



# READINESS TO RESILIENCE

The Community Action COVID-19 Story





**READINESS  
RAPID RESPONSE  
RECOVERY  
RESILIENCE**

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TO RESILIENCE**

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# Foreword

## A Note From Dalitso S. Sulamoyo and Denise Harlow

In March 2020, when much of the country was shutting down and the immense impact of COVID-19 was not yet known, the pandemic was changing the world. During this time of uncertainty, across this great county we call home, the Community Action Network remained fully committed to helping people and changing lives.

As Chair of the Board of Directors and CEO of the National Community Partnership, we are honored to share this report, which highlights the Community Action Network's response to the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 through June 2022.

This report shows the exemplary responses of hundreds of Community Action Agencies from all of America – small towns, rural and frontier areas, tribal territories, cities, and suburbs – transforming how they supplied vital, life-saving services that kept people fed, housed and safe. They helped communities where they needed it most by supporting small businesses, aiding schools with remote learning, leading vaccination efforts, opening a shelter for those experiencing homelessness, and more.

CAAs know their communities well, and that knowledge has earned them the trust of residents most severely affected by the



pandemic as well as other community, state and national leaders.

Thank you to the 1000+ Community Action Agencies who were ready to respond and responded quickly to the crisis. Thank you to those who are leading community recovery efforts. Thank you for all you are doing to become more resilient, taking to heart lessons from the COVID-19 crisis as we look ahead to the future.

We know the pandemic is not over. We know our work is not done. Because we care about the entire community and are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other, Community Action will continue to embody the spirit of hope as we improve communities and make America a better place to live.

**Dr. Dalitso S. Sulamoyo, CCAP**

Chair, NCAP Board of Directors  
CEO, Champaign County Regional  
Planning Commission

**Denise Harlow, CCAP**

CEO, National Community  
Action Partnership

# Introduction



The global pandemic caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in December 2019 transformed the world. It had a noxious impact on the American health system and thrust the entire country into one of the greatest periods of physical, economic and social fragility in modern times. As a result, human services responders had to innovate new ways to ensure that every citizen had access to supports that would ensure recovery, healing, dignity and

overall well-being through this important time in history.

This report cannot describe the broad and diverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, it focuses on how one of the most critical parts of America's community-based human services infrastructure was prepared to respond to such a crisis, how it leveraged a wide range of emergency funding to magnify the impact of those dollars in every community, and how it has served (and still



ABOVE: Enrichment Services Program, Inc. in Columbus, Georgia.

continues to serve) as a vital locus for building community resilience. **More concretely, this report describes how America's network of 1,000 locally-based Community Action Agencies (CAAs) effectively responded to the COVID-19 crisis.**

CAAs were created with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964 to reduce poverty by attacking its root causes and mobilizing government and private resources in a coordinated manner at the local level. A unique feature of these place-based agencies is their tripartite board structure: at least a third of each agency's

board are people with low incomes and their representatives, a third are public officials, and the remainder are members of the larger community. This board composition ensures that everyone, and especially the people the agency serves - people who have lived experience of poverty - are directly engaged in the governance of the agency.

CAAs are a critical member of the local human services ecosystem, serving over 10 million people with low incomes annually, according to the 2019 CSBG (Community Services Block Grant) Annual Report. In a typical year, CAAs utilize

nearly \$14 billion in private and governmental resources to improve conditions for families and communities across the nation. CAAs operate a wide array of federal, state, and local programs and services. Beyond service provision, CAAs create new opportunities, leverage resources, and strengthen all types of families in every community.

The Community Action Network is a robust state and local force that reaches children and families in 99% of America's counties, spanning all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five United States territories. The Network is comprised of 1,000+ CAAs, 55 state and regional associations, 56 State CSBG Offices, 11 regional consortia, and four national partner organizations.

State Community Action Associations facilitate training and network-wide advocacy, providing a critical connection between local CAAs and state and national policymakers.

State CSBG Offices administer the CSBG and provide oversight, training, and technical assistance to CAAs. State Offices receive CSBG funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and are a critical connector between the federal government, other State Offices, and CAAs.

National partners, such as the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services (OCS), the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS), Community Action Program Legal Services

(CAPLAW), and the National Community Action Foundation (NCAF), provide training, technical assistance, advocacy, and support to the nationwide network of CAAs.

Together, this Community Action Network of local agencies, state offices, state associations, and national partner organizations helps ensure that virtually every community in America benefits from an effective, accountable, trusted CAA.

In the earliest days of the pandemic, the Community Action Network was ready to leap into action, engaged in a rapid response to quickly changing local needs, promoted an accessible and safe recovery, and supported the long-term resilience of diverse individuals, families, and community resources to ensure stronger and more connected communities in the future.

**Accordingly, this report is divided into four primary sections:**

- Readiness
- Rapid Response
- Recovery
- Resilience

CAAs deploy, leverage, and coordinate a variety of federal, state, and local resources to address local causes and conditions of poverty in their communities. This report will showcase examples of how the Network

leveraged both its regular \$750 million CSBG allocation along with its \$1 billion in CSBG supplemental funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, 2020 (CARES) Act. The report will also showcase how the Network leveraged

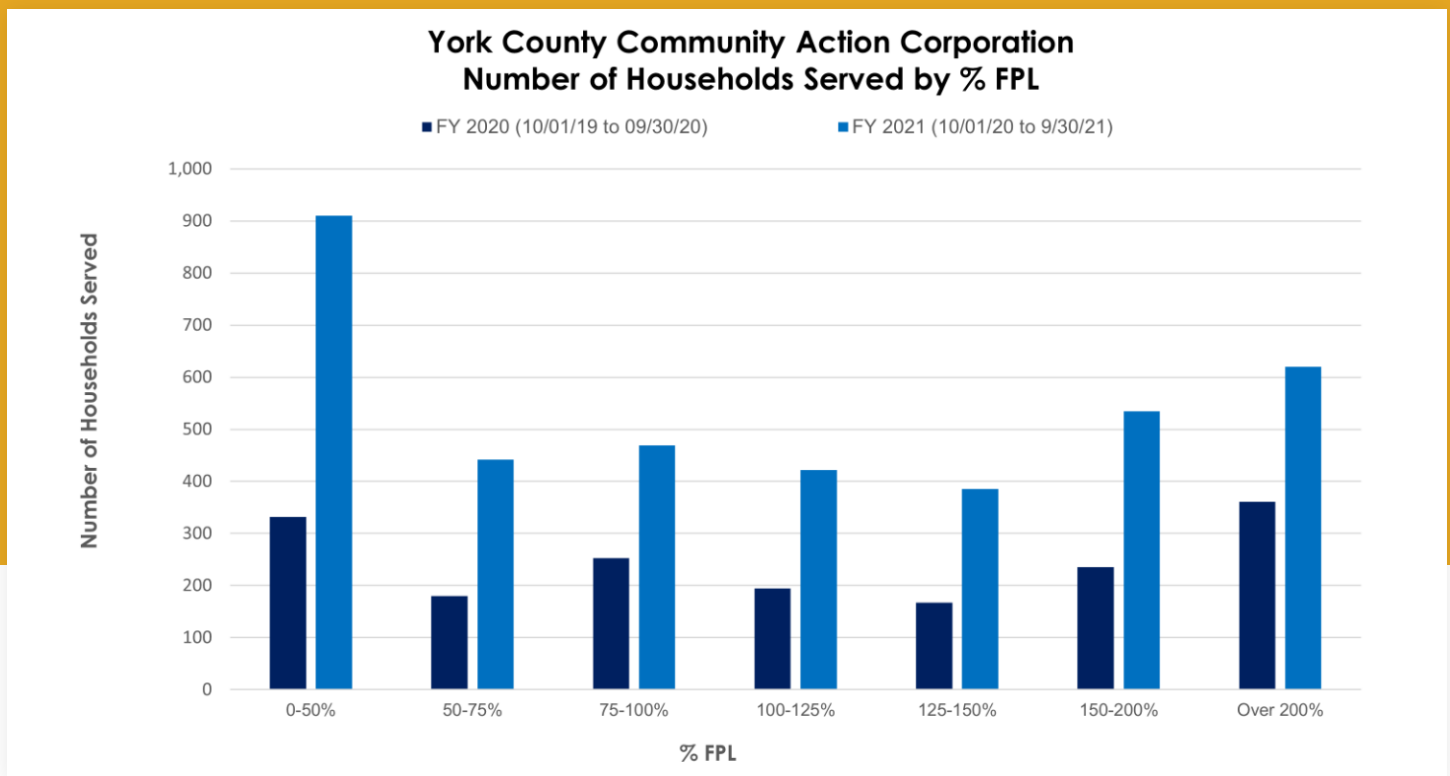
other existing funding and new investments from the federal government, including the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) and the Coronavirus Response and Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRCAA).

## Dig Into the Data

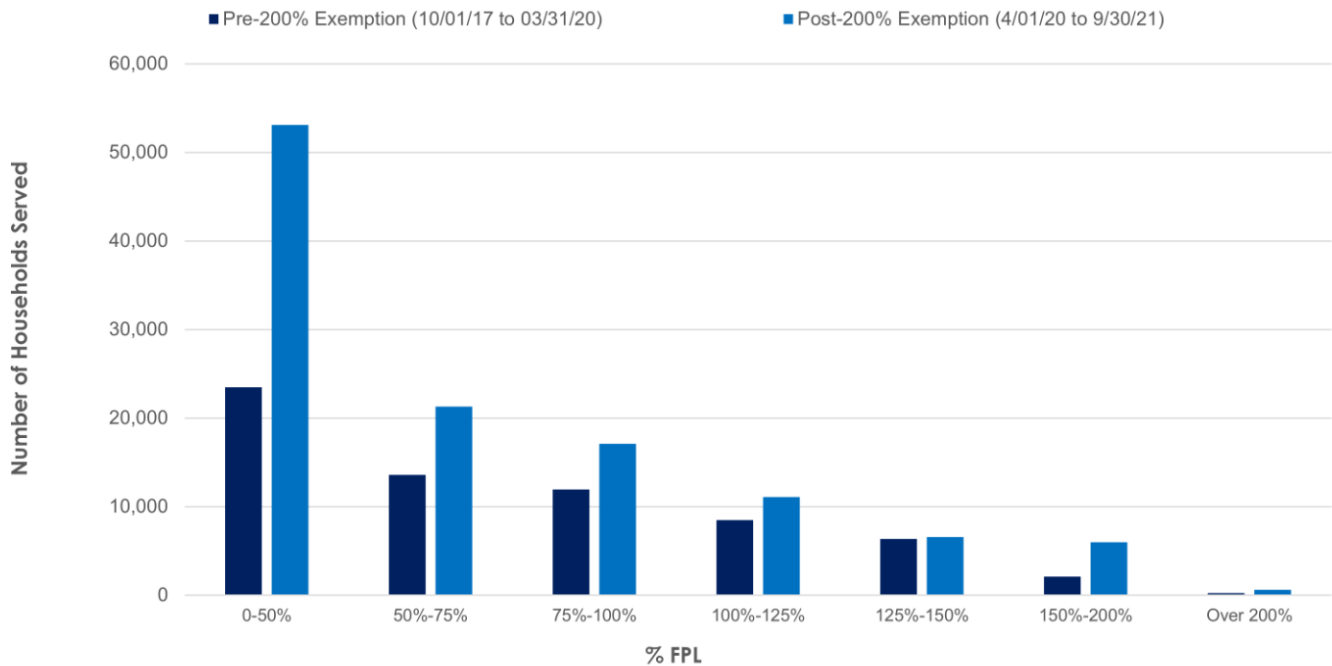
## A Rural Agency in Maine

CAAs, regardless of size and location, delivered services at a dramatically greater scale and scope than ever before. Here's an example of how a rural CAA - **York County Community Action Corporation in Sanford, Maine** (pop. 21,166) - adapted to deliver services at increased levels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chart also demonstrates that as CSBG services were made available to Americans up to 200% of FPL (as part of the response to COVID-19), agencies successfully adapted, serving more people than ever before - but not at the expense of those at or below 125% of the FPL, the traditional CSBG eligibility threshold.



## Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency Number of Households Served by % FPL



## Dig Into the Data

## An Urban Agency in Michigan

CAAs, regardless of size and location, delivered services at a dramatically greater scale and scope than ever before. Here's an example of how an urban CAA - **Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency in Detroit, Michigan** (pop. 672,351) - adapted to deliver services at increased levels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chart also demonstrates that as CSBG services were made available to Americans up to 200% of FPL (as part of the response to COVID-19), agencies successfully adapted, serving more people than ever before - but not at the expense of those at or below 125% of the FPL, the traditional CSBG eligibility threshold.

Each year, CAAs administer and manage a range of federal, state, local, and private funding streams, braiding and blending those resources to fill gaps in services and to maximize the impact of each dollar. During the pandemic, CAAs received large

increases in federal funding, either directly awarded or via state and local government awards. Additionally, many CAAs also received increases in private donations during the pandemic. The following data from two CAAs indicate broader funding-



**ABOVE:** Community Action Partnership of Orange County in Garden Grove, California.

level changes during the pandemic at local CAAs all across America.

From June 2021 to 2022, **Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO) in San Luis Obispo, California** received \$97 million via a mix of federal, state, local, and private sources. As an effective and efficient agency, CAPSLO secured an additional \$17 million in federal funding (from the CARES Act, ARPA, and CRCAA) and from private donors.

Regular funding levels for the **MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota**, a CAA serving a five-county rural area, total nearly \$20 million, but during the pandemic the agency received an additional \$2 million in CARES Act and ARPA funding.

CAA experience provided the Network with the capacity to quickly receive and disburse

funds to those most in need of resources. Comprehensive and rigorous audit regulations and CSBG Organizational Standards ensure that each CAA has sound fiscal management practices. Even before federal CARES Act funding was released to the Community Action Network, CAAs were already assessing current funding streams and re-directing resources within allowable parameters to meet needs.

Increased federal, state, local, and private resources allowed CAAs to serve more people than the Network typically serves in a year. Additionally, the CARES Act allowed States and CAAs to increase eligibility levels to up to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) starting in March 2020. This change allowed CAAs to reach households and individuals destabilized by the COVID-19 economic crisis.

# A Nationwide Network

1,000+ CAAs serving 99% of America's counties

55 State and Regional Associations

56 State CSBG Offices

11 Regional Consortia

4 National Partner Organizations

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*Learn more about the Network's national partners in the Appendix.*

Because of the broad mission of the Community Action Network, the crucial flexibility of the CSBG and CARES funds to meet a variety of local community needs and the large increase in federal, state, local, and private funding to the network, it is impossible to tell the complete Community Action Network story purely through quantitative data or a simple single outcome measure.

This report, which highlights Community Action's work from March 2020 to June 2022, will instead inform the reader's understanding of the depth and breadth of our work. As detailed data becomes available and the time frame for CARES Act funding and other funding streams expires, updated information will be provided.

**The COVID-19 pandemic affected every community at different times and in different ways.** Each community faced a different set of challenges and possessed a

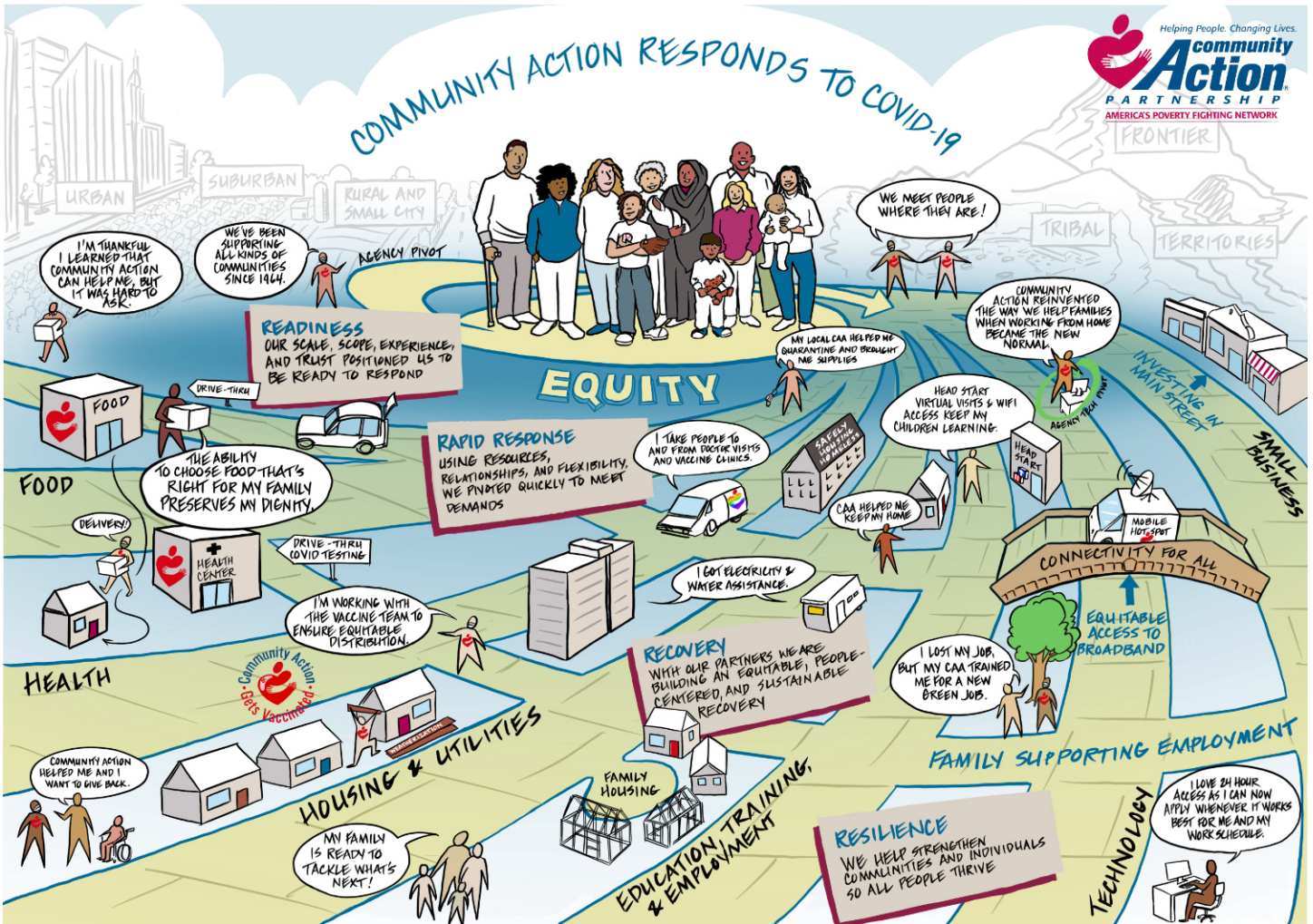
different array of resources available to meet those challenges. The Community Action Network took on a leadership role, liaising with stakeholders to understand quickly-changing local needs, then working with the public and private sectors, the faith and business communities, and others to align resources and help American families navigate the crisis.

This report will describe the Community Action Network, the characteristics that made it uniquely able to mobilize an immediate and ongoing support effort within each CAA's local service area, and how these efforts varied throughout communities across the United States.

**One common theme unites the diverse stories in this report: Where families with low incomes faced a particular challenge within a community as a result of COVID-19, local CAAs leveraged their long-standing trust with residents, community partnerships, and flexible federal funding to meet the needs.** The stories herein are just several examples of how Community Action rose to the challenge in 99% of America's counties.

For nearly sixty years, local CAAs have kept the Promise of Community Action:

*Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.*



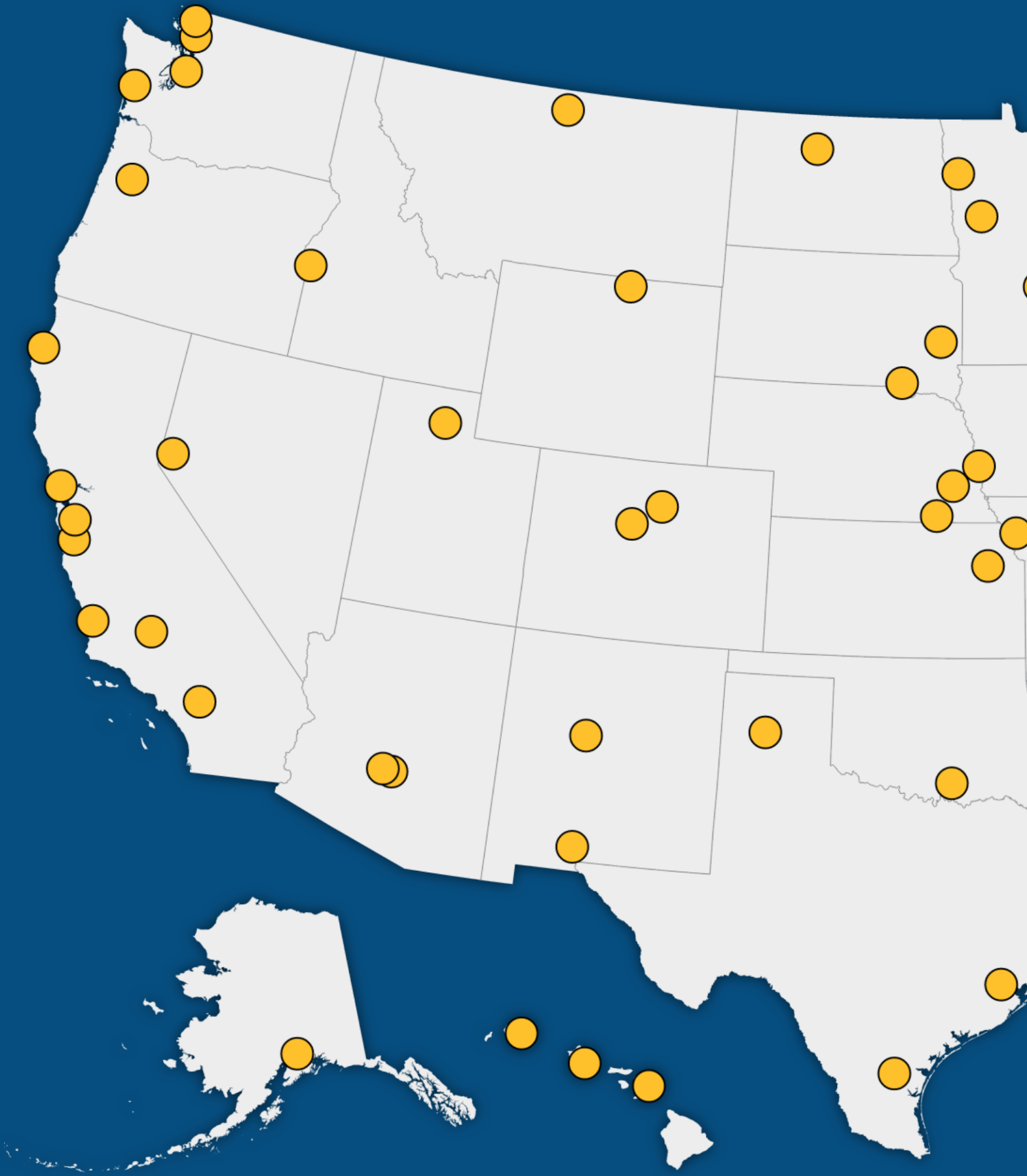
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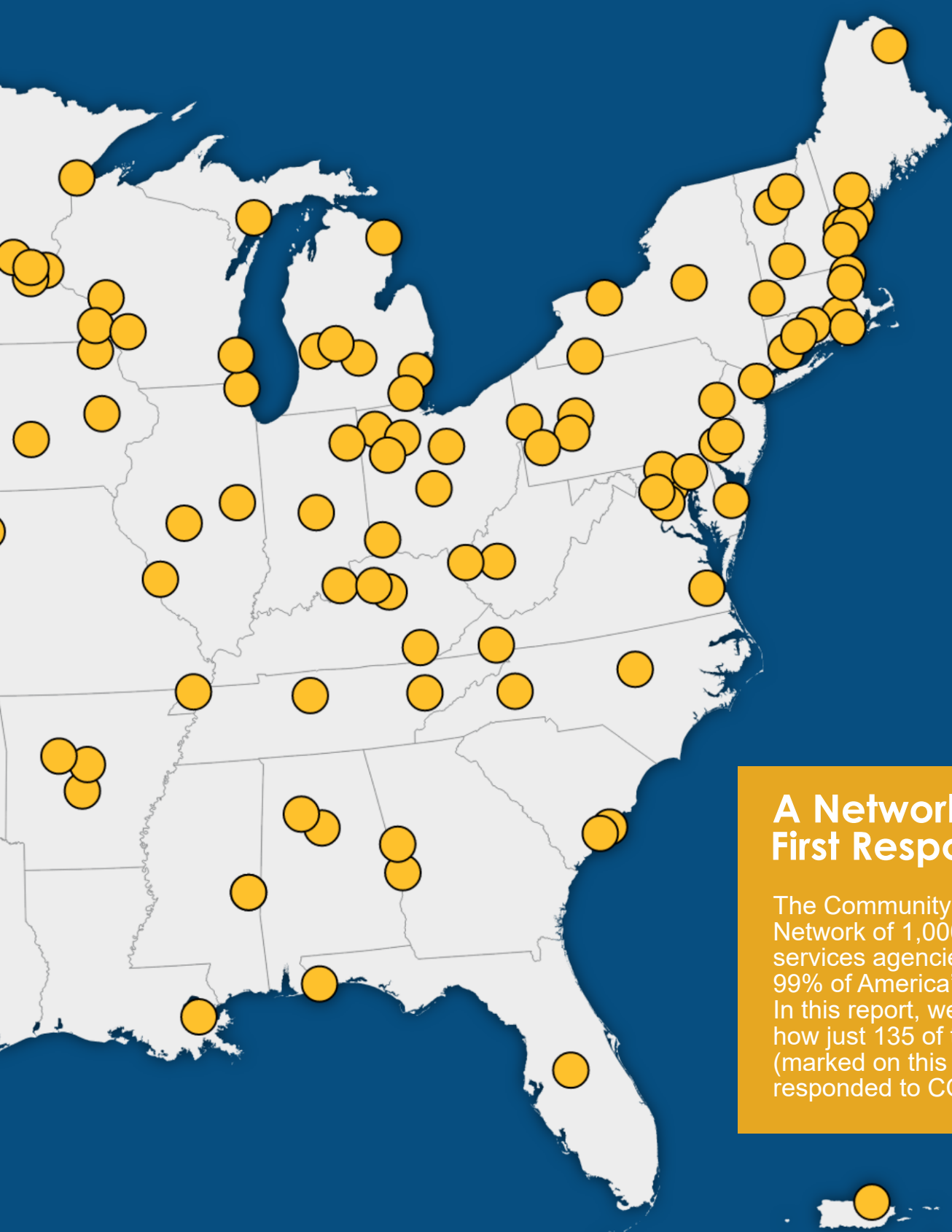


# Community Action Responds to COVID-19

This powerful graphic demonstrates the scale and scope of the work CAAs have done to respond to community needs during the pandemic. Scan the code to the right to download and view at high resolution.







## A Network of First Responders

The Community Action Network of 1,000+ social services agencies spans 99% of America's counties. In this report, we showcase how just 135 of them (marked on this map) responded to COVID-19.

# Readiness



The Community Action Network is among the country's most trusted and knowledgeable group of anti-poverty advocates and first responders.

Consisting of over 1,000 community-based organizations (both private non-profit and public agencies), the Community Action Network provides services and community-change leadership in 99% of America's counties.

Unlike other first responders that specialize in specific types

of crises (such as natural disasters, public health, and public safety), the Community Action Network consists of local staff and volunteers knowledgeable about their area's challenges, strengths, and resources and possessing deep relationships with residents, community leaders, and service providers that they can leverage to meet a wide variety of emerging local needs. Local Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are committed to supporting their entire local community, particularly families



**ABOVE:** The staff of Community Action Partnership of Kern in Bakersfield, California.

with low incomes who are too often excluded from vital resources, such as adequate food, safe/stable housing, accessible health care, reliable transportation, quality early childhood resources, and employment opportunities.

Local CAAs also prioritize equitable access for customers. Often, impacts on diverse communities are disparate, and CAAs engage in customer-centered approaches to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

The scale and scope of the Network, its decades of experience, and the trust and confidence it has earned within each local community positioned Community Action to

be ready like no other national network for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Scale & Scope

Every day, Community Action's infrastructure and resources make it possible to serve millions of Americans of all ages living on low or moderate incomes in all areas of the country: tribal, frontier, rural, suburban, urban, and United States territories.

As "eligible entities" for flexible federal dollars, every CAA receives CSBG funds,



**ABOVE:** Minnesota Congresswoman **Betty McCollum** meets with staff and customers at Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties in St. Paul, Minnesota. During her visit, McCollum spoke with a Head Start child and his mother, a Head Start volunteer who is learning English by working with students.

which it uses to leverage hundreds of millions of dollars nationwide in additional public and private funds. **As of 2019, for every \$1 of CSBG received, CAAs leverage \$19.83 from federal, state, local, and private sources, including the value of volunteer hours.**

After the Office of Community Services (OCS) distributes funds to State Offices, states award CSBG funding to local CAAs and work with agencies to promote the efficient and effective use of funding. CSBG funds are legislatively directed to address the “causes and conditions of poverty” in American communities. With this flexibility come requirements that CAAs conduct assessments of community needs and resources, develop Community Action Plans to address said needs, and track and report data to ensure accountability.

## Experience

With almost sixty years of experience delivering services and building

relationships across their local community, CAAs are adept at addressing the causes and conditions of poverty and responding to needs during economic downturns, natural disasters, and other emergencies. As a key component of their readiness to address the challenges of COVID-19, CAAs’ multi-faceted experience allowed them to manage funds, plan services, leverage partnerships, and deliver services in innovative ways. The Network’s experience allowed it to co-create solutions and support community leadership, addressing needs and building resilience.

CAAs employ dedicated professionals committed to achieving social and economic mobility through holistic community-led solutions. Family development, outreach, early child care, fiscal, family development, and weatherization staff ensure that local CAAs deploy effective, evidence-based strategies to help families and communities in need. Community Action professionals live in the communities they serve, practice asset-based engagement strategies, and

continuously learn from their peers across their state and national network. These staff members already began anticipating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic before many in their community understood the scope of the pandemic's disruption.

Agencies like **Aroostook County Action Program in Presque Isle, Maine** perfectly exemplify how CAAs utilized organizational experience, partnerships, and awareness of their communities to affect change and meet the need quickly. "The extensive training and technical assistance we received, along with the accompanying cultural shift we are embracing, truly place our quickly-growing customer base at the center of all we do," says Jason Parent, Executive Director and CEO at Aroostook. "As the pandemic introduced new demands on some existing programs, and with new 'heavy-lift' programs coming at us quickly, we were ready and able to mobilize team members from other areas not as critically impacted and transition them to areas of greatest need."

"Additionally," Parent adds, "our previous and ongoing efforts to build awareness of our services and programs with community members throughout our large, rural county, and our practice approach with state and federal agencies and other funders, positioned us such that both those in need of help and community partners in our work immediately sought us out as the 'go-to' agency. **In so many ways, our most challenging hour has also been our finest and defining hour.**"

## Trust & Confidence

Communities and individuals have a high level of trust and confidence in their local CAA. They entrust caring Head Start teachers with their children and come to their local agency when they have no food or need help paying the heating bill in the depths of winter. CAAs' sound practices, efficiency, and effectiveness have led customers and partners to depend on Community Action in tough times. Over 10 million Americans look to their local agency for support and opportunity every year.

When a fire, tornado, or hurricane hits, or when a major employer closes, Community Action responds, showing up with vans in the middle of the night to take tornado victims to a shelter, collaborating with partners to set up rapid response centers, helping with rental assistance and job retraining, and more. Before nearly anyone else on the ground responds, CAAs are ready to work with their neighbors, listen, and solve problems. Community Action means action!



**ABOVE:** Kentucky Congressman **Hal Rogers** meets with staff at KCEOC Community Action Partnership in Barbourville, KY.

## Readiness Deep Dive

# Building Readiness With Technical Innovation In Michigan

### Thinking Ahead

Before the pandemic, **Wayne Metropolitan Community Action (Wayne Metro)** in **Detroit, Michigan** was already hard at work on upgrades to its application system, including the creation of a digital intake process. Pursued after carefully identifying a community need for a flexible, accessible digital application, work on the project was

well underway when the pandemic struck the country. Wayne Metro's visionary, forward-thinking approach allowed it to hit the ground running and pivot quickly as both the agency and the local community adapted to the "new world" ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Naturally, as a result, Wayne Metro (pictured) experienced both an influx of new applications and increased demands on staff time and areas of expertise. Recognizing that in-person appointments would not be feasible during a public health crisis, Wayne Metro staff developed an online universal application that customers could access 24/7. The online application system's primary focus was ensuring ease of access for the customers: The application takes 4-5 minutes on average to complete. Wayne Metro continued to work throughout the pandemic to improve its platform and processes to make it more robust, user-friendly, and efficient. On the program side, the agency continues to optimize staff and move people between teams when needed. Electronic application processing makes this cross-deployment easier than ever before.





## Meeting the Demand

Broadly, Wayne Metro's streamlined application process, real-time data about service needs, and increased staff and contractor capacity improved the customer experience and helped the agency respond to increasing demand. How much demand? As of February 2021, they had received 31,962 applications for a total of 66,518 service requests: *A 48% increase over a typical year.* At first, one team was processing all of the online applications, but as management regularly analyzed the

data, they recognized the need for more capacity and quickly added four more teams to the mix. Further, this new process occurred at the same time staff were adjusting to working remotely, demonstrating CAAs' extraordinary ability to adapt to new circumstances.

"Change can be frightening, but it can also be good," says Nadeem Siddiqi, Ph.D., Director of Data Strategy at Wayne Metro. "Embrace the opportunities and use them to launch forward!"

# Rapid Response



On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, and, as lockdowns followed, life in America dramatically changed. Within days, the Community Action Network changed with it, pivoting operations, communications, and service delivery to address a plethora of challenges and inequities wrought or exacerbated by COVID-19.

Amid stay-at-home orders and evolving public health guidance,

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) quickly found innovative ways to serve their existing customers, as well as the thousands of individuals and families who found themselves newly in need of assistance as their health changed, the economy crashed, and jobs vanished.

All the while, the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP) supported on-the-ground efforts by establishing weekly Network-wide calls to gather



**PICTURED:** Volunteers at Community Action Partnership of Orange County's Food Bank in Garden Grove, California pack food boxes for people impacted by COVID-19. It's one of the largest food banks in the country.

information about agencies' responses, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and keep the entire Network informed and connected during a time of intense uncertainty.

The impacts of the pandemic were deeply intensified for certain groups in our society. Older adults and people with serious underlying medical conditions were at higher risk of experiencing acute symptoms. Additionally, Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color were disparately impacted by health, economic, and social consequences. Parents with young children had to navigate uncertainties surrounding

work, child care, and education. In the midst of it all, CAAs around the nation centered themselves more deeply on equity and on the voices and needs of their customers to inform approaches that ensure access to vital resources and, most of all, dignity.

Wherever communities needed urgent assistance, Community Action was there, building partnerships, securing and leveraging both public and private resources, thinking creatively, and moving swiftly.

# Mobilizing to Combat Hunger

Early in the pandemic, grocery store shelves were suddenly empty of certain foods and necessary paper and cleaning supplies. People were afraid to go shopping because of the crowds. Most meal sites (senior centers, schools, and daycares) had to close, disproportionately impacting Americans experiencing poverty.

Within days, Community Action redesigned systems to get food to people safely using existing resources like CSBG, partner relationships, and private funding. With the addition of CSBG CARES funding they received to help families deal with the disruptions caused by the pandemic, agencies were able to leverage additional public and private funds, community relationships, and flexibilities to create an even greater impact.

Throughout the early days of the pandemic, agencies stepped up and met the demand, enabling individuals and families to receive healthy food and simultaneously bringing communities together in new ways, strengthening connections and building readiness for future crises. Here are just a few examples.



**ABOVE:** In the first months of the pandemic, Kent County Community Action's food pantry distributed 48,779 pounds of food to 780 households in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## Pivoting from Soup Kitchen to Food Delivery

 **Olean, NY**

Prior to the pandemic, **Cattaraugus Community Action (CCA) in Olean, New York** provided hot meals five evenings a week in its Lighthouse Soup Kitchen and maintained the largest food pantry in the county, serving as the hub for a 20-pantry network. But once soup kitchens closed, CCA and two restaurateurs stepped up to help feed neighbors in need and keep local

workers employed. Stock the Freezer was established to provide fresh, frozen meals to the community. Customers could both order for themselves and donate meals to help others. CCA distributed donated meals to homes, shelters, and congregate meal sites. With momentum building, another program, Twin Tiers Meals, added even more opportunities for community members. By December 2020, more than 30,000 meals had been donated for families. In 2021, CCA distributed an additional 1,932 meals to 91 individuals and distributed 5,748 meals to eight local school districts. The frozen meal distribution program ended in April 2021.

## More than 12 Million Pounds of Food

 Hiawatha, IA

The **Hawkeye Area Community Action Partnership (HACAP)** Food Reservoir in **Hiawatha, Iowa** is a Feeding America member food bank, serving seven Iowa counties through partner agencies across their network. Before the pandemic, HACAP worked with 150 providers to feed Iowa families. As the pandemic wore on, 22 new partner agencies joined to help meet increasing demand for food. "Meeting the food needs in our communities has been a collaborative effort among all HACAP programs and team members," CEO Jane Drapeaux says.

Compared to 2019, food purchased for distribution increased by 540%. Overall, HACAP distribution grew 23% compared to the previous year, distributing more than 12



**ABOVE:** A Cattaraugus Community Action volunteer distributes a meal to a customer in the early days of the pandemic.

million pounds of food. Compared to 2019, HACAP also served more than double the number of households through mobile food pantries, where visitors were able to safely receive food in outdoor distributions. As a result, 22,000 households received critical food assistance in 2020. And despite the inherent difficulties in managing such an effort, volunteer hours in the Food Reservoir more than doubled from 4,226 hours in 2019 to 8,586 in 2020.



**ABOVE:** Hawkeye Area Community Action Partnership's Mobile Food Reservoir in Hiawatha, Iowa.

# Helping Feed People in Quarantine

 Lake County, IL

Like nearly every area of the country, suburban **Lake County, Illinois** faced dramatic increases in food insecurity. **Community Action Partnership of Lake County (CAPOLC)** responded. From March 2020 through March 2022, CAPOLC cooked and delivered 61,375 hot meals to people housed or quarantined in hotels. Referrals came from local organizations that serve people experiencing homelessness and/or domestic violence.

During this same time period, CAPOLC provided fresh foods and non-perishables to 10,098 households at their pop-up Curbside Food Pantries. Partner agencies and the private sector donated PPE and energy-saving products for distribution at these pop-up events. The agency added ten more pop-up Curbside Food Pantry locations to expand access to food and adhere to social distancing measures and stay-at-home orders.



**ABOVE:** A Mobile Food Shelf run by Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver & Dakota Counties in Shakopee, Minnesota.

## Highlights from Across America



**The Summit County Senior Center, part of Frisco, Colorado's CAA**, turned their daily meal program into weekly food boxes, seven days a week, increasing deliveries by 300%. Their child nutrition program, Smart Bellies, used the bus system to drop off food for families.

The nutrition program at **Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership, Madison, South Dakota** shut down its 49 congregate meal sites during the pandemic and quickly developed a new food delivery program. Customers chose from ten entree options and received a box of seven frozen meals, milk, bread, and juice every week. The program was funded by voluntary donations. "Our priority is keeping our clients safe and healthy," the agency's nutrition director says.

**Wright County Community Action (WCCA) in Maple Lake, Minnesota** partnered with Catholic Charities to provide older adults with nutritious, low-sodium heat-to-eat meals. The agency collaborated with businesses and organizations across the county to ensure they reached residents no matter where they resided.

As the provider of public transportation in its four-county rural service area, **INCA Community Services in Tishomingo, Oklahoma** partnered with public school systems from mid-March to the end of school in May 2020, delivering nearly



**ABOVE:** Community Action staff speak with customers at a drive-thru food pantry event in Birmingham, Alabama. Across the country, cars lined up for Community Action events to receive vital services during the pandemic.

47,000 meals to area children. INCA's Head Start teachers rode along with the driver to deliver "snacktivity" bags on Fridays - one of the many creative ways they kept in touch with families during lockdown.

**Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation, Decorah, Iowa (NEICAC)**'s service area received funding from the Community Development Block Grant to support the Food Delivery Program, which delivered 88,486 pounds of food to 1,474 households in 2020 alone. NEICAC also received many local contributions, including from area businesses that provided financial support to the program.

**Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC) in Columbia, Maryland** helped the Howard County Food Bank get food to over 10,000 people in March and April 2020, doubling the amount of previous distributions. CAC partnered with a local nonprofit to deliver groceries using a

network of volunteer drivers and pop-up pantries in communities with low incomes.

**Multi-County Community Services Agency (MCCSA) in Meridian, Mississippi** provided approximately 1,000 bags of food to families in need. Additionally, working with Love's Kitchen, a local mission serving the homeless, the agency secured 1,400 pounds of poultry to distribute across nine counties.

During the year following the onset of the pandemic, **Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC) in Benton, Arkansas** distributed about 1.5 million pounds of food and household products to community members. During the distributions, CADC teamed up with major food distributors to allow them to keep employees from being furloughed or laid off and even hire additional workers because of high demand for the agency's services.

# Assuring Safe & Stable Housing

The pandemic exacerbated long-standing issues of housing availability and affordability. Safe and stable housing situations became challenging to maintain for many Americans. Those experiencing homelessness were especially vulnerable to COVID-19 health risks. When families faced the possibility of losing their homes, they were desperate to find help.

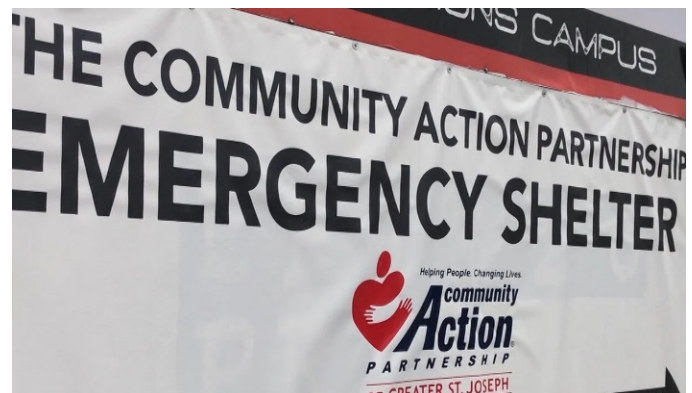
Using existing infrastructure and capacity, agencies responded by keeping shelters open and working with community partners to expand or create new shelters. Agencies moved quickly and effectively to provide rental and other financial assistance and disseminated life-saving information to keep families in their homes, maintain family stability, and lessen the stress of the situation. Rental assistance was provided early in the pandemic and remains widely necessary, as affordable housing continues to be out of reach for many people with low and even moderate incomes. Housing assistance and related efforts during the pandemic were coordinated by Community Action all across the country, as these examples show.

## Stepping In to Save a Homeless Shelter

📍 St. Joseph, MO

The pandemic put incredible strain on the healthcare system across the country. In Greater St. Joseph, the pandemic forced the local hospital to shift funds away from a local emergency shelter. Knowing the importance of the shelter to the community, **Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph (CAPSTJOE) in Missouri** seized the opportunity to address this crisis and offered to take over operation of the shelter during the pandemic.

The need was urgent; on an average night, 35 individuals relied on it for a place to go for help and rest. During the winter, the number doubled. In addition to emergency housing, the shelter provided wrap-around services like case management, transitional and long-term housing assistance, food programs, and outreach, getting people the help they needed.



**ABOVE:** A sign welcoming customers to the Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph homeless shelter.



↑ **ABOVE:** Home weatherization, one essential housing-related service Community Action provides, continued during COVID-19.

## Over \$3 Million for Families Not Covered by Other Rental Assistance

📍 New Orleans, LA

In March of 2020, **Total Community Action (TCA)** partnered with the City of **New Orleans, Louisiana** to assist families ineligible for other rental assistance programs. An initial \$500,000 in funds allowed TCA to assist 679 people experiencing housing insecurity. An additional \$2.9 million was secured through a combination of private and public funding, including CSBG CARES, and, through March 2022, TCA had provided 1,992 more residents with rental assistance.

## Over \$185 Million in Rental Assistance

📍 Milwaukee, WI

Since the early days of the pandemic, Wisconsin CAAs have provided critical rental assistance in all 72 counties. With over 187,000 households paying over 50% of their income for rent, the need – especially early on – was critical.

On behalf of Governor Tony Evers, the Wisconsin Division of Energy, Housing, and Community Resources approached the **Wisconsin Community Action Program (WISCAP)**, the statewide Community Action Association, to ramp up collaboration between state government and local CAAs. Working in tandem, CAAs distributed over \$185 million in CARES and Emergency Rental Assistance funding to over 55,000 households.

## Operating the Only Shelter in the State During the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic

📍 Carroll County, MD

**Human Services Program of Carroll County (HSP) in Maryland** operated the only shelter system in the state that continued to take in new people during the pandemic. In March 2020, HSP opened a day center and connected with the local school district, government, and health services to provide critical supports, including medical services, to the homeless population. In August 2020, HSP reported zero positive COVID-19 cases among people experiencing homelessness in Carroll County, a life-saving achievement.

## Highlights from Across America



**In Nashville, Tennessee, Metropolitan Action Commission's** Housing, Opportunity, Partnership and Employment (HOPE) Program distributed more than \$50 million in rental assistance funds to over 6,000 area households via a new easy-to-use online application system, spreading the word about the program with an animated tutorial video.

In early 2020, the pandemic forced businesses to close to reduce the spread of the virus and keep Ohioans healthy. Brooke, a dance studio owner, was one such entrepreneur impacted by the lockdowns. By November 2020, Brooke was several months past due on her mortgage payments and facing foreclosure. **Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission (NOCAC) in Defiance, Ohio** paid her past due mortgage payments and an upcoming December payment through the Housing Assistance Fund - Utility Assistance Plus grant in partnership with the Ohio Finance Agency. Brooke also qualified for assistance with her utilities to pay past due balances and even received emergency propane during the winter. With NOCAP's help, Brooke restabilized her home and began rebuilding her business.

**Hampton Roads Community Action Partnership in Newport News, Virginia** offered mobile showers and Wi-Fi services to unhoused people in their area: critical supports during the pandemic.



**ABOVE:** A Community Action carpentry trainee in Duluth, Minnesota renovates the home of a family with low income.

**Community Action Agency of Delaware County (CAADC) in Boothwyn, Pennsylvania** focused on remaining a vital provider of homeless services in its service area. CAADC used CARES Funding to keep its homeless shelters open, including utilizing funding for the Wesley House Shelter (for families and single women) and the Life Center of Eastern Delaware County (for single individuals). In addition, due to health and safety issues and increased need, CAADC expanded use of its Temporary Emergency Housing Program, which works with hotels and motels, to provide shelter to residents. The agency served over 300 community members through this service.

**Western Idaho Community Action Partnership (WICAP) in Payette, Idaho** utilized CSBG CARES funds to support customers seeking assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily for homeless hotel stays, utility assistance, and rental and mortgage assistance.

# Protecting & Advancing Health, Safety, & Well-Being

The pandemic resulted in a direct threat to the health and well-being of our entire country, especially those working on the front lines. The pandemic also redefined what it meant to serve on the front line, with grocery stores, child care centers, and service providers who were previously overlooked or undervalued now vital to the well-being of the community. Further, our collective understanding of health and well-being grew to incorporate the importance of addressing mental health needs.

Because communities are unique, CAAs responded not only with the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) but also with strategies and programs that addressed the unique needs they uncovered: for example, dental exams in some places or virtual mental health and youth programming services in others. Even at the beginning of the pandemic, when it was difficult to acquire supplies, hundreds of CAAs, from New Hampshire to American Samoa to North Dakota to Alabama, bulk purchased PPE for

employees and community members to keep people safe.

Agencies found themselves implementing approaches they'd never used before to address new and emerging needs. As trusted community members, CAAs were vital first responders to the diverse, constantly evolving needs of their communities in the early days of the pandemic. Here are just a few examples from across the nation.

## Keeping Dental Professionals Employed During Lockdowns

 Cranston, RI

**Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) of Cranston, Rhode Island**, a CAA with a multi-site health program, provides integrated medical, behavioral health, and dental programs serving people with low incomes. Facing a shutdown of dental services early on in the pandemic, dental employees were concerned that they would lose their jobs, especially international employees facing changes in visa sponsorship regulations.

Given these concerns, the agency partnered with the National Guard to create a COVID-19 testing site and trained dental staff to work with the medical team to conduct swabbing procedures. This re-deployment of agency resources allowed for ongoing employment for dental staff and increased testing capacity: a win-win for all.

## Quarantine Boxes in Rural Michigan

📍 Escanaba, MI

When COVID-19 hit the rural service area of **Menominee-Delta-Schoolcraft Community Action Agency (MDSCAA) in Escanaba, Michigan**, agency staff quickly assessed the community's needs and found that many residents needed to quarantine at home due to contracting or being exposed to the virus. Additionally, many older community members had been told by medical professionals to remain home and isolate due to having comorbidities or being immunocompromised.

That's when MDSCAA began home delivery of quarantine boxes. Boxes for families included enough food for 28 meals, while boxes for older adults included 56 individual meals as well as sanitation, hygiene, and personal care products like shampoo and deodorant. In just three months, the agency delivered more than 890 boxes.

As vaccines became more available, the agency focused assistance on two underserved populations: inmates re-entering their communities from prison and community members who were experiencing homelessness. When these individuals moved into new housing, the agency sent them food, hygiene, and household cleaning products to help them settle in.

## Pivoting to Address Mental Health Challenges

📍 Ogden, UT

**Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (OWCAP) in Ogden, Utah** (pictured) took action to address the need for mental health services, providing customers with virtual support.

Families with low income and other community members gained access to OWCAP's mental health specialist through events hosted on Facebook Live, during which many mental health concerns were discussed. Community members were also able to connect with each other during these sessions, combating the isolation that became so common during the pandemic.

Additionally, OWCAP allocated CSBG CARES funds to help pay for mental health sessions for those affected by COVID-19. The agency worked with two partners to provide these mental health services at the Medicaid rate, funding up to 10 sessions for individuals who met the eligibility criteria.



**ABOVE:** An OWCAP counselor speaks with a customer.



**ABOVE:** Latinx farmworkers demonstrate 6 feet of social distance for the Latinx Advisory Committee.

Committee (LAC), a body of 150+ representatives of 30+ nonprofits, which advises the Agency on how best to serve Latinx and Indigenous populations. The LAC also democratically elects a representative to the CAA's Board of Directors.

These long-standing relationships, as well as flexible funding from sources like the CSBG, allowed Community Action to quickly address disparities communities were experiencing. For example, the agency leveraged trusted messengers and community members to conduct COVID-19 prevention and outreach efforts in Spanish, provide education and PPE for Latinx small businesses, and facilitate weekly bilingual public listening sessions.

## Tailoring COVID-19 Messaging to Latinx & Indigenous Communities

 Mount Vernon, WA

One striking reality the pandemic quickly laid bare were the inequities and injustice latent in the healthcare system. In May 2020, for example, 75% of those who tested positive in Skagit County, Washington were Latinx and Hispanic residents, although these groups make up only 19% of its population.

Well aware of these concerns, **Community Action of Skagit County in Mount Vernon, Washington** led a task force to address disproportionately high COVID-19 transmission rates, severe illness, and hospitalization among Latinx, Spanish-speaking, and Indigenous households in their service area. Local leaders from Skagit County Public Health and the North Sound Accountable Communities of Health turned to Community Action for task force leadership because for many years it facilitated a Skagit Latinx Advisory



**BELOW:** An expectant Indigenous mother models COVID prevention measures by wearing a mask and gloves. Community-led messaging was a pivotal element of the Committee's work.



# Highlights from Across America



1

**Community Chest, Inc. in Virginia City, Nevada** used CSBG CARES funds to provide youth programming so that students K-8 could still have access to developmentally appropriate support services addressing adverse effects related to COVID-19, including social isolation, mental health, academic support, and more.

2

**RurAL CAP, serving the entire state of Alaska,** used YouTube to host youth conferences once the staff started to work remotely. The Youth Encouraging Alaskans' Health Moving Forward Together conference moved online.

3

**Monroe County Opportunity Program, Inc. in Monroe, Michigan** created a Community Health Hub that provided dental exams. The agency also offered mental health services, nutrition education and cooking classes, and a food pantry.

4

**At Community Action, Inc. in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania,** AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers provided friendly check-in calls through the Phone-a-Friend project during the pandemic.

5

CAAs across America, from **Lihue, Hawai'i to Minot, North Dakota to Jasper, Alabama to Independence, Wisconsin,** bought supplies such as masks, sanitizer, and personal hygiene materials and implemented social distancing to keep staff and clients safe.

6

**Berkshire Community Action Council, Inc. in Pittsfield, Massachusetts** expanded the pool of available health care and human service workers by connecting individuals to affordable training and educational opportunities. The program particularly focused on supporting those struggling with addiction.

7

**Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP), of Portland, Maine,** through its existing partnership with state public health entities, connected the Maine CDC with the ten Maine CAAs. MeCAP led the way in providing crucial services to people quarantined due to possible exposure, helping them stay at home and reduce the possibility of spreading COVID-19.

8

**Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc. in Morganton, North Carolina** created a Community Care Resource Coordinator role to address new health, social, and behavioral needs in the community following the onset of the pandemic.

9

**Blue Valley Community Action in Fairbury, Nebraska** recognized that area youth and seniors were both isolated during the pandemic. In response, the agency piloted a program that brought together the two groups. In summer 2020, enrolled youth made weekly "connection calls" to their senior friends and helped out with simple chores. Over 50 seniors received laptops and tech tips from young people, learning new skills like ordering groceries online, connecting virtually with family and friends, and setting up email accounts.



# Supporting Children Learning & Parents Working

As the virus spread quickly through towns and states, many families suddenly had nowhere to turn for child care and early childhood education. Parents working from home had to care for young children and oversee the education of children pre-K-12, a new source of stress for all. Community Action responded with compassionate and innovative approaches to support families facing this new reality. The following are just a few examples of how CAAs and their partners successfully met their communities' needs.

## Quality Child Care Early in the Pandemic

 Washington, DC

As the number of virus cases climbed in early 2020, the **United Planning Organization (UPO)** was tapped by the **City of Washington, District of Columbia** to use some of their Head Start classrooms (which had to be closed because of the



**ABOVE:** Head Start staff at Honolulu Community Action Program in Honolulu, Hawai'i share socially-distanced messages for parents and students.

pandemic) to provide child care services for children of essential workers.

And as the school year began later in 2020, UPO again transformed programs to address evolving needs. Using classrooms at eight centers, the agency offered in-person care for 64 Early Head Start (EHS) children.

To accommodate the needs of the parents of the 300 remaining EHS children, UPO employed a combination of home and virtual visits, and set-up "grab-and-go" stations for parents to pick up emergency equipment, gifts cards, diapers, toys, and books for children. Parents received backpacks full of materials they could use with their young children. In their determination to provide comprehensive services, UPO delivered nearly 300 laptops to support online learning, more than 600 gift cards for food, more than 800 supply bags with formula and diapers, and 5,383 grocery deliveries in four months.

Syrita Johnson, Vice President of the UPO Office of Early Learning, says the adjustments UPO made were “a real eye opener. We never knew we could do all this. It has helped us take our comprehensive services to children and their families to the next level of quality, including health and safety practices, meals, and engagement of families.”



**ABOVE:** Staff from Parents in Community Action in Hennepin County, Minnesota.

## Highlights from Across America



**TEAM, Inc. in Derby, Connecticut** opened the doors to their Head Start and other child care facilities to provide safe, high-quality child care services to healthcare and other essential professionals.

Likewise, **Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency in Salem, Oregon** provided child care services for the children of Marion and Polk City first responders, front-line workers, health care, and essential workers.

To help children keep learning, Head Start staff at **Community Action Program Committee in Pensacola, Florida** read stories and conducted activities over Facebook Live.

**Multi-County Community Service Agency, Inc. in Meridian, Mississippi** administered its K-3 grade reading program via a virtual system in households with internet service and a take-home program for households without service.

Head Start teachers and family engagement staff at **Community Action in Lincoln, Nebraska** worked closely with students and families virtually by holding parent coaching sessions.

**MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota** and **Tri-Valley Opportunity Council in Crookston, Minnesota** received over 330 gallons each of bleach and hand sanitizer that the agencies then delivered to child care programs across Northwest and Central Minnesota. This allowed the centers to maintain safe operations and provide critical services in the early phases of the pandemic.

**Community Action for Improvement, Inc. in LaGrange, Georgia** partnered with the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning to hold a mini pop-up event for area residents. Attendees received food, supplies, and information about Community Action services.

# Meeting Needs with New Private Sector Resources

CAAs didn't just rely on federal or state funding streams to support the services they provided during the pandemic. These agencies are experts at making their case to funders, whether they are local, state, or national. And once funders heard about the level of need and how agencies changed lives by responding to those needs, they gave generously. CAAs' success in securing funds allowed them to respond even more effectively to community needs. Here are just a few examples.



**ABOVE:** Community Action volunteers distribute food boxes in Arkansas.

## Highlights from Across America



**Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. (CAB) in Watsonville, California** took part in a national fundraising campaign for day laborers struggling during COVID-19.

**Compass Center for Families in Sheridan, Wyoming** worked with community partners to provide assistance for schools, aging centers, and hospitals. Leveraging these partnerships, Compass Center provided emergency fuel and phone cards, rental and broadband assistance, and more. And together with the Chamber of Commerce, the agency invested over \$250,000 in local gift cards to distribute to customers, boosting community engagement with mom and pop shops to keep them open.

On March 29, 2020, **The Community Action Program for Central Arkansas, located in Conway, Arkansas**, distributed food boxes to more than 100 families thanks to a donation from George Odum, a safety for the Indianapolis Colts who grew up in the agency's service area and traveled there to pitch in (pictured).

"When I was a kid, if I wasn't in school, I wasn't going to eat [multiple meals a day]. I thought about when I was a kid, and with these kids not being in school, they're hungry," Odum says. "When they're at school, they eat twice a day. Right now, they're not eating like that."



**ABOVE:** Local leaders in government and nonprofit advocacy gather to promote Community Action's work in the colonias. From left, former United States Congresswoman **Xochitl Torres-Small**, Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico CEO Dawn Hommer, former Governor **Bill Richardson**, Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico CEO Terra Winter, State Senator Joseph Cervantes, and Javier Perea, Mayor, Sunland Park, New Mexico.

## Serving Rural New Mexicans by Fundraising Collaboratively

 **Las Cruces, NM**

Among the populations with the lowest incomes in the country are residents of the colonias along the Mexican border, where many people live in substandard housing without basic infrastructure like paved roads and sewers. The pandemic hit this area particularly hard, exacerbating what were already challenging living circumstances.

In order to provide immediate cash assistance to residents of the colonias in New Mexico's Doña Ana County,

**Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico in Las Cruces, New Mexico** partnered with the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson's foundation provided the first \$10,000 to launch the fund. This was followed by donations from noted actors Edward James Olmos and Danny Trejo and comedian George Lopez.

As of mid-June of 2020, the agency had received \$75,000 in pledged donations to assist local families. Putting money directly into the hands of residents of the colonias stimulated the local economy by providing residents with funds needed to patronize and support local businesses.

# Rapid Response Deep Dive

# Creating Jobs & Feeding Americans in Vermont

## A Community-Centered Approach to Food Insecurity

Before COVID-19, more than 500 CAAs nationwide provided food assistance to their communities, serving over 8 million people annually. And as the pandemic exacerbated food instability and jeopardized small businesses' survival, agencies innovated, expanding or creating programs and teaming up with community partners to meet both these needs at once. In July 2020, the Vermont Legislature enacted the "Restaurants and Farmers Feeding the Hungry" program, laying the groundwork for CAAs' leadership. CARES Act funding was critical to implementing these exciting new initiatives. FEMA funds also played a major role.

Vermont Everyone Eats, a statewide program administered by **Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)** in **Westminster, Vermont** and supported by **Capstone Community Action** in **Barre, Vermont** and **Northeast Kingdom Community Action** in **St. Johnsbury, Vermont**, exemplifies the Community

Action Network's unique focus on meeting a plethora of local needs and building lasting community connections. Leveraging a diverse grassroots network to procure meals for community members, Vermont Everyone Eats feeds neighbors facing food insecurity, keeps restaurants open, and offers farmers and food producers a stabilizing source of income.

What began as a disparate set of partnerships between individual CAAs and restaurants in the summer of 2020 eventually transformed into a statewide program boasting 14 regional hubs covering every county in Vermont with over 2.5 million meals served to date and roughly 30,000 meals distributed weekly across the state as of June 2022.





↑ **ABOVE:** Workers and volunteers at local restaurants cook meals and prepare them for delivery in exchange for a \$10 reimbursement per meal. June Lupiani and her ragtag kitchen crew (pictured), comprised of employees, family, and even schoolchildren helping out after class, prepared 175+ meals per day at her restaurant in Grafton.

## Strengthening Local Economies

In harnessing the power of small businesses to distribute meals, Vermont Everyone Eats has worked in tandem with hundreds of community partners, including restaurants, farmers, and other local food producers, to strengthen local economies in a time of crisis. The program has invested over \$30 million in 260+ participating restaurants, reimbursing them \$10 per meal. An average of 35% of meal

ingredients were purchased by participating restaurants from 300+ Vermont farmers and value-added food producers throughout the program, far exceeding the minimum 10% threshold set by the Vermont Legislature.

For many businesses, partnership with Vermont Everyone Eats helped them deal with the immediate economic effects wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. “This program was a total life-saver for our business,” one restaurant owner says. “It provided a steady demand and kept my employees working.”

As America recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, Vermont Everyone Eats also provides a model for ongoing economic resilience and job growth. Sixty-seven percent of participating restaurants say they will hire staff to continue their partnership with the program and many meal recipients expressed interest in patronizing Vermont Everyone Eats restaurants with their own funds in the future. “[Vermont Everyone Eats] introduced us to some restaurants we liked and will frequent as finances permit,” one customer says. “This program helped me get to know restaurants that I may eat at later,” another adds.

## Neighbors Helping Neighbors

In the spirit of CAAs’ place-and-partnership-based mission, Vermont Everyone Eats’ twinned approach to both food insecurity and economic issues perfectly demonstrates how the Community Action Network not only helps Americans in need, but also facilitates help from one neighbor to another, forging a stronger, more resilient community in the process.

“We are all locals – most of us grew up here – and it meant a lot to us to be able to feed our friends and families,” one distribution partner says. “This program is social and makes me so proud of our community,” a meal recipient adds.

Moreover, the program’s emphasis on providing a variety of high quality, locally sourced food to people in need has

## By the Numbers

**2.5 million** meals served to date by Vermont Everyone Eats

**30,000** meals served weekly as of June 2022

**\$30 million** invested in **260+** local restaurants

**35%** of meal ingredients bought from Vermont farms



furthered that feeling of community, togetherness, and mutual respect. “When you have nothing, you are told that ‘beggars can’t be choosers,’” a distribution partner says. “Vermont Everyone Eats has helped to change the narrative – The community is saying, ‘No. You are deserving. You have dignity, and you should have choice in food.’”

With over two and a half million meals distributed since its rapid response to COVID-19 in 2020, Vermont Everyone Eats is still making change, bolstering small businesses, and building community in

cities, towns, and villages across the state. This innovative program’s unique features, such as multi-sector collaboration, local “hub” control as a feature of statewide implementation, and the reduction of stigma for program beneficiaries, serve as a model example for Community Action initiatives moving forward.

And Vermont Everyone Eats will continue to make change for farmers, restaurateurs, and individuals with low income: In June 2022, the Legislature allocated \$1.3 million in support of another year of the program.





↑ ABOVE: Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County in San Bernardino, California.

# Concluding Thoughts on Rapid Response

When the pandemic struck, Community Action proved ready to quickly identify new needs and respond effectively to them. This ability arose from the Network’s nearly sixty-year history as a nationwide system of local organizations that have developed stability, flexibility, legitimacy, and trust within their communities.

One of the many lessons Community Action staff and boards of directors learned over the past two years is that where there is a need, there is a way to address it, even if it is something the agency has never done before. Community Action represents the power of collective action, unwavering commitment, and creativity to address problems.



↑ ABOVE: EnAct Community Services in Charleston, West Virginia.

# RECOVERY



The pandemic recovery has been a period characterized by a few steps forward followed by several steps back. Cases fall, people feel encouraged to return to normal routines, and then a new variant comes along, cases rise, healthcare guidance changes, and anxiety returns. As a result of the pandemic, other problems, such as high gas and food prices and the

return of inflation, have compounded stress and anxiety. Clearly, recovery is a process, rather than a finite event.

Through it all, the Community Action Network, alongside individuals, families, and community partners, continues to create and transform communities to build an equitable, people-centered, and sustainable



ABOVE: Wayne Metro Community Action Agency in Detroit, Michigan.

recovery. That kind of recovery means transforming workplaces and communities and engaging a diverse cross-section of stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and implementation of recovery activities.

As COVID-19 positivity rates decreased and communities were eager to re-open, Community Action Agencies (CAAs) reassessed community and family needs. In some areas, agencies shifted focus toward helping people get back to work, opening child care facilities, and ramping up vaccine outreach to help ensure a

permanent recovery. CAAs also made changes to systems and policies to make access to services and programs easier for the people they serve. The pandemic also revealed significant healthcare and workplace disparities for people of color and other under-represented groups.

This reality intensifies the Network's commitment to targeted approaches centered in customer experience aimed to improve access to services/resources, promote healing, resilience, and strengthen customer engagement.

# Promoting & Providing Equitable COVID-19 Vaccination



**ABOVE:** Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission in Covington, Kentucky, which hosts Juneteenth annually, partnered with the local hospital to administer COVID-19 vaccines at the event in 2021.

The value of strong, healthy relationships became apparent during the pandemic as CAAs worked to get people vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Whether building on existing relationships or forming new ones, agencies proved instrumental in leading community efforts to help families access information and resources that allowed them to survive and thrive despite the economic, social, and health challenges of the pandemic.

As trusted community messengers, Network leaders took part in a wide range of coalitions organized to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines to people of color, aging populations, and communities with low incomes. Here are just a few examples of the hundreds from across the nation.

## Vaccinations for the Deaf Community

 Maui, Hawai'i

**Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. (MEO) in Maui, Hawai'i** partnered with the Department of Health to host a series of COVID-19 vaccination events tailored to members of Maui's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, including a clinic offering booster shots in late 2021. Department of Health sign language interpreters staffed the event to accommodate Deaf and Hard of Hearing attendees, like Mark Gil Costa (pictured), who received his first shot at a MEO event.



# Boosting Vaccine Confidence Among the Black Community

📍 Jeffersonville, IN

At **Community Action of Southern Indiana in Jeffersonville, Indiana**, the agency's minority health initiative director worked alongside the Clark County Health Department to build trust within the Black community and vaccinate as many people as possible by joining forces with community partners, local employers, barbershops, churches, and social service providers. A trusted local leader and pastor shared his experience getting vaccinated at an Urban League event in an effort to influence members of his community.

In early March 2021, Community Action of Southern Indiana held a vaccine clinic in a majority-Black community, partnering with a local church, which volunteered to be the host site. Staff sent out press releases and contacted local radio stations to spread the word about getting vaccinated.



**ABOVE:** Community Action leaders like Dalitso S. Sulamoyo of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission in Urbana, Illinois, became the face of the COVID-19 vaccination effort in their areas.



**BELOW:** Greater Bergen Community Action conducted COVID-19 vaccine outreach at events like Columbian Independence Day to reach communities of color.



# Leading a COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Team

📍 Hackensack, NJ

As vaccine distribution began in Bergen County, New Jersey, officials noted racial inequities among those receiving vaccines. Despite a disproportionately high number of COVID-19 cases in communities of color, by mid-February 2021 only a small percent of vaccines had been distributed to these communities.

To address the inequity, **Greater Bergen Community Action (GBCA) in Hackensack, New Jersey** joined the COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Team, founded by Bergen New Bridge Medical Center and supported by the County of Bergen and the Bergen Coalition of Black Clergy. Together, the group reserved vaccine appointments for Black and Brown residents of Bergen County, including the Ramapough Lenape Nation. In addition, the Equity Team worked

with leaders in communities of color to build trust in medical professionals and confidence in the vaccine.

## Outreach to Asian-Americans and Refugees

 Arundel, ME

Knowing the importance of improving vaccine access in hard-to-reach communities, **Maine Community Action Partnership** and local partners held an event for Asian-American and refugee communities in Arundel, Maine – one of many vaccination efforts Community Action led or supported statewide, each tailored to the unique needs and demographics of agencies' particular service areas.

Attendees (pictured) wrote why they chose to get vaccinated on prayer flags in their native languages. Also, people vaccinated at the event received a complimentary bowl of pho, boba tea, and groceries.

## Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

 Rochester, NY

In **Rochester, New York**, the first person to die from COVID-19 was a 50-year-old Black man and an **Action for a Better Community (ABC)** customer. Recognizing that systemic inequities contributed to his passing and the passing of many others, the agency took action and declared racism a public health crisis.



**ABOVE:** Attendees at a Community Action vaccination event in Arundel, Maine.

Like many CAAs across the nation, ABC has been a leader in the fight for racial equity since its conception. Because of this history, the agency has deep connections to the community that allow it to mobilize others and enact change on an even greater level. ABC continued to offer their essential programming during the pandemic, but also took new action to address racial injustice. The agency invested \$1 million from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan to address the digital divide in their community, allowing more people of color to access health care, education, jobs, and more.

“No one needs to have another conversation about what systemic racism is. We can see it every day. We need to get to the action part—the counteraction part,” says Jerome Underwood, executive director of ABC.

To do just that, the agency held a virtual conference series in January 2021 focused on the connection between structural racism and COVID-19. “Racism is a Public Health Crisis – Attacking the 2 Pandemics” invited business leaders, community and nonprofit professionals, care providers, consumers, and stakeholders to connect and create strategies to improve community outcomes. The conference included speakers, workshops, and a day for creating specific action plans.

As an extension to the conference, ABC and six other community organizations—all led by people of color—have founded the Rochester Racism is a Public Health Crisis Coalition, which created a list of actions and demands for local government. These included a commuter tax for municipal employees to fund economic development in Black and Brown neighborhoods. “Anybody who is going to work on racial justice [in Rochester] has to come to this table... And it’s safe to say that ABC will be the leader of that,” Underwood says.

“No one needs to have another conversation about what systematic racism is... We need to get to the action part.”

ABC Executive Director Jerome Underwood

## Highlights from Across America



The Executive Director of **Michigan Community Action (MCA)**, the state Community Action Association, served on the newly formed bipartisan statewide commission, “Protect Michigan,” which raised awareness of the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines and helped protect the health and safety of all Michigan residents.

### **Ohio Heartland Community Action Commission in Mansfield, Ohio**

sponsored the “Count On Me Richland County” initiative, which sought input from Richland County’s Black and Brown communities. Survey findings helped the agency develop educational materials about COVID-19 and supported customers in making informed healthcare decisions.

**Access Community Action Agency in Wilimantic, Connecticut** joined efforts with public and private organizations to ensure seniors living at Access Senior Housing of Willington received the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Neighborhood House in Seattle, Washington** worked to ensure equitable access to vaccines by setting up clinics in communities of color.

**Community Action, Inc. in Topeka, Kansas** partnered with the YWCA to hire a staff member to conduct racial equity training and technical assistance.

# Increasing Access to COVID-19 Testing & Vaccination



Given their deep roots in local communities, CAAs have a reputation as the place to go to get help and be treated with dignity and respect. When communities needed trusted messengers to provide accurate, factual information about COVID-19 safety, testing, and vaccines, in all areas of the country, whether frontier, rural, suburban, or urban, CAAs stepped up. Especially in rural communities, where a CAA might be the only service provider in the area, agencies were uniquely positioned to provide information and help individuals and families stay safe and healthy.

In many communities, both rural and urban, transportation presents a barrier every day for persons with low or limited income. When communities started providing vaccinations, the Community Action Network understood that a lack of transportation would impact individuals' and families' ability to get their shots. Many CAAs used their own vehicles or partnered with others to transport community members to vaccination sites. Here are a

few activities the Network engaged in to provide safety supplies, promote testing and vaccination, and make them more accessible to all.

## Sharing Vaccine Info with Latinx Youth on Instagram

📍 Watsonville, CA

**The Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. (CAB) in Watsonville, California** knew strategic partnerships could help community members become more comfortable with vaccines. The agency worked with partners to produce a series of Instagram Live events designed to educate area youth on COVID-19 vaccines. Each focused on a different aspect of the process - One featured a local teen who shared her vaccination story. CAB also shared vaccine information on social media and through a COVID-19 hotline in Spanish and Indigenous languages like Mixteco and Triqui.



↑ ABOVE: A panel of experts answers viewers' questions about COVID-19 during Aroostook Community Action Program's "Don't Wait, Vaccinate" television special. Over 50,000 people were reached via live broadcast, radio, and social media.

## Hour-Long Television Specials Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy

📍 Presque Isle, ME

**Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) in Presque Isle, Maine** launched a "Don't Wait, Vaccinate" campaign.

Developed with partners at WAGM-TV, the program included nine public service announcements featuring local "celebrities," as well as accompanying hour-long television interviews with medical professionals who answered questions from the public. These materials were disseminated on television, radio, social media, and through a weekly newsletter.

In addition to the media messaging campaign, ACAP distributed information brochures to residents across the county. And as Maine was transitioning from one-time use plastic bags in stores statewide,

ACAP created reusable bags featuring the "Don't Wait, Vaccinate" logo. The innovative campaign not only served its purpose of informing and educating the community through a variety of multi-media, but also strengthened existing community partnerships - and even forged new ones.

## Keeping Remote Populations Protected

📍 Mesepa, AS

**American Samoa Community College in Mesepa, American Samoa**, part of the CSBG Network, conducted air and ground travel to provide high-quality community health education on COVID-19 prevention and treatment, as well as the care of underlying conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart conditions, diabetes, renal disorders, and cancer, to the remote island of Manu'a.

# Highlights from Across America



**1** **Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico in Las Cruces, New Mexico** partnered with state universities and foundations to coordinate 145 partners conducting COVID-19 outreach in El Paso and Hudspeth counties, Ciudad Juárez, and southern New Mexico.

**2** **Multiple CAAs across Minnesota** embedded their MNSure Navigators at COVID-19 testing sites to enroll people without insurance in either Minnesota's free testing program or in health insurance to cover the cost of their testing and follow-up care and treatment.

**3** When vaccines became available, **District Four Human Resources Development Council in Havre, Montana** partnered with the County Health Department to provide COVID-19 rapid testing.

**4** **Coastal Community Action Program in Aberdeen, WA** provided transportation for older adults to and from vaccination sites.

**5** **Semcac Community Action Agency in Rushford, Minnesota** created a wheelchair-accessible "Vax Van" (pictured) providing customers in a seven-county service area with free rides to and from vaccine appointments.

**6** **Community Action Agency of St. Louis County in Overland, Missouri** partnered with the county health department to increase COVID-19 vaccine acceptance and to pre-register individuals for the vaccine in north St. Louis County.

**7** **North Carolina Community Action Association in Raleigh, North Carolina** launched "Sleeves Up North Carolina," a statewide public education campaign aimed at dispelling myths and providing factual information about the COVID-19 vaccines.

**8** **East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) in Newport, Rhode Island** partnered with the National Guard to run two free testing sites - walk-up and drive-up. Because 44% of the state's population is Latinx, EBCAP provided translation services in a variety of languages.

**9** **Community Action Partnership of Strafford County in Dover, New Hampshire** partnered with the county transportation system to provide rides to and from vaccination sites.



# Creating Stability Through Housing Supports

During the pandemic, millions of households fell behind in paying for their rent, water, heating, and cooling. As costs for rent and utilities soared and people lost their jobs, they simply could not pay their bills. Yet living without these basic services put people at even greater risk of negative health outcomes, in addition to the risks of the pandemic itself. Other people fell so far behind that they faced eviction.

Unfortunately, many such renters are unaware of their rights and unable to defend themselves in court and, therefore, are often evicted. Lack of stable housing typically leads to a downward spiral, including homelessness, difficulty finding or maintaining work, and worsened mental health. Inability to pay rent, mortgage, or utilities can create stress and trauma in a household or family that can create adverse experiences for children.

Increasing housing stability can have a positive multiplier effect on longer term child and adult outcomes. CAAs around the

country recognized the potentially damaging, and even deadly effects of housing instability and continued to take action, linking local, state, and national resources and information to ensure families around America stay housed.

“I don’t think I’ve ever had to ask for help like this in my entire life, not since COVID came around.”

Iowa rental assistance recipient

## Using Technology to Target Housing Assistance

 Edgewood, MD

In 2021, Harford County reassessed the needs of households in their rural and urban communities and discovered that many residents continued to suffer financial hardships due to the effects of COVID-19. **Harford Community Action Agency (HCAA) in Edgewood, Maryland** moved quickly to implement an automation service and geofencing to target populations in need of assistance recovering from the effects of the pandemic.

With COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) funds, HCAA provided more than \$4.3 million in rental and utility

bill assistance to its community members. Since the program's inception, Harford CAA has assisted over 3,000 households pay down arrearages and keep their water on.

## \$61 Million for 21,900+ Iowans

📍 Des Moines, IA

**IMPACT Community Action Partnership in Des Moines, Iowa**, the City of Des Moines, and Polk County, Iowa were cited by the U.S. Department of the Treasury as a “high performing” program in supporting families in need of rental assistance.

In a press release issued by the Treasury on September 14, 2021, the agency was commended for “creating a low barrier program” and “providing real time support to those facing potential evictions.” Strong relationships with the local court system and refugee organizations were also noted.

The funds, totaling over \$61 million, enabled IMPACT to assist 21,986 individuals including 9,617 children from February 2021 to May 2022. One parent testified that the rental assistance they received allowed them to “take care of our kids. I don't think I've ever had to ask for help like this in my entire life, not since COVID came around. I've been working since I was 12 years old.”



**ABOVE:** Lexington, Kentucky Mayor **Linda Gorton** (left) and Kentucky Governor **Andy Beshear** (middle) announce that Lexington's Housing Stabilization Program will transition to being managed by Community Action Council (CAC), the local CAA. At the podium, CAC Executive Director Sharon Price delivers remarks.

## Highlights from Across America



Katrina, a customer of **IMPACT Community Action in Columbus, Ohio**, was forced to quit her 16-year career as a truck driver when her kids' schooling went virtual, drawing on savings to get by. Not only did Katrina receive assistance to keep her family in their home, but she also enrolled in IMPACT Community Action's Connections program to train for a new career. She is now stable in her home, having avoided eviction, and well on her way to a new career as a phlebotomist.

**The Agricultural and Labor Program, Inc. in Lake Alfred, Florida** provided emergency assistance, including direct payments to utility providers for farmworkers in the community.

**Northern California Indian Development Council, Inc. in Eureka, California** provided emergency services for housing and utility costs, as well as related food and household expenses, for Native American households affected by the pandemic.

**Southwestern Community Action Council, Inc. in Huntington, West Virginia** and **Rural Office of Community Services, Inc. in Wagner, South Dakota** dedicated most of their CSBG CARES funds to housing stabilization, including rent, utility, mortgage, and deposit assistance, based on the results of a Community Assessment.

To make sure the largest possible number of households received assistance, **Knoxville-Knox County Community Action (KnoxCAP) in Knoxville, Tennessee** obtained financial support from four main sources: CURE, funded by the Tennessee Utility Board; LIHEAP, funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services; Project HELP, a community donation program; and United Way of Greater Knoxville. With the combined resources, nearly 8,000 households obtained support paying utility bills.

**Indiana County Community Action Program in Indiana, Pennsylvania** used CSBG CARES funding to pay for utilities when shelter residents were moved to apartments. Without assistance, these individuals and families could not have afforded to stay in stable housing.

**First State Community Action Agency, Inc. in Georgetown, Delaware** provided emergency housing assistance to renters affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In March 2021, they began offering \$2000 to families for up to 18 months.



**BELOW:** Southwestern Community Action Council, Inc. in Huntington, West Virginia.





ABOVE: Community Action Partnership of Kern in Bakersfield, California.

# Mobilizing to Combat Hunger

Throughout the pandemic, food insecurity continued to affect individuals and families across the country. Issues around food changed and different solutions were needed during recovery compared to the Network's initial rapid response. The federal government made changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), rendering some people ineligible. Inflation and supply chain issues increased food costs, increasing pressure on lower-wage individuals and families. In response, CAAs across the country provided food and met other emergency needs through pop-up events.

Another food-related problem, a shortage of baby formula, began in May 2022. When parents and caregivers can't ensure the

health and safety of their children, it becomes a crisis. CAAs immediately partnered with the federal government to get information out to families about where to get baby formula.

On May 22, 2022, Jessica Fraser from **Indiana Community Action Association**, Patricia Mays from **Community Action of Greater Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana**, and Jacob Sipe from Indiana's CSBG state lead agency represented the Community Action Network and welcomed USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack as the first pallets of infant formula under Operation Fly Formula arrived in Indiana (pictured).



# \$10 Million in Donated Goods Distributed

 Raleigh, NC

Throughout the pandemic, **North Carolina Community Action Association (NCCAA)** worked with many local and national partners to provide community-wide Big Pop Up events to serve families in need (pictured right). Since the start of the pandemic, the association has hosted events in seven locations (Raleigh, Statesville, Hertford, Charlotte, Goldsboro, Lumberton, and Greensboro), serving more than 21,000 individuals with more than \$10 million in donated products distributed, more than 1,200 volunteers participating, and more than \$100,000 leveraged.

In the spring of 2022, NCCAA began transitioning to a community resource fair model to provide similar products as the Pop Up events, along with vaccinations in some locations, and other resources in collaboration with partners in 15 counties.

## COVID-era Cooking Classes

 Indiana, PA

A survey conducted by **Indiana County Community Action Program (ICCAP) in Indiana, Pennsylvania** found that during the pandemic, individuals felt isolated and lonely and expressed an increased need for food. When the agency began bi-weekly food distributions, staff discovered that many people receiving food did not know



how to prepare several items they received, such as produce and dairy products.

In response, ICCAP collaborated with community partners to provide workshops about nutrition. In November 2021, instructors prepared meals using Instant Pots for distribution through ICCAP's 17 food pantries and the PA Senior Food Box Program. Each participant sampled the foods prepared and received a cookbook as an incentive to use what they learned in the workshop. To date, the pilot program has garnered widespread interest in ICCAP's rural service area, boasting 107 participants as of May 2022.

# Bolstering Local Economies & Small Businesses

The pandemic put not only individuals, but also businesses at risk. Having lost months of revenue, businesses were eager to open their doors just as communities were eager for the resumption of services. Some businesses were successful in securing financial aid from the federal government, but not all qualified or could complete the application process without support. In response, the Network coordinated public and private partners to address small business needs, increasing economic security and healthy communities by maintaining jobs and keeping businesses operational. Here are a few examples.

## Critical Supports for Child Care Centers

 **Bellingham, WA**

**Opportunity Council (OC) in Bellingham, Washington** boasts a 56-year history of providing early care and learning services. When the pandemic hit, social distancing

was implemented, and parents kept their kids at home, the community recognized that child care homes and centers were struggling. The OC and its partners, including seven foundations and two corporations, helped the network of care providers stay open and also protected employees' health. Agency, private sector, and CSBG CARES funds allowed providers to purchase PPE and pay staff.

By mid-January 2021, over \$1 million had been raised and the OC had assisted 62 area providers in a five-county area. Significant new funding to support licensed home child care centers owned and operated by BIPOC caregivers came from a coalition of Washington foundations. All in all, the program provided the support for child care to continue, a lifeline for working families helping keep America open.

## COVID-19 Relief for Small Businesses

 **Phillipsburg, NJ**

At a time when businesses worked hard to survive, **Norwescap in Phillipsburg, New Jersey** provided resources to local businesses to keep their doors open. In a two-month period between November 2020 and January 2021, Norwescap's Community Development program, along with a team of volunteers and local business owners, put together a COVID-19 relief package to help eligible businesses keep the lights on, retain their employees, and generate revenue. The agency applied for the funds, created an application process, selected the businesses that

would receive funding, and hand-delivered the checks. These grants, provided to small businesses like the Ice Cream Junction (pictured) in downtown Phillipsburg, totaled over \$500,000.

This effort was a one-time infusion of money, but it was a lifeline for many businesses. “In the 47 years that our business has been in Phillipsburg, I can’t remember anyone working so hard for the downtown businesses,” one local small business owner and Norwescap loan recipient says. “Your approach to serving our community embodies the care and attention you devote to finding new ways to address critical issues, to courageously exhaust all methods of communication, and to your commitment to strengthen our collective resolve to overcome this pandemic.”

Norwescap’s responsiveness on this issue attracted the attention of local policy makers, state offices, and other businesses and has led to several exciting future grant opportunities.



**“In the 47 years that our business has been in Phillipsburg, I can’t remember anyone working so hard for the downtown businesses.”**

Community Action loan recipient

## Highlights from Across America

Due to the high demand for financial relief, **Brightpoint, the Community Action Agency in Ft. Wayne, Indiana**, created a COVID-19 Express Loan for businesses affected by the pandemic. Loans of up to \$20,000 were available with no upfront costs; immediate deferred payment options were available.

**Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) in Urbana, Illinois** provided direct consultation to struggling small businesses, guiding them through the application and submission process necessary for accessing Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs funding.

# Building A Stronger Workforce

The pandemic intensified people's need for jobs that pay a living wage. Some people's employment ended or the number of work hours per week declined. Working from home was an option for some, but not all. As the country began to enter the recovery phase, Community Action stepped up to provide services that trained people for new occupations and put them back to work. Here are some examples.

## Adult Learning Forges a Resilient Workforce

 Portageville, MO

**Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation (DAEOC) in Portageville, Missouri** successfully secured a \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Labor's Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities Initiative to create an adult learning center that prepares individuals for jobs that pay a living wage.

"My vision for [the center] is to provide the flexibility to meet the needs of our target audience and the ability to anticipate and respond to the needs of our local employers," says Joel Evans, DAEOC president and CEO. "This will ensure a

good match of skilled employees with living wage jobs."

This emphasis on flexibility, inspired in part by the uncertain conditions of the pandemic, informed the center's innovative design and programming: An onsite media lab ensures the continuity of educational opportunities should face-to-face training be interrupted, and wraparound services are also provided onsite. Further, all spaces can be retooled with ease to meet the needs of the labor market in the future.

**"I'm glad this grant will support the Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation's important work to help prepare people for in-demand careers."**

United States Senator Roy Blunt

"Workforce development programs are an invaluable tool for helping people get the skills they need to earn a good living, take care of their families and get ahead," says United States Senator Roy Blunt. "I'm glad this grant will support the Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation's important work to help prepare people for in-demand careers," he adds.

# Workforce Support for BIPOC Youth

 Boulder, CO

**In Boulder, Colorado, Boulder County Community Programs's** conversations with local government and partners identified youth as disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and thus having fewer opportunities to succeed in a post-pandemic world. The group also identified a broken workforce development pipeline that too often fails to connect working people to the training and the jobs they need to make ends meet. Their solution? The Youth Leaders Academy.

The Academy provides opportunities for BIPOC youth aged 16 - 24 who are disconnected from school and employment by supporting high school equivalency degrees, paid apprenticeships, occupation training, and tuition assistance, combined with mentorship to support the journey.

## Highlights from Across America



**Lawrence County Community Action Partnership in New Castle, Pennsylvania** created a new staff position, an Economic Advocate, who works one on one with customers to evaluate and improve credit scores, explore banking options, develop financial safety plans, and help individuals obtain reliable, good-paying jobs.

**Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Inc. in Utica, New York** hired a Workforce Development Coordinator to support job searches, resume writing, professional dress, interview skills, and more.

**Center for Employment Training in San Jose, California** used CSBG CARES funds to retain job training staff, who develop and maintain systems to determine customer eligibility, manage and report data, and implement software to collect eligibility documentation. During COVID, the agency used new technology to notify the community about PPE availability, rental assistance support, and job openings.

**Gulf Coast Community Services Association, Inc. (GCCSA) in Houston, Texas** used relationships with community partners to reach immigrant populations and survivors of domestic violence and connect them with resources and tools that help them gain employment. Also, a GCCSA pilot program identified eight business owners whose establishments experienced a long-term closure, significantly decreasing income. These entrepreneurs received assistance for PPE and other necessities to aid in re-opening.

**Allegheny County Department of Human Services in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania** established a workforce service through a partnership with the local workforce board, and the local Pennsylvania CareerLink. This service deployed career navigators to local community agencies to assist unemployed or under-employed individuals to obtain employment or to enroll in job and career training programs.

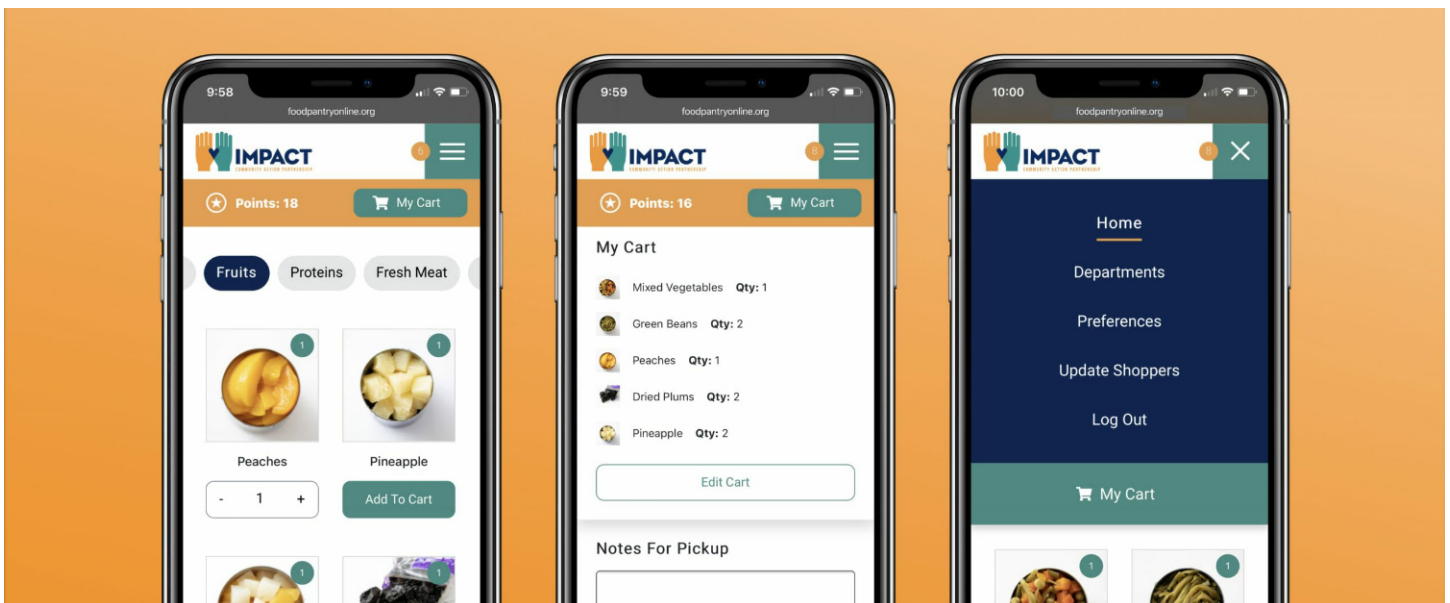
# Enhancing Technology & Systems to Extend Services

## New Telehealth Treatments for Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, and Mental Illness

 Russellville, AR

In Russellville, Arkansas, the pandemic threatened to interrupt **Arkansas River Valley Area Council (ARVAC)**'s behavioral health program, Freedom House, and its treatment options for alcoholism, drug abuse, and mental illness. Telehealth helped participants in ARVAC's medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinic complete weekly visits with providers. Patients, including some who had recently finished chemotherapy and could not visit the clinic, received personalized support. ARVAC also helped connect high-risk patients with virtual recovery programming, connecting them with peers in recovery.

Community Action staff used the technological improvements they made early in the pandemic as a foundation for continued innovation to meet the needs of individuals and families as effectively as possible during an extended period of upheaval. Here are a few examples.



**ABOVE:** IMPACT Community Action Partnership in Des Moines, Iowa commissioned a new online shopping experience for their food pantry.

# Highlights from Across America



**Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency Inc. in Alpena, Michigan** used CSBG CARES funds to launch new intake systems and hire a unified central intake team. This included a newly developed database system, electronic signatures, and electronic document submission.

**Mid-West New Mexico Community Action Program in Los Lunas, New Mexico** used CSBG CARES funds to license an online customer application system, allowing individuals and families to submit applications for assistance online from anywhere at any time.

**North Shore Community Action Programs (NSCAP), Inc. in Peabody, Massachusetts** partnered with phone system provider TPx and the Reserve

Corps of Massachusetts to create a call center providing COVID-19 information and referrals to community resources.

**The Center for Employment Training in California** developed and maintained systems to determine participant eligibility, data management, and reporting and utilized new software to collect eligibility documentation. Additionally, CSBG CARES funds were used to modify management systems to improve the online training experience by adding a single point of access to job training and other services.

**EightCAP Inc. in Orleans, Michigan** updated their personnel and payroll software, which allowed for digital communication between the departments as well as electronic timekeeping.

**Multiple Virginia CAAs** in a Whole Family Approach pilot met with families virtually, arranging virtual individual and group counseling sessions that addressed the behavioral health of parents and children.



## Recovery Deep Dive

# Equitable Vaccine Access in South Texas

**Headquartered in Alice, Texas, Community Action Corporation of South Texas (CACOST)**, a CAA that is also a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), distributed over 16,000 vaccines in four months. CACOST's tireless, dedicated staff helped protect the health of a significant number of people in one of the most rural and sparsely populated areas of south Texas, achieving more equitable access to the vaccine.

In eight of the nine counties in the agency's service area, more than 50% of the residents identify as Hispanic or Latinx, while in five of those counties more than 80% do. Without the aggressive attention CACOST gave to serving minority populations, healthcare inequities undoubtedly would have continued. Another way the agency addressed equity issues was to recruit and, where possible, hire qualified Latinx staff. As a result, communities served see themselves and their culture reflected in CACOST employees.

## Distributing Vaccines Quickly and Efficiently

The agency received their first vaccine shipment in late January 2021. At one of their seven FQHC sites, staff ran mass vaccinations every week for four months, giving out an average of 1,000 vaccines per week. Each site involved several stations and at least 21 staff. Commenting on the importance of full communication during those hectic weeks, Chief Operating Officer





**ABOVE:** Staff outside the Community Action Corporation of South Texas mobile health unit. Introduced in 2021, the unit helps the agency distribute vaccines and other health services to rural and hard-to-reach communities. Several photos in this section and on the front cover courtesy of Jason Garza, The Texas Tribune.

Nikki Alviar notes that communication among the staff was key. After they held their vaccine clinics, staff met virtually to gather feedback, discuss lessons learned, and share how processes could be improved. Alviar adds that managers sought “constant feedback [from] people who were working in these clinics.”

Community members expressed praise for the help they received from CACOST. “My octogenarian mother, who has numerous health issues, lives with my husband, myself, and our youngest adult son, who

often assists in her caregiving,” one says. “[CACOST] contacted us about the availability of my mother, as well as our family unit, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine at their health center in Alice. We jumped at the opportunity, and the process from start to finish was extremely smooth. All staff involved were very courteous, considerate, and helpful. We are very thankful to the doctor and all the Community Action staff for their efforts in assuring that the citizens of Alice and surrounding communities are protected during this devastating pandemic.”



## By the Numbers

**16,000+** vaccines distributed by CACOST over four months

**1,000** vaccines distributed every week

**Over 50%** of residents served identified as Hispanic or Latinx

## Expanding Other Health Services

It didn't stop with COVID-19 clinics. CACOST acquired rapid PCR diagnostic machines, which test not only for COVID but for RSV, Influenza A, and Influenza B with just one swab. Results are delivered within 35 minutes. And the agency also radically revamped its fee structure to make some services, including HIV testing and behavioral health care, more financially accessible than in the past.

Agency leaders also observed that behavioral health issues were escalating, and in response, CACOST hired seven licensed professional counselors who work both in the FQHC and the Head Start program. And when CACOST staff recognized that teen mental health had become a critical issue, the agency partnered with Texas A&M University on a project promoting teen wellness. CACOST also launched an initiative promoting the

use of Med Pods in small, rural school districts throughout the service area, which can be used to evaluate and treat students using telehealth technology.

CACOST's multiple innovative responses to the pandemic offer a heartening example of what can be accomplished by determined board members, leaders, and staff seeking to increase equity of access to quality healthcare services, including COVID-19 vaccination. Looking beyond the pandemic, CACOST's continued focus on making a variety of physical, behavioral, and mental health resources more accessible, including through the use of cutting-edge technology, serves as an inspiration to CAAs across America.



# Concluding Thoughts on Recovery

In every part of the country - frontier, rural, suburban, and urban - CAA staff worked hard to ensure that community members knew the facts about vaccination and increase vaccine confidence. With Community Action's help, customers got their shots, often providing appointments, transportation, and vaccine clinics themselves. But recovery efforts also meant dealing with other crises that occurred within and because of the pandemic, including social and racial unrest, lack of

basic utilities, homelessness, small business instability, limited broadband access, the constant need for better technology to deal with all these issues, and more.

The Community Action Network envisions a nation that creates opportunities for all people to thrive, builds strong, resilient communities, and ensures a more equitable society. This belief guided CAAs' activities and messaging during the pandemic. The examples offered here represent only a few of the hundreds of new or expanded strategies that CAAs employed to support their communities. As the pandemic and its impacts evolve and change, so will America's recovery. Community Action remains ready to serve communities and the people who live there through the recovery efforts yet to come.



ABOVE: Honolulu Community Action Partnership in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

# Resilience



What seemed impossible at the beginning of the pandemic soon proved possible: More than ever, Community Action innovated, moved quickly, partnered with others, and wielded technology to improve service delivery. This turbulent time provided the Network a chance to shine, and it did, engendering a new level of competence and confidence that will allow Community Action to help more people more effectively in the future.

The pandemic has also demonstrated communities' interdependence and highlighted the need for problem solvers who work across sectors to expand what is possible. As the nation looks forward to a future beyond COVID-19, many Community Action Agencies (CAAs), along with partner organizations, are leading a cultural change within their organizations and communities that support a more collaborative, creative,



**ABOVE:** Members of the immigrant and refugee community pick out seeds at a Vermont Community Action Partnership event.

and innovative way to deliver services across the nation. This change ensures accurate and timely administration of programs to assure compliance, working across sectors to address the root causes people face while tackling large, systematic barriers and inequalities that prevent a community from reaching and achieving its full potential.

An example of this cultural change is working together to knit public health, health care, and human services together, weaving a web of supports that promote overall health and well-being. The

Community Action Network understands that addressing the social determinants of health, including economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context creates resilient, vibrant communities. Such forward-looking work lessens the impact of future traumas for all Americans, but especially for those disproportionately affected, including people of color, older adults, children, and people experiencing homelessness.

# Supporting Small Businesses



Community Action and its partners play a role in strengthening resilience in small, local businesses to protect people and places from future shocks. Here are a few examples.

## Emergency Small Business Loans

 Abingdon, VA

As need from small businesses in southwest Virginia increased exponentially in the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic, **People Incorporated (People Inc.) in Abingdon, Virginia** was ready to help the families and businesses of their community.

“That loan at the time it happened, it was perfect. I don’t know what I would have done without it.”

Luke Patterson, Community Action loan recipient

Known for its work in economic development, People Inc. partnered with the City of Bristol to transform an existing small business loan program into an emergency loan program for businesses facing new and urgent challenges. In less than 12 months, 71 new small business loans were approved and distributed, pumping more than \$1.5 million into the local economy. As the new program expanded, People Inc. also helped existing borrowers by deferring loan payments. The agency worked with the Small Business Association to coordinate six months of payments for 86 existing borrowers.

As the pandemic continues to strain the business environment, People Inc. plans to create new loans in the future. These small business loans serve as a vital lifeline for business owners, their families, and their employees. “When you have that on your shoulders, whether people are going to have a job, whether you’re going to be able to pay your own bills ... it’s a lot of weight,” Luke Patterson, restaurateur and loan recipient, says. “People Incorporated, that loan at the time it happened, it was perfect. I don’t know what I would have done without it.”

## Highlights from Across America



**Coulecap in Westby, Wisconsin** launched the La Crosse Small Business Resiliency Fund. The fund will provide grants of up to \$5,000 to small, locally-owned businesses with 1-30 employees within La Crosse County. The project aims to support businesses executing projects that increase resilience and sustainability amid the new market conditions brought on by the pandemic, as well as ongoing public health concerns.

**The Philadelphia Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity in Pennsylvania** invested in programs and initiatives to address the prolonged impact of COVID-19. Measures were put into place to ensure that partnering public agencies, non profit service providers, and small BIPOC-owned businesses were equipped with the necessary information, technology, and resources to operate effectively and have the ability to continue to contribute to the city's economic recovery.

**Mesa Community Action Network in Mesa, Arizona** provided community members with training and technical assistance for small business and entrepreneurship.



**ABOVE:** Driven Skate Shop Plus, a small business that received a loan from Norwescap, a CAA in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Forging Structural Resilience

As the pandemic evolves and conditions change, so too do CAAs evolve their approaches to ensuring organizational stability. Addressing new threats to that stability, including the changing public health situation and the “Great Resignation,” required CAAs to get creative, wielding new technologies and implementing new strategies to increase resilience not only internally, but also in their communities. The following are just a few examples of how they did just that.

## Lowering Turnover in the Great Resignation

 San Luis Obispo, CA

Despite a challenging hiring market and record-low unemployment, CAAs across the country, like **Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County in San Luis Obispo, California**, implemented new strategies to hire and retain top-tier staff. To recruit employees, the agency offered virtual interviews, advertised remote or hybrid work arrangements where possible, and spread the word about opportunities on job networking sites.

And to combat the effects of the “Great Resignation” and tackle burnout, CAPSLO implemented new benefits to improve the employee experience, including a flexible work schedule, new incentives and stipends, increased break time for those working on-site, positive feedback and morale programs, and a lunch-and-learn program centered on wellness.

These forward-thinking adaptations have paid off dramatically: CAPSLO’s turnover ratio has decreased since the onset of the pandemic, from 19.6% in 2019 to just 11.4% in 2021.

## Ensuring Broadband Access for All

 Nationwide

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 allocated \$3.2 billion to increasing the affordability of internet service for Americans during the pandemic. This Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program helped make internet more accessible to eligible families, connecting them with telehealth services, remote work opportunities, virtual classrooms, and more. The EBB was later replaced with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a long-term initiative.

Recognizing the importance, particularly in the time of COVID-19, of ensuring high-quality, affordable internet access for all, the Community Action Network played a critical role in raising awareness about these programs at both the local and national levels. As CAAs spread the word to

their customers, the National Community Action Partnership assisted by producing and disseminating webinars, printed flyers, social media toolkits, and more.

## Prioritizing Continuity of Operations

 Middletown, CT

Through a partnership with the Connecticut Department of Social Services, **Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA)** administered a statewide project to develop Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPs) for nine CAAs and the state association. A COOP provides the information and procedures necessary to respond to a business interruption, assemble continuity teams, coordinate recovery of data and access to data and network systems, and to resume operations to ensure minimal disruption to the agency, its operations, and its services.

## Training Staff & Boosting Morale Virtually

 San Juan, PR

Staff at **Acción Social de Puerto Rico, Inc. in San Juan, Puerto Rico** began offering virtual trainings for both staff and community members in the first months of COVID-19 on topics including mental health and self care, best practices for remote work, and more. And utilizing YouTube, employees began sharing videos about their quarantine experiences, staying in touch with fellow staff and the community.

## Highlights from Across America



**Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Inc. in Boston, Massachusetts** used CSBG CARES funding to support the design and implementation of a web-based platform called Your Market, which allows food pantries to catalog inventory, communicate with individuals and families, and obtain valuable data about shoppers' experiences.

**Arkansas River Valley Area Council, Inc. (ARVAC) in Russellville, Arkansas** provided Head Start lessons outside of a traditional classroom setting by providing Wi-Fi hotspots and tablets. Having access to technology increased parent involvement and attendance in monthly family meetings by more than 75%. Additionally, a quorum of parent Policy Council members was present every month from March of 2020 through May 2022 despite social distancing measures. Through access to technology, parents overcame transportation, communication, and child care barriers that had hindered their involvement in the past, creating greater participation going forward.

Leadership at CAAs across Illinois focused on improving their staff's mental health amid a transition to a work-from-home environment and conversations about racial injustice. **The Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies in Springfield, Illinois** supported these efforts by hosting a series of virtual racial equity conversations statewide.

# Protecting & Advancing Health, Safety, & Well-Being



**WATCH:** Scan the code above to watch a video about the Child Tax Credit, featuring three families served by Community Action.

As the nation continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Action continues to work tirelessly to protect and strengthen communities and develop systematic equity for the people they serve. From providing substance abuse services virtually to enabling families to purchase a home to making sure parents receive tax credits owed them to building new cross-sector partnerships, the Network continues to change families' lives and build healthier, more resilient communities. A few examples follow:

## Spotlighting the Child Tax Credit

### Nationwide

As part of the American Rescue Plan, the 2021 Child Tax Credit (CTC) was expanded to provide up to \$3,600 per child under age six and \$3,000 for children ages six to 17. Recognizing the Child Tax Credit's potential as a critical asset to help families stay

resilient in the aftermath of the pandemic, the National Community Action Partnership began a nationwide promotional campaign bolstered by foundation funding.

The National Community Action Partnership supported CAAs' promotion of the CTC through training webinars (several held jointly with partners like the Office of Community Services, the Office of Head Start, and the IRS), one-on-one consultations, videos, publications, social media toolkits, and more. In tandem, CAAs, many of which also serve as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, helped eligible Americans apply to receive the expanded Child Tax Credit.

One such recipient was Rose: a mother of three, an immigrant from one of the most war-torn countries in the world, and a Community Action customer in Amarillo, Texas. Shortly after the birth of her third child, Rose's husband suffered a traumatic brain injury, and the family wondered how to make ends meet.

But when she visited the VITA site at **Panhandle Community Services** in Amarillo, staff helped her access \$20,449 in refunds, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the CTC. Rose was overjoyed. “Now, I can tell my son the rent is paid for many months, and he does not need to worry anymore,” she told staff.

Thanks to Community Action’s outreach, thousands of American families became aware of and received the Child Tax Credit for the first time in 2021 and 2022 and many will continue to utilize this resource in the years ahead. Although the expanded Child Tax Credit was not renewed in 2022, Community Action continues to champion the CTC as one of the most effective ways to keep families healthy and resilient.

## Addressing Both Housing Instability & Chronic Health Conditions

📍 Salem, OR

Since 2017, health care provider Kaiser Permanente has collected data on frequent users of emergency medical services, including emergency room usage, overnight hospital stays, and/or use of ambulance services within a six-month period. In 2021, those tracked used emergency services an average of two times in six months. The top 2% – 34 people – needed publicly-funded emergency services 1,078 times in 2021, up from 883 the year prior.

In March 2022, **Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency in Salem,**



**ABOVE:** The ribbon-cutting ceremony for Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency’s new 90-day, low-barrier emergency shelter prioritizing chronically homeless people, people in fragile health, and wildfire survivors.

**Oregon** was one of three locations from across the country to receive a \$1.5 million grant from Kaiser Permanente aimed at getting people who frequently use the emergency room into stable housing. Data showed that 106 residents from the Salem area were frequent emergency room users. MWVCAA set a goal of providing housing assistance to at least 100 of the identified residents. The agency will provide a year of intensive case management with program participants and provide funding to help cover rent and moving costs.

Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency is implementing creative strategies to address housing instability as well as chronic health conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us of the finite capacity of the American healthcare system. By better managing and addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH), we can more effectively and efficiently utilize our healthcare resources, solving two problems at once.

## University Partnership Boosts Financial Literacy

**Frankfort, KY**

**Blue Grass Community Action Partnership in Frankfort, Kentucky** partnered with the Family and Consumer Sciences Team at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment to offer financial literacy trainings on topics like savings and credit. 203 attendees gained new insight into how to improve their financial well-being.

## Tackling Vaccine Inequities Head-On

**Charleston, SC**

**Palmetto Community Action Partnership in Charleston, South Carolina** is proud to be one of five CAAs in the country selected to create and host a vaccine equity project funded by the CDC. The project aims to reduce vaccine-preventable disease among communities of color and empower individuals living in Berkeley County to make informed choices about their health. Berkeley County was selected due to low adult vaccination rates and racial and ethnic disparities in vaccination coverage.

Since the project's inception in 2021, Palmetto Community Action Partnership



**ABOVE:** Palmetto Community Action Partnership staff at a vaccine outreach event in Wadamalaw Island, South Carolina.

has successfully formed an advisory committee of established partner organizations committed to achieving optimal health for all to provide guidance on project activities, developed a community action plan to identify goals of the project, and begun to implement strategies to achieve selected health goals.

## Temporary Shelter Builds Lasting Partnerships

 Lewiston, ME

In Western Maine, many shelters for people who are unhoused are private, faith-based, and had screening criteria many people could not meet during the pandemic. In response, **Community Concepts of Lewiston, Maine** set up a 60-bed shelter for people needing to quarantine.

These shelters ultimately helped to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the program afforded an opportunity to get people connected with other services. Many people left the shelters with connections to employment and more stable housing, creating greater community resilience.

And according to Shawn Yardley, CEO of Community Concepts, this rapid and effective response had a major impact on Community Action's lasting credibility in the state of Maine. Maine Community Action Partnership, the statewide Community Action association of which Community Concepts is a member, was not widely known in some circles prior to the pandemic, but it is now seen as a reliable partner. "We get called to be at every table

now," Yardley says. This has also resulted in growth of the agency's annual budget from \$24 million to \$32 million.

## Vaccine Equity Outreach at Community Gatherings

 Columbus, GA

**Enrichment Services in Columbus, Georgia** is engaged in a CDC-funded vaccine equity project with a goal of increasing vaccination rates. The project will build trust among customers and partners by deploying messaging about the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccinations.

The agency is participating in multiple events to promote vaccinations, including Back-to-School Bash, the annual Crawford Community Health Resource Fair, and a prescription drug take back and health fair.

## Addressing COVID-19 Health Disparities

 Phoenix, AZ

**In Phoenix Arizona, Wildfire** (the state's Community Action Association) and the Department of Health Services are partnering to leverage funding from the CDC's National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities.

## Highlights from Across America



During the 2022 baby formula crisis, **CAAs across the state of New York** worked with health care providers to approve appropriate baby formula substitutions when possible, changed the type of formula based on what was available, utilized the WIC Vendor Management Agency to organize drop shipments when available, and encouraged participants to use WIC benefits throughout the month and not all at once.

After recovering from addiction, Michelle found herself at the end of her stay at a local transition shelter and needing to find housing to stay off the street and away from drugs. **HHWP Community Action Commission in Findlay, Ohio** assisted her and many other community members experiencing housing insecurity with temporary housing in a hotel while she worked to secure a permanent home. Working with Community Action caseworkers, Michelle was able to find a job as a peer support monitor and secured a rental property lease in October 2021.

To meet community during the COVID-19 crisis and to prepare for the future, **Community Action Program for Central Arkansas (CAPCA) in Conway, Arkansas** modified its food services to include curbside assistance. The agency purchased a storage building with CSBG funds and Weatherization staff modified it to make it a registration shelter for guests.

The curbside service speeds up the food delivery process by over two hours. CAPCA also purchased an application system used to register food recipients. These technological changes ensure that agency services become even more resilient and adaptable in the face of future disruptions.

When stay-at-home orders came to **Lima, Ohio** in mid-March 2020, **West Ohio Community Action Partnership (WOCAP)**'s homeownership class was only halfway through its curriculum, but staff and enrollees had to stop meeting in person. To maintain participants' progress, WOCAP continued classwork and case management virtually. WOCAP also worked quickly to contact title companies and associated parties to re-tool the closing process. Despite a challenging housing market, 25 families in rural West Ohio completed their homeownership course and three families closed on their new homes. Homeownership increased both personal and community stability in West Ohio as the pandemic continued.



**ABOVE:** A customer speaks with staff from Community Action Partnership Dickinson-Williston in Dickinson, North Dakota.

## Resilience Deep Dive

# A Coalition for Equitable Policies in California

In August 2020, the leaders of **Community Action Marin in San Rafael, California** joined together with local government, nonprofit, and foundation leadership to call for action to protect the Marin County residents hardest hit by the pandemic, particularly Latinx community members, and best position the county for a vibrant recovery.

A coalition representing community, health, education, and business sectors sent a letter to the elected officials of the City of

San Rafael and the County of Marin highlighting the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impacts on the Latinx community in San Rafael and across the county, urging officials to take swift action to address the many crises caused or exacerbated by the pandemic.

On the local, state, and national levels, studies have identified the inequitable impacts of COVID-19 on housing stability, employment, debt, and food security. In its letter, the coalition stressed that many of





those most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are essential workers and that the recovery and long-term resilience of these communities are inextricably connected to the recovery and resilience of the local business sector, the nonprofit sector, and the public sector.

## Taking Action for Long-Term Justice

City and County elected officials and staff from both jurisdictions met with representatives from the coalition to discuss opportunities for rapid, collaborative action. Following this meeting, members of the coalition developed a set of specific recommendations for elected

officials in key policy areas including health, housing, and supporting the recovery of local businesses. In addition, they also recommended the creation of a policy task force.

The coalition has already produced policy successes at the county and local city levels, including limited rent freezes in two communities, a county eviction moratorium extension through June 30, 2021, and a commitment by local government to engage in bold, collaborative solutions that prioritize the COVID-19's most inequitable impacts on communities of color, local businesses, property owners, and more. While these wins are impressive, the coalition continues to push for equitable policy that will strengthen the community for years to come.

# Concluding Thoughts on Resilience

communities across America and a demonstrated commitment to generating enduring, sustainable resilience, CAAs work tirelessly to ensure every American has an opportunity to help themselves and each other, addressing a variety of systematic and interwoven inequities, from economic mobility to health and child care to education to racial oppression.

Even after crises recede and rapid responses are through, the Community Action Network is in it for the long haul. With decades-strong roots in 1,000+

Across the country, Community Action is the nation's eyes and ears about what gets in the way of a family's economic stability - and what's working to help them succeed.



**ABOVE:** Participants in Community Action Duluth's Community Construction training program in Duluth, Minnesota, which provides a hands-on one-year certification in basic carpentry. The program also addresses the need for quality housing: Participants learn skills by remodeling homes for families with low incomes.

# Conclusion



The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored for the entire nation what every community that has endured a natural disaster knows: Americans must be able to trust that when the unexpected happens, when crisis hits their community or their family, a skilled, dependable national network of local first responders will be there to answer the call.

One group of first responders has proven it is especially versatile, innovative, and trusted by the community to be there in times of need: local Community Action Agencies (CAAs). Just as one can travel anywhere in the country and know fire, police and emergency medical services are merely a phone call away, so too can one know that CAAs, serving 99% of America's counties, are on the ground, in



**ABOVE:** 2022 Graduates of Montgomery County, Maryland’s Community Advocacy Institute, an eight-month advocacy training program for lower-income community members. Participants attend monthly workshops on a variety of topics, including how to work with elected officials, storytelling, letter-writing, and more. Community Action Board members facilitate workshops and welcome guest speakers, including local politicians and experts.

the community, helping people and changing lives. Each CAA is an established, trusted organization in its local area, ready to meet families where they are, support individuals in their time of need, and convene community resources to ensure every resident has a path to opportunity, dignity, and economic mobility.

This report tells only a fraction of the stories from across the United States about how CAAs were ready, responded rapidly, helped families and communities recover

from a global pandemic, and built resilience for the uncertain times ahead. Although not every story could be captured in this report, several common threads run through the agencies showcased here. Those common threads together form a strong and resilient tapestry as diverse as the nation’s communities and inclusive of the millions of neighbors helping neighbors overcome unprecedented challenges like COVID-19.

The story of Community Action during the COVID-19 pandemic is one that was set in



motion over the past six decades, during which CAAs built local partnerships, identified the needs of their communities, and helped residents, community leaders, and other service providers work together to support families.

## **A Solid, Trusted, & Skilled Network of Local Agencies**

Community Action was effective during the COVID-19 pandemic precisely because it operates at both a community level as well as the national level: a sophisticated nationwide network of service providers and advocates.

Local CAAs not only monitored and responded to the quickly changing needs of their own community, but they also remained closely attuned to their peer CAAs across their state, their region, and the country as a whole. State CSBG offices and state Community Action Associations provided funding, information, and technical assistance that supported the critical work

of local agencies. National level Community Action partners served as critical conduits between the local agencies and the federal government.

This network responded together to share information, strategies, innovative approaches, and resources with one another. And because of it, every local CAA had not only their own community trust and knowledge at the ready, they also brought with them the collective expertise of 1,000+ peers across the country: CAAs supporting each other to keep the Promise of Community Action.

## **Leveraging Public & Private Resources for Community Impact**

The Community Action Network of local CAAs administers \$14 billion in financial resources in a typical year, providing full transparency and accountability for those resources and ensuring they achieve maximum impact in their communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, countless CAAs became the “go-to” organization for both public and private funders to ensure community needs could be met without delay. When some state and local governments found their systems overwhelmed by the need to get resources into communities, it was often CAAs that provided additional capacity, flexibility, and integrity to ensure funds would get to those most in need. Millions of Americans remained in stable housing, received much-needed food assistance, and were

supported in countless other ways because their local CAA had the financial and administrative infrastructure to distribute resources effectively to meet the needs in the community.

## Guided By Evidence-Based Strategies & Lived Experience

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was critical that the most trusted public health initiatives could be put immediately into practice, and equally important that residents could participate in response

efforts in their own community. Every CAA in America is led by a Board of Directors that represents the entire community they serve: people with low incomes, public officials, and other community stakeholders, like business leaders and the faith community.

Every CAA also organizes their strategies and services around up-to-date assessments of the needs and resources specific to their community. Finally, every CAA implemented a COVID-19 response appropriate to their particular community and its needs and benefited immeasurably from the lived experience of customers in their own community.



**ABOVE:** A bus driver for Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership's ENCAP Transportation Program in Omaha, Nebraska.

**Community Action  
during the pandemic:  
A network of local  
first responders using  
its strengths to  
advance equity and  
opportunity for all.**

## **Innovating Across Sectors to Partner in the Co- Creation and Co-Design of Local Solutions**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the important connection between traditional emergency services (housing, employment, education, etc.) and public health. CAAs have long bettered health outcomes by ensuring the social determinants of health – the basic needs of families – are met.

During the pandemic, CAAs partnered with other community stakeholders to provide critical COVID testing, education, and vaccination services, working with faith leaders and respected local residents to build confidence in the safety of vaccines. Working together with public health departments, CAAs co-created messaging and mobilized contact tracing activities. In partnership with the private sector, CAAs worked to keep small businesses open and help workers attain financial stability.

While local CAAs continued to provide services directly to families, they also invested in key partnerships, across both public and private sectors, to reach those residents most threatened by the pandemic's devastation.

## **Driven By a Belief in Belonging – Caring About the Entire Community**

Community Action was uniquely positioned to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic because local CAAs live the Promise of Community Action and especially the principle, “We care about the entire community.”

This report demonstrates how CAAs actively promote belonging: Every member of the community belongs, every person deserves care and concern, and every child and adult has the same needs for food, shelter, and a feeling of security. This sense of belonging is evident in examples of CAAs focusing on disparities in health services, housing, child care, and education by taking action to serve under-represented communities.

The COVID pandemic called many local CAAs to redouble their commitment to belonging: They delivered services in new ways, reached out to communities using new multilingual resources, and tailored vaccination education to specific communities. In other words, they leaned into the practice of bridging difference to promote true belonging.

# Achieving One Shared Goal: Safe, Healthy Communities of Opportunity for All

First responders exist in every community across the United States. Each has a specific mission: Whether it be medical response, public safety, or protection from fire and flood, first responders have a distinct and valuable role. Community Action also has a distinct valuable role: to ensure no one is left behind, every person can live in dignity, and the community, as a whole, embraces every resident and provides an opportunity for them to pursue their dreams.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatened everyone. But where some Americans had access to food, safe shelter, and steady employment, many others did not. Local CAAs knew the residents most severely impacted by the pandemic, they knew the resources available in their community, and they knew where forceful advocacy and community collaboration was needed to ensure all residents could remain safe.

This report tells many stories. It describes many innovative approaches, new partnerships, and tireless efforts to support residents through very challenging times. Within those stories are the people of Community Action – the staff, the board members, the volunteers, the residents – all working side by side with one common goal: making their community more equitable, more hospitable, more of what they all believe a community should look and feel like.

Community Action takes many forms. It looks different in every single community across the country. In all its forms and in every place, Community Action embodies a powerful principle: Strong, resilient communities rely on leveraging the wisdom, skills, and gifts of everyone who comprises them. This report highlights the power and impact that result when that wisdom, and those gifts, are unleashed.

Community Action during the pandemic: a network of local first responders using its strengths to advance equity and opportunity for all.

**READINESS  
RAPID RESPONSE  
RECOVERY  
RESILIENCE**



# Appendix

## Community Action National Partners

**The National Community Action Partnership (NCAP)** is a national nonprofit membership organization that believes America was built on the promise that every family should have an opportunity for success. Yet, today's uneven economy and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have put a good quality of life out of reach for too many Americans. To make that belief a

reality for millions of people, NCAP provides technical assistance, training, tools and other resources to CAAs.

**The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services (OCS)** partners with states, communities, and agencies to reduce the causes of poverty, increase opportunity and economic security of individuals and families, and revitalize communities. OCS social service and community development programs work in a variety of ways to improve the lives of many. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) provides funds to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities.



# CAPLAW

Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc



# NASCS

National Association For State Community Services Programs



# NCAF

# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

**The National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)** is the sole national association charged with advocating and enhancing the leadership role of States in the administration of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). NASCSPP helps States attain full utilization of resources to implement an extensive array of services to individuals and families. It provides training and technical assistance, resources, data collection and reporting, and advocacy on behalf of state community services programs.

**Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc. (CAPLAW)** is the national legal expert for the Community Action network. Through consultations, training and resources, it equips CAAs with the knowledge and tools to operate as accountable and effective change agents. CAPLAW also provides guidance to federal, state, and national Community Action partners on legal and financial issues affecting CAAs.

**The National Community Action Foundation (NCAF)** is membership organization and is a leading voice on federal anti-poverty policy. NCAF serves as the federal advocate for the nationwide Community Action Network, comprised of local CAAs and their state and federal partners. NCAF staff lobby, engage in the federal political process, and informs the Network about Congress and relevant legislation through the CAPFacts newsletter, webinars, and action alerts.

## Pandemic-Era Resources for CAAs

**The National Community Action Partnership (NCAP)** produced a plethora of reports, social media toolkits, graphics, and videos about the pandemic, vaccination, the Child Tax Credit, the Emergency Broadband Benefit, the American Rescue Plan, and more.



**The National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP)** shared webinars, handouts, and tools for the Community Action Network on topics from employee retention to best practices for virtual training to CARES Act funding management to risk management.



**Community Action Program Legal Services Inc. (CAPLAW)** created a variety of micro-websites, publications, toolkits, sample human resources policies and forms, news flashes, and legal updates to help CAAs across the country respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. CAPLAW also held several webinars to share best practices.



# NCAP Board of Directors

The National Community Action Partnership would like to thank our Board of Directors:

**Chair: Dalitso S. Sulamoyo, CCAP**  
Champaign County Regional Planning  
Commission, Urbana, Illinois

**2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chair: Rick Baker, CCAP**  
LKLP Community Action Council, Inc.,  
Hazard, Kentucky

**Secretary: Peter Kilde, CCAP**  
West Central Wisconsin CAA,  
Glenwood City, Wisconsin

**1<sup>st</sup> Vice-Chair: Elizabeth “Biz” Steinberg**  
Community Action Partnership of San Luis  
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**Region 10: Jay Doman, CPA, CCAP**  
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## Report Advisory Committee

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- Veronica Zhang, CAPLAW

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## The Office of Community Services

We extend our utmost gratitude to our partners at the Office of Community Services for their support and guidance.







# READINESS TO RESILIENCE

The Community Action  
COVID-19 Story



[communityactionpartnership.com](https://communityactionpartnership.com)

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