

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

DEFINITION

Racial and ethnic disparities is the gap that exists in outcomes for children of different racial and ethnic groups in Rhode Island. Child well-being outcome areas include economic well-being, health, safety, and education.

SIGNIFICANCE

Rhode Island's children are diverse in racial and ethnic background. In 2020 in Rhode Island, less than 1% of children under 18 were American Indian or Native Alaskan, 3% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander, 6% Black, 27% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Some other race, 8% Two or more races, and 53% white.¹

Children who live in poverty, especially those who experience deep poverty in early childhood, are more likely to have health, behavioral, educational, economic, and social problems.^{2,3} Between 2019 and 2023, 13% of all Rhode Island children lived in poverty, 70% of whom were Children of Color.⁴

Black, Latino, and Native American children are more likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and face challenges above and beyond the burdens of individual poverty.⁵ Between 2019 and 2023, in Rhode Island, 8% of Black children and 7% of Hispanic children lived in concentrated poverty compared to only 1% of white children.⁶ In 2020, more than half (59%) of Rhode Island's Children of Color lived in one of

the four core cities (those cities with the highest concentration of children living in poverty), and more than three quarters of the children in Central Falls (90%) and Providence (85%) were Children of Color.⁷

Racial and ethnic disparities in child well-being can be traced to the founding of the United States and the inequitable practices and policies that harmed Families of Color. From the removal of Native Americans from their lands and the use of Africans as enslaved labor, the country's first People of Color were prevented from fully participating in the economy while simultaneously building wealth for the country and its white citizens. Racism became an economic tool infused into laws, policies, and practices that have harmed Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, and low-income white people for centuries. Substantial changes to these laws and policies did not occur until the late 1960s, and the harm continues to reverberate in the lives of Children of Color.^{8,9,10}

Long-standing racial and ethnic disparities continue to persist.¹¹ Children in immigrant families (defined as children living with at least one foreign-born parent) also face additional barriers. In 2022, 29% (60,000) of Rhode Island children were living in immigrant families. More than half (54%) of Rhode Island's Hispanic children live in an immigrant family, and Hispanic workers are disproportionately represented in low-wage blue-collar and service sectors.^{12,13,14}



Root Causes of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Child Well-being

◆ **Economic Well-being:** Historic policies such as the *Homestead Acts* and the *Federal Housing Act* built the foundation of the American middle class by facilitating homeownership; however, People of Color were excluded from many of these wealth-building opportunities due to discriminatory policies in housing and banking.^{15,16} The results of this past discrimination and current systemic racism can be seen in current disparities in homeownership, an important component of wealth for many families in the United States and a tool to building intergenerational wealth.¹⁷

◆ **Health:** Health care only accounts for 10-20% of an individual's overall health outcomes and is just one of the social determinants of health, which is defined as the conditions and environments where people are born, live, learn, work, and play that greatly impact health outcomes.¹⁸ These social determinants of health, including economic stability, educational opportunities, neighborhood and the built environment, and social context, account for over 80% of health outcomes. Inequities in these determinants along with pervasive racial bias and unequal treatment of Communities of Color from the medical system contribute to significant unintended outcomes and disparities.^{19,20}

◆ **Safety:** Structural racism (e.g., policies that concentrate policing in Communities of Color), institutional racism (e.g., policies that disproportionately place Children of Color out of their homes), and racial bias and discrimination (e.g., beliefs held by workers about people from different racial or ethnic groups) all contribute to worse outcomes for Children of Color who come in contact with these systems.^{21,22,23}

◆ **Education:** An increase in segregation of schools has resulted in students in schools with high concentrations of low-income students and Students of Color having inequitable educational opportunities.²⁴ Additionally, students living in poverty often face a host of challenges outside the classroom that can negatively impact academic performance, including inadequate housing, less access to health care, lower parental educational levels, and fewer opportunities for enriching after-school and summer activities.^{25,26}

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Economic Well-Being Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island

	ALL RACES	AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	WHITE
Children in Poverty	13%	29%	7%	24%	25%	0%	7%
Births to Mothers with <12 Years Education	11%	23%	6%	11%	25%	33%	7%
Unemployment Rate	4.5%	NA	NA	3.5%	5.7%	NA	4.3%
Median Family Income	\$109,979	\$64,688	\$120,811	\$82,438	\$65,799	NA	\$120,491
Homeownership	63%	40%	54%	36%	38%	30%	69%

Sources: *Children in Poverty* data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019-2023. Tables S1701, B17020A, B17020B, B17020C, B17020D & B17020I. **Data is for Asian/Pacific Islander *Maternal Education* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, Maternal and Child Health Database, 2019-2023 (race data is non-Hispanic). *Unemployment Rate* data are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2024. *Median Family Income* data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019-2023, Tables B19113, B19113A, B19113B, B19113C, B19113D, B19113E & B19113I. *Homeownership* data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019-2023, Tables B25003, B25003A, B25003B, B25003C, B25003D, B25003E & B25003I. For U.S. Census Bureau data, Hispanics may be included in any of the race categories. All Census data refer only to those individuals who selected one race. NA indicates that the rate was suppressed because the number was too small to calculate a reliable rate.

◆ Between 2019 and 2023 in Rhode Island, 13% of all children, 29% of American Indian or Alaska Native children, 25% of Hispanic children, 24% of Black children, 7% of Asian/Pacific Islander children, and 7% of white children in Rhode Island lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold.²⁷

◆ In 2024 in Rhode Island, the unemployment rate was 5.7% for Hispanic workers, 3.5% for Black workers, and 4.3% for white workers. Nationally, the unemployment rate was 6.0% for Black workers, 5.1% for Hispanic workers, and 3.6% for white workers.²⁸

◆ People of Color are overrepresented among low-income working families. In Rhode Island, 64% of Latino two-parent families earn less than the income required to meet their basic needs, compared to 26% of white two-parent families.²⁹

◆ In Rhode Island, white residents have a homeownership rate almost double the rate of Black and Latino residents and higher than Asian residents.³⁰ Nearly 40% of Latino homeowners in Rhode Island experience cost burdens and 19% pay more than 50% of their income to housing costs.³¹ Nationally, median Black and Latino households would require 242 and 94 years respectively to gain wealth equal to that of white families.³²



Health Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island

	ALL RACES	AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	WHITE
Children Without Health Insurance	3.3%	NA	8.7%	3.2%	2.7%	NA	2.3%
Women with Delayed or No Prenatal Care	16.0%	26.9%	15.6%	21.7%	18.6%	*	13.0%
Low Birthweight Infants	7.7%	9.3%	8.8%	11.4%	8.3%	*	6.6%
Infant Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	4.6	0.0	*	7.2	6.4	0.0	2.9
Any Infant Breastfeeding	79%	71%	84%	73%	74%	75%	81%
Combined Overweight and Obesity	39%	NA	NA	42%	47%	NA	31%

Sources: All data are from the Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, Maternal and Child Health Database, 2019-2023 unless otherwise specified. Race and ethnicity is self-reported. Race data is non-Hispanic. *Children Without Health Insurance* data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023, Tables B27001, B27001A, B27001B, B27001D & B27001I. For U.S. Census Bureau data, Hispanic also may be included in any of the race categories. For *Combined Overweight and Obesity* data are from Brown University School of Public Health analysis of BMI clinical and billing records of children ages two to 17 in Rhode Island from KIDSNET, Current Care, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Cigna HealthCare, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, United Healthcare, and Tufts Health Plan collected by the Rhode Island Department of Health, 2024. NA data not available. *The data are statistically unreliable and rates are not reported and should not be calculated.

◆ Rhode Island ranks 10th in the nation for having lower rates (3.3%) of children under 19 without health insurance.³³ Asian (8.7%), Black (3.2%) and Hispanic (2.7%) children are more likely to be uninsured than white children (2.3%).³⁴ Over half (52%) of RI children under age three receive medical assistance.^{35,36}

◆ Although progress has been made on many health indicators across racial and ethnic populations, disparities still exist for many maternal and infant health outcomes. In Rhode Island, Women of Color are more likely than white women to receive delayed or no prenatal care and have infants with low birth weight. The Black infant mortality is the highest of any racial and ethnic group even after controlling for socioeconomic factors.^{37,38}

◆ American Indian and Alaskan Native and Hispanic children in Rhode Island are more likely to live in older housing, which increases the risk for lead exposure, environmental allergens, and dust.^{39,40} Between 2019-2023, Black and Hispanic children were more likely than non-Hispanic white children to visit the emergency room due to asthma.⁴¹

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Safety Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island

	ALL RACES	AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE
Youth at the Training School (per 1,000 youth ages 13-18)	2.2	2.7	1.1	7.9	3.3	0.8
Children of Incarcerated Parents (per 1,000 children)	10.9	26.0	3.0	50.5	12.5	7.8
Child Neglect & Abuse (per 1,000 children)	9.9	5.6	2.4	22.5	13.4	13.6

Sources: *Youth at the Training School* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Training School, Calendar Year 2024. *Children of Incarcerated Parents* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2024 and reflect the race of the incarcerated parent (includes only the sentenced population). *Child Neglect & Abuse* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RICHIST Database, 2024. Population denominators used for *Youth at the Training School* are youth ages 13 to 18 by race from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020, DHC. Population denominators used for *Children of Incarcerated Parents* and *Child Neglect & Abuse* are the populations under age 18 by race from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020, P2,P4.

◆ Nationally, racial and ethnic disproportionality in the youth justice, adult corrections, and child welfare systems is well-documented with disproportionality occurring at multiple steps within each system.^{42,43}

◆ During 2024 in Rhode Island, Black youth were 11 times more likely to be at the Rhode Island Training School compared to white youth and were five times more likely compared to youth of all races. American Indian or Alaskan Native youth and Hispanic youth were four times more likely to be at the Training School compared to white youth.⁴⁴ Black children in Rhode Island are twice as likely to enter the child welfare system as victims of neglect or abuse as white children and children of all races in 2024.⁴⁵

◆ In Rhode Island on September 30, 2024, 50.5 per 1,000 Black children had an incarcerated parent compared to 7.8 per 1,000 white children. American Indian or Alaska Native children also experience higher rates of parent incarceration (26.0 per 1,000).⁴⁶



Education Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity, Rhode Island

	ALL RACES	AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN+	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE
3rd Grade Students Meeting Expectations in Reading	38%	20%	64%	25%	23%	48%
3rd Grade Students Meeting Expectations in Math	39%	20%	62%	24%	26%	49%
Four-Year High School Graduation Rates	84%	71%	89%	79%	79%	88%
Immediate College Enrollment Rates	62%	44%	77%	61%	52%	67%
% of Adults Over Age 25 With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	39%	20%	56%	25%	17%	41%

Sources: *Third Grade Students Meeting Expectations in Reading and Math* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2024. *Four-Year High School Graduation Rates* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2024. *Immediate College Enrollment Rates* data are from the Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2024. *Adult Educational Attainment* data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019-2023, Tables B15003, C15002A, C15002B, C15002C, C15002D & C15002I. All Census data refer only to those individuals who selected one race, and Hispanic or Latino also may be included in any of the race categories. +Data for Asian and Pacific Islander students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

◆ Educators of Color benefit all students, especially Students of Color.⁴⁷ In October 2023, 49% of Rhode Island public school students identified as Students of Color while 87% of Rhode Island public school educators identified as white.⁴⁸

◆ In Rhode Island, Black and Hispanic children are more likely to attend school in the four core cities and less likely to meet expectations in reading and mathematics in third grade than white or Asian children.^{49,50}

◆ In Rhode Island during the 2023-2024 school year, Students of Color missed more school than their peers. American Indian or Alaska Native (37%), Hispanic (33%), and Black (27%) K-12 students had higher rates of chronic absence than Asian (16%) and white (19%) students.⁵¹

◆ In Rhode Island, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic, and Black students are less likely to graduate from high school within four years and are less likely to immediately enroll in college than white or Asian students. Gaps in college enrollment are particularly large for four-year college enrollment.⁵²



Rhode Island's Black Children and Youth

◆ Since the colonization of the state, Black Rhode Islanders were treated unequally. The historical roots lie in the reliance of Black slaves for labor and trade and were reinforced more recently through oppressive policies limiting opportunities for homeownership and inequitable education opportunities. While the state has made progress, significant social and economic disparities persist for Black Rhode Islanders.⁵³

◆ Rhode Island's Black population is linguistically and ancestrally diverse. Nearly one in three (29%) Black Rhode Islanders are foreign-born, almost 80% of whom were born in Africa and 21% born in the Caribbean.⁵⁴

◆ In 2020, there were 13,462 Black children under age 18 living in Rhode Island, a decrease from 14,830 in 2000. Black children made up 6% of Rhode Island's child population in 2020, the same percentage in 2000.^{55,56}

Economic Well-Being

◆ Between 2019 and 2023, 24% percent of Rhode Island's Black children were living in poverty, compared to 7% of white children.⁵⁷ The median family income for Black families in Rhode Island was \$82,438, compared to \$120,491 for white families in Rhode Island.⁵⁸

Health

◆ In Rhode Island, Black women are more likely than white women to receive delayed or no prenatal care and have infants with low birth weight. Black women in Rhode Island have the highest rates of severe maternal morbidity (116 per 10,000) and the infant mortality rate (7.2 per 1,000) is highest for Black babies compared to all other races.⁵⁹

Justice System

◆ During 2024 in Rhode Island, Black youth were 11 times more likely to be at the Rhode Island Training School compared to white youth and 50.5 per 1,000 Black children had an incarcerated parent compared to 7.8 per 1,000 white children.⁶⁰

Education

◆ Nationally, school segregation of Black and white students has increased by 64% since 1988.⁶¹ In Rhode Island in 2024, 64% of Black students attend schools in the urban core cities compared to only 10% of white students.⁶² Segregated schools create inequitable opportunities. In the 2023-2024 school year, only 8% of students taking Advanced Placement courses were Black, while 57% were white.⁶³

◆ In the 2023-2024 school year, Black students were twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than white students.^{64,65}

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- Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Cost of Housing**
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- **Typical monthly housing payment for Providence includes the East Side and therefore cannot be compared to data reported for Providence in Factbooks between 2013 and 2021.
- Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.
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- References for Cost of Housing**
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- Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Children Experiencing Homelessness**
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- References for Children Experiencing Homelessness**
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