

**Human Services Block Grant Survey
(2016)**

Qualitative Analysis Report

August 8, 2016



University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg



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Notes

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- The report that follows is an explanation of the common themes that developed from the respondents to the Human Services Block Grant Survey. Included within the report are representative quotes from survey respondents.
- The order in which thematic response categories are described in each service category follows the order of importance based on the responses of county residents.
- While direct quotes are included, this list is not exhaustive list of all responses. These responses were selected based on their relevance to the thematic patterns that emerged during the qualitative analysis.
- Many of the responses carry over throughout the survey: increasing services, decreasing cost, and eliminating wait times were some of the constant themes throughout much of the survey.
- One major concern that overlapped several service areas was the community's knowledge on the availability of specific services. Many requested increased education about service availability.
- Steering Committee members have much more experience in these areas and it would benefit the overall analysis of this project if members of the committee read the survey responses. There may be additional areas of interest that can be examined.
- If you would like specific response references to any of the service categories, please send a request to Dr. Timothy Holler at tjh67@pitt.edu

Three Greatest Areas of Need within the County

The three greatest areas of need that were identified by county respondents included Substance Abuse, Transportation, and Mental/Behavioral Health respectively. These results are basically identical to those of the 2015 Block Grant Survey. It is clear that county residents and employees recognize the drug epidemic, and the resulting social problems, as the greatest need within the county. All three of these categories are expanded upon below as respondents were directly asked to provide feedback on these service areas. Housing services, Children & Family services, and Elderly services round out the top six greatest areas of need in Westmoreland County.

Representative Quotes:

“Drug abuse is rampant in this county; more programs and therapies should be set up, especially for youth.”

“As an addict/alcoholic in recovery (3+ years), I don't believe there is enough immediate help for those seeking it. When an addict seeks help, it is an immediate need, not a need that can be addressed 2 weeks down the road.”

“Transportation is horrific in this county all 7 days of the week.”

“Transportation to and from work for individuals with disabilities is poor to say the least. Since the takeover with the computer system, it seems that there is always a problem. At least once a month, transportation delays occur.”

“There is a lack of care. Even someone who is catatonic cannot be hospitalized under emergency conditions. We need to care for those before they become suicidal or homicidal and that requires expanding care and changing admission requirements.”

“More services/laws/policies that allow psychiatric services to assist a client in need of psychiatric care before the client can harm themselves/others.”

Other Important Service Needs within the County

The following categories were listed as being other important service needs within the county. They are listed in rank order based on their number of references throughout this particular question:

- *Employment*
- *Food*
- *Healthcare*
- *Utility Assistance*
- *Substance Abuse*
- *Suicide*

Employment

Finding gainful employment is very important for survey respondents. There is a concern that there is not only a lack of employment opportunity throughout the county, but also a lack of services specifically dedicated to helping individuals find work. Many respondents believe that they could be more productive members of the community if they were able to contribute in a positive manner. Additionally, there is an understanding that finding employment can reduce the pressure placed on other county services.

Food

Similarly to last year's Block Grant Survey food is a major concern for respondents. It is clear from the data that food banks within the county are often overwhelmed and inadequately equipped to deal with the growing number of families that turn to them for help every year. Additional food banks are often listed as a solution, as well as receiving additional donations from the community. There is also a level of unease regarding the quality of food that is being provide to those in need. The food received by food banks is consider to be sub-standard at best. Low-income families, and the elderly, have a particularly hard time obtaining an adequate and healthy supply of nourishment.

Healthcare

Healthcare remains a priority for survey respondents. The responses in this particular category span a variety of healthcare related needs. While greater access to healthcare was the most consistent response, transportation, elderly services, youth services, and disability services were just some of the specific areas of need that were addressed. Additionally, help with insurance costs and the development of personal wellness programs (smoking cessation, weight loss, etc...) were among the more frequent responses.

Representative Quotes:

“Potential employment will go a long way in not only supporting those in need but as a pathway to get people back into functioning society.”

“Supported employment is essential in building up the economy in this area. Not only would it give people a meaningful purpose, but it would keep them off the streets.”

“I believe there should be more fresh foods available to the people in poverty and that food stamps aren't high enough for people to feed their families”

“We need more food donation in our food banks, the churches turn people away in their hour of need because of this shortage.”

“Healthcare - deductible - copay are so high now that I can't afford even a visit to doctor let alone any tests or procedures!! I have insurance and go without care now!”

“I think more can be and should be done about helping people to stop smoking.”

Behavioral (Mental) Health Services

One of the greatest areas of concern in this service category is suicide awareness and prevention. This includes better training of healthcare professionals to recognize the warning signs including depression, and substance abuse. Co-occurring drug and alcohol, and mental health disorders are referenced consistently within this category.

Both the availability of mental health services as well as the awareness of mental health services are areas of concern for survey respondents. Many individuals believe that there are not enough facilities available to meet the needs of the county and even the services that are available are not

adequately advertised to the community. Finally, the understaffing at mental health facilities is acknowledged as contributing to the growing mental health crisis.

The youth population is mentioned frequently within this category. Respondents believe that children with mental or behavioral health issues are not cared for properly throughout the county. Overall, programming and care for children is said to be lacking, particularly in the area of autism. Developing support services and groups is listed as being paramount to the success of these individuals.

Representative Quotes:

“Suicide awareness is important to everyone, being able to recognize when there is a problem before things get too far”

“We definitely need more suicide awareness/prevention education in this county. Especially for parents who think or question what frame of mind their children may be in.

“Westmoreland County needs to make all their available services more known to those in the community, because most consumes or individuals do not know things like WCSI or Blackburn Center and that is a huge problem.”

“There needs to be an increased availability of services and transportation to these services.”

“Need more psychiatric professionals available for families and children and adults.”

“Children need to be protected when they are in families that cannot function adequately.”

“More and more young children are starting school with diagnoses and medication. If we focused on therapy for these children to address the challenges they face, we may see fewer cases as they age.”

Children & Family Services

Many of the responses in this category mirror that of the previous year. Of particular importance to respondents is the number of personnel trained and hired to handle familial-based issues. There is a strong belief that current caseworkers/staff are both overwhelmed in terms of caseload, and are being woefully underpaid/underfunded. The enormous amount of stress that comes with this profession has been identified by some respondents as creating a high rate of turnover in this field.

An additional concern for survey respondents is children becoming victims of the drug epidemic. There is a recognition that familial drug use turns families, especially children, into victims. While increasing the number of those being drug tested was one solution outlined by a small minority of respondents, most responses center on family-based treatment that can eliminate the cycle of drug use that will likely transfer to their children. While taking children from dangerous homes may be extreme, several respondents suggest this as option, while others believe more directed support can help alleviate some of this concern.

Life skills courses are also identified as an area of need for respondents. One program that was consistently discussed is that of a parenting skills class. This would include learning stress management, cooking skills, and how to handle the behavioral and developmental issues of their children.

Aside from proper nutritional and behavioral care, ensuring the safety of children is a concern for a large portion of respondents. One of the issues that presented itself was that when abuse or neglect are reported to the proper agencies, nothing is done about it. Also, there is a worry that certain types of abuse, like sexual abuse, are more readily dealt with than psychological abuse, which can be just as detrimental to a child's future. Additional services are said to be needed to address those children caught in domestic abuse situations as well.

Representative Quotes:

“More work with the actual caseworkers in engaging families and working on their own vicarious trauma. Then we will be able to provide more specific services for family need.”

“The turn-over rate is high. These jobs are arguably the most stressful in the human services sector. Caseloads are high relative to the work that we are required to do and the services that we are expected to provide.”

“When parents are on drugs children should be followed better by CYS. I have witnessed several cases when the parents test positive for drugs and the children still stay in the home. I have even seen when both the child and the parent tested positive for marijuana and nothing we done by CYS. How is that even possible? We are letting our children down.”

“Help for children of addicts to help them understand addiction and help them cope with parents that are addicts.”

“Parenting skills, such as appropriate discipline and stress management, are very much needed by the families. These services are often available, but again, the families are not always aware of them.”

“Need to improve the negative public opinion of this office. Concerns exist that people report child abuse neglect and they do not do anything about it.”

“Child sexual abuse is a cancer that effects human services for decades and generation after generation. Putting an end to this needs to be addressed. This ties in closely with mental health, drug and alcohol, child and family services, and domestic and sexual violence.”

Developmental Services

This category had some notable positive responses. There is some belief that current services are doing an adequate job of handling those with developmental disabilities. However, educational and employment training were the two most widely represented needs in this category with employment references coming most frequently. This includes educating the community on how to handle individuals with developmental disabilities which will in turn reduce the stigma associated with a disability. Job training that helps to maintain long term, and stable employment, is also important.

Housing was another concern in this category. In particular, finding transitional housing, and developing transitional services for those individuals aging out of youth-based services are discussed. This would also mean increasing the availability of services such as supported housing and life-skills. Additionally, increasing the amount of assisted living, such as group homes, should be prioritized.

Waiver funding was referenced by several respondents as being a necessity in properly dealing with the developmentally disabled population. Many individuals believe that the only way they can receive services is through waiver funding and that recent changes to the program may prove detrimental.

Other items of concern include youth services, and the need for increased community-based services. Respondents discuss the necessity of reading programs, school-based programs, and programs for parents of youth whom are developmentally disabled. Finally, aside from educating the community to be more cognizant of the difficulties their neighbors are facing, community-based programs can provide individuals with a “natural support” system that develops from an increased presence in the community.

Representative Quotes:

“I feel that there are some excellent programs developmentally. We need to work on independence and job placement with adults with developmental disabilities specifically.”

“Priorities should include: affordable and local transportation, addressing ODP's 'waiting list' on a local level, competitive employment. Thinking outside the box on ways to support or develop programing.”

“Community education on the enormous spectrum of intellectual disabilities to avoid stigmas and encourage families to seek services early. Maybe create a community celebration day of the success stories of children with disabilities and how they how been supported through the school districts.”

“Lack of transition of children services to adult services especially for individuals that are in the teenage years. There are no services for those in teenage years to learn independence and daily skills of living. There are only children services and limited adult services.”

“The biggest area I am concerned with are helping them in a living arrangement when they cannot take care of themselves. Or attempting to move kids who grew up in the State Welfare system and then have to be sent on their own independently.”

“These services are going to be hurt by the changes in waiver funding and what parents can afford”

“More opportunities to fit in to the more mainstream of the community. This includes residences in the community with greater access to the community”

Drug & Alcohol Services

Respondents discuss the need for early types of prevention for youth. This includes going into the school system to address behavior at a young age. The belief is that appropriate drug prevention programs in the schools, including those for families, can avert a life time of drug abuse.

The disease model is referenced several times by respondents wishing to see a more treatment oriented approach. Included within this concept is the idea that many respondents believe that punishment/incarceration were not proper methods for dealing with drug and alcohol issues.

Several respondents discuss the need for increased drug testing, especially for those that are on public assistance and for those who receive subsidized housing. This follows the lines of increased punishment that several respondents deem as necessary. There is some belief that drug offenders, those who fail drug programs, and doctors who illegally proscribe medication, should face more stringent penalties.

Rehabilitation is by far one of the most consistent themes to develop out of this question. This includes the need to increase the number of both in-patient and out-patient rehabilitation centers throughout the county. Additionally, respondents believe there is a need for long term care within rehabilitation facilities over the current structure within the county. Finally, an increase in detox centers was identified by many respondents as being an important county need.

Respondents recognize a need for family addiction services that get to behavior outside of just the individual. Also, there is an acknowledgment that drug and alcohol abuse is strongly correlated with mental health issues, and that these co-occurring disorders should be addressed simultaneously.

Lastly, both ease of access to services, and information regarding the availability of services are seemingly lacking. Many individuals do not know what services are available and others conferred stories regarding their inabilities to get into useful recovery programs.

Representative Quotes:

“There's a definite need for greater early education with youth on the dangers of ATOD use/ abuse. And, in economically disadvantaged communities, it would be beneficial to have funding provided for regular, safe, structured afterschool programming as a healthy alternative for youth lacking adequate supervision.”

“With the current state of addiction taking its toll in our community there needs to be more support for individuals afflicted with this condition. Human services needs to help all stakeholders work together to treat this as an illness and provide the treatment and support necessary to break the cycle of addiction. (Beyond prevention, education and making Narcan readily available...more needs to be done to treat addicts and support their sobriety).”

“Have services to continue with drug and alcohol recovery after drug and alcohol rehab, services that follow and continue with the individual during the recovery. Make bigger facilities or make more spaces for the programs that drug and alcohol user want to utilize.”

“A high number of families have some type of drug or alcohol involvement (past or present). Services to the family members including children is needed.”

“More awareness, and help lines, places you can go to that will direct you to somewhere to go and not be told they have to go to a ton of places before they get the help they need”

Housing Services

Homelessness is by far the greatest concern for respondents. There is a belief that the financial assistance that exists is not adequate. Respondents discuss the need for increasing both transitional housing and permanent housing options. One item that stuck out is the continued response of “shelters for men”. There seemed to be some consensus that homeless men had very little support, and that the wait times to get into an assistance program, or shelter, were entirely too long. Finally, respondents believe that long term assistance is needed to sustain a level of permanent housing.

Other groups that were identified as needing access to housing services were families, LGBTQ youth, convicted felons, and individuals with Drug & Alcohol and Mental Health Issues, respectively.

The affordability of current housing options is questioned by many of the respondents. In particular, many individuals feel the need for income-based housing that makes it easier to sustain housing on a budget. In some cases, even free housing for those who are unable to pay was argued.

While affordability was a major issue, the need for safe housing is also identified as a need within the county. Problems with bedbug infestations, and bug eradication are among the common reoccurring responses. Respondents thus want safe, clean, and affordable housing rather than just being warehoused in facilities.

Finally, the waiting lists and wait times for housing services are said to be excruciatingly long. Some even mentioned that they could wait a year or more until services were secured from the county.

Representative Quotes:

“We definitely need more than one homeless shelter. As of now we only have the Welcome Home Shelter for families or women and children, and there is only one male homeless shelter in the Latrobe area (or at least there used to be). If we had more options for families in need we could reduce the number of children that enter into the custody of the county.”

“It is completely unreasonable for people on fixed incomes especially to those who are working. Change rent based on income. If someone is getting child support and welfare and not working just because they have kids does not mean that they are not productive members of society and its discouraging to a single person who wants to work and has a job and ends up homeless because of people who can but won't work.”

“Housing: There is a long waiting list for low-income and section 8 housing, which can cause issues of needing to depend on other people or having to seek out homeless shelter. Also whenever a unit is empty it takes weeks or months to get the apartments filled which adds to the problem.”

“Housing is hard on all who live with a mental illness. When seeking housing and finding yourself put on a waiting list of multiple months is crushing. It can be seen as a reason to give up all hope of gaining some level of normalcy back into your life”

Juvenile Services

A typical dichotomization happened with these responses regarding the punishment versus rehabilitation debate. While some believe the county is too harsh on “typical” juvenile behavior, others think they are not strict enough. Although many call for the increased punishment of juvenile offenders, other respondents discuss the need for rehabilitation and early intervention.

As was discussed in the 2015 Block Grant Survey, the need for more probation officers to curb juvenile criminality is continuously referenced.

Programming needs are addressed in various areas. Family-based programming that addresses the needs of both parenting and juvenile development are needed. Additionally, many respondents believe that the needs of the youth throughout the county should be met at the community level. This would include the development of employment opportunities and work-skills programs that can benefit the juvenile and their community. Finally, mental health, and drug and alcohol services, are said to need an increase in funding in order to address these growing problems.

Respondents also believe that education is a key to a juvenile’s success in the community. School-based services should include an increase in the use of restorative practices that lessen the need for a criminal response to juvenile behavior. While the need for in-school services is addressed, respondents also recognize a problem with the connection between juvenile probation and the school systems. In truancy cases in particular, respondents believe that the juvenile probation department should become more involved, as was previously done within the county.

Some respondents recognize the potential for juvenile services to be a bridge to other community services such as helping with the elderly, in homeless & animal shelters, and participating in community beautification.

Representative Quotes:

“Focus on rehabilitation instead of punishment to prevent reoffending as an adult.”

Vs.

“Juveniles have it too easy already. Do them a favor and nip recidivism in the bud, and be harsher on them earlier!”

“Increase in children entering the legal system due to poor parenting, poverty, D&A and Mental Health issues. Early intervention needed more programs for mentoring, youth commission and integrate into the school system.”

“We need jobs for those who are leaving juvenile probation if they are to be successful.”

“Juvenile Probation used to be able to assist schools and parents with truancy. Now, for a student to receive services, there has to be a crime committed. Failing to attend school, which leads to drop-outs is a crime. Please bring this component back to Juvenile Probation.”

“More restorative justice, using the whole spectrum, not just community service. You have to focus on victims to be considered restorative justice.”

“Get the juveniles involved in programs to help others such as in a food kitchen, homeless shelter, animal shelter, and nursing facilities. Have them do community service as well as drug and alcohol testing and have mental health professionals involved as well.”

Older Adult Services

There were a number of services areas where respondents would like to see increases made. Services discussed include help with monthly bills, increased medical coverage, increased opportunities for transportation, better mental and behavioral health services, and more services for obtaining meals. Additionally, several respondents address the need for an increase in the number of volunteers and aides that can go into the homes of those on medication to ensure dosage is being followed properly.

One of the most consistent responses centers on the lack of recreational activities geared toward older adults. While the major concern is that there were few activities to attend, many believe that even when there were opportunities for recreation, that transportation to get there was nearly impossible to find.

As with several of the other service categories, there is a belief that the information regarding older adult services is not disseminated widely enough. Some respondents do not know how or where to obtain services, while others believe they need help obtaining the services once they figure out where to find them. An increase in recreational activities throughout the county could potentially increase the awareness of older adult services.

Senior centers were a major concern for the respondents. There is the belief that both the quality of the centers, as well as the quality of the staff, could be improved upon. Also, many respondents understand that there should be more options available to elderly individuals thus increasing the likelihood of finding suitable services.

Independent living is identified as being an important need. In particular, increasing the opportunity for independent living through other service areas. This relates specifically to another representative response which is the need for additional visitation from neighbors, community members, volunteers, and care workers.

Representative Quotes:

“The elderly are running into more and more difficulties due to financial distress, lack of transportation, lack of technology knowledge, and in many cases becoming disorientated. Our elderly population needs to know they are valued. We need to provide them with more meaningful ways to remain active and useful.”

“Older adult services that are needed include utility supports and providing sufficient food for the poorer individuals or those who have cognizant disabilities and cannot address these needs themselves. Providing opportunities for older adults to be integrated with the rest of society is also important for their mental health. Transportation for older adults and the disabled is too limited in terms of its availability...it needs to be available later in the evenings and on weekends or older adults and individuals with disabilities are limited to very few options for supported employment or access to a truly integrated life style. The current state will leave many individuals in an isolated environment.”

“The aged population need to be taken care of. A good start would be community day centers where aging adults can come to be active in physical exercise, socialization, and obtain resources to help them remain independent in their daily living.”

“I'm currently taking care of my aging grandparents. They have no clue of services out there. Where is the marketing team to teach seniors? Is there transportation? Is there volunteer programs that just stop by to visit?”

“Just recently joining the older adult population, my only complaint so far is dealing with all the red tape and all the frustration you have to deal with in applying for services. Can't tell you how much time I've had to spend on the phone trying to sign up for benefits.”

“The aged population need to be taken care of. A good start would be community day centers where aging adults can come to be active in physical exercise, socialization, and obtain resources to help them remain independent in their daily living.”

“Faith in Action is a wonderful program and we need more help organizations like that. More affordable, in home care for seniors or those with disabilities so they can stay in their own homes but knowing that they will have help with meals, hygiene, social opportunities, medication administration, housekeeping, etc. Most seniors are on limited income and can't afford out of pocket in home care.”

Transportation Services

Elderly services again topped the list of transportation needs. In particular, there is consensus that there are simply not enough buses available to meet appointment and shopping needs. The latter may be correlated with the need for more food services as well. Additionally, respondents discuss issues with both shared ride and the local taxi drivers where many believe that drivers were drunk, “smelly”, and overly priced. Other transportation services like repairing the sidewalks for better mobility of hover rounds was included in a handful of responses. Finally, respondents address their frustration with waiting for hours after an appointment to be picked up.

Services for those with disabilities is widely discussed. This includes increasing the availability of disability services and developing a more reliable MATP system.

Bus services are understandably addressed by a majority of respondents. Specifically, respondents discuss the need for additional routes and for being picked up and dropped off in a more timely fashion. Subsequently, the lack of hours over the weekend, and in the evenings, is of great concern. This is directly linked with the idea that wait times were far too long. As a final point, respondents believe they need more information on the routes that are available to them.

While affordability is a concern for the respondents, there is an overall sense of there simply being no one to call in times of need. The lack of taxi service, and limited or no availability of independent drivers (Uber), leaves many individuals feeling stranded in their homes or out in the community.

Representative Quotes:

“Better transportation for traveling to appointments not covered by med cabs, help to get to grocery stores, food banks, etc. and for medical appointments for those who don't qualify for med cabs but no longer drive (elderly)”

“Although the bus line is good in Westmoreland County there should be more stops around the route so people with disabilities don't have to walk very far. MedCab is slow on picking individuals up and there are long wait times.”

“The medical transportation program should allow children to travel with their caregivers. The way it is now, it is very specific on the number of people allowed to be transported, which could prevent the care and medical attention of children in need when families do not have resources to assist with caring for the other children that are now allowed to travel.”

“Advertise the transportation that is available to citizens of Westmoreland County, both elderly and young. I think a lot of people are not aware of what is available.”

“Sliding scale fee. Everyone should have to pay something, but make it convenient and affordable for people to get transportation. When a bus only runs from 9-5, it makes it hard to work full time anywhere.”

“Transportation in Westmoreland County is terrible, plain and simple. One way to solve the transportation problem would be to have more Uber drivers in the area.”