

Graham Center Policy One-Pager

Primary Care, Public Health, and Social Assets Are Essential to the COVID-19 Response

Yalda Jabbarpour, MD; Anuradha Jetty, MPH; Ann Greiner, MCP; and Jack Westfall, MD, MPH

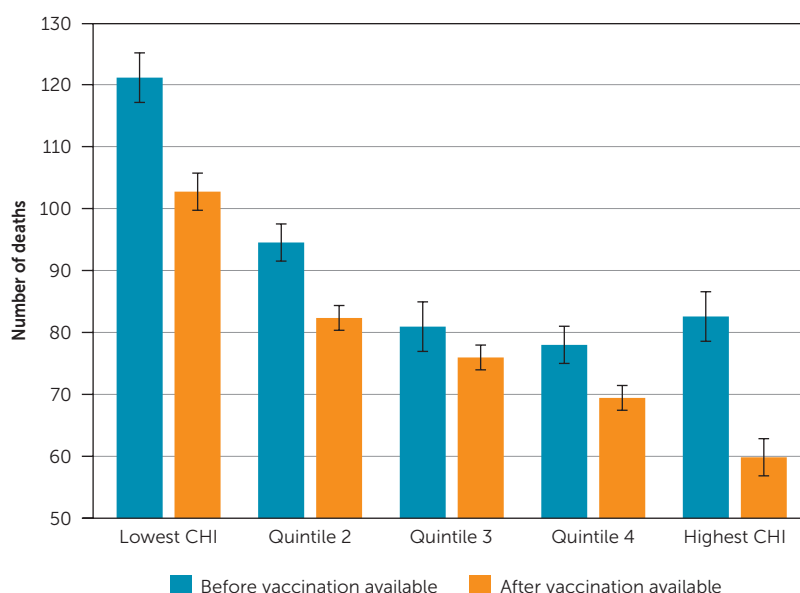
The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for a more effective and equitable health care system in the United States. County-level variations in COVID-19 positivity rates, hospitalizations, and number of deaths demonstrate that community-level factors are essential to the pandemic response.¹ Greater access to primary care has historically resulted in better health outcomes.² Public health measures, such as masking and vaccination, and social assets, including access to housing for quarantine periods and transportation for treatment, are also important determinants of COVID-19 outcomes.

Our goal was to examine the cumulative effects of robust primary care, public health preparedness, and social assets on COVID-19 outcomes at the county level using a novel index called the Community Health Index (CHI). The CHI is an average score of public health preparedness, primary care physician supply rates, and the social deprivation index (a proxy for community-level factors such as housing and transportation). The National Health Security Preparedness Index was used to derive a public health preparedness score, the American Medical Association Physician Masterfile was used to provide the

primary care physician supply rates, and the American Communities Survey was used to calculate a social deprivation index.³

Each component of the CHI can have a score between 1 (lowest) and 10 (highest) for a total CHI score that ranges from 3 (lowest total score) to 30 (highest total score). In this analysis, counties were divided into quintiles based on their CHI, with Quintile 1 representing the lowest scoring counties (mean score = 8.6) and Quintile 5 representing the highest scoring counties (mean score = 26.7). These scores were then compared with county-level COVID-19 death rates before and after vaccination was available to all adults in the United States. Detailed methodology, including dates of data acquisition, is available elsewhere.⁴

FIGURE 1



Adjusted number of deaths per 100,000 before and after the date of vaccination commencement (December 14, 2020).

Source: American Medical Association Physician Masterfile 2020; American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-year Summary File, National Health Security Preparedness Index 2020. USA Facts/Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center COVID-19 data (April 15, 2021). Adjusted for county-level percent rural, Black, and Hispanic population.

The information and opinions contained in research from the Graham Center do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the AAFP.

This series is coordinated by Kenny Lin, MD, MPH, deputy editor.

A collection of Graham Center Policy One-Pagers published in *AFP* is available at <https://www.aafp.org/afp/graham>. One-Pagers are also available at <https://www.graham-center.org>.

Author disclosure: No relevant financial relationships.

Results demonstrate that before and after vaccination, COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 individuals were lower in counties with higher CHI scores. Specifically, counties in the top quintile had 42% lower death rates than counties in the lowest quintile. Furthermore, although deaths related to COVID-19 fell after vaccination availability regardless of CHI, the number of deaths fell most drastically for counties in the highest quintile (*Figure 1*).

These data demonstrate that the three components of the CHI (primary care, public health, social assets) had a cumulative effect on preventing deaths from COVID-19. Although this analysis does not account for the benefits of integrating these sectors, data emerging from states such as Maryland demonstrate improved COVID-19 outcomes in areas where public health and primary care are well-integrated.⁵ Strong public health, robust primary care, and social assets contributed to the COVID-19 response. Working in combination, these three resources have the potential to lead to exponentially better success in combatting future surges of COVID-19 or another health pandemic.

References

1. Jha AK. Opinion: Vermont's and South Dakota's covid infection rates are remarkably similar—but their outcomes are not. *The Washington Post*. July 13, 2021. Accessed August 25, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/13/vermont-south-dakota-covid-19-lessons/>
2. Starfield B, Shi L, Macinko J. Contribution of primary care to health systems and health. *Milbank Q*. 2005;83(3): 457-502.
3. Butler DC, Petterson S, Phillips RL, et al. Measures of social deprivation that predict health care access and need within a rational area of primary care service delivery. *Health Serv Res*. 2013;48(2 pt 1):539-559.
4. Jabbarpour Y, Jetty A, Westfall JM, et al. Primary care and COVID-19: it's complicated. Leveraging primary care, public health, and social assets. *Primary Care Collaborative*. October 2021. Accessed December 17, 2021. https://www.pcc.org/sites/default/files/resources/PCC_Primary_Care_COVID-19_Its_Complicated.pdf
5. Perman C, Adashi E, Gruber E, et al. Improving COVID-19 outcomes for Medicare beneficiaries: a public health-supported advanced primary care paradigm. *Millbank Memorial Fund*. September 9, 2021. Accessed September 17, 2021. <https://www.milbank.org/publications/improving-covid-19-outcomes-for-medicare-beneficiaries-a-public-health-supported-advanced-primary-care-paradigm/> ■

The Department of Family Medicine at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN seeks clinicians with a career focus on research to join the #1 hospital in the nation (U.S. News & World Report 2021-2022).

An integral part of Mayo Clinic, the Department of Family Medicine features a robust team-based primary care practice model within an integrated health system that spans 42 Midwestern communities across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, and includes four outstanding Family Medicine residency programs.

With a strong foundation of research on primary care innovations and translating evidence into practice, the department has a portfolio of patient-oriented and practice transformation research in both urban and rural settings.

Mayo Clinic's multi-disciplinary group practice focuses on providing high quality, compassionate medical care that assures "the needs of the patient come first." Consider bringing your skills and experience to a position that will challenge you, an organization that will support you, and a community that will welcome you with open arms.

To learn more about Mayo Clinic and apply, please visit
jobs.mayoclinic.org/familymedicine



Or contact:
Jeannie Green,
Physician Recruiter
green.jeannie@mayo.edu
507-238-8596

