

# 2018-2020 Pennsylvania Family Support Needs Assessment Summary

The 2018-2020 Pennsylvania Family Support Needs Assessment took a deep look at a wide range of maternal and child social, environmental, and health factors to draw an understanding of current needs and community program capacity for young families across the state.

To conduct the needs assessment, PolicyLab, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), which is co-located between the Pennsylvania departments of Education and Human Services, evaluated county strengths and need across six domains—maternal and child health, socioeconomic status, substance use, child safety and maltreatment, community environment and child care—and categorized counties as having “low need,” moderate need,” or “elevated need” for each domain. In addition to administrative data, the report includes community program spotlights developed through interviews with local service providers, who shared lessons learned from their own experiences that can inform and inspire practice across Pennsylvania.

All data collection occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is anticipated that the pandemic will exacerbate many areas of community need.

## Overall findings:

### STRENGTHS

- Since the 2014 statewide needs assessment, many of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties have improved substantially across maternal and child health outcome measures:
  - Nearly every county (63) saw improved rates of preterm birth and teen births.*
  - 60% of counties (40) saw improvements in infant mortality rates.*
  - Nearly half of counties (32) saw a reduction in the percentage of children under age 5 living in poverty.*
- Compared to national averages, on average Pennsylvanians have more access to libraries, stores that accept SNAP benefits, and, in low-income areas, healthy foods/grocery stores, as well as lower crime rates.
- More than half of the 2,200 community survey respondents perceived both the availability and quality of health and social services for families in their county as favorable.
- There was a significant increase (52%) in statewide investment in evidence-based home visiting programs over the last four years, so that more than 8,200 families are now connected to these services, up from 5,235 in state fiscal year 2016-17.

### COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Pennsylvania’s urban and rural communities are both experiencing pronounced needs related to substance use, mental health, intimate partner violence and economic conditions such as unemployment.
- Fifteen counties distributed across the state met elevated need thresholds in three or more health domains.
  - There was an absence of geographic or otherwise defined patterns of elevated need across the state, underscoring that each county has unique strengths and needs.*
- Pennsylvania’s evidence-based home visiting system serves approximately 5% of the total eligible population across the state.

### Risk domains:



Maternal and child health



Child safety and maltreatment



Child care



Socioeconomic status



Substance abuse



Community environment

Child care icon by Andrew Doane from Noun Project

\*The report includes county profiles (Appendix 1), as well as ZIP code-level evaluations for 12 counties (pg. 56).

The needs assessment is a tool by which state policymakers can compare maternal and child health county-level metrics across the state and prioritize communities for funding of family support services. Program administrators, service providers, and local policymakers can also use this report to acquire a nuanced understanding of their community in order to inform tailored programmatic and policy responses.