

ALEXANDRIA

At first glance, Alexandria is a healthy place to live. It ranks among the healthiest counties in the nation, but closer examination reveals wide variation in health across neighborhoods and census tracts. For example, life expectancy—how long a newborn is expected to live—varies by nine years, depending on where in Alexandria a child is born. Other health measures also vary greatly.

Health itself, and the inequities in health we see across Alexandria, are about more than health care. Health is shaped by education, economic and other household resources, housing, transportation, and our environment—both physical (e.g., parks) and social (e.g., racial discrimination).

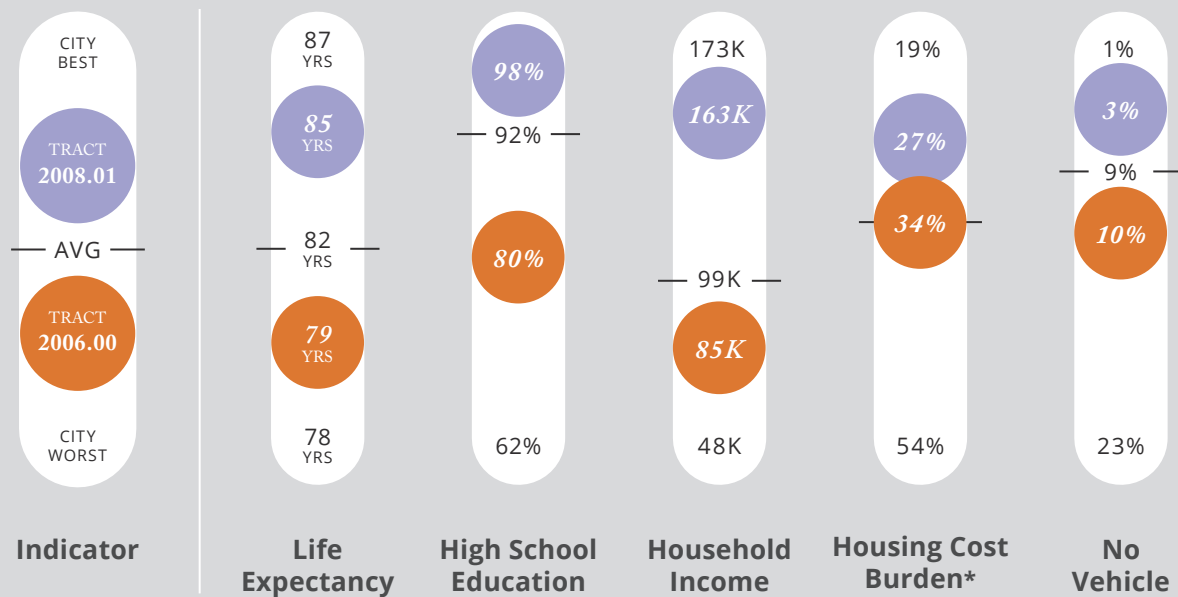
At the request of the Northern Virginia Health Foundation and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University developed a new tool, called the Healthy Places Index (HPI), to provide the public a convenient way to measure the health of neighborhoods in Northern Virginia. The HPI uses data on dozens of indicators, taken from each of the census tracts, to predict the health of communities. The advanced statistical computations used to produce the HPI yielded a stunning finding—education and economic resources accounted for 60% of the variation in life expectancy we see across the region. Housing and transportation explained 26%, and health care accounted for only 6%.

The HPI measures the health of every census tract on a scale of 0–100; high numbers represent the best conditions. As with life expectancy, HPI scores vary greatly across Alexandria, from a low of 42 in census tract 2016.00 in Old Town West to a high of 86 in tract 2004.04 in the Bren Mar Park area of Landmark.



Gaps in Opportunity in Alexandria

Indicators depict how greatly living conditions vary across Alexandria. Residents of tract 2008.01 (HPI 75) enjoy more favorable conditions for health than those living in tract 2006.00 (HPI 51).



Above: Outcomes in tracts 2008.01 (near TC Williams) and 2006.00 (near Cameron Run Park) compared to top, bottom, and average results for Alexandria

*Housing cost burden: 30% or more of income spent on housing costs

The differences in living conditions in places with high versus low HPI scores can be stark and often exist only a few miles apart. For example, in census tract 2008.01 near TC Williams High School, where the HPI is 75, residents have more education, income, and other resources for good health than do residents just one mile away in tract 2006.00 near Cameron Run Regional Park, where the HPI is 51. In that Cameron Run tract, only 64% of adults have attended some college and 19% of children live in poverty.

People of color are often disproportionately exposed to poor living conditions that affect their health. For example, in census tract 2004.06 in Landmark, where the HPI is only 47, 34% of residents are African American, 24% are Hispanic, and 56% are recent immigrants (2000 or later).

Closing the gaps in Alexandria—in health and opportunity—requires policies and investments to improve education, income, and the economic vitality of communities. It will also require a recognition of the institutional inequities that created many of these conditions—and that persist today. These investments will improve health while also strengthening the local economy, civic wellbeing, and regional growth. Access to health care is also important, but meaningful improvements in health require attention to living conditions.

Policymakers in local government, the business community, real estate developers, and community leaders are among the stakeholders who can change these conditions. The benefits extend beyond those most in need. Everyone in Alexandria gains from improvements in health and economic wellbeing.



To see data for all census tracts in Alexandria, please visit our interactive map at

<https://novahealthfdn.org/interactive-map-opportunity>