



2025

Community Needs Assessment Update



**Head Start &
Early Head Start**

West Central Community Action

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2025 West Central Community Action Head Start Community Needs Assessment (CNA) Update

The updated community information is being added to the comprehensive 2023 Community Needs Assessment in compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.11(b).

Total Population

A total of 204,387 people live in the 6,119.09 square mile report area defined for this assessment according to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-year estimates. This is only a very slight decrease from the 2024 Community Assessment data. The population density for this area, estimated at 33 persons per square mile, is less than the national average population density of 94 persons per square mile.

Report Area	Total Population	Total Land Miles (square miles)	Population Density (per square mile)
Cass County	13,115	564	23
Crawford County	16,289	714	23
Fremont County	6,570	511	13
Harrison County	14,645	697	21
Mills County	14,563	437	33
Monona County	8,619	694	12
Montgomery County	10,254	424	24
Page County	15,168	535	28
Pottawattamie County	93,407	951	98
Shelby County	11,757	590	20
Iowa	3,195,937	55,853	57
United States	332,387,540	3,533,269	94

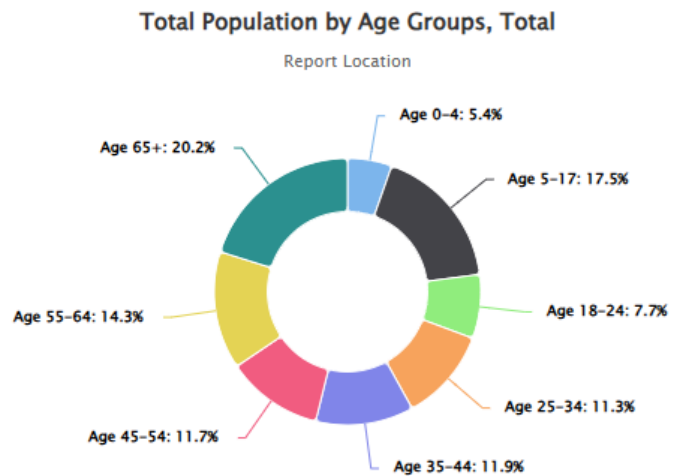
Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2019-23.

Population by Age

Population age is a key factor for programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start when planning service areas for the 0-5 age group. The table below to the left shows the population of children ages 0-

4 in the service area. The graph to the right shows the total population percentage for all age groups within the 10- county service area. The following counties had a very slight increase in the number of children ages 0-4 with this update: Cass, Crawford, Harrison, Monona, and Shelby.

Population, ages 0-4	
County	Age 0-4
Cass	670
Crawford	989
Fremont	303
Harrison	842
Mills	694
Monona	480
Montgomery	555
Page	656
Pottawattamie	5,182
Shelby	649
Total	11,020



Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2018-22

Economic Activity

Median Household Income

The report below shows the median household income based on the latest 5-year American Community Survey estimates (US Census Bureau, 2019-2023). In the service area, Mills County remains as the top earning county with a median household income of \$87,810. Page County also remains as the lowest

earning county with a medium income of only \$57,752. Page County was the only county to have a decrease in both their average and median household income from the 2024 assessment, this is predicted to be due to a decline in population. Shelby County also had their median household income decrease, every other county increased.

Median Household Income			
County	Total Households	Average Household Income	Median Household Income
Cass	5,789	\$82,873	\$61,657
Crawford	6,229	\$83,966	\$65,039
Fremont	2,760	\$93,275	\$73,750
Harrison	6,004	\$95,657	\$77,027
Mills	5,349	\$109,587	\$87,810
Monona	3,891	\$76,738	\$62,944
Montgomery	4,609	\$83,850	\$63,190
Page	6,161	\$74,484	\$57,752
Pottawattamie	37,531	\$90,639	\$71,446
Shelby	4,983	\$91,881	\$67,690
Service Territory	83,306	\$89,121	\$68,899
Iowa	1,303,763	\$110,490	\$73,147

Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2019-23

Unemployment Rate

The total unemployment rate for the service area in June

2025 was 3.8%. This was an increase from April 2024's 2.2%.

This is in line with Iowa's unemployment rate, which is also

3.8%.

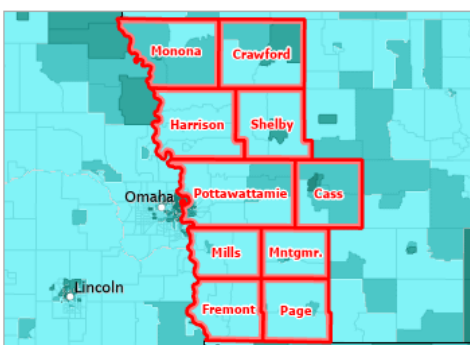
Unemployment Rate	
County	Unemployment Rate
Cass	3.2%
Crawford	4.5%
Fremont	3.8%
Harrison	3.0%
Mills	4.3%
Monona	3.0%
Montgomery	3.0%
Page	3.0%
Pottawattamie	4.2%
Shelby	3.0%
Service Area	3.8%

Data Source: US Department of Labor, [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). 2024

Poverty

Within the service area, a very slight decrease in population living in poverty was noted from the 2024 Community Needs Assessment report. The 2024 data represented 11.54% or 23,056 individuals were living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), the current data shows 11.23% or 22,335 individuals are living at or below the FPL. Cass, Crawford, and Page Counties represent the highest percentage of individuals living in poverty.

Poverty Rates by County			
County	Total Population	Population in Poverty	Population in Poverty, Percent
Cass	12,861	2,243	17.44%
Crawford	16,095	2,635	16.37%
Fremont	6,443	489	7.59%
Harrison	14,380	1,079	7.50%
Mills	14,396	989	6.87%
Monona	8,404	943	11.22%
Montgomery	10,042	1,201	11.96%
Page	14,054	1,887	13.43%
Pottawattamie	90,696	9,885	10.90%
Shelby	11,531	984	8.53%
Totals	198,902	22,335	11.23%



Population Below the Poverty Level, Percent by Tract, ACS 2019-23

- Over 20.0%
- 15.1 - 20.0%
- 10.1 - 15.0%
- Under 10.1%
- No Data or Data Suppressed
- Report Location

Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#), 2018-22.

Head Start Eligible Children and Families

Households in Poverty by Family Type

There is an estimated 11.8% of households in the service area living in poverty, this is an increase from the reported 8.4% of households living in poverty in the 2024 report.

Children in Poverty

The number of children ages 0-4 living in poverty in the service area rose to 15.8% This is slightly lower than the national average of 17.6%. Cass, and Montgomery Counties continue to stand out with the highest percent of children living in poverty within the service territory.

Children living in poverty	
County	Percent under age 18 living in poverty
Cass	31%
Crawford	13%
Fremont	5%
Harrison	11%
Mills	9%
Monona	16%
Montgomery	24%
Page	18%
Pottawattamie	16%
Shelby	4%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2019-23.

Health and Social Service Needs of Eligible Families

A barrier for WCCA Head Start and families in the service territory continues to be the lack of dental providers and facilities that accept Medicaid. The chart on page 8 reports the number of oral health care providers with a CMS National Provider Identifier (NPI). Providers included in this summary are those who list "dentist", "general practice dentist", or "pediatric dentistry" as their primary practice classification, regardless of sub-specialty. According to the data, there was an increase in both the number of facilities accepting Medicaid and the number of providers, however, families are still struggling with finding dental homes in a close proximity and waitlists.

Dental Care		
County	Number of Facilities that accept Medicaid	Number of Dental Providers
Cass	2	14
Crawford	2	9
Fremont	0	1
Harrison	4	7
Mills	3	5
Monona	2	3
Montgomery	2	5
Page	4	13
Pottawattamie	23	50
Shelby	5	7
Service Area	47	114
Iowa	645	2,036

Data Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, [CMS - National Plan and Provider Enumeration System \(NPPES\)](#). 2025

Nutrition Needs of Eligible Families

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, is a federal program that provides food benefits to low-income individuals and families to supplement their grocery budget. In 2022, the Office of Head Start began recognizing SNAP as categorically eligible for income verification. The chart shows the average percentage of the population receiving SNAP benefits in the service area. There has been a continued decrease in the number of households receiving SNAP. In 2024, 11.52% of households in the service area received SNAP, the 2025 report shows 9.9% of household receive SNAP.

Households Receiving SNAP		
County	Households Receiving SNAP Benefits	Households Receiving SNAP Benefits, Percent
Cass	802	13.85%
Crawford	457	7.34%
Fremont	294	10.65%
Harrison	367	6.11%
Mills	334	6.24%
Monona	323	8.30%
Montgomery	574	12.45%
Page	889	14.43%
Pottawattamie	3,856	10.27%
Shelby	381	7.65%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2019-23

Housing and Homelessness

Homelessness

The report below shows the number of homeless children and youth enrolled in the public school system during the school year 2020-2021. According to the data source definitions, homelessness is defined as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Those who are homeless may be sharing the housing of other persons, living in motels, hotels, or camping grounds, in emergency transitional shelters, or may be unsheltered. Data is aggregated in the report-area based on school-district summaries where three or more homeless children were counted.

In the report area, of all the 35,278 students enrolled in reported districts during the school year 2020-2021, there were 213 or 0.60% homeless students, which is lower than the statewide rate of 1.28%. Last years Needs Assessment reported 1.40% of students experiencing homelessness.

Note: Data is available for 80% school districts in the report area, representing 88.77% of the public school student population.

Number of People Experiencing Homelessness			
County	Students in Reported Districts	Homeless Students	Homeless Students, percent
Cass	3,076	4	0.13%
Crawford	3,141	1	0.03%
Fremont	1,231	4	0.32%
Harrison	2,618	0	0.00%
Mills	2,621	35	1.34%
Monona	1,344	0	0.0%
Montgomery	1,717	6	0.35%
Page	2,244	27	1.20%
Pottawattamie	15,285	135	0.88%
Shelby	2,001	1	0.05%
Service Area	35,278	213	0.60%

Data Source: US Department of Education, [EDFacts](#). Additional data analysis by [CARES](#), 2021-2022

Housing Costs - Cost Burden

The housing cost- cost burden report shows the percentage of the households where housing costs are 30% or more of total household income. The information offers a measure of housing affordability and excessive shelter costs. WCCA Head Start did update their policies and procedures to include assessing housing cost burden with any family that is over income with the updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Of the 83,306 total households in the report area, 17,791 or 21.36% of the population live in cost burdened households.

Housing Cost – Cost Burden (exceeds 30% of income)			
County	Total Households	Cost-Burdened Households	Cost-Burdened Households
Cass	5,789	1,542	26.64%
Crawford	6,229	1,022	16.41%
Fremont	2,760	508	18.41%
Harrison	6,004	1,092	18.19%
Mills	5,349	1,065	19.91%
Monona	3,891	695	17.89%
Montgomery	4,609	898	19.48%
Page	6,161	1,251	20.31%
Pottawattamie	37,531	8,659	23.07%
Shelby	4,983	1,058	21.23%
Total Service Area	83,306	17,791	21.36%
Iowa	1,303,763	288,550	22.13%

Data Source: US Census Bureau, [American Community Survey](#). 2019-23

Early Child Care & Education

Child Care Availability

The chart below shows the estimated number of children ages 0-5 that are without a registered childcare spot in the county. In the previous years, there has been a lot of effort to boost childcare options in our area, and some progress has been shown. Childcare data is important to note for the purposes of not only for children and families, but also for staff. If staff do not have care, they are unable to work.

Child Care Availability				
County	Population of children ages 0-5	% of Families where all parents work and have children under age 6	Estimated Number of Children Needing Child Care	Number of Children without a Registered Child Care Space
Cass	849	67%	569	+18
Crawford	1,254	69%	865	-375
Fremont	382	65%	248	-173
Harrison	1,011	88%	890	-498
Mills	883	69%	609	-367
Monona	561	67%	376	-216
Montgomery	642	67%	430	-126
Page	787	67%	527	-6
Pottawattamie	6,522	78%	5,087	-1,527
Shelby	774	72%	557	-263

Source: Iowa CCR & R Data Sheets, August 2025

As you see from the chart, Crawford, Harrison, and Pottawattamie Counties have the largest discrepancy in available registered child care slots. The number of children without registered slots continues to grow in almost all counties.

Recommendations

There has been a significant decrease in the number of households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits over the past year. This decrease is most likely caused from stricter requirements being imposed on public benefit programs that started in June 2023. We are anticipating we will continue to see with further changes to SNAP. With SNAP being a categorically eligible income verification factor, the program should continue to monitor this as well as review and update their child recruitment plan to assess how these changes may affect enrollment of eligible children.

There is an increased need for early education and childcare in nine out of the ten counties that are served by WCCA Head Start. Crawford, Harrison, and Pottawattamie Counties have the largest need

for registered childcare slots for children aged 0-5. In the Spring of 2024, the program was no longer able to operate a center based Early Head Start with 16 slots in Crawford County due to a building lease not being renewed. WCCA was unable to secure an alternate location that would meet the requirements. The program should continue to locate resources to transition back to a center-based option in Crawford County. In the Fall of 2025, the Harrison County Head Start classroom will go from 16 stand-alone slots to 8 school partnership slots due to the loss of a building location. The program should continue to monitor the needs in the county closely.

Sources

Community Action Partnership Community Assessment Tool

U.S. Census Bureau

CARES Engagement Network

Spark Map

Iowa Data Center within the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services

National Center for Health Statistics

The Annie E Casey Foundation- Kids Count

Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral