

Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County: Interim Community Strengths and Needs Assessment 2021



Community Action
Partnership of Hennepin County

The **Improve** Group

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Executive Summary

The Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAP-HC) completed this interim assessment to understand how the strengths and needs of Hennepin County residents experiencing poverty have changed since 2020. The interim assessment is an update to the last triennial community strengths and needs assessment, published in early 2020 before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. Recognizing the longstanding racial inequities intertwined in these upheavals, CAP-HC decided to update the previous needs assessment, engaging communities of color and cultural organizations that serve their communities. This interim assessment will help CAP-HC identify emergent needs, improve its programming, and strengthen relationships with the communities it serves, particularly communities of color.

The findings and results in this report are primarily based on workshops with community members from the Hmong, Somali, African American, Native, and Latino communities. Community partners who have strong ties and relationships in their communities recruited and engaged about 50 participants through the workshops. Additionally, interviews with staff members from five cultural organizations and one non-culturally specific social service nonprofit informed the assessment.

The findings and recommendations in this executive summary are based on common themes across the focus communities. Community-specific descriptions of strengths, challenges, and input shared by community members and service provider staff are included in the full report.

Themes from Community Workshops and Interviews

Community member and cultural and community organization staff responses shared the following themes:

- Community members were largely able to access services, resources, and government assistance through their community network and local organizations.
- Communities have a strong sense of connection and community empowerment, and neighbors came together to help each other.
- Community members and cultural and community organizations shared the need to continue improving and expanding access to affordable and healthy foods, stable and affordable housing, and training and high-wage work.
- Community members and organization staff identified public safety as a key challenge, highlighting fear for safety in the community, distrust of police, and lengthy emergency response times.
- Community members are experiencing anxiety, stress, and fear from COVID-19 and the uncertainties that it has caused. Mental health and chemical health services are priorities for some communities and organizations.
- Community members want more transparency in service processes and eligibility. They also want a greater emphasis on trusted community partners who live in the community they serve and support the community's best interests.

- Community members and organizations want programs, services, and supports to be more accessible, particularly when it comes to technology, eligibility requirements, or outreach.
- Technology improved some community members' access to services during the pandemic as providers shifted to virtual delivery. Unfortunately, the change also added barriers for people who did not have technology access or experience, causing some organizations to maintain in-person options.
- Organizations adapted their services to meet emerging community needs, starting new programs like rent assistance, emergency assistance, food delivery, hotlines, vaccination efforts, and health clinics.

Key Recommendations

Community member and cultural and community organization staff input prompted the following recommendations:

1. Continue to help community members access CAP-HC services and government assistance by ensuring eligibility requirements are transparent and streamlined and using a variety of outlets to inform the community about resources.
2. Review and develop a clear referral process with community organizations. This includes developing a formal process for community organizations to communicate and track referrals and mutually arrange for translation as needed.
3. Establish, strengthen, and leverage relationships with community organizations that work outside CAP-HC's focus areas to connect community members to needed services.
4. Partner with trusted community leaders and organizations to better serve communities that are marginalized. Community members want the opportunity for their communities to lead and be included in problem solving.
5. Work with organizations serving communities directly to integrate trauma-informed practices into their work, attending to communities' historical trauma and trauma from the past 18 months.
6. Mitigate technology access barriers by providing a safe space where community members can use computers to apply for services. This is particularly important as organizations have transitioned services online.
7. Partner with cultural organizations that serve specific communities to translate program descriptions and application forms in different languages or develop a system to refer clients to those organizations.
8. Take steps to explain CAP-HC's status as a nonprofit—not a government agency—to improve clarity for the community.

About the Interim Assessment

Purpose

Recognizing the radical shift in our world since early 2020, the Community Action Partnership of Hennepin County (CAP-HC) undertook this interim community strengths and needs assessment to get guidance directly from the Hennepin County community. This input will help CAP-HC plan and revise its programming to ensure that its services more fully align with community needs and complement the work of other nonprofit service providers.

CAP-HC completes a community strengths and needs assessment and strategic plan every three years to ensure organizational planning reflects a clear understanding of current community strengths and needs. The last regularly scheduled assessment came out in early 2020. Just as CAP-HC started realigning its programming, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a seismic shift in service needs and how they could be delivered. The pandemic's disproportionate impacts on communities of color, George Floyd's murder by police, and the subsequent uprising highlighted the longstanding racial inequities in our society and created new energy and commitments to address them.

CAP-HC decided it must update the previous needs assessment and fulfill its commitment to more frequently engage communities that are underserved in inclusive and culturally responsive ways. The organization gathered input from communities of color and cultural and community organizations through this interim assessment to ensure services complement community members' strengths and address their needs in this new reality.

About Hennepin County

Hennepin County is comprised of 45 cities, including Minneapolis and surrounding cities and suburbs. The county has an estimated population of 1,281,565 and covers 554 square miles.¹ The population density in Hennepin County is variable across its geography, with most densely populated areas in the eastern part of the county (Minneapolis and inner-ring suburbs), moving to less densely populated areas to the west and north.

Population Characteristics

An estimated **1,281,565** people live in Hennepin County.

851,611 in the Suburbs | **429,954** in Minneapolis



Among Hennepin's **517,091** households, the average family size is **3.13** people.

Table 1: Client Demographics – Comparison of Hennepin County Residents Under the Federal Poverty Level and CAP-HC Clients

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US27053>

	Hennepin County, All Under Federal Poverty Level ²	CAP-HC ³
Gender		
Female	54%	58%
Male	46%	41%
Non-Binary	N/A	1%
Age		
Under 18	28%	43%
18-64	62%	45%
65+	15%	12%
Education Attainment (Ages 25+)		
Less than HS Diploma/Equivalent	24%	50%
HS Diploma/Equivalent	26%	32%
Post-Secondary ⁴	50%	18%
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	3%
Asian	7%	7%
Black or African American	37%	60%
White	43%	26%
Multiracial	5%	4%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	12%	7%
Not Hispanic or Latino	88%	93%

Methodology

CAP-HC is committed to gathering input in authentic and inclusive ways from communities of color harmed by the inequities built into our society and systems. The organization does this to learn directly from members of these communities how to be a better and more culturally responsive partner. Because of this, The Improve Group took an equity approach to this work, centering our engagement on five key communities of color whom CAP-HC serves and who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and uprising after George Floyd's murder.

Our engagement approach recognizes the complexities of each community while using methods that respect community members and aim to incorporate voices from a wide variety of stakeholders. Most importantly, we worked with trusted community partners who have strong ties and relationships in their communities to recruit and engage community members in their preferred languages.

Data Collection

CAP-HC contracted with The Improve Group to gather input from two sources:

Workshops, three in person and two virtual, with community members experiencing poverty or living with low income. Before attending the workshops, community members filled out a brief

² Source: Census.gov Poverty Status, 5-Year Estimates

³ Source: CAP-HC demographic data for Federal Fiscal Year 2020 (10/1/2019 - 9/30/2020)

⁴ Note: Hennepin County = "Some college, associate's degree" or higher; CAP-HC = "12 grade + Some Post-Secondary" or higher

survey to help guide the conversation. About 50 people total from the following communities in Hennepin County attended the workshops:

- Hmong community
- Somali community
- African American community
- Native community
- Latino community

The Improve Group worked with five community partners who provided feedback on protocols and workshop design, conducted outreach, and organized and facilitated the workshops in participants’ preferred language. In the workshops, community members made meaning of the discussions—summarizing in their own words their community’s key strengths and challenges and making recommendations to CAP-HC.

Telephone interviews with employees from six community-based organizations, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations. This includes five cultural organizations that focus on serving their specific community and one non-culturally specific social service organization.

Table 2: Interim Community Strengths and Needs Assessment Data Sources

Data Source	Number of Participants
Workshops	Hmong community: 9 participants
	Somali community: 10 participants
	African American community: 10 participants
	Native community: 8 participants
	Latino community: 10 participants
Interviews	6 organizations

Community Strengths and Needs

This report describes the strengths, challenges, and needs and input that community members provided in the workshops and cultural and community organization staff offered in the interviews. The feedback and recommendations expressed by participants and interviewees are their own opinions and cannot be expected to represent the views of the entire community or organization.

The strengths, needs, and input shared by participants from each of the five focus communities are organized in this report by community. Interviews with cultural and community organization staff are presented in the same way. We also examine commonalities across communities and interviewees and offer broader recommendations for CAP-HC to use in its planning. CAP-HC intends to use community input to identify emergent needs, strengthen its programming, and improve partnerships with the communities it serves, particularly communities of color.

Workshops with Community Members

This section highlights the community strengths, challenges, and needs and input identified by community members from each of CAP-HC's five communities of focus.

Hmong Community

Demographics of Participants:

- 9 community members participated in the workshops
- Participants reside in Brooklyn Park and Minneapolis
- Ages of participants range from 24-54
- Majority of participants identified their gender as female
- Majority of participants have children in their household

Strengths

Hmong community participants highlighted **improved access to assistance and strong community connection and resilience** as key strengths.

Specifically, participants shared that they believe it is now **easier to access culturally appropriate services, resources, and government assistance**—and that the pandemic increased the support available. For example, participants said it feels like food is available on every corner, also noting the availability of utility and housing assistance. A staff member for a cultural organization that serves the Hmong community agreed, saying both housing and utility help appear to be more available. Additionally, survey participants shared “I can access culturally appropriate services and assistance” as a key strength. One participant said that keeping a consistent point of contact at an organization supported their wellbeing when looking for services.

Participants also found strength in **a powerful sense of community connectedness** and increased information sharing, including coming together to provide access to information in Hmong. Because of pandemic-induced stress, people felt a need to connect with others in their

community. One participant shared that they have a group they check in with every week, while a different community member said that families have become closer because it is more difficult to see friends and neighbors. Importantly, participants shared that there is strong resilience and encouragement within the community. Just as the community is trying to heal from its trauma from war, it is also recovering from violence and the loss of elders in the pandemic.

Community Challenges

The rise of anti-Asian hate and distrust of police make participants **feel unsafe in their neighborhoods** and around people outside their community; at the same time, community members worry about the **potential disappearance of crucial assistance** that the pandemic brought.

Participants shared feelings of **physical and mental stress among families and households** due to fear of COVID-19 and potential hate crimes in their schools and neighborhoods. For example, participants reported being afraid to go to the grocery store alone, make small talk with anyone outside of their friends and family, and leave the house without a backup plan.

Lack of trust in law enforcement is also a key challenge community members cited. One participant mentioned that they did not want to get someone in trouble by calling the police. Another participant fears approaching police: "I wanted to say thank you to a cop but was afraid that he might hurt me."

While participants appreciate easier access to services and support since the pandemic began, they also **worry that services and resources will decline in the future**. They questioned why it took so long for the resources to surface in the first place.

Community Needs and Input for CAP-HC

Participants identified the following key needs and areas for growth:

Community members need **transparency and consistency in service application processes and eligibility**. Participants shared that there is a lack of trust in community organizations because waitlists never seem to end. Some participants do not even apply for services because they believe they will be turned away. It is important that resources are available when publicizing services, application documentation requirements are clear, and the process is certain—it is frustrating for people who think they will get services or assistance never to receive support.

Having a point person or consistent message is important to participants. Community members identified the need for a consistent staff or message to help participants understand the resources and services offered and follow up on case status. Skip an automated telephone system and instead have a point person for working with community members.

Open and flexible space for everyone to access resources is key. The shift to a virtual environment has been a culture change for participants who are used to accessing services in person. It is important to offer flexible hours for community members to meet with staff.

Somali Community

Demographics of Participants

- 10 community members participated in the workshops
- All workshop participants lived in either Minneapolis or Bloomington
- Participants were a mixture of men and women
- All members of the workshop speak Somali at home
- Most workshop participants had children under 18 in their household

Community Strengths

Somali participants highlighted as strengths a **deep sense of community connectedness** and community members' commitment to taking care of one another. In an interview, a staff member at a cultural organization that serves the Somali community shared a similar view: The community became more aware of its collective strength, elevated traditional support systems, and came together to share resources and information. Participants also viewed the **significant resources available to community members** through mosques and community organizations as a key area of strength.

Community Challenges

Workshop participants reported feeling concerned about **public safety**, pandemic-related **mental health challenges**, and health-related **barriers to employment**.

Participants are very passionate about **safety**—they feel unsafe in the community due to community violence and police violence. For example, participants shared fears of increasing homicide, assault, and car theft. Some participants said they are afraid to go to the mosque because they worry about getting robbed on the way. On the law enforcement side, community members had concerns about longer police response times. The organizational interviewee shared similar concerns about public safety and security in many south Minneapolis neighborhoods.

Participants explained that community members are experiencing depression and other **mental health challenges** due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one participant shared that many people, including them and their family, developed severe depression and anxiety.

Participants said some community members have **difficulty accessing employment** because of a disability or chronic health issues, even as prices for basic needs have increased.

Community Needs and Input for CAP-HC:

Participants identified the following key needs and areas for growth:

Community members reported **barriers to learning about and accessing government services**. They shared challenges finding information about services, including communication and language barriers, lack of clear and updated information, and lack of promotion of the programs. Barriers to accessing services were similar: biases against community members, information about programs not reaching the community, excessive requirements, and difficulty getting the supports necessary to access services. The pandemic shut people out of in-person

visits to the county and other organizations that allowed them to get an interpreter. The new emphasis on connecting to services virtually or through the telephone makes them more difficult to access. While the cultural organization serving the community shifted many services online, the organizational interviewee shared that it did preserve walk-in services due to high demand and some community members' barriers to accessing technology.

Participants also discussed **a lack of trust in government programs**. Community members discussed concerns over bias, the amount of information and requirements necessary to get services, and not getting a response after applying. For example, a participant mentioned that they shared their personal information with the government but never received any help.

African American Community

Demographics of Participants

- 10 community members participated in the workshop
- Participants mostly reside in Minneapolis
- Ages of participants range from 20-45
- Majority of participants identified their gender as female
- Majority of participants have children in their household

Community Strengths

Workshop participants named **accessibility of government assistance** as a key strength. They credited neighbors helping neighbors, word of mouth, social media campaigns, nonprofits, and others for raising awareness of assistance such as unemployment benefits, rent help and protections, and stimulus payments. In addition to government support, participants also saw a lot of support to address food insecurities, including pop-up food markets and food drives.

Community members who joined the workshops said **community empowerment and resiliency are also key strengths**; community members and advocates came together to share information on basic human rights and needs to protect each other from injustices. Participants highlighted housing and renters' rights in discussing this strength. They shared that neighbors made sure community members knew about their rights and responsibilities as renters and citizens. A staff member for an organization that serves the African American community echoed these perceptions, saying the community unified to help each other.

Additionally, community members shared that advocates who care about community safety have come together through social media to keep the entire neighborhood **connected and informed on pressing topics such as public safety**. These neighborhood watch groups and social media pages are an important way to share information and resources.

Community Challenges

Workshop participants reported struggling with **accessing high-paying work, anxiety and stress, and lack of affordable food and safety**.

Barriers to **getting high-wage jobs that help community members meet basic needs** are a challenge. Workshop participants shared that they need access to resources such as training, opportunities to meet with hiring recruiters, transportation, and internet.

Living with anxiety and stress from fear of the unknown is exacerbating mental health issues. For example, some participants cited hunger and COVID-related school closures as impacting parents' ability to care for their families. These issues also manifest in children being traumatized and parents missing work if their children are not allowed to go to school.

While the community has worked together to **increase access to resources, barriers still exist**. Workshop participants reported that people are afraid of leaving home to access resources. Community members also experience challenges knowing where to go to ask for help, having appropriate documents to apply for assistance, and getting services virtually. Participants reported some skepticism about sharing income and financial information with government agencies due to concerns over taxes or becoming ineligible for resources.

Lack of affordable foods also emerged as a concern. Participants shared that the stores that are available often price their foods over what people living with low incomes can afford.

Workshop participants discussed **public safety challenges**, including distrust of police and concerns that some people take advantage of law enforcement's absence. The interviewee shared similar safety and security concerns, including protection by police and from police.

Community Needs and Input for CAP-HC

Participants identified the following key needs and areas for growth:

Community members identified the need for **Internet accessibility for all families**. The pandemic's shift to virtual services left people behind who do not have access to or experience using the internet.

Participants called for more **collaboration with trusted community leaders and inclusive partners who live in the community they serve**. Power should be shifted away from nonprofit institutions and into the community.

Community members recommended **wide outreach using a variety of outlets to share clear information on services**. These channels could include radio, newspapers, community calendars, neighborhood associations, and more. Additionally, government agencies should partner with trusted community voices, community leaders, and boots on the ground to spread information about resources.

Assistance beyond **employment, food, and housing** is needed. Participants identified barriers in child care affordability, mental health services, and youth investment (e.g., entrepreneurship, transition into trade school or higher education).

Native Community

Demographics of Participants

- 8 community members participated in the workshop
- Participants were a mixture of residents of Little Earth and non-residents of Little Earth
- Ages of participants range from 20s to over 65 years old
- The workshop included men, women, and non-binary participants
- Participants mostly speak English at home, and some speak Lakota
- Most participants have children under 18 in their household

Community Strengths

Community members who provided input identified key strengths, including **community caring**, **Little Earth as a resource**, a **community approach to safety**, and **Native-led organizations stepping up to serve the community** with services such as virtual mental health.

Participants shared that **community members look after one another** and said **Native-led organizations** serve the community well. One participant mentioned how the community has provided a safe space for her daughter to express her gender identity. Another community member said the community can make a lot of positive things happen when given the resources.

Little Earth serves as a **main connector of community and resources** for both residents and non-residents. With the pandemic and uprising, many community members showed up for the community in a variety of ways, especially at Little Earth. For example, there were pop-up pantries at Little Earth and other Native-run organizations.

Community members have taken a **significant role in ensuring community safety**. The Little Earth Protectors have helped maintain safety in the neighborhood and communication with community members.

Native-led organizations now **provide online mental health services**. Participants noted that Native American Community Clinic (NACC) and Indian Health Board (IHB) have stepped up to offer these services virtually.

Community Challenges

Workshop participants reported concerns with **public safety**, **substance use and mental health**, and **feeling unwelcome outside Little Earth**.

Several participants discussed **lack of safety in Little Earth and the surrounding community**. For example, one participant mentioned that stray gunfire hit her son's house—with babies inside. Most of the group agreed that better security is needed, but opinions varied on the best approach and role for law enforcement. Several participants shared they do not want a police presence at all. A couple community members said that certain police officers who are friendly and engaged with the community are fine—but others do not have a safe presence. Participants expressed nervousness calling the police because they are unsure if they would get a friendly officer, an officer who would make a situation worse with force, or whether anyone would show up at all. A

staff member for an organization that serves the community agreed that police presence in Little Earth is negative and shared that emergency response times in south Minneapolis are “unbelievable.”

Participants also discussed the Little Earth protectors, community-organized neighborhood security, who have helped prevent people who use drugs from doing so in community spaces. However, participants noted that there is only so much community security can do legally. For example, a Little Earth protector who tried to break up a fight would not have legal protections.

Both community members and the organizational interviewee identified **substance use and mental health** as key issues, particularly for young people. Participants shared that the lack of mental health and addiction treatments is a major concern.

Non-Native spaces and neighborhoods outside of Little Earth do not feel as comfortable or welcoming. For example, two participants who live in other parts of Minneapolis said they do not feel as welcoming.

Community Needs and Input

Participants identified the following key needs and areas for growth:

Information around programs and services is not always accessible. This is particularly true for those who have barriers to understanding the process, such as some elders. The organizational interviewee mentioned that the cultural organization has adapted its services to address this issue, using an increase in donations to create positions and programs to work directly with the community to connect people with resources.

Community members shared that they would like **more resources that they can use to care for one another.** This would build on key community strengths, including community members’ commitment to helping each other and Native-led organizations’ ability to serve the community well as trusted partners.

Participants shared that **access to mental health and addiction treatments, and education for community members to lead these services,** would be beneficial. One participant mentioned that with access to education, community members could lead support groups and other therapies within the community.

Latino Community

Demographics of Participants

- 10 community members participated in the workshop
- All participants live in Minneapolis
- Ages of participants range from 20-55
- Participants speak mostly either Spanish or Mam at home
- All participants had children under 18 in their household
- Several participant families live with grandparents in multigenerational homes

Community Strengths

Participants shared that community members can largely **access services and resources**, especially during the pandemic. Participants specified that services include physical, mental, and behavioral health services; childcare and eldercare services; and public assistance, such as financial support, disability benefits, and housing/rental assistance. Workshop participants compared Minnesota to other states where resources are limited, saying they find Minnesota to provide support and a higher level of security.

The group discussed believing that this is because of the needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and institutions' work to communicate the availability of resources. Participants shared that application processes have become more flexible and that resources are more available to the community. The group also noted that institutions offering support have used more culturally accessible outreach; for example, Spanish language publications and social media outreach have been used to announce assistance and services. Participants also shared that they see more community members working in those institutions, particularly at healthcare provider organizations.

Community members said that this openness from governmental organizations to translate resources, modify some processes to be more culturally open, and include members of the community as staff and leadership is key to positive impacts in the community. In addition to government assistance, a staff member for a cultural organization serving the community shared that friends and family have also come together to help each other.

Community Challenges

Workshop participants identified key challenges, including **lack of public safety, unsafe living conditions**, and barriers to accessing **financial assistance and unemployment**.

Participants and the cultural organization staff member identified **lack of safety in the community** as a key challenge. For participants, this extended to a general fear of law enforcement officers and procedures. Families believe that it can be better to deal with some problems without calling the police. Participants cited the idea of being "exposed" to authorities, the possibility of being harassed, and unnecessary complications due to unknown rights, language barriers, and immigration status.

The group mentioned two types of fears: 1) the fear of not seeing enough law enforcement on the street, and 2) the fear of interacting with police. Participants shared that law enforcement needs to close the cultural gap and be more understanding of the community.

Community members **do not feel safe in their homes because of hazardous living conditions and unresponsive landlords**. The group discussed that beyond crime in their neighborhood, homes do not feel safe for their health. They noted that landlords do not care about properties, which can have pests, mold, or nonfunctional basic services. Additionally, participants shared that homes are not “financially safe,” not only because of the rising prices of renting and homeownership, but also because landlords can initiate evictions if community members complain. Participants are aware of services like 311 in Minneapolis, but they do not feel secure using them.

Participants shared that **some community members were out of work due to the pandemic and could not access financial and unemployment assistance**. Financial stability was a major challenge in 2020 that continued this year. Some undocumented community members who were out of work did not qualify for unemployment and other financial assistance. The cultural organization interviewee shared that sentiment, saying that the inability to access government assistance due to lack of documentation was a key challenge.

Community Needs and Input for CAP-HC

Participants identified the following key needs and areas for growth:

Community members expressed a need for **better access to education and professional training opportunities**. Participants identified gaps in opportunities such as English classes for adults, affordable technical education for youth, and reasonably priced university tuition (as grants and educational assistance can be limited due to immigration status).

Participants also identified the need for **greater accessibility of public programs and services**. Community members shared that organizations need to educate the community about the navigation process for accessing services, as well as simplify the application process itself. The organizational interviewee also highlighted technology access and training for virtual services as a necessity. Additionally, participants want to see more members of the community employed at government agencies and other organizations in roles beyond translation.

Participants shared that they would like to see the **community have a greater voice in problem solving and finding solutions**. The group recommended that the key takeaway be:

“Just to consider a constant way for the community to express their needs by knowing that authorities are paying attention and also invite the community to find solutions and alternatives to their specific problems.”

Commonalities across Community Workshops

Participant responses shared the following commonalities across communities:

- **Accessibility of services.** Community members reported largely having access to services, resources, and government assistance through their community network and local organizations.
- **Food security.** Participants said they want access to affordable and healthy foods.
- **Housing stability.** Community members shared that they need to have access to safe, affordable, stable housing.
- **Employment.** Participants want to maintain jobs and have access to training and high-wage work.
- **Safety.** Community members expressed a lack of trust in law enforcement and fear for their safety in their neighborhoods.
- **Community.** Participants reported having a strong sense of community and community empowerment.
- **Mental and chemical health challenges.** Participants shared that they are experiencing anxiety, stress, and fear from COVID-19 and the uncertainties that it has caused, and some community members have substance use issues as a result.
- **Lack of trust in services.** Community members asked for more transparency in program processes and eligibility. They also want a greater emphasis on trusted community partners and providers who live in the community they serve and support the community's best interests.

Interviews with Cultural and Community Organizations

The Improve Group interviewed staff members from five cultural organizations that serve the communities of focus for this interim assessment, as well as one non-culturally specific social service organization. This section describes community strengths and challenges identified by organizational interviewees that are distinct from those community members shared in the workshops. It also outlines how the organizations have adapted since early 2020.

Organization Serving the Hmong Community

The staff member shared that resource limitations and income guidelines are key challenges. The organization serves community members who need housing support but have incomes or assets that slightly exceed the limit. The interviewee said that the process lacks transparency; for example, multi-generational homes affected by COVID-19 may fall behind on their utilities, but their combined income could still exceed the assistance limit. The staff member also saw the need for additional services, including job search assistance and training in an accessible platform, financial assistance, and childcare services.

Organization Serving the Somali Community

The staff member described a variety of community strengths, including revived religious traditions and family connections and cross-cultural exchanges of traditional health information. The interviewee said that key challenges include scarcity of food and basic supports, and issues with affordable housing, homelessness, and high utility bills. The staff member also raised issues

around employment and unemployment applications and appeals. For example, they said that home healthcare workers—many of whom are women—were not able to work due to the pandemic. On the service side, the organization preserved walk-in services—despite many staff members working remotely—due to high demand and barriers to accessing technology. The organization also shifted its work by coordinating food support for community members and referring people to CAP-HC for utility assistance. The staff member praised CAP-HC for being very responsive (particularly by e-mail) and delivering resources for their clients. This contrasted with other organizations that did not offer much response.

Organization Serving the African American Community

Several key support systems emerged as community strengths for the interviewee. For example, community members turned to area churches and pastors for support, some landlords were supportive of renters with strong payment histories, and neighbors and community organizations created food delivery systems to help vulnerable community members and children get food. The interviewee identified several challenges, including the need for safe spaces from domestic violence when shelters are full, as well as issues related to community and family trauma. The staff member also noted gaps in affordable housing, rental assistance, and chemical and mental health services. The organization adapted in several ways, including launching workshops to teach property owners how to be good landlords and providing a safe online space for community conversations on topics like community safety and the importance of vaccines.

Organization Serving the Native Community

The staff shared examples of many organizations stepping in to strengthen the community. This ranged from opening a new housing project for people experiencing homelessness, to offering Native people in the community chances to lead, to expanding access to healthy foods and community representation in the restaurant industry. The interviewee named affordable housing, high rates of homelessness, and the slow processing of rental assistance applications as key challenges. Additionally, community members face difficulties working because of education-related barriers, jobs lacking necessary flexibility, and limited access to childcare. The interviewee also identified the high rate of out-of-home placements of children as an important challenge. The organization adapted its work in several ways, including creating positions and programs to connect community members directly with resources. It also rented out laptops to community members and partnered with an internet service provider to help families get internet access.

Organization Serving the Latino Community

The interviewee identified access to housing, legal services, technology and training for virtual services, and healthcare (including mental health services) as key challenges. Community members specifically reported challenges with healthcare services for older adults, including costs, language barriers, and lack of culturally responsive approaches. To adapt to emerging community needs, the organization started a rent assistance program for people who did not qualify for financial assistance and emergency assistance for people who do not have a social security number. The nonprofit also provided hotlines for people to access resources, including a dedicated line for rental assistance. Other adaptations included expanding their food delivery service, coordinating vaccination programs, and planning a new health clinic.

Non-Culturally Specific Social Service Organization

The Improve Group interviewed a staff member at a non-culturally specific service provider to understand what the nonprofit experienced and how that differed from the cultural organization staff we interviewed.

The staff member whom we interviewed identified several interventions as strengths. For example, organizations working to end homelessness reduced the number of people in crowded shelters and moved them into hotels. Additionally, the State of Minnesota started a housing stabilization program where Medicaid dollars paid for housing.

The interviewee identified several challenges, with affordable housing as the main issue. The staff member shared that funding for subsidized housing has not kept up with rent increases. Additionally, a limited number of properties and landlords are willing to work with clients in the organization's program. The interviewee also identified public safety as a challenge—both protection by police and from police.

The organization made several service adaptations, including waiving recertifications for program eligibility and providing clients phones with apps to access program staff when in-person interactions were not occurring.

Commonalities across Interviews

Service provider interviews shared the following commonalities across organizations:

- **Utilization of government assistance.** Organizations and communities utilized housing, food, and employment assistance.
- **Organizations developed programs to meet gaps.** These programs included rent assistance, emergency assistance, food delivery, hotlines, vaccination, and health clinics.
- **Collective community support and empathy.** Organizations facilitated cross-cultural exchanges and shared information.
- **Providers identified several community challenges in common.** These challenges include access to food, safe and affordable housing, homelessness, employment, chemical and mental health, and safety and security.
- **Shifting services online.** Providers made services more accessible during the pandemic by shifting online, while some organizations still kept in-person options to maintain access for people who have technological barriers.
- **Making programs, services, and supports more accessible to the community.** This included helping people understand program eligibility and providing access to technology.

Recommendations for CAP-HC

These recommendations are based on the community member and cultural and community organization staff feedback:

1. **Continue to help the community access CAP-HC services and government assistance programs and resources.** Many community members reported accessing food, but there is a fear that food assistance will end after the pandemic. Because not all community

members have access to technology, staffing hotlines can help community members navigate program eligibility, requirements, the application process, required documentation, and timelines for processes such as when to expect to receive a response about their application. Some community members also struggled with not having the documents needed to apply for assistance. CAP-HC can continue to help communities access these resources by ensuring eligibility requirements are transparent and streamlined and using a variety of outlets to inform the community about resources.

2. **Review and develop a clear referral process with community organizations.** Based on what organizational interviewees shared, the energy assistance program CAP-HC administers was widely used in the community to help pay utility bills during the pandemic. However, the referral process between CAP-HC and community organizations working on the ground was often unclear. CAP-HC can improve this referral system by developing a formal process for community organizations to communicate and track referrals and mutually arrange for translation as needed.
3. **Establish, strengthen, and leverage relationships with community organizations that provide services outside CAP-HC's focus areas.** Other community needs include mental and chemical health services, public safety and violence prevention, food security, affordable housing, and education and job training opportunities. Community organizations filled these gaps by partnering with other organizations to provide those supports or developing programs for the communities they serve. CAP-HC can better serve the community by leveraging relationships with community organizations to connect people to services and resources outside of the organization's areas of focus.
4. **Partner with trusted community leaders and organizations to better serve communities that are marginalized.** Safety and security, along with distrust in government and mainstream organizations, were common themes throughout the findings. Community members want the opportunity for their communities to lead and be included in problem solving. One way CAP-HC can help communities feel safer is to partner with trusted community leaders and organizations that are embedded.
5. **Utilize trauma-informed practices.** All communities have historical trauma and trauma from the pandemic and civil unrest after the murder of George Floyd. CAP-HC could work with organizations serving communities directly to integrate trauma-informed practices into their work.
6. **Increase access to technology.** Community members without the necessary technology and/or internet struggled to access services during the pandemic, especially as many organizations worked remotely and/or transitioned services online. Providing a safe space where community members can use computers to apply for services could mitigate this barrier.
7. **Translation support and services.** Many communities turned to their local or cultural-based organization to learn about and access services and resources when a person who spoke their language was unavailable (or translated program/application materials were not on hand). CAP-HC could work with those organizations to translate program descriptions and application forms in different languages or have a system to refer clients to those organizations.
8. **CAP-HC branding and marketing.** Some community members have difficulty differentiating CAP-HC from the county or other government agencies. It may be helpful

to take additional communications- and marketing-related steps to clarify CAP-HC's status as a nonprofit organization.