



Measuring the Health of Milwaukee
 Socioeconomic Status and Health

Many researchers have found that there is a relationship between people's socioeconomic status (SES, commonly measured as a combination of income and education) and their health. This has been documented in studies in the United States as well as in countries around the world. The relationship between SES and health has also been found to exist in the City of Milwaukee.

The Center for Urban Population Health and the City of Milwaukee Health Department have prepared the Milwaukee Health Report by analyzing local data in order to update what we already know about the relationship between health and socioeconomic status. The goal of this report is to provide policy makers and community organizations with meaningful information that can be used in addressing Milwaukee's health issues.

Now in its third year, this report continues to summarize the current health of the city, as well as the distribution of key factors that may have implications for future health.



Milwaukee Health Report



Program Planning: Sharon Adams and Emma Nash, Walnut Way

Findings

Dramatic health disparities by socioeconomic status exist – and persist – within Wisconsin’s largest city. These findings continue to support those of other researchers, including the new National County Health Rankings produced by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, that socioeconomic status is one of the most powerful drivers of population-level health outcomes. As we noted in our 2007 report (Vila et al., 2007), “widely disparate environmental and socioeconomic contexts mean that not every individual has the same opportunity to initiate or sustain healthy choices.” Furthermore, it has become clearer since then that the chronic stress of living with poverty, racism, low educational attainment, and social disruption can affect people’s physiology directly

through chronic elevations of stress hormones such as cortisol, which, through their effects on blood pressure, glucose metabolism, and immune system functioning, can predispose individuals to heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases (Conroy, Sandel & Zuckerman, 2010).

In 2010, the report found that the lower SES zipcode communities were worse off than Wisconsin and the US in 25 of the total 34 health measures used in this report. Our current report continues to call upon all health professionals, elected officials, and policymakers to “work together to help change public policy so that individuals are more likely to live, work, and interact in environments that facilitate and support healthy behaviors” (Vila et al., 2007) and healthier outcomes. This means attending to both governmental and institutional policies that improve the built environment, encourage educational attainment, and social cohesion, and reduce unemployment, racism, and poverty. The [Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Plan](#) (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2010) and the UW [“What Works”](#) document (Booske, Kindig, Nelson & Remington, 2009) provide additional details, objectives, and recommendations.

In short, Milwaukee’s large population, poor health outcomes, and unacceptable health disparities – many associated with socioeconomic status – continue to have significant impact on the overall health of the state as well as on the economic vibrancy of the city and the state. It seems likely that improvements in the city’s and the state’s health outcomes will require solutions related to their associated upstream, socioeconomic factors.

POLICY

Highlights

How Is It Being Used?

Program Planning: Lindsay Heights Neighborhood Health Alliance is a gathering of community-anchored groups and neighbors, their friends and partners that promotes and serves as a resource for health. Their mission is to reduce health disparities and create a deep and sustained culture of health and community sufficiency in our families and in our neighborhoods. Through conversations with neighbors and community partners, they have come to recognize that chronic illnesses including hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease are among the top health concerns in our community. Guided by the community voice, and informed by the Milwaukee Health Report they have created a growing coalition, piloted community programs, and conducted neighborhood assessments.

Aligning Resources: In 2008 the Zilber Family Foundation announced a \$50 million commitment to Milwaukee neighborhoods, starting with Lindsay Heights and Clarke Square. It formed a partnership—called the **Zilber Neighborhood Initiative**—with Walnut Way Conservation Corp. in Lindsay Heights, Journey House in Clarke Square, LISC Milwaukee, and United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee to organize the effort. Since then, Lindsay Heights and Clarke Square residents, educators, business owners, and nonprofit leaders have come together to envision the future of their neighborhoods. The Foundation supported this work with multi-year grants for staff, operating expenses, organizing and planning, as well as funding for organizational development, technical assistance, and "early action" projects. The Center has presented and provided updated data from the Milwaukee Health Report for the two targeted neighborhoods. In addition, the Center has provided data for Milwaukee and discussed how data can be used to inform future investments.



Want to Know More?

Two videos have been created to provide an additional resource for those who are interested in understanding the process and project.

[The Milwaukee Health Report](#) video talks with a few individuals who use the report and provides insight to how the report has supported their missions.

[Unplugged: The Milwaukee Health Report](#) provides a simple and brief overview of the methodology and findings of the report. This video is without PowerPoint presentations or podiums, just our staff and a whiteboard.

Educating & Informing The report and its authors continue to be used to educate and inform. Each year for example, authors guest lecture and facilitate a discussion utilizing the report for the UW School of Medicine and Public Health's TRIUMPH program participants. The TRIUMPH program provides medical students an opportunity to learn and work in urban settings like Milwaukee.

The report has also been a significant source of information and data for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel; most recently as it has initiated a year-long series covering the death of children before their first birthday.

JOBS

Map of Milwaukee by SES

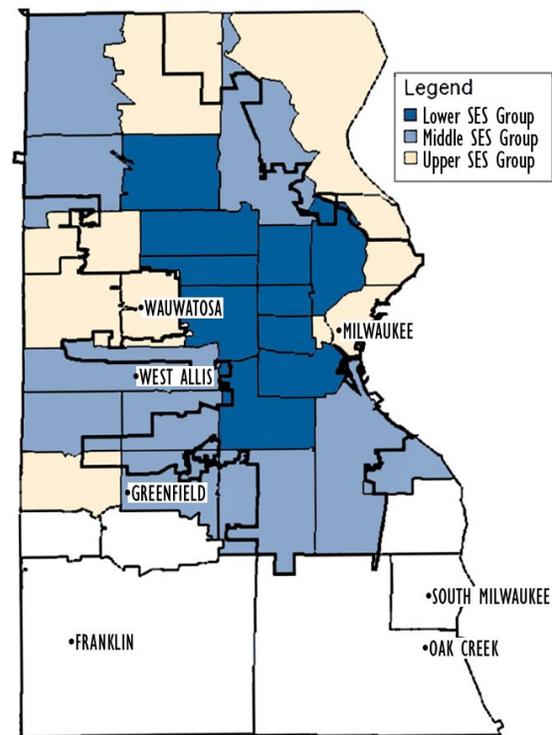
As the largest city in Wisconsin, Milwaukee contains 10.3% of the state's population. In 2008, the *Wisconsin County Health Rankings* compared Milwaukee's health outcomes and health determinants with the rest of the state; the City of Milwaukee ranked worse than all but one county in overall health outcomes, and worse than all but one county in health determinants, or risk factors for future health (Taylor, Athens, Booske, O'Connor, Jones, & Remington, 2008).

There is no reason to believe that the City's rank has improved since then. The Center gratefully acknowledges the foundational work of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute's [Wisconsin County Health Rankings](#), which were first published in 2003 and included the City of Milwaukee beginning in 2006. The *Milwaukee Health Report* builds upon that work, particularly by examining the disparities in health outcomes and health determinants between different areas of Milwaukee, as defined by socioeconomic status (SES).

Socioeconomic status is an index made up of income and education.

The *Milwaukee Health Report 2010* is based upon the population health framework developed by Kindig and Stoddart (2003). In that framework, health outcomes are considered the result of a set of health determinants (e.g., healthcare access and quality, health behaviors, physical environment, and socioeconomic determinants such as income and education). Thus, the distribution of health outcomes and health disparities results from differences in the distribution of the determinants in the population.

City of Milwaukee by ZIP Codes and SES



Future Plans

Center for Urban Population Health faculty and staff continue to compile and analyze sources of local data. The 2011 Milwaukee Health Report is scheduled to be released in June 2011. In addition to its release, this year its authors will contribute to a local workshop sponsored by the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Program and the American Psychological Association with funding from the Centers for Disease Control. The workshop, titled, **Socioeconomic Status Related Cancer Disparities Program (SESRCDD)**, will target community, academic and health care providers working to improve the lives of our communities as they relate to cancer.

As an extension of the report, the Center is in the process of developing a website that will provide a centralized location for the data, analysis and reports that are beyond the Milwaukee Health Report but are equally important.

Stay tuned for the updated report this summer and the Health of Milwaukee website this fall.