

A Washington Without Poverty and Injustice

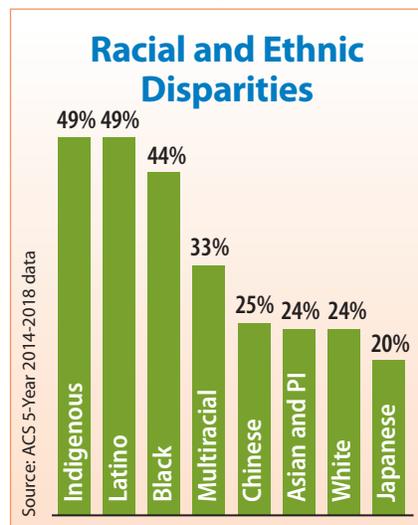
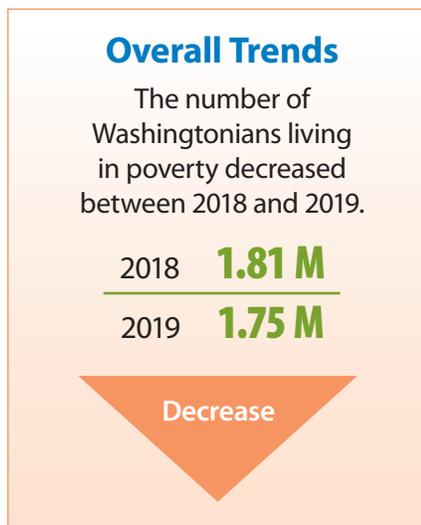
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Economic Services Administration

A Washington Without Poverty and Injustice

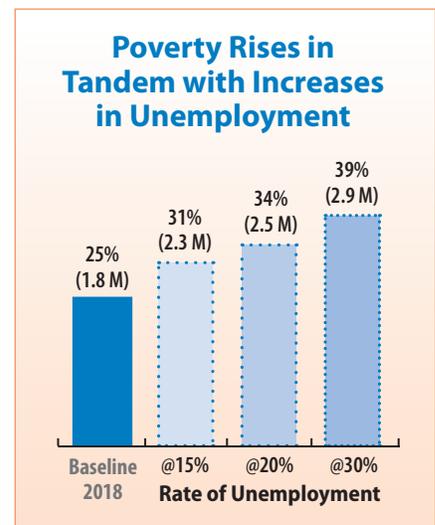
ESA transforms lives by connecting children, adults and families to the resources and opportunities that help them reach their full potential in life. A strong foundation of trusting relationships, a safe and stable home, abundant and nutritious food, with the building blocks of opportunity we all need to succeed – a high-quality education from cradle to career, a job that pays a living wage and healthy communities to support how we live, love, work and play. ESA works with state and local partners to provide essential services like cash, food, medical and housing assistance as well as education, employment and job training opportunities to two million Washingtonians annually.

The sheer number of Washingtonians served by ESA each year is indicative of deeper, systemic challenges – too many Washingtonians are living on a faulty foundation that threatens our collective well-being and progress as a state. **In 2019, conservative estimates show that over 1.8 million Washingtonians – over 500,000 of them children – had difficulty making ends meet.** Indigenous, Black and Brown communities experience the undue burden of poverty in our state, and structural racism intersects with other forms of systemic inequality to produce disparities in poverty rates among single parents with young children, youth, the LGBTBTQ community, rural families, people with disabilities, and immigrants and refugees. These estimates reflect conditions prior to the social, economic and health crises brought on by COVID-19. **With the steep rise in unemployment, emerging estimates show that poverty could reach its highest level in 50 years¹ and significantly deepen racial and geographic inequality.**

Poverty Rates in Washington Prior to COVID-19 % of people living below 200% of the federal poverty level in 2019



Projected Increases in Poverty Due to Rising Unemployment



ESA 2025 Goal and State Poverty Reduction Efforts

Systemic poverty, structural racism and inequality undermine the well-being of children, adult, and families, preventing us from reaching our full potential as a state. Indeed, the weight of the evidence shows there is a causal relationship between income, poverty and negative child outcomes in education, health, juvenile and criminal justice, child welfare and future employment.² The cost of child poverty is so great that estimates suggest that *(Continued on next page.)*

¹ Parolin, Z. & Christopher Wimer (April 2020) Forecasting Estimates of Poverty during the COVID-19 Crisis. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University Policy Brief
² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25246>.

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Transforming lives

(10/2020)

every \$1 spent on reducing it yields \$7 in return. **The well-established benefits of reducing poverty and inequality inspired ESA in DSHS to establish a 2025 goal to reduce poverty by half in a way that eliminates disparities.**

As part of our 2025 goal efforts, we are proud to co-lead Governor Inslee’s Poverty Reduction Work Group, which recently created the 10-year Plan to Reduce Poverty and Inequality (available at www.dismantlepovertyinwa.com). The eight strategies and 56 recommendations in the 10-year Plan are data-driven and grounded in evidence and informed by a steering committee consisting of people experiencing poverty, whose expertise guided our priorities. **As poverty increases in the wake of COVID-19, the 10-year Plan serves a blueprint for an equitable economic recovery and long-term economic growth.**

Strategies in the 10-Year Plan to Reduce Poverty and Inequality	
Strategy 1 – Understand structural racism and historical trauma, and take action to undo their harmful effects in policy and programs.	Strategy 5 – Address the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness, violence, mental illness and/or addiction.
Strategy 2 – Make equal space in decision-making for people and communities most affected by poverty and inequality.	Strategy 6 – Build an integrated human service continuum of care that addresses the holistic needs of children, adults and families.
Strategy 3 – Target equitable education, income growth and wealth-building opportunities for people with low incomes.	Strategy 7 – Decriminalize poverty and reduce reliance on the child welfare, juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.
Strategy 4 – Strengthen health supports across the life span to promote the intergenerational well-being of families.	Strategy 8 – Ensure a just and equitable transition to the future of work.

2021-23 Priorities to Achieve the 2025 Goal

Investments in health and human services are essential to an equitable economic recovery and long-term, inclusive economic growth. Recent estimates show that the recent CARES Act from Congress stabilized poverty rates in the wake of COVID-19 and prevented a deeper recession from occurring so far.³ As the CARES Act funding expires, it is essential Washington state leverage all federal and state resources to mitigate the economic downturn on children, adults and families, and make a sizable down payment on an equitable and inclusive economy in the long-term.

ESA priorities for the upcoming legislative and budget cycle include:

1. Set a foundation for equitable economic recovery by:

- Supporting and expanding the role of the Steering Committee to Governor Inslee’s Poverty Reduction Workgroup to influence policy, program and funding decisions.
- Adopting a definition and measure of recovery that holds the state accountable to long-term, equitable and inclusive economic growth.

2. Sustain and expand investments in health and human services to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, including:

- Continuing investment in COVID-19 related changes to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, State Food Assistance Program and programs serving immigrants and refugees.
- Leveraging existing programs to provide cash, food, housing and medical assistance to keep Washingtonians food secure, safe and stably housed, and able to obtain medical care when needed.

3. Establish an economic floor that guarantees all children, adults and families have their foundational needs met unconditionally by:

- Adopting a standard of need for the state that reflects the actual costs of what it takes to make ends meet for individuals and families.
- Prototyping a new state program that leverages the combination of wages, employer benefits, public assistance and tax credits to ensure an economic floor.

4. Adopt the 10-Year Plan to Reduce Poverty and Inequality as the state’s long-term economic recovery plan.

- The 10-Year Plan makes recommendations that mitigate the experience of poverty and reduce the overall incidence of poverty. As such, the plan is a blueprint for how to make progress toward an equitable, inclusive economy in the wake of the social, economic and health crises initiated by COVID-19.



³ Zachary Parolin, Megan A. Curran, and Christopher Wimer (June 21, 2020) The CARES Act and Poverty in the COVID-19 Crisis: Promises and Pitfalls of the Recovery Rebates and Expanded Unemployment Benefits. Poverty & Social Policy Brief: v4n8; Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University