



Executive Summary

Lincoln Vital Signs 2015



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AT A GLANCE

Community Profile

Lincoln's state of well-being is one of the highest in the country and the city benefits from population growth and increased diversity, primarily due to persons moving to the city.

Economy and Workforce

Lincoln has a highly educated workforce, high workforce participation, low unemployment, and tremendous physical infrastructure growth. Household incomes have declined and disparities among racial and ethnic groups exist.

Basic Needs

Lincoln's poverty rate has increased dramatically over the past 10 years and is higher than the national average.

Education

While accommodating a 23% increase in enrollment and a 139% increase in the number of students receiving free lunch (a proxy for low income) since 2000, Lincoln Public Schools achievement and graduation rates continue to improve. Disparities in racial and ethnic minority achievement and graduation rates exist.

Health

American health is declining precipitously; in Lincoln the declines have not been as severe, but are cause for concern.

Safety

Lincoln is a safe community that has a low crime rate.

Community Involvement and Culture

Lincoln has many cultural organizations, but financial support of them lags.

BE INFORMED

Leaders of Lincoln's largest public and private charitable organizations desired a more comprehensive understanding of Lincoln for themselves, as well as a way to share that information with the larger community -- resulting in the **Lincoln Vital Signs 2014** report. During the past 12 months since the publication of the report, sponsoring organizations have worked to inform the community about the findings of that report:

1. Lincoln does many things exceptionally well and these successes should be nurtured.
2. A growing proportion of Lincoln's population faces real need.
3. Lincoln's children fare poorly on many measures.

In 2014, the report achieved its intention to inform conversations, spark connections, and spur collaboration. This has been accomplished through dozens of presentations and print, television, radio, and web coverage; information shared through the Lincoln Vital Signs website (lincolnvitalsigns.org); and email updates to hundreds of people who want to receive information about the initiative. Lincoln Vital Signs has informed numerous organizations' strategic planning efforts, significantly contributed to several successful federal grant proposals, and even inspired a new musical about hunger that will debut in 2016.

GET INVOLVED

Lincoln Vital Signs 2015 updates the 2014 report. The three findings hold from the 2014 report. Lincoln appears to continue to recover from the Recession, yet some are being left behind.

During the coming year this report will be the centerpiece of a community-wide process that will catalyze action in areas of importance. From May to July 2015 input about how to move forward from the report will be solicited through events, meetings, and online. Over the remainder of the year and into 2016, Lincoln's community agenda will be shaped and set in action.

TREND COMPARISONS: 2014 TO 2015

Last year, the Lincoln Vital Signs 2014 report identified three cross-cutting themes and Lincoln Vital Signs 2015 confirms these themes:

1. Lincoln does many things exceptionally well and these successes should be nurtured.
2. A growing proportion of Lincoln's population faces real need.
3. Lincoln's children fare poorly on many measures.

Highlights of the theme areas are:



Lincoln is rebounding from the Recession



The average person in poverty is a white child with a single parent mother



Most adults in poverty are employed



Persons from racial and ethnic minorities and low-income persons face disparities in educational achievement, attainment, and employment.

Within the seven categories, some trends of note from 2014 to 2015 are:

Looking Good	Cause for Concern
<p>Lincoln's economy is continuing to rebound from the Recession:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of commercial building permits has doubled to \$463 million from a low in 2009 • Lincoln's declining unemployment rate continues to be one of the lowest in the U.S. • Employers report that they have jobs available for qualified workers • Lincoln has a high workforce participation rates <p>Lincoln's population continues to grow and grow in diversity</p> <p>Graduation rates continue on an upward trend; drop-outs continue on a downward trend</p> <p>Lincoln continues to be a safe community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln's overall crime, property crime, and violent crime rates continue to fall • The number of children in out of home placement has been halved <p>Use of safety net mental health crisis services has declined, suggesting improved services and collaboration</p> <p>Homeless continues to decline from a high in 2012</p> <p>Lincoln's national ranking for well-being continues to be high</p>	<p>Lincoln has a higher rate of poverty than the U.S. has a whole, and a higher rate of children in poverty</p> <p>Real household incomes have declined over the past decade</p> <p>Persons who are African-American and Hispanic/Latino have higher rates of unemployment and poverty</p> <p>Children enrolled in free lunch continues to trend upward</p> <p>Lincoln Public School students representing racial/ethnic minority populations continue to have lower educational achievement and attainment that those from non-minority backgrounds</p> <p>Lincoln continues to have six "extreme poverty" areas (40% or more of the individuals live below the poverty threshold).</p> <p>Two areas are additions from last year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown east area extending from approximately the Capitol to Lincoln High • Area directly east of the main campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln extending to 27th Street <p>Two previous areas have moved just beyond the designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area to the immediate west of I-180 to north to I-80 (39.5% individuals live below the poverty threshold) • Area southeast of the main campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln extending to Cornhusker Highway to 33rd street and southerly to Holdrege (39.2% individuals live below the poverty threshold)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lincoln is in an enviable position with its strong economy, highly-educated workforce, strong public educational system, strong well-being, good health outcomes, and effective civic services. However, Lincoln has not escaped the worldwide recession unscathed. A **growing proportion of Lincoln's population faces real need**; among these are Lincoln's children. **Lincoln's diversity is growing** and this presents opportunities, as well as challenges, to the community.

1. **Lincoln has exceptional strengths and these successes should be nurtured.**
 - Lincoln has grown 19% since 2000; largely attributable to people moving to the community.
 - Unemployment in Lincoln continues to be much lower than the rest of the nation and employers report having job vacancies.
 - Lincoln Metropolitan Statistical Area (Lancaster and Seward counties) is ranked 18th in the country for percent of workers with a college degree.
 - The value of commercial building permits in Lincoln in 2013 was nearly 250% higher than those issued in 2003.
 - The cost of housing in Lincoln is approximately 76% of the national average.
 - Lincoln has a high graduation rate and students score well in third, fourth, and eighth grades achievements tests.
 - Lincoln's overall crime rate has averaged 87% of the rate of other comparably-sized cities.
 - Lincoln ranked 10th in overall well-being in the 2012-13 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index®.
 - Lincoln generally receives high marks for lower rates of disease and death for health risks attributable to behaviors.
2. **A growing proportion of Lincoln's population faces real need.**
 - The number of people in Lincoln below the poverty threshold increased 58% since 2005 and the city now has a higher rate of poverty than the nation or Nebraska.
 - Residents' average and median household income has declined, when adjusting for inflation.
 - Persons from minority populations and those with lower levels of education attainment have much higher levels of unemployment.
 - In 2000, Lincoln had no neighborhoods in extreme poverty (40% or more of individuals live below the poverty threshold). By 2013, Lincoln had six neighborhoods in extreme poverty and two less than one percentage point from that designation.
3. **Lincoln's children fare poorly on many measures.**
 - The percent of children in poverty increased 78% since 2008, slightly lower than national rates. This translates to 12,100 children in Lincoln living in poverty. Since 2009, the age group with the largest proportion in poverty in Lincoln is children (20%).
 - Nearly 30% of all families with more than two children have incomes below the poverty threshold. For female headed households with more than two children, 60% are below the poverty threshold.
 - The rate of homeless children in Lincoln has increased 21% since 2007.
 - Approximately 43% of Lincoln Public Schools' students participate in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program ($n = 16,248$). Most of these students receive free lunch ($n = 13,679$).
 - Lincoln's racial and ethnic minority children and children living in poverty have lower educational achievement and attainment than do White children for most measures.
 - Lincoln has a much higher percentage of families with all parents in the workforce than the national average, suggesting that Lincoln may have an elevated need for high quality day care.
 - In Lancaster County, there continues to be a higher percentage of children in foster care than there are nationally. On any given day over 500 children are in out-of-home placements due primarily to parental neglect (67%), parental drug use (45%), and substandard/unsafe housing (29%).
 - Approximately one-third of elementary and middle school students are overweight or obese and are not proficient in cardiovascular fitness.

Be Informed. Get Involved.

Visit the **Lincoln Vital Signs** website: lincolnvitalsigns.org

You'll find:

- Latest information about the Lincoln Vital Signs project
- Downloadable copies of the full report and executive summary
- Links to relevant data

