Prepared for the Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership by:

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Tom Liszka, Penn State Altoona
March 2012

The Blair County Human Services Office, The United Way of Blair County and the Blair County Needs Assessment Steering Committee would like to thank the leaders and all community partners who came together to form work groups to develop a Community Plan based on priority issues identified in the *Blair County Profile: Our Strengths, Challenges and Issues*.

Four work groups were formed: Alcohol and Other Drugs, Crime, Economy, and Healthcare. Each work group reviewed survey results and supporting data for their particular work group. The members also developed goals and outcomes that address the identified issues. And, finally, they identified objectives and strategies to impact the goals and outcomes. The work groups reviewed the findings reported in the *Blair County Profile* and gathered other data as they deemed necessary. All groups worked diligently and delivered goals and outcomes to the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee considered all of the goals presented, surveyed community providers to see which goals were already being addressed, and developed a workable Community Plan. The process has been much more rewarding than we ever could have envisioned when it started back in 2007. The community involvement and response have been tremendous. The business and social service communities became more aware of each other and their common goals. The process reaffirmed that our community has many strengths and assets, helped us focus on identified issues and set goals that can make a measurable improvement in the quality of life in Blair County.

But this is only the beginning of our journey. We invite current partners to remain committed to implementing strategies to meet our challenges. We would also invite others to join us as we begin again to assess current needs, measure our progress since 2007 and plan for a healthy future for our community. What began as a collaborative effort between two organizations that wanted to determine the most effective way to invest limited funds to make the most impact has truly become a community effort to make Blair County the best it can be.

Sincerely,

Robin Beck, CPO  
United Way of Blair County

Cathy Crum, Director  
Blair County Human Services Office
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Section One:
Executive Summary

In 2007, the United Way of Blair County and the Blair County Human Services Office invited organizations to collaborate on a community-wide needs assessment. The Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership was formed to provide direction and on-going support for the project. The ultimate goal of the comprehensive assessment was to identify community assets, identify targeted needs, and develop an action plan to fill those needs. This project was carried out utilizing the COMPASS II® tool, a guide developed by the United Way of America.

Organizational Structure and Funding

A Steering Committee, including a consultant who was hired as the Process Manager, directed the needs assessment process. The Steering Committee collaborated with a broader group of local resource people, identified as the Needs Assessment Partnership. Members of the Partnership included stakeholders on whom the community decisions would have an impact, who had an interest in the effort, who represented diverse sectors of the community, and who were likely to be involved in shaping and implementing the community impact plan developed later in the effort.

The development of the Community Plan began with the formation of four work groups based on priority areas identified in the needs assessment: crime, alcohol and other drugs, economy, and healthcare. Each work group had a convener who was chosen based on his or her expertise for that particular issue, a recorder, and the Process Manager who served as a process facilitator. Each work group had the following responsibilities:

- Review survey results and supporting data associated with the particular work group.
- Develop community goals/outcomes that address the work group issue.
- Identify objectives/strategies that are needed to impact the goals/outcomes and indicators successfully.
- Encourage partnerships and collaborations that will use the Community Plan to guide programmatic and fiscal decisions.

After the work groups submitted their recommendations with goals and strategies, a meeting was held for the Needs Assessment Partnership and members of the four work groups. The purpose was to share the recommendations from all the work groups and obtain input on the development of the Community Plan.

The Steering Committee took the recommendations from this meeting and began by developing a Matrix of Goals and Strategies which included a listing of agencies known to be working on that issue or implementing researched-based programs. They also reviewed and discussed the feasibility of completing all sixty strategies. Based on many factors, including available resources, staff, and funding, the Steering Committee determined that they would need to narrow down and prioritize strategies.
Before doing so, they determined to select strategies from all four work groups. In addition, the Steering Committee wanted to support those strategies that were already being implemented with success. Also, they chose top scoring strategies that were being implemented but needed to be addressed or strengthened. Six strategies chosen had not been previously implemented at all or at least in a coordinated countywide effort and one needed more research in order to determine if it was being addressed.

As a result the Steering Committee selected the following twenty-eight strategies as those that should be addressed in 2011-2012. More detailed information on the selected goals and strategies are outlined in Section Nine of the Community Plan. Several of the strategies refer to the term fidelity which means whether the program service or intervention is being delivered as it was designed or written (e.g. with all core components being delivered to the appropriate population; staff trained appropriately; using the right protocols, techniques, and materials; and in the locations or contexts prescribed).

**Alcohol and Other Drugs**

The Community Plan encourages the continuation of programs that are effective by supporting the following four strategies under their respective goal(s):

**Goal:** Reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in Blair County communities.

1. Support prevention programs that incorporate the six federal strategies that address alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in the community.
2. Encourage, implement, and expand blueprint and other evidence-based models with fidelity for youth and families.
3. Enhance resources and support the specialty court program models (e.g. drug court, DUI court, family court, juvenile court, etc.).

**Goal:** Reduce the availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in Blair County.

1. Collaborate with physicians and practitioners on practices regarding prescribing addictive medications.

There are also initiatives that have been implemented but need to be sustained, strengthened, and/or supported. The following three strategies are recommended.

**Goal:** Reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in Blair County communities.

1. Encourage fidelity of the Student Assistance Program model, training, promotion, and collaboration with parents, including at the elementary level to intervene in substance abuse and mental health issues.

**Goal:** Strengthen the overall approach of intervention and treatment for people with alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug issues.

1. Implement a recovery-oriented system of care that utilizes evidence-based practices.
2. Build support and resources for children living with addiction in the family and also children in recovery.

Finally, although there are proactive and aggressive law enforcement efforts in Blair County to address alcohol and other drug problems, there are also concerns that policies, procedures, and laws are not always enforced with consistency across all segments of the community. This is why the following strategy is included.

Goal: Reduce the availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in Blair County.

1. Enforce consistent compliance with school policies and federal, state, and local laws that restrict access and use of substances.

Crime

Because of the support and collaboration among government leaders, businesses, law enforcement, community organizations, and citizens, the crime rate in Blair County has decreased over the past few years. In order to maintain Blair County’s status as a safe place to live, the Community Plan encourages the continuation of programs that are effective by supporting the following four strategies under their respective goal(s):

Goal: Continue support for effective local drug and alcohol prevention, intervention, and treatment because of the direct link to crime and to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.

1. Continue a community-based, multi-agency comprehensive strategic approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and treatment by coordinating federal, state, and local resources to reduce and/or eliminate criminal activity.
2. Encourage enforcement and compliance with laws and policies that restrict access and use of substances in our communities.
3. Encourage, implement, and expand blueprint and other evidence-based models with fidelity for youth and families.

Goal: Continue to target recidivism in Blair County by supporting effective and evidence-based programs that focus on risks and needs.

1. Conduct programs/classes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system to develop better life skills and understand the impact of crimes against victims.

The following strategy is considered important to address substance abuse among youth.

Goal: Expand communication and collaboration between government agencies, social service agencies, educational institutions, and the faith-based communities in order to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.
1. Discuss with school districts/school boards the need to comply with laws regarding drug education and the positive impact of school-community partnerships, especially with Act 211 which requires each school student to receive a course of instruction in alcohol, drug, and tobacco abuse education.

Many agencies and organizations provide services to families and children but it’s not known how those efforts are being coordinated or evaluated for their effectiveness. One suggested strategy is outlined below.

**Goal:** Support and assist families in their efforts to raise children who are less likely to get involved with drugs and crime.

1. Develop a family-focused work group to analyze how healthy are the families in Blair County; identify issues within the family that put them at-risk; develop a profile of the families most at-risk; prepare a list of programs that already exist to support families and analyze their effectiveness; and explore ways of implementing new programs or support successful local programs which already exist.

**Economy**

The Community Plan supports the following goals and three strategies which local economic development organizations, businesses, and educational institutions are addressing.

**Goal:** Strengthen partnerships in local communities to implement programs and policies that will assist in creating more vibrant and livable communities as a means to attract jobs and a work force to Blair County.

1. Increase the education and/or skill attainment level for under or unemployed adults.

**Goal:** Advocate for programs at the local, state and federal level that support business retention and expansion, business attraction and entrepreneurship in Blair County.

1. Conduct annually an economic summit/jobs expo aimed at elected local officials and emphasize the need for economic development funding.
2. Work closely with legislators to assure that priority projects are supported for federal and state appropriations.

One of the benefits of developing this Community Plan was the opportunity for segments of the community such as social service agencies and business leaders to discuss common concerns. One such area was situational and generational poverty. Although many agencies were identified that work daily to provide resources to persons and families living in poverty, a greater understanding and collaborative effort is needed. As a result, the following strategies are included in the Community Plan:
Goal: Inform the community as to what generational and situational poverty means, its impact on everyone in Blair County, and possible solutions.

1. Identify a proven strategy/program that will reduce generational and situational poverty in Blair County.
2. Empower businesses to understand the experiences of living in poverty and how to retain employees trying to break out of poverty.
3. Improve the level of understanding about the experiences of living in poverty for community members who work with low-income persons.
4. Empower people experiencing poverty with resources and/or tools to become self-sufficient.

It is important to understand the economic impact of alcohol and other drug use and the benefits of drug testing. This includes educating business owners, supervisors, and employees regarding their impact on work performance, absenteeism, accidents, health of employees, and relationship with others on the job. Therefore, the following two strategies are recommended.

Goal: Develop and utilize relevant information on the benefits of drug testing in the workplace to encourage more businesses to participate in drug testing programs.

1. Identify the appropriate agencies that can conduct an education piece and/or establish programs to educate businesses (e.g. data results and the potential cost outcomes). Identify barriers as to why companies do not drug test.
2. Gather local and national data on the importance and benefits of developing drug testing programs in the workplace.

Healthcare

Another common theme among all work groups was the need for more mental health treatment services. Therefore, the following goal and strategy were identified as a high priority:

Goal: Increase access to care for physical, mental and substance abuse services in Blair County.

1. Advocate for the recruitment of additional psychiatrists to serve consumers.

The availability and access to a variety of medical and behavioral health services can be enhanced by supporting the following five strategies under their respective goal(s):

Goal: Increase access to care for physical, mental and substance abuse services in Blair County.

1. Advocate for insurance initiatives to reduce the number of underinsured persons.
2. Recruit additional volunteers at free clinics and other community healthcare centers.

Goal: Increase community awareness of existing physical, mental, substance abuse and social service agencies in Blair County.
1. Educate Blair County residents about valuable services by utilizing current and future technologies, including supporting the 211 information system in Blair County to assist consumers in gathering knowledge of agencies and services.

**Goal:** Enhance coordination of referrals and services among providers in Blair County.

1. Improve linking of residents to resources by educating case managers and client advocates to all available healthcare and social services.
2. Form a workgroup to develop and implement a common application form acceptable to all participating providers to better facilitate client access to services.

**Implementation of the Community Plan**

To begin implementation of the goals and selected strategies, a Community Plan kickoff was held on March 28, 2011, with representatives from schools, businesses, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, healthcare providers, government leaders, and social service agencies attending the event.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the process used in developing the Community Plan, solidify the matrix of those agencies/organizations that are already working to address any one of the issues, and review strategies to determine who will take a leadership role in moving forward to implement the Community Plan.

In July 2011, the Needs Assessment Steering Committee took the following steps toward achieving progress in implementing strategies outlined in the Community Plan:

- Goal 1 – Develop and maintain an effective and collaborative Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership.
- Goal 2 – Develop and implement a community health needs assessment in collaboration with Altoona Regional Health System, Nason Hospital, and Tyrone Hospital.
- Goal 3 – Begin implementation of the Community Plan related to poverty. A Poverty Work Group with representatives from various aspects of the community (e.g. education, business, social services, faith-based, government, healthcare, etc.) was formed to research existing programs within the county, explore other model programs, offer training to its members and the community, and explore options for developing a model to coordinate services.
- Goal 4 – Begin implementation of the Community Plan related to healthcare in conjunction with the Blair County Healthy Community Partnership/local State Health Improvement Plan Committee.
- Goal 5 – Begin implementation of the Community Plan related to school-community partnerships. This started with a presentation to all Blair County School Superintendents and the appointment of a representative to serve on the Steering Committee.
Goal 6 – Begin implementation of the Community Plan related to drug testing. In collaboration with Penn State Altoona and the Altoona Blair County Development Corporation, a proposal was developed to research and implement strategies related to drug testing in the workplace. A sub-committee is working with a student intern on this project to be completed by summer 2012.

Goal 7 – Support current strategies and organizations as outlined in the Community Plan.

Goal 8 – Collaborate with other organizations regarding their needs assessment and/or related activities.

Goal 9 – Develop a marketing plan/campaign for the Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership.
The primary purpose in undertaking this community assessment was to identify and prioritize community issues to help guide programmatic and fiscal decisions. As defined by United Way of America, “Community impact is about working at the community level; improving the lives of people in our community; and influencing whatever sectors, systems, networks, groups, or environments that can play a role in getting that done.” Everyone involved in this endeavor, including the Steering Committee, members of the Needs Assessment Partnership, and work groups, is committed to strategies that create clearly recognizable improvement in the lives of Blair County residents. This can be accomplished by creating new partnerships and by joining existing collaborations to create measurable improvement on the four priority challenges and issues.

This needs assessment process confirmed that Blair County has many assets. For example, 71% of respondents in the household survey felt that people in their neighborhoods trust each other and two-thirds agreed that people help each other out when they have a problem or in times of crisis. Over 87% of key informants believe that leaders come together and work productively to address critical community issues. Blair County has many service providers, community organizations and individuals who work to improve the lives of residents by offering a variety of programs and services. Participants in focus groups had no difficulty listing a variety of assets that make Blair County a great place to live, including the availability of leisure, cultural, and recreation activities; location of stores, churches, libraries, restaurants; educational opportunities; good emergency responders; hometown pride and a sense of community; good work ethic; and a safe place to raise a family. Business and economic development leaders are working to bring new and innovative jobs to the county and have collaborated with colleges and universities to enhance educational opportunities.

But like many communities across the Commonwealth, there are significant challenges, many of which have become even more challenging with recent job losses and economic conditions that are impacting our local community and the nation. It is important to acknowledge one common theme that all four work groups felt impacted their primary issue, one they consider critical to continue addressing: alcohol and other drug use. It impacts children, families, senior citizens, businesses, our economy, crime, schools and universities, neighborhoods, healthcare, and everyone’s quality of life no matter what community they
reside in. Work group members also felt strongly that there is a need to explore options for maintaining and providing services and programs to strengthen families.

The challenge is to motivate key community leaders and citizens to use this information to understand the issues and to work collaboratively toward resolving them. There are so many individuals, organizations, and social service agencies that have been working on our challenges for years. We have made progress in many ways, but the same issues are still consuming our time and resources.

The Steering Committee reviewed all of the strategies, determined which ones were already being addressed by individuals, agencies, or other community organizations, and then developed an action plan to address short and long-term outcomes. We are asking all community organizations to review carefully this Community Plan and to choose one or more of the strategies in our plan and incorporate it or them into their existing organizational strategic plans. This will not only assure that we are all working toward similar goals but will increase the likelihood of success by sharing resources.

Once again, we thank all those who were involved in the development of the Community Plan and welcome those who are willing to work on improving their community. Those who want electronic access to the information contained in the entire needs assessment report and additional, detailed sources of data can visit the website of the Blair County Human Services Office: (http://www.hso.blairco.org/needsassessment.html).

A copy of this Community Plan will be posted on the Blair County Human Services Office website.
The United Way of America defines “community building as the process of mobilizing communities to improve people’s lives. It engages diverse stakeholders, including residents and others, in sustained, collaborative, strategic efforts to strengthen and improve conditions in an identified geographic area.”

Community building is the coming together of diverse segments of a community to develop a community agenda. It is more than a set of meetings or a project. It is the development and pursuit of a community impact plan. COMPASS II® is the guide to community building that many communities are using to provide a framework for accomplishing their needs assessment. It works by identifying community strengths and assets and by matching and connecting those strengths and assets with strategic opportunities for people to improve their community. COMPASS II includes people in the decision-making process on whom the decisions will have an impact.

There are eight phases to the COMPASS II Program:

**Phase I: Form a Community Partnership**

**Phase II: Inventory Key Community Assets**

**Phase III: Collect and Analyze Community Data**

**Phase IV: Create a Community Vision**

**Phase V: Select Priority Issues and Establish Targeted Community Outcomes**

**Phase VI: Build an Outcome-Focused Community Impact Plan**

**Phase VII: Take Action**

**Phase VIII: Track Process, Progress and Impact**
A. Implementation of COMPASS II in Blair County

The Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership is a community partnership effort to provide a comprehensive and enduring assessment of the needs and assets in our community. Its purpose is to identify community assets, identify targeted needs, and develop a Community Plan to fill those needs. In 2007, the United Way of Blair County and the Blair County Human Services Office invited organizations to collaborate on a community-wide needs assessment. The primary purpose of the Blair County Needs Assessment was to provide the community with increased knowledge of the current challenges and issues that affect residents of the county, as well as the strengths and assets from which to create solutions. Both objective indicator (factual) data and subjective survey (opinion) data were collected utilizing the following methods:

1. A written survey of randomly selected households in Blair County.
2. A written survey of businesses, associations, services providers, and faith organizations.
3. A written survey of key informants.
4. Focus groups with representation from youth, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and people dealing with family violence issues within the county.
5. Indicator data from local, state, and national reports.
6. Community meetings.

As a result of the needs assessment, the priority challenges identified for Blair County were:

- Crime
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Economy
- Healthcare

The results were outlined and distributed in the Blair County Profile: Our Strengths, Challenges, and Issues. After the release of the publication, the Partnership began the task of developing the Community Plan.
B. **Blair County Needs Assessment Steering Committee**

The Needs Assessment Steering Committee assumed responsibility to oversee the comprehensive needs assessment, the development of the Community Plan, and the implementation of a mechanism for monitoring the impact of goals and strategies. The following persons served as members:

Robin Beck, United Way of Blair County  
Cathy Crum, Blair County Human Services Office  
Robin de Koning, Tyrone Hospital  
Randy Feathers, Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General  
Donna D. Gority, Retired, Blair County Commissioner  
Coleen A. Heim, Process Manager  
Kevin Hockenberry, Altoona Regional Health System and Blair County Human Services Office  
Gael Hoover, Nason Hospital  
Shawna Hoover, Operation Our Town  
Lauren Jacobson, Penn State Altoona  
Norman J. Miller, Altoona Area School District  
Patrick Miller, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation  
Judy Rosser, Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc.  
Tim Salony, Altoona Area Public Library  
Tom Shaffer, Penn State Altoona  
JoEllen Steinbrunner, Retired, Consultant and Blair County Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Drug and Alcohol Program Administrator  
Dr. Andrew Vavreck, Penn State Altoona

C. **Blair County Needs Assessment Partnership**

The Steering Committee collaborated with a broader group of people, identified as the Needs Assessment Partnership. The Partnership was essential in guiding the entire COMPASS II community-building effort. Members of the Partnership included stakeholders on whom the community decisions would have an impact, who had an interest in the effort, who represented diverse sectors of the community, and who were likely to be involved in shaping and implementing the Community Impact Plan.

D. **Role of the Process Manager**

A part-time consultant was hired to assume the role of Process Manager. This person was responsible for administering the entire community-building process; scheduling and facilitating work group meetings; and preparing the needs assessment report and the Community Plan.

E. **Work Groups**

The development of the Community Plan began with the formation of four work groups based on priority areas identified in the needs assessment: crime, alcohol and other drugs, economy, and healthcare. Each work group had a convener who was chosen based on his or her expertise, a recorder, and the Process Manager who served as a process facilitator. Each work group had the following responsibilities:
- Review survey results and supporting data associated with the particular work group.
- Develop community goals/outcomes that address the work group issue.
- Identify objectives/strategies that are needed to successfully impact the goals/outcomes and indicators.
- Encourage partnerships and collaborations that will use the Community Plan to guide programmatic and fiscal decisions.

F.  Funding

The needs assessment process and the development of the Community Plan were funded primarily by the Blair County Human Services Office, the United Way of Blair County, and the Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc. In-kind services and other fiscal contributions such as meeting rooms, printing, refreshments, and volunteer hours were provided by many other organizations, including Altoona Regional Health System, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation, Blair County Adult Probation Office, Blair Senior Services, and Penn State Altoona.
A. **Vision:** Develop the alcohol and other drugs component of the Community Plan by April 30, 2010.

**Mission:** Reduce substance abuse among youth and, over time, among adults by addressing the factors in the community that increase the risk of substance abuse and promoting the protective factors that minimize the risk of substance abuse.

B. **Work Group Members:**

Judy Rosser, Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc. (Convener)
Renee Bambocci, Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc.
Craig Clark, Family Intervention Crisis Services (FICS)
Machel Drahnak, BREATHE
Donna Gority, Blair County Commissioner
Terri Grove, CONTACT Altoona (Recorder)
Coleen Heim, Process Manager (Process Facilitator)
Patty Karn, Altoona Regional Health System Prevention Office
Pam Myers, Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program, Inc.
Lisa Ozio, Blair County Adult Probation
Tony Pater, Student Assistance Program Liaison
Amy Marten-Shanafelt, Blair Health Choices
Abbie Tate, Blair County Prison
Matthew J Wineland, Community Member
Molly Rimbeck Wink, Blair County Juvenile Probation

C. **Overview of Work Group Issue:**

The work group began the task by reviewing results from the needs assessment which indicated that alcohol and drug abuse was a high priority challenge and issue for Blair County. It was ranked number one by 97% of key informants as a major/moderate issue. Over 69% of households and 67% of Head Start participants reported that alcohol and other drug abuse was a major/moderate issue. It was rated by youth as the number one concern for their population. Participants in the family violence focus group stated that substance abuse is a significant factor affecting families. Members of the work group consider drug use to include but not be limited to alcohol, tobacco, prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, inhalants, opiates, etc. They acknowledged that all of the above are concerns in the community.

The Blair County Drug and Alcohol Program (SCA) completed a Treatment Needs Assessment and the overall analysis indicated that the Blair County prevalence rates were higher in our community than in the
There is much concern regarding use involving Blair County youth, mental health issues, and prescription drugs. The top five drugs of choice are alcohol, heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and opiates. An emerging issue for the county is the prescribing of certain medications by physicians. Blair County was red-flagged (by request for pre-authorization) as one of three counties where seboxum was prescribed without evidence of opiates in the system to necessitate seboxum treatment. About 25% of inmates at the Blair County prison are prescribed psychotropic drugs. For female inmates that number is about 60-70%. In the last few years, several nationally recognized gangs have emerged in the Blair County communities. This culture is being drawn in from cities outside of Blair County for the sole purpose of drug distribution.

There was an increase in overdose deaths related to multiple prescription drugs over the last four years. Prescription drugs, specifically methadone, benzodiazepines and other opiate synthetic medication along with heroin, are the primary drugs used in overdoses, and their abuse is increasing.

Work group members concur that there is a drug problem in Blair County but they also recognize that mental health issues are prevalent and there are not enough funds for treatment. This results in the same people being arrested, incarcerated, or seeking treatment.

With regard to school-age children, it appears that families/parents must be more engaged or included in treatment. Children of alcoholics and/or addicts comprise as much as 80% of SAP referrals. One identified gap for adolescent services is the lack of support groups for teens or after-care groups in school systems. Reintegration into the community is failing. Researched-based prevention and intervention programs in schools are not being implemented with fidelity thereby limiting their effectiveness.

Blair County data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey shows an overall decrease in the percentage of students reporting lifetime use of alcohol and other drugs. This is a positive development, but smokeless tobacco has slowly increased each year. The Blair County rate for smoking during pregnancy is almost double the state average.

The work group also identified many successful initiatives that they believe are effective and should be supported. These include the specialty courts, Blair Countians for Drug-Free Communities, Operation Our Town (including funding of a special prosecutor in District Attorney’s Office), Underage Drinking Diversion Program, the Drug Task Force, Push Out the Pusher hotline, etc.

In considering all of the issues, the alcohol and other drugs work group developed the following goals and strategies.

**D. Goals and Strategies**

| **Goal 1:** Reduce Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in Blair County communities. |
| **Strategy 1.1:** Encourage fidelity of the Student Assistance Program model, training, promotion, and collaboration with parents, including at the elementary level to intervene in substance abuse and mental health issues. |
**Strategy 1.2:** Increase problem identification and referrals to services through the development and support of Employee Assistance Programs.

**Strategy 1.3:** Support prevention programs that incorporate the six federal strategies that address alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in the community.

**Strategy 1.4:** Implement and expand blueprint and other evidence-based models with fidelity for youth and families (add link for more information on blueprints).

**Strategy 1.5:** Conduct no-tolerance campaigns targeting youth and their families.

**Strategy 1.6:** Enhance resources to support the expansion of specialty courts (DUI court, drug court, family court, and juvenile drug court).

**Strategy 1.7:** Expand alternative alcohol, tobacco, and drug-free activities for youth, families, and the general community.

**Goal 2:** Reduce the availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in Blair County.

**Strategy 2.1:** Prevent the sale of alcohol beverages and tobacco products to minors through retail outlets and/or community events.

**Strategy 2.2:** Collaborate with physicians and practitioners on practices regarding prescribing addictive medications.

**Strategy 2.3:** Educate adults (ages 18 and over) on the consequences of providing alcohol and tobacco to minors.

**Strategy 2.4:** Enforce the consistency of compliance with school policies and federal, state, and local laws that restrict access and use of substances.

**Strategy 2.5:** Educate communities and families on monitoring of prescription and over-the-counter medications to reduce inappropriate use and abuse.

**Strategy 2.6:** Encourage community partners to have more alcohol and tobacco-free events.

**Goal 3:** Strengthen the overall approach of intervention and treatment for people with alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug issues.

**Strategy 3.1:** Increase engagement of families in the intervention and treatment approaches.

**Strategy 3.2:** Build support and resources for children living with addiction in the family and also children in recovery.

**Strategy 3.3:** Implement a recovery-oriented system of care that utilizes evidence-based practices.
Strategy 3.4: Support continuation and enhancement of specialty court program models (drug court, DUI court, family court, juvenile drug court, etc.).

Strategy 3.5: Collaborate with partners (e.g. faith-based, other human service agencies, businesses, etc.) to support resources that improve the quality of life for people in the recovering community.

E. Target Population

Alcohol and other drugs affect all communities, residents, and age groups in Blair County; therefore, no particular target population was identified. However, Tyrone, Claysburg, the Penn-Lincoln Elementary School area, and the Wright Elementary School area were identified as at-risk areas.

G. Data Indicators for Alcohol and Other Drugs

Below is a list of data indicators that can be used for comparison in future needs assessments and to monitor the progress of the goals and strategies in this Community Plan.

- Needs assessment survey results
- SAP data
- Focus groups
- PA Youth Survey - Students Reported Lifetime Use
- PA Youth Survey - Students Reported Past 30 Day Use
- Drug and Alcohol Related Reports for Blair County
- Treatment Needs Assessment – Demand for Services
- Prison Data
- SCA data
- Managed care data
- School violence reports
- Juvenile data
- Drug task force
- Input from the recovering community
- UCR data.
Section Six: Crime

A. Vision statement: Blair County is a safe place to live and work.

Mission: Reduce crime by multidisciplinary collaboration between law enforcement, social services, and the community to identify and enhance existing Blair County resources, as well as to encourage and expand community involvement in all types of crime prevention efforts.

B. Work Group Members:

Randy Feathers, PA Attorney General’s Office/Operation Our Town (Convener)
Dr. Michael Arter, Penn State Altoona
Kathy Baskin, IDA Evergreen Manors
Jackie Bernard, Blair County District Attorney’s Office
Jackie Condon, Family Services, Inc.
Mitch Cooper, Retired Police Officer/Blair County Sheriff
Tim Disabato, Community Member
Jon Frank, Blair County Juvenile Probation
Donna Gority, Blair County Commissioner
Coleen Heim, Process Manager (Process Facilitator)
Shawna Hoover, Operation Our Town
Judge Daniel Milliron, Blair County Court
Charmayne Raia, Blair County Drug and Alcohol Office (Recorder)
John Robertson, Community Member
Nelda Sharbaugh, Blair Senior Services – Crime Watch Program
Cory Seymour, Blair County Adult Probation
Rhonda Smith, Family Services, Inc.
Cindy Updyke, Office of Representative Rick Geist
James Walstrom, PA Attorney General’s Office
William Wilkinson, Retired Police Officer
Donald Witherspoon, Blair County NAACP

C. Overview of Work Group Issues

The crime work group began its task by reviewing indicator and survey data in comparison with the community’s perception of crime in the county. In the Blair County 2007 Household Survey, 70.4% of those responding ranked crime as the number one major/moderate community challenge. Crime was ranked number five in the Head Start survey with over 62.2% of respondents stating it was a major/moderate issue. Those responding to the key informant survey had similar views with 78.9% reporting crime as the second highest major/moderate issue. In the youth focus group, crime was ranked as their number one concern for Blair County.
There may be many reasons for the community to perceive that the crime rate in the county is high including the fact that Blair County is more aggressive in crime prevention and enforcement. Community organizations and funding are available to address crime, so offenses increase because of self-initiating behavior (i.e. police go out of their way to make arrests). It is important to address the perception of the community since Blair County arrests have decreased at the same time that the community believes it is an unsafe place.

According to the PA Uniform Crime Reports, the Part 1 crime rate (serious offenses such as murder, negligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny theft, arson, and motor vehicle theft) in the county did increase from 2001-2006 to reach state levels. Data indicates an increase as well for Part 2 crimes (all other crime classifications outside those defined as Part I offenses) in the county. However, a review of the Uniform Crime Reports indicated that Blair County’s crime has since decreased 13%. There was an 11% decrease in Part 1 crimes for Blair County from 2008-2009 and a 5.5% decrease overall.

When reviewing state parole data, there was a 6% increase in females under supervision and an increase in young females with drug-related charges. Overall, there was a 25% increase in state parolees which were mostly males. The largest number of offenses is drug related at 26% with theft, property, and burglary next. The state parole office supervises 57% of cases for Blair County and 86% of offenders are actively reporting and in good standing. The employment rate is 77% which is very good. Most crimes are committed by people in and out of jail. There is a need to provide skills to inmates and have an incentive program for businesses to hire people on probation/parole. The criminal justice system is seeing more mental health issues (at least 50% of cases in county probation/parole are on medications).

There appears to be general agreement within Blair County that alcohol and other drug abuse has adversely affected the quality of life and impacted crime rates. There is significant concern regarding the impact of crime in the future in view of the fact that: 1) social service agencies have suffered substantial cuts; 2) all schools may not be complying with Act 211 which mandates drug and alcohol education; 3) Safe and Drug Free Schools funding has been eliminated; 4) funding for Neighborhood Watch programs have been cut; 5) prescription drug abuse has increased and 6) people from other areas are still coming to Blair County for illegal activity.

Blair County is fortunate to have aggressive law enforcement efforts as well as significant citizen/community organizations working to address crime, drugs/alcohol, etc. Blair County is in the forefront of innovative programs for re-entry and is having success with the development of specialty courts. Basic recidivism rates of probationers and parolees are approximately 45%. However, the recidivism rate is 8% for Diversion Court, 10% for IP, and 10% for Re-entry. The rate for clients in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy classes is 11%. Small caseloads allow more supervision, and treatment dollars have helped.

After considering all of the issues, the crime work group developed the following goals and strategies.

D. Goals and Strategies

| Goal 1: Continue support for effective local drug and alcohol prevention, intervention, and treatment because of the direct link to crime and to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County. |
Strategy 1.1: Consistent enforcement and compliance with laws and policies that restrict access and use of substances in our communities.

Strategy 1.2: Encourage blue-print and other evidence-based models be implemented with fidelity for youth and families.

Strategy 1.3: Work with school boards to encourage compliance with Act 211 which requires each school student to have a course of instruction in alcohol, drug, and tobacco abuse education.

Strategy 1.4: Continue a community-based, multi-agency comprehensive strategic approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and treatment by coordinating federal, state, and local resources to reduce and/or eliminate criminal activity (examples include but are not limited to Operation Our Town; Blair Countians for Drug-Free Communities; etc.).

Strategy 1.5: Support the specialty court program models (e.g. drug court, DUI court, family court, juvenile court, etc.).

Goal 2: Support and assist families in their efforts to raise children who are less likely to get involved with drugs and crime.

Strategy 2.1: Develop a family-focused work group to analyze how healthy are the families in Blair County; identify issues within the family that put them at-risk; develop a profile of the families most at-risk; prepare a list of programs that already exists to support families and analyze their effectiveness; and explore ways of implementing new programs or support successful local programs which already exist.

Strategy 2.2: Explore programs that target young females which encourage positive gender identity and females’ roles in society.

Goal 3: Expand communication and collaboration between government agencies, social service agencies, educational institutions, and the faith-based communities in order to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.

Strategy 3.1: Continue collaboration between criminal justice and drug and alcohol treatment agencies involved in the supervision and treatment of targeted offenders.

Strategy 3.2: Forge partnerships among the drug courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations to generate local support and enhance drug court effectiveness.

Strategy 3.3: Discuss with school districts the need to comply with laws regarding drug education and the positive impact of school-community partnerships.
Goal 4: Continue to target recidivism in Blair County by supporting effective and evidence-based programs that focus on risks and needs.

Strategy 4.1:  Support the specialty court program models (e.g. drug court, DUI court, family court, juvenile court, etc.).

Strategy 4.2:  Conduct programs/classes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system to develop better life skills and understand the impact of crimes against victims.

Strategy 4.3:  Encourage legislators to examine successful programs which help to reduce recidivism.

Strategy 4.4:  Work with community-based organizations to provide sites for conducting probation/parolee related classes throughout Blair County.

Strategy 4.5:  Encourage businesses to work with government and social service agencies in the employment of individuals with past criminal histories.

Goal 5: Continue support for strong and effective law enforcement and prosecution in Blair County.

Strategy 5.1:  Continue a community-based, multi-agency comprehensive strategic approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and treatment by coordinating federal, state, and local resources to reduce and/or eliminate criminal activity (examples include but are not limited to Operation Our Town; Blair Countians for Drug-Free Communities; etc.).

Strategy 5.2:  Mobilize targeted communities to partner with public and private sector entities to offer solutions to issues affecting the residents (examples include but are not limited to neighborhood watch groups; Push Out the Pusher; etc.).

E. Target Population

There is concern regarding the young age of offenders who have significant mental health issues, along with drug use. An increase in female offenders with a history of drug and violent offenses will significantly impact children and contribute to the breakdown of the family unit.

F. Indicator Data for Crime

Below is a list of data indicators which can be used for comparison in future needs assessments and to monitor the progress of the goals and strategies in this Community Plan.

- Needs assessment survey results
- Focus groups
- Reported Crimes in Blair County (comparisons to other similar counties)
- Comparison of Reported Crimes – Part 1
- Comparison of Reported Crimes – Part 2
- Number of cases handled by the District Attorney’s Office
- Telephone Calls to the Push Out the Pusher Hotline
- School Safety Report for Blair County Schools
- Recidivism rates
- Revocation rates
- Increase/decrease in caseloads
- Number of drug overdoses
- Drug arrests
- Increase participation in Neighborhood Watch
- Data from specialty courts
- Number of out-of-town dealers arrested
A. **Vision:** A community that strives to provide economic opportunities for the residents of Blair County.

**Mission:** Develop an economic community work plan to give back to the needs assessment steering committee by April 30, 2010.

B. **Work Group Members**

Patrick Miller, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation (Convener)
Marty Culp, Southern Alleghenies Workforce Investment Board
Susan Estep, Center for Independent Living
Krista Etters, AmeriCorps VISTA at United Way of Blair County
Mahlon Fiscel, Family Services, Inc.
Matthew Fox, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation
Donna Gority, Blair County Commissioner
Coleen Heim, Process Manager (Process Facilitator)
Joe Hurd, Blair County Chamber of Commerce
Cheryl Johnson, Blair County CareerLink
Jean Johnstone, Catholic Charities, Inc.
Marty Marasco, Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation
Bobbie Miller, Advantage Group
Allan Robison, Blair County Community Action Agency
Lanny Ross, Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center
Neil Rudel, Altoona Mirror
Tim Salony, Blair County Library System
Susanna Tomlinson, Family Resource Center/United Way (Recorder)

C. **Overview of Work Group Issue:**

The work group discussed issues related to lack of jobs, unemployment/employment, and poverty. Blair County is suffering from economic struggles, and its residents expressed that in the household survey results. The major challenges identified in the Blair County Needs Assessment were related to economic conditions, including unemployment/underemployment, lack of jobs, poverty, and budgeting difficulties. Over 59% of those responding to the survey ranked unemployment/underemployment as a major/moderate issue community challenge. Key informants agreed with 77% reporting unemployment/underemployment as a major/moderate issue. Over 20% of respondents to the household survey were not able to afford recreational or entertainment activities. The economy was rated the number one community challenge in three of the four focus groups.
The perception of residents is that there are not jobs available; however, the issues for Blair County are more related to underemployment and a wage level that is lower than comparable areas. The average per capita income for Blair County is $20,174 which is lower than that for Pennsylvania at $24,694. Estimated median household income and wages are also lower for Blair County. This is due in part to Blair County’s having more technical-service type jobs that tend to pay lower wages. The average wage per employee in Blair County is almost $10,000 less per year than in Pennsylvania as a whole.

The average unemployment rate in Blair County has ranged from 4.2% to 5.9% in the time period from 2000 to 2007 and is currently slightly less than the state rate. Although there was a significant increase in the county employment rate in 2007, the greatest number of employer units is in retail trade which has one of the lowest annual average wages at $19,654. In Blair County, 62% of the population with any disability is unemployed.

In addition to wage and income data, other county economic indicators include poverty levels, food stamp use, and participation in government assistance programs. In Blair County, the use of food stamps and medical assistance is higher than the state average with one in five people getting assistance. Twelve percent of people are getting food stamps and 20% are receiving medical assistance. The percentage of students who are enrolled in free/reduced school lunch programs in Blair County is 35%.

The 2005 estimated poverty rate in Blair County is 14.0% which is higher than the state average of 11.9%. The estimated poverty rate for children under 18 in Blair County is 20.3%. The number of homeless persons served in shelters in Blair County almost doubled from 129 persons served in 2000 to 233 in 2007. Work group members involved in providing social services stated that many people living in poverty today are hard working people who find themselves affected by local, state, and economic circumstances. Middle class families may not have experienced living in poverty before and, when it affects them, they do not know how to survive so many declare bankruptcy.

Work group members were concerned about the impact of substance abuse on the economy, including the lack of drug testing in many businesses. From the perspective of drug users, they know what companies will or will not drug test and will seek employment with those companies that don’t. It is important to educate employers on the benefits of drug testing which can include a safer working environment, better pool of employees, and cost benefits related to job performance and production etc.

A lack of educational attainment hurts our community, especially when viewed by companies considering a move to Blair County. Education indicator data for Blair County shows that 10% of adults ages 25 and over did not finish high school, but that percentage has improved since 1990. One of the single most significant issues is losing 25% of our youth each decade – mostly those with education and/or skills sets. An important question to ask is why people are leaving Blair County.

In summary, Blair County’s ability to diversify its economy shortly after the decline of the railroad industry has assisted in creating a more stable economy over the years. During the 2008-09 recession the county’s unemployment rate did increase but remained considerably less than both the state and national averages. Recent reports indicate that the Blair County economy is experiencing growth at a faster pace than most other metropolitan areas in the state. Some of that growth can be attributed to a growing health care industry and minor growth in manufacturing and customer service employment.
The Moody’s Analytics employment diffusion index has jumped in recent months indicating that hiring is quickly becoming broader based across industries. Additionally, a relatively stable housing market, high affordability and a relative low cost of living will assist in stabilizing the local economy. Over the long term it is projected that the manufacturing sector will continue to lose jobs which will increase the area’s dependence on a growing services economy, spearheaded by growth in the transportation and logistics sector, education and healthcare. Weak demographics, including an aging and stagnant population and post-secondary education attainment levels and certifications of the workforce, will continue to hinder major advancements in business recruitment thereby making business retention and expansion a priority of economic development efforts.

The economy work group developed the following goals and strategies for inclusion in the Community Plan for Blair County.

D. Goals and Strategies:

Goal 1: Strengthen partnerships in local communities to implement programs and policies that will assist in creating more vibrant and livable communities as a means to attract jobs and a work force to Blair County

| Strategy 1.1: | Increase the number of blighted structures that are being eliminated in core neighborhoods (rehab or demolition) |
| Strategy 1.2: | Eliminate and eradicate building graffiti tagging to present more welcoming communities throughout Blair County. |
| Strategy 1.3: | Encourage and support efforts to introduce active transportation improvements including urban bike and walking trails, residential and sidewalk improvements, and make current commercial corridors pedestrian friendly in Blair County. |
| Strategy 1.4: | Encourage efforts to introduce alternative housing one block at a time in core areas throughout Blair County. (Find Tier 1 sites to rebuild the core area). |
| Strategy 1.5: | Encourage efforts to enhance gateway corridors throughout all municipalities in Blair County for the purpose of enhancing the gateways. |
| Strategy 1.6: | Encourage municipalities to adopt land use and zoning policies. |
| Strategy 1.7: | Increase the education and/or skill attainment level for under or unemployed adults. |

Goal 2: Develop and utilize relevant information on the benefits of drug testing in the workplace to encourage more businesses to participate in drug testing programs.

| Strategy 2.1: | Gather local and national data on the importance and benefits of developing drug testing program in the workplace. |
**Strategy 2.2:** Identify the appropriate agencies that can conduct an education piece and/or establish programs to educate businesses (e.g. data results and the potential cost outcomes). Identify barriers as to why companies do not drug test.

**Strategy 2.3:** Create a community incentive program to support a drug free workplace and publicize the success stories (financial incentive to encourage employers).

| Goal 3: | Advocate for programs at the local, state and federal level that support business retention and expansion, business attraction and entrepreneurship in Blair County. |

**Strategy 3.1:** Conduct annually an economic summit/jobs expo aimed at elected local officials and emphasize the need for economic development funding.

**Strategy 3.2:** Work closely with legislators to assure that priority projects are supported for federal and state appropriations.

**Strategy 3.3:** Work closely with local commercial institutions to establish creative programs to support commercial, residential, and industrial development investments.

| Goal 4: | Inform the community as to what generational and situational poverty means, its impact on everyone in Blair County, and possible solutions. |

**Strategy 4.1:** Improve the level of understanding about the experiences of living in poverty for community members who work with low-income persons.

**Strategy 4.2:** Empower people experiencing poverty with resources and/or tools to become self-sufficient.

**Strategy 4.3:** Empower businesses to understand the experiences of living in poverty and how to retain employees trying to break out of poverty.

**Strategy 4.4:** Identify a proven strategy/program that will reduce generational and situational poverty in Blair County.

**Strategy 4.5:** Build internal and external county collaborations to increase resources to reduce generational and situational poverty.

**E. Target Population**

Economy issues affect all segments of the community; therefore, no particular target population was identified.

**F. Indicator Data for Economy**
Below is a list of data indicators which can be used for comparison in future needs assessments and to monitor the progress of the goals and strategies in this Community Plan.

- Needs assessment survey
- Focus groups
- Annual Unemployment Rate
- Education attainment levels
- Change in population cohorts (20-34 and 35-49) as a work force for the community
- Per-capita income
- Changes in wages for employees in Blair County
- Changes in employment rate in Blair County
- Number of blighted structures eliminated
- Drug testing data if available
- Food Stamp Program - Percent of Blair County Population Participating
- Cash Assistance Program - Percent of Blair County Population Receiving
- Percent of students enrolled in free/reduced lunch program
- Estimated Poverty Rate for Blair County
- Estimated Poverty Rate for Children in Blair County
- Percent of Children under Five who are Low-income in Blair County
- Data on the homeless
Section Eight: Healthcare

A. Vision: Creating healthy communities through education and access to healthcare.


B. Work Group Members:

Kevin Hockenberry, Altoona Regional Health System (Convener)
Robin Beck, United Way of Blair County
Rose Dickson, Blair Senior Services
Krista Etters, AmeriCorps VISTA at United Way of Blair County
Mark Frederick, Altoona Regional Health System Behavioral Health
Donna Gority, Blair County Commissioner
Coleen Heim, Process Manager (Process Facilitator)
Paula Kenepp, Partnering for Health Services
Carol Leonard, Child Advocates of Blair County/Head Start
Sally Lenz, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries
Cathy McFee, Family Services, Inc.
Becky Mingle, Blair Health Choices (Recorder)
Scott Moyer, CBHNAP
Blaine Smith, Blair Health Choices
Robert Smith, DPW - Blair County Assistance Office

C. Overview of Work Group Issue:

Work group members reviewed indicator data and discussed issues related to overall health; anxiety, stress, and depression; lack of affordable medical care; and not having enough money to pay for medical care. The five leading causes of death in Blair County are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, and accidents. The death rate in the county is higher than for Pennsylvania and there is a notable decrease in the birth rate making Blair County an aging population. Work group members contemplated whether access to health care, lifestyle choices, lack of education or combination contributed to the current healthcare situation in the county. There was agreement that strong preventive care is crucial.

Respondents to the household survey and the Head Start survey put anxiety, stress, and depression as the number one challenge within their own households at 36% and 52% respectively. Blair County may have a proportionally higher number of mental health clients but the behavioral health care system must contend with a lack of psychiatrists and psychologists. At times clients must travel out of county or face waiting lists for a few weeks to several months. Waiting lists have improved for behavioral health...
services except for outpatient psychiatric care, but are still a problem for seboxum/methadone treatment.

The national annual suicide rate is 12.0 per 100,000 people. The rate in Blair County is somewhat higher at 15.6. Over the last eleven years, the average number of Student Assistance Program referrals for suicide ideation, gesture, or attempt in schools was over forty students per year. As indicated on the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, youth in Blair County also experience symptoms of depression with 32.4% of students feeling depressed or sad most days.

In Blair County, 31% of those responding to the random household survey indicated that one of their household challenges was not having enough money to pay the doctor, buy prescription medications, or get medical insurance. As a community challenge, the lack of affordable medical care was listed by 57% of households as well as 74% of key informants. As with most of the survey results, Head Start families saw it as an even greater challenge at 64%. About 19.5% of the population in Blair County is eligible for medical assistance, as compared to 15.1% for Pennsylvania. With regard to medical assistance, there is a problem accessing care because eligibility limits are extremely low and the basis for payment is stringent because of state and/or federal dollars.

Data taken from the 2004 Health Insurance Survey indicate 13.8% of people ages 19-64 in Blair County are without health insurance as compared to their counterparts in Pennsylvania at 11.1%. The estimated number of uninsured children under 19 years old in Blair County was 3.3% or 1,032 children. Without health insurance, people do not have the means to pay for office visits, diagnostic tests, or prescription medications. The result is often no treatment, overall poor health, or inappropriate emergency room use. Children and the elderly are covered for the most part, but adults are left out of medical care (including behavioral health services). Children are adequately covered by CHIP, although they could be without insurance for six months to be eligible. There is a large waiting list (which could go as long as two years) for Adult Basics (like an adult CHIP) depending on the expansion of the program.

There has been a 34% increase in people coming to the free clinic mostly because of losing their jobs; however, there is currently a waiting list for 60 people. In addition to this service, there are many other agencies and organizations assisting individuals and families but improved coordination is needed so that people can be served in the most effective and efficient manner.

After studying all of the issues, the healthcare work group developed the following goals and strategies.

**D. Goals and Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Goal 1:</strong> Increase access to care for physical, mental and substance abuse services in Blair County.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 1.1:</strong> Advocate for the recruitment of additional psychiatrists to serve consumers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 1.2:</strong> Recruit additional volunteers at free clinics and other community healthcare centers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 1.3:</strong> Advocate for insurance initiatives to reduce the number of underinsured persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 1.4:</strong> Improve linking of residents to resources by educating case managers and client advocates to all available healthcare and social services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal 2: Increase community awareness of existing physical, mental, substance abuse and social service agencies in Blair County.

**Strategy 2.1:** Educate Blair County residents about available services by utilizing current and future technology resources.

**Strategy 2.2:** Support the 211 information system in Blair County to assist consumers in gathering knowledge of agencies and services.

Goal 3: Enhance coordination of referrals and services among providers in Blair County.

**Strategy 3.1:** Form a workgroup to develop and implement a common application form acceptable to all participating providers to better facilitate client access to services.

E. **Target Population**

The issue of healthcare impacts all Blair County residents; however, the “working poor” seem to be the group that has the most trouble accessing services (e.g. waiting lists, lack of specialty doctors, providing for medical needs of their children instead of themselves, etc.).

F. **Indicator Data for Healthcare**

Below is a list of data indicators which can be used for comparison in future needs assessments and to monitor the progress of the goals and strategies in this Community Plan.

- Needs assessment survey results
- Blair County Health Profile Data
- Percent of Blair County population participating in medical assistance
- Decrease in waiting lists
- Number of psychiatrists
- Number of volunteer hours documented
- Rate of uninsured in comparison to state rate
- Number of case managers attending training
- Number of calls to CONTACT Altoona/other agencies before and after marketing of PA 211 in Blair County
- Pre-post survey results after launch
- Gaps in services
- Formation of a workgroup
- Development of a common application form
- Utilization of a common application form/agency supplements
- Number of applications and re-applications (due to errors, ineligibility, or no follow-through)
- Number of approvals and rejections
- Suicide Statistics for Blair County
- Percent of Youth Reporting Symptoms of Depression
Section Nine: Selected Strategies

After the work groups submitted their recommendations with goals and strategies, a meeting was held on July 12, 2010 for the Needs Assessment Partnership and members of the four work groups. The purpose was to share the recommendations from all the work groups and obtain input on the development of the Community Plan. The intent of a Community Plan is to drive funding decisions based on the needs of Blair County and to assist in obtaining community/agency buy-in on working together to solve the most immediate challenges.

Participants in the meeting expressed the following:

- Put a positive spin on the Community Plan.
- Don’t duplicate efforts that are already being implemented by other agencies or programs.
- Develop a matrix of all goals and prioritize by short and long-term.
- Pick a few easy fast wins to show success.
- Address drug and alcohol issues, which appear to be a common thread between all work groups.
- Address the importance of strengthening families.

To begin, Steering Committee members developed a Matrix of Goals and Strategies which included a list of agencies known to be working on that issue or implementing researched-based programs. Next, they reviewed each strategy and assigned a number (1 = currently being worked on with success; 2 = currently being worked on but needs to be addressed or is weak in some area; 3 = not being worked on at all or not with a coordinated countywide effort; 4 = needs further research as to the status). They decided that some designations of 2 may be based on funding issues. Individual Steering Committee members then assigned each strategy a value based on a numerical system (1 = the lowest value and 3 = the highest value).

After the joint Partnership/Work Group meeting was held, the Steering Committee began to review and discuss the feasibility of completing all sixty strategies. It was determined based on many factors, including available resources, staff, and funding that the Steering Committee would need to narrow down and prioritize strategies.

According to the COMPASS II manual, when selecting priority issues, the following criteria should be considered:

- Extent to which the issue relates to the community vision.
- Number of people the issue affects.
- Extent to which the issue affects the most vulnerable people.
- Cost to the affected individuals, for example, loss of income, disability.
- Trends in the issue: Is it getting better or worse?
Cost to the community, for example, image, dollars, loss of industry.
Likely ability of the community to have an impact on the issue.
Extent to which citizens are concerned about the issue.
Likely support from constituencies.
Likelihood that the community can reach a consensus on a proposed solution.
Availability of funding.

Before narrowing down and selecting the final strategies, it was determined that selected strategies would come from all four work groups. In addition, the Steering Committee wanted to support those strategies that were already being worked on with success. Also chosen were the top scoring strategies that were being worked on but needed to be addressed or strengthened. Six strategies chosen were not being worked on at all or at least not in a coordinated countywide effort and one needed more research in order to determine if it was being addressed. There were several strategies that were duplicated from one or more work groups or could easily be combined into one strategy.

As a result the Steering Committee selected the following strategies as those that should be addressed in 2011 - 2012.

**Alcohol and Other Drugs**

For many years, Blair County has been proactive in addressing substance abuse by applying for grants, implementing research-based and promising programs, redirecting resources to address the most critical areas, and collaborating with community partners. Therefore, the Community Plan encourages the continuation of programs that are effective by supporting the following four strategies under their respective goal(s):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in Blair County communities.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Support prevention programs that incorporate the six federal strategies that address alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Encourage, implement, and expand blueprint and other evidence-based models with fidelity for youth and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enhance resources and support the specialty court program models (e.g. drug court, DUI court, family court, juvenile court, etc.).</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Reduce the availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in Blair County.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Collaborate with physicians and practitioners on practices regarding prescribing addictive medications.</td>
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There are also initiatives that have been implemented but need to be sustained, strengthened, and/or supported. Many of those programs focus on children and youth and span the continuum of prevention, intervention, treatment, and aftercare. The following three strategies are recommended.
Goal: Reduce Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in Blair County communities.

1. Encourage fidelity of the Student Assistance Program model, training, promotion, and collaboration with parents, including at the elementary level to intervene in substance abuse and mental health issues (D1.1).

Goal: Strengthen the overall approach of intervention and treatment for people with alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug issues.

1. Implement a recovery-oriented system of care that utilizes evidence-based practices.
2. Build support and resources for children living with addiction in the family and also children in recovery.

Finally, although there are proactive and aggressive law enforcement efforts in Blair County to address alcohol and other drug problems, there are also concerns that policies, procedures, and laws are not always enforced with consistency across all segments of the community. This is why the following strategy is included.

Goal: Reduce the availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in Blair County.

1. Enforce consistent compliance with school policies and federal, state, and local laws that restrict access and use of substances.

Crime

Because of the support and collaboration among government leaders, businesses, law enforcement, community organizations, and citizens, the crime rate in Blair County has decreased over the past few years. In comparison to other communities, Blair County is a safe place to live and raise a family. In order to maintain this status, the Community Plan encourages the continuation of programs that are effective by supporting the following four strategies under their respective goal(s):

Goal: Continue support for effective local drug and alcohol prevention, intervention, and treatment because of the direct link to crime and to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.

1. Continue a community-based, multi-agency comprehensive strategic approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and treatment by coordinating federal, state, and local resources to reduce and/or eliminate criminal activity.
2. Encourage enforcement and compliance with laws and policies that restrict access and use of substances in our communities.
3. Encourage, implement, and expand blueprint and other evidence-based models with fidelity for youth and families.
**Goal:** Continue to target recidivism in Blair County by supporting effective and evidence-based programs that focus on risks and needs.

1. Conduct programs/classes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system to develop better life skills and understand the impact of crimes against victims.

There is also a recommendation in this section which addresses substance abuse among youth. The elimination of funding and the pressure on schools to enhance academic performance may lead to a decreased emphasis on curriculum and programs which address substance abuse. Therefore, the following strategy is considered important.

**Goal:** Continue support for effective local drug and alcohol prevention, intervention, and treatment because of the direct link to crime and to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.

**Goal:** Expand communication and collaboration between government agencies, social service agencies, educational institutions, and the faith-based communities in order to ensure public safety and increase the quality of life in Blair County.

1. Discuss with school districts/school boards the need to comply with laws regarding drug education and the positive impact of school-community partnerships, especially with Act 211 which requires each school student to receive a course of instruction in alcohol, drug, and tobacco abuse education.

There was much discussion regarding crime and substance abuse and their impact on families. Many agencies and organizations provide services to families and children but it’s not known how those efforts are being coordinated or evaluated for their effectiveness. One suggested strategy is outlined below.

**Goal:** Support and assist families in their efforts to raise children who are less likely to get involved with drugs and crime.

1. Develop a family-focused work group to analyze how healthy are the families in Blair County; identify issues within the family that put them at-risk; develop a profile of the families most at-risk; prepare a list of programs that already exist to support families and analyze their effectiveness; and explore ways of implementing new programs or support successful local programs which already exist.

**Economy**

Probably more than for any other issue, circumstances beyond our control affect the concerns regarding our economy in Blair County. However, there are many positives for our area such as a
relatively stable housing market, high affordability and a relative low cost of living. The downside for Blair County includes an aging and stagnant population and post-secondary education attainment levels and certifications of the workforce. These factors hinder major advancements in business retention and expansion.

The Community Plan supports the following goals and three strategies local economic development organizations, businesses, and educational institutions are addressing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Strengthen partnerships in local communities to implement programs and policies that will assist in creating more vibrant and livable communities as a means to attract jobs and a work force to Blair County.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Increase the education and/or skill attainment level for under or unemployed adults.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Advocate for programs at the local, state and federal level that support business retention and expansion, business attraction and entrepreneurship in Blair County.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Conduct annually an economic summit/jobs expo aimed at elected local officials and emphasize the need for economic development funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Work closely with legislators to assure that priority projects are supported for federal and state appropriations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the benefits of developing this Community Plan was the opportunity for segments of the community such as social service agencies and business leaders to discuss common concerns. One such area was situational and generational poverty. Although many agencies were identified who work daily to provide resources to persons and families living in poverty, a greater understanding and collaborative effort is needed. As a result, the following strategies are included in the Community Plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Inform the community as to what generational and situational poverty means, its impact on everyone in Blair County, and possible solutions.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Identify a proven strategy/program that will reduce generational and situational poverty in Blair County.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Empower businesses to understand the experiences of living in poverty and how to retain employees trying to break out of poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Improve the level of understanding about the experiences of living in poverty for community members who work with low-income persons.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Empower people experiencing poverty with resources and/or tools to become self-sufficient.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As was mentioned earlier in this report, alcohol and other drug use affects all segments of the community. The economy is no exception. It is important to understand the economic impact of alcohol and other drug use and the benefits of drug testing. This includes educating business owners, supervisors, and employees regarding the impact on work performance, absenteeism,
accidents, health of employees, and relationship with others on the job. Therefore, the following two strategies are recommended.

**Goal:** Develop and utilize relevant information on the benefits of drug testing in the workplace to encourage more businesses to participate in drug testing programs.

1. Identify the appropriate agencies that can conduct an education piece and/or establish programs to educate businesses (e.g. data results and the potential cost outcomes). Identify barriers as to why companies do not test.
2. Gather local and national data on the importance and benefits of developing drug testing program in the workplace.

**Healthcare**

Another common theme among all work groups was the need for more mental health treatment services. Therefore, the following goal and strategy were identified as a high priority:

**Goal:** Increase access to care for physical, mental and substance abuse services in Blair County.

1. Advocate for the recruitment of additional psychiatrists to serve consumers.

The availability and access to a variety of medical and behavioral health services can be enhanced by supporting the following five strategies under their respective goal(s):

**Goal:** Increase access to care for physical, mental and substance abuse services in Blair County.

1. Advocate for insurance initiatives to reduce the number of underinsured persons.
2. Recruit additional volunteers at free clinics and other community healthcare centers.

**Goal:** Increase community awareness of existing physical, mental, substance abuse and social service agencies in Blair County.

3. Educate Blair County residents about valuable services by utilizing current and future technologies, including supporting the 211 information system in Blair County to assist consumers in gathering knowledge of agencies and services.

**Goal:** Enhance coordination of referrals and services among providers in Blair County.

1. Improve linking of residents to resources by educating case managers and client advocates to all available healthcare and social services.
2. Form a workgroup to develop and implement a common application form acceptable to all participating providers to better facilitate client access to services.
## Section Ten: Indicator Data

### Indicator Data for Alcohol and Other Drugs

- Needs assessment survey results
- SAP data
- Focus groups
- PA Youth Survey - Students Reported Lifetime Use
- PA Youth Survey - Students Reported Past 30 Day Use
- Drug and Alcohol Related Reports for Blair County
- Treatment Needs Assessment – Demand for Services
- Prison Data
- SCA data
- Managed care data
- School violence reports
- Juvenile data
- Drug task force
- Input from the recovering community
- UCR data.

### Indicator Data for Crime

- Needs assessment survey results
- Focus groups
- Reported Crimes in Blair County (comparisons to other similar counties)
- Comparison of Reported Crimes – Part 1
- Comparison of Reported Crimes – Part 2
- Number of cases handled by the District Attorney’s Office
- Telephone Calls to the Push Out the Pusher Hotline
- School Safety Report for Blair County Schools
- Recidivism rates
- Revocation rates
- Increase/decrease in caseloads
- Number of drug overdoses
- Drug arrests
- Increase participation in Neighborhood Watch
- Data from specialty courts
- Number of out-of-town dealers arrested
## Indicator Data for Economy

- Needs assessment survey
- Focus groups
- Annual Unemployment Rate
- Education attainment levels
- Change in population cohorts (20-34 and 35-49) as a work force for the community
- Per-capita income
- Changes in wages for employees in Blair County
- Changes in employment rate in Blair County
- Number of blighted structures eliminated
- Drug testing data if available
- Food Stamp Program - Percent of Blair County Population Participating
- Cash Assistance Program - Percent of Blair County Population Receiving
- Percent of students enrolled in free/reduced lunch program
- Estimated Poverty Rate for Blair County
- Estimated Poverty Rate for Children in Blair County
- Percent of Children under Five who are Low-income in Blair County
- Data on the homeless

## Indicator Data for Healthcare

- Needs assessment survey results
- Blair County Health Profile Data
- Percent of Blair County population participating in medical assistance
- Decrease in waiting lists
- Number of psychiatrists by three
- Number of volunteer hours documented
- Rate of uninsured in comparison to state rate
- Number of case managers attending training
- Number of calls to CONTACT Altoona/other agencies before and after marketing of PA 211 in Blair County
- Pre-post survey results after launch
- Gaps in services
- Formation of a workgroup
- Development of a common application form
- Utilization of a common application form-agency supplements
- Number of applications and re-applications (due to errors, ineligibility, or no follow-through)
- Number of approvals and rejections
- Suicide statistics for Blair County
- Percent of Youth Reporting Symptoms of Depression
References, Bibliography and Web Links

1 United Way of America. COMPASS II®, Mobilizing Communities to Improve People’s Lives.

2 Blair County Human Services Office (www.hso.blairco.org).

3 United Way of America. COMPASS II®, Mobilizing Communities to Improve People’s Lives.