Our number one priority, for us as researchers, was to understand the needs of the community and how residents are coping with poverty. More than just material deprivation and we hope that these findings will continue to further the discourse on poverty in Tucson. 

Poverty in Tucson is a major concern for all its residents. At 20% in 2013, the poverty rate is extremely high for a city that’s Tucson’s size. Our number one priority, for us as researchers, was to understand the needs of the community and how residents are coping with poverty. Through this study, we learned that well-being is structured around health, income, work, housing, food, and social networks. 

Illness and Disability

26% of households had someone suffering from an illness or disability that made them unable to work, only 3% respondents were receiving disability income. This is the monthly average respondents reported spending on healthcare related bills.

“I applied for medical insurance....I get a letter declined because I made $25 too much. And I’m just not asking for medical for me, I’m asking for medical for my kids.” - Single Mother

19% of respondents have had debt collectors call them due to medical debt.

“I broke my ankle... 2 years ago, and some friends of ours already gave me a hand to get me through my difficulties.” - Respondent

16% of respondents have had debt collectors call them due to medical debt.

“I was involved in a car wreck and incurred quite extensive medical bills and they would call me all the time, but there was no insurance related bills.” - Single Mother

Health Care Benefit Distribution

- 181% of respondents have health care
- 45% of respondents are enrolled through employer
- 11% of respondents utilized other insurance
- 45% of respondents are not enrolled at all
- 45% of respondents not applicable

Food Assistance

In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough money for food?

16% yes

25% no

How Can Tucson Do Better?

Any assistance they have, like medical or anything like that, they set it really low so... people who are like a little above that, just a little above that, you can’t get any help.”

“The food bank could be open longer...and be there 24 hours instead of certain times in the day because some people work.”

“Veterans being homeless and not receiving assistance. You know, they are worried about these people that are in the streets - most of them are veterans that fought for our country. Give them some kind of mental health program to help them.”

Veteran Health

“I can’t work, because my VA benefits and hospital appointments would interfere with that... Plus, I’m waiting on my benefits from the VA, so if I work it complicates that process, so I try to work under the table when I can.” - Disabled Veteran

“I think people who are actually working for themselves get less help, which is kind of a Catch-22, I pay more taxes but I get less help when I need it.” - Single Mother of Three

“I applied for medical insurance....I get a letter declined because I made $25 too much. And I’m just not asking for medical for me, I’m asking for medical for my kids.” - Single Mother

Finances

Average Family Income Per Month in Tucson

$4,813.00

Average Family Income Per Month in 35.01

$1,407.68

Average Rent Per Month in Tucson

$742.00

Average Rent Per Month in 35.01

$610.00

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Our Conclusions

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“If you were tasked to come up with $2,000 in only 30 days, would you be able to?

45% yes

39% no

16% not sure