

January 31, 2025



Health and Human Services

## Healthy Iowans Newsletter

Iowa's State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

The **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)** is an annual, state-based survey system that collects data on health-related risk behaviors, chronic health conditions, health care access, and use of preventive services from the adult ( $\geq 18$  years) population in Iowa using telephone interviews. BRFSS data can be used to measure population health changes over time, design programs and policies, strengthen grant applications with state-specific population health data, and track progress towards public health goals.

[Iowa's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#) (BRFSS) is excited to share the release of new 2023 data, showing adult health trends in the state of Iowa. The Iowa BRFSS program recently published the [2023 Iowa BRFSS Survey Findings Brief](#) which summarizes 2023 data for more than 30 topics. Some key findings include data related to frequent mental distress, binge drinking, e-cigarette use, health insurance coverage, and caregiving.

## Frequent Mental Distress

Frequent mental distress (FMD), defined as experiencing 14 or more poor mental health days in the past 30 days, has been increasing among adults

in Iowa and the U.S. since 2011. In 2023, 376,672 adult Iowans (15.2%) indicated FMD, which is the highest reported rate to date. There is an association between frequent mental distress and adverse childhood experiences. [Adverse childhood experiences](#) (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur in childhood and adolescence (0-17 years). These experiences include instability due to parental divorce or incarceration, substance use or mental health challenges in the home, witnessing violence in the home or community, and experiencing violence or abuse. Most recently, the ACEs module was part of the Iowa BRFSS survey in 2022. The 2022 findings indicated that the rate of frequent mental distress among all adult Iowans was 13.5%. However, for those who reported no ACEs, this rate was only 5.2%. In stark contrast, the rate of FMD rose to 35% among adult Iowans who reported experiencing six to eleven ACEs.

To learn more about Iowa HHS' efforts to address frequent mental distress, visit the [Mental Health](#) webpage.

## Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is more common among adult Iowans (20.5%) compared to U.S. adults nationally (15.2%). Binge drinking is defined as the consumption of four or more drinks per occasion for females and five or more drinks per occasion for males and is highest among males aged 25-44. In 2023, Iowa ranked third highest in the United States for binge drinking in 2023, only behind the District of Columbia and North Dakota.

To learn more about Iowa HHS' efforts to address binge drinking, visit the [Substance Use Disorders](#) webpage.

## E-Cigarette Use

The use of electronic cigarettes or other electronic vaping products (e-cigarette use) in Iowa has been on the rise since 2016, when e-cigarette data was first collected in the Iowa BRFSS. Among youth in 9th-12th grades, current use of electronic vapor products (e-vapor) increased from 9% in 2017 to 16.4% in 2021 (Iowa Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)). Additionally, the prevalence of e-vapor product use increases with grade level: 8.6% among 9th graders and 25.5% among 12th graders (2021 Iowa YRBS). Among adults, it is more common for younger adult Iowans to engage in e-cigarette use than older Iowans. Approximately, one in five Iowans (20.6%) aged 18 to 24 and over one in 10 (13.6%) Iowans aged 25 to 34 are current e-cigarette users. In contrast, less than 1% of those aged 65 or older using e-cigarettes.

To learn more about Iowa HHS' efforts to address e-cigarette use, visit the [Vaping & Electronic Smoking](#) program webpage.

## Health Insurance Coverage

While the percentage of adults aged 18 to 64 without health insurance is one of the lowest recorded to date at 7.4%, significant disparities in health care coverage exist across different racial and ethnic groups, as well as among people with varying levels of education and income. Almost two out of five (38.4%) Hispanic adults living in Iowa and three in 10 adult Iowans with less than a high school education reported not having health insurance. Health insurance coverage has a substantial impact on receiving diagnoses for chronic health conditions (e.g. arthritis, asthma, and diabetes) and using preventive health practices (e.g. routine checkups and dental visits, recommended cancer screenings, and flu or pneumonia vaccinations).

To learn more about Iowa HHS' efforts to address health insurance coverage, visit the [Iowa Medicaid](#) webpage.

## Caregiving

Caregiving includes helping another person(s) with one or more activities important for their daily living, such as bathing, dressing or running errands. Caregiving can also involve emotional support and helping manage chronic diseases or disability.

In 2023, over one in six adult Iowans (196,714, or 17.2%) reported that they were currently providing care for another individual. Caregiving was most prevalent among those aged 45-64. Iowans aged 55-64 most commonly provided care for their mothers, while those 65-74 most commonly provided care for their spouse. A similar percentage indicated expecting to provide care in the next two years and was anticipated most heavily among those 45-64 years old.

The health of caregivers is also important – one out of three caregivers reported a disability of their own and one in five reported frequent mental distress.

To learn more about Iowa HHS' efforts around caregiving, visit the [Caregiver Resources](#) webpage.

## Connection to Healthy Iowans

Data collected from the BRFSS has been used to inform the State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement (SHIP) plan for many years. BRFSS indicators were included in the data analysis used to determine Iowa's top health issues in the [2021-2022 State Health Assessment](#) (SHA). These include (in alphabetical order): Access to Care, Cancer, Economic Stability & Income, Healthy Eating & Active Living, Housing, Mental Health & Mental Disorders, and Substance Use. Healthy Iowans uses Iowa BRFSS data as one of many sources that measure health behaviors and outcomes, as well as to understand how factors, such as social determinants of health, may impact the ability to achieve optimal health. The Healthy Iowans Partnership is dedicated to using primary and secondary data, community voices, and evidence-based strategies to create meaningful solutions for health disparities.

To learn about what work is being done to address many of the health issues highlighted in the [2023 Iowa BRFSS Survey Findings Brief](#) and the [2021-2022 SHA](#), we encourage you to read the [2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan](#) (SHIP) and our [Partners in Action: Health Improvement Strategies Throughout Iowa](#) publications.

## Get Involved

BRFSS data shows adults in Iowa are experiencing significant health challenges. Now, it is important we turn data into action. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

- Share the Iowa BRFSS [2023 Survey Findings Brief](#).
- Sharing this report will increase awareness of adult health trends and will serve as an opportunity to encourage others to use data as the foundation of their efforts.
- Integrate BRFSS data into your work.
- BRFSS data can influence decision making, grant writing, resource allocation, and more. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/brfssprevalence/index.html> to explore data by different topics & states, and <https://hhs.iowa.gov/brfss> for Iowa-specific data
- Encourage BRFSS participation.
- Each month a random sample of telephone numbers are contacted to participate in the survey over the phone. By participating when called, individuals perform a valuable public service for their family, community, and state.
- Learn more about the Iowa BRFSS program.
- Visit <https://hhs.iowa.gov/brfss> to find additional program information, publications, copies of questionnaires, and more.

## Trainings and Events

### [Developing AI Policies for Public Health Organizations](#)

- “This webinar will introduce attendees to the new, [Developing Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Policies for Public Health Organizations: A Template and Guidance](#), designed specifically to help public health organizations create policies that encourage ethical AI experimentation to improve efficiency, enhance the quality of work and advance organizational goals.”
- Hosted by the Kansas Health Institute
- February 12, 2025 from 1-2pm CST

### [Building Power Through Narrative](#)

- “The webinar will highlight Narratives for Health, a national partnership working to shift narratives to advance health for all. Participants will learn ways that groups can build power and advance health through narrative change.”
- Hosted by County Health Rankings and Roadmaps
- February 18, 2025 from 2-3pm CST

### [Onboarding Tools for the Public Health Workforce: Best Practices for Welcoming and Retaining Employees](#)

- “This webinar introduces techniques you can use to onboard and retain new employees in a changing landscape. Presenters will discuss workforce challenges and how you can address them, including transition facilitators, onboarding and professional socialization, and workforce retention techniques.”
- Hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Public Health Training Center
- February 19, 2025 from 11:30am-1pm CST

## **News and Resources**

The Public Health Communications Collaborative has released a new resource on [How to Build Cross-Sector Partnerships that Improve Public Health](#).

- This guide highlights best communication practices – informed by [Public Health Reaching Across Sectors](#) (PHRASES) - for developing cross-sector partnerships.

There is a new [grant opportunity](#) for Advancing Strategies to Deliver and Sustain Evidence-Based Chronic Disease Self-Management Education Programs to Support Older Adult Behavioral Health.

- The two primary goals of this grant are: Goal 1: Through a statewide initiative, develop capacity (e.g., instructors, partnerships, and referral networks) to increase the number of older adults and adults with disabilities in the target population who participate in evidence-based chronic disease self-management education (CDSME) and support programs. Goal 2: Develop and disseminate 508-compliant resources specific to your grant learnings to enhance knowledge in serving the target population and aid in the sustainability of programs.”
- Applications must be submitted no later than February 19, 2025.

America’s Health Rankings has released their [2024 Annual Report](#), which includes [state summaries](#) and [county-level maps](#).

- “As the longest running annual assessment of the nation’s health on a state-by-state basis, the 35th edition features 88 measures that span five categories of health and well-being.”

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Every day at HHS, we work to improve the lives of our fellow Iowans. As an agency it is important to keep focused on our mission; to help Iowans achieve healthy, safe, stable, and self-sufficient lives through the programs and services we provide.

For more information, please contact:  
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