User Guide: Well-being Indicators Across the State of Michigan

Getting an accurate picture of poverty in a county is challenging - many data points could represent the breadth and depth of poverty on the county level. In fact, while a county level report can shed some light on the state of poverty in Michigan, it obscures some of the nuances that appear county-to-county.

This map focuses on eight broad poverty-related indicators (unless otherwise noted, they are pulled from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey):

- **Population:** Broadly speaking, the higher a population of a county, the more economic opportunity that there will be. Population is a good way to make sure you're comparing similarly sized counties in terms of poverty.

- **Median Income:** In talking about poverty, researchers typically use median income (and not average income) to demonstrate the typical income of a household in that county. Medians are less susceptible to outliers – for example, if just a few households had a very high income, it could make the county's mean income look much higher.

- **Poverty Rate**: This is the percent of the population below the federal poverty line.
    - Interested in learning more about the federal poverty line and how it's calculated? See our primer [here](#).

- **Child Poverty Rate**: This is the percent of children under 18 who are in households under the poverty line.

- **Percent ALICE:** ALICE is an indicator developed by the United Way. It stands for: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE is a way to get a snapshot of the working poor, a group that's not captured in the percent below the poverty rate. This indicator is calculated at the household level, not the individual level. See the full United Way project [here](#).

- **Percent on SNAP:** SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, is the country's most robust social safety net program. It is one of very few programs that families who apply and qualify are guaranteed to receive. All funding for SNAP comes from the federal government.

- **Life Expectancy:** Life expectancy is a good proxy for overall health of a region – the better the lifetime health of individuals and the better the access to healthcare, the longer the life expectancy. This indicator is from the [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.](#).

- **Percent Single-Parent Households:** According to Raj Chetty and his co-authors, "the fraction of children living in single-parent households is the single strongest correlate of upward income mobility". They explored 5 variables in a [recent study](#) on upward mobility. There is a strong

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relationship between the percent of single parent households and a lack of social mobility in a region. This indicator is pulled from the [Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings.](#)

- **Percent of Children Who Experienced Homelessness During Elementary School:** Under federal education law all children and youth who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" are homeless. These children not only lack a stable place to call home, they are more likely to transfer schools, have long commutes, struggle with poor health, and be chronically absent than their non-homeless peers. This indicator is from [MERI – Michigan Education Data Center](#).
  - This student homelessness research result used data structured and maintained by the MERI-Michigan Education Data Center (MEDC). MEDC data is modified for analysis purposes using rules governed by MEDC and are not identical to those data collected and maintained by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and/or Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Results, information and opinions solely represent the analysis, information and opinions of the author(s) and are not endorsed by, or reflect the views or positions of, grantors, MDE and CEPI or any employee thereof. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonComercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

If you're interested in seeing a complete list of indicators available through Poverty Solutions, click [here](#).

Data Sources:
All data sources are publicly available. While we've given a snapshot of the data we believe is important as it relates to poverty on the county level, there are many more indicators to access [here](#).

[American Community Survey:](#)
The American Census Survey (ACS) is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and is updated yearly. The numbers reflect surveyed samples from across the United States that ultimately give us estimates of the entire region without surveying everyone. These estimates were pulled from the American Census Survey's database, American FactFinder. This data represents the most up-to-date estimation of these values.

Note: For larger counties, the indicator is based on the 2017 one-year estimation of the value. For smaller regions, we use what's called a "rolling estimate" that allows for statistical precision in small samples by using data from over time. For counties smaller than 65,000, all data is the 2013-2017 five year estimate.

[Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program](#)
The U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program has one-year estimates for poverty at a county level. This data is used for a reliable 1-year estimate of poverty rates for even small counties. The below indicators are from the SAIPE data from 2017.

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[United Way Alice Report:](#)

The United Way's ALICE (Asset limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report provides us with a more detailed look at the economic hardships families face in the United States. This population may be overlooked because they fall above the Federal Poverty Line, which is the cut-off that many data use as "poor". The ALICE number can be viewed as the number of "working poor" in a region. The data in this set are pulled from the United Way's last report in 2019, utilizing the 2017 ACS data.

[County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#)

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute release health-related data at the county-level. From their website, "The annual *County Health Rankings* measure vital health factors, including high school graduation rates, obesity, smoking, unemployment, access to healthy foods, the quality of air and water, income inequality, and teen births in nearly every county in America. The annual *Rankings* provide a revealing snapshot of how health is influenced by where we live, learn, work and play." Data comes from RWJF's 2019 release, see more [here.](#)

[IMHE Life Expectancy Data](#)

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation produces county-by-county estimates of life expectancy data. They utilize de-identified death records, census data and the Human Mortality Database to produce these estimates. This data was last calculated in 2014.

[Eviction Lab at Princeton University](#)

The Eviction Lab has built a dataset of evictions from across the country, utilizing court filings, scraping internet data, and partnering with companies that use this data. Eviction data county-by-county is included in our larger dataset. Before using these to do any analysis, please visit the [Eviction Lab website](#) to learn more about this data and its limitations. This dataset was completed in 2016.

[MERI – Michigan Education Data Center](#)

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Additional Indicators Currently Available:

Poverty Solutions is happy to discuss the creation of tailored maps if there are specific sub-categories of data that an organization may be interested in. We are also able to incorporate new sets of data into our existing dataset. The below variables are visible in [this spreadsheet](#).

Some example custom maps could focus on:

Housing Focused:

- Percent Owner-Occupied Units
- Percent Renter-Occupied Units
- Vacancy Rate

Child Focused:

- Child Poverty Rate
- Percent Free and Reduced Lunch
- Children on Public Health Insurance

Health Focused:

- Overall Percent with Public Coverage
- Unemployed with Public Coverage
- Employed with Public Coverage
- Adult Obesity Rate

For more information, or to request specific data, please contact povertysolutions@umich.edu.