



# Strategic Plan 2026-2028

## SUMMARY

**Vision:** A community in which everyone works together to end poverty.

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**Mission:** To break the cycle of poverty in Skagit County by walking alongside people who want to build a hope-filled future for themselves, their children, and the community.

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**Values:**

Integrity: We do the right thing and follow through on our commitments.

Compassion: We honor our shared humanity. We are sensitive to the burdens of those we serve and each other and treat everyone with dignity and kindness.

Empowerment: We walk alongside those we serve as they work toward their own solutions or goals.

Community: We believe that we can achieve more together than apart, so we build partnerships and practice teamwork.

Resilience: We demonstrate flexibility in the face of change, pivoting to meet the evolving needs of our customers and community.

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**Equity Statement:**

Guided by those we serve in our community, including underserved and marginalized populations, we act to remove barriers and build opportunity for all. We learn by listening to people with lived experience, and we support the development of leadership that is representative of our community.

# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Community Action agencies are required by their Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding to conduct a community needs assessment of service areas every three years and to use the findings to inform their strategic planning and operations. Community Action of Skagit County conducted its assessment in fall of 2024 with the following goals in mind:

- Show the dimensions of poverty in Skagit County with quantitative and qualitative data.
- Present and analyze our agency service data for the individual, family, community, and agency needs they convey.
- Based on the data, identify the areas of greatest need in Skagit County so that we and others can use it for strategic planning purposes and design services that meet community members' needs.
- Highlight the actions we have already taken to address the top needs identified and use asset-mapping of resources in the County to address these priority areas.

## **Summary of Key Findings:**

### **Affordable Housing and Shelter Options**

There is a dearth of affordable housing in the county, accessible to all income levels under 100% of the Area Median Income (AMI). In our previous CNA, we drew attention to the fact that there were not enough rental units to be able to quickly re-house people when necessary. After a period of significant inflation in the cost of housing and food, even middle-income families are struggling to find places they can afford to live, which means that hospitals, schools, shops, and manufacturers are less able to hire new staff. Elected officials and public and private organizations have attempted to work together to resolve this crisis. In addition to the need for workforce housing, there is a dire need for temporary and emergency shelters. People living on the street have few options for respite, especially to recover from medical emergencies or to survive during severe weather.

### **Access to Mental and Behavioral Health**

Access to behavioral health is limited in the county, and support for those with substance use disorder is also lacking. Where resources are nominally available, there is often no immediate access. We see this every day in our lobby and in the experiences that our Street Outreach and Recovery Navigator Program teams encounter. Partners' studies

largely found that the county needs more mental and behavioral health professionals. Similarly, social isolation was also a key challenge among a significant portion of the population, particularly seniors and disabled individuals.

### **Family Sustaining Jobs**

The unemployment rate has shrunk, but there still aren't enough jobs with family-sustaining wages to meet the needs of individuals and families. Based on data from the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a living wage in Washington is about \$24, and there is a significant gap between that and the minimum wage of \$17.13 that will go into effect soon. Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) data show that 28.7% of the county's working population lies between the poverty line and a family-sustaining income level. Employers struggle financially to raise wages to meet the level of inflation and economic need, because their revenue has not increased to reflect inflation either. People with less education and fewer skills may have trouble finding jobs above minimum wage, which necessitates programs that support skills development and on-the-job training.

**Other key findings gleaned from input and research that are not related to a specific domain, but related to systemic issues and service quality are the following:**

### **Equity and Access in Systems & Services**

Communities of color and other marginalized populations still experience poverty disproportionately, as indicated by the data included in the report. Services and policy advocacy need to reflect that reality; it is imperative that we actively reach out to traditionally marginalized populations to ensure they know about and have access to our services, and that we work to advocate for policies at the local, state, and federal levels to change policies that will positively impact those populations.

### **More Respect and Dignity**

Our customer service and needs assessment questions reflect the fact that people appreciate it when they are seen, heard, and respected and that they are hurt when they feel ignored, judged, or brushed off. This indicates a need to ensure we are continuing our customer service and trauma-informed training and continuing to change attitudes and practices towards our neighbors in challenging situations.

### **More Coordinated Information about Resources**

Our own internal research, as well as recommendations collected from other agencies indicated that there is a need for a resource hub for the county, as well as a need for

enhanced information sharing, dissemination, coordination, and even service provision that goes to communities and meets people where they are.

## KEY PRIORITIES

We have used the findings from the Community Needs Assessment and our conversations with partners, clients, and community to identify the following key populations, services, and strategic priorities. The needs identified in the CNA are woven throughout the 2026-28 Strategic Plan and will be included in each year's annual work plan. Creating a 3-year Strategic Plan allows us to keep the CNA and our planning process on the same timeline.

### **Key Priority Populations:**

- People with low incomes needing support to meet basic needs:
  - Seniors, Disabled Individuals, and Veterans
  - Housing Insecure and Working Families
  - Indigenous, Hispanic/Latino, and Immigrant communities
  - People in Rural Areas

### **Key Services:**

- Upstream services that prevent homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, illness, and Adverse Childhood Experiences and that provide opportunities for families to build foundations for the future
- Assessment & connection to resources (resource navigation)
- Client-centered, continuous engagement (walking alongside people)
- Advocacy and relationship building with partners and policymakers regarding attitudes, practices, policies, and budgets toward those experiencing poverty.

### **Strategic Priorities 2026-2028:**

- Integrate Processes and Services to Support Individuals and Families to Thrive
- Invest in Affordable Housing Development for Families and Seniors
- Plan for Strategic Growth and Strength in Turbulent Times
- Ensure Community Voice is Represented across Governance and Programs
- Foster Strategic Partnerships
- Tell the Community Action Story to Fuel Our Mission

The following graphic provides a visual of how we expect key services to lead to positive outcomes for each priority population. We recognize the need to integrate common services, such as welcome, assessment, coaching and navigation, and evaluation.

## Whole Family Approach Person-Centered Protocols

*Individuals and Families Reach Their Full Potential in Social and Economic Mobility, Independence, Health, and Well-Being.*

*\* Yellow text denotes partner services/outcomes. Will be filled out in year 2 when we expand partnerships.*



# WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

About 70% of the people Community Action serves are families with children. For over a year, a team of staff has been engaged in a national community of practice to learn about Whole Family Approach (WFA) practices and policies that help families thrive. In 2026, we will integrate this learning and implement practices to support our Skagit families.

The goal of WFA is to break the cycle of generational poverty. WFA is not a program. It is a mindset and method that ensures we're supporting families to thrive. It:

- Puts families at the center of developing their own goals and solutions,
- Supports the economic mobility of both parents and children by providing evidence-based services that lead to positive outcomes for families, and
- Integrates their input to co-design the services they need.

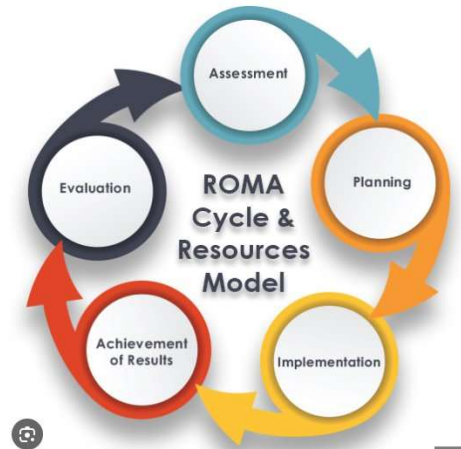
The 2026-28 Strategic Plan includes key priorities and strategies that will allow us to better integrate services; bolster client input, self-advocacy, and community engagement; and develop community partnerships with the goal of supporting families with children. The priorities and strategies that directly relate to our Whole Family Approach are:

- Implement universal intake, assessment, and referral to ensure all clients, regardless of their Community Action entry point, are connected to resources, benefits, and programs they need.
- Expand employment supports, Whole Family care coordination, and asset building opportunities for participants and their children so they can break the cycle of generational poverty.
- Ensure respectful, accessible, and consistent Client-Centered Services by improving staff training and exploring new ways to make services accessible.
- Invest in affordable housing development for families and seniors.
- Develop a system for client & family input and co-design of services and programs
- Improve pipelines and opportunities for client leadership and civic engagement.
- Prioritize time to build key partnerships, especially in priority areas of housing, food and health systems, children, seniors, and Spanish speaking communities.
- The agency has comprehensive, accurate, and reliable data to understand and support the communication of our impact.

**All these strategies are universally designed to benefit not only families, but also all other populations we serve, including seniors, unhoused or unstably housed individuals, and other undervalued populations.**

# Our Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Community Action's Strategic Plan and its annual work plans are informed by a process of continuous quality improvement our agency engages in called Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA). Community Action agencies use this process to measure, analyze, and communicate performance. In 2025, we put in place a system of Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) with cascading goals to ensure that all Board and program goals were working toward the same agency priorities.



**Assessment:** The agency conducts a Community Needs Assessment every three years, from which we pull data from other local studies and surveys, as well as our own client risk-assessment and services data. From these aggregate qualitative and quantitative assessment data, we are able to identify our agency priorities for service and advocacy.

**Planning:** The Transformation Team and the Board Planning and Engagement Committee are the committees tasked with strategic planning, engaging in evaluation, generative discussions, and analysis of needs in order to identify key areas of priority each year. Keeping an equity lens on their discussions and decision-making, they develop annual Agency and Board work plans to guide implementation of the Strategic Plan.

**Implementation:** Programs implement their services, consistently collecting service and outcome data and adjusting services as necessary to adapt to staff capacity or funding changes.

**Monitoring/Achievement of Results:** The Leadership Team engages in quarterly data dives, in which the Data and Assessment Manager presents quarterly demographic, assessment, services, and outcomes data. Program supervisors are expected to review the data and ask questions about what the data is showing or not showing.

**Evaluation:** Annually, programs are expected to review and analyze their data, reflect on accomplishments and lessons learned, and use that information to inform their planning, adjusting, and goal-setting for the upcoming year.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

**Community Action agencies are required to identify whether strategies are focused on community, agency, or family.** The following draft priorities and strategies were compiled from input from the Community Needs Assessment, Board members, and staff, and informed by community needs discussions with community partners, such as the Population Health Trust, PeaceHealth, North Star Advisory Group, Recovery Task Force, and others. **Each Annual Work Plan will include objectives and key results (OKRs), indicators, and actions that serve these priorities and strategies.**

## Strategic Priority #1: Integrate Processes and Services to Support Individuals and Families to Thrive

	<b>Strategy 1.1 (Agency):</b> Implement <b>Universal Intake, Assessment, and Referral</b> to ensure <u>all</u> clients, regardless of their Community Action entry point, are connected to resources, benefits, and programs they need.
	<b>Strategy 1.2 (Family):</b> Expand <b>Employment Supports, Whole Family Care Coordination, and Asset Building Opportunities</b> for participants and their children so they can break the cycle of generational poverty.
	<b>Strategy 1.3 (Family, Agency):</b> Ensure respectful, accessible, and consistent <b>Client-Centered Services</b> by improving staff training and exploring new ways to make services accessible to the community.
	<b>Strategy 1.4 (Family/Agency):</b> Grow a robust array of services and partnerships to support <b>Seniors</b> .
	<b>Strategy 1.5 (Family, Agency, Community):</b> Identify our best role in the <b>local food system, senior services, and mental &amp; behavioral health system</b> to meet community members' needs.



## Strategic Priority #2: Invest in Affordable Housing Development for Families and Seniors

	<b>Strategy 2.1 (Agency):</b> Develop a system to ensure our affordable housing projects are <b>Financially Sustainable</b> .
	<b>Strategy 2.2 (Community):</b> Identify a <b>Pipeline for Affordable Housing Projects</b> and begin implementation on at least one.
	<b>Strategy 2.3 (Community):</b> Research and explore <b>Alternative, Innovative Options</b> and possible partnerships for affordable housing development.
	<b>Strategy 2.4 (Agency):</b> Invest in <b>Housing Development Capacity</b> .

## Strategic Priority #3: Plan for Strategic Growth and Strength in Turbulent Times

	<b>Strategy 3.1 (Agency):</b> Build a flexible and fiscally sustainable agency by having <b>Processes in Place to Pivot Quickly</b> to capitalize on opportunities or adjust in the face of setbacks.
	<b>Strategy 3.2 (Agency):</b> <b>Identify Growth Strategies</b> and diversify revenue streams.
	<b>Strategy 3.3 (Agency):</b> <b>Equip Board Members</b> , who come with a variety of expertise and experience, with the knowledge and skills to support the mission.
	<b>Strategy 3.4 (Agency):</b> Invest in <b>Artificial Intelligence</b>
	<b>Strategy 3.5 (Agency):</b> <b>Equip Staff</b> with the tools, training, and leadership opportunities they need to succeed and grow, including financial, managerial, AI, and other technology tools.

	<b>Strategy 3.6 (Agency):</b> Be <b>Accountable and Transparent</b> financial stewards.
	<b>Strategy 3.7 (Agency/Community):</b> Invest in understanding and engaging in the local, state, and federal environments and <b>Anti-Poverty Policies</b> .
	<b>Strategy 3.8 (Agency):</b> <b>Use Data More Effectively</b> to analyze past performance, success, and evidence connecting services and outcomes, then leverage these data for quality improvement and decision-making.

#### **Strategic Priority #4: Ensure Community Voice is Represented across Governance and Programs**

	<b>Strategy 4.1 (Agency/Community):</b> The <b>Board is Diverse, Engaged, and Representative</b> of client experience, and continues outreach and conversations in the community.
	<b>Strategy 4.2 (Family/Agency):</b> Develop a system for <b>Client and Family Input and Co-design</b> of services and programs
	<b>Strategy 4.3 (Family/Community):</b> Improve pipelines and opportunities for <b>Client Leadership</b> and community engagement.
	<b>Strategy 4.4 (Agency/Community):</b> Develop a utilization-focused <b>Community Needs Assessment and Customer Satisfaction System</b> that captures robust client and partner input.
	<b>Strategy 4.5 (Agency):</b> Ensure that staff represent <b>Cultural, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity</b> and that they feel they belong.

## Strategic Priority #5: Foster Strategic Partnerships

	<b>Strategy 5.1 (Community): Build Collaboration with Coalitions and Organizations</b> doing similar work and understand their strategic plans to support maximum community impact.
	<b>Strategy 5.2 (Agency/Community): Prioritize Time to Build Key Partnerships</b> – plan it, track it, and show up - especially in priority areas of housing, food and health systems, children, seniors, and communities speaking languages other than English.
	<b>Strategy 5.3 (Community): Foster Deeper Relationships</b> with donors and community.

## Strategic Priority #6: Tell the Community Action Story to Fuel Our Mission

	<b>Strategy 6.1 (Agency):</b> Train board members, senior leadership, and the community on <b>Causes and Conditions of Poverty</b> , including history and policies.
	<b>Strategy 6.2 (Community): Advocate for Anti-Poverty Policies and Practices</b> and engage client voice and leadership in this effort.
	<b>Strategy 6.3 (Agency):</b> All Board and Staff members know and are able to communicate the <b>Vision, Mission, and Values</b> of the agency.
	<b>Strategy 6.4 (Community):</b> Become a <b>Trusted Source of Information</b> to inform clients and donors about the state of our community and policies that affect low-income community members.
	<b>Strategy 6.5 (Agency): Engage Staff, Clients, and Partners</b> in sharing the story of how we work together to make the community stronger and support individuals and families to stabilize and thrive.

	<p><b>Strategy 6.5 (Agency):</b> The agency has <b>Comprehensive, Accurate, and Reliable Data</b> to understand and support the communication of our impact.</p>
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