

Pathways to a Healthy Kansas

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Family and Consumer Sciences

FACT SHEET

2024 Annual Lesson Series



Did you know that being healthy has more to do with where you live than diet, exercise, and making healthy choices? You may have been told from the time you were a child that you should eat well and exercise to be healthy. Perhaps you heard that you need to drink more water, avoid smoking and drugs, get good sleep, and get regular checkups. This is all great advice, and you should be doing these things! Making smart and healthy choices certainly contributes to your overall health and well-being. However, according to recent research, how healthy – or unhealthy – you are is determined largely by where you live and the environment around you. In fact, your ZIP Code can be one of the biggest predictors of how long you live.

The average life expectancy in Kansas ranges from 65 to 81 years old, depending on where you live. In fact, people in one ZIP Code might have a life expectancy of 65, while the community only a few miles away has a life expectancy of 75. Why?

Let's imagine a friend named Charlie who has a goal of eating three cups of fresh vegetables per day. If Charlie lives in ZIP Code A where the life expectancy

is 65, it might be hard to reach that goal. Perhaps there is no grocery store that sells fresh produce, or the local food pantry receives very few fresh foods. However, if Charlie lives in ZIP Code B where the life expectancy is 75, there might be a better chance of eating healthy, fresh vegetables every day. In this community there is a nearby grocery store that is fully stocked with fresh produce, and the local food pantry has refrigerators full of fresh foods.

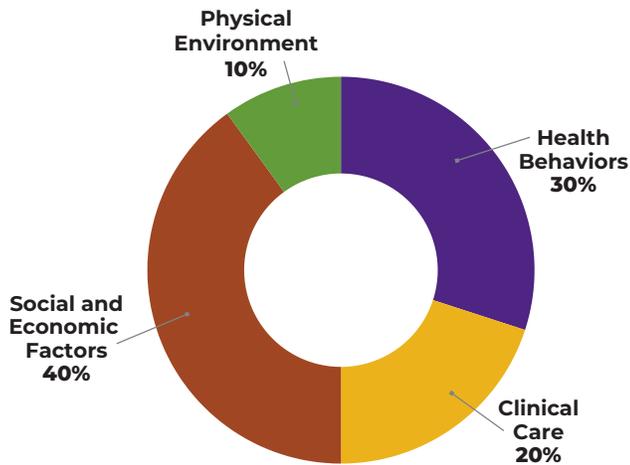
Charlie's ZIP Code has a large influence on potential health. If Charlie's community does not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, it will be very difficult for Charlie to meet the goal of eating those three cups of fresh vegetables per day.

This is only one small example of how ZIP Codes influence your health. There are examples everywhere – even in your own community – you just have to look for them. So, what else can determine how healthy you are?

Where we live largely determines how long and how well we live.

What influences health?

According to the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, there are dozens of factors that can influence how healthy you are and how long you live. Research suggests that your health behaviors account for 30% of your health and longevity. This includes behaviors such as tobacco use, diet and exercise, alcohol and drug use, and safe sexual activity.



The remaining 70% of factors that contribute to health and longevity are found in the conditions and environments in which you are born, live, learn, work, play, and age. Broadly, this can include things such as clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environments. These are commonly called the “Social Determinants of Health” or SDOH.

The SDOH can be grouped into 10 key areas, including:

- Access to healthy food
- Supportive infrastructure
- Social environment
- Employment
- Physical environment
- Health systems and services
- Public safety
- Education
- Income and wealth
- Housing

The SDOH play a large role in your health status and how long you can live. When the SDOH around you are lacking and you have limited access to resources, you may have poorer health and a shorter life expectancy. However, if you live in a strong, vibrant community with many resources, you will likely have better overall health and a longer life expectancy. When you look at communities and the resources they have to offer, you gain a better understanding of why ZIP Code matters so much to health.

Social Determinants of Health

- ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD**
Access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food
- SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE**
Internet connectivity, public transportation, traffic volume and commutes, walkability
- SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**
Social networks, sense of belonging, cultural expression, community engagement, discrimination
- EMPLOYMENT**
Steady job, living wage, working conditions, safety on the job
- PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS**
Air and water quality, parks and playgrounds, walking and biking trails
- HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SERVICES**
Quality health care, health coverage, preventative care and vaccines, mental health care, health literacy
- PUBLIC SAFETY**
Violent crime, juvenile arrests, drugs, violence
- EDUCATION**
Early childhood education, high school graduation, vocational training, higher education, language and literacy, lifelong learning
- INCOME AND WEALTH**
Income, debt, medical bills, financial support
- HOUSING**
Quality, safe and affordable housing, homeownership

Why do the SDOH matter?

The SDOH and your own health behaviors affect how healthy you are and how long you will live, but there are also greater impacts to families, workplaces, communities, and country. Here are a few examples of how health impacts individuals living in the United States:

- The United States spends \$4.3 trillion (about \$13,000 per person) on health care each year.
- 34 million people (about 11 times the population of Kansas) in the United States are food insecure, and 54 million turn to food programs for assistance with putting food on the table.
- 31.6 million people in the United States are uninsured, including 3.7 million children (about twice the population of New Mexico).
- 49% of adults say the availability of affordable housing in their community is a major problem.
- 45% of people in the United States have no access to public transportation.
- Communities with public transportation reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 63 million metric tons annually, thus improving air quality.
- More than 40% of people in the United States live in places with unhealthy levels of air pollution.
- 27% of young adults are ineligible for military service because of obesity.
- Children with poor oral health and limited access to care lose 34 million school-hours per year for unplanned dental care, thus interfering with their educational engagement.
- 43.7% of Kansas adults report consuming fruit less than 1 time per day.
- 22.3 % of Kansas adults report consuming vegetables less than 1 time per day.
- Harmful workplace conditions, including psychosocial stress, can increase the risk for negative health outcomes. In 2019, there were 2.8 million nonfatal and 5,333 fatal injuries at work.
- About 86% of full-time employees are above normal weight or have at least one chronic

condition, and these employees miss 450 more days of work than healthy employees, costing companies \$153 billion in lost productivity.

How can you help build a pathway to health in Kansas?

Paving the way for a healthier Kansas may not be easy, but it all starts with you.

Remember that 30% of your health and longevity is dependent on the decisions you make. So, make as many healthy choices as you can. Strive to eat healthy foods, move your body, do not smoke or do drugs, do not drink excessively or drink and drive, and make safe sex decisions to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Be sure to search for resources in your community that can help you live a healthier life. Your local K-State Research and Extension office can guide you.

Next, you can work to address the larger SDOH in your community by getting involved. Look around your own community to see your positive SDOH, but also identify SDOH that need improvement. Talk to people you know and visit with agencies in your area who can help, such as your local K-State Research and Extension office, neighborhood association, place of worship, local health department, hospitals, clinics, health care providers, city planning commission, and schools. Be an advocate for yourself and your community and start critical conversations on the SDOH or join those who are already doing great work. You just may be the spark that makes your community a healthier place.

Examining and addressing social determinants of health at the community level can reduce the negative influences of the environments we live in. Partnering with other community members, agencies, and local and state policy makers can result in impactful changes that lead to improved health for all. Look for ways to improve things such as:

- affordable housing,
- quality education in all neighborhoods,
- reliable and safe public transportation,
- safe neighborhoods, and
- working to plan walkable/accessible communities with access to a bounty of healthy food choices.

To see successes of communities and gather ideas on how you can make a difference in your community's SDOH go to www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-strategies.html

Community pathways to change

Navigating community-level changes surrounding SDOH is an exciting opportunity to bring community members together who share common goals and passions. Several tools are available to guide communities through each step. These tools have been proven to lead to successful initiatives with positive outcomes and lasting impacts. The Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas suggests in their Community Toolbox a plan for getting started. Find a step-by-step guide at their website: ctb.ku.edu. K-State Research and Extension staff are available to explore each step with you and determine the best approaches in your community.



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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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