

 **Lutheran Family Services**  
*of Nebraska, Inc.*



# AMBITION 2024



From an organization that provides services, to a place where people are served

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Our Ambition:** In communities to which we are called to serve, Lutheran Family Services will lead as a faith-based organization, placing the people we serve at the center as experts in their own experience, and effectively delivering health and human care that meets individuals' and communities' social, cultural, and linguistic needs.

Ambition 2024 is Lutheran Family Services' (LFS) Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2020 through 2024.

Ambition 2024 provides direction for LFS' priorities, guides our service strategies and decisions, and helps us continue to advance our legacy of care and excellence in all that we do.

Our plan includes six major objectives – each a critical area of focus for LFS' impact in helping to make the region the most healthy, safe, and welcoming place in the U.S.

**The Ambition 2024 plan's objectives are:**



**1. No Wrong Door:** Make sure that no matter when or how people come to LFS for service, they are welcomed and embraced



**3. Focus on "Outside-In":** Listening to and honoring the people we serve, build upon our tradition of leadership by becoming a model of person-centered care.



**5. Serve as One Organization:** Foster an organizational culture that is supportive, diverse, and inclusive, while enhancing joy at LFS.



**2. Advance the Quality and Accessibility of Human Services:** Through generous compassion, expand value for people we serve with an intense focus on understanding and empathy, quality, safety, and effectiveness.



**4. Fearlessly Experiment:** Fearlessly experiment for discovery and learning through continuous innovation. Invest in person-centered learning and design to create new models of care/service delivery.



**6. Aim for Accurate Understanding in Everything We Do:** Use data in new and innovative ways to guide decision-making in every corner of LFS, from person-centered services to finance and administration.

## LFS VISION, MISSION, AND CORE VALUES

LFS' vision, mission statement, and core values serve as the guiding principles for how we care for people, conduct our services, and interact with one another.

### **Vision:**

*Safety, hope, and well-being for all people.*

### **Mission:**

*Expressing God's love for all people by providing quality human care services that build and strengthen individual, family, and community life.*

### **Values:**

**H**umility, **K**indn**E**ss, **F**Aithfulness, **R**espect, and **A**ccoun**T**ability  
(Our core values are the **HEART** of LFS)



# INTRODUCTION

As we know, health starts where we live, learn, work, and play. If LFS is to take its vision and mission seriously (and we do!), it is important to frame our work in the wider context of our state and region.

**LFS believes, as research continues to demonstrate, that safety, hope, and well-being are enormously impacted by where people live, learn, work, and play.** Well-being starts in strong, loving families and in neighborhoods that are walkable and safe with nearby grocery stores that carry fresh produce. It starts in jobs that we can get to without hours of commuting and in hazard-free work places. It starts in schools that educate our children for the future and that feed them healthy

foods. And it starts in having time and resources to play at the end of a hard day’s work, because unrelieved stress takes its toll on our mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup>

**For the health and human services sector as a whole and as LFS in particular, we are positioned to and compelled by our experience, expertise and missions, to help make our communities healthier at those places where well-being begins, along what academicians now deem as the “Social Determinants of Health.”<sup>2</sup>**

LFS also believes that humans are social by nature and need strong ties with family and community friends. When those ties fray, well-being, as well as our sense

of safety and hope diminish. If we are to be healthy individuals who reside in healthy communities, we need strong families in loving relationships between parents and children that are nurturing in nature. Our communities need to have safe streets, no violence, and plenty of green space for kids and adults to play, exercise, and gather as community.<sup>3</sup>

**No single organization alone can enact safety, hope, and well-being for all. But, together in collaborative partnership with service partners, government, business, and civic and religious institutions, we can foster the kinds of environments required to help this state and region achieve safety, hope, and well-being for all.**

**THE LFS WAY:**

CHOOSE UNDERSTANDING	KEEP EVERY PROMISE
DEFAULT TO TRANSPARENCY	LISTEN FIRST, THEN LISTEN MORE
DWELL IN POSSIBILITY	VALUE QUESTIONS MORE THAN ANSWERS
LEAD FROM ANY CHAIR	ASSUME BEST INTENT
TRUST FIRST	FOCUS ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT

1 See *A New Way to Talk About the Social Determinants of Health*, Vulnerable Populations Portfolio, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2010. <https://www.rwjf.org>  
2 Ibid.  
3 Ibid.

# ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Nebraska, and the region as a whole, is a rapidly-changing landscape. Changes in demographics, economics, and the environment present growing challenges to the communities LFS has historically served.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Since 2010, Nebraska's population has increased about 5%. However, in 66 (or roughly 2/3) of Nebraska's counties, populations have decreased, some quite dramatically. With this decrease in population, the state has shifted its rural classification and now 50 of its 93 counties are considered 100% rural, representing counties that have no city over 2,500 residents.<sup>4</sup> **Since 2000, all but 9**

**counties have lost population under age 20.**

On average, about 2,000 Nebraskans per year move to another state and about 4,000 persons come to Nebraska from international locations. **Nebraska's minority population in 2017 grew to 21% overall from 8% in 1990.** Since 2000, in all but 3 counties (Sarpy, Arthur, and Lancaster) there has been a decline in the number of white, non-Hispanic

population under 20.

Along with a relatively nominal population increase that is concentrated in the Eastern part of the state, the ratio of working age to aging adults in Nebraska, which was 6:1 in 1950 and 5:1 in 2010, is now projected to be only 3:1 by 2050 as the aging adult population increases and the number of people under age 5 remains flat.

## POVERTY

Although poverty rates in Nebraska are mostly dispersed throughout the state, a few clusters of poverty exist.<sup>5</sup> A cluster of 4 counties with poverty rates that exceed U.S. and Nebraska figures is located in North Central Nebraska, a cluster of 3 counties is located in North Western Nebraska and 2 smaller clusters are located in North Eastern Nebraska. **Of**

**counties that have poverty rates higher than the national figures, 6 experienced "persistent" poverty,** defined as poverty higher than U.S. averages in the years 2000, 2010, and 2014. These counties were Thurston, Loup, Sheridan, Dawes, Blaine and Keya Paha.

As a state with one of the highest wealth disparities in the country,

Nebraska's difference in poverty rates between white and minority groups is also higher than the national average. It is important to note that **rural counties have the highest percentages of persons 65+ in poverty.** The poverty rate for non-Hispanic whites (9.7%) was lower than the national rate for the same racial group (10.8%) and was less than the overall state poverty rate of 12.9%. However,

<sup>4</sup> All demographic data comes from: **UNO Center for Public Affairs**, *The Changing Demographics of Nebraska*, June 6, 2019. [https://nacone.org/pdfs/featured\\_links/CB\\_presentations/Changing%20Demographics.pdf](https://nacone.org/pdfs/featured_links/CB_presentations/Changing%20Demographics.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> All poverty data comes from: **University of Nebraska – Lincoln**, *Mapping Quality of Life in Nebraska: The Geographic Distribution of Poverty*, 2017. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/mapquallifene>

**the poverty rate for almost all other racial groups exceeded the total state poverty rate and statewide poverty rates exceeded national poverty rates for each racial group.**

Poverty among Black Nebraskans (33.0%) was higher than national figures (27.3%) in 2014.

An even greater poverty rate existed for Native American Nebraskans, who experience poverty at 43.2%. Poverty for Native Americans in Nebraska is much higher than the national 28.8% average for Native Americans. This was more than 4 times the rate of poverty for non-Hispanic whites.

Hispanic/Latino Nebraskans had slightly higher rates of poverty than Hispanic/Latinos nationally, with poverty rates of 26.2% and 24.8%, respectively. In Nebraska, the poverty rates for Hispanics/Latinos were more than double the rates of non-Hispanic whites.

**Childhood poverty continues to be an issue for Nebraskans with its highest concentration in five counties: Keya Paha, Thurston, Loup, Box Butte and Richardson.**

Poverty is compounded by other issues including housing and transportation. **Nebraska, with no major mass transit system, is one of the most expensive states in which to own a vehicle**

with registration fees far greater than the majority of other U.S. states.<sup>6</sup> And **Omaha has one of the highest eviction rates in the country.**<sup>7</sup> Eviction rates, just as transit expense, help illuminate the crises many people living in poverty face in Nebraska and the region. As Matthew Desmond, founder of Eviction Lab, notes:

*The lack of affordable housing sits at the root of a host of social problems, from poverty and homelessness to educational disparities and health care. That means understanding the eviction crisis is critical to effectively addressing these problems and reducing inequality.*<sup>8</sup>

---

## DIVERSITY & WELCOME

**A**s previously noted, Nebraska has become a much more diverse state over the past 30 years. And, as the state becomes more diverse, it experiences an increase in the number of hate groups. In fact, **the number of hate groups in**

**Nebraska has doubled in number from 2008.** With an estimated 8 known hate groups, Nebraska has more than its neighbors Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa and Kansas.<sup>9</sup> And, while immigration continues to be cited as a vital aspect of the long-term prosperity

of American cities and the U.S. economy, **a recent index by the New American Economy initiative ranked Omaha the least immigrant-friendly of the 100 cities it studied.**<sup>10</sup>

---

6 From **U.S. News & World Report**, *50 Most Expensive States to Own a Car*, January 2018, <https://cars.usnews.com/cars-trucks/most-expensive-states-to-own-a-car>

7 From **Eviction Lab**, 2019. <https://evictionlab.org/rankings/#/evictions?r=United%20States&a=0&d=evictionRate&lang=en>

8 From **Eviction Lab**, 2019. <https://evictionlab.org/why-eviction-matters/#understanding-eviction>

9 From the **Southern Poverty Law Center** (SPLC) Hatewatch Map, 2019. <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map?year=2008>

10 From the **New American Economy City Index**, November 2019. <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/cities-index/city-profiles/>

## THE ECONOMY

According to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's Fact Card, in 2017 Nebraska farms and ranches covered 91 percent of the state's total land area. To support these agricultural communities, Nebraska has 24,000 miles of rivers and streams. **Within the state, one in every four jobs is related to agriculture, so droughts and flooding pose a serious threat to the stability of the state,**

according to the fact card. The sector most vulnerable to climate risk is agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

Environmental economist Geoffrey Heal, a professor in the Columbia Business School, notes that although agriculture makes up a fairly small part of the total U.S. economy, the Midwest is very dependent on agriculture as a primary economic driver.<sup>12</sup> Extreme rainfall events have increased

37 percent in the Midwest since the 1950s, and in 2019, the region experienced above normal amounts of rain and snowmelt that caused historic flooding. Nebraska alone lost \$440 million worth of cattle, and as of March 2019, Iowa had suffered \$1.6 billion in losses. As a result of climate change impacts, the Midwest is projected to lose up to 25 percent of its current corn and soybean yield by 2050.<sup>13</sup>

In light of these facts and projections, LFS embarked on a journey of planning for the future as one of many organizations committed to being problem-solving, change agents in our region. **Together we aim to combat and eliminate poverty, create a welcoming community for all people, and help build a more resilient state and region.** In order to do so, LFS sought insight from service providers, government officials, leaders in the private sector, and the people we serve to develop our Lutheran Family Services Ambition 2024.

11 From **Nebraska Agricultural Fact Card, a Cooperative Effort of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, USDA, NASS, Nebraska Field Office, Nebraska Bankers Association**, February 2019. <https://nda.nebraska.gov/facts.pdf>

12 From **Earth Institute, Columbia University**, *How Climate Change Impacts the Economy*, June 20, 2019. <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-climate-impacts-economy.html>

13 Ibid.

# SOAR (STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, ASPIRATIONS, RESULTS) ANALYSIS

As part of its Strategic Planning process, the LFS Board of Directors engaged in a number of external stakeholder interviews in order to assess LFS's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and to determine the results best associated with those aspirations. Our aspirations and results are outlined in our Objectives and Goals.

## STRENGTHS

It was no surprise to learn that among LFS' strengths are its region-wide presence and its scope of services. No other health and human service organization in the region has the broad reach that LFS has nor do any have the potential to reach under-served rural areas as does LFS. In addition, no other organization is poised to positively impact the number of social determinants of health that LFS is with its extensive expertise in mental/behavioral health, child welfare, and immigration and refugee services.

Our faith-based foundation was

also noted as a unique factor in the sector. While a faith-based foundation can be a hindrance for some organizations, LFS' Lutheran identity has historically been one that has expanded services for all people who might otherwise have no place to go; this expansive view of services grounded in a Lutheran theology of service runs counter to other organizations and is a valuable asset in the health and human services marketplace.

Our work with and expertise in services for people at the margins was also uncovered as a particular strength of LFS. Our experience

in working with people from all across the globe and from U.S communities at the margins is a unique advantage for LFS as we better define and refine how we work along the social determinants of health to create safety, hope, and well-being to every community to which we are called to serve.

And, our expertise in providing behavioral health in a variety of settings and our commitment to research-based methods and interventions was cited as another major strength of LFS.

## OPPORTUNITIES

It became evident early on in the Board's work on the strategic plan that LFS has opportunities to make an even larger and more positive impact in the state and region if we focus on the strengths noted above.

Leveraging our geographic footprint, LFS is uniquely positioned to bring services to rural areas in ways that other organizations simply cannot by virtue of their location or service portfolio. LFS is the rare health

and human services organization that serves both urban and rural populations; this is not only a primary strength, but presents real opportunity for LFS' future impact.

LFS also has the opportunity – and we would argue the mission imperative – to better serve seniors through our mental/behavioral health services, especially in rural communities. As populations decline and age in much of our state and region, rates of isolation and depression

continue to grow among people 65 and older. No other organization is poised to fill those service gaps as is LFS.

Another area of unique opportunity for LFS is to better leverage our cultural competency expertise throughout all of our services. Historically, LFS has isolated our cultural competency within our immigration and refugee portfolio, but if we infuse that cultural competency throughout the organization and strive for



cultural humility, LFS will be one of very few health and human service organizations in the region positioned to redefine and refine services.

The final area of overarching opportunity uncovered in the discovery phase of the planning

process involves gleaning the wisdom of lived experience from the people LFS serves. Without the benefit of their voices and wisdom, LFS services cannot pretend to best meet their needs. As such, LFS has an opportunity through the course of this 5-year strategic plan to place the people we serve

at the center of our services and at the center of our learning. Rather than an inside-out approach to service provision and innovation, LFS has the opportunity to take an outside-in approach to learning and program development.

---

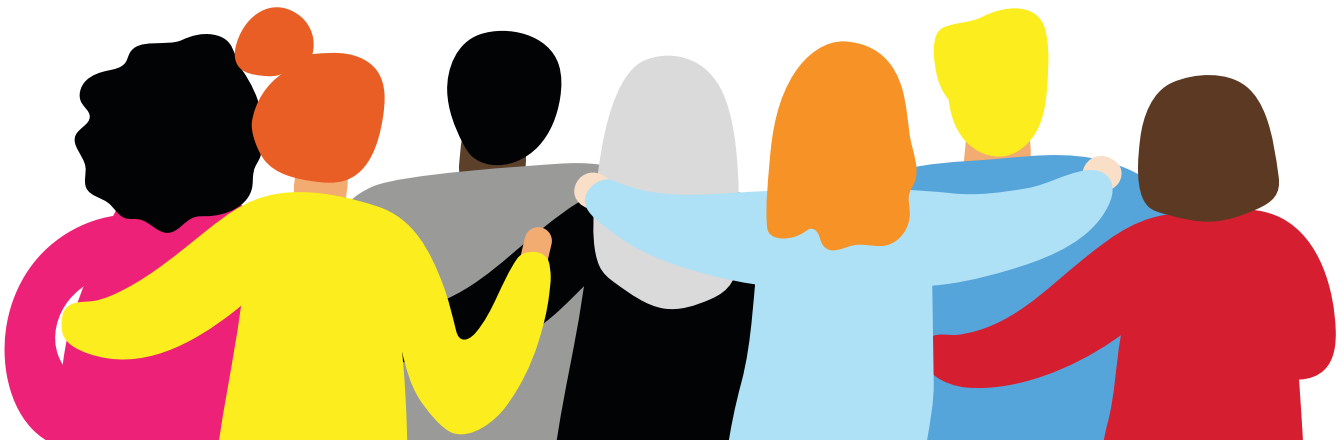
## ASPIRATIONS & RESULTS (OBJECTIVES & GOALS)

**B**ecause LFS exists to impact our state and region in ways that create safety, hope, and well-being, and because we have experience and expertise in almost

all of the social determinants of health, LFS is in a distinct position to lead the sector in effectively placing the people we serve at the center as experts in their

own experience, and effectively delivering health and human care that meets individuals' and communities' social, cultural, and linguistic needs.

**If we live into this ambition, we will increase opportunity in our communities for the people we serve to make choices that allow them to live safe, hope-filled, healthy lives in their families, neighborhoods, and communities.**



# SIX OBJECTIVES

At the heart of our ambition is our belief that if we focus on the 6 objectives outlined in our strategic plan, we will see the following theory of change come to realization:

No Wrong Door	If we welcome people where they are and connect people we serve to what they need and want, <b>then</b> they will have the opportunity they need to choose the programs and services they need...	...to live safe and hope-filled lives full of well-being
Quality & Accessibility	If we offer high quality care that is easy to access, <b>then</b> people we serve will have the opportunity to choose care that optimizes their ability....	
Outside-In	If we listen to and focus on the wants and needs of the people we serve, <b>then</b> our programs and services are more likely to be effective, making us a provider of choice in the community and to lead other organizations to do the same, leading the community to create programs and services that assist those we serve...	
Fearless Experimentation	If we continue to discover and learn, <b>then</b> we will be able to provide innovative services that people we serve want and most need...	
One LFS	If we serve as one organization, <b>then</b> we will remove barriers to care and create a culture that enhances joy at LFS which allows us to be an employer and provider of choice, positioning us to deliver care that helps people we serve...	
Understanding	If we seek understanding in all that we do from person-centered care, to finance, to administration, <b>then</b> we will be equipped to increase opportunity in our community for the people we serve to make choices that allow them....	

Through its deliberative process of external and internal feedback and an intensive facilitated planning process, LFS determined that if we focus on the following 6 objectives with each of their respective goals, over the course of the next 5 years LFS will have made great gains in impacting the region as a faith-based organization that places the people we serve at the center as experts in their own experience.

# OBJECTIVE 1: NO WRONG DOOR



No matter when or how people come to LFS for service, they are welcomed and embraced.

## GOALS:

- LFS will be the first place people think of and contact for human care services.
- LFS services are provided in a culturally competent and humble manner.
- No client leaves LFS without direction and understanding about how/where to access the services they need.

## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Design and implement a marketing and communications plan to promote LFS to the communities we serve.
- All services provided at all locations are provided in a way that meets individuals' and families' social, cultural, and linguistic needs.
- Ensure all clients and visitors to LFS receive a warm welcome regardless of when or how they arrive.

## OBJECTIVE 2: ADVANCE THE QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF HUMAN SERVICES



Through generous compassion, expand value for people we serve with an intense focus on understanding, empathy, quality, safety and effectiveness.

### GOALS:

- Accessing services at LFS is easy for all people.
- Our physical space is welcoming and appropriate for the services we provide.
- LFS is part of a robust network of service providers in the community that collaborate to identify gaps and meet needs.
- People we serve identify LFS services as the highest of quality.

### FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Evaluate and plan for our future facilities needs while being good stewards of existing facilities.
- Ensure waiting areas are accessible, child friendly, and welcoming to all.
- Increase opportunities for the people we serve to access LFS services (timeliness, locations, program & services available).
- Develop preferred partners referral system & a guide to be used across the organization.
- Maintain focus on quality through accreditation with the Council on Accreditation.
- Create learning loop from people we serve on how to continuously improve and increase quality.

## OBJECTIVE 3: FOCUS ON OUTSIDE-IN



Listening to and honoring the people we serve, build upon our tradition of leadership by becoming a model of person-centered care.

### GOALS:

- Evaluate the needs of the communities in which we serve.
- Know the needs of people we serve and strive to meet them.
- Know the needs of people we do not currently serve.
- Know why we are not their chosen provider for services we provide.

### FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Develop an understanding of the current and projected needs of the communities in which we serve through research, strategic partnership, and population-level data.
- Understand the client journey through our services.
- Design and implement a universal intake process.

## OBJECTIVE 4: FEARLESSLY EXPERIMENT



*Fearlessly experiment for discovery and learning through continuous innovation. Invest in person-centered learning and design to create new models of care/service delivery.*

### GOALS:

- Learn how to test programmatic hypotheses through pilot projects.
- Expand on existing partnerships and relationships.
- Build capacity required for innovation.
- Engage in systems-level work to elevate what we learn about community needs.

### FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Develop, model, and set expectations in staff learning about client insights for the development of pilot projects.
- Increase financial resources to allow for innovation and growth capacity.
- Share what we learn about community needs through advocacy and education.
- Enhance staff learning to be used to enable pilot projects and support areas of future impact.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SERVE AS ONE ORGANIZATION



Foster an organizational culture that is supportive, diverse, and inclusive, while enhancing joy at LFS.

### GOALS:

- Be a Great Place to Work:
  - *The key to being a great place to work is to maximize human potential, accomplished through leadership effectiveness, and values that include empathy and trust.*
- Develop the “LFS Way” – shared norms and values for communication and collaboration.
- Eliminate internal silos and enhance internal collaboration.

### FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Ensure adequate and proper training occurs for all employees and volunteers.
- Role model and live into the “LFS Way.”
- Identify and advocate for the necessary tools and resources to support our culture and growth.
- Establish systems, processes, and methodologies to support and enable alignment of our people and culture.

# OBJECTIVE 6: AIM FOR ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING IN EVERYTHING WE DO



Use data in new and innovative ways to guide decision-making in every corner of LFS, from person-centered services to finance and administration.

## GOALS:

- Understand that cultural competence and humility is our competitive advantage...and it is the right thing to do and to be.
- Anticipate and plan for future needs.
- Develop tools for planning and decision-making

## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIES:

- Create an integrated multi-year budget system and a uniform forecasting model.
- Develop and implement financial planning tools for key leadership across the organization.
- Diversify funding:
  - *Increase diversity in behavioral health payers*
  - *Increase contracts and grants*
  - *Prepare for Value-Based Reimbursement*
  - *Increase unrestricted funds raised*
- Develop competency using data in decision-making:
  - *Key Performance Indicator analysis*
  - *Business Intelligence output from Practice Management System*
  - *Meaningful analysis of client outcomes*
  - *Data integration into performance management*
  - *Increase efficiencies and effectiveness by linking and assigning costs to processes and outcomes*



# CONCLUSION

Our ambition is great, but in a changing and challenging landscape, LFS is needed now more than ever. LFS is determined to make our ambition a reality and, as outlined above, believes the objectives and strategies laid out in our plan will help us achieve our ambition:

*In communities to which we are called to serve, Lutheran Family Services will lead as a faith-based organization, placing the people we serve at the center as experts in their own experience, and effectively delivering health and human care that meets individuals' and communities' social, cultural, and linguistic needs.*

We know that we succeed when the people we serve succeed, which is all about learning and growth through developing and managing enduring relationships, in order to be the best place to work and to grow in our ability to serve, increasing our impact.

No single organization alone can enact safety, hope, and well-being for all. But, together in collaborative partnership with service partners, government, business, and civic and religious institutions, we can foster the kinds of environments required to help this state and region achieve safety, hope, and well-being.