

ALICE IN THE CROSSCURRENTS



COVID AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP IN IOWA

2023 Report | UnitedForALICE.org



United Ways of Iowa

ABOUT UNITED FOR ALICE AND OUR PARTNERS

ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Iowa is brought to you by [United Ways of Iowa](#) in partnership with [United For ALICE](#), a driver of innovative research and action around financial hardship for **ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households. With a commitment to [racial and economic justice](#), United For ALICE and United Ways across Iowa share this work with foundations, government, corporations, and other nonprofits to inform policy and promote positive change for ALICE households. The grassroots ALICE movement, developed by United Way of Northern New Jersey, has spread to 27 states and the District of Columbia. Learn more about the ALICE movement [here](#).

To create the ALICE Reports, our [team of researchers](#) works with [Research Advisory Committees](#) composed of experts from our partner states. This work is guided by our rigorous [methodology](#), which is updated biennially with experts from across our Research Advisory Committees.

United For ALICE partners with [United Ways of Iowa](#) to bring this research to Iowa, and this work is sponsored by the GreenState Foundation.



United Ways of Iowa

To learn more about how you can get involved in advocating and creating change for ALICE in Iowa, contact: Karey Chase, Interim Executive Director, United Ways of Iowa at Karey.Chase@uweci.org.

To access interactive ALICE data and resources for Iowa, go to UnitedForALICE.org/Iowa

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ALICE RESEARCH IN A TIME OF CHANGE

This ALICE Report provides the first look at the extent of financial hardship in Iowa using ALICE metrics since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The pandemic has disrupted longstanding patterns in how and where people live, work, study, save, and spend their time. And the story of ALICE and the pandemic is still unfolding as this Report is being written, amid an ongoing health crisis and an economic and public policy landscape that continues to shift. In a time of change, United For ALICE remains committed to providing the most up-to-date local data possible on financial hardship in Iowa and across the U.S.

Two pillars of the ALICE measures are household costs and income. The **Household Survival Budget** calculates the cost of household essentials for each county in Iowa and relies on a wide range of sources for the budget items of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan, plus taxes.

For household income, the ALICE measures rely on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS experienced such significant [disruption in data collection](#) in 2020 that the Census Bureau released only experimental estimates, which are not included in our analysis. By 2021, standard Census data collection had resumed.

Household costs are compared to household income to determine if households are **below the ALICE Threshold**. This includes both households in **Poverty**, with income below the [Federal Poverty Level](#) (FPL), and those that are **ALICE**, with income above the FPL but below the cost of basics.

Our standard ALICE data is based on the ACS – both [household tabulated data](#) and individual data from the [Public Use Microdata Sample](#) (PUMS) records.

KEY TERMS

- **ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed** – households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but cannot afford the basic cost of living in their county. Despite struggling to make ends meet, ALICE households often do not qualify for public assistance.
- **ALICE Threshold of Financial Survival:** Derived from the Household Survival Budget, the minimum average income that a household needs to afford housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and a smartphone plan, plus taxes. Calculated for all U.S. states and counties.
- **Below ALICE Threshold:** Includes people in poverty-level and ALICE households combined.

In addition, this Report includes our analysis of two surveys that capture the experiences of a nationally representative sample of households during the pandemic:

- [Federal Reserve Board's Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking \(SHED\)](#), October, 2019; November, 2020; and November, 2021
- [U.S. Census Bureau's COVID-19 Household Pulse Survey \(Household Pulse Survey\)](#), August 19–August 31, 2020; September 14–November 14, 2022; and December 9–December 19, 2022

Learn more about our methodology at: UnitedForALICE.org/Methodology

Data Notes: The data used in this Report are estimates; some are geographic averages, others are one- or five-year averages depending on population size. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers, sometimes resulting in percentages totaling 99% or 101%. ALICE analysis includes all households, regardless of work status, as employment is fluid and most households have members who are working, have worked, or are looking for work.

THE ALICE HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL BUDGET

The ALICE Household Survival Budget is the foundation of the ALICE research. This budget calculates the bare-minimum cost of the household basics needed to live and work in the modern economy by household composition, in every county.

When compared to the more accurate cost of living included in the Household Survival Budget, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is drastically inadequate. Unlike the ALICE budgets, the FPL is not based on the cost of contemporary household necessities, and except for Alaska and Hawai'i, it is not adjusted to reflect cost-of-living differences. Nor does it adjust for different ages of household members. The FPL is increased annually based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Consumer Price Index (CPI), and those increases are the same for all U.S. households of a given size. By contrast, the actual household costs in the Survival Budget have increased at different rates depending on location, household size, and household composition.

Yet despite its inadequacies, the FPL continues to be the standard for determining the number and proportion of people living in poverty in the U.S. **With the FPL as the primary way for policymakers and local stakeholders to gauge the extent of financial hardship in their communities, a huge portion of struggling U.S. households go unrecognized.**









Across Iowa, for all household sizes and in all locations, the FPL is well below the Household Survival Budget. In 2021, the FPL was \$26,500 for a family of four. In contrast, Figure 1 shows that the average cost of living for a family of four in Iowa was \$61,308, considerably higher than the FPL, and average household costs for a single adult were also substantially higher. Cost increases in the Household Survival Budget were driven by [housing](#), [food](#), and [health care](#). Increases were mitigated by child tax credits in 2021 for families with children.

Figure 1. ALICE Household Survival Budget and Federal Poverty Level, Iowa, 2021

	Federal Poverty Level <i>Census income thresholds that vary by household size but not geography to determine who is in poverty</i>	ALICE Household Survival Budget <i>The cost of the essentials needed to live and work in the modern economy, by household type and location</i>
Family of Four		
Monthly Total	\$2,208	\$5,109
Annual Total	\$26,500	\$61,308
Percent Change, 2019–2021	3%	10%
Single Adult		
Monthly Total	\$1,073	\$2,016
Annual Total	\$12,880	\$24,192
Percent Change, 2019–2021	3%	16%

Note: Percent change is pre-tax.

Sources: ALICE Household Survival Budget, 2021; Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), HHS poverty guidelines for 2021, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

ALICE Household Survival Budget		Average Monthly Costs, Iowa, 2021	
	Description, Update, and Sources	One Adult	Family of Four
 Housing	<p>Rent: Fair Market Rent (40th percentile) for an efficiency, one-bedroom, or two-bedroom apartment (based on family size), adjusted in metro areas using the American Community Survey (ACS) – minus utilities</p> <p>Utilities: As captured by the Community Expenditure Survey (CEX)</p> <p>Update: Costs of rent and utilities are now shown separately.</p> <p>Sources: ACS metro housing costs and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (rent); CEX (utilities)</p>	\$397 rent + \$154 utilities	\$482 rent + \$292 utilities
 Child Care	<p>Cost for registered Family Child Care Homes for infants (0–2 years), preschool-age (3–4), and school-age children (5–12)</p> <p>Source: : Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral, 2021</p>	\$ -	\$1,122
 Food	<p>USDA Thrifty Food Plan by age with county variation from Feeding America</p> <p>Update: A change in legislation requires the USDA Thrifty Food Plans to reflect the cost for resource-constrained households to purchase a healthy, practical diet, starting in 2021, increasing costs from prior years.</p> <p>Sources: Feeding America; U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)</p>	\$406	\$1,108
 Transportation	<p>Operating costs for a car (average daily miles by age, cost per mile, license, fees, and insurance), or public transportation where viable</p> <p>Update: The decline in public transportation use during the pandemic reduced the average expenditure, yet the cost for workers who had to use it to commute remained the same. To reflect this, the budget uses 2019 average CEX spending.</p> <p>Sources: AAA, Federal Highway Administration, The Zebra (car); CEX (public transportation)</p>	\$319	\$796
 Health Care	<p>Health insurance premiums based on employer-sponsored plans plus out-of-pocket costs for households with \$40,000–\$69,000 annual income by age, weighted with the poor-health multiplier. For the senior budget, cost of Medicare Part A and B, out-of-pocket costs, plus average out-of-pocket spending for the top five chronic diseases as reported by CMS.</p> <p>Sources: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS); CEX (health); Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)</p>	\$246	\$754
 Technology	<p>Smartphone plan with 10GB of data for each adult in a household</p> <p>Update: Costs were upgraded from a 5GB to a 10GB monthly data plan to reflect the increased need for internet access.</p> <p>Source: Consumer Reports</p>	\$75	\$110
 Miscellaneous	<p>Cost overruns estimated at 10% of the budget, excluding taxes, to cover one-time unanticipated costs within the other categories</p>	\$160	\$466
 Taxes	<p>Federal, state, and local taxes owed on the amount of income to cover the Survival Budget, as well as tax credits, including the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC)</p> <p>Update: Due to the significant effect of the expanded tax credits in 2021, total taxes before credits and the credits are both listed.</p> <p>Sources: Internal Revenue Service; Tax Foundation</p>	\$259	\$1,139 Tax before CTC and CDCTC -\$1,160 CTC and CDCTC
Monthly Total		\$2,016	\$5,109

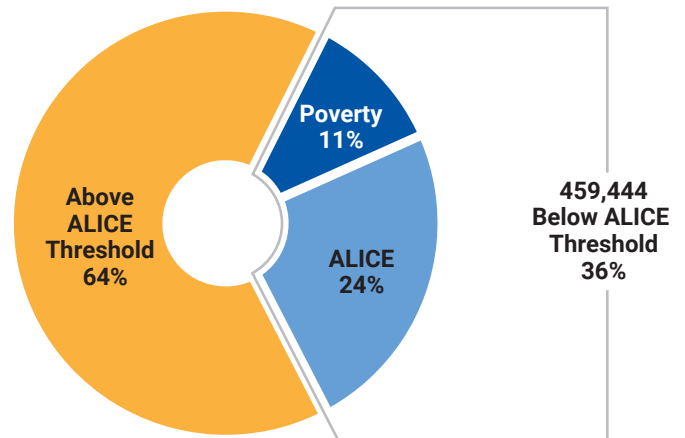
To see the Household Survival Budget for other household compositions at the state and county levels, go to UnitedForALICE.org/Household-Budgets/Iowa.

ALICE IN IOWA: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of households in financial hardship in Iowa continues to be undercounted in official measures.

According to the FPL, 11% of households in Iowa (144,427) were in poverty in 2021. Yet [United For ALICE](#) data shows that another 24% (315,017 households) – more than twice as many – were **ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). ALICE households earn above the FPL, but not enough to afford the basics in the communities where they live.

The reality is that of the 1.3 million households in Iowa, **459,444 – 36%*** – had income below the [ALICE Threshold of Financial Survival](#) in 2021. These included both households in poverty and ALICE households.



* In Iowa, out of 1,293,028 households, there were 144,427 (11.2%) in poverty plus 315,017 (24.4%) ALICE, which totals to 459,444 below the ALICE Threshold and rounds to 36% in this Report.

The crux of the problem is a mismatch between earnings and the cost of basics. For example, 36% of cashiers (one of the most common occupations in Iowa) were below the ALICE Threshold in 2021. These workers earned a median hourly wage of \$11.29 – not enough to cover the **ALICE Household Survival Budget** for one worker employed full time (\$12.10 per hour), much less for a family with children, even with two adults working (combined wage of \$30.65 per hour). Between 2019 and 2021, the cost of basics increased in Iowa and were well above the FPL. For a family of four in 2021, the FPL was \$26,500 while the ALICE Household Survival Budget was \$61,308. From 2019 to 2021, the average annual costs (excluding taxes) increased 16% for a single adult, 13% for a single senior, and 10% for a family of four.

ALICE Household Survival Budget, Iowa Average, 2021			
	Single Adult	Single Senior	2 Adults, 1 Infant, 1 Preschooler
Monthly Costs			
Housing – Rent	\$397	\$397	\$482
Housing – Utilities	\$154	\$154	\$292
Child Care	-	-	\$1,122
Food	\$406	\$375	\$1,108
Transportation	\$319	\$272	\$796
Health Care	\$246	\$498	\$754
Technology	\$75	\$75	\$110
Miscellaneous	\$160	\$177	\$466
Tax Before Credits	\$259	\$304	\$1,139
Monthly Total	\$2,016	\$2,252	\$6,269
ANNUAL TOTAL Before Credits	\$24,192	\$27,024	\$75,228
Tax Credits (CTC and CDCTC)			(\$13,920)
ANNUAL TOTAL with Credits	\$24,192	\$27,024	\$61,308
Full-Time Hourly Wage	\$12.10	\$13.51	\$30.65

Note: CTC = Child Tax Credit, CDCTC = Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Percent change is pre-tax. Full-time hourly wage represents the wage needed at 40 hours per week to support the annual total, with credits. For the family of four, this represents the combined wage needed for two workers. Many households incur higher costs, especially for housing, as units may not be available at Fair Market Rent. To view ALICE Household Survival Budgets for all counties and for any household composition, visit [UnitedForALICE.org/Household-Budgets/Iowa](#)

Sources: AAA, 2021; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2021; American Community Survey, 2021; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021—Consumer Expenditure Surveys; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021—Occupational Employment Statistics; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2021—Medicare - Chronic Conditions; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2021—Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2021; Federal Highway Administration, 2017; Feeding America, 2022; Fowler, 2021; Internal Revenue Service, 2021; Internal Revenue Service—FICA, 2021; Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral, 2021; Scarboro, 2021; Tax Foundation, 2021; The Zebra, 2022; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021—Official USDA Food Plans; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2021—Fair Market Rents; Walczak, 2021.

This Report details the impact of competing economic forces and public policy interventions during the pandemic on ALICE households in Iowa in 2021. It also presents research showing that the impact of the pandemic on financial security continued beyond 2021.

Key findings include:

- **Financial hardship over time:** ALICE households are especially vulnerable to national economic disruptions. The number of households below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa increased dramatically through the Great Recession (2007–2010) and continued to increase through 2018. By 2019, that number had just started to fall – and then the pandemic hit. From 2019 to 2021, the total number of households increased by 1% and the number of households below the Threshold increased by 5%.
- **Demographics:** There are households below the ALICE Threshold across all demographic groups. However, disparities exist in the rates of financial hardship due to [persistent racism](#), [ageism](#), [gender discrimination](#), and geographic [barriers](#) that limit many families' access to resources and opportunities for financial stability. For example, by race/ethnicity, 61% of Black and 46% of Hispanic households were below the Threshold in Iowa in 2021, compared to 34% of White households. By age of householder, the youngest (under age 25) and oldest (age 65+) households faced the highest rates of hardship. And by household composition, single-parent families with children were more likely to be below the Threshold than married-parent households or single/cohabiting households without children.
- **Work and wages:** Of the 20 most common occupations in Iowa in 2021, 70% paid less than \$20 per hour. Most of these saw an increase in the

median wage; for example, the median wage for driver/sales workers and truck drivers increased by 15% to \$20.77 per hour statewide in 2021. But given that wages had stagnated for a decade, many top jobs still had a substantial percentage of workers who lived below the ALICE Threshold in 2021.

- **Pandemic assistance:** Public assistance programs were temporarily expanded in 2021, but not enough to bring most households below the ALICE Threshold to financial stability. In Iowa, a family of four with two parents working full time in two of the most common occupations (retail salesperson and cashier) could not afford the Household Survival Budget in 2021, even with the expanded Child Tax Credit, the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, and the Economic Impact Payments.
- **Savings and assets:** While savings rates were increasing on average in Iowa, rates differed by income. According to SHED, only 47% of households below the ALICE Threshold had emergency savings or rainy day funds in October 2019, compared to 68% of households above the Threshold. By November 2021, the rate for households below the Threshold had increased slightly (to 48%), as had the rate for households above the Threshold (to 69%). Similarly, only 42% of households below the Threshold had retirement assets in 2021, compared to 70% of those above.
- **Beyond 2021:** With pandemic assistance waning while significant challenges remain, there are warning signs that the economic situation for households below the ALICE Threshold has worsened since 2021, including sustained high levels of food insufficiency, feelings of anxiety and depression, continued difficulty paying bills, increased medical debt, and reduced savings.

THE COMPETING FORCES OF THE COVID ECONOMY

When the pandemic hit, businesses, child care providers, schools, and community services closed, some permanently; others went remote for months. The [loss of jobs and wages was not experienced equally](#); those who could work remotely fared better than those who were required to be on-site. Initially, costs for many basics declined, but disruptions to the [supply chain and higher wages](#) to retain workers then [pushed prices up](#) – by 7.5% annually across the U.S. in 2021, compared to less than 3% annually in the [prior 10 years](#) – straining ALICE households even more.

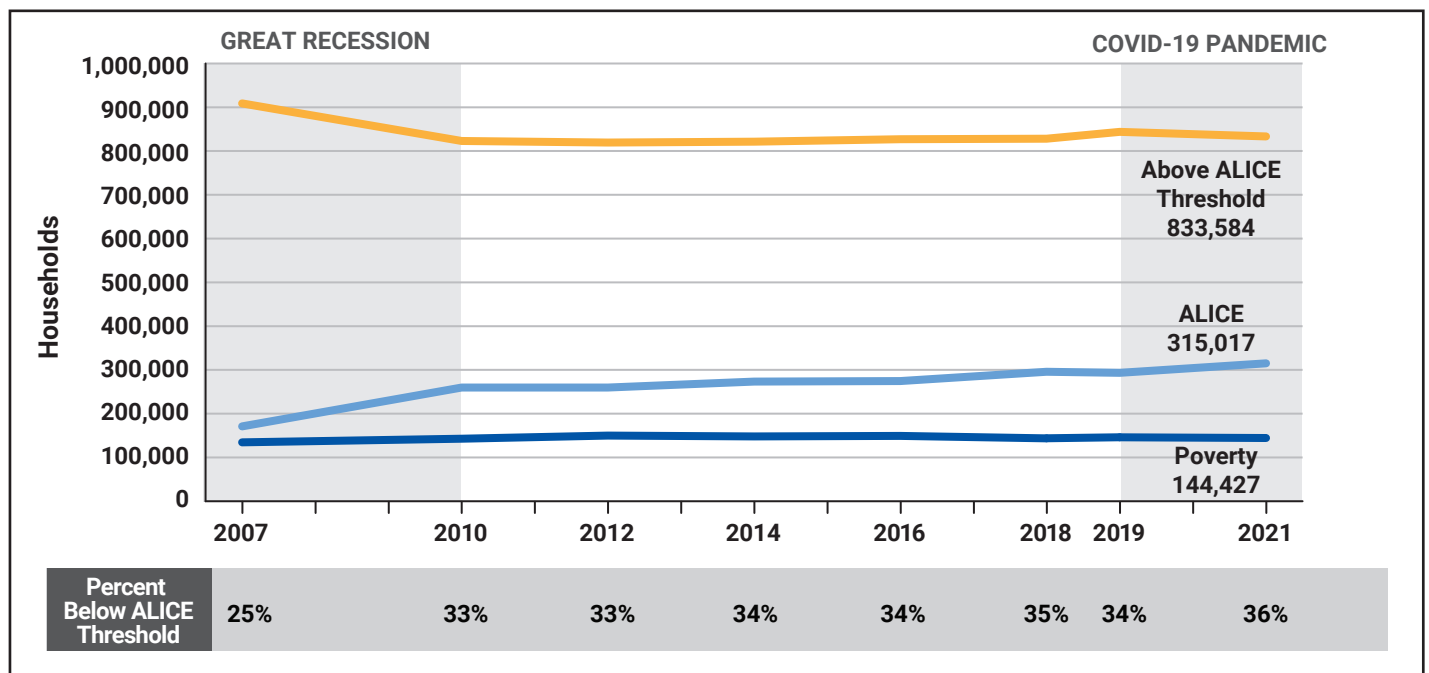
Yet other forces provided economic benefits for many households below the ALICE Threshold. In 2021, [average weekly wages](#) across all industries were up 3.8% in Iowa from 2020, and up 5.6% nationally (the second-fastest national increase in the past two decades). In addition, [emergency pandemic measures](#) and [economic policies](#) provided critical support for ALICE families, including housing assistance, expanded unemployment insurance, stimulus checks, enhanced tax credits, and a nationwide eviction moratorium.

Those measures made a difference: Government policies and assistance helped to mitigate, but not prevent, the economic impact of the pandemic.

Rates of financial hardship in Iowa have shifted over time (Figure 2). During the last major economic disruption – the Great Recession – the percentage of Iowa households below the ALICE Threshold increased from 25% in 2007 to 33% in 2010. During the pandemic, by comparison, the increase in households below the Threshold was more muted, rising from 34% in 2019 to 36% in 2021.

Yet that increase, while moderate, shifted the trend of a decade-long recovery: The number of households in poverty had started to taper down in 2016, and between 2018 and 2019, the number of ALICE households had started to decline. From 2019 to 2021, the total number of households in Iowa increased by 1% and the number of households below the ALICE Threshold increased by 5% (from 439,443 to 459,444).

Figure 2. Households by Income, Iowa, 2007–2021



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2007–2021; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007–2021

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID ECONOMY ON... ALICE DEMOGRAPHICS AND EQUITY

While the overall number of Iowa households that were struggling financially increased from 2019 to 2021, the impact of competing forces played out differently across demographic groups (Figure 3). In many cases, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated disparities and vulnerabilities that have long existed in our society, with substantial differences in rates of hardship by race/ethnicity, age, and household composition.

In Iowa in 2021, Black households, young households, and single-parent households had the highest rates below the ALICE Threshold. White households, working-age households, and married-parent households had the lowest rates below the Threshold.

Rates of financial hardship differed substantially across demographic groups, a result of multiple factors including [persistent racism](#), [ageism](#), [gender discrimination](#), and geographic [barriers](#) that limit many families' access to resources and opportunities for financial stability:

- In 2021, the largest number of households below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa were White (389,904), making up 34% of White households. And while the number of struggling households was lower for other groups, the percentage of those households was higher. For example, 46% (25,211) of Hispanic households and 61% (24,625) of Black households were below the Threshold.

- By age of householder, the youngest and the oldest households had the highest rates of hardship, with 62% of households headed by someone under age 25 and 46% of households headed by someone age 65 or older living below the Threshold in Iowa. By comparison, 29% each of households headed by people age 25–44 and 45–64 were below the Threshold.
- By household composition, single parents were most likely to be below the ALICE Threshold, with 48% of single-male-headed households and 70% of single-female-headed households struggling to make ends meet. Rates of financial hardship were lower for married-parent households (12%) and single/cohabiting households without children (34%).
- Iowa is fairly evenly split between the number of households in rural (550,784) and urban (742,244) counties. In 2021, the rate of financial hardship was slightly higher in rural counties, with 37% of households below the ALICE Threshold compared to 34% in urban counties.

Figure 3 paints a clear picture of the rates of hardship for different demographic groups compared to the Iowa average. For all households in the state, 11% were in poverty and 24% were ALICE in 2021.

Figure 3. Household Financial Status and Key Demographics, Iowa, 2021

	Total	Below ALICE Threshold	■ Poverty ■ ALICE ■ Above ALICE Theshold		
ALL HOUSEHOLDS	1,293,028	459,444	11%	24%	64%
AGE					
Under 25 Years	75,182	46,479	35%	27%	38%
25 to 44 Years	415,637	120,309	11%	18%	71%
45 to 64 Years	451,758	129,750	9%	20%	71%
Seniors (65+)	350,451	162,906	9%	37%	54%
RACE/ETHNICITY					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	3,396	1,805	15%	38%	47%
Asian	25,342	9,119	12%	24%	64%
Black	40,535	24,625	20%	41%	39%
Hispanic	54,382	25,211	10%	36%	54%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	950	383	5%	35%	60%
Two or More Races	29,905	14,505	14%	35%	51%
White	1,140,796	389,904	8%	26%	66%
HOUSEHOLD TYPE					
Married With Children	244,073	28,326	5%	7%	88%
Single-Female- Headed With Children	72,839	50,814	34%	35%	30%
Single-Male-Headed With Children	32,393	15,471	14%	34%	52%
Single or Cohabiting, Under 65, no Children	593,272	201,927	12%	22%	66%
URBAN/RURAL					
Rural	550,784	204,381	11%	26%	63%
Urban	742,244	255,063	11%	23%	66%

Note: The groups shown in this figure overlap across categories. 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 American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Native 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. Counties are defined as rural or urban based on the USDA's designation of metropolitan or non-metropolitan at the census tract level. Counties with 50% or more of the population in metropolitan tracts are designated as urban; those with 50% or more of the population in non-metropolitan tracts are designated as rural.

Note: In Iowa, out of 1,293,028 households, there were 144,427 (11.2%) in poverty plus 315,017 (24.4%) ALICE, which totals to 459,444 below the ALICE Threshold and rounds to 36% in this Report.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2019 and 2021; American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021

Changes in Population and Financial Hardship (2019–2021)

In the decade preceding the pandemic, population growth in the U.S. had started to slow due to a decrease in the number of births and international migration, and an increase in deaths associated with the aging population. The pandemic [exacerbated the national slowdown](#), and in 2021 population growth in the U.S. reached a [historic low](#) due to a sharp increase in COVID-related deaths, postponement of having children, and more restrictive policies on immigration.

The pandemic also affected domestic migration, which contributed to population shifts nationally and in Iowa. Between 2020 and 2021, the percentage of the [population that moved](#) from one residence to another within the U.S. dropped from 9.3% to 8.4%. People moved for a [variety of reasons](#), which included relocating to places where the cost of living was lower (especially for [housing](#) and [taxes](#)), and/or to [less densely populated locations](#).

In Iowa, the pandemic also impacted where people lived, who they lived with, and the demographics of households.

Location: In Iowa from 2019 to 2021, the largest county, Polk, experienced a 3% increase in the total number of households but a 7% decrease in the number of households below the ALICE Threshold. The midsize counties of Black Hawk, Linn, and Scott saw small percentage increases in the total number of households but larger increases in households below the Threshold

(7%, 8%, and 15%, respectively); among counties this size, only Johnson County experienced a decrease in struggling households (1%). Dallas County experienced the largest percentage increase in total households (10%) with a corresponding increase in households below the Threshold (7%). Many small counties experienced larger swings as people moved during the pandemic (see additional county-level data [on the ALICE website](#) and in the “County Comparison” section of this Report).

Age: Rates of financial hardship increased for all households except the youngest. Continuing the trend of the last decade, the number of young households in Iowa (those headed by someone under age 25) continued to fall during the pandemic, dropping by 4% from 2019 to 2021. The number of those households below the ALICE Threshold also fell.

With an aging population, the number of senior households overall increased by 3% from 2019 to 2021 in Iowa. The rate of hardship for seniors grew from 44% below the Threshold in 2019 to 46% in 2021.

Household composition: Families with children in married or single-parent households experienced small changes in hardship, though from very different starting points: The share of families with married parents below the Threshold increased from 11% in 2019 to 12% in 2021 in Iowa, while the percentage among families headed by a single male increased from 47% to 48%, and the percentage among families headed by a single female fell slightly, from 71% to 69%. Households without children headed by those in their prime working years (under 65) also experienced a slight increase in hardship, from 33% below the Threshold in 2019 to 34% in 2021.

URBAN AND RURAL CHANGE IN IOWA (2019–2021)

- 2% decrease in total number of households in rural counties
- 3% increase in total number of households in urban counties

Race/ethnicity: This Report is not able to accurately capture change over time by race/ethnicity in the total number or share of households below the ALICE Threshold. Starting in 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau changed how it asks about and codes [data on race and Hispanic origin](#). These changes help the Census and ACS provide a more complete picture of the U.S. population, especially for people who self-identify as multiracial or multiethnic. But as a result, the [Census urges caution](#) when comparing race data between years before and after 2020. For example, in Iowa, the huge increase in the Census count of people of [Two or More Races](#) (also referred to now as Multiracial) – an increase of 121% from 2019 to 2021 – is a combination of actual growth in this population and improvements to Census questions and coding. (Note: The number of Multiracial households below the ALICE Threshold increased at almost the same rate, by 120%).

Immigration: The pandemic not only imposed new barriers to international migration but also had a significant impact on immigrant communities across the U.S. According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), as a result of immigration center processing delays and bans on international travel, the number of visas issued in the U.S. dropped by half between 2019 and 2020. However, in Iowa in 2021, 6% of the population were immigrants, slightly more than in 2019 (5%), with the largest number of immigrants originating from Mexico, India, and China. Iowa's largest counties were home to the largest number of immigrants: Polk first, followed by Johnson and Linn.

ALICE DATA ONLINE

Visit UnitedForALICE.org/iowa to see interactive maps and data on:

- Financial hardship over time at the state and county levels
- State and county ALICE demographics
- ALICE household budgets
- The labor landscape in Iowa

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID ECONOMY ON... WORK AND WAGES

Overall, in 2021, the labor market was rebounding from the record-breaking unemployment and [drop in total employment](#) that occurred at the start of the pandemic. The unemployment rate was 3.8% in Iowa in 2021, a stark contrast to unemployment at the height of the pandemic (10.5% in April 2020). [Average weekly wages](#) across all industries in Iowa increased 3.8% from 2020 to 2021. In addition, many businesses in Iowa offered [benefits to attract and retain employees](#), including working from home, mental health and wellness benefits, pay on demand, and signing bonuses. This was driven by increased demand for [essential workers](#), as well as by "The Great Resignation" — while some workers left the labor force, over time many more changed jobs to find better pay as well as work-life balance.

It was also a unique year for low-wage jobs and workers. In 2021, low-wage workers across the country experienced [faster wage growth than middle- and high-wage workers](#), although from a much lower starting point. Research from [Opportunity Insights](#) shows that the number of low-wage jobs fell in Iowa: In December 2021, there were 16% fewer jobs paying less than \$29,000 per year than at the start of the pandemic — some became higher-paying jobs, others went away altogether.

[State Unemployment Insurance](#) (UI) helps individuals who lost jobs — before, during, and after the pandemic. In 2021, \$405 million was paid to individuals under Iowa's regular unemployment insurance program, and an

additional \$543,000 was paid in Extended Unemployment Benefits, available during periods of specified high unemployment.

During the pandemic, these standard UI benefits were expanded by the [Cares Act, the American Rescue Plan, and the Continued Assistance Act](#), which included [four temporary programs](#). The most utilized was the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, which provided a \$300 weekly supplement to all UI benefits (down from the \$600 weekly supplement included in the original 2020 authorization). Additional programs extended the weeks of eligibility for people who exhausted regular UI benefits, and expanded eligibility to people who were not otherwise eligible for UI benefits (including workers who were self-employed, independent contractors, or gig economy workers). Nationally, these temporary UI measures enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic ended in September 2021; however, Iowa [opted out](#) of these programs ahead of the national expiration, in June 2021.

For low-wage workers, the increases in wages and UI benefits were important developments during the pandemic. But they are only part of the story; ALICE workers still faced significant challenges:

- Better pay and work opportunities were helpful, but not enough to recoup years of being squeezed by the increasing cost of basics, especially for those

THE ALICE ECONOMIC VIABILITY DASHBOARD — COMING FALL 2023

The Economic Viability Dashboard (EVD) will provide key data on the local economic conditions that matter most to ALICE households: Housing Affordability, Job Opportunities, and Community Resources. The EVD mapping, profile, and comparison features will help stakeholders identify the gaps that ALICE workers and families face in reaching financial stability. Then, the Action Toolkit puts that data to use by quantifying gaps and pairing them with promising solutions.

who struggled to secure full-time employment. As documented in the [ALICE Essentials Index](#), the cost of essential goods had already been outpacing wages for more than a decade, stretching ALICE workers' household income even further.

- Many frontline and essential jobs became [hazardous and difficult](#) during the pandemic. In addition to increased exposure to COVID-19, many workers were required to work more days and hours, skip lunch and breaks, stand for hours, and work while sick. Others were [gig workers](#), forced to work more hours to fill income gaps. Without protective gear, health insurance, or even sick days, there were [increases in mortality](#) compared with previous years, especially for food- and agriculture-sector workers.
- Underemployment became an increasing problem. Many workers were unable to work full time due to family responsibilities, being in school or training, illness, disability, or child care problems. Others were working part time because their hours had been reduced; still others were unable to find full-time jobs. In 2021 in Iowa the [underemployment rate](#) that captures these workers was 6.4%, higher than the traditional unemployment rate (3.8%), and higher than before the pandemic (5.1% in 2019).
- Many older workers were also forced to [retire earlier than planned](#). Nationally, according to SHED in November 2021, 25% of adults who retired within the year prior to the survey, and 15% of those who reported that they retired one to two years earlier, said factors related to COVID-19 contributed to when they retired.
- Nationally, those most impacted by [unemployment, job disruption](#), and hazardous and difficult working conditions were [immigrants](#) and workers who were American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or of Two or More Races.

Wages for the Most Common Occupations

In 2021, the impact of the pandemic on workers' wages and wage gains did not translate uniformly across all jobs and sectors in terms of the share of households that were still left below the ALICE Threshold.

Of the 20 most common occupations in Iowa in 2021, 70% paid less than \$20 per hour. All of these saw an increase in the median wage; for example, the median wage for drivers/sales workers and truck drivers increased by 15% to \$20.77 per hour in 2021. But given that wages had stagnated for the previous decade, many top jobs still had a substantial percentage of workers who lived below the ALICE Threshold in 2021 (Figure 4). The wage to cover the ALICE Household Survival Budget for a single adult was \$12.10 per hour working full time, or for a family with two adults and two children, a combined wage of \$30.65 per hour.

While there were ALICE workers in all sectors in Iowa, of the occupations in the table below, those with the highest percentage of workers below the ALICE Threshold in 2021 were waiters and waitresses, fast food and counter workers, teaching assistants, cashiers, and stockers/order fillers.

CHILD CARE WORKERS

The pandemic brought to the forefront the crisis in child care availability and cost. For families with two children in care, child care is often the most expensive item in their budget, even more expensive than housing. Child care workers are the workforce behind the workforce, yet many struggle to make ends meet for their own families: With a median hourly wage of \$10.76 in Iowa in 2021, 29% were below the ALICE Threshold. And with staffing and demand fluctuations, many child care providers went out of business during the pandemic. Lack of care remains an [obstacle for working parents](#).

Figure 4. Top Occupations, Employment, Wages, and Percentage Below ALICE Threshold, Iowa, 2021

Occupation	Total Employment (BLS)	Median Hourly Wage (BLS)	Percent Median Wage Change From 2019 (BLS)	Percent Workers Below ALICE Threshold (ACS PUMS)
Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers	52,000	\$20.77	15%	19%
Cashiers	44,580	\$11.29	5%	36%
Retail Salespersons	37,530	\$13.49	17%	27%
Fast Food and Counter Workers	33,010	\$11.17	10%	46%
General and Operations Managers	32,670	\$36.99	-7%	14%
Registered Nurses	32,650	\$29.71	4%	7%
Customer Service Representatives	29,090	\$18.00	4%	22%
Laborers and Material Movers, Hand	28,740	\$17.88	12%	32%
Cooks	27,330	\$13.34	11%	34%
Office Clerks	26,800	\$17.74	7%	21%
Elementary and Middle School Teachers	23,730	\$28.67	10%	7%
Personal Care Aides	23,550	\$13.89	11%	32%
Teaching Assistants	22,750	\$13.78	14%	39%
Nursing Assistants	22,070	\$14.42	1%	23%
Stockers and Order Fillers	21,970	\$14.69	7%	35%
Bookkeeping and Auditing Clerks	18,620	\$19.15	2%	12%
Sales Representatives	17,030	\$31.69	9%	9%
Waiters and Waitresses	15,610	\$10.14	9%	49%
Maintenance and Repair Workers	14,350	\$22.02	11%	12%
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	14,130	\$18.12	6%	14%

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; Bureau of Labor Statistics—Occupational Employment Statistics, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, PUMS, 2019 and 2021

To see more data on jobs by hourly wages and full-time, part-time, and hourly work schedules, visit UnitedForALICE.org/Labor-Force/Iowa

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID ECONOMY ON... PANDEMIC ASSISTANCE

A prominent feature of the federal government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic was a range of direct assistance programs, including:

- Economic Impact Payments (stimulus payments)
- The expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC)
- Pandemic-specific unemployment insurance
- Emergency rental assistance

While ALICE households generally earn too much to qualify for traditional forms of public assistance like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), almost all ALICE households qualified for the Economic Impact Payments, and ALICE families with children were eligible for the expanded CTC and CDCTC.

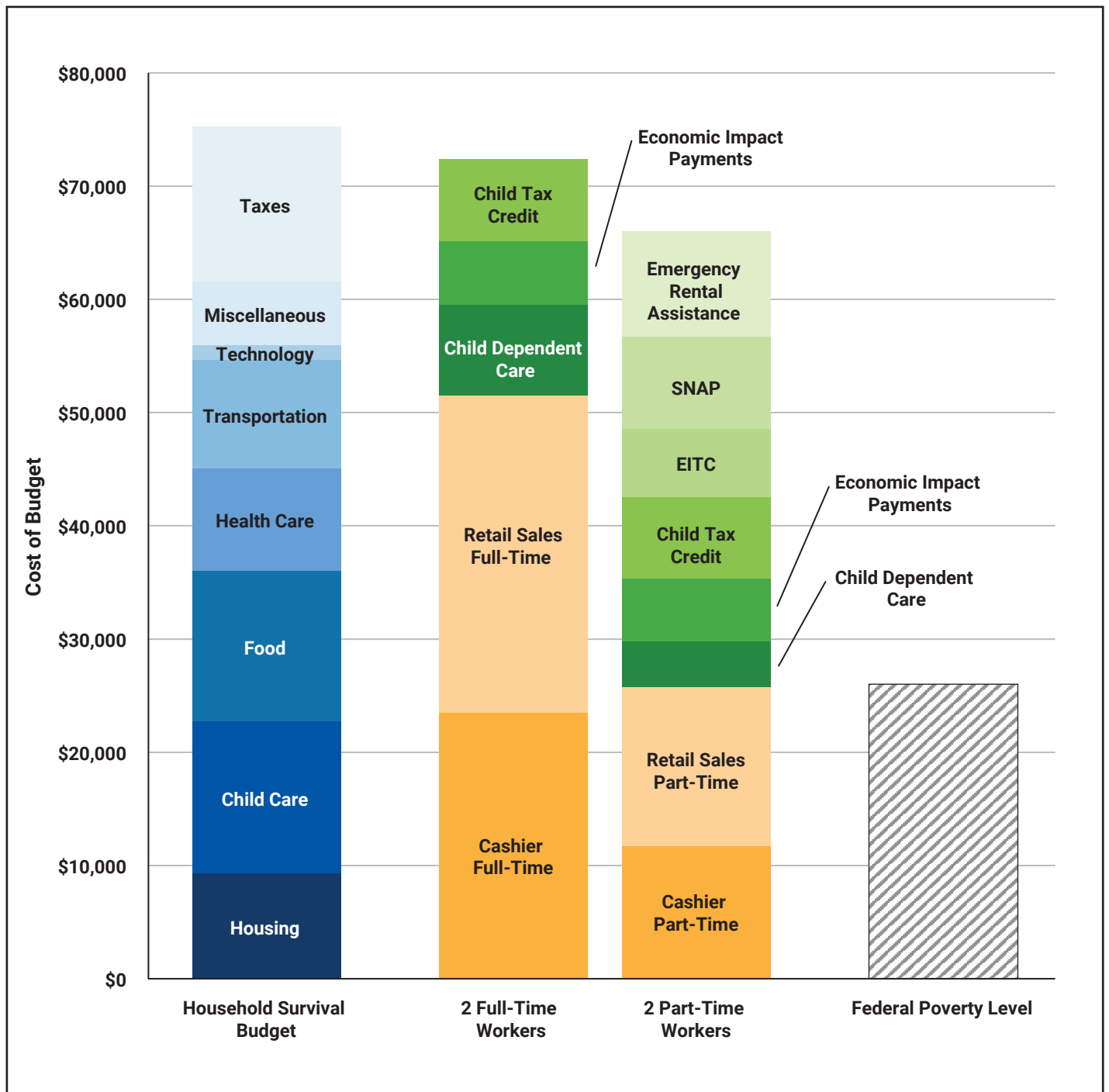
Figure 5 shows an example of the impact of pandemic assistance on a household’s ability to meet the cost of basics in 2021. The figure shows a family of four in Iowa with two parents working full time in two of the most common occupations, retail salesperson and cashier (median wages of \$13.49 and \$11.29 per hour, respectively). This family could almost afford the Household Survival Budget in 2021, with the temporarily increased credits and payments available to them: the CTC (\$3,600 for each child under age 6), the CDCTC (\$4,000 per child in child care), and the Economic Impact Payments (\$2,800 for married couples plus \$1,400 for each child). With both parents working full time, they were not eligible for [Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance](#) (ERA). This family’s annual income fell short of the Household Survival Budget by \$2,876, or 4%.

If both parents worked part time (20 hours per week), they could receive ERA to cover their rent, as well as [SNAP](#) and the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#) (EITC), but they would still fall short in meeting the Survival Budget by \$9,224, or 14%.

Additional actions taken by the state of Iowa in response to the pandemic can be found in the National Conference of State Legislatures’ [State Action on Coronavirus Database](#).

Pandemic Timeline	
2020	State Annual COVID-19 Deaths : 3,822
March 2020	– National Emergency Declared Emergency Pandemic Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits (including PUA , PEUC , FPUC , and MEUC) States required to keep Medicaid beneficiaries enrolled
April 2020	– Economic Impact Payments of up to \$1,200 per adult for eligible individuals and \$500 per qualifying child
December 2020	– First COVID-19 vaccinations receive emergency use authorization from FDA Economic Impact Payments of up to \$600 per adult for eligible individuals and up to \$600 per qualifying child
2021	State Annual COVID-19 Deaths : 4,036
January to November 2021	– Emergency rental assistance provided on average \$4,345 to low-income households to pay rent or utility bills
March 2021	– Economic Impact Payments of up to \$1,400 for eligible individuals
July to December 2021	– Child Tax Credit payments (up to \$300 month per child); temporary expansion of CTC ended nationally in December
September 2021	– National end of all Emergency Pandemic UI benefits
October 2021	– End of CDC’s eviction moratorium CDC approves vaccinations for children age 5-11
2022	State Annual COVID-19 Deaths : 2,564
June 2022	– CDC approves vaccinations for children under 5 years old
July 2022	– Federal rental assistance funds depleted in many states
December 2022	– Federal rental assistance funds depleted in most states
2023	
May 11, 2023	– Scheduled end of the national emergency and public health emergency

Figure 5. Income and Expenses, Family of Four, Iowa, 2021



Note: Full-time income is calculated based on 40 hours per week; part-time income is based on 20 hours per week.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; Bureau of Labor Statistics—Occupational Employment Statistics, 2021; Internal Revenue Service, tax credits – CTC, CDCTC, EITC, 2021; USDA, SNAP, 2021; U.S. Treasury, 2022

Participation in Assistance Programs

Traditional public assistance does not reach all people in households that are struggling financially. Due to [income and assets limits](#), most ALICE households are not able to participate in public assistance; and additional barriers, strict [program requirements](#), and [stigma](#) prevent even households in poverty from participating. In addition, income and asset limits for public assistance can create “[benefits cliffs](#)” that limit economic mobility. In Iowa in 2021:

- With increased food insecurity during the pandemic, the federal [SNAP](#) provided an [emergency allotments option](#) starting in 2020, which increased the amount of SNAP payments by about \$90 per month per household. Yet because the income eligibility threshold for SNAP was 160% of the FPL in Iowa, the reach of emergency and regular SNAP benefits was limited: 39% of households in poverty and 15% of ALICE households participated in 2021, based on ACS PUMS data. However, it is important to note that while not all financially insecure households are eligible for SNAP, the program reached [88% of eligible households](#) in Iowa.
- The percentage of households below the ALICE Threshold receiving direct cash assistance from programs like [TANF](#) or [General Assistance](#) was even smaller (6% of households in poverty and 4% of ALICE households).
- Participation in [SSI](#) – an assistance program only available for people with disabilities and seniors with limited financial resources – was also minimal, with 9% of all households below the ALICE Threshold and 18% of households with a member with a disability below the Threshold participating.

- To address the increased demands for health care during the pandemic, the federal government provided additional funding to states for Medicare and prohibited states from adding eligibility restrictions or terminating [Medicaid coverage](#) during the public health emergency. In 2021, 48% of all households below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa participated in CHIP or Medicaid.
- Paying for housing expenses was the top concern of households below the ALICE Threshold, as reported in the 2021 ALICE Report, [The Pandemic Divide](#). The federal [Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#) was critical in stabilizing millions of households by paying for rent, utilities, and home energy costs. Yet because of the strict requirements to qualify, many households struggling to afford rent were not eligible. Requirements included qualifying for unemployment benefits, experiencing a reduction in income, and one or more household members being at risk of homelessness. It is not surprising, then, that in the fall of 2022, 10% of adult renters in Iowa were not caught up on rent, according to the Household Pulse Survey.

In contrast, eligibility limits for the well-publicized stimulus payments and tax credits (Economic Impact Payments, CTC, and CDCTC) were well above those for traditional public assistance programs, making them available to most poverty-level and ALICE households.

However, even qualified households [experienced difficulties](#) getting their payments, especially those who were filing taxes for the first time, those without bank accounts or internet access, and families with mixed immigrant status or who were experiencing homelessness.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID ECONOMY ON... SAVINGS AND ASSETS

It has been widely reported that U.S. household savings increased during the pandemic. Yet analysis of the data from the Federal Reserve SHED reveals that the national average conceals different experiences by state and even more so by income level in terms of rainy day funds and retirement assets.

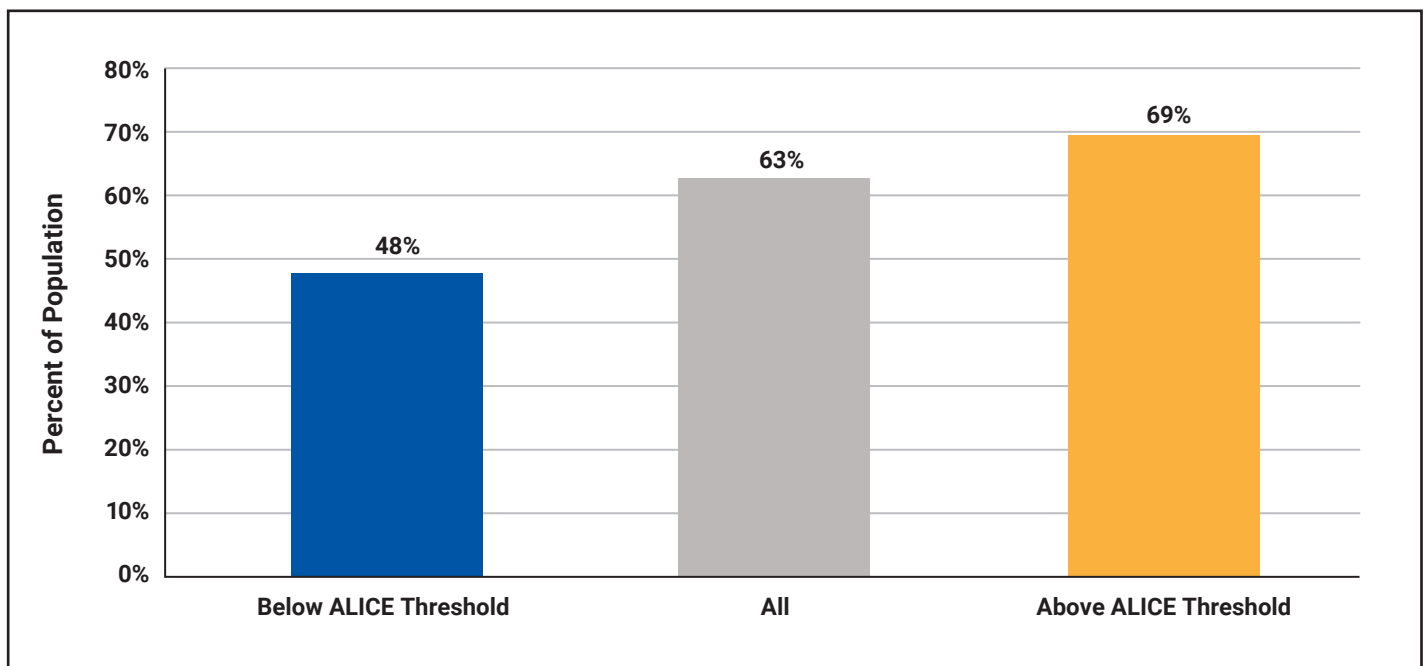
Rainy Day Funds

One of the best-known questions in the SHED survey asks whether respondents had set aside emergency savings or “rainy day” funds that would cover their expenses for three months in case of sickness, job loss, economic

downturn, or other emergencies. Before the pandemic, in October 2019, 62% of Iowa respondents reported having these funds; the first year of the pandemic, the rate dropped to 59% (November 2020), but then recovered to 63% by November 2021 (Figure 6).

Yet only 47% of respondents below the Threshold in Iowa reported having rainy day funds in October 2019, with that percentage dropping to 27% by November 2020 and then recovering to 48% by November 2021. In contrast, 68% of those above the Threshold in Iowa had rainy day funds in October 2019, and that share increased to 73% in November 2020 but fell to 69% in November 2021.

Figure 6. Funds to Cover Three Months’ Expenses by the ALICE Threshold, Iowa, 2021



Question: Have you set aside emergency or rainy day funds that would cover your expenses for three months in the case of sickness, job loss, economic downturn, or other emergencies?

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; Federal Reserve Board, Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), November 2021

Nationally, there were also substantial gaps by income and race/ethnicity in rainy day funds (this data is not available at the state level, but it is likely these disparities were mirrored in Iowa). In 2021, White and Hispanic respondents below the ALICE Threshold had higher rates of emergency savings (42% and 41%, respectively) than Black respondents below the Threshold (32%). Rates were higher overall for respondents above the Threshold, yet gaps remained (77% for White, 71% for Hispanic, and 64% for Black respondents). Each of these racial/ethnic groups made gains during the pandemic, with Hispanic respondents both above and below the Threshold showing the largest increase in emergency savings. From October 2019 to November 2021, the percentage of Hispanic respondents below the Threshold with rainy day funds increased from 28% to 41%, and the percentage of Hispanic respondents above the Threshold with these funds increased from 57% to 71%.

Retirement Assets

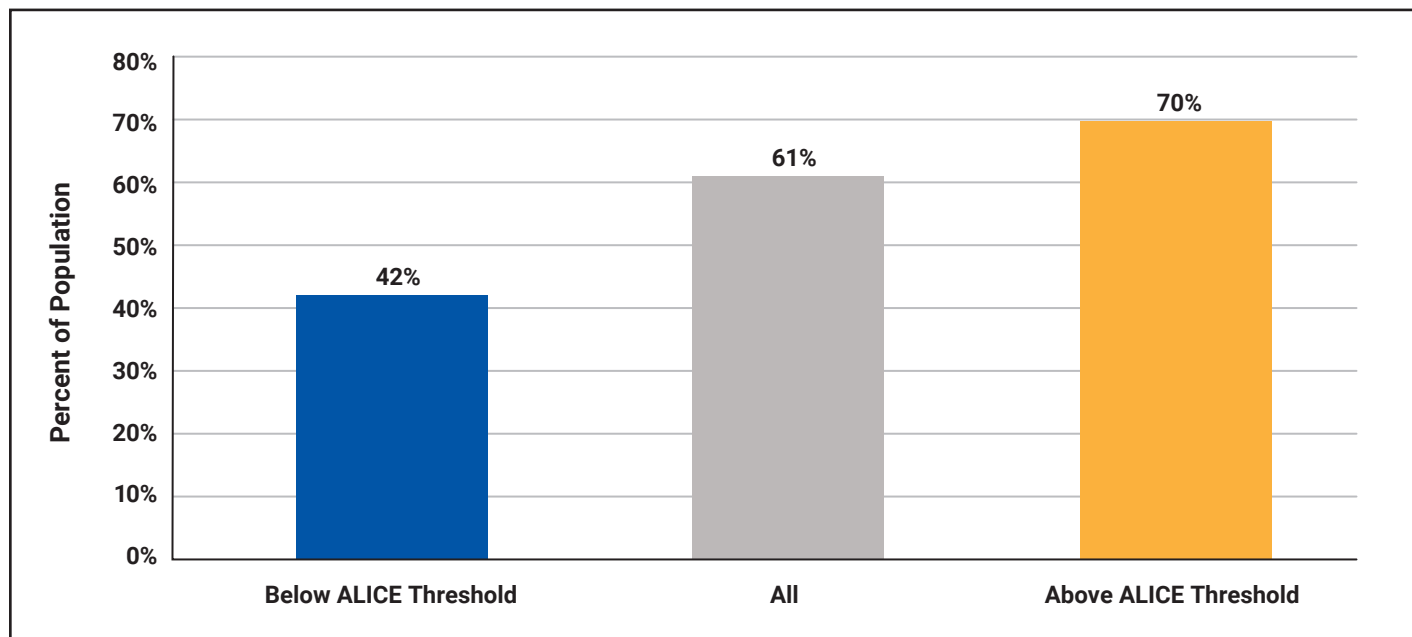
Having retirement assets was less common than having emergency savings in Iowa. [Retirement assets](#) include 401(k)s, IRAs, pensions, or business or real

estate holdings that provide income in retirement. Overall, 69% of Iowa respondents reported having these funds in October 2019. That rate remained unchanged through November 2020, then decreased to 61% by November 2021.

Yet these averages conceal a widening disparity in retirement assets between households above and below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa (Figure 7). Prior to the pandemic, in October 2019, 58% of respondents below the Threshold in Iowa had retirement assets, according to SHED. That rate dropped to 42% by November 2021. However, 73% of respondents above the Threshold in Iowa had retirement assets in October 2019; that rate dropped to 70% by November 2021.

The [CARES Act](#) reduced penalties for early withdrawals from retirement accounts, thus making it easier for households to access retirement funds. Overall, nationally, 8% of non-retired adults tapped into their retirement savings in 2021, according to SHED. And according to a [national retirement survey](#), the majority of loans or hardship withdrawals in 2022 were taken by low-income households.

Figure 7. Retirement Assets by the ALICE Threshold, Iowa, 2021



Question: Do you currently have each of the following types of retirement savings? Selected at least one: 401(k); IRA; pension; savings outside a retirement account, business, or real estate holding that will provide income in retirement; other retirement savings

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; Federal Reserve Board, Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED), November 2021

BEYOND 2021: ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR ALICE

The pandemic timeline shows a contracting economy in 2020 followed by a strong policy response in 2021. The government’s broad [pandemic response was effective](#) in preventing the kind of surge in financial hardship that was experienced during the Great Recession.

But 36% of households were still living below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa in 2021. With COVID-19 continuing but pandemic relief benefits expiring, [initial data from 2022](#) suggests that the economic situation has in fact gotten worse for ALICE, which in turn puts the wider economy at risk.

An analysis of recent surveys reveals that households below the ALICE Threshold are still facing food insufficiency, difficulty paying bills, increased medical debt, reduced savings, and feelings of anxiety and depression. These challenges were first reported in [The Pandemic Divide](#), and they are updated here with the most recent data from SHED (through November 2021) and the Household Pulse Survey (through December 2022).

These surveys also provide an alarming look at the breakdown of pandemic experiences by sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, and disability status.

Warning signs:

! Food insufficiency: ALICE families experiencing food insufficiency are a canary in the coal mine, indicating larger problems beyond food. Shockingly, the rates of food insufficiency have [remained elevated](#) since the beginning of the pandemic. In the August 2020 Household Pulse Survey, respondents below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa were far more likely to report that their household sometimes or often did not have enough food in the prior seven days than respondents above the Threshold (13% vs. 4%); by November 2022, the rates increased dramatically for struggling households (30% vs. 4%). Some demographic groups experienced higher than average food insufficiency (Figure 8). For example, 36% of LGBT respondents below the Threshold and 47% of respondents with disabilities below the Threshold reported not having enough food, compared to 13% of all Iowa residents.

For households with children in Iowa, rates got worse during the pandemic. In August 2020, respondents below the ALICE Threshold were more likely than respondents above the Threshold to

Figure 8. Food Insufficiency, Above and Below the ALICE Threshold, Iowa, 2022

Food Insufficiency			
	Below ALICE Threshold	Above ALICE Threshold	State Average
Female	25%	4%	13%
With a Disability	47%	15%	
LGBT	36%	7%	

Question: In the last seven days, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household? Selected: Sometimes or often not enough

Note: The “With a Disability” group includes respondents who have one or more vision, hearing, cognitive, mobility, or self-care difficulties; the “LGBT” group includes respondents who identify as gay or lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. The sample size was too small to include race/ethnicity in this analysis.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, September 14, 2022–November 14, 2022, Phase 3.6

report that often or sometimes their children were not eating enough because they couldn't afford enough food (12% vs. 9%); in November 2022, those rates had more than doubled for struggling families while they improved for those above the Threshold (26% vs. 5%).

With changes to the emergency pandemic food measures, including the [ending of SNAP emergency allotments](#), many families will need to rely on the charitable food system that was designed for emergencies, but is increasingly an [ongoing necessity](#).

! Learning loss: Following a year of widespread school closings and disrupted education, most students returned to in-person learning in the fall of 2021. The [learning loss](#) that accompanied remote learning has been widely reported. Not surprisingly, students in lower income districts with fewer resources were hardest hit. Nationally, in 2021, 71% of parents below the Threshold said that their child was prepared for the academic year ahead, compared to 81% of parents above the Threshold. The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES) reported that nationally in 2022, scores for 9-year-old students declined five points in reading and seven points in mathematics compared to 2020 – the largest average score decline in reading since 1990, and the first-ever score decline in mathematics. Drops were even larger for low-income students as well as for Black and Hispanic students.

! Behind on rent payments: According to the Household Pulse Survey, renter households below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa were more likely than those above the Threshold to report that they were not caught up on rent payments. In August 2020, 17% of renters below the Threshold and 8% of renters above the Threshold were not caught up; by November 2022, those rates decreased to 14% for renters below the Threshold and 3% for those above the Threshold. Renters who fall behind on rent are at greater risk for eviction, especially since the federal moratorium on [evictions and foreclosures](#) and [state-level bans](#) have now expired, and funding for rental assistance is running out. As

a result, [eviction filings are on the rise](#) and are likely to [increase in the near term](#).

! Struggling to pay bills: During the height of the pandemic, in August 2020, 46% of households below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa said it was somewhat or very difficult to pay for usual items such as food, rent or mortgage, car payments, and medical expenses, according to the Household Pulse Survey. That rate increased to 61% by November 2022. These rates were nearly three times higher than for respondents above the Threshold (16% in August 2020 and 24% in November 2022).

! Facing lack of savings and medical debt: By the end of 2021, many ALICE families were struggling to save and were facing medical debt, making them more vulnerable to an emergency in the future. Only 47% of respondents to the SHED survey below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa had set aside emergency savings or rainy day funds that would cover their expenses for three months in the event of sickness, job loss, economic downturn, or another emergency. In addition, 14% of respondents below the Threshold had incurred an unexpected major medical expense that they had to pay for out of pocket because it was not completely paid for by insurance.

! Physical health: With government support for expanded health services ending, in the wake of two years of reduced preventive care, health concerns are increasing for families across the U.S. Two key programs that increased access to health care and services during the pandemic are ending in 2023: One made [tests and vaccinations for COVID-19](#) free and widely available, and the other allowed people to stay on [Medicaid during the pandemic](#). In addition, a [September 2020 national survey](#) found that 36% of adults (age 18 to 64) delayed or missed health care services, including dental care, primary care, or specialist visits; preventive health screenings; and medical tests. For those with one or more chronic conditions, a mental health condition, or a lower income, the likelihood of postponing or forgoing care was even higher. Parents also postponed care for their children. In the fall of 2021, Iowa households

below the ALICE Threshold were far more likely to report that they missed, delayed, or skipped their [child's preventive check-up](#) in the last 12 months than households above the Threshold (41% vs. 21%). These delays, especially when coupled with preexisting conditions, can contribute to [more serious conditions in the future](#).

It is also not surprising that ALICE families were more likely to report experiencing long COVID than wealthier families. According to the Household Pulse Survey, in November 2022, Iowa respondents below the ALICE Threshold were more likely to report having symptoms (such as fatigue, “brain fog,” difficulty breathing, heart palpitations, dizziness, or changes to taste/smell) lasting three months or longer that they did not have prior to having COVID-19 than respondents above the Threshold (34% vs. 26%).

! Mental health: With these sustained challenges, it’s not surprising that people below the ALICE Threshold in Iowa were more likely to report feeling depressed or anxious than those above

the Threshold. According to the Household Pulse Survey, in August 2020, 23% of respondents below the Threshold and 12% above the Threshold reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge nearly every day over the prior two weeks. These rates increased by November 2022 for those below the Threshold (25% vs. 11%). Respondents below the Threshold were also more likely to report feeling down, depressed, or hopeless at both timepoints (16% in 2020 and 19% in 2022) than respondents above the Threshold (5% in 2020 and 6% in 2022). Some demographic groups experienced substantially higher rates of feeling anxious than the state average (Figure 9).

The lack of mental health resources during the pandemic has been [widely recognized](#), and awareness is increasing, especially with the launch of the [Nationwide Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) (988). But there remains a severe [shortage of mental health resources](#), especially for low-income families, and mental health providers struggle to meet [increased demand](#).

Figure 9. Feeling Anxious, Above and Below the ALICE Threshold, Iowa, 2022

Feeling Nervous, Anxious, or on Edge			
	Below ALICE Threshold	Above ALICE Threshold	State Average
Female	23%	11%	16%
With a Disability	48%	30%	
LGBT	32%	25%	

Question: Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge? Selected: Nearly every day

Note: The “With a Disability” group includes respondents who have one or more vision, hearing, cognitive, mobility, or self-care difficulties; the “LGBT” group includes respondents who identify as gay or lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. The sample size was too small to include race/ethnicity in this analysis.

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, September 14, 2022–November 14, 2022, Phase 3.6

From Warnings to Reality: ALICE Today

The strength of the Iowa economy is inextricably tied to the financial stability of all residents. As the pandemic has shown, ALICE workers are critical to the smooth running of the economy, during times of crisis and beyond. And, in turn, the stability of ALICE families depends on their being able to fully participate in that economy. Leaving ALICE behind in the recovery sets households and the larger economy up for greater vulnerability to the next economic disruption.

This is already happening, at the same time that the frequency and severity of [natural disasters](#) continue to increase. In places that experienced natural disasters in 2021 and 2022 — such as the [derecho and tornadoes](#) in Iowa; Hurricane Ian in Florida; wildfires in California, Idaho, and Utah; flooding in Kentucky and Missouri; and

tornadoes in the southern U.S. — ALICE families faced [higher risks](#). For example, following [Hurricane Ian in September 2022](#) in Florida, according to the Household Pulse Survey (December 2022), respondents below the ALICE Threshold were more likely than households above the Threshold to be displaced from their home (9% vs. 6%). One month after the storm, respondents below the Threshold were at least three times more likely to be experiencing a shortage of food (39% vs. 13%) and drinkable water (42% vs. 12%).

The pandemic has highlighted the ability of government policymakers and business managers to respond to changing conditions quickly. The 2021 ALICE data may surprise some readers who were expecting much worse. But 2021 was a unique year — and these warning signs are both a call to action and a challenge to complacency. We ignore our essential workers at our economy's and our communities' peril.



COUNTY COMPARISON: INCOME STATUS, 2021

Iowa Counties, 2021			Percent Change, 2019–2021	
County	Households	% ALICE + Poverty	# of Households	# ALICE + Poverty
Adair	3,180	38%	-1%	18%
Adams	1,529	42%	-4%	4%
Allamakee	5,814	36%	-2%	-1%
Appanoose	4,920	47%	-8%	-8%
Audubon	2,498	38%	-6%	-7%
Benton	10,075	29%	-2%	-5%
Black Hawk	53,951	41%	4%	7%
Boone	10,720	34%	-2%	10%
Bremer	9,638	29%	0%	2%
Buchanan	7,787	33%	-3%	-3%
Buena Vista	7,506	42%	0%	14%
Butler	5,860	35%	-6%	12%
Calhoun	3,932	41%	-5%	2%
Carroll	8,761	37%	0%	6%
Cass	5,777	40%	-2%	11%
Cedar	7,381	30%	0%	16%
Cerro Gordo	19,569	36%	2%	17%
Cherokee	5,126	34%	-4%	6%
Chickasaw	5,005	35%	-3%	11%
Clarke	3,740	39%	-4%	11%
Clay	7,137	44%	-1%	12%
Clayton	7,319	40%	-3%	12%
Clinton	19,103	37%	-3%	-1%
Crawford	6,159	43%	-4%	6%
Dallas	37,970	30%	10%	7%
Davis	3,150	32%	-1%	0%
Decatur	3,053	46%	-5%	3%
Delaware	6,944	32%	1%	13%

Iowa Counties, 2021			Percent Change, 2019–2021	
County	Households	% ALICE + Poverty	# of Households	# ALICE + Poverty
Des Moines	17,042	40%	1%	9%
Dickinson	8,096	25%	-1%	-7%
Dubuque	40,482	33%	6%	6%
Emmet	3,856	38%	-4%	-8%
Fayette	8,107	43%	-1%	12%
Floyd	6,712	41%	-3%	1%
Franklin	4,108	39%	-2%	21%
Fremont	2,742	36%	-7%	3%
Greene	3,790	39%	-5%	9%
Grundy	5,024	30%	-3%	13%
Guthrie	4,463	37%	0%	0%
Hamilton	5,993	37%	-4%	11%
Hancock	4,610	32%	-4%	-4%
Hardin	7,033	38%	-2%	7%
Harrison	5,932	35%	-1%	11%
Henry	7,565	39%	-2%	4%
Howard	3,708	39%	-3%	11%
Humboldt	4,189	34%	0%	7%
Ida	2,951	37%	-2%	10%
Iowa	6,765	34%	0%	15%
Jackson	8,020	36%	-3%	-1%
Jasper	14,370	35%	-1%	5%
Jefferson	6,688	45%	-1%	0%
Johnson	61,301	35%	1%	-1%
Jones	8,053	35%	-1%	4%
Keokuk	4,136	41%	-6%	5%
Kossuth	6,422	36%	-3%	7%
Lee	14,068	40%	-1%	1%
Linn	94,884	32%	1%	8%
Louisa	4,043	37%	-7%	-2%

Iowa Counties, 2021			Percent Change, 2019–2021	
County	Households	% ALICE + Poverty	# of Households	# ALICE + Poverty
Lucas	3,614	40%	-2%	14%
Lyon	4,364	31%	-4%	12%
Madison	6,377	36%	-1%	2%
Mahaska	8,813	37%	-1%	4%
Marion	13,241	30%	-1%	11%
Marshall	15,298	38%	-1%	16%
Mills	5,301	32%	-5%	-1%
Mitchell	4,400	35%	1%	12%
Monona	3,786	38%	-5%	-8%
Monroe	2,998	32%	-9%	-14%
Montgomery	4,380	40%	-4%	11%
Muscatine	16,785	38%	1%	4%
O'Brien	5,670	38%	-8%	16%
Osceola	2,659	30%	1%	13%
Page	6,171	47%	-2%	29%
Palo Alto	3,685	36%	0%	-2%
Plymouth	10,191	27%	-1%	8%
Pocahontas	3,121	38%	-3%	5%
Polk	203,390	32%	3%	-7%
Pottawattamie	37,930	39%	2%	-5%
Poweshiek	7,820	39%	1%	18%
Ringgold	1,860	43%	-6%	11%
Sac	4,196	34%	-3%	19%
Scott	72,128	35%	5%	15%
Shelby	4,918	36%	-2%	11%
Sioux	12,284	32%	0%	11%
Story	38,868	39%	-1%	8%
Tama	6,655	39%	-2%	23%
Taylor	2,446	36%	-6%	-8%
Union	4,936	45%	-5%	9%

Iowa Counties, 2021			Percent Change, 2019–2021	
County	Households	% ALICE + Poverty	# of Households	# ALICE + Poverty
Van Buren	2,858	42%	-1%	4%
Wapello	14,120	43%	-2%	2%
Warren	19,517	33%	1%	12%
Washington	8,833	35%	0%	26%
Wayne	2,536	42%	-6%	-4%
Webster	15,659	41%	2%	-2%
Winnebago	4,473	36%	-2%	0%
Winneshiek	8,156	33%	-1%	18%
Woodbury	41,327	41%	4%	12%
Worth	3,164	34%	0%	10%
Wright	5,343	41%	-7%	23%

NATIONAL COMPARISON: INCOME STATUS, 2021

STATE	RANK (1 = lowest % Below ALICE Threshold)	TOTAL	Household Income Status		
		Number of Households	% Households in Poverty	% ALICE Households	% Households Below ALICE Threshold
United States	—	126,903,920	13%	29%	41%
Alabama	48	1,951,995	16%	32%	48%
Alaska	1	266,391	10%	22%	32%
Arizona	24	2,813,110	12%	28%	40%
Arkansas	46	1,176,614	16%	31%	47%
California	35	13,420,382	12%	31%	43%
Colorado	13	2,297,529	10%	27%	37%
Connecticut	19	1,428,313	10%	28%	39%
Delaware	27	395,656	12%	29%	41%
District of Columbia	31	319,565	15%	28%	42%
Florida	44	8,533,422	13%	32%	45%
Georgia	47	3,954,813	14%	34%	47%
Hawai'i	29	490,101	12%	30%	41%
Idaho	34	681,926	11%	32%	43%
Illinois	10	4,981,919	12%	24%	36%
Indiana	21	2,656,794	12%	27%	39%
Iowa	9	1,293,028	11%	24%	36%
Kansas	20	1,153,270	12%	27%	39%
Kentucky	38	1,767,504	16%	28%	44%
Louisiana	50	1,776,260	19%	32%	51%
Maine	30	583,562	12%	30%	42%
Maryland	15	2,352,331	10%	28%	38%
Massachusetts	25	2,756,295	11%	28%	40%
Michigan	22	4,029,761	13%	26%	39%
Minnesota	8	2,254,997	10%	26%	35%
Mississippi	51	1,116,509	20%	32%	52%
Missouri	36	2,459,987	13%	30%	43%
Montana	28	443,529	12%	29%	41%
Nebraska	17	781,693	11%	27%	39%
Nevada	42	1,189,085	14%	31%	45%
New Hampshire	2	548,727	8%	25%	33%
New Jersey	12	3,495,628	11%	26%	37%
New Mexico	45	821,310	17%	29%	47%
New York	40	7,635,201	14%	30%	44%
North Carolina	41	4,150,059	13%	31%	44%
North Dakota	6	322,588	11%	23%	34%
Ohio	16	4,820,453	13%	25%	38%
Oklahoma	43	1,536,903	15%	30%	45%
Oregon	39	1,697,608	12%	32%	44%
Pennsylvania	23	5,229,253	12%	27%	39%
Rhode Island	18	435,782	12%	27%	39%
South Carolina	33	2,037,203	15%	29%	43%
South Dakota	11	352,363	11%	26%	36%
Tennessee	37	2,740,302	14%	30%	44%
Texas	32	10,705,476	14%	29%	43%
Utah	5	1,087,978	9%	25%	34%
Vermont	26	265,098	11%	29%	40%
Virginia	14	3,300,111	10%	28%	38%
Washington	4	3,013,644	10%	24%	34%
West Virginia	49	711,392	17%	31%	48%
Wisconsin	7	2,436,961	11%	23%	34%
Wyoming	3	233,539	11%	22%	34%

NEXT STEPS

Capturing the true extent of financial hardship in Iowa is critical for the appropriate allocation of funds for programs in areas such as education, health care, food access, housing, and employment. There is a lot more to be done to change the trajectory for households struggling to make ends meet. How can you help?

Learn more and help to raise awareness of the struggles ALICE households face with:

- The interactive [ALICE in Iowa webpages](#), to dig deeper into:
 - » [County Reports](#)
 - » [Household budgets](#)
 - » [Maps with data for local geographies](#)
 - » [Demographics](#)
 - » [Labor force data](#)
 - » [ALICE data alongside additional Indicators of Well-Being](#)

Connect with stakeholders:

- [Contact your local United Way](#) for support and volunteer opportunities.
- Connect with members of the state [Research Advisory Committees](#) that support this work.
- Find your state and federal representatives and see ALICE household data by legislative district with our [ALICE Legislative District Tool](#).

Turn the ALICE data into action in your state, county, or community:

- Use the ALICE metrics to highlight the challenges ALICE households face, to inspire action and

generate innovative solutions that promote financial stability.

- Armed with the ALICE data, advocate for policy change, apply for grant funding, allocate funding for programs and services targeted to ALICE households, etc.
- Learn more on our [ALICE in Action](#) webpage about the programs, practices, and policies to improve access to affordable housing, high quality child care and education, healthy food, health care, transportation, workforce training, and more.
- Demonstrate potential financial challenges that ALICE workers face with interactive tools from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta that incorporate the Household Survival Budget. These tools, which include the [Policy Rules Database](#) and the [Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster](#), map changes in benefits along a career path and identify potential benefits cliffs.

Be an ally and advocate for better data:

- Advocate for more accurate data collection by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) for people who have been [historically undercounted](#), including (but not limited to) people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, people of color, individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, and people in low-income and hard-to-count geographic areas.
- Support the [implementation](#) of a single combined question for race and ethnicity. Census [research](#) shows this change will yield a more accurate portrait of how the U.S. population self-identifies, especially for people who identify as multiracial or multiethnic.

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