

Community Impact Report

2007



United Way
of Greater Duluth

A synopsis of research and insight
addressing our community's most pressing
health and human service needs.

Introduction

The purpose of this report.

In order to qualify and quantify the most pressing health and human service needs in our community, United Way of Greater Duluth (UWGD) completed a year-long, comprehensive assessment. This report is the voice of the community to be used by the community. It provides the foundation for the work of UWGD and its community partners as they move toward making an even greater, more measurable impact in our area.

The findings presented in this report will be used to determine:

- UWGD's funding and programmatic priorities
- Emerging issues which demand special attention
- Relevant community-wide goals
- The existing assets and potential strategies which will help fill gaps in health and human services
- Strategies for non-profit organizations as they seek to fulfill their missions
- Opportunities for partnership and collaboration

United Way of Greater Duluth is committed to being an effective partner in creating lasting positive community change.

Our Methodology

Under the guidance of United Way's Community Impact Committee, a Research Committee was formed with both UWGD staff and community volunteers from local businesses, non-profits, universities, philanthropic organizations, and government entities. The Committee conducted a thorough community assessment to document the region's most pressing health and human service needs. This assessment included:

Focus Groups

More than 250 participants offered input regarding ten issue areas consistent with UWGD funding priorities.

Key Informant Interviews

Focus group input identified areas needing additional information; 20 interviews with key health and human service providers were conducted by an independent consultant.

Household Phone Surveys

A statistically significant sample size of 410 local interviews were conducted regarding issues identified as important by the groups above.

Our Approach

The move to Community Impact.

Partnerships and results. They are at the core of United Way's approach to Community Impact and are the impetus behind a national trend in charitable giving.

Donors are increasingly asking for accountability and return on their investment—they seek proof that their donations are making a tangible difference in the community. The Community Impact approach addresses these concerns by maximizing limited resources to create high-impact results and system-wide change.

UWGD moves to this approach as an organization committed to results—an organization fostering community engagement, ongoing community assessment, proactive initiatives, and the ability to mobilize resources. This is a new direction—expanding its focus on fundraising to maximizing outcomes.

To make this shift, and to truly create positive change in our community, United Way of Greater Duluth's Community Impact approach will focus on four target areas of community need identified by the community assessment:

Child and Youth Development

*High-Impact Initiative:
Kindergarten School Readiness*

Basic Human Services

Economic Well-Being

Health, Wellness, and Healing

Common Themes

While the community assessment highlighted four target areas for UWGD's focus (Child and Youth Development; Basic Human Services; Economic Well-Being; and Health, Wellness, and Healing) the following themes emerged in all phases of the research, creating a consistent thread through the broad range of issues which were examined.

1. Build Strong Support Systems for Vulnerable Populations

The assessment findings demonstrate an essential need to build support systems for low-income individuals and families, seniors, young children, and disabled and mentally ill people—ensuring equal opportunity to achieve educational success, to access health and human services, and to attain economic well-being. Supports can range from providing parent education on the stages of healthy child development to ensuring reliable transportation options that assist people in accessing services and maintaining employment.

2. Improve Accessibility to Community Resources

It is imperative to promote equitable access to services, health care, education, and employment. "Accessibility" encompasses the provision of: affordable high-quality services for people of all abilities and backgrounds throughout all geographic areas in the region; information and referral to connect people with community resources; and adequate transportation options for people to utilize those services.

3. Promote Early Intervention

Research highlighted the necessity of screening, detection, and early intervention to improve health, education, and economic outcomes, as well as to reduce the costs that stem from undiagnosed and untreated problems.

4. Facilitate Collaboration, Coordination, and Connection among Community Sectors

The assessment results emphasized the importance of building partnerships and mobilizing resources among business, government, and non-profit sectors to enhance service delivery and develop high-impact strategies to efficiently address pressing community concerns.

5. Promote Cultural Competence and Social Justice in the Community, Institutions, and Individuals

Practitioners and clients emphatically stated the need for health and human service programs to develop outreach, marketing, staffing, and services which are not discriminatory against people of any culture, religion, race, sexual orientation, income level, or mental or physical ability. Also stressed was the need to engage the community in the development of methods that foster acceptance, respect, and equitable treatment for all members of the community.

6. Address Funding Challenges

Input gathered through discussion with health and human service providers pointed to the critical need for mobilizing additional financial resources from within and outside the community. Limited resources, competitive fundraising, and reductions in government funding for human service organizations are all placing a collective strain on the community to provide a stable network of services to meet the needs of its most vulnerable people.

Child & Youth Development

50% of Minnesota children entering kindergarten are not ready for school.

— from a study by the Minnesota Department of Education

Key Research Findings

- Limited access to quality early childhood care and education is resulting in a high percentage of children who are inadequately prepared for kindergarten. School readiness is an indicator of long-term educational success.
- A lack of information for parents and caregivers regarding healthy early childhood development has created limitations in achieving optimal physical, mental, and cognitive growth.
- An increase in the number of young children with undiagnosed behavioral problems and mental health issues represents a significant unmet need.
- An inadequate supply of positive youth development opportunities is causing youth to miss out on the chance for optimal development.
- Access to youth development opportunities is limited by cost, lack of transportation, duties at home, and a lack of culturally open settings.
- High dropout rate, low graduation rate, and a lack of options for non-traditional students limits their ability to achieve economic stability.
- Minority students face significant disparity in educational success within the Duluth Public School district.
- High mobility rate within the Duluth Public School district disrupts the continuity of teaching and learning and can limit educational success.

Our High-Impact Initiative: *Kindergarten School Readiness*

It can be argued that success in life stems from success in school, and with nearly 50% of our youth assessed as unprepared for kindergarten, United Way of Greater Duluth has identified this issue as its first High-Impact Initiative.

Integrated with UWGD's Child and Youth Development priorities, and specifically to increase the percentage of children who are ready to enter school, an additional amount of UWGD funding and staffing will be allocated to focus on kindergarten school readiness.

By developing key partnerships in the community, UWGD will create a concrete action plan to address this critical issue. Because when children are ready for school, they'll be ready for life—and that means a strong foundation for educational and life success, and a healthier community.

UWGD Recommendations

- Partner with community stakeholders to develop a comprehensive early childhood care and education plan to address the needs of young children and their families.
- Establish baseline information of local kindergarten school readiness and utilize the results to identify and implement high-impact strategies to increase the percent of children who are school-ready.
- Support the assessment of local childcare centers using findings to develop quality improvement initiatives that address areas of concern; also continue to measure quality in childcare centers and the impact of quality improvement initiatives.
- Promote healthy early childhood development through parent/caregiver education, involvement, and supports. Focus on early intervention to increase the likelihood of educational and life success while reducing the need for intervention programs later in life.
- Support systems advocacy to encourage comprehensive school readiness; linkage between early childhood care and K-12 education; and childcare subsidies for low income families.
- Implement strategies to close the gap in achievement rates, dropout rates, and graduation rates for African American and American Indian students; partner with community leaders to address the impact of racial issues on students and their families.
- Implement the recommendations of the Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time to meet the developmental needs of children and youth for the first two decades of their lives by ensuring that high-quality community experiences and programs are available to all young people. Encourage a community-based solution to offer equitable youth development opportunities for all youth which builds on existing relationships between schools, businesses, government, and non-profit agencies.
- Support efforts to increase the supply of, and access to, youth development activities for particular population segments that lack services. Explore affordability measures and transportation options to increase access to youth development activities for youth who live in areas where there are gaps in service.

Almost 20% of Minnesota's six- to nine-year-olds are left to care for themselves when their parents are at work. This is the highest percentage among states studied by the Urban Institute.

When rated on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, 71% of childcare centers in Minnesota had scores indicating quality at a minimal level.

Duluth Public School's mobility rate (the number of students transferring in and out of the district and between schools in the district) is 24%—dramatically higher than the state average of 15%.

The dropout rate of 6.38% in Duluth Public Schools is twice the state average—and when it comes to American Indian and African American students, the dropout rate is a disturbing 20% and 14%, respectively.

Basic Human Services

One-third of food shelf recipients in northeastern Minnesota are part of a working family.

— from a report by Hunger Solutions Minnesota

Key Research Findings

- The cost of living has significantly outpaced wage growth in the region, resulting in an increased number of employed people who are unable to make ends meet. This has driven up the demand for basic human services such as food, shelter, and clothing.
- A dramatic increase in the demand for food assistance is placing an increased burden on the network of agencies that provide this service.
- The increasing rate of mortgage foreclosures has thrust many homeowners into serious financial hardship, resulting in an increase in the number of people who need access to basic human services.
- Domestic violence and sexual assault are significant problems in the community, and as demand for prevention, education, shelter, and counseling services increases, state funding has been reduced.

UWGD Recommendations

- Provide ongoing operating support for providers of high-quality basic human services including food, shelter, housing, clothing, and safety.
- Increase outreach to connect those who are eligible for benefits with government benefits of food support, childcare assistance, and health care.
- Join the End Homelessness in Ten Years Committee's effort to prevent new occurrences of homelessness; shorten the length of homelessness; rapidly re-house people in the most permanent arrangement; expand access to housing/services; and increase supports needed to maintain housing.
- Support programs to prevent mortgage foreclosure and provide services such as financial counseling, credit repair, and housing stabilization assistance.
- Work with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission's Area Agency on Aging to assess the changing needs of the senior population.
- Join local agencies in developing a comprehensive plan for the prevention of sexual assault and domestic violence.
- Educate the general public and legislators about the increasing need for food assistance, and then mobilize resources to support the demand.

In our region, 41% of food shelf clients and 38% soup kitchen clients are children.

34% of the homeless people in St. Louis County are children.

In Greater Minnesota, 32% of homeless people are employed—70% of which work more than 25 hours per week.

Economic Well-Being

The poverty rate in Duluth is 15.5%—
twice that of the rest of the state.

— from the U.S. Census Report, 2000

Key Research Findings

- The cost of living has outpaced wage growth, resulting in an increased number of employed people living in poverty.
- The region's poverty rate exceeds the national and state rates and disproportionately affects children and minorities. A prevalence of low-paying jobs in the region is the major contributor to this condition.
- The vast majority of people without health insurance in Greater Minnesota are people with jobs.

UWGD Recommendations

- Partner with Community Action Duluth in its local effort to eliminate poverty, the Blueprint to End Poverty, and Local Initiatives Support Corporation in its exploration of the Portland Model.
- Promote development of an annual local job vacancy forecast in the major industry sectors. Work to ensure adequate training and education to prepare workers to fill vacancies.
- Partner with the Duluth Workforce Council and the Duluth Workforce Strategy Task Force to develop and implement a comprehensive workforce development plan to improve the availability of and access to job training and continuing education for unemployed people and low-wage workers.
- Support programs that help low-income and disabled people increase their income and build assets through stable employment, financial literacy, credit repair, matched savings accounts, education, and access to banking services.
- Promote state-wide advocacy and system-change efforts in the following areas: childcare subsidies, transition-to-work benefits, state welfare policies that support training and education, and flexibility in the use of Individual Development Account matching funds.
- Promote the development of support networks for unemployed people and low-wage workers which provide information, referral, and access to community resources.
- Build partnerships with local lending institutions to create suitable alternatives to existing predatory quick-refund loan services.
- Join with Duluth Transit Authority, Community Action Duluth, and Lutheran Social Service to create and implement a multi-faceted plan to improve transportation options for low-wage workers.

1 in 3 people in Duluth are classified as "working poor" – not making enough money to meet basic needs.

In our region, a family of three needs to earn \$34,421 to meet their basic needs. Only 39% of the jobs here pay that much.

More than one-third of the jobs in northeastern Minnesota pay less than \$10 per hour. The median wage for all occupations in northeastern Minnesota is \$14.22 per hour.

Health, Wellness, and Healing

44% of 12th Grade male students in Duluth use alcohol before or during school.

Key Research Findings

- Limited access to health care compromises the health status of low-income people and results in unnecessary costs to the health care system.
- Access to physical, mental, and dental health care is limited by cost, lack of insurance, lack of reliable transportation, and lack of culturally appropriate service provision.
- A significant percentage of uninsured people who are eligible for public health care do not seek benefits due to the complex application process and a shortage of advocates to assist in navigating the system.
- Duluth-area high school students have self-reported an alarming level of alcohol use.
- The region's capacity to deal with the increased prevalence of undiagnosed behavioral problems and mental health issues in children is hampered by a shortage of service providers.
- Methamphetamine use accounts for significant utilization of county resources including law enforcement, court expenses, imprisonment, child protection, and chemical dependency services.

51% of St. Louis County's chemical dependency cases are related to methamphetamine use.

In Minnesota, 70% of low-income children don't receive any dental care.

Nearly one-quarter of the children under age 17 in Greater Minnesota don't have health insurance.

UWGD Recommendations

- Increase access to physical, mental, and dental health care for low-to-moderate income people who are without health insurance by partnering with Generations Health Care Initiatives and other partners to implement high-impact strategies of the Twin Ports Health Access Program.
- Improve access to benefits under public health care programs for those eligible by expanding outreach and assistance; promoting coordination of referrals; streamlining the complex application process; and supporting public awareness efforts about public health insurance programs.
- Develop a strong network of oral health care providers to improve the availability of and access to preventive and restorative dental care for uninsured and underinsured people.
- Partner with the Northland Foundation in its THRIVE Initiative to address the social and emotional needs of young children.
- Promote enhanced communication and coordination between schools and providers of mental health and disability services.
- Partner with The Twin Ports Tobacco-Free Coalition to address smoking and tobacco use by preventing the initiation of tobacco use among young people; promoting cessation among young people and adults; eliminating non-smokers exposure to second-hand smoke; and eliminating the disparities related to tobacco use and its effects among different population groups.
- Develop a partnership with school districts, substance treatment providers, and Generations Health Care Initiatives to examine and address the high level of alcohol use among high school students.

For the full [Community Impact Report 2007](#) and a detailed listing of key findings and recommendations, please visit www.unitedwayduluth.org or call 218-726-4770.

[United Way of Greater Duluth](#) was established in 1922 as the Duluth Community Fund, with annual fund drives conducted by hundreds of volunteers for the purpose of raising money to support Community Fund agencies. While our name has changed (to Community Chest in 1948, United Fund in 1962, and finally, United Way), and our goals have evolved, our United Way organization continues to provide meaningful support to essential health and human services in the Greater Duluth community. And as always, our mission remains:

LEAD A UNITED EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY BY
MOBILIZING RESOURCES TO IMPROVE PEOPLE'S LIVES.



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