

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty is the lack of sufficient resources to meet needs and sustain well-being. Typically, available resources are overwhelmed by the multidimensional demands of poverty. Racine Kenosha Community Action Agency, Inc., also known as RKCAA, has been at the forefront of local efforts to address poverty's persistent and complex social, economic, and political dimensions in southeastern Wisconsin. RKCAA has confronted the issues of poverty through continuous improvement in resources (programs, services, and activities) and the agency's capacity to respond to local needs through adaptations in strategy, structure, operation, and practices since 1967. RKCAA effectively balances legislative regulations, requirements, additional funding opportunities, and innovative programs and services to support the communities served.

Every three years, RKCAA is mandated to compile a Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CCNA) to determine and address gaps between the circumstances of poverty and deprivation and the desired situation of self-sufficiency, family stability, and community revitalization. The goals are to improve the current performance of anti-poverty efforts to reduce or remove existing deficiencies.

The needs assessment process generated the legal reasoning, information, and knowledge about the outcomes and impact of RKCAA programs and services. This process set the stage for assessing new and unmet needs and resources to address poverty-related problems. The triangulation of

primary and secondary evidence ensured a comprehensive description of poverty in Racine and Kenosha counties through primary and secondary data sources and activities, including:

- Population and demographic databases and other geographic information about poverty-related difficulties in Racine and Kenosha counties and cities.
- Primary data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups expand upon the statistical details and dynamics of poverty and poverty-related problems in Racine and Kenosha counties.
- The organization-wide 2020 Strategic Planning process guides the continuous improvement of RKCAA's vision, mission, capacities, program activities, and accomplishments. Notably, the strategic planning process developed a second-generation operational structure due to this process.

## **Conclusions**

Several important conclusions emerged based on the data collected, compiled, and analyzed from primary and secondary data.

- As resources are overwhelmed by multidimensional needs and hardship, people become more vulnerable to various personal and social challenges in life, coping skills, the criminal justice system, health, and geography.
- Poverty in the United States has not changed significantly in recent years. In the years since 2017, the poverty statistics for Wisconsin have

not improved to any significant degree. Too many people living in Wisconsin continue to experience economic hardship.

- Emphasizing family dynamics and wellness as strategic dimensions of RKCAA enables greater efficacy in RKCAA structure, programs, and activities.
- Income and financial resources or assets remain a foundational problem of poverty.
- We live in an era when having a job is no longer a reliable measure of whether a person is in need.
- Although income and monetary assets are foundational elements of poverty, income is not the only way to frame financial assets. Proxies for income and economic assets or words that have a causal relationship to income, such as lack, cost, or credit, can be operationalized to understand the various meanings and connections to income and other concerns, challenges, and barriers.
- RKCAA is required to operate within the following realities and constraints:
  - o Limitations and changing funding priorities of monetary and human resources,
  - o Increases in the numbers of participants requesting assistance from programs and services, and
  - o Shifts emphasize poverty-related issues and problems, such as the ongoing COVID pandemic.

RKCAA must prioritize the gaps or needs to address, the people to serve, the approaches to programming, and the collaborative partnerships to undertake.

## **Recommendations**

RKCAA should continue the following:

- Confirm and build on current programs and services' strengths and go beyond weaknesses that limit progress and achievements.
- Establish new directions for programs and services to meet changing internal and external circumstances, populations, and unmet needs.
- Pursue options for fulfilling the new vision and mission.
- RKCAA can construct and apply metrics, measures, and processes and leverage existing agency information and knowledge to improve existing programs and services and develop new directions and capacities for reaching selected goals.