

Strategy & Impact Analysis

I. Strategic Priorities

1. Stabilize Housing & Prevent Homelessness

Housing is the most urgent and cross-cutting need.

Strategic Actions:

- Expand emergency shelter capacity (especially for 16–17-year-olds, who fall through the CYS gap).
- Create a Housing Access Fund to help with:
 - Security deposits
 - First month's rent
 - Utility arrears
- Partner with landlords to increase available units and reduce barriers for high-risk renters.
- Advocate for LIHEAP acceptance among all utility providers (REA was specifically noted as a barrier).

Expected Impact:

- Reduced youth homelessness.
- Lower strain on food banks (as housing costs drive food insecurity).
- Improved stability for families, reducing downstream mental health and child welfare crises.

2. Strengthen Food Security Infrastructure

Food insecurity is rising at an alarming rate (500% increase in requests in one report).

Strategic Actions:

- Expand emergency food distribution sites in rural areas.
- Create a SNAP Navigation Team to help residents manage new rules and avoid benefit loss.
- Develop a Food Access Transportation Pilot (gas cards, subsidized transit, mobile food delivery).
- Increase monthly food drives to offset frozen EFSP funds.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced hunger among seniors, families, and working poor.
- Lower emergency demand on agencies like Chevy Chase and Salvation Army.
- More predictable food access despite federal funding volatility.

3. Build a Countywide Transportation Access Network

Transportation barriers affect nearly every service area: medical care, employment, food access, youth programs, and aging services.

Strategic Actions:

- Launch a micro-transit model (on-demand shuttles) for rural communities.

- Partner with employers, probation, halfway houses, and schools to create shared-ride systems.
- Expand bus pass assistance and gas card programs.
- Advocate for improved public transit routes with data from 211 and agency reports.

Expected Impact:

- Increased employment stability.
- Higher attendance at medical and behavioral health appointments.
- Better access to food, child care, and youth programs.
- Reduced isolation among seniors and individuals with disabilities.

4. Expand Mental & Behavioral Health Capacity

Agencies report rising substance use, lack of MH services, trauma-related needs, workforce shortages, and social isolation.

Strategic Actions:

- Develop a Trauma-Informed School Advocate Program (APH's proposed model).
- Increase funding for EMDR and trauma-informed specialists.
- Create incentives to attract and retain mental health workers.
- Expand mobile mental health services for rural and homebound individuals.
- Build a Grandparent/Relative Caregiver Support Program.

Expected Impact:

- Reduced juvenile justice involvement.
- Better continuity of care across agencies.
- Lower crisis intervention demand.
- Improved mental health outcomes for youth, seniors, and families.

5. Strengthen Child Care, Youth Support & Family Stability

Families need affordable child care, before-school programs, support for ADHD/autism, online safety education, and basic needs for homeless youth.

Strategic Actions:

- Restore funding for toddler programs and early childhood initiatives.
- Create a School Care Closet Network for hygiene items, clothing, and supplies.
- Offer parent education on digital literacy and early learning challenges.
- Ensure wraparound supports follow children into after-school programs.
- Advocate for stable funding for 21st Century programs (major risk area).

Expected Impact:

- Improved school readiness and academic performance.
- Reduced family stress and child neglect risk.
- Stronger youth engagement and reduced risky behaviors.
- More equitable access to enrichment and supervision.

II. Cross-Cutting System Strategies

A. Improve Interagency Coordination

- Expand Project Share into a monthly countywide coordination hub.
- Build a real-time digital resource hub.

- Standardize warm-handoff protocols between agencies.

B. Address Workforce Shortages

- Create county-funded hiring incentives.
- Partner with local colleges for pipelines into human services.
- Offer retention bonuses for high-turnover roles.

C. Prepare for Funding Instability

- Develop a County Emergency Funding Bridge for essential services.
- Train agencies in diversified fundraising and grant writing.
- Advocate collectively at the state level for rural funding protections.

III. Impact Analysis (What Happens If We Act vs. If We Don't)

If the Strategy Is Implemented

- Immediate reduction in food insecurity.
- More stable housing for families and youth.
- Increased access to mental health and transportation.
- Better coordination among agencies.
- Lower rates of homelessness, incarceration, and crisis intervention.
- Improved school outcomes and youth resilience.
- Stronger workforce participation.
- Reduced healthcare costs due to better preventative care.
- A more connected, resilient rural community.

If No Action Is Taken

- Food banks will become overwhelmed.
- Youth homelessness will rise.
- Agencies will continue to lose clients due to transportation barriers.
- Mental health crises will increase.
- A full-scale housing crisis in the county.
- Higher rates of addiction, crime, and generational trauma.
- Collapse of smaller nonprofits due to funding instability.
- Widening health disparities in rural areas.
- Increased burden on emergency services and hospitals.

- ***The data presented is sourced from independent third-party organizations .***