



**FOOD INSECURITY**

**30%**

**DURING MARCH- JUNE  
MONTHS OF PANDEMIC IN  
WA STATE, ACCORDING  
TO WAFOOD SURVEY**

# **WESTERN WASHINGTON COUNTIES OF FOCUS AMIDST THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC**

**SUMMARY REPORT OF PRE-COVID-19 AND COVID-19 PERIOD COMMUNITY  
NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND DATA FINDINGS FOR TARGETED  
GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**

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## ***Introduction***

About 850,000 people in the state of Washington experience food insecurity in a typical year.<sup>1</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of food-insecure people in Washington reached two million people in May of 2020.<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 and its impacts are far-reaching and long-lasting. It has exposed racial disparities along socioeconomic factors and health outcomes. The pandemic has affected low-income communities of color in so many ways, through its heavy toll on human life and on people's ability to get by and thrive.

The mission of Food Lifeline is "feeding people facing hunger today and working to end hunger for tomorrow." In order to eliminate hunger for the long term, geographical, racial, and social inequities must be taken into consideration and centered in the work. **This report pulls together research on existing pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19 needs assessments. It then uses a racial equity lens to layer public health, employment, and home ownership data to ground food insecurity in the broader pandemic context.** Food insecurity is closely tied to unemployment, health equity, and systemic racism, and in efforts to address these intersecting issues, the 17 counties in Food Lifeline's Western Washington service area counties in Western Washington were compared and examined.

According to a Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2020 Technical Brief, the three main factors influencing food insecurity levels were discovered to be unemployment, poverty, and disability<sup>3</sup>. They estimate that with one percentage point increase in unemployment rate, the food insecurity rate goes up by 0.502 percentage points.<sup>1</sup> When the poverty rate increases by one percentage point, the food insecurity rate increases by 0.296 percentage points.<sup>1</sup> When the disability rate increases by one percentage point, this leads to a 0.207 percentage point increase in food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> In all cases, all else is held constant except for the single variable.

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<sup>1</sup> "Revealing The Faces of Hunger" (Food Lifeline, n.d.), [https://foodlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Revealing\\_The\\_Faces\\_of\\_Hunger\\_COVID\\_19\\_Report\\_vr08.pdf](https://foodlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Revealing_The_Faces_of_Hunger_COVID_19_Report_vr08.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Emily McCarty, "1 In 4 Washingtonians Could Need Food Assistance Soon," Crosscut (Crosscut, October 9, 2020), <https://crosscut.com/news/2020/05/1-4-washingtonians-could-need-food-assistance-soon>.

<sup>3</sup> Feeding America, "Map The Meal Gap 2020 Technical Brief". 2020. *Feedingamerica.org*. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Map%20the%20Meal%20Gap%202020%20Technical%20Brief.pdf>.



Figure 1. Visualization of three prominent factors that influence food security. *Made with Canva*

The Washington State Food Security Survey (WAFOOD), fielded from June to July 2020, asked 2,621 WA residents about food insecurity experienced since the COVID-19 shutdown in March.<sup>4</sup> The Washington State University Food Systems Program wanted to understand how access to food and economic security has changed amid the pandemic, and the survey was a joint effort between the University of Washington and Washington State University, collaborating with Tacoma Community College.<sup>5</sup> The WAFOOD survey captured food insecurity experienced over a 3 to 4-month period, and their sample population had a lower-than-average income compared to the rest of Washington state. They found food insecurity rates to be startlingly high. Food insecurity was found to be prevalent in 50 to 58% of lower income households and in households with children, and 30% on average for the state of Washington.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Drewnowski, Adam, and Jennifer Otten. 2020. "WAFOOD Survey Brief #1: Economic Security And Food Access In Washington State During The COVID-19 Pandemic | Nutritional Sciences Program". *Nutr.Uw.Edu*. <https://nutr.uw.edu/resource/economic-security-and-food-access-in-washington-state-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

<sup>5</sup> Paterson, Lauren. 2020. [https://www.chinookobserver.com/news/local/study-finds-worse-food-insecurity-for-washington-families/article\\_d90aa7ea-2b4e-11eb-b87a-0f179632dc2a.html](https://www.chinookobserver.com/news/local/study-finds-worse-food-insecurity-for-washington-families/article_d90aa7ea-2b4e-11eb-b87a-0f179632dc2a.html).

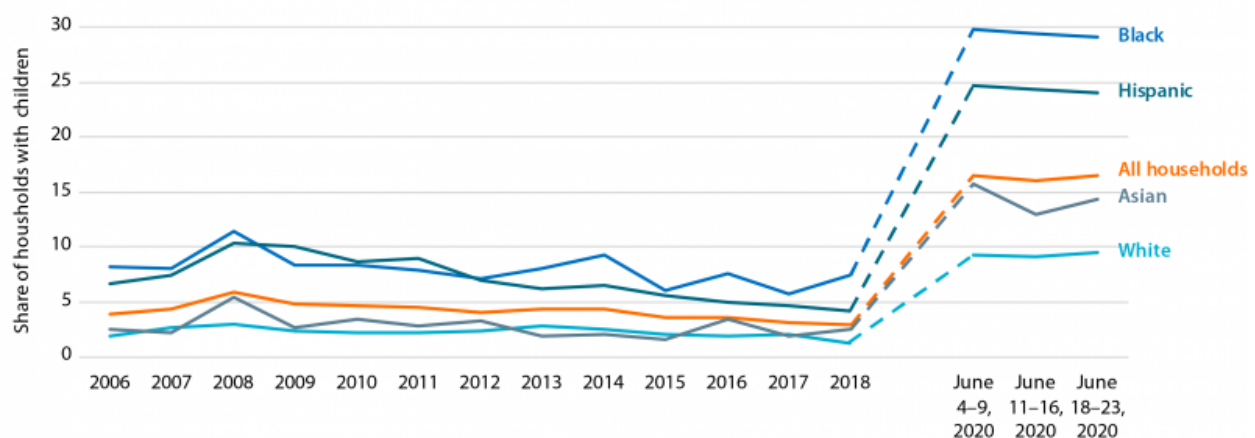


County	WAFOOD Estimate of Food Insecurity
Lewis	43%
Pierce	34%
King	30%
Snohomish	28%
Kitsap	25%
Thurston	24%
Skagit	20%
Washington State	30%

Figure 2. Chart Depicting the WAFOOD Estimate of Food Insecurity among western WA counties using available data. Counties with the highest estimates of food insecurity include Lewis and Pierce; outside Food Lifeline’s service region are Spokane and Clark.

FIGURE 1.

### Share of Households with Children in which the Children Are Food Insecure by Race/Ethnicity, 2006–20



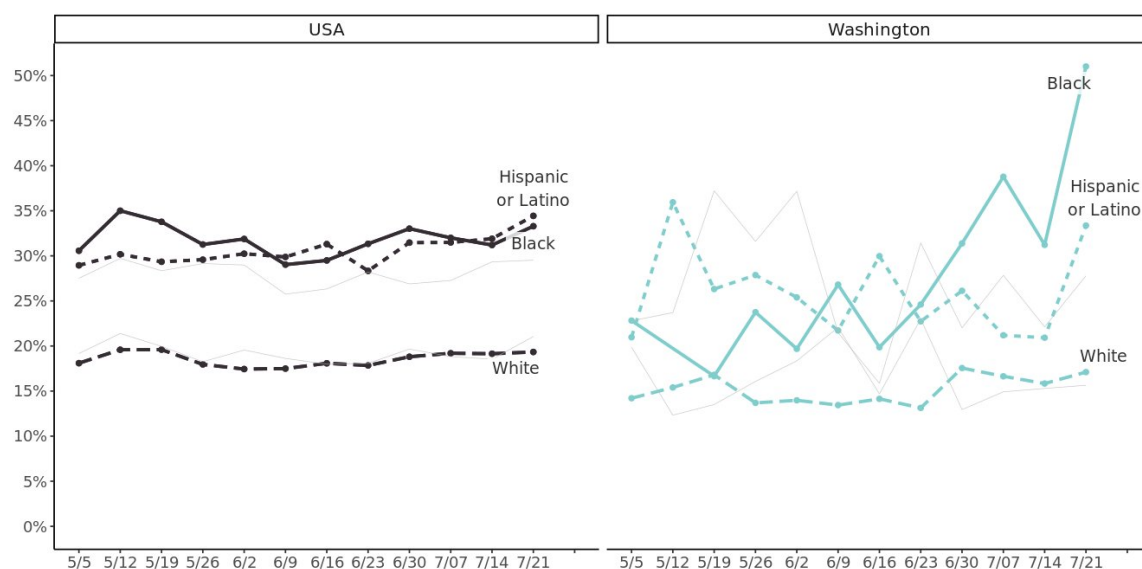
Source: Census Household Pulse Survey 2020 (Waves 6-8); Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement 2006-18; author's calculations.  
 Note: Surveys have been weighted to be representative of households with children, overall and by race/ethnicity. In the CHHPS (2020 datapoint), respondents were asked "Please indicate whether the next statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true in the last 7 days for the children living in your household who are under 18 years old. 'The children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food.'" In the FSS, respondents were asked "Now I'm going to read you several statements that people have made about the food situation of their children. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true in the last 12 months for (your child/children living in the household who are under 18 years old). '(My/Our child was/The children were) not eating enough because (I/we) just couldn't afford enough food.' Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?" Food insecurity statistics for race/ethnicities not shown were imprecisely measured.



Figure 3. The trend of Black and Hispanic households with children having a greater share of food insecure households shot up and became more unequal compared to Asian and white households during the pandemic. There is more than a 20% increase from pre-COVID-19 pandemic to June. Source: The Hamilton Project

The Hamilton Project used data from U.S. Census Household Pulse surveys to chart food insecurity and they found out that Black families with children are dealing with food insecurity at almost three times the rate of white families.<sup>6</sup> The WAFOOD survey found that in general, 40% of households with children in Washington state are bearing the burden of food insecurity, compared to 22% in households without children.

Weekly Food Insecurity for Selected Races/Ethnicities by State\*



Share of Weekly Overall Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity for Selected States

Figure 4. Graph depicts weekly overall food insecurity from May to July 2020. Compared to the average figures for the U.S., the Black and Hispanic/Latinx<sup>7</sup> residents in Washington state have a

<sup>6</sup> Bauer, Lauren. 2020. "About 14 Million Children In The US Are Not Getting Enough To Eat | The Hamilton Project". *Hamiltonproject.Org*.  
[https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/about\\_14\\_million\\_children\\_in\\_the\\_us\\_are\\_not\\_getting\\_enough\\_to\\_eat?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=08e66a6e-5680-4777-b29f-dc615a774b85](https://www.hamiltonproject.org/blog/about_14_million_children_in_the_us_are_not_getting_enough_to_eat?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=08e66a6e-5680-4777-b29f-dc615a774b85).

<sup>7</sup> Using "Latinx" instead of "Latino/a" in this report was not a straightforward choice. "Latinx" is a term that comes with a history of linguistic imperialism and only 3% of Hispanic and/or Latinx people use the term to describe themselves. However, I decided to go with "Latinx" in this report to be inclusive of gender identities and because of its growing usage. Read more about the term here:  
<https://www.motherjones.com/media/2019/06/digging-into-the-messy-history-of-latinx-helped-me-embrace-my-complex-identity/>  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/>

vastly higher rate of weekly food insecurity. (Grey lines are unlabeled; unclear what they represent). Source: Northwest Harvest

Shown in the above figure, Black and Hispanic/Latinx residents faced stark increased levels of food insecurity starting at the end of June, which was two months after April's 15.4% peak unemployment. When examining the figures of food insecurity by race and ethnicity, there are clear and persistent disparities. The WAFOOD survey reports that food insecurity for their respondents were 26% among non-Hispanic whites, 33% among Asians, 47% among Hispanics, 52% among non-Hispanic Blacks, and 40% among all other race/ethnic groups.

The U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey found that on a national level, respondents reported the most common reasons for not having enough to eat were because:

1. They couldn't afford to buy more (52% cited this reason in June)
2. Stores didn't have the food they wanted (33%)
3. They were afraid to or didn't want to go out to buy food (36%).

Washington State had similar response patterns.<sup>8</sup> At the start of the pandemic, King County 2-1-1 (Crisis Connections), received double the number of usual calls.<sup>3</sup> Food was the second most common social service need callers had (with housing being the first) in April and May.<sup>3</sup> After a few months, by July, food had gone down to be the 5th most requested social service need.<sup>3</sup> On average, Latinx, Black, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations were overrepresented in calls made about food assistance. Thirty-one percent of callers seeking assistance with food identified as Black and 21% of callers identified as Latinx, which is five times the proportion of Black individuals and double the proportion of Latinx individuals in the King County population.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Abigail Schachter, Lin Song, Scott Neal, Fel Pajimula, Kris Johnson, Amy Laurent, Elizabeth Kimball, Eva Wong. 2020. *Increases in Food Needs in King County, WA, 2020*. Public Health Seattle & King County; Assessment Policy Development and Evaluation Unit.

## I. COVID-19: RACE AND ETHNICITY

	White	Asian	Hispanic	Black	NHPI	AIAN
<b>King</b>	1	0.9	3.9	2.9	4.1	1.5
<b>Snohomish</b>	1	1	4	2.1	8.2	2
<b>Pierce</b>	1	1.1	2.4	1.9	3.8	1.9
<b>Thurston</b>	1	0.5	3.3	2.1	1	2.1
<b>Whatcom</b>	1	0.7	4	0.2	n/a	3
<b>Kitsap</b>	1	1	6.1	2.5	6	1.5
<b>Skagit</b>	1		4.16			

	County Average per 100,000	Hispanic Positive Cases per 100,000	NHPI Positive Cases per 100,000
<b>Mason</b>	1540	5876	n/a
<b>Cowlitz</b>	1718	5677	15455

Figure 5. [Relative Risk of Racial/Ethnic groups](#) testing positive for COVID-19 for counties with data available. The eight counties not present here did not publish numbers of confirmed cases broken down by race and ethnicity, likely because there wasn't enough data to perform the stratification. Mason and Cowlitz only provided positive case numbers for Hispanic and/or Pacific Islander populations, so instead of relative risk, positive cases per 100,000 are shown.

Looking at the figure above, the racial and ethnic groups that are facing the highest disproportionate burden of positive cases are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Black populations in Western Washington.

The rates of confirmed cases for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander residents are staggeringly higher than those of white residents in Washington State— rates of confirmed cases are nine times higher, and hospitalization rates are 10 times higher. Spokane county in Eastern Washington (outside of Food Lifeline's service area) is where the inequity is most pronounced— immigrants from the Marshall Islands make up only about 1% of Spokane's population, but make up around 30% of total confirmed COVID-19 cases.<sup>9</sup> Seventy-eight percent of the Pacific Islander residents in Food Lifeline's serviced counties in Western Washington live

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, Lagipoiva. 2020. "Pacific Islanders In US Hospitalised With Covid-19 At Up To 10 Times The Rate Of Other Groups". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/27/system-is-so-broken-covid-19-devastates-pacific-islander-communities-in-us>.

in King County (2258 Pacific Islander residents) and Pierce County (1654 Pacific Islander residents).

Recognizing that the United States used the Marshall Islands as a nuclear weapon testing site (the U.S. conducted 67 nuclear tests on or over the volcanic island chain from 1946 to 1958), many of the residents of Marshall Islands are severely impacted and Marshallese people suffer from intergenerational health impacts like high rates of cancer and preterm births.<sup>10</sup> Even now the federal government has not granted Marshallese people refugee or immigrant status and they don't receive benefits like Medicaid and Medicare. In the state of Washington, children and pregnant women are eligible for Apple Health, but a large percentage of COFA islanders (people from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated State of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau) are not eligible. There is a long history of institutional racism embedded in health care that has led to "distrust in the Pacific Islander Community," says Joseph Seia, Executive Director of the Pacific Islander Community Association.

There are several reasons why COVID-19 is so heavily impacting Pacific Islander communities— Islanders typically live in close-knit communities with many family members in a single house, and they have higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, putting them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Foundationally, there is a long withstanding structural problem of language barriers and difficulty of receiving care and medical assistance.

Structural barriers to accessing medical help are nothing new to communities of color. Hispanics and Latinxs have the highest uninsured rates of any ethnic or racial group in the U.S. The highest numbers of Washington state COVID-19 outbreaks that are taking place in non-healthcare environments are happening in restaurants and food service, construction, and agriculture. In Washington state's agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industry, Hispanic people make up 12% of the workforce but make up double that (24%) of the COVID-19 cases in the sector.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, around 21% of Black people are employed in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, but they're overrepresented in the percentage of positive cases in the health care and social assistance sector, with Black employees making up nearly half (48%) of the cases.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)". 2020. *Centers For Disease Control And Prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Doh.wa.gov. 2020. *COVID-19 Confirmed Cases By Industry Sector*. <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/IndustrySectorReport.pdf>



In 2012, 23% of working-age Black residents in Washington state lacked health insurance, compared to 19% of working-age adults.<sup>7</sup> For Black people born outside of the United States, the rate is 32%.<sup>12</sup>

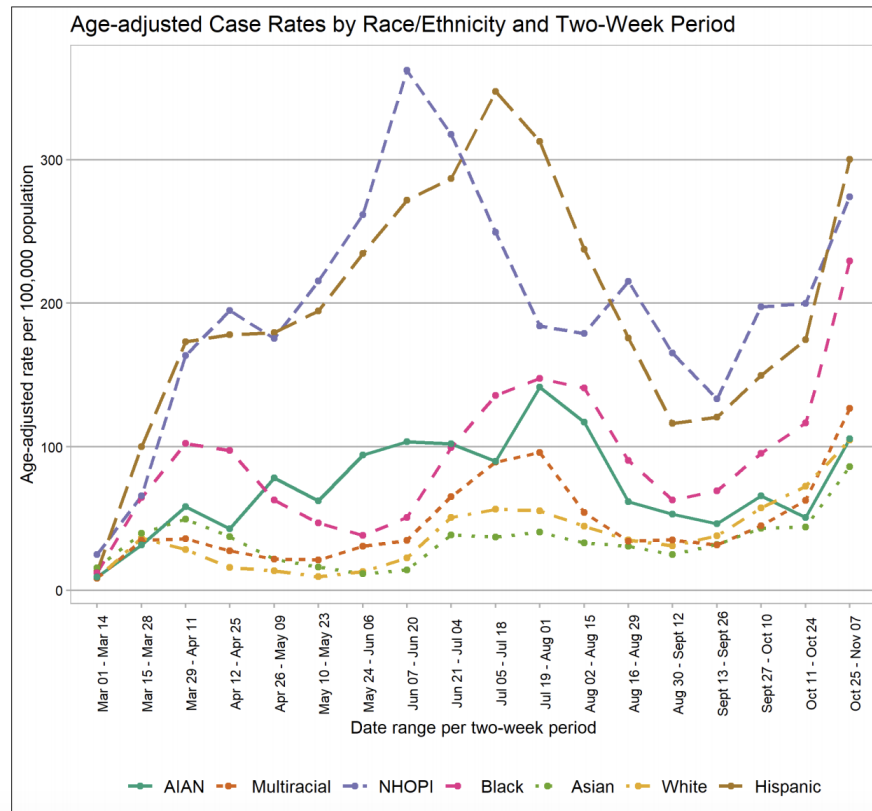


Figure 6. Washington State Department of Health published a graph on the confirmed COVID-19 cases by race/ethnicity.

From June to early August cases for all races and ethnicities rose, and substantially so for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and Hispanic (NHOPI) populations. The rates of confirmed cases are disproportionately higher for NHOPI, Hispanic, and Black populations compared to those for white, Asian, and multiracial populations. The rates of confirmed cases for Black residents reached a new peak at the end of October.

<sup>12</sup> Budget & Policy Center analysis of Integrated Public-Use Microdata (IPUMS). 2012. *American Communities Survey Data*

***A Few Reasons COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting racial/ethnic minorities:***

- Overrepresented in essential industries like grocery stores, restaurants, transportation, cleaning and building services where they get more exposure to the virus and can't work from home<sup>13</sup>
- More likely to live in multi-generational housing<sup>14</sup>
- Federal programs exclude undocumented people
- Underlying health conditions: Because of redlining, racial restrictive covenants, and other forms of systemic racism, people of color disproportionately live in areas with less access to healthy, affordable foods and in less walkable neighborhoods.

## ***II. UNEMPLOYMENT***

**During the Pandemic, White Unemployed Workers Have Been More Likely to Receive Unemployment Benefits**

According to an analysis of national survey data, Black unemployed workers were about half as likely to receive such benefits.



Source: Nyanya Browne and William Spriggs, Howard University, analysis of COVID Impact Survey, conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for the Data Foundation, April 20 to June 8, 2020.

Figure 7. National survey data from April to June, used to show a racial disparity with unemployment benefits. Source: Nyanya Browne and William Spriggs, Howard University

<sup>13</sup> Jr., Richard, Robert Gebeloff, K.K. Lai, Will Wright, and Mitch Smith. 2020. "The Fullest Look Yet At The Racial Inequity Of Coronavirus". *Nytimes.Com*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-Latinxs-african-americans-cdc-data.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, Gene. 2020. "COVID-19: Hispanics Twice As Likely To Die In King County". *AP NEWS*.  
<https://apnews.com/article/e7903c910dc7d247f437284483408e13>.

Black Americans are disproportionately more likely to be unemployed but also are the least likely to receive jobless benefits, which is especially true during this pandemic, according to a study by Nyanya Browne and William Spriggs of Howard University, which looked at national survey data collected from April to June.<sup>15</sup>

In the first quarter of 2020, Washington state had the second highest unemployment gap between Hispanic people and white people (2.0 to 1) in the United States, as well as the second highest Hispanic state unemployment rate in the nation.<sup>16</sup>

It's important to note that the unemployment benefits don't account for people who drop out of the workforce, like parents who have to take care of their kids as they go through virtual learning, which is a responsibility that falls disproportionately on women. In September of 2020, hundreds of thousands of women dropped out of the workforce. Of the 800,000 women who dropped out of the labor force, Hispanic and Latinx women and Black women comprised 324,000 and 58,000, respectively.<sup>17</sup> That means close to half (44 percent) of the women who dropped out of the labor force were Black and/or Latina. Latinas left at nearly three times the rate of white women and more than four times the rate of Black people, and they are less likely to have the ability to work from home in comparison to white workers.<sup>18</sup> The racial disparity of unemployment is compounded by gender, so actions taken to tackle unemployment, as with any matter, have to engage with the intersectionality of gender and race.

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<sup>15</sup>Kofman, Ava, and Hannah Fresques. 2020. "Black Workers Are More Likely To Be Unemployed But Less Likely To Get Unemployment Benefits". Propublica.<https://www.propublica.org/article/black-workers-are-more-likely-to-be-unemployed-but-less-likely-to-get-unemployment-benefits>.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, Jhacova. 2020. "2020Q1-Q2 | State Unemployment By Race And Ethnicity". *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/indicators/state-unemployment-race-ethnicity/>.

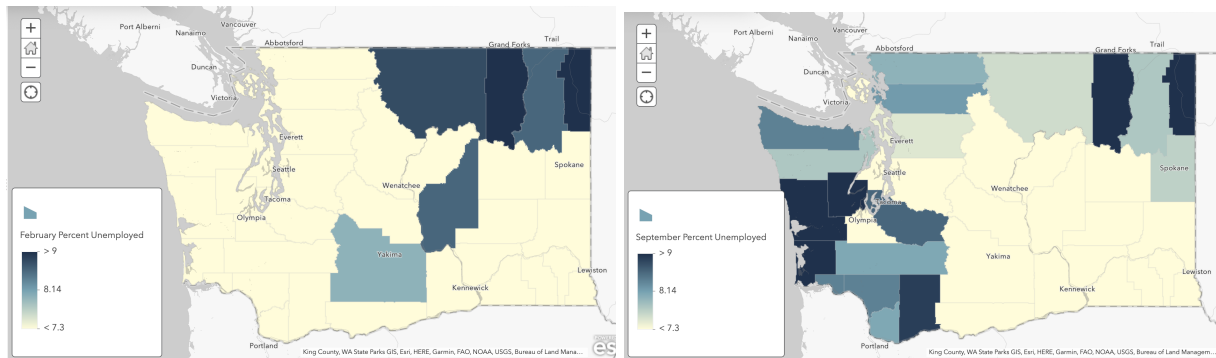
<sup>17</sup> Gupta, A., 2020. *Why Did Hundreds Of Thousands Of Women Drop Out Of The Work Force?*. Nytimes.com. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/03/us/jobs-women-dropping-out-workforce-wage-gap-gender.html>

<sup>18</sup> Gould, E., Perez, D. and Wilson, V., 2020. *Latinx Workers—Particularly Women—Face Devastating Job Losses In The COVID-19 Recession*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/Latinx-workers-covid/>

# Unemployment Rates in WA State

February to September 2020

*Start of COVID-19 Pandemic to Present Day*



February 2020

September 2020

Figure 8. Gif of Unemployment Rates from February to September 2020, with captures of unemployment rate during February and September shown above.

[Click here to see moving gif](#)

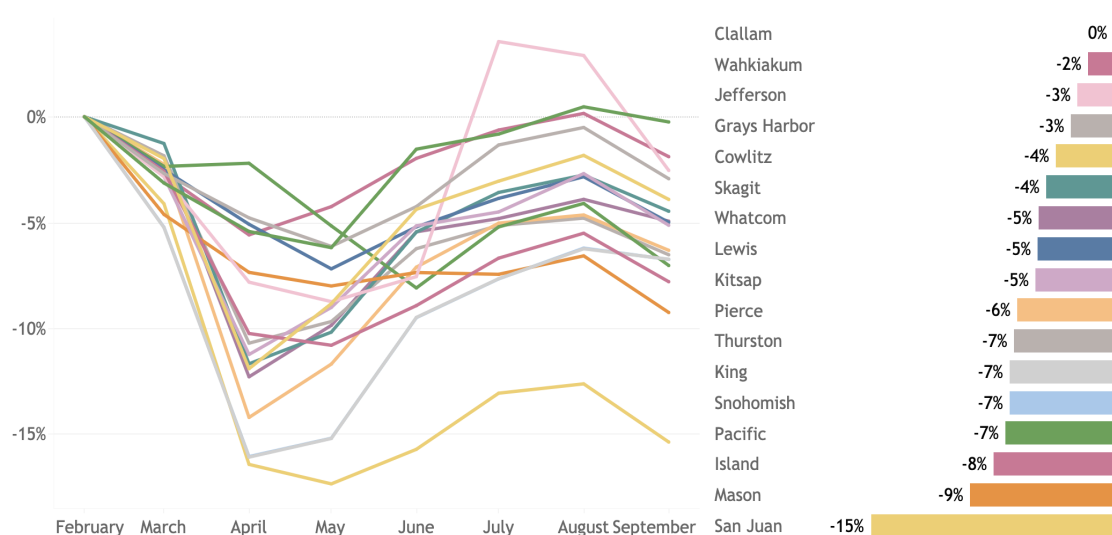
# Unemployment Rate in WA State

## April to August 2020

Figure 9. Gif showing a Closer Look at Unemployment Rates during COVID-19 Peak Months from April to August 2020. The scale is kept consistent in this map timeline for easier comparison.

[Click here to see moving gif, scroll down past Fig. 8](#)

**Washington employment by county and month**  
% change since start of period



Source: [Local Area Unemployment Statistics \(not seasonally adjusted\)](#)

Figure 10. Chart that displays shock to employment rates. Each county's February employment rate is considered the baseline. Data Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



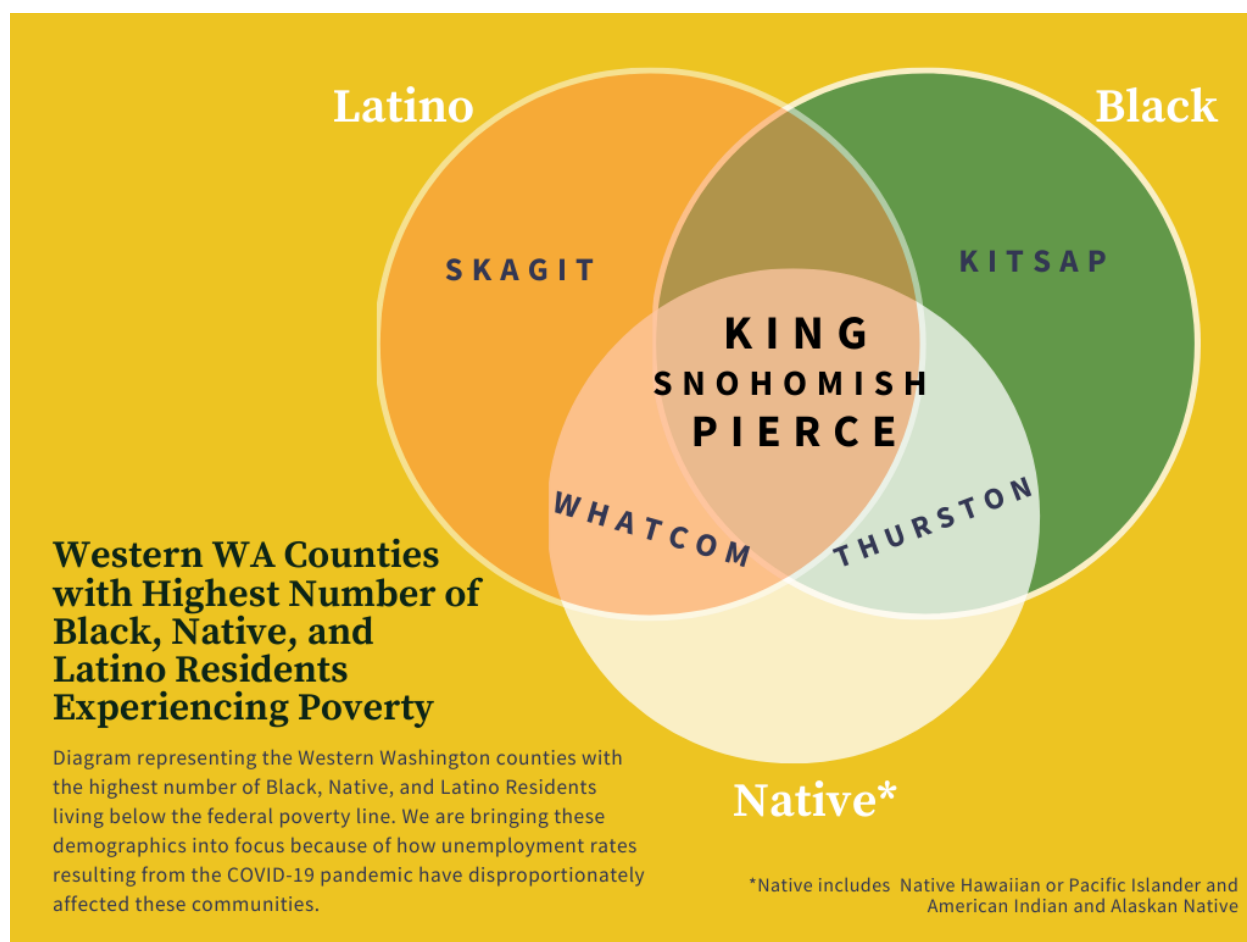


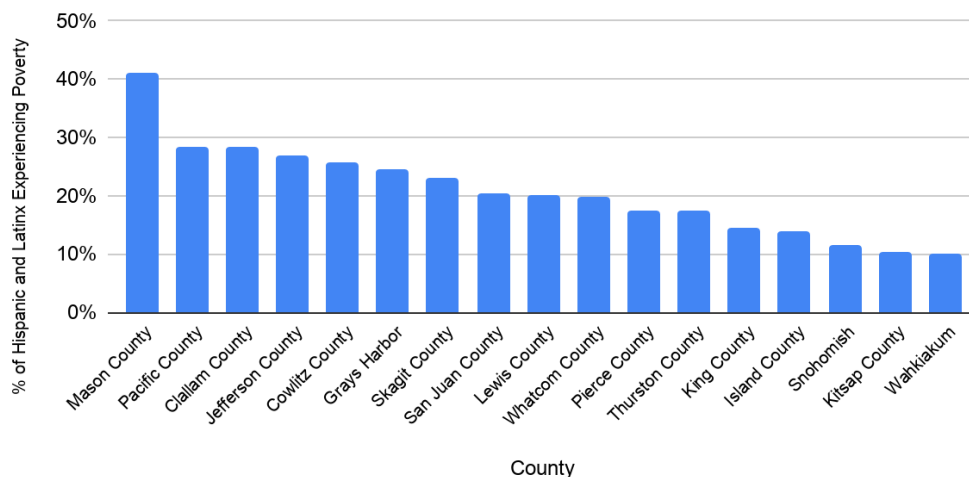
Figure 11. King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties have the highest numbers of Black, Native, and Latinx residents experiencing poverty, using ACS 2014-2018 5 year data. Whatcom County has the highest numbers of Latinx residents experiencing poverty, surpassing King, the second highest county, by 17,000. King County has the highest number of Black residents experiencing poverty, exceeding the second-highest county (Pierce)’s figure by almost 24,000. King County also has the highest number of Native residents experiencing poverty.

It’s important to note that Figure 11 relies on the federal poverty line as the threshold. In 2018, the majority of the food insecure population in the United States (63%) lived above the federal poverty line.

This data cannot capture the full picture of Black, Latinx, and Native Washingtonians experiencing poverty, especially as the cost of living is substantially higher in parts of Washington state, nor does it accurately reflect impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using

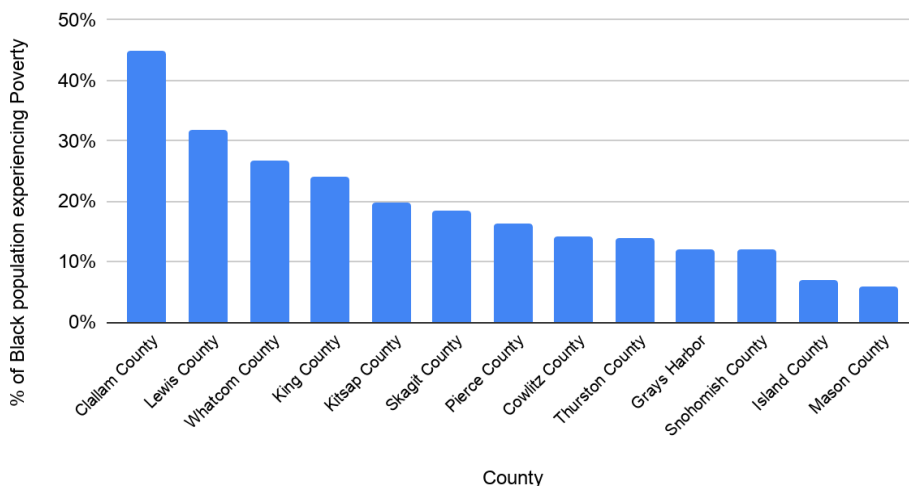
this, we only arrive at an underestimation of the scope of poverty and financial challenges faced by residents. The figures below show the breakdown of poverty by race/ethnicity and by county, using the most recent data published on December 10th, 2020, from the American Community Survey 2015-2019 5 year data.

### Percentage of Hispanic and Latinx Population Experiencing Poverty By County



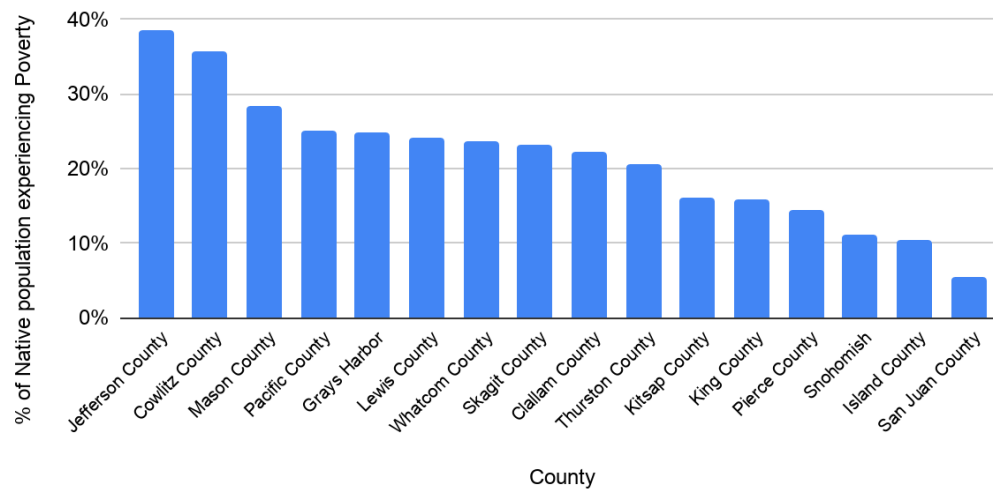
Figures 12. American Community Survey 2015-2019 5 year data. *Counties with Hispanic and Latinx populations that are very small (<200) are not shown in the chart.*

### Percentage of Black population experiencing Poverty by County



Figures 13. American Community Survey 2015-2019 5 year data. *Counties that have a very small (<200) Black population are not shown in the chart.*

### Percentage of Native population experiencing Poverty by County



Figures 14. American Community Survey 2015-2019 5 year data. *Counties that have a very small (<200) Native population are not shown in the chart.*

### III. HOUSING AND HOMEOWNERSHIP

In a 2019 Goodwill community needs assessment, 79% of Goodwill’s community partners reported that the “high cost of housing was a significant issue for their communities,” especially since wage stagnation has been continuing over many years.<sup>19</sup>

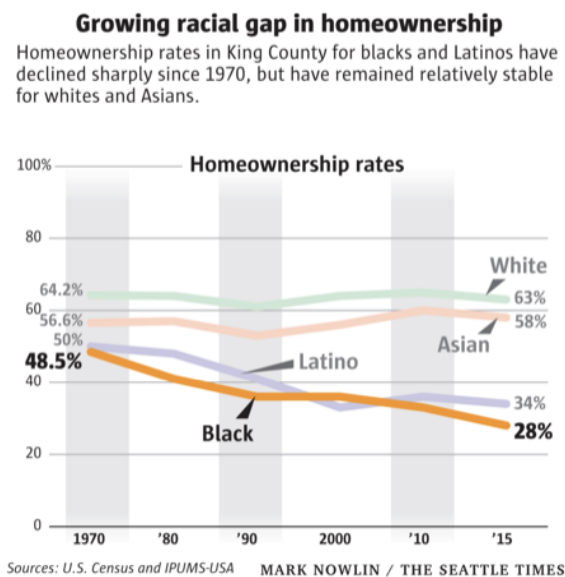


Figure 15. Homeownership rates for Black, Latinxs, white, and Asian populations in King County. Source: Mark Nowlin from *The Seattle Times*

In the 2017 IPUMS data for King County, 62% of White residents are homeowners, 58% of Asian residents are homeowners, 39% of Native American residents are homeowners, 34% of Hispanic/Latinx residents are homeowners, and 28% of Black residents are homeowners.

In the early 1950s, the median income for an average Black household in Seattle was only one percent lower than that for an average white household.<sup>20</sup> Now, it’s close to 50 percent lower. Back in the post-WW2 era, tens of thousands of Black people came to King County for

<sup>19</sup> Boettger, Felicia. 2019. *Seattlegoodwill.Org*.  
<https://seattlegoodwill.org/system/assets/general/Blog/GlitterGala/2019/Community%20Needs%20Assessment%202019.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Balk, Gene. 2017. "The Rise And Dramatic Fall Of King County'S Black Homeowners". *The Seattle Times*.  
<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/the-rise-and-dramatic-fall-of-king-countys-black-homeowners/>.

high-paying jobs, particularly in Boeing. But Boeing has “moved their jobs elsewhere,” according to Ron Sims, former deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and former King County Executive.<sup>9</sup> The modern tech boom Seattle experienced did not come with the same hiring opportunities for Black residents as it did for white and Asian residents. The recent Equal Employment Opportunity reports from Google, Twitter, and Facebook show that only 1.8 percent of their combined total workforce were Black, and the 2017 census data shows that less than 2 percent of King County residents who are tech employees are Black. The racist history of racial-restrictive covenants and redlining in Seattle are crucial factors that have limited Black residents in King County from building up legacy wealth and maintaining it.

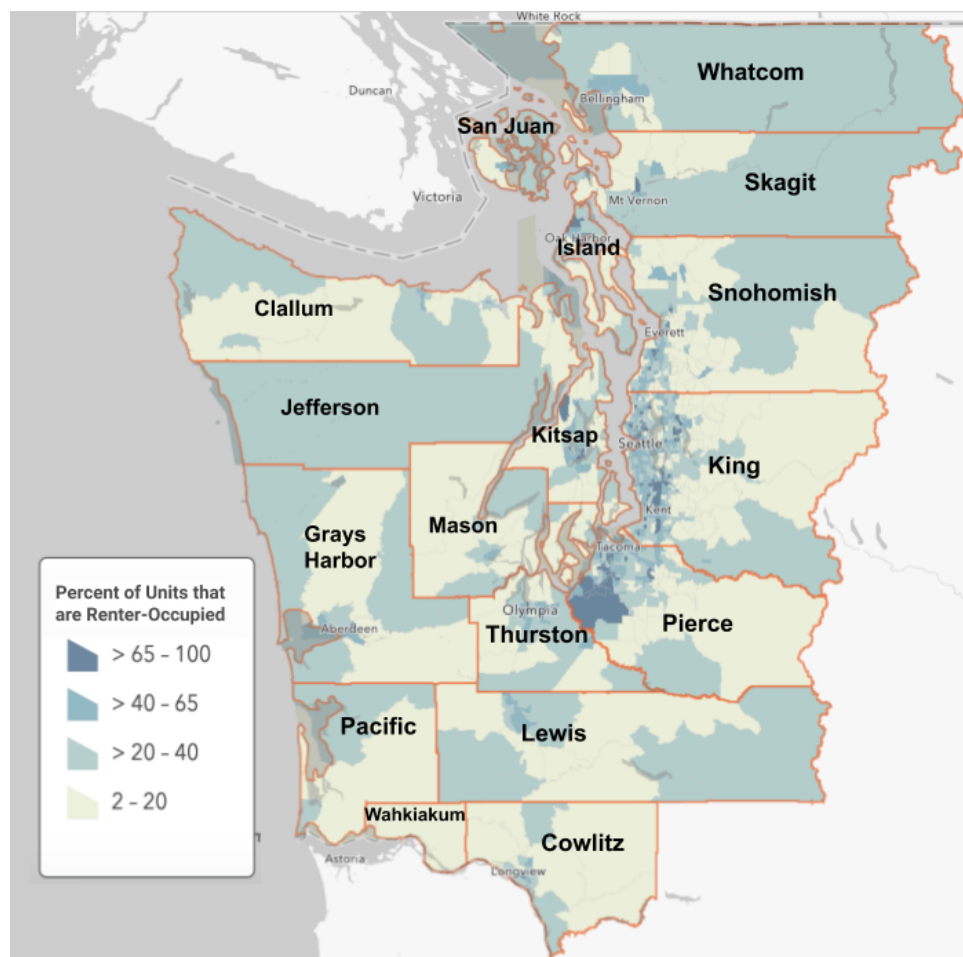


Figure 16. ACS 2014-2018 5 Year Data on Percent of Housing Units that are Renter-Occupied in Western Washington census tracts. Counties are outlined in orange. Renter-occupied housing units are concentrated in metropolitan areas.



Looking at national survey data from 2018, more than half of Latinx households are rent-burdened, meaning they pay 30% or more of their household income on rent.<sup>13</sup> In July 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey found that more than 25% of Latinx renters were not able to make their monthly rent, and close to half had "little to no confidence" in their ability to pay their rent for August. As unemployment rates in Western Washington counties have been going down steadily since April, the financial pressure is expected to have diminished somewhat, but it remains crucial that we take into consideration the renters who are at the cusp of housing loss.

#### ***IV. DISABILITY AND HEALTH***

The USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) finds that food insecurity impacts a third of households that have a working-age adult who is out of the labor force due to disability, and a quarter of households that have a working-age adult with a disability who is in the workforce.<sup>21</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only forty percent of working adults with disabilities are employed, which is at half of the rate of people without disabilities.<sup>22</sup> Not only that, but adults with impairments are less likely to have consistent employment. From 2008 to 2010, nearly fifty percent of working age adults with severe impairments and fourteen percent of individuals with non-severe impairments were unemployed for the full two years, compared to just nine percent of working-age adults with no impairments were unemployed. There also exists a substantial wage gap— the median monthly earnings for adults with disabilities is \$1,961, compared to \$2,724 for those without disabilities; that's a 28 percent difference in earnings.

Factors that make individuals with disabilities more prone to experiencing food insecurity involve general inaccessibility of assistance programs, difficulty securing and maintaining a job, and finding ways to access healthy, affordable food resources. For people with impairments, navigating applications for federal assistance programs can be difficult, as they may require assistance interpreting and responding to questions appropriately and they will be asked to navigate additional questions in regards to their impairment. Moreover, economic and physical accessibility play a large role in determining who and how people can access food and what kind

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<sup>21</sup> Coleman-Jensen, A., & Nord, M. (2013). Food Insecurity Among Households With Working-Age Adults With Disabilities. Economic Research Report, 144. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.

<sup>22</sup> 4 Brault, M. W. (2012). Americans with Disabilities: 2010. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P70-131. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

of transport they can use to get to food. When examined together, these factors make food access challenging for individuals with disabilities, and that's pre-pandemic. A December news article reports that the number of meals served by the Meals on Wheels program, which provides hot meals to home-bound seniors, in Snohomish County alone has shot up 216% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>23</sup>

Distribution of Residents with Disabilities in Western WA (Total Civilian Non-institutionalized Population: 630,935)

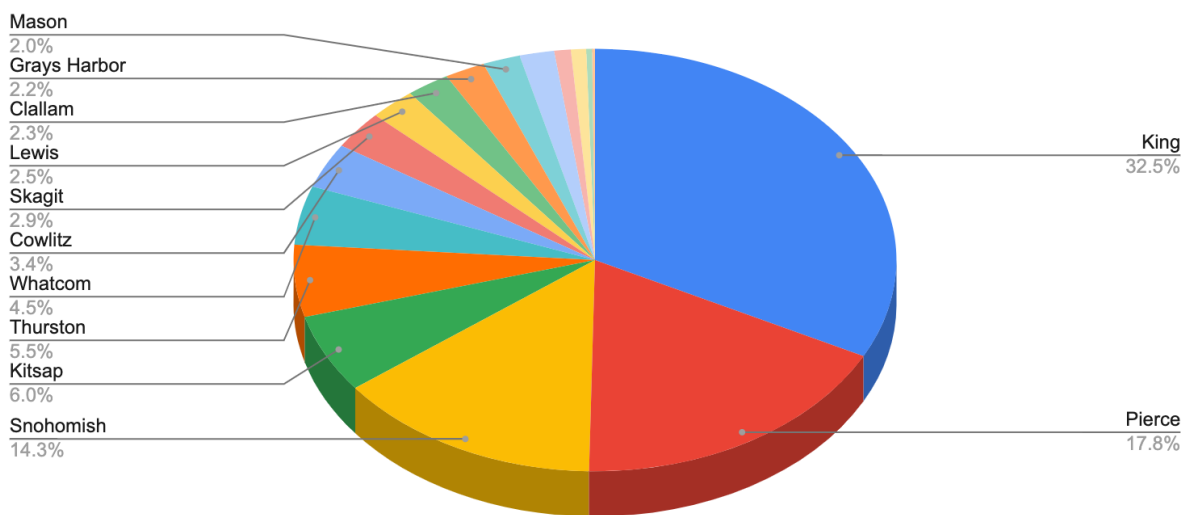


Figure 17. Pie Chart Depicting 2014-2018 ACS estimates of the total number of people with disabilities in the civilian non-institutionalized population (refers to people 16 years of age and older residing in the 50 States and the District of Columbia who are not residents of institution, such as homes for the aged, jail or prison, and who are not on active duty in the Armed Forces) by county in Western Washington. Remaining five counties not labeled here have the smallest figures: Island (1.9%), Pacific (0.9%), Jefferson (0.8%), San Juan (0.3%), and Wahkiakum (0.2%).

<sup>23</sup> Wilkinson, Eric. 2020. "Need For Food Services Surging In Snohomish County As Federal Funding Dwindles". <https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/need-for-food-services-surging-in-snohomish-county-as-federal-funding-dwindles/281-a8cf7ef0-0a97-4286-b85d-a2f20bb933cd>.

Half of the population with disabilities in Western Washington live in King and Pierce County, and 80% is captured by King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, Thurston, and Whatcom counties. Clallam, San Juan, Pierce, Lewis, and Skagit counties have the highest proportion of their population who have disabilities.

County	Percentage of Non-Institutionalized Population with a Disability
Clallam	26.6%
San Juan	23.6%
Pierce	20.9%
Lewis	20.7%
Skagit	20.5%
<b>Western WA Average</b>	<b>17%</b>

Figure 18. Data Source: 2014-2018 5 year ACS. Table Shows estimates of the total number of people with disabilities in the civilian non-institutionalized population

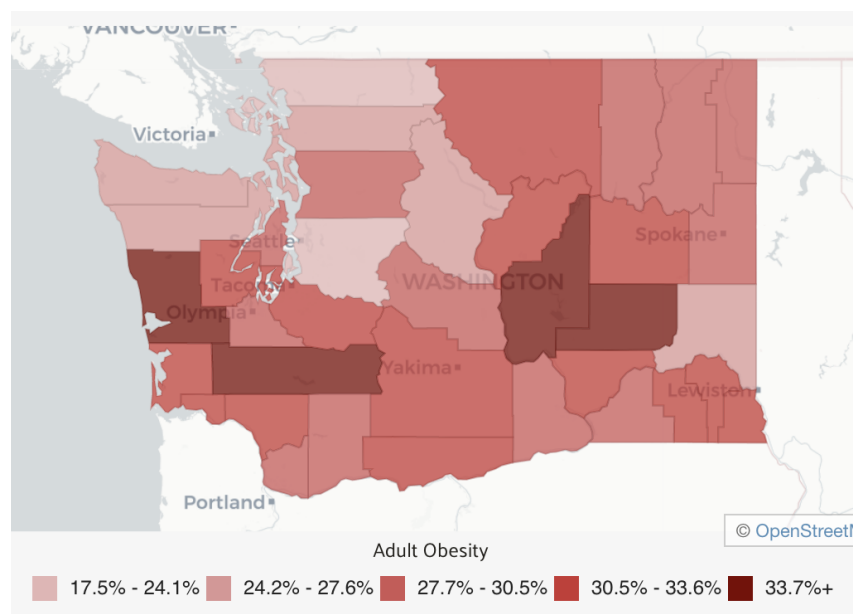


Figure 19. Heat Map depicting data from 2018 County Health Rankings. The counties within Food Lifeline's 17 county Western WA service area with the highest prevalence of adult obesity are Grays Harbor (35%) and Mason (31%).

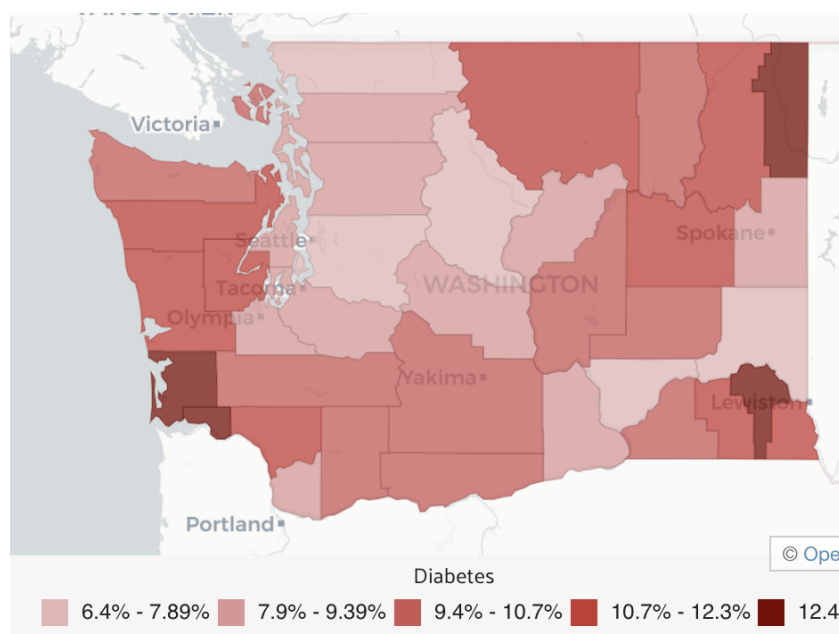


Figure 20. Heat Map depicting data from 2018 County Health Rankings. The counties with the highest prevalence of diabetes are Pacific (12.7%), Grays Harbor (12.1%), and Mason (11.8%).

Dr. Candice Myers, lead author of a recent paper<sup>24</sup> on the strong correlation between obesity and food insecurity, says that obesity and food insecurity “are linked in such a way that public health efforts to address them simultaneously may be necessary.” In the maps shown above, we see that generally, rural counties have higher rates of obesity and diabetes. The East Whatcom Food Landscape Assessment, performed by Aly Robinson, MPHc Community Health Specialist Whatcom County Health Department, found that for rural East Whatcom, the average commute time to a grocery store was 40 minutes, and the only stores in the region are convenience stores.<sup>25</sup> As a result, many residents go to Bellingham to shop for groceries.<sup>25</sup> The paper cites cumbersome county and state regulations and zoning as the main barriers which prevent new grocery stores from opening and currently existing stores from expanding.

<sup>24</sup> Myers, Candice A., Emily F. Mire, and Peter T. Katzmarzyk. "Trends in Adiposity and Food Insecurity Among US Adults." *JAMA network open* 3, no. 8 (2020): e2012767-e2012767.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, Aly. 2019. “East Whatcom Food Landscape Assessment”

## V. COUNTY PRIORITIZATION

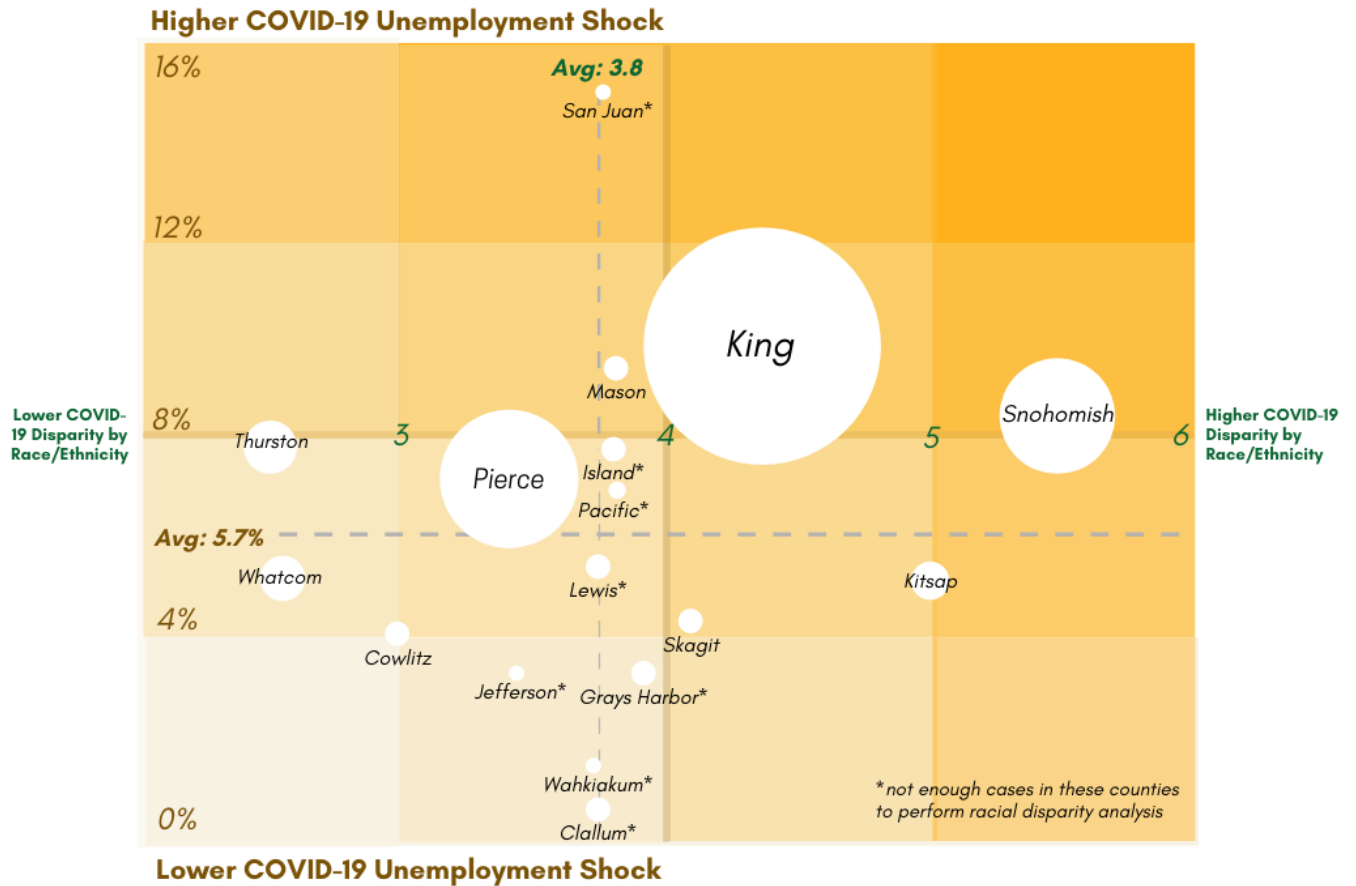


Figure 21. This depicts the cross-sectional visualization of various issues that are prioritized: racial equity through the lens of COVID-19 relative risk from low to high on the horizontal axis, the impact of COVID-19 on unemployment on the vertical axis (the higher the bubble, the bigger the unemployment shock experienced) and the 2017 Missing Meals calculated by Food Lifeline, represented by the relative size of the county bubbles.

*Unemployment shock:* The difference in unemployment rate in September (most recent month we have data for) and the unemployment rate in February, gives us unemployment shock for each respective county. The highest unemployment shock thus far has been experienced in San Juan County. The county's economy is reliant on tourism and second home construction. Victoria Compton, the Executive Director from the San Juan County Economic Development Council, says that San Juan's job losses are "markedly worse than previous downturns including the Great



Recession. We're reminded that our reliance on just a couple of swing-vulnerable industries tends to wallop us in downturns."<sup>26</sup>

*Racial disparity by COVID-19:* The racial disparity in COVID-19 case was determined from averaging relative risk across all people of color groups for which data was available. Relative risk was calculated from the difference in prevalence of positive confirmed cases for people of color per 100,000, as compared to positive cases for white people per 100,000. Relative risk ranged from 2.52 (Thurston County) To 5.5 (Snohomish County).

*Size of the bubbles:* Missing Meals 2017 from Food Lifeline, calculated from summing together the meals that come from Washington's hunger safety net (made up of food banks, meal programs, SNAP, school meals, WIC, and programs for seniors) and assessing how many meals are still missing to meet total hunger needs.

## **Methodology for selecting Priority Counties**

In assessing the counties within Food Lifeline's 17 county Western WA service area, I wanted to use the lens of three priorities:

### **Priority 1. Highest Racial Disparities**

Prioritize counties with high racial disparities, comparing the number of COVID-19 positive cases and federal 2019 poverty rates between residents of color and white residents. A more detailed breakdown by Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and more racial/ethnic groups can be found in the link below.

The counties with highest racial disparities are: *Skagit, Mason, and Snohomish*.

### **Priority 2. Greatest Total Need<sup>27</sup>**

Prioritize counties with the greatest number of people experiencing food insecurity, looking at the number of missing meals across counties, which comes from Food Lifeline's summing up of the meals from Washington's hunger safety net (made up of

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, Mandi. 2020. "Employment In San Juan County Is Down Nearly A Quarter | Islands' Sounder". *Islands' Sounder*. <https://www.islandssounder.com/news/employment-in-san-juan-county-is-down-nearly-a-quarter/>.

<sup>27</sup> I have reservations about using the term, "need" here because of how it suggests we see counties from the perspective of solely deficit. Each county and the communities within have a unique set of skills, resources, and assets. Keeping this in mind helps us see beyond the relationship of providers and recipients. To read about the assets of each county, navigate to the county profile section.

food banks, meal programs, SNAP, school meals, WIC, and programs for seniors) and assessing how many meals are still missing to meet total hunger needs.

The counties with greatest total need are: **King, Pierce, and Snohomish**.

### Priority 3. Greatest Proportional Need<sup>27</sup>

Prioritize counties whose residents were experiencing food insecurity rates potentially most impacted by COVID-19's economic downturn, by examining high unemployment shock and high food stamp enrollment pre-pandemic.

The counties with greatest proportional need are: **Mason, Pacific, Lewis, and King**.

## Western WA Priority Counties Data

County	Priority 2 Factor Missing Meals 2020	Size of Circle based on Population	Priority 1 Factor COVID-19 racial disparity	Priority 1 Factor Racial Disparity	Priority 3 Factor Unemployment %	Priority 3 Factor % of Pop on Food Stamp	WAFOOD Food Insecurity Rate
King County	95,048,460	367	4.14	7.06%	7	16%	30%
Pierce County	32,720,250	126	3.46	7.01%	6	14%	34%
Snohomish County	28,728,117	111	5.5	4.12%	7	11%	28%
Thurston County	11,920,859	46	2.52	5.77%	7	12%	24%
Whatcom County	11,049,083	43	2.56	7.96%	5	14%	n/a
Kitsap County	8,523,050	33	5.02	4.08%	5	11%	25%
Skagit County	4,320,442	17	4.16	12.69%	4	15%	20%
Cowlitz County	5,249,069	20	3.01	9.96%	4	23%	n/a
Grays Harbor	4,736,720	18	n/a	10.32%	3	21%	n/a
Clallam County	4,938,490	19	n/a	11.30%	0	16%	n/a
Lewis County	4,143,660	16	n/a	9.76%	5	20%	43%
Mason County	3,699,774	14	3.81	23.86%	9	17%	n/a
Island County	4,430,624	17	n/a	1.49%	8	9%	n/a
Pacific County	3,093,784	12	n/a	9.66%	7	24%	n/a
Jefferson County	1,881,548	7	n/a	14.53%	3	9%	n/a
San Juan County	620,800	2	n/a	8.16%	15	6%	n/a
Wahkiakum County	259,285	1	n/a	2.11%	2	15%	n/a

Figure 22. Snapshot of the data used to perform the county prioritization analysis. See [link above](#) to access the complete data analysis performed for the county prioritization along with tabs containing comprehensive data covering the other parts of the report.

To perform the county prioritization analysis for Priority 2, which only looks at the number of missing meals, the process in this case was straightforward. The counties with the highest number of missing meals were determined to showcase the greatest amount of need. The number was capped at three because past the third county, Snohomish County, the number of missing meals dropped off two-fold.

For Priorities 1 and 3, which take into consideration two factors each, I used the Jenks optimization method (also called the Jenks natural breaks classification method), a tool used

often in ArcGIS mapping.<sup>28</sup> This is a data clustering method that arranges values into different classes and seeks to minimize within-class variance and maximize between-class differences.<sup>29</sup> With the Jenks optimization method, factors were broken down into classes which were then assigned numerical values, making comparison across counties possible (see the spreadsheet tabs “Priority 1” and “Priority 3” for the breakdown).

For example, the Jenks method found natural breaks in unemployment change (from February to September) and classified the data into four groups: 0-4% increase in unemployment, 4-6% increase in unemployment, 6-9% increase in unemployment, and 9-15% increase in unemployment. Numerical weights were assigned in an increasing linear manner to the classes, akin to rankings, so that the highest increase group is reclassified with the highest weight (“4” in this case) and the lowest increase group is reclassified with the lowest weight (“1” in this case).

The same exercise was performed for the other factor in Priority 3: Greatest Proportional Need, using Jenks optimization method on percentage of food stamp enrollment. Then the newly reclassified weights for food stamp enrollment and the weight for unemployment shock were summed up for each county. The counties with the highest sum of weights (Mason, Pacific, Lewis, and King) are experiencing either some of the highest unemployment shocks, have a particularly large percentage of their population enrolled in food stamps, or more typically, both are happening.

Likewise, for Priority 1, which is focused on finding counties with the highest racial disparities (Skagit, Mason, and Snohomish), the weights are summed up for racial disparity by COVID-19 positive cases and racial disparity by poverty. Counties that have the largest weights are that way because of heavy disparities in both areas, with the exception of Snohomish County which is below average for racial disparity by poverty, but possesses the highest racial disparity by COVID-19 positive cases.

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<sup>28</sup> Ahmad, Rehan. 2021. "Jenks Natural Breaks—Best Range Finder Algorithm.". *Medium*. <https://medium.com/analytics-vidhya/jenks-natural-breaks-best-range-finder-algorithm-8d1907192051>.

<sup>29</sup> M. A. North, "A Method for Implementing a Statistically Significant Number of Data Classes in the Jenks Algorithm," *2009 Sixth International Conference on Fuzzy Systems and Knowledge Discovery*, Tianjin, 2009, pp. 35-38, doi: 10.1109/FSKD.2009.319.

**Quick Facts:**

- A. Snohomish has the highest COVID-19 racial disparity between white residents and residents of color, and is among the top three counties with the highest numbers of missing meals, calculated pre-pandemic in 2017.
- B. Mason County exceeded all other counties in the number of factors that mark it as a priority county— it has higher than average racial disparity by COVID-19 positive cases, higher than average unemployment shock, an above average proportion of its population enrolled in food stamps, and the highest racial disparity by poverty.

WAFOOD Food Insecurity Rates were not used as a metric in determining the priority counties because of the missing information for many counties. However, being one of the few data sources available that provide insight on county-level food insecurity prevalence during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is taken into consideration. WAFOOD reports that Lewis County has the highest food insecurity rate (43%) out of all the counties they had enough survey responses to make quantitative judgements on. Lewis is the smallest county of the counties they reported food insecurity rates for, with a population of nearly 80,000.

Although food insecurity rates are not available for smaller counties like Mason, Pacific, Grays Harbor, and others, these smaller counties have higher percentages of their population enrolled in food stamps (Lewis: 12.5% to Grays Harbor: 17.3%) and higher poverty rates pre-pandemic (Lewis: 17% to Pacific: 24%). We can expect that food insecurity rates are as comparatively high like Lewis County's, if not higher, due to a greater proportion of Pacific and Mason's population working in one of the most COVID-19 impacted sectors: retail trade.

**Data Gaps and Considerations**

1. There are not enough documented COVID-19 cases in most of the smaller counties to perform a breakdown by race/ethnicity for those counties
  - a. The self-report rate of ethnicity is as low as 65-69% in a couple counties (Snohomish and Thurston) so we are not getting the full picture of racial disparity by COVID-19 positive cases
  - b. Increased barriers to testing for communities of color, which artificially deflates the number of cases for these groups<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rubin-Miller, Lily. 2020. "COVID-19 Racial Disparities In Testing, Infection, Hospitalization, And Death: Analysis Of Epic Patient Data - Issue Brief". *KFF*.

2. The unemployment rate doesn't consider people who are no longer actively looking for work, such as those who have dropped out of the workforce to take care of children, who are disproportionately women.
3. Lacking data on immigrants: the COVID-19 and poverty racial disparity analyses only go so far as to tell us the disparities among recorded breakdowns of race and ethnicity but don't illuminate how foreign-born residents are faring in comparison with US-born residents.
4. Data that have breakdowns by racial and ethnic groups typically are not disaggregated enough, particularly for Asian and Latinx groups. Southeast Asian populations often get lumped together with East Asian populations, leading to underrepresentation and deepening of inequities, with not enough resources going to address the needs of the Southeast Asian communities.<sup>31</sup> This applies to Latinx too— the cultural diversity is huge as the term represents people coming from 25 countries in the Caribbean, Central America and South America. Yet the data available often aggregates them into a catch-all "Latinx" which renders them falsely as a monolithic group.<sup>32</sup> Data sets that aggregate Hispanic and Asian, as is the case with the data used in this analysis (American Community Survey data and COVID-19 positive cases by county) should be considered to be missing part of the picture.
5. The first round of the WAFOOD survey was provided in only English and Spanish, thereby excluding respondents whose first language is another language. The data used from the WAFOOD survey came from the first round. The second round of the survey is currently collecting responses, but only in English. Both rounds fall short of accounting for historically underserved immigrant populations.

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<https://www.kff.org/report-section/covid-19-racial-disparities-in-testing-infection-hospitalization-and-death-analysis-of-epic-patient-data-issue-brief/>.

<sup>31</sup> Edlagan, Christian. 2021. "How Data Disaggregation Matters For Asian Americans And Pacific Islanders - Equitable Growth". *Equitable Growth*.  
<https://equitablegrowth.org/how-data-disaggregation-matters-for-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders/>.

<sup>32</sup> Schoenherr, Neil. 2021. "Latinos Need A Disaggregated Approach To Health Care | The Source | Washington University In St. Louis". *The Source*.  
<https://source.wustl.edu/2018/08/latinos-need-a-disaggregated-approach-to-health-care/>.

## **VII. PROFILES OF PRIORITY COUNTIES**

### **KING COUNTY**

King County has a population of around two and a quarter million people and is home to people of the Duwamish, Suquamish, Nisqually, Snoqualmie, and Muckleshoot (Ilalkoamish, Stuckamish, and Skopamish) Tribes. The Latinx population makes up 10% of the county population. The next three largest people of color groups are Asian (19.7%), Black (7.0%) and two or more races (5.2%). The major languages spoken there, according to the latest American Community Survey (2019) data, are Spanish (6.6%), Chinese (5.0%), Russian (1.9%), and Tagalog (1.3%). Around four percent of residents speak other Asian and Pacific Island languages. The majority of the population is majority white with English as their first language.

According to a Valley Medical Center 2017 Community Health Needs Assessment, King County residents experience high economic inequality.<sup>19</sup> This manifests as higher school drop out rates, worse disciplinary actions, and lower college matriculation for students of color; barriers to accessing health and human services for residents of color, undocumented immigrants, and members of tribal communities; city services concentrated in gentrified neighborhoods and overrepresentation of people of color in the prison population.

The Central District used to be known as Seattle's Black neighborhood. At one point, it was eighty percent African-American. It came to be that way because of racial covenants that prevented Black people from living in many other Seattle neighborhoods. Today, the Central District is known for its up-zoned condos and upscale restaurants which have replaced long standing homes and legacy small businesses.

Many low-income people, immigrants, and people of color have been displaced as information technology jobs have raised housing costs in Seattle. They have moved out to suburbs with lower housing costs in mainly South King County in areas like Renton, Kent, Federal Way, and Tukwila.<sup>33</sup> Seen in the figure below, the WAFOOD food insecurity map is shown with an overlay of a blue screen containing census tracts with more than half of the population identifying as

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<sup>33</sup> Person, Daniel. 2016. "Searching For A New Central District In Suburban King County | Seattle Weekly". *Seattle Weekly*. <https://www.seattleweekly.com/news/searching-for-a-new-central-district-in-suburban-king-county/>.

people of color. From that, we see that many of the areas with 35.1% to 50% food insecurity prevalence in mid-2020 are also areas with majority residents of color.

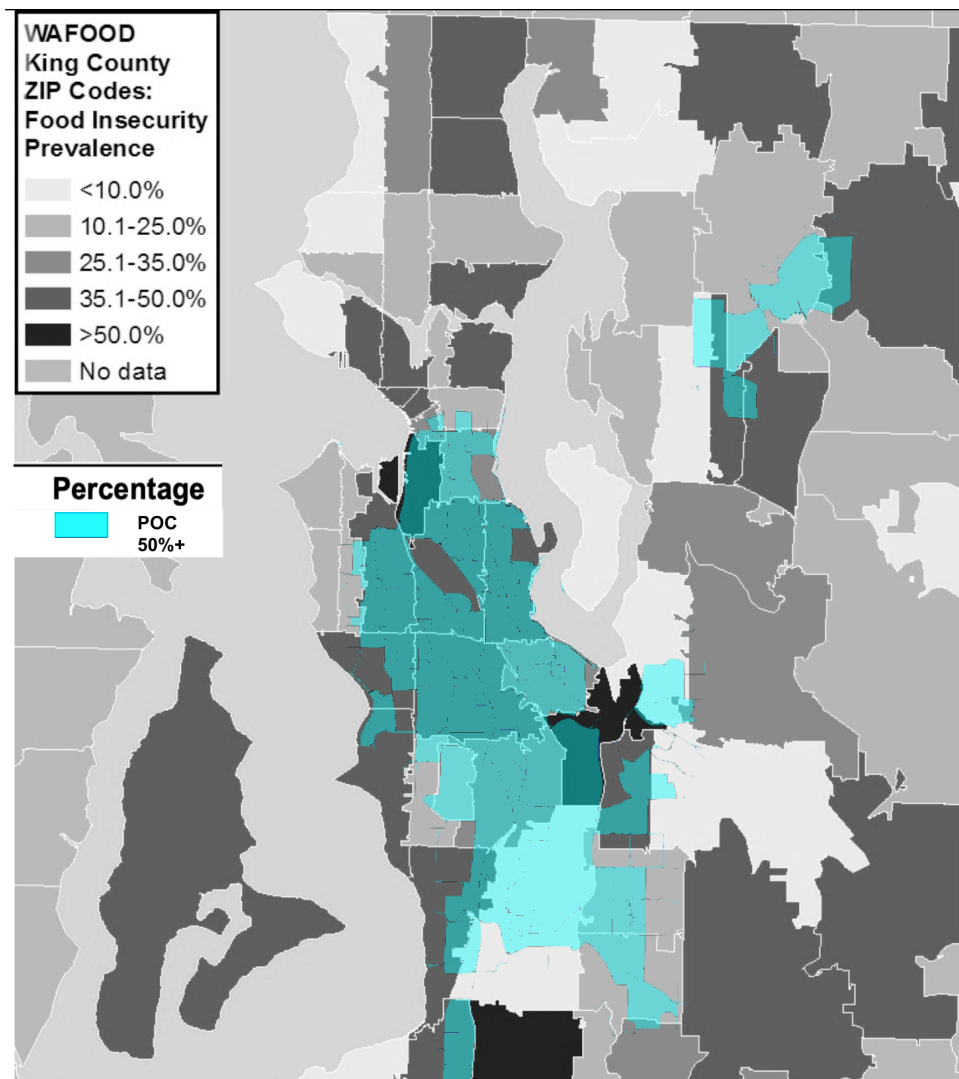


Figure 23. WAFOOD as baselayer, ACS 2010 Percent People of Color by Census Tract

There are implications for food insecurity when displacement occurs. The farther away people move from urban areas, the farther away grocery stores typically are located from people's residences.<sup>34</sup> Generally, communities closer to the I-5 corridor tend to be more well-resourced and have better access to supermarkets and grocery stores. If we look at suburban areas that have been recipients of the effects of displacement in Seattle, namely Kent, Renton, Federal

<sup>34</sup> Food Empowerment Project. "Food Deserts". <https://foodispower.org/access-health/food-deserts/>.



Way, and Tukwila, we see from 2011-2014 ACS data that all of these cities contain low-income census tracts in which a significant number of residents live more than a half mile from the nearest supermarket, and many of the above-mentioned cities also contain tracts with 100 or more housing units that don't have a vehicle (see Figure 16 below).

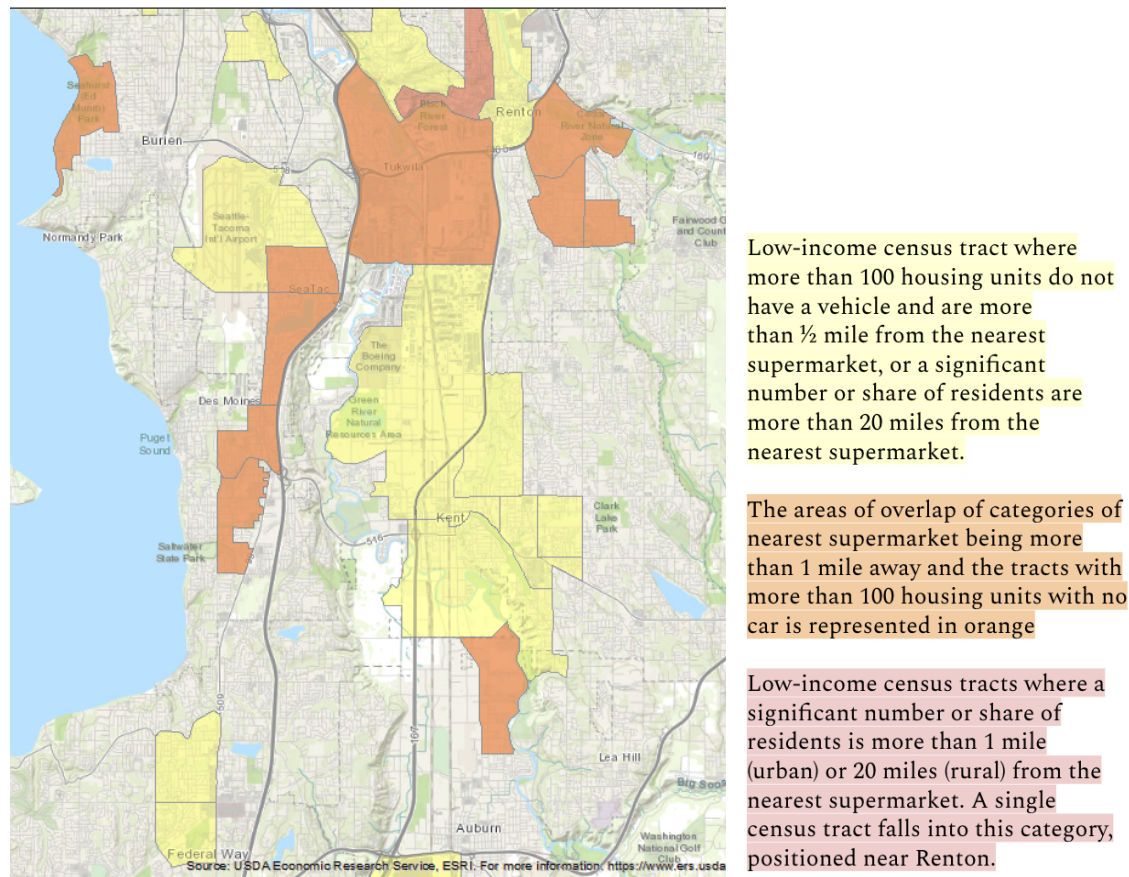


Figure 24 Map displays food access indicators for low-income and other census tracts using different measures of supermarket accessibility. Source: USDA Food Access Research Atlas

Several studies have linked together food deserts with poorer dietary intake, as well as poorer health outcomes related to diet, such as type 2 diabetes and obesity.<sup>35</sup> One caveat to consider when it comes to public health is a 2012 study on Seattle supermarkets, which found that

<sup>35</sup> . Moore LV, Diez Roux AV, Nettleton JA, Jacobs DR. Associations of the Local Food Environment with Diet Quality—A Comparison of Assessments based on Surveys and Geographic Information Systems: The MultiEthnic Study of Atherosclerosis. American journal of epidemiology. 2008;167:917–924.



proximity to supermarkets had no impact on obesity rates.<sup>36</sup> This was due in part to the fact that this study was conducted in King County, where most people drive to get their groceries and driving to a grocery store further away than the closest one available is typical. The study did find that the *type* of supermarket was associated with obesity rates— people who shopped at low-price supermarkets had obesity rates (18%) that were triple that of patrons of high-price supermarkets. While it's still valuable to assess physical access to supermarkets, improving people's economic access to healthy foods can be an even more important consideration in addressing obesity.

## **SNOHOMISH COUNTY**

Snohomish County has the third greatest population size, following King and Pierce, with a population of 789,400. Snohomish County has three federally-recognized Indian Tribes: the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe, the Stillaguamish Tribe, and the Tulalip Tribes.

Snohomish's immigrant population increased at more than twice the rate of that of the US-born population.<sup>19</sup> The Latinx and Asian populations each make up ten percent of the county population.<sup>19</sup> Nineteen percent of residents speak a language other than English at home; the major languages spoken in Snohomish are Spanish (6.7%), Korean (1.4%), Chinese (1.9%), Tagalog (2.0%), and Russian (2.0%).

The 2017 top employers were Boeing, Providence Medical Center, Edmonds School District, the Tulalip Tribes, Washington State Government, Naval Station Everett, the Everett Clinic, Snohomish County Government, the Everett School District, and Premera Blue Cross.<sup>19</sup> According to the 2015 Community Needs Assessment conducted by Snohomish County Human Services, having access to affordable medical care and dental care were the most highly ranked needs by Snohomish residents experiencing poverty.<sup>19</sup> A quarter of survey respondents reported a lack of regular medical care, and 75% of those people said it was because it is too expensive. Two-thirds of people interviewed do not have dental insurance.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Drewnowski, Adam, Anju Aggarwal, Philip M. Hurvitz, Pablo Monsivais, and Anne V. Moudon. "Obesity and supermarket access: proximity or price?." *American journal of public health* 102, no. 8 (2012): e74-e80.

Food security and housing security are intimately linked. Sixty-four percent of households in Snohomish County spend more than 50% of their income on housing, which characterizes them as “severely cost-burdened” (Housing Snohomish County Project). The US Department of Housing and Urban Development finds that cost-burdened families have “difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.”

In terms of food resources and assets, Snohomish County has 29 food banks and 29 hot meal programs, and 23 of the combined 58 food banks and/or meal programs are Food Lifeline member agencies. There are ten senior meal programs, including two Meals On Wheels programs.<sup>37</sup> As for emergency basis food, financial assistance for food, and benefit assistance, there are eight organizations that offer those services.<sup>35</sup>

Other local assets include the two housing authorities, the Everett Housing Authority and the Housing Authority of Snohomish County, which provide subsidized housing units to low-income residents; 27 organizations that offer rental and utility assistance; 22 organizations that provide housing assistance, transitional housing, clean and sober housing, housing for those with HIV/AIDS, and/or emergency shelter; and nine organizations for seniors and individuals with disabilities who are looking for affordable housing and housing support.<sup>35</sup> As for health services, there are 23 hospitals/clinics/medical centers in Snohomish County that provide general health care, and six of the twenty-three have services for low-income or uninsured residents.<sup>37</sup> There are also 33 clinics and/or organizations that have inpatient and/or outpatient services for individuals with chemical dependencies, and 30 thirty organizations with services for the elderly or residents with disabilities.<sup>35</sup>

The organizations in Snohomish County that offer the most employment-related services are Cascadia College, Edmonds and Everett Community Colleges, Seattle Goodwill Industries, and WorkSource Snohomish County.<sup>37</sup> Ten organizations provide job training and placement for people with disabilities. The Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest helps refugees get employment assistance and vocational training.<sup>35</sup> For their tribal members, Stillaguamish Tribe has an employment assistance program and an apprenticeship program.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Shortening The Line - Collaborating For Clients". 2017. Food Lifeline.

## PIERCE COUNTY

Pierce County has the second largest population in Washington, with 11.9 percent of the state's population. Pierce County has a population of around 904,980 people and is home to the Nisqually, Puyallup, Squaxin, Steilacoom and Muckleshoot people. The largest people of color groups are the Latinx population (11.4% of the county population), Black (7.7%), Asian (7.1%), and two or more races (7.4%).<sup>19</sup>

Twelve percent of residents speak a language other than English at home; the major languages spoken in Pierce County are Spanish (7%) and Asian/Islander languages (4%).<sup>19</sup> Six percent of Pierce County residents speak English with limited proficiency, which is lower than the Washington state average of 7.8%. Nearly sixty-eight percent of Vietnamese speakers and 64.1% of Arabic speakers speak English less than well.<sup>19</sup>

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health department published a 2019 Community Health assessment that reported findings from four workshops with rural and urban community partners, their county Board of Health, and their county Health Department staff, which shares how factors and trends in transportation, food, jobs, and housing are affecting Pierce County residents' way of life.<sup>38</sup>

Assets that were raised on the food side include Pierce's food bank network and a trend of community gardens being formed, which helps "provide local fresh produce and spaces for community gathering". In terms of jobs, "innovative programs and partnerships" were raised as a plus, such as the collaboration with Tacoma Public Schools and Multicare, as well as the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's partnership with the University of Washington.<sup>15</sup> Community colleges were also brought up, as they offer trade skills and pathways to four year colleges.<sup>15</sup> Housing pluses included communities becoming more walkable.<sup>15</sup>

Some trends brought up that negatively impact the health and livelihoods of residents include the cost of commuting, an aging workforce, lack of family-wage jobs, disparities of access to nutritious food across neighborhoods, lack of safe sidewalks and crosswalks in some areas, lack of rental options and high cost of renting.<sup>14</sup> Tacoma and Pierce County are also considered

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<sup>38</sup> "Community Health Assessment-- Pierce County". 2019. *Tpchd.Org*.  
<https://www.tpchd.org/home/showpublisheddocument?id=5380>.

bedroom communities as people live in these areas and commute into King County. The displacement caused by the housing squeeze in King County is raising housing costs in Pierce County as well.

## **SKAGIT COUNTY**

Even though Skagit County has a smaller population, it has a larger Latinx population than those in Whatcom or in Kitsap counties. Nearly nineteen percent of its residents are Hispanic/Latinx. Skagit County is the county with the highest percentage of foreign-born people who are not naturalized, as well as the highest percentage (55.8%) of immigrants who report speaking English “less than very well.” The major languages spoken there, according to the 2015 American Community Survey estimates, are Spanish (11.8%), Russian (0.5%), and Tagalog (0.5%). 42% percent of Spanish speakers reported speaking English “less than very well.” The translations services most frequently requested according to the Skagit County Superior Court are for Spanish, Mixteco, Russian, Ukranian, Marshallese, and Tagalog.

Top employers from 2017 data are Skagit Regional Health, Mount Vernon School District, Skagit County Government, Janicki Industries, the Sedro Woolley School District, and Island Hospital, and the Swinomish Casino. Skagit Horticulture is also a major employer, but the agricultural schedule is seasonal so the majority of their nearly 1,000 employees are employed seasonally.

A gap analysis by Community Action of Skagit County found that the important services that were hardest to reach are housing, affordable dental care, and living wage jobs. Forty-eight percent of survey respondents said they or a household member had a “hard time getting or keeping a job in the last year.”

As for food assets in Skagit County, there are fourteen food banks, ten of which are Food Lifeline member agencies.<sup>34</sup> There are six hot meal programs, three specifically for seniors, and three organizations that offer Meals on Wheels.<sup>34</sup> The four tribal organizations offer food vouchers and the the Small Tribes Organization of Western Washington carries out the USDA Commodity Food Program for all the residents living within the Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, and Upper Skagit tribal boundaries (tribal or non-tribal).<sup>34</sup>

Job resources include the Skagit Valley College which is a main provider of employment services— they help people with achieving academic degrees, vocational degrees/certificates, and life transitions.<sup>21</sup> For residents with disabilities, Chinook Enterprises, Skagit County Community Services, and Washington Vocational Services for Skagit, Whatcom, Island and San Juan Counties offer comprehensive job training and placement assistance.<sup>34</sup> For migrant seasonal farmworkers, there is one organization that offers employment training.<sup>34</sup>

To aid with housing, two housing authorities: the Anacortes Housing Authority and the Skagit County Housing Authority, provide subsidized housing units to low-income residents. In Skagit County there are five crisis/emergency shelters, two of which exclusively serve women and children; one serves residents who are survivors of domestic or sexual abuse and there are two that serve teens.<sup>32</sup>

## **PACIFIC COUNTY**

Pacific County has a Hispanic population that makes up 10% of the population, and American Indian and Alaska Native demographic makes up 2.8% of the county's population. The percentage of foreign-born population is smaller than the state average, at 7%. The largest industries in Pacific County are Health Care & Social Assistance which employs around 1,200 people, Manufacturing, which employs around 900 people, and retail trade which employs around 700 people.

In 2018, twenty two percent of the housing units in Pacific County were occupied by renters.<sup>39</sup> The Lower Columbia region has experienced increased home sales which has hiked up prices and lowered availability of housing. Rising rents have become a problem for the county's low income families.<sup>37</sup>

From 2013 to 2018, the jobless rate has gone up nearly eight percent. However, this statistic can be misleading, according to Katie Lindstrom, Pacific County's human services programs manager.<sup>40</sup> She says that "it may be that many local people who were at or below poverty before

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<sup>39</sup> "Pacific County, WA | Data USA". 2020. *Datausa.io*.  
<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/pacific-county-wa#covid>.

<sup>40</sup> Winters, Matt. 2016.  
[https://www.chinookobserver.com/coastal-struggles-persist-despite-rosier-poverty-statistics/article\\_781e29ef-9bbf-5881-940e-6dd1ec313712.html](https://www.chinookobserver.com/coastal-struggles-persist-despite-rosier-poverty-statistics/article_781e29ef-9bbf-5881-940e-6dd1ec313712.html).

are now just barely above the poverty line. On paper they are out of poverty, but it's just barely above. So income has grown, but a few hundred dollars a month doesn't feel like much. Especially considering the increase in other necessities at the same time — housing and healthcare in particular.”<sup>37</sup> Starting in 2017, the median property value has been growing by around \$6,000 each year, while median earnings have lagged behind, growing \$2,000 per year in comparison, according to 2017, 2018, and 2019 data from American Community Survey.

Peninsula Poverty Relief is the collaboration among community members from social service agencies, small business owners, non-profits, school leadership, all seeking to provide poverty relief. They draw attention to the Long Beach peninsula in Pacific County which experiences higher-than-state levels of poverty. On their website it states that “one in every four residents they meet is living in poverty. One in every four students in our schools is homeless.”<sup>41</sup> According to the 2014-2018 American Community Survey, thirty-five percent of the population in Long Beach (a major town in the peninsula) lives below the poverty line.

In terms of food assets in Pacific County, there are five food banks, two of which are Food Lifeline member agencies.<sup>34</sup> There's one hot meal program, facilitated by the Coastal Community Action Program, and they also provide Meals on Wheels for seniors.<sup>35</sup> There are two tribal organizations (Chinook Indian Nation and Small Tribes Organization of Western Washington) which offer food vouchers and the the Small Tribes Organization of Western Washington carries out the USDA Commodity Food Program for all the residents living within the Shoalwater Bay tribal boundaries (tribal or non-tribal).<sup>37</sup> Two organizations (Ocean Park Food Bank and Willapa Harbor Ministerial Association) provide clothing and other supplies as well as food.<sup>35</sup>

As for housing, there are three organizations that offer rental and utility assistance: St. Vincent de Paul, Willapa Harbor Ministerial Association, and Coast Community Action Program (which services both Pacific and Grays Harbor counties).<sup>37</sup> There are two shelters for the homeless hosted by the Union Gospel Mission of Grays Harbor, and one emergency shelter that offers temporary housing for survivors of domestic violence and their children.<sup>37</sup> The Rebuilding Together Pacific County does home repairs and revitalization for low-income homeowners.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Poverty On Our Peninsula | Peninsula Poverty Response". 2020. *Peninsulapovertyresponse.Org*. <https://peninsulapovertyresponse.org/poverty-on-our-peninsula/>.

According to the Shortening the Line report from Food Lifeline that arose from collaborating with clients to understand the landscape of services and assets counties come pre-equipped with, the organization that provides the most services on employment and income in Pacific County is the Goodwill of the Olympics and Rainier Region.<sup>37</sup> They provide job search assistance as well as vocational and career training. There also is the Coast Community Action Program in Grays Harbor that has a 6 month on-the-job training program, available to residents in Pacific County. Worksource's Career Development center offers job seekers assistance too, and the county's Public Health and Human Services Department has vocational services to people with developmental disabilities.<sup>37</sup>

## **MASON COUNTY**

Mason County has a Hispanic population that makes up 11% of the population, and American Indian and Alaska Native demographic makes up 5% of the county's population. Mason County has two federally-recognized Indian Tribes: the Squaxin Island Tribe and Skokomish Tribe. The percentage of foreign-born population is smaller than the state average, at 6%. The largest industries in Mason County are Office & Administrative Support Occupations (2,834 people), Sales & Related Occupations (2,285 people), and Management Occupations (2,283 people). Compared to other counties, Mason County has a higher than expected number of residents working in the Agricultural, Fishing, and Forestry sector.<sup>42</sup> Taylor Shellfish is the fifth largest employer in the county. The largest employer is the Squaxin Island Tribe, as the tribe owns Little Creek Casino Hotel and employs around 780 people.<sup>43</sup> Casinos are the hardest hit in the service industry in the midst of the pandemic, with an estimated 90% loss in spending.<sup>44</sup> The second largest employer, Mason General Hospital, employs 700 people.<sup>40</sup>

Mason's racial disparity is the highest amongst all the Western Washington counties. The difference between poverty rate for residents of color and poverty rate for white residents is 32

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<sup>42</sup> "Mason County, WA | Data USA". 2020. *Datausa.io*.  
<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/mason-county-wa#economy>.

<sup>43</sup> Allan, Dedrick. 2020. "Top Employers In Mason County". *Masonwebtv.Com*.  
<http://masonwebtv.com/archives/34785>.

<sup>44</sup> "Service Industries Hardest Hit By COVID-19 Outbreak". 2020. *Center On Budget And Policy Priorities*.  
<https://www.cbpp.org/service-industries-hardest-hit-by-covid-19-outbreak>.

percent. Half of the 5,909 Latinx residents in Mason County lived below the poverty line in 2018. Upon speaking with Rabecca Marquez, the Administrative Director at the Saints' Pantry Food Bank which is the county seat of Mason County, I learned from her that fifty percent of their clientele are Hispanic and many of them were employed by the salal, floral industry and shellfish industry. Those employers had shut down at the start of the pandemic because a majority of their products depend upon international markets in Europe and Asian countries. As a result, there was a big job loss experienced by the Hispanic population. Marquez reports that “around the start of the pandemic our clientele base increased by 30%.”

The Mason County Community Health Assessment published in 2018 found that a third of residents dealt with a housing cost burden greater than thirty percent of their income.<sup>45</sup> And of those residents, 35% of them are renters. Compared to the state of Washington, Mason County has a lower housing cost burden, but when compared to the neighboring Grays Harbor County, the housing cost burden is higher.

Food resources in Mason county include eight food banks, four of which are Food Lifeline member agencies.<sup>37</sup> Five organizations provide hot meal programs, and two organizations offer Meals on Wheels for the senior population.<sup>37</sup> The Squaxin Island Tribal Community have their own food bank, and the Skokomish Indian Tribe has a hot meal and senior service program for their tribal community.<sup>37</sup> There is also WIC assistance provided by South Puget Sound Intertribal Agency.<sup>37</sup>

Health care resources are abundant and varied in Mason County. There are five hospitals, clinics, and medical centers, including Planned Parenthood which provide general health care.<sup>37</sup> Mental health services are provided by four organizations, one of which, Behavioral Health Resources, has a low-income patient service to aid with navigating the social security system.<sup>37</sup> There are seven organizations and clinics that specialize in chemical dependencies services.<sup>37</sup> Eight organizations that offer services to seniors and/or residents who have disabilities, and these services include in-home care, transportation assistance, medical equipment banks, case management, and adult daycare.<sup>37</sup> There are three organizations in Mason County that provide nutrition education, diabetes education, and TB support.<sup>37</sup> A couple of organizations offer dental services— one of them, North Mason Resource, offers free teeth cleanings four times a

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<sup>45</sup> 2018. *Co.Mason.Wa.Us*. “Mason County Community Health Assessment”  
<https://www.co.mason.wa.us/forms/Health/CHA-2018.pdf>.



month.<sup>37</sup> Financial assistance is offered from four organizations to low-income individuals needing medical treatment.<sup>37</sup>

As for housing, there is one organization, the Community Action Program, that provides housing services like rental, utility, and home weatherization and heating assistance, for Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties.<sup>37</sup> There is just one organization (Crossroads Housing) that provides low-income individuals with affordable apartment options.<sup>37</sup> Two organizations provide utility and heating assistance.<sup>37</sup> There is one family shelter and two shelters for emergency cold weather situations.<sup>37</sup> As for tribal members, there are two organizations who provide housing assistance.<sup>37</sup> The South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency aids with energy assistance. The Skokomish Indian Tribe has a shelter for survivors of domestic violence. To help with employment, there are quite a few organizations, including Olympic College, that provide employment and vocational training.<sup>37</sup> The United Way of Mason County gets low-income individuals set up with bank accounts and provides seniors and low income individuals with free tax assistance.<sup>37</sup> Two organizations exist that help veterans with applying for benefits and filing claims. The Skokomish and Squaxin Indian Tribes provide financial assistance for higher education along with GED classes.<sup>37</sup>

## **LEWIS COUNTY**

Lewis County has a population of 80,707. It is home to people from the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and the Chehalis Confederated Tribes. The Hispanic/Latinx population makes up 10.5% of the population, the American Indian and Alaska Native population makes up 2.0%, and the group of two races or more makes up 3.5% , making these three groups the largest populations of color in Lewis County.

Lewis County has a Food Bank Coalition that distributes food to 8 local food banks.<sup>37</sup> The Lewis County Food Bank Coalition is actually a service of United Way of Lewis County, which aims to lift 30% of families out of poverty by 2030, primarily through building early literacy, youth success and financial stability.<sup>46</sup> There are 10 total food banks in Lewis County, all of which are member agencies.<sup>37</sup> There is a fresh market hosted by Hub City Mission where clients can get

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<sup>46</sup> "Lewis County Food Bank Coalition | United Way Of Lewis County". 2021. Lewiscountyuw.Galaxydigital.Com. [https://lewiscountyuw.galaxydigital.com/agency/detail/?agency\\_id=42963](https://lewiscountyuw.galaxydigital.com/agency/detail/?agency_id=42963).

fresh produce and meat. Six organizations offer hot meal programs, and the Twin Cities Senior Center specifically does senior center lunches.<sup>37</sup> The Cowlitz tribe receives food vouchers and food commodities from the Small Tribes Organization of Western Washington.<sup>37</sup>

As for health care resources, there are four hospitals, clinics, and medical centers that offer general health care services.<sup>37</sup> There are two organizations in Lewis County that offer education on diabetes and communicable disease support.<sup>37</sup> There are four clinics and organizations that provide mental health services, eight clinics and organizations with services for people with chemical dependencies and/or addictions.<sup>37</sup> For victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, one resource is the HOPE Alliance (formerly known as the Human Response network), which provides telephone crisis intervention, legal help, emergency shelter, safety planning, and support groups.

As for housing assets, the Community Action Program of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston counties offer residents rental, utility, home weatherization and heating assistance. In Lewis County there are seven subsidized housing apartment complexes, and four are exclusively for seniors.<sup>37</sup> Although located in Cowlitz County, the Longview Housing Authority provides Section 8 vouchers and rent assistance to Lewis County residents.<sup>37</sup> There exist two shelters, one of them for survivors of domestic violence and their children.<sup>37</sup> There is a Severe Weather Shelter hosted by the Hub City Mission, which runs on donations. In 2016, more than 200 individuals were served with 2,760 bed nights.<sup>47</sup> Its goal is to get people off of the streets and save lives from extreme cold. Housing Resources of Lewis County perform homeless prevention and outreach, as well as offer transitional and permanent housing.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of employment assistance, there are nine organizations that provide vocational training, one of which is Centralia College.<sup>37</sup> Centralia College is geared towards providing degrees and certificates that aid with entering the job market, and offers community members the opportunity to prepare for new careers, upgrade work skills, and/or further individual interests. There are three organizations in Lewis County that assist in financial matters, among them are Love INC and the Salvation Army, which offers a Paths out of Poverty class series.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Tomta, Justyna. 2021. "Cold Weather Shelter To Move To SWW Fairgrounds". [http://www.chronline.com/news/cold-weather-shelter-to-move-to-sww-fairgrounds/article\\_d133ea80-ba7d-11e7-b807-bb0739521624.html](http://www.chronline.com/news/cold-weather-shelter-to-move-to-sww-fairgrounds/article_d133ea80-ba7d-11e7-b807-bb0739521624.html).

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastatingly deepened long-standing racial and gender inequities. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Latinx, and Black residents in Food Lifeline's Western Washington service area counties are impacted by COVID-19 at the highest disproportionate rates. Latina workers dropped out of the workforce at alarming high numbers in the nation — nearly three times the rate of white women— many to take care of children. People with disabilities are some of the most vulnerable to unemployment, food insecurity, and medical discrimination.

Communities of color and marginalized groups have experienced trauma due to institutional racism and injustices. These traumas have persisted over many generations. Community, gender-based, and racial trauma compound the grief of losing loved ones, homes, jobs, and human connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local community organizer Roxana Pardo Garcia, founded Feeding El Pueblo to feed Latinx families in Burien during the pandemic. She says that the pandemic has had “a mental health impact, whether we acknowledge it collectively or not ... on the Latinx community. The memories that we're creating because of the pandemic are going to forever be tied to quarantine and isolation and being away from our families.”<sup>48</sup>

The severity of this crisis and the broken nature of our systems call us into urgent action. To end hunger, we must center communities of color, residents with disabilities, and the most vulnerable groups. We must look to their knowledge and their expertise, recognizing that they wield the answers. As a food bank, one of the things Food Lifeline can continue to do is advocate for policies to secure housing rights, fair wages, health care, and the social safety net. Food Lifeline can also continue to build relationships across sectors, such as with healthcare actors, to strengthen community resilience and reduce health disparities. Research tells us that communities with strong multi-sector networks have experienced fewer COVID-related deaths and lower infection rates.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Flores, Agueda. 2021. "A Culturally Inclusive Food Bank Is 'Feeding El Pueblo'". *Crosscut.Com*. <https://crosscut.com/culture/2020/08/burien-food-bank-keeps-latinx-community-fed-traditional-ingredients>.

<sup>49</sup> Lyttle, Chris. 2021. "Connecting Systems To Build Health Equity During COVID-19". *RWJF*. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/blog/2020/07/connecting-systems-to-build-health-equity-during-covid-19.html>.

The pandemic has glaringly shown us that transformative structural changes are needed. It is more critical than ever before that Food Lifeline and all food banks seek out and end any complicity they have in perpetuating systemic racism and injustices. At every turn, we must honor the power and agency of the communities we seek to serve.