



Access to Care

Objective:

Increase the number of healthy years that residents live

Strategy:

Ensure access to affordable, appropriate, and quality physical and behavioral health services

Why is this strategy important?

The story of the health and well-being of King County residents can be misleading. In the aggregate, King County ranks well compared to other parts of the state or country on safety, social, and health report cards. However, these averages mask profound health and social disparities, particularly when disaggregated by geography, income, and race/ethnicity. These disparities represent the key storyline about the State of Health and Human Potential in King County. King County is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The 2012 King County Equity and Social Justice Annual Report notes that from 1980 to 2010, people of color in King County grew from 13 percent to 35 percent of the total population. This diversity is relatively more concentrated in South King County. Not only is poverty (and the poverty rate) increasing in general but it is increasing at a faster rate outside of the City of the Seattle.

Since the adoption of the 2010-2014 King County Strategic Plan, much has changed in the landscape of health and human services. One change is the great recession which has exacerbated the already significant disparities in the health and well being of residents across geography, race/ethnicity, and income. The service systems that are designed to combat these disparities are constrained by rising health costs, reduced funding, and growing numbers of individuals and families with complex needs that often include economic hardship. At the same time, there is the recognition that while the role of clinical health services is vital, medical care alone accounts for only about 10 percent of premature deaths. Improving health and human potential requires looking outside the walls of the clinic and focusing on fixing the conditions within local communities that underpin poor health. The passage of the Affordable Care Act offers new opportunities to address these underlying factors and build on existing innovative local work.

How is our performance?

King County has identified 14 determinants of equity that are the conditions in which people live, learn, work and play. Equal access to these determinants is necessary for all people to thrive and reach their full potential regardless of race, income, or language spoken, including optimum health. Throughout AIMS High, many indicators show current disparities.

Increase the number of healthy years that residents live For this objective, King County tracks years of healthy life by subregion. The difference in years of healthy life between East and South subre

gions is over seven years. These disparities in years of health life can be seen across race/ethnicity and income categories.

Many factors influence these disparities. Examples include:

- The rate of obesity ranges from 8 percent to 35 percent depending upon where you live in King County with the highest rates found in south King County.
- African-American adults are nearly twice as likely as whites to be current smokers.
- Latino adults are three times as likely to be without health insurance and whites. African Americans are nearly two times as likely to be without health insurance.

Besides the tremendous toll on the lives of so many residents and communities in King County, these conditions also have a major economic impact that impedes growth and prosperity of the region. They drive up the cost of health care and other crisis and emergency systems. The distressing result of these indicators is that in King County place matters as a predictor of one's quality of life and life expectancy.

Protect the health of communities

Most deaths today result from diseases and conditions that are shaped by our social and environmental surroundings. Communities experience ill health because of intrinsic conditions such as houses and rental units that are substandard and contaminated with mold and toxins like lead, streets that aren't safe for walking to school or work because of crime or just a lack of sidewalks, and healthy food that isn't easily available, though high-fat, sugar-loaded processed food is for sale at the corner convenience store. The focus of this objective is to support safe surroundings -- such as air, food, water, and the environment -- and to fix the community conditions that underpin poor health. While no one or two measures capture all of the conditions under this objective, the example below illustrates current issues with disparities.

Communities that have access to healthy food, walkable neighborhoods, and trails and parks support making healthy choices easy for residents. At this time, there is currently not a composite measure available to indicate overall how well this region is doing. For these determinants of equity, however, there can be significant differences across communities. For example, the existence of food deserts -- lacking access to fresh food -- is concentrated in south Seattle and south King County.

Support the optimal growth and development of children and youth

The growth and development of children and youth have a major influence on this region's future -- economically, culturally, and civically. Tracking this growth and development can be reflected in two key areas -- preparing youth to succeed in school or vocational programs and helping them to be healthy and safe not just during their development years but throughout their lives. Disparities persist across most measures.

- In general, the great recession has disproportionately impacted youth employment as the gap between the youth unemployment rate and the national unemployment rate has widened.
- One measure of preparedness is high school graduation. For instance, while King County's overall rate for graduating from high school within five years is well above the rate for Washing

ton State, significant disparities exist by race/ethnicity such as 92 percent for white versus 75 percent for Latino students.

- Success in early education has a strong ripple effect on a child's future educational and vocational achievement. As noted on the Communities Count website, the "percentage of 4th graders who met state reading standards ranged from 58.3 percent in Tukwila to 90.8 percent in Mercer Island."
- While lower than the overall national average, 21 percent of youth in King County were overweight or obese in 2010. South King County experienced the highest rate of youth obesity.

What can you do?

Learn more about equity and social justice, including the determinants of equity, and what King County is doing

Moving forward

King County will continue to monitor health disparities, working towards development of a comprehensive health equity index. A comprehensive health equity index can help the county evaluate its efforts as a whole and make strategic decisions about how we tackle persistent disparities in health outcomes. In addition, King County is developing a policy surveillance tool that will monitor where policies are adopted that address access to healthy foods, limited access to sugary drinks, smoke-free environments, and how our communities are planning for increased physical activity. King County's equity and social justice tool helps the County to ensure that policies and actions appropriately impact health and other disparities, in order to promote optimal health for all in our community.

Finally, as noted in the Health and Human Services Transformation report , the delivery systems for health and human services are not currently well positioned to meet these needs.

- **What Determines Health?** -- Only 10 percent of health is dictated by provision of health care services. The rest is driven by behaviors; social and environmental factors; and genetics.
- **Overspending on Medical Care; Under Investing in Human Services** -- Given the small role of health care, investing in social and health services is critical to health outcomes. A recent study showed the spending on social services relative to health services was associated with better health outcomes in 30 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.³ Yet, in the United States, much more is spent on medical care than other prosperous countries with higher life expectancy.
- **Fragmented Service Delivery Systems** -- While King County has top rated medical services and innovative community-based social and human services, these services are not aligned to meet the most pressing needs of all communities and do not support a coordinated approach to prevention in the communities experiencing the worst health outcomes.