



Head Start of Washington County's Community Assessment

2025

Executive Summary:

The Federal Office of Head Start requires all programs to conduct a thorough community assessment every 5 years. This information is collected from census data, online research, program and community information, and feedback from stakeholders (parents, staff, community partners, etc.). The resulting data is compiled into this formal document that includes strengths, needs and resources around the community but more importantly is used to steer Head Start of Washington County's program planning as well as our short and long-term goals. It is through this process that we can address needs of the families we serve and maximize our efforts to support the children of our community. Trends throughout our service area become apparent and we can use that knowledge to guide program needs as well as training opportunities for families and staff.

Although the formal process occurs every 5 years, Head Start of Washington County is annually using surveys with parents, staff and community agencies to measure not only satisfaction levels but to monitor needs and areas of concern. This information then directly flows into our selection criteria priorities, our school readiness goal planning, our Parent Family Community Engagement planning and our overall program goals. It is not surprising that within Washington County the needs of the community are directly mirrored in the needs of our Head Start families.

Based on the data collected from the multitude of sources, there is a continued need to focus on the following both in the community and throughout our program:

- Safe and affordable childcare
- Transportation
- Housing and homelessness
- Health & Wellness
- Drug and Alcohol addiction and a continuing opioid epidemic
- Mental health needs to include trauma and domestic violence

It is our hope that the efforts of our program will lead to new opportunities for children and families in Washington County who benefit from the support of our comprehensive services and strong partnerships. We have been a leader in the early childhood community for 45+ years, and our focus will continue to be on doing whatever it takes to empower children and families to reach their full potential in learning and in life.

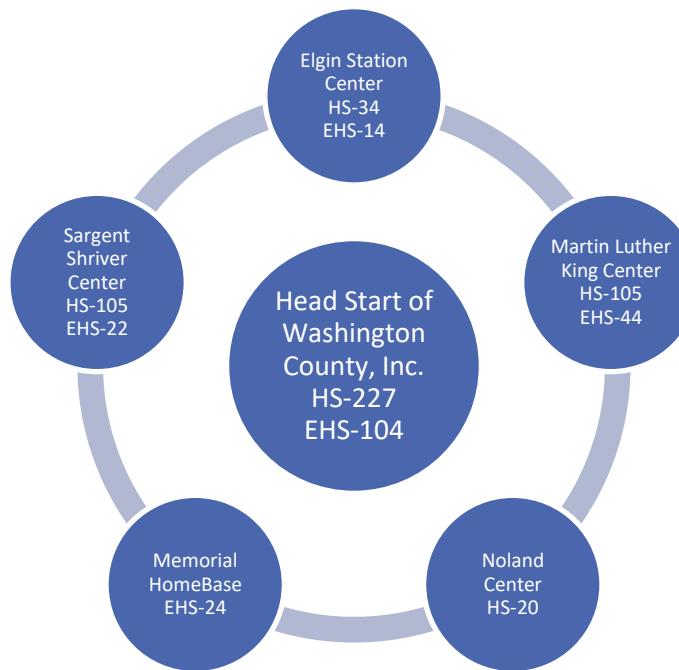
Vicki Robinson, Executive Director

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Introduction

Head Start of Washington County, Inc. (HSWC) has been providing school readiness services to eligible children and families for over 45 years in Washington County, Maryland. As the grantee for Washington County, HSWC is federally funded to provide services to 227 Head Start children and 104 Early Head Start children. Services are provided in five of the neediest areas throughout Washington County, mainly in greater Hagerstown.



The following Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2024) information illustrates Washington County to be less racially diverse than the state of Maryland, with the inner city of Hagerstown being a closer representation to the state.

	Hagerstown	Washington County	Maryland
White persons, percent 2024	60.9%	78.7%	56.7%
Black persons, percent 2024	23%	14.5%	31.6%
American Indian & Alaska Native persons, percent 2024	.03%	.6%	.9%
Asian persons, percent 2024	1.3%	2.3%	7.3%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander persons, percent 2024	.17%	.1%	.1%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent 2024	11.9%	3.7%	3.49%
Hispanic or Latino, percent 2024	10.6%	9.2%	13.3%

Race and Ethnicity within the Head Start of Washington County program differs greatly than the county wide representation as described in the chart below.

PIR 2025 Statistics (Sept 2024-Aug 2025)	Head Start children (264)	Early Head Start children & expectant mothers (134)	Program Wide (services provided to 398 children and expectant mothers)
White, percent (number)	24% (62)	15% (20)	21% (82)
Black, percent (number)	32% (85)	43% (58)	36% (143)
American Indian & Alaska Native, percent (number)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Asian, percent (number)	1% (3)	~1% (1)	1% (4)
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander, percent (number)	~1% (1)	0% (0)	~1% (1)
Two or more races, percent (number)	31% (82)	26% (35)	29% (117)
Other, percent (number)	0% (0)	~1% (1)	~1% (1)
Hispanic or Latino, percent (number)	12% (31)	14% (19)	13% (50)

Methodology

In accordance with the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards 45CFR1302.11(b)(2) and the Head Start Act, Head Start of Washington County, Inc. conducted a Community Assessment in 2025. The following information was gathered, reviewed, and used to effectively plan five-year goals to support the growth of families and children within Washington County:

- Demographic information about eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant families.
- Information about the education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families.
- Employment and school schedules of parents with eligible children
- Child Development information detailing services, childcare availability, and options available to eligible families.
- Resources available within the community
- Strengths of the community and any identified gaps in available services for Head Start eligible families.

Surveys, community partner input, and other information were reviewed and analyzed for trends within the community, assisting the agency with its program planning and goal development. Specifically, the following reports and information were used to develop a picture of the community and eligible Head Start families:

- COPA (Head Start of Washington County's data management system)
- Program Information Reports (PIR) from the past 2 years
- Healthy Washington County FY2025 Community Needs Assessment
- Washington County Department of Social Services Annual Reports
- Census Data

Service Area Data

Washington County, Maryland is in West Central Maryland. It is bounded by Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. It extends east to South Mountain, south to the merging of the Shenandoah River and Potomac River, north to the Mason-Dixon Line and west to Sideling Hill Creek. Hagerstown, the county seat of Washington County, is located approximately 70 miles west of Baltimore, MD and Washington D.C. with Interstate 70 and Interstate 81 intersecting in Hagerstown. There are 458 square miles of land and 9.6 square miles of water in Washington County, MD (of which Hagerstown is 12.17 square miles of land).

Washington County is home to nearly 3600 private sector businesses, employing over 55,000 workers and producing nearly \$6.4 billion in economic output. According to the Maryland Department of Commerce's Brief Economic Facts of Washington County report, there have been significant recent announcements including a \$150 million investment from Johnson Development for a 1.8 million square foot logistics center, an \$80 million investment from Hitachi Rail for a 300,000 square foot metro rail car manufacturing facility, and a \$100 million capital investment from Trammel Crow for a 2 million square foot distribution center. Nearly 19.6% of Washington County residents commute outside of the community to work.

Key private sector employers of Washington County:

- Meritus Health System
- Fed Ex Ground
- FiServ
- Volvo
- Amazon

In 2024, the population of Washington County was estimated to be 157,228. The overall population of Washington County is growing at a slower rate than the state of Maryland. According to Census reports, Hagerstown has an estimated population of 43,909. Below is a chart comparing specific information across state, county and city levels:

	Maryland	Washington County, MD	Hagerstown, MD
Population	6.263 million	157,228	43,909
Median Age	39.3 years	41 years	36.4 years
Median Household Income	\$101,652	\$74,157	\$49,957
Poverty Rate	9.3%	12.5%	22.7%
Median Property Value	\$397,700	\$275,900	\$207,700
Homeownership Rate	62%	61.2%	40.1%

Demographics

Employment:

As is evident in historical data, Washington County and in particular the city of Hagerstown is slow to recover from economic events (ex. 2008 housing crash and 2020 COVID pandemic). The local economy generally carries a higher rate of unemployment than either the state or country. Unemployment rates were low in 2022-2023, averaging between 2-3%. However, as noted in the chart below, jobless numbers have been steadily increasing in 2025.

August 2025	• Hagerstown- 5.5%
July 2025	• Hagerstown-5%
June 2025	• Hagerstown- 4.8%
May 2025	• Hagerstown- 4.3%
April 2025	• Hagerstown- 3.9%

Source: <https://www.communitysolutionshub.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=520&localeId=170873> (accessed 10/17/2025)

According to the agency's 2025 PIR Report, 73% of Head Start parents are employed and 65% of Early Head Start families have employment. Employment rates are typically lower for Early Head Start parents due to the availability of childcare slots locally. Employment and Financial Security is a concern of families enrolled in the program.

Families Biggest Stressors (according to the 2024-2025 Head Start of Washington County parent survey)



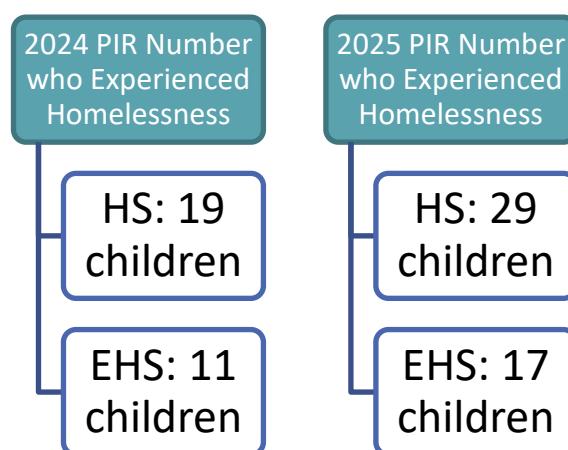
Poverty:

The poverty guideline for a family of four persons in 2025 is \$32,150. According to the Community Solutions Hub (an online hub of community data compiled by the United Way of Washington County), Hagerstown is home to a larger percentage of children under the age of 5 living below the federal poverty level than the county, state, and nation. Compared to their peers, children living in poverty are more likely to have physical health problems like low birth weight or lead poisoning and are also more likely to have behavioral and emotional concerns. Children in poverty also tend to exhibit cognitive delays, as shown in standardized test scores, and are less likely to complete basic education.

Young Children Living Below the Poverty Level	
Jurisdiction	% of children below the age of 5 living below the poverty level
Hagerstown	34.3%
Washington County, MD	17.9%
Maryland	12.1%
United States	17.6%

Homelessness:

Every January, a “point-in-time count” is conducted in Washington County to determine the number of homeless individuals in the community. The results of that count are available in June every year. The June 2025 report shows 212 homeless individuals in the community. Of those 63 (30%) are considered unsheltered. According to Head Start of Washington County’s PIR (Program Information Report), submitted annually to the federal government, the numbers of children experiencing homelessness in our program has increased throughout the past few years.



Out of Home Placements:

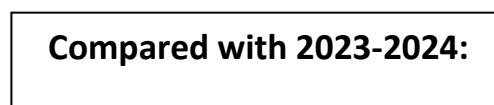
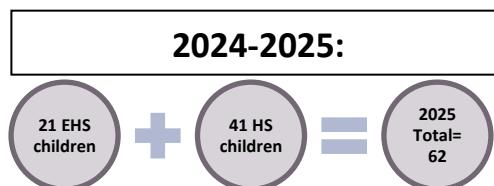
According to Washington County Department of Social Services, out-of-home placements provide short-term, continuous support services to children who require removal from the home. This can occur due to abuse, abandonment, neglect, or risk of serious harm. Depending on the child's needs, care is provided in an approved resource home, foster family home, group home, or a residential treatment center. In FY23, 59 children entered out-of-home placements: a 68% increase from FY22. Out of home placements have been steadily rising since FY19. As shown in the table below, Head Start has seen a slight increase in the number of children that were in foster care at any point during the school year:

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Head Start children	2	4
Early Head Start children	4	4

(data taken from HSWC 2024 and 2025 PIR)

Disabilities:

Maryland Special Education 2024 Census Data Report (published 5/2025) shows that there were 90 three-year-olds and 120 four-year-olds in Washington County having either an active IEP or IFSP. Many of those children are male (by more than a 2 to 1 margin). Below is data from Head Start's 2024 and 2025 PIR reports reflecting the decrease in numbers of children enrolled into the program who have either an IEP or IFSP.



Expectant Mothers:

According to Meritus Health there were 2,065 total births within Washington County between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, with 950 (or 46%) of those born under Medical Assistance. With the poverty rate at 17.9% in Washington County for children under the age of five, there are approximately 370 children born each year that would qualify for Early Head Start services. Head Start of Washington County provides infant care at three of our four centers within Washington County. In addition, we are funded to provide services to at least three expectant mothers during the program year through our Home-based option.

Identified Needs of the Community

Early Childhood Accessibility:

Due to the availability of free public preschool within the county, many childcare centers and family childcare providers have struggled to offer services to young children. In prior years, Head Start of Washington County (on average) transitioned 180 children to kindergarten per year. During the 2024-2025 program year only 48 children will transition to public school from the program. Washington County Public Schools currently provides public PreK to approximately 1270 children per year at every elementary school in the county.

Health and Nutrition Services:

Healthy Washington County conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment in FY2025. The assessment was a snapshot of the entire community. Surveys were conducted based on demographics and positions. Meritus hospital data was analyzed and compared to state and local trends, and focus groups based on characteristics were conducted (behavioral health, senior health, physician, etc.). Conclusions and Priorities were developed through careful examination of the data acquired.

The Community Health Needs Assessment developed 6 health priorities from the data collected. An implementation strategy was developed, outlining objectives, action steps, and goals that will address the prioritized community health needs and identified resources to commit towards improvement.

1. Food Nutrition & Wellness: Lack of access to affordable healthy food.
2. Food Nutrition & Wellness: Obesity
3. Mental Health: Lack of awareness of resources
4. Costs & affordability: Affordable housing
5. Social Equity & Justice: Stereotyping & Stigma towards certain communities and areas
6. Community Connection: Lack of awareness of available resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or uncertain ability to acquire these foods in socially acceptable ways. According to the Community Solutions Hub website, food insecurity is a real concern to Washington County residents. 15.8% of Washington County residents worry about having enough money to put food on the table. 18.3% of children living in Washington County are food insecure. Children who are food insecure are more likely to be hospitalized and may be at higher risk for developing chronic diseases.

According to the United Way of Washington County, 47.8% of all Washington County households qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The SNAP program supplements a household's food budget by providing additional benefits. Benefits are loaded onto a household EBT card once per month. Washington County Department of Social Services reports that during FY23, a monthly average of \$5,337,288 in SNAP benefits were spent in Washington County food stores.

According to Head Start's PIR statistics, obesity has been an ongoing issue within our children and families as well. Following the pandemic, obesity rates steadily increased to over 30%, where it has remained stable. During the 2023-2024 program year 34% of enrolled preschool aged children were overweight or obese compared to 33% during the 2024-2025 program year. Childhood obesity increases the risk for a variety of severe health issues, including bone and joint issues, sleep apnea, cardiovascular disease, and low self-esteem.

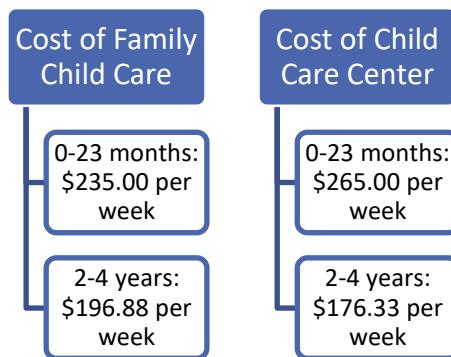
Children's mental health and behavior concerns have continued to increase within the program in recent years. The agency has been implementing the PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports) program wide for many years, supporting children and families with consistent intervention techniques. This program improves classroom environments, adult interactions, and decreases children's negative behaviors.

Economic Factors Impacting Families:

The United Way's "United for ALICE" project provides a framework, language, and tools to measure and understand the challenges faced by the growing number of low-income households in our community. ALICE (an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) looks at families who are working but don't earn enough to afford a basic household budget that includes housing, childcare, food, transportation, and health care. According to the United Way of Washington County's October 2025 newsletter, 43% of Washington County residents identified as "ALICE" families, struggling to afford the basic household necessities, despite many being employed. ALICE households face an average 15% unfulfilled income gap to reach financial stability. Because government assistance is increasingly composed of health care spending, which cannot be transferred to meet other needs, there are larger gaps in the areas of housing and childcare.

Hagerstown continues to be a city where renters are more abundant than homeowners. Only 40.1% of homes in the city are owned whereas 60.2% of homes are rented (<https://www.communitysolutionshub.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=272&periodId=6201&localeId=170873> accessed 11/4/2025). With a median rent of \$1,041, families living in poverty struggle to pay for childcare, rent, food, and utility costs. A minimum wage job (\$15 per hour in Maryland) would bring in \$600 per week for full time work. With most Head Start families working less than full time hours, they are forced to live in houses charging less than average rent or extremely small spaces where children do not have the space needed to grow and develop appropriately.

According to the Child Care Demographics 2025 Report, cost for childcare varies by age and type of care. A family of four that includes two children (an infant and a preschooler) can expect to pay \$16,585 (17.9%) of their annual income on childcare.



Community Resources and Strengths

Early Childhood Education:

Every year, Ready at Five reports the statewide and jurisdictional results for overall kindergarten readiness by performance levels as well as for student populations by gender, race/ethnicity, prior care setting, and for students receiving special services, including

children with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students living in low-income households. During the 2023-2024 academic program year, Washington County's kindergarten readiness scores improved by two percentage points to 55%. It is the viewpoint of Ready at Five and all early education professionals within Washington County that in order for our county to thrive, we must ensure that all children and families have access to enriching and supporting early learning environments. These experiences are essential, regardless of family background, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity to remove obstacles to kindergarten readiness, academic success, and a productive healthy life.

Community Resources and Strengths:

Head Start keeps an up-to-date Resource Manual full of community resources so that when a family has a need the Family Advocate can provide contact information for the outside agency to help resolve the situation. We partner with many agencies throughout Washington County, including those that provide services in the following areas:



Child Care
Disability & Special Needs
Social Services
Employment
Financial Assistance
Food & Clothing Assistance
Health/Mental Health
Housing Resources
Transportation

Hagerstown is a community where many individuals care about their neighborhoods, even though they may not always know how to make positive changes. It is a community who has struggled together to recover from the 2008 housing crash, the following recession and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Strengths and Recommendations

Community Trends:

According to the Community Health Needs Assessment there are several community Health Services Gaps that include:

- The affordability and availability of healthy food to Washington County households. Many households cannot afford food due to the rising cost of groceries, inflation, and having to prioritize other utilities.
- Timely access to outpatient psychiatry services and lack of mental health crisis beds.
- Adequate transportation to all medical services that can reach all parts of the county.

In the Early Childhood field, the increase of mental health concerns and challenging behaviors has strained not only families but teaching staff as well. Children's behaviors have escalated in the past few years, and teachers need an abundance of professional development opportunities to learn how to address these as well as how to provide safe and supportive environments for all children.

Poverty and unemployment have been growing steadily within the county, particularly in Hagerstown city. Families have been struggling to survive and get ahead. Sometimes there are underlying conditions that families need to address, but there are also an abundance of minimum paying jobs in the community where dedicated workers struggle to make ends meet.

Five-year Goals:

Goal #1: Sustain a High-Quality Workforce

Head Start of Washington County, Inc. will foster growth in staff through consistent opportunities for professional learning and wellness while creating a healthy work environment that focuses on staff's expertise, interests and needs.

Goal #2: Establish an Efficient Program-Wide Data Informed Management System

Head Start of Washington County, Inc. seeks to increase the agency's organizational capacity by supporting its continuous quality improvement, effective reporting, and collaborative decision-making efforts through streamlined, data-informed and efficient processes.

Goal #3: Strengthen Child, Family, Staff, and Community Relations

Head Start of Washington County, Inc. will build a culture of engagement through relationship-based practices within the agency to include the children and families we serve as well as amongst our staff and community partners.

2025-2026 School Readiness Goals	
Domain: Approaches to Learning	Goal: Children will demonstrate positive approaches to learning to include attending and engaging, persistence, problem solving skills, curiosity, motivation, flexibility and inventiveness in thinking.
Domain: Social & Emotional Development	Goal: Children will develop self-regulation skills to have positive social interactions with peers and adults and to follow expectations for an educational environment.
Domain: Language & Literacy	Goal: Children will understand and develop a progressively complex vocabulary. Children will demonstrate an awareness that language can be broken down into words and smaller pieces of sounds.
Domain: Cognition	Goal: Children will use mathematical skills to explore, experiment, question, and problem solve. Children will develop mathematical thinking skills that include counting, comparing, relating and patterns.
Domain: Perceptual, Motor, & Physical Development	Goal: Children will build and refine skills for such purposes as movement, balancing, building, writing, and self-help skills. Children will demonstrate knowledge of positive health and safety practices.

Community Assessment References:

Documents:

Healthy Washington County's 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment:

<https://healthywashingtoncounty.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/FY26-28-CHNA.pdf>

Maryland Child Care Resource Network Child Care Demographics 2025 Washington County Report

<https://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/Washington.pdf>

Washington County Department of Social Services FY23 Annual Report

<https://www.washco-md.net/wp-content/uploads/bocc231107a.pdf#:~:text=ATTACHMENTS%3A%20We%20will%20have%20our,version%20with%20this%20report%20form.>

Websites:

Community Solutions Hub

<https://www.communitysolutionshub.org/>

Maryland Early Intervention and Special Education Services Census Data & Related Tables:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20242025Student/2024-Census-Publication-A.pdf>

Hagerstown Census Data through Data USA

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/hagerstown-md>

Washington County Census Data through Data USA

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/washington-county-md>

Maryland Census Data through Data USA

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/maryland>

Washington County Brief Economic Facts

<https://commerce.maryland.gov/documents/researchdocument/washingtonbef.pdf>

Unemployment Data:

<https://www.communitysolutionshub.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=520&localeId=170873>

https://ycharts.com/indicators/hagerstown_md_unemployment_rate