



2025

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Addressing the Causes that Could
Lead to Poverty*

COMPLETED: JUNE 2025



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Approved by the Board of Directors September 25, 2025

Community Needs Assessment Team Members:

MEO Staff:

Debbie Cabebe, SHRM-SCP Chief Executive Officer, (Team Leader)

Gay Sibonga, NCR	Chief Operating Officer
Wil Torricer	Interim Chief Fiscal Officer
Lauren Amano	Executive Administrative Assistant
Lee Imada	Communications Specialist
David Daly	Business Development Director
Cassi Yamashita	Community Services Director
Debbi Amaral	Early Childhood Services Director
Kane Kanakaole	Hana Branch Manager
Rose Jane Ancheta	Lanai Branch Manager
Mahie McPherson	Molokai Branch Director
Patty Copperfield	Transportation Director
Guy Aguirre	IT Manager
Nick Poree	Facilities Manager
Dane Ka'ae	Youth Services Director

Report Data Analysis: Maggie Batangan, NCRT, MPA, SHRM-CP
Chief Administrative Officer

MEO Board of Directors:

Carol Reimann	President (Alexander & Baldwin)
Bard Peterson	Vice President (Representative Justin Woodson)
Cliff Alakai	Treasurer (Senator Troy Hashimoto)
Arlene Gerbig	Secretary (West Maui Seniors)
Adele Rugg	South Maui Seniors
Crystal Nakihei	Head Start Policy Council
Tessie Segui	Kahului Seniors
Dawn Bicoy	Molokai Filipino Community Council
Mindy Bolo	Lana'i Community Health Center
Reuben Ignacio	Hale Mahaolu
Desiree Ting	Central Pacific Bank
Sandy Ryan	Maui Economic Development Board
Gemma Medina	Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children
Caitlin Musson	Maui County Bar Association
Emmanuel Baltazar	ILWU
Kai Pelayo	Maui Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce
Ned Davis	State Senator Lynn DeCoite
Scott Okada	State House Representative Angus McKelvey
Glenn Yamasaki	State House Representative Kyle Yamashita
David Raatz	Maui County Council
Cynthia Lallo	Mayor Richard T. Bissen, Jr.

MEO Community Agencies & Partners:

Aloha House
American Jobs Centers
Commission on Persons with Disabilities
Council on Aging
County of Maui
Good Beginnings Alliance
Friends of the Children’s Justice Center
Hale Mahaolu
Hale Makua
Hana Health Center
Hawaii Department of Education
Hawaii Community Action Program Directors Association
Head Start Association of Hawaii
IMUA Family Services
Kalima O Maui
Lanai Community Health Center
Maui Adult Day Care
Maui Chamber of Commerce
Maui Community Correctional Center (MCCC)
Maui County Senior Planning and Coordinating Council
Maui County Workforce Investment Board (WIB)
Maui Disability Alliance
Maui Economic Development Board (MEDB)
Maui Economic Recovery Commission (ERC)
Maui Family Support Services
Maui Homeless Alliance
Maui Memorial Medical Center
Maui Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce
Maui Nonprofit Directors Association
MEO Business Development Center Committee
MEO Head Start Policy Council
Mobility Management Task Force
Molokai Community Service Council
Paratransit Advisory Council
Parents and Children Together
Stakeholders and Recipients of Funding and the General Public
State of Hawaii, Office of Community Services
University of Hawaii Maui College
Workforce Investment Board

Community Partners & Key Informants Solicited for Survey Responses:

Maui Non-Profit Directors (MNPD)

Maui Homeless Alliance

County of Maui:

- **Office on Aging**
- **Department of Transportation**
- **Department of Housing**
- **Department of Human Concerns**
- **Department of Agriculture**
- **Office of Economic Development**

MEO Senior Planning and Coordinating Counsel

Staff Feedback Session:

Conducted on June 27, 2025

Departments Represented: Fiscal, IT, Business Development Center, Youth Services, Early Childhood Services, Human Resources, and Community Services

Surveys sent to all staff and distributed widely internally and to community partners, including QR codes and hard copies for those without email access.

Executive Summary

The Community Needs Assessment for 2025 – 2028 was conducted in accordance with federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Organizational Standards. The data was gathered from April to June 2025, with the report prepared in June 2025 to inform services for the next three years. This assessment ensures maximum feasible participation from stakeholders to support the relevance and effectiveness of services provided by Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. (MEO) as a Community Action Agency. The assessment provides feedback for all community services, not only those provided by MEO.

From May 7, 2025 through June 25, 2025, 496 community members provided responses to the Community Needs Assessment survey. This is more than double the responses received in the 2022 needs assessment survey (n=240). Of these responses, approximately 31% identified as current clients of MEO.

The survey provided 17 identified causes that could lead to poverty and asked respondents to rank, on a scale of 1 to 4 (Completely Unimportant to Very Important) the importance of addressing the cause that could lead to poverty in Maui County. On average, respondents rated all causes as important or very important. **The following are the top 5 ranked outcomes from respondents, listing the causes they identified as most important to address:**

1. **Cost of Living**
2. **Affordable Housing**
3. **Low Wages**
4. **Food Insecurity**
5. **Affordable Healthcare**
6. *Affordable/Quality Childcare**
7. *Affordable/Quality Eldercare**

**Data note: The ranked score for #6 and #7 were less than 50 pts apart from #5, indicating a very close margin in terms of importance of the issue.*

The survey also provided the same 17 identified causes that could lead to poverty and asked respondents to rank, on a scale of 1 to 4 (Completely Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied), how satisfied they are with the current services offered in Maui County to address this cause. On average, respondents rated they were unsatisfied or unsatisfied with current services offered in Maui County. **The following are the top 5 ranked outcomes where respondents are most satisfied with services, and the bottom five outcomes where respondents are least satisfied with services.**

Respondents are most satisfied with services in Maui County for:

1. Literacy Skills for Immigrants
2. Teen Pregnancy
3. Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities
4. Limited Job Opportunities
5. Continuing Education or Trade Opportunities

Respondents are least satisfied with Services in Maui County for:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Cost of Living
3. Low Wages
4. Affordable/Quality Childcare
5. Culture of Poverty (Generational Cycle)

Data note: responses are ranked on relative terms. The majority of respondents were completely unsatisfied, unsatisfied, or satisfied with services, indicating area for improvement for all service areas.

Background

The Mission of MEO is to strengthen the community while helping people in need restore their hope, empowering them to reach their potential and enrich their lives.

Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. (MEO) is a private non-profit Community Action Agency, chartered on March 22, 1965. MEO provides outreach, resources, and human service programs for those in need in Maui County. The agency was organized as a Community Action Agency under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to strengthen and coordinate efforts to eliminate poverty by providing opportunities in education, employment and training, transportation, and other areas to help people help themselves. MEO assists more than 30,500 individuals and families, touching the lives of 55,000 each year. There are five departments within MEO that help to strengthen the community:

1. **MEO Community Services** provides a range of assistance from employment and training programs, energy and rental assistance, reintegration, senior services, acculturation and translation services for the Hispanic/Latino community, and more.
2. **Early Childhood Services** provides toddler care, and the Head Start Preschool program to promote school readiness, parent involvement, and economic development through supporting working families.
3. **Youth Services** trains and mentor youth eleven to eighteen and facilitates prevention related programs and activities.
4. **Transportation Services**, through the Human Services and Paratransit programs, provides rides for low-income individuals, persons with disabilities, seniors, and youth; allowing them to be independent and remove barriers to improve their quality of life.
5. **MEO Business Development Center** provides business classes, financial literacy classes, technical support, start-up microloans, and agriculture grants to businesses across Maui County.

MEO is committed to fulfilling the Community Action Promise – *Community action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community and are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.*

MEO’s vision is to improve the community by promoting economic independence and sustainability. The organization embraces the core values of Teamwork, Integrity, Personal Excellence, Empathy, Creativity, and Flexibility.

Purpose

Federal organizational standards encourage agencies to conduct a Community Needs Assessment every three years. The needs assessment considers the perception of the causes of poverty and the breath of community needs addressing these causes, with the intention of sharing the assessment outcomes with MEO’s community resource partners. The information gathered will assist the MEO staff and board members with determining a strategy to address any gaps identified that are in alignment to their mission and determine the resources and next steps.

Methodology

Poverty is a complicated social issue and there are competing theories as to the cause of poverty in our community. Poverty is often defined in two ways: 1. Absolute Poverty where individuals do not have what they need for maintaining life. They are short of basic food, shelter, clothing, adequate health care, education, and even transportation. 2. Relative Poverty, which is viewed as subjective. The Maui County Data Book 2021-2022, in the section entitled Census Bureau Quick Facts, identifies the rate of Maui County Persons in Poverty as 11.4%, with Maui's Median household income (in 2021 dollars) as \$88,249. The Community Needs Assessment survey aims to quantify some of the issues relating to poverty in the Maui County community, and to assess potential community-driven solutions for addressing these issues.

Survey Instrument

To conduct the Community Needs Assessment, a survey instrument was developed addressing various issues related to poverty. Each potential identified issue had two corresponding questions. The first question asked for the person's opinion on "the importance of addressing the issue affecting poverty" with a four-point Likert scale range from very important to completely unimportant. The second question asked about the person's "satisfaction regarding the community's current services" that address the issue. The range utilized was four-point Likert scale very satisfied to completely unsatisfied.

Assumptions

Assumption 1: Respondents of the survey may not have the same definition of poverty or be knowledgeable of all the services MEO currently provides within the community that address poverty.

Assumption 2: The Survey provides an opportunity to obtain respondent's individual perceptions on the various causes of poverty and their satisfaction regarding the services that are provided.

Assumption 3: If respondents do not complete sections of the survey, it can be assumed that they were not knowledgeable of the services currently provided, and only the responses that were provided will be utilized in the compilation.

Assumption 4: At times the respondent may not respond to the satisfaction of a service that addresses the issue because it does not apply to them personally. A lack of selection may mean the respondent would not utilize the service versus the service not being valuable.

Survey Collection

Surveys were distributed and collected through both hard-copy and web link response methods. Survey response links were sent to all MEO employees, distributed to clients, promoted on social media, and delivered through traditional media sources such as press releases and news publications. The survey was also published on MEO's website, and hard copies were distributed. The vast majority of responses were collected through the web link response tool. Key community partners were also digitally sent the survey to distribute. These methods proved effective in doubling the response rate from the last needs assessment survey.

Summary of Data and Demographics

A total of 496 surveys were returned during the collection period from May 7, 2025 through June 25, 2025 (n=496). This is more than double 241 surveys returned for the previous 2022 Community Needs Assessment Survey. In addition to the survey, a staff focus group was conducted on June 27, 2025 to acquire additional targeted information and input. The comprehensive Community Needs Assessment also includes data and information from the 2022 Maui County Data Book, 2023 Edition State of Hawaii Data Book, reports from the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (UHERO), US Census Bureau data and reports, the Maui Economic Development Board Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2022 (CEDS) Report, the Lahaina Long Term Recovery Plan (December 2024), and the 2025 Maui Economic Recovery Commission Report.

County Geography and Population

The County of Maui consists of the inhabited islands of Maui, Molokai, and Lanai and the uninhabited island of Kaho'olawe. Maui County is the second largest of the four counties that make up the state of Hawaii. According to the 2020 census Maui County has 1,161.53 square miles of land. The population per square mile is 141.8

The 2020 Census Report, April 1, 2020, indicated the Maui County population at 164,754. The Maui County Data Book 2022 states the population estimates as of July 1, 2022, for Maui County to be 164,351. This number increases to 212,378 (July 1, 2021) when including visitors. The population percent change from April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022 is -0.2%.

Impact of 2023 Wildfires in Maui County

It is important to note that the majority of verified census data reports predate the devastating 2023 wildfires in the County of Maui. According to the 2025 Maui Economic Recovery Commission (ERC) report, while definitive data is not currently available, evidence points to a potentially significant outflow of persons leaving Maui since the wildfires. An analysis of State tax filings by UHERO estimated that the wildfires reduced Maui County's population by at least 1,000 residents.

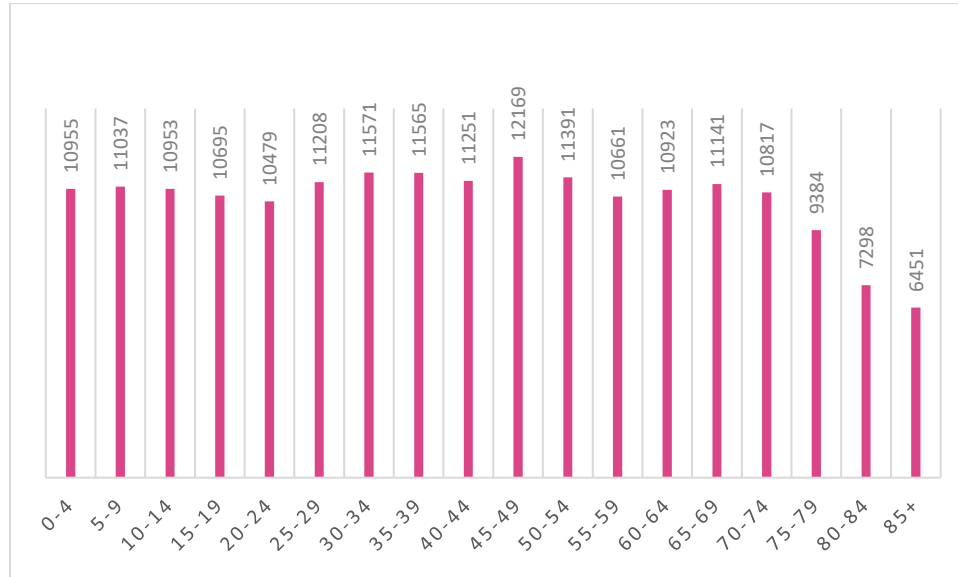
The ERC report also states that a June 2024 survey published by the Hawaii State Rural Health Association found that nearly half of Maui County residents surveyed reported worse financial conditions since the fires, and 39% of surveyed individuals were considering leaving the state.

A May, 2025 report from UHERO identified that Hawaii now has the highest homelessness rate in the nation, largely due to impacts from the Lahaina Fire.

Preliminary estimates also point to a significant reduction in the County's labor force. According to numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between August 2023 and August 2024 Maui County saw a loss of nearly 5,000 potential workers in the seasonally adjusted civilian labor force.

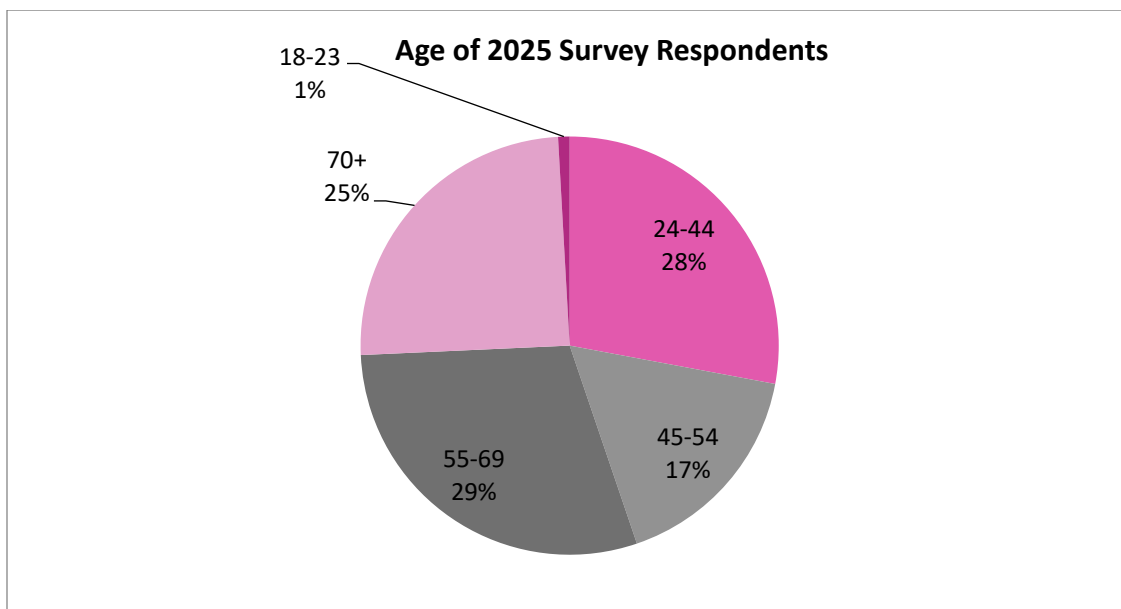
County Resident Population Projections by 5-Year Age Group for 2030

The following is a chart illustrating Maui County’s projected population in 2030 for 5-year age ranges beginning at birth. The Maui Data Book estimates that as of 2025, persons 65 years and older represent 24.1% of Maui County’s population. In the year 2030, it is estimated that 23.7% of the population will be 65 years or older. In the year 2035 it is projected that this percentage will represent approximately 25% of Maui County’s population.

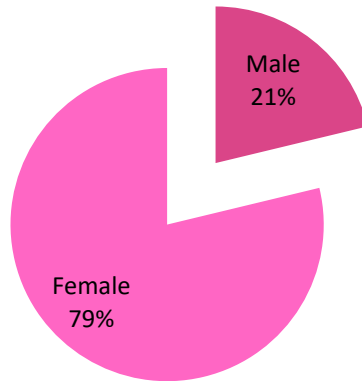


Data from Survey Responses and Current Community Demographics

The following charts represent data collected from the 2025 Community Needs Assessment Survey instrument and overall demographics of Maui County. Please note that the surveys were not distributed with the intention to mirror the age or gender demographics of Maui County. This comparison is done to provide an awareness of the type of survey respondent participating in this needs assessment.

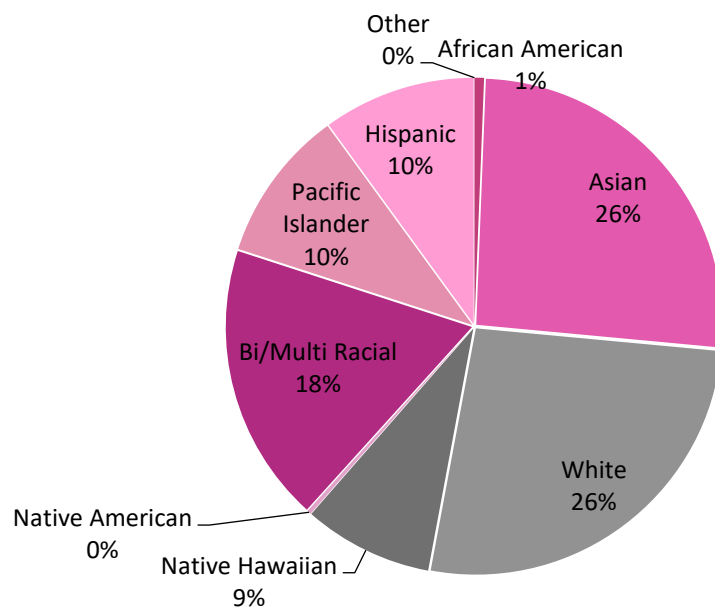


2025 Survey Respondent's Gender

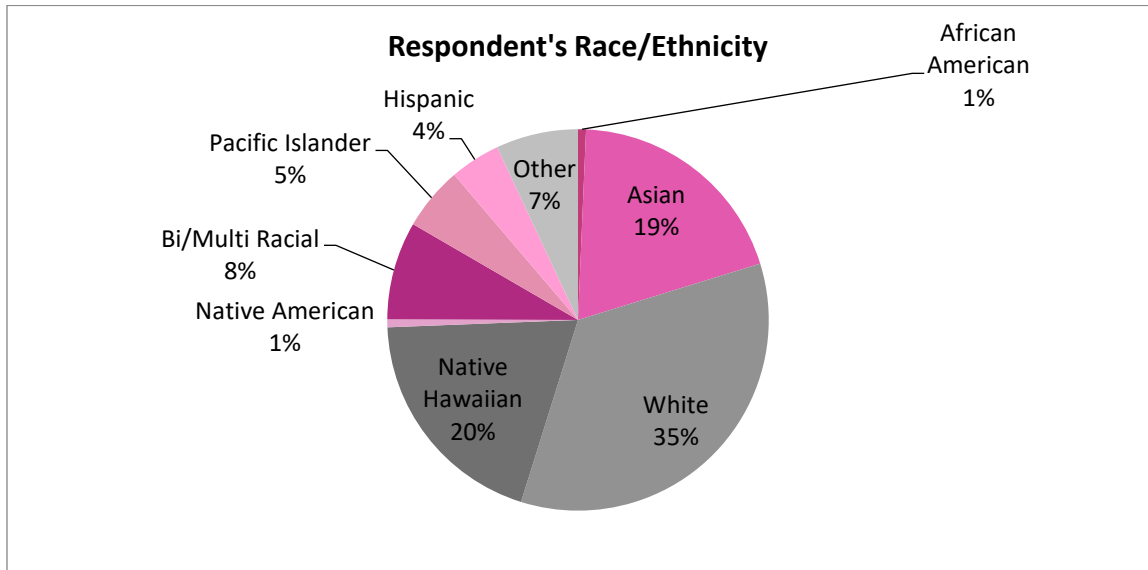


Maui County's population is composed of multiple heritages including Hawaiian, Japanese, Caucasian, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Tongan, Samoan, Micronesian, and others. The following breakdown was provided from the 2022 Maui County Data Book.

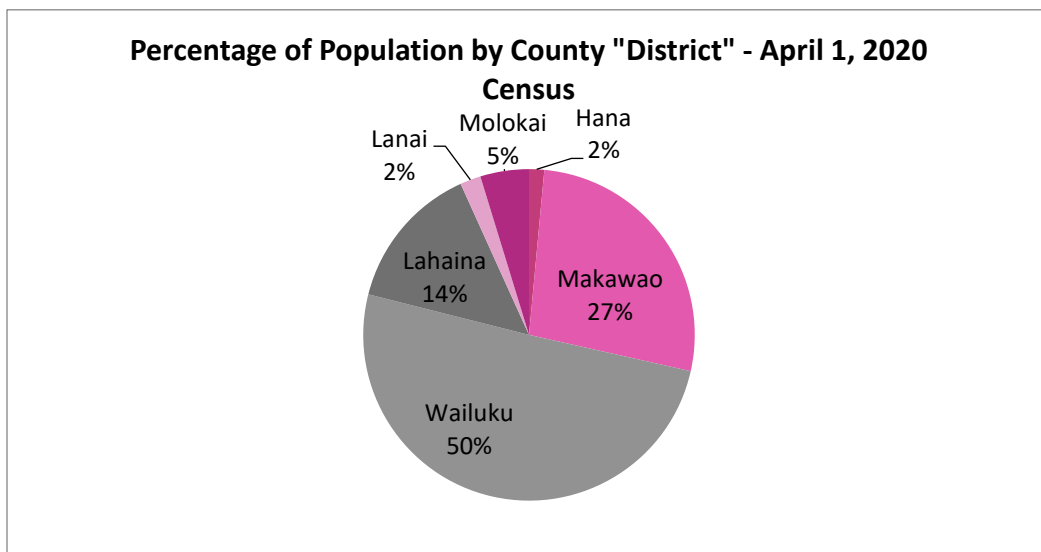
Maui County Population by Race (Maui County Data Book, 2022)



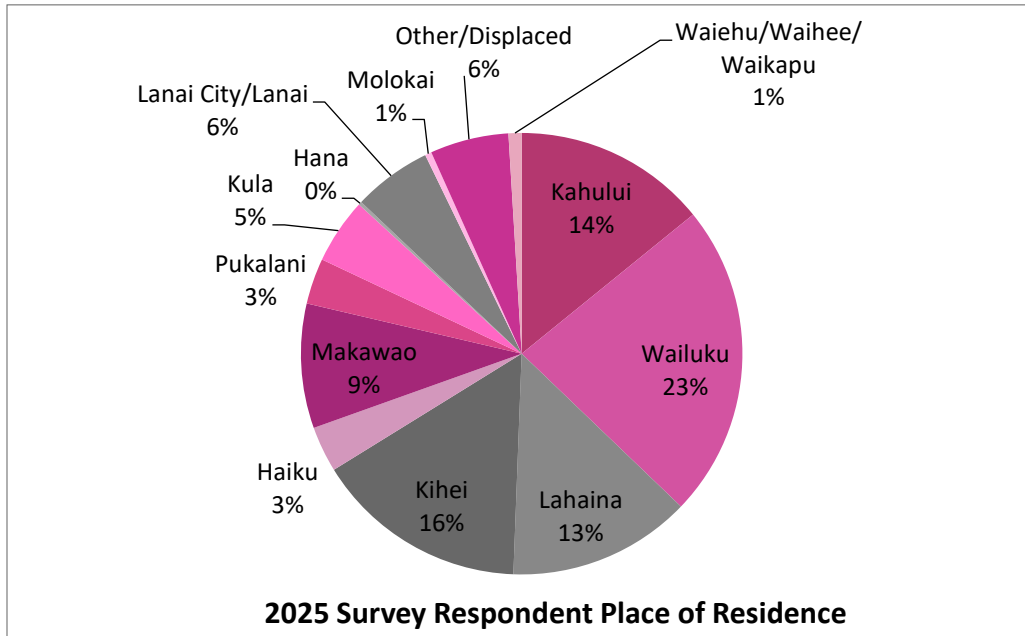
In comparison, here are the demographics for the 2025 survey respondents:



The 2020 Census Data identified the percentage of population by County "District" areas. Specific populations for each city within Maui County, or the specific "Census Track" can be obtained from the 2020 Census Report. There were 31 tracks for Maui Island alone. The 2020 Census data is the most recent verifiable data by district as of 2025.

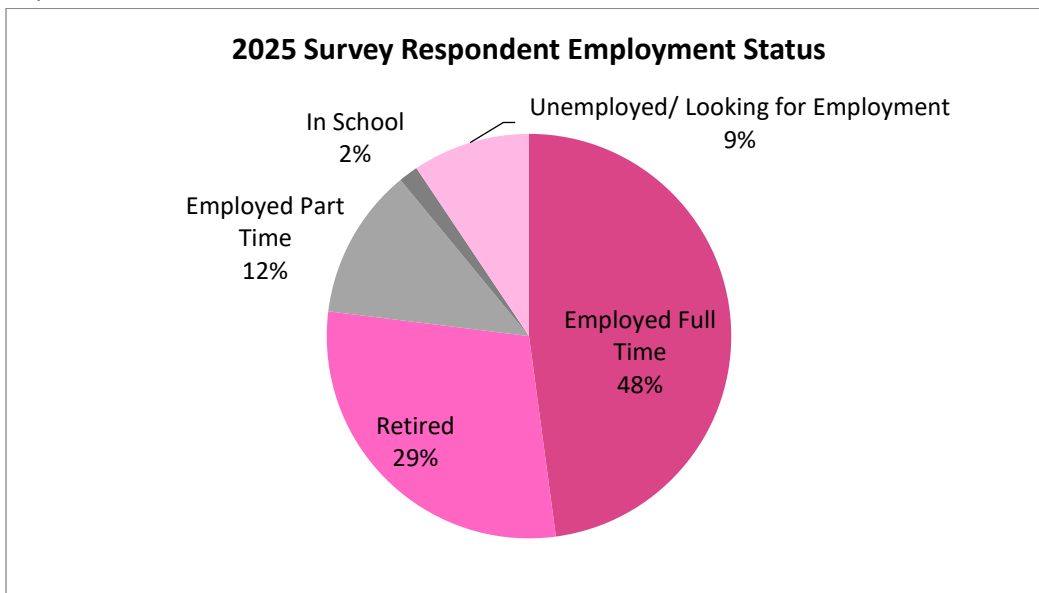


In comparison, here are the Survey Respondent's place of residence:

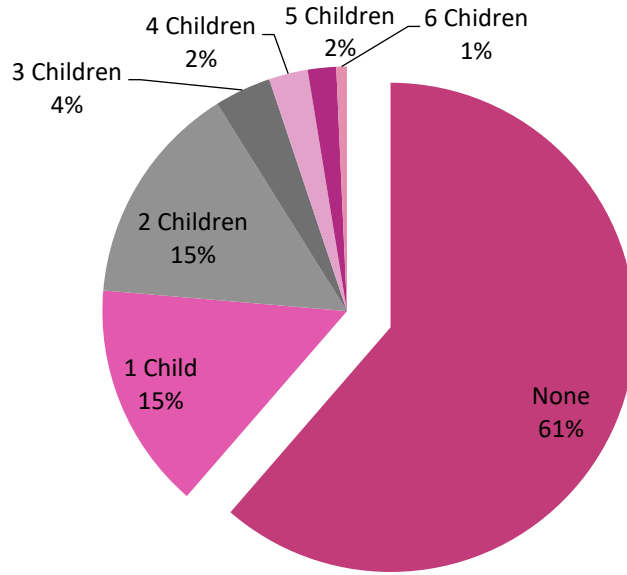


Data note: this data includes responses where people indicated they were displaced from the 2023 wildfires. Six percent of respondents indicated that they were either "displaced" or identified as "residents of Lahaina" but indicated that they were currently living elsewhere.

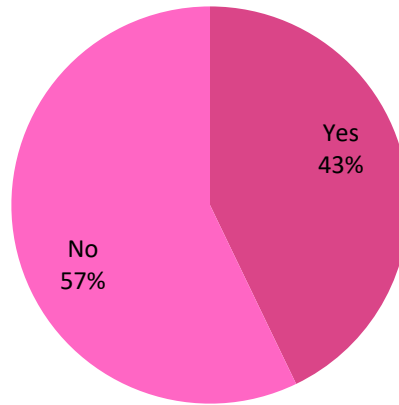
The Survey also asked the respondents to share their employment status, and to indicate the number of children under the age of 18 living in their household, along with whether they currently utilize services provided by MEO.



Number of Children Under 18 in the Respondent's Household



Does the 2025 Survey Respondent Utilize MEO Services?



Survey Results: Causes that Could Lead to Poverty

From May 7, 2025 through June 25, 2025, 496 community members provided responses to the Community Needs Assessment survey. This is more than double the responses received in the 2022 needs assessment survey (n=240). Of these responses, approximately 31% identified as current clients of MEO.

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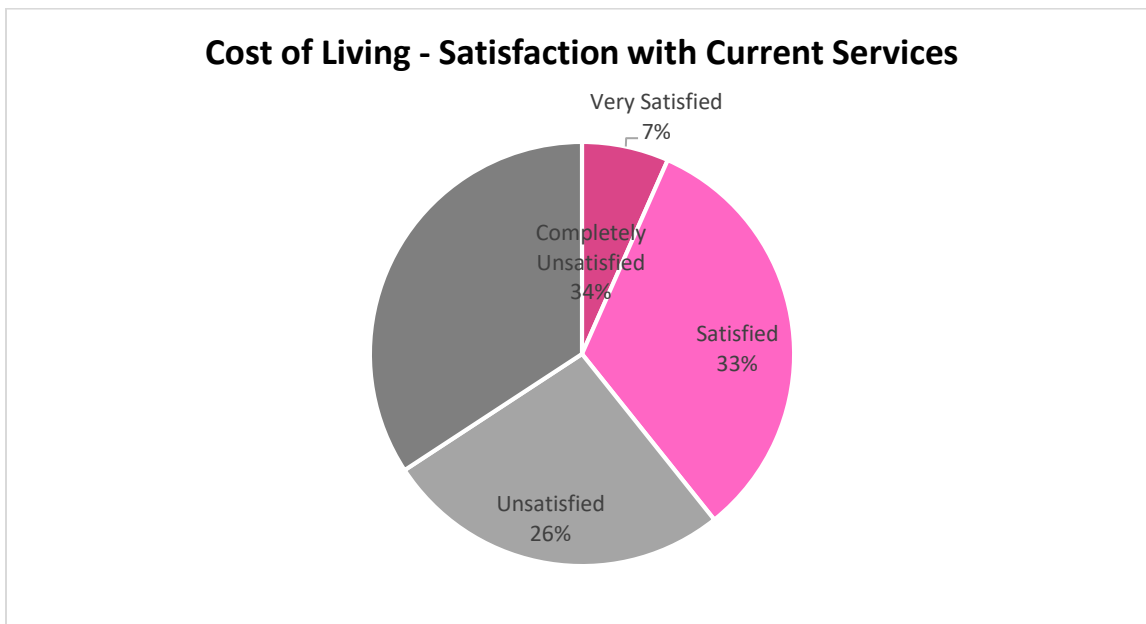
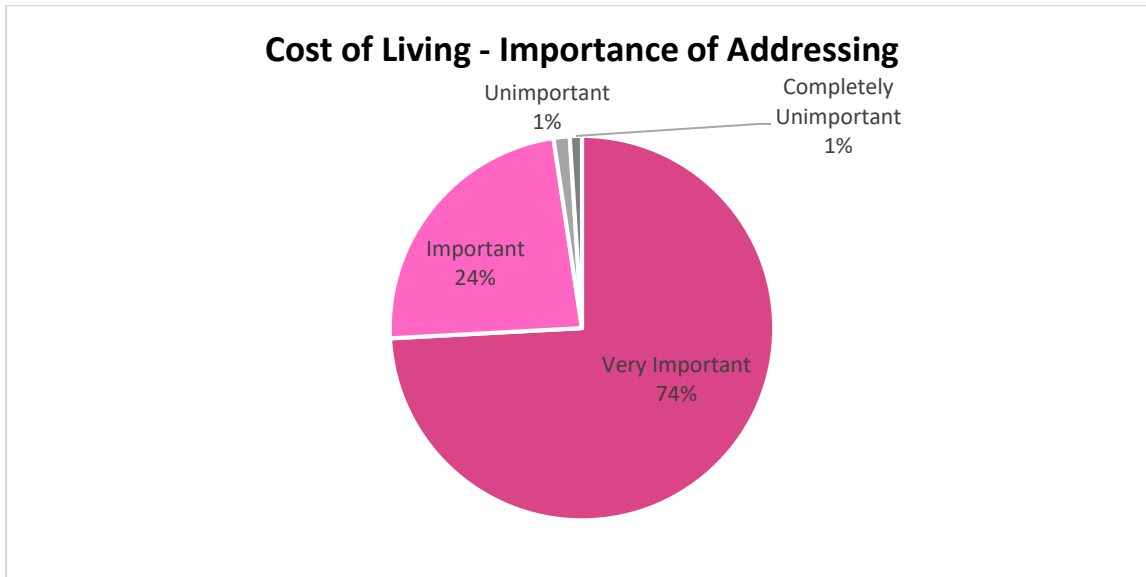
Data note: responses are ranked on relative terms. The majority of respondents were completely unsatisfied, unsatisfied, or satisfied with services, indicating potential area for improvement for all service areas.

Analysis criteria:

When an issue is identified as very important or important (part one) AND the second question is answered with completely unsatisfied or unsatisfied (part two) – this indicates an area or issue that is perceived to be a concern, or there is a gap in services to address this area. When an issue is identified as very important or important, AND the second question is answered with a selection of very satisfied or satisfied, this then identifies a perceived strength, or that services are addressing the issue.

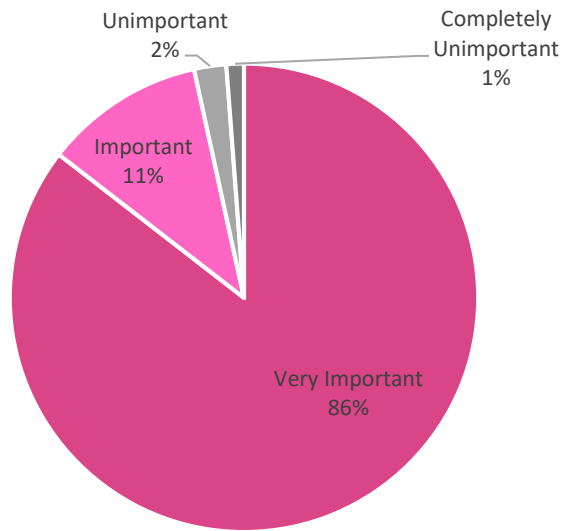
The following charts show the top outcomes as most important to address, compared with how satisfied they are with current services in Maui County.

Cost of Living

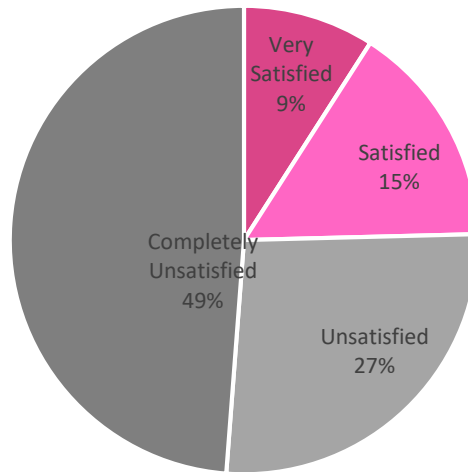


Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing - Importance of Addressing

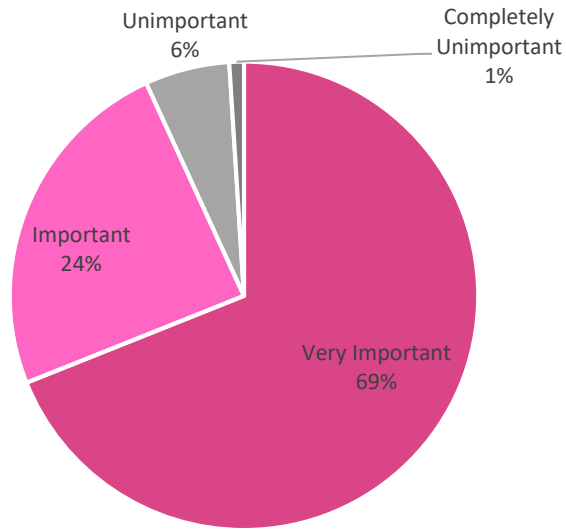


Affordable Housing - Satisfaction with Current Services

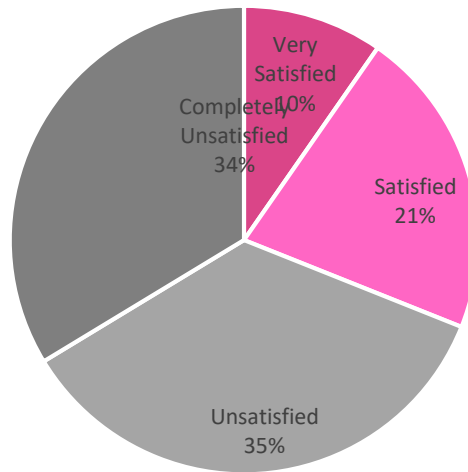


Low Wages

Low Wages - Importance of Addressing

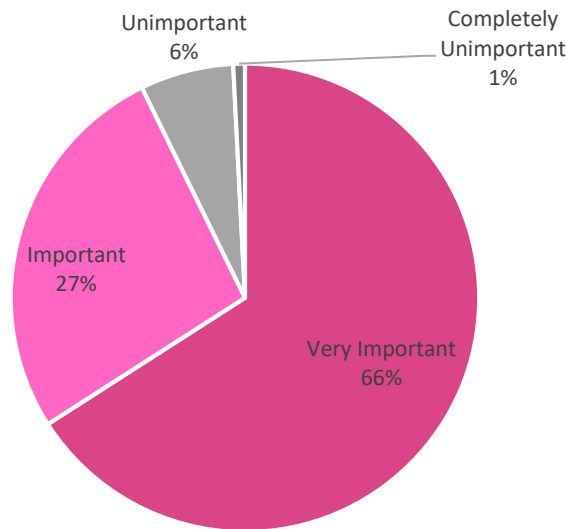


Low Wages - Satisfaction with Current Services

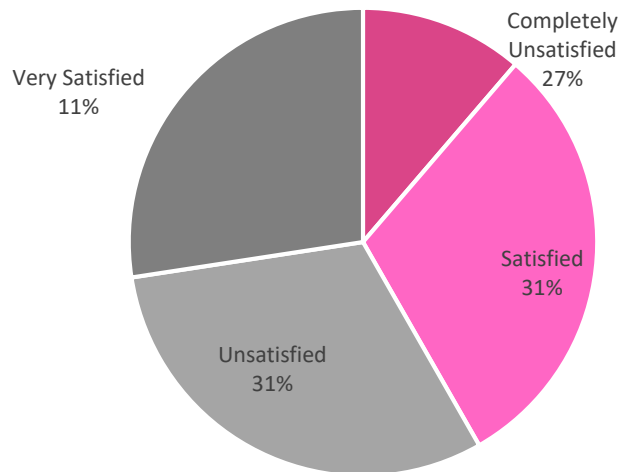


Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity - Importance of Addressing

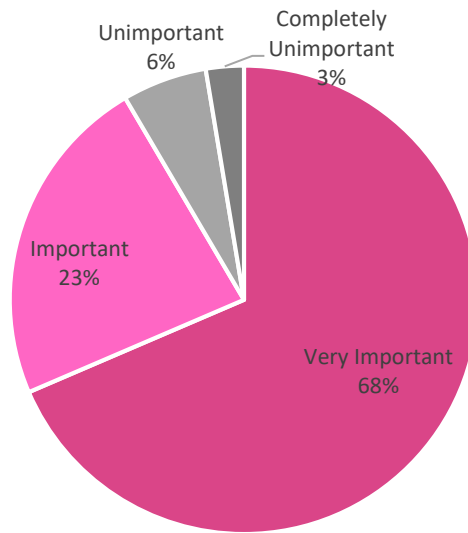


Food Insecurity - Satisfaction with Current Services

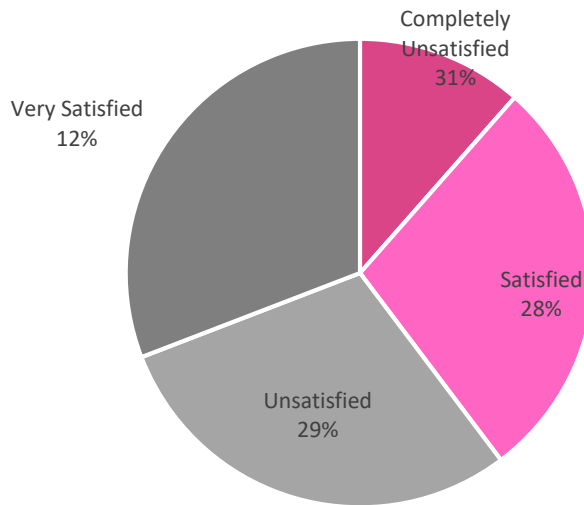


Affordable Healthcare

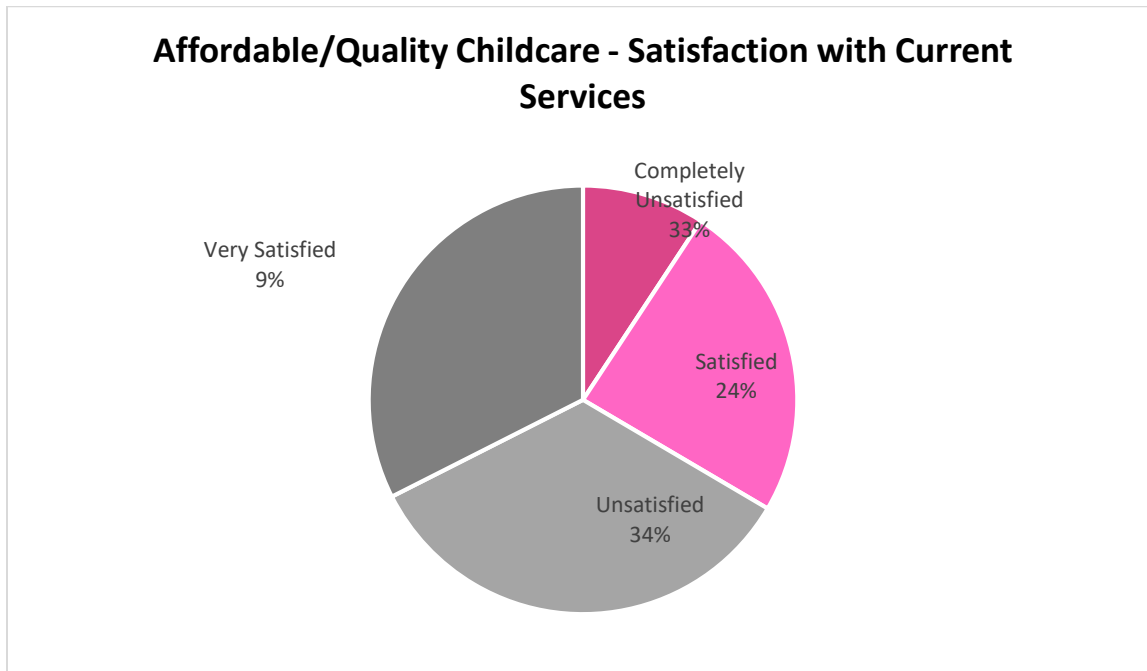
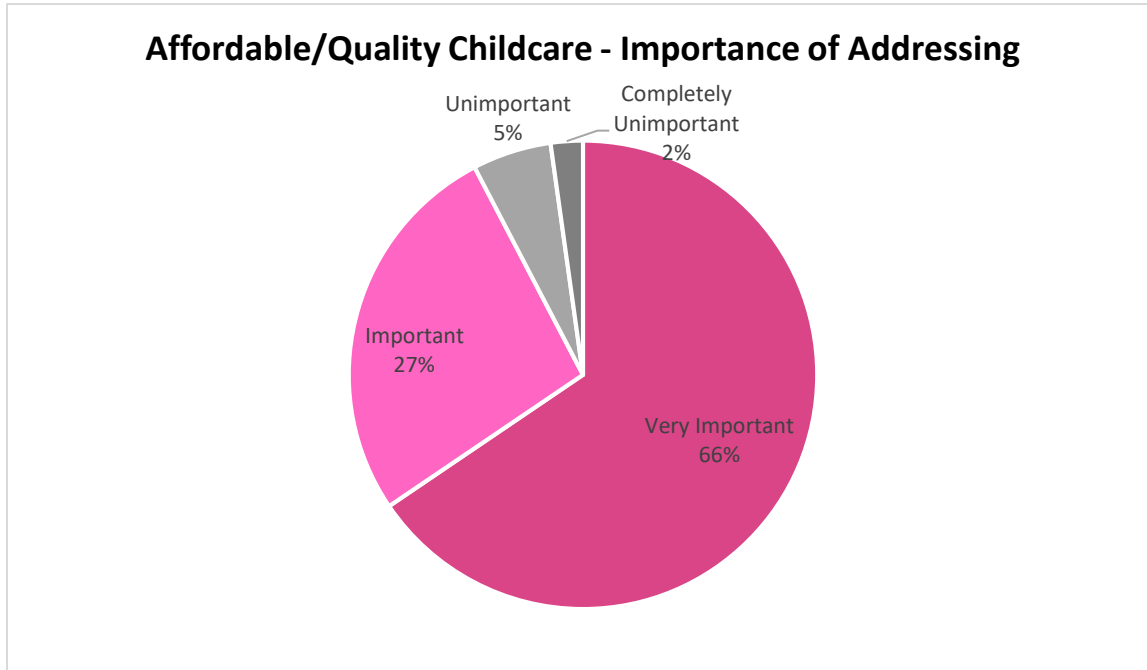
Affordable Healthcare - Importance of Addressing



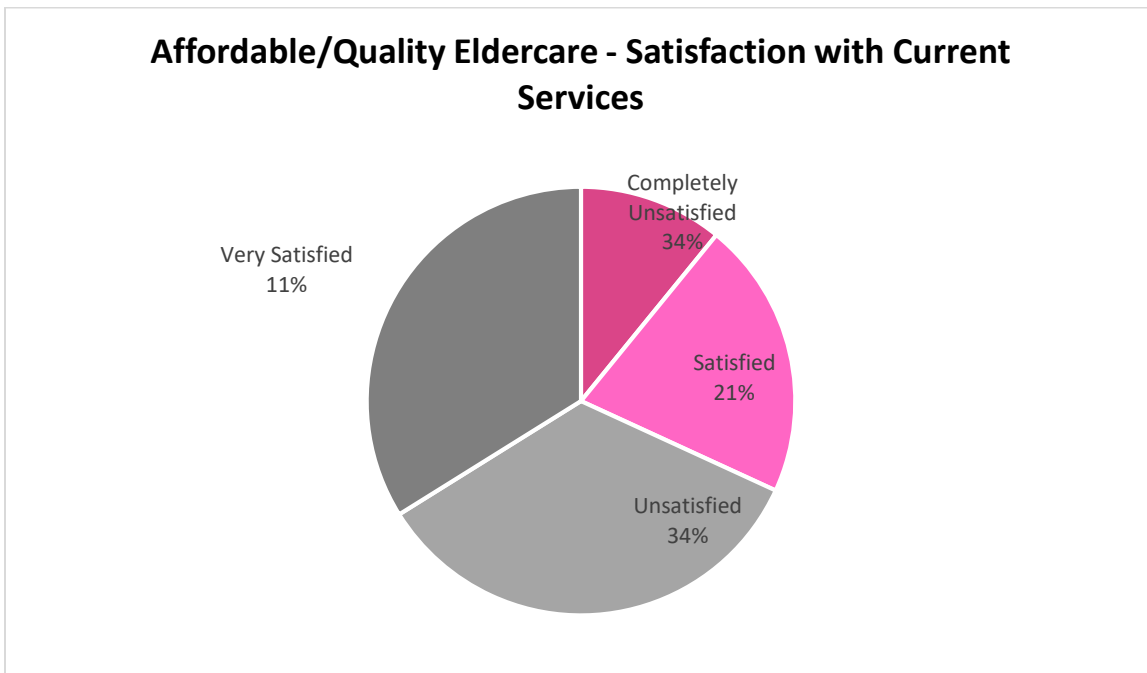
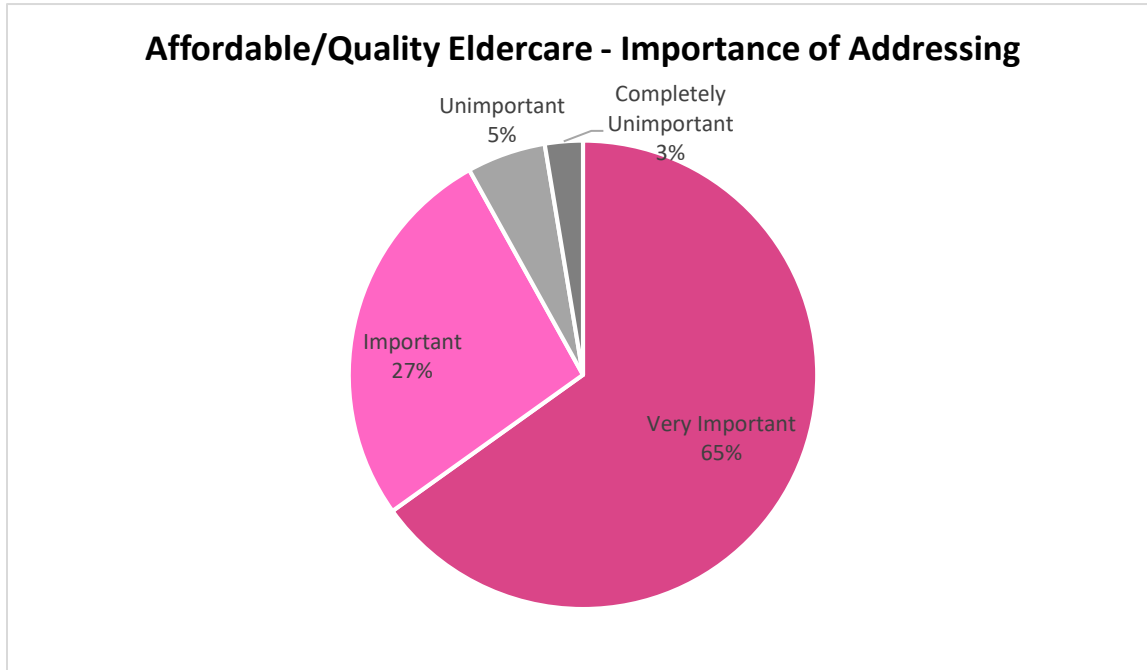
Affordable Healthcare - Satisfaction with Current Services



Affordable/Quality Childcare



Affordable/Quality Eldercare



All Ranked Results:

Issue that Could Lead to Poverty – Ranked by Weighted Level of Importance from Survey Respondents

1. Cost of Living
2. Affordable Housing
3. Low Wages
4. Food Insecurity
5. Affordable Healthcare
6. Affordable/Quality Childcare
7. Affordable/Quality Eldercare
8. Continuing Education/Trade Opportunities
9. Alcohol and substance abuse
10. Limited mental health support
11. Culture of Poverty (Generational Cycle)
12. Financial Literacy
13. Single Parent Household
14. Limited Job Opportunities
15. Opportunities for persons with disabilities
16. Teen Pregnancy
17. Literacy Skills for Immigrants

Next Steps

According to CSBG Standards, the Community Needs Assessment serves as the foundation for Community Action Agencies to understand their community, plan effective interventions, and work towards reducing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency for vulnerable populations. The key purposes of the Community Needs Assessment are to use the results to guide the following:

- Understanding Community Conditions
- Identifying Needs and Barriers
- Informing Decision-Making
- Community Engagement
- Supporting CSBG Implementation
- Meeting Organizational Standards
- Guiding Resource Allocation
- Fostering Collaboration
- Supporting Funding Requests

The results of this assessment will also be used to make data-informed decisions in the crafting of the CSBG Community Action plan for Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.

COMMENTS-

Please share any additional comments with regards to addressing the poverty issue:

1. What city or town do you currently reside in? _____

2. What is your age? Please check one:

18-23 24-44 45-54 55-69 70+

3. What is your gender?

Female Male

4. Which race/ethnicity would you consider yourself? Please check one:

African American Asian White Native Hawaiian Native American
 Bi-Racial/Multi Racial Pacific Islander Hispanic Other: _____

5. How many children under the age of 18 live in your home? _____

6. What is your employment status? Fulltime Retired Works Part-time

Currently in School Unemployed/looking for employment

7. Do you currently utilize services provided by MEO? If so, please state the service(s).

Thank you for making the time to complete this survey. Please send the completed survey to MEO, P.O. Box 2122, Kahului, HI 96733 OR scan and email to lauren.amano@meoinc.org
DEADLINE is June 25, 2025. Know that we appreciate and value your input.

Summary of Staff Focus Group:

Staff Focus Group Recap – 6/27/25

Departments in Attendance: Fiscal, IT, Business Development Center, Youth Services, Early Childhood Services, HR and Community Services

As an agency, what should we start:

- Incentive programs
- Rebuilding homes in Lahaina
- Shopping for Kupuna
- ESL classes for other language (currently MEO offers Spanish)
- Expand Re-entry Services
- Basic computer classes
- Employment training
-

Note: Top three programs MEO should start:

1. Basic computer classes (especially for kupuna)
2. Employee training
3. Expansion of re-entry services

As an agency, what should we end:

- Saying “yes” as default
- Project Grad

Note: Staff did not identify program that we need to end. Staff did discuss ending or not applying for programs that are no longer relevant or do not make sense. Examples NFJP–We do not have “real” seasonal or migrant workers. Program does not make sense in Hawaii, as families do not move from farm to farm during harvest seasons. Some felt that Project Grad was not impactful. Explanation was given that Project Grad was intended to ensure that all students can attend and subsidies were given to students with financial need.

What are the top three pressing issues that affect poverty in Maui County:

1. Financial Literacy/Literacy for Immigrants
 - Offer financial literacy in different languages to include Marshallese and Spanish.
 - ESL classes not only for Spanish but also other Pacific Island languages.
 - Partner with the college and have students teach and receive college credits, hands on learning for the students while benefiting the clients. (Mutually beneficial)
2. Food Insecurity
 - Community gardens
 - Encourage backyard farming–extending ag grants to backyard farmers
 - Technical support for farmers, business planning for farmers
 - Food delivery (Debbie spoke of meals on wheels, food delivery during covid, neighbors helping neighbors to assist with shopping and food delivery)
3. Affordable/Quality Elder care
 - HHEAP (Hawai Home Energy Assistance Program) like assistance for medical bills.
 - Senior daycare

Reference Materials and Community Resources (with links):

- [Central Maui Community Plan Update Meeting – June 2025](#)
- [The Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawaii \(UHERO\) – The Hawaii Housing Factbook 2025](#)
- [County of Maui – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) 2022](#)
- [County of Maui – Office of Economic Development – Maui County Data Book 2021 - 2022](#)
- [Maui Economic Recovery Commission Report – A Community-Led Pathway Towards Maui’s Economic Recovery & Future](#)
- [County of Maui – Lahaina Long-Term Recovery Plan \(December 2024\)](#)
- [Lahaina Filipino Community Needs Assessment Report \(February 2025\)](#)