

# Community Playbook

ISSUES AND CONCERNS FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE



## Prepared by

NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION  
AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES

Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, Webster Counties; Buffalo and area Counties; Dawson County; Dodge County; Douglas County; Hall County; Lancaster County; Otoe County; Pawnee, Richardson, Johnson, & Nemaha Counties; Panhandle Counties; Tribal Communities (Santee Sioux Nation, Omaha Tribe, Winnebago Tribe, Native Western Nebraska); York County

## Language Barriers



### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Need for readily available ) translation and interpreters
  - More instruction in tribal languages [this is not directly related to COVID-19, but is an ongoing concern about loss of connection to culture and the importance of culture as an element of prevention efforts]
  - Pandemic increased needs for all residents, but especially those who have language barriers to getting services
  - Many Spanish-speaking individuals reached out for help for the first time
  - Need for more translators/interpreters but funding not available
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- Provide training for some who might be able to serve in this way and find funds to pay for their service.
  - Funding to provide translation for programs who do not have a bilingual staff person available to help people find employment.
  - Additional TVs/teleprompters to share community information in different areas of the city to make information more accessible.
  - Promote awareness and provide funding for flyers, giveaways and incentives at pop-up sites for COVID vaccinations.
  - Conversation about developing a translator/interpreter pool to be linked to NATI (Nebraska Association of Translators and Interpreters) with pilot in Kearney to form a Community Charter Association
  - Funds for Spanish Radio, newspapers to provide PSAs
  - Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has hired a Translation/Interpretation Navigator to assist with fostering and supporting T&I resources

## Connectivity



- Tech literacy - many adults struggle to fill out an online form, understand the educational technology to help their children with their homework or receive messages from the school
- Still have places that do not have internet access, or limited bandwidth (outside of Grand Island and Kearney, southeast NE, central NE)
- Families and individuals outside of public school systems - unknown device and broadband access
- Adult education students need electronic devices for GED and other learning
- Child care home and center-based directors do not have access to laptops
- Broadband is extremely limited in Tribal Communities; sole provider option of service is often experiencing limitations in new services and support for repair
- Loaning devices from nonprofits can cause problems with software licenses and availability.
- Access to printers is limited for families and some childcares. Not every library has printer

### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Provide families with SIM cards, modems, and routers that can be provided as pre-paid rather than monthly charges; request schools could have an orientation at the beginning of the school year
- Public schools have provided devices and hotspots for kids, but for school use only
- ALLO EBB is great
- Childcare providers to host virtual meetings to connect families to resources, etc., but need agency support to host volunteer connections
- Possible hot spot 'check outs' in partnership with library
- Collaboratives check out out devices to individuals and families (from Hall County)
- Organizing laptop take-back with Motherboard and then buying refurbished devices back at \$200-350/laptop. Providing devices to long-term care homes, adults and youth working on GEDs, migrant families, and childcare directors (Buffalo County)

# Housing and Utilities



- Many households requested assistance with rent or utilities so far in 2021 and requests continue to come in and the statewide COVID-19 funds are hard to access and receive in timely manner
- Huge increase in first time assistance
- Seeing an increase in utilities assistance
- Long-term affordable housing across the state
- Need more resources for coordination staffing to support emergency services and coordinate supports
- Large hotel expenses due to long-term stays, need for coaching to support individuals and families in hotels
- Incentivized coaching to help families and individuals sustain housing
- Coordinated list of rental options for agencies to refer individuals looking for rentals
- Grow current coordinated entry system for housing, rent and utilities to electronic forums
- Evictions that need legal assistance to retain housing vouchers or success in next rental
- Need workforce housing to support job opportunities in communities
- Need for funding for undocumented persons
- Every NPPD shut off requires a \$25 reconnection fee; unable to get traction to waive fee if paid by Community Response
- Unable to create a plan to reduce electrical shut offs with NPPD when family is working with a coach or Central Navigator or receive messages from the school
- Need for a coordinated, one-stop entry system for people to receive information and assistance with food housing, legal, mental health.
- Concern that there are so many groups working on housing and that efforts may be duplicated. All of the groups must be better connected so when a person goes into a place for services, all of the resources are available from every point of entry.
- Message fatigue with so many different systems/services/processes
- Increased need for sober homes

## Housing and Utilities (cont'd)

- Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA):
  - Need a published timeline and clear instructions for ERA application process. The complexity of the application seems to be a barrier for both renter and landlord.
  - Need technical assistance/navigation to complete all necessary steps
  - Families and Tenants need assistance more quickly than the ERA process allows.
  - Portal is not always giving accurate and consistent information to tenant and landlord. The portal will tell tenant that application is complete and tell landlord it is pending.
  - Biggest barrier for accessing funds is documentation status or having the necessary documentation on hand (birth certificate, SSN, etc.)
  - Need to establish a known process for collaboratives to ask questions and get responses
  - Landlords have difficulty completing application. Call line said they'd call him back but didn't.
  - Some landlords don't want to give personal information (such as driver's license) via website.
  - Some landlords hesitant to participate due to perception that people behind on rent due to "poor choices."
  - Barriers to accessing funds by those in unusual situations:
    - Example - client living in car with no proof of income for 2019. Currently unemployed without unemployment or disability payments.
    - Example - families who have not lost hours or experienced COVID but are impacted by rising costs of groceries, utilities, fuel, rent. How do they "prove" their impact?
    - Example - mother who takes care of kids is in a divorce situation and husband is no longer in the home; she is now facing eviction. She does not have access to all of the necessary documents and information, is new at paying the bills and is also having to find a job.

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Easily accessed funds for short-term assistance
- Moratorium on utility disconnects and evictions helped immensely, but those short-term solutions are starting to go away (bring them back)
- Continued assistance to offset bills for rent, mortgage and utility assistance.
- Funding to continue hotel/motel vouchers for homeless individuals who cannot be placed in a shelter due to COVID, COVID exposure or waiting for a test result to come back
- BCCP has hired a bilingual navigator to help in processing Community Response applications
- Open Houses and clinics to help individuals through the process.
  - Have computers, scanner, interpreters.
  - Have participants pre-register with contact information. Then call can happen before event and some problems can be solved or challenges addressed.
  - Have childcare and food available.
  - Host with other agencies in their facilities, providing support staff and resources.
  - Invite DHHS staff to attend.
- Support landlords who have not been fully compensated and are left in financial trouble. May need to provide supportive services or incentives so they continue to rent instead of selling their properties.
- Provide incentives to landlords that keep families in a property for at least 12 months. This could be funding for repairs or upgrades to the properties. Could ERA funds not being utilized now be used for this?
- Host open houses/events for landlords to explain ERA funding and process, other services available
- Creating a landlord “concierge service” so landlords have a number to contact for any issue so they feel more supported if challenges arise (from Omaha MACCH).

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has private funding to help develop capacity for landlord assistance and to develop and maintain relationships with landlords
- Develop a (minimum) 12-month program to assist families find and maintain housing.
- Incentivized coaching to help families and individuals sustain housing
- We have an agreement regarding families getting disconnected or reconnected if they are working with a case manager on a utility request. The relationship has not changed to date, but rather expanded. The utility department agreed to not disconnect or reconnecting a household if they are working with a case manager on the ERA application.
- Coordinate with at local attorney to immediately accept CR clients for \$500 per client. Three referrals have been sent and all have prevented evictions.
- Coordinate and educate property managers, as well as landlords, on ERA and Community Response
- Have worked on combining housing/rental option lists that case workers at different areas in the community use. This has been compiled and updated and we are currently revising from an excel list to a flyer to give to clients. That list will be available to all case workers/advocates to use/distribute
- A landlord outreach effort to build relationships with community collaboratives and assistance.

## Food and Supplies



- Food banks will have a funding cliff when the fiscal year ends in June
- FEMA is stating food banks do not have legal authority to feed people; this will create crises unfunded by state funds and thousands of hungry Nebraska families
- Families and individuals who cannot qualify for SNAP or EBT are struggling to have enough funds for food
- High need for fresh and healthy foods; mostly packaged options available if there is availability
- Continued support of farm to table food boxes; need to clarify importance to elected officials and within communities who these boxes should be prioritized for
- Senior Center has become the distribution point for USDA food boxes (475 boxes distributed in February in Gothenburg)
- Need a central place for food pantry updates, times, locations
- Increases in students utilizing backpack programs
- Food pantry busy with appointments and distribution
- Food pantries (Cozad) seeing twice the usual number of families each month
- Hundreds of families need food boxes each week, but there is no one to organize this distribution anymore (Lexington)
- Food pantries need additional items; relying solely on community to donate and donations are down
- Need for food in Community Response is much higher due to students needing to be home for quarantine or home-based learning and not accessing school-provided meals
- Experiencing volunteer fatigue in the community
- People do not have transportation to get to food pantries and are requesting rides
- Barrier can be providing the necessary documentation
- Food pantries often don't have enough refrigeration
- Need for foods not available in regular pantry packages for immigrant and refugee communities with specific dietary needs



## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Need continued SNAP enrollment efforts
- Prioritize Food pantry refrigeration
- Fund Bountiful Backpacks
- Ensure Summer Nutrition Programs are in place for all communities
- Provide coordinated technical assistance for Farmers' Markets (e.g., with Nebraska Extension)
- Keep in contact with Senior Center to provide funds if needed. Keep in contact with food pantry to be sure supplies are adequate. Dawson County Family Partners consider heading up distribution in Lexington.
- Additional funding to support additional food needed in boxes (protein) and items, supplies to continue to carry out multiple distribution (advertisements, bags/boxes, storage, etc.) location - Hall County
- Gas vouchers for volunteers who deliver the food to outlying counties
- Funding to support a part-time position to coordinate the community food efforts (this ensures no food goes to waste and is shared amongst all of the distribution locations) - Hall County example
- Be Well Collaborative is raising \$15,000 to set up EBT services for this season's farmer's market - Buffalo County
- Enhancing UNK's Handshake platform to engage college volunteers, could it be expanded to other high schools
- No Kid Hungry created program that helps find summer food locations for kids (text "food" or "comida" to 877877)
- Mobile pantries are key to aiding those who do not have transportation to food pantries

## Physical and Mental Health Care



- Access to vaccines
- Supports to combat vaccine hesitancy in English and non-English speaking populations
- Mental health care is a huge need for children, parents, and families
- Anxiety has increased in all populations; consensus this is a high priority for healthcare workers, elderly, unemployed, families, educators, etc.
- Increase in the number and severity of issues needing professional mental health interventions
- Need 24-hour crisis support options
- Not enough funds or mental health professionals
- Workforce capacity issues for health and mental health
- Need for more types of mental health treatments or counseling options
- Noting higher costs of health care
- Need better understanding of community to reduce stigma
- Law enforcement and EMS need better training
- Funds to cover costs associated with intensive family in-home therapy
- Spanish-speaking and other multi-lingual counselors/therapists
- Drug counselors/meetings in other languages
- Free health care clinic needed
- Need funds for extra costs of healthcare bills for COVID related medical bills
- Consistent health care screenings in own language
- Continued availability of mental health services to be offered virtually
- Stigma still associated with accessing mental health therapy but not trauma informed supports due to COVID -19 realities
- Need brain injury resources and case management (bilingual case managers) in Buffalo County
- Dental services for uninsured children/families/individuals

## Physical and Mental Health Care (cont'd)

- Need trusted sites for purchase of PPE for businesses
- Need for compassion fatigue training for front line health care workers
- Need continued support for wearing masks in facilities (no city ordinance after Feb 2021)
- Need supports for first responders, funeral home employees, medical providers, to deal with significant loss of life among patients and clients
- Need Behavioral Health Regions to offer more guidance and supports, share models, etc.
- Families requesting support for insurance deductibles, mental health visits, and medical expenses
- There is an increase in substance abuse - specifically with meth
- True substance abuse issues may be unknown because of high need and lower availability of services

### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Telehealth sessions, additional staff in the schools
- Funding to support access to devices with internet connections. Funding to support internet access.
- Possible partnership with HelpCare Clinic (Buffalo)
- Funding to offset costs of mental health services, transportation vouchers to get there, advertising in multiple languages, funding to offer community training for partners to provide appropriate trauma informed services.
- Funding to provide kits to seniors who are isolated and unable to get out and socialize with others.
- Funding for campaign around suicide prevention phone numbers and ways to deal with isolation and strategies (radio, TV, social media, flyers)
- Interest in setting Charter up to help bilingual students pursue degrees in nursing and mental health counseling.
- Nebraska Strong Recovery Project has been forming support groups and educational groups for staff and residents of retirement communities and will be focusing on other populations as well.

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Richard Young Hospital providing new programs including crisis planning, Live Well Counseling Center providing mental health therapies in person and virtually to youth in central NE, BCCP Youth Coordinator is hosting youth talks with law enforcement, mental health therapists, DHHS, SAFE Center and more to create greater clarity of programs and services
- Schools are a part of the AWARE grant which has helped placed therapists in the schools to support students at the schools and that helps with transportation and time. Families are always involved in the ways that work for them
- Can licensing and payment mental health training programs - can those being trained in mental health help support? Can payment requirements be relaxed?
- Begin building a broader array of mental health supports including informal supports, parent networks, coaching.
- Need to identify evidence-based strategies for families and youth Implementation of a program/support for coping skills that connect youth to each other - youth feel disconnected and losing interest since COVID limited activities in community and school.
- Providing gift certificates/vouchers to local mental health providers including bilingual providers
- Self-care kits to front line workers with survey to determine need for compassion fatigue trainings
- Including mental health information in food boxes that are distributed
- Project Harmony and LFS have developed training for interpreters around mental health and for therapists using interpreters
- Supporting and equipping coaches with Step Up to Quality, Sixpence and Rooted with a mental health toolbox or trainings to assist local childcare providers with their intense needs.
- Participating in Mental Health First Aid training events (from Buffalo County)

## Childcare



- Overall concern for lack of available care (capacity)
- Parents struggling to pay for the cost of quality childcare (especially low-wage earning families)
- Limited childcare in rural communities
- Parents needing supports to pay for childcare if they have to stay home to care for other children
- Childcare option shortage; especially evening options; many childcare options closed due to COVID
- Some programs have had to limit numbers due to COVID, which also limits income while increased PPE/cleaning costs
- Need certified staffing
- Existing child care centers are struggling with expensive needed repairs
- Lack of transportation for families to get child to childcare, especially in rural communities
- Childcare providers struggling to find qualified staff
- Need Mental Health supports for workers
- Need compassion fatigue training for providers
- Childcare providers struggling to make relationships with parents (because of limited drop off time/access)
- Connectivity needs for zoom meetings, need laptops in homes and centers
  - Fulfilling professional development online can be a challenge when using a personal phone
  - Many childcare providers and early educators have only a landline and mail, making it problematic to get available CARES funding
- Funds to pay for general operating costs, especially or provider salaries, to keep doors open during times of decreased attendance when families are quarantined
- Need for formal social-emotional skill curriculum in childcare centers (staff and children)
- Continued need for PPE including thermometers, sanitizer, masks, and cleaning supplies
- Difficult to find childcare that is open and accepting new families; some providers are not accepting or do not qualify for other childcare expense aid
- Limited training opportunities in non-English languages/bilingual

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Funds to pay for general operating costs, especially for provider salaries, to keep doors open during times of decreased attendance when families are quarantined.
- Community child care services/providers, free classes/assistance for home care providers to get/receive state certification
- Developing a substitute pool of providers that could help at centers if a teacher has to quarantine to avoid closure of a classroom.
- Funds needed for support and address compassion fatigue training and support for mental health
- Hiring incentives to attract workforce to child care positions
- Provide funds for pre-paying first month's cost of childcare and that allows parent to spread that cost over 12 months (from Southeast Collaborative)
- Perform check-ins with newly employed on any issues and help to remove barriers, including calling local childcare providers if needed (from Blue Valley).
- Training for providers in first language to enhance retention of employee.
- Working with local taxi services to provide rides with vouchers (from Blue Valley).

## Education



### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- More assistance for GED/ESL classes to make them more affordable
  - Transportation vouchers - tune up clinics for vehicles so kids can get to school
  - Food insecurity on weekends
  - Gaps in providing breakfast/lunch everyday/every week this summer (Hall County)
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- Stipends for summer camps and recreational activities
  - Student shoe vouchers (other clothing as well)
  - Summer Reading activities and food in a bag
  - Funding for mental health counseling for students who are seeing an increase in behaviors, loneliness and social isolation

## Transportation



- Lack of reliable transportation or money to keep cars running
- Transportation expenses including gas and public transit vouchers, funding for repairs on vehicles, car payments and insurance
- Challenges for seniors and low income to get supplies and to services
- Persons accessing Community Response need car repairs or vehicles for transportation
- Transportation is needed to run after 4:30 to get people to work outside of first shift jobs (e.g., Santee Community)
- Public transportation doesn't exist in many towns and in those that do have access, hours and routes are limited. Taxi service, where available, is often unavailable at night for those working non-traditional hours
- Youth in more rural communities who are not attending high school don't have access to driver's education

### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Public transportation to and from local towns, in-town bus stops
- Would car repair shops or auto sales businesses assist in creating some solutions?
- Vouchers for gas and vehicle repair
- Transportation vouchers for public transportation and for private car services (Uber/Lyft)
- Partner with schools, churches and nonprofits to utilize vans and buses for work transportation when not otherwise being used.
- Individual Development Accounts/Opportunity Passport for matched savings to purchase reliable cars



## Employment



- People with past criminal history or history of drug abuse have limited job opportunities, particularly in rural areas.
- Inability to afford taking GED/ESL classes
- People who move or change phones frequently have difficulty finding and keeping jobs
  - Those with inconsistent contact information/phone and have difficulty being reached for employment. Phone numbers and addresses change frequently, or phones are on/off based on ability to pay bills
- Struggling to meet basic needs (e.g., food, housing stability and transportation) makes completing the tasks necessary to find and keep jobs difficult.
- The risk of losing public benefits suddenly creates risk, uncertainty, and anxiety about being able to pay bills and meet responsibilities
- Current application processes are overly complicated and difficult
- Lack of devices/internet access makes applying for jobs more difficult
- Lack of affordable childcare makes holding a job difficult
- Lack of reliable transportation makes holding a job difficult
  - Transitional youth experience additional barriers to car ownership due to inability to attain insurance and credit and lack of accrued capital to make a down payment
- Young adults entering the workforce face increased challenges finding jobs
  - Some lack appropriate work experience, often due to previously having short-term jobs or job hopping.
  - Some struggle getting legal documents such as social security cards and other forms of ID and credentialing.
  - Many have limited social capital and network, connections and resources to obtaining job knowledge, references and introductions.

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Work with state and federal partners to create a pilot program for a tiered system for SNAP eligibility to support those who become employed (especially parents) to gradually move off the SNAP program
- Partner with Nebraska Department of Labor to simplify the WIOA application process
- Paid “Learn and Earn” opportunities in industries impacted by staff shortages. Example: employing college students and transition-aged youth in childcares and out-of-school program sites experiencing workforce shortages. Employer can gain employees and employee can gain on-the-job training and experience.
- Collaborations and nonprofits employ young people on project work such as planning, implementing and working landlord workshops or computer collection drives in order to develop job skills and to build resumes (from Southeast Collaboration).

## Substance Abuse Prevention



### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Youth substance abuse treatment options, schools are seeing an increase in substance abuse since COVID began.
- Need to identify evidence-based strategies for families and youth Implementation of a program/support for coping skills that connect youth to each other – youth feel disconnected and losing interest since COVID limited activities in community and school. Finding ways to connect with a purpose.
- Intervention services in schools who are breaking policy for substance abuse – streamlined efforts for early intervention for youth who violate substance abuse policies on school grounds – this would require more staff

## SPECIAL POPULATION: Undocumented



- They are less likely to access services including health care because of status
- They are less likely to have health coverage
- Finding the name on the statement does not match the client's name and finding the other person proves difficult
- Non SS requesting assistance (undocumented)
- Unknown numbers of at-risk populations who have age and language barriers to vaccine
- Need to get people back to work, many jobs open
- Need for centralized resources, in multiple languages (MyLink)
- Dental services for uninsured children/families/individuals
- Mental health education awareness and supports for Hispanic/Latino populations
- Mental health vouchers that are accepted by bilingual mental health therapists for primarily Spanish speaking families/individuals
- Entry into the field for bilingual talent in medical, legal, and community settings
- Cultural awareness in agencies, organizations and businesses for the person served
- Do not have bilingual therapists

### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Private Community Response funds are available, but sometimes getting the paperwork to match the client is a struggle
- Partnering with 'Do Right Right Now' to promote vaccine, not garnering support from greater partners yet
- BCCP has hired as Spanish speaking navigator to assist with applications and outreach, First Lady developed a discussion board for ideas/solutions to be posted
- UNK providing \$100K to support the development of MyLink in Central Nebraska with Cares Act Funds
- Train the trainer in Spanish for Mental Health First Aid Training in Buffalo County
- Expand capacity to provide affordable dental services to uninsured children/families/individuals and education by increasing interdisciplinary collaboration
- Educational Campaign on mental health awareness for both English & non-English individuals/families
- Integrate bilingual professionals in community, healthcare, and legal settings

## SPECIAL POPULATION: Young Adults



- Young adults are having trouble making wise decisions and are lacking guidance - left “adrift”
- Disconnected youth lack information regarding resources
- Gas money for transitional youth
- Access to postsecondary ed/career training and re-training (affordability, accessibility issues in competitive market)
- Past due balances/debt to colleges for students stopping out/dropping out with virtual transition/pandemic related reasons
- Accessible housing. This is not related to housing/rental support financial, but availability of affordable housing units to utilize FYI voucher, rental assistance, etc.
- Access to cash assistance (not gift cards, gas cards, etc.) - cash for emergency needs

## Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Develop coaching system and connect with DHHS coach when possible
- Providing smart phones at discharge at Richard Young Hospital when youth are being discharged
- ETV - NE will receive \$406,000 in additional ETV. We have a plan to allocate \$30,000 to past due balances so youth can re-enroll in school/training. We also plan to increase the ETV awards by \$1000 per student and students are eligible up to age 27. We also hope to provide a one-time stimulus to all ETV students.
- Utilizing Venmo for quick access to cash assistance, when possible (versus cutting checks via support services funds or issuing gift cards)
- Regarding accessible housing - this is a bigger issue than we can solve - but hoping to increase accessible housing via the Blair tech campus and eventually the Sarpy County campus.
  - Need more options that landlords/programs open-up housing options that accept FYI/HUD vouchers or to partner with YHDP.
  - College on-campus housing needs to accept FYI and HUD/YHDP as forms of payment - particularly on community college campuses
- Fostering Academic Achievement network is working on a plan to re-design developmental courses so that students (all students) can move into a degree more quickly.
- Partnership with AIM/pilot with CYI youth interested in tech - rapid stackable credentialing (done virtually), shared scholarship (AIM pays for the courses, CYI pays to support students to remain stably housed/supported during courses).

## Additional Insights



- Child abuse cases being reported are more severe than pre-COVID
- Finding jobs for community members
- Many new people needing services that have never accessed before and they are unsure of where to start
- Community has jobs available, shortage of workers or people choosing not to work at this time
- Many needs for basic social emotional skill development as there has been a loss across populations and all ages due to isolation because of COVID
- Kids and families are more isolated and have become withdrawn and disconnected

### Resources needed and possible solutions:

- Starting to see some benefits of kids and families being back in a routine and integrated back into community activities