

2026 COMMUNITY NEEDS SUMMARY



*A regional guide for prioritizing resources,
investment and action*

UNITED WAY OF GREATER ST. LOUIS



A Regional Guide for Prioritizing Resources, Investment and Action

PURPOSE

United Way of Greater St. Louis regularly assesses community conditions to identify where needs are greatest and help ensure the region's resources are aligned where they can make the greatest difference.

WHAT INFORMS THE ASSESSMENT

2026 Community Needs Assessment, combined with regional and national data and real-time insights from United Way 211 and the 211 Counts Dashboard, provides a clear picture of the pressures facing individuals and families across our 16-county region.

Because 211 captures what people are seeking help with every day, these insights provide an important real-time complement to broader community data.

“These insights help confirm where needs are most urgent.”

Where Our Region Should Focus Now

The findings point to three interconnected priorities.

Housing Security

Housing and utility assistance remain among the most frequently requested needs through United Way 211. Maintaining stable housing is foundational to family stability, employment, health and overall well-being.

Food Security

Food assistance also remains a leading need. When household budgets are strained, families can be forced to make difficult choices among food, housing, utilities, transportation and other necessities.

Jobs & Financial Mobility

Long-term stability requires more than responding to immediate needs. Individuals and families also need pathways to sustainable employment, increased income and greater financial security. Strengthening jobs and financial mobility is therefore essential to reducing recurring dependence on emergency assistance.

These priorities are not isolated. They reinforce one another and the assessment confirms the importance of addressing them together. The findings have already helped inform United Way's priorities for strengthening the regional Safety Net and the selection of the 2027–2029 Safety Net cohort.

Why These Needs Demand Attention

PRESSURES THAT CAN QUICKLY INCREASE DEMAND

- Rising costs for basic necessities
- Housing affordability challenges
- Income that may not keep pace with household expenses
- Disruptions in employment
- Severe weather or other emergencies

The pressures households face are influenced by broader conditions that can quickly increase demand for assistance.

THE MAY 2025 STORM RESPONSE

“A community’s ability to respond during crisis depends heavily on the strength of the systems already serving people every day.”

Strong nonprofits, accessible services, effective referral systems and coordinated community infrastructure are not simply emergency resources, they are essential components of regional resilience.

A Call for Coordinated Regional Action

United Way believes these findings should help guide how our region prioritizes resources, partnerships and investments in the months ahead. Our nonprofit Safety Net, government, businesses, philanthropy and community partners should work collectively to:

Protect and expand access to essentials

by strengthening housing, utility and food assistance capacity.

Connect immediate assistance to long-term stability

by integrating basic needs services with employment, workforce and financial-mobility supports.

Strengthen the nonprofit Safety Net

so organizations have the capacity and infrastructure to meet everyday demand while responding effectively when crises occur.

Use 211 as an ongoing community intelligence resource

to identify changing needs, gaps in services and emerging pressures in real time.

Coordinate investments around demonstrated need

directing public, private and philanthropic resources toward the areas where data show they can have the greatest impact.

The Path Forward

Housing security, food security, and jobs and financial mobility should be among our region's highest priorities right now.

A SHARED REGIONAL VIEW

United Way of Greater St. Louis brings together community assessment, real-time 211 insights, a broad regional perspective and deep knowledge of the nonprofit Safety Net to help our community understand not only where needs exist, but where collective action is most urgently required.

A GUIDE FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

These findings should serve as a shared guide for the region helping nonprofits, funders, businesses, government and community leaders align resources, strengthen services and build the capacity necessary to meet today's needs while creating greater stability for tomorrow.

2026 COMMUNITY NEEDS SUMMARY

Together, we can build greater stability for tomorrow.

Align resources. Strengthen services. Act on demonstrated need.

*Our detailed report explores both local and national benchmarks in comparison with current conditions and patterns emerging across the St. Louis MSA.
A full report will be released in **September 2026**.

UNITED WAY OF GREATER ST. LOUIS

