

Still working for too little in Akron

All working people — no matter their race, gender, or the kind of job they do — should be paid enough to live a good life and provide for their families. Labor market pressures forced many employers to increase pay during the pandemic. Federal stimulus stabilized people's incomes. But in 2021, three of the Akron area's 10 most common occupations paid so little that a worker with a family of three would need food aid to get by. These three occupations alone employ 20,850 people.

Wages up, but not enough: From 2019 to 2021, employers increased median pay for eight of the 10 most common jobs in the Akron area. Changes ranged from general managers being paid \$5.22-per-hour less (-10.0%) to laborers and freight handlers being paid \$1.99-per-hour more (+12.8%). Considering nearly two decades of wage suppression that predated COVID, average annual change in pay ranged from an 8-cent-per-hour pay cut for both customer service representatives and truck drivers to a pay boost of 13 cents for both office clerks and general managers over the whole span from 2000 to 2021.

Wages up since 2019, but working people are still underpaid in Akron

Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Akron area jobs

Top 10 occupations 2021	2021 jobs	2021 hourly pay	Pay growth 2000-2019	Pay growth since 2019	Percent pay growth since 2019	Annualized pay growth 2000-2021	2021 pay as a share of poverty
Registered Nurses	8,430	\$36.08	-\$0.49	\$1.71	5.0%	\$0.06	342%
Retail Salespersons	7,480	\$13.47	\$0.24	\$1.16	9.4%	\$0.07	128%
Customer Service Representatives	7,130	\$17.73	-\$1.72	\$0.09	0.5%	-\$0.08	168%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	6,850	\$10.65	-\$0.59	\$0.67	6.8%	\$0.00	101%
Cashiers	6,520	\$10.91	\$0.42	-\$0.23	-2.1%	\$0.01	103%
Stockers & Order Fillers	6,310	\$14.08	-\$0.21	\$1.63	13.1%	\$0.07	133%
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Handlers	6,020	\$17.48	-\$0.16	\$1.99	12.8%	\$0.09	166%
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	5,650	\$23.32	-\$2.33	\$0.56	2.5%	-\$0.08	221%
Office Clerks, General	5,460	\$17.94	\$2.76	\$0.02	0.1%	\$0.13	170%
General & Operations Managers	5,440	\$47.08	\$7.95	-\$5.22	-10.0%	\$0.13	446%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2000, May 2019, and May 2021. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 12, 2022. Largest detail occupations in Akron MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2021 (\$21,960). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$28,548) or less. All wages are adjusted for inflation using May 2021 dollars.

COVID disproportionately destroyed low-paying jobs

COVID-19 disproportionately destroyed the jobs of low-paid Ohioans: people in economic precarity even before the pandemic. These jobs statewide are more likely to be held by Black and brown Ohioans, and women.

Seven of greater Akron’s 10 most common pre-COVID occupations lost jobs from 2019 to 2021. As people scaled back dining out, employers laid off 5,650 fast food workers — nearly half. Movement to online shopping meant fewer retail salespeople, though Akron diverged from the state in adding cashiers. Unlike the state, Akron lost registered nurses and home health aides during the pandemic. Akron added a substantial 810 truck drivers.

Many common occupations in Akron lost jobs between 2019 and 2021						
Ten most common Akron MSA occupations by employment, 2019						
Top 10 occupations 2019 pre-COVID-19	2019 rank	2021 rank	2019 jobs	2021 jobs	Change in jobs	Percent change
Fast Food & Counter Workers	1	4	12,500	6,850	-5,650	-45%
Retail Salespersons	2	2	9,010	7,480	-1,530	-17%
Registered Nurses	3	1	8,490	8,430	-60	-1%
Customer Service Representatives	4	3	7,170	7,130	-40	-1%
Office Clerks, General	5	9	6,780	5,460	-1,320	-19%
Stockers & Order Fillers	6	6	6,060	6,310	250	4%
Cashiers	7	5	5,710	6,520	810	14%
Janitors & Cleaners, Except Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	8	13	5,530	4,340	-1,190	-22%
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	9	11	5,470	5,340	-130	-2%
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	10	8	4,840	5,650	810	17%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey, May 2000, May 2019, and May 2021. Estimates, available at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>, accessed April 12, 2020. Largest detail occupations in Akron MSA by employment. Median annual earnings shown as a share of the poverty threshold for a family of three in 2021 (\$21,960). The gross monthly income threshold for food assistance is 130% of poverty (\$28,548) or less.