

# Purpose

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*Health of Washington State* provides a “one-stop” summary of information on health status, health risks and healthcare services in Washington. While providing basic data on topics important to the public’s health, *Health of Washington State* explains what the data mean and suggests approaches for improving health. With this ready source of information:

- The Washington State Department of Health can quickly respond to questions from legislators and the public.
- Grant writers can present scientifically accurate information.
- Public health leaders can work toward effective policy decision-making and program planning.

*Health of Washington State* is a primary source document for some topics. For others, it is more of a “gateway” document providing basic information and leading readers to more detailed information available elsewhere.

Most chapters discuss a major indicator, representing an important aspect of the topic. Many chapters also provide more limited data on other measures of impact and burden. To the extent that data permit, each chapter includes:

- **Washington State and county-specific health rates**, making it easy to compare the state to the nation or counties to the state.
- **Time-series measures** documenting whether state rates are improving or worsening and identifying emerging problems.
- **National and state goals** documenting whether Washington achieved goals for 2010 and progress toward goals for 2020.
- **Group-specific measures** identifying disparities by race and ethnicity, county of residence, age, income, education and sex, as well as a discussion of the sources of disparities to provide for accurate interpretation of the measures.
- **Factors that increase risk or protect individuals from** the disease or condition.
- **Research-based information on effective programs** designed to reduce illness and injury and to optimize health.

- **Reference to resources** for additional information.

*Health of Washington State* includes topics that affect:

- The health of many people in Washington.
- Relatively few people but might result in serious outcomes, such as death or disability.
- Relatively few people but might affect larger numbers if not well controlled (such as infectious diseases and environmental pollution).

*Health of Washington State* also focuses on topics with proven public health interventions. Finally, department staff needs to be available to write chapters. Thus, *Health of Washington State* highlights most, but not all, major issues of importance to health in Washington.

This report shows what we know generally about health status, risks to good health, and healthcare in Washington. It also identifies gaps in our monitoring data; in our knowledge of underlying processes by which disease, injury, disability and premature death affect us; and in our knowledge of proven approaches for improving health.

Data in this document might differ from those presented in other department publications or in publications of federal, local and other state organizations. While there are guidelines and commonly used conventions for many definitions and analytic methods, there are few fixed standards. Definitions and methods that work best for one purpose might not be best in another context. Where relevant, each chapter discusses differences between definitions and analytic methods in the chapter and those used elsewhere.