



# 2020 Community Needs Assessment

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# Acronyms

AppCAA	Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency
CASA	Court-Appointed Special Advocate
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
MEOC	Mountain Empire Older Citizens
NCD	Non-communicable Diseases
PACE	Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly
VISTA	Volunteers in Service to America

# AppCAA Board Members

## **BOARD OFFICERS:**

*Selma Hood, Scott County Board of Supervisors – President*

*Wandaleen Adams, Lee County At-Large– Vice-President*

*Jeffrey Shupe, Norton City Council – Treasurer*

*Mary Absher, Kids Central, Inc. – Secretary*

## **MEMBERS AT LARGE:**

*Michael Abbott, Wise County Member At-Large*

*Delores Belcher, Norton City Council*

*Zachary Bowen, Redevelopment & Housing Authority*

*Jennifer Frazier, Scott County School Board*

*Tony Lawson, Lee County Board of Supervisors*

*Crystal Lyke, Town of Big Stone Gap*

*Danny Mann, Scott County Board of Supervisors*

*Doris Presley, Feed America and Flatwoods Baptist Church*

*Abe Rutherford, Norton Department of Social Services*

*Charles Slep, Jr., Lee County Board of Supervisors*

*Brad Stallard, Wise County Health Department*

*Danny Ward, Faith Community*

*Julia Wyrick, Head Start Lee County*

## **COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT TASK FORCE MEMBERS**

*Mike Abbott, Wise County Member At-Large*

*Wandaleen Adams, Lee County Member At-Large*

*Sara Buchanan, Agency Planner, AppCAA*

*Rebecca Dillow, Executive Director, AppCAA*

*Sarah White, AppCAA VISTA*

*Christa Moore, University of Virginia College at Wise*

# Executive Summary

## Background

This Community Needs Assessment was conducted July-August 2020 by the Appalachian Community Action & Development Agency, Inc. (AppCAA) and the Community Needs Assessment Task Force<sup>1</sup> with support from members of the AppCAA Board of Directors. The Assessment was completed in adherence to the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) requirements and Organizational Standards. The purpose of the CNA is to: identify and assess gaps in service delivery; to determine complementarity between activities; and to develop priority action areas to continue adapting activities and services to emergent community needs. The results of the Assessment will directly assist AppCAA in its Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2022-2027 development.

## Summary Methodology

AppCAA administered two surveys and a focus group discussion. Secondary data were collected and analyzed to support assumptions and make comparisons with the greater Southwest Virginia population. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AppCAA staff could not administer surveys in-person.

## Summary of Findings

Surveys: Two surveys with identical questions were administered to collect the opinions of the community: an internet-based survey for stakeholders, community members and service providers and a telephone survey for clients. Included below is a list of major concerns expressed by survey respondents:

- Alcohol/Drug Use
- Poverty:
  - Low Wages
  - Low Educational Attainment
- Affordable Housing
- Lack of Childcare Options
- Working Poor More At-risk

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<sup>1</sup> AppCAA's Community Needs Assessment Task Force included: a client representative; Board Members (a former Head Start Director and extractive industries executive); higher education representative (professor at university located in the region); Americorps VISTA Volunteer; and AppCAA staff (Executive Director and Agency Planner). The Task Force met weekly for 16 weeks.

The internet-based and telephone surveys yielded results from closed and open questions and from ranking of issues on a Likert scale.

Focus Group: A Focus Group Discussion/Community Meeting was held on August 26, 2020 via the internet. The Focus Group responded to the questions: 1) The community survey data are showing us that drugs, health and poverty are the top three issues in our service area. What are your thoughts on these issues being the highest priorities? 2) Are there other areas that are of particular concern to you or your organization that are not being addressed? What should AppCAA's role be? 3) How has the COVID pandemic affected your work or the context in which you work? How is it impacting people living in poverty?

Areas of Concern-Community Meeting:

- Alcohol/Drug Use
- Poverty
- Childcare
- COVID-related, Social Issues (child abuse, substance abuse)
- Low Wages
- Healthcare Access and Cost

## Methodology

### Data collection

Online Survey:

The online survey was developed with 15 questions aimed to capture:

- Basic Demographic Data
- Needs within the community as they relate to: transportation, childcare, employment opportunities, housing, home ownership, heads of household, as well as gaps in services.

The questions were both multi-choice and open-ended. The online survey was launched on June 23, 2020 on the Survey Monkey web application. The online survey remained open for respondents until August 23. Community members were informed about the survey through: advertisements in two print newspapers; link to survey shared on the first page of AppCAA's website; link to survey shared on social media; announcements at AppCAA and partner events

(e.g. mobile food pantry). There were 101 respondents. All data was analyzed using Survey Monkey's online descriptive analysis tools. Filters were created to sort data by questions and answers, depending on the variable of interest, illuminating trends in the data. Reports were created based on demographic categories. See charts below for respondent demographics, obtained from the survey completed by clients and community members

#### Telephone Survey:

A telephone survey was developed that incorporated questions from the web-based survey as well as qualitative, atmospheric questions to provide more information on the underlying causes of poverty in AppCAA's service area. Additional questions centered on:

- Housing status
- Ownership of land and other productive resources
- Income
- Employment and industry type
- Household demographics
- Optimism about future

These questions were closed. Those not related to demographic information were administered using a Likert scale from "very much" to "not at all."

Qualitative questions included:

- In your opinion, why are communities in SW VA poorer than other areas?
- What are the biggest social problems in your community?
- What ideas do you have about fixing those problems?
- How do people support themselves when they are unemployed in your community?

The participants were randomly sampled from a closed list of individuals with home telephone lines in Lee, Scott and Wise counties. The phone surveys were conducted between 10:00am and 7:00pm. All responses were recorded on paper or directly in the Survey Monkey application. The total number of respondents was 93, representing the feedback of residents of Lee, Scott and Wise counties. Additional, paper, surveys were administered by AppCAA staff at the Agency's food distribution site. Paper survey responses were keyed into the Survey Monkey application.

This method introduces bias as respondents were more likely to be older and unemployed due to the timing of the calls and adoption of cell phone technology by youth over older individuals.

#### Secondary Data Review:

Data from existing sources included: Census data; vital records (births and deaths and disease); peer-reviewed journal articles; and other data collected for administrative or governmental purposes.

Through a review of these data, patterns and anomalies were identified to help guide the completion of the Community Meeting/Focus Group Discussion. These data were analyzed and used to produce background information for the CNA as well as a standard against which to review the outcomes of the CNA.

### **Community Meeting/Focus Group Discussion**

A Community Meeting was held on August 26, 2020 in the form of a Focus Group Discussion. The meeting was an opportunity for data and preliminary outcomes of the Survey to be presented to the community and service providers for validation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings were not feasible at the time of writing. The Community Meeting therefore was held via a web conferencing application. Participants included: stakeholders of AppCAA, members of the community, local leaders and business owners.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Quantitative Data**

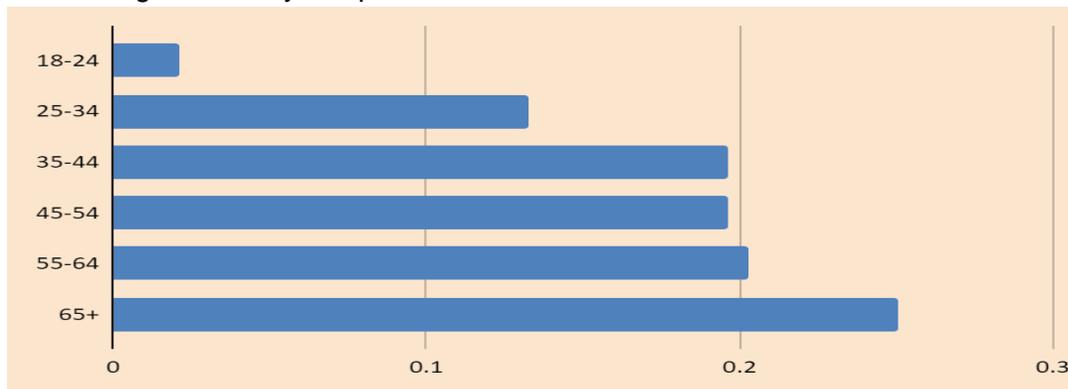
Data collected from the internet-based and phone-based surveys were recorded electronically and merged. Quantitative data from the telephone survey from additional questions were separately tabulated using Excel. Frequency and percentage were used to determine if there are strong preferences for one outcome over another.

#### **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative responses to survey questions were compiled in an excel spreadsheet and reviewed for patterns or commonalities. These responses were used to formulate follow-up/probing questions for participants in the Community Meeting. Similarly, information collected at the Community Meeting was compiled and reviewed for any trends or commonalities. Open-ended responses were ranked and presented by prevalence.

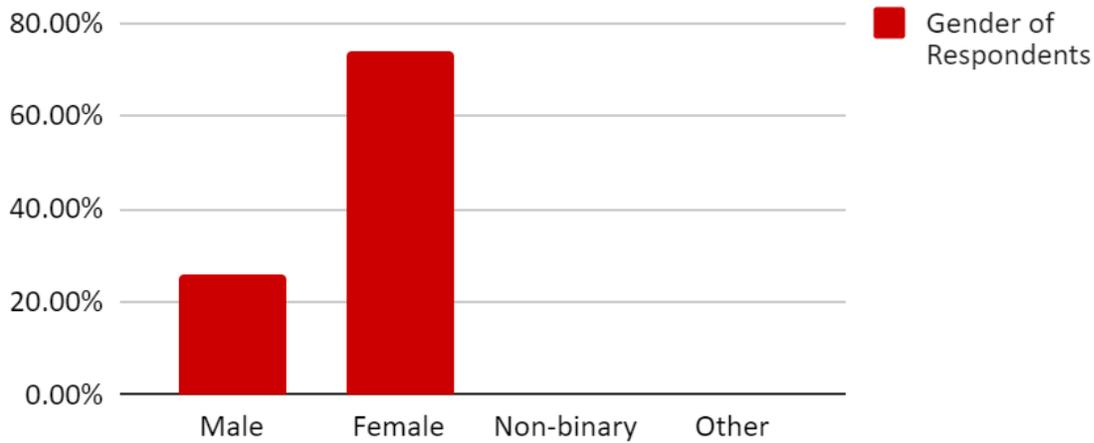
### **Results: Demographic Data**

Chart 1: Age of Survey Respondents



A majority of respondents to the surveys were over the age of 65 (25 percent); with ages 55-64 and 45-54 comprising 20 percent of respondents, respectively.

Chart 2: Gender of Respondents



Ninety-eight percent of respondents were white; less than half a percent were black and one percent of respondents reported “other race.” Seventy-four percent of respondents were female. This preponderance of female respondents tracks with the profile of clients who use AppCAA services. Across all counties in AppCAA’s service area, women are more likely to live in poverty than men.

Chart 3: Number of Children in Household

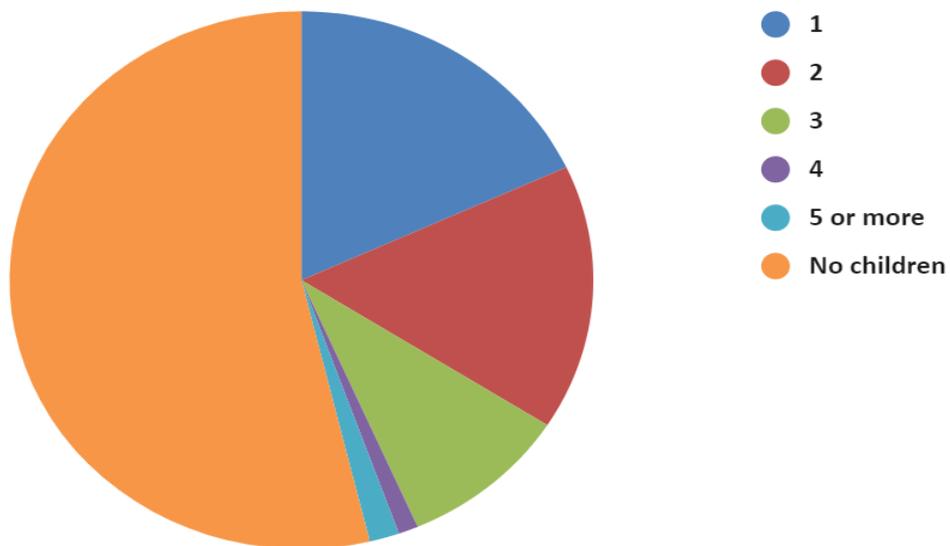


Chart 4: Annual Income

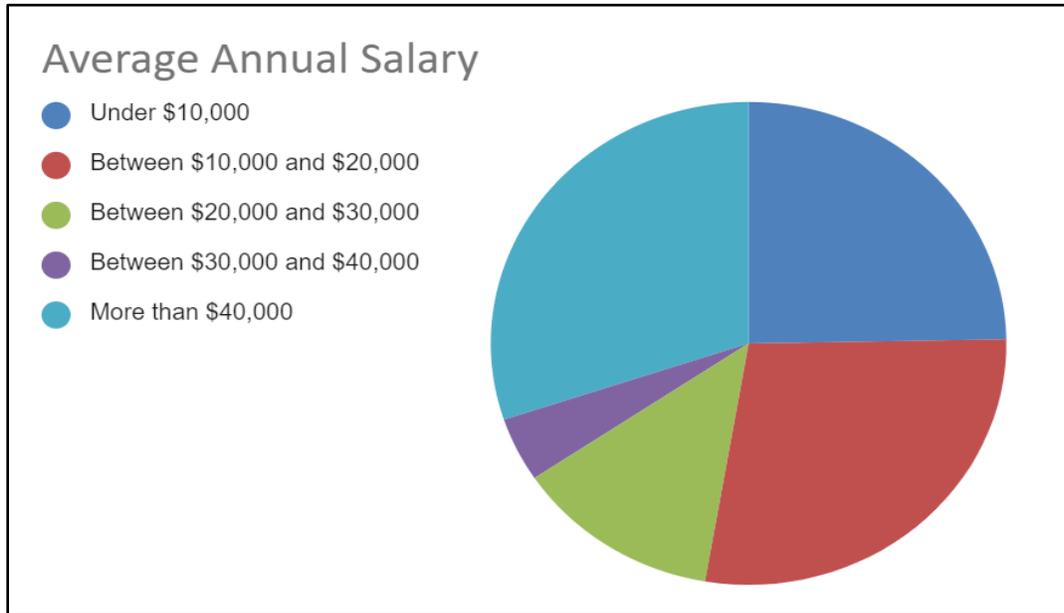
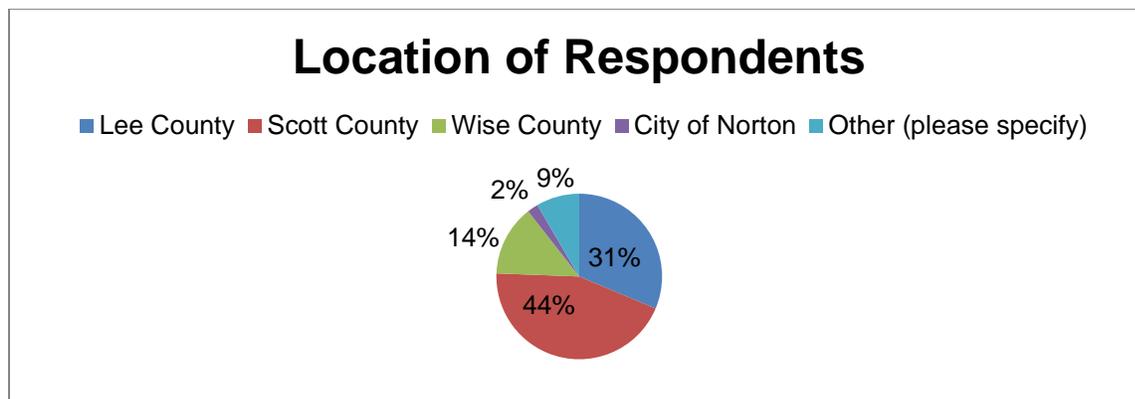


Chart 5: Location of Respondents



## Community Profiles

Poverty in the AppCAA catchment area is 21.4 percent, compared to the state average of 10.7 percent and national average of 12.96 percent<sup>2</sup>. According to the US Census, the poverty rate

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

increased by 4.69 percent from 2000 to 2018, compared to the national increase of 2.1 percent<sup>3</sup>.

The poverty rate for the counties of Lee, Wise and Scott has remained above the Virginia average for decades and spikes during recessions. The most recent data from the Census Bureau's 2018 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates indicates 21.4 percent of residents in these areas live in poverty, compared to 11 percent for the Commonwealth. According to the US Census, the poverty rate increased by 4.69 percent from 2000 to 2018, compared to the national increase of 2.1 percent<sup>4</sup>.

Low wages, loss of industry and lack of income generating opportunities are particularly affecting the population of Southwest Virginia. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in May 2019 the median wage for Southwest Virginia was \$38,410 (compared to \$56,740 state-wide), with a majority of Southwest Virginia residents working in the Food Preparation and Service Industries: the mean annual salary for these workers is \$22,130.<sup>5</sup>

Poverty particularly affects the elderly and female-headed households in the area: according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2018, 14 percent of the population over the age of 65 in the catchment area lives in poverty (compared to 9.3 percent for Virginia). Per the same source, of the 3,553 families living in poverty in the region, 51.3 percent are female single parents compared to 9.7 percent of male single parents. Anecdotal evidence suggests a substantive factor contributing to the inability of individuals to improve their financial wellbeing is lack of awareness of budgeting and financial concepts.

Rising levels of poverty are necessitating that all able-bodied adults work to be able to afford life essentials. As a result, civic participation is waning along with the social services civil society provides. According to studies from 2013 and 2014 from Virginia Performs, the Southwest Virginia region lagged behind the rest of the state in levels of contributions to charitable causes (1.42 percent) and evinces the lowest level of voter turnout for the state--a proxy indicator for a population's participation in civil society.

Multiplying the problems of lack of economic opportunities and social support are poor health outcomes related to nutrition and food security. The Feeding America 2019 Map the Meal Gap report found that food insecurity exists in all counties where AppCAA operates. The food insecurity rate for children in Southwest Virginia is almost four percent higher than that of adults. The report also found that in Lee County, 4,120 residents were food insecure; in Wise County

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019). May 2019 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates Southwest Virginia nonmetropolitan area. Retrieved from: [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_5100001.htm#00-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_5100001.htm#00-0000) on August 28, 2020.

there are 6,750 food insecure and in Scott County 3,150 are food insecure<sup>6</sup>. This problem stems from a lack of nutritional food in rural areas as the communities transition away from subsistence farming to purchasing food. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to exacerbate food insecurity and other poverty-related issues (e.g. dearth of childcare and employment). Feeding America projections on the impact of COVID-19 predict food insecurity for families in Norton City will increase to 31 percent by the end of the calendar year. In Lee County, food insecurity is slated to increase to 32 percent, in Scott County, to 34 percent and in Wise County to 34 percent<sup>7</sup>.

Below is a chart indicating levels of employment in AppCAA’s targeted counties. Over all areas, unemployment has increased by nearly five percent in the past year. Lee and Wise Counties have unemployment rates of close to nine percent. Scott County has not experienced as great a drop in employment due to its proximity to a peri-urban center, which offers greater employment opportunities. The predominant reason for this precipitous drop in employment has been the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Employment Status by County (May 2020 and change from 2019)<sup>8</sup>

Report Area	Unemployment May 2019	Unemployment May 2020	Unemployment Rate May 2019	Unemployment Rate May 2020	Rate Change
Report Location	1,125	2,526	3.65%	8.45%	-4.80%
Lee County, VA	284	714	3.42%	8.76%	-5.34%
Scott County, VA	283	638	3.09%	7.28%	-4.19%
Wise County, VA	558	1,174	4.18%	9.06%	-4.88%
Virginia	118,238	397,994	2.69%	9.19%	-6.50%
United States	5,573,115	20,513,638	3.41%	12.99%	-9.57%

<sup>6</sup> Hake, M., E. Engelhard, A. Dewey, C. Gundersen (2020). The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity [Brief series]. Available from Feeding America: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/coronavirus-hunger-research>

<sup>7</sup> Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard (2020). The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity v1 [Data file and FAQ]. Available from Feeding America: [research@feedingamerica.org](mailto:research@feedingamerica.org).

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Labor. (2020). Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Table 2: Poverty Rates by County<sup>9</sup>

Report Area	All Ages No of Persons	All Ages Poverty Rate	Age 0-17 No of Persons	Age 0-17 Poverty Rate	Age 5-17 No of Persons	Age 5-17 Poverty Rate
All Counties	18,224	21.40%	4,717	28.77%	3,203	25.88%
Lee County, VA	5,461	24.8%	1,414	32.5%	964	29.5%
Scott County, VA	3,834	18.5%	921	24.5%	624	21.6%
Wise County, VA	8,929	25.4%	2,382	32.5%	1,615	30.2%
Virginia	884,898	10.7%	253,481	13.8%	169,939	12.8%
United States	41,852,315	12.96%	12,997,532	17.67%	8,930,152	16.62%

Table 3: Age of Housing Stock<sup>10</sup>

Report Area	Total Housing Units	Median Year Built	Median Age (from 2018)
Report Location	41,681	No data	No data
Lee County, VA	11,784	1977	41
Scott County, VA	11,940	1977	41
Wise County, VA	17,957	1977	41
Virginia	3,491,091	1982	36
United States	136,384,292	1977	41

## Lee County

Lee County is an area in the most southwestern part of Virginia; it borders both the Tennessee and Kentucky state lines and covers 437 square miles. Lee County has the highest poverty rates in AppCAA's service area; in 2018, 21.4 percent of the population lived below the poverty line<sup>11</sup>. Approximately 19 percent of Lee County Public Schools students do not have access to the internet at home; 31 percent do not have computers<sup>12</sup>. In 2018, 62 percent of children in Lee County were economically disadvantaged<sup>13</sup>, while 34 percent of children in Lee County received SNAP benefits<sup>14</sup>.

An incident in Lee County underscores the issues those living in poverty in Southwest Virginia face: in October 1996, coal slurry blew out from a mine portal in Lee County, causing a fish kill and pollution of streams leading to the Tennessee River. The Department of the Interior spent

<sup>9</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

<sup>10</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*.

<sup>13</sup> Defined as Below 200% federal poverty level.

<sup>14</sup> Voices for Virginia's Children (2018). *Southwest Region Snapshot*.

over \$2 million in remediation efforts; however, most of these expenditures were spent outside of the project site, so the project had only a small local economic impact.<sup>15</sup>

Table 4: Lee County Population Overview<sup>16</sup>

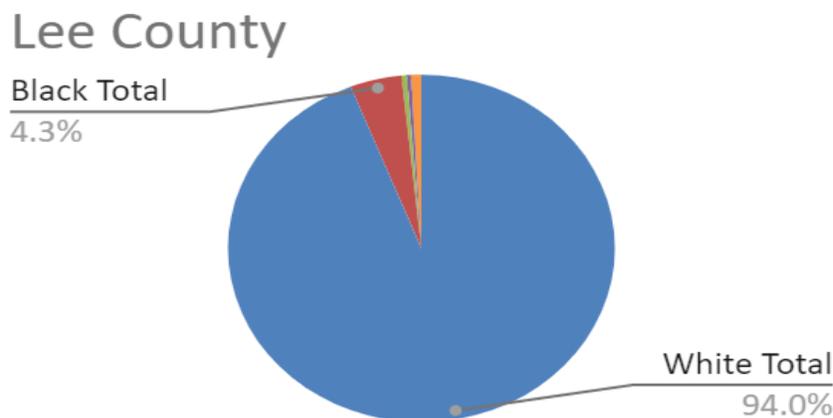
Report Area	0 to 4 Male	0 to 4 Female	5 to 17 Male	5 to 17 Female	18 to 64 Male	18 to 64 Female	Over 64 Male	Over 64 Female
Lee County, VA	566	557	1,817	1,640	8,041	6,754	2,075	2,575
Virginia	262,126	247,829	691,960	665,512	2,640,678	2,675,423	494,283	686,436
United States	10,146,960	9,689,890	27,438,613	26,277,777	99,617,317	100,493,892	19,630,586	27,457,281

The total population of Lee County in 2018 was 24,134, an increase of 2.3 percent since 2000. However, over the long-term, the population has fallen in Lee County<sup>17</sup>:

Table 5: Lee County Racial Demographics

Service Area	White Total	Black Total	American Indian Total	Asian Total	Native Hawaiian Total	Mixed Race Total
Lee County, VA	22,551	1,033	107	82	0	208
Virginia	5,722,660	1,613,285	22,972	531,503	5,677	309,213
United States	234,904,818	40,916,113	2,699,073	17,574,550	582,718	10,435,797

Chart 6: Racial Demographics



<sup>15</sup> Thomas, C. et al. (2016). *Estimating the Economic Impacts of Ecosystem Restoration—Methods and Case Studies*. US Geological Survey.

<sup>16</sup> US Census Bureau (2018). *American Community Survey, 2014-2018*.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Employment Commission (2020). *Labor Market Information: Lee County Community Profile*.

## Scott County

Scott County is an area in the southwestern part of the state located on the Virginia/Tennessee border and covering 539 square miles. Situated close to Tennessee and a peri-urban center, Scott County experiences greater opportunities for employment and other resources compared to the other counties that AppCAA serves. However, Scott County still experiences challenges when compared to the averages across the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 2018, Scott County's percentage of people living in poverty was 18.6 percent<sup>18</sup>. Students in Scott County Public Schools have lower access to technology than their Virginia peers; ten percent of students did not have internet access at home, while 30 percent did not have a computer at home<sup>19</sup>. In 2018, 50 percent of children in Scott County were economically disadvantaged; 35 percent of children in Scott County received SNAP benefits<sup>20</sup>.

Table 7: Scott County Population Overview<sup>21</sup>

Service Area	0 to 4 Male	0 to 4 Female	5 to 17 Male	5 to 17 Female	18 to 64 Male	18 to 64 Female	Over 64 Male	Over 64 Female
Scott County, VA	461	424	1,632	1,545	6,694	6,254	2,119	2,697
Virginia	262,126	247,829	691,960	665,512	2,640,678	2,675,423	494,283	686,436
United States	10,146,960	9,689,890	27,438,613	26,277,777	99,617,317	100,493,892	19,630,586	27,457,281

The total population of Scott County in 2018 was 22,009; a decrease of six percent from 2000.

Table 8: Scott County Race Demographics

Service Area	White Total	Black Total	American Indian Total	Asian Total	Native Hawaiian Total	Mixed Race Total
Scott County, VA	21,566	162	57	92	0	114
Virginia	5,722,660	1,613,285	22,972	531,503	5,677	309,213
United States	234,904,818	40,916,113	2,699,073	17,574,550	582,718	10,435,797

<sup>18</sup> US Census Bureau (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

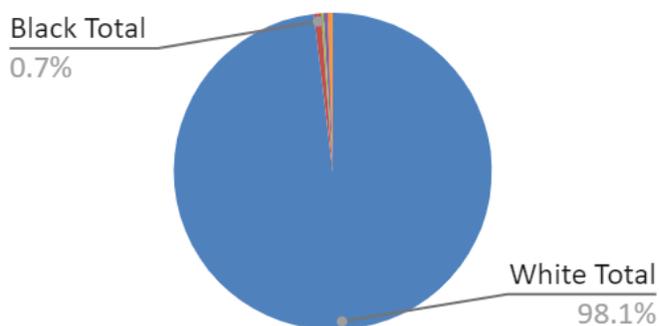
<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*.

<sup>20</sup> Voices for Virginia's Children (2018). *Southwest Region Snapshot*.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

Chart 7: Racial Demographics

### Scott County



### Wise County

Wise County is an area in the southwestern region of Virginia that borders the state line of Kentucky and covers 405 square miles. This county is the most populated of AppCAA’s service area and the most unique with a four year college in the City of Wise. This county as well with AppCAA’s other counties have seen poverty in recent years increase with the decline in the coal industry. Poverty in Wise County in 2018 stood at 22 percent--more than twice the poverty rate in the state as a whole. Nearly 14 percent of students in Wise County public schools do not have internet access at home; 21 percent do not have computers at home<sup>22</sup>. In 2018, 48 percent of children in Wise County were economically disadvantaged with 37 percent of children in Wise County receiving SNAP benefits<sup>23</sup>.

Table 9: Wise County Population Overview<sup>24</sup>

Report Area	0 to 4 Male	0 to 4 Female	5 to 17 Male	5 to 17 Female	18 to 64 Male	18 to 64 Female	Over 64 Male	Over 64 Female
Wise County, VA	1,031	982	2,973	2,769	13,487	11,200	2,701	3,584
Virginia	262,126	247,829	691,960	665,512	2,640,678	2,675,423	494,283	686,436
United States	10,146,960	9,689,890	27,438,613	26,277,777	99,617,317	100,493,892	19,630,586	27,457,281

The 2018 population of Wise County was 39,025; a decrease of two-point-seven percent from 2000.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). *National Assessment of Educational Progress*.

<sup>23</sup> Voices for Virginia’s Children (2019). *Southwest Region Snapshot*.

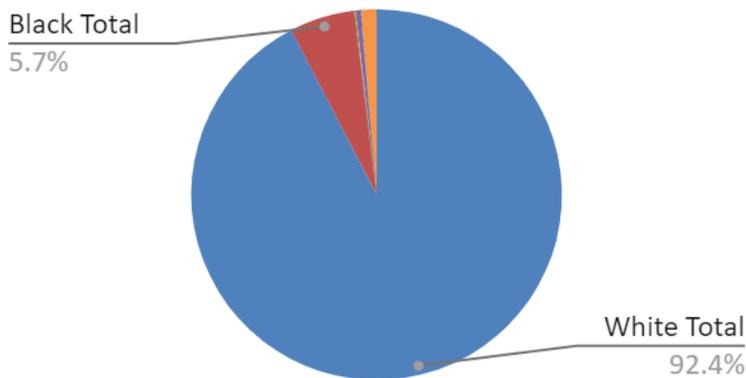
<sup>24</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates*.

Table 10: Wise County Race Demographics

Report Area	White Total	Black Total	American Indian Total	Asian Total	Native Hawaiian Total	Mixed Race Total
Wise County, VA	35,998	2,227	44	165	15	526
Virginia	5,722,660	1,613,285	22,972	531,503	5,677	309,213
United States	234,904,818	40,916,113	2,699,073	17,574,550	582,718	10,435,797

Chart 8: Racial Demographics

### Wise County, VA



## AppCAA Services

**CHORE Program (Scott Co.):** Chore is designed to assist elderly and disabled people to remain in their own homes by providing light housekeeping services, errand running, and even meal preparation on occasion. Clients served by Chore service are accepted based on need and require a referral from a medical doctor. Currently, this program operates in Scott County. Funding for this program is provided by Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

**Emergency Services Program (Utilities):** Residents who have received a shut-off notice from the electric or water company are sometimes eligible for one-time help paying the bill to avoid interruption of these services.

**Housing Counseling:** Individuals work one-on-one or in a classroom setting with a Financial Housing Counselor after they have completed financial counseling. Together they can figure out their best choice -renting vs. owning- and create a plan to work toward that goal.

Indoor Plumbing Rehabilitation: This provides installations and renovations of indoor plumbing to homes that do not have indoor plumbing or have inoperable indoor plumbing. Residents of Scott, Dickenson, Wise Counties and the City of Norton are eligible for this service. Indoor Plumbing Rehabilitation is a loan-based program. It is based on a 10-year loan with zero interest. The amount the client will pay back on a monthly schedule is based on ability to pay. The rest of the monthly payment is forgiven, as long as the homeowner pays the predetermined payment. The minimum any client will be required to pay is \$25.

New Eyes for the Needy: New Eyes for the Needy buys new prescription glasses for children and adults in financial need.

Safelink Cell Phone: Provides a free cell phone with limited minutes for low-income adults.

Weatherization (Scott, Lee, Wise, Dickenson Counties and City of Norton): The Weatherization program is designed to reduce the cost of heating and cooling homes in order to make them more energy efficient. This program helps families to save money and makes homes safer for habitation during extreme hot or cold weather.

Afterschool Meals for Children: Provides after school meals free of charge to children at different locations throughout our service area.

Summer Meals Program (Scott and Lee Counties, just ended for July 2020): Children age 18 and under can eat free of charge during the months of June and July. Several school sites and locations participate in Scott and Lee Counties.

Financial Coaching and Empowerment: This provides classes as well as one-on-one coaching on understanding and building credit, money management, saving and other financial topics.

Financial Workshops Budgeting and life skills, including: financial management and savings.

Tax Preparation: AppCAA Tax Preparation Services provides free tax preparation to help people in Southwest Virginia and surrounding areas access the Earned Income Tax Credit. Tax preparation is offered year-round.

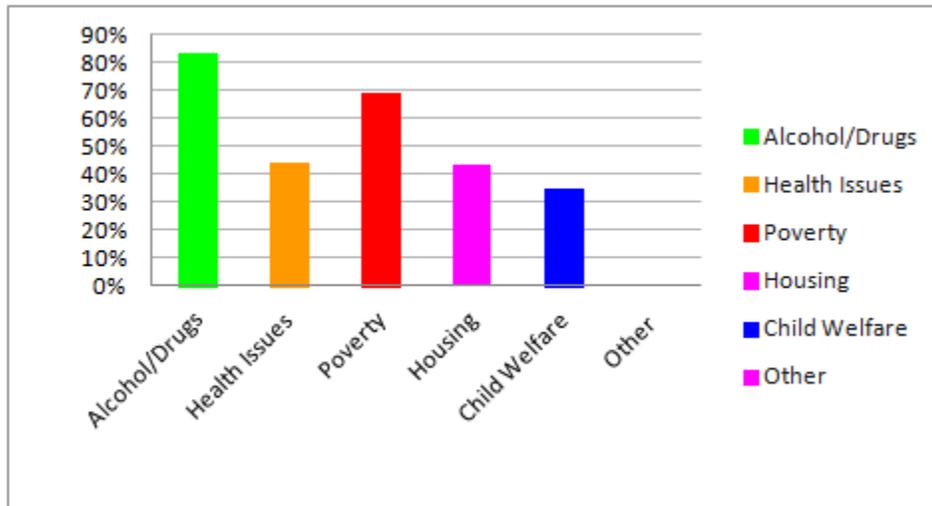
RSVP Volunteers: Service opportunities for older volunteers and may include:

- Organizing neighborhood watch programs
- Tutoring and mentoring disadvantaged or disabled youth
- Renovating homes
- Delivering meals
- Assisting victims of natural disasters

# Findings of Surveys

## Internet-based and Phone Surveys

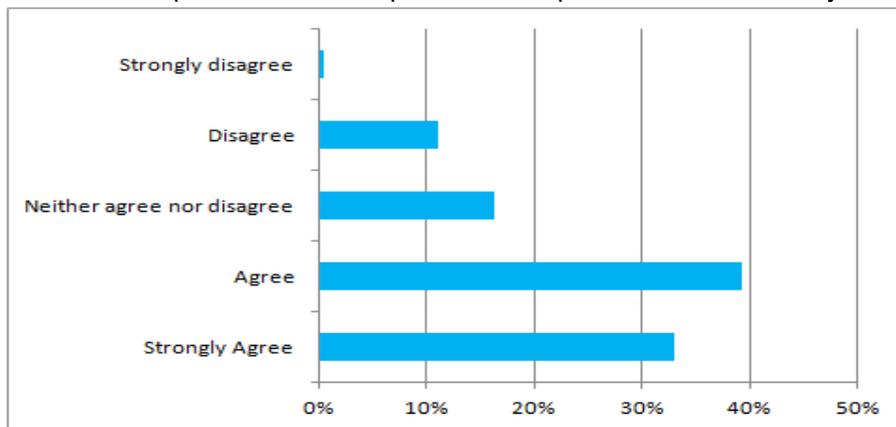
Chart 9: Responses to: “What do you consider to be significant problems in your community?”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Transportation;
- Mental Health;
- Lack of jobs/business investment;
- Childcare and more child services;
- Food/medication help for seniors;
- Transitional services for formerly incarcerated;
- Drug and alcohol treatment services;
- Financial aid coaching for students to attend college or vocational school. .

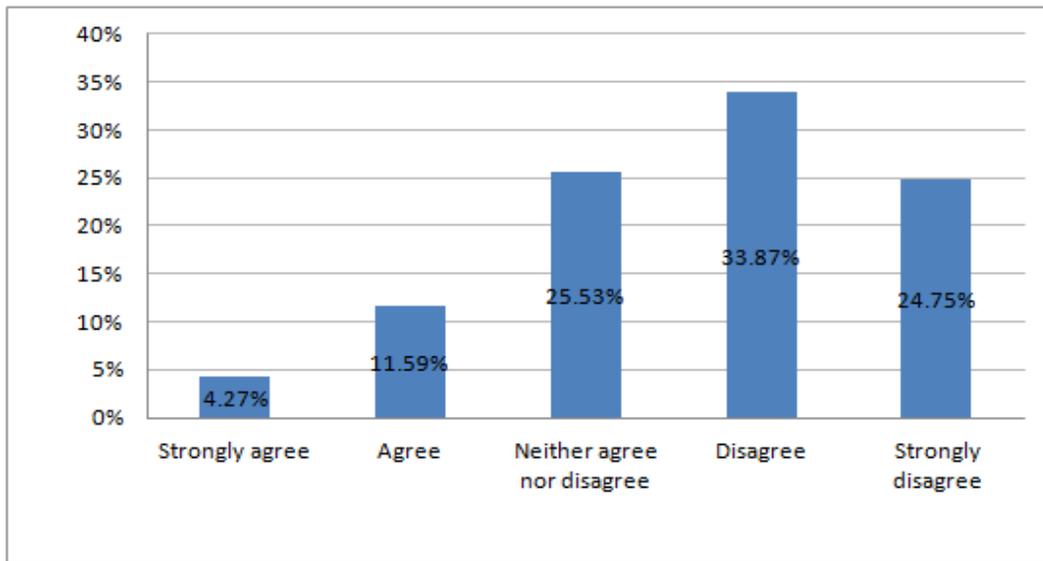
Chart 10: Responses to: “Transportation is a problem for community members.”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Expand MEOC (Mountain Empire Older Citizens) transit to be more available with set routes;
- Increase awareness of MEOC transit services;
- Provide bus routes with reduced rates based on income;
- Expand public transit;
- Internet-based AA/NA meetings.

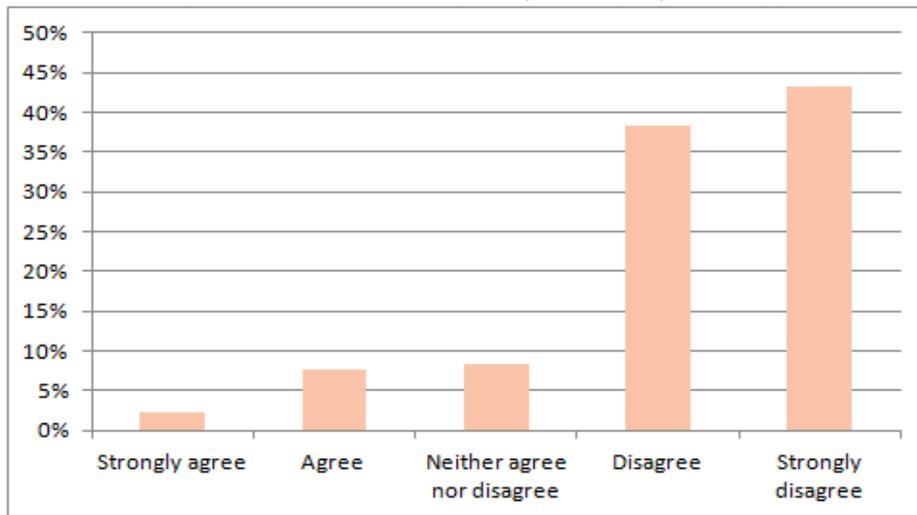
Chart 11: Responses to: “There is adequate childcare in the region.”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Make available more preschool programs for working parents;
- Lower-cost daycare is needed;
- Set up after school programs;
- Wellness center with fitness programs and daycare would help community.

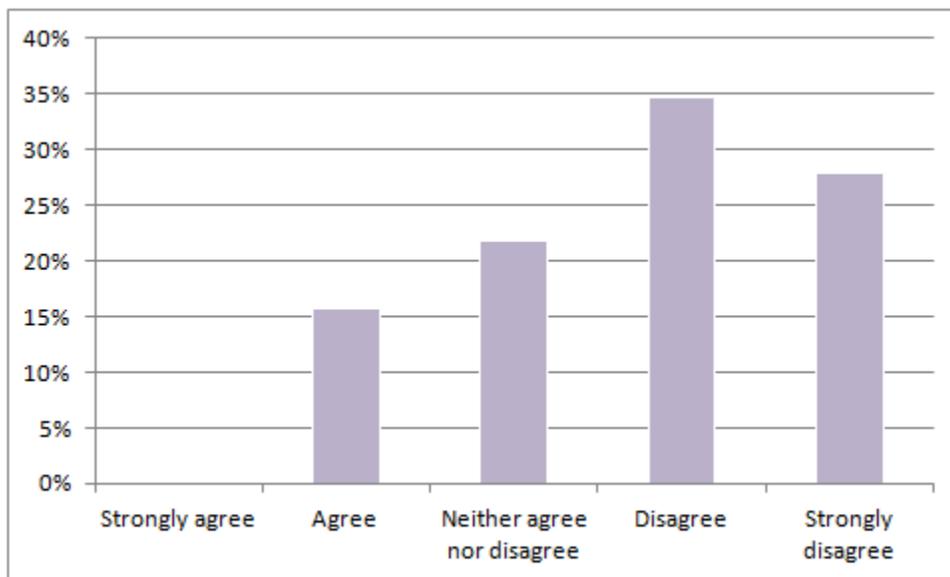
Chart 12: Responses to “There are plenty of employment opportunities in the area.”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Jobs are available but salaries are low;
- Individuals who want to work are already employed;
- Business investment is needed to raise wages;
- Build business infrastructure;
- High-speed internet is needed;
- Network with local economic development agencies and colleges to discuss the need to attract businesses to the region that pay a living wage;
- People who have felony convictions experience difficulties getting a job.

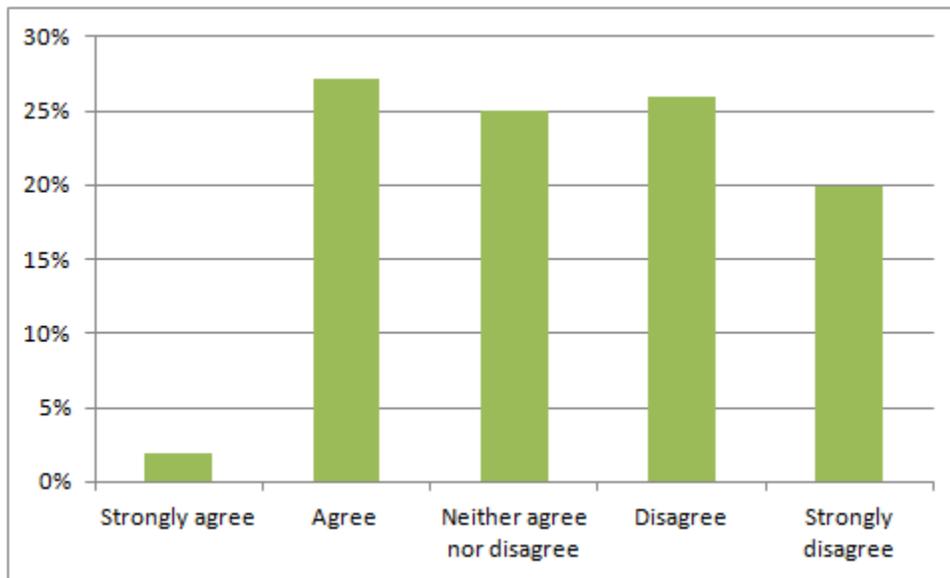
Chart 13: Responses to: “There is affordable quality housing in the area.”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Housing stock is old, need new development;
- Advocate for housing for low-income families.

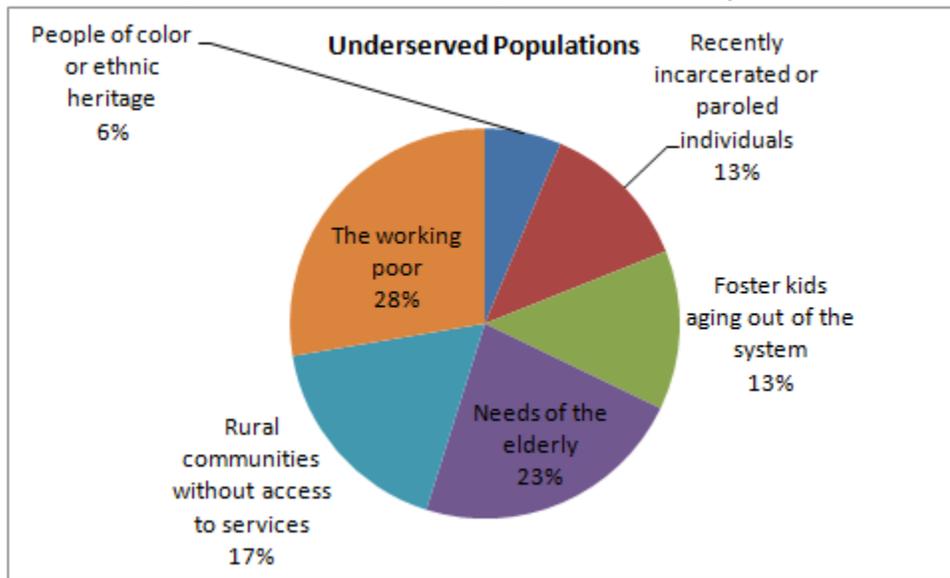
Chart 14: Responses to “There is equal opportunity for everyone in the community to become homeowners.”



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Higher wage jobs and competitive financing rates are needed to enable people to purchase a nice home;
- Bad credit and lack of financing prevent many from being able to purchase a home;
- FHA loans are difficult to obtain so need more types of loans based on income and ability to repay.

Chart 15: Responses to: Are some populations not being served?



Open-ended responses to this question included:

- Communities of St.Charles, Keokee, Rose Hill and Ewing;
- Rural farm communities; and
- Wise County.

Chart 16: Responses to "What is your housing status?"

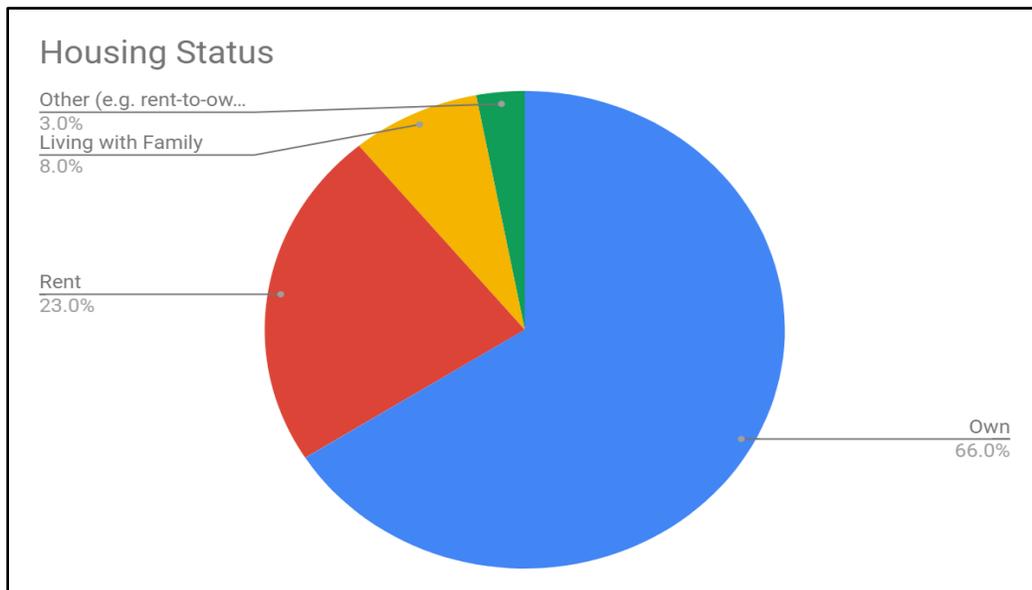


Chart 17: Are you employed?

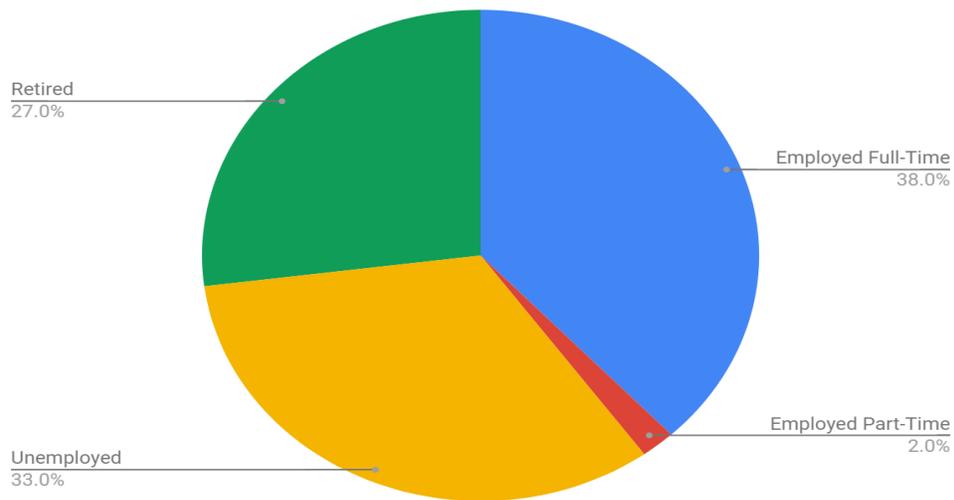
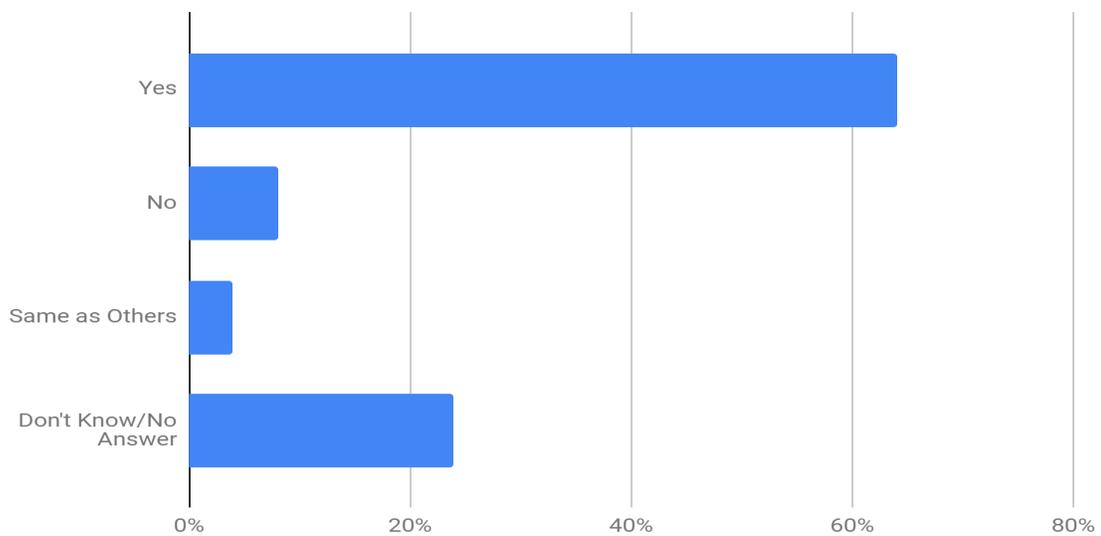


Chart 18: Responses to “ Are communities in SW VA poorer than other areas? If yes, why?”



Open-ended responses to the question included:

- Poverty is lack of services, not only lack of jobs;
- Topography means people in Southwest Virginia are isolated and there are no major urban areas to support new jobs and industry;

- Lack of employment opportunities that pay a living wage.

Chart 19: How do people support themselves in your community when they are unemployed?

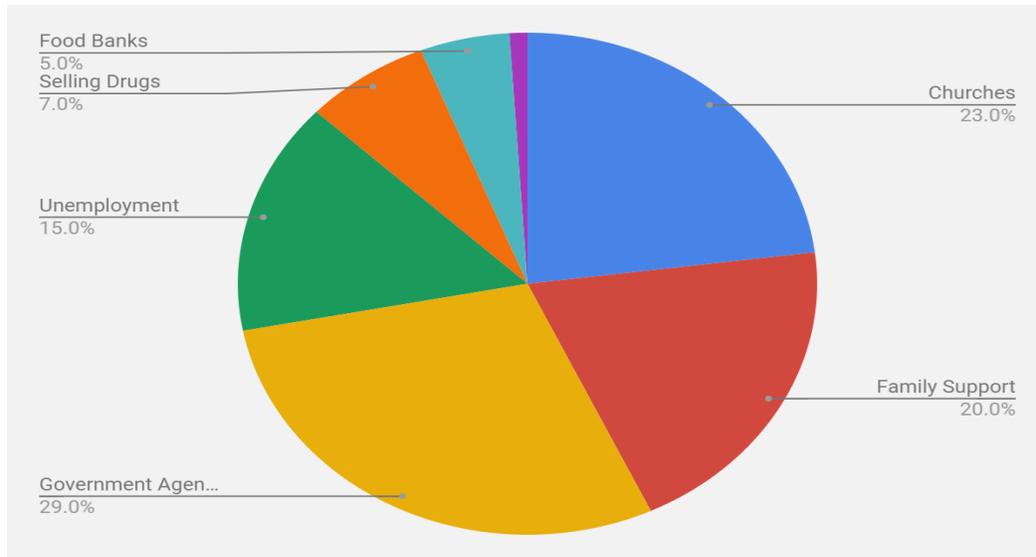
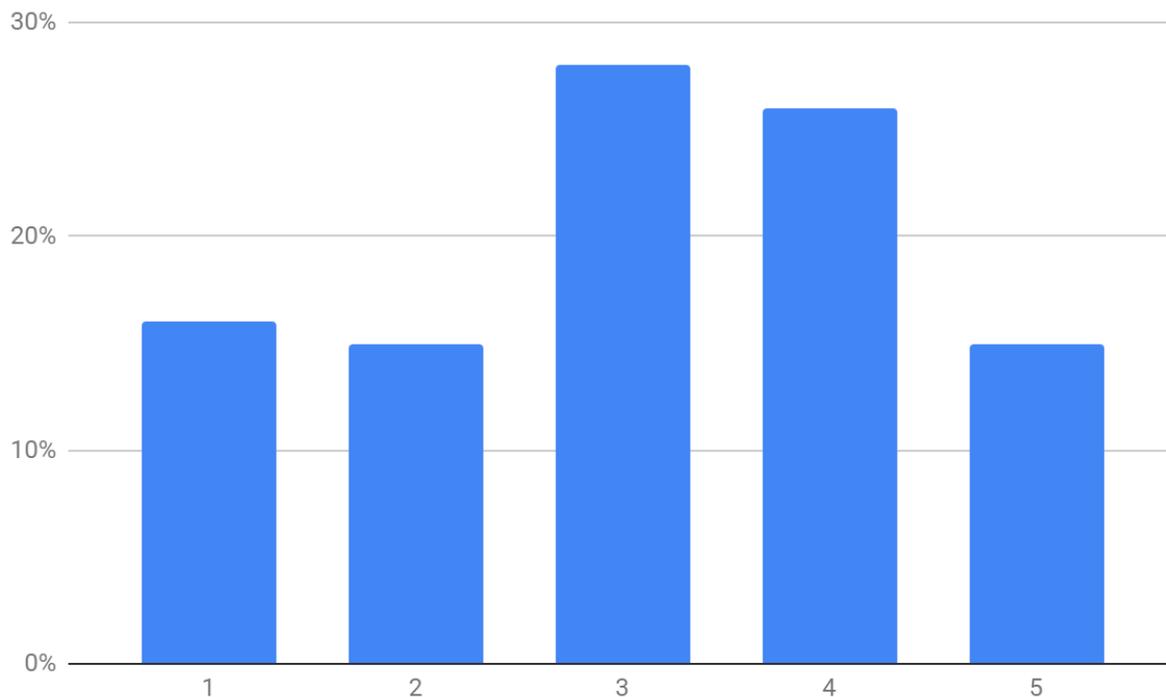


Table 11: Responses to “Have you experienced financial problems (for example: job loss, eviction, bills, cost of living increases, rental costs) due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, what are they?” (From high-to-low frequency in responses.)

Job Loss
Increasing Cost of Food and Other Essential Items
Electricity Bills Increased
Lost Health Insurance
Transportation harder to find (people are afraid to give rides because of COVID)

Chart 20: On a scale of 1-5, with one being not at all, and 5 being very much, how optimistic are you about the future?



## Focus Group Discussion

The Focus Group Discussion was held on August 26, 2020 via the internet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents in the Focus Group comprised representatives from different sectors including:

- Healthcare
- Child Development
- Private Business
- Education
- Local Government

Community members participated as well. The Focus Group included representatives from the LGBT community and the African-American community. The group discussed three questions and the pattern of responses is recorded below.

1) The community survey data is showing us that drugs, health and poverty are the top three issues in our service area. What are your thoughts on these issues being the highest priorities?

The group agreed with survey respondents that drug abuse, healthcare and poverty are the most pressing issues in the area. The issues of healthcare access and drugs stem directly from

the high rates of poverty facing Southwest Virginia. They noted that the “War on Poverty” started in the 1960’s when good-paying, extractive industry jobs were available in the region; the loss of mining jobs and declining educational opportunities since that time have kept the region’s population in poverty.

While Wise County has institutions of higher education (i.e. University of Virginia, Wise and Mountain Empire Community College), transportation and internet connectivity remain barriers for potential students. Childcare has emerged as an issue for some adult students and reflects the greater problem of insufficient childcare options and their high cost. Respondents remarked that childcare costs can be “more than a mortgage payment” for most so some individuals choose to stay home with their children rather than enter the workforce due to expense. The group remarked that sometimes “it does not pay [make economic sense] to go to work” and “sometimes you can do better [economically from SNAP and other benefits] than working.”

Concern was voiced for children’s food security in Lee County. During the COVID-19 outbreak, schools have made lunches available to students while they are learning virtually; however, if these meals are not delivered parents will not or cannot always pick them up. One respondent mentioned that when schools closed in March, parents did not receive additional food support for their children. The group felt that Scott County was more responsive to the food security needs of children and reacted quicker than other counties to ensure children had meals delivered.

Computer availability and WIFI/internet for virtual learning were identified as an issue for most families. As found in secondary data sources, children in AppCAA’s service area do not have internet connectivity and laptops on par with their peers across Virginia. The Focus Group noted that with COVID-19 rates increasing in the service area, solutions are quickly needed to make sure students do not fall behind in learning and development if distance learning continues.

Healthcare services are not consistently available for the citizens of Southwest Virginia (e.g. there is no hospital for Lee County) and access is a major issue due to lack of insurance and transportation options. The group noted that children and the elderly are the most adversely affected by decreasing healthcare availability. Two-person households are not always eligible for Medicaid, deductibles are high, and payment is often due up front. As a result, some Southwest Virginia residents forgo treatment for chronic diseases or preventative care.

The prevailing concern coming out of this portion of the discussion was the working poor. Jobs in the region are low-paying and mostly in the service industry. Many families are struggling to make ends meet while both parents are working, and the proportion of women-headed households living in poverty is greater than male-headed or two-parent households.

2) Are there other areas that are of particular concern to you or your organization that are not being addressed? What should AppCAA's role be?

As in the discussion on the previous point, to fill the gaps identified, the group suggested initiating partnerships with organizations and institutions who are working in these areas. For example, one participant referenced the Agency on Aging has elderly services and child care, physical therapy, services for people with disabilities and a PACE program with daycare.

Non-communicable diseases (NCD) related to lifestyle were mentioned as a major issue contributing to poverty. The group discussed how to improve the knowledge of NCDs and how to prevent them through awareness-raising and behavioral change efforts.

3) How has the COVID pandemic affected your work or the context in which you work? How is it impacting people living in poverty?

The group discussed issues related to testing for COVID-19 and the lack of transportation for individuals to get tested. They acknowledged the rising rates of infection in Southwest Virginia, and talked about the stress parents and students are experiencing. The group concluded that COVID-19 is exacerbating social problems already affecting communities in the region, including:

- Mental health and lack of psychosocial services;
- Increasing substance abuse (especially alcohol);
- Food insecurity among children;
- Delinquent payments for mortgages, rent;
- Child abuse (i.e. children are away from teachers and people to whom students could report abuse);
- Parents having to leave work to care for children who are remote learning; and
- Child rights/advocacy (e.g. CASA is not operational now).

## Analysis and Discussion

The results of this Community Needs Assessment will be the basis on which AppCAA and its Board will develop the Fiscal Years 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. A solicitation has been issued to consultant firms to prepare AppCAA's next Strategic Plan and it will be completed late in FY2021. The needs that have been identified in this Assessment will be used by the Agency and other stakeholders to further and define AppCAA's comparative advantage in serving low income communities in Southwest Virginia.

Presently, AppCAA addresses some issues identified through this Assessment, including: food insecurity, housing improvements and delinquent mortgage/rent and utilities payments. However, as the Assessment found and secondary data suggests, the COVID-19 pandemic has made food insecurity and economic stability more precarious for families living in poverty. These emerging concerns need to be addressed immediately to avoid further backsliding. Chief among these are:

- Support for the working poor through emergency assistance (in the form of extended mortgage/rent payments, increasing availability of vouchers for basic needs);
- Enhance availability of community-based programs to help those affected by substance abuse, to include family members of substance users;
- Establish partnerships with local organizations to promote education and early childhood development to help parents and students during the pandemic;
- Expand interventions to promote food security among the most vulnerable, including the elderly and children.

## Conclusion

The Community Needs Assessment largely confirmed information stakeholders have been sharing anecdotally with AppCAA, namely that the situation of the working poor in Southwest Virginia is getting worse and assistance remains out of reach for many due to childcare, transportation, health and housing needs. As the COVID-19 pandemic led to shutdowns and closing of schools, the working poor and working parents are being disproportionately affected. Moving forward, AppCAA, its Board and stakeholders will use the data generated through this exercise to develop new, and add on to existing, activities to ensure the needs of those who are not able to presently receive assistance do so.

## Annex: Survey Questions

1. How old are you?

25-34

45-54

65+

18-24

35-44

55-64

2. What is your race/ethnicity?

White or Caucasian

Hispanic or Latino

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Another race

Black or African American

Asian or Asian American

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary
- Other

4. How many children live in your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
- none

5. How many are under five years old?

6. What county do you live in?

7. Income:

How much do you make in a year before taxes?

- Less than \$10,000/year
- \$10,000-\$20,000/year
- \$20,000-\$30,000/year
- \$30,000-\$40,000/year
- More than \$40,000/year

8. What is your housing status: (Rent, Own, Living with relatives, temporary quarters, living with family)

9. Do you own yourself or own with your spouse:

-house

-land

-vehicle?

10. Are you employed? ( explain: full time/employee; full-time/temporary; part-time/employee; part-time/contract; self-employed/business owner; contractor)

11. In what industry do you work? (For example: healthcare, hospitality, finance/banking; extractive industries/mining; governmental; education; construction/skilled trades; administration/clerical; transportation; other.)

12. Are you the head of household?

13. Are you aware of the Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency (formerly known as RADA)? If yes, what do you know about them?

14. What do you consider to be significant problems in your community?

Alcohol/Drugs

Health Issues

Poverty

Housing

Child Welfare

Other (please specify)

15. For the next few questions, I am going to read a statement. Tell me if you:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Transportation is a problem for community members.

Do you have any comments?

16. There is adequate childcare in the region.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Do you have any comments?

17. There are plenty of employment opportunities in the area.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Do you have any comments?

18. There is affordable quality housing in the area.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Do you have any comments?

19. There is equal opportunity for everyone in the community to become homeowners.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Do you have any comments?

20. How do most people earn a living?

20. What needs are not being met by service providers?

21. Are some populations not being served ? (i.e. people of color or ethnic heritage, recently incarcerated or paroled individuals, foster kids aging out of the system, needs of the elderly, rural communities without access to current services, the working poor, etc...)

22. Are communities in SW VA poorer than other areas? If yes, why?

23. How do people support themselves when they are unemployed in your community?

24. Where do people go when they need basic services? (for example: Government agency, church, relatives, etc.)

25. Have you experienced financial problems (for example: job loss, eviction, bills, cost of living increases, rental costs) due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, what are they?

26. Optimism about future:

-On a scale of one to five, with five being "very much" and one being "not at all," how optimistic are you about the future?