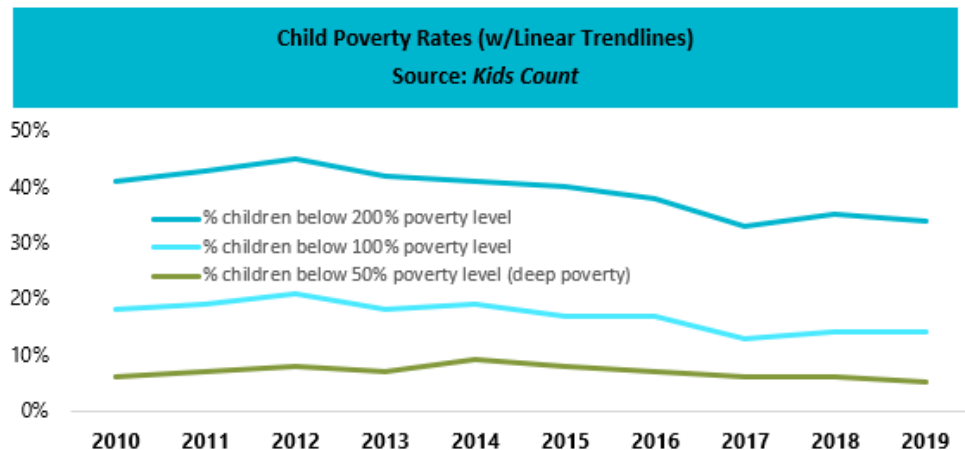




Invest in Tomorrow in 2021

What does the data tell us about child poverty in Maine?

The child poverty rate in Maine has been relatively consistent over the last 10 years, with some spikes (2012) and some progress (2017). Notably, Maine was starting to see a gradual downward trend over time. Due to historical and contemporary structural inequities and discrimination, children from Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color in Maine continue to face poverty at [disparate rates](#) compared to white children. Children living in more rural areas, as well as children living in single parent homes are also [more likely](#) to live in poverty.



COVID-19 has hit families with children hardest

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has upended some of this progress and exacerbated existing hardships. According to the Census' Weekly Pulse [Data](#), in Maine, more than half (54%) of adults living in households with children lost employment income since March 13, 2020, while more than one in three (36%) of Maine adults living in households with children reported difficulty paying for usual household expenses in the past week (Nov 25/Dec 31).

About Invest in Tomorrow

Invest in Tomorrow is an initiative undertaken by Maine organizations, businesses, and individuals to cut Maine's child poverty rate in half over the next ten years as a bold step toward eradicating child poverty in a generation. Solving child poverty will forever change the lives of Maine children and families for the better, while at the same time, strengthening our workforce.

What's next for Invest in Tomorrow?

As the state works to recover from the pandemic and we work to rebuild our economy, it is more important than ever that parents and caregivers have the supports they need to participate in the workforce and are able to meet the basic needs of their children. Given the data, community needs, and the progress we have made to date, we believe Invest in Tomorrow can make the most meaningful difference in 2021 working on the following priorities identified in the 2018 Invest in Tomorrow [report](#):

- **Streamline, simplify, and improve the delivery of support and services for families living in poverty so they can access opportunity and sustain economic security, while at the same time, reducing inefficiencies in state government.**
 - It should not be so hard to access public assistance programs and supports. Covid-19 has exposed the gaps and inadequacies in access to and the delivery of safety net programs. Our goal is to

ensure that state systems and services are accessible, respectful, culturally competent, coordinated, responsive to people's needs, and accountable to the people they serve.

Opportunities to move this work forward in 2021 include:

- Preserve changes DHHS made in response to COVID-19 to remove barriers and onerous requirements in an effort to improve access to public assistance programs;
 - Break down silos in our systems that make it harder for people to access help and support. State agencies, state departments within agencies, and community-based organizations assisting people in need should be coordinated and interfacing. People in need of help should only have to tell their story once to get the help they need and are eligible to receive;
 - Reform ASPIRE, TANF's retraining and employment program, to better meet families where they are so they can forge a path to economic opportunity and security that will work for them; and
 - Address inequities in access to broadband that limit the ability of families to work, learn, access health care, and engage in their communities in a host of other ways.
- **Ensure parents and caregivers have increased access to quality, affordable child care and early learning so they can sustain employment while providing for their children with the support and learning that is necessary for healthy development.**
 - A gap identified by the working group created by the 2019 Invest in Tomorrow bill package was the lack of child care available to parents who are immigrants, which creates an obstacle to employment. The Child Care Subsidy Program should be made available to working immigrant families. This recommendation was prioritized in the Economic Recovery Committee's [report](#) to the Governor. Invest in Tomorrow sees this as an opportunity to support immigrants' successful integration in our workforce and make access to child care more equitable in our state.

Other areas identified for prioritization in 2021 include:

- **Adequate food and nutrition**
 - Maine is one of the states that received approval for and has been operating a Pandemic EBT program during COVID-19. P-EBT has provided extra food to families with children to supplement free or reduced meals lost because of school closures. Invest in Tomorrow will support the continuation and strong implementation of this program.
- **Stable and affordable housing**
 - COVID-19 has highlighted the affordable housing crisis in Maine, and the risks of eviction and homelessness that families with children face. This risk is even greater for families of color. Even before the pandemic, [twenty-six](#) percent of Maine's homeless population was Black or African American even though they make up only 1% of Maine's population. Investing in affordable housing and improving housing stability for Maine's workforce was prioritized in the Economic Recovery Committee's [report](#) to the Governor. Invest in Tomorrow aims to explore ways in which the collective can support and advance efforts to address the looming housing crisis in Maine.

Invest in Tomorrow will continue to build on past work, ensuring strong implementation of the 2019 Invest in Tomorrow bill package (which you can read more about [here](#)). We will continue to support work to advance the additional priorities identified by community forums – the importance of which have been highlighted by COVID-19 – including:

- **Health Care;**
- **Transportation;**
- **the Transition from Assistance to Employment; and**
- **Education and Training.**

Learn more about Invest in Tomorrow at [InvestInTomorrow.me](https://investintomorrow.me).