



Building Stronger Communities for Better Health

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The Challenges:

- Health inequality will get worse as a result of the economic downturn.
- Health insurance reform – even if enacted – will NOT eliminate racial and ethnic inequities in health and health care. Simply having insurance will not level the health care playing field.
- To eliminate health inequities, we must address factors outside of health care, particularly the conditions in which people live, work, and play.

The Economic Burden of Health Inequalities in the United States

(www.jointcenter.org/hpi)

- Direct medical costs of health inequalities
- Indirect costs of health inequalities
- Costs of premature death

The Economic Burden of Health Inequalities in the United States

- Between 2003 and 2006, 30.6% of direct medical care expenditures for African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics were excess costs due to health inequalities.
- Eliminating health inequalities for minorities would have reduced direct medical care expenditures by \$229.4 billion for the years 2003-2006.
- Between 2003 and 2006 the combined costs of health inequalities and premature death were \$1.24 trillion.

Neighborhood Factors Influence Health Through:

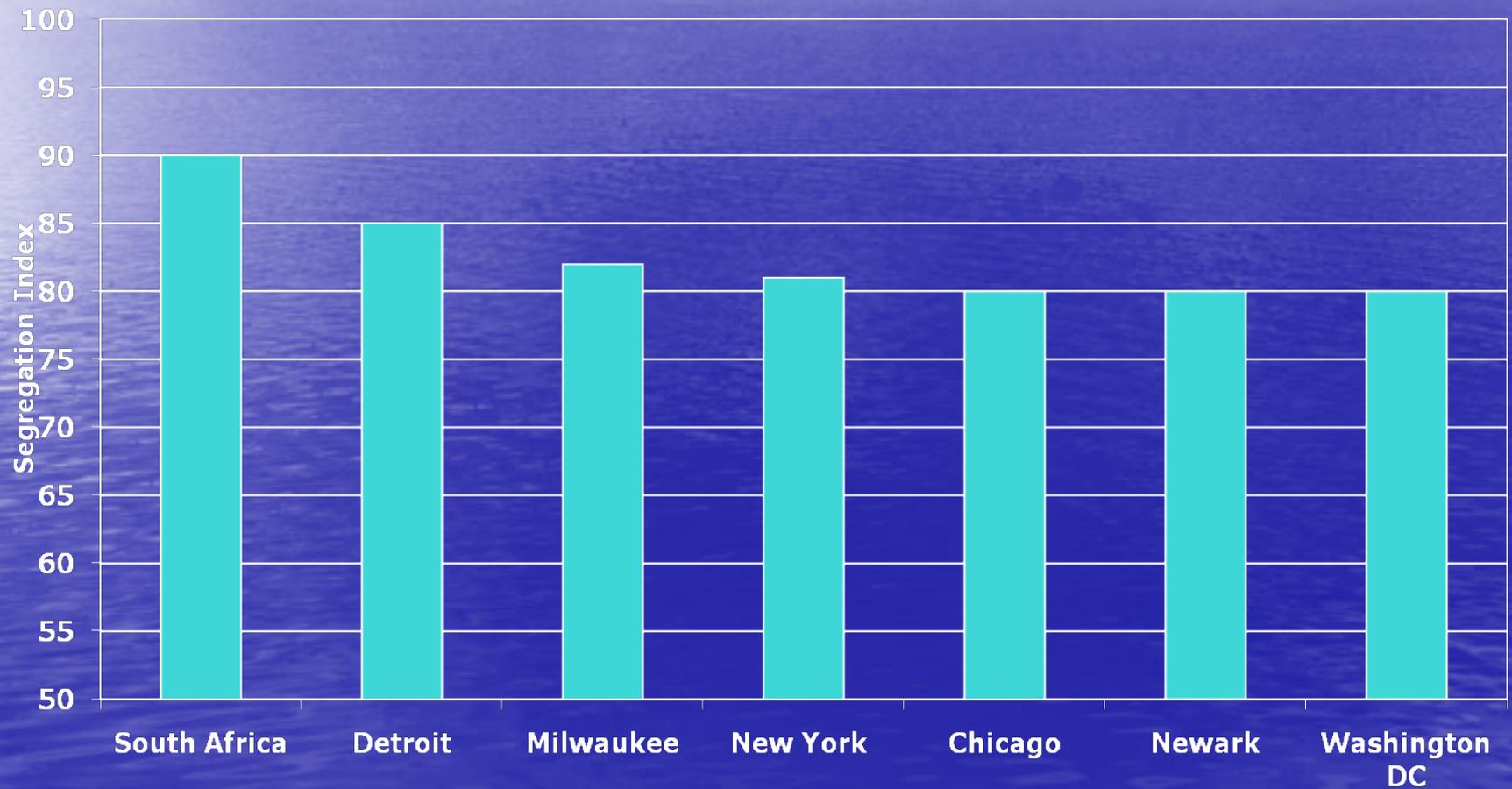
- Direct effects on both physical and mental health
- Indirect influences on behaviors that have health consequences
- Health impacts resulting from the quality and availability of health care
- Health impacts associated with the availability of opportunity structures (e.g., access to healthy food, safe spaces, capital, transportation, jobs, entrepreneurial activity, recreation facilities)

The background is a smooth blue gradient. On the left side, there is a bright, glowing area that resembles a sun or moon reflecting on water, creating a shimmering effect. The rest of the background is a deep, uniform blue with some subtle, wispy white clouds near the top.

The Role of Segregation

Racial Residential Segregation – Apartheid-era South Africa (1991) and the US (2001)

Source: Massey 2004; Iceland et al 2002; Sawyer and Tatian 2003



Negative Effects of Segregation on Health and Human Development

- Racial segregation *concentrates poverty* and excludes and isolates communities of color from the mainstream resources needed for success. African Americans are more likely to reside in poorer neighborhoods regardless of income level.
- Segregation also *restricts socio-economic opportunity* by channeling non-whites into neighborhoods with poorer public schools, fewer employment opportunities, and smaller returns on real estate.

Negative Effects of Segregation on Health and Human Development (cont'd)

- African Americans are *five times less likely* than whites to live in census tracts with supermarkets, and are *more likely* to live in communities with a high percentage of fast-food outlets, liquor stores and convenience stores
- Black and Latino neighborhoods also have *fewer parks and green spaces* than white neighborhoods, and *fewer safe places* to walk, jog, bike or play, including fewer gyms, recreational centers and swimming pools

Negative Effects of Segregation on Health and Human Development (cont'd)

- Low-income communities and communities of color are *more likely to be exposed* to environmental hazards. For example, 56% of residents in neighborhoods with commercial hazardous waste facilities are people of color even though they comprise less than 30% of the U.S. population
- The "Poverty Tax:" Residents of poor communities *pay more for the exact same consumer products* than those in higher income neighborhoods— more for auto/home loans, furniture, appliances, bank fees, and even groceries

What's Needed

- A focus on prevention, particularly on the conditions in which people live, work, play, and study
- Multiple strategies across sectors
- Sustained investment and a long-term policy agenda

Create Healthier Communities:

- Stimulate investments in communities by creating Community Wellness Opportunity Zones (CWOZ)
- CWOZ draws upon community-identified goals and priorities to focus public and private investment in economic opportunities, education, safe environments, access to health care, and a fair legal system
- CWOZ can put minority small and "cottage" businesses on a level playing field in health and green economy with micro loans, support and technical assistance to help them succeed

Create Healthier Communities:

- Improve food and nutritional options through incentives for Farmer's Markets and grocery stores, and regulation of fast food and liquor stores
- Structure land use and zoning policy to reduce the concentration of health risks
- Institute Health Impact Assessments to determine the public health consequences of policies, projects and proposals (e.g., new housing and development, transportation, labor, education, employment policies)

Improve the Physical Environment of Communities:

- Improve air quality (e.g., by relocating bus depots, major thoroughfares further from homes and schools)
- Expand the availability of open space and clean, safe, innovative recreational facilities (e.g., encourage exercise- and pedestrian-friendly communities)
- Address disproportionate environmental impacts (e.g., encourage Brownfields redevelopment)

"[I]nequities in health [and] avoidable health inequalities arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are, in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces."

World Health Organization Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2008)