Progress: Access to Quality Health Care

Before the 2014 expansion of coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 100,000 to 120,000 Denver residents were uninsured. Hispanics were uninsured at the highest rates. Since January 1, 2014, more than 86,000 residents are estimated to have gained coverage. Those with Medicaid coverage and those who remain uninsured continue to face challenges accessing care, particularly specialty care.

Highlight

- Many more people in Denver have health care coverage now than in 2013, due to Medicaid and Connect for Health Colorado.
- The Mile High Health Alliance is working to assure that health disparities can improve quality of life.

What do Differences in Health Measures Mean for the Community?

Health differences across communities or population groups are called health disparities. Many factors may be associated with health disparities, such as income, education, race, ethnicity or access to health care. Communities can advocate for and make changes to encourage healthy behaviors. For example, providing local places to exercise, healthier food options in public places, and smoking cessation programs in the work place can help individuals achieve better health. Working together to decrease health disparities can improve quality of life.

District 6’s Health Highlights

This report describes the health of District 6 residents in four public health priority areas: life expectancy, tobacco use, childhood obesity and mental health.

Demographics

Average Age: 39 | Average Income: $63,897
A majority of residents are White (87%). One in 10 identify as Hispanic.

Source: ESRI 2015 Demographic Estimates

Life Expectancy

District 6 life expectancy is 79.9 years, 1.3 years longer than Denver overall (78.6 years).

Tobacco Use

17% of District 6 young adults (18-24 years) use tobacco, the same as Denver overall (17%).

Childhood Obesity

9% of public school children (2-17 years) in District 6 neighborhoods are obese, 7% lower than Denver overall (16%).

Mental Health

10% of District 6 adults have been diagnosed with depression, which is common across all districts in Denver (13%).

Mental Health

SOURCE: ESRI 2015 Demographic Estimates

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Life Expectancy

Evaluating differences in life expectancy is one way to measure overall health and compare health by council district. Life expectancy reflects a person’s health, genetics, behaviors, race, gender and community. About 70 percent of factors affecting life expectancy and health can be modified or improved.

Differences in life expectancy between districts show that place matters. Community policies that address health equity (e.g., access to health care, recreation, transportation or healthy food) all play important roles in improving health for residents.

Highlights
- The average life expectancy in Denver is 78.6 years but varies as much as six years between districts, from 75.4 to 81.4 years.
- Districts with lower life expectancy often have higher levels of poverty and lower levels of education.

Tobacco Use

Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in Denver. Smoking rates are highest among young adults, ages 18-24 years-old. Young adults entering the work force directly from high school are more than twice as likely to smoke than those entering college. Smoking rates among this age group have remained relatively unchanged from 2001 to 2012. One way to decrease smoking rates is to prevent underage youth from ever starting to smoke.

Highlights
- People who don’t start smoking tobacco by age 21 years are very unlikely to ever become a chronic smoker.
- Access to cessation services and use of smoke-free policies can reduce tobacco use in the workplace.


**Childhood Obesity**

Obesity, a common and preventable condition, is related to unhealthy eating and physical inactivity. In Denver, one in six children is obese; however, the percent varies widely by council district. Exercise and nutritional habits are learned early. Dietary choices contribute to obesity: a 2013 survey reported that 25 percent of 7th and 8th graders drink one or more sugar sweetened drinks per day. The number of students in 2013 achieving the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day decreased every year as grade increased from middle school to high school.

**Highlights**

- Healthy eating is supported by providing healthier food and drink options in all public areas.
- All children should have access to quality physical education to meet daily requirements for physical activity.

**Mental Health**

Good health includes positive mental health. Depression is not just “feeling blue.” Depression is a medical disorder, just like diabetes or thyroid disease, that affects thoughts, feelings, behaviors and relationships. It is associated with both poor physical health and unhealthy behaviors, like thoughts of suicide and substance abuse. Depression influences sensitivity and reaction to pain, which can lead to overuse of controlled drugs. These may delay diagnosis and treatment. At least one in 10 adults in Denver is diagnosed with depression.

**Highlights**

- Depression, a common condition in Denver, is highly treatable.
- In 2013, more than one-third of community members reported having felt one or more days of poor mental health in the past 30 days.
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Highlights

- Many more people in Denver have health care coverage now than in 2013, due to Medicaid and Connect for Health Colorado.
- The Mile High Health Alliance is working to assure that people have access to comprehensive and coordinated care.

What do Differences in Health Measures Mean for the Community?

Health differences across communities or population groups are called health disparities. Many factors may be associated with health disparities, such as income, education, race, ethnicity or access to health care. Communities can advocate for and make changes to encourage healthy behaviors. For example, providing local places to exercise, healthier food options in public places, and smoking cessation programs in the work place can help individuals achieve better health. Working together to decrease health disparities can improve quality of life.

Denver County Enrollments

Coverage since January 2014 by Type of Coverage

- Total new Medicaid = 76,066
- 79% of new Medicaid enrollment is by people 21 years and older
- 21% of new Medicaid enrollment is by people 20 years and younger


Resources and References

More information about health topics and resources to support community work is available through BeHealthyDenver.org.

1 Colorado Tobacco Attitudes and Behaviors Survey (2001-2012) http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/community/CEPEG/TABS/Surveys/Pages/default.aspx
3 Healthy Kids Colorad Survey (2013) http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/community/CEPEG/UnitYouth/Pages/HealthyKidsSurvey.aspx
4 Helen and Arthur E. Johnson Depression Center - Conditions We Treat (2015) http://www.coloradodepressioncenter.org/conditions-we-treat.html