



ARKANSAS PATHWAYS TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

PRELIMINARY REPORT 2025

A UNIFIED ROADMAP FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE



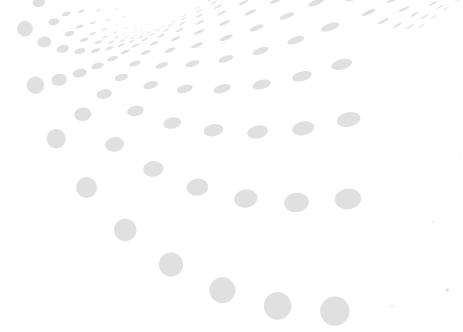
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Prepared by :
**ARKANSAS COMMUNITY ACTION
AGENCIES ASSOCIATION, INC. - ACAA**

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Pathways Timeline

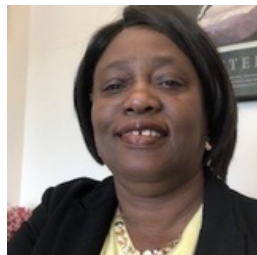
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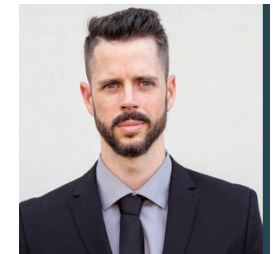
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Well Fed Arkansas

Self Sufficiency - The capacity of individuals and families to meet their basic needs without public or private assistance, while also fostering the long-term economic stability and progress of the community as a whole.

~Defined by the National Community Action Partnership



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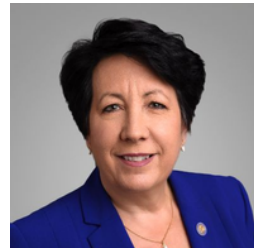


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We extend our deepest gratitude to the more than 100 organizations that make up the Arkansas Pathways to Self-Sufficiency coalition—your leadership, partnership, and unwavering commitment make this transformative work possible.



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Pathways Summary



A Unified Roadmap for Community Resilience

The Arkansas Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Initiative (Arkansas Pathways) is a statewide, cross-sector effort designed to address poverty through a coordinated, holistic, and community-driven approach. Rooted in the understanding that poverty is complex and multifaceted, this initiative brings together leaders from across Arkansas—practitioners, policymakers, community advocates, business partners, educators, faith-based organizations, and philanthropy—to create meaningful pathways for families to achieve long-term stability and economic mobility.

Arkansas Pathways was launched following two years of statewide engagement led by the Arkansas Community Action Network through its 2024 ACAA Poverty Summits and the 2025 Rising Together Roundtable Discussions, where hundreds of voices emphasized the need for integrated solutions and stronger alignment across systems. In response, Community Action leadership established a coalition of more than 100 organizations, united by a shared commitment to improving quality of life for individuals and families in all 75 counties.

Through eight dedicated taskforces, Arkansas Pathways examines the many conditions that shape a person's ability to thrive—including Workforce Development, Education, Healthcare, Digital Opportunity & Economic Mobility, Food & Nutrition, Policies Impacting Children & Families, ALICE, and Self-Sufficiency. These taskforces work collaboratively to develop actionable recommendations that are both data-informed and grounded in lived experience.

At its core, Arkansas Pathways elevates a simple but powerful principle: when everyday Arkansans win, we all win. The initiative aims to build a comprehensive self-sufficiency model for the state—one that aligns resources, strengthens partnerships, and expands opportunity across every community in Arkansas.



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Taskforce Overview

About The Taskforces

Each taskforce contributes unique expertise, ensuring that the statewide self-sufficiency model reflects diverse perspectives and real-world conditions across communities. While their focus areas vary, all taskforces share a commitment to cross-sector collaboration, results-driven strategy, and practical recommendations that can be implemented at both the state and local levels. Targeted domains include:

- **Workforce Development & Economic Mobility** – strategies to strengthen employment pathways, support job readiness, and bolster a thriving economy.
- **Education** – access to quality early learning, K–12 supports, postsecondary opportunities, and lifelong learning
- **Healthcare** – improving access, affordability, and wellness outcomes
- **Food & Nutrition Security** – addressing food deserts and increasing access to healthy foods
- **Digital Opportunity** – connecting families to financial stability and the digital tools needed to succeed
- **Self-Sufficiency** – defining what it truly takes for Arkansas families to thrive
- **Policy Impacting Children & Families** – centering support for Arkansas families
- **ALICE** – elevating the needs of working families struggling to meet basic costs

By analyzing these domains together—not in isolation—the taskforces help build a comprehensive picture of what self-sufficiency means in Arkansas. Their recommendations form the backbone of the Arkansas Pathways Initiative, guiding policy development, community engagement, and the creation of a statewide self-sufficiency model that supports families at every stage of their journey.



Purpose & Grounding

Mission Statement

Arkansas Pathways empowers families, strengthens communities, and aligns systems to ensure every Arkansan has a clear and achievable path to self-sufficiency.

Vision Statement

Arkansas Pathways envisions a state where every individual and family has the resources, opportunities, and support needed to achieve lasting self-sufficiency and live a life of dignity, stability, and purpose—no matter where they live, who they are, or what challenges they face.



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Theory of Change

Three-Tenet Theory of Change



● Tenet 1: Collective Alignment Across Systems

Arkansas Pathways believes that self-sufficiency is only possible when public, private, nonprofit, and community systems work together—not in silos. By aligning leaders, practitioners, policymakers, and community members across all 75 counties, we create shared goals, shared measures, and shared accountability. This cross-sector alignment ensures that families experience a coordinated journey toward stability and opportunity.

● Tenet 2: Community-Driven Insight

Arkansas Pathways centers lived experience and local wisdom in every stage of planning and implementation. We believe solutions must be shaped by those closest to the challenges—families, frontline practitioners, rural leaders, faith networks, educators, and community advocates. When communities drive the process, strategies are more relevant and sustainable.

● Tenet 3: Holistic & Interconnected Strategies

Self-sufficiency requires more than one program or resource—it requires a constellation of supports across workforce, education, healthcare, housing, digital opportunity, food security, and policy. Arkansas Pathways uses a multi-domain, interconnected approach to address the root causes of poverty and strengthen conditions for long-term success.

Primary Actions

- Leverage 8 interdisciplinary taskforces
- Create a comprehensive statewide self-sufficiency model
- Align resources to support families across all domains of well-being
- Ensure services and initiatives are developed with communities, not just for them, so that strategies reflect local culture, values, and realities.



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Primary Agency

Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, Inc. - ACAA



Community Action Impact in Arkansas

- **163,495 individuals** served across **80,743 families** in FY23.
- **10,464** people served **without health insurance**
- **35,999** people served **with disabilities**
- **24,429** **senior citizens** served
- **44,939** **children** served living in poverty
- **2,279** **veterans and active military** persons served
- Volunteers donated **392,655 hours of service** to the Arkansas CAA network.
- Financial leverage: For **every \$1 of CSBG federal funding, Arkansas agencies leveraged \$30.10** from other sources (federal, state, local, private, and volunteer value).
- **Employment Outcomes**: 1,347 outcomes such as job acquisition or benefit access.
- **Education & Cognitive Development Outcomes**: 20,071 outcomes (improved literacy, diplomas, school readiness).
- **Income & Asset Building Outcomes**: 2,108 outcomes (budgeting, savings, asset growth).
- **Housing Impact Outcomes**: 33,475 outcomes (housing stability, eviction avoidance).
- **Health & Social/Behavioral Development Outcomes**: 52,571 outcomes (nutrition improvement, wellness, independence).
- **Civic Engagement & Community Involvement Outcomes**: 1,849 outcomes (leadership skills, expanded networks).

This level of reach and impact underscores the critical role of Community Action in Arkansas. By serving hundreds of thousands of individuals, addressing multiple domains of well-being, and leveraging local resources so effectively, CAAs help families move out of crisis, into stability, and toward long-term opportunity.



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Taskforce Recommendations



Self-Sufficiency/Digital Opportunity Recommendations

- Develop financial resilience strategies for agencies and partners in response to current funding instability.
- Pursue supplemental and alternative funding streams, including philanthropic, private sector, and public-private partnerships.
- Establish contingency and continuity-of-operations plans for human service programs to protect vulnerable families during disruptions.
- Support entrepreneurship & micro-enterprise pathways through skill-building, tools, and wrap-around supports.
- Expand digital opportunity programs to ensure individuals have access to devices, broadband, digital skills training, and secure portals for accessing benefits and employment services.
- Implement standardized case management tools, eligibility forms, and coordinated intake systems across agencies to streamline services.
- Strengthen rapid-response workforce and upskilling programs, focusing on in-demand sectors and accelerated pathways to employment.

Immediate Policy & Program Actions

- Establish state-level contingency and rapid-response protocols for essential self-sufficiency programs.
- Create emergency stabilization funds providers.
- Leverage entrepreneurship incubators and microenterprise supports for low-income families.
- Integrate digital opportunity metrics into self-sufficiency policy goals.
- Adopt standard statewide digital intake & case-referral systems to streamline service access.
- Pilot regional innovation and workforce hubs to test scalable solutions

Key Facts

- An estimated 89% of jobs in Arkansas definitely or likely require digital skills, close to the U.S. average. This demand is high across all industries, including priority sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, and transportation.
- Closing the digital divide is seen as a critical economic development issue. For every job lost due to the internet, 2.6 jobs are created, and increased broadband saturation correlates with annual employment increases.

Taskforce Facilitators

- *Beverly Buchanan*, AR State CSBG Office
- *Kamelle Gomez*, AR State Broadband Office
- *Danielle Watson*, U of A Division of Agriculture



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Taskforce Recommendations

Policy Impacting Children & Families

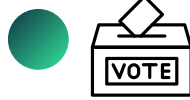
Christin Harper

Taskforce Facilitator: AR Advocates for Children & Families



Align with Existing Legislative Work

Allow the current legislative committee on Workforce and Social Services to take the lead on benefits cliff mitigation to avoid duplication and reinforce their efforts.



Identify Lead Agency for Civic Engagement

Identify an organization to research civic engagement curricula and determine feasible statewide delivery strategies, outcome tracking, and implementation models.



Strengthen Early Childhood Systems

- Increase funding for the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program.
- Advocate for reducing the 40% match rate required of ABC providers.
- Establish governing committees for ABC.



Support Out-of-School Programs

Include the Arkansas Out of School Network in planning and increase funding for afterschool and summer programming, particularly in light of the new SRA co-payment structure for school-age programs.

Expand Food Access & Nutrition Education

Identify state-level agricultural funding to support community gardens, SNAP Double Up Food Bucks, and basic life-skills education such as gardening, cooking, and budgeting. Potential partners include Cooperative Extension, county farm bureaus, and 4-H. New funding will be needed due to federal cuts to SNAP-Ed under H.R.1.



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Taskforce Recommendations

Education

Arkansas's education statistics reveal that too many students still lack the resources needed to thrive, signaling systemic gaps that directly impact the state's future workforce, economic mobility, and long-term community well-being.



01

Needs

Gaps in Early Childhood Education around access, literacy, and parental engagement.

02

Approach

Coordinate state and federal programs, promote universal pre-K, and early intervention.

03

Goals

- (1) Increase participation in high-quality Early Childhood Education programs by 30%.
- (2) Improve third grade reading proficiency rates by 15%.

04

Objectives

- 1) Advocate for Universal Pre-K legislation.
- (2) Launch an Education and Engagement Campaign for Parents.
- (3) Implement a multi-agency early intervention model.



Taskforce Facilitator

Jackie Govan

AR Head Start State Collaboration Office



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Taskforce Recommendations

ALICE: Asset-Limited Income-Constrained Employed



Research conducted by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation shows that in Arkansas, roughly 44% of households — including both those below the federal poverty line and those that are Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed (ALICE) — struggle to afford the basics of living in their counties. These households hold employment, yet contend with housing, childcare, transportation, healthcare, and other demands that push them precariously close to crisis.

With this evidence as our foundation, the ALICE Taskforce recommends targeted strategies to advance economic stability and ensure that these working-families have a fair chance to thrive.

Taskforce Facilitator
Georgiana Powell, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Raise Household Stability & Income Floors



- Advocate for policies that increase wages.
- Propose the adoption of an Arkansas “Living Wage” index based on county-level cost of living.
- Encourage employer incentives (tax credits, Workforce Development grants) for businesses whose full-time workers earn above the ALICE Threshold and receive benefits.

Strengthen Systems That Support ALICE Families

- Recommend reducing the work-hours or eligibility cliff that penalizes ALICE households when they earn more yet lose essential supports.
- Expand childcare subsidies and early-care access for ALICE families.
- Improve transportation access by exploring expanded public transit, ride-share incentives, or employer-led mobility partnerships.
- Increase access to affordable housing.

Amplify Local Voice, Data-Driven Action & Community Agency

- Identify and designate a lead entity for ALICE data tracking and civic engagement, tasked with reviewing existing curricula and supporting statewide delivery of financial-and-workforce literacy programs.
- Facilitate resident advisory councils and community co-design sessions in counties with high ALICE concentrations.
- Partner with philanthropic institutions to develop narrative-change campaigns that highlight ALICE families and destigmatize financial vulnerability.



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Taskforce Recommendations

Food & Nutrition Security Taskforce Facilitator
Joshua Harris, Well Fed Arkansas



Conduct a State-Wide Needs Assessment

- Use census tract data to identify underserved areas.
- Utilize a survey tool for individuals to understand real barriers: distance, transportation, stigma, hours, food preferences.
- Develop a feedback loop to update programming based on needs.



Identify a Technology-Enabled Network

CBOs, pantries, and food rescue can benefit from linked data/tech networks



Strengthen Transportation Access

- Partner with local transit agencies, ride-share services, or community ride programs to help people get to food sources.
- Map “transportation deserts” alongside food deserts to understand mobility gaps.



Promote Food Sovereignty

- Work with community-based farming networks to bring in culturally appropriate produce.
- Support nonprofit grocery models or co-ops in neighborhoods with limited supermarket access.

Leveraging Policy & Advocacy

The use of data from community needs assessments will elevate advocacy for sustainable funding, infrastructure improvements, and policy changes. Partnerships with research institutions and universities to develop predictive models and optimize food access across Arkansas is also recommended.



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Taskforce Recommendations

Workforce Development & Economic Mobility



The Workforce Development & Economic Mobility Taskforce recommends a coordinated, multi-sector approach to strengthening Arkansas’s workforce pipeline—one that centers families, employers, education systems, and community partners working together to expand opportunity and move Arkansans toward long-term self-sufficiency.

Accessibility

- Expand access to reliable and affordable transportation through public transit partnerships, employer-supported mobility solutions, and community-based ride networks.
- Improve access to quality, affordable child care.
- Support digital opportunity efforts by increasing access to broadband, devices, and digital literacy training essential for the modern workforce.

Alignment

- Strengthen partnerships among employers, education systems, workforce boards, and community organizations to ensure training aligns with real-time labor needs.
- Expand industry-recognized credentialing, apprenticeships, and earn-while-you-learn pathways in high-demand fields.
- Promote career pathways.

Taskforce Priorities

Taskforce Facilitators

Eddie Thomas, Arkansas Workforce Connections
Mireya Reith, Arkansas United



Support ALICE

- Collaborate with legislators and state leaders working on the benefits cliff to avoid duplicating efforts and help inform solutions that ensure work truly leads to financial stability.
- Advocate for pilots testing gradual phase-outs of supports as income rises.
- Encourage employer incentives or companies offering livable wages and benefits.



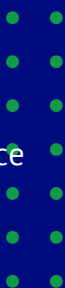
Strengthen Supports

- Expand the use of workforce navigators/career coaches to help individuals overcome barriers and stay engaged in training or employment.
- Encourage integrated service models that connect workforce, housing, transportation, food access, financial empowerment, and health supports.
- Support the development of workplace-based programs.



Build Stronger Systems

- Improve statewide data sharing to track outcomes and inform policy.
- Develop a shared set of workforce metrics for the Pathways initiative.
- Support partnerships with universities and research institutions to develop predictive models that help optimize training and resource allocation.





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Taskforce Recommendations

Healthcare

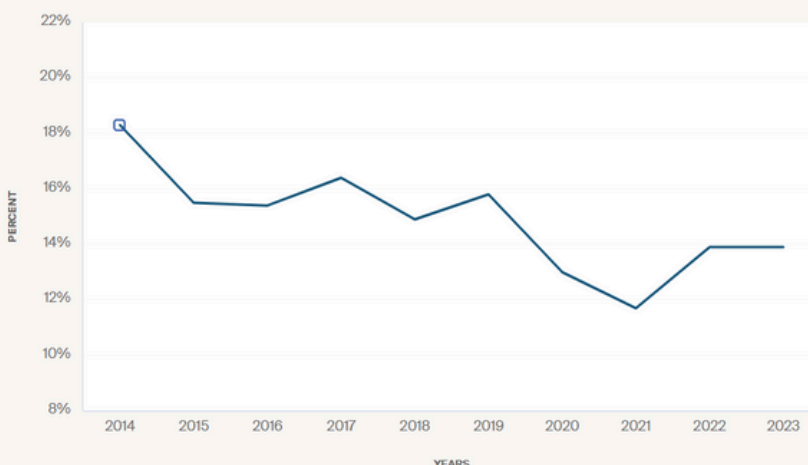


The Healthcare Taskforce identified several next steps to strengthen collaboration, clarify expertise, and expand the breadth of knowledge informing actionable change. The taskforce recommends conducting an asset mapping activity to identify each member's areas of expertise, reduce duplication of effort, and highlight the unique strengths each partner brings to the initiative. This mapping will be coordinated through a group email.

To deepen insight and broaden expertise, members advised inviting additional organizations and leaders to engage with the taskforce. These partners could provide valuable perspectives on comprehensive healthcare models, including work underway in maternal health.

Finally, the group recommends planning a roundtable discussion that brings these partners together to share insights, identify opportunities for alignment, and strengthen statewide strategies.

Adults age 18 and older who went without care because of cost in past year (%)



Taskforce Facilitators

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AR Black Philanthropy Collaborative
Teresa Conner
Baptist Healthcare Systems

Data: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) - Arkansas Statistics

Source: The Commonwealth Fund



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AR Pathways to Self-Sufficiency



2025

● **Statewide Taskforce Engagement & Preliminary Report**

Eight taskforces convene to develop recommendations across key domains of self-sufficiency. A statewide coalition of 100+ organizations contributes to the 2025 Preliminary Report, establishing a unified vision and early action steps.

2026

● **Local Community Forums & Geo-Mapping**

Local community forums are held to gather local insight, validate taskforce recommendations, and elevate lived experience into the statewide model. Geo-Mapping is completed to identify and coordinate statewide services to prevent duplication.

Finalization of the Arkansas Self-Sufficiency Model

● Taskforce findings and community feedback are integrated into a comprehensive Arkansas Self-Sufficiency Model, offering statewide definitions, metrics, and pathways for opportunity. The model is submitted to the Governor's Office.

2027

Self-Sufficiency Model Pilot Implementation

● Pilot communities launch targeted initiatives—such as workforce development hubs, early childhood expansion, mobile health and nutrition models, and ALICE-centered supports—to apply the model's strategies in real-world settings.

2028

Systems Alignment & Legislative Recommendations

● Cross-sector partners work with state leaders to align policies, funding streams, and performance measures. Legislative recommendations are advanced to support childcare access, transportation, workforce mobility, digital opportunity, and healthcare.

2029

Expansion & Infrastructure Building

● Successful pilots are scaled statewide. A data integration and shared measurement system is launched. Local coalitions are strengthened through ongoing training, leadership development, and resource-building across all 75 counties.

2030

Evaluation & Sustained Statewide Adoption

● A full five-year evaluation measures outcomes across families, workforce participation, community resilience, and economic mobility. Arkansas Pathways formally transitions into a sustained, statewide framework guiding long-term poverty alleviation and community prosperity.



Thank You!

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