

Summary Findings

The City of Tacoma's community-driven Vision of Tacoma 2025 is focused on economic opportunity, education, and quality of life. While the majority of Tacoma residents enjoy these benefits of living in Tacoma, many community members struggle with homelessness, hunger, under- and unemployment, limited educational opportunity, and poor life outcomes.

Tacoma is the third largest city in Washington and has a strong network of social and human service organizations that form a safety net to meet the needs of community members. Aside from the operation of its senior centers, the City is not a direct service provider. The City supports the social and human service network as an active funder, convener, and partner. The social and human service needs of Tacoma's residents surpass the available services and resources.

The City has worked closely with its partners to create a Human Services Strategic Plan (HSSP) for 2015 through 2019 to improve the reach and effectiveness of existing service system. The City is also revising its funding process to proactively and efficiently fund strategies focused on resident needs. The revised funding approach aligns funding to the City's vision articulated in Tacoma 2025, and uses a systems approach to improve the overall effectiveness of city funding.

This Community Needs Assessment will help the City prioritize funding for meeting human and social needs and provide common baseline information shared by the City and community service providers. Many of the greatest social and health challenges impacting community members today are the result of a complex set of factors that diminish health and well-being over time. These include historical patterns of income segregation and racial disparities. In order to help the City identify effective points of intervention and assess gaps in the current service system, the assessment attempts to identify causal factors that lead to the most urgent social and health challenges facing the community today. The assessment identifies community needs related to individual and community safety, education and economic opportunity, geographic and racial equity, and household stability. The broad range of topics investigated are organized into three primary topics:

1 Homelessness and Household Stability

How is homelessness changing, who in our community is at risk of homelessness, and what services are needed to prevent and address homelessness?

2 Workforce Development

What are the barriers community members face to economic advancement and what are the services needed to reduce those barriers?

3 Human and Social Wellness

What are the priority human and social health needs of residents and what are the barriers to meeting those needs?

Priority Community Needs

A particular individual may need different social and human service supports over the course of his or her life and many may have unmet needs for social and health services that compound over time. For example, mental health difficulties in adolescence can lead to disengagement in school, thus limiting educational opportunity. A lack of a high school diploma will reduce employability and diminish the opportunity to

develop work-based skills and experiences. The diminished earning potential will compound over time, thus undermining economic security and potentially household stability in the long term. As a result, the individual in this example needs mental health care, job skills training, employment support, and housing assistance. Each of these needs are real, related, and critical to address.

Understanding the interconnected nature of these factors, the Needs Assessment identified the following priority needs that undergird many of the social, economic, and health challenges facing the community today.

CHILDHOOD POVERTY

One in four children in Tacoma are living in poverty. Childhood poverty is a significant barrier to social wellbeing and economic opportunity for many.

Childhood poverty¹ is the greatest single risk factor for children, impacting everything from physical health and environmental quality to economic opportunity and social and emotional health. The link between childhood poverty and its impacts on adolescent and adult outcomes is well founded, and new research is shedding light on the impact of poverty-related stress to children's development and long-term functioning (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2012). Children living in households with poverty-level incomes are extremely vulnerable to income loss, health episodes, or housing status change. Many low-income families with children are likely still recovering from economic consequences associated with the recent recession.

- One out of every four children in Tacoma lives in poverty (26%). Childhood poverty has trended higher in Tacoma than in Pierce County and Washington State since 2006, and is consistently higher than adult or senior poverty (18% and 17%, respectively).
- A greater portion of Tacoma's children live in poverty compared to Seattle (15%), Fife (17%), and Renton (18%). Neighboring Lakewood has a higher rate of childhood poverty (32%).
- Children of color, including those who identify as American Indian and Alaska Native and Black or African American, as well as children of all races that identify as Hispanic or Latino, are twice as likely to be living in poverty as children who identify as White.
- While recent enrollment in the National School Lunch Program has remained fairly consistent since 2008 for the Tacoma School District, the number of meals served increased significantly during the recession years (2009 – 2011). The number of meals served in 2014 came back down to pre-recession rates of approximately 2.9 million meals served that year.

The rate of childhood poverty is driven by limited earning potential of adults as opposed to absence from the workforce.

Workforce participation includes everyone who works for income or is currently looking for work (unemployed). Workforce participation is similar in Tacoma to Pierce County and Washington State, and is relatively consistent across racial categories at between 64% and 73%. The exception is American Indian and Alaska Natives, for which labor force participation is about 10 percentage points less. Lower participation in the labor force is observed for those with less than a high school diploma as well as those older than age 55.

¹ Data is from U.S. Census 2010 – 2014. A family of four is considered to be living in poverty if their annual household income is less than \$24,230. The estimate for Tacoma children aged 0 – 17 years is 26.3% with 95% confidence range of +/-2.5%.

Historically higher unemployment and a greater displacement of jobs during the recent recession are likely contributors to the depressed household income. Median household income in Tacoma trails Pierce County and Washington State by approximately \$10,000 (figure in 2014 dollars). Between 2009 and 2010, Tacoma lost 3,800 jobs, approximately 3.9% of its employment base. This was a more significant employment contraction than Pierce County which lost 2.3% of its employment base and Washington State which lost 3.0%. Tacoma experienced greater annual losses of jobs and took longer to recover from the recession than both Pierce County and the State. In 2014, Tacoma finally reached pre-recession employment. However, while employment has regained its pre-recession levels, employment in higher-paying sectors such as manufacturing and construction has not achieved pre-recession levels.

The unemployment rate for Black or African American residents is significantly higher than for other races, as is the unemployment rate for individuals with less than a high school diploma. Unemployment for men has trended 2 to 4 percentage points higher than for women.

One quarter of Tacoma's homeless population is under the age of 18.

Youth represent 23% of Tacoma's homeless population according to recent point-in-time counts. Nearly one out of every four homeless individuals counted was younger than 18.

- The number of McKinney-Vento qualified homeless students in Tacoma School District increased an average of 4.9% every year since 2010. For the 2014-15 school year, 1,616 met the definition of homeless. The majority of McKinney-Vento qualified students report living "doubled up," meaning they are sharing housing with friends or family. Homeless students tend to be in younger grades, indicating a larger shadow population of homelessness among parents (likely women) and pre-school aged children.

Many children are born into households with characteristics that are predictive of more severe and persistent poverty.

Specific characteristics of households living in poverty are predictive of more severe and persistent poverty. Educational attainment of parents, particularly mothers, and attachment to the workforce are strong predictors of economic stability and long-term outcomes for children. Children born in poverty to mothers with less than a high school diploma are very likely to live in persistent poverty and have poor adult outcomes.

- Between 2005 and 2014, across all income categories, about 5,000 children were born in Tacoma to mothers with less than a high school diploma. This represents approximately 17% of all children born in the ten-year period, a higher rate than both Pierce County and Washington State (12% and 15%, respectively). Services such as early parenting support and low cost child care for those still pursuing their high school diploma are effective at improving outcomes for these parents and their children.
- Tacoma is not homogenous in terms of educational and professional attainment. Tacoma exceeds Pierce County in both low and high ranges of educational attainment. In 2014, 9% of Tacoma adults 25 years and over had a graduate or professional degree, while 15% lacked a high school diploma. This suggests that Tacoma has an asset in its highly educated workforce, as well as the challenge of another segment facing significant barriers to the economic opportunity available in the City.

Many children are missing timely educational benchmarks that are predictive of academic achievement and future economic independence.

Educational opportunity starts at birth and is significantly shaped by household economic factors and maternal mental and physical well-being. Several studies have demonstrated the link between economic hardship and an increase in children's social behavior development. Household food security in elementary school has been linked to changes in reading and math test performance, adolescent weight for girls, and social skill development for boys (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2015). Children's environment in the first years of life has been found to affect brain development. Children who are exposed to quality early-learning environments are more likely to meet developmental milestones, and arrive at kindergarten with the fundamental skills they need to thrive in school. Unfortunately, far too few children in Tacoma are meeting timely academic benchmarks, falling further behind, and thus facing diminished opportunity in the future. Children from low-income households and children of color face even greater gaps in achievement.

- About 50% of Tacoma's children entering school in 2015 met developmental benchmarks for kindergarten. Students of color, low-income students, and students with limited English proficiency were even less likely to meet benchmarks (45%, 40%, and 35%, respectively).
- 62% of third-graders in the Tacoma School District met the Reading Standard in the 2013-2014 school year. This rate is nearly 6 percentage points lower than the statewide rate.
- There is a persistent gap in 8th grade math performance between Tacoma and the statewide average. 44% of eighth-graders met the Math Standard in the 2013-2014 school year as compared to 56% statewide.
- After great efforts by the community and school district, Tacoma's on-time graduation rate (78%) is in alignment with statewide rates for the first time since 2010.
- Students' academic struggles are linked to feelings of discouragement and isolation. Youth Advisory Council members describe their struggle with bridging the racial and cultural divide between themselves and their teachers. Comments such as "the greatest challenge we face is shifting the minds of our teachers about us" speak to the barriers they feel as children of racial and ethnic minorities in the school system.

Many adolescents are struggling and face diminishing economic advancement opportunities.

Youth who are not actively engaged in school or the workforce face serious challenges as they transition to adulthood. Not graduating high school can limit future economic success and indicate future employment difficulties and poverty as adults.

- Tacoma's on-time graduation rate was below 60% in 2010 and did not align with statewide rates until 2014.
- Since 2010, the portion of 18- to 24-year-olds in Tacoma who have enrolled in college or graduate school (30%) is less than that of the state (35%). Male college enrollment in Tacoma is nine percentage points less than the statewide rate.
- Since 2011, the unemployment rate for residents without a high school degree is higher than the rate of residents with a high school or college degree.

MENTAL HEALTH

Poor mental health and a lack of access to mental health support undermines household and community resilience and long-term outcomes for children.

On its own, adolescence is associated with increased risk of mental health disorders including depression, social anxiety, disruptive behaviors, and substance abuse. Living in poverty adds to this risk through disrupting parent-adolescent relationships, increasing exposure to stress, and increasing the risk of trauma or violence in childhood. Combined, these experiences negatively affect health and well-being into adulthood.

Children are vulnerable to the mental health of their parents. Nationally speaking, many new mothers suffer from depression, and with unmet physical and emotional needs of the parents, family stress filters down to children. Emotional support and access to quality child care can improve long term outcomes for children living in poverty.

Tacoma youth report lower rates of mental wellness, less sense of personal safety, and earlier and more consistent drug use than their statewide counterparts.

Youth depression, exposure to violence, and early drug use represent multiple dimensions of risk to youth. Adolescence is also a time when many significant psychological disorders present themselves. Life course studies of chronically homeless individuals frequently report physiological and mental health difficulties, often starting in late childhood. Furthermore, an individual's first experience with the mental health services shape long-term attitudes toward mental health care and psychiatric medication (Patterson, Markey, & Eiboff, 2012).

- Tacoma School District students, especially middle schoolers, are less likely to report feeling safe at school than their peers in Washington State.
- Young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 years earning less than \$50,000 felt the least safe in Tacoma compared to other demographic groups (National Research Center, 2014).
- Adolescent suicide and suicide attempts are significantly higher in Tacoma than in Pierce County or Washington State.

Early Drug Use

An individual's exposure to alcohol and drugs interferes with memory, positive emotional and social development, and is associated with low school performance and academic disengagement. Early and frequent use of marijuana during adolescence is associated with the development of more psychiatric-related problems than occasional use or nonuse (Lubman, Cheetham, & Yucei, April 2015). Early drug use is also an indicator of vulnerability to gang activity.

- Tacoma students have higher rates of marijuana use than the state wide averages. The disproportionality is highest in 8th grade and 10th grade. Tacoma student use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs other than marijuana largely follow statewide patterns, with slightly higher use patterns in alcohol and prescription drugs.
- Only half (54%) of 8th graders report that marijuana would be "very hard" for them to get, as compared to the statewide rate of 66%.

Tacoma residents have a higher rate of being a victim of violence or being exposed to violence in the home than state averages.

Interpersonal violence, including child abuse and neglect, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and elder abuse, is both a criminal matter and a significant public health, social and developmental

threat. Exposure to violence creates immediate physical wounds as well as risk for long-lasting mental and physical health conditions (Summer, et al., 2015).

Domestic violence is higher in Tacoma than in Washington State.

- Since 2005, the rate of domestic violence offenses reported to the Tacoma Police Department is, on average, 2.5 times the statewide rate.
- Many domestic violence victims, especially those with few resources, find themselves homeless. 28% of homeless individuals, including children, in the Pierce County point-in-time count have experienced domestic violence.

Violent crime rates have decreased since 2009 in Tacoma, yet remain higher than comparable cities.

- In 2015, Tacoma had 720 violent offenses per 100,000 people known to law enforcement. Rates in Seattle and Spokane were 573 and 505, respectively.
- While overall incidents of violent crime in Tacoma trended down between 2011 and 2012, the rate of youth perpetrated violent crime is increasing (47.5% in 2011 to 48.7% in 2012). Much of this crime may be explained by gang activity.

Many adults have multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Adverse childhood experience (ACE) is defined as a traumatic experience in a person's life occurring before the age of 18 that the person recalls as an adult. Communities with higher ACE scores are more likely to experience poor health outcomes. Individuals with more ACE experiences are more likely to experience social and interpersonal challenges and be at a higher risk for homelessness in adulthood.

- Averaged ACE scores are highest in Tacoma's South, Sound End, and Eastside neighborhoods.
- In Pierce County, communities of color and low-income communities experience more ACEs than white, non-Hispanic, or higher income households.

HOUSEHOLD STABILITY

Stable housing is a foundation to many other important aspects of personal development. Research has demonstrated the benefit of stable housing for children's socio-emotional development and academic achievement (Voight, Shinn, & Nation, 2012). Unstable housing has a direct and profound impact on current and future health.

Tacoma has a broad range of affordable housing options, however, many residents struggle to secure stable, quality housing in Tacoma.

Tacoma has a more affordable housing market than other central Puget Sound cities.

- Housing in Tacoma is more affordable compared to many neighboring communities. The median sales price in June 2016 was \$230,350, significantly less than the median for Pierce County (\$251,500) and King County (\$450,000).
- Rents in Tacoma are also more affordable than other jurisdictions. Current median rent in Tacoma is \$1,441 per month, much less than Seattle (\$2,474) and Renton (\$2,069).
- In addition to more affordable market conditions, Tacoma has approximately 8,900 subsidized housing units, representing approximately 10% of its housing stock. This is higher than Seattle (8%), Kent (6%) and Renton (6%) (2013 estimates).

Many households cannot afford housing under Tacoma's current market conditions, and costs are likely to increase.

- Tacoma has similar labor force participation rates as Pierce County and Washington State, with approximately 80% of the population being engaged in the workforce. However, while most adults work, their income is not enough to maintain stable housing.
 - Tacoma unemployment rate trends have tracked slightly higher than Pierce County and Washington State, and have recouped to pre-recession levels. Tacoma residents with less than a high school degree, Black or African Americans as well as Hispanic or Latino origin experienced significantly higher unemployment during the recession and continue to experience higher rates of unemployment.
- Tacoma median income tracks about \$10,000 behind Pierce County and the State of Washington.
- Tacoma has more than 10,508 households (17% of all households) earning less than 30% of County Median Income (less than \$18,000 in 2014 dollars), 79% of which live in rental housing (about half of all of Tacoma's households live in renter-occupied housing). At this income level, many households are challenged to meet their basic needs.
- Tacoma has a higher rate of cost-burdened households in rental housing than Pierce County or the State. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of all rental households in Tacoma are severely cost burdened. Since 2005, the percentage of Tacoma households that are cost-burdened has trended higher than the statewide percentage.
- In Tacoma 6.7 homes are foreclosed (per 1,000). This is greater than the Seattle Metro value of 4.2 and also greater than the national value of 1.8 (Zillow.com estimate).
- Demand for emergency housing is increasing in Pierce County. Total calls received by Access Point 4 Housing has increased an average of 17% per year since 2012. Nearly half of all screenings for emergency housing resulted in a referral.
- Tacoma School district has higher rates of student mobility compared to other school districts. On average, 11% of students enrolled in Tacoma schools on October 1 did not maintain their enrollment in that school for the entire year. This rate of student mobility was higher than Renton School District (9%), Lakewood School District (8%), and Seattle Public Schools (6%). Tacoma's district average was also higher than analogous school years for the two years prior.

South and East neighborhoods show greater social and economic instability.

Research has demonstrated the negative impact that residential changes for negative reasons, such as needing to save money, eviction, or divorce, have on the education outcomes for children (Voight, Shinn, & Nation, 2012). Children who move for a negative reason are 7 percentage points more likely to not earn a high school diploma by age 20. The effect grows to 11.2 percent for children who move more than two times for a negative reason (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2012).

Barriers to social and economic mobility are clustered in Tacoma's South and East neighborhoods. This disproportionately affects people of color in Tacoma.

- Tacoma's South, South End, and Eastside neighborhoods have higher concentrations of families in poverty than other areas of the City.
- Nearly two-thirds of all utility warnings and disconnects issued between June 2015 and May 2016 were for customers in South and East neighborhoods.