Pulse Report for Children & Families
October 2021
Pulse Report User Survey

Please help us understand how you use these reports, what types of content are most valuable, and what you would like to see included in future reports.

Survey Link

We are conducting a survey to address these and other questions. It is brief and should not take more than ten minutes to complete. We look forward to sharing the results in a future report.

We sincerely thank you for your feedback!
The goal of the Community Pulse Report is to keep track of a consistent set of indicators as a way of taking the pulse of our community during these difficult times and to further inform policy makers, nonprofit leaders, reporters, and the public in general. The report is organized into five sections:

- COVID-19
- Health & Wellness
- Child Care & Education
- Economic Recovery
- Housing Security

Our aim is to utilize data that will give us a snapshot of what is happening in the five-county region—Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties. Important to the project will be finding data that deepens our understanding of the intersecting disparities in health care, society, and the economy and their impacts on Black and Latino/a/x children and families.
We are committed to utilizing data that can be disaggregated by race, gender, and age. We continue to strive to identify proxy indicators where disaggregated data is not available, and advocate for the disaggregation of data by race, gender, and age.

Where such data is available, we note that throughout the report with this symbol:

Where it is not available, we note with this symbol:

Throughout this report, the geography of analyzed data is noted in the upper left-hand corner of each chart or graph:

- United States
- Pennsylvania
- Five-County Region (Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland)
- Allegheny County (Only used rarely – where regional data is not available)
COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to impact our community. Throughout the pandemic, case and hospitalization rates have consistently been higher for the Black and Hispanic populations than the White population in the region.

While vaccination rates continue to rise, we also see disparities in who has access to the vaccine, a trend that has continued since the vaccine became available. Important work by local groups continue to strive for understanding and advocacy around equitable vaccine access.

With the Delta variant and a return to school, there was an increase in COVID-19 cases among children and adolescents in September, though rates of severe illness did not rise.
Throughout the pandemic, the COVID-19 case rate has consistently been higher for the Black population in Allegheny County than the White population. Disaggregated data is currently not available for every county in the region.

Cumulative Cases per 100K Population

Throughout the pandemic, the COVID-19 hospitalization rate has consistently been higher for Black populations in Allegheny County.

Disaggregated data is currently not available for every County in the region.

Black Vaccination Rate by ZIP Code

“Access to the vaccine has not been equitable since the start of the pandemic, and structural racism and residential segregation has long been at the root of disparate access to health care in the United States.”
- Black Equity Coalition

If you have thoughts or ideas on how to increase vaccination rates in your neighborhood, share your thoughts by emailing info@blackequitypgh.org.

Explore an interactive version of this map here.

Source: Black Equity Coalition and Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center, Retrieved 9.28.21
There is no singular reason for inequitable vaccine rates, and different populations—mothers of young children, senior adults, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and more—may have different reasons for getting vaccinated or not.

Many local organizations are actively working to better understand vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccination rates, especially in the Black community.
Nationally, **over one third** of unvaccinated adults have **household incomes under $40,000**.¹

**Workers earning at least $90,000 a year are more likely to report getting paid time off** for vaccinations or recovery from side effects than those with incomes under $40,000.²

**Increasing access to paid leave could help further reduce gaps in vaccination by income.**

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1. Kaiser Family Foundation Vaccine Monitor Dashboard  
2. Kaiser Family Foundation September 2021
COVID Cases in School-Aged Children, Allegheny County

During the week of September 13, COVID-19 cases among children in Allegheny County were the highest they’ve been since the start of pandemic.

While the Delta variant and possibly a return to school has increased the number of cases among children, rates of severe illness have not increased.

As of 9/28/21, 43% of children 12–19 were fully vaccinated in the five-county region.

Vaccination has been shown to have a significant impact on COVID-19 hospitalizations, with unvaccinated adolescents hospitalized in July at a rate 10 times higher than fully vaccinated adolescents.

Weekly COVID-19 Cases for 0- to 19-Year-Olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov 30 to Dec 6, 2020</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 5 to Apr 11, 2021</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 13 to Sep 19, 2021</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HEALTH & WELLNESS

As the pandemic continues to stretch on, mental health and well-being for children and adults—and particularly seniors—continues to suffer.

The number of children on Medical Assistance (also known as Medicaid) has grown since the start of the pandemic, demonstrating a need—but also an important utilization—of public health insurance.

Doses of (non-COVID) childhood vaccines initially saw steep declines at the start of the pandemic, but the youngest children in our communities have since been getting back on track for routine immunizations, while 13-17 year olds are still not back to pre-pandemic levels for vaccination rates.
Children Enrolled in Medicaid, Five-County Region

Medicaid has been shown to reduce the child poverty rate by 5.3 percentage points.

In the five-county region, the number of children enrolled in MA (Medical Assistance/Medicaid) has continued to climb steadily since the start of the pandemic. This may be because of economic need and also the continuous coverage provision of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (whose eventual expiration could result in a subsequent drop in enrollment).

With 7,000 children uninsured before the pandemic, this public support is critical to ensuring children have access to medical care.

Childhood Immunizations

After steep declines in childhood vaccine administration from March-May 2020, rates began to increase again from June-September 2020. But average levels of vaccine administration did not return to pre-pandemic levels.

Younger children remained the most on-schedule for immunizations, with more older youth missing scheduled vaccinations.

Decline in Scheduled Childhood Vaccinations
Jun-Sep 2020 vs. Pre-COVID Averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine Combination</th>
<th>12-23 mos</th>
<th>2-8 yrs</th>
<th>9-12 yrs</th>
<th>13-17 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetanus, Diphtheria, &amp; Pertussis</td>
<td>-9.1%</td>
<td>-6.7%</td>
<td>-21.3%</td>
<td>-30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measles, Mumps, &amp; Rubella</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-23 mos</td>
<td>-8.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-8 yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td>-11.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aging Adults & Social Isolation

Aging adults have social needs. Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh centers advocacy around the needs of adults aging in place. **Because of COVID-19, adults age 45 and older are now more vulnerable to social isolation**, in addition to housing and economic challenges.

Of Allegheny County adults age 45+:

- **75%** Felt more socially isolated due to COVID-19.
- **23%** Suffer loneliness through lack of companionship, being left out, or isolation.
- **56%** Rate their community as a very good place to live as people age.

Source: Age Friendly Greater Pittsburgh Survey.
CHILD CARE & EDUCATION

Existing gaps in child care have continued to worsen as the industry now faces a severe staffing shortage.

Meanwhile, K-12 schools have an opportunity for federal stimulus funding to support diversifying their workforce.

And out-of-school-time (OST) programming continues to be a source of consistency and support for children during these uncertain times.
A Child Care Staffing Crisis

We know that, even before COVID-19:

- **Child care workers were paid near-poverty wages.**
  - **$24,200** per year in the Pittsburgh metro, on average
  - **$7,420** per year for home-based providers (primarily women of color)

  Sources: [BLS 2019](#) | [Home Grown Childcare](#)

- **53% of child care workers were enrolled in at least one public income support program.**
  - (vs. 21% of the overall workforce)

  Source: [University of California, Berkeley Early Childhood Workforce Index, 2018](#)

- **40% of the child care workforce are women of color, and they earn an average of $0.78 less per hour than their White counterparts, nationally.**

  Sources: [Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco](#) | [National Women’s Law Center, The Care Minimum](#)
A Child Care Staffing Crisis

COVID-19 has made recruitment and retention even more difficult, with worrisome levels of staff turnover.

70,580 children under 5 need child care in the five-county region

Because of a staffing crisis:

- 371 classrooms are closed
- 5,951 children are on waiting lists
- 95% of providers reported staffing shortages
- 5,620 additional children could be served if fully staffed

A bright spot: $10 million in American Rescue Plan funding was recently designated to support building capacity and supporting existing programs for high-quality child care in Allegheny County.

Source: Start Strong PA
In the five-county region, 14% of students are Black, while only 2% of teachers are Black.

More than half of all Black teachers in the region teach in Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Source: Research for Action, 2020
Gaps in K-12 Teacher Diversity

These disparities have implications for students.

Black students who have at least one Black teacher in elementary school are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college¹.

Black educators have proven short and long-term outcomes for students of color, including: reducing dropout rates, increasing college acceptance and, in some cases, boosting standardized test scores².

Districts can use federal COVID relief money to increase teacher diversity: for recruiting and hiring, setting up mentoring programs, and improving employee benefits to boost teacher retention rates.³


A bright spot: The Para2Teacher program, piloted at Point Park and Carlow University, aims to narrow racial disparities between students and instructors by helping classroom aides become teachers.
High-quality out-of-school-time programming closes the achievement gap, improves academic performance and attendance, and decreases risky behavior and dropout rates.

Providers were concerned about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiring enough staff</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing learning loss</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the demand from families</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced enrollment due to COVID-19</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 89% of OST providers were planning to serve students this fall and 80% were optimistic about the future, anxieties remain.

A bright spot: The new Department of Children Initiatives in Allegheny County opened in June, with the mission to provide and coordinate resources for, leverage partnerships with, and promote access to high quality early learning and out-of-school time programs for all children in Allegheny County.

Source: Afterschool Alliance National Survey, Summer 2021
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Fewer workers in the region are accessing unemployment insurance benefits than earlier in the crisis, but many have exhausted eligibility.

Women’s labor force participation took a tremendous dip at the start of the pandemic, and women of color and mothers were particularly vulnerable to being forced out of the workforce. Rates continue to fluctuate, especially with the start of the school year and continued child care challenges, and women are still far behind their pre-pandemic levels of participation.

Federal stimulus payments had a notable impact on childhood poverty, helping to keep families above water. However, many families continue to struggle month-to-month with everyday expenses.
Unemployment Insurance

Data suggest that the number of people accessing Unemployment Insurance benefits through the state has decreased, with many people exhausting benefits even under expanded eligibility conditions during COVID-19.

Black workers in the region have consistently faced higher rates of unemployment during the crisis.

Source: UI Claims data from PA DLI. Estimates based on 2020 Q1 employment through US Census bureau QWI data. All data refer to five-county region. UI data exclude PUA claimants, for whom detailed data is not available. Data exclude claims for whom race is "Unknown" from DLI, although it is worth noting that recent claims include particularly high rates of race-unknown claimants.
Women’s Labor Force Participation, Nationally

Women’s labor force participation was approaching a record high before the pandemic.

September ‘20 saw another drop in women’s labor force participation, as inconsistent child care and school options forced many working mothers to remain home.

Women’s labor force participation was 57.1% in September—still well below the pre-pandemic rate of 59.2%.

3.6 million women left the labor force between February and April 2020.
By certain measures, federal economic stimulus payments helped protect millions of children from poverty in 2020, with a particularly large impact on Latino and Black children.

Yet because of the nature of how many of these temporary programs/funds were distributed, "many families swung between moments of surplus and desperation."

And poverty rates don’t always translate to economic need. For a family of four living in the Pittsburgh region in 2020, the supplemental poverty threshold was $27,906 vs. the ALICE “household survival budget” of $69,648.

Source: Census Bureau, September 2021
HOUSING SECURITY

After 18 months and several extensions, a Supreme Court ruling ended the national eviction moratorium on August 26, 2021. The COVID mortgage-forbearance program expired September 30th. Locally, measures to slow the eviction process remain in place until October 31st, but evictions and foreclosures are beginning to increase in Allegheny County after 2020 lows.

Food access requests to the United Way 211 help line have not increased locally as of late September, which may partly be due to a continued increase in SNAP enrollment in the region.

The region continues to see inequities in technology access and affordability, but there are potential federal funds coming that could support this critical infrastructure.
A Looming Eviction Crisis

Evictions

8.2 million households behind on rent

3.3 million now in fear of eviction

Threat of crisis: Could increase to 28-63% of all renters - with Black renters twice as likely to be evicted as white.

Foreclosures

6.3 million households behind on mortgage payments

25% more than 6 months behind

Outlook not as severe as 2008: 1.6 million borrowers in forbearance, but 93% have equity in their homes.

Source: Census Household Pulse Survey, Sept 1-13, 2021
Eviction Filings, Allegheny County

Protections from the local moratorium and CDC order contributed to 2020 lows in eviction filings. Since protections ended, there has not yet been a surge in evictions in Allegheny County, but a crisis could be around the corner.

Source: Eviction Lab, CMU Create Lab.
As with evictions, local and federal protections contributed to 2020 lows in foreclosures. While levels of foreclosures are not expected to be as severe as during the 2008 recession, families may still need support to maintain their homes.

Source: Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center
Housing and shelter requests for support have been on the rise in the region, even during the eviction moratorium.

From September 2019 to September 2021, requests were up 14% across the five-county region.

In the week following the end of the eviction moratorium (8/26-9/2), requests were up 42%, compared to same period in 2019.

Source: PA 211 Counts.
At the start of the pandemic, expanded access to and increased levels of SNAP benefits helped combat COVID-19 economic hardship. SNAP enrollment spiked during the crisis and remains higher than pre-COVID-levels.

Perhaps in part because of these increased benefits, in addition to free school meals, pandemic EBT, and strong public awareness of food resources, United Way’s 211 requests for food support in the five-county region have not increased compared to previous years.
The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission has developed an index to measure equitable access to connectivity in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Key metrics that comprise the index include:

- Home Internet cost
- Computer ownership and internet access
- Title VI data (i.e. share of low-income, minority, and disabled populations in the region)

A score of “1” indicates low access and equity in a region; while a score of “100” indicates strong equitable access.

A bright spot: Funding from the American Rescue Plan can help to bring connectivity and access to “opportunity areas” by expanding broadband infrastructure in the region.

High-speed internet access and equipment is critical to connect people to jobs, education, and health care. But a digital divide persists in the region, particularly when it comes to affordability and use of technology.

Explore an interactive version of the map here.

Source: Southwestern Pennsylvania Connected - Equitable Broadband Access
More Information & Previous Reports

- Previous reports:
  - Community Pulse Report: September ‘20
  - Community Pulse Report: October ‘20
  - Community Pulse Report: November/December ‘20
  - Community Pulse Report: January ‘21
  - Community Pulse Report: February ‘21
  - Community Pulse Report: April ‘21
  - Community Pulse Report: June ‘21
  - Community Pulse Report: August ‘21