

Connecticut Association of Directors of Health



Connecticut Health Equity Index

Despite strong public health efforts, health inequities can be found in towns and cities throughout Connecticut. Health inequities are tied to social conditions and affect the quality of life of all residents. Poor social conditions are tied to broader root causes, such as poverty, class discrimination and many other factors. These root causes create differences in access to opportunities for good health, like good jobs, enriching schools, safe neighborhoods, and quality housing, which in turn, affect the health of community residents.

Health inequities do not occur randomly. Differences in health status can be caused by unfair and avoidable circumstances beyond the control of individuals. Programs that focus solely on changing individual behaviors will have little impact on health inequities. Fixing only the deficiencies in the health care delivery system also misses the mark.

The solution is to move our attention to the underlying community conditions and opportunities that support good health practices and outcomes. To that end, the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health has developed the Health Equity Index (Index), a community-based assessment tool. It displays measures related to **housing, education, safety, employment, environmental quality, economic stability, and civic engagement**, factors at the neighborhood level that are strongly correlated with specific health outcomes. Unlike approaches that describe differences in health status among certain populations, the Index was developed to focus on the root causes of differences in health status.

The information generated by the Index facilitates much needed civic discourse regarding health inequities that focuses on systemic influences, rather than individual behaviors, to direct efforts toward improvement in state and local policies and practices. By combining national, state, and neighborhood-level data sources, the Index provides a way to conceptualize, measure, map, and track community influences on population health and disparate health outcomes.

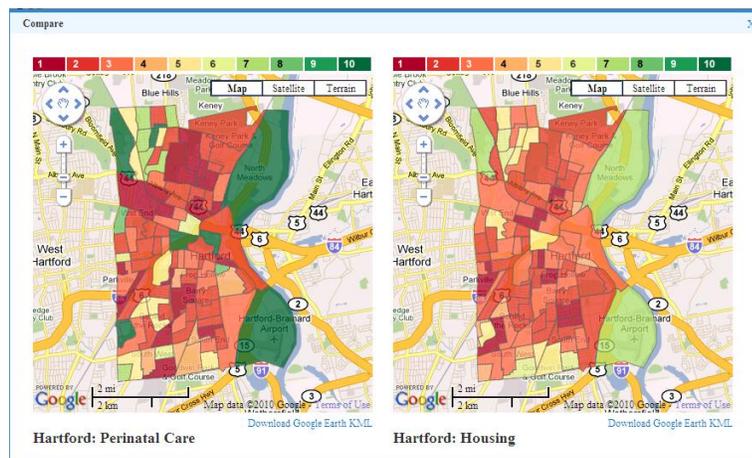


Figure 1. Example of Health Equity Index's geographic analysis:

The Index can be used to:

- Illuminate conditions in neighborhoods and communities that are related to poorer health;
- Encourage collaboration between public health, community leaders, neighborhood residents, and civic leadership;
- Focus policymakers' efforts and investments in improving conditions that promote good health.

Through a community engagement process, the Index provides the framework to begin an important paradigm shift in the practice of local public health. This approach departs from the traditional preoccupation with changing health status by changing people, in favor of a position where public health strives to ensure the conditions that allow communities to thrive.

Local health departments, particularly the New Haven Health Department, Hartford Department of Health and Human Services, and the Ledge Light Health District, have used the Index to identify influential social determinants at a local level and advance the health of their communities.

New Haven

The New Haven Health Department has used the Index to inform its research on the public health implications of urban violence, and obesity prevention.

Hartford

The Hartford Department of Health and Human Services has used the instrument to identify health and wellness needs within the city and to promote policies that support and improve its public health environment. Most recently, the Department applied the Index in preparing a community health needs assessment with four area hospitals.

Ledge Light

The Ledge Light Health District has used the Index to drive a form of community-based participatory research and advocacy designed to strengthen neighborhood capacity to improve the health of residents.



2012 Health Equity Index Expansion

Thirty-seven additional local health departments have recently joined the original pilot sites in using the Index to assist with community health assessments, grant writing, strategic planning, prioritization of health issues, and development of targeted interventions. The Index is also being used in health impact assessment projects.



Health Equity Alliance

Working together for healthier communities

For more information, please contact the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health
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