

Pierce County Chronic Disease Report and Action Plan 2017



To Achieve our Vision

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department recently completed an agency-wide strategic plan. This plan helps us achieve our vision of Healthy People in Healthy Communities. We will work to support a Pierce County where:

- 1) All people are healthy and safe.
- 2) People have equitable opportunities for health.
- 3) Children, families and communities thrive.

Chronic diseases, like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer and asthma shouldn't limit our ability to live happy and healthy lives.

While Pierce County is a great place to live, many people struggle to maintain good health. Health starts where we live, learn, work and play. Our neighborhoods and community policies affect our ability to live the best lives we can.

We want to have the greatest impact on chronic disease rates in our county and ensure the best health for all people. We look forward to working with colleagues, partners, and the community to help us achieve our mission to protect and improve the health of all people and places in Pierce County.

Pierce County

With a population of 830,120, Pierce County is the second largest county in Washington. It is comprised of culturally and socioeconomically diverse urban, suburban, rural and island communities in a 1,669 square-mile area bordering

south Puget Sound. It includes 23 incorporated cities, towns, and rapidly developing unincorporated areas. The military employs 58,000 people through Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Madigan Army Medical Center, and the Washington State National Guard.

According to the American Community Survey and the United States Census, racial minorities increased from 14% to 23% from 1990 to 2012. Currently, 72% of county residents identify themselves as White, 10% Hispanic, 8% African American, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. A large proportion of the county's racially diverse population is concentrated in the greater Tacoma area.

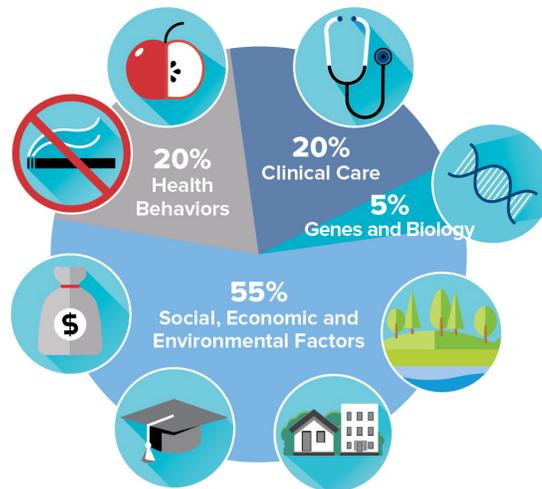
Chronic disease

A chronic disease is a persistent or long-lasting illness, and is often preventable. **In Pierce County, 55%**

of adults live with at least one of four types of chronic disease- heart disease, stroke, diabetes or cancer (Graph 1). In 2015, cancer and heart disease

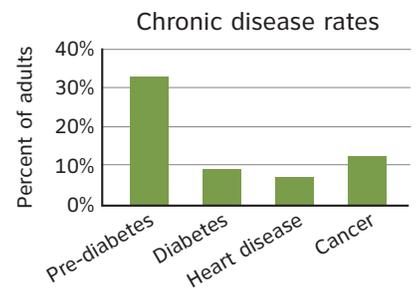
accounted for 44% of all deaths in Pierce County. Historically we have had higher rates of chronic disease, especially heart disease and diabetes, when compared to the rest of Washington state.

Figure 1: What makes us healthy?



Graph 1: Top chronic diseases in Pierce County.

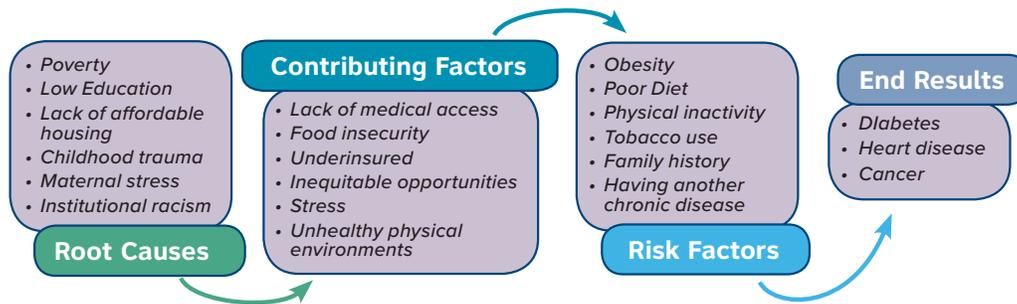
(BRFSS 2015)



Causes of disease

Chronic diseases are often the end result of many factors. Some factors we have a lot of control over, and some we don't. For many years, society believed chronic disease was solely the result of poor behavioral choices. However, social, cultural, economic, and environmental influences have a greater role in determining health (Figure 1). Where

Figure 2: Chronic disease relationships: causes and factors



we live, how much we earn, our education, and our mental health status are examples of some of these influences.

Risk and protective factors

Certain factors make us more at risk to develop chronic disease. Common risk factors include smoking, poor eating habits, lack of physical activity, and having another chronic disease (Figure 2, Graph 2). While risk factors are often the result of behavioral choices, environmental, social, and economic conditions influence them more than personal motivation. Alarming, among adults in Pierce County:

- Two out of every three are at an unhealthy weight.
- Almost one out of every three has high blood pressure.
- One out of every five smokes cigarettes.

Protective factors like breastfeeding help reduce the risk of disease. In addition to protecting children when they are young, breastfeeding can protect against adult obesity,

high blood pressure and Type II diabetes. The recommendation is for infants to drink breast milk for at least one year. In Pierce County, only two-thirds of mothers breastfeed for up to eight weeks (Graph 3).

Contributing factors

Conditions outside our control make it hard for us to make healthy choices and often contribute to chronic disease. For instance, if you live in a neighborhood without sidewalks, you might be less likely to get physical activity than someone who lives in a place where it is safe to walk. If you don't have transportation to get to a medical appointment, you might be less likely to see a medical provider. Or if you are greatly stressed and unable to get help, your physical

health may suffer. In Pierce County nearly 30% of adults have limited physical activity due to poor mental or physical health (Graph 4).

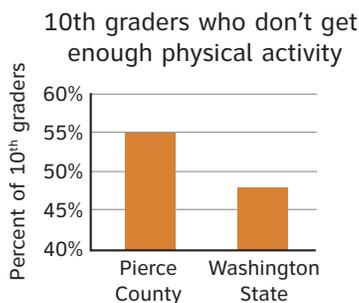
The environment and places where people live also factor into health status. People without consistent access to food have more illness including diabetes and high blood pressure. Also, people with easy access to affordable and healthy food make healthier choices than someone living in a community with only convenience stores. In Pierce County, neighbors living less than a mile apart can have up to eight years difference in life expectancy (Figure 3).

Root causes

Housing, education, mental health, and income have a large effect on health. People with a mental illness may find it harder to take care of their physical health. And, those with more education are more likely to enjoy good health. A 2011 report from the State Department of Health showed that Washington residents who don't have a stable place to

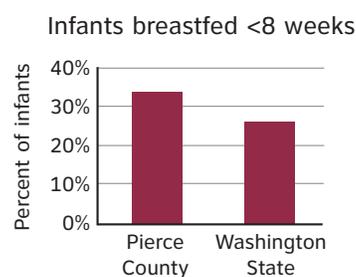
Graph 2: Percent of Pierce County 10th graders with low physical activity.

(HYS 2014)



Graph 3: Percent of infants breastfed for 8 weeks or less.

(PRAMS 2009-2011)



Graph 4: Percent of Pierce County adults limited by their mental health.

(BRFSS 2011-2013)

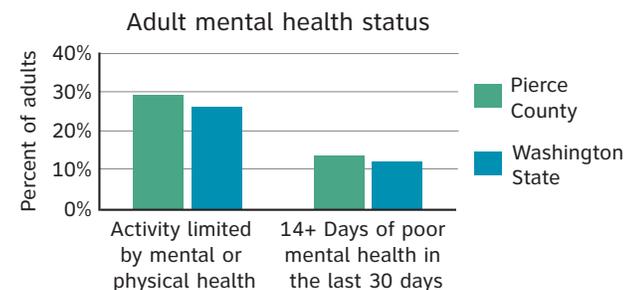
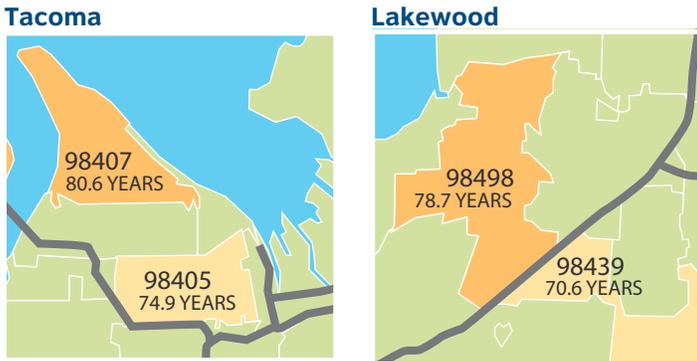


Figure 3: Relationship between where you live and life expectancy.

(US Census and Pierce County Death Registry)



live are twice as likely to have poor or fair health or delay doctor visits because of costs, than those who have stable housing.

Education and income are underlying influences of many root causes. They affect several factors that allow us to maintain good health, like transportation and housing. In Pierce County, one in five adults does not have a high school diploma (Graph 5).

Equity

The negative impacts are highest in low-income communities. People living in households with incomes less than \$20,000 per year and African-Americans are more susceptible to chronic disease.

They suffer more from obesity, tobacco use, and high blood pressure and cholesterol (Graph 6, Graph 7) than other groups. Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Hispanics have greater rates of smoking and obesity than Whites in Pierce County. Native American and African-American communities have the highest rates of cancer.

Impact

Chronic disease can lead to a shorter, lower quality life and a decreased ability to earn income. People with chronic disease may become depressed or experience other emotional or social difficulties. The cost to maintain a chronic disease is often a burden to people and their families. In many cases, people may not be able to afford treatment.

The community also pays a price. For example, we spend \$3 billion every year on healthcare related to tobacco use in Washington state. \$651 million of this comes from taxpayers to cover healthcare costs for those who can't afford it. Every Washington household pays \$625 a year, even if no one in their household smokes.

New Solutions

Effective solutions to reduce chronic disease in Pierce County will require commitment from decision makers to address its complex causes. It will also require:

- Knowledge that social, economic, and environmental influences rather than a consequence of poor behavior choices are the primary causes of chronic disease.

A more informed vision: Factors beyond individual control can present barriers to healthy behavior.

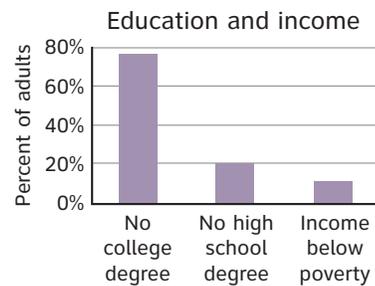
- A greater focus on policy.

Policies are a cost-effective and sustainable way to decrease chronic disease. For example, vapor product use among youth decreased from 18% to 13% in two years. We partially attribute this to local policies that restrict youth from using and buying these products (Source: Healthy Youth Survey). Other promising policies such as taxing sugar-sweetened beverages have the potential to significantly decrease soda consumption, obesity and other related chronic diseases.

- Willingness to address the root causes of health

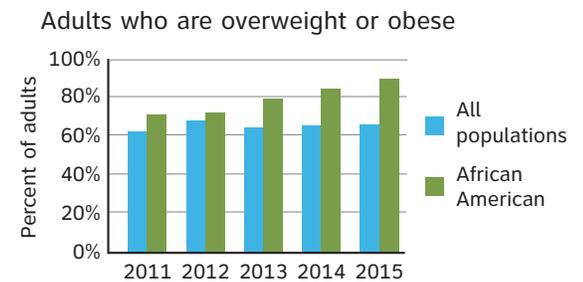
Graph 5: Percent of adults in Pierce County who live in poverty and with limited education.

(US Census 2009-2013)



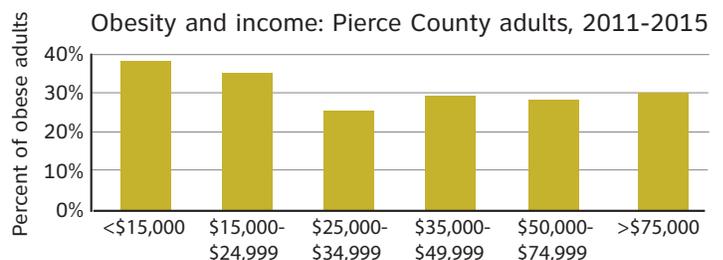
Graph 6: Obesity levels of African Americans compared with all populations in Pierce County.

(BRFSS 2011-2015)



Graph 7: Obesity and income: Pierce County adults 2011-2015.

(BRFSS)



(education, housing, poverty, etc.).

To move the needle on root causes of health, we need strong leadership and multi-agency collaboration. Progress towards achieving equity in these areas may be difficult and slow-moving but the potential impact is great.

- Priority to populations disproportionately burdened by the causes of chronic disease.

Direct programs, policies, and resources toward individuals and communities where low-income and priority populations live, learn, work, and play. Our communities of focus include: 1) East Tacoma, 2) Springbrook (Lakewood), and 3) Key Peninsula (Pierce County).

- Pierce County businesses and agencies support a “health in all policies” approach.

Organizations and jurisdictions have influence to improve the health of those they serve. We encourage you to include health in all policies and systems.

Action Steps

Our chronic disease strategic plan provides priorities and related activities for the next four years. Our priorities are to:

1. Increase opportunities for healthy food and physical activity.
2. Improve the ability for people to make healthy living the easy choice.
3. Address root causes, contributing factors, and risk factors that contribute to chronic disease.

We will implement these priorities in a variety of ways. We will work within our agency and with partners to provide expertise, funding, technical assistance, leadership, and staff to achieve our objectives. We encourage elected officials, planners, businesses, schools, parks, insurance providers, community-based organizations, and other entities to lead or partner with us on evidence-based programs and policies. The following recommended activities will help support these efforts.

Sector	Policy Issues
Elected Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass a sugar-sweetened beverage tax at the municipal level. • Develop policies and provide funding to support education, housing, behavioral health and economic opportunities for all.
City and County Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement non-motorized transportation plans.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create policies that support active transportation (walking and biking).
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clean indoor air and healthy home environments.
Businesses and Worksites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to employees that promote healthy food and physical activity. • Create business policies to support breastfeeding, pregnancy/parental leave accommodations, and work-life balance.
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote healthy foods and increase opportunities for physical activity. • Promote shared use agreements of facilities with community organizations. • Encourage and promote safe routes to school activities and infrastructure. • Encourage smoke-free campus policies and promote tobacco cessation resources. • Provide support and resources to children and families who have adverse childhood experiences.
Insurance Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to schools in implementing physical activity strategies (e.g. funding). • Provide coverage to employees for diabetes prevention programs and family planning.
Community-Based Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies for healthy food, physical activity and tobacco cessation. • Provide support and opportunities to families to strengthen social connections. • Become a breastfeeding friendly institution.
Hospitals and Clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community organizations to provide prevention based opportunities and resources.