

Ebel: Where you are born impacts how long you live

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(Photo: Submitted photo)

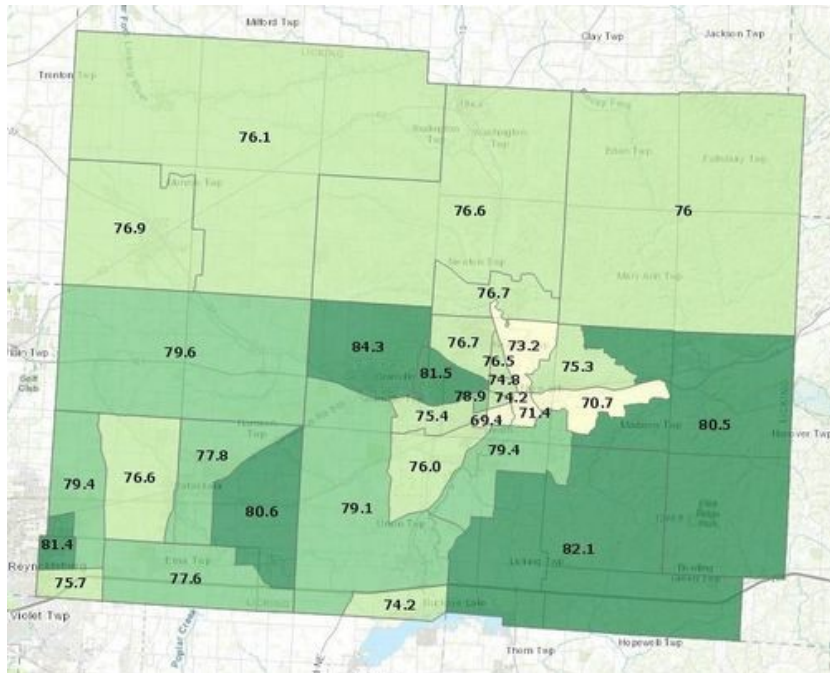
Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health, that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. Updated data released from the U.S. Small-Area Life Expectancy Estimates Project (USALEEP) illustrates health disparities in Licking County, where there is up to a 14.9-year difference in life expectancy for a child born today across different communities within the county.

Many of our communities have life expectancies below Ohio's average of 77.9 years, and well below the national average of 79.1 years. The highest life expectancy for a census tract within the county is 84.3 years and the lowest is 69.4 years. Two-thirds of Licking County census tracts have life expectancies below the state

average.

Race or ethnicity, sex, sexual identity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographic location all contribute to an individual's ability to achieve good health. In Licking County, our greatest health disparities are tied to areas that are home to large numbers of lower-income residents. Many of those residents are living in rental housing, lack reliable transportation, have lower graduation rates, higher smoking rates, less access to healthy food options, and other factors that contribute to this disparity.

The Licking County Health Department is using this new USALEEP data to drive discussions about improving health equity. Health equity is the principle underlying a commitment to reduce or eliminate disparities in health and in its determinants, including social determinants. Pursuing health equity means striving for the highest possible standard of health for all people and giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health, based on social conditions.



The map shows life expectancy based on geographic area in Licking County. (Photo: Joe Ebel)

The CDC recommends interventions to improve community health by changing the context to make healthy choices easier. Examples of this include school-based programs to increase physical activity and prevent violence, safe routes to school, motorcycle injury prevention, tobacco control interventions, access to clean syringes, and multi-component worksite obesity prevention.

Recommended interventions addressing the social determinants of health include early childhood education programs, public transportation system introduction or expansion, and home improvement loans or grants.

The Licking County Community Health Improvement Committee (CHIC) brings together health care, public health, mental health, social services, and other stakeholders to identify and address the health needs of our communities. Many of these groups are already working to assess community needs and plan interventions but working together has a greater impact than working alone.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the CHIC, or advancing health equity in Licking County, contact Chad Brown, Deputy Health Commissioner, at cbrown@lickingcohealth.org.

Where you are born within our county should not mean facing challenges that could result in years of potential life lost. We need to work together to remove barriers and eliminate disparities to give all Licking County residents the opportunity to achieve their best possible health.

Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.

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