

Letter from the Health Commissioner of Baltimore City

Dear Fellow Baltimore City Residents,

This health status report is a comprehensive review of available health data for Baltimore. It describes how the health of Baltimore, as characterized by a variety of health indicators, has changed over the past decade and how we compare to the state of Maryland as a whole. The data presented here reflect the vast scope of the challenges facing Baltimore. These include: high mortality rates, high rates of HIV and other infectious diseases, poor birth outcomes, high rates of drug addiction and violence, hundreds of children still poisoned by lead, high rates of smoking and obesity, and poor access to primary health care.

This report also demonstrates progress. Over the last decade, life expectancy in Baltimore has increased as mortality rates for many major health outcomes such as heart disease, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and drug addiction have decreased. We've witnessed a drastic reduction in lead poisoned children, substantial improvements in birth outcomes and decreases in incidence of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Not only have many key barometers of health improved, in many cases Baltimore has done better than the state and nation. The result is that, in 2008, citizens of Baltimore are leading healthier, longer lives than a decade ago.

We must extend this progress.

In bringing together data about health across the lifespan, this report sets out a framework for public health efforts in the city. Over the next year, the Health Department will strategically align our efforts to address the problems described in the report. We will reach out to key partners across the city who are working on these issues -- and those whose help is urgently needed. Our goal will be to continue developing coherent approaches to major public health challenges that bring about real results.

Mayor Sheila Dixon and I offer my special thanks to those whose hard work made this report possible ... and to those who will use it to contribute to a Healthy Baltimore.

Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D.
Commissioner
Baltimore City Health Department