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A LOOK AT WOMEN'S HEALTH IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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The theme of this year's National Women's Health Week is "It's Your Time"—a slogan intended to empower women to make their health a top priority. National Women's Health Week, which is a health observance coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health, will begin on May 8th and continue until May 11th this year. This Week brings together health organizations, government, business, communities along with other groups in an effort to promote women's health. Women are encouraged to take steps to improve their physical and mental health AND lower their risks for certain diseases. National Women's Health Week targets specific health behaviors for women, including: getting regular physical activity, eating a nutritious diet, receiving regular checkups and preventive screenings, avoiding risky behaviors (such as smoking), and paying attention to mental health.

This month, in honor of National Women's Health Week, the CHDB is highlighting data on women's health from the 2010 Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Household Health Survey. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey is a biennial, random digit dial telephone survey of over 10,000 households in the five-county region—Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties.

This article will focus on key health indicators for women 18 years and older living in Southeastern Pennsylvania, such as health status and chronic conditions, physical activity, diet and obesity, preventive screenings, smoking, and mental health.

Health Status and Chronic Conditions

Approximately 276,300 women (18+) in SEPA, 17.2% of women, self-identify as being in fair or poor health.

- Women in Philadelphia County are more likely to state they are in fair or poor health (23.7%) than those in Delaware (14.6%), Bucks (13.3%), Montgomery (12.5%) and Chester (12.1%) Counties.
- Also, women living below the Federal Poverty Line are much more likely (37.0%) than non-poor women (13.9%) to consider themselves in fair or poor health. See Figure 1.
- Three out of ten Latina women (30.3%) self-identify as in fair or poor health along with 24.6% of Black women; approximately 14% of White women state they are in fair or poor health.

Many women in the SEPA region suffer from chronic illnesses, including asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure.

- Specifically, 16.5% of women (18+) have been diagnosed with asthma, one out of ten (10.1%) have been diagnosed with diabetes, and three out of ten (30.5%) have been told they have high blood pressure.



Physical Activity

National Women's Health Week encourages women to get at least two hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, one hour and fifteen minutes of vigorous physical activity, or a combination of both, each week.

- In SEPA, women are less likely than men to get exercise each week. Approximately 21% of women (18+) exercise less than once a week (for 30 minutes at a time) compared to 17% of men.
- Black and Latina women are less likely to exercise regularly than White women. Approximately one quarter of both Black and Latina women exercise less than once per week (25.1% and 24.7% respectively) in comparison to 18.8% of White women.

Diet and Obesity

National Women's Health Week also encourages women to eat a nutritious diet. The Office on Women's Health provides suggestions for healthy eating and resources for doing so (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/FitnessNutrition/eatinghealthy/>).

Approximately 41% of women (18+) in SEPA eat two or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day—nearly 652,000 women across the region.

- Women in Philadelphia are the least likely to regularly eat fruits and vegetables. Of women in Philadelphia, over half (52.9%) eat two or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Nearly 41% of women in Delaware, 33.8% in Bucks, 32.9% in Montgomery, and 30.7% in Chester Counties eat two or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- In addition, Latina and Black women (18+) are substantially more likely to eat two or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day (60.9% and 58.4% respectively) compared to White women (34.7%).

An important component of nutrition and disease prevention is maintaining a healthy weight. Nearly 420,000 women (18+) in the region (27%) are considered obese and another 459,500 considered overweight (29.5%) based on the Body Mass Index (BMI).

- Women in Philadelphia are more likely to be obese (34.4%) compared to Delaware (25.5%), Montgomery (22.2%), Bucks (20.8%) and Chester (20.7%) Counties.
- Black women (18+) are more likely to be obese (41.4%) followed by Latina women (35.2%) and White women (21.6%). See Figure 2.

Preventive Screenings

Another integral part of disease prevention and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is getting routine check-ups and screenings.

- Approximately 38% of women (18+) in SEPA have not had a Pap test in the past year representing nearly 603,000 women in the region. This number has slowly been on the increase since 2000. White and Latina women are more likely to not have had a Pap test in the past year (40.4% and 39.3% respectively) than Black women (29.5%).



- In addition, just under one-third of women (18+) across the region (30.1%) have not had a breast exam by a doctor or health professional in the past year. Latina women are substantially more likely to not have had a breast exam in the past year (45.5%) in comparison to White women (29.7%) and Black women (25.9%).
- Similarly, approximately 35% of women 40 years and older have not had a mammogram in the past year, representing nearly 370,300 women. Latina women are the least likely to have had a mammogram in the past year (40.9%) followed by 35.1% of White and 30.7% of Black women.

Smoking

Smoking is a key risky behavior highlighted by National Women’s Health Week. One fifth of women (18+) in SEPA (19.6%) currently smoke cigarettes (approximately 313,400 women).

- Women in Philadelphia County are more likely to smoke (24.3%) compared to women in Delaware (18.8%), Bucks (18.6%), Montgomery (15.7%) and Chester (12.8%) Counties. Also, Black women are more likely to smoke (23.3%) than White (19.0%) or Latina women (18.6%).
- When looking at women (18+) in the region who smoke, approximately 60% have tried to quit smoking in the past year.

Mental Health

Paying attention to one’s mental health, including managing stress, is another focus of National Women’s Health Week. In the Household Health Survey, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of stress on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 signifying no stress and 10 signifying an extreme amount of stress. Responses of 7 or higher are categorized as high levels of stress.

- Approximately 41% of women (18+) in SEPA state they experience high levels of stress in comparison to one third of men (33.4%).
- Over half of Latina women (51.2%) state they experience high levels of stress in comparison to 42% of White women and 37.8% of Black women.
- Also, half of women (50.0%) living below the Federal Poverty Line signify they experience high levels of stress in comparison to 40% of non-poor women.

Summary

The data above show a wide range of needs still exist when it comes to women’s health in this region. In addition, it is evident that poverty status, race and ethnicity are key social determinants of health, and women living in Philadelphia are at greater risk for poor health. Addressing these health disparities will be important in order to improve the health of women across Southeastern Pennsylvania.

National Women’s Health Week is one effort to promote women’s health across the country and to empower women to make healthier choices. For those interested in the events that are taking place in the region and state during National Women’s Health Week, click here: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/events/> OR for general information on National Women’s Health Week, click here: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/>.

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