2022 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. This measure is from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program (SAIPE).

- **Child Poverty Rate**: This is the percent of children under 18 who are in households under the poverty line. This measure is from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates program (SAIPE).

- **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 Housing Cost Burdened:** Housing Cost Burdened is defined as paying more than 30% of household income on housing related expenses (rent or mortgage, utilities, insurance). Housing costs are considered unaffordable for these households.

- **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.

- **Percent without Health Insurance:** The percent of the working age population (adults aged

19 to 64) who do not have private or public health insurance.

- **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 relationship between the percent of single parent households and a lack of social mobility in a region.

Data Sources:
All data sources are publicly available.

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, data.census.gov. This data represents the most up-to-date estimation of these values. The indicators are based on the 2019 five-year estimates of the values, which is a "rolling estimate" that allows for statistical precision in small areas by using data over time.

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 indicators are from the SAIPE 2020 release of 2019 data.

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 2021, utilizing the 2019 ACS data.

Additional Indicators 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.