New Report Highlights Progress in Urban Health

Big Cities Health Inventory and Data Platform Reveal Health Status for 26 Cities

Washington, D.C. – A new report released today by the Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC) reveals that America’s largest cities have made remarkable progress in reducing mortality rates for diabetes and cancer while improving adult obesity rates. The Big Cities Health Inventory builds on a 2007 report that found cities were far less healthy than the country as a whole. The newer data offer a more complex picture than they did eight years ago. On a number of measures, cities are faring better, but significant health issues remain.

“In 2007, the Big Cities Health Inventory characterized America’s big cities as unhealthy places to live. Today, that is no longer true,” said Chrissie Juliano, MPP, Director of the BCHC. “While challenges remain, the cities included in this report have made remarkable progress toward improving the health of their communities. Using sound science and innovative programming, these cities are leading the way in tackling our nation’s most pervasive health problems.”

The BCHI includes three key findings:

1. Cities have improved health outcomes, both when compared with their standing in 2007 and when compared with the nation as a whole. However, significant challenges remain.

As cities continue to conduct campaigns focused on key health issues, the overall health of urban America appears to be improving. Since the 2007 report, death rates for nearly every measure are lower, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. However, when urban Americans’ health is compared with the nation as a whole, the picture is less straightforward. While cancer death rates are on par with national numbers, heart disease deaths are far higher in urban America. Diabetes death rates, on the other hand, are much lower in these cities when compared with the rest of the country.

2. Health disparities between black and white Americans remain, while the health of Hispanics outpaces the general population.

BCHI data reveal that racial disparities persist in the country’s urban centers. Black populations bear a disproportionate burden of negative health outcomes, including
higher mortality rates for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS than their white counterparts. Further, the health outcomes of black city residents often lag behind nationwide figures for black health outcomes.

Conversely, the BCHI also shows extraordinary strides made in the health of Hispanic populations. Across the 26 cities, they have lower rates of cancer than the population as a whole, as well as fewer HIV-related, firearm-related, heart disease and infant death rates. In several categories, they fare better than white residents, including on female breast cancer, lung cancer, and heart disease deaths. Diabetes mortality was an outlier: Hispanics fared worse than the general population.

3. Cities are on track to meet the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Healthy People 2020 goals.

The Healthy People 2020 goals provide 10-year objectives to improve the health of all Americans. The BCHI shows that several cities have met mid-decade Winnable Battle 2015 benchmarks, and some have even already reached the Healthy People 2020 target.

For example:

- Twenty-three cities (out of 23) successfully reduced the diabetes death rate, meeting the 2020 target.
- Twelve (out of 23) cities successfully reduced the overall cancer death rate, meeting the 2020 target.
- Twenty-one (out of 23) cities met the 2015 target for reducing motor vehicle crash-related deaths, while one, Houston, has already met the 2020 target.
- Seventeen (out of 20) cities met the 2020 target for reducing adult obesity, while ten (out of 13) cities met the 2020 target for reducing the proportion of adolescents who are obese.

“Public health officials who work every day to improve the lives of urban Americans will benefit greatly from the insights in this report,” LaMar Hasbrouck, MD, Executive Director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) said. “We know that public health work that is informed by best practices and sound data translates to great progress and better outcomes, not just for local health departments, but for the communities they serve.”

In addition to the top findings and BCHI report, the BCHC has made more than 12,000 data points – more than 30 health indicators across 26 cities – available to the public to support additional research and data-driven program and policy development. The data platform can be found at bchi.bigcitieshealth.org.

“CDC is proud to support the Big Cities Health Inventory. The ability to access local, reliable data about the nation’s most important health challenges is vital to effective public health practice,” said Judy Monroe, MD, a Deputy Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Director of the agency’s Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support. “Coupled with the BCHI data platform, this work is a significant step forward for the field of public health and for data-informed decision making at the city level.”
This is the sixth edition of the *Big Cities Health Inventory* and the first produced by the BCHC. This edition expands upon previous versions by sharing case studies on innovative and effective efforts that cities have implemented to address some of CDC’s “Winnable Battles,” including tobacco, food safety, HIV/AIDS, community violence, and nutrition, physical activity, and obesity.

The data set (which is available at [bchi.bigcitieshealth.org](http://bchi.bigcitieshealth.org)) is the first of its kind to provide a broad, comparable view of city health. It presents 34 health indicators that encompass nine broad categories of public health importance: HIV/AIDS; cancer; food safety; infectious disease; maternal and child health; tobacco; nutrition, physical activity, and obesity; injury and violence; and behavioral health and substance abuse. Additional sociodemographic measures provide contextual information on poverty, unemployment, educational attainment, household income, place of birth, life expectancy, and all-cause mortality.

The *BCHI* includes data from Atlanta (Fulton County), Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Fort Worth (Tarrant County), Houston, Kansas City (MO), Las Vegas (Clark County), Los Angeles County, Miami (Miami-Dade County), Minneapolis, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, Phoenix (Maricopa County), Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego County, San Francisco, San Jose (Santa Clara County), Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

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The Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC) is a forum for the leaders of America’s largest metropolitan health departments to exchange strategies and jointly address issues to promote and protect the health and safety of their residents. Collectively, BCHC member jurisdictions directly impact 51 million people, or one in six Americans. The Big Cities Health Coalition is an independent project of the National Association of City and County Health Officials made possible through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the de Beaumont Foundation. For more information, please visit [www.bigcitieshealth.org](http://www.bigcitieshealth.org).

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