

A Health of the Heartland Fact Sheet: Voting and Civic Engagement



Non-Partisan Civic Engagement and Health

Voting and civic engagement, where residents and organizations actively work to influence policy, are important for health. Increased access to voting is associated with better health outcomes, and poor physical and mental health are strongly linked to lower voter turnout, especially in rural areas where rates of poor physical and mental health are higher.^{1,2} Missouri is ranked 41st on the Cost of Voting Index (COVI), meaning that it takes a lot of time and effort to vote in relation to other states.³ This creates a harmful cycle: poor health reduces civic engagement, which quiets voices who may vote for investment in health care.² In communities facing both poor health outcomes and voting barriers, civic engagement is essential. Civic engagement to improve health can include advocacy for clinics, health screenings or voter registration events at community hubs.

High Civic
Engagement =
Improved Health
Outcomes

Percentage of eligible Jackson County
voters who voted in 2020 general election

38.1%

Percentage of eligible Jasper County voters
who voted in 2020 general election

60.0%

*Source: County Health Rankings

Social Determinants of Health Interact with Voter Turnout

In Missouri, voter turnout tends to be lower in counties where:

- Poverty rates are high
- People experience more mental distress
- Many residents are in fair or poor health
- People are more likely to die at younger ages
- Fewer people have education beyond high school
- Many people lack health insurance¹⁰

State	% of eligible voters registered	Cost of Voting Index Rank
Missouri	79.5	41st
Kansas	79.8	38th
Arkansas	64.7	49th
Oklahoma	70.5	36th
Nebraska	73.8	28th
Iowa	80.6	24th

Source: U.S. Census, COVI

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Barriers to Voting in Missouri

Barrier Type	Definition
Polling Sites	Increasing polling sites can make voting easier by reducing long travel and wait times
Registration	Voters must register by four Wednesdays before election day (~27 days before Election Day)
Voter ID Requirements	Voters must have an acceptable form of photo ID in order to vote
Mail-in Voting	Voters must apply and receive ID/SSN verification; ballots must arrive by Election Day and there is no grace period

Source: Missouri Secretary of State

Public Health Interventions

Making voting easier allows for more communities to be represented in laws and policies. When voting is easier and voter participation increases, better public health outcomes are seen throughout the state and elections are more likely to represent the entire community.^{1,2} Automatic and same day registration, non-strict voter ID requirements, felon re-enfranchisement and mail voting options make voting more accessible and support public health.¹

References

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Kansas City University was founded in 1916 as one of the nation’s five original osteopathic medical schools. Today, KCU is a fully accredited, private, not-for-profit health sciences university strategically located on two campus locations – Kansas City and Joplin, Missouri – to address the growing health needs of both urban and rural populations. KCU’s Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, Biosciences and Dental Medicine offer graduate degree programs in osteopathic medicine, clinical psychology, biomedical sciences, dental medicine as well as multiple dual-degree opportunities.

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The CPHE builds momentum around understanding and addressing the social factors that impact health within and outside of the traditional health care setting, in partnership with local organizations, to better prepare students to practice osteopathic medicine, clinical psychology and dentistry while improving the well-being of the communities we serve.