



West Ohio Community  
Action Partnership



2023

Community  
Assessment  
Annual Update

AUGLAIZE & MERCER  
COUNTIES

This update to the community assessment for Auglaize and Mercer Counties does not reflect all of the changes that have occurred since the last report; rather it highlights some significant changes in the way we see barriers to low-income families attaining family stability; and the way in which we may approach possible solutions.

The continuous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were still visible in 2023. Our agency proceeded with serving people in need in non-traditional ways and provided more services than done in years prior for families who otherwise in the past, had never had a need for our programs. These non-traditional ways of serving included expanding our online and virtual presence to the families and individuals seeking assistance. Looking back, and seeing the number of families we have helped since the start of the pandemic, there is much accomplished. We distributed millions of dollars to help people from losing their homes and continue to do so.

According to World Population Review, Auglaize County’s 2023 population is 45,656 and has decreased in growth by .64% since 2010. Unlike Auglaize County, Mercer County has experienced a growth of over 3.7% since 2010 with a population of 42,327 currently.

<b>County</b>	<b>Population, 2023</b>	<b>Growth since 2010</b>
Auglaize County, OH	45,656	-0.64%
Mercer County, OH	42,327	+3.7 %

World Population Review, 2024

Allen County has a significantly higher rate of individuals in poverty than both Auglaize and Mercer Counties. Allen County reports a total of 13,230 individuals, with Auglaize and Mercer Counties reporting 3,153 and 2,637 respectively, according to World Population Review. The median household income for Auglaize County is \$70,192, with Mercer County slightly lower at \$68,914.

In 2023, West Ohio CAP maintained our services of rent and mortgage assistance to individuals affected by COVID-19 due to employment changes, childcare changes, and more. The agency provided rent assistance to 612 households in 2023, as well as about 15 households with mortgage assistance in Allen, Auglaize and Mercer Counties. We continued to see many in need of rent assistance considering in 2020 there were only a total of 276 eligible households being served with rent assistance prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to our community needs surveys collected from customers in 2023, rent and mortgage assistance was the highest need.

Auglaize County is comprised of 4,487 renter occupied units (24%). The state of Ohio is 33% renters, with a number of 1,588,226 renter households. Ohio’s minimum wage is \$10.10, making the rent affordable price at minimum wage, \$525. In 2023, the fair market rent for a 2-bedroom unit in both Auglaize County and Mercer County is \$794. The previous year, rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$738 per month. This is a 7.59% increase year-over-year. Mercer County is comprised of 3,256 renter occupied units (20%). In order to afford a 2 -bedroom unit at fair market rent, and individual in Auglaize and Mercer County would need to obtain an hourly wage of minimum \$15.27 and work 60 hours each week. Affordable rent continues to be an issue for Auglaize and Mercer Counties.

<b>County</b>	<b># of Renter Occupied Units</b>	<b>% of Renter Occupied Units</b>	<b>FMR for 2- bedroom in 2022</b>	<b>FMR for 2- bedroom in 2023</b>	<b>% increase from 2022 to 2023</b>
Auglaize	4,487	24%	\$738	\$794	7.59%
Mercer	3,256	20%	\$738	\$794	7.59%

A large concern of ours in regards to the rising cost of rent is those individuals who receive a fixed income, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). We have seen an increase in those in need of rent assistance who receive this type of payment. An average SSI payment is \$991/month, and that makes affordable rent for them only \$274/month. To assist the aging population, WOCAP and Area Agency on Aging 3 partnered to streamline the application process. When applying for WOCAP services, any customers of theirs will be assisted with the paperwork and then be sent to us. We strive to continue to partner with various community local agencies to serve our community with their various needs and ensure resources are available for all.

Our agency received additional COVID funding twice in 2023 to assist individuals and families with housing assistance in relation to rent, rent arrears, mortgage, evictions and more. All of this money had been expended by the end of 2023, and now going back to pre-COVID funding and how we can help people will look a lot different moving forward. There continues to be a lack of safe and affordable housing in all counties. WOCAP is committed to making sure that we are helping family's budget for housing and reduce other cost burdens to become better able to obtain/maintain housing in the future.

West Ohio CAP partnered with local agencies to provide non-congregate shelter to homeless families who otherwise would not be able to stay at a shelter in our communities. In 2023, we provided emergency lodging to 35 households in the three counties we serve. Our agency no longer has the COVID funding we were using to house individuals and families who were homeless into a safe hotel. With this resource gone, our only option now is to refer

homeless individuals to a shelter. There are several shelters available for homeless individuals or families in Allen, but still no shelters in Auglaize or Mercer.

In 2023, our agency has experienced a decrease in the number of individuals needing assistance with evictions. Only 16 families in Auglaize and Mercer Counties combined were aided with an eviction. This decrease since 2022 is significant to point out because while it shows that the need is still relevant, it proves that our additional rent funding was helping families and individuals obtain and maintain safe housing. However, the housing needs remain even this long after the initial start of the COVID-19 public health emergency when individuals were losing their jobs and being affected negatively by the pandemic.

Another recommendation from our Community Assessment in 2022 was to collaborate with other community stakeholders to ensure an accurate count of the homeless across the community. West Ohio CAP is working to establish a broader understanding and recognition of the homelessness problem in the community. We have worked with others in the three counties we serve to organize The Point in Time Count, which is an annual mandatory activity to count homeless individuals. In 2023, almost 60 individuals were counted on the date and time of The Point in Time Count in the designated census tracts.

West Ohio CAP continued to actively respond to the changing conditions to fulfill the needs in the communities we serve through areas such as food assistance, transportation needs, appliances, clothing assistance and more. In the year 2023, we assisted 10 households with emergency supportive services in Auglaize and Mercer Counties, as well as 7 additional households with property tax assistance. All of our work was done while simultaneously facing a staff shortage, similar to other agencies and businesses in the area. In 2023, we were down an average of 24 staff with a turnover rate of 36.6%.

The quality of housing remains a concern. There is a concentration of pre-1978 housing in the City of Lima, but also in the rural areas such as Auglaize and Mercer Counties as well. There is a high risk for lead hazards in these homes that go unabated. The focus for 2023 was put on the prevention of lead through demolition and treating the ground, as well as recruiting contractors. Home repairs completed remained the same as previous years, with a total of two homes in 2023. Both lead hazard control and home repair programs have been affected by the pandemic. There is a shortage of availability of contractors and licensed lead abatement contractors. WOCAP received \$375,000 from the Ohio Department of Health to educate the public and recruit contractors willing to get licensed for lead abatement. As recommended in our 2022 Community Assessment, West Ohio CAP has prioritized efforts to focus on lead. With this suggestion, we held a Lead Contractor class in 2023, and we had 36 individuals complete the class in 2023 through two separate sessions.

In 2023, our agency has provided over 730 households, in the 3 counties we serve, with utility assistance, not including the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) or the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) program. For the services of HEAP, PIPP, Winter Crisis and Summer Crisis, the number served returned closer to those served in years prior to pandemic. The various COVID-19 funds received allowed us to provide utility assistance for a large number of customers. This can reflect the increased need for services since 2020 for those who may not have needed services in the past.

A recommendation made in our previous community assessment suggested WOCAP expand efforts to increase education and programming regarding efficient energy usage in homes. From this recommendation, WOCAP successfully acquired an Energy Conservation Grant in 2023 that will allow staff to go into homes for an assessment and assist with items that

will help customers conserve energy. This grant allows residents in Allen, Auglaize and Mercer Counties to take the steps in reducing the amount of income spent on utility costs.

Homeownership and Financial Management classes continued to be held virtually to serve customers interested in increasing their financial knowledge and/or becoming homeowners. In 2023, our agency had 8 individuals complete the Financial Management courses, and 4 individuals complete the Homeownership Program classes. Homeownership numbers have decreased due to pandemic unemployment and the continued competitive housing market. WOCAP's Housing Team continues to build community relationships through presentations at local agencies, as well as meeting with financial institutions, realtors, insurance agents, and community and neighborhood organizations.

The unemployment rate in Auglaize County in 2023 peaked in the month of August with 3.1 %, and was the lowest of the year in the month of November with 2.3%. In Mercer County, unemployment in 2023 peaked in the months of January and February at 2.6%, and April was the lowest month with 1.9% unemployment.

West Ohio CAP has played a vital role in the community, working to improve and increase services to eligible West Ohio CAP clients, by providing access to home repair services, lead abatement, transportation, eye glasses, and work supports such as uniforms. The income limit for eligibility remained at 200% Federal Poverty Guidelines. CSBG's income increase of eligibility has allowed West Ohio CAP to serve more individuals than in the past. In addition, West Ohio CAP continued to advocate for change to improve the quality and affordability of housing for low-income people. Concern also grows for homeless individuals in these counties now that the non-congregate shelter funding is depleted and this resource to house homeless individuals is gone. This was a crucial service in these counties due to lack of homeless shelters.

Safe and affordable housing/shelter must remain a top priority for West Ohio CAP and other community agencies.

The work documented in this summary confirms that West Ohio CAP and other local service agencies had a positive impact on the local community, especially assisting additional individuals during the hardships that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effects are still present in the communities we serve. The higher cost of rent continues to be a burden to many. West Ohio CAP continues to focus on self-sufficiency programs such as financial management and efforts towards affordable housing. Parenting and family interventions are still needed to help families get out of the cycle of poverty. However, it is clear that West Ohio CAP alone cannot solve the persistent poverty cycle burdening so many Auglaize and Mercer County residents.

The accomplishments documented in the most recent Community Assessment reflects not only the work of West Ohio CAP, but of many other community organizations and government entities working together. These partnerships resulted in positive community-wide changes in education, employment, housing, transportation, and social services. One of this community's best assets is the ability to work together, with other community stakeholders, on these important issues. West Ohio CAP is proud to be part of this community and looks forward to continuing to work together with other local service and government agencies alike, to improve the standard of living for all Auglaize and Mercer County residents.



## Sources

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<https://www.rentdata.org/mercercounty-oh>

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**Auglaize County- 13093 Infirmary Road- Wapakoneta, Ohio 45895  
(419) 227-2586**

**Mercer County- 420 North Brandon Avenue- Celina, Ohio 45822  
(419) 584- 1550**