

A PORTRAIT OF

NEW YORK CITY 2018

WELL-BEING IN THE FIVE BOROUGHES AND THE GREATER METRO AREA



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What is this report all about?

A Portrait of New York City 2018 examines well-being and access to opportunity for different places and demographic groups in New York City and the greater New York–New Jersey–Connecticut metropolitan area using the framework of human development. The report presents the American Human Development Index, which combines health, education, and earnings data into a single well-being score, for 170 groups of towns and neighborhoods in the greater metro area and 188 neighborhoods in New York City; for racial and ethnic groups; for women and men; and for US- and foreign-born residents. This easy-to-understand report shines a spotlight on the well-being challenges faced by various New York metro area and NYC communities. It offers recommendations for action to spur strategic programs and policies and foster greater accountability for reducing disparities and improving well-being for all New Yorkers. And it concludes with an ambitious but attainable goal to increase well-being for all city residents and narrow the gaps between groups, resulting in an increase in the American Human Development Index from today's score of 5.98 to 6.60 by 2025.

What is human development?

Human development is about the real freedom ordinary people have to decide what to do, who to be, and how to live. It is formally defined as the process of improving people's well-being and expanding their freedoms and opportunities. The approach puts people at the center of analysis and considers how political, social, environmental, and economic forces interact to shape the range of choices open to them.

The human development concept is the brainchild of the late economist Dr. Mahbub ul Haq. Working at the United Nations with Harvard professor and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and other gifted economists, Dr. Haq devised not only the idea of human development but also a way to measure it: the Human Development Index. This new way of thinking about and measuring progress was introduced in the first Human Development Report, which was released in 1990 under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program. The American Human Development Index is based on this work.

The UN Human Development Index as well as the adapted American Human Development Index that forms the conceptual spine of Portrait of New York City 2018 measure three fundamental human development dimensions: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. People around the world view these areas as core building blocks of a life of value, freedom, and dignity. A long and healthy life is measured using life expectancy at birth; access to knowledge is measured using educational degree attainment for all adults age 25 and older and school enrollment for children and young adults ages 3-24; and a decent standard of living is measured using median personal earnings—the wages and salaries of all workers age 16 and older. These indicators are combined into a composite score that is expressed on a scale that goes from 0 to 10. All data are from official government sources.



What does the American Human Development Index tell us?

The American Human Development Index is an alternative to GDP and other money metrics that tells the story of how ordinary Americans are faring. The index looks at how interlocking issues act together to shape an individual's life chances and has been effective in breaking down silos and fostering holistic solutions to complex problems. Combining health, education, and earnings indicators into a single number that falls on a scale from one to ten with 10 being the highest, the American Human Development Index allows for well-being scores and rankings for different geographies and groups of people: states, congressional districts, counties, metro areas, neighborhood clusters, and census tracts, as well as women and men, the native-born and immigrants, and racial and ethnic groups.

What does this report mean for me, my family, and our community?

That significant economic gaps separate New Yorkers of different racial or ethnic groups and neighborhoods is common knowledge – though the size of the gaps often surprises people not familiar with the data. Less well understood are the remarkable disparities in health and education that characterize our region and how these three factors interact to shape people’s lives. A Portrait of New York City 2018 provides residents, communities, cross-sector stakeholders, and policymakers an accurate picture of the barriers to opportunity in the region.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied together into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.” Residents from different parts of the city and the larger metro area have access to distinct sets of opportunities and face very different challenges; their lives can be lived in ways that make them appear quite separate from one another. But in fundamental ways, their lives are interdependent, the boundaries between them are permeable, their dreams for their children are equally heartfelt, and their fates are linked.

Measure of America and the stakeholders involved in developing this report believe that better results for children, families, and neighborhoods are possible. Collectively, we are committed to pursuing those results. Our hope is that this report will inspire as well as empower individuals to take action and advocate for policies to improve conditions for their own families and the broader community.



How are the power of community voices and stakeholder perspectives reflected in the report?

Every project Measure of America embarks on is co-created with partners and stakeholders in order to marry the data with the reality on the ground. Over 70 community residents and stakeholders participated in the development of this report, a collaboration that was critical to developing shared goals and community buy-in necessary for long-term change. In addition, an Advisory Panel of diverse eminent scholars and thought leaders from across disciplines and sectors and from different parts of the city provided specific expertise on framing the issues, understanding what works, mobilizing research, and disseminating the findings.

How can this report help direct public and private funding to areas in need?

Effective multi-sector work begins with an understanding of current realities. It is clear from the index that in terms of health, education, and earnings, large segments of the population are being left behind. Index scores signal to businesses, policymakers, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and individuals who want to make a difference exactly where the need lies.

What are some impacts from Measure of America's "portraits" in other places?

Measure of America's "portrait" series has helped stakeholders across the country focus on addressing the gaps and moving to solutions for the aspirations they see for their community's immediate future. For example:

- A Portrait of Los Angeles County was released in November 2017 and the key findings were immediately integrated into the County's eight-part Prevention Plan, which seeks to reduce the number of children involved in the child maltreatment system through the use of family and community strengthening strategies (e.g., Early Care & Education, Home Visiting, and other strategies). The project was the result of a partnership with three County agencies and enjoyed financial support from fifteen funders.
- A Portrait of Sonoma County, commissioned by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, was released in May 2014 and served as a starting point for a broad county-led quest for Sonoma County to be the healthiest of California's 58 counties by 2020.
- Immediate effects of the report were legislation banning the sale of e-cigarettes to minors and the commissioning of a study and introduction of legislation for universal pre-school. This has been followed by a county-wide focus on the five lowest census tracts on the HD Index, the formation of a Sonoma Funding Circle for better coordination among philanthropic foundations, passage of a living wage ordinance, a public art project in low-HD Index neighborhoods with police for healing, and many other new policy and programmatic initiatives.
- The California Endowment, one of California's five largest foundations, made A Portrait of California 2011's social determinants of health approach and unique life expectancy calculations the centerpiece of its statewide "Health Happens Here" campaign, an effort that involved billboards across the state and an exhibit at the state capital accompanied by an interactive website.



Did the government commission this report?

No, the report was compiled, written, and produced by Measure of America, a research and advocacy program of the Social Science Research Council. Both are independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations committed to rigorous social science research and scholarship for the public good. The report was funded by The Leona M and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. Government funding is not connected to the report in any way.

Click [here](#) to read *A Portrait of New York City 2018*.

To map over 300 indicators for New York City neighborhoods, visit [**DATA2GO.NYC.**](https://data2go.nyc.gov)