Key Findings
2017 Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee Needs Assessment

Introduction
The Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) is a local public agency located in Knoxville, Tennessee. It is part of the national community action network established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. CAC serves the community with a comprehensive range of federal, state, local, and privately funded programs that focus on building communities, providing services to individuals and families, and advocating for opportunities for lower-income people. Programs administered by CAC include, but are not limited to, AmeriCorps, Beardsley Farm, Community Leadership, Food and Nutrition Programs, Head Start, Housing and Energy Services, Neighborhood Centers, Office on Aging, Tax Assistance, Transit, and Workforce Connections. CAC continues to be an integral part of social services within Knoxville and Knox County. The CAC mission is to promote family self-sufficiency and independent living for low-income and other vulnerable people through caring and efficient delivery of needed services and the development of partnerships at all levels. The purpose of this report is to summarize the needs in 2017 of those living in Knox County and Knoxville for the CAC to inform decision making and program planning.

Key findings from the 2017 Knoxville-Knox County Needs Assessment include:

- Knox County is located in east Tennessee and occupies an area of 526 square miles including the City of Knoxville which occupies 104.2 square miles near the center of the county. Two interstate highways, I-75 which runs north and south and I-40 which runs east and west, intersect in Knox County making it a hub for transit.

- According to U.S. Census Bureau 2015 estimates, 451,324 people live in Knox County, an increase of 4.4% since 2010. Similarly, as of 2015, 186,291 people live in the City of Knoxville which is an increase of 3.7% since 2010. The majority of residents in Knox County and Knoxville are White. The county and the city are showing signs of becoming slightly more diverse as the percentages of White residents decreased slightly and the percentages of all other races and those identifying as Hispanic/Latino increased slightly from 2010 to 2015.

- The populations of Knox County and Knoxville are aging, as evidenced by a slight decrease in the percentage of those who are under age 18 and a slight increase in those who are age 65 and older from 2010 to 2015.

- According to 2015 estimates, approximately 29,214 Veterans live in Knox County and made up 8.4% of the total adult civilian population. The City of Knoxville’s 10,173 Veterans accounted for 6.8% of the city’s adult civilian population. Veterans in both Knox County and Knoxville were more likely to have a disability, higher incomes, and roughly the same likelihood of being unemployed as non-Veterans.

- Poverty in Knox County\(^1\) and Knoxville is rising. Since 2012, the number of those individuals and families living at or below the poverty level in Knoxville has risen 2.4 percentage points to 25.7%

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\(^1\) Knox County poverty data includes city of Knoxville.
in 2015. In Knox County, since 2012, the number of those living at or below the poverty level has risen 1.8 percentage points to 16.0%.

- Nearly 37% of Black/African Americans in Knox County and 43% of Black/African Americans in Knoxville were living at or below the poverty level in 2015 compared to 13% of Whites in Knox County and 21% of Whites in Knoxville. Hispanic/Latinos living in Knox County and Knoxville were more than twice as likely to live at or below the poverty level when compared to White, not Hispanic/Latinos.

- According to U.S. Census Bureau 2015 estimates, in both Knox County and Knoxville, a greater proportion of those under 18 years of age lived at or below the poverty level when compared to those aged 18-64 and 65 years of age and older.

- 2015 data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that in Knox County and Knoxville, females were slightly more likely than males to live at or below the poverty level.

- Poverty in Knox County and Knoxville is not evenly distributed. U.S. Census Bureau estimates from 2011 through 2015 show clusters of poverty, mostly in the areas within and immediately surrounding the City of Knoxville and in the far eastern and southwestern portions of Knox County.

- The 2015 median income in Knox County for households ($48,701) was higher than the median income for the City of Knoxville ($34,226). The median income in Knox County was higher than the median income in the state of Tennessee ($45,219), but lower than the median income in the United States ($53,889).

- The level of income inequality in Knox County is on par with the level of income inequality in Tennessee and the United States according to data available from the 2015 American Community Survey. There is slightly more income inequality in the City of Knoxville, than in Knox County and the United States.

- The 2015 unemployment rate in Knox County was 4.8% and the unemployment rate in Knoxville was 5.4%.

- The 2015 median income in Knox County for those with less than a high school diploma was $18,009, whereas the median income for those with a graduate or professional degree was $60,774. In Knoxville, the median income for those with less than a high school diploma was $16,394, whereas the median income for those with a graduate or professional degree was $50,034.

- 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data show that in Knox County 32.1% of those with less than a high school diploma experienced poverty, compared to 4.0% of those with a graduate or professional degree. In Knoxville, 40.7% of those with less than a high school diploma experienced poverty, compared to 6.3% of those with a graduate or professional degree.

- Data for the 2015 fiscal year show that Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation (KCDC) provided 3,525 units of public housing and supported 3,500 Section 8 housing units for low-
income individuals and families in Knox County. However, there currently are waiting lists for both forms of subsidized housing according to the KCDC website.

- A 2016 report found that in order to afford housing in Knox County, a household needs to earn $32,280 a year, or roughly $15.52 an hour.

- The 2015 Community Health Status Indicators (CHSI) report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that roughly 1/3 of people in Knox County experience some kind of housing stress. Housing stress is defined as living in a home lacking complete plumbing or kitchen facilities, paying more than 30% of household income in gross rent/selected owner costs, or having more than one person per room living in the household.

- In 2015, 9,339 individuals accessed homeless services from one of 18 partner agencies in Knox County; 691 of these were young adults (ages 18-24) and 753 were seniors (62 or older); 816 family households were served.

- Lead paint and radon exposure are two household environmental factors that affect low-income families disproportionately because of the cost associated with abating lead paint and radon.

- According to the 2014-2015 Knox County Community Health Assessment, 11.5% of households in Knox County received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in 2013 and 39% of students in Knox County schools qualified for free or reduced cost breakfast and lunch.

- The same report noted that 11.3% of those living in Knox County were low-income and did not live close to a grocery store. Further, 38.9% of those with incomes less than $15,000 per year reported being stressed about preparing nutritious meals compared with 4.2% of those with incomes greater than $50,000 per year.

- The 2014-2015 Knox County Community Health Assessment reported that adults in households making less than $15,000 per year are more likely to have diabetes, more likely to have had a heart attack, less likely to see a dentist, and more likely to have more poor mental health days than those who live in households making $50,000 or more a year.

- In 2014, 15.8% of Knox County adults surveyed reported that they couldn’t see a doctor in the past 12 months because of cost.

- Those residents who do not own vehicles have limited public transportation options. Those who do not live or work near a bus line or work evening or nights shifts are not able to take advantage of the transit system.

- In 2010-2014, 7% of households in Knox County and 11% of households in Knoxville did not own a vehicle.

- In 2015 an article in the Knoxville News Sentinel stated that the average annual cost of child care in Tennessee is $5,857 a year for infants and $4,515 for 4-year-olds.
• In 2014-2015, Knoxville-Knox County Head Start/Early Head Start served 1,109 children. Approximately 33% of eligible preschool-aged children and 3% of eligible infants in Knox County received Head Start/Early Head Start services.

• A 2017 survey of the Knoxville-Knox County CAC Board of Directors found that board members ranked “Helping people become more self-sufficient by getting and keeping a job” as the most important CSBG service, while community partners ranked “Helping low-income families achieve safe, affordable, and energy-efficient housing” as the most important service. CAC staff ranked education and job-training most important and CAC program directors selected comprehensive case management services as most important.

• CAC board members were asked to identify barriers that prevent community members from securing safe housing, achieving economic stability, and/or aging in place. The barriers identified cost and accessibility as major barriers. Lack of information or education were factors relating to health insurance, nutrition, and getting a job.

• A 2017 survey of 181 CAC clients found that the most frequently cited household problems were health problems, transportation, paying utility bills, buying food, and paying rent/house payments.

• In the same client survey, the most frequently cited community/neighborhood problems were crime, lack of affordable housing, drug abuse, mental illness, and homelessness.

• In a 2017 survey of CAC community partners, staff, and program managers, the most serious community problems included lack of affordable housing, lack of good paying jobs, inadequate transportation, inadequate health care, homelessness, unemployment, crime, and mental illness.

• With regard to gaps in services, respondents felt that CAC was already addressing the major household and community needs, and the predominant response from board, staff, and program managers was to expand or strengthen existing programs, especially housing and transportation.

• Regarding what the CAC should keep doing, the most prevalent responses from CAC board, staff, and program managers were elderly services, weatherization and home repair, assistance to homeless and at-risk homeless person, and case management. However, many respondents endorsed “everything.”

• In a 2017 Client Satisfaction Survey of 146 clients, all the respondents, with one single exception, rated their service experience and the CAC program staff they encountered as “good” or “excellent,” with a very high percentage (88% to 93%) selecting “excellent.”