

An Equity Profile of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania: Summary

PolicyLink

USC Dornsife
Equity Research Institute

January 2023



Foreword

The National Equity Atlas was invited into the Lancaster County community in the summer of 2021 to support a collaborative process of asking questions, finding data, and determining ways to create impact to improve racial equity.

As a research partnership between [PolicyLink](#) and the [USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute](#), the [National Equity Atlas](#) has completed dozens of equity profiles of cities, counties, and regions over the past 10 years and brings deep awareness and commitment to the data and the policy recommendations that can create change. This is the first county-wide racial equity profile in Pennsylvania, and our hope is that it will serve as a benchmark to show us where we are as a county and where we can continue to improve.

Change — it is a big idea that brings energy and resistance at the same time. Lancaster County is a wonderful place with a deep legacy important to the state and the nation. The county has been home to key political figures with opposing perspectives who had a dramatic impact on the history of our nation. One was a US President whose inaction both extended the horrors of slavery and failed to prevent the Civil War, and another was a prominent congressman who dedicated his political power to seeking equity and freedom for all. Today the growing diversity of the county residents is obvious but so is the concern over stubborn inequity: de facto segregation and uneven opportunities.

We hope this profile helps illuminate the stories we already know, brings new questions to the table, and enables everyone to see themselves as part of a new opportunity to create systemic change in a county that is trying to live up to its branding: a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family for all.

Steering Committee Members

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Overview

An Equity Profile of Lancaster County is designed to provide a starting point for residents, community organizations, business leaders, and elected officials to understand the state of equity in the county by providing deeply disaggregated data and identifying priority areas for policy and systems change. This summary report highlights findings from the profile and offers a framework for developing equitable policy and systems changes in the county.

Equity—just and fair inclusion—is both a moral imperative and the path to a prosperous and inclusive new economy. Lancaster’s economic power, diversity, and innovation attract residents from across the country and around the world, and these same assets are the key ingredients for equitable growth.

Over two years into the economic and social upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic, Lancaster County is poised to rebound strongly. Now is the time for community leaders working across sectors and neighborhoods to take action to ensure that recovery is inclusive. By making equity a core operating principle and implementing policies and strategies to ensure low-income people and communities of color can reach their full potential, Lancaster can create prosperity for generations to come.

This is a pivotal moment for the county, as for the United States as a whole, to boldly address racial inequities and lay the foundation for an inclusive future. The murder of George Floyd in 2020 and a sharp increase in violence against Asian Americans in the wake of Covid-19 sparked a moment of racial reckoning in communities across the nation, and Lancaster was no exception. During a pandemic that deeply harmed communities of color through both its health and economic impacts, longstanding racial injustices were brought to light and centered in public discourse. But even as aggregate measures of economic growth like GDP and unemployment have recovered, deep-seated racial inequities (and the particular racial inequities of the pandemic) remain an urgent challenge. The difficult conversations about race that have been kindled in the past two years have provided an opening and a springboard for those who care about equity to guide their communities toward a common understanding, reconciliation, and concrete action.

Lancaster has a proud and ongoing legacy of welcoming diverse communities and fostering inclusion for people escaping persecution, as seen in the robust Amish and refugee populations that have made Lancaster their home. As the population grows more diverse, addressing racial inequity is the pathway to improving vitality and growth for everyone.

The indicators included in the profile were drawn from the National Equity Atlas indicators database, a resource developed by PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute. The database incorporates data from public and private sources, such as the US Census Bureau, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Woods & Poole Economics, Inc., and provides equity indicators deeply disaggregated by race and ethnicity as well as gender, nativity, education, and income. The data collection and analysis were informed by previous Lancaster County studies and reports.

To supplement the quantitative analysis contained in the profile, this summary report draws upon insights that were shared during individual interviews conducted with local community leaders and residents and includes a framework for identifying local strategies to address the inequities revealed in our data analysis. While this document does not exhaustively address every challenge facing Lancaster, nor all its assets, our hope is that it will help guide efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive county.

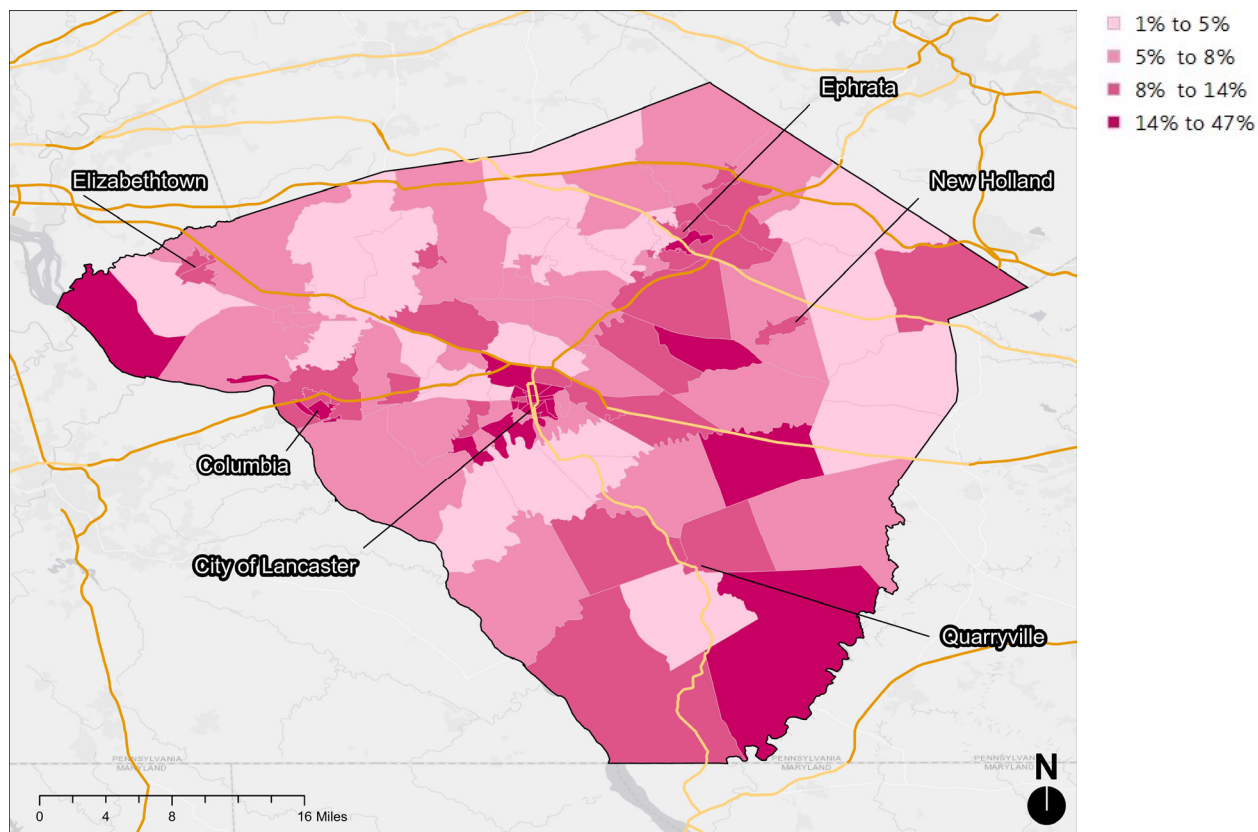
Profile Highlights

Everyone gains with equity

Equity is an issue that concerns the well-being and success of all residents in the county. *An Equity Profile of Lancaster County* reveals racial disparities across a wide range of issues and indicators including poverty, unemployment, and wages.

Inequitable outcomes in employment and earnings are entrenched and driven by structural racism across multiple systems beyond the labor market, including housing, education, health care, transportation, and the criminal-legal system. People of color face compounding barriers to reaching their full potential, and this exclusion carries mounting costs for the entire community.

Percent Population Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract, 2019

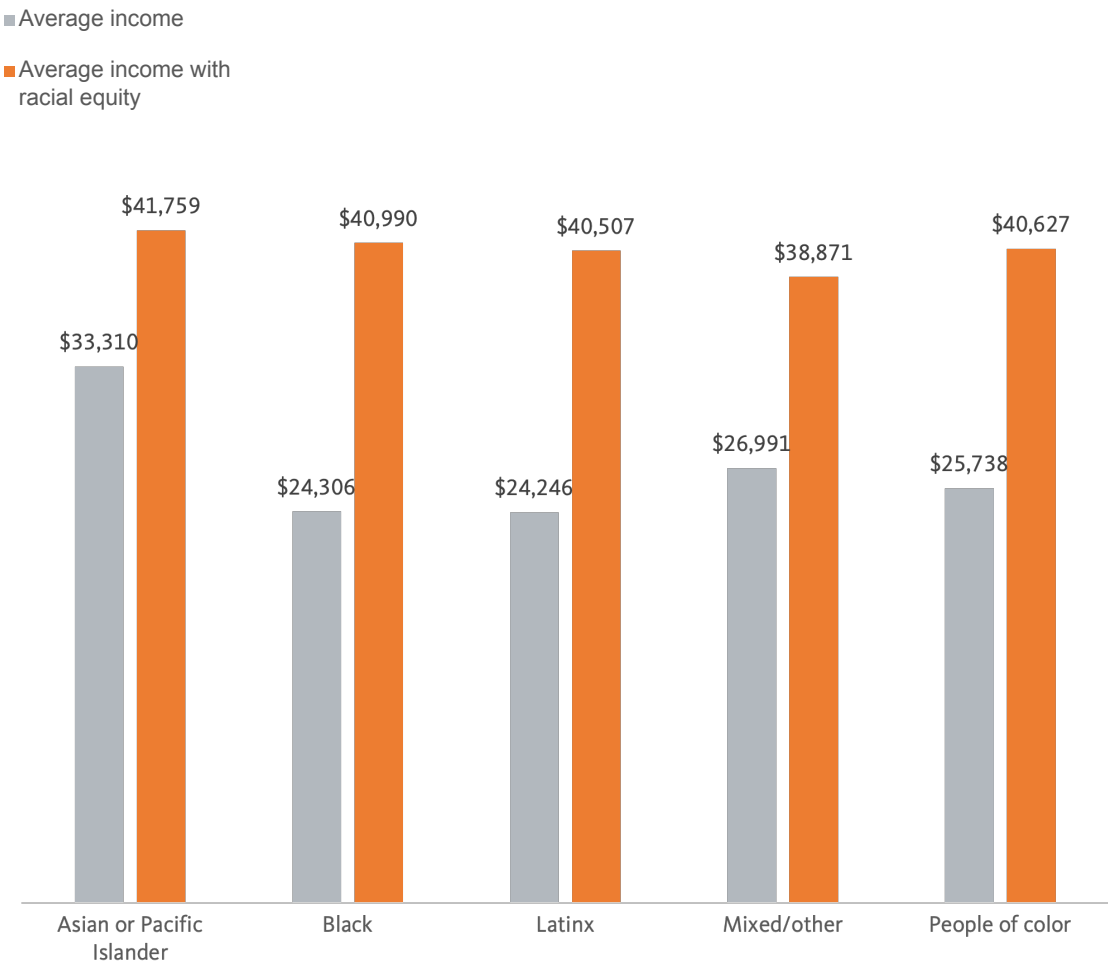


Source: 2019 5 Year ACS Summary File; US Census Bureau; TomTom, ESRI, HERE, DeLorme, MaymyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors; and the GIS user community. Universe includes all persons not in group quarters. Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

Equity and shared prosperity are the foundation of a sustainable, thriving economy, and this is increasingly true as the workforce grows more diverse. **In 2019 alone, Lancaster County’s gross domestic product (GDP) could have been about \$1.9 billion larger, an increase of about 6 percent, if there had been no racial gaps in employment and wages** (i.e., if workers in all racial/ethnic groups were employed at least at the same rate and earned at least the same average wages as their white peers, adjusted for age).

Black and Latinx residents—those most likely to experience working poverty and economic insecurity—would see the greatest gains from closing these racial gaps. For example, with equity in employment and wages in 2019, the average annual income of Black residents would have risen by 69 percent, from around \$24,300 to about \$41,000.

Estimated Income Gains with Racial Equity by Race/Ethnicity, 2019



Source: 2019 5-year ACS Microdata from IPUMS USA; Bureau of Economic Analysis.
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Values are in 2019 dollars.

Lancaster is becoming more diverse

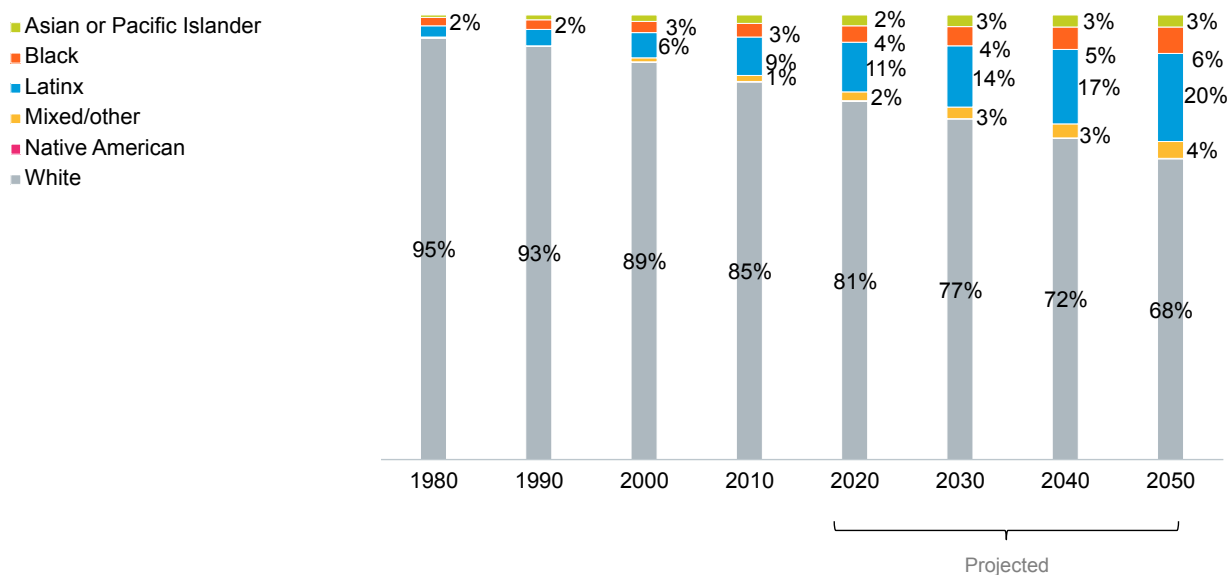
With more people of color moving into the county for school and work, Lancaster is becoming more and more diverse. The growth of Latinx residents (both immigrants and US-born), as well as Black immigrants, is driving the county's overall population growth. **Between 2010 and 2019, people of color accounted for 88 percent of the net population growth in Lancaster.** Among the net growth of about 22,000 people during that period, the Latinx population accounted for nearly 12,000 new residents.

Known as the refugee capital of America, Lancaster has long been a new home to resettled families from all over the world. From 1990 to 2019, the county added nearly 2,700 foreign-born Black residents. Supporting the integration of refugees

and immigrants who call Lancaster home is important for community cohesion and offers a ripe opportunity to design equitable strategies to make Lancaster's economy and civic institutions stronger and more resilient. Recent research from the New American Economy reported that the county's immigrant population helped to preserve or create more than 1,200 manufacturing jobs and represented about \$455 million in spending power in 2019 alone.¹

Because of this rapid demographic change, **Lancaster's youth—the county's future workers, leaders, and innovators—are much more diverse than its older generations.** In 2019, more than a quarter of young people (those younger than 18 years of age) were people of color, compared to 7 percent of the county's seniors (those ages 65 years and older). Ensuring that the county's diverse youth population has the resources and support to succeed is critical for the future prosperity of all.

Racial/Ethnic Composition, 1980 to 2050



Source: US Census Bureau and Woods & Poole Economics, Inc.

Note: Much of the increase in the Mixed/other population between 1990 and 2000 is due to a change in the survey question on race.

Growing good jobs for the future

A considerable portion of jobs in Lancaster County are in health care, manufacturing, retail, and food service industries—occupations that have seen a surge in demand as the economy starts to recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, long-term trends have seen wages stagnate or decline for workers in the bottom half of the income distribution. Among full-time workers in the county, **workers of color are twice as likely as their white counterparts to be economically insecure.** Economic recovery strategies must be paired with wage increases and other equity-focused policies to increase economic security for all workers and families and to address persistent racial economic exclusions that leave

Black households more than three and half times as likely as white households to be in poverty. The recent focus on a \$15 per hour minimum wage may seem significant as an increase, yet the MIT Living Wage Calculator for Lancaster County indicates this wage only works if two adults are earning it and only have one child.²

Higher educational attainment is associated with lower unemployment and higher wages across racial/ethnic groups, but education alone does not close racial wage gaps. At the same educational levels, white workers out-earn workers of color. The median wage for white workers with a bachelor's degree or higher is about 14 percent (\$3.50/hour) more than that for workers of color with similar educational attainment.

Median Hourly Wages by Educational Attainment and Race/Ethnicity, 2019



Source: 2019 5-year ACS Microdata from IPUMS USA . Universe includes civilian noninstitutional full-time wage and salary workers ages 25 through 64 years.

Note: Wages for some racial/ethnic groups are excluded due to small sample size. People of color includes all people other than the non-Hispanic white population. Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Values are in 2019 dollars.

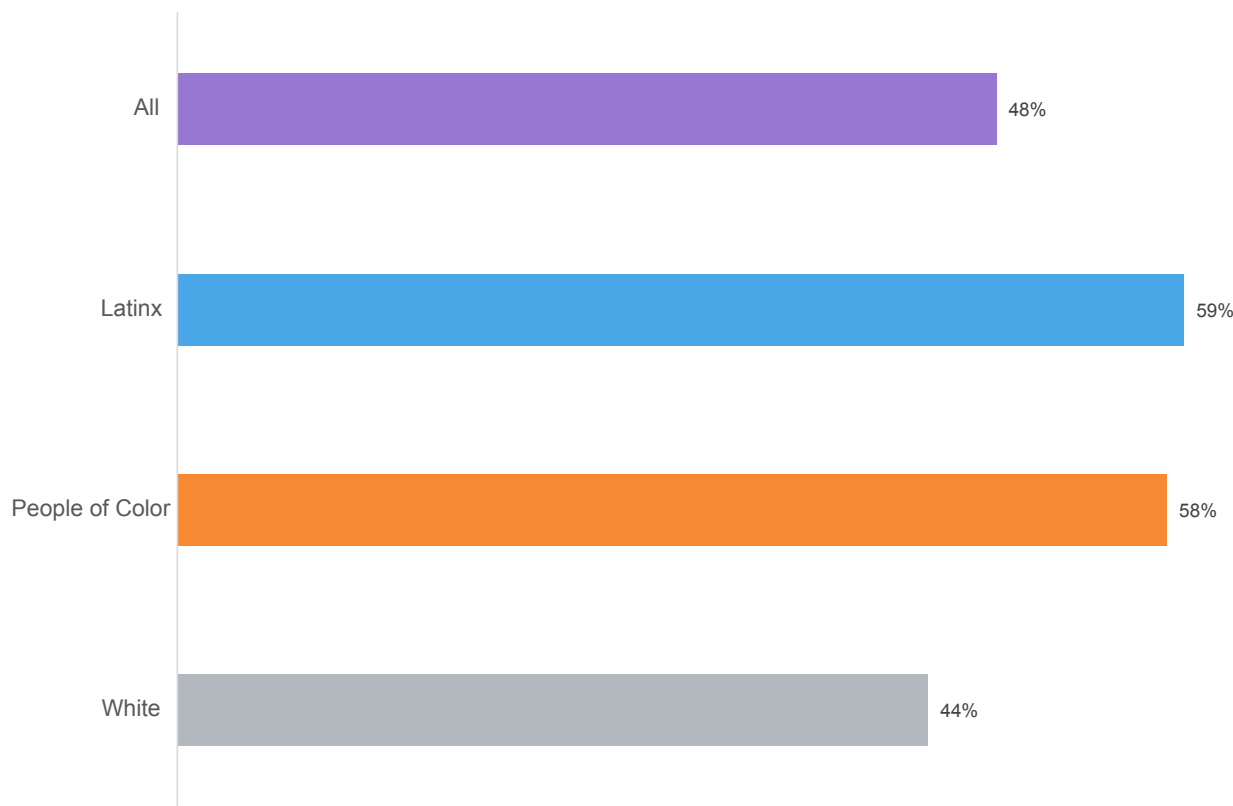
Housing insecurity remains a top concern

Lancaster County attracts new residents on the strength of opportunities it offers for jobs, higher education, and housing. But new housing developments are largely geared toward higher-income earners, and many longtime residents face the threat of being priced out or otherwise displaced from their communities. In 2019, residents in Lancaster named housing insecurity as the top challenge in the community.³ The lasting effects of discriminatory housing and lending policies, along with stagnant wages, have excluded many Black households and other people of color from accessible homeownership. Many families of color are forced to pay high rents: **nearly 60 percent of Latinx and other People of Color are rent burdened**, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their

income for housing, leaving them with few resources to cover other basic expenses such as education, childcare, health care, and savings and other wealth-building opportunities.

Many of the county’s jobs are also located in areas where housing is the most expensive. For households without vehicles, they must either be self-sufficient within a community, like the Amish communities, or like many newly arrived refugee families they need to live close to the city center or public transportation to be able to access employment opportunities. But unaffordable rents force many low-paid and economically insecure residents to live in rural parts of the county, where housing is more affordable, but the transportation systems are less robust and access to jobs and services is limited.

Percent Rent Burden by Race/Ethnicity, 2019



Source: 2019 5-year ACS Microdata from IPUMS USA . Universe includes all households (excludes group quarters).
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. “People of color” is used to refer to all people who do not identify as non-Hispanic white.”

Community perspectives on the equity challenge and opportunity

Many community stakeholders are aware of the imperative for action. We invited a broad range of community residents, advocates, elected officials, and civic leaders to share their insights about both the county's challenges and its assets to identify opportunities for meaningful change. In our conversations, those who participated in the interview process surfaced the following themes.

Strong civic institutions contribute to a strong community identity, and there is a desire to foster authentic belonging for all

As one resident put it, “people in Lancaster want to show up [for each other].” Many residents came out to express solidarity and to support calls for racial justice amid the demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd and in response to rising violence against Asian Americans. As a result, there is increased awareness of racial inequity and the history of systemic oppression among community members.

The energy from young people and people of color in the community is palpable as they lead the call for change and progress. Youth are leading in schools and communities demonstrating a strong appetite for building community power and advancing equity. Many faith-based institutions and local businesses are crucial pillars, providing space for community-building. These places hold the potential to build support for the equity movement.

Uncertainty about the future and asymmetries in power hamper efforts to advance equity

Some community members interviewed for this research expressed that some elected officials and other residents may be resistant to focusing on racial equity. Others noted their concern that organized white nationalist groups are increasingly making their presence known within the county.

Some residents worry about how race-conscious equity efforts may negatively impact them, while others wonder whether their children of color have a real future here. The community is contending with both overt acts of racism—such as race-based violence against individuals, businesses, and organizations—and other emerging obstacles to systems change, like resistance to teaching the history of oppression in schools and opposition to legislation that supports people of color and other structurally marginalized groups.

Leadership in local elected offices, philanthropy, community organizations, and other institutions skew white, male, and wealthy. Young people, people of color, immigrants, queer folks, and others are less successful in accessing positions in these halls of power, and the support needed to build strong pipelines of diverse leaders is inadequate. When representation does not reflect the diversity of the county, many residents are left silenced and their needs are left unmet.

An uneven geography of opportunity exacerbates racial inequities

Opportunities and resources are not distributed equitably across the county and City of Lancaster. For example, the southeastern quadrant of the city is home to many Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities. Compared to northern parts of the city where white residents are concentrated, southeastern neighborhoods have less-resourced schools, limited options for public transit, and fewer quality grocery stores.

The School District of Lancaster (SDOL) is one of six entities suing the state of Pennsylvania for insufficient funding that is reliant on local property taxes.⁴ There is momentum and energy for fairer funding of schools that ensures adequate resources for all students, which would benefit most school districts and children in the county.

Affordable housing is a top concern for residents. Much of the new housing being developed in the county is in luxury buildings targeted at higher income renters and homeowners. Without strong renter-protection policies, some community members worry that the county's housing market leaves many low-income households burdened by high costs and vulnerable to displacement.

Promising community-based efforts are underway, but more resources are needed

Community organizations are doing necessary work on the ground, but many grassroots groups face barriers to accessing the funds and other resources they need to maximize their impact. Building capacity and dedicating supports for community-based organizations is essential to nurturing inclusive and healthy neighborhoods.

Social services are often left to underfunded organizations rather than prioritized and resourced as the responsibility of local government bodies. Many community organizations rely on philanthropy to fund their work, but onerous requirements can place additional burdens on organizations with less capacity.

Approaches to advance racial equity

The findings described in *An Equity Profile of Lancaster County* are not surprising to many of those who live, work, and go to school in Lancaster. Structural racism—in which policies, cultural and institutional practices, and social norms systematically disadvantage people of color—has created very different outcomes for people of color in terms of economic opportunity, health, housing, education, public safety, and civic power. But local leaders have expressed a renewed and shared commitment to taking collective action, understanding the magnitude of racial inequities, and co-designing strategies to eliminate them to build a stronger Lancaster for generations to come. As our analysis reveals, ensuring that all residents can contribute their full potential to the community is the path to a thriving and prosperous future for Lancaster County. This requires understanding how racism manifests across various systems—health, housing, workforce, education, and the criminal-legal system—and how the resulting racial disparities mutually reinforce one another. For example, disinvestment in communities of color, discrimination, and burdensome housing costs concentrate low-income households and people of color in neighborhoods with fewer opportunities, lower property values, and underresourced schools; educational inequities, in turn, contribute to racial inequities in the workforce, fueling racial income gaps as well as health inequities.

Policy and systems changes are critical to fostering racial equity in Lancaster County. The federal government's investments in pandemic recovery and infrastructure provide important opportunities to steer resources toward addressing the disparities revealed in this report. Lancaster County and the state of Pennsylvania are receiving millions from the American Rescue Plan Act and will be receiving millions from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Many competitive grant programs are also being established seeking to fund local efforts that advance racial equity.

The policy priorities outlined below are intended to accelerate existing efforts to advance racial equity and to catalyze new conversations about how residents, community organizations, grassroots groups, elected officials, and business and civic leaders can collaborate to realize high-impact equity solutions. By maintaining a deep commitment to antiracism and centering those closest to the issues, equity champions in Lancaster can design and move a bold agenda for just and fair inclusion across the county.

Increase affordable housing and protect tenants

Quality, stable, and affordable housing is critical for health and economic security. Living in a stable environment creates peace of mind that allows residents to focus their energy on work and school. However, nearly every community member and advocate we spoke with has cited a lack of affordable housing and rising rents as a top concern for residents. Nearly half of all renters in the county are rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent, and renter households of color are about 32 percent more likely than their white counterparts to be rent burdened. These unequal outcomes are not naturally occurring but rather are a result of decades of discriminatory housing policies and disinvestments, such as redlining and segregation. Policies that increase affordable housing stock and strengthen tenant protections are key to ensuring that all residents have access to quality and secure housing.

In cities like [El Paso, Texas](#), **first-time homebuyer programs** are designed to reduce barriers for low-income households to access homeownership through education and low-cost loans. In [Dayton, Ohio](#), the **Housing Voucher Choice** program helps eligible participants (including seniors, low-income households,

and people with disabilities) access safe and healthy housing in the private market. **Just cause ordinances**, like the “Good Cause” bill enacted in [Philadelphia](#) in 2019, can protect renters from arbitrary evictions by prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants without a specific and valid reason. **Rent stabilization laws**, such as that recently passed in [Hayward, California](#), limit the frequency and amount by which a landlord can increase rent, providing residents with some insulation against cost-driven displacement. And **municipal fair housing programs**, like the one in [Knoxville, Tennessee](#), can promote equity by protecting both renters and homebuyers from discrimination.

Ensure good jobs for all workers

A high-quality job should pay a living wage and provide health and wealth-building benefits for workers and their families, and it should contribute to economic security in times of financial uncertainty, as felt by so many during the pandemic. However, many low-income workers and workers of color face barriers to accessing good jobs and fully participating in the economy. Local governments and businesses have the power to make systems changes that reduce these barriers and support a thriving and inclusive regional economy for all. Targeted practices that prioritize local workers and businesses of color can increase quality employment for workers who are struggling.

Equitable contracting and procurement policies support economic growth in local communities by helping ensure that public spending equitably benefits businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants. In 2009, [Philadelphia](#) established the **Office of Economic Opportunity**, which promotes the economic development of minority, women, disabled, and disadvantaged small businesses—this office supports the growth of businesses that are most likely to employ and build wealth in communities of color. A local ordinance that supports job quality for all workers, like the paid sick time policy in [Duluth, Minnesota](#), mandates the provision of a minimum number of paid sick hours for eligible employees and protects those workers from retaliation for using these benefits.

Invest in education and career pathways

Young people are the most diverse generation in Lancaster and ensuring that they have the opportunity and resources to succeed is vital to the prosperity of the county. But decades of segregation have led to underresourced schools in parts of Lancaster that have high concentrations of low-income residents and households of color. Right now, there is real traction in the state for fairer funding of public schools, which would distribute more resources to the schools with the greatest need. Initiatives like the [Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium](#) that strengthen the pipeline for teachers of color and allocate more resources to schools have the potential to set the next generation, and the county, up for success.

Municipal and county governments and community members can play a vital role in advocating for **fair school funding** at the state level, to ensure equitable funding that matches students’ and schools’ needs, to close opportunity gaps, and to promote racial equity. At the local level, **cradle-to-career programs** can be designed to provide children with health, social, and educational system support from birth through college and career. Examples such as [Promise Neighborhoods](#) and the pioneering [Harlem Children’s Zone](#) use wraparound supports to help interrupt cycles of generational poverty by promoting the learning, growth, and success of all children.

Foster healthy communities

Racial disparities in health outcomes are not natural or inevitable, but stem from inequitable access to opportunities and resources that are proven to promote health, such as safe and affordable housing, good jobs, quality education, and inclusive neighborhoods. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the ways that economic, educational, and social inequities exacerbate poor health outcomes. Frontline workers in health care and food service industries were essential to combating the pandemic, but these workers also were the most at-risk of contracting the virus. Families with school-age children struggled to adapt to remote learning when they did not have adequate access to the internet and computers.

As the county slowly recovers from the fallout of the pandemic, municipal and county governments should take the opportunity to build in a **health-in-all-policies framework** that incorporates public health in all levels of decision-making. This framework should center social determinants of health at

every level of policymaking and hold elected officials accountable for the health impacts of their decisions. In [Nashville, Tennessee](#), the Metropolitan Planning Organization uses **health outcomes criteria** in determining the funding of transportation projects, boosting projects that contain pedestrian and cycling features. And local programs, like the Fresh Food Retailers Initiative in [New Orleans, Louisiana](#), can help ensure **affordable access to healthy foods** while simultaneously creating local jobs in disinvested communities.

Increase public safety while restoring communities

The civil uprisings in 2020 have tapped into a deep hurt that people of color experience, caused by overpolicing and discriminatory criminal justice systems in their communities. School discipline practices that disproportionately punish students of color force young people of color, especially boys, into the school-to-prison pipeline and further destabilize communities. Reshaping what public safety looks like across the county to be fairer and more transparent is the first step to restoring trust. For example, centering a restorative justice approach in the judicial and prison systems can focus on healing and rehabilitation rather than strict punishment, and policies to ensure public access to accurate, transparent, disaggregated data from courts and law enforcement agencies can set the stage for meaningful public engagement and accountability.

Eliminating or restricting court fines and fees can prevent community members from being incarcerated simply due to an inability to pay fines and fees, which disproportionately burden people of color and low-income people. In [Leon County, Florida](#), a research report revealed that efforts to arrest and jail those with court debt was a substantial drain on county funds and staff resources. The county closed its collections court and terminated approximately 8,000 outstanding arrest warrants that were issued for nonpayment. Similarly, **abolishing or limiting cash bail**, as in [Cook County, Illinois](#), can significantly ameliorate racial and economic inequities in the criminal-legal system.

Promote a more open democracy

Equitable governance is founded on the democratic ideal of civic participation. When residents are not represented in the halls of power, they are left without a say in determining how their communities are shaped. Elected officials, business leaders, and board members in local institutions tend to skew male and white. This makes it difficult for people of color, immigrants, and those not connected to systems of power to break into these decision-making spaces and ensure that their voices are heard and valued. Policies and programs that reduce the barrier to entry for people of color and other people historically marginalized from power would strengthen participation in the democratic process.

Public campaign financing can reduce the funding barriers that prevent people of color from seeking office. In 2015, Seattle created a [Democracy Voucher Program](#) that distributes vouchers to residents who can in turn use these vouchers to support candidates running for local office. **Leadership development programs like the [Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute](#)** in the San Francisco Bay Area prepare those from low-income communities and communities of color who have been historically excluded from political power to run for and win elected office.

Conclusion

Many local organizations and community coalitions are working hard to ensure that people of color and low-income residents both contribute to and benefit from Lancaster's economic and civic vitality. Now is the time for all residents and leaders from every sector to join together with this common goal. Like other communities across the nation, Lancaster is reckoning with the legacy of racist policies and practices that have long locked people out of economic opportunities, political power, and the necessary resources for family and community well-being because of the color of their skin. A forthright acknowledgement of the ways in which different systems and institutions have perpetuated harm is the first step to building bridges and trust across communities, as the cornerstone of a shared agenda for systems change.

Equity—just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential—is the key to a resilient and prosperous future for Lancaster County. Community advocates, grassroots groups, business leaders, elected officials, anchor institutions, and philanthropy each have an important role to play in envisioning that future and bringing it to life.

Notes

1. New American Economy Research Fund, New Americans in Lancaster County (Gateways for Growth, American Immigration Council, New American Economy, Lancaster County, and City of Lincoln, Nebraska, March 2022), https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/12.21-G4G_Lancaster-County_v4.pdf.
2. Amy K. Glasmeier and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "Living Wage Calculation for Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," Living Wage Calculator, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/42071>.
3. Center for Opinion Research, 2019 Lancaster County Community Health Needs Assessment (Lancaster Behavioral Health Hospital, Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster Rehabilitation Hospital, UPMC Lititz, and WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital, 2019), <https://www.lancastergeneralhealth.org/about-lancaster-general-health/caring-for-our-community/needs-assessment-and-improvement-plan>.
4. Maddie Hanna, "Lancaster schools spend above the state average. But poor students need a lot more, superintendent testified at historic funding trial," The Philadelphia Inquirer, December 26, 2021, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/pa-school-funding-trial-lancaster-20211218.html>.

Acknowledgments

PolicyLink and the University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife Equity Research Institute (ERI) are grateful to YWCA Lancaster for their partnership and support for this effort.

We are grateful to the members of the steering committee for their insightful guidance and feedback: Aiza Ashraf, United Way of Lancaster County; Tom Baldrige; Dan Betancourt, Community First Fund; Stacie Blake, YWCA Lancaster; Sam Bressi, Lancaster County Community Foundation; Adam Hosey; Alisa Jones, Union Community Care; Vanessa Philbert, Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County; Kevin Ressler, United Way of Lancaster County; Marshall Snively, Lancaster City Alliance; Robin Stauffer, High Foundation; Heather Valudes, Lancaster Chamber; and Colleen Wagner, Lancaster City Alliance. The organizations listed here, along with the 7 Foundation Fund, CHI St. Joseph Children's Health, and Erie Insurance, funded this report.

The profile was written by Michelle Huang at PolicyLink; the data, charts, and maps were prepared by Rebecca Smith at ERI, Justin Scoggins at ERI, Michelle Huang at PolicyLink, Edward Muña at ERI, and Sabrina Kim at ERI; and Abbie Langston and Jennifer Tran at PolicyLink assisted with editing. The summary was written by Michelle Huang and Abbie Langston at PolicyLink, and designed by Jacob Goolkasian at PolicyLink.

In addition to the data analysis contained in the profile, the summary report draws upon insights that were shared during 13 interviews conducted with local community leaders and residents. Their comments helped shape the policy recommendations included in the summary. More individuals were invited to interview but not all could participate. We would like to give a special thanks to all the individuals and organizations that participated in interviews.

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