

# Rochester's Poverty Worse Than Most Comparably Sized Cities

An analysis of recently released U.S. Census data for a five-year period shows that the City of Rochester's poverty has gotten worse.

The report, released by Rochester Area Community Foundation and ACT Rochester, compares Rochester to 17 other principal cities in similarly sized metro areas. Benchmarking Rochester's Poverty: A 2015 Update and Deeper Analysis of Poverty in the City of Rochester by Edward J. Doherty finds that:

1. The city's poverty rate continues to rise, and is now at 32.9 percent;
2. The childhood poverty rate has increased to 50.1 percent, ranking highest among the 18 benchmark cities. In that group, Rochester is now the only city where more than half of the children live in poverty; and
3. Among those benchmark cities, Rochester now has the highest rate of extreme poverty (16.2 percent), defined as people living below 50 percent of the federal poverty level.

In December 2013, the Community Foundation and ACT Rochester released Poverty and the Concentration of Poverty in the Nine-County Greater Rochester Area, which was primarily based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey over the five-year period from 2007-11.

Since that time, the Census Bureau has released one-year survey data estimates for 2012 and 2013 that also signaled poverty increases. The newest five-year survey, which covers 2009-13, is based on a larger sample and considered more

reliable and precise. The Census Bureau released the data in December 2014 and it provided the basis for this update and comparison with benchmark cities.

“The first poverty report and its startling statistics were a wake-up call for our entire region to better understand the depth of poverty that exists in every city, town, and village,” says Jennifer Leonard, president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation. “Benchmarking Rochester’s Poverty provides an opportunity to update key data from that report and take a deeper look at the realities of poverty in the City of Rochester.”

The Census Bureau data estimates that 66,312 poor people live in the City of Rochester, with more than 95,000 spread across suburban Monroe and the surrounding eight counties.

In an effort to put Rochester’s poverty into context, report author and researcher Doherty developed a list of 18 principal cities in similar-sized metro areas (within plus or minus 200,000 of the Rochester population). Included in the benchmark group are Buffalo, Hartford, Conn., Richmond, Va., Birmingham, Ala., Tulsa, Okla., Louisville, Ky., and Honolulu.

In 28 charts at the back of the 20-page report, the benchmark cities are ranked based on their rates of overall poverty and extreme poverty, as well as poverty rates for children, adults, seniors, and female-headed families. The charts also compare poverty data based on gender and race, educational attainment, disability, employment, age, and family size and income.

“Several of the report’s child-related poverty statistics are the most troubling,” says Doherty, who retired in 2014 as the Community Foundation’s vice president of community programs.

- More than 25,000 children under age 18 in Rochester are living in poverty;
- In the top 75 metro areas, only three cities – Detroit,

Cleveland, and Dayton – have higher childhood poverty rates than Rochester; and

- Rochester's poverty rate for families headed by females is the highest among the benchmark group of cities.

“Developing a deeper understanding of poverty includes knowing the statistics, but also going beyond the data to seek out poor people's perspectives that would provide a better grasp of the complex causes and effects of poverty,” says Ann Johnson, director of ACT Rochester.

Johnson also believes that gaining insight into what it is like to be poor is essential to making our community more understanding of the issue and related problems. Eighty community leaders and interested residents participated January 7 in an intensive poverty simulation hosted by ACT Rochester and led by Rhonda O'Connor, director of Onondaga County's anti-poverty initiative called “Choosing To Thrive.”