



WRHSAC Equity Data Project – Western Mass 2023



Equity Project Summary

This report identifies groups experiencing various functional and access needs who may be at higher risk of threats and hazards, as well as specific circumstances that might impact an individual's ability to respond quickly and appropriately before, during, and after an emergency. The data are not exhaustive, are points in time, fluctuate, and have large margins of error in small towns. [Census Bureau Data](#) The aim of this report is to begin identifying trends, vulnerabilities, and strategies that are likely to increase equity in access and outcomes for emergency response information and resources as well as to provide data that can be used to plan for emergencies. Full reports available at [Equity in Emergency Management | WRHSAC](#)

Berkshire County Specific Equity Concerns

According to the Robert Wood Johnson's County Health Rankings, Berkshire residents, as compared to the rest of Massachusetts, are more likely to die prematurely, be unemployed, be a single parent, have children living in poverty, experience income inequity, be victims of violent crime, experience more deaths due to injuries, have more teen births, die of a drug overdose, have a child die, die in a vehicle crash, live in a segregated neighborhood, pay more for childcare, die by suicide, die from firearms, and use tobacco products. Selected data associated with increased risks show that even when the percentages are low, Berkshire County cities and towns with fewer resources have a significant number of individuals likely to need additional or different assistance in emergencies. About 13,000 people live in poverty, 1,900 don't have a vehicle, 8,800 age 65+ live alone, and almost 20,000 are living with one or more disabilities that significantly impact daily living. By 2100, Berkshire temperatures are expected to rise more than 8°F, the highest MA county increase, raising the number of expected heat emergencies, heart attacks, ER visits, etc. and creating another emergency within every emergency response. U.S. Census Fact Finder, Mass Environmental Public Health Tracking, [Emergency Preparedness Planning Tool \(region1hmcc.org\)](#)

Western Mass Hazard Vulnerability Assessments

In the past, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalitions, and the Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition have conducted Hazard Vulnerability and Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments to identify the most likely threats and how likely they are to occur. The State 2013 & 2018 State Hazard Mitigation Plans also list threats and vulnerabilities to consider. [ocn921510011.pdf](#). ([Massachusetts Integrated State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan | Mass.gov](#)).

Berkshire County Specific Hazards, Threats, Concerns, and Vulnerabilities

1. **Older Population:** 25% of the population is over 65 with a median age of 46.4 years, one of the highest in Massachusetts. Some Berkshire communities have a majority of their population over 50 years old. Older Adults often need additional assistance in emergencies.
2. **Seasonal Visitors:** Berkshire County has a large population of second homeowners and tens of thousands of seasonal visitors who must be managed in an emergency. Large income disparities also create inequities that are more apparent when resources are scarce.
3. **Broadband and Cell Service Gaps:** Broadband affordability and digital literacy are significant barriers to access. Cell service remains spotty in the hilly valleys, making all communications difficult in emergencies.
4. **Electricity Dependent:** Nearly 1,000 individuals are medically dependent on equipment powered by electricity. The elderly and very young also depend on electricity to maintain a safe temperature range and keep medicines refrigerated, making power outages a significant concern.
5. **Rural Communities** have fewer resources, less infrastructure, and higher costs per capita, making emergency response more challenging.
6. **Critical lack of Housing** for middle income workers as well as lower income individuals, families, and older adults complicates a response.

Town of Dalton: Selected Population Characteristics Contributing to Inequities in Emergencies

Summary: Dalton is a medium-sized town in Berkshire County with a higher population density. The population is the same age and has a slightly higher Median Household Income than the rest of the county; about 81% of the State's. Around 27 Dalton residents depend on electricity for their medical equipment, over 850 are living with one or more disabilities, and 320 residents are living in poverty, including 16.8% of children. About 350 residents have ambulatory difficulty, 300 independent living difficulty, 250 hearing difficulty, 250 cognitive difficulties, 29% of adults 65+ live alone, and 6% of the population identifies as other than White alone. There are almost 660 children ages 9 and under. The young, the old, and those living alone, in poverty, or with a disability are more at-risk during emergencies. Dalton is an Environmental Justice Area based on income disparities.

| | Total Population | | | Land Area | | Children 9 and Under | | People 60 – 69 Years Old | | People 70+ Years Old | | Medicare Electrically Dependent – Zip Code | |
|---------------|------------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Number of People | Median Age | Median Household Income | Sq. Miles | People Per Sq. Mile | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People. | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | # of Medicare Beneficiaries | # Electrically Dependent |
| Dalton | 6,332 | 49.8 | \$76,198 | 21.8 | 290.9 | 659 | 10.4 | 1,115 | 17.6 | 1,020 | 16.1 | 1,744 | 27 |
| Berkshire Co. | 127,859 | 49.4 | \$74,176 | 926.9 | 137.9 | 10,734 | 8.4 | 21,245 | 16.6 | 21,354 | 16.7 | 36,666 | 979 |
| Massachusetts | 6,981,974 | 40.3 | \$94,488 | 7,800.9 | 895.0 | 702,092 | 10.1 | 885,484 | 12.7 | 853,387 | 12.2 | 1,423,062 | 40,208 |

N/A – Not Available or Unknown

Source: US Census [Dalton town, Berkshire County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#), [Berkshire County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#)

Source: Electrically Dependent [HHS emPOWER Map](#)

Source: WMHMCC 2019/2020, [Berkshire-County-Vulnerable-Pop-Data.pdf](#) ; 2023/24, [Emergency Preparedness Planning Tool \(region1hmcc.org\)](#)

| | No Vehicle | | Below Poverty Level | | Less than 9th-Grade Education | | Over 65 who live alone | | No English Spoken | | One Disability | | Two Disabilities | |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population |
| Dalton | 40 | 0.6 | 320 | 5.1 | 17 | 0.3 | 449 | 28.8 | 8 | 0.1 | 395 | 6.2 | 462 | 7.3 |
| Berkshire Co. | 1,895 | 1.5 | 13,063 | 10.2 | 2,355 | 1.8 | 8,849 | 27.7 | 538 | 0.4 | 10,392 | 8.1 | 9,188 | 7.2 |

| | Vision Difficulty | | Self-Care Difficulty | | Independent Living Difficulty | | Cognitive Difficulty | | Hearing Difficulty | | Ambulatory Difficulty | |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population | Number of People | % of Population |
| Dalton | 124 | 2.0 | 274 | 4.3 | 294 | 4.6 | 263 | 4.2 | 274 | 4.3 | 374 | 5.9 |
| Berkshire Co. | 2,929 | 2.3 | 3,136 | 2.5 | 7,159 | 5.6 | 7,832 | 6.1 | 5,814 | 4.5 | 9,100 | 7.1 |

Environmental Justice Areas Source 2022; [Environmental Justice Populations in Massachusetts | Mass.gov](#)

Risk Factors [Berkshire County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#)

| Geographic Area | Environmental Justice Area | % Minority Population Other than White Alone | Median Household Income as % of MA Inc. | % Children under 18 Living in Poverty | % Seniors 65+ Living in Poverty |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Dalton | Yes | 6.1% | 80.6% | 16.8% | 5.3% |
| Berkshire Co. | 13/32 Towns | 14.6% | 78.5% | 15.5% | 8.6% |