

# The Meramec Region's COVID-19 Economic Development Impact Report

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Action Plan

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# Introduction

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Meramec Regional Planning Commission is a voluntary council of local governments established to enhance the quality of life for residents through cleaner, healthier, and safer communities; create greater socio-economic and cultural wealth through community and economic development; and provide a stronger, unified voice in the legislative process. The rural Meramec Region of south central Missouri includes Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski, and Washington Counties, and is home to 196,084 individuals (Census, 2020).



On January 31, 2020, the United States Health and Human Services determined a national public health emergency as a result of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2): COVID-19 (HHS, 2020), and on March 25, 2020, the Meramec Region reported its first COVID-19 cases (CDC, 2020). This report presents information on the economic development before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and is part of the [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) action plan.

## COVID-19 2023 Recovery Survey

In the Spring of 2023, MRPC sought input from the business leaders in the region through voluntary participation in a survey to assess the economic impact of the pandemic on their businesses. The questions were designed to capture the impact and best practices as it relates to resiliency and recovery from future natural disasters. The gathered information on the severity of COVID-19 on the business, employee retention or loss, how the business adapted to handle the pandemic, if there are continued impacts on the business due to the pandemic, and what types of financial assistance a business was able to access to mitigate the economic impacts from the pandemic. Highlighted findings of this survey included: 49% of respondents reported declined revenue; a majority did not apply for pandemic-related financial assistance; and supply costs, delays, and shortages were high business-limiting factors. More information on the survey and its results can be found in the CEDS COVID-19 2023 Recovery Update provided by MRPC.

*This report presents business and economic impact data in the Meramec Region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. MRPC is a non-partisan entity and is not an expert in public health and safety administration.*



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# COVID-19 Timeline: United States, Missouri, & Regional Responses

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*Note: This timeline is not a comprehensive timeline of the history of nor the policies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Sources can be found at the end of this report.*

## 2020

### JANUARY 2020

- 31:** The Department of Health and Human Services declared the 2019 Novel Coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency.

### MARCH 2020

- 7:** *MO*, Officials announced the state's first positive COVID-19 case.
- 11:** The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.
- 13:** *MO*, Gov. Mike Parson signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency.
- 18:** *MO*, Health leaders reported the state's first COVID-19-related death.
- 18:** *Crawford Co., MO*, Crawford County Commission declared a public health emergency.
- 19:** *MO*, All public and charter schools closed doors.
- 19:** *Crawford Co., MO*, The county courthouse closed its building to the public.
- 19:** *Phelps Co., MO.*, The County Commission declared a state of emergency.
- 21:** *MO*, Governor Parson announced a statewide social distancing order and banned nursing home visits.
- 26:** *MO*, The White House approved funding for state and local COVID-19 pandemic resources.
- 27:** *MO*, The National Guard assisted with testing and protective personal equipment.
- 27:** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law.
- 28:** *MO*, DHSS expanded COVID-19 testing to healthcare workers and first responders.
- 30:** *Rolla, MO*, City Council declared a state of emergency and stay-at-home order.
- 31:** *Gasconade Co., MO*, The Health Department issued a temporary stay-at-home order.

### APRIL 2020

- 1:** *MO*, The state announced a nearly \$500M budget pandemic-related shortfall and imposed \$180M in expenditure restrictions.
- 1:** *Osage Co., MO*, County updated its stay-at-home order and enabled essential services.
- 6:** *MO*, Governor Parson issued a statewide stay-at-home order.
- 9:** *MO*, All public schools closed for the academic year and transitioned to virtual learning.
- 10:** *MO*, Governor Parson approved a \$6.2B budget utilizing CARES Act funds.



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- 16:** Federal officials released guidance for states to reopen.
- 30:** Nationally, over 26.5M people have filed for unemployment.

#### MAY 2020

- 4:** *Rolla, MO*, City Council approved to continue safely reopening businesses.
- 4:** *MO*, Governor Parson lifted the stay-at-home order and reopened economic and social activity with limited safeguards.
- 18:** *MO*, State park campgrounds reopened to guests with reservations.
- 20:** *MO*, The state updated its COVID-19 data dashboard and began tracking cases and hospitalizations.
- 21:** *MO*, State Park beaches reopened to the public.
- 29:** *MO*, Governor Parson extended the Show Me Strong Recovery Plan, Phase One to June 15.

#### JUNE 2020

- 8:** *Rolla, MO*, City Council approved to continue safely reopening businesses.
- 9:** *MO*, The state announced schools would reopen at the discretion of local officials.
- 15:** *Rolla, MO*, City Council approved to continue safely reopening businesses.
- 16:** *MO*, Phase Two of the Show Me Strong Recovery Plan lifted restrictions but allowed local officials to implement regulations.
- 16:** *MO*, Governor Parson extended Missouri's state of emergency through Dec. 30, 2020.

#### JULY 2020

- 14:** *MO*, The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released guidance for the 2020-2021 academic year.
- 20:** *Rolla, MO*, City Council approved to continue safely reopening businesses.
- 23:** CDC released COVID-19 mitigation strategies for public health and schools.

#### SEPTEMBER 2020

- 8:** *Rolla, MO.*, City Council approved continuing the safe re-opening of all businesses with limited restrictions.
- 23:** HHS and CDC awarded states, territories, and local jurisdictions \$200M to support COVID-19 vaccine distribution.
- 24:** *MO*, State leaders released guidance for visits at long-term care facilities.

#### NOVEMBER 2020

- 12:** *MO*, State leaders reduced public school quarantine periods for COVID-19 individual exposures while unmasked.
- 23:** *MO*, Governor Parson extended the state of emergency through March 31, 2021.



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- 24:** *Rolla, MO.*, Imposed a public mask mandate, social-distancing guidelines, and limited venue capacities to 25%.

## DECEMBER 2020

- 11:** *MO*, Governor Parson added \$1.27B in CARES Act funding to the state budget.
- 20:** *MO*, DHSS provided the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to healthcare, EMS, and long-term care facilities personnel.
- 27:** COVID Relief Act II provided \$900B for unemployment benefits, business loans, vaccines, and eligible individual payments.

## 2021

### JANUARY 2021

- 4:** *Rolla, MO*, All city businesses reopened with pandemic-related safeguards.
- 14:** *MO*, COVID-19 vaccination plan, Phase 1B - Tier 1, opened to all emergency and non-patient-facing public health personnel.
- 18:** *MO*, COVID-19 vaccination plan, Phase 1b - Tier 2, opened to individuals 65+ years old and those with high-risk conditions.

### FEBRUARY 2021

- 4-6:** *MO*, Mass COVID-19 vaccination events were held across the state.
- 9:** *MO*, The state launched the [COVID-19 Vaccine Navigator](#).
- 9-13:** *MO*, Mass COVID-19 vaccination events were held across the state.

### MARCH 2021

- Early March:** The 2021 American Rescue Plan Act provided economic impact payments, child tax credits, employment assistance, and unemployment benefits for qualifying individuals.
- 15:** *MO*, COVID-19 vaccination plan, Phase 1B - Tier 3, opened to schools, grocery stores, and critical infrastructure workers.
- 17:** CDC allocated \$2.25B for COVID-19 disparities for rural areas and minority groups.
- 29:** *MO*, COVID-19 vaccination plan, Phase 2, opened to construction workers, higher education personnel, and the unhoused.
- 30:** *MO*, Governor Parson extended the state of emergency through Aug. 31, 2021.

### APRIL 2021

- 2:** CDC recommended that people fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can travel safely.
- 9:** *MO*, Residents age 16 and older are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.



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## MAY 2021

- 17:** *MO*, State employees and buildings returned to pre-pandemic work settings.

## JUNE 2021

- 12:** *MO*, The state ended its participation in pandemic-related federal unemployment benefit programs.
- 16:** *MO*, Local governments are prohibited to require proof of COVID-19 vaccination for public facilities and services access.

## JULY 2021

- 7:** *MO*, Governor Parson signed a law that protected providers and organizations from civil liability related to the pandemic.

## AUGUST 2021

- 27:** *MO*, Governor Parson terminated the state of emergency related to the pandemic as a public health crisis, but declared a state of emergency related to the healthcare system, its staff shortages, and hospital bed availability.

## SEPTEMBER 2021

- 3:** CDC announced \$300M for community services for COVID-19 prevention and control.

## DECEMBER 2021

CDC decreased its isolation and quarantine recommendations for COVID-19 infections.

## 2022

### JANUARY 2022

- 19:** The Biden Administration purchased COVID-19 tests and enabled people to order free at-home tests through the USPS.

### MARCH 2022

- 3:** 90% of the U.S. population is in a location with either low or medium COVID-19 community transmission level.

## 2023

### MAY 2023

- 11:** U.S. Health and Human Services ended the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.



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# Economic Development Indicators and Impact

*The following indicators provide insight into the impacts of the pandemic by comparing 2019 data to the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, and recovery in 2022 and 2023.*

## Deaths and Births

Death and birth rates greatly impact the national, state, and regional communities and economies – including the region’s eligible labor force.

From November to December 2020, the Meramec Region experienced its first pandemic “wave” – consistently high reported cases and deaths. Two additional waves followed from July to September 2021 and January to March 2022. An estimated 1.1 million United States (World Health Organization, 2023), 21,000 Missouri, and 968 Meramec Region (CDC, 2020) deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 (USA Facts, 2023).

According to the latest data, both the Meramec Region and the state of Missouri show declines in birth and death rates from 2017 to 2020 (MO DHSS, 2023). These trends indicate that the region’s population was steadily declining before the peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Changes in Business

There was a slight variance in the number of establishments and employees across the Meramec Region from 2019 to the latest data collected in 2021. In 2019, there were 3,675 establishments with 45,773 employees. The number of establishments decreased

Title: Missouri Resident Deaths				
Data selected in addition to rows and columns below:				
Year:	2017-2018	2017-2018	2019-2020	2019-2020
Statistics:	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
County				
Crawford	634	973.29	683	1,032.98
Dent	365	765.26	495	1,030.42
Gasconade	433	876.38	497	1,024.12
Maries	201	778.34	265	966.99
Osage	288	802.93	281	754.84
Phelps	905	843.99	1,073	968.45
Pulaski	669	887.80	751	960.59
Washington	586	997.06	677	1,103.51
Missouri	124,976	821.40	136,038	868.15

Title: Missouri Resident Births		
Data selected in addition to rows and columns below:		
Indicator: Live Births;		
Year:	2017-2018	2019-2020
Statistics:	Count	Count
County		
Crawford	519	482
Dent	357	290
Gasconade	309	294
Maries	164	192
Osage	296	272
Phelps	957	815
Pulaski	1,406	1,428
Washington	563	540
Missouri	146,298	141,380
Source: DHSS - MOPHIMS - Birth MICA		





to 3,613 in 2020 but rose again to 3,651 in 2021. The number of employees increased to 46,679 in 2020 but decreased to 44,767 in 2021 (Explore Census Data, n.d.). A more comprehensive analysis (2022 – on) will be evident after the U.S. Census Bureau collects and releases that data.

## Industries

Agriculture is one of Missouri's largest industries, providing 38.2% of Missouri jobs in March 2020 (Department of Agriculture, 2020).

In November 2021, the Missouri Department of Agriculture reported that livestock and crop production, forestry, and related industries such as meat, food, and crop processing, and animal and pet food manufacturing contributed \$93.7 billion to the state's economy, and provided 456,618 jobs and \$31.8 billion in household income. See chart for the 2021 economic impact of agriculture specific to the Meramec Region (2021 Economic Contributions & Impact of Missouri

Agriculture and Forestry - Missouri Department of Agriculture, n.d.). During the pandemic, livestock production and processing were heavily disrupted. In spring 2020, Missouri experienced labor shortages, which caused a 50% decrease in slaughter rates, reduced production, and inflated beef prices that affected consumers (Bina et al., 2022).

Across all industries, Missouri and the Meramec Region experienced decreases in employment beginning in 2020 but recovered, if not exceeding pre-pandemic levels, by the first quarter of 2023. Industries related to accommodation, entertainment, food services, and personal services declined greater than those less centered on direct interactions between people. Additionally, data from Smith Travel Research reported that from 2019 to 2020, Rolla hotel occupancy rates dropped as much as 67.6% with revenue losses as great as 74.1% (Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce, n.d.).

2021 Agriculture Economic Impact in Meramec Region		
COUNTY	JOBS	HH INCOME
Crawford	2,187	\$96.2M
Dent	2,136	\$188.6M
Gasconade	1,849	\$78M
Maries	1,888	\$155.2M
Phelps	2,364	\$131M
Pulaski	454	\$5.3M
Washington	1,137	\$82.6M

agriculture.mo.gov

<b><u>Industry</u></b>	<b><u>2019</u></b>	<b><u>2020</u></b>	<b><u>2021</u></b>	<b><u>2022</u></b>	<b><u>2023</u></b>
<b>Total nonfarm</b>	<b>2,905,000</b>	<b>2,921,600</b>	<b>2,805,900</b>	<b>2,885,500</b>	<b>2,960,200</b>
Service-providing	2,497,900	2,514,400	2,400,400	2,469,500	2,530,100
Goods-producing	407,100	407,200	405,500	416,000	430,100
<b>Total private</b>	<b>2,470,400</b>	<b>2,480,900</b>	<b>2,382,500</b>	<b>2,460,800</b>	<b>2,532,600</b>
Mining, Logging and Construction	129,600	133,100	133,700	141,400	143,000
Manufacturing	277,500	274,100	271,800	274,600	287,100
Trade, transportation, and utilities	544,700	539,400	538,900	552,500	557,200
Information	48,700	47,500	46,000	47,300	48,400
Financial activities (including real estate, rental, & leasing)	173,600	176,200	178,500	182,800	188,500
Professional and business services	383,700	383,400	370,200	378,100	386,500
Educational services	62,600	63,700	54,800	62,500	69,200
Health care and social assistance	426,700	434,200	419,200	418,300	426,100
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	42,600	43,500	35,200	41,400	47,800
Accommodation and food services	264,400	268,500	225,500	249,600	259,800
Other services	116,300	117,300	108,700	112,300	119,000
<b>Government</b>	<b>434,600</b>	<b>440,700</b>	<b>423,400</b>	<b>424,700</b>	<b>427,600</b>
Federal	54,300	56,100	57,100	57,000	55,200
State government	104,100	106,200	98,900	101,200	102,300
Local government	276,200	278,400	267,400	266,500	270,100

(Current Employment Statistics | Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, 2019)



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## Tourism

Tourism – including the region’s vast outdoor recreational opportunities – is a significant economic driver of the Meramec Region. Despite the challenges surrounding the pandemic, the Meramec Region’s tourism-related employment was moderately effected, as shown in the table below.

Tourism-Related Employment in Meramec Region				
Source: MO Division of Tourism Annual Report				
	FY 2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021
Crawford	556	551	556	603
Dent	331	328	295	288
Gasconade	564	519	491	689
Maries	42	39	48	46
Osage	197	200	180	191
Phelps	2248	2276	2231	2166
Pulaski	2685	2704	2645	2663
Washington	291	281	290	322
MRPC	6914	6898	6736	6968

## Labor Force

The labor force comprises individuals 16 years of age and older who are employed or unemployed – including those searching for work (Concepts and Definitions (CPS), n.d.). Notable is the modest impact that early and delayed retirement played on the labor force during the pandemic. A survey by the U.S. Census Bureau showed that 2.9% of adults ages 55-70 employed in January 2020 said they retired early or planned to; compared to 2.3% who said they either delayed or planned to delay retirement due to the pandemic. Of those who chose to retire early, most came from education and hospitality occupations, correlating with the top occupations and industries with job openings during the pandemic (Bureau, n.d.).



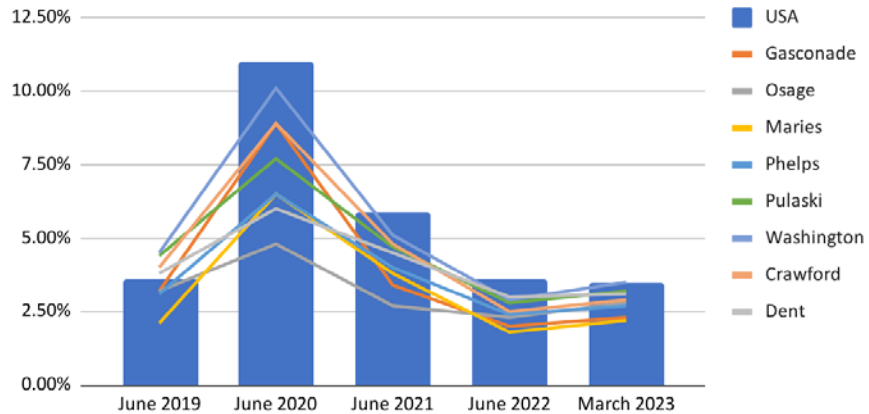
## Unemployment

In June 2019, the average unemployment rate of 3.7% in the Meramec Region correlated with the national average of 3.6%. By June 2020, Meramec Region unemployment increased dramatically to an average of 7.4%, which was 3.8% lower than the national average of 11%. Just

prior to this spike, the CARES Act provided Economic Impact Payments and the Paycheck Protection Program. By June 2021, the same month the state of Missouri ended its participation in pandemic-related federal unemployment benefits, the unemployment rate fell. It continued to drop below pre-pandemic levels by June 2022, averaging 2.5% in the eight Meramec Region counties – 1.6% lower than the national average.

### Unemployment in Meramec Region Compared to US

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



As of January 2023, Missouri's labor force participation rate was 63.5% – almost back to the 64% pre-pandemic rate. The state is also at a record low unemployment rate of 2.5%, down from its peak pandemic height in March 2020 of over 11% (Bureau of Labor Statistics Data, n.d.). Missouri's employment is projected to grow by 7.3 percent between 2020 and 2030. About two-thirds of this growth is expected to be due to recovery from the 2020 pandemic. Missouri lost 4.7 percent of its total employment in 2020 but by 2030, is projected to recover and surpass the employment level from 2019 (Missouri 2020-2030 Projected Growth and Recovery | Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, n.d.).

## Education

### Proficiency Rates

The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) reported that students who were transitioned to virtual or distance learning were affected more negatively than those who remained in an onsite or hybrid setting. Students in lower grades – starting at 5th – tested lower than those in higher grades. Math and English Language Arts (ELA) showed the greatest loss in testing proficiency.



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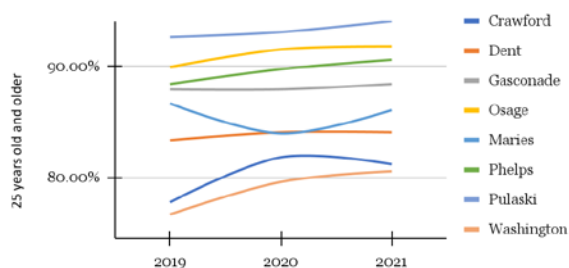
Additionally, since the 2020-2021 school year, ELA and Social Studies scores have continued to decline (August 2022 Report on the 2021-22 MAP Grade-Level and End-of-Course Preliminary Statewide Results in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies | Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The long-term social and economic impacts of the decline in primary and secondary school proficiency rates are still unknown.

## High School and College Graduation Rates

Graduation rates in the Meramec Region increased modestly in individuals age 25+ from 2019 to the latest U.S. Census report in 2021. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that earnings increase and unemployment decreases as educational attainment rises – suggesting these rates could contribute to unemployment decreases in the Meramec Region.

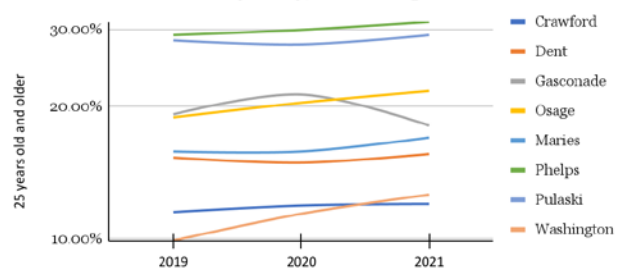
### High School Graduation Rate

Source: American Community Survey, data.census.gov



### College Graduation Rate

Source: American Community Survey, data.census.gov



## Job Openings

Job openings in Missouri decreased rapidly from March 2020 to the end of the year and then began to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels by March 2021, with healthcare, education, and food/leisure services showing a dramatic increase in employment opportunities

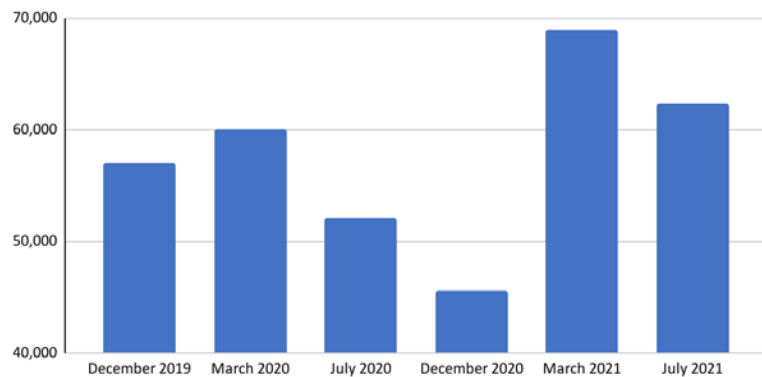
(Archived Data and Information from Pandemic | Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, n.d.).

Revolving Loan Fund (RLF),  
Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)

The Meramec Region received large funding amounts of federal aid to support employment and employee earnings during the pandemic. Below are tables with information surrounding the RLF, EIDL, and PPP loans.

### Missouri Job Openings

Source: Missouri Economic and Research Center



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# Meramec Regional Planning Commission - Revolving Loan Fund CARES Grant

Grant Award: \$700,000

	Total Loans	Dollar Amount	Jobs Created/Retained	Cost/Job	Loan Status
<b>Crawford</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$212,000</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$21,200</b>	<b>1-Default/1-Current</b>
	Steelville (1)	\$106,000	0	\$0	Default
	Steelville (2)	\$106,000	10	\$21,200	Current
<b>Dent</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$122,000</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>\$24,400</b>	<b>All Current</b>
	Salem	\$67,000	2	\$33,500	Current
	Jadwin	\$55,000	3	\$18,333	Current
<b>Gasconade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$52,000</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$52,000</b>	<b>All Current</b>
	Hermann	\$52,000	1	\$52,000	Current
<b>Maries</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Osage</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$205,000</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>\$41,000</b>	<b>All Current</b>
	Linn	\$205,000	5	\$41,000	Current
<b>Phelps</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$176,000</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>\$5,500</b>	<b>All Current</b>
	St. James	\$52,000	22	\$2,364	Current
	Rolla (1)	\$82,000	6	\$13,667	Current
	Rolla (2)	\$42,000	4	\$10,500	Current
<b>Pulaski</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$52,000</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>\$3,714</b>	<b>All Current</b>
	St. Robert	\$52,000	14	\$3,714	Current
<b>Washington</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>\$819,000</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>\$12,224</b>	<b>1-Default/9-Current</b>

## Meramec Region - EIDL Loans as of 12/31/22

	Total Loans	Total Amount	Missouri Loans Approved	Missouri Total Dollars
Crawford	89	\$545,644	44,615	\$4,161,443,451
Dent	86	\$797,633		
Gasconade	92	\$881,420		
Maries	37	\$206,686		
Osage	58	\$381,543		
Phelps	199	\$2,058,274		
Pulaski	157	\$1,682,177		
Washington	132	\$1,882,431		
<b>Total Region</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>\$8,435,808</b>		

Source: information provided by USASpending.gov



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Meramec Region		PPP Loans less than \$150,000 (by county)	
	Total PPP Loans		Total PPP Loans (\$)
Crawford	963	\$	15,549,349
Dent	710	\$	9,789,101
Gasconade	875	\$	13,582,978
Maries	745	\$	7,919,710
Osage	1,328	\$	17,063,713
Phelps	1,751	\$	32,629,990
Pulaski	1,196	\$	21,056,695
Washington	596	\$	9,300,320
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>8,164</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>126,891,856</b>
<b>Missouri Total (All PPP)</b>	<b>142,243</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>4,606,412,713.00</b>

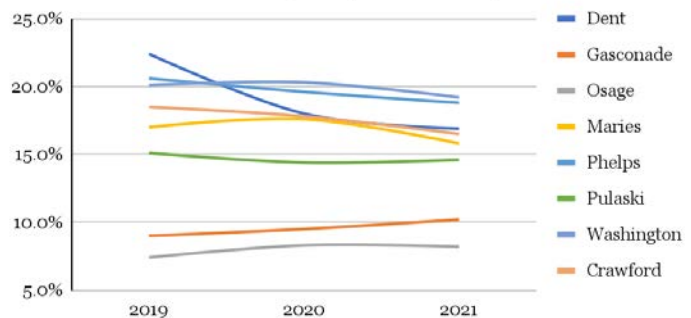
## Poverty and Income

In 2021, poverty rates in each Meramec Region county either declined or held, and mean household income trends increased steadily. This could partially be due to the payments that qualifying individuals received from the CARES Act, and could justify the increased incomes that correspond with increased unemployment rates and labor shortages in 2020 and 2021.

At the time that this report was published, data from the U.S. Census Bureau was only available up to 2021. A comprehensive perspective on these trends will be known once 2022 and 2023 data are reported.

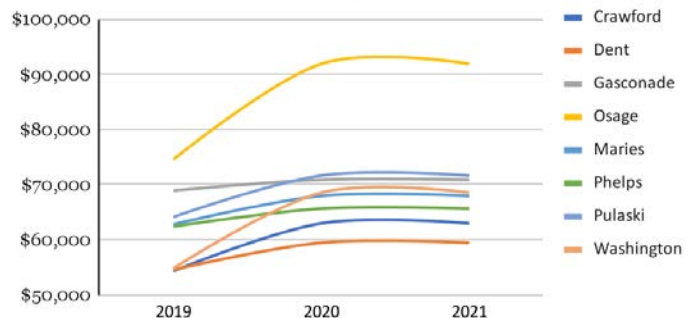
### Poverty Rate in the Meramec Region

Source: American Community Survey data.census.gov



### Mean Household Income in the Meramec Region

Source: American Community Survey, data.census.gov





## Revenue

### Sales Taxes

Data from the Gasconade Valley Enterprise Zone shows significant increases in sales tax revenue in three of the eight Meramec Region counties from 2019 to 2020 (Public Information Reports, n.d.). A key factor that may have contributed to these increases were the counties' less stringent COVID-mitigation policies that could have allowed more consumers to spend locally.

Gasconade 2019	Gasconade 2020	Maries 2019	Maries 2020	Osage 2019	Osage 2020
\$ 39,121,284.83	\$ 41,167,059.68	\$ 11,508,591.59	\$ 11,746,064.32	\$ 27,919,933.08	\$ 28,158,772.74

### Supply Issues

As noted above, supply issues during the pandemic impacted regional businesses and revenue. Negative indicators including purchasing activity, transportation, prices, inventory, and labor affected the global supply chain and trickled down to rural areas of the United States from January to December 2020 ("Race to Measure Supply Chain Snarls Draws a Crowded Field," 2022).

### Revenue Trends

From 2019 to 2021, Missouri reported a dramatic increase in all funds and state general revenue – showing \$2.8 billion in general revenue at the end of 2021. That balance resulted from a combination of savings in state general revenue spending over the last two years and increased state tax revenue resulting from increased personal income. Both components were made possible by the influx of Federal COVID relief (Missouri Budget Project, 2022). Economic experts and state leaders dispute what the state surplus should be allocated for; ranging from increasing employee wages and supporting state agency staff shortages and turnover to grants for local projects (KCUR, 2022).



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## Pandemic Comorbidities

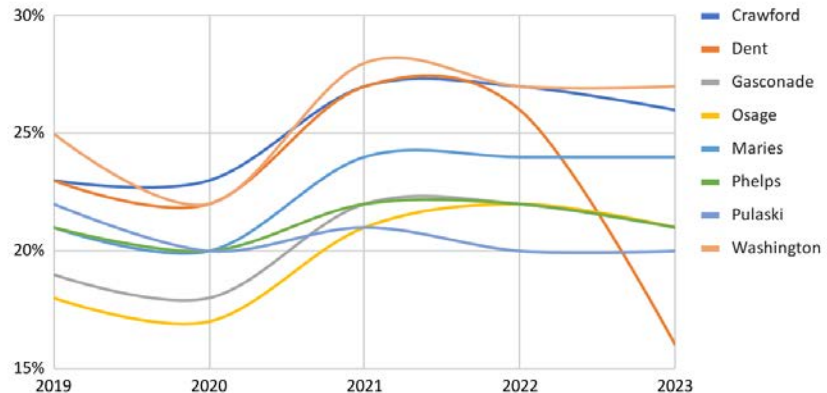
Unemployment, economic crises, social isolation, illness and deaths related to COVID-19 exacerbated substance misuse and poor mental health during and following the pandemic.

### Adult Smoking

Data in the image below adult smoking was on a steady decline until 2020, then spiked beginning in the first quarter of that year and has maintained higher than pre-pandemic levels over the past three years in the vast majority of the eight Meramec Region counties.

#### Adult Smoking in the Meramec Region

Source: [www.countyealthrankings.org](http://www.countyealthrankings.org)

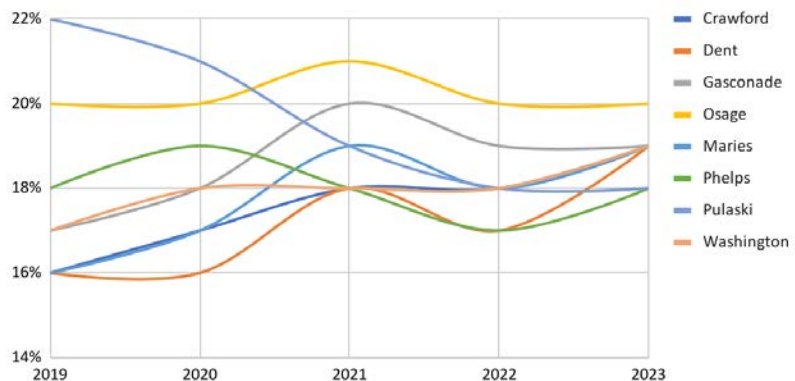


### Excessive Drinking

Excessive drinking – a minimum of four drinks per occasion or eight per week for women and five drinks per occasion or fifteen per week for men (What is Excessive Drinking? | CDC, 2020) – increased in six of the eight counties during the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022. Phelps and Pulaski counties did not show increases in excessive drinking and local restrictions may support this evidence.

#### Excessive Drinking in the Meramec Region

Source: [www.countyealthrankings.org](http://www.countyealthrankings.org)



Within the Meramec Region, three key areas enacted stringent restrictions during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. The City of Rolla and the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Phelps County, enforced mask ordinances and limited business functions and capacities (Rolla City Council, 2020 and MO S&T, 2020). In Pulaski County, U.S. Army Base,

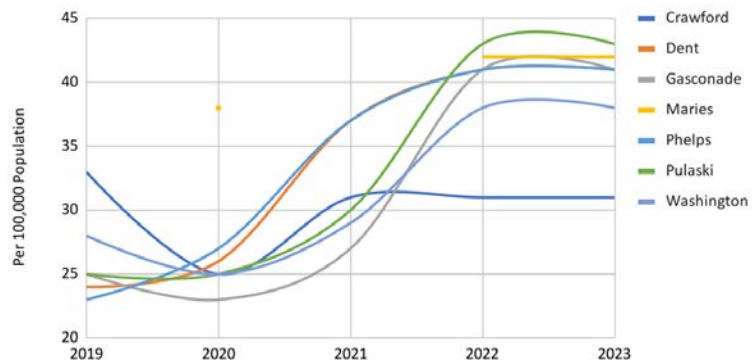
Fort Leonard Wood, which makes up roughly 15,000 of the 54,000 (28%) of residents prohibited service members from patroning any bars or clubs (Some COVID Restrictions Returning at Fort Leonard Wood, n.d.).

### Drug Overdose Deaths

In the Meramec Region, drug overdose deaths increased sharply and have maintained extremely high levels – largely due to fentanyl. Additionally, a December 2021 study by the U.S. Labor Department hypothesized the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic would have on U.S. workers, including increased drug use among new and existing users could be a result of spikes in job loss, reduced earnings, and stressed physical and mental health (Hill et al., 2021).

#### Drug Overdose Deaths in the Meramec Region

Source: [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)

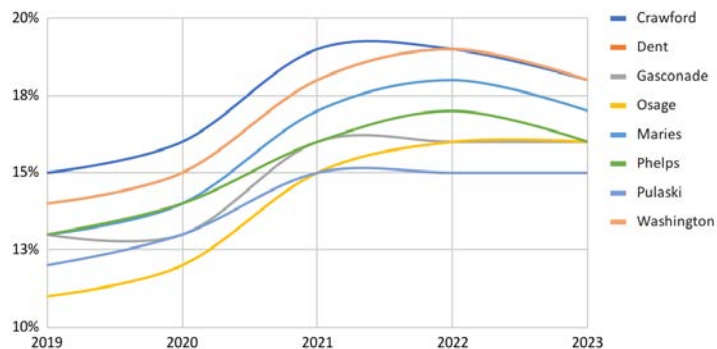


### Problem Mental Health

According to data from County Health Rankings, frequent mental distress increased in all eight counties throughout the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022 and have maintained significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2023.

#### Frequent Mental Distress in the Meramec Region

Source: [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)



Nationally, fifty percent of young adults feel symptoms of anxiety or depression. Working-age adults have faced many challenges related to the pandemic, such as disruptions in education, transitions to remote work, and loss of income or employment, which can impact mental health (Panchal et al., 2023).

# Conclusion

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The economic impacts and recovery efforts surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in the Meramec Region are documented in this report, and accompany the CEDS Action Plan, to act as a living document and to serve as a resource for future disasters and regional economic development efforts.

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