

Snohomish County Profile



By Anneliese Vance-Sherman, Ph.D.
Regional labor economist
Updated January 2021

[Overview](#) | [Geographic facts](#) | [Outlook](#) | [Labor force and unemployment](#) | [Industry employment](#) | [Wages and income](#) | [Population](#) | [Useful links](#)

Overview

Regional context

Snohomish County is situated between northern Puget Sound to the west and the crest line of the North Cascade Range to the east. It shares its northern border with rural Skagit County and borders King County to the south. Snohomish County is separated from Camano Island (part of Island County) by Davis Slough. The highest point in Snohomish County is Granite Peak (10,541 feet).

Due to its proximity to and shared labor market with King County, Snohomish County is incorporated into the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett Metropolitan Division and the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan Statistical Area, as designated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and other government agencies.

The geographic distribution of population, economic activity and land use in Snohomish County is diverse, with a mix of rural and urban zones. For the most part, population centers in the county are oriented south in proximity to the border with King County and west along Interstate 5. By contrast, north and east Snohomish County are characterized by smaller town and cities, farmland and reservations.

The county ranks 13th statewide in terms of total land area (2,087.3 square miles) and is the 7th most densely populated county in Washington, with 397.89 people per square mile in 2020.

Local economy

Snohomish County has been and continues to be home to a number of Native American tribes. Early economic history of the county is characterized by an abundance of natural resources in a diverse ecological region.

European settlement of Puget Sound, including what is now Snohomish County, followed Captain George Vancouver's claim of much of western Washington for Great Britain in 1792. Snohomish County was carved out of Island County in 1861 and the late 19th century saw the establishment of several settlements in western Snohomish County. The Great Northern Railway reached the newly established city of Everett, bringing an economic boom to the area. Snohomish County's early industrial economy thus continued to be based on the availability of abundant natural resources - primarily timber and farming.

Following World War II, Snohomish County's economic growth expanded through the establishment of suburban cities oriented toward Seattle in the southwestern part of the county.

Home-grown multinational corporation, Boeing, traces its roots to the Seattle metropolitan area and continues to play a prominent role in Snohomish County’s economic make up. In the late 1960s, Boeing established its 747 manufacturing plant at Paine Field near Everett. The later development of other high technology industries in Snohomish County brought population increases and a shift from an economy based on logging and agriculture to one rooted in manufacturing and an expanding service sector.

Manufacturing continues to be a major economic driver in Snohomish County. About 60,600 jobs (20.0 percent of total Snohomish County nonfarm employment) in 2019 were in manufacturing industries. This is proportionally higher than any other county in Washington and above the national average. Although Snohomish County manufacturing is made up of many types of industries, aerospace products and parts manufacturing makes up the largest portion of employment. Aerospace manufacturers supplied 41,000 jobs in 2019. The manufacturing base, coupled with proximity to a major urban center, provides the foundation for a diverse local economy.

Other major industry sectors employing more than 20,000 included government (40,600), educational and health services (36,500), retail trade (35,000), professional and business services (29,300), leisure and hospitality (27,000) and construction (24,400).

Snohomish County began to feel the effects of the Great Recession in mid-2008. The lowest employment levels were recorded in 2010 – several months after the recession had been officially declared over. Since 2010, all private sector industry groups have seen overall increases in employment and the local unemployment rate has been dropping.

In 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic-induced recession hit Snohomish County. Total nonfarm employment dropped by more than 20.0 percent from March to April, and began to recover as businesses, government and individuals navigated the new environment. As of November 2020 (preliminary), total nonfarm employment was estimated at 273,900 or 8.2 percent below the November 2019 reading.

Geographic facts

	Snohomish County	Rank in state
Land area, 2010 (square miles)	2,087.3	13
People per square mile, 2020	397.289	7

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

Outlook

Snohomish County experienced relative job losses that exceeded those of the state or the nation in 2009 and 2010. It has also experienced above average job creation by comparison during the first couple of years of economic recovery (2011 and 2012). All private sector industry groups have reported net employment growth since the recession (with recovery starting in 2010 for most industries). Generally speaking, the rate of employment growth was highest at the start of the recovery. Total nonfarm employment expanded by 3.2 percent from 2010 to 2011 and by another 4.1 percent in 2012. As the recovery continued, Snohomish County employment dipped down into the 1.0 percent per year range, lower than the state or nation. In 2015 and 2016, Snohomish County’s rate of job growth once again jumped up over 2.0 percent, dropping again in 2017 to 0.0 percent (following drops in manufacturing employment) and returned to the 1.0 percent range in 2018 and 2019.

Unemployment rates have been falling since 2010 and have consistently remained below the rates reported for the state. In 2019, the average unemployment rate was 3.0 percent. In 2020, the unemployment rate reached a record high of 19.2 percent in April, and quickly dropped as workers and businesses navigated the new environment. The most recent estimated unemployment rate was 4.8 percent in November (preliminary).

The primary driver of Snohomish County's early recovery from the Great Recession was the manufacturing sector, specifically the aerospace products and parts manufacturing industry. Employment in aerospace expanded rapidly from 2010 to 2012 and stabilized around 43,000 from 2012 to 2016. Employment levels dropped in 2017 and began to recover. In 2019, average employment in aerospace was estimated at 41,000. In 2020, the aerospace sector was hit hard by a sudden and severe drop in demand for international and domestic travel. Employment levels observed in Snohomish County's aerospace industry dropped from a high of 43,800 in February to the most recent reading of 35,700 jobs as of November (preliminary).

The past few years have been characterized by expansion in most major industry groups except manufacturing, however, the rate of expansion has been tapering off. From 2018 to 2019, Snohomish County employers collectively added 4,700 jobs or 1.6 percent. Manufacturing added the largest number of jobs, but on a percentage basis, the highest growth was observed in transportation, warehousing and utilities (up 5.6 percent), largely a reflection of Paine Field opening to commercial traffic.

During the 2020 pandemic, the industries that make up leisure and hospitality (e.g. restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues) were the most severely impacted, while many of the region's high tech and professional workers were able to shift their work environments temporarily, easing the impact.

Labor force and unemployment

Current labor force and unemployment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

Snohomish County's 2019 labor force averaged 439,464, with an unemployment rate of 3.0 percent. Within this estimate, 426,100 county residents were counted among the employed and 13,364 were counted among the unemployed.

During the recent period of recession and recovery, peak unemployment rates were reached in early 2010, when rates reached 11.2 percent. The average unemployment rate for 2010 was 10.7 percent. Since 2010, the unemployment rate has been on a consistent downward trend, largely a result of high growth demand in neighboring King County. In 2020, the unemployment rate climbed quickly to a high level of 19.2 percent, and has subsequently dropped. The most recent reading was 4.8 percent (preliminary) in November. Note that these numbers are periodically revised as we incorporate more information.

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment

Current industry employment statistics are available on the [Labor area summaries](#) page on ESD's labor market information website.

Although the Great Recession technically ended in June 2009, the employment situation did not begin to turn around until well into the recovery period. The lowest employment levels during this period were reached in 2010. Some industries that were particularly hard hit include construction and financial activities.

Snohomish County averaged 295,700 nonfarm jobs in 2019, up from an estimated 291,100 in 2018. Over the year, total employment increased an average 1.6 percent. Washington state as a whole experienced the addition of 67,100 jobs over the same time period, an increase of 2.0 percent.

- Goods-producing industries supported an average of 84,900 jobs in 2019, up from 82,700 in 2018. Net growth was attributable to hiring in manufacturing.
 - Snohomish County goods-producing industries generally fall within two industries: manufacturing and construction. Manufacturing dipped during the recession and recovered employment quickly (relative to other sectors), however this industry’s employment growth slowed later in the recovery. At the start of 2020, the industry was on a growth trajectory that was immediately and severely impacted by the global pandemic.
 - Construction suffered the greatest job losses in the county during the 2008 recession but has expanded employment every year since 2011. During 2020, construction employment dropped quickly, but appears to have recovered quickly, exceeding beginning of the year levels. Employment gains are supported by existing projects, a robust regional real estate market, and infrastructure projects related to Sound Transit 3.
- Service-providing industries supported an average of 210,800 jobs in 2019, up from 208,400 in 2018. Seven major service-providing industry categories expanded employment over the year and two shed jobs.
 - The service sector includes a broad range of industries, each responding differently to economic conditions. Over the course of the recession and recovery, the greatest proportional service sector industry losses came from the local information sector and the greatest absolute losses came from retail. Educational and health services continued to grow over the course of the recession and recovery period.
 - At the broad industry level, all private sector service-providing industries have reached employment levels that exceed their respective pre-recession peaks.
 - Government employment averaged 40,600 jobs in 2019. This is up from an estimated 40,000 in 2018.

For historical industry employment data, [*contact an economist*](#).

Source: Employment Security Department

Industry employment by age and gender

The Local Employment Dynamics (LED) database, a joint project of state employment departments and the U.S. Census Bureau, matches state employment data with federal administrative data. Among the products is industry employment by age and gender. All workers covered by state unemployment insurance data are included; federal workers and non-covered workers, such as the self-employed, are not. Data are presented by place of work, not place of residence.

Snohomish County highlights:

In 2019, Snohomish County's labor force was slightly older than that of the state. While the statewide workforce had proportionally more workers age 25 to 44, Snohomish County's workforce was proportionally more represented among workers age 45 to 64. This is largely a reflection of industry employment patterns. More than 30.0 percent of the manufacturing workforce in Snohomish County is age 55 or older.

In 2019, 53.2 percent of all jobs were held by men, while 46.8 percent were held by women.

- Industries with male-dominant workforces included mining (83.4 percent), construction (78.1 percent), transportation and warehousing (74.6 percent) and manufacturing (73.6 percent).
- Female-dominated included healthcare and social assistance (78.5 percent), educational services (74.1 percent) and finance and insurance (65.6 percent).

Source: The Local Employment Dynamics

Wages and income

In 2019, Snohomish County averaged 291,836 jobs covered by unemployment insurance, with a total payroll in excess of \$18.5 billion.

The average annual wage in Snohomish County was \$63,457 for all industries in 2019. This is below the statewide average wage of \$69,615, but significantly higher than the statewide average when King County is excluded (\$52,669). The average wage in Snohomish County is also higher than the national average (\$59,209).

The median hourly wage \$26.44 in 2018, compared to a statewide median wage of \$25.98 per hour.

Personal income

Personal income includes earned income, investment income, and government payments such as Social Security and Veterans Benefits. Investment income includes income imputed from pension funds and from owning a home. Per capita personal income equals total personal income divided by the resident population.

In 2018, the per capita personal income in Snohomish County was \$55,888, less than Washington state (\$62,026) but higher than the nation as a whole (\$54,446). Within Washington state, Snohomish County ranked fourth for per capita income.

According to the American Community Survey, the median household income in Snohomish County was \$89,260 in 2019. Snohomish County's median was higher than both the state (\$78,687) and the nation (\$65,712).

In 2019, 6.8 percent of the resident population in Snohomish County was estimated to be living below the poverty level. Statewide and national poverty levels were higher (9.8 and 12.3 percent respectively).

In Snohomish County, 8.1 percent of all children under age 18 were reported as living below the poverty level in 2019.

Source: Employment Security Department; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Population

With an estimated 830,500 residents in 2020, Snohomish County has the third highest county population in Washington. Only King and Pierce counties have higher resident populations.

Over the past couple of decades, Snohomish County's population growth rate has exceeded those of the state and the nation, and this higher-than-average population growth trend is projected to continue.

Migration trends tend to be linked closely with economic cycles. During the recent recession and recovery period, Snohomish County's usual migration-related increase fell below the relatively constant rate of natural increase, and reached the lowest levels observed since the early 1970s. In 2020, Snohomish County welcomed an estimated 11,800 new residents.

The largest city in Snohomish County is Everett (112,700 residents in 2020). Other large cities include Marysville, Edmonds and Lynnwood.

Population facts

	Snohomish County	Washington state
Population 2020	830,500	7,656,200
Population 2010	713,335	6,724,540
Percent change, 2010 to 2020	16.4%	13.9%

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management

Age, gender and ethnicity

The age distribution of Snohomish County residents compared to the state as a whole reveals the suburban and industrial nature of the county. It suggests that people move to Snohomish County to work and raise their families.

Snohomish County has a similar proportion of young people under age 18 compared to the state and nation, and a much lower proportion of teenagers and adults between ages 15 and 29. The population between age 30 and 64 proportionally exceeds that of the state and nation, and the population aged 64 and above is under-represented in Snohomish County relative to the state.

The racial and ethnic makeup of Snohomish County shows a relative under-representation of Black or African American (3.8 percent) and Hispanic or Latino residents (10.6 percent) compared to the state, and a higher representation of Asian residents (12.7 percent compared to 10.4 percent statewide).

Demographics

	Snohomish County	Washington state
Population by age, 2019		
Under 5 years old	6.3%	6.0%
Under 18 years old	22.4%	21.8%
65 years and older	14.0%	15.9%
Females, 2019	49.8%	49.9%
Race/ethnicity, 2019		
White	77.0%	78.5%
Black or African American	3.8%	4.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	1.6%	1.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander	12.7%	10.4%
Hispanic or Latino, any race	10.6%	13.0%

Educational attainment

Compared to Washington state and the U.S. as a whole, Snohomish County residents age 25 and above are more likely to have graduated from high school; 92.8 percent of Snohomish County residents over age 25 had earned a high school degree. This is proportionally higher than the state and the nation.

There were proportionally fewer Snohomish County residents with four-year college degrees than statewide. Thirty-three percent of Snohomish County residents age 25 and up had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36.0 percent for the state. Snohomish County residents were more likely to have attended some college or to have earned their associate's degree compared to the state and the nation.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

Useful links

- [County data tables](#)
- [Census Bureau Profile](#)
- [Snohomish County home page](#)
- [Snohomish County on ofm.wa.gov](#)
- [Snohomish County on ChooseWashington.com](#)
- [Snohomish County History](#)
- [Workforce Snohomish](#)
- [Economic Alliance Snohomish County](#)
- [Port of Edmonds](#)
- [Port of Everett](#)
- [Self Sufficiency Calculator for Washington State](#)
- [Puget Sound Regional Council](#)
- [Census Bureau QuickFacts](#)
- [Washington Ports](#)
- [WorkSource Snohomish County](#)

Employment Security Department is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Language assistance services for limited English proficient individuals are available free of charge. Washington Relay Service: 711.