



# BLACK WELL-BEING:

Moving Toward Solutions Together

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**Dear Black Washingtonians,**

Our things exude love. Our things are grounded in wisdom carefully gifted to us by our ancestors. And when we get together, every good thing inside us rejoices. We are full length mirrors of mutual affirmation. We are call and response. We are hugs and full bellies. We are the gentle hum and a resounding choir. When we come together to nurture one another, we manifest more than we imagine and everything we feel.

*We did this thing.*

This report is yours to own and build upon. The community identified approaches it offers only begin to reflect the mosaic of differences among us — they are not an end point. In the coming months, we at the Black Future Coop Fund intend to hold space to talk with more of you across the state. We'll use this report to facilitate collective organizing, direct funds, and accelerate deep systemic change. Your continued engagement is necessary to realize Black generational wealth, health, and well-being.

As we continue walking together, we hope this report serves as a tool to celebrate our differences as we labor and love alongside one another. Unity, after all, does not require sameness, but rather collaboration. Let us keep the conversation going and inspire each other to act in more powerful ways.

Thank you, Black Washingtonians and organizational partners, for offering pieces of yourselves to this report — your wisdom, your stories, your talent, your joy, your accountability, your strength, your time. Hundreds of you across the state have contributed to this study. You planned, amplified, connected, filmed, photographed, sang, designed, edited, coordinated, wrote, funded, and created. A very special thank you to the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, Cardea, and Pyramid Communications for bringing life to the myriad of data and perspectives reflected in these pages. Another very special thank you to Sharon Nyree Williams, Michael B. Maine, and Carlos Imani for co-creating a space for our community to feel, hear, see, and contribute to this report in very specific ways that are meaningful to us.

In solidarity,

T'wina Nobles, Andrea Caupain Sanderson,  
Angela Jones, and Michelle Merriweather

**Black Future Co-op Fund Architects**

*“What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order for us to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness.”*

— Audre Lorde

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## Introduction

This report is a love note to Black Washingtonians, written for us and by us, to accelerate change. In each section, we offer approaches identified by Black Washingtonians — actions that we and our society can take to make necessary change across sectors.

In 2015, Byrd Barr Place, in collaboration with the Washington Commission on African American Affairs and the African American Leadership Forum-Seattle, and working in partnership with Angela Powell and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, published “Creating an Equitable Future in Washington State: Black Well-being & Beyond.” This was the first in a series of reports to assess barriers to economic security and educational opportunity, and to equity in the criminal justice system, health, and civic engagement for Black Washingtonians.

The 2015 report and its data have been valuable tools in promoting public dialogue on race and the obstacles Black Washingtonians face, as well as to supporting community-driven public policy solutions.

Since then the landscape has shifted. Ongoing local and national protests — precipitated by the continued killing of unarmed Black people — have brought the Black Lives Matter movement and message to public consciousness. The compounding crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing climate disasters, the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, generations of deeply embedded white-supremist policies, and free-flowing racist rhetoric have accelerated the urgency for structural change. And, as has always happened, we have found ways to thrive in spite of it all.

Washington state now has its first Black-led philanthropy, the Black Future Co-op Fund, working to connect Black communities for collective power, promote a truthful Black narrative, and invest in Black generational prosperity, health, and well-being. Given our mission and statewide focus, the Fund seemed a natural partner and convener for this study.

With this 2022 Black Well-Being study, we wanted to flip the frame and focus on the structural barriers behind the adverse and unequal outcomes that Black Washingtonians experience. It’s long overdue that there’s an accounting of the systems creating these issues. Framed in this way, the report aims to:

- Support collective organizing among Black people and communities across the state.
- Direct resources to invest strategically in Black prosperity, health, and well-being.
- Inform policy change to fix structural injustices and advance equitable opportunity for Black Washingtonians.

We invite you to spend time with family and your community exploring the report.





## Our Approach

The planning for this report started in May of 2021. To create a report for Black people and about Black people, we wanted to start by learning from Black people across the state as a first step. It was important throughout the process to elevate our brilliance and bring forward the approaches that will result in the world we want to see.

## Focus Groups

We started by holding five focus groups, one on each section in this report, and looked for themes across the discussions. Here's what emerged:

### Accountability

Ensure the people who make decisions that impact Black lives are accountable for representing and serving Black communities.

### Community Building

Create spaces for intergenerational listening, learning, skill development, collaboration, and organizing.

### Data

Collect meaningful data that will help identify, monitor, and address racist outcomes.

### Healing

Support individual and collective healing from racism and trauma that spans generations, and rebuild trust that has been eroded by racism.

### Leadership Development

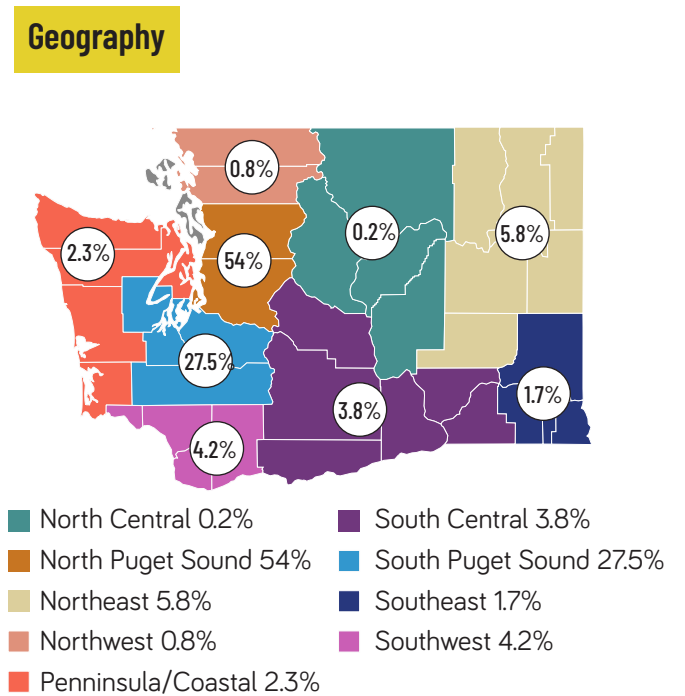
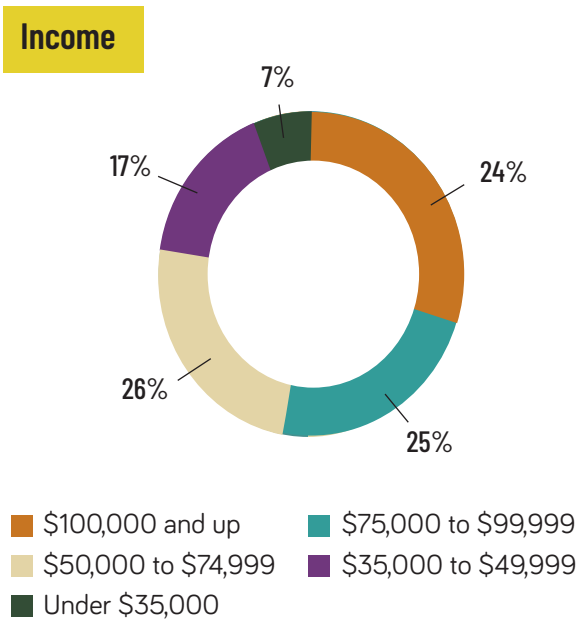
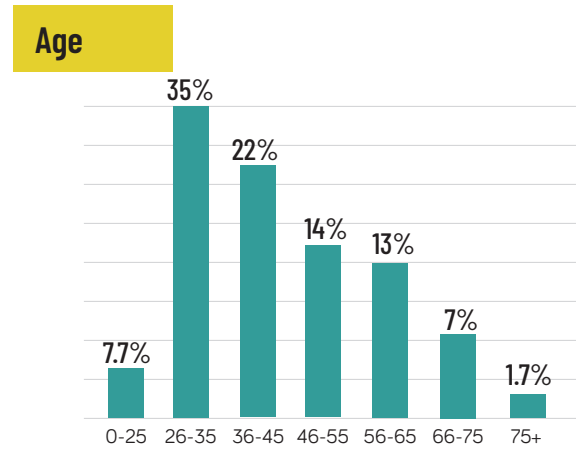
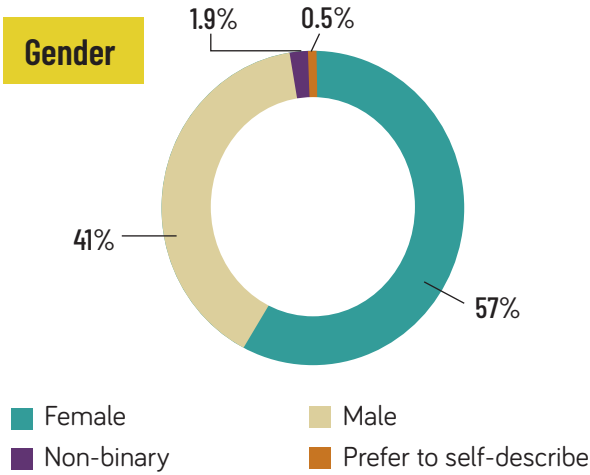
Redefine leadership on our own terms and invest the resources needed to build and strengthen Black leadership.

### Truthful Narrative

Uplift and portray Black people truthfully in all spaces — media, literature, curricula, stories, art.

### Statewide Survey

We wanted to know what Black people across the state thought about these themes. So, we asked folks to respond to a statewide survey translated into 11 languages. We received more than 600 responses. Survey results are discussed in the sections below. A more thorough look into the survey data is in process to better understand the perspectives of specific demographics. Here's who responded by age, gender, income, and region:

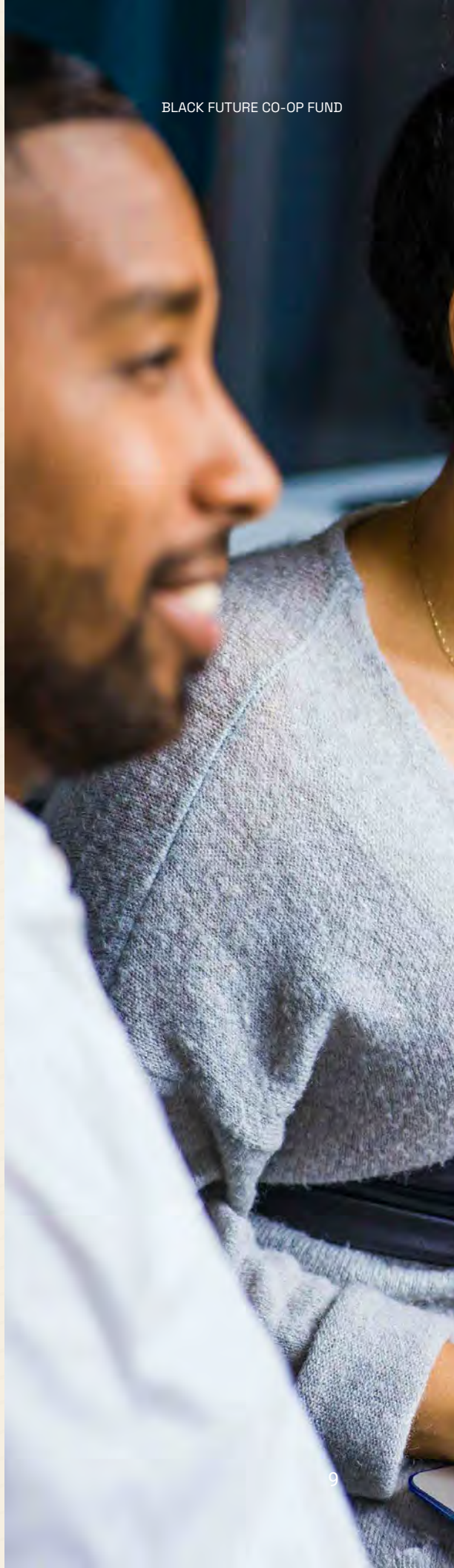




### Statewide Gathering

After we conducted the survey, we held a statewide event that featured themes from the focus groups and survey. More than 150 watch parties tuned in online, while 75 people met in person at the Central Area Senior Center in Seattle, the University of Puget Sound Black Student Union in Tacoma, and Excelsior Wellness in Spokane. Throughout the Black-centered gathering, local changemakers across Washington discussed community-identified approaches to education, health, economic mobility, public safety, and civic engagement. Interwoven throughout the program were spoken word and song by Black artists.

The feedback and interactive components from the event further informed our approach. We were able to get a better sense of what ideas and themes resonated with folks from comments and polls. People expressed particular excitement around themes of healing, working together, and amplifying the fullness and beauty of our community. We hope you see those elements reflected strongly in the five sections of the report that follow.



## Who We Are

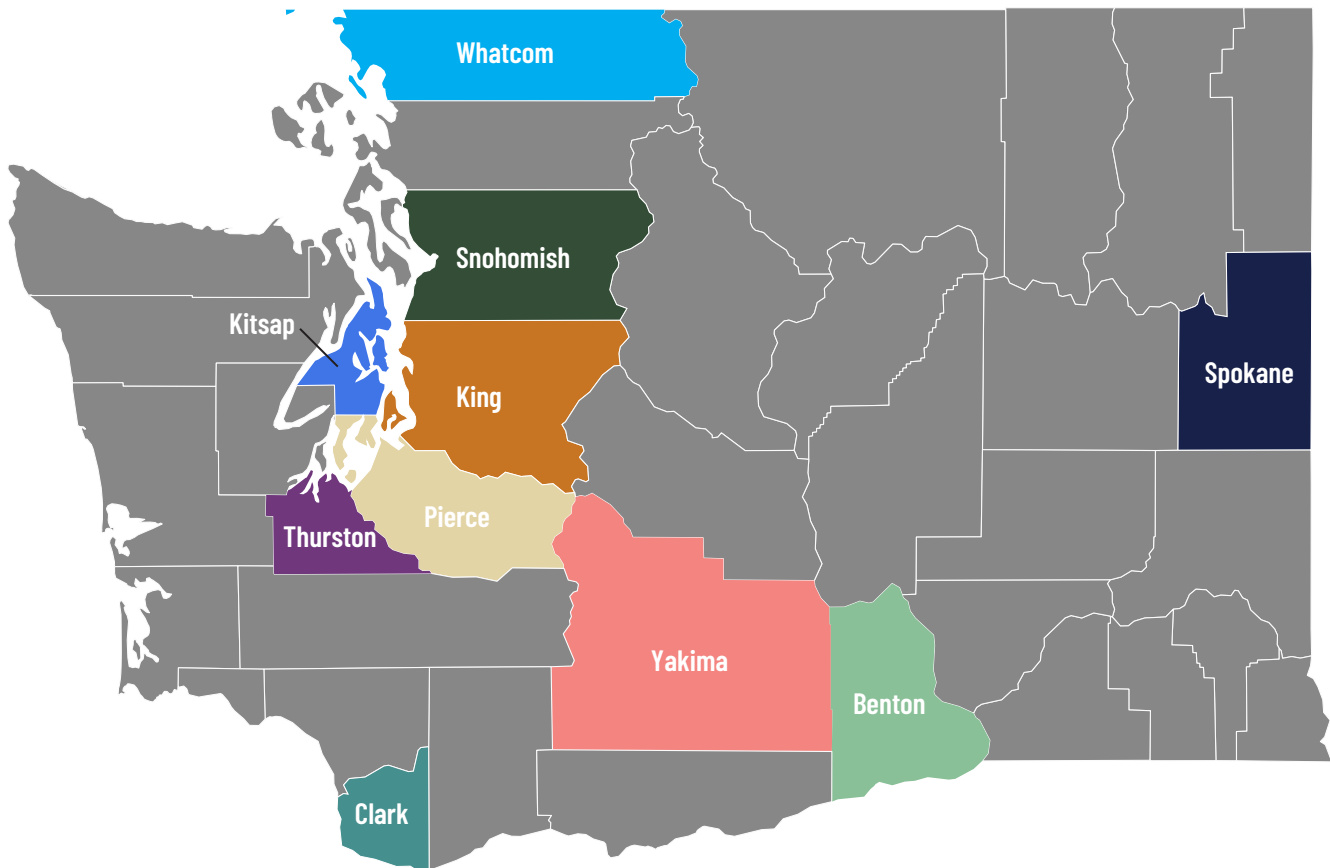
Black people make up 5.8% of Washington state's population as of 2020.<sup>1</sup> That number has grown by over 37% or 121,336 more people since 2010.<sup>2</sup> Of people born outside the United States, we make up around 7%.<sup>3</sup>

### Income

Average earnings of Black Washingtonians across educational attainment:<sup>4</sup>

- Master: \$51,668
- Bachelor: \$41,030
- Associate: \$28,637
- Some college, no degree: \$20,262
- High school or equivalent: \$24,314
- Less than high school: \$1,418

Where Black Folks Live 2020 <sup>5</sup>



### WHERE BLACK FOLKS LIVE 2020

King 49.1%	Yakima 1.2%
Pierce 21.4%	Thurston 2.9%
Snohomish 8.4%	Benton 1.1%
Clark 3.7%	Whatcom 0.9%
Spokane 3.2%	Less than 1%
Kitsap 2.7%	

## What Are Our Priorities and Perceptions of Progress

Over 600 Black people statewide offered their perspectives to help us understand the priorities and perceptions of our communities statewide.

Here's what we found:

### Priorities

- Accountability was a top priority for respondents 56 and older.
- Civic engagement, not economic mobility was the top priority for folks making less than \$50,000.
- Health care only made the top five for people 56 and older.

### Priorities

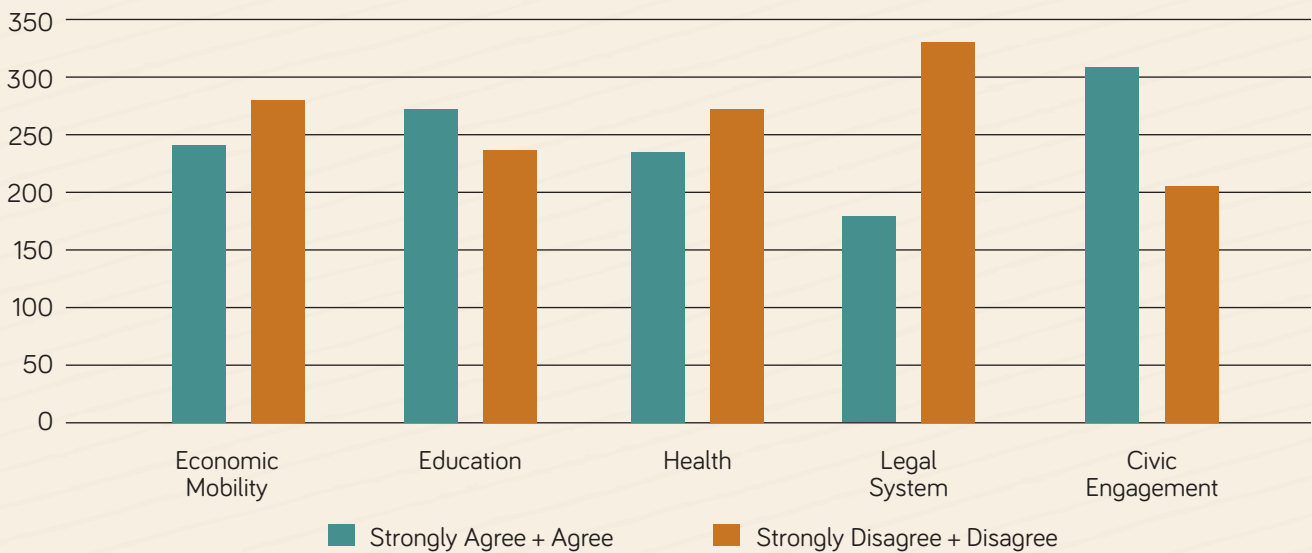
Rank	Survey Respondents (N=523)*	Under \$50,000 (N=112)	Age 55 and under (N=359)	Age 56 and older (N=123)
1	Economic Mobility	Civic Engagement	Economic Mobility	Accountability
2	Education	Education	Education	Economic Mobility
3	Civic Engagement	Economic Mobility	Civic Engagement	Education
4	Accountability	Community Building	Community Building	Civic Engagement
5	Community Building	Accountability	Accountability	Health Care

*\*Not every respondent answered every question.*

### Perceptions of Progress

- Overall, respondents are most hopeful around making progress in civic engagement and education.
- Respondents making under \$50,000 feel we're making progress in economic mobility and education more so than those with higher incomes.
- Respondents 56 and older feel less progress is being made in all areas than those younger than them.

### Perceptions of Progress



## Leadership and Accountability

Based on the focus group themes that emerged, we asked questions to understand how we are defining important ideas like leadership and accountability.

Here's a summary of how people are defining a good leader:

- Relational: Listens, shares power, stands beside — not in front of us, cultivates leaders.
- Respectful: Honors elders and ancestors; speaks with, not for people.
- Loving: Shows empathy, exercises compassion, celebrates others, and is gentle.
- Integrity: Transparent, honest, truth-teller, unswayed by power or money.
- Influential: Inspirational, good communicator, removes barriers for others, builds unity.
- Self-aware: Checks their ego, roots out their own anti-blackness, models the way, maintains clear and healthy boundaries.
- Humble: Willing to follow, admits to and learns from mistakes, and is not attention-seeking.
- Visionary and strategic: Offers clear purpose and direction.
- Learner: Curious, knowledgeable about the issues, learns what is wanted and needed.
- Bold: Courageous, unafraid to take risks or feel pressure.



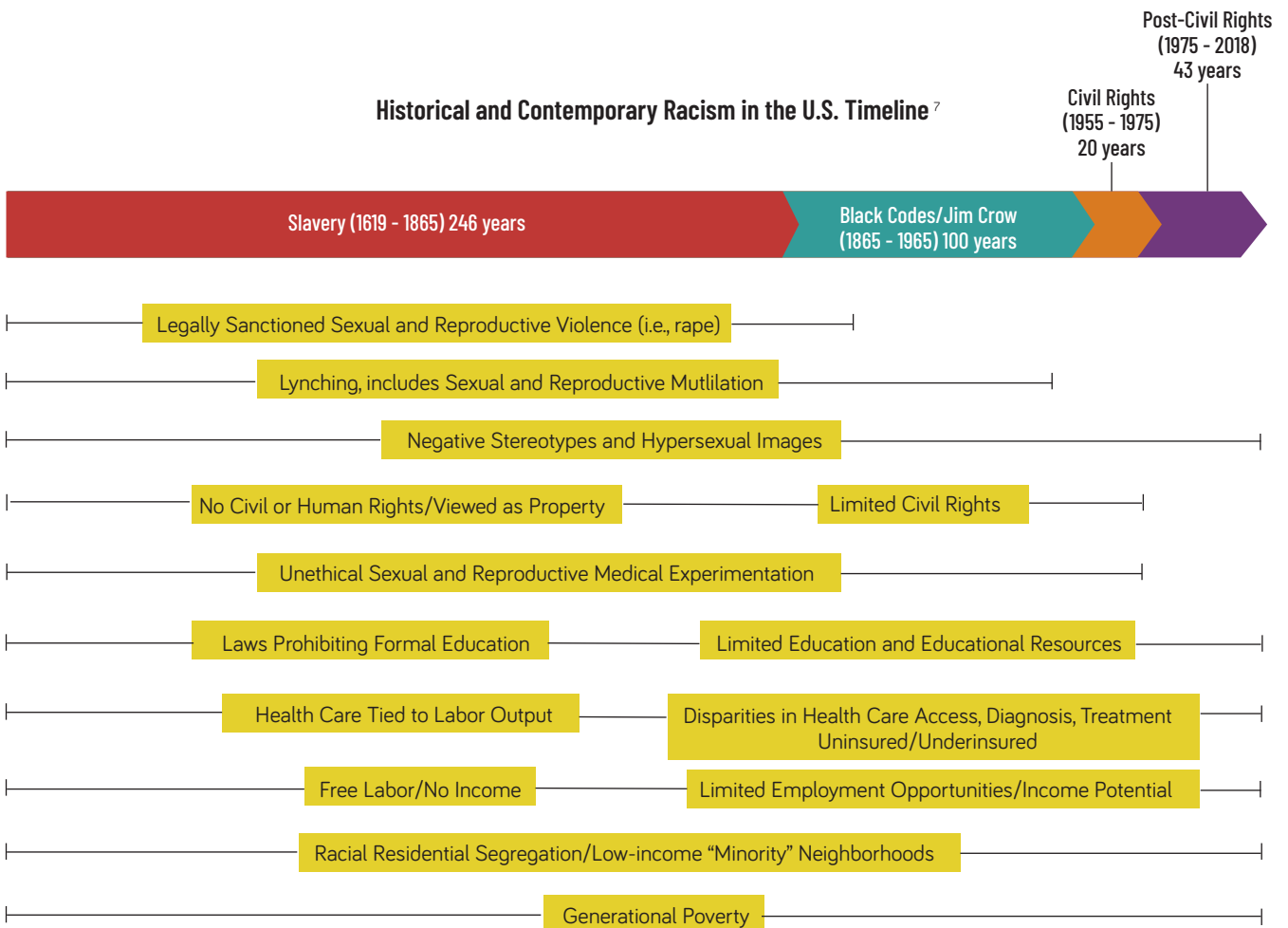
Here's a summary of how people are defining accountability:

- Aligning words with actions to do what they say they will.
- Taking personal responsibility.
- Admitting mistakes, missteps, and harm.
- Accepting and taking corrective action that repairs and prevents further harm.
- Receiving feedback and acting on it.
- Owning your power personally and within roles.
- Making clear commitments that are aligned with values.
- Being transparent around information and decisions.
- Holding people with care.



# The Update Since 2015

What’s happened since 2015 must be put into a much longer context. Since 1492, we’ve fought an uphill battle.<sup>6</sup> The following visual shows just how long we’ve been facing the issues highlighted in this report. The frustrations, the exhaustion we feel are not only about what’s happening today, at your job, at your school, in your neighborhood. Our social systems have been centuries in the making. Although we’ve made progress, the rules by which our social systems function are the same as they’ve always been — only the flavor of harm has shifted.



## Racial Justice Uprisings

Black people looked with exasperation at the continued murders of our people. Since 2015 alone, law enforcement has killed 26 Black people in our state.<sup>8</sup> We responded by organizing, finding ways to keep one another safe, and continuing to demand justice. We formed new coalitions, advocated for our public safety, and got important laws passed.

## A Global Pandemic

In 2020, COVID became a new reality for us. COVID data, like many other data sets, show that Black people continue to be disproportionately harmed.<sup>9</sup> We felt those impacts most harshly on our physical health, jobs, housing, education, and mental health — all the result of systems that have not produced well-being for us. Yet, we mobilized to form mutual aid networks, advocated for more services, and did for each other what our systems did not.

## The Political Landscape

Nationally, we've had many shifts in the political landscape. The 2016 presidential election and resulting political action drew so much of our attention. Most recently, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* will impact Black women greatly as we represent four of 10 abortions in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> Locally, we began redistricting — a process to create new political boundaries, changing who votes for which people and laws in a district. Washington voters haven't passed important measures like Referendum 88 on affirmative action, which impacts Black people across experiences in education, health, economics, and more.<sup>11</sup>



## Workforce Shifts

Following the onset of the pandemic, people have and continue to quit their jobs in record numbers.<sup>12</sup> Black people are over-represented in industries where people are traditionally overworked and underpaid. For those able to work from home, a reduction in the emotional labor and the ability to be with family have been a welcome change for many. Many Black-led organizations are shifting work practices to support the well-being of both the organization and the people who work there. This includes raising salaries to a living wage for all staff,<sup>13</sup> moving to four-day work weeks,<sup>14</sup> encouraging rest and sabbaticals,<sup>15</sup> and shifting leadership models to that of shared leadership.<sup>16</sup>

## Key Metrics That Have Moved Since 2015

Category	State (2015)	Black (2015)	State (2020)	Black (2020)
↑ Percent of people with health insurance <sup>17</sup>	94.2%	89.7%	93.9%	93%
↑ Household median networth (2011 compared to 2017) <sup>18</sup>	\$68,828	\$6,314	\$104,000	\$9,567
↑ Household median income <sup>19</sup>	\$58,405	\$40,760	\$78,687	\$56,250
↓ Home ownership – live in a household that owns a home <sup>20</sup>	63%	35%	63%	31%
↑ Percentage of children ready for kindergarten <sup>21</sup>	41%	39%	52%	44%
↑ Percentage of students meeting 8th grade math standards <sup>22</sup>	56%	34%	72%	47%
↑ Percentage of students graduating from high school on time <sup>23</sup>	76%	65%	83%	76.3%
↓ Average cost of attending Washington's public 4-year universities as a share of median household income <sup>24</sup>	42%	61%	32%	44.5%
↑ Number of representatives in the legislature <sup>25</sup>		1 in 147		10 in 147

*While some metrics have improved in comparison to 2015, the gap between us and everyone else has not improved because the social structures and systems in which we participate – housing, transportation, legal, education, employment – are relatively unchanged.*

These data are an entry point to explore the five focus areas of the report: civic engagement, education, economic mobility, public safety and health. For ease of understanding, we organized the report in sections by topic, but each area of the report builds on the others. The conversations and community wisdom that informed the report reflected a clear understanding that the outcomes we see in the table above are the product of intersecting root causes. Those root causes operate on individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and structural levels and function across sectors. As you read, we hope you hold multiple truths at the same time and are able to see the interconnected nature of the contextual factors raised and the community identified approaches offered.







# Civic Engagement



... is defined as individual or collective actions designed to identify and address the issues we care about.<sup>26</sup> It's how we act about the issues that matter. Usually, we think about civic engagement as political systems, voting, or elected positions. But there are both formal (government and political systems) and informal (movements and organized community action) ways to influence policies and laws, the rules that shape our world. Civics is engaging in our community. It isn't just the legislative system, it's school boards, churches, and mutual aid.

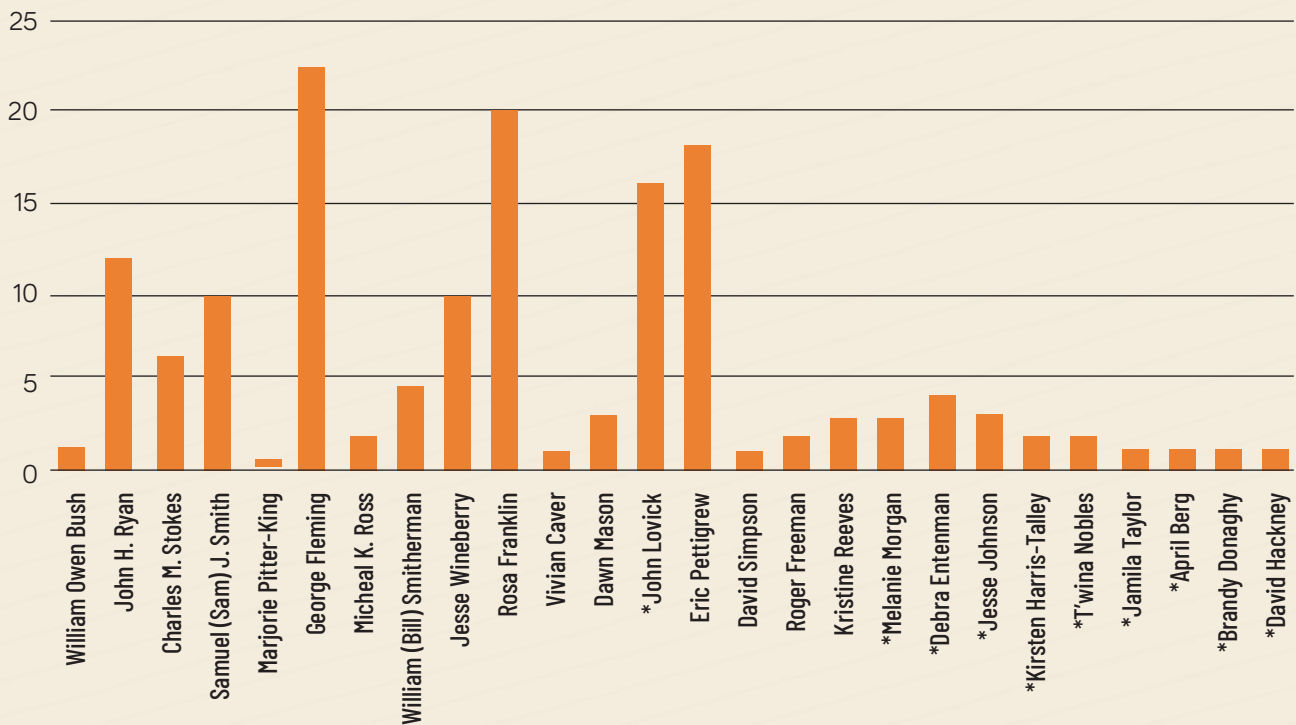
## Contextual Factors Related to Civic Engagement

### Who has a seat at the table

The conversation about a “seat at the table” has shifted dramatically. Among various tactics, polls show that working to get more Black people elected has been viewed as a less effective strategy to achieve equality.<sup>27</sup> The reality is, representation matters, but it does not function alone — the social and political environment impacts what is possible.

For generations, we’ve worked to influence fellow decision-makers with reason, empathy, and proximity. We’ve focused on representation — Black voting rights and positioning Black political leaders. Representation can be an important way to have our needs raised and advocated for in the legislature. In 2022, we have eight representatives and two senators, more Black legislators in office at the same time than we’ve ever had in the history of the state.<sup>28</sup>

Washington State’s Black Legislators’ Time In Office <sup>29</sup>



\*Indicates legislators in office through 2022.

### Whose voices are heard

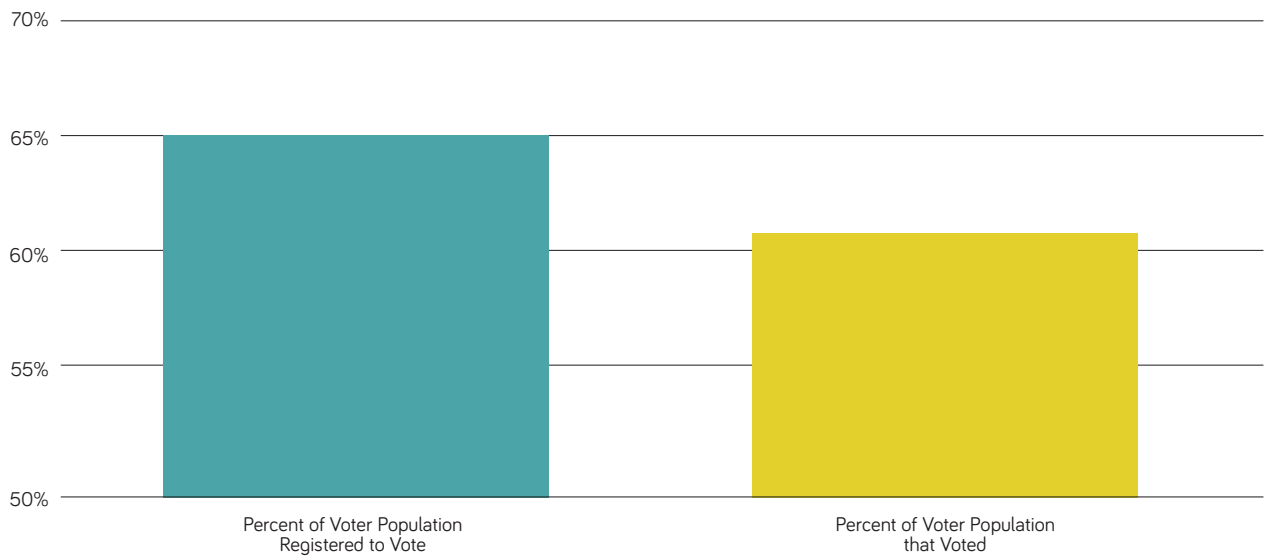
From 2015 to 2020, the percentage of Black Washingtonians who were registered to vote decreased by 3%. Still, Black people were the highest percentage of registered voters among other people of color at 65%.<sup>30</sup> Of that number, 61% voted in the 2020 elections.<sup>31</sup> And in 2021, the Voting Rights Restoration bill (HB 1078) passed, restoring voting rights to people convicted of a felony who are not serving a sentence in total confinement,<sup>32</sup> increasing the number of Black voters.<sup>33</sup>

A 2022 audit by the Office of the State Auditor “discovered that the votes of Black residents were rejected four times more often than white voters. The main reason was problematic signatures, which disqualified one out of every 40 mail-in votes from Black residents. Overall, 29,000 ballots were rejected for signature problems.”<sup>34</sup>

Despite the perception that young people don't vote, young people stepped up to vote in recent federal election years. In King County alone, voter turnout for 18- to 24-year-olds was 65.5% in 2016 and grew to 77.4% in 2020.<sup>35</sup>



Percentages of Black Voting Age Population (2020)

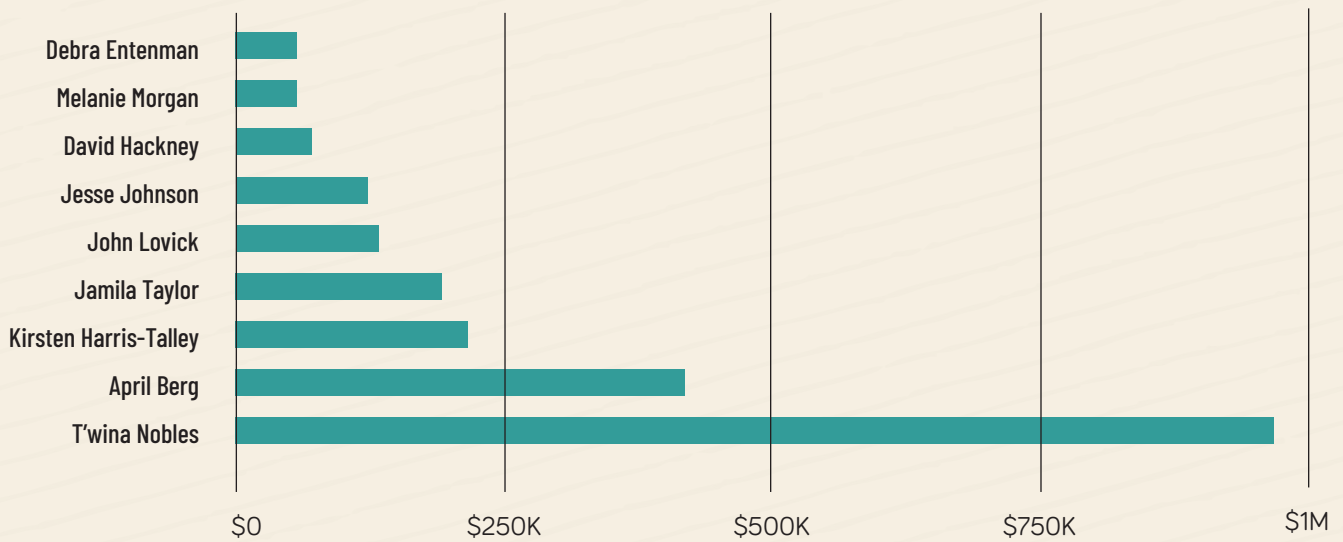


Source: [www.kff.org/state-indicator/voting-and-voter-registration-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population-by](http://www.kff.org/state-indicator/voting-and-voter-registration-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population-by)

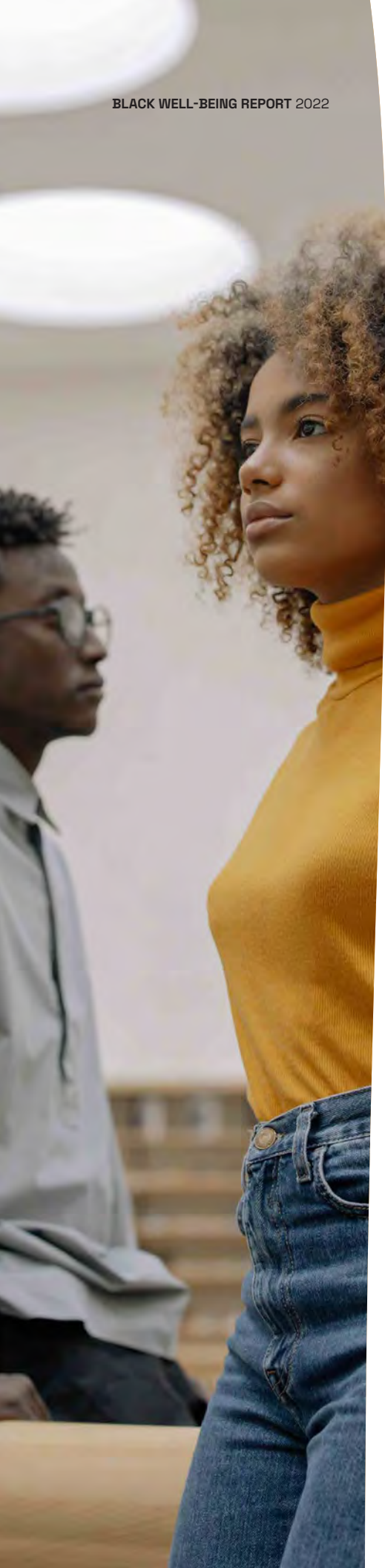
### The price of admission

Today we're clear — representation is necessary, but alone will not get us to change. The 2015 report talked about how wealth inequality shapes who gets voted in and what they are “allowed” to vote for. The barriers for working class people to enter politics are not new and are not unintentional.<sup>36</sup> Originally designed for the agricultural worker who had the resources to travel, the way our legislature works needs to shift to include participation from today's working class people. The typical salary for a legislator is \$57,876.<sup>37</sup> The average campaign in Washington state costs \$87,634.<sup>38</sup> For Black candidates, in 2020, it looked like this:

Campaign Spending by Black Legislator in 2020 Washington State Election <sup>39</sup>



Once elected, we are pressured to make “necessary” compromises for the promise of change a later day. When we don't compromise, there are consequences. Systems of oppression have always required complicity. Leaders who step outside of party lines are silenced, and as history goes, often by our own — a practice that is as old as slavery and colonization itself. The transactional nature of politics is dehumanizing. The hours are grueling. During the legislative session, it is not uncommon to work 20 hours a day. And the working norms are rooted in whiteness — urgency, perfectionism, not showing emotion, written word over everything, paternalism, and fear of conflict.<sup>40</sup> Holding a role within politics or government is not a job that can be done in isolation. We must work side-by-side to make change with our communities, or we risk our legislators becoming unaccountable gatekeepers who unintentionally cause harm.<sup>41</sup>



### **Inadequate civics education**

Ensuring we all understand civics, how society functions, and our political system has not been a high priority within school districts or our political system. Until the 2020-21 school year, Washington state was one of 11 states that did not require a stand-alone K-12 civics class.<sup>42</sup> As with all curriculum, districts are free to create their own as long as they meet Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)'s content standards. Despite a lack of systemwide implementation, there are examples within Seattle and Spokane school districts of civics classes that are interdisciplinary, racially inclusive, and hands-on.<sup>43</sup>

### **Community demystifying civics**

To change our society, we must help each other make the connection between civics, politics, and people's everyday experiences. Today, we are stepping up to educate our own community. And it isn't majoritively schools, politicians, or government employees creating accessible spaces for learning. It is Black journalists, writers, radio hosts, religious leaders, barbers, artists, teachers, actors, tiktokers, dancers, and athletes who are speaking up about the issues and creating space for discourse. Powerful Black-led coalitions and initiatives like the Washington Build Back Black Alliance, Washington Community Alliance, Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance, and King County Equity Now have been formed. They are moving forward policy agendas that speak to a vision of Black well-being with a focus on educating people and mobilizing them to act.

### **Social change has and always will take all of us**

Social change will take all of us recognizing and activating our personal power in the spaces we occupy — on the job, in community spaces, and with our loved ones. It has been those of us willing to accept the risks of truth telling, and usually outside of the political system, who have shifted the ways we understand what is possible and build the courage to demand it. None of the Black people referenced in mainstream historical accounts acted alone, despite what we are told. Throughout history, Black people — especially queer, disabled, women — have organized, acted, and inspired to shift the reality of our lived experience.

## Community Identified Approaches to Civic Engagement

We continue to grow wiser in this moment, having learned from our ancestors — living and passed. We're moving more boldly toward creating the world we want to see: exercising individual and collective power, stepping into our joy, having time to be and rest so that we heal and dream, and listening, learning, and organizing intergenerationally with attention to healthy interdependence.

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### Interrogate and shift harmful narratives

"A Color Of Change and Family Story study finds that Black families represent 59% of stories about poverty in news and opinion outlets like CNN and Fox News — even though they make up just 27% of poor families in the country," according to Media 2070. In a society where you can pay to have the microphone, looking at how thought is shaped, our own and that of the collective, is an important starting place. The information we receive has an impact on how we feel about what changes are possible through the vehicle of civic engagement.

- Learn to identify anti-Black narratives; start with understanding history.
- Get curious about the information you receive. Who wrote it, what's their motivation, where'd they get their information, how are Black people characterized, what aren't they saying?
- Invest in and elevate Black-led media and media makers.
- Fund communications work for Black-led organizations.
- Hold media outlets and institutions accountable for narratives that harm Black people.
- Put Black people in senior leadership roles.

### Stop looking to a small handful of Black leaders to represent us

We're moving away from the narrative that one or two leaders are positioned to "save" us. Many of us work within these systems, where the unspoken way to get ahead is not to challenge the way things are done. We put our head down, do our jobs, don't rock the boat, focus on getting our paycheck, and go home. How much of this is born from trauma and rooted in survival? How are our decisions on the job rooted in trauma? How willing are we to disentangle ourselves from it?

- Refuse to be tokenized. Assess what power you have to make decisions. Make it a requirement of your presence that more of us stand beside you.
- Stop tokenizing Black people.
- Resource Black communities to participate in civics as a form of repair.
- Create and fund ongoing, community-designed spaces for dialogue.
- Pay attention to unintentionally causing harm and practice repairing relationships.
- Define, seek out, and practice accountability.

### Increase and enhance civic readiness

Youth have always been catalysts of change, today is no different. And their feelings about civics are shaped early. Beyond reading, writing, math, and science, our youth should understand the dynamics of power and how it is expressed through laws and policy. Formal education is only one way we learn. We want forums, spaces, and organic opportunities for conversation for and by Black people to learn about the ideas on which people are acting.

- Prioritize intergenerational dialogue about civics, starting at the earliest of ages.
- Utilize integrated curricula that connect the “issues” to a person’s everyday life.
- Rework the curriculum in all educational spaces to include hands-on, racially attuned learning about how societies are constructed and shaped.
- Teach the totality of Black history from Black perspectives.
- Invest in community-led spaces to discuss politics: places of worship, schools, dinner parties, community organizations and centers, and block parties.

### Center the arts because they are foundational to civic engagement and therefore social change

Art is essential to our being. It’s an important way for us to make sense of the world and express ideas and concepts that have yet to conjure words. It is the language of evolution and self actualization, bringing together all our senses, including our intuition. We need the holders and shapers of culture to successfully move anything strategically.

- Pay Black artists well. On top of already low pay, during the pandemic, they were hit especially hard.
- Make sure artists retain rights to their work.
- Seek out artists early to shape strategy work — as the saying goes, culture eats strategy for breakfast.
- Bring arts back to educational, healing, civic, and work spaces.

### Community plans and leads, governments and systems fund our plans

Much research has studied the limited effectiveness of solutions born from government agencies. It isn’t only that we often are not represented at the decision-making tables, it’s also that government structures are not conducive to making effective decisions. They are siloed and force solutions into funding boxes that usually aren’t tailored to community needs and result in inflexible tools or programming to get the job done.

- Fund community to organize, plan, and architect the solutions.
- Re-envision governments and large institutions’ roles in implementing community-directed strategies.
- Break down silos and work across systems.
- Build timelines and write contracts that speak to the capacity and strengths of organizations.







# Education



The education Black children receive is, by necessity, in two parts: in formal educational settings like schools and at home. Our education should lead us to a fulfilling career and the freedom to live our lives. Seven months into the pandemic, statewide enrollment in the public K-12 system dropped by 40,000 students.<sup>44</sup> Even with a return to in-person schooling, it still has not returned to previous levels. The discussion around educating Black children is evolving. Black parents may be exploring options outside the public school system. They are looking for different avenues that help their children think critically about the world and move steadily toward self-actualization.

## Contextual to Factors Related to Education

### The cost of quality early learning and child care

Brain science aligns with what we already know: investing in quality early learning from birth to three years old is critical to children’s development.<sup>45</sup> In the U.S., parents — a child’s most important teacher — are forced to choose between time with our children and employment income. Child care is so expensive that it can be more cost effective for a parent to quit their job and stay home, especially if a child has a disability or needs additional support.

The U.S. is one of seven countries in the world without federal paid parental leave.<sup>46</sup> Nationally, only 4% of employers offer subsidized

child care.<sup>47</sup> Despite Washington being one of a few states that offers 12 weeks of paid parental leave, for most families, it isn’t enough to spend the time we need with our children in those critical early years. Washington’s Fair Start for Kids Act is a good beginning to taking care of families.<sup>48</sup> Passed in 2021, it reduces child care co-pays and expands eligibility and services for those at 60% of the state median income, which is \$3,677 per month (or \$44,124 per year) for a family of two.<sup>49</sup> That still leaves many Black families in a financial quandary as the median household income for Black families in Washington state is \$56,250.<sup>50</sup>

Child Care as a Share of Black Median Household Income

	Child Care (Per Infant)*	Child Care (Per 4-year-old)*
Costs	\$14,554	\$11,051
Percentage of Black Median Household Income (\$56,250)**	25.9%	19.6%

\*EPI, October 2020. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/WA>

\*\*Washington State Budget & Policy Center analysis of 2014-2019 American Community Survey Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series ([www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org))

### Public school funding structures benefit the already resourced

In Washington state, 50,716 Black children were enrolled in K-12 grade levels in public school for the 2021-22 school year. In 2020, there were 52,284 Black children ages 5-17 total in our state.<sup>51</sup> The average per child cost for the 2019-20 school year in Washington was \$17,082.<sup>52</sup> However, this amount does not include additional funds that are raised and spent by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), which vary based on the wealth of parents in the district.

Despite racial segregation being illegal, public schools still effectively offer segregated educational experiences for the majority of Black children. Funding for public schools is tied to property taxes.<sup>53</sup> Those taxes are based on the assessed value of homes in the area. Racist practices like redlining and restrictive covenants have impacted

both who lives where and how much money a school district has to spend. In 2018, wealthier school districts received 7.6% more funding than high-poverty districts due to inequitable funding structures.<sup>54</sup> A recent study shows that students exposed to an increase of at least 10% in school funding each year (K-3) experienced a 2% reduction in the likelihood of being arrested as an adult.<sup>55</sup> Schools with higher poverty levels are also more likely to see teacher turnover.<sup>56</sup>

Alignment with stated values of equity would mean putting more resources where they are needed most. When schools lack services, opportunities, and maintained buildings, it speaks volumes to our children about how much they’re valued. This is something parents then must work overtime to address at home.

### Cost of higher education

In 2019, 60% of Black students in the state moved immediately from high school to college, up from 2015.<sup>57</sup> Since the pandemic, that number has likely declined. More and more, the idea that we all need a college education is being questioned. Once young people are ready for post-secondary education, the cost of college and the debt incurred is a deterrent and stalls economic mobility. Since 1980, the cost to attend a four-year college has increased by 180%.<sup>58</sup> There's also the emotional and psychological cost when attending a predominantly white institution. Racist experiences in schools erode Black students' well-being, bringing up feelings of anger, loneliness, social isolation, and invisibility.<sup>59</sup> Beyond higher education, other avenues exist to the careers we want to be in, including the trades.

*Higher education takes 45% of the income of an average Black household in Washington, down from 61% in 2015.<sup>60</sup>*



*In 2020-21 school year, 1.5% of Washington's teachers were Black.<sup>62</sup>*

### Who is teaching our children and youth

White educators made up approximately 88% of classroom teachers statewide during the 2018-19 school year, while white students and students of color made up 53% and 47% respectively of Washington's student population.<sup>61</sup> In the 2020-21 school year, just 1.5% of Washington's teachers were Black.<sup>62</sup>

For Black children, having teachers who look like them matters immensely. Black students who had at least one Black teacher in grades K-3 were 13% more likely to graduate from high school and 19% more likely to enroll in college than their same-school, same-race peers. Males and students in relatively disadvantaged schools would gain the most from having a same-race teacher.<sup>63</sup>

In a state that is still majority white, it is critical that white students have early and often experiences in which Black people are in positions of power. These are important opportunities to disrupt racism at a young age.



### **Eurocentric approaches to education**

In addition to representation, Black teachers bring their lived, racialized experience with them to the classroom — and to the curriculum. Young Black folks and their families are taking a critical look at the curriculum schools are teaching. In addition to curricula, eurocentric teaching methods inhibit the ability of students to learn and demonstrate mastery in a multitude of ways and on their own time.<sup>64</sup>

Practices that incorporate experiential learning, figurative and symbolic learning, and direct engagement through interaction open possibilities for students to excel.

“When Black students don’t see themselves in the curriculum at school — when they don’t see themselves as respected and important — they can rightfully feel alienated and disengaged.”<sup>65</sup>

In 2019, the state legislature mandated that OSPI create an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee to identify and make available ethnic studies materials and resources for use in grades K-12. The nuance: It remains optional for graduation. Each school district, in coordination with schools, families, and community-based organizations can determine what ethnic studies material is taught and when it is taught at the district level.<sup>66</sup>

House Bill 1149 was introduced to the Washington House of Representatives in 2021 with the goal to expand learning about social determinants of health, healthy community building, and baseline understanding of public health, but it did not pass.<sup>67</sup>

*“When Black students don’t see themselves in the curriculum at school — when they don’t see themselves as respected and important — they can rightfully feel alienated and disengaged.”<sup>65</sup>*

### Implicit bias of teachers and administrators

We are grateful for the wisdom, strength, and resolve of Black students turned organizers who are calling attention to how racism in the learning environment actively impacts racism in their field, whether it be policy, health care, education, or urban planning. Protest at the earliest of ages looks like defiance and disconnection, which is likely met with some form of punishment. The culture of compliance within schools needs to transform to one of belonging.

Discipline data are counted by unduplicated student disciplinary action measures. In the 2019-20 school year, 5% of Black students were disciplined. This is a significant drop from the 2015 report; however, this is most likely due to the pandemic, where discipline rates dropped for every racial group. In the 2018-19 school year, 8.2% of Black students were suspended or expelled. Discipline starts with teachers. Black teachers are more likely to believe in Black children's ability to succeed, and respond accordingly. They are also less likely to view Black students' behavior as disruptive.<sup>68</sup>

### Washington's Schools Suspend Students at Different Rates

Washington state has worked to reduce disparities in school discipline rates among different groups of students. Still, schools were doling out short-term suspensions to Black, homeless, and Native students, and students with disabilities at significantly higher rates than their peers.

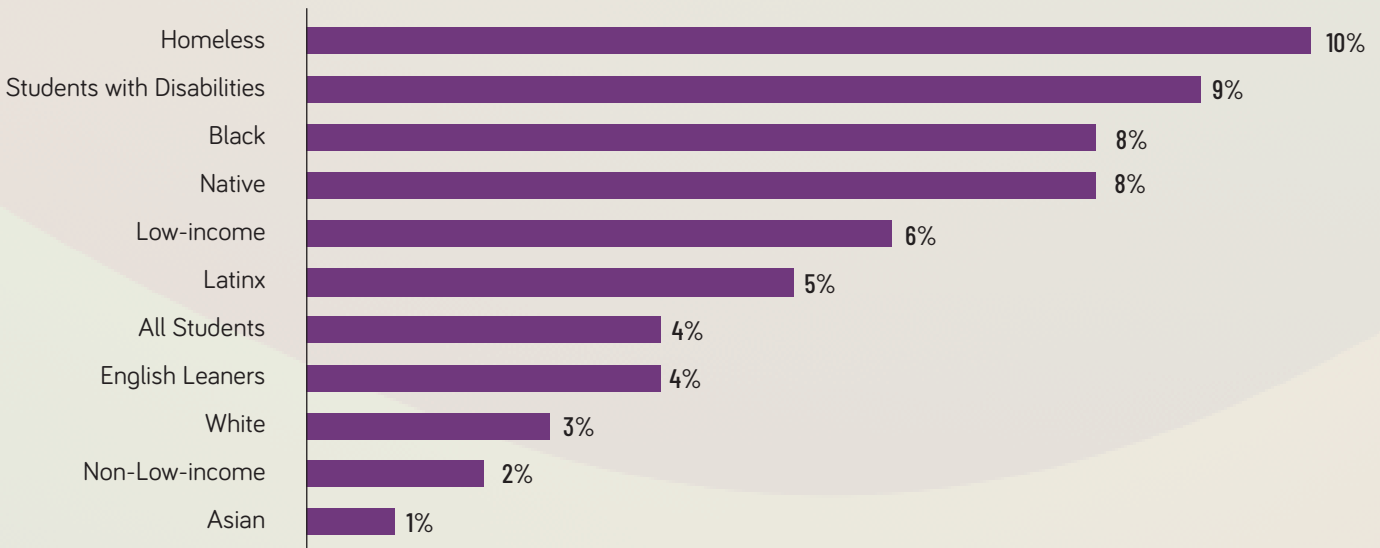


Chart: Lauren Flannery / The Seattle Times - Source: The Education Trust; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Discipline Rates, 2019

## Community Identified Approaches to Education

There is no one vision of education in which every detail is the same for every student. We want different approaches because we have a diversity of brilliance and creativity. In the end, we all envision rich, integrated educational spaces that teach students how to grow into themselves and shape a better society. Education that is interactive, hands on, and culturally relevant.

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### **Fund the Black community to plan how we want our education systems to function**

We want planning dollars so we can create the time for families to get precise about what we want and how to get there.

- Fund community to envision the types of organizations we want in a world that produces well-being, the positions needed in those organizations, and the skillsets required to do a good job.
- Center the right voices and expertise at the right time, providing income for community-led strategy and planning work.
- Design regular, accessible spaces for administrators to plan with Black families. School board meetings are still highly inaccessible to most families.
- Gather systemwide data that speaks to decision points within education systems.

### **Utilize mastery- or competency-based learning toward self-actualization**

Learning spaces across the lifespan would nurture our creativity using mastery- or competency-based learning models, allowing students to lean into their strengths and master things on their own time using a lens of targeted universalism.<sup>69</sup>

- Provide money up front for learners who require additional tools to get where they want to go.
- Select and design curriculum with the input of Black students to create the jobs of tomorrow.
- Integrate education with the world that exists outside of the school walls in order to achieve mastery that is real-world applicable.
- Better integrate community involvement, health, civics, arts, and food systems.

### **Redefine academic standards to cultivate Black brilliance**

Academic standards and related assessments should speak to our different gifts and contributions we bring to the world.

- Shift the focus of evaluation more toward the system than students.
- Disaggregate system data to get to targeted universalism.
- Make better use of the data that's already there such as entry assessments to inform teaching.
- Redefine assessment standards. Standardized tests have a racist history.<sup>70</sup>
- Create shared definitions of what mastery looks like with a baseline belief in the ability of Black students to succeed, honoring their uniqueness and dignity.

### **Cultivate loving interactions within the education ecosystem**

Nurture our humanity and honor our dignity from the earliest of ages. Ensure the norms, culture, structures, and policies across the education ecosystem foster love, rather than perpetuate trauma.

- Tend to the social-emotional environment of the system: interactions between educators and administrators, educators and students, and educators and themselves.
- Provide teachers the adequate support to grow, self-regulate, and set boundaries.
- Create new norms and new organizational cultures rooted in belonging, and set an expectation for continued healing, self-reflection, and love.
- Fund the people and programs that facilitate healing in the learning environment.

### **Create practices of accountability and transparency at all levels of decision making**

We want clear and meaningful accountability at every level, tailored specifically to the scope of decision making and authority of that role.

- Be willing to admit when a strategy won't work as well as you thought it might.
- Connect administrative leadership pay to performance outcomes.
- Test and purposefully align strategies to contribute to district, state, and community-directed outcomes, before implementing schoolwide plans.
- Create a connected cross-sector network of partners from K-12 to higher education.
- Map out how all partner agencies — public health, housing authorities, transportation, etc. — are working collectively to support our children, rather than each agency having separate plans.
- Ensure families, broader community, incoming staff, and faculty are able to understand and follow decision-making processes.
- Create a process beyond school board meetings for community dialogue (not just feedback) that enables everyone to understand how a policy is working in real time and allows everyone to shift in the moment in response to what is happening.
- Better utilize ombudsman-type processes to evaluate classroom exclusion and reentry.

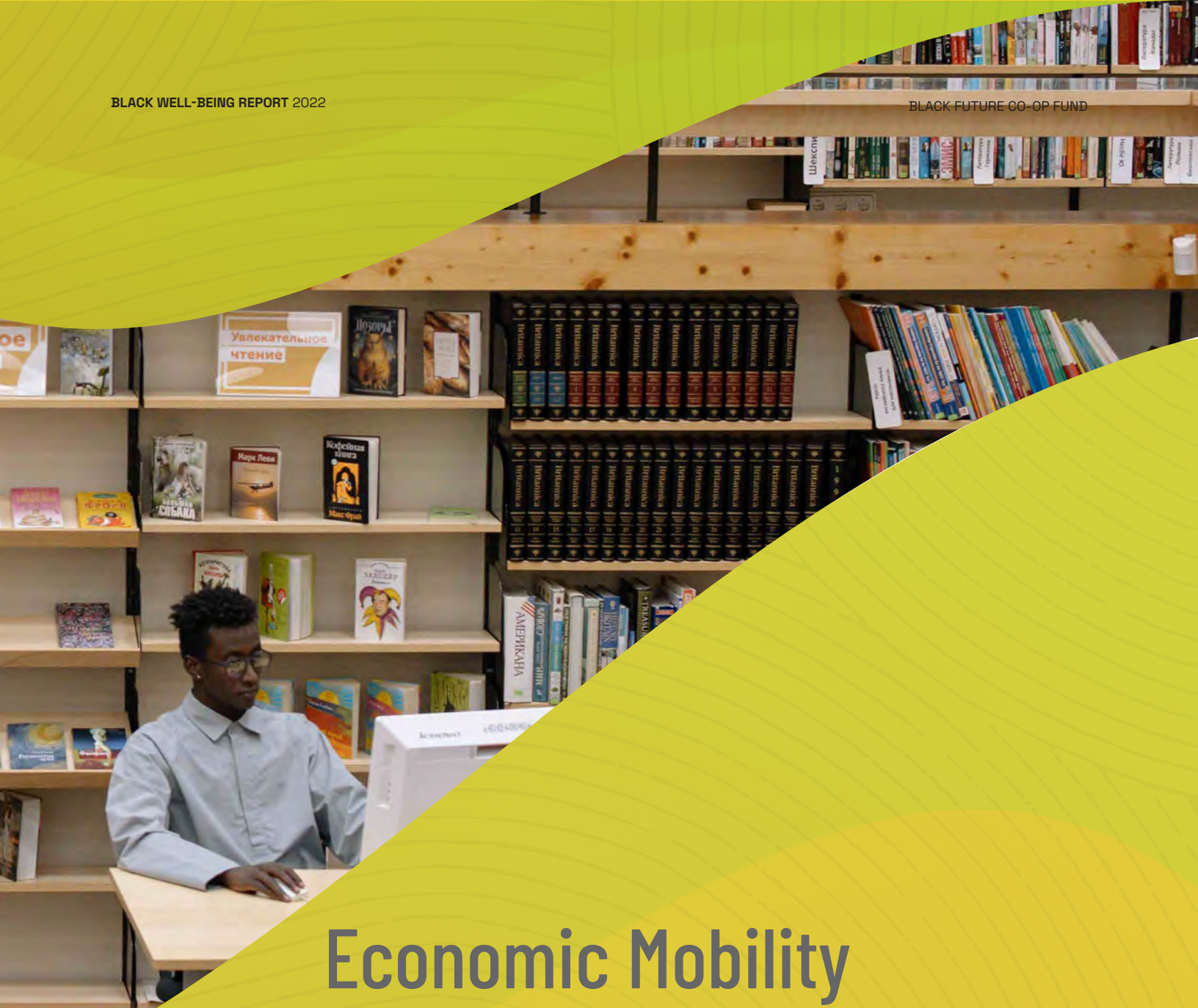
### **Revisit job descriptions and organizational structures, and diversify the workforce**

To cultivate a generation that will create the jobs of tomorrow, we want to look with fresh eyes at the workforce.

- Assess and rework policies and collective bargaining agreements to better align with our goals.
- Outline creative pathways to our future workforce with Black youth at the center.
- Address pay equity for teachers and offer more paid teacher residencies.
- Define clear roles across the educational system and balance workloads to consider emotional labor.
- Place teachers with specific skills and lived experiences to strategically support the students in that school.
- Set expectations that schools hire racially and gender diverse teachers and pay them well.







# Economic Mobility



... is defined as our ability to access more resources over time.<sup>71</sup> It is the likelihood that children can have a higher standard of living than they grew up having. Those numbers are different based on the neighborhood(s) you grew up in, your race, and your gender. Because this country was founded on dehumanizing us to extract our wealth, income, and labor, a structural wealth gap remains despite any advances we're making around income or homeownership.

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## Contextual Factors Related to Economic Mobility

### What we believe to be true

Narratives about money and our personal value are as old as slavery and colonization, propping up systems of injustice and inherently devaluing the very people and land that feed, heal, house, care for, and protect us. In the absence of reparations and the presence of narratives swirling about working harder, hustle culture has become a survival strategy. People are not poor because they are lazy. In 2019, more than 23% of families in Washington weren't paid enough to make more than 200% of the federal poverty level, which is an outdated measure of basic needs.<sup>72</sup> Many of us are exhausted, underpaid, and overburdened because our society was not set up for us to succeed.

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### Reparations and closing the structural gap

Recent research shows that even if the conditions for building wealth, like equal pay, access to capital, healthy housing, and education, were the same for Black people and white people from 1870 to 2020, white households would still have three times as much wealth as Black households. It would take 200 more years, until 2220, to achieve equal wealth under those same conditions.<sup>73</sup> We haven't even started the clock. Reparations are an essential component to closing the gap.



### How much things cost

We know that building wealth is not only about increasing our income. Structural racism, as an unspoken foundational design aspect of our social structures, results in us paying a larger share of our income for most things.<sup>74</sup>

### The cost of housing is higher

You would need an annual household income of \$60,966 to afford a two-bedroom rental home using Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Fair Market Rent in Washington, which is roughly \$4,000 higher than the Black median household income of \$56,250.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, under the 2020 state minimum wage of \$13.69, you would need to work 86 hours per week at minimum wage or 2.1 full time jobs to afford a two-bedroom rental home. Washington state recently increased the minimum wage to \$14.49.

**Cost of Housing Compared to Black Median Household Income in Washington\***

	Fair Market Value of a 2-Bedroom Apartment (Monthly)	Income Needed to Afford a Fair Market Value 2-Bedroom Apartment (Annual)	Statewide Black Median Household Income (2019)	County Annual Income Needed as a Percent of Black Median Household Income
King County	\$1,906	\$76,240	\$56,250	136%
Pierce County	\$1,461	\$58,440	\$56,250	104%
Snohomish County	\$1,906	\$76,240	\$56,250	136%
Clark County	\$1,536	\$61,440	\$56,250	109%
Spokane County	\$1,007	\$40,280	\$56,250	72%

\*Source: Numbers are from Out of Reach Report 2021: Washington. <https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/files/reports/state/wa-2021-oor.pdf>

**Interest rates are also higher**

When we are able to acquire loans, we are charged higher interest rates. There is a history of Black women getting the highest interest rates for home loans across all racial categories.<sup>76</sup> And lenders have a high mortgage denial rate when it comes to Black people overall.<sup>77</sup> Nationally, 32% of Black people live in homes where a Black woman is the head of the household.<sup>78</sup>

**We spend a lot of time in transit**

The average commute time in Washington state is 27.6 minutes, higher than the national average.<sup>79</sup> That does not account for people using public transit. Due to the impacts of displacement, we live further away from jobs, grocery stores, affordable child care, health care, and each other. So, we spend more money and time to get there. In the Seattle area, Black residents spend 18 more hours each year commuting than white residents, and double that to 36 hours more for Black residents with low incomes.<sup>80</sup>

**Food costs a lot**

Today, 19% of Black people across the state are food insecure, 5% more than the general population.<sup>81</sup> At one point in July during the pandemic, that statewide number jumped to 51%.<sup>82</sup> Approximately two out of every five Black households experience food insecurity in King County. Between 2020 and 2021, food prices went up 3.4%, more than it has since 2011, and the increases appear as though they'll continue.<sup>83</sup>

**Healthcare costs and medical debt**

The average American family spends around 11% of household income on health care premiums and out-of-pocket costs, but that amount approaches 20% for African American households.<sup>84</sup> Today, 93% of Black Washingtonians have health insurance. In 2019, 34% of Washingtonians enrolled in Medicaid were Black, limiting the types and number of providers we can access.<sup>85</sup>

Our healthcare systems effectively send the message that your health care is only important if you can produce. And when we're sick, this translates into medical debt. Over 27% of Black people in America carry medical debt and 6.2% of those people's debt is more than 20% of their yearly income.<sup>86</sup> Just this year, state legislation (SHB 1616) was passed to minimize medical debt. It expands charity care eligibility to 1 million Washingtonians, and guarantees free hospital care to an additional 1 million Washingtonians who are currently eligible for discounted care.<sup>87</sup>

### College debt

From 2011 to 2021, the percentage of Black students with a bachelor's degree increased from 19.9% to 21.8%.<sup>88</sup> But four years after graduation, as interest accumulates, the average amount of college debt for Black students is \$52,762, almost twice as much as white graduates.<sup>89</sup> Without the burden of student loans, it is estimated that Black wealth would increase substantially.<sup>90</sup>



### Who gets hired for the "good" jobs

Data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission shows that of the roughly 900,000 people holding top-paying jobs across the country, about 3% were Black, even though we make up 13% of the population. Racist recruiting, hiring, and retention practices have ensured segregation continues in the workplace, resulting in continued wage discrimination. It does not take long to see how history has replicated itself ensuring that white people, especially white men, continue to be overpaid and overrepresented in decision-making spaces. In research that examined 300 public corporations that had the lowest median wages in 2020, not only did median worker wages not match increases in inflation at more than 30% of corporations, CEO pay increased from an average of \$2.5 million to an average of \$10.6 million, while median worker pay increased \$3,556 to an average of \$23,968.<sup>91</sup>

Employers are still screening people out based on their involvement with the legal system or lack of a college degree — two places there's plenty of data illustrating the racist institutional practices that make up the school to prison pipeline. We are familiar with the old narrative that employers just can't find qualified candidates. It is simply not true. The data show subjective hiring practices that reinforce racial bias.<sup>92</sup>

### Racism in the workplace and promotions

Employment practices, like looking for “cultural fit,” continue to produce racist outcomes. In 2021, Equality in Tech found 57% of Black technologists reported experiences of racial discrimination, up from 55% in 2020. This contributes to another trend: 39% of Black tech workers are considering switching employers. The top reasons given are more responsibility/greater professional development and better working conditions.<sup>93</sup>

Hiring more Black employees is one thing, making sure the company’s culture is intentional about including Black people in how they promote and grow talent within the organization is another. Few

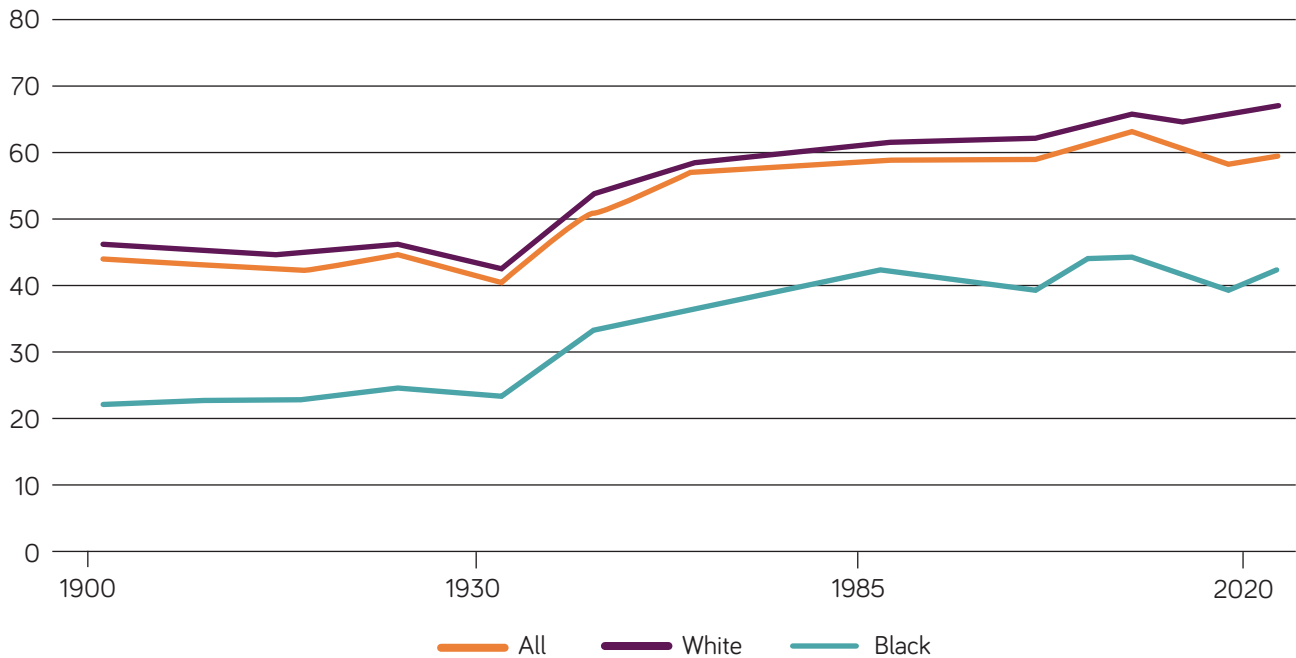
employers are actively reviewing and transparently reporting on pay and promotion by race and gender — two long entrenched gaps that greatly impact economic mobility for Black people.

In jobs that pay more than \$100,000 per year, Black women represent just 2.7%.<sup>94</sup> In addition, we are frequently put in positions that demand our assimilation.<sup>95</sup> Silenced by the perceived threat of being fired, not promoted, or retaliated against, many of us are reluctant to rock the boat and experience increased anxiety and depression as a result.<sup>96</sup>

### Owning a home or residential property

Housing equity makes up nearly 60% of total net worth for Black homeowners.<sup>97</sup> In 2020, the percentage of Black homeowners statewide was 34%, still lower than the statewide average of 63.3% and the national average of Black homeownership of 43.4%.<sup>98</sup> For reference, in Seattle in the 1930s, that number was 39% for Black people<sup>99</sup> and in 2019 was 25.8%.<sup>100</sup>

Homeownership Rates by Race from 1900-2020



\*\* Source: 1900-1990 Data provided by U.S. Census Decennial Survey. More details 1995-2010 and Q12015 data was provided by the Census Bureau’s Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Survey. 2020 and future projections provided by Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard. Calculations conducted by Richardson, J. and Mitchell, B. of NCRC Research team.

Black homeowners must contend with the legacy of redlining, mortgage steering, biased appraisals, denied loan applications, higher interest rates, and more expensive, risk-laden loans. The net effect of higher interest rates, less favorable financial products, and lower assessed values means we go into more debt for less of a return. In Washington state, the assessor’s office has increased the value of some Black homes, but for now, the net effect of that means higher property taxes, further decreasing the amount of our disposable income. In Kent, property taxes increased 12.96%, and in Tukwila 15.14%, the highest increase in King County.<sup>101</sup> In most cases, homeownership is the primary way wealth is passed down.<sup>88</sup> The Black Homeownership Initiative has laid out a clear seven point plan to increase Black homeownership in the region.<sup>102</sup>

**Access to business capital**

Today Black people make up 12.4% of the U.S., yet in 2019 Black businesses represented 2.3% of all employers, employing 1.3 million people.<sup>103</sup> Often in addition to working a full-time job, many of us own a side business, or two, or three. Nationally, Black folks make up 11.8% of non-employer businesses.

**Business Representation by Race/Ethnicity Group**

Race/Ethnicity Group	% Population	% Employer	% Non-employer Business
White	75.3%	83.5%	77.2%
Black	14.0%	2.3%	11.8%
Asian	6.6%	10.1%	7.8%
Latino or Hispanic	18%	6%	14.7%
Other	7.6%	0.6%	0.5%

Notes: Race groups include those who identify with more than one race.  
 Source: Brookings Metro. Data for population and employer business are for 2019 (from 2019 ACS and 2020 ABS) and the data for nonemployer firms are for 2018 (most NESD data)

And getting there is no small task. The capital and knowledge needed must be sought out and that takes time, trial, and error — further complicated by racial bias of the people making decisions. In 2020, 92% of Black business owners reported experiencing a financial challenge. Black small business owners were also the most likely to experience difficulty accessing credit (53%) and the most likely to tap into personal funds (74%).<sup>104</sup>

Banks and lending institutions continue their centuries long racist practices, denying Black loan applications and the capital needed to start and sustain the businesses we’re building. During the pandemic, paycheck protection program (PPP) loans for Black-owned businesses were received later and were substantially less than white-owned businesses.<sup>105</sup> The PPP system was built on the banking system, which purposefully underserved the Black community. Black businesses had better chances for financial services with non-mainstream banks. Although Black businesses were hit particularly hard by the pandemic, there has been a substantial surge of new Black businesses — making up 26% of all new businesses, which is 9% more than pre-pandemic.<sup>106</sup>

In Washington state, during testimony for initiatives and legislation around I-200, elected officials pointed to state analysis that demonstrated a significant decrease in state spending on contracts with minority and women owned businesses and contractors 1998 and 2017.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, the number of certified firms declined by half. If the rate of spending stayed the same as before I-200 was passed, an additional \$3.5 billion would have gone to smaller minority and women owned businesses by 2018.<sup>108</sup> We know that this number would be higher over the past four years. To add to that picture, the Office of Minority and Women Owned Businesses has found that long established firms have reported significant negative impacts from I-200.<sup>109</sup>

## Community Identified Approaches to Economic Mobility

In the midst of our reality, we are still dreaming and remembering the joy of building with each other, the care of mutual aid. We remember that we are our most precious asset. Everyday, we are examining the dissonance and finding our way back to our own humanity. Our planning today is for generations to come because all of us, not just a few of us, are deserving of comfort and care. We recognize our abundance and move from the inner knowing that we have access to an abundant world.

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### **Lean into each other as our most valuable resource**

We are our greatest asset. We are healing and learning to trust ourselves and each other. We deserve to be with each other from a place of power, clarity, and compassion.

- Balance individual and collective healing as interconnected, but not codependent.
- Share meals, space, and knowledge with each other, honoring our various paths.
- Celebrate each other's wins.
- Be intentional about what we value and make decisions that mirror those values.

### **Hire Black people, pay them well, and put them in leadership roles**

Most of us, particularly Black women, are told the lie that we need more experience, more training, before we can successfully fill leadership roles. We don't. Impostor syndrome is used against us.

- Normalize pay transparency.
- Adjust salaries of underpaid Black employees.
- Reflect emotional labor, especially that of Black women, in their pay.
- Put Black people in leadership roles and support their leadership.
- Embrace shifts in work culture and business practices that come with Black leadership.
- Cultivate more Black leaders even if their style doesn't mirror your own.
- Reverse I-200.

### **Partner with Black youth to create the jobs of tomorrow**

Most of the jobs and organizational models that will move us toward societal well-being do not exist today. We are creating them.

- Prioritize teaching curious thinking, problem solving, technology, arts, and social and emotional skills.
- Partner with youth to redesign curriculum at all levels, catering to their interests.
- Co-create opportunities for youth to influence the workforce.
- Design ways for people to develop mastery in real-world settings, outside of the traditional K-12 and college experiences.

### Change the nature of traditional human resources (HR)

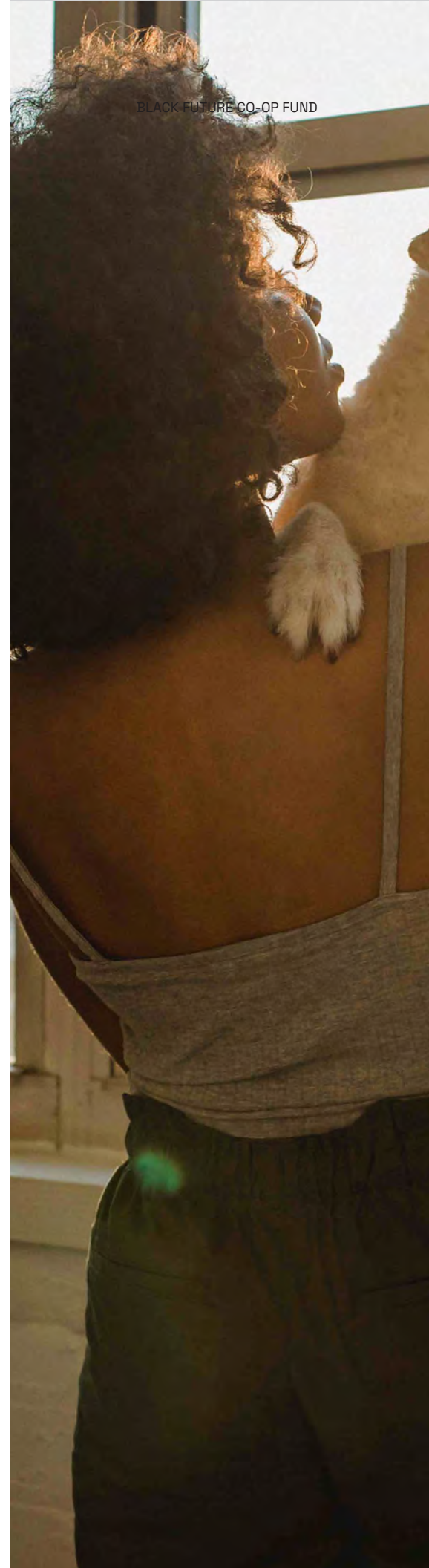
Currently in place to manage risk and protect the organization, everything about HR needs to shift. One lesson many of us painfully learn is that HR's primary role is not to support us.

- Collect standard data on the utilization of equitable HR practices and their impact on Black employees across organizations.
- Accurately assess and reflect all competencies needed for a job, rather than subjective hiring based on "fit".
- Address the accountability gap between the legal definition of racism and the daily impacts of racism from things like microaggressions.
- Prioritize employees' growth and development.
- Know your rights as an employee, read the employee handbook, and ask questions.
- Get wise legal consultation.

### Start, invest in, and expand Black-owned businesses

Today Black businesses are 2.2% of all employers.<sup>110</sup> More than ensuring company profits circulate within the Black community, Black employers are also more likely to offer flexibility and balance to employees.

- Direct opportunities and programming specifically to Black entrepreneurs.
- Offer well-structured access to credit and capital.
- Support policies and financial decisions that decentralize the marketplace.
- Resource spaces where Black entrepreneurs can share knowledge.
- Offer free, long-term technical support (grant writing, paperwork, financial management, legal, etc.).
- Reverse I-200.







### **Increase and sustain Black homeownership**

Homeownership is currently an important pathway to generational wealth and even community building. Currently 34% of Black households in Washington own their home.<sup>111</sup>

- Educate our communities on homeownership as a pathway to generational wealth.
- Build awareness of predatory practices and how they work.
- Fund Black organizations that are working to increase homeownership.
- Increase the amounts of money dedicated to down payment assistance.
- Create funding streams to keep Black homeowners in their homes.
- Explore non-traditional options for homeownership.

### **Get more Black involvement in urban planning**

We need more Black people influencing what our neighborhoods look like and how they function — the amount and types of housing, businesses, greenspace, and transportation.

- Increase urban planning literacy in Black communities.
- Make neighborhood planning accessible to Black families.
- Pay Black residents well to participate in neighborhood and regional planning.
- Learn what state, local, regional agencies, like Puget Sound Regional Council, are already planning decades out.





# Public Safety



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... as defined by Black community members within the recent Black Brilliance Research Project, public safety is “learning how to keep each other safe without police, coercion, or the threat of systemic violence and oppression.” Public safety isn’t just physical, it starts with mental, psychological, and emotional safety.

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## Contextual Factors Related to Public Safety

### Washington state’s history of leading the way ...in harm

It is important to know Washington state’s history of criminalization. It was the first in 1993 to enact the harmful 3-strikes sentencing policy. Washington blocked state funding from funding education of people it incarcerated. It eradicated parole, gave juveniles life without the possibility of parole, and led national models for long-term solitary confinement.

In 1887, it was the horrific treatment of people in Walla Walla in which local sheriffs rented out jailed people for free labor that created what we know as the Washington State Penitentiary, now

run by the government. Washington was the last state with active gallows; the Washington Supreme Court only ruled the death penalty unconstitutional in 2018.<sup>112</sup>

Change has been extremely slow. Only in 2021, following the Blake Decision, a simple drug possession is now a misdemeanor rather than a felony.<sup>113</sup> Better aligned with principles of transformative justice, rather than charging a person with a crime and incarcerating them, they are to be diverted to services at least twice.<sup>114</sup>



*“It is extremely hard for the advocates doing this work to show up each day when they see their communities being harmed and killed.”*

– Washington domestic violence advocate<sup>118</sup>

### Understanding abolition and transformative justice

Transformative justice, whether interpersonal or systemwide, is about addressing harm in ways that don’t cause more harm or profit off of people being harmed. More than that, it’s about focusing on healing, connection, and restoring us all to a right relationship with one another. It means abolishing harmful systems.

Our vision does not stop at addressing the incarceration and overrepresentation of Black people in Washington prisons and jails. Across our communities, we are discussing what needs to happen for Black Washingtonians to be and feel safe. Most community solutions don’t mention incarceration or more policing, which we know originated from slave catchers. Enslaved people were the first abolitionists in this country. Locally, we can look to the 1965 Freedom Patrols as a part of the foundation for the conversation on police accountability.<sup>116</sup> Today, many of us are remembering, learning, and revisiting the concept of abolition.<sup>117</sup>

*“It appears African Americans enter homelessness with higher incomes and lower rates of mental illness, drug addiction, and other health problems than white people. It seems like folks of color who are experiencing homelessness are generally better off by almost every indicator than their white counterparts. It’s almost as if more has to go wrong in a white person’s life for them to become homeless.”*<sup>126</sup>

— Marc Dones,  
Director of the Regional  
Homelessness Authority

### The impact of structural violence

Often when we think of violence, we think about direct violent actions like domestic violence. What became clear to many during the mid- to late-2020s following the murder of George Floyd is that entire social systems in the U.S., like the legal system, have been and continue to be violent toward Black people. The continued murders of Black and brown people across the nation, including Black and brown trans people and detained individuals, have had profound impacts on our health and well-being.

“It is extremely hard for the advocates doing this work to show up each day when they see their communities being harmed and killed,” said Washington domestic violence advocate.<sup>118</sup>

Structural violence undermines our basic sense of safety, greatly impacting our mental health. “According to the U.S. Census Household Pulse data, in the week following Floyd’s death, depression and anxiety severity increased among Black Americans at significantly higher rates than that of white Americans.”<sup>119</sup> Yet, as of 2020, Black people represented only 4% of the psychology workforce, making it difficult for us to talk to someone who personally understands our racialized experiences.<sup>120</sup>

Structural violence doesn’t have a single perpetrator. It shows up as harms caused by the social arrangements of our society (e.g., education, transportation, housing, and government systems). It results in group-wide harm to health and well-being and shows up as racism, ableism, sexism, and other abuses of social power.

A focus on creating social systems that heal and restore is the single most important contributing factor to public safety.<sup>121</sup>

### Housing and housing stability contribute to healthier people and communities

When people are housing unstable they are subject to trauma, disruption in education and employment, and disconnection from people who can support them.<sup>122</sup> It costs so much more — financially, psychologically, and emotionally — to be unhoused or face housing instability.<sup>123</sup> To afford a 2-bedroom apartment without being cost burdened (more than 30% of income), you would need to make \$61,000 per year on average across the state, which is more than the median income of Black Washingtonians.<sup>124</sup> In addition, there are not enough affordable units on the market in Washington.<sup>125</sup>

When people are deciding between healthy housing, food, and health care needs, they are no longer experiencing safety. Turning to one another for help often means turning to others who are also struggling to make ends meet. And, in these conditions, every human being is more likely to experience stress and be impacted by or turn to crimes of survival. Once someone is incarcerated, they are seven times more likely to experience homelessness — 13 times more likely if they are incarcerated more than once.<sup>127</sup>

*“I want every neighborhood to be like the most affluent neighborhood you live near that has very low policing. Everyone has jobs. Every child has an education. Everyone has health care. You don’t see folks going to jail from those communities because they’ve been invested in the ways that we know make a difference.”*<sup>129</sup>

— Rep. Kirsten Harris-Talley  
(37th L.D.)

**Neighborhood accessibility, conditions, and trust**

How close people live to a stable job, parks, clinics, schools, transportation, and healthy food all contribute to public safety.<sup>128</sup> Where we live and what’s accessible to us greatly influences our likelihood of successfully utilizing those resources. If getting to school, work, or a doctor’s appointment means walking several miles and long bus rides, everything becomes more stressful and our quality of life is impacted. The impacts are that much greater for those of us with disabilities. When people have familiar, vibrant, well-maintained places in which they feel good about spending time together, social cohesion happens. When social cohesion happens, community members can build and maintain trust.

“I want every neighborhood to be like the most affluent neighborhood you live near that has very low policing. Everyone has jobs. Every child has an education. Everyone has health care. You don’t see folks going to jail from those communities because they’ve been invested in the ways that we know make a difference.” <sup>129</sup> — Rep. Kirsten Harris-Talley (37th L.D.)

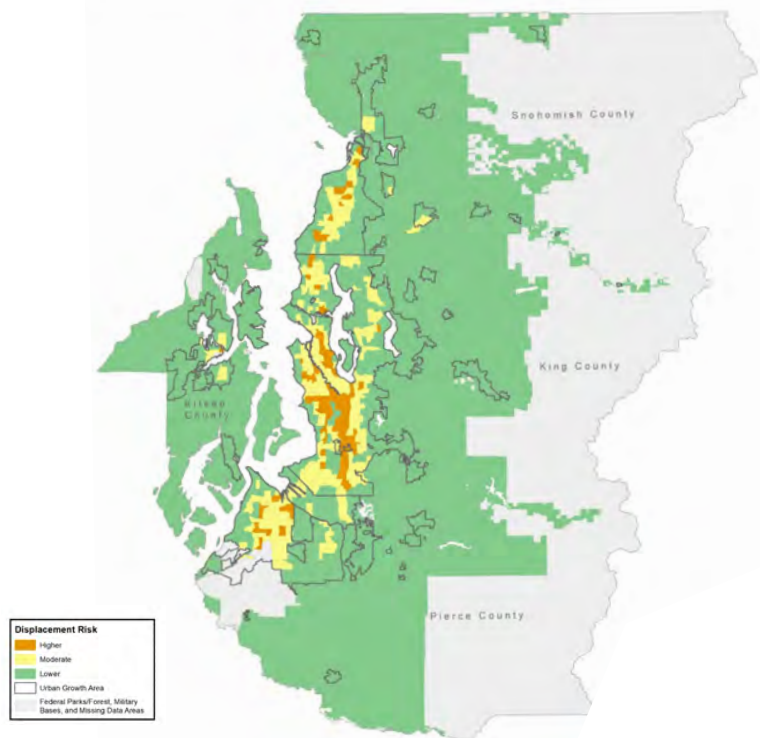
**The impact of “regional growth”**

When cities and counties don’t work with the existing local community to ensure resources are in place where they are needed most, displacement happens. When they do, public safety is possible.<sup>130</sup> It is an ever present reality for so many Black families in our state. It is a disruption to the very resource we need the most, each other.

The Puget Sound Regional Council reports that over 400,000 people in the Puget Sound region are at risk for displacement. In the neighborhoods marked for development, places like light rail stations and identified regional growth centers, people of color are a higher percentage of the population and at greater risk for displacement.<sup>131</sup>

*“Due to a chain of discriminatory choices made by government agencies, people of color earn less income, have less wealth, and are more likely to be renters.<sup>132</sup> Lower incomes and wealth make even slight increases in housing costs difficult to afford. Additionally, rents are more susceptible to price increases than mortgages, only further increasing the likelihood of displacement.”<sup>133</sup>*

**Regional Displacement Risk Map**



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council

**Access to economic opportunity**

Research shows that every \$10,000 increase in spending per person living in poverty was associated with 0.87 fewer homicides per 100,000 population or approximately a 16% decrease in the average homicide rate.<sup>134</sup>

Caring for people produces caring people. Increasing economic opportunity through policies like universal basic income,<sup>135</sup> baby bonds,<sup>136</sup> investment in youth programming,<sup>137</sup> and workforce development go a long way to increase public safety. Such policies would provide a basis for people to feel secure, safe, and happy, not fearful. Knowing we have what we need encourages us to dream and physically manifest the abundance within us.

## Community Identified Approaches to Public Safety

We want the freedom to be, to take up space, to be spontaneous. We want to feel relief, ease, peace, and joy. Our vision is one where we have land to care for and homes in which we can care for each other.

We envision radical inclusion and validation, of laughter and joy, and of listening, trust, and curiosity. Despite the conditions of society, we have always managed to find moments and spaces of safety. To make those moments a constant reality, the conditions of society need to shift.

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### **Educate, motivate, and empower Black communities, especially youth**

This looks like raising a generation of critical thinkers who are hungry for not only information, but wisdom — the ability to apply what they know appropriately in the context. We can channel the imagination and energy of youth constructively from an early age toward building a world in which our norms are freedom and joy. Every one of us has a role in this.

- Take an intergenerational, multisector approach to learning and organizing; we keep us safe.
- Put resources toward Black innovation — Black storytelling, Black projects, Black creativity — to educate and mobilize our community.
- Deeply integrate civics education into the school curriculum to show how historical and present day decisions are relevant to students' lives.
- Hire more Black teachers. They are important mentors and role models.

### **Fund Black brilliance to ideate, plan, and implement nuanced public safety solutions**

Black people, like any grouping of people, have different, sometimes opposing, sometimes intersecting needs and wants. Rather than expecting that we all have one approach, it is important to recognize that in a diversity of approaches we're stronger. Cultural, geographic, historical nuances matter to our approaches.

- Factor in that it takes time (and therefore money) to convene so we can plan and implement the public safety solutions we know work.
- Direct funding to Black organizations and community members so we can advocate and organize for what keeps us safe.
- Fund free advocacy training for Black organizations — advocacy is our legal right. Knowing how laws work is critical to public safety.
- Get clear about which experts are needed during which parts of the conversation and work — elevate Black leaders across all sectors of society to participate in planning and implementation.
- Design funding and planning cycles that are responsive to community, not the other way around. Removing a false sense of urgency give us the space do be thorough and effective.

### **Dismantle systems that harm us and replace them with systems that heal**

Trauma is peeled away in layers and found within interactions. A system is the sum of its parts — a series of people, rules, norms, and actions. Once we see how they function together, those parts can be rearranged and replaced to cultivate well-being.

- Know our rights under current laws and policies.
- End performative investments in equity offices, positions, plans, and statements that have no real power to make structural, budgetary, and policy changes.
- Give decision-making authority to Black people who can implement community-designed solutions.

### **Hold people, not systems accountable**

Organizations, agencies, groups, and teams are all made of people. Each of us within these systems are responsible to some degree for that system functioning. Simply putting a Black person in a leadership role does not automatically change how that role functions within that system. Nor does it immediately equate to the system changing.

- Normalize compassionate accountability — personally, in community, in organizations, and across systems.
- Assess the impact of your role and individual choices. We are all capable of harm. Get support to repair harm and prevent it from happening again.
- Don't ignore harm just because we like the person causing harm, especially if that person is you.
- Get help noticing the ways you may be conforming to a broken system.
- Build transformative justice approaches into our systems and community interactions.







### **Focus resources toward incarcerated people and their families, until we get rid of systems of punishment**

Many of us have a family member who is being detained. They are miles and miles away from the people who love them, furthering social disconnection. And, we know that connection is critical to life.

- Love and care for people who are incarcerated by ensuring access to their community, to programs, to healthy food, and to high quality health care.
- Pay for family members' transportation, hotel, and food to go visit their loved ones.
- Offer paid time off and flexible working arrangements for family members of incarcerated people.
- Fund Black-led organizations who are supporting people re-entering society following incarceration.
- Strengthen the network of services and resources — food, housing, mental health, family proximity, healthcare, employment, and transportation — available to Black people following incarceration.
- Invest in policy change, legal aid, and support services to stop wrongful convictions.

### **Fund and create social systems that keep us safe while also addressing immediate needs**

We've heard so much about stopping the school to prison pipeline. In reality, it's designing an ecosystem of well-being that will achieve public safety.

- Fund Black-led and -owned community care models, recognizing health is essential to our safety.
- Elevate Black leadership in public education and make options available for Black families of all income levels to pursue education alternatives that reflect their values.
- Fund diversion programs to prepare and connect young people to opportunities aligned with their interests.
- Develop and elevate Black-owned recruiting firms that can be a resource toward system re-design across multiple sectors.





# Health



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Health is holistic well-being. It reaches beyond the physical and into the mental, emotional, and spiritual. When the conditions for health in all of those realms take place, health is the natural result. It asks us to imagine what life is like when we are truly flourishing. Many Black Washingtonians are working around what currently exists to get there, further underscoring the need for Black-owned health centers.

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## Contextual Factors Related to Health

Known, ongoing racism is built into medical practice. Medicine is a practice. And “modern” medicine was built on practices of racism, the destruction of non-white knowledge and knowledge systems, and ableism. The saying goes, when you know better, you do better, but are we? The history of racial inferiority built into “objective” measures like kidney and lung function or pain management directives are not new. There are too many examples to name.

Without a race adjustment for kidney function:

- 3.3 million (10.4%) more Black Americans would reach diagnostic threshold for Stage 3 Chronic Kidney Disease.
- 300,000 more would qualify for beneficial nephrologist referral.
- 31,000 more would be eligible for transplant evaluation and waitlist.<sup>138</sup>
- Medical students at the University of Washington have raised this issue.<sup>139</sup>

C-section deliveries are associated with higher rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. They also cost more.

- Washington healthcare providers charge \$8,572 a vaginal birth on average and \$11,781 for a c-section.<sup>140</sup>
- From 2018 to 2020 in Washington, cesarean delivery rates were highest for Black infants (34%) compared to the statewide average of 28.1%.<sup>141</sup>



### Medical racism is taught

Not enough is being done to correct ongoing medical racism, starting with schools.

Healthcare professionals, including Black professionals, are trained using biased materials and within systems built on racist practices. They are faced with challenging professors and institutions from the time they are educated well into their careers. Passed in 2021, SB 5229 requires health equity continuing education for licensed professionals and dictates that communities most impacted are involved in developing course information.<sup>142</sup> It's a start, but if we want to eliminate medical racism we must identify and address the ways it has been embedded into the training environment — and then internalized throughout a system, expressed in research, the day-to-day administration of care, policy, and more.

### Continuing to treat the symptoms, not the root causes

Our medical system, as Black people are acutely aware, focuses on treating symptoms rather than addressing root causes. The ‘social determinants or drivers of health’ is a framework that considers the conditions that are foundational to addressing human health. Conditions like clean air, healthy housing, nutritious food, transportation, living wages, good schools, and a supportive community are all well known to be essential to our health. Clinical care, a last resort for many, is only 20% of the equation.

In a 2021 research poll, Black Americans attributed health inequities to a lack of access to quality care where they live. The second most common reason was environmental factors.<sup>143</sup> New local data shows how racist urban planning decisions made decades ago (i.e., redlining) continue to negatively and disproportionately impact Black health in our state today through divestment and continued pollution.<sup>144</sup>

Chemicals that interfere with hormones — including pesticides, plasticizers, and flame retardants — are connected to infertility and to preterm birth.<sup>145</sup> The amount of chemicals we are exposed to depends much on where we live and work and what types of products and food we can afford. Racism is functioning across all of our systems and is making us sick.

### Ongoing health inequities cost everyone, especially us

The real cost of health care includes things like the cost of healthy food and the cost of living in low-pollution, transit accessible neighborhoods. Additionally, the disjointed nature of referral systems result in costly uncoordinated care. Research shows that 30% of medical costs for Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans are excess costs related to health inequities. Direct and indirect cost of inequities cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$309 billion.<sup>146</sup> It seems obvious — our health systems have yet to operate in ways that reflect this understanding. The amount of time Black families spend looking for quality care is costly, as is navigating complex insurance rules and the out-of-pocket costs that remain. In 2017, the estimated cost of unpaid labor from caregivers was \$470 billion nationally.<sup>147</sup> It's as if our systems don't reflect the interconnected nature of our lives.

Public health leaders must leverage the full power of their own cross sector framework to protect the health of Black communities. Declarations of racism as a public health crisis do little to create accountability and better practices across the systems that directly impact our health. What we know about the impact of racism and social determinants on Black people's lives, requires public health systems to be fundamentally different.

### Insurance and who “deserves” care

Since 2015, the number of people who don't have insurance has reduced from 23% to 7%. Despite 93% of Black Washingtonians having insurance, 37% of us are on Medicaid and experience gaps in coverage... so the conversation on universal healthcare continues.<sup>153, 154</sup> Insurance plans are not covering the cost of care for the things we need the most. Tubman Center for Health & Freedom completed a local study of obstacles and solutions relevant to the health of marginalized community members.<sup>155</sup> The report shows cost and racism/discrimination are the two top barriers to care.<sup>156</sup>

We've been conditioned to accept that quality health care is a condition of employment, signaling that if you don't work, you don't deserve to be in excellent health. You matter beyond what you can produce. If we really believe that, then we must ensure that people receive excellent care, starting with preventative measures, no matter the amount of money they are able to pay.

### Sickness as a business model

Despite attempts to move toward a pay-for-value model, our sickness is still profitable to healthcare systems. According to the Washington State Department of Commerce, the healthcare industry in our state makes over \$31.6 billion in sales.<sup>148</sup> The net income after taxes made by health carriers, or life insurance companies, in Washington state in 2020 was more than \$8.1 billion.<sup>149</sup> Until 2021, hospitals were not required to give much detail publicly in their financial reporting. In the coming years, because of E2SHB 1272 we'll have more data on where that money is expended within the system.<sup>150</sup>

Plenty of research shows that prevention costs less than emergency care, yet we spend so much more on emergency care models. The healthcare sector is the largest employer in the U.S. and one of the fastest growing industries globally. It currently isn't in the financial interest of any of the 900,000+ businesses that make up the U.S. healthcare industry to ensure we have fewer sick people.<sup>151</sup> In hospitals where pay equity is poor, CEOs made on average 26 times more than the average hourly worker and in some cases up to 60 times more in major teaching hospitals.<sup>152</sup> Structural shifts in how health care is financed and administered is critical.

## Community Identified Approaches to Health

As we begin to manifest the societal conditions for well-being, health care as we know it today will drastically shift. We'll be able to easily get the care we need, when we need it from people we know, love, and trust. Black researchers, scientists, care providers, and community members will work together across sectors to develop innovations built on the wisdom of our ancestors. The experience of health care will once again feel caring, loving, and supportive.

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### Redefine what care means

Care is not just something we deserve in crisis. It is loving attention to the conditions necessary for our well-being. Tending to our well-being requires tending to what keeps us well. It is more than a surgery, a diagnosis, or a prescription.

- Address mind, body, emotions, and spirit in all health care interactions. See all of us — we are so much more than Black bodies.
- Learn and understand our histories — individually and generational — with deep humility.
- Help us ask the questions we don't know to ask when we seek care.
- Care for the family (blood or chosen) and community, not just the individual. We are connected.
- Fund free, ongoing therapy for Black people and families.
- Restructure systems and their many interactions to center our dignity and humanity.
- Leverage institutional power to advocate for policies that shift societal conditions to promote Black well-being — housing, employment, education, public safety.
- Support and care for Black care workers. They are doing more than their fair share.

### Address ableism and racism in the health care ecosystem

Valuing health also means acknowledging all of the ways we've accepted ableist views as a fundamental part of our health care, undergirding the way our society functions. Our practices are rooted in a deep history of viewing humans, especially Black bodies, as capital.

- Create community-led accountability mechanisms to report incidents of racism. Licensure of facilities and providers should be impacted by reports of ongoing racism.
- Train providers using public health and structural competency frameworks.
- Address racism and elitism in the training environment, including curricula, teaching, and practice.
- Prioritize the very young and the very old, viewing people as integral parts of social systems.
- Fund Black-led research and give grants and scholarships to Black people to enter health fields, especially medicine, policy, and research.
- Enact government policies at every level that are comprehensive across social determinants with a specific focus on addressing racism.

### Fund Black-owned, initiated, and operated care

Access is as much about physical location as it is money, language, mood, visual appeal, education, and time. Where and how care happens matters.

- Invest in Black-owned care hubs that prioritize access, social connection, and prevention.
- Invest in Black-owned behavioral health services.
- Expand Black home-based care models that pay care workers well.
- Invest in Black-owned hospice spaces to care for our elders.

### Create responsive, coordinated care models that address all social determinants of health

Caring for the whole human includes addressing the mind, body, and spirit, which means forming new and different relationships among physicians, dentists, optometrists, and holistic, traditional, or spiritual practitioners.

- Build the relationships across sectors that allow providers to directly connect people to what they need (i.e., housing, dental, classes, financial aid, legal).
- Work toward coordinated billing across types of care.
- Strengthen referral systems to ensure people are not just referred but get served.
- Expand and support telehealth options.
- Make the time in appointments to ensure people understand what is being explained.
- Incorporate food, herbs, social connection, and arts as medicine.

### Restructure the way insurance works and what it covers

Until we have an entirely new model of resourcing care, Tubman Center for Health and Freedom's WELL US Study outlines important changes insurance companies and managed care plans can make to support the well-being of Black Washingtonians who society has marginalized the most.

- All insurance plans, including state plans, should follow the Every Category of Provider Law.
- Add more providers in-network to improve access and choice.
- Provide premium reimbursement for providers caring for communities who society marginalizes.
- Cover the cost of vitamins, medicinal herbs, and indigenous and ancestral medicines.



### Address family and community, not just the individual

The focus on the individual, the family, and the community is critical to Black well-being. We are connected. We are both individuals and part of a broader collective.

- Ask about family and community dynamics and history beyond physical manifestations of sickness and disease.
- Build provider knowledge of family resources that are culturally appropriate.
- Conduct comprehensive family assessments that include the unified expertise of multiple providers — traditional and not.
- Provide culturally responsive, community-designed resources for relationship health.
- Provide incentives to implement systemwide comprehensive approaches to integrated, holistic care.
- Invest in Black behavioral health centers that include a focus on relationship health.

### Reflect well-being in employer business models and policies

Black-led organizations are beginning to prioritize our well-being over what we can produce for an employer, our community, and even our own families. Build and implement operational models and practices that produce healing, rather than constantly working to heal from systems that continue to harm us.

- Rest. Get support to rest. Support each other in taking turns to rest.
- Shift employer business models to offer rest and adequate pay, such as 4-day work weeks, flexible schedules, additional paid parental leave, and capped salary ratios.
- Implement new leadership models that build in shared power, support, and rest.
- Offer sabbaticals and respite programs for Black leaders, particularly women.
- Implement some version of guaranteed basic income.
- Increase the length of parental leave in policies.
- Stop incentivizing “grind” culture directly and indirectly. Overworking is not cute.

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Thank you for spending time with this report. Throughout the process there were so many questions we asked, but couldn't yet answer. As a community, we have data to collect, discussions to hold, and connections to make. We hope you are activated by the approaches identified and the data presented.

To support collective action, please access the simple discussion guide on our website. Use it to elevate to our collaborations and organizing statewide, and in doing so, work in ways that manifest Black well-being.







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