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***This update to the Albany Community Action Partnership Community Needs Assessment was completed June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.***

## **Background**

In December 2019, the novel coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) was discovered to be the causative agent for acute respiratory and flu-like symptoms infecting increasing numbers of people starting in Wuhan, China. The first case in the United States was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on January 22, 2020. Despite efforts to contain the virus, by March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. By March 17, 2020, all 50 US States had confirmed cases of the virus.

Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, the alarmingly high rate of fatalities associated with it, and the lack of a vaccine or treatment, the only effective way to reduce incidence of mass illness is through restricted travel, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, not touching the face, and staying at home. By mid-March 2020, local, state and federal public health officials recommended extreme measures to minimize a public health catastrophe: mass quarantine, physical distancing, and a virtual lockdown of all public gatherings and economic activity.

While all types of people are getting sick from the disease, older adults and people of any age who experience serious underlying medical conditions, many which are more prevalent in African American communities, are at increased risk for severe symptoms from COVID-19. Persons of color, immigrants, and women are disproportionately impacted by underlying health conditions linked to poverty, face discrimination in medical care, and are more likely to work jobs that require them to leave their homes. Also, persons with disabilities or chronic conditions are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their inability to thoroughly isolate themselves (need for hands-on care), physical impairments, environmental barriers, or interrupted services. The following additional populations experience differential exposure and extensive corresponding implications as a result of the pandemic: frontline workers, persons experiencing homelessness, gig-economy workers, low-income communities under quarantine, especially in urban settings, rural communities, tribal communities, incarcerated persons and returning citizens.

Children, families, individuals, and Community Action Agency staff may experience heightened stress, anxiety, and trauma as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Loss of income, growing childcare needs, heightened food insecurity, housing and energy instability, lack of access to transportation, lack of basic supplies, and increased domestic violence are growing factors as the crisis unfolds.

Because of the urgent and widespread needs affecting all sectors of the community, this Community Needs Assessment update is an **initial** effort to capture **some** of the emerging needs in the community as well as to forecast how those needs may evolve over the coming weeks and months and is intended to provide some **initial** information to describe the scope of this crisis on our community and to support the many different responses that will be required to address emerging and evolving needs. **It is likely that as needs evolve, some of those needs will not be captured in this update and therefore some necessary community responses may not connect to the needs identified in this document.** The needs assessed will inform services to those affected by the crisis.

The *community* assessed in this document, related to the below information, is defined as the following:

***Albany County, New York***

## National, State and Local public health crisis

State and local health authorities responded to the outbreak by placing restrictions on travel, business and recreation that have had a number of impacts on the community. New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an Executive Order on March 20, 2020 officially declaring NYS to be on pause (NYS PAUSE)<sup>1</sup>

As of June 11, 2020, 1996 individuals had tested positive for COVID-19 in Albany County: 1207 cases in the city of Albany itself, with 849 cases (42.5% of the total county) in the most vulnerable zip codes of 12202, 12203, 12206, 12208, 12209, 12210.<sup>2</sup> While statistically this number represents only a small portion of the county residents, the significant factor is the concentration of those cases in the urban area and ease with which the virus appears to be transmitted within close quarters.

In Albany, early data suggests that some sectors of the population are experiencing disproportionately higher rates of infection and/or complications/deaths as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>

- Infection rates for males (47%) and females (53%) does not vary greatly; but the death rate is nearly doubled for women over men at nearly 61%
- Approximately ½ of positive test results for COVID-19 have been in those age 50 and over, all of the COVID-19 related deaths in Albany County have occurred in those over the age of 50, with 70.9% in the 75+ age bracket.
- African Americans who make up 14.1% of the county population, account for 23% of the cases and similarly persons identifying as Hispanic make up 6.1% of the population and account for 8% of the cases while those.
- Significant portions of the community have underlying health conditions known to be complicating factors in COVID-19: high blood pressure (55.1%), high cholesterol (43%), diabetes (25%), and cardiovascular disease (27.2%). Additionally, there are 5.6% of residents who have been diagnosed with asthma.<sup>4</sup>

## Immediate impacts on the community

The immediate impacts of COVID-19 have been felt across all sectors of society. In particular, some of the greatest impacts have been in the areas of health, education, employment, human services provision, and community resources. In this community, areas of highest vulnerability are in those communities with high population density, and/or a high proportion of older residents.

The following outlines some of the critical areas of impact to the Albany community thus far:

- Health impacts:
  - Individuals over 65, especially those with underlying health conditions have been shown to be at particular risk for severe health implications from COVID-19.
  - Behavioral health resources will need to be available in new and increased ways to deal with the many different stressors/traumas caused by the pandemic, especially its impact over an extended time period. Issues such as domestic violence, elder abuse, child abuse, drug abuse, suicide and other indicators of behavioral health issues are seen to be on a sharp rise according to mental health experts.<sup>5</sup>
  - Nutrition for school-aged children previously accessing free/reduced breakfast, lunch, and snacks is impacted as many are now removed from that food source due to school closures.
- Employment impacts:
  - Anecdotal information as well as early data about unemployment claims from March and April confirm a significant emerging need in the area of employment.<sup>6</sup> NYS Department of Labor website shows that as of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-covid-19-maternity-task-force-chair-melissa-derosa-announce-increased-access>

<sup>2</sup> <https://legacy.livestories.com/s/v2/covid-19-dashboard-albany-county-ny/dabd57f3-5285-4666-97fc-53c5bf4b8560/>

<sup>3</sup> COVID statistics <https://legacy.livestories.com/s/v2/covid-19-dashboard-albany-county-ny/dabd57f3-5285-4666-97fc-53c5bf4b8560/> County demographics <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/albanycountyny/PST045219>

<sup>4</sup> <https://apps.cares.missouri.edu/portal/apps/10.7.1/opsdashboard/index.html#/0d68267bca524e34a4e0432c315e51b8>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.news10.com/news/local-news/mental-health-issues-on-rise-due-to-covid-19/>

<sup>6</sup> Special Update New York Business Leader COVID-19 Survey [www.Siena.edu/SCRI](http://www.Siena.edu/SCRI)

April 2020 unemployment in Albany County has hit 11.8%, increased from 3.7% the prior month and 3.3% the same time the previous year.<sup>7</sup>

- Individuals in the health care field are at high-risk of exposure to COVID-19 and are under tremendous stress due to additional work hours and challenging work conditions. In particular many of those workers with close, frequent contact with vulnerable individuals are lower-wage individuals.<sup>8</sup>
  - Individuals in the educational field – especially teachers and assistants in Head Start and Early Head Start as well as other early childhood care settings – are working remotely due to school shutdowns. Lower-wage workers in these fields are more vulnerable to layoffs and/or may lack the technology resources in their home to work remotely as data indicates that 13.9% of Albany residents don't have home internet access<sup>9</sup>
  - Individuals in many sectors of the economy – but particularly the service sector, the retail sectors, gig economy, and others most affected by quarantine policies – are currently experiencing sudden and unexpected unemployment. Some are unaware of resources available to them and their families as they are experiencing unemployment for the first time.<sup>10</sup>
- Educational impacts:
    - Closings of public schools in the Community Assessment area are having an immediate impact on children's education. Children with less access to resources (broadband internet, computers/tablets, technology expertise, language barriers, etc.) are most at-risk for suffering learning loss during a potentially protracted period of school closure.
    - Caregivers of school-age children must secure day care arrangements for their children or sacrifice employment to care for their children. These same caregivers are also expected to be primary teachers for their children during the period of the closure. Parents with limited resources face numerous challenges as a result of this situation and educational outcomes for their children will be affected.<sup>11</sup>
  - Impacts on human services provision:
    - Services to vulnerable populations are having to be curtailed or drastically changed. Some service providers are not operating, leaving gaps in services to the community. Other service providers have had to alter their service provision in significant ways, leaving some family needs unmet. While ACAP has continued operating our Food Pantry, service hours have been reduced and customers are advised to call and pre-order items which are packaged and waiting for them when they arrive. Additionally, other programs such as Weatherization and Career trainings are effectively non-functioning and Head Start is very limited working only remotely with families.
  - Community resource impacts:
    - The impacts of COVID-19 on community resources are numerous and include a reduction in the availability of resources (access to group activities, commercial services), and a scarcity and/or lack thereof of some resources (health care, food and emergency supplies). A Siena College Research Poll indicated that over 40% have had difficulty obtaining necessities including groceries or other household items and 24% have had trouble meeting their monthly expenses.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://labor.ny.gov/stats/cap/index/shtm>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e6.htm?s\\_cid=mm6915e6\\_x](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e6.htm?s_cid=mm6915e6_x)

<sup>9</sup> <https://apps.cares.missouri.edu/portal/apps/10.7.1/opsdashboard/index.html#/0d68267bca524e34a4e0432c315e51b8>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/27/young-workers-likely-to-be-hard-hit-as-covid-19-strikes-a-blow-to-restaurants-and-other-service-sector-jobs/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/17/why-covid-19-will-explode-existing-academic-achievement-gaps/>

<sup>12</sup> Special Capital Region COVID-19 Survey [www.Siena.edu/SCRI](http://www.Siena.edu/SCRI)

- There has been significant reduction in mobility throughout the area, more predominantly in our community than the state average:

Mobility area	Albany	New York State
Grocery	-5%	6%
Workplace	-30%	-27.6%
Transit	-56%	-44.5%
Retail	-58%	-41.3%

- The broad impacts of COVID-19 on this community have created an even more urgent need for coordination and collaboration of resources among the public sector, the public health sector, first responders, educators, the business community, the faith community and many others. Albany Community Action Partnership plays an important role convening organizations, people and resources to support families.

### Anticipated near- and long-term impacts

The needs above are already established through initial data and anecdotal reports from customers, staff, board members and community stakeholders. Based on these already-observed events, it is likely that there will be near-term (1-3 months) and longer-term (greater than 3 months) impacts that that require immediate planning. A partial, but not complete, list of the anticipated impacts include:

- *Prolonged service disruptions:* The disruptions in service delivery to customers are expected to continue as even though businesses are starting to open back up, not every sector is yet cleared to do so and may not be until the fall. There is also the question of what will happen as we open – will there be a spike in cases causing business re-closure. This is likely to lead to ancillary challenges for customers that may become long-term issues. For example, learning loss<sup>13</sup> and domestic violence/child abuse<sup>14</sup> have become larger problems due to service disruptions.
- *Exacerbated housing issues:* Due to the immediate economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, renters face one or more months where they may lack the funds to pay rent; homeowners with a mortgage may miss mortgage payments. This may extend to the inability to pay local and state property and/or school taxes, water/sewer and utility bills.
- *Prolonged employment issues:* Sudden layoffs and other employment disruptions are being addressed by emergency response measures; however, it is anticipated that long-term recovery efforts will be required to help customers reconnect to the workforce, particularly those for whom employment assistance has not previously been required.<sup>15</sup>
- *Prolonged agency capacity issues:* Policies limiting in-person staff/customer interactions may be in place for an extended period of time and agencies will need to maintain remote work and remote customer-interaction infrastructure to be responsive to these needs in a more sustainable capacity.
- *Prolonged community resource/coordination issues:* The short-term community coordination needs cited in this Assessment are presumed to continue into the long-term. Current conditions may persist for an extended period; recovery efforts will require coordination; ongoing community preparedness to guard against a future outbreak will also require ongoing convening and new community readiness strategies based on what is shown to be effective during the current crisis.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/17/why-covid-19-will-explode-existing-academic-achievement-gaps/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/social-distancing-domestic-violence.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-covid-19-will-change-the-nations-long-term-economic-trends-brookings-metro/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://centerforcommunityinvestment.org/blog/reimagining-strategy-context-covid-19-crisis-triage-tool>

## Moving Forward

It comes as no surprise that the challenges faced from an unprecedented global pandemic are they themselves unprecedented and numerous. As a community it is up to us to come together as stakeholders (non-profit, faith-based, educational institutions, and for profit), political entities, individuals and families to work to not only bring Albany back from this pandemic, but to learn from it and show our community is resilient and prepared to meet challenges head on.

Recognition of the part of area business CEOs indicates their confidence in the fact they will be in business 12 months from now (89%), but also the realization that things will not be returning to the way they were any time soon. In fact, only 31% expect things to return to normal in the next 6 months and 35% don't believe normal will happen prior to 2021.<sup>17</sup> This will have a direct impact on economic recovery and the need for gap services. For example, traditional services such as HEAP are designed to provide assistance with paying utility and heating bills but aren't designed to meet the needs of those persons experiencing difficulty paying rent/mortgage and/or tax bills to help avoid eviction.

Continued remote work requires entities to develop the capacity for staff to be able to function from home as if they were in the office, particularly in the area of technology such as laptop, internet provisions, and the ability to connect back to the office data hubs securely and effectively. It may also require the acquisition of new skill sets as Educators take on the challenge of conducting lessons remotely. And new technology platforms, as business meetings and strategy sessions are held over teleconference instead of in-person.

Even as we work to re-enter the traditional business model in the office, rules for social distancing and reductions in overall occupancy levels requires adjustments to be made in service delivery – or at the very least a review of the way services are provided and how/if they can be continued given the current local guidance and findings from this pandemic.

As noted in the assessment to which this is an update, ACAP is well entrenched in the community and works to deliver services that are of greatest need to its residents. Moving forward, ACAP should continue to develop their existing programs, using the data to identify enhancements and possible expansions to current programmatic service provisions in the areas of emergency resources such as food, energy assistance, housing assistance, etc; early childhood education; job and workforce development; and energy services.

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<sup>17</sup> Special Update New York Business Leader COVID-19 Survey [www.Siena.edu/SCRI](http://www.Siena.edu/SCRI)