

Health in Marin County on the American Human Development Index

A Portrait of Marin 2012 is an in-depth look at how the residents of Marin County are faring in three fundamental areas of life: **health**, **access to knowledge**, and **living standards**. The Marin report, part of the *Measure of America* series, examines the surprisingly large disparities within the county among different neighborhoods as well as along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. The analysis is based on the American Human Development Index, a composite measure of well-being and opportunity. The **Marin Community Foundation** commissioned this work to provide a holistic framework for understanding and addressing complex issues facing Marin today.

The capability to live a long and healthy life is measured using life expectancy at birth – the number of years a baby born today can expect to live if current mortality patterns continue. By this measure, the state of California excels, ranking third among all states, with Marinites living even longer. Life expectancy in California is 80.1 years, roughly one-and-a-half years longer than the national average, and in Marin it is 83.7, over five years longer than the national average.

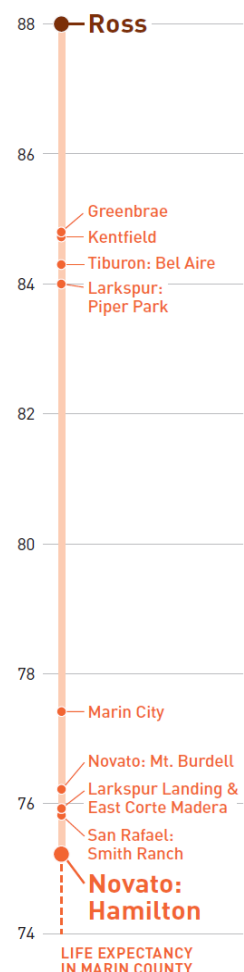
Despite overall good health in Marin, however, there remain significant disparities and striking anomalies that are cause for concern. For example, a life expectancy gap of nearly thirteen years separates the community with the highest longevity (Ross) from the lowest (Hamilton in southern Novato, a mixed-income community that was once home to an air force base).

MARIN HEALTH FINDINGS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

All major racial and ethnic groups in Marin County live longer than their California counterparts, but significant disparities exist between different races and ethnicities:

- **Asian Americans** live the longest among the four major racial and ethnic groups in Marin, which also holds true for California and the nation as a whole. In addition, Asian Americans in Marin live significantly longer than Asian Americans in California as a whole, 90.9 years as opposed to 86.1 years. This difference stems at least in part from the fact that Asian Americans in Marin have somewhat more education than Asian Americans in California and earn about \$6,000 more annually.
- **Latinos** have the second-longest life expectancies in Marin, 88.2 years. They outlive Marin whites by nearly five years. Researchers hypothesize that social

The gap in life expectancy between Ross and Hamilton is a striking 13 years.



Source: Marin County Department of Health and Human Services calculations. See Methodological Notes for more details.



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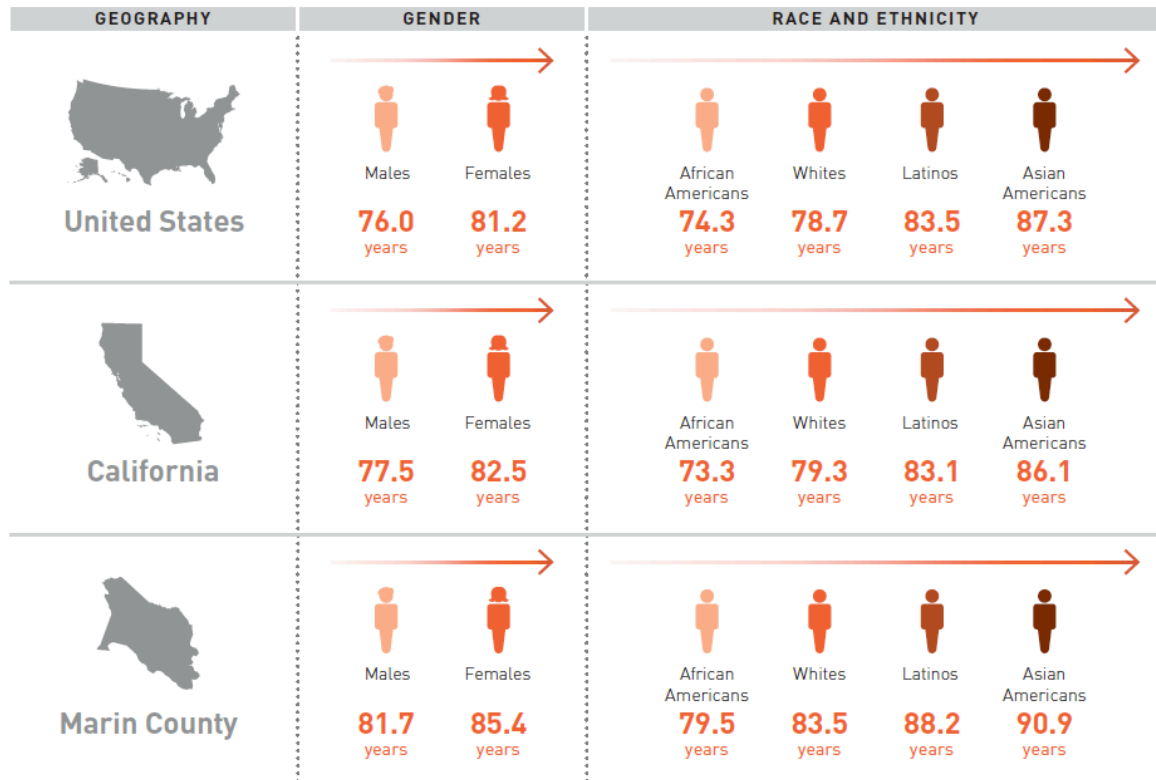
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factors like family cohesion and strong support networks, coupled with a fewer health risk behaviors like smoking and heavy drinking, offer a protective health benefit to Latinos.

FIGURE 5 Life Expectancy by Gender and by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Lewis and Burd-Sharps, 2010; Burd-Sharps and Lewis, 2011; Marin County Department of Health and Human Services calculations. See Methodological Notes for more details.

- **Whites** in Marin live on average 83.5 years, about four years longer than whites in the state. Given the higher incomes and education levels in the county as well as other environmental and social characteristics of Marin that support good health, these results are not surprising. What is surprising in Marin is that whites live significantly shorter lives than Latinos and Asian Americans, despite their higher earnings and other socioeconomic advantages.
- **African Americans** in Marin have a longer life span than African Americans in the rest of the state, 79.5 years as opposed to 73.3 years in California. The nearly six additional years of life for African Americans in Marin is heartening, yet the eleven-year gap that separates African Americans from the longest-lived group, Asian Americans, is still cause for alarm.



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