

UPWARD
MOBILITY
IN KANSAS
2025

AMERICA'S HEALTH RANKINGS tracks state and national data across hundreds of health, environmental, and socio-economic measures. Each of the 50 states is ranked, with one being the most favorable. Kansas currently ranks 28th overall and 26th on the Economic Hardship Index—a measure that takes into account income inequality and those struggling to make ends meet.

AT THE KANSAS HEALTH FOUNDATION, we view this data through the lens of upward mobility—the ability to stabilize, thrive, and make choices over time without losing connection to culture, community, or self. We want every Kansan to have the opportunity to succeed, no matter their starting point in life. Despite rising per capita income over the past decade, Kansas has not kept pace with national trends. The gap between wages and the cost of living continues to grow.

To help close these gaps, KHF is examining efforts that expand income and opportunity—such as entrepreneurship supports, workforce development, employment opportunities, job quality, and wealth building.

2 IN 5

Kansas households struggle to meet their basic needs even with employed household members.

The average job in

84
out of
105

Kansas counties pays less than 60 cents for every dollar needed to meet basic living costs.*

*Ratio of dollars earned per \$1 cost of living is earnings for an average job in the county divided by the cost of basic expenses in that county. Cost of living is defined for a family of three (one adult and two children), using Massachusetts Institute of Technology Living Wage Calculator, 2022. Average job pay uses employer reported data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Values greater than 1 indicate that the average job pays more than the cost of living, and values less than 1 suggest the average job pays less.

Source: Kansas Health Institute analysis of Urban Institute Upward Mobility Dashboard, 2022.

ABOUT

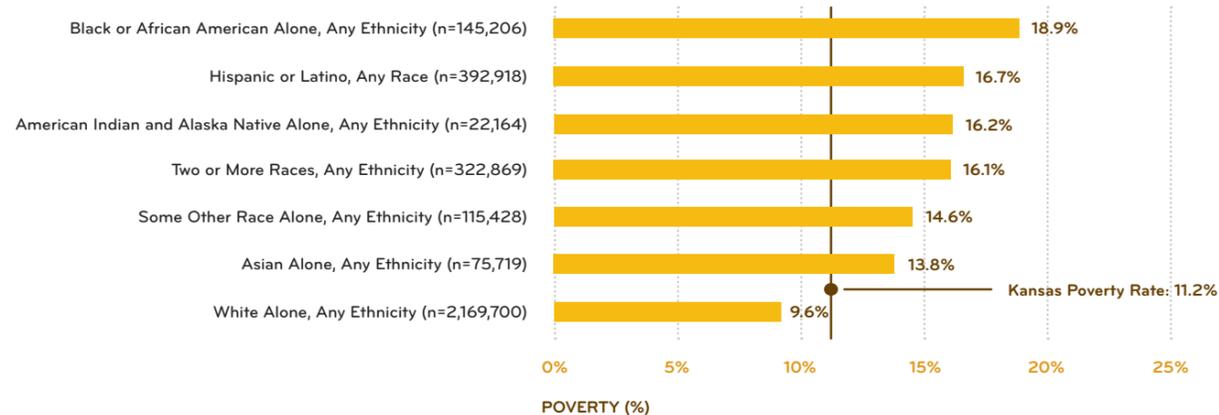
1 IN 10

Kansas children live in poverty, with two-thirds of these children living in single-parent households.

Poverty in Kansas has remained fairly stable for the past decade with approximately 1 in 10 Kansans living below the federal poverty level. The 2025 federal poverty level for an individual is \$15,650, and for a family of four it is \$32,150.

Poverty in Kansas is not evenly shared. One in five Black Kansans live in poverty, about 2 times higher than the poverty rate of White Kansans. Systemic inequities limit upward mobility, reinforcing generational barriers to income growth, wealth building, and long-term financial security.

Figure 3. POVERTY RATE BY RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUP IN KANSAS, 2023



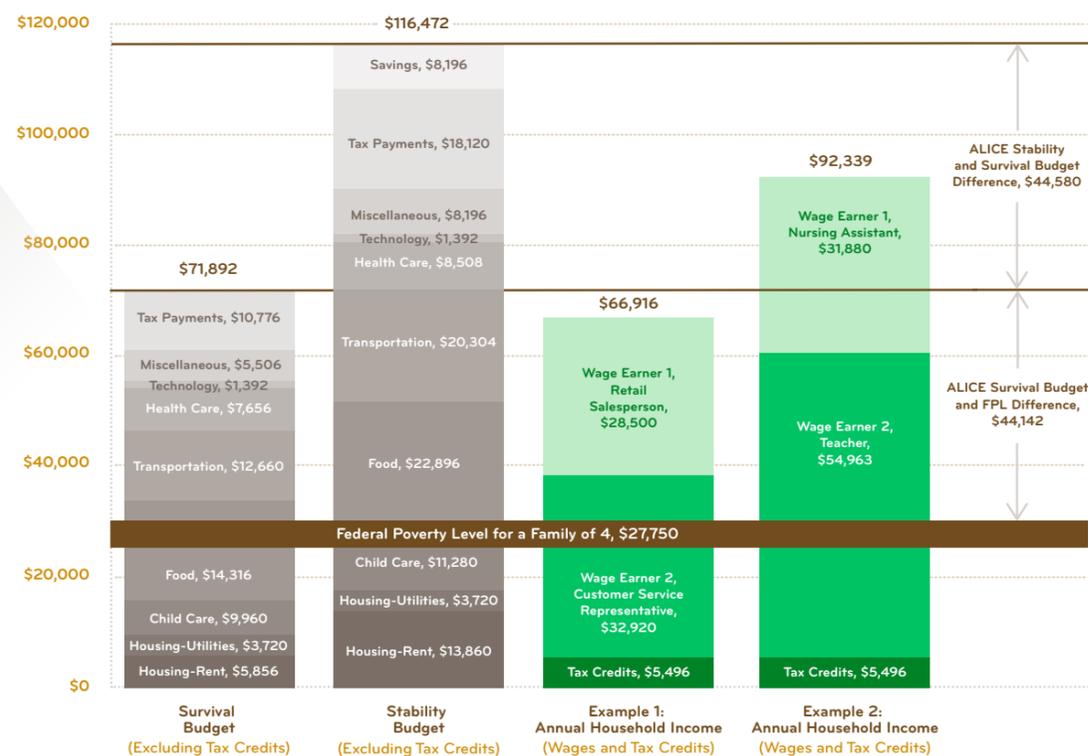
Note: In 2023, 1-year estimates, population in Kansas = 2,854,559. Kansans earning less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL; \$30,000 for a family of four in 2023, 1-year estimates) = 319,652. The category of Hispanic or Latino, Any Race, is not mutually exclusive with other categories.

Source: Kansas Health Institute analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year Estimates, Table S1701, 2023.

ASSET LIMITED, INCOME CONSTRAINED, EMPLOYED (ALICE)

ALICE households earn above the federal poverty level (FPL), but cannot afford the basic cost of living in their county (Figure 5). The ALICE household survival budget includes the minimum costs of household necessities, such as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care and technology (Figure 4). For a Kansas family of two adults and two children, the estimated survival budget, or the amount needed to pay for basic household expenses, is \$71,892. This is well above the median household income of \$69,900 in Kansas.

Figure 4. SURVIVAL AND STABILITY BUDGETS WITH TWO EXAMPLES OF ANNUAL INCOME FOR A KANSAS FAMILY OF 2 ADULTS AND 2 CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE, 2022



Note: Federal poverty level (FPL), survival budget and stability budget are shown at state level for a household of two adults and two children in child care (1 infant and 1 child who is pre-school age). FPL is a guideline used by the U.S. government to determine eligibility for various social programs, including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Child Tax Credit. Two annual household incomes were selected as examples to provide context to the survival and stability budgets. The survival budget is the bare minimum costs needed for a household. The stability budget reflects the more moderate costs and savings that sustain a household. Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) budgets can vary by county and household type. The "Miscellaneous" category includes a contingency fund equal to 10 percent of the budget. These budgets do not include debt, auto repairs, cable service, travel, laundry costs or items such as holiday gifts or dinners at restaurants. Taxes include federal and state income taxes assuming a salary equal to the respective ALICE budget total. Tax credits include the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

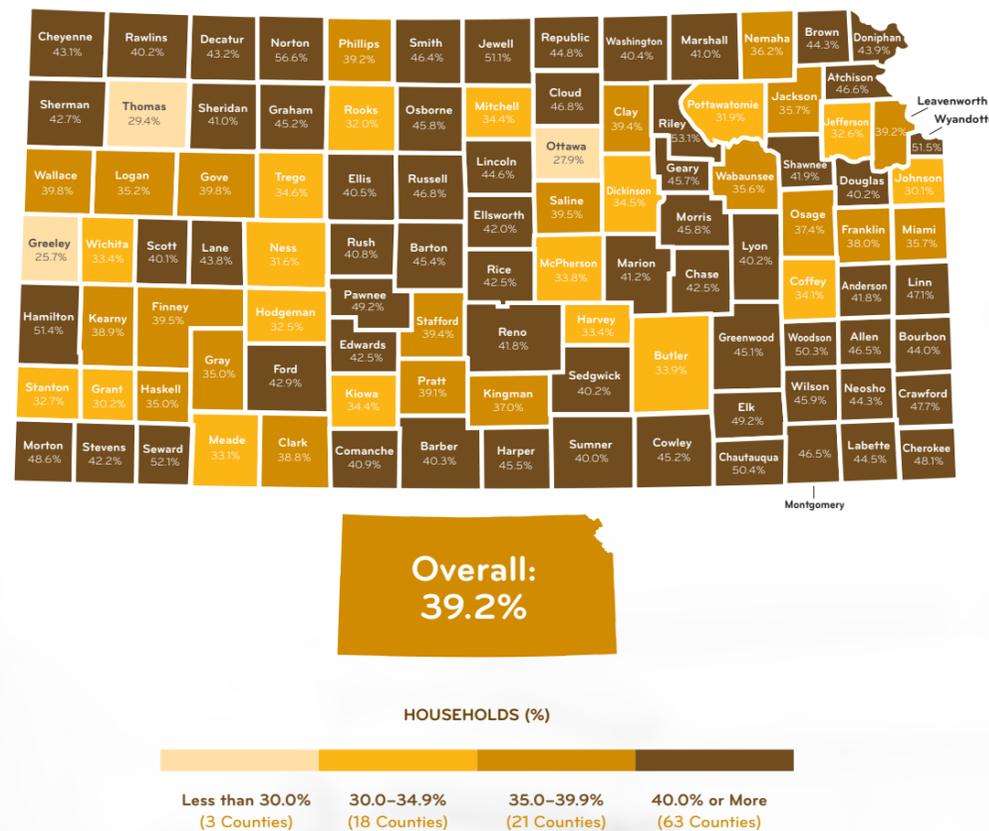
Source: Kansas Health Institute analysis of United for ALICE Threshold, 2022; Bureau of Labor Statistics – Occupational Employment Statistics, 2022; Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines, 2022.

For households already living paycheck to paycheck, these burdens deepen inequality and close off opportunities to move upward — making it harder to qualify for loans, pursue education, or invest in small businesses that could expand income over time.

1 IN 5

Kansans have debt in collections.

Figure 5. PERCENT OF KANSAS HOUSEHOLDS BELOW THE ALICE SURVIVAL BUDGET THRESHOLD, 2023



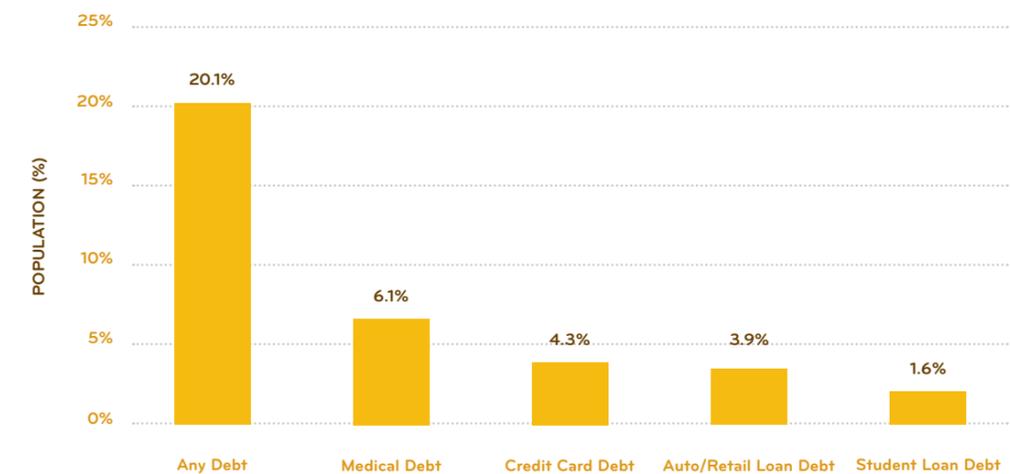
Note: The map represents the percentage of households in each county unable to meet their estimated household survival budget for all 105 Kansas counties.

Source: Kansas Health Institute analysis of United for ALICE Threshold, 2022.

DEBT IN DEFAULT

Credit can be an important tool for financing education and homeownership. Debt can be a burden. ALICE budgets do not include debt and other financial burdens, such as medical costs and auto repairs. Households earning above a Survival Budget are still vulnerable to unexpected costs of medical expenses and other emergencies. One in 5 Kansans (20.1 percent) have debt in collections, and about one-third of these Kansans have medical debt in collections (6.1 percent).

Figure 6. PERCENT OF KANSANS WITH DEBT IN COLLECTIONS, SIXTY DAYS DELINQUENT OR IN DEFAULT, 2023



Note: Data based on Urban Institute's analysis of a 4 percent nationally representative panel of deidentified, consumer-level records from August 2023 from a major credit bureau, U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey estimates and 2020 Decennial Census. Credit bureau data includes all people with a credit bureau record as of August 2023 data obtained by the Urban Institute. Debt status varies by type. For example, medical debt includes debt in collections, credit card and auto/retail loan debt include debt 60 days or more delinquent and student loan debt includes debt in default. Median debt in collections from all sources was \$2,049.

Source: Kansas Health Institute analysis of Urban Institute's Debt in America: An Interactive Map, 2023.

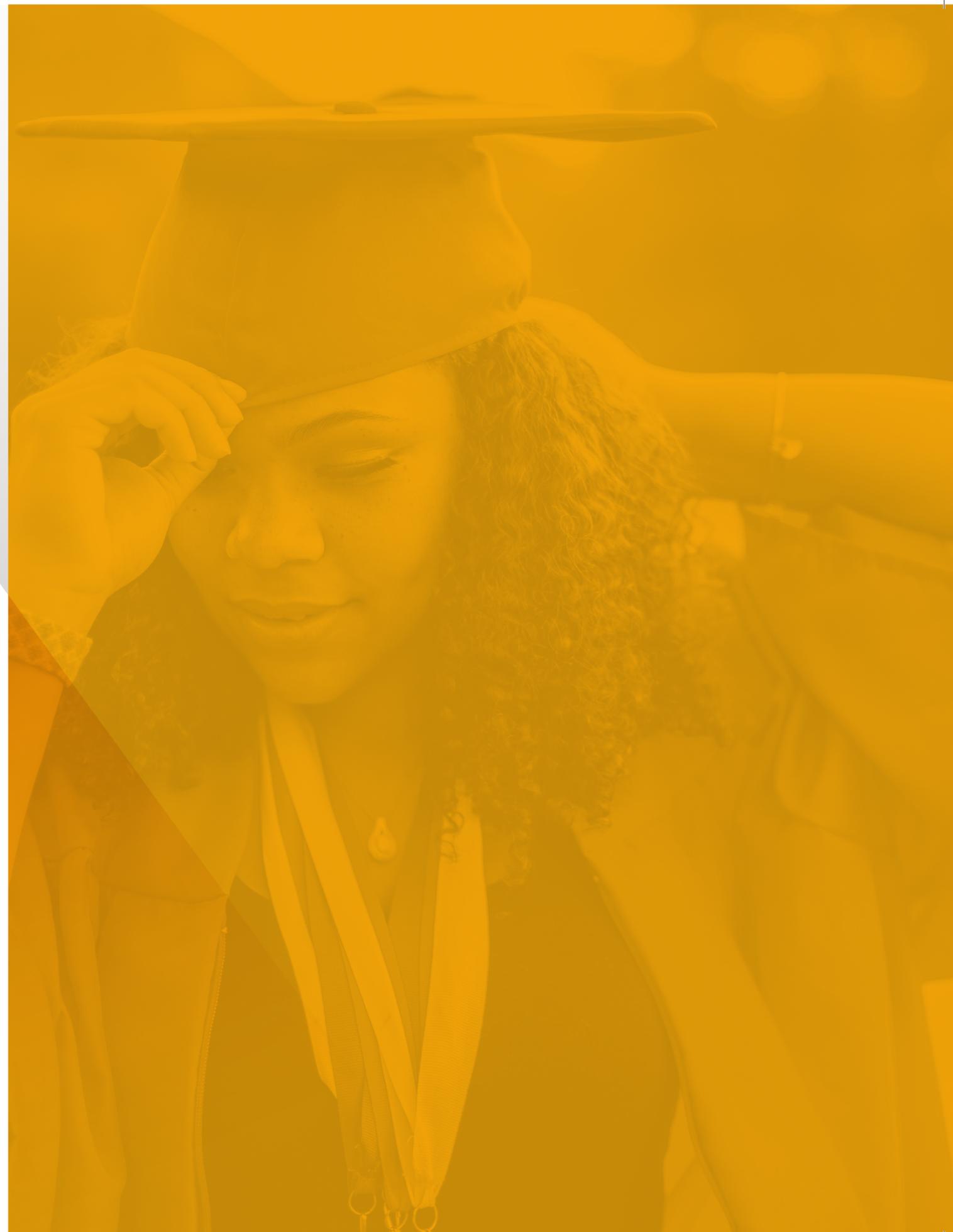
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