

COMMUNITY ACTION RESPONDS:

COVID-19

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.



Ohio Association of  
Community Action Agencies

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# Summary of Needs

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## Food

Food and hygiene products in all forms

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## Transportation

Support and waivers to continue services

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## Housing

Safe housing for high-risk homeless populations

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## WIC Flexibility

Waivers and flexibility to maintain services

# About Community Action

Ohio's forty-seven (47) Community Action Agencies (CAAs) serve all 88 counties in the state. They are part of a network of over 1000 locally controlled, private nonprofit corporations nationwide covering 99% of America.

Community Action is operated at the local level. Each is governed by a tri-partite Board of Directors comprised of public officials, the private sector, and

low-income representatives to ensure the needs of the community as a whole are

## ***47 Community Action Agencies serve all of Ohio's 88 counties***

understood. The network is supported, in part, by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), which serves as flexible

umbrella funding. CSBG is the only federal funding source with the explicit purpose of reducing poverty.

Ohio's CAAs annually administer over \$500 million in private, local, state, and federal funding. The network employs over 6,500 staff and serves over 600,000 Ohioans each year.

# Community Action Response Summary

Community Action Agencies across Ohio have quickly responded to the coronavirus pandemic to continue supporting essential emergency services and more to low-income Ohioans. To reduce the spread of the virus, CAAs have eliminated most face-to-face contact though maintained intake, application, case management, and education services through drop boxes, electronic submissions, telephone interviews, and web interface technology (i.e., webinars).

Agencies have prioritized professional development training and, in most cases, maintained full employment to date. By keeping staff, agencies can not only reduce the economic impacts on the community with reduced unemployment claims, but they also preserve organizational capacity and the ability to respond once the virus is contained.

Community Action Agencies have also quickly responded to emergency needs

by providing food and hygiene products, working with local school districts to distribute food, providing emergency transportation, preventing utility disconnections, securing emergency housing to enable homeless families to shelter in place and maintain appropriate physical distancing, all while continuing to support educational needs of children and adults, preserving as many healthcare services as possible, and supporting workforce development opportunities.

# Immediate Response



## 18,000 meals

delivered to 26 agencies, serving 52 counties



## 20,000+ soaps

coordinated with the Governor's Office for distribution

## About OACAA

Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) is a nonprofit association dedicated to supporting its members and strengthening the Community Action presence in Ohio. OACAA provides community support, partnership and funding connections and opportunities, strengthens government relationships, and provides training and technical assistance that are unique and meet the needs of Community Action.

## OACAA

## Community Response

OACAA has been actively responding to member requests to fulfill communities' needs, including but not limited to working with the Ohio Development Services Agency to extend program deadlines, increase flexibility on grant funding, provide technical assistance for policy updates and communications, and comply with physical distancing guidelines from the Ohio Department of Health.

***18,000 meals delivered  
serving 52 counties***

On March 13, 2020, OACAA purchased 18,000 meals which were distributed by 26 Community Action Agencies serving 52 Ohio counties. Working with the

Office of Governor DeWine, OACAA is coordinating delivery by our member agencies of over 20,000 bottles of soaps across the state to food pantries, domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, and other locations. OACAA is also working to obtain additional shelf-stable meals and personal hygiene products for distribution across Ohio's 88 counties.

# COVID-19 Community Needs & Trends

A drastic spike in unemployment due to the novel coronavirus will disproportionately impact low-income Ohioans. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1.7 million Ohioans were already living in poverty and struggling to meet basic needs with low wages, a lack of health benefits, sick time, and more. Nearly half of all Ohioans lack the liquid assets needed to stay out poverty for three months, and when faced with a household financial crisis such as unemployment, a health crisis, or other unexpected expenses families are likely to experience episodic poverty which impacts 32% of Americans during a typical year.

Many partner food pantries have been forced to close due to either health concerns for high-risk volunteers or lack of supply or both causing Community Action Agencies to experience, in

***Nearly half of all Ohioans lack the assets to stay out of poverty for 3 months.***

some cases, double or triple the demand for emergency food assistance in just the past two weeks. This increased demand is expected to continue beyond the initial Ohio Stay At Home order from the Governor as businesses struggle to rebuild operations.

Fee-for-service programs have been drastically reduced or eliminated. Transportation, Home Weatherization Assistance Program, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and dental clinics

have been reduced due to the demand for supplies in COVID-19 response settings and to minimize physical contact with others. These programs provide vital services, employ hundreds of people across the state, and serve as match requirements for state and partner funding.

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## ***Recommendations***

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### **Food Insecurity**

Limitations by local grocers have prohibited the usual bulk food purchases by CAAs of essential needs like milk, eggs, bread, and baby formula, as well as limitations of personal hygiene items such as hand soap, paper products, diapers, and more. Low-income families are also unable to purchase personal hygiene and paper products with SNAP funding, significantly reducing their ability to obtain necessary products.

#### **Recommendations**

- Increase funding and allow CAAs to source food from local restaurants with meal vouchers due to overwhelming demand and decreased capacity (which will also support local businesses)
- Eliminate 90-day income verification requirements to help families who lost income due to COVID-19
- Increase funding to provide shelf-stable meals to families
- Increase funding to provide personal hygiene products immediately

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## *Recommendations*

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### Transportation

Many CAAs operate a variety of local and statewide transportation services, including city transit and more, which allow individuals to obtain medical care and for work transportation. Ohio Department of Transportation guidance has eliminated fee-for-service payments to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by eliminating fare touchpoints and close driver contact. Many transportation programs funded in part by ODOT have 50% match requirements, which are typically covered by fee-for-service, Non-Emergency Medical Transportation programs, school transportation partnerships, and other grants. Reduced ridership and fee elimination have significantly reduced the ability to financially support this critical operation. Though ridership has diminished, the need for public transit services remains vital to the community.

#### Recommendations

- Request ODOT temporarily convert quarterly payments to monthly payments to increase cash flow
- Request ODOT match requirements be reduced or eliminated
- Request increased funding to bridge gaps between grants and fee-for-service

### Housing and Homelessness

Securing housing for homeless households during the pandemic has also been a challenge. Communal shelters are over capacity, and symptomatic individuals are unable to be housed alongside asymptomatic persons to avoid the spread of the virus. On a limited basis, CAAs have partnered with area hotels to house families who are symptomatic, though funds to cover these expenses are quickly running out.

#### Recommendations

- Funding/vouchers needed for private hotel space for symptomatic and high-risk homeless families

### Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The WIC program is a valuable program necessary to support the nutritional needs of women, infants, and children. During this pandemic, grocery stores often areas where maintaining a 6' physical distance requirement difficult if not impossible. There is growing concern that eligible families will opt out of this valuable program due to the restrictions on utilizing WIC for grocery pickup or delivery. The process for reverification and reloading of WIC cards is also highly contact-oriented.

#### Recommendations

- Partner with local grocers who offer pickup and delivery services and allow WIC benefits to be used for ClickList-type and delivery services to reduce in-person contact
- Waiver of monthly in-person income verification and electronic distance fund reloading



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