

Material Hardship in Massachusetts

Economic security and the ability to meet basic needs is central to the well-being of every family. Financial and material hardship create instabilities in families with young children that can jeopardize babies' development during their critical first 3 years and undermine lifelong development.

The economic and social impacts of COVID-19 have increased the incidence of material hardship and have deepened the need to support parents in nurturing the development of their young children. Families experiencing material hardship face substantial challenges in meeting their children's basic needs and providing the stable physical environments required for optimal development. However, caring relationships with trusted caregivers can buffer babies' exposure to adverse events and mitigate long-term negative effects.

How is Material Hardship Showing Up in the Lives of Massachusetts's babies and families?

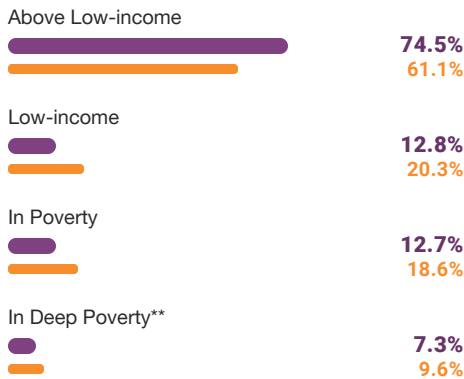
The selected set of State of Babies indicators below provides a pre-pandemic snapshot of families' economic status, the specific areas in which they experience challenges meeting basic needs, the extent to which they have access to and are reached by existing policies; and offers a view of where your state's policies currently

address or can be expanded to further assist families in supporting their babies' well-being. To deepen your understanding of how families' experiences vary, select the + icon where it appears with an indicator to view the data by subgroup (race/ethnicity, income, and/or urbanicity).

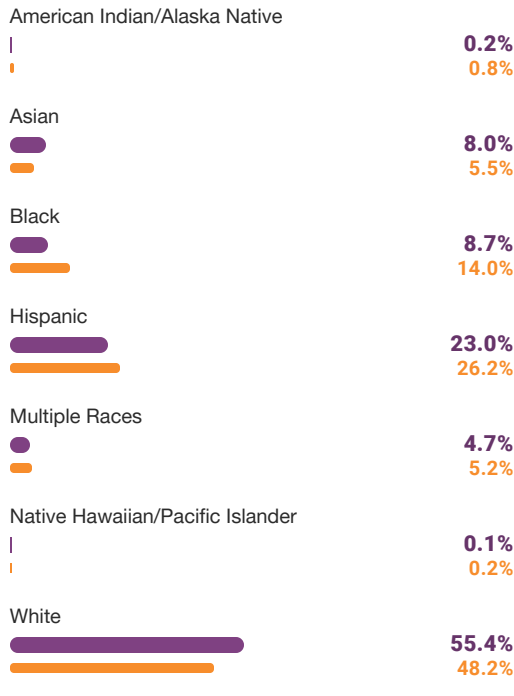
Income

Poverty at an early age can be especially harmful, affecting later achievement and employment. Yet babies are the age group most likely to live in families with low income and in poverty. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of Massachusetts's infants and toddlers lived in families that earned less than 200 percent of the FPL (\$52,400 for a family of four in 2020), meaning they did not have the financial resources to make ends meet.

Poverty status of infants and toddlers



Race/ethnicity of infants and toddlers

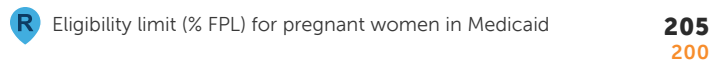
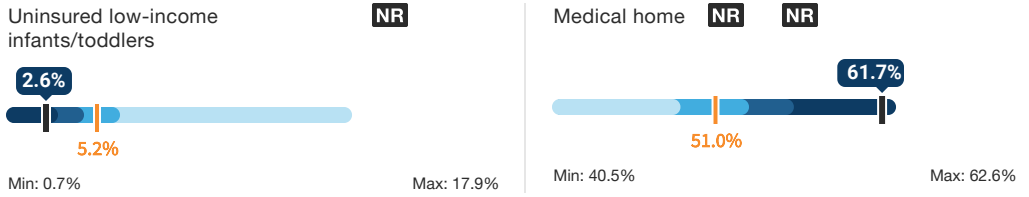


Note: N/A indicates Not Available

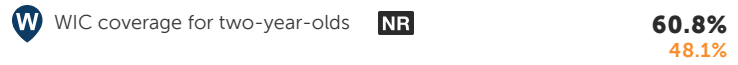
Challenges to Meeting Basic Needs

All babies need preventive care to support healthy development in the critical first three years, but families with low income often cannot afford or obtain health care. Infants and toddlers are also uniquely sensitive to challenges in their environments. Adversities experienced early in life, such as hunger or living in crowded housing, create stress that can undermine lifelong development.

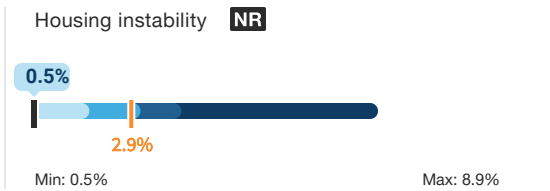
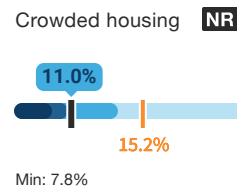
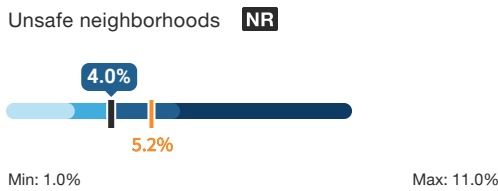
Health Care Access & Affordability



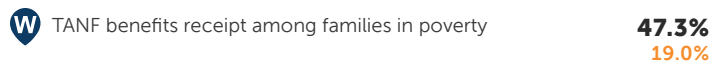
Food/Nutrition



Housing



Economic Stability



Note: N/A indicates Not Applicable

Opportunities to Reduce Hardship through Supportive Policies

Babies benefit from unhurried time with their parents to form healthy attachments and parents benefit from family-friendly employer policies that allow them the time to nurture and care for their children. Economic supports in the form of direct assistance, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, and tax credits are particularly critical for families with young children and directly contribute to lifting families out of poverty.

Health Policies & Employer Leave Policies

Postpartum extension of Medicaid coverage **NR** Law covering all pregnant people for 1 year post-partum

Pregnant workers protection **NR** Limited coverage: State employees and private employees with exceptions

Paid family leave Yes ✓

Paid sick time that covers care for child Yes ✓

TANF Work Exemption **NR** Yes ✓

State Tax Credits

State Child Tax Credit **NR**

State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) **NR** Yes ✓

Note: N/A indicates Not Applicable