

Advancing Health Equity in Nueces County

Amid and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic

Executive Brief



Developed by Texas Health Institute
Developed for and Supported by
Nueces County Office of Emergency Management &
Nueces County Hospital District



April 2021

Introduction

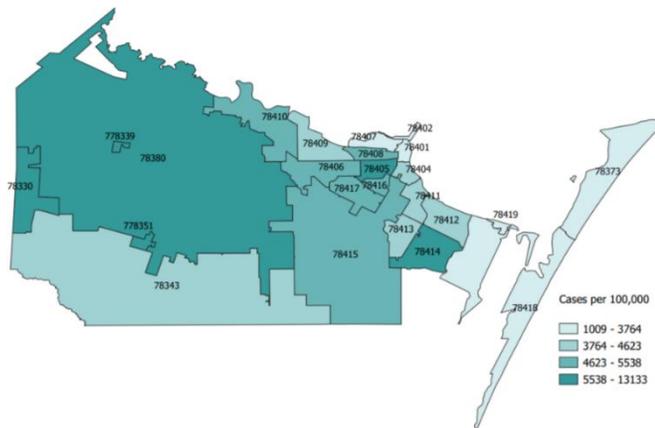
Located on the coastal bend of the South Texas region, Nueces County is the 16th largest county in Texas, and home to Corpus Christi, the 8th largest city in the state. Much like the rest of the nation and state, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated health inequities in Nueces County. While all communities have been impacted, Hispanic, low-income and other people of color have faced a disproportionate burden of disease, death, and loss. These inequities are not new, but a reflection of the systemic social, economic, and environmental barriers some communities face, placing them at greater risk before, during, and following a public health crisis. **Emerging from this pandemic a stronger, healthier, and more prosperous Nueces County will require improving community conditions for health and building opportunities for all residents to thrive. Doing so will require an explicit focus on working to achieve health equity. Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.**

PURPOSE

To develop a first-of-its-kind *Nueces County Health Equity and COVID-19 Dashboard and Summary Report*, with timely, community-centered COVID-19 data and insights to guide an equitable response and recovery for all people in Nueces County.

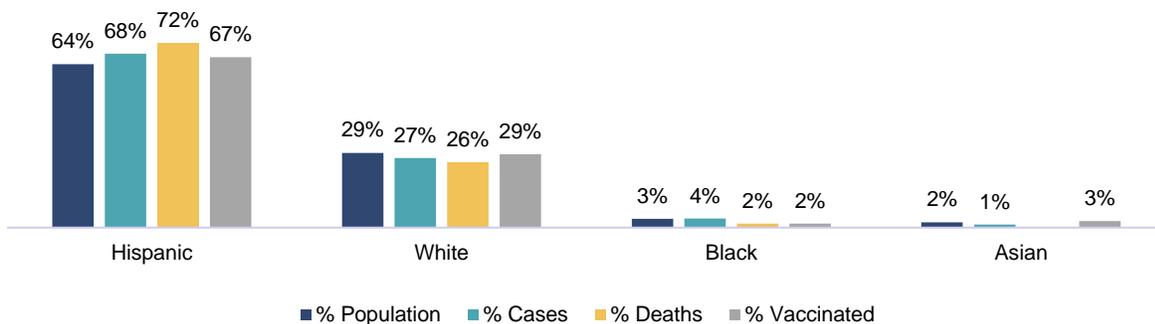
The report analyzes public data on COVID-19 and other health outcomes in the context of broader social, economic, and community measures. Data are complemented by insights from community stakeholders and a scan of community assets and resources.

COVID-19 Has Disproportionately Impacted Communities in the West, North and Central Parts of Nueces County



COVID-19 Cases per 100,000 in Nueces County as of March 2021

Hispanic and Black Residents in Nueces County Have Higher COVID-19 Rates Compared to their Share of the Population



COVID-19 data as of March 2021

Key Takeaways

1

Where a person lives in Nueces County shapes their opportunities for health and how long they live.

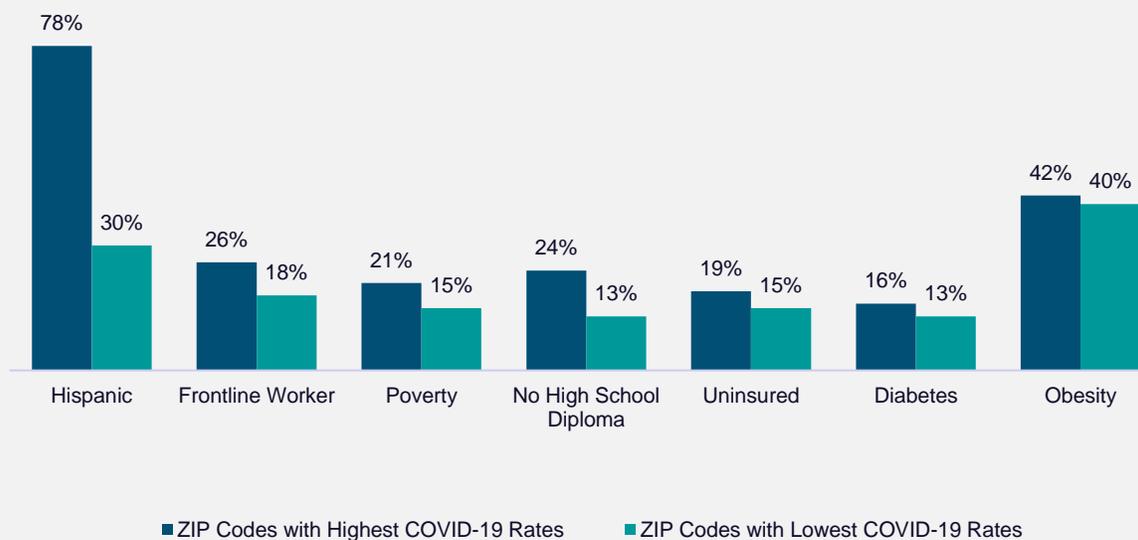
Two neighborhoods, roughly 10 miles apart can vary in average life expectancy by 15 years because of disparities in basic social, economic and environmental opportunities. A resident in a predominantly low-income, community of color in the Northside can expect to live to just 70 years, compared to a resident in a higher-income neighborhood in the East who can live to 85 years in Nueces County.

2

ZIP Codes with the highest COVID-19 rates in Nueces County have higher percentages of Hispanic residents, greater socioeconomic vulnerability, and higher rates of chronic disease.

The top 25% of ZIP codes with the highest rates of COVID-19 have on average higher percentages of residents who are Hispanic, living in poverty, working frontline jobs, having no health insurance, having no high school diploma, and having diabetes and obesity.

ZIP Codes with the Highest COVID-19 Rates per 100,000 Have Higher Percentages of Residents Who are Hispanic, Frontline Worker, Uninsured, in Poverty and with Chronic Disease



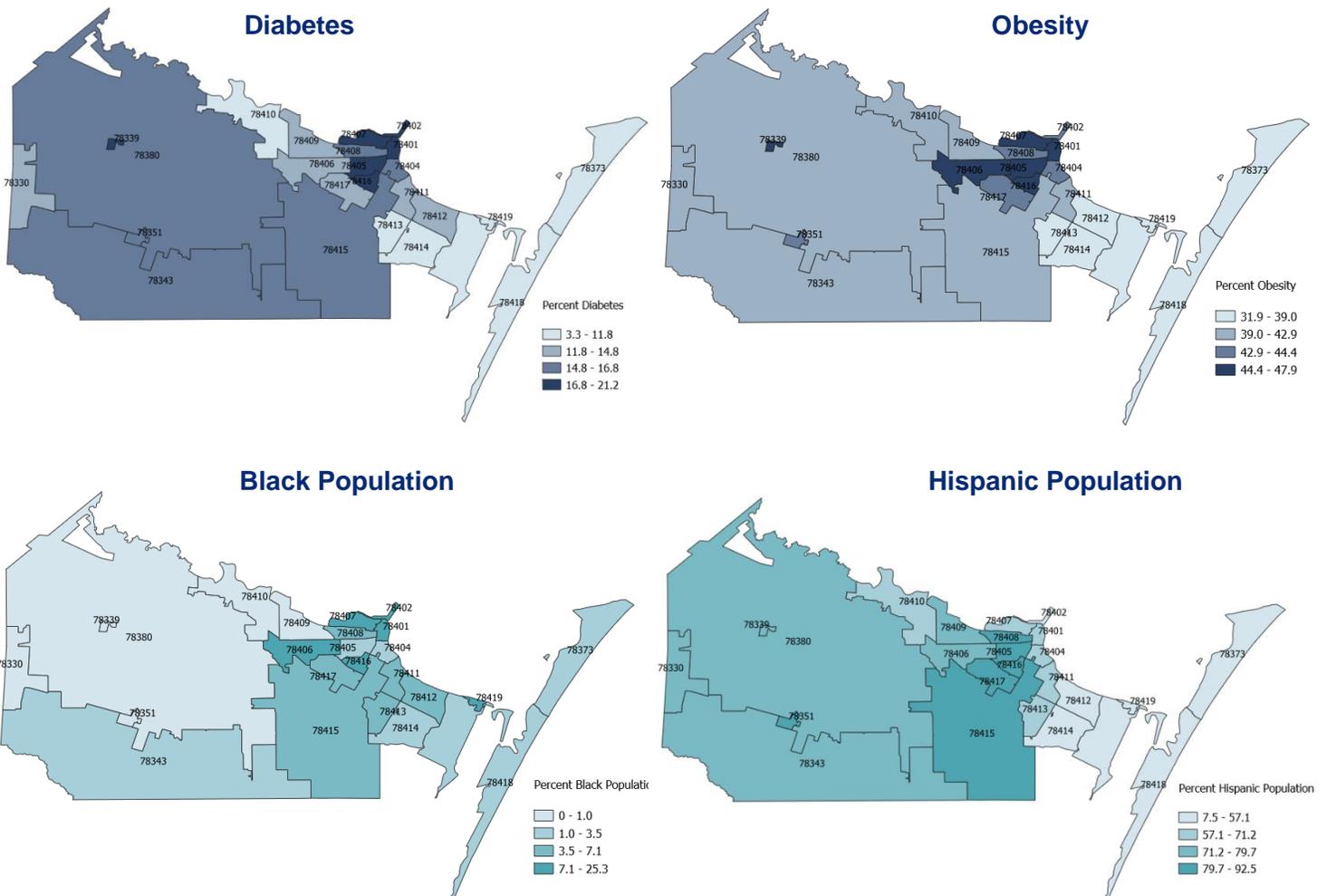
Source: Analysis were conducted with population and socioeconomic data from ACS, 2015-2019, focusing on top and bottom quartiles; COVID-19 cases per ZIP code data from Nueces County Public Health District, 2021; and chronic disease data from BRFSS, 2018.

3

Black and Hispanic communities facing the poorest health outcomes in Nueces County today are those impacted by a legacy of discriminatory policies of the past, and at risk for continued disadvantage in the present.

Black child mortality and adult prematurely mortality rates are highest in the county. Rates of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes are also among the highest in predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhoods such as Hillcrest, Washington-Coles and Central City, which have endured the effects of historic redlining and segregation, and have been the focus of litigation alleging exposures to industrial toxins and a more recent environmental justice complaint pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The cities of Robstown, Bishop and Driscoll—along with the Molina neighborhood—are among the communities also facing a confluence of social, economic, and health challenges. These realities seek redress through administration of cooperative programs (e.g., the recent voluntary relocation of at risk neighborhoods of Hillcrest and Washington-Coles).

ZIP Codes with the Highest Rates of Chronic Disease are Home to Higher Percentages of Black and Hispanic Residents in Nueces County



Source: Chronic conditions acquired through BRFSS, 2018 and population data through ACS, 2015-2019

4

Non-Hispanic White residents also face inequities, including greater challenges with mental health and substance abuse.

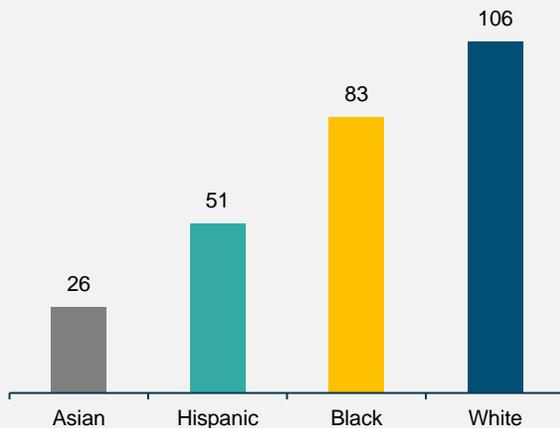
Going into the COVID-19 pandemic, Nueces County had nearly twice the rate of drug overdose deaths than Texas, with White and Black residents having a rate two times higher than the county. White residents also had the highest rates of injury and suicide deaths.

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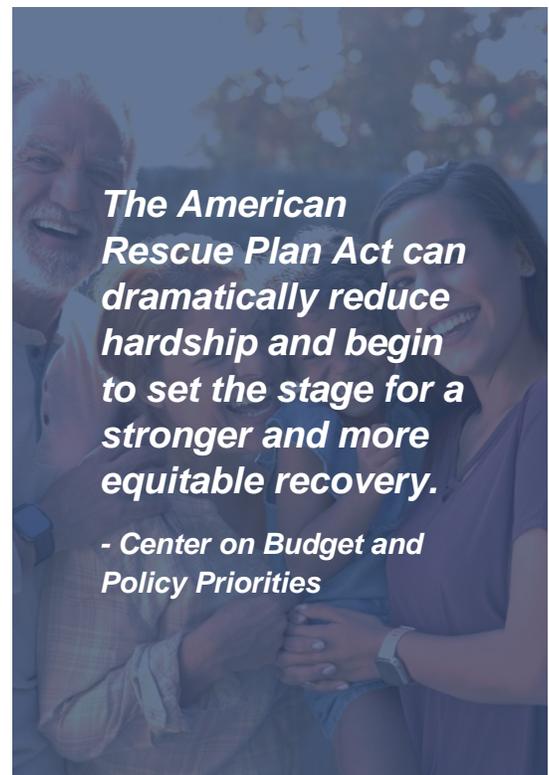
The commitment of county leaders, community partners and the focus of the American Rescue Plan Act provide a key opportunity to invest in advancing health equity.

Stakeholders identified county leadership, health care systems, academic institutions, and community organizations as key assets working to improve the conditions and health of Nueces County residents. These assets together with the American Rescue Plan Act provide new ways to invest in health equity initiatives.

White Residents in Nueces County Have the Highest Rate of Injury Deaths per 100,000



Source: County Health Rankings 2020
Injury deaths include unintentional deaths such as from poisoning and motor vehicle accidents and intentional injuries including firearm suicide, firearm homicide, and other forms of suicide.



The American Rescue Plan Act can dramatically reduce hardship and begin to set the stage for a stronger and more equitable recovery.

- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Recommendations

Seven specific health-equity centered recommendations are provided below for Nueces County leaders and cross-sector partners to consider. These recommendations are focused on responding to the immediate needs of the pandemic, as well as looking to the future to create a healthier, more prosperous community prepared and ready to withstand future crises. The recommendations are divided into two categories: **short-term**, referring to immediate actions critical to an equitable response and recovery over the next several months; and **long-term**, referring to broader, systemic solutions that will help set the county on a path to achieving health equity over time.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS	1 	Establish a community-centered and equitable COVID-19 response, communication and vaccine strategy.
	2 	Collect, analyze and report disaggregated data on COVID-19 in the context of broader social vulnerability to guide and inform tailored community solutions.
	3 	Leverage and invest federal support from the American Rescue Plan Act to bridge gaps in social, economic, health and mental health opportunities across Nueces County.
	4 	Explore a second phase study to produce actionable data and guidance to address growing mental health and substance abuse challenges from a health equity lens in Nueces County.
LONG-TERM ACTIONS	5 	Engage diverse community leaders and members as active collaborators on an ongoing basis to co-create solutions that are equitable and culturally and linguistically tailored.
	6 	Establish a Nueces County Health Equity Taskforce to guide and create accountability toward achieving health equity.
	7 	Advance cross-sector collaboration to address the root causes of health inequities faced by Nueces County residents and advance health and health equity.