

ALICE IN WISCONSIN: A FINANCIAL HARDSHIP STUDY

LIVE UNITED



2020 WISCONSIN REPORT



United Way of Wisconsin

ALICE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19



The release of this ALICE Report for Wisconsin comes during an unprecedented crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic. While our world changed significantly in March 2020 with the impact of this global, dual health and economic crisis, ALICE remains central to the story in every U.S. county and state. The pandemic has exposed exactly the issues of economic fragility and widespread hardship that United For ALICE and the ALICE data work to reveal.

That exposure makes the ALICE data and analysis more important than ever. The ALICE Report for Wisconsin presents the latest ALICE data available – a point-in-time snapshot of economic conditions across the state in 2018. By showing how many Wisconsin households were struggling then, the ALICE Research provides the backstory for why the COVID-19 crisis is having such a devastating economic impact. The ALICE data is especially important now to help stakeholders identify the most vulnerable in their communities, and direct programming and resources to assist them throughout the pandemic and the recovery that follows. And as Wisconsin moves forward, this data can be used to estimate the impact of the crisis over time, providing an important baseline for changes to come.

This crisis is fast-moving and quickly evolving. To stay abreast of the impact of COVID-19 on ALICE households and their communities, visit our website at UnitedForALICE.org/COVID19 for updates.

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Note: In addition to the corporate sponsorships, this report was made possible by the United Ways noted above in bold.

Learn more about ALICE in Wisconsin: unitedwaywi.org/ALICE

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Acknowledgments

United Way of Wisconsin thanks our sponsors, partners, and community stakeholders throughout the state for their support and commitment to this 2020 ALICE Report for Wisconsin. We mean to raise awareness of the 34% of households in the state who live in poverty or who are **ALICE** – **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed – and inform and inspire policy and action that improves the lives of ALICE families and strengthens our state.

To learn more about how you can get involved in advocating and creating change for ALICE in Wisconsin, contact: **Charlene Mouille**, cmouille@unitedwaywi.org or your local United Way (unitedwaywi.org/local)

To access the ALICE data and resources for Wisconsin, go to UnitedForALICE.org/Wisconsin



ALICE RESEARCH

ALICE Reports provide high-quality, research-based information to foster a better understanding of who is struggling in our communities. To produce the ALICE Report for Wisconsin, our team of researchers collaborated with a Research Advisory Committee composed of experts from across the state. Research Advisory Committee members from our partner states also periodically review the ALICE Methodology. This collaborative model ensures that the ALICE Reports present unbiased data that is replicable, easily updated on a regular basis, and sensitive to local context.

Learn more about the ALICE Research Team on our website at UnitedForALICE.org/ALICE-team

Director and Lead Researcher: Stephanie Hoopes, Ph.D.

Research Support Team:

Andrew Abrahamson; Ashley Anglin, Ph.D.; Catherine Connelly, D.M.H.; Max Holdsworth, M.A.; Dan Treglia, Ph.D.

ALICE Research Advisory Committee for Wisconsin

Sashi Gregory
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association

Lisa Hassenstab
Supporting Families Together Association

Stephanie Jung Dorfman
Feeding Wisconsin

Peter Kilde
WestCAP

Brad Paul
Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)

Carrie Poser
WI Balance of State CoC

Ruth Schmidt
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

Darrell Stroud
BMO Bank

Ken Taylor
KidsForward

Karen Timberlake, J.D.
Michael Best Strategies

Julie A. Urban, PhD
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

UNITED WAY STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

Said Hassan
Brown County United Way

Sarah Inman
Brown County United Way

Suzanne Brault
United Way Fox Cities

Dawn Helmrich
United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Kelly Abrams
United Way of Dane County

Martha Cranley
United Way of Dane County

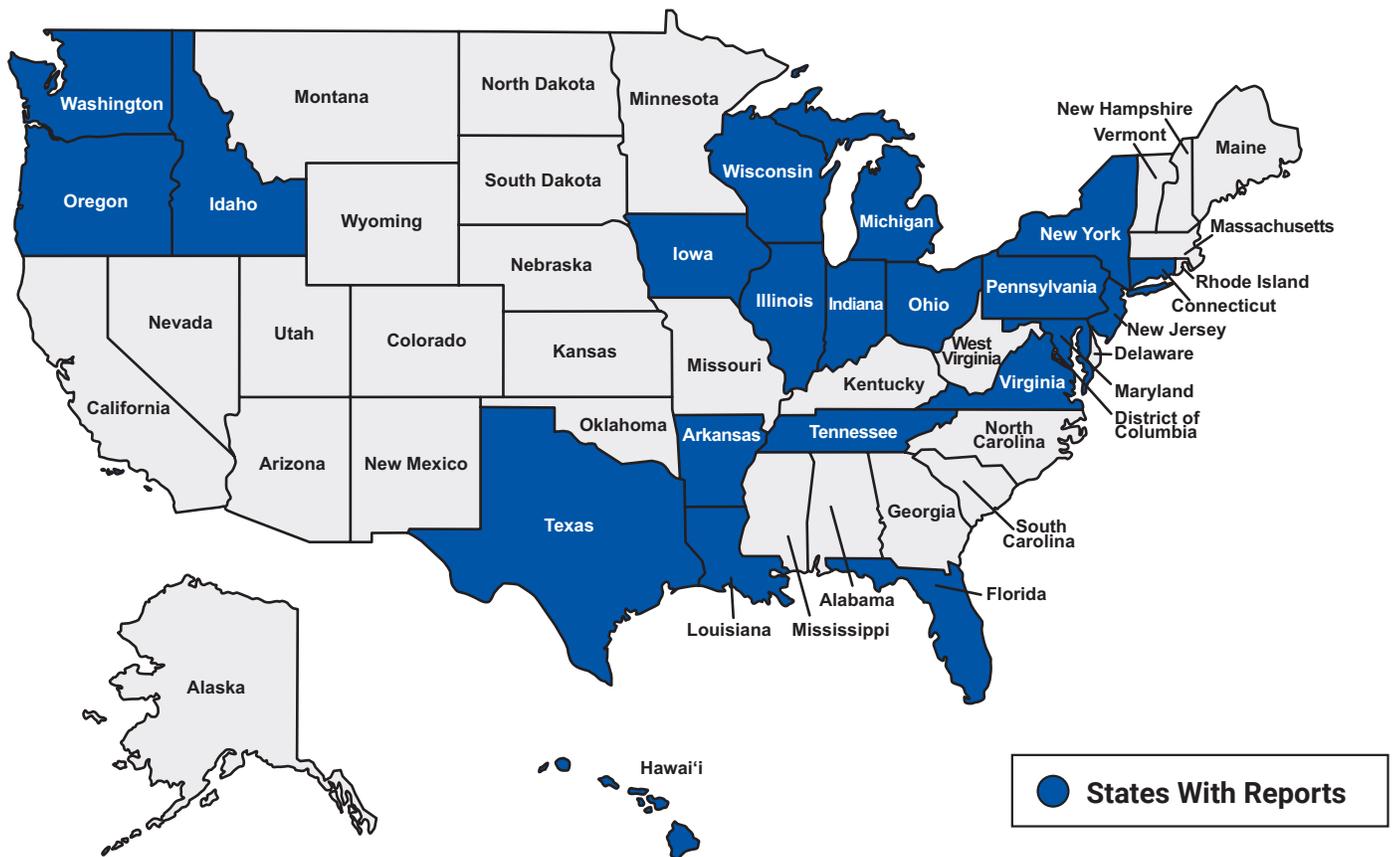
Charlene Mouille
United Way of Wisconsin

Katie McMullen
United Way of Wisconsin

ALICE: A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

This body of research provides a framework, language, and tools to measure and understand the struggles of a population called **ALICE** – an acronym for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. ALICE represents the growing number of households in our communities that do not earn enough to afford basic necessities. Partnering with United Ways, nonprofits, academic institutions, corporations, and other state organizations, this research initiative provides data to stimulate meaningful discussion, attract new partners, and ultimately inform strategies for positive change.

Based on the overwhelming success of this research in identifying and articulating the needs of this vulnerable population, this work has grown from a pilot in Morris County, New Jersey to 21 states and more than 648 United Ways. Together, United For ALICE partners can evaluate current initiatives and discover innovative approaches to improve life for ALICE and the wider community. To access Reports from all states, visit UnitedForALICE.org



NATIONAL ALICE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The following companies are major funders and supporters of this work:

**Aetna Foundation ■ Allergan ■ Alliant Energy ■ AT&T ■ Atlantic Health System ■ Atlantic Union Bank
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WHAT'S NEW IN ALICE RESEARCH

Every two years, United For ALICE undertakes a full review of the ALICE Methodology to ensure that the ALICE measures are transparent, replicable, and current in order to accurately reflect how much income families need to live and work in the modern economy. In 2019, more than 40 external experts – drawn from the Research Advisory Committees across our United For ALICE partner states – participated in the review process. A full description of the Methodology and sources is available at UnitedForALICE.org/Methodology

This Report includes the following improvements:

More local variation: The ALICE budgets for housing, food, transportation, health care, and taxes incorporate more local data. For housing, we differentiate counties within Metropolitan Statistical Areas using American Community Survey gross rent estimates. For food, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Thrifty Food Plan is adjusted at the county level using Feeding America's cost-of-meal data. For transportation, auto insurance is added to new miles-traveled data (discussed in the next paragraph) to reflect different driving costs by state. For health care, out-of-pocket costs are provided by census region. And taxes now systematically include local income tax, using data from the Tax Foundation.

Better reflection of household composition: Transportation and health care budgets now better reflect costs for different household members. The transportation budget for driving a car uses the Federal Highway Administration's miles-traveled data, sorted by age and gender, and AAA's cost-per-mile for a small or medium-sized car. The health care budget reflects employer-sponsored health insurance (the most common form in 2018, when it covered 49% of Americans¹), using the employee's contribution, plus out-of-pocket expenditures by age and income, from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Medical Expenditure Panel Survey.

More variations by household size: The median household size in the U.S. is three people for households headed by a person under age 65 and two people for households headed by seniors (65+).² Reflecting this reality, the Household Survival Budgets are presented in new variations, including a Senior Survival Budget. The website provides data to create budgets for households with any combination of adults and children. The ALICE Threshold has also been adjusted to incorporate the most common modern household compositions. These new budget variations are included in the County Profile and Household Budget pages on UnitedForALICE.org/Wisconsin

New ALICE measures:

- The **Senior Survival Budget** more accurately represents household costs for people age 65 and over. Housing and technology remain constant; however, some costs are lower – transportation, food, and health insurance premiums (due to Medicare) – while others are higher, especially out-of-pocket health costs. Because over 90% of seniors have at least one chronic condition, the Senior Survival Budget includes the additional cost of treating the average of the five most common chronic diseases.
- The **ALICE Essentials Index** is a standardized measure of the change over time in the costs of essential household goods and services, calculated for both urban and rural areas. It can be used as a companion to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Consumer Price Index, which covers all goods and services that families at all income levels buy regularly.

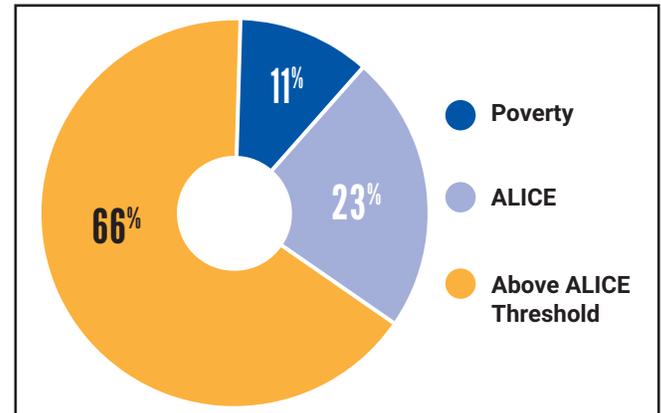
Data Notes: The data are estimates; some are geographic averages, others are one- or five-year averages depending on population size. Change-over-time ranges start with 2007, before the Great Recession, then measure change every two years from 2010 to 2018. County-level data remains the primary focus, as state averages mask significant differences between counties. For example, the share of households below the ALICE Threshold in Wisconsin ranges from 26% in Ozaukee County to 55% in Menominee County. Many percentages are rounded to whole numbers, sometimes resulting in percentages totaling 99% or 101%. The methodological improvements included in this Report have been applied to previous years to allow for accurate year-over-year comparisons. This means that some numbers and percentages at the state and county level will not match those reported in previous ALICE Reports for Wisconsin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed	1
At-A-Glance: Wisconsin	3
Who Is ALICE?	6
Trends: Household Demographics	8
The Cost of Living in Wisconsin	10
The ALICE Household Budgets	10
The ALICE Essentials Index	12
Trends: Cost of Living	13
The Changing Landscape of Work in Wisconsin	16
The New Labor Force	18
ALICE Jobs: Maintaining the Economy	20
Trends: The Landscape of Work	22
Next Steps: Data for Action	24
Identifying Gaps	24
Understanding ALICE: Health, Education, and Social Factors	26
The Benefits of Moving Toward Equity in Wisconsin	27
Endnotes	32
Figure 12: Sources	44

ASSET LIMITED, INCOME CONSTRAINED, EMPLOYED

From 2010 to 2018, Wisconsin showed steady economic improvements according to traditional measures. Unemployment in the state and across the U.S. fell to historic lows, GDP grew, and wages rose slightly. Yet in 2018, eight years after the end of the Great Recession, 34% of Wisconsin's 2,359,857 households still struggled to make ends meet. And while 11% of these households were living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), another 23% — more than twice as many — were **ALICE** households: **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mloyed. These households earned above the FPL, but not enough to afford basic household necessities.



This Report provides new data and tools that explain the persistent level of hardship faced by ALICE households, revealing aspects of the Wisconsin economy not tracked by traditional economic measures. The Report highlights three critical trends:

- **The cost of living is increasing for ALICE households.** From 2007 to 2018, the cost of household essentials (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology) increased faster than the cost of other goods and services. The ALICE Essentials Index, a new tool that measures change over time in the cost of essentials, increased at an average rate of 3.4% annually nationwide over the past decade, while the official rate of inflation was 1.8%.
- **Worker vulnerability is increasing while wages stagnate in ALICE jobs.** By 2018, a near-record-low number of people were reported to be unemployed. However, that low unemployment concealed three trends that expose ALICE workers to greater risk: growth in the number of low-wage jobs, minimal increases in wages, and more fluctuations in job hours, schedules, and benefits that make it harder to budget and plan. These trends were clear in 2018: A record number of Wisconsin workers — 60% — were paid by the hour, and 59% of the state's jobs paid less than \$20 per hour.
- **The number of ALICE households in Wisconsin has increased** as a result of rising costs and stagnant wages. There are more ALICE households than households in poverty, and the number of ALICE households is increasing at a faster rate. The FPL, with its minimal and uniform national estimate of the cost of living, far underestimates the number of households that cannot afford to live and work in the modern economy. In Wisconsin, the percentage of households that were ALICE rose from 17% in 2007 to 23% in 2018. By contrast, those in poverty increased from 10% of all households in 2007 to 13% by 2014, before dipping slightly to comprise 11% of all households in 2018.

This Report provides critical measures that assess Wisconsin's economy from four perspectives: They track financial hardship over time and across demographic groups; quantify the basic cost of living in Wisconsin; assess job trends; and identify gaps in assistance and community resources. These measures also debunk assumptions and stereotypes about low-income workers and families. ALICE households are as diverse as the general population, composed of people of all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities, living in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

The Report concludes with an analysis of the economic benefits if all households had income above the ALICE Threshold. Not only would there be a significant positive impact on families and their communities, but the state economy would also benefit. In fact, the added value to the Wisconsin GDP would be approximately \$52.3 billion.

This Report and its measures are tools to help stakeholders ask the right questions, reduce vulnerabilities, remove obstacles to advancement, identify gaps in community resources, build a stronger workforce, and implement programs and policies that help put financial stability within reach for ALICE households. With the magnitude of financial hardship revealed, these actions can help move all households toward a more equitable economy, and ensure that no one is left behind in harder times.

GLOSSARY

ALICE is an acronym that stands for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed – households with income above the Federal Poverty Level but below the basic cost of living. A household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. In this Report, households do not include those living in group quarters such as a dorm, nursing home, or prison.

The **Household Survival Budget** estimates the actual bare-minimum costs of basic necessities (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a basic smartphone plan) in Wisconsin, adjusted for different counties and household types.

The **Senior Survival Budget** incorporates specific cost estimates for seniors for food, transportation, and health care, reflecting key differences in household expenses by age.

The **Household Stability Budget** calculates the costs of supporting and sustaining an economically viable household over time, including a contingency for savings.

The **ALICE Threshold** is the average income that a household needs to afford the basic necessities defined by the Household Survival Budget for each county in Wisconsin. Households **Below the ALICE Threshold** include both ALICE and poverty-level households.

The **ALICE Essentials Index** is a measure of the average change over time in the costs of the essential goods and services that households need to live and work in the modern economy – housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan.

ALICE ONLINE

Visit UnitedForALICE.org for more details about ALICE, including:



Interactive Maps

Data at the state, county, municipal, ZIP code, and congressional district levels



Research Advisory Committee

Learn about the members and role of this critical group



Additional Reports

Explore The ALICE Essentials Index and The Consequences of Insufficient Household Income



Demographic Data

Information about ALICE households by age, race/ethnicity, and household type



Data Spreadsheet

Download the ALICE data



Jobs Graphs

Details about where ALICE works



County Profiles

Detailed data about ALICE households in each county



Methodology

Overview of the sources and calculations used in the ALICE research



More About United For ALICE

See our partners, press coverage, learning communities, etc.

AT-A-GLANCE: WISCONSIN

2018 Point-in-Time Data

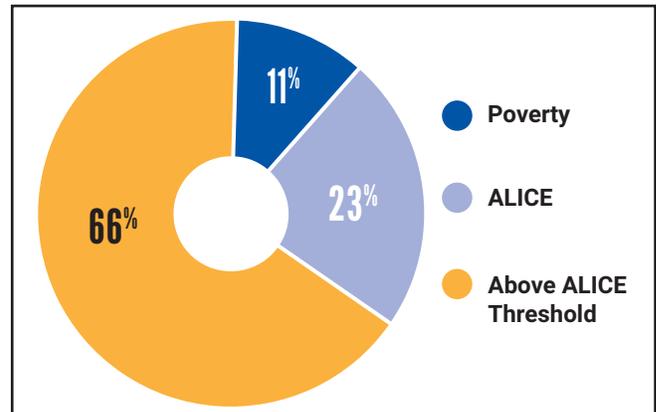
Population: 5,813,568

Number of Counties: 72

Number of Households: 2,359,857

How many households are struggling?

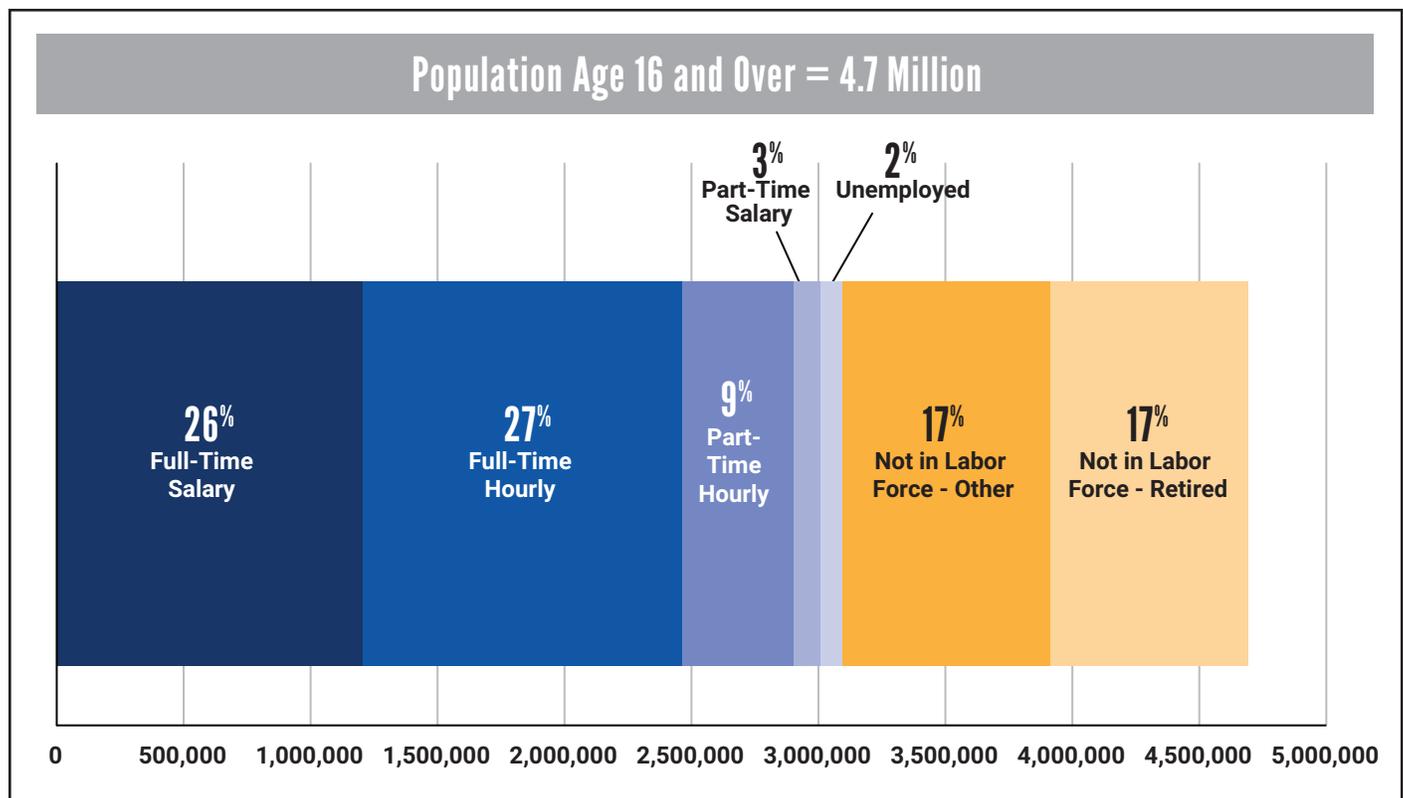
ALICE, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, comprises households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but less than the basic cost of living for the state (the ALICE Threshold). Of Wisconsin's 2,359,857 households, 262,960 earned below the Federal Poverty Level (11%) in 2018, and another 549,313 (23%) were ALICE.



What does the Wisconsin labor force look like?

A 2018 overview of the labor status of Wisconsin's 4,688,927 working-age adults (people age 16 and over) shows that 67% of adults were in the labor force (blue bars), yet more than half were workers who were paid hourly. Hourly paid jobs tend to have lower wages, fewer benefits, and less stability. In addition, 34% of adults were outside the labor force (gold bars), either because they were retired or because they had stopped looking for work.

Labor Status, Population Age 16 and Over, Wisconsin, 2018



Note: Data for full- and part-time jobs is only available at the national level; these national rates (51% of full-time workers and 75% of part-time, hourly workers) have been applied to the total Wisconsin workforce to calculate the breakdown shown in this figure. Full-time represents a minimum of 35 hours per week at one or more jobs for 48 weeks per year. Many percentages are rounded to whole numbers, sometimes resulting in percentages totaling 99% or 101%.

What does it cost to afford the basic necessities?

The average ALICE Household Survival Budget in Wisconsin was \$21,624 for a single adult, \$24,000 for a single senior, and \$68,472 for a family of four in 2018 — significantly more than the Federal Poverty Level of \$12,140 for a single adult and \$25,100 for a family of four.



Household Survival Budget, Wisconsin, Average, 2018			
	SINGLE ADULT	SENIOR (1 ADULT)	2 ADULTS, 1 INFANT, 1 PRESCHOOLER
Monthly Costs			
Housing	\$526	\$526	\$767
Child Care	\$-	\$-	\$1,297
Food	\$264	\$224	\$798
Transportation	\$326	\$280	\$795
Health Care	\$214	\$468	\$699
Technology	\$55	\$55	\$75
Miscellaneous	\$164	\$182	\$519
Taxes	\$253	\$265	\$756
Monthly Total	\$1,802	\$2,000	\$5,706
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$21,624	\$24,000	\$68,472
<i>Hourly Wage*</i>	<i>\$10.81</i>	<i>\$12.00</i>	<i>\$34.24</i>

*Full-time wage required to support this budget

Wisconsin Counties, 2018		
COUNTY	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	% ALICE & POVERTY
Adams	8,619	43%
Ashland	6,546	44%
Barron	19,108	37%
Bayfield	6,963	36%
Brown	104,470	33%
Buffalo	5,713	31%
Burnett	7,303	37%
Calumet	19,567	29%
Chippewa	25,485	32%
Clark	12,800	42%
Columbia	23,790	27%

Wisconsin Counties, 2018		
COUNTY	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	% ALICE & POVERTY
Crawford	6,618	39%
Dane	226,350	29%
Dodge	35,221	29%
Door	13,196	31%
Douglas	18,920	37%
Dunn	16,818	33%
Eau Claire	40,421	35%
Florence	2,010	40%
Fond du Lac	41,009	36%
Forest	4,029	40%
Grant	19,401	36%

Wisconsin Counties, 2018

COUNTY	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	% ALICE & POVERTY
Green	15,098	30%
Green Lake	7,935	33%
Iowa	9,835	30%
Iron	3,003	43%
Jackson	8,083	41%
Jefferson	33,180	31%
Juneau	10,640	37%
Kenosha	62,950	37%
Kewaunee	8,238	32%
La Crosse	47,924	37%
Lafayette	6,679	32%
Langlade	8,594	36%
Lincoln	12,547	33%
Manitowoc	35,259	31%
Marathon	56,245	29%
Marinette	18,631	39%
Marquette	6,516	37%
Menominee	1,443	55%
Milwaukee	384,281	44%
Monroe	17,772	31%
Oconto	15,940	32%
Oneida	15,403	33%
Outagamie	74,603	32%
Ozaukee	35,625	26%
Pepin	3,095	35%
Pierce	15,367	32%
Polk	18,314	34%
Portage	29,193	32%
Price	6,605	36%
Racine	76,808	37%
Richland	7,626	37%
Rock	64,632	36%
Rusk	6,382	38%

Wisconsin Counties, 2018

COUNTY	TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	% ALICE & POVERTY
Sauk	26,178	35%
Sawyer	7,634	43%
Shawano	17,019	34%
Sheboygan	46,308	33%
St. Croix	34,422	27%
Taylor	8,632	35%
Trempealeau	11,936	33%
Vernon	12,080	39%
Vilas	10,914	44%
Walworth	40,864	33%
Washburn	7,062	37%
Washington	54,138	27%
Waukesha	158,368	27%
Waupaca	22,024	30%
Waushara	9,869	39%
Winnebago	71,332	34%
Wood	32,274	32%

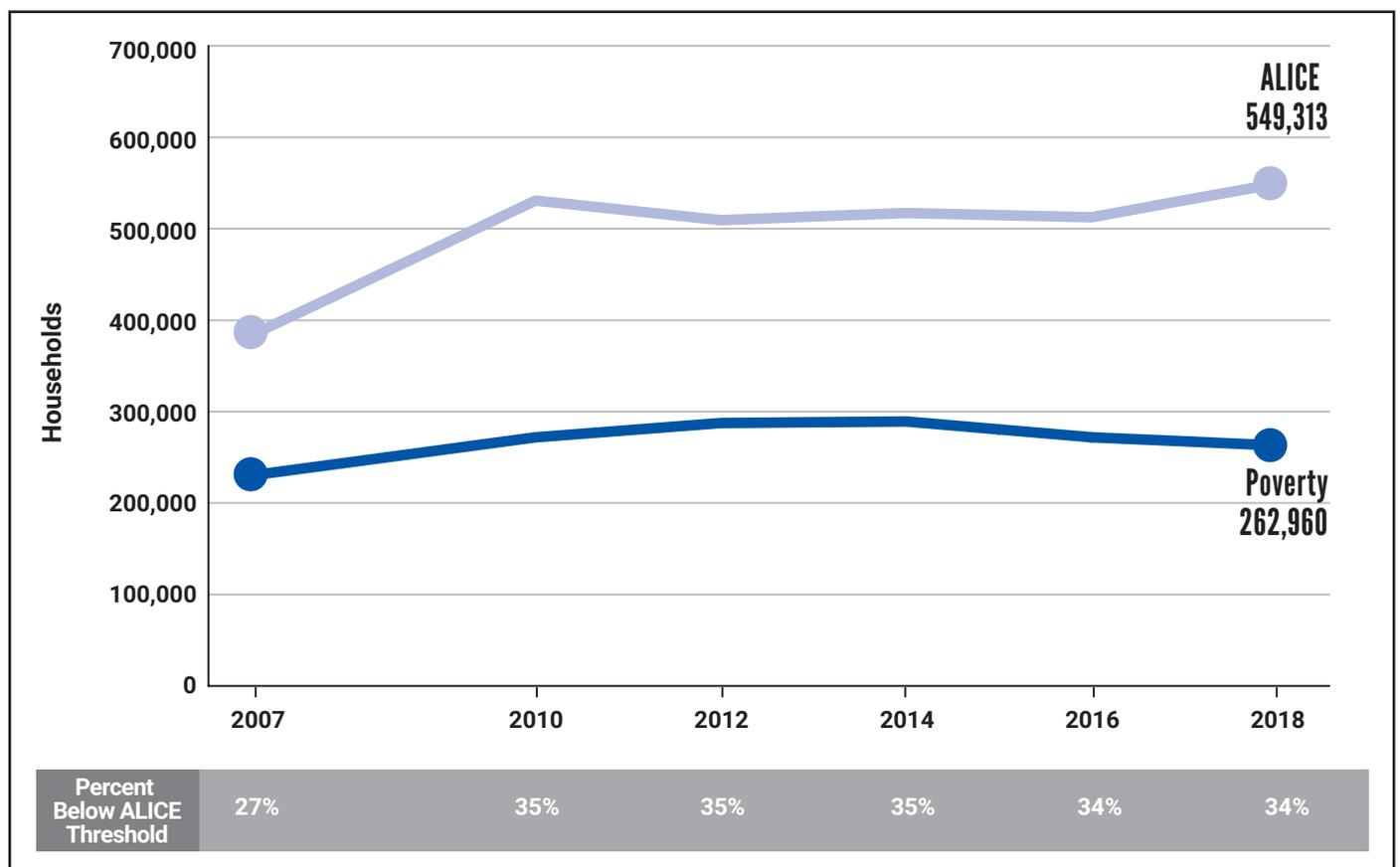
Sources: *Point-in-Time Data:* American Community Survey, 2018. **ALICE Demographics:** ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018. **Labor Status:** American Community Survey, 2018; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2018. **Budget:** AAA, 2018; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018—Consumer Expenditure Surveys; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019—Consumer Expenditure Survey; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018—Occupational Employment Statistics; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2016—Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2019; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2019—Medicare - Chronic Conditions; Federal Highway Administration, 2017; Feeding America, 2019; Fowler, 2019; Internal Revenue Service, 2020; Internal Revenue Service—FICA, 2020; Medicare.gov; Scarboro, 2018; Supporting Families Together Association, 2019; The Zebra, 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018—Official USDA Food Plans; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018—Fair Market Rents; Walczak, 2019. For more details, see the Methodology Overview at www.UnitedForALICE.org/Methodology

WHO IS ALICE?

With income above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but below a basic survival threshold – defined as the ALICE Threshold – ALICE households earn too much to qualify as “poor” but are still unable to make ends meet. They often work as cashiers, nursing assistants, office clerks, servers, laborers, and security guards. These types of jobs are vital to keeping Wisconsin’s economy running smoothly, but they do not provide adequate wages to cover the basics of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology for these ALICE workers and their families.

Between 2007 and 2018 the total number of Wisconsin households increased gradually each year, reaching 2,359,857 in 2018. The number of households in poverty also increased steadily between 2007 and 2014, before dipping slightly from 2014 to 2018, comprising 11% of all households by 2018. But the number of ALICE households increased significantly between 2007 to 2018 (from 386,700 to 549,313, a 42% increase), with their share of all households rising from 17% to 23%. This growth was especially pronounced between 2007 and 2010; between 2010 and 2012, there was a slight dip that was sustained through 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, however, there was a 7% increase in the number of ALICE households, which offset the declining poverty rate. Overall, the percentage of households living below the ALICE Threshold (ALICE and poverty-level households combined) increased from 27% in 2007 to 34% in 2018 (Figure 1).

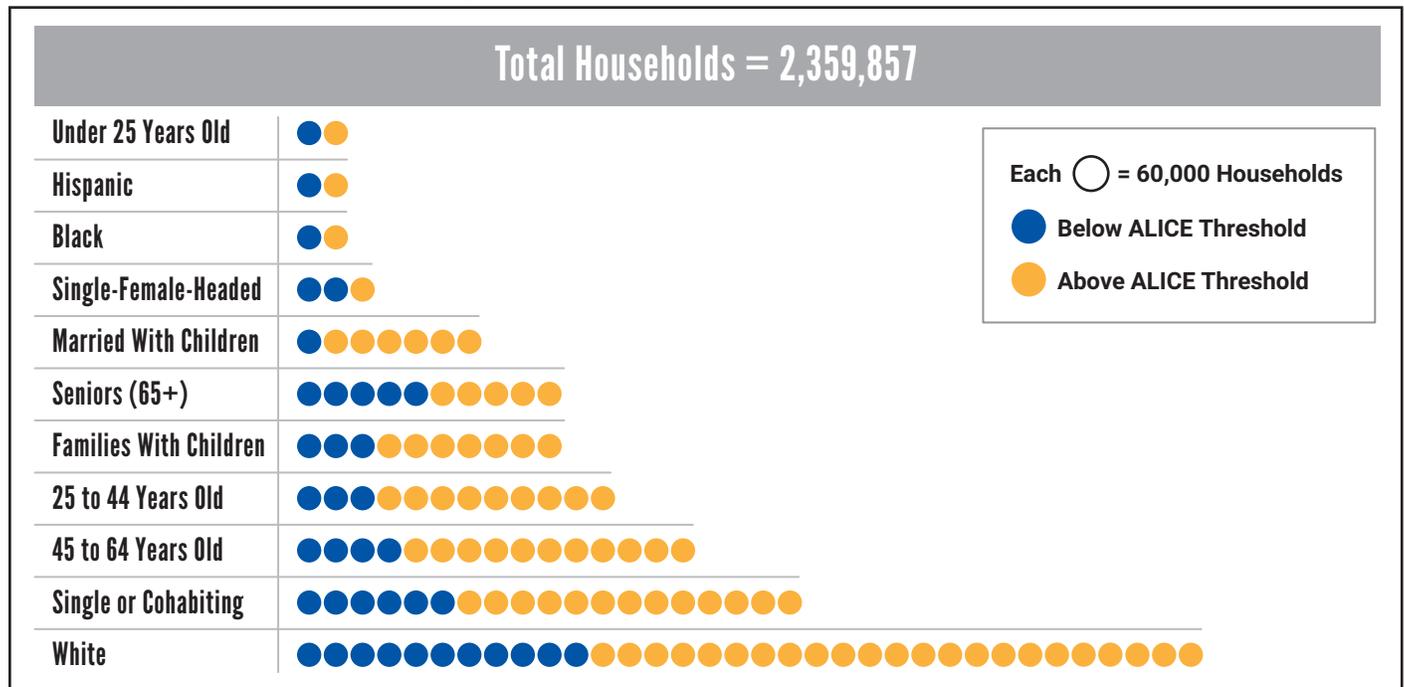
Figure 1.
Households by Income, Wisconsin, 2007–2018



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2007–2018; American Community Survey, 2007–2018

ALICE households live in every county in Wisconsin – urban, suburban, and rural – and they include people of all genders, ages, and races/ethnicities, across all household types. Figure 2 shows that in 2018, the largest numbers of households below the ALICE Threshold were in the largest demographic groups in Wisconsin – namely, households headed by someone in their prime working years (ages 25–64), single or cohabiting households (without children or seniors), and White households. Among families with children – the next-largest household type in the state – married-parent families were the largest subgroup, yet single-parent families are more likely to be below the ALICE Threshold.

Figure 2.
Household Types by Income, Largest Groups, Wisconsin, 2018

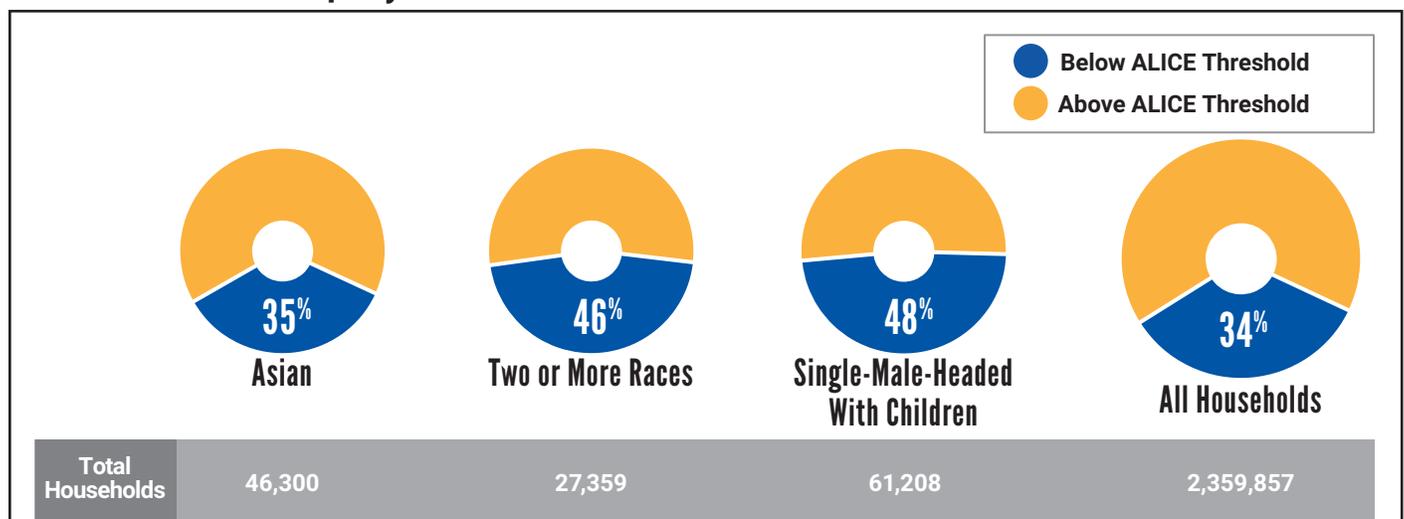


Note: The groups shown in this figure overlap across categories (age, household type, race/ethnicity). Within the race/ethnicity category, all racial categories except Two or More Races are for one race alone. Race and ethnicity are overlapping categories; in this Report, the Asian, Black, Hawaiian (includes other Pacific Islanders), and Two or More Races groups may include Hispanic households. The White group includes only White, non-Hispanic households. The Hispanic group may include households of any race. Because household poverty data is not available for the American Community Survey's race/ethnicity categories, annual income below \$15,000 is used as a proxy.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018

Another way to examine the data is to look at the proportion of each group that is below the ALICE Threshold. Overall, 34% of households in Wisconsin had income below the ALICE Threshold in 2018. But many groups in the state had a disproportionately high percentage of households below the ALICE Threshold in 2018. Five of these groups are shown in Figure 2: single-female-headed families with children (70% below the ALICE Threshold), Black and Hispanic households (with 66% and 48% below the ALICE threshold, respectively), and the youngest and oldest households (62% of households headed by someone under 25 years and 47% of households headed by seniors). Two smaller groups (each with fewer than 65,000 total households), shown in Figure 3, also had a disproportionately high percentage of households below the ALICE Threshold: households headed by someone of two or more races and single-male-headed families with children. Among Asian households – the smallest single-race group – 35% were below the ALICE Threshold, similar to the state average.

Figure 3.
Select Household Groups by Income, Wisconsin, 2018



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018

In addition to these important variations by age, race/ethnicity, and family type, other factors can also make households more likely to be ALICE or to be in poverty. These include being a household headed by a recent immigrant, especially those who are undocumented; by someone with low proficiency in English; by a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer individual (though gay men, particularly those in married couples, are less likely to be low-income than other LGBTQ+ groups); by someone with a low level of education; or by someone living with a disability. Groups with more than one of these factors — younger combat veterans, for example, who may have both a disability and a low level of education — are even more likely to fall below the ALICE Threshold.

TRENDS: HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

A growing number of households live on the edge of the ALICE Threshold. For these households, even a small increase in the cost of housing or a decrease in work hours can mean the difference between being financially stable and being ALICE. **In Wisconsin, 10% of households (229,296) were on the cusp of the ALICE Threshold in 2018;** of those, about half earned just above the ALICE Threshold and half earned just below it.³ This matters for families, but it can also impact the Wisconsin economy as a whole: Even a small drop in wages or hours worked, or an unexpected emergency — such as a factory closing or a natural disaster — could destabilize a large number of households. Conversely, a small increase in wages or a decrease in rent or a car payment could help push families above the Threshold.

Wisconsin is increasingly diverse. While all of the state's largest racial and ethnic groups grew between 2010 and 2018, their trajectories for growth and financial hardship differed. For the largest group, White households, the total number of households increased by only 1% (with a larger proportion of seniors than other racial/ethnic groups), while the number of Black, Hispanic, and Asian households increased by 7%, 33%, and 37%, respectively. The largest racial/ethnic groups in the state also had different trajectories for those below the ALICE Threshold. While White households saw a 1% drop in the number of households below the ALICE Threshold, all others experienced an increase: Black households by 6%, Hispanic households by 25%, and Asian households by 38%.⁴ Wisconsin is also home to a large and growing foreign-born population, with the largest groups born in Latin America (primarily Mexico, but also Colombia and El Salvador), and Asia (with the majority born in India and China). These immigrants contribute to an increasingly diverse workforce, especially in agricultural, technological, and scientific fields, and reside primarily in Dane, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Walworth counties.⁵

Wisconsin's household structure continues to change. The number of married-parent families with children is decreasing, falling 10% from 2010 to 2018. In 2018, single or cohabiting adults under age 65 with no children under age 18 made up the largest proportion of households in Wisconsin (48%), as well as the largest share of households below the ALICE Threshold (43%). Nationally, the number of cohabiting adults more than doubled between 1996 and 2017, and these partners tend to have higher levels of education and be more racially diverse today than cohabiting adults 20 years ago.⁶

Baby boomers and millennials, the two largest population bubbles, are getting older. This natural aging of the population is increasing the number of seniors as more boomers pass age 65. As a result, there has been a decline in working-age residents in most counties. The proportion of both college-age students and families with children has also fallen as millennials have passed traditional college age, are having fewer children, and are waiting longer than previous generations to have them.⁷

Among seniors, there are three trends. First, the White population in Wisconsin is older than other racial/ethnic groups and will continue to account for an increasing share of the senior population. Second, seniors are the age group with the largest increase in ALICE households in the state. Having lived through a decade of financial challenges since the Great Recession, more Wisconsin seniors will become ALICE. (Though without the many policies and programs in place to help seniors financially — such as Social Security, property tax deductions or exemptions based on age, and senior discounts for both private and public purchases — many more seniors would fall below the ALICE Threshold.) And third, seniors make up a larger portion of households in rural areas, where they will continue to face additional challenges in

access to transportation, health care, and caregiving. Despite these challenges, Wisconsin performed well in a 2020 report on the best and worst places for seniors to live in the U.S., ranking 9th out of 50 states and scoring better than the national average on measures such as air and water quality, traffic congestion, crime rate, and access to parks (yet worse than the national average on the rate of mental health professionals, access to jobs by transit, and broadband internet cost and speed).⁸

For millennials, in addition to the natural aging of this population, there has also been a negative annual net migration rate, with Wisconsin losing around 3,700 people age 25–34 each year between 2012 and 2017. However, this trend differs by metropolitan area in the state. For example, while Milwaukee saw an annual net out-migration of millennials over the last decade, Madison ranked in the top-10 destinations for millennials in a 2019 analysis of the 100 largest metro areas in the U.S., with millennials comprising 75% of recent movers to the city. This report cited employment opportunities, relatively high wages, and housing affordability (millennials moving into the city can afford to buy nearly 30% of homes) as the primary factors drawing millennials to Madison.⁹

Inequality in income and wealth will continue to rise as wage growth and job stability in high-wage jobs greatly outpace growth and stability at the lower end. Nationwide, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, incomes across the income distribution grew at nearly the same pace. Then, beginning in the 1970s, income disparities began to widen: The average income for the top 1% increased over five times more than that of the middle 60% and over three times more than that of the bottom fifth, from 1979 to 2016.¹⁰ In Wisconsin by 2015, the average income of the top 1% was 18.9 times higher than the average income of the bottom 99%.¹¹ Based on the Gini coefficient (a calculation that compares actual income distribution to a hypothetical “equal” income distribution), Sawyer County had the most unequal income distribution between 2013 and 2017, while Calumet County had the most equal distribution during this period.¹² The gap in wealth (savings and assets) is even greater. Unable to save, ALICE families do not have the means to build assets, let alone catch up to those who already have assets (especially those who have been building assets for generations). ALICE families also face more barriers that, when compounded, create an even bigger wealth gap. These include issues like lower pay for women, racial/ethnic discrimination in homeownership, and student loan debt.¹³

THE COST OF LIVING IN WISCONSIN

Traditional economic measures systematically underestimate the actual cost of basic needs and their rate of increase over time, concealing important aspects of the local and national economy. To better capture the reality of how much income households need to live and work in the modern economy in each county in Wisconsin, this Report includes the **ALICE Household Budgets**. In addition, the Report presents the **ALICE Essentials Index**, a standardized national measure that captures change over time in the cost of household essentials that ALICE households purchase. Together, these tools provide a more accurate estimate of the cost of living and a clearer way to track change over time.

THE ALICE HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS

United For ALICE provides three basic budgets for all counties in Wisconsin. Each budget can be calculated for various household types.

- The **ALICE Household Survival Budget** is an estimate of the minimal total cost of household essentials — housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology, plus taxes and a miscellaneous contingency fund equal to 10% of the budget. It does not include savings, auto repairs, cable service, travel, laundry costs, or amenities such as holiday gifts or dinner at a restaurant that many families take for granted.
- The **Senior Survival Budget**, new to this Report, adjusts the Household Survival Budget to reflect the fact that seniors have lower food costs than younger adults, travel fewer miles for work and family responsibilities, and have increasing health needs and out-of-pocket health care expenses.
- For comparison to a more sustainable budget, the **ALICE Household Stability Budget** estimates the higher costs of maintaining a viable household over time, and it is the only ALICE budget to include a savings category, equal to 10% of the budget.

The actual cost of household basics in every county in Wisconsin is well above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for all household sizes and types (Figure 4). For a single adult, the FPL was \$12,140 per year in 2018, but the average Household Survival Budget in Wisconsin was \$21,624 per year.¹⁴ The average Senior Survival Budget totaled \$24,000 per year, primarily due to increased health costs. (Despite having Medicare, seniors have greater out-of-pocket health care costs, largely due to increased spending on chronic health issues like heart disease and diabetes.) And all budgets were significantly lower than the Household Stability Budget, which reached \$42,672 per year for a single adult in Wisconsin.

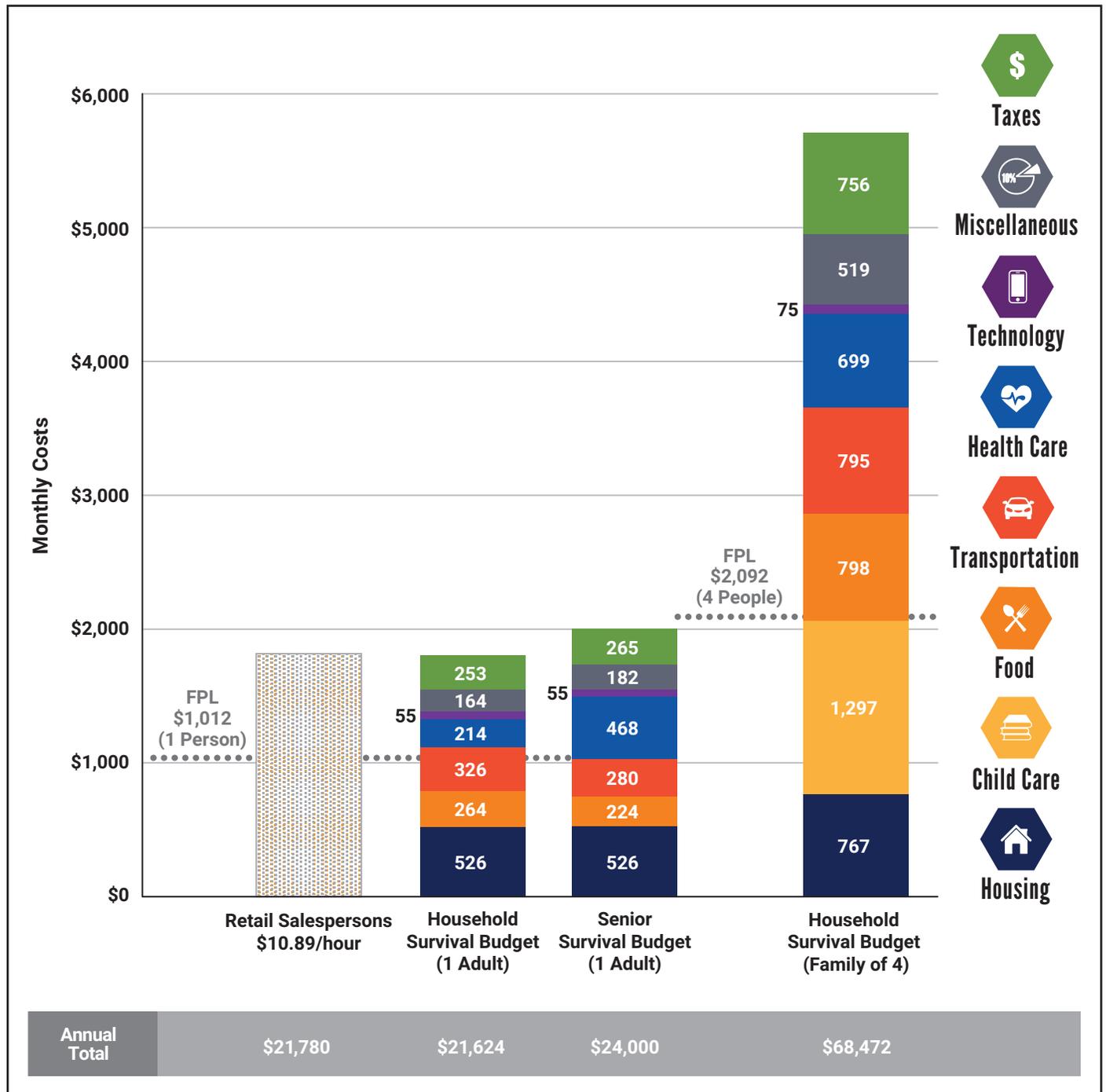
The gaps are even larger for families. The FPL for a four-person family was \$25,100 in 2018, while the Household Survival Budget for a family with two adults, an infant, and a four-year-old was \$68,472.¹⁵

The hourly wages needed to support these budgets were \$10.81 for the single-adult Survival Budget; \$12.00 for the Senior Survival Budget; and \$34.24 for one worker or \$17.12 each for two workers for the Survival Budget for a family of four. To put these budgets in perspective, the median hourly wage for the most common occupation in Wisconsin, retail sales, was \$10.89 in 2018, or \$21,780 if full time, year-round — barely enough to support the single-adult Survival Budget (by a mere \$0.08 per hour) and not enough to support any of the other ALICE budgets.

Public assistance programs are based on the FPL, but the FPL is not enough for a household to cover even its most minimal costs, as shown by the comparison to the Household Survival Budget in Figure 4. This means that assistance programs serve far fewer households than actually need assistance, even in a strong economy.

To see the details of each ALICE budget for different household types, visit UnitedForALICE.org/Wisconsin

Figure 4.
Budget Comparison, Wisconsin, 2018



Note: The FPL is a total; there is no breakdown of how that amount is allocated by budget category.

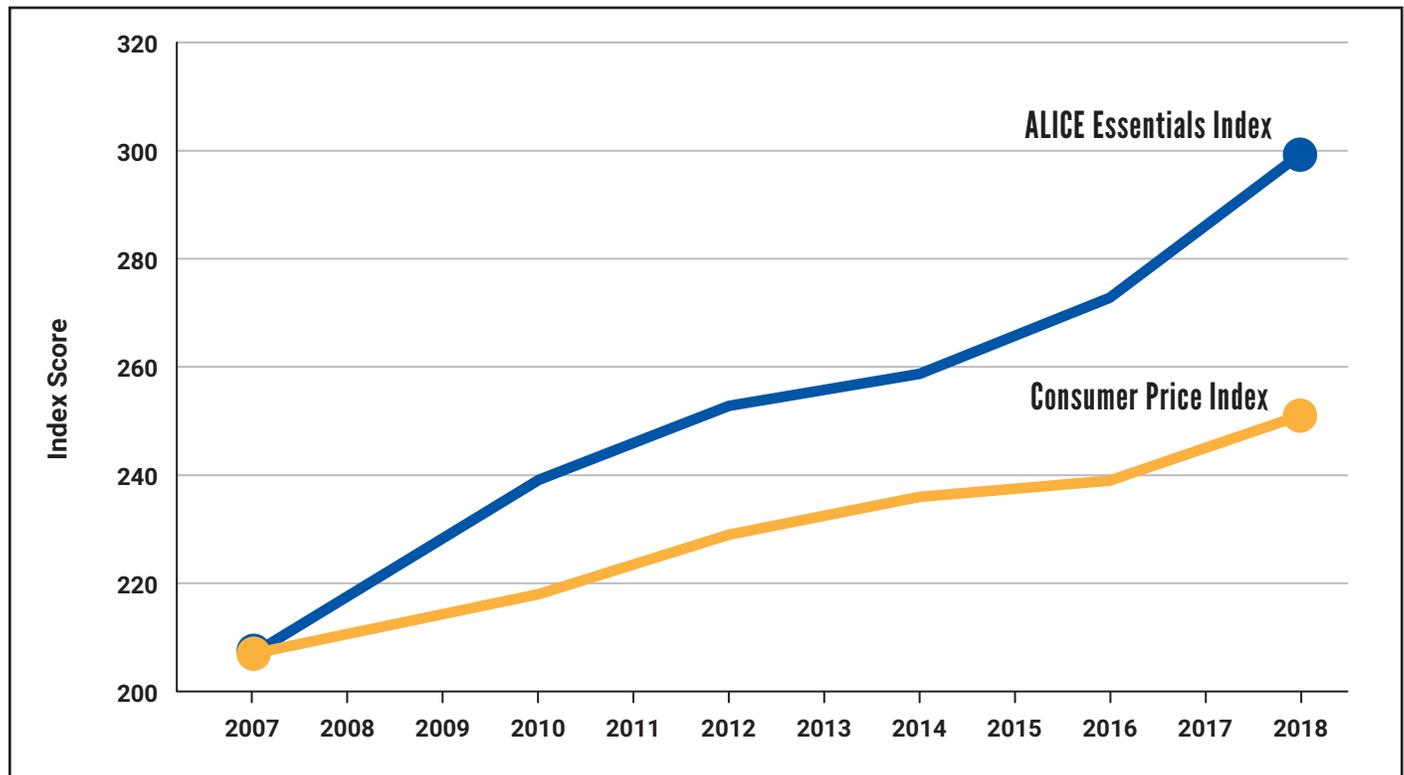
Sources: AAA, 2018; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018—Consumer Expenditure Surveys; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019—Consumer Expenditure Survey; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018—Occupational Employment Statistics; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2016—Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2019; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2019—Medicare - Chronic Conditions; Federal Highway Administration, 2017; Fowler, 2019; Gundersen, Dewey, Kato, Crumbaugh, and Strayer, 2019; Internal Revenue Service, 2020; Internal Revenue Service—FICA, 2020; Medicare.gov; Scarboro, 2018; Supporting Families Together Association, 2019; The Zebra, 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018—Official USDA Food Plans; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018—Fair Market Rents; Walczak, 2019. For more details, see the Methodology Overview at [UnitedForALICE.org/Methodology](https://www.alice.org/Methodology)⁶

THE ALICE ESSENTIALS INDEX

Based on items in the Household Survival Budget, the ALICE Essentials Index measures the change over time in the costs of household essentials – a much narrower definition than the more common rate of inflation based on the BLS Consumer Price Index (CPI). While the CPI covers a large group of goods and services that urban consumers buy regularly (housing, food and beverages, transportation, medical care, apparel, recreation, education, and communication services), the ALICE Essentials Index includes only essential household items (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan). The ALICE Essentials Index is also calculated for both urban and rural areas, while the CPI only tracks inflation based on a select number of metropolitan (urban) counties.¹⁷ For more detailed information, see the *2020 ALICE Essential Index Report* available at UnitedForALICE.org/Essentials-Index.

Across the country, the ALICE Essentials Index has increased faster than the CPI over the last decade (Figure 5). From 2007 to 2018, the average annual rate of increase was 3.3% in urban areas and 3.4% in rural areas, while the CPI increased by 1.8%.¹⁸ This difference is primarily due to the fact that the costs of basics, especially housing and health care, have increased, while the costs of other items – notably manufactured goods, from apparel to cars – have remained relatively flat. And while basic household goods were 18% to 22% more expensive in urban areas than in rural areas, those costs increased at nearly the same rate in both areas during this period.

Figure 5.
Consumer Price Index and ALICE Essentials Index, United States, 2007–2018



Sources: ALICE Essentials Index, 2007–2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics—Consumer Price Index, 2007–2018. For more information, visit UnitedForALICE.org/Essentials-Index

The difference between these two cost-of-living measures is more than an academic question. The CPI is used to measure inflation and monitor monetary policy. It also determines the rate at which a wide range of government program levels and benefits are increased, including Social Security, veterans' and Federal Civil Service retirees' benefits, government assistance programs, the FPL, income tax brackets, and tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).¹⁹ But the ALICE Essentials Index shows that from 2007 to 2018, the CPI considerably underestimated the increase in the cost of living for ALICE households across the country.

TRENDS: COST OF LIVING

The cost of living for ALICE is growing significantly in both urban and rural areas, often driven by the cost of housing. In Wisconsin over the last decade, housing construction has not kept up with population growth, and construction costs rose faster than incomes and inflation. As a result, between 2007 and 2017, housing costs increased – for both renters and owners – and homeownership rates declined, especially among young adults (25-44), first-time homebuyers, and Black and Hispanic families. The shortage of available housing is particularly pronounced in the counties that have seen the most rapid population growth: Brown, Dane, and Waukesha Counties. Between 2006 and 2017, these three counties accounted for over half of all population growth in Wisconsin. Yet, together, their housing capacity fell short by approximately 15,000 housing units during this period.²⁰ Additionally, in Milwaukee County, a 2018 report found that low incomes – not housing availability or rental prices – were the most significant barrier to affordable housing.²¹

These trends will likely continue as affordable housing becomes harder to find. And while the overall cost of living in rural America is lower than in metro areas, expenses – especially housing – are rising at similar rates in both areas. Nationwide, households that are severely rent burdened (with rent accounting for more than 50% of their income) are projected to grow by at least 11% to 13.1 million households, by 2025.²²

Commuting times will continue to increase, as will demand for alternative transportation options.

High housing costs and urban sprawl push workers farther from their jobs and increase commute times, which has a negative impact on health, job retention, and productivity. Public transportation is also of great importance to non-drivers (particularly seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low or fixed incomes). These pressures – along with the cost of owning and maintaining a car – lead to growing demand for both traditional and new public transportation options (e.g., trains and buses, rideshares, and self-driving vehicles). Despite this growing need across the state, funding priorities have focused primarily on highway infrastructure and maintenance over the past decade. In 2015, over half of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation budget went toward state highways, while public transportation funding made up less than 5% of the total budget.²³

“High housing costs and urban sprawl push workers farther from their jobs and increase commute times, which has a negative impact on health, job retention, and productivity.”

The child care industry will face new challenges, and so will parents. In Wisconsin, the number of families with children decreased between 2010 and 2018 (down 7%), while the number of these households living below the ALICE Threshold increased (up 7%). Despite the decrease in families with children during this period, the state still faces child care provider shortages. Across the state, 54% of people live in a child care desert, with a higher percentage for people living in rural areas (68%).²⁴ Child care costs are also on the rise in Wisconsin: In 2018, the average annual costs for home-based care (\$9,873) and center-based care (\$12,552) for an infant were more than the average annual tuition at an in-state, public four-year university (at \$9,080).²⁵

These child care costs comprise a significant portion of family income. And in most communities across the state, higher quality care comes at a higher cost, leaving families with difficult choices about how to best balance quality and affordability. (Although rating programs like the Wisconsin YoungStar program can help families make more informed decisions.)²⁶ Higher costs for child care may also mean ALICE families have to make sacrifices in other areas of the budget, a trend that will have a particular impact on single-parent families who are more likely to be below the ALICE Threshold. Compounding this issue is the fact that low-paid child care workers are ALICE as well (with a median hourly

wage of \$10.24 in Wisconsin); child care workers earning the median wage would have to spend 59% of earnings to put their own children in infant care.²⁷ The overall trend, then, is toward fewer families with children in Wisconsin, but more who are struggling. These issues matter for families and workers, but they also have an impact on the state economy: If the state capped family child-care expenditures at 7% of income, it would expand the Wisconsin economy by 0.9% (totaling \$3 billion in new economic activity).²⁸

Food insecurity, a longstanding problem for families with children, is also increasing among young adults and seniors.

In 2018, households headed by adults under the age of 25 were more likely to be below the ALICE Threshold compared to other age groups in Wisconsin, and they often struggled to put food on the table. For example, reports consistently find higher rates of food insecurity among college students. Nationally in 2018, 45% of college students surveyed reported that they were food insecure in the 30 days prior to taking the survey.²⁹ More locally, a survey conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee during the 2016–2017 school year found that 49.4% of students experienced food insecurity while enrolled at the university, with higher rates among first-generation students and students of color.³⁰ There is also growing food insecurity at the other end of the age spectrum, with a projected 8 million food-insecure seniors nationwide by 2050. In Wisconsin in 2017, 4.8% of seniors were food insecure. In the Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis metropolitan area, this rate was significantly higher, at 7.2%.³¹ Compared to other seniors, food-insecure seniors are more than twice as likely to have depression, 91% more likely to have asthma, 66% more likely to have had a heart attack, and 57% more likely to have congestive heart failure. Public benefits help but do not eliminate the need for emergency assistance measures, such as food pantries.³²

“ There is also growing food insecurity at the other end of the age spectrum, with a projected 8 million food-insecure seniors nationwide by 2050. In Wisconsin in 2017, 4.8% of seniors were food insecure. ”

College students across the country are facing greater challenges in meeting living expenses, despite the fact that increasing numbers of students are working full or part time.

Students often rely on multiple sources of financial support, including financial aid, student loans, and assistance from parents or other family members, to cover their living expenses. Yet even with these types of financial help, many students need to work while in school; in particular, more than two-thirds of students enrolled in community colleges work full or part time.³³ In a recent financial wellness survey, 56% of students report paying for college using money from their current employment, and 31% of students pay for college with credit cards, leading to accumulation of increased debt.³⁴ Working long hours to earn more income comes at a price, as it can interfere with academic performance and ultimately the likelihood of obtaining a degree.³⁵ Students report that two of the major obstacles to academic success are juggling work with school and other responsibilities and difficulty meeting expenses.³⁶ For more information, see the 2019 United For ALICE Report, *The Consequences of Insufficient Household Income*.

Gaps in health based on demographic, environmental, and socioeconomic factors will continue to grow.

The Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality reports significant health disparities in the state by race/ethnicity and income.³⁷ Volatility in health-insurance availability and coverage, increasing out-of-pocket costs — even for those with employer-sponsored programs — and shortages of health care providers (especially in rural areas) make it harder for many families to get the health care they need.³⁸ Wisconsin ranked 8th in the Commonwealth Fund’s 2018 survey of state health systems, scoring higher than other states for prevention and treatment indicators, but with lower scores related to health care spending (out-of-pocket costs and employee contributions to employer-sponsored plans) and avoidable emergency department visits.³⁹ Existing disparities in health will grow with new but expensive advances in medicine, compounded exposure to environmental hazards and public health crises for many low-income households, and a persistent context of discrimination and institutionalized racism in Wisconsin and across the country.⁴⁰

Natural and human-made disasters will continue to impact ALICE households disproportionately. Across Wisconsin, the increasing impact of these incidents — from floods and tornadoes to pandemics — is felt most acutely by ALICE households and their surrounding communities. With minimal job security and little or no savings, ALICE families feel the impact of an economic disruption almost immediately as hourly paid workers suffer lost wages right away. ALICE households are more vulnerable during natural disasters as they often live in communities with fewer resources, and their housing is more susceptible to flooding, fire, and other hazards. With no financial cushion, ALICE workers struggle to repair damage, recover from illness, and pay ongoing bills. At the same time, ALICE workers are essential to disaster recovery efforts in both infrastructure repair and health care, and they are often forced to choose between caring for their families and ensuring community recovery. All of these costs are added to the increased risk of physical harm ALICE families face if they cannot afford to flee an oncoming natural disaster or take necessary precautions during a public health crisis.⁴¹

Financial instability will mean additional costs for ALICE households. The costs of financial instability are cumulative and intensify over time. Skimping on essentials, from food to health care, leads to greater long-term problems (see United For ALICE’s 2019 Report, *The Consequences of Insufficient Household Income*). Failure to pay bills on time leads to fees, penalties, and low credit scores, which in turn increase interest rates, insurance rates, and costs for other financial transactions (from check-cashing fees to payday cards).⁴² Unexpected expenses can intensify these impacts. In 2017, only 61% of Wisconsin households had set aside any money in the prior 12 months that could be used for unexpected expenses or emergencies such as illness or the loss of a job. Though this was well above the national rate of 42%, it still left more than one-third of Wisconsinites without any financial cushion. And without enough income to cover current and unexpected expenses, ALICE households cannot save for future expenses like education, retirement, or a down payment on a house.⁴³

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF WORK IN WISCONSIN

ALICE workers play an essential role in Wisconsin's economy but have not benefited from many of the state's recent economic gains — a reality that is not captured by traditional economic measures. This section breaks down labor force data in new ways, and in so doing highlights the challenges ALICE workers face: the declining power of wages to keep up with the cost of living, greater dependence on hourly wages, a historically high number of adults out of the labor force, and increased economic risk for workers.

In 2018, Wisconsin had a GDP that had been growing steadily since 2009, a near-record low unemployment rate (with only 2% of adults actively looking but unable to find work), and total employment that had rebounded from the Great Recession, reaching almost 3 million by the end of that year. However, labor force participation was at its lowest point since the mid-1980s, wages have been fairly stagnant, income inequality is on the rise, and overall employment growth between 2007 and 2018 was largely driven by an increase in low- and medium-wage jobs.⁴⁴

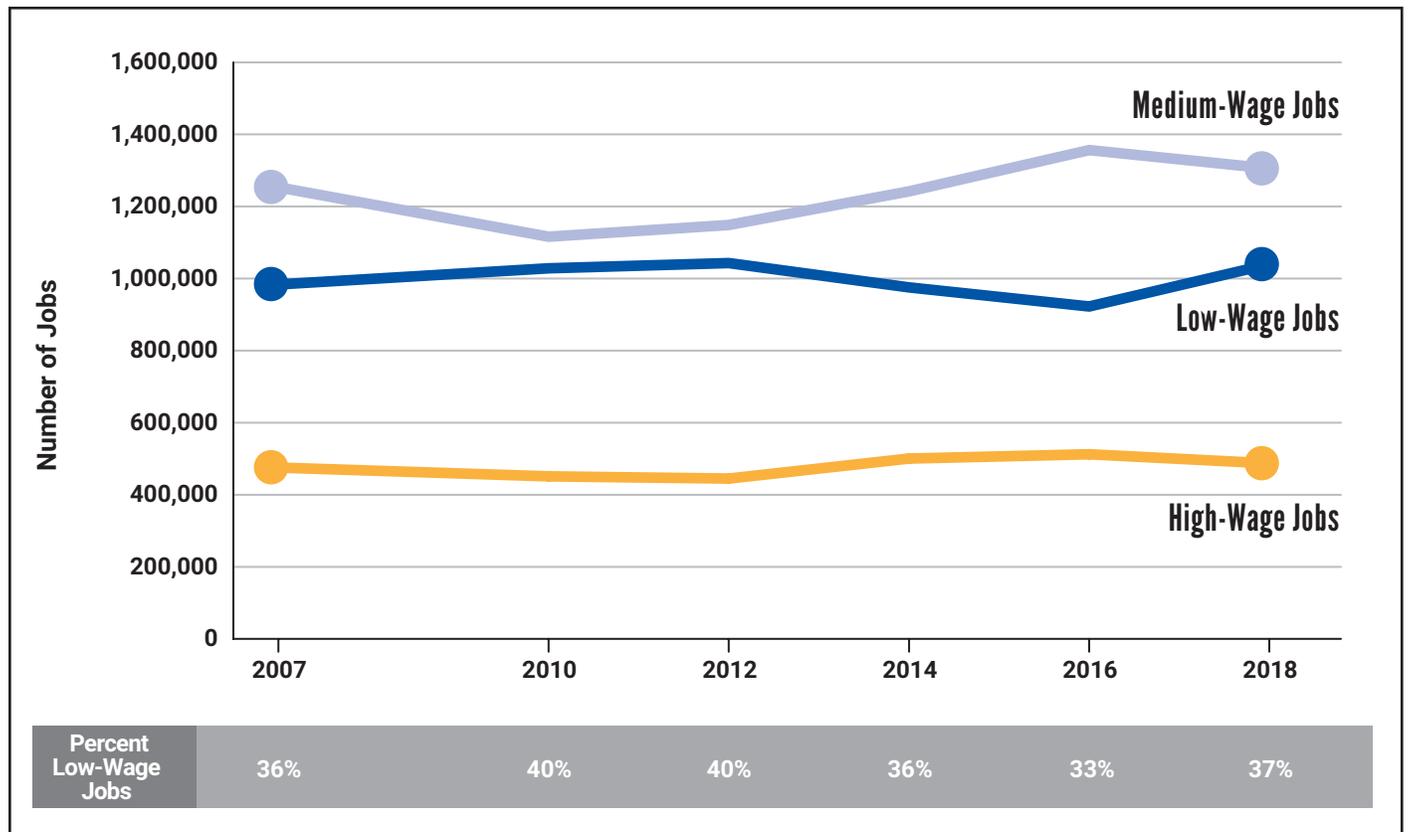
Figure 6 illustrates the following trends in wages compared to the cost of living in Wisconsin from 2007 to 2018:

- Low-wage jobs (dark-blue line) are defined as those paying less than the wage needed for two workers to afford the family Household Survival Budget (which includes costs for two adults, an infant, and a four-year-old). In 2007, this was less than \$13.36 per hour; by 2018, the wage required had increased to \$17.12 per hour. The number of low-wage jobs increased slightly (by 6%) during that period. This shows that, even with two earners working full time, it is not only possible but common for households to fall below the ALICE Threshold.

“ALICE workers play an essential role in Wisconsin's economy but have not benefited from many of the state's recent economic gains — a reality that is not captured by traditional economic measures.”

- Medium-wage jobs (light-blue line) allow two full-time workers to afford a family Household Survival Budget. In 2007, these were jobs that paid between \$13.36 and \$26.73 per hour, per worker; by 2018, wages needed for these jobs were between \$17.12 and \$34.23 per hour, per worker. Medium-wage jobs are the largest group in Wisconsin, and the number of these jobs increased by 4% during that period. This helps explain why the number of households in poverty has declined slightly, while the number of ALICE households in the state has remained at a higher level since the Great Recession.
- High-wage jobs (gold line) allow one full-time worker to afford a family Household Survival Budget. In 2007, the wage required was \$26.73 per hour or more; by 2018, the wage required had increased to \$34.24 per hour. High-wage jobs make up the smallest number of jobs in the state, although their number increased slightly (by 2%) between 2007 and 2010.⁴⁵

Figure 6.
Number of Jobs by Wage Level, Wisconsin, 2007–2018



Note: Wage levels are defined by their relation to the Household Survival Budget. Dark blue = Job cannot support family Household Survival Budget with two earners. Light blue = Job supports family Household Survival Budget with two earners. Gold = Job supports family Household Survival Budget with one earner.

Sources: ALICE Household Survival Budget, 2007–2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics, 2007–2018—Occupational Employment Statistics

The large number of medium-wage jobs combined with a relatively flat trajectory for low-wage jobs made the Wisconsin economy unique compared to most other states, which saw growth driven primarily by low-wage jobs between 2007 and 2018. The large number of ALICE households in the state suggests that many of the medium-wages jobs are not full-time.

The high number of medium-wage jobs is due in part to the composition of the Wisconsin economy (which is more diverse than many other states), with strengths in the manufacturing, health care, and agriculture sectors. The health care and social assistance industries grew, as did manufacturing, both in terms of employment and their contribution to the state’s GDP between 2007 and 2018.⁴⁶ While employment in manufacturing did not regain the peak reached in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it increased a total of 14% from a low point in 2010 to the end of 2018. Average hourly earnings in manufacturing also rose during this period.⁴⁷ The health care and social assistance industry saw significant growth in the decade leading up to 2018, and by the end of that year it employed over 400,000 Wisconsin workers, with more than 100,000 working in hospitals and health systems alone. With a reputation for high-quality health care, Wisconsin has also become a destination for out-of-state patients, who spent \$2.3 billion on hospital services in 2018 (comprising over 10% of Wisconsin exports). Health care and social assistance is projected to be the fastest-growing industry between 2016 and 2026.⁴⁸

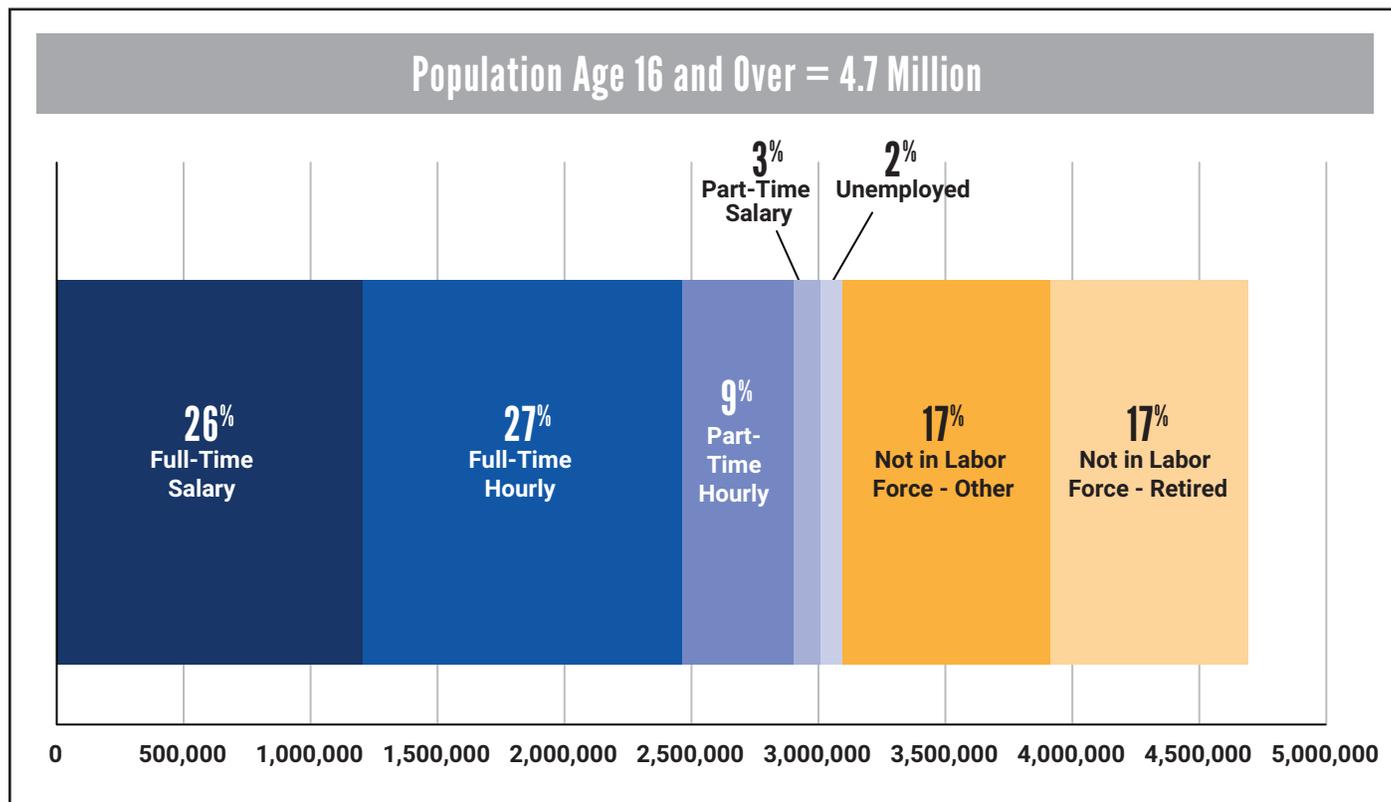
Agriculture – another significant industry in Wisconsin – provides over 435,000 jobs annually, contributing just over \$100 billion each year to the state economy. In addition to the dairy products that the state is known for, Wisconsin also ranks first in the nation for cranberries, corn for silage, and snap beans for processing. However, change over time in the size of the agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industry has been uneven in Wisconsin: GDP for this industry increased on average between 2009 and 2014, and then decreased between 2014 and 2018. Wisconsin also led the nation in Chapter 12 farm bankruptcies in 2018 (with a total of 49); nationally, the average farmers’ income declined almost 35% between 2013 and 2018.⁴⁹

THE NEW LABOR FORCE

A 2018 overview of the labor status of Wisconsin’s 4,688,927 working-age adults (people age 16 and over) shows that 67% of adults were in the labor force (blue bars in Figure 7), yet more than half of them were workers who were paid hourly. In addition, 34% of adults were outside the labor force (gold bars), the largest number since the mid-1980s (Figure 7).⁵⁰

Though the majority of adults in Wisconsin were working in 2018 and most households had at least one worker, only 26% of working-age adults had the security of a full-time job with a salary. The rest were paid hourly and/or worked part time.⁵¹

Figure 7.
Labor Status, Population Age 16 and Over, Wisconsin, 2018



Note: Data for full- and part-time jobs is only available at the national level; these national rates (51% of full-time workers and 75% of part-time workers paid hourly) have been applied to the total Wisconsin workforce to calculate the breakdown shown in this figure. Full-time represents a minimum of 35 hours per week at one or more jobs for 48 weeks per year. Many percentages are rounded to whole numbers, sometimes resulting in percentages totaling 99% or 101%.

Sources: American Community Survey, 2018; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2018

Hourly Work and the Gig Economy

Employers' increasing reliance on hourly workers is typically associated with freelance "gig economy" jobs (like rideshare driving or on-demand delivery), but even traditional jobs are now more likely to be paid by the hour, especially in retail, health care, food service, and construction.⁵² These workers are more likely to have fluctuations in income, with frequent schedule changes and variation in the number of hours available for work each week/month. They are also less likely to receive benefits, such as health insurance, paid time off, family leave, or retirement benefits, especially if they work fewer than 30 hours per week at a single job. While there are hourly workers across all sectors in Wisconsin, the largest concentrations are in food service, retail, and long-term health and personal care services.⁵³

Hourly workers are more likely to have multiple sources of income. Traditional measures of employment have focused on the number of jobs held by a worker; for example, BLS estimates that only 5% of workers held two or more jobs in 2018.⁵⁴ However, in the modern economy, where many workers have their own small business, are consultants, or are contingent, temporary, freelance, or contract workers, a worker may have many sources of income that are not necessarily considered a "job." In 2019, nearly half (45%) of working adults reported having a side gig outside of their primary job.⁵⁵

In comparison with hourly workers, salaried workers are paid an annual amount at regular pay periods, and usually receive benefits. Nationally, employers spent an average of 31% of compensation on benefits in 2018; not providing these represents significant savings to the employer. As a result, even traditional jobs are morphing as employers shift the financial risk of changes in supply and demand to employees.⁵⁶ While this is true throughout the economy, it is especially concentrated in lower-wage positions — the jobs most accessible to ALICE.

Who is Out of the Labor Force?

Of adults 16 years and older in Wisconsin, 17% were out of the labor force in 2018 because they were retired and another 17% were out of the labor force for other reasons (gold bars in Figure 7). This totals 34% of adults outside the labor force.⁵⁷

Retirees (age 65 and over and not working) are traditionally one of the largest groups of adults out of the labor force. In Wisconsin in 2018, they accounted for a high percentage, in part due to the baby boomer generation aging into retirement. However, this number did not include the increasing number of seniors who were still working; in 2018, 21% of seniors in Wisconsin were still in the labor force, an unusually high percentage compared to other states.⁵⁸

Those under 65 and not working were out of the labor force for a variety of reasons, the two most common being:

- **School:** Nationally, 77% of high school students and 52% of college students did not work in 2018. At these rates, non-working students in Wisconsin would account for more than one-third (36%) of the state's working-age adults out of the workforce.⁵⁹
- **Health:** Adults with one or more health issues — an illness or disability that makes it difficult to get to work, perform some job functions, or work long hours — accounted for almost one-quarter (21%) of those out of the labor force in Wisconsin in 2018.⁶⁰

The remainder of adults were out of the labor force for other reasons, including scheduling conflicts, family caregiving responsibilities, or limited access to transportation or child care.⁶¹ For women 25 to 54 years old, the most common reason for not working in 2018 was in-home responsibilities — caring for children, but also, as the population of Wisconsin ages, caring for an aging parent or a family member with a disability or chronic health issue.⁶²

These adults who were out of the workforce were not included in the state’s low unemployment rate, which only counts adults actively looking for work. In previous periods of low unemployment, employers have had to offer much higher wages to attract workers back into the labor force or away from other businesses. However, in the 2018 economy, those out of the labor force proved to be a large reserve of potential workers able to be drawn back into the labor force with only slightly higher wages – in effect, keeping wages low.⁶³

ALICE JOBS: MAINTAINING THE ECONOMY

While national conversations about work often focus on the economic importance of the “innovation” sector and its high-paying jobs, the reality is that the smooth functioning of the national and Wisconsin economies relies on a much larger number of occupations that build and repair the infrastructure and educate and care for the past, current, and future workforce. The workers in these jobs are described as “Maintainers” by technology scholars Lee Vinsel and Andrew Russell, and they are primarily ALICE.⁶⁴ To better understand where ALICE works, we elaborate on Vinsel and Russell’s concept by breaking down all occupations in Wisconsin into two occupational categories, each with two job types: the lower-paying Maintainer occupations, composed of Infrastructor and Nurturer jobs; and the higher-paying Innovator occupations, composed of Adaptor and Inventor jobs.

DEFINITIONS

Maintainer Occupations:

Infrastructors build and maintain the physical economy (construction, maintenance, management, administration, manufacturing, agriculture, mining, transportation, retail).

Nurturers care for and educate the workforce (health and education, food service, arts, tourism, hospitality).

Innovator Occupations:

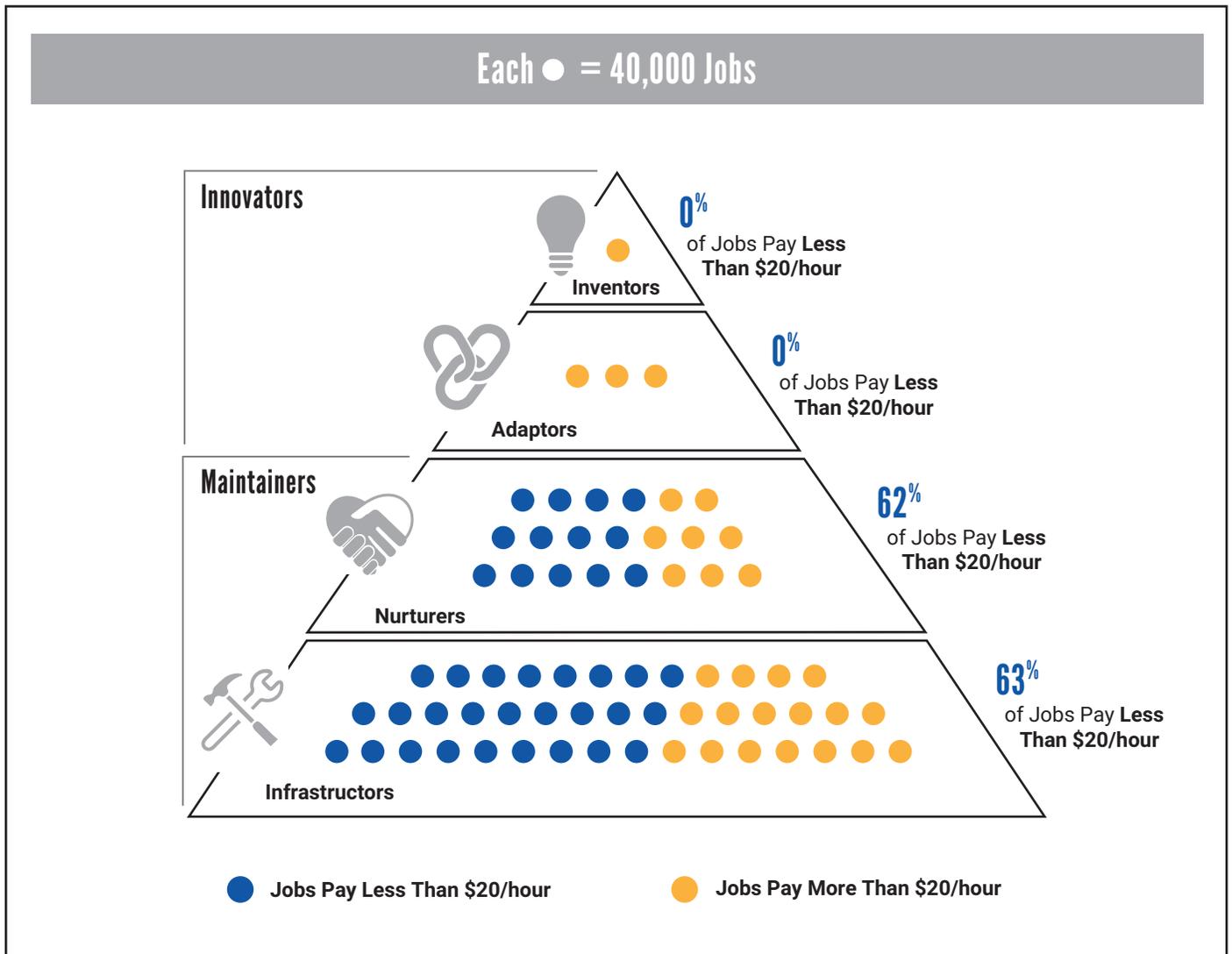
Adaptors implement existing tools or processes in new ways, responding to opportunities and changing circumstances (managers, industrial and organizational psychologists, analysts, designers, technicians, and even policymakers).

Inventors devise new processes, appliances, machines, or ideas. Before World War II, most inventors were independent entrepreneurs. Today, they are most likely engineers and scientists working in research & development, and, in some cases, higher education.

The largest employment sectors in Wisconsin are comprised primarily of Maintainer occupations. The single largest industry group in 2018, with 540,000 employees, was trade, transportation, and utilities, which is comprised of Infrastructor jobs. The second largest, with 480,000 employees, was manufacturing, which is comprised largely of Infrastructor jobs. And the third largest, with 459,000 employees and a large share of Nurturer jobs, was health and education services. Each of these industry groups have large shares of ALICE workers.⁶⁵ There are far fewer jobs in Innovator occupations (Adaptors and Inventors).

When stacked together, Wisconsin’s occupations form a pyramid that reveals the critical role of Maintainer jobs – the jobs most accessible to ALICE – in the state economy (Figure 8). The majority of Maintainer jobs (63% of Infrastructor jobs and 62% of Nurturer jobs) pay less than \$20 per hour – a wage that, if full time, year-round, provides a maximum annual salary of \$40,000, or \$28,472 less than the family Household Survival Budget of \$68,472. By comparison, almost all Adaptor and Inventor occupations pay more than \$20 per hour.

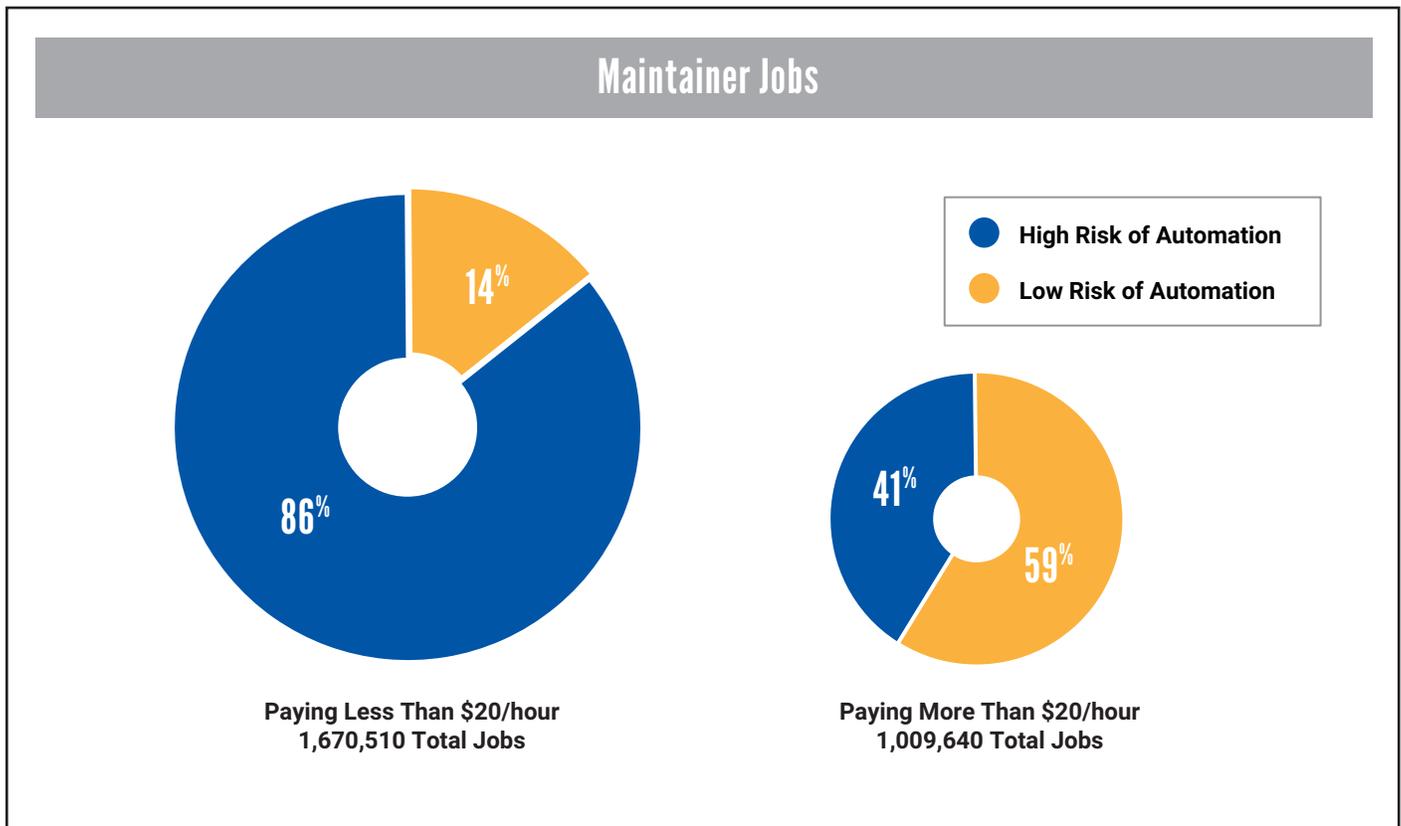
Figure 8.
Occupations by Wage and Type, Wisconsin, 2018



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics, 2018—Occupational Employment Statistics

The precarious nature of ALICE workers' jobs is reinforced by the powerful relationship between low wages and the high risk of jobs becoming automated (defined as having a greater than 50% chance of being replaced by technology in the next decade). Jobs that pay less than \$20 per hour are more likely to be replaced by technology compared to higher-paying jobs. This is especially true for Maintainer occupations, where most jobs pay less than \$20 per hour and 86% of these low-paying jobs are at a high risk of automation. By comparison, only 41% of Maintainer jobs that pay more than \$20 per hour are at that level of risk (Figure 9). In Wisconsin, it is estimated that almost half (47.5%) of occupational tasks performed by people can be replaced by technologies that already exist; Wisconsin ranks 10th highest in the nation on this measure.⁶⁶ The risk of automation also differs geographically, as automation risk varies by industry and each region in the state has a unique mix of industries. Of Wisconsin's 11 Workforce Development Areas, automation risk is highest in the Northwest, Southeast, North Central, Western, and Bay Area regions. Each of these regions has a high percentage of employment in administrative support, production, food preparation, sales, and transportation and material moving,⁶⁷

Figure 9.
Occupations by Type and Risk of Automation, Wisconsin, 2018



Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018—Occupational Employment Statistics; Frey & Osborne, 2013

There are also differences in salary and risk of automation based on the type of Maintainer job. Among Infrastructor jobs, 94% of jobs that pay less than \$20 per hour are at risk of automation, compared to 60% of those that pay more than \$20 per hour. Among Nurturer jobs, the discrepancy is even greater: 68% of jobs that pay less than \$20 per hour are at risk of automation, compared with 3% of those that pay more than \$20 per hour.⁶⁸ Education level also impacts risk of automation; nationally, the risk for jobs that require only a high school diploma (55%) is more than double the risk for jobs that require a bachelor’s degree (24%).⁶⁹

TRENDS: THE LANDSCAPE OF WORK

Economic growth will be led by the non-traditional work and small businesses of the gig economy. As much as 94% of U.S. net employment growth in the last decade has come from alternative or contingent labor, according to a National Bureau of Economic Research report.⁷⁰ With an increasing number of workers who are contractors, work in small businesses, or rely on a combination of side gigs, the number of people experiencing gaps in income and going without benefits will also rise. Millennials are leading the way in this trend, with 48% nationally saying they earn income on the side (i.e., in addition to what they consider their primary employment), compared to 28% of baby boomers.⁷¹ These arrangements are more volatile than traditional jobs, and workers bear the brunt of changes in demand, the price of materials, and transportation costs, as well as impacts related to cyberattacks, natural and human-made disasters, and economic downturns.⁷²

The rise of automation will require a workforce with more digital skills. Rather than being replaced outright, many jobs, across all job types, will require an increasing ability to incorporate new technologies, work with data, and make data-based decisions.⁷³ ALICE workers will need to gain new skills rapidly, and that will require more on-the-job training, more flexibility to change career paths, and different kinds of education providers.⁷⁴ The benefits of increased technology will include improved accuracy in areas like pharmaceutical pill dispensing, and reduced risk of injury for workers such as warehouse packers and long-distance drivers.⁷⁵

The number of low-wage jobs will continue to increase, despite automation. Even though most jobs will change and evolve with demand as well as technology, it may not be economical or effective to automate certain jobs. For example, low-wage Maintainer jobs in areas like education and health care require employees to be on-site and often involve relational skills that are difficult or impossible to automate (although these workers will still have to learn to work with technology). From 2016 to 2026, the occupation projected to have the largest number of new jobs in Wisconsin is food preparation and serving workers; the median wage for these jobs in 2018 was \$9.23 per hour (including employer-reported tips), which was not enough to support the single-adult, Senior, or family Survival Budgets. Of the state's top-20 growth occupations, 66% will pay less than \$15 per hour, 41% will not require any formal educational credential at all, and 39% will require only a high school diploma.⁷⁶

Students will continue to be a significant part of the labor force. As more families face financial hardship and the cost of college continues to rise, more students will have to work while in school. Nationally, 20% of high school students, 41% of full-time college students, and 82% of part-time college students had a job in 2017.⁷⁷ What's more, despite many students being employed, 45% of college students who completed the largest annual survey of basic college needs reported having experienced food insecurity in the previous month, and 56% had experienced housing insecurity in the prior year.⁷⁸ And even with more students working, student debt will continue to increase as more students from lower-income families attend college and costs continue to rise. In Wisconsin, 64% of college students who graduated in 2018 were in debt with an average loan of \$31,705, a 29% increase from 2010.⁷⁹

NEXT STEPS: DATA FOR ACTION

The ALICE data highlights significant problems in the Wisconsin economy in 2018: stagnant wages, a rising cost of living, and 34% of the state's households unable to afford even the most basic budget. However, this data can also be used to generate solutions to these problems that help ALICE households and create equity across communities. The measures of cost of living, financial hardship, and changes in the labor force presented in this Report can help stakeholders ask the right questions and make data-driven decisions. This data can help policymakers and community organizations identify gaps in community resources, and it can guide businesses in finding additional ways to assist their workforce and increase productivity – both in times of economic growth and in periods of economic recovery.

This section of the Report maps the 2018 ALICE data, showing gaps in resources to help direct assistance and fill immediate needs. When analyzed in relation to broader data on health, education, and social factors, these maps help focus solutions on underlying causes of hardship, and they also highlight areas of success.

IDENTIFYING GAPS

ALICE households often live in areas with limited community resources, making it even more difficult to make ends meet. The lack of some resources has immediate and direct costs. For example, without public transportation or nearby publicly funded preschools, ALICE families pay more for transportation and child care. Other costs, such as the consequences of limited access to health care providers, open space, or libraries, accumulate over time.

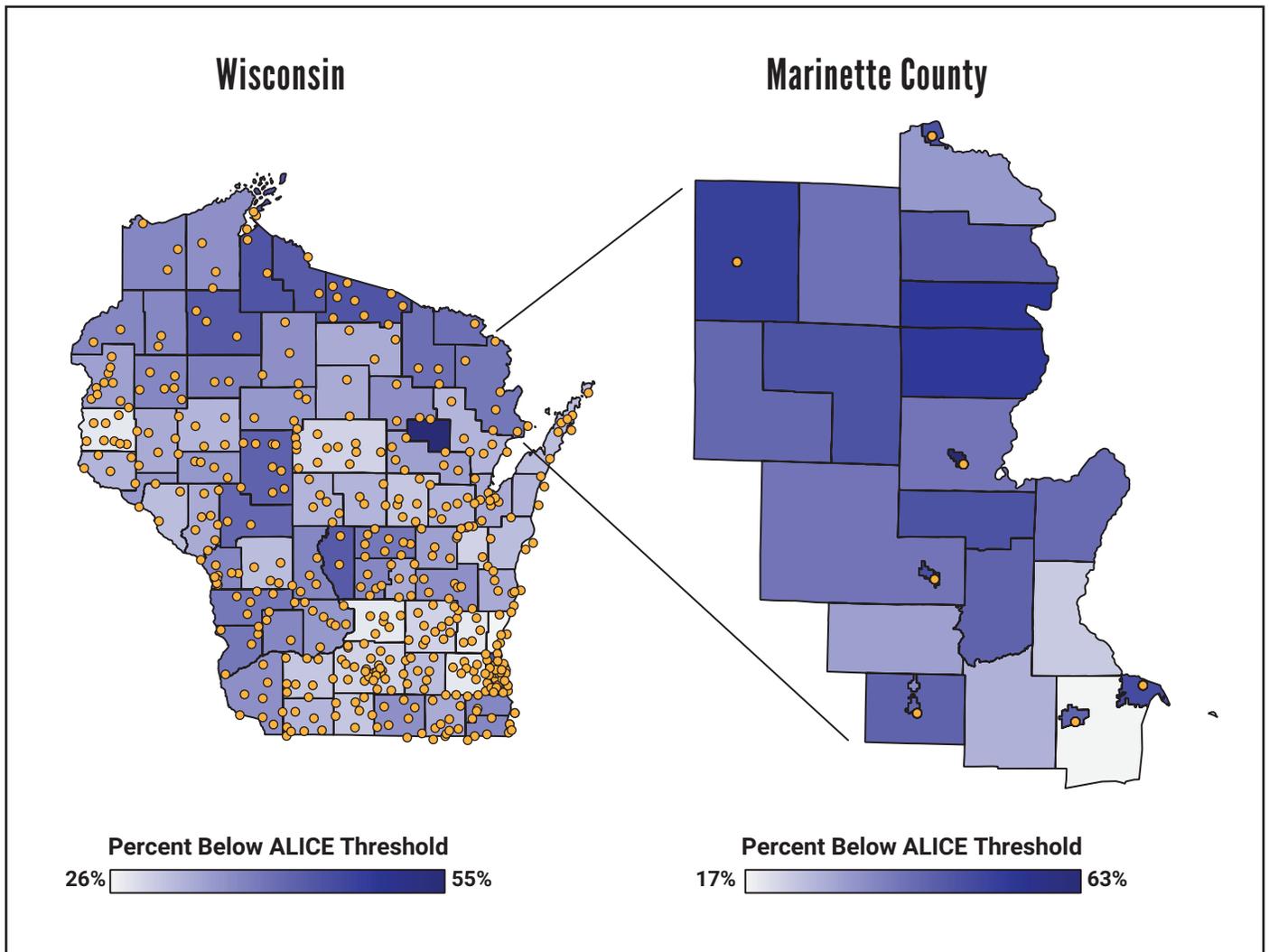
With the ALICE data tools, stakeholders can map where ALICE lives along with the location of community resources – such as public libraries or disaster-relief services – to identify gaps by town, ZIP code, or county (Figure 10). This data can help stakeholders answer targeted questions, including the following:

Do ALICE households have access to libraries?

Access to public libraries is especially important for ALICE families because libraries provide information on social services and job opportunities, free internet and computer access, and a range of free programs, community meetings, and even 3-D printers. After a natural disaster, libraries serve as second responders, providing electricity, internet access, charging stations, heat or air conditioning, and current information on recovery efforts.⁸⁰ In lower-income communities, the library can provide a safe and inclusive place for individuals and families. A 2019 Gallup Poll found that lower-income households (earning less than \$40,000 per year) visit the library more frequently than average- and higher-income households.⁸¹

There are 462 libraries across Wisconsin's 72 counties, shown in gold dots in Figure 10 (and in an interactive feature on UnitedForALICE.org/Wisconsin).⁸² This data can help stakeholders identify where there are gaps in needed services (such as in areas with a high percentage of ALICE households but few or no libraries) and what type of intervention might be most helpful. For example, areas with a small population but a high percentage of ALICE households may benefit more from mobile library services than a new brick-and-mortar building, or library services (like free computers) could be offered in other public buildings.

Figure 10.
Library Locations and Households Below ALICE Threshold, Wisconsin, 2018



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018; The Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2019

Are the needs of ALICE households met after a natural disaster?

Mapping where ALICE households live in relation to the impact of natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, or tornadoes can help first and second responders meet critical needs. Disasters directly threaten the homes of ALICE families since more affordable housing is often located in vulnerable areas. The jobs where ALICE works are also more at risk, since low-wage and hourly paid jobs are more likely to be interrupted or lost. In addition, ALICE households have few or no savings for an emergency to begin with, and their communities often have fewer resources to assist households.⁸³

Knowing where ALICE households live can help federal, state, and local governments target preparation, response, and assistance for natural disasters, and help companies plan where to deploy their workforce and support. Because ALICE households and communities do not have the same resources as their wealthier counterparts, namely insurance or savings, they will need more assistance over a longer period of time to recover. Strategies will vary by rural or urban context, the quality of the housing stock, and the age composition of the community (with the young and the elderly more dependent on care).⁸⁴

UNDERSTANDING ALICE: HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL FACTORS

In most contexts, having a low income is associated with lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment, and poorer health.⁸⁵ Communities that have been able to disrupt that association can provide important insights on how to change environments or policy to support ALICE households. By tracking where ALICE lives with other indicators, it is possible to identify counties that have overcome a challenge or bucked a trend. Stakeholders can then learn from these examples and adapt those solutions to their own areas.

Tracking relationships between ALICE households and other variables at the county level – in areas such as technology or health – can also help stakeholders ask important questions and target resources where they can have the greatest impact. To see interactive maps of socioeconomic indicators in Wisconsin, visit our website: UnitedForALICE.org/Wisconsin

Here are two possible questions:

Is internet access related to income?

Access to digital technology has exploded over the last three decades: By 2018, 92% of U.S. adults owned a computing device and 85% had a broadband internet subscription. In Wisconsin the rates were similar: 90% owned a computing device and 84% had a broadband internet subscription in 2018.⁸⁶ Technology has also become more important for work, education, community participation, and, crucially, disaster response and recovery.

But access to technology still varies by income and geography. For many families, that lack of access translates directly to reduced job opportunities, educational opportunities, health care access, and financial tools. For example, low-income adults are more likely to use their phones to search and apply for jobs; nationally, 32% of smartphone users with income below \$30,000 have applied for a job on their phone, compared with 7% of smartphone users with income above \$75,000. Although smartphone technology is constantly improving, many tasks are still more difficult to complete on the small screen of a smartphone as opposed to a computer (e.g., word processing, filling out applications, editing spreadsheets), and many websites still do not have a mobile version, making navigation time-consuming and difficult, or sometimes impossible. Households without internet access are also at greater risk of being undercounted in the 2020 Census, when they may need government programs and services the most.⁸⁷

This high usage of smartphones for a critical task indicates that many low-income households have limited access to the internet at home. In Wisconsin, 33% of households with income below the ALICE Threshold do not have an internet subscription, compared with only 9% for households above the ALICE Threshold. Rates also vary widely by location: The counties with the lowest access rates and lowest income are in rural areas, where almost 40% of households below the ALICE Threshold do not have an internet subscription.⁸⁸ Identifying these gaps can help businesses and government provide more resources to libraries, establish training centers, or target low-cost internet plans.⁸⁹

Are drug overdoses driven by income?

Wisconsin, like many states across the country, has experienced an increase in drug overdose deaths over the last decade, largely due to an increase in deaths from opioid use. In 2017, the age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths in Wisconsin was 21.2 per 100,000 population (just under the U.S. rate of 21.7), with the total number growing 38% between 2014 and 2017 (increasing from 853 to 1,177). During the same period, the number of opioid-related deaths in the state increased by 33% and the number of opioid-related hospitalizations more than doubled (up 105%).⁹⁰

Several national studies have suggested that counties with the worst economic prospects have the highest rates of substance use disorders and drug overdose hospitalizations and deaths. Yet that relationship varies across states, as people of all incomes, geographies, ages, and races/ethnicities suffer from substance use disorders.⁹¹ In Wisconsin, overdose deaths have been reported in the majority of counties across the state. In 2017, the number of overdose deaths in the state was related to income: As the percentage of households below the ALICE Threshold increased across counties, so did the number of deaths due to drug overdose.⁹²

Understanding which communities have been hardest hit by substance use disorders can help planners and stakeholders see the complex ways in which addiction and financial hardship interact. Although economic standing is not the only risk factor for drug addiction in Wisconsin, the consequences of addiction hit low-income families harder. The impact of addiction and substance use disorders on families often means a decline in their financial position, causing many families to become or remain ALICE. A family's income may be reduced if addiction interferes with an adult's ability to work, and these families often have substantial health care costs. For example, addiction treatment ranges from \$1,176 to \$6,552 per month nationally. And lower-income families may not have access to such treatment programs, which only prolongs and compounds the outcomes of addiction. Substance use disorders take a toll on the stability of families and marriages, on parenting, and on the physical and mental health of family members.⁹³ For all of these reasons, there can be huge value for community stakeholders in mapping where ALICE lives with drug overdose deaths to identify communities that have the greatest need but the fewest resources to address addiction-related problems.⁹⁴

THE BENEFITS OF MOVING TOWARD EQUITY IN WISCONSIN

The strength of the Wisconsin economy is inextricably tied to the financial stability of its residents. The more people who participate in a state's economy, the stronger it will be. In 2018, when the national economy was often described as "strong," the reality was that 812,273 Wisconsin households — more than one-third of all households in the state — struggled to support themselves. If all households earned enough to meet their basic needs, not only would each family's hardship be eased, but the Wisconsin economy would also benefit substantially. This is true in times of economic growth, and it becomes even more important during a period of crisis and recovery.

To better understand the extent to which financial hardship is a drain on a state's economy, this section provides an estimate of the benefits of raising the income of all households to the ALICE Threshold. While lifting family income would be an enormous undertaking, the statewide benefits of doing so make a compelling case for pointing both policy and investment toward that goal.

Based on 2018 data, the economic benefit to Wisconsin of bringing all households to the ALICE Threshold would be approximately \$52.3 billion, meaning that the state GDP would grow by 16% (Figure 11). This is based on three categories of economic enhancement:

Earnings: Wisconsin's 2018 GDP reflected earnings of \$14.9 billion by the state's households below the ALICE Threshold. Bringing all households to the ALICE Threshold would have a two-fold impact:

- **Additional earnings:** \$18.8 billion statewide.
- **Multiplier effect:** Studies show that almost all additional wages earned by low-wage workers are put back into the economy through increased consumer spending, which in turn spurs business growth.⁹⁵ Building on economic calculations used by Moody's Analytics, this estimate assumes an economic multiplier of 1.2, meaning that a \$1 increase in compensation to low-wage workers leads to a \$1.20 increase in economic activity. In Wisconsin, this increased economic activity would be valued at \$22.5 billion.⁹⁶

Tax revenue: Wisconsin's 2018 GDP reflected tax revenue of \$400 million from the state's households below the ALICE Threshold. Bringing all households to the ALICE Threshold would have a two-fold impact:

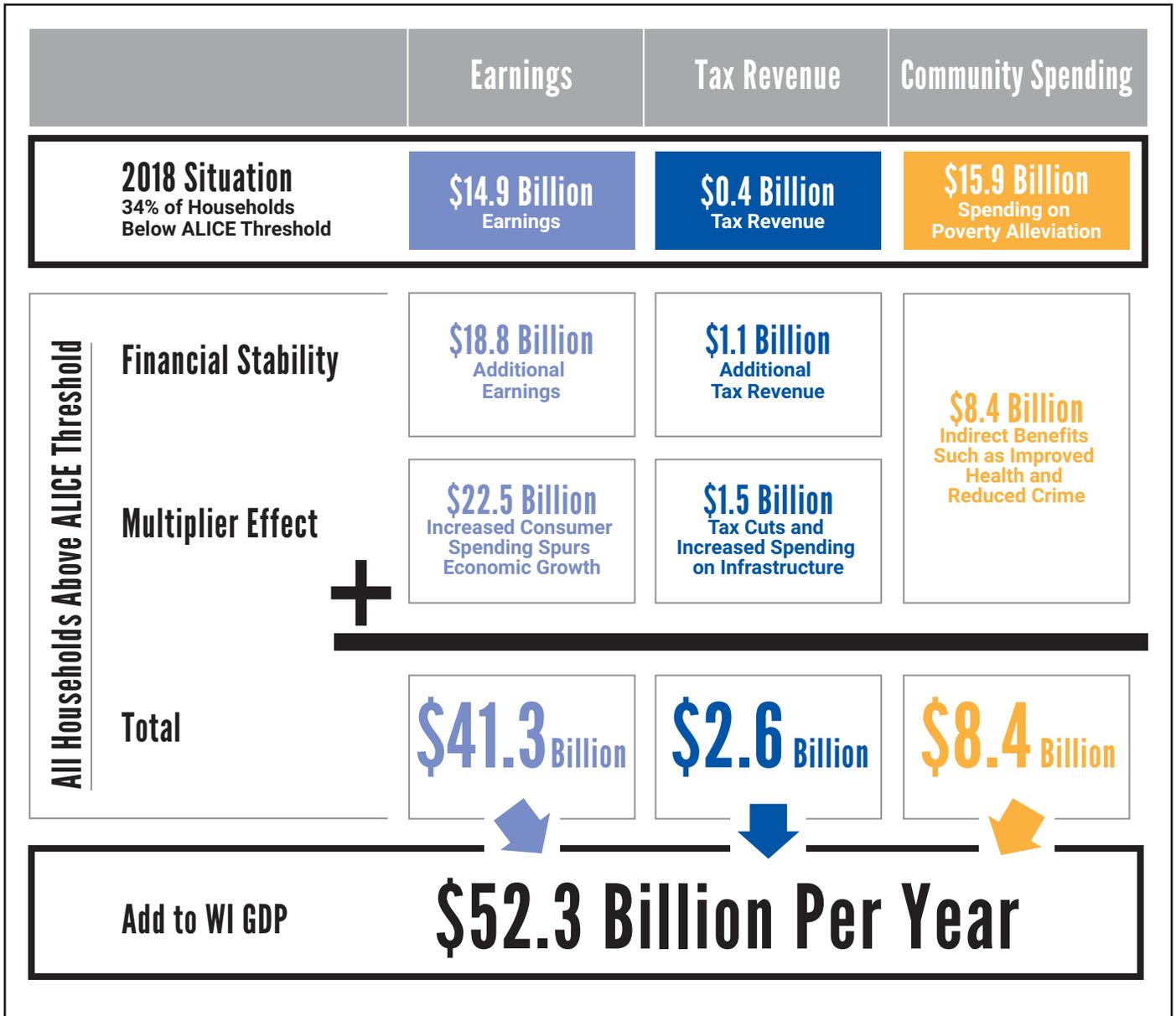
- **Additional tax revenue:** With additional earnings, there would also be additional taxes paid and reduced usage of tax credits such as EITC for low-income earners, totaling an additional \$1.1 billion in tax revenue for Wisconsin.
- **Multiplier effect:** Additional state tax revenue gives state and local governments the opportunity to make investments that matter most to the well-being of residents and businesses – from tax cuts for small businesses to improvements in infrastructure, including health care and education – that can yield a high return on investment. Based on work by the Congressional Budget Office and Moody's Analytics, the estimated multiplier is 1.44, which would mean an added \$1.5 billion in economic activity in Wisconsin.⁹⁷

Community spending: Wisconsin's 2018 GDP reflected community spending of \$15.9 billion on assistance to the state's households below the ALICE Threshold.⁹⁸ When all households can meet their basic needs, this spending can be reallocated to projects and programs that help families and communities *thrive*, not just survive.

- **Indirect benefits:** Added value to the state GDP would come in the form of indirect benefits associated with increased financial stability. These benefits include improved health (and reduced health care expenditures), reduced crime and homelessness, and greater community engagement. Figure 11 uses the very conservative estimate of an added \$8.4 billion (or 2.5% of the state GDP, which is the estimated cost of childhood poverty alone).⁹⁹ This is still far short of the total indirect benefits of bringing all households to the ALICE Threshold, as it does not include benefits for adults or factor in the direct impact of redeploying private and nonprofit spending currently used to alleviate poverty.¹⁰⁰

Figure 11.

Economic Benefits of Raising All Households to the ALICE Threshold, Wisconsin, 2018



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2018; American Community Survey, 2018; Internal Revenue Service—1040, 2018; Internal Revenue Service—EITC, 2018; Internal Revenue Service—FICA, 2019; McKeever, 2018; National Association of State Budget Officers, 2019; Office of Management and Budget, 2019; Scarboro, 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture—SNAP, 2019; Urban Institute, 2012; Walczak, 2019¹⁰¹

Benefits for Households and Local Communities

In addition to the economic benefits to the state if all households had income above the ALICE Threshold, there would be a significant number of positive changes for families and their communities. Our 2019 companion Report, *The Consequences of Insufficient Household Income*, outlines the tough choices ALICE and poverty-level families make when they do not have enough income to afford basic necessities, and how those decisions affect their broader communities. By contrast, Figure 12 outlines the improvements that all Wisconsin families and their communities would experience if policies were implemented that moved all households above the ALICE Threshold.¹⁰²

Figure 12.
The Benefits of Sufficient Income

If households have sufficient income for...	Impact on ALICE	Impact on the Community
 Safe, Affordable Housing	Improved health through safer environments and decreased stress, improved educational performance and outcomes for children, greater stability for household members, a means to build wealth for homeowners	Less traffic, lower health care costs, better maintained housing stock, lower crime rates, less spending on homelessness/social services
 Quality Child Care and Education	Improved academic performance, higher lifetime earnings, higher graduation rates, improved job stability/access for parents, better health	Decreased racial/ethnic and socioeconomic performance gaps, decreased income disparities, high return on investment (especially for early childhood education)
 Adequate Food	Decreased food insecurity, improved health (especially for children and seniors), decreased likelihood of developmental delays and behavioral problems in school	Lower health care costs, improved workplace productivity, less spending on emergency food services
 Reliable Transportation	Improved access to job opportunities, school and child care, health care, retail markets, social services, and support systems (friends, family, faith communities)	Fewer high-emissions vehicles on the road, more diverse labor market, decreased income disparities
 Quality Health Care	Better mental and physical health (including increased life expectancy), improved access to preventative care, fewer missed days of work/school, decreased need for emergency services	Decreased health care spending, fewer communicable diseases, improved workplace productivity, decreased wealth-health gap
 Reliable Technology	Improved access to job opportunities, expanded access to health information and tele-health services, increased job and academic performance	Decreased “digital divide” in access to technology by income, increased opportunities for civic participation
 Savings	Ability to withstand emergencies without impacting long-term financial stability and greater asset accumulation over time (e.g., interest on savings; ability to invest in education, property, or finance a secure retirement)	Greater charitable contributions; less spending on emergency health, food, and senior services

Note: For sources, see Figure 12: Sources, following the Endnotes for this Report

In addition to the benefits listed above, greater financial stability and having basic needs met can reduce the anxiety that comes from struggling to survive, or not having a cushion for emergencies. It also leaves more time to spend with loved ones and to give back to the community — all of which contribute to happiness and improved life satisfaction.¹⁰³

Having money saves money: Having enough income means that households can build their credit scores and avoid late fees, predatory lending, and higher interest rates.¹⁰⁴ That, in turn, means that ALICE families have more resources to use to reduce risks (e.g., by purchasing insurance), stay healthy (e.g., by getting preventative health care), or save and invest in education or assets that could grow over time (e.g., buying a home or opening a small business). Instead of a downward cycle of accumulating fees, debt, and stress, families can have an upward cycle of savings and health that makes them even better able to be engaged in their communities and, in turn, enjoy a reasonable quality of life.

For communities, this leads to greater economic activity, greater tax revenue, lower levels of crime, and fewer demands on the social safety net, allowing more investment in vital infrastructure, schools, and health care.¹⁰⁵ Strengthening communities by strengthening ALICE families means a higher quality of life for all.

ENDNOTES

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