

CEOC

CAMBRIDGE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE



“We envision an inclusive and diverse Cambridge without poverty where everyone has affordable housing, quality health care, education, food security and economic stability”

Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan

2018-2020

11 Inman Street • Cambridge, MA 02139 • 617-868-2900

www.ceoccambridge.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEOC is proud to present the results of its Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan (CARSP) planning process to lead CEOC into the year 2020. This CARSP represents CEOC's strong commitment to its newly updated mission to: *"Empower people and mobilize resources to fight poverty's causes and impacts through education and organizing."*

CEOC's CARSP's Planning Committee was comprised of Board and staff members and led CEOC through a nine-month planning process from October 2016 – June 2017. The CEOC Planning Committee reviewed and approved the community needs assessment survey and key informant and focus group discussion questions, to insure that the questions were clearly written and easy to understand. The individual and focus group surveying, and key informant interviews were carried out over a three-month period. The focus groups were conducted in the primary language of the participants, English, Spanish, Haitian Kreyol and Amharic during the months of February and March 2016.

The CEOC Planning Committee reviewed and analyzed all the individual and focus group discussions and individual key informant responses from the interviews. The CARSP includes qualitative data that was collected through individual surveying, one-on-one interviews with key informants and focus groups, and quantitative data sources that are listed in the appendices.

The current situation for poor and low-income individuals is already dire. CEOC's CARSP documents the current specific challenges facing low-income and poor people in Cambridge, and some of the surrounding communities that CEOC serves.

The following are a few highlights of some of major economic impact issues identified in CEOC's CARSP: impacting low-income and poor people in Cambridge: poverty; lack of affordable housing; and barriers to health care access.

Cambridge residents live with a wide range of financial extremes. On the one hand, Cambridge has a median household income of \$75,909 that is higher than the state at \$67,846. On the other hand, Cambridge has a higher household poverty rate than the state, at 14% vs 12%. In Cambridge the poor rub elbows with the affluent daily. There are currently 471 millionaires living in Cambridge.

Low-income people in Cambridge are struggling to simply make ends meet with insufficient income, high rents and limited benefits. Fifty-six percent of individuals who completed CEOC's needs assessment survey reported that if they lost their income they would only be able to support themselves or their family for less than one month, and 28% said they could support themselves for one month.

This financial extreme is further highlighted by the fact that the poverty rate for families with children is higher in Cambridge than the state, 15% vs 13% statewide. The numbers are even higher for families with children headed by a woman alone, over 38% of these families live in poverty. People of color in Cambridge experience poverty at

higher rates than the overall population. In Cambridge the poverty rate for Whites is 10.7% and 26.4% for Blacks, one and a half times more.

Studies support the fact that poverty and wealth accumulation do not impact all races equally. *The Ever-Growing Gap Report* illustrates that over the past thirty years, the average wealth of white families has grown by 84%, 1.2 times the rate of growth for the Latino population and three times the rate of growth for the Black population. If average Black family wealth continues to grow at the same pace as it has over the past three decades, it would take Black families 228 years to amass the same amount of wealth White families have today. For the average Latino family it would take 84 years to amass the same wealth as White families.

CEOC focus group members who were people of color reported to us that they experience that the city diminishes issues of race and class, by attributing their economic situation solely to economic inequality or poverty, without acknowledging issues related to the lack of opportunities that arise because of racial discrimination. CEOC's priority to build civic engagement is critical to insuring that Cambridge's diverse populations are engaged in the public policy discussions and decisions that impact them and their communities.

Food insecurity is tied to financial insecurity. Sixty-seven percent of CEOC survey respondents reported that in the past twelve months they worried that they would run out of food before they were able to get more. Forty-nine percent reported actually running out of food in the past twelve months.

Other Massachusetts' financial statistics further highlight this growing income inequality, Massachusetts ranks sixth out of the 50 states in income inequality based upon the ratio of the top 1% to the bottom 99%. The Boston-Cambridge-Newton area is the most unequal metro area in the state. The top 1% here makes 30.6 times more than the bottom 99%. This is within a metro area that has the most expensive housing costs in the state.

According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, *Out Of Reach*, the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy HMFA has the most expensive housing in the state, requiring an hourly income of \$32.52 wage in order to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment without paying more than 30% of income. Given the income extremes of Cambridge residents in the city, affordable housing is the number one identified need in Cambridge. It is an acknowledged fact that Cambridge is experiencing an affordable housing crisis. For low-income and poor people affordable and stable housing is necessary for them to attempt to build economic stability and security. As their income increases, rents go up and benefits go down it is an unending roller coaster.

CEOC survey respondents expressed concerns about the potential elimination of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The failed proposal that did not pass the U.S. Senate would have stripped Medicaid as an entitlement program and pushed the costs onto the states.

It would have cost Massachusetts an increase of \$527 million to maintain Medicaid expansion, a 120% increase in state costs. Clearly this would not be sustainable for the state, thus jeopardizing those in long-term care, pregnant women and the many thousands of individuals who were eligible to enroll in MassHealth as a result of the

expanded Medicaid eligibility and children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Those already enrolled in health insurance realize that without ACA their health insurance and therefore their access to health care would be at risk. Sixty-seven percent of CEOC assessment respondents reported that they have health insurance, but only 23% reported that they could afford their premiums and co-pays, without the Medicaid expansion they would lose their health insurance and access to their physicians and medications.

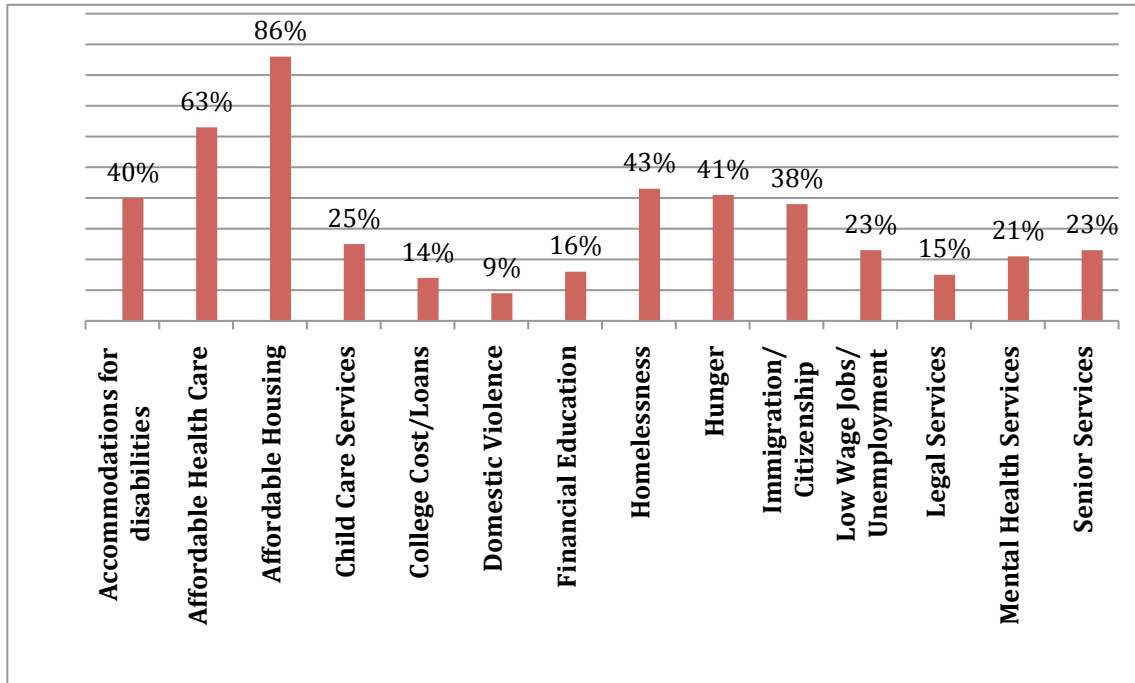
The findings are not new or surprising as stated earlier in this report. These reported priorities are the same that were identified in CEOC's previous community needs assessment, exposing the lack of progress that the nation has made in addressing issues of poverty. Not only have we not made progress, and we have heard directly from impacted low-income and poor people that it is getting worse. The quantitative data supports their claims. Rising income inequality, lack of affordable housing, increasing health premiums and co-pays limiting health care access, and diminishing access to public benefits. There appears to be little relief in sight with a proposed FY 2018 federal Presidential budget, if enacted would leave a shredded safety net hanging by a thread.

In this uncertain and threatening economic environment for poor and low-income people, the Planning Committee, after comprehensive review, discussed and submitted to the Board of Directors the results of the community needs assessment, key informant interviews and focus groups, and recommended these top priority needs for CEOC to include in its CARSP.

The priorities identified in CEOC's CARSP are the local ramification of the issues facing low-income and poor people throughout the nation: lack of affordable housing; access barriers to affordable health care; homelessness; hunger; greater civic engagement for low-income, poor and diverse people; individual debt, including college debt; and income inequality and insecurity.

The Board reviewed and discussed the Planning Committee's recommendations and approved them for CEOC's three-year goals and outcomes.

CEOC Community Needs Assessment Priority Ranking Chart



The completed CARSP was presented to the Board of Directors and approved at the June 29, 2017 Board meeting, which proposed CEOC's five three-year strategic goals:

- Goal 1. CEOC will increase the number of affordable housing units in Cambridge
- Goal 2. CEOC will increase the number of people participating in public hearings, policy forums, community planning or other advisory Boards, related to CEOC's delivery of service and/or implementation of strategies to address conditions of poverty in Cambridge
- Goal 3. Individuals and families with low-incomes are stable and achieve economic security
- Goal 4. CEOC will increase enrollment to affordable health insurance in our community and maintain enrollment for those who are already enrolled
- Goal 5. Individuals have increased access to nutritious healthy food

The Board also decided to review its mission statement and voted to change it at the April 27, 2017 Board meeting. CEOC'S revised mission is: *Empower people and mobilize resources to fight poverty's causes and impacts through education and organizing.*

The Board also decided to review its vision statement and voted to change it at the May 25, 2017 Board meeting. CEOC's revised vision is: *We envision an inclusive and diverse Cambridge without poverty where everyone has affordable housing, quality health care and education, food security and economic stability.*

In addition to the three-year strategic goals and objectives, the Board reviewed and established internal agency outcomes in the area of: funding strategies, staffing and service delivery systems, linkages and service gaps. The Board reviewed, discussed,

asked clarifying questions and only then approved the CARSP for submission to DHCD.

CEOC is prepared to challenge these complex issues with individual advocacy, education, organizing, and public policy advocacy to engage impacted and non-impacted individuals in public policy advocacy to create public policies that support and rather than sanction poor people.

CEOC's CARSP will challenge the entrenched problems facing low-income and poor people in Cambridge whose situations are exacerbated by the extremes of living in the state's most expensive housing cost area, with the highest income inequality and the highest poverty rate. It would not be hyperbole to say that Cambridge is "A Tale of Two Cities."

Looking forward it would be a serious omission to not acknowledge some specific federal public policies that would threaten the city of Cambridge and CEOC participants. Because of Cambridge's established Sanctuary City status, that rightly refuses to collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the city and CEOC are at risk for funding cuts. ICE deportation actions are also scaring CEOC immigrant participants and residents throughout the city. The impermanency of the Temporary Protective Status (TPS) is of special concern to CEOC's Haitian participants who would have nothing in Haiti to which to return, should TPS not be renewed.

Also the potential cuts to both CSBG and CDBG would significantly impact CEOC funding going forward and its ability to carry out program services. Federal cuts to a whole host of public benefit programs would negatively impact the financial security of low-income and poor individuals and families.

These potential regressive public policy changes and potential devastating funding cuts would shred the safety net upon which the poor, elderly, people with disabilities, children and low-income families rely, in order it establish and maintain some level of financial stability.

Shredding the safety net makes little sense because data shows that the safety net reduces poverty. The Center On Budget and Policy Priorities reported in May 2016, that the safety net in Massachusetts lifted 920,000 people, including 200,000 children above the poverty line and provided health coverage to 41% of all children. These safety net benefits included Social Security, SNAP, Earned Income Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits, Supplemental Security Income and Housing Assistance.

Realistically the successful completion of the goals and initiatives established in CEOC's CARSP will not eliminate poverty in Cambridge, however, the successful completion of these initiatives will reduce many of the negative impacts that poverty creates for low-income and poor individuals and families in Cambridge. CEOC in carrying out its CARSP over the next three years will be challenging poverty's impacts during a time of the greatest income inequality that the nation has ever seen.