

# State of Working Maine | 2017

## Executive Summary

### In Brief

The State of Working Maine 2017 presents a comprehensive analysis of the economic, demographic, and workforce trends that impact the quality and quantity of jobs in Maine. It provides data for policymakers to formulate policy solutions that will improve Mainers' ability to find and secure good jobs that will reinvigorate our state's economy.

### Our Findings

- **Rural Maine is struggling to recover and is still in a deep depression.** Between 2006 and 2013, economic activity outside the Portland region fell for seven consecutive years. In comparison, during the Great Depression of 1929, economic activity declined just four consecutive years. The Greater Portland metropolitan area has received an annual net influx of a thousand people per year from rural Maine since 2012 and now accounts for 51% of the state's economic activity.
- **Unable to find a good job and struggling with declining health, too many Mainers are giving up on work.** The labor force participation rate among prime-age workers between ages 25 to 54, has fallen dramatically from 87% in 2001 to 82% in 2017. The five percentage point difference in labor force participation from 2001 to 2017 represents 30,000 Mainers of working age who are not participating in the economy.
- **Maine's middle class is disappearing.** Middle-class jobs have disappeared in large numbers, while low-wage jobs, largely in service, retail, and tourism sectors, have replaced them. This phenomenon began more than 15 years ago after the 2001 recession. Since then, Maine has lost a net of 37,000 middle-class jobs, mostly in manufacturing, largely replaced by low-wage jobs.
- **Unequal income gains worsen income inequality.** Approximately 31% of all real household income growth between 2012 and 2015 went to the wealthiest 5% of Maine households, while the poorest 25% of households realized just 0.2% of the total income growth.
- **Economic inequality persists among women and Mainers of color.** Maine women who work full-time, year-round, earn, on average, 79 cents for every dollar their male peers earn. Similarly, full-time, year-round Maine workers of color earn 85 cents for every dollar earned by white non-Hispanic Mainers and the unemployment rate for black Mainers with a bachelor's degree is typically the same as white Mainers with just a high school education.
- **"Deaths of despair" accompany long-term unemployment and poverty.** Prime-age Mainers who dropped out of the labor force have been dying in larger numbers every year for the last decade and a half. Opioid overdose deaths in Maine have greatly increased over the last 15 years -- up by 273% since 2010. However, opioid abuse is not the only cause of this rising mortality. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show that among 25- to 54-year-old Mainers, between 2000 and 2015, suicide rates increased 45%, drug-related accidental deaths (e.g. overdoses) increased 577%, and deaths from drug- and alcohol-related illnesses (e.g. liver failure) increased 185%.