GREATER ERIE COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

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2025 - 2028

ERIE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

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Mission & Vision

Mission
The Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) will eliminate poverty in Erie County through empowerment, education and community partnership.

Vision
Empowering the community to foster a better life for all.

HELPING PEOPLE,
CHANGING LIVES

INTRODUCTION

GECAC's 2024–2028 Community Needs Assessment (CNA) confirms what many residents, partners, and frontline staff already see every day: families in Erie County are working hard, but too many are still one crisis away from losing housing, utilities, transportation, or access to basic care. Through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and analysis of local data (including CHNA, AARP, and other community indicators), several themes consistently emerged. Residents highlighted challenges related to low wages, rising housing and utility costs, transportation barriers, unmet health and behavioral health needs, and persistent inequities across race, gender, age, and disability.

Across the county, job opportunities remain limited, and many people who are working do not earn family-sustaining wages. Residents described difficulty affording or accessing job training programs, while seniors, especially women, are staying in the workforce longer just to pay for food and medicine. Housing and homelessness concerns centered on paying utilities, rent or mortgage, and basic home maintenance. Data and community input also pointed to gaps in multifamily and subsidized housing, particularly for older adults, and a growing call for property tax relief and affordable housing located near essential services. Transportation was repeatedly cited as a cross-cutting barrier: in many neighborhoods, there are few or no bus routes, while the cost of car insurance, reliable vehicles, and transit fares limits access to employment, healthcare, childcare, and senior services.

Health and nutrition needs are equally pressing. Local health assessments identify substance use, chronic disease, and access to care as top issues, while residents report difficulty affording dental care, prescriptions, and insurance. Food insecurity remains high, making programs like Meals on Wheels and senior nutrition services essential. At the same time, child poverty and youth opportunity gaps carry long-term consequences. Approximately one in four young children lives in poverty, with limited childcare and after-school options and uneven graduation and post-secondary outcomes, particularly by neighborhood and population group. Older adults and caregivers face mounting challenges as well—social isolation, affordability pressures, healthcare access barriers, workforce shortages in direct care, and a growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren

.
These conditions do not affect all residents equally. Poverty disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic residents, and there are clear racial and geographic disparities in employment, health outcomes, and housing stability. The CNA therefore adopts an explicit equity lens, recognizing that current conditions are rooted in historic and ongoing systemic barriers rather than individual shortcomings. GECAC will use this lens to guide how programs are structured, how resources are allocated, and whose voices shape planning and decision-making.

One concrete opportunity to respond to the needs identified in this CNA is the Emerson School project, now known as the RB Wiley Learning Center, a building owned by GECAC. This site represents a major community asset that can be reimagined to address multiple priority needs whether through affordable housing, community-based programs, aging and caregiver services, or other mixed-use models. GECAC will work closely with residents, neighborhood stakeholders, and partners to determine the best use of the RB Wiley Learning Center by conducting focus groups, surveys, and ongoing engagement. This community-driven planning process will ensure that any redevelopment of the building reflects what local residents say they need most and aligns with the broader goals of this CNA.

Based on this analysis, the CNA identifies seven interrelated priority areas that will guide GECAC's strategic focus from 2024–2028:

- **Affordable Housing & Utility Relief**
- **Living-Wage Jobs & Job Training Access**
- **Transportation Equity (Urban & Rural)**
- **Healthcare Access, Mental Health & Substance Use Response**
- **Senior Services: Nutrition, Social Isolation, Caregiver Support**
- **Child Poverty Reduction & Youth Engagement**
- **Equity Across Race, Gender, Age & Disability**

Together, these priorities provide a framework for program development, partnerships, advocacy, and resource allocation aimed at helping people and changing lives throughout Erie County.

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OVERVIEW

The Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) is Erie County's Community Action Agency and a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in downtown Erie PA. Founded in the 1965 as part of the national network of community action agencies that grew out of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, GECAC has spent six decades focused on alleviating the causes of poverty and empowering families in Erie County to build wealth and live with dignity. The agency regularly conducts a comprehensive Community.

This community needs assessment aims to use surveys, informal feedback, and federal, state, and local data to understand local needs and to guide the goals, outcomes, and services over the next three years (2025-2028), rather than simply "checking a box" for compliance. In terms of scale, GECAC is one of the larger human-service nonprofits in Erie County.

Recent filings show annual revenue of about $13 million & a staff of nearly 110 employees, supported by hundreds of volunteers across its programs. Through departments focused on aging, community outreach, education, workforce & self-sufficiency services, GECAC serves thousands of residents each year—from older adults needing in-home services to youth in workforce and education programs, and families seeking housing and utility assistance.

GECAC's mission is clear: to eliminate poverty in Erie County through empowerment, education, and community partnership. Its vision flows directly from that mission: empowering the community to foster a better life for all. Guided by the spirit of "Helping People. Changing Lives." and grounded in data.

GECAC works alongside local partners and residents to move individuals and families from crisis to stability, and from stability to long-term self-sufficiency.

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METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Approach

This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is completed at least every three years to guide GECAC's strategic planning, program design, and funding decisions. The CNA combines quantitative data with qualitative input from residents, clients, staff, and community partners. Data collection focused on identifying both current needs and emerging trends, with special attention to low-income households, older adults, and other populations disproportionately affected by poverty and inequity in Erie County.

Primary (GECAC/Local) Data Sources

GECAC relied on several core local data sources that provide a direct view of community conditions and service use:

- 2023–2025 GECAC Community Assessment
- Aggregated client demographics, participation, and outcome data across GECAC programs, including service volumes, waitlists, and patterns of unmet need.
- Erie County AAA 2024–2028 Local Plan
- As Erie County's designated Area Agency on Aging (AAA), GECAC used this plan to understand the needs and priorities of older adults and caregivers, including data on aging trends, service demand, and gaps in the aging-services network.
- Community Needs Assessment Survey (2021–2022)
- Resident and client survey capturing self-reported needs, barriers, and priorities in areas such as employment, housing, childcare, transportation, education, health, and financial stability.
- Client Data retrieved from *CAP60 to track metrics from low-income Erie County residents to determine the causes and conditions of poverty

Secondary Local and Regional Data Sources

To place GECAC's experience and survey results in context, the CNA integrated additional local datasets:

- Erie Vital Signs (Community Indicators)
- County and neighborhood-level indicators on economy, education, health, housing, demographics, and quality of life are used to track disparities across communities and population groups.
- AARP Livability Index (2024)
- Measures of housing, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity, used to assess how livable Erie County is for residents of all ages, especially older adults and people with disabilities.
- LECOM/Erie County Community Health Needs Assessment (2024–2025)
- Data and analysis on major health conditions, risk factors, and access to care, used to understand how health issues intersect with poverty, housing, and workforce challenges.

CAP60 is a cloud-based case management and reporting software platform used by Community Action Agencies and similar nonprofits to track clients, services, outcomes, and reporting requirements.

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METHODOLOGY CONT.

State and National Data Sources

To benchmark Erie County and understand broader trends, the CNA also draws on state and national data, including:

- U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) for population, race/ethnicity, age, income, poverty, housing, educational attainment, and disability status.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry for employment, unemployment, and industry trends.
- Pennsylvania state agency reports (e.g., Departments of Human Services, Education, Aging, and Health) for program participation, funding, and policy context.

These state and national datasets enable comparisons between Erie County, Pennsylvania, and the United States, helping to identify where local outcomes differ from larger trends and where targeted intervention is needed.

Data Integration and Limitations

Data from all sources were reviewed, cleaned as needed, and synthesized to identify consistent patterns and outliers. Where possible, indicators are disaggregated by geography, age, race/ethnicity, and income to highlight disparities. Qualitative input from surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder conversations was used to interpret quantitative findings and to surface needs not fully captured in administrative data.

Limitations include differences in data years, reporting methods, and geographic levels; lag times in state and federal datasets; and under-representation of certain groups in surveys or administrative records. Where limitations are significant, they are noted in the text or footnotes. Despite these constraints, the combined local, state, and national data provide a robust foundation for understanding need and for guiding GECAC's goals, outcomes, and services over the next three years.

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COMMUNITY PROFILE

Erie County is located in the northwestern corner of Pennsylvania on the southern shore of Lake Erie and is the Commonwealth's only direct link to the Great Lakes. The county covers approximately 1,558 square miles—roughly half of which is water—with the City of Erie as its county seat and primary urban center.

In addition to the city, the county includes townships and boroughs such as Millcreek, Harborcreek, Fairview, Summit, Edinboro, North East, Girard, and Corry, creating a mix of urban, suburban, small-town, and rural communities.

Erie County has a population of roughly 268,000 residents. Recent estimates show a slow but steady population decline since 2010, reflecting broader trends in older industrial regions. The median age is approximately 1 40 years, indicating an aging population compared with the nation as a whole.

The county remains majority White (81%), with growing Black, multiracial, Hispanic/Latino, and immigrant communities that contribute to increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Educational attainment is relatively strong at the high-school level (over 92% of adults have at least a high school diploma), while approximately 29% hold a bachelor's degree or higher—below state and national averages

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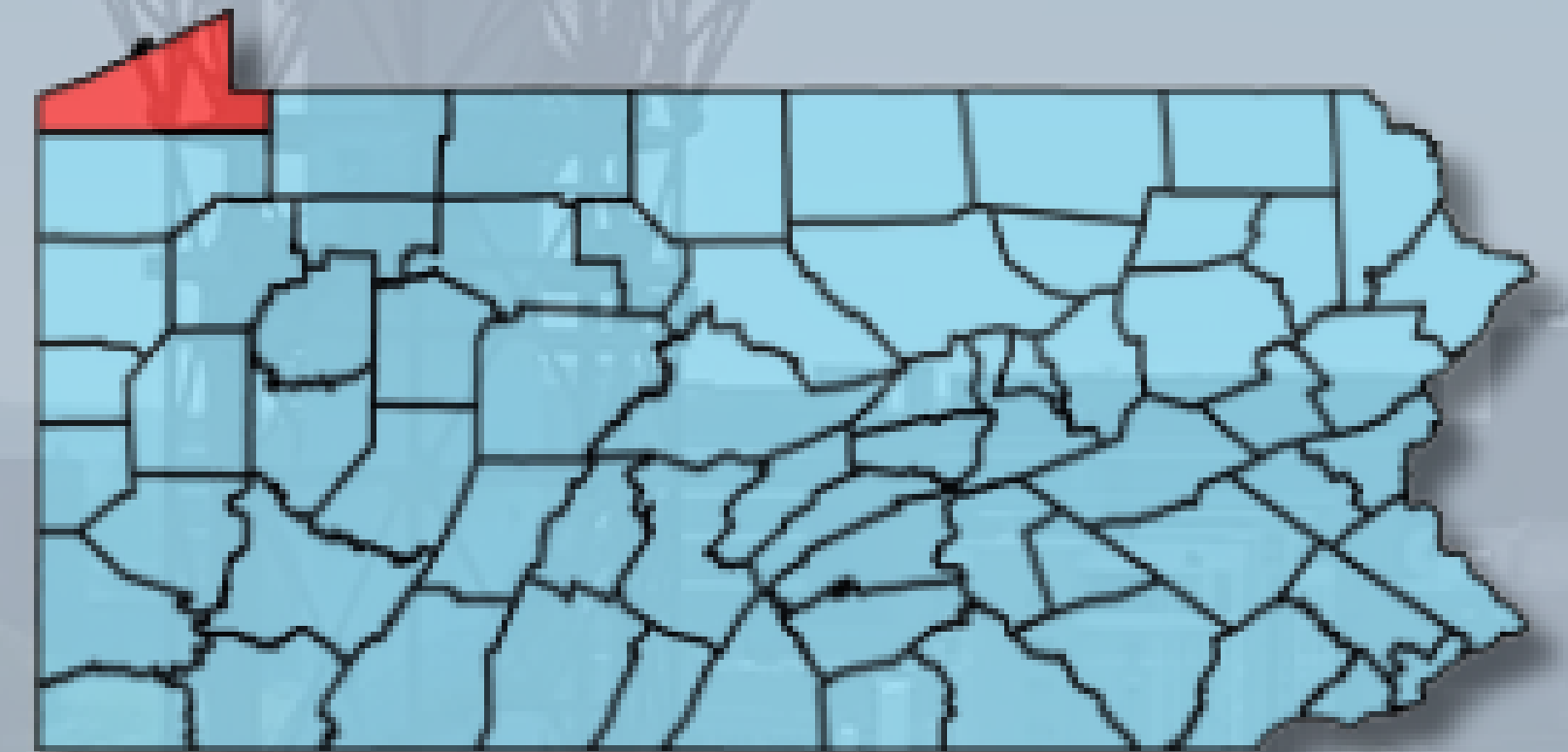
Erie County & Pennsylvania Profile By Race:

Erie County is more White and less racially and ethnically diverse than Pennsylvania overall:

White: 83.5% in Erie County vs. 75.8% in Pennsylvania
Black: 6.9% vs. 10.7%
Other races: 9.6% vs. 13.5%
Hispanic (all races): 4.6% vs. 8.4%

This means Erie County has a smaller share of Black and Hispanic residents and a somewhat smaller "Other" race category than the state as a whole. While the county is less diverse in percentage terms, the absolute number of residents of color is still significant, and national data show that Black, Hispanic, and some other racial groups continue to experience higher poverty rates and economic barriers than White residents.
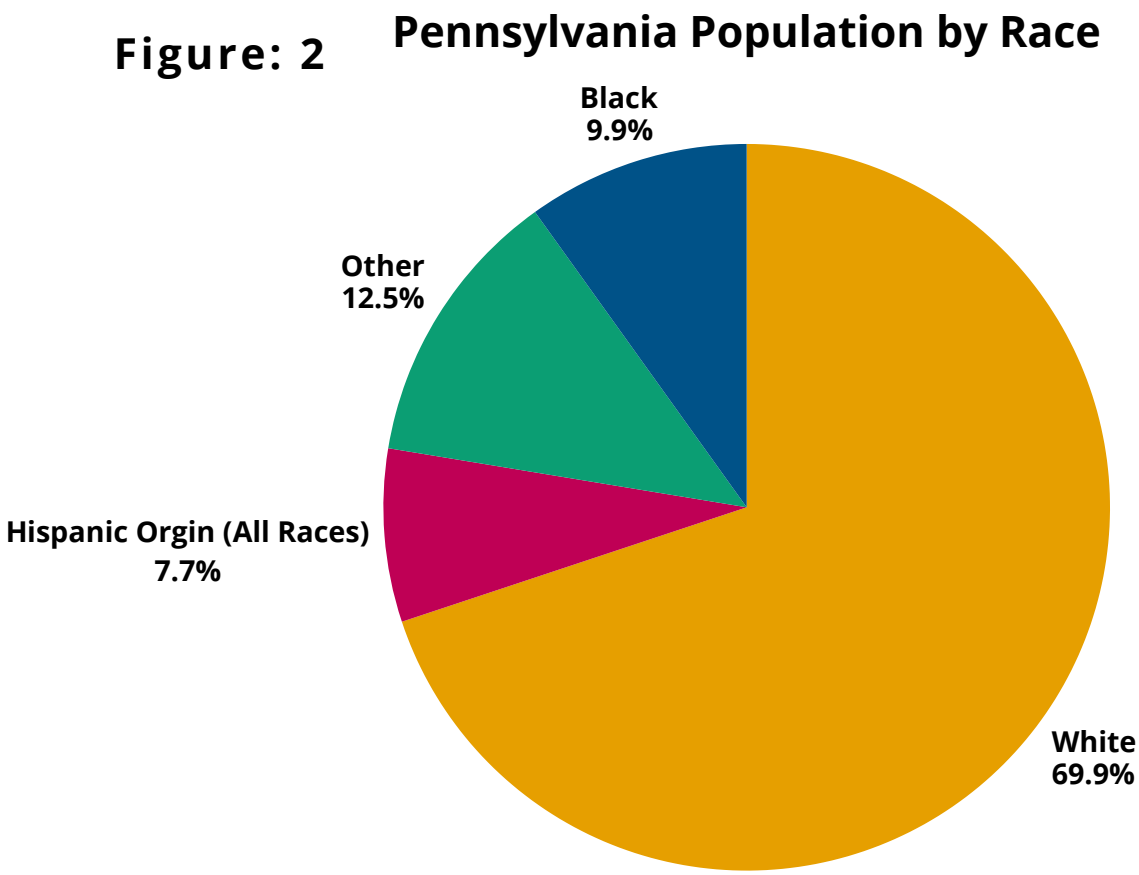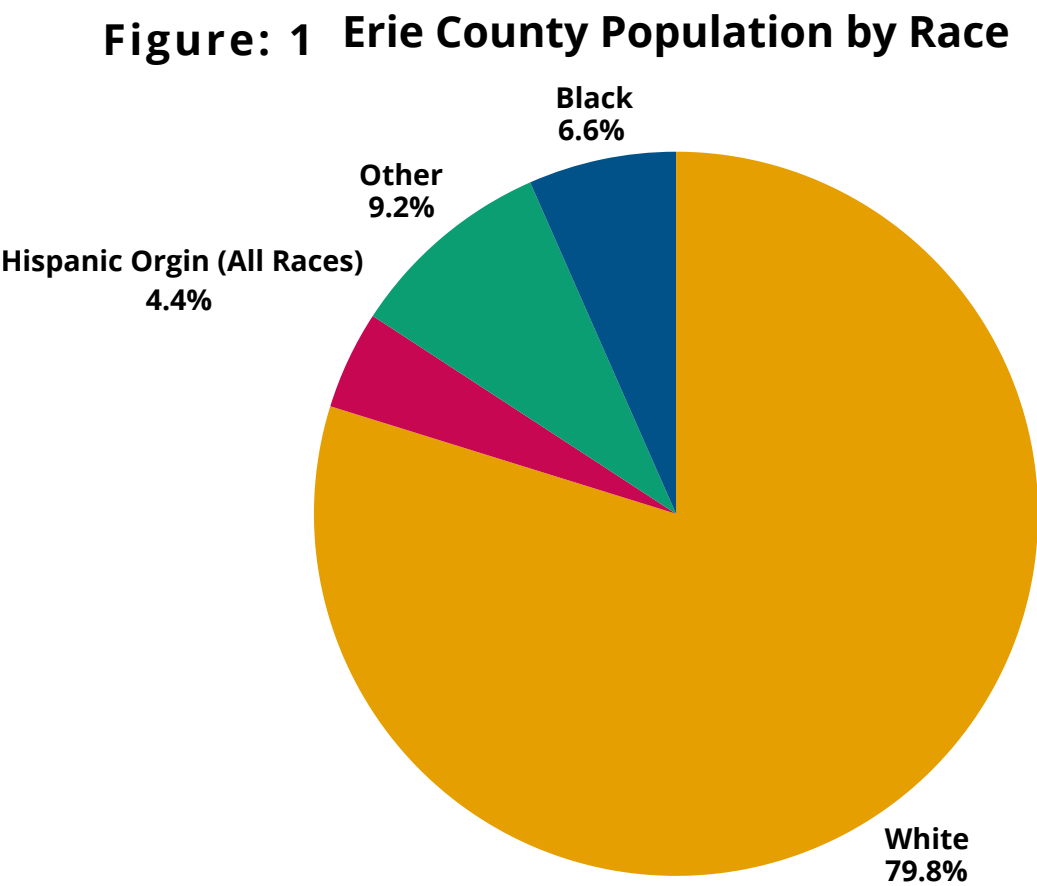
IMPLICATIONS / NEEDS TO MONITOR

Ensure program eligibility, outreach, and marketing are intentionally inclusive and visible to smaller racial/ethnic communities so that lower percentages do not translate into under-service.

Maintain disaggregated data by race and ethnicity in program records to understand who is being reached and where gaps persist.

Strengthen partnerships with organizations that serve Black, Hispanic, immigrant, and refugee communities to address barriers such as language access, discrimination, and lack of transportation.

Use race-disaggregated local data (e.g., Erie Vital Signs, school district data) to track racial equity in outcomes such as employment, housing stability, and educational attainment.

Figure: 1 **Erie County Population by Race**

Black 6.6%
Other 9.2%
Hispanic Orgin (All Races) 4.4%
White 79.8%

Figure: 2 **Pennsylvania Population by Race**

Black 9.9%
Other 12.5%
Hispanic Orgin (All Races) 7.7%
White 69.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates, Tables DP05 (ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates) and S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months.

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Erie County & Pennsylvania Profile By Age:

Age patterns in Erie County are broadly similar to Pennsylvania, with a slightly higher share of children and young adults and a comparable share of older adults:

Children & young adults (0–24): 30.8% in Erie County vs. 29.5% in PA
0–17: 20.9% vs. 20.6%
18–24: 9.9% vs. 8.9%

Prime working age (25–44): very similar – 24.5% vs. 25.3%
Older adults (45+): 44.7% in Erie County vs. 45.2% in PA
Median age: 40.1 years in Erie County vs. 40.9 years in PA

In short, Erie County is neither dramatically younger nor older than the state, but it has:
A slightly larger school-age and college-age population, and
A large share of middle-aged and older adults, especially those 55 and older, similar to statewide patterns.

IMPLICATIONS / NEEDS TO MONITOR

With nearly one-third of residents under age 25, there is ongoing need for:

Early childhood and K–12 support, youth and young adult workforce programs, and post-secondary and training pathways that connect youth to family-sustaining employment.

The substantial share of residents 45 and older underscores the importance of:
Aging-in-place supports (home and community-based services, home modification, nutrition, and transportation), caregiver supports for family members providing unpaid care, and
Planning for increasing demand on health, long-term care, and housing systems as Baby Boomers age.

Program design should account for "multi-generational" households, where children, working-age adults, and older adults live together and may need coordinated services (e.g., childcare + workforce + senior supports).

Figure: 3

Erie County Population by Age (2023)

- 0-17: 20.9%
- 18-24: 9.9%
- 25-34: 12.6%
- 35-44: 11.9%
- 45-54: 11.8%
- 55-64: 13.7%
- 65-74: 11.5%
- 75: 7.7%

Figure: 4

Pennsylvania Population by Age (2023)

- 0-17: 20.6%
- 18-24: 8.9%
- 25-34: 13%
- 35-44: 12.3%
- 45-54: 12.2%
- 55-64: 13.9%
- 65-74: 11.2%
- 75: 7.9%

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Erie County & Pennsylvania Profile By Gender:

Gender distribution is almost identical in Erie County and Pennsylvania:

Erie County: 50.3% female, 49.7% male
Pennsylvania: 50.7% female, 49.3% male

On its face, this near 50/50 split does not signal a major structural difference between the county and the state. However, gender still matters for how poverty and opportunity are experienced:

Nationally, women continue to have higher poverty rates than men (11.9% vs. 10.2% in 2023).
Women, particularly single mothers, remain over-represented among families in poverty and are more likely to live in "extreme poverty." National Women's Law Center+1
The gender wage gap persists, with women earning roughly 80–82% of men's earnings on average.

Given these national patterns, it is reasonable to expect gendered differences in economic security within Erie County even though the population share is balanced.

IMPLICATIONS / NEEDS TO MONITOR

- Track program participation and outcomes by gender, especially in workforce, income support, and housing programs, to see whether women—particularly single mothers—are facing higher barriers.
- Ensure workforce and training programs are designed to accommodate caregiving responsibilities (e.g., childcare, scheduling, transportation), which more often fall to women.
- Consider targeted outreach and supports for female-headed households, who are at higher risk of poverty at the national level.
- In aging services, recognize that older women often outnumber older men and may have lower lifetime earnings and savings, increasing their risk of economic insecurity and isolation.

Figure: 5

Pennsylvania Population by Gender (2023)

Male 49.3%
Female 50.7%
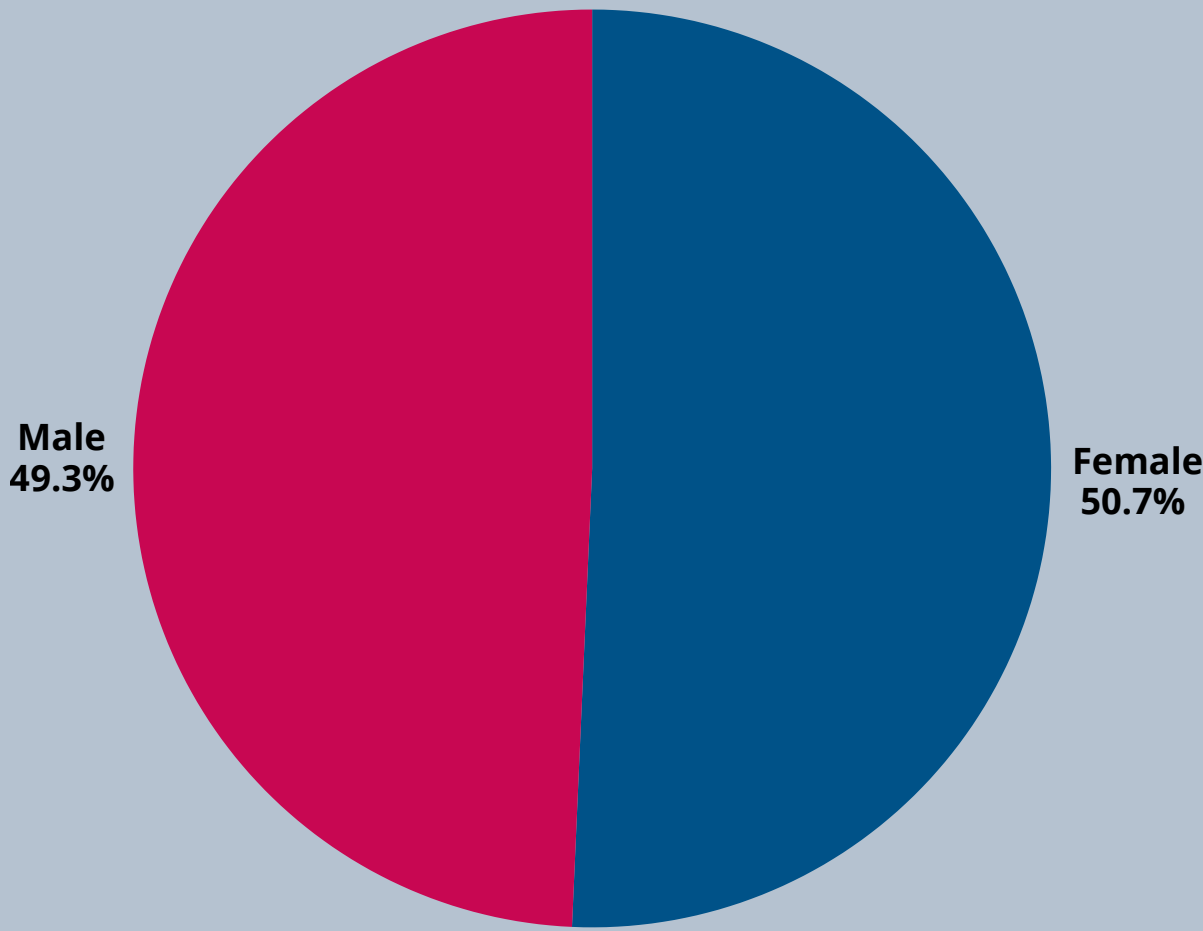
Figure: 6

Erie County Population by Gender (2023)

Male 48.7%
Female 51.3%

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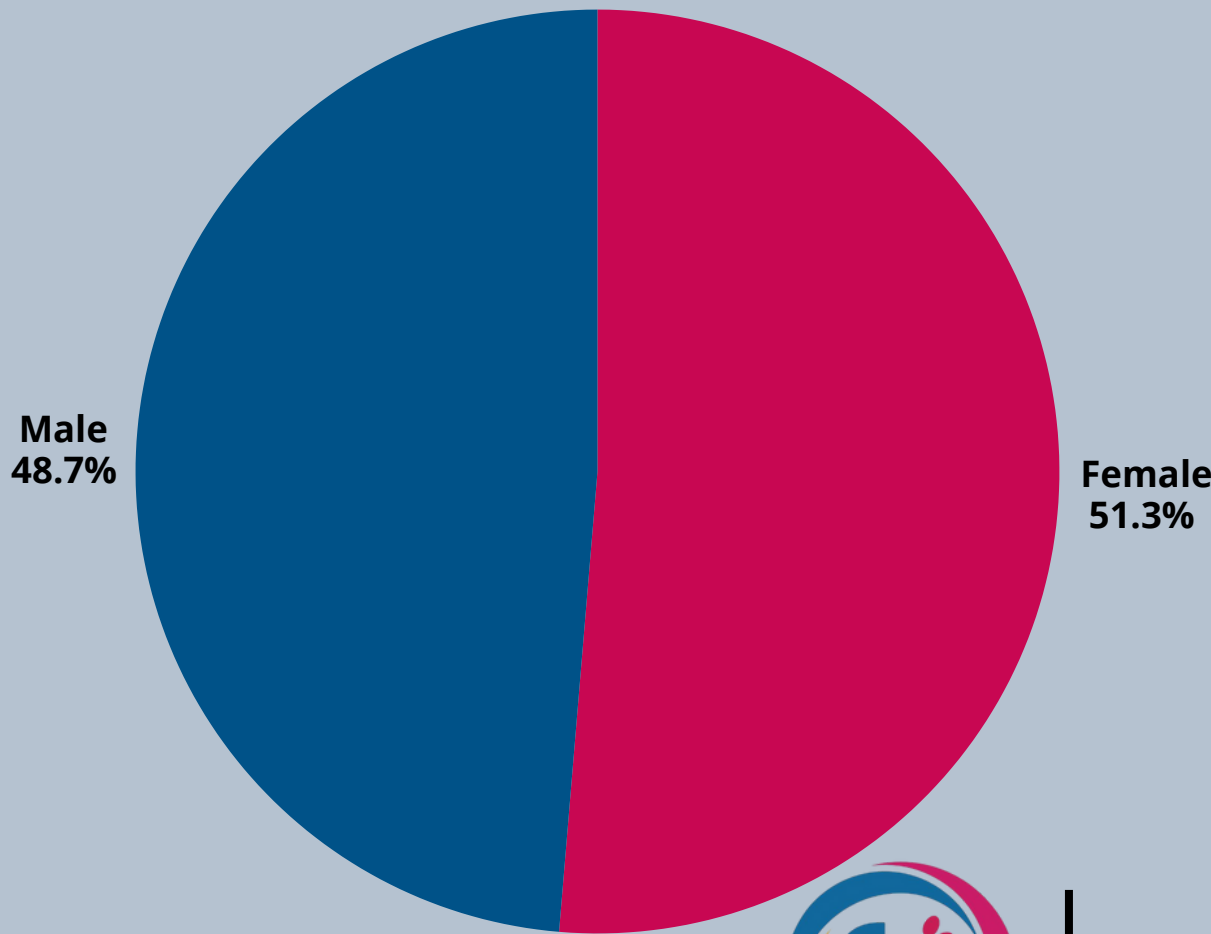
Erie County Profile - Veterans Income & Unemployment:

In 2023, Erie County was home to an estimated 15,545 veterans, compared with about 656,112 veterans statewide in Pennsylvania. Veterans represent an important share of the county's adult population and bring specific strengths, skills, and service-related needs.

Figure: 7 **Veteran Unemployment Rate: Erie County vs. Pennsylvania**

Pennslvania
48.8%
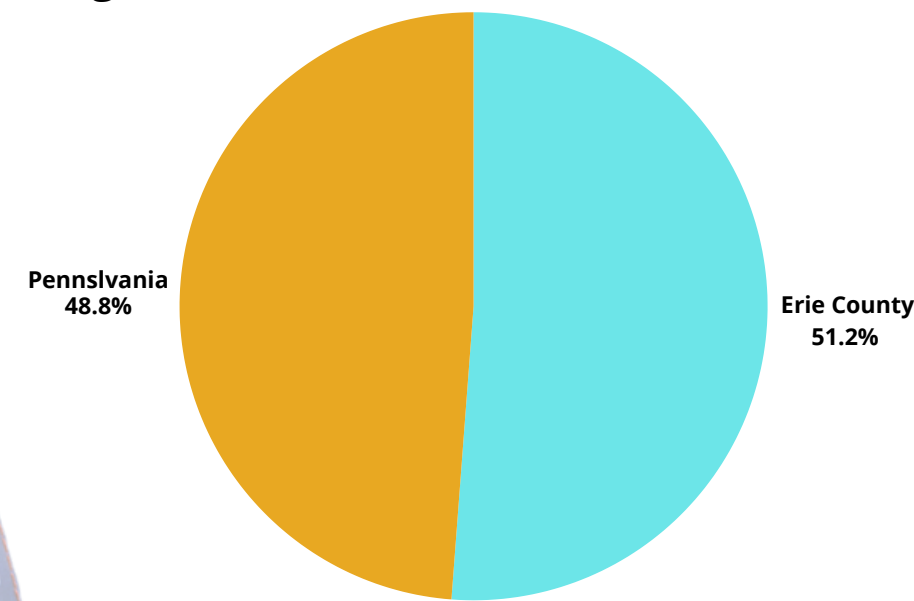
Erie County
51.2%

Figure: 8 **Veteran Median Income: Erie County vs. Pennsylvania**

Pennsylvania
52.3%

Erie County Veterans
47.7%
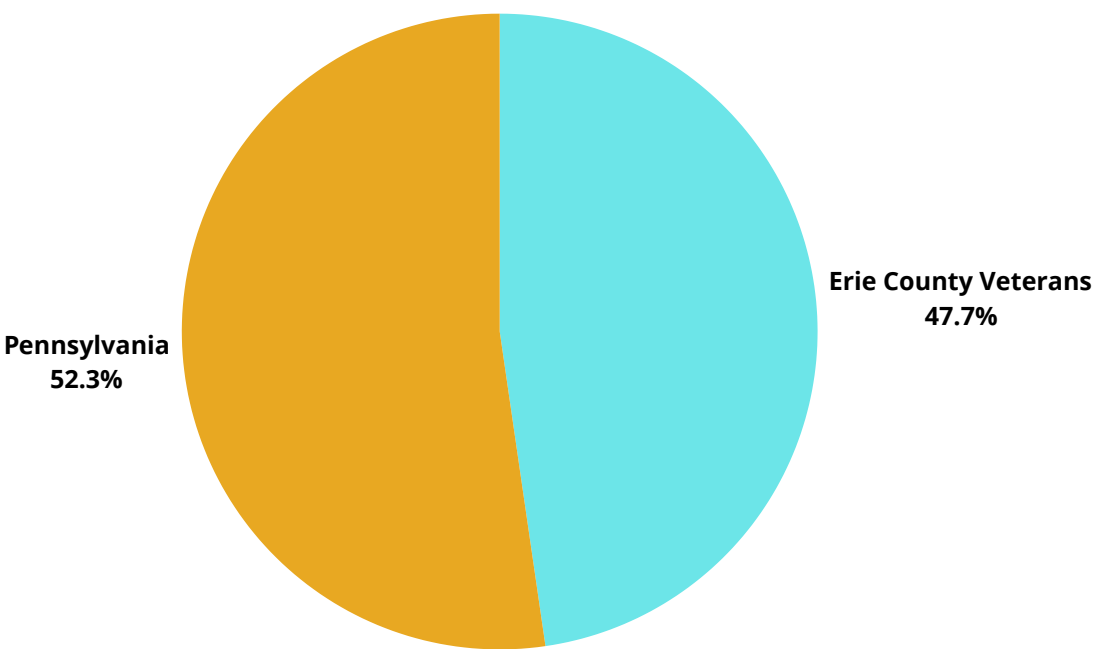
IMPLICATIONS / NEEDS TO MONITOR:

Given these patterns, several needs and opportunities emerge for programs and services:

- Targeted workforce supports for veterans
- Strengthen outreach to veterans for job placement, sector-based training, and credential translation (e.g., converting military skills into recognized civilian credentials in manufacturing, logistics, IT, public safety, and healthcare).
- Coordinate closely with PA CareerLink, Veterans' Service Offices, and employers who actively recruit veterans but may need help designing veteran-friendly pathways.
- Bridging income gaps and underemployment

Even though veterans' median incomes are higher than non-veterans locally, Erie County veterans still trail the statewide veteran median, pointing to possible underemployment or concentration in lower-wage sectors. Programs that support upskilling, advancement, and entrepreneurship for veterans can help close that gap.

Many veterans and their families may not need basic job search help as much as coordinated services around:

- Housing stability and homelessness prevention
- Behavioral health and substance use treatment
- Financial coaching and benefit navigation (VA benefits, GI Bill, disability compensation, SNAP, LIHEAP, etc.)

Behind each veteran is often a spouse, partner, children, or aging parents who may carry caregiving and financial responsibilities. Integrating family supports, childcare, and caregiver resources into veteran-focused programming can improve outcomes for the whole household.

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HOUSING

Between 2015 and 2024, Erie County's housing stock has barely changed—approximately 120,451 units in 2024, a small decline since 2015, while Pennsylvania and the U.S. added housing. This means Erie's challenge is not rapid growth, but an older, mostly fixed supply that is increasingly worn, inefficient, and often unaffordable for low-income households.

FOR GECAC, THIS POINTS TO THREE PRIORITIES:

- Stabilize existing housing through rental assistance, eviction prevention, and housing counseling so occupied units don't turn into vacancies and blight.
- Support aging in place by linking older adults to home-delivered services, minor repairs, and utility help so they can safely remain in older homes.
- Target fragile neighborhoods by using CAP60 and local data to focus outreach where housing conditions and cost burdens are worst.

In short, GECAC's role is to help residents stay safely housed in the units we already have, while partnering with others to improve and preserve that aging stock.

The number of housing units within the report area in July of each year from 2015–2024 is shown below. According to the U.S. Census, there were a total of 120,451 housing units in the report area in 2024, a decrease of -472 (or -0.39%) since 2015 compared to a 3.67% increase statewide.

Table: 1

Report Area	July 2015	July 2016	July 2017	July 2018	July 2019	July 2020	July 2021	July 2022	July 2023	July 2024
Erie County, PA	120,923	121,124	121,407	121,611	121,858	119,812	119,954	120,111	120,295	120,451
Pennsylvania	11,308,342	11,347,040	11,386,938	11,425,396	11,465,256	11,495,306	11,540,300	11,628,576	11,678,668	11,723,006
United States	135,285,123	136,286,436	137,366,902	138,516,439	139,684,244	140,811,440	142,172,055	143,799,370	145,359,015	146,770,711

Source: : U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; HUD-assisted housing estimates, 2017–2021.

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HOUSING

Between 2017 and 2022, homeownership in Erie County grew only slightly, while Pennsylvania and the United States saw stronger gains. At the same time, Erie County has 6,204 HUD-assisted housing units, or 562 units per 10,000 housing units—a much higher rate than both Pennsylvania (436) and the U.S. (414). This means a larger share of Erie's housing market is made up of subsidized rental units, and more households rely on federal assistance to stay housed.

FOR GECAC, THIS SUGGESTS TWO PARALLEL PRIORITIES:

- Support and stabilize very low-income renters living in HUD-assisted housing through rental assistance, housing counseling, resident services, and connections to workforce and benefits programs.

- Strengthen pathways into sustainable homeownership—financial coaching, credit repair, pre-purchase counseling, and down-payment/rehab partnerships—so more Erie County residents can move from subsidized or unstable rentals into stable, affordable ownership over time.

Assisted Housing – HUD

This indicator reports the total number of HUD-funded assisted housing units available to eligible renters as well as the unit rate (per 10,000 total households).

Table: 2

Report Area	Total Housing Units (2022)	Total HUD-Assisted Housing Units	HUD-Assisted Units, Rate per 10,000 Housing Units
Erie County, PA	110,388	6,204	562.02
Pennsylvania	5,106,601	222,394	435.50
United States	123,559,968	5,114,316	413.91
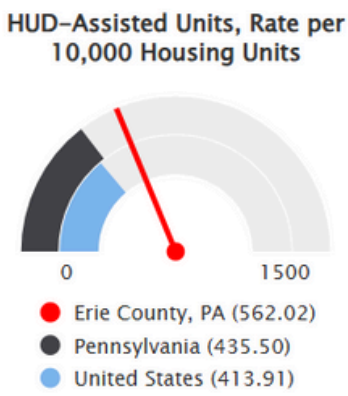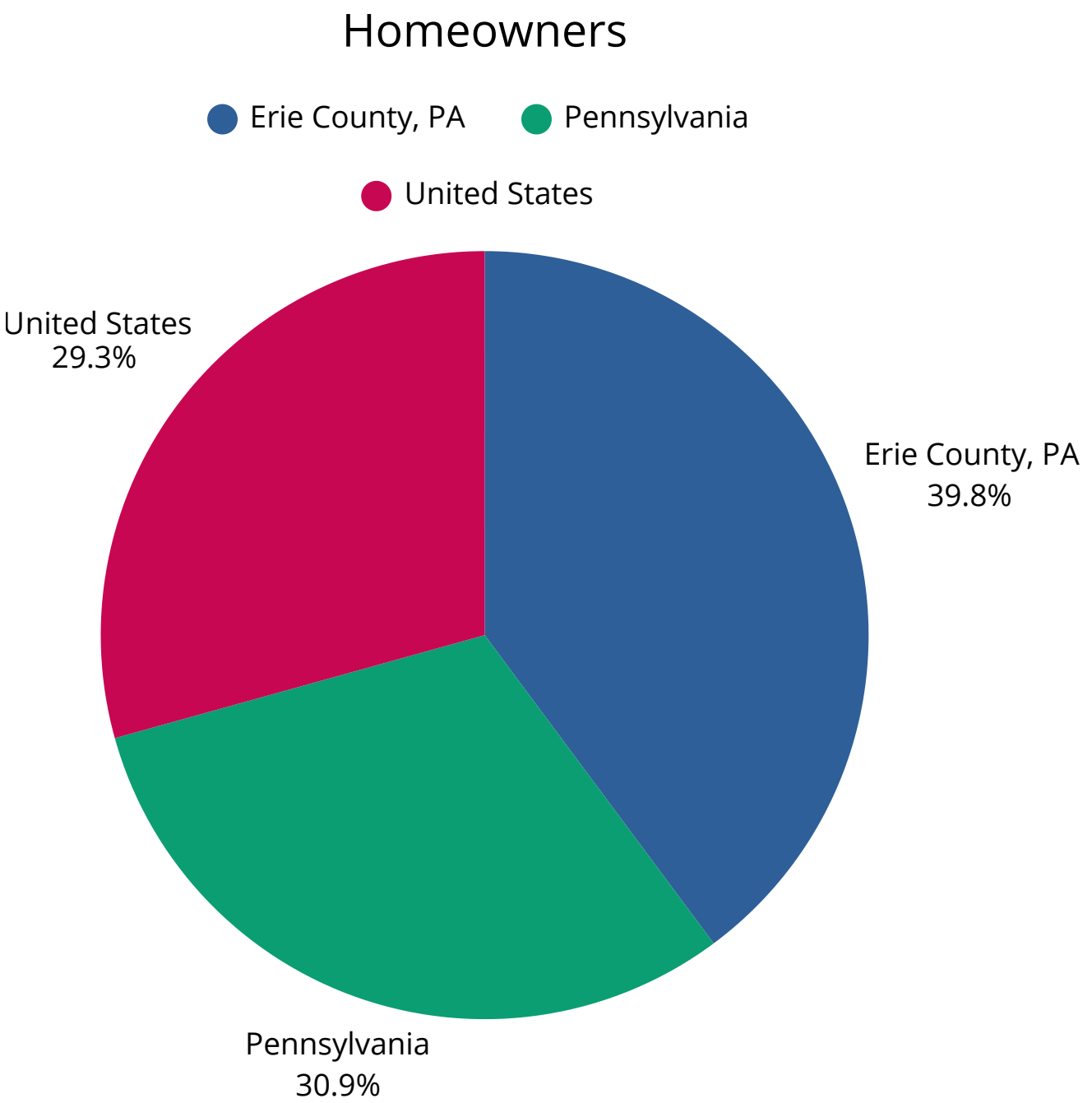
HUD–Assisted Units, Rate per 10,000 Housing Units

- Erie County, PA (562.02)
- Pennsylvania (435.50)
- United States (413.91)

Figure: 8 - Housing

Homeowners

- Erie County, PA
- Pennsylvania
- United States

United States 29.3%

Erie County, PA 39.8%

Pennsylvania 30.9%

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; HUD-assisted housing estimates, 2017–2021.

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HOUSING

What is needed going forward:

The Infinite Erie Playbook and housing-focused initiatives point to several clear needs:

Permanent supportive housing at scale

- Fully implement and expand Housing First Erie to reach at least 150 permanent units for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

- Pair housing with intensive supportive services (behavioral health, case management, tenancy support) to keep people stably housed and reduce pressure on hospitals, jails, and shelters.

Preservation and rehabilitation of older housing stock

- Use tools like the Cornerstone Community Land Trust, land banking, PHARE/HOME funds, and local capital to repair existing homes, not just build new ones.

- Focus on basic safety and habitability (roof, heat, electrical, lead, mold) and on accessibility upgrades so older adults can age in place in existing neighborhoods.

Permanently affordable homeownership and anti-displacement strategies

- Scale CCLT-style models that keep homes permanently affordable, even as neighborhoods improve.

- Prioritize BIPOC and low-income households for down-payment assistance, rehab support, and access to new or preserved units so they benefit from rising values, rather than being pushed out.

Neighborhood-based housing and services

- Continue place-based projects like Burton School and Savocchio Opportunity Park, combining housing, childcare, education, and workforce supports within walking distance.

- Align housing investments with transportation, parks, broadband, and main-street improvements outlined in the Playbook so neighborhoods become safer, more connected, and more attractive for residents across income levels.

Better data and coordination across systems

- Use Playbook delivery teams, GECAC's CAP60 and housing programs, the County's home team, and PA Navigate to build a shared picture of housing need (evictions, cost-burdened households, lead risk, aging homeowners, etc.).

- Coordinate land banking, CCLT, Housing First Erie, and rehab funds so each project reinforces the others and fills different parts of the housing continuum.

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HOUSING BURDEN (RENTERS/OWNERS)

Renters: The 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) shows in the report area that 46.89% of occupied units paying rent nationwide pay 30% or more of their income on housing costs. For the study area, 46.24% of occupied units paying rent have a housing cost burden. When 30% or more of income is spent on housing costs, it is considered a "housing-cost burden".
Total housing units are defined as "total rentals and owned where rent/owned and income are known".
The number of occupied units is limited to those where gross rent as a percentage of household income is able to be calculated.

Table: 3

Report Area	Total Housing Units	Occupied Units Paying Rent	30 Percent or More of Income Paying Rent	Percent of Renters Spending 30 Percent or More of Income with Rent
Erie County, PA	110,106	34,865	16,120	**46.24%**
Pennsylvania	5,235,339	1,605,715	707,485	44.06%
United States	127,482,865	44,590,828	20,909,407	46.89%

Owners: The 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) shows in the report area that 27.38% of homeowners with mortgages nationwide pay 30% or more of their income on housing costs. 23.6% of owners with mortgages and 11.93% of owners without mortgages spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs in the report area. 30% or more of income spent on housing costs is considered a "housing-cost burden". Total housing units are defined as "total rentals and owned where rent/owned and income are known".
The number of occupied units is limited to those where gross rent as a percentage of household income is able to be calculated.

Table: 4

Report Area	Total Housing Units	Owners with Mortgage	30 Percent or More Income with Mortgage	Percent of Owners Spending 30 Percent or More of Income with Mortgage	Owners without Mortgages	30 Percent or More of Income without Mortgage	Percent of Owners Spending 30 Percent or More of Income without Mortgage
Erie County, PA	110,106	40,681	9,602	**23.60%**	34,560	4,123	11.93%
Pennsylvania	5,235,339	2,127,016	499,297	23.47%	1,502,608	211,524	14.08%
United States	127,482,865	50,718,449	13,886,916	27.38%	32,173,588	4,391,728	13.65%

Housing - What is needed going forward

Housing Issues and Investment Priorities:

Erie's Investment Playbook, coordinated through Infinite Erie, treats housing as one of the core levers for inclusive growth. The Playbook explicitly calls for "investments in housing stock, homeownership, and minority-owned construction" as a way to ensure that new growth is shared equitably among Erie's residents and not concentrated in a few neighborhoods or income groups.

Erie County, PA Playbook Identifies Several specific housing challenges emerge from the Playbook and related Infinite Erie initiatives:

- Chronic homelessness and lack of permanent supportive housing

- Housing First Erie, a key Playbook initiative, estimates that roughly 100 people in Erie County are chronically homeless and remain on the community's "master list" despite existing shelter and rapid rehousing efforts.

  ○ Phase 1 of Housing First Erie will develop 72 units of permanent supportive housing at Washington Square—22 units in a renovated former school building and 50 units in new construction—with a goal of reducing chronic homelessness by 75% within three years. Additional phases anticipate building out to 150 permanent homes for people with the most complex needs.

  ○ Shortage of permanently affordable housing and risk of displacement

  ○ Infinite Erie worked with the Erie County Land Bank and partners to secure a $400,000 PHARE grant to launch the Cornerstone Community Land Trust (CCLT), explicitly designed to create and preserve permanently affordable housing across Erie County and reduce future gentrification in struggling neighborhoods. This signals a recognition that conventional affordable projects are not enough; long-term affordability and anti-displacement tools are needed.

- Aging, underutilized, and blighted properties

- Need for a full homelessness "continuum of care."

- The Playbook explicitly identifies the need to expand the continuum of care for people experiencing homelessness as part of downtown and neighborhood investment strategies—recognizing that housing, services, and public space improvements must move together.

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Population in Poverty by Gender

In Erie County, poverty is higher for women than for men—and higher than the state overall. An estimated 17,192 men (13.6%) and 22,351 women (17.2%) live below the federal poverty level. By comparison, Pennsylvania's poverty rates are 10.6% for men and 12.9% for women, and the U.S. rates are 11.3% and 13.6%. This means women in Erie County face a significantly greater risk of poverty than men and a greater risk than women statewide or nationally.

FOR GECAC, THIS POINTS TO THE NEED TO:

- Prioritize female-headed households and single mothers in housing, workforce, and income-support programs.
- Design workforce and education services that account for caregiving, childcare, transportation, and scheduling barriers that disproportionately affect women.
- Use program data (CAP60, workforce systems) to monitor gender gaps in access and outcomes and adjust outreach and services accordingly.

This indicator reports the population in poverty in the report area by gender.
The percentage values could be interpreted as, for example, "Of all the male population within the report area, the proportion living in households with income below the federal poverty level is (value)

Table: 5

Report Area	Male	Female	Male, Percent	Female, Percent
Erie County, PA	17,192	22,351	13.60%	17.19%
Pennsylvania	654,286	826,695	10.58%	12.93%
United States	18,016,757	22,373,288	11.26%	13.60%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019–2023 (poverty by gender)

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Population in Poverty by Race Alone

The data show large racial gaps in poverty in Erie County, and in several cases the gaps are wider than in Pennsylvania or the U.S. overall. Poverty rates for Black residents in Erie County are markedly higher than for White residents and appear above the state and national averages for Black residents. Asian and multiracial residents in Erie County also experience higher poverty than their White counterparts and are roughly at or above state and national levels. The chart suggests an especially high poverty rate for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander residents in Erie County, though this is likely based on a very small population and should be interpreted with caution. For American Indian/Alaska Native and "Some Other Race" residents, Erie's poverty rates are closer to or slightly below the state and national figures, but still well above those of White residents.

FOR GECAC, THIS UNDERSCORES THAT POVERTY IN ERIE COUNTY IS NOT EVENLY DISTRIBUTED BY RACE. PRIORITIES SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Making sure outreach, eligibility, and service locations intentionally reach Black, Asian, multiracial, and other residents of color who face higher poverty risk.

- Tracking program access and outcomes by race in CAP60 and workforce systems to see who is being served and where gaps remain.

- Strengthening partnerships with trusted community, cultural, and faith organizations to co-design services and address barriers like discrimination, language access, and transportation.

- These disparities make clear that any strategy to reduce poverty countywide must also be a racial equity strategy, with Community Action at the center.

The percentage values could be interpreted as, for example, "Of all the white population within the report area, the proportion living in households with income below the federal poverty level is (value).

Table: 6

Report Area	White	Black or African American		American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian			
Erie County, PA	12.97%	33.94%		12.86%	15.97%	51.02%	28.23%	26.18%
Pennsylvania	8.88%	24.22%		26.07%	12.15%	18.76%	27.07%	17.07%
United States	9.85%	21.28%		21.81%	9.93%	17.18%	18.24%	14.70%

Figure: 9

Population in Poverty by Race Alone, Percent

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Population in Poverty by Race Alone

This chart shows that most people in poverty in Erie County are White, simply because White residents make up the largest share of the overall population.

Of all residents living below the poverty line:

- Approximately 70.6% are non-Hispanic White (27,910 people)
- Approximately 14.1% are Black or African American (5,561 people)
- Approximately 11% identify as multiple races (4,304 people)
- Smaller but important numbers are Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and "Some Other Race."

THIS MEANS THAT POVERTY AFFECTS EVERY RACIAL GROUP IN ERIE COUNTY, AND GECAC MUST:

- Continue serving large numbers of White households in poverty, especially in city neighborhoods and rural areas; and
- Remain intentional about reaching Black, multiracial, and other residents of color, who experience higher poverty rates relative to their share of the population.

For GECAC, the takeaway is that reducing poverty in Erie County must be both broad and equity-focused—addressing countywide need while also tackling racial disparities in opportunities, wages, housing, and access to services.

Population in Poverty by Race
Population in Poverty by Race, Total Erie County

Figure: 10

Table: 7

Report Area	Non-Hispanic White	Black or African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Multiple Race
Erie County, PA	27,910	5,561	45	774	25	924	4,304
Pennsylvania	848,573	319,256	6,042	56,452	787	117,799	132,072
United States	20,312,310	8,404,656	617,308	1,884,376	104,976	3,933,913	5,132,506

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019–2023 (population in poverty by race, Erie County, PA).

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Poverty

- Erie County's overall poverty rate is 14.5%, noticeably higher than both Pennsylvania (11.9%) and the United States (12.5%). The gap is even larger for children. For residents age 0–17, poverty in Erie County is 20.8%, compared with 15.5% in Pennsylvania and 16% nationally. Among children age 5–17, Erie's poverty rate is 20.1%, versus 14.7% statewide and 15.3% nationally.
- This means Erie County has more people in poverty overall—and a significantly higher share of children in poverty—than the state and nation.

FOR GECAC, THIS POINTS TO CLEAR PRIORITIES:

- Intensify anti-poverty work for families with children, including rental assistance, childcare supports, food security, and whole-family case management.

- Strengthen education and workforce pipelines so parents and young adults can move into family-sustaining employment.

- Use CAP60 and program data to target high-poverty neighborhoods and schools, ensuring services reach children and families where poverty is most concentrated.

- These figures reinforce that reducing child and family poverty must remain central to GECAC's mission and strategy.

Table: 8

Report Area	All Ages No. of Persons	All Ages Poverty Rate	Age 0-17 No. of Persons	Age 0-17 Poverty Rate	Age 5-17 No. of Persons	Age 5-17 Poverty Rate
Erie County, PA	36,783	**14.5%**	11,160	20.80%	8,068	20.10%
Pennsylvania	1,497,696	11.90%	400,534	15.5%	283,155	14.70%
United States	40,763,043	12.5%	11,445,264	16%	8,139,044	15.30%
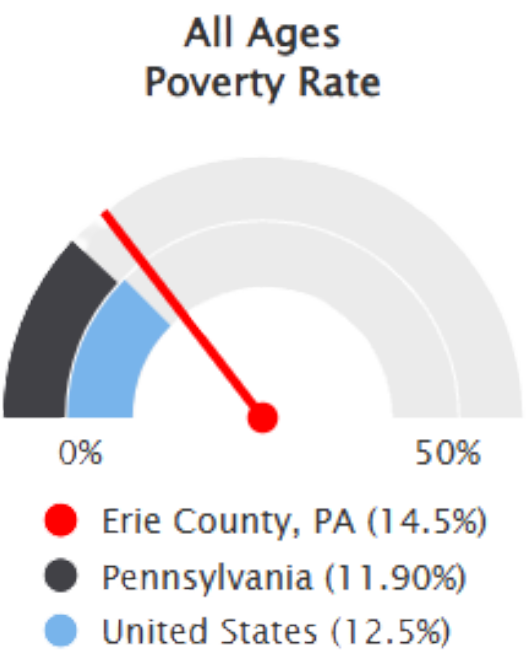
All Ages Poverty Rate

0%   50%

- Erie County, PA (14.5%)
- Pennsylvania (11.90%)
- United States (12.5%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019–2023

GECAC 60 Years

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INTERNAL DATA SYSTEMS AND
CLIENT-LEVEL INFORMATION

GECAC relies on internal data systems to track services, monitor outcomes, and understand patterns of need among the individuals and families it serves. The primary platform used across programs is CAP60, a web-based case management and reporting system designed for Community Action Agencies. GECAC will continue to use CAP60 as its core data system throughout the next CNA cycle.

CAP60 captures client-level, household-level, and service-level information, allowing GECAC to:

- Create unduplicated counts of clients and households served
- Track services across multiple programs for the same household
- Monitor eligibility, income, and changes in household composition over time
- Produce reports required by funders and internal leadership
- Analyze outcomes by geography, demographic characteristics, and program area

Standard data elements in CAP60 include demographic information (age, gender, race/ethnicity), income and employment status, household size and composition, address and ZIP code, benefit receipt, and service history.

Housing, Utility Assistance

For housing and rental assistance programs, CAP60 is used to record:

- Type of housing assistance provided (rental arrears, security deposit, first month's rent, utility assistance, eviction prevention, relocation support)
- Household income, rent burden, and source of income
- Landlord information, unit address, and length of tenancy when available
- Reason for assistance (loss of income, medical issues, domestic violence, increase in rent, etc.)
- Amount of financial assistance provided and funding source
- Outcomes such as prevention of eviction, relocation to safer or more stable housing, and subsequent requests for assistance
- These data allow GECAC to track who is requesting help, why households are falling behind on housing costs, and how effective interventions are in stabilizing housing over time.

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: AAA

Area Agency on Aging:

As Erie County's Area Agency on Aging, GECAC also uses CAP60 to support older adult services. For aging programs, CAP60 captures:

Demographic and functional information on older adults, including age, living situation, caregiver status, and basic health/functional limitations as required by program guidelines. Results of standardized assessments used for care planning (e.g., needs related to personal care, homemaker services, transportation, nutrition, caregiver support, and social engagement).

1. **Authorized services and service units (meals, in-home support hours, care management contacts, transportation trips, senior center participation, evidence-based wellness classes)**

2. **Referrals to and from external partners (healthcare providers, long-term care, mental health, housing, and legal services)**

3. **Indicators of risk such as social isolation, falls, caregiver stress, or risk of nursing home placement when collected under specific programs**

These data support care management, service coordination, and required state and federal reporting, and allow GECAC to monitor which older adults are being reached, which services are most heavily used, and where gaps remain in the aging-services network.

For this Community Needs Assessment, CAP60 data were used to:

- Generate unduplicated counts of clients served in housing, rental assistance, and aging services

- Identify trends in requests for assistance (e.g., reasons for housing instability, frequency of re-contacts, geographic "hot spots")

- Examine client characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, income, and household type to assess equity and access

- Inform discussions with staff and partners about unmet needs, service gaps, and areas where demand exceeds current capacity

- Together with external data sources, CAP60 provides a ground-level view of how Erie County residents interact with GECAC's programs, where services are effective, and where additional resources or program changes may be needed.

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: Workforce Development

In addition to housing and aging services, GECAC maintains several internal data sources that document workforce development needs and outcomes in Erie County. These systems capture information on youth, adults, and families working toward employment, education, and self-sufficiency.

Summer Youth Jobs Program:

GECAC's Summer Youth Jobs program provides subsidized employment, work readiness training, and career exposure for youth and young adults. Program staff use surveys and program records to track:

- Participant demographics (age, school status, ZIP code, race/ethnicity, income eligibility)
- Worksite placements, hours worked, and wages earned
- Self-reported barriers to work (transportation, childcare, mental health, housing instability, justice involvement, etc.)
- Changes in skills and confidence (communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management)
- Future plans for education, training, or employment
- Pre- and post-program surveys give GECAC a direct view of how young people experience the local labor market—what helps them succeed and what continues to stand in their way. These data highlight ongoing needs for paid work experience, mentoring, transportation support, and clear pathways into post-secondary education and higher-wage jobs.

Adult Education and Literacy Data:

GECAC's Adult Education programs (including literacy, GED/HSE preparation, and related services) track data for Erie County in alignment with state and federal reporting requirements. The program maintains records on:

- Enrollment, attendance, and persistence
- Educational functioning levels at intake and exit
- Progress toward GED/HSE and other credentials
- Employment and training outcomes following program participation

Data show the scale of low basic skills and incomplete credentials among adults in Erie County and document how many participants are able to move on to post-secondary training or employment. They also highlight gaps—for example, adults who stop attending due to transportation, childcare, health issues, or work schedule conflicts—pointing to a need for more flexible, wraparound models of instruction and support.

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: Workforce Development

Work Ready:

- GECAC's Work Ready program serves individuals receiving public assistance who are required to participate in work-related activities. Outcomes for this program are tracked primarily in the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDS), Pennsylvania's statewide case management and reporting system. CWDS captures:

- Participant demographics and benefit status

- Assigned activities (work experience, job search, education, training)

- Participation hours and compliance

- Job placements, wages, and retention

- Work Ready data underscore the challenges faced by residents who are furthest from the labor market, including long-term unemployment, limited work history, and multiple barriers. They also show where additional supports—such as mental health services, transportation, and employer engagement—are needed for participants to achieve sustained employment.

Toward a More Integrated Workforce Data System:

- At present, workforce development information is spread across multiple systems and tools—CAP60, program-specific spreadsheets and surveys, Adult Education reporting platforms, and the statewide CWDS system. GECAC's long-term goal is to streamline these platforms into a more integrated data environment, ideally anchoring them to a single system where allowable by funding sources and state requirements.

A more unified data system would enable GECAC to:

- Follow individuals and families across Summer Youth Jobs, Adult Education, Work Ready, and other workforce services

- See how education, training, and support services combine to produce long-term outcomes

- Identify which neighborhoods, age groups, and demographic groups are underserved

- Report more efficiently to multiple funders while maintaining high standards of data quality and privacy

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: PA Navigate

PA Navigate:

PA Navigate is Pennsylvania's statewide online resource and referral platform, sponsored by the Department of Human Services. It allows residents, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations to search for and connect to services that address basic needs such as food, housing, utilities, transportation, childcare, and more. Individuals can self-refer through the PA Navigate website, and providers can send "closed-loop" referrals that track whether a household actually connects to the service they were referred to.

The platform is built on the find help technology and is designed to support work on the social determinants of health and health-related social needs. By connecting healthcare teams directly with local organizations, PA Navigate helps ensure that medical providers are not working in isolation when patients face non-medical barriers like food insecurity, unstable housing, or lack of transportation.

GECAC's Approach to PA Navigate:

Community Action is deeply woven into PA Navigate's design and implementation. The Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP) serves as the statewide Community Engagement Support for the platform. CAAP's role.

GECAC's Approach:

- Onboard community-based organizations and helping them "claim" and update their program listings
- Provide one-on-one and group training on how to search, make referrals, and use PA Navigate's free tools
- Support organizations in closing referral loops and using platform analytics
- Hosting learning sessions and share stories from GECAC and other partners across Erie County

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: PA Navigate

As Erie County's Community Action Agency and Area Agency on Aging, GECAC is a natural partner for PA Navigate. The platform complements GECAC's existing data systems (such as CAP60 and CWDS) by:

- Making GECAC's programs easier to find for residents, healthcare providers, and other referral sources

- Allowing GECAC to receive electronic referrals for services such as housing and utility assistance, older adult services, food resources, and workforce programs

- Enabling GECAC staff to make "warm" referrals to other local partners when a household has needs that fall outside GECAC's services

- Providing referral and search analytics that can highlight emerging needs (for example, spikes in housing requests or transportation barriers) and inform future planning and Community Needs Assessments

Used effectively, PA Navigate supports a "no wrong door" approach: whether a household first connects with GECAC, a healthcare provider, or another community organization, they can be linked to a broader network of resources without having to start over at each door.

This section summarizes key trends from GECAC's COPOS reports for 2023, 2024, and 2025. The analysis is designed to support the Community Needs Assessment by showing how resources and employment outcomes have shifted over time.

'Year-by-Year Highlights:

2023: GECAC focused on stabilizing and supporting its workforce, including revising the compensation scale to address inflation and reward longevity, and forming staff committees on wages, retention, and accountability. CSBG resources supported employment, education, housing, and senior services while the agency operated the only licensed GED testing site in Erie County.

2024: GECAC strengthened internal capacity by formalizing strategic planning committees and investing in technology, data, and accountability systems. Programmatically, the agency used CSBG and leveraged funds to address food insecurity and basic needs through warm clothing distributions, food bag events, and spring cleaning supply drives held at senior centers across Erie County.

2025: GECAC is finalizing final report. The COPOS report shows strong programmatic outcomes, particularly in youth employment through Earn + Learn and adult employment services.

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: CAP60 Common Themes 2025
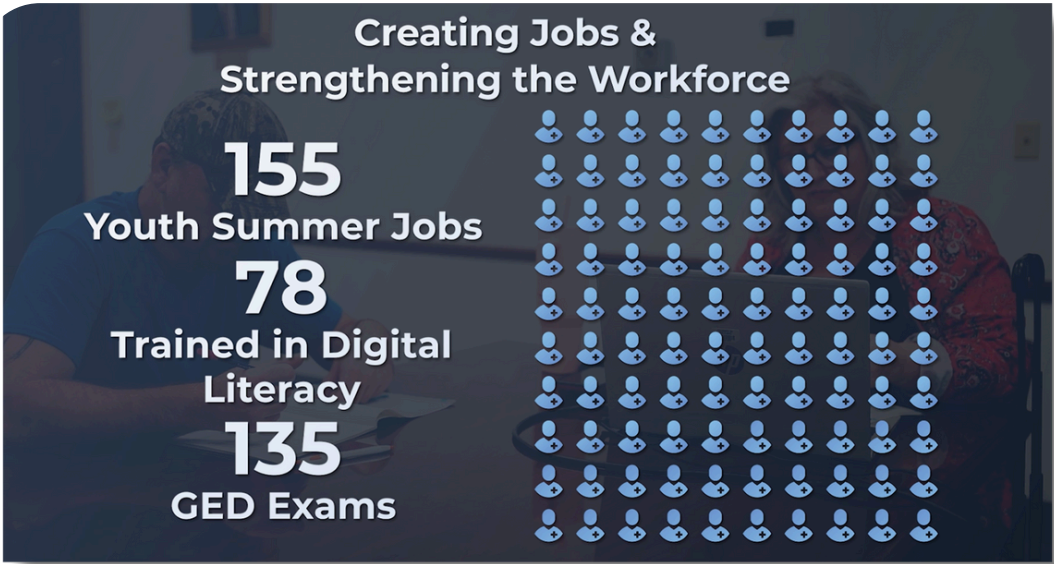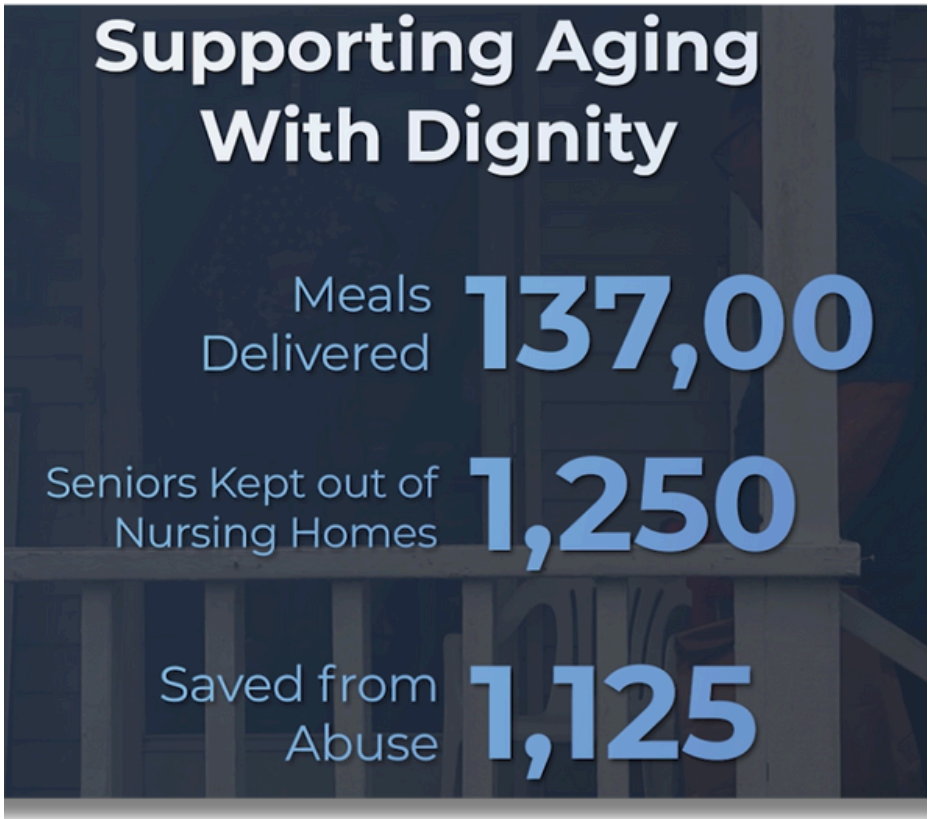
Date	Response
08/07/2025	MOW meals were barely edible. Food needs to be a higher quality.
08/11/2025	It would be helpful if services for seniors could support higher than poverty level incomes. With very high medical and prescription drug costs I must make decisions on juggling mortgage, utilities, prescription drugs. I have no credit left, behind on mortgage, and no savings, prescription drug refills are behind so I skip every other day, split tablets, etc. I do have my alert, fall detection, and the door key holder so emergency staff can enter and I appreciate those so very much.
09/03/2025	The wait list is keeping me from getting services
09/03/2025	My cuurent case worker is great. The prior one was not helpful and made me feel like i was wasting her time.
09/05/2025	None
09/05/2025	Mk has been spoiled many times. Would like them to ring the doorbell when they come.
09/08/2025	Once meals on wheels got started, it was a rough go from the delivery/receiving end for a while. We finally found our groove though. Also, not to be ungrateful...but most of the meals are frozen/TV dinners when we thought there would be some hot meals. That was a misinformed expectation. It's fine but may not be for others.
09/05/2025	The meals are delivered too early 7AM! That is way too early. I know I am a first stop, but 7AM? I know funds are limited but I have been on the wait list for almost 3 years for an aide and a lifeline!
09/03/2025	Many of the meals do not taste good. Cannot identify what the meal is. It looks like slop. Some are okay. Frozen meals are cheap and I get 4 frozen meals, Banquet meals, and I may get all the same meal for each week. No variety. I am on the low sodium diet and those frozen meals are full of salt. I cannot eat those. I get apples but cannot eat them. I have no teeth. Milk is sometimes frozen. I have complained before and nothing changes.
09/08/2025	aide service was on hold for two years lack of funding i was told
09/08/2025	Meals delivered too too early. The person comes by 7:15. I like to sleep in to 9 and cant on days meals are delivered. Lunch meal should not be delivered so early. Milk has been frozen. Crazy.
09/08/2025	Meals delivered too too early. The person comes by 7:15. I like to sleep in to 9 and cant on days meals are delivered. Lunch meal should not be delivered so early. Milk has been frozen. Crazy.
09/09/2025	I cannot receive some services i need because of no funding.
09/09/2025	Ongoing issues with meal delivery. Uneatable meals due to the following issues: meals thrown on porch, meals thrown on bottom step of porch in rain, meals thrown in yard, receiving expired milk.
09/10/2025	Was on wait list for meals but now am getting them.

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Internal Data Systems and Client-Level Information: CAP60 Reporting 2023-2025

The following section presents data retrieved from CAP60, GECAC's client data management system used to track services, demographics, and outcomes for individuals and families served through our programs. CAP60 compiles unduplicated information on residents of Erie County who engage with GECAC, allowing us to better understand community needs, service utilization, and trends over time. In addition to this administrative data, GECAC also conducted a community survey to capture the voices and experiences of Erie County residents who may or may not already be connected to our programs. Together, these data sources provide a more complete picture of local needs and help guide our planning, resource allocation, and advocacy efforts.

In practical terms, CAP60 allows GECAC to capture detailed information such as household composition, income level, employment status, housing stability, and the types of services accessed (e.g., utility assistance, workforce development, senior services, or education programs). Because the system is designed to track unduplicated clients, it helps prevent double-counting and supports more accurate analysis of how many unique Erie County residents are being served, how often they return, and which services they rely on most. The accompanying GECAC survey adds another layer of insight by asking residents about their lived experiences, unmet needs, and perceptions of local resources. This combination of CAP60 data and community survey responses strengthens the reliability of our findings and helps ensure that our planning is grounded in both quantitative trends and the real stories of people living in Erie County.

Fighting Poverty

400
Received Utility Assistance

2,800
Received Food Vouchers

289
Received Job Training & Employment Support

Supporting Aging With Dignity

Meals Delivered **137,00**

Seniors Kept out of Nursing Homes **1,250**

Saved from Abuse **1,125**

Creating Jobs & Strengthening the Workforce

155
Youth Summer Jobs

78
Trained in Digital Literacy

135
GED Exams

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Overall COPOS Data and Need

GECAC's 2024 COPOS data show both the scale of need in Erie County and the breadth of outcomes achieved across multiple domains. In 2024, a total of 6,126 individuals were enrolled in GECAC programs tracked through COPOS, and 3,025 individuals achieved at least one National Performance Indicator (NPI) outcome. Nearly one in two participants met a significant benchmark in employment, education, housing, health, financial stability, aging, or civic engagement.

These numbers reinforce GECAC's role as Erie County's Community Action Agency and confirm that thousands of residents rely on GECAC each year to stabilize basic needs, build skills, maintain independence, and participate in their communities. The concentration of outcomes in health, food security, and independent living also highlights the growing needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, and households struggling with chronic illness and food insecurity.

Overall Reach: Total Enrolled vs. Total Achieving at Least One Outcome, GECAC COPOS 2024.

The chart below illustrates the overall reach of GECAC's services in 2024. Of 6,126 individuals enrolled in COPOS-tracked programs, 3,025 achieved at least one NPI outcome, underscoring that GECAC is not only reaching large numbers of residents, but also helping many of them achieve meaningful progress toward self-sufficiency.

Of 6,126 individuals enrolled in COPOS-tracked programs, 3,025 achieved at least one NPI outcome, underscoring that GECAC is not only reaching large numbers of residents, but also helping many of them achieve meaningful progress toward self-sufficiency.

Figure: 11

Overall Reach - 2024

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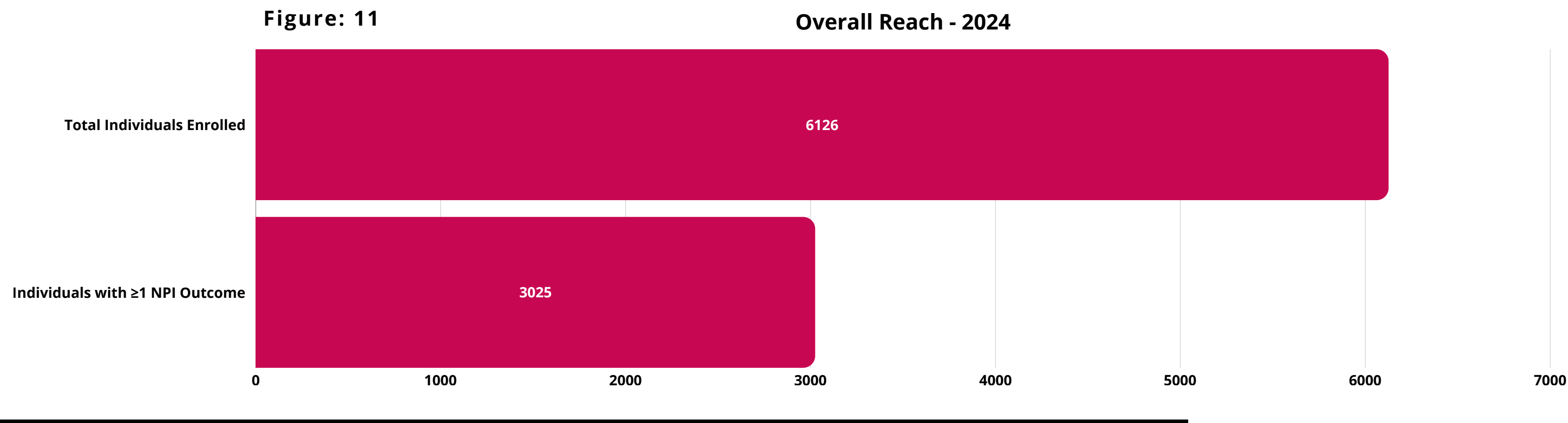
Distribution of Outcomes by Domain

The following section shows how key outcomes are distributed across the major domains of GECAC's work. The largest share of outcomes is concentrated in health, food security, and independent living, reflecting the intensive needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, and residents with chronic health conditions. Employment, education, housing/utility assistance, and civic engagement outcomes also represent substantial areas of impact and ongoing community need.

Distribution of Outcomes by Domain

Domain	Value
Employment Outcomes	173
Education & Skills Outcomes	134
Housing & Utility Outcomes	298
Health, Food & Independent Living Outcomes	5504
Civic Engagement Outcomes	409
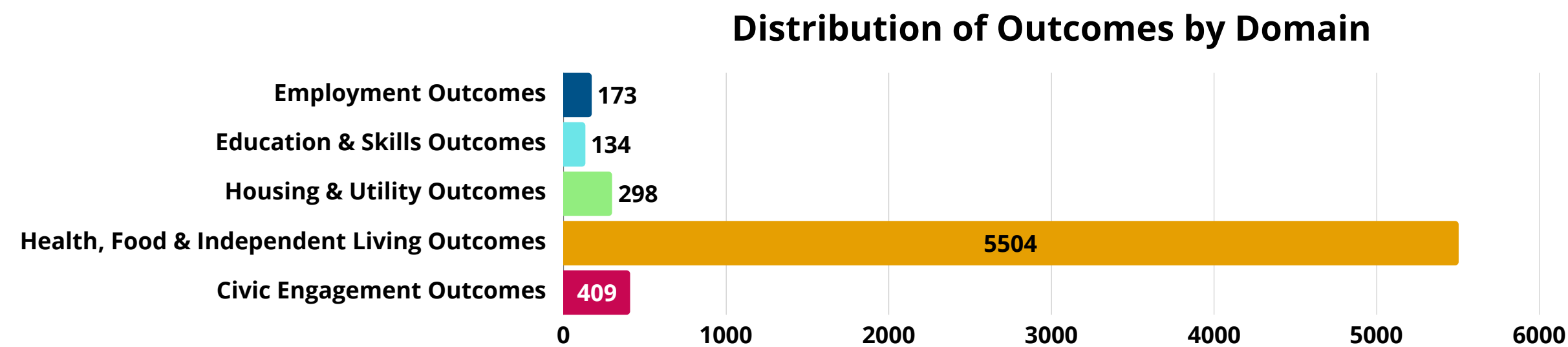
Employment & Workforce Outcomes

Employment and workforce services remain a core need for Erie County residents served by GECAC. In 2024, 157 unemployed youth obtained employment to gain skills and income, exceeding the agency's annual target of 125 youth and outpacing the originally projected enrollment. GECAC's youth workforce programs help young people overcome barriers to work, develop essential job skills, and connect to local employers.

For adults, GECAC's employment services focus on individuals who are unemployed or underemployed and facing multiple barriers. In 2024, 16 unemployed adults obtained employment (up to a living wage), more than doubling the original target of 6. A subset of adults were tracked for 90- and 180-day job retention, demonstrating that residents often need continued coaching and support even after they secure a job. Overall, demand for workforce services is strong, and the data indicate a clear need for both job placement and ongoing retention support.

HELPING PEOPLE,
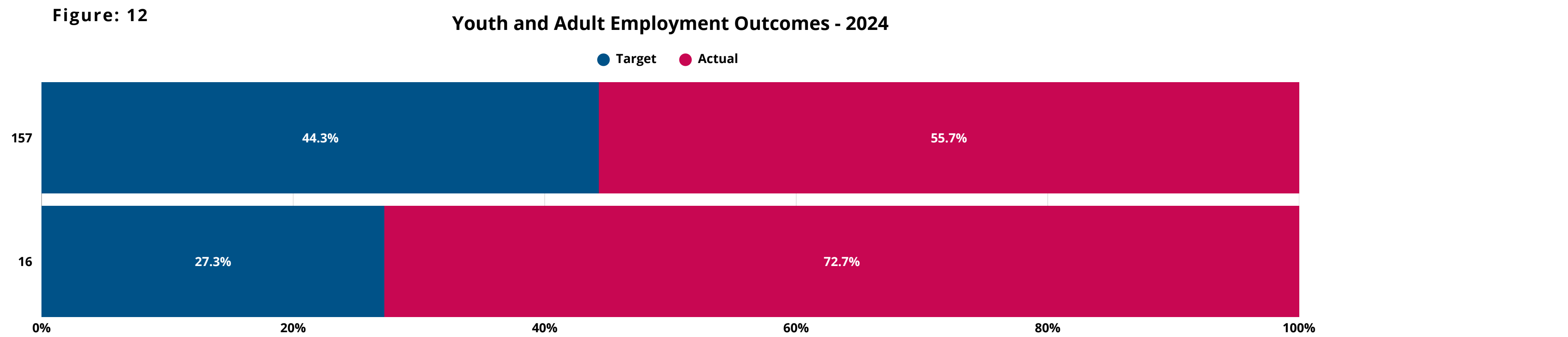CHANGING LIVES

Youth and Adult Employment Outcomes

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Figure: 12

Youth and Adult Employment Outcomes - 2024
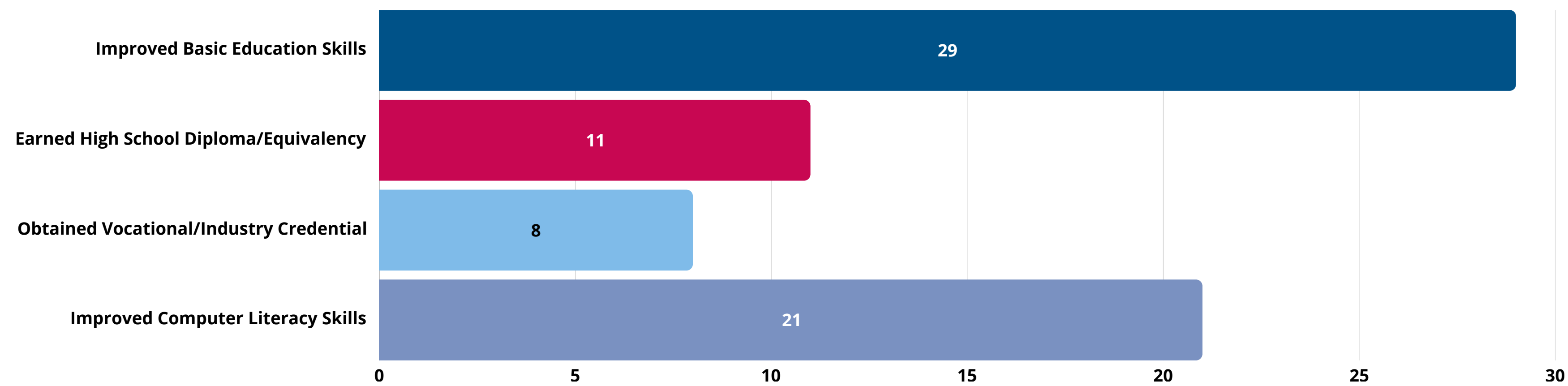
● Target   ● Actual

compares GECAC's 2024 targets with actual employment outcomes. Youth job placements significantly exceeded the annual target, and adult job placements were more than double the goal, indicating strong demand for and utilization of GECAC's workforce programming.

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Education, Credentials & Digital Skills

Educational attainment and skill development are ongoing challenges for many GECAC participants. In 2024, 65 high school youth improved their positive approaches to learning and attention skills, demonstrating strong engagement in school and readiness to succeed academically. Adult education programs served individuals returning to school later in life, often while balancing work, childcare, and financial pressures.

Among adults, 29 individuals demonstrated improved basic education skills, reflecting progress in literacy and numeracy. Another 11 individuals earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, and 8 obtained a recognized vocational or industry credential. In addition, 21 individuals demonstrated improved computer literacy skills, an essential foundation for job search, online applications, and access to digital services. These results underscore the need for sustained investment in adult education, GED preparation, credentialing, and digital literacy to support long-term economic mobility.

Figure: 13

Adult Education, Credential, and Digital Skills Outcomes 2024

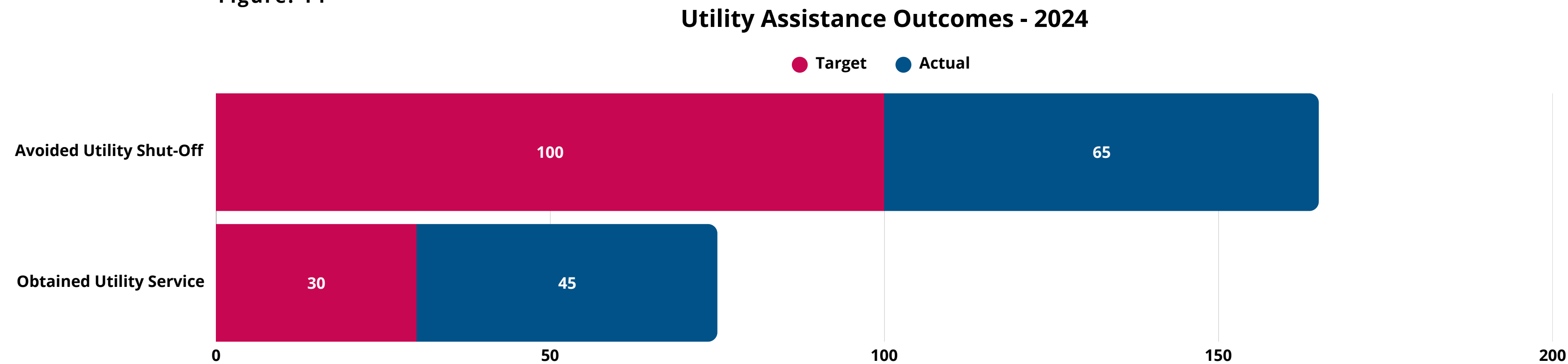| Category	Value
Improved Basic Education Skills	29
Earned High School Diploma/Equivalency	11
Obtained Vocational/Industry Credential	8
Improved Computer Literacy Skills	21

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Income, Financial Stability & Utility Security

GECAC's financial capability and utility assistance services help households avoid crises that can quickly spiral into homelessness, health issues, or deepened poverty. In 2024, 106 individuals reported improved financial well-being after engaging with financial education, coaching, or counseling. These improvements reflect better budgeting, debt management, and planning, all of which are critical to long-term stability. Utility assistance remains a high-demand service. GECAC helped 65 individuals avoid a utility shut-off and 45 individuals obtain utility service, with 100% of enrolled participants achieving these outcomes. Actual demand for reconnection exceeded the original target, underscoring that many Erie County residents are only one or two bills away from crisis and depend on GECAC to keep lights, heat, and water on.

The following chart highlights the gap between planned and actual utility assistance needs. While GECAC planned to serve 100 households to prevent shut-offs and 30 households needing reconnection, actual demand for reconnection services surpassed expectations, pointing to deeper financial instability among low-income households.

Figure: 14

Utility Assistance Outcomes - 2024

● Target   ● Actual

Avoided Utility Shut-Off: Target 100, Actual 65
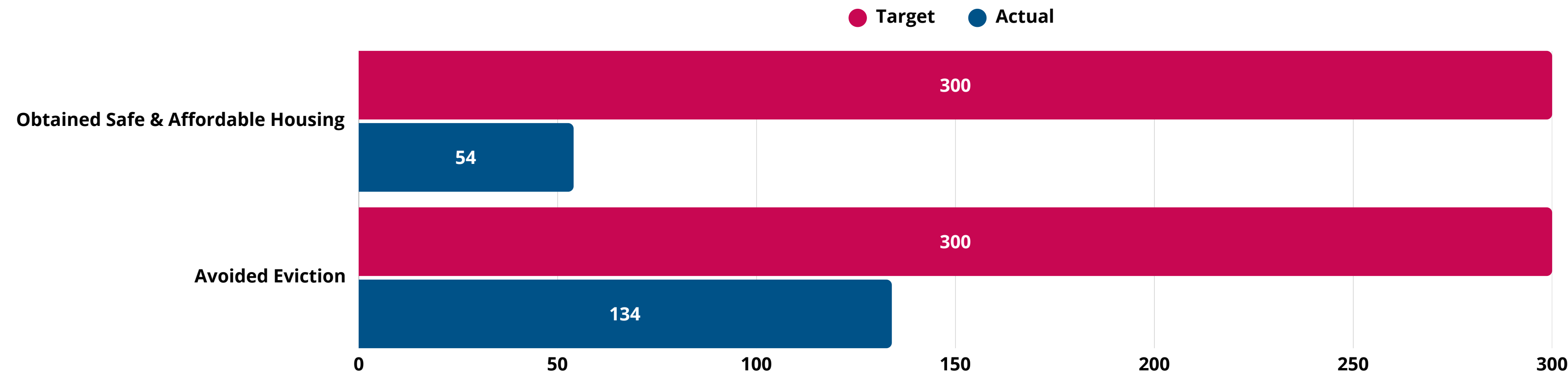**Obtained Utility Service**: Target 30, Actual 45

Housing Stability & Eviction Prevention

Housing stability is a critical and growing need in Erie County. In 2024, GECAC helped 54 individuals obtain safe and affordable housing and 134 individuals avoid eviction, with 100% success among those enrolled in eviction prevention services. These interventions not only prevented immediate homelessness, but also reduced disruptions to employment, schooling, and health.

The agency's 2024 workplan anticipated up to 300 individuals needing eviction prevention and 300 needing stable housing, indicating a much larger pool of households at risk than current funding can fully support. These data highlight the importance of sustained investment in rental assistance, landlord mediation, and housing navigation services to stabilize families before they enter crisis.

The following chart compares planned targets with actual housing stabilization outcomes. While GECAC successfully assisted all enrolled households in avoiding eviction or obtaining housing, the targets themselves point to a much larger number of residents at risk of housing instability county-wide.

Figure: 15

Housing Stabilization Outcomes - 2024

Legend: ● Target   ● Actual

Obtained Safe & Affordable Housing: Target 300, Actual 54
Avoided Eviction: Target 300, Actual 134

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Health, Food Security, Aging & Independent Living

GECAC's health, nutrition, and aging services address some of the most pressing needs of low-income residents. In 2024, 437 individuals increased their nutrition skills (such as cooking, shopping, and growing food), and 1,439 individuals reported an improved sense of food security. These outcomes demonstrate both the extent of food insecurity and the impact of education and access supports in helping families stretch limited budgets and improve their diets.

Health and well-being are also major focus areas. 156 individuals reported improved physical health and well-being, while 123 individuals reported improved mental and behavioral health. For older adults and people with disabilities, GECAC's programs are essential to maintaining independence: 873 seniors (65+), 507 individuals with disabilities, and 648 individuals with chronic illness maintained independent living. In addition, 560 emergency situations were mitigated through protective and crisis intervention supports, and 761 individuals increased social inclusion, helping to reduce isolation and loneliness. These outcomes underscore that hundreds of vulnerable residents depend on GECAC each year to remain safely in their homes and communities.

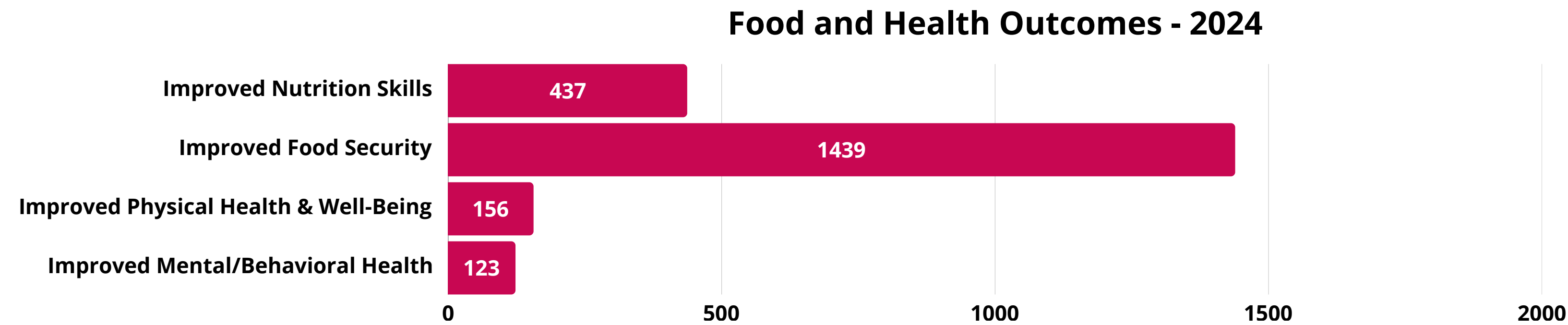The following shows the number of individuals in key groups who maintained independent living with GECAC's support. The high counts for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with chronic illness indicate the scale of need among residents who might otherwise require costly institutional care.

Figure: 16

Individuals Maintaining Independent Living - 2024

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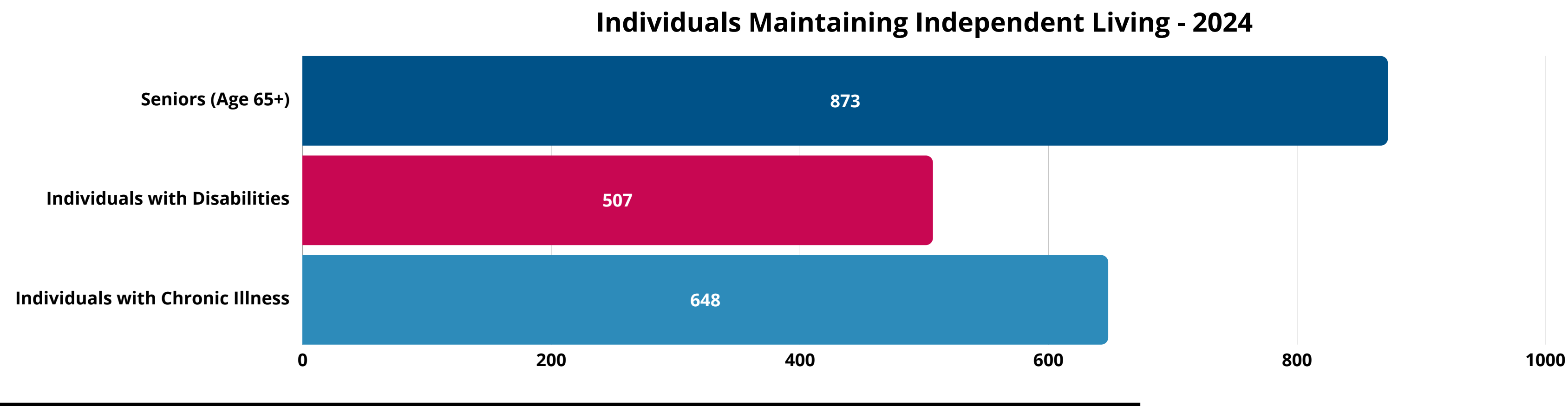
Food & Health Outcomes

Below highlights improvements in nutrition, food security, and health among GECAC participants. The particularly large number of residents reporting greater food security illustrates the depth of local need and the importance of sustained investment in nutrition and food access programs.

Food and Health Outcomes - 2024

Category	Value
Improved Nutrition Skills	437
Improved Food Security	1439
Improved Physical Health & Well-Being	156
Improved Mental/Behavioral Health	123

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Civic Engagement & Leadership Development

In addition to direct services, GECAC helps residents build leadership skills and engage in community problem-solving. In 2024, 409 individuals increased the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to work with Community Action to improve conditions in their communities. Within this group, 348 individuals strengthened leadership abilities, social networks, and other engagement-related skills.
These outcomes show that residents are not only receiving services, but also becoming more empowered to advocate for themselves and their neighborhoods. By building local leadership and civic capacity among low-income residents, GECAC helps create a stronger, more inclusive civic infrastructure in Erie County.

The following chart shows that hundreds of residents increased their civic engagement skills, with a large portion also building leadership and social networks. This illustrates GECAC's dual role as both a service provider and a catalyst for community leadership and voice.

Civic Engagement & Leadership Development - 2024

Improved Leadership Skills/Social Networks
46%

Increased Civic Engagement Skills
54%

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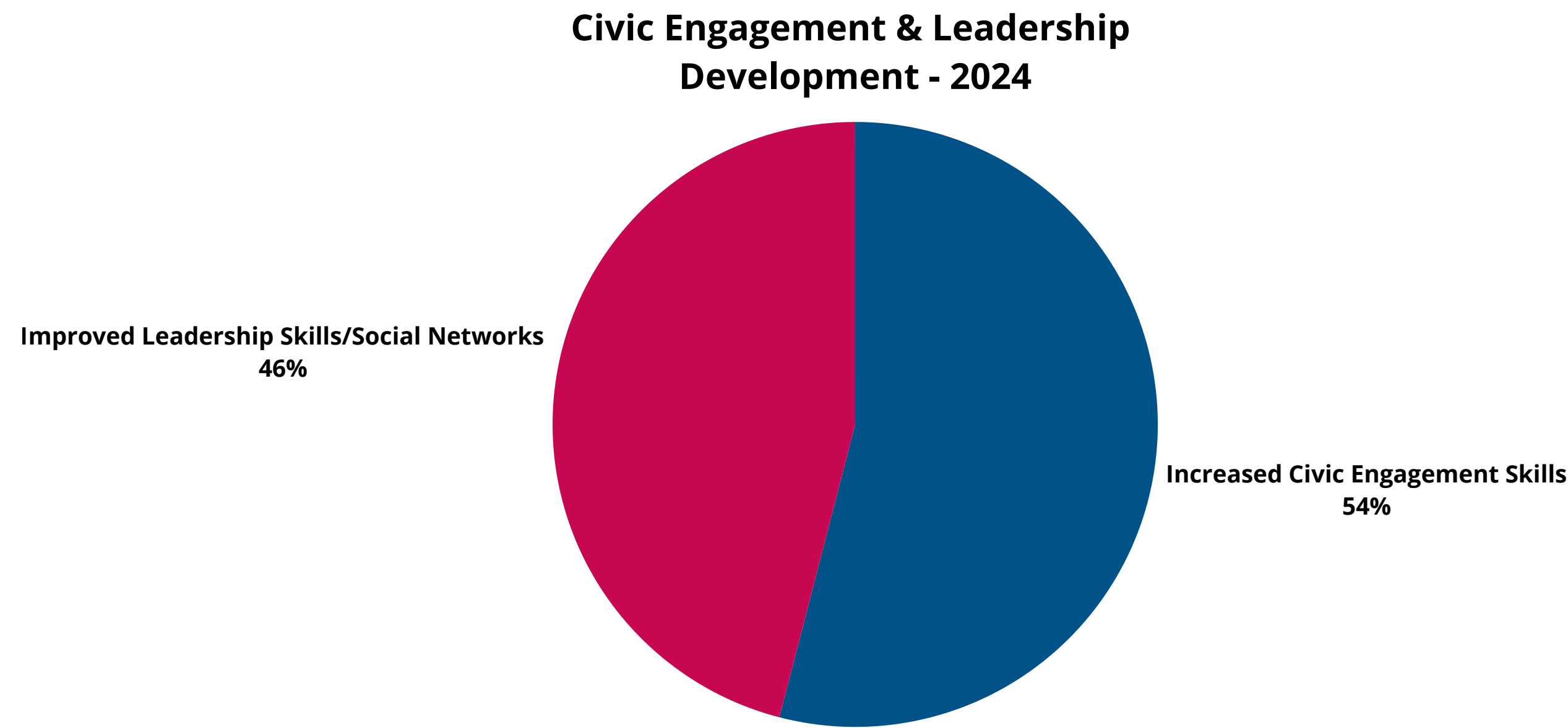
Key Findings

1. Employment & Economic Security

- Job opportunities are limited and many residents lack family-sustaining wages.

- People struggle to afford or access job training programs.

- Seniors—especially women—are staying in the workforce longer to afford food and medicine.

2. Housing & Homelessness

- Top concerns: paying utilities, home maintenance, and rent/mortgage.

- AARP data show low levels of multifamily housing and relatively few subsidized units per older adult.

- Seniors are asking for property tax relief and affordable housing near services.

3. Transportation

- In many areas there is 0 buses per hour or very infrequent transit.

- Residents report trouble affording car insurance, reliable vehicles, and transit costs.

- Transportation is a barrier to employment, healthcare, and senior services.

4. Health & Nutrition

- Local CHNA identifies substance use, chronic disease, and access to care as top health issues.

- Food insecurity remains high; Meals on Wheels and senior nutrition programs are critical.

- Residents report difficulty affording dental care, prescriptions, and insurance.

5. Education & Youth Development

- Persistent child poverty – about 25% of children under 5 live in poverty.

- Limited childcare and after-school options.

- Graduation and post-secondary outcomes are uneven, especially by place and population.

6. Older Adults & Caregivers

- Seniors face social isolation, affordability challenges, and healthcare access barriers.

- Caregiver burden is increasing, with workforce shortages in direct care.

- Growing numbers of grandparents are raising grandchildren in Erie County.

7. Equity & Inclusion

- Poverty disproportionately affects Black and Hispanic residents.

- There are systemic inequities in employment, health outcomes, and housing.

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Priority Needs for 2025–2028

- Affordable Housing & Utility Relief

- Living-Wage Jobs & Job Training Access

- Transportation Equity (Urban & Rural)

- Healthcare Access, Mental Health & Substance
  Use Response

- Senior Services: Nutrition, Social Isolation,
  Caregiver Support

- Child Poverty Reduction & Youth Engagement

- Equity Across Race, Gender, Age & Disability

North East

North East Twp

Lawrence Park Twp

Wesleyville Boro

City of Erie

Greenfield Twp

Fin

Millcreek Twp

20

Fairview

Greene Twp

8

Venango Twp

Summit Twp

Lake City Boro

Girard Boro

Girard Twp

McKean Twp

Amity Twp

8

Wayne Twp

Springfield Twp

Platea Boro

Waterford Twp

City of Corry

Corry

Franklin Twp

Union

Cranesville Boro

Conneaut Twp

Elk Creek Twp

Washington Twp

Edinboro Boro

Mill Village Boro

Union Twp

Concord Twp

State Game

GECAC 60 Years

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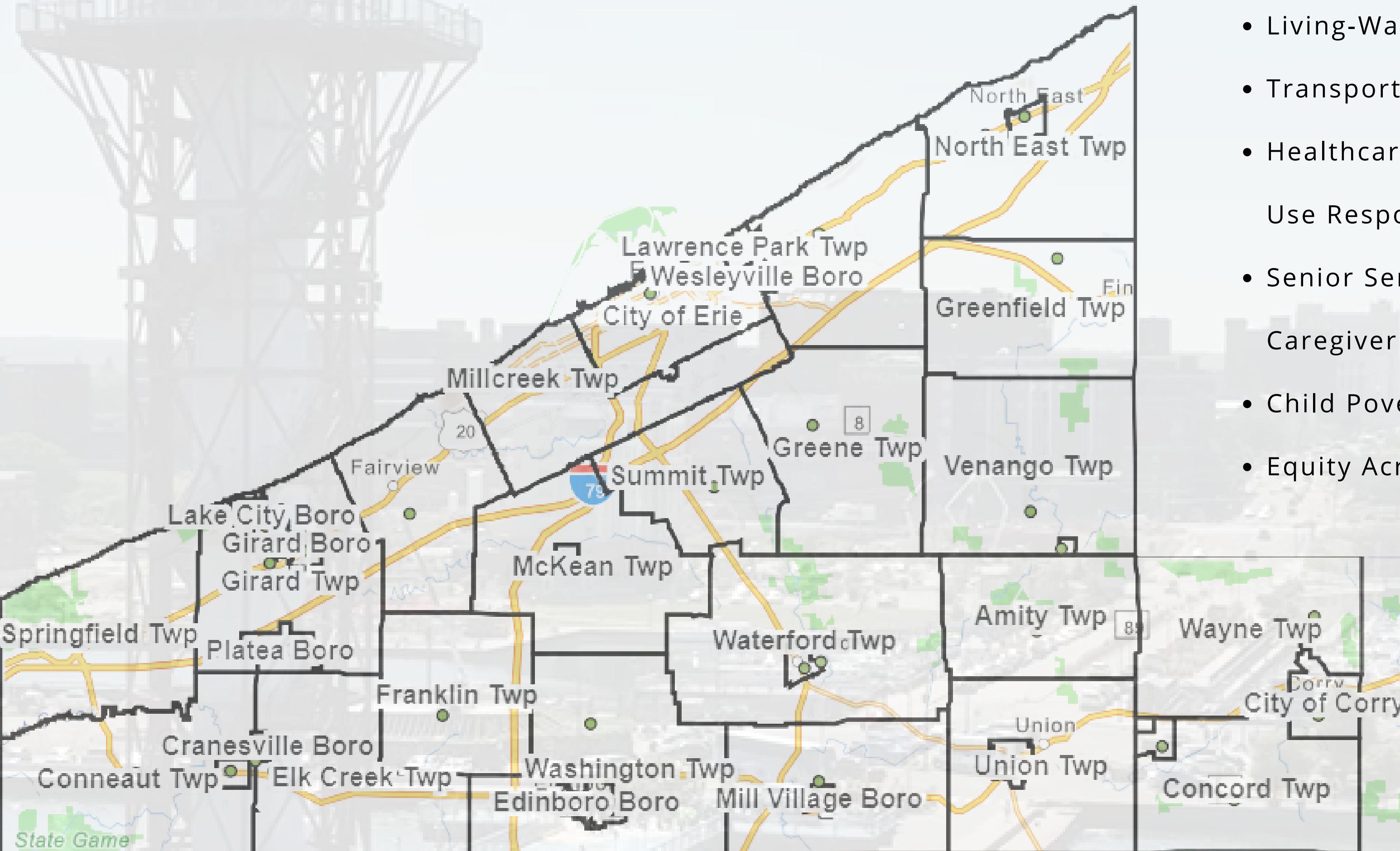
Priority Needs for 2025–2028

Based on quantitative data, stakeholder input, and community voice, GECAC's 2024–2028 Community Needs Assessment identifies the following priority needs for Erie County. These priorities will guide program design, partnerships, and advocacy efforts across the agency.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING & UTILITY RELIEF:
Affordable, safe, and stable housing remains a foundational need for low- and moderate-income households in Erie County. Rising rents, aging housing stock, and increasing utility costs place significant pressure on family budgets and contribute to housing instability, overcrowding, and homelessness. When shelter, heat, and electricity are insecure, families struggle to maintain employment, support their children's education, and address health needs. Prioritizing affordable housing and utility relief in the CNA ensures that GECAC and its partners continue to invest in prevention, eviction diversion, weatherization, energy assistance, and related supports that promote long-term stability.

LIVING-WAGE JOBS & JOB TRAINING ACCESS:
Access to living-wage employment is central to GECAC's mission of helping people move from crisis to stability and self-sufficiency. Too many Erie County residents are working in low-wage, unstable jobs without benefits, predictable hours, or advancement opportunities. At the same time, barriers such as childcare, transportation, limited digital access, and a lack of supportive services can prevent individuals from enrolling in or completing training. By elevating living-wage jobs and job training access as a priority, the CNA underscores the need for coordinated workforce pathways, sector-based training, and wraparound supports that align with employer demand and the realities of working families.

TRANSPORTATION EQUITY (URBAN & RURAL):
Transportation is a cross-cutting barrier that limits access to employment, healthcare, education, childcare, and social connections for residents in both urban and rural parts of Erie County. Gaps in public transit routes and schedules, lack of affordable options, and limited accessibility for individuals with disabilities can isolate households and undermine program effectiveness. Identifying transportation equity as a core need in the CNA highlights that service design must account for how people actually move—or cannot move—through the county. It also provides a basis for collaboration with transportation providers, local governments, and employers to improve routes, affordability, and last-mile solutions

HEALTHCARE ACCESS, MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE RESPONSE:
Health and economic stability are deeply interconnected. Many Erie County residents face barriers to primary care, behavioral health services, and timely, affordable treatment for substance use disorders. Unmet health needs can lead to lost wages, family stress, preventable hospitalizations, and involvement with public systems. By prioritizing healthcare access, mental health, and substance use response, the CNA recognizes the need for integrated, community-based approaches that connect residents to care, reduce stigma, and coordinate services across providers. This priority supports GECAC's role as a connector, helping clients navigate complex health and human service systems

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Priority Needs for 2025–2028

SENIOR SERVICES: NUTRITION, SOCIAL ISOLATION, CAREGIVER SUPPORT:

Erie County's aging population requires targeted attention in planning and service delivery. Many older adults live on fixed incomes, manage chronic health conditions, and depend on family or informal caregivers who are themselves under strain. Nutrition, social isolation, and caregiver burnout emerge as consistent concerns. Including senior services as a priority area ensures that meal programs, senior centers, in-home supports, transportation, and caregiver respite remain central components of the local safety net. This aligns with GECAC's role in promoting aging with dignity, independence, and social connection.

CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:

Child poverty has long-term implications for educational outcomes, health, and future earning potential in Erie County. Children growing up in households struggling to meet basic needs face barriers to school readiness, participation in enrichment activities, and healthy development. At the same time, youth need meaningful opportunities to work, lead, and contribute to their communities. By prioritizing child poverty reduction and youth engagement, the CNA calls for investment in early childhood supports, out-of-school-time programs, youth employment, and leadership opportunities that help young people build skills, confidence, and a sense of belonging. This priority reinforces GECAC's commitment to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

EQUITY ACROSS RACE, GENDER, AGE & DISABILITY:

Persistent disparities across race, gender, age, and disability shape who experiences poverty, housing instability, unemployment, poor health, and justice involvement in Erie County. These inequities are the result of historic and ongoing barriers, not individual shortcomings. Centering equity as a priority in the CNA affirms that GECAC will examine who is most affected by each need, disaggregate data where possible, and intentionally design strategies that close gaps rather than reinforce them. This lens will guide how programs are structured, how resources are allocated, and how community voice is incorporated into planning and decision-making.

Together, these seven priorities provide a framework for GECAC's strategic focus from 2024–2028 and will inform program development, partnerships, advocacy, and resource allocation aimed at helping people and changing lives throughout Erie County.

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Conclusion

This 2025–2028 Community Needs Assessment confirms that poverty in Erie County is persistent, multi-dimensional, and unevenly distributed across race, gender, age, geography, and disability. It highlights the ways in which housing instability, low-wage employment, transportation barriers, health challenges, and social isolation reinforce one another—particularly for children, older adults, women, and communities of color. At the same time, the Assessment documents the resilience and assets of Erie County residents and the important role that GECAC, as both the Community Action Agency and Area Agency on Aging, plays in helping households move from crisis to stability and toward long-term self-sufficiency.

Guided by this analysis, GECAC will focus its efforts on seven priority areas: affordable housing and utility relief; living-wage jobs and job training access; transportation equity in both urban and rural communities; healthcare access, mental health, and substance use response; senior services centered on nutrition, social connection, and caregiver support; child poverty reduction and youth engagement; and equity across race, gender, age, and disability. These priorities will shape program design, resource allocation, partnerships, and advocacy strategies over the next three years, ensuring that limited resources are targeted where need and impact are greatest.

The Assessment also underscores the importance of strong data systems and cross-sector collaboration. By aligning internal data tools such as CAP60, COPOS reporting, Adult Education platforms, CWDS, and PA Navigate analytics with external data from Erie Vital Signs, AARP, HUD, ACS, and local health assessments, GECAC can more accurately see who is being reached, where gaps remain, and which interventions are producing lasting results. Continued collaboration with local governments, health systems, schools, employers, and community-based organizations will be essential to advancing a "no wrong door" approach for households seeking help.

Ultimately, this Community Needs Assessment is not a one-time exercise but a living roadmap. GECAC will revisit these findings regularly, integrate community and client voice, and use ongoing data analysis to refine strategies, pilot new approaches, and scale what works. By remaining grounded in evidence, accountable to residents, and rooted in the mission of "Helping People, Changing Lives," GECAC will continue to work toward an Erie County where every individual—regardless of race, age, gender, income, or neighborhood—has the opportunity to live with dignity, stability, and hope.

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