

April 2020

This update to the CCA Community Assessment was completed in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

I. Background

This Community Assessment Update is in response to a global health pandemic that has not only affected every community in the United States but has also led to the most significant economic disruption since the Great Depression. This assessment is an initial effort to capture some of the emerging needs in the community as well as to forecast how those needs may evolve over the coming weeks and months.

In December 2019, the novel coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) was discovered to be the causative agent for acute respiratory and flu-like symptoms and began infecting increasing numbers of people in the Wuhan Province of China. The first case in the United States was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on January 22, 2020. Despite efforts to contain the virus, by March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. By March 17, 2020, all 50 US States had confirmed cases of the virus.

Because of the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, the alarmingly high rate of fatalities associated with it and the lack of a vaccine or treatment, the only effective way to prevent mass illness is through restricted travel, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, coughing in elbows, not touching the face, and staying at home. By mid-March 2020, with the virus clearly past the stage of effective isolation and contact tracing, local, state and federal public health officials recommend extreme measures to minimize a public health catastrophe: mass quarantine, physical distancing, and a virtual lockdown of all public gatherings and economic activity.

While all types of people are getting sick from the disease, older adults and people of any age who experience serious underlying medical conditions, many which are more prevalent in African American communities, and, to some extent, Latinx and Native American communities, are at increased risk for severe symptoms from COVID-19. Persons of color, immigrants, and women are also disproportionately impacted by underlying health conditions linked to poverty, face discrimination in medical care, and are more likely to work jobs that require them to leave their homes. Also, persons with disabilities or chronic conditions are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their inability to thoroughly isolate themselves (need for hands-on care), physical impairments, environmental barriers, or interrupted services. The following additional populations experience differential exposure and extensive corresponding implications as a result of the pandemic: frontline workers, persons experiencing homelessness, gig-economy workers, low-income communities under quarantine, especially in urban settings, rural communities, tribal communities, incarcerated persons and returning citizens.

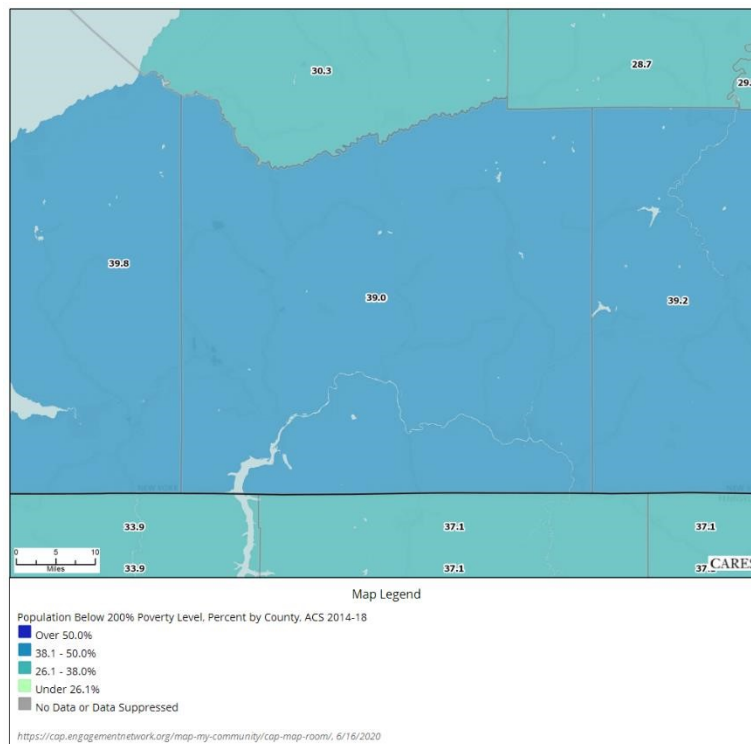
Children, families, individuals, and Community Action Agency staff may experience heightened stress, anxiety, and trauma because of the COVID-19 crisis. Loss of income, growing childcare needs, heightened food insecurity, housing and energy instability, lack of access to transportation, lack of basic supplies, and increased domestic violence are growing factors as the crisis unfolds.

Because of the urgent and widespread needs affecting all sectors of the community, this Community Assessment update is intended to provide some initial information to describe the scope of this crisis on our community and to support the many different responses that will be required to address emerging, evolving needs. It is likely that as needs evolve, some of those needs will not be captured in this update and therefore some necessary community responses may not connect to the needs identified in this document.

The *community* assessed in this document, related to the below information, is defined as the following:

Cattaraugus County, State of New York.

The needs assessed will inform services to those affected by the crisis. It is significant to note that Congressional action will permit FY20 and special supplemental CSBG funding to serve families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (as defined by [the US Census Bureau](#)). Specific programs or strategies will target the demographic groups most affected. Given persons of color are being disproportionately affected by both the health crisis and by the resulting economic disruption, an equity lens must be used to view current and emergent needs related to this crisis. According to the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, and as shown below, 39% of Cattaraugus County residents have incomes up to 200% FPL and are thus eligible CSBG CARES Act funded services.



As a result of this unprecedented public health crisis, CCA is updating its Community Assessment because there is currently a significant impact on the community, and several short-, intermediate- and longer-term impacts are expected.

II. Local public health response

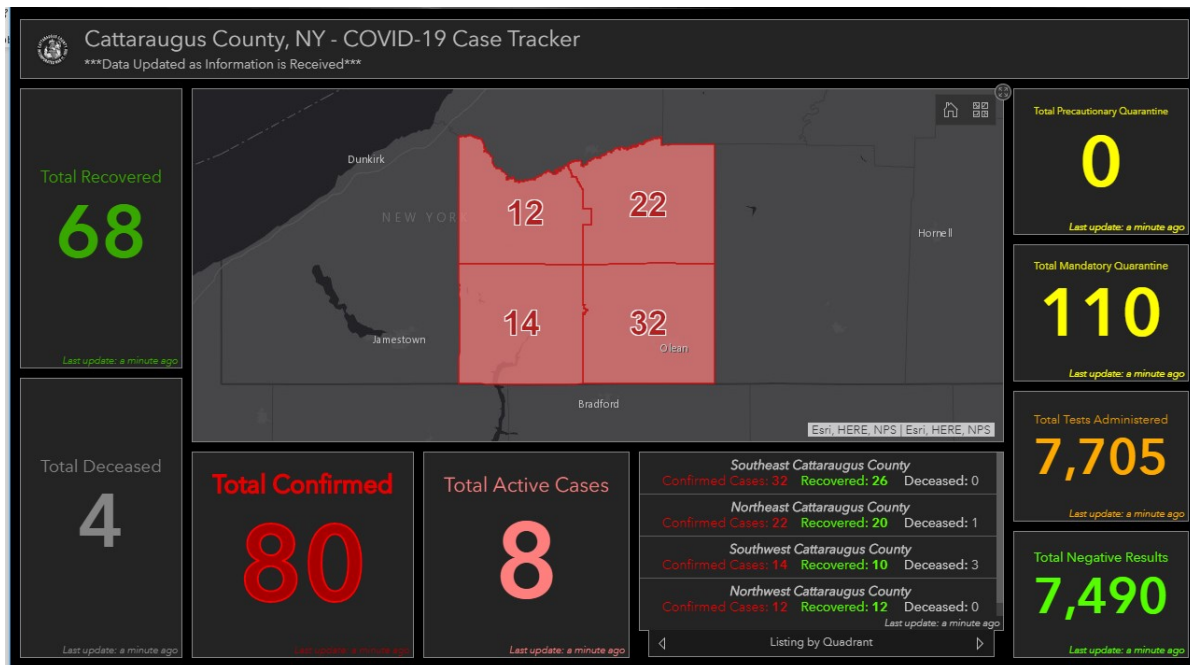
Date of first COVID-19 diagnosis in Cattaraugus County was March 24, 2020;

First date state/local officials issued policies limiting activities –

- New York State March 20, 2020 – closing all non-essential services in PAUSE order following a week of gradual reduction of workforce from 100% to 75% to 50% to 25%.
- Cattaraugus County operated nursing homes closed to visitors on March 13, 2020. Chair of the Cattaraugus County Legislature declared a State of Emergency on March 15, 2020, and another on April 15, 2020.
- Cattaraugus County schools were closed on or about March 16, 2020.

In compliance with NYS guidance, the local health department, which was part of the Emergency operations Center established by the County, remained responsible for tracking all COVID related illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths. The Health Department was also responsible for contact tracing.

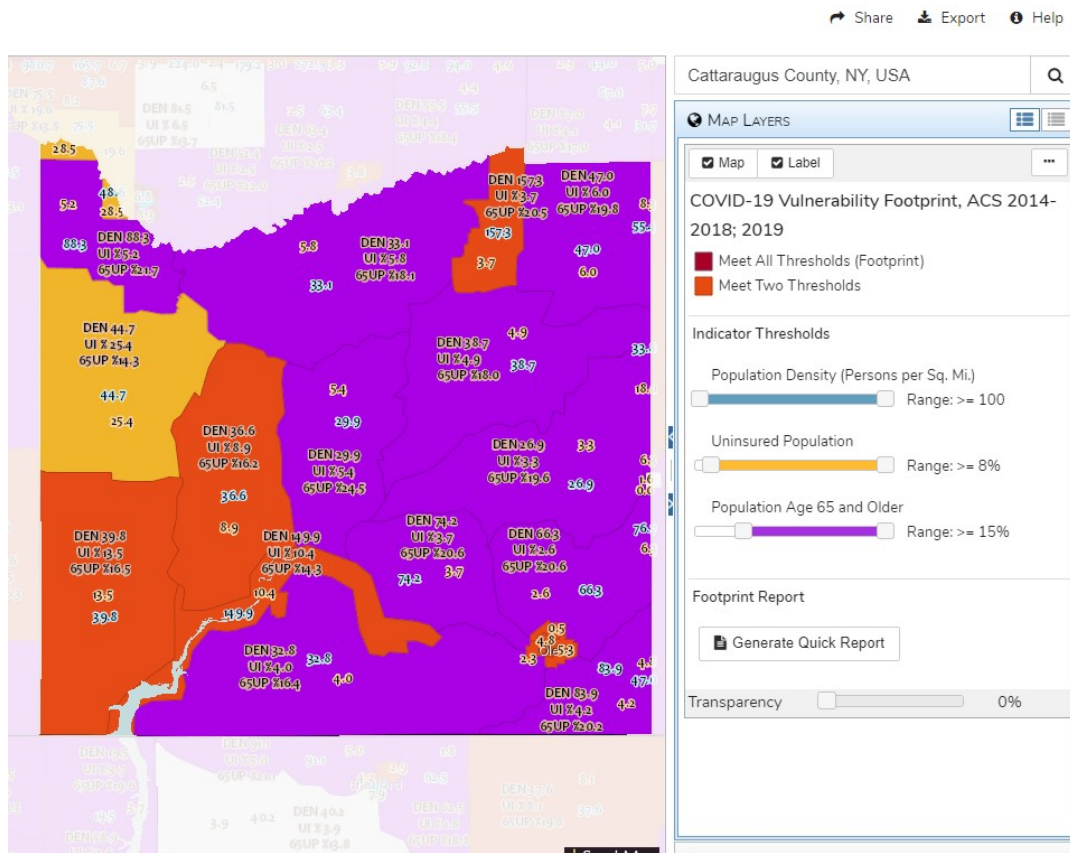
As of June 16, 2020, the following was reported on the Health Department Website:



Nationwide, early data suggest that the following groups have experienced disproportionately higher rates of infection and/or complications/death as a result the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Males
- Individuals 60+ years old
- People of color, particularly African Americans
- People with underlying health conditions (especially, lung disease, asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, liver disease, severe obesity, and individuals with immunocompromised conditions)

In addition, persons living in more densely populated areas, those who are uninsured, and those who are age 65 and over, are more vulnerable to COVID. In this community, vulnerability is highest in the following areas:



As shown above, there are several areas on the county that meet two of the three thresholds for higher vulnerability, particularly in the City of Olean and the Seneca Nation of Indians Allegany Reservation.

While the number of COVID infections and deaths are significantly less than in other more populous areas, efforts to control the spread of the virus has had immediate and dramatic effects on the community. The impact has been felt across all sectors of society. Some of the greatest impacts relevant to the Community Action Network have been in the areas of mental health resources, nutrition, employment, human services provision, and community resources. The following outlines the variety of impacts to the local community thus far.

III: Immediate impacts on the community

Mental health resources:

Mental health resources have largely transitioned to tele-therapy using a variety of approved virtual tools. Most clinics and private practitioners are seeing patients by phone or virtual platforms. The Department of Community Services therapists report fewer no-shows and cancellations now; we suspect this is due to the

removal of traditional barriers such as transportation, securing time off work, and childcare. Conversely, the transition to telemedicine is taking a toll on the low-income community. Many low-income households rely on government sponsored free cell phones that come with a predetermined number of minutes per month. Low income customer report that they are depleting monthly allotment quickly as they engage in telehealth and other services.

Members of the Trauma Informed Coalition of Cattaraugus County report that while adult no show rates are lower, children requiring therapy are experiencing challenges related to the constant and regular use of virtual platforms for school work, case management, and so on, and are seeking more personal contact. It is expected that some children and adults will be traumatized by the pandemic experience.

Nutrition resources:

With schools and local soup kitchen closed, there is an increased need for supplemental foods, particularly prepared meals, for families and individuals. Customers who once accessed soup kitchens on a regular were often those with limited skills or resources to utilize traditional pantry foods. Households on PAUSE with children may find it particularly challenging to prepare meals while juggling home schooling, remote work, or the special needs of their children. Fortunately, all school districts are currently offering free lunches to all students, typically via delivery using school buses, including lunches for weekends. While about half the schools in Cattaraugus County are interested in offering some version of the Summer Food Service Program, it is as yet unclear on how lunches will be distributed in partnership with CCA, or how children in districts opting out of SFSP will be impacted.

CCA has begun to offer frozen prepared meals. The demand for prepared foods has increased weekly, and as of June 2020, the average number of home-delivered prepared meals is 800 meals per week. And although the hours of operation of the food pantry at CCA have been reduced, the number of meals provided has increased slightly. We believe that the need for home delivered meals will continue.

Employment Impacts:

The impact of the COVID pandemic on employment is easy to see and yet difficult to document. Two factors lead to the dearth of data. First, the rapid onset of the pandemic and subsequent NYS PAUSE (Policies Assure Uniform Safety for Everyone) orders implemented to contain virus transmission, did not allow for rapid tracking of local data. Second, NYS Department of Labor's (NYDOL) most recent data is reported regionally. County level data lags.

New York, like many other states, is coping with alarming unemployment rates. According to an article published by Forbes Magazine, during the five-week period between March 16th and April 18th, the New York State Dept of Labor (SOL) reported 1.4 million applicants for Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefits. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mayrarodriguezvalladares/2020/04/26/new-york-state-unemployment-rate-is-at-highest-level-since-the-great-depression/#32c272e676f2> The DOL website is was not equipped to deal with this level of traffic; it has crashed repeatedly. Applicants have been unable to complete online applications without multiple attempts. Some were initially directed to call the Department of Labor regarding their UI claim and were unable to get through for weeks at a time. To address these concerns, the DOL has undated its website and issued notice that applicants directed to call DOL should not do so. While assured of receiving benefits when the backlog is cleared, applicants are still left without income for several weeks. Some are now being called back to work and have yet to receive UI benefits.

Cattaraugus County is included in the NYDOL’s Western New York Region. At the end of the first week of NYS PAUSE order, WNY saw a 482% increase in unemployment rates when compared to the previous year. There were a total of 6,692 claims during that week as compared to 1,043 claims the week before, and 1,149 claims at the same time one year before. Per the local Workforce Investment Board, 1,750 new unemployment claims were from Cattaraugus County. Claims peaked in the region during the week ending 3/28/20, with a total of 37,937 new claims compared to 1,104 at the same time one year prior. This represents a 3,304% increase. New claims continue through the week ending 5/2, although numbers are lower. For the week ending t the week ending 5/2/20, NYDOL reports a total of 13, 106 new claims.

Unemployment has not impacted one or two sectors – multiple sectors are feeling the effects of the pandemic. The local WIB Board and the NYS DOL report closing in education, manufacturing, retail, and travel/tourism. Local impacts are as follows:

Employment Impacts – Healthcare:

The local hospital system, Upper Allegheny Health System, which is comprised of one hospital on Cattaraugus County and another in neighboring McKean County, PA recently reported an estimated \$23.5 million loss (for 2020) as a direct result of COVID. Losses are the result of elective surgery cancellations, temporary cessation of some services and decreases in patient activity as people isolate rather than seek medical care. Lost revenue will undoubtedly result in future lay-offs. Current unemployment in the healthcare sector is difficult to determine because NY DOL regional data terms this industry “healthcare and social supports.” This sector’s peak unemployment claims occurred during the week ending 3/28/20 with 24, 173 new claims. Regionally, there were a total of 203,031 between March 7th and May 2nd.

Employment Impacts - Education:

All school districts were closed starting Monday, March 16th, 2020. NYS DOL data shows that, despite school staff working remotely and continuing to provide remote learning opportunities, meals and Wi-Fi access to students, this industry is not immune to lay-offs. The following chart shows the new unemployment claims in this industry by week:

Week ending	Number of new Claims	Number of claims for same time in prior year
3/21/20	2,765	246
3/28/20	9,477	243
4/4/20	7,930	266
4/11/20	9,091	278
4/18/20	4,625	226
4/25/20	6,236	428
5/2/20	5,576	1,219

Cumulative claims equal 45,961 between March 7 – May 2, 2020.

Employment Impacts - Service Industry:

Individuals in many sectors of the economy – but particularly the service sector, the retail sectors, gig economy, and others most affected by quarantine policies – are currently experiencing sudden and unexpected

unemployment. A significant portion of the Cattaraugus County economy is built on the service industry, including travel and tourism. Cattaraugus County is home to Holiday Valley, the Seneca- Allegany Casino and is also the gateway to the Allegany State Park. Combined, these entities employ hundreds of workers and draw thousands to the area each year; tourism generated as a result support numerous local hotels, restaurants, and ancillary businesses. Unemployment rates in these service sectors are shown in two categories – “Accommodations and Food Services” and “Arts, Entertainment and Recreation.” The cumulative NY DOL regional new unemployment claims for the Accommodations and Food Services Industry is 336,616 for the period March 7 – May 2, 2020. There was a total of 64,662 new unemployment claims in the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation Industry for the same time frame.

Employment Impacts - Agribusiness:

According to the 2017 AgCensus, there are 956 farms in Cattaraugus County, products from which have an average annual market value of \$934,120. Farm production includes meat and poultry, dairy and various crops. Except for horticulture, farming is not subject to NYS PAUSE orders. Nonetheless, farms are experiencing the impacts of COVID as the demand for their products have decreased and supply chains are disrupted. While unemployment numbers are not reported for this sector, supply chain disruptions will result in financial struggles for this industry.

Impacts on human services provision:

In a survey conducted by the Federal Reserve, 69% of non-profits, financial institutions, government agencies and other community groups stated that COVID-19 was a significant disruption to the economic conditions of the communities they serve. Income loss, health concerns, and basic consumer needs were the most frequently cited impacts. 66% indicated the demand for their services has increased and 55% reported a decrease in their ability to provide services.

Respondents in this survey (3,899) reported the top six impacts of COVID on their communities as:

1. Loss of income, loss of jobs and self-employment, leading to the inability to service debt and pay bills
2. Business impacts including closures, revenue loss and supply chain disruptions
3. Health concerns including the spread of covid-19, the limited ability for testing and PPE
4. Basic consumer needs including food and housing
5. Effects on vulnerable populations including homeless and aging populations, those without internet access, etc.
6. Nonprofit impacts including challenges reaching and serving clients remotely, access to funds, and closures.

All Cattaraugus County government operations have been modified and are now either suspended or offered via a virtual platform. Section III: Health Impacts as it relates to the availability of health-related services, speaks to the pandemic’s impact on Nutrition and Mental Health resources. Many secondhand clothing and supply closets have closed, at least temporarily, as have some smaller volunteer-based food pantries. Services providers are increasingly moving to telephonic services and web-based application processes to decrease risk of COVID transmission. The challenges listed below, while specific to CCA, are shared by many local human services providers.

CCA – From March until June, CCA modified its service provision by relocating the food pantry to offer a safer, drive up option, reducing foot traffic in the main waiting area. The soup kitchen remains closed as of June.

Weatherization Assistance and all Construction (housing rehabilitation, mobile home replacement) were paused from late March until late May but are now in operation with significant modifications to allow for sanitation and distancing.

CCA’s shelters and housing facilities remained open with some modifications to allow for quarantines spaces at the shelters and with enhanced safety and sanitation protocols. Most other services were available via virtual platforms.

However, the need for retrofitting building spaces, creating distancing between work stations, and creating sanitation protocols, has slowed the re-opening of services to the public. Significant changes to common spaces, customer intake and service locations, and staff offices and meeting rooms is required. Many of CCA’s employees worked in schools or were co-located with the local department of Social Services, and CCA must now find additional space for these employees.

Additional masks, sanitizer, other PPE have been in high demand. While CCA has met that demand through some donations from the local Emergency Operations Center and some purchases with foundation funds, this will be an ongoing need for the foreseeable future.

Technology for both providers and customers is in high demand and is exacerbated by the fact that universal broadband is unavailable. As families with school aged children attempt to meet the demands of virtual education as well as virtual case management, this has caused a financial strain around the cost of data, smart phones, or simple accessibility via Wi-Fi. Many families are working from vehicles parked in school or library parking lots. Staff, too, who are working from home, need upgraded technology, VPN services, cameras, Office 365 platforms, and supports for their home offices (ink cartridges, internet support, etc.)

Community resource impacts:

On May 1st, 2020, it was announced that all schools in New York state would be closed for the remaining school year. Closings of public schools in the Community Assessment area are having an immediate impact on children’s education and social interactions. For some families, school closures also resulted in loss of access to breakfasts and lunches. Children with less access to resources (broadband internet, computers/tablets, technology expertise, language barriers, etc.) are most at-risk for suffering learning loss during a potentially protracted period of school closure. Several area school districts were able to provide distance learning via online, however several households in the districts are without internet access. Data from June 2019 shows that Cattaraugus County is well below the population who have access to high-speed internet access.

Report Area	Total Population (2010)	Access to DL Speeds > 25MBPS (2019)
Cattaraugus County, NY	80,317	81.47%
New York	19,378,102	98.98%
United States	312,471,327	95.31%

At least 1 school in the county was offering internet hot spots. Buses throughout the district would park outside various locations for students to come and take advantage of the free wi-fi.

To keep students engaged, districts send packets of schoolwork home for students to complete. The assignments were either uploaded to an app or routine pickups were scheduled to keep students on track.

Caregivers of school-age children must secure day care arrangements for their children or sacrifice employment to care for their children. Summer recreation programs, day care facilities and summer camps are either not operation, or are limiting the number of participants on site, making childcare challenging. These same caregivers are also expected to be primary teachers for their children during the period of the closure. Parents with limited resources face numerous challenges because of this situation.

As mentioned above, the reduction in congregate dining, senior activities, school sports, in person fatherhood programs and parenting programs, and fewer direct contacts with high risk families equates to increased vulnerability in several areas: child neglect and abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, behavioral health crisis, increased addictive behaviors and overdoses. Telehealth options, while appropriate for the pandemic, have kept people at home instead of participating in wellness checks, physicals, or treatment of minor or moderate illnesses.

This new reality demands a sharp increase in virtual platform use and the need for reliable internet and cloud-based services.

CCA working with Emergency Operations Center to coordinate response to needs, and regularly participates in a Cattaraugus County HUB, wherein non-profits, government, faith organizations, schools, etc. come together to share resources and discuss ways to overcome barriers. CCA plays a critical role in a Western New York Intermediaries Group that discusses COVID-related challenges faced by non-profits and advocates for change and creative responses.

CCA has been the recipient of several awards from local and regional collaborative efforts of existing foundations. These awards have been targeted to food, food delivery, diapers, household cleaning supplies, agency sanitation, home based activities for children and adults, phones and data for customers, licenses for virtual platforms for CCA (i.e. Right Signature, Zoom), etc.

This infusion of funds is directed entirely to customer service, so CCA anticipates a loss of administrative revenue as State and County budgets are reduced because of the economic impact of the coronavirus.

III. Anticipated near- and long-term impacts

The state of New York has been among the hardest hit by the COVID pandemic. While more populous areas of the State experienced higher rates of illness and death, overarching statewide preventative measures we implemented in mid-March and remain in place. At present, a phased, regional reopening is planned. Regions will be able to consider reopening when they have a 14-day decline in the number of new hospitalizations. Additional conditions with respect to testing, contact tracing and the availability of hospital beds are also considered. The following summary of the plan is taken from the NYS Website:

- Phase one will include opening construction and manufacturing functions with low risk.
- Phase two will open certain industries based on priority and risk level. Businesses considered "more essential" with inherent low risks of infection in the workplace and to customers will be prioritized, followed by other businesses considered "less essential" or those that present a higher risk of infection spread. As the infection rate declines, the pace of reopening businesses will be increased.
- The region must not open attractions or businesses that would draw a large number of visitors from outside the local area.
- There will be two weeks in between each phase to monitor the effects of the re-opening and ensure hospitalization and infection rates are not increasing.

- This plan will be implemented with multi-state coordination, especially in downstate New York. The plan will also coordinate the opening of transportation systems, parks, schools, beaches and businesses with special attention on summer activities for downstate, public housing and low-income communities, food banks and childcare.
- The phased re-opening will also be based on individual business and industry plans that include new measures to protect employees and consumers, make the physical workspace safer and implement processes that lower risk of infection in the business.

Several aspects of the plan suggest long term service and employment disruptions. First, Cattaraugus County is in the Western New York region, which includes, among others, neighboring Erie County. Erie County reported 3,319 COVID cases and 241 deaths at the end of April. Erie County hospitalizations are rising. This will have a direct impact on the length of time it will take for Cattaraugus County to re-open its economy. Second, the Governor's plan calls for the reopening of low risk construction and manufacturing functions first. Manufacturing is one segment of a local economy that relies heavily on travel, tourism, hospitality, government and education. These industries are considered higher risk and will reopen later. Many of the sectors slated for later opening are those that employ and serve the low-income community. Finally, the plan shown above states that areas must not re-open attractions or businesses that will bring large numbers of visitors. Cattaraugus County is home to Holiday Valley, the Seneca- Allegany Casino and is also the gateway to the Allegany State Park. Combined, these entities employ hundreds of workers and draw thousands to the area each year; tourism generated as a result support numerous local hotels, restaurants and ancillary businesses.

In addition to hosting larger businesses like Cutco corporation, Siemen/Dresser Rand, the Casino and schools, much of the local economy is built on smaller businesses. While some have been creative in keeping their workforce active, via creative repurposing of equipment to change products, to accessing Payroll Protection funding, others have been unable to do so. Some have simply closed their doors and laid off staff. While largely unknown at this time, it is speculated that some smaller businesses will simply not re-open.

In addition to the above, the staggering loss of income throughout the country will have a devastating effect on the availability of community resources for years to come. New York State has a \$6 billion budget shortfall prior to the pandemic. According to a NYS Division of Budget posting in May 2020:

“ The New York State Division of the Budget announced today the FY 2021 Enacted State Budget Financial Plan, which projects a \$13.3 billion shortfall, or 14%, in revenue from the Executive Budget Forecast released in January and estimates a \$61 billion decline through FY 2024 as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, in the absence of Federal assistance, initial budget control actions outlined in the Financial Plan will reduce spending by \$10.1 billion from the Executive Budget. This represents a \$7.3 billion reduction in state spending from FY 2020 levels.”

Budget shortfalls of this magnitude will result in difficult decisions and budget cuts to schools and community services. On top of this, Cattaraugus County is reporting that the COVID pandemic is costing local businesses over \$20 million per month in lost revenue. Lost business revenue results in fewer tax dollars coming to the County, which result in decreased funding for essential governmental services.

If nothing else, the COVID pandemic has clearly illustrated the connectedness of various sector of the community. If employers are unable to re-open, people remain unemployed and will struggle to meet basic needs as time goes on. If childcare centers, schools and summer camps remained closed, parents without

childcare resources will be unable to return to work even if their positions remain. If community agencies are ill equipped to address the impending needs, because they lack the funding or resources with which to do so, Cattaraugus County, like many areas, can expect prolonged service, employment, and community resource issues.

Based on already-observed events, coupled with state plans to re-open the economy, it is likely that there will be near-term (1-3 months) and longer-term (greater than 3 months) impacts that that require immediate planning. A partial, but not complete, list of the anticipated impacts follows.

Prolonged service disruptions -

The disruptions in service delivery to customers are expected to continue for a substantial time. This is likely to lead to ancillary challenges for customers that may become long-term issues. Local services likely to experience continued disruptions include:

- Childcare – Local providers started to re-open in June but are taking limited numbers of children due to social distancing and sanitation requirements.
- Summer recreation programming/activities. Local youth centers remain closed and summer camps are limited to day camping.
- Education – both for children and adult learners. It remains uncertain when/how primary education will resume in the fall.
- Services that require face to face interactions, including, but not limited to mental health and substance use counseling, peer support services, personal care, and access to Public Assistance and Unemployment insurance benefits

Prolonged employment issues

Sudden layoffs and other employment disruptions are being addressed by emergency response measures; however, it is anticipated that long-term recovery efforts will be required to help customers reconnect to the workforce, particularly those for whom employment assistance has not previously been required.

- Businesses considered “less essential” and requiring face to face interactions like customer services, dining, hospitality, etc. , are slated to re-open after businesses that are “more essential” and that have lower risk of viral transmission. Many, but not all these businesses, employ low wage workers. This means that laid off low wage workers will remain unemployed for longer period.
- It is expected that some smaller businesses will be unable to weather long closures and will subsequently close. This means that some segments of the workforce will not have jobs to return to, so they will be looking for new employment opportunities. Should one sector (hospitality for example) lose more employers than another, this could mean that former employees will need to retrain for work in another field.
- It is expected that some employees will not want to return to work. Fear of contracting COVID may lead some to remain at home.
- Provision of PPE, cleaning supplies and social distancing plans - When business are allowed to re-open, they will be required to provide PPE for employees, ensure that adequate cleaning/disinfection plans are in place, and develop policies that lower risk of viral transmission. This represents an increased financial burden for employers who may need to

decrease their business' capacity (seat for example) as a means of lower the risk of infection for employees and patrons.

Prolonged agency capacity issues

CCA and its partner providers anticipate a loss of 20-60% of local and State financial resources. These resources not only support direct service and staff but also administration and overhead. Filling the gaps for this loss will be monumental.

There will continue to be a need for enhanced technology, cloud-based technologies, and support for staff in terms of training and financial support for at-home work.

There is a need for self-care and wellness activities for staff, now offered in new virtual or safely distanced approaches.

Staff need to be preparing customers for the consequences of non-payment of utilities and rent once SNAP and UI benefits and the moratorium on evictions and shut offs run out. Staff will require additional training in Your Money Your Goals and Financial Social Work.

Staff training needs will not end due to the inability to gather together for employee development but rather will take a turn toward exploration of virtual training technologies.

CCA leads the Trauma Informed Care Coalition for the county, and we believe that the toxic stress of COVID and the historical trauma of racism and othering require, now more than ever, that we support our own efforts and those of our coalition partners in becoming trauma informed.

In a world of unknowns, one of the largest is the trajectory of the COVID pandemic. While no one can predict the long-term prevalence of COVID in our communities, scientists are developing scenarios that depict possible transmission and infection rates over time. In one scenario, we are currently at in a peak crisis stage, but will continue to see small flare ups in varies communities until a vaccine is developed or enough of the population develop immunity. In the second scenario, COVID cases will decrease until the early fall, when there will be a resurgence with infection rates and deaths greater than they are at present. In the final scenario, referred to by one scientist as the "slow burn scenario," we will continue to see regular flare ups that are larger than those predicted in scenario #1, but not as severe as the resurgence predicted in the second scenario. All models are based on the lack of widespread immunity, the balance between social distancing and the need to re-start the economy, and the ability of the coronavirus to recirculate. (www.statnews.com/2020/05/01/three-potential-futures-for-covid-19/) Regardless of which model one chooses to accept, it is very likely that societal disruptions created by COVID will remain to varying degrees for a long time to come.

Addressing Equity Implications

Given persons of color are being disproportionately affected by both the health crisis and by the resulting economic disruption, an equity lens must be used to view current and emergent needs related to this crisis. Though immediate data may not yet be easily obtained regarding the demographics of those most impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, previous Community Assessments, as well as countless government and academic studies have established that structural racism, xenophobia, sexism, stigmatization and othering persist – and are often exacerbated – in times of crisis. Community Action recognizes the obligation to ensure that the barriers of structural race, gender, and other inequities are addressed during this time of crisis and beyond.

Therefore, it is with this lens that communities are invited to use the equity lens and the question, “why”, to understand the specific needs of the diverse populations served.

IV. Conclusion

Given the current landscape and uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of the COVID pandemic, CCA has identified the following key areas on which to focus:

- 1: Nutrition services – We anticipate that supplemental food resources will remain a need in the coming months. The future of Summer lunch programs, a vital source of mid-day meals for many low-income children, remains uncertain. In addition, persons who lack transportation, or who are at high risk from complications from COVID, may not feel comfortable accessing food resources in the community.
- 2: Cell Phones – We note above that services are increasingly telephonic. Remaining connected to service providers rapidly depletes cell minutes for low income customers.
- 3: Back rent/utility assistance – Delays in unemployment benefits mean that many low-income households have been unable to pay rent and/or utilities. Furthermore, long term shutdown of local businesses results in a lack of revenue. Re-opening guidelines that call for decreasing capacity to maintain social distancing will result in reduced revenue when businesses do reopen. Both factors strongly suggest that some smaller businesses will not re-open and others will reduce staffing. With the moratorium on evictions set to expire in August, we anticipate that a need for back rent/utility assistance to prevent homelessness.
- 4: Trauma Informed Care – We anticipate that the community will need to embrace a trauma informed approach to responding to conditions caused by the pandemic.
- 5: Agency capacity building – the pandemic means that all service providers will need to reassess service delivery methods and create spaces that allow for social distancing, as well as services that are effective and flexible. Specific needs within CCA include staff training revisions to common areas to increase social distancing, increased use of technology and telework as a means of maintaining wellbeing of staff and customers, introduction of new building cleaning practices, sanitation stations, etc. to operate a safe clean building.