

# We Need to Talk About Well-Being

Why the Study of Well-Being Is Crucial for Race Relations and Advancing Prosperity | **The Brookings Institution**

The New Economics Foundation defines well-being as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.

Well-being is a composite of material social and economic goods (housing, education, workforce, etc.) and the immaterial (social bonds, community cohesion) that influence outcomes.

Deaths of despair (deaths from suicide, drug overdose, or alcoholism) reveal how different racial groups cope, albeit negatively, with their environments.

*People of every racial and ethnic group want financial security, health, supportive social relationships, and opportunities to perform meaningful work in their homes or communities.*

## Well-Being: A Measure of **Thriving**

High well-being scores are correlated with greater individual and community stability, high racial and ethnic diversity, and lower rates of deaths of despair, making it a more holistic indicator of how people are faring than traditional, narrower measures such as income or educational attainment.

## Well-Being Relates to **Race**

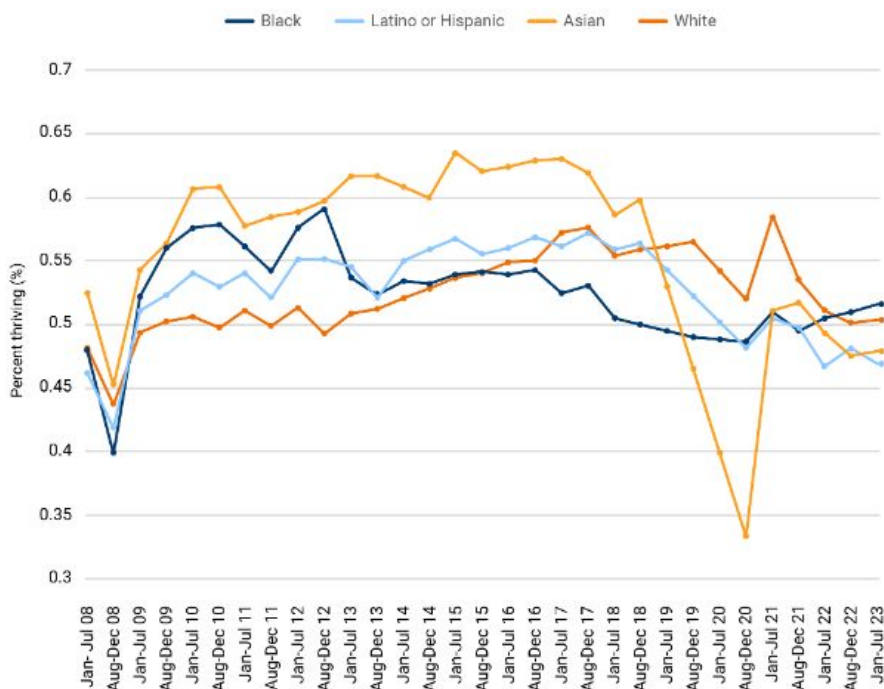
- Well-being adds relevance to the study of race relations because it offers a more complete picture.
- Improving well-being for diverse racial identities is how we collectively advance.
- Well-being is an effective predictor of social stability and security.

## Well-Being Relates to **Place**

Having confidence in institutions and leaders and having a sense of fairness in treatment by public officials, employers, and business partners also influence well-being... Understanding our connections at a human level helps us see our shared fate, ignite systemic change, and build racial equity across our cities and communities.

## Trends in percent thriving by large racial and ethnic groups

2008-2023



Between 2008 and 2023, well-being fluctuated for all racial and ethnicity groups, with noticeable declines in the aftermath of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2020, all racial and ethnic groups experienced a sharp drop in well-being, with Asian Americans seeing the largest decline, which aligns with the rise in anti-Asian hate.

Young adults in each racial and ethnic group experienced 20 percentage point or larger reductions in well-being.

The sharp fall in well-being since 2016 resulted in Black Americans dying from suicide and despair-related deaths at equal rates as white Americans. American Indians and other smaller racial groups continue to exhibit the highest rates of deaths of despair and the lowest rates of well-being.



*In Multnomah County, every person – at every stage in life – has equitable opportunities to thrive.*

The DCHS North Star represents our collective vision, supported by four pillars - improving quality of life, increasing educational access and support, building economic stability in our community, and creating diverse and inclusive systems.

As a framework for examining systemic racism, well-being accounts for “the policies and behaviors that can transform a community for the better.” As a measure of thriving, well-being offers a lens to evaluate our progress towards our North Star.

**How might** DCHS infuse well-being, as a measure of thriving, into its efforts to make DCHS an employer of choice?