

# Executive Summary



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**Lincoln Vital Signs 2014** is intended to inform conversations, spark connections, and spur collaboration. The indicators presented in this study provide data, not a plan for action. Many communities have found that tracking key indicators is a powerful way to understand their community's assets and challenges. This document summarizes key indicators about Lincoln to paint a picture of our collective successes and challenges. It is hoped that it will catalyze insight and action among individuals and organizations developing a vision for the future. The full report is available at [lincolnvitalsigns.org](http://lincolnvitalsigns.org)

Lincoln Vital Signs 2014 was written by Nancy Shank, PhD, MBA, Stacey Hoffman, PhD, and Teri Perkins, MS, MA, all of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center ([ppc.nebraska.edu](http://ppc.nebraska.edu)).

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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.*

### **Economy and Workforce**

*Although Lincoln has low unemployment and a highly educated workforce, Lincoln's wages are lower than the national average even when adjusted for our lower cost of living.*

### **Basic Needs**

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

### **Education**

*While facing a 21% increase in enrollment and a 133% increase in the number of students receiving free lunch (a proxy for low income) since 2000, Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) achievement and graduation rates continue to improve.*

### **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 residents support organizations generously with their time, but charitable giving is slightly less than the national average.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lincoln is in an enviable position with its strong economy, highly-educated workforce, strong public educational system, high 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 does many things exceptionally well and these successes should be nurtured.**

- Lincoln has grown 16% since 2000; largely attributable to people moving to the community.
- Unemployment in Lincoln continues to be much lower than the rest of the nation.
- Lincoln Metropolitan Statistical Area (Lancaster and Seward counties) is ranked 18th in the country for percent of workers with a college degree.
- Lincoln has a high graduation rate. Overall rates of student proficiency are strong in standardized national testing at the third, fourth, and eighth grades.
- Lincoln's violent crime rate has averaged 44% of the violent crime rate of other comparably-sized cities.
- Lincoln ranked first in overall well-being in the 2012 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.**

- Lincoln's per capita income trails the national average by \$4,000, and trails by \$1,400 when adjusted for cost of living.
- The number of people in Lincoln below the poverty threshold increased 48% since 2005 and the city now has a higher rate of poverty than the nation or Nebraska.
- Since 2007, Lincoln's number of homeless individuals has risen 41%.
- In 2000, Lincoln had no neighborhoods in extreme poverty. By 2010, Lincoln had six neighborhoods in extreme poverty.

3. **Lincoln's children fare poorly on many measures.**

- The percent of children in poverty has doubled since 2008, which is now equivalent to national rates. This translates to 12,500 children in Lincoln living in poverty. Since 2009, the age group with the largest proportion in poverty in Lincoln is children (22%).
- Nearly 30% of all families with more than two children have incomes at or below the poverty threshold. For female headed households with more than two children, 68% are at or below the poverty threshold.
- In the 2013 single day count, one-third of homeless individuals were children 19 years of age or younger ( $n = 312$ ); this number has increased 26% since 2007.
- Approximately 44% of Lincoln Public School students participate in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program ( $n = 16,077$ ). Most of these students receive free lunch ( $n = 13,315$ ).
- Lincoln's racial and ethnic minority children and children living in poverty have lower educational achievement than do White children.
- 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. However, no data for Lincoln could be identified that measures the availability of quality child care or its cost burden to families.
- In Lancaster County, there continues to be a higher percentage of children in foster care than there are nationally. On any given day almost 1,000 children are in out-of-home placements due primarily to parental neglect (58%), parental substance abuse (30%), and substandard housing (25%).
- 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](http://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

