

State of the Safety Net in Montgomery County, PA

HealthSpark Foundation

June 2022

Survey Findings June 2022

- Beginning in 2020, following the onset of the pandemic, HealthSpark Foundation has fielded an annual State of the Safety Net Survey to gather input about the challenges, opportunities, and trends in Montgomery County's safety net.
- The survey has varied slightly from year to year. Where possible, a comparison across the years is provided.

Key Findings: State of the Safety Net

- Overall, the state of **the safety net is more stable** yet remains strained. It is held-up by passionate people committed to making sure it holds-up.
- Organizations **continue to adapt** to changing circumstances and changes in service needs.
- More organizations report increased challenges with **attracting and retaining staff**.
- Organizations are investing in **capacities to address racism and racial disparities**; the interest and attention to addressing racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion has not waned.
- Yet **organizations led by people of color remain under-funded and under-resourced**.
- More organizations express **concern about the stability of funding**.
- Supporting the **health and well-being of staff** is more commonplace than before the pandemic, but funding constraints limit the support, including wages and benefits, that can be offered.

I have seen this rickety system survive due to the incredible individuals committed to serve.

Who Took the Survey

Services	2020 n = 57	2021 n = 42	2022 N = 46
Food security	42%	59%	57%
Housing and homeless services	42%	49%	30%
Behavioral health	33%	36%	21%
Senior services	25%	33%	27%
Subsidies for household bills/income assistance	19%	28%	27%
Services for people with disabilities	19%	23%	23%
Transportation assistance	14%	21%	25%
Workforce development	23%	21%	23%
Violence prevention	16%	18%	20%
Substance abuse assistance	9%	16%	7%
Child care	9%	13%	9%

Other: Domestic violence support, wellness, child abuse, youth development, clothing, caregiver support, education

Regional areas served by 2022 respondents:

- 32% serve entire county
- 39% serve Central (Norristown)
- 21% serve Western (Pottstown)
- 21% serve North Penn (Lansdale/Indian Valley)
- 18% serve Southeast (Bryn Mawr/Ardmore)
- 13% serve Eastern (Jenkintown)
- 11% serve Northeast (Pennsburg)

Note: Similar to prior years, with the exception that fewer identify as serving the entire county.

Annual Budgets

Annual Budget	2020	2021	2022
\$49,999 or below	6%	0	19%
\$50,000-199,999	6%	8%	14%
\$200,000-499,999	22%	13%	22%
\$500,000-999,999	26%	18%	8%
\$1 million-2.4 million	28%	24%	22%
\$2.5 million-4.999 million	8%	5%	3%
\$5 million-9.999	4%	11%	3%
\$10 million-20 million	10%	5%	0
Over \$20 million	8%	16%	11%

- Increase in participating organizations with budgets below \$200,000 (33% in 2022); likely reflects HealthSpark's intentional outreach to smaller and grassroots organizations
- Majority of respondents continue to have budgets between \$200,000 - 2.4 million



Organizational Experiences

In the past year (April - March), which best describes shifts in your services?

	2021	2022
Expanded all services	21%	29%
Expanded some services, reduced others	67%	44%
Reduced/cut all services	3%	9%
No changes	9%	18%

- More stability overall, yet organizations continually adapt; only 18% report no changes.

Over the past year, we have struggled to keep things running. We are taking steps to expand our services in the near future.

Inability to coordinate in-person meetings has hampered development/growth of the organization.

Saw expansion in programs where staffing was successful and reduction in programs that haven't been successful in recruiting staff. The need is great - staffing has been the obstacle.

There has been more demand, but staffing has been slow and volunteers are limited and grants are hyper competitive.

More online and telephonic versus in-person service remains.

The only reduction has been our ability to assist with housing. This is not a function of funding but rather a reflection of the lack of affordable housing options.

Compared with a year ago, are you serving populations that historically you did not serve?

	2021	2022
Yes	45%	32%
No	55%	68%

Our population remains the same, Pottstown School District.

More Spanish speaking Latinx than previous.

More homeowners and formerly middle class households who have never asked for assistance before. Also an increase in the elderly.

Serving Ida population with housing support.

We have always served the most under-resourced populations - low-income, single mother families, 90% people of color.

Our food pantry has seen a rise in first time participants.

95% of the people we serve are Black, by design.

Which of the following statements best applies to your organization?

Options	2021	2022
We do not collect demographic data about the people we serve.	19%	24%
We collect demographic data about the people we serve, but do not use it much.	19%	26%
We collect demographic data about the people we serve, and use it to make program and strategy decisions.	62%	50%

In total, 50% of 2022 respondents do not actively *use* demographic data, even if it is collected - meaning it is not a factor in planning, evaluation, and understanding who is accessing services, and in resource deployment.

Cash Reserves

Months of Cash Reserves as of March 31	2020	2021	2022
0 - We have no reserves	10%	6%	25%
1 - 2 months	12%	12%	7%
3 - 6 months	49%	46%	31%
7 - 12 months	20%	20%	31%
More than a year	4%	17%	6%

- It is not surprising that this cohort of responding organizations would report no/fewer reserves since more have smaller budgets than previous years.

Does your organization currently have access to capital or credit?

	2020	2021	2022
Yes	78%	72%	50%
No	22%	28%	50%

2022: If yes, please specify how many months of operating capital are available?
Note: most respondents did not specify:

- 1 month
- 2 - 3 months (2)
- 4 - 5 months
- 36 months

Is your organization currently looking for access to capital that you do not already have?

	#
Yes	16
No	15

If yes, what amount are you currently seeking? Note: most did not specify:

- \$30,000
- \$50,000 (2)
- \$100,000 (2)
- \$350,000
- \$600,000
- \$2.5 million
- \$8 million

Does your Executive Director self-identify as being a person of color?

	2021	2022
Yes	7/19%	10/26%
No	30/81%	28/74%

- In 2022, 10 of the 38 responding organizations to this question (8 skipped it) are led by an individual who identifies as being a person of color (POC).
- There are some differences between organizations with an Executive Director that is a POC versus non-POC. Among organizations with an Executive Director that is a POC:
 - They rate the safety net as weaker in relation to the ability to leverage and access funding and cultural competence and inclusion.
 - 50% have no cash reserves (compared with 13% of organizations with a non-POC Executive Director).
 - 90% have no access to capital or credit (compared with 67% of organizations with a non-POC Executive Director).
 - 33% have budgets under \$50,000 (compared with 15% of non-POC led); none are over \$1,000,000 (50% of all non-POC led organizations have budgets over \$1,000,000).
 - 100% anticipate increases in demand for services (compared with 82% of non-POC led) and increases in expenses (compared with 79% of non-POC led).
 - 70% anticipate increases in revenue (compared with 35% of non-POC led).

Which statement below best captures how your organization is doing (i.e., your Board, staff, and volunteers)? Our organization...

	2021	2022
Is doing great	9%	17%
Is doing fine	58%	43%
Is struggling but holding up	33%	35%
Is on the verge of breaking down	0	4%
Has failed	0	0

- Staffing is a common challenge.
- Increased concern in 2022 about future funding.

The last two plus years have been difficult programmatically and successful financially. We were able to grow programming and staff slightly. Concerned about next two years with respect to fundraising/income as government monies shift/dry up.

Donations have decreased since the end of the high level of the pandemic.

This year looks less strong (financially) as many Covid financial supports have discontinued and service costs have increased.

Seems like everyone is weary of the problems.

Our staff is tired and nearing burnout. We are hiring, but the process is slow. In the meantime, current staff members are underpaid and are working too much.

I am also keenly aware of the heavy impact of the staffing crisis on our teams. Additionally, everyone is managing the individual and collective impact of the pandemic on wellness, energy, and personal resource.

We, as all organizations, have been the victims of the Great Resignation. We are struggling to hire staff for our programming, but we are in the process of hiring for our open positions, which should add a lot of stability to the organization.

Heavy reliance on volunteers. Less volunteers available.

What tools are you using or do you plan to use to prepare for the future?

Currently Using

	2020	2021	2022
Staff strategy and planning sessions	71%	76%	67%
Budgeting, cash flow forecasting, and scenarios	70%	78%	64%
Fundraising and development planning	49%	71%	58%
Board strategy and planning sessions	44%	64%	44%
Program evaluation to identify and prioritize most impactful services	42%	62%	58%
Community and constituent engagement to inform decisions	N/A	62%	63%

- Organizations with smaller budgets report using fewer of these tools.

In the past year, what actions, if any, have you taken to build your organization's capacity to advance racial and social justice?

	2021	2022
Adopted or updated anti-racist/anti-discrimination policies and practices	38%	53%
Invested in our internal capacity through trainings or other learning opportunities	82%	79%
Created or expanded opportunities to promote diverse volunteers and staff	59%	74%
Prioritized cultural and language competence and inclusion in our service delivery	62%	74%

- Sustained attention to building capacity to advance racial and social justice.

We still have a long way to go.

Still looking to update our policies - we could certainly use some help with this endeavor and we continue to engage in trainings, learning, and activities to increase our understanding and knowledge around this important issue.

We are actively participating in three distinct processes to develop a workplan, set and assess goals, educate our staff, board and volunteers.

We have added a translation app to our website, we use close captioning for all our online meetings, we have docs translated into multiple languages.

All of the above are crucial to the effectiveness of any organization.

In the past year, did you do any of the following?

	Yes	No
Conducted assessments to determine if our programs and services are meeting the needs of distinct racial/ethnic populations	35%	65%
Used intentional communications strategies to reach distinct racial/ethnic populations (e.g., media outlets, language-specific strategies, storytelling)	52%	48%
Used intentional outreach strategies to reach distinct racial/ethnic populations (e.g., relationship-building, network development, designated outreach staff)	64%	36%
Engaged people who have experience with using safety net services to get their feedback and ideas for improvements	70%	30%

We regularly survey, and are in regular two-way communication via text with over 1250 client households

We work to serve all individuals seeking assistance without questioning racial background, gender identification or religious affiliation.

Use of consumer advisory board, consumer survey feedback.

We have not been able to implement any of the above changes due to being focused on continuing our services throughout the pandemic. We are planning to implement some of these changes in the future.

We are in the process of developing a strategic plan to outreach different populations so we can get feedback on how our services are serving/not serving them well.

Looking ahead to Spring 2023, what do you anticipate for the next year?

	Increase		Decrease		No change		No idea	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Need for services	87%	87	3	0	8	9	3	4
My organization's revenue	46	43	31	26	21	24	3	7
My organization's expenses	67	87	10	0	21	11	3	2
Funding from government sources	18	16	23	25	38	32	21	27
Funding from foundation sources	29	30	21	17	34	22	16	30
Funding from individuals	26	28	26	17	26	20	21	35

Overall:

- Anticipate relative stability in year over year changes
- Anticipate increases in expenses, but not funding
- More uncertainty about funding

What is your organization doing to prioritize the health and wellness of your team?

Common responses:

- Flexible scheduling
- Trainings and time discussing stress and wellness
- Increase in benefits
- Additional time off

- Past surveys and the current survey suggest the focus on health and wellness increased in response to the pandemic, and the focus has been normalized - though the need is still acute.

We have wellness workshops and encourage staff to take vacation, comp time, and wellness days.

We have increased our support for mental health treatment for staff (reduced co-pays), increased pay to living wage for direct care staff.

Our staff have been given a monthly floating holiday that can only be used on a Monday or Friday, which allows them to take a three-day weekend once per month.

Set mental health days. Daily personal check ins/ needs assessment before any meetings. Open discussions around wellness and health that is a normal part of all daily work.

We contract with two therapists. We encourage staff to participate with the private therapists by providing a self-care day (a.k.a. PTO day) if they meet with the therapist.

Lowered deductible for Mental Health and counseling services, increased wellness activities internally, diversified EAP team we use.

What do you want funders and decision makers to know about what your organization needs?

Common responses:

- ▶ Stable and consistent funding that is responsive to the needs that organizations identify for themselves (e.g., capacity building, salaries, facilities)
- ▶ Continued support for racial and social justice
- ▶ Time to network and connect

Being on the frontlines through the pandemic is hard.

Increased salaries for staff so they no longer qualify for our programs.

We need capacity building grants to build organizational infrastructure, not just grant funds for specific programs.

Community program staff and administrators are more isolated than pre-pandemic.

Continued support for action steps for DEI work. Moving from words on paper to action.

Having funders understand inflation.

Operations and staffing are extremely important and very difficult to fund.

We have numerous concerns coupled with an abundance of hope and resiliency. Sadness about the state of our nation and government, Angst about future funding from private and government funders, And concerns about how we lead our staff, serve our community, engage our participants, keep the lights on, and continuous improvement. But we have hope, tenacity, and resiliency so we figure it out and keep going. Two issues that keep me up at night are health benefits for staff and consistent funding.



System Experiences

Which statement below best captures how Montgomery County's safety net is doing? Montgomery County's safety net...

	2020	2021	2022
Is doing great	3%	0	5%
Is doing fine	14%	17%	22%
Is struggling but holding up	69%	83%	59%
Is on the verge of breaking down	14%	0	8%
Has failed	0	0	5%

Some parts are doing fine and others are problematic. Behavioral health is overwhelmed- much more need for counselors serving low income people than available. There is not enough shelter or supportive housing, particularly for adults experiencing mental health crises. Cost of food combined with supply chain issues is making food insecurity a greater problem. Recession on the horizon :-(. Seniors as well as all ages have suffered immensely under pandemic isolation.

The housing crisis is straining everything.

If the goal is to have traditionally under-resourced populations serve in leadership roles of nonprofits, there needs to be a funding infrastructure that supports it, otherwise they will literally be unable to afford to fill those roles.

I would have checked the "Is on the verge of breaking down"; however, I have seen this rickety system survive due to the incredible individuals committed to serve.

There is always room for improvement. We have to continue to dismantle systematic and structural racism.

No boroughs, town, municipalities have demonstrated commitment to care for the most vulnerable persons. I am impressed by and grateful for grass roots organizations, faith communities, and others who have stepped up to contribute to the safety net over the last couple years. Their contribution has been mighty.

The provider community is grappling with the workforce crisis that was looming before the pandemic.

Overall, please rate how Montgomery County's safety net system is doing in the following areas.

		Excellent	Good	Fair	Terrible	Don't Know
Service location access	2021	0	23%	53%	8%	18%
	2022	0	29%	45%	16%	11%
Language access	2021	0	18%	51%	13%	18%
	2022	5%	18%	24%	21%	32%
Cultural competence and inclusion	2021	0	20%	50%	15%	15%
	2022	0	34%	32%	13%	21%
Appropriate eligibility guidelines	2021	0	35%	35%	10%	20%
	2022	0	39%	29%	18%	13%
Ability to leverage and access funding	2021	5%	28%	50%	5%	13%
	2022	11%	21%	34%	16%	18%

- Relative stability
- Room for improvement across all
- Consistent high percentages of “Don’t Know”

I truly do not know the aggregate struggle of safety net providers. The HealthSpark study is invaluable to determine this. My impression is groups compete for available funds and this creates less cooperation.

To what extent have the following contributed to shortfalls or cracks in the safety net system's response to COVID-19?

	Gotten much better	Gotten a little better	About the same	Gotten a little worse	Gotten much worse
Funding	6%	36%	30%	27%	0
Burdensome regulations	0	28%	47%	22%	3%
Technology (e.g., bandwidth, software)	3%	48%	27%	18%	3%
Staff being overworked	6%	3%	32%	26%	32%
Staff being underpaid	3%	15%	52%	12%	18%
Appreciation for the safety net	12%	45%	36%	6%	0
Responsiveness to and inclusion of diverse populations	0	54%	33%	9%	3%
Stigma of using safety net services	3%	45%	52%	0	0
Collaboration	9%	48%	21%	21%	0
Racial inequities	0	39%	48%	12%	0

- Percentages in purple indicate where the responses lean.
- Improvements in:
 - Funding
 - technology;
 - appreciation for the safety net
 - Responsiveness to diverse populations
 - Collaboration

Is Montgomery County’s safety net system making progress toward addressing racial inequities and disparities in the system?

	2021	2022
Yes, a lot	2%	10%
Yes, a little	70%	58%
No, not at all	2%	7%
Not sure	26%	25%

Continue to hold space and accountability for the conversation. Grateful for these efforts.

Continued to support for the Racial Equity Learning Community (RELC) and other efforts by nonprofits to work DEI principles.

The work HealthSpark is doing is making a difference.

Keep us talking.

Reflecting on the past year, what are the most significant lessons you learned about your work and Montgomery County's safety net that can be applied to building a more just and resilient safety net in the future?

- Importance of collaboration
- Funding and support for the safety net
- Intentionality with diversity
- Adaptability and community responsiveness

We ALL need to be flexible and we need to learn to scale back if we need to, or we risk losing or harming our staff, which is a losing proposition for everyone. And, we cannot do everything all at once as it relates to diversity. We have to have patience for ourselves and others in our learning journey.

Making the public aware of the real needs of residents in Montgomery County. Involve the business community in finding solutions, bring all segments together politically (County and Norristown Township) to become aware of the underlying needs in housing, mental health, food insecurity. Utilize newspapers, social media, to focus with topics such as food insecurity and anti-poverty approaches.

Intentional partnerships are needed on all levels of the public-private sector to create the change needed. Also, I am inspired by the engagement process the county has conducted within the Recovery Office. Those partnerships and initiatives need to be adopted by all County offices.

Always have an idea for a new service solution in your back pocket - ideas that come from proximity in the community. Let the community build the service - meet needs identified by people.

Equitable distribution of funding to organizations that have the ability to continue to serve in the face of a worldwide health crisis. Strengthen capacities of those organizations that were on the ground running during the pandemic because they will be better equipped for something like this in the future.

Diversity builds stronger organizations and more dynamic programming.

The same dynamics that keep people in poverty in America, keep nonprofits in poverty.



Reflections