

# LIVING A HEALTHY LIFE

## Nassau second, Suffolk 16th in NY health rankings

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Nassau County ranked the second-healthiest county in the state, boosted by factors including low smoking rates, greater wealth and more doctors per person than the state average, according to a new study released Tuesday.

Suffolk County ranked 16th out of the state's 62 counties in health outcomes.

Nassau was just behind Rockland County in "health outcomes," which used measures such as premature death rates and the quality of physical and mental health to provide a snapshot of counties' current health in a study conducted by the Princeton, N.J.-based Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a health philanthropy, and the University of Wisconsin Health Population Institute.

The annual rankings compile data from a variety of sources, including the U.S. census and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 2010 through 2018.

Experts pointed to less access to health care in Suffolk County and a higher rate of premature deaths than Nassau County and the state average, which could be linked to the opioid crisis.

"Where you live matters to how long and how well you live," said Kate Konkle, an associate researcher with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Health outcomes are a measure of "today's health," but the study also ranked "health factors," which predict health in the future, according to the study's authors.

Nassau ranked first statewide in health factors, such as smoking, obesity, exercise, pollution and measures that include child poverty and educational attainment. Under



Dr. Héctor Alcalá, assistant professor of public health at Stony Brook University. ■ Video: newsday.com/health

those measures, Suffolk was eighth.

In 2018, Nassau ranked fourth for health outcomes and first for health factors. Suffolk that year ranked 13th in health outcome and seventh in health factors.

Nassau's high ranking reflects in part its high median family income, said Dr. Ram Raju, senior vice president in charge of community benefit programs and social determinants of health for New Hyde Park-based Northwell Health, which operates 13 Long Island hospitals. Healthiness is linked to income and other socioeconomic factors, he said.

Within Nassau, there likely are big disparities, he said.

"One of the drawbacks of this kind of survey is that when you take the entire county as it is, you get an average," he said.

"But Hempstead may look very different from Manhasset," Raju said. Hempstead, a village in Nassau with a high poverty rate, is only a few miles from upscale Manhasset.

An Associated Press analysis of U.S. census data on life expectancy that was released in

December found life expectancy on Long Island was generally much higher in wealthier communities than in poorer ones.

There also are significant racial differences, Raju said. The study looked at rates of premature death and found that in both Nassau and Suffolk, African Americans had a significantly higher "years of potential life lost rate" than whites and Hispanics.

Nassau County had an overall life expectancy of 82.8 years, while Suffolk County had a life expectancy of 80.7 years, according to data compiled in the report. The statewide average life expectancy was 81.2 years.

Nassau County life expectancy for black residents was 81.6 years, while Hispanic life expectancy was 88.6 years and white life expectancy was 82.2 years. In Suffolk, black life expectancy was 78.4 years, while Hispanic life expectancy was 86.8 years and white life expectancy was 80.3 years.

Suffolk County also has a high median income. Suffolk ranked just behind Nassau on

socioeconomic factors. One reason for worse health outcomes in Suffolk than in Nassau is less access to health care, said Dr. Héctor Alcalá, an assistant professor of public health at Stony Brook University.

Nassau ranked third and Suffolk ranked 33rd in access to physical and mental health care. In Nassau, for example, there is one primary care physician for every 700 residents. In Suffolk, the ratio is 1,360 to 1.

And Suffolk is less densely populated, especially in the eastern part of the county, so people may need to travel farther to access health care.

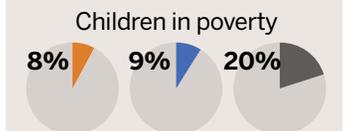
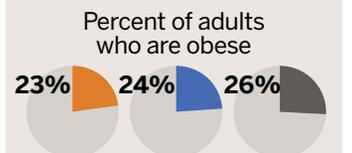
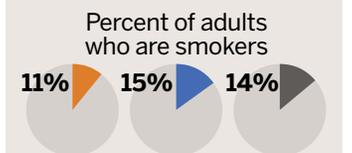
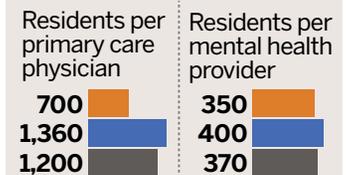
"The longer you need to travel for care, the less likely you are to use it," especially for people who rely on Suffolk's spotty public transportation system, Alcalá said.

With less density in Suffolk, "The pockets of poverty are going to be stronger and more isolated," he said. One example is the low-income communities on the East End where many low-wage service workers for upscale places such as the Hamptons live, he said.

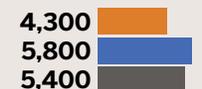
Fatal opioid overdoses,

## BY THE NUMBERS

NASSAU SUFFOLK NY STATE



Years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population



Air pollution level (higher is worse)



SOURCE: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, University of Wisconsin Health Population Institute

which are more numerous in Suffolk than Nassau and usually claim the lives of younger and middle-age people, likely is a reason why rates of premature death are significantly higher in Suffolk, he said.

Suffolk County health officials said they have programs to improve the county's health. "Health outcomes are largely based on the social determinants of health, which include economic status, education, social support, access to health care and the built environment," according to Suffolk Health Commissioner Dr. James L. Tomarken.

Nassau County officials declined to comment