



# **MINNESOTA FAMILY WELLBEING INDEX**

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**2022**  
EDITION

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# Letter from CEO

**Families are the building blocks of our community. They are key to the health of our society. When families are safe and strong, communities are supportive and resilient.**

In order for families to thrive, parents and children need the support of their communities, whether that support comes in the form of a meal from a neighbor or a counseling session with a therapist.

Knowing that families and communities in Minnesota have faced wave after wave of challenges in recent years, we created this report with the goals of understanding how Minnesota families are doing and highlighting stories of how community supports are strengthening family wellbeing. What we found was that while there is a lot of data available about families' needs and risk factors, there is little data about the strengths that exist within our families and communities.

At FamilyWise, we approach all of our work through a strengths-based lens that lifts up the wisdom of families and communities. We know that we can't always change risk factors (like a family's past traumas), but we can change protective factors (like a family's ability to ask for and receive help). Every day we see the resourcefulness and resilience of families, and yet it is hard to find statewide data to tell that story. With this first annual Family Wellbeing Index Report, we want to encourage dialogue about the need for better measurement of strengths-based levers of family wellbeing in our state.



**Ann Gaasch**  
Chief Executive Officer FamilyWise



# Introduction

**This report explores measures that demonstrate how Minnesota families are doing in terms of concrete (or formal) supports like housing and healthcare and natural (or informal) supports like helpful neighbors or caring friends and mentors.**

This report compiles statewide population data from large scale data sets. Due to the timing of data collection for the sources and disruption from COVID-19, the most recent available data in most cases is from 2019. It establishes a pre-pandemic baseline. We fully expect these numbers to be different in later years due to the pandemic. We also want to acknowledge that we know both experientially from our work with families and from national research that low-income and BIPOC families are facing greater disparities and instability. It should also be noted that Minneapolis was at the center of a reckoning for racial justice during this same period, and that the ongoing disparities highlighted in this report need to be addressed for all families to increase their wellbeing.

# Indicators of Concrete Supports

**While Minnesota ranks above the national average in measures of family wellbeing including living above poverty, living in affordable housing, and access to healthcare, the data shows significant disparities between White and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Minnesotans.**

## Income

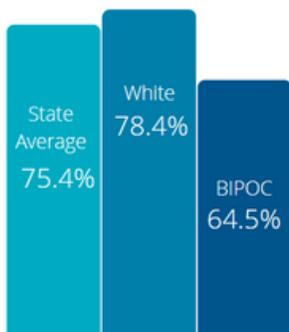
According to the 2019 American Community Survey, BIPOC Minnesotans were more than 2.5 times as likely as White Minnesotans to be living in poverty (at 18.2% versus 6.5%). The Federal Poverty Level, defined as \$27,750 per year for a family of four, is distinct from a living wage, which varies by county. Data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) estimates a statewide average cost of living for a family of four to be \$91,032. A DEED analysis showed that Black and Indigenous households had median incomes of less than half that of White households.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1**  
Percent of Minnesota Residents  
Living Above Poverty  
*US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019*



**Figure 2**

Percent of Minnesota Residents  
Affordably Housed  
US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019



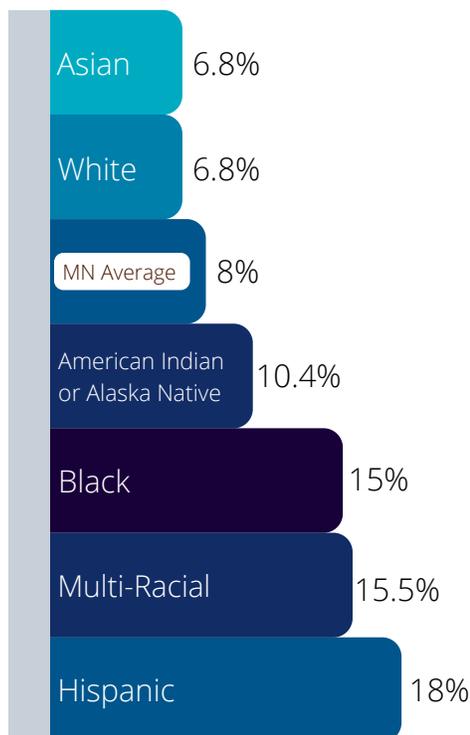
**Figure 3**

Percent of Minnesota Residents with  
Health Insurance  
US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019



**Figure 4**

MN Residents who could not see the Doctor  
when needed in the past 12 months due to cost  
Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 2020



## Housing

Housing is considered affordable when it costs less than 30% of household income—more than that and a family is at risk of sacrificing food, medical care or other basic needs. While 75.4% of Minnesotans are affordably housed, BIPOC Minnesotans are less likely than White Minnesotans to be affordably housed (64.5% versus 78.4%). Cost-burden is particularly pronounced in renters. Forty-three percent of all Minnesota renters live in cost-burdened housing, and 58% of Black renters are cost-burdened.<sup>2</sup> In addition, families with additional barriers, like a lack of credit history, having a prior criminal background, and even family size can be subject to predatory housing practices.

## Health Insurance

Having health insurance does not necessarily lead to access to healthcare. For Minnesotans enrolled in employer-based healthcare, the average employee contribution to an annual family premium was \$5,635, and the average annual family deductible was \$4,581.<sup>3</sup> While 94.2% of Minnesotans are insured, 8% of Minnesotans reported not seeing a doctor when they needed to in the last 12 months due to cost. When broken down by race and ethnicity, White and Asian Minnesotans were least likely to report forgoing needed medical treatment due to cost at 6.8%, and Hispanic Minnesotans were most likely, at 18%. Delaying treatment is costly, both physically and mentally, personally and societally.

# Childcare

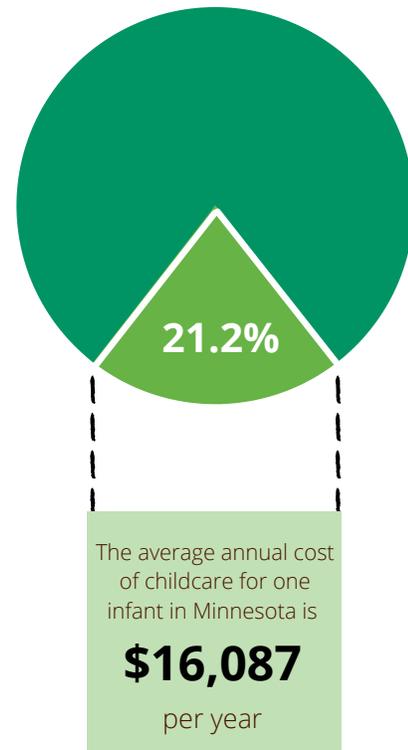
Quality, accessible childcare supports young minds and working parents. Minnesota is facing issues of both childcare access and affordability. With average infant care in the state costing \$16,087 per year, Minnesota is ranked fourth in the nation in most expensive infant care. Care for a single infant takes up 21.2% of a median family income, and roughly half the income of a family in poverty.

While thousands of families benefit from the Child Care Assistance Program each month, funding by a federal block grant means many families who qualify are put on a waiting list to receive it. Even those who can afford childcare may not be able to access it. According to analysis by researchers at the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management and College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, in 2018 the average Minnesota family with young children lived somewhere where there are nearly two young children per available childcare slot. With the effects of COVID on childcare centers, today there are even fewer available slots. Lack of affordable and quality childcare impacts a family's ability to participate in the workforce and can affect the development of the child.

## Figure 4

### Percent of Income Spent on Childcare for Median Income Family

Economic Policy Institute, Minnesota State Childcare Fact Sheet, 2020.



**4th** in the US

Minnesota has the 4th most expensive infant care in the country

**15,349**

Minnesota Families participated in Child Care Assistance Programs each month, 2019<sup>6</sup>

# Finding Professional Help

**When parents and caregivers have stable income, employment, and can access affordable health care and childcare, they can feel secure about meeting the basic needs of their family.**

In the absence of these concrete supports, parents can experience chronic stress and be at increased risk for anxiety and depression, chemical dependency, family violence, and other health problems.

**Parents facing high levels of instability often seek support from vital public assistance resources** like social workers, public health nurses, primary healthcare providers, and school staff if they have school-age children. Knowledge of and access to these supports is foundational to family wellbeing.

**Parents often learn about these resources from each other.** For example, through Circle of Parents, a peer-led, mutual self-help support group, parents last year received referrals for mental health, community education, job training and healthcare services. There are currently 55 active Circle of Parents groups across Minnesota. Circle of Parents creates safe spaces for parents to share parenting experiences and resources to build confidence and strengthen family relationships.

In the wake of the pandemic, we are seeing reduced stigma around accessing mental health services and increased need for those services. According to a Circle of Parents facilitator in Northern Minnesota, “We do have some [mental health] services available in our area but they are all short staffed and do not have the capacity to serve all the individuals needing services.”

The ability of public service professionals to recognize when a family is in need of support and resources is also critically important. **It can be hard for parents to ask for help, either because they don’t want to be judged or because they don’t recognize their circumstances as atypical or problematic.**

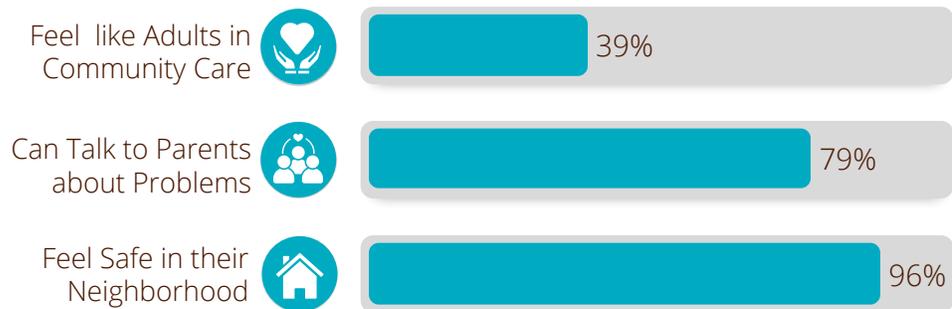
In the experience of FamilyWise Parent Education Coordinator Katie Bierch, “Sometimes a parent is just waiting for a professional to bring something to their attention.” By offering insight and consistent support, a professional can help a parent shift their perspective and make steps towards stability.

# Indicators of Natural Supports

An informal support network of friends family, and mentors can be a powerful protective factor, helping sustain the wellbeing of parents and children through challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, protective factors like social and emotional connections and support are not well measured.

"In the absence of a statewide data source for measuring resilience factors for adults, communities may want to consider collecting these data as part of their Community Health Assessments."  
*Melissa Adolfson, Research Scientist at Wilder Research*

**Figure 5**  
Let's Hear from Minnesota's Youth  
*Minnesota Student Survey 2019, analysis by EpiCog and EpiMachine.*



The Minnesota Student Survey is administered every three years to monitor risk and protective behaviors among students. The most recent survey, conducted in 2019, had participation from 81% of public schools and a sample size of over 170,000. It provides rich data on the behaviors and attitudes of Minnesota's youth, including the presence of natural supports.

There is no comparable statewide data set that measures natural supports and resilience factors for adults. While we know from the US Census Current Population Survey that 64% of Minnesota adults have helped a neighbor in the past year, we do not have statewide data on whether they have family, friends or neighbors they can call on in an emergency or if they're receiving adequate social and emotional support from those around them. Family wellbeing must include the whole family. **While we can't always impact risk factors, we can build protective factors, and these indicators are equally important to measure.**

# Someone in Your Corner

**Research has shown that having even one caring person in your life can make a significant impact on whether hardships turn into major setbacks or opportunities to learn, grow, and change for the better.**

All parents need a natural support system of family, friends, neighbors, coaches and mentors in order to be resilient for themselves and their families.

Youth Services Manager Ademir Escobar-Bonilla shares the story of a mother of eight who was not only parenting on her own, but also struggling with substance use. Through our Wraparound program, which wraps a team of professional and natural supports around youth and their families, staff learned she had a brother in Iowa—but they were estranged. Knowing the value of natural supports, she began to picture a path to reuniting with her brother, and eventually he came to stay with her in Minnesota. This revitalized relationship, especially with a family member who shares so much history, has helped the mother overcome her substance use and know she has someone in her corner for the long haul.

And while we know that one natural support can make a significant difference in the life of a parent or child, having an extended natural support system is even more beneficial because each helper offers something unique.

**Sometimes a parent needs a babysitter, and other times they need advice, or a laugh to lift their mood and shift their thinking.**

Unfortunately, many parents that need help don't have one or more people to turn to when they need support, and it can be hard to ask for help. According to FamilyWise Parent Support Partner and former Wraparound participant, Sheila Harris, **"Usually, the person...showing signs that help is needed is not wanting to ask because nobody wants to be judged. They don't want their children to be judged, they don't want their parenting skills to be questioned."** For this reason, helping parents and children feel comfortable asking for help is a key strategy for strengthening family wellbeing.



# Conclusion

**All families need both concrete and natural supports in place in order to thrive.** While Minnesota is often known for providing a strong social safety net for residents, the data show that we need to better serve BIPOC families to reduce disparities in access to concrete supports. To improve family wellbeing, housing, healthcare and childcare need to be more available and affordable to all Minnesotans.

In addition to many families deserving better access to concrete resources, **more data needs to be collected to identify how natural supports are contributing to family wellbeing.** Failing to gather this data means that we are missing an essential piece of the puzzle, not only for establishing family wellbeing, but for sustaining it for future generations.

**All of us, whether in a professional role or in our own families and communities, can be proactive in our support of parents and children.** We should consider ways to reduce the barriers and stigma associated with asking for help and we should promote the idea that asking for help is an important skill and a sign of strength. Being receptive to a parent's strengths and needs and being present to support them can change the trajectory of that parent as well as their children and grandchildren.



# Support Family Wellbeing

We can all take actions that strengthen the wellbeing of parents and children in our communities. Take time to learn more about topics covered in this report and consider what actions you will take to support Minnesota families

## As an Individual...

### ADVOCATE

... for policies that ensure families have access to concrete supports like affordable healthcare, housing, and childcare.

### VISIT

... FamilyWise.org for more ways to move the dial on family wellbeing.

### ASK

... parents and children proactively if they need help, knowing it can be hard to ask for help.

### SHOW

... a parent or child that you value and care for them by naming their strengths, offering a friendly ear, providing a meal or activity for the family, etc.

### VOLUNTEER

... or donate to organizations in your community that are supporting families.

## As a Community...

### INVEST

... in more accessible and affordable concrete supports for families including high-quality childcare, housing, and healthcare (including mental health care) for families.

### COLLECT

... more data about what strengths-based levers are making a positive difference on family wellbeing; from peer organizations, family-serving agencies, and philanthropic organizations

### ENGAGE

... with Children's Mental Health and Family Services Collaboratives' efforts to strengthen families through prevention efforts that promote healing and resilience.

### LEARN

... from and partner with local organizations that are empowering families with the tools and resources to establish stability, to grow, and to thrive.

# Acknowledgements

**This report would not be possible without the support of our sponsors:**



**Jefferey and Helene Slocum**



## **Special Thanks to Staff Contributors:**

Kate Bailey	Sheila Harris
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Ademir Escobar-Bonilla	Anna VonRueden
Ann Gaasch	

**This report was created with the support of Amplify DMC**

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