

High Quality Of Life, Lower Life Expectancy?

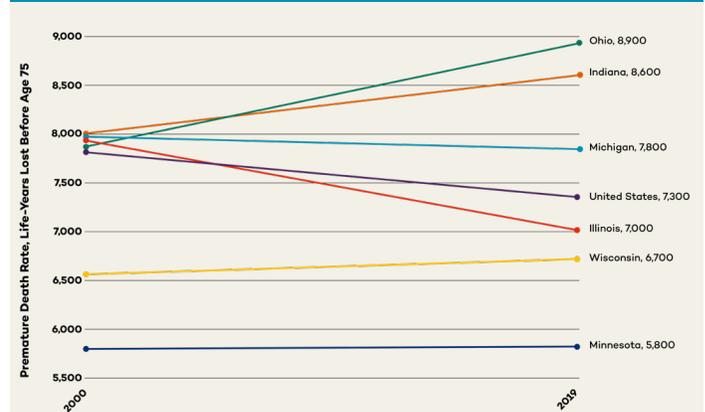
Michigan must provide strong public health and safety systems that measure up to our quality of life potential. Currently, we suffer a gap between the amenities we have to offer and the opportunity to enjoy them. The life expectancy of Michiganders at birth has consistently lagged behind the national average and that of many of our neighbors since 2000. Gains made since that year have been lost since the onset of the COVID pandemic, leaving Michiganders with a lower life expectancy in 2021 than in 2000 and nearly a full year less than the national average—76.2 years vs. 77.1. Additionally, our premature death rate is about five percent higher than the national rate.¹

Perhaps ironically, the AARP has noted Michigan as ranking in the top five destination states for retirement moves,² identifying our high-quality health care system, opportunities for outdoor activities, and access to fresh food as highlights—alongside our cost of living and the great sense of place in our small towns. Bringing health and life expectancy measures for Michigan at least up to the national average would support our residents in enjoying those same amenities to the fullest, and our communities in thriving.

Local government plays a front-line role in this work: Local police, fire, and EMS departments respond to emergencies, while municipalities support long-term health outcomes through construction codes, parks and recreation programs, and safe street networks.

While many communities have implemented community policing, non-police crisis response teams, crime prevention through environmental design, and other techniques to try to address crime rates, both prevention and response are hindered by Michigan’s municipal finance straitjacket. Public safety is the largest slice of municipal budgets, so reduced funding has led both to smaller departments and reduced pay and benefits. From 2002 to 2022, Michigan’s local public safety staffing numbers fell by 17 percent,⁴ and nearly three-quarters of local law enforcement departments report recruiting challenges even to fill that reduced headcount.⁵

Premature Death Rate, 2000–2019



Violent Crime in Long-term Decline, but Still High

Michigan resumed a long-term trend of declining crime rates after a brief jump in 2020, with violent crime rates down almost 20 percent since the year 2000. However, our violent crime rate remains significantly higher than both the national average and in our neighboring states, and our rate of improvement has been slower. On property crime, Michigan fares better: FBI stats show our rates are lower than the national average and most neighboring states, and have declined faster, dropping by more than half since 2000, despite an uptick in recent years.³

Violent Crime Rates

20%

In Michigan since 2000

50%

Higher than neighboring states

Property Crime Rates

57%

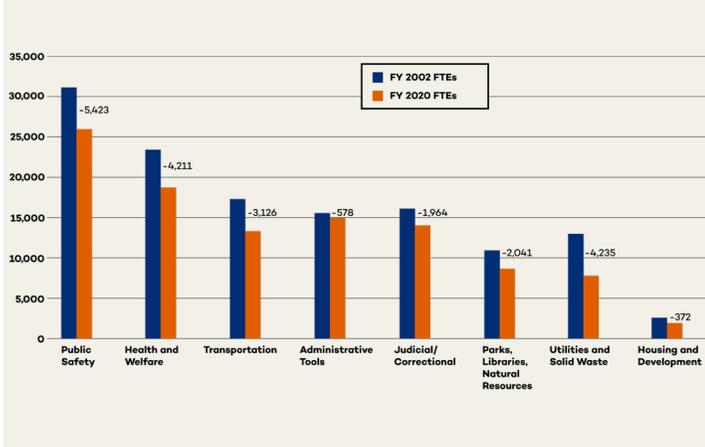
In Michigan since 2000

4%

Lower than neighboring states

Thriving Michigan evaluates how well Michigan is fostering thriving communities where people want to live, work, and build their futures. This series benchmarks the state’s performance across key indicators that contribute to long-term prosperity. Each report presents a clear, data-driven snapshot of how state policies and investments are impacting one of the key indicators in Michigan communities, including health and safety, economic and financial security, natural resources, virtual and physical infrastructure, arts and cultural, lifelong learning opportunities, and housing.

Local (Municipal and County) FTEs



Road Safety Improvements Have Stalled Out

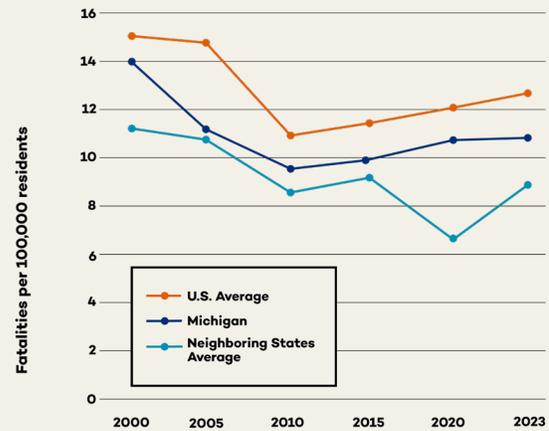
After successfully reducing traffic fatalities throughout the 2000s, Michigan began to see its fatal crash rate tick up again through the 2010s: Michigan residents' rate of death in car crashes—1,095 traffic deaths in 2023—is now twice the rate of death by violent crime, and eleven times the rate of death in structure fires.⁶ One (limited) bright spot is that Michigan has managed to keep pedestrian traffic death rates flat, even as pedestrian traffic fatalities nationally have risen 75 percent since 2010. Where Metro Detroit was the 17th most dangerous metropolitan area for pedestrians before 2014, it is now in the middle of the pack at the 53rd most dangerous of the 100 largest metro areas.⁷

The best tool Michigan has to reduce traffic deaths is street design features that discourage speeding and other unsafe driving behaviors, supported by education and enforcement. As with addressing crime, creating safe streets requires ensuring adequate funding for both the street infrastructure and the supporting education and enforcement. State policies also must be aligned with these goals. For example, road funding formulas should not penalize a community that improves safety by converting a four-lane street to a three-lane configuration with a center turn lane.

Creating Healthy Neighborhoods

Michiganders' long-term health and safety is affected by a range of factors, e.g., air quality, diet, physical activity, exposure to toxins, and social engagement.

Traffic Fatalities



Just as fixing the roads should be an opportunity to improve safety and expand opportunities for walking and biking as healthy transportation, many of our priorities overlap with health and safety. Michigan's housing strategy should include addressing lead paint and pipes, asbestos, mold, and other challenges with our aging housing stock—the eighth oldest in the nation.⁸ Economic development work around food-based businesses and outdoor recreation access can support health alongside major economic sectors. Prioritizing brownfield redevelopment over greenfield expansion can reduce communities' exposure to toxins. And, of course, our placemaking efforts can support the growth of “third spaces,” where people can come together, helping to combat loneliness.

The Path to Thriving

A thriving Michigan means state policies must commit to strong public health and safety systems that ensure the well-being of people living and working here:

- Invest in the local public safety systems—police, fire, and EMS—to provide needed capacity for both prevention of and appropriate response to emergencies.
- Prioritize safety and active transportation in our street design and road funding approaches.
- Leverage our amazing outdoor recreation opportunities, diverse agricultural sector, world-class “eds and meds” research institutions, and deep placemaking expertise to support health for all.

1 University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. www.countyhealthrankings.org. 2 “Six Great Reasons to Retire to Michigan,” Patrick Kiger, AARP website, November 8, 2023. Accessed July 12, 2025 at www.aarp.org/money/retirement/michigan-relocation-advantages. 3 “Crime in the United States,” FBI, accessed Feb 2024 via FBI Crime Data Explorer, cde.ucrajis.gov/LATEST/webapp/# Years of life before age 75, per 100,000 residents. 4 Analysis by League staff of data from US Census Bureau, Census of Governments, Survey of Public Employment & Payroll. 5 “Michigan local governments report increased challenges with law enforcement recruitment and retention,” Natalie Fitzpatrick and Debra Horner, Michigan Public Policy Survey, University of Michigan, September 2024, closus.umich.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/MPPS-Spring-2024-Personnel-Recruitment-Retention-Final.pdf & FBI, ibid. “Fatality Facts,” Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, accessed July 8, 2025 at www.iihs.org/research-areas/fatality-statistics; and “Michigan Fatal Fire Stats,” Michigan Fire Inspectors’ Society, accessed July 8 at mfiis.org/fire-stats-17 “Dangerous by Design 2024: State of the States,” Smart Growth America and National Complete Streets Coalition, June 2024, accessed online July 8, 2025 at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/knowledge-hub/resources/dangerous-by-design-2024-state-of-the-states 8 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, “Median Year Structure Built,” American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B25035, data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B25035?t=Year+Structure+Built&g=010XX00U50400000&tp=true. Accessed on 11 Jul 2025.