Berks Vital Signs
An Initiative of Berks County Community Foundation

An Overview of Key Trends

January, 2020

Prepared for:
Berks County Community Foundation

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Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the Berks County Community Foundation for its stewardship of this project.

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Introduction

Berks Vital Signs is an initiative of the Berks Community Foundation is aimed at deepening our knowledge and understanding of Berks County. The data and analysis will serve as a common source of information on critical topics that affect the health and progress of Berks County and inform community stakeholders, spur discussion and collaboration, and monitor our quality of life.

Community indicators are measurements of social, environmental and economic factors that affect quality of life. In a community indicator project, these factors are gathered and analyzed over time to monitor the community’s well-being and whether it’s improving, declining, or staying the same. These metrics help us decide how to focus our resources to improve our community, and then to monitor the impact of our collective efforts.

Our overview report will be updated annually, and the online data will be updated more frequently to allow for continual monitoring of the community’s evolving needs.

Using this data, the Berks Community Foundation will help the community create a shared vision for Berks future and build a data-driven civic agenda to realize that vision. The Berks Community Foundation will then facilitate partnerships and strategic initiatives that help align the community’s resources to support the agenda.

Berks Vital Signs was developed with assistance from the Center for Governmental Research (CGR), based in Rochester, New York. CGR is a nonprofit research and consulting firm that has created several community indicator projects in New York State, Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, Delaware and Massachusetts.

This project includes data for Berks County, the state of Pennsylvania, the nation and local areas within Berks County, broken into five regions and Reading City. The internal county regions are made up of boroughs and townships within Berks County. The internal regions are Central (five boroughs and townships including Reading City), Northeast (18 boroughs and townships), South (12 boroughs and townships), Southeast (13 boroughs and townships) and West (25 boroughs and townships). See the map below and Appendix for more details on what comprises each region.
In addition, where available, Berks County is compared to the state and nation as a whole, as well as Berks’ surrounding counties of Chester, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery and Schuylkill. These points of comparison provide context and a reference point for looking at and interpreting Berks County’s data. As much as the areas are alike, they also have different factors and characteristics impacting them. Our intention is not to rank the areas or put them in competition with one another, but to provide a frame of reference for making meaning out of Berks County’s data.
Overview

Like much of the nation, Berks County has experienced an improving economy and low unemployment. More residents have health insurance and more students are graduating from high school. Growing diversity means the county is graying more slowly than it would have without increases in younger ethnic and racial groups.

Yet, the community faces broad challenges including rising poverty and median incomes that are not keeping up with inflation. The median incomes for single parents, who make up an increasing share of families, are often not high enough to provide a living wage that covers life’s necessities. Additionally, not all groups are sharing equally in Berks’ prosperity. Poverty rates among children of color are much higher than those of white children.

This project is aimed at re-engaging county residents in a conversation about the overall quality of life in Berks County and how to work together to address issues and build on strengths. We hope this study provides a foundation for that process. Below are our key data findings in each of the 10 focus areas covered by this project: Children and Youth, Demographics, Economy, Education, Financial Self-Sufficiency, Health, Housing, Living, Public Safety and Transportation.

Children and Youth

More children in Berks County are living in poverty and in single-parent households, with deep disparities among children of different racial and ethnic groups. However, there are positive trends for Berks County’s children, too – many more women are accessing prenatal care, and the teen birth rate has dropped significantly.

Prenatal care, which is critical in reducing risks for complications of pregnancy and birth, was a bright spot in Berks County, with 83% of all mothers receiving prenatal care in their first trimester, higher than state and national rates. In addition, Berks compares very favorably with the state and nation in prenatal care for racial and ethnic groups: In 2018, 79% of Hispanic women, 78% of African American women, 83% of white women and 100% of Asian women in the county received early prenatal care.

Growing up in poverty puts children at higher risk for long-term health and social problems, diminishing their chances for success as adults. In 2014-18, 20% of Berks children were living in poverty, up 7 percentage points since 2000, a larger increase than the state and nation experienced. Throughout the nation and Berks, poverty is higher for some racial and ethnic groups: In 2014-18, 40% of Hispanic children and 29% of African American children in Berks County lived at or below the poverty line,
compared to 15% of white children. The local rates for Hispanic children are higher than for Pennsylvania and the nation.

Children raised by single parents are more likely to grow up in low-income households. In Berks County, 36% of families are headed up single parents, up 10 points from 2000. As with child poverty, there are racial disparities for this indicator nationwide and in Berks. In 2014-18, single parenting was nearly twice as prevalent among Hispanic and African American families (58% and 55% respectively) compared to white (37%) families in Berks County. Rates were up among white and Hispanic families since 2000. The county’s rates for Hispanics and white families was higher than the state and national rates. Fewer African-American families in Berks County were headed by single-parents when compared to Pennsylvania and the US.

About 6% of youths ages 16 to 19 in Berks County were disengaged in 2014-18 – not working or attending school. That’s flat since 2000 and similar to Pennsylvania and the U.S.

Teen births can prevent a young woman from completing her education or becoming financially self-sufficient. Babies born to teen mothers also are at higher risk for poor educational outcomes and living in poverty. Berks County’s teen birth rate fell 53% from 2000 to 2018, from 41 per 1,000 teens to 19 per 1,000. This drop was similar to Pennsylvania, but less than the nation.

**Demographics**

Berks County’s overall population is aging. However, the county’s Asian American, Hispanic and African American populations are growing significantly, and these residents tend to be younger. In another measure of the county’s vitality, its home vacancy rate is lower than the state and national rates, and is holding steady.

Population measures provide insight on how communities are changing in size and composition, as well as potential needs for public services. From 2000 to 2014-18 in Berks, there was more growth in older age brackets among both men and women. This included increases of 26% among women 60-84 and 69% among men 85 and older. This trend was generally similar to Pennsylvania and the U.S.

Changes in population by race and ethnicity can offer insight into a community’s level of diversity, which also may reflect particular challenges and opportunities. From 2000 to 2014-18, Berks County’s Hispanic population more than doubled, while its Asian population increased 62% and its African American population rose 66%. The county’s white population increased slightly (4%). These population changes were similar to the state and national levels.
The foreign-born population offers another measure. In 2014-18, 7% of Berks County’s population was foreign-born, up 3 percentage points from 2000. This percentage was similar to Pennsylvania, but less than the nation. In addition, 19% of Berks residents spoke a language other than English at home, up 6 percentage points since 2000. Both the state and nation increased 3 percentage points during this period.

**Economy**

Berks County appears to be recovering from the national recession of 2008-09, with an unemployment rate and an employment-to-population ratio that are slightly outperforming Pennsylvania and nation. However, there also are a few warning signs, including an average salary increase that is smaller than both the state and national level, and relatively high spending by county government and schools.

Unemployment rates are a timely indicator of changes in the local employment landscape. In 2018, Berks County’s unemployment rate was 4.2%, slightly lower than Pennsylvania and similar to the nation. This was down from a post-recession peak of 8.7% in 2010. This was the third year of a rate decline.

The employment-to-population ratio also offers an indicator of the availability of work in a region. The ratio in Berks was 62% in 2014-18, slightly higher than Pennsylvania and the nation at 60%.

Changes in the size of the labor force indicate people’s willingness and ability to find work. From 2000 to 2018, Berks County’s labor force increased 9%, a larger increase than at the state level, but less than at the national level.

Employment changes by sector paint a picture of the county’s changing economy. The total number of jobs in Berks County increased 11% from 2001 to 2018, but the Professional and Business Services sector grew 29% during this period, while Manufacturing jobs declined 18%. Trade, Transportation and Utilities was up slightly, by 4%.

The share of jobs by sector is a key indicator of the structure of the economy in a region. In 2018, Trade, Transportation and Utilities made up the largest sector in Berks, accounting for 18% of jobs. Professional and Business Services comprised 14% of jobs, a similar share to the nation and even with the state. Other key sectors were Manufacturing, 14%; Health Care and Social Assistance, 13%; and Government, 10%.

Average salaries also are a gauge of the degree to which employees are sharing in the prosperity of particular industries. In 2018, the three highest-paid sectors in Berks County were Financial Activities, with an average salary of $77,200, Construction, at $63,800, and Professional and Business Services, at $62,500.
Changes in salaries by sector offer a more detailed view of economic health in specific industries. Between 2000 and 2018, the average salary for Berks workers increased 8%, less than the state and nation. Most economic sectors in Berks had increases in average salaries during this period, but the extent varied widely, from a 41% increase in Financial Activities to a 21% decline in Educational Services.

Commuters entering and leaving a county is an indicator of its economic vitality and ability to draw employers and employees from surrounding areas. It may also reflect the quality of the match between the jobs available in an area and the skills of its resident workforce. In 2017, 44% of Berks County residents commuted outside the county for work, up 9 percentage points since 2002. Also in 2017, 38% of people who worked in Berks had traveled there from another county. The City of Reading, in contrast, had 85% of city residents commute out of the city, while 80% of the city’s workers commuted in from elsewhere.

Per capita income from governmental programs is one way to measure a region’s level of poverty. In 2018, Berks County received $3,185 in public assistance income per resident, less than Pennsylvania, but more than the nation. Between 2001 and 2018, public assistance per resident in Berks County increased 94% (after inflation), compared to 82% statewide and 53% nationally.

Local government spending per capita can indicate the level of services provided, as well as the cost of taxes, a potential hindrance to development. Local governments in Berks County spent $1,138 per resident in 2017, up 17% from 2000, but down from $1,569 in 2008. Local government spending was higher across Pennsylvania than in Berks.

County government spending is a similar indicator, but at the county level. Berks County government spent just over $1,050 per resident in 2017, down from $1,090 in 2000. County government spending across Pennsylvania has been consistently lower than Berks since 2000.

Spending of school districts show a community’s support for public education. Schools in Berks County spent $2,870 per resident in 2018, up 40% from $2,050 in 2001. Berks spent more per resident than Pennsylvania in 2018, and has spent more than the state each year since 2001.

**Education**

Educational success hinges upon myriad factors, but important ones include prekindergarten participation, the availability of high-quality early childhood education, the challenges and needs of the student population, and the adequacy of school funding. Prekindergarten helps prepare children both socially and academically.
for school, and can be especially important for low-income children who tend to be exposed to a less rich vocabulary and have access to fewer resources than their peers. In Berks County in 2017, 18% of 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in prekindergarten programs, up from 10% in 2007, though still below the state rate of 23%. Additionally, only 6% of the children under age 5 who needed child care had access to high-quality early childhood centers, under the statewide rate of 10%.

School spending in Berks County across public school districts was $16,960 per student in 2018, about 4% less than the statewide level of $17,600. The county level has increased 44% since 2001, more than the 42% increase the state saw as a whole. Per-student spending was the lowest in the Reading district at $13,600 and the highest in the Kutztown district at $23,700.

Pennsylvania defines students as historically underperforming if they are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, English Language Learners, or receive special education services. The size and concentration of these groups of students can pose additional challenges to schools as they seek to education children who have fewer resources at home, require special or modified instruction as they gain English proficiency, or require intensive and often expensive special education services in order to support their educational outcomes. In Berks County, 50% of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 9% of students were English language learners, and 21% received special education services. Reading School District had the highest proportion of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch (93%) and the highest share of English language learners (27%). Berks County as a whole also had a higher proportion of these student groups than its neighboring counties.

Measures of academic achievement show the majority of students in Berks County are considered proficient in the key subjects of English and Math by 11th grade, but up to a quarter to 30% are not. Disparities in academic achievement between historically underperforming students and students as a whole are consistent and remain significant. Additionally, Reading, with its high concentration of free and reduced price lunch students, consistently has some of the lowest academic outcomes for its students.

Third grade is an important milestone, particularly in the development of students’ literacy skills. Through third grade, many students are learning to read; from third grade on, they need to be able to read to learn. In Berks County in 2019, 58% of 3rd graders (and 42% of historically underperforming 3rd graders) were considered proficient on the state’s English Language Arts exams, a slight improvement from the previous year.

Similarly, 8th grade math and English language arts proficiency serve as important high school readiness checkpoints. In total, 50% of students were proficient in English
Language Arts, and only 29% of students reached proficiency in Grade 8 Math. Again, these rates were much lower for historically underperforming students (30% for English language arts and 12% for math).

Beginning with the class of 2017, Pennsylvania has designated 11th grade algebra and literature proficiency as a requirement for high school graduation. In 2019, 72% of 11th grade students reached proficiency in literature, and 65% achieved proficiency in algebra.

High school graduation rates in Berks County have been rising, with 86% of the 2018 high school cohort graduating on time, up 2 percentage points from 2011 and similar to the state graduation rate and increase over this time period. Some of the lowest 2018 graduation rates were in districts with high rates of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a rough measure of low-income backgrounds. These included Reading, with a graduation rate of 67%. The highest graduation rates were in districts where between a quarter and one-third of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (for example, Wyomissing which had a graduation rate of 99%).

High school graduates’ post-graduation plans have been rising, with 65% of the 2018 high school graduates in Berks County planning on attending college at a 2- or 4-year institution, similar to 2008, and slightly lower than the current state rate (which declined by 1 percentage points over this time period). Several school districts had 75% or more of their graduates plan to attend a 2- or 4-year institution, these were: Wyomissing, Wilson, Antietam and Daniel Boone. Tulpehocken had the lowest rate, with only 52% of its graduates planning to go on to a 2- or 4-year institution, followed by Hamburg (54%) and Reading (55%). Berks’ rate ranked it in the middle of neighboring counties, whose college-bound rates ranged from 60% to 83%.

Berks County’s adult education levels are highest for Asian Americans (43% with a bachelor’s degree or higher) followed by whites (26%). African Americans and Hispanics in Berks had lower rates of higher education (14% and 10% respectively held a bachelor’s degree or above). These rates of higher education by race/ethnicity are generally below the state and national rates for almost every group. Additionally, the share of Berks County residents without a high school degree has declined since 2000 for all racial and ethnic groups.

Young adults provide a regional economy with a supply of young workers starting out in careers. Berks County had a little more than 13,000 young adults in 2014-18 with a bachelor’s degree or higher, making up 4.2% of the total population, below the state and nation.

Financial Self-Sufficiency
How easy is it for Berks County residents to support themselves and their families? The county’s median household income, living wage and percentage of working poor people compare well with Pennsylvania as a whole. However, other indicators may be causes for concern, including increases in the county’s poverty rate and the percentage of residents who receive federal food assistance. Within the county, poverty is highest by far in the Central region, where median income also declined the most since 2000.

Median household income is a gauge of the county’s overall economic health and the financial resources of its residents. In 2014-18, the median income in Berks was $61,500, slightly higher than the state and nation, but down 9% since 2000 (after inflation). This was a larger decrease than at the state and national levels.

There are significant disparities in median income by household type. For households headed by single women with children in Berks County, the median household income in 2014-18 was $28,200. This was roughly half that of single men with children, at $45,900. Married couples without children had a median income of $83,700, compared to those with children, at $95,100. Income decreased for all types of households in Berks since 2000, except married with children which held steady.

Living wage measures the level of income that households require to pay for necessities, including housing and food, without assistance. In 2018, a family of four with two earners in Berks County would need to earn $16.35 per hour, or $68,000 a year. The living wage for a family of four with one earner was $25.00, or $52,000 a year, and for a single parent with two children, $29.93, or $62,300. This represents a slightly cheaper cost of living than Pennsylvania as a whole.

The percentage of people living in or near poverty is another measure of overall economic health, as well as the need for social supports to help families make ends meet. In 2014-18, Berks County’s poverty rate was 13%, similar to the state and nation. However, the county’s poverty rate rose 4 percentage points since 2000, a larger increase than at the state and national levels. The poverty rate was 28% in the Central region of the county, and ranged from 5% to 8% in other regions.

The percentage of working poor measures people who are working, but earning at or below the poverty line. In 2014-18, 3.4% of Berks County residents could be considered working poor, a percentage similar to the state, but smaller than at the national level.

The share of people receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, formerly called food stamps, indicates how many people in the county rely on government assistance to meet basic needs. In 2017, 15% of Berks County residents received SNAP benefits – slightly more than at the state and national levels. This represented a threefold increase since 2000.
Health

Critical factors in human health include access to health care and lifestyle indicators such as exercise. In Berks County, most residents have health insurance but many are overweight or obese and a significant share do not regularly engage in physical activity.

Just 8% of Berks County residents under 65 lacked health insurance, similar with the state, and slightly better than the national rate of 10%. Reaching a low uninsured rate and ensuring that residents have access to medical care and are able to maintain financial stability is possible in part through government and state assistance to those who cannot afford healthcare. Berks County had 19% of its residents enrolled in Medicaid managed care in 2018, similar with the state. Both the state and county have experienced a 5 percentage point increase since 2015 in the proportion of their residents that are enrolled in these services. The percentage of Medicaid managed care enrollees rose in all neighboring counties from 2015 to 2018 as the state entered its fourth year of expanded Medicaid eligibility, with Berks’ increase above most nearby counties’ 3 to 6 percentage point increases.

Residents’ current health level is as important as their access to healthcare. Berks and Schuylkill counties residents display health levels similar to the state and nation. In Berks and Schuylkill counties, 21% of residents report being in fair or poor health, indicating that the majority of residents perceived their overall health as good, very good, or even excellent. Despite this, a quarter of Berks and Schuylkill counties residents had not engaged in leisure-time physical activity in the past 30 days, raising concerns as to their future health status and potential higher healthcare costs in 2016-18.

The majority (73%) of Berks and Schuylkill counties residents were overweight or obese, an increase of 7 percentage points since 2011-13. Berks and Schuylkill counties had a larger percentage of overweight and obese residents than either the state or the nation (both 66%).

The share of overweight and obese children in Berks was smaller, but had increased at a faster rate with 33% of K-6th and 44% of 7-12th graders being overweight or obese, a 3 and 12 percentage point increase respectively, since 2009.

Housing

Homeownership is an important factor for neighborhood stability and a vital financial asset for families. Home sales have rebounded in Berks County since the national housing crisis. Home prices also stabilized, and overall, homes remain affordable here.
Renters, however, spend more of their income on rent here than at the state or national levels, particularly among racial and ethnic minorities.

In 2014-18, homeowners occupied 72% of the homes in Berks County, a higher percentage than at the state or national level. Homeownership declined 2 percentage points since 2000, similar to Pennsylvania and the U.S.

Home affordability can be measured by dividing the median home value by the median household income. A ratio below 2 or 3 is usually affordable. Berks County’s ratio in 2014-18 was 2.8, similar to the state and below the nation. While this suggests that homes in Berks County are generally affordable, affordability at the county level has declined since 2000, when the ratio was 2.7.

Housing also is generally more affordable for all racial and ethnic groups in Berks County than at the state and national levels. The ratios were lower for Hispanics and African Americans (2.5 and 2.2 respectively) than for Asian Americans (2.8) and whites (2.6) in 2014-18.

However, renters in Berks County may face difficulties paying for housing. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development’s guideline for affordability says that rent should consume no more than 30% of a household’s income. In 2014-18, renters in Berks spent 33% of their income on rent, slightly more than the state and nation.

Racial and ethnic minorities in Berks County may have particular difficulty. In 2014-18, Hispanics paid 40% of their income on rent, compared to 37% among African American renters, 46% among Asian Americans and 29% among white residents. These disparities were more pronounced here than at the state or national levels.

The age of housing stock can indicate the condition and quality of homes in a community, as well as the potential cost of repairs and maintenance. In Berks County, 27% of homes were built before 1940. This proportion is similar to Pennsylvania, but higher than the national level. In the U.S., about half of homes were built since 1970, compared to 47% in Berks County.

Single-family home sales can indicate demand for housing, and by extension, the health of a community’s economy. In Berks County, home sales steadily increased until 2005 and then dropped every year until 2011. Sales have since recovered and were 12% above 2000 levels as of 2019.

Home prices typically reflect demand for housing, and by extension, the health of the local economy and real estate market. In 2018, the median price of a single-family home in Berks County was about $164,000, a 9% increase over the median in 2000. During this period, the median home price increased steadily and peaked in 2007. Prices then dropped until 2011 and remained flat until increasing in 2016 and 2017.
The percentage of vacant housing units indicates whether an area has many vacancies, which may be a sign of blight or decline. In 2014-18, 7% of residential housing units in Berks were vacant. This percentage was less than Pennsylvania and the nation. Berks County’s vacancy rate increased 1 percentage point from 2000, below the increases at the state and national levels.

**Living**

Quality of life in a community is made up of many components – including physical assets such as the environment and technology, and a community’s residents and their level of involvement.

Berks County residents’ engagement in their community and political process is increasing. Of voting-age residents, 76% of voting-age Berks residents were registered to vote and 44% voted in the 2018 election. While both voter registration and participation have increased in Berks County since 2000, they are both below state levels. When comparing to neighboring counties, Chester and Montgomery both had higher voter registration and voter participation than Berks County, while in contrast Schuylkill County had lower voter registration and participation.

Another measure of residents’ engagement in their community is the level of charitable giving, which shows residents’ willingness to invest in programs and organizations that serve their community. The average charitable donation in Berks County increased by 26% in real terms since 2011, which is a larger increase than that experienced by neighboring counties, the state or the nation. The level of giving (an average of $4,293) is still lower than the average for the state of Pennsylvania or for the country as a whole. When considered in terms of residents’ income, Berks County residents contributed 1.6% of their income, a similar rate to the state and the country. However, while that rate has been fairly constant for Pennsylvania and the U.S., this share represents a slight increase from the 1.4% of income donated in 2011.

Tourism can bring important economic activity to an area, providing jobs as well as the potential for regional pride. Over $923 million was spent on travel and tourism in Berks County in 2017, good for $2,213 per county resident. Tourism spending increased by only 6% from 2005 to 2017, while the state as whole experienced a 13% increase.

Access to the Internet is crucial for households to communicate and search for jobs. In 2014-18, 81% of households in Berks County had access to the Internet, similar to Pennsylvania and the U.S. When compared to neighboring counties, Berks had a similar share of households with internet access, though Chester and Montgomery (both 88%) counties had higher rates of access.
Beyond jobs and community engagement, environmental factors can affect community life. While dams can provide benefits such as economic activity, renewable power, and flood control, many dams are rapidly aging and come with significant costs. Dams can contribute to water pollution of their related watershed, as well as impacting local environments and habitats. As dams age, their infrastructure can weaken and increase the chance of failure, potentially endangering human life and property. Such dams require monitoring and infrastructure investment to ensure the safety of those in the surrounding areas. Berks County contained 4.3 dams per 100 square miles, for a total of 37 dams in the county, accounting for 2% of the state’s dams.

Public Safety

Crime can cause long-lasting trauma to individuals and disruption to a community. This makes safety a top priority for most residents. Overall, Berks County is similar to Pennsylvania in terms of its crime and incarceration rates. Property crimes in particular are on the decline, and the county’s drug-related arrest rate is lower than the state rate. However, the county’s rate of protection from abuse orders – a potential indicator of domestic violence – is higher than at the state level.

In 2017, there were 2.6 violent crimes reported per 1,000 residents in Berks County – similar to Pennsylvania as a whole. These crimes include murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. The state’s violent crime rate dropped 23% from 2005 to 2017, similar to Berks County’s rate.

There were 15 property crimes reported per 1,000 residents in Berks County in 2017, just below the state rate of 17. These offenses include arson, burglary, theft, fraud, embezzlement and vandalism. The county rate dropped significantly between 2012 and 2017, and decreased more than at the state level.

Incarceration removes an offender from a community, but it also can create hardships on families whose relative is imprisoned. After release, formerly incarcerated people often encounter challenges in obtaining employment. In 2016, there were 2.5 county jail inmates per 1,000 residents in Berks County. This rate was similar to Pennsylvania. The county’s incarceration rate fell from 2006 to 2011, but climbed again in 2012 before falling slightly in 2016.

Drug use, sale and other illegal drug-related activity can have immediate as well as long-term negative health, social and economic consequences for people and communities. In 2017, there were 4.8 drug abuse arrests per 1,000 residents in Berks County, similar to the statewide rate.
A protection from abuse order is a civil order from a court to safeguard victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. In 2017, there were 4.3 abuse protection orders issued per 1,000 residents in Berks County. This was 40% higher than the Pennsylvania rate, but it is impossible to say whether this is because there is more domestic violence in Berks County or because local policies lead courts to issue more orders here than in other parts of the state. Berks County’s rate has fluctuated year to year, while the statewide rate was essentially flat from 2005 to 2017.

Transportation

Berks County residents rely heavily on personal automobiles to commute, travel and run errands. The vast majority commute to work by driving alone, with an average travel time of 25 minutes. However, about 1 in 10 households lack access to a vehicle. There were 9 alcohol-related crashes per 10,000 residents in 2018, higher than the statewide rate.

Commuting patterns reflect the transportation choices available to workers in a region. This can affect residents’ access to jobs and public services. These patterns also impact environmental and transportation planning in a region. In 2014-18, 83% of Berks County residents drove to work alone, 10% carpooled, 2% used public transit, and 5% biked, walked or used other means of transportation. These commuting patterns have not changed since 2000. Slightly more people used public transportation at the state and national levels.

Travel time to work is another reflection of transportation options, as well as the availability of desirable and affordable housing near employers. In 2014-18, Berks County’s average travel time of 25 minutes was up 3 minutes from 2000. This was still slightly less than the statewide and U.S. average (both 27 minutes).

Access to a vehicle can have a major impact on a person’s ability to work, conduct daily errands such as grocery shopping and get involved in civic life. In 2014-18, 8% of households in Berks County lacked access to a vehicle, down 3 percentage points since 2000. This was lower than Pennsylvania and similar to the nation.

Alcohol-related crashes are preventable, and they cost millions of dollars in health care, legal services and lost worker productivity. The county’s 2018 alcohol-related crash rate of 8.7 per 10,000 was down 36% from 14 per 10,000 in 2000, but has been flat since 2009. This was higher than the statewide rate of 7.7 crashes per 10,000 residents.
Below is the list of boroughs and townships making up each region as defined in Berks Vital Signs.

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