

# health

## HOW CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND ENVIRONMENT AFFECT HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICE NEEDS IN HOUSTON



Good health is an essential component in quality of life for both individuals and a community as a whole. As our region and population continues to grow, it is important to evaluate public-health challenges and needs deriving from shifting demographics, changing social and physical environments, and growing prevalence of illness so that we can better identify and prioritize opportunities for better health in our communities.

Despite the region's renowned healthcare resources, many Houston-area residents have no health insurance coverage and have difficulty accessing needed care. Although the number of uninsured has decreased since the Affordable Care Act coverage provisions went into effect and health insurance coverage numbers in Houston remain lower than the state and national averages, the incidence of uninsured increased between 2016 and 2017. The number of uninsured among children under 19 was nearly 11% for the three-county area in 2017, more than double the national average (5%). Hispanic children have a much higher rate of uninsured (15.9%), nearly three times that of white children.<sup>1</sup>

Daily habits, lifestyle choices, and risky behaviors also have a significant impact on the overall state of health in our region. While individuals may be responsible for making healthy choices, the ability to choose and make changes also depends on the physical and cultural environment available to them. Unfortunately, factors like high crime rates, lack of sidewalk access, pollution, and poor housing in our communities only add to the challenge.

Our region faces several challenges associated with health behaviors and risk factors. One in five adults aged 20 years and over across the three-county area had no leisure-time physical activity—even though almost 82% of households in the region have easy access to parks—contributing to high rates of obesity in our region. Food insecurity remains a substantial problem affecting more than 911,000 people in our region, including more than 350,000 children. School-aged children struggling with access to food are more likely to have poor academic performance and more social and behavioral problems.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, teen pregnancy has significant impact on health outcomes for mothers, children, families, and our community. Although improving since 2008, the teen birth rate remains higher than the national average with major differences across counties and by race/ethnicity. On a more positive note, the drug overdose death rate in the region is only half of the national rate.

Health gaps persist not only by location, but also by race and income. In general, adults living in Fort Bend and Montgomery counties are healthier than those in Harris County. Racial disparities in life expectancy remain in Harris County, with black residents' life expectancies averaging about four years less than those of white residents. Most of the black-white gap in life expectancy at age one can be accounted for by differences in socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Other public health concerns include the prevalence of diabetes in Harris County, low birth weight in Fort Bend and Harris counties, and cancer mortality in Montgomery. Fortunately, across all counties we see a major decline in new cancer incidence rates that is worth highlighting.

Closely connected with physical health, mental health is also a vital part of our lives. Positive mental health can promote productivity and allow people to cope with adversity; while mental disorders may cause disability, pain, or even death.<sup>4</sup> Mental illnesses are common and vary in severity. Harris County has a higher percentage of adults reporting 14 or more days of poor mental health (12.3%), compared to 9% in Fort Bend County and 10% in Montgomery. Additionally, suicide rates are on the rise, particularly in Montgomery County. On average, the suicide rate for males is about four times the rate for females. More education is needed to reduce stigma toward persons with mental illness and ultimately improve mental health in everyday life.

*The more we understand the public health challenges and needs, the better we can bridge health disparities and promote good health for all.*

# 4 Subtopics of Health



## MENTAL HEALTH

# 988:1

One mental health provider for every 988 residents in the three-county area, **less than half the access compared to the national average.**



### ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

## 1,522:1 → 1,180:1

Ratio of population to primary care providers has improved steadily in Fort Bend County, surpassing state and national averages. Meanwhile, primary care ratios in Harris County are worse than national and state averages.

### HEALTH OUTCOMES

## ↓12-15%

decrease in the number of new cases of cancer per 100,000 people between 2012 and 2016 across the three counties, a much faster decline than the state rate (6%) and the national rate (4%).

### HEALTH BEHAVIORS AND RISKS

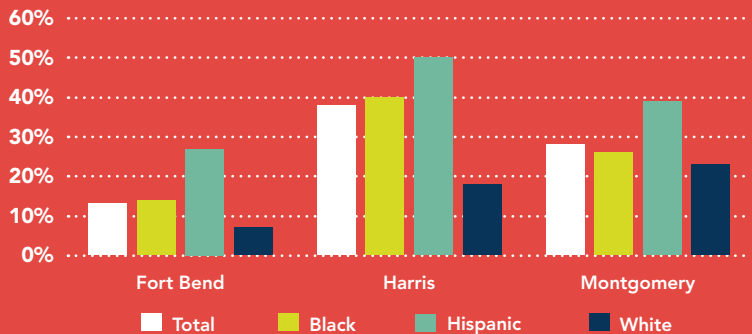
## 1 in 5 adults aged 20+ had no leisure-time physical activity

Prevalence of exercise and other extracurricular physical activity correlates strongly with race and income.

**EXPLORE ALL FOUR SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE.**

### TEEN BIRTHS

Teen Birth Rate By Race/Ethnicity (Per 1,000 Females Aged 15-19)



Teen birth rates declined steadily since 2008 for all three counties. However, when looking at combined 2011-2017 data, teen **birth rates among Hispanic and black teens were about two to three times higher** than the rate for white teens in Fort Bend and Harris counties. The **birth rate among white teens in Montgomery County is much higher** than that in Fort Bend and Harris Counties.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

### UNINSURED RATES

## 19.4% ↑ 20.7% uninsured

Between 2016 and 2017, the share of uninsured residents under 65 **increased across the three-county area** for the first time since the Affordable Care Act went into effect.

In 2017, **1-in-4 adults ages 19 to 64 were uninsured** across the three-county area.

Among **children under 19, nearly 11% were uninsured** in the three-county area in 2017—more than **double the U.S. average.**

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

### FOOD INSECURITY

## 911,000+ people, including more than 350,000 children food insecure in 2017

Across the three-county area and for each county, we see higher rates of food insecurity compared to the nation. Though slow, we are seeing declining food insecurity rates across the region.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:



### FREQUENT MENTAL DISTRESS

## 12.3% reported 14 or more poor mental health days a month in Harris County.

In 2018, more Harris County residents reported having two weeks or more of poor mental health a month than the national average. A smaller share of Fort Bend County (9%) and Montgomery County (10%) residents reported such frequent mental distress.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

### LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: Fort Bend Harris Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See page 30-33 of 2019 Summary Report for references and data sources.