

Civilian Labor Force

After rising to 17.6% in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate fell to 6.1% in October (Figure 1). Between October 2019 and October 2020, the estimated number of employed persons decreased from 170,869 to 156,612 (-14,257), while the civilian labor force fell from 176,864 to 166,767 (-10,097). In October 2020, the Hickory MSA had the fourth-highest (twelfth lowest) unemployment rate among North Carolina MSAs (Table 1). October 2020 unemployment rates by county were Alexander 5.4%, Burke 5.7%, Caldwell 6.6%, and Catawba 6.2%.

Table 1.

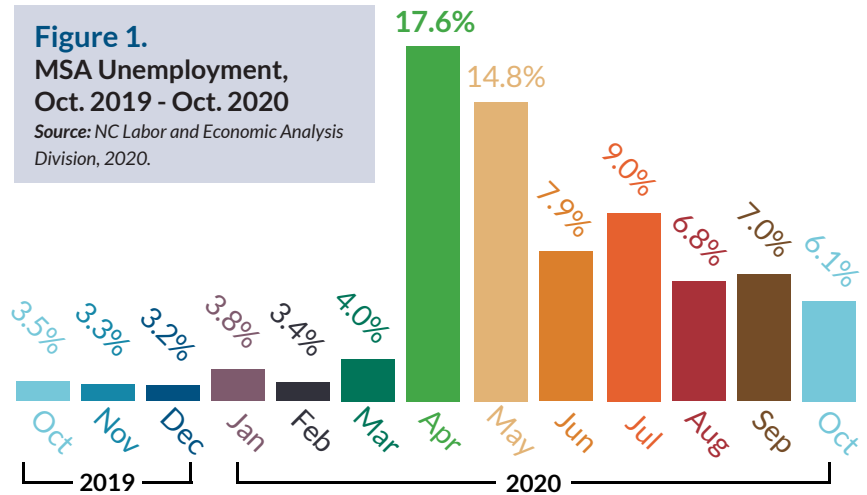
MSA Unemployment Rate, October 2019

Durham-Chapel Hill	5.3%
Raleigh	5.3%
Wilmington	5.5%
New Bern	5.6%
Asheville	5.9%
Goldsboro	5.9%
Jacksonville	5.9%
Burlington	6.0%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	6.0%
Greenville	6.0%
Winston-Salem	6.0%
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton	6.1%
Greensboro-High Point	7.0%
Rocky Mount	8.2%
Fayetteville	8.3%

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2019.

Figure 1.
MSA Unemployment,
Oct. 2019 - Oct. 2020

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2020.

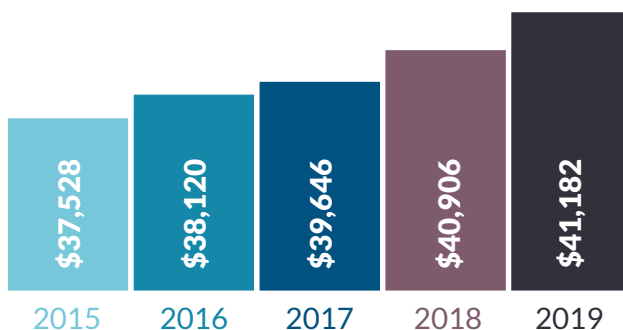


Hickory Metro Average Annual Wages

Average annual Hickory MSA wages grew from \$37,528 in 2015 to \$41,812 in 2018 (Figure 2). The percentage increase in Hickory MSA average yearly salaries between 2015 and 2019 (11.4%) was 3.9 percentage points higher than the US inflation rate between 2015 and 2019 (7.5%) (Table 2). The Hickory MSA's wage growth rate from 2015 to 2019 was lower than the NC average (12.6%) and the national average (11.9%). The Hickory Metro's average annual wage growth rate from 2018 to 2019 (2.2%) was more than the US inflation rate (1.8%) but was less than the NC salary growth rate (3.2%). The growth in Hickory MSA wages between 2018 and 2019 is due in part to job growth in higher-paying sectors, such as transportation and warehousing (282 workers) health care (260 workers).

Figure 2.

Hickory MSA Average Yearly Wages per Worker



Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2020.

Table 2. Change in Wages Versus Inflation, 2015-19

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Census and NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2020.

County	2015 - 2016	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2015 - 2019
US Inflation Rate	0.8%	1.7%	3.0%	1.8%	7.5%
Hickory MSA Wages	1.6%	4.0%	3.4%	2.2%	11.4%
NC Wages	1.5%	3.5%	3.8%	3.2%	12.6%
US Wages	1.3%	3.3%	3.4%	3.5%	11.9%

EIN Spotlight – 2019 Hickory MSA American Community Survey Results

The US Census Bureau began the American Community Survey (or ACS) program in 1999. The ACS goal was to replace the Census “long form,” which was generated only once every ten years, with a survey that would provide yearly updates on a variety of socio-economic indicators for communities and metro areas. In 2003, the first ACS results were reported for the Hickory Metro. However, a complete survey of the population in the region was not available until group quarters data (group quarters includes dormitories, group homes, halfway houses, nursing homes, and prisons) was added in 2006. Since 2006, the ACS has added more survey topics, including health insurance coverage and home broadband access. Annual American Community Survey results are generated each September for areas with a population over 65,000. New 2015-2019 American Community Survey data (five-year averages) for areas smaller than 65,000 became available in December 2020.

A few cautions must be taken into consideration when analyzing American Community Survey results. First, the survey does allow for comparisons between states, metro areas, and counties; however, the data is not fully comparable to the 2000 Census “long form” due to different weighting and sampling techniques. In addition, for some data categories, the sample size is still too small to provide fully reliable data with margins of error of 10% or more. Even with these caveats, the ACS still provides timely data in many social and economic categories. This edition of the EIN Spotlight will focus on a selection of the many socio-economic results of the 2019 ACS, including comparisons with the United States, North Carolina, and other North Carolina metro areas.

Hickory MSA “Class” of Worker

One of the ACS employment questions relates to the “Class” of workers in households. The American Community Survey divides the civilian labor force into four main classes (or categories): private sector wage and salary workers, government workers, self-employed workers (persons working in their own, but not incorporated businesses), and unpaid family workers. Data seen in Figure 3 displays 2019 ACS results for Hickory MSA by type of worker. Nearly 83.0% of the Hickory MSA’s employed labor force work in the private wage and salary occupations. Another 19,243 (11.0%) are employed in the government sector, while 6.1% or 10,765 are self-employed.

Table 3 on page 3 compares Hickory MSA class (type) of worker results from the 2019 American Community Survey with the other North Carolina MSAs. The Charlotte MSA had the highest percentage of private wage and salary workers (85.1%) of any metro area in North Carolina, followed by Greensboro (83.7%) and Winston-Salem (83.0%) MSAs. The Jacksonville MSA had the lowest percentage (73.0%). The Hickory MSA had the fourth-highest percentage of private and salary workers (82.9%).

The Jacksonville, Fayetteville, and Goldsboro MSAs had the highest percentage of government jobs among North Carolina MSAs, with at least two in ten workers employed in the public sector. The high percentage of government jobs is due to the US military presence in the Jacksonville, Fayetteville, and Goldsboro Metro areas. In the Hickory MSA, 11.0% of all workers in 2019 were employed in the public sector. The Charlotte MSA had the lowest percentage of government workers (9.4%) among North Carolina Metros.

The “self-employment” category represents entrepreneurs whose businesses are not large enough to be incorporated. Approximately 8.1% of Asheville MSA workers were self-employed, the highest percentage of any metro in the State. In the Hickory MSA, 6.1% of workers were classified as self-employed, the sixth-highest percentage among North Carolina Metro areas. Five percent or less of workers were self-employed in the Durham, Fayetteville, Goldsboro, and Greensboro MSAs.

Hickory MSA Household Earnings

The ACS asked Hickory MSA residents several US questions concerning household income. One survey question dealt with how a household receives income. ACS 2019 results indicate that 108,058 households (or 73.8% of all households) in the Hickory MSA collected income through earnings (Figure 4). Only 97,044 of Hickory MSA households (or 69.3% of all households)

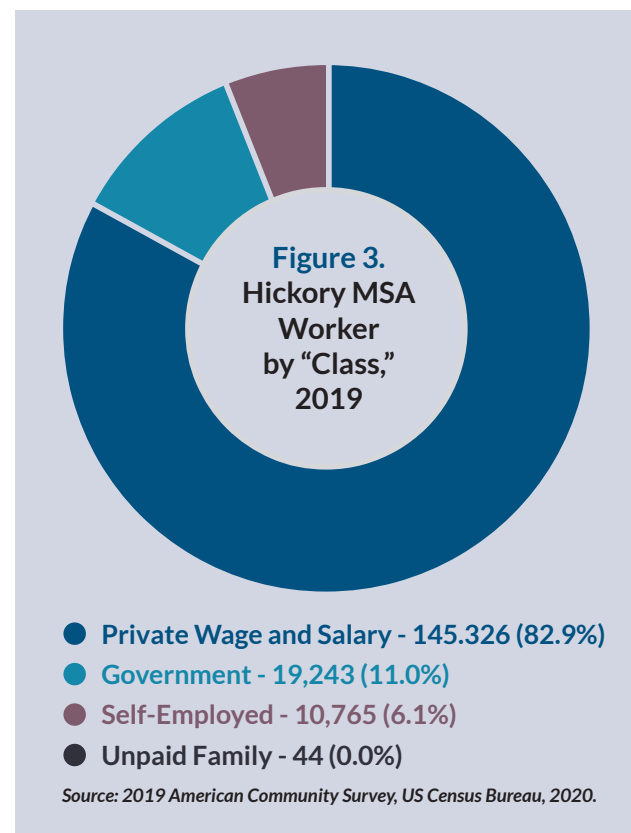


Table 3. NC MSA Employment by “Class” of Worker, 2019

Govt. = Government Employment; Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

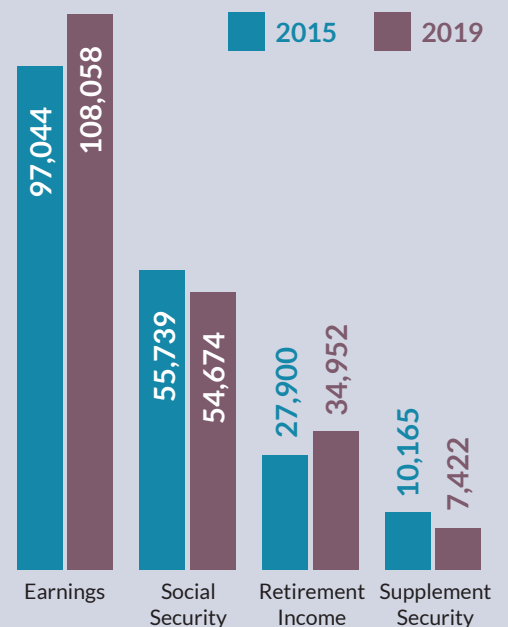
NC MSA	Number				Unpaid Family	Percentage			
	Total Workers	Private Wage/ Salary	Govt.	Self-Employed		Private Wage/ Salary	Govt.	Self-Employed	Unpaid Family
Asheville	222,916	174,975	28,784	18,071	1,086	78.5%	12.9%	8.1%	0.5%
Burlington	83,546	66,718	11,311	4,902	615	79.9%	13.5%	5.9%	0.7%
Charlotte	1,354,242	1,152,267	127,773	70,443	3,759	85.1%	9.4%	5.2%	0.3%
Durham	322,002	247,468	57,956	15,970	608	76.9%	18.0%	5.0%	0.2%
Fayetteville	203,390	153,769	40,613	8,669	339	75.6%	20.0%	4.3%	0.2%
Goldsboro	48,552	36,355	9,719	2,428	50	74.9%	20.0%	5.0%	0.1%
Greensboro	359,150	300,632	41,880	16,173	465	83.7%	11.7%	4.5%	0.1%
Greenville	86,219	67,888	13,722	4,425	184	78.7%	15.9%	5.1%	0.2%
Hickory	175,378	145,326	19,243	10,765	44	82.9%	11.0%	6.1%	<0.1%
Jacksonville	68,223	49,799	14,010	4,312	102	73.0%	20.5%	6.3%	0.1%
New Bern	51,793	39,233	8,595	3,909	56	75.7%	16.6%	7.5%	0.1%
Raleigh	724,327	589,532	97,095	36,616	1,084	81.4%	13.4%	5.1%	0.1%
Rocky Mount	62,259	50,992	7,180	3,564	523	81.9%	11.5%	5.7%	0.8%
Wilmington	146,790	117,386	18,384	10,619	401	80.0%	12.5%	7.2%	0.3%
Winston-Salem	310,031	257,171	32,567	19,428	865	83.0%	10.5%	6.3%	0.3%
North Carolina	4,937,837	3,989,591	651,993	283,117	13,136	80.8%	13.2%	5.7%	0.3%
United States	158,785,794	126,974,535	22,166,456	9,260,967	356,836	80.0%	14.0%	5.8%	0.2%

in 2015 had income from earnings. From 2015 to 2019, Hickory MSA’s mean income from earnings rose significantly as hourly pay and the number of hours worked increased. Hickory MSA households with earnings in 2015 had a mean income of just \$58,605 compared to \$67,803 in 2019 (Figure 5, page 4).

Nearly two in five Hickory MSA households gain at least some of their income from Social Security. About 37.4% (54,674) of the region’s households received Social Security benefits in 2019, nearly the same percentage (39.8% or 55,739) of households as in 2015. In 2019, Hickory MSA households averaged \$19,912 from Social Security or \$1,783 more than 2019. Nearly one-quarter (23.9%) of Hickory Metro households received income from other retirement sources in 2019. Mean household retirement income, excluding Social Security benefits, in the region was \$19,030 in 2019, or \$882 less than mean income from Social Security.

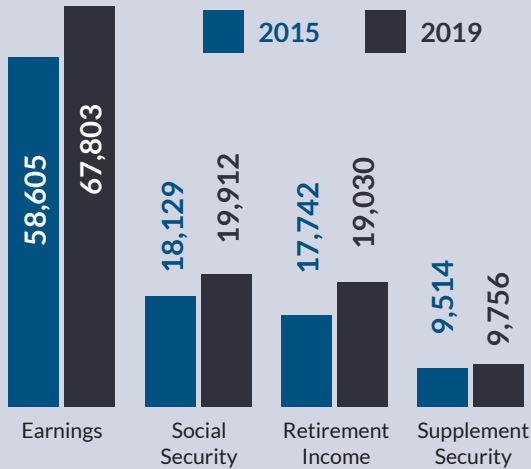
Table 4 (page 4) examines Hickory MSA mean household income from earnings, Social Security benefits, other retirement income and Supplemental Security (a Federal income program that provides cash to meet basic needs of the aged, blind and disabled, who have little or no income) versus other metro areas in North Carolina. In 2019, the Raleigh MSA had the highest mean household income from earnings (\$105,978). The Charlotte and Durham MSAs had average earnings above \$90,000. The Hickory Metro was one of six North Carolina MSAs with mean household income from earnings less than \$70,000.

Figure 4. Hickory MSA Households by Type of Income Received, 2015 and 2019



Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Figure 5. Hickory MSA Households by Type Average Amount Received, 2015 and 2019



Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Only the Goldsboro (\$55,343), Rocky Mount (\$56,412), Fayetteville (\$59,624), Jacksonville (\$63,129), and New Bern (\$64,755) MSAs had lower average household earnings than the Hickory MSA (\$67,803).

Only the New Bern (41.3%), Rocky Mount (41.0%), and Asheville (39.9%) MSAs had a greater percentage of households receiving Social Security than the Hickory Metro (37.4%). NC Metro's average Social Security income from households ranged from \$17,736 in the Fayetteville MSA to \$20,774 in the Raleigh MSA.

While the Hickory MSA has a higher percentage of households receiving Social Security income compared to most other metro areas in North Carolina, it has a lower percentage of households receiving other retirement income from pensions, 401Ks, and other retirement income sources than many other NC MSAs. Only four Metros in North Carolina (Charlotte, Fayetteville, Greenville, and Raleigh) had a lower percentage of households receiving retirement income beyond Social Security than the Hickory MSA. The Hickory MSA had the lowest average income from retirement income (excluding Social Security-\$19,030) among North Carolina MSAs.

Table 4. NC MSA Average Household Income, 2019

Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

NC MSA	% of Households				Average Income			
	Earnings	Social Security	Retirement Income	Supplemental Security	Earnings	Social Security	Retirement Income	Supplemental Security
Asheville	71.1%	39.9%	29.8%	4.4%	\$71,493	\$20,588	\$28,044	\$9,241
Burlington	74.8%	31.4%	26.6%	2.1%	\$74,183	\$19,698	\$19,790	\$13,169
Charlotte	81.5%	28.0%	21.1%	3.7%	\$95,838	\$20,434	\$25,707	\$9,755
Durham	79.3%	28.1%	25.0%	4.0%	\$90,474	\$20,315	\$29,388	\$10,204
Fayetteville	77.2%	27.3%	23.7%	5.3%	\$59,624	\$17,736	\$24,545	\$9,544
Goldsboro	74.0%	33.9%	26.4%	9.4%	\$55,343	\$19,033	\$22,504	\$9,365
Greensboro	76.4%	32.5%	24.5%	4.9%	\$71,886	\$20,100	\$24,198	\$9,228
Greenville	77.2%	27.3%	23.4%	6.1%	\$73,520	\$18,852	\$21,566	\$9,388
Hickory	73.8%	37.4%	23.9%	5.1%	\$67,803	\$19,912	\$19,030	\$9,756
Jacksonville	79.6%	22.5%	28.0%	5.1%	\$63,129	\$19,186	\$23,617	\$7,886
New Bern	73.7%	41.3%	34.3%	3.2%	\$64,755	\$19,731	\$29,523	\$9,385
Raleigh	83.5%	24.5%	21.4%	3.7%	\$105,978	\$20,774	\$27,992	\$10,409
Rocky Mount	73.8%	41.0%	24.6%	8.6%	\$56,412	\$19,487	\$31,898	\$10,063
Wilmington	75.2%	34.4%	28.1%	3.2%	\$80,785	\$20,509	\$29,357	\$11,201
Winston-Salem	73.5%	35.3%	26.3%	4.4%	\$73,233	\$19,457	\$22,589	\$10,039
North Carolina	76.2%	32.7%	25.1%	4.7%	\$80,933	\$19,863	\$25,778	\$9,617
United States	77.4%	31.7%	24.5%	5.2%	\$93,563	\$19,872	\$28,381	\$9,824

Hickory MSA Poverty Rates

The US Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and age of householders to determine who is included in the “poverty” category. If a household’s total income is less than the household’s poverty threshold, then every individual in the household is considered to be living in poverty. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically; however, they are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The official poverty definition uses income before taxes and includes capital gains or any noncash benefits such as public housing, Medicaid services, and food stamps. In 2019, for a family of four comprised of two parents and two children under age 18, for example, the poverty threshold was \$25,750. For a one-person household with the householder age 65 and older, the 2019 poverty threshold was \$12,261.

Hickory MSA data from the American Community Survey shows a drop (-2,068) in the number of persons living in poverty between 2015 and 2019 (Table 5). The 2015 ACS results indicated that 55,976 (or 15.8%) of the Hickory MSA’s population were living below the poverty level. By 2019, 53,908 (or 14.9%) of the population were below the poverty threshold. Improving economic conditions and employment gains played a substantial role in decreasing poverty-income households since 2015.

Figure 6 on page 6 shows Hickory MSA poverty rates for the 2015 and 2019 ACS by age and ethnic group. While the percentage change in Hickory MSA poverty rates by age and ethnic group vary tremendously, all groups, except the under age 18 group, have experienced a decline in poverty rates over the past four years. The region’s poverty rate for persons under 18 equaled 22.8% (or more than one in five under age 18) in 2019 versus just 19.4% (or close to one in five) in 2015. The number of children under 18 living in poverty increased from 14,795 in 2015 to 16,759 in 2019. This data matches the general increase in free and reduced lunch students in the region over the past four years.

Table 5. Hickory MSA Poverty Statistics, 2015 and 2019

Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Population Group	2015 ACS		2019 ACS		Change 2015-2019	
	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level
All Persons	55,976	15.8%	53,908	14.9%	-2,068	-0.9%
Males	24,878	14.1%	24,653	14.0%	-225	-0.1%
Females	31,098	17.5%	29,255	15.8%	-1,843	-1.7%
Under 18 Years	14,795	19.4%	16,759	22.8%	1,964	3.4%
65 Years and Over	5,568	9.0%	6,227	8.9%	659	-0.1%
White, not Hispanic	36,463	12.6%	35,804	12.3%	-659	-0.3%
African American	5,970	28.7%	4,197	18.8%	-1,773	-9.9%
Hispanic	9,786	39.5%	8,823	31.0%	-963	-8.5%

For people age 65 and over, the region’s 2019 poverty rate, based on results from the American Community Survey, was 8.9% compared to 14.9% for all individuals. The poverty rate for people age 65 and over is usually lower than the total population since the Social Security payments and/or other retirement payments that many seniors receive place them above the poverty threshold. The poverty rate for the population age 65 and over has remained close to 9.0% over the past four years.

The number of African-Americans in the Hickory MSA living below the poverty level dropped more than 25%, from 5,970 in 2015 to 4,197 in 2019. This decrease resulted in the Hickory MSA poverty rate for African-Americans falling from 28.7% in 2015 to 18.8% in 2019. The number of Hispanics below the poverty threshold also fell from 9,786 in 2015 to 8,823 in 2019. Poverty rates for African Americans (18.8%) and Hispanics (31.0%) in 2019 were higher than for “White, not Hispanics” (12.3%).

Hickory MSA County Level Poverty Rates

Poverty data for Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties from the 2015 and 2019 ACS is shown in Table 6 (2015 and 2019 poverty data for Alexander is not available due to the County’s population being less than the 65,000 threshold for one-year ACS data to be released). Poverty rates for all persons was lower in Caldwell and Catawba in 2019 than in 2015. In Burke County, however, the poverty rate for all persons grew from 16.6% in 2015 to 21.0% in 2019.

Poverty rates for males and females in 2019 were similar in Burke and Caldwell Counties, but the poverty rate for females in Catawba County (16.6%) was higher than the poverty rate for males (13.1%). Forty percent of children under age 18 in Burke County were living below the poverty level in 2019. In Caldwell, 12.5% of children under 18 were below poverty level in 2019, which was substantially less than in 2015 (17.8%). Poverty rates for persons age 65 and older ranged from 6.2% in Burke and Caldwell to 12.5% in Catawba County. In Catawba County, the White, not Hispanic 2019 poverty rate was much lower than the African-American and Hispanic poverty rates (2019 race and ethnic poverty rates for some groups were not available in Burke and Caldwell Counties).

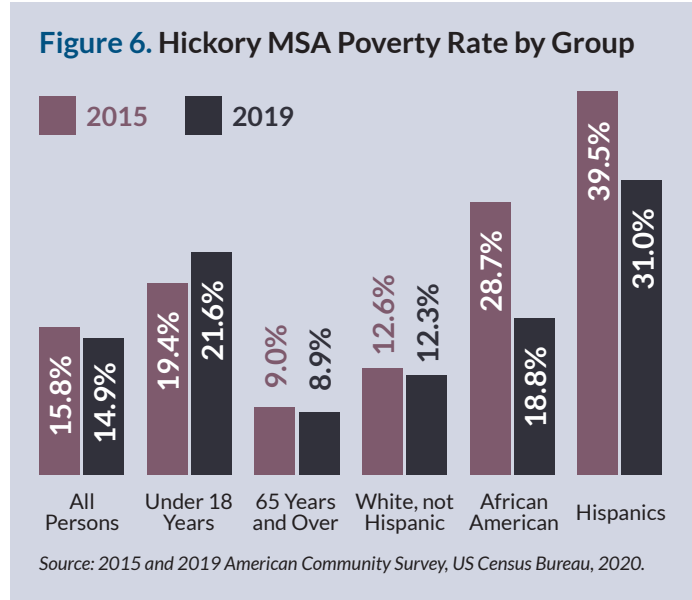


Table 6. Hickory MSA County Level Poverty Statistics, 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey
Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Population Group	Burke County		Caldwell County		Catawba County	
	2015 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2019 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2015 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2019 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2015 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2019 ACS % Below Poverty Level
All Persons	16.6%	21.0%	15.4%	10.0%	15.3%	14.9%
Males	15.2%	21.1%	12.2%	10.0%	13.9%	13.1%
Females	17.9%	20.9%	18.6%	10.0%	16.8%	16.6%
Under 18 Years	20.9%	40.0%	17.8%	12.5%	18.4%	20.7%
65 Years and Over	12.9%	6.2%	8.9%	6.2%	6.5%	12.5%
White, not Hispanic	13.4%	15.7%	14.1%	N/A	10.7%	12.2%
African American	32.1%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25.5%
Hispanic	49.6%	57.2%	31.7%	10.3%	35.6%	29.1%

North Carolina MSA Poverty Rates

The Hickory MSA’s 14.9% poverty rate for all persons was the eighth-lowest (sixth highest) among North Carolina MSAs in 2019 (Table 7, page 7). As of 2019, no North Carolina MSAs had a poverty rate for all persons greater than 20%. The Raleigh MSA had the lowest poverty rate for all persons (8.9%), followed by the Charlotte MSA (9.7%) and the Asheville MSA (11.0%).

Female poverty percentages are typically higher than male poverty rates due to higher poverty rates among single-parent female households. The 2019 Hickory MSA poverty rate for women (15.8%) was 1.8 percentage points higher than the male poverty rate (14.0%). In the Rocky Mount MSA, the female poverty rate (17.2%) was the same as the male rate. In contrast, the 2019 Goldsboro MSA female poverty rate was 5.4 percentage points higher than the male poverty rate.

The 2019 under age 18 poverty rate in the Goldsboro MSA was 33.2%, by far the highest of the North Carolina Metro areas. The Hickory MSA was one of eight MSAs with under age 18 poverty rates between 20% and 25%. The Raleigh MSA had the lowest 2019 metro poverty rate for children under 18 (11.4%). In 2019, the Hickory MSA was one of 10

Table 7. NC MSA Poverty Rates, 2019

Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

NC MSA	All Persons	Male	Female	Under Age 18	65 Years and Over	White, not Hispanic	African American	Hispanic
Asheville	11.0%	10.2%	11.8%	17.1%	8.3%	8.6%	20.4%	34.7%
Burlington	15.3%	13.8%	16.6%	25.2%	10.7%	11.3%	19.7%	23.6%
Charlotte	9.7%	8.5%	10.8%	11.9%	8.0%	15.6%	15.0%	15.6%
Durham	14.0%	12.0%	15.8%	21.2%	7.9%	7.8%	19.7%	28.0%
Fayetteville	17.9%	15.4%	20.3%	24.9%	13.1%	12.9%	21.7%	21.6%
Goldsboro	19.4%	16.6%	22.0%	33.2%	12.6%	10.7%	27.4%	36.3%
Greensboro	16.6%	15.5%	17.6%	23.4%	11.6%	10.9%	27.7%	21.8%
Greenville	19.6%	17.2%	21.7%	24.2%	10.0%	14.9%	28.9%	N/A
Hickory	14.9%	14.0%	15.8%	22.8%	8.9%	12.3%	18.8%	31.0%
Jacksonville	11.1%	10.0%	12.1%	15.9%	7.3%	9.8%	14.0%	N/A
New Bern	14.1%	12.8%	15.3%	20.1%	8.0%	9.0%	21.8%	39.7%
Raleigh	8.9%	8.1%	9.6%	11.4%	6.0%	5.0%	17.3%	15.7%
Rocky Mount	17.2%	17.2%	17.2%	23.0%	9.7%	14.3%	19.9%	N/A
Wilmington	12.5%	11.9%	13.0%	15.4%	7.2%	9.6%	23.9%	25.4%
Winston-Salem	16.0%	14.4%	17.5%	24.4%	9.4%	11.1%	25.1%	31.6%
North Carolina	13.6%	12.2%	14.9%	19.5%	9.1%	9.4%	21.5%	22.1%
United States	12.3%	11.1%	13.5%	16.8%	9.4%	9.0%	21.2%	17.2%

North Carolina MSAs to have age 65 and over poverty percentages below 10%. The Raleigh MSA had the lowest age 65 and over 2019 poverty rate (6.0%), while the Fayetteville MSA had the highest age 65 and over poverty rate (13.1%).

The Hickory Metro had the fourth-lowest NC MSA African-American poverty rate (18.8%) in 2019. Jacksonville (14.0%), Charlotte (15.0%) and Raleigh (17.3%) had the lowest African-American poverty rates. The 2019 African-American poverty rate in the Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, and Winston-Salem MSAs exceeded 25%. Unlike the United States totals in most NC Metros, Hispanics tended to have higher poverty rates than other ethnic/race groups. The Hickory MSA was one of five metros in North Carolina with Hispanic poverty rates above 30%, meaning that more than three in ten Hispanics reside in below poverty-level households. The highest 2019 NC MSA Hispanic poverty rate was in New Bern (39.7%), followed by Goldsboro (36.3%) and Asheville (34.7%). Five North Carolina Metros were estimated to have Hispanic poverty rates less than 25%. The lowest Hispanic poverty rate occurred in Charlotte (15.6%), followed by the Raleigh (15.7%) and Fayetteville (21.6%) MSAs. Poverty rates for White, not Hispanics during 2019 were less than 16% in all North Carolina metro areas.

Summary

American Community Survey (ACS) results for 2019 reveal several interesting demographic and economic results for the Hickory MSA. Over 80% of the region's workers receive income through private sector wage and salary jobs. More than 10,000 workers (6.1%) were self-employed. ACS results indicated that the majority of North Carolina MSAs had a lower percentage of self-employed workers than the Hickory Metro. More than 108,000 households (73.3%) in the Hickory MSA receive income through earnings. The average Hickory MSA household income from earnings is \$67,803. Only four North Carolina Metros had lower mean household earnings than the Hickory MSA (Fayetteville, Goldsboro, Jacksonville, and New Bern). About 37.4% of Hickory MSA households gained income from Social Security. Only the Asheville, New Bern, and Rocky Mount MSAs had a greater percentage of households receiving Social Security benefits than the Hickory MSA.

The number of persons below the poverty level in the Hickory MSA fell from 55,976 (15.8%) in 2015 to 53,908 (14.9%) in 2019. The 2019 Hickory MSA poverty rate for all persons was higher than the North Carolina (13.6%) or the United States (12.3%) poverty rate (all persons). Most Hickory MSA age and ethnic/race groups saw declines in the number of persons below poverty level between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, 15.8% of females were below the poverty threshold compared to 14.0% of men, while

22.8% of persons under 18 were below poverty level. The Hickory MSA had the fourth-lowest African-American poverty rate (18.8%) among NC MSAs. Nearly 40% of Hispanics in the Hickory MSA were below the poverty level in 2019.

Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Statistics

The Hickory MSA’s educational attainment levels continue to rise, according to the latest results from the 2019 American Community Survey (Table 8). The number of persons age 25 and older with a “high school graduate or equivalent” educational attainment level, for instance, has grown by 9,305 since 2000. Since 2015, the number of persons estimated to have an educational attainment level of high school graduate or equivalent has risen from 76,069 to 82,492. Between 2015 and 2019, the “some college, no degree” educational attainment group has dropped from 56,593 to 54,590 as some group members completed their Associate’s or Bachelor’s Degree.

Table 8. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment for Persons 25 or Older, 2000-2019

Source: 2000 Census, 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

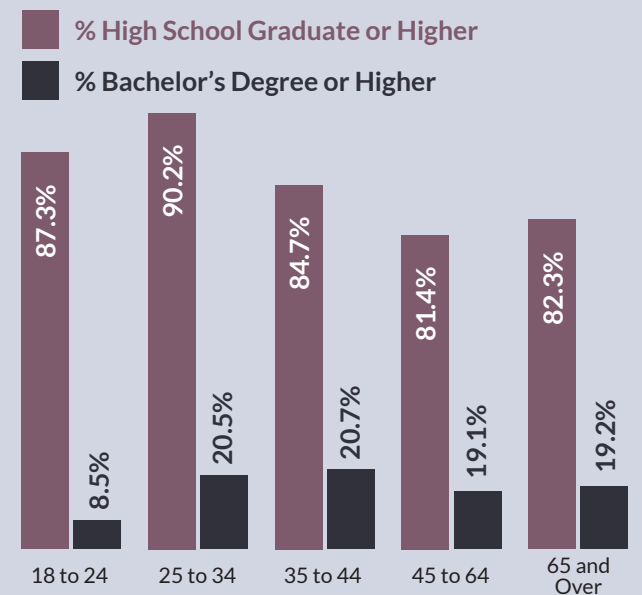
Educational Attainment	Census 2000	% of Pop	2015 ACS	% of Pop	2019 ACS	% of Pop	Change 2000-2019	% Change 2000-2019
Population 25 and Over	230,937	100.0%	251,942	100.0%	265,222	100.0%	34,285	14.8%
Less than 9th Grade	25,286	10.9%	15,350	6.1%	15,005	5.7%	-10,281	-40.7%
9th to 12th Grade	43,199	18.7%	31,230	12.4%	28,323	10.7%	-14,876	-34.4%
High School Graduate	73,187	31.7%	76,069	30.2%	82,492	31.1%	9,305	12.7%
Some College, No Degree	42,672	18.5%	56,593	22.5%	54,590	20.5%	11,918	27.9%
Associate's Degree	15,139	6.6%	26,002	10.3%	32,844	12.4%	17,705	116.9%
Bachelor's Degree	22,333	9.7%	30,334	12.0%	36,040	13.6%	13,707	61.4%
Graduate Degree	9,121	3.9%	16,364	6.5%	16,028	6.0%	6,907	75.7%

The number of persons age 25 and older with an attainment level of “associate degree” has more than doubled from 15,139 in 2000 to 32,844 in 2019. The 17,705 increase is the most of any Hickory MSA educational attainment level. Since 2015, the number of people age 25 and over with an associate degree has grown by 6,842 persons. This trend correlates well with the increasing number of graduates in the region’s community colleges over the past several years. American Community Survey (ACS) data results also show significant gains in the number of persons over 25 with a “Bachelor’s Degree” over the past 20 years. The “Bachelor’s Degree” educational attainment group increased by 13,707 (61.4%) between 2000 and 2019. From 2015 to 2019, the total population age 25 and over group with a “bachelor degree” attainment level has grown by 5,706 to 36,040.

Since 2000, the “graduate degree or higher” educational attainment group has increased from 9,121 to 16,028 (75.7% increase). Little population change has occurred with respect to the number of people over age 25 with a graduate degree between 2015 and 2019. In 2019, 6.0% of the region’s population age 25 and over had a graduate degree compared to 3.9% in 2000 and 6.5% in 2015.

Besides providing a detailed educational attainment breakdown for persons over 25, the ACS also provides Hickory MSA data on “high school graduate (or equivalent) or higher” and “Bachelor’s Degree or higher” populations for various age groups. Survey results for 2019 reveal that only 8.5% of persons in the age 18 to 24 group have an education attainment level of Bachelor’s Degree or higher (Figure 7). The results are not surprising since many people in this group are still trying to earn their Bachelor’s Degree. Over 87% in the age 18 to 24 cohort have achieved an educational attainment level of high school graduate or higher (it is probable that some 18-year-olds respondents were still in high school when the survey was taken).

Figure 7. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Age Group, 2019 ACS



Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Over 80% of persons in all Hickory MSA age groups had obtained an educational attainment level of high school graduate or higher. The age 45 to 64 cohort had the lowest percentage of any age group with an educational attainment level of high school graduate or higher (81.4%), followed closely by the age 65 and older group (82.3%). More than 90% of persons in age 25 to 34 group had an educational attainment of high school graduate or higher. Excluding the age 18 to 24 group, the percentage of population with a Bachelor's Degree among other Hickory MSA age cohorts ranged from 19.1% in the age 45 to 64 group to 20.7% in the age 35 to 44 cohort.

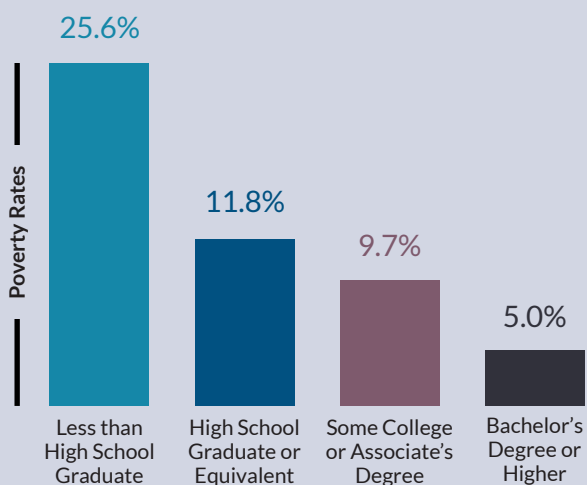
ACS results clearly reveal a relationship between educational attainment and income, and poverty. Figure 8 shows the percentage of Hickory MSA population over age 25 below the poverty threshold by educational attainment level. More than 25% of persons over age 25 with a less than a high school graduate educational attainment were living below the poverty level. In contrast, only 5.0% with a Bachelor's Degree or higher had household incomes below the poverty threshold. In 2019, 11.8% of persons over age 25 with an educational attainment level of high school graduate or equivalent were below the poverty threshold, while less than 10% of the over age 25 population with some college or an Associate's Degree were below the poverty threshold.

Figure 9 displays 2019 ACS results of Hickory MSA median earnings by educational attainment level. The data clearly proves the link between increasing levels of educational attainment and income. Hickory MSA median earnings for a person age 25 and over with an educational attainment of less than high school was only \$26,403. For high school graduate or equivalent, median earnings jumped to \$31,657. Hickory MSA persons age 25 and over with some college or Associate's Degree had 2019 median earnings of more than \$32,500.

Hickory MSA median earnings for residents over 25 with an educational attainment level of Bachelor's Degree equaled \$41,960. The \$9,283 difference in median earnings between persons with some college or Associate's Degree and a Bachelor's Degree was the largest increase between adjoining educational attainment levels. Not surprisingly, persons with a graduate or professional degree had the highest median earnings (\$50,213) of any Hickory MSA educational attainment group. ACS results show that persons over 25 with a graduate or professional degree in the Hickory MSA have 90.2% higher median earnings compared to persons age 25 and over without a high school diploma (or equivalent).

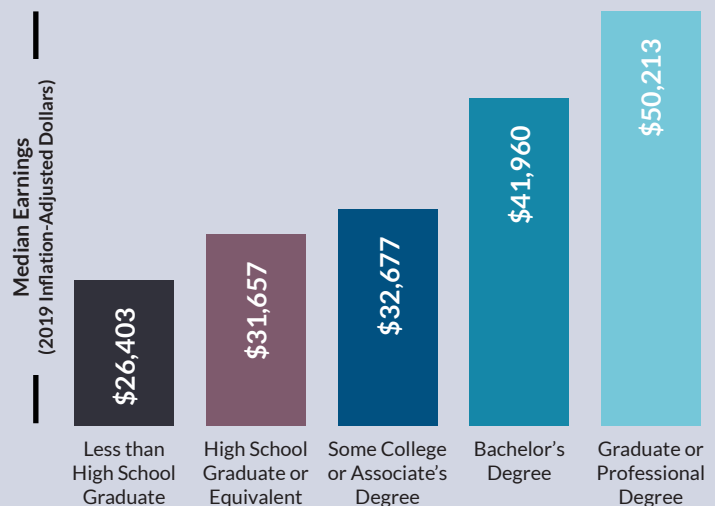
Educational attainment data from the 2015 and 2019 ACS for all North Carolina Metros are shown in Table 9. Between 2015 and 2019, the percentage of the Hickory MSA population age 25 and over with a high school (or equivalent) or higher educational attainment grew from 81.5% to 83.7%. In 2019, the Hickory MSA had the lowest percentage of persons over age 25 with an attainment level of high school or higher among the State's 15 metro areas.

Figure 8. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Poverty Rate, 2019 ACS



Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Figure 9. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Median Earnings, 2019 ACS



Source: 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Table 9. NC MSA Educational Attainment Rankings, 2015 and 2019 ACS

Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

NC MSA	2015 American Community Survey				2019 American Community Survey			
	% High School or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% High School or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Ranking (1=High)
Asheville	88.4	7	32.8	5	91.2	4	35.5	5
Burlington	83.3	13	22.9	11	87.3	11	25.4	9
Charlotte	87.9	9	33.5	4	89.9	6	36.2	4
Durham	88.1	8	45.1	1	89.2	7	46.3	2
Fayetteville	90.2	4	25.2	9	90.2	5	23.8	11
Goldsboro	85.3	12	21.9	12	85.8	13	18.1	14
Greensboro	85.9	10 (Tie)	28	7	86.4	12	30.0	7
Greenville	89.5	6	31.6	6	88.3	9	32.1	6
Hickory	81.5	14	18.5	14	83.7	15	19.6	13
Jacksonville	91.4	2	20.8	13	91.7	3	24.7	10
New Bern	89.6	5	23	10	89.3	8	20.9	12
Raleigh	90.9	3	44.4	2	92.3	1	48.0	1
Rocky Mount	81.2	15	16.4	15	85.4	14	17.4	15
Wilmington	92.4	1	34.3	3	92.2	2	39.3	3
Winston-Salem	85.9	10 (Tie)	26.9	8	87.7	10	27.1	8
North Carolina	86.6	-	29.4	-	88.6	-	32.3	-
United States	87.1	-	30.6	-	88.6	-	33.1	-

In 2015 all NC MSAs had more than 80% of the population age 25 and older with an educational attainment level of high school (or equivalent) graduate or higher. In 2019, five North Carolina MSAs had high school or higher educational attainment levels above 90%. In the Raleigh Metro, 92.3% of the population 25 and older had a high school or higher educational attainment level, the most of any MSA in the State. The percentage of people age 25 and older with a Bachelor's Degree or higher in the Hickory MSA was 1.1 percentage points higher in 2019 (19.6%) than in 2015 (18.5%). The Hickory Metro is one of three MSAs in the State where less than 20% of the population age 25 and older, as of 2019, has a Bachelor's Degree or higher. The Rocky Mount MSA had the lowest percentage of persons 25 and older with a Bachelor's Degree or higher (17.4%), followed by the Goldsboro (18.1%) MSA.

ACS results revealed that in 2019 two North Carolina Metro areas had more than 45% of the population over age 25 with Bachelor's Degree or higher. In the Raleigh MSA, 48.0% of persons 25 and older have a Bachelor's Degree or higher, while 46.3% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher in the Durham Metro. Educational attainment levels in the Raleigh and Durham MSAs appear to benefit from a large university presence and jobs in State Government and Research Triangle Park.

Summary

Since 2000, the Hickory MSA's high school graduate (or equivalent); some college, no degree; Associate's Degree; Bachelor's Degree and graduate degree educational attainment population groups have grown substantially. These trends are positive for the region since ACS results clearly reveal reduced poverty rates (from 25.6% for less than high school graduate compared to 5.0% for Bachelor's Degree or higher) and increased median earnings (from \$26,403 for less than high school graduate compared to \$41,960 for Bachelor's Degree) for persons age 25 and over with higher educational attainment levels.

In 2019, 83.7% of the Hickory MSA population age 25 and older had an educational attainment level of "high school or higher," while 19.6% had achieved an educational attainment level of "Bachelor's Degree or higher." Since 2015, the percentage of Hickory MSA population 25 and over with a high school (or equivalent) or higher educational attainment has grown by 2.2 percentage

points. In 2019, more than one-third of the population age 25 and over had a Bachelor’s Degree or higher in five of the State’s 15 Metro areas.

Hickory MSA Health Insurance Coverage Statistics

Since 2009, the American Community Survey has asked questions concerning health insurance coverage. Data results for the Hickory MSA reveal the number of persons with private insurance coverage, public insurance coverage (Medicare and Medicaid, for example), a combination of private and public insurance coverage and no insurance coverage. Please note that ACS results for 2019 will be the first year of data that does not include the tax penalty for not having health insurance, as the provision was removed from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2019.

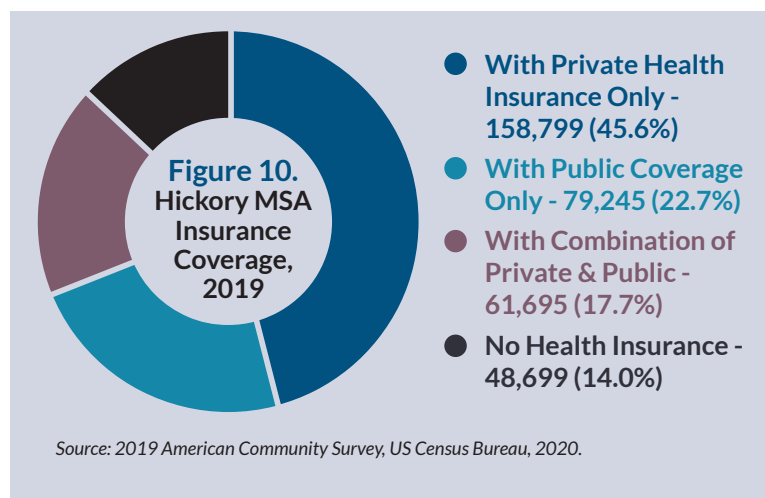
Results in Table 10 display changes in the number of persons with health insurance coverage (public and private) for Hickory MSA residents from 2015 to 2019. The percentage of Hickory MSA population that has health insurance coverage fell from 88.5% in 2015 to 86.6% in 2019. An estimated 244 fewer people had health insurance in the Hickory MSA in 2019 than in 2015, as the region’s civilian noninstitutionalized population also increased by 7,545 persons. The number of uninsured persons in the Hickory MSA grew from 40,910 in 2015 to 48,699 in 2019. The number of persons with private health insurance rose by 688 between 2015 and 2019, while the number of persons with public coverage decreased by 3,808.

Table 10. Hickory MSA Health Insurance Coverage Statistics, 2015 and 2019

Source: 2015 and 2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2020.

Population Group	2015 ACS		2019 ACS		Change 2015-2019	
	Population	% of Population	Population	% of Population	Population	% of Population
Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population	355,807	100.0%	363,352	100.0%	7,545	0.0%
With Health Insurance Coverage	314,897	88.5%	314,653	86.6%	-244	-1.9%
With Private Health Insurance	220,076	61.9%	220,764	60.8%	688	-1.1%
With Private Health Insurance Only	154,627	43.5%	158,799	43.7%	4,172	0.2%
With Public Coverage	145,518	40.9%	141,710	39.0%	-3,808	-1.9%
With Public Coverage Only	80,069	22.5%	79,745	21.9%	-324	-0.6%
With Combination of Private and Public Health Coverage	65,449	18.4%	61,965	17.1%	-3,484	-1.3%
No Health Insurance Coverage	40,910	11.5%	48,699	13.4%	7,789	1.9%
Age 18 and under with No Health Insurance Coverage	2,463	3.2%	8,073	10.2%	5,610	7.0%

Less than half (158,799) of the Hickory MSA’s population is covered with private health insurance only (Figure 10). Less than a quarter of Hickory MSA residents (79,245) have public coverage only, while 17.7% (61,695) have a combination of public and private insurance. The fastest growing insurance category over the past four years is private insurance only, which has increased by 4,172 since 2014. Perhaps this increase is due to more people getting insurance through ACA insurance exchange. The number of persons with public coverage was nearly the same in 2015 (80,069) as in 2019 (79,745). The number of persons in the Hickory MSA with a combination of private and public health coverage dropped from 65,449 in 2015 to 61,965 in 2019. The reasons for the drop are unclear, although it is possible that some residents dropped supplemental private coverage from their public insurance plan.



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Future EIN Topics

- Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA Employment Patterns
- Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA Retail Sales
- Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA Census 2020 Results

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