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LI Residents Express Concern about Cancer Incidence, Drug/Alcohol Abuse, Heart Disease *Results pulled from updated analysis of ongoing survey that solicits feedback about health perceptions*

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. (August 24, 2021) – Suffolk County and Nassau County respondents both note that their greatest health concern for their community is cancer followed by drug/alcohol abuse. When asked about their greatest concern for themselves, Suffolk County respondents reported cancer followed by heart disease/stroke. Nassau County respondents reported the opposite individual concerns – heart disease/stroke followed by cancer. These results are the product of an analysis of community health data collected by the Long Island Health Collaborative (LIHC). The data were collected January through December 2020 using the [Community Health Assessment Survey \(English Version\)](#) and [Spanish version](#), an ongoing survey that collects primary data about Long Islanders' health concerns for themselves and their communities. The data is used by hospitals, county health departments, community-based organizations and other social and health services providers to offer programs that best meet the needs of local communities.

Analysts further compared the 2019 survey results to the [2020 results](#) and found that community concern about cancer ranked number one for Nassau respondents, but number two for Suffolk respondents. In the individual concern category, heart disease/stroke and cancer ranked first and second among respondents from both counties in 2019. The same individual concerns were expressed in the 2020 analysis; however, heart disease/stroke ranked number one among Nassau County respondents and cancer ranked number one among Suffolk County residents.

Heart disease remains the number one killer of men and women in the United States, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). [Lifestyle habits](#) and environmental factors contribute to the incidence of heart disease and, in fact, all chronic diseases, including many cancers. Unhealthy diets and lack of exercise are modifiable risk factors. The Long Island Health Collaborative and its partners support access to affordable and nutritious foods and encourage residents of all ages to walk. Numerous studies support the physical and mental health benefits of walking. The LIHC's public awareness campaign – [Live Better](#) – promotes the importance of nutrition and physical activity to better manage and/or prevent chronic diseases.

Residents in both counties continue to see obesity/weight loss issues as a major concern to the health of their communities, with this answer now ranking in the third spot (up from fourth last year) in Suffolk County and in the fifth spot (same rank as last year) for Nassau County. Obesity is a prevailing risk factor for almost all chronic diseases.

Surprisingly, community and individual concern about mental health/depression/suicide did not appear in the top five rankings for either county. Given the rise in mental health issues during the pandemic,

analysts anticipated this finding to rise to the top. However, when asked *what is most needed to improve the health of your community* and *what health screenings or education services are needed in the community*, mental health services/depression screening ranked first in Suffolk County. It took the third spot in Nassau County.

Long Island, like New York State and the nation, continues to grapple with a growing mental health crisis, especially as anxiety and depression related to the pandemic's disruption of life continues. A Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) August 2020 [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) (MMWR) looked at this issue, as earlier studies and mounting empirical evidence showed that symptoms of anxiety disorder and depressive disorder increased considerably in the United States during April – June 2020, compared with the same period in 2019. The MMWR notes that approximately one quarter of respondents to its survey administered June 24 – 30, 2020 reported symptoms of a trauma or stressor-related disorder related to the pandemic, and about one in 10 reported that they started or increased substance use because of the pandemic. Suicide ideation was also elevated.

Another question asked *where health information is obtained*. Respondents from both counties reported that they rely first on the doctor/health professional and then the Internet. Such a finding may be of concern to public health and medical providers, as information found on the Internet, particularly about the pandemic, is often incomplete, inaccurate, and biased.

Individuals are encouraged to complete the Community Health Assessment Survey [online](#). To date, about 12,000 individual surveys have been collected and analyzed since 2013. These analyses offer a window into this region's healthcare landscape.

“Our data analyses are excellent resources for researchers, grant writers, physicians and anyone involved in providing healthcare and social services,” said Janine Logan, director of the Long Island Health Collaborative, “but a member of the general ‘population’ can get a sense of the burden of disease in their communities by viewing the zip code level data. A healthier community leads to a more robust local economic infrastructure and prosperity. Health is the undervalued connector.”

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About the Long Island Health Collaborative

The [Long Island Health Collaborative](#) is a partnership of Long Island's hospitals, county health departments, physicians, health providers, community-based social and human service organizations, academic institutions, health plans, local government, and the business sector, all engaged in improving the health of Long Islanders with a focus on the reduction of chronic diseases. The LIHC initiative is overseen by the [Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council](#), the association that advocates for Long Island's hospitals.