

The State of Poverty in Maine, 2021

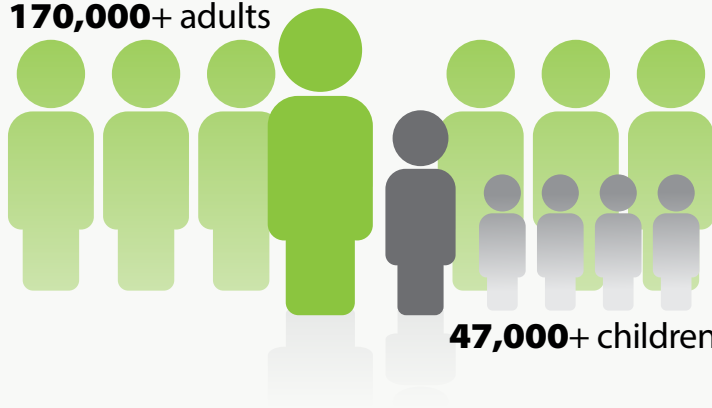
Prepared by MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE

Every Maine resident should have enough to eat, a safe place to live, and healthcare when they need it.

Strong economic security programs help ensure that everyone has these needs met. NOW is the time to invest in these public programs that support families and strengthen our economy.

Mainers are suffering from a pandemic and a recession that arrived amid growing racial and economic inequality. The stage was set for COVID-19 to push people from housing insecurity to homelessness, from poor nutrition to hunger, and from worrying about affording a doctor's visit to going without necessary health care.

170,000+ adults

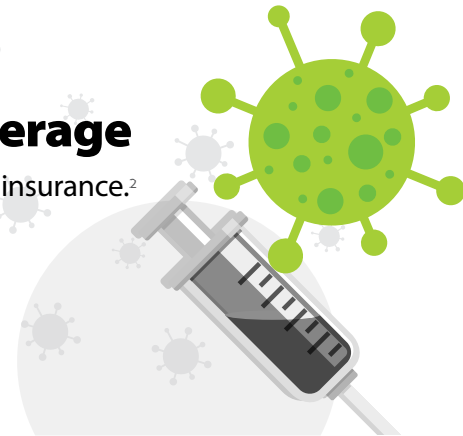


food insecurity

1 in 8 adults, including **1 in 5 children** experience food insecurity yearly. They are unable to get enough healthy food on a day-to-day basis.¹

Nearly 1 in 12 have no health coverage

and many more struggle to afford the cost of care even with insurance.²



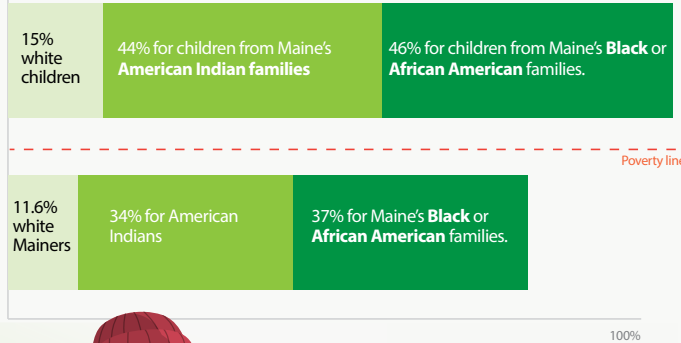
Maine's **rental housing market** is among **the least affordable in the nation.**³

Nearly **60%** of extremely low-income households pay more than **50%** of their income for rent.⁴

That leaves little for all other needs.

We are suffering from significant racial disparities in Maine

Living in poverty by race/ethnicity



We are suffering from significant racial disparities in Maine when it comes to economic security and access to supports that help people meet their basic needs:

In 2018 **37% of Black or African American Mainers lived below the poverty level** as compared to **11.6%** of white Mainers.⁶ That figure is **34% for American Indians** (and Alaska Natives – the census combines these groups nationally), **21% for Hispanic or Latinos**, and **11% for Asians** in Maine.

While approximately **15% of white children** live in poverty, the rate is **44% for children from Maine’s American Indian families** and over **46% for children from Maine’s Black or African American families**.

26% of Maine’s homeless population is Black or African American even though they make up only **1%** of Maine’s population.⁷



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The pandemic has exacerbated existing hardships.

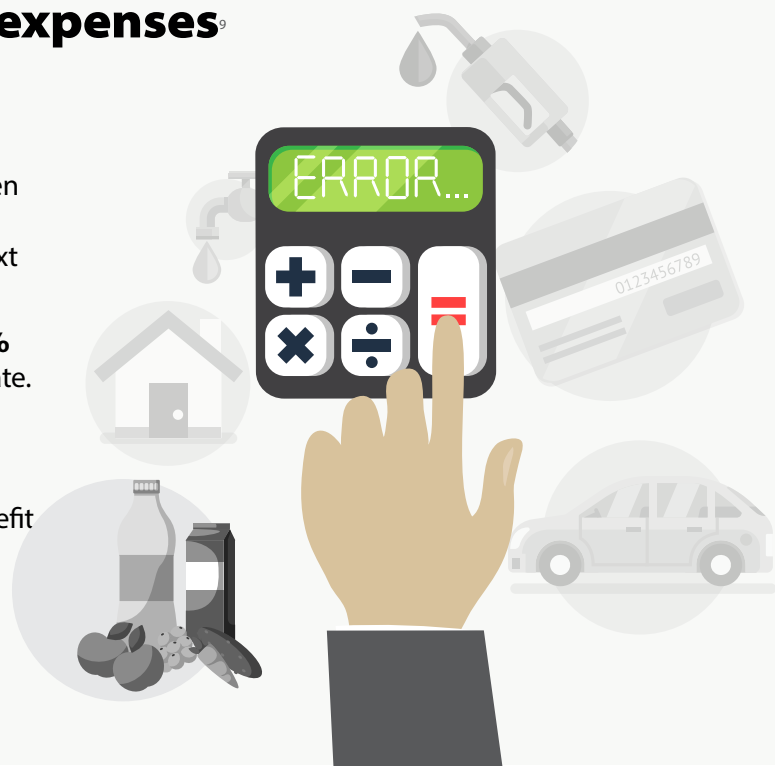
Nearly **1 in 3 Maine adults** are having trouble **covering usual household expenses**⁹

Roughly **20,000 – 40,000 Maine households** are behind in their rent and at risk of eviction⁸

More than half of all Maine households with children were “not at all confident” or “not very confident” that they would be able to afford **needed food** in the next four weeks.¹⁰

Food pantries say the pandemic has prompted a **50% spike in demand for food** assistance across the state.

COVID-19 has highlighted the inadequacy of the nation’s unemployment insurance system, with **only one in four unemployed Mainers** receiving the benefit at the beginning of the pandemic.



Communities of color are experiencing disproportionate harm due to the pandemic:

Black communities in Maine have contracted COVID-19 at a rate more than **20 times** that of white Mainers.¹²

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are more likely to be unemployed due to the pandemic, with Black workers more likely to experience longer periods of unemployment than white workers.¹³

At the same time, workers of color are less likely than white workers to receive unemployment benefits for which they qualify.¹⁴



Economic security programs help many Mainers stay afloat; NOW is the time to invest in them:

Poverty is a growing problem, but there are proven solutions. In Maine, economic security programs such as food assistance (SNAP), school lunch subsidies, and tax credits, have helped cut child poverty in half, according to 2017 Census data.¹⁵

Economic security programs (including TANF, SNAP, General Assistance, and rent subsidies) don't just help Mainers stay housed, healthy, and fed; they also make it possible for people to work, care for themselves and their families, and reach for education and training opportunities that will fuel a rebound and recovery that benefits the whole state.

We can and should invest in economic security programs and work to target racial disparities in health care access, economic stability, and opportunity to level the playing field for Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Maine. Making these investments will strengthen our communities and bolster our economy.

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