

Financial well-being in Oregon

Households struggle to afford basic needs



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



While most survey respondents identify themselves as financially stable, this isn't equally true for everyone. 11% indicated it would be "very difficult" to get \$1,000 in an emergency.



Across all demographics, respondents worry about their community's access to well-paying jobs, especially for families having trouble making ends meet and the impact of rising cost-of-living expenses.



Respondents elevate concern about the growing wealth inequality across Oregon. Responses to open-ended questions focused on the issue.

Oregon's economy is only as strong as its households' financial well-being. Our success relies on a stable economy where all Oregonians can meet their financial needs. Not all households, however, currently have access to what they need to meet their household expenses. This issue brief elevates voices from across the state on how the lack of living wage jobs and economic opportunity impacts Oregonians' financial well-being.

About Oregon Voices

In an increasingly urban state and nation, rural residents often find themselves unseen and unheard in the systems and decisions that affect their daily lives. Oregon Voices aims to amplify lived experiences in the state's less densely populated areas and to cultivate a sense of common cause – a first for Oregon.

This issue brief summarizes key findings from the Oregon Voices survey that focus on financial stability and household finance conditions in communities.

For more information about our research methods, please visit orvoices.org.

What we know about Oregonian’s household financial well-being

Being able to sustain a household budget helps families feel financially secure and gives them freedom to make life-enriching choices. Household financial health is understood to mean being able to handle day-to-day and month-to-month expenses, absorb unexpected expenses or emergencies, and set and meet financial goals. To do this, households need steady employment, jobs with a living wage, and resources to manage debt and establish good credit.

Uneven opportunities across generations of Oregonians have meant not everyone has had the same chance to build wealth. Timber, agriculture and manufacturing sectors have changed, and there is less focus on rural infrastructure.¹ Over decades, this has led to underemployment, affects local job opportunities, and results in lower median incomes in rural places.² This means that some families have less access where they live to high-paying jobs in high-growth sectors. In addition, some households have a more difficult time building long-term wealth. We see one example of this in homeownership rates between Oregonians of color and their white counterparts: 52.3% of Oregon’s non-white households own a home compared to 67.3% of white households.³



“Working an exhausting 40 hr/week job, often 10-12 days in a row back to back, for minimum wage pay that isn’t enough to cover bills and rent and allow us to have food the entire month. Often eat crackers and cheese until my next paycheck comes in. Barely.”

Urban, white, employed full-time, \$10,000-\$24,999, Benton County

What is a “living wage” in Oregon?

Living wage is the hourly rate an individual must be paid to meet their and/or their family’s basic needs while working full-time. This is based on the number of adults and children in a household, where they live in Oregon, and costs of child care.

Households without children

\$16.65

2 working adults

\$24.30

1 working adult

\$33.29

2 adults, 1 working

Households with children

\$24.09

2 working adults, 1 child

\$45.07

2 adults, 1 working, 2 children

\$56.43

1 working adult, 2 children

Learn more by visiting the **MIT Living Wage Calculator**.

¹ Smith, K. & Tickamyer, A. *Economic Restructuring and Family Well-being in Rural America*, Penn State University Press, 2011.

² Oregon Center for Public Policy, *Oregon’s Labor Market Recovers Unevenly*, 2019. ocpp.org/2019/08/29/oregon-labor-market-recovery-uneven/






³ Business Oregon, *Racial Homeownership Gap Narrower in Oregon, National Study Finds*, 2023. oregonbusiness.com/19777-racial-homeownership-gap-narrower-in-oregon-national-study-finds

What Oregonians said about household financial well-being

The research team's analysis revealed a clear takeaway: Oregonians from a variety of backgrounds are concerned about each other's financial well-being. While most respondents consider themselves financially stable, when given the opportunity to share their greatest concerns about their community, respondents were quick to share about the incompatibility of low wages with the increased cost of living, particularly for lower-income community members and households with children. These concerns came charged with solutions to promote “living wages” and work to address the state’s growing wealth inequality.

Who responded to the survey

How do Oregon Voices respondents compare to the state as a whole?

	Survey Respondents	State of Oregon
 Own a home ⁴	79%	63%
 Median income	\$66.6k	\$76.6k
 Households with children	23%	26%
 Retired/ self-employed	33%/ 19%	24%/ 10%
 Bachelor's degree or higher	54.8%	35.5%

KNOW THE FACTS

\$14.20

Oregon’s minimum hourly wage, the 11th highest in the nation. This ranges from **\$15.45** in the Portland metropolitan area to **\$13.20** in rural areas.⁵

\$76,632

Median household income in Oregon, slightly higher than the national median of \$75,149⁶

45%

Portion of Oregon households experiencing financial hardship⁷

\$61,760

Amount of average Oregon household debt, higher than the national average of \$55,480⁸

4 The Ford Family Foundation. (2024). Oregon Voices issue brief: Housing access and affordability in Oregon. *Oregon Voices*.

5 PayCor, *Minimum Wage by State and 2024 Increases*, 2023. See also: Oregon Bureau of Labor & Industries, *Oregon Minimum Wage*, 2023.

6 2022 One-Year ACS Subject Table

7 United For ALICE, Oregon. unitedforalice.org/state-overview/Oregon

8 Oregon State Treasury, *Oregon Financial Wellness Scorecard*, 2024. oregon.gov/treasury/financial-empowerment/Documents/FEAT-Meeting%20Materials/2024/240205-FINAL-2024-Financial-Empowerment-scorecard.pdf

9 The Ford Family Foundation. *Housing access and affordability in Oregon: Voices from Oregon's statewide crisis*. *Oregon Voices*. 2024.





While most survey respondents consider themselves financially stable, this isn't equally true for everyone.

Almost three-quarters of Oregon Voices respondents (73%) consider themselves financially stable, but this is not felt by everyone equally. When asked about the difficulty of acquiring \$1,000 in an emergency, most respondents reported “not at all difficult,” with only 11% indicating “very difficult.” While the survey did not explicitly define financial stability, we understand that social determinants like income and employment, education, and homeownership affect one’s financial well-being.

The following are demographics where the data show gaps in household financial well-being:

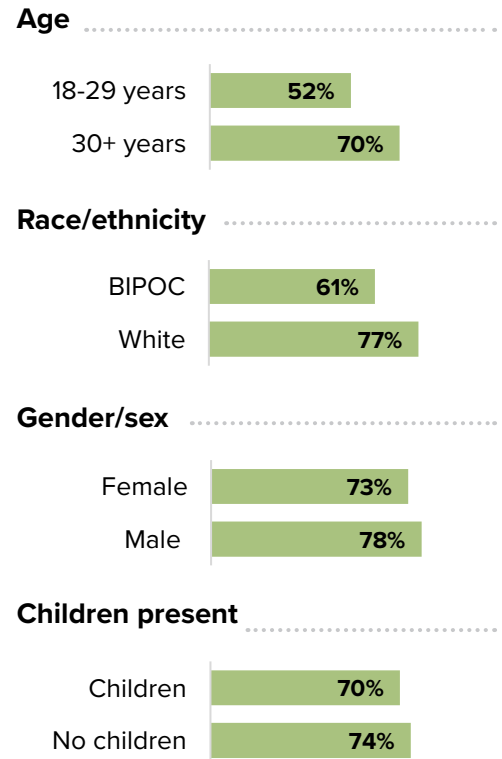
Geography gap: Rural respondents as a whole were just slightly more likely to report finding it difficult to access \$1,000 in case of an emergency, but people of color living in rural areas reported rates more than twice as high as everyone else (32.2% compared to 15.7%). They also reported an annual income \$7,000 lower than urban respondents. Income disparities across urban and rural Oregon likely result from decades of rural economic disinvestment.

Race gap: Almost one in three respondents identifying as a race other than white reported that it would be difficult to get \$1,000 in case of an emergency. These respondents report less stability as well: 14% compared to 6% of white respondents answered this question with a 1 (very unstable) or 2 (unstable). They also reported a median household income \$13,000 lower than white respondents. The economic gap experienced by Oregonians of color has roots in past policies of segregation, like exclusion laws.

Figure 1: **Younger respondents are the least financially stable**

We asked: “How stable is your personal financial situation?” from 1 (very unstable) to 5 (very stable).”

This share of respondents answered the question with a **4 or 5**:



All differences are statistically significant.



Family gap: While households with children reported slightly higher median incomes than childless households under 65, they also reported slightly lower stability and more difficulty in case of a financial emergency. Additionally, when asked whether families in their communities are having trouble making ends meet, respondents from households with children present and from larger households were more likely to agree with such statement. The presence of children can drastically increase the costs of basic necessities, including utility expenses, food and child care.

Gender gap: Women respondents¹⁰ were slightly less likely to report their financial situation as secure (73%) than respondents who identified as male (78%), and they reported a median income \$12,000 lower than male respondents. Child care, caregiving responsibilities, and other gendered expectations in part influence women’s ability to build wealth and financial security.

Figure 2: **Many households agreed that it would be difficult to get \$1,000 for an emergency**

We asked: “If you had an emergency and needed \$1,000 to pay for it, how difficult would it be to get that \$1,000?” from 1 (not at all difficult) to 5 (very difficult).”

*This share of respondents answered the question with a **4 or 5**:*

Race/ethnicity



Age



Children present




Gender/sex





Geography



All differences are statistically significant.

 **“I am able to make it living here because of the job that I have. If it were not for that I would not be here”**
Rural, white, employed full-time, \$65,000-\$99,999, Union County

 **“We recognize that our financial situation could become VERY quickly unstable especially if one of our wage earners becomes sick or injured. Health care costs are concerning.”**
Rural, white, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Clackamas County

 **“La pobreza que vivimos la minorías comparado con los anglosajones (The poverty that minorities live compared to white people)”**
Urban, Latino/Hispanic, homemaker, \$10,000-\$24,999, Multnomah County

¹⁰ Respondents could identify their gender as "female," "male" or "Other identity not listed." "Women" here refers to respondents who selected "Female."



Across all demographics, respondents worry about their community’s access to well-paying jobs, especially for families having trouble making ends meet and the impact of rising cost-of-living expenses.

More than half of respondents (55%) agreed or strongly agreed that jobs do not pay enough in their communities. Although differences in this sentiment appear by income and education level, across rural and urban geographies there is agreement. In fact, even retirees and people being paid a living wage agree that economic conditions are not working for the majority of families in their community.



“It feels like a 'barbell' community with a number of wealthier residents (doctors, professionals, retirees) doing well and a large segment of the middle/low-income families really struggling.”

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Douglas County



“I worry about the lack of jobs and economic opportunities available here.”

Rural, BIPOC, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Malheur County

Respondents voiced that wages are not keeping up with the increasing cost of meeting basic needs. Rural respondents were more likely than urban respondents to agree that jobs in their communities do not pay enough.



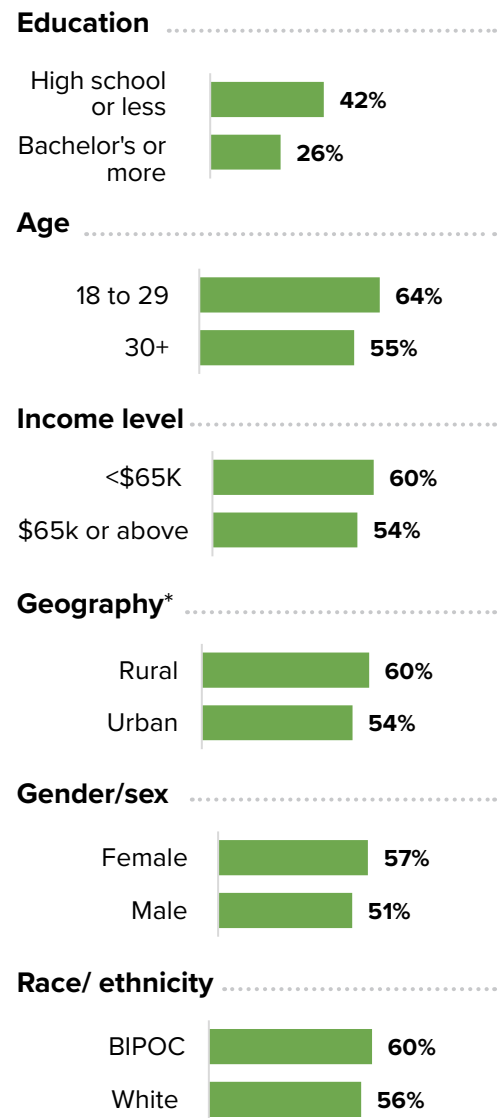
“It was a mistake for the legislature to raise the minimum wage in Portland but only partly raise it in places like Jackson County. Combine that with the lack of affordable housing and you have the basis for social problems like mental illness, addiction, homelessness, and more.”

Rural, white, retired, \$65,000-\$99,999, Jackson County

Figure 3: Those with high school education or less and people under 30 are the most likely to think that jobs do not pay enough where they live

Responses to the prompt: “In my community – Jobs do **not** pay enough” from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)”

This share of respondents answered the question with a **4 or 5**:



*Difference is not statistically significant

While lower-income respondents were more concerned about the inability to pay or keep up with monthly bills, higher income respondents were concerned about property tax increases due to rising property values:



“Prices of non-optional (gas, utilities, taxes, rent) are going up at unsustainable rates to income. People are stressed out.”

Urban, employed part-time, Clackamas County



“The town and its leadership are pushing to raise property values but that means that the lower income and lower-middle income families - the ones that work the day-to-day jobs - can't afford to live in or even near the place they work.”

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$65,000-\$99,999, Lane County



“The increases in cost of living are out pacing most increases in income which means homes (whether rent or mortgage) are quickly becoming unavailable to the people living in this community and filling needed jobs.”

Rural, white, self-employed, \$100,000 or more, Wasco County

Our team found a repeated narrative among older respondents: a deep and sincere concern for younger families’ financial well-being.



“[We need] family wage jobs. Although we are retired, the lack of jobs here impacts all aspects of our community.”

Rural, white, retired, \$65,000-\$99,999, Coos County



“We are primarily a retirement community and also a tourism economy, so things are priced out of our working class range. There are few opportunities for young people and young families - our workforce.”

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$25,000-\$44,999, Curry County

Figure 4: **Agreement is strong across the state that families have trouble making ends meet**

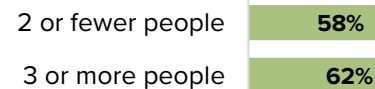
Responses to the prompt: “In my community – Families are having trouble making ends meet,” from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)”

59% of respondents chose a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale of high agreement.

Children present



Household size



**All differences are statistically significant.*





Respondents elevate concern about the growing wealth inequality across Oregon.

In open ended responses, Oregon Voices respondents commented on the observable increase in wealth inequality. Across all incomes levels, respondents share how the wealth divide in their communities is growing, particularly due to increased housing costs. While respondents themselves are on average satisfied with their housing, as housing prices rise, they worry for what this might mean for the financial well-being of lower-income households, particularly with children.



“Bend has a huge wealth gap and the high cost of living pushes middle and lower income families out. This is not sustainable.”

Urban, white, employed full-time, \$65,000-\$99,999, Deschutes County



“Increasing divide between income groups - especially those at the highest incomes and those at the lowest. Our grocery store is very expensive - sometimes twice the cost of other like-stores. People who can choose, because they have transportation, shop elsewhere. People without transport are forced to use their SNAP benefits here and do not get as much food as a result.”

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Clackamas County



“Highest income inequality in the state and we don’t believe we have poor people or families and kids that struggle”

Urban, BIPOC, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Benton County



“Unless you have lived here or your family has lived here and has passed your home/ranch on to you, it is impossible to purchase a nice home, land costs are too high (and wages too low).”

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Baker County



In Oregon, a household's annual income must be **\$139,000** to afford the average mortgage payment of \$2,616. Our team dives further into data on respondents' concerns about housing in our **Housing Access and Affordability in Oregon** issue brief. See orvoices.org/housing.

What leaders and community builders should know

We can improve the financial well-being of Oregon's households by working to meet basic needs while better leveraging tools the state already has in place: the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Family Financial Protection Act. The Earned Income Tax Credit provides households an average federal credit of \$2,000 (\$3,000 for households with children), giving extra cash to cover utilities or bills, pay off loans, and/or make meaningful investments for their lives. While Oregon is the only state with a higher credit for households with young children, our state has the lowest participation rate in the nation. Nearly one in three eligible Oregon households (compared to one in four nationally) do not claim this credit, often due to lack of awareness and the difficulty of navigating the state's tax filing system. Increasing awareness and supports to tax payers can ensure all eligible Oregon households can take advantage of this tax credit to help meet the financial needs of their households.

Oregon's state legislature also recently passed the Family Financial Protection Act (SB 1595) to strengthen economic protections for Oregonians who are working to pay back their debts and/or who may have been subjected to unfair debt collections practices. Key provisions in this bill that support financial well-being include expanded home protection, bank account protections, motor vehicle protections, increases in gradual wage exemptions and protections against unowned/incorrect debt. It is the hope that this legislation will continue to provide transformative changes that give Oregonians the opportunity for financial fresh starts.



"It's a physically beautiful place to live and is welcoming if you are a white and middle to high income. We are in desperate need of child care, housing, higher paying jobs, and community education around racial and cultural needs."

Rural, white, employed full-time, \$100,000 or more, Coos County



"Jobs in this area don't support the rising cost of housing, food, and gas to name a few things. This really needs to change in order for this community to grow and thrive."

Rural, BIPOC, employed full-time, \$25,000-\$44,999, Douglas County

What trends do you notice in your community?

Visit orvoices.org see what respondents in your county think about Oregon's household financial well-being. From the Oregon Voices homepage, navigate to "Explore the Data" where you can see survey results for topics related to this issue brief. Use the filters to explore some of the prompts below — or create your own research questions! Let us know what you're learning by emailing us at oregonvoices@tfff.org.

Community Infrastructure:

What do respondents from your home county share about their financial status? Choose a county different than your own. Are the results similar? What do you notice?

Community Concerns:

Do respondents in your community seem to agree that better-paying jobs are needed where you live? What do you think? Is this the case in a neighboring county?

For data summaries for each county in Oregon,
more research and to explore the data on your own, visit
orvoices.org.



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