



PUBLIC HEALTH: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Between March and May 2023, the Big Cities Health Coalition polled key audiences in its member jurisdictions (35 big cities)*. The goal was to better understand how individuals who are skeptical of public health interventions could be moved to better support the important role governmental public health departments and leaders play in their communities. Below are the top strategies our research supports.

PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

The audiences we polled found these to be the most convincing messages about why city leaders should invest in public health:

Fiscal responsibility and prevention

One reason the United States spends so much on health care is that we spend so little on preventing health problems before they start. We have one of the lowest life expectancies in the world and huge disparities across race, ethnicity, and income. We can reduce health care costs by investing in things like livable wages, healthy food access, and other things that will help prevent many health problems from occurring in the first place.

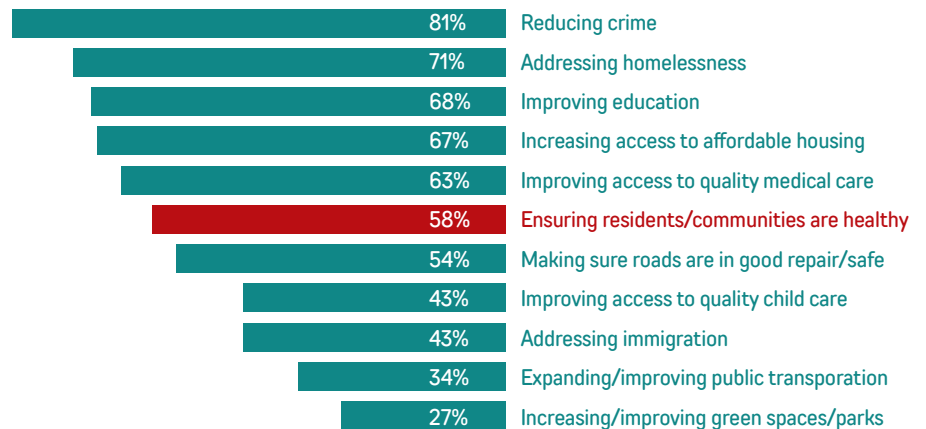
Quality of life

Everyone wants their city to be a healthy, thriving city. We don't want to have to choose between clean air, good education, affordable housing, and access to quality food and we shouldn't have to choose. We need all these things in order to have the best possible quality of life for our families and our neighbors, and everyone in the city needs and deserves them. The city must make investments to ensure we have them.

- ▶ Describe how meaningful investments in public health save money by preventing disease and supporting a better quality of life for all communities (see **Persuasive Messages** sidebar at left).
- ▶ Explain the direct connections between public health and health issues people care about most. Respondents ranked reducing crime, addressing homelessness, improving education, and increasing access to affordable housing and quality medical care as even higher priorities in their city than public health. (See graph below.)
- ▶ Illustrate how health departments fight for policies that make it easier for all people to live their healthiest lives: livable wages, safe and affordable housing, healthy food.
- ▶ When relevant, account for regional/political variation: western state and conservative respondents were the most concerned about homelessness and substance use disorder, while respondents in southern states (incl. Texas) prioritized obesity and diabetes instead. Concern about mental health issues was highest in the northeast and midwest and among Black residents.

Respondents consider public health important – but rank other city needs as having a higher priority.

Percent who answered yes to “This issue should be a top priority for the city I live in to address”

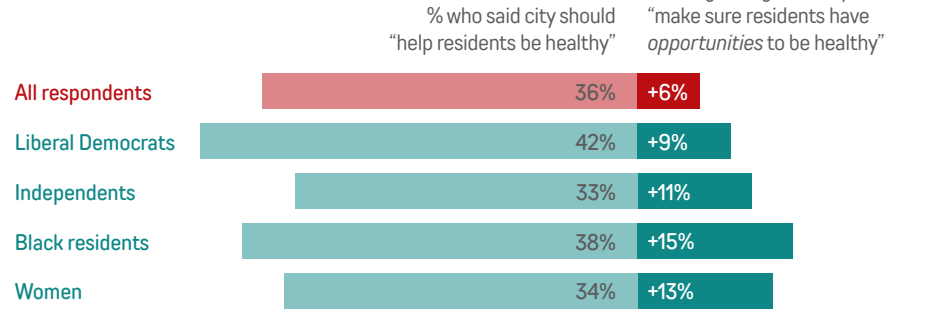


* BCHC conducted two focus groups with 8 white centrists and 8 Black residents in Philadelphia; then QualBoards with 20 white center-right and 19 Black and Hispanic residents; and finally an online survey of 1,006 similar “policy influencers” in 35 BCHC jurisdictions with an oversample of Black and Hispanic residents.

► Show how your city supports *opportunities* for health and *empowers* residents to make healthy choices. In our study, using empowerment and opportunity language aligned with respondents' values and made them more likely to see their local health department as a valued community partner. (See graph at top right.)

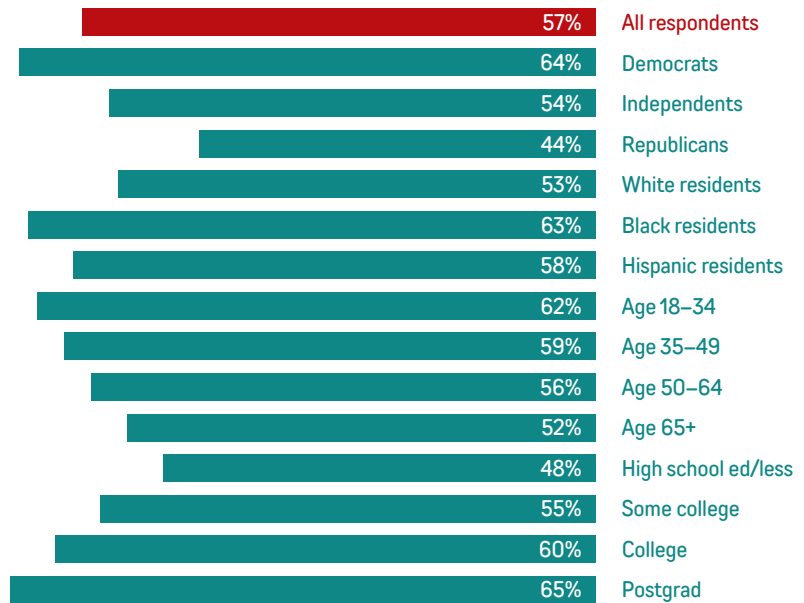
► Emphasize that people have the power to address their community's challenges. Respondents often resisted explicit language about racial justice, but most (57%) supported this framing: "Racial health inequities are a result of social and economic systems that have been made by people, and therefore can be changed by people as well. Addressing racial health inequities will require examining and addressing the root causes of these disparities, including unequal access to healthcare and distribution of resources. But by acknowledging that these inequities are manmade and fixable, we can begin to take the necessary steps to create a more fair and just society." (See graph at bottom right.)

Respondents support city government giving residents *opportunities* to be healthy.



Discussions of racial inequity gain more traction when framed as a human-made problem we can fix.

Percent of respondents who said messaging about racial health inequities being human-made and thus fixable was a major reason for their city to focus on the health of Black and Hispanic residents



CONTACT BCHC

Share messaging successes or ask further questions: info@bigcitieshealth.org

LEARN MORE

View more recommendations on the BCHC website: bit.ly/bchc-comms-study

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Big Cities Health Coalition is a forum for the leaders of America's largest metropolitan health departments to exchange strategies and jointly address issues to promote and protect the health and safety of their residents. Collectively, BCHC's 35 member jurisdictions directly impact more than 61 million people, or 1 in 5 Americans. bigcitieshealth.org