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BASIC NEEDS PERSIST AND NEW NEEDS ARISE IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR GIVEN RECENT HISTORIC EVENTS

Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County Announces 2021 Community Needs Assessment Results

ST. LOUIS PARK, MINNESOTA, January 6, 2022: Late in 2021, Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAP-HC) worked with The Improve Group to conduct a community needs assessment focused on five communities of color. Individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or as People of Color make up over half of CAP-HC's clientele, and in 2020, COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent unrest exacerbated existing inequities in these communities. CAP-HC completed a community needs assessment in early 2020, before these historic events had taken place. The goal of the 2021 assessment was to understand how the needs of Hennepin County residents with lower incomes have changed in light of these events, particularly within communities of color.

CAP-HC Executive Director Dr. Clarence Hightower stated, "The best way for us to fulfill our mission is to ask the communities we serve what they need—to really listen and then respond. Each time we conduct a community needs analysis, we are better equipped to address the specific factors that cause and reinforce poverty in Hennepin County."

Engagement centered on five communities of color which CAP-HC serves – African American, Hmong, Latino, Native and Somali. Taking an equity approach to the project, trusted community partners with strong relationships in these communities were asked to recruit and engage with community members in their preferred languages. Input was gathered through surveys, telephone calls and workshops with community partners. Six organizations and 47 community members participated in the assessment which was completed in December 2021. While specific strengths and challenges for each community varied, major themes are outlined below.

- **Strength in community** – Communities have a strong sense of connection and community empowerment. During these exceptionally difficult times, neighbors have come together to help each other.
- **Struggles with basic needs continue** – Improving access to affordable and healthy foods, stable and affordable housing and training for higher-wage employment options were specifically mentioned.
- **Public safety is a key challenge** – Community members named fear for safety, distrust of police and lengthy emergency response times.
- **Anxiety, stress and fear** – COVID-19 has caused feelings of uncertainty leading to anxiety, stress and fear that erodes mental health.



- **Trust, transparency and access** – People mentioned a need for working with trusted partners, improving transparency in eligibility requirements and application processes and the need for more outreach regarding CAP-HC programs and services.

The Improve Group added, “We appreciate CAP-HC’s commitment to ensuring its services are meaningful and responsive to the communities it serves, particularly communities of color who have experienced the longstanding racial inequities in our society and disproportionately felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also thank the community partners who helped lead this work and the organizations and community members who contributed their time and insights.”

Many organizational interviewees mentioned CAP-HC’s Energy Assistance Program being used widely, exemplifying the struggle to meet basic needs. A [report from the U.S. Energy Information Administration](#) released in October 2021 forecasts a drastic increase in utility bills during the 2021-2022 winter due to retail prices for fuels at or near multi-year highs. CAP-HC is already one of the largest providers of energy assistance in Minnesota, and the increase in costs will likely mean even more demand for its Energy Assistance Program this winter.

Government response to COVID-19 hardships has provided help for more households through stimulus payments, tax credits, additional unemployment benefits and increasing income eligibility for CAP-HC programs to 200% of Federal Poverty level. But many of these pandemic considerations are only in effect temporarily. Additional unemployment benefits ended September 4, 2021, and the increased income-eligibility threshold for CAP-HC programs has not been made permanent. Community members expressed concern about what happens after these pandemic considerations end.

The full report and an abbreviated executive summary can be downloaded via this private link: caphennepin.org/what-we-do/2021-cna.html

About CAP-HC

Established in 1986, Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAP-HC) helps people with lower incomes navigate crisis situations, build stability, and lift themselves out of poverty. CAP-HC’s mission is to partner with the community to provide effective and responsive services to reduce the impact of poverty in Hennepin County.

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