

Using Data to Understand Your Community

According to the Institute of Medicine, health care should be safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim[®] adds to this, stating that health care should seek to achieve better population health ("better health"), improved experience of care ("better care"), and lower per capita cost ("lower cost"). Using data to understand your community's population can be a useful starting point in accomplishing these goals. It's challenging to offer equitable health care if you don't know which groups of people might be disadvantaged in your population. It's difficult to improve the health of your population if you don't have a big picture of health status (and other factors that impact health status) in your community.

IDEAS AND NEXT STEPS FOR USING DATA TO UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNITY

Some useful websites that include demographic, population, health, and other data for ZIP codes, cities, counties, and states are included below. Before you start exploring these resources:

- **Start by thinking about your goals.** Overall, what do you hope to learn and why do you want to know it? Are you hoping to understand your population as a whole, or a certain group within it? Are you searching for data to support an application for a funding source? Are you seeking to better know your community or population in hopes of creating an innovative program to address health concerns or disparities?
- **Next, identify some specific questions you would like to answer about your population.** For example, if you are considering an innovative program to pursue better health for vulnerable seniors, you might ask how many people 65 years and older in your community are living alone or have incomes below the federal poverty level, or you might seek to describe the environment in which your community's seniors live. Or, if you are seeking funding to implement community-based chronic disease management programs, you might want to understand how the prevalence of some of your community's health behaviors (inactivity, binge drinking, or smoking) compares to other communities.
- **Finally, look through descriptions of and uses for the data sources below,** and begin to explore any that might address your questions.



America's Health Rankings

Main website: <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/>

About: America's Health Rankings provides analysis of national health on a state-by-state basis by evaluating a historical and comprehensive set of health, environmental, and socioeconomic data to determine national benchmarks and state rankings.

Detail: America's Health Rankings is built upon the World Health Organization definition of health – “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” The rankings are a composite index of state-level population health measures. Each measure is ranked by the state and a state's total score is calculated by adding the products of the score for each ranked measure multiplied by its assigned weight and impact on health.

Specific ideas for using this resource: America's Health Rankings provides state-based data that could be used to better understand a state's population with respect to other states and could potentially be used to help frame funding proposals around social determinants of health or health outcomes.

Blue Cross Blue Shield Health Index

Main website: <https://www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/health-index>

About: The BCBS Health Index quantifies over 200 different health conditions to identify which diseases and conditions most affect American's longevity and quality of life.

Detail: The BCBS is powered by annual data from more than 41 million BCBS commercially insured Americans. The Health Index Map offers comparison at state and county levels, providing an impact assessment that highlights the 10 most detrimentally impactful conditions that population's health and demographic comparisons by gender and age. Condition impact maps allow users to compare the adverse health impacts of certain conditions at state and county levels with further demographic comparisons by gender and age.

County Health Rankings

Main website: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>

About: The *County Health Rankings* show the rank of the health of nearly every county in the nation, providing data, evidence, guidance, and examples to build awareness of the multiple factors that influence health and support community leaders working to improve health and increase health equity.

Detail: The *County Health Rankings* uses a model of population health to rank U.S. counties within each state, basing the rankings on available data.

Specific ideas for using this resource: County Health Rankings provides detail on various population health status factors. This resource could be used to supplement and support decisions around population health and to help identify relevant health concerns in counties.





The Dartmouth Atlas Project

Main website: <http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/>

About: The Dartmouth Atlas Project documents variations in how medical resources are distributed and used in the US, using Medicare and Medicaid data to provide information and analysis about national, regional, and local markets, as well as hospitals and their affiliated physicians.

Detail: Users can interact with a variety of maps and charts to dig into the available data, including end of life care, medical discharges, Medicare reimbursements, primary care access and quality measures, and more.

Specific ideas for using this resource: The Dartmouth Atlas is a good source for place-based information specific to hospital referral region (HRR) or hospital service area (HSA). Data can be organized by region, hospital, or available topic, to help you better understand your hospital or region's performance on various levels of access and health care, and identify opportunities for improvement.

HealthLandscape

Main website: <http://www.healthlandscape.org>

About: HealthLandscape is an interactive web-based mapping tool that allows health professionals, policy makers, academic researchers, and planners to combine, analyze and display information in ways that promote better understanding of health and the forces that affect it.

Detail: HealthLandscape is the “parent” of UDS Mapper (see below). It incorporates data from a range of publicly available datasets, including data on education, criminal justice, demographics, and healthcare. HealthLandscape is available to anyone at no cost after creating a user account.

Specific ideas for using this resource: Similar to UDS Mapper, HealthLandscape may be used for community health assessment, health planning, and grant writing. It would be particularly useful in describing and sharing community characteristics. The tool also allows you to upload limited amounts of your own data, if what you would like to map is not available in the datasets included.

Kaiser Family Foundation: State Health Facts

Main website: <http://kff.org/statedata/>

About: State Health Facts provides free, up-to-date, and easy-to-use health data for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the United States, counties, territories, and other geographies. State Health Facts is comprised of more than 800 health indicators and provides users with the ability to map, rank, trend, and download data.

Detail: Kaiser State Health Facts is a compilation of a wide range of health data, organized into 11 categories: health coverage, Medicaid & CHIP, private insurance and marketplaces, Medicare, health status, women's health, health costs, access to care, providers, demographics, and economic measures. Categories are further organized into subcategories and indicators, allowing users to select specific factors they want to consider and compare across states.





Specific ideas for using this resource: Kaiser State Health Facts is based on data at a state level, but it is still a useful resource for better understanding the population—particularly in comparison to other states. A small rural hospital seeking grant funding for an innovation might use Kaiser State Health Facts to frame its state in terms of its place among all the nation’s states, then use another source to provide more specific community-level data.

Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council

Main website: <http://www.measureofamerica.org/maps/>

About: Mapping America is a tool to understand well-being in America. Users can select categories of well-being, a specific location, and a population segment, and see the results visually mapped. The Human Development Index is a composite measure of well-being and opportunity that combines indicators across a variety of categories which can be further analyzed.

Detail: Users can select topics from the following categories that contribute to the Human Development Index to see them graphed at state, county, or congressional district levels: sustainable development goals; demographics; education; environment; health; housing; inclusion and engagement; safety and security; and work, wealth, and poverty. Data can be further segmented by demographic information, including by sex and race/ethnicity.

Specific ideas for using this resource: This interactive tool is useful for fully describing your community’s characteristics. Users can look at a specific county or state status (as compared to others in the United States) on a wide range of data criteria in an easily accessible map. Indicators and data elements at the bottom of the screen can be selected to change the geographic level, and be used to look at specific racial/ethnic subgroups, or explore specific topic areas. Data can be downloaded into an external file or used as it appears on the screen.

My Tribal Area (U.S. Census Bureau)

Main website: <https://www.census.gov/tribal/>

About: My Tribal Area gives you quick and easy access to selected demographic, social, economic, and housing statistics for the nation’s American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) population communities.

Detail: My Tribal Area is powered by the [Census Application Programming Interface](#) based on data from the [American Community Survey](#) (ACS), which is an ongoing survey that builds on the questions asked of the census. Users drill down to a particular tribal area of interest and are able to navigate data related to people, jobs, housing, economy, and education.

Specific ideas for using this resource: Data could be used to understand age, race/ethnicity, employment, housing, income, health insurance, and education characteristics for a tribal area’s population, and can provide data to help support decision making around population health.





State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC)

Main website: <http://www.shadac.org/datacenter>

About: SHADAC's State Health Compare is a web-based tool for obtaining state-level estimates related to health and health care – such as insurance coverage, access, cost, utilization, and outcomes – as well as equity and economic measures.

Detail: SHADAC compiles census-based data around health insurance into an easy-to-access portal that allows exploration of topics within states by characteristics (i.e. age, race/ethnicity, and education level) as well as across states looking at trends over time. High-level topics available for exploration include: health insurance coverage, cost of care – dollars, cost of care – behavior changes, health behaviors, outcomes, access to care, utilization of care, quality of care, public health, and social and economic factors.

Specific ideas for using this resource: The SHADAC Data Center provides state-based data that could be used to better understand a state's population with respect to other states and could potentially be used to help frame funding proposals around health insurance or health access.

UDS Mapper

Main website: <http://www.udsmapper.org>

About: The UDS Mapper is designed to help inform users about the current geographic extent of U.S. federal (Section 330) Health Center Program (HCP) grantees and “look-alikes.” It is a robust mapping tool meant to help users visualize service area information, as well as to help these HCP grantees and look-alikes compare data to community and population-level data.

Detail: The creators of UDS Mapper incorporated data elements from the [Uniform Data System](#), making this tool particularly relevant to HCP grantees and look-alikes. Data elements available in the tool include a wide variety of population health, demographic, and insurance data elements – nearly all at the ZCTA (an approximation for ZIP code) level. UDS Mapper is free, although it requires the user to set up a user account before it can be accessed.

Specific ideas for using this resource: UDS Mapper creators recommend using the tool for community health assessment, health planning, and grant writing and reviewing. UDS Mapper can be used to create service area maps (by geography, patient location of origin, or driving distance), look specifically at various population health indicators (including levels of insurance), and can be used to create maps with your own data.





(U.S. Census Bureau) data.census.gov

Main website: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

About: “data.census.gov is the platform to access demographic and economic data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The vision for data.census.gov is to improve the customer experience by making data available from one centralized place so that users spend less time searching for data and content, and more time using it.”

Detail: data.census.gov is a platform built on the Census Data application programming interface. As users search, they make direct calls to the data, metadata, and geospatial services that allow for data visualizations, maps, and other data displays. The advanced search function includes Health as a topic area with sub-topics of health, disability, fertility, health insurance, and expenses.

Specific ideas for using this resource: Data could be used to understand age, race/ethnicity, relationship, and housing characteristics for a community’s population from city, county, ZIP code, and school district perspectives, and can provide data to help support decision making around population health.

WhyNotTheBest.org

Main website: <http://www.whynotthebest.org/>

About: WhyNotTheBest.org is a resource for health care professionals interested in tracking performance on various measures of health care quality. It enables organizations to compare their performance against that of peer organizations, against a range of benchmarks, and over time.

Detail: WhyNotTheBest.org includes process measures, HCAHPS patient satisfaction measures, readmission rates, mortality rates, health care costs, and other measures at the county, hospital referral region, state, and national level. Data can be viewed as trends, top performer lists, or interactive maps and can be further filtered by facility characteristics such as number of beds, safety net or teaching facility, and type of ownership.

Specific ideas for using this resource: WhyNotTheBest.org offers data that allows comparison of states, referral regions, hospital types, or counties by various levels. It is a useful resource for understanding your hospital or community’s performance as compared to others with similar characteristics.





Table 1: Resources by Data Topic and Primary Data Level

Resource Name	Data Topic					Primary Data Level			
	Health Outcomes/Status	Housing	Quality of Care	Safety/Security/Crime	Utilization	National	State	County	Other/Local
America’s Health Rankings	X			X	X	X	X		
Blue Cross Blue Shield Health Index	X					X	X	X	
County Health Rankings	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
The Dartmouth Atlas Project			X			X	X	X	X
HealthLandscape									
Kaiser Family Foundation: State Health Facts	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
My Tribal Area (U.S. Census Bureau)		X							X
State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC)	X	X	X		X	X	X		
UDS Mapper	X					X	X	X	X
U.S. Census Bureau		X				X	X	X	X
WhyNotTheBest.org			X			X	X	X	X

For more information about the Rural Health Value project, contact:

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 Go to <http://www.RuralHealthValue.org> and click on “Share Your Innovation.”