

An exploration of local data to evaluate  
socioeconomic and racial disparities in health.

SONOMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

March, 2008

"When it comes to health, all Americans are not equal. If you are poor, less educated or a minority in the United States, your prospects for living a long, healthy life are significantly worse than if you are more affluent, better educated or white."

*Taken from: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Overcoming Obstacles to Health, Stories, Facts and Findings." February, 2008: p. 6. <<http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/obstaclestohealthhighlights.pdf>>*

# Unnatural Causes

Unnatural Causes examines the alarming socioeconomic and racial disparities in health in our country and explores key research and initiatives addressing the causes.

Compelling research finds a strong gradient to health whereby people tend to be sicker and die sooner as their socioeconomic status decreases within society.

Poor Americans die an average of five years earlier than the middle class. But middle class Americans die three years sooner than those who are wealthy.

# Sonoma County Findings

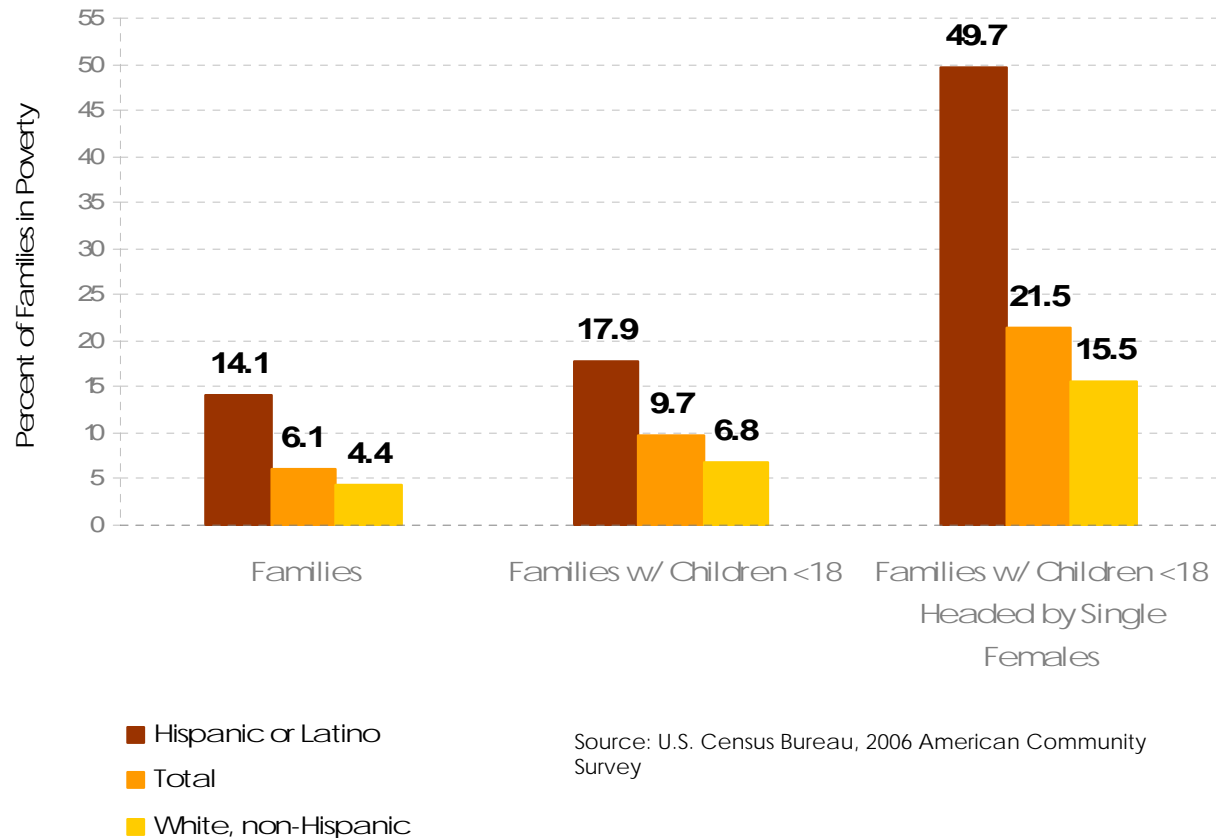
Here in Sonoma County our local data also reveals the strong relationships between disease risk factors and prevalence and social conditions.

The following slides illustrate socioeconomic and racial disparities in:

- Poverty rates
- Infant mortality
- Low birth weight
- Health perception
- Chronic disease
- Disability
- Obesity
- Physical activity
- Smoking
- Health care access

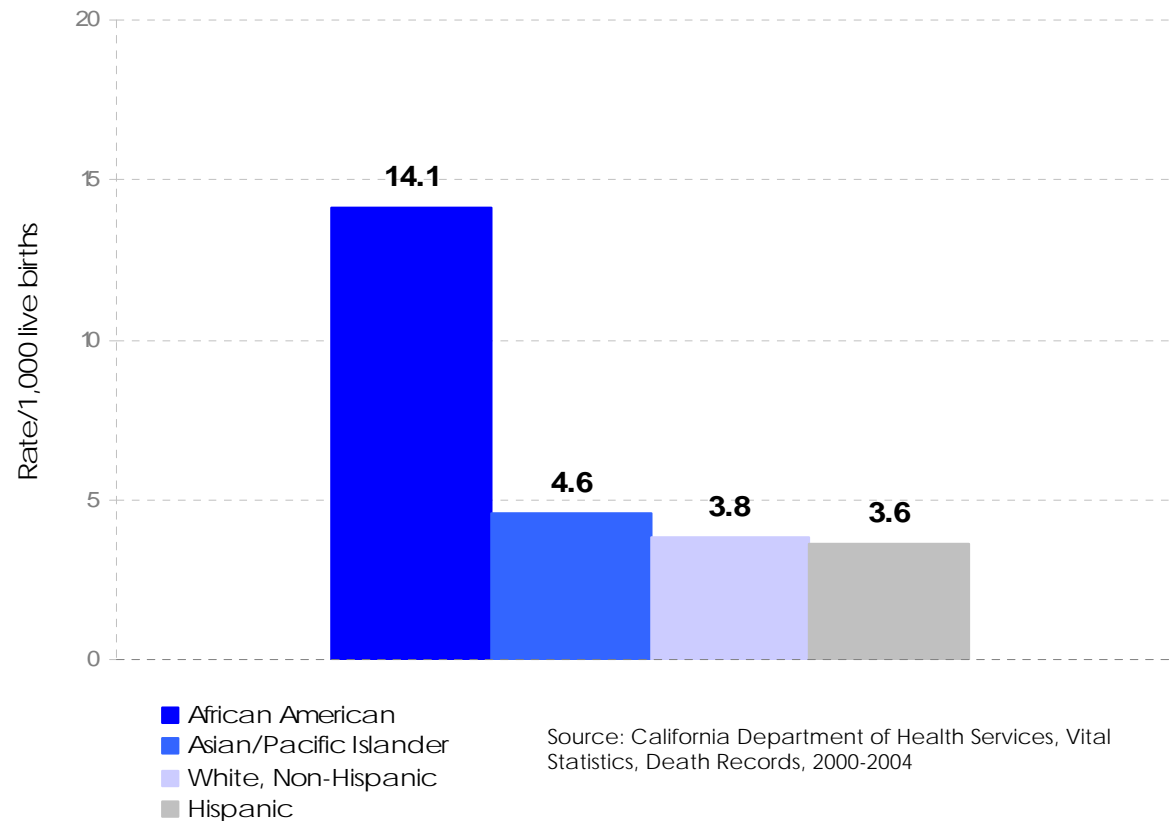
# Families Living in Poverty

In Sonoma County, Hispanic families are over three times more likely to live in poverty compared to White, non-Hispanic families.



# Infant Mortality varies by Race and Ethnicity

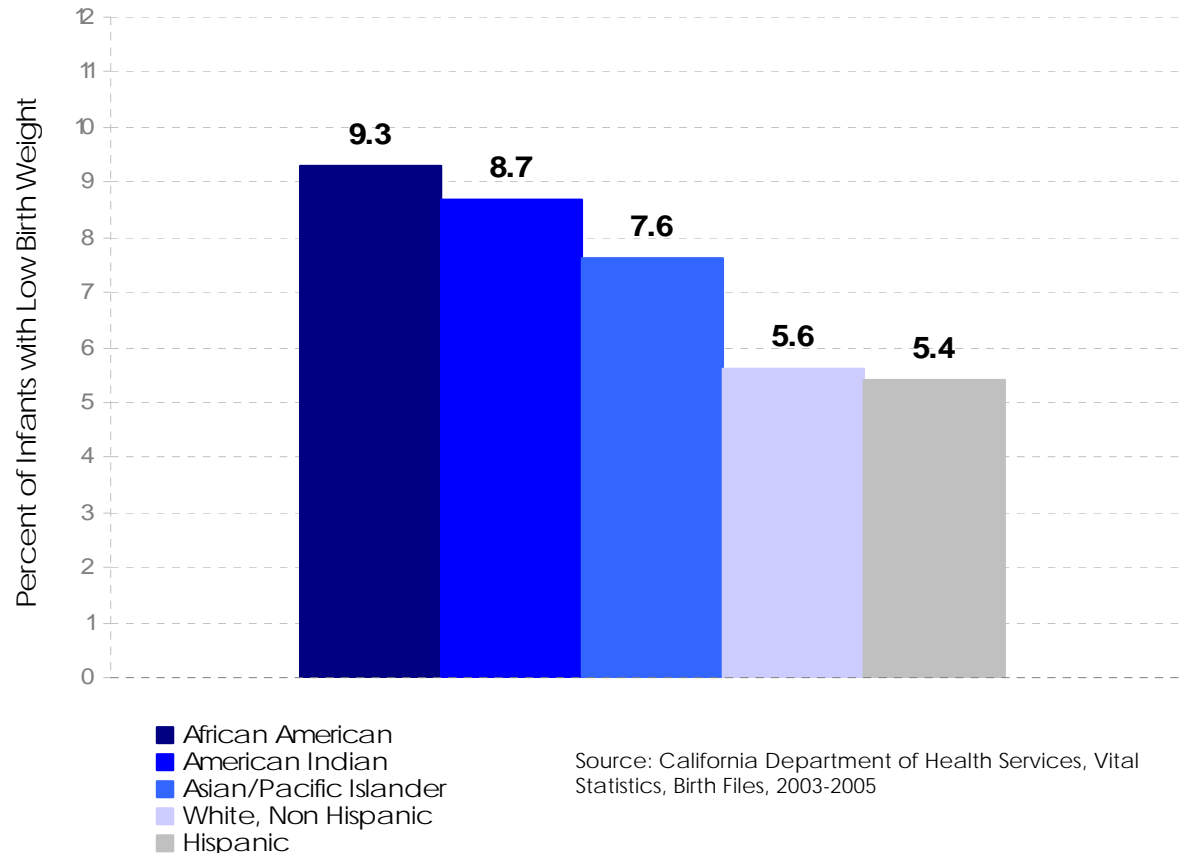
Hispanic and White mothers have the lowest rates of Infant mortality in Sonoma County. The rate for African American mothers is over four times higher.



Source: California Department of Health Services, Vital Statistics, Death Records, 2000-2004

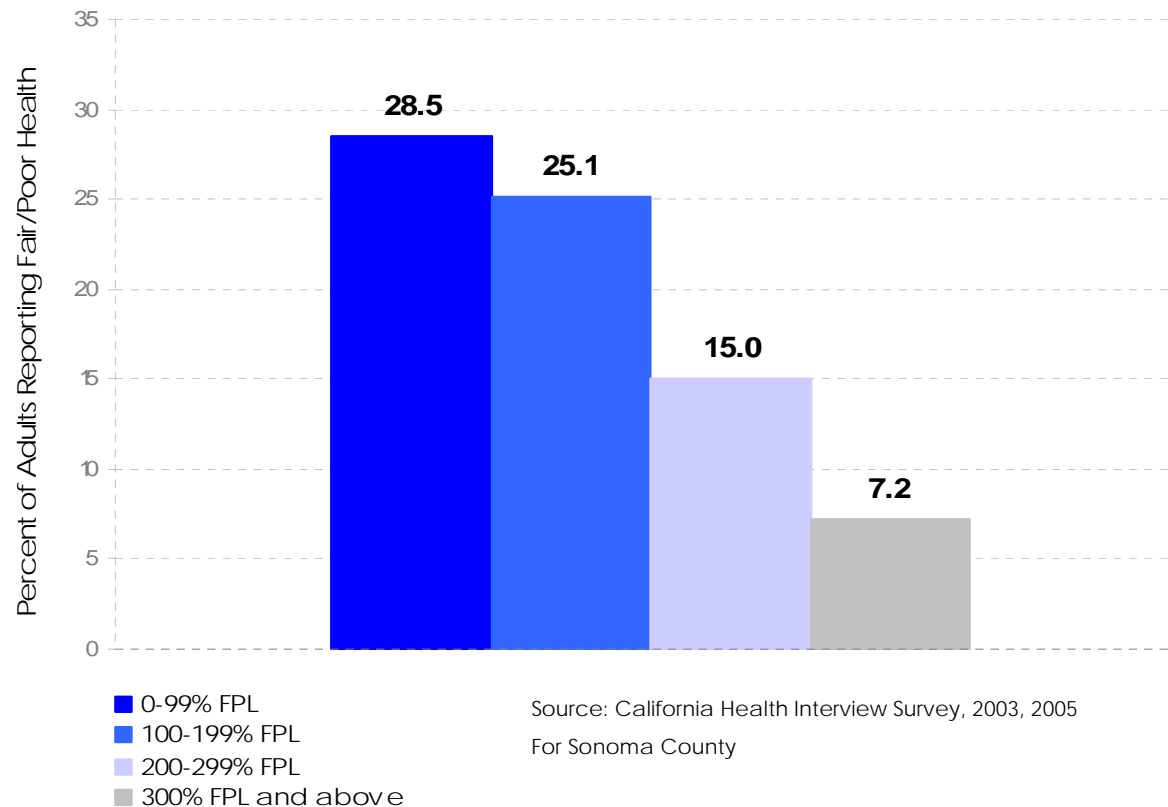
# Proportion of Low Birth Weight is Not Equal

Hispanic and White mothers have the lowest proportion of low birth weight infants in Sonoma County. The rate for African American mothers is nearly two times higher.



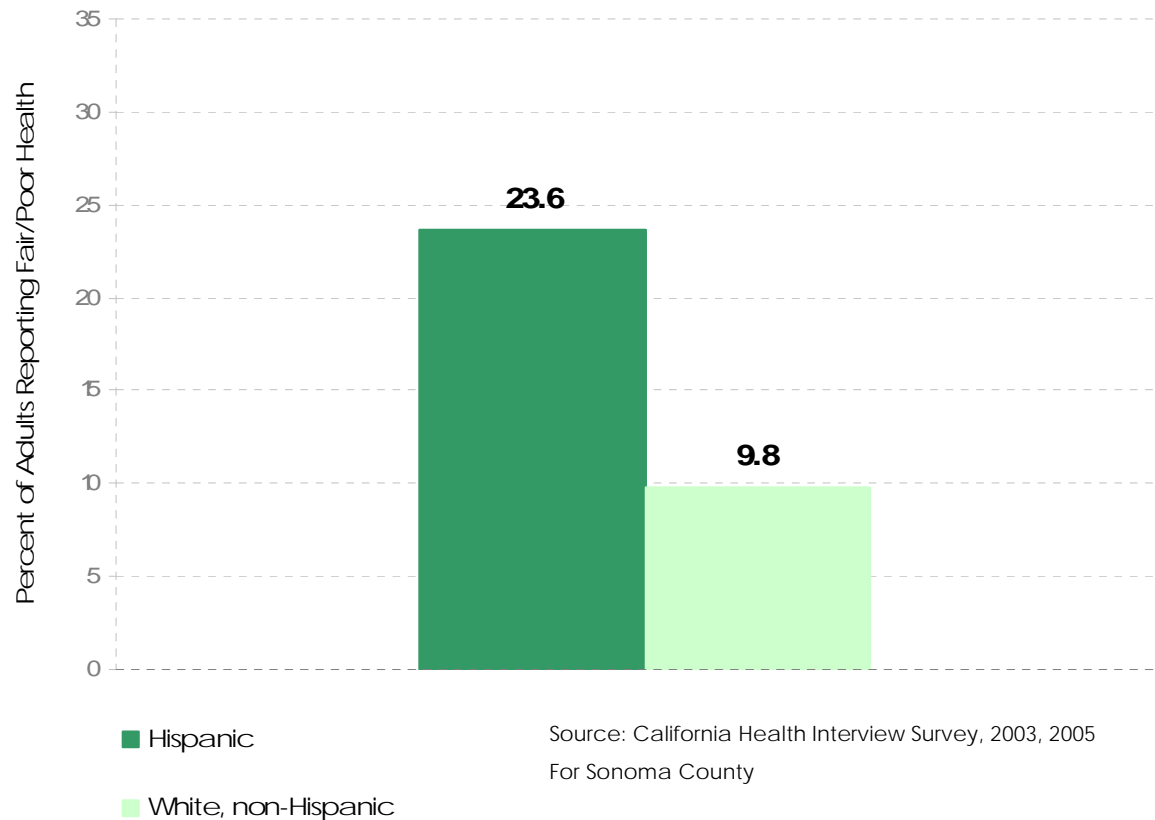
# Lower Income, Lower Perception of Personal Health

Sonoma County residents in the lowest income category are nearly four times as likely to report fair or poor health status compared to those in the highest income category.



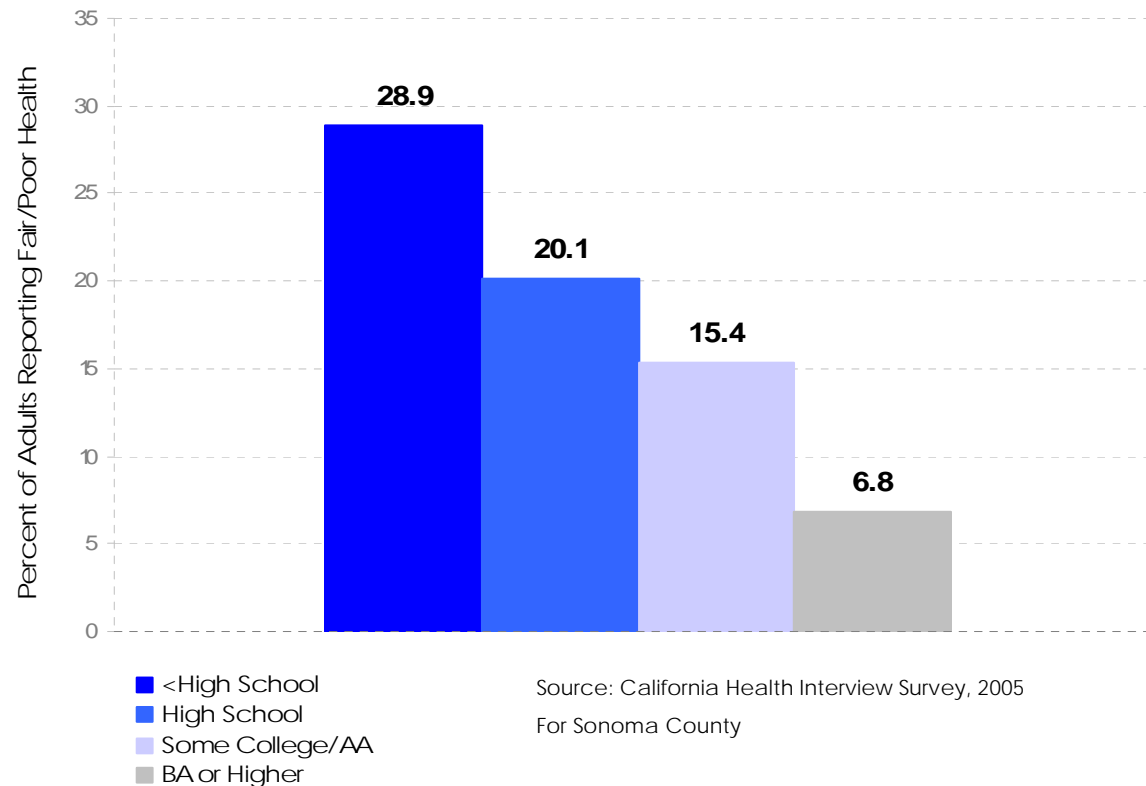
# Perception of Personal Health is Not Equal

In Sonoma County, persons who are Hispanic report poor or fair health at least twice as often compared to White, non-Hispanic persons.



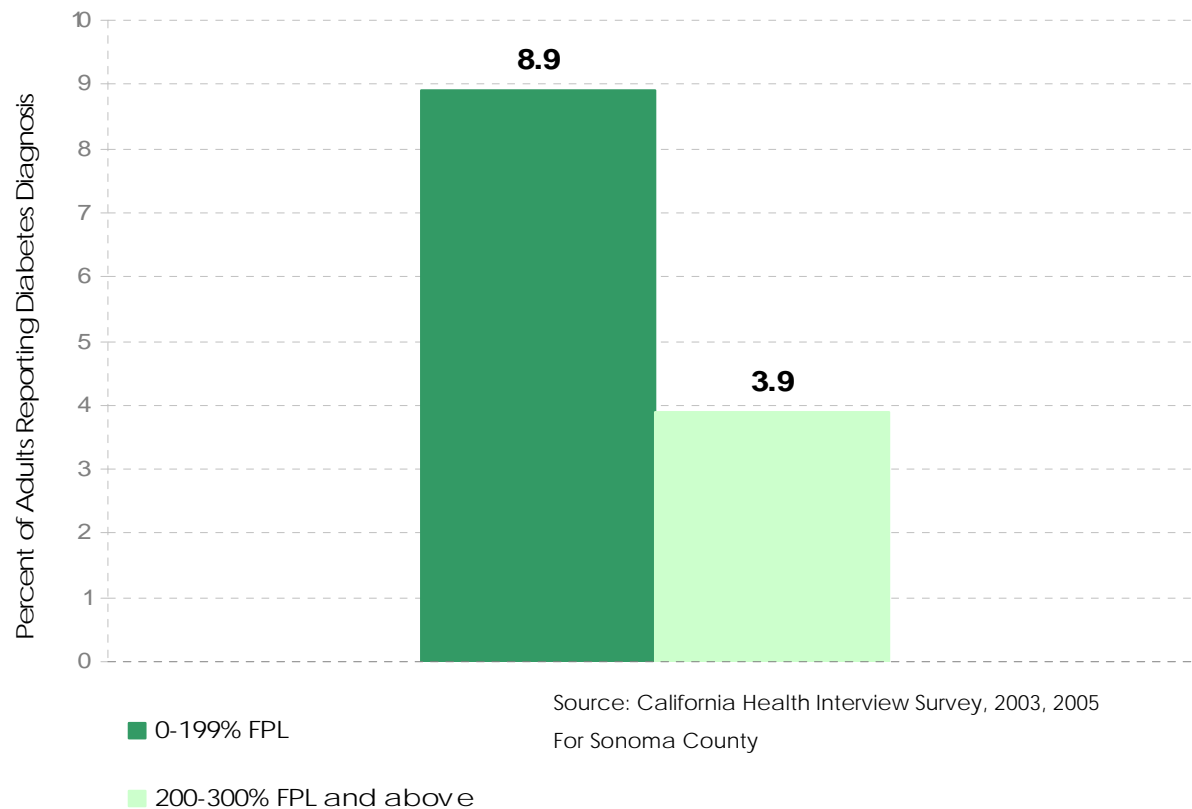
# Fewer Years of Education, Lower Perception of Personal Health

Sonoma County residents who have not graduated from high school are nearly four times as likely to report fair or poor health status compared to those that are college graduates.



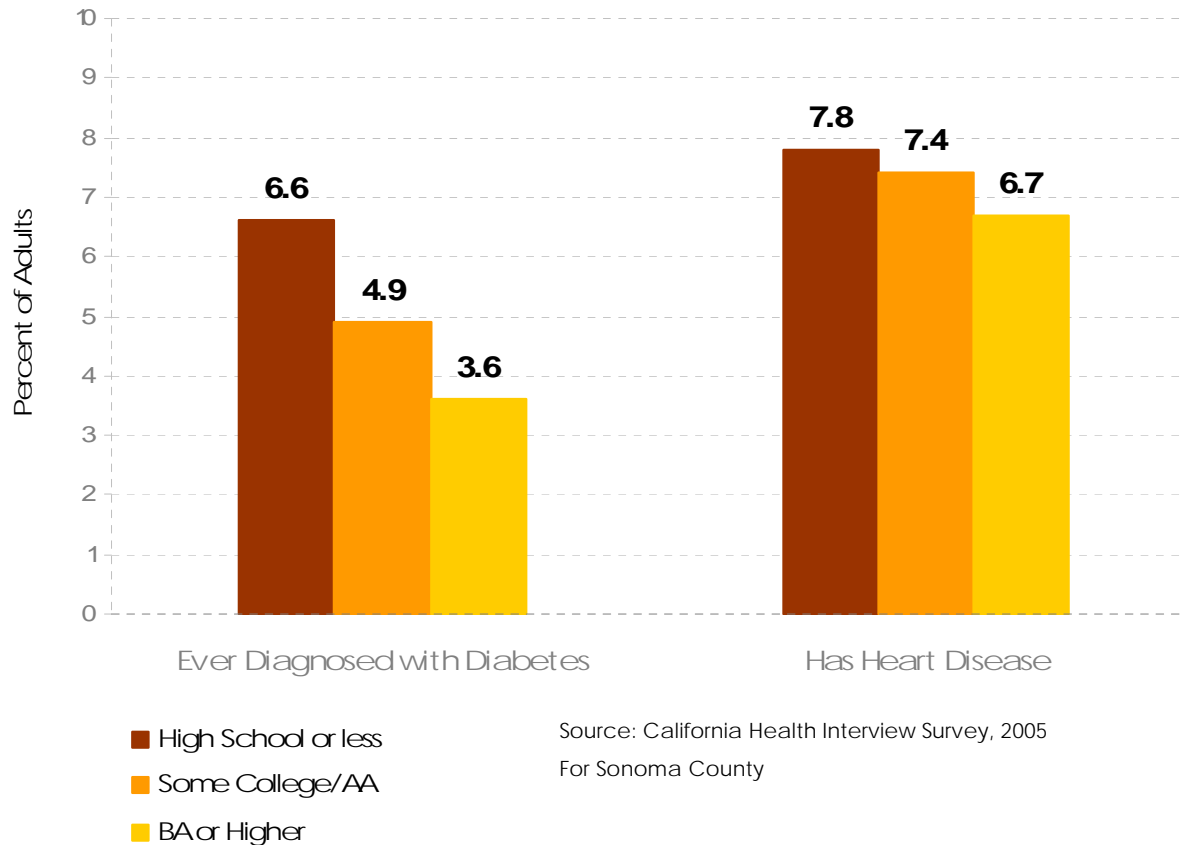
# Lower Income, Higher Proportion of Diabetes

Sonoma County residents with lower income are twice as likely to report ever being diagnosed with diabetes.



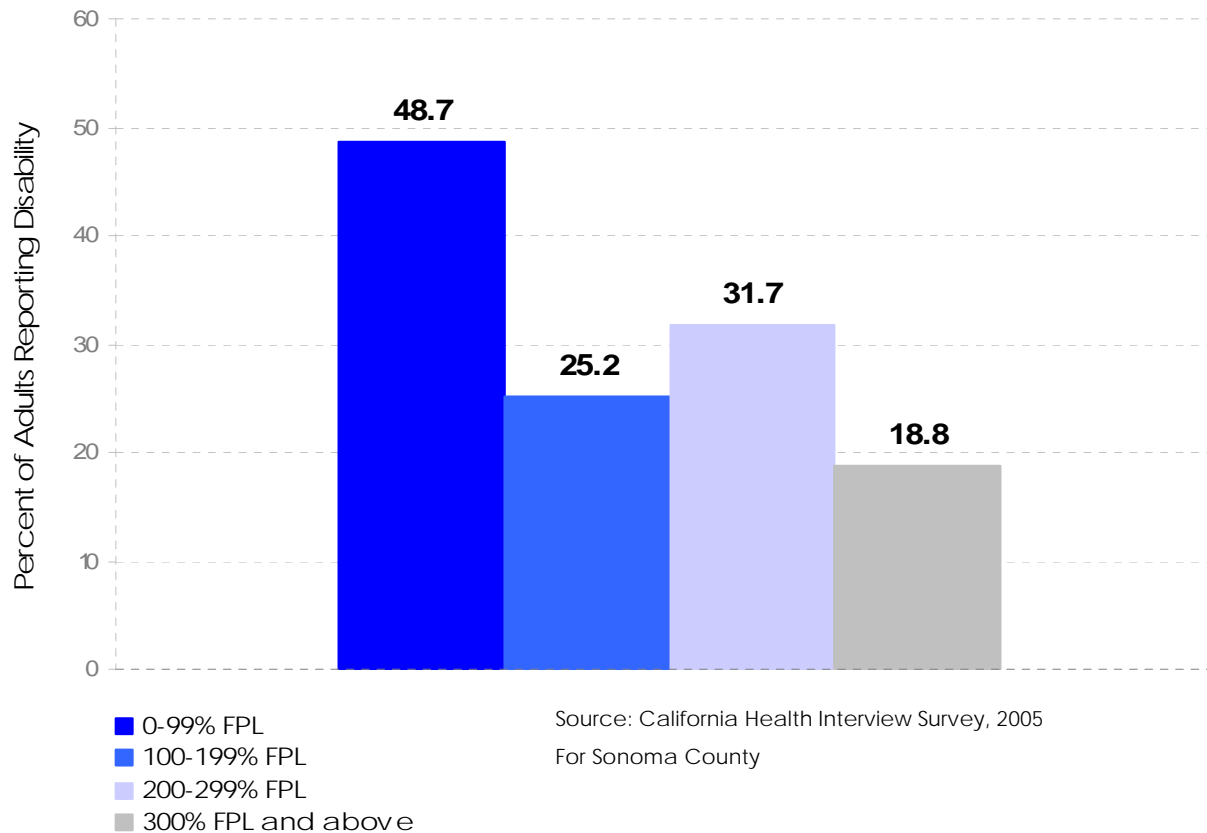
# Education Affects Levels of Chronic Disease

Sonoma County residents with higher levels of education tend to have lower levels of diabetes and heart disease.



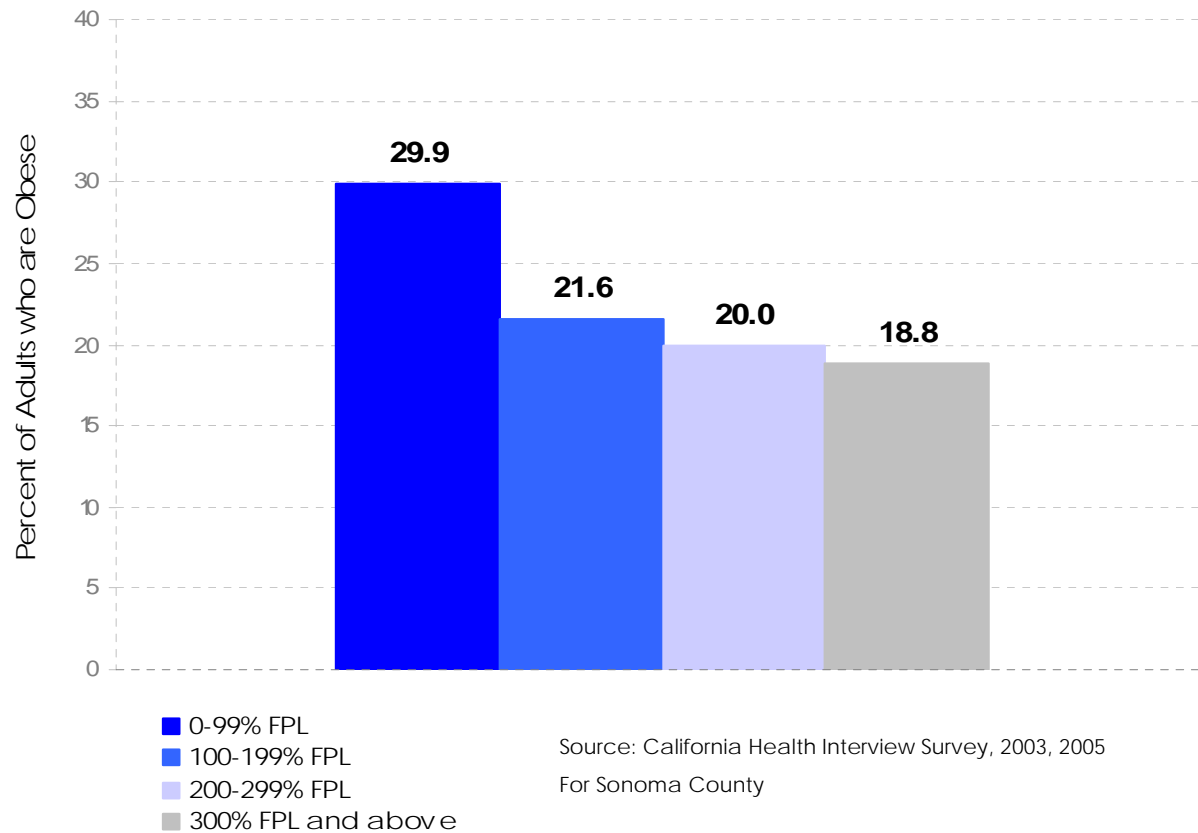
# Income and Disability are Interrelated

Persons in the lowest income category were two and a half times more likely to report a disability compared to those in the highest income category.



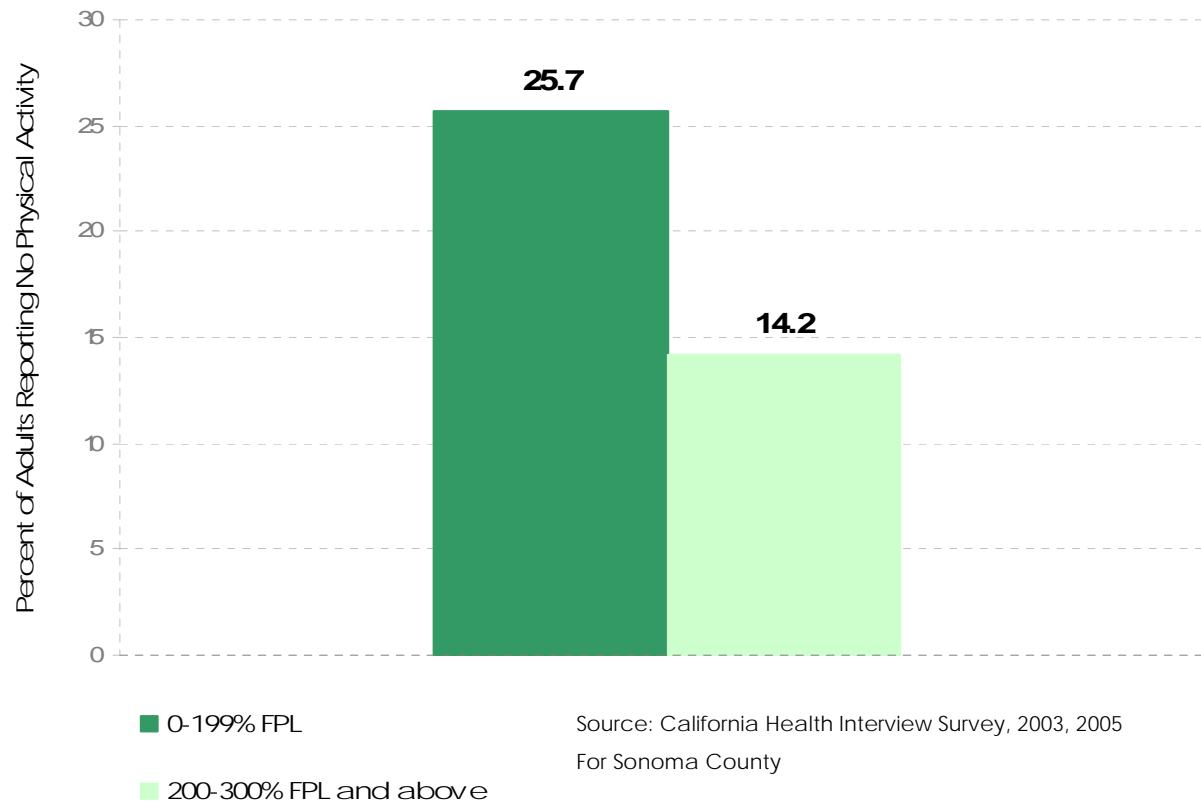
# Less Income, More Obesity

Sonoma County residents in the lowest income category more often report obesity compared to those in higher income categories.



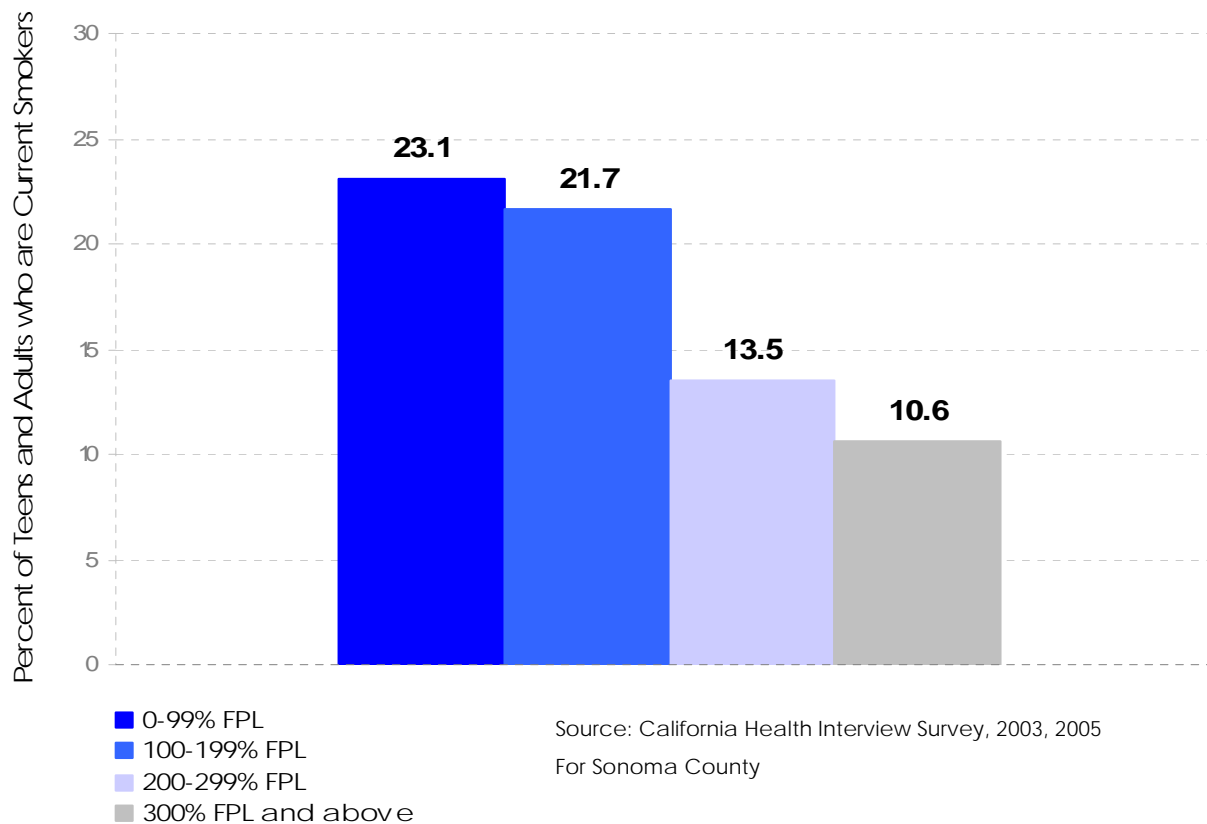
# Higher Income, More Physical Activity

In Sonoma County, people with lower income are almost twice as likely to report no physical activity. One in four persons under 200% of the FPL reported no physical activity.



# Smoking Status Varies by Income

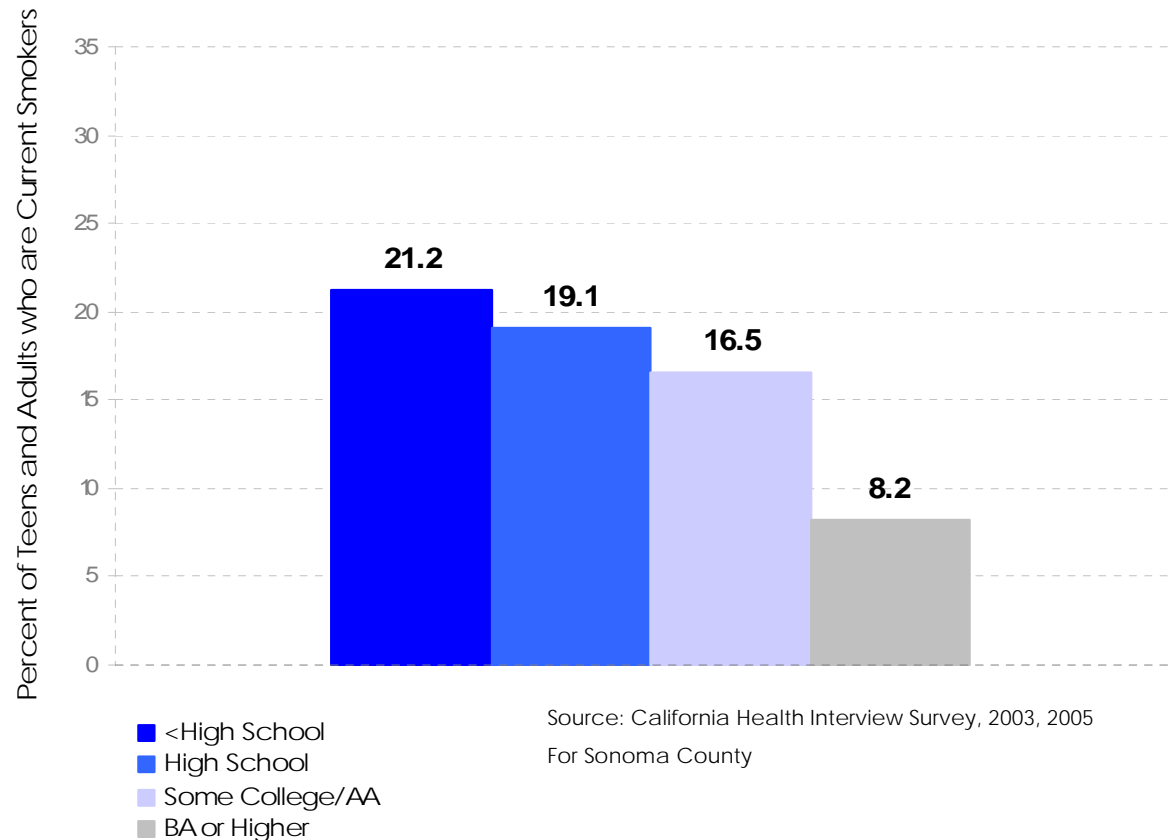
Adults and teens in the lowest income category are over twice as likely to be current smokers compared to those in the highest income category.



Source: California Health Interview Survey, 2003, 2005  
For Sonoma County

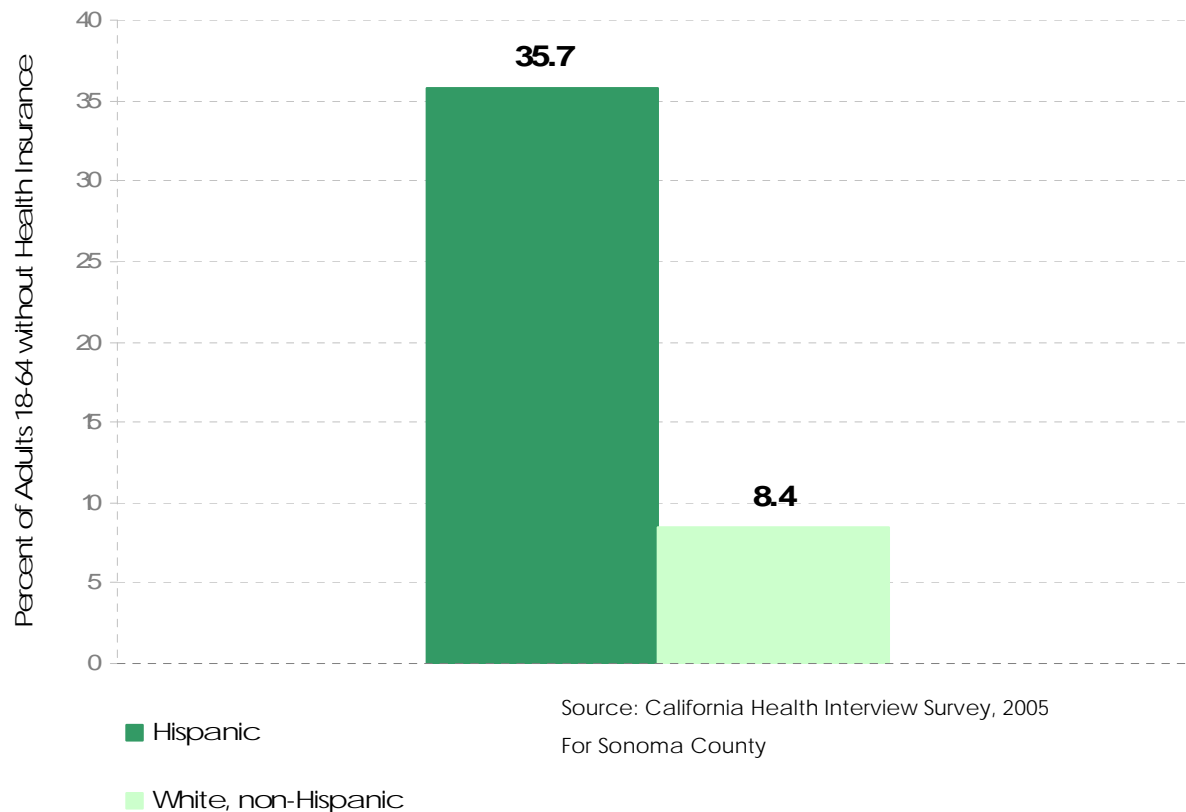
# More Education, Less Smoking

Sonoma County residents who have not completed high school report smoking two and a half times more often than college graduates.



# Access to Health Care is Not Equal

In Sonoma County, Hispanic adults are four times more likely to be uninsured compared to White, non-Hispanic adults.



“Social differences in health can be reduced, but only if solutions can be identified to address their root causes.

The greatest potential lies in solutions that will help people *choose health*.

That means both strengthening individuals' ability to make healthy choices and removing obstacles to choosing health.

It also means creating more opportunities to be healthy.”

Taken from: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “Overcoming Obstacles to Health, A report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to the Commission on Building a Better America.” February, 2008: p. 9.  
<<http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/obstaclestohealth.pdf>>