



2019 Census data show increased median income, but racial inequities persist

ALBUQUERQUE—Data released Sept. 17 by the U.S. Census Bureau show a significant improvement in the poverty rate in New Mexico between 2018 and 2019. That tracks with an increase in the median income during that timeframe. However, the data show little progress for children younger than five, and inequities continue to persist along racial and ethnic lines. The data released Sept. 17 – which are from 2019 – show that the poverty rate for all children ages 0 to 17 decreased from 26.3 percent in 2018 to 24.9 percent in 2019.

“While it’s always great to see improvement, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has likely wiped these gains away for many New Mexicans,” Executive Director for New Mexico Voices for Children James Jimenez said. “We know that the pandemic hasn’t hit every New Mexican in the same way.

“Families of color and immigrants often don’t have access to the same supports as other families in the state and are more likely to have missed out on federal relief, and workers in service jobs who were earning low wages before the pandemic have suffered more under the recession than those in occupations where they’ve been able to work remotely,” he added.

The total poverty rate – for New Mexicans of all ages – dropped from 19.5 percent in 2018 to 18.2 percent in 2019. The 2019 data ranks New Mexico 48th in the nation in both overall and child poverty, ahead of Louisiana and Mississippi. The 2018 data, which were released last year, ranked New Mexico 49th for overall poverty and 48th for child poverty.

Census: Poverty was on the decline in pre-pandemic New Mexico

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New Mexico's median income increased by 10 percent, up from \$47,169 in 2018 to \$51,945 in 2019. While that is still well below the national average, the state's median income increased at a higher rate than did the nation as a whole – which saw a 6 percent increase, rising from \$61,937 to \$65,712. New Mexico still ranks 50th in the nation for its poverty rate among people with a bachelor's degree and ranks 48th in poverty among all people who work.

The child advocacy organization champions numerous public policies that can reduce poverty and ensure that families have the resources they need to thrive, but says that those policies must be targeted correctly.

“We need to acknowledge the racial inequities in poverty, particularly as they’ve been exacerbated by COVID-19,” Emily Wildau, who coordinates the group’s KIDS COUNT program, which tracks data on child well-being, said. “All policies that are designed to help families recover from the pandemic and to alleviate poverty must be centered on eliminating the inequities along racial lines.”

These policies include making sure families can meet basic needs, putting financial resources into the hands of New Mexico families who will spend money quickly and locally, and raising enough revenue so the state can make investments in the structures and services – like education, health care, public safety, and infrastructure – that create jobs. Studies have shown that such investments would also help the state's economy recover from the recession.

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