



*LiveWell*  
Erie

SEPTEMBER 2019

Dear Erie County Resident:

On March 20th, 2015, my administration launched *Initiatives for a Stronger Community*, a multi-department health and human services document that laid out a set of initiatives to be undertaken by Erie County government to improve the lives of our citizens. *Initiatives for Stronger Community* ultimately led to the implementation of dozens of new program enhancements across Erie County.

When it came time to think about a new health and human services plan, I asked county department heads to go in a different direction. Instead of focusing on individual initiatives, think bigger. How can we make the lives of all of our residents better? The result is the launch of a new collaborative effort: Live Well Erie.

Live Well Erie seeks to achieve three primary goals:

- Give Every Child a Chance to Succeed
- Empower Working Families
- Support our Seniors

To accomplish these critical goals, we're turning to the data. By tracking a series of data indicators, we can gauge how well of a job Erie County Departments are doing addressing these critical issues so they can better deliver results for Erie County residents. "Live Well Erie" is in part inspired by conversations I've had with county leaders from across the United States who have successfully implemented similar plans, and I look forward to ensuring the resources of county government help you "Live Well."

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Mark C. Poloncarz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" being the most prominent.

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.  
Erie County Executive

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## BACKGROUND

Live Well Erie is a plan to help all Erie County residents achieve their full potential. It is organized around a single vision--that **the new Erie County will leave no one behind**. It is necessary to address both health behaviors and the social determinants of health to help residents achieve their full potential. Live Well Erie primarily focuses on addressing the social determinants of health while appreciating of the role health behaviors has on the health of a population.

All across the country, health care providers, advocates, insurance carriers, and others have become focused on a new and succinct way of understanding health behavior and health outcomes among the public. This new health behavior framework is called 3-4-50: three behaviors that contribute to four conditions that cause 50 percent of premature deaths. The three behaviors are poor diet, inactive lifestyle, and smoking. The four conditions are diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and lung disease. Simply put, these three behaviors collide to create four deadly conditions, which together cause 50 percent of premature deaths [1].

In Erie County, these four conditions are indeed deadly. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Erie County and “Erie County residents experience 33% more heart disease death than the average US citizen” [2, p. 24]. Risk factors such as high blood pressure and obesity are contributing to heart disease and “only 58% of Buffalo and surrounding area residents (compared to 75% nationally) report visiting their doctors routinely to have their blood pressure and cholesterol checked” [2, p. 24]. Additionally, 62.7 percent of Erie County adults are overweight or obese, which is higher than the NYS rate of 60.9 percent and Erie County has higher rates of respiratory cancer (tracheal, bronchial, and lung) than both NYS and the country. In Erie County, 54.4 females and 76 males per 100,000 population have respiratory cancer, whereas the same is true for just 39.9 females and 57 males per 100,000 population in New York State [2].



However, health behaviors are not the whole story. Health behaviors like diet and exercise shape only 30 percent of the health of a population, and clinical care shapes 20 percent. **A full 40 percent of health outcomes are shaped by the social determinants of health**, consisting of social and economic factors, and the physical environment shapes the remaining ten percent [3]. **The social determinants of health and the physical environment are critically important areas on which county government can and should focus because they are areas in which county government has the most influence.** Thus, Live Well Erie primarily focuses on the social determinants of health.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The social determinants of health are the conditions under which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Based on research from the Centers for Disease Control [4], we know that good health is primarily determined by:

- Access to social and economic opportunities;
- The resources and supports available in neighborhoods and communities;
- The quality of schooling;
- The safety of workplaces;
- The cleanliness of water, food, and air; and
- The nature of social interactions and relationships.

Through the Live Well Erie effort, County government is making a deliberate attempt to properly understand and positively influence the social determinants of health to create better positive health outcomes for Erie County residents.

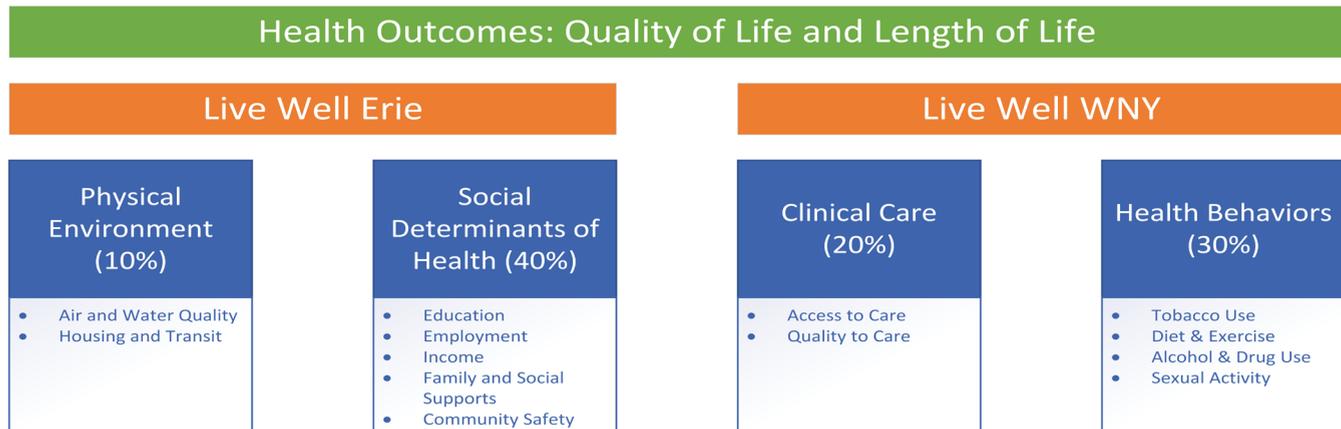


## THE LIVE WELL MODEL

In 2010, San Diego County (California) initiated an effort to support residents in a shared vision—building better health, living safely, and thriving. This effort was known as “Live Well San Diego.” Since then, approximately 387 recognized partners consisting of public, private, non-profit, health care, and philanthropic leaders and organizations have joined together to achieve more positive health outcomes and a higher quality of life for San Diego’s 3.3 million residents [5]. Communities across the United States are embracing the Live Well model.

**LIVE WELL WNY:** A “Live Well” effort is already underway in Western New York with the use of a 3-4-50 framework for understanding and improving health behaviors and health outcomes in the region. The Population Health Collaborative, formerly P2 Collaborative, has launched Live Well WNY to focus on changing the three behaviors that result in dangerous health conditions and premature death for many Western New Yorkers [6].

**LIVE WELL ERIE:** Live Well Erie is similarly situated around a single vision—that the new Erie County will leave no one behind and residents will be healthier and better able to realize their full potential. Live Well Erie is meant to complement Live Well WNY by focusing on meaningful improvements in the social determinants of health. Live Well Erie will do this by focusing attention on three distinct populations: children, working families, and older adults. In this way, Erie County government can ensure its resources and efforts focus on all residents during the course of their lives and in those areas government can best influence, while also aligning with the many partner organizations involved in Live Well WNY.

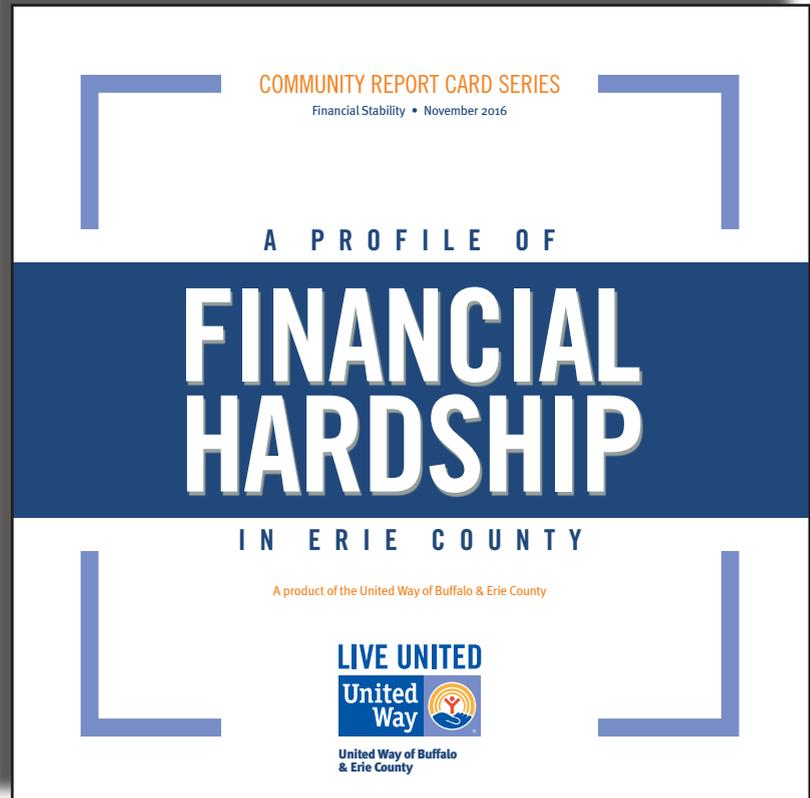


## THE NEED FOR LIVE WELL ERIE

**THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE:** The economic climate in Western New York has improved dramatically in recent years. Less than a decade ago, the unemployment rate in Erie County was 8.9%, but by May 2019 the local unemployment rate was just 3.7%, its lowest level in over 40 years [7]. The local economy has also benefited from significant capital investment. Since 2012, the Erie County Industrial Development Agency has incentivized over \$2 Billion in private sector investment, which created over 11,000 good-paying construction jobs and more than 3,000 new permanent jobs [8].

Despite such low unemployment, Western New Yorkers continue to struggle. As recently as 2016, the City of Buffalo still ranked among the top 10 poorest U.S. cities with a population of 250,000 residents or more [9]. This continued struggle led the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County to issue a report on financial hardship in November 2016 [10]. The report indicates that jobs paying less than \$20 per hour make up 64% of all jobs in Western New York. The report further suggests that 41% of all Erie County residents struggle to make ends meet, citing in part the high costs of child care and challenges in affordable housing and public transportation.

Across the nation, stagnant wages create financial challenges for American families. The Pew Research Center published an article in August 2018 documenting that real wages for most U.S. Workers have barely budged in decades. “In fact, despite some ups and downs over the past several decades, today’s real average wage (adjusted for inflation) has about the same purchasing power it did



40 years ago.” According to Pew’s research, the \$4.03 per hour rate provided in January 1973, “had the same purchasing power that \$23.68 per hour would today.” There continues to be a great deal of debate about what is causing such long term stagnant wage growth, however; what is clear is that wages are not keeping pace with growing costs of living [11].

These combined data—low unemployment but stagnant wages, high poverty, and financial hardship—paints a somewhat counter-intuitive picture. Erie County residents are working, and they are doing so in the greatest numbers the region has seen in more than a generation. Unfortunately, the prevalence of low wage jobs, the high costs of child care, the challenges created by the disconnect between public transportation routes and employers, and a shrinking supply of affordable housing all create a climate of financial hardship.

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES:** After a generation of population stagnation, Erie County has been slowly growing and this decade is poised to be the first with growth in a half-century. While this growth is cause for celebration, there are some challenges. Our community is growing older, as the median age between 2000 and 2017 rose from 38 years to 40.3 years. As an example of that change, the number of residents 85 years old or older rose from 18,525 to 24,691. Our community is also becoming more diverse, due in part to the number of refugees who have been resettled in our area by the federal government. The number of foreign-born residents in Erie County has grown from 42,886 to 63,161 between 2000 and 2017 [12].

The City of Buffalo is experiencing an incredible renaissance, but that has increased the costs of rent in some neighborhoods. Some long-time residents of limited means can no longer afford to live in their neighborhood and are being forced to move to other communities [13]. These individuals often move to suburban and rural areas that lack the institutions and experience to support these individuals. The ladder out of poverty for these residents is shakier when these communities are without the services and supports they need.

**ERIE COUNTY’S COMMUNITY SURVEY:** To better understand Erie County resident’s wellness needs, Erie County issued a community survey. The survey asked questions about each of the distinct populations targeted by Live Well Erie (children, working families, and seniors) and conducted primarily online. More than 1,000 responses were received, and the following highlights were noted:

- Twenty percent (20%) of all Erie County residents do not have enough money to provide the essentials for everybody in their family, and more than thirty percent (30%) of older

adults have difficulty meeting their monthly expenses.

- Fifty percent (50%) of Erie County residents attended work when they were sick due to lack of sick time.
- Twenty-two percent (22%) of older adults (60+) in Erie County are not satisfied with the amount of activity in their lives.



- Participants reported Bullying (53%), Mental Health (39%) and Drug and Alcohol Abuse (37%) as the top three health concerns for children.
- Insufficient activities for children in the summer and after school (71%), lack of more affordable child care (52%) and improve public education (48%) were cited as the top three ways our community can be more supportive of children.
- Twenty-five percent (25%) of working families are not saving for retirement.
- Thirty-one percent (31%) of working families worry a lot or a great deal about not being able to afford their mortgage or rent in the future.
- Twenty-two percent (22%) of working families reported being more than \$50,000 in debt (not including mortgage).

These survey results confirm much of the data from the United Way's Financial Hardship report and further demonstrate the need for a deliberate focus on the social determinants of health. It is more apparent than ever before that to achieve comprehensive wellness, the public, private, non-profit, philanthropic, and health-care sectors need the dual approach provided by Live Well WNY and Live Well Erie.

## **THE METHODOLOGY OF LIVE WELL ERIE**

Live Well Erie is the result of more than nine months of work beginning in October 2018. Many county departments, including the Departments of Social Services, Senior Services, Health, Mental Health, Public Advocacy, Parks, Environment and Planning, and Information and Support Services, were involved. More than 60 different community partners were also involved including the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, the Child Care Resource Network, Say Yes Buffalo, the University at Buffalo School of Law Community Justice Clinic, the International Institute, the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, the Partnership for the Public Good, and many more.

A steering committee, which consisted of representatives from the County Executive's office and several critical departments, led the effort. Early in the process, the steering committee agreed to employ a results-based accountability (RBA) methodology. RBA is a data-driven, decision-making process that starts with the ultimate goal or result in mind, and works backwards from there. RBA allows for a focus on the targeted population for each goal or desired result [14].

In addition to using RBA, the steering committee also established five guiding principles in which to frame the work. These guiding principles include:

1. A clear focus on the **social determinants of health**;
2. An integration of the **Racial Equity Impact Analysis** (see Appendix);
3. An invitation for **innovative thinking**;
4. An opportunity for the **modernization of service delivery**;
5. An expectation of enhanced **partnership and collaboration**.

With the RBA methodology and the guiding principles established, the steering committee convened a partner orientation with more than 60 community organizations in January 2019. At that time, the partners were invited to join Erie County departments in three different working groups: Every Child Deserves a Chance to Succeed; Empowering Working Families; and Support for our Seniors. Each working group then discussed the goals and desired results for each population, identified the data that would be used to track progress towards the goals, and brainstormed a variety of initiatives Erie County and the community partners could work on together to help make progress towards the goals. The steering committee vetted the initiatives brainstormed by each of the working groups and assembled the strongest initiatives in a separate document called Live Well Erie Community Strategies. While the Live Well Erie Vision will stay the same, Erie County recognizes that the Community Strategies and initiatives will need to change and evolve, based on how effective the initiatives are at helping to achieve the goals.



## **LIVE WELL ERIE IMPLEMENTATION AND TIMELINE**

To implement Live Well Erie, Erie County has invited organizations, businesses, and institutions to formally take the Live Well Erie Partner Pledge. Partners are encouraged to continue their participation in each of the three Live Well Erie working groups: Children, Working Families, and Seniors. The working groups will meet regularly to discuss, evaluate, and implement the Live Well Erie Community Strategies. Erie County will convene all the partners several times throughout the year in a task force to report out on the progress of each working group and monitor overall progress towards the goals.

Erie County and the Live Well Erie steering committee recognize that helping our residents to achieve their full potential will not happen overnight. It will take a concentrated multiyear effort by many partners implementing many different initiatives to make progress towards the goals. For this reason, the Live Well Erie Task Force will regularly monitor the indicators attached to each goal and will annually report changes in the indicators.

Live Well Erie will be thoroughly re-examined in 2025 and again in 2029. 2025 is six years from the first publication of the Live Well Erie Vision. Erie County believes it is worthwhile to reassemble after six years and again after ten years to not only evaluate the success of the community strategies and initiatives, but also to ensure the goals and indicators are still appropriate for Erie County.

## **LIVE WELL ERIE ECOSYSTEM**

As already stated, Live Well Erie is united around a single vision—in the new Erie County no one will be left behind, and all residents will be able to realize their potential more fully. Live Well Erie will help this community achieve this vision by working with Live Well WNY to establish an ecosystem of supports during the lifespan of a person. Rather than focusing on a single intervention to achieve wellness, Live Well WNY and Live Well Erie have created a compliment of community strategies and initiatives that provide an interconnected system of support. These initiatives not only encourage a more active lifestyle and healthy eating but also include strategies such as increasing access to affordable housing and helping working families and seniors achieve greater financial security.

If the new Erie County really is to achieve its single vision of leaving no one behind, it will take an evolved and comprehensive “Live Well” ecosystem to make that vision a reality.

A group of diverse children, including boys and girls of various ethnicities, are smiling and shouting joyfully. They are positioned in front of a world map, which is visible in the background. The children are wearing colorful clothing, such as a red and orange striped sweater, a blue and green striped sweater, and a light blue polo shirt. The overall atmosphere is one of happiness and excitement.

**EVERY CHILD  
DESERVES A  
CHANCE TO  
SUCCEED**

**Children** are our most precious resource and investing in their health, and success is a down payment on Erie County's future. Children are particularly impacted by their environment and the systems in which they live, including their families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities. Children under 18 years of age represent 20.4 percent of the County's population. There are nearly 189,000 children under 18 years of age, and of these almost 51,000 are under the age of 5. To address the broad spectrum of our children's needs, the County and our community partners will focus on attaining the following goals:

## **GOAL 1: CHILDREN WILL GROW UP IN A STABLE, SAFE, AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY**

For all children to get the chance they truly deserve, they must grow up in a stable, safe, and supportive community environment. Safety and stability, along with social and emotional support structures, are instrumental in a child's ability to perform in school and fulfill his or her true potential. Sadly, many children in Erie County do not grow up in a stable, safe, and supportive community.

### **Indicator 1.1: Children/Youth in Indicated Reports of Abuse and Maltreatment**

<b>Current Benchmark</b>	<b>New York State Average</b>
2017 - 25.1/1,000 children	2017 - 17.1/1,000 children
<i>Data Source: NYS Office of Children and Family Services - National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)</i>	

Some children suffer from abuse. Abuse and maltreatment can impact children regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, or ethnic background. There are several negative consequences related to child abuse and maltreatment affecting health and educational attainment, along with social and behavioral development. The stress resulting from child maltreatment can disrupt early brain development and impair the development of the nervous and immune response systems [15].



**Indicator 1.2: Firearm Related Index Crimes, General Population Crimes**

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
2017 - 10.1/10,000 population	2017 - 3.6/10,000 population (Excluding NYC)
<i>Data Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services; Uniform Crime Report</i>	

Violent crimes, specifically violent crimes involving a firearm, is a vital indicator of the seriousness of crime in a community. The higher the violent crime rate and the use of firearms, the more disruptive it is to a child's safety and development.

The New York State Uniform Crime Report Index Crimes includes data on firearms present during the commission of a murder, forcible rape, robbery, or aggravated assault. Collectively, these are referred to as Violent Index Crimes. The firearm-related crime rate is the number of reported Violent Index Crimes where a firearm was present.

In 2017 in Erie County there were 930 Violent Crimes involving a firearm and the rate was 10.1/10,000 population. Since 2011 the rate has been up to 12.8, and 2017 had the lowest rate of the past seven years. While this is promising, it should be noted that Erie County has the highest rate of Violent Crimes involving a firearm for counties outside of New York City and has maintained that distinction at least since 2011. Reducing this number further is essential to improving the safety and well-being of children in Erie County and will help make progress towards the goal of achieving a safe, stable and supportive community in which children can grow.

**Possible initiatives to achieve Children will grow up in a stable, safe, supportive community:**

- Improve services by implementing evidence based models including Trauma Informed Care and Strengthening Families
- Focus on reducing gun violence using multi-pronged approach
- Internet safety education for children, youth and parents

## GOAL 2: CHILDREN WILL ACHIEVE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH

Comprehensive health and wellness are important for all people to be successful. The best way for individuals to become healthy adults is to maintain health and wellness throughout childhood and adolescence [16]. However, many children today do not enjoy the physical and mental wellness needed to succeed. There are a variety of indicators which demonstrate the challenges these children are facing.

### Indicator 2.1: Rate of Students Overweight or Obese

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
2016 - 33/100	2016 - 33.8/100
<i>Data Source: New York State Department of Health: Student Weight Status Category Reporting Survey Results</i>	

Childhood obesity has a significant effect on a child's well-being, both immediate and long-term. Obesity affects physical, social, and emotional health. Children with obesity have a higher risk of having other chronic health conditions and diseases such as asthma, bone and joint problems, Type 2 Diabetes, and risk factors for heart disease. They are also more likely to suffer from social isolation, depression, and lower self-esteem. Long term, a child with obesity is more likely to have obesity as an adult, and therefore has a higher risk for developing heart disease, Type-2 Diabetes, and many types of cancer [17].



Based on available data, we know obesity becomes worse through our lifespan. Of children age 2-4 receiving WIC in Erie County, 12.1 percent are obese. In elementary school, 30.1 percent are overweight or obese. For children in middle and high school, 35 percent of Erie County students are overweight or obese. By adulthood, 63% of Erie County residents are obese or overweight.

**Indicator 2.2: Incidence of Preterm Birth**

A healthy beginning starts before birth with a healthy mother. To improve chances for a strong start in life, all expectant mothers need access to high quality comprehensive prenatal and postnatal care, as well as access to preventive and comprehensive health care for their babies. Preventive and comprehensive health care includes regular well-child visits, physical and developmental screenings, and referrals to necessary services to ensure infants are born healthy and continue to live well [18].



Current Benchmark	New York State Average
2015 - 10.0/100	2018 - 9.1/100 (excluding NYC)
<i>Data Source: New York State Department of Health; Vital Statistics</i>	

**Possible initiatives to achieve Children will achieve comprehensive health :**

- Implement a countywide wellness initiative on healthy eating and physical activity, particularly in Erie County parks.
- Implement the Ages and Stages Questionnaire countywide.
- Expanded training for early childhood teachers.
- Convene community stakeholders to adopt the National Infant and Toddler Collaborative.

### **GOAL 3: CHILDREN WILL REALIZE THEIR GREATEST POTENTIAL**

Many areas of life contribute to helping children achieve their greatest potential. The basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter must be met. Children must also grow up in safe, stable, and supportive communities free from abuse, maltreatment, and violent crime. Beyond these factors, however, children must also have quality primary and secondary education to realize their greatest potential.

#### **Indicator 3.1: 3rd and 8th Grade ELA and Math Scores**

Educational attainment has been found to impact short and long term outcomes for health, income, employment, civic engagement, and poverty [19]. Elementary, middle, and high school create the foundation of future accomplishments for children.



In New York State student skills are assessed in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math in 3rd grade and 8th grade. The data reflect the percentage of students that are meeting proficiency at the grade level for that subject. For ELA, there has been a marked improvement over the past five years in Erie County. ELA proficiency for students in 3rd grade went from 33 percent in 2014 to 48 percent in 2018. These gains are less pronounced for 8th-grade students as they rose from 33 percent in 2014 to 40 percent in 2018.

For Math, the percent of Erie County students in 3rd grade who were proficient increased from 41 percent in 2014 to 51 percent in 2018. Math proficiency at the 8th-grade level, however, falls from 3rd grade. While the math proficiency levels for all 3rd and 8th graders increased from 2014 to 2018, the rates decreased significantly between 3rd grade (51 percent proficient in 2018) to 8th grade (22 percent in 2018). We know that there is significant variation based on where a child lives, their school district, and the school they attend. Looking at the school district level data, the trend of lower percentages of students proficient in 8th grade compared to 3rd grade is consistent across districts. That said, there is wide variation in proficiency at this level with many school districts exceeding the county average and several falling below the county average.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
ELA Grade 3: 48% ELA Grade 8: 40% Math Grade 3: 51% Math Grade 8: 22%	ELA Grade 3: 51% ELA Grade 8: 48% Math Grade 3: 54% Math Grade 8: 30%
<i>Data Source: NYS Dept of Education, NYSED; Office of Information; Reporting and Technology Services</i>	

**Indicator 3.2: High School Dropout Rate**

Students who do not complete high school are unlikely to realize their greatest potential. In general, these students have higher unemployment rates than high school graduates. When they are employed, they earn less, are more likely to be in semi-skilled manual jobs and work at jobs with undesirable working conditions and benefits. The social, economic, and personal costs include decreased productivity, increased demand for and reliance on social services, reduced civic participation, and generally poorer health [20].



This indicator is a cohort dropout rate and is a measure of the number of students from a freshman cohort who leave school before graduating in 4 years. In Erie County, 7 percent of students drop out of school without graduating. This percentage varies by the district with just a handful of districts over the county benchmark of 7 percent. This allows targeted strategies starting with those schools with the highest dropout rates.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
2016 - 7.1/100	2016 - 6.0/100
<i>Data Source: NYS Dept of Education; Office of Information; Reporting and Technology Services</i>	

**Possible initiatives to achieve Children will Achieve their Greatest Potential :**

- Assess the availability of Universal Pre-K and student success throughout Erie County.
- Implement strategies that support student success at every stage of development, including convening a Community Impact Committee comprised of a cross section of community stakeholders.
- Create a Mindfulness Advisory Team to inform policy and practice that will support successful learning transitions for children throughout their pre-k, elementary and secondary education.

A photograph of two men in a construction or industrial setting. Both are wearing white hard hats. The man on the left has a beard and is wearing a dark jacket over a blue shirt. The man on the right is wearing a red sweater and safety glasses. They are both looking at a tablet held by the man on the right. The background is blurred, showing industrial equipment and lights.

**EMPOWER  
WORKING  
FAMILIES**

**Working Families** often struggle to maintain a sustainable standard of living, thus being financially challenged to provide the basic modern needs. This segment of the population, sometimes referred to as ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, is the focus of the Live Well Erie report.

Across the country, the United Way has undertaken vital research to discover a household survival budget for different-sized households in different markets in the United States. The household survival budget includes basic necessities, such as housing, transportation, food, and child care expenses [10]. Throughout the country, this research has placed the necessary income for the household survival budget well above the federal poverty limit, including here in Erie County. In response, the United Way began a particular focus on the ALICE population (i.e., those families who are working but still struggling to make ends meet). Together with the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Erie County will not only track the number of families whose income is at or below the Federal Poverty Level, but we will also track by zip code the number of families living at the ALICE level.

As a part of Live Well Erie, we focus on the following goals that are important to achieving a stable, sustainable, and thriving quality of life for Working Families in Erie County:



## **GOAL 1: FAMILIES WILL HAVE SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The importance of safe, affordable housing cannot be understated. A home is not just a place where individuals and families start and end their day, but a foundation from which every-day people construct their lives, build their wealth, and conceive of their own personal American Dream.

Increasingly, however, rising rents and housing prices in the WNY housing market make finding affordable housing more difficult. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as the combined total of housing and utility costs that do not exceed 30 percent of an individual's or family's gross income per month [21].

Also, much of the housing stock throughout WNY is quite old, leading to high concentrations in some zip codes of homes with lead hazards and children with lead poisoning. Lead from peeling and chipping paint puts young children at serious risk, negatively affecting their mental and physical development.

### **Indicator 1.1: Percentage of families in Erie County who are considered housing cost burdened.**

Certain “high demand” areas in Erie County have seen rising housing costs due to higher home values. These higher home values have resulted in fewer options for low- to moderate-income families to purchase a home. Rising home values have also resulted in increasing rental costs for renter families. Further complicating the situation is the high prevalence of low-wage jobs in Western New York and the slow growth of wages throughout the country.

Meanwhile, there has also been a decrease in State and Federal funding for affordable housing projects. In Erie County, for instance, the federal Community Development Block Grant has been decreased by 23 percent from 1994 to 2018. These affordable housing projects are vital in achieving the goal of increasing affordable housing because they require that rents and utility costs for families are not higher than 30 percent of their gross income.

In many cases, families who are housing cost-burdened are forced to choose between paying to maintain their place of residence or to pay off debt, child care or health care expenses. According to the US Census American Community Survey (ACS), in 2017, 12.7 percent of middle-class households in Erie County were housing cost-burdened. Erie County will measure progress towards the goal of decreasing the number of housing cost-burdened families by comparing data from the US Census American Community Survey (ACS) from 2017 to that same data set over time.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
28.6%	39.2%
<i>Data Source: US Census, American Community Survey</i>	

**Indicator 1.2: Number of Erie County residents that are discriminated against when seeking housing.**

Unfortunately, instances of housing discrimination still occur in Erie County. The local non-profit organization, Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), tracks reports of discrimination for rental housing in Erie County. HOME works with renters and landlords to attempt to resolve cases of possible housing discrimination. In 2018, there were 213 cases of housing discrimination reported to HOME by Erie County residents.

Residents of Erie County have reported being discriminated against when seeking housing for a variety of reasons. These include having a mental or physical disability, marital status, sexual orientation, military status, gender identity, familial status, national origin, immigration and citizenship status, and source of income.

In May of 2018, 50 years after passage of the National Fair Housing Act, Erie County passed a local fair housing law that added immigration, disability, and citizenship status,



gender identity, and source of income as protected classes under the law. HOME will now have this new fair housing law to use as a legal tool to prosecute landlords and realtors in discrimination cases.

Erie County will measure the progress of reducing the number of housing discrimination cases reported to HOME by using data from HOME for the number of reported cases in 2018 to the number of cases that will be reported in 2025.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
2018 - 213	TBD
<i>Data Source: Erie County Fair Housing Board</i>	

**Indicator 1.3: Number of new cases of elevated blood lead levels of 10mcg/dl or above**

Erie County has the oldest housing stock of any county in the nation and Buffalo has the second oldest housing stock of any city. As a consequence, Erie County has a large quantity of pre-1978 housing almost of all of which contains decades of built-up lead paint. When this paint deteriorates, it creates dangerous lead dust particulate that is ingested by young children, especially those under 24 months of age. Lead poisoning can lead to a variety of health issues. A lowered IQ and permanent changes to behavior are among the most dangerous of these health impacts.

The Erie County Department of Health and Department of Environment and Planning both operate large and robust programs to address lead poisoning in housing. In particular, the Erie County Department of Health tracks new cases of blood lead poisoning. The number of new cases of children with elevated blood lead levels of 10mcg/dl or higher is a strong indicator of the state of the county’s housing stock.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
187	TBD
<i>Data Source: New York State Department of Health</i>	



**Possible initiatives to achieve Families in Erie County will have safe affordable housing:**

- Pass affordable housing policy for adaptive reuse projects receiving tax incentives at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency;
- Partner with the Buffalo Erie Niagara Land Improvement Corporation on the rehabilitation of more owner-occupied affordable housing properties
- Increase federal Home Investment Partnership (HOME) funding from HUD to continue to build new units of affordable rental housing.
- Educate municipal Planning Boards on strategies to increase affordable housing in their municipalities.
- Explore the possibility of creating Limited Equity Cooperatives (LEC) to fund low-interest mortgages and property tax reductions for the purpose of selling units in apartment buildings to low-income households.
- Explore increased weatherization opportunities for families using HEAP
- Remediate lead hazards in homes through the Department of Environment and Planning's Housing Rehabilitation Program in Erie County's Community Development Consortium areas and through the Erie County's Health Department in the City of Buffalo

## GOAL 2: FAMILIES WILL HAVE GREATER FINANCIAL SECURITY

Financial security is an important social determinant of health and is essential if families are to thrive. Financial security is not just about earning enough money to pay for necessary expenses, but also enough to save for emergencies, education, and retirement.

In Erie County, many low-wage jobs do not offer the financial security individuals need to provide for their families. With massive retirements on the horizon, there are also many middle-skill, high-wage jobs that are at risk of going unfilled. There are many obstacles to filling those jobs including transportation gaps, lack of access to quality child care, an underskilled workforce and insufficient supports for families approaching the “benefits cliff” when an increase in wages does not offset a loss of public assistance. Increasing financial security for families in Erie County will require creative strategies to overcome these obstacles while also supporting retirement planning, homeownership, and more.



**Indicator 2.1: Percentage of households in Erie County living at the ALICE level.**

Across the country, the United Way has undertaken some critical research to discover a household survival budget for different-sized households in different markets in the United States. The household survival budget includes just the basic necessities such as housing, transportation, food, and child care expenses. Throughout the country, this research has placed the necessary income for the household survival budget well above the federal poverty limit, including here in Erie County. As such, the United Way began a particular focus on those families who are working but still struggling to make ends meet. This population has come to be called the “ALICE” population. ALICE stands for “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.”

Together with the United Way, Erie County will not only track the number of families whose income is at or below the Federal Poverty Level, but we will also track by zip code the number of families living at the ALICE level.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
104,578 (27.49%)	2,223,333 ( 30.81%)
<i>Data Source: United Way of Buffalo and Erie County</i>	

**Possible Initiatives to achieve Families in Erie County will have greater financial security:**

- Using Erie County GIS create a PIVOT Resource Map to identify clusters of employers participating in the PIVOT program and their proximity to both transportation lines and child care centers
- Work with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and its members on “opt out” retirement saving and financial planning initiatives for employees
- Explore strategies to grow the number of employers in Erie County offering paid sick to their low and moderate income employees
- Establish a Re-Entry Hub to support employment opportunities and financial stability for recently incarcerated individuals
- Establish a Erie County Live Well Mobile Services Van to better connect residents throughout the county to county services

### **GOAL 3: FAMILIES WILL HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE**

High-quality child care is essential for many parents to get and keep a job, and to give children a start toward success in life. Readily available child care strengthens our economy. Unfortunately, many families, particularly low- to middle-wage families, lack access to high-quality child care that parents need to work, and children need to grow and thrive.

Although Erie County receives approximately 25 million dollars in funding for child care subsidies, families in Erie County still struggle to access high-quality child care. This often places families in a compromised position of having to choose between high-quality licensed child care and employment, or, if available, utilizing family and friends or unlicensed child care providers of varying quality.



**Indicator 3.1: Ratio to Slots to Children**

Few child care providers offer their services during nontraditional working hours, which places a burden on parents whose work schedules fall outside of the typical 9-5 range. These include transportation and financial limitations as well as fluid or nontraditional working shifts/ hours. As such, Erie County will use geographic information system software to map child care throughout the county and measure the ratio of those centers to populations in need of child care.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
<p>Capacity of Child Care Program by Type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Day Care Centers- 17,601 (Infant- 2,123, Toddler 3,421, Preschool-9,375, and School Age 2,682)</li> <li>▪ Group Family Day Care Homes-2,620</li> <li>▪ Family Day Care Homes-694</li> <li>▪ School Age Child Care Programs-8,580</li> <li>▪ Total: 29,495</li> </ul>	<p>Capacity of Child Care Program by Type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Day Care Centers- 168, 718 (Infant- 15,250, Toddler 30,158, Preschool-101,787, and School Age 21,523)</li> <li>▪ Group Family Day Care Homes-123,894</li> <li>▪ Family Day Care Homes-33,259</li> <li>▪ School Age Child Care Programs-304,573</li> <li>▪ Total: 630,444</li> </ul>
<p><i>Data Source: Child Care Resource Network, 2017 OCFS NY State Child Care Demographics report</i></p>	

**Possible Initiatives to achieve Families in Erie County will have access to quality, affordable childcare:**

- Increase awareness of available daycare subsidy programs (DSS low income subsidy, WDI)
- Collaborate with Child Care Resource Network and develop a checklist of easy to follow, step by step guide or requirements and timeline for becoming a childcare provider.
- Incentivize participation of Erie County childcare providers in QUALITYstarsNY (NY’s childcare Quality Rating and Improvement System)
- Work with Erie County GIS to plot existing child care centers throughout the county and then work with employers, healthcare providers and schools to share information about the location of quality childcare and available options.



**SUPPORTING  
OUR  
SENIORS**

**Older Adults** are an increasingly important part of our community. Demographic trends show that Erie County will become a significantly older community in the next few decades. The United States Census Bureau predicts that older adults will outnumber children by 2035, a milestone Erie County will likely reach earlier as it has a greater percentage of older adults than the national average and fewer children than the national average. Without adequate planning and resources, this shift in Erie County's demographics will strain human service systems in our community. There are currently 155,817 adults 65 years or older in Erie County, with one-third having a disability and 8.8 percent living in poverty.

As you are aware, older adults are a rich source of knowledge, make essential contributions to communities all across the country, and have a significant positive economic impact. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that older adults between the ages of 65 and 74 spend \$48,885 annually, and adults age 75 and older spend \$36,673 annually [22]. In Erie County, this represents \$6.7 Billion in annual economic activity. Unfortunately, many older adults, particularly the affluent, choose to migrate to other parts of the country after they retire due to weather and other amenities. Making our community more enticing to older adults, and thus retaining a larger portion of this population, would have a positive social and economic impact on our community.

To be attractive to older adults, Erie County must retrofit its physical infrastructure to the needs of our aging population. As we age, we often experience a change in our range of abilities and are unable to take advantage of many opportunities. Older adults interact with the built environment in ways that reflect changing lifestyles and changing physical capabilities. Conditions such as chronic diseases and limited vision may limit mobility and create unique needs. However, through senior-inclusive policies, Erie County can become accessible to people of all ages.

Social isolation has been linked to several adverse health effects, including dementia, increased risk for hospital readmission, and increased risk of falls [23]. The impact of social isolation is so severe that it has been compared to smoking 15 cigarettes a day [23]. Older adults are sometimes at a higher risk for social isolation due to health and mobility challenges, inability to drive and limited transportation options, loss of a partner and friends, ageism, and limited opportunities to participate in the community. To improve the health and well-being of older adults, overcoming these challenges must be a priority.



Although only 8.8 percent of older adults live in poverty, for older adults above the poverty line, a single major adverse life event can cause extreme financial hardship. Many older adults are at high risk for slipping into poverty as more than 44 percent of adults 65 or older lack retirement income outside of Social Security. Unlike their younger counterparts, most low income older adults are unable to escape poverty because they are no longer in the labor force (84.4 percent). Also, there are significant gender inequalities for older adults. On average, older adult women received about \$4,500 less annually in Social Security benefits than older adult men due to lower lifetime earnings, time off for caregiving, occupational segregation into lower-wage work, and other issues. This gap is even more significant for women of color.

To address these challenges and assist our aging population more fully realize their potential, Erie County has developed the following goals:

## **GOAL 1: OLDER ADULTS WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN AN ACTIVE AND STIMULATING SOCIAL LIFE AS THEY AGE**

In addition to a prima facie improvements to quality-of-life, research shows that having an active and stimulating social life improves the physical and mental health of older adults [25]. Unfortunately, many individuals become socially isolated as they age. Older adults often lose their social support network, the people in their lives they can talk to, spend time with, and get help from, and as a result, withdraw socially. Older adults who lose friends and family members may have holes in their social networks that are difficult to fill.



**Indicator 1.1: Percent 65 and over with an independent living difficulty**

The American Community Survey (ACS) measures the number of older adults with an independent living difficulty. People with an independent living difficulty encounter challenges performing instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition. Examples of IADLs include grocery shopping or visiting a doctor’s office. Older adults may have more difficulty accessing food or health services due to inability to drive or navigate public transportation, physical limitations (walking, reaching, lifting, etc.), and financial limitations.

As lifespans rise the number of residents with an independent living difficulty is expected to increase. Without assistance, older people with an independent living difficulty may not be able to perform daily activities successfully and can experience a decline in quality of life.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
13.7 percent	15.2 percent
<i>Data Source: United States Census Bureau - American Community Survey</i>	

**Indicator 1.2: 60 and over living in the same residence for one year or more**

Aging in place is a goal of Erie County and New York State. The preference of older adults is to live in the privacy of their own homes or apartments and to stay where they are. Many older adults suffer relocation stress syndrome when relocating away from a private residence to a less independent living arrangement. Relocation stress syndrome is characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, confusion, hopelessness, and loneliness. While there is undoubtedly a need for assisted living facilities in Erie County, quality-of-life is usually enhanced by allowing older adults to age-in-place. In Erie County, an array of in-home and community-based programs and services are available to help older people age in place safely and successfully. Living in the same residence for one year or more is being used here as a proxy for aging-in-place.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
94.5 percent	95.0 percent
<i>Data Source: United States Census Bureau - American Community Survey</i>	

**Possible Initiatives to achieve Older Adults will be able to maintain an active and stimulating social life as they age:**

- Offer dinner at Senior Centers / Go Dine program
- Offer older adult technology training through Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

**GOAL 2: ERIE COUNTY WILL BE ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND PHYSICAL ABILITIES**

Central to the creation of livable communities is the ability for everyone, regardless of age or ability, to visit and travel conveniently, safely and comfortably. Older adults often have a more restricted range of abilities, and are unable to take advantage of some opportunities in our community. Older adults interact with infrastructure in ways that reflect changing lifestyles and changing physical capabilities. Conditions such as chronic disease and limited vision may limit mobility and create unique needs. Through investment and planning, Erie County can become accessible to people of all ages.

**Indicator 2.1: Miles of Complete Streets in Erie County**

Some older adults do not have the ability to drive, but are still able to walk and use transportation services. For Erie County to be accessible for people of all ages, streets can be designed to be safe and convenient for travel by automobile, foot, bicycle, and transit regardless of age or ability. Complete streets are roadways designed to be safely accessed for this range of users. Initiatives for a Smart Economy 2.0 included an initiative for Erie County to adopt a Complete Streets Policy.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
This initial indicator will require Erie County to work with partners in local government and advocacy organizations to implement.	TBD
<i>Data Source: n/a</i>	



**Indicator 2.2: Number of Facilities Built with Universal Design Goals**

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. A facility should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it.

Erie County is proud to be home to one of the leading institutes on Universal Design, the University at Buffalo Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA). IDeA has a certification program for facilities looking to be certified as meeting Inclusive Design principles. Erie County will work with IDeA on tracking the number of facilities in Erie County achieving this certification.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
Erie County will work with IDeA on tracking the number of facilities in Erie County achieving this certification.	TBD
<i>Data Source: n/a</i>	



**Possible Initiatives to achieve Erie County will be Accessible to People of All Ages:**

- Explore with the Erie County Industrial Development Agency the possibility of creating a policy requiring senior housing and other public spaces to meet universal design standards.
- Perform a crowdsourced walk audit of all Erie County roadways in commercial or densely populated residential areas
- Develop and distribute a Senior Transportation Card that lets older adults use numerous modes of transportation

**GOAL 3: OLDER ADULTS WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN FINANCIAL SECURITY THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES**

If older adults do not have adequate resources, they are unable to prioritize their health and well-being. Many rely primarily on social security for the bulk of their income, and many older adults, unlike most younger citizens, are unable to rejoin the workforce to increase their income. Many older adults lack financial literacy skills and are unable to navigate the supportive services available to them.

**Indicator 3.1: Number of people over age 60 at or above 150% of the poverty rate**

As life expectancy increases, the savings that older adults have accumulated throughout their lives has to be stretched longer. As retirement schemes have transformed from guaranteed pensions to 401(k) plans, many older adults are less prepared for retirement and are subject to more volatility due to the financial markets.

Current Benchmark	New York State Average
82.7 percent	80.1 percent
<i>Data Source: United States Census Bureau</i>	

**Possible Initiatives to achieve Older Adults will be able to maintain financial security throughout their lives:**

- Create a Senior Homeshare matching program where older adults can share a home to split expenses and provide companionship
- Expand the Representative Payee program to provide benefit payment management for beneficiaries who have difficulty managing their Social Security payments

# NEXT STEPS

Live Well Erie County is a long term plan designed to address broad goals. To make progress towards these goals and measure them by tracking changes in the indicators, Live Well Erie has developed a Community Strategies addendum. In the Community Strategies addendum, the reader will find a short narrative of the possible next steps or initiatives briefly presented here. Erie County and our community partners will begin to implement these initiatives in an effort to achieve the desired results and stated goals discussed in this document. Some of the initiatives represent short-term, easy to make changes that Erie County can take on its own. Others will require more community engagement and additional partners. Still others require broad-based policy changes that will take more time to explore and for which greater consensus will need to be built.

No matter the course, the Live Well Erie Community Strategies addendum will be a living, breathing document that will change over time. An annual review of the data indicators, coupled with periodic community feedback, will provide insight as to whether the initiatives are working. In the event the indicators are not moving in a positive direction and the initiatives are deemed not to be making a difference, partners will re-convene and new initiatives will be conceived and added to the Community Strategies addendum.

In this way, through frequent monitoring of the indicators and continuous quality improvement of the initiatives, our community can hope to achieve these goals and truly

**LIVE WELL.**

# APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: RELATED DOCUMENTS**

Live Well San Diego

<http://www.livewellsd.org/>

Live Well Western New York

<https://www.pophealthwny.org/news/san-diego-is-miles-ahead.-lets-catch-up-345/>

Erie County Health Assessment

<http://www2.erie.gov/health/sites/www2.erie.gov.health/files/uploads/pdfs/cha.pdf>

## **APPENDIX B: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The Administration also wishes to thank the many partners, both internal and external, for all their hard work on Live Well Erie. Partnerships and cooperation are key to building a truly inclusive community: Best Self Western New York - Child Advocacy Center, BlueCross Blue Shield of Western New York, Boys and Girls Club of Buffalo, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board, Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Catholic Charities, Child Care Resource Network, City of Buffalo Youth Services, Compass House, Crisis Services, Erie 1 BOCES, Erie Community College, Erie County Council for the Prevention of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Food Bank of Western New York, Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), Health Foundation for Western New York and Central New York, Help Me Grow, Homeless Alliance of Western New York, International

Institute of Buffalo, John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital, Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, Literacy New York Buffalo-Niagara, Inc., Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Meals on Wheels for Western New York, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority - NFTA- Metro, People Against Trafficking Humans - PATH, Population Health Collaborative, Read to Succeed Buffalo, Rural Transit Service, Inc., Say Yes to Education Buffalo, Shared Mobility, Inc., The Belle Center, Tivity Health- Silver Sneakers, Town of Aurora Senior Center, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, University at Buffalo- Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access, University at Buffalo Community Justice Clinic, Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, Western New York Area Labor Federation/ New York State AFL-CIO, and WNY Women’s Foundation.

## **APPENDIX C: RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ANALYSIS**

One meaningful way to ensure the efforts outlined in this document create shared opportunities for all Erie County Residents is to make use of the Racial Equity Impact Analysis in decision making. Members of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, which includes a representative from Erie County, were given the opportunity to train key leaders in their institution on the use of the Racial Equity Impact Analysis. This tool, developed by the Race Matters Institute of JustPartners, Inc., consists of five simple questions and is used to identify how to alter existing and proposed policies and practices to achieve greater results for all groups. Where applicable, Erie County will use the Racial Equity Impact Analysis to guide implementation of the Live Well Erie Community Strategies and Initiatives.

Racial Equity Impact Analysis:

1. Are all racial/ethnic groups who are affected by the policy/practice/decision at the table?
2. How will the proposed policy/practice/decision affect each group?
3. How will the proposed policy/practice/decision be perceived by the group?
4. Does the policy/practice/decision worsen or ignore existing disparities?
5. Based on the above responses, what revisions are needed in the policy/practice/decision under discussion?

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