adults with No Dental Exam
Forest	6,526	0	0
Warren	32,880	11,692	35.6%
Report Area	39,406	11,692	29.7%
Pennsylvania	9,857,384	2,804,554	28.5%

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Additional data analysis by CARES, 2006-10.

Section III | Community Input

Throughout 2021 there were several methods used to obtain community insight into the needs of the area. These included several surveys, telephone interviews, staff feedback, and focus group discussions.

Surveys - Process | There were two primary survey types used for gathering input. One, a basic customer satisfaction survey, is sent out to clients after they have been exited from a program or received services from the Agency. These are mailed out and essentially ask general questions to gauge level of customer satisfaction but lack the ability to garner program specific questions. Examples of questions include items such as:

- Were staff courteous and helpful?
- Would you recommend the Agency?

A program specific exit survey is provided to clients leaving various housing programs. There is also an exit survey for HUD Housing Counseling, Head Start, and some weatherization programs. The flaw with these surveys is that typically the opportunity to provide the exit survey to clients being negatively terminated is lost. This happens for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, the clients opting to move out outside of business hours to avoid contact with staff, leaving on bad terms and unwilling to complete survey, or a client has been exited and during the typically 90-day follow up period they disappear and we are no longer able to contact them. A similar situation occurs with the HUD Housing Counseling when clients are attending appointments for budget counseling/financial capability. In this instance however, the clients typically stop responding and no call, no show to their appointments. Despite repeated attempts to make contact the client does not come back and finish the program. In many cases, the client is concurrently participating in a housing program. The Head Start program conducts a survey of all parents and caregivers at the close of each school year. This information and all survey results are reviewed along with test results to evaluate overall program effectiveness and the greater impact on not only the students but; the entire family unit. In 2021, an additional survey is being piloted by housing crisis programs which is completed by the case manager asking questions to gauge barriers that the client had, willingness to work on barriers, and what services/interventions were provided to the clients. It is the hope that collecting this information will, in time, review trends in regard to program deliver which would assist in future program evaluation and planning for subsequent program years in an effort to improve service delivery and measurable outcomes.

The Agency is working to determine a better procedure for collecting helpful feedback post program participation directly from clients which would help us improve overall efficacy. We tend to either lose contact unexpectedly or the client is completing the survey in front of staff after a positive program experience. One idea being explored for upcoming program years is making surveys available via the Agency website and mailing surveys to random selections of past clients with postage-paid envelopes included for return mail. The flaw with an online option is internet accessibility. While we track number of website visits many inquiries come through Facebook or via word of mouth. Once a client has completed a program they are less likely to visit the website. The other potential barrier is internet access for low-income clients in the area. Many clients rely on free wireless from various public locations and only utilize their phone for accessing the internet. The flaw in mailing surveys is the low response rate even with postage paid envelopes.

The majority of information obtained through surveys that was utilized specifically for this Needs Assessment focused on impacts of COVID-19 on the community. Up until that point there had been no major changes to indicate that there were any shifts in community or family level needs. Surveys for 2021 were created in survey monkey and distributed to clients as well as posted on social media. Responses were lower than expected with less than 50 respondents to a survey on COVID related impact and 33 responses to a survey regarding employment impacts. The survey also collected basic demographics and asked respondents to rank what they felt were top needs / gaps in service within the community.

A focus group discussion was also held with all Agency staff twice, once in 2020 and once in 2021, to identify any new trends being observed and issues impacting our clients. Additional discussions were held with key staff and board members in anticipation of drafting the new strategic plan. The raw data, program information, and some initial findings from this assessment were used to guide those discussions. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with the Head Start policy council and a second discussion with enrolled families.

Survey – Findings | The general customer satisfaction survey data is compiled and reviewed throughout each year. This survey however does very little to provide insight into program effectiveness or community need however; the survey findings provided better insight into how the Agency and staff were perceived by the target population of Warren and Forest Counties. These findings were overwhelmingly positive with respondents indicating a positive experience with various departments and staff. With few exceptions, clients indicated that they would come back if needed and would recommend programs and services to other people within the community. Further, clients who left comments were appreciative of the services received.

The assessment survey from 2018 which asked respondents to identify community needs and perceived gaps in service provided more useful data which at times supported trends identified within the available quantitative data. Survey respondents were first asked to rank what they felt was the biggest need facing the community from a range of options which included: access to grocery stores and food, activities for young children (Ages 0 to 10), Activities for youth (Ages 11 to 18), adequate and affordable housing, caring community, charities and social services, churches, community events and activities, recreation, retail shopping options, schools / education, transportation, cost of living, day care options, employment options and job security, entertainment and social gatherings, health care, infrastructure, leadership, mental health services, services and opportunities for disabled, services and opportunities for elderly, substance abuse and addiction service, and other. The top 10 rated needs in order from greatest to least are as follows:

1. Employment options and job security
2. Adequate and affordable housing
3. Day care options
4. Cost of living
5. Activities for young children (0 to 10)
6. Mental health services

7. Activities for youth (11 to 18)
8. Substance abuse and addiction services
9. Infrastructure
10. Leadership

Changes for the 2021 survey collection list the same issues however the order has changed. The top 10 rated needs are now:

1. Adequate and affordable housing
2. Cost of living (and access to food/household goods with current supply chain issues)
3. Employment options and job security
4. Affordable child care
5. Mental health services
6. Substance abuse and addiction services
7. Infrastructure
8. Activities for young children
9. Activities for youth (11-18)
10. Leadership

The results of the surveys relating specifically to different categories are described below. The top three responses in each category have been identified as follows:

Education is a problem in this area because

- Lack tuition money
- Lack of affordable child care to pursue / further education
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of support and motivation

Nutrition is a problem in this area because

- Cost of nutritious food items (fresh fruit, vegetables, meats, milk, etc.) is too high
- Not enough income to purchase food all month

- Rely on fast food more than 1 time per month
- Not eligible for SNAP and unable to afford enough food (Fourth most popular choice and ties to “not enough income to purchase food all month”)

Housing is a problem in this area because

- Cost of rent/mortgage payment is too high
- Cost of utility and security deposits / inability to save for these expenses.
- Housing size doesn't meet family needs
- Housing location and safety are not adequate

Employment is a problem in this area because

- I can't find affordable child care or care during times I need.
- Lack of transportation is an issue in finding, obtaining, and keeping a job long term
- I lack the education to obtain a better job.

Income usage is a problem in this area because

- Poor or no credit
- Difficulty with money management
- Do not know how to create and follow a budget

Transportation is a problem in this area because

- Cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle (cost of gas to travel, repairs, insurance, etc.)
- Unable to save for a down payment for a car
- Unable to purchase a reliable vehicle due to credit

Health Care is a problem in this area because

- Availability of specialists
- Wait time to receive mental health service
- Wait times to receive an appointment once you have been referred for services

Several of the identified needs by survey respondents are interrelated. For instance, employment options and job security was listed as the top need impacting the area. Related to that are the identified statements that respondents

indicated were true for themselves or people in the service area which included the lack of reliable transportation, education, and child care options.

In summary, throughout the Warren and Forest County communities affordable housing, employment, lower than average wages, transportation barriers, access to medical care including mental health, and an increasing demand on providers for more vulnerable populations which include the growing senior citizen population coupled with decreased funding all pose sometimes insurmountable challenges for those living in the service area. Note that housing would encompass the cost of utilities, utility deposits, and maintenance/upkeep of the aging housing stock in addition to the shortage of affordable housing options for low-income households. Employment barriers include the lack of higher paying jobs, growing trend of temporary employment, lack of job skills / required education among those seeking work, aging work force, and low wages. In the service area wages are lower than average and there are fewer opportunities which pay employees a true living wage which has resulted in a noticeable increase in the “working poor.” Additionally, a significant portion of the work force lacks education and job skills that would make them more employable and/or eligible for available opportunities.

Focus Groups | While surveys provided a basic understanding and identification of the needs within the community; focus group discussions with stakeholders, key staff, and board members expanded on the identified areas of concern. Discussions yielded a more in depth understanding of the identified needs, who are clients are, and what trends are being observed with the families and individuals we are currently working with.

During a focus group discussion with front line staff; case managers, teachers, aides, and admin were asked to identify trends that they were seeing in the community which impacted the target clients whom we serve. The following is a complete list of identified trends which relate back to already identified needs surrounding employment, life skills, cost of living, housing, mental health, and substance abuse.

- The community lacks good paying (living wage) jobs.
- The community lacks viable childcare options that are affordable and work for the family’s needs.
- Individuals lack mental health supports and access to treatment/services.
- Individuals lack employable soft skills and demonstrate a poor work ethic.
- Individuals lack reliable transportation (impacts employment, access to services, etc.)
- The community lacks affordable housing.
- Individuals lack needed skills to be self-sufficient and there is an over-reliance on welfare programs.
- Individuals lack the ability to plan and create achievable goals. They are unable to see a way to live any differently and have become apathetic and unmotivated to change their situation.
- Families are experiencing a breakdown of the family as two incomes are needed, parents are incarcerated, drug addiction, and intergenerational households.

All staff commented on an observed and marked increase in drug abuse. It is becoming increasingly common that grandparents are raising grandchildren. This was also noted in the focus group held in May 2021 with the Head Start Policy Council. In addition to an observed increase in drug use, one participant noted that calls regarding overdoses have increased since that same time the previous year. While anecdotal, this is in line with other assessment findings. When asked about input on the impacts of the pandemic specifically for families' focus groups stated that:

- Lots of people remain unemployed yet there are many places hiring. There was some discussion as to if this would change once the additional stimulus and unemployment payments ended.
- Virtual school was difficult to manage for parents trying to work from home. Teachers felt that parents were often doing the work, there were internet issues, no substitutes. While some kids managed to do okay; many children struggled and it was observed that students in higher grades were cheating. Teachers also fear that there is some learning loss carrying over into the next year and mental health issues were growing among the student population due to depression and isolation.
- In general, it was observed, that overall mental health for many families was at risk and often poor.

When asked about the impacts of poverty in the community the group had concerns about the ability for families to manage without additional pandemic benefits. There was also a great concern that had been echoed by front line staff who wondered if there would still be job openings when people finally resumed looking for work as unemployment ends in the fall. Many families actually were in a better situation due to additional pandemic benefits which further highlighted the low wage jobs and a need for sustainable, livable incomes.

Prior to COVID-19; the focus groups stated that the biggest struggles for the community included the isolated location and lack of things to do. There was mention of the cost of goods like food and gasoline. Additionally, childcare is a continuous barrier for many in the area. There are no new businesses or industry. The lack of affordable housing and access to specialists and medical care were also discussed at length.

In opening focus group discussion participants were asked to define our current clients. All responses were written down and saved for later reference. This type of free association was intended to provide an overview of the different individuals who need and participate in the current programs and services that we offer. No one phrase perfectly describes an individual client but rather the list as a whole provides insight into the types of people we work with and the barriers they most struggle with. Descriptions are listed in no particular order and include the following:

- Job jumpers
- General lack of stability
- Low income
- Appalachian lifestyle
- Youth / young parents
- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- Blended families
- Single parents
- Incarcerated or in and out of criminal justice system
- Homeless

- Addicts
- Low / little education
- Renters
- Living with relatives / friends (unstable)
- Unmotivated / apathetic
- Mental health issues
- Lack of parenting skills
- Un and underemployed
- Hungry
- Low health literacy
- Transportation needs
- Generational poverty
- Good families but struggling
- Working poor
- Immature parents
- Bubbly parents
- Overwhelmed
- Not able to prioritize
- Working to the best of their ability
- Entitled
- Poor budgeting / planning
- Lack of life skills

Trends observed by focus groups included the following and are grouped by area of need with specifics provided by about what they are seeing while working with clients. Housing, and specifically the lack of affordable housing options, has long been a need facing the area. Unfortunately, this is a trend that continues to grow as the following factors impact the affordable housing program: 1) a growing number of out of town landlords, 2) high cost of rent in comparison with household income forcing many households to expend more than 30% on rent, 3) larger families and lack of options that can accommodate while still being affordable, and 4) old housing stock which is increasingly in need of repairs and regular maintenance. It was also noted during discussion that the waiting list for Section 8 vouchers is often closed. When it reopens; it is often very brief and rarely allows for new names to be added to the waiting list. The waiting list for the Housing Authority typically results in a 4 to 7 month wait however, families or individuals with criminal records or past debts are ineligible. The demand for housing has forced the Housing Authority to reconsider applicants with criminal records on a case-by-case basis which looks at the severity and type of crime as well as how long ago it was. It is difficult to find funds or programs that can assist with addressing past debts. The other variable brought up in response to a question posed on the Agency's social media page was that the cost of housing near the majority of employment options tends to be higher than our clients can afford while also being limited on options with more than one bedroom. Clients who have transportation barriers often find they are limited to the more downtown / central Warren, PA options in order to be able to get to and from work easily. To move further outside of the downtown Warren location where the bulk of the employers are located is more affordable but the transportation barrier puts employment at risk. Living in town increases the likelihood of maintaining employment long term yet but puts greater financial strain on the household. This is a good example of multiple barriers impacting a household's ability to be self-sufficient and the challenge of overcoming these barriers can be nearly insurmountable adding instability to the household.

Another increasing trend was the demand for mental health services as more people continue to need access to services yet are unable to get them when needed. While housing for individuals with a mental health diagnosis and/or physical disability is an area that the Agency has focused on and continues to expand; there is still more demand than

there is supply. Beyond that, clients face long waiting times before they are able to access services. This interim period is challenging as the client is in need of services and more likely to not ultimately attend their appointment. While the long wait time damages trust in available mental health services it is also difficult to ensure a client attends an appointment that is 60 to 90 days away due to the service not being mandatory. As an Agency, a mental health diagnosis is required as part of certain housing program eligibility however, outside of those programs, the Agency can only suggest and refer a client for services. If they are unwilling to acknowledge the issue or access services the pattern of instability and crisis will continue. Employment options, already limited within the service area, are further limited for those struggling with mental health. This reality is also true for those in active addiction or recovery. There are no local, in-patient providers, extremely limited transitional options, and inadequate available supports and services to meet area demand.

An observation of our clients, and particularly our families, is the increase in non-traditional family types. Front line staff are seeing a multiple scenarios which, particularly for young children, create stress and feelings of instability within the family unit. It is increasingly common for case managers to be working with grandparents raising their grandchildren, multi-generational families, single parents who have a revolving door of different partners, and families with multiple children closely spaced together. This last scenario can create greater difficulties in the ability of the household to find and secure affordable childcare so that the parents / caregivers can work. Childcare is another increasing trend impacting families. Specifically, parents are juggling complicated work schedules or working multiple jobs to cobble together a full time pay check to try and ensure their children are cared for in their absence. There are no providers in the area that care for children after 5 or 6pm. This creates an issue for parents or caregivers who obtain employment working second or third shift who do not have local friends and family. In the last two years a change in the subsidized child care funds has eliminated the ability of recipients to use the subsidy to reimburse friends or family who care for children. The service area has limited, licensed day care options and securing a spot for the child in one can often become yet another barrier making retention of good employment difficult. All scenarios have the potential to create instability, stress, anxiousness, or other emotional turmoil for children in the household. It is important to note that while the potential is there; this is not always the case. As was mentioned multiple times throughout the group discussions; we have many families who are trying, love their children, and are working to their full potential.

A final observation of a concerning, increasing trend seen in our target population is a prevalent negative attitude. There is a growing number of clients whom are increasingly apathetic and unmotivated to do the work necessary to truly change their situation. In too many situations; clients want to come for the appointment, secure funds or services to resolve their crisis, and not do any recommended actions to prevent the crisis from reoccurring. A prime example are emergency utility programs designed to be used in crisis situations rather than cyclically. A concerning number of clients are counting on these programs as part of their annual "income" to pay utility bills. Another example is requiring clients to participate in budget counseling were they work with a trained counselor to create sustainable budgets and examine spending habits to make needed changes so that the household can live within their means. Clients referred from other Agency programs are often resentful that they are "being forced" to attend appointments and insist that they do not need budgeting despite having recently been in near homeless or homeless situations. This growing trend has also been observed by other providers and even area employers. In fact, the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry began bringing together a group of human resources representatives from area employers to discuss the

growing difficulty employers are having in finding qualified employees. It quickly became clear that a lack of motivation by many in the work force is a growing issue. Employers have openings but struggle to find employees that have the desire to work, soft skills, willingness and ability to be trained, and can pass a drug test.

Conclusion | Analysis of survey findings and focus group discussion topics has helped to provide greater insight into the needs of the Warren and Forest County communities. Further, the findings support the current data sets for the area and identify the needs of the community as follows:

- The **COMMUNITY** lacks employment opportunities for entry level employees which pay a living wage.
- **INDIVIDUALS** lack the needed soft skills, education, and experience to maintain long term employment.
- **INDIVIDUALS** lack the needed education and/or job skills to secure better employment.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks an experienced and qualified labor pool for many of the available job openings.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks affordable housing; particularly for low income and vulnerable populations.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks emergency shelter options for homeless households.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks adequate, affordable housing options for larger families.
- **INDIVIDUALS** lack the resources to complete needed repairs for the safety and upkeeps of the home.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** cannot afford housing where subsidized options are unavailable.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks adequate subsidized options to meet the demand.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks engaging, healthy activities for children ages 0 to 10.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks programming and activities for children ages 11 to 18.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack needed life skills to be self sufficient
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIS** lack social support network within the community to help with things like emergency child care, transportation, etc.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks adequate, affordable child care options.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks child care providers / options for parents working second or third shift jobs.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks adequate mental health providers to meet the demand / need for services.
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks proper education to alleviate negative mental health stigma
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack ability to access mental health services at time of crisis
- The **COMMUNITY** lacks in patient treatment options for those with addiction/substance abuse.

- The **COMMUNITY** lacks adequate substance abuse providers to meet growing demand
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack basic budgeting, saving, and money management skills.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack an understanding of credit and often have poor or no credit.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack access to reliable and safe transportation
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES** lack basic life skills needed to truly be self-sufficient (knowledge of hygiene, home upkeep, budgeting, nutrition, planning for future, etc.)

Section IV | Agency Service Data

As the most diversified agency among other area social service providers, the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides a valuable community asset for addressing the often multiple needs faced by low-income individuals and families. A systemic set of programs designed to attack poverty through employment and soft skill training, budget counseling, and Head Start, which not only provides services to the student but the family unit as a whole, are offered by the agency. The EOC further addresses the conditions faced by low-income persons in areas such as housing and utility assistance. While our offerings are diverse there are still service areas that we do not provide direct services for such as mental health or chemical dependencies. In this instance, strong partnerships within the community are maintained by EOC caseworkers who manage an extensive system of linkages to other service providers within the community. Some of the most frequently utilized service partners when working to empower our clients and propel them to maintaining self-sufficiency include Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Behavioral Health, Family Services of Warren County, Forest Area School District, Forest County Board of Assistance, Forest-Warren Health & Human Services, Intermediate Unit #5 and #6, and the Warren County School District.

Funding for the Warren-Forest EOC activities is coordinated with other public and private sources. Many activities are enhanced through local business and community initiatives, such as the Community Fund. Partners and/or sources of funding in these areas include Warren and Forest Counties, Warren and Forest County school districts, National Fuel Gas, Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Since 1965, the Warren-Forest EOC has expanded considerably, and currently employs 60 persons with an annual budget of approximately \$5 million. Among the current listing of over 20 programs administered by the Warren-Forest EOC are the following:

➤ Education

- Head Start
- Pre-K Counts
- Pre-K Scholarship

➤ Housing

- County Housing Trust Fund – Roof Repair / Replacement Program
- Faith Inn Emergency Shelter
- Rapid Rehousing Program / ESG Homeless Prevention
- HUD Housing Counseling
- Pre-Housing (Prepurchase) Counseling
- PA Homeowners Assistance Fund

- Homeless Assistance Program (HAP)
 - Mental Health Permanent Supportive Housing Program
 - Mental Health Transitional Housing Program (PATH)
 - National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program (HEMAP)
 - Supportive Housing Program
 - Re-Entry Transitional Housing for Ex-Offenders
 - Youngsville Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless
 - Warren Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless
 - State Weatherization Program
 - Warm III Program – Penelec
 - Furnace and Water Heater Repair / Replacement Program – National Fuel
 - Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP) – National Fuel
 - LIHEAP Non-Fuel Crisis
 - Financial Capability (Budget Counseling) Program
- **Emergency Services**
- Columbia Gas Customer Assistance Program (CAP)
 - Neighbor for Neighbor Heat Fund
 - Emergency Food and Shelter
 - Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP – CARES)
- **Nutrition**
- Produce Express through Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern PA
 - Community Garden

The following section provides greater detail for the efficacy of each identified program and/or service. Logic models have been provided to detail provided services and anticipated outcomes. Program data from the most recent calendar year (January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018) has been utilized for actual results. Where needed, additional comments or explanation have been provided.

Service Category | Education

The EOC Head Start program currently serves Warren County through 3 center locations. In past program years there was a center location in neighboring Forest County but continuously declining numbers within the target population ultimately meant there was not enough demand for that area. Currently, the Forest County School District addresses the need for a quality early childhood education. The Head Start program remains in close contact with the district and annually assesses if there is a renewed need to re-establish a center location in Forest County. The Agency typically carries a funded enrollment of 185 income-eligible, three and four year olds. Additionally, the Agency is the sole Pennsylvania PreK Counts provider for the allotted 26 slots in Warren County. An additional 18 slots were added to this program in 2021 which are also handled by the Agency. This state wide program is for children between ages 3 and entry age for kindergarten who are in families earning up to 300% of the Federal poverty level. Classrooms designated to offer this program ensure that teachers have an educational background in early childhood education, follow an evidence based and appropriate curriculum, regularly reviews a child's progress, assists with the transition to kindergarten, and has a small class size with no more than 20 students per one teacher and one aide.

In Head Start, the philosophy and understanding is that for our children to be successful we must also serve the family by ensuring that households are given access to additional programs or services that are needed in order to create a positive, healthy environment at home. Family Resource Assistants work with families throughout the year with a combination of home visits, case management, referrals, and regular assessments which include establishing goals for the family to address needs beyond a high quality early childhood program. Head Start emphasizes the role of the parents and/or caregiver as their child's first and most important teacher and seeks to help build relationships that support well-being and positive interactions, engagement, connecting to the community, and encouraging parents to be lifelong educators, learners, advocates, and leaders.

The reported achievements / outcomes for the 2020 to 2021 school year which was a hybrid model are listed below and pertain to both students and impact to the entire household:

- Funded enrollment | 185 / Total Enrolled | 168
- 106 four year olds / 62 three year olds
- 78 Second year students
- 95% Average daily attendance and 100% monthly enrollment
- 41,142 meals served
- 2,466 volunteer hours
- 166 children received hearing screening, 165 had a vision screening 168 had height/weight, developmental, and social/emotional health screens completed
- 135 children had an iron screening
- 121 children had a lead screening

- 158 children had a dental exam
- 26 children received dental treatment after an exam
- 50 children received treatment for chronic conditions
- 30% of enrollees were determined to be eligible for additional services and appropriate referrals / linkages were established.

Children served in the PreK Counts program are provided with the same services as Head Start families. Children participate in 180 days of instruction, meeting for 6 hours each day which allows for 5 hours of class plus two meals, five days per week. Notable achievements for the 2019 to 2020 school year include the following:

- Funded enrollment | 30 / Actual enrollment | 31
- 96.84% Average daily attendance.
- 100% of children received vision, social/emotional, physical, and developmental screenings.

The Head Start and PreK Counts programs address multiple needs which are reported on an annual basis. The value and benefit of a high, quality early childhood education program cannot be overstated. Specific long term outcomes for each school year include multiple goals which are all part of preparing children for Kindergarten. The Head Start program works with the Warren County School District to ensure that the curriculum utilized by Head Start teachers meets the needs of the district. Preparing children with skills, routines, and a base of knowledge that aligns with the school district helps ensure success as the students transition into Kindergarten. The partial logic model provided below shows data from the 2019 reporting year (January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019) which covers the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. COVID dramatically impacted average reporting numbers which is why the above referenced outcomes are lower than anticipated.

Program | Head Start and PreK Counts

Need/Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Children need a quality prek program that prepares them for entering Kindergarten	Provide Head Start and/or PreK Counts to 350 eligible preK students during the calendar year (2019).	Children are prepared for Kindergarten as indicated by meeting certain thresholds in relevant	300 out of 350, or 86%, of children participating demonstrate emerging literacy skills.	232 of 360, or 64%, of children demonstrated emerging literacy skills by the end of the calendar year.

		educational domains.	300 out of 350, or 86%, of children participating demonstrate school readiness skills.	232 of 360, or 64%, of children demonstrated school readiness skills.
			300 out of 350, or 86%, of children demonstrated positive approaches toward learning (Includes attention skills)	232 of 360, or 64%, of children demonstrated positive approaches toward learning.
			300 out of 350, or 86%, of children achieve at basic grade level (academic, social/emotional, and other school success skills)	232 of 360, or 64%, of children achieved at basic grade level by the end of the calendar year.
Mission To provide a high quality, early childhood education experience for the service area’s youngest learners through an evidence based curriculum.				

As mentioned, Head Start and by extension PreK Counts, focus not just on the students attending class but the family unit as a whole. Family Resource Assistants divide the case load and meet with families/caregivers on a regular basis to assess health, safety, and basic needs of the family. Goals for the family to work on may include creating a safety plan in case of emergency / natural disaster, attending parenting classes, nutrition classes, reading more with children, installing safety measures in the home, or obtaining needed documents like birth certificates. This list is not all inclusive as services that are provided to families are on an individual basis based on the assessed needs of the families and identified goals that the parent(s)/caregiver(s) opts to work toward. The need can be defined as follows:

- **INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY LEVEL NEED |** Parents / Caregivers lack knowledge to make improvements that create safe and healthier home environments for the children in the household.

As with outcome indicators related to assessments of student progress; the following logic model provides insight into the impact the program on addressing the stated need utilizing data from the 2019 calendar year. Recall that this pulls information from families that participated in the 2018 to 2019 school year in addition to the 2019 to 2020 school year. The 2020 to 2021 year will be an anomaly in reporting due to the changes in attendance as a result of the pandemic.

Program | Head Start and PreK Counts

Need Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Families lack knowledge needed to implement improvements and changes which would create safer, healthier homes.	500 families over the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year will receive additional services related to improving home environment.	Families make changes and gain knowledge which results in healthier home environments.	400 out of 500, or 80%, of households made changes that created healthier home environments.	359 out of 464, or 77%, of households made changes that created healthier home environments.
<p>Mission To work with families as a whole, and specifically parents/caregivers, to improve and create the healthiest, safest environment for the child(ren)</p>				

Another noteworthy achievement of the Head Start program was completed thanks in part to a 2016 five year grant awarded to the Agency from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness- UCLA Health Care Institute Training. Each year a key topic in children’s health is selected and Head Start Agency staff receive both training and materials to present to families who choose to participate. Training for parents and caregivers is designed to improve knowledge and skills so that parents and caregivers can learn how to improve or provide better care for the health needs of the family. Past topics have included what to do when children are sick, safety measures for the home, and accident prevention measures and tips. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, 68 families participated in special activities and training to learn about better oral health care. Part of the training was a family activity to learn about the amount of sugar in different drinks which received a very positive result from families who self-reported looking more closely at labels to see how much sugar is in the drink prior to purchase, flossing more frequently, and drinking more water. The oral healthcare focus was also good in that families had a better grasp on the importance of regularly scheduled dental appointments and regular cleanings. Attendance to these appointments is historically poor in the service area.

PreK Scholarship is a program designed to assist families with Pre-K costs. In general, families are not eligible for Head Start or funding through the Department of Human Services. The Warren-Forest Counties EOC is an approved pre-kindergarten scholarship organization and accepts donations from local businesses. Families that apply for the scholarship are awarded funds which may then be used at any of the area pre-k programs.

Scholarship funds were less than in past years where an average of 100 scholarships had been awards each calendar year. In the 2020 to 2021 scholarship year four local industries / businesses donated and a total of 29 families were awarded funds to be used at an area preschool of their choice.

In an area facing generational poverty and lower wages, programs like Head Start and PreK Counts are a much needed resource for low-income households. Each year, outcomes are overwhelmingly positive with students and families showing marked improvement when looking at each household from the beginning of the year to the end. The Head Start program performs an annual community assessment used to evaluate the number of funded enrollment slots based on the need of the service area. PreK Scholarship, the success of which is largely dependent on available tax credits offered to participating businesses, helps to meet the needs of working families in the area who may otherwise find the cost of a pre-kindergarten program to be prohibitive.

Service Category | Housing

In terms of housing programs, the EOC is unique in that multiple program offerings plus well maintained community partnerships provides several options for homeless or near homeless clients seeking assistance. No two situations are ever exactly the same and there is never a one size fits all solution. With our range of program offerings we address both community and individual/family level needs identified for the service area which include:

- **COMMUNITY LEVEL |** The community lacks safe, affordable housing options for those with mental health and/or physical disability.
- **COMMUNITY LEVEL |** The community lacks re-entry housing for hard to place individuals exiting the prison system and/or institutional setting.
- **COMMUNITY LEVEL |** The community lacks adequate homeless services for chronically homeless families.
- **COMMUNITY LEVEL |** The community lacks homes which are energy efficient. Housing stock tends to be older and poorly maintained.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** Families in crisis lack shelter / emergency options.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** Families are unable to save for needed security deposits.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** Low income families are often at risk of being evicted because they lack funds.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** Low income families frequently struggle to pay utilities consistently.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** At risk individuals exiting prison and/or institutional settings lack housing options.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** At risk individuals exiting prison and/or institutional settings need supportive services and case management dedicated to assisting them in transitioning back into the community.
- **INDIVIDUALS/FAMILY |** Low income families struggle to make needed improvements / repairs to homes.

Multiple weatherization programs, permanent housing for those with serious mental illness or physical disability, limited shelter and re-entry housing, transitional housing for individuals with co-occurring chemical dependency and mental health, permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless, rapid rehousing, rental assistance, and utility assistance programs. This variety allows the agency to respond to a wide range of situations and find the best possible

solution for individuals and families who are facing a housing crisis or some sort. Unfortunately, even with that variety, our programs are still limited by eligibility criteria, income, or situation. In these situations, the Agency relies on its' well established network of partner agencies and providers within the community to refer clients in the hope that their situation can be addressed. The following logic models have been provided to give an overview of Agency data on services and programs designed to address the above housing needs.

Permanent Supportive Housing for mental health consumers (clients) includes a property with 8 one-bedroom units owned by the HANDS program in Erie County. In this program, tenants are all relatively stable but require permanent supportive housing due to mental illness. The EOC acts primarily as property manager in this situation however there is very little turn over within these units. The Agency also has 14 permanent housing units with a total of 43 units available for rent. In 2022 the Agency will be renovating a duplex and completing work on a single family home to add this to the available permanent housing options for those eligible clients with mental health diagnosis and/or physical disability. The Agency has also submitted a funding request for funds to finish site preparation after demolition of existing blighted properties. It will then partner with Forest Warren Human Services to construct two duplexes for a total of (4) one-bedroom units. The lack of adequate subsidized options to meet the need in the area makes the need for permanent affordable housing ongoing.

Program | Permanent Housing

Need Type | Community & Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
The community lacks adequate safe and affordable housing for vulnerable populations.	Create 6 new affordable housing options through acquisition and rehab in the 2022 calendar year.	Safe and affordable housing options for vulnerable populations are	Complete construction on 2 new housing units. Secure funding for renovations on single family home and existing duplex (East Street)	ND
Vulnerable individuals / families with mental health and/or disability lack affordable, permanent housing options.	Provide 50 individuals with safe and affordable permanent housing for renters in the service area with mental	Vulnerable individuals/families have affordable, permanent housing options	50 out of 50, or 100%, of individuals with a mental health diagnosis are housed in permanent, affordable options in 2018.	47 out of 47, or 100%, of individuals referred who meet criteria were able to live in permanent, affordable

				housing owned by the Agency.
Mission To continue to create new, permanent housing options which are safe and affordable for those with documented mental illness and/or physical disability.				

The Mental Health Transitional Housing program or PATH is a formula grant to all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. PATH exists to provide services to individuals with serious mental illness, including those with co-occurring substance use disorders, who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The numbers utilized within the below logic model do reflect some carry over from year-to-year as clients stay until they are exited from the program. Ideally a program exit would be into a permanent housing solution where the individual could successfully remain independent. However, it is normal for there to be negative terminations due to non-compliance, additional crisis, or re-incarceration. Referrals into the PATH program come from a wide variety of sources which include, but are not limited to, jails, walk-ins, family, psychiatric facilities, and hospitals. The EOC Housing Specialist then works with a variety of local agencies and service providers to assist individuals as they transition into stable housing situations. The transitional housing for this program is owned by the State Hospital and located on that campus in Warren, PA. There are 4 houses with separate bedrooms and shared living space.

The Re-Entry Housing program officially began April 2018 in response to a long known community need for transitional housing options for hard to place individuals leaving the County Prison. These individuals face even more barriers than already vulnerable families including no job, no home, and no hope of successfully re-entering the community. Often, hard to place individuals remain in jail longer than needed until their sentence ultimately is maxed out and they are released to homelessness. Working in conjunction with the Warren County Prison Authority on a collaborative solution, the Agency reallocated 6 of the 9 units within the Faith Inn shelter to be transitional housing for re-entry. Individuals can stay for up to 6 months while working closely with an Agency Housing Specialist, the Warren County Prison Counselor, Probation, and any other support service staff. Service plans identify barriers, locate suitable housing, secure income/employment, and help teach life skills such as income management.

Addressing the need for ReEntry housing was long overdue and an unmet need. Individuals in this program leaving the Warren County prison encounter more road block than already vulnerable individuals or families. Upon exit these individuals have no home, income, or starting point for proper integration back into the community. This housing program allows individuals to stay up to 6 months while working on overcoming barriers. In the last program year, 7 of the 26 consumers were able to achieve a major housing goal. A major housing goal means all issues and barriers were addressed and permanent housing was secured. 6 of the 26 consumers demonstrated improved mental and behavior changes.

Program | PATH and ReEntry Housing

Need Type | Community & Individual

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
The community lacks re-entry housing options for those exiting prison or institutional settings.	Create a transitional housing program with units specifically for those exiting prison in 2018.	The community has a re-entry program.	6 of 9 units, or 67%, in the Faith Inn are converted to transitional housing for individuals who would otherwise be homeless when they exit the County prison.	6 of 9 units, or 67%, in the Faith Inn are converted to transitional housing for a re-entry program. Program began moving individuals in on April 1, 2018.
At risk individuals exiting prison and/or institutional settings lack housing options	Transitional housing will be provided for 40 individuals through the PATH and ReEntry programs	At risk individuals have a transitional housing option.	40 of 80 applicants, or 50%, will be approved and moved into transitional housing program in the 2018 calendar year. 25 of 40, or 62.5% will exit into permanent housing in the 2018 calendar year.	33 of 73, or 45%, of applicants were approved and moved into re-entry or PATH transitional housing in 2018. 16 of 33, or 48%, exited into permanent housing with income established in the 2018 calendar year. 7 of 33, or 21%, had probation violations and were reincarcerated.
At risk individuals exiting prison and/or institutional settings need supportive services and case management dedicated to assisting them in transitioning back into the community.	40 participants living in transitional housing programs will receive services as part of living in the housing program which help them transition back into the community throughout 2018.	At risk individuals transition back into the community.	25 of 40, or 62.5%, will participate in supportive services and case management which ultimately helps them to transition back into the community.	16 out of 33, or 48%, of those participating throughout 2018 successfully transitioned back into the community. 22 out of 33, or 67%, of those who moved into transitional housing have positive participation.
Mission To provide transitional housing options for individuals working to successfully re-enter the community with supportive services that help clients overcome identified barriers.				

The emergency shelter known as the Faith Inn is currently the solo shelter of its kind for both Warren and Forest County. After careful consideration a difficult decision was made to reduce the shelter from 9 to 3 in March of 2018. The other 6 units were allocated to the newly instated re-entry program. The remaining 3 are utilized for individuals who are homeless.

or facing homelessness. After being housed the individual can stay for 30 days. It is normal for individuals to need to stay passed the 30 day mark to have adequate time to obtain employment, set up eligible benefits, attend budget counseling and set up secure housing that is suitable for individual’s and family’s needs. However, a request must be made to extend stay. Applicants may be denied or placed on a waiting list due to no vacancy, over the income limit, adequate housing at time of application or inability to get in contact with individual. Notable data for faith in most individuals have never had employment, the households seem to be single parent females or a single person. Individuals are largely in the 24-44 year age range. Most have obtained a high school diploma or GED. 10 out of the 30 families serviced in the most recent program years were able to reach a major goal of securing safe, affordable housing. From April 2018 through June 2018 there were over 95 applications for the three available units and the decreased ability to serve this need was apparent. Rapid ReHousing, Permanent Supportive Housing for chronically homeless individuals or families with mental health issues, and the Agency’s permanent housing stock provide options to further assist those households in the shelter with quickly moving to permanent housing or another program that would better fit their need.

Program | Faith Inn Shelter

Need Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Households in crisis lack emergency shelter options.	Provide emergency shelter units to 30 of 50 households. (Activities include shelter units at the Faith Inn, referrals, and case management to assist with moving into shelter for SSVF families)	Households in crisis have emergency shelter options.	30 out of 50 households, or 60% of homeless households applying for help are able to be housed in temporary shelter options in 2019	25 out of 66, or 37.5%, of homeless households applying for help were able to be housed in temporary shelter options.

Mission | To provide homeless or near homeless families / individuals in crisis with needed programs and services to help immediately stabilize the situation.

The primary goal of multiple Agency housing programs is to assist clients with securing safe, affordable housing and then following up or providing active case management dependent on the program to ensure clients remain housed for 90 days. Follow up past 90 days does not typically happen except in some Rapid ReHousing cases where clients

need services past the 90 day mark. Rapid ReHousing assists homeless households with finding and securing permanent housing. The program provides funding for security deposits, utility deposits or arrears in certain situations, and short term rental subsidy. Typically, household receive a subsidy for 90 days. In that time they work intensively with the Housing Specialist to secure and increase income through employment, create and follow sustainable household budgets, and eliminate any barriers which in the past have de-stabilized the housing situation. This program is available through Lawrence County Community Action and the Agency is a sub-grantee.

Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) is a program funded by the state and administered within the service area by the EOC and the Salvation Army. In most instances, the EOC utilizes HAP funds to assist families facing crisis situations to stay in their homes. Primarily, this is through the provision of funds to assist in keeping utility services connected or preventing eviction. Funds can also be used to assist with security deposits and first month’s rent. The majority of our clients utilize available funds, which are limited and dispersed within a set time frame on a first come first served basis for qualifying clients, for one time emergency service.

In the last year 11 individuals/families were serviced and 7 of those were able to reduce to less than 50% or eliminate debt. Noteworthy demographics are 2 parent or single female parents utilize this program the most. Along with individuals in the 24-44 year age range. 57 out of the 147 families/individuals serviced were able to obtain a major housing goal.

Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless individuals and/or families with a mental health diagnosis is through the Western Pennsylvania Continuum of Care. The Agency has 8 units dedicated to this program. Clients are technically in permanent housing and there is no time limit on how long they can stay. The program follows Housing First and rent is based off of 30% of household income. A Housing Specialist works intensively with clients to address barriers and once ready; look for other permanent housing solutions. These units were formerly transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence however funding priorities and low referrals made it difficult to justify continuing these programs. The Permanent Supportive Housing has remained consistently full with all units being in use. The program also participates in a coordinated entry system for all of Western Pennsylvania which maintains a regional priority list. As units are available, the household highest on the priority list is given the option of moving to the service area and occupying the unit.

Program | Rapid ReHousing, Homeless Assistance Program, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Faith Inn Emergency Shelter, Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless, PATH, ReEntry, HEMAP

Need Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Homeless individuals/families need to obtain and maintain safe,	Assist 150 families with housing search, lease agreements,	Homeless individuals/families obtain safe, affordable housing	90 out of 150, or 60%, of households in programs find and move into	90 out of 134, or 67%, of households in programs find and move into

affordable housing.	and obtaining safe, affordable housing in 2019.	Homeless individuals/families are able to maintain housing for 90 days.	affordable housing in the 2019 calendar year. 50 out of 90, or 56%, of households are able to maintain housing for 90 days.	affordable housing. 51 out of 90, or 56%, of households maintain housing for 90 days.
Low income families / individuals are at risk of eviction due to lacking funds.	Provide 20 eligible families with one-time emergency rental assistance to stop eviction in 2019.	Families (households) facing homelessness receive funds to avoid eviction.	20 out of 30 families (households), or 67%, receive emergency funds to stop an eviction.	13 out of 19 families (households), or 68%, receive emergency assistance to stop an eviction.
Households lack funds and are at risk of foreclosure.	Provide HEMAP and/or foreclosure intervention services to eligible families with an Act 91 to potentially stop foreclosure in 2019.	Households are able to stop foreclosure and maintain ownership of the home.	1 out of 5 households with an Act 91, or 20%, will maintain ownership of the home and stop foreclosure proceedings.	2 out of 5, or 40%, of households with an Act 91 were able to maintain ownership of the home due to services received.
Mission To provide services to homeless and near homeless households which allow the household to remain in or obtain safe and affordable, permanent housing.				

The need for affordable housing is not new to the service area. In response to this, the Board of Directors supported the pursuit of housing as a main objective for the EOC several years ago as part of the strategic plan and approved direction for the agency. Since that point in time, the EOC has acquired several properties throughout Warren County and one in Forest County and after performing the necessary rehabilitation and/or renovation work made apartment units available for rent to those clients with a mental health diagnosis. This program has been made possible through several community partners including the Department of Human Services, the County Commissioners, and PHARE (Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund). In 2014 there were 19 available apartments. Throughout the year 46 applications were received, 21 families (32 people) housed, and therefore only 2 move outs. In 2015 an additional 4 units were made available for a total of 23 apartments. Of the 34 applications, 25

families were able to be housed (37 people). The EOC continues to pursue opportunities to expand our efforts in this type of affordable housing by acquiring additional properties as funding allows. In February 2016, 6 additional units will be available for rental to clients meeting the eligibility criteria. An additional property has also been purchased to be used as a Fairweather Lodge property and associated business.

Multiple weatherization programs offered by the Agency address issues related to needed improvements and energy efficiency measure for homeowners and renters in the service area. Some of these are offered in partnership with area utility companies while other programs, such as the State Weatherization Program are offered in partnership with the Department of Energy. These programs are consistently in demand in this area particularly due to the large amount of older housing stock As mentioned in other sections of the assessment, older homes often become too expensive for homeowners to maintain and heat in the winter. This is particularly true in an area with entrenched and generational poverty plus an aging population typically on a fixed income. In most cases, applicants who are screened and determined to be eligible are served by the various programs. It is less common for the work to be denied or deferred.

Program | Weatherization Programs (Various including LIHEAP non-fuel Crisis, WARM, National Fuel, and the state weatherization program)

Need Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Individuals/Families need energy efficient homes to reduce household costs.	Provide weatherization services to 150 families needing improved energy efficiency in 2019.	Individuals/Families have improved energy efficiency / burden.	100 of 150, or 67%, individuals/families see improved energy efficiency after receiving weatherization services.	50 out of 87, or 57%, of individuals/families experience improved energy efficiency throughout 2018.
Individuals/Families need appliances, particularly heating units, repaired or replaced to improve energy efficiency and safety.	100 families/individuals are eligible for the repair or replacement of their heating unit or other major appliance if it qualifies and improves safety and efficiency.	Individuals/Families have needed repairs made to appliances or have them replaced for improved safety and efficiency.	100 of 150, or 67%, individuals/families have a major appliance or heating system repaired/replaced for improved efficiency and safety.	119 or 202, or 59%, of individuals/families have a major appliance or heating system repaired/replaced for improved efficiency and safety.

Mission | To make improvements to eligible households which improve the safety, health, and most important, energy efficiency. In some cases this may involve the repair / replacement of major appliance or heating system. (Typically refrigerator or hot water tank.)

In addition to the above referenced programs related to housing; the Agency also offers a small selection of utility assistance programs. Utility assistance is a perennial need in the service area due to a combination of the lack of living wage employment options, older housing stock, increasing numbers of “working poor”, an aging population, and entrenched poverty. In general, the demand for a program like Neighbor-for-Neighbor seems highest in the fall. This is particularly true for September through November as the weather gets colder and clients realize they will need heat. Strained household budgets often mean that people let their gas bills go in the summer and wind up getting shut off. Once the weather cools help is needed and calls are consistent until tapering off with the beginning of the LIHEAP program in November. This has decreased from past years when the Agency also provided application assistance for Dollar Energy Fund grants and UGI CAP. Level billing assistance was also provided for First Energy (Penelec) however this contract was not renewed as the company wanted to go to a sole source provider for all of the western Pennsylvania region. In 2018, utility program offerings were therefore reduced to Columbia Gas CAP (requires a referral from Columbia Gas), National Fuel’s Neighbor-for-Neighbor, Emergency Food and Shelter (FEMA), and limited Homeless Assistance Program funds which can be utilized to stop utility shut off. In certain situations, the Rapid ReHousing and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (ended September 30, 2018) have the capacity to address arrearage or assist with deposits to turn on utilities when a family moves into new housing. Highlights for the 2020-2021 calendar year include the following:

- **Utility Payments (includes deliverable fuels) | 5**
- **Utility Arrearage | 14**
- **Level Billing Assistance | 13**

Service Category | Income Management

The Agency is an approved HUD Housing Counseling Agency and works with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to provide multiple financial management programs to the service area. As such, the Agency provided HUD Housing Counseling services to interested clients and those referred from other programs. Counseling covers homeless assistance, rental topics, pre-purchase counseling, foreclosure intervention, credit repair, and home maintenance/financial management. This program has proven invaluable in that it helps to prevent future crisis situations or alleviate a current homeless incidence. Financial management skills are imperative for all households in the service area but in particular, they are primarily important to low-income households burdened with an older home, high utility costs, and/or the lack of affordable housing options both safe and suitable for the household. The majority of clients are initially assessed and complete a general budget counseling session. In this, credit is pulled and reviewed, a household budget is developed, and different action items are addressed for the client and counselor to follow up on prior to the next appointment. Clients are also provided with materials to track monthly expenses so that

actual spending versus estimated spending can be reviewed with the counselor at the second session. The goal is for the counselor to assist the client with better financial management skills while also looking at ways for the household to reduce expenses and maintain their housing. In addition to the more general budget counseling the Agency provides foreclosure mitigation counseling and can work with those clients who have received an Act 91 Notice on completion of a HEMAP loan application which can stop a foreclosure thus allowing eligible applicants to remain in their homes.

Data provided is for the 2019 calendar year however this program will be undergoing changes due to a lack of client participation and buy in. The Agency paused budget counseling for most of 2021 and will resume in 2022 with a revised service delivery in the hopes that participation with a smaller number of clients may be better. The program is needed but is one where we see the need however the client does not.

Program | HUD Housing Counseling, Project Reinvest, Pre/Post Purchase, and HEMAP

Need Type | Individual/Family

Problem / Need	Service / Activity	Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Actual Results
Individuals lack knowledge to manage finances and meet basic needs.	Provide financial counseling services to 50 individuals throughout 2019.	Individuals gain knowledge and are able to meet basic needs.	25 of 50, or 50%, of individuals attend budget counseling and manage finances for 90 days while meeting all basic needs. <i>(Long term)</i> 10 of 25, or 40%, of individuals meet all basic needs for 180 days.	31 of 109, or 28%, of individuals attend budget counseling and manage finances for 90 days while meeting all basic needs. 5 of 31, or 16%, of individuals attend budget counseling and manage finances for 180 days.

Mission | To assess, evaluate, and educate clients on their personal financial situation so that they can better manage their funds and meet the basic needs of the family.

Service Category | Nutrition

In 2015, the EOC agreed to help in administering a Produce Express food distribution provided by the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania. The EOC role in this program is very simple and straightforward in that the EOC manages the monthly sign ups. The food distribution occurs one time each month and there are 120 slots available. Slots are filled on a first come / first served basis. The EOC ensures that there is a process for this, lets Second Harvest and the local church where pick-ups occur know when sign ups are full, and schedules pick-ups.

While the EOC does administer this program there is currently no interest in growing efforts in this service category. Several churches as well as the Salvation Army address food needs for low-income individuals and families. In the midst of the pandemic the Agency launched a trial community garden program. A larger scale version of this with educational components will be launching in early 2022.

Section V | Resources

The Warren Forest EOC has consistently acted as a catalyst in the community working to strengthen and build new partnerships, pioneer business economic development/incubators, and administering multiple programs covering housing, education, emergency services, and income management. The idea of working together with other agencies is not new and in this spirit, the EOC heads the Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) which brings together multiple agencies and providers at a monthly meeting to discuss programs, services, and housing options for low-income, vulnerable, or hard to place households. The Agency is also represented in the Impacting Poverty group and participated in the county wide Human Services Summit held in 2018. Another example is the newly spearheaded, working in conjunction with Forest-Warren Health & Human Services, Beacon Light Behavioral, Warren County Jail, Forest and Warren County Sheriff Departments, and Forest and Warren County Probation Departments in transforming the way in which mental health services for those in the criminal justice system are delivered. The EOC is working, with this and other endeavors, to be a true “consumer first” agency which puts the traditional ideas of how to do something aside in order to best serve those in our community.

Community Resources | While the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) offers many programs which are focused on addressing these needs, problems still persist. The agency is only one COG in a multi-oriented social service delivery system for the area. Traditionally, the Warren-Forest EOC has been the most diversified agency, providing services to consumers that range from pre-school to elderly. The EOC’s varied program offerings address multiple areas of need including housing, education, nutrition, income management, emergency services, and employment. The EOC also maintains strong relationships with other area social service agencies and providers to provide low income persons with the best combination of programs to address each unique situation. We strive to build a stronger community by helping clients achieve self-sufficiency as they overcome any barriers they may face. As funding declines, the agency, as well as other non-profits in the area, is investigating ways to meet increasing demand with decreasing funds. Cooperation and coordination are the norm, rather than the exception. The current system, and the EOC’s place within this system, can generally be described as follows based on area of need:

Food / Nutrition | The Warren Salvation Army, County Assistance Offices, Saint Joseph Soup Kitchen, First Presbyterian Church Sharing Place, County Ministries, and Sheffield Food Cupboard provide emergency food and food pantry services. The WIC Program is available to qualifying families with children under 5 and Meals on Wheels offers services to seniors. The Produce Express offered via the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwestern Pennsylvania is a program launched in 2014 for the service area and has a limited number of distributions available through various local congregations. The EOC has administered the sign-ups for each monthly distribution picked up at the Lutheran Church in downtown Warren since 2014.

Employment / Job Training | The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Warren-Forest Hi-Ed Council, and the County Assistance Office provide assistance/training to individuals aimed at helping clients obtain and/or retain employment. This is primarily done through vocational training and certificate programs, online learning, Work Ready and EARN programs, soft skill development, and assistance with job search. The PA CareerLink is available as a mobile service to residents within the service area. There is no longer a physical building address.

Education | The Warren County School District and Forest Area School District each provide transitional K-12 services for their respective counties. Early childhood education is well represented where there are over 10 programs, including the EOC Head Start Program, YMCA, and Jefferson DeFrees Family Center, serving 3 and 4 year olds. Early intervention services are offered for children 0 to 3 while preschoolers who are severely handicapped and/or have intellectual deficiencies are served by the Intermediate Unit 5 in Warren County, Intermediate Unit 6 in Forest County, and the Don Mills Center. Private school options include St. Joe's Catholic School, Warren Christian Academy, and the Tidioute Charter School.

Housing | The Warren County Housing Authority provides safe, affordable subsidized housing to the elderly, disabled, and low-income families of the area. The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides re-entry transitional housing for ex-offenders leaving the County prison system, permanent housing for chronic mental health consumers, permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals/families with a mental health disorder, transitional housing for homeless or near homeless individuals with a mental health disorder, limited emergency housing for homeless individuals and families, and short term rental assistance for homeless individuals/families through Rapid ReHousing. Forest-Warren Health and Human Services is a primary partner in housing those with chronic mental health conditions. Other partners include Warren County Probation and Parole, Deerfield Behavioral Health, Warren State Hospital, and Beacon Light Behavioral Health. This is not a comprehensive list of all partners and organizations however it does provide some insight into the true continuum of care available for clients needing housing in the service area.

Emergency Services | The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council provides emergency utility assistance through National Fuel's Neighbor-for-Neighbor and Emergency Food and Shelter Funds when available. The Salvation Army provides emergency hotel vouchers when available while the County Assistance Office can provide diversion or Emergency Shelter Allowance funding for eligible families facing homelessness. The Salvation Army and Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council administer the Homeless Assistance Program for Warren County which can be used by eligible families to prevent eviction via a one-time emergency rental payment to address arrears or assist with first month's rent / security deposit if new housing is the best solution. In some cases the funds can also be used to prevent utility shut off.

Mental Health Services | Beacon Light Behavioral Health, Deerfield Health, and Warren General Hospital all provide case management and related services to the population of clients in need of mental health services. Other providers also include the Warren State Hospital and Family Services of Warren County.

Transportation | The Transit Authority of Warren County provides medical transportation and fixed route schedule transportation. Forest County Transportation is limited to a service for seniors and disabled clients who need to go to an appointment. The request for service must be done one working day in advance and the client must also be willing to share the ride with other passengers.

Elderly | The Warren Forest Area Agency on Aging (Experience Incorporated) provides services to the elderly including case management and operation of the senior citizen centers throughout the service area. This Agency is also responsible for administration of the Meals on Wheels program for the area.

In an ongoing effort to provide the best service to our clients through communication and strong relationships with area social service providers and/or groups; the Warren-Forest EOC continuously seeks out opportunities to partner with area organizations to combine resources and better address the needs of the community. Our tenure as the area's community action agency has allowed the Warren-Forest EOC to forge partnerships and relationships that allow us to work within the network of available resources and assist clients in linking with needed services or programs which they may be eligible for and that would aid in barrier removal. Additionally, the Agency continuously looks at the needs of the families and individuals living in the service area as well as the needs of the community in an effort to identify gaps in service or areas where the Agency may be uniquely suited to develop programming or services.

Physical Resources | The Warren-Forest EOC manages and utilizes multiple properties throughout the service area for our programs. Many of our properties are for our various housing programs and include an emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing. The type of property and use are described below and represent the physical buildings owned and/or managed by the EOC.

- **McClintock Center** | Located in downtown Warren, the McClintock Center has three classrooms. One is all Head Start children and two are mixed classrooms with PreK Counts and Head Start students. Additionally, the main administrative offices for the Executive Director, Fiscal Operations, Grant Administration, Community Development, Weatherization, and Head Start are housed here.
- **Faith Inn Emergency Shelter** | Also located in downtown Warren, the Faith Inn is the only emergency shelter in both Warren and Forest Counties. The Faith Inn has 3 efficiency apartments, 4 one bedroom, and 2 two bedroom apartments. Three of the nine units are dedicated as emergency housing for up to 30 days. The remaining six units are used as transitional housing for hard to place individuals exiting the prison system and working to successfully re-enter the community. The EOC also maintains office space at this location for the Housing Director and staff as well as the Community Service Department which handles utility assistance programs, Work Ready, HUD Housing Counseling which includes pre-purchase education, foreclosure intervention, and financial capability coaching (budget counseling). Other programs run out of this office include the Homeless Assistance Program which provides emergency rental assistance to homeless or near homeless families. Housing programs include PATH transitional housing, permanent housing, Rapid ReHousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronically Homeless.
- **Head Start Centers** | The Head Start program has 5 center locations with the McClintock Center and its three classrooms being one. The other four locations include the Seneca Center (3 classrooms), Youngsville High School (2 classrooms), and South Street Center (4 classrooms). The EOC owns, in addition to the McClintock Center, the Seneca Center however space at Youngsville High School and South Street School are leased by the Agency for the Head Start program.
- **Transitional Housing Properties** | The EOC oversees five transitional housing properties. Note that this number includes the Faith Inn Emergency Shelter. Four of the remaining eight properties are located on the Warren State Hospital grounds and used by participants in the PATH program. PATH provides services to

individuals with serious mental illness, including those with co-occurring substance use disorders, who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

- **Permanent Housing** | The EOC manages a total of 15 permanent housing units throughout Warren County including 1 in Forest County. There are a total of 34 units available to our clients with a mental health diagnosis, transitioning/aged out youth, and forensic mental health consumers. One property is a 3 bedroom house on St. Clair Street in Warren which has been renovated to be used as part of a Fairweather Lodge project operated by the Forest Warren Mental Wellness Association.

Financial Resources | Funding for the Warren-Forest EOC activities is coordinated with other public and private sources. Many activities are enhanced through local business and community initiatives, such as the Community Fund. Partners and/or sources of funding in these areas include Warren and Forest Counties, Warren and Forest County school districts, First Energy, National Fuel Gas, Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Annual audits for all programs and services are posted to the EOC website once the audit has been completed and presented to the Board of Directors. Additional forms of funding, other than those aforementioned, include the Neighborhood Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund, private donations (both monetary and in-kind goods or services), and discretionary competitive block grant funding.

Systemic Resources | The following operational procedures, administrative systems, and controls outlined below are provided to further illustrate how available program and service offerings are delivered in a fair and effective manner.

The **Executive Director** is responsible for overseeing the total Agency, including all programs and activities.

The **Head Start Director** manages Warren-Forest EOC's Head Start Program.

The **Community Services Director** manages all direct service programs with the exception of Head Start, Weatherization, and Housing. The position supervises Case Managers who do the intake, eligibility, and service provision for emergency services. In addition, this department is responsible for a variety of employment and training programs. In development is a program providing one-on-one tutoring for individuals interested in obtaining their GED as well as finalizing a program that would provide the Employability Case Manager the opportunity to work with senior classes in the Warren and Forest County School districts on job skills (particularly soft skills), job search, and interviewing as well as basic life skills like the development of a sustainable household budget as a series of presentations and/or monthly workshops.

The **Housing Director** and **Community Development Director** share the responsibility for the oversight of the Agency's Housing Programs. The Community Development Director manages the physical aspects (buildings) while the Housing Director supervises the (soft) case management aspects. They work together to ensure that consumers achieve their housing objectives.

Selection of Participants | All clients who receive services directly from Warren-Forest EOC programs must adhere to that individual program's eligibility criteria. Those receiving general services from the Agency must meet the 125% of poverty guidelines criteria. Outreach efforts will be coordinated to maximize productivity. All clients must participate in the EOC's management information system, which includes the certification of eligibility and enrollment procedures.

Client income will include all salaries, wages, dividends, interest, unemployment compensation or other cash receipts for the ninety-day (90) period immediately preceding the date of application for services. The federal poverty level is based on annual income, which is derived by multiplying income for the previous ninety (90) days by four (4). Specifically excluded from considerations as income are TANF payments, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) payment and training program stipends.

Salary or wage statement, W-2 forms, signed statements from the Warren or Forest County Assistance Offices, Social Security Office, or signed certification of the participant, or parent/guardian in the case of minors, shall be adequate documentation of income eligibility. Documentation of participant income obtained more than ninety (90) days prior to the provision of services is not acceptable.

Coordination | The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) proposal was developed with relevant input from many organizations and individuals within the community, including low income persons and organizations. Among those persons with input through the Warren-Forest Board of Directors are the following: Cindy Morrison, Warren County Commissioner; Father Matthew Scott; Norman Wimer, Forest County Commissioner; Barbara Beach, Forest County Commission Representative; Barb Litten, Barbara C. Litten, Esq.; Hon. Maureen Skerda, Warren County Courthouse; and Marina Burch, Northwest Savings Bank. Those listed are in addition to six target area representatives that represent the neighborhoods and communities that are served as well as additional representatives of the private/business sector.

Warren-Forest EOC takes a proactive approach to community planning and development. Existing and emerging community problems are identified through existing data sources as well as continual feedback from Agency staff, partnering agencies, community stakeholders, and the clients we serve.

Financial Controls and Auditing | The Warren-Forest EOC uses a modified accrual method of accounting and a double-entry accounting system prepared for the Agency by the Grants Management System (GMS). The GMS Accounting and Financial Reporting System is a complete and comprehensive system designed to conform to State and Federal financial management standards and audit requirements. Backups of the financial files are prepared at the end of every month on disks. One set of disks is placed in the Safety Deposit Box at First Niagara by the Director of Fiscal/Operations. Another set is kept in the Fiscal Office. Complete system backups are done every six months. Independent program audits are performed on an annual basis by the Mauthe, Yutzey, Gabler, and Troxell, P.C., Certified Public Accountants. Audits are conducted in accordance with accepted auditing standards and the specific standards contained in *Government Auditing Standards*.

The 2017-2018 Agency-wide audit was advertised for proposal. The Request for Proposal was posted in the *Warren Times Observer* as a legal notice. Due to our isolated geography and stringent audit requirements, only one firm

responded. The Agency retained the audit firm from the previous year, Mauthe, Yutzey Gabler, and Troxell, P.C. Audit services are typically put out for proposal every 3 to 5 years.

Evaluation Procedures | Program information is entered by each program into Outcome Results System (ORS), a client tracking software system that the Agency first began using in 2010. The data is analyzed on a monthly basis, in order to determine how the numbers measure up against the projected goals. This information is reported to the Executive Director and the provided to the Board of Directors. In addition, ORS allows for access to up-to-date information, so that program staff can assess program performance on demand or on an as needed basis. Information is reported quarterly into the statewide database and progress is compared to target numbers set in February of each calendar year.

Program evaluation and self-monitoring will include both computerized program data and client feedback through program surveys and/or case management follow-up. Staff is required to produce monthly project reports detailing progress on stated objectives.

Information is presented to the Board of Directors at the regularly scheduled meetings. Any input from the Board is used to further strengthen programs. The input from the low-income members is especially helpful since most have either utilized or are utilizing Agency programs.

A client satisfaction survey has been developed to assess the experience of clients to the Agency in general. These surveys are periodically sent out, responses recorded, and surveys kept in a file by the Grants Administrator. Program specific client satisfaction surveys are also used to evaluate a program's effectiveness. These are maintained on file by the appropriate program director.

Section VI | Summary

The 2021 Community Needs Assessment revealed very few surprises. Many of the identified trends have been steadily building over a long period of time. As a result, with a substantial number of social service agencies serving the area needs are generally being met however, more could always be done. The general experience for Agencies and providers in our area, including our own, is a continued decrease in available resources while demand continues to grow as the area continues to experience economic decline and growing poverty, particularly generational poverty. In some cases, such as housing, social service providers have been able to pool resources and create partnerships to help meet the various housing needs.

The main needs impacting the service area and creating barriers for low-income individuals and households as identified by survey respondents, focus groups, and quantitative data are employment, housing, family supports, and access to mental health services. Other concerns included the perceived cost of living as being too high for many households, growing substance abuse, and a lack of services to adequately address this issue. Family supports encompasses issues like transportation, child care, and age appropriate activities that are accessible to all regardless of socio-economic status.

Employment | Employment has been a building trend impacting Warren and Forest Counties as increasing numbers of households can best be described as the “working poor”, poverty rates slowly rise, depressed wages, and a lack of economic growth or recovery all continue to hurt the area. There are no new employers being attracted to the area and there is no significant projected growth within existing industries, trades, or employers. These facts coupled with low educational attainment across the area have resulted in rising numbers of households struggling to secure and maintain long term, full time employment which pays a living wage. These opportunities are few and far between meaning that households are more likely to be under-employed in the service area and require some form(s) of social service programming in order to meet their basic needs. Despite the fact that the service area has a lower cost of living in comparison to other locations in Pennsylvania or even nationally; families identified cost of living as a need plaguing the area. Many households, in particular vulnerable populations and low-income families with children report regular struggles with affording monthly expenses including rent/mortgage, utilities, childcare, food, and transportation. Front line staff have noted that many of the individuals applying for various programs / services at the Agency are employed places temporarily through Agencies like Quickstaff. This creates a situation where the income can widely fluctuate or disappear entirely thus putting the stability of the household in jeopardy.

Anticipated job openings in the area will primarily be due to the aging work force which, in a 2015 assessment, was projected to have many retiring within the next ten years. In this area, there are few who can replace them due to a lack of education and training which ultimately leaves positions unfilled or put the employer in a situation where they need to recruit professionals from outside the area. This has proven difficult as the wages, even for professional positions, are on average lower than what one could make in more populated areas with stronger economies. It is also difficult to compete with lifestyle, arts, culture, entertainment, restaurants, and shopping in other areas which creates a challenge for area employers when this situation occurs.

Employers with available openings often state that they are willing to train people. The frequently cited problem however becomes finding potential employees with strong soft skills and the ability to pass a drug test. Soft skills might include punctuality, self-motivations, independent worker, communication skills, and responsibility. This lack of soft skills among a significant portion of the labor force is also being observed by various social service providers in their clients. A concerning trend that employers are beginning to experience is advertising for openings and not having qualified applicants for the job. As the economy began re-opening after the pandemic era shut downs these issues have only intensified. Low educational attainment, generational poverty, and lack of interest coupled with little importance placed on post-secondary education has resulted in a situation where the bulk of the existing work forces is largely, unskilled and uneducated. The difficulty encountered in finding reliable employees with the needed skill sets for an employer has led many to hire through temporary employment agencies where they can hire people temporarily and then select from that pool of employees ones to keep on permanently after the typically 90-day time period has ended. These realities paired with additional barriers to employment such as lack of reliable transportation, lack of affordable child care options, and no options for child care when offered second or third shift work create sometimes insurmountable barriers for job seekers.

In 2020 the Agency lost funding for the Work Ready program due to low numbers. This was a referral based program and the lack of any employment related training is noticeable as securing employment and income are often goals for our clients.

Housing | Affordable housing is a large barrier for many in Warren and Forest Counties. There is a severe lack of subsidized housing options which often leaves already struggling households with few options. In many cases, families ultimately end up staying in poorly maintained apartments that are often too small for the size of the family. In addition, the large proportion of older homes frequently means higher utility bills, particularly for heating, than what a family is able to afford. It is rare for an apartment to include utilities and if it does; it is generally a one bedroom unit. Those with additional barriers such as a mental health diagnosis, disability, addiction, or criminal record are further burdened and can sometimes find the task of securing and maintaining a permanent housing solution to be insurmountable.

The Warren-Forest Economic Opportunity Council, having identified this need within the community early on has partnered with multiple organizations to offer several different housing programs. These include an emergency shelter that allows for a 30-day stay, Rapid ReHousing, transitional housing for those with mental health diagnosis and/or co-occurring chemical dependencies, permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals / families with mental health diagnosis, transitional housing for those exiting the criminal justice system and re-entering the community, and permanent housing options for individuals with mental health diagnosis. In addition to actually helping address the physical address / housing needs of our clients the Agency also administers multiple weatherization programs available to homeowners and landlords to assist in improving utility costs for low-income households. This work might entail energy audits, boiler replacement, and other related activities to address issues resulting in excessive heat loss in a home which can ultimately affect the health of the household. Smaller utility programs suited to crisis situations are also offered by the Agency and include Neighbor-for-Neighbor Head Fund for eligible households in need of deliverable fuel or National Fuel customers with shut off notice and the Emergency Food

and Shelter program which can be utilized for deliverable fuel or a shut off notice. The Agency also meets with clients and completes applications for the Columbia Gas level billing program for eligible families.

The Agency, based on the findings of this assessment should continue to offer these programs as well as continue to create affordable housing opportunities for qualified clients as funding is available. In the upcoming years; funding will need to be secured for the continuation of the re-entry transitional housing program as well as a Master Leasing program which provides a subsidy to those clients in permanent housing who have limited income and mental health and/or physical disabilities. The Agency continues to assess and look at additional properties which could be renovated into affordable apartments to meet this continuing need. Long term, the Agency should increase outreach efforts to work with clients proactively on things like budgeting in order to potentially prevent the family from continued crisis.

Other needs identified that are not currently being addressed due to a lack of funding are the number of houses which are falling into disrepair as struggling families cannot afford the upkeep for needed repairs. Households in crisis are also not typically in a situation where they can afford or even save for security deposits or to establish utility service. Rapid Rehousing and the Homeless Assistance Program have been invaluable in serving this need however the demand outweighs available funds.

Family Supports & Programming | Multiple identified needs facing the community can be grouped under a broader title of family supports and programming. Child care, or the lack of affordable options and ones that work for second and third shift workers, is a barrier for adult parents and caregivers in terms of employment and pursuing education/training beyond high school, and can prohibit those from committing to GED programs offered via Forest-Warren Hi-Ed Council. The lack of a GED or high school diploma in a small, rural area with limited employment options is even more limiting as there are only a handful of employers willing to hire people without a GED / high school diploma. Typically, these employers do not pay a living wage causing long term financial strain and erecting a nearly insurmountable barrier. Suppressed wages, lack of economic recovery, and rising poverty contribute to making access to child care a major barrier which can negatively impact the household's ability to become self-sufficient. There are many options in the area however; finding child care when working non-traditional hours is often a challenge if friends and family are not an option. As aforementioned, the cost of child care can sometimes be prohibitive if a parent or caregiver cannot earn enough to outweigh the added expense. Those households with infants face long waiting lists and limited openings making it difficult for a parent to go back to work after the birth of a child. In households that are already financially stressed the loss of income can deepen the crisis.

In addition to the lack of child care options, a large number of survey respondents as well as focus group discussion, point toward the lack of activities and options for young children and their families. The situation does not improve much with older children or youth ages 11 to 18. There are outdoor parks and playgrounds as well as a community pool however recreational, sport, and club opportunities are pay-to-play. Lower income and economically disadvantaged children are more and more frequently unable to participate and there are no other options available to them. In later years this can open the door to trouble. At the middle and high school level, area sports teams have transitioned into pay-to-play teams as well. Even for families where both parents / caregivers work, the cost to participate added to the cost of equipment can prove too costly leaving children with few options in terms of constructive ways to spend time. At the family level, there is a lack of places offering an experience or activity for

the family to participate in. Unless the family can travel, access to museums, zoos, indoor entertainment such as laser tag or even arcades, is non-existent. The area even lacks retail options. These are largely limited to discount retailers like Walmart and Ollie's Bargain Outlet or smaller retail locations like Dollar General.

Families also lack basic life skills making them more vulnerable to crisis and health issues. In the past five years there is a noticeable increase in families who lack the ability to meal plan, budget, prepare healthy food options, maintain the home, schedule and attend necessary appointments, writing a resume, or a simple job search. This lack of basic life skills in parents / caregivers, over time, extends to the youth within the family. As these children transition out of high school we are finding more and more that they are unprepared for how to live and work successfully on their own. The Agency is seeing more transitional age youth (ages 18 to 24) parents and individuals applying for programs and in need of employment, budgeting, Head Start, and housing services. Once staff begin working with this age cohort it quickly becomes clear that there is a lack of life skills which extends to cleaning and maintenance of the home, hygiene, meal planning, cooking and preparing food, budgeting, and how to find and keep employment.

It is recommended that the Agency regularly review linkages and other opportunities throughout the area so that they can help families and households stay aware of offerings throughout the community. Case Managers should be prepared to work intensely at times with clients to address some of these more basic needs – like child care – as they can go hand-in-hand with the ability of the client to obtain employment. While actually providing childcare as a service to the community is not an option the Agency may consider expanding services under Head Start for an early Head Start program. The Agency may also want to consider researching youth programs or activities that may become a proactive measure for those ages 11 to 18.

Mental Health Services | In the Community Health Needs Assessment completed by Warren General Hospital in 2019, psychosis was listed as the top reason for admission to the hospital. This is not a new phenomenon and sadly, the lack of adequate mental health services and access to these services to serve the demand in the area is part of this issue. Several interconnected factors also contribute to mental health being identified in our survey and through focus group discussions as an issue the area, and possibly the Agency in some capacity, will need to address. Warren General Hospital stated that the hospital is the primary service provider for behavioral health. This can also be seen in combined visit data to Warren Medical Group offices where anxiety and depression have continuously been in the top 10 listing of what people are going to the doctor about. At the Warren County Human Services summit held in 2018 both service providers and families indicated that long wait times, particularly for those families in crisis, were a major issue which long term damages trust in the system. Standard wait time for an initial appointment for mental health services is anywhere from 30 to 60 days.

Other concerns impacting the treatment of mental health and provision of services included:

1. Providers are dealing with decreasing funding with increased demand for services. Additionally, there is greater demand on time for providers due to the amount of paperwork required. This takes away from actual treatment and care of the individual.

2. Many clients struggle with a lack of transportation, child care, and the ability to request time off from work in order to attend an appointment. If a family is juggling needs and in crisis already the threat of losing their job, income, etc. may be too great to risk and they fail to address the underlying mental health issues.
3. Youth are also in need of services as a growing number of children are battling lack of parenting, generational poverty, drug abuse and/or mental health issues with parents. Ideally, it would be better to have a system which could reach these at-risk youth before it is due to court order, school behaviors, etc.
4. Long wait times have created a negative stigma for human service and mental health providers.
5. Lack of services outside normal business hours and a crisis can occur 24/7.
6. No transitional services for youth out on probation who are unable to return home but lack life skills to manage alone.
7. Students have to be placed outside of the county due to a lack of a residential system / transitional housing here that serves those under 18.
8. There is a huge, negative stigma surrounding mental health issues to the extent that clients will deny they need help which often worsens a crisis. In some instances, clients will refuse to enter certain provider buildings due to the stigma and negative connotation.
9. Families need support and assistance with navigating the system.

Substance Abuse and Addiction | During the Human Services Summit, the issue of drug / alcohol abuse was raised. Similar to mental health services, there is a lack of providers and treatment options in the area, a negative stigma / connotation, long waiting lists, lack of insurance, and lack of support systems which all contribute to this issue. According to the Forest-Warren Human Services 2018 Treatment Plan for the two-county service area “an estimated 3,143 persons age 12 and older may need treatment services in the two-county area.” The most common need for treatment was alcohol abuse followed by heroin or prescription opioids. The most significant emerging problem identified by Forest-Warren Human Services is the resurgence in the use of Methamphetamine. Note that this is only a reporting on those who have been identified within the system typically because of issues being identified by other family members, the criminal justice system, or other providers within the human services network. In the survey response for this assessment and focus group discussions; substance abuse and addiction was identified as a growing concern within the service area.

Specifically identified by the community were the following observations:

1. There are no local youth rehab services and no in-patient services for those needing treatment.
2. Drug and alcohol treatment providers are especially shorthanded to meet the growing problem within the area. Funding is also an issue.
3. Need to bridge the gap between legal and medical drug courts.

4. There is only one addiction specialist locally who does accept insurance which can be an additional barrier preventing a client from seeking treatment. The next closest options are Erie and Clarion and these providers only accept cash. Transportation can be an issue.
5. There are 150 people on the Drug and Alcohol waiting list at the time of the Human Service Summit and they typically stay on this list for 1 to 2 years before a space for treatment opens.
6. Negative stigma and lack of support for families impacted by a person's drug / alcohol abuse.

In the 2017 to 2018 school year, teachers and classroom aides in the Head Start program had a higher than normal experience with children impacted by a parent or caregiver's drug use. This prompted the program to have opioid abuse training for staff so that they could identify issues and properly address them. This was also noted during the human services summit where it was observed that a growing number of children in the service area are impacted by drug and alcohol abuse.

While the Agency is not equipped to specifically provide services for mental health or substance abuse issues it is recommended that the Agency look at ways to partner or work with other Agencies to address these issues which impact our mutually served clients. This may be as simple as educational initiatives aimed at alleviating the negative stigma surrounding mental health and substance abuse as well as continuing to strengthen relationships with other providers while also staying aware of available programs and services to make the best possible recommendation to our clients.

Overall, the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council is actively working to address some of the identified barriers or needs within the community. These programs should continue and services should be expanded to meet the needs of more people. This is particularly true for residents of Forest County who tend to stay insular. Educational initiatives to work with clients on building life skills and working with younger generations proactively to try and reverse ingrained mind sets / apathy are additional recommendations to consider. In some instances, particularly where transportation poses a very real and difficult barrier to overcome, the Agency should move toward offering mobile service delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

Program Overview | The Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (EOC) Head Start program believes that all children share certain needs, and that each child is a unique, valuable human being with the potential to succeed. Going further, we believe that young children benefit most from a comprehensive program offering a broad range of services that fosters school readiness, literacy, physical development, and mental wellness. The child's family, as well as the Community as a whole, must be involved to maximize the strengths and weaknesses of each child. Through individual and group activities qualified teachers, who hold four year degrees in education, work closely with classroom aides, who minimally hold the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, to not only prepare our community's young children for school but to address health, nutrition, social, and other needs for each child and family based on a family needs assessment.

Our program serves children at three Head Start centers located throughout Warren County. Center locations are based on areas with the highest concentrations of eligible children. South Street Center, located in the east side of Warren, enrolls children from Warren's east side, Clarendon, Tiona, and Sheffield areas as well as Youngsville, Pittsfield, Garland, Grand Valley, Irvine, Bear Lake, Columbus, and Spring Creek. Two other centers in Warren, one located at the west end and one on the south side, enroll children from Warren, Starbrick, Russell, and Sugar Grove areas. The program operates a part day center based program. Six of the twelve classes operate 5 hours per day Tuesday through Friday for a total of 640 classroom hours per program year with approximately 140 instruction days. The other classes operate 5.75 hours Monday through Friday for a total of minimum 1,020 hours. The following is a listing of Head Start locations and the number of classrooms found at each:

- The McClintock Building, located in Warren, PA, houses three classrooms.
- The Head Start Seneca Center, located in Warren, PA, houses three classrooms.
- South Street Center, located in Warren, PA, houses seven classrooms.

For our children to be successful we ensure that families have access to additional programs or services that they may need in order to create a positive, healthy environment at home. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher and works to build relationships with families that support well-being and positive interactions, engagement in transition, connections to the community, and helping become lifelong educators, learners, advocates, and leaders.

Opportunities are provided throughout the course of each school year to encourage family engagement as a unit and as part of the community. Parents are encouraged to participate during the school year as classroom volunteers, on field trips, by attending curriculum themed celebrations, attending parent/staff, conferences, joining parent committees at various Head Start centers, monthly parent/child activities, and attending training workshops designed to meet the specific needs and interests of our parents. During the height of the COVID pandemic many of these opportunities were non-existent due to safety protocols. In the school year following the pandemic where in person classes ended in late March 2020; the program utilized a hybrid model where half of the students met on Tuesday and Wednesday in person and half met on Thursday and Friday. Monday's were virtual instruction days for all students. Full, in person classes resumed in the 2021-2022 school year however parents and caregivers were still not able to participate in activities within the classroom at the beginning of the school year. EOC Head Start teachers regularly use newsletters to keep the lines of communication between teachers and parents or caregivers open. Several classrooms also utilize social media through the creation of private groups administered by the teacher with parents and caregivers invited. This provides another means of providing classroom announcements, photos, and communication between the teacher and parents. Home visits, suspended during the height of the pandemic, are done as needed by our team of Family Resource Assistants and finally, special activities throughout the year encourage dads, grandfathers, or other male role models in the child's life to get involved.

Purpose | The purpose of the Community Assessment is to meet Head Start Performance Standard 1305.3 – Determining Community Strengths and Needs. This year, it was completed in conjunction with the full Community

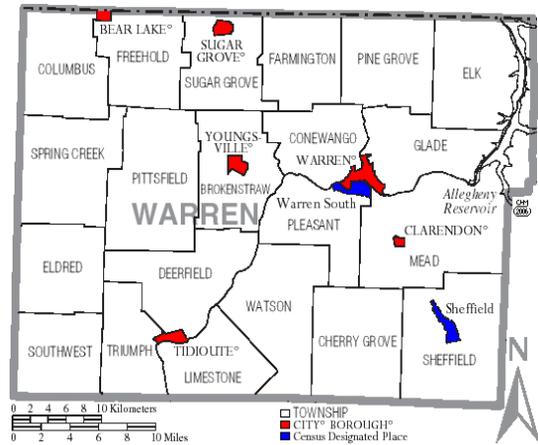
Needs Assessment done every three years by the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. The information presented is intended for use when setting the long and short-term program objectives, identify the services most needed, and to provide partner organizations and governing bodies with relevant information about the service area.

Methodology | All information presented was acquired from the most recent, relevant data sources including, but not limited to, the United State Census Bureau, American Community Survey, and the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates in addition to surveys.

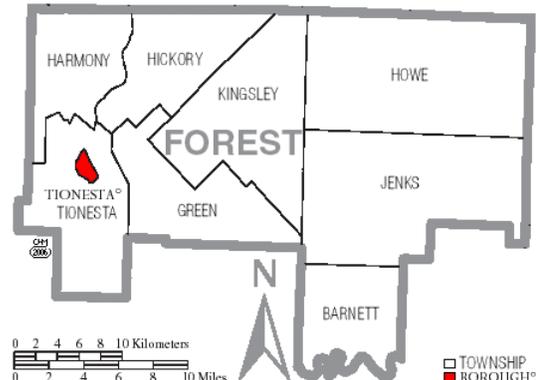
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE FOR SERVICE AREA

Predominately rural, Warren and Forest Counties are located in northwest Pennsylvania. The City of Warren is the single, most populated location and sole city within the two-county service area. A significant portion of the available area within Warren County is the Allegheny National Forest, the only National Forest in the State of Pennsylvania, accounting for 26% of the total acreage. Forest County, by comparison, has 43.5% of all available acreage dedicated to the Allegheny National Forest and hosting Cook Forest State Park. This reality is a primary factor contributing to the rural, secluded nature of the area. As is typical for rural locations in traditional “rust belt” states, Warren and Forest County have experienced sustained population loss, as jobs, especially those in the formerly well-paying manufacturing sector, disappear. Typically, the service sector jobs replacing these losses do not pay as well and offer fewer benefits. New employers and opportunities are difficult to attract to the area. Consequently, very little job creation and growth is predicted over the next 10 years. Available jobs will be the result of long term employees leaving the work force for retirement which will create problems for employers who do not have the people with the right experience, skill set, and education to replace them in the current, local work force. This scenario has created long-term social and economic strains for remaining families in the area as the realities of generational poverty become more visible. This is particularly true of families dependent on Head Start and other similar services offered by the Warren-Forest EOC or other social service providers.

Warren County is comprised, under Pennsylvania law, of three types of incorporated municipalities. As aforementioned, Warren is the sole City and most populated area within the county. Additionally, there are five boroughs: Bear Lake, Clarendon, Sugar Grove, Tidioute, and Youngsville. There are 21 recognized townships which include the following: Brokenstraw, Cherry Grove, Columbus, Conewango, Deerfield, Eldred, Elk, Farmington, Freehold, Glade, Limestone, Mead, Pine Grove, Pittsfield, Pleasant, Sheffield, Southwest, Spring Creek, Sugar Grove, Triumph, and Watson. Akeley, Lander, and Torpedo are not incorporated yet, are part of Warren County.



Forest County is comprised of one borough, Tionesta, which also functions as the county seat. There are 8 recognized townships which include Barnett, Green, Harmony, Hickory, Howe, Jenks, Kingsley, and Tionesta. Marienville, also the location of a state prison with an average population of 2,200 inmates, is listed as a census-designated place. Note that the construction of the prison and the creation of 650 jobs in 2004 resulted in a population increase. The majority of the population increase was the prison population and thus not families with children likely to depend on Head Start or similar services.



Population

The two-county service area spans 1,329 square miles. Warren County is 898 square miles and Forest County is 431 square miles. A substantial portion of available acreage in both counties is designated as either the Allegheny National Forest in Warren County or the Allegheny National Forest and Cook State Forest in Forest County. The most populated location in both counties, the City of Warren, is the lone city in the rural, two-county service area. According to the most recent data provided by the American Community Survey, the total population is estimated at 45,560 people. Of these, an estimated 38,587 people reside within Warren County (-7.72% change since 2010) and an estimated 6,973 in Forest County (-9.63% change since 2010). There was a large influx of persons in Forest County that was attributed to the construction of the State Correctional Institute – Forest (SCI – Forest) in Meadville in 2004 which has an average inmate population of 2,200 and employs just over 600 people. After the initial population boom data shows that the population is again showing slow decline. There as a 55% net change between 2000 and 2010. Since 2010 however, the net change is now -9.63%. There are community indicators that suggest there have been further losses since the Covid pandemic however the exact impact is not yet known in any quantifiable way.

Table 1: Population Change 2010 to 2020

	Census 2010 Population	Census 2020 Population	Population Change 2010-2020	% Change
Forest	7,716	6,973	-743	-9.63%
Warren	41,815	38,587	-3,228	-7.72%
Report Area	49,531	45,560	-3,971	-8.02%
Pennsylvania	12,702,385	13,002,700	300,315	2.36%
National	312,471,161	334,735,155	22,263,994	7.13%

Source: United State Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2020. Source geography: Tract.

Of the total county population, 53.07% are male and 46.93% are female according to the American Community Survey 2015-2019. The aged 0 to 4 cohort comprises 4.7% of the population, those aged 5 to 17 comprise 13.9%, and those 65 and older comprise 20% of the total population. Projected growth for the county is slow as the number of live births each year is not enough to outweigh the number of deaths in an area with an aging population. In comparing the most recent data with the previously reported number the 18 to 24 and the 35 to 44 age cohorts have experienced the biggest losses while the 65 and older cohort has increased. The age distribution of the population (Table 2) shows this uneven distribution. Note that the largest segment of the population by age grouping is the 65 and up cohort. This group is followed by those aged 55 to 64 and 45 to 54 respectively. In each of the aforementioned cohorts, there were more than 3 times as many people than in the 0 to 4 age group.

Table 2: Population by Age and Gender, 2015 to 2019

County	0 to 4		5 to 17		18 to 24		25 to 34	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Forest	83	71	393	238	514	21	1,395	48
Warren	985	1,002	2,948	2,805	1,506	1,316	2,118	1,926
Report Area	1,068	1,073	3,341	3,043	2,020	1,337	3,513	1,974

County	35 to 44		45 to 54		55 to 64		65 and Up	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Forest	972	80	559	321	573	442	773	774
Warren	2,072	2,048	2,784	2,721	3,357	3,286	3,676	4,751
Report Area	3,044	2,128	3,343	3,042	3,930	3,728	4,449	5,525

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019. Source geography: Tract.

The population of Warren County has experienced a -7.72% loss since 2000. Forest County is the third-least populous county in Pennsylvania. The age distribution clearly indicates that the population is aging with the number of young children and families slowly declining. Without new industry or jobs to attract an influx of younger adults and their families, or keep younger adults in the area, we can expect to see a continuation of current trends.

Head Start Population Estimates

Data from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning shows a continued decrease in the total population of 3 and 4 year olds living in Warren County compared to 2000 U.S. Census data. The most recent data from Pennsylvania Department of Education estimates that 834 children aged 3 and 4 lived in Warren County. Of these, 380 were served through early childhood programming that includes Head Start, Early Intervention, Keystone STARS, and PA Pre-K Counts (Table 3). By comparison, data from the US Census, 2000, states that 667 children had been served by pre-school and early learning programs indicating a significant decrease in the number of children being served. This information is shown in Table 3 below.

Neighboring Forest County, which faces many of the same challenges as Warren County and is also serviced by the Agency, has an even smaller population of 3 and 4 year olds. Compared to the 834 living in Warren County, Forest County had an estimated total of 73 children aged 3 and 4 years old. There are an estimated 64 children ranging from infancy to age 2 for a total of 137 children. The school based pre-kindergarten program provided by the Forest County School District serves approximately 30 3 to 4 year olds and 10 children aged 0 to 2. The decreasing population of young children in Forest County is perhaps more noticeable than in Warren County. During the 2014-2015 school year the district struggled to fill classrooms. The number of elementary school age children in the County is rapidly decreasing and has been noted by the school district. There are few, if any, families moving into the county and the population continues to decline despite an initial boost which occurred just after the construction of the state prison.

Table 3: Early Childhood Programming and Head Start Participation, 2015 - 2016

County	Children Ages 0-2	Children Ages 3-4	Served Ages 0-2	Served Ages 3-4
Forest County	64	73	10	31
Warren County	1,152	834	212	380
Pennsylvania	418,384	299,039	97,986	138,445

Source: Departments of Education and Public Welfare, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Reach and Risk Report, 2016 – 2017.

Since 2000, the total number of 3 and 4 year olds served by Early Childhood Programming, including Head Start, has decreased by 248 children 38%. The total number of children in Forest

County has continued to dramatically decline making it difficult to fill classes at the preschool and elementary level. Due to the low numbers of enrollment the need for pre-kindergarten services is currently being met by the school district.

Race

Race demographics across the two-county area show the population as predominately white. The homogenous composition of the population is not new and is merely a long standing, continued trend. There is no data or anticipated outside influences to suggest that the ethnic composition of the area would change dramatically at any point in the future.

Recent data from the American Community Survey (2015 to 2019) report the two-county service area as 93.35% white, 4.43% Black, 0.54% Asian, 0.92% other, and 1.31% as multiple races.

Households and Families

According to the most recent data available through the U.S. Census Bureau from the 2013 – 2017 American Community Survey, there are an estimated 17,095 occupied households in Warren County. This points toward a decrease of 672 in occupied households since the 2010 census with a slow decrease in home ownership. Based on this current information approximately 76% of the occupied homes are owner occupied. Of all households, 64% are families and 36% are non-families. These percentages have remained consistent since the 2010 census and support the observation that there has not been an influx of families moving into the area. Additionally, of all households, 23.7% have children under the age of 18 present. These findings show a 6% decrease in the number of family households with children present since 2000. Of the all households, 51% are married, 4.8% are male householder, 8.6% are female householder, and the remaining 36% are non-family households. The majority of non-family households are individuals living alone with no children present.

Dramatic shifts in households and families when comparing the US Census, 2000 to the US Census, 2010 include the following:

- The total number of family households with children under 18 decreased by 1,063. As of the 2013-2017 American Community Survey; this decrease is continuing.
- The total number of husband-wife households decreased. This is a trend we see continuing while there is a concurrent increase in the number of children growing up in multi-generational families or being raised by grandparents.
- The total number of husband and wife households with children under 18 decreased by 1,079 between 2000 and 2010. This decrease is a continuing trend.
- Non-family households where the householder (either male or female) was living alone increased.

There was a negligible change in the average family size. In 2000 this was documented as 2.93 and in 2010 the average was 2.85. As evidenced by the data, there has been an overall decrease in the number of households with children under the age of 18. This is further supported by population and age distribution data which shows a continual decrease in those aged 0 to 17 in Warren County since 2000.

In comparison, Forest County has an estimated 1,473 occupied households according to the American Community Survey, 2013 to 2017. Of these, 59% are families and 41% are non-family. This ratio of family to non-family households remains the same as it was in the 2010 U.S. Census however the number of occupied households has continued to decrease. Family households with children under 18 have also decreased in number since 2000. The current data states that 110 households (7.5%) have children as opposed to the 464 households (23.2%) documented in 2000.

Single parent households account for 13% of family households with children in Warren County. Of these, 8% (863 households) are female head-of-household. In looking at poverty statistics, families with children in the service area are more likely to struggle. In looking at family households in poverty, female led family households had a higher incidence of poverty (393 married family households vs. 432 female head of households).

Source: United States Census Bureau, 2000.
 United States Census Bureau, 2010.
 American Community Survey, 2013 – 2017. (American Fact Finder)

Income/Poverty

Wages, on average, in Warren and Forest County are lower than in most other areas of Pennsylvania. Table 4 is a good illustration of this. Shown below is a reporting on the number of families with household incomes above \$75,000. This includes income from all reported sources including wages and salaries, self-employment, interest of dividends, public assistance, retirement, and other sources. As shown, the most recent estimate for this benchmark indicate that there are significantly fewer families earning above \$75,000 than at state or national levels. This would mean that a significantly large percentage of families, well over 50%, earn less than \$75,000 which is a good indication that the family, depending on size, struggles to afford the cost of living in the service area. The lower earning and wages are also illustrated by Table 5 which shows the median family income and Table 6 which shows the per capita earnings. Per capita earnings is simply taking the total income for an area and dividing it by the total number of people living there. In all cases, households in Warren and Forest Counties earn less than those performing similar jobs in other parts of the state and country. This reality paired with the lack of new employers entering the area and generational poverty are barriers that could prove challenging to overcome. It is unknown the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As pandemic era funding and programs begin to taper off and disappear; a better understanding of need will become clear. While median and average incomes have increased since the last reporting; the costs for goods, services, and utilities has also increased negating any small gains.

Table 4: Families Earning Over \$75,000

Report Area	Total Families	Total Families with Income Over \$75,000	Percent Families with Income Over \$75,000
Forest	1,061	188	17.72%
Warren	10,839	3,829	35.33%
Pennsylvania	3,195,577	1,480,698	46.34%
National	77,608,829	35,073,881	45.19%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2012-2016.

Table 5: Median Family Income

Report Area	Total Family Households	Average Family Income	Median Family Income
Forest	1,079	\$56,564	\$46,444
Warren	11,079	\$74,416	\$62,905
Pennsylvania	3,236,352	\$102,124	\$78,521
National	79,114,031	\$103,863	\$77,263

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019.

Table 6: Per Capita Income

Report Area	Total Population	Total Income (\$)	Per Capita Income (\$)
Forest	7,313	\$111,489,400	\$15,245
Warren	39,756	\$1,122,326,700	\$28,230
Pennsylvania	12,791,530	\$439,408,997,000	\$34,351
National	324,697	\$11,073,131,694,900	\$34,102

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019.

The number of persons within the two-county area living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Income Guideline is estimated to be 6,349 according to the United States Census Bureau and the American Community Survey for 2015 to 2019. This is equivalent to 13.49% of the population. Only considering the reported number of households at or below 100% of the FPIG can be misleading and underestimates the true number of households who may be struggling to meet basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, and clothing. It is estimated that a household at 100% of the FPIG would need to double their income in order to meet all needs without assistance. Therefore, looking at all households earning below 200% of the FPIG provides better clarity on the number of households likely to struggle throughout the year in Warren and Forest Counties. Tables 7 through 9 are provided to show the estimated poverty rate for the population below 100%, 50% and 185%. These would be the most “at-risk” or vulnerable persons within the service area.

Table 7: Poverty Rate – Population Below 100% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population in Poverty	Percent Population in Poverty
Forest	3,613	654	18.10%
Warren	39,012	4,926	12.63%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	1,539,183	12.43%
National	316,715,051	42,510,843	13.42%

Source: United State Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release December 2020

Table 8: Poverty Rate – Population Below 50% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population in Poverty	Percent Population in Poverty
Forest	3,613	257	7.11%
Warren	39,012	1,878	4.81%
Report Area	42,625	2,135	5.01%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	693,930	5.61%
National	316,715,051	18,957,462	5.99%

Source: United States Census, American Community Survey, 2015 to 2019. Data Release December 2020.

Table 9: Poverty Rate – Population Below 185% FPL (ACS)

County	Poverty Rate for All Persons		
	Total Population	Population in Poverty	Percent Population in Poverty
Forest	3,613	1,281	35.46%
Warren	39,012	11,327	29.03%
Report Area	42,625	12,608	29.58%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	3,199,657	25.84%
National	316,715,051	89,440,015	28.24%

Source: United States Census, American Community Survey, 2015 to 2019. Data Release December 2020.

The average number of households in poverty reported in 2019 was 2,006 or 11.7% in Warren County (Table 8). The much smaller Forest County had a rate of 16.6% for the number of households in poverty. Of these, 5.56% were families. Recall that poverty is the 100% threshold and that this number reflects those living at or below this mark. In Warren County, the households living in poverty, 16% were female head of household, 55% were non-family, and 21% were married couples (Table 10).

Table 10: Households in Poverty by Family Type

County	Total Households, 2015-2019	Total Households in Poverty	Non-Family Households in Poverty - Including Persons Living Alone	Married Couples in Poverty	Male Head of Household in Poverty	Female Head of Household in Poverty
Forest	1,079	305	162	97	5	41
Warren	11,079	2,006	1,095	419	172	320
Pennsylvania	3,236,352	612,247	340,728	87,125	31,105	153,289
National	79,114,031	15,610,142	8,068,946	2,764,595	803,863	3,972,738

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Data Release, December 2020.

In Warren and Forest Counties, children under the age of 18 have a high incidence of living at or below the poverty threshold as shown in Tables 11. Note that the chart provides data on those children living below 200% of poverty. While 100% of the FPIG is the typical threshold; 200% is used in this case because it is estimated that a family or household would need to 200% or above to afford all basic needs without assistance. This indicates that families and/or households with children in the two-county service area are more likely to face financial hardship and struggle to meet basic needs each month. In the report area an average of 45.53% of children under 18 are living at or below 200%. Looking closer at each county; this translates into 53.41% in Forest County and 44.85% in Warren County. This is a concerning statistic because we know that in order for a family or household to comfortably afford all basic necessities (food, shelter, health insurance, transportation, child care, etc.) they must earn 200% or more of the FPIG. Therefore, we can make a reasonable assumption that approximately half of all households with children struggle to meet all basic needs throughout the year. This may be especially true at times where utility costs fluctuate or when unanticipated events/expenses impact the household. These reported rates are already concerning and do not take into account the number of households impacted by COVID when initial shut downs, job losses, and increased expenses began to impact the area. The high number may also point to the increasing trend of grandparents likely to be on fixed incomes raising grandchildren.

Table 11: Poverty, Children Below 200% FPIG

	Total Population	Population Under Age 18	Population Under Age 18 in Poverty	Percent Population Under Age 18 in Poverty
Forest	3,613	659	352	53.41%
Warren	39,012	7,599	3,408	44.85%
Pennsylvania	12,380,284	2,613,746	966,243	36.97%
National	316,715,051	72,235,700	28,929,639	40.05%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015 to 2019.

The rate of poverty for children in the target age range is higher than that found in the State of Pennsylvania and throughout the United States.

Transportation

Warren County, in terms of geographic area, is the second largest school district in the State of Pennsylvania covering 884.13 square miles. Highways and roads typically follow the terrain and topography of the Appalachian Plateau. They often wind through steeply wooded hillsides or parallel to county creeks and the Allegheny River. Many current Head Start students and families find transportation to be a major barrier in receiving services. It is common for people to live on unpaved roads which restrict access to public transportation. Further adding to this complication, lower income families often only have one vehicle, limited access, or no vehicle.

The Transit Authority of Warren County (TAWC) was organized in 1979 and began operations in 1980. It is the sole provider of public transportation operating in Warren County. To try and best serve the needs of the community TAWC offers a few variations on their services. There is a fixed route service open to everyone, a shared ride service for those 65 years and older, a complimentary paratransit service for persons with disabilities, and last, a medical assistance transportation program.

In surveying other social service providers and organizations, transportation continues to be a commonly brought up issue. The combination of factors leads to an ever increasing need for more ways to help move past this barrier. The terrain of the rural area and distance to downtown business areas, places of employment, or appointments to obtain services commonly sought by Head Start families is one part of the problem. Further contributing to transportation as a barrier in the area is the limited times and routes offered by the public transportation system, the cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle is out of reach for many household, and the difficulty in accessing a vehicle for lower income families due to poor/no credit and inability to save for a down payment. If a low income or vulnerable family is able to access personal transportation the gas, upkeep, and cyclical maintenance costs tend to become too much

Source: <http://www.tawcbus.com>

Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (Head Start Program)

Education

Educational attainment for the area is low which can have long term negative effects on the service area work force and the ability of households to be self-sufficient in an area with little to no economic growth, stagnant wages, and few opportunities for low education / low skill workers. Table 12 provides information on the level of educational

attainment in the services area. It is calculated for persons over 25 and averages data collected between 2015 and 2019. The area, when combined, reports that 8.8% of adults over age 25 do not have a high school diploma which is less than the nearly 12% nationally and 9.48% statewide. When breaking this number down, however, we find that the percentage in Forest County is substantially higher at 17% while Warren County is 7.11%. A more eye-opening data point is the number of adults who ONLY have a high school diploma. At the national level this is true for 26.96% of adults and 34.59% in all of Pennsylvania. In Warren County, 45.44% of adults over 25 and in Forest County 57% of adults over 25 have only a high school education. This is much higher in both counties than at either the state or national level and is a contributor to the increasing generational poverty, “working poor”, and lack of new, good paying jobs as there is not a significant and skilled workforce to support new employers. Further, existing employers have cited more and more frequently the challenge of finding qualified, experienced candidates to fill positions above entry level and that require a college degree. In Forest County there is a smaller percentage of the population with college degrees than at any other level. In Warren County, there is a greater percentage of adults with two-year college degrees however, there is a smaller percentage of adults with Bachelors or graduate/professional degrees than both state and national levels. While this reality of low educational attainment has a lasting and negative impact on the service area; it also lends weight to the belief that those youth who graduate and pursue a college degree are not returning to the area to work upon graduation which, over time, has created an increasingly unskilled and less educated work force. This also has impacts to the health and self-sufficiency of the household. The inmate population at the State Correctional Institute – Marienville may skew the data points in Forest County. In particular, it may be falsely inflating the percentage of people without a high school diploma.

Table 12: Educational Attainment

County	Over Age 18 and no HS Diploma	No High School Diploma	High School Only	Some College	Associates	Bachelors	Graduate or Prof.
Report Area	9.77%	8.80%	47.49%	16.74%	9.41%	11.51%	6.05%
Forest County	18.37%	17.04%	57.43%	13.47%	3.99%	5.14%	2.94%
Warren County	8.02%	7.11%	45.44%	17.41%	10.53%	12.82%	6.69%
Pennsylvania	9.77%	9.48%	34.69%	15.93%	8.47%	19%	12.43%
National	10.07%	11.99%	26.96%	20.42%	8.48%	19.78%	12.36%

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2015-19. Source geography: Tract

The total public school enrollment, as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, for Kindergarten through High School in Warren County was 4,117 for the 2019-2020 school year and 4,009 for the 2020-2021 school year. This marks a decrease from the 5,240 enrolled in the 2013 and 2014 school year. This also represents a nearly 50% decrease from the 8,301 enrolled in Kindergarten through grade 12 as reported by the US Census, 2000. The Department of Education predicts that there will be 3400 students enrolled by the 2030-2031 school year. This continued, steady decline paired with a decreasing tax base unable to support the school infrastructure, physical buildings, and staffing are all issues the district will need to address in the next few years as the current model is unsustainable. Table 32, shown below provides insight into early education and services for the 2015-2016 school year.

There were 2,123 children aged 0-4 in the service area. This breaks down to 64 children ages 0-2 and 73 children ages 3-4 in Forest County and 1,152 children ages 0-2 and 834 children ages 3-4 in Warren County. From that total, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reported that 411 children ages 3-4 were served by early childhood education program. Additionally 222 children ages 0-2 received services. Children and families account for a significant part of the area’s declining population. Projections indicate a continued decline in enrollment as the number of children and families continues to decrease across the service area.

Data from Forest County shows similar trends in declining enrollment as the overall population of school age children continues to decrease. Unlike Warren County, there are no private schools in Forest County as there is not a population to support one. In 2016-2017 there were a total of 447 students enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is reporting a total of 396 students enrolled county wide for the 2020-2021 school year and projects that by 2030-2031 there will be 298. While there is not a dramatic drop you can note the continued decline in the number of students enrolled. This reality, when taking into consideration the number of buildings that are maintained and utilized as part of the school districts, staffing, overhead, and student transportation costs coupled with a declining tax base creates a situation that can no longer be ignored as changes will need to occur. In both the Warren and Forest County School Districts over 50% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. Further, in Warren County, 22% are receiving special education services which is 4% higher than the state average. This is an added challenge faced by the district. Forest County School District has similar statistics with 19% receiving special education services.

Table 13: Early Childhood Programming and Head Start Participation

	Children Ages 0-2	Children Ages 3-4	Served Ages 0-2	Served Ages 3-4
Forest County	64	73	10	31
Warren County	1,152	834	212	380
Pennsylvania	418,384	299,039	97,986	138,445

Data Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education. Source geography: County

Observations from the Special Education Plan Report (7.1.2019-6.30.2022) by the Warren County School District supports the observations made by the Warren Head Start program regarding an observed increase in mental health and disruptive behaviors in children that require additional services which may include, but are not limited to, an IEP. It is unclear whether the pandemic, virtual schooling, and shut down will have impacted this by even further increasing the observed number of students with mental health and disruptive behaviors beyond the norm. Within the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card the following statement can be found: “The district has engaged in ongoing evaluation of needs at Youngsville Elementary Middle School and Warren Area Elementary Center in response to the increase in mental health and behavioral needs of our children.” Overall enrollment and student population has decreased 18.642% since 2007-2008 while the special education enrollment has increased by 3.5% across the number of total enrolled. This leads to already referenced challenges for future planning and points toward some of the challenges being faced by families within the target population. This has been observed by front line staff when working closely with families in

housing and Head Start programs in particular. In some cases, the reality of the household's situation and continuous cycle of crisis can be the catalyst impacting the child. In other cases, the child's challenges can be an added stressor for a household with limited resources.

The following list has been taken from the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card and indicates the steps taken by the district to address the needs of the students at the elementary level. In particular, these interventions which are actively being implemented in the current school year are in response to the increased need for special education services for the growing number of children attending the central attendance area (Warren Area Elementary Center) and Youngsville Elementary Middle School. It can be anticipated that, based on the current trend, these services will later expand to some degree into Sheffield and Eisenhower Elementary schools.

1. Behavior support specialist (contracted by the school district from the Achievement center) working with the teacher and students on behavior and classroom management strategies.
2. District instructional coach providing behavior and instructional support to the classroom teacher.
3. CSBBH (Beacon Light) mental health support to individual students.
4. Additional full time teacher added to the classroom for a period of time to support student behavioral needs.
5. Building and district level administrative support for the classroom teacher and students.
6. Dean of Students actively working with students individually, small group, and classroom.
7. Check-in, check-out with school counselors, Dean of Students for individual students who need of additional behavior support.
8. School counselor provides weekly classroom lessons regarding social skills/appropriate behavior.
9. Child Study Team meetings to develop positive behavior intervention plans to support both behavioral and academic needs of individual student.
10. Special Education screenings and evaluations conducted; supports put in place for qualifying students.
11. SWPBIS lessons taught to every classroom in the school regarding building procedures and behavior expectations.

For younger children, ages 3 to 4, the school district coordinates services with the Intermediate Unit #5 Early Intervention program as children make the transition into Kindergarten. Services identified in Individual Education Plans (IEP) are tailored to the needs of each child and are typically provided by staff at the Warren Intermediate Unit #5. An IEP could include Speech/Language Support, Occupational and/or Physical Therapy, Assistive Technology, Transportation, or other identified services within the IEP. Children requiring intervention prior to pre-school age can be referred to the Birth to Three Early Intervention Program offered through Forest-Warren Health & Human Services. Services are generally identified via the child's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and may include, but are not limited to, special instruction, speech, physical, and occupational therapy. Often, these types of services are provided in the

home or at a day care setting. Information on the number of children accessing services through the Birth to Three Early Intervention Program and the Intermediate Unit #5 Early Intervention Program can be found in tables 37 and 38. While the number of children referred for Early Intervention have been higher the last three reporting years; it is not significantly higher. The Warren County Head Start program is the largest early childhood education provider in the area and has observed a noticeable increase in the number of children who are referred for assessment and potentially services based on classroom observation. In keeping with the same trend identified at the grade school level; the program is observing a rising number of children with disruptive behaviors and/or mental health issues. One identified issue in trying to proactively address this trend is the wait time between when a child is referred for assessment and potential intervention and when the assessment actually takes place. At times the wait has been several months before a child can even be assessed which can create further issues for children who would greatly benefit from intervention.

In an effort to counteract the trend of increasing numbers of children with emotional disturbance, disruptive behaviors, and mental health the Head Start program implemented Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS). This approach integrates classroom practices supported by coordinators and administration which include preventative and responsive approaches that can be used with the class as a whole or intensified to support a smaller group or even individual students. Teachers and classroom aides are provided with needed supports to ensure implementation in the classroom while regular collection and assessment of data allows for fluid decision-making as patterns, strengths, and needs are identified. The PBIS model allows the teacher and proactive classroom management to change, adapt, and flex to meet the needs of the students and create a wholly more positive and productive atmosphere. The Head Start program also introduced and began implementing PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) into the classrooms several years ago. This strategy is integrated directly into the classrooms and taught from the first day of class in an effort to enhance areas of social-emotional development including self-control, self-esteem, friendships, and interpersonal problem solving while working to reduce aggression and other behavioral problems. Since implementing the program has observed the same trends in the number of students identified as potentially needed intervention or services however, the proactive implementation of PBIS and PATHS has resulted in a decrease in challenging behaviors resulting in more positive learning environments. The program makes every effort to seamlessly transition children into Kindergarten however, services and interventions which were in place throughout PreK are not always carried through and begin the first day of Kindergarten.

In the 2020 to 2021 school year, the Head Start program in Warren County also created a new position to coordinate mental health and emotional support needs for enrollees. Due to the increasing numbers of children presenting with this issue as well as the delay in receiving services until months after a referral has been made; this position was created to identify children, advocate, and work with families to ensure evaluation and interventions happen faster for the overall well-being of the child.

Table 14: B-3 Special Education Services in Warren County, 2011-2018

School Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
# of Children	143	138	161	132*	149 (active) & 18 (tracking)	161 (active) & 24 (tracking)	159 (active) & 25 (tracking)

Source: Warren-Forest Counties Head Start; Forest-Warren Human Services Early Intervention Program

The Warren Head Start program, the sole Head Start program within the two county service area, has made additional observations regarding the Special Education needs within their particular target population of 3 and 4 year olds. On average, at the onset of the school year there are typically 10-15% of enrolled students with an identified problem whom have been professionally diagnosed with a disability. However, there has been an observed trend of an increasing number of children who may not have a diagnosis but who do have challenging behaviors requiring more individualized instruction and / or interventions throughout the school day. In the 2016 to 2017 school year almost 8% of enrolled children started the school year with an IEP in place but 16% had one in place by the end of the school year. In the 2017 to 2018 school year 11% of enrolled students had an IEP prior to enrollment. An additional 16 children were referred for services and had IEPs in place before that school year ended. This resulted in a total of 18% of all enrolled children. The most recent school year, 2020-2021, 20% of the enrolled students were eligible to receive special education or related services and had individualized plans (IEPs) established. It is becoming increasingly common that once the school year begins, challenging behaviors are being identified and additional children are being diagnosed with a disability requiring Special Education services. Local mental health providers can be accessed by the family for children lacking an IEP but who have been identified as having a challenging behavior. However, it should be noted that focus group discussions and surveys revealed that mental health services, even with a referral, are difficult to access due to long wait times. In some instances, recommended providers such as Sunrise Collaborative in Warren, PA, are no longer accepting new patients on their wait list due to the length.

Forest County has no typical preschools. There is a K4 and IU6 program offered through the school district. The IU6 program of Forest County, similar to IU5 in Warren County, had no children enrolled for the 2014-2015 school year. Subsequent years have seen low enrollment as well. In the 2013 – 2014 school year, there were 4 children enrolled and therefore, typical 3-year-olds were being brought into the classroom in a reverse mainstream process. This is the result of significantly lower numbers than what was reported in January of 2014. The data collected for the 2014-2015 school year indicated that there were 30 less students requiring services. The K4 program also moved 3-year-olds into the classroom to bring the total class size to 18 students. This pattern has persisted and will likely continue as there is no reason to believe that the area will experience an influx of new residents due to location and lack of employment opportunities. Due to the low numbers of students, those requiring services are transported to North Clarion.

Enrollment for children in preschool programs continues to slowly decline with the population however enrollment in PreK Counts and Head Start have both remained consistent. The 3 and 4 year olds in Forest County are served by a school based program and there is currently no demand for an additional Head Start center location due to the low numbers. Based on the below chart 45% of the eligible 3 and 4 year olds are served through a combination of

PreK Counts, Head Start, and Keystone STARS. There are also additional pre-kindergarten programs in the Warren County area so it is likely that over 50% of children are attending preschool if the able.

Table 15: Early Childhood Programming and Head Start Participation, 2016 - 2017

County	Number of Children		Total Children Served	Age 0-2 Only Participants		Age 3-4 Only Participants	
	Ages 0-2	Ages 3-4	All Ages	Nurse Family Partnership	Healthy Families America	Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts	School Based Pre-K
Forest	22	16	36	0	0	0	26
Warren	1,085	919	383	0	0	26	0
Report Area	1,107	935	419	0	0	26	26

County	Age 0-4 Participants				Head Start Program Participants	
	Parent-Child Home Program	Parents as Teachers	Early Intervention	Keystone STARS	Early Head Start (Age 0-2)	Head Start (Age 3-4)
Forest	0	3	7	0	0	0
Warren	0	0	79	93	0	185
Report Area	0	3	86	93	0	185

Source: Departments of Education and Public Welfare, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, Reach and Risk Report, 2016 – 2017.

Since 2000, total school enrollment has declined by approximately 40%. For early childhood services, like Head Start and PreK Counts, there was a 33% decrease since 2000 in the total number of children served.

Housing

Since the data presented by the US Census, 2000, there has been little change in the overall housing picture. Of the total population, 76% reside in owner occupied homes according to the most recent data from the American Community Survey's five year estimate (2013-2017), compared to the slightly higher 78.2% that lived in their own home in 2000. The total number of housing units in Warren County is currently estimated to be 23,357 with a 27.63% vacancy rate. This rate is significantly higher than state and national rates which are 11.27% and 12.19% respectively. Of the population in Warren County renting, 35% carry a housing cost burden. That is, the cost of their rent is more than 30% of their income. This is actually lower than the average at both the state and national levels. Homeowners carrying a housing cost burden were found to be 25.18%. Again, this is slightly less than both the state and national averages.

Warren County has an older housing stock than what is typically found at both state and national levels. The median age is 1955 versus 1961 and 1975 respectively. This creates a unique set of challenges as low-income earners attempt to continuously maintain and improve properties. This is one reason for the identified need for additional safe,

affordable housing units in the area. In Warren County, the American Community Survey estimates that 75% of the homeowner live in houses that were built prior to 1980. Of this number, 51% live in houses built before 1960. It is common for utility costs to be higher in these homes or for the home to have needed repairs that are not being completed due to cost which ultimately creates additional health and safety concerns. Of those renting in Warren County; 86% rent homes or apartments in structures build prior to 1980. Similar to homeowners, the majority (62%) live in homes built prior to 1960. The sad reality is that too many of these older homes are not maintained properly which eventually create health and safety concerns for families in Warren County. A similar situation exists in Forest County where approximately 68% of owners live in homes built prior to 1980 (41.4% in homes built before 1960) and nearly 74% of renters live in these older homes. Forest County also has a high vacancy rate at 78% however; the area markets itself as a recreational area and as such the majority of the available housing units are seasonal or vacation properties.

The most noticeable, and impactful, changes that likely affect Head Start children and families include the following: 1) increasing number of out of town landlords, 2) increasing rental costs, and 3) a lack of affordable, safe options for families needing more than 2 bedrooms which are located in more populated areas allowing easy access to education, services, and employment opportunities.

Source: US Census, 2000
US Census, 2010
Americian Community Survey, 2012-2016

OTHER CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDCARE RESOURCES

Note the purpose of the information provided in this section is to meet the requirement of 1305.3(2): Other child development and childcare programs that are serving Head Start eligible children including publicly funded state and local pre-school programs, and the approximate number or Head Start eligible children served by each.

Children Eligible for Childcare Financial Assistance

According to the 2014 data provided by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, the average monthly number of children receiving subsidized child care in Warren County was determined to be 206. Data provided by the Department of Human Services' Early Learning Resource Center serving both Warren and Forest Counties showed a reduction in those being served to 151 children for the current, 2018 to 2019 school year. There are only 4 children receiving the subsidy in Forest County. This is partially due to a smaller population of children and the simple reality that there are no approved providers. The subsidy provided by the Early Learning Resource Center can only be used for child care at an approved facility. In past years, families had been able to utilize the subsidy for friends / family however, this changed in 2016 and this option was eliminated. There is not currently a waiting list and all that were eligible received a subsidy. This does not necessarily mean that the entire demand is being met as there are limited spaces available in approved facilities. Children may be eligible for a subsidy but not have a space.

Covid 19 has impacted this fairly consistent statistic in multiple ways. At the onset of the pandemic; daycare facilities were closed or children weren't going. This led to several options available to area families having to close permanently which eventually decreased an already limited number of openings. Staff turnover and the need to decrease the number of children allowed in the facility also proved challenging. As we move out of the Covid pandemic and try to resume a "new normal" parents and caregivers are finding that options are even more limited than they were before leading many families to delay returns to work if possible.

The Pennsylvania Partnership for Children estimates that 54% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds in Warren County do not have access to high-quality, pre-k programs which include Head Start, keystone STARS 3 and 4 center and group child care, PDE-licensed nursery schools, and school districts. It should also be noted that data from Pennsylvania Partnership for Children includes those enrolled in high-quality providers using public funds to support their pre-k educations. There are 8 participating providers and 10 locations which are eligible to participate. In Forest County there are 2 providers and 2 locations which are eligible. Due to the small population of pre-school age children the school district is able to meet the current demand in coordination with Intermediate Unit 6.

Another program offering aid to families with preschool age children is the PreK Scholarship. The scholarship fund is administered and awarded by the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council. Each year, local businesses and organizations contribute to the program. Funding is then used to assist families with Pre-K costs. Families targeted are those not income eligible for Head Start or Pennsylvania PreK Counts Program. In the 2020-2021 scholarship year; contributors provided \$23,497 in funds that were awarded for at least one quarter of that school year to 29 children attending area preschool programs.

Source: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. – PreK Scholarship

Childcare Availability

According to the Pennsylvania Departments of Public Welfare and Education, in Warren County, there are a total of 17 licensed facilities providing child care services with the ability to serve a maximum of 766 children. There are 9 child care centers and 8 family child care homes. By definition, a day care center is defined as a child care facility where 7 or more children who are not related to the operator receive child care. A family child care home is defined, by contrast, as a home where 7 to 12 children unrelated to the caregiver receive care. Last, a group child care home is one where 7 to 12 children of varying age or 7 to 15 children from 4th grade to 15 years old and are not related to the operator receive care. In addition to the licensed child care centers, additional options exist for families and are often used. These include non-licensed options or children being cared for by family members while the primary caregiver is at work.

The Maximum Child Care Allowances (MCCA) is determined by the Department of Human Services of the Commonwealth (DHS) and is the maximum base amount paid by Early Learning Resource Centers for child care assistance made available to eligible families enrolled in the program. The rates included with this assessment are current as of June 29, 2018. Periodically, DHS does a rate assessment of providers to determine the MCCA rate. The 75th percentile of actual child care provider costs in the county by type and age range cared for is used to ultimately determine rates (Table 17). While updated data is not available at this time; surveys and research regarding available options shows this information to still be true with minimal fluctuation.

Table 16: Child Care Ceiling Rates

County	Type of Provider	Full Time Care					
		Infant	Young Toddler	Old Toddler	Pre-School	Young School-Age	Old School-Age
Forest	Child Care Center	\$26.70	\$26.29	\$26.29	\$26.09	\$26.09	\$26.09
Forest	Group Child Care Home	\$20.86	\$20.86	\$20.86	\$17.89	\$17.89	\$17.89
Forest	Family Child Care Home	\$24.24	\$24.24	\$24.24	\$20.14	\$20.14	\$20.14
Forest	Unregulated	\$11.28	\$11.28	\$11.28	\$10.58	\$10.58	\$10.58
Warren	Child Care Center	\$26.74	\$24.75	\$24.75	\$23.18	\$23.18	\$23.18
Warren	Group Child Care Home	\$25.27	\$25.27	\$25.27	\$25.27	\$25.27	\$25.27

Warren	Family Child Care Home	\$20.14	\$20.14	\$20.14	\$20.14	\$18.50	\$18.50
Warren	Unregulated	\$11.28	\$10.58	\$10.58	\$10.58	\$10.58	\$10.58

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Child Care Works Subsidized Child Care Program

In the two-county service area there are multiple licensed child care providers as well as a selection of un-licensed providers. Data collected from Head Start families enrolled in the program over the past several years also indicates that many families use friends and/or extended family. The following chart provides a listing of licensed options for child care centers in the service area which are subsidy eligible.

Option: Child Care Center

Program	Capacity	Daily Rates (3 & 4 y.o)	Curriculum	Hours (M-F)	Keystone STARS Quality Rating
Henry R. Rouse Children’s Center Youngsville, PA	67	\$26.50 FT / \$27.50 PT Preschool		6am – 6pm	4
Grace United Methodist Church Warren, PA	71	\$110/week FT; \$50-80 PT	Teacher Choice	6:30am – 5:30pm	1
Ruth Smith Center Sheffield, PA	111	\$125/Week FT; \$68/Week PT	Beginning uses ABCs	6:30am – 5pm	
Jefferson DeFrees Family Center Warren, PA	126	\$25 FT / \$28 PT		6:15am – 5:30pm	4
Russell Methodist Church Russell, PA	83	\$125 FT		6:30am – 5:30pm	2
North Warren Presbyterian Community Day Care North Warren, PA	N/A	\$24.50 FT / \$5/hr PT		6:45am – 6pm	

Sugar Grove Free Methodist	N/A	\$20 FT	6:45am – 6pm	
Sugar Grove, PA				
YMCA of Warren	N/A	\$115/Week FT 3yrs; \$105/Week FT 4yrs	6:30am – 4:30pm (3yrs) 12pm – 5pm (4yrs)	1
Warren, PA				

Childcare Quality

According to the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), the Keystone STARS program has the greatest reach across the state as an investment. Services are provided to an estimated 23% of all children age 5 and under throughout the state of Pennsylvania. The STAR initiative seeks to improve, support, and recognize continuous quality improvement efforts in child care settings. STARS stands for Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support. The highest level is a STAR 4. Each level builds on the previous one using research-based best practices to promote quality early learning environment producing positive child outcomes.

The Warren Head Start program does not offer childcare. However, the program does collaborate with area child care providers for Head Start eligible children and their families to attend and receive Head Start services in addition to receiving child care during the school year. In Warren County there are two STAR 1, seven STAR 2, one STAR 3, and two STAR 4 providers serving slightly more than just over 50% of children age 5 and younger.

Preschool Programs in Warren County

In addition to a selection of child care providers, Warren County has several preschool programs as well as a Head Start program. All programs and enrollment information on the past enrollment years through 2019 plus the current school year are provided in Table 35. The area Head Start program is the largest provider and the only program requiring teachers to have a four year degree in education with certification or experience in early childhood educations. Classroom aides are required to have, at minimum, the Child Development Associate credential (CDA). Beginning in 2018-2019, the Head Start program became the lead agency for PreK Counts, a state-funded early childhood education program, in Warren County which provides 26 children with a high-quality, evidence based curriculum program. In past years the Agency offered PreK Counts to 20 students while Jefferson DeFrees Family Center oversaw provision of services to the remaining 6 children. When the grant was submitted for the next funding cycle Jefferson DeFrees Family Center opted out. In the 2021-2022 school year an additional 18 slots were funded for expansion of the PreK Counts program. This additional class is also under the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council.

The number of young children and families is slowly declining as evidenced by the 18% decrease in enrolled students in the Warren County School District and the shrinking numbers in Forest County School District. Based on the estimated population of 3 and 4 year olds eligible for early childhood programs (approx. 850 children) the number of children attending is slightly over 60%.

Table 17: Preschool Enrollment in Warren County

Program	2016 to 2017		2017 to 2018		2018 to 2019		2021-2022	
	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds
Creative Preschool	16	18	16	20	23	16	ND	ND
Imagine Preschool	18	22	10	14	20	14	16	16
Jefferson DeFrees	20	17	17	22	16	23	11	10
Jefferson DeFrees PKC			6		6			
North Warren	12	11	19	17	13	17	9	0
Rouse Children's Center	20	11	18	9	15	18	12	12
Russell United Methodist	9	10	7	14	10	11	8	10
YMCA	25	29	30	30	26	26	12	14
Head Start PreK Counts (PKC)	17	16	13	7	4	17	22	25
Tidioute Charter	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12
Don Mills Achievement Preschool	7	9	10	10	5	21	4	4
St. Joes	13	11	10	15	11	8	ND	ND
Head Start	84	110	86	110	85	117	99	91
TOTALS	243	274	246	286	228	323	193	194
	517		532		551		387	

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC and Head Start

The COVID 19 pandemic not only impacted traditional schools but preschool and early education programs as well. As evidenced by numbers, overall enrollment has decreased. This could be due to several factors including, but not limited to, parents out of work and home with their kids, decreased preK scholarship funding available, elimination of preK programs (i.e. Ruth Stitt Center PreK in Sheffield), and not wanting younger children to either be exposed or follow safety precautions such as mask wearing.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The purpose of this section is to meet the requirement of 1305.3 (3): The estimated number of children with disabilities four years or younger, including the types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies.

Special Education Child Count Data

In the Warren County School District, 51.69% of all enrolled students are economically disadvantaged while 19% receive special education services. Forest County boasts similar statistics with 55.8% of enrolled students being economically disadvantaged and 19% receiving special education services.

The Pupil Service Report Card released in 2018 by the Warren County School District supports observations made by the Warren Head Start program regarding an increase in mental health and disruptive behaviors in children which require additional services which may include, but are not limited to, an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Within the content of the Report Card the following statement can be found: “The district has engaged in ongoing evaluation of needs at Youngsville Elementary Middle School and Warren Area Elementary Center in response to the increase in mental health and behavioral needs of our children.” The district also notes that the overall enrollment and student population has decrease 18.64% since 2007-2008 while the special education enrollment has increased by 2.4% across the number of total enrolled. This creates new challenges which will need to be addressed for future planning and points toward some of the challenges being faced by families within the target population. Updates to the Pupil Service Report Card for the most recent school year show a continuation of this identified trend.

Focusing on the target population, there are two programs based in Warren County to perform early intervention services to children under 5. The Birth to Three Early Intervention Program is offered through Forest-Warren Human Services and provides special education services to eligible children age birth to three. Services are identified via the child’s Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and may include, but are not limited to, special instruction, speech, physical, and occupational therapy. Often, services in this program are provided in the home or at a day care setting. Referrals for the program come from NICUs, specialists, hospitals, PCPs, parents, family members, private daycares, providers outside the Early Intervention, child care programs, Early Intervention providers, social service agencies, and homeless shelters. To be eligible for Early Intervention services the child must have a 25% delay in one or more areas of development, have an Early Intervention provider’s clinical opinion or a known medical or mental health diagnosis with high probability of developmental delays. Year over year, the average number of children receiving services tends to stay fairly consistent (Table 18).

Table 18: B-3 Special Education Services in Warren County, 2011-2018

School Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
# of Children	143	138	161	132 to date	149 (Active) & 18 (Tracking)	161 (Active) & 24 (Tracking)	159 (Active) & 25 (Training)

Source: Warren-Forest Counties Head Start; Forest-Warren Human Services Early Intervention Program

A second program in Warren County is available and concentrates efforts on children in the 3 to 5 year old population in need of Special Education services. The aforementioned, Intermediate Unit #5 provides services identified through Individual Education Plans (IEP) which are tailored to the needs of each child. An IEP could include Speech/Language Support, Occupational and/or Physical Therapy, Assistive Technology, Transportation, or other services identified within the IEP (Table 20).

Table 19: 3 and 4 Year Olds Receiving Special Education Services in Warren County, 2009-2018

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2016-2017	2017-2018
Head Start	49	38	47	41	39	35	32	38
IU#5	44	ND	ND	ND	ND	4	ND	ND
Don Mills	27	ND	ND	ND	30	ND	ND	ND

Source: Warren-Forest Counties Head Start *ND = No Data Available

The Warren Head Start program has made additional observations regarding the Special Education needs within their particular target population of 3 and 4 year olds. On average, at the onset of the school year, there are typically 10-15% of enrolled students with an identified problem whom have been professionally diagnosed with a disability. However, there has been an observed trend of an increasing number of children who may not have a diagnosis but who do present in the classroom with challenging behaviors requiring more individualized instruction and/or interventions throughout the school day. In the 2016 to 2017 school year almost 8% of enrolled children began the school year with an IEP already in place but by the end of the school year; 16% had one. In the 2017 to 2018 school year 11% of enrolled students began with an IEP and an additional 16 children were referred for services and had IEPs in place by the end of the year. This resulted in a total of 18% of all enrolled children which is consistent with rates within the school district. It is becoming increasingly common that once the school year begins, challenging behaviors are being identified and additional children are being diagnosed with a disability requiring Special Education services. Local mental health providers can be accessed by the family for children lacking an IEP but who have been identified as having a challenging behavior. This trend is persistent and increasing. In fact, recent classes that have resumed since the COVID pandemic and related shut downs have observed even more challenging behaviors. The theory is that these may be a result of children having fewer social opportunities with peers, increased screen time, and increased stress at home.

Forest County contains no typical preschools. There is a K4 and IU6 program offered through the school district. The IU6 program of Forest County, similar to IU5 in Warren County has no children. This school year there were 4 children enrolled and therefore, typical 3-year-olds were being brought into the classroom in a reverse mainstream process. This is due to significantly lower numbers than what was reported in January of 2014. Current numbers are approximately 30 less students requiring services. The K4 program also moved 3-year-olds into the classroom to bring the total class size to 18 students. Due to the low numbers of students, those requiring services are transported to North Clarion.

Disability Categories

The following table shows data collected from 2003 to the current school year on the special needs of children in the Warren-Forest Counties Head Start Program. All children with disabilities eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) are included (Table 20).

Table 20: Children Receiving Special Services by Primary or Most Significant Disability, 2004-2015

	2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010	2011- 2012	2012- 2013	2013- 2014	2014- 2015	2016- 2017	2017- 2018	2021- 2022
Health Impairment	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	4	0	1
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Speech or Language Impairment	11	14	23	18	12	16	18	19	19	25	24
Mental Retardation / Intellectual Disability	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hearing Impairment Including Deafness	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Visual Impairment Including Blindness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Learning Disabilities	0	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Autism	1	0	0	0	2	3	3	2	0	0	0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Non Categorical/ Developmental Delay	39	44	36	30	33	22	19	11	9	13	10
Multiple Disabilities Including Deaf-Blind	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total With Disabilities	51	58	66	54	47	41	41	35	32	38	35
Total Head Start Children	212	207	215	220	213	218	211	218	196	202	193
Percent with Disability	24%	28%	31%	25%	22%	19%	20%	16%	16%	19%	18%

Source: Head Start Program Information Reports and Data

The percentage of student receiving special education services for Head Start in the 2017-2018 school year is 18.8%. This is nearly the same percentage seen at the Kindergarten through high school level for the same school year. The Warren County School District has observed a slowly increasing rate of student needing Special Education service. The current rate is 18% which is higher than state and national levels.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEAD START CHILDREN

The purpose of this section is to meet the requirements of 1305.3(3) and (5): Data regarding the education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of Head Start eligible children and their families; the education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of Head Start eligible children and their families as defined by families of Head Start eligible children and institutions in the community that service young children.

Age Distribution

The total number of children served by Head Start in the 2021-2022 school year was 193. Of the total number of children served, 52% are 4 years of age and the remaining 48% are 3 years of age. Additionally, the program had multiple classrooms with an additional 48 children participating in the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program. However, 9 of those children in PreK Counts left during the program year. There were 49 children enrolled who were second year participants and 4 who were in their third year. This equates to 27% of the total children enrolled in Head Start.

In the 2021-2022 school year there are 92 three year olds (48%) and 101 four year olds (52%) that have been served by the program for a total enrollment of 193. Typically the program provides early childhood education and services to an average of 200 students each school year. The Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program in the 2018-2019 school year provided services to an additional 10 children for a total of 30. To date 17 three year olds and 16 four year olds have been served. This number, for both Head Start and PreK Counts is cumulative and includes those children who may no longer be enrolled actively in the program. When a child and family moves, chooses to withdrawal, or other scenario; the program enrolls a new student from a waiting list.

Source: Warren Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council; Head Start Program

Center Enrollment

All Head Start Center locations for the program are currently in Warren County. While the program actively recruits in Forest County there are not enough Head Start eligible children to warrant an additional center. Throughout the 2017 to 2018 school year there were five center locations. The program reduced to three center locations serving all areas of Warren County and include the McClintock Center on the west end of Warren, South Street Center on the east end, and the Seneca center location on the south side. Recruitment is from Pittsfield, Sugar Grove, Bear Lake, Columbus, Spring Creek, Youngsville, Garland, Grand Valley, Irvine, Tidioute, Pleasantville, Clarendon, Sheffield, Tiona, Warren, Russell, and Sugar Grove.

In the 2018 to 2019 school year the center locations changed due to declining numbers in outlying townships like Lottsville. Children are transported to the closest center. In the current school year the program has three center location in Warren located on the west, south, and east ends of the city. Revised center locations and recruitment areas are now as follows:

- McClintock and Seneca Centers (located in Warren) each have three classrooms and enrolls from Warren, Starbrick, Russell, Pittsfield, Garland, Grand Valley, Irvine, Bear Lake, Columbus, Spring Creek, and Sugar Grove.
- South Street Center (located in East Warren) has four classrooms and enrolls from the east side of Warren, Clarendon, Tiona, and Sheffield.

The chart below shows the number of children recruited from the aforementioned areas each school year beginning with the 2010-2011 school year and leading up to the year where major changes in center locations were made pre-covid (Table 20).

Table 20: Head Start Enrollment and Locations 2010 – 2019

Location	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2017-2018	2018-2019
Clarendon	9	7	15	16	6	12	13
Endeavor	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
Pittsfield	11	13	14	13	10	10	6
Russell	12	8	11	13	7	6	5
Sheffield	13	16	8	18	17	19	11
Sugar Grove	9	8	11	11	15	7	4
Chandlers Valley	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Tidioute	3	0	0	1	1	2	1
Tionesta	11	11	7	0	0	0	0
Warren	96	102	106	109	114	106	113
West Hickory	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Youngsville	24	27	32	20	24	17	18
Bear Lake	4	6	1	2	6	2	3
Columbus	6	4	0	0	1	0	0
Garland	5	2	2	1	4	3	5
Grand Valley	2	2	0	0	1	0	3
Spring Creek	1	1	0	4	5	1	2
Tiona	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
East Hickory	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Irvine	1	3	2	3	5	0	2
Pleasantville	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	212	213	218	211	218	185	185

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR

Family Educational Characteristics

The majority of 2021 to 2022 Head Start families have at least one parent with a High School diploma as their highest level of education. The complete breakdown is listed below. There are 184 families represented by this data. When looking at two-parent households, the parent with the highest level of education was counted (Table 21).

Table 21: Educational Attainment within Head Start Families, 2021-2022

Level Attained	# of Families	% of Families
Less than High School Diploma	20	11%
High School Diploma / GED	108	59%
Associate Degree, Vocational, or Some College	14	7%
Advanced Degree or Baccalaureate	42	23%
TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES	184	100%

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR

The following information is provided as a comparison between Head Start families and educational attainment levels for the entire two-county service area (Table 22).

Table 22: Comparison of Educational Attainment for Head Start Families and Service Area

Level Attained	% of Head Start Families	% within Two-County Report Area
Less than a High School Diploma	11%	9%
High School Diploma / GED	59%	48%
Associate’s Degree / Vocational / Some College	7%	25%
Bachelor’s Degree	23%	18%

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR; American Community Survey, 2015 – 2019, Data Release December 2020

The percentage of households where at least one of the primary caregivers for the child holds only a high school diploma or equivalent is higher within the population of Head Start families than what is observed at the county levels. The percentages of those with some college education, an Associate’s Degree, or a Bachelor’s Degree for the two-county area are already lower than state and national averages. When looking at the cohort of Head Start families alone; the percentage of households where one (or both) caregivers has attained a college degree or some college education is even lower.

The lack of education among Head Start parents and caregivers compounds the entrenched poverty seen among families. Based on program information, 62% of Head Start families have at least one person employed while 38% are listed as unemployed or in a job training program (Table 23). However, it can be inferred based on income eligibility requirements and the area’s socio-economic reality; that many of those working are in low-paying jobs. Further, these entry level or low wage positions typically offer few, if any, benefits such as health insurance. The lack of higher education, job skills, and experience all become barriers to securing some of the higher earning jobs within the area. Further, it should be noted that the Covid pandemic resulted in a mass job loss throughout the community with some employers closing for good or drastically reducing operations and thus employment opportunities.

Table 23: Employment, Job Training and School

	# of Families	% of Families
At least one parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school at enrollment	128	
One or more parent/guardian is employed	114	62%
One or more parent/guardian is in job training	14	8%
One or more parent/guardian is in school	0	
Neither/No parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school (unemployed, retired, or disabled)	56	30%

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR *Percentages are based on total number of families (184)

Health Indicators

Of the 184 families participating in the Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start program it is estimated that approximately 50% received services under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This estimate was provided by the WIC Program of Warren County. Each month, there are approximately 850 total participants throughout the County.

The WIC Program of Warren County reports that families with young children receiving services typically lack basic parenting skills and exist within an unstable family environment. Poverty and parents working low wage jobs with little to no benefits are still unable to meet basic needs even with BOTH parents working. Parents lack knowledge and skills when it comes to basic cooking, food preparation, and budgeting. There is a noticeable increase in the use of pre-packaged, instant food items which are less costly for the family but not as nutritious.

This observation is further backed by data which shows an increase in the number of enrolled children with obesity as a chronic health condition. In fact, obesity is the number one medical condition seen in current Head Start students (Table 24). Observations by the Head Start staff also corroborate what is being seen at the WIC Program. That is, limited transportation in turn limits access to supermarkets. This trend has encouraged a reliance on convenience stores and similar options where foods tend to be more expensive with a limited selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, many area food banks tend to supply cheap and easy-to-store food. Vending machines, many restaurants in the service area, and especially fast food restaurants tend to not supply fruit or vegetables either. Compounding the issue, lower income parents with one or more jobs tend to have little time for cooking and are more likely to view fruits and vegetables as too time consuming to prepare. For some of the same or similar reasons, fast food chains hold greater appeal for many families on the go. In recent years, fast food chains have begun offering few healthy options on their menus. All of the aforementioned factors, especially when combined with lack of physical exercise, tend to create a scenario where lower income persons, especially children, are increasingly becoming overweight and obese.

Table 24: Children Receiving Treatment for Specific Medical Conditions, 2003-2015

	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2016-2017	2017-2018
Anemia	2	1	1	11	8	8	4	6	7	2	6
Sickle Cell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High Lead Levels	1	3	4	5	6	6	2	34	39	18	18
Hearing Difficulties	11	19	11	29	12	17	16	19	15	35	32
Vision Problems	14	13	8	22	10	26	18	15	27	40	37
Diabetes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Seizure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Overweight / Obesity	15	19	22	32	28	79	79	70	73	42	57
Underweight	0	0	0	0	0	4	5	11	8	10	12
Asthma	12	22	21	20	8	15	10	18	15	13	12
Child Abuse & Neglect	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 referrals	0	0
Total Head Start Children	218	215	216	214	212	213	218	211	218	195	202

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR

Note we only have information on the number of referrals for the child abuse and neglect categories. Also, note that the number of children indicated as having high lead levels in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 is based on the CDC level of 5-9. If using the State of Pennsylvania’s level of 10 the number of children affected for the current school year (2014-2015) would be 2.

Primary Care Access

It can be difficult to attract physicians and specialists to rural counties. Warren and Forest County are no exception. The area has a noticable lack of specialists and inadequate numbers of providers to effectively serve the area. Adding to this issue is a severe shortage of providers which accept medical access cards. Warren County does have one federally qualified health center or FQHC. In general, a FQHC is any organization receiving grants under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act and qualify for enhanced reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid. Compounding the issue, for Head Start families more likely to be reliant on medical assistance, many area providers are not accepting new patients due to overwhelming demand or do not accept medical assistance.

Doctors classified as “primary care physicians” by the American Medical Association include: General Family Medicine MDs and DOs, General Practice MDs and DOs, General Internal Medicine MDs, and General Pediatrics MDs. The average ratio of providers to people in the State of Pennsylvania is 98.9 per every 100,000 persons. This is actually better than the national average of 87.8 providers for every 100,000 persons. However, in Warren County the ratio drops sharply to 56.5 providers for every 100,000 persons. This leads to difficulties in trying to secure a primary care physician; particularly if the provider is no longer accepting patients and is one of the few which accepts medical assistance.

Another barrier in accessing medical care is transportation. Public transportation is not easily accessible to all of Warren and Forest Counties. Additionally, many families have only one vehicle. It should be assumed that Forest County residents must travel to Warren or other surrounding counties to access medical care. The reality is that in order to receive care you need to be able to arrange transportation or have access to it. This reality has contributed to greater demand placed on emergency care workers for minor aches/pains, colds, or other illness not typically classified as an actual emergency.

Area physicians surveyed for the 2016 Community Health needs Assessment by Warren General Hospital were asked what the top concern in terms of patient care was for Warren County residents. The response, as previously stated, was that a lack of primary care physician access has contributed to increased utilization of the Emergency Care Center for minor issues. This situation makes treatment less efficient and more costly. Further, in the survey, what asked to make recommendations, many of the physicians suggested the following: “[T]here needs to be better access to specialty physicians, and other options to provide open access for patients, especially patients on a limited income.” Providers were also asked, “Do you seem to see clinical trends in any certain area of the patients that you treat?” The response was again overwhelmingly shared among the group that obesity and diabetes were top medical concerns. These two issues tend to go hand-in-hand and point toward the poor nutrition throughout the community as a whole. Other areas trending as increasing concerns included cancer and dental related issues.

A summary of the Physician Focus Group survey from the Community Health Needs Assessment reads as follows:

“The overall trend was very consistent across the board. Medical providers characterized current challenges in Warren County to be representative of three categories: Weight Loss (diabetes/cardiac), Healthcare Literacy and decision-making (patient accountability), and unnecessary medical specialty referrals to services outside Warren County. In particular, the patient’s ability to afford transfer for low-income (poverty) and elderly patients (to include primary care and cardiac care.)

The first concern mentioned the most was the ability to work with residents understanding the impact of obesity. It is closely correlated with diabetes and cardiac related issues with patients. There were several requests for additional nutritional services for referrals. Obesity covers the full gamut of needs to include increasing cardiac services and providers being available in Warren.

With the largest growing populations being the elderly and those in poverty, there are educational needs directly related to health care literacy. These groups are not completely aware of existing assistance within the community and often have to leave the community for specialty services. This travel burden diminishes compliance and in turn causes greater dependence on the non-traditional care providers. The use of the Emergency Care Center at Warren General Hospital is not reflecting a multi-generational dependence on this resource as their source of primary and specialty care.

When asked for recommendations to eliminate the concerns listed in the body of the survey, there were consistent trends. Providers felt an increase in the number of primary care providers in the Warren County service market would improve the compliance of patients that are unable to travel to referrals outside the Warren County area. The lack of Cardiology services locally was the only service that was mentioned with repetition. According to respondents, there is a growing concern

that drug dependence is slowly becoming a new problem with younger populations as they are accessing the healthcare system. There is a recurring request by patients for narcotics.”

Additionally, adequate mental health services and access to care are a concern for many area providers of social services including the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council and Head Start program. Similar to primary care access, the ratio of providers to those who need services is less than state and national rates. This reality is a concern that was echoed during a 2018 Warren County Human Service summit where both service providers and families indicated that long wait times, particularly for families/individuals in crisis, were a major issue which has resulted in distrust in the available system of care by those who need it most. In the Community Health Assessment completed by Warren General Hospital it was discussed that the hospital has often become the primary service provider for behavior health needs. This is supported by looking at combined visit data to Warren Medical Group offices where anxiety and depression have continuously ranked in the top 10 listing of what patient complains are when attending appointments with their providers. Standard wait times for mental health services can be anywhere between 30 and 60 days. The pandemic era shut downs have resulted in a greater demand on an already stressed mental health system that wasn't able to meet pre-pandemic needs. Currently, many options for mental health are either not accepting new patients or the waitlists are 10 to 12 weeks. In emergency or crisis situations; this is far from meeting the needs of the area.

The Head Start program focuses on the family unit as a whole and in order to be successful the program relies on the ability to effectively and consistently provide needed mental health services to students, families, and staff. Currently, services are provided through partnership agreement with seven local mental health agencies which includes the local school district. However, consistently due to schedule conflicts and being overwhelmed with demand these agencies are unable to provide serviced for referred enrollees or the family in a timely manner. There have even been times when services cannot be provided at all. This is a growing concern as staff reports and classroom data show that an increasing number of children exhibit more and more evidence of stress in the classroom, with significant numbers exhibiting either withdrawn, aggressive, or “out-of-control” behaviors that are challenging and have at times threatened the overall environment of the classroom. This trend is continuing as these children enter the school system in Kindergarten. In fact, throughout 2016-2017 the special education department in the Warren County School District engaged in “ongoing discussion with the Board of Education and Superintendent regarding the increasing need of services to support mental health needs of children in our schools. In 2017, an additional school psychologist was hired.” According to the 2018 Pupil Service Report Card; the district has also moved forward with other behavior intervention programs to meet increasing need; in particular these programs launched at Warren Area Elementary Center and Youngsville Elementary Middle School. In the most recent school year; therapy dogs have been introduced into the schools as well as options such as Art Therapy for upper grades beginning in middle school.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. April 2014.
United States Census Bureau
American Community Survey
Community Health Needs Assessment, 2016 from Warren General Hospital

Dental Care

Forest County has no dentists or dental hygienists. The situation in Warren County mirrors that found at the state level with 1 dentist per 1,000 people. While there are options, the most significant barrier to accessing dental care is cost and inability to pay. There are no longer any dentists in all of Warren County that accept assistance in lieu of dental insurance. This makes getting an appointment or even being accepted as a new patient increasingly difficult. The majority of Head Start children have never been to a dentist prior to enrolling in the program. Currently, there are no dentists in Warren County who will accept medical assistance creating a huge barrier for vulnerable, low-income children and families.

Additionally, fluoride, a substance found naturally in a water supply is noticeably lacking in Warren County. Fluoride is well known for the role it plays in helping to prevent and even reverse early stages of tooth decay. If tooth decay

is not stopped or treated it can lead to pain, tooth loss, and potentially infection. Tooth decay is also one of the most common childhood diseases making access to dental care from an early age important in maintaining overall good health.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. April 2014.

<http://kidshealth.org>

United States Census

Free and Reduced Lunch

In the two-county service area nearly 50% of enrolled students were eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program as of March 12, 2014. This number is reflective of public, private, and parochial schools as well as residential child care institutional figures. Total, there are 2,654 eligible student equating to 49.28%. The State of Pennsylvania, by comparison, has an average rate of 42.94% (Table 25). Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year; all students in the Warren County School District now receive free breakfast and lunch.

Table 25: Students Participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (Lunches Only), March 2014

County	2010-2011	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Forest	45.14%	55.24%	47.88%	59.87%	58%
Warren	42.46%	46.29%	47.36%	48.21%	52.84%
Pennsylvania	39.41%	41.52%	43.58%	45.63%	48.16%
National	48.15%	51.32%	51.99%	51.8%	52.3%

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, 2017.

Public Assistance

Of the 193 children enrolled in the 2021 to 2022 school year cumulatively; 16 families or 9% receive cash benefits. This number includes those receiving benefits under TANF and those receiving Social Security Income or SSI. 105 or over 50% of families received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 57 families or 31% by the end of the year still received services under Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Source: Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start PIR

Services Requested

All families enrolled in the EOC Head Start program receive assistance and support from the Family Services component. Partnerships are formed and each family is looked at on an individual basis to best determine what the needs of the family are and ensure that these needs are met as efficiently as possible (Table 26).

Service	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2016-2017	2017-2018	2021-2022
Emergency/Crisis Intervention (Immediate Need)	77	59	138	99	69	86	100
Housing Assistance	91	56	6	12	31	20	7
Transportation Assistance	40	25	14	12	1	1	9
Mental Health Services	47	53	3	0	0	0	1

English as a Second Language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adult Education (GED, etc.)	19	15	1	208	0	0	7
Job Training	3	12	0	0	1	0	0
Substance Abuse Prevention or Treatment	10	7	0	1	0	0	7
Child Abuse and Neglect Services	12	7	0	0	0	0	0
Domestic Violence Services	5	1	1	0	0	0	ND
Child Support Assistance	53	35	10	0	0	0	ND
Health Education	199	200	200	208	181	189	177
Assistance to Families of Incarcerated Individuals	15	16	1	0	9	8	3
Parenting Education	199	200	200	208	181	189	184
Relationship / Marriage Education	ND	ND	ND	ND	0	0	1
Asset Building Services (Financial Education, open savings account, debt counseling, etc.)	ND	ND	ND	ND	3	0	0
TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHO WERE COUNTED IN AT LEAST ONE SERVICE	ND	ND	ND	ND	181	189	184

Source: Head Start Program Information Reports and Data

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The purpose of this section is to meet the requirement of 1305.3 (6): Resources in the community that could be used to address the needs of Head Start eligible children and their families.

The Warren-Forest Counties EOC Head Start Program partners with numerous government and community agencies to support the needs of low-income families and children. The following listing is arranged by category of service and includes a brief description of what can be provided by each partnering group or organization.

Family Income and Poverty

Low paying jobs with few, if any, benefits create a situation where many families in Warren and Forest Counties are earning less than the average income seen in other areas of the state and at a national level. This has created a situation of entrenched and generational poverty, especially for those without job skills. However, several programs are available to help low-income persons enter and better prepare for the job market.

- ❑ **Partners for Progress** | Works with the PA CareerLink system and the Workforce Investment Act to provide employability services to job seekers; assists in seeking, securing, and retaining permanent unsubsidized jobs.
- ❑ **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation** | Provides vocational counseling and employment preparation services for persons with sever/multiple employment handicaps. This organization is especially committed to assisting the severely disabled person in accessing the job market.
- ❑ **Mobile Career Link** | Provides basic job applicant and employer services which include interviewing, counseling, testing, job development, selection, referrals, supportive services, job placement, and unemployment compensation. By appointment only. Service is mobile with no physical office location.
- ❑ **Warren County School-To-Work Program** | A partnership composed of citizens, educators, business and government agencies that offer knowledge, training and guidance to all students to enable them to be competitive members of the workforce.
- ❑ **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council Community Services Program** | Offering assistance with developing a workable household budget as well as various job training programs.
- ❑ **Warren Forest Higher Education Council** | Works to identify, implement, and coordinate educational and employment opportunities for the citizens of Warren and Forest Counties.

Family and Child Health

- ❑ **Automated Health Systems** | Located in Pittsburgh, this service ensures that children from birth to age 20, who currently have a Medical Card, have their EPSDT screenings. Reminders and information to consumers and agencies regarding services are provided through the service.
- ❑ **Hospice of Warren County** | Care for patients with life limiting illness.

- ❑ **March of Dimes, Northwest Pennsylvania Chapter** | Seeks to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects and infant mortality through a combination of targeted public and professional education, research, advocacy, and community service.
- ❑ **Pennsylvania Department of Health Forest County State Health Center** | Provides public health education, preventative nursing services, community empowerment as mandated by the State of Pennsylvania legislation. Also provides adult and child immunizations, HIV/AIDS counseling-referral and health resources.
- ❑ **Pennsylvania Department of Health, Warren County State Health Center** | Provides immunizations, public health education, communicable disease surveillance and investigation, HIV testing and counseling, and other nursing services as mandated by the State of Pennsylvania.
- ❑ **Pine Grove Lions Club** | Pine Grove, PA branch of the Lions Club International which actively promotes a spirit of engaged interest in the civic, cultural, social, and moral welfare of the communities in which a club exists.
- ❑ **Pregnancy Support Center** | Provides support, services, practical help, and hope for women with crisis pregnancies.
- ❑ **Warren General Hospital** | Located in Warren, PA, the hospital provides a wide range of services including a walk-in clinic for non-life threatening health issues and financial assistance.
- ❑ **Warren Lioness Club**
- ❑ **Warren Lions Club** | Warren, PA branch of the Lions Club International which actively promotes a spirit of engaged interest in the civic, cultural, social, and moral welfare of the communities in which a club exists.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Since North Warren is home to Warren State Hospital, a state mental hospital facility, there are a large number of organizations and programs that address the issues of substance abuse and/or mental health. Many are located on or near the Warren State Hospital campus.

- ❑ **Alcoholics Anonymous** | A fellowship of men and women sharing their experience, strength, and hope in order to recover from alcoholism.
- ❑ **Beacon Light** | Offers a continuum of services for children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral problems. Group and individual counseling available at the Warren, PA location.
- ❑ **Cornell Abraxas I** | Provides an alternative to incarceration for male offenders ages 14 – 18 who have drug and alcohol histories.
- ❑ **Deerfield Behavioral Health of Warren County, Outpatient Services** | Provides individual, couple, and family therapy, medication assessment and management, psychological evaluations and therapy, adolescent psychiatry, geriatric consultation, substance abuse evaluations, outpatient intensive and partial services.
- ❑ **Deerfield Behavioral Health of Warren County, Inpatient Services** | 24/7 acute psychiatric treatment facility for persons 14 years old and above. Provides psychiatric evaluation, treatment, medication management, and stabilization for psychiatric emergencies.
- ❑ **Family Services of Warren, Inc.** | Professional counseling for couples, individuals and families, employment assistance, groups for anger management, domestic violence offenders, consultation to schools and community education. Coordination of Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth, a positive youth development initiative.

- ❑ **Friendship House** | Provides mental health consumers with opportunities for recreation, socialization, education, and empowerment.
- ❑ **Narcotics Anonymous, Chautauqua Area Service Committee** | NA is a non-profit fellowship of men and women for whom drugs have become a major problem. Recovering addicts meet regularly to help others in recovery stay clean.
- ❑ **Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance, Region IX** | Exists to aid students in trouble with drugs, alcohol, abuse, divorce or suicide by getting the student to appropriate counseling services through the school system. Monitors school for the Drug Free Schools Program.
- ❑ **Phoenix House, Inc.** | Located in Warren, PA, Phoenix House is a residential halfway house program for men who need a safe place to live while attending a drug and/or alcohol recovery program.
- ❑ **Warren County DUI Program** | Provides DUI offenders with alcohol evaluations, alcohol highway safety school, the victim impact panel and intervention group services.

Disabilities

The Lions Clubs provide much assistance particularly to persons with visual disabilities and were already listed under the Family Child and Health section. Also missing from this list are support groups organized around specific conditions or diseases that may result in disabilities.

- ❑ **Community Resources for Independence** | Seeks to improve the quality of life for all people with disabilities. Services include, but are not limited to, information and referral, peer support, advocacy, independent living skills, and attendant care services.
- ❑ **Farrah Grotto** | Supports projects which aid disabled children with emphasis on dentistry for the disabled and cerebral palsy research.
- ❑ **Forest Area Disability Council** | Provides support and advocacy to people with disabilities and offers them various resources to help them meet their needs.

Child Abuse

- ❑ **Parents Anonymous of Forest County** | Support group for parents.
- ❑ **Warren County Human Services Intake** | Provider of holistic assessment, service planning, and referral services to individuals and families. The basic intake assessment which includes a basic child abuse investigation and other brief services is completed by this group. Further, they are responsible for providing 24-hour services for mental health crisis or emergency.
- ❑ **CASA of Warren & Forest Counties** | This is the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program which works to train volunteers to objectively advocate for children and youth in the court system.

Juvenile Delinquency and Crime

- ❑ **A Safe Place/Forest County Branch** | Provides support counseling services for victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault, prevention/education programs, legal advocacy, assistance to clients with the court system, accompaniment to hospitals, police, etc. and support groups.
- ❑ **Forest County Probation Office** | Oversees adult and juvenile probation, pre-sentence investigations, pre-parole plans, court-related criminal actions, counseling, job placement assistance, CRN testing, DUI

suspension, intermediate punishment program, community service programs, and Student Accountability to the Community (SAC) community service program.

- ❑ **Safe Place** | Similar to the Forest County branch, A Safe Place offers supportive counseling services for victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Prevention/education programs, legal advocacy and assistance within the court system, accompaniment to hospitals, police, etc., are provided. Last, support groups and shelter for victims and their children.
- ❑ **Warren County Adult Probation Department** | Investigations for the court, probation, and parole supervision. Restitution for victims of crime is also collected by this entity.
- ❑ **Warren County District Attorney's Victim Witness Program** | Provides support services to crime victims, including support groups, counseling, information and referral, orientation to the criminal justice system, crisis intervention, case status information. This program also provides accompaniment for victims to court and provides assistance in filing a crime victim compensation claim under Pennsylvania law.
- ❑ **Warren County Jail Office for Counseling Services** | Provides assessment and treatment for individuals and in group settings (counseling and therapy), life skills training, drug and alcohol counseling, GED preparation and testing, referral services, community work release, vocation skills training, sexual additions counseling, HIV testing, and both pre and post counseling for inmates.
- ❑ **Warren County Juvenile Probation Department** | This department works specifically with juveniles who have been charged with misdemeanors and felonies. Each child's supervision plan is aimed at restoring the victim, protecting the community, and building competencies in the young offender which will help him/her to remain crime free in the future.

Education

Major educational institutions (such as school districts) and individual schools and colleges are generally omitted from this list although; they do all provide and represent an important resource within the community.

- ❑ **Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit #5** | Provides consultant services to Warren County School District for gifted programs, work-study programs, vocational-special education liaison. Services for preschool children with suspected development disabilities. This resource also works with the school district providing programs for school-age children with mental retardation, learning and/or physical disabilities, and learning and/or emotionally impaired and socially and/or emotionally disturbed.

Housing and Homelessness

Excluded from the list in this section are those organizations with a primary focus on providing senior housing services. Individual apartment buildings or housing developments are also not included unless they provide affordable housing and/or on-site supportive services.

- ❑ **Faith Inn Shelter** | Owned and operated by the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council, the shelter provides emergency housing and supportive services to homeless persons and families.
- ❑ **Housing Authority of the County of Warren** | Operates all federally subsidized housing for low-income families, elderly, and the physically and mentally challenged.
- ❑ **Lincoln Woods Apartments** | Safe, clean, and affordable housing at a 44 family apartment complex with both 1 and 2 bedroom units. Applicants must qualify for rental assistance. Section 8 is accepted.
- ❑ **Salvation Army** | Provides emergency shelter, clothing and food for men, women, and children in need, visitations and gifts for shut-ins, spiritual counseling, socialization programs, information, and referral

services. The Salvation Army of Warren also runs the Cobham Youth Program, which provides day camps as well as before and after school care.

- **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council** | Assistance with utilities as well as offering housing and homelessness prevention programs.
- **Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council** | The weatherization program provides assistance for elderly, disabled, and low-income homeowners in weatherizing their homes.