

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Community Inequality and Connection to Basic Needs

Ensuring that youth and families have access to basic needs is critical to positive youth development, including safe and stable housing, caregiver employment and family financial stability, health insurance coverage, fresh and healthy foods, and other types of resources. Limited access to these resources can have negative impacts on mental health, physical health, health behaviors, risky behaviors, personal relationships, educational and work attainment, school readiness, and life satisfaction (Bess et al., 2023; Comfort et al., 2013; Duncan et al., 2010; Gultekin et al., 2020; Jakovljevic et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2020; McMorrow et al., 2017; Moo-Reci et al., 2019; Moo-Reci & Wooden, 2022; Murrain & Brady, 2023; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Nikolova & Nikolaev, 2021; Roos et al., 2019).

Lack of access to basic needs, and associated negative impacts, disproportionately affect certain communities, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); (American Psychological Association, 2022; Backes et al., 2019; Oxfam, 2016). Moreover, experiencing inequality can cause negative impacts itself, such as increasing stress levels, depressive symptoms, and other mental health concerns (Hansen, 2014; Backes et al., 2019). Community inequality is the result of systemic racism, other types of systemic discrimination against certain groups (e.g., individuals with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals), and current and historical discriminatory policies that disproportionately impact certain communities. For the most current local data on basic needs such as housing, food security, employment, and insurance coverage, please visit MDH's interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data \(www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html\)](http://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

While there are many community-based strategies that can address inequality, there are broader systems-level or policy changes that can also be used that are out of scope for this brief.

Relevant indicator(s):

- Community inequality
- Health insurance coverage
- Housing insecurity, instability, and homelessness
- Lack of access to grocery stores with healthy food
- Children living in poverty
- Unemployment

Effective strategies

Strategies for addressing community inequality and connecting people to resources to meet their basic needs include:

- **Service navigators and community liaisons** who provide guidance to individuals and families who are seeking services to help meet their needs (Di Diase & Mochel, 2021; European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2022; Gottlieb et al., 2016; Valaitis et al., 2017; Waid et al., 2021). Professionals in these positions work with clients to identify needs, identify potential services and programs to address those needs, provide social support, assist with the application or sign-up process and other types of communication required to access services, and address barriers preventing the individual or family from accessing services.
These roles can vary widely, from helping people navigate a many types of services across a range of sectors or focusing on a specific type of service (e.g., health care, career training, transportation) and can include professionals from a wide range of backgrounds (e.g., social workers, nurses, paraprofessionals). Some roles are designed to be held by people who hold a specific identity and/or focus on serving specific communities (e.g., specific racial, ethnic, or cultural identities), and some serve people in specific settings (e.g., schools, hospitals, libraries, community centers). Navigators may also conduct community outreach or educational activities.
- **Coordination and integration of services** across sectors and agencies, from small efforts to improve communication between different agencies to larger efforts to restructure pathways to services (Fichtenberg et al., 2020; McCullough et al., 2020). These efforts are most often found in health care settings and involve strengthening relationships between health care agencies and community-based and social services organizations, screening assessments to identify needs, and implementing new technologies or workflows to improve cross-sector communication and referral processes. Similar to service navigation roles, these efforts can span a wide range of services and may focus on serving specific communities.
- **Targeted efforts to address inequality and increase access to certain types of resources.** These efforts can also vary widely, and they may pertain to different types of resources, focus on increasing access among specific communities, and involve small-scale or large-scale activities. Examples include: broadband internet expansion, from creating new publicly available Wi-Fi networks in public spaces to public-private partnerships to increase access across entire communities (Rachfal, 2020); initiatives to improve access to healthy foods, such as creating mobile product markets (Hsiao et al., 2019); outreach and assistance to uninsured individuals and families, such as personalized telephone calls, messaging and public awareness efforts, and tabling at events (Myerson et al., 2022; Plain, 2017; Orfield et al., 2015; Saya & Safran, 2022); and book fairs for students attending schools with high rates of poverty (Social Programs that Work, 2017).

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

Resource navigation tools

There are multiple tools available in Minnesota to help individuals and families identify resources they may benefit from. These include:

- **United Way 211** provides information regarding health and human services. Information is available by website, phone call, and text. [United Way 2-1-1\(www.211unitedway.org/\)](http://www.211unitedway.org/)
- **Findhelp.org** is a website that provides information on social care services by geography. [Findhelp \(www.findhelp.org/\)](http://www.findhelp.org/)
- **Help Me Connect** is a service navigation tool specifically for families going through pregnancy, families with young children, and professionals working with young families to identify resources to support healthy child development. The website also includes contact information for community navigators based in organizations across the state. [Help Me Connect \(helpmeconnect.web.health.state.mn.us/HelpMeConnect\)](http://helpmeconnect.web.health.state.mn.us/HelpMeConnect)

Portico Healthnet

Portico Healthnet provides real-time assistance to uninsured Minnesotans to navigate the health care system and enroll in health insurance coverage. They provide assistance in multiple languages and also train MNSure Navigators.

More information about [Portico Healthnet \(porticohealthnet.org/\)](http://porticohealthnet.org/)

Scott County Family Resource Centers

Scott County created resource centers throughout the county that provide assistance related to navigating services, completing applications and paperwork to receive services, and learning about family well-being topics, such as financial health. Families can meet individually with providers who work with economic assistance and housing programs, the county child support department, the Minnesota chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and personal finance programs through the University of Minnesota Extension. They also partner with organizations to provide culturally specific assistance, including assistance in Spanish and Somali.

More information about Scott County [Family Resource Centers \(www.scottcountymn.gov/2016/Family-Resource-Centers\)](http://www.scottcountymn.gov/2016/Family-Resource-Centers)

Twin Cities Mobile Market

The Twin Cities Mobile Market is a remodeled bus that provides mobile access to healthy, fresh, and affordable foods in the metro area. The Market focuses on serving neighborhoods with limited grocery store or food shelf availability. In addition to standard payment methods, customers can pay for groceries with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds.

More information about [Twin Cities Mobile Market \(www.thefoodgroupmn.org/groceries/twin-cities-mobile-market/\)](http://www.thefoodgroupmn.org/groceries/twin-cities-mobile-market/)

Examples of national initiatives

City Connects

City Connects helps educators and schools provide integrated services and supports to students who attend under-resourced schools. City Connects Coordinators work with teachers to understand the strengths and needs of every student in every classroom annually, and Coordinators create individualized support plans for each student that include prevention, intervention, and enrichment services and activities. Students who have the greatest needs receive additional support.

More information about [City Connects \(www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/lynch-school/sites/city-connects.html\)](http://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/lynch-school/sites/city-connects.html)

Detroit Land Contracts, Counseling, and Buyer's Guide

Since the Great Recession, land contracts have become a more common homeownership option for households with limited financial resources, most often those who cannot qualify for a mortgage. Land contracts are real estate agreements in which the buyer pays for the property over time, while the seller holds the deed until the full price is paid. While land contracts can be an effective way to facilitate homeownership, they also involve risk and can be complicated or difficult to understand. To support families interested in purchasing a home through a land contract, several organizations in Detroit provide housing counseling regarding this process. Additionally, community partners produced a buyer guide that includes information and guidance about the land contract process, including risks and tips, and it is available in English and Spanish.

More information about [Land Contracts \(poverty.umich.edu/projects/land-contracts/\)](http://poverty.umich.edu/projects/land-contracts/)

[Land Contract Buyer Guide \(detroitmi.gov/departments/housing-and-revitalization-department/land-contract-information\)](http://detroitmi.gov/departments/housing-and-revitalization-department/land-contract-information)

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