



# Developing a Community Scorecard to Chronicle Public Health Disparities in South Los Angeles

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## INTRODUCTION

The *South LA Health Equity Scorecard* examines the health of South Los Angeles residents in the context of the social and economic policies that contribute to inequitable resource levels. Scorecard then provides recommendations for policy solutions to achieve health equity. Scorecard was designed to serve as a tool for drawing public attention to and contributing to a greater understanding of the institutional and systemic barriers to health.

Residents of South Los Angeles suffer from the highest rates of morbidity and mortality in Los Angeles County. This is attributed in large part to the historical patterns of migration and segregation that today make South Los Angeles home to the largest population of African Americans (45.6%) and Hispanic or Latino populations (18.5%) in this region of more than 9 million residents. South Los Angeles stands as an icon for all that plagues the urban inner cities across the country. Much of the disease burden can be attributed to the erosion of resources and the inequitable distribution of resources as a result of public/private divestment.

## POLICY/PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Good health is determined by multiple factors—among them gender, race and ethnicity; genetic predisposition; individual behavior; and the social determinants of health (Evans, 1990). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the social determinants of health to be the conditions in which people are born, live, work, play and age. These social conditions are in turn fashioned by the distribution of income, goods, services, power and other necessary resources. Inequities in health occur when these resources are distributed in an unbalanced manner (WHO CSDH, 2008).

The social conditions that contribute to South LA's determinants of health paint a stark picture of health inequity. The availability and accessibility of resources is highly disparate compared to other areas of the county (i.e., West LA). Environmental resources such as housing, schools, nutritional outlets, physical activity options, general public safety, and air and land quality all were found severely lacking in South LA. Health care resources such as facilities, financing, workforce, coverage, access and utilization were also all found severely lacking in the area.

The data and analyses reported in *Scorecard* provide a tool for communities and advocates to identify the resource inequities that need to be changed. The data also provide a tool from which to frame sound public policy and recommendations, as well as a strategy to push for the adoption of policy and systems changes that will create healthy communities.

## KEY LESSONS

- Health disparities are not simply a result of individual behavior but rather an outgrowth of racial segregation and public and private policies that concentrate socioeconomic depression. The inequities in the resource environment mirror those disparities that are present in the health outcomes of the South LA community.
- There are 11 pediatricians available per 100,000 children in South LA. By comparison, there are 193 pediatricians per 100,000 children available in West LA, while LA County overall has a pediatrician supply of 57 per 100,000 children. The lack of pediatric care in South LA contributes to the increasing incidences of asthma, juvenile diabetes and obesity. Parents who do not have access to care are more likely to leave untreated these conditions or ignore early warning signs. The closure of Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Hospital in Watts, the region's public hospital, depleted the area even further when 250 residents and over 50 doctors were transferred out of South LA. Since the publication of *Scorecard*, advocates have used the data and policy recommendations in the report to push for the timely and successful reopening of Martin Luther King Hospital. They have met with and provided public testimony to decision-makers including the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, the University of California Board of Regents and members of the state legislature. Community advocates continue to monitor the progress that LA county has made toward reopening the hospital facility, as well as the progress the county has made toward using other opportunities to build up the safety-net system of providers in South LA. The hospital is scheduled to reopen by late 2012.
- The County of Los Angeles provides primary care services for the indigent populations through their Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programs, through which they reimburse nonprofit primary-care clinics for treating uninsured patients. South LA clinics participating in this program receive \$27.12 per uninsured person residing

in the community. West LA clinics, however, receive \$65.36 per uninsured person residing in the West LA area. While these funding allocations are based on a decades-old formula that previously accounted for the lack of capacity in South LA, the primary care infrastructure has grown over the past 10 years, and as such, these funding allocations should be recalculated to meet the current need and maximize the available capacity. In response to the funding inequities highlighted in *Scorecard*, the LA County Board of Supervisors identified and committed an additional \$44.8 million in one-time funds to those clinics located in underfunded areas. Advocates continue to identify additional funding and push for the adoption of a more equitable funding allocation.

- Many studies have shown that regular consumption of fast food can lead to higher body mass index, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Limited service, or fast food establishments comprise approximately 71.8 percent of restaurants in South Los Angeles. By comparison, only 40.8 percent of West LA's food service establishments and 47.7 percent of LA County eateries are considered fast food outlets. In July of 2008, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed an Interim Control Ordinance that prohibited the establishment of any new, stand-alone fast food establishments in the South LA region. *Scorecard* recommends extending this ordinance indefinitely. *Scorecard* also recommends offering retail/tax incentives for healthy food resources and providing for a healthy community zone designation in the City of Los Angeles' land use and planning updates.
- Current policy dictates that the number of off-sale liquor retail licenses issued is based upon the size of the population rather than by geographic area. Using the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control's database, South LA has approximately 8.51 liquor licenses per square mile. In comparison, West LA has 1.97 per square mile, while LA County has 1.56 per square mile. A number of studies have shown that alcohol outlet density is a predictor of violent crimes (Scribner, 1995). Further analysis of *Scorecard* data calls for policy changes that would cap the number of licenses issued in overconcentrated areas, limiting the number of licensed retailers based on their geographic proximity to each other, and also changing the population standards that are currently used to exclude the population under 21 years of age.

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Scribner RA, MacKinnon DP and Dwyer J H. “The Risk of Assaultive Violence and Alcohol Availability in Los Angeles County.” *American Journal of Public Health*, 85(3): 335–340, 1995. Available [online](#).

World Health Organization, Commission on Social Determinants of Health. *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*, 2008. Available [online](#).

### Web Sites

[www.abc.ca.gov](http://www.abc.ca.gov) The California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control issues liquor licenses and administers regulations and provisions in accordance with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Act.

[www.lahealthaction.org](http://www.lahealthaction.org) Los Angeles Health Action is a nonprofit organization seeking to improve the health of LA County residents through research, policy advocacy and strategic alliances.

[www.ladhs.org](http://www.ladhs.org) The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services is responsible for providing free and low-cost health care to the uninsured and indigent populations in LA County.

[www.oshpd.ca.gov](http://www.oshpd.ca.gov) The Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development provides data and reports on health care facilities, financing, workforce, patient discharge and utilization, quality indicators, and other issues.