



COVID-19 RESPONSE

By using a collective impact approach, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is able to work directly with communities and create permanent change for children, youth and families whose lives have been upended by the economic turmoil created by COVID-19. In response to this time of crisis, we developed playbooks to quickly identify gaps in services, develop plans, coordinate activities, and respond quickly to the emergent needs of youth and families across the state. The result is community-owned systems that are supported by a strong collaborative infrastructure, thanks to an increased and more focused and streamlined investment of philanthropic dollars and governmental efforts. Bring Up Nebraska is imperative in response to COVID-19.

Over the last decade, Nebraska Children has established collaboratives in communities across Nebraska. There are currently 16 autonomous collaboratives serving 50 of Nebraska's counties. In addition, we are working with local Educational Service Units to cover the additional 31 counties in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Counties involved thus far include:

Dakota County (Growing Community Connections); Dawson County Collaborative; Douglas County Community Response; Dodge County (Fremont Family Collaborative); Hall County Community Collaborative (H3C); Lancaster County Collaborative; Madison County (Norfolk Family Coalition); Otoe County (Better Together Collaborative); Panhandle Partnership (11 Counties); Sandhills Community Collaborative (8 Counties); Sarpy County (Lift Up Sarpy); York County Health Collaborative; Tribal Communities (Santee, Omaha, Winnebago, Western Nebraska, Omaha Metro); Families First Partnership (Lincoln, Keith Perkins Counties); Blue Valley Collaborative (Saline/Jefferson/Gage and Blue Valley); Buffalo County Partnership; Webster, Clay, Adams and Nuckolls; Cherry and Brown Counties; Johnson/Nemaha and other counties; Red Willow, Dundee, Frontier, Hayes, and Chase; Knox and Antelope Counties

All Nebraska Children collaboratives have a Community Response (CR) program. CR consists of formal and informal community services and supports (e.g. churches, basic need agencies, public health, childcare, schools, neighborhood groups, etc.) committed to keeping children safely in their homes and out of child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Community Response approach relies on youth and family engagement and practices such as central navigation, coaching, and flexible funding to provide uniquely tailored services appropriate for each family or individual. The organized array of resources is accessed through collaborative partners who formally pledge to serve and support families first, no matter the barriers (e.g. funding, eligibility, agency policies, etc.). Through Nebraska Children's unique public/private partnership model, we can best serve youth and families while maximizing the use of public dollars and using private philanthropic dollars only as a fill-in when all other options are exhausted.

Typically, communities develop a Community Response Team with designated point persons for central navigation and professionals for management, support, and connection. While typically thought of as prevention initiatives, Nebraska Children learned quickly in response to the 2019 flood disasters that our established framework is a natural fit to respond to needs to youth and families in times of major crises, like the COVID-19 outbreak and its economic impacts.

Nebraska Children is specifically poised to tackle these pressing issues because of our partnerships with community leaders, businesses, government agencies, and local nonprofits. We have the unique ability to work on all levels to find innovative solutions and help shape policies that affect youth and families across the state. Our partners include:

- First Lady of Nebraska Susanne Shore
- Center for the Study of Social Policy
- Children & Family Coalition of Nebraska (CAFCON)
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
- Nebraska Department of Education
- Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board
- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
- Nebraska Department of Labor
- Department of Economic Development
- Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)
- Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA)
- Administrative Office of Courts and Probation
- Casey Family Programs
- Annie E. Casey Foundation –CHAMPS
- Private Foundations
- Local community collaboratives

Because of these strong partners, Bring Up Nebraska is able to easily bring all necessary voices to the table in shaping policies and responding to unique emerging needs relating to the COVID-19 crisis.

In response to the recent COVID-19 outbreak, Nebraska Children worked with its community partners and state and local governmental agencies to establish playbooks to help synthesize the emergent needs of Nebraskans. Playbooks serve as summaries of individual and community needs relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Playbooks were developed in the areas of food security, healthcare, mental and behavioral health, childcare, connectivity, housing, vulnerable populations, and older youth.

Complete Playbooks available at:

<http://www.bringupnebraska.org/tools-resources>

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Nebraska Children and Bring Up Nebraska partners are most concerned and focused on our state's most vulnerable populations:

CHILDREN

- Child Abuse and Neglect rates and hotline calls are going down and there are less eyes on children that need the most support
- Parents of children with special education needs are unable to do the work as given to them

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN STATE CARE

- Youth exiting care at age 17 or 18 (and not entering B2i) or exiting B2i between April 1 and Sept. 30 are vulnerable to the unstable economy, workforce, and housing
- We would like to see a stop to all exits from care or from B2i for 90-180 days until economy is stable
- Immigrant and Refugee Population
- Language Barriers - Extra difficulty navigating assistance and helping children with online learning and sharing resource information

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- Alternative housing options for those with COVID-19 symptoms
- Schools not able to locate homeless students due to pandemic
- Shelters receiving increase of calls and drop-ins of people traveling from out-of-state; shelters not accepting out-of-state clients in the shelter due to health and safety concerns

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Increased need for single adults with disabilities for rent and utilities support

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

- Increase in severity of calls for help as people are dealing with increased anxiety and fear
- Loss of face-to-face social supports (e.g. therapy, AA) will increase mental health concerns

SENIORS

- Food and Isolation
- Transportation
- Seniors in rural areas have limited or no access to food and connectivity is limited

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & TRAFFICKING

- Long waits for housing (up to 36-months prior to COVID-19) and anticipate getting longer during and after pandemic
- Anticipated increase in drug trafficking as human trafficking becomes more difficult with social distancing guidelines
- Victims living with perpetrators are not considered “homeless” and do not qualify for many public housing support
- Increase of hotline calls and severity of calls have increased, per law enforcement
- Shelters closed due to COVID-19 risks
- More difficult to get protection orders with courts closed

UNCONNECTED OLDER YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

- Social isolation and disconnection from family supports, school, work and community are increased due to COVID-19, with an increase in mental health needs due to isolation, anxiety and fear
- Housing insecurity, including a lack of safe and affordable housing

NEEDS

Across the state, specific needs and concerns found in our playbook formation currently include:

FOOD SECURITY (57 COUNTIES)

- Funding for meals to individuals and to replenish food pantries (needed in all counties)
- Communication about available resources to populations in need (needed in all counties)
- Transportation to food distribution sites (needed in all counties)

HEALTHCARE (57 COUNTIES)

- Personal Protective Equipment and testing supplies are at a severe shortage (all counties)
- Community members and front line health workers don't have a safe space to quarantine (all counties)
- Potential lack of space in healthcare facilities, especially in hot spot areas like Grand Island (all counties)
- High cost of healthcare for the uninsured (all counties)
- Awareness of social distancing and other health measures is needed (all counties)
- Mental and behavioral health (71 counties)
- Patients and providers lack devices, internet access, and technological knowledge for telehealth (41 counties)
- Healthcare, financial, and work concerns have increased anxiety (45 counties)
- There is a lack of capacity in mental health providers (29 counties)

CHILDCARE (55 COUNTIES)

- Essential workers are having a hard time accessing childcare (26 counties)
- Providers are losing income due to lack of attendance (all counties)
- Lack of access to essential items like cleaning supplies, toilet paper, diapers, and food (all counties)
- Concern that many providers will not reopen after the crisis is over (29 counties)

CONNECTIVITY (84 COUNTIES AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES)

- Some rural areas low-income populations, seniors and homeless populations have no internet access (all counties)
- Some schools have as many as 80% of students with no internet access
- Access to telephones and phone service is limited, making working from home, accessing health care, and communicating with service providers difficult (all counties surveyed)
- Many lack devices including computers in order to complete schoolwork or work from home (24 counties)

HOUSING (52 COUNTIES)

- Threats of eviction or foreclosure if unable to pay rent or mortgages (all counties)
- Homeless and domestic violence shelters running out of space due to lack of affordable housing options, even before the crisis started (all counties)

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS/OLDER YOUTH (NEEDED IN ALL COMMUNITIES)

- Unemployment and loss of income
- Housing insecurity
- Threats of domestic violence and increased sex and labor trafficking risks
- Youth in state care (probation, foster care) who are transitioning to independent living with little or no supports
- Young parents' ability to access childcare, transportation, and affordable baby supplies (diapers, wipes, formula)
- Closing of colleges and universities causing a lack of housing and food access, e-learning access issues including
- Mental health concerns due to isolation and increased anxiety

STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

During these playbook discussions, Nebraska Children and its partners have found targeted solutions to these needs. Many of the following solutions can be addressed via the Community Response funding and support with access to public resources. The strategies and solutions include (items in red are already underway):

FOOD SECURITY

- Provide funding to access food and transportation for food deliveries, without restrictions such as age or school status
- Market available resources
- Utilizing bus drivers or other transportation services to deliver food
- Ensure USDA waivers to increase access to food and supplies are understood and utilized by schools
 - Waivers and policy changes from NDE and DHHS
 - Several private funders have provided funds to the collaboratives to meet the emergency needs in their communities: Nebraska Impact COVID-19 Relief Fund, The Sherwood Foundation, William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation and Anne Hubbard
 - Money raised through the Nebraska Impact COVID-19 Relief Fund, has been directed to the community collaboratives in Dakota, Madison, Hall and Dawson Counties to ease food challenges
 - People who are not eligible for SNAP, but still have food insecurity issues, have been referred to Community Response

HEALTHCARE

- Support statewide and local marketing and communication efforts to promote direct health measures (Why Stay at Home?) and other safety precautions
 - A survey was conducted by Nebraska Children and First Lady Susanne Shore in order to inform videos and printed materials from the Governor's Office for COVID-19 safety precautions and resources as well as Nebraska's Children's prevention messaging and translation support for community response in multiple languages.
- Establish a helpline for frontline employees to assist each other
- Deploy the National Guard for testing
- Relax rules on Medicaid to allow more to access health services

MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Provide devices and internet access
- Increase awareness of existing mental health services and supports such as Parent Child Interaction Therapy through virtual efforts
 - PCIT: Nebraska Children is partnering with the System of Care and UNL to develop a Community of Practice (CoP) around Parent Child Interaction Therapy which will coordinate and offer initial training and continuing education.
 - Additionally, the System of Care will be utilizing federal grant funds to facilitate training of up to eight additional therapists in PCIT by the end of the year. The CoP partnership includes support of practices such as Child Parent Psychotherapy and Circle of Security Parenting.
- Make EAP services available to front-line workers

CHILDCARE

- Creating a portal where childcare providers and essential workers can match openings in licensed care centers
 - The Child Care Referral Network is now live at <https://www.nechildcarereferral.org>
- Schools providing child care with needed supplies. Schools can apply for funding to replenish cleaning and other supplies at the schools
- Giving providers a one-time payment of \$1,000 to help fill gaps in income
 - Nebraska Children, Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative, and Community Response collaboratives provided this gap-fill funding to over 500 providers, although there were nearly as many providers we could not fund at this time.
 - Early Childhood partners have formed a work group to collect and disseminate resources as well as develop transition plans and resources to support childcare providers, children and parents as children transition back to child care.

CONNECTIVITY

- Help community-based orgs in the state identify and purchase virtual meeting platforms (e.g., zoom) and other address other technology needs so that providers can connect with clients.
- Provide free internet access without barriers like credit checks, service contracts, or requiring school-aged child(ren) in the home
- Collect, refurbish and distribute devices to those who are in need
 - The Community and Family Partnership (Platte/Colfax Counties), one of the community collaboratives in the Bring Up Nebraska initiative, reached out to other partners to help provide technology to families with no current access. Funds from the Nebraska Impact COVID-19 Fund, Community Response funds from Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and support from The Sherwood Foundation, paid to refurbish over 80 computers.
 - Community Response funds were made available, by private funding, to provide individuals funds to purchase devices, secure internet connection, and provided older youth hot spots in the Omaha area.

HOUSING

- Flex funds needed to provide temporary shelter in place of homeless shelters (hotels/motels agreements)
 - Through Bring Up Nebraska community collaboratives and in partnership with state and local Continuums of Care for the homeless, hotel/motel vouchers are being utilized to shelter at risk homeless individuals and families to reduce exposure to COVID-19.
- Flex funds needed to ensure rent, mortgages, and utilities are paid on time
 - Community Response Funds are being utilized to maximize public and private funding streams to help as many Nebraskans, landlords, and communities as possible.
 - Federal stimulus funds are coming to help with prevention efforts and housing sustainability to make sure Nebraskans can maintain their current housing. This effort will be addressed through a coordinated effort by the Department of Health and Human Services, Bring Up Nebraska, and multiple state systems, funders, and communities to align efforts to provide the best possible support.

FINANCIAL

- Provide emergency funds via community response to meet individuals needs
 - Community Response Funds are being utilized to maximize public and private funding stream to help as many Nebraskans as possible
- Community and service level financial coaching for individuals through Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's "Your Money Your Goals" financial tool kit
- Financial literacy and matched saving accounts, low interest loans, and asset purchases are continuing through the Nebraska Opportunity Passport program
- Eliminate asset limits from public benefit programs to ensure a cash infusion from a stimulus check doesn't lead to people losing their benefits.
- Encourage banks to cash stimulus checks for no charge to prevent low-income individuals from losing money at cash checking agencies
- Restrict rate increases on payday lenders

OLDER YOUTH

- Ensure all older youth have access to a cell phone and internet access. Ensure connectivity support is not limited to families with school-aged children or college students.
 - Project Everlast Omaha, with the support of The Sherwood Foundation, are working to ensure all unconnected older youth and young adults have a cell phone with internet access so they can be connected to resources and virtual coaching.
- Create flexible food delivery services and/or hold WIC hours at grocery stores that allow parents to shop with children
- Hold virtual engagement activities to maintain social connections
 - Connected Youth Initiative partners, with consultation from youth and young adults, created youth-friendly resources, one-pagers, and youth-led media messaging to ensure youth know how to access critical support. More information can be found at www.NebraskaChildren.org/COVID-19-information-and-resources .
- Create accelerated workforce training and credentialing to respond to the shift to e-learning and anticipated change in high-demand jobs during and following pandemic
 - Virtual training and learning opportunities for youth and young adults are being provided by Connected Youth Initiative partners across the state. Youth may earn stipends for participation, connect with peers virtually and learn valuable skills during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Encourage flexible policies to relax public funding restrictions that require eviction risk or homelessness to pay utilities and rent
 - Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services allocated additional John H. Chafee funds to support youth with foster care experience and meet emergent needs due to COVID-19. In addition, committed private funding is also supporting older youth to access needed resources via central navigation and Independent Living Specialists.
- Create social connections through paired relationships between older youth and senior citizens in the community to assist with yard work, grocery delivery, and technology assistance
 - The Blue Valley Collaborative in Southeast Nebraska, paired senior citizens with unconnected older youth in the community to do weekly "check-in" calls with one another. The older youth also assist seniors with daily chores like grocery shopping, yard work, and learning technology to reduce social isolation and increase social connections.