

Durham's Community Health Assessment

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Last spring, an elderly African-American man in Bahama was asked what he thought were the most serious health problems in his community. He commented, "I think I saw on TV where they said that the cancer rate for black males in NC was like, almost the highest in the nation. And we're trying to figure out, why NC? I mean, it's something to think about – black males in NC have the highest rate of cancer of any state in the nation. Is it the water we drink, or what?... Is it the climate, is it the whatever it is in NC? I wish I did know."

His questions are important. Every four years, Durham County conducts a community health assessment to try to help answer questions such as these. How healthy are our residents? What is affecting their health? What groups of residents are not as healthy as others, or do not get as much needed health care? What can we do about it?

In 2007, the Partnership for a Healthy Durham and the Health Department completed the latest assessment. It is based on information from two telephone surveys, a survey of middle and high school students, community listening sessions, and a community assessment of patients at Lincoln Community Health Center. It also includes information from several other sources such as state health statistics.

Arranged according to things that affect health, here are some of the key findings:

Health, Function, and Well-Being

- Half of Durham residents said that they are in "excellent" or "very good" health.
- 96% of Durham residents were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their lives.
- 12.3% of Durham residents over five years old have a disability.
- 32% of the 46 Latino students surveyed in high schools said they tried to commit suicide in the past year (compared to 15% of other students).

Disease

- For most of the leading causes of death, minorities have a much higher death rate, particularly males.
- In 2006, 30 infants in Durham died before their first birthday. 22 of these were minorities, for a rate of 12.6 deaths / 1,000 live births, compared to 7.2 / 1,000 for all of Durham County.
- In 2006, the overall HIV prevalence rate in Durham County was 42.5 per 100,000 persons; this rate is higher for African-American men and women.

Healthcare

- Between 13-26% of Durham residents under 65 years old are uninsured. The uninsured are more likely to be without a college education, minorities, in households earning less than \$50,000 a year, or male.
- Of the patients who go to Lincoln Community Health Center, 78% have no health insurance and 82% live in poverty, compared to 51% and 54% of the patient populations of other community health centers in North Carolina (respectively).

Prosperity

- Durham has higher median and family incomes than other North Carolina counties; however, the percentage of families (with children) living in poverty in Durham rose from 14.8% in 2000 to 16.6% in 2006.
- In 2007, 539 homeless people were identified in Durham.

Physical environment

- More children are being screened for lead exposure, with fewer children testing positive.
- While 40% of Durham's overall population described their residence as an excellent place to live, only 30% of African-Americans and 20% of Latinos agreed.

Social environment

- After dropping each year since 1997, Durham's violent crime rate increased in 2006.
- Almost 46% of students in Durham Public Schools qualify for free or reduced lunches because they have lower family income.
- 42% of people in Durham County feel safe walking in their neighborhoods at night, but only 20% of Latinos do.

Individual behaviors

- Between 57-65% of Durham adults are overweight or obese, with obesity rising particularly fast among those with less education.
- 27% of children 2-4 years old enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program in Durham County were overweight, up from 10% in 2002.
- 27.5% of Durham's residents eat the recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables, and 36.3% exercise regularly.

Look for the insert about the assessment in today's paper. More of the data and further details can also be found online at www.healthydurham.org.

The people of Durham have shared this information with us, and now it's our mutual responsibility to address the issues that they have brought to our attention. We must take care of our own health in partnership with the medical establishment. The Partnership for a Healthy Durham has eight committees focused on priority areas identified in our health assessments:

- Access to Healthcare
- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention
- HIV / STD Prevention and Treatment
- Infant Mortality Prevention
- Injury Prevention
- Mental Healthcare
- Obesity and Chronic Illness Prevention
- Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment

These groups will be developing action plans based on the information in the assessments for 2008-2012. We welcome anyone from the community – whether you are currently involved in health and healthcare or not – to join us in our efforts to make sure that future data reflects solid progress towards making Durham a healthier community.

CLIP and SAVE

Partnership for a Healthy Durham – a **coalition** of local agencies and communities, with the goal of collaboratively improving the physical, mental, and social health and well-being of Durham's residents. www.healthydurham.org, 560-7833.

Healthy Carolinians – a statewide network of partnerships that address health and safety issues at the community level. www.healthycarolinians.org, 707-5150.

Results-Based Accountability – a Durham City and County government joint initiative that adopted nine goals – or priority outcomes – for our community. They established community work-groups committed to improving our community in different areas. www.durhamnc.gov/rba, 560-0032.

“The Partnership for a Healthy Durham is the Healthy Carolinians planning team for Durham and serves as the Health Committee for the City and County’s Results-Based Accountability initiative. The Access to Care Committee is responsible for this series of articles. For more information on the Partnership, see www.healthydurham.org or call 560-7833.”