

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FACT SHEET: A Project of Women Leaders Count

Women and Health

Fall 2012

The Institute for Women's Leadership is committed to increasing the numbers of women in decision making and leadership positions across all sectors and professions. Our series of Women's Leadership Fact Sheets is designed to increase awareness of women's current progress and continued underrepresentation. Gender is an important factor in the health of individuals due to biological, cultural, and socio-economic reasons. Life expectancy at birth¹ differs between women and men, with women living longer than men in all regions of the world. Life expectancy in Africa, for both women and men, is significantly lower than in all other regions of the world.

Life Expectancy at Birth by Region of the World 2005 – 2010 ²		
Region	Women	Men
United States & Canada	80.7	75.6
Europe	79.3	71.4
Oceania	79.0	74.3
Latin America & Caribbean	76.7	70.2
Asia	70.9	67.2
Africa	56.3	54.0

Following global regional patterns, women in the United States have a longer life expectancy than men in all racial groups. The largest gap between women and men exists in the black community, with black women living 6.5 years longer than black men. Among women, black women have the shortest life expectancy, living 3.5 years less than the national average, 3.7 years less than white women, and 6.1 years less than Hispanic women. In New Jersey, women also live longer than men. The largest gap exists between black women and black men, both with life expectancies below the average for the state. Among the 50 states of the U.S., New Jersey ranks 14th highest in life expectancy for women and 17th for men.⁶

Life Expectancy at Birth in the United States 2009 ⁷		
Race or Origin ⁵	Women	Men
Hispanic (all races)	83.5	78.6
White	81.1	76.3
Black	77.4	70.9
USA National Average (all races)	80.9	76.0

Life Expectancy at Birth in the New Jersey 2007 ³		
Race or Origin ⁴	Women	Men
Asian	91.5	87.2
Hispanic (all races)	86.0	81.7
White	81.9	77.4
Black	77.8	70.9
USA National Average (all races) ⁵	80.4	75.4

¹ Life expectancy at birth refers to the average number of years a newborn is expected to live according to the levels of mortality in the year and the region in which he or she is born. Factors considered when calculating life expectancy include rates of preventable and non-preventable diseases, accidental injury, suicide, homicide, and others.

² Source: United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Estimates and Projections Section. *World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision*: <http://esa.un.org/wpp/Excel-Data/mortality.htm>.

³ Source: *Data for Life Expectancy at Birth by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, New Jersey, 2007*. State of NJ Department of Health & Senior Services, NJ State Health Assessment Data, Indicator Reports: http://www4.state.nj.us/dhss-shad/indicator/view_numbers/LifeExpectancy.RESex.html.

⁴ The category "Hispanic" includes people of all races who are of Hispanic origin. The categories "White," "Black," and "Asian" include people of those races who are of non-Hispanic origin.

⁵ Source: *Life expectancy at birth, at 65 years of age, and at 75 years of age, by race and sex: United States, selected years 1900–2007*. Report: Health, United States, 2010. US Dept. of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus10.pdf>.

⁶ Source: USA Life Expectancy: <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/usa/life-expectancy-male>.

⁷ Sources: *Expectation of life at selected ages by race, Hispanic origin, race for non-Hispanic population, and sex: United States, final 2009 and preliminary 2010*. National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 60, No. 4: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr60/nvsr60_04.pdf.

Causes of Death & Burden of Disease

Diseases of the heart and cancer are leading causes of death for women of all racial groups. While non-Hispanic black women have the highest percentage of deaths due to heart diseases, American Indian women have the lowest. Heart diseases are also a higher cause of death for Hispanic women as well as non-Hispanic white and black women, than for men in those groups. Asian or Pacific Islander women lead the list of deaths by cancer, surpassed only by the men of the same group.

Leading Causes of Death in the United States by Sex and Race in 2008 (as % of total deaths at all ages) ⁸										
Cause of Death	Non-Hispanic White		Non-Hispanic Black		Hispanic		American Indian		Asian or Pacific Islander	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Diseases of the heart	24.8	26.1	24.9	24.1	21.6	20.2	17.1	18.7	22.3	24.2
Cancer	21.6	24.6	21.8	22.5	21.8	19.9	19.3	17.8	26.9	27.0
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	6.6	6.1	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.6	4.7	3.8	2.6	3.6
Cerebrovascular diseases	6.4	4.2	6.7	4.9	6.0	4.4	4.3	2.9	8.9	6.5

Cancer is the second highest cause of death among both women and men in the United States. The three most common cancer types in the population are breast, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum cancers. While breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, the burden of disease in cancer varies among women of different races and ethnicities. In 2008, non-Hispanic white women had the highest incidence of cancer in the U.S., followed by non-Hispanic black women, according to the National Program of Cancer Registries.⁹ The lowest incidence of cancer reported was for lung and bronchus cancers among Hispanic women.

Incidence Rates (per 100,000 people) of Major Cancer Types Among Women in the U.S. by Race in 2008 ⁹					
Type of Cancer	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander
Breast	143.6	107.1	63.9	53.2	85.0
Lung and Bronchus	68.7	42.4	15.5	28.1	23.0
Colon and Rectum	47.0	39.9	19.4	20.4	27.5

Other important facts about women's health are:¹⁰

- ❖ Globally, the leading cause of death for women is cardiovascular disease, followed by infectious and parasitic diseases, including HIV/AIDS.
- ❖ Women die of cardiovascular diseases more than men in all regions of the globe.
- ❖ In the U.S., in all racial groups women die by suicide less than men. The highest percentage of deaths by suicide among women is in American Indians at 1.5%, followed closely by Asian or Pacific Islanders at 1.3%, and non-Hispanic white women at 0.6%.⁸

⁸ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Tables: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/mortality_tables.htm#lcod.

⁹ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Program of Cancer Registries: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/uscs/cancersbyraceandethnicity.aspx>. Incidence rates refer to the rate of new cases of a disease in a specified population over a defined period. Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th ed. 2009. <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, source: *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*. UN Statistics Division: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW2010pub.htm>.