



Health & Human Services

2023 Gwinnett Human Services Needs Assessment Ecosystem Map

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OVERVIEW

Gwinnett County delivers, either directly or through partners, numerous services designed to meet the health and human services needs of County residents. This document details the major findings of Health Management Associates' qualitative and quantitative research and is intended to:

1. Serve as a snapshot of community need in a growing, dynamic County where the disruptive forces of the COVID-19 pandemic are still playing out
2. Provide insights about the experiences of County residents in accessing health and human services in the County
3. Provide insights about the health and human services delivery system and the experiences of service providers
4. Shed light on the human service needs and gaps in Gwinnett County to inform service delivery in the future

It is worth noting that the ecosystem review here is a point-in-time study. In some ways, it is the means to an end, with the end being the County's Strategic Plan, which then allows the County to understand more deeply the ecosystem for future activities and initiatives.

SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

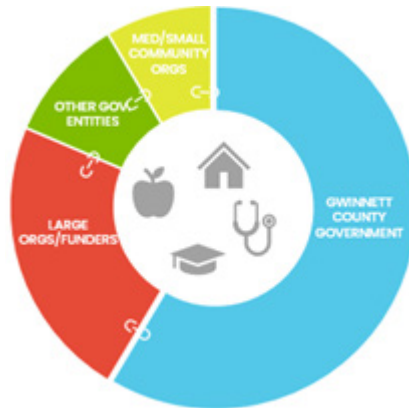
Gwinnett County, together with an array of public, private, and nonprofit partners, provides a dynamic portfolio of ever-evolving human services to meet the needs of Gwinnett County residents. The County plays a critical role in identifying health and human service needs, distributing funding, and working closely with partners to meet human service needs. Some services are delivered directly by the County, while others are delivered through subsidy or sub-recipient organizations. Because of the heightened need for basic human services precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the availability of federal relief funding to help address those needs, the County added new partners and services over the past three years.

OTHER GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

- Provide various services to residents who live inside their borders.

LARGE ORGANIZATIONS/FUNDERS

- Of various, geographic coverage, purpose, and influence.
- Provide funding for numerous nonprofits in the County and can provide direction based on funding priorities.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Deliver specific programs.
- Well-positioned to serve as a conduit to populations that may be hard for larger providers or government to reach or that require a culturally and linguistically specific approach.
- Some are funded by the County and/or larger organizations/philanthropy.

GWINNETT COUNTY GOVERNMENT

- Manages and oversees funding and grant recipient activities/outcomes.
- Coordinates programs and services.
- Directly administers certain programs.

The current human services delivery system includes services directly provided by the County, including OneStop 4 Help, Live Healthy Gwinnett, Volunteer Gwinnett, first responder services, and services for seniors and veterans. A vast, robust network of providers also delivers parallel and/or supporting services, including Housing and Community Development and Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services in these and other areas.

Based on extensive qualitative and quantitative research and discussions with County leadership, the HMA team concentrated on the following major program areas because of their prevalence as areas of significant need:

- Food security
- Health and wellbeing
- Housing affordability and stability
- Youth, literacy, and learning

We also identified cross-cutting barriers to access, particularly transportation and a need for culturally and linguistically responsive services. All of these are detailed further in the sections that follow.

The Needs Assessment section includes additional details about our approach and methods.

FOOD SECURITY

Background

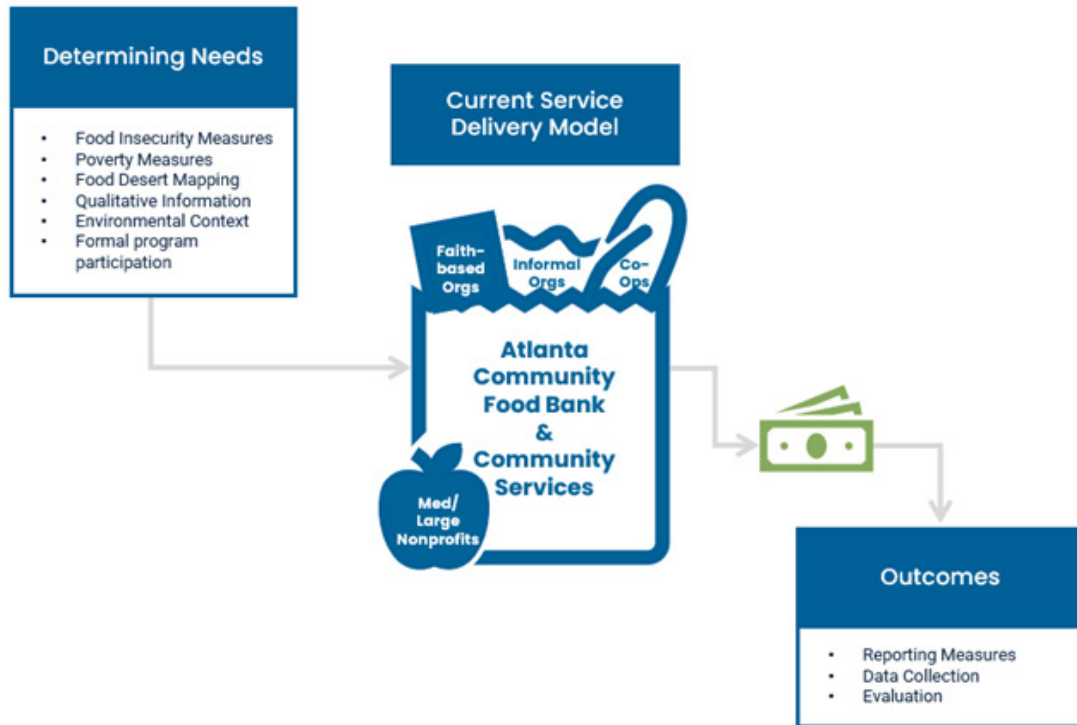
According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food security is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity refers to a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food (1). Examples of conditions that households with high levels of food insecurity experience include having worried that food would run out before there was money to buy more, reported that food that was purchased didn't last and there wasn't money to buy more, and skipped meals or cut the size of meals. *Feeding America*, a nationwide network of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs of which the *Atlanta Community Food Bank* is a member, identifies common causes of food insecurity as poverty, unemployment, or low income; lack of affordable housing; chronic health conditions or lack of access to health care; and systemic racism and racial discrimination (2). According to *Feeding America*, the effects of food insecurity include making it difficult for children to learn and grow, the emergence of serious health issues when people must choose between spending money on food or health care and having to make difficult decisions between food and basic needs like rent, bills, and transportation.

One of the byproducts of the COVID-19 pandemic was a heightened need for access to enough food. Food insecurity among households with children surged nationally in the Summer of 2020 (3). Subsequent rises in inflation (food prices increased by 9.9 percent (4) in 2022) and the end of pandemic-era benefits (5) have led to stubbornly high food prices and elevated rates of food insecurity (6).

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1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>
 2. Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>
 3. "Reducing Child Food Insecurity After COVID-19: Policy Innovations And Cross-Sector Partnerships", *Health Affairs Forefront*, June 15, 2022.
 4. Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Food Price Outlook 2023*, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/>
 5. Georgia Recorder, "Georgia food banks gear up for summertime demand a year after pandemic food stamp benefits ended," April 13, 2023. <https://georgiarecorder.com/2023/04/13/georgia-food-banks-gear-up-for-summer-surge-in-demand-a-year-after-pandemic-food-stamp-benefits-ended/>
 6. Cassandra Martinchek et al, "As Inflation Squeezed Family Budgets, Food Insecurity Increased between 2021 and 2022." *Urban Institute*, March 2023.

Current Food Delivery System

Gwinnett County residents who struggle with food insecurity face numerous barriers to consistently accessing nutritious and culturally relevant foods. Gwinnett County has worked closely with the Atlanta Community Food Bank and several nonprofit organizations to disseminate and leverage COVID-19 Relief and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address food insecurity in the County over the past 2-3 years, and the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners has charged the Department of Community Services with developing a service delivery model to address food insecurity. The current service delivery model for addressing food insecurity in Gwinnett County is depicted in the graphic below.



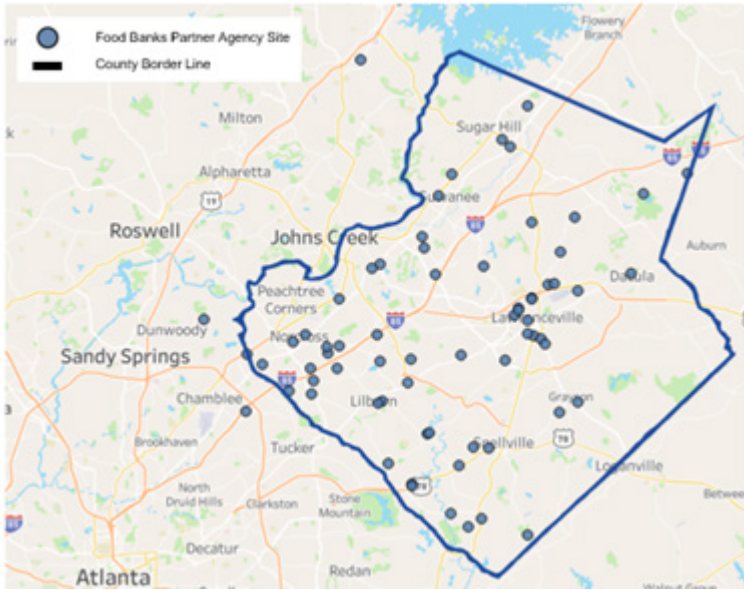
Over 100 organizations actively addressing food insecurity in the County comprise both a formal and informal network of providers. In addition to the Department of Community Services, these organizations include:

- The Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB) and its 70 distribution partners.
- Six co-ops are intended to cover all zip codes within Gwinnett County.
- Other small and medium-sized nonprofit organizations.
- Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and other places of worship.
- Informal groups.
- The various school systems in Gwinnett ensures that children don't go hungry during school hours
- Senior Home Delivered Meals and Congregate Meals at Senior Centers.
- UGA Extension Gwinnett provides programming that includes community school gardens, food education, and nutritional education, in Gwinnett through their 4-H, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Family and Consumer Sciences programs.

There is also part of the food security strategy for food-insecure residents in the County:

- The organizations providing services cover the entirety of the county from a geographic standpoint but are not entirely meeting the county's needs.
- Measurement of how they are meeting needs in different ways (volume of phone calls, wait lists, etc.), and there is no standard set of measures or any processes to understand in real-time which providers have capacity and which do not, aside from informal communication channels.

Atlanta Community Food Bank's partner agencies in Gwinnett County



Community discussions have revealed that, while some providers collaborate effectively, the system is characterized by fragmentation, lack of coordination, and competition between service providers that has hindered the overall system's ability to efficiently address unmet needs.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank and its partners in Gwinnett County more than doubled the amount of food distributed between 2019 and 2023, reflecting enhanced efforts to meet the heightened need associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects.

Total Food Distributed by Atlanta Community Food Bank and Partners, Gwinnett County (7)

Year	Total Pounds	Total Meals
2019	7,987,481	6,656,234
2020	11,709,539	9,757,949
2021	14,064,646	11,720,538
2022	16,915,748	14,096,457

7. Data obtained directly from Atlanta Community Food Bank per a data request.

Assessing Food Needs in Gwinnett County

In its 2022 Strategic Priorities, the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners identified continuing to address food insecurity as a critical theme, noting that the need to address food insecurity will remain once the federal COVID-19 relief funds are exhausted. To better understand the extent of food insecurity, the need for assistance, and how the current service delivery ecosystem for addressing the needs of community residents experiencing food insecurity operates, HMA did the following:

- Reviewed numerous key indicators at the county level and, where available, zip code or census tract levels to identify disparities. In addition, where possible, HMA used Live Healthy Gwinnett’s Community Health Dashboard to generate key indicators. This data will remain available to the County, its partners, and the public in an accessible way through the dashboard, allowing for ease of ongoing monitoring and comparison.

Food insecurity rate

Generated by *Feeding America* and published in the *Map the Meal Gap* report, this rate reflects the prevalence of food insecurity in the County as measured by the number of individuals (or children) who live in a food-insecure household.

Households receiving SNAP benefits

Developed by the Food Research & Action Center from American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-year estimates, these rates show the percentage of households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These rates can be considered in conjunction with food insecurity rates to better understand the unmet need level.

Percent of children enrolled in public schools eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

Compiled by County Health Rankings from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2022-2023 data, this indicator provides information about the level of need among school-aged children and youth.

Food insecurity index

This indicator maintained on the Live Healthy Gwinnett dashboard shows the relative need within Gwinnett County and allows for a better understanding of which specific neighborhoods may be facing the highest relative need.

Low-income and low-access to a food store (food deserts)

This indicator comes from the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s periodic analysis of low-income and low-food store-access census tracts. It can help show where there are food deserts in low-income communities. In addition, these food deserts contribute to low access and healthcare disparities such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and other diseases impacting communities, especially those communities of color who are affected.

- Conducted a focus group with the organizations participating in the Gwinnett Food Roundtable, including the Atlanta Community Food Bank and its Gwinnett County distribution partners.
- Discussed food insecurity with providers and community residents through four Community Conversations and conducted a community survey that included questions about food insecurity.
- Interviewed human services stakeholders and facilitated community conversations with human services providers and County residents.

Key Food Insecurity Indicators: Gwinnett County Compared to Georgia and the U.S.(8)

Indicator	Gwinnett County	Georgia	United States
FOOD INSECURITY RATE	7.2%	10.7%	10.4%
HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) BENEFITS	6.5%	11.9%	11.7%
% OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH 2022-23 SCHOOL YEAR	56%	53%	47%

While Gwinnett County generally performs better than the state of Georgia and the United States on measures of food insecurity, there are communities with substantial unmet needs within this large and diverse County.

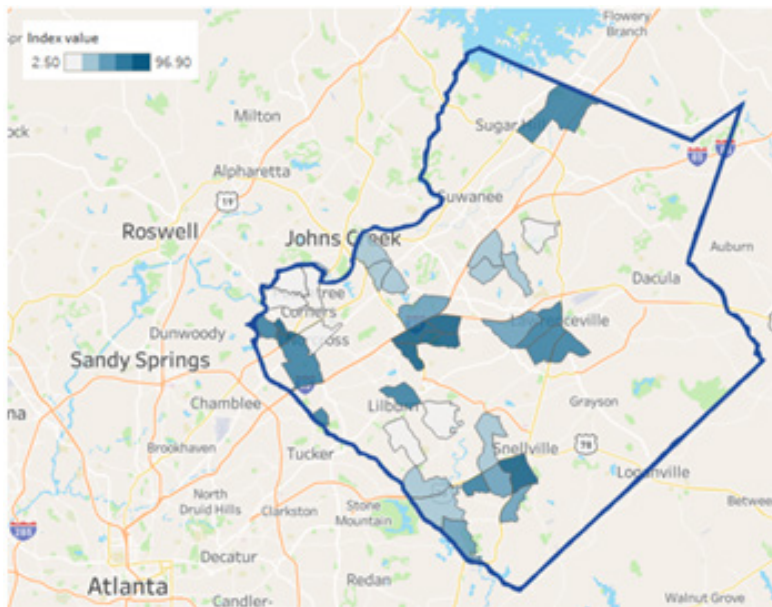
Live Healthy Gwinnett's Community Health Dashboard includes the Food Insecurity Index, which indicates relative needs within the County. Gwinnett County census tracts are assigned an index value between 0 and 100 and then grouped into five tiers ranging from 1 to 5, where 5 indicates the greatest need. The index varies widely within the County from a low of 2.5 to a high of 96.9, and there are several neighborhoods clustered in the Southwest part of the County with high relative need, as displayed in the map below.

2022 Food Security Index

By Census Tract

Measurement Period: 2022

Data Source: Conduit Healthy Communities Institute



8. The Food Insecurity Rate is generated by Feeding America and published in its Map the Meal Gap report. Data are derived from Current Population Survey figures. The data presented in this table is for 2021. Food insecurity is a measure of the number of individuals (or children) who live in a food-insecure household. SNAP data are developed by the Food Research & Action Center from American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-year estimates. Children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch data from County Health Rankings, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2020-2021 data.

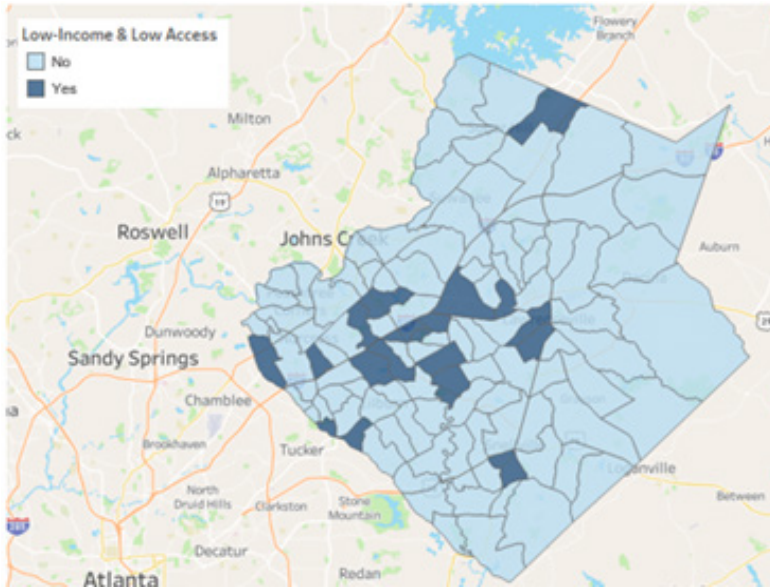
Another key indicator for identifying communities and neighborhoods with high needs is the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's periodic analysis of low-income and low-food store-access census tracts. Using the ERS Food Access Research Atlas, HMA identified 18 census tracts within Gwinnett County that are flagged for low-income and low-access (defined as at least one mile from a food store in urban areas and ten miles in rural areas) (9). These 18 census tracts are primarily clustered around the I-85 corridor in the Southwest part of the County as well as around Lawrenceville and Snellville, as depicted in the map at left (10).

Low-Income and Low-Access to Food Stores

By Census Tract

Measurement Period: 2019

Data Source: TBD



For additional nuance that quantitative data cannot provide, HMA used our extensive qualitative research to refine further and understand how food insecurity plays out in specific neighborhoods and across the County. More specifically, key stakeholders described persistently high levels of food insecurity throughout the County. The pandemic exposed the depth and breadth of need but has not receded. Recent increases in food prices have exacerbated the need, as have spikes in the cost of rent (which have the effect of reducing available income left over to purchase food).

Specific needs identified include:

Culturally specific foods

The need for culturally relevant foods for Gwinnett County's ethnically diverse population emerged as a key theme. Some organizations are providing culturally specific foods, but this is not a widespread practice throughout the County. It will be important that additional healthy food options be explored and dispersed into cultural communities to support health, well-being, and diversity.

Meat, dairy, and other foods that require refrigeration

These types of foods can be more challenging to source and distribute and were described as unmet needs.

High-quality foods with variety

Concerns about food quality at senior centers, in schools, and through the summer meals program were raised using United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines.

9. Food Access Research Atlas, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

10. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>

Barriers to accessing nutritious and culturally relevant foods include:

Transportation was frequently cited as a barrier.

- Public transportation within the County is limited; not only are some areas of the County without any public transportation, but even in the areas with public transportation, it may not be in close proximity to the community member's place of residence or the food distribution site, and carrying quantities of food (e.g., a weekly food box) for the time and distance needed to reach public transportation is not feasible.
- There is a need for food delivery or, at a minimum, more coordinated free or subsidized ride-sharing or private transportation (e.g., church vans) to allow for regular food delivery for seniors, home-bound individuals, or people without access to other forms of transportation.

Language barriers

- Communication around how and when to access food is often unavailable in all relevant languages within Gwinnett County.
- Fear, particularly among immigrant communities and specifically the undocumented population, is a barrier to access, and stigma associated with asking for help is sometimes a barrier across all populations.

Unstable or substandard housing conditions barrier.

- For example, people living in extended-stay hotels cannot store and prepare fresh and nutritious foods. It will be critical for open communication through sources like OneStop 4 Help, who work with the Department of Family and Children Services, to be educated and well-versed in SNAP and Food Application benefits to prevent food security and other food waiver issues.

Fragmentation within the food services ecosystem barrier

- Because they may not be able to locate clear information about their available options and may not know how or when to access the food they need. Hours of operations, days of significant distribution, and opportunities for transportation may also not be synchronized or developed in ways that take community needs into account and may cause community residents to miss out.

In addition, the community survey conducted by HMA showed that service providers identified food as the service for which community residents were coming to them the most, reflecting high ongoing need for food.

HOUSING STABILITY

Current Housing System

Gwinnett County is part of the Georgia Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) and does not have its own CoC. However, HomeFirst Gwinnett was established to design, implement, and administer the coordinated entry system for the County. HomeFirst Gwinnett is a combined effort of United Way, Primerica, and Gwinnett County. HomeFirst Gwinnett provides assessment and either direct or referral services for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. HomeFirst Gwinnett maintains a bed inventory system with up-to-date information on the availability of beds and services. According to HomeFirst Gwinnett's 2023 budget request to the County, since its formation in 2018, more than 14,000 people have been served by HomeFirst Gwinnett through direct services and referrals to community partners for emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing services. In 2021, HomeFirst Gwinnett provided emergency shelter services for 4,968 residents and eviction prevention services for 1,649 residents.

In 2022, the County created a new division – the Housing and Community Development Division – within the Department of Planning and Development, coming out of the Housing Study's recommendations. The division is responsible for administering grant funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through HOME, Community Development Block Grant, and other programs.

The Housing Authority of Gwinnett County was established in 1982 but does not operate as a traditional housing authority. According to the 2022 Housing Study, "the Authority's primary mission is to enhance the supply of affordable housing in Gwinnett County by financing private developers who wish to build affordable, multifamily housing. The Authority does this by issuing tax-exempt non-recourse bonds that the Board of Commissioners must approve. In exchange for tax-exempt financing, the private developer agrees to restrict the property to be occupied by persons earning below the median income. Fees generated from these projects are used by the Housing Authority to issue grants to Gwinnett municipal housing authorities or affiliated nonprofits." Gwinnett County has four traditional municipal housing authorities: Lawrenceville, Buford, Norcross, and Sugar Hill. These housing authorities receive state and federal funding and operate properties within Gwinnett County.

Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Infrastructure

HomeFirst Gwinnett opened The Resting Spot in 2021 as the County's first homeless shelter. It's a 20-bed facility with two rooms for families and 1 room for single women, and it also has a mail room for residents without a reliable and secure way to receive mail. In addition, Rainbow Village operates a transitional housing shelter with five apartment buildings (30 families at a time). Habitat for Humanity works with residents for overcrowded, unhealthy, or inadequate housing with affordable, no-interest, no-profit mortgages. Gwinnett Housing Corporation works through three targeted programs: Pathway Market Program, Pathway Home Program, and Welcome Home Program to address supportive housing toward securing permanent housing, attaining affordable rental options, and homeownership with affordable homes to low to moderate-income residents and families. Salvation Army provides emergency and life-sustaining assistance with food, clothing, rent/mortgage, utilities, school supplies, and furniture to individuals and families facing a financial crisis. Family Promise established various emergency and shelter programs, including prevention and diversion with temporary hotel/motel, rental assistance, and landlord mediation. They also provide emergency shelter through rotational and static shelters, temporary apartments, and motel stays. Home of Hope offers a 3 to 12-month transitional living program for children and their moms experiencing homelessness. Additionally, Positive Impact offers transitional living environments for youth in need of supportive housing for homeless youth.

During the nonprofit community conversations, several participants expressed confusion about what was the actual shelter capacity in Gwinnett County. Given the shifts in bed capacity after the end of the public health emergency declaration there appeared to be lack of clarity on how many individual and family shelter beds there really were. Despite this ambiguity there was consensus across all participants that the current shelter capacity was insufficient.

Warming Stations

To fill gaps in the emergency shelter system and to assist residents who need temporary, overnight relief when temperatures reach 35 degrees and below, Gwinnett County established county-run warming stations in 2021. Warming stations are open from 6:00pm to 7:00am, allowing residents to “warm up, eat a meal, and get some rest.” Five warming stations are located at the Senior Center in Buford, Shorty Howell Park Activity Building in Duluth, Best Friend Park Gym in Norcross, Centerville Senior Center in Snellville, and the Senior Center in Lawrenceville. All are located near a bus line or microtransit route.

Assessing Housing Needs in Gwinnett County

Gwinnett County released a Comprehensive Housing Study in 2022 that identified access to and supply of affordable and workforce housing as the single biggest housing issue facing the County (11). Interviews conducted by the Housing Study team with community and nonprofit organizations also identified housing instability and homelessness as themes. The study presents a wide range of potential solutions that are grouped into seven categories: establish Gwinnett County housing goals and priorities; support and develop organizational infrastructure; review current zoning and land use regulations for potential housing-related amendments; leverage public land ownership and development priorities to promote affordable and workforce housing; expand housing affordability to improve access to housing for low- and moderate-income households; preserve existing lower-cost and affordable housing units; and sponsor and support housing stability.

The County began applying the Housing Study results to address housing concerns in the County and provide support for homeless and precariously housed populations in 2022. Community Services plays a critical role in supporting the County’s homeless and precariously housed population and in addressing the interaction of housing affordability, quality, and stability with other human services. The OneStop (through referral to HomeFirst Gwinnett) and warming stations are DoCS initiatives that are connected to housing needs and services in the community. To better understand the housing-related human services needs of Gwinnett County residents, HMA reviewed the Housing Study and the numerous housing indicators that it covered and, to avoid duplication, for the Human Services Needs Assessment, focused on the qualitative and quantitative indicators and insights that are most tightly connected with human services (e.g., overcrowding, unsafe or unstable housing conditions, homelessness) as compared to planning and development-oriented indicators.

During focus groups and Community Conversations facilitated by HMA, nonprofit and community stakeholders described housing stability, safety, and affordability as crisis-level issues in the County, with lack of affordability as an overall trend that has impacted the entire community, the housing and human services ecosystems, and specific populations and communities that are particularly vulnerable. Gwinnett County’s performance on the Severe Housing Problems indicator featured on Live Healthy Gwinnett’s Community Health Dashboard (12), an important indicator measuring the percentage of households with at least one of four housing problems including overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen, or lack of plumbing facilities, supports this sense of crisis: Gwinnett County performs in the bottom quartile of all counties in the United States and the second-worst quartile of all counties in Georgia. Gwinnett County has an indicator with 16.4 percent of households experiencing severe housing problems, as displayed in the table to the right.

According to the 2022 Comprehensive Housing Study, access to and supply of affordable and workforce housing is the single biggest housing issue facing the County:

- **The current housing market is delivering just 2.1% of demand for new housing units affordable to households earning ≤ \$50k.**
- **54% of Gwinnett’s jobs earn less than \$40k/yr. but only 3% of apartments rent for less than \$1k/month**

11. Other emerging themes included continuing growth, increased housing demand, limited housing choices, aging housing stock, and rising housing prices and affordability.

12. Source: County Health Rankings from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) “custom tabulations” of US. Census Bureau data

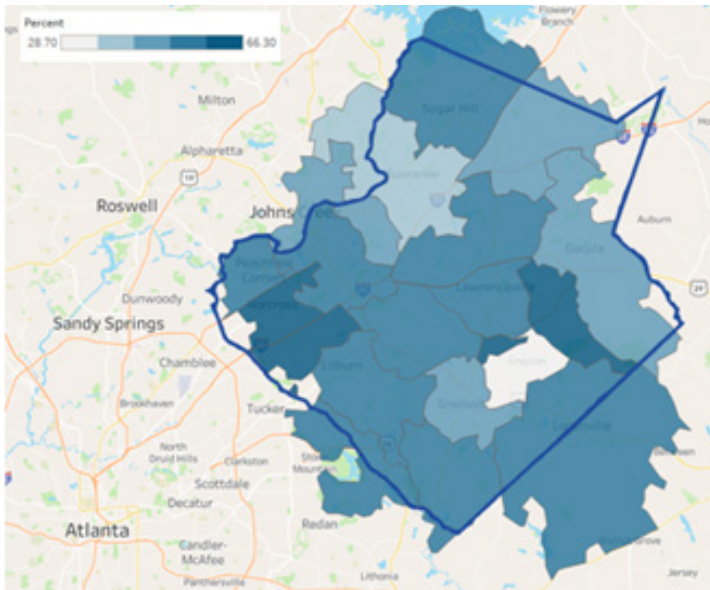
Severe Housing Problems: Gwinnett County as Compare to Georgia and the U.S.

Indicator	Gwinnett County	Georgia	United States
SEVERE HOUSING PROBLEMS	16.4%	15.5%	17.0%

While this combination indicator reveals substantial need at the county-wide level, additional measures of housing affordability and stability reveal wide variation among geographic areas and demographic groups within the County, with some communities experiencing extremely high levels of need.

The Housing Cost Burden in Gwinnett County

The high cost of housing relative to income can create a financial burden on households that may have a spillover effect on other human services needs by creating financial hardship and limiting the amount of money available for other basic necessities such as food, transportation, and health care. This cost burden is particularly acute for renters in Gwinnett County, but homeowners also face housing cost burdens.



Renters Spending +30% of Household Income on Rent

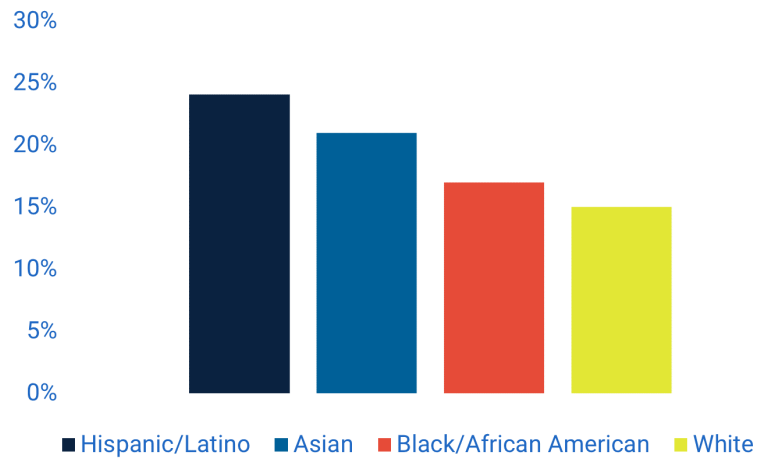
Measurement Period: 2017 – 2021

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year

County-wide, 55.8% of renters in Gwinnett County are spending 30% or more of household income on rent and utilities, which is an indicator in the worst quartile of counties in the United States as well as the worst quartile of counties in Georgia. In 16 of 19 zip codes in the County, at least 50% of renters are spending 30% or more of household income on rent and utilities. This figure is worsening over time, with the 5-year estimate from 2017-2021 more than five percentage points higher than the 2012-2016 5-year estimate of 50.6%. While this indicator reveals a high and growing percentage of cost-burdened renters throughout the County, there is also variation among communities, with roughly two-thirds (66.3%) of households in the 30045-zip code spending 30% or more of income on rent and utilities ranging down to 28.7% in the 30017-zip code, as depicted in the map above.

There are also disparities in the home renter expenditure to income ratio, which is the ratio between the average spending among households that spent on renter expenses and the median household income in the selected location, which provides more of a community-wide picture. This indicator is available both by location and by race and ethnicity, revealing disparities not only between zip codes but also among different demographic groups within the same zip code. For example, this indicator ranges from 26.8% in the 30093-zip code (where it is 29.3% for the Hispanic/Latino population) to 11.2% in the 30019-zip code. However, even in the 30019-zip code, this indicator is 20.9% for the Asian population and 15.8% for the Hispanic/Latino population. County-wide, the racial and ethnic disparities in this indicator are apparent, as displayed to the right.

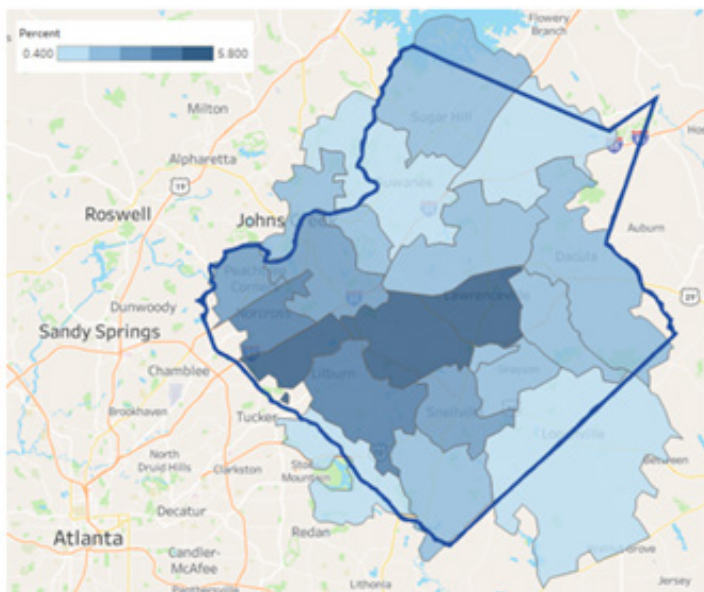
Home Renter Expenditure to Income Ratio, County-wide, by Race/Ethnicity



Many of the census tracts with the highest ratios are in the Southwest part of the County around the cities of Lawrenceville (Norcross) and Duluth (Pleasant Hill), with the highest ratio of 30.6% in a census tract on the Dekalb County line. The ratio is 37.3% for the Hispanic/Latino population in this census tract.

Overcrowded housing is also a key indicator for lack of affordable housing options and poverty. County-wide, 2.9% of households are overcrowded, which is higher than the state (2.2%) but lower than the nation (3.4%). However, there is variation across communities within the County, with zip codes in the Norcross, Lilburn, and Lawrenceville areas having higher rates of overcrowding with the highest rate in the 30093-zip code of 5.8%. The lowest rate is in zip code 30519 (.4%). This variation is apparent in the map below.

While homeowner expenditure to income ratios in Gwinnett County are generally lower and feature less variation than renter expenditure to income ratios, there are a few census tracts in the Southwest portion of the County that are particularly high on this indicator. In the County, this indicator ranges from a high of 20.7% in a census tract on the Dekalb County line (where the ratio for the Hispanic/Latino population is 28.7%) to a low of 6.8%. At the zip code level, the range is from a high of 16.6% in the 30092-zip code to a low of 13.1% in the 30097-zip code.



Overcrowded House Holds by Zip Code

Measurement Period: 2017 – 2021

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year

Relationship Between Lack of Affordable Housing and Human Services Needs

During COVID, the County established Project RESET, Gwinnett County in partnership with the Gwinnett Magistrate Court, United Way of Greater Atlanta, and First Home Gwinnett. The purpose of Project RESET and Project RESET 2.0 was to provide rental, utility and internet service relief for eligible renter households who had become housing insecure because of the COVID 19 pandemic. It was an incredibly responsive and successful program to address the needs of vulnerable households during the pandemic.

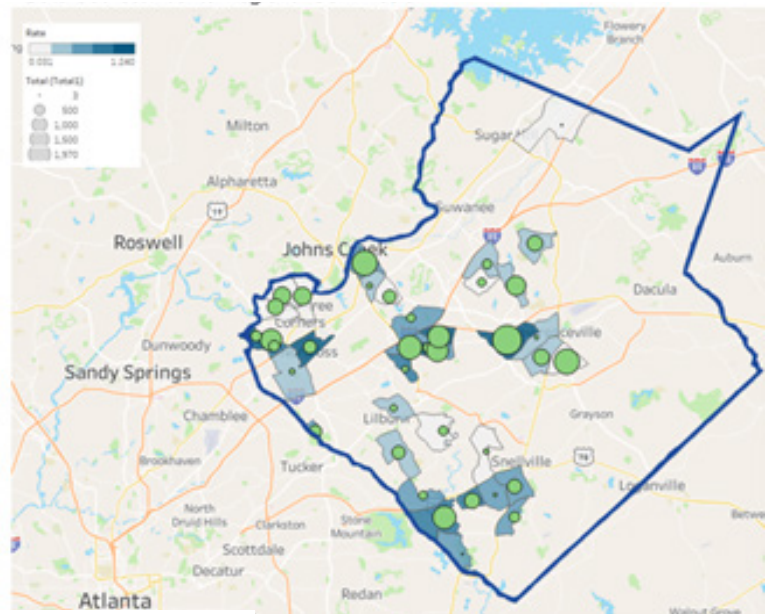
However, since the declaration of the end of the public health emergency, the lack of affordable housing stock for low- and moderate-income individuals and families further exacerbated by recent rental spikes and an abrupt end to emergency rental assistance (Project RESET) in November 2022 have resulted in an increase in instability of housing situations for vulnerable households. According to the Atlanta Regional Commission's Eviction Tracker, total eviction filings over the past three years for the entire County show that evictions during the CARES Act Moratorium and CDC Moratorium were substantially lower than the 2019 baseline. Evictions have been higher over the past year and have been higher than the 2019 baseline for most months over the past year. For example, in January 2023 there were 2,422 reported eviction filings (there were 2,378 filings in 2019). Evictions by census tract show higher numbers of evictions around the Southwest part of the County and along the I-85 corridor, although evictions were not limited to these areas.

Eviction Filing Rate

By Census Tract

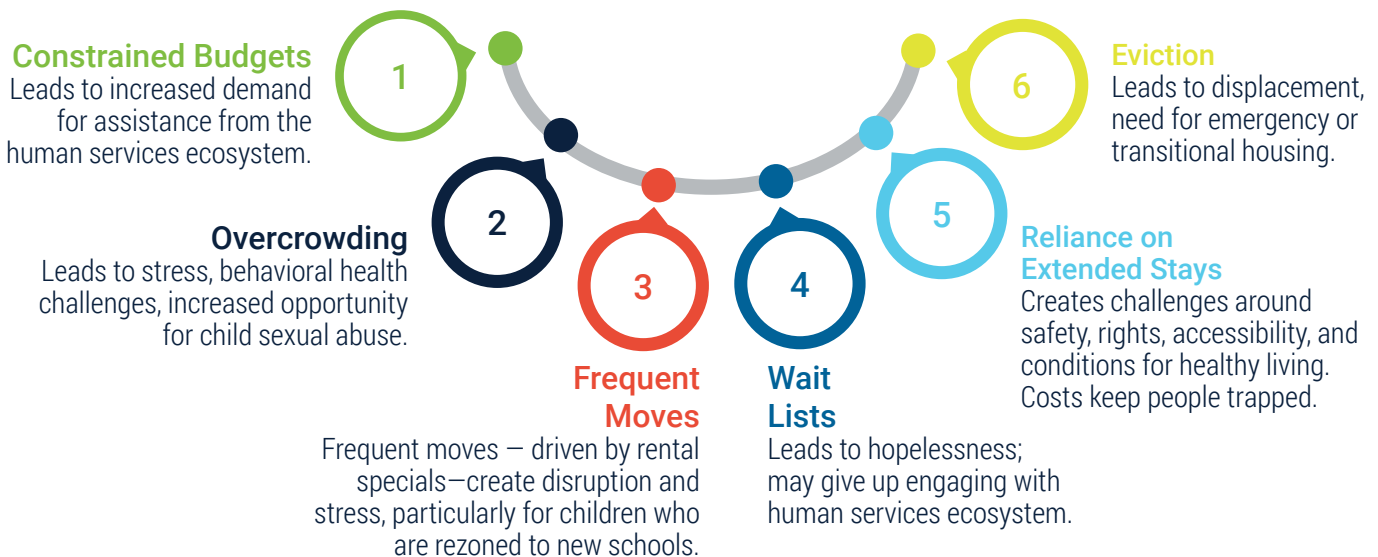
Measurement Period: 2019 – 2023

Data Source: Atlanta Regional Commission



Human Services Needs and Challenges Stemming from Unstable Housing Situations

These unstable housing situations create additional human services needs and challenges.



The following themes were identified through interviews, focus groups, and the community survey:

- **Severely constrained household budgets** (e.g., little money left over for food transportation, utilities, and other necessities after paying rent) to meet other needs and increased demand for food, utility, and other assistance from the human services ecosystem.
- **Overcrowding in rental homes or apartments with multiple families living together** can create stress for children and families. Human services organizations described seeing a rise in child sexual abuse and behavioral health needs (when many families are living together in close quarters, there may be more opportunity for exploitation).
- **Frequent moves create learning disruption and stress for children.** Nonprofit and school system staff described challenges with families relocating to new apartments in a different school zone in response to rental specials during the school year.
- **Long waiting lists for subsidized housing.** People may give up or feel hopeless when waiting lists are long and referrals for affordable housing don't yield results because there is little to no affordable housing available.
- **Reliance on extended stay hotels.** Extended stay hotels have become de facto emergency, transitional, and in some cases even semi-permanent housing for community members who cannot afford rent or who face other barriers to entering the rental market (security deposit, credit check, demonstrating sufficient income, etc.) as there are no barriers to entry and rent is typically paid weekly, even though the total amount paid monthly may not be meaningfully different than that of a genuine rental unit. Hotels are not intended to be used this way and neither the conditions nor the oversight meet the standards of rental housing. This includes:
 - **Safety concerns** about crime, as well as specific safety concerns include potential situations where sex offenders could live in the same building as trafficking victims, who may be temporarily housed in extended stay hotels, or children.
 - **Inability to properly store and prepare nutritious foods** leads to over reliance on unhealthy fast food/ prepared food.
 - **Lack of services and conditions needed for daily living** such as laundry, mail, and storage can also further strain families.
 - **School buses may or may not come to extended stay hotels** as they are not official residences.
 - **Lack of full tenant rights** or recourse leads to additional vulnerability and concern about immediate eviction; weekly rates and a high daily rate that make it difficult to build savings.
 - **High costs** of extended stay hotels are unsustainable for nonprofits and faith-based organizations providing housing assistance (13).
- **Eviction:** Eviction can lead to displacement and the need for emergency or transitional housing; because the supply for emergency and transitional housing is severely constrained in Gwinnett County, there is an over reliance on extended stay hotels. Some who are evicted also may become homeless, placing strain on the extremely limited shelter and transitional housing supports available in the County and leaving some with nowhere to go.

A 2019 Live Norcross study found that 30% of extended stay hotels in Gwinnett County were in Norcross zip codes and that nine of the 14 extended stay hotels within the Norcross city limits were primarily residential facilities, accounting for 1,249 rooms.

Nonprofit and community stakeholders also identified increasing homelessness as a growing challenge in the County and described the current shelter system as insufficiently robust to meaningfully meet the need for emergency and transitional housing in the County. There was also an acknowledgment that various populations may experience homelessness differently and may have different needs. For example, there are no shelters specifically for men in Gwinnett County, and the needs of homeless youth may be very different than those of seniors. Nonprofit organizations active in supporting precariously housed or unhoused individuals and families also expressed a need for more coordination and information sharing between organizations helping people who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. They also expressed a need for additional emergency shelter and transitional housing that is safe, secure, and up to standard. Because of the complexity of developing this (policy, land use, zoning, etc.) type of housing, nonprofit organizations felt as though they couldn't do it on their own and would welcome leadership from the County.

13. Allen et al, *When Extended Stay Becomes Home, Live Norcross, May 2019*, <https://gwinnetthousing.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/extended-stay-survey-report-052019.pdf>

While the official “Point-In-Time Count” of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night is 269 (231 sheltered homeless and 38 unsheltered homeless), the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is intended to provide an unduplicated count of a community’s homeless population that is sheltered (e.g. served by a non-profit organization or shelter that was able to capture their information) has identified substantially larger numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs estimates, based on HMIS data, that the number of people becoming homeless in Gwinnett County per year is 745. During qualitative interviews and focus groups, human services providers in the County shared estimates as high as 10,000 people who may be in extremely unstable housing or unhoused (e.g., couch-surfing, temporary shelters, etc.) based on their experience serving this population.

In addition, access to safe, stable, and affordable housing was an important priority identified by community residents in the community-wide survey, with **5% of resident respondents said that they access housing services the most and 17% of resident respondents saying that they are not able to get housing support.** Housing for residents with disabilities, support with unsafe housing, utility costs/bills all came up as specific services that residents may be unable to access. When asked why they can’t get the services residents pointed to lack of affordable senior housing, locating affordable housing, limited resources for single mothers, wait lists/availability, inability to locate rent/support.

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Among service providers taking the community survey, 14% reported providing housing support the most and 16% said that housing services need to be made more available. Stakeholders described their housing services: transitional shelter, life skills, self-sufficiency support/counseling, homeless prevention and rapid rehousing, critical home repairs, rent/utility assistance, unhoused family support, employment services for unhoused residents, domestic violence shelters, affordable housing, emergency shelter, and affordable home ownership.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Current Health and Wellbeing Delivery System

Gwinnett County supports, through County funding and partnerships, entities focused on public health, prevention, behavioral health (encompassing mental health and substance use disorder), and basic safety net health care access. These entities include the Gwinnett, Newton, & Rockdale Health Department (GNR Public Health), which serves as the local health department; View Point Health which serves as the Community Service Board (CSB), which provides a full array of safety net services for severe and persistent mental illness, substance use disorder, and intellectual and developmental disability challenges; Gwinnett United In Drug Education, Inc. (GUIDE), which delivers programming, training, and resources to support substance use prevention and positive youth development; Live Healthy Gwinnett, Gwinnett's county-wide initiative under the Department of Community Services that supports active and healthy living through community education and programming; the Gwinnett Coalition which has several health and wellbeing programs and initiatives; Mosaic Georgia, which provides a range of victim services for sexual assault, human trafficking, and child abuse as well as community prevention and education services; Good Samaritan Health Center, a nonprofit safety-net clinic providing medical, dental, and pharmacy services for the uninsured and under-insured; the Hope Clinic, a non-profit safety net clinic providing primary care services to the uninsured, under-insured, and indigent; and UGA Extension Gwinnett provides through its Family and Consumer Sciences Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which offers various tools to help families cut food costs and provide healthy meals and snacks for the whole family. Participants learn new recipes and how to improve nutritional choices and habits through three different forms of interactive educational sessions: Food Talk, Hablemos de Comida, and Food Talk Teen.

Gwinnett County also engages with the major health systems (Kaiser, Northside and Piedmont) in Gwinnett County in numerous ways, particularly around public health, and community health. There are also Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) operating within Gwinnett County that the County does not directly support but that play an important role in serving low-income and uninsured patients.

Assessing Health and Wellbeing Needs in Gwinnett County

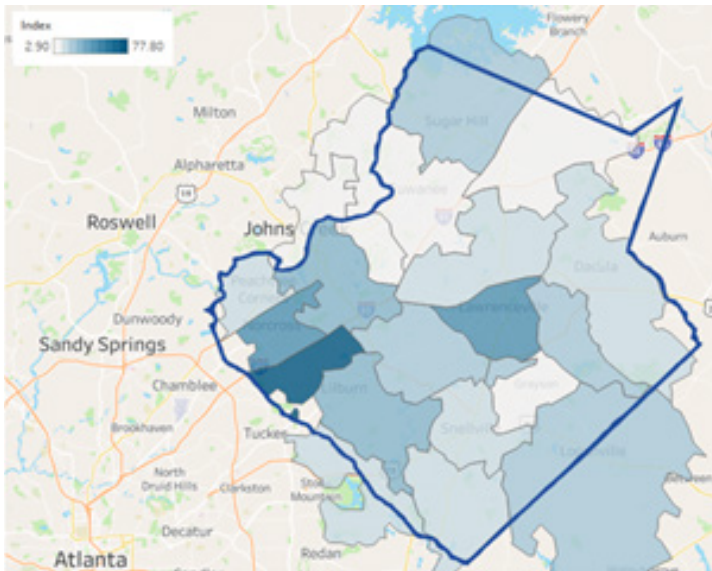
Gwinnett County is known for its quality of life and focus on building a healthy community, including its extensive system of parks and recreational facilities, proximity to Atlanta and world-class health care providers, and exceptional public health and behavioral health entities providing community health and safety net services. Among Georgia counties, Gwinnett ranks high (in the first quartile of the 2023 County Health Rankings for Georgia) among Georgia's 159 counties for quality of life (#8), health factors (#8), and health outcomes (#6). There are, however, communities within Gwinnett County where numerous barriers to accessing health and behavioral health services translate to unmet need for services and limit the ability of individuals, families, and communities to obtain their optimal level of health and wellbeing. These disparities are apparent in the Health Equity Index, a measure of socioeconomic need correlated with poor health outcomes, maintained on the Live Healthy Gwinnett dashboard. Zip codes around Norcross and Lawrenceville show the highest relative need, as depicted on the map below.

2023 Health Equity Index

By zip code

Measurement Period: 2023

Data Source: Conduent Health Communities Institute



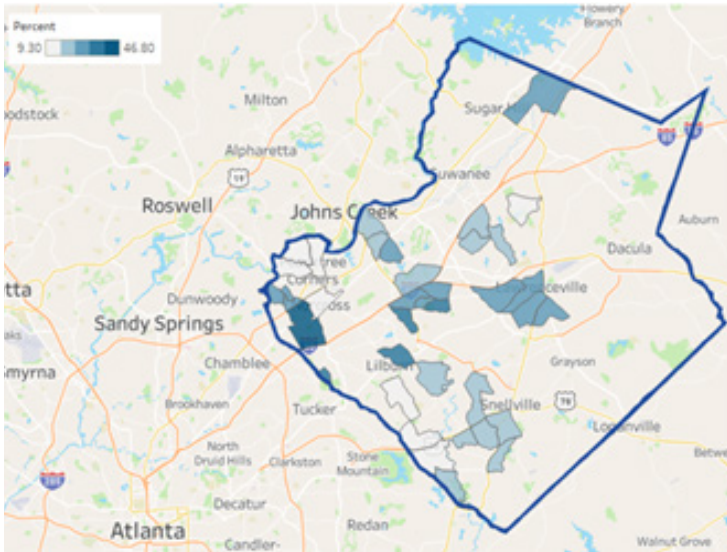
Health Insurance and Access to Care

Gwinnett County's high uninsured rate (16 percent), as well as other barriers to accessing basic health care services, emerged as a concern during interviews and focus groups. Despite Gwinnett County's high rankings on numerous health-related indicators, according to data compiled for the 2023 County Health Rankings, the County's uninsured rates are higher than the state, which is of particular concern because Georgia has the third highest uninsured rate in the nation, rendering the County's uninsured rates roughly on par with those of the state with the highest uninsured rate in the entire nation (15).

Uninsured Rates for Gwinnett County as compared to Georgia and the United States (14)

Indicator	Gwinnett County	Georgia	United States
OVERALL UNINSURED RATE	16%	15%	10%
PERCENT OF ADULTS (UNDER AGE 65) WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE	19%	18%	12%
PERCENT OF CHILDREN WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE	9%	7%	5%

While the overall uninsurance rates in Gwinnett County are high, there is substantial variation among communities within the County, according to census-tract level data for adults without health insurance featured on Live Healthy Gwinnett's Community Health Dashboard. Several census tracts in the Southwest part of the County, particularly around Norcross and the I-85 corridor, feature uninsured rates for adults of more than 30 percent, with the highest rate being 46.8 percent, as depicted in the map below.



Adults without Health Insurance

By Census Tract

Measurement Period: 2020

Data Source: Conduent Health Communities Institute

14. Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2023. www.countyhealthrankings.org.

15. Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-population/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Uninsured%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

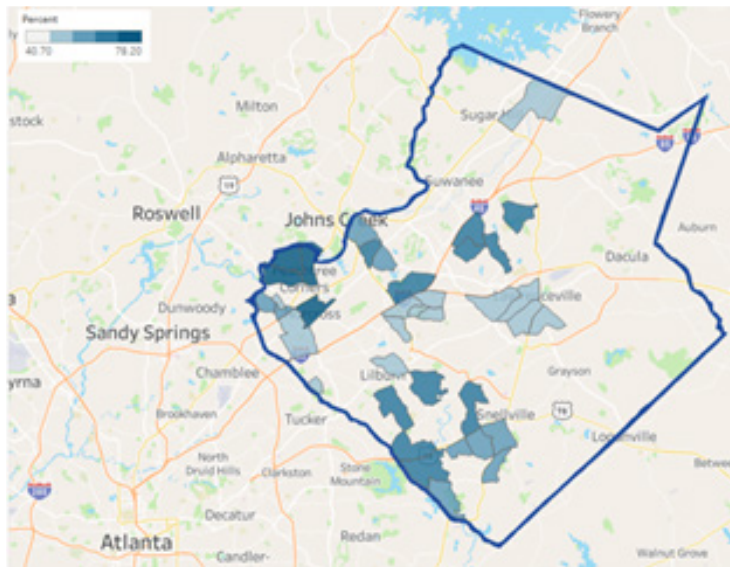
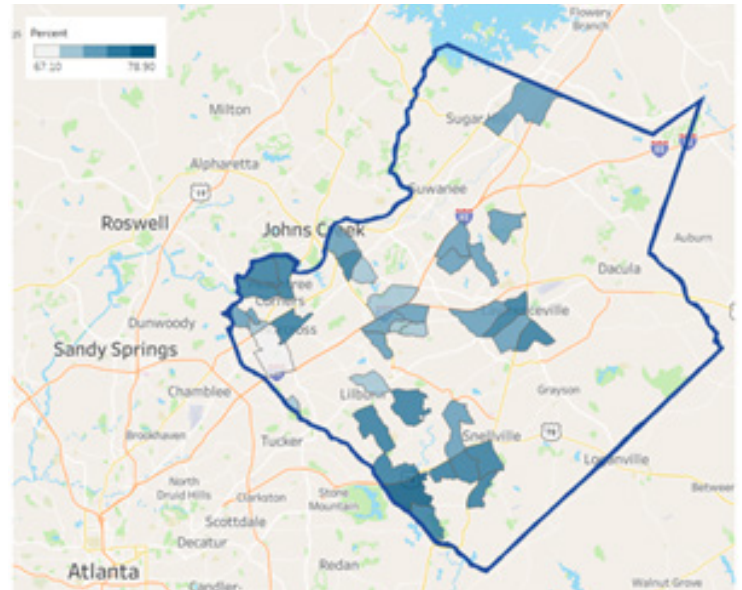
Similar geographic variations are apparent in access to routine health care and access to dental care among adults, revealing severe challenges with access to essential health care services in particular communities, as depicted in the maps below.

Adults Who Have Had a Routine Check-up

By Census Tract

Measurement Period: 2020

Data Source: Conduent Health Communities Institute



Adults Who Have Visited a Dentist

By Census Tract

Measurement Period: 2020

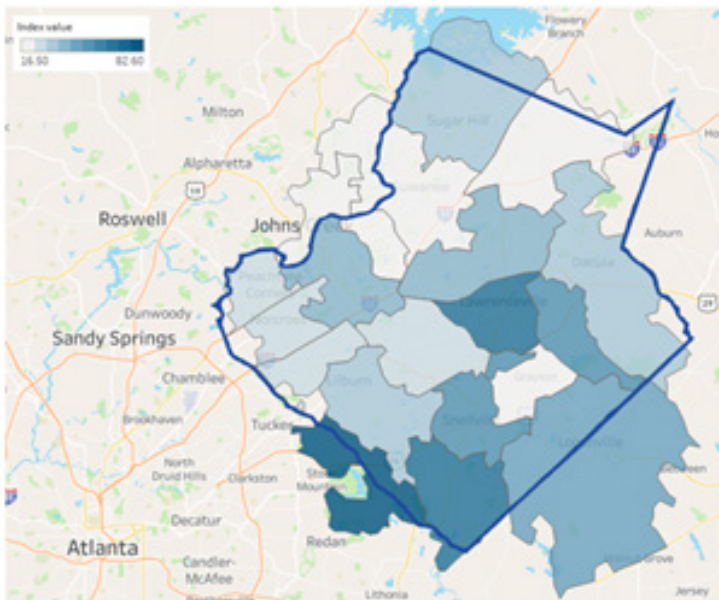
Data Source: Conduent Health Communities Institute

Behavioral Health Needs

Mental health and substance use are a growing concern in Gwinnett County, particularly among youth who are still processing trauma, loss, and disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic but also for Gwinnett residents of all ages, including adults, families, and seniors. Gwinnett County Public Schools, View Point Health, GUIDE, and other community-based organizations and providers are active in behavioral health within the county including substance use prevention, mental well-being, and mental health services.

The Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners identified continuing to focus on mental health as one of its themes under the Addressing Key Service Gaps in Basic Human Needs topic that falls within the Safe, Livable, and Healthy Community priority in the Board of Commissioners' Strategic Priorities for 2022. This includes deliverables associated with the recent implementation of a co-responder model where the police, fire, and EMS (public safety) departments partner closely with View Point Health and the Police Department embed behavioral health professionals with police department crisis response teams. In addition, GUIDE, Inc. and Live Healthy Gwinnett offer to the community and all Gwinnett County staff, including public safety, ongoing public safety suicide training using Question.Persuade.Refer. (QPR). The County is also expanding its OneStop footprint through the expansion of the OneStop Centerville facility which will support the establishment of Public Health, Head Start, OneStop and View Point Health direct services in the southern region of the County.

Live Healthy Gwinnett's Community Health Dashboard includes the Mental Health Index, which provides an indicator of relative need within the County, where high index values indicate the areas with the highest socioeconomic and health needs correlated with self-reported poor mental health. This indicator helps provide a picture of where mental health needs in the County may be particularly elevated. Census tracts with higher relative need are somewhat scattered around the County, with tracts near Lawrenceville, Snellville, Centerville, and Duluth showing high need, although in some cases these census tracts about other tracts with relatively low need, as depicted in the map below.



2023 Mental Health Index

By zip code

Measurement Period: 2023

Data Source: Conduent Health Communities Institute

Unmet Needs

To better understand the health and wellbeing needs of community residents throughout Gwinnett County, HMA conducted interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders engaged in delivering public health, behavioral health, and safety net health care services within the County and obtained input from nonprofit community-based organizations and community residents through four Community Conversations and a community survey. These key stakeholders and community members described an acute and rising need for behavioral health services, health care access barriers, and a severe lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate health services, particularly in mental health. Themes from this qualitative research include:

- **Health Care Access Barriers**
 - High rates of uninsurance.
 - Lack of transportation was consistently cited as a major barrier for accessing health care services, including for uninsured residents who access services at the health care clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in the County and for seniors who have a variety of regular appointments with both primary care and specialist physicians and facilities.
 - Need for access to adult dental care.
 - Cultural barriers impede effective navigation of the health care system, including differences in the design of the U.S. health system as compared to that of other countries and different norms and expectations around when and how to access preventive care.
 - 911 is over utilized/not used appropriately.
- **Acute and Rising Need for Mental and Behavioral Health Services**
 - School officials noted high levels of anxiety and stress among school-age youth and observed behaviors including truancy, chronic absence, emotional outbursts, aggression, defiance, smoking/vaping, and sexual activity in the school setting.
 - Among various stakeholders in the community and in the school setting, it was observed that youth are taking on more adult responsibilities and roles and taking on more adult stress (e.g., when parents are working all of the time adolescents are taking on adult roles for which they are not equipped).
 - After-effects from the COVID-19 pandemic including trauma, loss, and disruption are present
 - Observed increases in suicidal ideation among youth.
- **Severe Need for Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Mental and Behavioral Health Services**
 - Insufficient capacity of Spanish-speaking counselors and therapists.
 - Need for specialized training and skills among the behavioral health workforce to better understand the diverse population they are serving.
- **Service Gaps Around Crisis Mental and Behavioral Health Services**
 - No Behavioral Health Crisis Center/Crisis Stabilization Unit.
 - No Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities.
 - Insufficient transitional housing.
- **Public Health Threats: HIV incidence rising, opioid and fentanyl use**

Health and wellbeing, particularly health care, maternal health and behavioral health (encompassing both mental health and substance use), were also identified by residents and service providers as critical needs. Nineteen percent of County residents said that they accessed health care or behavioral health services the most, and 21 percent reported being unable to access these services. Among service providers, 23 percent said that they provided this service the most and 26 percent said that these services need to be made more available. Related services that residents are unable to access include vaccinations, dental care, prescription drug coverage, and mental and behavioral health services. Reasons cited for not being able to access health and wellbeing services include not knowing how to access them, not qualifying for services, and transportation barriers.

It should also be noted that, because youth-serving organizations and schools are critical to identifying and addressing youth behavioral health needs, the section on Youth, Literacy, and Learning also incorporates some behavioral health information.

YOUTH, LITERACY, AND LEARNING

Current Youth, Literacy, and Learning Services Delivery System

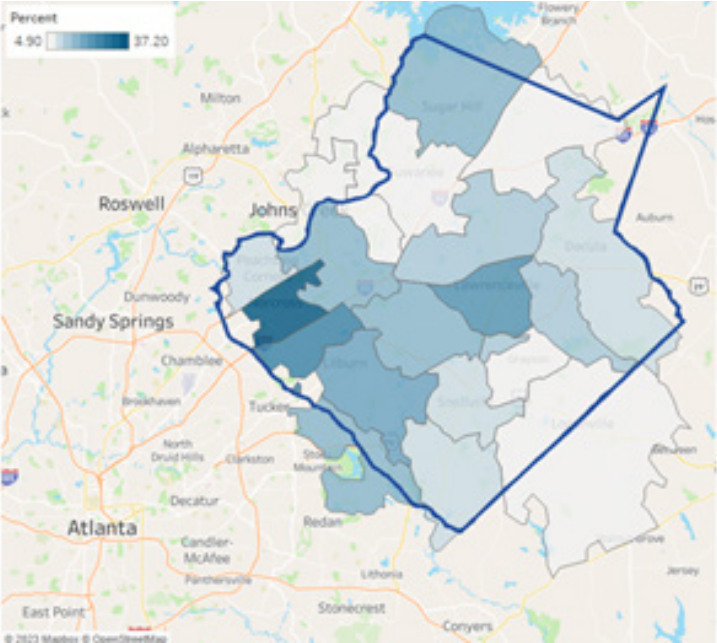
Gwinnett County and its subsidy partners, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Buford City Schools, and an array of community-based organizations deliver a wide range of services to Gwinnett County youth. As Gwinnett County continues to grow and diversify, the human service needs of youth in communities throughout the County are changing rapidly. Of note is the number of English language learners in Gwinnett County. Overall, in Gwinnett County, more than a third of the population over five years old lives in a household where a language other than English is spoken at home, and this indicator ranges from a high of 63.1% in zip code 30093 to 12.3% in zip code 30052. Additional indicators pertinent for child wellbeing and youth development, as compared to Georgia and the United States, are presented below.

Key Youth, Literacy, and Learning Indicators, Gwinnett County as compared to Georgia and the U.S. (16)

Indicator	Gwinnett County	Georgia	United States
POPULATION AGE 5+ WITH LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME	35.4%	14.3%	21.7%
CHILDREN LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL	14.6%	19.6%	17.0%
CHILDREN AGES 3-4 NOT ATTENDING PRESCHOOL	54.2%	50.9%	N/A
YOUTH AGES 16-19 NOT IN SCHOOL OR WORKING	6.6%	7.8%	6.9%

16. Children Ages 3-4 Not Attending Preschool data accessed through KidsCount Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation. All other data accessed through the Live Healthy Gwinnett Dashboard.

Childhood poverty can impact child development and is associated with negative outcomes related to child health and wellbeing, educational attainment, and behavioral and emotional problems. While Gwinnett County has childhood poverty rates that are lower than Georgia and the nation, there are communities with extremely high child poverty rates, as depicted in the map below.



Children Living Below Poverty Level

*By zip code
Measurement Period: 2017 – 2021
Data Source: American Community Survey 5-Year*

Current Ecosystem for Youth, Literacy, and Learning

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) and Buford City Schools comprise the public school system in Gwinnett County. GCPS is the largest school system in the state, and one of the largest in the nation, with more than 180,000 students. GCPS has adopted the Community Schools model with a mission that “the community schools for each cluster will work collaboratively with students and families, connecting them with community partners who can provide the educational and recreational programs, support, and services they need to be successful.” The goal is to tailor the model for each cluster and to open community school models in each of the clusters within the next five years. This work is underway. While recommendations directed toward the public school districts are outside the scope of this needs assessment, discussions with key informants indicated a clear need for vetting of, coordination between, navigation for students and families of, and communication regarding the numerous community-based organizations and service providers that operate in the community and serve students and their families.

The County infrastructure to support education and youth also includes:

- Building Brains Anywhere, A Shirley Carner-Miller Early Learning Initiative is an essential early childhood program implemented across select elementary school sites in Gwinnett County School Districts and mobile throughout the community. In addition to the community early learning collective, Building Babies Brains, the impact of these initiatives can be seen as a 4% improvement in children entering Kindergarten Ready to Learn.
- Gwinnett United in Drug Education, Inc. (GUIDE), which is a joint effort between the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners and Board of Education with a mission to improve community conditions by utilizing collaborations, promoting positive youth development, delivering specialized training and resources, and preventing substance use and abuse.
- The Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services Department, which provides legal representation for children to advocate for their legal rights and best interests, volunteer oversight for children in foster care, and supervision for youthful offenders utilizing the least restrictive interventions that do not compromise public safety.
- The Gwinnett County office of the Division of Family & Children Services works on child abuse, neglect, foster care, and Medicaid/SNAP enrollment. The County provides a subsidy to DFCS (it is a “Subsidy Partner”).
- Positive Impact and various nonprofits are collaboratively working on youth-supportive housing. They are creating more initiatives to address homelessness among youth collectively. These programs depend on a combination of factors, including community involvement, sustained funding, and a holistic approach to addressing the root causes of youth homelessness. However, resources are limited and will need to be augmented as the youth population increases in Gwinnett County.
- The UGA Extension Gwinnett offers a 4-H Youth Development program. The mission of Georgia 4-H is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills, and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. This mission is accomplished through “hands on” learning experiences focused on agricultural and environmental issues, agriculture awareness, leadership, communication skills, foods and nutrition, health, energy conservation, and citizenship.
- Gwinnett County’s Police Department, Fire and Emergency Services, and Parks and Recreation offer/provide youth programming and services. Parks and Recreation operates summer camps and other recreational activities throughout the County that support positive youth development and youth engagement.
- Career Starts Here Youth Development Program is a comprehensive program that enhances leadership and team building skills, imparts financial literacy, career exploration, and offers the opportunity for youth to gain valuable workplace experience while exploring career and workforce opportunities in Gwinnett County Government.
- Juvenile Court exercises jurisdiction in cases involving delinquent, unruly, dependent, and runaway offenses under the age of 18. Juvenile Court has concurrent jurisdiction with the Superior courts involving capital offenses, custody, child support cases, and termination of parental rights.
- Gwinnett Family Treatment Court is aimed at positively addressing substance abuse issues of parents to ensure the safety and well-being of children.
- Gwinnett County Public School’s Community-based Mentoring Program is an opportunity to pair caring adults with students in grades 4 through 12 to provide guidance, encouragement, and support to help them become successful young adults, both in and out of school.
- Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) serves the community with programs focused on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.
- The Lawrenceville Boys & Girls Club works with hundreds of kids and teens each year to provide an environment where all youth feel safe and secure to dream, discover, and develop.
- Corners Outreach provides a several programs which serve to equip under-served students of color through educational development and economic opportunities.
- Center for Pan-Asian Community Services promote self-sufficiency and equity for immigrants, refugees, and the underprivileged through comprehensive health and social services, capacity building, and advocacy.



Human Services Needs Related to Youth, Literacy, and Learning

Nonprofit, community, and school system stakeholders described needs, gaps, challenges, and barriers facing youth in Gwinnett County, including:

- High-risk behaviors create negative impact on literacy, poverty, mental and behavioral health. Rising unmet need for and barriers to accessing behavioral health services among youth, including:
 - Need for services resulting from exposure to trauma, including disruption and loss from the COVID-19 pandemic, community violence, and child sexual abuse.
 - High levels of stress and anxiety, in part from shouldering adult responsibilities and stressors due to economic pressures facing families.
 - Behavioral health needs manifesting in emotional outbursts, defiance, and aggression in the school setting.
 - Observed increase in suicidal ideation.
 - Need for culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services, notably a severe lack of Spanish speaking therapists, counselors, and psychiatrists.
 - Need for family therapy services and parenting skills/support for families in survival mode.
 - Need for additional counselors in the schools; Georgia APEX program/View Point provide some behavioral health services, but more services needed. The Georgia Apex Program (Apex), funded by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), strives to build capacity, and increase access to mental health services for school-aged youth, Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade, throughout the state.
 - Stigma and lack of transportation were both cited as barriers.
 - Need for an organized campaign and communications strategy to destigmatize mental health among youth.
 - Insufficient coordination, navigation, and communication regarding available after-school, enrichment, summer, and youth development programming, mentoring, and tutoring.
 - There are numerous programs and nonprofit organizations providing services to school-age children but there isn't an overarching organization that provides a backbone/framework to ensure there isn't duplication of services.
 - Adopting the Community Schools model (the pillars of which include integrated student support, expanded learning time opportunities, active family and community engagement, and shared leadership and practices) presents an opportunity to increase the interconnectedness and coordination of various types of programming for students, but there is still work to be done to develop the infrastructure for this to occur.
 - More intentionality needed to reach and engage parents, particularly those who may primarily speak a language other than English and who may be working multiple jobs.
 - Continued need for positive and high-quality youth programming that will prevent youth from gang-related involvement, drugs, open violence, or other risky behaviors.

- Ongoing need for quality, affordable childcare and early learning opportunities that support kindergarten readiness.
 - Building Brains Anywhere, A Shirley Carver Miller Learning Initiative, is a county-wide, early learning brainchild of Gwinnett County. The initiative aims to serve children, parents, and care givers by providing safe, fun, and engaging early learning opportunities for children. is doing important work regarding outreach, promoting kindergarten readiness, and connection with resources – need for this type of work to continue.
 - 49% (17) of students were coming under-prepared for kindergarten – piloting Pre-K programs to fill the gap and the Building Babies Brains but there is still a need/gap for Pre-K of about 3,000 “seats” .
 - Gwinnett County Schools are offering a variety of Early Learning initiatives within the district and limited numbers of free Pre-K slots to support low income students and families with high quality early education to support the goal of increasing the percentage of children entering Kindergarten Ready to Learn.
 - Barriers include poorly staffed childcare centers; high cost of programs and limited offerings; children experiencing housing instability; English language learners (children may not be strong in either language); and transportation for childcare and Pre-K.
- Need for better and more supports for English language learners.
 - A small percentage of children in the school system who are English language learners “graduate” to regular classes.
 - Several community nonprofits provide tutoring and mentoring for English language learners, but not all youth who would benefit from these services are aware of or able to access them.
- Other human services needs and gaps impact youth and families:
 - Housing instability impacts youth mental health and can disrupt learning and the structures and supports that surround learning (after school youth programming, athletics, tutoring, mentoring, etc.).
 - Food insecurity impacts the ability of children to learn and thrive; the school system provides universal free breakfast, free/reduced lunch, weekly food bags; partnerships with co-ops/food banks; and partnerships with community programs to assist in the summer. There is a need for continued innovation and de-stigmatization in this space. In addition, Gwinnett County powers a summer initiative to meet the challenge of food security through the American Rescue Plan Act supplemented summer meals program, where no family is turned away.
 - Need for school nurses and more coordination with health care providers/systems/GNR Public Health to facilitate access to preventive health care services; relatively high uninsured population in the County including for children impacts access to care (*possible opportunity if Governor Kemp signs budgetary language to eliminate the 5-year bar for pregnant women and children*).
- Major barriers cited include:
 - Fragmentation, lack of coordination among service providers, and a school-by-school approach where individual school principals make decisions regarding nonprofits that can offer programming at the school leads to a large and possibly unwieldy number of organizations providing services and limits the ability to meaningfully provide navigation supports to youth and their families.
 - Transportation is a barrier for certain enrichment and athletic opportunities, as well as for childcare and early learning opportunities.
 - Cultural and linguistically appropriate approaches are needed. According to key informants, there are 98 languages spoken in GCPS and approximately 25% of GCPS students are English language learners.

Youth programming and education also emerged as an area of importance in the community survey. Among community residents responding to the survey, 7 percent selected youth programming/education as the County services they accessed the most, and 5 percent selected youth programming/education as services they are not able to access. Among human services providers responding to the survey, 11.65 percent serve young children and 13.66 percent serve adolescents. For 9.61 percent of human services providers completing the survey, youth programming/education was the service for which community members come to them the most, and 5 percent of providers selected youth programming/education as a service that needs to be made more available and accessible for County residents.



CROSS-CUTTING BARRIERS TO ACCESS

As part of HMA's Needs Assessment research, we probed barriers to accessing needed human services during interviews, focus groups, community conversations, and through the community survey.

Transportation

Nonprofit and community stakeholders consistently named transportation as one of the main barriers that community residents faced in accessing health and human services in the County. Inadequate transportation impacts many aspects of residents' lives, including their ability to access basic services needed for themselves and their families. Themes identified through interviews, focus groups, and community conversations include:

- Lack of reliable, consistent, and affordable transportation for residents to meaningfully access health and human services in the County.
 - Transportation was described as a major barrier to accessing various essential services including food, medical appointments, behavioral health services, childcare and early learning opportunities, and basic services for seniors.
- Youth cannot fully participate in all available after-school enrichment, athletic opportunities, and other activities that may positively impact their development due to transportation barriers.
 - In addition to enhanced transportation services, better coordination with the school system and service providers around transportation services is needed.
- The public transportation system in the County has too many gaps and there are not adequate alternative solutions.
 - Ride-sharing services, taxis, and other services are sometimes used, but can be expensive.
 - Bus service is only sometimes realistic when accessing services, given the lack of consistent connectors and transit transfers. Often, areas of the County are sectioned in pockets of transportation accessibility, and others experience a transit desert with limited access due to a transit area gap.
- Many service providers are exploring individual solutions, some of which are innovative, and others may carry risk. Some of these ideas may be scalable but this requires leadership, coordination, funding, and oversight from the County.
 - Examples include procuring vans and hiring/training residents for food delivery, partnering with delivery services, working through local churches who have vans, etc.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Services

Nonprofit and community stakeholders described numerous cultural and linguistic barriers to accessing services in the community. Themes identified through interviews, focus groups, and community conversations include:

- **There are several different cultures represented within Gwinnett County, and the differences between these various cultures and American culture are substantial and impact the ability of many communities to access the services they need.** Examples abound in health care, education, household finances, behavioral health, leadership, and civic engagement in the community, expected relationship with/level of trust in entities or individuals in positions of authority such as police officers, and other various services associated with daily life. These cultural differences can become barriers when there are not liaisons, navigators, or “cultural brokers” who understand both the cultural norms of the community resident who is seeking services and the systems, processes, and norms associated with human services in Gwinnett County, Georgia. Community-based organizations that emerge to help fill this role also struggle to build up sufficient capacity to perform these functions at scale because it can be challenging to raise funds and build an operational infrastructure while remaining embedded within a particular cultural community.
- There is a perception that the County is trying to put information out in different languages and work with organizations serving the diverse communities throughout Gwinnett, **but that there remains unconscious bias, a “check the box” mentality of engaging diverse communities, and a lack of a culturally responsive and appropriate County-wide engagement strategy.**
- **The need for culturally relevant food** in programming targeted to food insecure residents in the County was frequently discussed. Some organizations have partnerships with ethnic food companies or distributors, but sourcing culturally relevant foods at scale to support the diverse food needs of community residents remains a challenge.
- **Language access and lack of sufficient and appropriate translation/interpretation services serves as a barrier to accessing human services** in the County. While the County, school system, and larger organizations tend to disseminate information in the top languages spoken in the County, this can be more for the other languages spoken in the county — or those for whom literacy is a struggle — and challenging for smaller organizations. For example, costs associated with a language line or interpretation services for nonprofits that serve clients who speak various languages can inhibit their ability to maintain these services. There may also be instances when entities providing services fall back on asking family members to provide interpretation or reach out to culturally specific nonprofits at the last minute to ask for translation or dissemination of information in the community in a particular language. The County could play a role in developing a more cohesive, sustainable, and respectful approach that service providers could adopt, including protocols for front line workers who may be the first point of contact for community residents.
- **Language and cultural barriers in the health and behavioral health realms can be particularly challenging for community residents due to the personal and sensitive nature of these services.** For example, a lack of Spanish-speaking mental health providers in the County creates challenges for Spanish-speaking residents who need these services.