

BRIEF REPORT: Social Risk Factors and Health Inequities Among Alaska Adults



Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

September 2024

Health inequities are preventable differences in health. They occur when groups of people do not have equal access to opportunities and resources that promote optimal health.

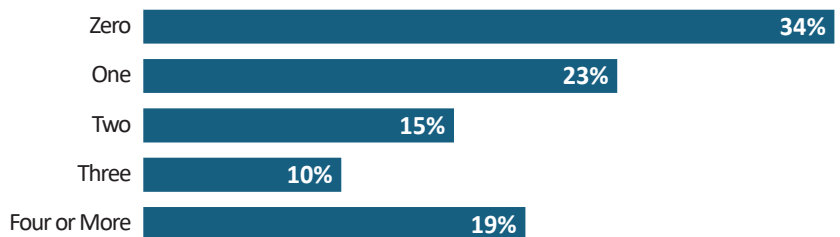
A person's exposure to conditions that negatively impact their health is influenced by their income, how many years of education they've completed, where they live, and their surroundings.¹ Additional characteristics such as a person's age, race, gender identity, and possible disabilities also play important roles in contributing to differences in their lived experience, access to resources, and to health inequities.² These non-medical social risk factors are often referred to more broadly as social determinants of health.^{1,2}

With support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) included questions in 2022 to measure the prevalence of 10 social risk factors that may negatively impact health. These 10 social risk factors, along with two existing measures of health care access and coverage, are scored individually and combined for a composite score ranging from 0 (lowest risk) to 12 (highest risk).^{3,4}

The majority of Alaska adults experience zero or one social risk factor (57%), but nearly 20% experience four or more. Data collection methods used by BRFSS may not include the most vulnerable adults. That means the true percentage of adults experiencing social risk factors is likely higher.

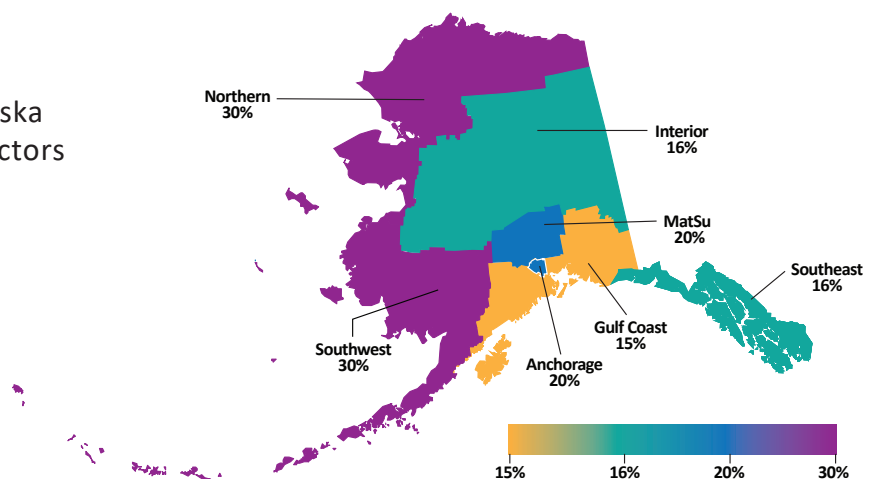
35%	Stress
34%	Social Isolation
25%	Lack of Social and Emotional Support
14%	Food Insecurity
13%	Housing Insecurity
12%	Loss or Reduction of Employment
11%	Unmet Medical Need Due to Cost
11%	Receive Food Stamps
11%	Lack of Reliable Transportation
9%	Lack of Health Insurance or Coverage
8%	Utility Insecurity
7%	Life Dissatisfaction

Number of Social Risk Factors Experienced by Alaska Adults (Max of 12)



The percentage of Alaska adults experiencing four or more risk factors differs considerably among Alaska public health regions.

The Northern and Southwest public health regions have the highest percentage of Alaska adults who experience four or more risk factors (30%), while the Gulf Coast public health region has the lowest percentage (15%).



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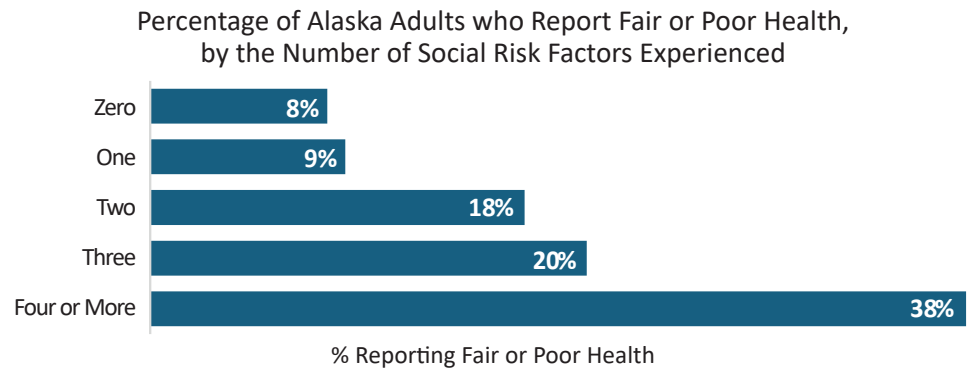


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Alaska adults who experience more social risk factors are more likely to report poorer overall health.

There is a clear association between the number of social risk factors a person has experienced and how that person reports their overall health from poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent. In 2022, 66% of Alaska adults reported experiencing at least one social risk factor, and 16% reported fair or poor overall health. Alaska adults experiencing four or more social risk factors were nearly five times more likely to report fair or poor health (38%) than those experiencing zero social risk factors (8%).



Recommendations

Social risk factors can be explored by the public in the online [Alaska BRFSS Data Center](#). Two suggested analyses follow:

- 1 Identify populations and geographic areas that experience a greater number of total social risk factors or a higher percentage of individual social risk factors.
- 2 Explore associations between social risk factors and specific health outcomes (such as obesity) or health behaviors (such as cancer screening).

These measures will be collected again in 2023 and 2024 to allow for more in-depth analysis and to inform health promotion strategies. Public health efforts in Alaska should consider multi-level programs, policies, diverse partnerships, and discussions that address both the root causes of health inequities and the upstream disparities in daily living conditions. Data presented also supports engagement with Alaska public health regions that experience a high prevalence of social risk factors.

References

- ¹ Chelak, K., & Chakole, S. (2023). The Role of Social Determinants of Health in Promoting Health Equality: A Narrative Review. *Cureus*, 15(1), e33425. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.33425>.
- ² Solar O, Irwin A. A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health discussion paper Geneva, Switzerland: WHO; 2010. https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/44489/9789241500852_eng.pdf
- ³ Town M, Eke P, Zhao G, Thomas CW, Hsia J, Pierannunzi C, Hacker K. All Racial and Ethnic Differences in Social Determinants of Health and Health- Related Social Needs Among Adults — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, United States, 2022. *MMWR MORb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2024; Mar 7; 73(9):204-208. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7309a3 PMID: 38451870; PMCID: PMC10932584.
- ⁴ CDC. Statistical brief on the social determinants of health and health equity module, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2022. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2022. https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/data_documentation/pdf/SDOH-Module-Statistical-Brief-508c.pdf