

# Strategic Plan

2022-2027



Aroostook County Action Program

# ACAP Strategic Plan

## 2022-2027

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*We Make Life Better!*

## INTRODUCTION

For 50 years, Aroostook County Action Program has been here for the people of northern Maine. From supporting expectant parents and providing our youngest residents with a great Head Start, to making our community a healthier place to live, and supporting older adults to live warm and safe in their homes, we have worked side-by-side with the community to Make Life Better. We have helped people earn degrees, land a job, and families be more secure. We've been there for the community through it all, even a pandemic.

As a 501c3 non-profit organization founded in 1972, and the most comprehensive provider of social services in our region, we deliver programs and resources to the people of Aroostook County that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, homelessness prevention and mitigation, and workforce development services. ACAP has decades of experience administering local, state and federal funds. Annually, ACAP serves more than 14,000 (and growing) of the 68,859 people living in our vast rural county.

As we launch into our next five decades of service, this Strategic Plan will be a living, breathing and key guiding document that will drive our efforts to support our community's resiliency and recovery from the unprecedented challenges of our time. The devastating effects of a global pandemic, the economic uncertainty it has wrought, and the co-occurring instability across our nation and the world, in many regards have positioned ACAP, and the need for the programs and services we provide, at the forefront of the greatest upheaval of our time.

This work plan, and the concrete measures of success it calls for, are both bold and necessary. It reflects our efforts to meet the cited needs of our community, as noted both in our 2021 Comprehensive Community Assessment, and, equally important, our daily work directly with the consumers who utilize our services. With numerous partners at the table, our efforts turn to addressing many of the very real challenges that define our time.

Plans to address the critical shortage of available and skilled labor, amplified during the pandemic, and further underscored by a lack of affordable childcare options for parents in our region are addressed in this Plan. Equally, the crisis of homelessness and lack of affordable housing across our region are a focus. Continued efforts to provide additional stability to the families and individuals we serve through ACAP's Whole Family Approach and Comprehensive Service Delivery Model serve as the underpinning for these efforts.

Our work to improve the health and wellbeing of the community we serve includes innovative and evidenced-based prevention initiatives across the lifespan. Additionally, the provision of critical services that provide for key supports of social determinants of health, especially for the most vulnerable amongst us, will be at the forefront of our daily work.

Success toward accomplishing the objectives laid out in this Strategic Plan will be made possible by the members of the ACAP Team who dedicate their professional lives to the service of our community, the many volunteers that serve – including our volunteer Board of Directors, and numerous partners and stakeholders who work shoulder to shoulder with us. To all of them, we dedicate this Strategic Plan and express profound gratitude!

## DIVERSITY/INCLUSION

The changing demographics of our nation and state are slowly but surely coming to our beloved County, making us stronger and richer than ever. ACAP is committed to ensuring that people of all lived experiences have opportunities to live up to their full potential. Mindful of the indigenous people who occupied Aroostook County long before the United States became a nation, we will humbly learn to be good neighbors to the Wabanaki Peoples, while celebrating all people of color.

In partnership with the Community Action Network, we are committed to addressing widespread, historical inequity. In this Plan, we will be intentional about reviewing our employment practices, services, education and partnerships to ensure equity and justice are considered and advanced.



## METHODOLOGY

Community Action Agencies across the United States must comply with 58 Organizational Standards that ensure agencies have appropriate organizational capacity to provide services to low-income members of the community. These Organizational Standards are organized into nine (9) categories that focus on Maximum Feasible Participation, Agency Vision and Direction and Operations and Accountability \*(Reference IM 138, State Establishment of Organizational Standards for CSBG Eligible Entities). Category 6 of the Organizational Standards specifically looks at agency Strategic Planning.

**Standard 6.1:** The organization has an agency-wide Strategic Plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.

**Standard 6.2:** The approved Strategic Plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.

**Standard 6.3:** The approved Strategic Plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.

**Standard 6.4:** Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the Strategic Planning process.

**Standard 6.5:** The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the Strategic Plan within the past 12 months.

\*Adapted from NCAP Center of Excellence Developed CSBG Organizational Standards

ACAP has included these and the other additional Organizational Standards into the Strategic Planning process. In accordance with the Community Action Performance Management Framework, ACAP incorporated Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) principles into the planning and development of this Strategic Plan. The agency is committed to ensuring these practices and principles guide the Strategic Planning process with the support and oversight by its three ROMA Implementers. Each of these employees have completed the National ROMA Implementer training and provide ongoing agency support and implementation in ROMA practices.

# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT



This process for this Plan was initiated in the fall of 2020 when the 10 State of Maine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), along with MeCAP, the State Association, partnered together to conduct a statewide Community Needs Assessment (CNA). This assessment, the first of its kind in Maine, assessed community needs at both the state level and regionally based on agency coverage areas. In the fall of 2020, MeCAP released a Request for Proposals from interested organizations to submit a proposal to conduct and prepare a comprehensive Statewide Community Needs Assessment of the ten service areas of the community action agencies in Maine. The contract was awarded to Crescendo Consulting Group (Crescendo). Crescendo worked collaboratively with MeCAP to gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources, integrate primary and secondary data, match causes and conditions of poverty, assess community services gaps and complete a professionally finished document to be published by the Community Action Agencies of Maine.

The CNA methodology includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods designed to evaluate perspectives and opinions of area stakeholders and community members – especially those from underserved populations and agency clients. The methodology used helped prioritize the needs and establish a basis for continued community engagement – in addition to simply developing a broad, community-based list of needs. The major sections of the methodology included the following:

- Strategic Secondary Research. This type of research includes a thorough analysis of previously published materials that provides insight regarding the community profile and health-related measures.
- Qualitative Interviews and Discussion Groups. This primary research includes discussion groups and interviews with CAA leadership and staff, other community service providers, and community members across the state of Maine. One hundred and fifty (150) one-on-one interviews that lasted approximately 20-30 minutes in length were conducted. This provided the opportunity to have in-depth discussions about community-wide strengths, barriers to health equity, and action-steps. In addition, 25 virtual or in-person focus group discussions allowed Maine voices to be heard to highlight areas of consensus as to what they see as the biggest community needs facing the community. In total, across both qualitative research stages, over 300 individuals provided input from the following segments:
  - Community service organizations
  - Executive leadership
  - Faith based organizations
  - Governmental organizations
  - MeCAP clients and stakeholders by region

**Community Survey:** Crescendo conducted an online and paper-based survey in eight languages with over 7,000 community members across the state. Results were analyzed, and data tables / graphs were created to illuminate the results, which can be found in the [Community Needs Assessment](#) report.

**A Needs Prioritization Process.** Following the secondary research, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and community survey, a list of 35 community needs was generated. Leadership group members participated in a two-phase prioritization process. In Phase 1, leadership group members were asked to complete a quantitative and qualitative survey in which they indicated: “What community needs require more focus and attention?” After analysis of the Phase 1 survey, leadership group members reviewed the Phase 1 responses and generated a final list of prioritized needs during two 90-minute discussion sessions. Results were used to arrive at the five (5) key areas of priority emphasis.

The CNA report was finalized in October of 2021 and a presentation of the results to and approval of the report by the ACAP Board of Directors occurred on November 23, 2021. Full releases of the reports statewide occurred on January 26, 2022 with a press conference held at the State House in Augusta, as well as a coordinated statewide media release.

# REVIEW OF ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

In March of 2021, ACAP board members engaged in the process of a formal review and approval of the agency's Mission Statement to ensure it addresses poverty and aligns with programs and services offered. A mission statement sub-committee was formed with a combination of board members and agency staff. The two agency staff members are ROMA implementers. The sub-committee met monthly from March through June and in a Board work session on June 24, 2021. The following is the final approved ACAP Mission Statement "Aroostook County Action Program leads or collaborates to provide services that support, empower and improve lives."

## AGENCY Strategic Plan PROCESS

A sub-committee comprised of board members and agency staff (2 of which are ROMA Implementers), began meeting in January of 2022 to begin developing the strategies to address the top five (5) needs identified in the CNA.

Committee Members	
ACAP Board of Directors Members:	
Monica Pettengill-Jerkins (Tri-Chair)	Trudy Gorneault (ex-officio member)
Erik Vaughn	
ACAP Employees:	
Jamie Chandler (Tri-Chair)	Sherry Locke (Tri-Chair)
Cortney Therrien	Mary Duff
Raymond Saucier	Meg Hegemann
Sue Powers (ex-officio member)	

The committee was provided with training on the ROMA Cycle and components of a Strategic Plan. The committee began the process of drafting outcomes and strategies. Once a draft had been developed, the sub-committee sought feedback from stakeholders. The committee met with the following stakeholder groups to gather feedback and insight into the Plan.

- ACAP Ambassadors
- ACAP Board of Directors
- ACAP Management and Leadership Teams
- ACAP Parent Policy Council
- Aroostook Community Collaborative
- Community Development Committee
- Family Council
- Health Services Advisory Committee
- Hope and Prosperity Center Customer Focus Group

Feedback from these groups was compiled to develop the outcomes outlined in this Plan. The sub-committee developed the Strategic Plan document, to be shared with the Board of Directors with consideration for full approval of the Plan on June 23, 2022.



# STRATEGIC ISSUES

The five over-arching and most pressing needs identified by the people of Aroostook County in the region-wide 2021 Community Assessment, and, subsequently, those addressed in this Strategic Plan, are inextricably intertwined. The challenges must be addressed collectively, and through the collaborative efforts of numerous stakeholders, if we are to ensure the people of our region, especially the most vulnerable low- and moderate-income individuals and families, can achieve and maintain economic and overall stability and forge a pathway to success. The very economic livelihood and future of our region depends on multi-faceted and bold engagement by our agency and other stakeholders.

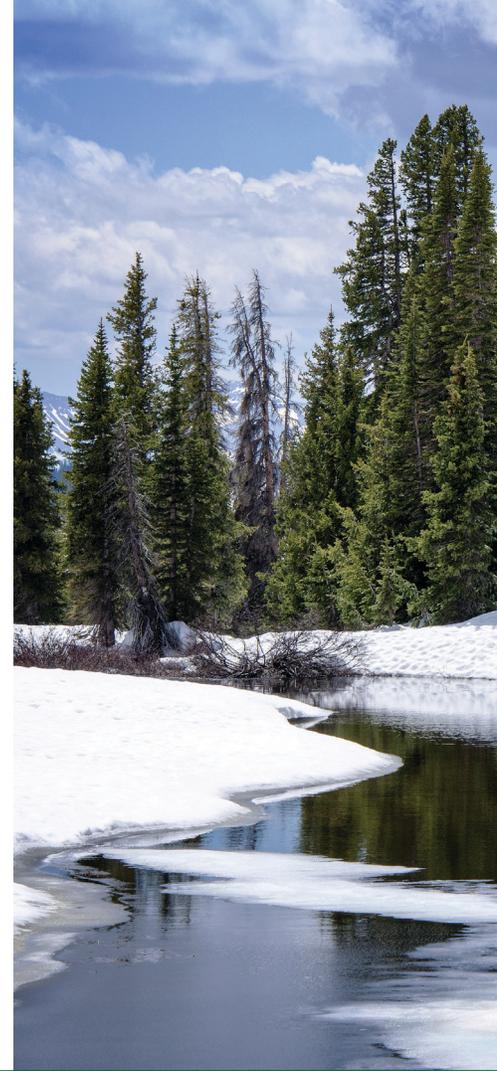
Below is a list of the top five community needs identified by the 2021 Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment:

1. **Increase Access to Affordable, Quality Childcare-** Childcare continues to be the highest ranked community need in Aroostook County. The need for affordable, quality childcare is identified by parents and guardians throughout the region, but is also identified by employers. Childcare is a key pillar of economic development. This plan will work to address not only the number of available child care opportunities in Aroostook, but look to increase support for childcare providers.
2. **Increase Access to Safe, Affordable Housing-** Housing in Aroostook County comes in a variety of forms, from single unit dwellings to multi-unit apartments. There is a mix of styles that are found throughout the region. Through the community engagement process, community members noted the need for quality places for families and individuals to call home along with the need to update our aging housing stock. Moving forward, there is an opportunity for this Plan to advocate for community members to increase access to safe and affordable housing countywide.
3. **Enhance Holistic Person-Centered Healthcare-** Before and during the pandemic comprehensive healthcare has been a challenge for many in our rural community. The pandemic amplified the need while diminished availability of services. The categories of mental health and substance use disorders continue to climb as a direct result of the pandemic and social isolation. The rates of chronic health conditions such as heart disease, COPD, obesity, deaths from heart attack and cardiovascular diseases and depression exceed state and in some cases national incidence. Additionally dental care was reported the top concern for low income survey respondents in the MeCAP CNA and ambulatory dental emergencies in Aroostook continue to exceed state rates due to lack of preventative care. It is imperative that community stakeholders work together to develop supportive environments and improve access to services to address these healthcare related challenges.
4. **Strengthen Employment Opportunities and Practices-** Unemployment levels are at a historic low in Aroostook County and across the State. Despite low unemployment figures, both employees and employers are expressing unmet needs. Our Plan will outline strategies to strength both employment opportunities and practices for employees and employers.
5. **Increase Access to Transportation-** Aroostook County is the largest county east of the Mississippi River measuring 6,829 square miles of rural communities. Transportation continues to be one of the biggest obstacles for residents, especially low-income residents. This Plan will identify strategies to increase access to transportation and necessary services.

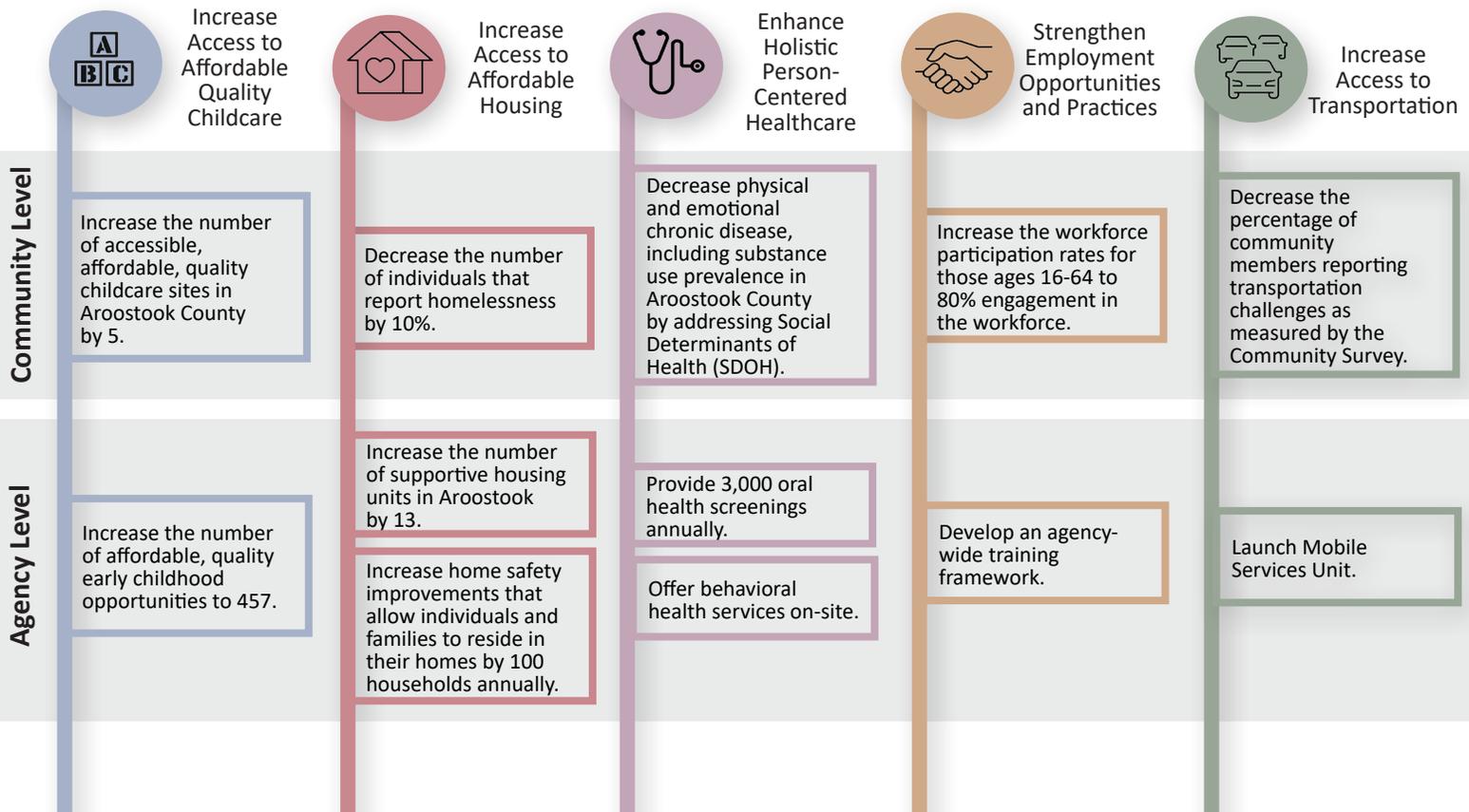


The areas identified through the Community Assessment, and outlined with measurable and benchmarked outcomes in this Strategic Plan, are amplified and exacerbated by the unprecedented global, national, state, and local challenges presented by the pandemic, as well as geopolitical and economic upheaval and uncertainty of our time. The ability for employers across our region to maintain and grow their businesses and organizations, and for working-age individuals to engage in their communities and the workforce, require not only employment opportunities and access to the education and training necessary to fill them, but also quality, affordable and accessible childcare, affordable housing, access to transportation, and to the services that lead to overall health and wellbeing. Expanding and improving access to many of these resources is also critically important to ensuring the needs of our region's older residents and individuals living with disabilities, who rely on such services to survive, are met.

As a national leader among Community Action Agencies that have adopted and embraced the Whole Family Approach for families with children, and the parallel Comprehensive Service Delivery Model, with which we engage customers, ACAP is poised to take on these challenges and advance the deliverables detailed in this Strategic Plan. We partner with the families and individuals we serve, and the collaborating organizations joining in our efforts and ready to mobilize our community and its people. It is through these cross-sector partnerships and shared initiatives that the measurable goals outlined in this Strategic Plan, and many and varied other benchmarks of success held by individuals, families, organizations and our community, will be attained.



## GOALS/OBJECTIVES



## NEXT STEPS

The ACAP 2022 5-Year Strategic Plan was approved by the ACAP Board of Directors on June 23, 2022 and shortly afterward, the Plan was shared with agency staff. Members of the ACAP Management Team will engage in a process to begin action-planning cross collaboratively, bringing in the key components of ACAP's Whole Family Approach and Comprehensive Service Delivery Model. This process will result in agency and or program implementation plans and enhanced partnerships.

