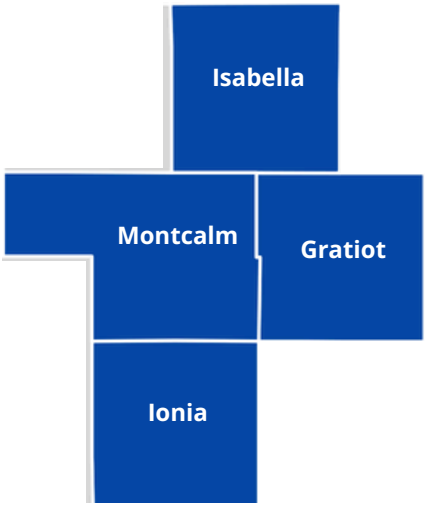
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2026 Community Needs Assessment

AT A GLANCE

EightCAP conducts a Community Needs Assessment every three years to better understand the conditions affecting individuals and families in Gratiot, Ionia, Isabella, and Montcalm counties. The findings highlight the strengths of our communities and the most significant challenges facing residents today.



EIGHTCAP'S FOUR-COUNTY SERVICE AREA

240,340	2,418	4
Total Residents	Square Miles	Counties Served

Population: U.S. Cencus Bureau, ACS 2020-2024 5-Year Estimates

Three Priority Needs Emerged

Based on community input and data from multiple sources, three key needs rise to the top as the most significant challenges facing individuals and families across the four-county service area.

HOUSING

Safe • Stable • Affordable
Appropriate

44%

of renters are **housing-cost burdened** (spending 30% or more of household income on housing costs).

ECONOMIC STABILITY & BASIC NEEDS

Income • Food • Utilities
Financial Resilience

79%

of **community survey** respondents **could not cover** an unexpected $500 expense.

TRANSPORTATION

Employment • Healthcare
Food • Services •Connection

#1

barrier to accessing services identified by community partners.

How We Developed This Assessment

EightCAP gathered input from individuals and families, including EightCAP clients, older adults, community partners, and other stakeholders.

Community Input

Direct input from people who live, work, and serve in our communities.

403 Community/Client Survey respondents who identified their county of residence

177 Senior Community Survey respondents

38 Community Partner Survey respondents

23 older adults participating in two focus groups

Additional input: Business, partner and resident dot surveys, plus limited Parent Café feedback.

Data and Research

We reviewed local, state, and national data and research, including:

- Community Action Partnership Report (2026), including U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data (2020–2024)
- United For ALICE — Michigan ALICE Report (2026)
- Michigan Poverty & Well-being Map
- Bowen National Research — Regional Housing Needs Study
- Feeding America West Michigan — Montcalm County Community Research Brief (2026)

What We Heard

Across surveys, partner input and focus groups, many of the same challenges were identified. Housing costs were the leading anticipated household challenge; food, utilities, transportation and wages were also frequently identified. Older adults also expressed concerns about financial stability, home maintenance, access to healthcare and opportunities for social connection.

> *"I make it all in one big swoop. I don't make a little jaunt here, a little jaunt there. You can't do that anymore."*
>
> -Older Adult Focus Group Participant

What Happens Next

The findings from this Community Needs Assessment will help EightCAP implement its 2025–2029 Strategic Plan, inform its Community Action Plan, guide program and service decisions, and strengthen partnerships that address the needs identified across our four-county service area.

Together, we can help individuals and families thrive in communities across Gratiot, Ionia, Isabella, and Montcalm counties.

Read the Full 2026 Community Needs Assessment

8cap.org