2023

The Economic Opportunities Commission

Alexandria Community Needs Assessment

Department of Community and Human Services

Virginia Community Action Partnership

The City of Alexandria's Economic Opportunity Commission advocates for residents living with low income to ensure equitable economic opportunities to thrive. It serves as an advisory board to the Department of Community and Human Services, Office of Community Services, which is Alexandria's Community Action Agency. The EOC presents the 2023 Community Needs Assessment, which focuses on the five priority areas of housing, health, childcare, food security, and employment, pillars for economic stability for individuals and community.   Special Thanks to the EOC Board Members, City and non-profit organizations staff, and other stakeholders for contributing to this comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Report.

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Overview

Founded in 1749, Alexandria is home to the nation's third oldest historic district. Nestled in Northern Virginia just outside Washington, D.C., it boasts a vibrant and diverse population. According to the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Regional Fair Housing Plan 2023](#), about 43.2% of Alexandria's households have children and the population demographics comprise of 51.9% White, 21.1% Black, 16.7% Latino, 5.8% Asian American or Pacific Islander.

In Alexandria, 11.23% of the population have limited English proficiency, of which the most commonly spoken languages are Spanish, Amharic, and Arabic. The most common countries of origin include Ethiopia, El Salvador, and Honduras. However, this makeup is ever changing, as Alexandria continues to attract new residents from all over the world while also filling a critical need in refugee resettlement efforts in the United States.

Figure A. Country of Origin for Immigrant Residents in Alexandria City

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN FOR IMMIGRANT RESIDENTS
Data sources: 2015–2019 American Community Survey

In Alexandria, the location of renters correlates with patterns of racial and ethnic segregation. The center of the city has a low percentage of renters. The most northern and southern portions have the highest concentration of renters. According to the 2022 Alexandria Community Survey, 53% of units are renter occupied, compared to 40% owner-occupied, and 7% are vacant. 31% of renters speak a preferred language other than English, with Spanish and Amharic being the most frequently spoken languages.

The poverty rate in Alexandria was about 9.4% overall according to American Community Survey 5-year Estimates from 2020. In the same year, the poverty rate for white, non-Hispanic Alexandrians was 4.1%, where the poverty rate for Black or African American Alexandrians was 16.7%. The poverty rate is significantly higher for Black Alexandrians than for white, non-Hispanic Alexandrians ([Equity Index Map](#)). By recognizing these disparities and where they are most pronounced in the city, we can begin to explore why the disparities exist and how to address them so that ALL Alexandrians are able to thrive.

Figure B. Racial Equity Index Map
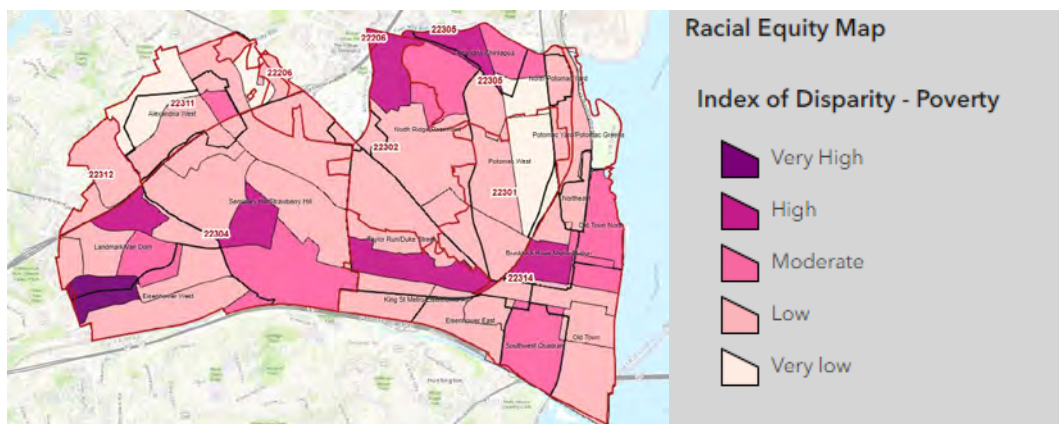
Introduction

The City of Alexandria's strategic plan calls for the City to be "a caring, kind, compassionate, fair, just and equitable city that supports an affordable and livable community for all." Achieving this goal means ensuring that residents who are living with low incomes are able to live a quality life in Alexandria, and that all residents receive the needed resources and support to prosper. This goal is not without challenges. Alexandria remains an expensive community to live in, but the Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) is committed to this vision of an inclusive and diverse city.

This needs assessment is intended as a tool to help identify areas where the City of Alexandria is not meeting the above mentioned goals. While some of these results are known problems facing the City, this Needs Assessment highlights the importance of exploring these areas to deepen our understanding of the challenges facing residents living with low income, and where supportive efforts fall short.

Executive Summary

Childcare

Affordable, high-quality childcare is a challenge for families. The COVID-19 pandemic added new challenges to childcare, including disruptions to regular care services, concerns about the safety of group settings, and increased difficulties in finding suitable childcare arrangements. Parents often face difficulties in achieving a balance between their work and family responsibilities, as the availability of flexible working arrangements may be limited. Government policies and subsidies for childcare can impact accessibility and affordability. Changes in legislation or funding may affect the overall landscape of childcare services.

Employment

Residents' ability to afford and meet basic needs contributes to the economic stability of Alexandria. One indicator, employment levels, shows relatively high levels of employment with disparities between racial groups. A range of City programs offered by the Workforce Development Center connect residents with opportunities for job training, employment and professional development. Additional employment-related indicators, including wages, the Labor Market Index and the Jobs Proximity Index, help identify areas where improvements are needed. Distinctions are noted between the east and west ends of Alexandria.

Food Security

Food insecurity is a pressing issue in Alexandria, especially since the pandemic, with significant social and economic implications. Causes can include various factors, including poverty, lack of access to nutritious food, and unequal distribution of resources. Addressing this problem is crucial as it not only affects residents' health but also contributes to long-term social disparities and economic inefficiencies. Through community partnerships, the City has implemented initiatives to ensure equitable access to affordable and nutritious food. However, funding through the American Rescue Plan will soon expire in 2024 and require the City to explore additional funding channels to meet current and future food security needs.

Healthcare

Disparities in access to healthcare services remain a significant concern. Factors such as geographic location, socioeconomic status, and systemic barriers can limit people's ability to receive timely and quality healthcare. The cost of healthcare, including medical treatments, medications, and insurance, can be a significant burden for individuals and families. Affordability issues may lead to delayed or inadequate medical care. Addressing these healthcare issues requires comprehensive and collaborative efforts from governments, healthcare providers, policymakers, and the community to ensure accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare for all.

Housing

Housing continues to be a top-line concern for residents living with low-income. From the end of the CDC's eviction moratorium in August 2021 to the close of 2023, nearly 8,000 evictions have been filed in Alexandria. However, with support provided by the Eviction Prevention Task Force and other community partners, only 13% of those evictions resulted in residents being removed from their homes. In addition to challenges of affording rent (which manifested as late payments, court summons and evictions), residents also reported having utilities cut off and/or unsafe dwelling conditions. Finding affordable housing is only part of the struggle; keeping up with payments, ensuring decent living conditions and the cost of utilities are serious monthly challenges that residents face.

Childcare

The Alexandria Landscape Data Analysis, commissioned by Kids First Years, final report was released in April 2022. The data was sourced from census reports—using city specific data when available—and focuses on the demographics of Alexandria's youth and assesses which socioeconomic, health and education risks predominate in the city. It compared available resources, made recommendations, and outlined overall expectations for the community to move forward with these recommendations. Additional information was gathered for this needs assessment from the Supporting the Alexandria's Youngest Citizens Report presented on December 15, 2021 to the Economic Opportunities Commission.

Section I: Scope of the Problem

The areas with the greatest racial diversity and with the highest percentage of children born to foreign-born parents are in Arlandria and the West End of Alexandria. These two areas have limited childcare capacity relative to the total number of children. The following reasons highlight the need for more childcare options to be available in the Arlandria and West End area of Alexandria, specifically childcare centers with staff who speak Amharic and / or Spanish:

- The West End and Arlandria have the highest percentage of single parent households.

- The West End has the highest number of households with children under 5 at or near poverty.

- The number of children in poverty has declined in the US and the Commonwealth of VA, but in Alexandria it has increased.

- The rate of poverty of Latino children under 6 in Alexandria is greater than the Virginia and national rates.

- The percent of women who have given birth in or near poverty is higher in the West End.

- Arlandria and the West End have the highest percentage of children without working parents.

- Alexandria has a high single mother birth rate for the non-white population.

Section II: Specific Issues

◆ From 2021 to 2023 the average number of children receiving childcare assistance in the city of Alexandria increased 40%, from 274 to 683 respectively. The numbers are for all programs that received public funds for childcare including Headstart.

◆ Communities with the highest levels of poverty among children–Arlandria and the West End–have limited childcare capacity relative to the total number of children, compared to more affluent areas that have excess capacity.

◆ Programming for young children is not well-distributed geographically throughout the city.

◆ Pre-pandemic (2018), costs for infant care were estimated to be $1,885 per month for one child on average, and $1,485 for a second child, https://alexandrialivingmagazine.com/lifestyle/the-struggle-is-real-alexandriadaycare-costs-are-among-the-/. The cost for infant care rises in 2023, starting at $2,444 per month. This is approximately $60 to $120 increase per child.

◆ Language diversity presents a unique challenge for households who speak a preferred language other than English, while the majority of child care centers are English-speaking.

Section III: Potential Solutions

◆ Commission a study at a granular level of the demographics (income, transportation, types and hours of employment, poverty levels and transient patterns) in households that have 0-5 year old children to better assess childcare needs and gaps.

◆ Advocate for City-led investments and partnerships.

◆ Promote awareness of early intervention and publicly funded childcare options.

◆ Improve compensation for early childhood professionals.

◆ Stabilize the childcare sector by encouraging the use of grants and contracts to build a pipeline from middle school to profession in early childhood.

◆ Maximize participation in state-funded Virginia Preschool Initiatives Programs.

◆ Make the COVID-era changes to eligibility for the childcare subsidy program permanent.

◆ Fund initiatives surrounding the new, well-intended mandates which focus on areas such as workforce support and mental health. For example, a current Notice of Public Rule Making (NPRM) proposes new and enhanced changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards in three main areas: workforce supports, mental health, and other quality improvements. There are 67 new requirements and over 60 updates to select Head Start standards all of which are unfunded. While some of these requirements have a long time horizon for full implementation, the impact of this from an implementation cost perspective is considerable.

Employment

Section I: Scope of the Problem

Economic stability considers an individual's or family's ability to afford and meet basic needs. Alexandria has a strong local employment climate when compared to the rest of the state, with an unemployment rate of 2.2% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics as of December 2023. The State of Virginia's unemployment rate is 3.2%. Alexandria's unemployment rate is also in line with the unemployment rates of neighboring Arlington County (2.1%) and Fairfax County (2.5%). According to the United Way's 2023 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Index, 34% of Alexandrians earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but are still unable to afford a basic budget made up of essential expenses such as housing, food, childcare, health care, transportation, a smartphone plan, and taxes. This represents an 11% increase since 2019. The average annual wage for all jobs in the City of Alexandria is $87,760, equivalent to $42.19 per hour. It's worth noting that this average is influenced by the presence of highly skilled jobs in the area. When you combine jobs in Accommodation and Food Services, as well as Retail Trade, constitute the majority of employment in the city, these 2 sectors have an average annual wage of $40,121 or $19.29 per hour. However, this falls significantly below the calculated living wage for the City of Alexandria, which is $22.42. Currently, the minimum wage in the state of Virginia is $12.00 per hour.

For more information on living wages: https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/51510

There are a variety of programs operating in Alexandria that seek to connect workers living with low-income of diverse racial and ethnic minority groups with opportunities for employment and professional advancement. The city's low 2.2% unemployment rate masks the financial struggles many residents face. While Alexandria's labor force participation rate is high, 42.8% of Alexandria's labor force is underemployed, with many earning minimum wage and working 2 to 3 jobs.

The City's Workforce Development Center is committed to providing comprehensive support to job seekers, including access to training programs essential for career advancement. In addition to offering employment services, job readiness workshops, essential skills training, information sessions, and personalized job coaching:

- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult Training Program, which focuses on providing comprehensive employment and training services for individuals with barriers to employment, including

residents living with low-income, veterans, and those who have been laid off. WIOA emphasizes the importance of high-quality job training programs tailored to meet the demands of in-demand industries, ensuring that participants acquire the necessary skills to secure employment in competitive fields.

◆ The Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) program, which provides employment-related services to eligible City of Alexandria residents who are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

◆ Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which exposes youth to career paths and builds positive work experiences for youth.

◆ The Workforce Development Center's work-based learning program provides invaluable opportunities for individuals to gain hands-on experience in their desired field while also receiving compensation. Through partnerships with local businesses, participants can engage in training while earning a paycheck, allowing them to apply classroom knowledge to real-world settings, enhancing their skills, and increasing their employability. This program bridges the gap between education and employment, empowering individuals to succeed in their careers.

Access to employment at a livable wage is an integral component of broader access to opportunity. Where one lives can affect access to and quality of employment opportunities. This can happen both through proximity of residential areas to places with high concentrations (or low concentrations) of jobs and through barriers to residents of particular neighborhoods accessing jobs, even when they are close by.

Section II: Specific Issues

The analysis in this section is based on the of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Regional Fair Housing Plan 2023, which included a review of two data indicators for the City of Alexandria: the Labor Market Index and the Jobs Proximity Index.

The Labor Market Index measures, by census tract in a jurisdiction, the level of engagement residents within that tract have in the labor force. Values range from 0 to 100. The higher the score, the higher the rates of employment in that particular area. Similarly, the Jobs Proximity Index measures, by census tract, the accessibility of 59 employment opportunities for that tract's residents. Values range from 0 to 100. The higher the score, the more access residents from that area have to employment opportunities.

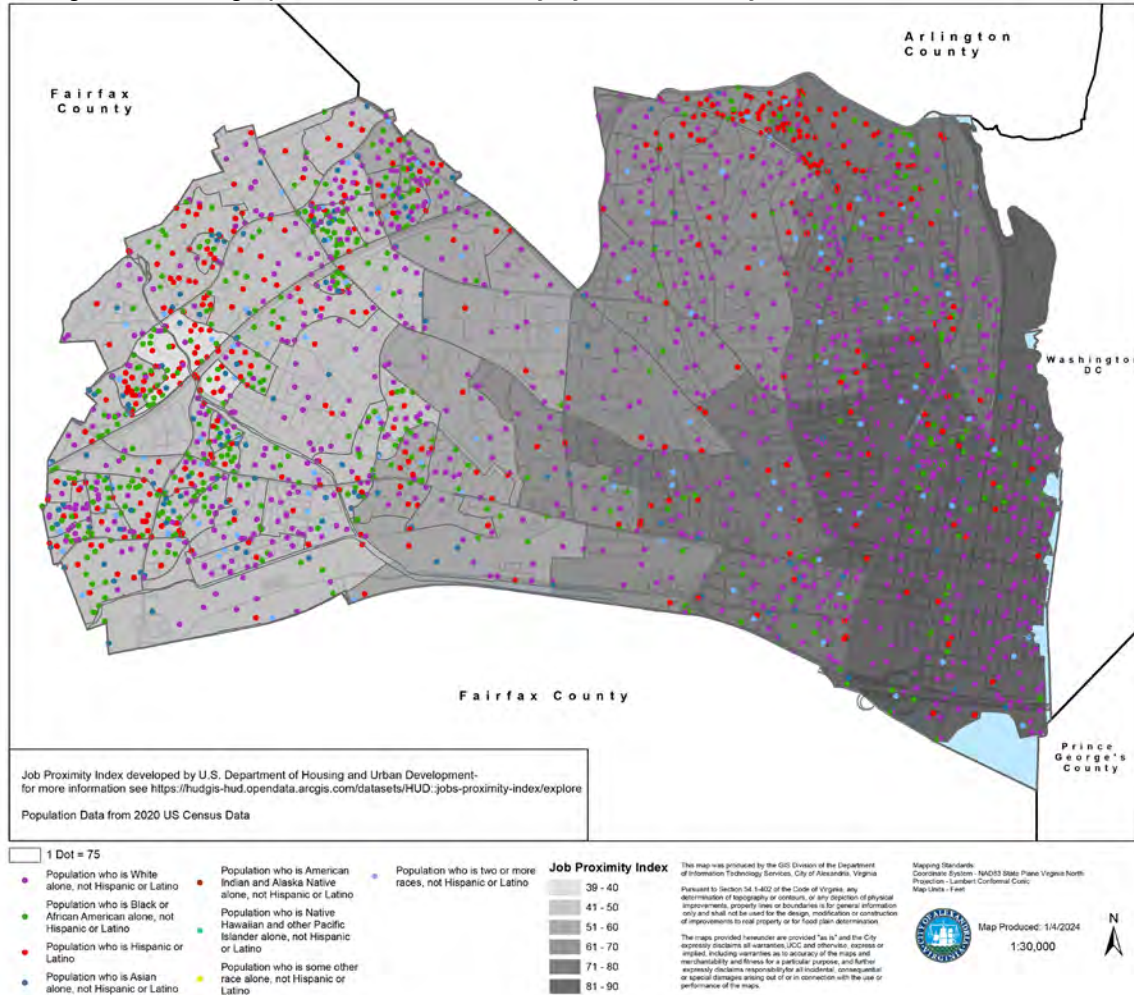Figure D: Demographics and Job Proximity by Race/Ethnicity

Table 1: Labor Market and Jobs Proximity Indexes by Total Population

Race/Ethnicity	City of Alexandria	Region
White, Non-Hispanic	94.07	82.91
Black, Non-Hispanic	87.56	62.67
Hispanic	85.23	74.49
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	88.72	86.47
Native American, Non-Hispanic	91.35	72.84

Table 2: Labor Market and Jobs Proximity Indexes by Population Below Federal Poverty Line

Race/Ethnicity	City of Alexandria	Region
White, Non-Hispanic	60.24	50.51
Black, Non-Hispanic	61.09	50.96
Hispanic	55.91	46.40
Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	53.70	58.27
Native American, Non-Hispanic	74.82	55.30

All racial and ethnic groups measured by the Labor Market Index have high levels of employment engagement in Alexandria, ranging from 85 to 94, but there is a racial disparity between the groups. Hispanic residents have the lowest Index figure, 85.23, while White residents have the highest, 94.07.

Compared to White residents, Black and Hispanic residents have less labor engagement. For residents who live below the poverty line, the rates of engagement are similarly high, deviating little from the Index values for the whole groups, respectively. In the case of Asian American, Black, and Native American residents below the poverty line, these residents have marginally higher Labor Market Index values compared to their respective whole groups.

Unlike the notably strong numbers for labor engagement displayed by the Labor Market Index, the Job Proximity figures are substantially lower. White residents are at the high end of the index, with a Job Proximity value of 64, while the figure for residents of color is several points lower. Across racial groups, Asian Americans are the group with the lowest Job Proximity Index, 53.22. So, while residents throughout Alexandria have high engagement in the labor market, residents of color must travel farther than White residents to obtain employment.

When economic status is accounted for, these numbers vary little for most groups, suggesting that income does not strongly impact job proximity. The two exceptions are Black and Native American residents living below the poverty line, whose Job Proximity Index values increase when compared to their respective whole groups.

Separately, there is an uneven distribution of Job Proximity Index values. Alexandria's East End has higher Index values while Alexandria's West End has lower. The racial patterns correspond to this difference, with a higher percentage of White residents on the east side and a higher percentage of residents of color on the west side. One deviation from this pattern is the pocket of Hispanic residents residing in the northeastern edge of the jurisdiction known as Arlandria. Unlike residents on Alexandria West, this group has a job proximity value similar to that of White residents there, despite its Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty designation.

Section III: Potential Solutions

Upskilling programs offered at the Workforce Development Center are essential in addressing underemployment in Alexandria. These initiatives provide individuals with the opportunity to acquire new skills or enhance existing ones, making them more competitive in today's rapidly evolving job market. By investing in upskilling initiatives, job seekers can pursue career advancement opportunities and secure higher-paying positions. Furthermore, programs such as Work-Based Learning offer a promising avenue for addressing underemployment. These initiatives allow participants to gain valuable hands-on experience in their desired field while also earning a wage. By partnering with local businesses and providing training opportunities, Alexandria can equip individuals with the skills and experience necessary to secure stable, well-paying jobs.

To comprehensively address underemployment in Alexandria, raising the minimum wage to a living wage is crucial. Ensuring that workers are paid enough to cover their basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare, can lead to greater financial stability and reduce reliance on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Additionally, the importance of accessible and affordable childcare cannot be overstated. Many individuals, particularly parents, are unable to pursue full-time employment or advance in their careers due to the high cost and limited availability of childcare services. By investing in childcare infrastructure and subsidy programs, Alexandria can enable parents to enter or re-enter the workforce, contributing to economic growth and stability.
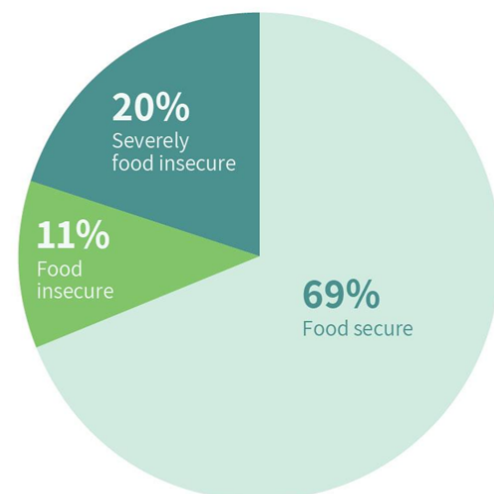
Food Security

Section I: Scope of the Problem

There are multiple data points of assessing food insecurity, which include Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap and Capital Area Food Bank. Feeding America's data is more in line with how the USDA measures food insecurity, while the Capital Area Food Bank includes other factors such as the high cost of living specific to the region. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap estimates the City of Alexandria's food insecurity rate is 8%. According to the Capital Area Food Bank, 31% of residents in the City of Alexandria are food insecure of which 20% are severely food insecure. This demonstrates that there is a need in Alexandria that goes beyond official correlating indicators (poverty, unemployment, homeownership, disability).

According to the City of Alexandria's Food Security Report, organizations providing food assistance have seen a significant increase in the number of people seeking help since the pandemic, and the demand has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2022, an estimated 9% households in Alexandria faced poverty and food insecurity, and this number is expected to have grown significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. In the last three years the local Alexandria nonprofit ALIVE! has seen a drastic increase in the number of people served; ALIVE! served 20,000 individuals/5,000 households on average.

Prevalence of Food Insecurity in Alexandria

Question: USDA six-item screener for food insecurity
Source: Capital Area Food Bank Survey conducted February 4 - March 2, 2022 with 3,769 adults age 18 and older in the D.C. Metro Area

Section II: Specific Issues

With such an increase in demand and need, nonprofits and faith based organizations are spread thin. It is increasingly difficult to provide the food and services needed by the community.

Below is a food distribution map obtained from the City of Alexandria that shows the distribution of food pantries throughout the city. In 2022, the 22304 zip code in Alexandria West was being underserved, with the majority of food pantries being located in the 22314 zip code, in Old Town and Alexandria East. More needs to be done to expand equal access across the City.
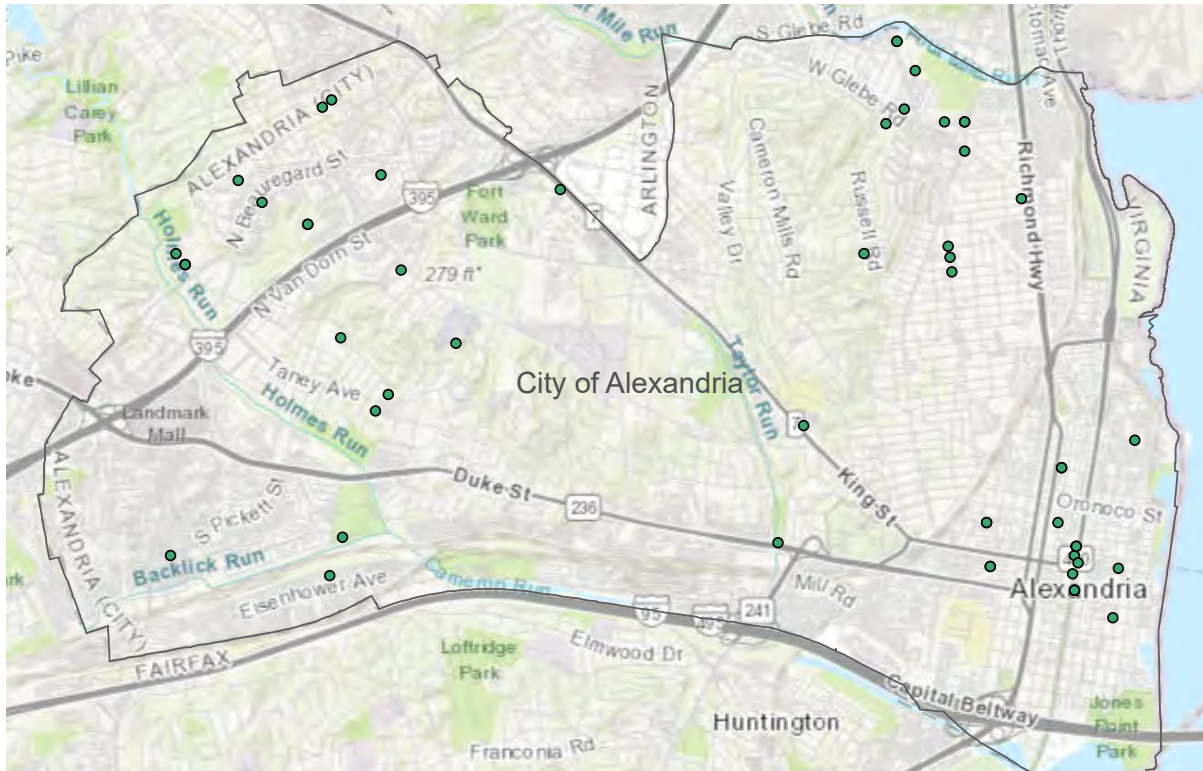

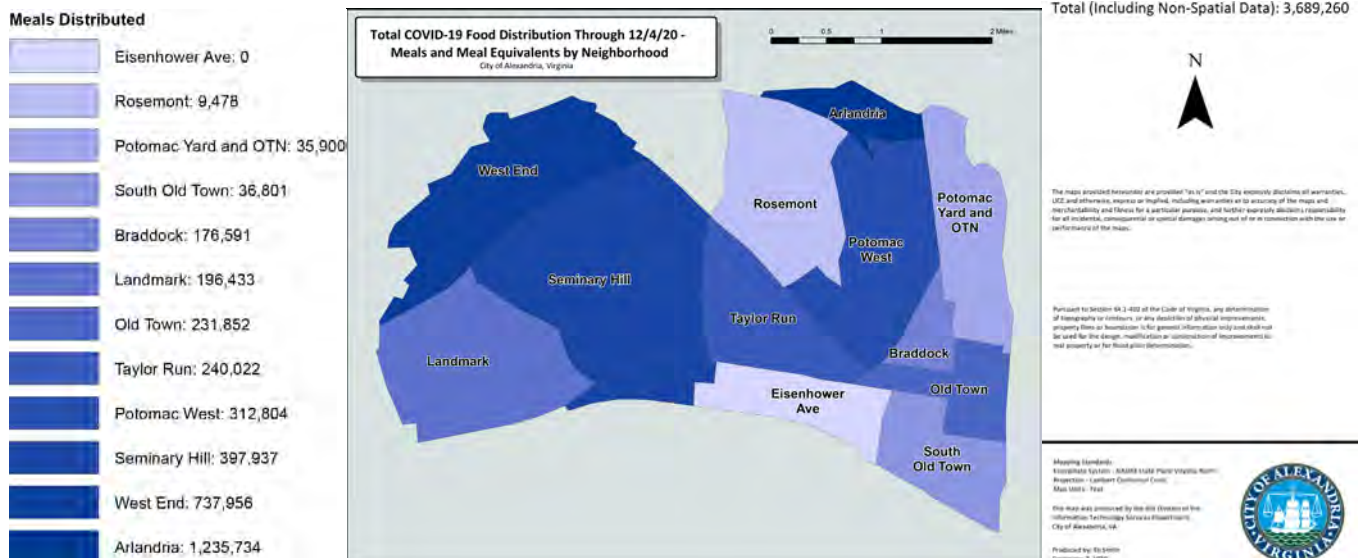Figure E: Green dots represent food distribution and resource sites.

Figure F: Meals distributed by Neighborhood source: The City Of Alexandria, Virginia.

Provider	Event Count	Meals/Meal Equiv
ACPS	558	1,896,729
ALIVE	179	743,641
Casa Chirilagua	21	619,733
Mother of Light	27	231,416
Old Town Community Church	9	122,326
City Frozen Meals	203	34,828
Meals on Wheels	203	30,716
World Central Kitchen	7	7,422
Washington Street United Methodist Church	4	1,439
Royal Restaurant	2	1,010

Figure G: The above is a snapshot at the height of food distribution providers in 2022. With the ending of emergency funding, programs have since reduced the number of meals distributed.

Current City of Alexandria food security needs for residents include:

1. Alexandria's high cost of living may limit budgets for residents living with low-income, leaving little money for food after paying for rent and utilities.

2. As of FY 2022, 39,501 individuals in the City of Alexandria were supported through Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program.

3. As of May 2023, 5,872 households and 11,832 individuals in the City of Alexandria received supplemental nutrition access program (SNAP) benefits.

4. The 22304 zip code in the City of Alexandria has a higher concentration of people facing food insecurity, and there is a need to expand equal access to food across the City.

5. Food insecurity disproportionately affects communities of color, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue.

6. Nonprofits and faith-based organizations, such as ALIVE!, have experienced a drastic increase in the number of people they serve, but they face challenges due to the lack of centralized data collection and sustainable funding.

7. Access to information, language barriers, reliable internet access, neighborhood proximity, transportation limitations, cultural preferences, storage and transportation of food, and communication channels are important factors to consider in addressing food insecurity in the City of Alexandria.

Current City of Alexandria food insecurity needs for providers and organizations include:

1. Centralized data collection, impact measurement, and standardization; as well as access to data about how clients travel from one provider to another, in addition to information about causation.

2. Improved ability of organizations to identify and reach people in need directly and/or through referral networks.

3. Advocacy around funding to support the continuation of emergency food distribution through the City of Alexandria. As emergency funding has sunset, food insecurity needs remain high.

Section III: Potential Solutions

In response to these needs, DCHS established a Food Access Working Group to gather data on food insecurity and develop a strategic plan with short-term and long-term goals. The City hired a company to do a landscape study of Alexandria and conduct surveys and interviews of residents regarding experiences with food insecurity (2024 Completion Target).

The Working Group consists of the following partners:

- Food Security Coordinator: Melissa Jensen
- DCHS/CES: Esperita Bullard
- Health: Natalie Talis
- Aging: Barbara Ravenell
- ACPS: Kelly Combs
- Parks and Rec: Laura Durham
- Housing Alexandria: William Stowe
- No Kid Hungry: Amy Biestek
- Hunger Free Alexandria: Bryan Perry

- ACT for Alexandria: Shelley Miller
- ALIVE!: Jenn Ayers
- Christ House: Melanie Gray/Liz Denson
- Catholic Charities: Vince Cannava/Lori Sikra
- Capital Area Food Bank: Cynthia Singiser/Kimberly Guy/Riley Chitwood
- African Communities Together: Makeda Seare
- Senior Services Alexandria: Marshall Hespe

- Endependence Center of Northen Virginia: Rosalia Fajardo
- Virginia Cooperative Extension: Aisha Salazar
- Balducci's: Wilma Kosakowski
- Community Members
  » William Schuyler-volunteer
  » Rita Nelson-lived experience

Current City efforts:

1. Hired a full time food security coordinator in 2022.

2. Moved DCHS to the West End for greater accessibility.

3. Increased SNAP outreach in the West End.

4. Gathering and analyzing data to demonstrate the need for more resources and infrastructure improvements in support of organizations providing food assistance.

5. Understanding client experiences and their access to food.

6. Identifying the causes of food insecurity in the City.

Establish a food council to help coordinate efforts and strategize responses to food insecurity in the community. A proposed Food Council would work with the Alexandria DCHS Food Access Working Group on data collection and the strategic plan.

Health

Section I: Scope of the Problem

According to Inova Health System's 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, while Alexandria is relatively healthy overall, community members have significant differences in health outcomes depending on race, gender, age, income, ZIP code, and education. The Alexandria Health Department and the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria facilitated the development of a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), in effect from 2021-2025, to address the underlying causes of health inequities in this community. The most recent CHIP report was released December 2023.

The EOC supports the following key focus areas and agrees to support this work, as it will help people living with low incomes thrive. While the CHIP is detailed, the EOC broadly supports its implementation and has outlined the below key areas of focus in the CHIP that underscore the needs of Alexandrians living with low income and align well with the priorities and needs of the people who EOC represents.

- The CHIP identifies three priorities including **Housing, Mental Health and Poverty**. Addressing these three priorities would help improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Alexandria. Each area has goals, strategies and tactics. The tactics are all driven by owners who work to implement the effort.

- The goal for the Housing Priority is: **Affordable, safe and high-quality housing.**

- The goal for the Mental Health Priority is: **Accessible, culturally appropriate and normalized.**

- The goal for Poverty is: **Wealth building opportunities for all.**

- The Alexandria Health Department and the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria monitor and evaluate the CHIP to ensure progress towards health equity.

Each focus area outlined above has specific strategies and tactics for implementation according to the CHIP. Rather than repeat this here, the EOC iterates the strategies by priority area to underscore the need for these actions. These largely echo the issues and concerns raised by other areas of the Community Needs Assessment and further underscore the intersectionality of these issues among various city and community organizations. Aligning priorities interdepartmentally and with community partners to ensure harmony among various stakeholders and residents is critical to improving opportunity for people living with low-incomes or from historically marginalized communities. Furthermore, the encouragement of community participation and reducing duplication of effort should be seen as critical.

Figure H: Events, Trends and Factors that Affect Health (Inova)
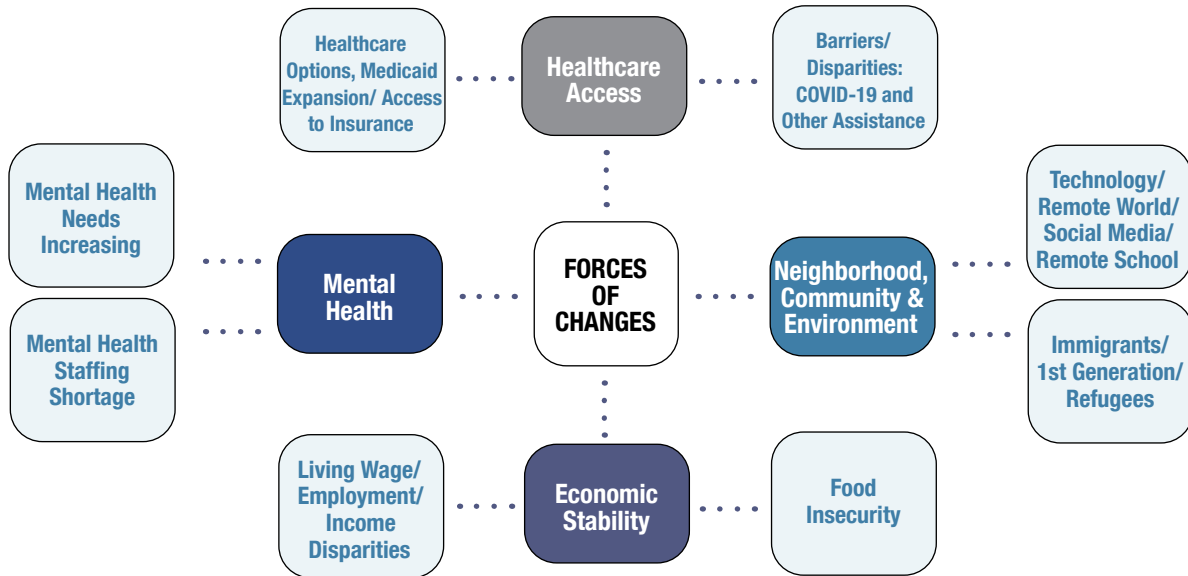
Section II: Specific Issues

We believe the CHIP has made strides in its design to align various stakeholders and articulates their needs thoughtfully. Following is a review of the key strategies by priority area that the EOC believes are reflective of the needs of people living with low incomes in Alexandria.

Housing strategy areas are outlined in the CHIP are as indicated below. Each strategy has detailed tactics and timelines and is assigned a community partner or owner to take responsibility for implementation.

• Identify and support creative land use and other models for affordable and market-rate housing.

• Provide sustainable and predictive housing for individuals and families across incomes.

• Provide additional needed services in housing to reflect community needs and values.

• Increase funding for housing development.

• Support healthy, high-quality, energy-efficient housing.

• Build appropriate supports for those experiencing homelessness.

The strategies for Mental Health are outlined below:

• Assure culturally appropriate and trauma-informed mental health resources, services and support for all Alexandria's communities.

- Advocate for mental health services and education funding.

- Expand opportunities to free and low-cost physical activity.

- Expand early intervention programming and counseling in the community.

- Incorporate mental health strategies into the school day.

- Normalize conversations about mental health.

The strategies for Poverty include:

- Increase quality, equity, and relevance of education for youth in and out of schools.

- Increase the availability and access to childcare, while lowering the cost of childcare for households living with low-income.

- Address disparities in the criminal justice system.

- Increase access to employment resources and opportunities.

- Establish policies that advance wage equity and hiring opportunities.

- Fund tech or other skills training for vulnerable populations.

- Expand opportunities for community-centered financial resources.

- Remove barriers to public transit.

- Eliminate the digital divide.

Section III: Potential Solutions

The CHIP takes a unified approach to problem-solving and implementation; it values and uses community feedback and support to identify and address the needs of Alexandrians. Many of the tactics underscore the need for equity and propose solutions that remove barriers to access and detail opportunities to alleviate poverty.

Continue collaborating with the Alexandria Health Department and the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria to implement the CHIP and take an active role in Alexandria's next Community Health Assessment, beginning in 2024.
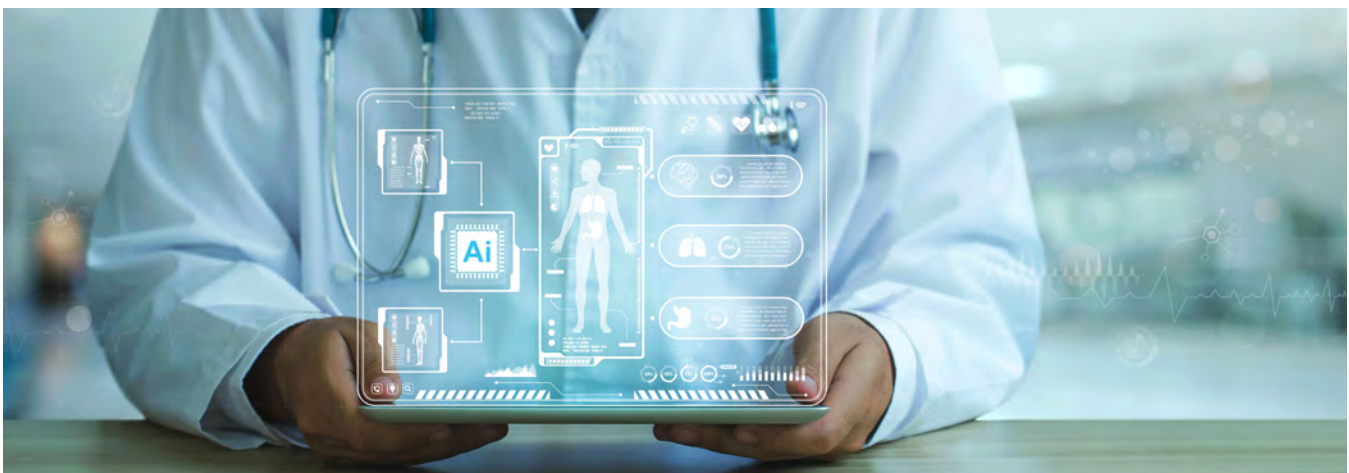
Housing

On October 28, 2021, the Alexandria Eviction Prevention Task Force released "The State of Eviction in Alexandria, Virginia: A Community Assessment." The assessment focused on eviction as one of the main problems for families living with low-incomes in Virginia, and how COVID-19 exacerbated the housing crisis among the most vulnerable. The data provided by residents focused on root causes that lead to households being at risk of eviction, including demographics, lack of resources, barriers for tenants to receive legal advice, and the limited resources available for families facing eviction. The finding for the assessment is consistent in four main areas: risk and causes, strengths, needs and gaps, and potential directions offered by the participants.

Section I: Scope of the Problem

Communities of color, both native born and immigrant, were at heightened risk of eviction in Alexandria. Several explanations for disparities include:

- There are not enough affordable housing options in the City of Alexandria.

- Minority communities experience both systemic and individual racism.

- Lack of knowledge regarding tenant rights and fear of seeking available resources.

- Uninhabitable living conditions affect tenants' health and safety.

- High cost of childcare and rising cost of goods.

- Note - Undocumented residents are at particular risk as they are not eligible for some resources.

Section II: Specific Issues

- Because of the Dillon Rule in Virginia, localities can only wield powers explicitly authorized to them by the Commonwealth. With this, there are policies that would be helpful specifically for Northern Virginia, but since they do not apply to all of Virginia, they have not been passed. This includes policies such as:

    » **Rent increases:** A cap on the percent increase of rent that landlords and property managers can request on an annual basis. In Alexandria, the City has adopted Voluntary Rent Guidelines that recommend landlords do not increase rents by more than 5% annually. The City's guidelines are suggested maximum rent increases for existing tenants but provide no enforcement authority to the City against landlords who do not adopt them (some of the City's non-profit partners and developers of new affordable rental set aside units agree to comply with the guidelines).

    Since 2020, average asking rents have fluctuated due to the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the multifamily residential housing market, ranging from a 3.9% decrease in 2020 to over 12% increase in 2021. While average asking rents in the city have not increased more than 5% on average since 2022, many tenants have reported that landlords and property managers have begun to pass on additional fees and utilities (reported to range between $250-$450+/month) to residents. These costs, which are not reflected in asking rents, are borne by residents and contribute to their total housing costs, resulting in a significant increase in housing cost burden for many tenants.

    » **Affordable housing:** Requiring new developers to offer a certain percentage of new development towards affordable housing. Under current Virginia law, affordable housing can only be required through optional increases in density that offer a benefit to developers; monetary contributions are voluntary. Affordable housing continues to be a necessary resource for families with AMI 60% and below. As rent continues to increase, families who have lived in Alexandria for generations will continue to be pushed out of their community.

- **COVID-19 and RENT RELIEF PROGRAM (RRP):** Some of the most vulnerable populations faced different barriers to receive RRP funds due to the difficulty of the process. The main barriers to access were identified as the time to apply, language, technology, and eligibility:

    » Literacy and technology were barriers that led to slow processes and often a need for direct support.

    » Landlords lacked capacity to complete forms for each individuals in need.

    » Some landlords had less financial flexibility to wait for assistance to arrive.

    » Individual and organization capacity was spread thin and often insufficient.

    » The RRP income eligibility requirement did not take into consideration cities like Alexandria with a high cost of living, therefore many families in need were unable to qualify for the program.

Section III: Potential Solutions

- **Funding:** The biggest protective factor has been rental assistance for households as rent continues to increase. More must be done to create affordable housing options, creative solutions should be explored to maximize creation of new affordable stock for all AMI levels. Additional funding should be advocated for in order to realize the full potential of the Zoning for Housing framework.

- **Community Partnerships:** Continued intentional collaboration among community partners, such as landlords and tenants, to reduce rate of evictions.

- **Education & Awareness:** Continues to offer educational events and flyers, such as "Know Your Rights" workshops to help residents understand their rights, learn about available resources, and understand the eviction process and their options if they are at risk of facing eviction.

Conclusions

This needs assessment explores current issues and potential solutions for Alexandrians in obtaining Childcare, Employment, Food Security, Healthcare, and Housing. These are fundamental needs for any society. But while Alexandria has made progress over the past three years in addressing these needs, much more must be done to ensure equitable access to opportunities for all Alexandrians.

Alexandria continues to be an attractive place to call home. Alexandria departments such as DCHS work closely with community partners and refugee resettlement agencies to connect new arrivals with necessary resources, enabling a transition to a new life that is as seamless as possible. This important work is consistent with Alexandria's mission and the core values reflected in its people, and it must continue.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted disparities and presented opportunities for Alexandria to engage in community collaborative efforts to address immediate needs and system change. Alexandria used its COVID funding - CARES and ARPA to implement innovative initiatives, such as the Guaranteed Income Pilot, and best and promising practices, such as Work-Based Learning and Service Navigation. Policy makers in Alexandria have many exciting opportunities ahead, with the continued influence of Amazon HQ2, recent passage of Zoning for Housing, and expanded transit options such as with Duke Street In Motion. These developments can have the potential to unlock solutions not previously available to our city leaders. But any future development also has the potential to exacerbate the issues identified herein for Alexandrians living with low to moderate incomes. We must therefore continue to demand that our leaders keep these residents top-of-mind. In doing so, Alexandria will come closer to being a place where everyone can thrive.