

Civilian Labor Force

The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate was 4.6% in August 2021. Over the past year, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate has dropped to 3.6% as of August 2022 (Figure 1). Between August 2021 and August 2022, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 159,364 to 165,702 (6,338), while the civilian labor force grew from 167,094 to 171,927 (4,833). In August 2022, the Hickory MSA had the fifth lowest (eleventh highest) unemployment rate among North Carolina MSAs (Table 1). August 2022 unemployment rates by county were Alexander 3.3%, Burke 3.6%, Caldwell 3.7%, and Catawba 3.6%.

Figure 1. MSA Unemployment, Aug. 2021 - Aug. 2022
Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2022.

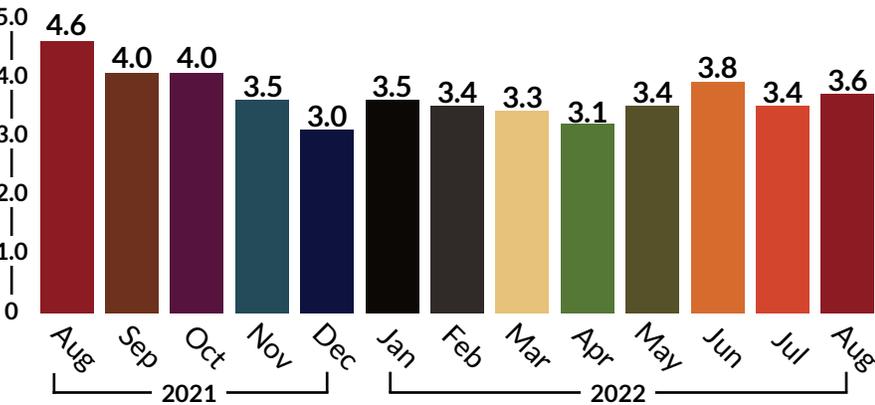


Table 1. MSA Unemployment Rate, August 2022

Asheville	3.2%
Durham-Chapel Hill	3.2%
Raleigh	3.3%
Wilmington	3.5%
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton	3.6%
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	3.6%
New Bern	3.8%
Winston-Salem	3.8%
Burlington	4.0%
Goldsboro	4.2%
Greensboro-High Point	4.4%
Greenville	4.5%
Jacksonville	4.5%
Fayetteville	5.8%
Rocky Mount	6.5%

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2022.

Gross Collections

North Carolina gross collections include money from registration fees, penalties, interest, and sales and use taxes (county sales taxes are excluded). Hickory MSA State gross tax collections equaled \$180.8 million in 2017 (Figure 2). As economic conditions continued to improve in the region, gross collections increased to \$189.0 million in 2018 and \$197.8 million in 2019. In 2020, despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hickory MSA gross collections rose another 6.6% to \$210.8 million. As of 2021, Hickory MSA's gross collections were more than \$252 million.

Figure 2. MSA Gross Collections (\$ Millions), 2017-2021

Source: NC Department of Revenue, 2022.



Gross collections increased in all four Hickory MSA counties between 2019 and 2021. (Table 2). In Catawba County, State gross tax collections exceeded \$147 million in 2021. From 2019 to 2021, gross tax collections grew by more than \$4.4 million in Alexander County, \$11.9 million in Burke County, and \$12.0 million in Caldwell County.

Table 2. Gross Tax Collections
Source: NC Department of Revenue, 2022.

County	2019	2020	2021
Alexander	\$10,593,673	\$12,800,898	\$15,069,594
Burke	\$37,703,343	\$40,743,824	\$49,634,976
Caldwell	\$28,768,098	\$34,326,616	\$40,817,589
Catawba	\$120,709,646	\$122,957,235	\$147,386,454

EIN Spotlight | 2021 Hickory MSA American Community Survey Results

The US Census Bureau began the American Community Survey (ACS) program in 1999. The goal of the ACS was to replace the Census “long form,” which was generated only once every ten years, with a survey that would provide yearly updates on a variety of socio-economic indicators for communities and metro areas. In 2003, the first ACS results were reported for the Hickory Metro. However, a complete survey of the population in the region was not available until group quarters data (group quarters includes dormitories, group homes, halfway houses, nursing homes, and prisons) was added in 2006. Since 2006, the ACS has added several additional survey topics, including health insurance coverage and home internet access. Annual American Community Survey results are generated each September for areas with a population over 65,000. New American Community Survey data (five-year averages) for areas smaller than 65,000 will be available in late 2022.

A few cautions must be considered when analyzing American Community Survey results. First, the survey does allow for comparisons between metro areas; however, the data is not fully comparable to the 2000 Census “long form” due to different weighting and sampling techniques. In addition, for some data categories, the sample size is still too small to provide fully reliable data with margins of error of 10% or more. Even with these caveats, the ACS still provides timely data in many social and economic categories. This edition of the EIN Spotlight will focus on a selection of the many socio-economic results of the 2021 ACS, including comparisons with the United States, North Carolina, and other North Carolina metro areas.

Hickory MSA “Class” of Worker

One of the ACS employment questions relates to the “Class” of workers in households. The American Community Survey divides the civilian labor force into four main classes (or categories): private sector wage and salary workers, government workers, self-employed workers (persons working in their own but not incorporated businesses), and unpaid family workers. Data seen in Figure 3 reveals 2021 ACS results for Hickory MSA by type of worker. About 79.6% of the Hickory MSA employed labor force work in the private wage and salary occupations. Another 23,791 (14.5%) are employed in the government sector, while 5.4% or 8,780 are self-employed.

Table 3 on page 3 compares Hickory MSA class of worker results from the 2021 ACS with the other North Carolina MSAs. More than 80% of the employed labor force in five NC MSAs were in private wage and salary positions. The Charlotte MSA had the highest percentage of private wage and salary workers (83.7%) of any metro area in North Carolina, followed by the Winston-Salem MSA (82.6%). The Jacksonville MSAs had the lowest percentage of private wage workers (64.4%). The Hickory MSA had the sixth-highest percentage of private and salary workers (79.6%).

The Jacksonville, Fayetteville, Goldsboro, and New Bern MSAs had the highest percentage of government employment of any North Carolina MSA, as more than two in ten workers were in the public sector. The high percentage of government jobs is due to the US military presence in these Metro areas. In the Hickory MSA, the public sector comprised 14.5% of all workers in the region. The Charlotte MSA had the lowest percentage of government workers (10.4%) among North Carolina Metros.

The “self-employment” category represents entrepreneurs whose businesses are not large enough to be incorporated. In the Jacksonville MSA, approximately 8.7% of all persons who work are self-employed, the highest percentage of any metro in the State. In the Hickory MSA, 5.4% of workers were self-employed, slightly lower than the State or National average (6.1%). Less than 5% of workers were classified as self-employed in the Goldsboro, Greenville, New Bern, and Rocky Mount MSAs.

Figure 3. Hickory MSA Worker by “Class,” 2021

Source: 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

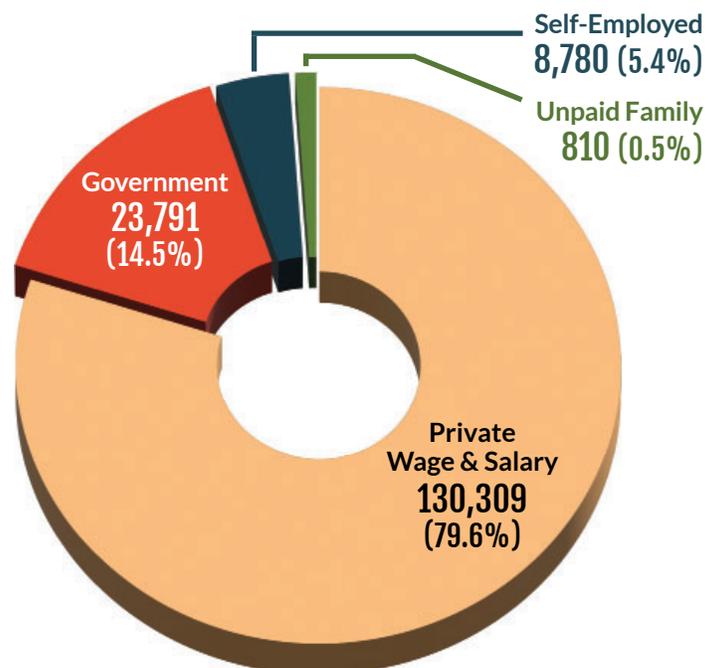


Table 3. NC MSA Employment by “Class” of Worker, 2021

NC MSA	NUMBER					PERCENTAGE			
	Total Workers	Private Wage/Salary	Govt.	Self-employed	Unpaid Family	Private Wage/Salary	Govt.	Self-employed	Unpaid Family
Asheville	215,305	170,217	27,082	17,720	286	79.1%	12.6%	8.2%	0.1%
Burlington	81,204	63,407	12,845	4,914	38	78.1%	15.8%	6.1%	0.0%
Charlotte	1,360,729	1,139,510	141,280	76,629	3,310	83.7%	10.4%	5.6%	0.2%
Durham	314,888	237,504	59,454	17,423	507	75.4%	18.9%	5.5%	0.2%
Fayetteville	195,450	143,610	40,348	11,045	446	73.5%	20.6%	5.7%	0.2%
Goldsboro	49,277	37,082	9,950	2,198	47	75.3%	20.2%	4.5%	0.1%
Greensboro	369,953	301,467	48,890	18,972	624	81.5%	13.2%	5.1%	0.2%
Greenville	78,503	61,100	13,684	3,598	121	77.8%	17.4%	4.6%	0.2%
Hickory	163,690	130,309	23,791	8,780	810	79.6%	14.5%	5.4%	0.5%
Jacksonville	65,151	41,975	16,986	5,699	491	64.4%	26.1%	8.7%	0.8%
New Bern	48,538	36,506	9,779	2,235	18	75.2%	20.1%	4.6%	0.0%
Raleigh	742,785	597,796	102,467	41,496	1,053	80.5%	13.8%	5.6%	0.1%
Rocky Mount	65,084	53,066	10,007	2,011	0	81.5%	15.4%	3.1%	0.0%
Wilmington	144,980	112,517	20,037	12,020	406	77.6%	13.8%	8.3%	0.3%
Winston-Salem	308,064	254,320	35,880	16,955	909	82.6%	11.6%	5.5%	0.3%
North Carolina	4,889,866	3,892,852	688,820	298,037	10,157	79.6%	14.1%	6.1%	0.2%
United States	156,380,433	123,744,069	2,286,100	9,481,077	295,187	79.1%	14.6%	6.1%	0.2%

Govt. = Government Employment; Source: 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

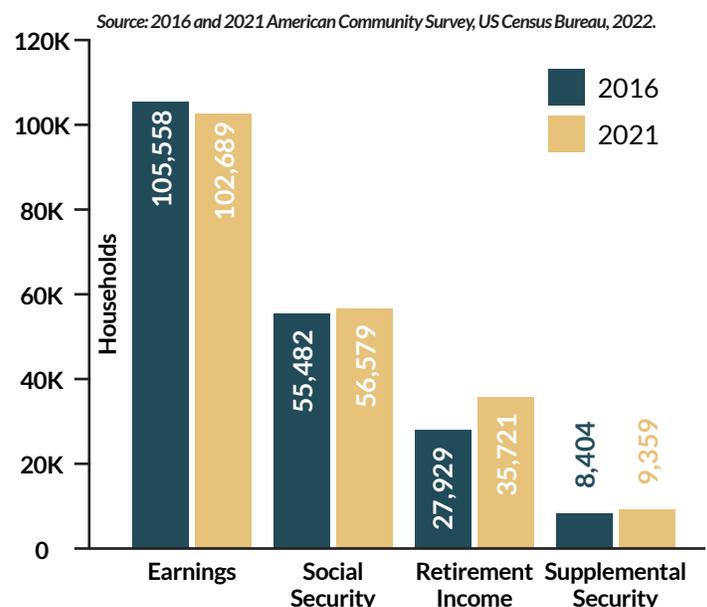
Hickory MSA Household Earnings

The American Community Survey asked Hickory MSA residents several questions concerning household income. One survey question dealt with how a household receives income. There are four possible answers: earnings (such as through employment), social security, other retirement income (examples include 401Ks and company pensions), and supplemental security (such as disability payments). Respondents can check one or more answers to the question since, for instance, a household could receive income from social security and other retirement income.

In 2021, 102,689 households (or 69.9% of all households) in the Hickory MSA gained income through earnings (Figure 4). More than 105,000 Hickory MSA households (or 73.1% of all households) in 2016 had earnings from income. Between 2016 and 2021, mean earnings from income have significantly risen in the Hickory MSA as hourly pay and the number of hours worked increased. Hickory MSA households with earnings had a mean income of \$58,749 in 2016 compared to \$73,040 in 2021 (Figure 5, page 4).

As more baby boomers retire, the number of households in the region getting income from social security continues to grow. About 38.5% (56,579) of Hickory MSA households received social security benefits in 2021 compared to 38.4% (55,482) of households in 2016. In 2021, Hickory MSA households averaged \$20,762 from social security or \$2,282 more than in 2016. Nearly one-quarter of Hickory Metro households during 2021 received income from other retirement sources. The mean household retirement income, excluding social security, in the region was \$25,945 in 2021 or \$5,183 more than the mean income from Social Security.

Figure 4. Hickory MSA Households by Type of Income Received, 2016 & 2021



Hickory MSA Household Earnings

Table 4 examines Hickory MSA’s average household income from earnings, social security, other retirement income, and supplemental security (a federal income program that provides cash to meet the basic needs of the aged, blind and disabled, who have little or no income) versus other metro areas in North Carolina. In 2021, the Raleigh MSA had the highest mean household income from earnings (\$114,116). The Charlotte and Durham MSAs also had average earnings greater than \$100,000. The Hickory Metro was one of six North Carolina MSAs with mean household income from earnings between \$70,000 and \$80,000. The Goldsboro (\$65,837), Fayetteville (\$68,222), and Greenville (\$69,582) MSAs had average household earnings of less than \$70,000.

Only the New Bern (40.6%) and Asheville (39.9%) MSAs had a greater percentage of households receiving Social Security than the Hickory Metro (38.6%). NC Metro’s average Social Security income from households ranged from \$18,737 in the Jacksonville MSA to \$22,915 in the Wilmington MSA.

Seven Metros in North Carolina (Asheville, Burlington, Fayetteville, New Bern, Rocky Mount, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem) had a higher percentage of households receiving retirement income beyond Social Security than the Hickory MSA. Conversely, seven Metros in North Carolina (Charlotte, Durham, Goldsboro, Greensboro, Greenville, Jacksonville, and Raleigh) had a lower percentage of households receiving retirement income beyond Social Security than the Hickory MSA. Among households receiving other retirement income, 11 of the 15 MSAs, including the Hickory MSA, had an average household income of more than \$25,000 from other retirement sources.

Figure 5. Hickory MSA Households by Type Average Amount Received, 2016 & 2021

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

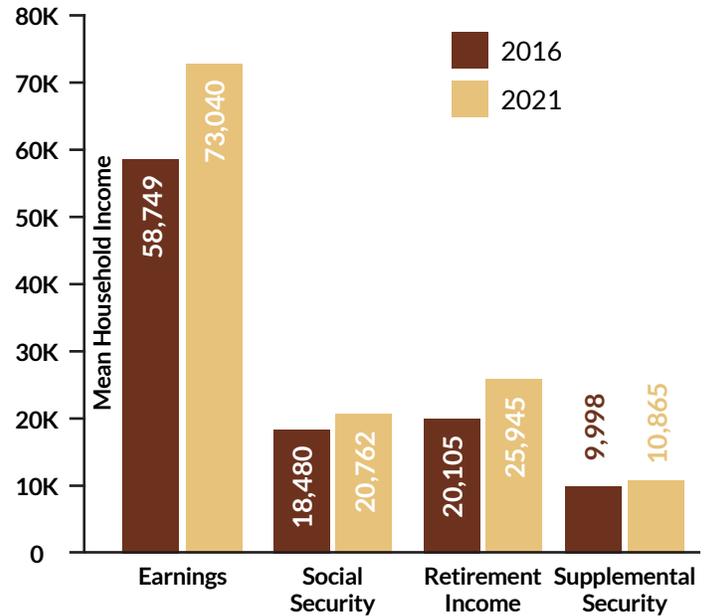


Table 4. NC MSA Average Household Income, 2021

NC MSA	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS				AVERAGE INCOME			
	Earnings	Social Security	Retirement Income	Supplemental Security	Earnings	Social Security	Retirement Income	Supplemental Security
Asheville	68.3%	39.9%	30.3%	3.5%	\$87,115	\$21,627	\$28,269	\$10,924
Burlington	75.3%	31.0%	26.4%	3.5%	\$72,787	\$21,194	\$22,897	\$9,958
Charlotte	81.4%	27.4%	20.7%	3.8%	\$102,075	\$21,945	\$24,408	\$10,731
Durham	77.0%	28.3%	22.6%	3.8%	\$105,459	\$22,367	\$31,375	\$9,966
Fayetteville	76.8%	27.5%	25.4%	5.5%	\$68,222	\$18,873	\$25,359	\$9,832
Goldsboro	75.6%	36.0%	24.2%	7.1%	\$65,837	\$20,117	\$23,252	\$8,238
Greensboro	77.2%	32.4%	23.2%	4.7%	\$79,225	\$20,324	\$26,552	\$8,879
Greenville	72.4%	29.7%	18.4%	5.3%	\$69,582	\$19,526	\$25,786	\$8,289
Hickory	70.0%	38.6%	24.4%	6.4%	\$73,040	\$20,762	\$25,945	\$10,865
Jacksonville	79.7%	23.5%	21.4%	4.4%	\$73,960	\$18,737	\$25,166	\$9,563
New Bern	67.9%	40.6%	31.3%	5.6%	\$70,727	\$20,731	\$33,708	\$9,174
Raleigh	82.6%	23.5%	20.6%	2.7%	\$114,116	\$22,131	\$29,072	\$9,795
Rocky Mount	70.6%	37.2%	25.4%	8.2%	\$71,178	\$19,969	\$31,787	\$11,168
Wilmington	77.7%	31.7%	27.5%	4.7%	\$92,951	\$22,915	\$31,444	\$11,905
Winston-Salem	74.0%	35.2%	26.6%	5.1%	\$80,613	\$20,494	\$22,654	\$9,764
North Carolina	75.8%	32.2%	24.0%	4.6%	\$88,859	\$21,011	\$26,867	\$10,058
United States	77.0%	31.2%	24.0%	5.2%	\$99,688	\$21,152	\$29,628	\$10,230

Source: 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Hickory MSA Poverty Rates

The US Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and age of householders to determine who is included in the “poverty” category. If a household’s total income is less than the household’s poverty threshold, then every individual in the household is considered to be living in poverty. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically; however, they are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The official poverty definition uses income before taxes and includes capital gains or any noncash benefits such as public housing, Medicaid services, and food stamps. In 2021, for example, for a family of four comprised of two parents and two children under age 18, the poverty threshold was \$27,479. For a one-person household with the householder age 65 and older, the 2021 poverty threshold is \$14,097.

Hickory MSA data from the American Community Survey show a substantial drop (-6,138) in the number of persons living in poverty between 2016 and 2021 (Table 5). Results from the 2016 ACS indicated that 56,232 (or 15.8%) of the region’s population were living below the poverty level. By 2021, 50,094 (or 14.0%) of the population had incomes below the poverty threshold. Better economic conditions and employment gains have played a significant role in the decrease in poverty-income households since 2016.

Table 5. Hickory MSA Poverty Statistics, 2016 and 2021

Population Group	2016 ACS		2021 ACS		Change 2016-2021	
	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level	Persons Below Poverty Level	% Below Poverty Level
All Persons	56,232	15.8%	50,094	14.0%	-6,138	-1.8%
Males	25,829	14.7%	22,460	12.9%	-3,369	-1.8%
Females	30,403	16.8%	27,634	15.0%	-2,769	-1.8%
Under 18 Years	16,610	22.1%	13,696	18.5%	-2,914	-3.6%
65 Years and Over	6,180	9.4%	8,480	11.7%	2,300	2.3%
White, not Hispanic	40,013	13.8%	32,269	11.3%	-7,744	-2.5%
African American	4,795	20.8%	5,250	32.7%	455	12.7%
Hispanic	7,128	27.6%	7,633	27.2%	505	-0.4%

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Figure 6 on page 6 reveals Hickory MSA poverty rates for the 2016 and 2021 ACS by age and ethnic group. The percentage change in Hickory MSA poverty rates by age and ethnic group between 2016 and 2021 vary tremendously. For example, the region’s poverty rate for persons under 18 was 22.1% (or more than one in five under age 18) in 2016 versus 18.5% (or less than one in five) in 2021. The number of children under 18 living in poverty decreased from 16,610 in 2016 to 13,696 in 2021.

For people age 65 and over, the region’s 2021 poverty rate was 11.7% compared to 14.0% for all individuals. The poverty rate for people age 65 and over is lower than the total population since the Social Security payments and/or other retirement payments that many seniors receive place them above the poverty threshold. The poverty rate for persons age 65 and over has risen from 9.4% in 2016 to 11.7% in 2021. The number of persons age 65 and over whose household income is below the poverty threshold has increased 37.2% from 6,180 in 2016 to 8,480 in 2021.

The number of African-Americans in the Hickory MSA living below the poverty level rose 9.5% from 4,795 in 2016 to 5,250 in 2021. This increase resulted in the Hickory MSA poverty rate for African-Americans growing from 20.8% in 2016 to 32.7% in 2021. The number of Hispanics below the poverty threshold also grew from 7,128 in 2016 to 7,633 in 2021. As a result, poverty rates for African Americans (32.7%) and Hispanics (27.2%) in 2021 were higher than for “White, not Hispanics” (11.3%).

Hickory MSA County Level Poverty Rates

Poverty data for Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties from the 2016 and 2021 ACS is displayed in Table 6 (2016 and 2021 poverty data for Alexander is not available due to the County’s population being less than the 65,000 threshold for one-year ACS data to be released). Poverty rates for all persons were lower in Burke and Caldwell in 2021 than in 2016. However, in Catawba County, the poverty rate for all persons grew from 12.0% in 2016 to 14.1% in 2021.

In Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties the 2021 poverty rate for females was higher than the poverty rate for males. Nearly 20% of children under age 18 in Burke County were living below the poverty level in 2021. In Burke, 17.4% of children under 18 were below the poverty level in 2021, which was significantly less than in 2016 (31.3%). Poverty rates for persons age 65 and older ranged from 9.7% in Burke to 13.8% in Caldwell County. In Catawba County, the White, not Hispanic, 2021 poverty rate was much lower than the African-American and Hispanic poverty rates (African-American rates were unavailable for Burke and Caldwell Counties in 2021).

The under-age 18 poverty rate in the Goldsboro MSA was 30.7%, the highest of the North Carolina Metro areas. The Hickory MSA was one of seven MSAs with under-age 18 poverty rates between 15% and 20%. The Wilmington MSA had the lowest 2021 metro poverty rate for children under 18 (8.0%). The Hickory MSA had the third highest age 65 and over poverty rate (11.7%) among NC MSAs. The Wilmington MSA had the lowest 65 and over 2016 poverty rate (6.9%), while the Greenville MSA tallied the highest age 65 and over poverty rate (14.4%).

The Hickory Metro had the highest NC MSA African-American poverty rate (32.7%) in 2021. Charlotte (15.3%), Raleigh (15.3%), and Burlington (16.6%) had the lowest African-American poverty rates. The 2021 African-American poverty rate in the Greenville and Hickory MSAs exceeded 30%. In most NC Metros, unlike the United States totals, Hispanics tended to have higher poverty rates than other ethnic/race groups. The Hickory MSA was one of four metros in North Carolina with Hispanic poverty rates between 25% and 30%, meaning that about one in four Hispanics resides in below-poverty-level households. The highest 2021 NC MSA Hispanic poverty rate was in Asheville (33.2%), followed by Goldsboro (32.6%) and Winston-Salem (27.5%). Five North Carolina Metros were estimated to have Hispanic poverty rates less than 20%. The lowest Hispanic poverty rate occurred in Burlington (8.3%), followed by the Wilmington (11.8%) and Fayetteville (15.0%) MSAs. Poverty rates for White, not Hispanics, during 2021 were less than 18% in all North Carolina metro areas.

Figure 6. Hickory MSA Poverty Rate by Group, 2016 and 2021

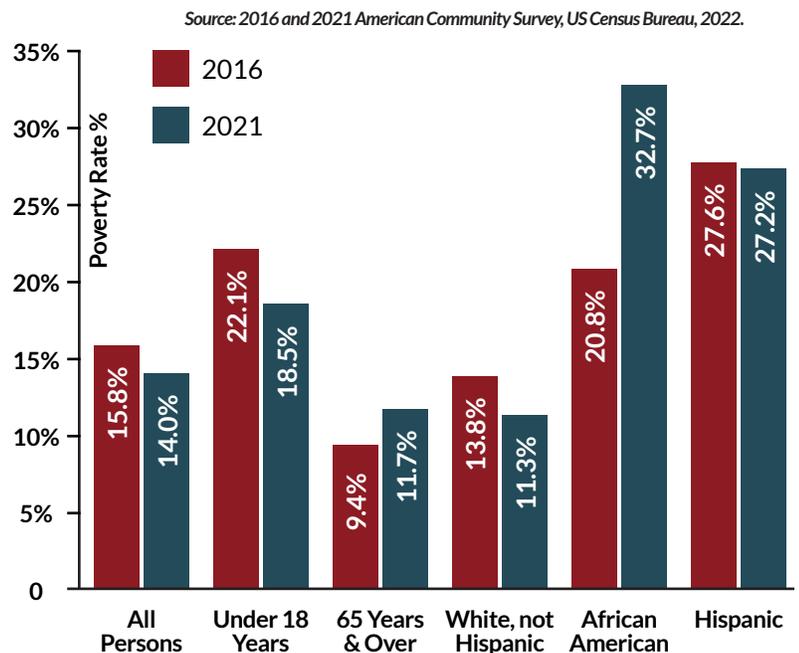


Table 6. Hickory MSA County Level Poverty Statistics, 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey

Population Group	Burke County		Caldwell County		Catawba County	
	2016 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2021 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2016 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2021 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2016 ACS % Below Poverty Level	2021 ACS % Below Poverty Level
All Persons	19.1%	13.8%	17.6%	14.7%	12.0%	14.1%
Males	18.5%	13.0%	17.5%	12.8%	10.7%	13.4%
Females	19.8%	14.5%	17.6%	16.6%	13.3%	14.7%
Under 18 Years	31.3%	17.4%	19.6%	19.9%	15.3%	18.0%
65 Years and Over	7.5%	9.7%	15.5%	13.8%	7.6%	10.5%
White, not Hispanic	19.6%	11.7%	15.9%	11.5%	9.8%	11.3%
African American	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	23.0%	19.4%
Hispanic	19.6%	20.5%	N/A	N/A	29.6%	28.7%

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Summary

American Community Survey (ACS) results for 2021 reveal several interesting demographic and economic results for the Hickory MSA. Nearly 80% of Hickory MSA workers receive income through private sector wage and salary jobs. About 5.4% (8,780) of workers were self-employed. ACS results indicated that the majority of North Carolina MSAs had a lower percentage of self-employed workers than the Hickory MSA. A total of 102,689 households (79.7%) in the Hickory MSA receive income through earnings. The 2021 average Hickory MSA household income from earnings was \$73,040. Seven North Carolina Metros had lower mean household earnings than the Hickory MSA (Burlington, Fayetteville, Goldsboro, Greenville, Jacksonville, New Bern, and Rocky Mount). About 38.6% of Hickory MSA households gained income from Social Security. Only the Asheville and New Bern MSAs had a greater percentage of households receiving Social Security income than the Hickory MSA.

The number of persons below the poverty level in the Hickory MSA decreased from 56,232 (15.8%) in 2016 to 50,094 (14.0%) in 2021. The 2021 Hickory MSA poverty rate for all persons was slightly higher than the North Carolina (13.4%) or the United States (12.8%) poverty rate (all persons). In 2021, 15.0% of females were below the poverty threshold compared to 12.9% of men, while 18.5% of persons under 18 were below the poverty level. The Hickory MSA had the highest African-American poverty rate (32.7%) in 2021 among NC Metro areas. Slightly more than a quarter of Hispanics in the Hickory MSA were below the poverty level.

Table 7. NC MSA Poverty Rates, 2021

NC MSA	All Persons	Male	Female	Under Age 18	65 Years and Over	White, not Hispanic	African American	Hispanic
Asheville	11.7%	11.0%	17.1%	17.3%	10.4%	9.0%	17.1%	33.2%
Burlington	11.2%	9.3%	12.9%	16.4%	10.0%	9.4%	16.6%	8.3%
Charlotte	10.7%	9.6%	11.7%	14.9%	8.8%	7.7%	15.3%	19.0%
Durham	14.0%	12.8%	15.1%	18.2%	10.2%	7.5%	22.3%	26.8%
Fayetteville	14.8%	12.5%	16.9%	19.9%	11.6%	9.7%	22.4%	15.0%
Goldsboro	19.9%	18.6%	21.2%	30.7%	11.3%	11.8%	29.6%	32.6%
Greensboro	14.0%	13.0%	15.0%	19.3%	11.2%	10.1%	18.1%	22.6%
Greenville	22.5%	20.2%	24.5%	25.0%	14.4%	17.2%	30.8%	18.6%
Hickory	14.0%	12.9%	15.0%	18.5%	11.7%	11.3%	32.7%	27.2%
Jacksonville	13.8%	13.0%	14.5%	19.2%	12.5%	9.9%	27.3%	25.0%
New Bern	11.7%	9.3%	14.0%	10.0%	9.4%	9.9%	19.0%	N/A
Raleigh	10.1%	9.3%	10.8%	12.0%	9.0%	6.7%	15.3%	22.7%
Rocky Mount	15.1%	14.2%	16.0%	23.0%	10.3%	6.7%	24.0%	N/A
Wilmington	10.6%	12.6%	8.5%	8.0%	6.9%	9.0%	20.7%	11.8%
Winston-Salem	13.6%	12.5%	14.7%	20.3%	8.2%	9.8%	18.9%	27.5%
North Carolina	13.4%	12.1%	14.6%	18.1%	10.2%	9.5%	20.6%	22.9%
United States	12.8%	11.6%	13.9%	16.9%	10.3%	9.5%	21.8%	17.5%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Statistics

According to the latest results from the American Community Survey, the Hickory MSA's educational attainment levels continue to rise (Table 8, page 8). The number of persons age 25 and older with a "high school graduate or equivalent" educational attainment level, for instance, has increased by 8,227 since 2000. Since 2016, the number of persons counted with educational attainment level of high school graduate or equivalent has fallen from 84,756 to 81,414 as some group members have completed coursework at 2-year or 4-year colleges and universities. Since 2016, the "Some College, no Degree" educational attainment group has experienced little net population change (55,396 in 2016 to 55,173 in 2021).

Table 8. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment for Persons 25 or Older, 2000-2021

Educational Attainment	Census 2000	% of Population	2016 ACS	% of Population	2021 ACS	% of Population	Change 2000-2021	% Change 2000-2021
Population 25 and Over	230,937	100.0%	258,373	100.0%	260,973	100.0%	30,036	13.0%
Less than 9th Grade	25,286	10.9%	15,079	5.8%	13,780	5.3%	-11,506	-45.5%
9th to 12th Grade	43,199	18.7%	30,223	11.7%	26,434	10.1%	-16,765	-38.8%
High School Graduate	73,187	31.7%	84,756	32.8%	81,414	31.2%	8,227	11.2%
Some College, No Degree	42,672	18.5%	55,396	21.4%	55,173	21.1%	12,501	29.3%
Associate's Degree	15,139	6.6%	29,039	11.2%	28,062	10.8%	12,923	85.4%
Bachelor's Degree	22,333	9.7%	29,823	11.5%	36,342	13.9%	14,009	62.7%
Graduate Degree	9,121	3.9%	14,057	5.4%	19,768	7.6%	10,647	116.7%

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

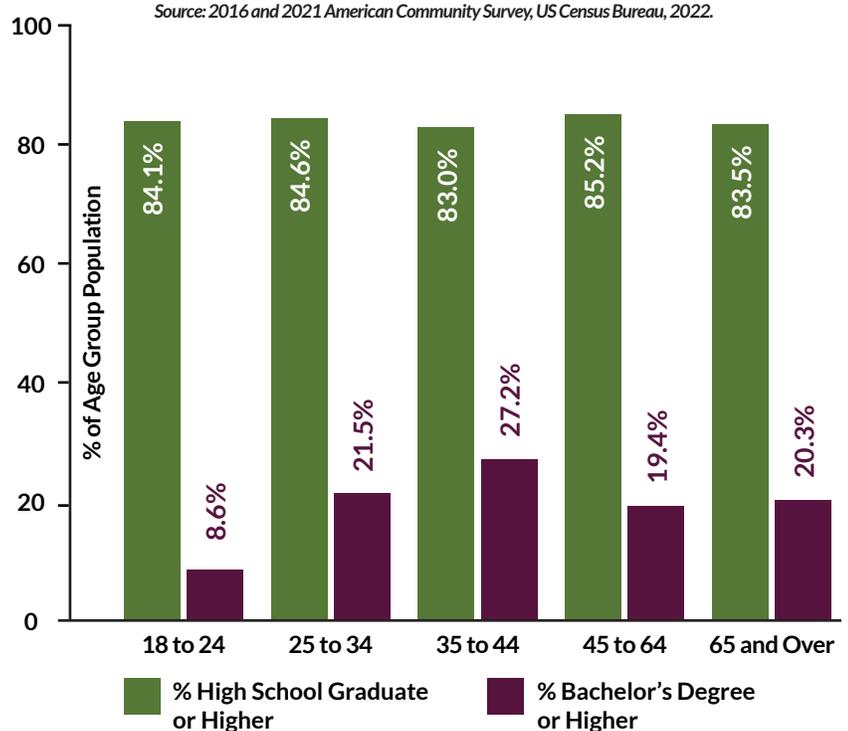
The number of persons age 25 and older with an attainment level of “Associate Degree” has more than doubled from 15,139 in 2000 to 28,062 in 2021. The 12,923 increase is the second most of any Hickory MSA educational attainment category. However, since 2016, the number of people age 25 and over with an educational attainment level of associate degree has fallen by 977 as some group members have gotten their bachelor’s degrees.

ACS data results also reveal significant gains in the number of persons over 25 with a “Bachelor’s Degree” since 2000. The bachelor’s degree educational attainment group increased by 14,009 (62.7%) people between 2000 and 2021. The growth in the bachelor degree group is the most of any Hickory MSA educational attainment category. From 2016 to 2021, the total population age 25 and over in the group with a bachelor’s degree educational attainment level has risen by 6,519 to 36,342. Between 2000 and 2021, the number of persons in the “Graduate Degree or Higher” educational attainment group has more than doubled to 19,768. In 2021, 7.6% of the region’s population age 25 and over had a graduate degree, compared to 3.9% in 2000 and 5.4% in 2016.

Besides providing a detailed educational attainment breakdown for persons over 25, the ACS also provides Hickory MSA data on “high school graduate (or equivalent) or higher” and “bachelor’s degree or higher” populations for various age groups. Survey results indicate that only 8.6% of persons in the age 18 to 24 group have an educational attainment level of a bachelor’s degree or higher (Figure 7). The results are not surprising since many people in this group are still in school trying to earn their bachelor’s degree. Over 84% of the age 18 to 24 cohort have an educational attainment level of high school graduate or higher (probably, some 18-year-old respondents were still in high school when the survey was taken). Over 80% of persons in all other age groups had obtained an educational attainment level of high school graduate or higher.

The age 45 to 64 group had the second lowest percentage of persons with a bachelor’s degree or higher (19.4%). The age 35 to 44 group had the highest percentage with a bachelor’s degree or higher (27.2%), followed by the 25 to 34 age group (21.5%). These results reveal that people in the region continue to acquire bachelor’s degrees well into their 30s and 40s.

Figure 7. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Age Group, 2021



ACS results clearly show a relationship between educational attainment levels and poverty rates. Figure 8 reveals the percentage of the Hickory MSA population below the poverty threshold by educational attainment level. About 27% of persons over age 25 with less than a high school graduate educational attainment were living below the poverty level. In contrast, only 2.9% of the over age 25 population with a bachelor's degree or higher had household incomes below the poverty threshold. In 2021, 11.9% of persons over age 25 with an educational attainment level of high school graduate or equivalent and some college or associate's degree were below the poverty threshold.

Figure 9 shows 2021 ACS results of Hickory MSA median earnings by educational attainment level. The data clearly proves the link between increasing levels of educational attainment and income. Hickory MSA 2021 median earnings for a person over age 25 with an educational attainment of less than high school was only \$25,295. For high school graduate or equivalent, median earnings jumped to \$32,133. Hickory MSA residents age 25 and over with some college or associate's degree had median earnings of more than \$36,772.

Figure 8. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Poverty Rate (Age 25 and Over), 2021

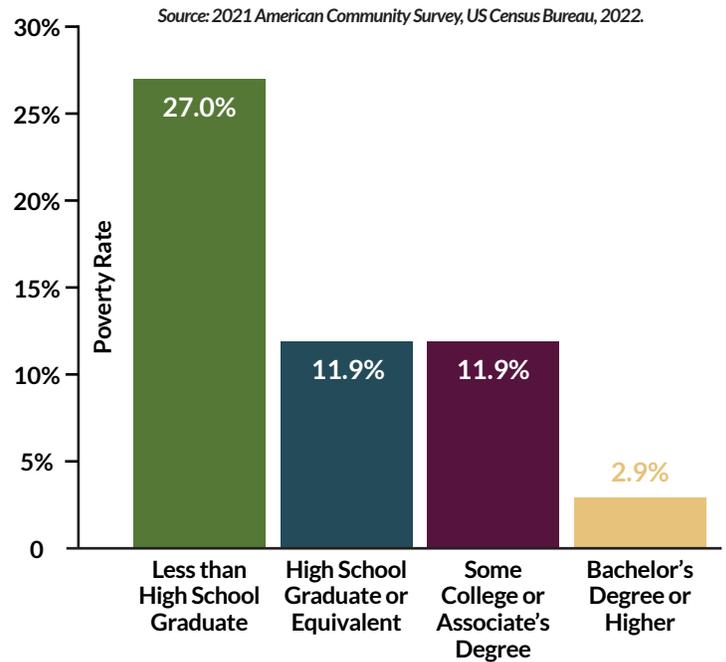
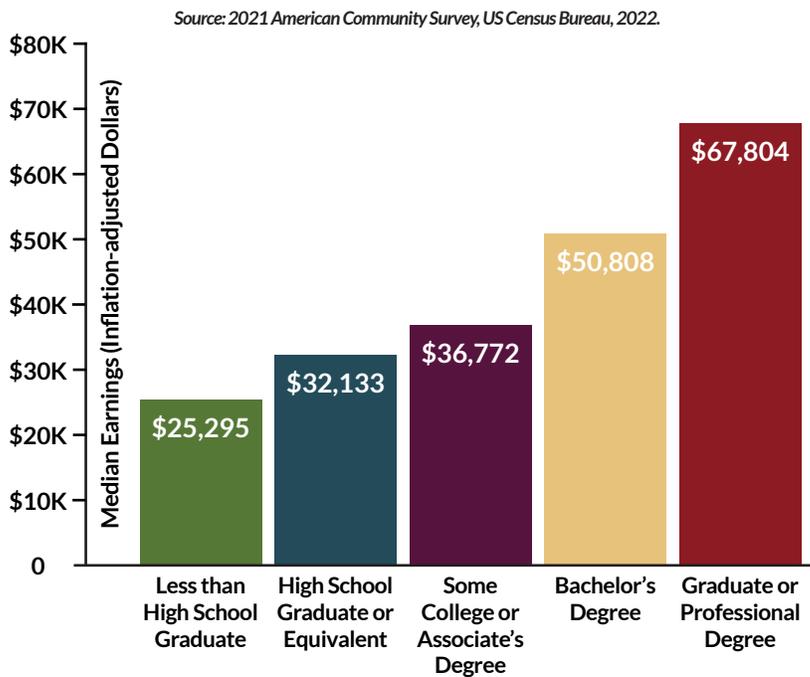


Figure 9. Hickory MSA Educational Attainment Level by Median Earnings (Age 25 and Over), 2021



Hickory MSA median earnings for persons over 25 with an educational attainment level of bachelor's degree equaled \$50,808. Not surprisingly, persons with a graduate or professional degree had the highest median earnings (\$67,804) of any Hickory MSA educational attainment group. The \$16,996 difference in median earnings between persons over 25 with a bachelor's degree and a graduate or professional degree was the largest increase between adjoining educational attainment levels. It is estimated that persons over 25 with a graduate or professional degree in the Hickory MSA have 268% higher median earnings compared to persons age 25 and over without a high school diploma (or equivalent).

Educational attainment results from the 2016 and 2021 ACS for all North Carolina Metros are revealed in Table 9. Between 2016 and 2021, the percentage of the Hickory MSA population with a high school (or equivalent) or higher educational attainment grew from 82.5% to 84.6%. In 2021, the Hickory MSA had the lowest percentage of persons over age 25 with an attainment level of high school or higher among the State's 15 metro areas.

In all North Carolina MSAs, more than 84% of the population 25 and older had an educational attainment level of high school (or equivalent) graduate or higher as of 2021. Nine MSAs had high school or higher educational attainment levels above 90%. In the Wilmington Metro, 92.8% of the population age 25 and older had a high school or higher educational attainment level, the most of any MSA in the State.

The percentage of people age 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher in the Hickory MSA was 4.5 percentage points higher in 2021 (21.5%) than in 2016 (17.0%). The Hickory Metro is one of four MSAs in the State where less than 25% of the population age 25 and older, as of 2021, has a bachelor’s degree or higher. The Goldsboro MSA had the lowest percentage of persons 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher (20.3%), followed by the Rocky Mount (21.2%) and the Hickory (21.5%) MSAs.

ACS results revealed that in 2021 two North Carolina Metros had more than 50% of the population over age 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher. In the Durham MSA, 50.8% of persons 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree or higher, while 50.7% have a bachelor’s degree or higher in the Raleigh Metro. Educational attainment levels in the Raleigh and Durham MSAs appear to benefit from a large university presence and jobs in State Government and Research Triangle Park.

Table 9. NC MSA Educational Attainment Rankings, 2016 and 2021 ACS

2016 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY					2021 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY			
NC MSA	% High School or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% High School or Higher	Ranking (1=High)	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	Ranking (1=High)
Asheville	89.1	6	33.4	5	92.0	3	40.5	3
Burlington	86.2	11	22.4	11	88.0	12	28.9	9
Charlotte	88.7	7	34.4	4	90.3	9	39.3	5
Durham	88.6	8	47	2	91.0	7	50.8	1
Fayetteville	90.1	4 (Tie)	23.7	10	91.9	4	26.6	11
Goldsboro	83.5	13	17.6	13	84.8	14	20.3	15
Greensboro	85.6	12	28.4	7	89.0	11	31.5	7
Greenville	90.1	4 (Tie)	31.6	6	91.4	5 (Tie)	33.6	6
Hickory	82.5	14	17.0	14 (Tie)	84.6	15	21.5	13
Jacksonville	90.7	3	18.6	12	90.7	8	23.8	12
New Bern	86.4	10	24	9	91.4	5 (Tie)	27.7	10
Raleigh	91.6	1	47.2	1	92.7	2	50.7	2
Rocky Mount	81.4	15	17.0	14 (Tie)	87.9	13	21.2	14
Wilmington	91.0	2	36.5	3	92.8	1	39.7	4
Winston-Salem	87.1	9	26.4	8	89.3	10	30.1	8
North Carolina	87.3		30.4		89.7		34.9	
United States	87.5		31.3		89.4		35.0	

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Summary

Between 2000 and 2021, the Hickory MSA’s high school graduate (or equivalent); some college, no degree; associate’s degree; bachelor’s degree, and graduate degree educational attainment population groups have grown significantly. These trends are positive for the region since ACS results indicate reduced poverty rates (from 27.0% for less than a high school graduate compared to 2.9% for a bachelor’s degree or higher) and increased median earnings (from \$25,295 for less than high school graduate compared to \$50,808 for bachelor’s degree) for persons with higher educational attainment levels.

In 2021, 82.5% of the population age 25 and older had an educational attainment level of “high school or higher,” while 17.0% had achieved an educational attainment level of “bachelor’s degree or higher.” From 2016 to 2021, the percentage of population over age 25 with high school or higher rose by 1.9 percentage points, while the percentage of population over age 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher educational attainment levels increased by 4.5 percentage points. As of 2021, more than one-third of the population age 25 and over had a bachelor’s degree or higher in six of the State’s 15 Metro areas.

Hickory MSA Health Insurance Coverage Statistics

Since 2009, the American Community Survey (ACS) has asked questions concerning health insurance coverage. Data results for the Hickory MSA reveal the number of persons with private insurance coverage, public insurance coverage (Medicare and Medicaid, for example), a combination of private and public insurance coverage, and no insurance coverage.

Results in Table 10 show growth in health insurance coverage for Hickory MSA residents over the past five years. The Hickory MSA population with health insurance coverage rose from 88.9% in 2016 to 89.9% in 2021. An estimated 5,742 more people had health insurance in the Hickory MSA in 2021 than in 2016, even though the region’s civilian noninstitutionalized population increased by just 2,451. The number of uninsured persons in the Hickory MSA dropped from 39,799 in 2016 to 36,508 in 2021. The number of persons with private health insurance declined by 589 between 2016 and 2021, while the number of persons with public coverage grew by 6,061.

Table 10. Hickory MSA Health Insurance Coverage Statistics, 2016 and 2021

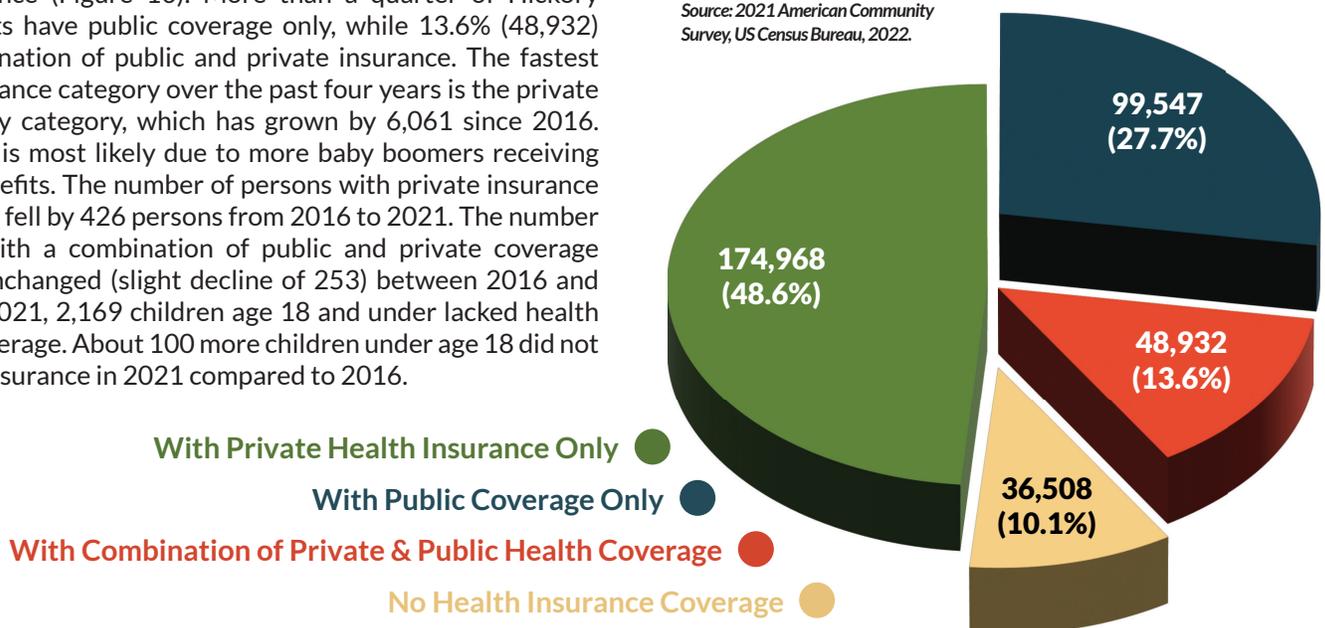
Population Group	2016 ACS		2021 ACS		Change 2016-2021	
	Population	% of Population	Population	% of Population	Population	% of Population
Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population	357,864	100.0%	360,315	100.0%	2,451	0.0%
With Health Insurance Coverage	318,065	88.9%	323,807	89.9%	5,742	1.0%
With Private Health Insurance	224,579	62.8%	223,990	62.2%	-589	-0.6%
With Private Health Insurance Only	175,394	49.0%	174,968	48.6%	-426	-0.4%
With Public Coverage	142,671	39.9%	148,479	41.2%	5,808	1.3%
With Public Coverage Only	93,486	26.1%	99,547	27.6%	6,061	1.5%
With Combination of Private and Public Health Coverage	49,185	13.7%	48,932	13.6%	-253	-0.1%
No Health Insurance Coverage	39,799	11.1%	36,508	10.1%	-3,291	-1.0%
Age 18 and under with No Health Insurance Coverage	2,055	2.7%	2,169	2.8%	114	0.1%

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.

Close to half of Hickory MSA residents are only covered by private health insurance (Figure 10). More than a quarter of Hickory MSA residents have public coverage only, while 13.6% (48,932) have a combination of public and private insurance. The fastest growing insurance category over the past four years is the private insurance only category, which has grown by 6,061 since 2016. This increase is most likely due to more baby boomers receiving Medicare benefits. The number of persons with private insurance coverage only fell by 426 persons from 2016 to 2021. The number of persons with a combination of public and private coverage was nearly unchanged (slight decline of 253) between 2016 and 2021. As of 2021, 2,169 children age 18 and under lacked health insurance coverage. About 100 more children under age 18 did not have health insurance in 2021 compared to 2016.

Figure 10. Hickory MSA Insurance Coverage, 2021

Source: 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.



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