POVERTY SOLUTIONS
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FACT SHEET

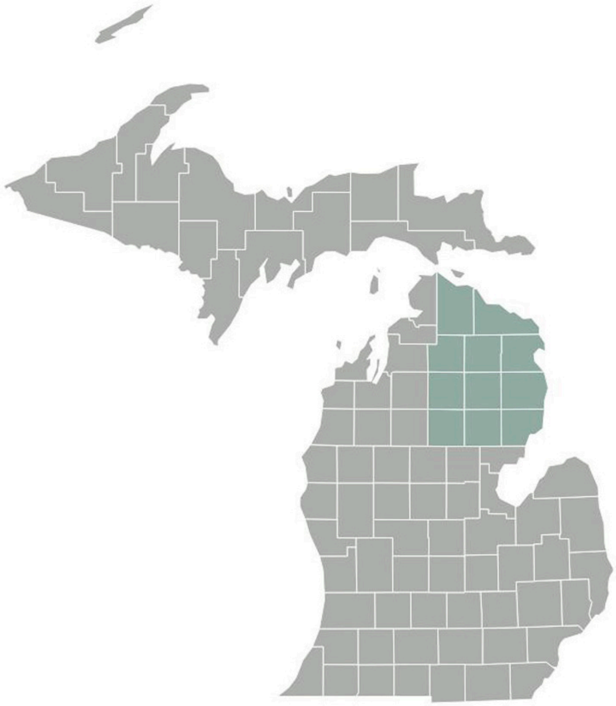
Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: Northeast Region

The Northeast Region includes: Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, and Roscommon counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Transportation Burden and Seasonal Volatility Contribute to Economic Hardship in Northeast Michigan

The Northeast Michigan Region trails the state on nearly every measure of economic well-being. The region's median household income of $56,550 is nearly $16,000 below the state median, 14.2% of the region's population lives in poverty, and another 42.9% of households fall below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold, which means they cannot afford basic necessities even when employed and making enough to be above the poverty line. The child poverty rate is higher than the state overall, 21.1% versus 17.7%, and 9% of adults lack health insurance. While fewer households are housing cost burdened, 29.8% compared to the state rate of 32.7%, this figure understates the true financial strain facing the region's households. Factoring in transportation costs reveals a heavier burden, with combined housing and transportation costs consuming between 49% and 59% of household income across the region's counties, well above the affordability threshold of 45%. The region's geography drives high transportation costs. Jobs are concentrated in a small number of towns and small cities, whereas the population is dispersed across the rural region. This imbalance results in long, expensive commutes.

Housing costs in the Northeast Region average between $931 and $1,163 per month, depending on the county, but transportation costs largely cancel out the low housing costs.[1] Households across the region drive between 23,000 and 27,000 miles per year and spend $15,000 to $17,800



	State	Region
Population	10,077,761	205,214
Median Household Income	$72,336	$56,550
Children in Poverty	17.7%	21.1%
Population in Poverty	13.4%	14.2%
ALICE	26.3%	27.6%
ALICE + Poverty	39.7%	42.9%
Households Receiving Food Stamps / SNAP	13.5%	14.6%
Housing Cost Burdened	32.7%	29.8%
Adults Without Insurance	7.1%	9.0%
Single- Parent Households	30.6%	32.2%

annually on transportation on average, adding 29% to 35% of income to housing costs. These high transportation costs are a direct consequence of poor access to jobs. Employment density in the most isolated counties is extremely thin, with Oscoda County, Montmorency County, and Alcona County having fewer than 2 jobs per working-age adult within a 30-minute commute.[2] With meaningful employment concentrated primarily in the cities of Alpena and Gaylord, workers in outlying counties have little choice but to commute long distances or seek online work. The Northeast Michigan Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) recognized transportation difficulties as one of the region's core structural challenges, alongside a declining working-age population and above-average poverty rates.[3]

Seasonal income swings in Northeast Michigan make high transportation burdens harder to absorb. The local economy relies heavily on seasonal industries, which concentrate employment in the summer months. Consequently, local unemployment rates swing dramatically throughout the year. In Cheboygan County, the unemployment rate ranged from 4.7% in August 2025 to 15.7% in February 2025.[4] Presque Isle County's rate increased from 6.4% to 14.2% over the same period. Alcona and Oscoda counties regularly see winter unemployment rates of 10% to 14%, more than double the state's 2025 annual average of 5.2%.[5] Pivoting to alternative work when the season turns is not a realistic option for many workers, as the other major industries in the region are healthcare and manufacturing, which may require more specialized skills.

These pressures are most acute in Alcona, Montmorency, and Iosco counties, where median household incomes range from $46,000 to $50,000, and combined housing and transportation burdens reach 57% to 59% of income. Low postsecondary enrollment rates further perpetuate this cycle of economic volatility and vulnerability. In the Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona Educational Service District, only 40.3% of students pursue postsecondary education within six months of graduating from high school, including 23.4% who pursue community college credentials. Similarly, the Iosco Regional Education Service Agency's postsecondary enrollment rate of 42% falls approximately 10 percentage points below the state average.[6] The deficit in credential attainment traps the local workforce in the same seasonal, low-wage industries that drive the region's financial instability. The CEDS report highlights that regional training programs are underutilized despite their broad availability, underscoring an information gap about pathways to stable, year-round employment.[7] Without gains in credential attainment, particularly in growth sectors such as healthcare and advanced manufacturing, households remain dependent on seasonal work and vulnerable to ongoing financial instability.

Addressing these challenges will require coordinated investment in workforce development and industry diversification. Michigan Works! Northeast Consortium provides career assessment, occupational training, apprenticeship programs, and job search assistance across the region, serving as the primary vehicle for connecting workers to educational and employment pathways. The Michigan Reconnect program offers free tuition to adults without college credentials who are pursuing community college or skilled trades credentials. Alpena Community College, which directly serves the Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona ESD, is well-positioned to expand access for adult learners seeking year-round credentials in healthcare and manufacturing.

References

1 H+T Map and Index. Center for Neighborhood Technology. https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/

2 *Ibid*

3 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, 2025. https://www.nemcog.org/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy

4 Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor. accessed via: Michigan Labor Market Information Website. https://milmi.org/DataSearch/LAUS

5 *Ibid*

6 College Enrollment by High School. MiSchool Data, Michigan Department of Education. https://www.mischooldata.org/college-enrollment-by-hs/

7 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, 2025. https://www.nemcog.org/comprehensive-economic-development-strategy