

Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: Upper Peninsula

The Upper Peninsula region includes: Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, and Schoolcraft counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Upper Peninsula Residents Face Cost of Living Challenges

While the Upper Peninsula of Michigan’s poverty rate (13.6%) is only slightly higher than the state average (13.03%), data indicate many families in the UP are struggling to make ends meet. The Upper Peninsula has the second-highest percentage of ALICE households (30.2%) in Michigan for the year 2021. ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed and represents households that struggle to afford the basic costs of living (e.g., housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology).

A few factors may explain why households in the Upper Peninsula struggle financially. The median income in the Upper Peninsula is significantly lower than the state average - \$51,950 versus \$63,202 - and none of the counties has a median income above \$57,500. Low incomes combined with high transportation costs strain household budgets. The rural character of the Upper Peninsula means nearly all residents must have access to a vehicle and travel lengthy distances to access basic needs such as food, employment, education, health care, and more. Consequently, transportation costs eat up 30% or more of household incomes in all but two counties in the region.¹ Combined with high housing costs, this means that the average household spends 50% or more of their income on these necessities alone, with residents in some areas spending much more, such as Keweenaw County, where the average household spends 67% of their income on housing and transportation costs combined.

Lengthy distances to basic needs contribute to high transportation costs in the region and can



	State	Region
Population	10,062,512	303,102
Median Income	\$63,202	\$51,950
Below Poverty Level (<18)	17.6%	17.4%
Below Poverty Level	13.0%	13.6%
ALICE	25.9%	30.2%
ALICE + Poverty Rate	39.0%	43.8%
Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	12.6%	11.5%
Housing Cost Burdened	31.3%	27.5%
Without Health Insurance	7.1%	7.9%
Single Parent Households	25.2%	20.2%

have a compounding impact on household budgets. For example, residents in most counties are located more than 10 miles from a supermarket,² designating these rural counties as food deserts. This lack of nearby grocery stores also proves costly, as grocery stores situated in food deserts are often more expensive.³ Low rates of receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits disguise the relatively high food insecurity rates that may be caused by these barriers to access and high basic costs of living.

The need for investments that boost residents' ability to pay for their basic needs is evident. One way to support residents of the Upper Peninsula region is to increase the number of households with broadband internet access. Census data shows that households in the Upper Peninsula are without broadband internet at a higher rate than the state average. In Gogebic County and Baraga County, the rates of households with broadband internet subscriptions are as low as 77% while the state average is 90.2%.⁴ A reliable broadband internet connection opens opportunities such as telehealth, remote work, the ability to apply for resources more swiftly, and online education. Access to such platforms can help residents secure financial stability and cut down on transportation costs.

Reliable broadband internet can also help the Upper Peninsula reach goals already identified within the region. Economic development organizations such as InvestUP point to the need to increase industry and attract talent amidst the region's declining population, and they identify high-speed internet access as one tool to do so.⁵ With reliable broadband internet, more industries and workers can feasibly establish roots in the Upper Peninsula.

InvestUP also identified a need for investment in public education to drive economic growth. The possibilities reliable internet offers for education and/or training are especially important for residents in the Upper Peninsula, where the attainment rates of post-secondary education are significantly lower than statewide averages.⁶ Increasing rates of post-secondary education and training can improve residents' income and job stability. With the \$1.5 billion in federal funding Michigan is expected to receive through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, there is an opportunity to address the difficulties residents of the Upper Peninsula face in affording the cost of living.⁷

References

- 1 Center for Neighborhood Technology. "Housing and Transportation Affordability Index." <https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/>
- 2 U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. "Food Access Research Atlas." [July 2023]. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>
- 2 Ney, Jeremy. "Food Deserts and Inequality". Social Policy Lab. [January 24 2022]. <https://www.socialpolicylab.org/post/grow-your-blog-community#:~:text=Groceries%20sold%20in%20food%20deserts,and%20cereal%20prices%2025%25%20higher>
- 4 United States Census Bureau. "QuickFacts: Menominee County, Michigan; Gogebic County, Michigan; Baraga County, Michigan; Keweenaw County, Michigan." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/menomineecountymichigan,gogebiccountymichigan,baragacountymichigan,keweenawcountymichigan/INT100221>
- 5 InvestUP. "About Us." [2021]. <https://www.investupmi.com/index.php/about-us/>
- 6 InvestUP. "Population and Demographics." [2021]. <https://www.investupmi.com/index.php/population-demographics/>
- 7 Moore, Lindsay. "[\\$1.5B grant brings high-speed internet to 200,000 Michigan homes, businesses.](#)" *MLive*, June 27, 2023.