



By David Levine | December 5, 2016

In Chicago, life expectancy can differ by as much as 16 years between just seven stops on the "L," between the Loop and Washington Park.

In Philadelphia, the five miles that separate Society Hill from North Philadelphia can add or subtract 20 years from your life.

In New York City, if you reside near the Mets' Citi Field, you will live on average seven years longer than if you live near Yankee Stadium. That has nothing to do with the fortunes of the teams.

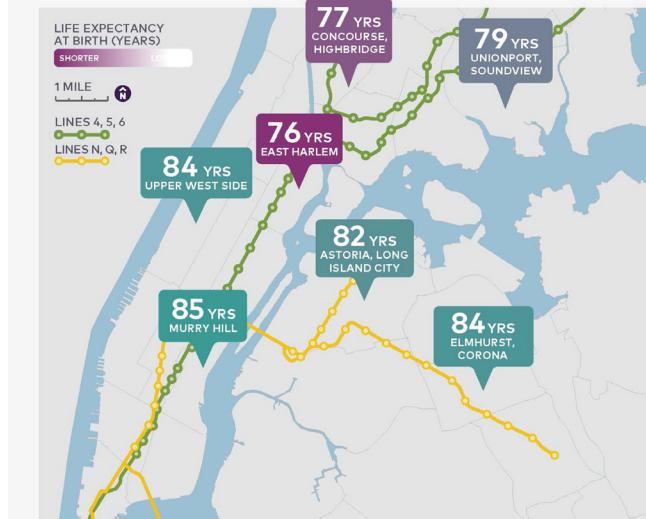
It has everything to do with ZIP codes.

These are some of the dramatic findings from research conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Derek Chapman, associate director for research at the VCU Center, says the research came from an initial look at longevity disparity in the Washington, D.C., area in 2014.

"The RWJF saw that and asked us to produce more," he says. The result: a series of 21 maps that

Gaps in Health Across Neighborhoods



SOURCE: <http://www.societyhealth.vcu.edu/work/the-projects/mapsnewyork.html>

graphically illustrate the social determinants of health and the role that location plays.

"The choices we make depend on the choices available to us," Chapman says. "Some neighborhoods have more liquor stores than grocery stores, lack safe

and affordable housing, or have poor quality schools. And many urban and rural areas have experienced generations of isolation from opportunity."

Most people grasp that there are gaps in health within communities.

"But it is surprising to see it represented this way," says Matt Trujillo, program officer with RWJF. "It's one thing to feel something intuitively, it's another thing to see a map where life expectancy can vary as much as 12 years within a few miles."

The maps have two intended purposes. One is simply to raise awareness, to act as conversation starters among local officials and residents, that "there is more to health than just health care," Chapman says.

That leads to the second purpose. "We hope people might be motivated to take action to address these disparities, to learn what their community and other communities are doing to address it," Trujillo says. "There are a lot of things out there that we think can help address these disparities."

Some communities are extending the conversation. In Arizona, where life expectancy differs by as much as 14 years between downtown Phoenix and Scottsdale, the Arizona Partnership for Healthy Communities used its own data to create more maps covering all 403 ZIP codes in the state.

And in some communities, growing awareness of the social determinants of health have prompted healthcare leaders to forge partnerships, expand their services, and extend community outreach. In Chicago, a breast cancer task force embarked on a program to reduce breast cancer mortality among African-American women, using "community health navigators" to help women get access to screenings.

In Athens, Ohio, a group of obstetricians, addiction counselors, and nurse navigators are providing wraparound care — including gas vouchers and rent assistance — for pregnant women addicted to opioids.

"We don't have all the answers from these maps, but we know the first step is to recognize that gaps exist, then continue the dialog with a broader range of players at the table," Chapman says.

*David Levine is a frequent contributor to athenaInsight.
Illustration by Peter Pa.*



A daily news hub reporting from the heart of the health care internet, with access to a comprehensive data set of health care transactions from athenahealth's nationwide network. We equip leaders with actionable insight and inspiration for making health care work as it should.

Stay in the know

Sign up for weekly data and news:
insight.athenahealth.com/newsletter