

# Purpose and User Guide

As in previous editions, *The Health of Washington State, 2007* assesses health status and related topics that are important to the Washington State Department of Health's (Department) mission of protecting and improving health in Washington. Insofar as possible, each chapter provides:

- Comparative data for counties and the state as a whole and for Washington and the nation
- An overview of what we know about public health problems in Washington and what we can do about them
- Information resources for making policy decisions, prioritizing efforts, managing programs, developing budgets, and allocating resources.

*The Health of Washington State, 2007* serves as a primary source document for some topics. For others, it is more useful as a "gateway" document, providing readers basic information and directing them to more detailed information available elsewhere. It can serve as a source of data for policy decision making and program planning, but it is best used as a starting point for data-based decisions. For example, if a program wanted to allocate resources to counties based on need, it might want to develop county data similar to that in *The Health of Washington State, 2007* for additional time periods to assure that the counties with high rates of disease have been consistently high. The program might also want to look at the numbers of people with disease to obtain additional perspective on the magnitude of the problem in each county.

This edition covers 62 topics grouped into ten sections. As with previous editions, *The Health of Washington State, 2007* includes topics that affect

- The health of many people in Washington
- Relatively few people but might result in serious outcomes, such as death or disability

- Relatively few people but might affect larger numbers if not well controlled (such as infectious diseases and environmental pollution).

Because effective actions are essential to improving health, *The Health of Washington State, 2007* focuses on topics for which there are proven public health interventions. For example, it does not include a chapter on prostate cancer, because public health interventions continue to be ill-defined. The Department also needed personnel to write the chapters.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while *The Health of Washington State, 2007* highlights many issues of importance to health in Washington, some health-related topics are not included.

Most chapters in *The Health of Washington State, 2007* identify a major indicator to discuss in relation to the topic. The indicator represents an important aspect of the topic, but data availability also affected the choice of indicators. A single indicator rarely gives a complete picture, and most chapters contain a section discussing measures of impact and burden in addition to the primary indicator. Some chapters present more than one major indicator, and some are divided into several sections, each with a major indicator.

Most chapters in *The Health of Washington State, 2007* are in a standardized format that includes:

- A definition of the topic and of the major indicator
- A summary
- Trends over time, including the most recent data, to describe the magnitude of the problem in Washington, allow comparisons to the United States, assess whether Washington is improving, and identify emerging problems
- National and state goals for 2010
- The major indicator by county, age, gender, race, Hispanic origin, income, and education to identify health disparities
- Additional measures of impact and burden
- Known risk and protective factors
- Public health interventions, such as what strategies work best and how effective they are in reducing illness and maximizing health, including documenting current Department strategies

- Sources for additional information about the topic.

Some chapters also include maps that show regions with high rates of the major indicator independent of geopolitical boundaries.

The format described above works best for specific diseases, causes of death, injuries, and events related to pregnancy and birth for which considerable data are available. This format is less useful in other areas, particularly the sections on environmental health and health care systems. Consequently, chapters in those sections might follow a different structure.

This report shows what we know generally about health status, risks to good health, and health care in Washington. It also identifies gaps in our monitoring data; in our knowledge of underlying processes by which disease, injury, disability, and premature death affect us; and in our knowledge of proven approaches for improving health.

To help the reader develop a more complete context for understanding the data presented in this report, *The Health of Washington State, 2007* includes two appendices. [Appendix A](#): Technical Notes explains analytic approaches. It also provides explanations of elements of the charts and graphs that were too cumbersome to include in the text. [Appendix B](#): Data Sources provides information on data sources used in more than two chapters. This appendix explains how the data for each source are collected; the strengths and limitations of the data; and the years of data availability, including why different years of data are sometimes used in seemingly similar situations.

Data in this document might differ from those presented in other Department publications or in publications of federal, local, and other state organizations. While there are guidelines and commonly used conventions for many definitions and analytic methods, there are few fixed standards. Definitions and methods that work best for one purpose might not be best in another context. Where relevant, each chapter discusses differences between definitions and analytic methods in the chapter and those used elsewhere, such as in *Healthy People 2010*. Because of these differences, care must be taken when comparing data from this document to data from other publications.

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<sup>1</sup> The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries wrote the Occupational Health section.