What makes a healthy city?
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Good health is the result of more than genes, lifestyle choices, and access to quality, affordable medical care. Health and longevity are strongly influenced by the economic, physical, and social landscapes in which people live and work.

Education

Education is a powerful predictor of health and longevity. People who are well-educated have access to higher paying, more rewarding work than those with less schooling. Adults with good salaries are better able to afford health insurance, homes in safe neighborhoods, quality child care, and nutritious foods. Conversely, adults who never graduated high school are more likely to live in poverty, have lower-paying, sometimes dangerous jobs; engage in risky health behaviors; and die prematurely.

Economic Health

A vibrant local economy attracts businesses and entrepreneurs, creating jobs and increasing personal and collective wealth. A thriving commercial sector also contributes substantially to a community’s tax base – revenue that helps support schools, affordable housing, hospitals, public safety, jobs programs, and other services that promote health and address income disparities.

Physical Environment

The physical features of a community encompass natural and human-made environments. Parks, playgrounds, and open space encourage physical activity and social interaction. A good public transportation system promotes walking and discourages automobile travel, resulting in better air quality and fewer car accidents. Extensive walking and biking paths also reduce car travel. Neighborhood supermarkets offer easy access to fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods. Safe housing results in fewer children suffering from asthma or lead poisoning.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness refers to how people come together, interact, and build relationships. Strong social networks give people a sense of belonging, purpose, and well-being. A city can nurture community life by encouraging civic engagement, embracing diversity, and offering opportunities for social interaction.

Safety

Safe neighborhoods are essential to a healthy community. Neighborhood policing initiatives and crime awareness programs help reduce street violence and robberies. Enforcement of fire prevention laws and building codes prevents fires from occurring. Addressing environmental and occupational health concerns at the local level helps protect citizens from hazardous exposures at home and work. Streets, parks, and plazas that are safe and well-lit encourage physical activity and social interaction.

Access to Health Services

Improving access to clinical and preventive services is essential for increasing quality and length of life, and eliminating health disparities. Among the many barriers to care in the U.S. are lack of health insurance, poverty, distrust of the medical system, citizenship status, English proficiency, and limited awareness about the effectiveness of immunizations and preventive screenings.

Cambridge by the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambridge</th>
<th>MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of public school students who graduated high school in 2007</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of public school students who graduated high school in 2007 who planned to attend college</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents (age 25+) with a bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of individuals with income below the federal poverty level</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households earning $100,000+ a year</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadjusted unemployment rate (Oct. 2008)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median price of a condo</td>
<td>$420K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of housing that is subsidized (affordable housing)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of land that is protected open space</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who walk to work</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households within 1/2 mile of a T station or 1/4 mile of a high-frequency bus line</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households within 1/4 mile of a full-service grocery store or supermarket</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of children under 6 screened for lead poisoning who had elevated lead levels (&gt;15 mg/dL)</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who rate the sense of community in Cambridge as &quot;good&quot; or &quot;excellent&quot;</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who feel that Cambridge is welcoming to all races</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of public high school students who participate in volunteer work</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of eligible residents who voted in the 2008 presidential election</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cambridge Public Health Department |

It is a municipal health agency operated by Cambridge Health Alliance through a contract with the City of Cambridge. The Department’s mission is to improve the quality of life for residents and workers by reducing sickness and injury; encouraging healthy behaviors, and fostering safe and healthy environments.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager, City of Cambridge

Dennis D. Keefe
Chief Executive Officer, Cambridge Health Alliance & Commissioner of Public Health, City of Cambridge

Sources:
3. Massachusetts Association of Realtors, 2007
6. Cambridge Community Development Dept., 2008
17. 2007 Crime/Drug in Massachusetts, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey

Photos/Credit:
Pront: Sue Handley (Hansard Lab); Inside: Robert Mautery (Charles River), Romina Visinato (CRIS graduation), Shira Heman Geller, Ultras, Inc. (Cambridge Health Alliance) - David Lueckenhuter (Bicycle ride near Fresh Pond); In Towns (Tiesha Party, 2008), Glenn Turner (Clarks St. icy), Dr. Elm (photo courtesy of CHA Dept. of Marketing and Planning). Back: Sue Handley (all photos)

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Cambridge: A healthy place to live

In a recent survey, 93% of Cantabrigians rated their health as good to excellent. This finding is not surprising given the city’s many “health assets”: a strong economy, low unemployment, civic pride, top universities, low crime in comparison to cities its size, extensive public transportation, and inviting parks and playgrounds. Cambridge also dedicates considerable resources to improving the health and well-being of its citizens, as the following examples illustrate.

Cambridge has a wealth of programs aimed at preventing sickness and chronic disease. Public health prevention services offered through Cambridge Health Alliance include annual flu clinics (pictured), adult immunizations, school health services, maternal and child health programs, a men’s wellness initiative, medical outreach to homeless individuals, HIV counseling and testing, and family planning. In addition, residents can receive comprehensive primary care at the city’s two community hospitals, seven neighborhood health centers, and numerous doctors’ offices.

Early childhood experiences have an enormous impact on academic achievement, future earnings, and lifelong health. To improve the lives of its youngest citizens, Cambridge offers an array of services that include innovative early education and family support programs; high quality child care; and childhood asthma and lead poisoning prevention programs. The award-winning Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative (pictured) empowers parents to be their child’s first and most important teacher.

People who eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can reduce their risk of developing many chronic diseases. Most Cantabrigians live within a half-mile of a supermarket, which gives them access to a variety of healthy foods at affordable prices. Cambridge also supports 12 food pantries, a healthy school meals initiative, free meals programs for seniors and other groups, five seasonal farmers’ markets (pictured), and 13 community gardens with 450 active gardeners.

A catastrophic event – like a flu pandemic or bioterrorist attack – can paralyze an unprepared community. To ensure that Cambridge is ready for a major disaster, health and safety officials work together to develop coordinated emergency response plans. The public health department, local hospitals, fire, police, EMS, and other city agencies routinely test and evaluate these plans through tabletop exercises and “real world” disaster scenarios that have included a dirty bomb explosion (pictured) and the mass dispensing of flu vaccine.