

**2017 DelawareFocus Report**  
Assessing Quality of Life in the First  
State

October, 2017



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# 2017 DelawareFocus Report

## Assessing Quality of Life in the First State

October, 2017

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Delaware Community Foundation

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## Staff Team

The research, data collection and analysis for this report was completed by CGR staff members Michael Silva, Katherine Bell, Yiwei Wang and Karen Yorks.

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# Introduction to DelawareFocus

## An Initiative to Assess Quality of Life

What makes the quality of life in a community great? Is it a thriving economy, high incomes, the opportunity for all residents to meaningfully contribute? Is it safety, affordability, a clean environment, vibrant arts and music, civic engagement, or the feeling about being connected to one another?

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 assess 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 monitor the impact of our collective efforts.

Through the DelawareFocus project, we use reliable and consistently reported data to track many important components of quality of life, in order to create a holistic picture of Delaware and deepen our knowledge and understanding of our state.

DelawareFocus is an initiative of the Delaware Community Foundation. This "state of the community" website – found at [DelawareFocus.org](http://DelawareFocus.org) – provides data and analysis on critical topics that affect the well-being and progress of our state. It serves as a common source of information, spurring discussion and collaboration, and allowing all residents to continually monitor our quality of life.

This report is updated annually, and the online data is updated as data is released to allow for continual monitoring of the community's evolving needs.

Using this data, the DCF strives to help the community build a common understanding of the quality of life in Delaware, and opportunities to make it better. The DCF will then facilitate partnerships and strategic initiatives that help align the community's resources to support the agenda.

DelawareFocus 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, Pennsylvania, Florida, Massachusetts and other locations.

## Comparison Regions

DelawareFocus compares the state of Delaware to the nation and three comparable areas: the state of Rhode Island and the metro areas of Jacksonville, FL and Richmond,

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VA. These areas were chosen because they are similar to Delaware in key areas, including their overall size (about 1 million people), the share of the population that is non-white, the share of people living in poverty, median household income and education levels of adults. In addition, both Richmond and Jacksonville were chosen as points of comparison for Delaware in the 2009 report, [Philanthropy in the First State](#), produced by KBT & Associates.

These points of comparison provide context and a reference point for looking at and interpreting Delaware'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. Instead, we use the comparison to help identify variations that may indicate potential need for further research and focus.

## Diversity and Disparities

In our 2016 report, we highlighted the trend of Delaware overall growing more prosperous but leaving some part of the population behind. This year, we focus on a related theme – growing diversity but persistent disparities.

Since 2000, Delaware's Hispanic and Asian populations have doubled in size and the African-American population increase by 35%, while the white population increased more gradually (10%). The changes are especially dramatic in Sussex County, where the Hispanic population nearly tripled to over 18,000, and Kent County, where the Hispanic population increased 149% and the African-American population increased 61%. However, both counties remained majority white. In New Castle County, the Asian population doubled, while the African American population grew 33%, the Hispanic population 88% and the white population declined 2%.

In addition, a growing share of Delaware's population speaks a language other than English at home – 13% in 2011-15, up from 9.5% in 2000.

But opportunity and prosperity are not equally available to all groups, and this is most starkly apparent looking at statistics for children. Statewide child poverty rates are higher among African American and Hispanic children, 28% and 34%, compared to 12% for white children, and even higher in Sussex County at 39% and 40%.

Poverty impacts children's ability to be successful in school, which can limit their future opportunities. In Delaware, while 51% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were proficient in reading on the state's test, proficiency rates were lower among groups with higher poverty: 37% for low-income students, 36% for African American students and 39% for Hispanic students. Studies demonstrate that students who aren't on track in reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are less likely to graduate on time from high school.

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And though overall statewide poverty is low at 12%, 19% of African American residents and 25% of Hispanic residents in the state live below the poverty level. These poverty levels help to measure the size of the opportunity gap, the unequal distribution of resources among different populations, which contributes to the achievement gap, the disparity in educational performance among students in different groups.

## Trend Summary by Topic

Below, find a more detailed summary of trends within each of the DelawareFocus key topics.

### Children and Youth

How well our children can meet the challenges of tomorrow matters greatly to our state. As with the overall data, the story is mixed. Child poverty across Delaware is less severe than our nation's. Even so, 1 in 5 children in Delaware are growing up in poverty, and rates in cities and among some racial and ethnic groups are much higher.

Poverty makes raising children more difficult and puts children at risk for a host of negative experiences and outcomes: health conditions, problems at school, violence in neighborhoods, and other issues. Research has documented that children who are born into poverty and spend multiple years living in poor families are more likely to drop out of high school, have children at young ages and be poor as adults. In 2011-15, 18% of children in Delaware were [living in poverty](#), up from 12% in 2000 but still below the national level of 22%. In the cities of Dover and Wilmington, child poverty was higher at more than 33% and 35%, respectively.

Poverty rates were [higher among African American and Hispanic](#) children: 28% and 34% statewide, and even higher in Sussex County at 39% and 40%. Here too, however, the state's rates were lower than national rates. The poverty rate for African American children in Delaware was 10 percentage points below the national rate of 38%, though the rate among Hispanic children was closer to the national rate.

Children raised by [single parents](#) are more likely to grow up in low-income households. In Delaware, 39% of families with children were headed by a single parent, up from 32% in 2000. Similar to trends in poverty, single-parent families were more common in the cities (69% in Wilmington and 58% in Dover) and in African American families (61% statewide, 84% in Wilmington and 74% in Dover).

A healthy start in life can be critical for a child's success, and this begins even before children are born. In Delaware, 81% of births were to [women who began prenatal care in the first trimester](#) of their pregnancy. This rate has increased in recent years but is

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below the rate in some similar regions. [Infant mortality](#), deaths of infants before age 1, has been declining in Delaware and was 9.1 per 1,000 births in 2015.

In adolescence, children are prone to taking risks, and the consequences of risky behavior can be long-lasting. [Teen pregnancy](#) and [lack of engagement](#) in school or work are two examples. In Delaware, teen pregnancy has been declining and was 2.8% among females 15-19 in 2015, the latest year available. The rate of young people ages 16-24 who are not in school or employed was 12% in 2016, close to the national rate.

## Demographics

Delaware's [population](#) numbers almost 1 million (952,000 residents in 2016) and has grown by 22% since 2000. Our growth has outpaced the nation and Rhode Island, and been similar to growth in comparable metro areas of Jacksonville, Fla. and Richmond, Va. The fastest growing counties in Delaware are Kent and Sussex, each gaining 38% in population since 2000.

Like many other states and region, Delaware has an [aging population](#). The strongest growth since 2000 has been in the older populations: an increase of 52% in people 60-84 years old and 70% in people 85 or older. Those growth rates are a bit higher than growth rates among older populations nationwide, but on par with or below our comparable states and regions.

Also similar to other areas, Delaware is [growing more diverse](#). Our Hispanic, Asian and African American populations have all had double-digit percentage increases since 2000 while the white population has increased just 10%. Delaware's diversity is increasing faster than the nation's, though some comparable regions have had even faster growth. Delaware's population remains majority white (69%) though that is below the national percentage (73%).

A growing share of Delaware's population [speaks a language other than English at home](#) – 13% in 2011-15, up from 9.5% in 2000. This was comparable to similar regions though below the levels of language diversity in Rhode Island and the nation (both 21%).

## Economy and Workforce

A strong economy is the foundation for a healthy state. In Delaware, economic performance has been on par with the nation, though salaries are a bit higher and unemployment a bit lower.

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Since 2000, Delaware [has gained 13% in jobs](#) and from 2014 to 2015, jobs increased 2.3%. Sussex County has had the strongest growth, gaining 32% in jobs since 2000. New Castle has had the weakest growth, with an increase of just 7% since 2000. Delaware's job growth has been very close to the national figure over the last decade, including during the recession years of 2008 through 2010, when Delaware lost about 3% of its jobs each year. The state is performing similarly to comparison geographies.

The [sectors with the most job growth](#) from 2001 to 2015 were Health Care, gaining 55%, Financial Activities (27%) and Government (12%). There were major declines in Manufacturing (30%), Information (28%) and Construction (7%). Among the counties, there were particularly large increases in Professional and Business Services in Kent County (113%) and Sussex (195%), and Health Care and Social Assistance in New Castle (51%). While Delaware's Health Care sector outperformed the nation's by almost 16 percentage points more than the nation, the state's sectors have largely tracked the nation and comparison geographies.

The [average salary](#) in Delaware of \$53,000 was slightly higher than the national average and higher compared with similar geographies. The [highest-paying sector](#) was Financial Activities, with an average salary of \$87,000, followed by Professional and Business Services at \$73,000. Though salaries were higher, [wage growth](#) in Delaware has lagged a bit behind the nation at 5.1%, and several comparable areas had much stronger growth, including Rhode Island (13%) and the Jacksonville metro area (9%).

[Unemployment](#) in Delaware was 4.4% in 2016, down from the previous year and below the nation and most similar areas. Among racial and ethnic groups, [unemployment was highest for Hispanics](#) at 8% but this was below the rate for the nation.

Delaware's tax burden is lower than comparable areas. Its [property tax burden](#) was far lower than the nation and comparison areas, with the median annual property taxes paid amounting to 0.5% of the median home value. In state [income taxes per capita](#), Delaware's figure of \$945 in 2013 was below Rhode Island and the Richmond area (Florida has no state income tax).

## Education

Upward mobility and equality of opportunity rests upon our educational system. In Delaware, a growing share of students come from low-income families, and though most graduate high school, not all have the reading and math competencies necessary for success in a global marketplace.

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Like other states, Delaware has raised academic standards by adopting the Common Core, and 2015 was the first year for a new testing regimen aligned to the new standards. These higher standards are faced by a more disadvantaged student population – the share of [students eligible for free or reduced price school lunches](#) has grown 4 points from 2000 to 37% in 2015. Rates are especially high in some school districts, including Seaford (53%) and Laurel (54%) in Sussex County. With the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the National School Lunch Program now includes a “Community Eligibility” provision allowing districts with at least 40% of students qualifying for free meals to serve free meals to all enrolled students.

[Resources in school](#) can make up some of what low-income children may not have access to at home, though the debate over how much money matters in educational performance may never be settled. In Delaware, school districts as a whole spent \$16,000 for every student, up 23% since 2000 even after adjusting for inflation. This was 26% higher than the national figure. Spending per student was even greater in the state’s vocational and technical schools, rising above \$20,000, and much lower in some districts: \$11,500 in Delmar and \$12,000 in Smyrna in New Castle. In summer 2010, Delaware began receiving federal Race to the Top funding, which has impacted student spending levels between FY2011-2015.

As part of the shift to Common Core standards, Delaware, like many other states, has made changes to student testing in recent years, adopting the Smarter Balanced Assessments in 2015. Education leaders say the tests are more difficult than the previous versions, which about 70% of students passed. And in spring 2016, the SAT replaced the Smarter Balanced Assessment as Delaware’s 11<sup>th</sup> grade test in an effort to streamline and reduce testing.

The state’s new tests show just over half of all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are at grade level in [reading](#), half of 11th graders are proficient in [English Language Arts](#) but less than a third of 11th graders are proficient in [math](#).

While 51% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders met standards on the state test, performance was lower among some groups: 37% of [low-income students](#), 36% of [African American](#) students and 39% of [Hispanic](#) students were considered proficient. At 11<sup>th</sup> grade, [28% of students passed the SAT exam](#) for math and 52% for the [SAT English exam](#). With 2015 being the first year that Delaware administered the Smarter Balanced Assessments, aligned with Common Core standards, we can track trends over time going forward.

By 2016, 85% of Delaware’s Class of 2016 had [graduated high school](#) on time, up from 80% in 2013 but below the 2010 rate of 87%. Delaware’s 2016 rate was above that of Rhode Island and Jacksonville metro area (both 83%) but below the Richmond metro area (90%). Several of the highest graduation rates in the state were at the vocational

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and technical districts: 97% at Polytech in Kent County, 96% at New Castle County Vocational-Technical District and 97% at Sussex Technical District.

Graduation rates were somewhat higher among white (88%) and Asian (91%) students compared with Hispanic and African American (both 81%) students. While many districts had [disparities in graduation rates](#), the Polytech district in Kent County and the New Castle County Vocational-Technical district reported graduation rates above 90% for all groups.

The [adult population in Delaware](#) is about as well educated as the nation's, with 30% of adults holding bachelor's or higher degrees, 27% with an associate's or some college experience, a third with only a high school diploma and 12% lacking that basic credential. As in the nation, Delaware has stark racial disparities in adult education levels – while 69% of Asian residents have at least a bachelor's degree, 31% of white residents, 21% of African American residents and 15% of Hispanic residents do.

## Financial Well-Being

How easy is it for Delawareans to support themselves and their families? How does poverty in our state compare to the rest of the nation and similar areas? The indicators in this section show a state with falling incomes and rising poverty but still more prosperity than the nation and comparable regions.

As in many parts of the country, incomes in Delaware, after adjusting for inflation, have fallen over the past decade. The [median household income](#) fell 10% since 2000 statewide and 12% in New Castle County. Yet Delaware's median income of \$60,500 is higher than the nation or comparable regions.

But that [relative prosperity is not evenly distributed](#) – median incomes are lower in some places and among some groups. In Wilmington, for example, the median income of \$40,500 is 67% of the state median. Statewide, median incomes among African American (\$47,200) and Hispanic (\$45,700) households are also significantly lower than the overall state median.

Yet, by one measure, Delaware's income inequality is less severe than the nation's. Our [ratio of incomes](#) at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile to those at the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile is 4.4, below the national ratio of 5.0 and the same or lower than comparable regions.

Delaware's [poverty rate](#) of 12% is up 3 percentage points since 2000 and higher in the cities of Dover and Wilmington (19% and 26%, respectively). But the nation and two of three comparable regions had higher poverty rates. As with income, disparities in

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poverty are striking, with 19% of African American residents and 24% of Hispanic residents living in poverty.

The affordability of housing is becoming an increasingly important issue within the state. [Homeownership rates](#) decreased slightly since 2000, at 71%, while the [median value of a home](#) has increased by 33% over the same period. At \$231,500 in 2011-15, the median value of a home in Delaware is considerably higher than the national median of \$178,600.

Delaware's [ratio of home value to income](#) rose 45% to 3.2 in 2011-15, above the 2-3 range considered affordable. Delaware was considerably less affordable than the nation in 2011-15, which had a home value to income ratio of 2.6.

Rental units are also becoming increasingly costly for residents of Delaware. In 2000, 25% of the [median household income of renters went to pay for rent](#), below the 30% threshold that is generally agreed to be the measure of whether or not housing is affordable. By 2011-15, that rate had climbed to 32%, mirroring a national increase. Whether they rent or own, Delaware residents are spending an increasing amount of their income on housing, which can displace other types of spending or savings.

Despite the rising cost of housing in our state, the prevalence of [homelessness](#) has steadily declined since 2000, and 2016 was no exception to that positive trend. Delaware's rate of homelessness is below the national figure, and decreased by 14% since 2005.

While a small share of Delawareans receive [public assistance](#), higher shares access government help such as [Medicaid](#) and [food stamps](#). Less than 3% of state residents receive public assistance, while 20% are enrolled in Medicaid, the government health insurance program for low-income and disabled people. About 16% of state residents receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or food stamps – a dramatic increase from 4% in 2000. And 17% of Delawareans receive the Earned Income Tax Credit, which provides tax relief to people with low incomes. Delaware was comparable to similar regions and the nation on these measures.

## Health

Physical and mental health is a precursor to individual and community well-being. Like other areas, our state struggles with health problems like drug addiction, cancer and obesity. Yet most people have health insurance, and mortality rates have sharply declined.

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Access to health care is critical for a community's well-being. In Delaware, 11% of residents [lacked health insurance](#) in 2015, below the national rate of 19% and below rates in comparable areas. In addition, since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, insurance coverage has expanded. Nearly 28,000 Delaware residents signed up for a qualified health plan on HealthCare.gov during the 2016 open enrollment period, or more than half the state's potential pool of 48,000 people.<sup>[1]</sup>

Overall [mortality](#) has declined sharply since 2000 in Delaware, as it has nationwide, as medical advances make it possible for people to live longer. The state's mortality rate of 74 deaths per 10,000 residents has fallen 17% since 2000. The mortality rate was highest in Kent County (79) and lower in both New Castle and Sussex (73 and 74 respectively).

Cancer is a leading cause of death. Delaware has a slightly higher [incidence of cancer](#) (new cases diagnosed within a year) but [cancer mortality](#) rates are comparable to the nation and similar areas. In 2013, the state's cancer incidence rate was 52 per 10,000 residents, compared with a national rate of 46. The mortality rate for cancer was 17 per 10,000 residents in Delaware in 2015, slightly higher than the national rate of 16 per 10,000 residents.

Our behavior plays a large role in our health. Over a quarter of Delaware adults [do not report regular physical activity](#), and two-thirds are [overweight or obese](#) – similar to national rates. About a 15% engage in [binge drinking](#) down 4% since 2007, and 8% report using [illegal drugs](#) (including marijuana). These are also similar to rates throughout the nation and in comparable areas. About 2% of adults reported [needing but not receiving treatment for substance abuse](#).

Substance use is a special concern among young people. In 2012-14, 11% of Delaware youth ages 12-17 reported using [alcohol](#) in the previous 30 days, about the same as the rates in the nation and comparable areas. About 10% said they used [illegal drugs](#), slightly above the national rate of 9%.

About 4% of Delawareans 12 and older reported having a [serious mental illness](#) in 2012-14, similar to the national rate. The state's [rate of suicide](#) was 1.3 deaths per 10,000 residents, the same as the national rate in 2015. For Delaware, this was a 27% increase from the level reported in 2000.

[Air quality](#) has improved considerably in Delaware since 2000, with the percentage of days for which air quality was monitored and found to be good increasing from 47% in 2000 to 76% in 2016. Still, Delaware's air quality lags behind comparable communities like Rhode Island (85%), the Jacksonville metro area (86%), and the Richmond metro area (88%).

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## Community Life

What makes a community a great place to live? In this section, we present indicators tracking civic engagement, safety, the arts - all important components of community life.

[Voter turnout](#) has been declining in Delaware, both during presidential elections and non-presidential years. In midterm elections, Delaware's voter turnout dropped from 45% in 2010 to 32% in 2014. Voter participation was lower in 2014 than any of the previous three midterm elections. For presidential elections, the 60% voter turnout in 2016 was a bit higher than previous presidential election years.

[Charitable giving](#) is an important measure of civic engagement, and many non-profit organizations rely on donations to support essential services to the community and people in need. Delaware residents used to outpace the nation on a whole in terms of charitable giving, but have slipped behind the country in recent years. Our residents contributed an average of \$4,330 per tax return in 2014, a 12% increase from 2011.

[Serious crimes](#) increased by 3% from 2015 to 2016. While the serious crime rate in Delaware remains about 15% higher than the national figure, the state continued to grow safer most years. [Violent crime](#) has also declined, by 27% since 2000 statewide.