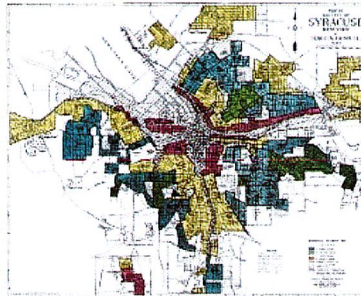


Executive Statement from PEACE, Inc.'s 2024 Community Needs Assessment for Onondaga County

For the report, visit our website at <https://www.peace-caa.org/2024-cna/> or scan the QR Code below.



2024 COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CNA) FOR ONONDAGA COUNTY



"I'm frequently asked 'what is the biggest issue or need in our community?' I tell them, 'Poverty.' They often respond, 'no, what is the biggest issue...is it employment, transportation, etc.?' I again say, 'it's Poverty.'" A former PEACE, Inc. employee.

"Poverty is more like a blanket, there are so many things that fall under poverty. To really address poverty, you need to address the trauma that has been inflicted." An anonymous Central New York (CNY) Direct Service Staff Member.

Welcome to PEACE, Inc.'s 2024 Community Needs Assessment (CNA). The agency is excited that you are reviewing the document and considering its recommendations. The CNA seeks to further ongoing conversations about our community and its advancement for all. The CNA, the data found within it, and the experiences shared in it are all parts of evolving advocacy and planning processes that will develop in the coming years. This is a work in progress. We expect there will be topics addressed in the CNA that you will find eye-opening, controversial, underdeveloped, and/or inspiring. Let's discuss it!

As the agency has stated in its annual report and elsewhere,¹ Central New York is on the verge of having a "moment." The arrival of *Micron Technologies, Inc.*, the removal of the I-81 viaduct for a Community Grid option, and the rebuilding of *Syracuse Public Housing* offer **transformative possibilities to deliver social opportunity, economic promise, and inclusionary justice** for those who have often been marginalized. Yet, the promise of the future must wrestle with the legacies of the past and the conditions of the present. In particular,

- The city of Syracuse has the **second highest rate of childhood poverty in the nation**, with 45.8% of city youth under the age of 18 living in poverty according to 2018-2022, 5-year *American Community Survey Estimates* (ACS).

- White Median Household Income (MHI) (\$77,804) was 112% greater than Black MHI (\$36,640) in Onondaga County according to 2018-2022, 5-year ACS. **Onondaga County’s racial income gap has widened** from 97% in 2018, when *The Brookings Institute found Onondaga County and the city of Syracuse to have the “seventh worst racial income gap among the nation’s aging industrial cities.”*^{1,2}
- Between February 2023 to February 2024, the Syracuse Metropolitan area experienced **the greatest one-year, average monthly rent increase in the nation** at 22% (with the average rent of a 1-bedroom apartment being \$1050 a month).
- **Onondaga County is aging.** Its 65 and over population increased by 28.8% from 2011 to 2021. Syracuse’s 65 and over population increased by 42.8% during the same period. The number of older adults living in poverty in the city of Syracuse increased by 110% during the same period.

Embracing the quotes at the top of the page, these realities are interconnected and reinforcing for those who live in and/or face the threat of poverty. To offer insights and potential recommendations about poverty in Onondaga County, the CNA a) will integrate quantitative and qualitative data, b) will embrace research conducted and released publicly by the agency’s community partners, and c) will raise the voices and narratives of diverse community members. From this equitable, justice-informed approach, the CNA will present 5 key claims. First,

- Redlining, Racial Covenants, Urban Renewal, and other discriminatory policies of the past are more than just footnotes of twentieth century history. Nor are they solely a City of Syracuse “problem.” Rather, **racial inequalities have been systematized over time and have shaped the development of Onondaga County towards its present state.** In Onondaga County, community needs must be analyzed and met using a **lens of equity.** It must include the voices and experiences of those who are often overlooked, if not outright ignored. Tied to this claim,
- The barriers faced by low-income Onondaga County residents during the COVID-19 pandemic were not new. This was an argument presented in *PEACE, Inc.’s “COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment and Chronicle”* from June 2020. Rather, **COVID-19 exacerbated and intensified long-standing structural insecurities and inequalities**, a contention becoming all the more apparent in the pandemic’s aftermath and around crises about housing, mental health, domestic violence, and more. The CNA also presents evidence that low-income families are struggling to adjust after **unprecedented levels of pandemic-era assistance** and in the face of **rising inflation** that is spiking costs across the board. In response then,
- A **holistic, layered understanding of poverty** -one that acknowledges multiple histories, barriers, and strengths- is necessary if diverse, low-income households are to reach self-sufficiency. Low-income households face many challenges which are often out of their control. When reading the CNA, note the frequency in which one need can inform, shape, and find meaning alongside other needs. Also, when reading the CNA, note the resiliency and resourcefulness of Onondaga County’s low-income residents. Such descriptions are apt ones when explaining the work being pursued by local nonprofit staff. Thus,
- To tackle the complexities of poverty in Onondaga County, **robust and flexible capacity building measures must take place within the Human/Social Services Sector.** Low wages, restrictive funding streams, high turnover, and burnout are hampering the effectiveness of local nonprofits and their community-focused staff to pursue their missions. And last,
- Sustainable **advocacy and power-building campaigns** must continue to be nurtured and promoted to mobilize communities, to overcome lacking senses of belonging, and to push inclusivity as well as community-driven decision-making.

¹ *PEACE, Inc.*, “Annual Report 2022-2023.”

² Alan Berube, “To Succeed, Older Industrial Cities Must Overcome Their Stark Color Lines.”