



HSC Statistical Brief



Gender Differences in Life Expectancy, Mortality, and Health-Related Behaviors, West Virginia, 2003 Brief No. 15

In general, women live longer than men. This is true nationwide, in every one of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. In 2003, the estimated life expectancy in the United States was 77.6, 74.8 for men and 80.1 for women. This was a substantial increase from 1990, when the overall average life expectancy was 75.4, 71.8 for men and 78.8 for women. The gap between men and women narrowed, from 6.97 years in 1990 to 5.30 in 2003.

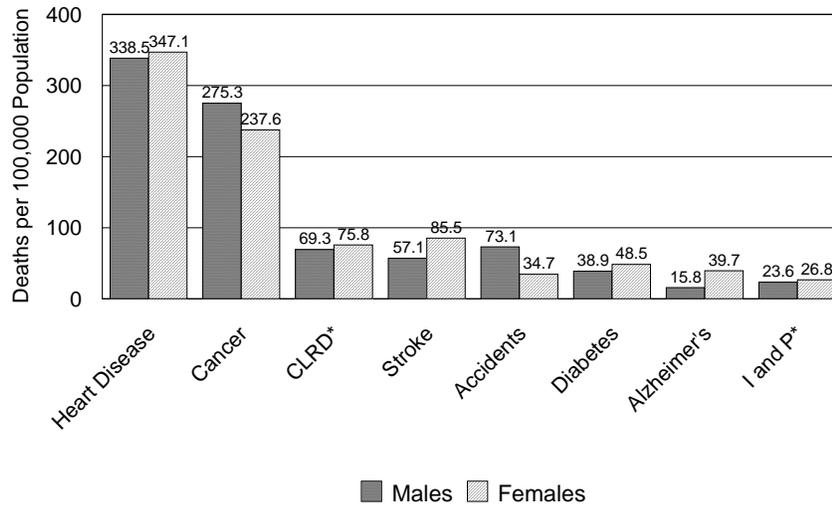
The National Center for Health Statistics calculates average life expectancies by state decennially, using three years of data centered on census years. The latest state information currently available is that for 1989-1991 (NCHS, May 1998). According to these data, West Virginia ranked 44th among the states and D.C. in overall average lifetime. At that time, the average life expectancy for West Virginia residents was 74.26, 70.53 for men (1.27 years less than the U.S. average) and 77.93 for women (0.87 years less than the U.S. average). The gap in life expectancy between men and women in the state was 7.40 years.

CAUSES OF DEATH. The leading cause of death for both men and women in West Virginia in 2003 was heart disease. The state's rates for heart disease mortality in that year differed little by gender, 338.5 deaths per 100,000 men and 347.1 deaths per 100,000 women. The gender-specific rates for West Virginia's eight leading causes of death in 2003 are shown in the graph on page 2. Men had higher rates of mortality from cancer (13.7% higher) and unintentional injury (accidents) (52.5% higher). Women were 8.6% more likely than men to die from chronic lower respiratory diseases, 11.9% more likely to die from influenza and pneumonia, 19.9% more likely to die from diabetes, 33.2% more likely to die from stroke, and 60.2% more likely to die from Alzheimer's disease. Stroke, influenza and pneumonia, and Alzheimer's disease are all more likely to occur among older people, making women, with their longer life spans, more vulnerable to death from these causes.

While 64.4% of all 2003 unintentional injury deaths were male, 69.1% of motor vehicle accident deaths occurred among males, as did two-thirds (66.6%) of poisoning deaths. In fact, of all categories of unintentional injury mortality, only deaths from falls were more likely to occur among women than men (51.7% versus 48.3%, respectively).

Intentional injury deaths (i.e., suicide and homicide) were markedly more likely to occur among men. Of the 278 suicides in West Virginia in 2003, 234, or 84.2%, were males. The state had 92 homicides in 2003; of these, 63, or 68.5%, were males.

Leading Causes of Death by Gender
West Virginia Residents, 2003



*Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases; Influenza and Pneumonia
Rates calculated using 2003 Census population estimates.

PREMATURE DEATHS. Years of potential life lost (YPLL) before age 75 are a measure of premature death, calculated as the difference between age 75 (an average lifespan in the United States) and the age at death. The sum of YPLL across all causes of death represents the total for all people dying before the age of 75. A person who dies at the age of 45, for example, would contribute 30 years to the total YPLL (75-45=30). According to 2001 data, West Virginia ranked 44th among the 50 states in total YPLL, with 8,923 YPLL per 100,000 population, compared with a U.S. rate of 7,521 YPLL per 100,000 population.

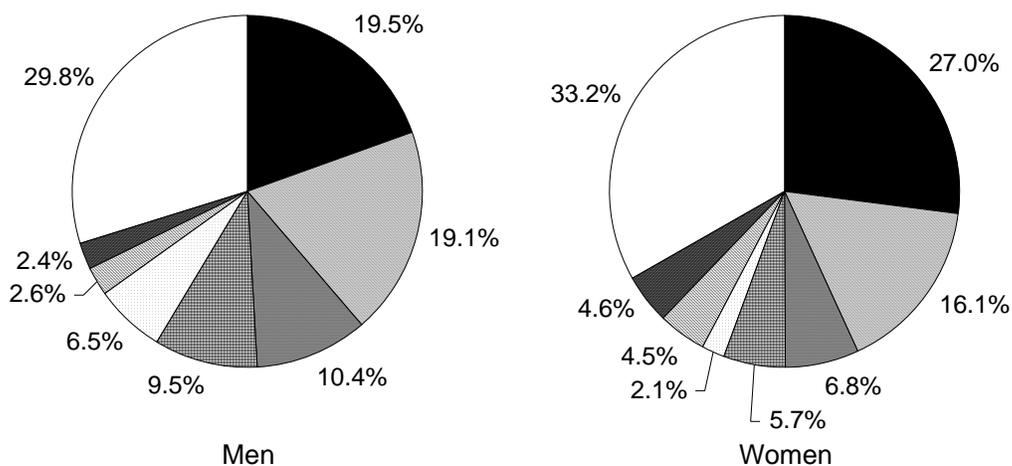
In 2003, there were a total of 161,585 YPLL in West Virginia. Of these, 101,336 (62.7%) were among men and 60,249 (37.3%) among women, illustrating the fact that men are more likely to die prematurely than are women. The table on the following page presents the leading causes of YPLL in 2003 by gender. The graph illustrates the differences in the distribution of YPLL.

Of the ten leading causes of YPLL, men were more likely than women to die before the age of 75 from cancer, heart disease, non-motor vehicle accidents, motor vehicle accidents, suicide, perinatal conditions (certain causes of infant deaths), chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, and stroke. The differences were most pronounced in deaths from heart disease, non-motor vehicle accidents, and motor vehicle accidents. The only causes from which women were more likely to die prematurely were diabetes and chronic lower respiratory diseases.

Leading Causes of YPLL* by Gender West Virginia Residents, 2003			
Cause of Death	Men	Women	Total
All Causes	101,336	60,249	161,585
Cancer	19,710	16,290	36,000
Heart Disease	19,302	9,691	28,993
Non-Motor Vehicle Accidents	10,506	4,107	14,613
Motor Vehicle Accidents	9,624	3,442	13,066
Suicide	6,566	1,264	7,830
Diabetes Mellitus	2,667	2,684	5,351
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	2,461	2,759	5,220
Perinatal Conditions	3,204	1,863	5,066
Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis	3,150	871	4,021
Stroke	2,108	1,804	3,912
All Other Causes	22,038	15,474	37,512

*Years of potential life lost before age 75

Distribution of Leading Causes of YPLL by Gender
West Virginia Residents, 2003



Cancer
 Non-MVA Injury
 Suicide
 CLRD

Heart Disease
 MVA Injury
 Diabetes
 All Other

Health is a product of many factors, including genetics, life style, and socioeconomic influences. It has been estimated 43% of mortality is due to our life styles, or the health behaviors we practice during our lifetimes.¹ As a rule, nonsmokers live longer than smokers, heavy drinkers die sooner than moderate drinkers or persons who do not drink at all, individuals who use seatbelts while driving or riding in a car are more likely to survive an accident, and so on. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) measures certain behaviors among adults (aged 18 and older) that have been associated with the occurrence of chronic disease or injury. The table below presents BRFSS data from 2003 by gender for selected behaviors.

Prevalence (%) of Selected Health Behaviors by Gender West Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2003			
Health Behavior	Men	Women	Total
Current Cigarette Smoking	27.6	27.1	27.3
Smokeless Tobacco Use	15.9*	0.3	7.7
Obesity**	30.5*	25.0	27.7
Overweight**	39.0*	29.2	34.0
Physical Inactivity	24.9*	30.9	28.0
High Blood Pressure	35.0	32.3	33.6
High Cholesterol	33.8*	41.7	38.1
Not Using Seatbelts (2002)	32.6*	19.2	25.6
Heavier Drinking (>2 drinks/day for men and >1 drink /day for women)	4.5*	1.9	3.1
Binge Drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion)	16.8*	5.9	11.1

*Denotes a statistically significant gender difference (using a 95% confidence interval).
 **Obesity is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater; overweight is defined as having a BMI of 25-29.

Overall, little difference in current cigarette smoking was reported by men and women, but men were significantly more likely to use smokeless tobacco. Men were also significantly more likely than women to report being either overweight or obese, being a heavy or binge drinker, or not always wearing a seatbelt. Women, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to be physically inactive or have been diagnosed with high cholesterol. Men were slightly more likely to report having high blood pressure, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Men on average have shorter life expectancies than women. They are more likely than women to die prematurely, i.e., before the age of 75. Injury deaths in particular occur much more frequently among men, but men are also more likely to die at a younger age from heart disease, cancer, and chronic liver disease and cirrhosis. These facts are supported by BRFSS data that indicate that men are more likely than women to engage in negative health behaviors such as nonuse of seatbelts, alcohol misuse, and poor nutrition leading to obesity and overweight.

¹Alan Dever, *Social Indicators Research* 2, p.462, 1976