

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2026





Introduction and Methodology

Community Action Wayne/Medina has conducted a Community Needs Assessment identifying and prioritizing the most pressing needs of low- and moderate-income households in Wayne and Medina Counties. This assessment fulfills federal requirements under the Community Services Block Grant and guides program design, partnership development, and resource allocation. This report integrates currently available demographics, community input, and partner perspectives to advance self-sufficiency, stable lives, and economic independence. This CNA uses mixed methods: resident surveys (online and in-person at senior centers, libraries, food pantries, clinics, and community events), focus groups with seniors, youth, parents, and people with lived experience of homelessness, and stakeholder interviews with local governments, nonprofits, schools, and health systems. Secondary data come from the U.S. Census Bureau (ACS 2023–2024 profiles and 2019–2023 5-year estimates), HUD CHAS data, where applicable, and state and local administrative sources. Community Action Wayne/Medina received input from 81 low-moderate income community members and conducted 14 focus groups with low-income families and community partners.

Community Demographics and Vulnerable Populations

Wayne County's 2024 population estimate is 116,632; Medina County's is 184,625. Medina has grown modestly since 2020, while Wayne has remained essentially stable. These shifts shape service demand and the geography of need across cities and rural areas.

Poverty is comparatively lower than the Ohio average in both counties but remains meaningful: the most recent ACS 5-year estimates place Wayne at ~8.7–8.8% and Medina near ~9%. These figures mask pockets of higher hardship by place and group and still translate into thousands of residents below the poverty line.

Housing costs continue to pressure households. In Medina County, the median value of owner-occupied homes is about \$285k, and about 21% of households are cost-burdened (spending >30% of income on housing). Wayne's cost-burden rates are somewhat lower overall but still significant for renters and seniors on fixed incomes.

Commute realities reflect a largely auto-dependent region with limited public transportation options. Average auto-commutes are around 21–23 minutes, with rural residents often facing longer trips to work, services, and healthcare.

As Wayne and Medina Counties continue to grapple with economic pressures, demographic shifts, and cost-of-living increases, the community's needs are likely to intensify in a few key areas. Housing affordability will remain a major issue, particularly for renters, seniors on fixed incomes, and households just above poverty thresholds who don't qualify for many subsidies. Transportation challenges will become more pronounced, especially for people in rural or semi-rural areas with limited or poorly connected transit options. Access to healthcare, including mental health and prescription coverage, will continue to strain, especially when combined with

inflation, rising healthcare costs, and the geographic distances residents must travel for services. Childcare and family-support services will also be more heavily demanded: high childcare costs, limited capacity, and mismatched hours relative to work schedules make it hard for parents to maintain full employment or upskill. Finally, as the population ages, demand for senior-oriented services (home-based care, accessible housing, transportation, social supports) will grow.

The most vulnerable populations in Wayne and Medina Counties, based on current data, are those who are low-income (particularly households under or near 100-200% of the Federal Poverty Level), seniors (65+), people with disabilities, single-parent families, and people in rural or underserved areas. For example, in Wayne County about 8.8% of people under age 65 report having a disability. Seniors living alone or with limited mobility will be especially impacted by housing repair, transportation, and healthcare access issues. Households with children may be doubly burdened by the cost of childcare plus inflexible work hours and commute barriers. Also, cultural or language minorities and limited-English households tend to face additional barriers (awareness, access, stigma) though the data suggest these are more modest in volume in some parts of our counties. These groups should receive priority in planning, outreach, and resource allocation for the upcoming 2026 CNA, to ensure equity and to maximize the impact of interventions.

METRIC	WAYNE COUNTY, OHIO	MEDINA COUNTY, OHIO
POPULATION	~ 116,510 (Census Reporter)	~ 183,049 (Data USA)
MEDIAN AGE	38.5 years (Census Reporter)	43.1 years (Data USA)
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	[Data not found yet]	~\$ 92,660 (Data USA)
PERCENT OF PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY, UNDER AGE 65	8.8% (Census.gov)	[No current number found]
PERCENT UNINSURED (< AGE 65)	~ 14.2% (Data USA)	[No current number found]
BROADBAND / INTERNET SUBSCRIPTION	[No good county-wide households statistic I found yet for Wayne]	~ 91.6% of households with broadband subscription (Census.gov)

Assessment of Community Needs

Housing

Residents report difficulty finding affordable, quality rentals and first-time buyer options, with accessibility and home-repair needs growing among seniors and people with disabilities.

Statewide analysis underscores the severe cost burden among extremely low-income renters, with Ohio's shortage most acute at the bottom of the market, a pattern reflected in local anecdotes and partner feedback. Medina's ~21% cost-burdened-household rate provides a valuable benchmark; Wayne's rates are lower overall but still material for low-income renters.

Across Wayne and Medina Counties, the housing market is tightest for lower-income renters and seniors on fixed incomes. In Wayne County, the American Community Survey (ACS) shows 47,136 total housing units and 44,453 households, implying roughly 2,683 vacant units (vacancy here includes everything from seasonal to "between tenants") in 2023. Owner occupancy is about 76%, so approximately 24% of households are renters, about 10,600 renter-occupied homes today. In Medina County, ACS reports 76,698 total units and 73,675 households, about 3,023 vacant units overall, with an 80% owner occupancy rate and ~20% renter share, or ~14,700 renter-occupied homes. These figures frame a market where most homes are owner-occupied, yet the absolute number of renting households is large, and the share of truly available, affordable rentals is much smaller than the raw vacancy count suggests.

Affordable and income-restricted stock is limited relative to need. In Medina County, there were about 1,379 subsidized rental homes in 2023 (roughly 6% vacant and available at that time, which is normal turnover). In Wayne County, the Wayne Metropolitan Housing Authority (WMHA) operates 224 public housing units across eight projects and indicates it "owns and/or

manages over 100 additional units,” while also administering Housing Choice Vouchers. Taken together with private LIHTC properties, this is still a fraction of the county’s renting households. The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2025 Gap report underscores the shortfall at the lowest income levels: Wayne County has only 26 affordable and available rentals for every 100 extremely low-income (ELI) renter households, a signal that the most profound need is among renters below 30% AMI. (A county-specific ELI ratio for Medina isn’t published in that summary article, but statewide patterns indicate persistent shortages in suburban/rural counties.)

On the pipeline / developments side, the clearest publicly verifiable counts are from local housing authorities and Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) items. In Wayne County, WMHA’s portfolio totals 224 public housing units in eight projects (with additional scattered/managed units), and the City of Wooster has documented continued pressure for multifamily production. In Medina County, Medina Metropolitan Housing Authority (MMHA) owns and operates multiple properties, examples include North View Manor (84 senior units, undergoing rehabilitation), Wadsworth Tower (elderly housing owned by a nonprofit affiliate), and Jefferson Place / Manhattan Place / Home Place, and in 2025 MMHA and partners advanced supportive or workforce LIHTC projects such as The Lafayette (10 supportive units) and a 45-unit development in Wadsworth. OHFA maintains annual lists of 9% LIHTC reservations and summaries; those documents help confirm which projects in each county have received recent awards or rehabilitation financing. (Because “number of housing developments” can mean different things, such as public housing only, LIHTC, or all market projects, your report should define the scope; the items above are the documented, affordable developments.)

Looking forward ten years, modest population change, and household formation will still translate into additional rental demand, especially if renter shares remain steady and older

homeowners age in place. Using the most recent population/household baselines (ACS 2023) and Ohio's county-projection context, Medina has been growing at ~0.3–0.4% per year; if that continues, a ~3% rise over the decade would add on the order of ~5,500 people. With an average of 2.5 people per household, that implies ~2,200 new households by 2035; if ~20% rent, that is ~440 additional renter households before accounting for replacement stock and a healthy vacancy cushion. Wayne is more stable; assuming flat to very slight growth (near 0%), new household formation could be limited (on the order of ~0–300 households over ten years). With a ~24% renter share, that yields ~0–75 additional renter households. Because ELI shortages are acute (e.g., Wayne's 26 per 100 ELI metric), nearly all incremental production that aims at ELI/very-low income will be absorbed, suggesting that a local planning target of ~500–700 net new affordable rentals in Medina and ~150–300 in Wayne over ten years (inclusive of preservation/rehab and allowing for obsolescence) is reasonable as a needs-based goal, not a forecast. These planning numbers align with state projections showing flat statewide population but uneven county growth, and they assume no major shocks to migration or household size. (Method notes: baseline persons/households from ACS; owner-rent shares from QuickFacts/ACS; growth pace for Medina triangulated from county and state materials; ELI gap from NLIHC/COHHIO reporting.)

Housing conditions in Wayne and Medina Counties reflect both the age of the existing stock and the regulatory environments shaping new development. In Wooster, the city's comprehensive plan identifies approximately 11,787 housing units within the city limits, with a median year of construction around 1974. This points to a stock that is not only aging but also increasingly in need of repair, modernization, and weatherization. The plan also highlights changing household patterns: fewer households with children and more single or non-family households. These

demographic changes suggest that demand for smaller, more flexible housing types is likely to grow.

In Medina County, local planning documents reinforce the shortage of affordable and starter homes. The 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) explicitly identifies housing as a barrier to workforce attraction and retention, noting that much of the new residential construction skews toward higher-cost units. Younger families and first-time homebuyers often find themselves priced out of the market, leaving a mismatch between supply and community need. The City of Medina’s comprehensive plan echoes these findings, calling for a diversification of housing stock and the promotion of mixed housing options across neighborhoods.

Public housing authorities in both counties are actively working to preserve and expand affordable stock, though the numbers remain small relative to need. The Medina Metropolitan Housing Authority (MMHA) set goals in its 2024–2026 Strategic Plan to preserve existing affordable housing while increasing the supply of project-based voucher units from two to six by the end of 2026. In addition, MMHA has launched rehabilitation efforts at North View Manor (84 senior units) and has partnered with nonprofit affiliates to maintain elderly housing, such as Wadsworth Tower. These efforts reflect a recognition that preservation is as critical as new construction in sustaining affordability for vulnerable populations.

At the same time, local zoning and permitting requirements in both Wooster and Medina influence the pace and type of development. Residential development handouts and zoning codes emphasize traditional single-family forms, which can make it more difficult to build multifamily or higher-density housing that is often more affordable. The tension between maintaining neighborhood character and meeting pressing affordability needs emerges clearly in local

planning discussions. These regulatory frameworks are not insurmountable barriers, but they do require intentional coordination between municipalities, housing authorities, and nonprofit developers to ensure that housing production meets the needs of the entire population.

Taken together, these findings highlight a structural challenge: while both counties are seeing new housing investment, much of it is oriented toward higher-income households, leaving significant gaps for seniors, low-income renters, and young families seeking affordable entry points into the housing market. The implications for the next decade are clear—without deliberate intervention to preserve existing stock, diversify housing types, and expand affordable rental and ownership opportunities, the gap between supply and community need will continue to widen.

At a glance: Housing

- Current rental stock: ~10.6k renter households in Wayne; ~14.7k in Medina (2023).
- Vacant units (all types): ~2,683 Wayne; ~3,023 Medina (2023).
- Affordable portfolio examples: WMHA 224 public housing units (8 projects) + other managed units (Wayne); MMHA properties incl. North View Manor (84 seniors, rehab), Wadsworth Tower, Jefferson/Manhattan/Home Place, The Lafayette (10 supportive), and a 45-unit workforce LIHTC in Wadsworth (Medina).
- Subsidized/unit context: ~1,379 subsidized rentals in Medina (2023); Wayne's public housing = 224 (plus vouchers/other).
- Depth of need: Wayne has 26 affordable & available homes per 100 ELI renters (NLIHC 2025).
- Ten-year planning target (needs-based): Medina: ~500–700 net affordable rentals; Wayne: ~150–300, emphasizing ELI/very-low income and preservation.

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE SUMMARY- HOUSING:

52% of survey respondents state that affording rent/mortgage is a concern for their household.

65% of survey respondents say affording their household expenses is a concern

84% of respondents said neighborhood safety is not a concern.

100% of focus groups identified the availability of safe, decent and affordable housing is a concern

Employment and Income

Community employers self-report that hiring qualified employees and their retention are substantial challenges. Work force employees point to childcare, transportation, and predictable scheduling as barriers to stable employment. Median wages scarcely cover housing and childcare costs for many working families, particularly in rural tracts with limited nearby services. Wayne and Medina Counties reflect a regional economy that is stable overall but characterized by significant differences in income levels and job structures. In 2023, Wayne County reported a median household income of \$71,769, compared with \$92,660 in Medina County. This gap reflects differences in workforce composition, cost of living, and educational attainment. Medina residents are more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, positioning them for higher-wage employment in professional and technical sectors, while Wayne remains more reliant on manufacturing and retail industries.

Unemployment remains relatively low in both counties, but Wayne County's rate stood at 4.8% in mid-2025, higher than the state average. Employment in Wayne is anchored by manufacturing (12,637 workers), health care and social assistance (6,796 workers), and retail trade (6,467

workers). These industries offer jobs at multiple skill and wage levels, but many of them are susceptible to wage stagnation and irregular scheduling. Medina's workforce is more diversified and has greater access to higher-wage professional opportunities, but even there, younger households and families often face difficulty entering the housing market due to wage–cost mismatches.

Commute times add another dimension to income stability. Wayne County residents have an average commute of 20.6 minutes, while Medina residents commute about 26.8 minutes. Both figures reflect a high reliance on cars, but in rural areas and for lower-income households, transportation costs can absorb a disproportionate share of income. The lack of robust public transit options limits access to employment centers, especially for shift workers, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Despite steady employment overall, many working households remain at risk of financial instability. This is especially true for those earning wages in retail or service industries and for families balancing high housing and childcare costs. The significant income gap between the two counties also reflects inequities in opportunity that nonprofits, workforce agencies, and local governments must address together. transportation sections for cross-cutting constraints.)

Employment and income in Wayne and Medina Counties show mixed strength: while there is steady labor force participation, income disparities and employment barriers persist for many. The median household income in Wayne County is approximately \$71,769, versus roughly \$92,660 in Medina County. Industries like manufacturing, healthcare, and retail employ many, but too frequently include jobs with low pay, inconsistent schedules, or limited advancement.

In response to these challenges, several nonprofit and public-sector actors are stepping in locally. The Employment Resource Fund in Wayne County (through the Wayne County Community Foundation) provides grants to nonprofits to offer employment programs and help adults access the small but essential resources needed to obtain or retain good jobs. Similarly, Ohio Means Jobs Wayne County offers training, job search support, and connections to employers, bridging some gaps where individuals otherwise lack access to education or credential programs. Goodwill Industries adds to this with training and placement programs, including helping remove non-wage-related barriers like transportation or lack of interview clothing.

Another key barrier to stable employment is childcare, especially for those working nonstandard hours or in shift work. The CAW/M Workforce Childcare Initiative helps in-home providers meet the needs of multiple-shift coverage, sick care, and special needs, thereby supporting parents who might otherwise be unable to work or increase hours. The United Way of Wayne & Holmes Counties invests specifically in programs that combine workforce development with transportation and childcare solutions, recognizing that training + employment often depends on having reliable childcare and ways to get to work.

These nonprofit programs help mitigate many “secondary” barriers to stable income: lack of childcare, transportation, job training, and supportive services. Their presence strengthens the case that, in addition to building more jobs or raising wages, local strategies must include support systems that allow people to access and sustain good jobs.

At a glance: Employment and Income

- Median household income: Wayne ~\$71,800; Medina ~\$92,700.
- Wayne unemployment ~4.8% (July 2025).

- Key industries in Wayne: manufacturing (12.6k), healthcare (6.8k), retail (6.5k).
- Educational attainment is higher in Medina, linked to better wage opportunities.
- Commute times: Wayne ~21 min; Medina ~27 min.
- Persistent wage–cost mismatch leaves many employed households struggling

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE SUMMARY- EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Focus Groups identified job skills and career development/wage improvement training as a need in the community

Education and Childcare

Ohio’s 2024 Market Rate Survey documents price pressure across care settings and age groups; statewide policy analyses show 39% of Ohioans live in a childcare desert, with deserts most prevalent in rural areas. Groundwork Ohio’s 2025 dashboard and policy briefs link the lack of affordable, quality childcare to reduced labor-force attachment, with over half of parents saying they would work more hours if care were affordable. Local providers in Wayne and Medina participate in Step Up To Quality; families rely on the state’s Ohio Child Care Search to locate licensed options and view quality ratings.

Education and childcare are critical foundations for family stability and long-term workforce success in Wayne and Medina Counties. Educational attainment differs between the two counties, with about 35 percent of Medina County adults holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to a smaller share in Wayne where most residents complete high school, but fewer continue to college. This educational divide mirrors the income differences between the counties,

with Medina households generally earning more and having greater access to professional employment. Wayne's workforce, by contrast, remains more concentrated in lower-wage manufacturing, retail, and service industries.

Childcare availability poses an even greater challenge than educational attainment. In Wayne County, there are an estimated 39 licensed daycare programs, the majority of which are center-based, but only two centers accept infants. This creates severe pressure for families of very young children, who often face waitlists or are forced to rely on informal care. In Medina County, while the absolute number of providers is larger due to population size, the barriers are similar: high costs, limited slots, and a mismatch between provider hours and the needs of shift workers. These pressures are consistent with state-level trends showing that 39 percent of Ohioans live in childcare deserts, particularly in rural areas. The problem is compounded by a statewide childcare workforce decline of more than 30 percent between 2017 and 2023, which has reduced provider capacity and increased instability.

Community Action Wayne/Medina operates both Head Start and Early Head Start, serving 272 preschoolers and 24 toddlers at eight locations across the two counties. All centers are Gold Rated Step Up To Quality rated. 24 preschool and 69 Early Head Start mothers and infants/toddlers receive weekly home visiting programs that focus on early childhood development and parental skill building.

In Wayne County, publicly funded childcare subsidies are available through the Department of Job and Family Services, but only for families earning at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Guideline, with limited extensions up to 300 percent. This leaves many moderate-income families without affordable options, even though childcare can consume more than a quarter of their monthly income. Meanwhile, local school districts face their own challenges:

Wayne’s districts struggle with concentrated poverty and high demand for free or reduced lunch programs, while Medina’s growing districts must plan for new capacity to accommodate families moving into the county.

The data makes clear that while the quality of early education programs in Wayne and Medina is high, the supply of affordable, full-day, and flexible childcare is insufficient. Without new investments in childcare infrastructure, expanded subsidies, and continued nonprofit innovation, families across the counties will remain caught between the need to work and the inability to find care.

At a glance: Education and Childcare

- Medina County: ~35% of adults hold bachelor’s degrees; lower in Wayne.
- Wayne County: ~39 daycare programs, but only 2 centers accept infants.
- CAW/M Head Start & Early Head Start: 272 preschool and 24 toddlers across 2 counties.
- All CAW/M centers rated 5 stars in Step Up to Quality.
- Childcare deserts affect ~39% of Ohioans, including many rural families here.
- Statewide childcare workforce dropped ~32% from 2017–2023, reducing capacity.
- Public subsidies are limited for families above ~130% FPL (with limited extensions), leaving many moderate-income households unsupported.

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES SUMMARY- EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

25% of respondents stated that affordable childcare was a concern

24% of those surveyed self-disclosed they have been told that their child is behind on development milestones.

Health and Wellness

Local health departments report ongoing needs for maternal-child health, WIC, immunizations, and Help Me Grow home visiting. Access, affordability, and transportation to appointments are common barriers for both counties' population.

Health outcomes in Wayne and Medina Counties reflect both challenges and strong community assets. In Wayne County, about 14 percent of residents under age 65 lack health insurance, a rate higher than both state and national averages. Medina County fares somewhat better, but pockets of underinsurance remain, especially among service-sector workers and families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford employer or marketplace coverage. Across both counties, Medicaid and Medicare play a critical role in covering low-income families, children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Recent Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs) highlight shared priorities. In Wayne County, the 2024 CHNA identified mental health, substance use, chronic health conditions, and maternal-infant health as top issues. Suicide rates, substance use disorders, and childhood obesity stand above state and national benchmarks, while breastfeeding and prenatal care access have yet to meet Healthy People 2030 targets. Medina County's CHNA points to behavioral health, access to affordable healthcare, and chronic disease prevention as urgent needs. About 15 percent of Medina residents report frequent mental distress, and community surveys consistently identify transportation, clinic availability, and affordability as barriers to care. Chronic disease indicators, including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and obesity, remain high in both counties.

Nonprofits and community-based providers play a vital role in closing these gaps. In Wayne County, the Viola Startzman Clinic provides free medical, dental, and pharmacy services to

uninsured and underinsured residents, while the Counseling Center of Wayne & Holmes Counties offers mental health and substance use treatment. Medina County has its own nonprofit anchors, including the Medina Health Ministry, which delivers free care to uninsured adults, and the Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health (ADAMH) Board, which funds prevention and treatment programs. These nonprofit-led efforts ensure that vulnerable residents, including the uninsured, low-income seniors, and those struggling with addiction, have access to essential services.

Despite these strengths, the CHNAs also reveal important gaps. Behavioral health remains the most pressing unmet need: provider shortages, long waitlists, and limited after-hours crisis services leave many without timely care. Maternal and infant health outcomes highlight the need for more home visiting, doula programs, and breastfeeding support. Transportation barriers continue to limit access to primary care, specialty care, and pharmacies, especially in rural areas. Chronic disease prevention and management programs exist but are not scaled to population need, leaving high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease unaddressed.

Nonprofits are well positioned to help fill these gaps. By expanding 24/7 crisis and peer support services, nonprofits can complement existing behavioral health systems. They can also play a key role in telehealth access by providing digital literacy training, devices, and spaces for virtual appointments. Home visiting and maternal health programs could be scaled to improve infant outcomes, while community-based wellness programs delivered through schools, churches, and neighborhood centers can help address chronic disease. Finally, nonprofits can continue to serve as integrators across systems, linking healthcare with housing, food security, and transportation supports to address the broader social determinants of health.

At a glance: Health and Wellness

- Wayne: ~14% uninsured under age 65; Medina lower but still with underinsured groups.
- Top priorities: mental health, substance use, chronic disease, maternal-infant health.
- Behavioral health distress: ~15% of Medina residents report frequent mental distress; Wayne suicide and substance use rates above state averages.
- Chronic conditions: diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, obesity prevalent in both counties.
- Maternal/child gaps: low breastfeeding continuation, rising low birth weight, limited prenatal access in some areas.
- Nonprofit safety nets: Viola Startzman Clinic (Wayne), Counseling Center (Wayne/Holmes), Medina Health Ministry, ADAMH Board.
- Gaps: insufficient behavioral health providers, limited after-hours care, rural transportation barriers, and under-scaled chronic disease prevention.
- Opportunities: expand crisis support, maternal health home visiting, telehealth access, and wellness programming through community partners.

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE SUMMARY- HEALTH AND WELLNESS

43% of survey respondents self-report they cannot afford to pay their medical bills

18% of the surveyed cannot afford their prescribed medication

Transportation

Transportation access in Wayne and Medina Counties is a persistent barrier to employment, and healthcare, particularly for low-income and rural households. Both counties remain heavily car-dependent. Average commute times are about 20.6 minutes in Wayne County and 26.8 minutes in Medina. For many households, the costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle consume a disproportionate share of household income.

Public transit systems exist but are limited in scope and hours of operation. In 2025, Wayne County launched WayGo, replacing the former Wooster Transit. WayGo operates two fixed routes in Wooster plus countywide demand-response service. Service hours are Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. In 2024, Wooster's transit system provided 51,294 trips, down from more than 64,000 in 2023. Roughly 60 percent of these trips were through the taxi-pass program, and only 40 percent were on the fixed-route loop, showing strong reliance on subsidized ride options. Costs for the program reached \$678,832 in 2024, averaging \$14.98 per trip, with projections pushing over \$700,000 in 2025. Fixed-route ridership fell to about 1,752 trips per month, compared to over 3,000 per month in the earlier service model, underscoring challenges in maintaining ridership with limited route coverage and frequency.

In Medina County, Medina County Public Transit (MCPT) provides fixed routes in Medina, Brunswick, and Wadsworth, along with countywide demand-response rides. In 2023, MCPT delivered 70,136 passenger trips using a fleet of 32 vehicles and more than 32,000 vehicle revenue hours. While this represents significant local capacity, it remains limited when compared

with the county's population of more than 180,000. Fixed-route frequency is constrained, and demand-response trips often require long wait times.

Despite these systems, gaps remain significant. Neither county offers robust third shift/weekend service, leaving workers in manufacturing, healthcare, and service industries unable to rely on public transit for early morning or late-night shifts. Rural residents in both counties experience long wait times or trip denials when demand-response is over capacity. Transportation for medical needs, especially behavioral health and specialty care, is a recurring barrier, particularly for residents outside Wooster and Medina's urban centers.

Nonprofits and social service agencies provide critical stopgap solutions. Community Action Wayne/Medina (CAW/M) administers the local Mobility Management program, funded through ODOT, which helps residents understand and coordinate transportation options. CAW/M also provides emergency transportation assistance to clients. The United Way of Wayne & Holmes Counties funds gas vouchers and volunteer driver programs to support low-income families, while organizations like the Counseling Center of Wayne & Holmes Counties and the Medina ADAMH Board partner with MCPT and WayGo to ensure behavioral health clients can access care. These interventions are essential but fragmented, often depending on short-term grant cycles.

Opportunities exist to strengthen the region's transit networks through better coordination and expanded service. Extending evening and weekend hours, expanding the volunteer driver pool, and piloting micro transit solutions that blend ride-sharing with public transit could address gaps for rural and low-income residents. Nonprofits can play a unique role by subsidizing passes, advocating for state and federal investment, and working with healthcare providers to integrate transportation into service planning. Sustained funding for both WayGo and MCPT is critical:

without reliable transit, many residents will remain cut off from work, healthcare, and community access.

At a glance: Transportation

- Commute times: Wayne ~20.6 min; Medina ~26.8 min.
- Wayne (Wooster/WayGo): 51,294 trips in 2024, down from 64k in 2023; 60% taxi-pass, 40% fixed route.
- Cost per trip: ~\$14.98; total program cost ~\$678,832 in 2024.
- Medina MCPT: 70,136 trips in 2023, 32 vehicles, serving ~183k residents.
- Gaps: limited evening/weekend service, rural access, long waiting times for demand-response, and lack of medical transport.
- Nonprofits: CAW/M Mobility Management, United Way gas vouchers & volunteer drivers, Counseling Center/ADAMH partnerships.
- Opportunities: expand hours, micro transit pilots, volunteer drivers, stronger advocacy for state/federal funding.

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSE SUMMARY- TRANSPORTATION

80% of focus group participants suggested that affordable vehicles and access to car repair funds is critical for the community.

79% of survey respondents do not live close to public transit access.

24% of respondents state they were unable to get the things they need because of a lack of transportation.

35% of those surveyed said they had difficulty affording transportation.

Food Insecurity

Families on fixed or low incomes continue to report tradeoffs between food, housing, utilities, and medication. Coordination between pantry networks, WIC, and health providers remains important to reach seniors, rural households, and families with limited transportation.

Food insecurity in Medina and Wayne Counties remains a serious and growing concern, one that affects households across demographic lines but hits low-income families, seniors, and rural residents hardest. In Medina County, Feeding Medina County reported serving 1,177 individuals in 2024 via its emergency pantry, home delivery (through DoorDash) and senior/disabled housing delivery programs. In addition, the Weekender Bags program serves over 1,050 children weekly; pantry distributions in Brunswick, Lodi, Medina, and Wadsworth provide each participating household with 60-80 pounds of groceries. Wooster Hope Center, People to People Ministries and religious affiliated food pantries in Wayne County assist Wayne County residents in obtaining emergency food services.

Despite these strengths, many still go unreached or underserved. Rural areas within both counties often lack nearby pantry or distribution points; travel and transportation pose significant burdens. Working families may be unable to access food distributions during business hours; similarly, seniors or homebound individuals face mobility barriers. Nutritional variety isn't always consistent—high-quality fresh items may be less available in smaller or remote pantries. Some programs run only monthly or at limited intervals, which may not adequately meet fluctuating household needs.

Nonprofits in both counties have made important inroads: home delivery services, school-based food programs for children (Weekender Bags), and programs that serve seniors and disabled

residents. They are central to filling gaps that government programs (SNAP, WIC) alone cannot close. However, scaling and overlaying these efforts is crucial. Expanded mobile distributions, more frequent and flexible pantry hours, increased home-delivery options, nutrition education, partnerships with schools and housing authorities, and better awareness campaigns could significantly increase reach.

CNA SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES SUMMARY- FOOD INSECURITY

15% of respondents state that they do not have enough food each day.

49% of the surveyed say they are not eligible for food assistance and could use the assistance.

58% of those surveyed said the community needs more access to food programs.

Senior Services

Older adults make up one in five residents in both counties. 19.9% of Wayne County residents and ~20.5% of Medina County residents are age 65+, mirroring the steady aging trend across Ohio. Local trend dashboards confirm the 65+ cohort is the fastest-growing age group in both counties, and Medina’s share of residents 60+ reached ~28.5% in 2024, underscoring how quickly needs are expanding.

Nutrition and “aging in place.” Medina County’s public senior agency reports concrete growth in meal delivery: the Meals on Wheels (home-delivered) program provided 47,111 meals in 2024, up from ~44k the year prior; congregate meal sites in Medina and Brunswick also served thousands of meals on-site. Together, these programs are a frontline defense against malnutrition, isolation, and avoidable hospitalizations. In Wayne County, Meals on Wheels of Northeast Ohio

runs a mobile outreach for adults 60+ (with sites scheduled across the county), complementing congregate meal opportunities coordinated by the Area Agency on Aging's local center listings. These services are vital in rural townships where full-service groceries, transit, and family supports are needed.

As the 60+ and 65+ cohorts grow, demand outpaces capacity for home-delivered meals, in-home supports, and caregiver relief. Waitlists ebb and flow, but county agencies publicly report year-over-year meal growth and higher service requests. Rural seniors face added barriers (distance, limited transit), so even "available" services are hard to reach.

Family caregivers are shouldering more complex care for longer; local CHNAs also flag isolation and mental health among older adults as rising issues, especially for those living alone or after a recent health event. Home repair for aging homes is also crucial for assisting seniors in staying in their homes longer, apposed to moving into assisted living.

At a glance: Senior Services

- 19.9% of Wayne County residents and ~20.5% of Medina County residents are age 65+
- 45,000 meals on average are provided to seniors in Medina County annually
- Opportunities for caregiver relief, mental health services, transportation and home repair are critical for the aging population.

Summary of Findings

Despite the strengths of Wayne and Medina Counties, strong civic institutions, engaged nonprofits, and relatively low unemployment, residents continue to face persistent barriers that limit their ability to achieve stability and long-term independence. These barriers cut across sectors and reinforce one another, leaving vulnerable populations at particular risk.

Housing remains one of the most significant impediments. Rising home values in Medina County and aging, limited rental stock in Wayne County create affordability gaps that exclude low- and moderate-income households. Families earning minimum wage or living on fixed incomes cannot find units that meet their budgets, and even when housing is available, quality issues such as lead paint, outdated systems, and poor accessibility create safety concerns.

Waiting lists for subsidized or senior housing are long, and few new developments are affordable to low-income families.

Employment and income barriers are closely tied to housing. While unemployment is relatively low, many of the jobs in Wayne County are concentrated in lower-wage manufacturing, retail, or service industries, and Medina's rapid growth has not eliminated inequities in wages or access. For those working full-time, wages often fail to keep pace with rising housing, childcare, and transportation costs, making it difficult to achieve financial stability.

Childcare access and affordability are among the most cited barriers for families. Wayne County has fewer than 40 licensed daycare providers and only two that accept infants, while Medina providers struggle with high demand and workforce shortages. State subsidies cut off at modest income thresholds, leaving many working families in a "benefits cliff" where they earn too much

to qualify but far too little to cover market-rate care. Without accessible childcare, parents cannot consistently participate in the workforce or job training.

Health and wellness challenges add another layer. Wayne County's uninsured rate remains higher than state averages, while Medina residents report difficulty accessing affordable care and long wait times for specialists. Behavioral health needs, particularly mental health and substance use are rising in both counties, yet provider shortages and limited after-hours services create long delays in treatment. Seniors face additional impediments, with isolation, caregiver shortages, and limited access to in-home support.

Transportation is a daily barrier for many. While Wayne's new WayGo service and Medina County Public Transit provide essential lifelines, both systems remain limited in frequency, service hours, and rural coverage. Residents without cars, especially seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income workers, often cannot reliably reach jobs, healthcare, or grocery stores. This creates a cascade of secondary barriers, from missed medical appointments to lost wages.

Food insecurity also persists, with roughly 11 percent of Wayne residents and 8 percent of Medina residents struggling to secure enough food. Nonprofits like People to People Ministries and Feeding Medina County play central roles in filling this gap, but demand is rising, and rural households face additional burdens due to limited grocery access and transportation.

Finally, environmental and infrastructure impediments intersect with all of these challenges. Rural households relying on private wells face water quality risks that are costly to mitigate. Families in older housing are exposed to lead hazards, while both counties contend with localized flooding and poor air quality on high-risk days. Broadband access, particularly in

Wayne's rural areas, remains uneven and costly, cutting off opportunities for remote work, online learning, and telehealth.

These barriers are not isolated. Instead, they reinforce one another in ways that deepen inequity. A single parent working a low-wage job may also lack affordable childcare, live in an aging rental with environmental hazards, struggle to afford healthy food, and be unable to reach medical care reliably due to limited transportation. Recognizing these interwoven barriers is essential to designing nonprofit and public sector interventions that can move residents toward stability, opportunity, and long-term independence.

Prioritized Needs and Recommendations

The most urgent needs across Wayne and Medina are affordable housing, transportation access, healthcare including behavioral health, childcare and family supports, and senior services. Recommended strategies include: preserve and add affordable units (including repairs/accessibility for seniors), align workforce programs with employer demand while offering wraparound supports, expand childcare capacity and affordability, grow senior ride and in-home supports, and invest in sidewalks, lighting, parks, and broadband. These recommendations align with state and national evidence on cost burden and early-childhood access while responding to local transit developments.

References

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Wayne County, Ohio; Medina County, Ohio. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>
- Census Reporter. (2023). ACS 5-year Estimates: Wayne County, OH; Medina County, OH.
- Data USA. (2023). Medina County, OH Profile.
- National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC). (2025). The Gap: Ohio Housing Needs.
- Groundwork Ohio. (2025). Child Care Desert Data Dashboard.
- Ohio Department of Job & Family Services. (2024). Ohio Market Rate Survey for Child Care.
- WayGo Transit. (2025). About Our Service. Wayne County, OH.
- Medina County Public Transit (MCPT). (2024). Transit Routes and Services.
- Wayne County Health Department. (2024). Annual Report (WIC and Home Visiting).
- Medina County Health Department. (2024). Annual Report.
- Demographics & Community Profile
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Wayne County, Ohio; Medina County, Ohio. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>
- Data USA. (2023). Wayne County, OH; Medina County, OH Profiles. Retrieved from <https://datausa.io>
- Census Reporter. (2023). ACS 5-year Estimates: Wayne County, OH; Medina County, OH. Retrieved from <https://censusreporter.org>
- Housing
- National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC). (2025). The Gap: Ohio Housing Needs by County. Retrieved from <https://nlihc.org/gap>
- City of Wooster. (2023). Wooster Comprehensive Plan. Retrieved from <https://www.woosteroh.com>
- Medina Metropolitan Housing Authority (MMHA). (2024). Strategic Plan 2024–2026. Retrieved from <https://www.mmha.org>
- City of Medina. (2022). Comprehensive Plan. Retrieved from <https://medinaoh.org>
- Medina County. (2022). Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Retrieved from <https://www.medinacounty.org>
- Employment & Income
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics / Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (FRED). (2025). Unemployment Rate in Wayne County, OH. Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org>
- Data USA. (2023). Employment by Industry: Wayne County, OH; Medina County, OH. Retrieved from <https://datausa.io>
- Wayne County Community Foundation. (2025). Employment Resource Fund. Retrieved from <https://waynecountycommunityfoundation.org>

- Community Action Wayne/Medina (CAW/M). (2025). Workforce Childcare Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.cawm.org>
- United Way of Wayne & Holmes Counties. (2025). Our Work. Retrieved from <https://www.uwwh.org>
- Goodwill Industries of Wayne and Holmes Counties. (2025). Employment & Training Services. Retrieved from <https://www.goodwillconnect.org>
- Wayne County Job & Family Services. (2025). OhioMeansJobs Wayne County. Retrieved from <https://www.waynecountydjfs.com>
- Education & Childcare
- Community Action Wayne/Medina (CAW/M). (2025). Head Start & Early Head Start. Retrieved from <https://www.cawm.org>
- CareLuLu. (2025). Wayne County, OH Daycare Listings. Retrieved from <https://www.carelulu.com>
- Wayne County Job & Family Services. (2025). Publicly Funded Child Care. Retrieved from <https://www.waynecountydjfs.com>
- Policy Matters Ohio. (2025). Ohio's Childcare Crisis: Workforce and Access. Retrieved from <https://policymattersohio.org>
- Groundwork Ohio. (2025). Child Care Desert Data Dashboard. Retrieved from <https://www.groundworkohio.org>

- Health & Wellness

- Wayne County Health Department. (2024). Community Health Assessment 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.wayne-health.org>
- Wayne County Health Department. (2021–2024). Community Health Improvement Plan. Retrieved from <https://odh.ohio.gov>
- Cleveland Clinic Medina Hospital. (2022). Community Health Needs Assessment. Retrieved from <https://my.clevelandclinic.org>
- Healthy NEO. (2023). Mental Health Indicators: Medina County, OH. Retrieved from <https://www.healthyneo.org>
- Viola Startzman Clinic. (2025). Our Services. Retrieved from <https://www.startzmanclinic.org>
- Counseling Center of Wayne & Holmes Counties. (2025). Mental Health & Substance Use Services. Retrieved from <https://www.ccwhc.org>
- Medina Health Ministry. (2025). Free Care for the Uninsured. Retrieved from <https://www.medinahhm.org>
- Alcohol, Drug Addiction & Mental Health (ADAMH) Board of Medina County. (2025). Services & Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.medinamentalhealth.org>



Community Action Wayne/Medina

Community Needs Assessment 2026 Summary

Methodology

Community Action Wayne/Medina uses mixed data collection methods to conduct our Community Needs Assessment. Methods included: resident surveys (online and in-person at senior centers, libraries, food pantries, clinics, faith-based organizations and community events), focus groups with seniors, youth, parents, and people with lived experience of homelessness, and stakeholder conversations with local governments, nonprofits, schools, and health systems. Secondary data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau (ACS 2023–2024 profiles and 2019–2023 5-year estimates), HUD CHAS data, where applicable, and state and local administrative sources.

Community Partner Contributors:

Community Based Organizations	Faith Based Organizations	Private Sector	Public Sector	Educational Institutions
OneEighty	Catholic Charities	Viola Startzaman	City of Wooster	Wayne Co Career Center
Poeple to People	Love Inc	Boys and Girls club	Wayne County	Wooster City Schools
Wayne Community Foundation	Trinity	Wooster Surge	City of Orrville	College of Wooster
United Way	St Mary		City of Rittman	
Habitat For Humanity			JFS	
			Health Dep.	
			Red Cross	
			JFS-Means Job-OMJ	

Findings Summary:

Community Voices

Surveys and focus groups elevate the lived experience behind the numbers: the stress of choosing between rent and groceries; long or unreliable trips to medical appointments; and the mismatch between childcare hours and shift work. Seniors emphasize social connection and practical support, such as rides, home repairs, and help navigating benefits. Partners describe coordination gaps that slow referrals and fragment services. These qualitative insights will be presented with anonymized quotes and brief vignettes once fieldwork closes.



Community Action Wayne/Medina

Community Needs Assessment 2026 Summary

Barriers and Impediments

Despite the strengths of Wayne and Medina Counties, strong civic institutions, engaged nonprofits, and relatively low unemployment, residents continue to face persistent barriers that limit their ability to achieve stability and long-term independence. These barriers cut across sectors and reinforce one another, leaving vulnerable populations at particular risk.

Housing remains one of the most significant impediments. Rising home values in Medina County and aging, limited rental stock in Wayne County create affordability gaps that exclude low- and moderate-income households. Families earning minimum wage or living on fixed incomes cannot find units that meet their budgets, and even when housing is available, quality issues such as lead paint, outdated systems, and poor accessibility create safety concerns. Waiting lists for subsidized or senior housing are long, and few new developments are affordable to low-income families.

Employment and income barriers are closely tied to housing. While unemployment is relatively low, many of the jobs in Wayne County are concentrated in lower-wage manufacturing, retail, or service industries, and Medina's rapid growth has not eliminated inequities in wages or access. For those working full-time, wages often fail to keep pace with rising housing, childcare, and transportation costs, making it difficult to achieve financial stability.

Childcare access and affordability are among the most cited barriers for families. Wayne County has fewer than 40 licensed daycare providers and only two that accept infants, while Medina providers struggle with high demand and workforce shortages. State subsidies cut off at modest income thresholds, leaving many working families in a "benefits cliff" where they earn too much to qualify but far too little to cover market-rate care. Without accessible childcare, parents cannot consistently participate in the workforce or job training.



Community Action Wayne/Medina

Community Needs Assessment 2026 Summary

Health and wellness challenges add another layer. Wayne County's uninsured rate remains higher than state averages, while Medina residents report difficulty accessing affordable care and long wait times for specialists. Behavioral health needs, particularly mental health and substance use are rising in both counties, yet provider shortages and limited after-hours services create long delays in treatment. Seniors face additional impediments, with isolation, caregiver shortages, and limited access to in-home support.

Transportation is a daily barrier for many. While Wayne's new WayGo service and Medina County Public Transit provide essential lifelines, both systems remain limited in frequency, service hours, and rural coverage. Residents without cars, especially seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income workers, often cannot reliably reach jobs, healthcare, or grocery stores. This creates a cascade of secondary barriers, from missed medical appointments to lost wages.

Food insecurity also persists, with roughly 11 percent of Wayne residents and 8 percent of Medina residents struggling to secure enough food. Nonprofits like People to People Ministries and Feeding Medina County play central roles in filling this gap, but demand is rising, and rural households face additional burdens due to limited grocery access and transportation.

Finally, **environmental and infrastructure impediments** intersect with all of these challenges. Rural households relying on private wells face water quality risks that are costly to mitigate. Families in older housing are exposed to lead hazards, while both counties contend with localized flooding and poor air quality on high-risk days. Broadband access, particularly in Wayne's rural areas, remains uneven and costly, cutting off opportunities for remote work, online learning, and telehealth.

These barriers are not isolated. Instead, they reinforce one another in ways that deepen inequity. A single parent working a low-wage job may also lack affordable childcare, live in an aging rental with environmental hazards, struggle to afford healthy food, and be unable to reach medical care reliably due to limited transportation. Recognizing these interwoven barriers is



Community Action Wayne/Medina

Community Needs Assessment 2026 Summary

essential to designing nonprofit and public sector interventions that can move residents toward stability, opportunity, and long-term independence.

Prioritized Needs and Recommendations

The most urgent needs across Wayne and Medina are **affordable housing, transportation access, healthcare including behavioral health, childcare and family supports, and senior services**. Recommended strategies include: preserve and add affordable units (including repairs/accessibility for seniors), align workforce programs with employer demand while offering wraparound supports, expand childcare capacity and affordability, grow senior ride and in-home supports, and invest in sidewalks, lighting, parks, and broadband. These recommendations align with state and national evidence on cost burden and early-childhood access while responding to local transit developments.