

# SIGNPOSTS

## Social and Health Indicators for King County



We've all heard of "leading economic indicators," the factors that experts measure when determining whether our economy is doing well. These indicators — things like stock market prices and the rate of inflation — help planners guide our economy in a positive direction.

But what are the indicators that determine whether our communities are healthy and livable? How do we know that we are making progress and that we are investing in the right things to make our communities better places to live? Until now, there has not been a unified set of health and social indicators that can be measured on a regular basis. Various groups throughout King County have acted on differing information.

### A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

In 1997 a partnership of organizations (see page 6) set out on a journey of discovery to find a unified set of health and social indicators. Eventually, these would include things like basic needs, such as food and housing; a positive atmosphere for personal and family development; safe and healthy neighborhoods;

and community strengths, like social cohesiveness and involvement in community organizations.

We agreed that there should be some basic principles guiding this search:

- The indicators should emphasize prevention and a long-term view of change.
- The indicators should be selected based on their importance in contributing to the health and well-being of our communities.
- A variety of citizens and technical advisors should be involved in the selection process.

### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

It was immediately obvious that a viable set of indicators could not be created in a vacuum. Citizen input was vital. So, along the way, more than 1500 King County residents provided their ideas and opinions on their "valued conditions" — the conditions that they would most like to see in their communities. They participated in a telephone survey,

### HOW DID THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATE?

#### Telephone Survey

A total of 1212 adult residents of King County participated in a random-digit-dial survey in November 1997. The survey was designed to give a representative picture of what residents value about their neighborhoods and communities, what concerns they have about their region and the county, and what reactions they have to suggested indicators.

#### Focus Group Discussions with Under-Represented Groups

Because some groups lack telephones or do not speak English, they were under-represented in the telephone survey. A series of focus group discussions was held with 17 ethnic groups around the county in the Spring of 1998. The 105 participants responded to

a series of general questions designed to explore the same issues that were raised in the telephone survey.

#### Technical Advisory Groups

A Technical Advisory Group was formed to provide a consistent source of technical review and analysis throughout the process. Thirty resource people with knowledge and expertise in specific health and social issues developed and refined a set of indicators based on the public participation phases of the project.

#### Public Meetings

Community leaders and citizens were invited to two civic forums and five public meetings in 1998 to provide input on draft summaries of valued conditions and indicators.

discussed their concerns in focus groups, and held forth in numerous public forums across the county.

Citizens were asked what conditions they most valued in their communities, what issues concerned them most, and what they thought the solutions might be.

Technical advisors then analyzed these views. They determined what kind of information was available or could be found regarding the values expressed by citizen participants. Over a period of months, they developed and refined a list of indicators to reflect the concerns of the citizens.

### HOW WILL THE INDICATORS BE USED?

As things exist now, various funding organizations and government agencies conduct needs assessments periodically to determine how to invest their resources. The Social and Health Indicators are not intended to replace these assessments. But the assessments have limitations in that they commonly address a specific problem, such as child abuse or homelessness.

The Social and Health Indicators — collected at the county and sub-regional levels — offer an opportunity to step back and look at the broader trends in a variety of areas. They will help highlight areas in which progress is being made toward “valued conditions,” as well as those where something might be going wrong and more information needs to be gathered.

Measured at least every two years, they will have several major purposes:

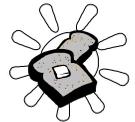
- To assess the health and social environment of our county and its sub-regions.
- To track changes, determining where and in what ways we are making headway or going backwards.
- To furnish funding organizations and government agencies with information to inform the way they allocate their resources.

- To engage citizens in following progress towards greater health and well-being for King County communities.
- To suggest what is being successful in improving the quality of life of King County's residents and what other things might be needed.

### SIGNPOSTS AND INDICATORS

Based on public input and technical analysis, the Social and Health Indicators will be divided into four major clusters:

#### I. Basic Physical and Social Needs



#### II. Positive Development Through Life Stages



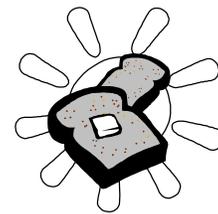
#### III. Safety and Health



#### IV. Community Strength



The following are the indicators and examples of measures that will be tracked. Asterisks (\*) indicate where reliable, consistent data are lacking, but could be collected through a random digit dial telephone survey of King County residents, businesses and organizations.



## I. BASIC PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS

### 1. Adequate Food

Adequate, nutritious food is perhaps the most basic need of families and individuals in the community.

Measure: The percent of residents who say they have worried about not having enough food for themselves or their families during the past 30 days.

### 2. Livable-Wage Income

Income must not only provide the basic necessities; it must provide a sufficient level of support for the overall well-being of families and individuals.

Measure: The percent of people living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

### 3. Income Distribution

Beyond concerns about equity, studies show a strong correlation between income disparity and overall health in the population.

Measure: Share of total income received by the poorest 20 percent of households, compared to share received by the richest 20 percent.

### 4. Social Support

Individuals in society rely on social support from others to live healthy, enjoyable lives.

Measure: Percent of residents who perceive that they receive sufficient support in such areas as emotional support, love, empathy, companionship, and help with chores and transportation.

### 5. Freedom from Discrimination \*

No one can live a healthy, enjoyable life when afflicted by discrimination.

Measures 1: Percent of residents who report that they have experienced discrimination based on race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Measure II: Number of hate and bias crimes.

### 6. Affordable Housing

Shelter is universally recognized as one of the most basic needs. Housing that is affordable to most county residents has become increasingly difficult to find as this region has become more popular and populous.

Measure: Percent of income paid for housing.

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## II. POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LIFE STAGES



### 1. Family Friendly Employment Benefits \*

Employers can contribute to their communities through the benefits and services they provide to their employees. These in turn support a positive family environment.

Measure: Percent of employers who provide and percent of employees who receive benefits such as paid maternity leave, family and sick leave.

### 2. Parent or Guardian Involvement in Child's Learning \*

Educators universally agree that the involvement of parents or guardians in their child's learning is vital. Parents not only contribute directly to their child's learning through such

activities as reading to them and helping them with homework, they send a strong signal of its importance by becoming involved.

Measures: For pre-school students, the percent of parents who read to their child every few days or daily. For school-age students, the percent of parents who spend time with their child doing parent-child activities every few days or daily.

### 3. Quality, Affordable, Available Childcare \*

Childcare is increasingly important for a large number of households with only one parent or where both parents work.

Measure: Percent who are satisfied with the quality of their childcare.

#### 4. Developmental Assets, Risk and Protective Factors in Youth \*

These include experiences, social support, values and skills that if assimilated by kids will prevent risky behavior and help them as adults.

Measure: For example, percentage of students involved in structured after-school activities or percent of students having positive social skills.

#### 5. Academic Achievement

Academic achievement forms an important measure of progress in learning and an indicator of the future well-being of the community.

Measure: Percent of 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who meet the Essential Academic Learning Requirements set by the state in reading, writing, listening and math.

#### 6. Positive Social Values and Behaviors in Youth

Communities benefit when their youth exhibit positive social values and behaviors, such as a keen sense of caring, social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility and restraint.

Measure: Percent of middle and high school students who score high in these areas in self-reported tests.

#### 7. Participation in Life-Enriching Activities \*

Communities benefit when residents of all ages participate in activities that enrich lives — theirs and others' — socially, culturally, artistically, spiritually, or intellectually.

Measure: Percent of residents who have participated in one or more cultural activities over a set period of time.

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### III. SAFETY AND HEALTH

#### 1. Perceptions of Safe Neighborhoods \*

People should be able to move about their neighborhoods and communities and not be fearful about their safety.

Measure: Percent of residents who report that they feel safe walking in their neighborhood during the day and night.

#### 2. Crime

Residents of healthy communities should be safe in their homes and on the streets, and know that their property is safe.

Measure: Number of incidents reported and arrests per 1,000 population for crimes.

#### 3. Family Violence

Violence within the family undermines healthy communities and often leads to a cycle of violence that can afflict society for generations to come.

Measures: Number of child referrals accepted by Child Protective Services, and domestic violence felonies and misdemeanors.

#### 4. Infant Mortality

Infant deaths are tragedies for families and an important indicator for communities.

Measures: Number of children accepted by Child Protective Services, and the number of domestic violence felonies and misdemeanors.

#### 5. Teen Births

Giving birth as a teenager has lifelong implications for the parent and child.

Measure: Number of live births per 1,000 for teenage and young adult females.

#### 6. Stress \*

Acute, protracted stress is detrimental to the health of individuals, as it is for the entire community.

Measure: Percent of residents who indicate they have experienced high levels of stress.

#### 7. Tobacco and Alcohol Use

The use of tobacco and excessive use of alcohol harms individuals and tends to lead to reduced productivity of workers, early deaths, and increased health care costs.

Measures: Percent of residents who smoke, drink and use other drugs in various age groups.

#### 8. Physical Activity and Weight

Inactive and overweight individuals are likely to suffer more health problems, resulting in increased healthcare costs.

Measures: Percent of adults who are physically active and who are overweight.



## 9. Restricted Activity Due to Physical and Mental Health Problems

Lost work and school time due to health problems reduces productivity and is an indicator of the overall health of the community.

Measure: Percent of residents who report that they have lost a high number of days from normal activities in the past month due to poor physical or mental health.

## 10. Health Insurance Coverage and Access \*

For many people, access to health insurance has become an increasing problem as health care costs have risen and work patterns have changed.

Measures: Percent of residents who are uninsured or underinsured, percent lacking coverage for specific health problems, and percent not getting needed medical, dental or mental health services. Also percent of employers that offer health care benefits.

# IV. COMMUNITY STRENGTH

## 1. Social Cohesion \*

Social divisions harm the overall health of the community, making social cohesion an important indicator.

Measures: Percent of adult residents responding in agreement with observations such as "people around here are willing to help their neighbors" and "people in this neighborhood can be trusted."

## 2. Involvement in Community Organizations \*

The extent to which people do or do not participate in community organizations demonstrates their willingness to work together to solve problems and improve their surroundings, to the benefit of all residents.

Measure: Percent of residents who have participated in local community organizations, such as their Parent Teacher Student Association, neighborhood groups, and ethnic associations, over the past six months.

## 3. Institutional Support for Community Service \*

Employers and schools play an important role in encouraging community service.

Measures: Percent of middle and high schools that give official approval of class time used for community service, and percent of businesses that allow paid time for employees to give community service.

## 4. Pollution Exposure in Neighborhoods

Pollution reduces the strength of communities by harming the health of residents and reducing their quality of life.

Measure: Percent of people exposed to specific pollutants mapped by income and

racial and ethnic makeup of neighborhoods.



## 5. Ease of Access to Shops and Services \*

Less accessible shops and services increase the necessity to drive long distances.

Measure: Percent of residents who find it convenient to get to shops and services, such as childcare, libraries, doctors' offices, and schools.

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR ALL INDICATORS

A variety of sources will be tapped to provide the data for the various indicators, including:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- The Seattle-King County Department of Public Health
- Other King County agencies
- The Washington Assessment of Student Learning
- Child Protective Services
- The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs
- Local jurisdictions

A more detailed technical report containing the valued conditions and a complete listing of indicator measures can be obtained from the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health at (206) 296-6817 or the King County Children and Family Commission at (206) 296-5219.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The Indicators Initiative has helped us identify a core set of Social and Health Indicators for King County. These indicators will help us monitor our progress toward more livable communities and set priorities for future actions. But there is still much left to be done.

We need to:

- Develop community and leadership support for the indicators reflected on these pages.
- Identify or create an organization to gather and maintain data related to the Social and Health Indicators.
- Develop financial resources for: (1) collecting, compiling and formatting existing data, and (2) collecting new population-based survey data where data does not exist.

- Conduct new survey(s) with samples large enough to provide data for up to four sub-regions of the County, augmented by focus groups for hard-to-reach populations.
- Develop the first report on Social and Health Indicators for King County and broadly disseminate it to assure its use by private and public sectors, fund providers and citizens.

We hope to complete this process by early 2000. In the meantime interested citizens can follow our progress by calling Carol Maurer at (206) 296-5219 or Kathryn Horsley at (206) 296-2789.

The Social and Health Indicators — and, most importantly, the data associated with them — will help us all navigate successfully toward more livable neighborhoods and communities.

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The Social and Health Indicators Steering Committee — including The King County Children and Family Commission, United Way of King County, the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, the King County Department of Community and Human Services, the City of Seattle Department of Housing and Human Services, the City of Bellevue Department of Parks and Community Services, Sustainable Seattle, and the Cross Cultural Health Care Program, among others — would like to thank all of the citizens, community leaders, and technical advisors who have made this project possible.

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