

Vital Signs



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More than 400 community leaders attended a Jan. 23 breakfast meeting to hear about Lincoln Vital Signs 2014. Lincoln Vital Signs was commissioned by philanthropic organizations, the business community, the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County to create a more comprehensive understanding of Lincoln – both its strengths and challenges. The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center collected the data and wrote the report.

The study was initiated because leaders of Lincoln's philanthropic organizations were concerned about federal, state and local budget cuts to programs for social needs. Lincoln's philanthropy community cannot single-handedly take up the slack, and neither can local government or the business community. Complex issues will require collaboration among all community sectors.

The report shows that Lincoln does many things exceptionally well, and these successes should be nurtured. Lincoln's population has grown 16 percent since 2000. Lincoln has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, one of the highest ratios of workers with college degrees, a strong public school system and a very low crime rate compared to similar-sized cities.

The report also shows a growing proportion of Lincoln's population faces real need. The poverty rate has increased 48 percent since 2005 and now is higher than the national average. More than one in five children lives in poverty, a number that has doubled since 2008.

"One of our city's strengths is the ability for public, private and philanthropic sectors to come together to create positive change," said Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler. "Partnerships helped to revitalize the core of our city through the Antelope Valley Project and to build the new Pinnacle Bank Arena. At the same time, we understand that building a stronger community is not just about investing in bricks and mortar. We need to invest in our children, our families and our support systems."

Jeff Kutash, executive director for Kiewit Foundation, was the keynote speaker. Kutash has spent 20 years in the social sector helping cities and organizations achieve social change for complex problems. He said communities that make the best use of data use it to identify and prioritize issues that really matter to the city and set ambitious goals. When people align their work and rise above individual organizations, it is possible to foster a true collaborative spirit to spur collective action.

Lincoln Vital Signs 2014 is intended to generate conversations, create connections and spur collaboration throughout the community. Download the report and view it online at lincolnvitalsigns.org. Sign up online to participate in upcoming community discussions.