

Executive Summary

During the summer of 2016, the East Texas Human Needs Network (ETHNN) conducted a Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CCNA) in order to understand the nature, extent, and effects of poverty on East Texas Residents. This report is for Smith County only. The CCNA survey contained 82 questions and more than 600 possible responses. Surveys of clients and visitors were conducted by trained staff and volunteers at 11 ETHNN social services member agencies.

This report is organized into three areas: Demographic Profile, Economic Wellbeing, and Areas of Study. The areas of study are Education, Employment, Healthcare, Housing, and Transportation. Each of these study areas contains specific poverty indicators and the top needs of those exhibiting that indicator. In addition, the top ten overall needs are included in this report.

Demographic Profile:

The Smith County CCNA data accounts for 269 households made up of 538 adults and 158 children, for a total of 723 individuals.

- 52% are White, 43% are Black, 5% two or more races.
- 12% are of Hispanic descent.
- 64% are female, 36% are male.
- 44% are single, 26% are married, and 30% are divorced, separated, or widowed.
- 38% have children under the age of 18.
- The average household size is 2.8.
- 5% are US Veterans.



Economic Wellbeing:

Although a variety of factors are associated with the needs of Smith County residents, household income emerged as the factor that has the greatest impact on need, access to services, and quality of life.

- 62% of those surveyed are living below the official poverty line. These official measures, however, do not account for the working poor, individuals working full time, earning more than the poverty line and still unable to make ends meet.
- Earning a living wage and health insurance coverage were identified as the most critical needs in relation to economic wellbeing.

Areas of Study:

There are several key indicators that place a person at risk of living in poverty, including: Low educational attainment; unemployment; large family size; single parent family; disability; minority race or ethnic group; female gender; size and remoteness of home community; and no healthcare coverage, among others.

Education

Indicator: 22% have **less than a high school education**.
Need: Acquiring a GED was identified as the **top education need**.

Employment

Indicator: 25% are **unemployed**.
Need: Developing computer skills was identified as the top employment need, followed closely by career and job training and resume writing.

Healthcare

Indicator: 39% have **no healthcare coverage**.
Need: Dental care and eye/vision care were identified as the top two healthcare needs.
In addition, treatment for depression and anxiety were identified as the top mental health needs.

Housing

Indicator: 18% percent are **experiencing homelessness** with an additional 8% at risk of becoming homeless.
Need: Affordable housing was identified as the **top housing need**.

Transportation

Indicator: 31% percent **do not have a vehicle**.
Need: Getting a driver's license was identified as the top transportation need.

All indicators combined:

12% of all those interviewed reported facing all five indicators combined: No high school diploma or GED, unemployed, no healthcare coverage, experiencing homelessness, and without a form of transportation.

The top ten overall needs quantified by the Smith County CCNA are:

1. Dental Care
2. Eye/Vision Care
3. Achieving a Living Wage of Income
4. Health Insurance
5. Computer Skills
6. Credit Repair
7. Money for Prescription Medication
8. Have Past Due Bills
9. Resume Writing
10. General Medical Care

Finally, CCNA data present the reality of poverty in Smith County, how it affects all aspects of life and limits people's ability to live fruitful and happy lives. The data also present how people living in poverty experience a range of disadvantages which combine to reinforce each other and trap them in poverty, which reduces the length and quality of life often for multiple generations.

Next steps

With this valuable information now available, ETHNN will connect the efforts of individuals, and the public, private, and non-profit sectors to develop a community action plan. Goals and benchmarks will be measured annually and the full assessment will be conducted every three years; the next one will take place during the summer months of 2019.

