Chelan and Douglas counties continue to lag behind the rest of the state - as the two counties have for decades - when it comes to income levels, poverty rates, educational attainments, employment, and healthy living. All of this is occurring at a time when the region is growing and attracting new residents and businesses thanks to quality-of-life considerations. If this trend continues, the likelihood of having a region made up of economic haves and have-nots in the future is real.

**Warning signs in Chelan and Douglas counties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>The gap between income levels is growing. The median household income is $58,990 compared to $70,979 statewide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🏡</td>
<td>The median home sales price increased by 69% between 2013 ($196,475) and 2018 ($332,674). The rental vacancy remains 2%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>👦</td>
<td>Roughly 1 in every 4 youth (age and under) is living in poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⚒️</td>
<td>1/3 of all residents are on Medicaid. The percentage of residents saying they suffer from mental health issues has risen sharply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📚</td>
<td>Just 24% of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree, versus 36% statewide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🍽️</td>
<td>1/3 of low-income residents say they, or a family member, has skipped a meal due to finances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>💪</td>
<td>Obesity rates are on the rise for youth. Statewide, they are dropping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>👤</td>
<td>1/3 of households are headed by a single parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🚪</td>
<td>Hispanic residents fear sharing information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🌴</td>
<td>About 1/2 of low-income residents say drug and alcohol use is a big problem in their neighborhood or among family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regional improvements**

The two-county region has witnessed improvements in some areas over the years.

- High school graduation rates have risen
- Number of Hispanics in higher education has risen
- Unemployment rates have declined amid strong job growth
- Internet coverage has increased
- Public transit ridership has grown
- The number of physicians has increased
- Mortality rates have declined
Highest Priority community resources

Q: “Which community resources do you consider the highest priority for yourself and/or your family members?”

1. Housing
2. Health Care
3. Education
4. Employment
5. Mental Health

Gaps in community resources

Housing  The region’s housing crisis has impacted all socio-economic groups in one way or another. In many cases, people are paying significantly more for housing than they can afford. Low-income residents have faced skyrocketing housing costs (the median home sales price rose 69 percent from 2013-18), coupled with little available housing. The latter has been influenced by down-buying and down-renting, in which people snap up whatever is available even though they can afford more.

Employment  Wages are lower than in other parts the state. The agriculture industry remains the top industry in the region but also pays lower wages than other industries. Many people lack basic (soft) skills. Many teenagers can’t be hired due to state laws and don’t pick up needed job skills as a result. The rate of those holding a higher-education degree is significantly lower than the statewide rate, creating a drag for existing businesses needing a highly skilled labor pool and a deterrent for businesses considering moving to the region.

Health Care  Most health care services are concentrated in Wenatchee/East Wenatchee, forcing those who live outside the urban area to devote several hours of their day for an appointment. Some specialty medical services are not available or the wait list for those services is several months long. The health care system also can be difficult to understand and navigate. There is a lack of knowledge among some residents about how to live a healthy life, including nutrition, exercise and wellness visits.

Education  There is a general lack of access to preschool, and early learning services are too expensive or not available for many. There also is a perception that local school districts are not meeting the needs of all students, including those who seek or need nontraditional educational offerings, such as the trades, apprenticeships, technical skills, and personalized learning. There is no four-year university or college in the region.

Mental Health  For those on Medicaid, the wait to get into counseling can be months due to a shortage of therapists who accept Medicaid clients. Some employers do not offer behavioral health services to employees. Behavioral health services are lacking for children and students.

Barriers to accessing social services

- People are living in places far away from employment, education, and health care options.
- Some do not qualify for services or can’t afford services. Others can’t access services due to providers’ hours of operation.
- The system is difficult to navigate, in part due to numerous jurisdictions and numerous providers.
- The lack of information about services and providers creates additional confusion.
- The language barrier is a real impediment for many. So is the fear of sharing information.

Source: Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council 2019 needs assessment report