



**Howard County Health Assessment Survey Results
2014 Executive Summary**

INTRODUCTION

The Howard County Health Assessment Survey (HCHAS) is a public study that was developed to assess health-related behaviors and risk factors among the adult population of Howard County (the county), Maryland. Results of this study enable local government, health providers and stakeholders to measure progress and determine where to focus resources so that health outcomes can be improved, health disparities reduced, and the community can become healthier. This is a biennial study that was first conducted in 2012, updated in 2014, and is planned to continue through 2018.

METHODOLOGY

The 2014 HCHAS was commissioned by the Horizon Foundation, the Howard County Health Department, Howard County General Hospital, and the Columbia Association. OpinionWorks, LLC, provided the technical aspects of the survey, including recommendations on the precise wording of questions, population sampling, and telephone data collection. The fact sheets and website were developed by Simplicity Metrics.

Selecting and Weighting Respondents

More than 2,000 interviews were conducted between July 8 and August 18, 2014. In order to be compared geographically, the county was divided into five sampling areas, based on the seven regional planning areas, with the three westernmost planning areas combined into a single sampling area. Howard County households were dialed at random, and the first adult to answer the phone was asked to participate in the survey. Caregivers were not allowed to answer for others; answers for all study respondents reflected their own characteristics and experience.

As is common with telephone surveys, some populations were underrepresented (including African-Americans and residents ages 18 to 34), while other groups were overrepresented (including Whites, women, and residents over age 65). To ensure the survey results reflected the characteristics of the county, a statistical procedure known as weighting was used. The demographic profile of the survey was adjusted to be similar to the actual population, based on the most recent U.S. Census data. In short, the answers from those groups underrepresented in the sample count more when totaling up responses and calculating averages to accurately represent all residents.

The Survey Questions

The organizations sponsoring HCHAS jointly determined the questions that were asked. The survey approach, methodology, and questions were modeled after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). This means that residents across the country have been asked many of the same questions and results from national studies may be effectively compared with Howard County results. Additional questions were added to the 2014 survey to gain more detailed information in certain areas.

RESULTS

Howard County is, on average, healthier than the rest of the country, but significant health challenges persist—especially among those with lower levels of income and education, as well as health outcomes related to everyday choices about smoking, drinking, diet, and exercise.

Access to Affordable Care

The survey revealed that 15,229 residents currently do not have health insurance coverage. This number has decreased by about 2,700 since 2012. However, problems of inequality compared by

income, race and education still remain. While 95% of residents have some type of health care coverage, only 88% of respondents in households making less than \$50,000 a year have coverage, and only 88% of those with a high school diploma or GED have coverage.

Respondents who identified their race as African-American, Hispanic, or Native American/other were more likely to experience health access difficulties. While 96% of White residents said they have health coverage, only 90% of African-Americans, 90% of Hispanics, and 90% of those in the Native American/other category report having coverage. Employment status also affected access to health care. For example, while 96% of those employed say they have some type of health insurance, only 90% of those who were self-employed and 78% of those unemployed were insured.

Behavioral Health and Addictions

Women were more likely than men to report taking medication or receiving treatment from a doctor or other health professional for a mental or emotional condition (9% vs. 5%). Between 2012 and 2014, about the same percentage of residents reported being stressed about money for vital expenses, such as rent, mortgage, and food. However, respondents who identified their race as African-American, Hispanic, or Native American/other were more likely to experience this type of stress. Fifty-three percent of White residents said they were never stressed about money for vital expenses, compared with 42% of African-Americans, 28% of Hispanics, and 38% of those in the Native American/other category.

Additionally, there was a noticeable increase in residents aged 18 to 34 who reported binge drinking or having more than five drinks for men and four drinks for women, at least once in a month. In 2012, 20% of residents in this age group reported binge drinking at least once in a month, and in 2014 that percentage increased to 27%.

Chronic Diseases

The survey included questions about many chronic diseases, including cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. One-quarter (24%) of residents have been told by a health professional that they have high blood pressure. Another 1% are women who were only told that during pregnancy, and 2% were told they were borderline high or pre-hypertensive. These numbers are unchanged since 2012. Of those who have been told they have high blood pressure, 81% are currently taking medications to control it.

Diabetes continues to be a concern for many residents. Eight percent of residents have been told they have diabetes. An additional 4% volunteered that they were told they had pre-diabetes or borderline diabetes. While there was a slight decrease among White and Asian residents who have been told they have diabetes, there was a significant increase in the percentage of African American residents (2% to 10%), Hispanic residents (1% to 8%), and Native American/other residents (7% to 12%) who have been told they have diabetes. Of those who have not been told they have diabetes, 8% have been told they have pre-diabetes or borderline diabetes. This is a slight increase from 6% measured in 2012. An additional 1% in both 2014 and 2012 said that was only while they were pregnant.

Healthy Weight, Exercise and Nutrition

Fifty-six percent of Howard County respondents reported BMI scores in the overweight or obese range, compared with 64% of Marylanders. Although fewer Howard County residents were overweight or obese compared to the State, many survey participants reported behaviors that contribute to unhealthy weight, including lack of exercise and low consumption of fruits and vegetables. When broken down by race, there were decreases in overweight/obesity rates among all

rates/ethnicities from 2012 to 2014, except a slight increase among White residents (55% to 59%) and a strong increase among Hispanic residents (29% to 53%). Additionally, residents earning less than \$50,000 are getting more than 1 serving of fruit per day in 2014 (64%) compared to 2012 (46%).

Tobacco Usage

Twenty-nine percent of residents said they have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their life. This percentage is slightly larger than the 27% measured in 2012. Twenty-six percent of residents who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their life said they now smoke every day or some days. This is slightly lower than the 29% measured in 2012. The projected smoking rate for the adult population in the county in 2014 is 7.5%, compared to 7.9% in 2012.

In 2014, residents were less likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke in a vehicle. There has also been significant improvement in the percentage of residents in apartments, condos, townhouses, or other multi-family buildings who smell tobacco smoke coming from other units or outside in Ellicott City (25% to 10%) and Elkridge (22% to 7%).

Health and Aging

From 2012 to 2014, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of residents aged 50 to 64 who report they smoke every day and a significant increase in the percentage who do not smoke. In 2014, 9% of residents aged 50-64 reported smoking every day, compared to 19% in 2012. In 2014, 89% of residents aged 50 to 64 reported that they do not smoke, compared to 71% in 2012.

CONCLUSION

The 2014 HCHAS provides the most detailed data collected about how health behaviors and needs vary across different demographic groups in the county. The HCHAS will be repeated again in 2016 and 2018. The Howard County Health Department and partners will continue to work together to update information, conduct studies, and ensure resources are focused where greatest need meets greatest opportunity to improve the health of all residents of Howard County.

* A full report of the survey findings is available. Please contact kmoore@howardcountymd.gov for a copy.