

MKE Elevate Issue Brief:

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Economic Security includes the following topics: Employment, Education, Access to credit and banking, Racial wealth gap, Childhood poverty.



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Economic security is a root cause of health that affects all Milwaukeeans

Higher levels of wealth are associated with better health outcomes, from self-rated health and well-being to lower morbidity and mortality rates. Economic stability and education are key social determinants of health, and research consistently highlights that **adults with higher education have better health** and longer lifespans. [Job security](#) and policies that protect workers (such as paid sick leave) reduce stress, transmission of infectious disease, and incidence of workplace injuries while increasing access to health insurance and other benefits, steadier paychecks that allow workers to purchase **resources that satisfy their basic needs**, and access to adequate housing.

Economic security affects all households, but especially the **140,055 Milwaukeeans living in poverty**.

Have outcomes improved or gotten worse (past 5 years)?

Economic security briefly improved during the pandemic as the expansion of social service programs like the Child Tax Credit, stimulus payments, eviction moratoriums, and expansion of unemployment benefits were implemented. As those temporary policies ended, economic insecurity experienced especially by low income households and people of color has worsened.

Some key indicators include:

Childhood poverty rates in Milwaukee (**35.1%** in 2016-2020) have **decreased** since 2011, but remain among the highest in Wisconsin and compared to other U.S. cities.

48.7% of renters in Milwaukee County are spending **more than 30%** of their household income on rent.

24.6% of people are living in poverty (**140,055 people**)

84.4% of people 25+ have at least graduated high school; this value has **increased significantly** since 2011.

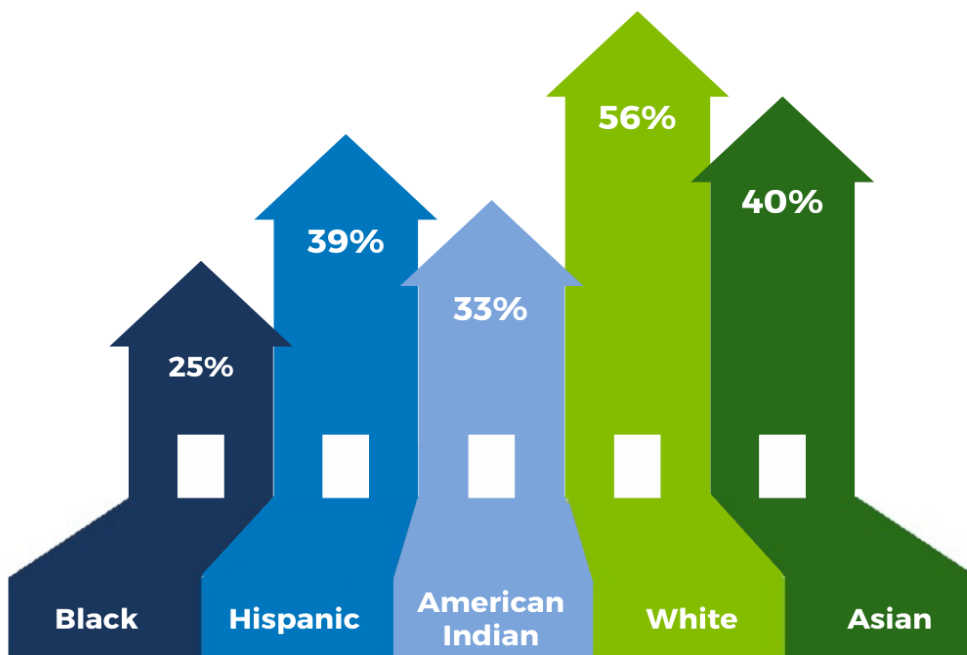
There are significant racial disparities in economic security, so intentional anti-racist actions can help close the gap.

Economic Security impacts **all Milwaukeeans**, but can especially be an important protective factor for health in **children**, households led by a single mother, **people of color** who have been presently and historically excluded from wealth building, and **elderly residents** who may no longer be able to work and rely on a fixed income from Social Security and/or retirement savings.

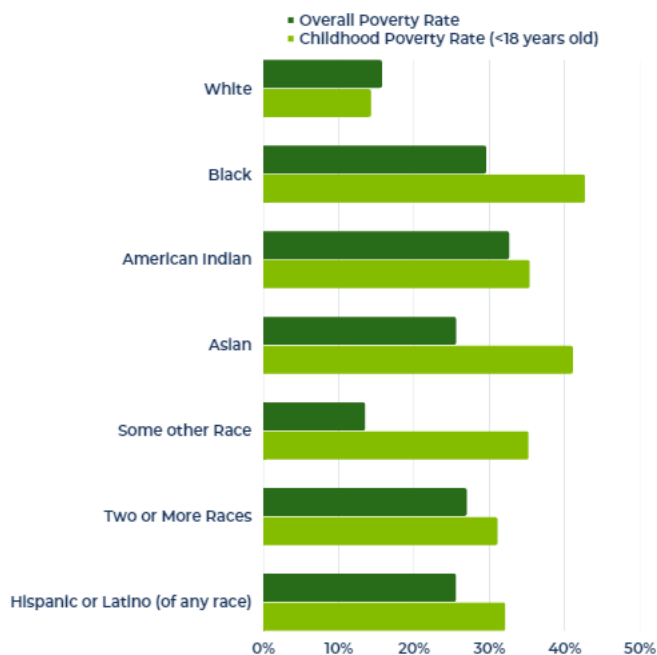
Is there a disparity?

Yes – across nearly all indicators of economic security, for a snapshot:

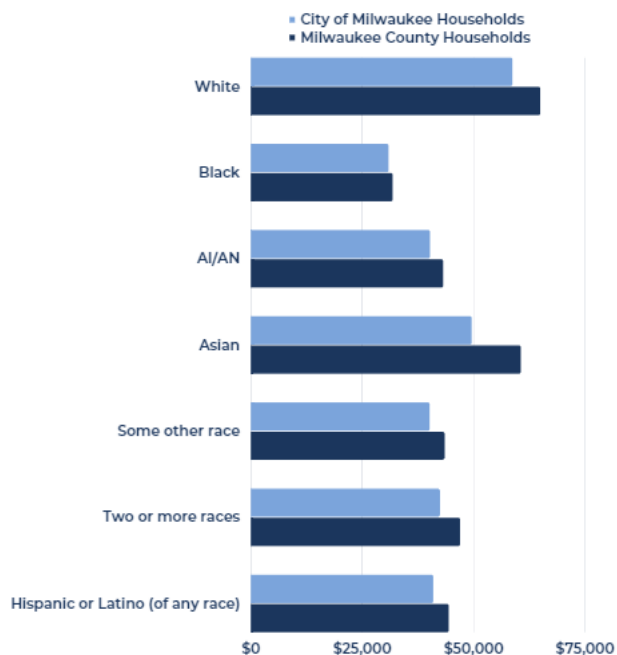
Home Ownership in City of Milwaukee



Poverty Rates in the City of Milwaukee by Race and Ethnicity:



Median Annual Household Income by Race and Ethnicity:



All data from this page: American Community Survey 2020

How do social conditions, access to resources, and risk/protective factors impact issue?

Economic security is one of the social determinants of health that affects access to resources and promotes the ability to lead a healthy life. Economic supports like a generous social safety net and programs that promote universal high-quality education and childcare, are critical to supporting health.

We have the ability to improve economic security in next five years

Some examples of evidence-based policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies we could implement:

- Workforce development strategies & recruitment for underrepresented students into health careers
- Advocate for policies that protect worker's health & safety such as paid sick & family leave, childcare subsidies, flexible scheduling and living wage laws
- Build capacity for innovative housing models such as community land trusts, land banking, and service-enriched housing (especially for folks with mental & physical disabilities, substance misuse, and for folks transitioning out of prison)
- Implement locally or advocate for state or federal programs like [baby bonds](#) or [housing reparations](#) that close the racial wealth gap.

Could more be done if MKE Elevate takes on issue?

Yes – especially in the policy & systems change levels. Many organizations provide services and are beginning to work further upstream, but the real potential in improving economic security for all lies in working collectively to advocate for policies that promote healthier and more inclusive work environments, affordable housing & more equitable access to quality education.

Is there political will to address issue?

Yes – economic development and affordable housing are priorities for political leaders and many community organizations and residents in Milwaukee.

Community members would support action to improve economic security

48% of MKE Elevate Priority Issue Survey respondents selected at least one of the topics around economic security (tied for 3rd highest with Health Care Access). Economic security was ranked 5th highest in the Prioritization Activity, and housing quality was a common theme in the Photovoice Activity.

Are any community groups working on issue?

Yes – some major initiatives include:

- Collective Affordable Housing Plan: aims to close the racial gap in homeownership by increasing Black & Latino homeownership.
 - WIOA Local and Regional Plan (Employ Milwaukee): outlines regional workforce development needs, establishes workforce program goals and highlights strategies and initiatives to create and support strong regional economies.
 - Milwaukee Succeeds: advances education equity in Milwaukee, ensuring all children have the resources they need to succeed.
 - DCD's Comprehensive Plan: provides a community-based framework for investment, a guide for public and private decision-making and coordinating initiatives for many different groups. Consists of a Citywide Policy Plan & area plans for neighborhood development. In addition, DCD conducts studies and plans for specific topics that are relevant including Growing Prosperity: An Action Agenda for Economic Development, and an Anti-Displacement Plan.
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Resources are available to implement strategies to increase economic security

Is there staffing to support an action team?

Yes – Housing & Economic Security Public Health Strategist.

Is funding available currently or possibly in the future?

Yes – Many grant opportunities through HUD, CDC, foundations (many of which focus on promoting economic security) or through partnerships with banks/financial institutions, businesses, or academic institutions, ARPA, or Federal Infrastructure or Climate Bill.

Are there clear implementation partners?

Key Implementation Partners:

- City Government: DCD, BID & NID leaders, CDBG, etc.
- Business & Workforce Development Organizations: MMAC (Especially the Hispanic Collaborative & Region of Choice Initiative), Employ Milwaukee, Chambers of Commerce
- Education: MPS, MATC, local schools & universities, Milwaukee Succeeds
- Community Organizations and agencies: SDC, Bank On Milwaukee/ UEDA/ Take Root Milwaukee, IMPACT 211, Community Development Corporations, United Way, Greater Milwaukee Foundation, United Community Center (UCC), etc.
- Health Care Organizations



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Contact us at
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