

Civic participation is not only a great way to engage with the community, but it can also improve individual and community health.

- Voting has been shown to be associated with better individual health and wellbeing.
- Greater voter participation can lead to more equitable health policy outcomes.
- Equipping community residents with the tools and information needed to vote can help ensure everyone has a voice in our elections.



## Civic Participation as a Social Determinant of Health

**Social and Community Context** is a Social Determinant of Health (SDoH) that represents the group environment in which people work, live, and regularly take part. Like all SDoH, social and community context can both influence and magnify health concerns.

**Civic Participation** such as volunteering, community groups, and voting can help to create a sense of belonging. Research has shown that individuals who engage in civic participation report:

- Better overall self-reported health than those who do not vote or participate in community social activities.
- Lower levels of psychological distress than non-participants, which may help to offset the negative mental health effects of other social disadvantages.

## Health and Voting

**Voting** is a form of civic participation. Studies have shown that not voting is associated with the health of voters, where:

- People with low incomes are more likely to not participate in voting if they have poor health compared to people with higher incomes and poor health.
- Not participating in the electoral process is associated with subsequent reductions in health in following years, unrelated to one's initial health status.

## Impacts of Voter Health on Policy

**Electoral Outcomes** are largely influenced by differences in voter participation due to social, economic, and health inequities. When community residents do not vote, elected officials are less representative of the entire community's needs.

Because of these documented differences in election participation, politicians are also more likely to be engaged with healthier constituents while in office rather than those who are less healthy.

**Health Policy** created by elected officials that are not adequately representing residents with greater health needs has been shown to hinder efforts to improve community health.

## Inequities in Washtenaw County

**Washtenaw County** may be particularly affected by differences in voter participation. While the county does score high in terms of overall health, these documented measures are not equal across racial and economic lines.

**People of Color** may face further disenfranchisement at a county level due to income and health inequities. Data shows that Black residents have a median income that is only 59% of that of the total population and have the highest rates of chronic health conditions including:

- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Asthma
- Mental Health Concerns
- Heart Attacks

In order to address the negative affects of poor constituent health on electoral participation, Washtenaw County residents could benefit from an initiative to better engage residents in the electoral process.

## Community Health Voting Initiative

- Voting access initiatives at non-profit and private health organizations, particularly community health centers and safety-net hospitals, can equip eligible voters with the tools and information needed to vote.
- Having information on the voter registration process, how to look up polling places, viewing a sample ballot, and instructions to request an absentee ballot readily available can promote higher percentages of voter participation.