

FACING OUR HEALTH AND WELLNESS WITH COURAGE AND FORTITUDE



Washington State Commission On

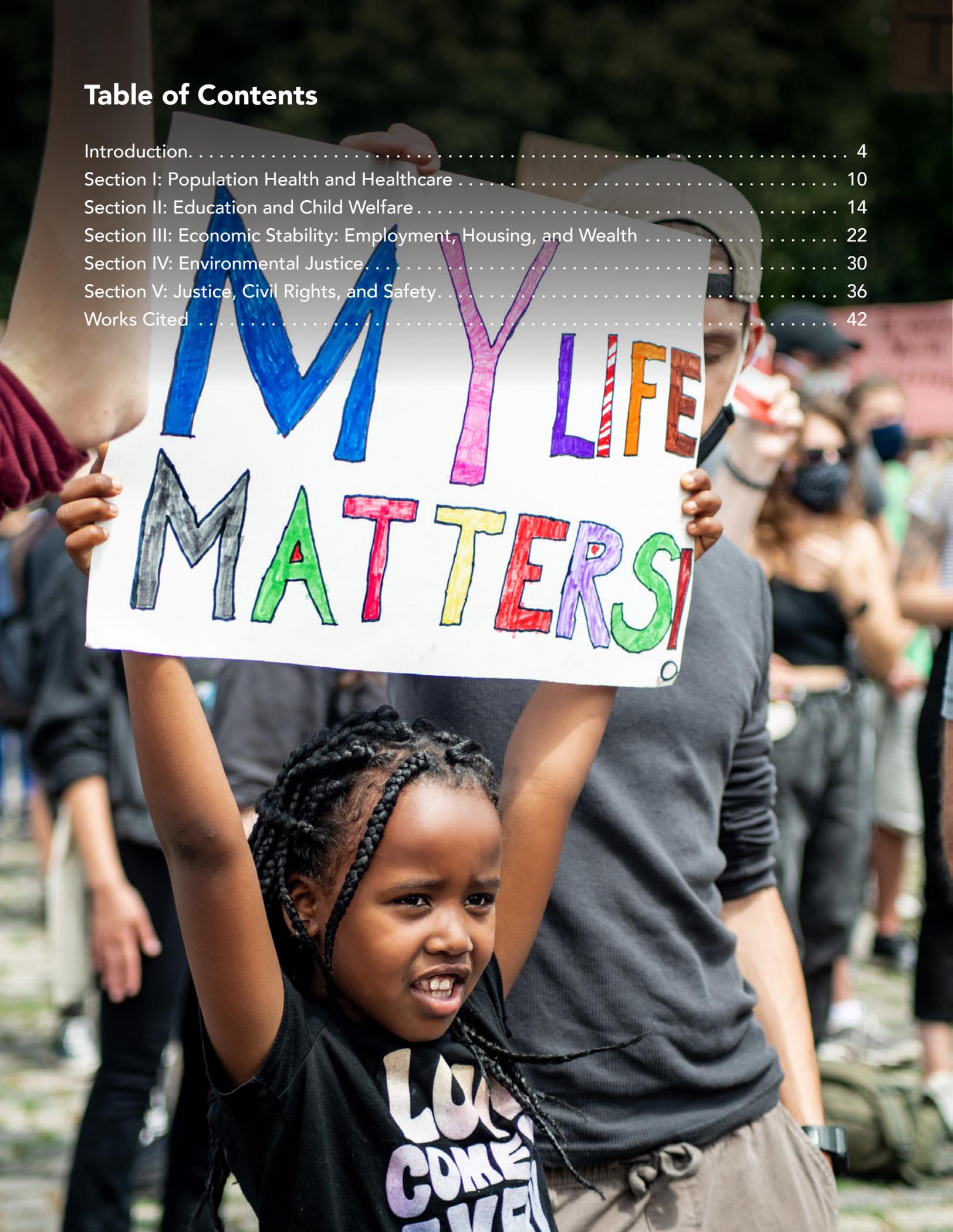
African American Affairs

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A young girl with braids is holding a sign that says "MY LIFE MATTERS!". The sign is white with the words "MY LIFE" on the top line and "MATTERS!" on the bottom line. The letters are hand-drawn and colored in various colors: "M" is blue, "Y" is pink, "L" is purple, "I" is red and white striped, "F" is orange, "E" is brown, "M" is grey, "A" is green, "T" is red, "T" is yellow, "E" is red, "R" is purple, "S" is green, and "!" is red. The girl is wearing a black t-shirt with white text that says "LOVE COME EVERY". She is standing in front of a crowd of people at what appears to be a protest or rally.

Letter from Edward Prince, Executive Director, Commission on African American Affairs



I am honored to present this report on the health and wellness of Black Washingtonians, the fourth in a series by the Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA). I thank the hundreds of contributors who selflessly shared their own experiences to illuminate the collective experience of our community for this report. Because of their resilience, strength, and deep commitment, we continue to move forward despite the obstacles faced as we continue to seek social justice and equity for ourselves, for our children, and for our community.

The purpose of this report is to shed light on the unique health and wellbeing challenges faced by our community due to the historical and continued systemic racism that permeates our society and results in the inequities that exist in healthcare, economic stability, education, criminal justice, and environmental justice. In their own words, contributors shared experiences navigating systems that directly impact their daily lives.

As you read through this report, I invite you to reflect on the power of knowledge, community, and self-care in promoting health and wellness. This report is not just a collection of statistics and data points, but a call to action to prioritize health and wellness for Black people. It reinforces the need for all of us to continue to insist on a more equitable and just system.

I hope that this report inspires you to act, whether it is advancing policy change, prioritizing your own health and well-being, or supporting the health of your loved ones and community. We must create a world where all Black Washingtonians have access to the resources, support, and care they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ed Prince', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ed Prince, Executive Director
Commission on African American Affairs

Acknowledgments and Special Thanks

Please accept our acknowledgment and special thanks for the organizations and individuals that made this report possible.

Halcyon Northwest, LLC

Katherine Boyd, Project Manager (*Co-Lead Contractor*)
Ryan Taylor, Golden Gift Consulting, LLC (*Co-Lead Contractor*)
Tracy L. Brown, Equity Leadership Collaborative, *Principal Consultant*
Edward D. West, Flex Emergence, *Principal Consultant*

Writers

Tracy L. Brown
DuValle Daniel

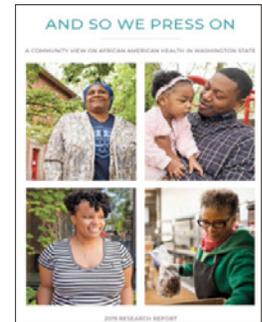
Editor

DuValle Daniel

Health and welfare outcomes for Black Americans are tied to the societal conditions in which they are born, work, live, and grow. This report on the health and wellness of Black Washingtonians is based on a 2022 community study by the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA), as well as state and national level analytics. It is our fourth publication, elevating the voices of the Black people who live in Washington state, and keeping in the forefront the challenges that continue to impact our daily lives.

Creating an Equitable Future in Washington State, our first report, was released in 2015 and identified five key areas of wellbeing that include economic stability, education, healthcare, criminal justice, and civic engagement.

Our 2017 report, *Voices Rising: African American Economic Security in King County*, took a deep dive into the economic security of our community, with an emphasis on King County.



In 2020, *And So We Press On: A Community View on African American Health in Washington State*, focused on healthcare.

In 2020, *And So We Press On: A Community View on African American Health in Washington State*, focused on healthcare.

This report, *Facing Our Health and Wellness with Courage and Fortitude*, continues to address all the determinants of wellbeing for Black citizens in Washington state. We invited the African American community to speak up and speak out about their current lived experiences.

Defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) conceptual framework is defined as “nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. SDoHs are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, social norms and policies, racism, climate change and political systems.”¹ These determinants show the impact upon our quality of life.

The five SDoHs addressed in this study are:

- 1 Population Health and Healthcare
- 2 Education and Child Welfare
- 3 Economic Stability: Employment, Housing, and Wealth
- 4 Environmental Justice
- 5 Justice, Civil Rights, and Safety

Each social determinant, explored separately, intersects in different ways, compounding the overall impact of each individual social determinant. A statement published by the Washington State Board of Public Health in 2021 acknowledges the intersectionality of racism and health:

“We know that high-quality healthcare and education, food security, justice, and a living wage are necessary for optimal health. The inequities that persist because of racism creates barriers to accessing these basic needs. The Board acknowledges racism disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Racism has prevented communities of color from thriving and achieving their optimal health for centuries.”²

Section I Population Health and Healthcare

addresses key areas related to health and healthcare that includes the cultural competency of providers, access to insurance, access to healthcare services, the mortality rate of Black women who are pregnant, and the impact of COVID on the Black community.

Section II Education and Child Welfare speaks to the barriers to education faced by our Black students: lack of access to affordable preschools, lack of cultural competency among teachers and curriculum, special education reform, the over-disciplining of Black students in K-12, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Section III Economic Stability: Employment, Housing, and Wealth explores three main indicators of economic stability—employment status, housing security, and wealth.

Section IV Environmental Justice looks at the physical and social environment in Washington state. Survey data on access to environmental information, clean water, grocery stores, green spaces, and recycling programs show the overlap between highly impacted communities and the Black population.

Section V Justice, Civil Rights, and Safety reveals a community viewpoint on policing, stops, arrests, sentencing, incarcerations and the school-to-prison pipeline, and how the justice system disproportionately affects Black residents. The loss of voting blocs, voter participation, ballot rejections, and concerns about the erosion of civil rights are also discussed.

Methodology Design

Framed around the SDoH, the research methodology uses a qualitative study design, relying heavily on comments and information derived from surveys and focus groups of Black Washingtonians, combined with quantitative data.

Social Research Survey

From October 6 through December 22, 2022, the Black community was asked to complete our survey and participate in our focus groups. Four hundred and ninety-five participants provided their voice, insights, and experiences. Distributed statewide, the survey was open for over 2.5 months: participants were not compensated for their participation.

Focus Group Design

Researchers led 42 non-recorded focus groups to provide participants an opportunity to share in-depth their voice, insights, and experiences. Each focus group was 2.5 hours in duration and had from one to eight participants who were each assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy. Each participant signed a consent form that outlined the research purpose, use of a pseudonym, what to expect, how the information would be used, and number of years the information would be stored. Focus group participants were not compensated for their role.

Target Population

The target population demographics for the study were as follows:

- Black/African American Washingtonian
- Gender (Male and Female)
- Gender Identity/Gender Expression
- Age Range: 18 and above
- Income Range: \$0–\$200,000-plus
- Education Range: Some High School through Doctorate
- Employment Status: Employed, Unemployed, Retired, Business Owner
- Business Sector: Private, Public, Nonprofit
- Zip Code
- Housed and Unhoused

Demographics of Participants in the Survey

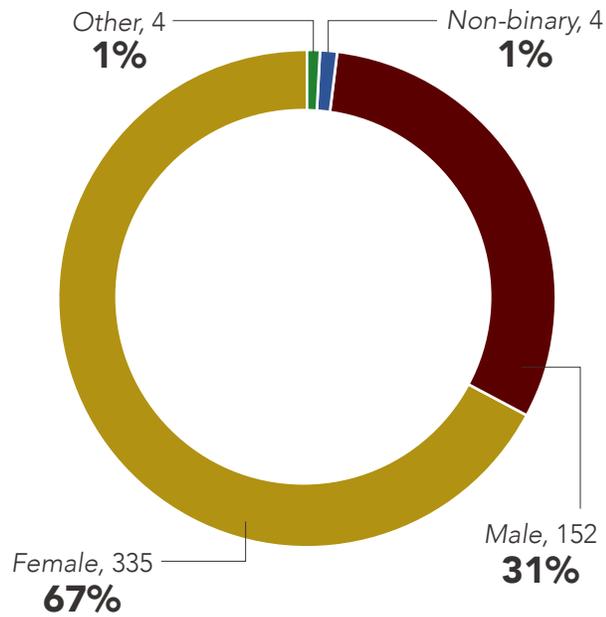
A Note About the Demographics of the Participants in This Study

Efforts were made to gather input from a wider array of Black residents, such as the unhoused, more individuals between the ages of 18-24, etc. Survey respondents were not as varied as we hoped for and may fail to capture the stories of those in lower economic strata. For example: a high number of participants are employed full-time, have salaries above \$50,000, and hold an associate degree or higher. When considering disparities such as homelessness, and those earning less than a family wage, these responses could present a more positive view of current living conditions and experiences. Other demographic factors to keep in mind are that more than half of the participants are women, over 60% are 45 years or older, only 6% identify as belonging to the LGBTQ community, and 72% of the participants do not have children under 18 years old. Please consider these elements when reading this report.

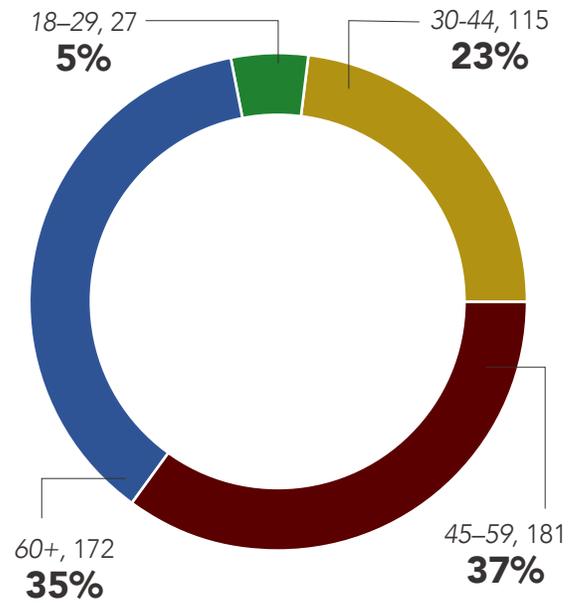
Survey Demographics

Representatives from both the survey and focus groups contributed their voices, insights, and experiences.

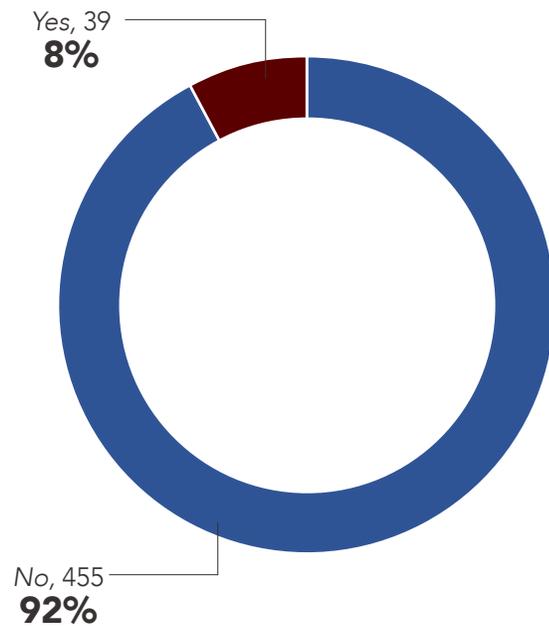
Gender



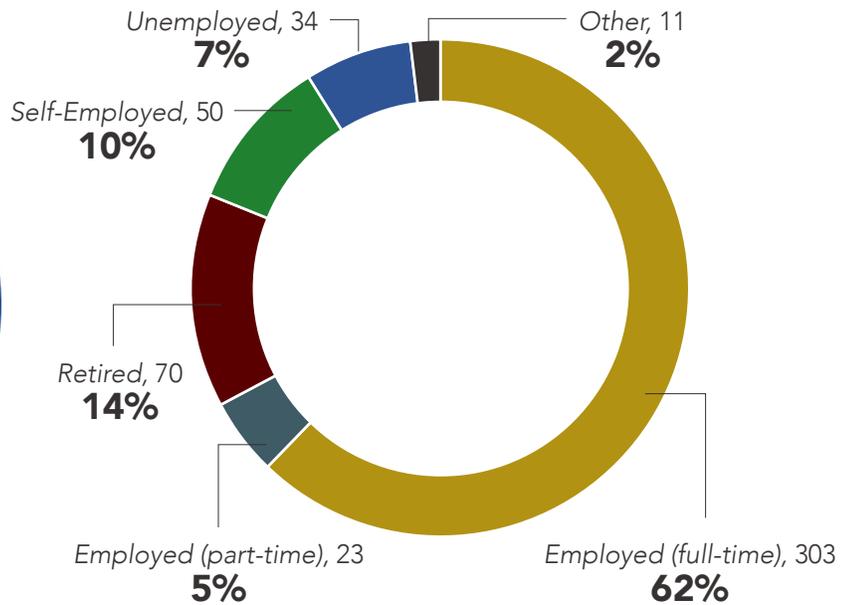
Age Range



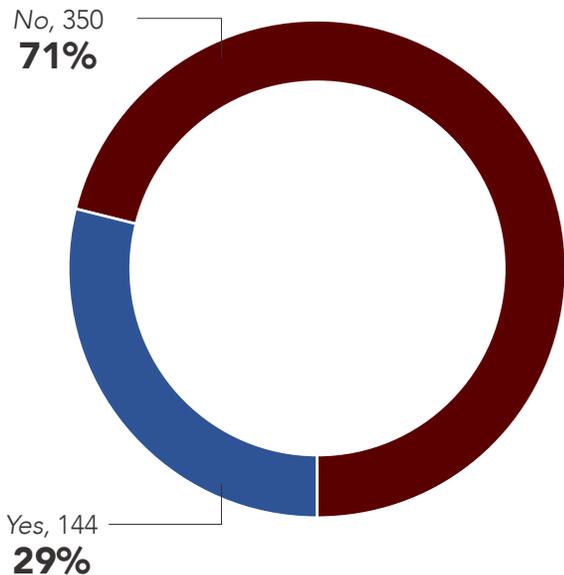
LGBTQ+



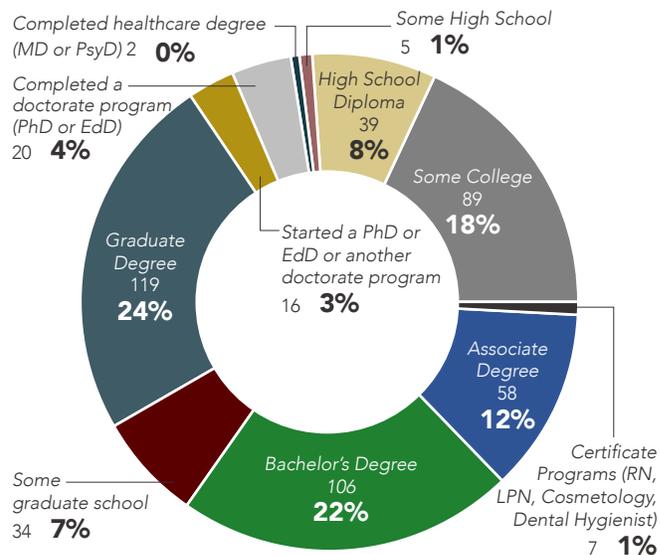
Employment Status



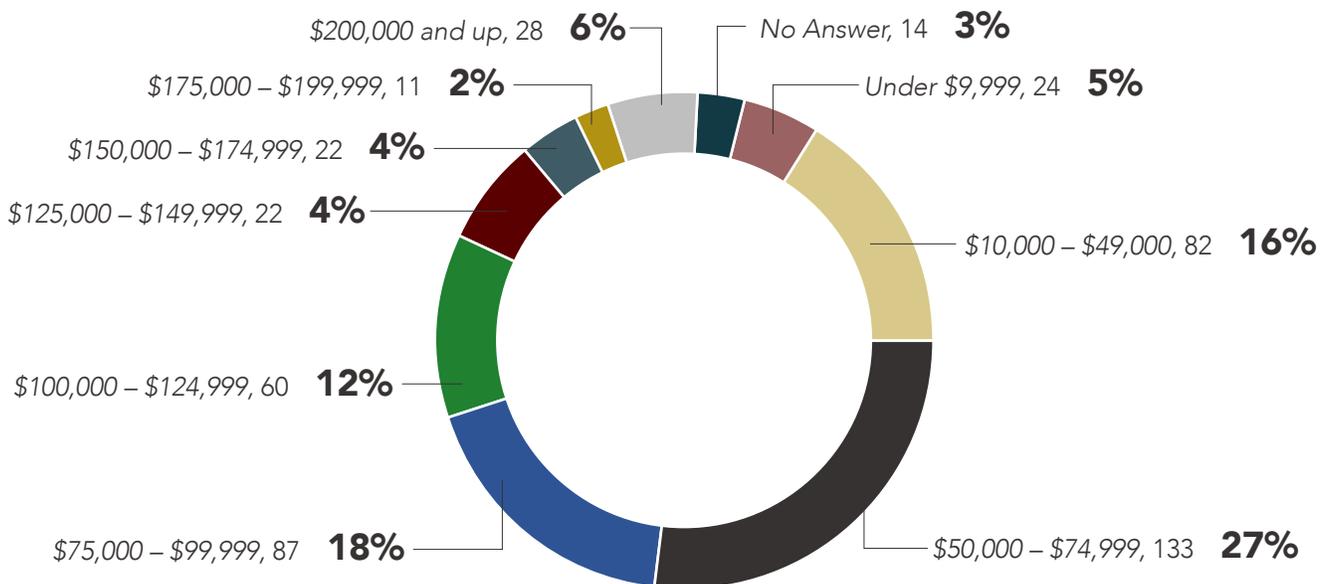
Have Children Under 18



Highest Level of Education



Annual Household Income

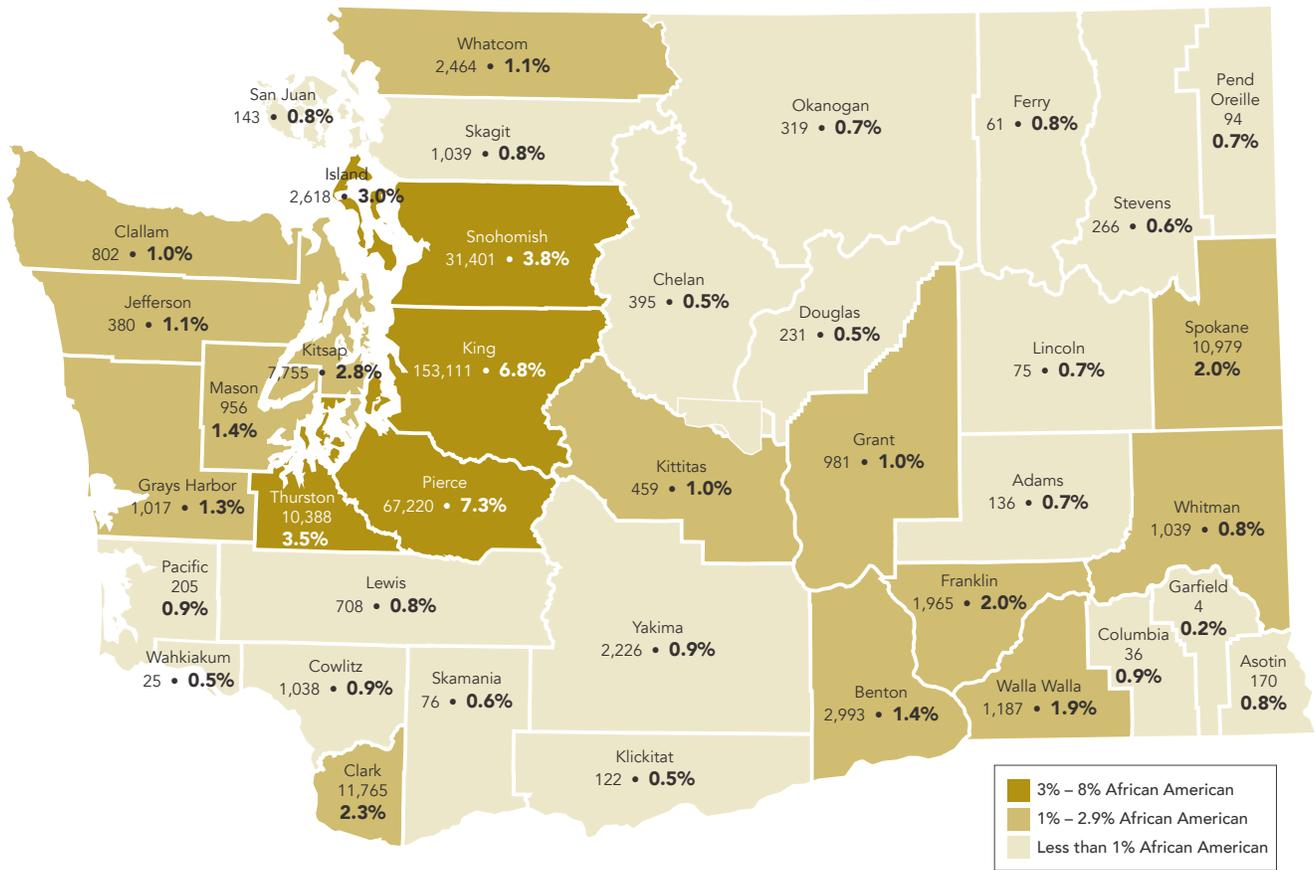


As of 2021, African Americans reside in all 49 counties — with the largest concentration living primarily in six counties: King, Pierce, Snohomish, Clark, Spokane, and Thurston. By county:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 King County: 153,111 residents (6.8%) | 4 Clark County: 11,765 residents (2.3%) |
| 2 Pierce County: 67,220 residents (7.3%) | 5 Spokane County: 10,979 residents (2.0%) |
| 3 Snohomish County: 31,401 residents (3.8%) | 6 Thurston County: 10,388 residents (3.5%) |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Washington State Counties Total number and percentage of each county population that is African American (2021)



Black Population in Washington State

In 2020, African Americans comprised 4.2% of the 7.6 million people in Washington state, increasing from 3.8% in 2011.³ Percentages over time are noted.

Washington State Population by Race/Ethnicity

Ethnicity	White	Hispanic*	Asian	Two or more races	Black	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
2011	82.1%	11.5%	7.3%	4.3%	3.8%	1.8%	0.7%
2012	81.9%	11.7%	7.4%	4.4%	3.8%	1.8%	0.7%
2013	81.6%	11.9%	7.5%	4.5%	3.8%	1.8%	0.7%
2014	81.2%	12.2%	7.7%	4.7%	3.9%	1.8%	0.7%
2015	80.8%	12.4%	7.9%	4.8%	3.9%	1.8%	0.7%
2016	80.4%	12.6%	8.2%	4.9%	4.0%	1.8%	0.7%
2017	80.0%	12.8%	8.5%	5.0%	4.1%	1.8%	0.8%
2018	79.5%	13.0%	8.7%	5.1%	4.1%	1.8%	0.8%
2019	79.1%	13.2%	9.0%	5.2%	4.1%	1.8%	0.8%
2020	78.7%	13.5%	9.2%	5.3%	4.2%	1.8%	0.8%

* Hispanic ethnicity totals are also counted in racial categories (i.e., Hispanic white, Hispanic Black, etc.)

SECTION I: POPULATION HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE



In 2003, the Institute of Medicine, now known as the National Academy of Medicine, published “Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnicity Disparities in Healthcare,” stressing the seriousness and severity of healthcare disparities.⁴ This report confirmed earlier medical reports of racism and discrimination in the healthcare system nationally. A 2021 statement by the Washington State Board of Health indicated that disparities due to racism for communities of color continued to be significant in areas identified as SDOHs.

Participants in the study stated that they experience bias from the healthcare system and providers in Washington. They also shared concerns that medical providers lack sensitivity and cultural awareness when it comes to Black patients, regardless of socioeconomic class and education level.

Need for More Culturally Competent and Sensitive Providers

Having a community center such as the Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic and the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center providing care in the neighborhood isn’t the norm. Instead, participants shared their experiences about providers who too often were culturally insensitive and lacking in compassion, and provided care based on stereotypes. Reports of providers not trusting Black patients, not believing their reports of pain, and dismissing their concerns were also communicated:

“Refusal to investigate, do testing or early preventative care, so diseases are caught in later stages. Not just providers, entire healthcare staffing system viewing African American patients with suspicion and bias.”

“Doctors focusing on stereotypes, weight, not using respectful language, getting defensive when asked questions, refusing to do additional tests.”

“Lack of empathy and compassion.”

“Dismissal of concerns. Being overlooked or diminished.”

“Providers not listening or entirely ignoring . . . patient description of symptoms.”

“Providers writing notes in records that invalidate patients or recording incorrect observations.”

The Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic and the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center are two medical facilities that have served the Black residents of Seattle’s Central District for over 50 years. The centers are named for Odessa Brown, “a fierce advocate for healthcare for the District’s Black community, [who] persuaded the Model Cities Program commission to include a provision for a children’s clinic,” and Carolyn Downs, “one of the [Black] Panthers’ earliest members and advocate for providing the Black community medical services in the late 1960s.”⁵ It continues to serve those most in need and does not turn anyone away, regardless of their ability to pay.

One participant in the study described her experience growing up with healthcare in her neighborhood:

“I live in West Seattle. My mother was instrumental in bringing a community health center in the area where I grew up, and I have continued the legacy. I still go to the community clinic and have been since I was a teenager. They offer very good services at the community center and make healthcare available to everyone. I feel blessed that I grew up with a good healthcare system.”

One way to improve healthcare experiences would be to have more culturally sensitive providers. This requires more training.

"I feel it is important for culturally sensitive care providers to be available. I am not concerned if they don't look like me as long as they are aware of issues that specifically relate to me."

"I have a strong desire to find providers with good communication, who listen, who care, who are knowledgeable and culturally sensitive, who can be trusted."

"Yes. I really believe in how our mental health is tied to our physical health, and often this is tied to our culture. This is especially true when our culture is tied to who we are. There are big and little things that affect Black people, and it is important to be sensitive to that."

It was felt that doctors need to be culturally sensitive and educated on the specific needs and challenges of African Americans, whether the doctor is Black or not. There is a strong desire for more Black providers.

"You are more comfortable with people who look like you and have your background; you are more likely to open up about more than we do to people who we don't relate to. If I had my druthers, all of my healthcare providers would look like me."

"I do believe it is important for healthcare, mental health, and chemical dependency. There is a different level of transparency and communication when I'm being served by people of my culture."

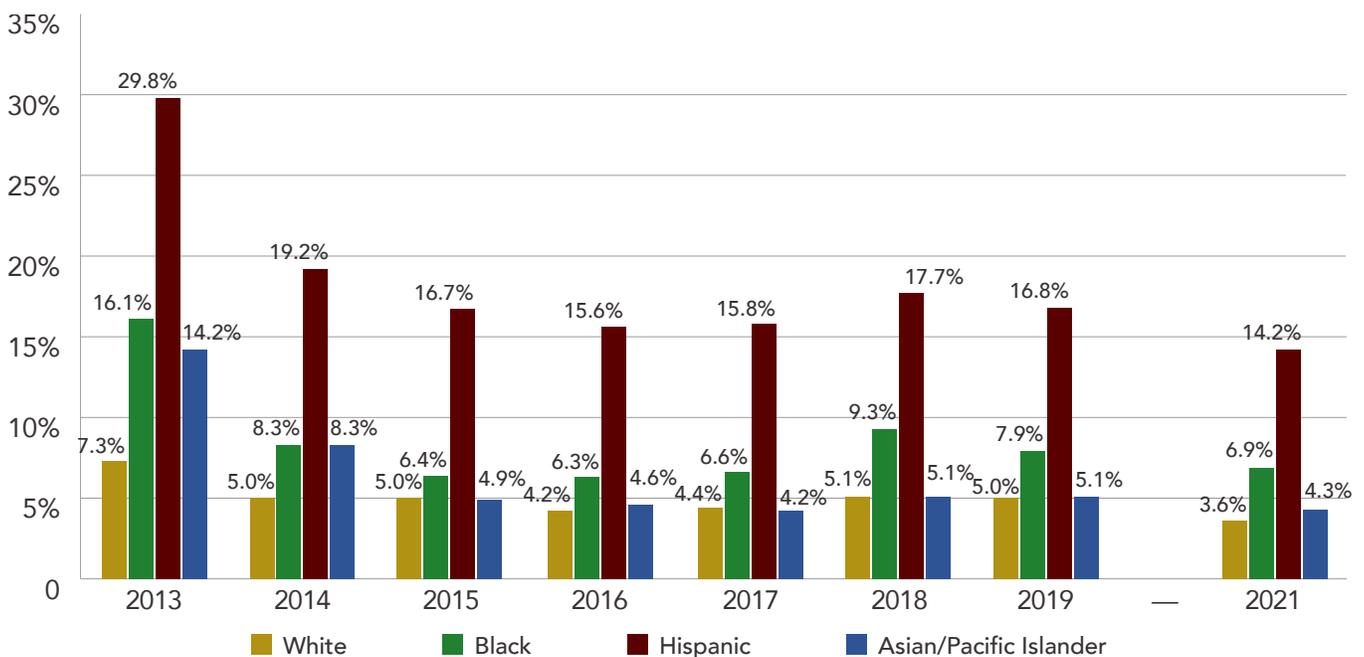
"My doctor seems to understand quickly what I'm talking about, and I've not had that for nearly 40 years. The doctor being African American is a significant part of that."

Access to Healthcare Services and Insurance

Access to quality healthcare and affordability are obstacles still faced by many.

The implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2014 drastically reduced the number of uninsured. However, the number of uninsured African Americans has varied between 6.3% and 9.3% since the ACA began, whereas only 4.2% to 5.0% of White Washingtonians have been uninsured in that same period. (2020 rates are not available and 2021 rates are not comparable with previous years.)⁶

Washington State Percentage of Uninsured by Race, 2013–2019 and 2021



Source: Wei Yen, "Record Low Uninsured Rate in 2021 amid COVID-19 Pandemic." Note: no data for 2020; 2021 estimates not comparable to estimates of prior years.

A majority of the participants (61.3%) reported being employed by either the government or a private employer. Many have health plans through their employers. In addition, 14% stated they are retired and 10.2% are self-employed. In all, 96.4% of the participants have access to healthcare. With an understanding of the struggles those uninsured may face, one participant commented:

"I've been lucky to have been born into a family with jobs and insurance, but many people I know do not have these advantages. How can people at young ages have access to healthcare when they cannot depend on their parents."

Despite the ACA, access to healthcare can be daunting. Survey results showed that 5.4% of participants, some of whom are insured, stated that they still struggle to access healthcare due to lack of affordability: high deductibles, high prescription prices, the inability to qualify for subsidies because they make too much from their employer, and loss of insurance or suspension of insurance coverage due to changes in employment.

Navigating the healthcare system can be confusing; oftentimes people just give up:

"There are so many hoops to jump with all of the processes that often you just give up and you just endure not receiving the services that you are told you are not eligible for."

"Would help to have an advocate to help people navigate."

Black Women Pregnancy Deaths: A Public Health Crisis

Recent studies indicate that nationally, the rate of Black women who die during and after pregnancy is three times that of White women.⁷ Pregnancy-related mortality rates for Black women between 2014 and 2018 were 41.4% compared to 13.7% for White women. The pandemic resulted in a significant increase in maternal deaths of Black women compared to White women, reaching a high in 2021 of 68.9% compared to 26.1% for White women. This widened the gap between the two groups from 31% to 38%.⁸

While the Washington state overall maternal death rates have not increased as drastically as they have

nationwide, according to a February 2023 report published by the Washington State Maternity Review Panel, Black women in Washington had the second highest maternal mortality rates for non-Hispanic Black women in Washington state. This is more than twice the number of maternal deaths of non-Hispanic White women.⁹ This rate has remained disturbingly consistent over the years. The CDC asserts that "multiple factors contribute to these disparities, such as variation in quality healthcare, underlying chronic conditions, structural racism, and implicit bias."¹⁰

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic grimly touched the lives of all ethnic groups: 1,789,950 Washingtonians contracted COVID-19 between 2019 and 2020. Data shows that Black Washingtonians experienced the highest number of hospitalizations and the second highest infection and death rate in comparison.¹¹

Confirmed or probable COVID-19 case, hospitalization rates by race/ethnicity (2019–2020)

Race/Ethnicity	Age Adjusted Case Rate/ 100,000	Age Adjusted Hospitalization Rate/ 100,000	Age Adjusted Death Rate/ 100,000
Hispanic	23,094	1,384	373
White	15,823	717	165
Asian	15,549	539	154
Black	22,282	1,407	265

Source: Washington State Department of Health, "COVID-19 Morbidity and Mortality by Race, Ethnicity, and Spoken Language in Washington State."

Although there is no clear answer about the disproportionate number of COVID-19 rates, the disproportionality continued regarding the equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. The federal government did not explicitly mandate vaccines be distributed or administered equally. Moreover, reporting of race and ethnicity data by many states was not enforced by the CDC. As supply was limited in the early days of the vaccine, disparities in distribution were present — countering the perceived hesitancy to the COVID-19 vaccine by African Americans. Emerging studies suggest access to the vaccine, not refusal of the vaccine, may have played a significant role in low vaccination rates.¹²

SECTION II: EDUCATION AND CHILD WELFARE



"Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it."

— Marian Wright Edelman

As Marian Wright Edelman’s quote suggests, the value of an education is about preparing yourself for the future. It is about building character, contributing to your community, continuing the struggle for human and civil rights, and building a better world. Education continues to be one of society’s core values, especially in the African American community.

Parents expect their children will be valued, safe, encouraged, and academically prepared to succeed in school and beyond. Concerns about the treatment of Black students in schools continues to be problematic. Too often, Black children in the school system are not affirmed and are disproportionately disciplined compared to White children in the same schools with similar behaviors. Participants call for more diverse teaching staff, cultural competency training for all staff, and an inclusive curriculum. They present reasons why having more Black teachers would have a positive effect on Black students:

“It is important so African American children know that they can achieve or be anything they want to be, so to have role models in those positions is important. It helps children to realize they can achieve anything.”

Pre-K and Kindergarten

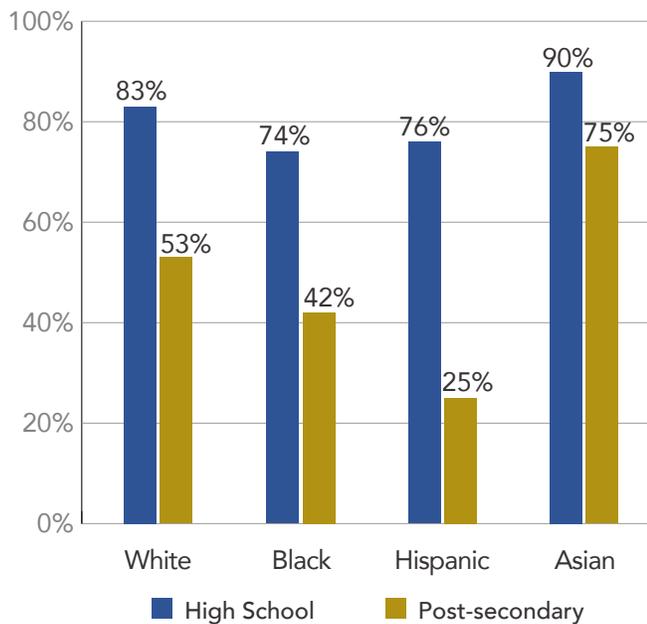
Early learning programs provide children with the fundamental skills for a lifetime of learning. Parents were asked, “Do/Did your child(ren) attend a ‘head start’ or pre-kindergarten program? If yes, why?” They provided the following reasons why they enrolled their children in preschool:

“I wanted my children to have an early experience with the education system so they could begin learning how to navigate it.”

“To help them get a firm and early foundation for school and socializing.”

“Preschool is full of learning and prepares for kindergarten.”

Washington State Graduation Rates by Race, 2020



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, “Equity Landscape Report: Exploring Equity Gaps in Washington Postsecondary Education”

However, the barriers start at an early stage of education for children, as can be seen by the response of one parent:

“However, it was only for six months right before he began kindergarten because it was the only time I was able to afford it due to a job change on a single income. I wished that I would have been able to put him in a pre-kindergarten class much earlier because I knew it would give him a better chance at success and confidence when entering the K-12 system, but it was economically impossible.”

Cost is one of the most significant barriers to access to pre-K school. In 2021, the cost for preschool in Washington, separated into regions, ranged from a high of \$1,213 per month in South Central Washington to a high of \$3,250 per month in Southwest/Olympic Washington based on whether the preschool was in a licensed center or a family home.¹³

“Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is a kindergarten program for children aged five or about to turn five who do not have access to high-quality early learning experiences and have been identified as needing additional support to be successful in kindergarten. TK programs are provided at no cost to families, are staffed by certificated educators, and are fully integrated in their schools with access to meals, transportation, and recess. . . . In many communities, TK programs operate as part of a blended model, where students participating in TK, head start, and the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) are all served under one roof and students are placed based on need.”¹⁴

However, just because assistance is available does not mean individuals have access. CAAA survey participants cited the following reasons why they didn’t access pre-kindergarten programs:

1. Did not qualify or not available in their area.
2. Could not afford it (preschool) if they didn’t qualify based on income.
3. Didn’t know/unaware of the programs available.

Cultural Competency in Curriculum and Staff

The National School Board Association wrote the following on its website in February 2021:

“Developing a racially diverse workforce has long been cited as crucial to improving student performance, especially among Black and Latino youth. Studies show all students benefit when they have access to teachers of color, but this is especially true for minority children. They have better academic performance, improved graduation rates, and are more likely to attend college when taught by teachers of color.”¹⁵

“Representation matters. It comes with a whole lot of benefits from positive image and self-worth, encouragement, belief in oneself, understanding, validation, etc.”

“The hope would be that having someone that [Black students] can relate to may build a sense of trust so they can open up and perhaps be more apt to getting the help they need.”

The call for diversity is not just to help Black students achieve academically; many of the participants see having representative classroom teachers as a way to help their children survive a systemically racist institution, the education system:

“Schools are often hostile places for African American children. It’s important that they have advocates, allies, and mentors that look like them, come from their communities, and understand how to navigate the system to help those students achieve academic and social success.”

“African American administrators, academic and guidance counselors, and teachers would be understanding of the children’s family and/or living situations that could affect the child’s schooling. They would aid or create solutions that would help the child and family excel, instead of labeling them with stigmas.”

“Racialized abuse happens in all of our schools. Having more teachers and administrators of color, specifically Black people, would hopefully make these incidents be taken seriously and addressed proactively.”

Research suggests that some of the disparities in achievement data can be attributed to the “adultification” of Black children. Adultification is when people interpret a child’s behavior as if they are adults — robbing Black children of the very essence of what makes childhood distinct from all other developmental periods: innocence. Adultification contributes to a false narrative that Black children’s transgressions are intentional and malicious, instead of the result of immature decision-making — a key characteristic of childhood.¹⁶

The perception of Black children being more sexually mature or hypersexualized is due to a combination of adultification and racial stereotypes:

"First of all, the K-12 teaching profession is 83% White who are from mostly White communities, so they do not have any knowledge of Black children. Kids therefore get criminalized and adultified (assumed they are more mature than they are and can take on more responsibilities). Girls are being hypersexualized at younger ages and teachers and staff assume that Black girls who may be acting out sexually are wanting it versus that there might be some sexual abuse they are experiencing."

"Often due to fear due to lack of cultural sensitivity. The people making the call are often not qualified/equipped to deal with anything they consider abnormal, and as a result, they react/respond to students who are different and perceive them to be more violent and are therefore treated as such."

As with so many educational issues, the disparity in discipline leads back to a lack of cultural competence of teachers and systemic racism:

"A lot of the White kids, especially White boys, are not disciplined. The high rate of discipline assigned to Black boys is because they are the ones the discipline is being enforced against. It is often the first solution. If discipline is enforced fairly and evenly, then there would not be a higher need/incidence for discipline."

"The emotional spiritual abuse they have to navigate makes our kids have a higher rate of drop out. I'd like to see the same energy around racialized abuse in schools as currently exists for sexual harassment, so our students don't have to deal with the bullying and hostile environment."

We call for a more diverse staff, a more inclusive and representative curriculum reflecting the contributions of all people.

"Do you believe it is important for K-12 curriculum to reflect diverse contributions of all people (historical and present day)?"

"It is important for children to learn real history, not erased history, and to include history that has impacted them and people that look like them."

"Culturally relevant curriculum is key to self-awareness, confidence, and so much more."

"The roots of hate are fertilized by a lack of cultural awareness and appreciation of others' experiences/his-her-our stories."

"It helps to build an increased cultural understanding and build stronger critical thinking skills and enhanced creativity. All which helps to prepare Black students for adulthood. It also shows them how their ancestors impacted this biased country, which tries to make them feel 'less than.' "

In its 2020 report to the Legislature, the OSPI African American Studies Workgroup made recommendations that, once implemented, would address some of the concerns expressed by the participants regarding the lack of a diverse curriculum and the lack of cultural competency of teachers. This included funding for training and professional development to develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula that accurately portray the African American experience. They also recognized the need for ongoing engagement and financial support from committed stakeholders to ensure that African American studies is infused "across core subject areas."¹⁷

Special Education Reform and Disproportionate Disciplining of Black Students

Whether experiencing it themselves or witnessing it happen to other children, respondents believe that Black children are often steered to special education when they don't need to be. Respondents believe teachers are merely removing what they perceive as a problem in their classroom. Most draw a connection between the problems with the special education programs and the problems with the schools in general: systemic racism and lack of culturally competency.

Most survey respondents felt special education programs in Washington schools need reform and that the general quality of special education programs results in our students leaving the system without adequate education.

"Special education needs some reform because of the simple fact because special education is like the waste basket of the schools when a teacher can't deal with a student; this is where our Black kids end up. In reality, if someone took a little more time to see what is going on with 'Johnny,' we would discover that we are putting geniuses with students with actual learning disabilities instead of properly diagnosing them and providing the necessary services."

"Some kids are just not interested in what is being taught because they are not represented. Teachers might see this as a form of disrespect. Not much enrichment or differentiation, and kids are bored, and teachers see it as them acting out."

"Yes, again, the systemic racism that is evident in school impacts who gets referred to special education and our children get referred more often. White people see Black kids' gregariousness as dangerous versus seeing it as kids playing as they see playing for their White counterparts."

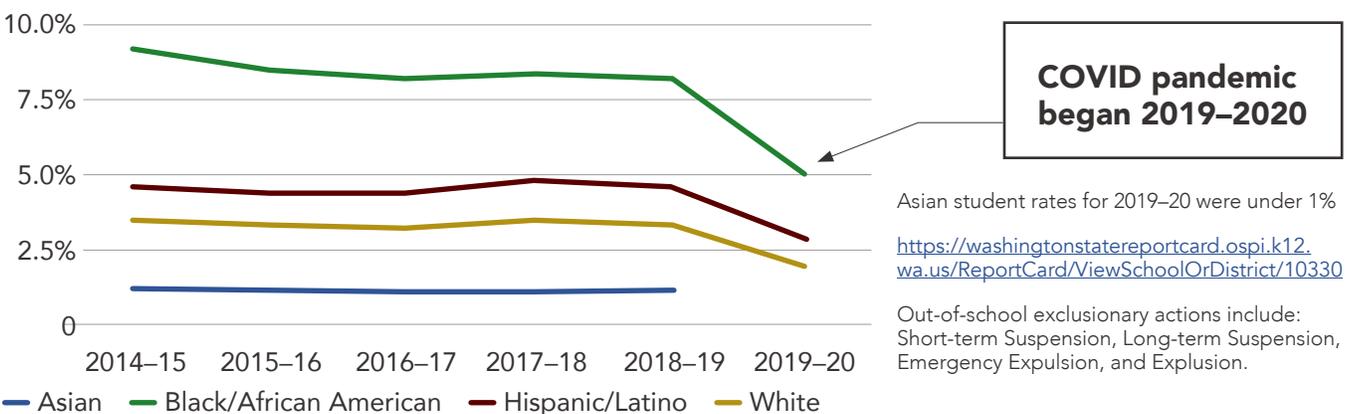
"When I think of educating our Black youth, we need to prioritize and protect the potential of our Black students the same way we protect and prioritize White students. When I look at students, I think of them as our students. We have a real obligation as a society to shift to understand our Black students who will go into the world."

"My son and daughter, every year they would find a problem of putting them in regular math. Every year I filled out the forms to put them in regular classes, but they would every year put them in special education classes."

"Concerns I have had over the years is that our kids are promoted before being ready. I had a nephew who received a diploma who is now in Job Corps trying to learn basic math. They are not informing the family or actively planning to acquire the resources. He had an IEP plan but no support for him to receive the lacking information."

Black children are subjected to a disproportionate amount of discipline such as suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement for status offenses. Discipline and expulsions contribute to opportunity gaps due to high school absenteeism, not meeting grade-level expectations, and high drop-out rates.¹⁸

Percent of Students Excluded from School in Response to a Behavioral Violation



Source: Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, "African American Studies Workgroup 2020"

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

By far, the most consistent concern expressed by the participants is the issue of the disciplining of Black children compared to their White counterparts: differences in how often they are disciplined, how long the punishment lasts, and types of discipline — specifically, the escalation of disciplinary actions that result in disruption of education for a day, a week, or even suspension from school for a much longer period.

“Black children are subjected to disciplinary actions at disproportionate rates, which contributes to issues such as the school-to-prison pipeline. The intervention of staff and faculty who can be sensitive to the injustice is imperative, regarding ensuring the academic success of the youth.”

Many attribute the disparity in discipline to the lack of diversity of the teachers in the school system: teachers with limited to no experience of Black people, Black children, or Black culture that act based on preconceived assumptions and stereotypes instead of the individual child involved.

“. . . Non-Black staff [do] not always know how to address challenges with Black students and/or have no experience dealing with them or understanding some of their references/ challenges and don't know how to deal with the pushback and frustrations of Black students.”

The significance of the high rates of discipline and expulsions from school is commonly known as “the school-to-prison pipeline.”

“Exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, [that] disproportionately impact African American students and students with disabilities. This process is commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline.”¹⁹ Recent studies

found that disproportional application of exclusionary discipline practices, as early as preschool, may double the chances of students of color entering the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Another contributor to the school-to-prison pipeline is that Black students are more likely to be transferred to alternative schools. These alternative schools usually have partnerships with the juvenile justice systems or police departments, easing the transition from school to the criminal justice system.²⁰

Participants were very clear that the school-to-prison pipeline is not a myth, but a reality, and presented theories as to why it exists:

“Too many kids are being doped up to make them behave coupled with putting a lot of discipline on our kids. It is by design that they are steering the trajectory to the prison pipeline.”

“The school-to-prison pipeline is profitable. Plus, there's a lack of sympathy for our Black children because teachers don't see them as their own children.”

“The school-to-prison pipeline is alive and well, brought to us by White America, especially White women. They impose their social values and norms on Black students. When I went to the juvenile center, I met students that had been suspended in second and third grade, and this was because of the teacher. When you don't have culturally relevant teachers, curriculum, or administration, you'll find these high numbers of Black students getting disciplined. The teachers are picking the winners and losers early.”

“When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison.”

— Angela Davis

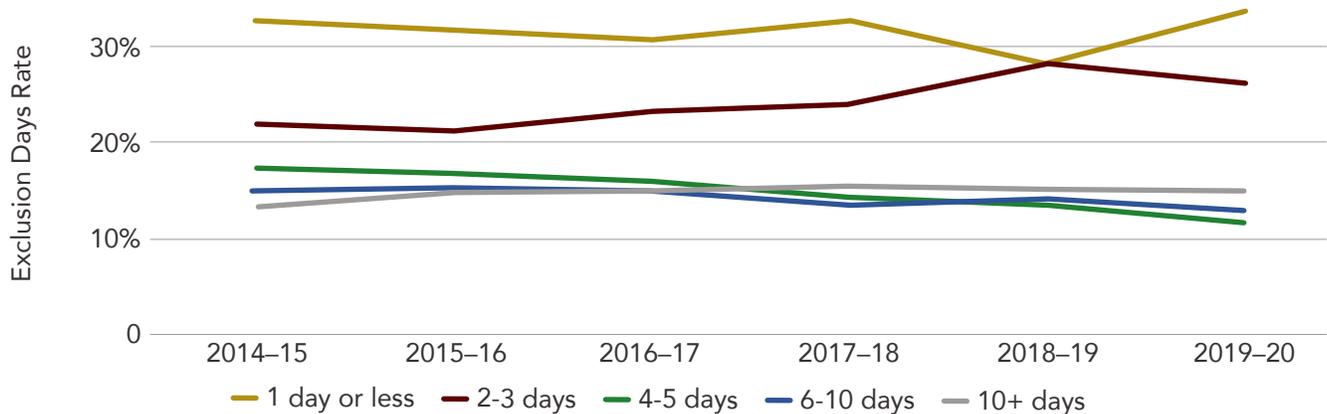
According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, students from “racial minorities and children with disabilities [are] disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline. African American students, for instance, are 3.5 times more likely than their White classmates to be suspended or expelled.”²¹ “About one in four Black children with disabilities were suspended at least once, versus one in eleven White students.”²²

Washington state is no exception when comparing expulsion rates and length of time expelled. Based on the graph below, the exclusion rate for Black students is four to five times higher than it is for White and Hispanic students.

In the **2019–20** school year, **26.4%** of the **2,509** students in **State Total** that received a Short-term Suspension, Long-term Suspension, Emergency Expulsion, or Expulsion for a discipline-related incident received an exclusion of **1 day or less**.

Length of Exclusion Trend Data: Black/African American Students

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
1 Day or Less	21.9%	21.2%	23.1%	24.1%	28.5%	26.4%
2–3 Days	32.5%	31.5%	30.9%	32.5%	28.4%	33.9%
4–5 Days	13.7%	15.0%	15.1%	15.3%	15.1%	14.9%
6–10 Days	14.3%	15.3%	15.0%	13.7%	14.3%	12.9%
10+ Days	17.6%	17.0%	15.9%	14.3%	13.7%	11.9%



Source: Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, “African American Studies Workgroup 2020”

Our schools should work to help every student graduate. As seen in the following graph, high school completion is correlated with higher income. However, those who continue their educational pursuits earn \$1.5 million more in their lifetimes than those who only obtain a high school degree.²³



Median Income in Washington by Educational Attainment, 2020



Source: "Higher Education and the Labor Market Equity Landscape Report: Exploring Equity Gaps in Washington Postsecondary Education"²⁴

The 74% high school graduation rate for Black students in Washington is lower than that of White, Asian, and Hispanic students. Only 42% obtain post-secondary degrees, compared with 53% of White and 75% of Asian students.²⁵



SECTION III: ECONOMIC STABILITY: EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, AND WEALTH



Economic stability is the anchor for quality of life for all. Black populations across the United States continue to suffer from significant wealth and income gaps when compared to White and Asian populations. These gaps directly impact the health and welfare of Black people.

Why do these disparities persist? The historical inequities perpetuated by employment discrimination are the main contributors to the economic disparities we see today and were mentioned by several focus group participants:

“Any and everything is possible for Black people, but there’s a system of Jim Crow still in operation. We can achieve homeownership, which is one thing. We cannot always retain our home and pass it down. With the cost of housing going up, it makes it even more difficult to qualify for loans.”

“I’m a ‘reparationist,’ and I believe we can achieve wealth if we are paid for the historical damages we’ve experienced in the U.S. The money would help our community to acquire wealth, establish wealth, and maintain our wealth.”

“It takes a long time to see any equity in terms of generational wealth.”

Unemployment

Nationally, the unemployment rate has fluctuated greatly for African Americans. Reaching 16.3% at the end of the Great Recession in 2009, it hovered around 6% for the next ten years but trended upwards again at the start of the pandemic. Regardless, it is consistently higher for Blacks than for any other demographic.²⁶ At the end of 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the rate at 7.1%. By the end of 2022, post-pandemic, it was down to 5.8%, but still the highest of all demographics.²⁷

While people move in and out of jobs all the time, data on unemployment rates addresses trends over a period of time, taking into account the fluidity of the day-to-day changes in employment. Unemployment compensation does little to keep housing instability, food insecurities, and financial setbacks at bay.

State unemployment data by demographic group is not tracked. The total percentage of Washington residents who are Black is 4.3%.²⁸

Employment does not guarantee fairness, job security, or equity. Respondents talked about inequities on the job when it comes to treatment, advancement, and wages. Among respondents, 79% reported being employed, but:

“I’ve been passed over by less qualified people. I’ve been training people for positions I’m more qualified for. There’s a system of cronyism that operates on all levels of businesses.”

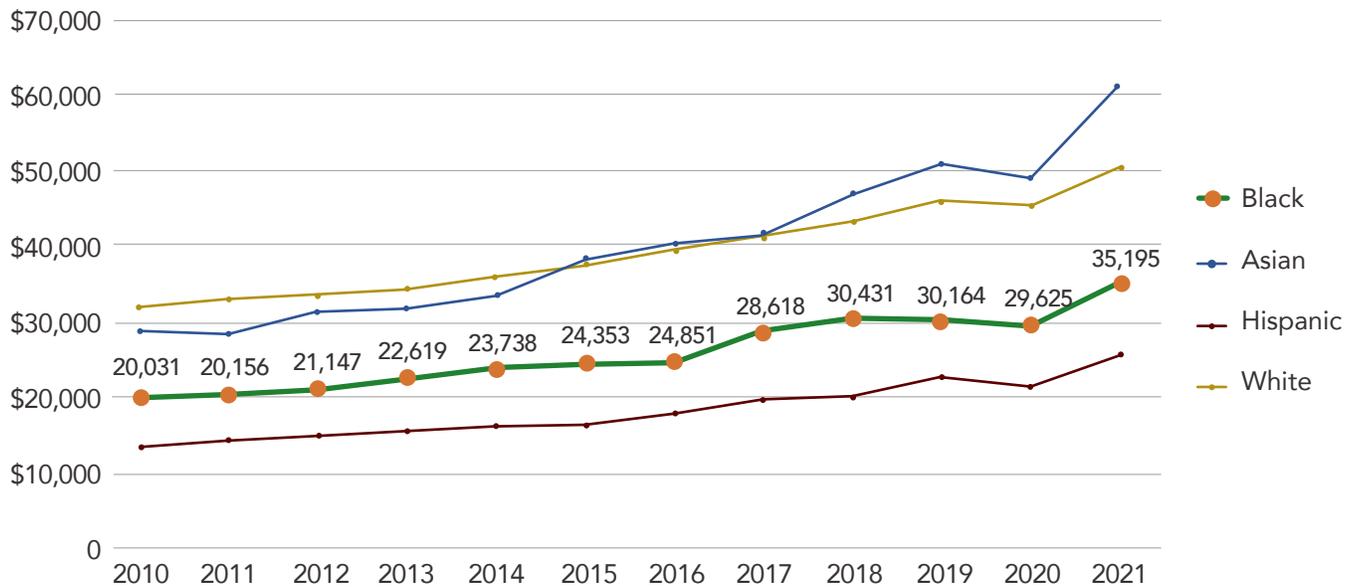
“When it comes to compensation, when I go to negotiate, it is seen as being arrogant. We’re passed over for promotion when we are doing the most work. You can’t get around race. Can’t get the brown off.”

“Some of the biggest inequities is seeing a lot of mediocre White men and women or other people of color who align with whiteness get promotions. I’m a little more Malcolm than Martin, and that often does not go over well with employers and supervisors.”

Income

Income inequality in the U.S. isn't new — the statistic has been tracked nationally since 1915. From 2010 to 2021, Washington state per capita income data collected indicates an overall increase in income for workers across all ethnic groups, although not at the same rate. There is no indication of income convergence for Black households. Instead, Black income per capita was relatively flat in comparison to Asian and White households between 2018 and 2020.²⁹

Washington State Per Capita Income by Race/Ethnicity, 2010–2021



Source: American Community Survey, Current Population Survey Tables for Personal Income, U.S. Census Bureau

Self-Employment

Black business owners in the focus groups reported experiencing more obstacles and inequities when compared to their White counterparts. Experiences for them have not changed significantly.

"I got contracts in 2021 with two major government agencies, but I've only been given three spaces to clean, and this was only one time. What I'm seeing is that companies offering work are appearing to give work to minority businesses but are not actually giving them enough work to survive."

"In order to get a contract, I have to have insurance, which is a barrier of an outgoing expense before any work is done."

"The barrier is someone stringing you along when someone is trying to build a business and efforts are being stifled at every turn."

"White boys are getting loans for their businesses when Black people don't."

It is believed local, state, and federal government agencies can do a better job of developing a pipeline for Black businesses, addressing both historical and current issues that create barriers for Black-owned businesses to enter and remain in markets. Not enough opportunities to qualify for government contracts, too many hoops to qualify for loans and contracts, and unequal treatment of Black business owners compared to White business owners when it comes to licensing are just a few of the barriers that Black business participants discussed in our study.

"A study of public sector contracting in Washington from FY 2012 to 2016 found that White-owned businesses were awarded contracts five times as much as minority business enterprises (MBEs), while Black-owned businesses were selected only 1.2% of the time. The study also showed that wages and business earnings were lower for MBEs, credit discrimination barriers remain high, and human capital constraints

continue to impede the success of minority-owned firms. Data analyzing potential contracting disparities between White- and minority-owned businesses isn't widely available."³⁰

Initiative 200 (I-200), passed in 1998, created more obstacles to closing the wealth gap by making it more difficult to overcome systemic racism when seeking employment and government contracting. It has had a negative effect on public contracting in Washington state by prohibiting racial- and gender-based preference, curtailing Affirmative Action efforts. In 2019, the Legislature passed Initiative 1000 to reverse I-200, but voters blocked it later that same year, passing Referendum 88.³¹

A significant concern about a lack of technical and financial literacy support for the Black community exists. Questions prevail about how aspiring entrepreneurs can access capital, technical assistance, grants or the necessary elements a business needs to compete for contracting opportunities.

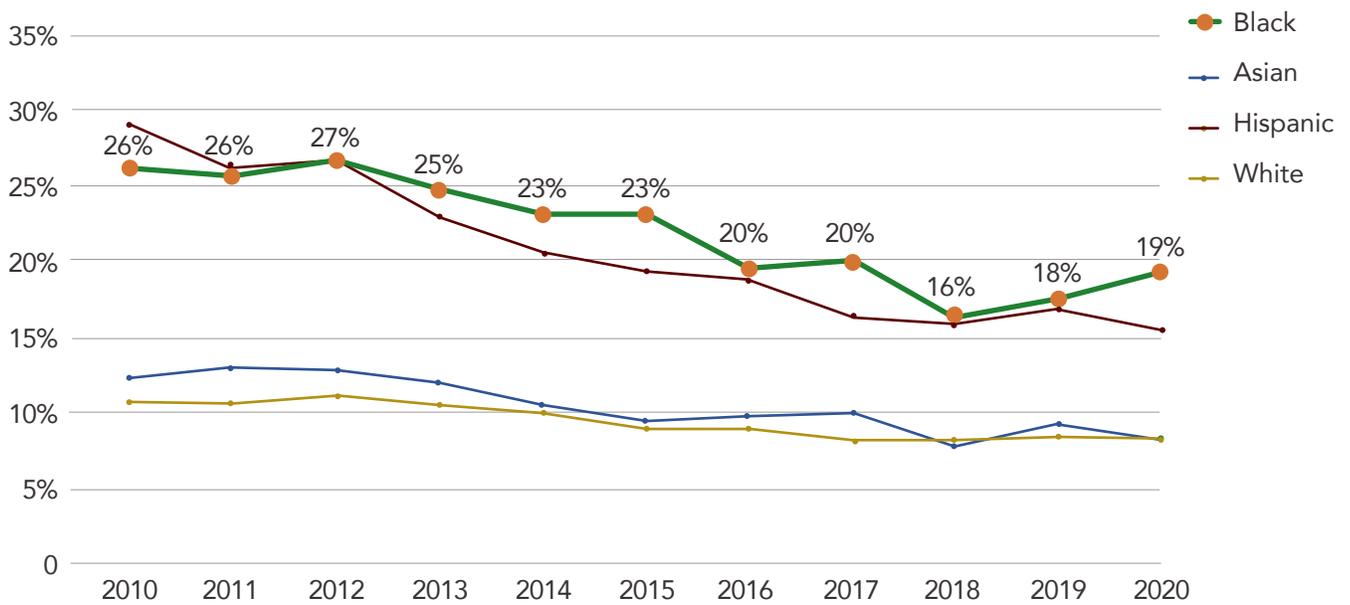
"It's hard to move into the next stage of wealth unless you are equipped with a level of financial literacy."

"If one is resourceful and up to it, but if you don't have an education, don't have the skills, and are not networking, it is hard to access the funds that are going to hit [Washington] state. I'm reaching [out] to different organizations like DSHS in order to ensure that there's access for people of color to get these resources. Opportunities are there, but the race game is making it difficult for Black people to access those resources."

Homelessness and Poverty

Between 2010 and 2020, the Black poverty rate has hovered between 16% and 26% higher than other groups.³²

Washington State Percent of Population Below Poverty Level by Race/Ethnicity, 2010–2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Data Tables"

The level of poverty has a direct effect on the rate of homelessness for those who find themselves experiencing extreme poverty. Some of those experiencing active homelessness spoke of having no family or friends who could help them because their family and friends are struggling to prevent the same fate.

"... every dollar we manage to get is spoken for. There is no saving because of the constant hunt for the next dollar and everyone I know is doin' the same."

"With no safety net to speak of, the slightest obstacle, the smallest thing goes wrong and I could be right back to looking for a shelter."

Black families are substantially more likely to receive fewer inheritances, gifts, and other means of family support than White families.³³

Receipt of an inheritance/monies based on race/ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Received an Inheritance	29.9%	10.1%	7.2%	17.8%
Conditional Median Inheritance	\$88,500	\$85,800	\$52,200	\$59,400
Expect an Inheritance	17.1%	6.0%	4.2%	14.7%
Conditional Median Expected Inheritance	\$195,500	\$100,000	\$150,000	\$100,000
Could get \$3,000 from Family or Friends	71.9%	40.9%	57.8%	63.4%
Parent(s) Have a College Degree	34.4%	24.8%	15.2%	40.0%

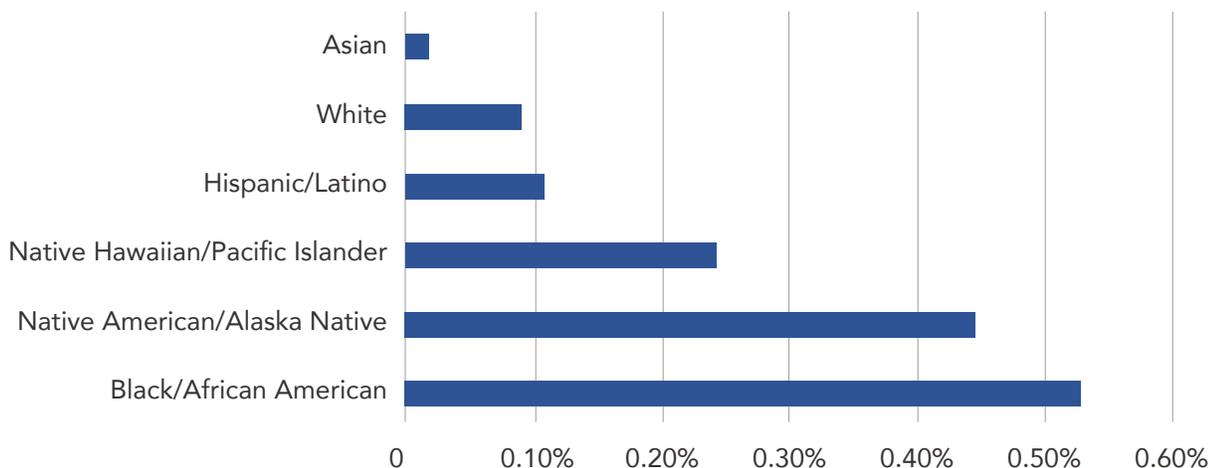
Source: The Federal Reserve, "Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances." Note: Figures are 2019 dollars.

Currently, Washington state has the fifth-highest homeless population in the country, trailing California, New York, Florida, and Texas.³⁴ More current data could not be found regarding how many of the reported 22,923 unsheltered individuals are Black, but a 2018 report published by the Washington State Department of Health, based on a statewide "Point

in Time" count of homeless Washingtonians in 2017, provides some data that extracts numbers based on race and ethnicity.³⁵

Based on the 2018 study, when head count data identified by race versus ethnicity, the highest number of homeless and unsheltered individuals were Black.

Washington State Rate of Homelessness by Race

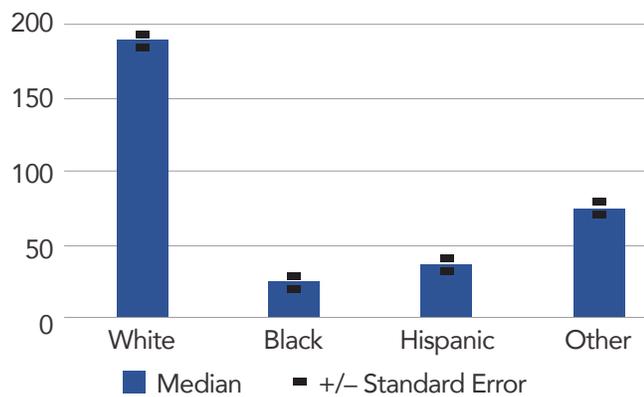


Source: Washington State Department of Health Assessment Report, "Homelessness and Inadequate Housing," 2018

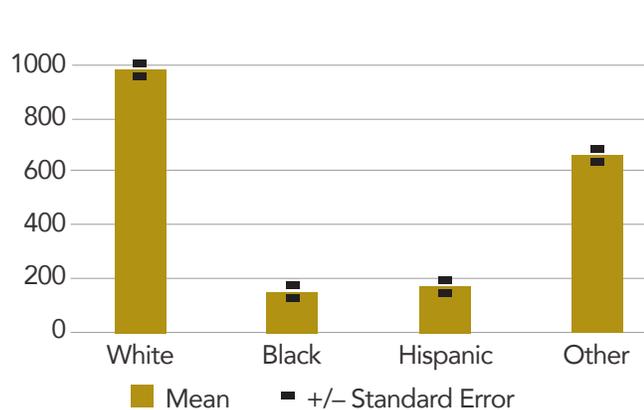
Wealth

Intergenerational transmission of wealth plays a significant role in the creation and holding of wealth. By some estimates, bequests and transfers account for at least half of aggregate wealth,³⁶ have recently averaged 3% of total household disposable personal income,³⁷ and account for more of the racial wealth gap than any other demographic or socioeconomic indicator.³⁸ Black families have considerably less wealth than White families: national statistics indicate a median of \$24,100 and \$188,200, respectfully. This adds up to a median difference of \$164,100. (The median does not count the individuals in both groups that stand out as extremely wealthy or extremely impoverished.) The discrepancy in wealth accumulation between Black and White families is clearly disproportionate.³⁹ The figure below illustrates the median net worth of White families compared to Black, Hispanic, and other or multiple race families in 2019.

Median Net Worth



Mean Net Worth



Source: The Federal Reserve, “Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances”⁴⁰

Wealth gaps between White and non-White families throughout the life cycle

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Under 35	\$25,400	\$600	\$11,200	\$13,500
35–54	\$185,000	\$40,100	\$46,100	\$154,500
Over 55	\$315,000	\$53,800	\$111,500	\$213,200

Source: The Federal Reserve, “Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances.” Note: These figures are 2019 dollars.

Wealth distribution data based on race and ethnicity was not available statewide. However, for the city of Seattle, Black household median wealth is \$23,000. This is a mere 5% of the White household median wealth of \$456,000 — an overall gap of \$433,000 in net worth.⁴¹ The Prosperity Now organization estimates that 33% of Black households have zero net worth, compared with 12% of White households, 7% of Asian households, and 19% of Hispanic households in the state.⁴²

The historical aspects of the wealth gap were discussed in our focus groups. There is little optimism about current efforts, if any, to close it.

“... it doesn’t surprise me that the difference is so large. When the laws are written in your favor and you have a four-hundred-year head start, you should be way out ahead.”

“I have not seen much evidence of these opportunities. Very few opportunities to pass on generational wealth.”

Homeownership and Redlining

The ability to purchase a home is often considered an indicator of wealth. Homeownership provides strong financial returns on average and is a key channel for wealth-building.⁴³ Although, as one participant points out:

“Sometimes, buying a home can be attaining debt not wealth. But, if you are able to leave a home totally paid for to your children, then you are doing well.”

Created out of President Roosevelt’s New Deal in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) allowed millions of Americans to purchase their first

home and prevented millions of citizens from losing their homes during the Great Depression — except African Americans. FHA refused to insure mortgages in and near African American neighborhoods and created the discriminatory practice known as “redlining.”

Redlining is the discriminatory practice that kept Black families out of certain neighborhoods. The FHA subsidized the mass production of entire subdivisions for Whites — with the requirement that none of the homes be sold to African Americans. The FHA *Underwriting Manual* said “incompatible racial groups should not be permitted to live in the same communities.”^{44,45} Meaning, loans to African Americans could not be insured and the federal subsidy went almost exclusively to White applicants. The government deemed predominantly Black neighborhoods “risky” based almost entirely on their racial composition, making it difficult for Black people to acquire loans.⁴⁶ Although the New Deal was instrumental in moving the country out of the Great Depression, those same policies have contributed to the economic inequity for African Americans.



African American families prohibited by the FHA from buying homes during the 1940s and '50s and even into the '60s gained none of the equity appreciation that Whites gained: equity used to put their children through college and provide other economic advantages, including the passing of generational wealth — advantages that eluded the majority of African Americans. As the federal government subsidized segregated, low-cost homes in the suburbs, public housing, having been built to address the national housing shortage during the Great Depression for White families, now sheltered poor Black families.

Today, we question whether African Americans are able to purchase a home at all: volatility in the housing market paired with rising mortgage interest rates make homeownership especially difficult. At just 43.4% nationally, Black homeownership is lower than it was 10 years ago despite the lower interest rates experienced in April 2020 and throughout 2021.^{47,48} Data from the Prosperity Now organization shows Black homeownership is lower than it is for other ethnicities in Washington state.⁴⁹

Washington State Homeownership Rate by Race, 2020

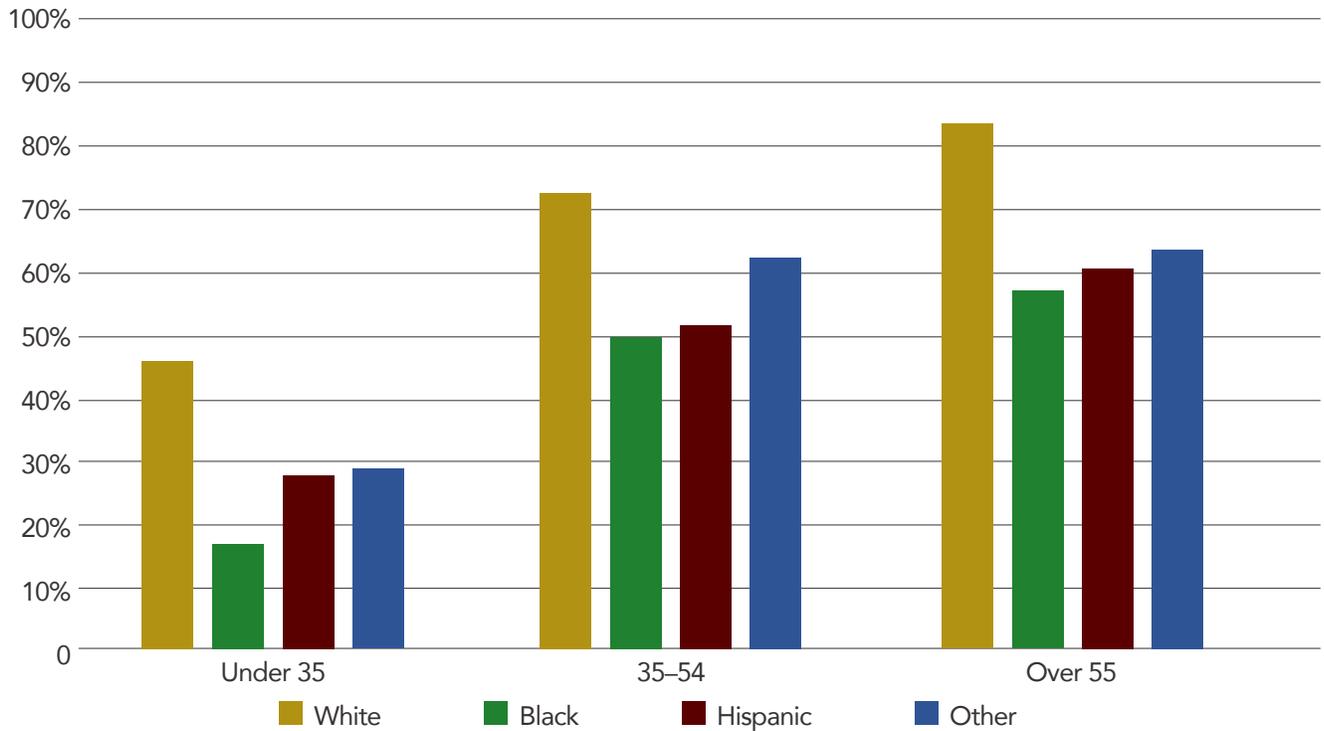
White	67.40%
Black	32.30%
Asian	61.20%
Hispanic	43.60%

Source: Prosperity Now Scorecard, 2021

On the national level, as individuals age, they are generally more likely to become homeowners than younger Americans. This is true regardless of race and ethnicity,⁵⁰ but significant gaps in homeownership exist between White and Black families at any age.⁵¹ Among younger families, about 46% of White families own their home, compared to just 17% of Black families. This gap may partially be explained due to differences in generational wealth. Research shows Black families are far less likely to receive down payment assistance from their parents, carry a larger amount of student loan debt, use more than 30% of their monthly income on rent, and experience a greater rejection rate when applying for a mortgage.^{52,53}

The figure below exemplifies the national trend of homeownership rising with age regardless of race or ethnicity, though there are significant differences in homeownership between White and non-White families throughout the life cycle.

Homeownership: Age and Race



Source: Federal Reserve Board, 2021 National Survey of Consumer Finances

An analysis of the data collected from the focus groups and surveys shows that Black homeowners follow a similar life-cycle pattern to the national data. Only 12% of homeowners in the focus groups purchased homes in their twenties to mid-thirties compared to 84.3% who purchased homes during middle age. According to the National Association of Realtors, Black households are twice as likely to use 401(k) or pension funds for their down payment. A small number of our respondents spoke of having inherited a family member's home (2%), and a smaller group (1.7%) have experienced homeownership but then lost their home through foreclosure.⁵⁴

Home Values

Nationally, significant gaps in home values by race and ethnicity shows the average market value of a White family's home is \$230,000 whereas the average market value of a Black family's home is \$150,000.⁵⁵

The gap in home value is calculated based on purchase prices and housing appreciation, which are determined by a combination of factors like income, down payments, residential segregation, and fair market prices. Redlining presents a major obstacle to Black homeownership. Although outlawed in 1968 with the passing of the Civil Rights Act, it persists today.⁵⁶

SECTION IV: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



People are born into an environment in which they live, work, and play. This environment has a lasting impact on their health and wellness. Environmental toxins negatively impact our quality of life, and the research reveals that a disproportionately high number of Black residents (72%) live in areas identified as having high levels of environmental toxins or other environmental ills.⁵⁷ When the environment we live in is toxic, we suffer poor health outcomes. Toxic chemicals in the air, water, and food create adverse health outcomes, escalating healthcare costs and accelerating mortality. The organization Greenaction for Environmental Justice provides a definition of environmental justice that captures the essence of our understanding of the term.

"The EJ [Environmental Justice] movement is an inter-generational, multi-racial and international movement that promotes environmental, economic and social justice by recognizing the direct link between economic, environmental and health issues and demanding a safe, clean community and workplace environment."⁵⁸

A high percentage of those surveyed reported having access to clean water (96%) and grocery stores (94%). A large portion participate in recycling programs (87%), and 92% have access to green spaces in their neighborhoods.

However, only 53% indicate they know how to access information about environmental concerns. Many depend largely on the information they receive through media, word of mouth, jobs, churches, or other sources, versus seeking information that is not always easily accessible. Access to green spaces and grocery stores only tells part of the story: Access does not mean equity.

"The grocery store has low-quality food."

"The items are low- to medium-quality in comparison to White neighborhoods."

"Yes, but it is very expensive."

"Although there is a grocery store, I'm vegan and find it takes me out of my neighborhood to purchase healthy food a lot of times!"

Most participants in the study have a general understanding of the importance of addressing environmental conditions that impact them and others, are informed of environmental issues affecting their communities, and have access to and are involved in practices that promote environmental health. However, there's also evidence that disparities continue to exist depending on where you reside, and that these disparities are disproportionate.



Environmental Justice

Only a slight majority of those surveyed fully understand how to access information, monitor conditions, and stay informed about the negative impacts of toxic health outcomes. The remainder either do not have access to or know how to access specific environmental information.

I am aware of how to access environmental information

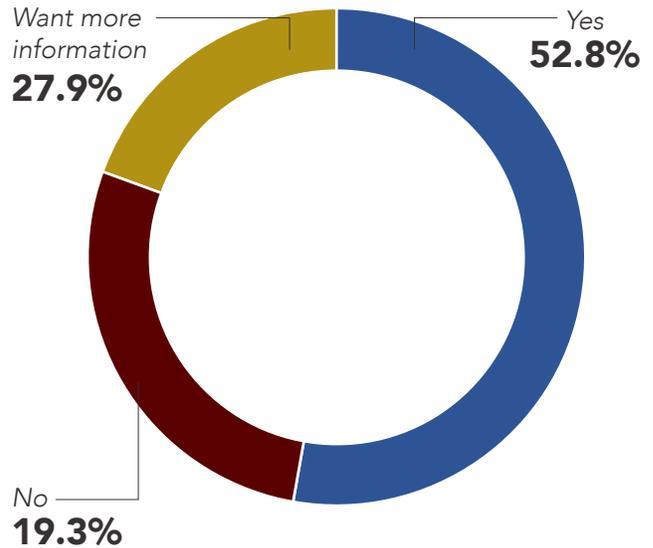
When our community speaks of environmental information:

"... This information is not coming through social media, news, or music, which are the places where we get information. Word of mouth is how we share information. These conversations are not happening in the places we get information. We are blessed [in Washington] because we live in an area with high education. If my water is dirty, my neighbor will probably know about it and not let it be there."

"I am not sure if my not knowing is because I don't look for it. I believe it is available except for from some companies."

"I feel like I'm seeking more information than I'm given. If I ask the question, I can get the answer."

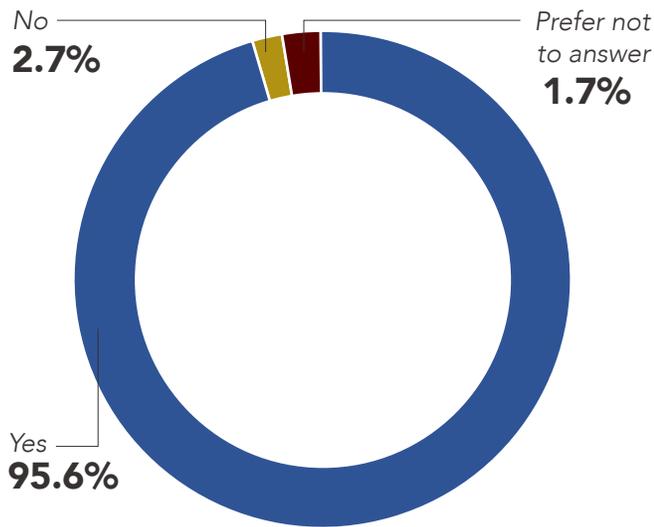
"In my community, yes, we have enough information. I live in a White community. I know where to find the information. However, there are populations that are not privy to this information. They have things like rent on their minds, so don't have time to pay attention to things like water. Geographics matter."



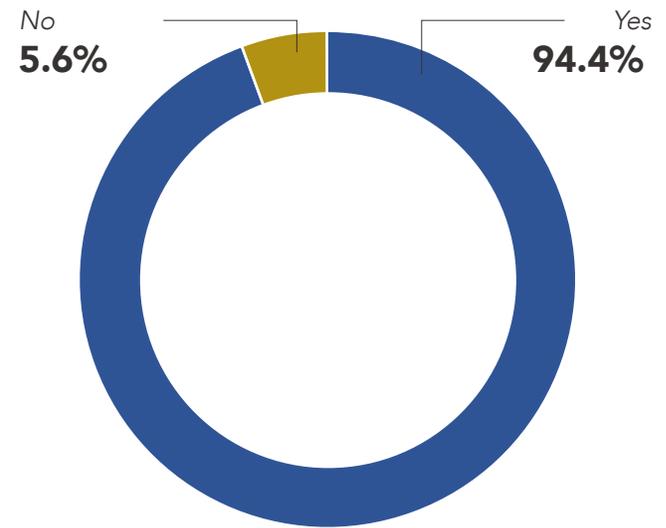
Community Access to Clean Water, Grocery Stores, and Green Spaces

Healthy communities have access to healthy foods through grocery store proximity, clean water, and safe, clean, green spaces. Most participants conveyed having access to clean water, grocery stores, and parks. Fewer reported having access to community trails, gardens, and beaches. Several expressed concerns about the affordability and quality of food, and inadequate green spaces that lack safety and are not equitable.

I have access to clean water



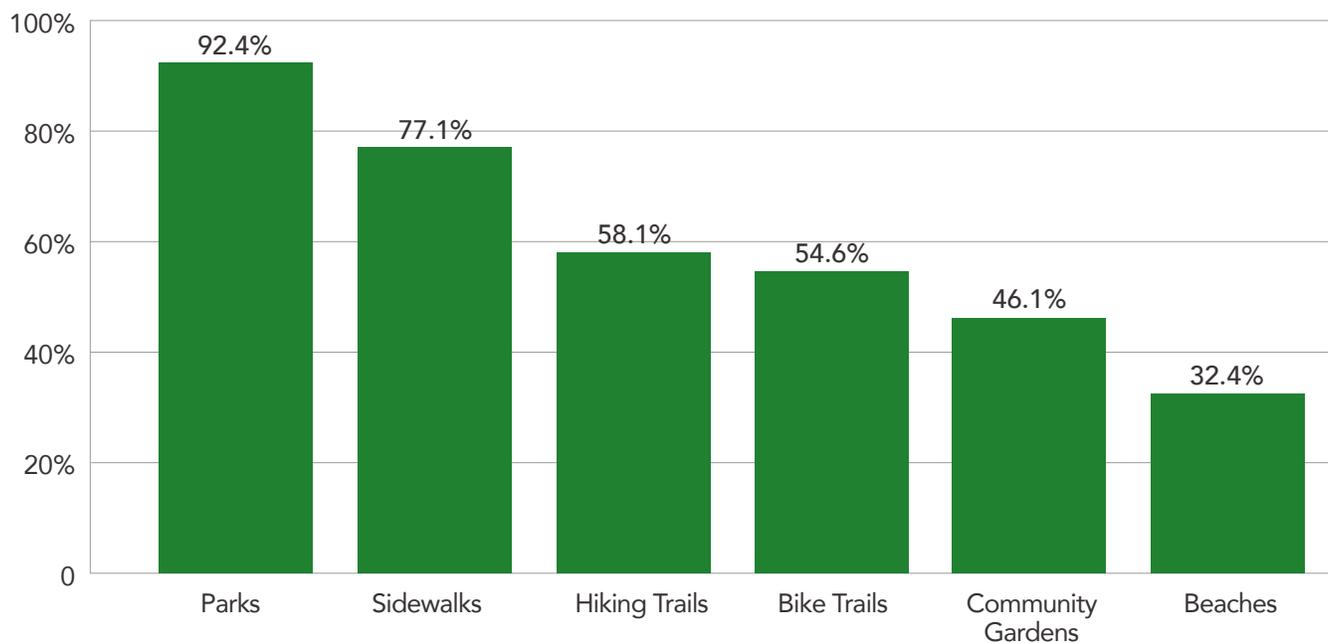
I have access to a grocery store within three miles



What the participants want us to know about access to clean water and grocery stores:

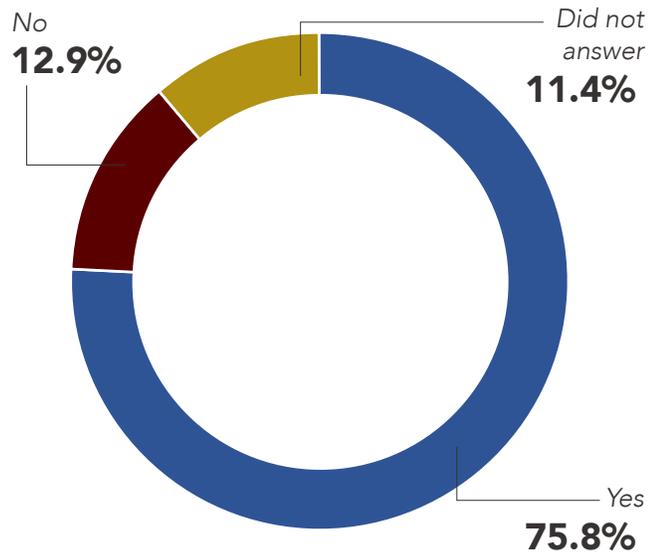
"There are three grocery stores within a three-mile radius from my home."

Types of accessible green spaces in my neighborhood



Safety of Green Spaces

I have access to safe green spaces



Note: Numbers do not add to 100% due to rounding

What the participants want us to know about the safety of the green spaces available to them:

"Some are safe. The park is dangerous at night."

"I live in an area that is safe and free of dirty needles and debris; however, so many people do not or can't afford to relocate. I have reported squatters and campsites to my local authorities when I have encountered them in my neighborhood."

"Yes, reported problems but not addressed."

"They don't come unless there is a life-threatening issue."

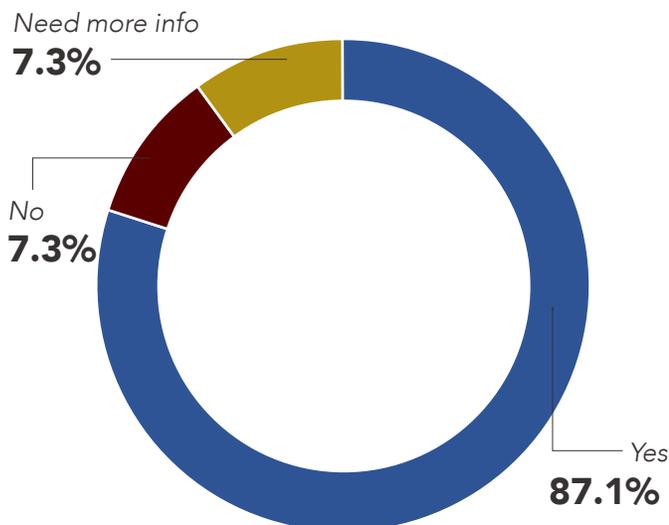
"I have not reported. I have opted not to patronize the green spaces during days or times [that] don't feel safe."

"No. It doesn't appear that local government is willing to do what needs to be done about homelessness and the waste it leaves."

"No sidewalks [so there is a] danger from traffic."

Recycling

I have access to and participate in recycling programs



Recycling programs are key to reducing pollution, preventing the squandering of natural resources like trees, reducing the use of fossil fuels, and reducing our landfill waste contribution. It is encouraging that so many who participated in our study contribute to the environmental health of Washington state.

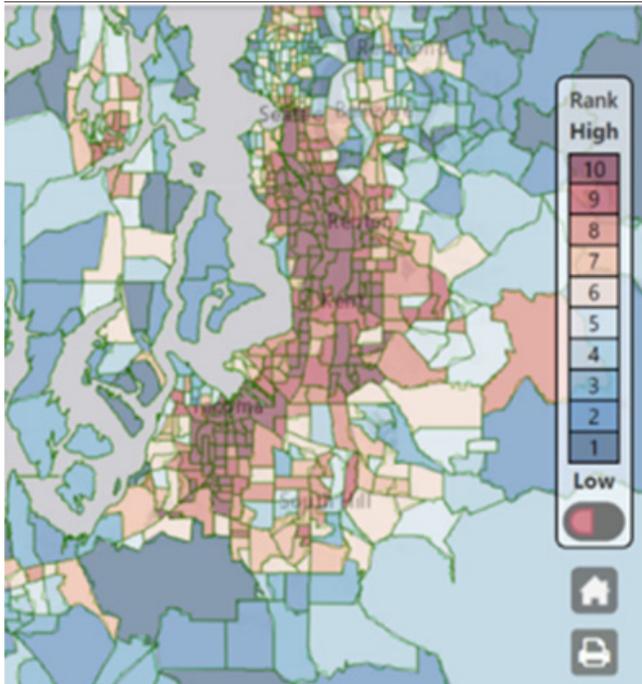
Locations of Environmental Disparities and Hazards in Washington

In contrast to the results of the survey based on the demographics of the study participants, data published by the Washington State Department of Health identifies where environmental hazards and disparities occur. There is a disproportionate impact on Black residents as compared to other Washingtonians. The data is based on zip code for greater accuracy. The following categories of disparities in environmental justice were selected from the Washington State Department of Health website because they clearly reveal areas that consistently and directly impact Black people:⁵⁹

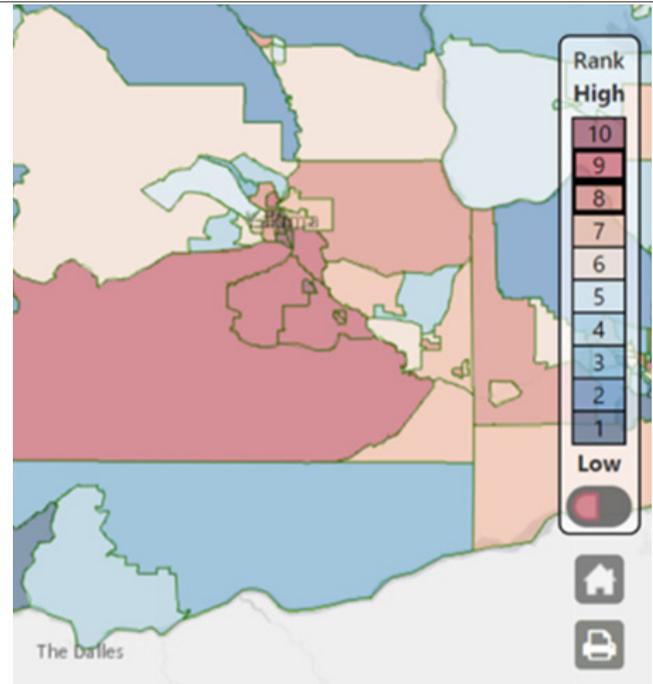
- Environmental Health Disparities
- Diesel Pollution and Disparities Impact
- Social Vulnerability to COVID-19
- Social Vulnerability to Hazards
- Lead Exposure Risk

Two maps from the Washington State Tracking Network identify where the top 20% of Washington state's highly impacted communities in urban and rural areas are located.

Areas at High Risk of Environmental Hazards



Puget Sound Region



South Central Washington

Source: The Washington State Department of Health

What the Washington State Department of Health's Tracking Network Maps Reveal

- Approximately nine clusters were identified as areas ranking 9 or 10, or the top 20% (80th percentile) of highly impacted communities in both western and eastern Washington. The urban areas are in South Seattle, Kent, Tacoma, Vancouver, and Spokane; the rural areas are Centralia, Longview, Yakima Valley, and the Tri-Cities.
- 72.6% of Black people live in one of these eight clusters (primarily in cities).
- Environmental health disparities in these tracts are influenced by diesel emission, traffic density, toxic release from facilities, proximity to Superfund National Priority List of hazardous waste sites, and housing burden (low-income households that are impacted by housing costs)⁶⁰ that ranked 9 or 10 for these individual indicators.⁶¹

The justice system in the United States has a long history of perpetuating oppression and institutional racism against African Americans, leading to disproportionate rates of incarceration, police brutality, and other forms of state violence. There is a lack of trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system among African American communities and the result has been a devastating, long-lasting, perpetuated cycle of poverty, trauma, and social exclusion. The injustice within the criminal justice system is the foremost threat to the health and well-being of the African American community.

Policing

When asked about policing, responses were varied based on circumstances. Many negative experiences were expressed and a majority believed some type of policing reform is essential:

“Depending on what I need the police for determines if I do like them or not, but overall, they overstep their bounds and mistreat people of color and they do a lot of things they don’t get punished for. Need to have the whole criteria of policing turned around and instead have peace officers.”

“All my experiences with the police have been negative. If you are a person of color, you are deemed the enemy.”

“I do not trust them. I don’t care what racial background they come from. Policing is a racist institutional creation, and I don’t think it can be reformed. If police are doing bad things and others are not standing up, then there are no good ones.”

“There are other alternatives for community safety that don’t use the power of a White supremacist organization to maintain order.”

“In order to reduce the number of Black people killed by police, structural changes must be made. Recommendations include changes in hiring practices to ensure better representation and changes in disciplinary measures to ensure that violent or racist officers are removed from the system. Sadly, many people believe that no changes will be effective.”

“Clean departments of officers who have committed violence against BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color], clean departments of officers who are known to have significant bias and prejudice against BIPOC, include systems to weed out racists in the hiring process.”

“A whole retraining of what policing means; better standards required to become an officer.”

“It would take all the above and more. The system was designed to do what it is doing; the police system literally came from policing African Americans.”

“I’m thankful for the police, but on the other hand, there needs to be some police reform.”

Statistical and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that, throughout Washington, Black people and other people of color are more likely to be stopped, arrested, receive a felony conviction, and killed by police.⁶²

Stops

Police stops are critical to understand because what may begin as a casual stop can quickly escalate into something much more detrimental, such as death. While several high-profile cases have captured the attention of the country, the dangers of “doing anything while Black” are not new.

Washington state does not have collected data that shows all police departments’ statistics on Terry stops. A Terry stop is defined in Washington state as “a brief, minimally intrusive seizure of a subject based upon articulable reasonable suspicion in order to investigate possible criminal activity. The stop can apply to people as well as vehicles. The subject of a Terry stop is not free to leave.”⁶³

The City of Seattle Police Department collects data on stops by police based on “perceived” race, meaning race based on the perception of the officer making the stop. Black people are stopped at a higher rate than non-Hispanic White Washingtonians. Seattle Police Department data from the period from 2016 to mid-June 2018 shows stops at a rate of 4.1 times that of non-Hispanic White Washingtonians, with total stops making up 30.4% of all stops. At that time, only 7.7% of the population of Seattle identified as Black.⁶⁴

Stops By Perceived Subject Race 2016 to Mid-2018

Race	Stop Count	Percent of Total
White	9,873	50.5%
Black	5,986	30.6%
Hispanic	937	4.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	647	3.3%
Asian	548	2.8%
Two or more races	360	1.8%
Missing/Other/Unknown	1,139	6.1%

Source: Seattle Police Department, 2019 Disparity Review pg. 20

Arrests, Sentencing, and Incarceration

Ethnicity and race data for arrests and incarcerations in Washington state indicate a disproportionately high rate of arrests and incarcerations.⁶⁵

From 2017 to 2020, Black people were arrested in Washington state at rates that far exceed their proportion within the population: an arrest ratio of 3:1 in comparison to Whites.⁶⁶

Washington State Disproportionality for Arrests

	2017	2018	2019	2020
White (including Hispanics)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Black	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1
Indigenous	2.2	1.7	2.5	2.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4

Source: Seattle University School of Law, “Race and Washington’s Criminal Justice System: 2021 Report to the Washington Supreme Court”

Similarly, from 2018 to 2020, felony sentences were three times more likely to occur for Black people. As of September 2022, 17.3% of the population of Washington state correctional facilities were Black, when the total state population is approximately 4.3%.⁶⁷

Washington State Disproportionality for Felony Sentences

	2018	2019	2020
White (non-Hispanics)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Black	3.0	3.0	3.0
Indigenous	1.9	1.7	1.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.3	0.3	0.3
Hispanic	0.6	0.6	0.6

Source: Seattle University School of Law, “Race and Washington’s Criminal Justice System: 2021 Report to the Washington Supreme Court”

	Felony Assault Sentences		Prison		Jail		Other	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	2,683	63.6	1,001	61.1	1,516	64.8	163	67.4
Black	776	18.4	347	21.2	385	16.5	43	17.8
Asian	147	3.5	46	2.8	90	3.8	11	4.5
Hispanic	415	9.8	175	10.7	230	9.8	10	4.1
Total	4,166		1,622		2,303		237	

Source: Seattle University School of Law, "Race and Washington's Criminal Justice System: 2021 Report to the Washington Supreme Court"

Between 2013 and 2022, 253 people were killed by police in Washington. Composing only 4.3% of the state's population, the 11.9% of Black people killed by police in Washington is disproportionately high.⁶⁸

Washington State Disproportionate Killed by Police by Race/Ethnicity 2013–2020

	Population (Census July 1, 2019)	Percentage of Population	Number Killed	Approx. Percentage of Deaths	Comparative Disproportionality Ratio (relative to White/non-Hispanic)
Total	7,614,839	1.0	253		
White non-Hispanic	5,140,053	67.5	128	50.6	
Black	335,055	4.4	30	11.9	0.33
Asian	791,949	9.6	6	2.4	1.3
Hispanic	989,936	13	34	13.4	3.5

Source: Seattle University School of Law, "Race and Washington's Criminal Justice System: 2021 Report to the Washington Supreme Court"⁶⁹

Civic Participation

Paramount in the fight for equal rights are the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Discrimination on the base of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin was outlawed: equal opportunity in employment and other public accommodations became protected rights under law.

But some 50 years later, the repeal of legal remedies and the narrowing of civil protections, and legal actions by the Supreme Court have not been reassuring. Many believe the civil rights African Americans fought for are

being eroded. "...Civil rights action against discrimination in employment practices in the private sector and in local and state governments focuses today on "reverse discrimination" rather than clear patterns and practices of discrimination against African Americans and other racial minorities."⁷⁰

"The Court having the audacity of taking on cases with long established, historical wins in the civil rights era is disturbing. Chipping away at voting rights and education system."

"The Voting Rights Act of 1965 remains one of the hardest-fought safeguards for Black Americans and other minority groups as it relates to voting. The power, agency, and access to vote is a civil right for all."

— The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People⁷¹

“Absolutely, they are eroded. Supreme Court decisions have recently been shameful, and there’s a great deal of concern with how much further they will go with the population voting for White supremacy, the anti-Black, critical theory movement, with little understanding of what it is, and the fear that BIPOC are taking their jobs.”

“Being eroded. On the state level, there are people in power that are placing policies that are targeted to certain individuals. When we have national elections, these become more apparent. Affirmative action, Roe v. Wade, banned books, and critical race theory. All of these discussions will lead to the limiting of our civil rights.”

Collectively, the power of the vote is recognized as a means of improving societal conditions. When asked about voting blocs, some suggest there never was one or that the dispersal of Black citizens to lessen their political leverage is intentional by way of gentrification. Nonetheless, there is some impression that the dispersal of Black people is no accident.

“Do you believe the Black community lost their voting bloc, and if so, why?”

“I would say yes. For example, the Central District in Seattle was once largely populated by African Americans, but now it is taken over by others, and the African Americans have been spread out to other communities.”

“Yes, with some of the redistricting have been deliberate to break up some of the voting power.”

“I hadn’t thought about this before. Just given that I’ve lived in different areas, eastern and western [Washington]. Most areas do not have large Black communities, so in local elections this could have a large impact.”

One participant shared a slightly different viewpoint:

“You have to look at the changing demographics of [Washington] state, so we have to look at the bloc as mental space, and what you will find is that African Americans pretty much vote for democrats. We are meeting in Zoom now. We just need to change our mental space; it doesn’t mean I’m not African American. In fact, I have to be more African American in the place where I live now.”

Voter Registration and Participation

Since 2014, there is a noticeable increase in the number of Black voters; the number of registrants and returned ballots continues to grow. However, a performance audit notes differences in ballot rejection rates with the greatest disparity being between White and Black voters.⁷²

Percent of WA State Population Registered to Vote by Race/Ethnicity (2014–2020)

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Total Pop	68.7%	75.5%	73.7%	74.8%
White	71.6%	78.2%	74.6%	78.2%
Black	46.6%	63.2%	66.8%	64.7%
Asian	59.9%	79.6%	73.4%	63.9%
Hispanic	44.8%	62.9%	57.2%	61.0%

Source: Kaiser Foundation, “Voting and Voter Registration as a Share of the Voter Population, by Race/Ethnicity, 2014–2020”

Percent of Black Population in WA State to Vote by Race/Ethnicity (2014–2020)

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Total Pop	68.7%	75.5%	73.7%	74.8%
Black	33.7%	42.6%	44.2%	61.9%

Source: Kaiser Foundation, “Voting and Voter Registration as a Share of the Voter Population, by Race/Ethnicity, 2014–2020”

Controlling all other variables, Black voters are twice as likely to have ballots rejected as White voters. A disturbing occurrence, the 2020 ballot rejection rates and voter rejection ratios for Washington state by race are shown below.⁷³

2020 General Election: Rate of Rejection by Race/Ethnicity

Black	2.49%
Native American	1.59%
Hispanic	1.57%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.24%
White	0.63%

Source: Office of the Washington State Auditor, "Performance Audit"⁷⁴

2020 General Election: Voter Rejection Risk Ratio by Race/Ethnicity

	Odds Ratio		
	Any Reason	Signature Mismatch	Unsigned
Black	1.945%	2.082%	1.246%
Hispanic	1.275%	1.283%	1.209%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.212%	1.307%	0.844%
Native American	1.817%	1.138%	4.176%

Note: Race/Ethnicity (comparison = White)

Source: Office of the Washington State Auditor, "Performance Audit"⁷⁵

Most vote without noticeable obstacles and keep abreast of the issues but were not fully confident in the system.

"The main barriers are learning more about candidates. It is hard to understand the jargon around some candidates. Learning more about the ins and outs about law and what the candidates stand for and the past of the candidates."

"Yes, being able to trust in the system and who you are voting for. I don't know the people or what they will do, so I just ignore them all."

"The ID [Real ID]⁷⁶ can become a barrier." "Not personally, but I follow the news and see that [R]epublican legislators are trying to rezone to give them an advantage. They are worried about the change in demographics, so they are trying to change zoning to make it more difficult for minorities, young people, and older people to vote."

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