



BLACK WELL-BEING

Moving Toward Solutions Together

THE SUMMARY | NOVEMBER 2022

OVERVIEW

Washington state has its first Black-led philanthropy, the Black Future Co-op Fund, working to connect Black communities for collective power, promote a truthful Black narrative, and invest in Black generational wealth, health, and well-being. Launched in June 2020, the Fund seeks to shift the philanthropic paradigm by centering the beauty, strength, and soulfulness of Blackness.

A Report By Us and For Us

Together, with Black Washingtonians, the Fund created this new report, for us and by us, to manifest Black well-being statewide. Building on Byrd Barr Place's 2015 report, *Creating an Equitable Future in Washington State: Black Well-being & Beyond*, this report examines the structural barriers behind the outcomes that Black Washingtonians experience, and elevates community identified approaches that will result in the world we want to see. Framed in this way, the report aims to:

- Support collective organizing among Black people and communities across the state.
- Direct resources to invest strategically in Black prosperity, health, and well-being.
- Inform policy change to fix structural injustices and advance equitable opportunity.

Grounded in Community Wisdom

The study and resulting report were designed to live out a core principle of the Fund — promoting a truthful Black narrative. It is rooted in gathering the diverse perspectives of our community statewide. In July 2021, we started with focus groups on five topic areas: civic engagement, education, economic mobility, public

safety, and health, from which we distilled common themes. Next, we conducted a statewide survey of more than 600 Black Washingtonians about priorities, perceptions of progress, and definitions of leadership and accountability.

Following the survey, we formed panels around each of the five topic areas to discuss the survey results and community approaches that work for us. And, in June 2022, we hosted a statewide gathering, featuring five panel conversations where we sought feedback on the themes and community approaches. More than 150 watch parties tuned in online, while over 75 people met in person at community spaces in Seattle, Spokane, and Tacoma. All of these conversations and community wisdom helped shape the report. We hope more Black Washingtonians add their voices to our growing and colorful vision of well-being.

A Truthful Black Narrative

This report is a reflection of two essential components: 1) a clear picture of the societal conditions around us; and 2) our vision for long overdue societal change from the individual to the institution. It includes an overview of who we are, key metrics that have moved since the 2015 report, and summaries of the five topic areas.

What's clear across topics is that the outcomes that we experience are the product of intersecting root causes that operate individually, interpersonally, communally, organizationally, and structurally across sectors. As you read, we hope you hold multiple truths at the same time and are able to see the interconnected nature of the contextual factors raised and the community identified approaches offered.

What follows is a summary of the report; for the full report, visit BlackFutureWA.org/BlackWellBeing.

Who We Are

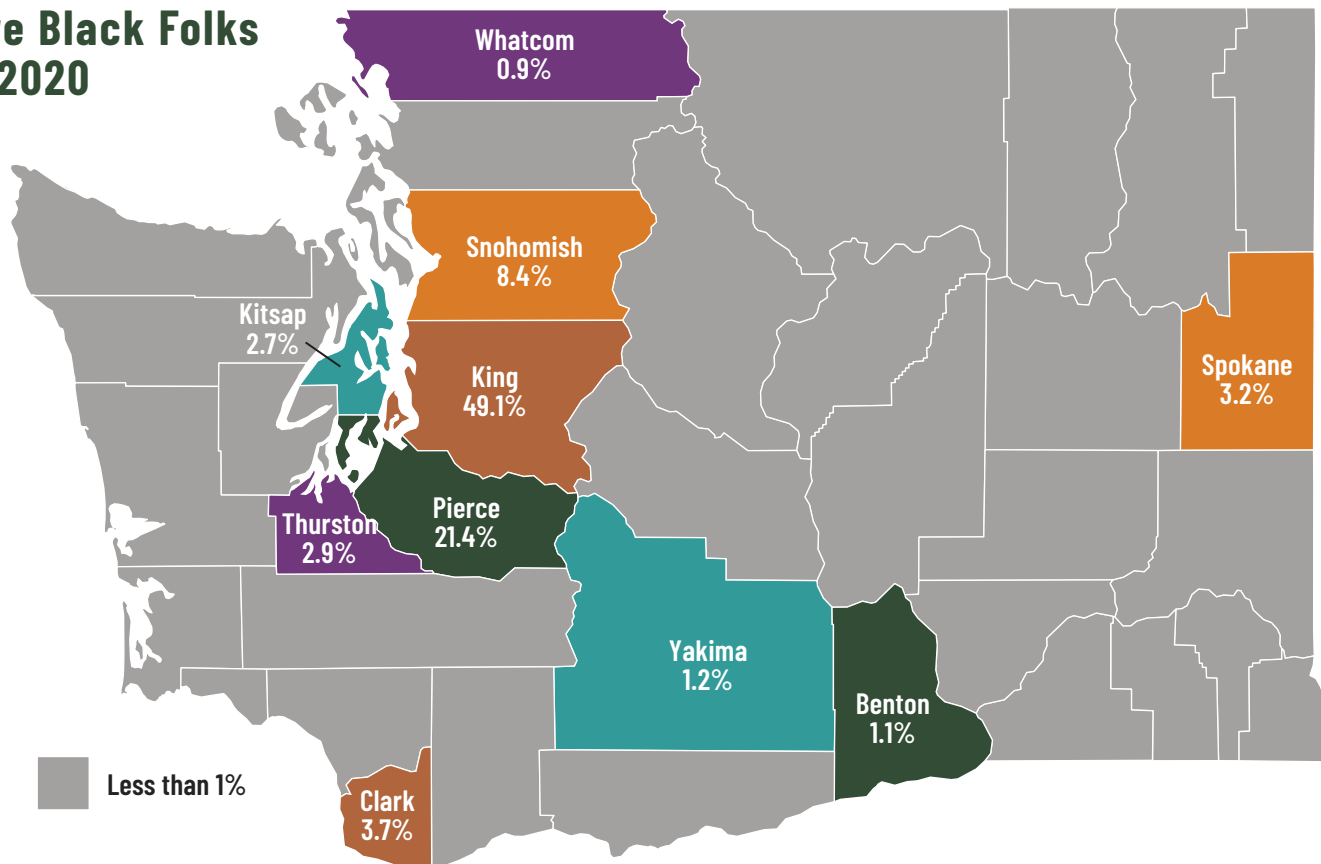
Black people make up 5.8% of Washington state's population as of 2020. We live in all 39 counties, with the majority of us in King (49.1%), Pierce (21.4%), Snohomish (8.4%), Clark (3.7%), Spokane (3.2%), Thurston (2.9%), Kitsap (2.7%), and Yakima (1.2%). Average earnings of Black people in Washington range from \$1,418 who have less than a high school diploma to \$51,668 who have a master's degree.

What Are Our Priorities and Perceptions of Progress

From the Fund's survey of 600 Black Washingtonians, we are most hopeful about progress in civic engagement and education. Black people who are making less than \$50,000 are more hopeful about progress in economic mobility than those with higher incomes. And, Black people aged 56 and over believe less progress is being made in all areas compared to people younger than them.

Civic engagement was the top priority for Black people making less than \$50,000. Accountability was the top priority for those aged 56 and over. They were also the only age group to list health care as a top five priority.

Where Black Folks Live 2020



Key Metrics That Have Moved Since 2015

While some metrics have improved in comparison to 2015, the gap between us and everyone else has not improved because the social structures and systems in which we participate, such as housing, education, employment, transportation, and health are relatively unchanged.

Category	State (2015)	Black (2015)	State (2020)	Black (2020)
↑ Percent of people with health insurance	94.2%	89.7%	93.9%	93%
↑ Household median net worth (2011 compared to 2017)	\$68,828	\$6,314	\$104,000	\$9,567
↑ Household median income	\$58,405	\$40,760	\$78,687	\$56,250
↓ Homeownership – live in a household that owns a home	63%	35%	63%	31%
↑ Percentage of children ready for kindergarten	41%	39%	52%	44%
↑ Percentage of students meeting 8th grade math standards	56%	34%	72%	47%
↑ Percentage of students graduating from high school on time	76%	65%	83%	76.3%
↓ Average cost of attending Washington’s public 4-year universities as a share of median household income	42%	61%	32%	44.5%
↑ Number of representatives in the legislature		1 in 147		10 in 147

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement is acting individually or collectively on the issues that matter to us. There are both formal and informal ways to influence the policies, laws, and rules that shape our world. It isn't just the legislative system, it's school boards, churches, and mutual aid.

Contextual Factors

- **Who has a seat at the table?** Representation matters to having our needs raised in the legislature. In 2022, we had eight Black representatives and two Black senators — the most representation in the state's history.
- **Whose voices are heard?** Black people do vote, despite what the rhetoric says. We have the highest percentage registered among people of color with 65%. However, a 2022 audit by the Office of the State Auditor discovered that Black voters' ballots were rejected four times more often than white voters.
- **Inadequate civics education.** Until the 2020-21 school year, Washington was one of 11 states that did not require a stand-alone civic class. There hasn't been systemwide implementation; still, there are interdisciplinary, racially inclusive, and hands-on civics education from which we can learn.
- **Community demystifying civics.** A myriad of folks and groups are stepping up to educate community and create space for discourse — from Black journalists, religious leaders, dancers, and athletes to organizations like Washington Community Alliance, Washington Build Back Black Alliance, Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance, and King County Equity Now.

Community Identified Approaches

We envision moving more boldly to create the world we want to see: exercising individual and collective power, stepping into our joy, having time to be and rest so that we heal and dream, and listening, learning, and organizing intergenerationally, with attention to healthy interdependence. To do that, we need to:

- **Interrogate and shift harmful narratives.** The information we receive has an impact on how we feel about what's possible. For example, depictions of poverty disproportionately center Black people with 59% of stories being about Black poor folks, while we only make up 27% of the population of poor families.
- **Stop looking to a small handful of Black leaders to represent us.** We're moving away from the narrative that one or two leaders are positioned to "save" us.
- **Center the arts in civics because they are foundational to social change.** We need the holders and shapers of culture to successfully move anything strategically.
- **Increase and enhance civic readiness.** Beyond reading, writing, math, and science, our youth should understand how the dynamics of power are expressed socially, legally, and politically.
- **Fund community to plan and lead.** In addition to Black people creating and leading the decision-making tables, we must work across systems and resource adequate planning periods.

Black voters' ballots were **rejected 4X more often** than white voters.


EDUCATION

The education Black children receive is, by necessity, in two parts: in formal educational settings like schools and at home. Our education should lead us to a fulfilling career, the freedom to live our lives, and ultimately self-actualization.

Contextual Factors

- **The cost of quality early learning and child care.** Infant child care is 25.9% of Black median household income and care for children up to 4 years old is 19.6%. This is an incredible stressor in the face of so much research emphasizing the importance of quality early education on brain development and long-term success. In 2020, less than half (44%) of Black children were ready for kindergarten.

- **Public school funding structures benefit the already resourced.** Racist practices like redlining and restrictive covenants have impacted both who lives where and how much money a school district has. In 2018, wealthier school districts received 7.6% more funding than high-poverty districts. A recent study showed students exposed to at least 10% more annual school funding in K-3 experienced a 2% reduction in the likelihood of being arrested as an adult.
- **Implicit bias of teachers and administrators.** Across Washington's public schools, 10% of homeless students, 9% of students with disabilities, and 8% of Black students were suspended in 2019, compared to an average of 4% of all students. Discipline starts with teachers. Black teachers are more likely to believe in Black children's ability to succeed, and respond accordingly. In the 2020-21 school year, just 1.5% of Washington's teachers were Black.
- **Cost of higher education.** Higher education takes 45% of the income of an average Black household in Washington, down from 61% in 2015. In 2019, 60% of Black students in the state moved immediately from high school to college, up from 2015, but many contend with the emotional and psychological cost of attending a predominantly white institution.



Black students who have at least **one Black teacher** in grades K-3 are **13% more likely to graduate from high school** and **19% more likely to enroll in college** than their same-school, same-race peers.

Community Identified Approaches

We envision rich, integrated educational spaces that teach students how to grow into themselves and shape a better society. Education that is interactive, hands on, and culturally relevant. To improve the education ecosystem, we must:

- **Fund the Black community to plan how we want our education systems to function.** Create space, time, and resources for community visioning and strategy development.
- **Utilize mastery- or competency-based learning toward self-actualization.** Apply targeted universalism to allow students to lean into their strengths and master concepts on their own time.
- **Redefine academic standards to recognize and cultivate Black brilliance.** Shift the focus of evaluation toward the system rather than the student, and shift the pay incentives of school administrators toward producing better outcomes for Black students.
- **Cultivate loving interactions within the education ecosystem.** Build new norms and organizational cultures rooted in belonging, and set expectations for continued healing, self-reflection, and love.
- **Create practices of accountability and transparency at all levels of decision making.** Ensure clear and meaningful accountability, tailored to the decision making and authority of each role. Create a connected network from early learning to K-12 to higher education.
- **Revisit job descriptions and organizational structures, and diversify the workforce.** Set expectations that schools hire racially and gender diverse teachers and pay them well with consideration to workload and emotional labor.



ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Economic mobility is our ability to access more resources over time. It is the likelihood that our children can have a higher standard of living than they grew up having.

Contextual Factors

- **What we believe to be true.** Narratives about money and our personal value are as old as slavery and colonization, propping up systems of injustice. People are not poor because they are lazy; 23% of Black Washingtonians work full-time but still fall below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- **Reparations and closing the structural gap.** Research shows that even if the conditions for building wealth were the same for Black people and white people from 1870 to 2020, white households would still have three times as much wealth as Black households.
- **Rising costs mean harsher economic realities.** Structural racism is foundationally designed in societal systems, resulting in Black people paying a larger share of income for most things. Black median household income is \$56,250 in Washington, which isn't enough to afford a market rate 2-bedroom home in most of the state. Additionally, 19% of Black Washingtonians experience food insecurity, 5% more than the general population.

- **Who gets hired for the “good” jobs and racism in the workplace.** National data shows that of the roughly 900,000 people holding top-paying jobs across the country, about 3% were Black, even though we make up 13% of the population. In jobs that pay more than \$100,000 per year, Black women represent just 2.7%. Employers are still looking for “cultural fit,” or screening people out based on their involvement with the legal system or lack of a college degree.
- **Owning a home or residential property.** Homeownership — a critical path to wealth-building — was 34% for Black Washingtonians in 2020, almost half of the statewide average of 63.3%.
- **Access to business capital.** Black people make up 12.4% of the U.S., yet in 2019 Black businesses represented 2.3% of all employers, employing 1.3 million people. Often in addition to working a full-time job, many own a side business, or two, or three. Nationally, Black folks make up 11.8% of non-employer businesses. Getting there is no small task, complicated by structural racism in systems of credit and capital.



Community Identified Approaches

Our planning today is for generations to come because all of us, not just a few of us, are deserving of comfort and care. We recognize our abundance and move from the inner knowing that we have access to an abundant world. When Black people thrive, all communities will thrive. To manifest this, we can:

- **Lean into each other as our most valuable resource.**

This is the heart of the co-op approach. We deserve to be with each other from a place of power, clarity, and compassion. We are healing and learning to trust ourselves and each other.

- **Hire Black people, pay them well, and put them in leadership roles.** Many of us, particularly Black women, are told the lie that we need more experience, more training, before we can successfully fill leadership roles. We don't. Impostor syndrome is used against us.

- **Partner with Black youth to create the jobs of tomorrow.** Most of the jobs and organizational models that will move us toward societal well-being do not exist today. We are creating them.

- **Change the nature of traditional human resources.**

One lesson many of us painfully learn is that human resources' primary role is not to support us, it's to protect the organization. We must address the accountability gap between the legal definition of racism and the daily impacts of racism.

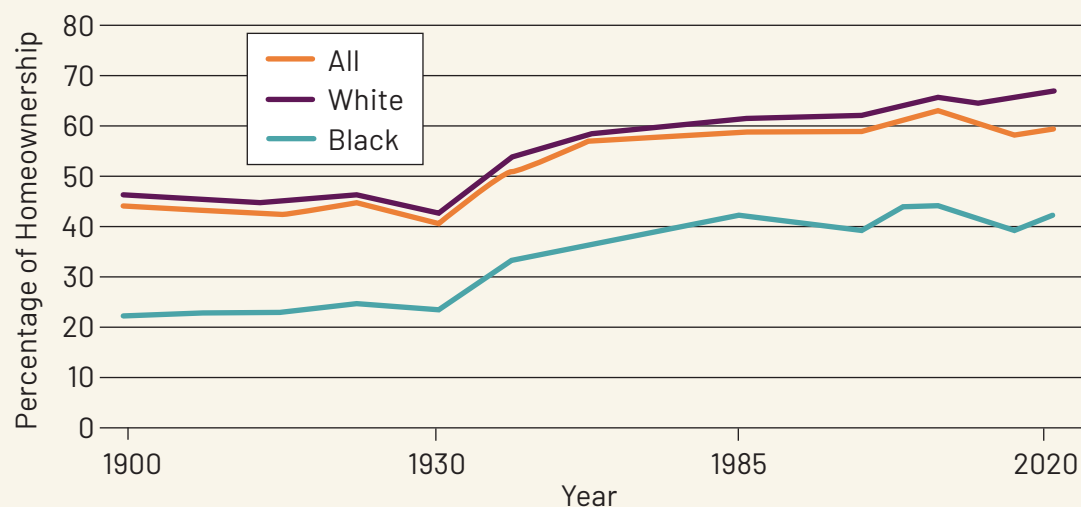
- **Start, invest in, and expand Black-owned businesses.** More than ensuring company profits circulate within the Black community, Black employers are also more likely to offer flexibility and balance to employees.

- **Increase and sustain Black homeownership.** It is an important pathway to generational wealth and community building.

- **Get more Black involvement in urban planning.** We need more Black people influencing what our neighborhoods look like and how they function by making the process accessible, expanding urban planning literacy, and paying people to participate.

Homeownership Rates by Race from 1900-2020

SOURCE Data provided by U.S. Census Decennial Survey, U.S. Census Bureau's Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Survey, and Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard.



PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety is “learning how to keep each other safe without police, coercion, or the threat of systemic violence and oppression.” Public safety isn’t just physical, it starts with mental, psychological, and emotional safety.

Black people make up **5.8% of the state population**, yet **17.3% of people who are incarcerated** — and **28% of those are serving life without parole**.



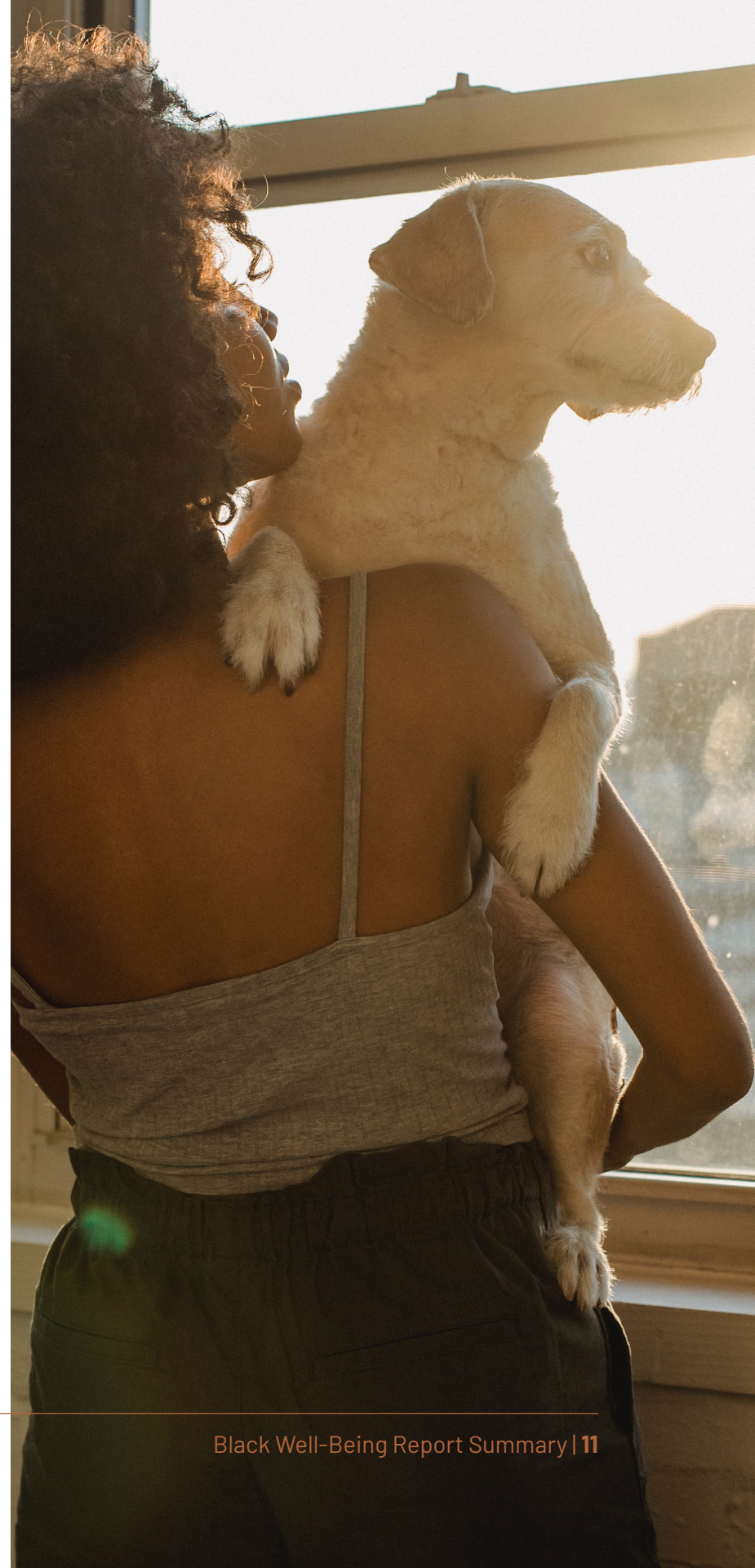
Contextual Factors

- **Washington state has a history of leading the way ... in harm.** It was the first in 1993 to enact the harmful 3-strikes sentencing policy. It gave juveniles life without the possibility of parole, blocked education funding for people incarcerated, and led national models for long-term solitary confinement.
- **Structural violence undermines public safety.** Social systems in the U.S., particularly the legal system, have been designed to exclusively benefit white people at the expense of Black people — this setup is inherently violent.
- **Housing stability contributes to healthier people.** When people are housing unstable, they experience trauma, disruption in education and employment, and disconnection from support. In these conditions, every human being is more likely to experience stress and be impacted by or turn to crimes of survival. Once someone is incarcerated more than once, they are 13 times more likely to be unhoused.
- **Neighborhood accessibility, conditions, and trust.** Historic redlining and government disinvestment, coupled with rising costs, continue to push Black families away from each other and neighborhoods with the resources that provide safety.
- **The impact of regional growth.** In the neighborhoods marked for development, like light rail stations and regional growth centers, people of color are at greater risk for displacement.
- **Access to economic opportunity.** Due to discriminatory choices by government, people of color earn less income and have less wealth. Every \$10,000 increase in spending per person living in poverty is associated with less violence and safer communities.

Community Identified Approaches

We want the freedom to be, take up space, be spontaneous. We want to feel relief, ease, peace, and joy. Despite the conditions of society, we've managed to find moments and spaces of safety. To make those moments a constant reality, we must:

- **Educate, motivate, and empower Black communities, especially youth.** Resource Black innovation and education to mobilize our community toward building the world we want.
- **Fund Black brilliance to ideate, plan, and implement nuanced public safety solutions.** Recognize that in a diversity of approaches we're stronger. Cultural, geographic, historical nuances matter to our approaches.
- **Dismantle systems that harm us and replace them with systems that heal.** A system is the sum of its parts — a series of people, rules, norms, and actions — that can be rearranged or replaced to cultivate well-being.
- **Hold people, not just systems accountable.** Each of us function within systems, and are responsible to some degree for that system functioning.
- **Create social systems that keep us safe while also addressing immediate needs.** We need to design an ecosystem of well-being that will achieve public safety.
- **Resource incarcerated people and their families.** We must strengthen the network of resources — food, housing, mental health, health care, employment, legal aid, and transportation — available to Black people experiencing incarceration.



HEALTH

Health is holistic well-being. It reaches beyond the physical and into the mental, emotional, and spiritual. When the conditions for health in all of those realms take place, health is the natural result.



Contextual Factors

- **Known, ongoing racism is built into medical practice.** The myth of racial inferiority is embedded in medicine, from “objective” measures like kidney and lung function to pain management directives to medical procedures.
- **Continuing to treat the symptoms, not the root causes.** New local data shows how racist urban planning decisions made decades ago (i.e., redlining) continue to negatively and disproportionately impact Black health in our state today through divestment and continued pollution.
- **Ongoing health inequities cost everyone, especially us.** The cost of health care includes costs like healthy food and living in low-pollution, transit accessible neighborhoods. Research shows that 30% of medical costs for Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans are excess costs related to health inequities.
- **Sickness as a business model.** The net income after taxes made by health carriers or life insurance companies in Washington state in 2020 was more than \$8.1 billion.
- **Insurance and who “deserves” care.** While 93% of Black Washingtonians have insurance, the 37% on Medicaid experience major gaps in coverage, limiting the care they can access. According to a recent study by the Tubman Center for Health & Freedom, cost and racism are the two top barriers to care for people of color.

Community Identified Approaches

As we begin to manifest the societal conditions for well-being, health care as we know it today will drastically shift. We'll be able to easily get the care we need, when we need it from people we know, love, and trust.

- **Redefine what care means.** See all of us — we are so much more than Black bodies. We need to care for people's mind, body, emotions, and spirit in all healthcare interactions.
- **Address ableism and racism in health care.** Train providers using public health and structural competency frameworks, and create community-led accountability mechanisms to report and redress racism.
- **Fund Black-owned, initiated, and operated care.** Access is as much about physical location as it is money, language, mood, visual appeal, education, and time. Investment is needed in Black-owned care hubs, behavioral health services, home-based models, hospice spaces, and more.
- **Create responsive, coordinated care models.** Form new and different relationships among physicians, dentists, optometrists, holistic and spiritual practitioners, as well as across sectors like housing, finance, and child care.
- **Restructure the way insurance works and what it covers.** We need more providers in-network to improve access and choice, and premium reimbursement for providers caring for communities whom society marginalizes.



- **Address family and community, not just the individual.** We are part of families and communities, with dynamics and histories beyond physical manifestations of sickness and disease. Culturally relevant care is essential.
- **Reflect well-being in employer business models and practices.** Prioritize rest, respite, and sabbaticals. Implement operational models and practices that produce healing, rather than constantly working to heal from systems that continue to harm us.

OUR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Thank you for spending time with this summary. The Black Well-being report is intended to be a living document. It lives with you and the conversations you have with friends, colleagues, family members, and people in your various community spaces.

Sharing what we know with one another is a first step. Some of us work in the systems discussed in the report. Some of us are dreamers, with vivid imaginations of the new systems we need in place. Some of us are incredibly detailed planners and are helping move us from where we are now to where we need to go. Some of us are implementers who are beginning to act on the vision as set forth and information at hand.

We encourage you to talk with others in and across topic areas because this work is so intersectional. Let's have new and interesting conversations about what's possible and how to get there.

**Read the full report at
[BlackFutureWA.org/
BlackWellBeing](https://BlackFutureWA.org/BlackWellBeing)**



**It will take all of us.
Collectively and
cooperatively, we
will manifest Black
well-being statewide!**

Here are discussion questions to get you started:

- What from the report are you most surprised about or challenged by and why?
- Which community identified approaches are you or your organization or group working to advance?
- What factors are making the approaches successful?
- What additional resources are needed to accelerate your efforts?
- What questions came up for you that the data didn't answer?

Please share your responses at
BlackFutureWA.org/share-your-ideas.

GRATITUDE TO PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Created in community, we honor every voice, story, and experience enlabeled in the report. A special thank you to:

**Black Well-being Study Focus
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Black Well-being Study Panelists

**Black Well-being Study
Statewide Survey Participants**

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**Washington State Commission
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