



# The Facts About Georgians: Our Health Depends On It

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Prepared for  
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Foundation by:



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EMORY

# Introduction

A large and diverse state such as Georgia, with nearly nine million residents, faces complex health challenges. It is in this context that Healthcare Georgia Foundation pursues its commitment to advance the health of all Georgians and to expand access to affordable, quality healthcare for underserved individuals and communities.

The 2003 report, *The Facts About Georgians: Our Health Depends On It*, was an effort to compile notable data related to the health of Georgians. Data were grouped under six major areas: 1) demographics, 2) health status, 3) access to care, 4) preventive services, 5) health behaviors and 6) environmental factors. Snapshots of more than 50 health indicators were shown using graphics, maps and facts. This information continues to serve as a resource to assist the Foundation and its constituents in meeting their goals.

This summary updates and highlights key health indicators from the 2003 report from two perspectives: 1) social factors and health behaviors and 2) population-specific health issues. The first are factors that appear to have a major impact on Georgians. Because the health of many Georgians is affected by more than one social factor or health behavior, we have also looked at health data by population groups. Population-specific issues are highlighted where data reveal disparities in gender, age, race/ethnicity or geography.



# Education

Low educational attainment, a surrogate measure for low socioeconomic status, is associated with lower utilization of preventive services, greater risk of disease and increased death rate. Georgia has historically lagged behind the nation in educational status, and data suggest that the state still has much work to do in this arena.

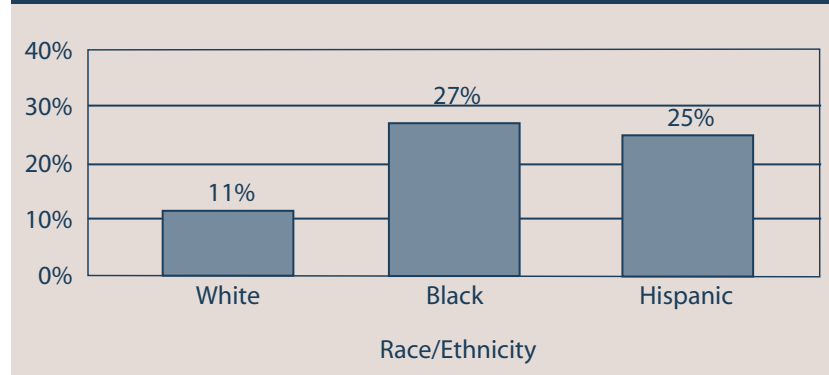
- Georgia has the lowest high school graduation rates in the country. The graduation rate varies by race, with 44% of black, 32% of Hispanic and 61% of white students graduating from high school.
- On a daily basis, 74,000 students in Georgia's public schools are absent. Absenteeism is a major indicator of the number of students at high risk for becoming future dropouts.
- In 2004, the high school dropout rate was 12%. Rates among counties varied from a low of 2% to as high as 44%.
- Nearly one-fourth of Georgia adults may be illiterate (Literacy Level 1).

# Poverty

Georgians with lower incomes often can't afford health care and health insurance, and frequently suffer poor health.

- Approximately 12% of Georgia's population is living in poverty.
- Children and minority populations are more likely than others to live in poverty.

Poverty Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2004



Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts

- In 2004, more than 91,000 Georgia households required energy assistance in the winter, costing approximately \$18 million.
- While, as of September 2005, the unemployment rate in Georgia (5.3%) was slightly higher than the rate for the U.S. (5.1%), the opportunities for employment are uneven among regions in the state.

## Obesity/Overweight and Physical Activity

The epidemic of obesity has hit Georgia particularly hard, with Georgians being among the heaviest Americans. Obesity increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer and aggravates other conditions such as arthritis. Nearly 80% of obese adults suffer with chronic diseases. The prevalence of low activity levels has been implicated as a root cause of increasing obesity rates in both children and adults.

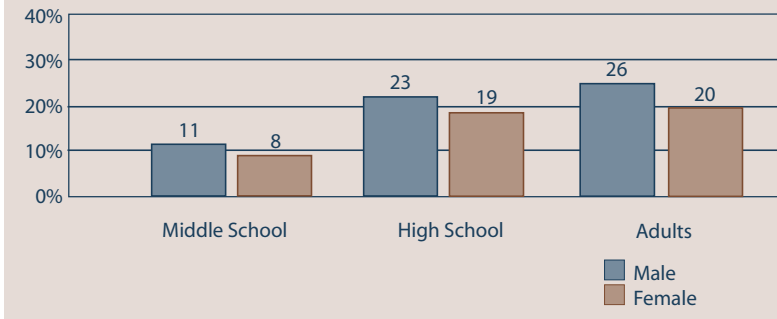
- In 2002, nearly one in four Georgia adults was obese.
- Alarmingly, three in ten middle school students and one in four high school students in Georgia are overweight or at risk of being overweight, which has implications for the increasing rate of diabetes and potential chronic disease burden for the state.
- One in four adults in Georgia does not engage in any leisure time physical activity, which is similar to the overall U.S. rate.
- Physical inactivity is more common in those with lower income and among older adults.
- If all Georgians became regularly active, an estimated 5,500 lives per year would be saved.

## Tobacco Use

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. In Georgia, tobacco kills more than 11,000 people each year and drains \$1.2 billion from our economy in health care expenditures.

- Tobacco use is common among Georgians, with nearly one in four Georgia adults smoking cigarettes.
- One in ten high school students in Georgia uses smokeless tobacco.
- The most prevalent age of initiation for high school students who smoke is age 13-14. Easy access to cigarettes may increase underage smoking.

Percent of Cigarette Smokers by Age Group and Sex, Georgia, 2003



Georgia Department of Human Resources, Tobacco Use Survey

- More than half of middle school students and nearly two-thirds of high school students get their cigarettes from another person.
- Although Georgia's tobacco tax recently increased to 37 cents per pack, Georgia continues to have one of the lowest tobacco taxes in the nation.



Geographic  
Disparities

Hispanic Population

**Population-Specific  
Issues**

Women's Health

Men's Health

Aging Population

# Geographic Disparities

Where people live can influence their health. Problems are evident in both rural and urban areas; however, each face their own distinct challenges.

## Rural Challenges

- The tendency of physicians to gravitate toward metropolitan areas has left many Georgians, especially those in rural areas, with limited access to primary care physicians.
- A larger percentage of the population in rural areas (16–17%) is uninsured, compared to 13% statewide.

## Urban Challenges

- Homelessness is a major concern for our urban cities. While the exact number of homeless is difficult to define, it is estimated that 21,000 people in the Atlanta metro area experienced homelessness in 2005.
- Murders and other violent crimes are more prevalent in urban areas.
- Urban sprawl and dependence on car travel have contributed to Atlanta's ranking for the poorest air quality in the Southeast.

# Hispanic Population

Current and projected growth of Georgia's Hispanic population raises concerns of potential barriers to health care services. Shortages of Spanish-speaking staff, cultural and attitudinal barriers, and immigration status are all factors that may limit the use of health services.

- Nearly 7% of Georgia's population is of Hispanic ethnicity, and that number is expected to increase to 10% by 2015.
- In 2004, an estimated 6.5% of Georgia's population spoke Spanish at home.
- In Georgia, 25% of Hispanics live in poverty.
- During the last decade, teen pregnancy rates have been increasing for Hispanic women.
- Fifteen percent of middle school and high school Hispanic students are at risk for being overweight.
- Approximately 27% of Hispanic adults in Georgia do not engage in any leisure time physical activity.
- Compared to whites and blacks, Hispanics had the highest rates of influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations in 2001, which may provide some insight as we seek to address other health-related issues among this population.

# Men's Health

Statistically, men live approximately five fewer years than women and face major health risks that can be prevented and treated if detected early. Black men residing in Georgia are at increased risk for several diseases, compared to other races.

10 Leading Causes of Death, Georgia, 2002 Males, All Races, All Ages	
1. Heart Disease	6. Influenza & Pneumonia
2. Malignant Neoplasms	7. Suicide
3. Unintentional Injury	8. Diabetes Mellitus
4. Cerebrovascular	9. Nephritis
5. Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	10. Septicemia

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention

- Cardiovascular disease deaths were 1.4 times higher for men than for women in 2002.
- In Georgia, stroke death rates for black men are 1.7 times higher than for white men.
- Mortality rates from both colorectal and prostate cancer are higher among Georgia's black men than Georgia's white men.
- Death rates from diabetes for black men in Georgia are 1.5 times higher than for white men.
- Men-who-have-sex-with-men represent the highest number of reported AIDS cases in Georgia. There are 15 cases of AIDS per 100,000 men in Georgia.

# Women's Health

Historically, inequalities in research, health care services and education have placed the health of women at risk and resulted in gender disparities in health status.

10 Leading Causes of Death, Georgia, 2002 Females, All Races, All Ages	
1. Heart Disease	6. Alzheimer's Disease
2. Malignant Neoplasms	7. Influenza & Pneumonia
3. Cerebrovascular	8. Diabetes Mellitus
4. Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	9. Nephritis
5. Unintentional Injury	10. Septicemia

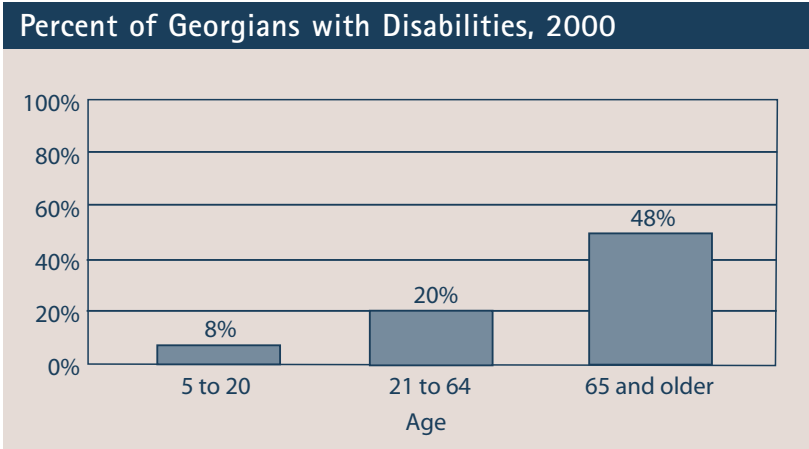
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention

- Fifteen percent of households in Georgia are headed by a single female.
- In Georgia, 35% of families headed by a single female live in poverty, compared to 14% of families overall.
- The Georgia Women, Infants and Children's Supplemental Food Program for low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women and children aged 5 and younger, experienced a 19% increase in participation in just four years.
- Racial disparities exist among women. Death rates for black women with diabetes are more than twice that of white women.
- Women (30%) are more likely to have arthritis than men (23%).
- Females (38%) are more likely than males (27%) to report having poor mental health days.
- Women are more often the victims of domestic violence, as males initiate nearly four in five incidences of family violence.

# Aging Population

The prevalence of most chronic diseases increases with age. Nationally, at least 80% of seniors have at least one chronic condition and 50% have at least two. There are great opportunities for intervention with this population, since poor health is not an inevitable consequence of aging.

- Currently, 10% of Georgians are aged 65 or older. By 2030, the over-65 population is expected to increase to 16%.
- In May 2003, fourteen counties did not have any nursing home facilities, and seven counties had neither nursing nor personal care facilities.
- In 2000, nearly half of Georgians 65 and older reported having some type of disability.



U.S. Census Bureau. Available at <http://factfinder.gov>

# Considerations

As Healthcare Georgia Foundation and its partners seek to advance the health of all Georgians by improving access to affordable, quality healthcare for underserved individuals and communities, sufficient data are needed to determine priority areas for funding and to monitor and evaluate efforts.

The 2003 report, *The Facts About Georgians: Our Health Depends On It*, serves as an inventory of selected health indicators of Georgia that are relevant to the mission of the Foundation. While limited by space considerations and, in some cases, lack of available data, this report was designed to provide a snapshot of some of the health-related issues of greatest concern in the State of Georgia.

These health-related factors and trends have implications for Georgia far beyond the singular issues presented in this summary and in the more detailed report. The issues presented here are by no means exhaustive; however, it is hoped that they will provide a basis for discussion of priorities for use of resources and possible strategies for addressing pervasive public health problems that ultimately affect Georgians on a very personal level.



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