

Still working for too little in Columbus

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, four of the Columbus 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 four occupations alone employed 88,190 people.

Wages up but not enough: From 2019 to 2021, employers increased median pay for seven of the 10 most common jobs in the Columbus area. Changes ranged from general and operations managers being paid \$3.65-per-hour less (-7.1%) to registered nurses being paid \$3.85-per-hour more (+11.9%). Considering nearly two decades of wage suppression that predated COVID, average annual change in pay ranged from a 3-cent-per-hour pay cut for cashiers to a pay boost of 17 cents for registered nurses over the whole span from 2000 to 2021.

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

Pay growth recovered lost ground in most common Columbus 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
Customer Service Representatives	30,220	\$18.02	-\$0.53	\$0.27	1.5%	-\$0.01	171%
Stockers & Order Fillers	27,520	\$17.34	-\$0.10	\$3.23	22.9%	\$0.15	164%
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Handlers	25,980	\$17.89	-\$0.17	\$2.36	15.2%	\$0.10	169%
Registered Nurses	24,630	\$36.16	-\$0.37	\$3.85	11.9%	\$0.17	343%
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	23,560	\$11.55	-\$2.10	-\$0.35	-2.9%	-\$0.12	109%
Retail Salespersons	23,210	\$13.41	-\$0.60	\$1.31	10.8%	\$0.03	127%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	22,080	\$10.79	-\$0.81	\$0.69	6.8%	-\$0.01	102%
Cashiers	19,340	\$11.04	-\$0.51	-\$0.14	-1.3%	-\$0.03	105%
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	18,020	\$23.49	-\$0.35	\$0.41	1.8%	\$0.00	222%
General & Operations Managers	17,610	\$47.76	\$6.33	-\$3.65	-7.1%	\$0.13	452%

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 Columbus 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. Statewide, these jobs are typically more likely to be held by Black and brown Ohioans, and women of all races.

Five of greater Columbus's 10 most common pre-COVID occupations lost jobs from 2019 to 2021. As people scaled back dining out, employers laid off 9,650 fast food workers and 8,320 waiters and waitresses. Movement to online shopping meant fewer retail salespeople and more stockers and order fillers. Columbus was atypical in adding cashiers. The pandemic drove the hiring of 1,380 registered nurses and 1,020 home health aides.

Many common occupations in Columbus lost jobs between 2019 and 2021

Ten most common Columbus 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
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Handlers	1	3	32,010	25,980	-6,030	-19%
Fast Food & Counter Workers	2	7	31,730	22,080	-9,650	-30%
Customer Service Representatives	3	1	30,030	30,220	190	1%
Retail Salespersons	4	6	27,920	23,210	-4,710	-17%
Registered Nurses	5	4	23,250	24,630	1,380	6%
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	6	5	22,540	23,560	1,020	5%
Office Clerks, General	7	11	20,280	16,000	-4,280	-21%
Waiters & Waitresses	8	16	19,990	11,670	-8,320	-42%
Stockers & Order Fillers	9	2	18,800	27,520	8,720	46%
Cashiers	10	8	17,980	19,340	1,360	8%

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 Columbus 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.