

District 7 HRDC Community Action Agency

2017

Community Needs Assessment Report

H O P E  
R E S P E C T  
D R E A M  
C H A N G E

## Introduction

District 7, Human Resources Development Council, (HRDC) delivers 23 programs administered through 47 funding sources in its five county service area. The focus of all programming and service delivery is to stabilize families, build self-sufficiency, and to strengthen communities by encouraging collaboration. Through its mission, HRDC serves to “empower people in need by mobilizing and developing community resources to create opportunities for success” in Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties.

An estimated 151,000 or 15.21 percent of Montanans live at or below the poverty line. Montana ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation for average annual wage and 40<sup>th</sup> for jobs in occupations paying below poverty level wages. 18 percent of children in Montana are living in poverty. For children under the age of 5, that number rises to 23 percent living in poverty.

Community Service Block Grants (CSBG) requires that Community Action Agencies receiving this stream of funding conduct a community needs assessment every two years. The last needs assessment was completed in 2015. The results of the 2017 Needs Assessment Survey provide an accounting of current community needs and an evaluation tool for each agency to gauge the effectiveness of their current programs. The results of the needs assessment helps to identify areas where services are needed but not currently provided, to eliminate services no longer necessary, and to introduce new and or modified services as community requirements dictate. Most importantly, these data provides the basis for the Agency Work Plan. The HRDC Work Plan is not only tied to CSBG, but to the entire scope of programs, services, and activities administered by this agency.

## Service Area Profile

The five counties served by HRDC, which include Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass and Yellowstone, are referred to as Community Action Agency service area. Based on 2013 U.S. Census Estimates, the population for the service area is 190,022 with an average household income of \$48,771. These income estimates are skewed by the high wages earned in the mining industry, primarily by workers from Yellowstone and Stillwater counties. Average mining incomes can extend well into the middle \$150,000 range. These high wages increase income averages for the entire service area.



## Methodology

The 2017 HRDC Needs Assessment Survey is a key component of the (ROMA) Results Oriented Management and Accountability Modeling Cycle. ROMA Modeling is paramount to the planning and evaluation process and is tied to the 6 National Goals established by CSBG. Based upon community needs specific measurable outcome are identified and tracked to determine progress toward established goals and benchmarks. As noted, the goals of the agency work plan are identified by the Community Needs Assessment. All outcomes are measured based upon three primary areas that include: self sufficiency, family stability, and community revitalization. Collected

data is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. These six national goals established in 1996 by the CSBG Monitoring and Assessment Task Force have been the focus of all community action for the last 21 years. They are:

- Goal 1            Self Sufficiency
- Goal 2            Community Revitalization
- Goal 3            Community Ownership and Pride
- Goal 4            Partnerships among supporters and providers of services
- Goal 5            Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results.
- Goal 6            Strengthen Families and Communities

As part of the comprehensive needs assessment for the CSBG, HRDC collected data from a broad population of residents, organizations, clients receiving services, and businesses in Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties. In addition, surveys were distributed to community partners, other non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, local colleges and universities, and at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) tax preparation sites. HRDC case managers were requested to administer the survey if a client required assistance.

All questions were validated and tested for reliability with the input of the executive team, directors, program managers, and HRDC staff. The 2017 Needs Assessment form is available both on-line at the HRDC website home page; [www.hrdc7.org](http://www.hrdc7.org) and as hard copy. Survey Monkey was utilized as the primary software designed to collect, compile, and process data. Hard copy survey data was entered into the Survey Monkey database for processing. The average completion time for the online survey was less than 10 minutes. Four primary goals are the focus of the 2017 HRDC Needs Assessment Survey.

They are:

- (1) Identify and quantify individual and or family needs based upon program area
- (2) Identify gaps in current program services, and or eliminate services no longer relevant or needed
- (3) Identify barriers to self-sufficiency by program area, and add, eliminate, or modify services as required
- (4) Identify strategies for overcoming barriers to self-sufficiency with innovative programming.

The design of the survey categorized questions into primary cells that included: Demographics, Housing, Transportation, Employment, Childcare and Youth Services, Eldercare, Food Programs, Health and Well Being, and Family and Community Services. The Survey opened on January 28, 2017 and closed on February 12, 2017.

## Results and Findings

In previous needs assessment surveys collected data was compiled and reported as a descriptive study. While data was extracted to set quantitative goals, this report will display all data by question with an accompanying bar graph that shows distribution of responses. In questions where multiple responses are applicable, distribution of data is reported by the number of individuals responding to that specific option. All questions were designed as multiple-choice. Some included drop down menus to insert answers not listed in the question. Data will be extrapolated and discussed by the primary categories. These categories include:

- Demographics
- Housing
- Transportation
- Employment
- Childcare and Youth Services
- Eldercare
- Food Programs
- Money Management
- Health and Well-being
- Family and Community Services

The following pages summarize the information collected from the questionnaire completed by 485 respondents from January 28<sup>th</sup> through February 12<sup>th</sup> in 2017.

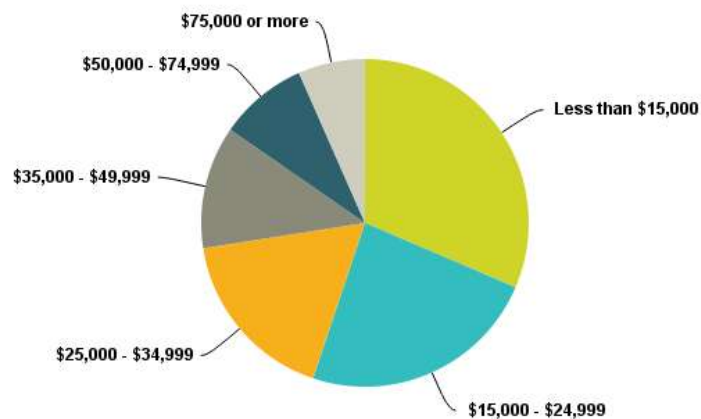
## 2017 HRDC Needs Assessment Conclusions:

### Demographics

Montana median income levels increased from very minimally from 2013 to 2014, from \$46,230 to \$46,608. More than half of respondents reported annual gross income less than \$25,000. The percentage of Montanans living at the poverty level still hovers around 15 percent. As an extreme, 30.6 percent of Big Horn County's population is living at or below the poverty level, up 5 percent from the 2015 survey. While unemployment has decreased in Montana, and income levels have increased across the state, poverty has actually increased as well. In fact, Big Horn County's unemployment rate is nearly double both the five-county area and state averages.

#### Q15 Which of the following categories best describes your gross total family income during the last year?

Answered: 455 Skipped: 30



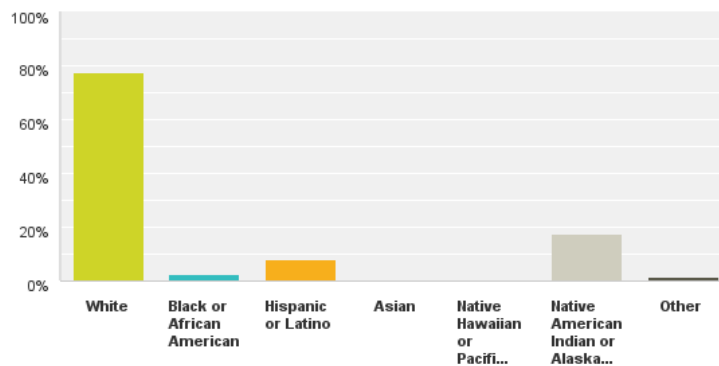
What is most concerning about the increasing poverty statistic is that many of the Montanans falling into the poverty classification are the “new working poor.” Minimum wage workers including those working in the retail and service industries such as fast food or Wal-Mart are seriously impacted. This cross section represents a large sample of the HRDC client base. This past year, 2016, HRDC provided services to 14,974 qualifying recipients.

Survey respondents were predominantly aged 25-44 (41%) or 45-64 (41%), with only 9% over the age of 65. The area served has 15% over the age of 65, so that age was slightly less represented in survey respondents. The other age groups, however, were more evenly represented by survey respondents in comparison to region demographics. Females represented 74% of the respondents, which is higher in average than the 51% female population of the 5-county region.

The majority profile of the HRDC client base is described as follows: Caucasian, single female, between ages 25-44, with child or children, high school graduate. We have seen an increase in the numbers of Native American respondents since the 2015 Needs Assessment Survey. In the five-county area Native American respondents increased by 5 percent to a current level of 17.6 percent. Hispanic respondents accounted for nearly 8 percent of participants, and Caucasian respondents at 77 percent. Hispanic demographic population statistics average 2.9% across Montana showing a significant shift in ethnicity in the HRDC service area. Native American populations are also concentrated into the service area with state average at 6.6 percent as compared to the over 17.6 percent of respondents completing this survey.

**Q4 What is your ethnicity? Provide multiple responses if they apply.**

Answered: 478 Skipped: 7



## Housing

The number of respondents who own their own home increased from below just 26 percent to 34 percent since 2015. Fifty percent rent their home. HRDC has an allotment of 200 Section 8 vouchers, but is at 80 percent capacity with approximately 160 vouchers currently distributed. It has become very difficult to secure low income rentals as housing demand has exponentially increased across the state.

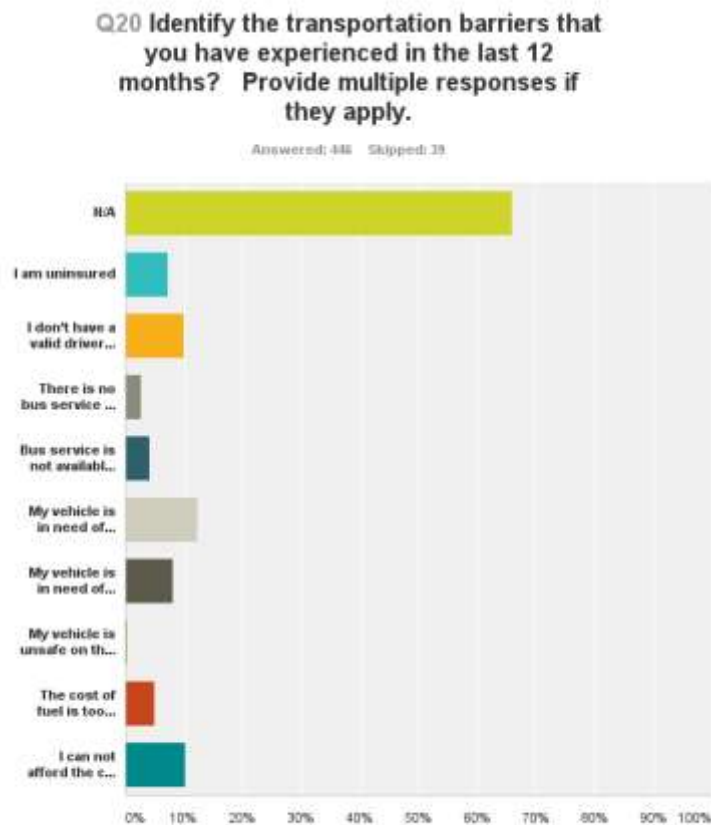
Approximately 20 percent of respondents indicated that they lived with a disabled person. This in part may be indicative of the trend of multigenerational families living together as a result of lack of housing affordability. Of those responding to this survey, 19 percent indicated safety issues within their homes ranging from bad neighborhoods to mold, lead paint, pest infestations, plumbing, electrical, and disrepair problems both in rentals and owned homes. It was also of interest to note that over 32 percent of those surveyed received some type of housing assistance, up 5 percent from 2015.



The primary housing barriers remain: insufficient funds to cover first, last, and deposit requirements for rentals, bad credit, and a shortage of safe and affordable housing.

## Transportation

Of those responding to this survey, 15 percent do not own a vehicle. This means these respondents are dependent on others for rides, restricted to walking, bicycling, busses, or cabs. There is a significant correlation between high unemployment and lack of reliable transportation. Lack of reliable transportation significantly impacts family stability and sustainability as employment, childcare, health, and education are all impacted, especially by rural residents that have no access to services without transportation. Eleven percent of respondents receive some type of transportation services in the form of repairs, gas cards, insurance payments, or bus passes.



When asked to identify barriers to reliable transportation, even the majority of respondents that owned their own vehicles cited challenges related to cost of insurance, necessary repairs, or cost of licensing. For those without vehicles, an additional barrier that impacts access is lack of bus service during needed hours, and no bus service in rural communities. These data demonstrate a significant

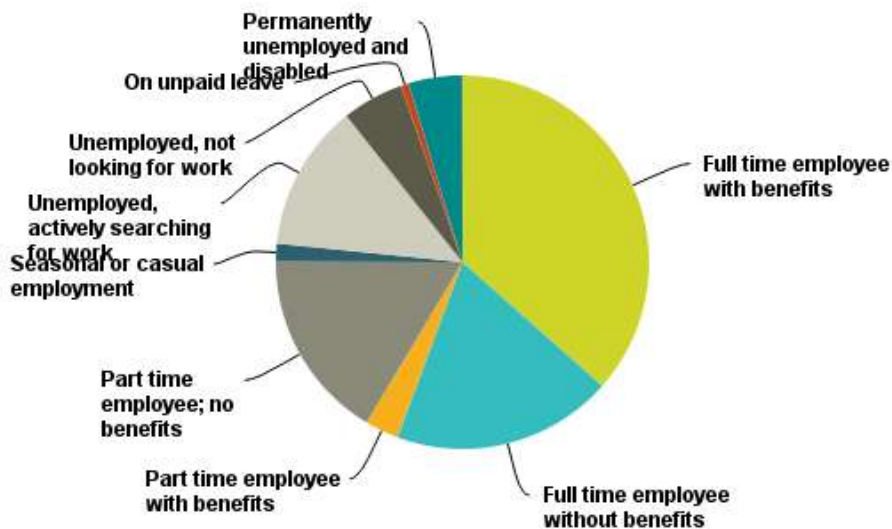
correlation between reliable transportation and access to services. It is of further interest to note that over 34 percent of the respondents surveyed identified barriers to transportation.

## Employment

While unemployment in the HRDC service area is low, there are two inferential factors that must be cited; first the many available jobs are entry level positions, many of which start at minimum wage. Secondly, of those surveyed only one-third of respondents currently have full time jobs with benefits. This translates into the other two-thirds of survey participants working full time with no benefits, part time with or without benefits, seasonal employment, and or unemployed looking for work. The availability of full time positions with benefits is limited by education, and vocational skills. Of those surveyed nearly 23 percent are unemployed. Some of this group are the chronically unemployed and have been without employment for over a year, disabled, or have dropped out of the labor force all together.

### Q21 What best describes your current employment status?

Answered: 449 Skipped: 36



Of those surveyed, less than 8 percent are participating in some type of employment program. While not reflected in the survey, there is a clear correlation between the number of clients HRDC serves in the Pathways program and the number of the same families receiving TANF benefits. Most of the

referrals received by HRDC for employment training come from the OPA and are a condition for assistance.

## Child care

Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed indicated they had no need for child care services. There was no change in this number from the 2015 survey. For those who needed child care, the most common barriers faced were: could not afford child care; did not qualify for any assistance; child care centers did not have flexible hours conducive to their work schedules; or child care was not available in their community. It is disturbing to note that half of the respondents who use child care were not even aware of the Best Beginnings or after school scholarships, which indicates an unsuccessful outreach effort by those agencies offering these programs. This was also a noted factor in the 2015 and 2013 Needs Assessment Surveys.

## Eldercare

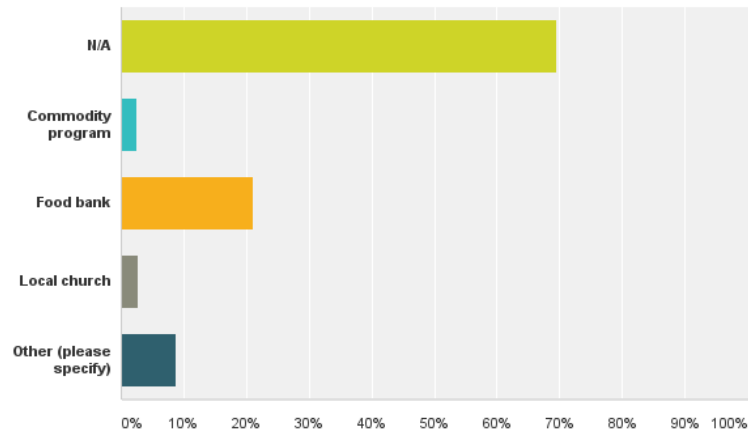
Only 4 percent of respondents indicated a need for eldercare. Of these respondents, some did not know where to find these services, and or how to qualify. At this time, HRDC programs provide indirect services to seniors with Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP), Weatherization, Food Commodity Programs, VITA, and other related programs. These programs are tracked as low income recipients, not classified as eldercare.

## Food Programs

Sixteen percent of respondents that participated in this survey have experienced food shortages over the last year. These respondents attributed food shortages to lack of money; food stamps that had run out; no food banks in their communities, no transportation to a store or food bank; and in many cases they were just too embarrassed to admit that they needed help. Thirty percent of survey participants indicated that they received some type of emergency food assistance in the past year through commodity programs, food banks, local churches, and other sources. This demonstrates the reality of hunger in our communities. According to the Montana Poverty Report Card, updated in August 2016, about 45 percent of school-aged children in Montana's public schools are eligible for free and reduced school lunches. Big Horn County has over 75 percent of school-aged children participating in this program, an alarming statistic.

### Q32 Where do you go for emergency food assistance?

Answered: 442 Skipped: 43

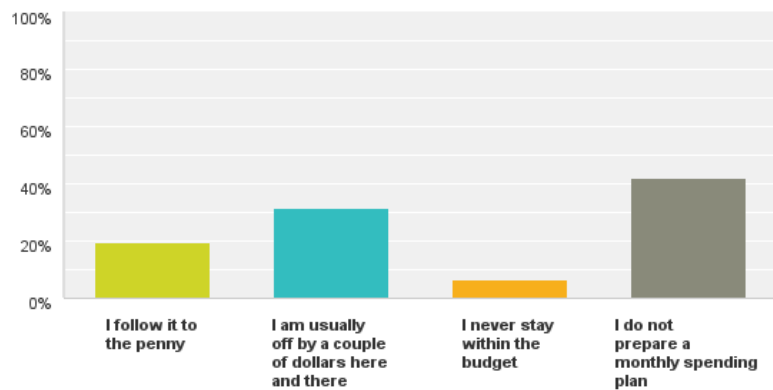


## Money Management

While it is fully acknowledged that money management is vital for family and community stability and sustainability, it must be recognized that acute poverty and financial disaster such as loss of a job, eviction, or foreclosure do not allow families in crisis to participate in financial education. Money management and financial education are vital components to upward mobility, but requires stability and safety before a family or individual can participate. Families in crisis are essentially eliminated.

### Q33 Do you prepare a monthly spending plan? If so how well do you stay within your budget?

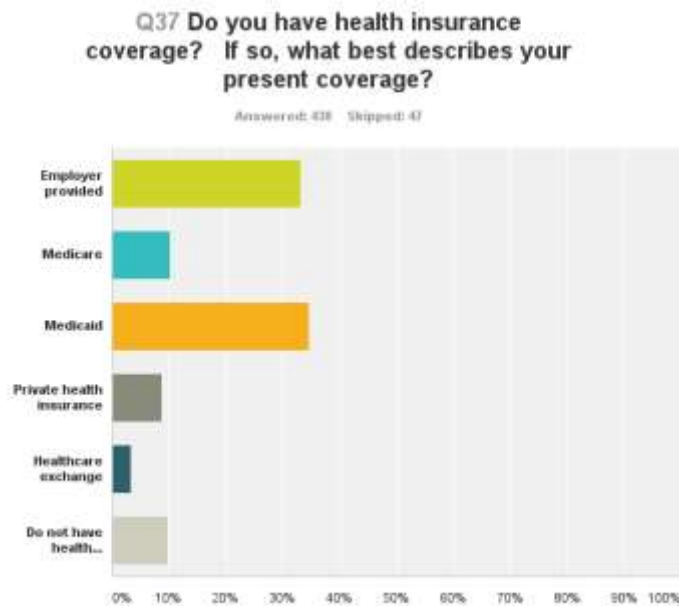
Answered: 438 Skipped: 47



It is also of interest to note that only a third of participants taking this survey responded to the question on budgeting. Of that that group, 42 percent of respondents admitted they have no monthly budget. This statistic demonstrates the issue of stability as a requirement for money management. Only 23 percent had an emergency savings fund. Again, it must be emphasized that before money management and financial education programs are beneficial, families must be stable.

## Health and Well-being

Only one-third of all respondents taking this survey have employer-provided health insurance, leaving 67% of respondents to find their own options for health care coverage. Forty-four percent of respondents were covered by Medicare or Medicaid, and almost 10 percent of respondents have no health insurance whatsoever. Considering how many respondents had to find their own options for health insurance coverage, a large percentage still had to see a health care professional in the past year, including 20 percent of respondents making a trip to the emergency room. Hospitals are required by law to treat patients regardless of their ability to pay. This of course puts the burden on the rest of Montana through increased insurance premiums and higher medical costs. This is the irony of poverty. Poverty is expensive, and costs everyone regardless of where they sit on the social strata.



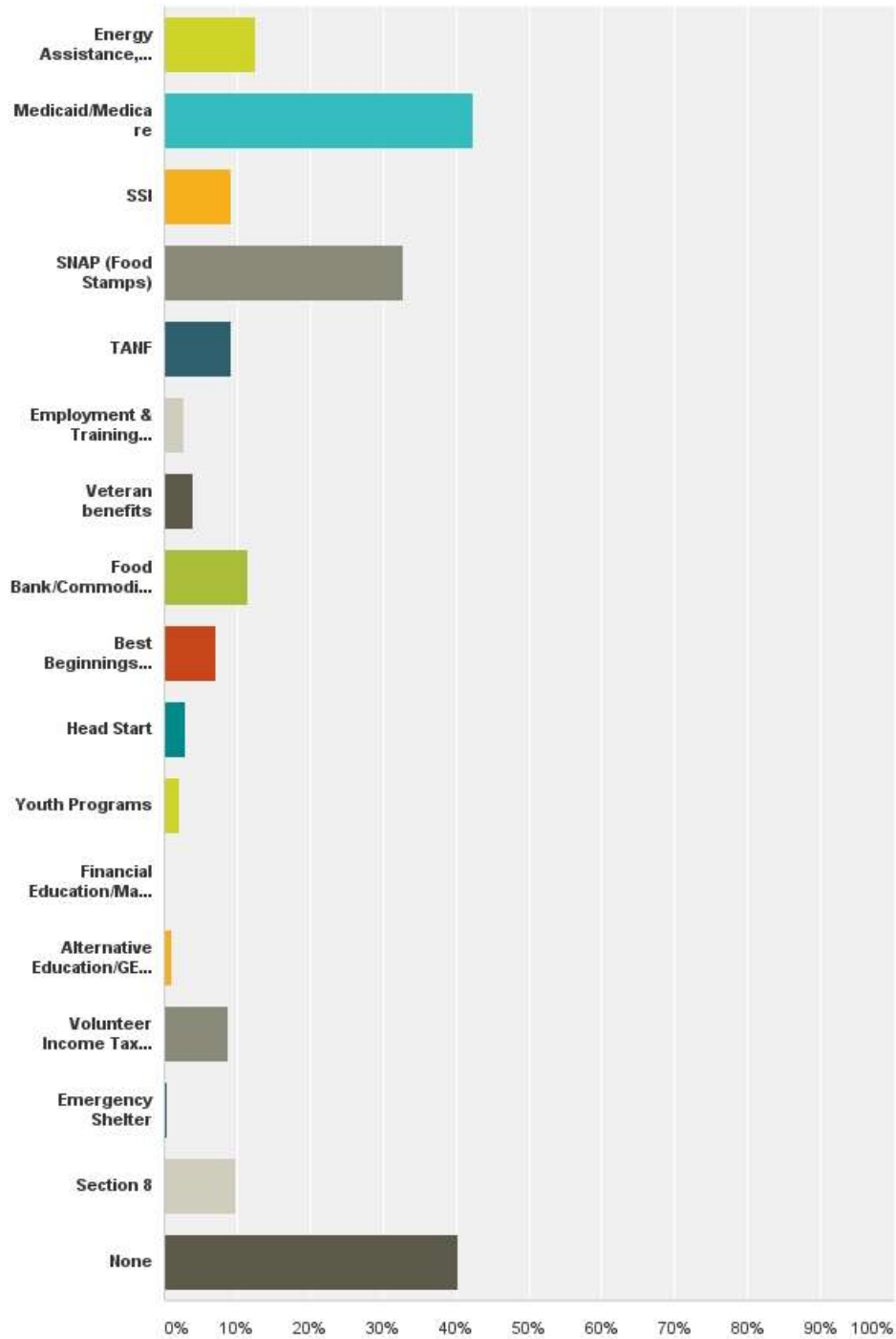
When queried about prescription availability and affordability, 25 percent of respondents indicated that they had gone without necessary prescriptions in the past year. The majority of that number is due to respondents simply not having the money to pay for prescriptions.

## Family and Community Services

When asked about the types of programs individuals and families participate in, respondents identified 19 different categories of assistance that they currently receive. This was a multiple response question that provided for multiple answers if participants were receiving benefits in more than one category. Forty percent of respondents indicated that they did not participate in any program. This leaves 60 percent that did. The most widely utilized program was Medicare/Medicaid with over 42 percent of these respondents receiving some type of assistance. This is a 7 percent increase over 2015 in Medicare/Medicaid recipients. Nearly 33 percent of participants in this group had received food stamp benefits. Eleven percent received benefits from commodity and food bank programs. The number of participants receiving food benefits has dropped since 2015 in both food stamp and food bank/commodity programs. Almost 10 percent received TANF, and 10 percent Section 8. Another notable program was Energy Assistance, in which close to 13% of respondents received assistance. The remainder of programs had smaller participation rates between 1 and 7 percent.

**Q40 What programs do you and or a member of your household currently participate in? Provide multiple responses if they apply.**

Answered: 437 Skipped: 48

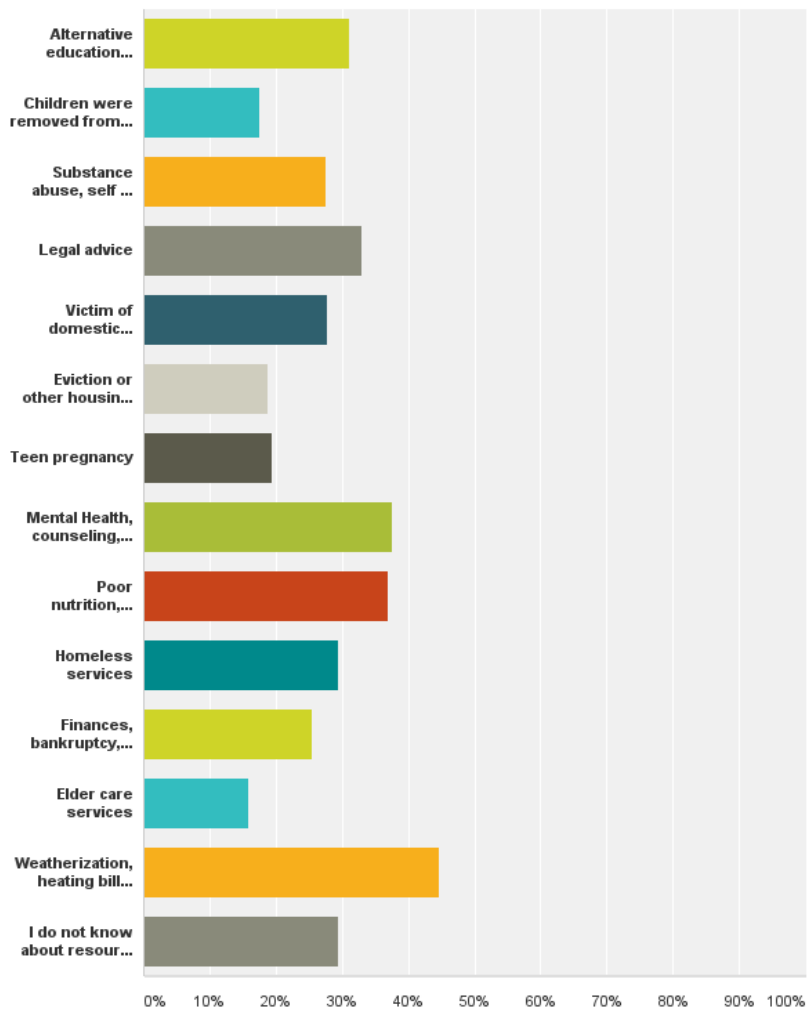


When asked about programs to reconnect families, almost 28 percent of respondents indicated they would have some level of interest, with family counseling being the number one request.

As a final question, respondents were asked if they would know where to go to secure 13 different services. The highest rating for any category in this question was 45 percent, and the lowest rating was 16, which indicates that people in need do not know where to go, or how to secure services when needed. These results indicate that agencies, community organizations, government, and communities at large have not been effective in the delivery of outreach programs.

**Q42 If you or a member of your family were experiencing any of the following problems, would you know where to go for help? If the answer is yes, click on the resources you know about. Provide multiple responses if they apply.**

Answered: 309 Skipped: 176





## Final Conclusions

Low unemployment does not solve the problems associated with poverty. Service economy and retail industry wages coupled to higher rents and increasing home prices have exasperated the problem. As rents increase, families are forced to move to outlying areas where housing costs are more affordable. The current Montana minimum wage is \$8.15. Average area rents for a two bedroom unit range between \$700 to \$800 per month or higher. The migration to outlying areas then forces the issue of reliable transportation which is a struggle for low income families. The reality is that a wage of \$15 to \$20 per hour is necessary to sustain a family and provide the necessities of food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, and transportation needs.

Community partners must work together to align resources that address the long term problems associated with poverty. These long term issues are not easily solved by short term services such as emergency shelter, food banks, or rapid re-housing, nor by long term programs like Assets Development that provide financial education solutions over time. Communities must develop strategies that engage stakeholders to invest in programs that stabilize and sustain individuals, families, and communities. Poverty is expensive. The least cost solutions to alleviate the problem may be to provide pathways out of poverty through long term strategies.

These strategic plans require:

1. Coordination of Federal, State, local governments
2. Alignment of community organizations and businesses to maximize resources and eliminate redundancy
3. Better planned outreach efforts that provide information to families in need
4. More sophisticated client referral processes within the agency and throughout the community that refer clients to multiple resources, concurrently
5. New approaches to funding which include adoption of revenue models, contract services, and alternative paradigms for building sustainable programs
6. Collaboration with public school systems, private and public post secondary institutions, and specialized training providers in the trades to develop joint ventures that develop skills, educate, and provide sustainable employment.
7. Joint ventures designed to work with the business community, chambers of commerce, DCCA, and others to implement workforce strategies that increase wages and local economies
8. Development of innovative childcare and youth programs that provide early development opportunities that circumvent longer term costs.

Sources:

*Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Online Tool*, National Association of Community Action Agencies - Community Action Partnership in the performance of the U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services Grant Number 90ET0428.

*Montana Poverty Report Card*, August 2016, Montana State University Extension, Bozeman, MT.

*Montana Kids Count*, 2014 Data Book, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, University of Montana School of Business Administration, Missoula, MT.

*State of the States Report 2015*, Rachel West and Jackie Odum, February 2016, Center for American Progress, Washington, D.C.

*Yellowstone County Montana Poverty Report Card*, June 2016, Montana State University Extension, Bozeman, MT.

HRDC Main Office (Billings)  
7 North 31st Street, Billings, MT 59101  
office: 406.247.4732 | fax: 406.248.2943

HRDC Satellite Office (Hardin)  
501 North Center, Hardin, MT 59034  
office 406.665.3500 | fax 406.665.1395

Child Care Eligibility  
Billings office 406.247.4700 | fax 406.869.2585  
Hardin office 406.665.3500 | fax 406.655.1395

Child Care for Providers  
office 406.247.4710 | fax 406.248.2943

Employment and Training for Adults  
Billings office 406.247.4732 | fax 406.248.6971  
Hardin office 406.665.3500 | fax 406.655.1395

Energy Assistance  
3116 1st Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101  
office 406.247.4778 | fax 406.247.4791

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations  
406 Crook, Hardin, MT 59034  
office 406.665.2523 | fax 406.665.1026

The Home Center  
3124 1st Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101  
office 406.206.2717 | fax 406.206.2716

Matched Savings/Financial Education  
office 406.206.2717 | fax 406.206.2716

Youth Employment  
3116 1st Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101  
office 406.247.4732 | fax 406.247.4747

ASK Directory  
The ASK Directory is a community resource tool to assist clients with options for locating other service providers in our service area. To learn more visit: <http://ask.hrdc7.org>

For assistance with all other programs, email [info@hrdc7.org](mailto:info@hrdc7.org) or call the main office at 406-247-4732 or 1-800-433-1411.

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