

## Executive Summary

### Families

*Teen pregnancies have declined in the tri-county area*

- Since the late 1990s teen pregnancies are down in each county, but the teen birth rate per 100 females in the counties is still generally above the state average.

*Out-of-wedlock births are extremely high in the tri-county area*

- Births to unwed mothers as a percentage of total births are close to 50 percent in Sumter, slightly above the state average. Out-of-wedlock births are extremely high in Clarendon and Lee. The percentage of single-parent families in the counties is also above the state norm. Higher percentages of single-parent families, which are prevalent among African Americans, cause a significant parenting strain generally placed on the mother that often manifests itself in lack of nurturance, discipline, teaching and language use for children during their formative years. The end result of inadequate parenting behaviors is generally a lack of educational attainment for children and more poverty.

*Idle (out-of-school) youth totals are high*

- Idle (out-of-school) youth totals are high in the tri-county area and the state, especially among African-American males. Some of these idle youth are arrested and become part of the juvenile justice system. About 80 percent of juvenile justice cases in the tri-county area involve African Americans.

*The senior population is growing in the tri-county area*

- Given aging of “Baby Boomers,” the senior population is expanding in the three counties.
- Similar to overall poverty trends, the tri-county area has more seniors in poverty than the U.S. and state average. About 22 percent of all area seniors were in poverty in 2000.

### Housing and Public Transit

*Potential home ownership is largely only financially feasible for the area’s middle- and upper-class*

- Given rapidly rising new home construction values and increasing poverty rates, larger percentages of homeowners and renters are likely becoming economically burdened.

*Homeless totals are rising in the tri-county area and the state with very limited shelter options locally*

- Given gradually increasing poverty rates and a growing divide between the rich and poor, the best estimates show homeless totals are on the rise in all three counties and the state. The number of emergency, transitional and permanent shelter beds in the tri-county area is very limited.

*Overall public transportation ridership has increased in the region*

- Increased contract-service ridership other than Medicaid and worker commuter routes have offset decreases in Medicaid and fixed route ridership. Several possible strategies exist to sustain and grow ridership, though many may depend on additional funding.

### Education

*Standardized test scores in the tri-county area are below the state average*

- Standardized test scores on the PACT, SAT and ACT are lowest in Lee County and Clarendon School District 1. Scores are generally highest in Sumter 17 and Clarendon 3.

*Public school graduation rates have improved in the tri-county area*

- Sumter County has the highest graduation rate of the three counties and is currently on par with the state average. Lee County has the lowest graduation rate.
- African-American males have the highest percentage of dropouts in the area and the state.

*The percentage of public school students in the tri-county area entering post-secondary education is below the state average*

- Clarendon and Sumter counties have the highest percentage of students entering post-secondary training directly after high school and are slightly below the state norm. Sumter has shown annual percentage improvement. Lee County has the lowest percentage of students entering post-secondary education. Due in part to fewer students entering post-secondary education, adult educational attainment levels in the tri-county area are below the state norm.

*High relative family poverty rates in the tri-county area curtail student achievement*

- Research shows there is a direct correlation between a child from a low-income family and that child's lack of school readiness. Issues contributing to family poverty include single-parent families, and lower educational and income levels. Family poverty is especially prevalent among minorities in the tri-county area and the state. Educational statistics bear this out as a relatively high percentage of African-American males demonstrate a lack of readiness for the first grade in the tri-county area and state. A potential solution to this dilemma is expansion of early childhood education programs.

## **Economy**

*The tri-county area has suffered significant job losses overall since 2000*

- Offshoring, increased technologies necessitating fewer laborers, a marketplace requiring a more technically skilled workforce and other economic development factors have resulted in significant net job losses in Sumter County, the industrial center of the tri-county area. The majority of the area's job losses have been lower-skilled, lower-wage manufacturing jobs. These trends have also occurred in other rural counties in the state and Southeast.
- Job losses have resulted in increased unemployment rates in the three counties. Estimates show the tri-county unemployment rate for African Americans and other minorities is significantly higher than the rate for whites.
- Like many rural counties in the state and Southeast, job losses in the three counties are curtailing any population growth.

*Per capita income growth in the tri-county area is about equal to the state and U.S. averages*

- In recent years, percentage income growth in the three counties is on par with state and national increases. Despite the increases, income levels are still significantly below the U.S. average. A contributing factor to lower wages is fewer relative skilled workers in the area.

## **Health**

*Mental illness case rates in the tri-county area are above the state average*

- The rate of population served for severe and persistent mental illness in Lee and Clarendon has typically been very high relative to the state average. All three counties have seen decreasing "penetration rates" for clients served, but the decline is largely due to reduced mental health staff.

*HIV and STD case rates in the tri-county area are well above the state average*

- Similar to the state, the vast majority of HIV and STD cases in the counties involves African Americans and is the result of unprotected heterosexual sex.

*Inadequate prenatal care and low birth-weight rates in the area are above the state average*

- The rate of low birth-weight babies to total births is very high in Lee and Clarendon compared to the state and national average. Sumter's rate is close to the state norm.

*Hospitalizations and costs associated with the uninsured are rising in the area and the state*

- Lee's uninsured hospital discharges and associated costs both doubled from 2003-'06, far exceeding average state increases. Clarendon's rate of uninsured hospitalizations is above the state average; while Sumter's rise in the uninsured is similar to the S.C. norm.