

Still working for too little in Akron

Michael Shields and Bryce Springfield

All work should pay enough to live a good life. All working people should be paid enough to provide for their families, no matter their race or gender, the kind of job they do, or where they live and work. For years, too many of greater Akron's most common jobs paid so little the typical worker would qualify for — and likely rely on — food aid to feed a family of three. By May 2022, the number of greater Akron's 10 most common jobs paying the median worker so little fell to four, less than the five before COVID-19.

New statewide data show that 1) wages overall and in a majority of the state's most common occupations grew since 2019, and 2) some of the lowest-paying common jobs have been displaced in the top 10 by better-paying ones. Similarly, Akron's mix of most common occupations has shifted toward higher-paid positions since 2019 before COVID-19. However, the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has experienced wage growth in six of the ten most common jobs, compared with five for the state, but not enough to lift most workers in them out of economic precarity. These data are from Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics gathered over a three-year survey and using a model to estimate wages for 2022.

Jobs restored statewide, but not to Akron

A full recovery must include all Ohio communities. With 333,500 people working as of May 2023, the Akron metro area still faced a shortage of 6,800 jobs (-2.0%) as compared with February 2020, making it one of nine regions where jobs had yet to fully recover. These data are from the monthly Current Employment Statistics survey gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and released with the unemployment rate.

Rising pay, but still too low for too many

From 2019 to 2022, wages rose overall by 6.4% for the typical (median) Akron MSA worker, accounting for all jobs. Among the Akron area's 10 most common jobs, wages rose in six. The number of jobs in the 10 biggest occupations that still paid so little that the middle worker would qualify for, and likely need, food aid to feed a family of three dropped to four in 2022, compared to five in 2019. Wages below 130% of the poverty level, \$29,939 in 2022, meet that threshold. Just three occupations paid enough for financial security: a wage at least 200% of the poverty level (\$46,060).

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Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Akron MSA jobs

Top 10 occupations 2022	Job growth			Pay growth			Pay level	
	2022 rank	2022 jobs	Change since 2019	2022 median hourly pay	Change since 2019	% change since 2019	2022 median annual pay	2022 pay as a share of poverty
Registered Nurses	1	8,420	590	\$37.79	-\$1.68	-4.3%	\$78,590	341%
General and Operations Managers	2	7,970	3,830	\$45.99	-\$5.26	-10.3%	\$95,650	415%
Fast Food and Counter Workers	3	7,910	-3,170	\$11.14	\$0.66	6.3%	\$23,180	101%
Stockers and Order Fillers	4	7,350	1960	\$15.07	\$0.27	1.8%	\$31,340	136%
Customer Service Reps	5	6,800	-590	\$17.98	-\$1.26	-6.6%	\$37,390	162%
Cashiers	6	6,770	400	\$12.39	\$0.33	2.7%	\$25,770	112%
Retail Salespersons	7	6,710	-2,300	\$13.98	\$1.53	12.3%	\$29,070	126%
Laborers and Freight, Stock & Material Movers, Hand	8	6,010	220	\$17.13	\$1.09	6.8%	\$35,630	155%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	9	5,840	850	\$24.12	-\$1.18	-4.7%	\$50,180	218%
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	10	5,370	-620	\$13.17	\$0.96	7.8%	\$27,390	119%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2019, and May 2022. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, updated April 24, 2023. Largest detail occupations in Ohio by employment. Median annual pay shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2022 (\$23,030). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$29,939) or less. Note that BLS implemented a change to the data classification methodology between 2019 and 2022. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey Methods and Reliability Statement for MB3 Research Estimates of the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Survey. We have used the updated MB3 method. Wages in red are less than 130% of the poverty level for a family of three. Figures in orange represent a decrease in either jobs or pay.

Wages at all jobs should cover the basics, so people and their families can thrive. While fewer working Akron residents are struggling on the brink of poverty, many jobs still pay too little for financial security. Policymakers must step up to ensure that every Akron area and Ohio job is a good job that enables the worker to thrive.