



Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative

Alameda County | City of Berkeley | Contra Costa County | Marin County | City and County of San Francisco | San Mateo County | Santa Clara County | Solano County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 7, 2008

Contact: Bob Prentice, BARHII, (510) 302-3321
Njoke Thomas, BARHII, (510) 302-3369

**Does your address determine your life span?
*Comprehensive Report Shows Bay Area Neighborhood
May be the Greatest Determinant of Health Status***

Oakland, April 7, 2008: The findings of a study released today on life expectancy in the San Francisco Bay Area show that the neighborhood where a person lives can predict how long they can expect to live. The report by the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII), a collaboration of senior leadership from 8 local health departments, was conducted in conjunction with the California Newsreel documentary series, “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?”. The series is presently airing on PBS stations nationally through April 17th. This week’s installment, “Place Matters” dramatizes and explains exactly the kind of health disparities BARHII found in the Bay Area.

Among the key findings of the page report are the following:

- Life expectancy in the Bay Area as a whole, and in each county, conforms to a pattern called the “social gradient,” in which the more income and wealth people have, the more likely they are to live longer, while people with less income and wealth can expect to live comparatively shorter lives.
- People who live in West Oakland can expect to live on average 10 years less than those who live in the Berkeley Hills. Similarly, people who live in Bayview/Hunters Point can expect to live on average 14 years less than their counterparts on Russian Hill, while residents of Bay Point can expect to live on average 11 years less than people in Orinda.
- Among those in the San Francisco Bay Area, African Americans had the lowest life expectancy.
- Neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, often disproportionately communities of color, have a confluence of conditions that constitute risk factors for heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, asthma, alcohol and drug abuse, and homicide.

“Is it fair that if your address is in West Oakland, your sons and daughters will live, on average, 10 years less than if your address is in the Berkeley Hills? This is not acceptable. Where you live should not determine how long you live,” said BARHII director Bob Prentice, PhD. “Every local jurisdiction, including health departments, should do whatever is in their power to rectify these differences,” he said.

“We have to think of health in much broader terms than we have in the past,” said Dr. Tony Iton, director of the Alameda county health department. “Education policy affects health, planning policy affects health, and economic policy affects health. We can’t make a difference in isolation, we have to consider these sectors together,” he said. Alameda County is also trying to understand the relationship between place and health in our neighborhoods and will release a local report later this week.

The City of Berkeley also recently reported these disparities in their own Health Status Report, and has been developing wide ranging strategies to address them. “This work cannot be done by the Public Health Division alone,” noted Linda Rudolph Berkeley’s Public Health Division Director. “It will take a community-wide effort and partnerships among many city agencies and community-based organizations. It will also take more than access to health care – we need to look at the many ways in which our social, economic, and physical environments shape our lives.”

BARHII’s report will be the focus of a regional forum planned in June that will bring together public health and other public agencies to discuss the implications of these findings and develop concrete strategies to address the specific factors that make put some at a disadvantage when it comes to health.

The full report is available at the BARHII website: www.barhii.org

###