

Maine Children's Alliance

CHILD POVERTY IN MAINE: 2020

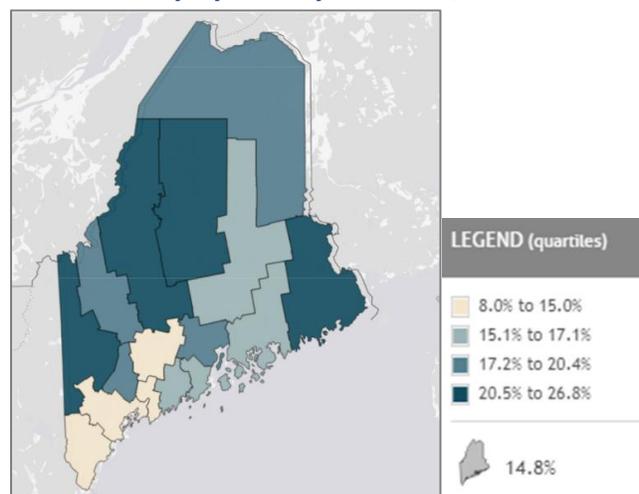
Growing up in poverty can dramatically impact a child's life. Child poverty can adversely affect children across all developmental domains, beginning in early childhood and lasting into adulthood. Living in poverty also increases a child's risk for poor health, cognitive, social, emotional, and educational outcomes. Adults who grew up in poverty are more likely to earn less, to have chronic health issues, and to struggle to maintain steady, stable employment. This is especially true for adults who spent long periods of their childhood in poverty, or periods of their childhood in deep poverty. Therefore, it is critical to the health and well-being of Maine's children and to our shared future success, that we work to eradicate child poverty in our state.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

The poverty rate in 2018 in the United States for children ages 0-17 was 18%, down from 18.4% in the previous year.¹ In Maine, the poverty rate for children in 2018 was 14.8%, a steep decline from 2012 when it was 19.8% and from 2016 when it was 16.7%, but up slightly from 2017 when it was 14.2%.² The difference in child poverty rates in Maine from 2017 to 2018 was not statistically significant.

By county in Maine, in 2018 both Cumberland and York had the lowest poverty rates in the state - below 11%. The county with the next lowest percentage of children in poverty was Sagadahoc at 13%. None of the other 13 counties had rates below the state average of 14.8%. In 2018, six counties had child poverty rates above 20% - Washington County at 26.8%, Oxford at 26.3%, Piscataquis at 23.8%, Somerset at 21.1%, Franklin at 20.4% and Waldo at 20.2%.³

Children in Poverty by County in Maine, 2018



¹ SAIPE State and County Estimates for 2018, <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2018/demo/saipe/2018-state-and-county.html>

² KIDS COUNT Data Center, Children in Poverty 2005-2018, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1562-children-in-poverty-2005-2018?loc=21&loct=5#detailed/5/3284-3299/true/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/any/3331>

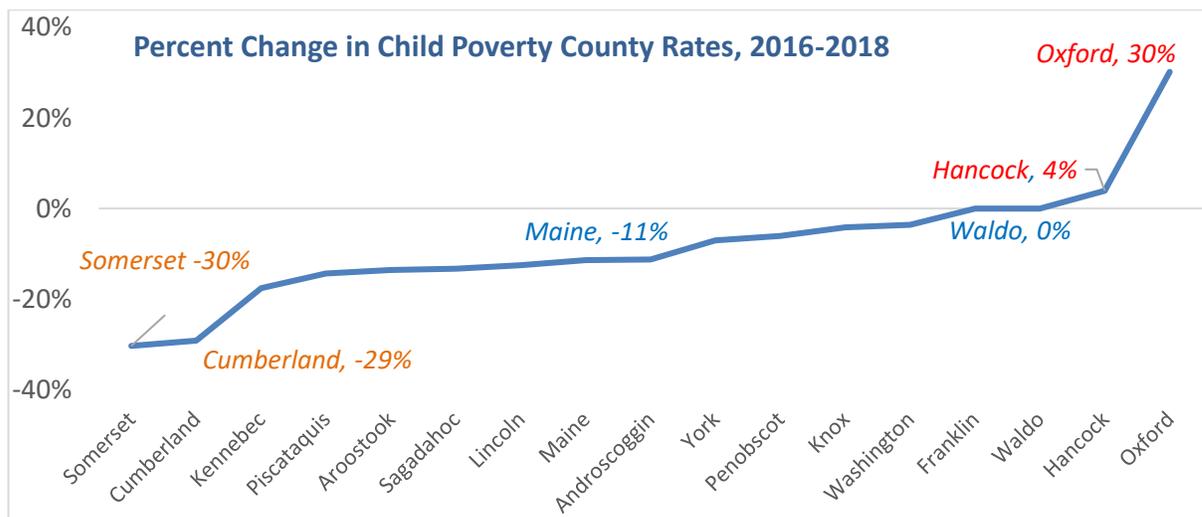
³ Ibid

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The 2017 child poverty rate in Maine was the lowest percent and number since 2005, representing the largest state decline in the country.⁴ In one year, nearly 6,400 Maine children were lifted out of poverty, due in part to the minimum wage increase. However, just as in 2017, Maine's child poverty rate in 2018 was still higher than all the other New England states except Rhode Island.

Between 2016-2018, the child poverty rate was reduced in all but three counties. In Oxford, the rate of poverty increased from 20.2% to 26.3%, a statistically significant increase of 30%. By contrast, in Cumberland it decreased from 11.3% to 8.0%, a 29% reduction.



Despite the promising recent reductions in the number of children living in poverty in most of our state, in 2018, there were still an estimated 36,000 children growing up in the difficult conditions of poverty. And while overall gains have been made in the state, *significant disparities persist* in the counties in Maine that are being most hard-hit by poverty.

WHAT WE CAN DO TO END CHILD POVERTY

Congress recently asked the **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine** to conduct a comprehensive study of child poverty in the U.S., and to identify evidence-based programs and policies for reducing the number of children living in poverty by half within 10 years. The National Academies appointed a committee with expertise in economics, psychology, cognitive science, public policy, education, sociology, and pediatrics to conduct the study and issue a report. The committee's report identifies four packages of policies and programs that emphasize both poverty reduction and work incentives that could substantially reduce child poverty in the U.S..⁵

⁴ Maine Children's Alliance, 2019 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book
https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/1241/kidscount_2019.pdf

⁵ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, A Roadmap to Reducing Poverty 2019
<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25246/a-roadmap-to-reducing-child-poverty>

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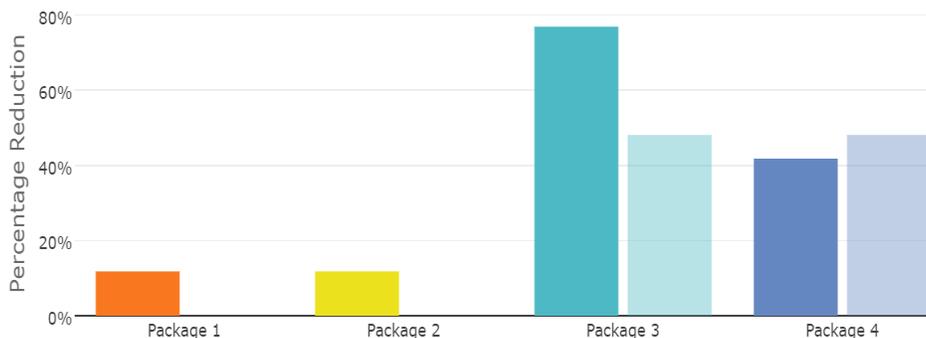
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For Maine, the programs likely to have the greatest impact on child poverty include (package 3):

- Increasing payments along the phase-in and flat portions of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) schedule
- Converting the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to a fully refundable tax credit and concentrate its benefits on families with the lowest incomes and with children under the age of five
- Increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by 35 percent as well as increasing benefits for older children
- Increasing the number of housing vouchers directed to families with children so that 70 percent of eligible families that are not currently receiving subsidized housing would use them

MAINE - PROJECTED REDUCTION IN CHILD POVERTY AND DEEP CHILD POVERTY RATES

The change in the rates of child poverty and deep poverty under each package



Notes: The second lighter colored bar represents the reduction of deep poverty, children living in families at less than half of the poverty rate. Poverty data are presented using the Supplemental Poverty Measure and adjusted for underreporting. The data reflect the 2015 tax law applied to the 2015 population. Results for the 2018 tax law applied to the 2015 population are similar and can be found at www.nap.edu/catalog/25246

According to the **Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty**, this option could decrease poverty for children in Maine by 77% - more than the national estimate of 51% - and *represents the largest potential reduction in poverty predicted in any state.*

These policy recommendations offer us opportunities to implement meaningful changes within our state to reduce child poverty. You can explore details of the report and its findings, as well as specific recommendations with impact and cost at www.nap.edu/child-poverty/.

Given what we know about the importance of a strong foundation of health and development as a predictor of long-term success for our children, it is critical that we look at policies and programs that can support children and families to achieving economic stability, and ensuring a prosperous future for our children, our communities, and our state.