



CIVIC HEALTH & PUBLIC HEALTH

According to research by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), volunteering can positively influence both physical and mental health, as it can help to build confidence, provide a sense of purpose, prevent depression, and decrease mortality.¹

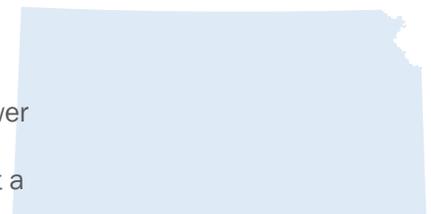
“People’s engagement in society and their associations and networks, as well as the characteristics of their communities profoundly affect their quality of life. The attributes commonly discussed under the rubric “social capital”—political participation; engagement in community organizations; connecting with friends, family, and neighbors; and attitudes toward and relationships with neighbors, government, and groups unlike one’s own—are often associated with positive outcomes in many areas of life. These include physical health, altruism, compliance with the law, education, employment, and child welfare.”ⁱⁱ -The Committee on National Statistics Panel on Measuring Social and Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion in Surveys.



FINDINGS IN ACTION

Finding: Kansas groups that are the least politically engaged also experience the poorest health outcomes and struggle to access health care. Examples include:

- The percentage of African Americans and Latinos in Kansas who reported lower levels of overall health were also less likely to vote in local elections. (African Americans reported voting in local elections at a rate of 46.3% and Latinos at a rate of 26.8%, compared to non-Hispanic whites at 61.6%.)
- Sociodemographic factors, such as education, income, race, and ethnicity are highly related to civic engagement. The low level of political involvement for certain population groups suggests important perspectives are underrepresented in the democratic process in Kansas.



Action: The Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) collaborated on the first Kansas Civic Health Index after establishing a new focus on civic health. Findings of the Kansas CHI revealed similar disparities in public health outcomes as civic engagement across the state. To address the disparities, KHF is pursuing strategies to increase civic engagement in those communities. This action begins by awarding mini-grants to five organizations in Kansas that will focus on increasing voter participation in upcoming elections in parts of the state with high rates of poverty, poor health outcomes, and high rates of uninsured residents.

“In recent years we’ve been paying close attention to the widening gaps in health outcomes across different populations in Kansas, as we believe these disparities greatly impact the overall health of our state. This report, and our partnership with NCoC, allowed us to investigate any common links between disparities in health outcomes and civic engagement.”

-Steve Coen, President and CEO of the Kansas Health Foundation

FINDINGS IN ACTION

Finding: Compared to the top 50 metropolitan areas in America, greater Seattle ranked among the highest when it came to:

- Joining a school, neighborhood, or community association (1st),
- Buying or boycotting a product (2nd),
- Volunteering (3rd), and
- Always voting in local elections (6th).



However, residents fared among the worst when comparing indicators of informal participation such as:

- Talking with neighbors frequently (48th), and
- Exchanging favors with neighbors frequently (37th).

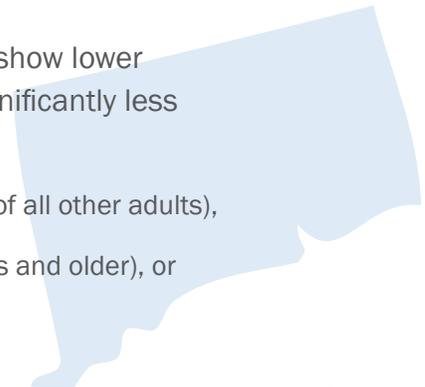
Action: Seattle City Club has recognized that while the city excels on many areas of civic health, there is still work to be done. They have cited cross-sector partnerships among their list of transformational successes resulting from the CHI. Among these, they have worked with the Snohomish County Health Leadership Coalition to incorporate civic health development in its overall goal to improve county residents' wellness.

There's a countywide initiative to improve health—and without the Greater Seattle Civic Health Index, health would have been defined as nutrition, physical health, mental and emotional health. But, because of our collaboration, civic health is now one of the four pillars that the community is using to define its health and to create programming to improve health.

-Diane Douglas, Executive Director, Seattle CityClub

Finding: In Connecticut, young adults (18-to-24 years old) in particular show lower levels of political and civic engagement. In 2013, young adults were significantly less likely than others to:

- Attend a public meeting (2.1% of adults 18-to-24 years compared to 11.8% of all other adults),
- Give to charity (23.9% of adults 18-to-24 years and 62.5% of adults 25 years and older), or
- Register and cast votes.



Action: Everyday Democracy has worked with Secretary of State Denise Merrill to establish the Connecticut Civic Health Advisory Group which represents over 50 stakeholders from every sector. Over the past four years, the group has initiated projects on topics ranging from voter engagement to civic education.

They have also had a unique focus on how civic health and public health issues are interwoven. Through the Text, Talk, Act Youth Dialogues, high school youth in Greater Hartford participated in conversations and small group dialogues on mental health. Youth leaders were trained to plan and facilitate the live conversations at their schools. Some of the youth are now planning future school and community events designed to dispel myths and stereotypes among youth about mental health.

ⁱ Grimm, Jr., Robert, Kimberly Spring, Nathan Dietz. 2007. "The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research. Corporation for National and Community Service." http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0506_hbr.pdf

ⁱⁱ Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion: Measuring Dimensions of Social Capital to Inform Public Policy (<http://www.nap.edu/read/18831/chapter/1>)