



EBCC

EAST BILOXI COMMUNITY
COLLABORATIVE



COMMUNITY **NEEDS** ASSESSMENT *2019*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our partners and supporters, Jackson State University Mississippi Urban Research Center and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. A special thank you to East Biloxi community for their participation without their contribution this work would not be possible.



ABOUT EBCC

East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) was founded in 2012 as an organization that offers residents and community-based groups a platform to develop and implement change strategies to improve the lives of children and families in East Biloxi.

The mission of EBCC is to create a healthy, vibrant and sustainable East Biloxi with improved outcomes for all children and families by working together to develop a better place to live, work and play.

The vision of EBCC is a healthy, sustainable community where everyone lives, works, and thrives.

The EBCC has been successful with bringing the various non-profits, community-based organizations, community members and business leaders to the same table to discuss community problems. The EBCC has provided advocacy training and skills for residents to help them leverage their collective power to make policy changes.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In 2012, the East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) was established in an effort to create a platform to develop and implement strategies designed to improve the lives of residents in East Biloxi. The mission of the EBCC is to “create a healthy, vibrant and sustainable East Biloxi with improved outcomes for all children and families by working to develop a better place to live, work, and play.” As East Biloxi positions for change, it is imperative that efforts be made to ensure an equitable opportunity for all residents to thrive and reach their full potential.

TAKING ACTION

To begin working on creating a sustainable East Biloxi and breaking down barriers, the EBCC commissioned Mississippi Urban Research Center at Jackson State University to conduct the Community Needs Assessment (CNA). True community buy-in and participation is needed in order to ensure the programmatic focus areas of EBCC meet capture the needs of residents in the area. The project’s major goal was to gather data and input from area residents and other concerned parties regarding key needs, priorities, issues, and other relevant factors impacting the quality of life in East Biloxi. This report presents the findings from the EBCC CNA.

THE APPROACH

East Biloxi Community Collaborative conducted a comprehensive needs assessment that considered all aspects of the area between March 2019 and September 2019. The team met with numerous stakeholders from the community to draw on as many perspectives as possible and to confirm trends by collecting multiple data sources including secondary data, surveying residents, community forums, and focus groups. The findings from this report collectively incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to provide a rich and meaningful analysis.

KEY FINDINGS

The following report integrates the collective input from the community needs assessment survey, Kick-off event, focus groups with residents, business owners (non-residents), and youth, and the youth photovoice project. Focus group participants were recruited and organized into the following categories: (1) Young adults age 18 to 30 years old; (2) Cross-sector of Community Representatives (i.e., Service Providers, Business Owners, Individuals); and (3) Community residents.

EBCC's data analysis from 305 surveys and 3 focus groups revealed the top five priorities for the East Biloxi community are: access to healthy foods, health/healthcare, employment, affordable quality housing, and improvements to public infrastructure. Each priority area was then compared with "needs" based on findings from the data.

The identified priority areas were also the same as top five "needs," with more programs for youth being an additional need. For each priority area, the report provides an overview of current relevant research, an analysis of the current structure, specific areas for improvement, and detailed recommendations to achieve improvement.



SUMMARY

Collectively, the themes discussed above tell a story of common and unique needs, issues, and possible solutions related to the East Biloxi community. They provide focal points upon which EBCC and other officials can begin to develop programs, services, policies, and activities that can help improve the quality of life in East Biloxi. The similarities between the "Top 5 Priorities" survey responses and the "Needs to be Done" survey responses provide solid evidence as to common needs and priorities as viewed by community residents and representatives. That evidence is clarified and amplified by feedback obtained during the focus groups sessions. It is up to community members, other representatives, and public, private, and non-profit organizations to collectively write the next chapter in the East Biloxi story. Using the themes, issues, needs, and priorities identified in this community needs assessment can help EBCC officials begin to write that story.

BACKGROUND

Across the nation, community organizations and residents, local governments, and policymakers are striving to put plans, policies, and programs in place that build healthier, more equitable communities and foster inclusive growth. In 2011, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation identified East Biloxi as one of three Mississippi communities where targeted efforts could be launched to improve the lives of children and families with equity in mind. As such community advocates and residents were approached by the foundation to take up the challenge of identifying the greatest needs facing East Biloxi. In 2012, the first community needs assessment was conducted by the University of Southern Mississippi researchers revealing five critical areas: Civic Engagement, Economic Security, Education, Health, and Neighborhood Viability.

Mostly recently, in 2018, three census tracts in Biloxi were designated as Opportunity Zones, thereby making the neighborhoods in those areas eligible for subsidized private investment. The East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) views Opportunity Zones as not only having the potential to catalyze much-needed new development in the city, but also offering a vehicle to address some of the lingering racial disparities that continue to impact residents. EBCC invites Biloxi City leaders to embrace equity as a superior growth model and work alongside residents to ensure that all Biloxians have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

With that in mind, it is imperative that EBCC leaders continuously revisit the needs of the community and understand ways in which they align the current needs of the East Biloxi in order to capitalize on the new designation.

EAST BILOXI, MS

The community of East Biloxi, Mississippi is a 10.3 square mile peninsula area between Biloxi Bay and the Mississippi Sound on the Gulf of Mexico located in Harrison County, Mississippi. The community



A lot of us grew up here in East Biloxi. I grew up here in East Biloxi, and I want to see East Biloxi thrive, and it just isn't growing at the same rate as other parts of Biloxi."

– A. Perryman

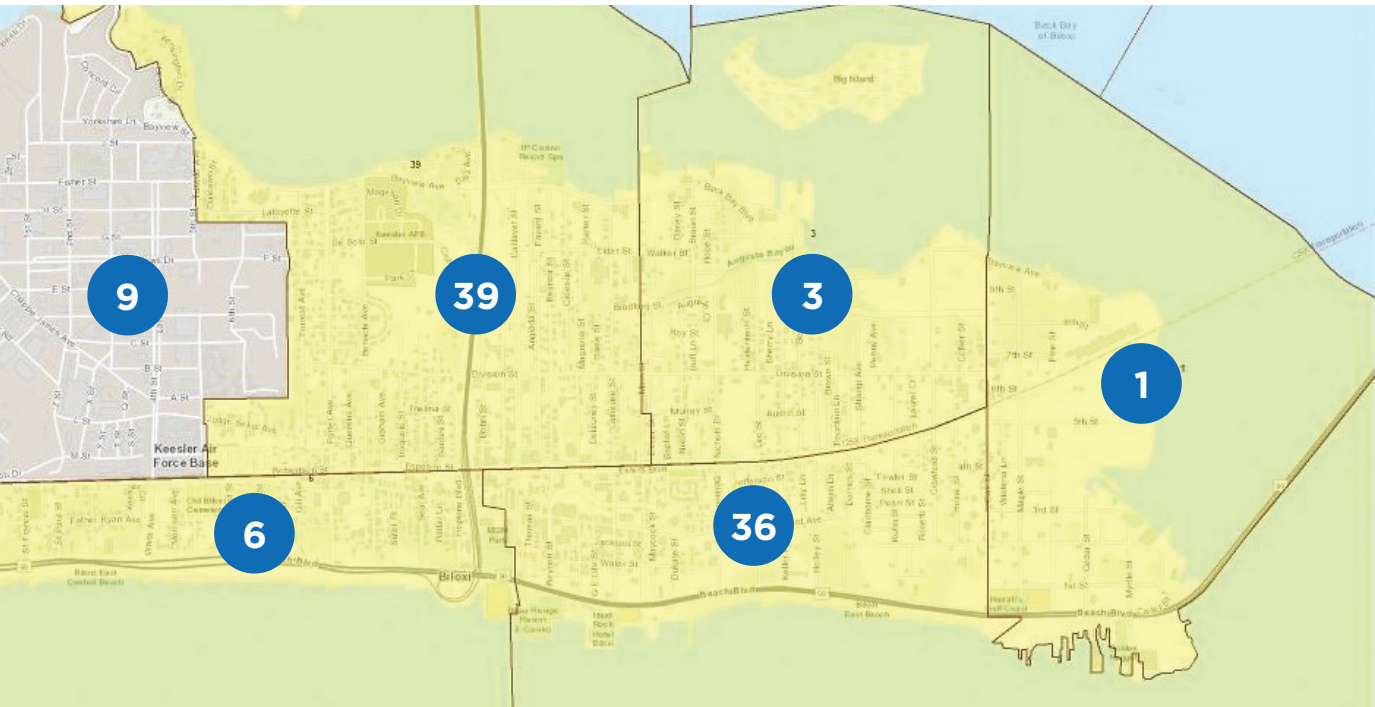
represents a small but culturally distinct neighborhood of the larger Biloxi metropolitan area. The history of east Biloxi is one of diverse immigrant populations – culturally rich and ethnically diverse. In recent years, East Biloxi's low-lying gulf front peninsula was particularly vulnerable to two disasters. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina, destroyed four out of five homes in East Biloxi (Neives, 2005). Recovery has been uneven since the 2005 disaster: commercial properties were quickly re-established, yet adjacent working-class residential areas remained vacant in 2012. The eight casinos located along east Biloxi's waterfront were swiftly re-built after Hurricane Katrina, but other traditional industries, such as shrimping, remain in steep decline in the years following. In 2010, the BP Oil Spill exacerbated the lingering devastation of Hurricane Katrina in East Biloxi community. The impact of the BP Oil Spill particularly devastated individuals who primarily worked as shrimpers, many of whom are Vietnamese (Mississippi Coalition of Vietnamese American Fisherfolk and Families, 2010). These two disasters have had an unequitable impact on the speed in which East Biloxi has recovered.

To help establish a context for understanding current East Biloxi quality of life issues, and to compare perceived community needs across the different data collection activities, project consultants reviewed U.S. Census Bureau data covering the targeted community. The East Biloxi area was segmented into statistically identifiable areas called “census tracts”. By definition, census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county containing populations typically ranging between 1,200 to 8,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau).

Figure 1 presents a map listing the census tract areas comprising the East Biloxi area. Based upon the boundaries listed earlier for the East Biloxi area, there are approximately five applicable census tract areas - 1, 3, 6, 36, 39. It should be noted that Census tract 6 contain land areas outside of the East Biloxi boundaries described earlier. Given the majority of the census tract areas are within the targeted boundaries, coupled with the need to maintain geographic and statistical consistency throughout analysis activities, data for Census tract 6 is reported in full. The following section presents data findings that provide a statistical profile of the East Biloxi community. The purpose of including these profiles is to help establish a context for understanding current East Biloxi quality of life issues, and for comparing perceived community needs as received through additional data collection activities such as surveys, focus groups, and community asset mapping.

The East Biloxi community is one with significant socio-economic contrasts. A review of secondary data on the area reveals wide variations among the five census tracts in terms of income, housing, employment, health, and other socio-economic variables. The total population of the target area is approximately 8,035 persons consisting of 4013 males (49.9%) and 4022 females (50.1%). The racial distribution is 50.5% White; 36.1% Blacks; 6.8% Asian; and 6.6% other races. There are wide numerical and statistical fluctuations across the 5 census tracts across (e.g., Census tract 1 has a population of 227 whereas Census tract 39 has a population of 3,420).

Figure 1. Applicable Census Tracts in East Biloxi





THE APPROACH

The perspectives of communities facing deep challenges and barriers to inclusion may often be absent from data analysis. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) places an emphasis on joining with the community as full and equal partners in all phases of the research process. With that in mind, the EBCC commissioned Jackson State University Mississippi Urban Research Center to develop and collect data that thoughtfully engaged community residents through local data sources and the lived experiences of diverse residents. Collectively this approach was used to supplement the data provided in this assessment to more fully represent the state of equity in East Biloxi.

The research methodology used to conduct this CNA consisted of a mixed-methods data collection and analysis approach that utilized both quantitative and qualitative measures. Qualitative measures included gathering perceptual data from a “Kick-off Community Meeting”; conducting three focus group sessions (n=16); conducting primary and secondary community asset mapping activities; and conducting a youth photo voice and feedback activity (n=5). Qualitative data was analyzed using narrative analysis, frequency counts, and cataloguing techniques. To protect the identity of participants, all names and identifying information were removed and is not included within this report.

For the purpose of this project, the East Biloxi community boundaries were defined as White Avenue on the West; the Back Bay on the North; the Ocean Springs Bridge on the East; and the Gulf of Mexico on the South.

COMMUNITY ASSET MAPPING ACTIVITIES

To help EBCC officials better identify what institutions, physical structures, and organizations currently exist in East Biloxi that could be used to improve the overall quality of life, project consultants began collecting data identifying community assets. The data collection process included such activities such as conducting field photography capturing existing facilities and structures, and reviewing secondary data sources identifying area institutions, organizations, and landmarks. Data collected was organized into categories representing assets that can significantly impact the overall quality of life in East Biloxi.

When reviewing the asset mapping findings from a needs assessment perspective, several observations emerged. These included: (a) the relative large number of jobs (approximately 23,347) available through the area’s 12 largest employers; (b) the relatively limited number of education/training and healthcare providers in the target area; (c) an apparent disconnect between survey results indicating the need for “Grocery Stores” and the community asset mapping of 6 grocery stores in the target area (later clarified by EBCC officials to include convenience stores that also sold some food products) ; and (d) a relative large number of community structures (amenities), recreation facilities, and churches/religious institutions in the East Biloxi area. Survey responses seem to be consistent with asset mapping findings in terms of: (1) parks and recreation not being a top 10 community need; and (2) survey respondents listing “Local Community-based Organizations/Non-profits” and “Churches and faith-based organizations” as valuable or important community assets. Based upon asset mapping findings, it appears the East Biloxi area strengths include its recreational facilities; number of employers; community structures; and churches & religious institutions. The area’s weaknesses from a community asset mapping perspective includes its lack of educational/training facilities targeting adults, and its relative lack of healthcare facilities as viewed from the perspective of survey respondents.

EBCC COMMUNITY “KICK-OFF EVENT”

This event served as the official EBCC Community “Kick-off Event” announcing the beginning of the community needs assessment process. To help get initial input regarding perceived community needs and priorities, event attendees were asked to place “sticky notes” on flip chart pages posted on the wall. Six (6) broad community needs’ categories (including an “Other” category) were posted on the flip chart pages for the purpose of stimulating discussion on community needs. The placement of notes by participants served to identify and prioritize community needs from each participant’s perspective. In addition to placing sticky notes on the posted flip chart pages, participants were permitted to write on the sticky notes more specific information expressing their views of what specific programs, services, and/or activities they believe are needed in East Biloxi.





Based solely upon numerical rankings of the categories and notes, issues concerning “environmental”, “education”, and “economic security” rated the highest. Another interesting finding that emerged from the exercise was the large number of posts listing “grocery store” as a community need/priority. Of the 20 items listed in the “Other” category, 8 of the 20 (approximately 40%) listed “grocery store” as a need. The sheer number of responses listed under this category provided an early indication of attendees’ preferences regarding perceived needs and priorities in the East Biloxi community.

YOUTH FEEDBACK SESSION

A youth feedback session (n=5) was held during the Youth Photo Voice training session. While the session consisted of a small, non-randomized sampling of youth, their responses did provide some evidence regarding issues of concern for local youth. The participants ranged in grade level from 5th grade to 10th grade. For example, three of the ten overall issues discussed (30%) related to the broader topic of “parks and recreation.” This topic consistently emerged across other data collection activities as a need for East Biloxi, albeit not a high priority need. Additional youth data collection activities may be needed to obtain a wider perspective regarding community needs and priorities as perceived by local youth. Images from the photo voice project are embedded throughout the report.

SURVEY

Quantitative data was collected utilizing online survey instrument, Qualtrics. Quantitative measures included conducting secondary data analysis of socio-economic data describing the East Biloxi community, and administering a comprehensive online survey (n=303) to gather data from community representatives. A power analysis revealed a need for a sample size of 350 responses. The completion rate for the survey 86.5%. Survey and secondary data were analyzed using descriptive procedures including mean scores, frequency counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations.

KEY FINDINGS

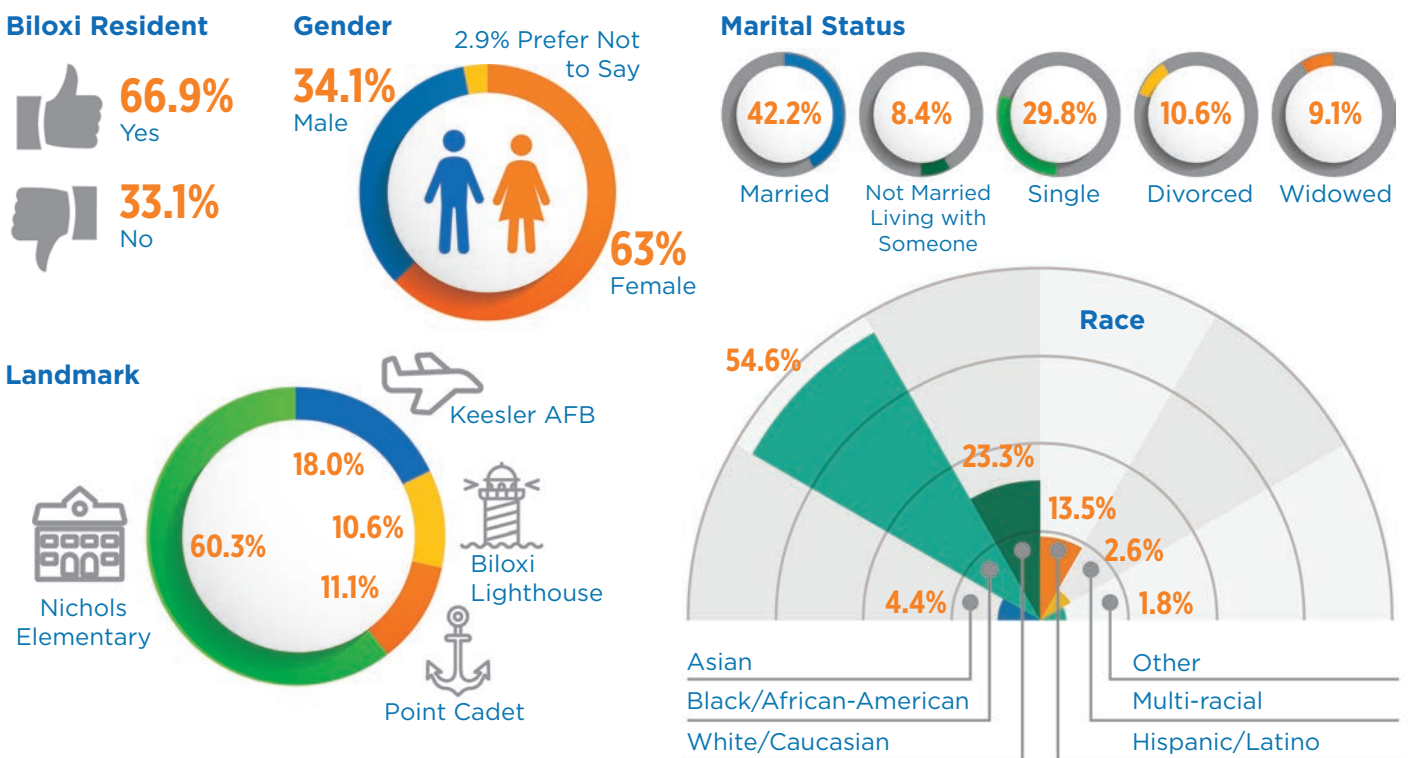
In 2012, researchers from the University of Southern Mississippi conducted the first community needs assessment for the East Biloxi Community Collaborative was conducted to identify and discuss the needs of east Biloxi residents. USM researchers used the Social Reconnaissance model to conduct a series of focus groups with 22 service providers and community advocates working in east Biloxi. The six domains of need originally identified by the east Biloxi service provider stakeholder group were: Civic Engagement; Neighborhood Viability, Education, Health, Economic Security, and Economic Development.

EBCC’s data analysis from 303 surveys and 3 focus groups revealed the top five priorities for the East Biloxi community are: access to healthy foods, health/healthcare, employment, affordable quality housing, and improvements to public infrastructure. Each priority area was then compared with “needs” based on findings from the data. The identified priority areas were also the same as top five “needs,” with more programs for youth being an additional need. For each priority area, the report provides an overview of current relevant research, an analysis of the current structure, specific areas for improvement, and detailed recommendations to achieve improvement. Reflecting on the previous needs assessment reveals that these areas are still primary concerns for the East Biloxi community.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

An overview of key demographic characteristics is detailed in this section (Table 1. Community Needs Assessment Demographic Profile) A total of 378 respondents completed the online survey. A demographic review of survey respondents indicated the majority of respondents (67%) actually lived in East Biloxi. Most of the respondents who were surveyed lived near Nichols school (60%); and 54% had an income between \$20,000 and \$74,000.

Figure 2. Community Needs Assessment Demographic Profile (n=305)



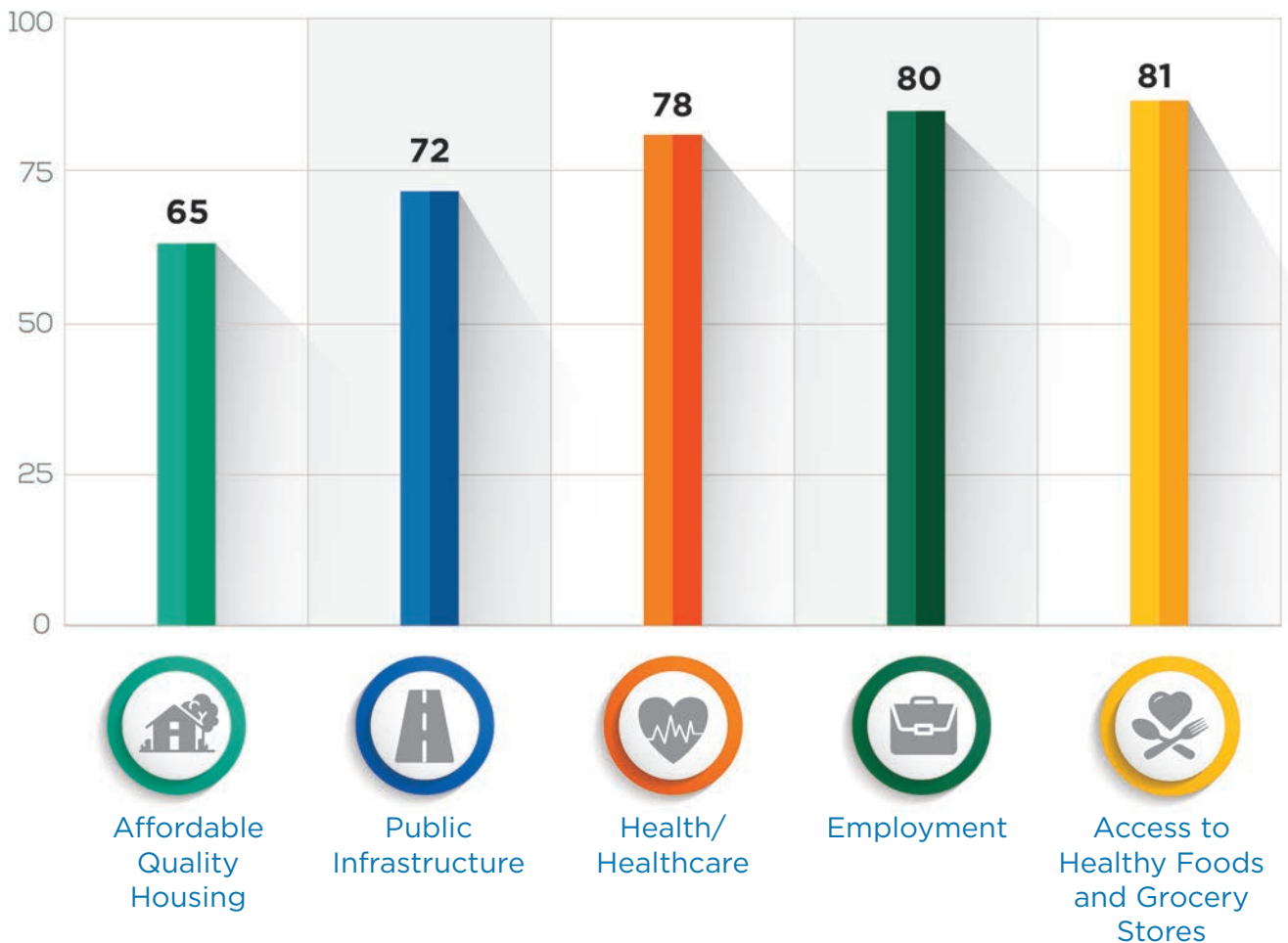
Over half of the survey respondents were female (63%) and 34.1% of respondents were of male, and small 2.9% of respondents chose not to disclose their gender.

When considering marital status, 42.2% of respondents were married. 29.8% were single, 10.6% were divorced, 9.1% were widowed, and 8.4% were not married but currently lived with a significant other. This data highlights that the study population was overwhelming Black or African American, unmarried, female residents of East Biloxi.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND NEEDS

The following section summarizes key findings from data collection activities. When asked to select the top five priorities in the East Biloxi community, the top five responses included (1) Access to healthy foods and grocery stores; (2) Employment; (3) Health/Healthcare; (4) Improving Roads and Streets; and (5) Affordable Quality Housing. When asked “What needs to be done to improve the quality of life in East Biloxi?”, the top five responses included (1) More Programs for Youth; (2) Higher Paying Jobs; (3) Affordable Quality Housing; (4) Affordable Quality Healthcare; and (5) More Jobs.

Figure 3. Top Five Priorities in East Biloxi



PRIORITY 1: ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Access to foods that support healthy eating patterns is a key social determinant of health and contributes to an individual's health throughout life. Eighty-one East Biloxi residents identified access to healthy foods and grocery stores as the number one priority for the area. Strong negative opinions were expressed regarding accessibility

to healthy foods and grocery stores in East Biloxi. The theme of "access to healthy foods" encompassed low food quality, high price, limited access to fresh food, store cleanliness, limited selection of food items, and difficulty accessing additional stores as major concerns.

Participating focus group residents stated that existing stores are often not clean and the food quality (not fresh) is low. Additionally, residents shared that due to having a limited number of stores in the East Biloxi area they often have to travel across the Bay to D'Iberville to access quality foods and grocery stores with more options as well as restaurants. Furthermore, for those who do not have access to a car or public transportation, the cost of travel time to find healthier options in addition to out-of-pocket expenses further exacerbate the disparity.

A lack of basic amenities in East Biloxi makes it harder for struggling families. The Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service identifies two food deserts in East Biloxi, meaning that access to a supermarket or to a large grocery store is extremely limited. Vulnerable populations suffer the brunt of these lacking resources. One in five residents living in low-food access areas are also low income. One-quarter of the population with low food access is ages 0-17 and 18 percent are elderly, ages 65 or older. Effects of distressed economic conditions lead to other barriers in accessing resources. About 17 percent of the food desert population lives in households without a vehicle and public transportation routes are very limited in East Biloxi." Asset mapping activities identified six grocery retailers in the area:

- Discount Grocery Store
- Lee's Grocery Store
- Quality Seafood & Poultry
- Biloxi's Farmers Market
- Division's Hot Food & Grocery
- Food Giant

However, strong negative opinions were expressed regarding accessibility to healthy foods and grocery stores in East Biloxi. Participants in the focus groups expressed low food quality, limited access to fresh food, cleanliness, limited selection of food items, and difficulty accessing additional stores as major



There needs to be a grocery store closer. Because there is only Food Giant. And it depends upon where you stay in East Biloxi. If you stay in what we consider "The Point" and you don't have transportation, you can't get to the store. So, we do need access to a grocery store."



NEWS

East Biloxi residents want relief from 'food desert'



concerns. A follow-up discussion with EBCC officials indicated that several of the asset mapping “grocery/food” stores were not true grocery stores, but more like convenience stores that offered some food products.

Several strategies have also been proposed to encourage more equitable access to healthy food choices, such as, “attracting and opening supermarkets in underserved neighborhoods, selling healthy foods at reduced prices, and limiting the total number of per capita fast food restaurants in a community.”



PRIORITY 2: EMPLOYMENT/JOB

Broad economic conditions are outside of an individual’s control, but directly influence their immediate circumstance. This is most pronounced in lower income neighborhoods. Unemployment levels among those 16 years or older

in East Biloxi surpass citywide levels and more than double national rates, reaching more than 18 percent in some neighborhoods. Areas in Biloxi where unemployment is highest also experience the highest poverty rates, the highest concentration of single mothers and the highest rate of adults without a high school diploma. Lower educational attainment hinders East Biloxians’ employment options, with seven in 10 residents over 25 years old lacking education beyond high school.

Almost one in every four full-time workers in Biloxi is struggling to make ends meet. With a poverty rate of 23%, workers in Biloxi are more likely to live in poverty when compared to the poverty level of the state (19.7%), or the nation (12.3%) as a whole (Data USA, 2018). One focus group participant stated,

“ *Minimum wage does pay for what you are doing but does not pay enough based upon the cost of living.*”

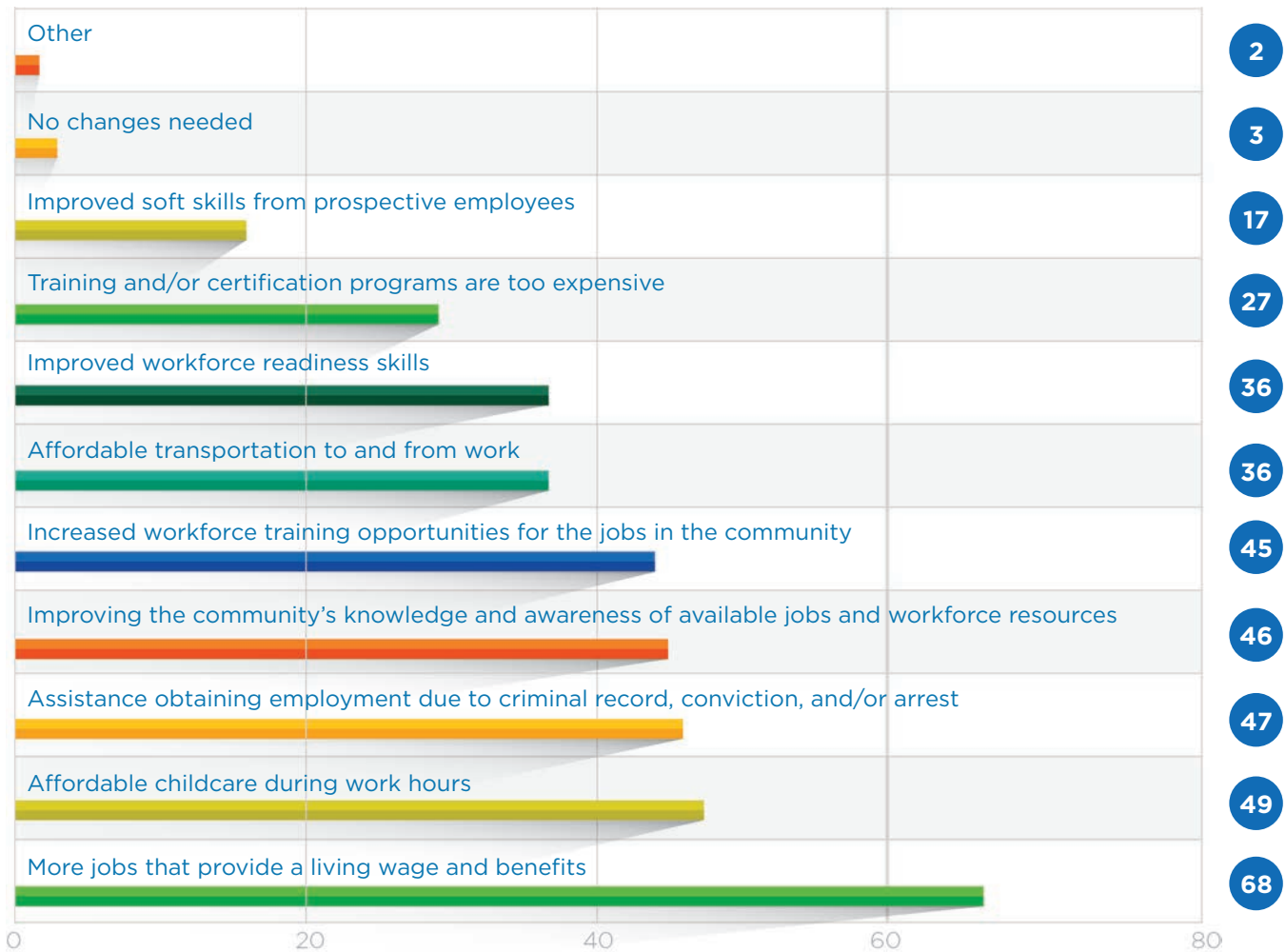


– Young Adult Participant

“With a lot of jobs the minimum wage is not comparable with the duties and responsibilities that come with it. It doesn’t work out [you] are not being appreciated. The minimum wage should be enough to support the cost of living.” Economic insecurity often forces workers and their families to choose between critical household expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and healthcare. There are multiple aspects of employment including job security, the quality of the work environment, financial compensation, and job demand which may affect the economic stability of a workers and ultimately the stability of the community.

Approximately 80 of responses from the survey indicated that employment and jobs in East Biloxi was both a priority and a pressing need. Areas in Biloxi where unemployment is highest also experience the highest poverty rates, the highest concentration of single mothers and the highest rate of adults without a high school diploma. Lower educational attainment hinders East Biloxians’ employment options, with seven in 10 residents over 25 years old lacking education beyond high school. Survey responses from individuals who live in East Biloxi suggest more jobs that provided a living wage and benefits was of most importance, followed by affordable childcare during work hours. Additionally, residents shared that decreasing barriers to obtaining a job for individuals with criminal records is needed.

Figure 4. Most Pressing Employment Needs for Residents of East Biloxi



Responses were also gathered from individuals who work in East Biloxi. Again, more jobs that provided a livable wage was identified as the most pressing employment need, with other responses mirroring that of East Biloxi residents. When looking at the data by race, “more jobs that provide a living wage and benefit” was highest rated category for Whites and Hispanics; whereas “assistance obtaining employment due to criminal record, conviction, and/or arrest” was for Black/African Americans: and “training and certification programs are too expensive” was the top rated category for Asians.

Figure 5. Most Pressing Employment Needs for those who Work in East Biloxi



Increasingly, securing a job that pays a family-sustaining wage requires some additional education beyond high school. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2018) 22% of jobs in the Biloxi region in 2018 required at least a bachelor’s degree. There is also a growing number of jobs that don’t require a bachelor’s degree some type of industry-recognized training or certification is necessary. In fact, over half of all jobs in the South are middle-skill jobs which require some education or training beyond high school but not a four-year college degree. These trends present a challenge for youth in Biloxi’s Opportunity Zones, particularly youth of color, that are less likely to have completed secondary education beyond high school.

Community asset mapping activities revealed that of the twelve the largest employers in the East Biloxi area seven are casinos (Table Largest Employers). Respondents also expressed that there is a need for

more diversity in the types of jobs available. Many shared that due to the type of industry, most jobs are primarily available at the casinos. Impact of local casinos were viewed both positively in terms of providing employment and promoting tourism, and negatively in terms of not paying sufficient wages and benefits, and not contributing enough to local community. Additionally, transportation and computer or smartphone access lead to difficulties getting to work and completing online job applications.

Table 1. Largest Employers in Biloxi

Employer	Number Employed (2017)	Employer	Number Employed (2017)
Keesler Air Force Base	11,276	Harrah’s Gulf Coast	762
Beau Rivage Casino & Resort	2,928	Merit Health Biloxi (Biloxi Reg. Med. Center)	750
Biloxi Veterans Administration Hospital	1,605	Palace Casino Resort	708
IP Casino Resort & Spa	1,457	Biloxi Public School District	670
Golden Nugget Casino	1,067	City of Biloxi	606
Hard Rock Hotel & Casino	1,018	Margaritaville Resort Biloxi	500

PRIORITY 3: HEALTH/HEALTHCARE

The third highest rated priority (78 responses) for East Biloxi was related to health and healthcare. Many residents described their interactions with the healthcare systems as “complicated and slow.”

The Biloxi area as a whole has a relatively diverse immigrant population who often experience

translation barriers when accessing care, thus making health literacy a concern. The theme of health and healthcare also encompassed concerns about the affordability of services, not providing enough services, and general lack of understanding about other available health resources within the community. When asked about the most pressing needs concerning the health care system: affordability, financial assistance to pay for services (dental, vision, health, etc.) and more mental health services. East Biloxi is located in Harrison County, MS. Harrison County is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). The factors that determine HPSA are population to provider ratio; poverty levels; infant mortality/low birth weight, and; insufficient access to physicians within thirty (30) minutes. Coastal Family Health Center (CFHC) is the only comprehensive health care provider serving the low-income



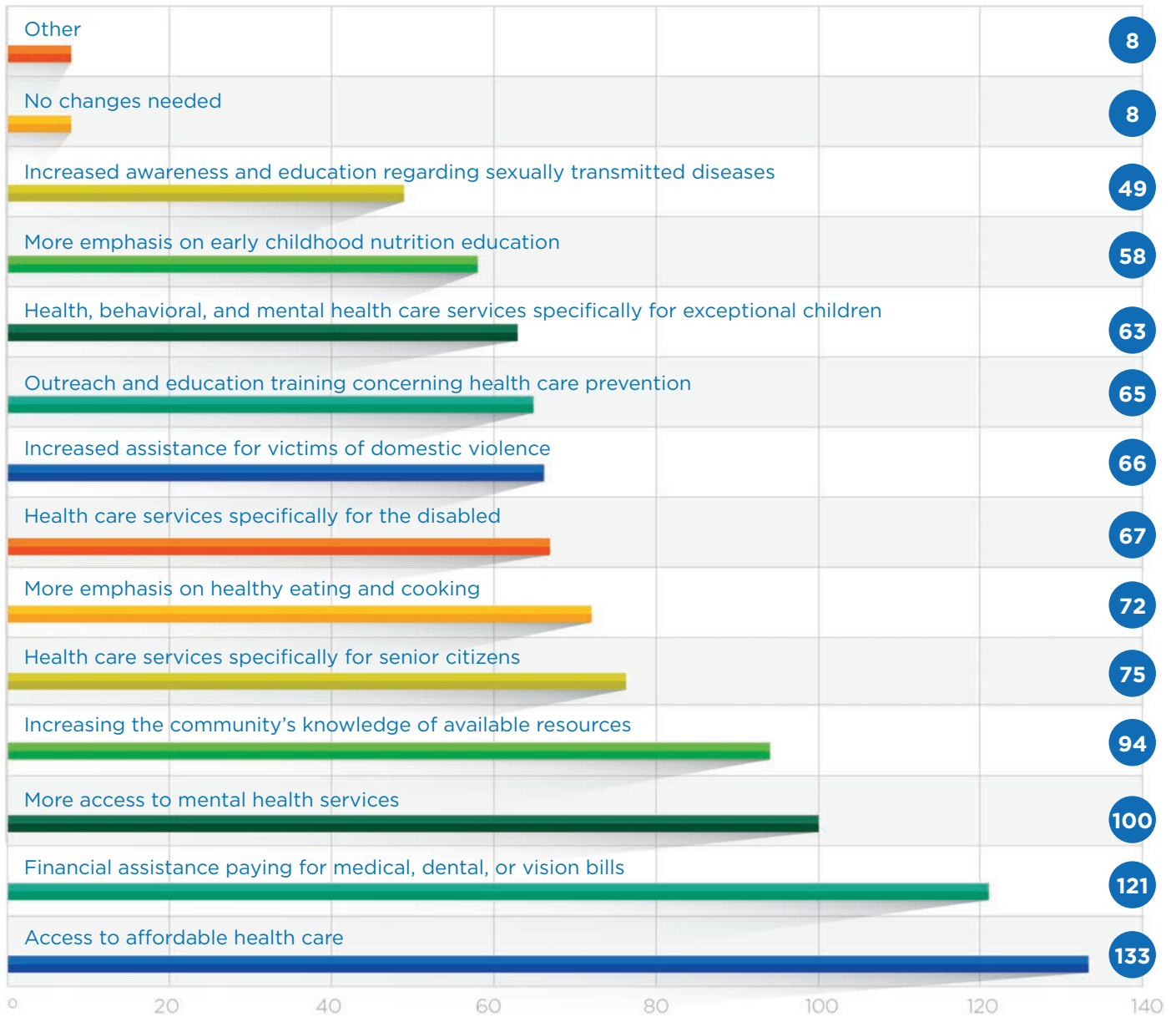
In regards that we do not have very many diverse



medical professionals in East Biloxi for the diverse community. Many are multilingual. And even our larger hospitals offer a language line, but it is not a working language line.”
– Community Resident Participant

residents of East Biloxi. Additionally, the Coastal Family Health Center mobile unit is the only clinic in Biloxi that offers prenatal care for low-income residents.

Figure 6. Most Pressing Healthcare Need in East Biloxi



When considering race, “access to affordable health care” was the top-rated category among Asians, Black/African Americans, and Whites. While “financial assistance paying for medical, dental, or vision bills” was the top pressing need for Hispanics. Responses from the focus groups also affirmed the need for a focus on providing more mental health services to get individuals into the proper setting for treatment. One participant shared, ***“There needs to be more help with mental health outreach. There is only one worker the association. I call her and sometimes she is hard to reach. She is still referring people to a facility that is closed.”*** More service providers would help alleviate the heavy use of emergency rooms and the burden of incarcerating individuals. Affordable quality health care would greatly improve the quality of life of residents and attract reputable business to the area.

PRIORITY 4: AFFORDABLE/QUALITY HOUSING

Housing affordability and employment are intricately tied determinants. Hurricane Katrina greatly impacted the quality of housing available in the East Biloxi area. Housing instability is also caused by a limited rental market with few affordable vacancies, in which individuals with the lowest incomes may be forced to rent substandard housing that



When we got employed at Hard Rock, they would only



work us for 32 hours. But in order for us to get an apartment we had to be able to prove you were working fulltime. If you not able to work forty hours a week how are you going to be able to get housing?"

– Community Resident Participant

exposes them to health and safety risks such as vermin, mold, water leaks, and inadequate heating or cooling systems. Affordable/Quality housing was rated as the fourth priority among survey respondents. When asked to consider the most pressing need related to this priority, affordable quality housing, grants to help purchase homes and assist with utilities such as electricity, gas, and water were noted. Additionally, residents felt that there needed to be more programs to provide with home repairs among other needs.

Figure 7. Most Pressing Housing Needs in East Biloxi



Many residents feel that the rent is too high for houses that are not in prime condition. Focus group responses and notes from the Kick-off event also suggest that there is a great need for housing for the homeless population, affordable loans that would assist with rebuilding vacant lots and existing properties. Poor-quality housing is associated with various negative health outcomes, including chronic disease and injury and poor mental health. Improvements in policies related to accessibility and quality of housing is needed.



PRIORITY 5: PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Poor health outcomes are often made worse by the interaction between individuals and their social and physical environment. The fifth priority area regards the public infrastructure of the area and focuses primarily on the built environment.

Emergent themes from the focus

groups highlight a major concern with the roads and streets in the neighborhoods of East Biloxi. Residents stated that the amount and duration of road and street construction created transportation, economic and social hardships, and creating sentiments of unfairness as East Biloxi is a minority community. In addition to feeling targeted by construction efforts, improvements are needed to the local bus system which include expanding its routes beyond those catering to tourist and/or the casino area. Transportation was also viewed as a multi-dimensional problem including such areas as a public transportation system that does not serve the needs of local residents. Continuous road construction has severely restricted access to the public transportation system limiting the ability to access everything from grocery stores, employment, and social services.

The theme of public safety also included residents' thoughts on the need to decrease crime in the area. Exposure to violence in a community can be experienced at various levels, including victimization,



Some of the roads have been made better. I think it's a shame the way they are doing it. I moved back after retiring from my job in 2015. When I got here you could not get down a street ... every street was torn up"



– Community Resident Participant

directly witnessing acts of violence, or hearing about events from other community members. Renovating dilapidated buildings, providing more opportunities for youth and young adults, was noted as potential ways to help to change the climate and reduce areas of frequent criminal activity.

While exhibiting a relatively small geographic footprint, the East Biloxi community contains a plethora of physical and structural resources and amenities ranging from parks, marinas, churches, museums, community centers, and multi-dimensional businesses such as the local casinos with their various amenities. The pictures taken by youth during the photo voice activity display a wide variety of assets and issues existing in the local community. The story emerging from this theme is the need for the community to better utilize, and build upon, its existing assets.



OTHER NOTABLE PRIORITIES AND ASSETS

The “people” of East Biloxi were viewed as being a valuable asset and positive force in the community and described as friendly, helpful, resilient, and willing to work together. Respondents were asked what they believe are the most important needs concerning civic and community engagement. The top choice for that question was “More knowledge on how to improve my community” (20.62%). The final question asked on the survey was “What role are you willing to take in helping to improve the East Biloxi community?” The top three responses included:

33.7%

Participate in a neighborhood or nonprofit organization’s activities

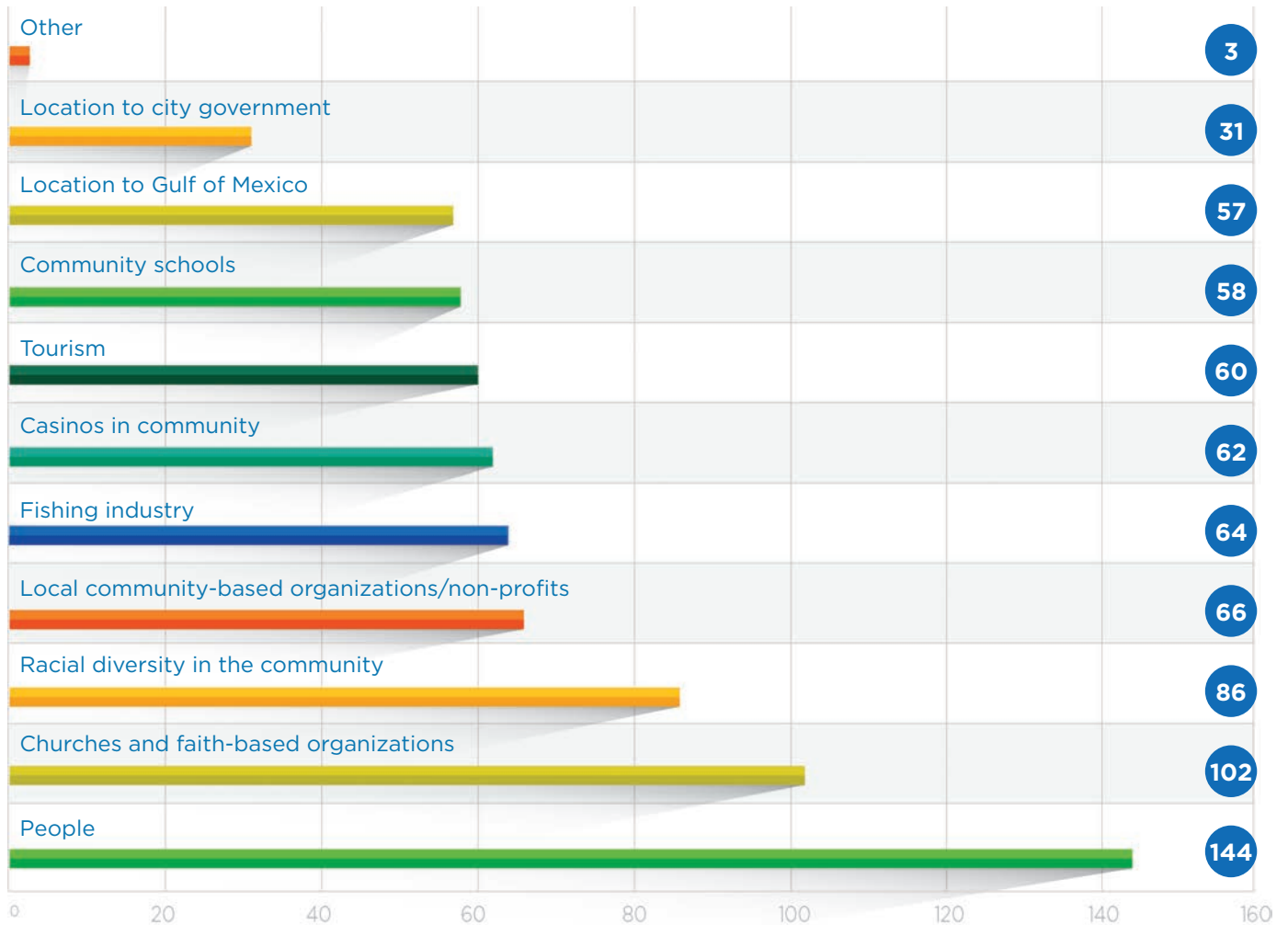
24.6%

Volunteer my time

23%

Become more active in civic and community engagement

Figure 8. Valuable or Important Assets in East Biloxi



The responses to the above two questions seem to indicate respondents are willing to participate in community activities if they are given the necessary knowledge on how to improve their communities. If this finding remains consistent throughout the survey completion period, it can provide guidance regarding designing impactful training and community involvement activities.

A final observation concerned what appears to be a large number of community structures (amenities), recreation facilities, and churches/religious institutions in the East Biloxi area. Survey responses seem to be consistent with asset mapping findings in terms of: (1) parks and recreation not being a top 10 community need; and (2) survey respondents listing “Local Community-based Organizations/Non-profits” and “Churches and faith-based organizations” as valuable or important community assets. Based upon asset mapping findings, it appears the East Biloxi area strengths include its recreational facilities; number of employers; community structures; and churches & religious institutions.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the community needs assessment and various other data collection activities reveal that the East Biloxi community is an area containing significant contrasts such as having multi-million businesses (e.g., casinos) and high levels of poverty and unemployment (Census tract 1) located just several blocks away, a highly rated school system (Biloxi overall, Nichols Elementary in particular) and significant segments of the population not completing the 9th grade. What is evident is that East Biloxi is a resilient diverse community containing a long rich history dating back to 1700s and an area trying to re-establish itself after the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. These contrasts provide a backdrop for analyzing and interpreting data collection efforts conducted in support of this community needs assessment. The identified needs provide focal points upon which EBCC and other officials can begin to develop programs, services, policies, and activities that can help improve the quality of life in East Biloxi.

When reviewing asset mapping findings from a needs assessment perspective, several observations emerged. The first observation involves the relatively large number of jobs (approximately 23,347) available through the area's 12 largest employers. With the relatively large number of total jobs in the area, one question that emerges is whether there is a "skills/experience mismatch" between what area employers are seeking and the skills/experiences possessed by area residents. Additionally, the impact of local casinos was viewed positively in terms of providing employment and promoting tourism, and negatively in terms of not paying sufficient wages and benefits and contributing enough to the local community.

Another observation that emerged involved the relatively limited number of education/training and healthcare providers in the area. The limited number of education/training providers targeting "Adults" seems especially problematic given survey responses indicating residents want to receive more education and training services. This is another area where EBCC officials may want to consider conducting additional investigation.

As highlighted healthy foods and access to grocery stores were the primary concern for residents from survey results. Although survey results indicate the need for "Grocery Stores," and the community asset mapping indicates 6 grocery stores in the target area. This raises the question of what is meant by the need for grocery stores; whether need is inclusive of more stores, access to existing stores, higher quality stores, and/or cheaper stores. After further discussions with EBCC officials indicated that several of the asset mapping "grocery/food" stores were not true grocery stores, but more like convenience stores that offered some food products.

Although housing was identified as priority area for East Biloxi, there are a large number of community structures (amenities), recreation facilities, and churches/religious institutions in the area. Survey responses seem to be consistent with asset mapping which identified "Local Community-based Organizations/Non-profits" and "Churches and faith-based organizations" as valuable or important community assets. Based upon asset mapping findings, it appears the East Biloxi area strengths include its number of employers; community structures; and churches & religious institutions. The area's weaknesses from a community asset mapping perspective includes its lack of educational/training

facilities targeting adults, and its relative lack of healthcare facilities as viewed from the perspective of survey respondents.

Equitable access to healthcare is important to preventing disease and disability, promoting and maintain health, and reducing premature death (De Maeseneer et al., 2003). As noted by residents, improving access to health care services in East Biloxi begins with ensuring that people have a usual and ongoing source of care, can access a location that is geographically available, and can find support in alleviating the financial barriers. People with a usual source of care have better health outcomes, fewer disparities, and lower costs. Additionally, access to care is dependent upon improvements to the roads and public infrastructure.

It is important that officials whether community leaders, philanthropy, or policymakers ensure that investments in East Biloxi are beneficent and do not harm to low-income residents and existing small businesses as they seek to capitalize on this new “opportunity zone” designation. This would include prioritize investments in projects that will yield equitable growth, development without displacement, and healthy communities of opportunity. Opportunity Zones have the potential to bring relief to these low-wage workers in several ways. For example, one of the largest expenses for many Mississippians, particularly low-income families, is housing. Any residential development in Biloxi’s Opportunity Zones should include a number of housing units set-aside for economically insecure families. State leaders can encourage affordable housing development by offering competitive points for Low-Income Housing Tax Credit or New Market Tax Credit projects located within Opportunity Zones.

Consideration should also be given to how municipal leaders actively engage with the community. As local leaders take on this challenge to push East Biloxi towards inclusivity and growth they must engage and collaborate with residents in setting priorities that are aligned with the identified needs outlined in this community needs assessment: access to healthy foods, jobs/employment, health/healthcare, affordable/quality housing, and improving public infrastructure. It is the hope that the approach taken for this community needs assessment, one that values community voice, will deepen community engagement and opportunities to learn from stakeholders while encouraging community-led solutions for East Biloxians.



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