

BLUEPRINT

FOR A

JUST &

EQUITABLE

FUTURE



The 10-Year Plan to
Dismantle Poverty





TOWARD A JUST & EQUITABLE FUTURE

For two years running, Washington state has made national headlines for ranking as the best state in the nation to live.¹ Strong technology, manufacturing, and energy sectors, combined with high scores for health care, education, and opportunity propelled us to the top of the list, only confirming what we Washingtonians already know – our beautiful corner of the Pacific Northwest is indeed unique for all it has to offer.

No one could have predicted that our lives would be so different in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a public health and economic crisis that has profoundly shifted the ground beneath us. The economic effects are staggering, with the state losing half of the total jobs created over the last ten years in the early months of the pandemic. And against the backdrop of COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd ignited protests against racial injustice and inequality throughout the country, demanding a nation reckon with our past for the sake of our future.

The magnitude of the moment cannot be overstated – by any measure, it is an extraordinary time.

If extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, our relatively strong position before COVID-19 gives Washington state much to build on to meet the moment. And if we invest in our most precious resource – the children, adults, and families that call Washington state home – the best state in the nation can emerge even stronger than before.

But to build a better future, we need to take stock of the past. **Despite the narrative of a strong economy before the pandemic, nearly one in four Washingtonians – 1.75 million people, including 500,000 children – struggled to make ends meet.**²

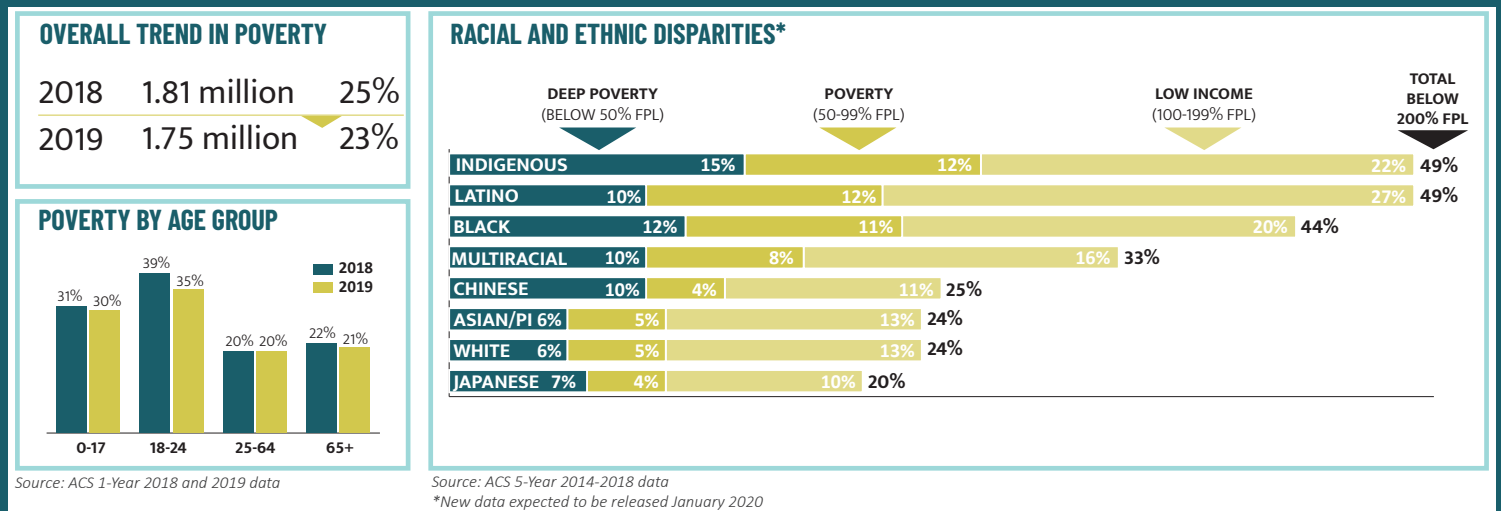
The burden of poverty is not equal – Indigenous, Black, and Brown people are disproportionately affected, as are rural residents, women – especially those with young children – youth, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, and immigrants and refugees. Structural racism intersects with all forms of oppression and inequality to undermine our collective well-being – when nearly a quarter of Washingtonians lack the basic building blocks of well-being, such as having enough food and a stable home, it prevents us from reaching our full potential as a state.

These outcomes are not due to chance. Stubbornly high rates of poverty and inequality are the product of inherently unjust and unequal policies, programs, and practices that have underwritten our economy for decades. Recent data show that the current economic downturn will only deepen these trends, possibly pushing poverty and inequality to their highest rates in 50 years.³

In every crisis there is opportunity, and Washington state is at a turning point. Now is the time to invest in an economy underwritten by equity, in which all Washingtonians have their foundational needs met and the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Fortunately, we have a plan to meet the moment and build a just and equitable future for all.

Pre-COVID Rates of Poverty and Inequality in Washington Remained Stubbornly High

Trends in the percent of people living below 200% of the federal poverty level, Washington state 2019



¹U.S. News & World Report (May 14, 2019) "Why Washington is the Best State in the Nation" downloaded on June 5, 2019 @ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings>

²DSHS/ESA analysis of 2019 American Community Survey data

³Parolin, Z. & Christopher Wimer (April 2020) Forecasting Estimates of Poverty during the COVID-19 Crisis. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University Policy Brief available for download at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/5e9786f17c4b4e20ca02d16b/1586988788821/Forecasting-Poverty-Estimates-COVID19-CPSP-2020.pdf>

EIGHT STRATEGIES. 60 RECOMMENDATIONS. ONE GOAL.

LET'S GO.

A Washington without Poverty & Injustice

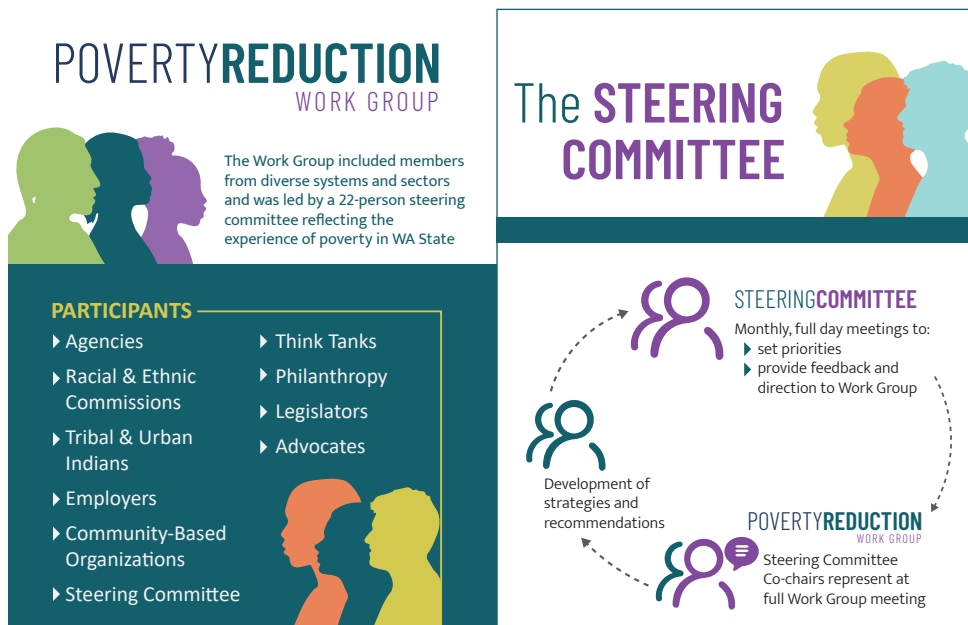
The effects of economic hardship are well-documented and crystal clear: poverty causes negative outcomes for children, adults, and families⁴ and costs the U.S. economy over \$1 trillion annually.⁵ A Washington without poverty and injustice would be substantially better off – well-being would soar due to improved education, health, and employment outcomes, and rates of homelessness, child neglect, addiction, and crime would decrease. Our communities would be more vibrant, healthy, and safe, with substantial economic benefits: for every \$1 spent on reducing childhood poverty, we save at least \$7 in return.⁶

In Washington state, the economy would be nearly \$40 billion stronger if poverty were reduced and racial disparities in income were eliminated.⁷

Reducing poverty and inequality is not just about the economic returns– it is also about dignity, humanity, and belonging. When Washingtonians have their foundational needs met and believe their lives are valued, they are more likely to thrive and fully contribute to their families, schools, communities, and jobs. Investments in economic stability, equity, and inclusion benefit all of us.

Poverty Reduction Work Group

Governor Inslee created the Poverty Reduction Work Group (PRWG) in 2018, tasking the group to create a comprehensive, 10-year plan to reduce poverty and inequality in Washington state. For the last two years, a diverse and dedicated group of 45 stakeholders, powered by a 22-member Steering Committee of people experiencing poverty, met monthly to ultimately craft eight strategies containing 60 specific recommendations that serve as a blueprint for a just and equitable future.



8 STRATEGIES POVERTYREDUCTION

ROOT CAUSES & BEYOND

- 1 UNDO STRUCTURAL RACISM**
 Understand structural racism and historical trauma and take action to undo how they manifest in state policy, program, and practice.
- 2 BALANCE POWER**
 Make equal space in decision-making for people and communities most affected by poverty and inequality.
- 3 INCREASE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**
 Target equitable income growth and wealth-building among people with low incomes.
- 4 ENSURE FOUNDATIONAL WELL-BEING**
 Strengthen health supports across the life span to promote the intergenerational well-being of families.
- 5 PRIORITIZE URGENT NEEDS**
 Prioritize the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness, mental illness, or addiction.
- 6 BUILD A HOLISTIC CONTINUUM OF CARE**
 Build an integrated human service continuum of care that addresses the holistic needs of children, adults, and families.
- 7 DECRIMINALIZE POVERTY**
 Decriminalize poverty and reduce reliance on the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems.
- 8 PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK**
 Ensure a just transition to the future of work.

⁴National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019) *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press

⁵Michael McLaughlin and Mark R Rank (2018) *Estimating the Economic Cost of Childhood Poverty in the United States*. *Social Work Research*, v42(2); 73–8

⁶Michael McLaughlin and Mark R Rank (2018) *Estimating the Economic Cost of Childhood Poverty in the United States*. *Social Work Research*, v42(2); 73–8

⁷National Equity Atlas (2018) downloaded at <http://nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries/Washington/>

STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS.

LET'S GET TO WORK

Foundational Principles in the Strategies

Two foundational principles guided development of the strategic plan.

- 1** First, any effort to reduce poverty must center race in the discussion, including how it intersects with other forms of inequality and oppression, such as sexism, ageism, homophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, and classism.
- 2** Second, people most affected by poverty must be involved and have equal power and influence in decision-making. PRWG upheld these principles by using a racial equity consultant, practices, and tools to develop the strategies and recommendations, and by creating the Steering Committee to set the work group's priorities and approve the final plan.

Strategies 1 and 2

Strategies 1 and 2 recommend institutionalizing these same practices in state policy, program, and funding decisions so that equity-driven and person-centered solutions to reduce poverty and inequality are implemented.

Strategies 3 through 8

The remaining strategies, 3 through 8, broadly aim to accomplish two main objectives: (1) more effectively mitigate the effects of poverty on children, adults, and families experiencing it and move them toward economic stability; and (2) prevent the incidence of poverty from occurring altogether by investing in the opportunities all Washingtonians need to achieve social and economic mobility.

Implementing the 10-Year Plan

History shows that times of profound disruption are followed by significant social, cultural, and economic change. This time will be no different, and the timely release of the *10-Year Plan* outlines the strategies and recommendations we can begin implementing today to build a just and equitable future.

Systemic change becomes possible when we recognize the "system" is us – people working in state and local government, non-profits, businesses, and philanthropic entities across the state all have a role to play. It simply takes a willingness to act... so let's get to work.

Five Immediate Actions

Below are five immediate actions any entity or individual, in any sector, can take to discover ways you can contribute to building a just and equitable future by reducing poverty and inequality.

- 1** Visit www.dismantlepovertyinwa.com to learn more about PRWG and the Steering Committee, hear from agency leadership on their support for the plan, and sign-up to stay connected to the work.
- 2** Read the [full plan](#) to review the full set of strategies and recommendations.
- 3** Use the [Action Toolkit](#) to identify ways you and your organization can contribute to implementation of the plan.
- 4** Follow us on [social media](#) to engage in the work and share our posts with your networks.
- 5** **Invite** the PRWG Steering Committee and members to your events to learn more about the plan from the people who led its development.



www.DismantlePovertyinWA.com



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