

Alameda County Public
Health Department

Alameda County Health Status Report 2006



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Cover mural from Santa Fe Elementary School, Oakland California



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Anthony B. Iton, M.D., J.D., MPH
County Health Officer

May, 2006

Dear Alameda County Residents,

Welcome to the Alameda County Public Health Department's 2006 County Health Status Report. As you delve into this comprehensive report, you will see that the trends in the data are simultaneously reassuring and alarming. By and large, Alameda County residents are living longer, healthier lives. Rates of death and illness from most all of the major diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and cancer, are on the decline. Rates of most infectious diseases also continue to fall. Life expectancy in Alameda County has increased by about four years during the past decade alone. Life expectancy increases were seen in every race/ethnic group: 4 years for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and roughly 3 years for Whites, African Americans, and Latinos.

Despite these encouraging improvements, we continue to observe large and persistent disparities in health based on race, income, neighborhood, education, and other so-called social determinants. There is even some evidence that these health disparities are worsening. The gaps between Alameda County's *haves* and the *have-nots* increased during the decade of the nineties. We have an increasing concentration of wealth, decreasing affordability of housing, increasing school segregation, and a disproportionate growth in non-living wage jobs. These worsening social inequities have direct and profound consequences on our residents' health. While significant health disparities can be found that afflict almost every racial and ethnic group, the magnitude of racial health disparities in Alameda County is most profound for African-Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. It is clear that new strategies and solutions are desperately needed.

The root causes of health disparities are complex and closely tied to similar persistent racial and class disparities in education, employment, income, and housing that so thoroughly characterize our society and continue to challenge our deeply held commitment to social justice. It is this relatedness to other social inequities and our recognition of their inherent injustice that leads us to regard them as *health inequities*, rather than health disparities. Eliminating health inequities will require sophisticated and sustained multi-disciplinary interventions. These must simultaneously address both the conditions in our low-income neighborhoods and the inequitable policies that

continue to systematically deprive the residents of these neighborhoods of access to critical social goods such as good schools, better jobs, safe recreational space, clean air, and less crime. We have begun to create such interventions on a small scale and believe that they will soon begin to reap health benefits. We invite your input and guidance.

I am very proud of the hard-working and talented people who labored long hours to put this report together and ensure that it is accurate and relevant to the needs of our community partners. Particular credit must be given to Dr. Sandra Witt, the Director of our Community Assessment, Planning, Education and Evaluation (CAPE) Unit and her dedicated team. Her commitment to high epidemiologic standards and clarity in presentation make this report an extremely valuable tool for our community partners. The enduring vision for this report derives from our Agency Director, Dave Kears, and our Public Health Director, Arnold Perkins. Their commitment to putting the *public* back in public health has driven our efforts to make these reports useable and pertinent to the needs of the residents, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders that make up this wonderful and diverse county.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tony Iton', is positioned above the typed name.

Tony Iton, M.D., J.D., MPH
Alameda County Health Officer

Acknowledgments

This report was produced by:

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Arnold Perkins, Director of Alameda County Public Health Department, who will retire this year. It is through Mr. Perkins' vision of monitoring the health status of county residents and examining health inequities that the County Health Status Report has been produced, now for the third time since 1999. His vision, dedication, perseverance, and compassion have compelled the Public Health Department to work in close partnership with our diverse communities to improve health for all. Mr. Perkins is a beloved colleague and mentor to all who work in the Public Health Department, the Health Care Services Agency, and the community.

