

TECHNICAL NOTES

Rates

Age-adjusted rates are used to present data for comparison among several populations, to take into account the fact that there may be more older people (who have high rates of death) in one population than in another. The AAR is calculated by applying the age-specific death rate in a population to a standard population (typically, the 2000 US standard population).

Incidence rates are used to report new cases of disease during a specified time period and are calculated on the basis of every 100,000 people.

Statistical Significance

An array of statistical tools is available to determine whether findings, typically differences observed between groups, are large enough that they are not likely to have been due to chance. Essentially, statistical significance testing provides an assessment of how reasonable it would be to conclude that an observed difference is real. It is not capable of overcoming other issues such as noncomparable samples or too few cases in a sample, but is a valuable guide to the interpretation of rates, proportions, and similar measures.

Statistical significance is only one measure of significance. There may be findings that have other important relevance clinically or for public health programs, regardless of statistical significance. An absence of statistical significance should not be used to imply an absence of other significance.

Population

All data presented in this report pertain to Boston residents only.

Population statistics are from the census of the population taken every ten years by the federal government. The census provides the best actual count of the population.

Population projections are developed by the Census Bureau and other institutions to take into account migration and other changes occurring in the population between census years. Estimates of population changes between census years have some drawbacks. They do not typically account for changes in the racial composition of a community, and they do not generally permit neighborhood-level analyses. Perhaps most importantly, even small errors in the accuracy of projections for neighborhoods or other population subgroups can result in large distortions in the resulting statistical estimates.

To provide data on people of Latino ethnicity, who may be of any race, this report uses the 2000 US census for Boston census tracts, produced by the Bureau of the Census, and MISER and Massachusetts Department of Public Health population estimates, for denominators for rate calculations. This avoids the double-counting which would result if Latinos were included in the White, Black, and Asian racial categories as well as in the Latino categories. However, in hospitalization data, Latinos are reported in the White, Black, Latino, or Asian category, depending on the individual hospital's practices. This produces unreliability in data reporting, and readers must interpret hospitalization data by race/ethnicity with caution.

GLOSSARY

Adolescent Birth Rate: The number of live births to adolescents aged 15 to 17 per thousand female 15 to 17 year-olds.

Age Adjusted Mortality Rate (AAR): The age adjusted mortality rate is calculated by applying the age specific mortality rates in a population to the 2000 US standard population. The age adjusted rate of one area or group can be compared to the age adjusted rate of another area or group with confidence that differences in the rates of the two areas or groups do not stem from differences in the age structure of their populations.

Asian: All persons self-identified as Asian or Pacific Islander (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiians, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Asian Indians, Filipinos) who do not identify themselves as Latino.

Asthma: Asthma is a chronic inflammatory condition defined by sudden periodic attacks of difficulty in breathing accompanied by wheezing caused by a spasm of the bronchial tubes.

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS): A random telephone survey of Massachusetts adults ages 18 years and older. The survey is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is conducted annually in all 50 states. The BRFSS collects information regarding various health-related issues, such as behavior, attitudes, knowledge, access to health care, and opinions on health policy issues. The responses to the survey provide important information regarding the prevalence of risk factors that are responsible for causing premature death, illness, and disability among Massachusetts residents.

Birthweight: The weight of an infant at the time of delivery. It may be recorded in either grams or pounds/ounces: 1 pound = 453.6 grams; 1,000 grams = 2 pounds and 3 ounces.

Black: All persons self-identified as Black (e.g., African American, Haitian, West Indian) who do not identify themselves as Latino.

Body Mass Index (BMI): Calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by his or her height in meters squared (kg/m²); a measure of the appropriateness of weight in relation to height.

The BMI cutpoints for adults are as follows:

Overweight; BMI of 25.0 to 29.9

Obese; BMI of 30.0 or more

Colonoscopy: A visual screening examination for colorectal cancer, of the lining of the colon and rectum.

Death Rate: The number of deaths per year per 100,000 population.

Demographics: Characteristics of human populations such as age, sex, and race/ethnicity.

Diabetes: A chronic metabolic disease characterized by inadequate insulin production by the pancreas or inadequate utilization of insulin in converting food to energy.

Heart Disease: A group of diseases affecting the heart, including valve and conductive disorders as well as hypertensive diseases.

HIV/AIDS: Human immunodeficiency virus infection or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, which follows HIV infection, often after a period of years.

Homicide: A death intentionally caused by a person other than the deceased.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): The virus responsible for causing AIDS.

Incidence: The number of new cases of a particular disease over a period of time and in relation to the population in which it occurs.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR): The number of deaths under one year of age per 1,000 live births.

Injury: Injury deaths include five categories: homicides, suicides, motor vehicle-related injuries, (other) unintentional injuries, and "undetermined" injuries (for which it was not determined on the death certificate whether the injury was intentional).

Latino: Includes people of any race (Asian, Black, White, or Other) self-identified as Hispanic or Latino (such as Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, Spanish, or Dominican).

Lead Screening: The measurement of blood-lead levels in children to identify those who have been exposed to toxic levels of environmental lead. 10 µg/dL is the threshold used in this report to denote elevated blood lead levels in children.

Low Birthweight (LBW): Birthweight less than 2,500 grams (or 5.5 lbs).

Mammogram: A radiographic examination of the breast to screen for malignancies.

µg/dL: Micrograms per deciliter. A measurement unit for level of lead in a measured quantity of blood: a billionth of a gram in a tenth of a liter.

Mortality: Death, or the relative frequency of death per unit of population in a specific time period; death rate.

Pap Test: A screening to detect cancerous or precancerous conditions of the uterine cervix.

Prematurity: Birth too early, at too low a birthweight, following abnormally slow intrauterine growth, or a combination of these factors. Prematurity is strongly associated with illness and death in infants.

Preterm Birth: Delivery at less than 37 completed weeks' gestation.

Risk Factor: A characteristic or agent whose presence increases the probability of occurrence of a particular disease, injury, cause of death, or birth outcome.

Sigmoidoscopy: A screening examination for colorectal cancer of the rectum and lower colon.

Socioeconomics: The statistical study of the social and economic characteristics of a population, such as education and poverty levels.

Statistical Significance: A certain group of statistical tests determines whether findings accurately describe the population of interest or whether they can be explained by chance. If these tests identify the findings to be outside of the range of chance, they are considered to have statistical significance.

Standard Population: An estimate of the US population in which the age, race, and sex distributions are known, resulting in a set of population weights that can be used to calculate adjusted mortality rates. In this report, the year 2000 US standard population is used to calculate age-adjusted mortality rates.

Stroke: A cerebrovascular accident. Stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain bursts or when the blood supply to part of the brain is blocked, depriving the brain of oxygen.

Very Low Birth Weight (VLBW): Birthweight less than 1,500 grams (or 3.3 lbs).

White: All persons self-identified as White who do not also identify themselves as Latino.

Years of Potential Life Lost: An estimate of years lost in a population due to premature death, in this report defined as deaths occurring before age 75. YPLL estimates may be presented in terms of numbers or rates.

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS): A surveillance system developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor the prevalence of youth behaviors that influence health. The survey consists of representative samples of ninth-through twelfth-graders in the United States and the District of Columbia.

DATA SOURCES

Figure 1. Boston's Population in 1990, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 1990, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 2. Boston's Population in 2000, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 3. Place of Origin, Boston Residents. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 4. Ethnic Origins of Boston's Largest Latino Subpopulations. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 5. Ethnic Origins of Boston's Largest Asian Subpopulations. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 6. Ethnic Origins of Boston's Largest Black Subpopulations. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 7. Boston Adults Rating Their Overall Health as "Fair" or "Poor," by Race/Ethnicity and Income. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 8. Income of Boston Residents, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 9. Boston Population (All Ages) Living in Poverty, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.

Figure 10. Boston Children in Living in Poverty, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 11. Boston Adults without a High School Diploma, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 12. Boston Adults with at Least a Bachelor's Degree, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 13. Boston Adults Who Speak Little or No English, by Race/Ethnicity. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 14. Boston Adults Who Report Having Been Treated Worse Than People of Other Races at Work during the Previous Year, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2003. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 15. Boston Adults Who Report Having Been Treated Worse Than People of Other Races When Seeking Health Care during the Previous Year, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2003. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Table 1. How Boston Residents Feel They Are Treated Compared with Others When Seeking Health Care, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2003. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 16. Boston Adults Who Report Thinking about Their Race "Constantly," by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2003. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 17. Percentage of Adult Boston Residents without Health Insurance, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 18. Uninsured Boston Adults Who Could Not Afford to See a Doctor When They Needed One in the Previous Year, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 19. Boston Adults Who Could Not Afford to See a Doctor When They Needed One in the Previous Year, by Income. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 20. Boston Adults Who Could Not Afford to See a Doctor When They Needed One in the Previous Year, by Race/Ethnicity. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 21. Residences of Black Population in Boston. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 22. Residences of White Population in Boston. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 23. Boston Index of Dissimilarity 2000. Frey WH and Myers D. Social Science Data Analysis Network. http://www.censuscope.org/us/s25/p7000/print_chart_dissimilarity.html

Table 2. Asthma Hospitalization of Boston Residents Under Age 18, by Race/Ethnicity. Acute Care Hospital Case Mix files 1998-2002. Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy.

Figure 24. Residences of Boston Children with Elevated Blood Lead Levels. Lead database 2003. Boston Public Health Commission Environmental Health Office.

Table 3. Selected Leading Causes of Death in Boston: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 25. Boston Death Rates from All Causes: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 26. Life Expectancy of Black and White Boston Residents, by Sex. Boston resident births and deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 27. Boston Premature Death Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 28. Boston YPLL Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 29. Boston Hospitalization Rates: Black and White Residents. Acute Care Hospital Case Mix files 2002. Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy.

Figure 30. Boston Infant Mortality Rates: Black and White Women. Resident infant deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Figure 31. Boston Infant Mortality Rates, by Maternal Education Level: Black and White Women. Linked resident live births and infant deaths 1996-2001. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Table 4. Very Low Birthweight among Infants Born to Boston Women: Black and White Residents. Resident live births 1999-2001. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Figure 32. Boston Women with Adequate Prenatal Care: Black and White Residents. Resident live births 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Figure 33. Boston Cancer Mortality Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2000-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 34. Boston Breast Cancer Mortality Rates: Black and White Women. Boston resident deaths 2000-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 35. Boston Women Age 40 or Older Who Have Ever Had a Mammogram to Screen for Breast Cancer: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 36. Boston Prostate Cancer Mortality Rates: Black and White Men. Boston resident deaths 1995-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 37. Boston Men Who Have Ever Had a PSA Test to Screen for Prostate Cancer: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 38. Boston Cervical Cancer Mortality Rates: Black and White Women. Boston resident deaths 1995-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 39. Boston Women Who Have Ever Had a Pap Test to Screen for Cervical Cancer: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 40. Boston Lung Cancer Mortality Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2000-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 41. Boston High School Students Who Smoke Cigarettes: Black and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 42. Boston Heart Disease Mortality Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 43. Boston Adults who Have Ever Been Told They Have Hypertension: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 44. Boston HIV/AIDS Incidence Rates: Black and White Residents. Reported cases of HIV/AIDS as of February 2004. AIDS Reporting System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Program

Figure 45. Boston Adults Who Have Ever Been Told by a Doctor That They Have Asthma, by Race/Ethnicity and Income. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 46. Boston Adults Who Have Ever Been Told by a Doctor That They Have Diabetes: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 47. Boston Adults Who Have Ever Been Told by a Doctor That They Have Diabetes, by Race/Ethnicity and Income. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 48. Underweight/Normal-Weight Boston Adults Who Have Ever Been Told by a Doctor That They Have Diabetes: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 49. Boston Adult Hospitalization for Diabetes, by Race/Ethnicity. Acute Care Hospital Case Mix files 1999-2001. Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy.

Figure 50. Diabetes as an Immediate or Underlying Cause of Death among Boston Residents: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2001-2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 51. Boston Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese, by Income: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 52. Boston High School Students Who Are Overweight or Obese: Black and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 53. What is the Body Mass Index? Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. BMI--Body Mass Index: Home. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm>

Figure 54. Boston Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese, by Income: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 55. Boston Adults Getting Sufficient Exercise: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 56. Boston High School Students Getting Sufficient Exercise: Black and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 57. Boston Adults Getting Sufficient Exercise, by Income: Black and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 58. Boston Nonfatal Gunshot and Stabbing Injuries, by Race/Ethnicity. Weapon-related injuries 2003. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Weapon-Related Injury Surveillance System.

Figure 59. Boston Homicide Rates: Black and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 60. Boston Adults Rating Their Overall Health as “Fair” or “Poor”: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999–2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 61. Boston Infant Mortality Rates: Latino and White Residents. Boston resident live births and infant deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Figure 62. Boston Birth Rates for 15 to 17 Year-Olds: Latino and White Residents. Boston resident live births 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Figure 63. Boston Adults Reporting Poor Mental Health on 15 or More Days in the Previous Month: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999–2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 64. Boston Hepatitis C Incidence Rates: Latino and White Residents. New cases of hepatitis C 2002. Communicable Disease Database, Boston Public Health Commission Communicable Disease Control Division; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 65. Boston HIV/AIDS Incidence Rates: Latino and White Residents. Reported cases of HIV/AIDS as of February 2004. AIDS Reporting System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Program.

Figure 66. Boston Asthma Hospitalization of Children under Age 18: Latino and White Residents. Acute Care Hospital Case Mix files 2002. Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy.

Figure 67. Boston Asthma Mortality Rates: Latino and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 1999–2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 68. Diabetes as an Immediate or Underlying Cause of Death in Boston: Latino and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2001–2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 69. Boston Adults Who Are Overweight or Obese: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999–2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 70. Boston High School Students Who Are Overweight or Obese: Latino and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 71. Boston Adults Getting Sufficient Exercise: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999–2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 72. Boston High School Students Getting Sufficient Exercise: Latino and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 73. Boston Homicide Rates: Latino and White Residents. Boston resident deaths 2002. Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Center for Health Information, Statistics, Research, and Evaluation, Registry of Vital Records and Statistics; Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 74. Boston Women Age 40 or Older Who Have Ever Had a Mammogram to Screen for Breast Cancer: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999–2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 75. Boston Men Age 40 or Older Who Have Ever Had a PSA Test to Screen for Prostate Cancer: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 76. Boston Women Who Have Ever Had a Pap Test to Screen for Cervical Cancer: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 77. Percentage of Adult Boston Residents without Health Insurance: Latino and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 78. Boston Adults Who Speak Little or No English: Latino and White Residents. Census 2000. US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 79. Ethnic Origins of Boston's Asian Residents. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 80. Boston Tuberculosis Cases, by Place of Birth. New cases of tuberculosis 1998-2002. Boston Public Health Commission, Communicable Disease Control Division.

Figure 81. Boston Tuberculosis Incidence Rates: Asian and White Residents. New cases of tuberculosis 2002. Boston Public Health Commission, Communicable Disease Control Division. Census 2000, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 82. Chronic Hepatitis B Incidence Rates: Asian and White Residents. Boston Public Health Commission, Communicable Disease Control Division.

Figure 83. Boston High School Students Missing School Because They Feel Unsafe: Asian and White Residents. Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2003. Boston School Department, Unified Student Services.

Figure 84. Boston Adults Who Report Thinking about Their Race "Constantly": Asian and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 2003. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 85. Boston Adults Who Could Not Afford to See a Doctor When They Needed One in the Previous Year: Asian and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey 1999-2001. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Boston Public Health Commission.

Figure 86. Boston Adults Who Speak Little or No English: Asian and White Residents. Behavioral Risk Factor Survey. Census 2000. US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Figure 87. Language Spoken at Home by Chinese-Ancestry Residents of Boston's Chinatown. Census 2000. US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American FactFinder.
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