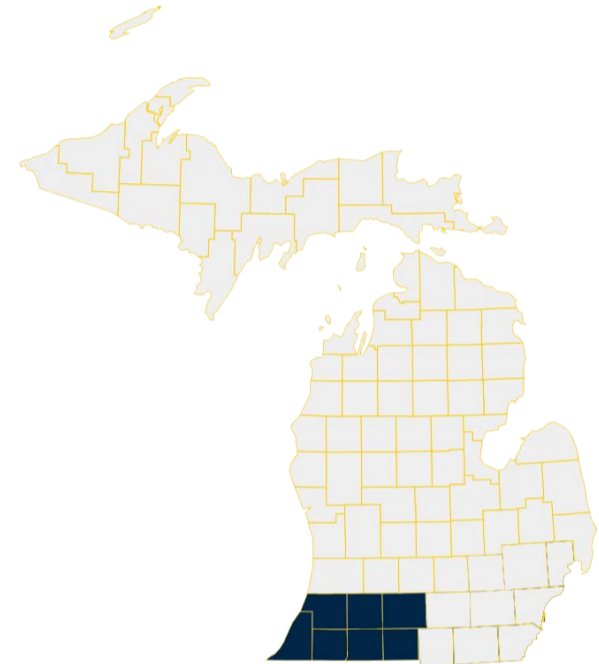


Michigan Poverty & Well-being Map: Southwest

The Southwest region includes: Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Van Buren counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Addressing Water Infrastructure and Affordability Needs

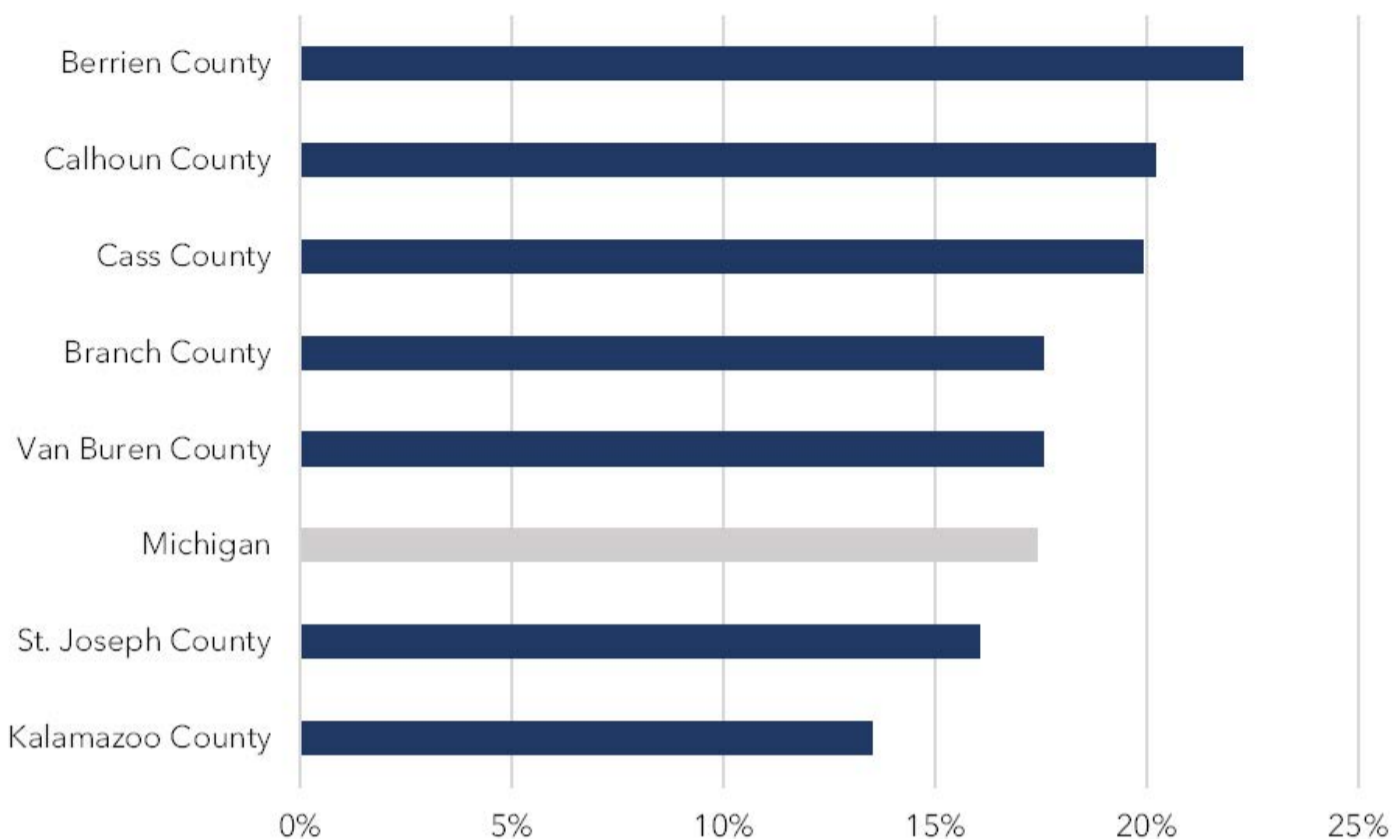
While the Flint water crisis attracted international attention, Southwest Michigan has also had issues surrounding water infrastructure and affordability that have garnered statewide concern. The Benton Harbor water supply has elevated lead levels that the city has been unable to mitigate. The long-term solution is to replace the area's 2,400 pipes that contain lead, a costly proposition that will need financial support from the federal and state governments to be completed.¹ Elevated rates of lead in the water supply is especially concerning since counties in the region generally have child poverty rates that are higher than the statewide average. The county surrounding Benton Harbor has the highest poverty rates within the region, with a higher proportion of families who are housing cost-burdened and receiving food assistance. For many families, water – even lead-contaminated



water – is unaffordable. At the close of 2020, Congress created the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program, a temporary emergency program that will help low-income households and families afford water and wastewater services during the coronavirus pandemic, providing \$1.1 billion to help residents pay their water bills, avoid shutoffs, and support household water system reconnections related to non-payment.² Although the program is temporary, it can play a critical role in guaranteeing water security in the region during this crisis. Additionally, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill allocates \$3 billion in 2022 to accelerate the replacement of lead water pipes over the next decade and calls on states to prioritize underserved communities such as Benton Harbor.³

The region will benefit from investments in all forms of infrastructure, not just water infrastructure. After suffering declines in manufacturing jobs, the industry has rebounded significantly. Ensuring that the roads are in good condition and investing in intermodal freight will help support this growth. The federal money that is available through both the American Rescue Plan Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill will allow the region to address these needs, which are necessary for future growth.

Southwest: Percentage of Population Age 18 and Under Living Below Poverty Line⁴



References

¹ Phillis, Michael. "Michigan City on Edge as Lead Water Crisis Persists." AP News, November 4, 2021.

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² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Biden-Harris Administration Launches Relief Program to Improve Access to Affordable Water Services." News release, June 2, 2021, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/06/02/biden-harris-administration-launches-relief-program-to-improve-access-to-affordable-water-services.html>.

³ The White House. "Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan." News release, December 16, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/16/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-lead-pipe-and-paint-action-plan/>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. "Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2019" Accessed March 21, 2022. https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saipe/#/?map_geoSelector=aa_c.