

United Way of 1000 Lakes 2022-2027 Community Impact Framework

Our Mission:

Improving lives by mobilizing the caring power of Itasca-area communities.

Our Vision:

United Way of 1000 Lakes envisions an equitable Itasca Area where all people have the opportunities and resources needed to thrive.

A New Framework for Community Impact: The Discovery Process

Leaning into our role as a connector and convenor, United Way launched a comprehensive community assessment in 2021 to document our region's strengths and better understand the most pressing and evolving needs of our community's members and families.

Drawing on past research and promising work around the country, United Way centered our assessment in the areas of education, financial stability, and health & wellbeing. In addition to receiving 540 responses to an online, community-wide survey, United Way conducted individual interviews and hosted focus groups to go deeper around initial survey findings and better understand the lived experiences of our community's residents and families.

Survey respondents represented a diverse spectrum of community members educationally and economically, however the survey garnered a higher percentage of responses across certain demographic categories from our community including gender and race:

- Age: 17% ages 25-34, 26% ages 35-44, 20% ages 45-54, 15% ages 55-64, 18% ages 65+
- Race/Ethnicity: 95% White, 3% American Indian, 1% Hispanic/Latino
- Gender: 77% female, 22% male, 1% other
- Income: 10% at \$24,000 or less, 9% at \$30,000, 14% at \$42,000, 16% at \$54,000, 11% at \$75,000, 9% at \$150,000, and 8% who did not report income levels
- Families: 39% have children living in their household

United Way also convened groups of nonprofit leaders/staff to gain their perspective on the community's emerging needs and gaps in services. United Way also sought to uncover insights on the organizational needs and challenges of our community's nonprofit sector to identify resources that would enable greater impact.

Community Impact Area Pillars

The results of United Way's community assessment substantiated significant areas of need within the Itasca Community while also illuminating key opportunities for United Way to leverage investments and position its strategies for maximum impact.

Informed by the voices of our community's residents and nonprofit organizations, United Way will incorporate four impact area pillars to guide our work over the next five years.

1. Ready Kids, Resilient Families
2. Family Financial Stability
3. Healthy Minds & Bodies
4. Safety Net

Two-Generation Approach

Informed by the findings in our community assessment underscoring the interconnected nature of educational, economic, and health outcomes for children and the adults in their lives, United Way is introducing a new two-generation approach across our community impact area pillars. A promising practice originally designed by the Aspen Institute, two-generation programming acknowledges that outcomes for children and their families are inextricably linked.

To advance a two-generation approach across our community, United Way seeks to partner with organizations addressing the multiple domains that impact individual and family success, including:

- Education spanning early childhood through secondary
- Postsecondary and employment pathways
- Family stability and economic asset-building
- Holistic health and wellness
- Social capital and connectedness

United Way will invest in organizations, programs, and collaborative coalitions providing direct services, influencing systems, and filling unmet needs within and across these domains. While many partners may specialize in one key domain, United Way encourages organizations to consider partnership strategies to provide coordinated care that strengthens whole families, accelerating outcomes for both children and the adults in their lives at the same time.

The Work Ahead for United Way

Situated at the intersection of Itasca's nonprofit, public service, and business sectors, United Way of 1000 Lakes has a unique vantage point and role to play in ensuring that our community works for everyone. United Way's greatest strength is our ability to approach a challenge from multiple directions.

United Way is committed to leveraging our unique position, expertise, resources and relationships to drive community-wide change. Within our community assessment, United Way garnered critical input from our region's network of nonprofit partners that will drive our strategy and role leading this important work. By increasing local volunteerism, enhancing access to transportation, and creating opportunities to connect with and learn from one another, United Way will strengthen the collective infrastructure and coordination of nonprofit programs and resources across the Itasca area.

As we deploy our new community impact strategies over the next five years, United Way will focus primarily on the following levers for change:

- Coordinating efforts through a new Safety Net and Upward Mobility framework that centers a two-generation approach
- Fostering partnerships across sectors to bring innovation, quality, and reporting progress over the years and measure impact annually
- Convening collective action around goals and community issue areas by leading and supporting coalitions
- Building capacity of nonprofit organizations and funding partners
- Strengthening volunteerism across our community
- Advancing outreach, education, advocacy, and public policy around goals
- Prioritizing diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in all our efforts

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Impact Area Pillar: Ready Kids, Resilient Families

Supporting children and families to achieve academic success throughout the entire educational journey

Community Context:

- Nearly one in four residents in the Itasca Region is under the age of 18 ([U.S. Census](#)).
- Nearly one in four children under the age of five in the Itasca Region are living in poverty (American Community Survey, Census Bureau).
- The Itasca Region is facing a significant childcare shortage, with more than 375 children under the age of 6 (20%) unable to access essential early childhood programs ([Northspan](#)).
- While nearly nine of ten high school students (89%) are graduating on time, only six in ten (62%) are enrolling in college post-graduation ([Minnesota Department of Education](#)).

Most Needed Education Resources:

United Way determined that the greatest needs related to education for children and families in our region currently include life skills programming, childcare access, as well as after-school and enrichment opportunities.

Through interviews and focus groups, gaps in early childhood education, affordable childcare, and lack of out-of-school time opportunities were identified as key challenges limiting academic achievement for students in our region. Learning loss as a result of the pandemic also continues to be a significant issue facing many students and schools in our community.

Key Strategies within Ready Kids, Resilient Families include:

1. Access to quality early education and care programs that nurture and stimulate development to support the resiliency of kids and their families.
2. Access to quality afterschool and summer experiences that foster academic outcomes, leadership development, social connections, and future-ready kids (ages 4-18).
3. Support services and educational resources that strengthen positive parenting skills and promote a stable and nurturing home environment.

Examples of potential work within Ready Kids, Resilient Families include, but are not limited to:

- Early childhood education programs that provide safe and affordable childcare services, expand access in early education programs for childcare providers, and/or that develop social, emotional, and intellectual skills.
- Afterschool and summer programs that help children develop strong self-esteem and empower them to make healthy choices during their out-of-school time, and/or develop career aspirations and relevant experiences.
- Parenting programs that provide coaching on child development and parenting skills.

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Impact Area Pillar: Family Financial Stability

Helping families overcome barriers to opportunity, develop economic mobility, and build generational resilience

Community Context:

- Nearly 30 percent of households in the Itasca Region earn less than \$35,000/year, however the cost of living for a family of three is just over \$50,000. As a result, a significant number of families are challenged to their basic needs for housing, food, transportation and more ([MN Compass](#)).
- Significant income disparities exist by race/ethnicity in Itasca County with Hispanic/Latino and White households earning nearly twice that of their American Indian, Asian, and multiple race counterparts (\$55,000+ compared to \$35,000 or less) ([2021 Community Health Assessment, Health Fairview](#)).
- Nearly one in four of the assessment's survey respondents (24%) reported being unable to pay a bill in the past year with payments for healthcare costs, utilities, and telephone/internet being most commonly missed.

Most Needed Upward Mobility Resources:

United Way determined that the greatest needs related to financial stability for individuals and families in our region currently include financial education, job creation, and employment opportunities.

Through interviews and focus groups, budgeting and money management, lack of affordable housing, and lack of job opportunities offering living wages were identified as key barriers inhibiting upward mobility for individuals and families.

Key Strategies within Family Financial Stability include:

1. Access to employment-appropriate training and job readiness skills to enter, remain, and advance in the workplace.
2. Support services and educational resources to help eliminate barriers hindering the economic mobility of struggling households.

Examples of potential work within Family Financial Stability include, but are not limited to:

- Employment programs that provide skill certification and job readiness, career exploration, and/or support differently-abled individuals to thrive in the workplace
- Programs that support families to secure stable housing, provide financial counseling, money management education, and tax support, and/or create conditions that enable families to become economically self-reliant.

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Impact Area Pillar: Healthy Minds & Bodies

Increasing opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices and promote overall health and wellbeing

Community Context:

- More than 2,000 residents under 65 (6%) do not have health care coverage ([MN Compass](#))
- Twelve percent of residents ages 18+ reported 14 or more days of poor mental health in the past 30 days ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).
- Life expectancy can vary as much as 15 years based on income levels. The average life expectancy for Itasca County is 79.9 years, but among the census tracts within the county, the life expectancy ranges from 74.7 years to 88.4 years ([County Health Rankings: Relationships between Determinant Factors and Health Outcomes](#)).
- Leading causes of premature death in Itasca County include cancer, heart disease, unintentional injury, suicide, and respiratory disease); all of which are above the statewide average in Minnesota ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).
- Nearly half of the assessment's survey respondents (43%) experience health concerns with chronic illness and mental health being most prevalent.
- Social determinants of health, such as access to healthy food and reliable transportation, safe spaces to exercise, reduced stressors as a result of job security, financial security, and stable and safe housing, are shown to positively influence health-related behaviors that improve overall health and wellbeing ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).

Most Needed Health & Wellbeing Resources:

United Way determined the greatest needs in health and wellbeing for individuals and families in our region currently include mental health (area of need for 65% of respondents), physical health resources (area of need for 51% of respondents), and health care access (area of need for 31% of respondents).

Through interviews and focus groups, lack of care and assistance for seniors and accommodations for individuals with disabilities were identified as key issues in addition to needs for dental care, home health aid, and specialty care.

Key Strategies within Healthy Minds & Bodies include:

1. Access to primary health services including mental, behavioral, vision, and dental health care services.
2. Support for individuals' resilience, social connectedness, social capital, and independence.
3. Support services and educational resources to help individuals make healthy choices that reduce risk and harm and prevent crisis.

Examples of potential work within Healthy Minds & Bodies include, but are not limited to:

- Access to primary and/or behavioral and mental health care, programs that help overcome barriers to care, and/or preventive dental care
- Help fostering positive, sustaining social and emotional connections throughout the lifespan, including health and wellbeing for pregnant women, families with young children, and helping older adults to thrive
- Environments that promote healing and recovery and build on individuals' resilience

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Impact Area Pillar: Safety Net

Ensuring a safety net for our community that emphasizes basic human needs

Community Context:

- One in four households (24%) in Itasca County receive public assistance through Medicaid (American Community Survey).
- Nearly one in three renter households (34%) and nearly two in three owner households (64%) in the Itasca Region are housing cost burdened, spending one-third or more of their income on housing ([MN Compass](#)).
- One in ten households in Itasca County are food insecure (11%) with 10% of households receiving food assistance through SNAP ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).
- Six percent of households in Itasca County do not have access to a vehicle (American Community Survey).
- Twelve percent of residents under 65 in Itasca County (12%) have a disability ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).
- Fifteen percent of residents over the age of 65 live alone ([2021 Community Health Assessment, M Health Fairview](#)).

Most Needed Basic Needs Resources:

United Way determined that the greatest basic needs for our region currently include childcare (area of need for 46% of respondents), affordable housing and rent assistance (area of need for 40% of respondents), transportation (area of need for 24% of respondents), and senior services (area of need for 14% of respondents).

Through interviews and focus groups, transportation and lack of internet/broadband access were identified as key issues in addition to the need for sharing opportunities and creating community connections. Children with incarcerated parents was also identified as a significant and complex issue for the community.

Key Strategies within Safety Net:

United Way remains committed to the most vulnerable members of our community, centering our investments and efforts to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, health, and safety, including community disaster response. We partner with organizations providing pathways for upward mobility as well as community stakeholders and housing experts improving access to stable, affordable housing and homeless prevention.

Examples of potential work within Safety Net include, but are not limited to:

- Administering programs like the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)
- Health and hygiene
- Culturally-specific food drives
- Other emerging opportunities to meet the needs of our community's most vulnerable members