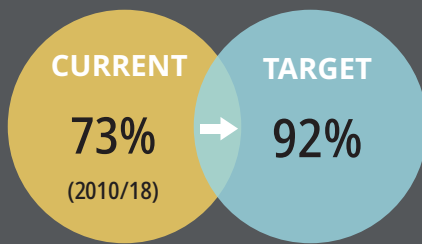


HEALTH INDICATOR 7: ACCESS TO EXERCISE OPPORTUNITIES

DESIRED RESULT: INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



DEFINITION

Percent of the population living half a mile from a park in any area, one mile from a recreational center in a metropolitan area, or three miles from a recreational center in a rural area

DETAILS

Exercise access is based on census tract proximity to public parklands or recreational facilities such as “gyms, community centers, dance studios, pools,” and other exercise facilities

NC ACCESS TO EXERCISE OPPORTUNITIES (2010/18)

73% of population

2030 TARGET

92% of population

RANGE AMONG NC COUNTIES

6 – 100%

RANK AMONG STATES

Tied for 40th*

DATA SOURCE

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps - Business Analyst, Delorme map data, ESRI, & US Census Tiger line Files

STATE PLANS WITH SIMILAR INDICATORS

Not Applicable

*Rank of 1st for state with best access to exercise opportunities

Rationale for Selection:

Exercise is linked to positive physical, psychological, and social outcomes. Communities that create spaces for physical activity have healthier people with decreased risks of obesity, heart disease, and other chronic conditions that increase morbidity and mortality.⁷

Context

One of the most important things communities can do to improve the health of their people is to provide opportunities for physical activity.⁵⁷ Research shows that everyone, regardless of health status, benefits from being physically active. Regular physical activity fosters positive growth and development, improves brain health, and reduces the risk of a large number of chronic diseases.⁵⁷ Physical activity, or exercise, is a protective factor for many chronic health conditions, premature mortality, and poor cardiovascular health.⁵⁸

“Regular physical activity fosters positive growth and development, improves brain health, and reduces the risk of a large number of chronic diseases.”

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recognizes physical activity as a means of improving health and preventing negative health outcomes.⁵⁷ However, in order to exercise, people must have access to safe places to be physically active. Such spaces include crime-free neighborhoods with sidewalks and bike lanes, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities, playgrounds, senior centers, sports fields, and other designated spaces to exercise.⁵⁷ Studies have shown that those who live in communities that facilitate easy access to exercise opportunities are better able to engage in physical activity.⁵⁸

Disparities

Income level, race/ethnicity, and geography all have an impact on one's access to exercise opportunities. Low-income communities may not have as many parks or as many recreational facilities as their more affluent counterparts.⁵⁹ People of color are less likely to live in areas with accessible parks or development of recreational facility systems.⁵⁸ Rural areas face more barriers to exercise access than their metropolitan counterparts.⁶⁰ Additionally, persons with physical disabilities may face difficulties accessing parks and recreational facilities that have necessary accommodations.⁶¹

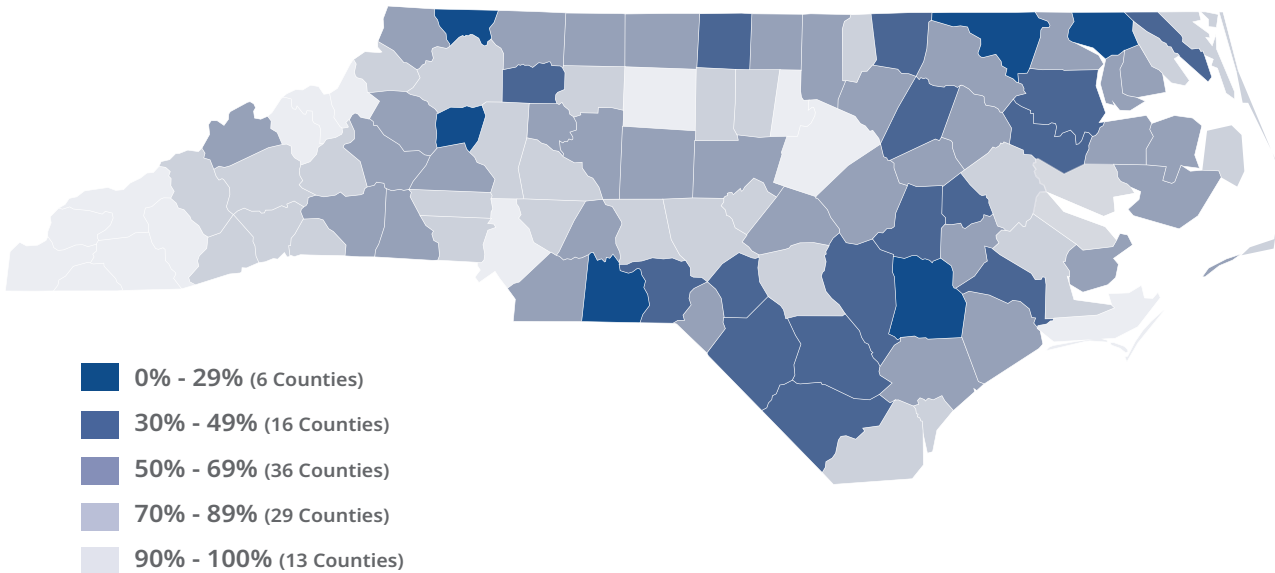
⁷ This measure does not account for sidewalks or other non-parkland spaces that can be used for exercise (CHR, 2019). Additionally, it measures access on distance alone, without taking into account physical barriers that might complicate access, such as busy roads or limited entryways to the park (CHR, 2019). Finally, it has no cost measure, and includes recreation facilities that may have financial barriers for the residents of the census block (CHR, 2019).

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FIGURE 15

Percent of People with Access to Exercise Opportunities in North Carolina Counties, 2018



Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps; <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/north-carolina/2019/measure/factors/132/data>

2030 Target and Potential for Change

The HNC 2030 group reviewed data across several years and projected a future level to develop a target for exercise access. The group chose 92% of the population having access to exercise opportunities as the target for 2030. This would reflect an acceleration in the current slow positive trend and signal a substantive step toward improving the physical health and well-being of North Carolina communities.

Levers for Change

(CDC, 2017; County Health Rankings, 2019)

- Increase number of community parks, particularly in rural areas
- Expand transit options to include places for physical recreation
- Maintain safe and well-lit sidewalks
- Increase number of biking, walking trails, and greenways
- Support community walking clubs and public fitness classes
- Increase access to evidenced-based and informed interventions that support physical activity in childcare, schools, churches, workplaces and other community-based settings
- Increase the number of joint use agreements for school playground facilities
- Provide public access to municipal recreation facilities (NC DHHS, 2018)