

# LAKWOOD 2012 HUMAN SERVICES SUMMIT

## Executive Summary

### **Goal:**

The Lakewood 2012 Human Services Summit was designed to map information about human services in Lakewood so as to inform decision-making by City Hall leadership about the role of local government in this arena.

The Summit brought human services providers with direct service delivery experience together to:

- Inventory human services resources available to Lakewood residents.
- Identify service gaps.
- Note trends.
- Discuss critical issues.
- Consider the role of municipal government.

### **Process:**

Over three weekly two-hour meetings held on July 17, 24 and 31 at the University of Akron Lakewood, thirty-five (35) representatives from twenty-eight (28) local and regional human services providers participated in the Summit. Fifteen (15) human services indicators, in three categories, were reviewed:

July 17	<b>Economic Stabilization</b> Income, Food, Renters, Utilities, Homeownership
July 24	<b>Physical &amp; Mental Health</b> Physical Health, Mental Health, Addiction, Disabilities
July 31	<b>Safe &amp; Supportive Neighborhoods</b> Safety & Crime Prevention, Childcare & After School, Community Case Management, Education & Life Skills Resource Information, Civic Engagement, Community Building

## Analysis:

The Lakewood 2012 Human Services Summit was convened to learn directly from service providers about the state of human services activity in Lakewood and to solicit their input on the role of municipal government.

The purpose of human services is to build, strengthen and protect the human infrastructure of a community. This field focuses on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintains a commitment to improving the overall quality of life of service populations. At the Summit, community stability was noted as a critical outcome of the providers' collective one-on-one work with residents.

The Summit affirmed that national trends and issues related to economic and housing instability are evident in Lakewood and are reflected in the increased local demand for human services. These issues include population and poverty moving out of the inner city to the suburbs, unemployment and underemployment, lack of physical or mental health insurance, a growing reliance on Medicare/Medicaid and the impact of the national housing crisis. The Great Recession of 2008 created a class of "newly poor" residents without jobs or insurance and who often carry the weight of underwater mortgages. As has long been the case, Lakewood's high quantity of relatively affordable rental properties combined with its reputation for safety and good schools, continues to make it attractive to populations in transition that are more vulnerable to unstable economic conditions.

These factors, combined with underfunded entitlement and subsidy programs, reduced eligibility limits, plus reductions or loss of other funding streams have put human service organizations under enormous pressure to meet the needs of their clients, and ultimately, the community.

Encumbering service delivery is the structure of the human service system that is staggering in its complexity. Since there is little, if any, coordination between agencies, high-need residents are subjected to multiple and onerous in-take processes at various locations throughout the Cuyahoga County. Too often, the result is failure of the resident to get help that would benefit them, and ultimately, the community.

Understanding the interconnectedness of human services indicators is highly relevant to an analysis of the subject. Unresolved issues or deferred action related to **either** basic (income, food and housing) **or** physical health **or** mental health needs can escalate into a much more serious problem with potentially catastrophic implications for the individual/household. Failure to address issues at the earliest point significantly increases the cost to the community, in terms of dollars and quality of life. For example, a resident without medical insurance or a primary care doctor may neglect a minor

health symptom until it becomes debilitating. The resident, now in poor health, finds it harder to apply for/go to work, go to school, care for family members, or get assistance for other issues. The community cost lies in emergency, uncompensated care at the hospital and an increased demand for basic needs (income, food, housing) that impacts household stability. The symptoms of a household in stress are then manifested in schools and neighborhoods across the community, creating a demand for additional and more complex services.

This vicious cycle underscores the importance of prevention programs and the availability of navigators to quickly connect residents in need to resources. Accordingly, community strategies that support resource access & awareness, wellness, education, child-care and afterschool programming, safety and crime prevention and civic engagement/volunteerism are essential to long-term community stability.

## **Role of Local Government**

With regard to the delivery of human services across all 15 indicators, Summit participants discerned the role of local government to primarily be that of advocate, convener and monitor. The most striking exception was in regard to safe and supportive neighborhood indicators where the Summit participants charged government (local and otherwise) with the responsibility of providing prevention programming that support long-term individual/family/community benefit.

### **Advocate**

Summit participants feel strongly that local government could do more to advocate at the County, State and Federal levels on behalf of residents and service agencies for changes in bureaucratic processes, eligibility requirements, program funding, economic and health policies, and increased service presence in Lakewood.

### **Convener**

Collaboration between community agencies is crucial in this time of dwindling funding. The Lakewood 2012 Human Services Summit revealed a strong desire among local service providers to address service barriers and gaps at a grassroots, local level. Participants are acutely aware of the inter-connectedness of their work and “silo-ed” nature of case management. This group looks to local government to serve as a convener to facilitate local problem solving and collaboration.

Another important aspect of the convener role is that of a clearinghouse for current resource/agency information. Agencies need information about each other and residents need to know where to go for assistance. Ideally, a system that tracked a client’s place in the system could be developed to monitor agency coordination and efficiency.

### **Monitor**

The strong opinion of Summit participants is that local government needs to improve its effort to monitor Lakewood human services needs and trends. Monitoring key program activity and indicators will support effective and authentic advocacy. Monitoring could be a natural result of the above aforementioned Convener function.

### **Provider**

The impact of prevention programs is generally long-term in nature. Therefore, the collection of short-term impact data needed for program funding requests is very challenging. For this reason, Summit participants believe that most prevention programs are appropriately provided by or funded by government entities. In Lakewood, examples of local prevention services include safety protection, health & wellness strategies, early childhood and youth programming as well as civic engagement activities.

A significant number of participants view local government in Lakewood as the entity that “fills the gap” e.g. providing transportation services and/or community case management that help residents/households navigate the human services system.

**Funder**

Local government is expected by Summit participants to allocate funding to programs related to “basic needs” economic stabilization and health indicators. Basic needs human services funding, in conjunction with effective advocacy, is viewed as essential to maintaining a tenuous community safety net.

Participants also suggested that due to the significant barriers to service presented by transportation, and literacy and translation issues, local government should play a role in resolving them, perhaps through funding support to outside agencies/institutions.

**Policy/Strategy/Enforcer**

These traditional roles of local government play an important over-arching role in the human services arena, most critically in housing, for both owner-occupied and rental units. Foreclosure implications, families doubling up, water/utility issues and code and landlord regulation enforcement were among the many housing-related issues that were discussed at length due to their high household and community impact.

Strategies and policies that encourage health, wellness and self-sufficiency were mentioned as important ways to protect and improve general well-being and the quality of life in Lakewood.