

# What determines health in Seattle?

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## Health begins where we live, work, play, and learn.

Social and environmental determinants of health can have a profound influence on the choices people have in their daily lives that promote or inhibit health. Peoples' health behaviors, access to care, and their physical and social environments shape how healthy they are or have the potential to be. The degree to which each factor plays a role is based on a framework developed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute for the national County Health Rankings ([www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)). In many areas—including Seattle—there are large disparities in both health outcomes and health factors, as shown below. This information helps community partners create strategies that make it easier for people to be healthy in their own communities.

### Life expectancy

### Median income

Individuals and families with lower incomes generally have poorer health and lower life expectancy compared to those with higher incomes. Social-emotional development and general health are worse for young children whose families have incomes below the federal poverty level; adults living in poverty also are in poorer health and have much higher rates of heart disease and diabetes. In King County, children from poor families are more likely to be obese than other children.<sup>1</sup>

### Educational attainment

Educational status is strongly related to health status. People with lower levels of education are more likely to be in fair or poor health and to have lower life expectancy. According to population health experts, "In King County, Washington, if 5 percent more people attended some college and 3 percent more had an income higher than twice the federal poverty level we could expect to save 548 lives, prevent 5,800 cases of diabetes, and eliminate \$32.8 million in diabetes costs every year."<sup>2</sup>

### SOCIAL & ECONOMIC FACTORS

While diabetes prevalence in King County has remained stable, health factors related to diabetes—rates of obesity and physical inactivity—are steadily increasing.

### HEALTH BEHAVIORS

### ENVIRONMENT

### CLINICAL CARE

Lack of jobs and ability to pay for adequate food, clothing, and shelter are considered by many King County health and social service providers to be the most immediate and important health-related needs of the populations they serve.

*"This maybe sounds like a caricature, but the number one determinant is income. As society has become polarized between haves and have-not, that shows up in a big way ... If you had to pick out one thing, it would be the extent of poverty in our communities, which is growing."*

### Adults who get no leisure-time physical activity

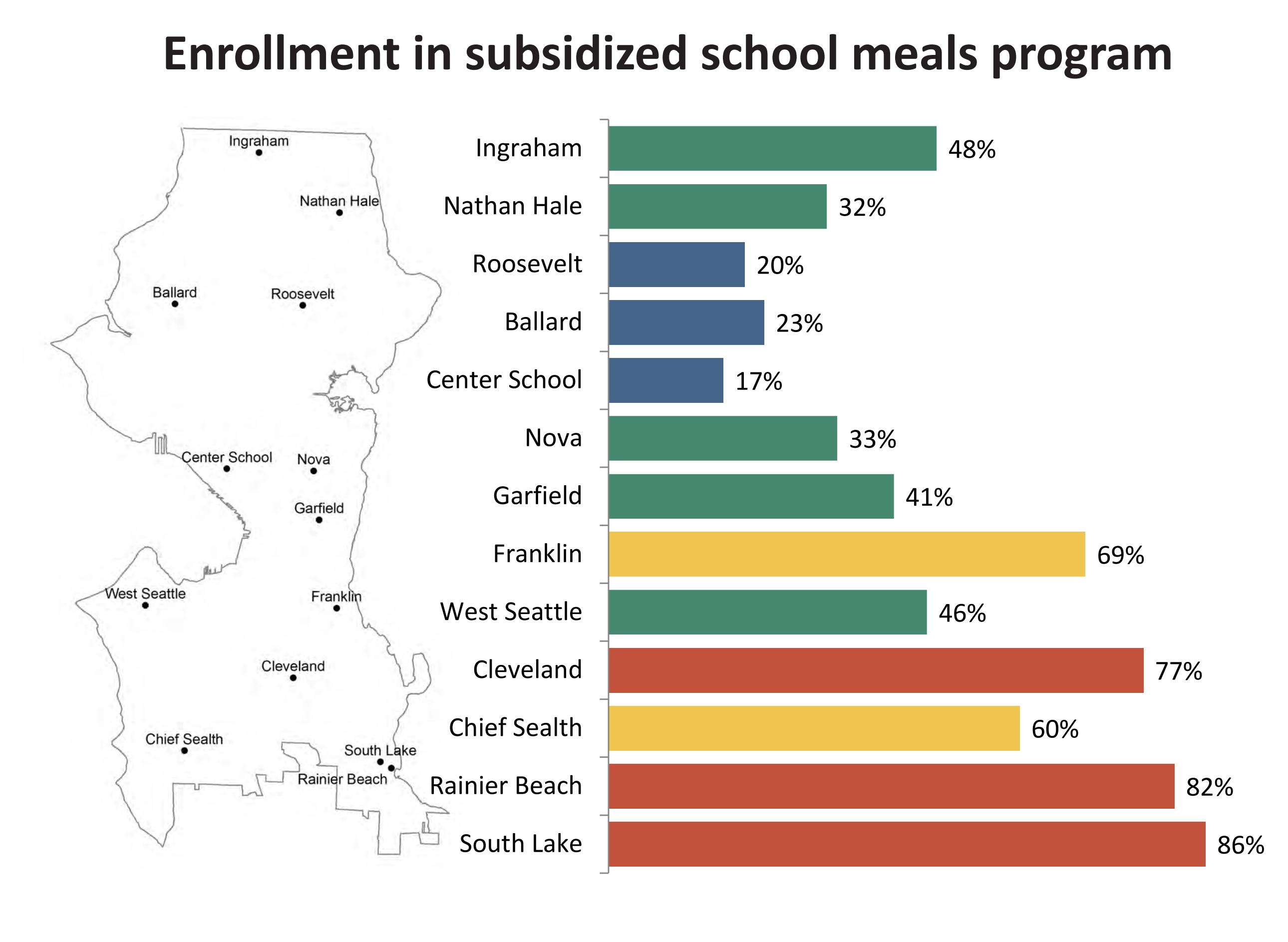
### Percentage of youth who ...

Teens' risky behaviors like smoking and drinking appear to increase as they get older. They are less likely to eat recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables or to regularly eat dinner with their families.

### Obesity and the food environment

### Parks & bicycle routes

Some Seattle neighborhoods have less access to healthy foods than other areas. While amenities that support physical activity, such as parks, trails, pools, and YMCAs are located throughout the city, the network of safe bicycle routes and lanes appear to be fairly disconnected.



References  
<sup>1</sup>Grow HM, Cook AJ, Arterburn DE, Saelens BE, Drewnowski A, Lozano P. Child obesity associated with social disadvantage of children's neighborhoods. Soc Sci Med. 2010 Aug;71(3):584-91.  
<sup>2</sup>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & Virginia Commonwealth University, County Health Calculator; <http://countyhealthcalculator.org/location/153033/>

**15%** of Seattle adults under 65 are estimated to be uninsured  
**40%** of those are eligible for coverage under Medicaid expansion

Data sources: Public Health—Seattle & King County, Washington State Department of Health, Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council  
 Dates: Median income, school meals program enrollment: 2012; life expectancy: 2006-10; adult educational attainment: 2005-09; diabetes hospitalization: 2008-10; insurance coverage: 2009-11; adult obesity, physical inactivity: 2006-09; youth behaviors: 2010