

A matter of miles: New maps to show differences in life expectancy within US cities

September 5 2013, by Frances Dumenci



The map of New Orleans shows a dramatic 25-year difference in life expectancy just a few miles apart. Image provided by Steven Woolf, M.D.

Where you live can make a big difference in how long you live, even compared to your neighbors in an adjacent zip code. [Maps](#) released by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health at the request of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) show large

differences in life expectancy in the United States across neighborhoods of cities and across rural areas.

"A few miles can make a big difference in the lifespan of Americans," said Steven Woolf, M.D., director of the VCU Center on Society and Health. "Newborns in one zip code can expect to live a lot longer than newborns from a nearby neighborhood. The maps have captured the attention of the media and the public."

To put the differences in life expectancy in geographic context, the maps display highway exit numbers, subway stops and zip codes as geographic landmarks to show how large differences in life expectancy can exist across small distances. For example, [life expectancy](#) in New Orleans varies by 25 years between two nearby zip codes.

Produced for the RWJF's Commission to Build a Healthier America, the maps were released with its latest report. The maps include an update to the commission's 2007 [map](#) of Washington, D.C., featuring subway stops as geographic landmarks. VCU researchers updated the map with more current data and issued new maps of New Orleans, La., the San Joaquin Valley of California and Kansas City, Mo.

The maps can be viewed at [www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/new ...urces/city-maps.html](http://www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/new...urces/city-maps.html) .



Just a few metro stops can mean a seven-year difference in the life expectancy for babies born in the Washington, D.C. area. Image provided by Steven Woolf, M.D.

In addition to Woolf, who led the project, the VCU team that developed the maps included Robert E. Johnson, Ph.D., adjunct statistician in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health in the VCU School of Medicine; Chunfeng Ren, Department of Biostatistics in the School of Medicine; Ivan Suen, Ph.D., associate professor and program chair of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning in the Wilder School

of Government and Public Affairs; and Benjamin Evans, policy research manager in the Center on Society and Health.

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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