

PATHWAYS TO HEALTH SUMMIT

Hosted by the Harris Health Sheila Jackson Lee Center for Accelerating Health Outcomes



OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Esmail Porsa

MD, MBA, MPH, CCHP-A

President and Chief Executive Officer, Harris Health

ANNOUNCING 2026 WINNER

Garnet F. Coleman Health Equity Award

CONGRATULATIONS TO

The Metropolitan Organization (TMO)

Thank you for the difference you continue to make for our communities!

INTRODUCING

Louis Smith

**MHA, Sr. Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer,
Harris Health**

INTRODUCING

Dr. Ruth N. López Turley

**PhD, Professor of Sociology,
Director, Kinder Institute for Urban Research
Rice University**

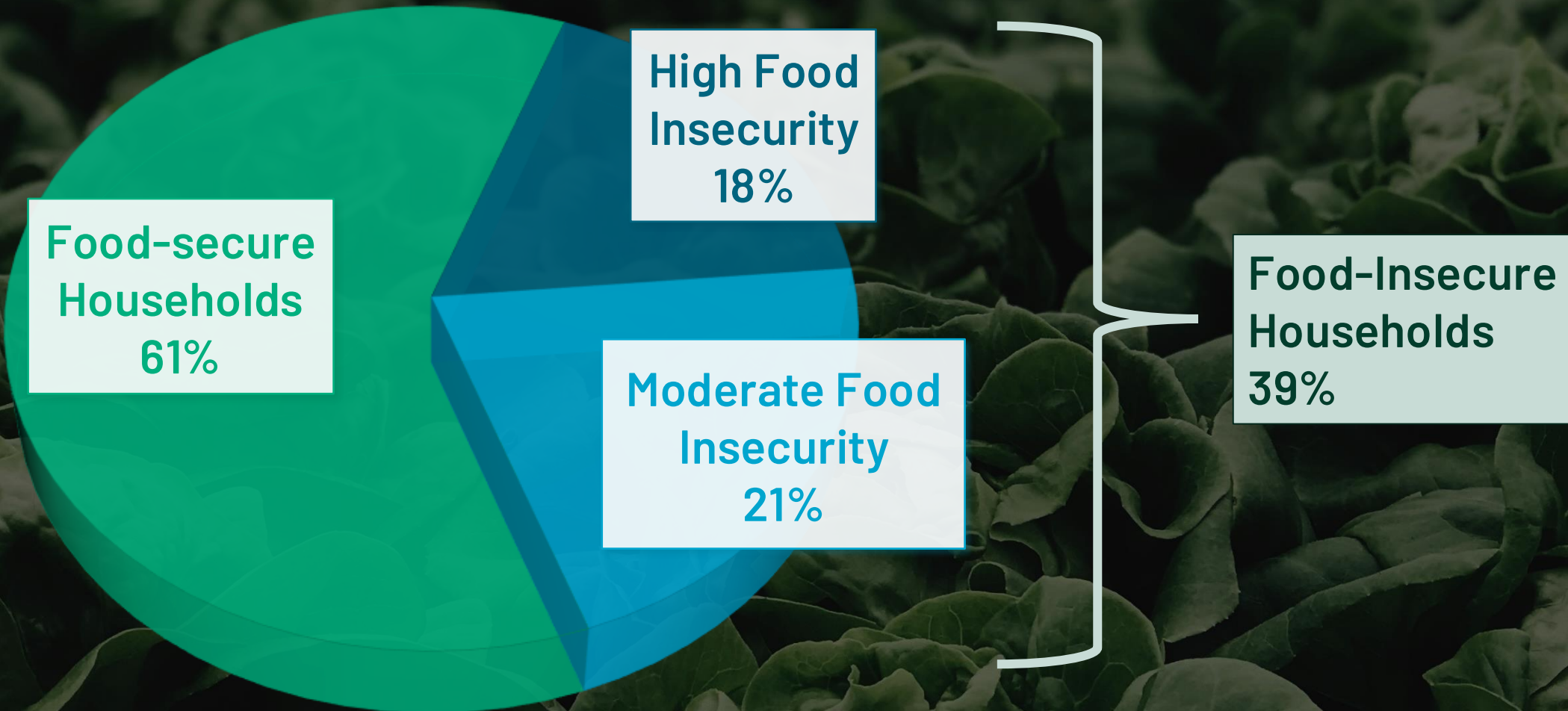
KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Socioeconomic Pathways to Health

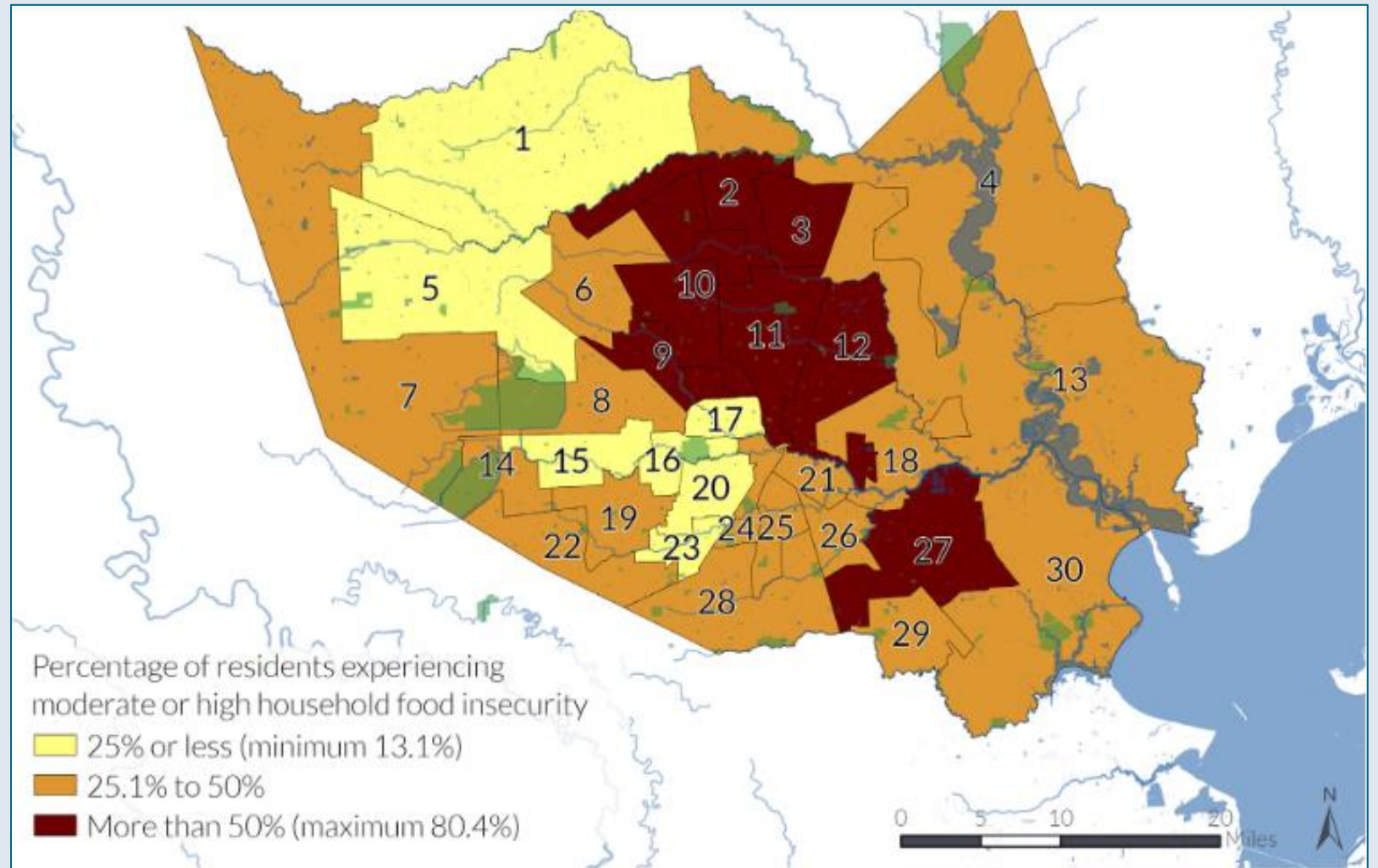
Ruth N. López Turley, PhD
Professor of Sociology and Director,
Kinder Institute for Urban Research,
Rice University



Food Insecurity in Harris County

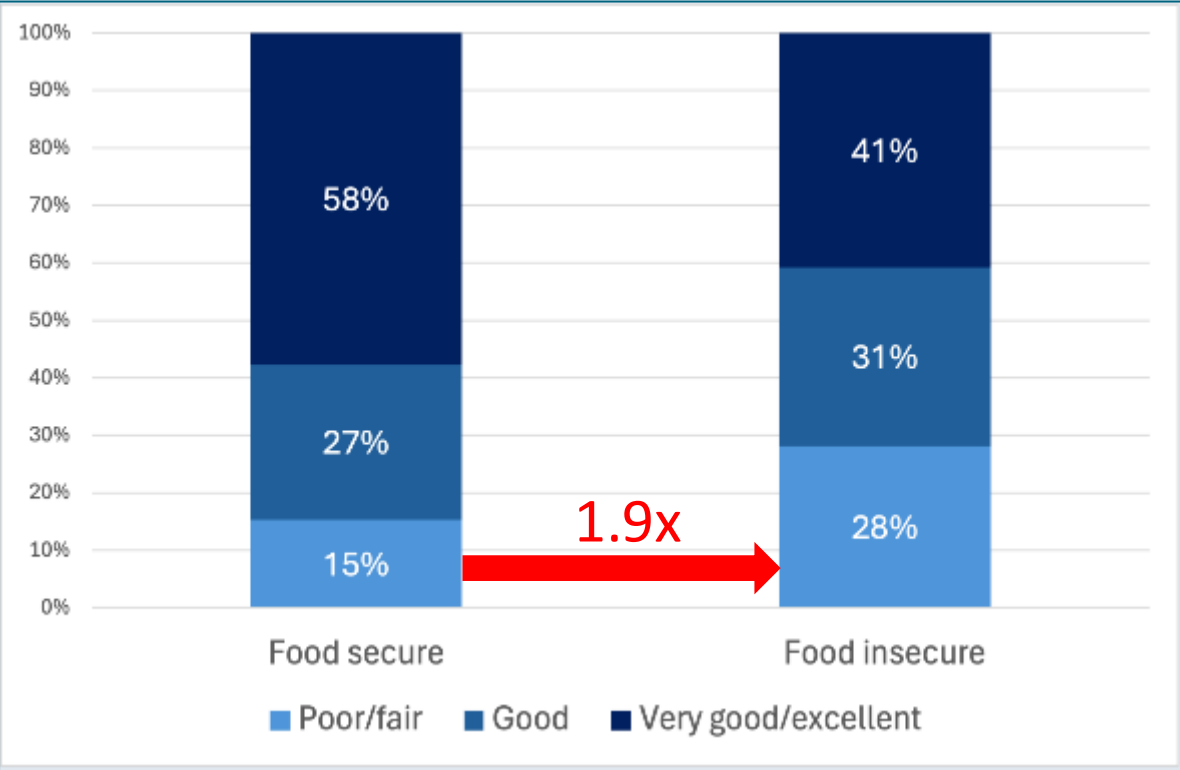


Household Food Insecurity by Neighborhood Area

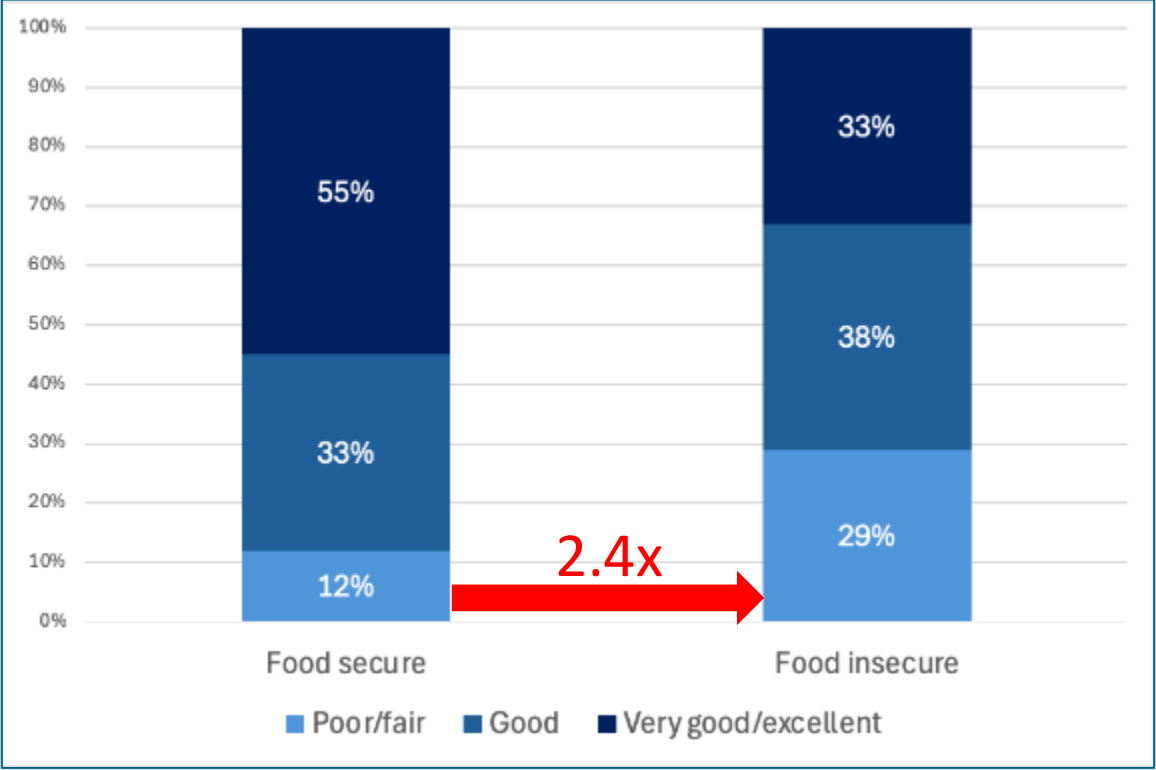


Food-insecure households face 2x risk of poor health

Mental Health Ratings



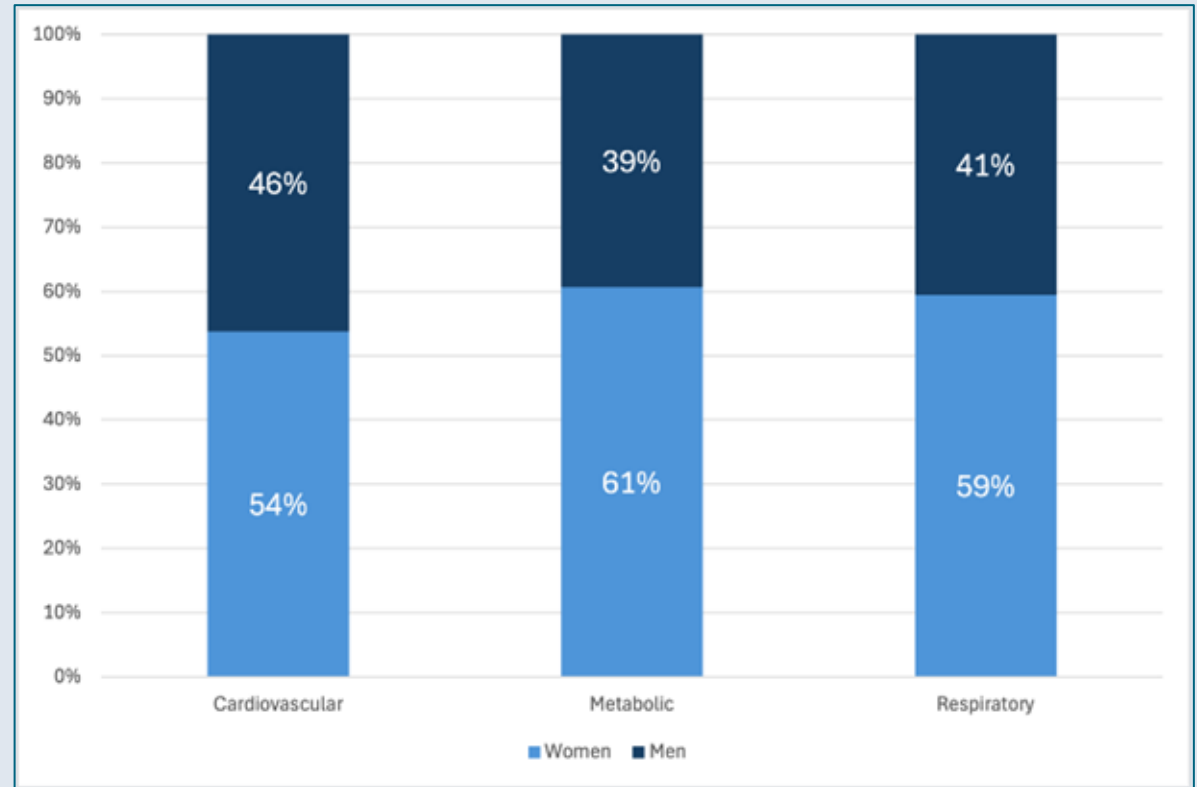
Physical Health Ratings



Health conditions among food-insecure households

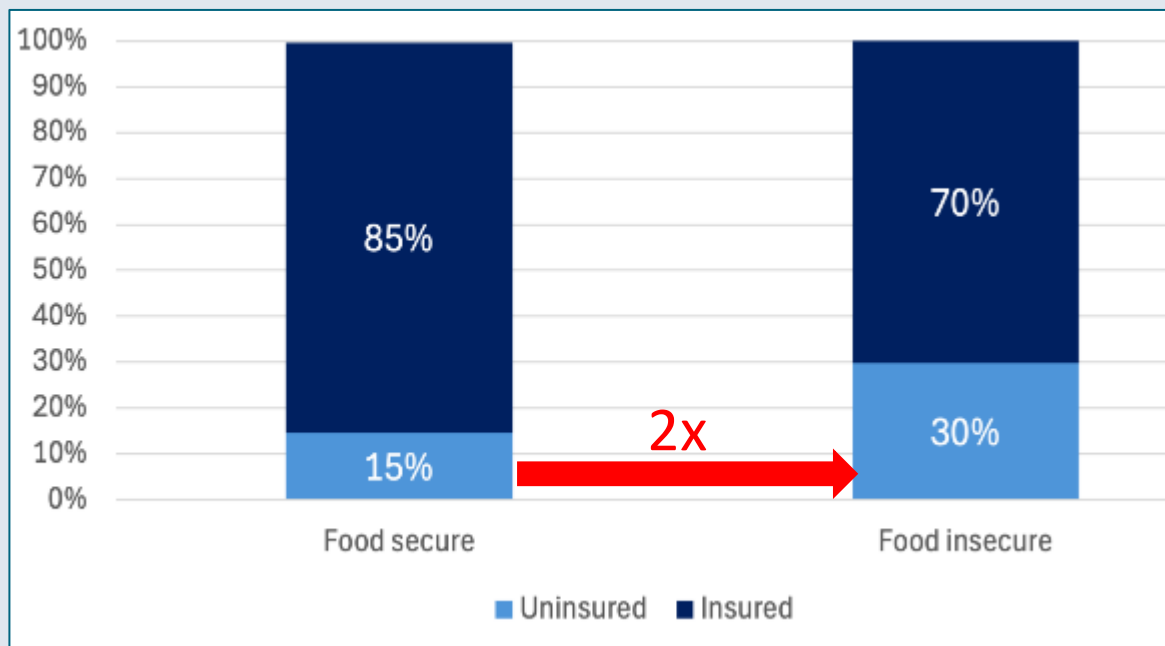
Nearly 2 in 3 residents in food-insecure households report a physical health condition, which are more common for women.

Physical Health Conditions

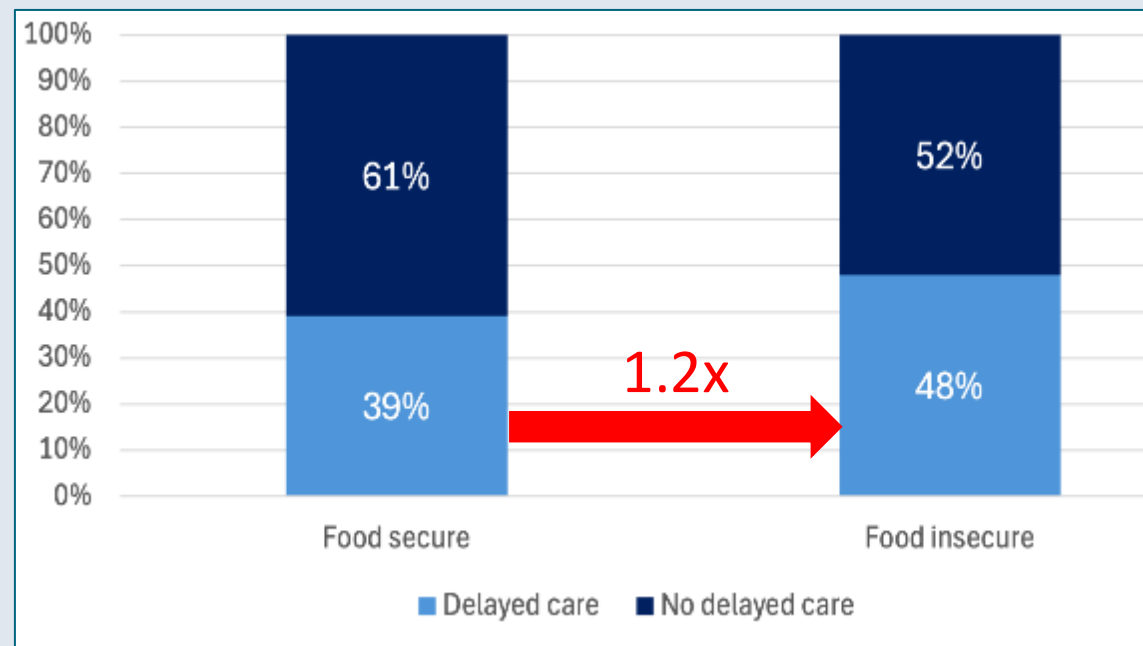


Food-insecure more likely to be uninsured & face delayed medical care

Insurance Status

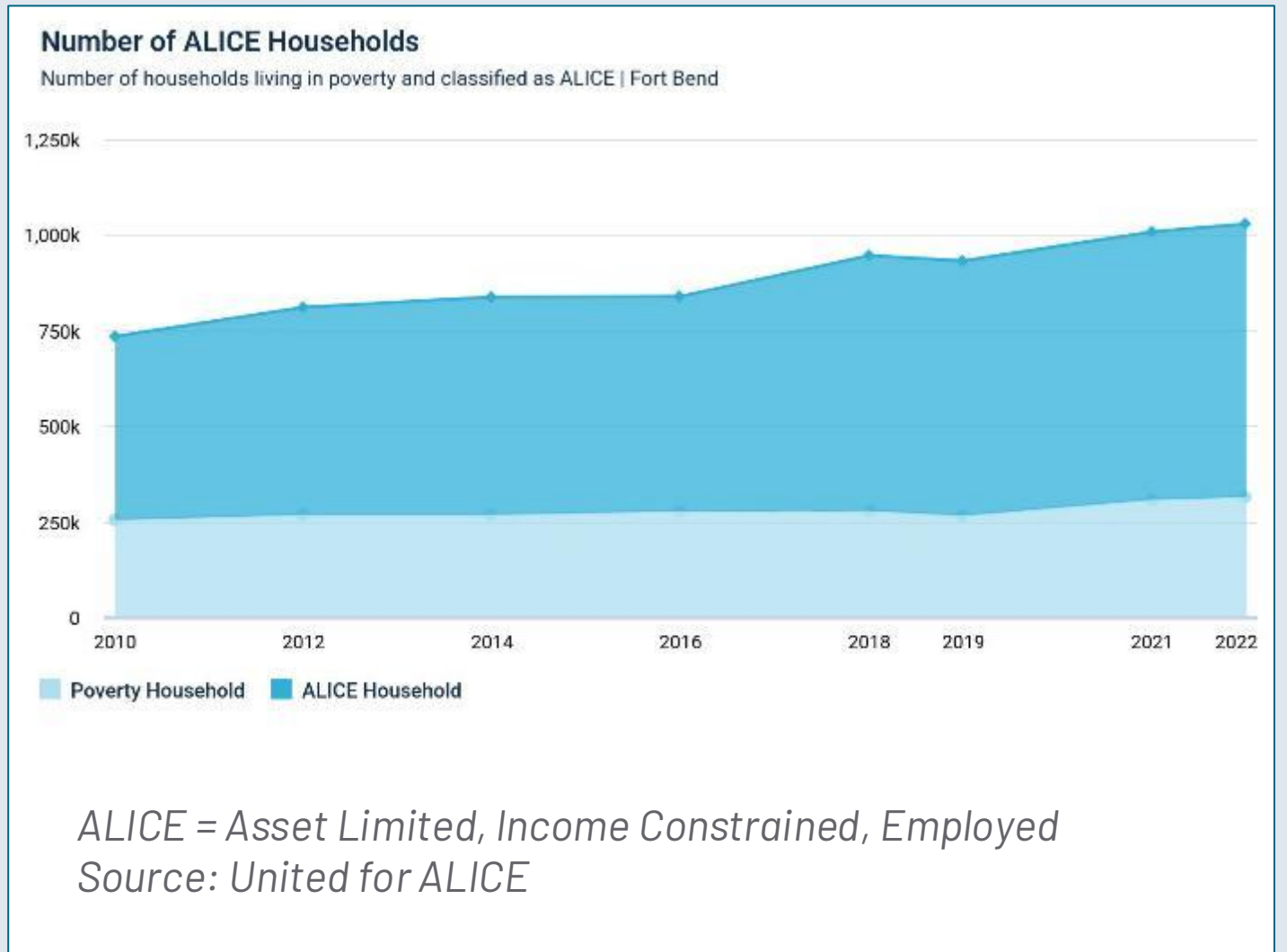


Medical Delays



Economic Insecurity

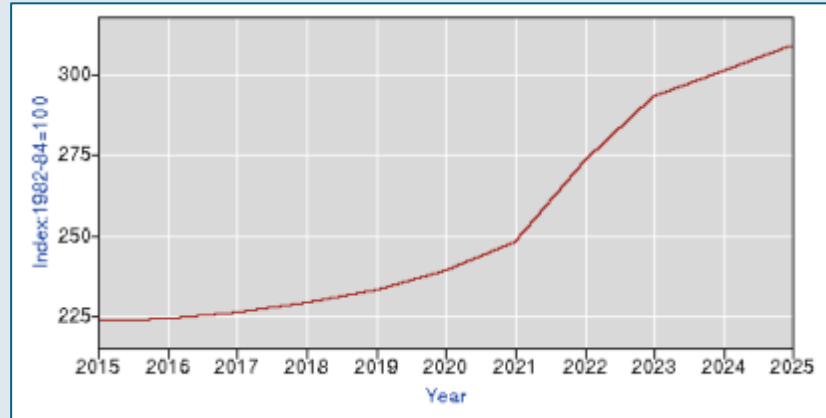
- The official poverty measure is not a strong indicator of economic insecurity
- ALICE represents families who are working but unable to afford basic necessities
- Over 1 million households in 3-county area (44%) are poor or ALICE
- ALICE households are growing faster, due to rising costs & stagnant wages



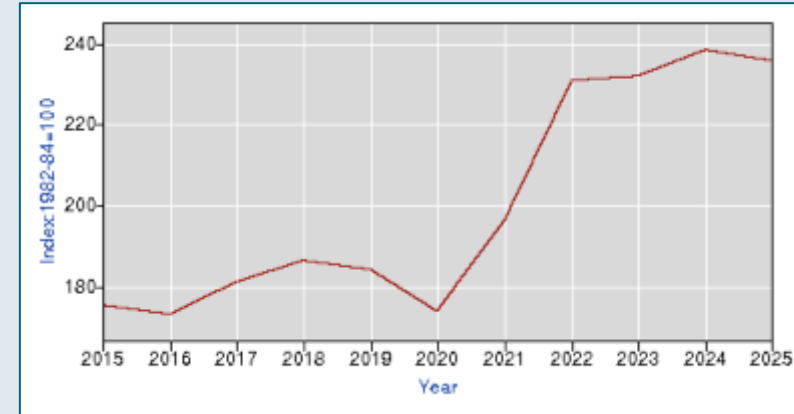
Rising Cost of Living

Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) for Houston Metro

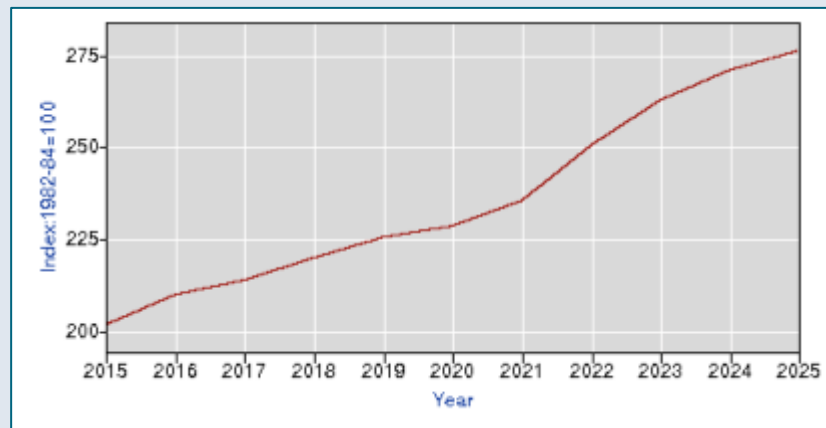
Food & Beverages



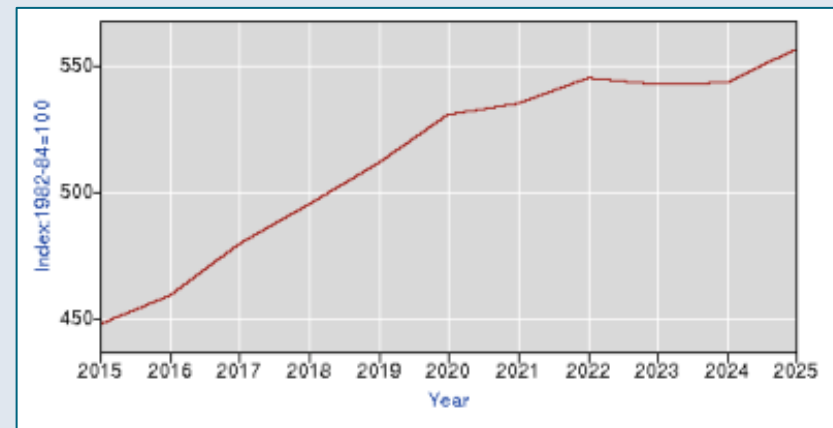
Transportation



Housing

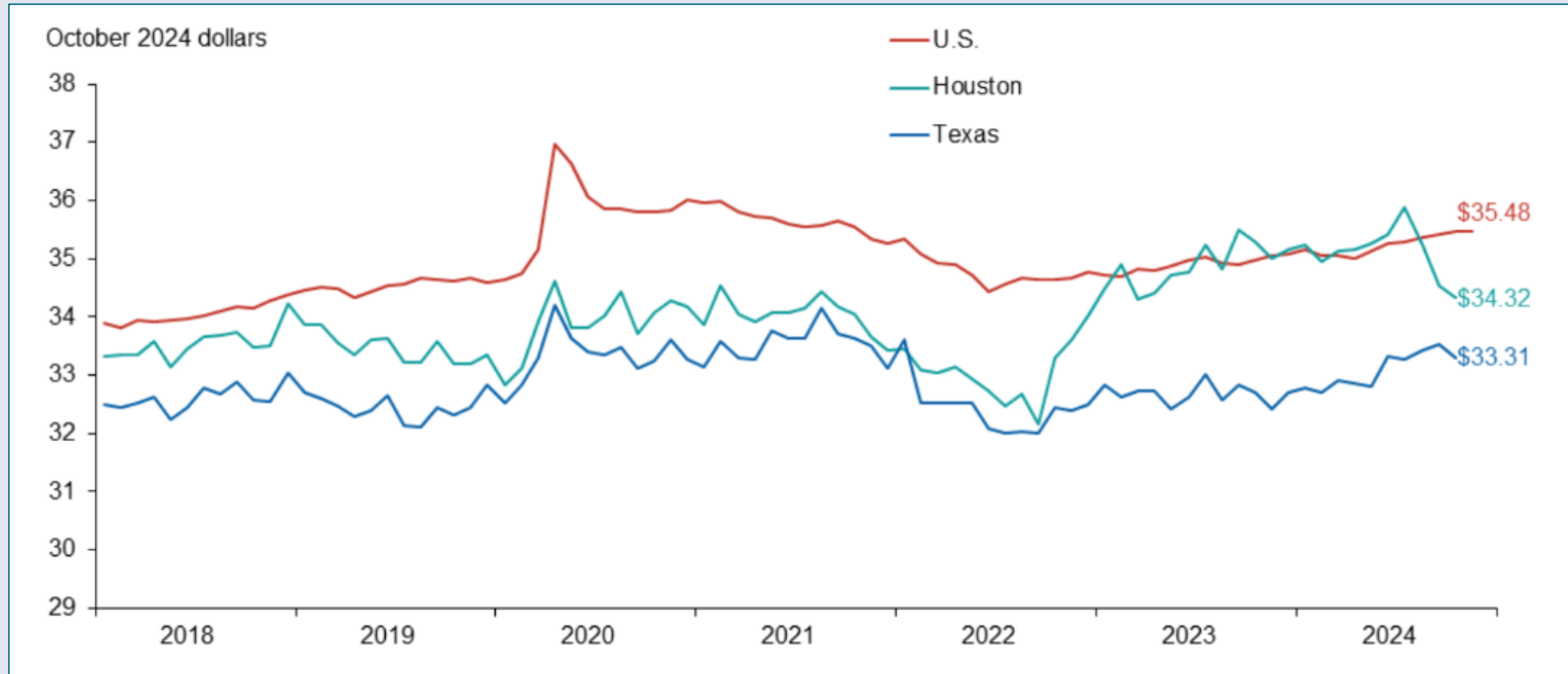


Medical Care



Meanwhile... Real Earnings Hold Steady

Houston Average Hourly Earnings



Houston's Challenge

How can more people benefit from Houston's big, booming economy?

**GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT OF METRO HOUSTON
COMPARED TO TOP NATIONS**

Country	GDP \$ Billion	Country	GDP \$ Billion
1 United States	27,721	14 South Korea	1,713
2 China	17,795	15 Spain	1,620
3 Germany	4,526	16 Indonesia	1,371
4 Japan	4,204	17 Netherlands	1,154
5 India	3,568	18 Turkey	1,118
6 U.K.	3,381	19 Saudi Arabia	1,068
7 France	3,052	20 Switzerland	885
8 Italy	2,301	21 Poland	809
9 Brazil	2,174	-- Metro Houston	697
10 Canada	2,142	22 Argentina	646
11 Russia	2,021	23 Belgium	645
12 Mexico	1,789	24 Sweden	585
13 Australia	1,728	25 Ireland	551

Source: Partnership analysis of World Bank and BEA '23 data

**20 MOST POPULOUS U.S. METRO AREAS
RANKED BY '21 - '23 GDP GROWTH RATE**

Rank	Metro Area	GDP (\$ Billion)		Growth '21-'23 (%)
		'21	'23	
1	Houston	557.3	697.0	25.1
2	Miami	434.5	533.7	22.8
3	Tampa Bay	198.2	243.3	22.7
4	Dallas	612.2	744.7	21.6
5	Phoenix	329.6	398.1	20.8
6	Denver	260.3	311.9	19.8
7	Atlanta	483.5	570.7	18.0
8	Detroit	282.0	331.3	17.5
9	Seattle	483.6	566.7	17.2
10	Riverside	220.0	256.9	16.7
11	Minneapolis	301.5	350.7	16.3
12	Chicago	770.5	894.9	16.1
13	Philadelphia	481.8	557.6	15.7
14	Washington	618.5	714.7	15.5
15	Baltimore	225.1	259.7	15.4
16	San Diego	273.0	314.9	15.4
17	Los Angeles	1,136.2	1,295.4	14.0
18	Boston	537.6	610.5	13.6
19	New York	2,025.2	2,298.9	13.5
20	San Francisco	703.0	778.9	10.8
U.S. Overall		23,681.2	27,720.7	16.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



RICE UNIVERSITY

Kinder Institute for Urban Research

Houston's Challenge

How can more people benefit from Houston's big, booming economy?

Houston has the highest poverty rate of the U.S.'s 10 most populous cities

The federal poverty income threshold was \$15,940 for one person in 2024.

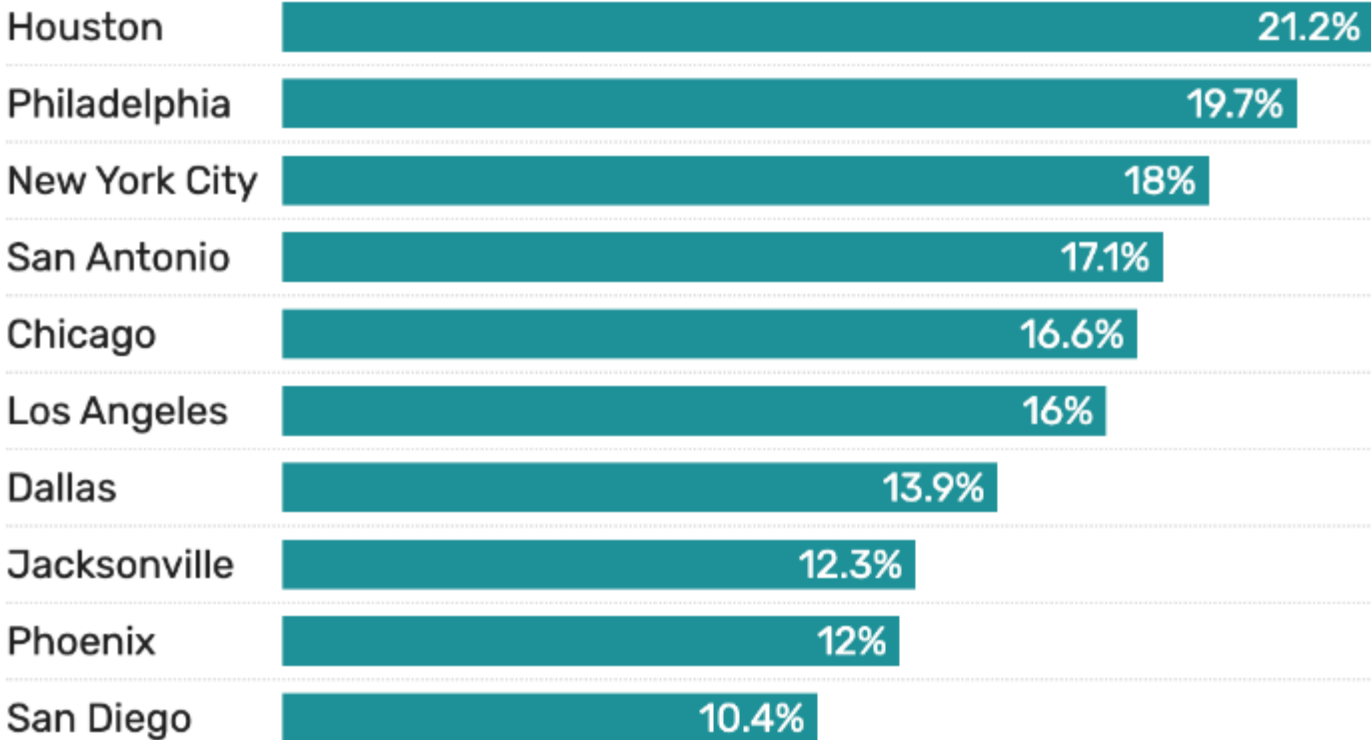
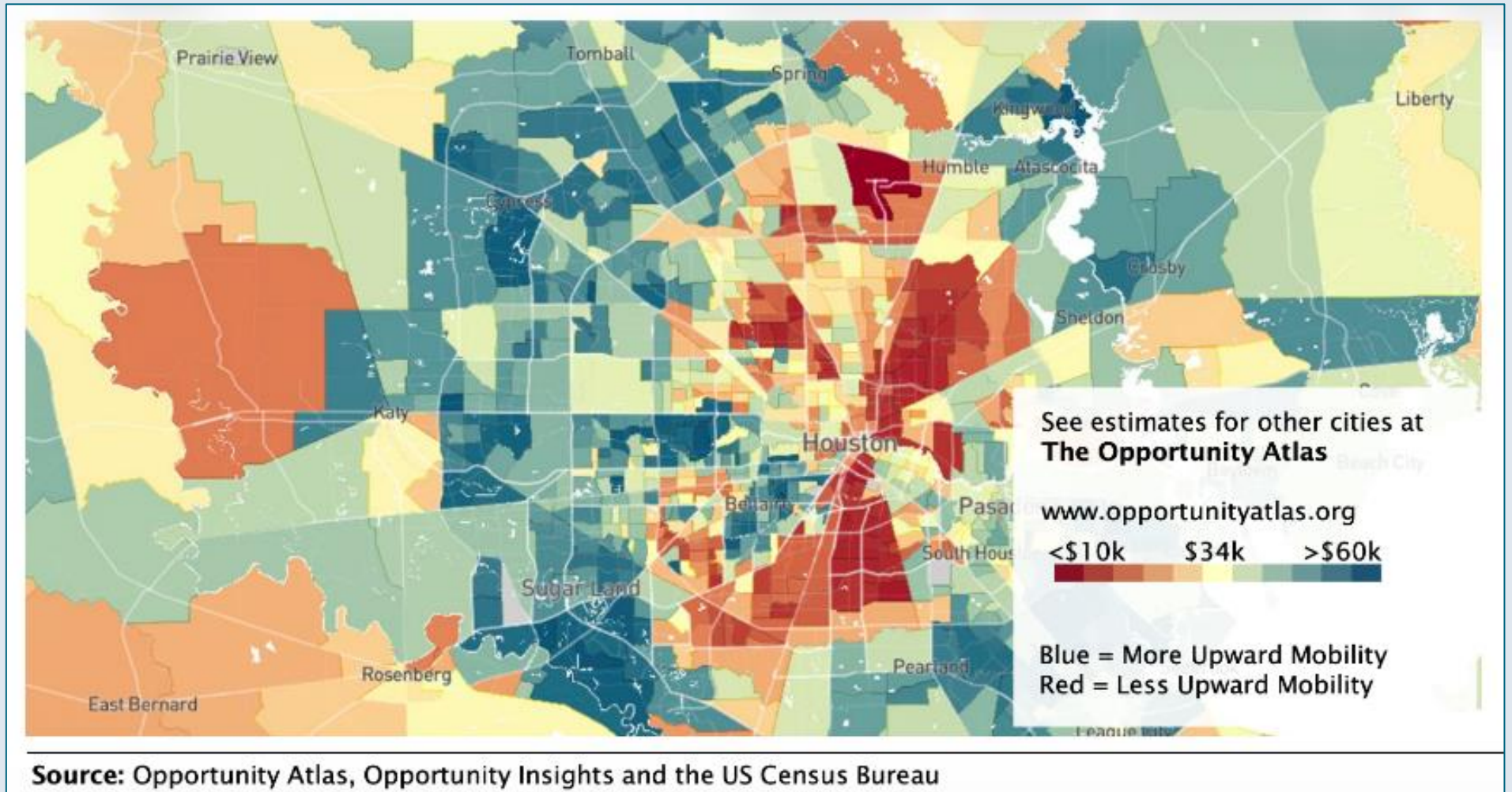


Chart: Maliya Ellis • Source: [2024 American Community Survey](#)



Economic Mobility

Average income at 35 for children born in 1978 whose parents earned \$27k



Economic Mobility

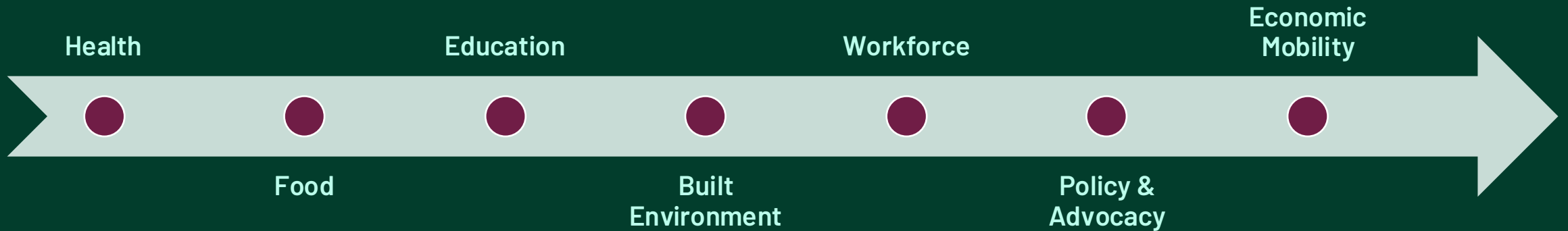


*Forthcoming 2026
Economic Mobility Annual Report*

- Improving economic mobility requires more than individual effort
- It requires systems-level investment
- And systems-level coordination across sectors:
 - education
 - employers
 - training programs
- And monitoring economic mobility over time, not just our usual economic indicators
- Continue community-wide support for food security & health equity
 - **Health** ↔ **Economic Mobility**



Systems-level solutions start with systems-level conversations.



Today, those systems are in the same room at the Pathways to Health Summit.

SESSION 1

Heart Health and Nutrition

INTRODUCING SESSION 1 SPEAKERS

Dr. Shreeela Sharma

PhD, RDN, LD

Professor & Vice Chair, Dept. of Epidemiology
Director, Center for Healthy Communities,
UTHealth Houston School of Public Health

Dr. Esperanza (Hope) Galvan

PhD, MS, CVRN-BC, CDE

Vice President, Population Health, Harris
Health and Sheila Jackson Lee Center for
Accelerating Health Outcomes

Healing Community Through Food for Equitable Health

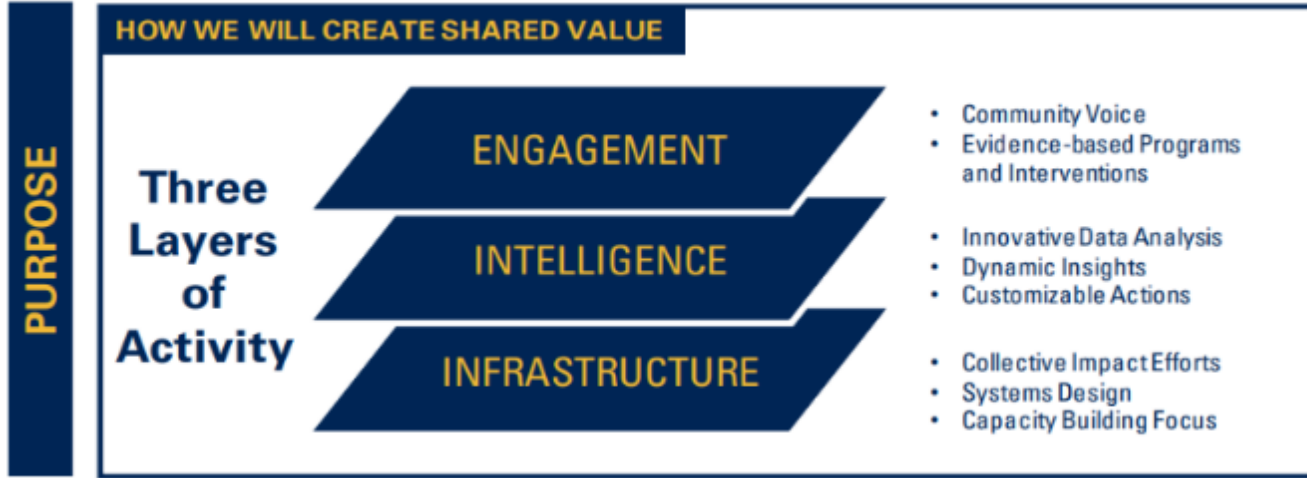
Shreela Sharma, PhD, RDN, LD
Professor & Vice Chair, Dept. of Epidemiology
Director, Center for Healthy Communities,
UTHealth Houston School of Public Health



CENTER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

OUR VISION

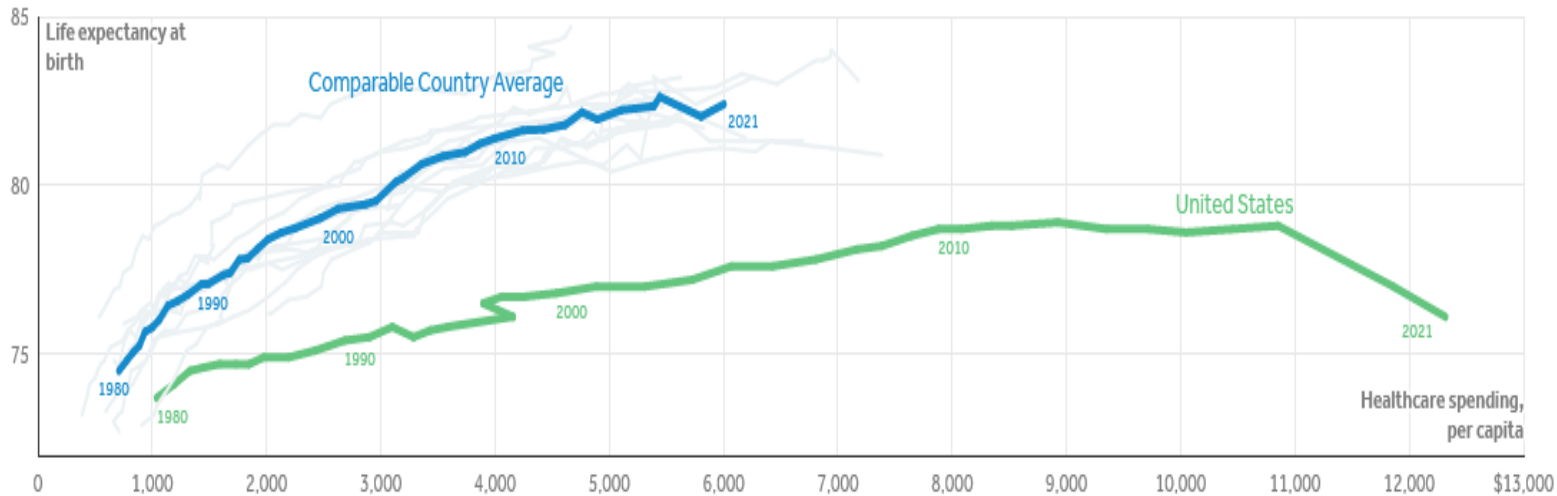
Healthy people across flourishing communities



Policy and Systems	Data and analytics	Interventions (Design, Implementation, Evaluation)
Coalition for Connected Care systems coalition for NMDOH	Spatial epidemiology – mapping and advocacy	Food Is Medicine and Culinary Medicine
Community and Stakeholder Engagement Studio for Research	Food security Nutritional Epidemiology	School-based research- Child Health, Oral health
Policy partnerships – CHLPI, TX NMDOH consortium, TX RPC	Water security	Physical Activity
Community Health Workers	Aging and Brain Health	Medical Legal Partnership
CCC CARE Network for closed-loop referrals		Healthy Aging and Brain Health
		Maternal health

US trajectory: higher cost and worse outcomes than OECD...

Life expectancy and healthcare spending per capita, 1980-2021



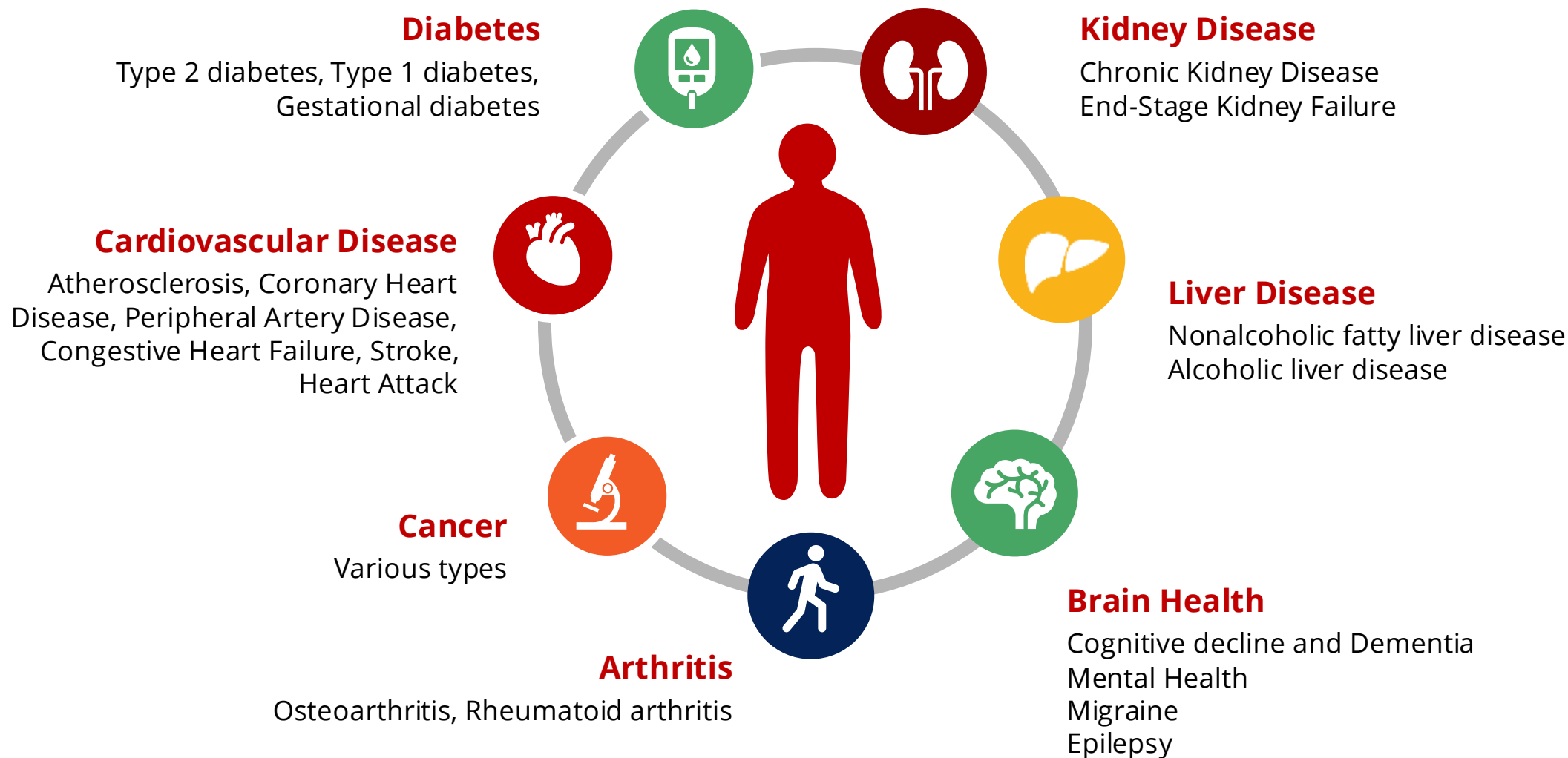
Notes: Comparable countries include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada (except for life expectancy average in 2021), France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. See Methods section of "How does U.S. life expectancy compare to other countries?"

Source: KFF analysis of CDC, OECD, Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and UK Office for Health Improvement and Disparities data • Get the data • PNG

Peterson-KFF
Health System Tracker

- We spend more on medical care and have worse life expectancy than any peer country.
- Americans consume more calories than any other country; higher obesity rates explain about half of lower life expectancy at age 50
- A majority of our health happens outside the clinic.

Food Is Central To Health Outcomes

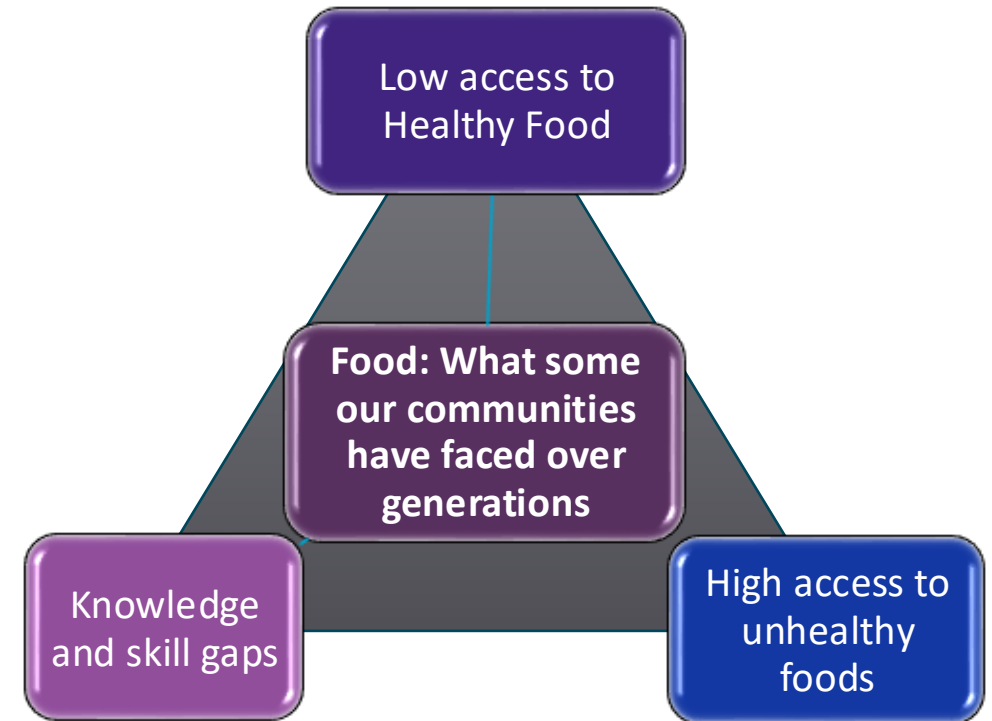
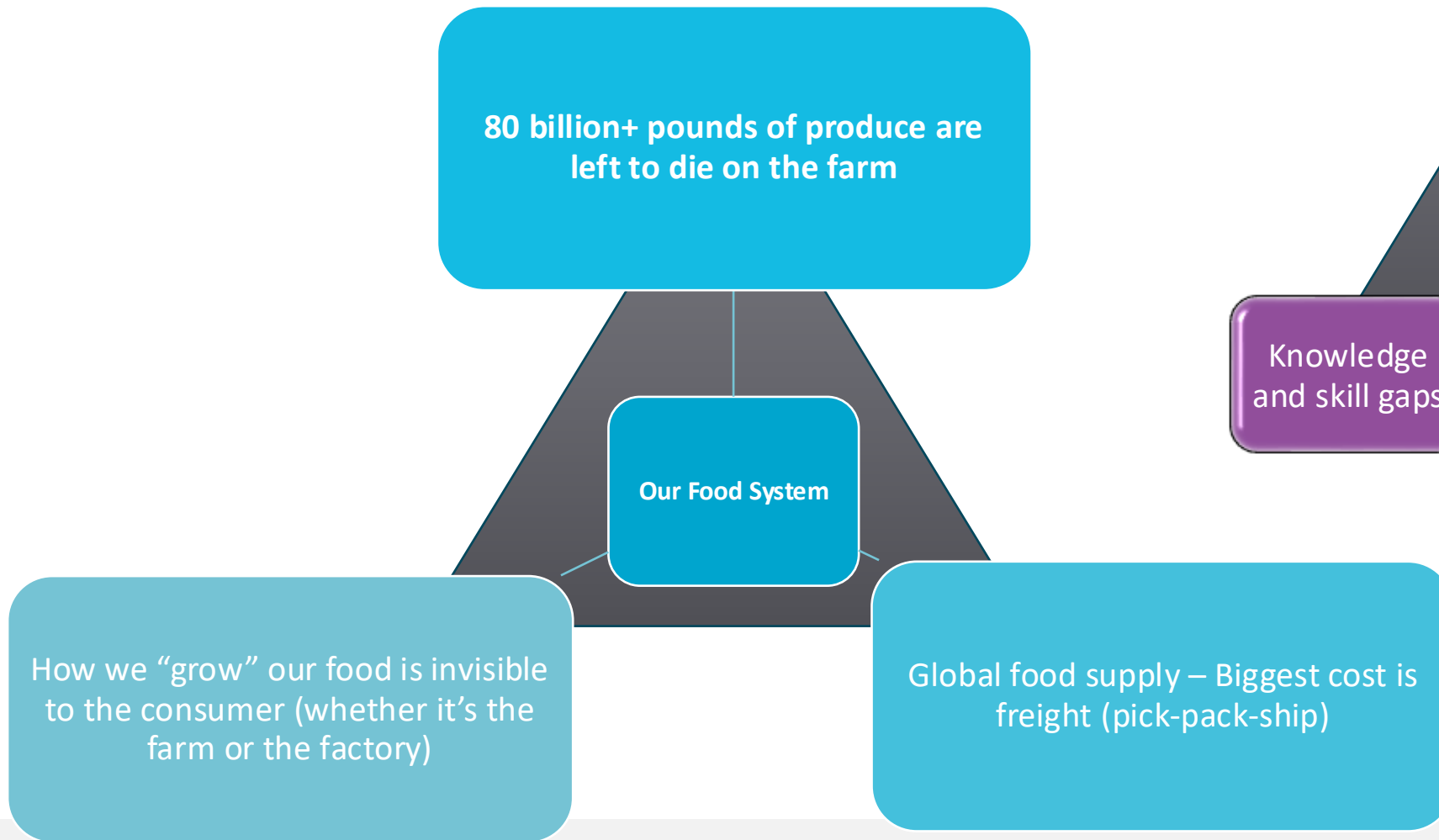




**IF WE KNOW EATING HEALTHY IS GOOD FOR US,
WHY ARE WE NOT DOING IT?**

**OUR FOOD SYSTEM IS BUILT FOR PROFIT,
NOT NOURISHMENT**

A Persistent and Pernicious Problem



Ultra-Processed Food (UPF)

- UPFs, as defined by the NOVA food classification system, **are industrially manufactured products that are typically pre-packaged, energy-dense, and low in nutritional value.**
- UPFs consist of ingredients not commonly found in household kitchens, such as hydrogenated oils, protein isolates, and artificial additives like colorants, emulsifiers, flavor enhancers, and artificial colors.
- Examples include **soft drinks, packaged snack foods, processed meat products, and a variety of ready-to-eat convenience meals.**

What about ultra-processed food and health?



- **Each incremental increase in the proportion of energy from UPFs is associated with higher disease risk**, even after adjustment for total energy intake and key confounders. (Monteiro et al, 2025, The Lancet)
- UPF-related harm cannot be explained solely by excess sugar, salt, fat, or calories. Several **non-nutrient mechanisms** include food matrix disruption, hyperpalatability, phytochemical content, endocrine disruptors (The Lancet, 2025)
- High UPF intake is linked to **faster cognitive decline**, with individuals consuming the most UPFs showing up to 28% faster decline over eight years. (Goncalves et al., 2022, JAMA Neurology)
- Daily consumption of ultra-processed meats **increases cognitive issues** by 17%, and soda by 6%, based on a 7-year study of adults 55+. (Barbey & Davis, 2023, Journal of Nutrition)
- UPFs independently increase risk of stroke and cognitive impairment, **even when overall dietary quality is otherwise high**. (Bhave et al., 2024, Neurology)
- Diets high in UPFs **promote systemic inflammation and disrupt the gut-brain axis**. (Rondinella et al., 2025, Nutrients)

Food Insecurity = Lack of consistent access to food
Those who are food insecure = Higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases

**A Conceptual Framework:
Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease**

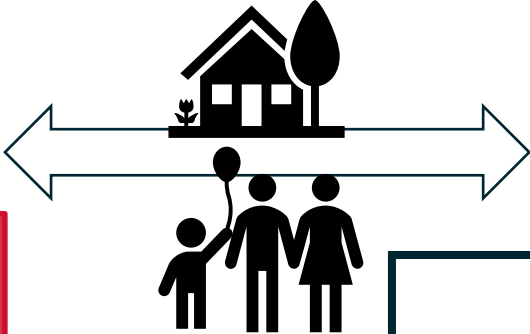


Adapted: Seligman HK, Schillinger D. N Engl J Med. 2010;363:6-9.

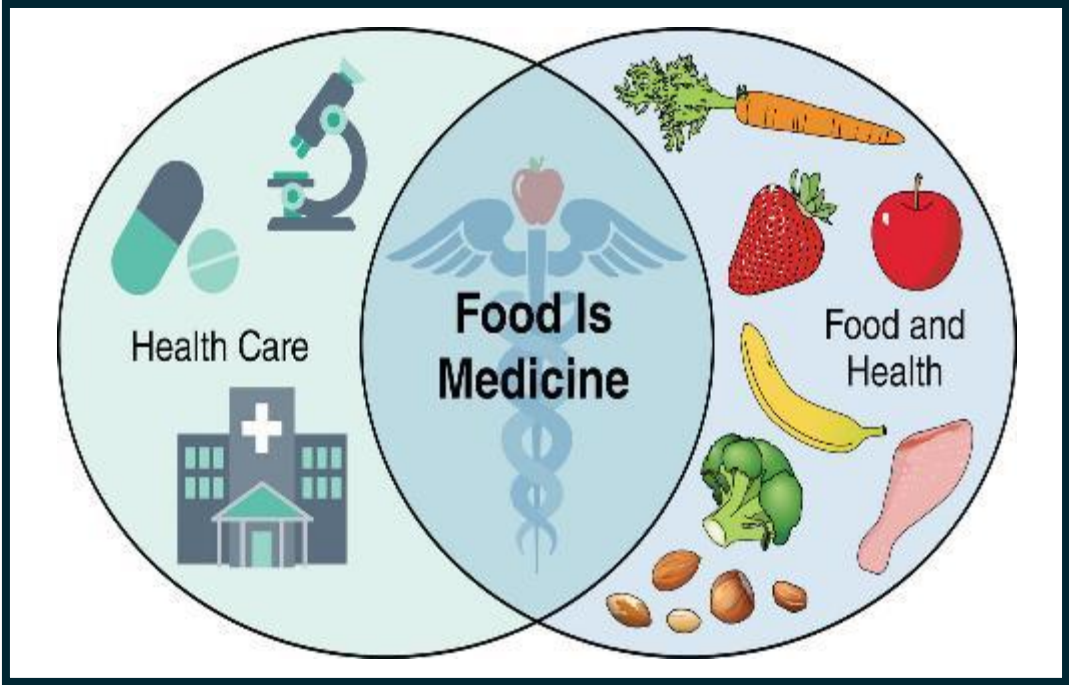
Consistent access to healthy food has to be combined with education for meaningful impact

How do we get from illness to wellness?

Community-centered



Health system-integrated



Shift social norms. Strengthen Policy Supports.

>90% of \$4.5 trillion in annual healthcare costs are spent on medical care of diet-related chronic conditions

Can some of those dollars go towards healthy food to be a covered medical benefit?

SESSION 2

Heart Health and Neighborhood Conditions

INTRODUCING SESSION 2 SPEAKERS

Lharissa Jacobs

MBA
Executive Director,
Fit Houston

Dexter R. Handy

Lt. Colonel and MSc
Chair, Greater Houston
Coalition for Complete
Streets and Citizens'
Transportation Coalition

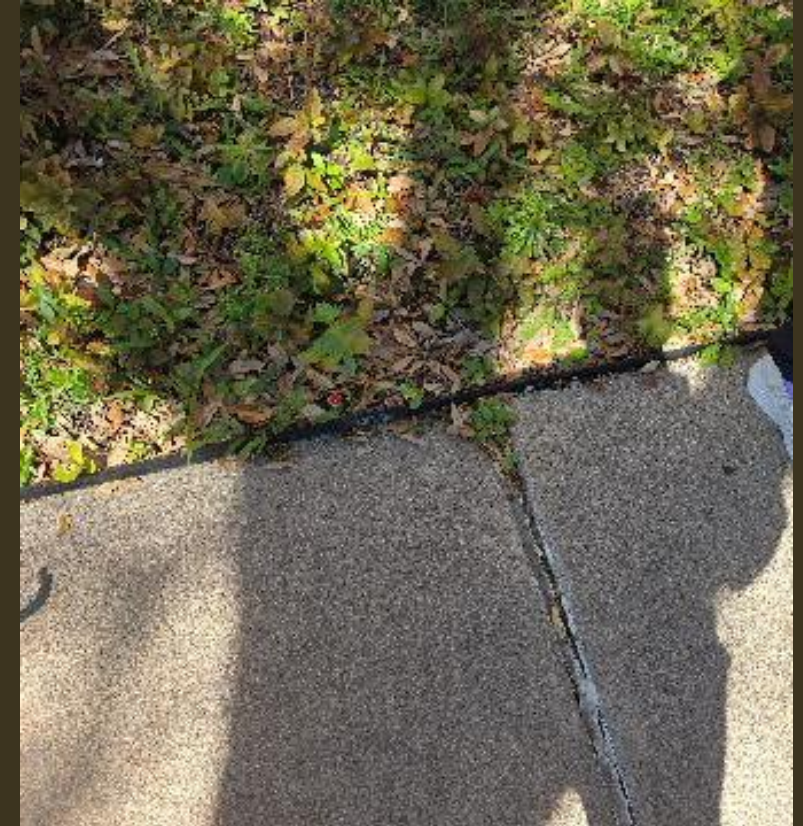
Edward (Ed) Pettitt

MPH
President, Friends
of Columbia Tap

IT'S NATIONAL WALKING DAY TODAY ON APRIL 1!

You're invited to join us for a brief, guided walk around the building to learn about how walk audits can improve our neighborhoods.

WHAT WE'RE SEEING ON OUR WALK OUTSIDE THE BUILDING...





DEXTER L. McCOY
COMMISSIONER

AARP Walk Audit at Mission Glen Elementary





DEXTER L. McCOY
COMMISSIONER

New Trail to Accommodate Trikes and Walking at Four Corners!



Combined population of these zip codes is approximately 334,000

Zip Codes	Population
77498	53,000
77479	92,400
77459	83,600
77478	23,300
77407	81,500



This figure is based on the most recent data from the U.S. census(2020), American Community survey ACS 2021.



DEXTER L. McCOY
COMMISSIONER

Trike Library at Four Corners





Engaging Your Community Through Walk Audits

A WALK AUDIT IS ... an activity in which participants observe and evaluate the walkability of a location to identify and document if and how pedestrians can safely travel along a street, navigate an intersection and get from Point A to B and C and so on.

A WALK AUDIT CAN LEAD TO ...

- Reduced traffic congestion and pollution
- Healthier, more active lifestyles
- Increased property values
- Safer streets for people of all ages



A WALK AUDIT CAN ...

- Gather input about community infrastructure needs and investments
- Educate residents about design elements that support safety
- Empower community members and local leaders to become agents of change

WHO CAN DO A WALK AUDIT?

- *Everyone and anyone!*





Walk Audit Methodology

Leaders – Civic Clubs - Volunteers – Training -Tools – Execution – Analysis – Reports – Results

- **Route Planning & Mapping**
 - **Morning/Weekend in Fall/Winter/Spring**
 - **½ Mile Routes Optimal for Houston Climate Conditions**
 - **1- 1 ½ Hour Time Limits**
- **Team Size & Composition Modifications**
 - **4- 10 Teams Per Walk Audit- Two Teams On Each Side Of The Street**
 - **Team Leader/Route Manager/Timekeeper**
 - **Spotter (s)**
 - **Recorder/Videographer**
 - **Safety Manager**
- **Each Team Collaborates Collectively To Make Sidewalk Assessments – One/Two Recorders Per Team!**
 - **Walk the Block/Crosswalk/Intersection/Trail**
 - **Take Photos & Annotate Observations on the Survey Form**
 - **Identify Defects & Positive Aspects of the Sector**
 - **Make the Overall Assessment of the Sector**
 - **Great**
 - **Acceptable**
 - **Mixed**
 - **Poor**



Link to AARP Walk Audit Toolkits





Walk Audit Methodology



Leaders – Civic Clubs - Volunteers – Training -Tools – Execution – Analysis – Reports – Results



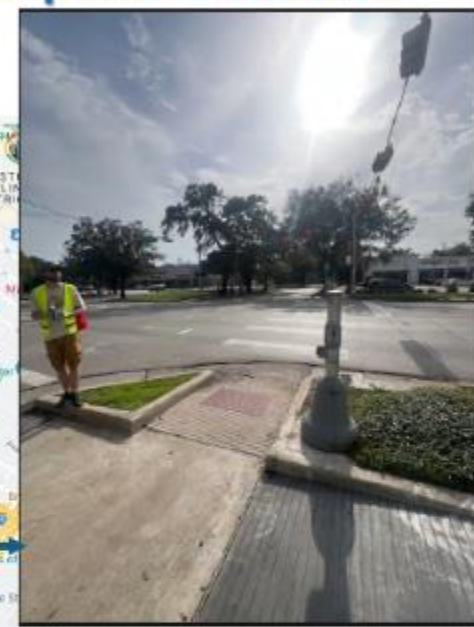
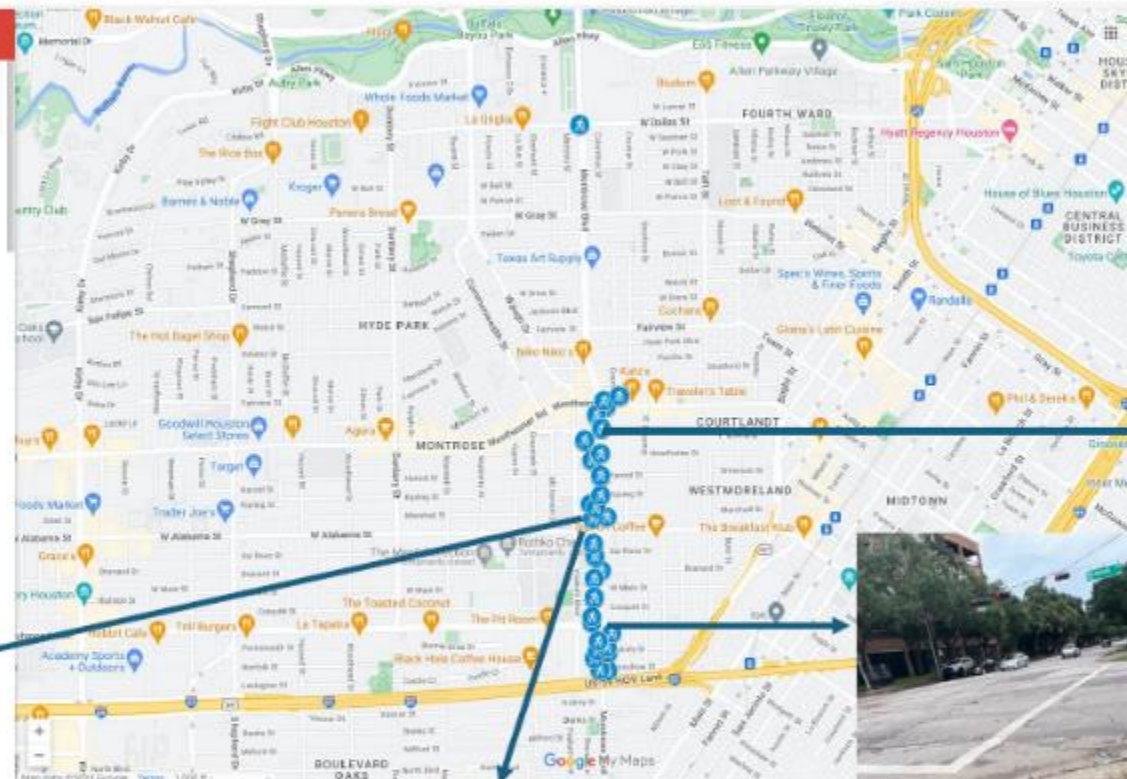
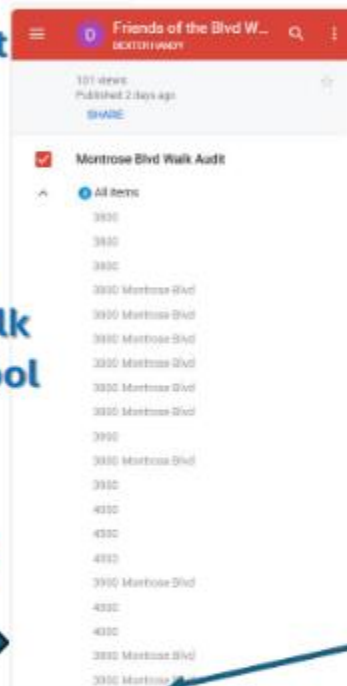
AARP
Walk Audit Toolkit



Cell Phone
Automated Walk
Audit Survey Tool



Spreadsheet
Database



AARP Walk Audit Forms - Google Survey Forms - Spreadsheet Analysis + Google My Maps Output

Links to AARP Walk Audit Toolkits

- **Walk Audit, self service guide:**

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/getting-around/2022/AARP%20Walk%20Audit%20Tool%20Kit-singles-1302023.pdf>

- **Walk Audit Page:** <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/getting-around/aarp-walk-audit-tool-kit-download/>






WE RISE FOR OUR FUTURE
CUNEY + 3RD WARD


We Walk Toward our Future

 8:45 AM Leave from Law Harrington at
2222 Cleburne Street, Houston, TX 77004

 9 AM Arrive at Cuney Homes at
3260 Truxillo Street, Houston, TX 77004

 9:15 AM Walk the Columbia Tap Trail

 10 AM Coffee Chat with Friends of Columbia Tap at
RADO Market!

 Or...Use the FREE Ryde with Circuit app for a lift back!



Map of Route
Route subject to change



@friendsofcolumbiatap
@fithouston1
@ltseniorliving
@radomarkethx
getmoving@fithouston.org

Columns

As Columbia Tap Trail use grows, neighbors see positive changes. But could that speed up?

by Maggie Gordon
August 17, 2023 | 4:00 am



BEFORE



AFTER





OUR TOWN

WALKING HOUSTON'S HISTORIC THIRD WARD

NEWS

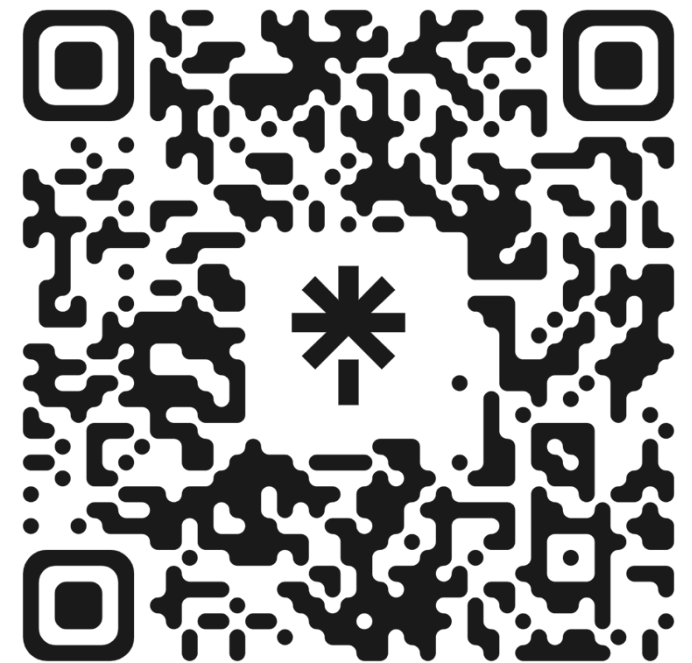
Description



Our Town: How people in the Third Ward community use walking to connect and create change



FRIENDS OF
COLUMBIA TAP



PANEL DISCUSSION

**Healthier neighborhoods...
Healthier hearts.**

DISTINGUISHED GUEST REMARKS

Harris County Judge's Office
&
Harris County Commissioners
Court Precinct Offices

HONORING SHEILA JACKSON LEE'S LEGACY

Erica Lee Carter

MPP

**Harris County Administrator,
Office of County Administration**

INTRODUCING SESSION 3 SPEAKERS

Dr. Himika Rahman

MD, MPH

Director, Sheila Jackson Lee Center for
Accelerating Health Outcomes, Harris Health

Dr. Esperanza (Hope) Galvan

PhD, MS, CVRN-BC, CDE

Vice President, Population Health
Harris Health

PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT YOUR ANSWER TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS - WHICHEVER RESONATES THE MOST WITH YOU:

- 1. What is one concrete step you're leaving today committed to taking for improving the health of our community?**
- 2. What is one takeaway from today that changed how you think about heart health?**

SHEILA JACKSON LEE CENTER FOR ACCELERATING HEALTH OUTCOMES

A YEAR IN REVIEW



Amplification of Harris Health Initiatives



Community Voice Integration via Experience Groups & Listening Sessions



Tailored Health Education Events



New Resource Connections



Disparities Data Analysis



TAKING THE NEXT STEPS ON PARTNERSHIP WITH INTENTION

Introducing the Harris Collaborative: A Multi-Agency Collaboration to Improve Heart Health Outcomes in NE Houston

Harris Health, Harris County Public Health, Houston Health Department, The Harris Center, and Community Health Choice are intentionally coming together to create new impact

CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you all for your partnership

- to our speakers, partners, and attendees.

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