



KEY TAKEAWAYS • PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES •

WHY PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES MATTER

Many of the early milestones in community planning (e.g. zoning regulations and infrastructure design) were a direct response to public health concerns. Today, we are experiencing a return to ‘place-making’ in the traditional sense, with an emphasis on public health in an attempt to improve our personal health, wellness and overall quality of life. ‘Health’ can mean many things to different people. Although genetics and healthcare can influence an individual’s health, it is the social, economic, behavioral and physical factors that determine the majority of one’s overall health. Recognizing these factors as ‘determinants of health’, and understanding the policies, institutions and systems that drive them has led to municipalities expanding their health and social services offerings to better support residents.

CHICOPEE HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

The City of Chicopee offers diverse services for residents.

Chicopee Health Department & Board of Health

The Health Department and Board of Health are responsible for developing public health policy, programs, and activities. They have been integral in the local management of the COVID-19 public health crisis. The Health Department has been shifting its focus away from alcohol abuse and more toward opioid abuse, homelessness, and “vaping” (particularly among teenagers). It is critical to point out that in the Health Department’s experience, all these issues are growing among Chicopee residents, and are not increasing due to “outsiders” from Springfield and Holyoke. Chicopee has been partnering with Springfield and Northampton on strategies for combatting opioid abuse and has partnered with the local Boys & Girls Club on similar efforts.

Chicopee Veteran’s Services

The office provides eligible Veteran residents and their families with financial, medical, and social assistance and referrals for housing, employment, food, shelter, and other eligible government programs.

RiverMills Senior Center/Council on Aging

The Senior Center and Council on Aging provide services to residents 60 years or older, their spouses, and those providing care to older persons. Services include a wellness health center, which allows older residents to have access to free health checks, activities, and one-on-one consultations. The RiverMills Senior Center also provides transportation services, which is made possible by 15 volunteer drivers giving about 11,000 rides per year. Also available are community services, recreation, and lifelong learning programs and opportunities.

COVID-19 Pandemic

At the writing of this report, the world is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, a situation that poses a serious public health risk in Chicopee and across the globe. While it is too early to say what the impacts of this health crisis will be, it is important to note here that there will likely be many long-term effects not only on public health, but where we live and how we travel, socialize, and shop.

CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

Baystate Medical Center’s Community Health Needs Assessment of 2019 provides much information on public health in Chicopee and Hampden County, as provided below. Graphs are taken from the 2019 report.

Cardiovascular Disease

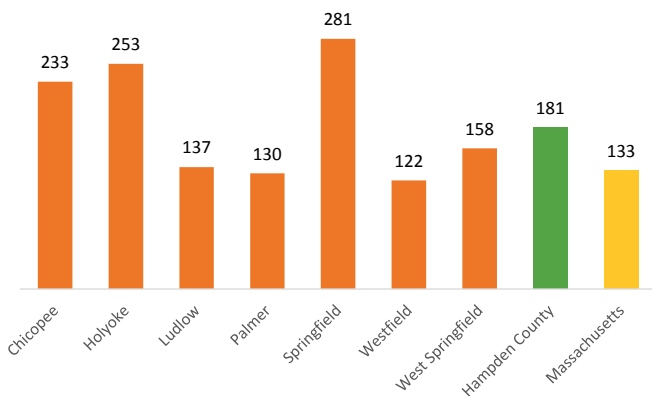
Cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in Hampden County, along with cancer. Stroke hospitalization rates for Chicopee are higher than most other communities across the county.



Cardiovascular Disease Hospitalization Rates, 2014

Diabetes

Hospitalization rates were 36% higher in Hampden County in 2014 as compared to overall Massachusetts rates. Rates among Latinos and African-Americans were particularly high in Chicopee with rates six times higher than the Massachusetts rate, as well as four times higher than Caucasians in Chicopee.



Diabetes Hospitalization Rates, 2014

Obesity

Obesity affects chronic illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, but also mental health and wellness. Obesity rates among children remain high across Hampden County, with rates observed over 20% in Chicopee. While obesity rates for adults in Chicopee are not available, the rate for Hampden County is 29% vs. 24% for Massachusetts overall.

Asthma

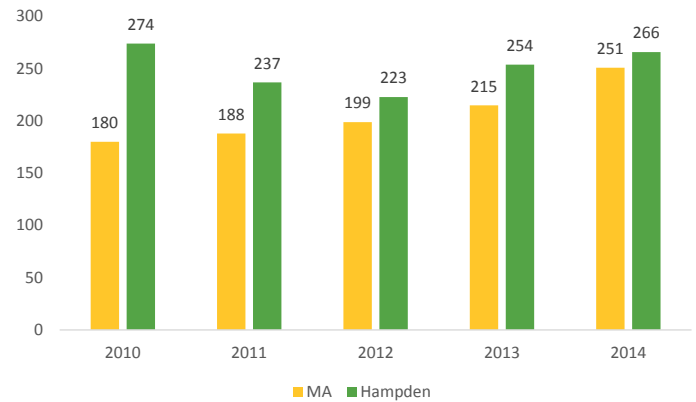
Asthma is a significant problem in Chicopee compared with Massachusetts overall. The rate of asthma emergency visits for Chicopee in 2012 was 113.8 per 10,000 compared to 66.5 in Massachusetts (i.e. over 70% greater).

Mental Health

Hospitalization rates for mental health disorders were almost double that in Hampden County in 2014 than the Commonwealth, with Chicopee higher than the Hampden County.

Substance Use

High rates of substance use such as tobacco, alcohol, and drugs also continue to be a prioritized health need for the community. Approximately 18% of Hampden County residents smoke tobacco, higher than the Massachusetts average (14%). Substance use emergency room visits were particularly high in 2014 in Chicopee.



Substance Use Disorder Emergency Department Visits, 2014

Opioid Use

Opioid use disorder has quickly emerged as a public health crisis in Massachusetts, including in Chicopee. Overdose fatalities in Hampden County were higher than compared to Massachusetts. Opioid overdoses were mostly attributed to heroin, pharmaceutical opioids, and fentanyl use, in addition to the use of a combination of drugs including cocaine, methadone, antidepressants, antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, stimulants, and muscle relaxants.