

Communities Count 2002

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 provide a biennial report on the health and well-being of people and communities in King County that identifies our strengths and those areas that need attention.

What This Report Offers:

- A common set of social and health indicators for use by all city and county governments, public agencies, human service funders, non-profit agencies, community-based organizations, and residents.
- 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, age and gender.
- Rich quotes about social support and neighborhood social cohesion from 255 King County residents who are from groups often not represented in indicator reports.
- New measures of community well-being, such as social support, income distribution, reading to children, and social cohesion in neighborhoods.
- Information that updates Communities Count 2000 and will be updated every two years to follow our progress over time.

The 29 indicators give a picture of our overall health and well-being. Many of the new indicators now have a second point of measurement and can be compared to baseline information from the 2000 report. Other indicators have been measured over several years and provide a picture of how well we are doing over a longer period of time.

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 use. But our situation is worsening with respect to affordable housing, the proportion of overweight people, and the amount of stress people experience.

In very basic ways, King County has not progressed. One out of five residents does not earn a living wage. One out of every ten children lives in poverty. Income distribution has shifted: incomes grew for the wealthiest households, while they stagnated or declined for the middle and low-income households. Fewer small and medium employers are offering benefits that allow people to support and care for their children and family members.

While there are differences among North, Seattle, East and South regions for most indicators, these differences are not large. There are no differences by region for people's experience of social support, social cohesion, participation in life-enriching activities, and participation in community organizations. However differences do exist for these same indicators and for almost every indicator by income and education levels, race, age, and gender.

The four categories into which the 29 indicators are grouped are 1) Basic Needs and Social Well-Being, 2) Positive Development Through Life Stages, 3) Safety and Health, and 4) Community Strength

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.

- While few (5%) King County residents have concerns about getting enough food for themselves or their families, many have difficulty finding the money for monthly rent or mortgage payments. The housing affordability gap for median income home buyers increased throughout the 1990s, and only one out of three rentals in King County was considered affordable for low income renters in 2000.
- Income data from the 2000 census indicate that one out of five King County residents does not earn a living wage income. One out of ten children live in poverty.
- Even with this recent data, poverty itself does not tell the full picture. The distribution of income in King County has been highly skewed toward the few wealthy residents throughout the past decade and has shifted even more in this direction between 1990 and 2000. These data confirm that the gap between the rich and poor is increasing, both nationally and locally.
- While 2001 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 as a group, people who are African American, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islanders receive less social support than whites. Focus groups with low income people, people of color, and people who speak limited or no English highlight how many different ways residents offer, receive, and need social support. (See page 17)
- In 1999 and 2001, almost 30% of King County residents reported that they had experienced discrimination within the past year in at least one setting. In 2001, 40% reported having experienced unfair treatment because of either race or ethnic background. One out of three have experienced recent discrimination based on age, gender or socioeconomic class, and as many as 10% based on their perceived sexual orientation. More people of color than whites experienced some type of discrimination; more Hispanics than non-Hispanics; more young people than older people; more lower income people than higher income people. In 2001 in King County there were 100 reported hate crimes, up from 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.

- Not all people of working age are able to spend time with their children, other family members, or friends, because of the demands of their work schedules. In 2002 while around 70% of King County employers offer flexibility in work hours, many fewer (especially the very large employers) offer flexibility to all employees. Between 2000 and 2002, there were significant declines in the percentage of employers who allow time off to care for a sick child or adult in the family and allow maternity, paternity, and new parent leave for adopting or fostering. Annual vacations are short—roughly 85% of small and medium-size employers offer two weeks or less in the first year of employment. Two thirds of large employers offer this short vacation.
- While 76% of respondents in households with young children reported in 2001 that they read or told stories to their children on a daily basis, the percentage varies by education level and income of respondents. 87% of college graduates reported daily reading while only 53% of people with a high school education or less read to their young children everyday. People in higher income households also read to their young children more frequently than those with lower incomes. In 2001 there were no differences between regions.
- Almost half of King County children up to age 5 are in child care on a regularly scheduled basis and over half of these are in child care for at least 25 hours a week. Many parents indicate that they would rather not use child care at all and would prefer to be home with their child. Quality and high cost of care were mentioned often by many parents who desired changes in their child's care.

- King County public school 4th graders have made progress as a whole 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 school districts in North and East King County. At the high school level, a new system of tracking completion and graduation rates of each cohort of students will provide a more accurate way of measuring academic success of older students in future years.
- High school-age youth in four King County districts reported having only 20 or fewer of the 40 developmental assets measured in the Search Institute survey. The more assets our youth have, the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors and the less likely they are to participate in risky behaviors, such as using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. Bellevue School District surveyed its students for a second time and did not find many changes between 1996 and 2000.
- Adults need a balance between work and leisure. In 2001 82% 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, but those who do are concerned about children's safety. In 2001 people who were white, who were male, and those who had college degrees reported feeling more 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. Both major violent crime and property crime have been decreasing with the exception of motor vehicle thefts.
- Family violence and the generational cycle it creates are still of great concern. In 2001, over 12,000 domestic violence offenses occurred in King County. The rate of major domestic violence crimes including murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault, has increased between 1997 and 2001 in some parts of the County.
- A total of 1.6 million pounds of toxic chemicals was released into the air by major manufacturing facilities in King County in 2000, a decrease from 2.2 million pounds in 1997. Approximately 190,000 pounds (nearly 20%) of these chemicals were potentially cancer-causing substances. 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 are both declining, but both remain higher in areas of the county where there is more poverty.
- Stress is reported by more residents in 2001 than in 1999. 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. 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.
- The proportion of adults who are overweight and obese is increasing in King County. In 2000, 50% of King County adults were overweight or obese. 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 people with college levels of education.
- Approximately 9% of King County adults under the age of 65 did not have any health insurance coverage in 2001. Among people earning between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year, 35% were uninsured. Only 3% of households with an income of \$50,000 or more included uninsured people. While 8% of all children were without health insurance in 2000, 20% of children in poverty were not covered.

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. These measures have been collected for the second time in King County, so we can begin to monitor our progress.

- A sense of neighborhood social cohesion among King County residents 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. Focus groups with low income people, people of color, and people who speak limited or no English reveal further variations on knowing and trusting neighbors and illuminated how complex neighborhood social cohesion can be. (See page 75)
- In 2001, about 66% of all King County adult residents said they are active in at least one community organization such as a neighborhood group, political group or civic club, parent-teacher association, religious group or congregation. Women are more involved than men, and people who have completed college are more involved than those with less education.
- Less than half of King County public school districts report more than one district policy that supports student participation in community service activities such as requiring service for graduation.
- While half of large employers report that they have formal policies regarding employee participation in community service, fewer than half of small and medium size employers have such a policy.
- Most King County residents have easy access to a grocery store by car. In 2001, 87% said that it takes less than 10 minutes to the grocery store from their homes. People with household incomes of at least \$50,000 have shorter trips by car than people with lower incomes. Residents of Seattle are far more likely to travel by walking, biking or bus than are residents of other regions of the County.

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. We are committed to broad dissemination of this report every two years to policy-makers, multiple public and private organizations and advocates who have influence on improving community conditions.

There are many strengths in King County and our residents in general experience good health and well-being. But economic shifts are occurring and may mean that harder times are ahead for our neighbors who lose their jobs or whose incomes fail to keep up with the cost of living. This may make it less likely that we will see progress on many indicators.

How do we respond? 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 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. 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.

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.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH INDICATORS

Indicators	King County Progress: 😊 Getting Better 😞 Getting Worse ↔ No Change ? Undetermined	King County Trend [^] : ↑ Increase ↓ Decrease ↔ No Change ? Undetermined	Group Comparisons*:						
			★ Significant Differences = No Significant Differences ? 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/Guardian Involvement in Child's Learning	↔	↔	=	=	★	★	=	=	=
Quality, Affordable Child Care	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Developmental Assets/Risk & Protect Factors	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Academic Achievement: Assessment	😊	↑	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
: Graduation Rate	↔	↔	★	?	?	?	?	?	?
Positive Social Values & Behaviors 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	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	😊	↑	★	★	★	★	★	★	=
Community Strength:									
Neighborhood Social Cohesion	↔	↔	★	=	★	★	★	★	=
Involvement in Community Organizations	↔	↔	=	=	★	★	=	★	★
Institutional Support for Community Service	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Ease of Access to Shops & Services	?	?	★	=	★	=	=	=	=

[^] 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.