



Opportunities, Inc.

Community Needs Assessment
Executive Summary

Agency Overview and Communities Served

For over 58 years of operational experience, Opportunities, Inc. as a non-profit Community Action Agency holds a distinguished history of helping children and families in the communities served through a variety of diverse services, with a focus on housing, energy services, early childhood education, workforce development and emergency services. Our Agency continually strives for excellence as we fulfill our mission to partner within each community to respectfully support and educate low-income individuals to achieve self-reliance. To ensure the services provided by Opportunities, Inc. meet the ever-changing needs of the people served, a needs assessment is conducted on a regular basis across the services area communities.



Opportunities, Inc. is a Community Action Agency in north central Montana, serving low-income individuals in six counties: Cascade, Chouteau, Teton, Pondera, Toole, and Glacier. The Opportunities, Inc. Administrative Offices are in Great Falls, the third largest city in Montana.

Approach





Opportunities, Inc. leveraged a variety of resources to conduct the 2023 Community Needs Assessment. Qualitative and Quantitative data was compiled and analyzed to inform this assessment and reveal an accurate overview of the challenges families in our six-county area face every day. Quantitative data used included Census data and programmatic data while Qualitative data included data from various community stake holders, clients, the Board of Directors, Community Leaders, Head Start Policy Council members, Head Start Parents, educational institutions, agency staff and other various community members. Qualitative data was gathered on-going through various community, leadership, and staff meetings, Board of Directors and Policy Council meetings and a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Survey. The survey allowed respondents to indicate what they felt were the top needs facing our community. This approach provided a complete picture of the needs of the communities served.

To ensure the qualitative and quantitative data accurately identified community needs, Opportunities, Inc. used a strategic approach leveraging the ROMA Cycle which aligns well and produces practical outcomes. This method includes planning, utilizing the mission statement and data to identify needs, implementing the identified strategies, assessing progress, and finally, in depth analysis and realistic evaluations of data and outcomes to adjust methods or processes. Once evaluation is complete and adjustments are made, the cycle can repeat as many times as necessary.

Community Assessment

Top Identified Community Needs

During our comprehensive Community Assessment, Opportunities, Inc. identified the following top needs in the communities served:

-  Access to Safe and Affordable Housing
-  Drug and Alcohol Addiction/Family & Relationship Related Issues
-  Employment Related Issues
-  Access to Affordable Childcare

Community Demographics

Demographic information along with state and national demographic information is presented to allow for comparisons. Data for the needs assessment were drawn from American Community Survey data accessed through the Community Action Partnerships Assessment Tool.

A total of 121,061 people live in the 15,476.92 square mile report area defined for this assessment according to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2017-21 5-year estimates. The population density for this area, estimated at 8 persons per square mile, is less than the national average population density of 93 persons per square mile.

Population, Density (Persons per Sq Mile) by County, ACS 2017-21

Report Areas	Total Population	Total Land Area (Square Miles)	Population Density (Per Square Mile)
Total for Report Area	121,061	15,476.92	8
Cascade County, MT	84,178	2,698.21	31
Chouteau County, MT	5,896	3,972.52	1
Glacier County, MT	13,827	2,995.15	5
Pondera County, MT	5,974	1,624.57	4
Teton County, MT	6,173	2,271.62	3
Toole County, MT	5,013	1,914.86	3
Montana	1,077,978	145,550.37	7
United States	329,725,481	3,533,041.03	93

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2017-21.

Source geography: Tract

Population Changes

For the 2023 Community Assessment 2020 census data was available to inform the distinct population changes in our service area. As shown below, Montana experienced a net gain of 94,810 between 2010 and 2020. While Pondera and Toole experienced a decline, Cascade, Chouteau, Glacier, and Teton counties experienced a positive gain of 3,088, 82, 379, 153 and 541.

Report Areas	Total Population, 2010 Census	Total Population, 2020 Census	Population Change, 2010-2020	Population Change, 2010-2020, Percent
Report Location	118,089	121,182	3,093	2.62%
Cascade County, MT	81,326	84,414	3,088	3.80%
Chouteau County, MT	5,813	5,895	82	1.41%
Glacier County, MT	13,399	13,778	379	2.83%
Pondera County, MT	6,154	5,898	-256	-4.16%
Teton County, MT	6,073	6,226	153	2.52%
Toole County, MT	5,324	4,971	-353	-6.63%
Montana	989,415	1,084,225	94,810	9.58%

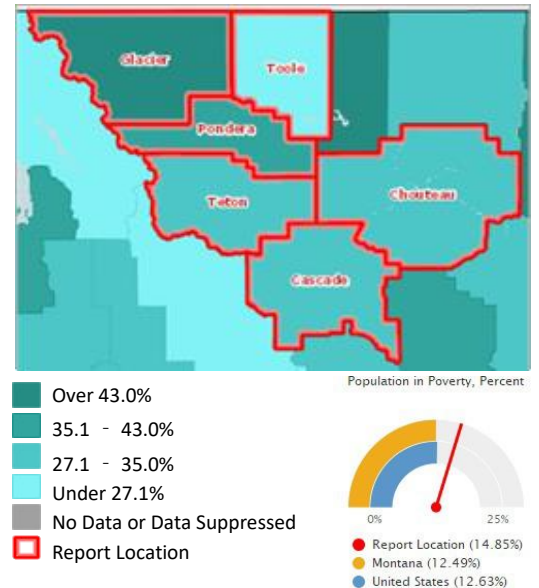
Population Below Federal Poverty Level

Within the report area 14.85% or 17,504 individuals for whom poverty status is determined are living in households with income below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This indicator is relevant because poverty creates barriers to access including health services, healthy food, and other necessities that contribute to poor health status.

Report Area	Total Population	Population in Poverty	Population in Poverty, Percent
Report Location	117,888	17,504	14.85%
Cascade County, MT	82,131	10,628	12.94%
Chouteau County, MT	5,857	855	14.60%
Glacier County, MT	13,525	3,786	27.99%
Pondera County, MT	5,839	1,026	17.57%
Teton County, MT	6,090	849	13.94%
Toole County, MT	4,446	360	8.10%
Montana	1,053,304	131,512	12.49%
United States	321,897,703	40,661,636	12.63%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2017 - 21. Source geography: Tract

As shown, 10,628 or 12.94% of individuals living below the FPL compared to the Montana state which sits at 131,512 or 12.49% of Individuals. Pondera County, which includes the city of Conrad, has 1,026 or 17.57% of individuals living below the FPL. Toole County, which includes the city of Shelby, has 360 or 8.10% of individuals living below the FPL. Teton County, which includes the city of Choteau, has 849 or 13.94% of individuals living below the FPL. Choteau County, which includes the city of Fort Benton, has 855



or 14.60% of individuals living below the FPL. Lastly, Glacier County, which includes both Browning and Cut Bank sits at 3,786 or 25.99% of individuals living below FPL.

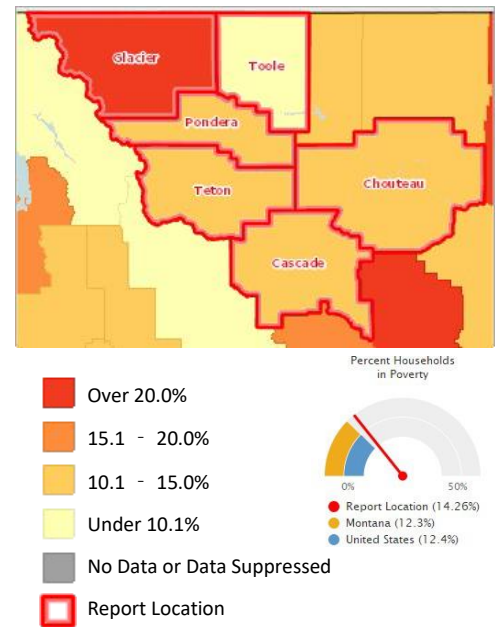
Households in Poverty

The number and percentage of households in poverty are shown in the report area. In 2021, it is estimated that there were 6,677 households, or 14.3%, living in poverty within the report area.

Report Area	Total Households	Households in Poverty	% Households in Poverty
Report Location	46,821	6,677	14.26%
Cascade County, MT	34,194	4,637	13.6%
Chouteau County, MT	2,201	314	14.3%
Glacier County, MT	4,005	1,021	25.5%
Pondera County, MT	2,188	266	12.2%
Teton County, MT	2,428	280	11.5%
Toole County, MT	1,805	159	8.8%
Montana	436,481	53,623	12.3%
United States	124,010,992	15,381,768	12.4%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2017 - 21.

Source geography: County



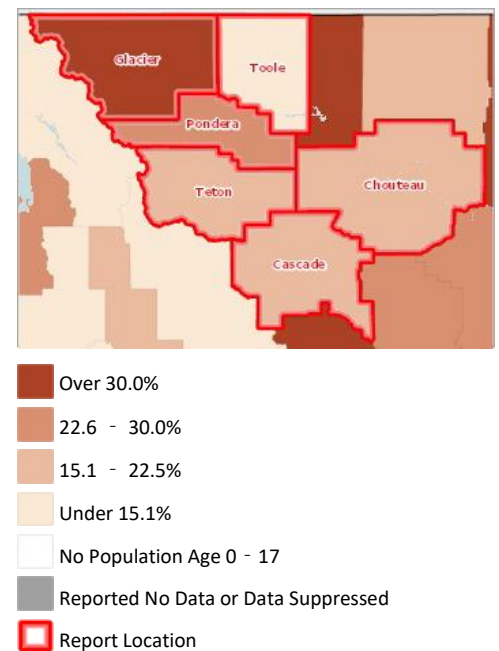
Individuals < Age 18 Below Federal Poverty Line

In the report area 19.42% or 5,413 children aged 0-17 are living in households with income below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This indicator is relevant because poverty creates barriers to access including health services, healthy food, and other necessities that contribute to poor health status.

Report Area	Total Population	Population < Age 18	Population < Age 18 in Poverty	Population < Age 18 in Poverty, Percent
Report Location	117,888	27,869	5,413	19.42%
Cascade County, MT	82,131	18,756	3,063	16.33%
Chouteau County, MT	5,857	1,363	211	15.48%
Glacier County, MT	13,525	3,903	1,375	35.23%
Pondera County, MT	5,839	1,334	365	27.36%
Teton County, MT	6,090	1,513	325	21.48%
Toole County, MT	4,446	1,000	74	7.40%
Montana	1,053,304	227,055	34,405	15.15%
United States	321,897,703	72,996,065	12,443,424	17.05%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey. 2017 - 21.

Source geography: Tract



Community Needs Assessment Survey Results

The 2023 Community Needs Assessment Survey provided a wealth of valuable knowledge and insights including the identification of several community needs. 1,734 responses were collected. The top needs identified were:

- Access to Safe and Affordable Housing
- Drug and Alcohol Addiction/Family & Relationship Related Issues
- Employment Related Issues
- Access to Affordable Childcare

Access to Safe and Affordable Housing

Access to safe and affordable housing remains a critical need in many of our communities. **The 2023 Community Assessment has shown that housing related issues continue to be critical in addressing. 61.52% of the 1,734 respondents felt this was the biggest problem facing adults in the community.** The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing housing issues. Communities are experiencing a low housing inventory, high rental costs, and other unforeseen economic hardships for renters. In the opinion of the 1,734 respondents, 68.14% said “no” when asked whether enough was being done to address housing in the community and keep people out of poverty. Of these same respondents, a majority, 73.56% rated housing at the most Important issue to be addressed in the community, with childcare 2nd most important at 64.81%, and employment third at 64.33%.

Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse/Family & Relationship Issues

The 2023 Community Assessment has also shown a continued need to address the substance abuse issues individuals in our community are facing. **Of the 1,734 respondents of the Community Needs Survey, 52.16% agreed substance abuse issues were the second biggest problem facing adults in the communities served.** Furthermore, a majority, 53.07% of respondents agreed that alcohol/drug abuse in the family is the biggest problem facing youth in our community. 74.94% of those same respondents agreed that alcohol/drug abuse were “very likely” to keep people in poverty. Substance abuse is a multifaceted issue that can be associated with family issues or mental health issues. It can be a major contributor to other issues such as homelessness, inability to maintain employment, legal issues, etc. This was indicated to be especially true in Glacier County where 69% of respondents felt that Alcohol/Drug Abuse was the biggest issue facing the community.

Employment/Workforce Issues

Employment-related issues were also identified as a top need in the 2023 assessment. The COVID-19 Pandemic and its aftermath had a significant impact on the Montana economy. During COVID as noted in our previous needs assessment, unemployment rates reached 11.9%. Now, the unemployment rate as of July 2023 was 2.5%. The employment issues in Montana today are very different. Employment has risen; however, significant workforce issues persist. **94% of respondents indicated employment-related issues as being important to extremely important to address with only 30% of respondents reporting enough being done to address these issues.**

Access to Safe and Affordable Childcare

Lastly, access to affordable childcare was identified as a need in the needs assessment. **92% of respondents indicated that addressing the lack of affordable childcare was very important.** This is another issue driving other community issues such as employment. Families without reliable childcare are often unable to work, which further contributes to employee shortages in many of the rural areas. This is a major community issue as it not only causes families to remain in poverty, but it also affects the business community, which in turn impacts a multitude of areas depending on the product or services each industry provides. In addition, childcare providers face the same issues as other businesses in finding workers. This shows that childcare issues are both a cause and an effect of the workforce issues being faced in Montana and Nation-wide.

Survey Respondent Comments on Community Needs

Below are some of the comments provided by survey respondents providing some qualitative insights regarding the identified community needs.

- *“Lack housing in general, what there is for housing is high cost.”*
- *“Many people in our community are working service jobs where they make minimum wage and do not have health insurance.”*
- *“Mental Health – There is no help out there for families with adults with mental health needs. The family’s hands are tied. Drug Abuse – We need to help our community adults and children. We need to get a handle on this problem.”*
- *“Our clients report homelessness and not being able to afford housing are insurmountable in our community. Many have given up on the idea of home ownership. This causes them to not be able to deal with health-related illnesses and they come in with advanced disease. We also see a good deal of effects from long term alcohol abuse.”*
- *“Healthcare and Housing!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Terrible just terrible. No one can afford to rent, eat or maintain their health.”*
- *“High cost of living, low wages, extreme lack of daycare, not enough mental health services.”*
- *“disconnection, lack of community groups, senior isolation, mental health access.”*
- *“Lack of support for family issues and parenting.”*
- *“Lack of early childcare.”*

Community Resources

Opportunities, Inc. gathers community resource information and compiles it into a comprehensive guide available for the public and professionals to connect community members to resources. The 2023 Guide summarizes the available Social, Financial, Medical, etc. resources of Cascade, Chouteau, Glacier, Pondera, Toole, and Teton Counties. The Guide further includes a resource list of active Self-Help meetings available along with any relevant Hot Line or phone resources available. This Guide has been attached to the Community Needs Assessment.

Opportunities, Inc., as always, will continue forward with the ROMA cycle to continue to assess and utilize this community data. This data is a key link in our endeavor to provide the best possible services to the families and children that we serve.