

Communities Count 2005

Executive Summary

Mission

Communities Count is committed to improving community conditions through information advocacy—providing accurate and timely reports on the conditions that matter to King County families and communities in order to stimulate action.

Purpose

To report on the health and well-being of people and communities in King County, identifying our strengths and those areas that need attention.

What This Report Offers:

- A common set of 38 social, health, environmental and arts indicators for use by all city and county governments, public agencies, foundations, human service funders, non-profit agencies, community-based organizations, and residents.
- New sections on the Natural and Built Environment and on the Arts and Culture.
- In-depth analyses of two indicators, Affordable Housing and Homelessness and community-level School Readiness.
- Qualitative information from persons who have experienced homelessness and from service providers.
- Indicators that reflect the valued conditions identified by King County residents.
- A process of developing indicators that was inclusive of the ethnic and geographic diversity of King County.
- Information that reveals disparities based on region, race, income, education, age and gender.
- Information that updates Communities Count 2002 and that will be updated every three years.

King County as a whole is making progress with improving grade school academic achievement, reducing crime, motor vehicle injuries, infant mortality, teen births, adult alcohol abuse and youth tobacco and alcohol use. But our situation is worsening with respect to poverty, affordable housing, the proportion of overweight people, and those not insured for health care.

In very basic ways, King County has not progressed. One out of five residents does not earn a living wage. Since the 2000 census, the percent of children living in poverty has increased from 10% to over 13%. Income continues to shift: incomes grew for the wealthiest households, while they stagnated or declined for the middle and low-income households. Few small and medium employers are offering benefits that allow people to support and care for their children and family members.

The 38 indicators are grouped into six categories: 1) Basic Needs and Social Well-Being, 2) Positive Development Through Life Stages, 3) Safety and Health, 4) Community Strength, 5) Natural and Built Environment and 6) Arts and Culture. Differences by income and education levels, race, age, and gender exist for almost every indicator. While there are regional differences for most indicators, these differences are not large. Seattle and South Region, however compare unfavorably with the rest of the county on most of the Safety and Health indicators.

Basic Needs and Social Well-Being

This category of indicators includes the crucial social, economic and environmental ingredients everyone needs--food, housing, income, social support, fairness and social acceptance.

- Income data from the 2004 (US Census) American Community Survey, shows that more than 1 in 5 people in King County lives in a household without a living wage income (\$38,600 for a family of four in 2004). This 3% increase since 1999 is also seen among King County's children who live below the poverty level. In 1999, 9.9% of children under age 18 were living in poverty, while that proportion increased to 13.3% in 2004.
- Poverty itself does not tell the full picture. The distribution of income in King County is skewed toward the few wealthy residents throughout the past decade and has shifted even more in this direction between 1990 and 2000. In 2004 the richest 20% of King County households received 47.4% of the total income that year. The poorest 20% earned only 3.6% of the total income.
- As many as 10% of King County residents reported in 2003 that the food they bought did not last through the month and there was no money to buy more. 43% of people making less than \$15,000 per year experienced their food money running out. Between July 2003 through June 2004 King County food banks served 111,470 households, representing 15% of all King County households.
- Families with very low incomes have very few options for rental housing in King County; affordable rent for these families is \$450 per month or less. Since 1998 there has been a gap of approximately \$40,000 between what median income families can afford to buy and the median home sale price in King County. The gap for low income homebuyers, however, is large--\$169,900-- and increasing. Today's "hot" housing market in King County exacerbates this affordability gap. Homelessness results from the inadequate supply of affordable housing, housing subsidies and strong social services for people with personal vulnerabilities.
- While 2004 survey data show that most King County adults report high levels of social support from family and friends, people earning less than \$50,000 a year say that they receive less than those whose incomes are higher, and people of color report less social support than whites.
- In 2004, 26% of King County residents reported that they had experienced discrimination within the past year in at least one setting. East Region residents experienced less discrimination than others. About 30% reported having experienced unfair treatment because of gender, social class, or age. One out of four experienced recent discrimination based on race or color. More people of color than whites experienced some type of discriminations; more young people than older people; more lower income people than higher income people. In 2003 in King County there were 92 reported hate crimes, down from 100 in 2001 but still higher than 87 hate crimes in 2000 and 78 crimes in 1999.

Positive Development Through Life Stages

This category of indicators focuses on important ingredients of learning and healthy development from early childhood through the senior years, including people's opportunities to spend time with family, quality of child care arrangements and children's progress in schools.

- Without paid vacation, holidays and sick leave, it is difficult for working people to spend time with their children, other family members, or friends, because of the demands of their work schedules. They may even work longer hours in order to buy health insurance for their dependents. In 2004 only 20% of all Washington private sector firms offered paid vacation and holidays, while only 12% offered paid sick leave. Large employers are much more likely to offer benefits than small employers, but less than half of those with 100 or more employees offer these benefits. As many as 16% of employed adults in King County worked without paid vacation or sick leave in 2004. About half of Washington's private sector firms offered full-time employees health insurance coverage for their dependents, but only 11% offered this to part-time workers.
- While 84% of respondents in households with young children reported in 2004 that they read or told stories to their young children on a daily basis, the percentage varies by education level and income of respondents. 88% of college graduates reported daily reading while only 72% of people with a high school education or less read to their young children everyday.

- In 2004, over half of King County children age 5 and younger were in child care on a regularly scheduled basis and 45% of these were in child care for at least 25 hours a week. Among older children (ages 6 through 14), 16.9% were in regularly scheduled non-parent care. Many parents indicate that they would rather not use child care at all and would prefer to be home with their children. Quality and high cost of care were mentioned often by many parents who desired changes in their child's care.
- Approximately one in four kindergarten children in three King County school districts were not ready for school in at least one of five areas of child development: physical health and well-being, emotional maturity, social competence, language and cognitive development; communication skills and general knowledge. The percentage of children who are prepared varies considerably by neighborhood within the school districts.
- 4th graders in King County public schools have made progress towards meeting the state standards for math, reading, writing, and listening, since assessment through WASL testing began in 1997. State level data, however, show that the racial disparities in the WASL scores are still large. Students in Seattle and school districts in South county have progressed but not done as well as those in school districts in North and East King County. "On time" graduation rates across King County school districts ranged from 43% to 95% in 2003.
- Adults need a balance between work and leisure. In 2004, 85% of King County adults reported that they were very or somewhat active in at least three life-enriching activities. This percentage was higher among those with higher levels of education and income and among people younger than 65 years of age.

Safety and Health

These 12 indicators provide details on environmental conditions and behaviors that contribute to our health (such as family violence, physical activity, and stress), as well as four specific health outcomes (including infant mortality and teen births).

- The majority of King County residents do not worry often about safety in their neighborhoods. Over 1 In 5 adults, however, said that they worried about their children's safety both in the neighborhood and at school. In 2004, residents in South Region reported significantly more concern about safety than residents of other regions. More people who were white, who were male, who had college degrees and who had incomes over \$50,000, reported feeling safe than other people.
- The overall crime rate in King County has decreased significantly from a high of 93 crimes per 1,000 people in 1987 to a low of 58 per 1,000 in 2001. The rate increased to 60 per 1,000 in 2003. Both major violent crime and property crime have been decreasing with the exception of motor vehicle thefts. Identity theft is an increasing problem and Washington State ranked 8th in the nation in 2004.
- Family violence and its generational effects are still of great concern. In 2003, just under 12,000 domestic violence offenses occurred in King County, about the same number as in 2001. Between 1997 and 2003 the rate of major domestic violence crimes, including murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault, has increased in South Region but decreased in Seattle and in King County overall.
- While both hospitalizations and deaths due to motor vehicle crashes have declined since 1990, the rates in South Region are significantly higher than rates for other regions and King County overall.
- Neighborhoods with higher proportions of low income residents and people of color bear a disproportionate burden of toxic pollution. The total amount of toxic chemicals released into the air by major manufacturing facilities in King County continues to decline, despite an increase in the number of sites that release chemicals. The location of polluting facilities suggests that certain areas of South Region and Seattle are much more heavily impacted by air releases of cancer-causing substances than the rest of the county.
- Infant mortality and teen births have been declining across the county, but in the most recent 5 year period, further declines in infant mortality are detected only in Seattle. Both infant mortality and teen births remain higher in areas of the county where there is more poverty. Infant death rates among African Americans and American Indian/Alaska Natives remain higher than the rates of other groups.
- Stress was reported by more residents in 2001 than in 1999, and remains at the higher level in 2004. Between 2001 and 2004, fewer people report feeling confident in their ability to handle personal problems. Young adults, people of color, people with less than a college-level education, and people who have incomes less than \$50,000 experience more stress than others.

- Abuse of alcohol and use of tobacco remain problems county-wide. However, local, state and national youth survey data show decreasing rates of youth smoking and drinking. Young adults and people of color report higher levels of tobacco use than others. Males, whether youth or adults, are more likely to report binge drinking than females.
- The proportion of adults who are overweight and obese is increasing in King County. In 2004, 54% of King County adults were overweight or obese, up from 50% in 2000. The risk of being overweight is higher for middle-age adults than others and higher among people who do not have a college degree than among people with college levels of education.
- The percentage of uninsured adults is at an all-time high since data were first recorded in 1991. In 2004 16% of King County adults under the age of 65 did not have any health insurance coverage. 18% of those people in the South Region were uninsured. Among people earning between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year, 42% were uninsured, up from 35% in 2001. Among those in households with an income of \$50,000 or more, only 4.4% included uninsured people.

Community Strength

These indicators reflect forces in the environment that contribute to community health—people’s involvement in their neighborhoods and communities, service to others, and access to shops and services. Most of these measures have been collected for the third time in King County, so we can begin to monitor our progress.

- A sense of neighborhood social cohesion among King County residents in 2004 varies by subgroups within the population. People who are young and those who have less than a college degree report less cohesion than others. People who have incomes of \$50,000 or more and those who are in a couple relationship, whether married or not, report more social cohesion than others.
- In 2004, 83% of all King County adult residents said they are active in at least one community organization such as a neighborhood, political, civic, youth, cultural, educational, or religious group. People who have completed college are more involved than those with less education.
- The majority of King County public school districts report support for 3 policies that encourage student participation in community service activities.

Natural and Built Environment

The quality of the air, water and land surface is determined by people’s transportation choices, chemicals and toxic substances used in manufacturing and agriculture, and regulations determining development and protection of the environment.

- Air quality in King County has remained steady since 2001 as reflected in the Air Quality Index, which monitors six pollutants. Ozone, largely from on-road vehicles, and particulate matter, mainly from indoor burning of wood and outdoor burning of yard waste, remain a concern and continue to determine the air quality rating in King County.
- Over 80% of the swimming beaches that were monitored over time for fecal coliform pollution were designated of low concern in 2000 and 2004. King County’s urban streams have significant levels of pesticides and broken down pesticides, with the likely source being residential use.
- Satellite images show that acres of grass and forests have decreased in King County since 1986, while acres of urban land, clear-cut, and regenerating forest have increased. The number of farms that generate at least \$1000 a year has declined.
- The overall use of chemicals for agricultural purposes has decreased between 1997 and 2002. Sales for residential use of products with likely human carcinogens, dropped by half between 2000 and 2003, but sales of products with reproductive or developmental toxicants doubled in this time.
- Over two thirds of King County employees working outside their homes drive alone to their places of work. The proportion of workers who carpool, use public transportation, bike, walk or use other means to commute to work has remained steady since 1990.

Arts and Culture

Four new indicators document levels of individual participation in artistic and cultural activities and organizations, the presence of arts and culture organizations, funding for arts and culture activities, and employment in the arts.

- King County residents reported substantial direct participation in artistic, cultural and literary activities: Approximately three-quarters wrote, read, participated in a book club during the past month, half did some sort of art or craft activity, and between one-fourth and one-third made music or danced. Similarly, the majority of residents attended some sort of artistic, cultural or literary event in the past month.
- In 2003, a survey showed that King County arts and cultural organizations received \$248 million in total income from all sources. Of government funding (6% of all income) city governments provided the greatest share (41%), then State (29%), and County (22%), while federal funding accounted for 8%.
- In 2002, out of every 1,000 employed persons in King County, 4.3 were working in arts organizations and 7.6 in arts establishments. The heaviest concentration of arts employment was in Seattle. Employed artists are more likely than all employed persons to be self-employed and to work for non-profits, and less likely to work for private employers or public employers.

How Do We Respond?

Communities Count provides a way to look at how we are doing and to identify those areas in King County that need our attention. There are many strengths in King County and our residents in general experience good health and well-being. But economic shifts are occurring and we now see more residents experiencing poverty. Basic needs like housing and health care are too costly for our neighbors who lose their jobs or whose incomes fail to keep up with the cost of living. These growing gaps make it less likely that we will see progress on many other indicators, especially physical and mental health and children's health and development.

How do we respond? As individuals we need to keep doing the things that work: nurturing and reading to our children, supporting our schools, volunteering with community organizations, eating well and exercising regularly; we can all be more active neighbors and help the children, youth and elders around us; we can rely increasingly on public transportation and sustainable gardening methods and support our library systems, local artists, and the rich array of diverse cultural events.

We face challenges that require collective action and a long view. Businesses and corporations need to step up to help make King County a place where people can balance work, family, friends and community involvement. Local governments need to work together and across jurisdictions to address the policies that affect these issues. Local funders need to use this report to inform their investments.

We, the people of King County, need to participate in the work of our democracy: staying informed, getting involved, and standing up for the things that are important to us. Living wages, affordable housing, access to quality child care and health care are challenges demanding collective action.

We must decide what are the most effective actions and policies to improve health and social well-being for all of our neighbors and communities — and we must take action.

Photo on the opposite page is from Youth in Focus (YIF), a youth development program offering photography classes and service learning opportunities. Through the Freelance Project, YIF's job-training program, students develop photographic and professional skills, and offer low cost services to community organizations.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH INDICATORS

2005 Indicators	King County Progress:	King County Trend^:	Group Comparisons*:					
	Getting Better Getting Worse No Change Undetermined	Increase Decrease No Change Undetermined	Region	Race †	Income	Education	Age	Gender
Basic Needs & Social Well-Being:								
Adequate Food	?	?	★	★	★	★	★	=
Affordable Housing		↓	★	?	★	?	?	?
Living Wage Income		↓	★	★	NA	?	?	?
Income Distribution		↑	?	?	?	?	?	?
Social Support	↔	↔	=	★	★	=	=	=
Freedom from Discrimination: Experience	↔	↔	★	★	★	=	★	=
: Hate Crimes	↔	↔	?	★	?	?	?	?
Positive Development Through Life Stages:								
Family-Friendly Employment Benefits	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Parent Involvement in Child's Learning	↔	↔	=	=	=	★	=	=
Quality, Affordable Child Care	↔	↔	★	?	?	?	?	?
School Readiness	?	?	★	?	?	?	★	★
Academic Achievement: Assessment		↑	★	?	?	?	?	?
: On-Time Graduation	?	?	★	?	?	?	?	?
Risk & Protect Factors in Youth	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Participation in Life Enriching Activities	↔	↔	★	=	★	★	★	=
Safety & Health:								
Perceived Neighborhood Safety	↔	↔	★	★	★	★	=	★
Crime: Violent Crime Rate		↓	★	?	?	?	?	?
: Murder Rate		↓	★	★	★	?	★	★
Family Violence: Domestic Violence		↓	★	?	?	?	?	★
: CPS Referrals	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Motor Vehicle Crash: Deaths		↓	★	=	?	?	★	★
: Hospitalizations		↓	★	?	?	?	★	★
Pollution in Neighborhoods	?	?	★	★	★	?	?	?
Infant Mortality		↓	★	★	★	?	★	?
Teen Births		↓	★	★	★	?	?	NA
Stress	↔	↔	★	★	★	★	★	=
Tobacco and Alcohol: Adult Tobacco Use		↓	★	★	★	★	★	★
: Youth Tobacco Use		↓	?	?	?	?	?	?
: Adult Alcohol Use		↓	★	★	=	=	★	★
: Youth Alcohol Use		↔	?	?	?	?	?	★
Physical Activity and Weight: Activity	↔	↔	=	★	★	★	★	=
: Overweight		↑	★	★	★	★	★	=
Restricted Activity Due to Poor Health		↑	★	★	★	★	=	★
Health Insurance Coverage and Access		↓	★	★	★	★	★	=

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH INDICATORS

2005 Indicators	King County Progress:	King County Trend[^]:	Group Comparisons⁺:						
	😊 Getting Better 😞 Getting Worse ↔ No Change ? Undetermined	↑ Increase ↓ Decrease ↔ No Change ? Undetermined	★ Significant Differences = No Significant Differences ? Undetermined	Region	Race †	Income	Education	Age	Gender
Community Strength:									
Neighborhood Social Cohesion	↔	↔	★	★	★	★	★	=	=
Involvement in Community Organizations	↔	↔	=	=	★	★	=	=	=
Institutional Support for Community Service	😊	↑	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
Ease of Access to Shops & Services	?	?	★	=	★	★	★	=	=
Natural and Built Environment:									
Air Quality	😊	↑	?	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Water Quality	?	?	?	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Land Cover	😞	↓	★	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Farmland Treated with Chemicals	😊	↓	?	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Commute Choices	😞	↔	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
Arts and Culture:									
Participation in Arts and Culture	?	?	★	★	=	★	=	★	★
Presence of Arts and Culture	😊	↑	★	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Employment in Arts and Culture	?	?	★	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Funding for Arts and Culture Activities	?	?	★	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

[^] Indicates whether there was a statistically significant increase or decrease in the measure for King County over the most recent years for which data are available. A question mark indicates that testing for trends was not possible.

^{*} Differences are reported as significant (★) if any one group is statistically higher or lower than another. The equal sign indicates that there are no statistically significant differences. A question mark indicates that testing for significant differences was not possible.

[†] Includes any significant differences by Hispanic ethnicity that were found.

NA = Not applicable.

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