

# The Health Disparities of Vermonters • 2010



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To reduce health disparities in Vermont

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June 2010



Dear Vermonter,

More than 20 years ago, the Institute of Medicine defined public health as “what we as a society do to collectively assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.”

Over the past decade, Vermonters have time and again been judged, by many researchers and by many measures, to be among the healthiest citizens of any state. Vermont is notable for lower smoking rates, lower prevalence of obesity, and lower rates of preventable death, among other important measures.

The health status of our population as a whole is truly good to excellent. But when we take a closer look at ourselves and the social determinants of health – our collective access to education, jobs, a living wage, healthy foods, medical care, safe housing and healthful, supportive and connected communities – we find another story.

Too many of us, especially younger, less educated and lower income Vermonters, experience the consequences of health disparities that are largely preventable.

What is a *health disparity*? In purely analytical terms, it is a measure of health that sets one group of people apart from another. In human terms, it amounts to real differences in years of healthy life enjoyed by one group compared to another.

The following pages present information, maps, data and trends that highlight health disparities as they exist today in our state, as well as recommended actions that can be taken to reduce these disparities.

This is the true calling of public health, and we ask government, communities and individuals to continue to work together toward our common goal: to better the health of *all* Vermonters.

Wendy Davis, MD  
Commissioner of Health

# Reader's Guide

## Data Sources

The information in this report comes from a variety of sources, including birth and death records, hospital discharge data, personal interviews and telephone surveys.

Unless otherwise noted, data are for adults age 18 and older (or 25 and older when referring to educational status) and are from the year 2008.

### United States

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Kaiser State Health Facts  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Vital Statistics System

### Vermont

Agency of Human Services  
Dept. of Health

- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (including the Asthma Callback Survey)
- Blood Lead Surveillance System
- Cancer Registry
- Children with Special Health Needs
- Dentist Survey
- Farmer Health Survey
- HIV, AIDS, & Sexually Transmitted Disease Program
- Immunization Registry
- Oral Health Survey
- Physician's Survey
- Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC)
- Vital Statistics System
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Agency of Transportation  
Dept. of Banking, Insurance, Securities  
& Health Care Administration (BISHCA)  
• Uniform Hospital Discharge Data  
Dept. of Housing & Urban Development  
• Point in Time Survey  
Dept. of Labor  
Dept. of Taxes  
Joint Fiscal Office  
• Basic Needs Budgets & the Livable Wage  
University of Vermont  
• Center for Rural Studies  
VT Center for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing  
VT Coalition of Clinics for the Uninsured  
VT Foodbank  
VT Housing Council & Vermont Housing  
Awareness Campaign  
VT Internet Service Provider dataset  
VT Office of Economic Opportunity  
• Emergency Shelter Grant Program

**With special thanks to –**

- Friends of Burlington Gardens
- VT Agency of Human Services
- VT Agency of Transportation
- VT Department for Children & Families
- VT Department of Education
- VT Department of Public Safety
- VT Foodbank

## Federal Poverty Level

Federal Poverty Guidelines are issued each year by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. They are a national measure of poverty, and are used to determine eligibility for an array of programs and services. These guidelines are sometimes referred to as the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), as they are in this report.

While all data presented in this report use the current Federal Poverty Level measure, there is a movement underway to revise the method the federal government uses to measure poverty. The current measure, developed in the 1960s, estimated poverty based on the assumption that Americans spend approximately one-third of their after-tax income on food.

Proponents of the new method argue that families typically spend about one-seventh of their income on food, but spend much more than that on housing, transportation, and child care expenses. The current method also does not take non-cash assistance such as food stamps, housing subsidies and tax credits into consideration.

## Reporting Race & Ethnicity

For more than 20 years, current standards in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 have provided a common language to promote uniformity and comparability for data on race and ethnicity. These data standards were developed in cooperation with federal agencies to provide consistent data on race and ethnicity throughout the federal government. These standards came about, in large measure, from new responsibilities for enforcing civil rights laws. Data were needed to monitor equal access in housing, education, employment, and other areas, for populations that had historically experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity.

Using these standards, race and ethnicity have been reported in the decennial census household surveys, on administrative forms (e.g. school registration and mortgage lending applications), and in medical and other research.

Especially since the 1990 census, these standards have come under criticism from those who believe that the minimum categories set forth in Directive No. 15 do not reflect the current diversity of the population, primarily a result of expanded immigration and interracial marriage.

In response to these observations, in July 1993 the OMB started a comprehensive review of the current categories for data on race and ethnicity.

As a result of the review, on January 1, 2003, all federal programs were required by the OMB to adopt revised standards for collecting and reporting racial and ethnic status. These standards were published in the *Federal Register* on October 30, 1997, under the title: “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.”

This classification provides a minimum standard for maintaining, collecting, and presenting data on race and ethnicity for all federal reporting purposes. Additional categories are permitted, provided they can be aggregated to the standard categories. The categories in the classification are social-political constructs, and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. They are not to be used as determinants of eligibility for participation in any federal program, but should be used for statistical reporting, general program administrative and grant reporting, for civil rights and other compliance reporting, and for presentation of data on race and ethnicity.

## Federal Categories & Definitions:

- **American Indian or Alaska Native**

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

- **Asian**

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

- **Black or African American**

A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as “Haitian” can be used in addition to “Black or African American.”

- **Hispanic or Latino**

A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander**

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

- **White**

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

*Respondents shall be offered the option of selecting one or more racial designations.*

### Reference

[www.whitehouse.gov/omb/rewrite/fedreg/ombdir15.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/rewrite/fedreg/ombdir15.html)

*Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.*