



Community Needs Assessment
2025-2027

Laura Rossman, CEO

Michael Gabrielli, Chair, Board of Directors

**COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
SEPTEMBER 2025-2027**

Statement of Board approval

This is to certify that at its duly sworn meeting on _____, the Board of Directors of Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. approved the community needs assessment and priority needs included in this document.

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We do ask three things:

1. If you reproduce this document or any part of it, please use color; the charts in the document rely on color to convey their meaning clearly.
2. If you use the data you find in our report, please cite this report as the source: Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. Community Needs Assessment 2025-2027; found at this link: _____
3. Much of the data as presented has been analyzed and “re-packaged” as needed to document local needs. All sources are cited. We advise going to the original source of the data to check the context of this data as originally presented prior to our analysis.

If you have any questions about the data or its analysis, or about sources of data, or if you want to provide feedback on the report, please contact: Laura Rossman, CEO via [email](#) or Zack Housworth, COO via [email](#), or call (607) 776-2125.

Table of Contents

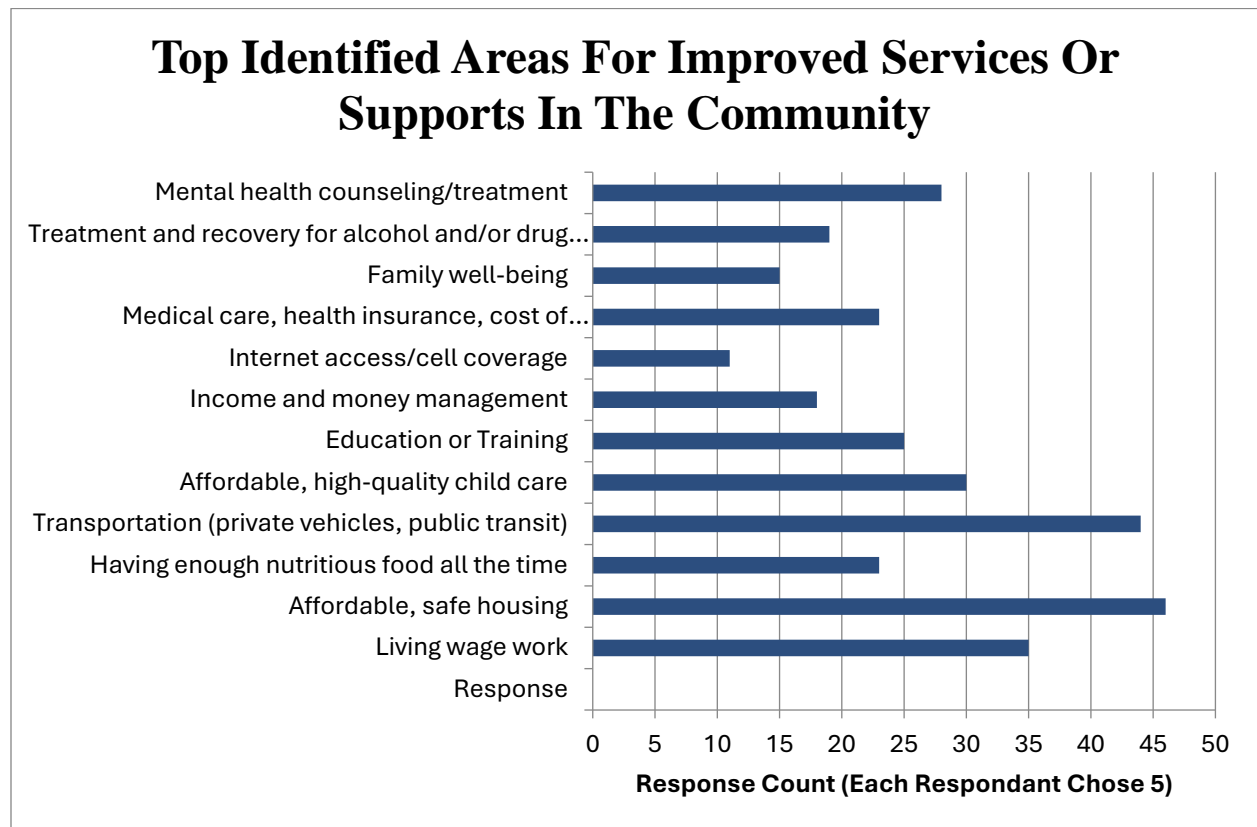
1. Executive Summary
2. Purpose of the Community Needs Assessment
3. About ProAction of Steuben and Yates, Inc.
4. Geographic & Demographic Profile of Steuben and Yates Counties
5. Methodology
6. Key Domain Findings
 - a. Employment & Income
 - b. Housing
 - c. Food Security
 - d. Health & Mental Health
 - e. Child care and Early Childhood Education
 - f. Transportation
 - g. Family Support & Youth Development
7. Long-Term Trends in Community Needs (2016-2025)
8. External Threats & Policy Context
9. Synthesis & Implications
10. Conclusion & Recommendations
11. Numbered Footnotes
12. References

Executive Summary

This **2025 Community Needs Assessment (CNA)** provides a comprehensive overview of conditions in Steuben and Yates Counties. Drawing on three surveys with a combined 610 respondents, **five focus groups/interviews** (Youth, Seniors/Office for the Aging, Policy Council, Family Resource Center, and Board of Directors), and publicly available datasets, the CNA identifies both pressing challenges and existing community strengths. Findings converge on **transportation barriers, housing affordability and quality, child care access, mental health capacity, and income eligibility thresholds** that exclude working families from assistance.

Families and community members consistently describe resilience, strong neighborhood ties, and a willingness to help one another. Local service providers emphasize effective collaboration and shared commitment across agencies. Yet, significant barriers undermine financial stability and well-being. Roughly 13% of area residents live below the federal poverty line,¹ and nearly half of households fall into poverty or ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) categories,¹⁵ indicating they cannot consistently meet basic needs. Survey results confirm this strain: over half of respondents reported trouble paying monthly bills.²⁵

Among the most frequently cited concerns are rising housing costs, shortages of affordable child care, and limited access to mental health services. Focus group participants also highlighted food insecurity as intertwined with these issues and suggested pragmatic solutions—from onsite mental health support in senior housing to community connection events for youth and families, and transportation assistance models.^{29 30 31}



Source: Community Partner Survey 2025

Primary Concerns Identified

Across all surveys, focus groups, and secondary data sourcing, the following primary concerns were identified and are outlined in more detail throughout the Key Domains section of this Needs Assessment.

1. **Economic Security:** Persistent financial strain, underemployment, and wages that lag behind the cost of living.
2. **Housing & Basic Needs:** Shortages of affordable rentals; aging housing driving high utility costs; limited shelter capacity, food security.
3. **Child Care & Family Supports:** Limited affordable child care slots restrict workforce participation and family stability.
4. **Transportation:** Long distances and limited public transit isolate families.
5. **Health & Mental Health:** Capacity constraints, availability, and affordability of services.

Imagine Sarah. She's a single mom, working full-time at minimum wage. On paper she earns too much to qualify for help, but in reality she's far below a living wage. Housing, food, transportation, and childcare constantly compete for her paycheck. Her story echoes what we've heard from across our communities.

Despite these challenges, the CNA emphasizes existing **community strengths:** resident resilience, dedicated service providers, cross-sector collaboration, and strong anchor programs (e.g., Head Start, congregate meals).

Purpose of the Community Needs Assessment

The CNA is a cornerstone of Pro Action's strategic framework, serving both as a compliance requirement and a planning tool. Conducted every three years, it documents the causes and conditions of poverty in Steuben and Yates Counties. The CNA ensures that Pro Action's strategies remain responsive, evidence-based, and aligned with community priorities.

Key Uses of the CNA

- **Program Planning & Service Delivery:** CNA findings guide program design and coordination. For example, if transportation is identified as a barrier, Pro Action may expand Wheels for Work or pursue new transit partnerships.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Federal regulations require that the agency's strategic plan be grounded in CNA data, ensuring integration with ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability) standards.
- **Compliance:** The CNA fulfills requirements of the Office of Community Services, Head Start, and the NYS Office for the Aging. It also demonstrates compliance with CSBG (Community Services Block Grant) and Head Start organizational standards.
- **Community Engagement:** Dissemination of the CNA informs community stakeholders—nonprofits, businesses, governments, and residents—of critical needs and

priorities. The data provides a shared evidence base for grant applications, policy advocacy, and collaboration.

The CNA is therefore not just descriptive, but directive. It ensures that Pro Action’s mission-driven goals are rooted in current data and aligned with community realities and provides the same opportunity for other community partners.

About Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc.

Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. is the federally designated Community Action Agency for the region. Its mission is to “**build a community of resilient individuals and families who can meet their basic needs, overcome adversity, and prosper.**”⁴¹ Founded in 1965, the agency is part of the national Community Action Network and brings decades of locally grounded service.⁴¹

Scope & Accountability

With a vision of creating “a strong community where all individuals and families prosper,” Pro Action delivers a comprehensive, integrated family of services across four key domains—Resilient Children & Families; Thriving Seniors; Prosperous Futures; and Basic Needs Support. Through these four domains, Pro Action implements a **multi-generational, integrated service model**, connecting early childhood education, workforce development, senior support, and emergency assistance into cohesive pathways out of poverty.⁴¹

Performance tracking and quality improvement are embedded across departments; funders rate Pro Action highly for professionalism in data and outcomes.³⁶

Core Values

The image displays three vertical panels, each representing a core value of Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. Each panel features the organization's logo at the top, a central title, a subtitle 'Our Values', and a descriptive paragraph. The first panel, 'Opportunity & Access', includes an illustration of diverse hands reaching up. The second panel, 'Hope & Resilience', features a small yellow flower growing from a crack in the pavement. The third panel, 'Innovation Excellence & Accountability', shows a glowing lightbulb. All panels conclude with a red heart icon.

Core Value	Description
Opportunity & Access	<i>We believe that opportunity and access are fundamental needs. Everyone deserves the chance to be seen, heard and valued. We are committed to a supportive environment that encourages authentic connection, removes obstacles, values unique strengths, and provides the resources, support and guidance needed for all to thrive.</i>
Hope & Resilience	<i>We believe that with hope, supportive relationships, adequate resources and opportunities, everyone can build resilience, overcome adversity, and prosper.</i>
Innovation Excellence & Accountability	<i>We pledge ourselves to create an environment that pursues innovation, excellence, and accountability.</i>

Source: Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc.

Organizational Strengths

- **Deep Roots:** Over five decades of adapting to evolving needs while retaining local trust.
- **Collaborative Networks:** Strong cross-sector partnerships expand service reach.
- **Focus on Vulnerable Populations:** Services prioritize families with children, older adults, and households facing economic hardship.

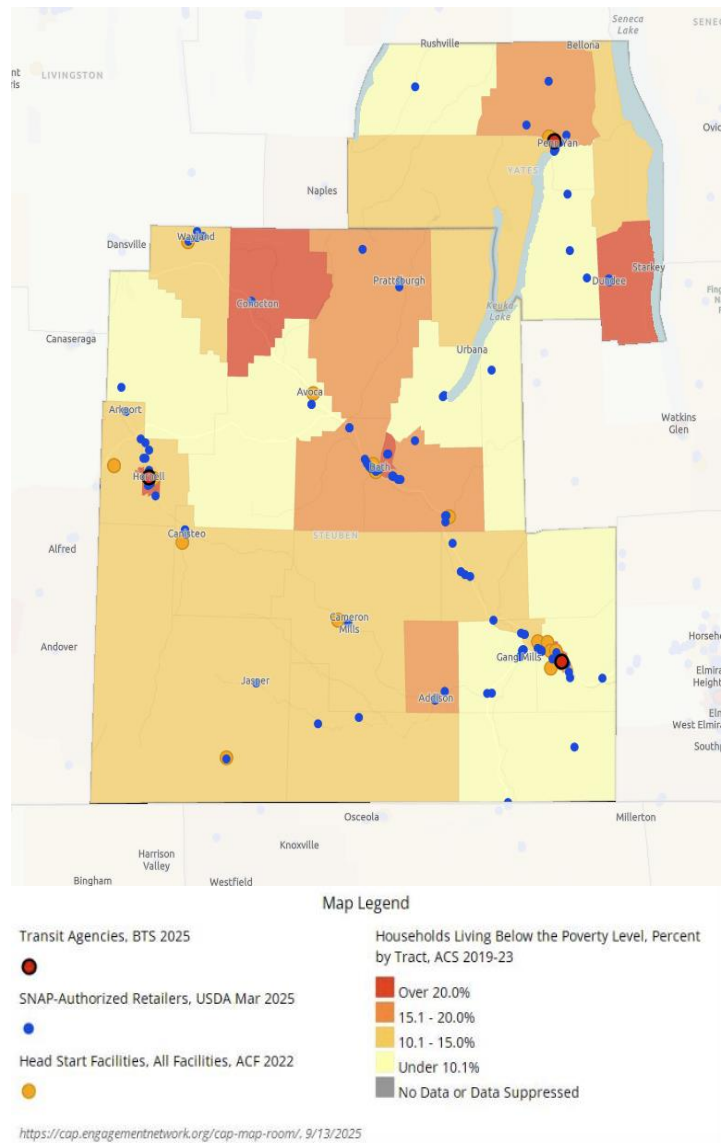
Pro Action continues to act as a hub for solutions that are local, collaborative, and resilient, positioning the agency as both a service provider and a leader in community change.

Geographic & Demographic Profile of Steuben & Yates Counties

A clear understanding of place is essential to interpreting community need. Steuben and Yates are large, rural counties with dispersed settlement patterns, aging populations, older housing, and economies anchored by manufacturing, health care, education, agriculture, and tourism. Distance, low population density, and limited public transit shape how residents access jobs, services, and supports.

Land Area & Rural Character

- **Geography & Scale:** Steuben spans ~1,391 square miles; Yates covers ~338 square miles.⁴⁰ Population density is low in both counties, with residents concentrated in small cities and villages—Corning, Bath, Hornell (Steuben) and Penn Yan (Yates)—and many households in outlying and townships.^{40 38}
- **Rural Access Patterns:** The lack of large urban centers and long travel distances to regional hubs make personal vehicles essential for most daily needs. Public transit exists in limited corridors but is not



Source: Community Action Partnership

ubiquitous across evenings or remote areas, which is typical for federally defined rural service areas.¹⁰

- **Economic Landscape:** Agriculture (including the wine industry), advanced manufacturing, health care, and education are major employers, alongside retail and hospitality; many positions are seasonal or part-time.²

Diversity Snapshot

Racial & Ethnic Composition: As of the 2020 Census, Steuben County is approximately 90.1% White (non-Hispanic), with Black residents (1.5%), Asian (1.7%), Hispanic or Latino (1.8%), Native American/Other (0.6%), and multiracial (4.3%) making up the balance. Yates County is roughly 93% White, with 0.6% Black, 0.4% Asian, 2.7% Hispanic or Latino, 0.5% Native American/Other, and 2.8% multiracial.⁴⁰

Economic Disparities by Race (Steuben): Recent ACS data show stark differences in household income: Asian-headed households report a median income of ~\$119,000; White households average ~\$64,500; Black households have the lowest at ~\$42,800. These disparities highlight how race intersects with financial instability and suggest the need for targeted outreach and resources.³⁸

Diversity Index & Foreign-Born Population: Both counties score low on diversity compared to New York State overall. Steuben's diversity index is ~15.5% and Yates' ~11.6%, indicating limited representation across racial groups. The foreign-born share is also very small: only ~3% in Steuben and ~1.6% in Yates.³⁸

Children and Families Facing the Greatest Barriers

To understand the needs of young children and families in the region, this section examines sub-populations most likely to face persistent barriers to stability and early learning access: families experiencing homelessness as defined under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11432)⁵⁷ children in foster care⁵⁹, children with developmental delays or disabilities⁵⁵, families speaking languages other than English¹, and those living in geographically isolated rural areas¹¹.

- **Homelessness:** During the 2022–2023 school year, the New York State Education Department reported 232 students experiencing homelessness in Steuben County and 84 in Yates County⁵⁷. The majority were classified as doubled up, living temporarily with other households because of loss of housing or economic hardship. Although age-specific data for children 0–5 are not published at the county level, national research estimates that approximately 28% of homeless children are under age six⁶¹. This suggests that dozens of local preschool-aged children experience housing instability each year.
- **Children in Foster Care:** The New York State Office of Children and Family Services reported 112 children in foster care in Steuben County and 26 in Yates County as of 2023⁵⁹. Consistent with statewide OCFS findings, rural counties continue to face challenges in maintaining sibling placements and ensuring sufficient access to trauma-informed caregivers of young children. Publicly available data do not disaggregate placements by age group; thus, counts for children 0–5 remain unknown. Collaboration with county Departments of Social Services and other local community based

organizations helps identify and refer young children in foster care who meet Head Start eligibility criteria, ensuring early access to education and support services⁵⁹.

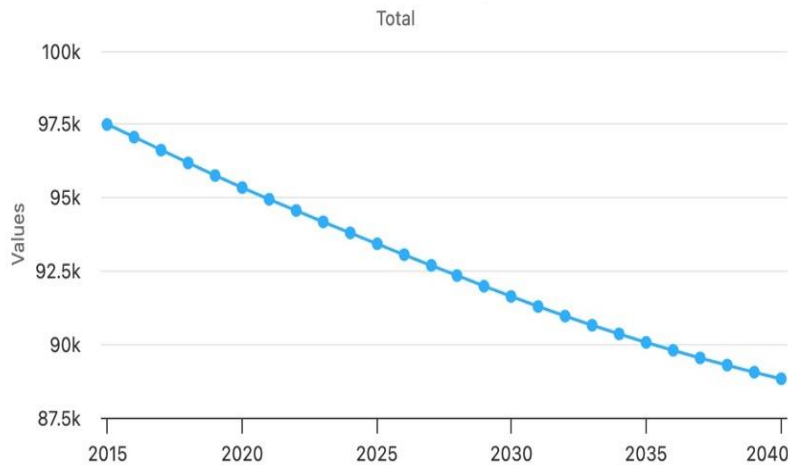
- **Children Living in Poverty:** According to the 2022 American Community Survey, approximately 18.6% of children under age 5 in Steuben County and 19.3% in Yates County live below the federal poverty level¹. These figures are roughly double the overall poverty rate, underscoring the concentration of economic hardship among families most likely to qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start.
- **Children with Disabilities:** The New York State Department of Health Early Intervention Program Performance Report (FFY 2023) shows that 43% of eligible children in Steuben and 41% in Yates began services within 30 days of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) authorization⁵⁵. Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and special instruction were the most frequently provided services. County-level data on preschool special-education programs are only available in aggregate form through the New York State Education Department’s SEDCAR State Data Summaries which indicate consistent rates of preschool special education enrollment across rural counties in the Southern Tier⁶². The most common disability classifications among local Early Intervention and preschool special education participants are speech and language impairments, developmental delays, and autism spectrum disorders. Community resources include county-administered Early Intervention programs (NYSDOH), district CPSE services, and BOCES programs that provide specialized supports^{55 62}.
- **Race, Ethnicity, and Language:** According to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2022 five-year estimates, Steuben County is 92.7% White (non-Hispanic) and Yates County is 93.4% White (non-Hispanic)¹. Yates County has a notable Amish and Mennonite population — estimated at 6–8 percent of residents — which affects language access and transportation patterns⁶⁰. Approximately 2.5 percent of households in Steuben and 3.1 percent in Yates report speaking a language other than English at home, most commonly Pennsylvania German or Spanish¹.
- **Geographic Isolation:** Both counties are predominantly rural with low population density and long travel distances to essential services such as child care centers and health clinics¹¹. Yates County lacks fixed-route public transit outside of Penn Yan, and many Steuben County towns have limited daily bus service. Geographic dispersion contributes to uneven access to early education, medical care, and employment opportunities.
- **Working Hours:** Many parents of young children in Steuben and Yates Counties work in healthcare, manufacturing, retail, and service sector positions that often require evening, overnight, or rotating shifts. These nontraditional schedules rarely align with standard child care hours, making consistent participation in early learning programs difficult. Parents described needing flexible, affordable care options to maintain employment or complete education and training programs, emphasizing the critical link between workforce schedules, family stability, and child development opportunities^{1 2}.
- **Other Early Childhood and Child Care Programs:** In addition to Head Start and Early Head Start, Steuben and Yates Counties are served by a network of early learning options including Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), Preschool Special Education, a network of home- and center-based child care programs, and home-visiting services through county Early Intervention programs and Pro Action’s Home Based Services. According to NYSED SEDCAR data, approximately 430 preschool-aged children in Steuben County

and 110 in Yates County are enrolled annually in publicly funded pre-kindergarten or special education programs⁶². These programs collectively serve many Head Start-eligible children but do not meet overall demand—particularly for infants and toddlers, extended-hour care, and families facing transportation or work-schedule barriers.

- **Cross-Domain Barriers:** Families experiencing poverty, disability, or foster care placement face compounded barriers such as transportation gaps, housing instability, and limited child care availability. These factors intersect to impact early learning participation and overall family stability in Steuben and Yates Counties^{11 25}.

Population Structure & Trends

Anticipated Population Trend Projections | Steuben



Source: County Projections Explorer—Cornell University

stabilization in Yates by the early 2030s, implying sustained service demand with a smaller working-age base.^{33 50}

- **Overall Change:** Since 2010, both counties have experienced population decline and aging, with faster growth in the 75+ cohort and modest declines among young children (0–5).¹

- **Age Distribution:** Relative to New York State overall, the counties skew older, increasing demand for senior services, caregiving, transportation to medical care, and accessible housing.¹

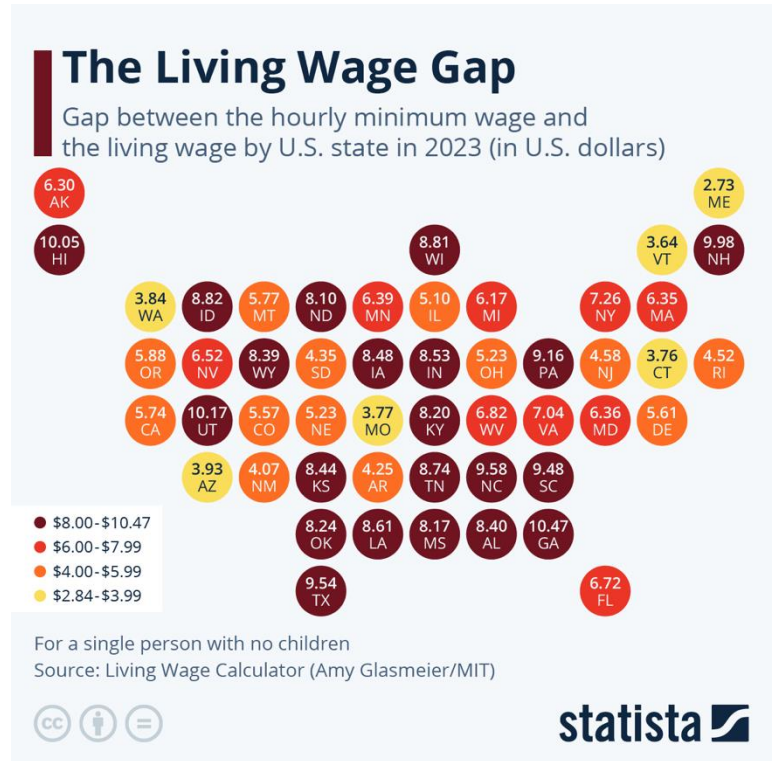
- **Projections:** State demography models anticipate continued gradual decline in Steuben and nearterm

Households & Housing Stock

- **Poverty & ALICE:** Roughly 13–14% of residents live below the federal poverty line; when ALICE households are included, an estimated 42–48% of families struggle to meet basic needs—particularly in rural communities where costs (transportation, utilities) are high relative to income.^{1 15}
- **Housing Age & Condition:** A large share of homes were built midcentury or earlier; older stock contributes to higher maintenance and energy costs and greater need for repair/weatherization relative to newer housing.¹
- **Cost Burden:** Approximately one-third of households are cost-burdened (paying >30% of income for housing), with renters facing higher rates of severe burden (>50% of income).⁴

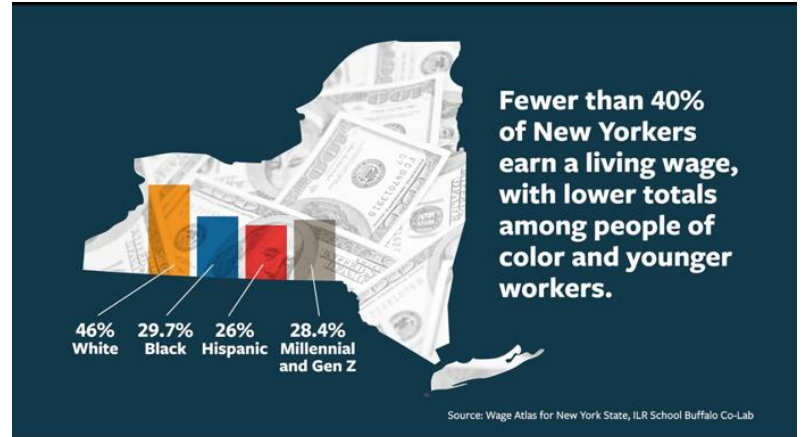
Economy & Labor Market

- Income & Employment:** Median household incomes in both counties trail the New York State median; laborforce participation is several points lower than the state average, reflecting an older age profile, disability prevalence, and sector mix. ^{1 2}
- Living Wage Gap:** Typical local wages fall short of living wage estimates for single parents and many two adult households, even before accounting for high transportation and energy costs in rural settings. ³



Transportation & Physical Access

- Vehicle Dependence:** With long distances between homes, jobs, schools, and clinics—and limited transit coverage—most households rely on personal vehicles. The total annual cost of car ownership now exceeds ~\$12,000 nationally, a heavy fixed expense for ALICE households. ⁶
- Service Reach:** Rural transit under \$5311 prioritizes basic mobility but rarely matches urban frequencies or hours, contributing to missed medical appointments, foregone services, and reduced employment options for residents without reliable cars. ¹⁰



Health & Social Need Indicators

- Provider Shortages:** Both counties include federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas, complicating timely access to primary and behavioral health care, especially for seniors and low income families in remote areas.
- Food & Child Nutrition:** Estimated county food insecurity rates hover around 10–11%, and more than 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals—signals of household resource strain and the importance of school-based nutrition supports. ^{5 9}

Why This Context Matters for the Key Findings

Low density, aging demographics, older housing stock, vehicle dependence, and provider shortages interact to amplify barriers identified in the CNA.^{6 10} For example, high transportation costs and limited transit make it harder to reach jobs, child care, and medical care; older homes mean higher utility bills and repair needs; an aging population increases demand for health and supportive services. These structural features help explain why housing affordability, child care access, transportation, behavioral health capacity, and income adequacy consistently surface as top needs in Steuben and Yates Counties.

Methodology

To ensure an accurate, representative, and regulation-compliant assessment, the 2025 CNA used a multi-method research design that integrates quantitative surveys, qualitative focus groups, and triangulation with secondary data. The approach aligns with ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability), meets CSBG Organizational Standards, and satisfies Head Start and NYS Office for the Aging community assessment requirements.

Research Design & Compliance

- **Standards & Frameworks:** Designed under ROMA, with needs findings mapped to outcomes and indicators for planning; compliant with CSBG Organizational Standards; coordinated with Head Start Program Performance Standards and NYS OFA assessment expectations.
- **Triangulation:** Survey data, focus group narratives, and public data-sets were compared to validate trends and reduce bias.
- **Head Start Program Standards:** Data sources were intentionally selected to align with the Head Start Program Performance Standards §1302.11(b)(3), emphasizing identification of populations most in need and available resources.
- **Data Validation:** Priority was given to validated and publicly available data sets that allow for county-level comparison^{1 11 16 55}.
- **Data Voids:** When Steuben- or Yates-specific data were not available, state or national proxies were used and clearly noted throughout the report to maintain transparency and methodological integrity.



Source: National Community Action Partnership

Survey Administration (Distribution & Reach)

- **Instruments:** Three structured surveys (Community Members; Community Partners; Pro Action Staff/Board/Policy Council/Volunteers).
- **Distribution:** Widely distributed both digitally and in paper form, including through Pro Action programs, partner agencies, congregate meal sites, and community events; paper copies were available to reduce access barriers for residents with limited internet.
- **Response:** 610 combined responses (Community Members n=419; Partners n=64; Staff/Board/Policy Council/Volunteers n=127). Items covered financial stability, housing, food, transportation, child care, health/mental health, and family supports.
- **Accessibility:** Distribution strategies ensured accessibility for all residents, including individuals without internet access, those in rural areas, and community members with language barriers, consistent with Head Start §1302.11(b)(2). Surveys were shared via multiple channels—digital platforms, physical distribution points, and community events—to reach traditionally underrepresented populations. Pro Action staff and partners provided in-person assistance completing surveys when needed to ensure inclusivity and equitable participation.

Focus Groups & Key Themes

Five focus groups/interviews deepened understanding of needs and assets identified in surveys:

- **Youth Focus Group (YDP):** Barriers included money, transportation, inflation, time, injuries/age; priority service areas included transportation, housing/shelter, tutoring, and mental health help. Behavioral health needs included depression and addiction, with suggestions such as deep-breathing/meditation classes and expanded transportation assistance. Strengths noted included facilities like the YMCA and peer helping behaviors. ²⁸
- **Seniors (Yates Office for the Aging Congregate Meal, 7/3/25):** Barriers included transportation limits (illness restricting driving), inadequate mental health service capacity, and income eligibility. Priorities included affordable housing, transportation, and access to mental health counseling. A key suggestion was bringing mental health professionals onsite to senior apartment complexes. Strengths included Concerts in the Park, local grocery stores, and congregate meals. ²⁹
- **Policy Council:** Barriers included transportation, limited mental health capacity, and restrictive income eligibility thresholds. Priorities focused on affordable housing, transportation, and mental health treatment. Additional concerns were lack of activities for pre-teens/teens and the need for community connection events. Strengths included community diversity and the quality of Head Start services. ³⁰
- **Family Resource Center (FRC):** Although only one participant, the discussion offered rich detail on children's mental health access challenges, the limits of telehealth for young children, and transportation gaps. Suggestions included creating a nonprofit rideshare-style service and peer groups to reduce stigma. Strengths cited were safety, local parks, and the library. ³¹

- Board of Directors (BOD): Reaffirmed barriers included transportation, mental health service capacity, and income eligibility thresholds. They linked food insecurity to these factors and identified addiction as a critical behavioral health priority. Workforce shortages in service programs and the importance of Pro-Housing Community designations (e.g., Starkey, Dundee) were discussed. Strengths included strong DSS partnerships, Pro Action’s flexibility, and cross-county collaboration via the Rural Health Network.³²

In alignment with Head Start §1302.11(b)(1), qualitative data were intentionally designed to elevate voices of families and individuals reflecting diverse geographic, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. Focus group recruitment prioritized participants who experience transportation barriers, limited digital access, or language differences to ensure findings reflect the realities of all eligible populations.

Secondary Data Sources

- U. S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics.^{1 2}
- United Way ALICE Reports; state labor market and health profiles.¹⁵
- Additional county/regional planning documents; housing authority data; county health assessments, etc. References listed below.
- Quantitative findings were cross-checked with HRSA Health Professional Shortage Area data¹¹ and OCFS Child Care Desert data¹⁶ to validate patterns and ensure consistency between local observations and state or federal indicators.

Limitations

- **Sampling:** Surveys were voluntary/non-random; despite broad distribution (digital and paper), some self-selection bias is likely.
- **Qualitative Scope:** Focus group composition varied (including one n=1 session), so qualitative findings illuminate context but are not population estimates.
- **Data Lags:** Certain secondary indicators (e. g., poverty rate) lag 12–24 months and may not fully capture recent inflation or policy shifts.
- **Monitoring:** Data sources will continue to be reviewed annually against updated federal and state releases to confirm accuracy and identify emerging demographic or service trends, consistent with Head Start’s ongoing monitoring expectations (§1302.11(b)(5)).

This assessment meets the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards §1302.11(b), providing a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of community demographics, strengths, and needs to inform program planning and prioritization across Steuben and Yates Counties. Overall, convergence across surveys, focus groups, and secondary data—especially on transportation barriers, mental health access capacity, housing affordability, and eligibility thresholds—supports the validity of the CNA’s key findings.

Key Domain Findings

This section provides an in-depth review of the most pressing domains identified in Steuben and Yates Counties: Employment & Income, Housing, Food Security, Health & Mental Health, Child Care & Early Childhood, Transportation, and Family Support & Youth Development. Each domain summary integrates findings from **three surveys** (Community Members, Community Partners, and Pro Action Staff/Board/Policy Council/Volunteers), **five focus groups** (Youth, Seniors/OFA, Policy Council, Family Resource Center, Board of Directors), and relevant **secondary data** sources. Together, these findings form the core of the CNA, illustrating both quantitative trends and the lived experiences of residents.

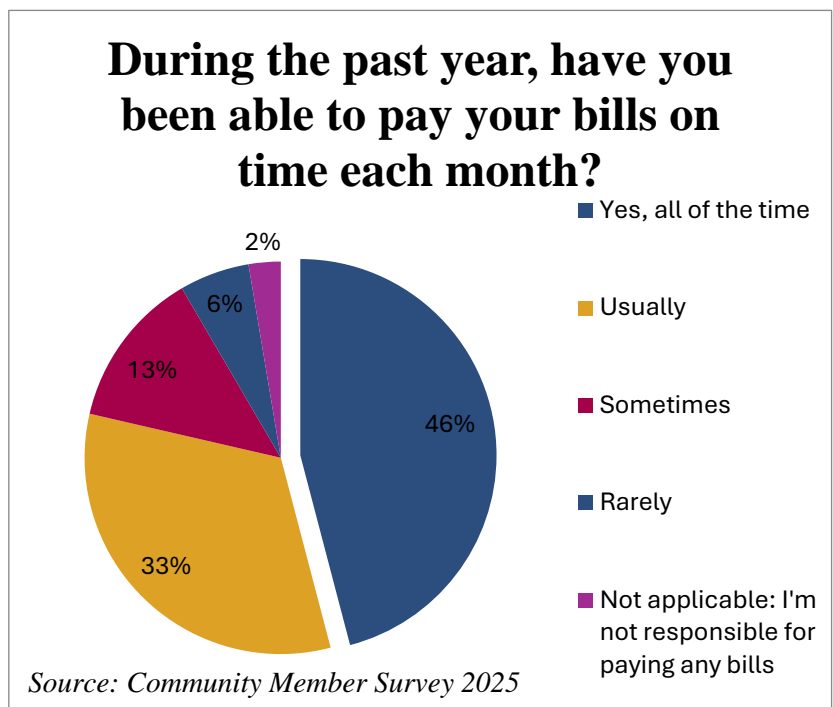
Employment & Income

Why It Matters

Employment and income stability are foundational to family and community well-being. Without adequate wages, households in Steuben and Yates Counties struggle to secure housing, food, child care, healthcare, and reliable transportation. Survey and focus groups emphasized that financial insecurity was both the most common barrier and the issue most interconnected with all other domains.

Community Survey Findings ²⁵

- Nearly half (46%) of respondents reported difficulty paying monthly bills.
- 28% selected income and money management as a top need.
- Only 12% reported having savings greater than \$2,000, and one-quarter of households said they had less than \$100 in savings.
- When asked what would help most with financial security, the top responses were: better paying jobs (41%), help with budgeting/financial management (27%), and affordable child care (22%).
- Open-ended responses highlighted stress from juggling multiple jobs, concerns about inflation, and frustration that “even working full-time, it’s not enough to cover bills.”



Community Partner Survey ²⁶

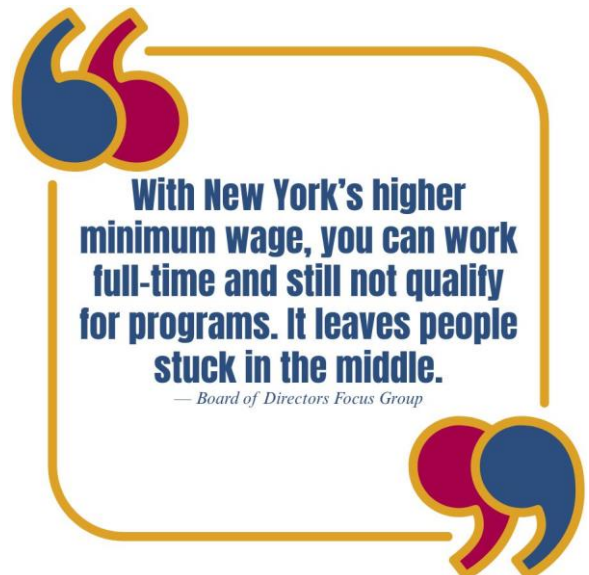
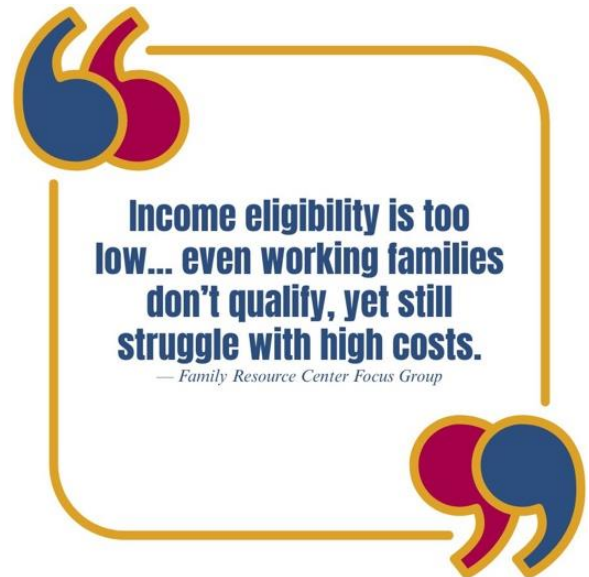
- 68% of partners cited employment and income as one of the top three needs they observe in their clients.
- Partners emphasized barriers including the seasonal nature of agricultural and tourism jobs, low wages in retail and hospitality, and the cliff effect when modest wage increases disqualify families from critical supports.

Staff/Board/Policy Council/Volunteer Survey: ²⁷

- Internal respondents identified financial instability as a driver of other issues such as housing and food insecurity.
- 59% ranked employment and income in the top three most pressing needs.
- Many noted that families they serve are employed but remain in crisis due to low wages.

Focus Group Insights ^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Youth Focus Group: Youth identified money and jobs as critical barriers, directly linking financial stress to mental health challenges such as depression and substance use. They also noted that transportation and injuries/age limit work opportunities for young people.
- Board of Directors Focus Group: Board members stressed workforce shortages across health and service sectors, which simultaneously strain service delivery and limit economic opportunity. Addiction was flagged as both a workforce and community barrier, reducing employability and economic stability.
- Policy Council Focus Group: Parents highlighted restrictive income eligibility thresholds that penalize working families and discourage upward mobility. Several described experiences of earning “just over the line” and losing benefits, leaving them worse off overall.



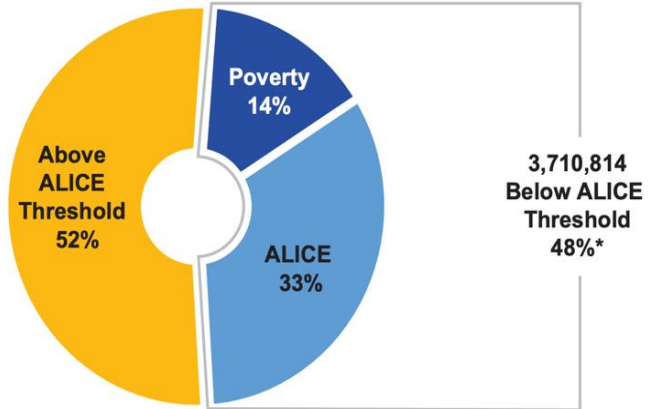
Secondary Data

- Median Income: \$64,738 in Steuben and \$67,521 in Yates, compared to \$82,000 statewide. ³⁸

- Poverty & ALICE: 14% of residents live below the poverty line; when ALICE households are included, 48% of families live below the ALICE threshold and cannot afford basic necessities. ^{38 15}
- Labor Force Participation: 57.7% in Steuben and 55.3% in Yates, both below the state average of 63%.³⁸
- Employment Sectors: Manufacturing (including Corning Inc.), healthcare, education, agriculture, and retail are dominant. Many jobs are part-time or seasonal. Tourism and viticulture bring seasonal income but lack stability. ^{2 40}
- Living Wage Gap: A single parent with one child in Steuben County would need to earn \$35/hour to meet basic needs without assistance, far higher than prevailing local wages. ³

Financial Instability in NY

Nearly half of NY Households Faced Financial Instability in 2023



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2010–2023; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023

Synthesis & Implications

Taken together, the findings paint a clear picture: income inadequacy is not only a direct hardship but also a root driver of other challenges in Steuben and Yates Counties. Families describe working multiple jobs yet still falling behind on bills. Partners point to structural barriers such as low-wage sectors and the benefit cliff that discourages upward mobility. Focus group narratives reveal the toll of constant financial stress on mental health, particularly for young people. Data confirms that nearly half of households cannot meet the true cost of living. Addressing these issues will require strategies that combine the creation of living-wage jobs, targeted

Typical Expenses | Steuben County

	1 ADULT			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Food	\$4,256	\$6,259	\$9,376	\$12,474
Child Care	\$0	\$13,114	\$24,518	\$33,146
Medical	\$3,714	\$9,388	\$9,479	\$9,574
Housing	\$9,990	\$12,207	\$12,207	\$15,762
Transportation	\$10,292	\$11,911	\$15,003	\$17,263
Civic	\$3,535	\$6,224	\$6,871	\$8,810
Internet & Mobile	\$1,413	\$1,413	\$1,413	\$1,413
Other	\$4,566	\$8,771	\$9,189	\$11,046
Required annual income after taxes	\$37,767	\$69,287	\$88,056	\$109,489
Annual taxes	\$7,272	\$10,966	\$14,022	\$19,779
Required annual income before taxes	\$45,039	\$80,253	\$102,078	\$129,267

Source: Living Wage Calculator - MIT

workforce development, expanded financial literacy support, and reforms to benefit structures. Without tackling income insecurity, progress in housing, child care, and health will remain out of reach.

Housing

Why It Matters

Affordable and quality housing has reached crisis levels in both counties. Housing was the single highest-ranked need by community partners²⁶ and among the top concerns for community members.²⁵ There is a shortage of rental units, especially those that are both safe and within reach for low-income households. Many families face cost burdens (paying over 30–50% of income on housing), making them one emergency away from eviction or homelessness. Additionally, housing quality issues – old homes in disrepair, high utility costs due to poor insulation, lead and safety hazards – compound the affordability problem. The 2025 data show that interventions are needed in multiple areas: lowering the cost of rent and utilities, increasing housing stock, and assisting with home repairs and weatherization.²⁵

Community Survey Findings

- 14.5% of respondents fell behind on rent or mortgage payments in the past year.
- 5.8% experienced a utility shutoff.
- 2.4% had property foreclosed or repossessed.
- 31% identified lower utility costs as a top housing need; 23% lower rent; 17% housing repairs or upgrades to reduce energy bills; 7% other repairs; 5% financial help with repairs/improvements; 9% more safe and affordable units; 9% landlords that accept Section 8 vouchers.
- 3% of respondents indicated unstable housing (doubling up, couch-surfing, etc.), likely an undercount due to stigma.

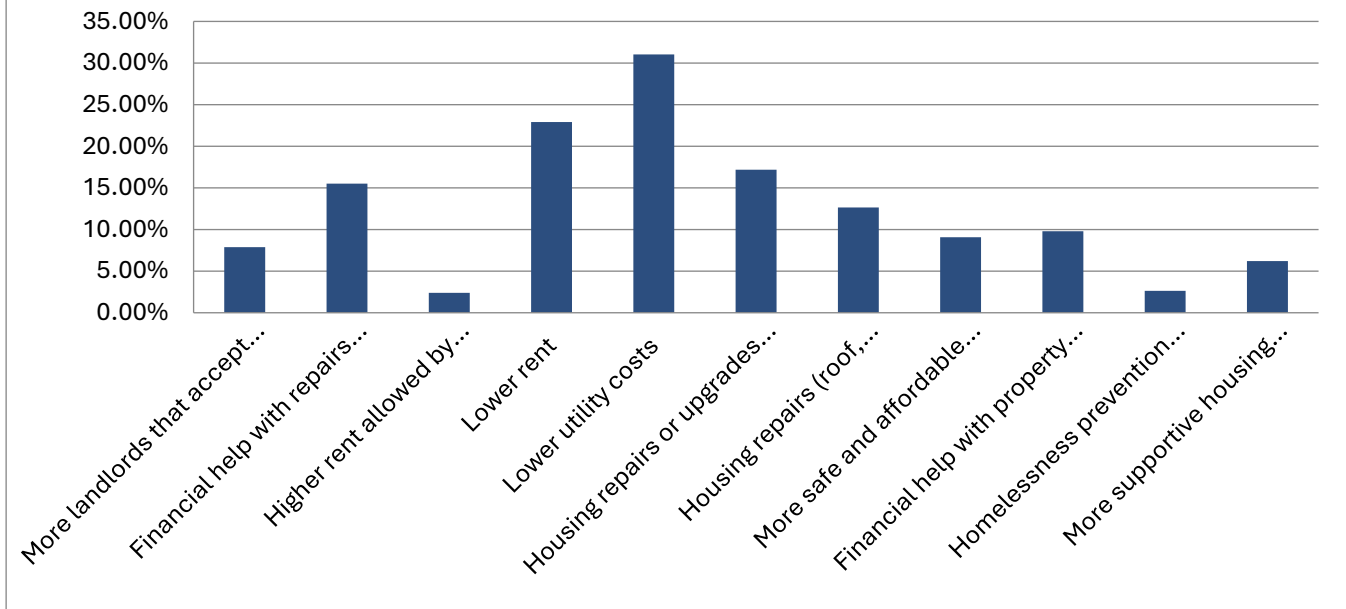
Community Partner Insights²⁶

- 71.9% included “affordable, safe housing” in their top five needs.
- Top priorities: 42% lower rent; 36% home repairs/improvements; 28% more housing stock; 30% lower utility costs; 12.5% more landlords accepting Section 8 Housing; 7% higher FMR limits.

Focus Group Perspectives^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Seniors: emphasized affordability and repair needs, particularly for energy efficiency.
- Policy Council: stressed shortages of affordable options for larger families.
- Family Resource Center: participant noted barriers to accessing energy programs and the need for weatherization.

COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED NEEDS FOR AFFORDABLE DECENT HOUSING



Source: Community Member Survey 2025

- Board of Directors: highlighted workforce shortages in housing services and stressed leveraging Pro-Housing Community designations.
- Youth: noted trade-offs between housing and food, underscoring how cost strain in one area spills into others.

Secondary Data

- ~30% of households are cost-burdened; ~14% severely burdened; nearly half of low-income renters pay >50% income toward housing .⁴
- Vacancy rates <5%; Fair Market Rent for 2-bedroom: \$846 (Steuben), \$797 (Yates).⁴
- ~38% of units in Steuben built before 1950; aging stock drives repair/weatherization needs. ⁴
- In addition to housing costs increasing, there's evidence homelessness is increasing in rural counties in the Finger



30%
of households
are cost-burdened



14%
are severely
cost-burdened



Nearly half
of low-income
renters pay >50%
income toward
housing

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
"Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS)
Data" HUD User, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datas-ets/cp/CHAS.html>

Lakes region (which includes Steuben and Yates). E.g. homelessness increased by ~215% in the Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates CoC between 2007 and 2021; and by ~46% in counties including Steuben in the Elmira / Steuben / Schuyler Continuum of Care over that period.

Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Housing has consistently ranked top-5. Conditions have worsened since 2019 despite some small new projects. Pandemic-era moratoriums delayed evictions but filings surged post-2022. Migration increased home prices.

Synthesis & Implications

The convergence of survey data, partner priorities, and focus group testimony makes clear that the housing system in Steuben and Yates Counties is strained to a breaking point.²⁵ Families are cost-burdened and at risk of eviction, seniors are struggling to maintain aging homes, and parents are unable to find safe, affordable options for their children. Partners confirm shortages across every level of housing assistance, from emergency shelter to long-term rentals. Data underscores that vacancy rates remain low and affordability is far out of reach for many working households. Addressing housing will require investment in new units, preservation of existing affordable housing, expanded repair and weatherization programs, and policy changes to increase voucher acceptance and tenant protections. Without decisive action, housing instability will continue to cascade into food insecurity, health challenges, and barriers to employment.

Food Security

Why It Matters

Food insecurity remains a pressing need. Survey respondents and partners consistently identified challenges in affording and accessing enough nutritious food. Rising food costs and the expiration of pandemic SNAP allotments have worsened strain, especially for families with children and seniors.

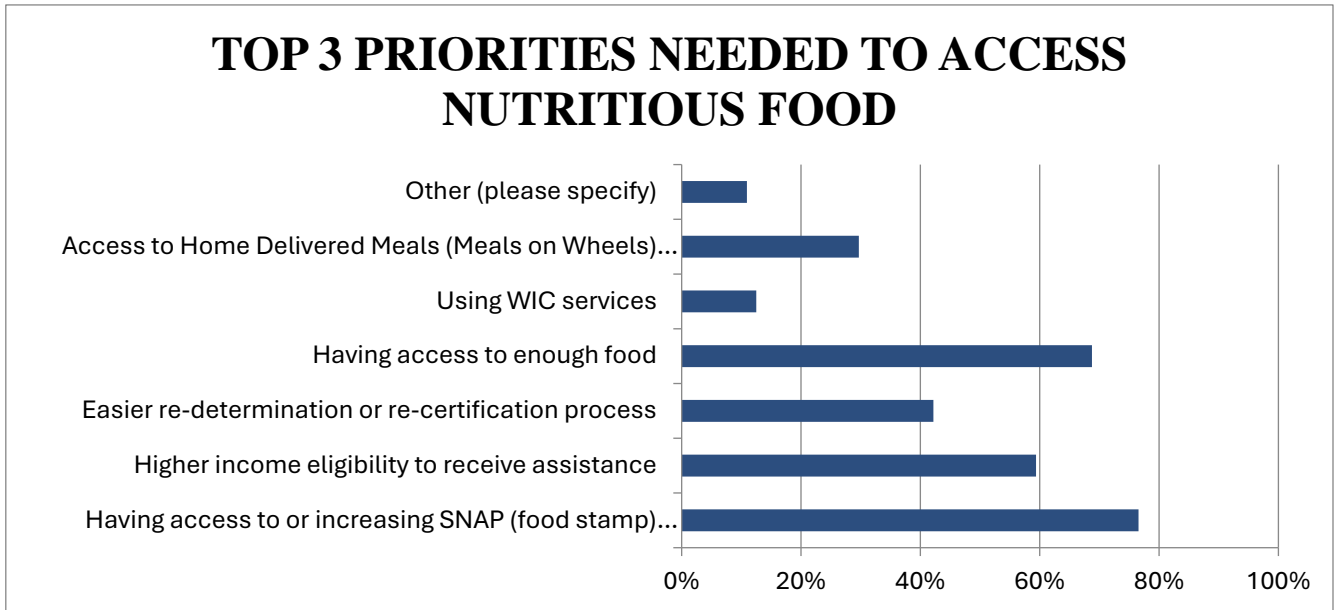
Community Survey Findings ²⁵

- 46% of households reported not always having enough nutritious food.
- 36% identified greater access to SNAP; 27% emergency food/pantries; 19% affordable, healthy food options.
- Open-ended responses described skipping meals, reliance on pantries, and difficulty affording nutritious options. Transportation barriers to grocery stores were noted.

Community Partner Insights ²⁶

- Partners reported heavy reliance on emergency food and noted increased insecurity following SNAP allotment reductions.

- While SNAP is at risk for funding cuts, Community Partners identify increasing access to SNAP as being the single greatest need to help the community have adequate access to nutritious food.



Source: Community Partner Survey 2025

Staff/Board/Policy Council/Volunteer Survey: ²⁷

- Staff observed families making trade-offs between food, rent, and other essentials.

Focus Group Perspectives ^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Board of Directors: linked food insecurity with housing and transportation costs.
- Seniors highlighted reliance on congregate meals and the challenge of affording fresh produce.
- Youth: identified money as a barrier, connecting financial strain to difficulty affording basic needs, though they did not directly reference food insecurity.
- Family Resource Center: participant emphasized stigma in using pantries.

Secondary Data

- Estimated food insecurity rate: 10–11% in both counties. ⁵
- ~14% of the population use SNAP but benefits are often insufficient. ^{39 22}
- Child Nutrition: Over 40% of students in both counties qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, underscoring reliance on school-based nutrition supports. ⁹ Schools provide an essential safety net, but families report difficulties covering food during summer months and breaks when these programs are unavailable. ²²



The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues monthly electronic benefits that can be used to purchase food at authorized retail food stores. Eligibility and benefit levels are based on household size, income and other factors.

WHO BENEFITS FROM SNAP?

2,900,000 NEW YORK RECIPIENTS | **14%** (about 1 out of every 7)

Most SNAP recipients in Steuben and Yates County are **Children, Elderly, or Disabled**



32%
CHILDREN



16%
ELDERLY



13%
NON-ELDERLY
DISABLED

Source: SNAP, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Food insecurity has ranked top-three since at least 2016. The 2025 CNA highlights worsening strain due to inflation and benefit reductions compared to 2019.

Synthesis & Implications

Food insecurity in Steuben and Yates Counties reflects the intersection of economic strain, benefit reductions, and limited access. Families describe skipping meals and relying on pantries, seniors depend heavily on congregate meals, and partners report demand increasing as pandemic-era supports expire. Secondary data confirms that more than 40% of local students depend on free or reduced-price school meals, a vital safety net that is diminished during school breaks. Focus group narratives further reveal that stigma and transportation barriers complicate food access. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that food insecurity is not simply a supply issue but a broader indicator of financial instability and structural inequities. Addressing it will require both immediate relief through

strengthened emergency food systems and long-term solutions that connect food security to wages, affordable housing, and reliable transportation.

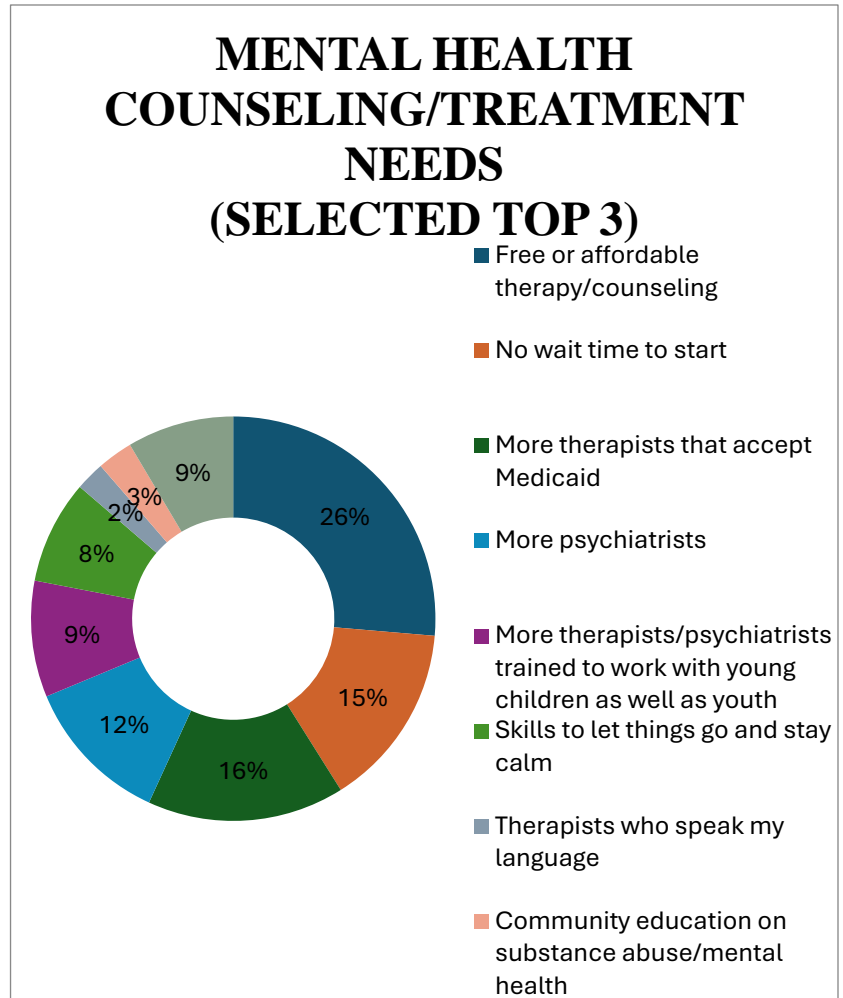
Health & Mental Health

Why It Matters

Access to health and mental health services is a persistent and growing challenge in Steuben and Yates Counties. While hospitals and primary care networks provide essential services, gaps in affordability, capacity, and transportation create barriers for families and individuals. Mental health, in particular, emerged as a top concern across all surveys and focus groups. Residents consistently report long wait times, limited availability of counseling, and difficulty accessing addiction treatment. Seniors worry about the lack of on-site mental health support in senior housing, while parents and secondary data on children living with disabilities point to the need for youth services and early intervention.

Community Survey Findings ²⁵

- 24% of Community Member Survey respondents reported not being able to access needed healthcare in the past year due to cost, transportation, or scheduling barriers.
- 31% identified mental health services as a priority need, including counseling and addiction services.
- 40% identified needing mental health services and of those 26% identified low or no cost counseling services as one of their top 3 identified mental health related needs.
- Among open-ended responses, recurring themes included difficulty affording prescriptions, gaps in dental care, and long waitlists for therapy.



Community Partner Insights ²⁶

- 56% of Community Partner Survey respondents ranked access to mental health and addiction treatment as a top five community need.
- Partners emphasized the lack of local psychiatric providers and limited crisis response services. Several noted that families cycle in and out of emergency departments due to inadequate outpatient supports.
- Partners also expressed concern about the toll of addiction on families, identifying opioid and methamphetamine use as drivers of both health and socioeconomic challenges.

Source: Community Member Survey 2025

Staff, Board, and Policy Council Perceptions ²⁷

- Staff and volunteers reported mental health as one of the most visible needs among families served by Pro Action programs. ³⁰
- The Board of Directors specifically identified addiction as a top priority, linking substance use to workforce shortages and community instability (Board of Directors Focus Group Transcript). ³⁰
- Policy Council members emphasized gaps in youth mental health services and described how limited capacity leads to delayed or unmet treatment for children (Policy Council Focus Group Transcript). ³⁰

Focus Group Perspectives ^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Youth: Identified depression, anxiety, and addiction as pressing needs. They suggested supports such as meditation, peer groups, and accessible counseling options.
- Seniors: Highlighted the lack of on-site counseling in senior apartment complexes, recommending that mental health professionals make regular visits to improve access.
- Family Resource Center: Described challenges in accessing mental health care for children, noting that telehealth is often inadequate for younger children.
- Board of Directors: Emphasized the severity of addiction and its ripple effects on families, employment, and housing stability.



Secondary Data

- Rates of depression and anxiety are higher in rural counties compared to statewide averages (New York State Health Department, 2023). ¹¹
- Suicide mortality in Steuben County is 14 per 100,000 and in Yates County 13 per 100,000, both above the state average of 8. ⁸
- Substance use disorder admissions for opioids remain elevated, with Steuben reporting 458 admissions in 2022. ⁷
- Both counties are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. ¹¹
- In Steuben County, only 42.9% of children needing early intervention services begin receiving them within 30 days after their Individualized Family Service Plan is authorized (FFY 2023). ⁵⁵
- Across New York State, about 8.5% of all students receiving special education fall into the preschool ages, showing a significant portion of disability support is needed early. ⁵⁶



Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Health and mental health have consistently been identified as high-need areas in past CNAs. In 2016 and 2019, limited mental health service availability was highlighted. The 2025 assessment shows these challenges worsening, with greater demand for youth counseling, increased addiction concerns, and ongoing workforce shortages among providers. Pandemic disruptions further strained already limited services, leaving many families without timely care.

Synthesis & Implications

The combined findings demonstrate that health and mental health needs in Steuben and Yates Counties are acute and multifaceted. Families report unmet healthcare needs due to cost and transportation, while focus groups emphasize the absence of timely, accessible counseling and addiction treatment. Seniors are calling for on-site supports, youth point to depression and anxiety, and service providers underscore the strain of addiction on both families and the workforce. Secondary data confirms high suicide rates, elevated substance use admissions, and a shortage of providers. Without expanded local services, strengthened prevention efforts, and integrated behavioral health supports, these counties will continue to see health disparities widen. Addressing mental health capacity is essential not only for individual well-being but also for stabilizing families and sustaining economic resilience.

Child Care & Early Childhood

Why It Matters

Access to affordable, high-quality child care and early education remains one of the most critical challenges facing families in Steuben and Yates Counties. Parents across surveys and focus groups repeatedly identified child care shortages and high costs as barriers to employment, family stability, and child development. Providers emphasized that the shortage is not just in availability but also in specialized services for infants, toddlers, and children with special needs. The pandemic further exacerbated staffing shortages and increased operational costs for child care centers, leaving many families with few viable options.

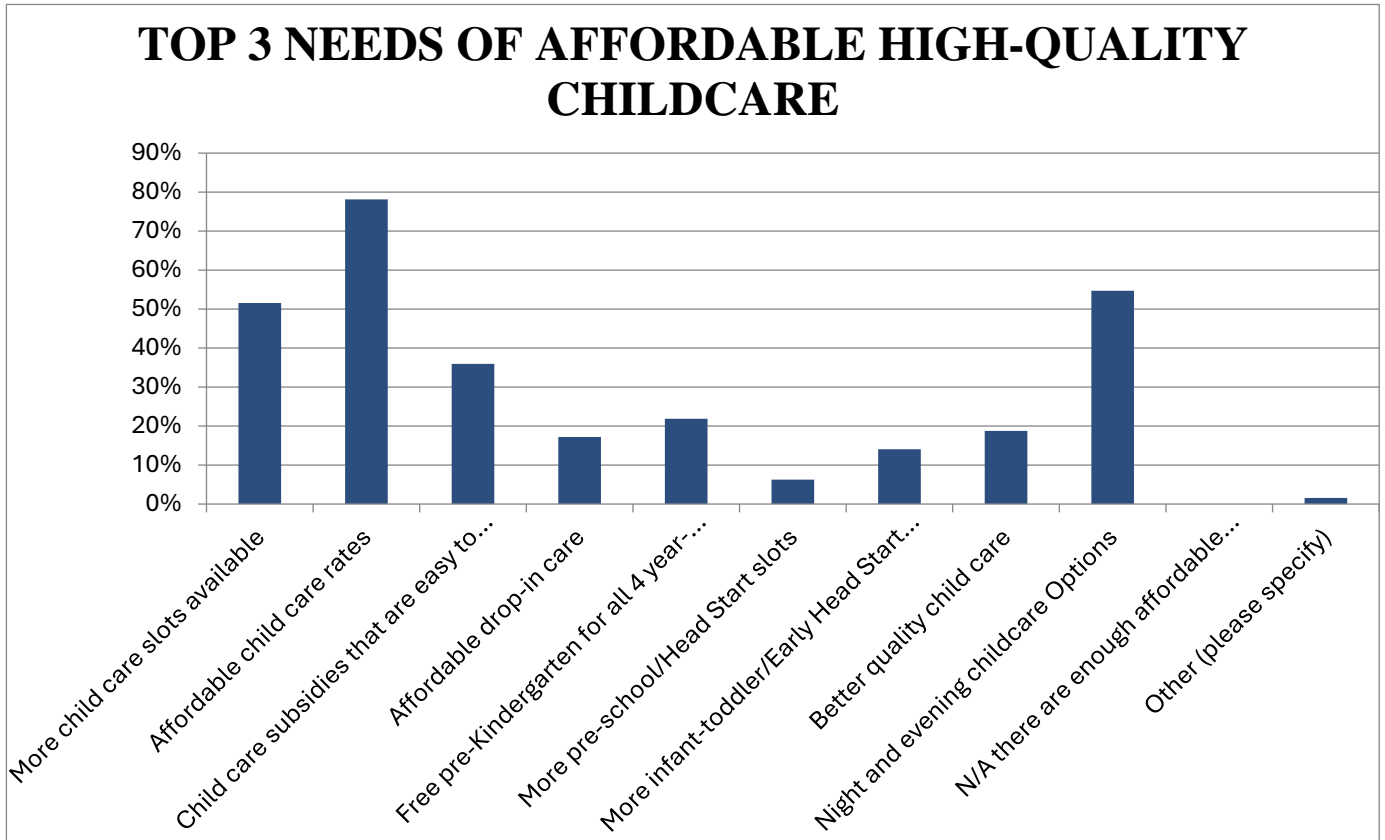
Community Survey Findings ²⁵

- 29% of Community Member Survey respondents selected affordable child care as a top need.
- Only 8% identified having access to good reliable child care they could afford.
- Open-ended comments reflected frustration: some parents described leaving the workforce or reducing hours due to lack of child care, while others reported relying on informal care arrangements that were unstable.

Community Partner Insights ²⁶

- 48% of Community Partner Survey respondents identified child care and early education as a top-five need in the community.
- There was not a single Community Partner Survey respondent (0%) who identified feeling that there is enough affordable child care.
- Partners noted that local employers are directly affected, as workforce participation is limited by lack of child care access. Several suggested employer-child care partnerships as a possible strategy.

- Agencies working with young children described long waiting lists and difficulties supporting families with infants and toddlers.



Source: Community Partner Survey 2025

Staff, Board, and Policy Council Perceptions ²⁷

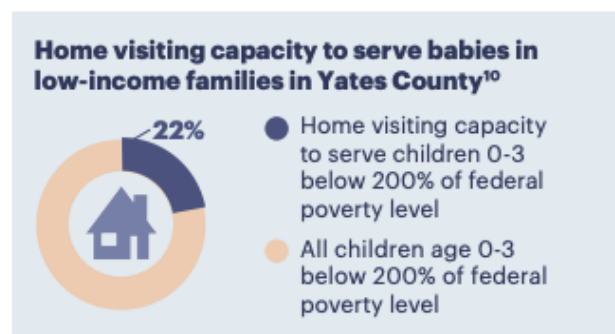
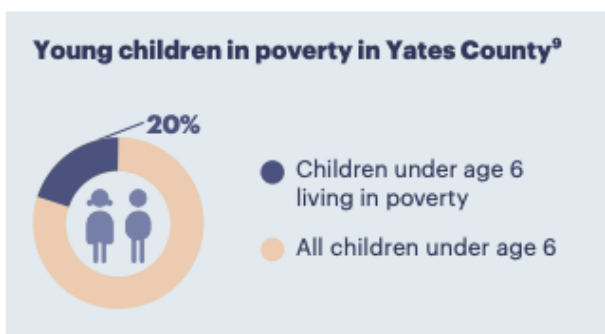
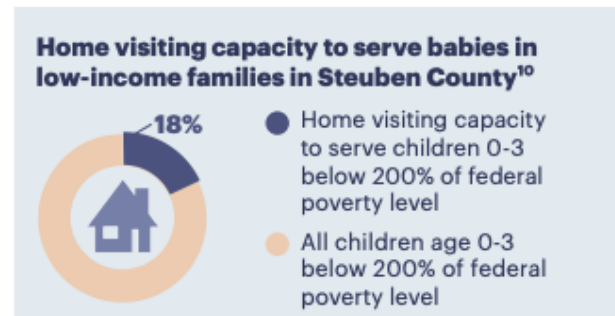
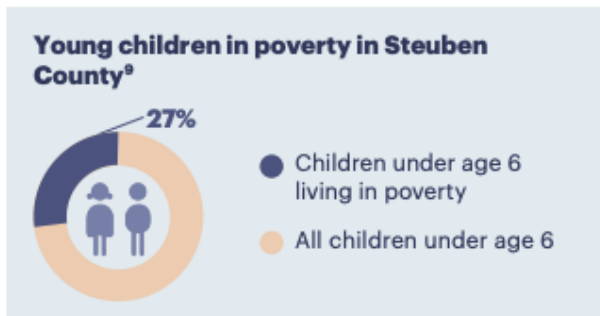
- Staff and volunteers stressed that lack of child care is one of the most common barriers families face in achieving self-sufficiency.
- Policy Council members highlighted the importance of Head Start and Early Head Start but noted that demand far exceeds available slots (Policy Council Focus Group Transcript).

Focus Group Perspectives ^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Policy Council: Parents described the difficulty of finding safe, affordable care, particularly for younger children. They also noted that income eligibility thresholds for child care subsidies often exclude working families who still cannot afford market rates.
- Family Resource Center: Emphasized gaps in child care for children with special needs and the burden on parents who must leave work to provide care.
- Board of Directors: Discussed the broader economic impact, stressing that child care shortages reduce labor force participation and strain employers.
- Seniors (OFA): Some noted how grandparents step in as caregivers due to lack of affordable options, highlighting intergenerational impacts.

Secondary Data

- Average cost of full-time center-based care for an infant in New York exceeds \$15,000 annually, nearly 20% of median household income in Steuben and Yates .^{24 38}
- Local child care deserts persist, with several census tracts in both counties identified as having more than three children for every licensed child care slot.¹⁶
- Early childhood outcomes: In both counties, about 50% of children entering kindergarten are not fully school-ready, underscoring the importance of quality early education (NYS Education Department, 2023).⁴⁵
- There is a significant eligibility gap. At least 1,726 Steuben and 354 Yates children under age 6 live below the federal poverty level—the minimum pool likely income-eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start; the true eligible pool is larger when including categorical eligibility (homelessness, foster care, TANF/SSI/SNAP).^{1 53 54}
- Head Start has strict eligibility standards and only some districts offer Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). Even if a family is eligible sometimes no slots are available in their area which is why there is advocacy in NY pushing for more universal child care (including for infants/toddlers), not just for 3- and 4-year-olds. For example, expanded eligibility, extending hours/days, and ensuring slots are available in both district classrooms and community-based organizations.⁵¹



Source: Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING: STEUBEN COUNTY PROFILE

ECONOMIC SECURITY

The younger the child, the more likely they are to experience poverty. In Steuben County, 13% of children under age six are living in deep poverty (below 50% of federal poverty level).¹¹

Historical and ongoing racial discrimination in employment, housing, and education, among other realms, cause children of color to experience poverty at approximately twice the rate of white children.

Child poverty and economic insecurity	County	NYS
Children under age 6 in deep poverty (under 50% FPL) ¹²	862 (13%)	144,164 (10%)
Children under age 6 in poverty (under 100% FPL) ¹³	1,726 (27%)	311,103 (23%)
White/Caucasian	1,561 (26%)	131,957 (17%)
Black/African American	29 (38%)	77,918 (35%)
American Indian and Alaska Native	—	2,079 (34%)
Asian	—	19,803 (18%)
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	—	86 (16%)
Other race	11 (23%)	57,256 (36%)
Two or more races	125 (51%)	22,004 (23%)
White not Hispanic/Latino	1,522 (26%)	98,134 (15%)
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	61 (32%)	110,549 (31%)
Children under age 6 with unemployed parent(s) ¹⁴	358 (6%)	115,603 (9%)
Receipt of SNAP in families with children under 18 ¹⁵	1,642	443,671
Number of children in asset limited income constrained employed families (ALICE) ¹⁶	3,372	481,084
Students who experienced homelessness at any point in the 2018-2019 school year ¹⁷	235	148,178

Source: Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Child care access was identified as a top barrier in the 2016 and 2019 CNAs, with conditions worsening by 2025. Pandemic-related closures, staffing shortages, and rising costs have further reduced options. The continued strain highlights a long-term systemic issue.

Synthesis & Implications

The evidence across surveys, focus groups, and secondary data confirms that child care is both a family need and an economic issue. Parents consistently report leaving jobs or reducing hours due to lack of affordable care, while employers struggle with workforce shortages as a result. Focus groups reveal the burden on families caring for children with special needs and the reliance on informal care arrangements that are often unstable. Data underscores the high cost of care and the persistent shortage of licensed slots, especially for infants and toddlers. Addressing this challenge will require increased investment in child care subsidies, expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start, creative employer partnerships, and policies that support workforce

development for child care providers. Without these measures, families will remain stuck in cycles of underemployment and stress, and children will miss out on critical early learning opportunities.

Transportation

Why It Matters

Transportation barriers are a consistent and significant challenge in Steuben and Yates Counties, shaping access to employment, healthcare, education, and other essential services. With large rural areas, limited public transit, and high costs associated with car ownership, families often face isolation. Transportation emerged as one of the most frequently cited needs in every survey and focus group, reflecting its role as both a standalone issue and a cross-cutting barrier.

Community Survey Findings ²⁵

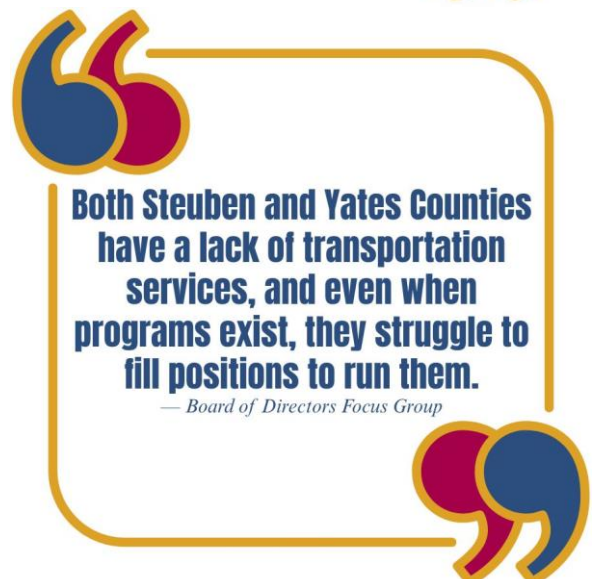
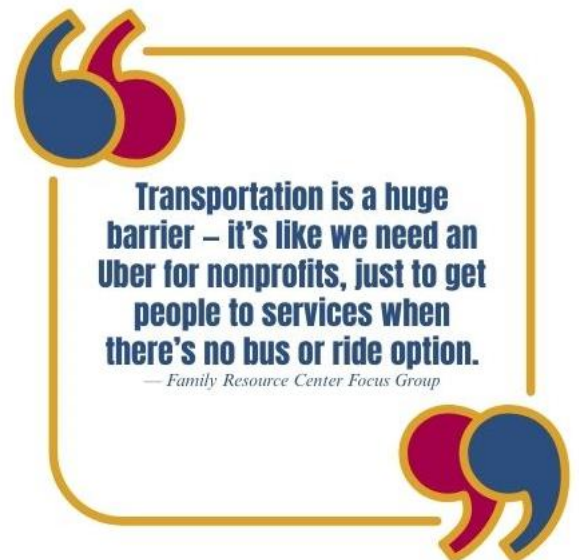
- 33% of Community Member Survey respondents identified transportation as a top need.
- Among open-ended responses, residents frequently noted the cost of gas, lack of vehicle reliability, and inadequate public transit routes.
- 18% reported missing medical appointments in the past year due to lack of reliable transportation.

Community Partner Insights ²⁶

- 44% of Community Partner Survey respondents listed transportation as a top-five need.
- Agencies described challenges in serving clients who cannot reach program sites, especially in remote areas.
- Partners emphasized that transportation barriers compound other issues such as housing instability and food insecurity.

Staff, Board, and Policy Council Perceptions ²⁷

- Staff noted that lack of transportation is one of the most common barriers faced by families seeking services.
- Policy Council members described difficulties accessing child care and employment without reliable transportation. ³⁰



Focus Group Perspectives ^{28 29 30 31 32}

- Youth: Cited transportation as one of the greatest barriers, affecting their ability to access jobs, school supports, and social activities.
- Seniors: Shared how loss of driving ability leads to social isolation and missed healthcare appointments. Participants expressed interest in expanded senior ride programs.
- Family Resource Center: Suggested creative solutions such as nonprofit rideshare-style models to fill gaps where public transit is absent.
- Board of Directors: Highlighted that transportation gaps directly contribute to missed opportunities in employment and healthcare, reinforcing cycles of poverty.

Secondary Data

- Public transit coverage is limited: Steuben County operates fixed-route and dial-a-ride services, but availability is constrained in evenings and rural areas; Yates County has even fewer options.¹⁰
- Vehicle ownership costs average \$10,000 annually, a heavy burden on households earning below the ALICE threshold.⁶
- Geographic spread: Steuben County covers nearly 1,400 square miles, making reliable personal transportation almost essential.⁴⁰

Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Transportation has been consistently identified as a top barrier since 2016, with little improvement. While Wheels for Work and some senior transportation services provide relief, coverage gaps and rising costs persist. Pandemic disruptions reduced transit services further, and many have not fully recovered.

Synthesis & Implications

Transportation barriers in Steuben and Yates Counties are both a direct hardship and an amplifier of other needs. Survey data confirms that families miss healthcare, employment, and educational opportunities due to unreliable or unaffordable transportation. Focus groups add depth, illustrating how youth, seniors, and parents alike are limited by lack of options. Partners and staff emphasize that transportation is one of the most significant cross-cutting challenges. Without expanded transit services, innovative rideshare solutions, and targeted supports such as vehicle repair programs, progress in employment, healthcare access, and family stability will remain limited. Addressing transportation is therefore a foundational step toward reducing isolation and enabling full participation in community life.

Family Support & Youth Development

Why It Matters

Families in Steuben and Yates Counties show strong resilience and community ties, yet they face persistent gaps in parenting supports, youth engagement, and mental/behavioral health for children and teens. Across surveys and focus groups, caregivers describe the strain of balancing

employment with parenting, limited affordable activities for adolescents, and a shortage of developmentally appropriate supports—particularly for pre-teens and teens.^{28 30} These challenges intersect with housing, transportation, and child care barriers, compounding stress for families and limiting positive youth outcomes.

Community Survey Findings²⁵

- **Top Needs:** 27% of Community Member Survey respondents selected family support/parenting resources as a top need; 22% selected youth development opportunities (e.g., after-school programs, mentoring).
- **Barriers:** Parents cited cost, lack of local options, and transportation as primary obstacles to enrolling children in structured activities.
- **Open-Ended Responses:** Families requested affordable, safe places for teens to gather, more mentoring and tutoring, and parent education resources that are practical and stigma-free.

Community Partner Insights²⁶

- **Service Gaps Identified:** 39% of Community Partner Survey respondents ranked family supports and youth development among the top five community needs.
- **Program Mix:** Partners emphasized the need for programs that pair academic support with social-emotional learning, evening/weekend hours, and options for middle-school youth who often “age out” of elementary offerings but are too young for teen programs.
- **Transportation Link:** Partners repeatedly linked youth participation to transportation access and suggested co-locating programs at schools, libraries, and community hubs.

Staff, Board, and Policy Council Perceptions²⁷

- **Staff & Volunteers:** Report frequent caregiver stress, limited affordable activities outside school, and long waits for child/youth counseling.
- **Policy Council:** Highlighted the importance of Head Start family engagement and called out the need for adolescent programming and community connection events to reduce isolation (Policy Council Focus Group Transcript).²⁹

Focus Group Perspectives^{28 29 30 31 32}

- **Youth:** Asked for more safe spaces, tutoring, recreation, and peer supports; noted that boredom and lack of engagement can lead to risky behaviors.
- **Policy Council (Parents):** Recommended community connection events (e. g., “I Matter”-style festivals), expanded after-school and summer programs, and supports for pre-teens/teens who fall between age-banded.
- **Family Resource Center:** Emphasized normalizing help-seeking, parent peer groups, and strategies that reduce stigma around parenting.
- **Board of Directors:** Pointed to the impacts of addiction and poverty on family stability and youth well-being, reinforcing the need for prevention and early intervention.
- **Seniors/OFA:** Noted the growing role of grandparents as caregivers due to child care shortages and economic pressure.

Secondary Data

- **Child Poverty:** Child poverty remains elevated relative to state averages, aligning with caregiver reports of financial strain.³⁹
- **After-School Access:** Regional participation in after-school programming trails demand, with fewer available slots relative to population.¹³ In New York, for every child in an afterschool program, 4 more would participate if a program were available.⁵² In fact, NY is the state with the highest unmet demand for after-school programs among children/families not already enrolled. About two-thirds of youth who are not enrolled in an after-school program wish they had access to one.¹³ That points to a huge unmet demand especially among pre-teens/teens.
- **Youth Mental Health:** Rural counties report higher unmet behavioral health needs for youth, with provider shortages and long waits.¹¹



Source: Afterschool Alliance.

Comparisons to Previous CNAs

Family supports and youth engagement have been priorities in every CNA since 2016. Despite incremental gains (e. g. , expanded family engagement in early childhood programs), gaps persist for adolescents, especially in out-of-school-time and mental/behavioral health supports. The 2025 findings show increased caregiver stress, continued transportation barriers, and greater demand for stigma-free parent and youth peer supports.

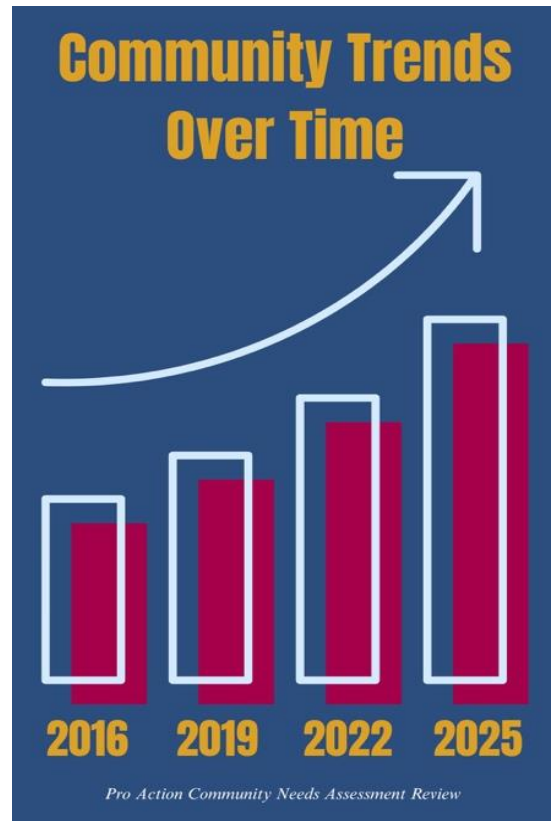
Synthesis & Implications

Taken together, the evidence indicates that strengthening families and engaging youth are central to community resilience. Parents want affordable, nearby programs and practical parenting resources; youth want safe places to belong, learn, and grow. Partners and staff underscore that participation hinges on transportation and scheduling. Without targeted investment in adolescent programming, family engagement, and youth mental health supports, the community will continue to see avoidable crises and missed opportunities. Priorities include expanding out-of-school-time programs (with transportation), building peer-led and mentorship models, integrating family support with mental/behavioral health access, and offering flexible, stigma-free parent education. These steps will help stabilize households today and build the human capital the region needs for tomorrow.

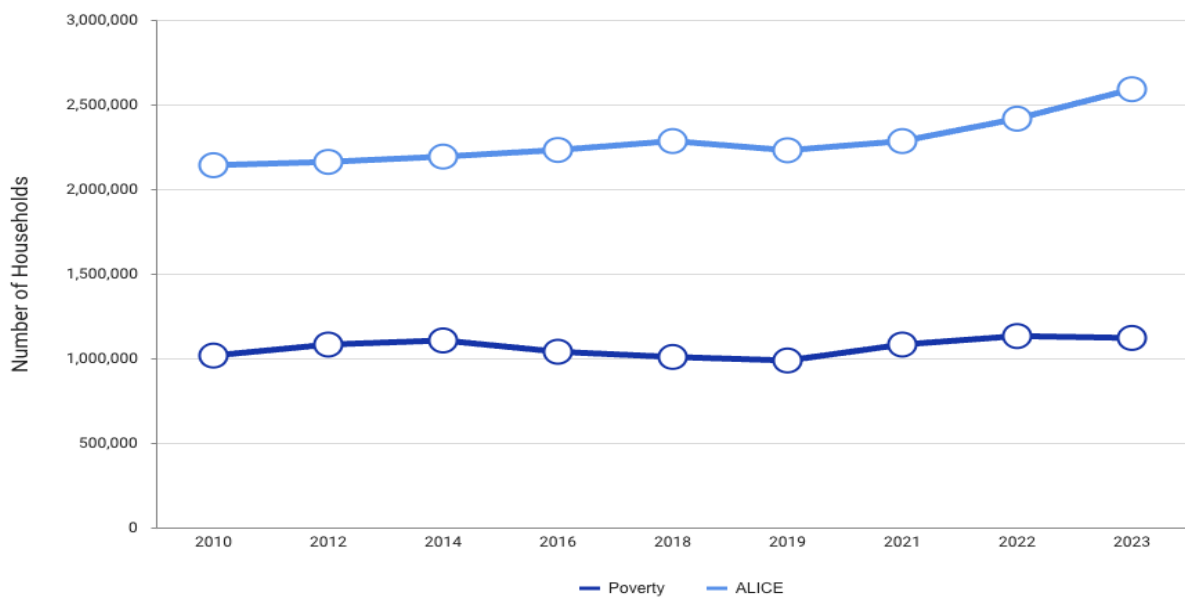
Long-Term Trends in Community Needs (2016–2025)

Overview

Across three assessment cycles (2016, 2019, 2022, 2025), the same core pressures surface again and again—housing affordability and quality, transportation access, child care availability and cost, mental/behavioral health capacity, and income adequacy—but they have intensified in scope and complexity since 2020. Community member and partner surveys, focus groups, and secondary data converge on a picture of persistent needs plus post-pandemic aftershocks (inflation, benefit expirations, and workforce shortages) that now shape daily life in Steuben and Yates Counties. And, while households living in poverty has only increased minimally over the last several years, the number of ALICE households has increased by over 350,000 households in NYS from 2019 to 2023, only underscoring the prevalence and needs of the “working poor.”



Number of ALICE and Poverty-Level Households, New York, 2023



Source: United For ALICE | Trends of Hardship

Persistent vs. Intensifying Themes

- **Employment & Income**
 - Persistent: Wages lag the cost of living; ALICE/near-poor households struggle to meet basic needs even when working. ^{34 35 36}
 - Intensifying: Inflation since 2021 and rising non-discretionary costs (rent, utilities, transportation, child care) widened the gap between earnings and expenses; benefit cliffs remain a deterrent to incremental income gains (2025 Community Member, Partner, and Staff/Board/Policy Council Surveys). ^{25 26 27}
- **Housing**
 - Persistent: Demand for safe, affordable rentals; aging housing stock requiring repairs/weatherization; low vacancy rates (2016, 2019 CNAs). ^{34 35}
 - Intensifying: Higher rents and energy costs post-2020; increased eviction filings after moratoriums ended; continued shortages in shelter/transitional options; voucher utilization constrained by landlord participation and FMR (fair market rent) limits. ^{25 28}
- **Food Security**
 - Persistent: Reliance on pantries and school-based meals; geographic/access barriers in rural areas. ^{34 35 36}
 - Intensifying: Loss of pandemic SNAP allotments; food price inflation; pronounced summer/holiday gaps when school meals are unavailable. ^{25 29 32}
- **Health & Mental Health**
 - Persistent: Limited local behavioral health capacity; transportation obstacles to care.
 - Intensifying: Greater demand for youth counseling; addiction concerns; provider shortages and waitlists; seniors requesting on-site supports in senior housing. ^{25 28 29 30 31 32 11}
- **Child Care & Early Childhood**
 - Persistent: Cost and slot availability limit parent employment and child development outcomes. ^{34 35}
 - Intensifying: Provider/staffing shortages and higher operating costs post-pandemic; long waitlists for infants/toddlers; families above subsidy cutoffs priced out (2025 surveys and focus groups). ²⁵
- **Transportation**
 - Persistent: Rural distances, limited routes/hours, and the cost of car ownership constrain access to work, health care, food, and programs. ^{34 35 36}
 - Intensifying: Higher fuel, insurance, and maintenance costs; lingering service reductions; growing need for flexible, demand-responsive models (2025 surveys and focus groups). ^{25 28}

Structural Shifts Shaping Need

- **Demographics & Rurality:** Population decline/stagnation, aging households, and low density increase per-capita cost of service delivery and heighten isolation for seniors and families without vehicles.

- **Workforce Constraints:** Shortages in health/behavioral health, child care, construction/weatherization, and human services slow program expansion and limit access even when funding is available.^{29 32}
- **Eligibility & Benefit Cliffs:** Income thresholds that do not reflect local cost of living create churn as families lose access to services with small wage gains.³⁰
- **Digital Access:** Broadband has improved in some corridors, but gaps persist for low-income and remote households, affecting telehealth, education, job search, and benefits navigation.^{26 27}
- **Community Collaboration:** Cross-sector coordination has strengthened (e.g., county agencies, Pro Action programs, Rural Health Network). Pro-Housing Community designations signal local readiness to pursue housing solutions.

What's Changed Since 2019

- Costs rose faster than incomes, eroding household stability across domains.³⁹
- SNAP emergency allotments ended, increasing pantry/congregate meal demand.²²
- Eviction protections expired, and filings increased from 2022 onward, heightening housing instability.⁴⁴
- Child care supply tightened due to staffing shortages and higher operating costs.
- Behavioral health demand increased, especially for youth; provider shortages deepened.¹¹

Implications for Strategy (ROMA-Aligned)

- **Results:** Reduce cost burden and access barriers in housing, child care, transportation, and food; improve access to behavioral health; increase income stability.
- **Outcomes/Indicators:** Fewer missed medical/education appointments due to transportation; reduced rent/utility arrears; increased child care access for working parents; shorter behavioral-health wait times; increased household net resources via benefits optimization and income supports.
- **Key Strategies:**
 - Expand affordable housing (production + preservation) and scale weatherization/repair.
 - Boost child care capacity via wage stabilization, training pipelines, and employer partnerships.
 - Develop demand-responsive transportation (rideshare models, volunteer driver networks) and vehicle repair supports.
 - Integrate behavioral health across settings (schools, senior housing, family resource hubs) and strengthen prevention.
 - Promote benefits navigation to mitigate cliffs; pilot “glide-path” supports for families crossing eligibility thresholds.
 - Leverage cross-sector collaborations and designations (e.g., Pro-Housing Communities) to unlock funding.
 - Advocate for the needs of ALICE families meeting support program criteria.

Synthesis

The through-line from 2016 to 2025 is clear: **the same core needs persist, but the margin for error has narrowed**. Families who were barely getting by in 2019 are now more vulnerable to crisis due to higher fixed costs and reduced safety-net supports. Addressing long-term trends will require a two-track approach—**stabilize households now** (rental/utility assistance, food access, transportation to critical services) while **changing the system conditions** (affordable housing supply, child care workforce, behavioral-health capacity, and benefit design) that keep needs chronic. This dual focus is essential to move households from coping to thriving.

External Threats & Policy Context

Overview

Families and providers in Steuben and Yates Counties operate within a policy environment that can either cushion or compound local need. Since 2020, a cluster of **external shocks**—inflation in essential goods, expiration of temporary safety-net flexibilities, workforce shortages, and rising housing costs—has converged with long-standing rural access barriers. This section summarizes the threats most likely to influence need over the next 24–36 months and highlights policy levers and partnerships relevant to Pro Action and community planning.

Policy Context: SNAP Funding Threats (2025)

- **Scale of Proposed Cuts:** In spring/summer 2025, Congress advanced budget and reconciliation measures (including the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill) that direct the Agriculture Committee to achieve at least \$230B in SNAP savings over 10 years, with some proposals estimating even larger reductions. Independent analyses warn this would be the largest SNAP cut in history, taking food assistance from millions of low-income households.^{17 42 43}
- **Cost Shift to States (NY Impact):** Analyses indicate the federal plan would shift administrative and benefit-related costs to states, with an estimated \$2.1 Million in new SNAP costs to New York—a major burden for local and county budgets and anti-hunger systems.¹⁸
- **Work Requirements:** Provisions expand/strictly enforce work rules for able-bodied adults without dependents, commonly benchmarked at 80 hours/month to maintain eligibility. New York OTDA guidance details the 80-hour standard and recent federal changes, with limited exemptions and geographic waivers.¹⁷
- **Public Health & Anti-Hunger Consensus:** Editorial boards and policy groups warn that deep SNAP cuts would undermine health and increase poverty statewide, particularly in rural regions where pantry networks are already strained.²³
- **Local Read-Through:** In parts of upstate NY, SNAP participation approaches 1 in 7 residents, meaning cuts and stricter rules would directly increase hunger, drive up pantry demand, and raise administrative caseloads for local DSS agencies.²⁰

Macroeconomic Headwinds

- Inflation & Fixed Costs: Higher prices for rent, utilities, food, child care, and transportation continue to squeeze ALICE and near-poor households. Even modest wage gains can be erased by these fixed costs, intensifying financial precarity. ^{15 39}
- Household Volatility: Families report income volatility (seasonal/part-time work, variable hours) that complicates budgeting and eligibility documentation. ¹⁵

Housing Market & Policy Environment

- Tight Supply, Aging Stock: Low vacancy rates and older homes drive up costs and utility burdens. Repairs/weatherization remain under-resourced relative to need. ^{4 40}
- Voucher Utilization: Limited landlord participation and Fair Market Rent (FMR) constraints reduce the effectiveness of Housing Choice Vouchers. Landlord incentives, navigator supports, and advocacy on FMR adjustments can unlock units. ⁴⁷
- Local Levers: Pro-Housing Community designations (e.g., Starkey, Dundee) and municipal partnerships can align zoning, infrastructure, and financing for affordable and supportive housing development. ¹²

Child Care Policy & Workforce

- Fragile Business Model: Provider wages remain low relative to responsibilities, affecting recruitment and retention. Rising operating costs pressure program quality and slot availability—especially for infants/toddlers and children with special needs. ²⁴
- Subsidy Design: Eligibility thresholds and copays can exclude working families just above cutoff lines. Smoother “glide-path” transitions and continuity of care reduce churn and parental employment disruptions. ²⁵

Behavioral Health & Addiction Response

- Capacity Gaps: Shortages in counseling, psychiatry, and youth-focused services prolong wait times and push families toward emergency settings. ⁷
- Addiction & Recovery: Opioid and stimulant use continue to destabilize households. Integrated, community-based recovery supports (housing, transportation, employment) are essential complements to clinical treatment. ⁷

Transportation & Infrastructure

- Sparse Coverage: Limited routes, hours, and geography make traditional fixed-route models insufficient in rural areas. Demand-responsive options (nonprofit rideshare, volunteer drivers) and vehicle repair supports can bridge access gaps. ^{10 25}
- Medical & Program Access: Missed appointments and low program attendance often trace back to transportation; aligning transit with health, child care, and workforce schedules is a high-ROI lever. ¹⁰

Digital Equity

- Broadband & Devices: Coverage has improved unevenly; affordability and device access still hinder telehealth, online learning, job search, and benefits management for low-income households. ^{48 49}

Climate & Energy Burden

- **Weatherization & Resilience:** Older housing combined with increasingly volatile weather raises heating/cooling costs and risk of damage. Scaling weatherization, energy-efficiency upgrades, and emergency utility supports reduces household risk and improves health.¹²⁴

Eligibility Thresholds & Benefit Cliffs

- **Cliff Effects:** Small wage increases can trigger loss of benefits (child care, SNAP, housing, energy assistance), leaving families worse off in the short term. Coordinated benefits navigation, budgeting support, and pilot “step-down” models can mitigate harm.²⁵

Funding & Compliance Landscape

- **ROMA & CSBG:** CNA findings should map to results/outcomes and tie to service strategies under ROMA and CSBG Organizational Standards, sustaining compliance and performance accountability.
- **Head Start & Early Head Start:** Maintain alignment with community assessment requirements for early childhood services, including facilities, transportation, and family engagement components.
- **Aging Services:** Coordination with NYS Office for the Aging priorities (nutrition, transportation, socialization, mental health access) remains vital as the 75+ population grows.
- **Braided Funding:** Blending CSBG with housing, transportation, workforce, and behavioral-health funds—plus philanthropic dollars—enables multi-problem solutions.

Synthesis & Implications

The policy context can either amplify burdens or unlock solutions. In housing, the combination of low vacancy, aging stock, and limited voucher acceptance drives instability unless paired with local development, preservation, and repair/weatherization strategies. In child care, workforce and subsidy design determine whether parents can work and children can learn.

Behavioral-health capacity and recovery supports shape family stability, while transportation and digital access determine whether services are reachable at all. Finally, eligibility rules and benefit cliffs frequently undercut incremental progress for working families.

Implication for Pro Action: Focus on **systems-level partnerships** (housing authorities, planning boards, employers, health systems, schools), **benefits navigation to smooth cliffs**, **demand-responsive transportation pilots**, **child care workforce pipelines and employer partnerships**, and **scaling weatherization/repair**. These are the levers most likely to bend the curve on need in the next planning cycle.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Summary

Across Steuben and Yates Counties, the same core pressures—housing affordability and quality, child care access and cost, transportation barriers, behavioral-health capacity, and income inadequacy—have persisted since 2016 and deepened since 2020. The **margin for error for low- and moderate-income households has narrowed** due to inflation in fixed costs, the expiration of pandemic-era supports (e.g., SNAP emergency allotments), and workforce shortages. The path forward requires a **twin-track approach**: (1) **stabilize households now** with targeted supports that prevent crises, and (2) **change system conditions** that make needs chronic.

ROMA-Aligned Outcomes to Target (12–36 months)

- **Housing Stability:** Lower rent/utility arrears; fewer evictions; more homes weatherized/repaired.
- **Food Security:** Reduced pantry dependence as measured by repeat pantry use; increased successful SNAP applications/retentions.
- **Child care Access:** More families with reliable child care enabling stable employment; reduced waitlists for infants/toddlers.
- **Behavioral Health Access:** Shorter wait times for counseling; increased on-site service encounters (schools, senior housing, family hubs); more recovery supports utilized. ²⁵
- **Transportation Access:** Fewer missed medical/education/work appointments due to transportation.
- **Income Adequacy:** Increased net household resources through benefits optimization and income supports; improved financial capability indicators (budgeting, savings).

Sarah's story comes back into focus.

Every morning she calculates what can — and cannot — be paid. If she covers rent, there's less for groceries. If she fills the gas tank, she can't afford the utility bill. The constant math of survival never ends.

Her car breaks down, and she weighs missing work against borrowing money she can't pay back. At the store, she puts back fresh produce for cheaper options that will stretch further. She hears about programs that could help, but her income — just above the poverty line — makes her ineligible. It's a cruel irony: she works full-time, yet is locked out of the very supports designed for struggling families.

Her children feel the squeeze, too. Her pre-teen has nowhere safe to go after school, no affordable activities to stay engaged. She sees boredom turning into restlessness, and she worries where that road could lead. When her child asks to join a sports league or go on a school trip, Sarah has to say no. Each no chips away at her sense of being able to provide, at her children's sense of belonging.

And still, she pushes through. But the weight shows up as anxiety, exhaustion, and quiet despair. Sarah lies awake at night wondering how long she can keep this up.

Sarah is not an outlier — she is the embodiment of what our surveys and focus groups revealed: families caught between not qualifying for help and not earning enough to live. When we talk about transportation gaps, food insecurity, housing costs, mental health waitlists, and the lack of youth opportunities, we are talking about Sarah.

Her story is not a sidebar. It is the heart of this Community Needs Assessment.

- **Early Childhood Development & Disability Support:** Reduced wait times for developmental screening and Early Intervention/CPSE services; increased percentage of children receiving timely IFSP/IEP supports.
- **Youth & Family Well-Being:** More affordable enrichment opportunities for pre-teens and teens; increased participation in family wellness and nutrition education activities.

Recommended Strategies

A. Stabilize Households (0–12 months)

1. Crisis Navigation & Benefits Optimization

Launch/expand navigator teams to help families secure/retain SNAP, HEAP, WIC, child care subsidies, and emergency rent/utility aid; include cliffs counseling and budgeting supports. If federal proposals reduce SNAP (e. g. , 2025 budget plans projecting \$230B in cuts and \$2.1B state cost shifts to NY), position navigators to mitigate loss through layered supports and rapid referrals.^{17 18}

2. Homelessness Prevention & Utility Security

Scale flexible funds for rent debts, security deposits, and utility shut-off prevention; coordinate with DSS eviction diversion calendars.

3. Vehicle Repair & Access Micro-Grants

Pilot small grants/loans for essential car repairs and insurance reinstatement to prevent job loss and missed appointments. Explore grant funding to offer alternative transportation reimbursement where there is an absence of public transit (e.g. Papa Pal’s transportation support).

4. Food Access Bridge

Expand mobile pantries and summer/holiday meal solutions for families losing access to school meals.

B. Build Capacity (6–24 months)

1. Weatherization + Critical Repairs

Pair WAP/utility programs with small-landlord/homeowner repair funds to reduce energy burden and preserve affordable units; track reduced kWh/therm usage and bill arrears.

2. Child Care Workforce & Slot Expansion

Create ECE career pipelines (CDA scholarships, paid practicums), wage add-ons/retention bonuses (with philanthropy or ARPA-like one-time funds), and employer-sponsored slots. Coordinate with OCFS, internal Child Care Program, and local CCR&Rs.

3. Integrated Behavioral Health Access

Embed counseling hours onsite at senior housing and family resource hubs; expand school-based services and referral pathways; partner with OASAS/behavioral-health providers for recovery housing and peer support.

4. Demand-Responsive Transportation

Pilot nonprofit rideshare/volunteer driver programs aligned to health, child care, and workforce schedules; braid Section 5311 rural transit resources with philanthropy.

5. Housing Navigation & Landlord Partnerships

Create a housing navigator function; offer landlord engagement, unit readiness

mini-grants, and voucher acceptance supports; partner with Pro-Housing Community municipalities.

6. Early Childhood Intervention & Disability Supports

Expand home-based developmental and disability support services through Early Head Start and Head Start. Train additional staff in inclusive, trauma-informed practices, and strengthen referral pipelines with Early Intervention and CPSE to reduce waitlists and ensure timely IFSP/IEP implementation.

7. Family Resource Center Expansion for Adolescents

Pilot pre-teen and teen enrichment programs (mentoring, academic help, arts, sports) at Family Resource Centers and Youth Development Program, filling a gap identified in focus groups. Use existing facilities as low-cost hubs to extend Pro Action’s family support continuum into adolescence.

C. Systems & Policy (ongoing)

1. SNAP, FMR, and Child care Subsidy Advocacy

- Oppose federal SNAP cuts and rigid work rules that jeopardize eligibility for irregular-hour workers; document local impact for congressional offices.²³
- Advocate FMR adjustments and landlord incentives to expand voucher usability; request geographic waivers for ABAWD work requirements where appropriate.¹⁴
- Promote smoother child care “glide-paths” to avoid benefit cliffs as wages rise.³⁰

2. Data-Sharing & Cross-Sector Compacts

Formalize agreements with DSS, health systems, schools, and housing partners to target high-need hot spots and streamline referrals.

3. Sustainable Financing

Pursue **LIHTC, HOME, CDBG, Weatherization**, rural transit (5311), HRSA, SAMHSA/OASAS, and philanthropic funds; braid with **CSBG** to underwrite navigation/coordination functions.

4. Mental Health Integration in Early Childhood Programs

Advocate for sustainable funding for embedded mental health consultants in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. Prioritize strategies that reduce child behavior-related suspensions, support teacher well-being, and connect families with timely counseling and parent support groups.

D. Child & Family Development (6–24 months and ongoing)

1. Early Childhood Intervention & Disability Supports

Strengthen developmental and disability supports within early childhood programs. Expand staff training in inclusive, trauma-informed practices, streamline referral pipelines with Early Intervention and CPSE, and reduce wait times for IFSP/IEP services. Track reduction in screening-to-service delays and improved developmental outcomes for children.

2. Youth Enrichment Opportunities

Develop affordable, accessible enrichment programs for pre-teens and teens, including mentoring, academic support, arts, and recreation. Use community hubs such as schools, libraries, or family resource centers to provide safe, engaging spaces. Monitor

participation rates, parent satisfaction, and self-reported improvements in youth connection and well-being.

3. **Integrated Mental Health in Early Childhood Settings**

Embed mental health consultation within early childhood classrooms and programs to support both children and caregivers. Focus on coaching for staff, behavior support strategies, and linking families to timely counseling services. Track reductions in suspensions/expulsions, increased teacher confidence, and quicker access to needed resources.

4. **Nutrition & Family Well-Being Education**

Enhance nutrition and wellness supports by offering family workshops on cooking, meal planning, and food budgeting. Partner with food pantries, farms, and community gardens to improve access to fresh produce. Evaluate impact through reduced pantry dependence and greater family participation in wellness activities.

Implementation Roadmap

- **Days (0–30)**
 - Stand up SNAP/benefits navigator huddles; define referral pathways.
 - Launch a small vehicle-repair micro-grant pilot.
 - Identify two sites (senior housing or schools) for embedded counseling hours.
- **Months (3–12)**
 - Execute landlord engagement and unit-readiness mini-grant pilot.
 - Secure seed funding for ECE workforce stipends.
 - Launch a pilot youth enrichment activity at one community hub.
- **Months (12–24)**
 - Reduce transportation-related no-shows by 10%.
 - Add new child care slots through workforce supports.
 - Expand nutrition/meal planning workshops for families.
- **24–36 Months**
 - Demonstrate reduced evictions and utility shut-offs.
 - Scale rideshare/volunteer driver model countywide.
 - Track shorter wait times for youth mental health and early childhood supports.

Access Considerations

- Prioritize households experiencing **compounded barriers** (single-parent families, seniors on fixed incomes, youth/young adults, rural isolated households).
- Ensure language access and disability accommodations in all navigation and transportation pilots.
- Use disaggregated data (age, geography, household type) to steer resources.

Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

- Use a ROMA scorecard with quarterly indicators for each outcome above; combine program data + survey pulse checks + partner dashboards.
- Conduct brief **after-action reviews** after each pilot phase; expand what works, sunset what doesn't.

Final Conclusion

The 2025 Community Needs Assessment underscores that while Steuben and Yates Counties are resilient communities, the persistence and intensification of core barriers demand a bolder, systems-level response. The evidence points to a cycle where families are working, contributing, and striving, yet rising fixed costs, benefit cliffs, and service shortages continue to erode stability. At the same time, strong local collaboration, Pro-Housing Community designations, and new policy opportunities offer tangible levers for change. To truly “bend the curve” on poverty, Pro Action and its partners must pair immediate supports that stabilize households with longer-term strategies that expand affordable housing, strengthen the child care workforce, integrate behavioral health, and innovate child and family resources and transportation. By linking direct relief with systemic reforms, and by grounding every step in community voice and cross-sector collaboration, the region can transform its challenges into opportunities for resilience and shared prosperity.

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