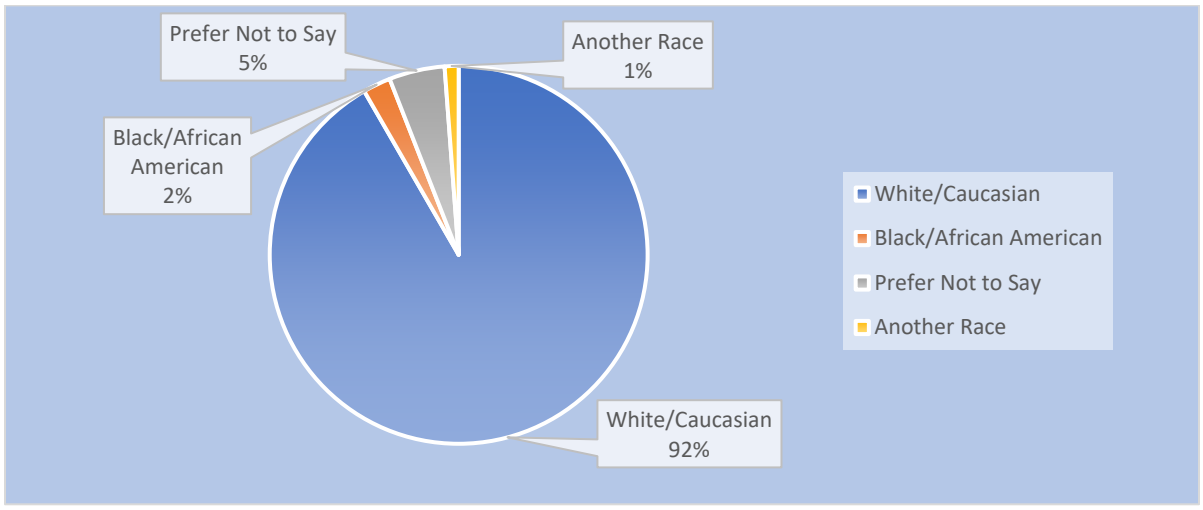
Community Needs Assessment 2024 – General Public Responses

Schuylkill Community Action conducted a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment utilizing surveys, focus groups, and public data sources to identify priority needs in the community. Survey information was collected from agency clients, human service providers, and the general public. The following section provides an analysis of the results from the general public of Schuylkill County.

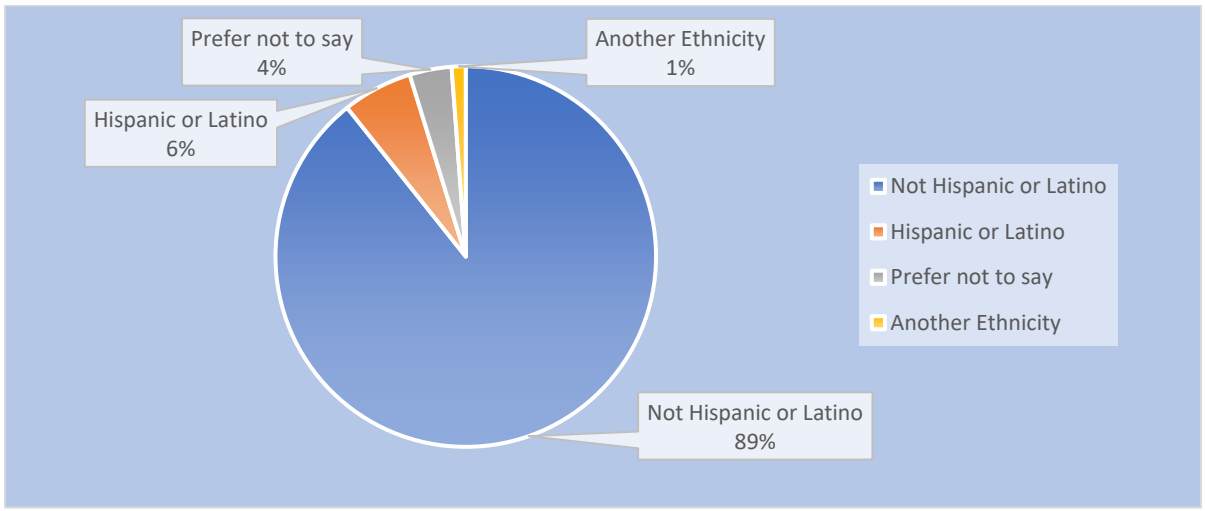
Demographics

Demographic breakdown of the general public that participated in the Community Needs Assessment Survey is listed below. Demographics collected include race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, household income, and household size.

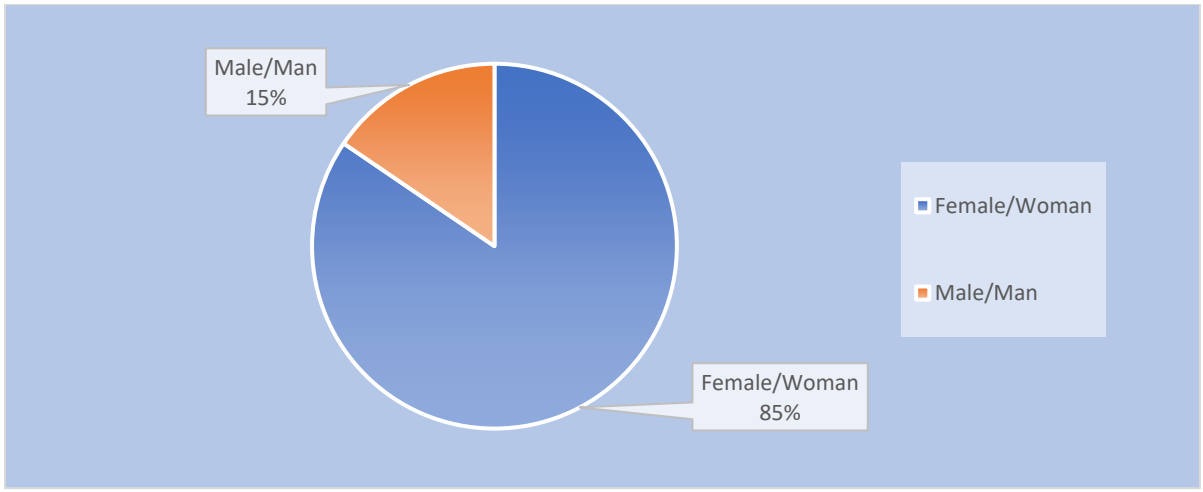
Race



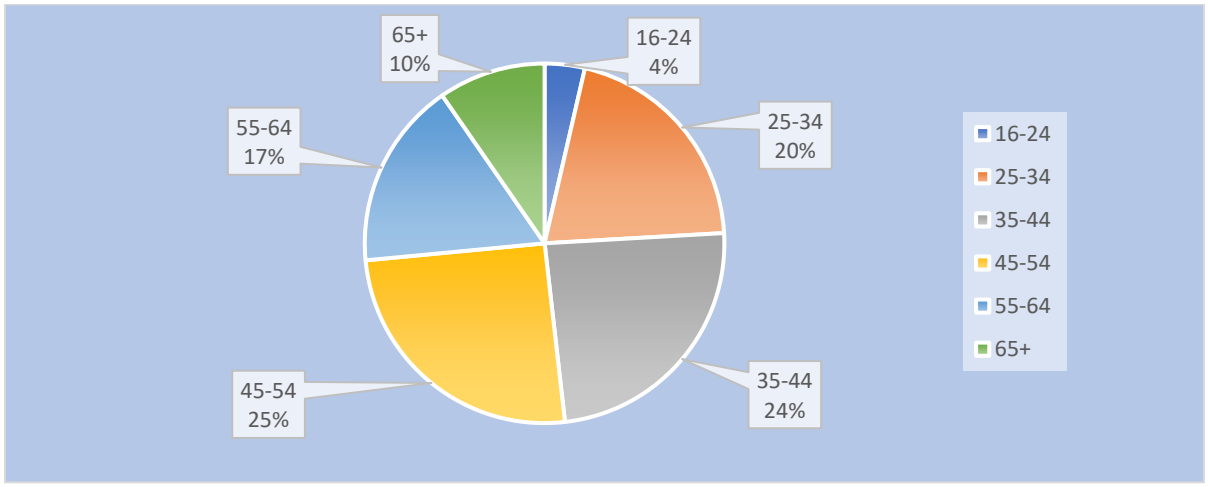
Ethnicity



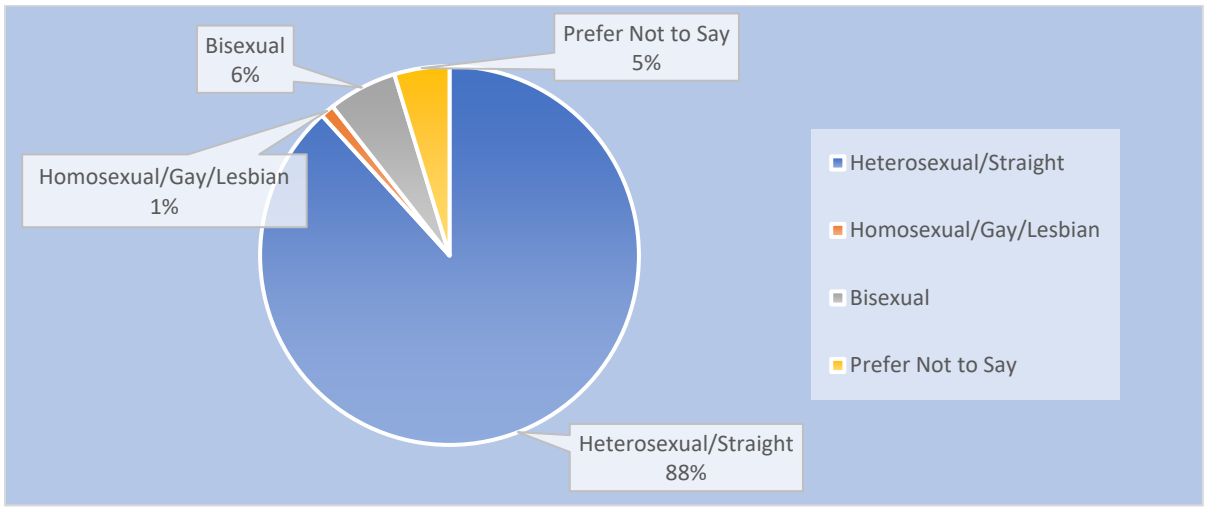
Gender



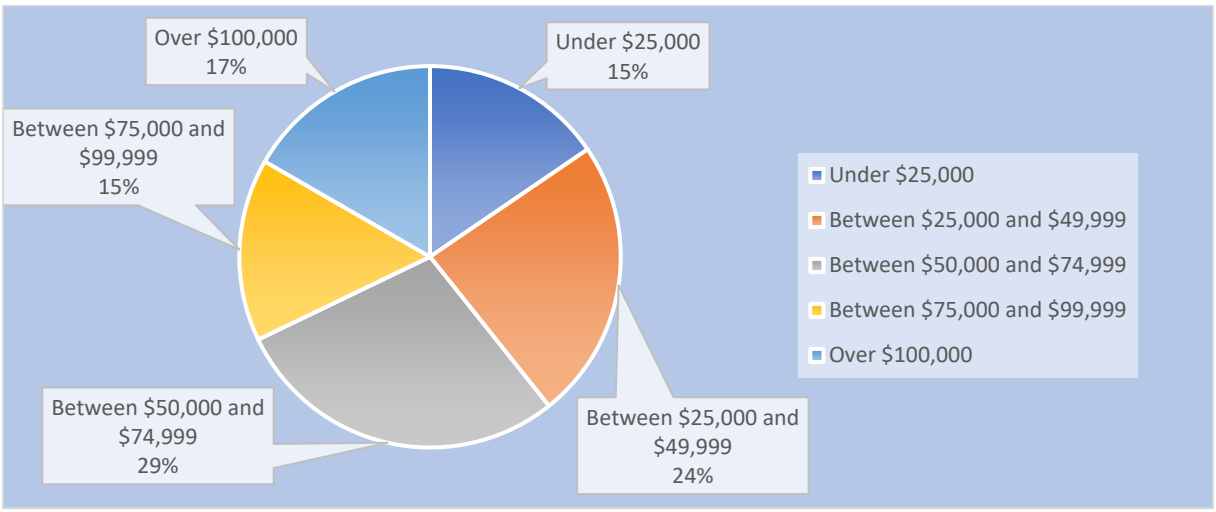
Age



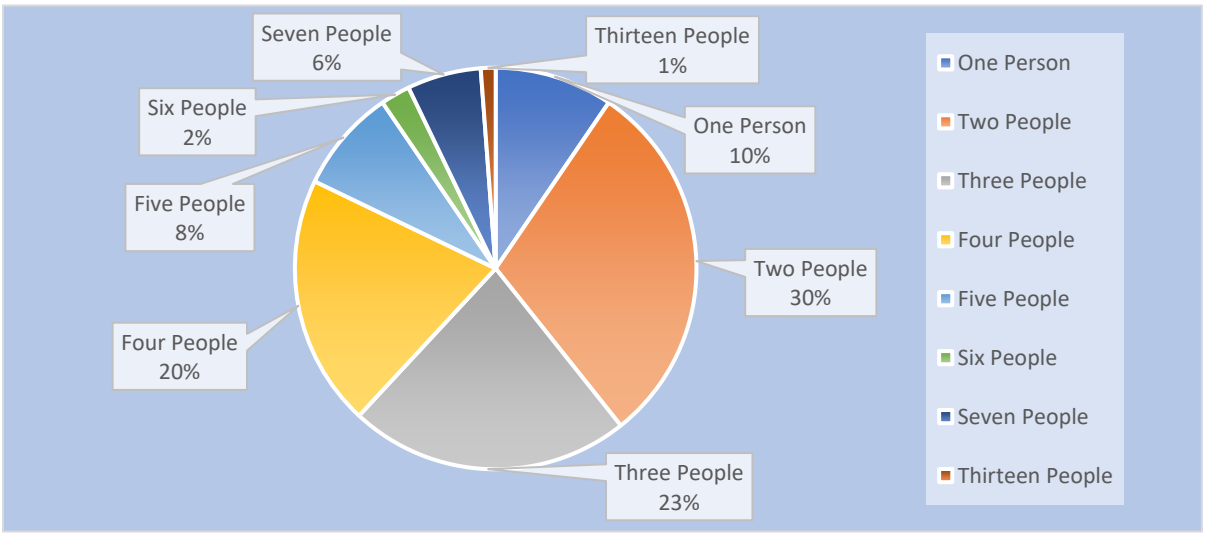
Sexual Orientation



Household Income

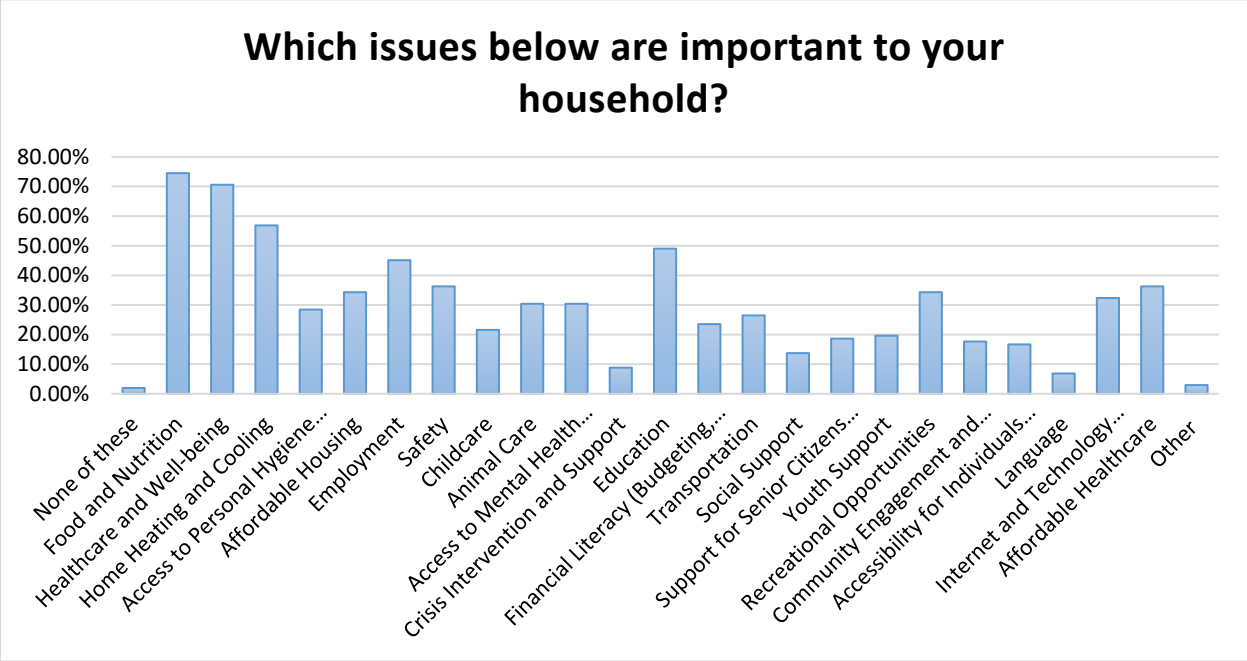


Household Size



Community Needs Assessment Survey Results

The survey received responses from 102 participants, highlighting a range of concerns and needs. Nearly 75% of participants cited Food and Nutrition as an issue of importance to their household. This was followed closely by Healthcare and Well-being (71%) and Home Heating and Cooling (57%). A full breakdown of important issues is highlighted in the graph below:



Survey participants were then asked to identify the top four issues that were important to their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top issue received 4 points, the second received 3 points, the third received 2 points, and the fourth received 1 point. This analysis identified the following as the top five most important issues for the households:

1. **Food and Nutrition**
2. **Healthcare and Well-being**
3. **Affordable Healthcare**
4. **Home Heating and Cooling**
5. **Education**

Employment

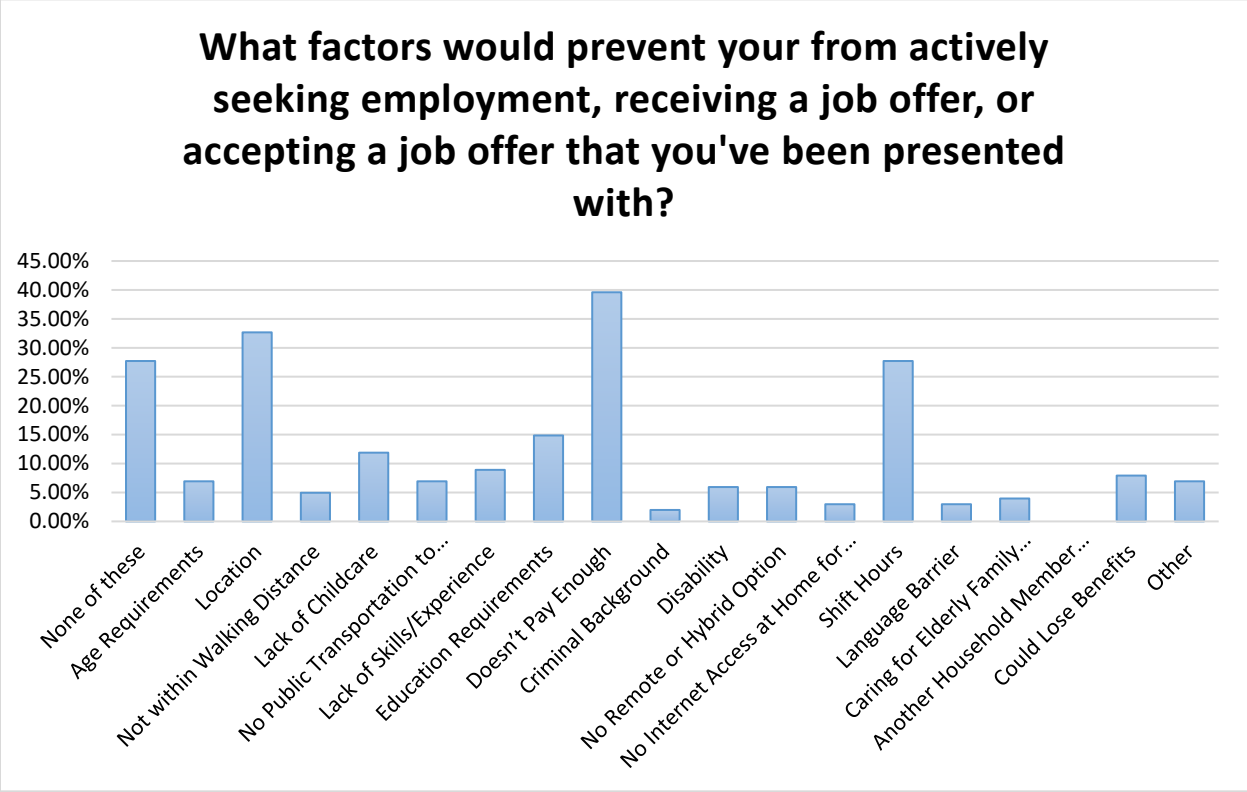
The next section of the 2024 Community Needs Assessment focused on employment. Over 83% of participants reported being employed and 13% reported being unemployed. Additionally, 4% of participants said they are retired.

The survey also explored factors that could prevent individuals from seeking or accepting job offers. The most significant barriers identified were:

1. **Doesn't Pay Enough:** 40% of participants cited inadequate pay as a primary reason for not pursuing or accepting employment opportunities.

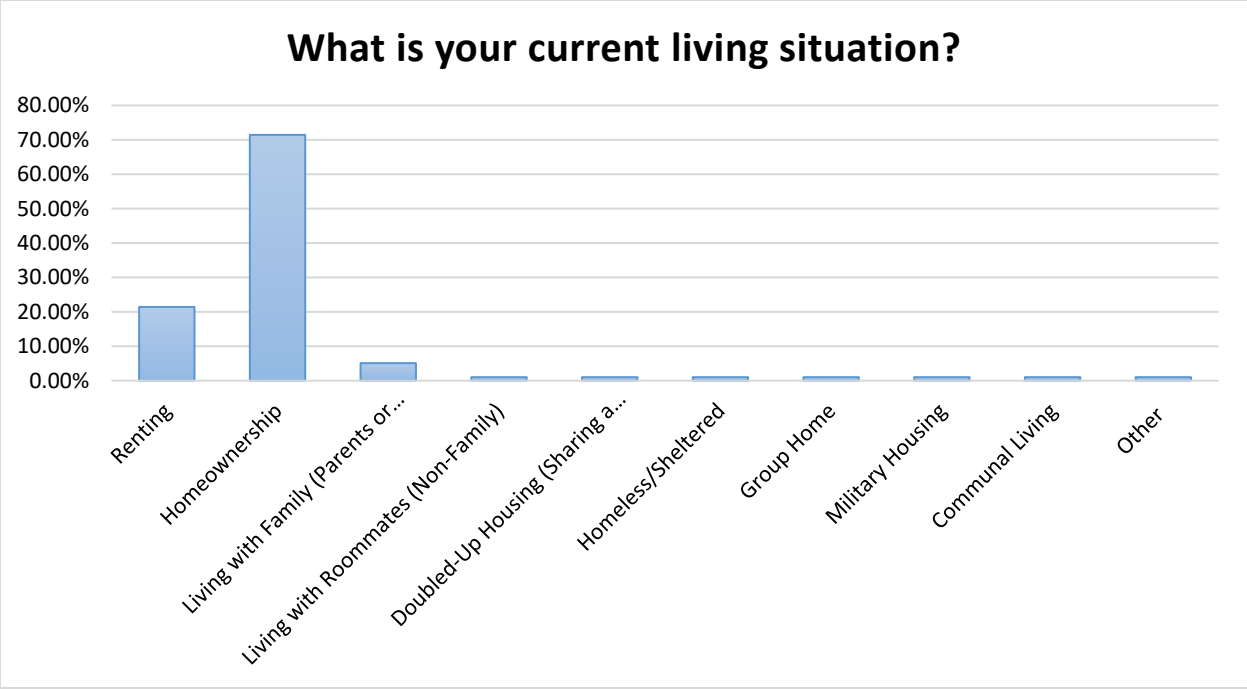
2. **Location:** 33% of participants indicated that job location was a significant obstacle, making it difficult to accept employment.
3. **Shift Hours:** 28% of participants reported that inconvenient shift hours prevented them from seeking or accepting job offers. (tied)
   None of These: 28% of participants answered that none of the options provided would prevent them from pursuing or accepting employment suggesting there may be other obstacles not mentioned in the survey. (tied)
4. **Education Requirements:** 15% of participants cited education requirements as a barrier to seeking or accepting employment.
5. **Lack of Childcare:** 12% of participants indicated that lack of childcare prevented them from pursuing or accepting job offers.

The table below represents the different barriers to employment identified by survey participants:



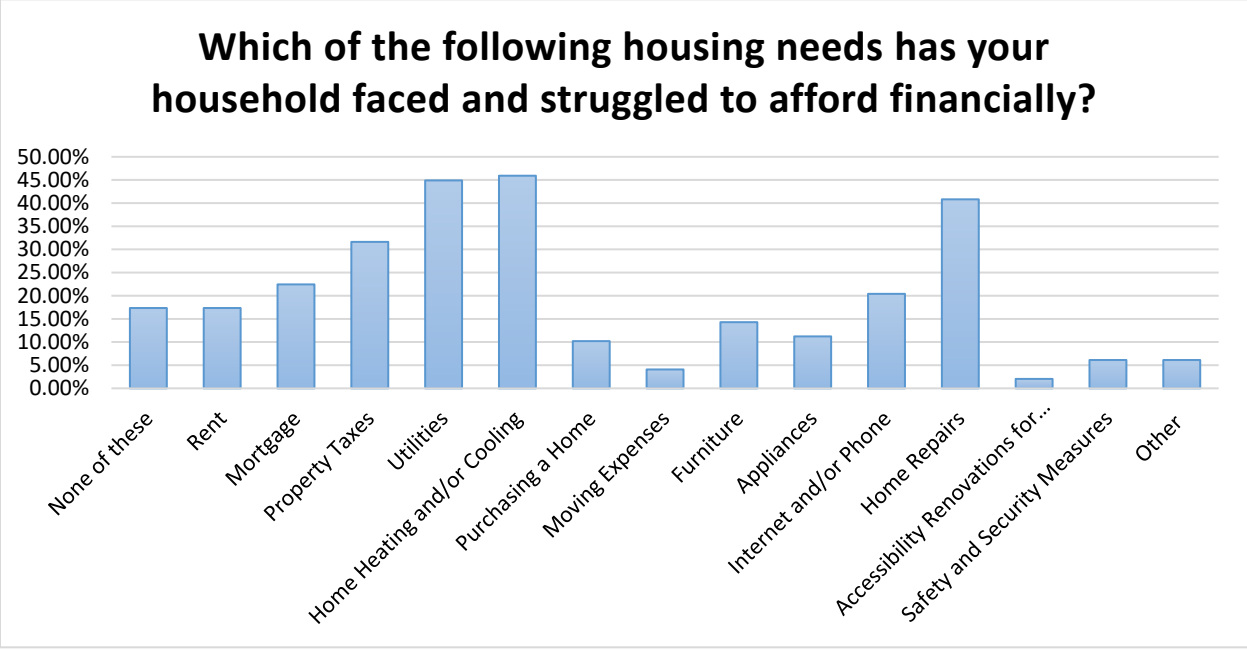
Housing

Survey participants were asked questions regarding housing. The first question asked participants about their current living arrangements. Over 71% of participants identified home ownership as their current living situation. 21% of participants reported they are currently living in rental properties. Just over 5% identified they are currently living with family (parents or other relatives.) A breakdown of their responses is below:



98% of participants surveyed responded that they felt safe in their current living situation with the remaining 2% stating they felt unsafe. Those that felt unsafe used open-ended responses to highlight some actions that would make them feel safer. Actions mentioned include having someone check on them regularly, reducing rent costs, and receiving assistance with yard work.

Survey participants were then questioned about housing needs that their households have struggled to afford financially. The majority faced some sort of financial burden, with nearly 46% struggling with home heating and/or cooling, 45% with utilities, and 41% with home repairs.



Survey participants were then asked to identify the top three needs that are most difficult to afford for their household. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top need received 3 points, the second received 2 points, and the third received 1 point. The top five challenges are ranked below:

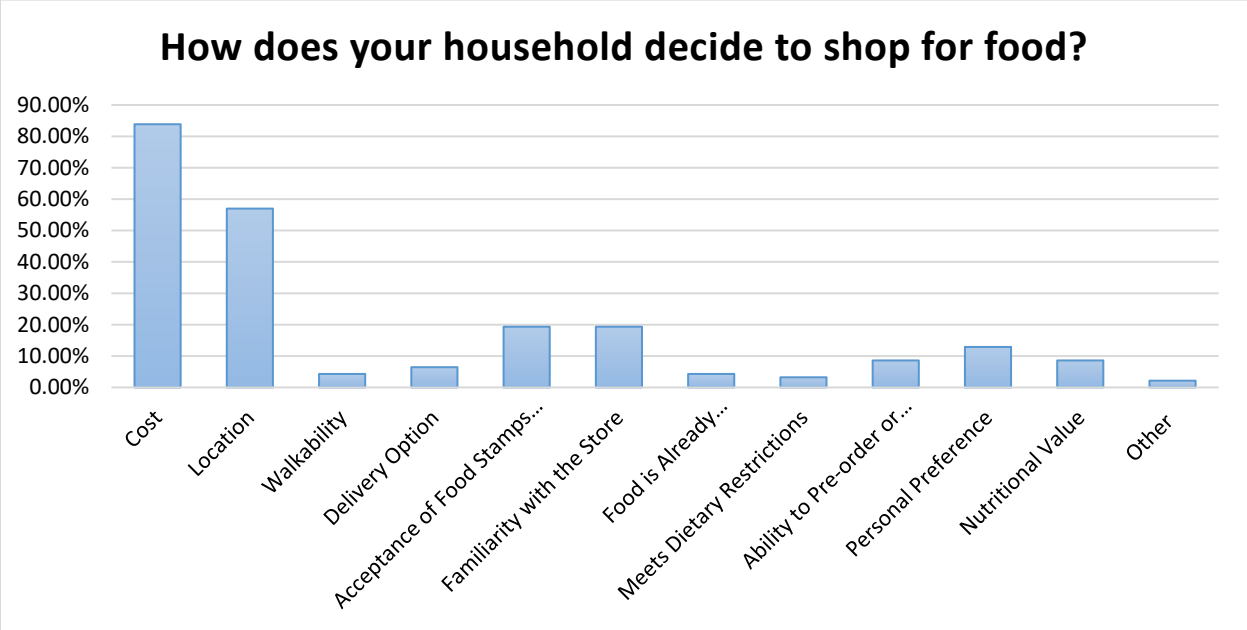
1. **Home Repairs**
2. **Property Taxes**
3. **Home Heating and/or Cooling (tied)**
   Utilities (tied)
4. **Mortgage**
5. **Rent**

To close out the housing section of the survey, participants were asked about reliable internet access in their homes. Almost 84% reported having reliable internet access. Over 11% reported having internet access that is unreliable, with the remaining 5% reporting they do not have internet. These findings underscore that while a majority enjoy consistent connectivity, a notable minority experience intermittent or no access to the internet, highlighting potential disparities in digital infrastructure and access across surveyed households.

Food and Nutrition

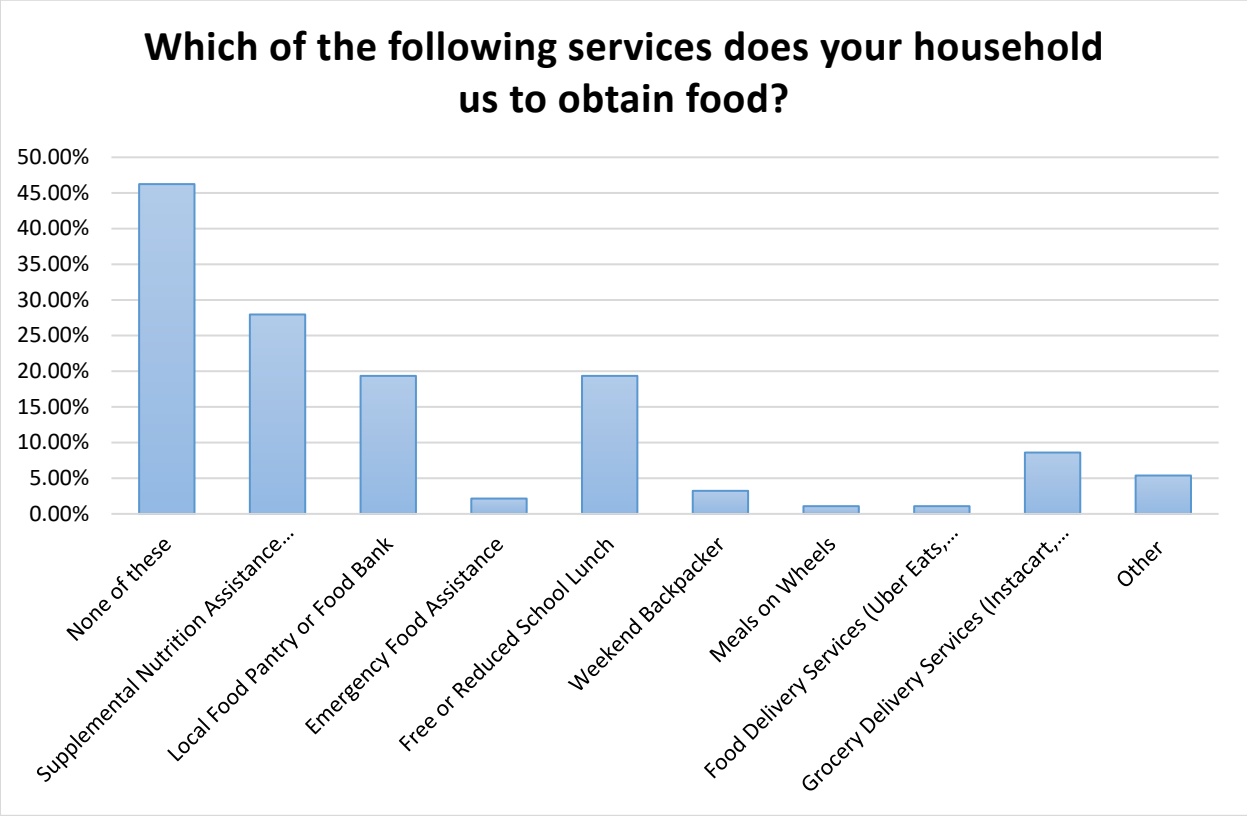
The next section of the survey asked questions around food and nutrition. Over 91% of participants surveyed reported having enough food to feed their entire household on a daily basis. 9% responded that they did not have enough food. Food insecurity can cause detrimental effects to an individual and families health and well-being.

Participants were surveyed on how their household decides where to shop for food. Response information showed that cost (84%), location (57%), acceptance of food stamps (SNAP) (19%), and familiarity with the store (19%) were the top reasons.



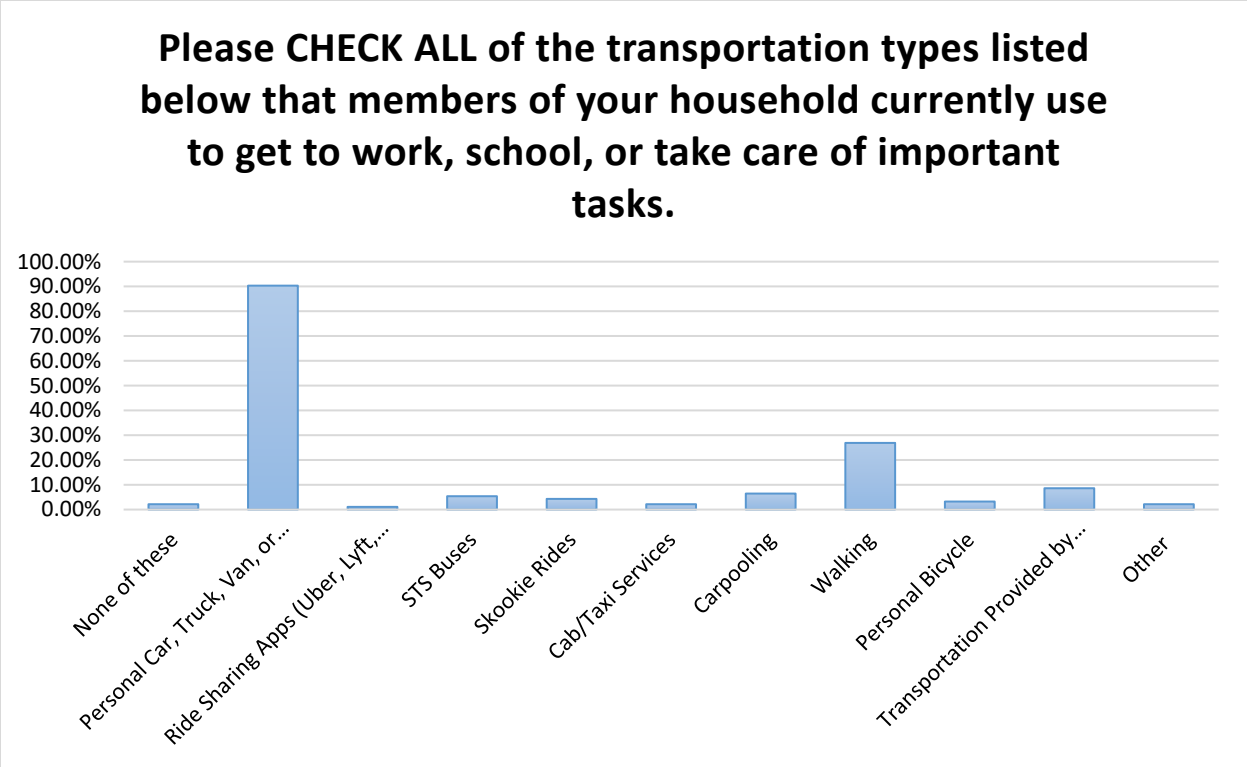
The next question posed regarding food was in reference to companion animals. Nearly 71% of participants felt they had enough food to provide to their animals on a daily basis, while 3% of participants stated they do not have enough food to provide. The remaining 26% of participants responded they did not have a companion animal in their home.

The final question inquired about food services that participant households use to obtain food. Nearly 46% reported not using any of the services listed, 28% reported participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 19% said they utilize local food pantries or food banks and 19% receive free or reduced school lunches.



Transportation

Survey participants were questioned about the different types of transportation utilized to get to work, school, or take care of important tasks. An overwhelming majority of participants, 90%, utilize their own personal vehicle to meet their transportation needs. Walking was cited as the second most popular mode of transportation at 27%.



Participants were asked about their household's experience with public transportation. 71% of participants did not need or utilize public transportation. Of the remaining 29% of participants, 52% felt that public transportation was inadequate for the needs of their household.

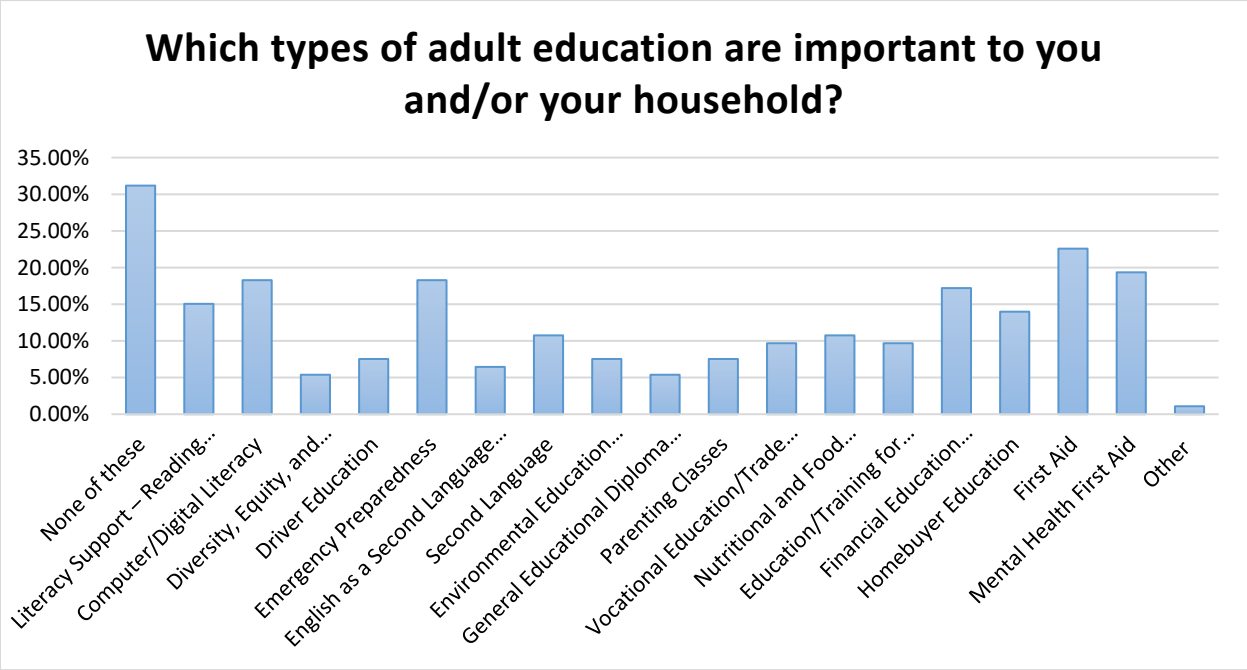
Survey participants highlighted several aspects of public transportation that do not meet their needs through open-ended responses. Key issues included:

1. **No Service to Specific Areas:** Participants mentioned the lack of public transportation to specific areas, such as Humboldt and many other towns.
2. **Insufficient Coverage:** Concerns were raised about the unavailability of public transportation in various towns, including long-distance routes through Tamaqua, PA.
3. **Inadequate Schedules and Stops:** Criticisms focused on bus schedules and stops not aligning with participants' needs, with some noting the lack of set stops within their towns and mismatched schedules with work times.
4. **Limited Availability for Essential Services:** Participants highlighted the need for bus services for tasks like food shopping, which are not adequately met.
5. **Shortage of Rideshare Options:** Concerns were expressed about the scarcity of Uber or Lyft drivers, as well as the absence of buses or taxis.
6. **Interest in Train Access:** Participants expressed a desire for train access to major cities through a Schuylkill County hub or station.

These insights highlight the need for improvements in geographical coverage, schedule alignment with community needs, availability of essential services, rideshare options, and the introduction of train access to better meet the needs of the community.

Education

Participants were asked to identify the types of adult education that are important to themselves and their households. A breakdown of adult education needs is summarized in the graph below:



Over 31% of participants stated they did not have a need for any of the types of education. Others identified a variety of adult education topics that are important to them. The top three priority adult education topics are:

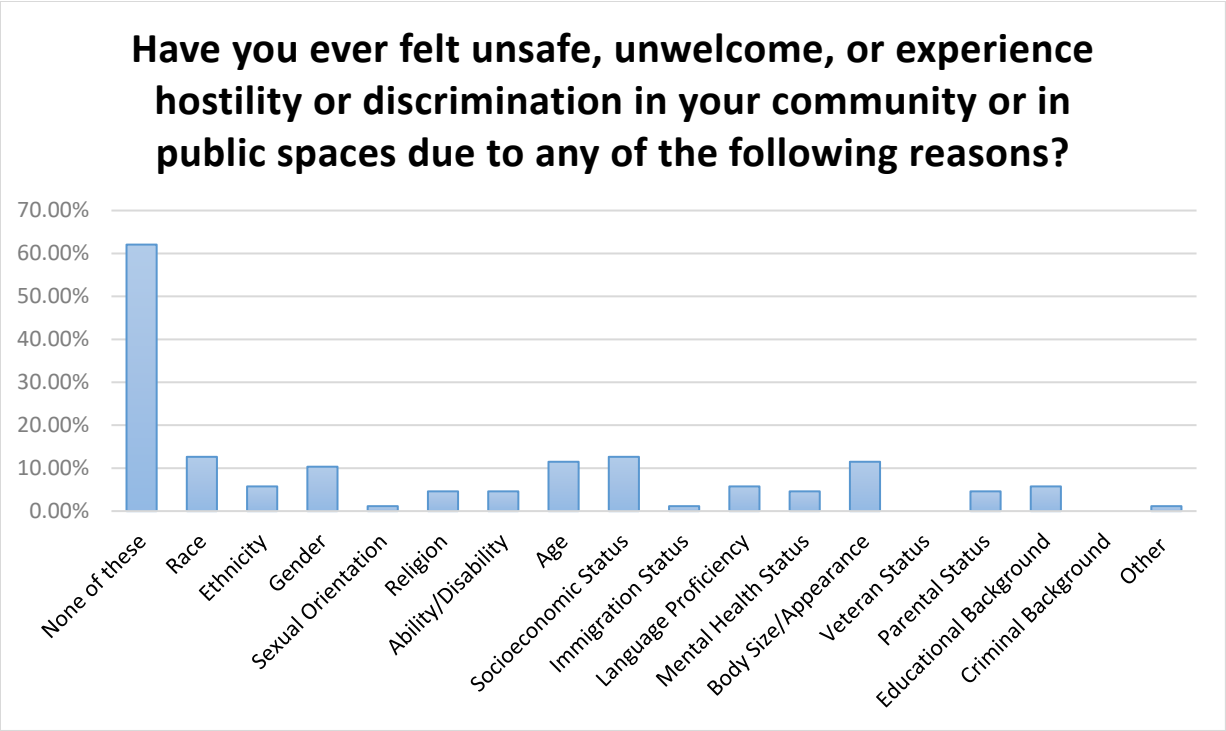
1. **First Aid**
2. **Mental Health First Aid**
3. **Computer/Digital Literacy (tied)**
   Emergency Preparedness (tied)

Thoughts and Experiences

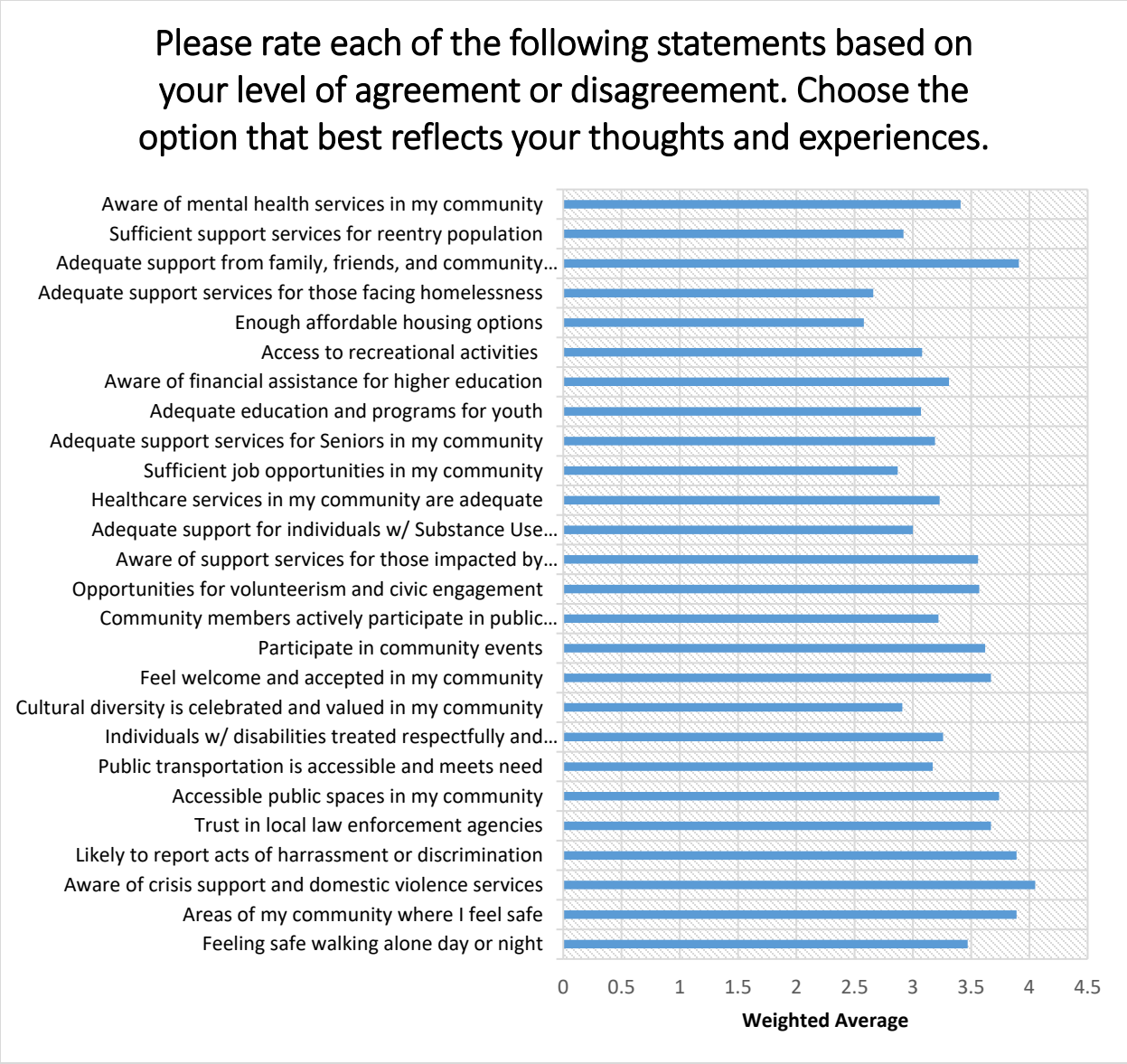
Participants were questioned on whether they felt unsafe, unwelcomed or experienced hostility or discrimination in their community. A significant portion of participants (62%) reported that they have never felt unsafe, unwelcome, or experienced hostility or discrimination in their community or public spaces due to any of the factors listed. This indicates a slight majority perception of overall safety and acceptance within the community.

Among those who reported feeling unsafe or experiencing discrimination, the most commonly cited race (13%), socioeconomic status (13%), age (11%), body size/appearance (11%), and gender (10%.) Other notable responses include ethnicity (6%), language proficiency (6%), and educational background (6%.) These findings highlight various dimensions of diversity and identity that can impact individuals' experiences within the community, underscoring the need for expanded Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) education in our community.

A breakdown of the responses is below:



Participants were then asked to share their thoughts and experiences regarding a variety of issues in their community. Participants replied on a scale of 1-5 with a score of 5 indicating strong agreement. Any score under 3 demonstrates a disagreement to the statement. Their responses are highlighted in the following chart:



The higher the score, the more agreement that the opportunities, services, or actions are adequate in our community. Below are the top five areas of strength in our community according to surveyed clients of Schuylkill Community Action:

1. **Awareness of crisis support services for victims of crime, domestic violence, sexual assault, etc., in the community**
2. **Support from family, friends, and/or community members**
3. **Areas in the community where people feel safer or more welcome than others**
4. **Individuals who experience or witness harassment or discrimination in the community are likely to report it to authorities or organizations**
5. **Public spaces in the community being accessible to everyone**

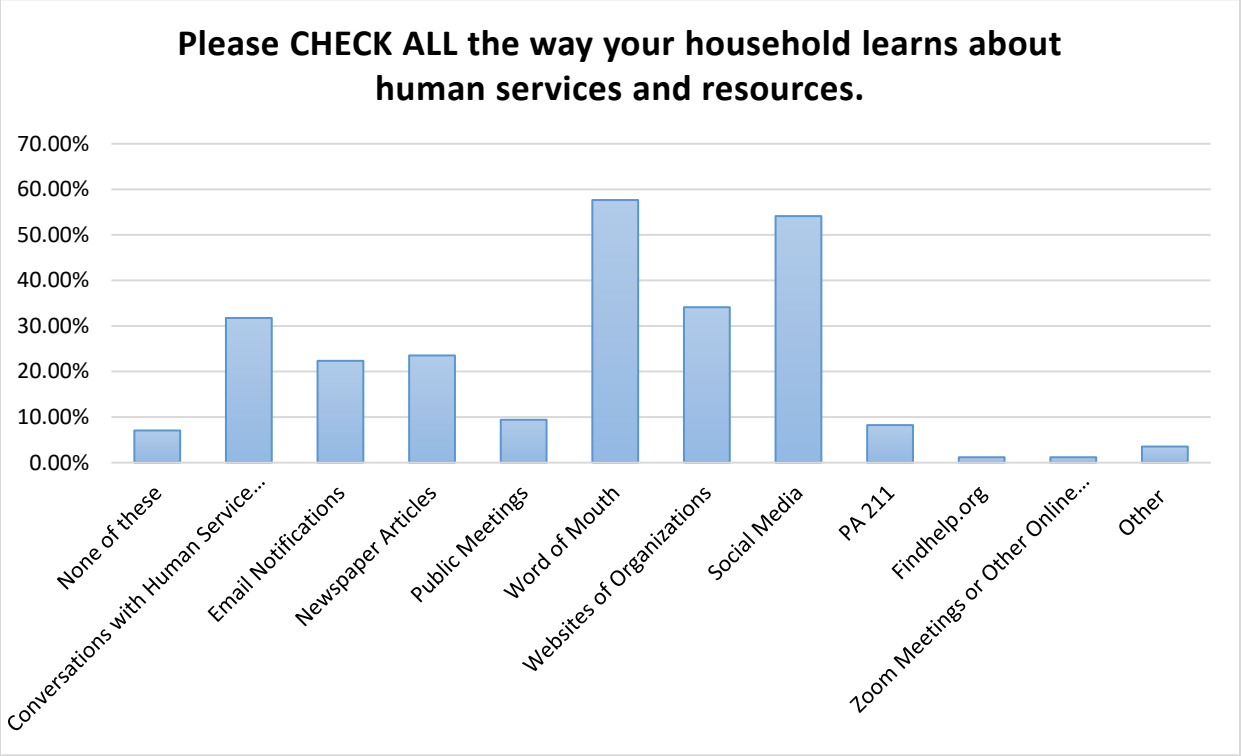
Conversely, the topics scoring the lowest represent areas of opportunity for improvement in the community. Below are the top five opportunities for improvement according to surveyed clients of Schuylkill Community Action:

1. **Affordable housing options in the community**
2. **Support services for individuals facing homelessness and other emergency situations**
3. **Job opportunities available in the community**
4. **Cultural diversity being celebrated and valued in the community**
5. **Support services for individuals reintegrating into the community after being incarcerated**

The survey results emphasize the importance of addressing various factors that contribute to feelings of insecurity and discrimination in our community. While there are notable strengths in areas such as awareness of crisis support services, support from family, friends, and the community, and feelings of safety, there are significant opportunities for improvement, particularly in affordable housing, support for the homeless, job opportunities, celebrating and valuing cultural diversity, and reintegration support services. Addressing these areas will require a concerted effort to enhance DEI education and implement targeted support services to foster a more inclusive and supportive community for all residents.

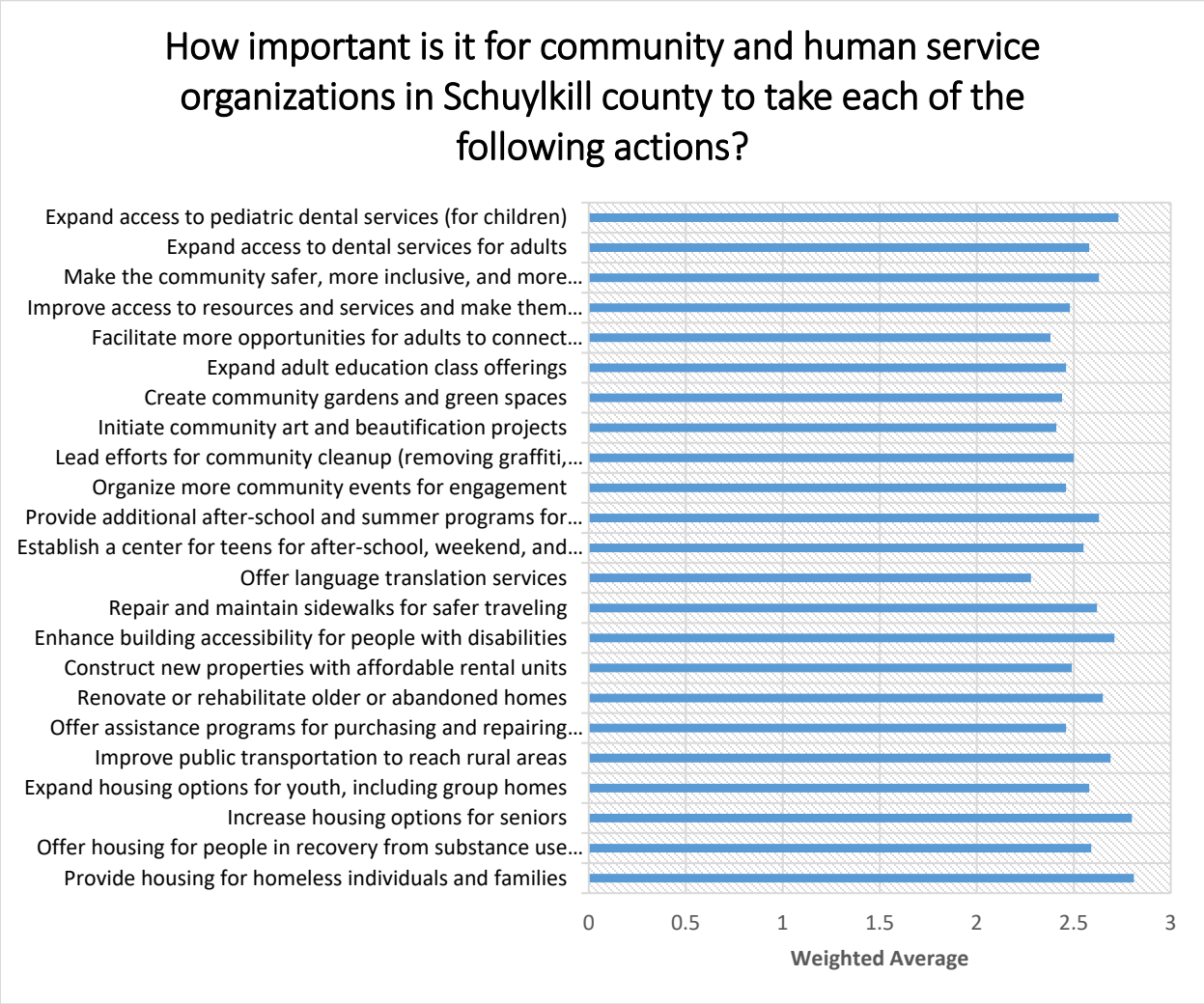
Awareness of Human Services

Participants were asked to indicate how their households learn about human services and resources. The top three methods identified were word of mouth (58%), social media (54%), and websites of organizations (34%). These insights highlight the importance of leveraging various communication channels to effectively reach and inform community members about available human services and resources. A complete breakdown of the responses is summarized in the below graph:



Action Steps

Surveyed participants were then questioned on how important it is for community and human service organizations to take specific actions. Each of the identified action steps received a weighted score above 2.0, indicating that they were all considered at least "somewhat important." Providing housing for homeless, increasing housing options for seniors, expanding access to pediatric dental services, enhancing building accessibility for people with disabilities, and improving public transportation had the highest weighted averages noting their priority of importance.



Participants were then asked to identify their top three priority action steps to be taken from the aforementioned actions. Responses were scored on a priority ranking scale, where the top action received 3 points, the second received 2 points, and the third received 1 point. The following are the top five priority action steps to be addressed, ranked in order of priority:

1. **Provide housing for homeless individuals and families**
2. **Expand access to dental services for adults**
3. **Provide additional after-school and summer programs for youth**

4. **Expand access to pediatric dental services (for children) (tied)**
   Organize more community events for engagement (tied)
5. **Renovate or rehabilitate older or abandoned homes**

The prioritization of these action steps underscores a strong commitment to addressing essential needs and enhancing community well-being. By focusing on these top priorities—such as providing housing for homeless individuals and families, expanding access to dental services for both adults and children, offering additional after-school and summer programs for youth, organizing more community events, and renovating or rehabilitating older or abandoned homes—the agency aims to significantly improve the quality of life for residents. These efforts are crucial steps toward creating a more supportive, engaged, and well-served community for all.

Additional Thoughts

Participants were asked to provide open-ended responses on any additional thoughts or concerns they have about the future needs or priorities of their community. A summary of those responses is outlined below:

1. **Community Services and Resources:**
   - Need for more focus on mental health services, awareness, and support
   - Severe lack of mental health services available in the community
   - Services are not easily accessible in rural areas, requiring travel to larger towns
   - Need for more AA support groups
2. **Safety and Law Enforcement:**
   - Concern about needles found on the ground along roads where families walk; safe cleanup should be a priority
   - Worry about drugs coming into the county
   - Issues with remodeled playgrounds attracting unruly kids using foul language
3. **Housing:**
   - Need for housing for the homeless and people in recovery from substance use disorders
   - Need for affordable income-based housing for individuals over 55 and those with disabilities
4. **Accessibility and Inclusion:**
   - Concern that people in smaller municipalities are often forgotten, especially those who are disabled and without public transportation
   - Working individuals struggling to afford essentials, pay bills, manage childcare, and maintain employment simultaneously
   - Need for education and training for preschool and school staff on transportation for children with special needs
5. **Community Engagement:**
   - Call for more people to volunteer and help the community

These responses from the Community Needs Assessment reveal significant needs and priorities for Schuylkill County's future. Key concerns include enhancing mental health services, addressing drug-related issues and ensuring safe public spaces, improving affordable housing options, expanding accessibility and inclusion efforts, and fostering community engagement. These findings underscore the

community's call for comprehensive actions to create a more equitable, supportive, and vibrant environment.

Conclusion

The Community Needs Assessment conducted by Schuylkill Community Action provides a detailed overview of the current state of human services within Schuylkill County. The survey responses from 102 members of the general public offer critical insights into the community's strengths, challenges, and priority needs.

Key Findings

- **Top Community Concerns:**
  - Food and Nutrition
  - Healthcare and Well-being
  - Affordable Healthcare
  - Home Heating and Cooling
  - Education
- **Employment Barriers:**
  - Inadequate Pay
  - Location
  - Shift Hours
  - Education Requirements
  - Lack of Childcare
- **Housing Challenges:**
  - Home Repairs
  - Property Taxes
  - Home Heating and/or Cooling
  - Utilities
  - Mortgage
  - Rent
- **Food Security:**
  - Majority have sufficient food daily, but a notable minority experience food insecurity.
  - Cost, location, acceptance of food stamps (SNAP), and familiarity with stores are the primary factors in choosing where to shop for food.
- **Transportation Issues:**
  - Heavy reliance on personal vehicles as a primary mode of transportation.
  - Inadequate public transportation options for those who need it.
- **Educational Needs:**
  - First Aid
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Computer/Digital Literacy
  - Emergency Preparedness.
- **Community Safety and Inclusivity:**
  - Many feel safe and supported, yet concerns remain about discrimination, particularly based on race, socioeconomic status, and age.

- Areas of opportunity include improving affordable housing, support for the homeless, job opportunities, celebrating cultural diversity, and reintegration services.

Priority Action Steps

The community has identified the following top priorities for action:

1. Provide housing for homeless individuals and families
2. Expand access to dental services for adults
3. Provide additional after-school and summer programs for youth
4. Expand access to pediatric dental services (for children) (tied)
   Organize more community events for engagement (tied)
5. Renovate or rehabilitate older or abandoned homes

The findings from the Community Needs Assessment conducted by Schuylkill Community Action highlight essential areas of concern that must be addressed to enhance the well-being of Schuylkill County residents. By prioritizing housing, safety, inclusivity, and access to essential services, Schuylkill Community Action can make significant strides in meeting the needs of its residents.

Focusing on these priorities and fostering collaboration among stakeholders will allow Schuylkill Community Action to effectively respond to the identified needs. This approach requires targeted resource allocation and a commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives throughout the community. Addressing these challenges will not only improve the quality of life but also create a more supportive, engaged, and well-served community for all residents of Schuylkill County.

By concentrating on these key areas and implementing the identified action steps, Schuylkill Community Action can ensure a more robust and inclusive response to the community's needs, fostering a healthier and more resilient Schuylkill County.