

HENNEPIN COUNTY

MINNESOTA

“Hennepin County has long been grounded in serving residents by working with community, delivering services, and impacting system changes to create opportunity for all residents.”

David Hough, Hennepin County Administrator

“Disparity Reduction strategy and efforts continue to mature and develop across programs in all areas of the county. We are intentionally bringing resident voices forward, building partnerships, and using data to inform decisions and measure outcomes.”

**Chela Guzmán-Wiegert, Assistant County Administrator,
Disparity Reduction**

Disparity Reduction

Vision and Priorities

November 2021



Reducing disparities

Hennepin County's North Star or directional path is to "Serve Residents." As a large urban county—Hennepin County is the 33rd largest county by population out of 3,100 counties in the United States—we recognize that many of our residents are impacted by systemic racism and don't have the same opportunities to grow and thrive as others in our population. For these residents, their quality of life is impacted, and the likelihood of a shorter lifespan is greater.

Our commitment

Hennepin County has spent many years focused on what drives county business. My assertion is that disparities drive our business. Clients present to the county in crisis. They receive reactive, deep-end, costly services that result in short-term outcomes instead of long-term, meaningful solutions for residents.

We have created a vision focused on Disparity Reduction and recognizing that disparities drive our county business. Since 2013, thousands of committed county employees have focused on developing innovative strategies and creating powerful solutions around seven interconnected disparity domains: education, employment, income, health, housing, justice and transportation. Each of these domains represent a social determinant of health. The domains provide a foundation for our organization's work to reduce disparities. We know that there are complex reasons that lead to residents needing our assistance, and our Disparity Reduction vision focuses on proactively responding to the many challenges they face and creating options and opportunity.

As Paul Wellstone said, "We all do better, when we all do better." We serve all residents but acknowledge that significant disparities exist between our White residents and our residents who are Black, Indigenous or people of color (BIPOC). Educational outcomes, compensation levels, wealth attainment, home ownership, mortality, and justice system involvement are just a few of the many disparities that disproportionately impact residents who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. We must do better for these residents.

The dedication of our staff and commitment from our leaders created a solid foundation for our work. The pandemic exacerbated the need to do more for our residents experiencing the starkest disparities and highlighted the criticality and immediacy of our Disparity Reduction vision and efforts. Hennepin County received significant federal pandemic response and recovery dollars that we have intentionally leveraged to expedite our Disparity Reduction vision and strategies. This funding has permitted the county to do things now versus taking decades to fund and improve the quality of life of our BIPOC residents. I am excited for what the futures holds.



David. J. Hough
County Administrator

Disparity Reduction Vision and Priorities

A shared purpose

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Please visit our website at hennepin.us/disparity-reduction and join us in our commitment to reducing disparities.

A shared purpose

Hennepin County is an organization committed to service.

With nearly 9,000 public employees, we work to enhance the health, safety, and quality of life of all residents. We envision a future where every community is thriving.

Inequities in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation are starkest between residents of color and their White counterparts. When we start our work from this shared perspective, shifting our guiding lens to a vision that is focused on reducing disparities, we see the places, partnerships, programs, and services where we have a responsibility to act.

Our work is intentional and comprehensive. In 2013, Hennepin County solidified its commitment to reduce disparities and began to build an infrastructure that could support the process of systemic change. From this foundation, and with a clear organizational focus, we have established priorities and are investing in strategies that support meaningful and sustainable change in the lives of our residents. We know that we cannot do this work alone, and partnerships are critical to reducing disparities in every domain.

We need to all lean in.



COVID-19 pandemic underscores the interconnectedness of our seven domains and deepens our commitment to this work

Equitable response

Hennepin County's response to COVID-19 was swift, multi-faceted, and led with a lens of racial equity. We maintained continuity of service by adopting innovations that could help us reach residents wherever they are – from expanded digital service to off-line engagement efforts. The pandemic has underscored the interconnectedness of our seven disparity domains and deepens our commitment to this work.

Fueled by once-in-a-generation federal funding, we are propelling our Disparity Reduction efforts beyond strategy and into action. With the support of our dedicated staff and community partners, Hennepin County will continue to invest in priorities and strategies to close the gap between residents who are thriving and those who are not.



Serving residents is our North Star

Milestones on our journey toward reducing disparities

Commitment and awareness

2013 Our North Star - Serving Residents A re-energizing of our focus on serving residents was initiated across the organization. Branding this motto created a common theme to unite staff across all departments with a focus on the customer and resident.

Assessment of county human resources practices and procedures Our Human Resources Department enhanced investments in employment strategies and began developing innovative practices to remove hiring barriers and attract diverse talent. Since then, Human Resources has updated more than 270 job classifications to reflect experience as an equivalency for education, increased tuition reimbursement, expanded programs, and launched a New Employee Academy to increase engagement of new employees, along with an Employee Career Center to support those seeking advancement in the organization.

2014 Hennepin Pathways program launches The Hennepin County Pathways Program was launched as a unique and collaborative partnership between employers, educators, and community providers and as a tangible connection for job seekers to meaningful work with livable wages, benefits and growth potential. Pathways is a solution to help Hennepin County and other employers in the region find qualified candidates and close employment disparities by creating diverse pools of well-trained and high potential applicants. Through structured and customized education, training programs, work experiences, and support services, Pathways enables job seekers to secure a family-sustaining career or advance in an industry or occupation.

2015 Creation of Core Values The county created a framework of core values as a model for excellence and accountability for the way we serve residents and deliver services. The core values are Continuous Improvement, Customer Service, Diversity and Inclusion, Employee Engagement, and Workforce Development. These values are foundational and are included in staff performance reviews.

Disparity Reduction Project The initial Disparity Reduction project included data analysis and research, an environmental scan of current work across the county, identification of gaps, and employee listening sessions and engagement. This work set the stage for development of our current Disparity Reduction domains and priorities.

2016 Continued discovery work Environmental scan of ongoing work across the county, identification of gaps and employee listening sessions and engagement.

Infrastructure and foundation

2017 Identification of Disparity Reduction

Domains A board retreat set the stage for weaving Disparity Reduction into the county's mission, vision, and overarching goals. The retreat addressed current challenges while positioning the county for the future. A total of seven disparity reduction domains were identified. They are education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation. A theory of change was introduced that outlined a broad spectrum of actions and initiatives the county was taking as both a service provider and employer.

2018 Disparity Reduction matures Disparity Reduction domain team development occurs, Disparity Reduction Governance Board launched and domain priorities identified. Cross-domain collaborations result in strong relationships, innovative thinking and proactive strategies and actions to reduce disparities.

2019 Advancing Racial Equity training required for all staff In 2019, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion division coordinated the countywide delivery of the Advancing Racial Equity training. This four-hour, classroom-based training helped employees gain awareness, develop skills and be positioned to apply the learning in their work. More than 95% of Hennepin County staff have been trained to understand the combination of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and expertise that guide us to have respect and sensitivity to the uniqueness of each individual and provide awareness for effective interactions and services that are inclusive to all, regardless of cultural characteristics.

Priorities begin working through Racial Equity Impact Tool After domains were identified, leads were assigned across the organization with the charge of creating workplans and engaging residents and stakeholders. The goal was to develop community indicators and measure results while redesigning policies and programs. The teams that formed utilized the Racial Equity Impact Tool, adapted from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, to guide the work.

County Board creates Race Equity Advisory Council

In December 2019, the board created the Race Equity Advisory Council. Its mission is to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and administration on the county's vision and strategy. Due to COVID-19, the kickoff was delayed until August 2020.

2020 Disparity Reduction Line of Business

In January 2020, a new line of business was formed with the vision to intentionally provide direction and strategy to foster institutional change that reduces and eliminates racial disparities in Hennepin County. At the time, there were three departments within the Disparity Reduction line of business: Center of Innovation and Excellence; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Purchasing and Contract Services. The mission of this line of business is to partner, frame, and adopt equitable practices in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation across Hennepin County. We educate, facilitate, train, and analyze data to complete priority goals in the community and workplace.

County Board declares racism a public health crisis

In June 2020, the Hennepin County board passed a Board Action Resolution that declares racism as a public health crisis that affects the entire county. This declaration supports the county's foundational work to develop strategies that mitigate personal bias and prejudice in the community, create systems that build equity, and reach a vision of a future where all residents are healthy and successful, and all communities thrive. Hennepin County will support local, regional, state, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism and seek partnership with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism. The county will promote community efforts to amplify issues of racism that engage actively and authentically with communities of color.

2021 County Board takes actions to allocate \$240 million federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding toward the seven domains

Hennepin County allocates its receipt of ARPA funding in alignment with its mission and vision to support residents who are adversely affected by disparities; to support innovative, equitable and sustainable changes in service delivery; to leverage private and public partnerships within our community; and to seek other funding sources to maximize our investments and best position Hennepin County for the future.

Board adopts Climate Action Plan

Hennepin County's Climate Action Plan includes strategies to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the changing climate in ways that reduce vulnerabilities and ensure a more equitable and resilient Hennepin County. Strategies include: protect and engage people, especially vulnerable communities; enhance public safety; increase the resilience of the built environment and protect natural resources; reduce emissions in ways that align with core county functions and priorities; and partner in ways that can be most impactful.

Board raises minimum wage to \$20 an hour

Measure affects approximately 450 employees, including office specialists, food-service workers, community health workers and case-management assistants.

Board recognizes Juneteenth as a county holiday

Juneteenth commemorates the end of slavery and the triumphs, culture, and achievements of African Americans locally and across the United States. The Board approved the holiday as an opportunity for employees to think and learn about the centuries of work that African Americans have done to advance equity in this county and build this country.

Disparity Reduction Community of Practice forms

The Disparity Reduction Community of Practice works toward racial equity by: supporting staff in developing and strengthening their knowledge and skills that will help bring about equity and eliminate disparities; helping staff to understand their role in the work to eliminate racial disparities and the impacts on the communities we serve; and increasing collaboration with internal partners across the county and external partners in the community.



Education

“The educational success of our young people will impact them in other areas of their lives. Education, income, and employment are tightly connected.”

Christa Mims, Director of Education Support Services

35% higher – the third grade math proficiency of White students compared to students of color

Persistent disparity

Educational attainment significantly affects the trajectory of a person’s life—impacting their future employment, income, health, and ability to maintain stable housing. Hennepin County’s 4-year high school graduation rates expose significant racial and ethnic disparities. Hennepin County learners

who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color are less likely to be proficient in math and reading, and less likely to graduate from high school. School-aged youth with Child Protection involvement have lower school attendance and lower math and reading proficiency.

Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism • Housing stability • Reliable transportation • Digital access

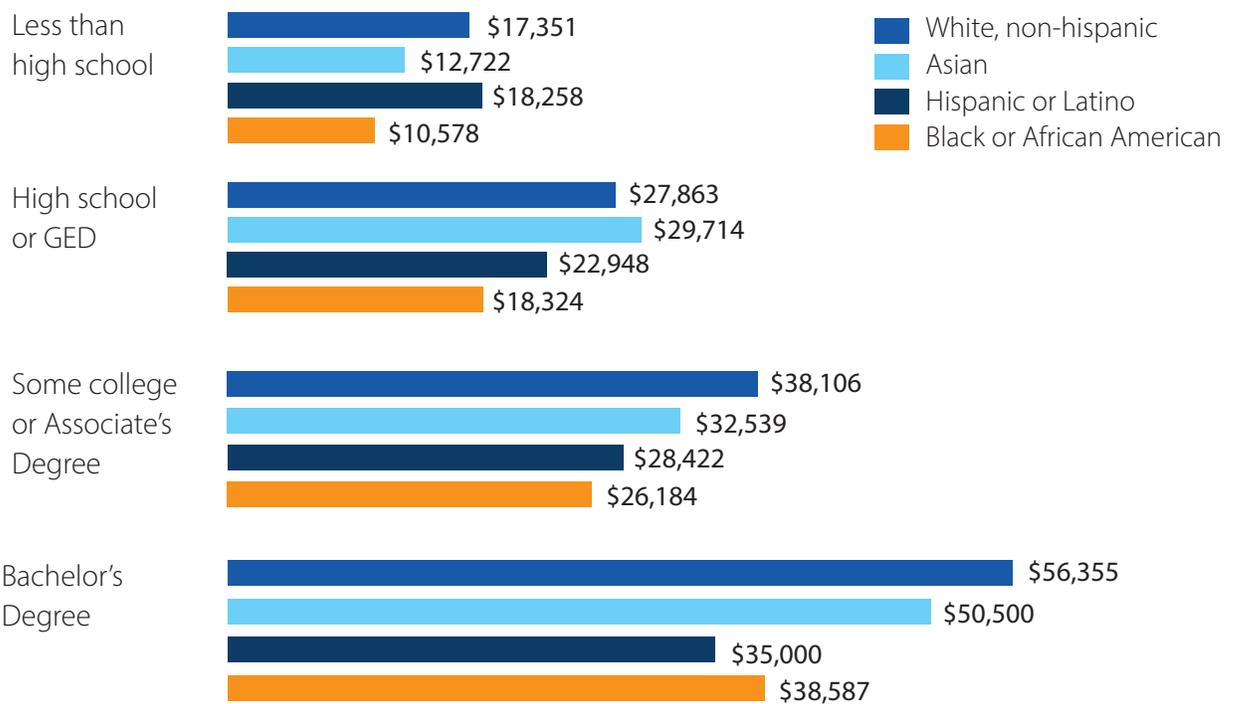
Regional indicators

Racial and ethnic disparities are also evident in the adult population. Considerably smaller proportions of Black, Indigenous, and people of color groups have attained at least a high school diploma or GED (Minnesota Department of Education Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System, 2018). Dropout rates are also disproportionately high for youth of color in Hennepin County.

All youth with less than a high school degree have lower earning potential. In most instances, Black or Hispanic or Latino students' earning potential is far less when compared to White students. For example, in the graph below, White workers with a high school degree or GED earned over \$9,000 more annually than their Black counterparts (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Median income by educational attainment by race and ethnicity

Hennepin County region



Hennepin County responds

Hennepin County is investing resources in academic skill supports, financial empowerment, independent living skills, and career readiness to improve school stability and consistency for youth connected to county programs.

Priorities

Education Support Services

The Education Support Services (ESS) department was created to advance county efforts to support the educational stability, health, and wellbeing of county-connected youth. Academic tutoring is provided for many of the youth engaged in ESS through a contracted agency that provides individualized, virtual tutoring supports to youth in grades K-12, and GED seekers connected to county systems. Academic tutoring has resulted in increased test scores in both math and reading, as well as fewer missing assignments, improved grades, increased confidence levels, and increased positive feelings toward school. This program has shown an average improvement of 15-20% on math and reading academic reassessments.

K-12 Homework Help

Hennepin County Library operates a drop-in tutoring program for all youth at 13 locations: Augsburg Park, Brookdale, Brooklyn Park, Cedar Riverside Opportunity Center, East Lake, Franklin, Hosmer, Nokomis, North Regional, Northeast, Roosevelt, Sumner, Webber Park. More than 13,000 tutoring sessions were completed in 2019.

Digital Access and Inclusion

Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the depth of the digital divide and highlighted gaps in digital access for students. In 2020, Hennepin County leveraged federal CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act dollars to distribute more than 2,700 Chromebooks to youth. This effort relied on strong partnerships with cities, schools, and community organizations.

COVID pandemic hits

Pivoting between different learning models creates ongoing uncertainty

2018

Education domain focuses on school stability and consistency for youth involved in county systems.

2020

Free, online homework help through Hennepin County Library attracts more than 160,000 tutoring sessions, a 58% increase over 2019.

Connecting Hennepin initiative launches.

Education Support Services launches to respond to greater student needs during pandemic.



“Her grades have increased by 82%, she’s passing all her classes, her average grade is a B, and her attendance is 95%.”

Teacher submitting a progress report on a student involved in Education Support Services

Looking ahead

Support educational success and improve holistic well-being outcomes of youth and families in Hennepin County, especially those connected to county services.

Goals

- Developing youth, family, and community driven priorities to support educational success
- Investing in resources to strengthen academic skill development, financial empowerment, independent living skills, and career readiness



Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

All public, private, and charter schools in Hennepin County

More than 50 programs that support education across the county

Youth and family engaged in program design and changes

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2021

Education Support Services builds upon the work from 2020 and becomes a department under Disparity Reduction Line of Business.

Board authorizes \$10 million to continue efforts to eliminate the digital divide. An Office of Broadband and Digital Inclusion is added to the Disparity Reduction Line of Business.

Board authorizes additional funding to expand free academic tutoring and school based mental health services.



Employment

“Employment is a driver for access to so many things, like food, housing and education.”

May Xiong, Director of Economic Supports, Child Support, and Well-Being

4x higher – the unemployment rate for Indigenous people compared to White people

Persistent disparity

People of color are overrepresented in low-paying jobs. Most Minnesota families of color have median incomes 50% lower than White families. The long-term impact of a low-wage job versus a career track limits long-term wealth building through traditional means (example: homeownership).

The pandemic spurred dramatic changes to how people work. Shifts to remote work, e-commerce, and automation were all possible because of technological advancements. Technology will continue to

accelerate change in how we work. Couple that reality with worker shortages, changing demographics, the “great resignation,” and retirements, and it’s easy to see that the new economy means everyone, from employers to employees, must learn and evolve.

Families trying to exit poverty through employment have a significant hurdle in the benefits cliff. As they earn more, they lose support such as childcare, making it nearly impossible to become self-sufficient.

Barriers in this area:

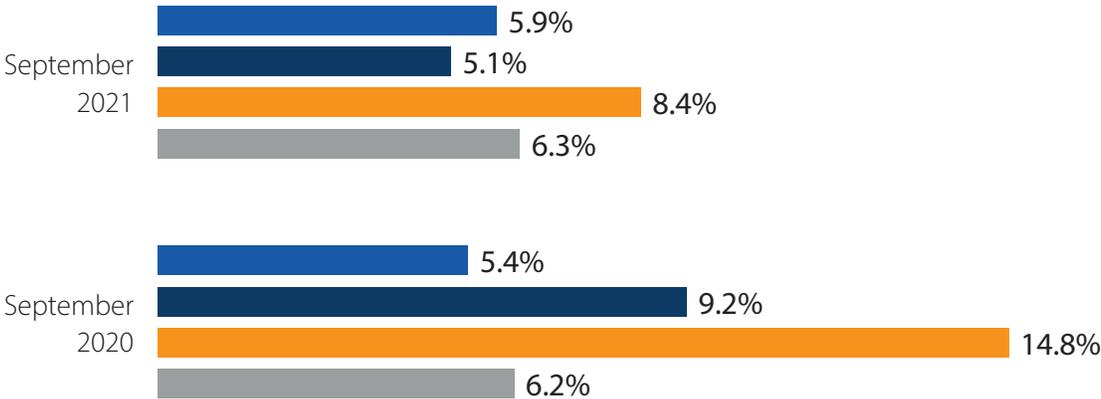
Systemic racism • Lack of access to quality education or training • Employers’ ability to identify and forecast skill gaps • Individual challenges (e.g., mental health, stable housing) • Disparities in business ownership and access to business financing

Regional indicators

People of color are overrepresented in notoriously elastic industries like transportation, hospitality, and personal services. These industries are susceptible to mass layoffs during economic emergencies and recessions.

This chart, from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, adds together unemployment rate and the change to labor force participation rate by race or ethnicity for September 2021. This indicates that Black Minnesotans are more likely to still be seeking work than their White or Hispanic peers.

Alternative Unemployment Rate by Race or Ethnicity, Minnesota
12-month moving average



Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Alternative unemployment is unemployment plus labor force participation decline.

- White, non-hispanic
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Total



Hennepin County responds

Hennepin County is leading as an employer as well as partnering with private sector and nonprofit organizations to match talent, training and market needs.

Priorities

Hennepin County leading as an employer

Over the last decade, Hennepin has removed barriers and changed policies and hiring practices to attract more diverse talent. The county raised its minimum wage for staff to \$20 an hour. To support staff looking to advance within the organization, the county increased tuition reimbursement to \$5,250 annually and launched an employee career center.

Pathways programs

Pathways programs guide residents to new careers and match employers with a diverse, trained pool of candidates—including people involved in the justice system. Pathways has expanded to include jobs in construction, clerical and human services, building operations, transportation, forestry, and more. These programs are designed to provide long-term, upwardly mobile career opportunities. Pathways participants are less likely to need public assistance as they move forward in their careers. The county now has over 20 career pathways.

Engaging employers

Local government and employers both benefit from open dialogue about current and future workforce needs. The Workforce Leadership Council is a space where Hennepin County engages regional public and private sector employers, as well as education and non-profit partners to share ideas, practices, and resources. These connections support our collective work in reducing disparities through employment and create opportunity through skill development and employment in living wage jobs.

Helping businesses grow

Growing businesses create employment opportunities for residents. Hennepin County is expanding business support programming that offers tools and resources to help businesses scale, preserve and create jobs, and explore new opportunities.

2014

Hennepin County partners with community-based organizations to create the Pathways Program, which connects the region's employers with a diverse pool of well-trained candidates.

2018

Hennepin County analyzes recruitment and hiring data to identify barriers for people of color. The county demonstrates its commitment to employment diversity by building a workforce that is representative of residents.

“Employment strategies that address both residents and businesses are vital to moving families toward self-sufficiency.”

Nola Speiser, Director of Workforce Development

Looking ahead

Engaging employers and career seekers to create meaningful employment opportunities that offer a living wage and benefits.

Goals

- Residents earn a living wage and employers are educated on new and innovative approaches to hiring residents.
- Continue to build and expand career pathways, including increasing employer participation.
- Support families as they move out of poverty.
- More employers will pay a \$20 minimum wage or retool benefit packages.



Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

Community-based organizations

Employers

Potential employees

Hennepin-Carver Workforce Board

Other county and state government

Business support organizations

Chambers of commerce

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2020

Retooled programs to focus on Disparity Reduction.

Advocated for changes in state policies to help residents.

More than half of Hennepin County’s Pathways participants decreased their use of public assistance in one year after hire.

2021

Hennepin County requests proposals and legislative action to address the benefits cliff.

Board allocated \$3.5 million in ARPA funds to provide employment services and training for approximately 200 people a year who are transitioning to permanent housing.

Pathways to connect people and employers

When Macy's department store closed its downtown Minneapolis location, hundreds of employees like Susan Taitel lost their jobs. She found her way to Hennepin County, thanks to the Pathways Program.

"I went to the Career Center in Uptown to learn tips about finding jobs," Taitel explained. "I heard about the Pathways Program at Hennepin County, looked it up and applied."

The six-week program offered basic job training specific to Hennepin County. Taitel practiced interview skills, updated her resume, learned Microsoft programs, toured the Government Center and completed a job shadow. By successfully completing the office specialist pathway program, she was able to interview for Hennepin County jobs before they hit the public website.

A short time later, she was hired as a service center representative where she has been working for more than three years. In her role, she helps residents get driver's licenses, vehicle registrations, birth certificates, and other vital records.

Pathways programs

Pathways are training programs serving people who face barriers to employment or who are underrepresented in the workforce. These programs connect employers to a diverse pool of well-trained candidates to meet their workforce needs, support Hennepin County's disparity reduction efforts, address upcoming workforce shortages, and help employers hire workers that reflect the county's demographics.

Pathways partners include cities, counties, the state, education institutions, community-based organizations, and businesses. Since its launch at Hennepin County in 2014, more than 300 program graduates have found jobs at the county, and 56% of participants are Black, Indigenous, or people of color. Hennepin Pathways graduates hired into Hennepin County have an average wage increase of over 140%.

Taitel said translating her sales skills into a public service job was pretty easy, "They helped me understand who I am as a worker and what my strengths are. That was different. In the past, I'd hear, 'This job is open. Can you do it?' Now I know that I have high attention to detail, I'm unflappable in the face of chaos, and I'm very diligent to making sure people get the best outcome."

At Macy's, Taitel said she was good at making sales and generating profit. At Hennepin County, she's good at "helping people get what they need" so they can lead better lives. "When someone gets an ID, they then can get a job and an apartment," she said. "I get to help them do something that matters."

Her favorite part? Helping people get marriage licenses. "They're so happy."

"They helped me understand who I am as a worker and what my strengths are."





Income

“The work toward systems change from a resident-user perspective will close the gap caused by racial disparities in our community.”

May Xiong, Director of Economic Supports, Child Support, and Well-Being

White children are more than **5x**
as likely to reach the top 20% of income distribution

Persistent disparity

Income is foundational to self-sufficiency and opportunity. Income pays for basic needs and is critical for establishing wealth and growing assets. Significant gaps exist in median household incomes for Black, Indigenous and Latino households, which means lifelong disparities in access to economic opportunity and wealth creation.

Small businesses account for the majority of jobs in Hennepin County and are a key way for people to build wealth, but significant disparities in business ownership by people of color reduce employment and wealth building opportunities in communities of color.

Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism • Lack of access to quality education and job training • Disparities in business ownership and access to financing

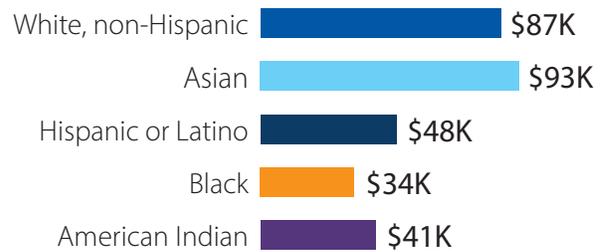
Regional indicators

To earn money, sustain a family, and build wealth, people need an education, job training, affordable housing, and myriad other factors.

Business ownership Less than 15% of businesses in Hennepin county are minority owned. Within Hennepin County, the ratio of business ownership share to population share is only 37% for minorities and lower for Black (16.9%) and Latino individuals (23%) in particular as compared to 77.2% for Whites.

Cited by Brookings, Source: U.S. Census Bureau Annual Business Survey. Disparities in business ownership indicate significant racial gaps in economic opportunity.

Hennepin County median household income



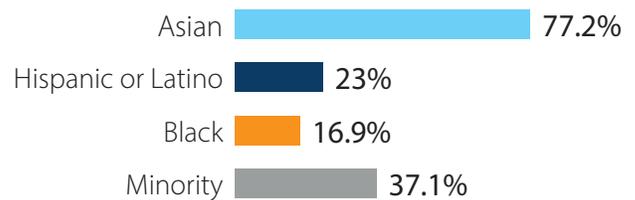
2018 inflation-adjusted dollars rounded to nearest thousand

Note: Asian/Pacific Islander is typically poorly measured because it groups different populations with vastly different experiences, cultures, etc. A person recruited for a tech job has a different income than a refugee, for example.

Income potential In Hennepin County, a child's chance of reaching the top 20% of the income distribution varies significantly by their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Children in White families are five times more likely to reach the top 20% than children who grew up in a Black family.

Source: The Opportunity Atlas www.opportunityatlas.org

Minority business ownership fair share ratio



2018 inflation-adjusted dollars



Hennepin County responds

Hennepin County is examining systems, including state and federal programs, to learn about barriers that keep residents in poverty and foster inequities. We are committed to seeking legislative changes, particularly making more funding available to working families for childcare and aligning and simplifying system requirements.

Priorities

Increasing financial wellness

- Hennepin County is engaging non-custodial parents involved in Child Support to proactively work with them to divert them from involvement with the justice system. The goal is having both parents contribute to the financial and emotional well-being of their children.
- The county is expanding homeownership programming that will help Black, Indigenous, and people of color build equity and contribute to generational wealth
- Government programs can be challenging to navigate. The county is realigning systems, particularly programs that primarily serve women and children, to help people get services that maximize economic stability.

Increasing diversity in contracts

Hennepin County's purchasing area has created affirmative action plans and workforce goals in county contracts, which has helped eliminate bias and barriers to women-owned and minority-owned businesses. The countywide goals are 32% for minorities and 20% for women-led firms.

Expanding support for small businesses

Entrepreneurship offers an important pathway to income and wealth-creation. Hennepin County is expanding support for emerging entrepreneurs, microenterprises, and small businesses, with a focus on entrepreneurs of color and women. Elevate Business is a new program focused on more robust, more inclusive, and more specialized supports for entrepreneurs. This work aligns with other efforts and offers a pathway for job seekers who want to explore business ownership as their career pathway.

2015

Building on 20 years of innovation, Purchasing and Contract Services conducted an audit and determined it can and should do more to hire small businesses, minority-owned businesses and women-owned businesses. From 2015 to 2020, contracts, for all three areas grew.

2018

Hennepin County sought legislative changes to allow a higher dollar amount for contracts reserved for small businesses, which opened the door to new opportunities for minority- and women-owned firms.

2020

Hennepin County expanded community services to help communities impacted by COVID-19, especially low income and communities of color. Eighty-eight organizations received grants.

“Entrepreneurship is a critical pathway to wealth creation, but business owners of color face significant barriers compared to their White counterparts. This hinders opportunities for communities of color to build wealth in place, which exacerbates disparities in every other domain.”

Patricia Fitzgerald, Director of Community and Economic Development

Looking ahead

Fostering an inclusive system of support that enables entrepreneurs, small businesses, and individuals to build wealth.

Goals

- Through training and employment programs, Hennepin County and its partners will help more people transition to permanent housing and jobs.
- Disparities in business ownership will be reduced as the county and its partners offer grants, mentoring, and other supports.
- The county will continue helping small and minority-owned businesses obtain contracts with the county, particularly in construction and professional services.



Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

Cities

Minnesota Department of Human Services

National Association of Minority Contractors – Upper Midwest (NAMC-UM)

Minnesota Minority Goods and Services Association (MMGSA)

Small business owners and advisors

Women and minority owned businesses

Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce

Timeline of critical investments and activities

Hennepin County provided more than 6,500 small business relief grants totaling almost \$70 million. 40% went to BIPOC owned businesses.

The county's purchasing team is making intentional efforts to purchase from and contract with minority or women-led companies.

The county launched Elevate Business HC, an innovative new program that provides no-cost professional business advising and other support services to businesses.

2021

Board allocated \$19 million in ARPA funds for equitable economic recovery strategies including investment toward small business and non-profit recovery.

Purchasing and Contract Services looks for opportunities to reserve contracts for up to \$250,000 for small business bidders.

Putting money where it matters

Each year, Hennepin County spends more than \$800 million on contracts for goods and services – that’s more than the overall budget of every other Minnesota county. But how much of that money is spent with firms owned by women or people of color?

An external audit conducted in 2015 showed the county that it could improve its engagement with small businesses in communities of focus. The county took several steps, including setting contracting goals and seeking legislative changes to allow for higher dollar amounts in contracts reserved for smaller firms.

Building relationships

Realizing that small businesses could perceive roadblocks to working with a large enterprise such as Hennepin County, staff focused on developing relationships with potential vendors, so the business knew who to call with questions and concerns. The county also reached out to industry and professional trade associations to pilot new programs and develop new contracting methods that may work better for small firms.

Sizing work for small businesses

By unbundling larger projects and rescoping work based on business capacity, Hennepin County is creating more opportunities for smaller firms.

Successfully advocating for legislative changes

State statutes guide the contracting and bidding process for local governments across Minnesota. In 2018, Hennepin County sought and received legislative permission to raise the statutory dollar limit on a solicitation to small business enterprises or veteran-owned small businesses. Since this change, Purchasing and Contract Services looks for opportunities to reserve contracts for up to \$250,000 for small business bidders.

Small business remodeling projects

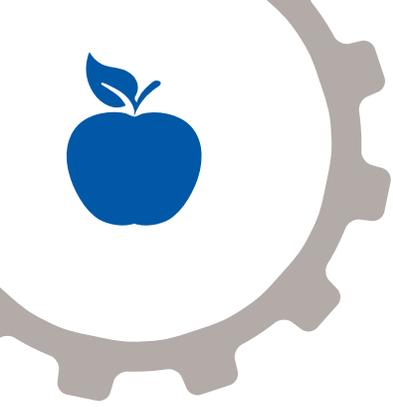
Many departments in Hennepin County seek help in engaging small businesses in their projects. The county now has curated physical building preservation contracts up to \$250,000 for pre-qualified small business contractors.

Providing technical expertise

Staff also realized they had to work more closely with the vendors. While small businesses are experts in the service they provide, they may not be experts at navigating county systems or other general business needs, such as billing and payment.

Through Hennepin County's contracting and purchasing work, Noor Companies received a contract to renovate Hennepin County's Hosmer Library. Owner Nawal Noor (pictured below left) is the first East African developer and general contractor in Minnesota, and focuses on employing and training workers historically underrepresented in development and real estate.





Health

“Providing access is not enough to change the health of a community. Communities are more challenged with greater needs and more complex social constructs.”

Stella Whitney-West, Chief Executive Officer, NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center

Indigenous people are **6x** more likely to die of a drug overdose

Persistent disparity

A resident's ZIP code is a better predictor of life expectancy than their genetics. Socially disadvantaged populations experience preventable health disparities with a greater burden of disease, injury, violence, and death.

Hennepin County's greatest needs are often found in communities of color. These communities have worse outcomes in health due to systemic racism, lower incomes, lower education attainment, and lack of access to physical and mental health care.

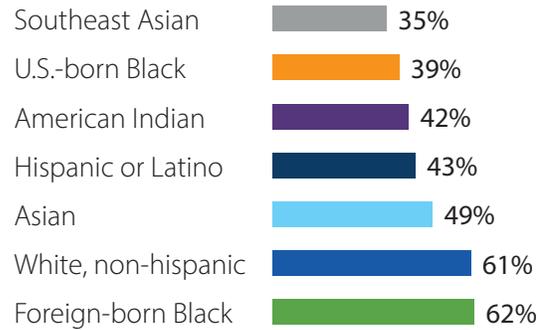
Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism in healthcare, income, and education • Access to affordable healthcare, nutrition, and education

Regional indicators

A fundamental component of good health is access to affordable, balanced nutrition. About 13% of adults in Hennepin County experience food insecurity, with low-income and communities of color disproportionately lacking ready access to healthy, low-calorie foods. The county continues to engage and support community organizations that provide essential nutritional access to residents who reside in “food deserts” — areas where the poverty rate is 20% or higher, and at least 500 people (or 33% of the population) live more than one mile from a large grocery provider.

Percentage of Hennepin County residents reporting their health, in general, as excellent or very good



Hennepin County SHAPE Survey, 2018

Mental health

Hennepin County is also focused on increasing access to culturally responsive mental health services. By improving access to culturally responsive mental health services, more residents will receive needed services in a timely manner, be better able to adhere to treatment, and will be able to remain in care.

The intersection between mental health and physical health is complicated and intertwined. Medical conditions such as chronic pain can lead to mental health problems, and common medications used to treat mental health may place a person at risk for secondary metabolic disorders. Addressing both mental health and physical health together can be a key to reducing disparities in chronic disease.

- People living with serious mental illness are more likely to be women (5.7% versus 3.3% for men).
- Mental illness rates are elevated for young adults aged 18-25 (7.5%) compared to mature and older adults.
- More than 20% of children have or have had a serious mental health disorder, including a mood, anxiety, or behavior disorder.
- People of color who experience mental health needs are over-represented in deep-end services, and more often experience cross-sector involvement with justice and social service systems.



Hennepin County responds

Addressing food insecurity during COVID-19

In 2020, the Hennepin County Board allocated CARES Act funding to support food security for Hennepin County residents impacted by COVID-19. Through grants, Hennepin County provided financial support for food distribution sites, including community organizations, non-profits, mutual assistance associations, religious organizations, food shelves, food pantries, and pop-up distribution sites.

Integrating mental health and co-locating services

In October 2021, Hennepin County and Hennepin Healthcare began a partnership for service integration at the South Minneapolis Human Services Center on Lake Street and Hiawatha Avenue. The fifth floor of this building is a space providing both primary health care delivery from Hennepin Healthcare's East Lake Clinic and outpatient mental health services from Hennepin County's Mental Health Center. Seventy-five percent of the individuals served by East Lake Clinic and 55% served by the Mental Health Center identify as non-White.

Future phases of this building integration will include the addition of services aimed at addressing disparities in access to health. Co-located services will include WIC, the Office of Multicultural Services, and benefits assistance.

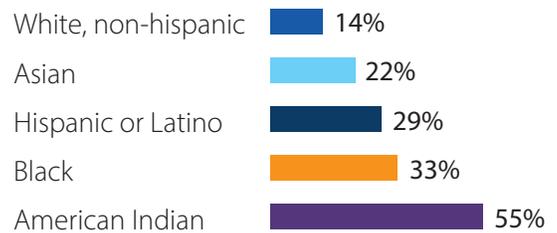
Healthy births and positive starts

In September 2021, the County Board authorized up to \$10 million in federal funds to advance critical public health supports for maternal and child wellness programs and improve maternal health outcomes for people and communities experiencing poor outcomes, especially Black and Indigenous mothers in Hennepin County.

In addition to supportive services offered by NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, funds will be allocated to enhance implementation of culturally congruent doula services, social service supports, and health education using a trauma-informed approach at Hennepin Healthcare's East Lake Clinic and Redleaf Center.

Percent late or no prenatal care by selected demographic factors in Hennepin County, 2019

Mother's race and ethnicity



2019

Health Care for the Homeless marks 30 years of service, supporting more than 4,000 residents annually.

2020

Hennepin County allocates \$2.8 million in CARES funding to fight food insecurity in low-income and communities of color.

Hennepin County allocates \$5 million to support the development of housing and services for individuals who are experiencing homelessness who are medically frail, elderly and/or are coming out of the hospital.

“Through our food insecurity work we have provided an opportunity for our communities to have access to food that is culturally appropriate and allows for healthy food choices. That being said, we need to ensure that connections to culturally appropriate, healthy foods is not merely episodic. It must be part of a longer-term strategy to stabilize food access in our communities.”

Jillian Kyles, Human Services Program Manager

Looking ahead

Health equity is achieved when every person feels they have the opportunity to attain their highest health potential, and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.

Hennepin County continues to empower and partner with communities to reduce chronic disease through:

- Addressing food insecurities
- Improving access to health care
- Integrating medical and mental health clinical services



Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

State and local public health agencies

Community Health Improvement Partnership

Law enforcement agencies

Community-based food security partners

Community-based mental health providers

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2021

\$20 million in federal ARPA funds allocated to strengthen public health programs and services for child and maternal health. This builds on the County’s annual spend of \$75.4 million.

\$20 million in federal ARPA funds allocated to support new and expanding behavioral health services. This builds on the County’s annual spend of \$120 million.

\$90-million NorthPoint Health and Wellness campus expansion breaks ground



Housing

“A home is the foundation on which people build successful lives and contribute to their communities. It’s that simple. Housing is a basic need that is becoming increasingly difficult for many Hennepin households to meet.”

David Hewitt, Housing Stability Director

89% of families experiencing homelessness in Hennepin County are Black

Persistent disparity

Too many Hennepin County residents struggle to maintain stable housing, and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the lack of affordable housing and are more likely to experience homelessness.

While many factors contribute to housing affordability challenges, we know that housing costs are increasing, while incomes are stagnant or decreasing. There is also a significant lack of available housing that is affordable to people at the lowest

income levels, where people of color are overrepresented.

Nearly one-third of Hennepin County households are housing cost burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income toward housing. This puts them at risk of not being able to afford other basic needs like health care, food, transportation, and education. People of color are disproportionately impacted.

Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism • Employment and income • Availability of affordable housing • Lack of federal subsidies

Regional indicators

More than half of Black and Latino households are housing cost burdened, compared to only 26% of White households. They are also almost three times more likely to be severely cost burdened, paying more than 50% of their income on housing. Rates of homeownership are also significantly less among households of color.

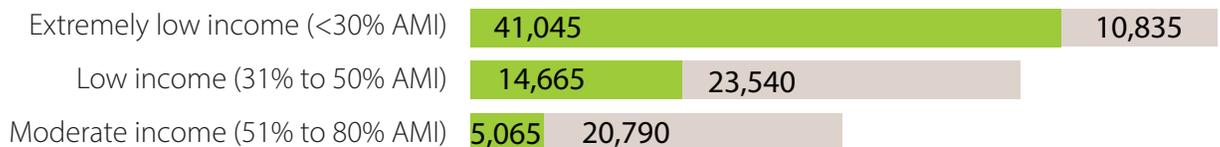
The rates of homelessness in Hennepin County follow similar trends. While Black individuals make up 36% of people in poverty in Hennepin County, and Indigenous individuals make up 2%, 58% of

people experiencing homelessness are Black, and 11% are Indigenous. While poverty is a factor, these higher rates of homelessness are far beyond what poverty alone can explain.

These indicators are compounded by increasing housing costs and stagnant incomes. Median rents increased 17% from 2000 to 2019 while renter incomes only rose 3%. Workers earning minimum wage – or even median wages – cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment.

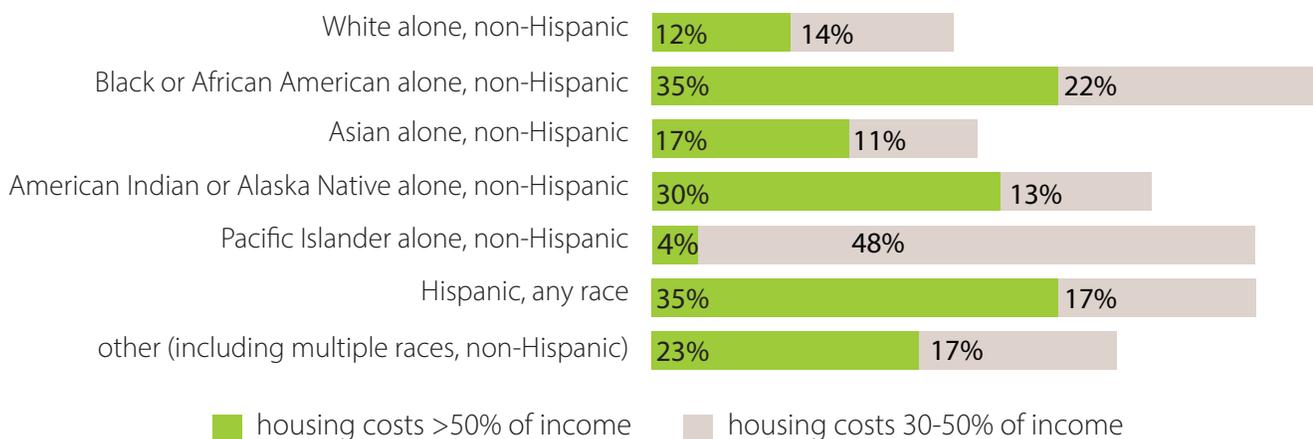
Number of households experiencing housing cost burden by income

Households in Hennepin County (AMI = Area Median Income)



Percent of households experiencing housing cost burden by race and ethnicity

Households in Hennepin County



Hennepin County responds

As one of several major organizations working to address affordable housing needs in the region, Hennepin County creates and preserves affordable housing through strategic investments and partnerships across a continuum of housing types according to income levels.

Priorities

Hennepin County focuses its impact on households with the lowest incomes through capital investments and supportive housing services. This creates a pathway from homelessness to permanent housing stability.

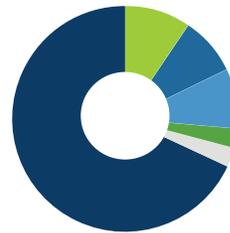
Over the next 10 years, we'll continue building up our homeless response system and affordable housing production and preservation efforts to be more stable than before the pandemic.

Each year, Hennepin County:

- Supports approximately 8,000 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness by funding a robust homeless response system, including emergency shelter and other supports
- Helps 7,500 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness access and maintain stable housing
- Directs \$98.9 million to serve 15,000 people in transitional and supportive housing
- Invests \$13.5 million to create and preserve an average of 1,100 units of affordable housing

\$146 million invested annually

Funding by activity



- Capital funding for affordable housing
- Emergency shelter
- Short-term housing assistance
- Home repairs for low-income homeowners
- Rental assistance
- Supportive housing services and operations

91% of annual housing funding targets households with incomes below 30% AMI

COVID pandemic hits

putting pressure on cost-burdened families



2019

Supportive Housing Strategy created to focus investments on vulnerable populations with extremely low incomes and greatest health and safety risks when unstably housed, the majority of whom are people of color.

Established new vision for single adult shelter focused on lowering barriers, improving outcomes, and increasing capacity for underserved populations.

2020

Emergency rental assistance program established, helping 6,000 low-income households and preventing homelessness, 2/3 of which were Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Moved 1,000 older adults and people with medical conditions putting them at highest risk of complications from COVID-19 into non-congregate sheltering settings.

“Where you live impacts what kind of job you can have. It impacts your transportation choices, and it deeply impacts your health. Every Hennepin County resident deserves a choice about where they can afford to live without having to choose between paying for housing, and having money for food, clothing, education, and healthcare.”

Julia Welle Ayres, Director of Housing Development and Finance

Looking ahead

Every household in Hennepin County needs access to safe, stable, affordable, permanent housing.

Creating pathways to exit shelter/homelessness through expanding shelter diversion, new low-barrier shelters, and increasing case management to help people move to permanent housing.

Maintaining and increasing housing stability through expanded emergency renter assistance and eviction prevention supports.

Increasing availability of affordable housing by piloting a new 30% AMI unit subsidy to further reduce rents in county financed housing projects; and increasing production of affordable, supportive, and single room occupancy housing.

Decreasing barriers to homeownership through homebuyer assistance grants and affordable single family home development.

Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

Cities, state, federal, and other government entities

Contractors and builders

Service providers

Emergency shelter providers

Apartment and rental owners

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2021

Creation of the Single Room Occupancy Task Force Report to facilitate the creation of more housing affordable to people with the lowest incomes, and to reduce shelter reliance.

Hotel to Housing team moved 400+ older adults and people with medical conditions putting them at highest risk of complications from COVID-19 into permanent housing.

“...we will not end homelessness without paying close attention to the needs of children in our community.”



Stable Homes Stable Schools having ‘tremendous impact’ on school success

A mother in Hennepin County sought support from the Stable Homes Stable Schools program to find housing for her family. As a victim of domestic abuse, she was planning to find refuge at a domestic violence shelter, but there was a hitch: the mother was a client of the DWI Court, and the conditions of her probation required her to reside within Hennepin County. The shelter was in a neighboring jurisdiction.

A human services liaison to Stable Homes Stable Schools worked quickly to connect with the DWI Court team to review the woman’s case, ultimately securing approval for her to move outside of the county.

Untangling complex situations like these is part of Hennepin County’s contribution to Stable Homes Stable Schools, an initiative to support students and their families when they are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Stable Homes Stable Schools works closely with Minneapolis schools to identify and support students with unstable housing. Families who are currently homeless can receive up to three years of rental assistance and support designed to help them move toward self-sufficiency. Families at risk of eviction can receive one-time emergency funds and other support as needed. By navigating crisis together, participants and program managers help ensure students can remain focused on their studies.

Stable Homes Stable Schools also can prioritize students who may not be eligible for other supports because they don’t meet the federal definition of

homelessness. Casey Schleisman, Hennepin County Human Services worker, says the program has had “a tremendous impact so far to secure housing stability for children within the families.”

Many of the families served by Stable Homes Stable Schools also have some connection to county programs or systems. “If there are barriers that families experience, our role has been to try to break those down so families can be better served,” Casey said.

Charlotte Kinzley, who supports the program for Minneapolis Public Schools, believes one critical and unique aspect of this housing initiative is that it focuses on the children in the family to prioritize those most in need. “Very rarely do we see this focus in the prioritization within our homeless response systems,” says Kinzley. “The lack of focus on children’s needs is short-sighted when we know that homelessness is often generational, and therefore, we will not end homelessness without paying close attention to the needs of children in our community.”

Partners in the project are the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Public Housing Authority, Hennepin County Health and Human Services, YMCA of the North, and Minneapolis Public Schools.





Justice

“Racial disparities and service gaps which perpetuate inequities need to be uncovered and resolved, so the system works for everyone.”

Catherine Johnson, Director of Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation

78% of clients receiving legal representation from Adult Representation Services are Black, Indigenous and people of color

Persistent disparity

A multitude of regional and national studies have documented that persons of color are overrepresented in the U.S. justice system, both as the accused and as victims. Black and Indigenous people make up 45.2% of the Minnesota prison population despite only accounting for 8.2% of the state population.

The justice system is a complex, interconnected partnership of state, county, and local authorities with different roles and

functions. Hennepin County departments share common goals and a commitment to move forward in a way that recognizes racism as a public health crisis while fulfilling their individual obligations to county residents. Through the Law, Safety and Justice departments we are united in identifying and implementing system changes that reduce disparities.

Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism • Income • Employment • Education • Family support • Mental health
• Substance use • Housing

Disparities among adult probation clients

Regional indicators

Black and Indigenous people in Minnesota are four times more likely to be arrested than their White counterparts. Black individuals are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is five times the imprisonment of Whites. Minnesota is one of five states where the disparity is more than 10 to 1.

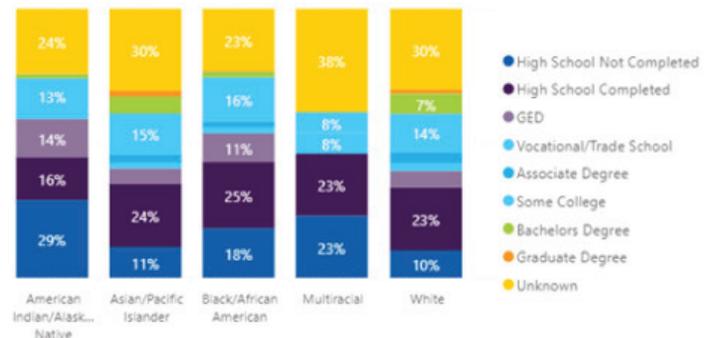
In 2018, nearly 75% of the 5,500 juvenile crime cases sent to the Hennepin County Attorney's Office for review involved youth of color. Black youth, who made up 61% of the cases prosecuted, accounted for only 22% of the county population of 10- to 17-year-olds.

There are a variety of factors that create instability and lead to contact with local law enforcement. By addressing areas of disparity, residents can be better supported to re-enter society. The county collects data at all levels to inform broad strategies and individual interventions.

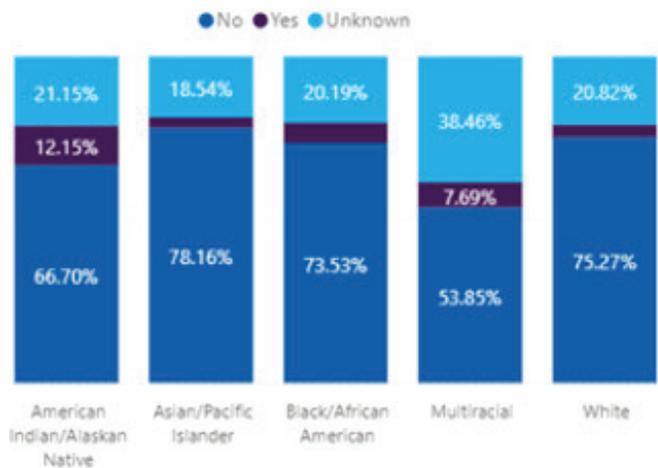
Employment



Education



Homeless



Hennepin County responds

Health-based approaches

The county expanded hours at the 1800 Chicago Behavioral Health and Wellness center to address a gap in care and create an integrated model of care, resulting in a 35% reduction in jail bookings. Social workers are embedded in Public Safety settings to directly connect clients with services that lead to better health, food and housing, and employment.

Physical and mental health services, including the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program, are offered to individuals in custody to ensure that health disparities are not perpetuated when clients are under the county's care or supervision.

Eviction prevention and intervention

As of August 2021, housing court clients whose income is at 150% of the federal poverty guidelines or lower are provided attorneys at no cost. Adult Representation Services represents clients who are facing eviction and other housing court matters that impact their housing stability.

Bail reform

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office (HCAO) has identified 19 low-level, non-violent felony offenses for which bail will no longer be routinely requested, including fifth-degree sale or possession of narcotics and theft under \$35,000.

Expungement

The County has created an expedited process for those seeking to seal their record of older, non-violent offenses without needing to hire a lawyer.

Expanding diversion from the justice system

Adult and juvenile diversion programs that help individuals avoid a criminal conviction and provide social services, substance use treatment, or mental health resources.

Supporting diverse victims

Hennepin County is strengthening its victim services, including pairing victims of violent crime with bilingual and multicultural advocates, and developing gender-specific violence intervention services tailored to the immediate needs of young people and their families - available 24/7.

Jury expansion

Communities of color have traditionally and routinely been underrepresented in Hennepin County jury pools. While Black people make up 13% of the county's population, they only constitute 6% of the jury pool in 2020.

The Public Defender's Office has initiated a project advocating for expansion of juror source lists, challenging how lists are generated, and examining the lack of follow through when prospective jurors do not respond to the call for jury service.

2018

The County conducted a system analysis of the jail population to identify drivers, strategies, and alternatives to detention for low-risk individuals.

2019

Hennepin County holds first juvenile Warrant Forgiveness Day.

Restorative court introduced for low-risk offenders, employing a holistic justice model that uses existing resources to restore individuals to good health and promote law abiding behavior.

Court Ride program launched. Over the first year, 818 rides were offered to Public Defender clients. Program now operates under the Public Defender's Office with the name Client Ride.

Looking ahead

Focused on providing equal access to justice, supporting community-led early intervention and prevention, and advancing reforms that support the whole person to successfully exit the justice system and move forward with their lives. Efforts must support those who are accused, those who have been harmed, and those who are convicted of an offense.

Expected outcomes and results:

- Strengthening community-based partnerships to support gun violence interruption and outreach
- Addressing behavioral health needs of youth and adults in county facilities
- Expanding availability of electronic home monitoring as an alternative to incarceration
- Implementing trauma-informed services and programming for clients who are Black, Indigenous or people of color in Adult Probation
- Supporting Hennepin Healthcare's Next Step Program, a hospital-based violence interruption service for victims ages 12-28 who are hospitalized due to violent injury
- Increased staff for Victim Services



Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation

Adult Representation Services

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

Hennepin County Sheriff's Office

Hennepin County Public Defender's Office

Fourth Judicial District Court

Local law enforcement agencies

Schools

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2020

County identifies low-risk youth for release from Juvenile Detention Center to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission, expands use of home monitoring.

2021

DOCCR eliminates Correctional Service Fee for Public Defender. Additional fee eliminations proposed for 2022, including removing co-pays for incarcerated medical care.

HCSO launches HOPE Program to provide education and training opportunities for offenders at Adult Detention Facility. Classes will be provided by Minneapolis Public Schools Adult Basic Education.

Hennepin County Board allocated \$5 million to implement evidence-based strategies to prevent, reduce, and mitigate gun violence.

“This was a life-changing experience, and I’m so grateful for it.”

Building the foundation for a brighter future

People are more likely to re-offend if they can't see a successful future for themselves. That's where Hennepin County's Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation's 26-week Productive Day program comes in.

People on probation or parole are given opportunities to complete on-site pre-apprenticeships in the construction industry. They build career skills with the goal of landing stable jobs that provide a living wage and benefits.

A recent client said she began the program with a self-defeating attitude, but by the end of her experience had obtained an electrician's license, bought a car, and renewed hopes of buying a home for herself and her son.

“When people walk in the door, we ask where they see themselves in three to five years,” explained Probation Officer Michelle Scheidemantle, who serves as a liaison between the program and participants' assigned probation officers. “They all want to be independent and self-sufficient. They want a career, not going from job to job.”

Productive Day can offer that roadmap to success. Graduates of the program can access career paths with trade unions and find long-term work in carpentry, plumbing and more.

Participants receive 32 hours of paid, hands-on skill building per week and eight hours of classroom study with accredited curriculum provided by a carpenters' union. There are four journeymen carpenters who provide on-the-job training and one who leads classroom sessions.

During their time with the program, clients receive assistance from DOCCR to make sure factors such as housing are addressed to give clients higher success rates in securing long-term, stable employment.

As the recent client, now-turned electrician said, “This was a life-changing experience, and I’m so grateful for it.”





Transportation

“Building and maintaining connections to get people to destinations and needed services requires an equity lens as well as technical expertise, creativity, and collaboration. By listening to community voices and proactively studying the impact of our decisions on people and disproportionately impacted communities in addition to our built and natural environments, we can improve our transportation and other infrastructure.”

Lisa Cerney, Assistant County Administrator, Public Works

Persistent disparity

Transportation: Transit, walking, and biking alternatives are critical to advancing connectivity and climate action, as well as disparity reduction. A lack of modal options within our county right of way creates disparities when residents need to access schools, health care, jobs, and shopping to meet basic needs. People also face accessibility challenges and safety issues when traveling through our communities. Racism has historically played a role in major transportation and land use policies, resulting in generational impacts.

Climate: Data shows that people of color, low-income families, and residents with disabilities contribute least to the problem of climate pollution, but these residents are the most at risk from negative climate impacts.

Connectivity: Eliminating the digital divide is a way to support regional prosperity and a strong and equitable post-pandemic recovery. We need quality broadband for telehealth visits, distance learning, and the ability to work from home or run a business that can reach customers wherever they live.

Barriers in this area:

Systemic racism • Aging infrastructure • Constrained right of way • Physical and geographic barriers
• Complex, interjurisdictional partnerships • Increasing severity of weather

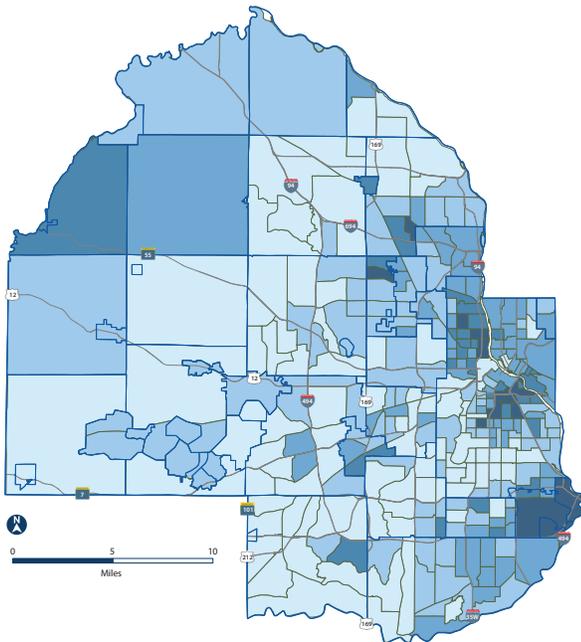
Regional indicators

Thousands of Hennepin County residents need assistance getting connected, whether that is

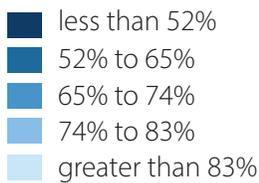
through more quality broadband or additional transit and other alternatives to traveling by car.

25% of Hennepin County households lack a broadband internet connection

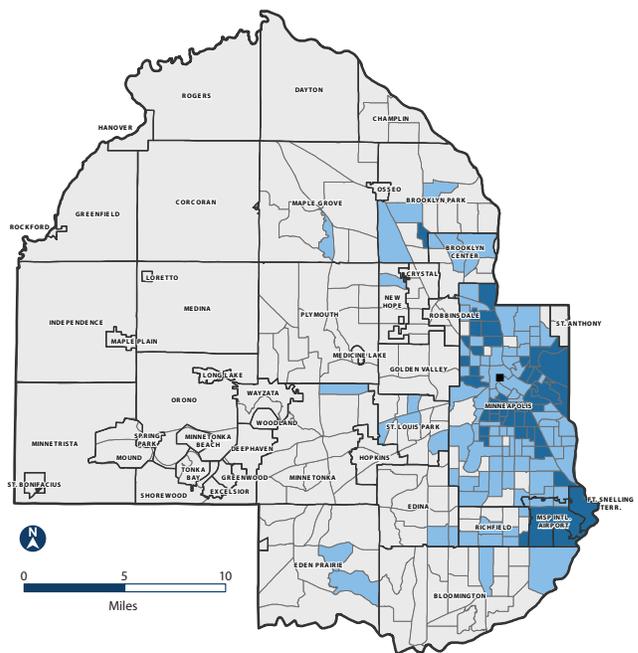
Households with broadband Internet Access includes cable, fiber optic, or DSL



Percent of total households by Census Tract



Commuters who take transit



Commuters who take transit



Source: American Community Survey (Census Tracts 2015-2019)



Hennepin County responds

Transportation

Hennepin County invests in annual capital improvements supporting a safe, accessible, and resilient multi-modal transportation system. In addition to ongoing funding for transit projects and initiatives, Hennepin County invested approximately \$70 million in road and bridge projects in 2021.

Climate

Hennepin County is committed to leading in our region and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 and achieving “net zero” emissions by 2050, both in the county’s operations and geographically.

Connectivity

Hennepin County has coupled an additional \$10 million investment to improve broadband with a 10-year, \$20 million ongoing effort to expand fiber optic connections across the county.

Priorities

Complete Streets Policy revision

Transportation departments are updating the policy to address the needs of transit users, bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists in the planning, design, and construction of our transportation system and to incorporate green streets strategies.

Blue Line Extension anti-displacement workgroup

This group is centering community voices and bringing together a variety of stakeholders to ensure the value of light rail will benefit current corridor residents and to minimize physical, cultural, and economic displacement.

Climate Action Plan implementation

The new department of Climate and Resiliency is building a strong foundation to operationalize the plan and lead a coordinated approach to policy development and response to climate change.

Expanding broadband and digital inclusion

The Office of Broadband and Digital Inclusion is working toward all residents being able to fully participate in the digital world and having universal access to affordable choices for broadband, personal technology, and the digital skills needed to thrive.

2009

Implemented Complete Streets Policy

2014

Collaborated with partners to begin fiber optic installation in county right of way

METRO Green Line light rail opened connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul

2018

METRO C Line rapid bus opened to serve North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center

2019

Began work on Climate Action Plan

“We seek to build a more equitable and resilient Hennepin County by reducing greenhouse gas emissions while engaging with communities vulnerable to climate impacts.”

Diana Chaman Salas, Director of Climate and Resiliency

Looking ahead

Hennepin County residents can expect positive outcomes in transportation, climate, and connectivity.



- Continued investment driven by revised policies and expanded community engagement.
- Resilient multi-modal infrastructure that reflects a sense of place and community.
- Safer, better mobility options supported by safety and accessibility plans.
- Improved air quality with reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Greater access to quality broadband.

Engaged partners

Clients, residents, community

Hennepin County cities and schools

Community groups and nonprofits

Internet service providers

Neighboring counties

Watershed districts

Regional, state, and federal transit authorities

Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Three Rivers Park District

Timeline of critical investments and activities

2020

Revised Capital Improvement Program criteria to address disparities

Applied Race Equity Impact Tool to all new transportation projects

2021

Began work on revised Blue Line Extension route and anti-displacement workgroup

Adopted ambitious climate goals and Climate Action Plan

METRO Orange Line to open with service on I-35W from Minneapolis to Burnsville

2021-22

Revise Complete Streets Policy

"I'm thankful for the laptop so that I can help my three daughters and son with school distance learning. We don't own a personal computer, and this will be so helpful. "



Tackling disparities in digital access

The COVID-19 pandemic sent thousands home for remote education and work – and illuminated the stark reality of the digital divide.

Lower-income families, many of whom are people of color, are more likely to lack the connectivity and technology needed to learn and work from home.

Hennepin County steps up

“The pandemic showed us that technology is critical to accessing services, connecting to health care and schools, and allowing people to stay in touch. Without technology, people are less likely to access vital services, are more isolated, and are more likely to fall behind in vital areas, such as education, employment, and health,” said Chela Guzmán-Wiegert, assistant county administrator for Disparity Reduction.

With the help of CARES Act funds, Hennepin County launched Connecting Hennepin to address three critical areas of the digital divide: devices; connectivity and internet access; and supports, like digital literacy education.

More than 5,850 laptops were purchased during the first year of the program. Over 2,700 Chromebooks were distributed to support youth in distance learning, supplementing what schools could provide. Later, when school resumed in fall 2020, the county

expanded to address adult technology needs, focusing on job seekers. The county also provided contracted technical support to these users.

Connecting Hennepin benefited from the help of more than 80 partners who helped refer residents to the program and get technology into the hands of those who need it most.

What people are saying

A parent wrote: “I’m thankful for the laptop so that I can help my three daughters and son with school distance learning. We don’t own a personal computer, and this will be so helpful. Also, my father-in-law was recently diagnosed with cancer and we constantly have virtual appointments with his oncologist. The laptop will be most helpful...”

An adult student noted: “My current laptop freezes in the middle of my work. With this, I will be able to complete all my coursework and apply to nursing school.”

A job-seeker said: “I have been down on my luck since I’ve been let go from my job that I enjoyed tremendously. I will use this to help me obtain a job and better myself.”



Positioning for the future

Our work is intentional, proactive, and comprehensive. The infrastructure for Disparity Reduction has allowed the organization to pivot quickly, bring innovation into our service delivery models, and focus on reducing disparities throughout Hennepin County.

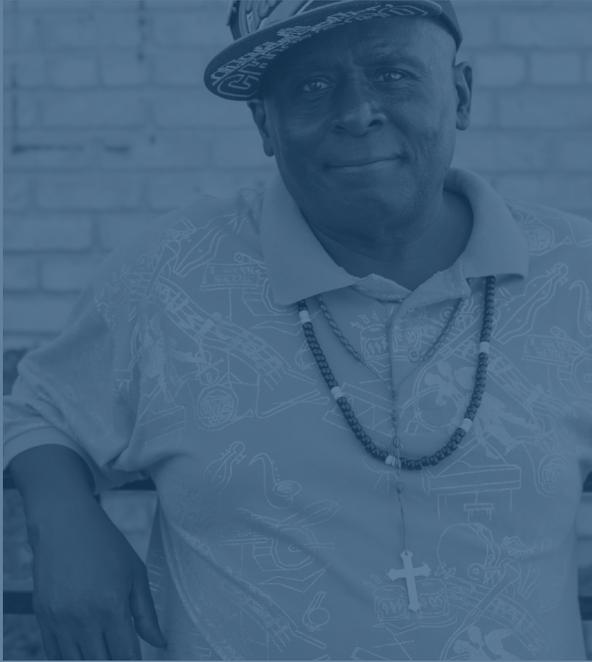
Aligning our Disparity Reduction domain work and the declaration of racism as a public health crisis with pandemic response and recovery funding provides an opportunity to make significant, positive, and lasting changes for our residents. This is a rare opportunity that can launch substantial change. We must seize the opportunity.

This report provides an overview of our Disparity Reduction domain goals and key priorities. It shows how we are funding programs and services tied to policy considerations posed in board briefings or through board action requests.

Our residents, our communities, and our partners are counting on us. Our residents experience improved outcomes when our efforts are aligned. We know that we cannot do this work alone, so partnerships are critical to implementing meaningful and sustainable change in the lives of our residents.

Please visit our website at hennepin.us/disparity-reduction to learn more, and join us in our commitment to reducing disparities.

Data citations available upon request.
Contact: disparityreduction@hennepin.us



Thank you to the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners, Hennepin County staff, our clients, residents, community, and engaged partners working toward the goal of equal opportunity for all county residents.

