



Strengthening Communities, Empowering People

Western Arizona Council of Governments

Community Needs & Assets Assessment

Community Action Agency Region IV
Head Start Region IX
Area Agency on Aging Region IV

Serving La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties



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Executive Summary

Purpose of Assessment

The Western Arizona Council of Governments (WACOG) Community Needs and Assets Assessment is intended to identify needs, assets, resources, gaps, and key issues within the tri-county area of La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties. As a Community Action Agency, Head Start provider, and Area Agency on Aging, WACOG serves low-income and vulnerable populations across the lifespan. This document is concerned with overall needs and assets within the communities. It is especially focused on needs and assets pertaining to low-income families and children that are potentially eligible for the Head Start program, older adults that currently or in the future may utilize the programs and services of the Area Agency on Aging, and all those that may use the community supports of the Community Action programs.

This document has been developed for use by WACOG to establish regional priorities for the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), the Older Americans Act (OAA)-funded Area Agency on Aging, and Head Start. It is also intended that this document is used by other community organizations and agencies for similar purposes: planning programs, making the case for grant funds, and aligning organizational objectives with documented needs.

This document provides WACOG with a road map that demonstrates linkages between community needs, assets, and services that are or ought to be provided. It also demonstrates the links between these goals and WACOG's strategic objectives. Additionally, WACOG uses this tool for planning services for the region, such as the Title XX Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) planning and transportation planning.

Description of WACOG

WACOG is Western Arizona's Community Action Agency (CAA). CAAs are the backbone organizations supporting community efforts to address poverty and community revitalization. The principles of community action include serving as a catalyst for action and mobilizing the resources of the total community to tackle issues around poverty; providing opportunities and strategies to enable people living in poverty to make decisions and take leadership in matters affecting their lives; and, representing the interests of the poor within the federal, state and local establishments as well as the general public through discussion and advocacy for institutional changes.

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood education program for pre-school age children whose families meet current Department of Health and Human Services income eligibility guidelines. WACOG also provides Early Head Start for children from birth up to age three. The program offers a broad range of individualized services in the areas of education and child development, special education, health services, nutrition, and parent/family development.

WACOG Area Agency on Aging serves as the planning, advocacy, coordinating, and contracting agency for seniors in La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties. Established in 1973 as a result of the Older Americans Act, Area Agencies on Aging respond to the needs of Americans age 60 and older, individuals living with disabilities, and caregivers.

Together, WACOG's programs and services help people at all life stages to attain self-sufficiency and maximize health and well-being, prioritizing those in greatest economic, social, and educational need. These programs aim to alleviate the symptoms and eradicate the causes of poverty with senior services, transportation, housing supports, early childhood education and development, homelessness prevention, and Social Service Block Grant planning.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

As the Community Action Agency for Region IV (La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties), WACOG is funded with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a federal anti-poverty block grant administered by every state through a network of local agencies. Designed as a measure to implement President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, Community Action Agencies were established as the local organ for catalyzing the intentions of the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964. This Act aimed to "eliminate the paradox of poverty" in a nation of plenty with opportunities for education, training, and work, so that all can live decently. Through CSBG funds, WACOG programs provide a safety net of services that equip individuals, families, and communities with tools to prevent homelessness, address transportation needs, support independent living for older adults, and develop self-sufficient, healthy, and productive children and families. While helping those in crisis or need, WACOG strives to build pathways out of poverty, a hand up to help low-income and vulnerable individuals and households reach self-sufficiency.

Head Start

Since its founding in 1965 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start has emerged as a comprehensive child development program, formed to help communities meet the needs of preschool children in low-income families. Early Head Start, established in 1995, expanded the program to serve children from birth to age three. The Community Needs and Assets Assessment is used by the Head Start program to assess the availability of and need for publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs that align with community demographics and community resources.

Older Americans Act (OAA)

Under the Older Americans Act, federal program funds flow via State Units on Aging (in Arizona, the Department of Economic Security Division of Aging and Adult Services) to Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). These funds support home and community-based supportive and nutrition services throughout the state. As the Area Agency on Aging for Region IV (La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties), WACOG coordinates the operation and provision of services for older adults, including contracting with providers for services and administering disbursement of

funding. WACOG AAA also advocates, plans, and provides services for adults age 60 and over, as well as caregivers and younger adults with disabilities. For WACOG Area Agency on Aging, the Needs Assessment identifies the needs and assets of older adults and forms the basis on which an Area Plan to address these needs is developed.

Description of Service Region

The Western Arizona Council of Governments service region is Yuma, La Paz, and Mohave Counties, covering the western part of the state of Arizona. The Colorado River runs along or through each of the counties. Encompassing an area of 23,502 square miles, approximately 21% of Arizona's landmass, the service area is only slightly smaller than the entire state of West Virginia. Within this large service region, the Grand Canyon blocks direct land access to the northern part of Mohave County from the south, meaning that some areas can only be accessed by driving through Nevada and Utah.

Within the service area, there is wide diversity in communities, cultures, and environments. Communities vary from the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) of Yuma and Lake Havasu City-Kingman, to small towns with less than 4,000 people, unincorporated areas, and small population centers or Census Designated Places (CDPs). The region is culturally diverse with substantial Hispanic/Latino populations and several tribal communities. A perennial influx of winter visitors from northern states and Canada also influences the region. The region has a diverse environment and topography, from the Sonoran Desert characterizing much of Yuma and La Paz County, to the Mojave Desert and Colorado Plateau overlapping with much of Mohave County. Parts of the region see some of the hottest summer temperatures in the nation, while other areas receive snowfall.

Description of Population

WACOG's service area has large populations of children, older adults, individuals living with disabilities, and low-income households. In many communities, demand for services that make up parts of the safety net outweighs funding and availability. The large influx of winter visitors every year also strains infrastructures.

Population Projections

While population growth in the region has slowed since the Great Recession, on the whole the population of Western Arizona continues to expand. According to the Arizona State Demographer's Office medium series population projections, Yuma County is expected to grow from a population of 214,991 in 2015 to 269,702 in 2030 and 345,661 in 2050 (an overall change of 60%). La Paz County, where the population was measured as 21,183 in 2015, is expected to grow modestly to 21,961 in 2030 and 22,922 in 2050 (an overall change of 4%). In Mohave County, it is expected that the population of 205,716 as of 2015 will reach 250,599 in

2030 and 310,932 in 2050 (an overall change of 51%).¹ As a tri-county region, the projected population growth is 22.7% between 2015 and 2030, and 53.8% between 2015 and 2050.

Age Composition

In all three counties, there are relatively few adults in the typical years of workforce activity. Adults age 25 through 54 make up 33.7% of the population of the tri-county area, compared to 38.8% of the population of Arizona and 40.5% of the nation's population.

Children under age five account for 6.2% of the tri-county area's population. This proportion is broadly in line with the prevalence of children in the state (6.7%) and nation (6.4%), but varies from a low of 4.7% in La Paz County to a high of 7.5% Yuma County.

The population of older adults in the WACOG service area is proportionally much larger than in the state or nation as a whole. Adults age 60 and over comprise 42.9% of the population of La Paz, 33.0% of Mohave, and 21.1% of Yuma County. Across the tri-county region, 27.8% of the population is age 60 or over. This compares to 20.5% in the state and 19.5% in the nation. Among older adults age 60+, women make up a small majority of the population in Yuma and Mohave Counties, in line with trends in Arizona and the nation. In La Paz County, however, there is an unusual majority of older men. Furthermore, with large populations in all counties in their 50s and 60s, Region IV can expect to see continued and increasingly large senior populations in the future.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Across Western Arizona, 37.3% of the population is of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Residents that identify as white and not Hispanic or Latino represent 56.6% of the region's population.

In Western Arizona, children with Hispanic or Latino ethnicity comprise 25.6% of the child population in Mohave County, 47.2% in La Paz, and 77.0% in Yuma County. Over one-quarter of children in La Paz County are American Indian and Alaska Native (25.3%), and substantial proportions in La Paz County (21.9%) and Yuma County (18.9%) are identified as "some other race." Less than two percent of the child populations in all counties are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Black or African American, or Asian.

Among the population age 65 years and over in Western Arizona, 12.8% is of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Residents in this age group that identify as white and not Hispanic or Latino make up 83.9% of the region's older population.

¹ Medium Series, 2015-2050 Population Projections for Yuma, La Paz, and Mohave Counties, <https://population.az.gov/population-projections>

Poverty

Across the tri-county area, 19.5% of residents are living in poverty, according to the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2010-2014, with a range from 18.2% in La Paz County to 19.9% in Yuma County.

For children under age five, the poverty rate across the tri-county area is 31.2%, ranging from 26.8% in Yuma to 33.2% in La Paz and 37.7% in Mohave County. These rates are all higher than the national rate of 24% of children under age six living in poverty (5.5 million children nationwide).²

For the population age 65 and older, the poverty rate in the Western Arizona region is 9.5%, ranging from 6.9% in La Paz County to 7.8% in Mohave County and 12.6% in Yuma County.

Unemployment

Yuma County is among the places in the nation with the highest unemployment rates, and unemployment is historically a serious issue across the region. The 2015 annual average unemployment in the tri-county region, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics, was 15.1%. Unemployment reached a peak across the region in 2010 with double-digit unemployment in all three counties, and an extremely high rate of 25.1% in Yuma County, where it has remained high.³

Disability

The rate of persons living with disabilities across La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties is 15.5%. This rises to 43.8% among the population of older adults age 65+. Among children under five years, the limited data sample of the ACS yields a disability rate of 0.43%. As discussed in Part II of this document, this rate is most likely an underrepresentation of children living with disabilities.

Educational Attainment

Of the population age 25 and older in Western Arizona, 21.7% have not graduated from high school; an additional 30.7% have a high school diploma but no further education. In the tri-county area, only 12.9% have a bachelor's degree or graduate education. Comparatively, 27.1% in the state and 29.3% in the nation have a bachelor's degree or graduate education.

Among seniors age 65 and older in the tri-county region, 21.6% have not graduated from high school. An additional 35.1% have a high school diploma but no further education, and 12.5% of older adults have a bachelor's degree or graduate education. Among older adults, the

² National Center for Children in Poverty, Children under 6 Years, 2014, http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1149.html

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Data by County, 2010 Annual Averages, <https://www.bls.gov/lau/laucnty10.txt>

educational disparities are not as dramatic between Western Arizona, the state, and nation as they are among the adult population as a whole.

Housing

In housing, Western Arizona is characterized by high homeownership rates and exceptionally high prevalence of housing units that are mobile homes or trailers. The homeownership rate ranges from 68% in Mohave County to 69% in Yuma County and 74% in La Paz County. Many achieve homeownership with a mobile home; such units make up approximately one-quarter of the occupied housing stock in Mohave (25.2%) and Yuma (24.6%) Counties, and 44.4% of the occupied housing stock in La Paz County. In comparison, mobile homes account for 9.4% of the occupied housing stock in Arizona, and 5.9% in the nation.

This prevalence of mobile homes is reflected in property values. The median property value in the tri-county area is lowest in La Paz County at \$81,000, is moderately higher in Yuma County at \$113,500, and peaks in Mohave County at \$124,600. This compares to median property values of \$162,900 in Arizona and \$175,700 across the U.S.

Even with comparatively low property values, low median wages in the most common industries throughout the three counties leave many families below or only a few cents above a living wage. This is the case not only for single-parent families, but also for many families with two working parents and just one child. The living wage is a market-based measure of the wages necessary to meet basic needs, a more nuanced measure than the Federal Poverty Level (see discussion in Section 2.1).⁴ With the wages common for agricultural, retail, and service workers in Yuma, La Paz, and Mohave Counties, few would be able to afford their rent (defined as spending no more than one-third of income on housing expenses), let alone other key expenses such as health care and child care.

Process to Determine Priorities

The steps of the Needs Assessment were:

1. Community surveys
2. Gathering of demographic and other existing public data
3. Key informant interviews
4. Focus groups
5. Advisory Council reports and input

Three community surveys were distributed to the community online and on paper: one providing input to Human Services and Head Start, one for adults age 60+ providing input to the Area Agency on Aging, and one to providers that serve older adults, again for input to the Area Agency on Aging.

⁴ Living Wage Calculator User's Guide / Technical Notes, MIT, 2015 update, <http://livingwage.mit.edu/resources/Living-Wage-User-Guide-and-Technical-Notes-2015.pdf>

There were a total of 284 responses to the Human Services and Head Start survey, of which 43 were submitted in Spanish and the remaining 241 in English. 57% of the responses came from Yuma County, 2.5% from La Paz County and 39.4% from Mohave County for the English survey, while 72% of responses came from Yuma County, 26% from Mohave County, and 2% from La Paz County for the Spanish survey. The average respondent to the English survey was:

- Female (87.3%)
- Identifies his/her race as white (96%), and ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino (58.3%)
- Married (48.7%) or divorced (16.23%)
- Not a homeowner (62.3%)
- Lives with children under the age of 18 (75%)
- Has health insurance coverage for everyone in the household (80.1%)
- Has an annual household income of \$30,000 or less (71.4%) (~\$2,500 monthly)

The average respondent to the Spanish survey was:

- Female (89.5%)
- Identifies his/her race as white (89.5%) and ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino (100%)
- Married (64.1%) or widowed (13%)
- Not a homeowner (62.5%)
- Lives with children under the age of 18 (85.7%)
- Has health insurance coverage for everyone in the household (60%)
- Has an annual household income of \$30,000 or less (97.2%) (~\$2,500 monthly)

In the tri-county area, the greatest concerns for respondents were health insurance (49.5% very or extremely concerned), medical healthcare (48% very or extremely concerned), dental healthcare (48.2% very or extremely concerned), education (46.2% very or extremely concerned), and employment (45.9% very or extremely concerned).

For the Area Agency on Aging community survey, there were a total of 394 responses, of which 71 were submitted in Spanish and the remaining 323 in English. The most responses (48.7%) came from Yuma County (121 responses (30.7%) in English and 71 responses (18%) in Spanish). There were 49 responses (12.4%) from La Paz County, and 149 responses (37.8%) from Mohave County. The average respondent to the English AAA survey was:

- Age 65 or older (80.2%)
- Female (64.2%)
- Identifies his/her race as white (89.6%), and ethnicity as not Hispanic or Latino (88.8%)
- Married or widowed (69.2%)
- Has educational attainment of 9-12th grade (39.9%) or some college (31.8%)
- Has a monthly household income of \$1,960 or less (66.6%) (~\$23,520 annually)

The average respondent to the Spanish AAA survey was:

- Age 65 or older (91.3%)
- Female (62.7%)
- Identifies his/her race as white (57.4%), and ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino (98.6%)

- Widowed (45.7%) or married (22.9%)
- Has educational attainment of 0-8th grade (83.33%)
- Has a monthly household income of less than \$980 or less (66.6%) (~\$11,760 annually)

Across the tri-county region, the area of greatest concern among this older adult population was health care (83.9% of respondents were somewhat or very concerned about this issue), followed by understanding services and benefits (74.3% somewhat or very concerned), obtaining services and benefits (64.9% somewhat or very concerned), home maintenance and repair (66.9% somewhat or very concerned), and nutrition and food (63.5% somewhat or very concerned).

There were 80 respondents to the AAA provider survey, with the most responses from providers serving Yuma, Mohave, and/or La Paz County at a county-wide level, and the rest serving municipalities within a county. Most respondents represented local government agencies, social service providers, or other community organizations. Among respondents, 77.6% saw collaboration and partnerships as the key community strengths to help people be healthy and economically self-sufficient; following that, a majority evaluated key community strengths as volunteerism, giving and charity (60.5%), and the active senior population (60.5%). A majority (72.15%) of respondents considered lack of knowledge about available services the biggest barrier to accessing services provided, followed by inadequate transportation (48.1%) and cost of services (41.8%). Assessing trends of the past five years, the majority of organizations have seen increased demand (73%) coupled with decreased funding (64.6%).

After gathering community survey data, three broad thematic areas were selected to provide a framework for further inquiry. These areas incorporated focus areas used in WACOG's 2009 Community Needs and Assets Assessment and criteria the World Health Organization has selected for age-friendly communities. They are also issues that intersect with the span of WACOG's programs and services, from early childhood through the end of life. The three areas selected, not ranked in any order of importance, were:

- Education, Employment, and Economic Development
- Housing, Social Services, and Supportive Services
- Health and Wellness, Social and Civic Participation and Inclusion

These three thematic areas guided key informant interviews. WACOG conducted nineteen key informant interviews with leaders representing the sectors of education (including early childhood education), health, housing, and economic development in Yuma, La Paz, and Mohave Counties.

Focus groups were held in each county with representatives invited from local government, transportation, law enforcement, emergency services, schools, community service nonprofits and faith-based groups, civic organizations representing veterans and other specific populations, and senior centers. These groups discussed challenges and solutions within the three thematic areas of Education, Employment, and Economic Development; Housing, Social

Services, and Supportive Services; and Health and Wellness, Social and Civic Participation and Inclusion.

WACOG's three County Advisory Councils and the Regional Council on Aging then provided input on the Needs Assessment results gathered from the community surveys, key informant interviews, and focus groups. Members of the County Advisory Councils comprise WACOG's Community Action Board. By engaging with each County Advisory Council individually, WACOG obtained more county-specific input for the Community Action programs. The Regional Council on Aging (RCOA), the advisory board for the Area Agency on Aging, was presented with and discussed senior-focused results. These discussions informed the synthesis of regional priorities.

Regional Priorities

Priorities for the region span age groups, and have been formulated with recognition that services cannot be one-size-fits-all. That is, each individual, household, family, or community has complex needs, assets, and networks of family members, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. This understanding must be at the core of developing and pursuing regional priorities that are flexible, creative, and impactful.

Synthesizing the information gathered from public data, WACOG's community surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, and advisory councils, the following ten regional priorities were identified: 1) economic security at all ages; 2) quality and affordable child care and elder care; 3) affordable housing; 4) coordinated service networks; 5) safety and well-being of vulnerable populations; 6) volunteerism; 7) holistic approaches to health; 8) funding structures; 9) focused approaches to change; and 10) connectivity.

Economic security at all ages

Economic security for low- to moderate-income individuals and households means that these households have opportunities and choices, and a sound quality of life. Recommended strategies and concepts promoting economic security for children include: 1) Children live in families with the financial, social, and emotional resources and tools for optimal development; 2) All children achieve literacy and numeracy so they are prepared to become productive members of society; 3) For children and parents alike, affordable and accessible child care underpins economic security, enabling parents to work and develop resources.

For the adult population, strategies promoting economic security include: 1) Livable wages to support the comparatively few adults of working age in all three counties, as livable wages ensure a decent quality of life, while also helping attract more people to the area; 2) Higher educational attainment across the tri-county area to build economic security, while providing a workforce more aligned with the needs of growing industries; 3) Targeted economic development to maximize the assets and address the needs of each county: ag-tech and the

border economy in Yuma, child and elder care in La Paz, and industries for the geographic corridor of Mohave County.

For older adults, strategies to promote economic security include: 1) Services and supports to maximize fixed incomes, and to prepare for or recover from large expenses; 2) Services and information that help seniors navigate benefits; 3) Services and communication that help seniors avoid scams, fraud, and financial exploitation.

Quality and affordable early childhood development and child care; quality care in aging services

The youngest and oldest members of communities are the most vulnerable, and have specific health needs and demands for specialized health care experts. Quality early childhood development and child care programs, such as Head Start, position children and families to achieve self-sufficiency. With critical brain development occurring from birth to age five, early childhood education optimizes each child's learning capacity and development of social skills. Strategies to advance this priority include: 1) Increase the provision of quality early childhood programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, partnerships, and private programs; 2) Expand affordable child care options, both public and private; 3) Advance the quality of programs and accessibility of programs to make them work for both the child and the child's parents or caregivers.

For older adults, health care and long-term care needs encompass a continuum of care, from independent living to home and community-based services, assisted living, and, for those with the highest care needs, skilled nursing facilities. Quality services for older adults are founded on the principles of quality, choices, and dignity. Strategies to this end include: 1) Promote access to home and community-based services to help older adults remain at home as long as it is possible and they desire it. This includes older adults who receive services from the Arizona Long Term Care System (ALTCSS); 2) Use holistic, person-centered approaches in all care and services for older adults, integrating services across the social services and health care sectors; 3) Integrate services through agency networking and partnerships to improve the navigability of services; 4) Enhance geriatric education in Arizona, expanding programs to local universities and colleges in Western Arizona; 5) Expand funding for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to meet the needs of the growing elderly population; 6) Continue to expand elder abuse coalitions in Western Arizona to increase awareness and action concerning this issue; 7) Educate state and federal legislators on the impact of senior programs, so that funding levels can provide quality programs for the growing, and increasingly diverse, senior population; 8) Strive for consistent quality in all programs, services, and organizations serving older adults.

Affordable housing that meets community needs

For many households, housing is the most substantial cost of living. Throughout Western Arizona, many households spend more of their income on housing than what the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers affordable (one-third of income). Provision of affordable housing varies considerably across Western Arizona. Strategies to target community

needs include: 1) Provision of assisted living and senior housing in La Paz County, including affordable housing designated for seniors in Parker; 2) In Mohave County, affordable housing that is undesignated (e.g. not limited to veterans or other specific populations), and available for the general low-income population; 3) In Yuma County, provision of affordable housing in South County, where disproportionate numbers of households are cost burdened.

Additionally, while homeownership levels are higher than national and state averages in all three counties, low household incomes can make homeownership a burden for some. Strategies to address the challenges of homeownership, while promoting the assets that homeownership brings to communities and households, include: 1) Expand financial capability education, particularly among young adults; 2) Expand pre- and post-purchase education and housing counseling; 3) Provide a more varied housing stock with options that suit different life stages and lifestyles, including multi-unit housing; 4) Reduce the cost of housing through design efficiencies, critically including energy efficiencies for new housing and weatherization of the older housing stock.

Older adults are more likely to have the security of homeownership without a mortgage, but also have challenges with housing. Strategies to address these challenges include: 1) Since older adults tend to live in the older housing stock, provide older adults, particularly those with moderate to low incomes, services and programs to help with home modifications (such as ramps or grab bars) as well as maintenance and repairs; 2) Help older adults remain in their homes and communities by organizing services and social engagement opportunities; 3) Increase the provision of affordable and accessible senior housing, particularly in La Paz County.

Coordinated service networks

Coordinated service networks improve service delivery and end-user experience. Strategies to achieve this include: 1) Coordinate communication both among providers and between providers and the public; 2) Maximize available funds with partnerships that build and sustain coordination efforts; 3) Improve early childhood education and development with coordination of programs and resources for children, parents, and grandparents raising grandchildren; 4) Improve health outcomes for older adults and other vulnerable populations with service delivery and funding/payment structures that traverse the social service and healthcare sectors.

Safety and well-being of vulnerable populations

Vulnerable populations, including older adults, individuals living with disabilities, and people that do not speak English, are exposed to greater threats to their safety and well-being. Strategies to address this include: 1) Agencies strive for fully bilingual services, as well as bilingual information and educational materials; 2) Increase the accessibility of services and information with websites, buildings, transportation, and services that incorporate universal design principles; 3) Develop opportunities and infrastructures that promote the engagement of all in social and civic life.

Volunteerism

Volunteering not only helps organizations and agencies with limited budgets meet communities needs, but also provides social and civic engagement opportunities to communities. Strategies to improve volunteerism include: 1) Design volunteer opportunities that engage retired adults; 2) Create opportunities for students and young adults that offer skill-building, particularly the development of soft skills. This has the added benefit of improving future employment prospects.

Holistic approaches to health

Holistic approaches to health recognize that health is not only about seeing the doctor, but also about daily activities, choices, and habits. Moreover, healthy communities are more productive and enjoy greater quality of life. Strategies to improve community health across Western Arizona include: 1) Improve preventative health with access to healthy food and recreation, and health education and fitness programs for people of all ages; 2) Improve community health by understanding and addressing social determinants of health (for instance education level and unemployment); 3) Design affordable, understandable, and most importantly navigable healthcare systems (medical, dental, and mental) for all ages: children, adults, and older adults. 4) Increase availability of specialist health services in Western Arizona, and improve transportation to these services; 5) Increase availability and accessibility of telemedicine; 6) Improve coordination of care, especially of geriatric care and care for those with multiple chronic conditions.

Funding structures

The funding models for many agencies, organizations, and programs, and also the metrics by which these organizations and programs are held accountable, are catastrophic rather than preventative. Strategies to move these funding structures from the catastrophic to the preventative include: 1) Build capacity of organizations and communities to apply for and administer funding; 2) Change the metrics of obtaining and reporting on funding to help meet more community or household needs before reaching crisis points; 3) Create structures to address more of the “doughnut” or “gap” households. These are households that earn a little too much for key means-tested services and benefits (such as health care or child care), but not enough to comfortably afford them at market rates; 4) Modify funding of service provision to address geographical doughnuts or gaps. These particularly impact adults and children with disabilities or mobility issues, who do not receive services due to distance from larger population centers, or for lack of local medical specialists; 5) Include population density and other factors that account for the challenges of rural service provision in funding formulas. Formulas based on population, but not population density or other rural factors, tend to leave small and rural population centers underserved.

Focused approaches to implementing change

There are many areas of need and issues that demand attention in the tri-county area of Western Arizona. A key strategy that emerged during the Needs Assessment process is to

effect change by concentrating on one pocket of great need at a time. A focused approach to change, applied to issues such as healthcare or service improvement, means breaking up large challenges into achievable steps with a reasonable scope.

Connectivity and infrastructure

Connecting the three thematic areas that guided the needs assessment process, and connecting the key findings and regional priorities, is the issue of connectivity itself. Connectivity means how people connect to services and supports, and to each other. Connectivity also means how agencies and organizations connect among themselves. Strategies to enhance connectivity include: 1) Improve physical connectivity with better roads and transportation, both within towns and smaller population centers, and also between them; 2) Improve social and economic connectivity with better cell phone and wireless internet coverage and availability. These needs are particularly acute in more rural areas, and also for low-income and elderly households throughout Western Arizona; 3) Improve organizational connectivity with goal-driven and creative networking and collaborations, with the overarching aim of providing more person-centered, holistic service delivery.

Regional priorities and WACOG's role

WACOG is not always the main service provider to address this array of community priorities. The Community Action programs, Head Start and Early Childhood programs, and Area Agency on Aging programs and services do, however, provide support and resources to help individuals, households, and communities build capacity and address social needs. WACOG's services for people at all ages and all life stages support self-sufficiency and the advancement of these regional priorities. WACOG's role in addressing and advancing these priorities is discussed in Parts V and VI.