This chapter provides an overview of the general health of residents in Kenton County and explores the impact of land uses on the health of a community. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1962, 13.4 percent of the United States population was obese. In 2010, the number had climbed to 35.7 percent and has been classified as an epidemic. Obesity has been linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and strokes.

The United Health Foundation ranks the rate of chronic diseases on an annual basis. Rates of heart disease deaths, deaths from stroke, and percent of population with diabetes help to determine the overall health of a county or state. The State of Kentucky is ranked 43rd out of 50 in overall health in the United Health Foundation’s American Health Rankings. The Northern Kentucky Region (Boone, Kenton and Campbell Counties) is ranked within the top 25 percent of the state with respect to health; however, rates of chronic diseases are relatively high compared to the rest of the country as shown in Figure 12.1.

### Risk Factors

Lack of physical exercise is considered to be one of the major causes for the rise in obesity rates, as shown in Figure 12.2. While there are many contributing factors to decreased levels of physical activity, the type of development that has occurred in recent decades has played a significant role. Referred to as suburban sprawl, this type of development is strictly oriented to the automobile and can be characterized by highly separated land uses with destinations miles apart, often devoid of a connected network of sidewalks or pedestrian connections, making automotive travel the only means of transportation for even simple tasks such as going to the park or a convenience store. By default, suburban development patterns have forced people into their cars and off of their feet significantly reducing the amount of physical activity performed by individuals living within these communities.

### Access to Healthy Foods

Another contributing factor to the increasing rate of obesity is access to healthy food choices, specifically fresh produce, fruits, and unprocessed meats. These food items, which are essential to a healthy diet, are typically found only in supermarkets which are often located long distances from residential areas making trips to and from burdensome for those with access to a car and nearly impossible for those without access to a vehicle.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers a detailed Food Access Research Atlas online mapping tool that identifies low income areas that are distant from existing supermarkets. Coined “food deserts”, the lack of access to supermarkets prevents many individuals from making healthier eating choices, relegating them to processed foods that can be found at a convenience store.

To be classified as a food desert, an area has to have a poverty rate over 20% or the local income average is 80% or less than the state/metro income average and the standard distance is ½ mile or more in an urban area, or ten miles or more in a rural area. Figure 12.3 shows the existing food deserts in Kenton County which are currently located in Bromley, Ludlow, and parts of Erlanger, Elsmere, South Covington and Latonia. Currently, seven percent of Kenton County residents are considered to have limited access to healthy foods. This is higher than the national average of 4.1 percent. This same report found that people with limited access to healthy food spend significantly more time (19.5 minutes) traveling to a grocery story than the national average of 15 minutes.

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**Figure 12.1: Chronic Diseases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Kenton</th>
<th>Boone</th>
<th>Campbell</th>
<th>KY</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart Disease deaths/100,000</td>
<td>194.1</td>
<td>195.6</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke deaths/100,000</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes Rate (%)</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: County Health Rankings and Roadmaps

**Figure 12.2: Risk Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Kenton</th>
<th>Boone</th>
<th>Campbell</th>
<th>KY</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inactivity (%)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity (%)</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Access to Healthy Foods (%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 servings of Fruits &amp; Veg. (%)</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Planning and Development Services of Kenton County
To combat the increase in obesity rates and to reduce the negative health affects caused by obesity, the United States Department of Health and Human Services created the Healthy People 2020 initiative. The program provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. It establishes benchmarks and monitors progress over time to empower individuals toward making informed health decisions and measure the impact of prevention activities. To reach their goal the program has identified six risk factors that, if improved, would significantly reduce the risk of chronic disease for an individual. The six factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, chronic smoking, diabetes, poor diet and physical inactivity, and obesity. To combat these health issues the American College of Sports Medicine, the American Heart Association, the National Institute of Health and the CDC have all recommended that adults (aged 18-64) should receive 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on all or most days of the week. According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans put out by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services child and adolescents (aged 6-17) should receive 60 minutes of moderate-intensity or more physical activity every day.

In a comprehensive study “What men should know about the impact of physical activity on their health”, International Journal of Clinical Practice, it was found that exercise plays an important role in reducing many chronic diseases. The study found that physical activity provided measurable benefits on rates of cancer, heart disease, dementia, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, obesity and high blood pressure.

**Summary**

Land use planning can play a role in reducing the risk factors listed above by providing the opportunity for residents to obtain higher levels of activity in their daily lives. This could be accomplished by developing and creating residential areas that are connected with employment and commercial centers via sidewalks, bike lanes and other non-automobile options. This would include commercial centers designed to allow for easy walking between stores, schools sited within walking distance of neighborhoods, inter-connected trail systems connecting residential neighborhoods and commercial centers, all of which would provide residents with the opportunity for physical exercise. Another way that land-use planning can help reduce chronic disease is by providing housing for the elderly and low-income close to healthy food. Providing more housing options closer to grocery stores can make accessing nutritious food easier for those with limited access.
Endnotes


2. County Health Rankings and Roadmaps: A Healthier Nation, County by County


9. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has many functions/mission areas which include Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, Food Nutrition and Consumer Services, Food Safety, Marketing and Regulatory Programs, Natural Resources and Environment, Research, Education and Economics, and Rural Development.

10. County Health Rankings


12. “What men should know about the impact of physical activity on their health”, *International Journal of Clinical Practice, Vo.* 64, Issue 13, Nov 12, 2010