

Resources: Food Accessibility Issues in Rural Counties: (Bedford and Lauderdale County, TN)

Food accessibility in Tennessee varies significantly by region, reflecting broader socioeconomic and infrastructural inequalities. In rural Bedford and Lauderdale counties, where agriculture is prominent, food access remains a pressing health and social issue. By examining the current food accessibility in these counties, we can better understand areas of need and highlight ongoing efforts to ensure residents have reliable access to nutritious food. This resource directory provides further analysis, comparing both counties to Tennessee and the United States.

| Metric | United States | Tennessee | Bedford County | Lauderdale County |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------|
| Total Population | * | 7,051,339 | 51,950 | 24,793 |
| Obesity | 34% | 36% | 37% | 41% |
| Hypertension | * | * | * | * |
| Poor or Fair Health | 14% | 18% | 21% | 26% |
| Poor Physical Health Days | 3.3 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 5.1 |
| Poor Mental Health Days | 4.8 | 5.8 | 6.0 | 6.3 |
| Diabetes Prevalence | 10% | 12% | 12% | 15% |
| Food Environment Index | 7.7 | 6.5 | 7.5 | 7.3 |
| Food Insecurity | 10% | 12% | 12% | 15% |
| Limited Access to Health Foods | 10% | 12% | 9% | 15% |
| Poverty (Census, 2022) | 11.5% | 14.0% | 12.4% | 18% |
| Children in Poverty | 16% | 18% | 18% | 25% |
| Income Inequality | 4.9 | 4.6 | 3.6 | 4.8 |

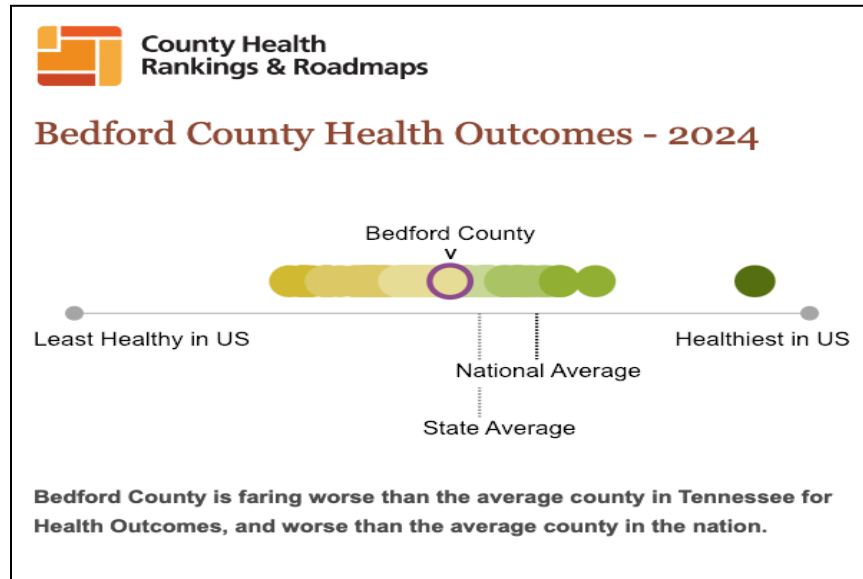
*Collecting 2024 Data

Demographics: Bedford and Lauderdale County

| Demographics | Tennessee | Bedford County | Lauderdale |
|--|-----------|----------------|------------|
| % Below 18 Years of Age | 21.8% | 24.7% | 22.0% |
| % 65 and Older | 17.3% | 15.2% | 16.8% |
| % Non-Hispanic Black | 16.4% | 7.7% | 34.3% |
| % American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.5% | 1.4% | 0.9% |
| % Asian | 2.1% | 1.1% | 0.6% |
| % Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | 0.1% | 0.2% | 0.0% |
| % Hispanic | 6.4% | 14.1% | 3.2% |
| % Non-Hispanic White | 72.9% | 74.7% | 59.5% |
| % Not Proficient in English | 2% | 2% | 1% |
| % Female | 50.9% | 50.0% | 48.3% |
| % Rural | 33.8% | 55.1% | 72.5% |

Bedford County Community Profile

Health Outcomes 2024 ([County Health Rankings, 2024](#))



Bedford County, located in Southern Middle Tennessee, has a population of 51,950, with around 12.4% living below the poverty line. The county also has a substantial Hispanic and Latino community. With the local workforce concentrated in agriculture and manufacturing, unique challenges arise in food accessibility, especially in less populated rural areas.

Leading Causes of Death in Bedford, Tennessee

| Leading Causes of Death Under Age 75 | Deaths | Rate per 100,000 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------------|
| Diseases of heart | 212 | 149.4 |
| Malignant neoplasms | 209 | 147.3 |
| COVID-19 | 106 | 74.7 |
| Accidents | 90 | 63.4 |
| Chronic lower respiratory diseases | 53 | 37.3 |

Data Source: [Tennessee Department of Health](#)

HEALTH OUTCOMES

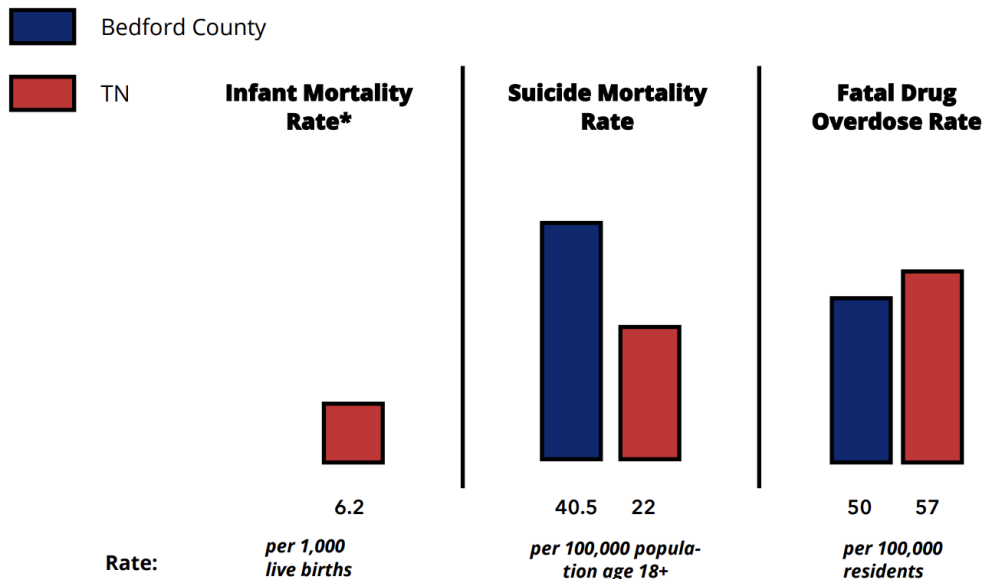
MORTALITY

The number of deaths in a population during a certain amount of time. Metrics included in this section are infant mortality, suicide mortality, and deaths due to fatal drug overdoses.

Leading causes of death: *This metric can be used to see trends in health inequities. Systemic health and social inequities place some populations at higher risk of these diseases or severe illness. Chronic conditions can be exacerbated by social factors and life stressors, which vary among racial and ethnic groups.*

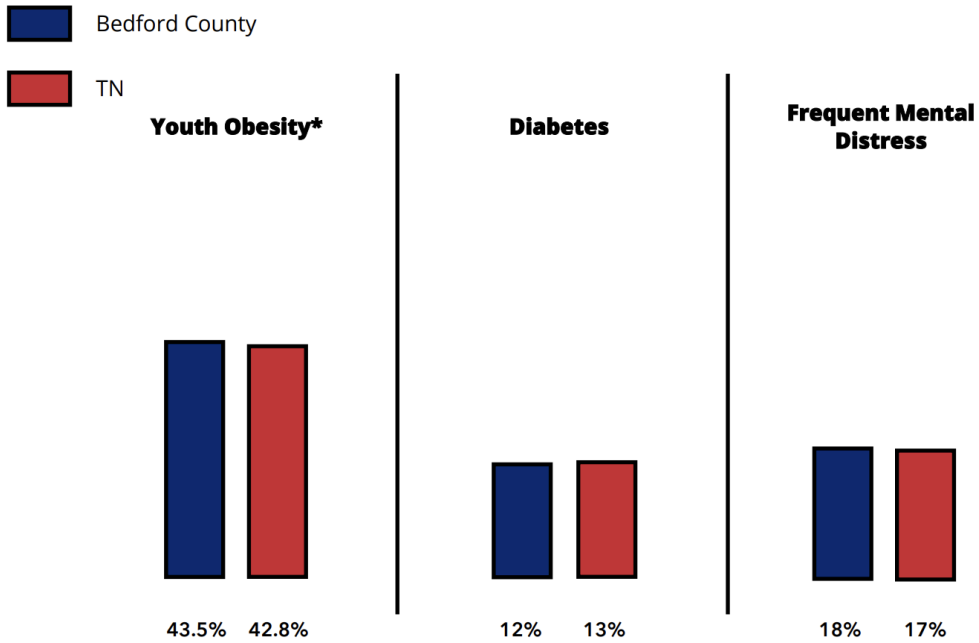
1. Heart Disease
2. COVID-19
3. Cancerous Tumors
4. Accidents (Unintentional Injuries)
5. Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases (COPD, Emphysema, Asthma, etc.)

MORTALITY CONTD.

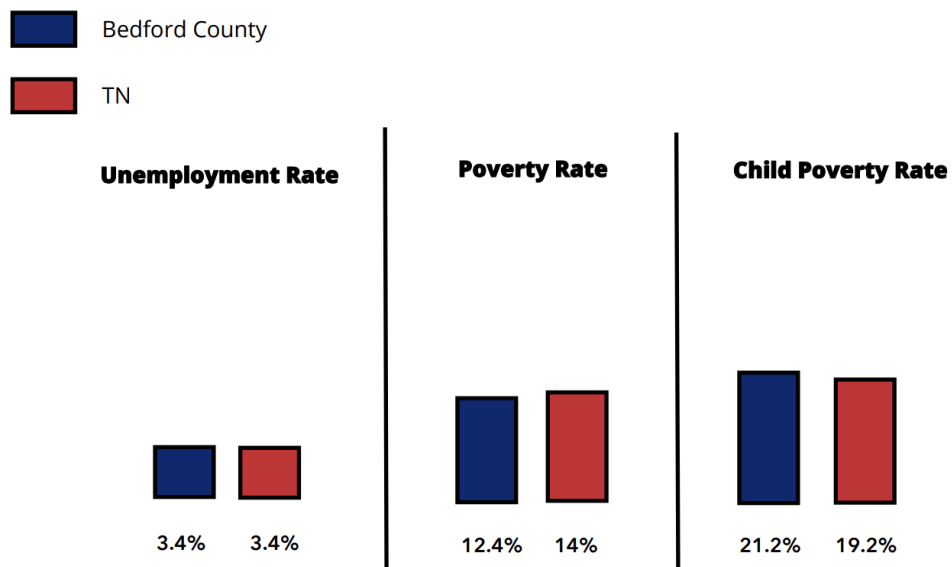


MORBIDITY

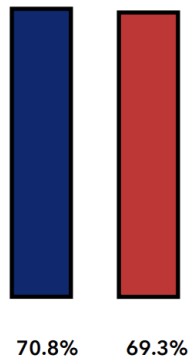
Morbidity means illness, disease, or a certain health state. Mental health is a state of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. The following indicators are included in this section: youth obesity, diabetes, and frequent mental distress (experiencing poor mental health for at least 14 out of the last 30 days).



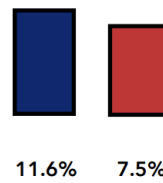
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT CONTD.



Voter Participation Rate

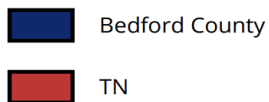


Speak a Language other than English at home

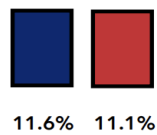


PHYSICAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

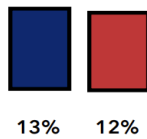
The built environment includes all physical parts of where we live and work and influences a person's level of physical activity. Metrics included in this section are severe housing cost burden (percentage of households that spend more than 50% of household income on housing), food insecurity, vehicle access, and access to green spaces.



Severe Housing Cost Burden



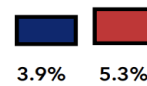
Food Insecurity



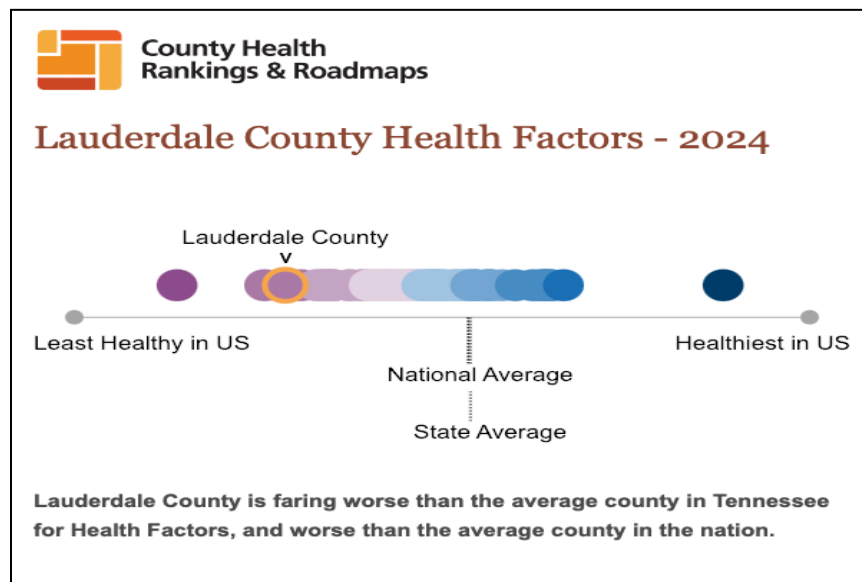
Access to Parks and Greenways



% of Population without access to a car



Lauderdale County Community Profile ([County Health Rankings, 2024](#))



Lauderdale County, located in northwestern Tennessee, has a smaller population of about 24,793. Approximately 18% of residents live below the poverty line, and the unemployment rate is often higher than the state average. The population is approximately 34.3% African American, a demographic facing unique challenges due to limited access to essential resources, including healthcare and affordable, nutritious food.

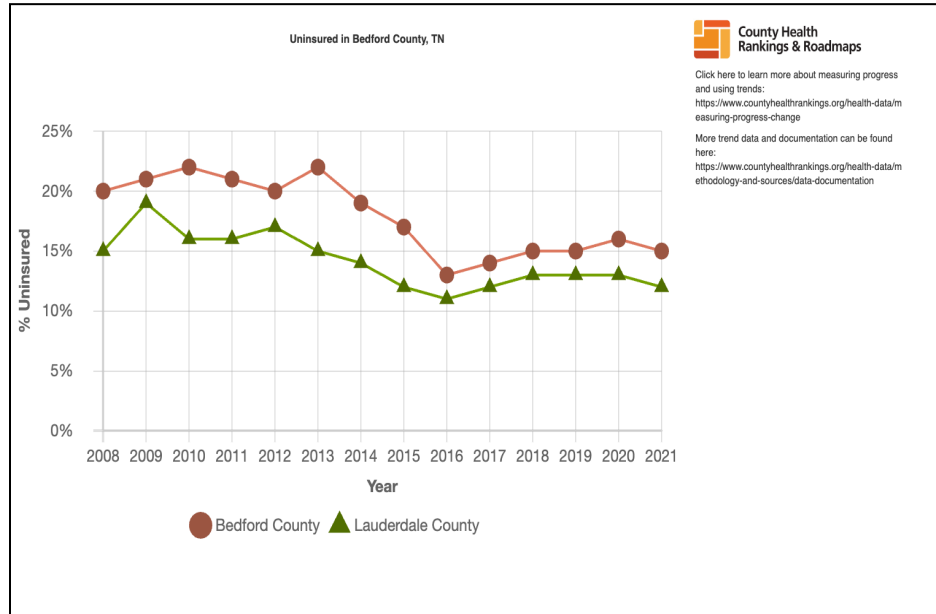
Leading Causes of Death in Lauderdale County

| Leading Causes of Death Under Age 75 | Deaths | Rate per 100,000 |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------------|
| Malignant neoplasms | 129 | 181 |
| Diseases of heart | 124 | 174 |
| COVID-19 | 60 | 84.2 |
| Accidents | 32 | 44.9 |
| Diabetes mellitus | 22 | 30.9 |

Health Outcomes

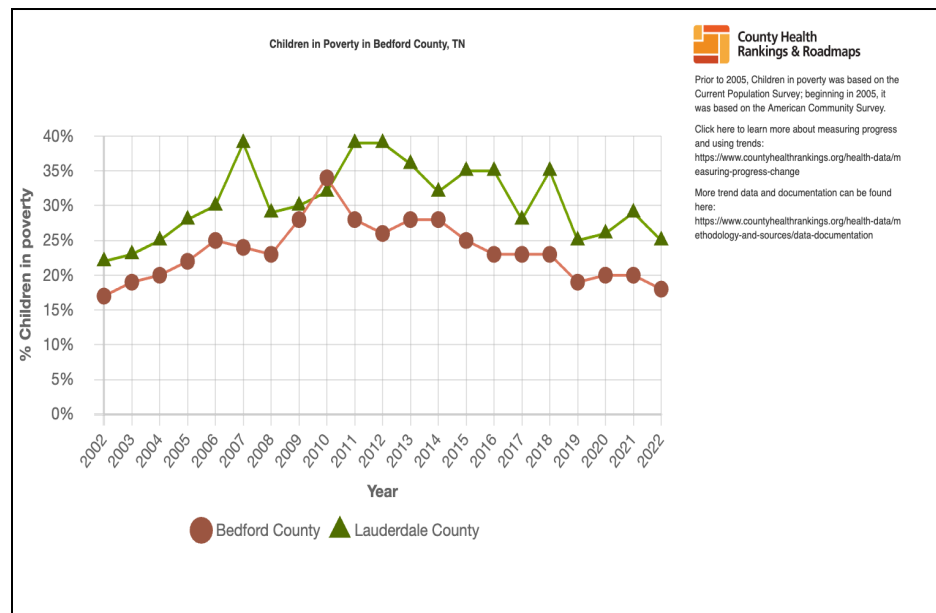
Clinical Care: Uninsured

Percentage of population under age 65 without health insurance: Bedford and Lauderdale County



Social & Economic Factors

Percentage of people under age 18 in poverty: Bedford and Lauderdale County



Data Source: [Tennessee Department of Health](#)

HEALTH OUTCOMES

MORTALITY

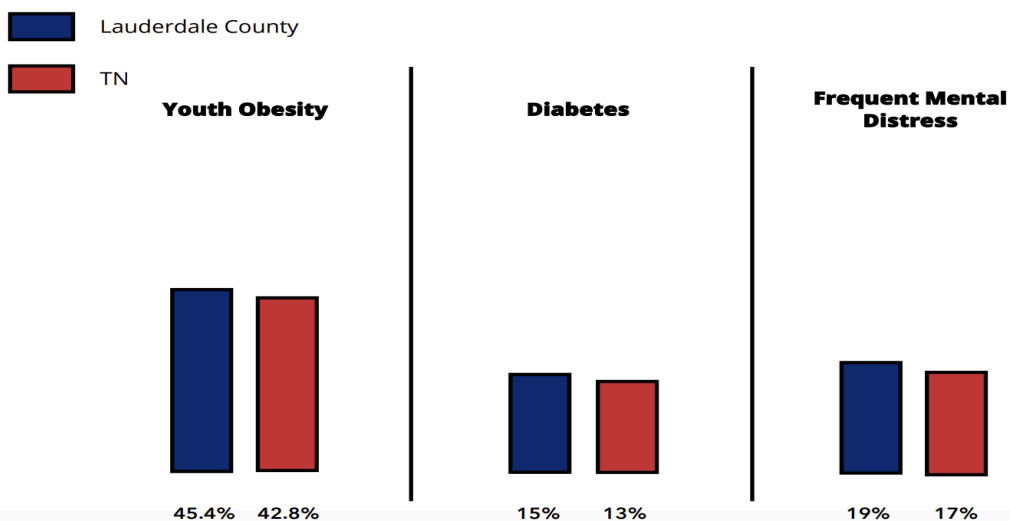
The number of deaths in a population during a certain amount of time. Metrics included in this section are infant mortality, suicide mortality, and deaths due to fatal drug overdoses.

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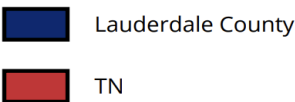
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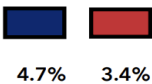
Morbidity means illness, disease, or a certain health state. Mental health is a state of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional well-being. The following indicators are included in this section: youth obesity, diabetes, and frequent mental distress (experiencing poor mental health for at least 14 out of the last 30 days).



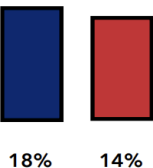
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT CONTD.



Unemployment Rate



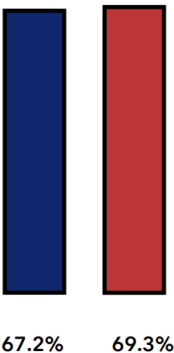
Poverty Rate



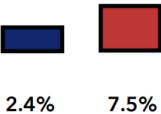
Child Poverty Rate



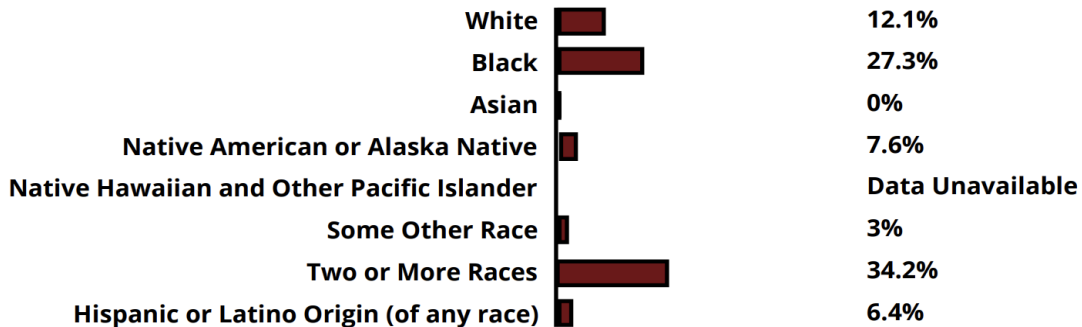
Voter Participation Rate



Speak a Language other than English at home



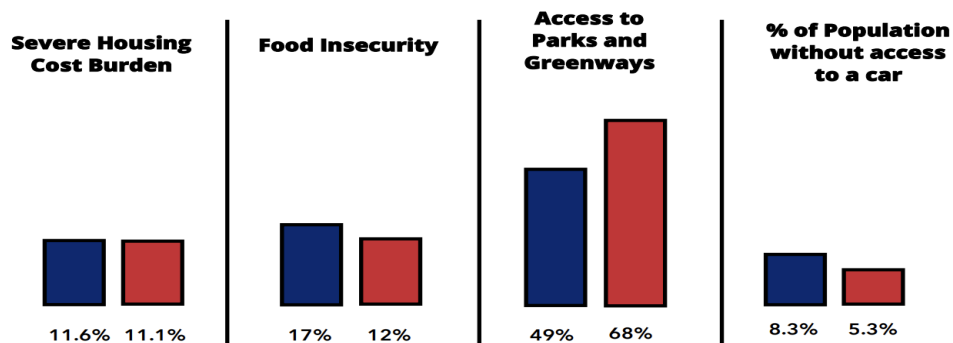
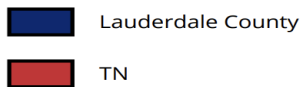
Poverty Rate by Race and Ethnicity in Lauderdale County



Residents of impoverished communities are at a higher risk for adverse health effects such as mental health issues, chronic disease, higher mortality, and lower life expectancy, for example. According to Healthy People 2030, children make up the largest age group of those experiencing poverty.

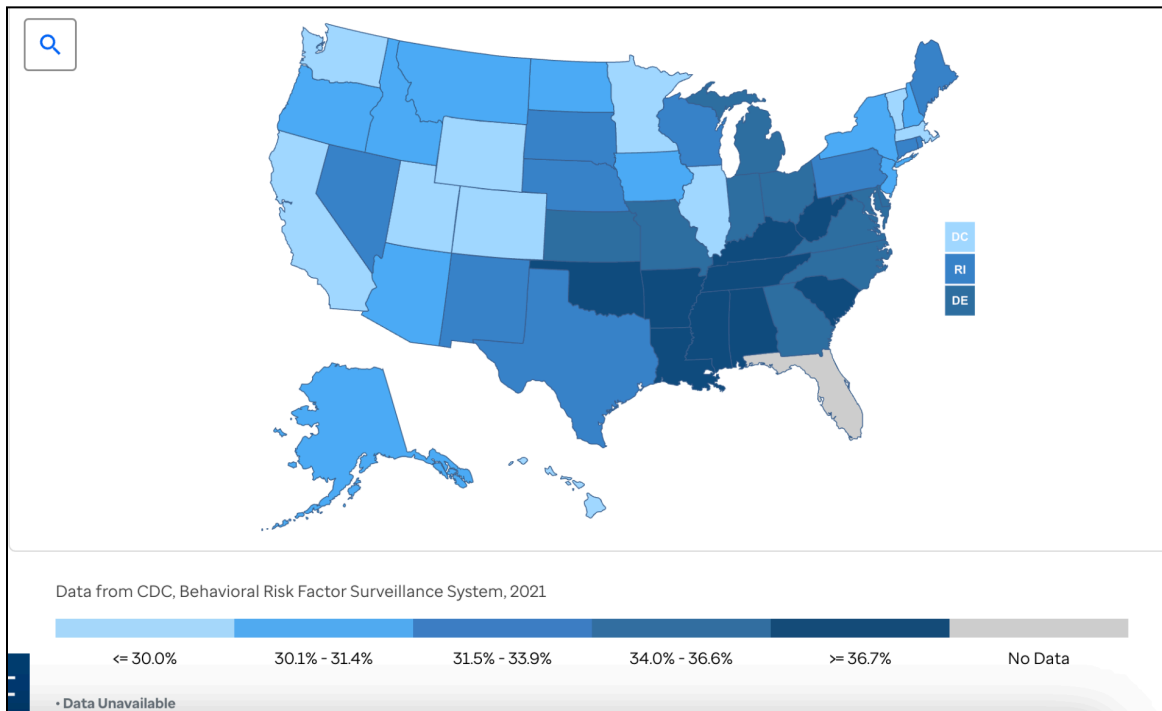
PHYSICAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment includes all physical parts of where we live and work and influences a person's level of physical activity. Metrics included in this section are severe housing cost burden (percentage of households that spend more than 50% of household income on housing), food insecurity, vehicle access, and access to green spaces.



Hypertension, High Blood Pressure by State

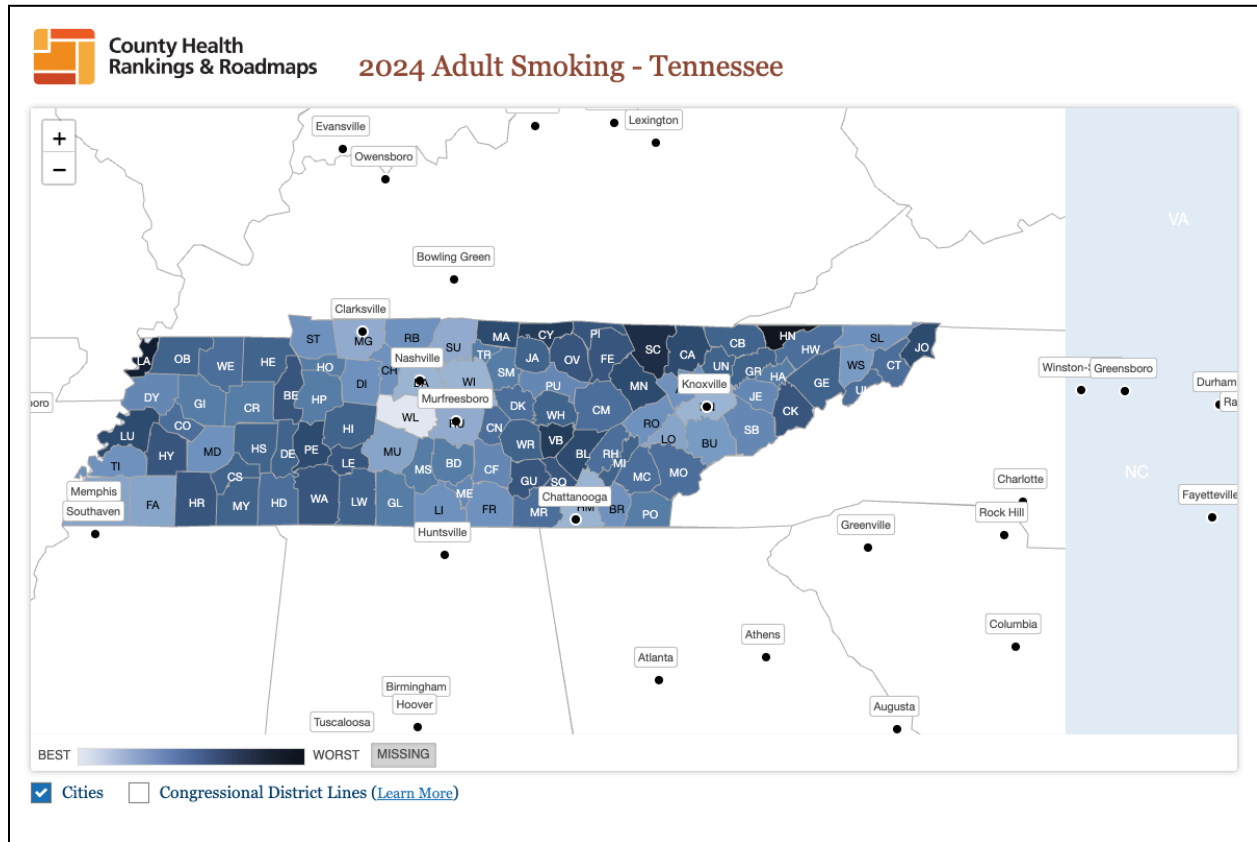
Percentage of adults who reported being told by a health professional that they had high blood pressure





Tennessee ranks 41st out of 49 states for hypertension, with a high prevalence rate of 37.7%. This widespread challenge is not evenly distributed across the state; certain counties, including Bedford and Lauderdale, face higher burdens related to hypertension and limited food accessibility. Food deserts in these areas reduce residents' access to fresh, healthy food options, exacerbating the risk factors for hypertension, such as poor diet and limited availability of low-sodium foods. Addressing hypertension in Tennessee requires tailored approaches recognizing local disparities, emphasizing food security and accessible, nutritious options to combat the heightened risks in underserved communities.

Bedford and Lauderdale Counties have regions identified as “food deserts” by the USDA, where low-income families live more than 10 miles from a grocery store. Rural Bedford, particularly in its southwestern areas, has few grocery stores, while Lauderdale has limited options outside its more populated centers, such as Ripley. A 2023 report by the Tennessee Department of Health shows that approximately 15% of Bedford County and 18% of Lauderdale County households experience food insecurity, meaning they lack reliable access to affordable, nutritious food. These rates are significantly higher than Tennessee’s statewide average of around 12%, underscoring the particular vulnerabilities of residents in these areas.



Health Behaviors: Adult Smoking



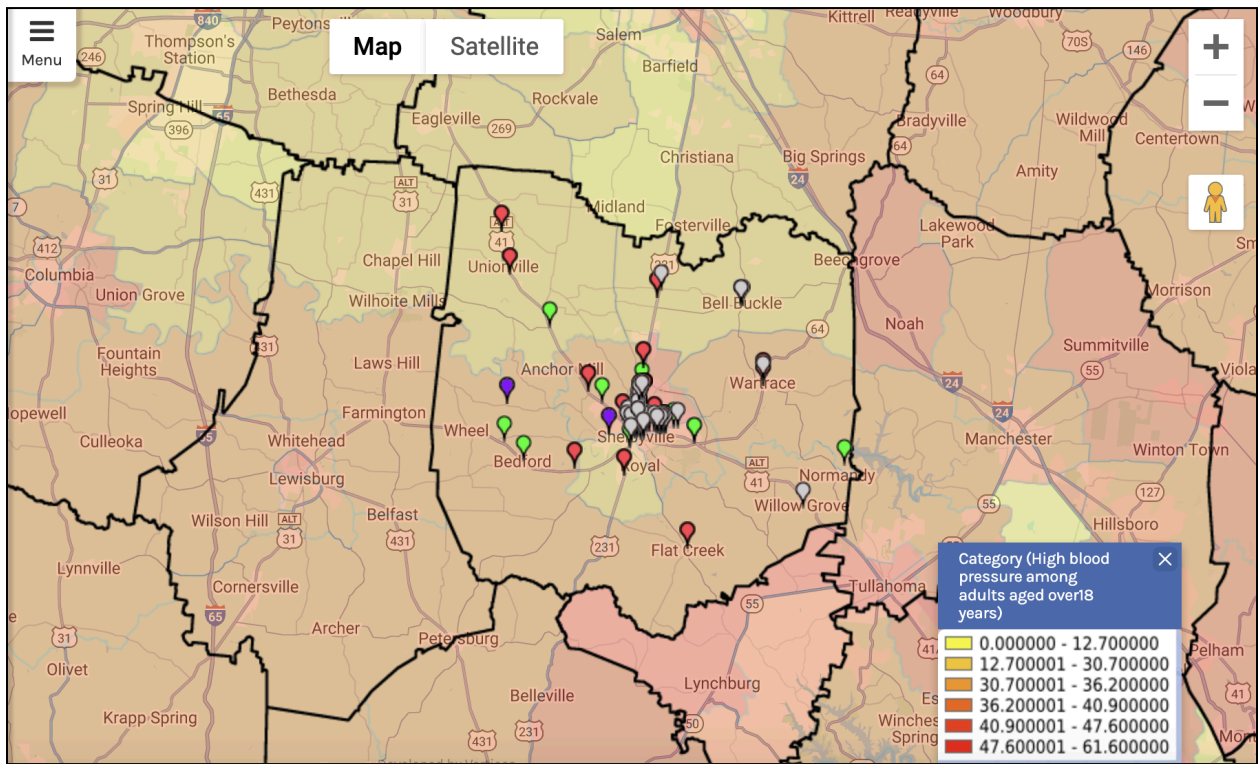
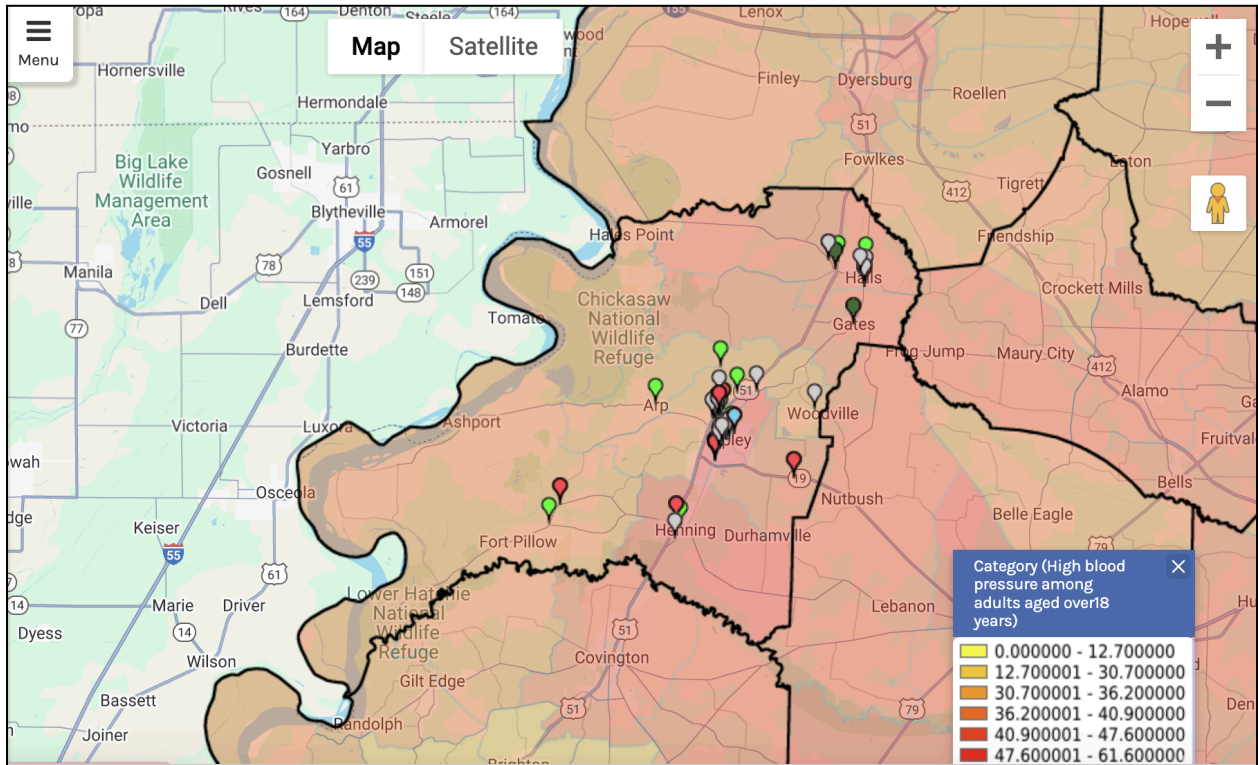
Bedford County

| Health Behaviors | Bedford County | Tennessee | United States | |
|---|---|-----------|---------------|---|
| Adult Smoking | 23% | 20% | 15% | ^ |
| <p>In Bedford County, Tennessee, 23% of adults are current cigarette smokers.</p> <p>Definition: Percentage of adults who are current smokers (age-adjusted).</p> <p>Error margin: 18-27%</p> <p>Years of data used: 2021</p> <p><i>Use caution if comparing these data with prior years</i></p> <div> <p>Explore Related Resources</p> <p>Evidence-informed strategies related to this this measure</p> <p>Map of Adult Smoking for Tennessee</p> <p>Methods and limitations for this measure</p> </div> | | | | |
| Adult Obesity | 37% | 36% | 34% | ✓ |
| Food Environment Index | 7.5 | 6.5 | 7.7 | ✓ |
| Physical Inactivity | 31% | 27% | 23% | ✓ |
| Access to Exercise Opportunities | 44% | 67% | 84% | ✓ |
| Excessive Drinking | 15% | 17% | 18% | ✓ |
| Alcohol-Impaired Driving Deaths |  39% | 24% | 26% | ✓ |
| Sexually Transmitted Infections |  457.8 | 562.4 | 495.5 | ✓ |
| Teen Births | 40 | 24 | 17 | ✓ |

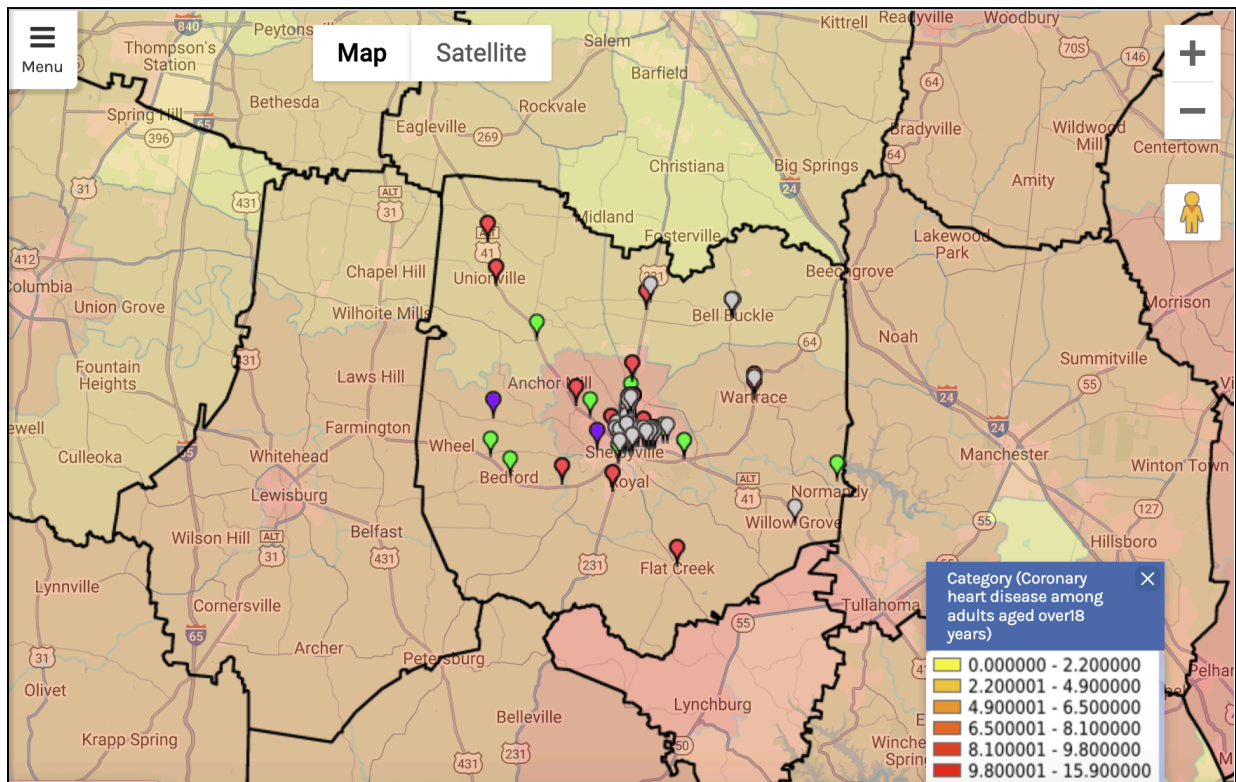
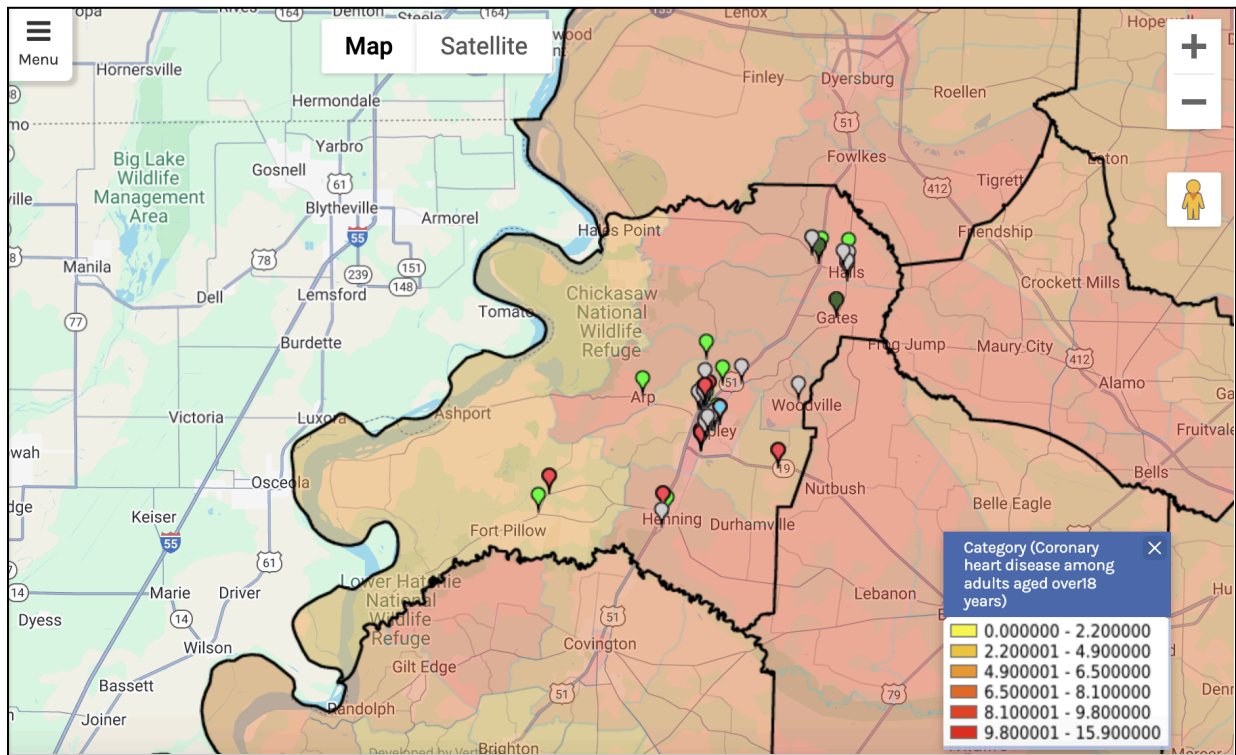
Lauderdale County

| Health Behaviors | Lauderdale County | Tennessee | United States | |
|---|---|-----------|---------------|---|
| Adult Smoking | 27% | 20% | 15% | ^ |
| <p>In Lauderdale County, Tennessee, 27% of adults are current cigarette smokers.</p> <p>Definition: Percentage of adults who are current smokers (age-adjusted).</p> <p>Error margin: 23-32%</p> <p>Years of data used: 2021</p> <p><i>Use caution if comparing these data with prior years</i></p> <div> <p>Explore Related Resources</p> <p>Evidence-informed strategies related to this measure</p> <p>Map of Adult Smoking for Tennessee</p> <p>Methods and limitations for this measure</p> </div> | | | | |
| Adult Obesity | 41% | 36% | 34% | ▼ |
| Food Environment Index | 7.3 | 6.5 | 7.7 | ▼ |
| Physical Inactivity | 37% | 27% | 23% | ▼ |
| Access to Exercise Opportunities | 49% | 67% | 84% | ▼ |
| Excessive Drinking | 14% | 17% | 18% | ▼ |
| Alcohol-Impaired Driving Deaths |  56% | 24% | 26% | ▼ |
| Sexually Transmitted Infections |  1,019.6 | 562.4 | 495.5 | ▼ |
| Teen Births | 46 | 24 | 17 | ▼ |

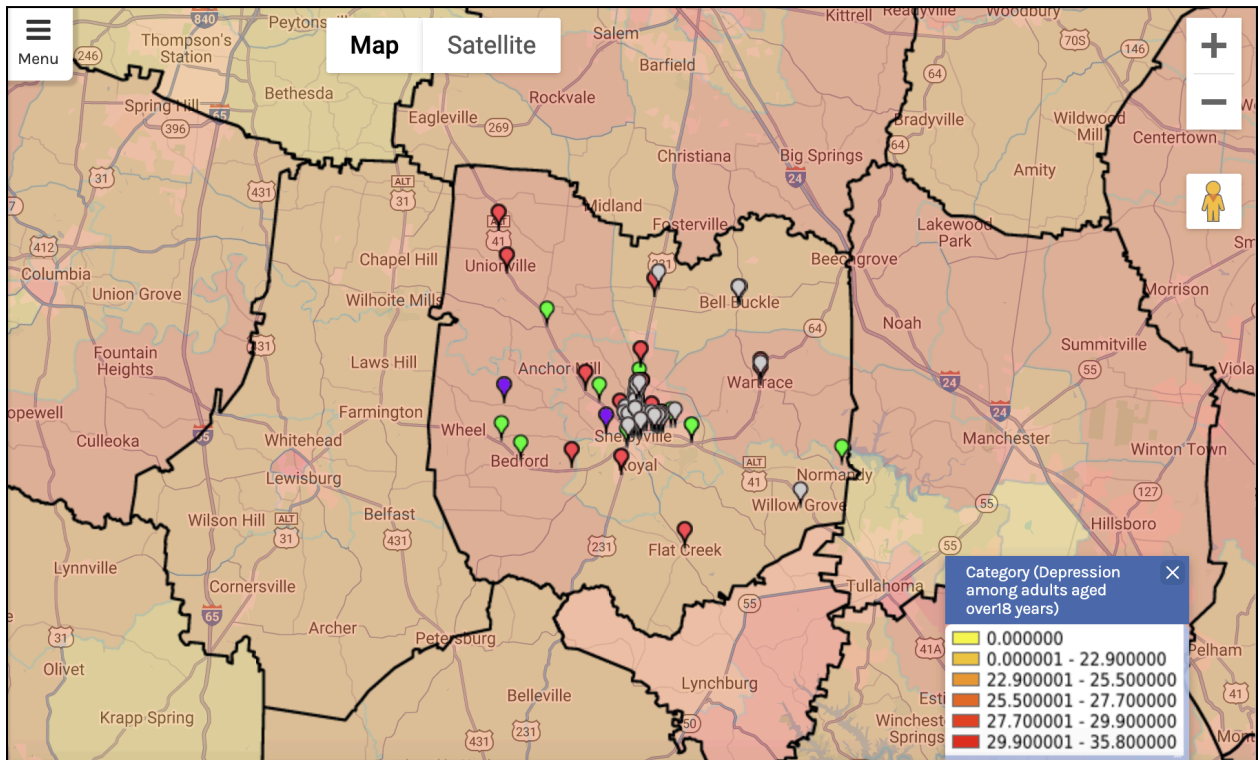
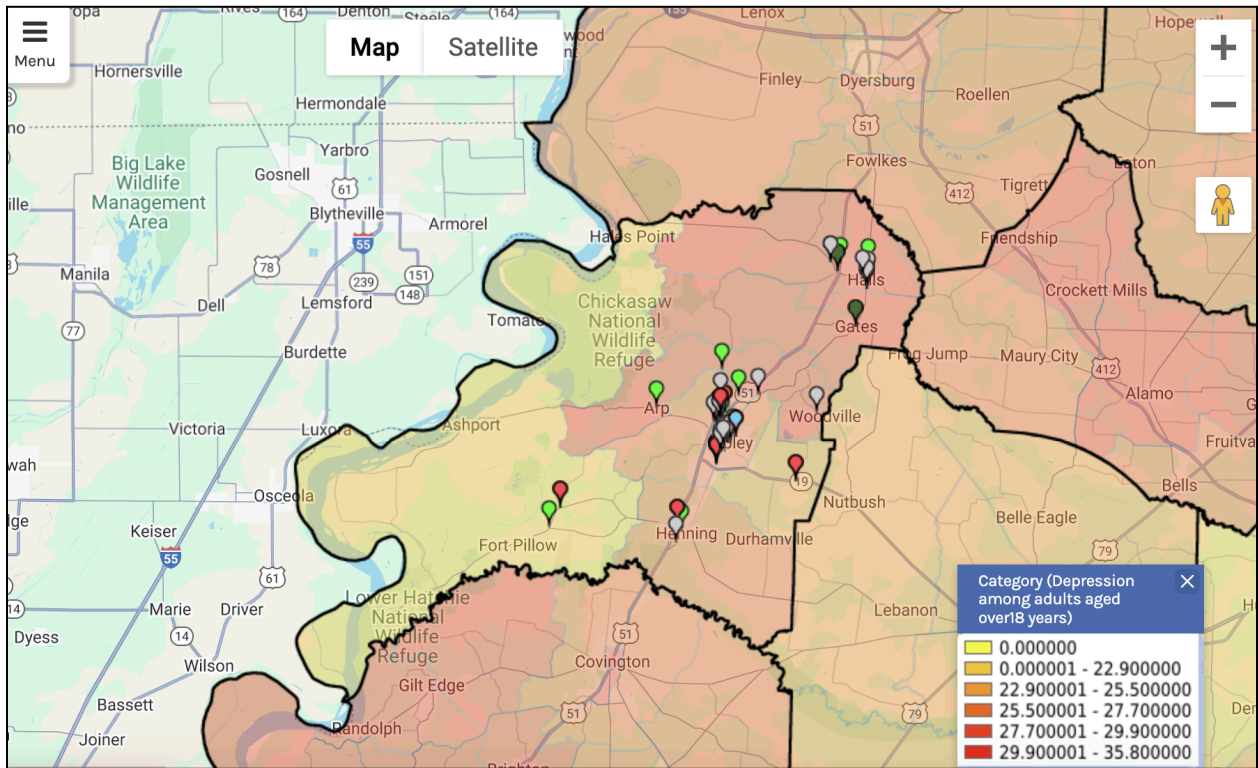
High Blood Pressure Among Adults Over 18 Years



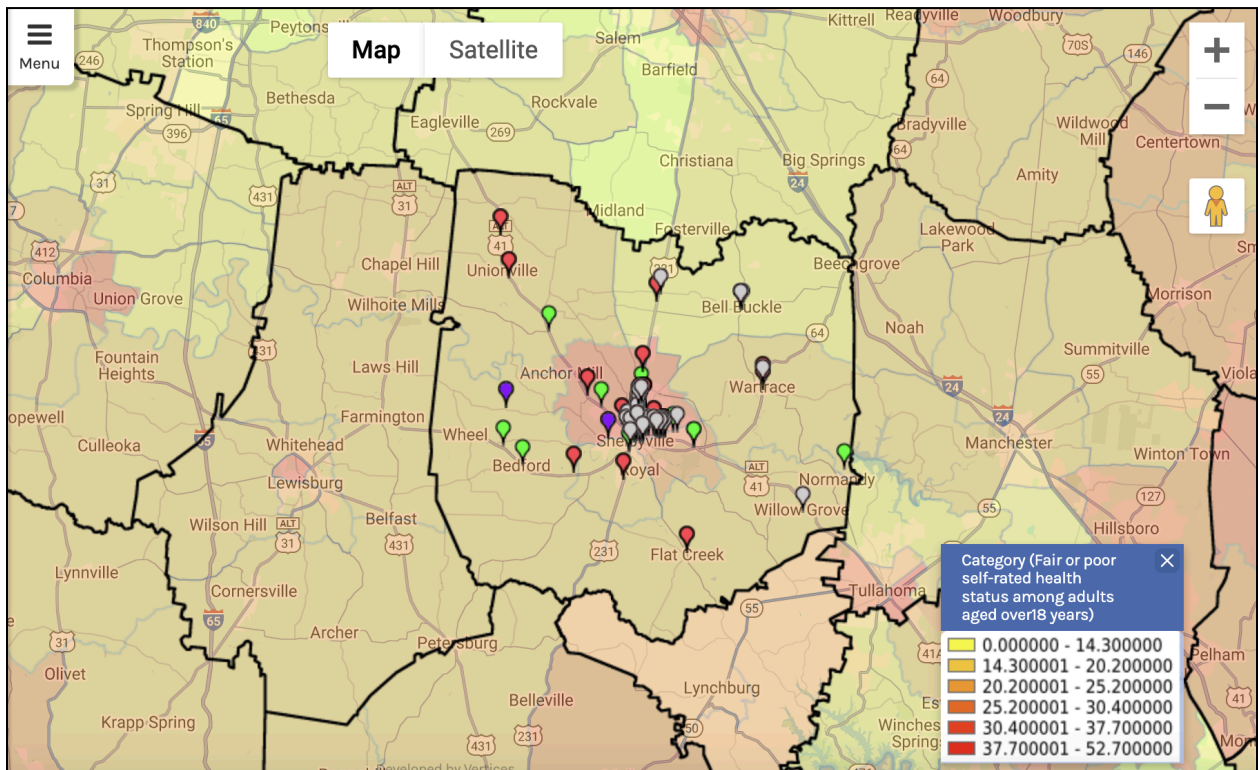
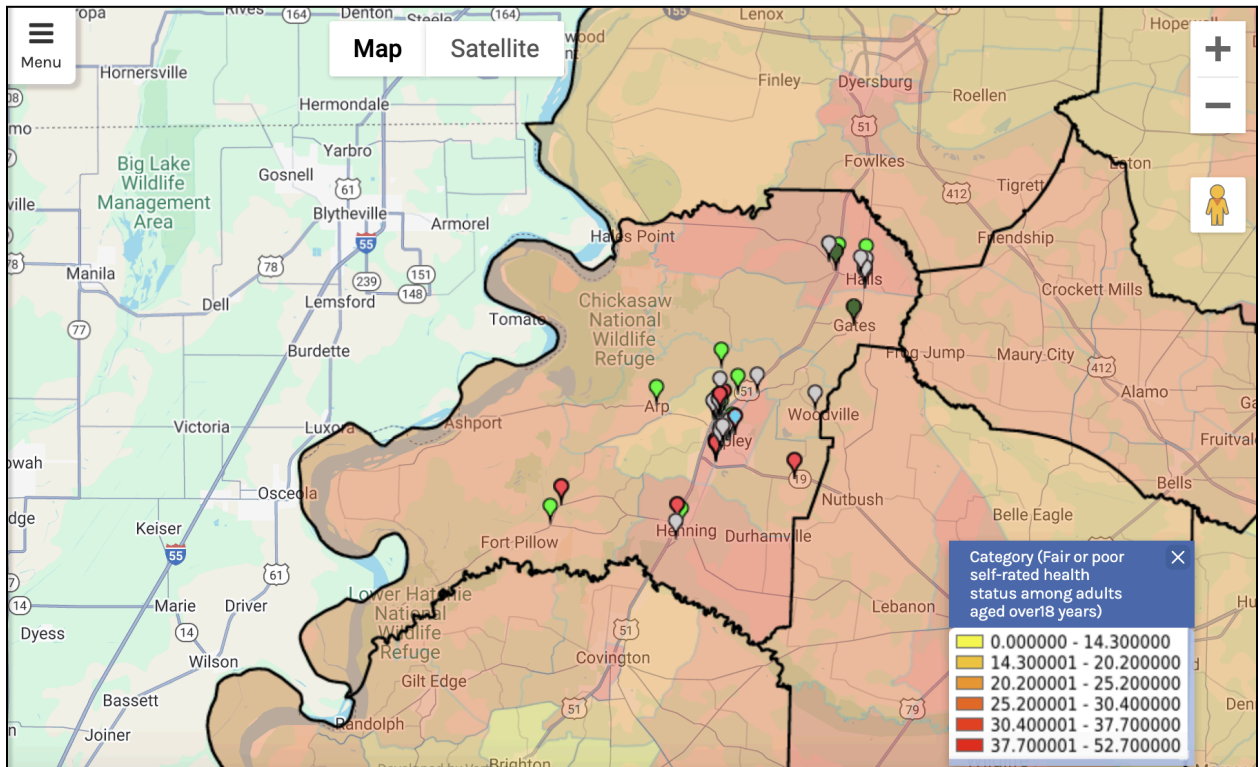
Coronary Heart Disease Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



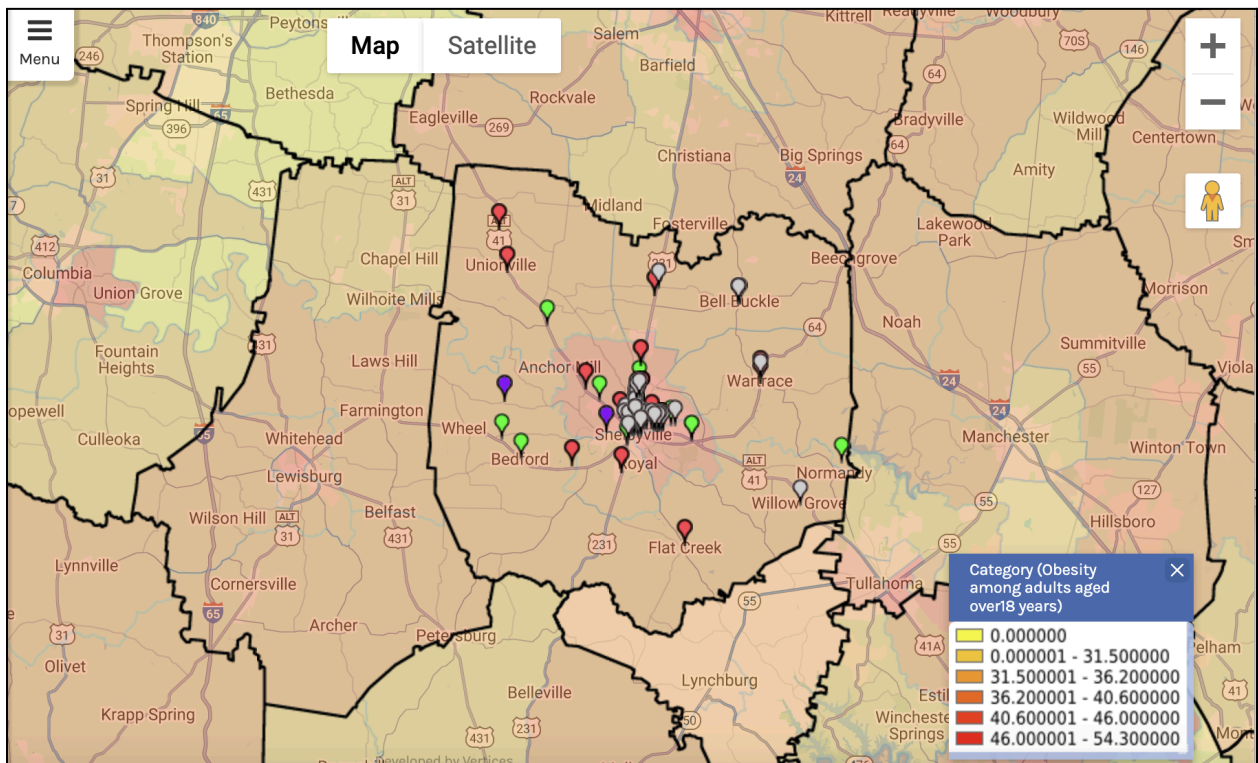
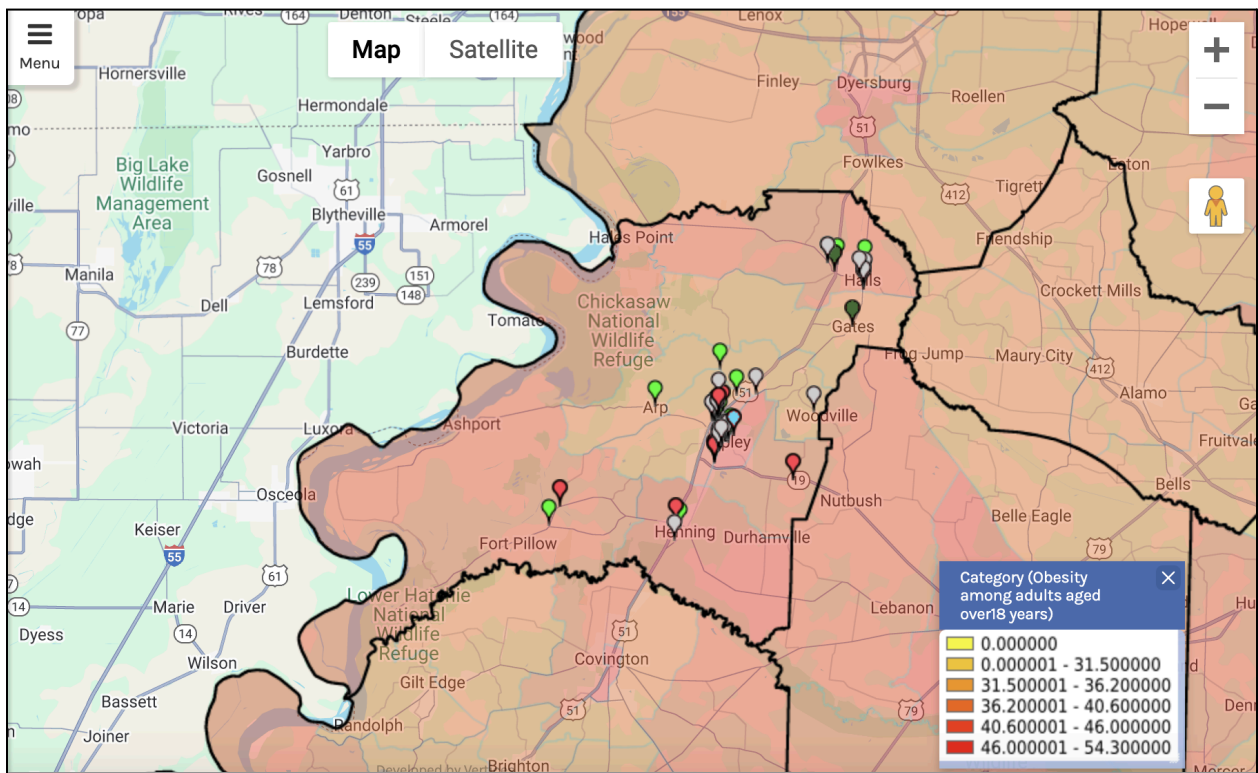
Depression Among Adults Over 18 Years



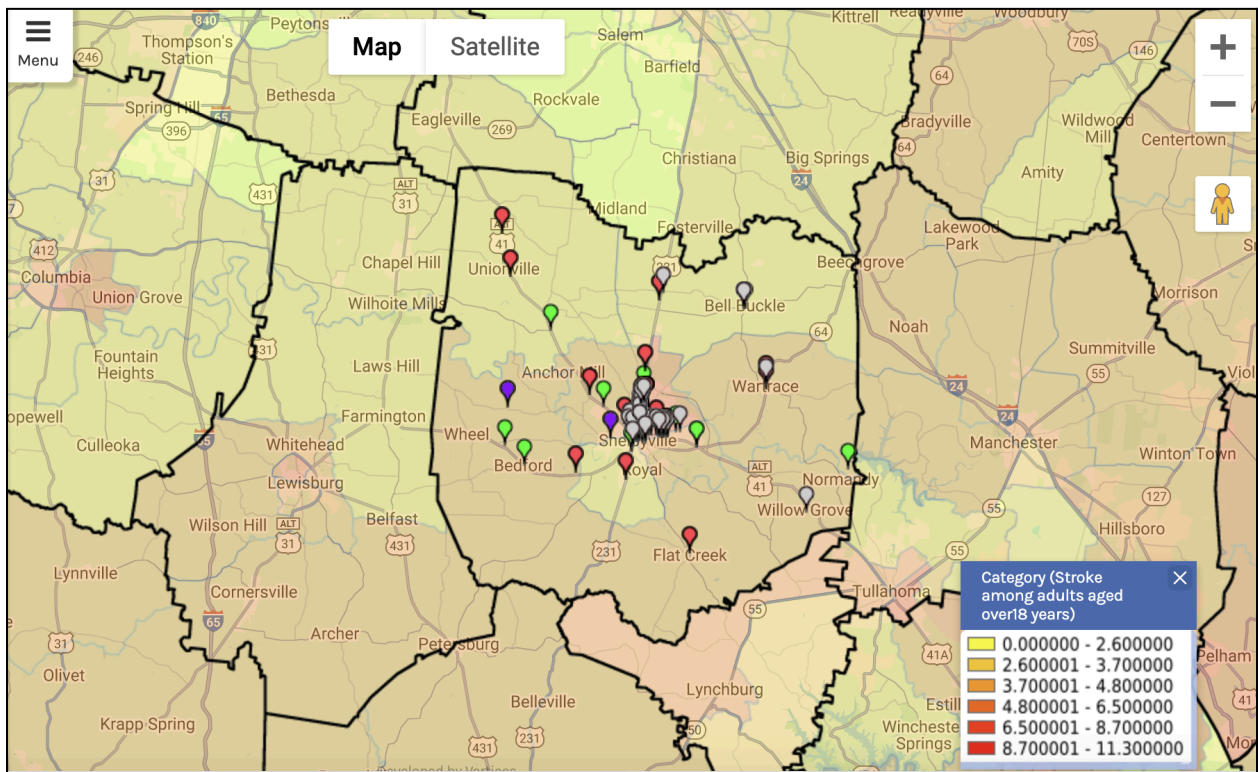
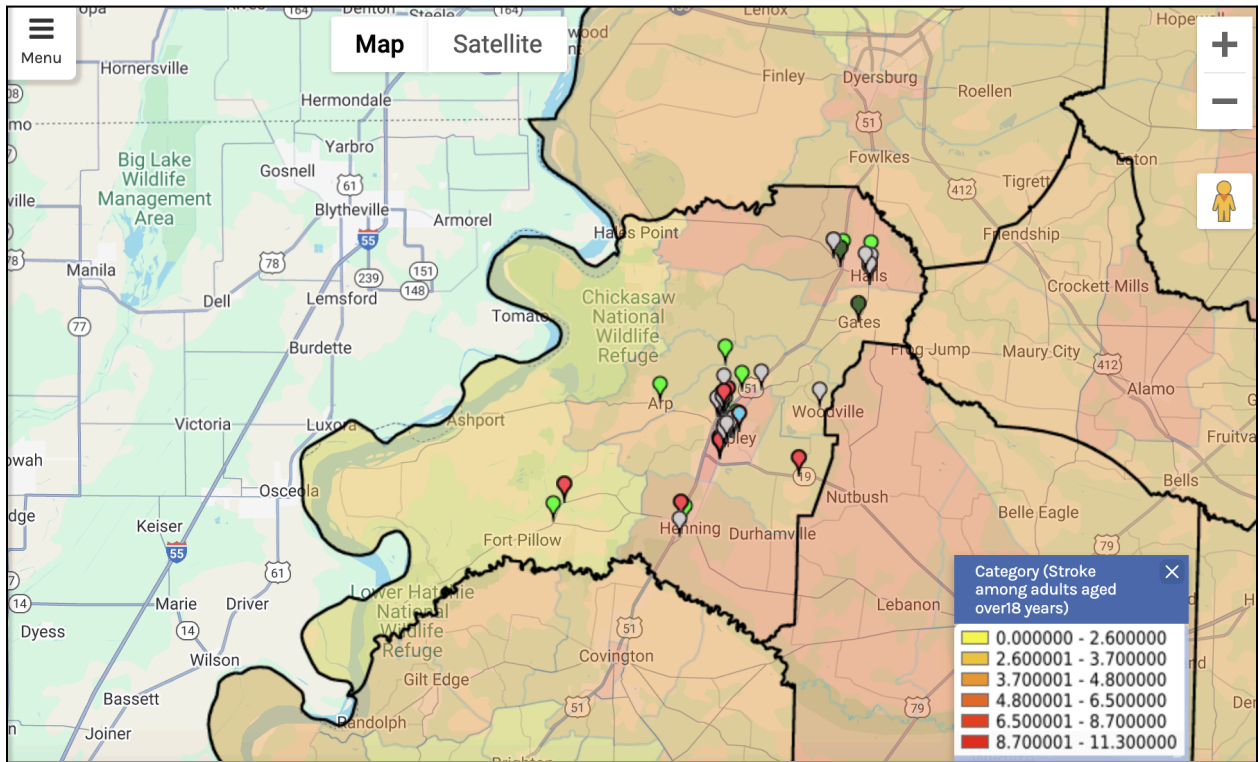
Fair or Poor Self-Rated Health Status Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



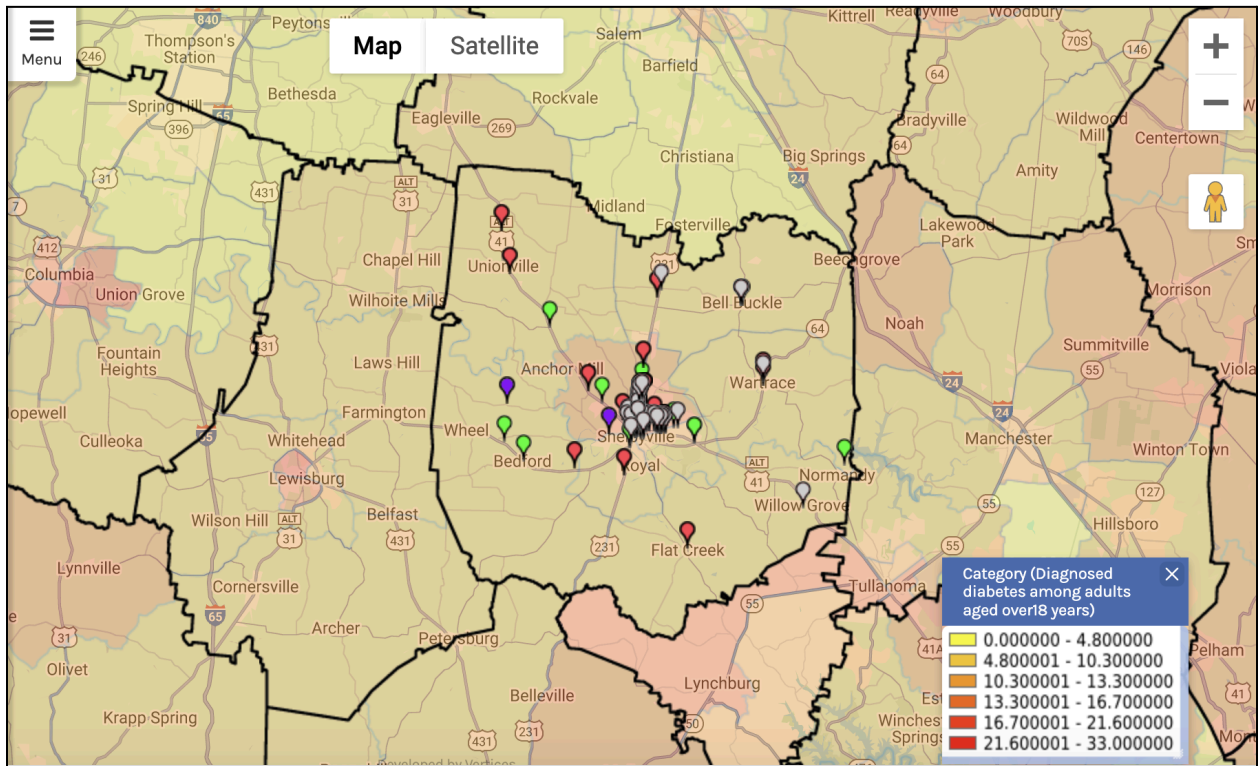
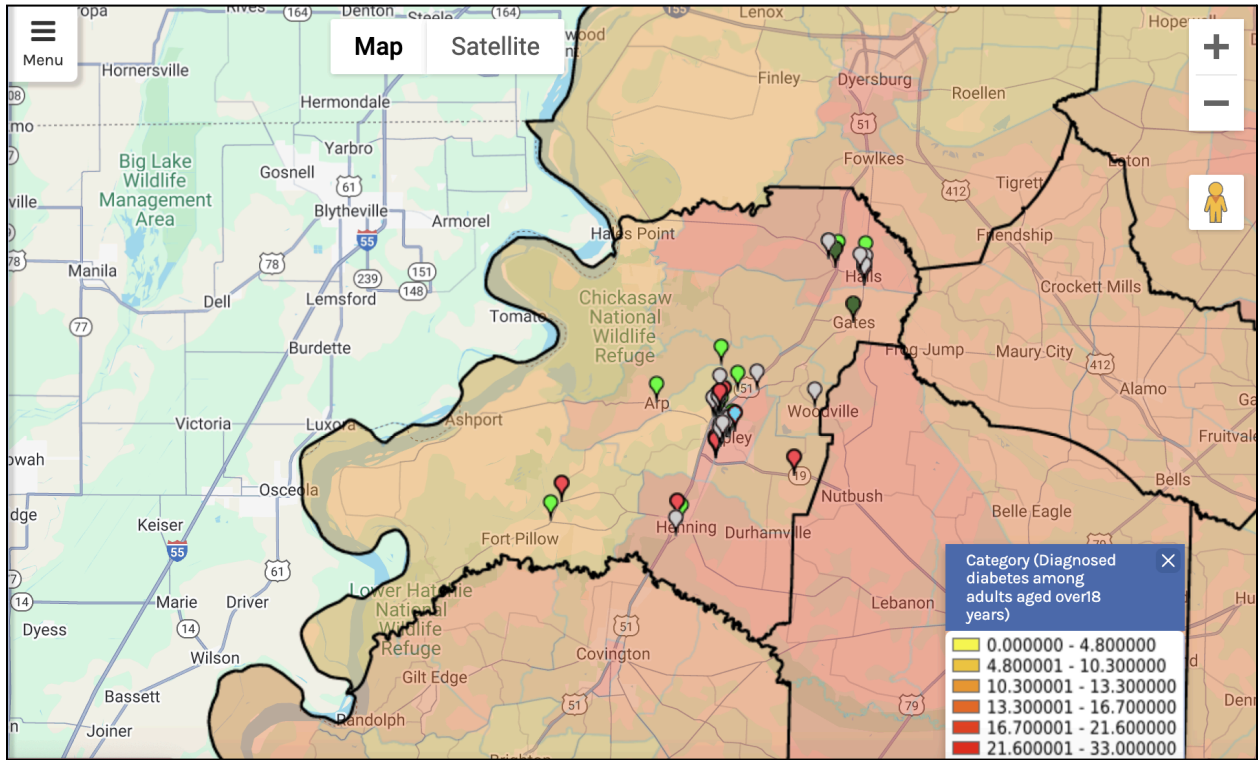
Obesity Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



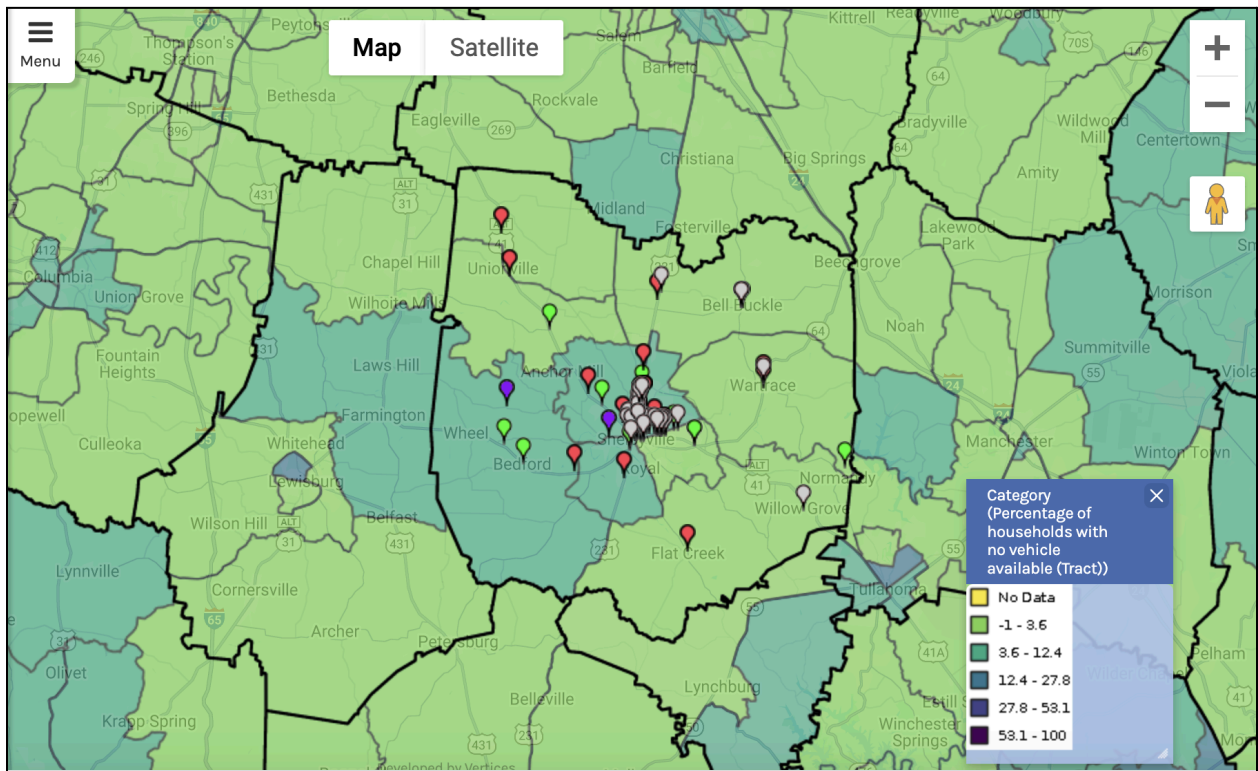
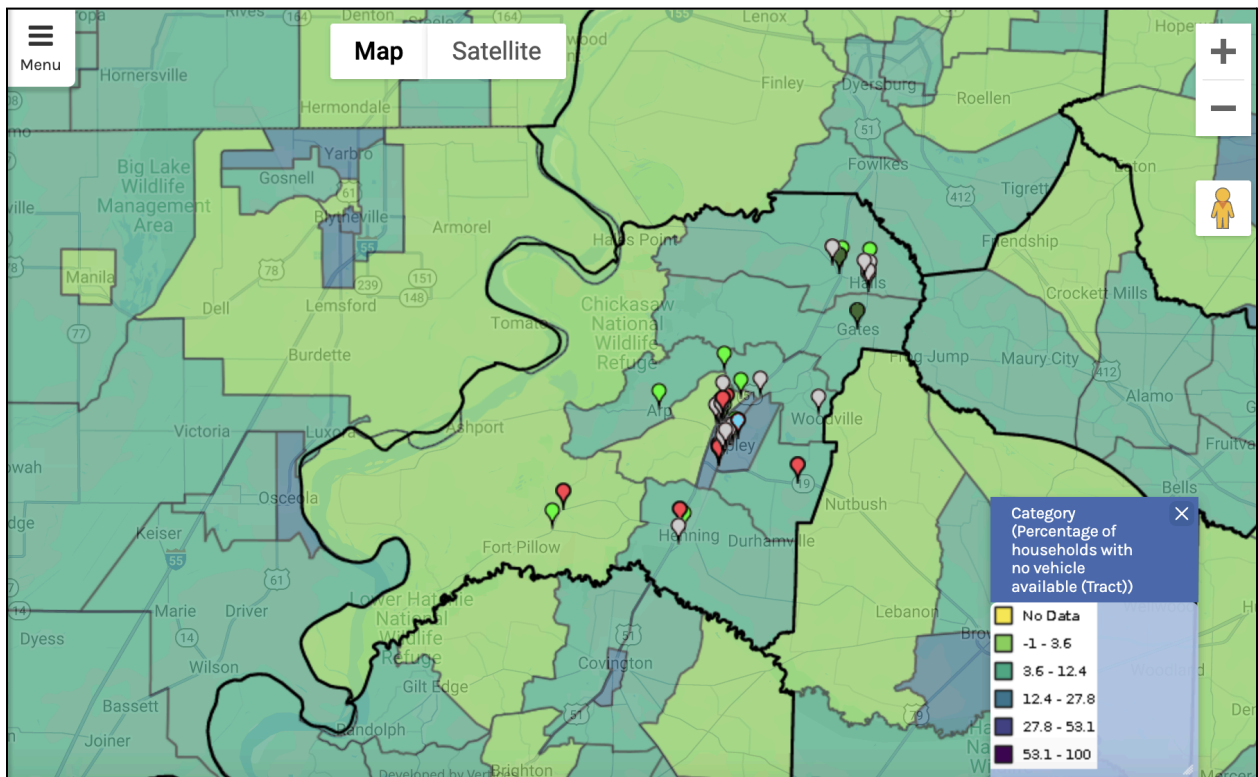
Stroke Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



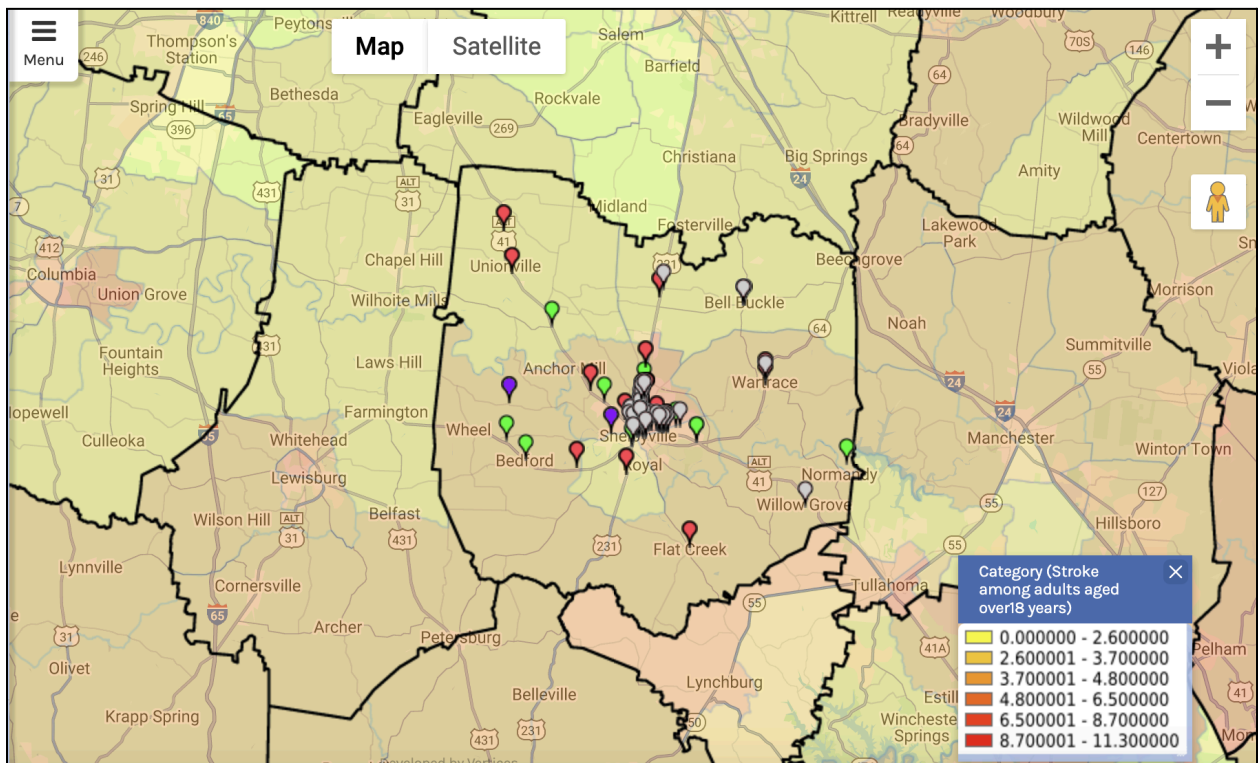
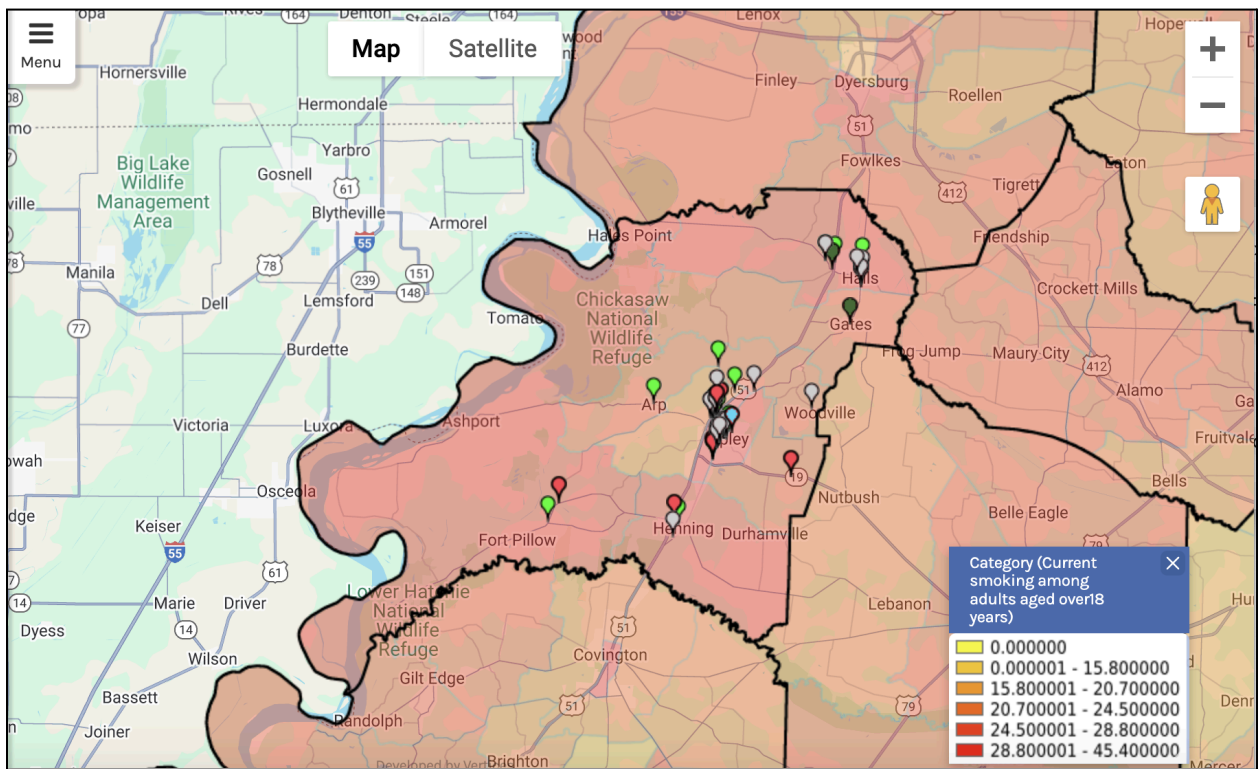
Diagnosed Diabetes Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



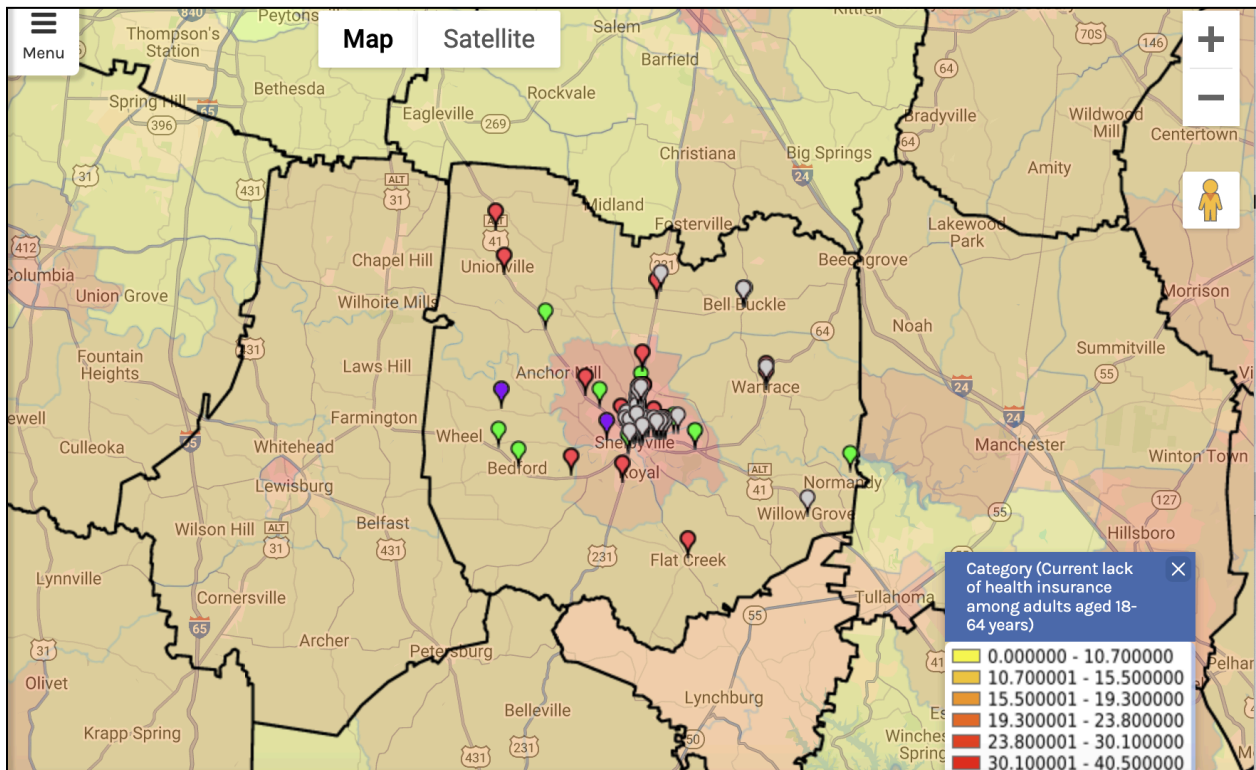
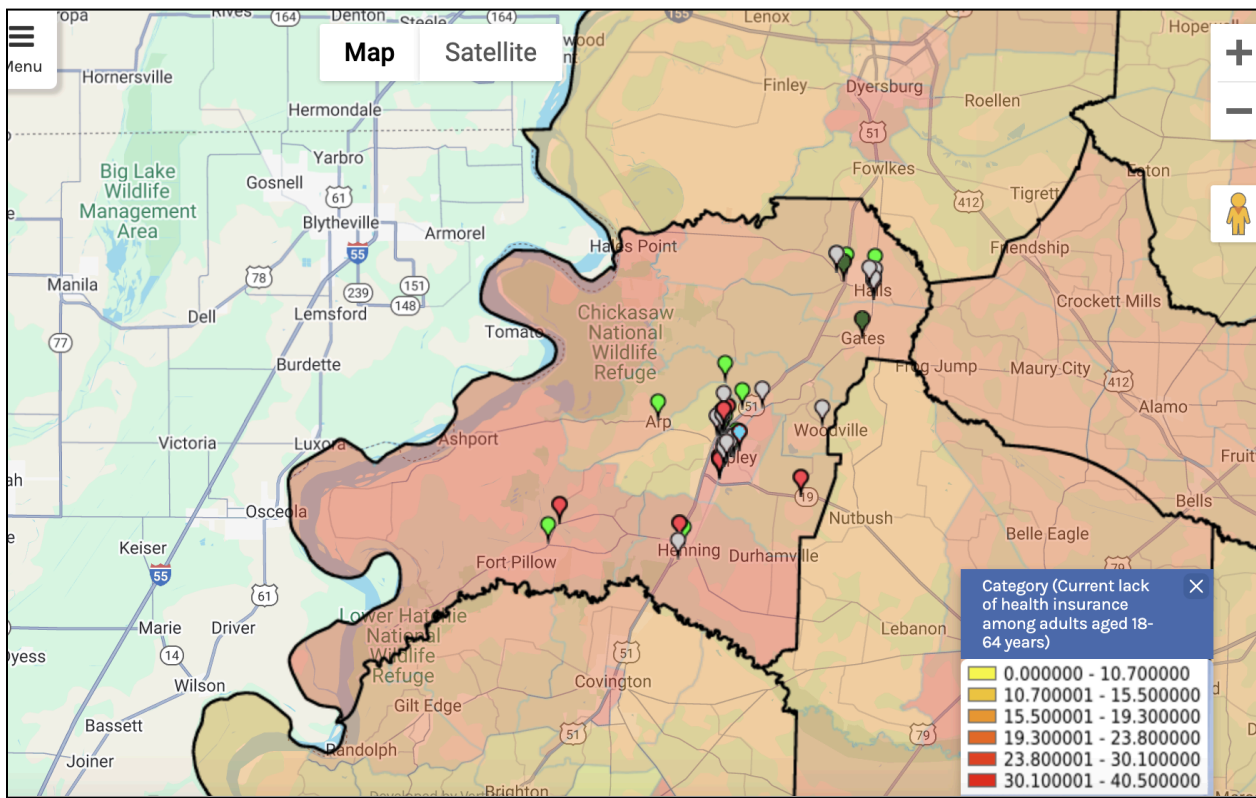
Percentage of Households with No Vehicle Available



Current Smoking Among Adults Aged Over 18 Years



Current Lack of Health Insurance Among Adults Aged 18-64 Years



Further Exploration: Food Accessibility and Solutions in Bedford and Lauderdale Counties

- **Transportation Barriers to Food Access**

- Limited public transportation exacerbates food accessibility issues in both counties.
- Lauderdale County: Approximately 20% of residents report lacking personal transportation.
- Bedford County: Nearly 15% of low-income households cite transportation costs as a barrier to grocery access.
- Rising gasoline prices further hinder residents' ability to travel to grocery stores regularly.

- **Food Banks and Mobile Markets**

- Essential resources for food security in both counties.
- Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee: Partners with local organizations in Bedford County.
- Mid-South Food Bank: Serves residents in Lauderdale County.
- Limited funding and rising food prices have strained these resources.
- Mobile Food Pantry Initiatives:
 - Bedford County: Launched a mobile food pantry program in 2023, collaborating with local nonprofits providing fresh produce and non-perishable items to rural areas monthly.
 - Lauderdale County: Started a similar program in early 2024, funded by local and state grants. High attendance underscores the demand for these mobile markets.

- **Community and School Gardens**

- Enhance local food availability and promote nutrition education.
- Bedford County: Through its extension office, it operates two large community gardens and distributes produce to food banks and shelters.
- Lauderdale County: Established school gardens in several public schools, educating students about agriculture and providing fresh produce to families.

- **Expansion Opportunities**
 - Increasing mobile market frequency and partnering with local farms could improve food accessibility.
 - Expanding SNAP and WIC enrollment:
 - SNAP enrollment is currently at 13% in Bedford and 18% in Lauderdale; outreach aims to increase enrollment by 5% over the next two years to reduce food insecurity.
 - **Farm-to-Food Bank Pipeline:**
 - Partnerships with local farmers to redirect surplus crops to those in need, reducing food waste and improving availability.
 - Tennessee Department of Agriculture is considering this program, with Bedford and Lauderdale Counties as pilot areas.

Conclusion

- Addressing food accessibility in Bedford and Lauderdale Counties requires comprehensive, multi-pronged solutions.
- Continued support for SNAP outreach, local farming partnerships, and transportation solutions can enhance food security.
- Recent efforts such as mobile markets and school gardens have had positive impacts, with future initiatives promising improved food access, health outcomes, and quality of life for rural residents.

Sources of Information:

<https://immapppler.com/tnfood/>

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data>

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/tennessee/bedford?year=2024>

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/tennessee/lauderdale?year=2024>

<https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/county-health-councils/cha-chip-resources/county-profiles.html>

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/vitality-toolkit/data-packages-2024/Data%20Package_Bedford.pdf

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/vitality-toolkit/data-packages-2024/Data%20Package_Lauderdale.pdf

https://data.census.gov/profile/Bedford_County,_Tennessee?q=050XX00US47003

https://data.census.gov/profile/Lauderdale_County,_Ten...?q=050XX00US47097

<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.html#:~:text=The%20official%20poverty%20rate%20in,decreased%20between%202021%20and%202022.>

https://www.healthdata.org/sites/default/files/files/county_profiles/US/2015/County_Report_Bedford_County_Tennessee.pdf

https://www.healthdata.org/sites/default/files/files/county_profiles/US/2015/County_Report_Lauderdale_County_Tennessee.pdf