Pulse Report for Children & Families

February 2021
The goal of the Community Pulse Report is to keep track of a consistent set of indicators as a way of taking the pulse of our community during these difficult times and to further inform policy makers, nonprofit leaders, reporters, and the public in general. The report is organized into four sections:

- Health & Wellness
- Housing & Utilities
- Jobs & Financial Assistance
- Educational Disruptions & Child Care

Our aim is to utilize data that will give us a snapshot of what is happening in the five-county region—Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties. Important to the project will be finding data that deepens our understanding of the intersecting disparities in health care, society, and the economy and their impacts on Black and Latino/a/x children and families.
We are committed to utilizing data that can be disaggregated by race, gender, and age.

In future reports, we will strive to identify proxy indicators where disaggregated data is not available. We will also advocate for the disaggregation of data by race, gender, and age and hope you can join us in that work.

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

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

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

- United States
- Pennsylvania
- Five-County Region (Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland)
- County-Specific
Feedback and observations from our on-the-ground providers are crucial to understanding the data we are collecting in context.

**Agencies continue to emphasize how critical increased funding is. Needs vary, and flexible support is particularly important, especially as providers play a critical role in vaccine outreach.**

“The impact of COVID-19 has shined an illuminous light on structural inequities in this country. One of the many threats to health and well-being is access to the lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine for under resourced and marginalized communities. What has become clear is that community based nonprofit organizations are integral in creating community access. This important work unfortunately becomes yet another expensive and unfunded priority that organizations fulfill.”

“We have been challenged to keep up with demand, due to limited availability of funds.”

“COVID makes it harder for re-entrants, minorities and senior citizens to find employment.”
There are continued disparities in who is contracting COVID-19, as well as who our essential workers on the front lines are.

While vaccines are being distributed across the region, access and receipt is not equitable.

Preliminary estimates from the CDC indicate that life expectancy in the US dropped a full year during the first half of 2020, with Black Americans losing nearly three years and Latinos/as/x, nearly two years.
The cumulative COVID-19 case rate continues to be higher for Black and Asian populations in Allegheny County than the White population.

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

Hospitalization rates from COVID-19 are also **higher for the Black population** in Allegheny County than the White or Asian populations.

Disaggregated data is currently not available for every County in the region.
Essential Workers by Race, Pennsylvania

Estimates suggest that jobs held by people of color in PA are more likely to be “essential” jobs. That is true in all five counties of Southwest PA’s five-county region.

We might expect vaccination rates among people of color to reflect these higher rates, but with limited data to date, we have not yet seen this.

Source: Fourth Economy analysis based on QWI data, UI Claims data, and PA closure order classifications.
There are greater concentrations of women working in industries that may be considered “essential,” thus potentially putting them at greater risk to contract COVID-19.

Source: QWI 2019 Annual Average Employment
In the five-county region, **204,914** people have been vaccinated with at least one dose.* That’s an estimated 13.3% of adults 18+ in the region.

The Butler County Area Agency on Aging has received state-wide recognition for its success in helping local older adults receive COVID-19 vaccines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Estimated % of Adults 18+ Vaccinated with at Least One Dose*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allegheny</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Butler</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.1%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayette</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*As of 2/15/21.

Until recently, it was not mandatory for facilities to collect race/ethnicity data. As of February 12, that data is now required. Therefore, we can expect to see the large portion of "unknowns" in the data go down and get a more accurate picture of who is getting vaccinated in the months to come.
More women than men have received at least one dose of the vaccine statewide.

This may partially be explained by the greater proportion of women working in health care and/or who are over age 75. Both of those groups have been prioritized for vaccine distribution.

*As of 2/16/21. **As of 2/12/21. Pennsylvania residents who receive a vaccination from a clinic located in Philadelphia county, a federal facility, or in another state are not included in this data.

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Health
Many families and children continue to face economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are racial disparities in unemployment rates, and women are exiting the labor force at alarming rates.
275,000 women left the labor force in January, leaving women's labor force participation rate at 57%. Before the pandemic, the last time women's labor force participation rate was this low was in 1988.

2.3 million women have exited the labor force since February 2020 (vs. 1.8 million men).

Individuals who have exited the labor force are those who are no longer working and not actively looking for work.
Impacts on Mothers & Parents

"Almost 1 million mothers have left the workforce — with Black mothers, Hispanic mothers and single mothers among the hardest hit."

For Pennsylvania families with average incomes below the basic household “survival budget,” 64% report reducing their hours or leaving a job to take care of their children during the pandemic.

Child care needs are a significant driver of women and parents exiting the labor force.

Source: NY Times

Race is a significant factor in unemployment disparities. Black and Latino/a/x individuals have higher rates of unemployment than their white counterparts.

Unemployed individuals are those who are not currently working but are actively looking for work.

Families continue to need housing supports, and fear evictions and foreclosures.

Increased access to broadband is imperative for supporting remote work, online schooling, telehealth, and more. Even before the pandemic, a 2018 survey conducted by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission showed over half of the 1,000+ respondents found that the provision of high-speed internet should be “the most urgent technological Force of Change the region should address over the next 25 years.”
In the five-county region, housing requests continue to rise. January 2021 requests were 75% higher than January 2020.

26% of adults are living in households not current on rent or mortgage where eviction or foreclosure in the next two months is either very likely or somewhat likely.

44% of households earning below below a basic “survival budget,” are more concerned about paying housing expenses than contracting COVID-19.

Pennsylvanians continue to struggle to pay rent and mortgage payments. When moratoriums and protections expire, there may be an eviction and foreclosure crisis.

Source: Census Household PULSE Survey, Pennsylvania, Week Ending 2/1

Overall, the region boasts fast internet.

Internet speed for a typical user in the region meets the FCC definition for high speed internet.

Median download and upload speed in the region in every county in the region is at least 25+ Mbps down / 3+ Mbps up.

This still may not be fast enough to support multiple remote workers and students taking online classes.

Source: BLS Job Flexibilities and Work Schedule data, 2017-2018
Measurement Lab Internet Speed data, 2020
But that doesn’t mean that everyone has access.

Even if the infrastructure is in place for high-speed internet, many households are still not connected.

In counties with strong broadband infrastructure, like Allegheny and Butler, households may still be unconnected due to subscription costs.

In counties where the infrastructure is not as strong, like Armstrong, lack of access could be related to rurality and the inability to connect to broadband regardless of cost.

Source: Census American Community Survey, 2015-2019 estimates
Lack of internet access, combined with other disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, factor heavily into children’s education.
Shifting truancy rules away from punishment and toward positive reinforcements can help schools support families, instead of penalize them.

School absences have spiked since the start of the pandemic, due to lack of internet access, housing instability, and more.

In the fall, teachers reported that student absences had increased from 6% before the pandemic to 10%.

In many cases, chronically absent students are being deemed “truant,” and their families may be facing harsh consequences, like fines, probation, and referrals to child protective services or court.

Source: K-12 Dive | The 74
More Information & Previous Reports

- Previous reports:
  - Community Pulse Report: September
  - Community Pulse Report: October
  - Community Pulse Report: November/December
  - Community Pulse Report: January