



## 2021 Community Needs Assessment Update January 2021

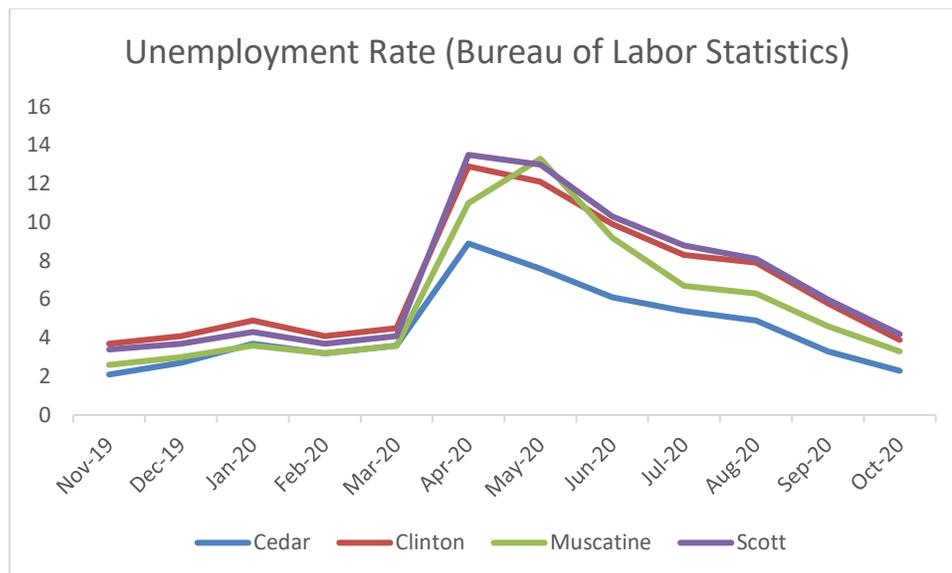
A supplement to the Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment –  
Identifying trends and community changes since the initial assessment

**COVID-19:** The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic dominated many facets of life in 2020.

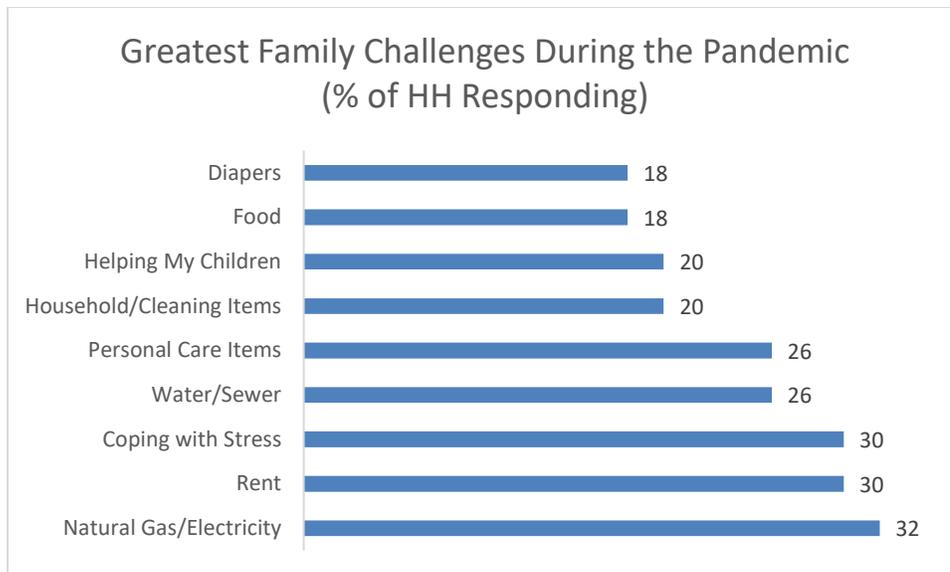
Significant trends driven by the pandemic include:

1. **Family Incomes Declined:** The negative economic impact of the pandemic and the uneven economic recovery significantly impacted Head Start and Early Head Start families' financial health. Fifty current Head Start and Early Head Start parents completed a survey to ask about the pandemic's impact. 48% of the households responded that they lost income due to the pandemic. 20% reported losing employment, and 52% reported reduced hours of work since the pandemic began.

Area Unemployment spiked in the spring of 2020 and has since improved.



2. **Families Lack Basic Necessities:** Due to lost income, families struggle more to meet their basic needs. Parents surveyed listed their most significant challenges as rent, utilities, and mental health.



Community Action of Eastern Iowa (CAEI) has seen sharp increases in the need for food, diapers, and utility assistance.

- A. **Food:** CAEI provided food pantry assistance to 4,326 unique households in 2020, up from 506 the previous year, increasing more than 800%. The vast majority of the food provided was delivered to the household's doorstep using a contactless process. Head Start and Early Head Start families automatically received food deliveries for several months. Numerous community partners provided funding for food assistance.
  - B. **Diapers:** CAEI ordered two semi-trailers full of diapers in 2020. A total of 1,168 unduplicated households received doorstep delivered diapers in 2020, up from 68 families in 2019.
  - C. **Water/Sewer/Garbage Assistance:** CAEI accessed funding through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to provide more than \$85,000 in water and sewer bill assistance. This was a new program, and the funding was exhausted within six months. The late 2020 recovery act passed by Congress may include additional resources for water bills.
  - D. **Home Heating Assistance:** CAEI is experiencing high numbers of requests for emergency heating assistance. According to the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB), as of July 2020, 9% of all Iowa residential accounts had an unpaid past-due balance. For energy assistance eligible accounts (lower-income households), the past-due arrearage rate was 23%.
3. **High Stress Levels:** Financial stress was the most highly reported parent stress area, with 42% of the families surveyed reporting high or very high stress levels.

Head Start and Early Head Start Parent Survey Self-Reported Stress Levels					
	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
Regarding Finances	16%	4%	38%	12%	30%
Regarding Employment	30%	4%	34%	8%	24%
At Home	20%	10%	56%	2%	12%
Overall	12%	4%	52%	18%	14%

4. **Parents Skeptical of Vaccine:** Fifty current Head Start and Early Head Start parents surveyed rated their comfort level with receiving the vaccine on a scale of zero (very uncomfortable) to ten (very comfortable). CAEI graphed responses on a Net Promoter Score® of Promoters (>6), and Detractors (<4). The aggregate score was -68, with Detractors outnumbering Promoters by nearly six to one. Just 8% of the respondents answered with a ten. Parent comfort level with getting their children vaccinated (if approved for use in children) yielded a similar result, with a Net Promoter Score® of -70.



*Parent Comfort Level Regarding Vaccine*

5. **Children Lost Learning Opportunities:** CAEI halted Head Start and Early Head Start center-based learning in mid-March 2020, due to COVID-19. Center-based services remained closed until early September when CAEI reopened with 50% enrollment. CAEI struggled to stay fully staffed due to COVID-19 exposure and had to close several classrooms intermittently. COVID-19 cases in Iowa spiked in late November, and CAEI closed centers again on December 7, 2020. CAEI plans to reopen centers with 50% enrollment on January 5, 2021, if public health conditions allow. The parent survey asked parents about their comfort level with sending their children to in-person Head Start and Early Head Start. Detractors outnumbered Promoters slightly, with a Net Promoter Score® of -22. CAEI has continued to provide remote learning and support when centers are closed, but recognizes that in-center learning is optimal for learning.



*Parent Comfort Level with In-Center Head Start*

6. **Staff Recruitment and Retention Difficulties:** 59 CAEI Head Start and Early Head Start employees have had lost days of work due to COVID-19 (56% of all program staff). 45 employees have qualified for emergency sick leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) due to exposure or potential exposure to COVID-19, and 22 employees have qualified for FMLA under the FFCRA due to school closures for their children. This has caused CAEI to be unable to appropriately staff classrooms to keep them open. Additionally, staff vacancies have been more challenging to fill despite the high unemployment rate. We believe this is at least partly because of the perceived risk of the jobs. CAEI anticipates staff recruitment and retention as a primary concern coming out of the pandemic in mid-to-late 2021.

7. Uncertain Impact on Community Child Care: The number of community child care providers and enrollment capacity (home providers and centers included) remains relatively unchanged since last year. However, the pandemic's full impact on child care is unknown, as several providers are uncertain what the future holds for them as they work to address lost revenue. Providers are waiting to hear about additional government support to sustain their critical role in the recovery efforts.

County		Jul-19	Jul-20	Change
Cedar	Programs	29	30	1
	Enrollment Capacity	909	922	13
Clinton	Programs	54	50	-4
	Enrollment Capacity	1,677	1,844	167
Muscatine	Programs	61	60	-1
	Enrollment Capacity	1,701	1,684	-17
Scott	Programs	312	297	-15
	Enrollment Capacity	9,348	9,333	-15
Totals	Programs	456	437	-19
	Enrollment Capacity	13,635	13,783	148

**Derecho:** While the COVID-19 pandemic had the most significant impact on households in eastern Iowa, the August 10, 2020 derecho also caused substantial damage in eastern Iowa, especially in Clinton and Cedar Counties, where property damage was highest. Widespread and persistent power outages also caused many households to incur additional costs for food and other essentials. CAEI's disaster recovery and case management services assisted with the recovery efforts.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue Helping Families Meet Their Basic Needs: The economic recovery is uneven, and families are continuing to struggle. CAEI should continue to look for creative ways to meet household needs, focusing on the types of services needed (food, diapers, water bill, heating, personal care items) and assistance methods (online, phone, by mail).
2. Continue Training to Implement Trauma-Informed Services: Based on last year's comprehensive Community Needs Assessment, CAEI started a training cohort with the Child Abuse Council. CAEI will continue that initiative and explore additional ways to build staff capacity to understand and respond to trauma, including the trauma and reintroduced trauma from the pandemic.
3. Provide Sensitive Information to Families Regarding the COVID-19 Vaccine: Parent survey results show intense skepticism regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. CAEI, in partnership with its community public health partners, should develop a sensitive and encouraging approach to vaccine education based on scientific data.
4. Develop Enhanced Staff Recruitment, Retention, and Training: CAEI will need new approaches to staff recruitment, retention, compensation, and training to assure it has the high-quality workforce it needs to fully implement Head Start and Early Head Start services coming out of the pandemic.