

health

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALL HOUSTONIANS IS ESSENTIAL TO A THRIVING, EQUITABLE REGION.

Good health is integral to quality of life. In addition to genetics and daily habits, physical and mental health is shaped by the environment, ability to access affordable, quality health care, and access to community resources, like parks, fresh affordable food, and supportive social networks.¹ These social determinants, including our occupation, income, and education level, are responsible for up to *half* of our health outcomes.²

Because these social determinants are critical to our physical and mental health, they are also responsible for explaining why the largest health disparities are found across neighborhoods and racial lines. The practices and policies related to residential segregation led to a reduction in public and private investments and employment opportunities in predominantly Black and Brown communities.^{3, 4} This disinvestment laid the groundwork for active harm by allowing polluting industries to operate without enforcing regulations and limited residents' opportunities for better health.⁵



Despite reductions in cancer mortality and lower rates of premature death than the state and nation,⁶ many Houstonians continue to experience poor physical health. More Houstonians have become sedentary, food insecure, obese, and diabetic in recent years, with people of color and low-income households disproportionately burdened. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these issues.

One in four adults in the three-county area does not exercise,⁷ and the prevalence of obesity and diabetes has risen, particularly among people of color. The proportion

of adults aged 20 and over in Montgomery County with obesity rose to 34% in 2019 from 20% in 2011 — the fastest increase in the region.⁸ These outcomes ultimately lead to a decline in quality of life and contribute to the most common causes of death. Racial disparities in life expectancy remain; the average life expectancy for Black residents in Harris County is 74 years — five years shorter than white residents.⁹

People without health insurance, or quality insurance, receive less preventative care and tend to have worse health outcomes than those with insurance.¹⁰ Texas has had the highest number and percentage of residents without health insurance each year for the last decade, and 1.2 million Houston-area residents under 65 have no health insurance coverage, including 232,000 children.

Lack of health insurance is also the largest contributor to delaying or not accessing prenatal care.¹¹ Women in Fort Bend and Harris counties receive prenatal care in their first trimester at lower rates than in Montgomery County, Texas, and the nation. The early prenatal care access rate in Fort Bend County fell by more than 10 percentage points to 61% in 2020 from 71% in 2019. One in 20 women in Harris County do not receive *any* prenatal care.¹²

Mental health is critical to well-being and is closely connected with physical health. Positive mental health can promote productivity and help us cope with adversity, while mental disorders may cause disability or even death.¹³ About 13% of Houston-area adults reported at least two weeks of poor mental health within one month during a 2019 survey — two points higher than in 2016.¹⁴ Just as suicide rates in the Houston region have ticked up, access to mental health care providers remains low.¹⁵ Our mental health worsened in 2020 and 2021 from emotional and mental distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with troubling implications for the future.¹⁶

The more we understand gaps in physical and mental health care access and outcomes, we can make investments to eliminate health disparities and improve outcomes for all residents.

4 Subtopics of Health

MENTAL HEALTH



1 out of 8

adults in the three-county Houston region reported mental distress for at least half the days in a one-month period in 2019, with the highest rates of distress in Harris and Montgomery counties.

HEALTH RISKS & OUTCOMES



IN THE HOUSTON REGION

- 1 in 6** adults are food insecure
- 1 in 4** adults don't get enough exercise
- 1 in 3** adults live with obesity

While individuals may be responsible for making healthy choices, the ability to choose and make changes also depends on the resources available to them. Half of Harris County adults who earn less than \$25,000 annually have obesity compared to about one-third of higher-earning adults.

EXPLORE ALL SUBTOPICS FURTHER ON OUR WEBSITE
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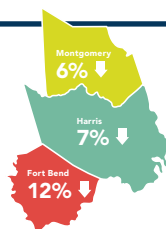
MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH



3x

Infant mortality rate for babies born to Black mothers in Harris County in 2018 is three times that for babies born to white women.

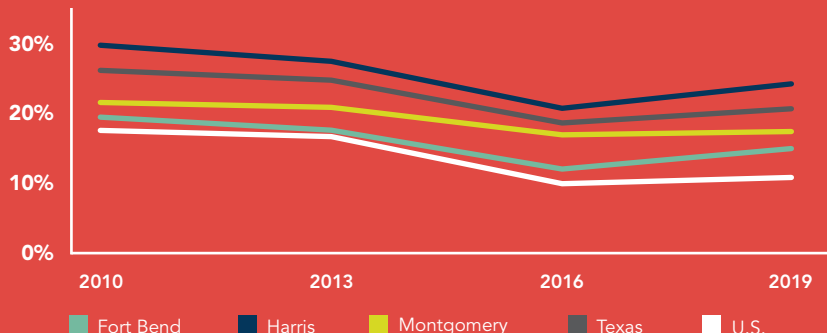
HEALTH CARE ACCESS



The ratio of preventable hospital stays per 100,000 Medicare enrollees fell in Houston's three counties between 2016 and 2018.

UNINSURED RATES

Percent of population under 65 without health insurance



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE)

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT



8.5% of babies born in the three-county area in 2020 weighed less than 5.5 lbs.

In addition to the high risk of infant mortality, infants with low birth weight also face short- and long-term health conditions which can permanently affect their quality of life.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

CANCER MORTALITY

Per 100,000 people (age-adjusted)

FORT BEND = 111 HARRIS = 140 MONTGOMERY = 138

Cancer mortality rates in 2018 have steadily declined in Houston's three-county region and remain lower than the U.S. and Texas rate. Between 2010 and 2018, the cancer mortality rate in the United States fell 13%, compared with declines of 22% in Fort Bend, 13% in Harris and 15% in Montgomery counties.

Trend over time: Compared to nation:

COVID ANXIETY

1 out of 3

When COVID cases were soaring in July 2020, and vaccines were still in development, 1 out of 3 Houston-area adults reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge for **more than half the days** in the last week.

LEGENDS

LOCATIONS: Fort Bend Harris Montgomery

COMPARISONS: Better Worse Same No Info

See next page for references and data sources.

references

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DATA SOURCES

SUBTOPICS

Health Care Access: County Health Rankings; Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Maternal & Child Health: CDC Wonder

Mental Health: 2022 County Health Rankings

Health Risks & Outcomes: Feeding America, 2021; 2022 County Health Rankings 2022, 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; CDC, U.S. Diabetes Surveillance System, 2019

INDICATORS HIGHLIGHTED

Uninsured Rates: U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE)

Low Birth Weight: CDC, Wonder

COVID Anxiety: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 11 (July 9–14, 2020)

Cancer Mortality: Texas Cancer Registry