

Public Health in Metro Atlanta:

Exploring How Healthy Our Neighborhoods Are

Atlanta Regional Commission
For more information, contact:
mcarnathan@atlantaregional.com

Measuring Public Health

Public Health issues are often reflective of the social and economic state of a community and can say a lot about its overall wellbeing. In this Snapshot, we will explore public health issues and trends in the region's neighborhoods and the Metro area as a whole.

Specifically, we analyze data about:

- Mortality (i.e. how long people live), from OASIS (GA Dept. of Public Health).
- Morbidity (i.e. how healthy people feel), from OASIS (GA Dept. of Public Health).
- 2015 County Health Rankings, which include the above plus more.
- Demographics from Neighborhood Nexus.

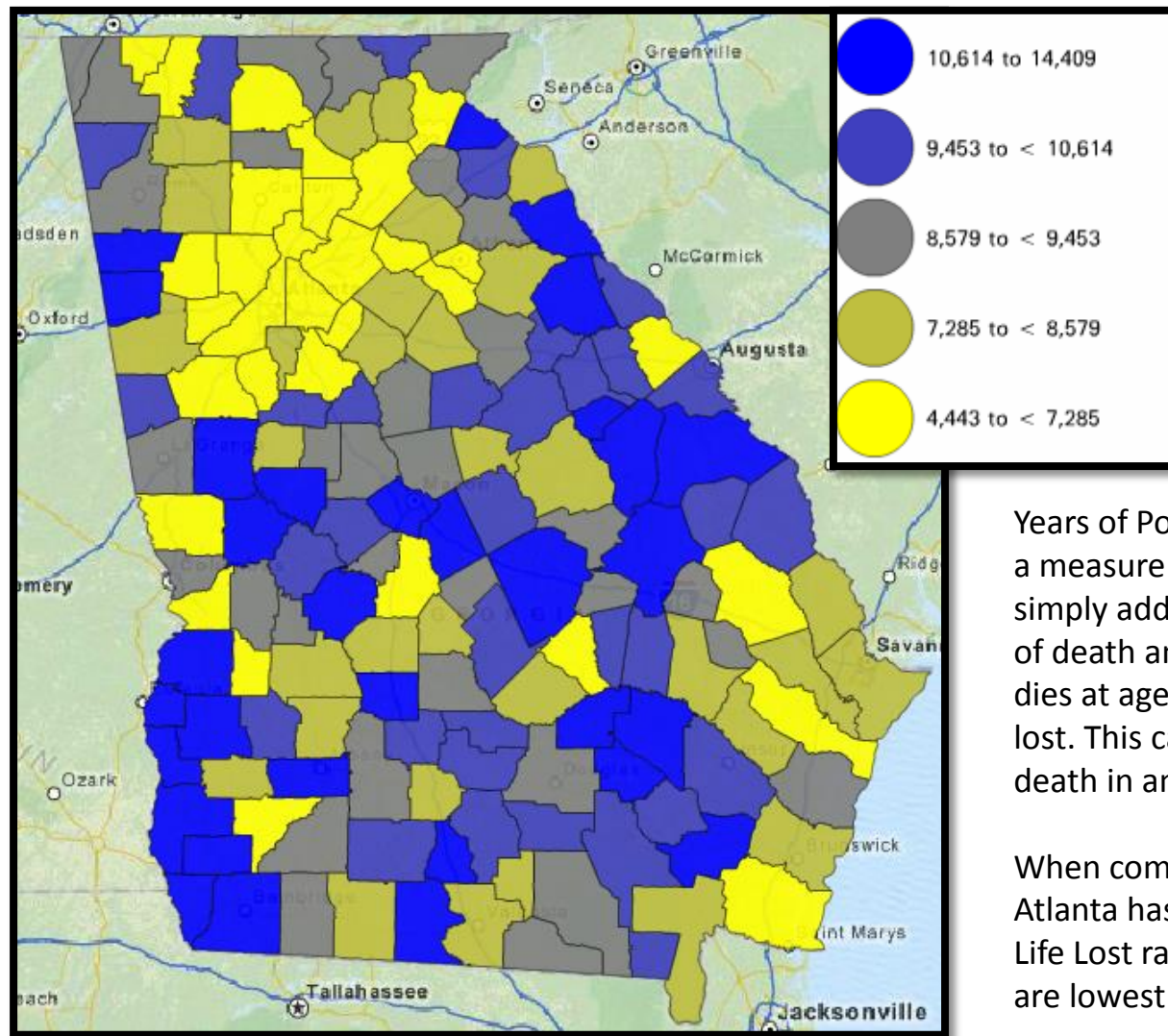


A Closer Look at Public Health in Metro Atlanta

- Based on **Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL)**, public health generally seems to be improving in most counties over the past decade or so. There are some notable exceptions, though.
- The latest **County Health Rankings** also show that health is *generally* improving across metro Atlanta, but again, there are some notable exceptions in mostly the same places.
- We also took a quick look into the state of **cardiovascular disease**, as it is the number one public health threat in the U.S. It is also on the decline in metro Atlanta.
- There are some areas that haven't seen the same levels of overall improvement. **Low Birthweight Births** and **Diabetes** are outliers in the general improvement of public health in the Atlanta area.
- **Place matters.** As suspected, there seems to be a common denominator among the increasing public health threats in Atlanta. Years of Potential Life Lost, Diabetes and Low Birthweight all are correlated with where **poverty levels** are highest in metro Atlanta.
- **Race Matters.** Race also appears to be a common denominator among the increasing health threats in Metro Atlanta. Both Low Birthweight Rates and Diabetes discharges are also correlated with **race**.



Years of Potential Life Lost under age 75 (A Measure of Premature Death)

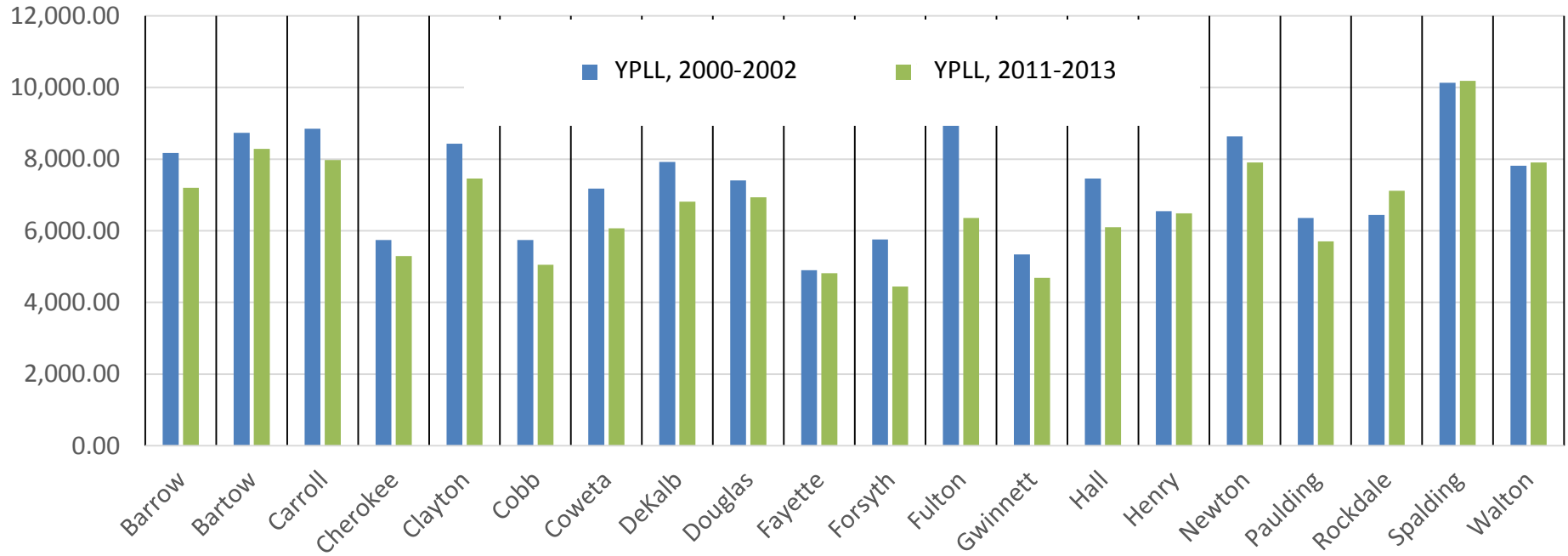


Years of Potential Life Lost before the age of 75 is a measure of premature death. The measure simply adds up the difference between actual age of death and age 75. So, for example, if a person dies at age 65, that is 10 years of potential life lost. This calculation is then performed for every death in an area.

When compared to the rest of the state, Metro Atlanta has some of the lowest Years of Potential Life Lost rates. (Blues are highest rates; Yellows are lowest rates)

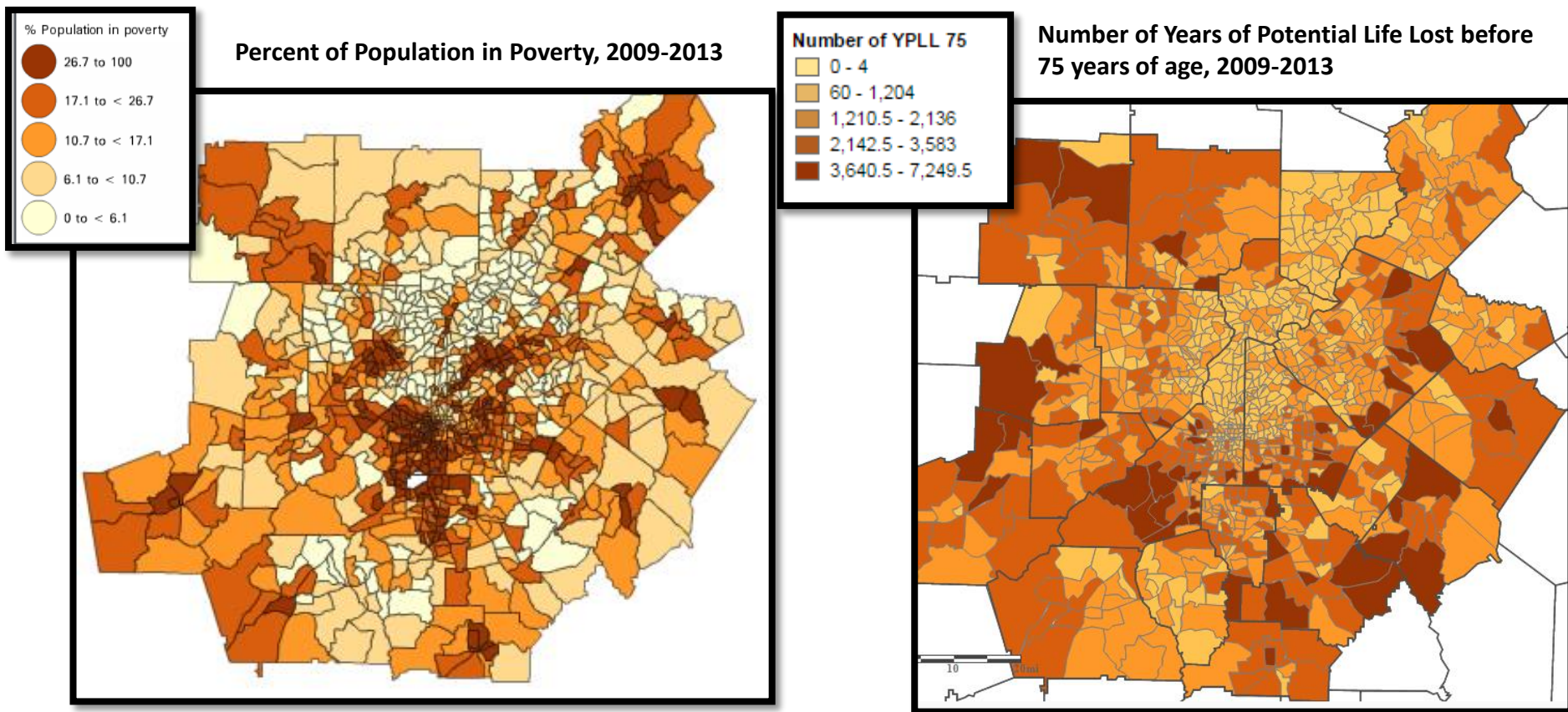
Years of Potential Life Lost under age 75 (A Measure of Premature Death)

Total Years of
Potential Life Lost



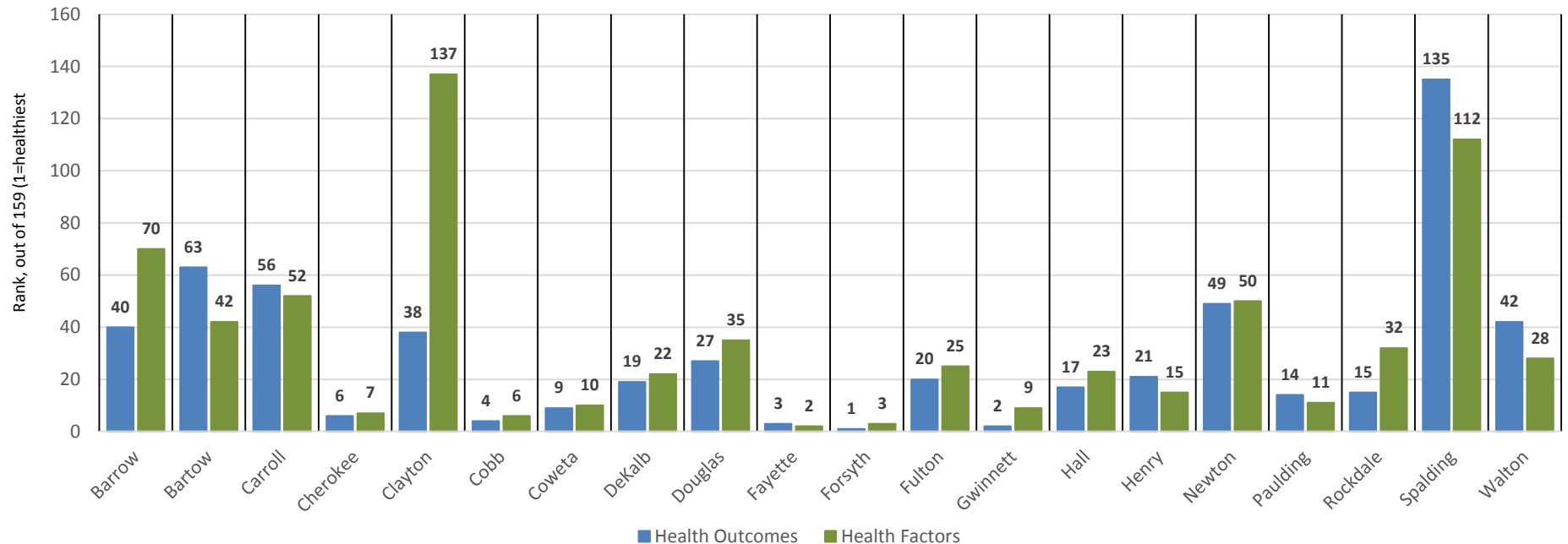
The chart illustrates an improving trend in metro Atlanta. Here we are comparing the number of years of potential life lost before the age of 75 (YPLL) between 2000-2002 to 2011-2013. The chart shows that YPLL has decreased significantly in every county, with the exception of Spalding and Walton. But, as the chart shows, the increases in these two counties are very small. Still, Spalding does have the highest levels of premature death in the 20-county region.

People in Poverty and Years of Potential Life Lost



Place matters. While YPLL is on the decline as a whole, there are several neighborhoods that still have high levels of premature death. Here we compare poverty rates (map on the left) to YPLL (map on the right). There are clusters of neighborhoods that stand out when comparing the two maps. South DeKalb and Fulton, North Clayton, and outer counties like Bartow, Hall, Carroll all have high levels of poverty and premature deaths.

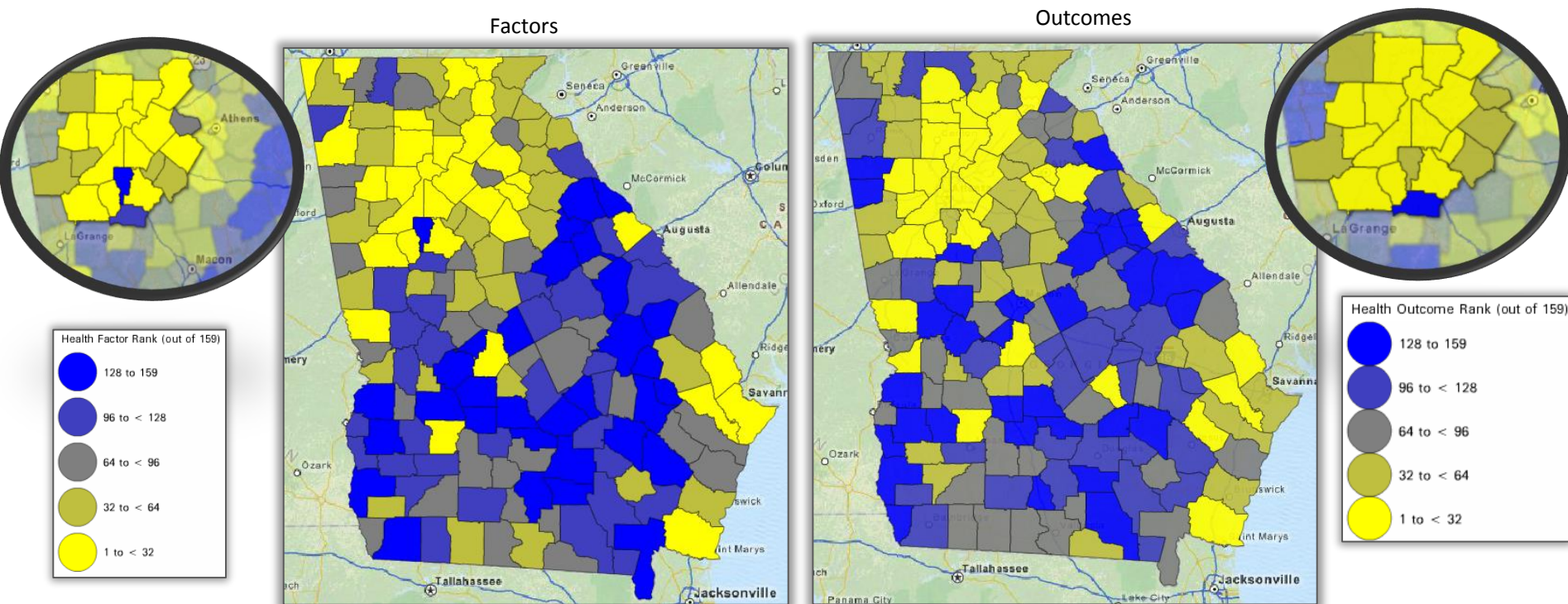
Counties in Metro Atlanta Generally Healthy



The [County Health Rankings](#) breaks down overall health into two basic categories – Outcomes and Factors. “Outcomes” include premature death and how healthy one feels while alive. “Factors” include a myriad of other things like behaviors (smoking, drinking alcohol, etc.), quality of clinical care, and social/economic/physical characteristics. Once all of these are considered, each county is given a rank, 1-159, where “1” is the healthiest county in the state, and “159” is the least healthy county in the state.

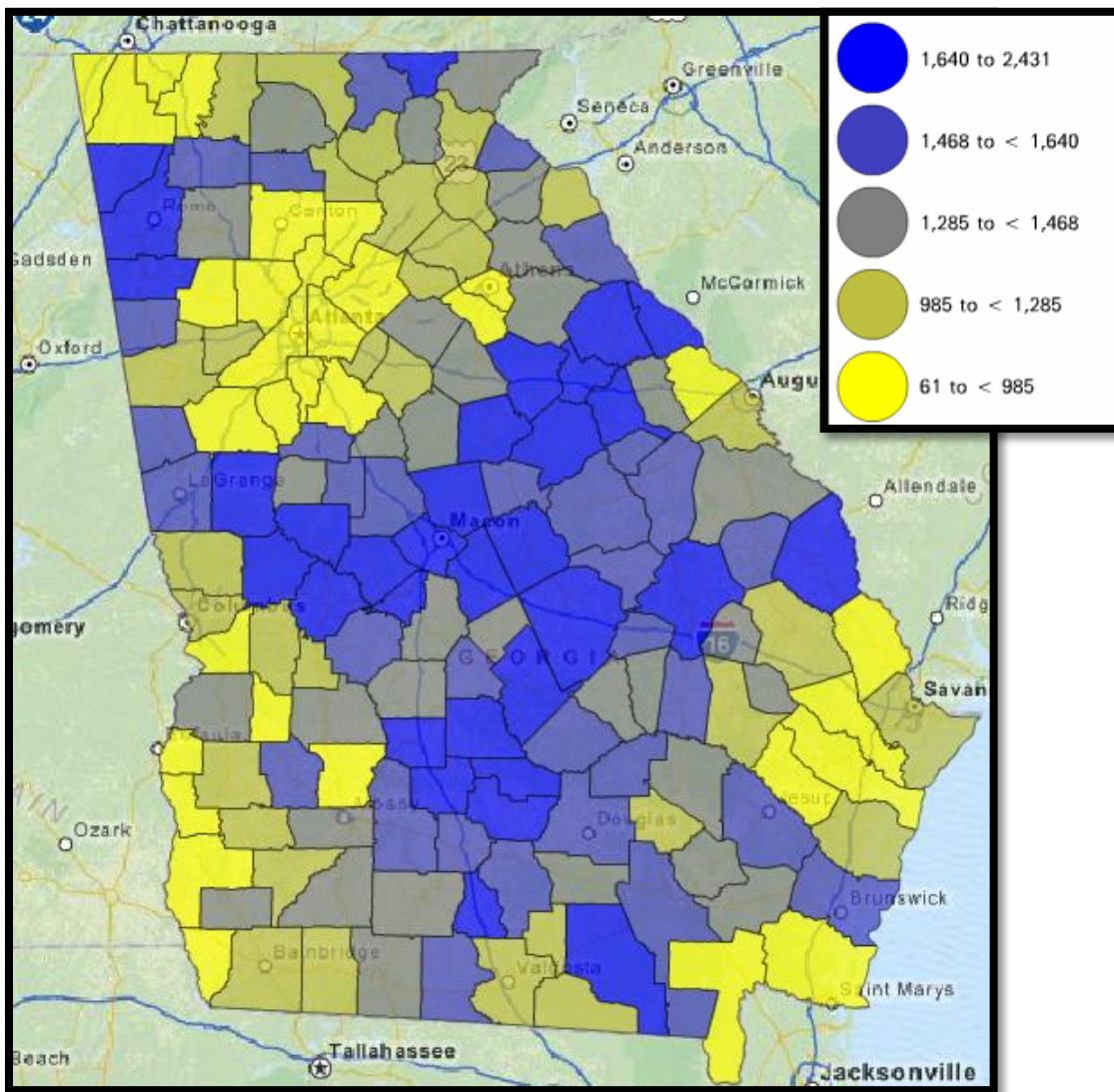
As can be seen, most counties in the Atlanta area have a relatively low rank, meaning they are among the healthiest counties in the state. This is particularly true for the relatively wealthy counties of Cherokee, Cobb, Fayette and Forsyth. There are exceptions, however. Clayton County, even though it has a relatively good rank for Outcomes, ranks among the lowest in the state for Factors, meaning that, eventually, these factors will begin to drag down Clayton residents overall health outlook. Spalding, again, is an outlier in the region, ranking poorly on both Outcomes and Factors.

How Metro Atlanta Compares



Metro Atlanta is a healthy place when compared to the rest of the state, and especially the southern half. However, in the Factors map, Spalding and Clayton counties stand out as poorly ranked counties within the metro area with rankings of 137 and 112 respectively.

Cardiovascular Disease in Georgia



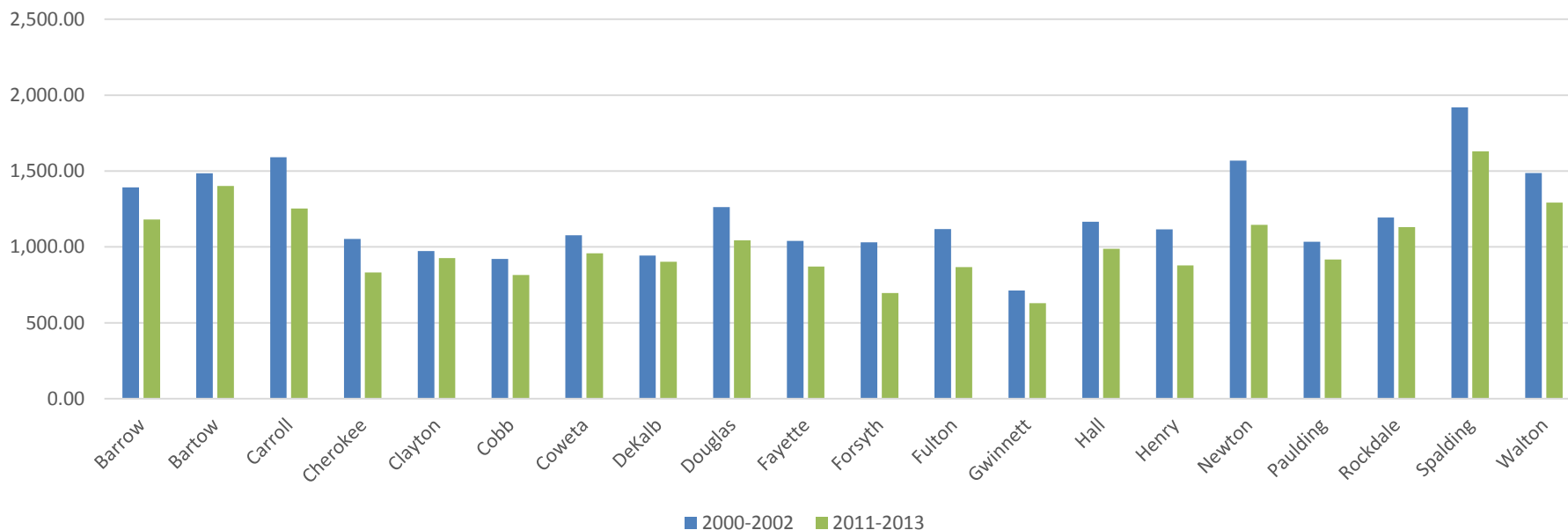
Discharge rate, per 100,000, Major Cardiovascular Diseases, (deduplicated), 2011-2013

One of the biggest NATIONAL public health threats is cardiovascular disease. This map shows how this disease is distributed throughout the state, with blues representing the highest rates, and yellows representing the lowest.

As illustrated in the map, Metro Atlanta has the lowest cardiovascular rates when compared to the state as a whole, with Spalding, again, being a notable exception.

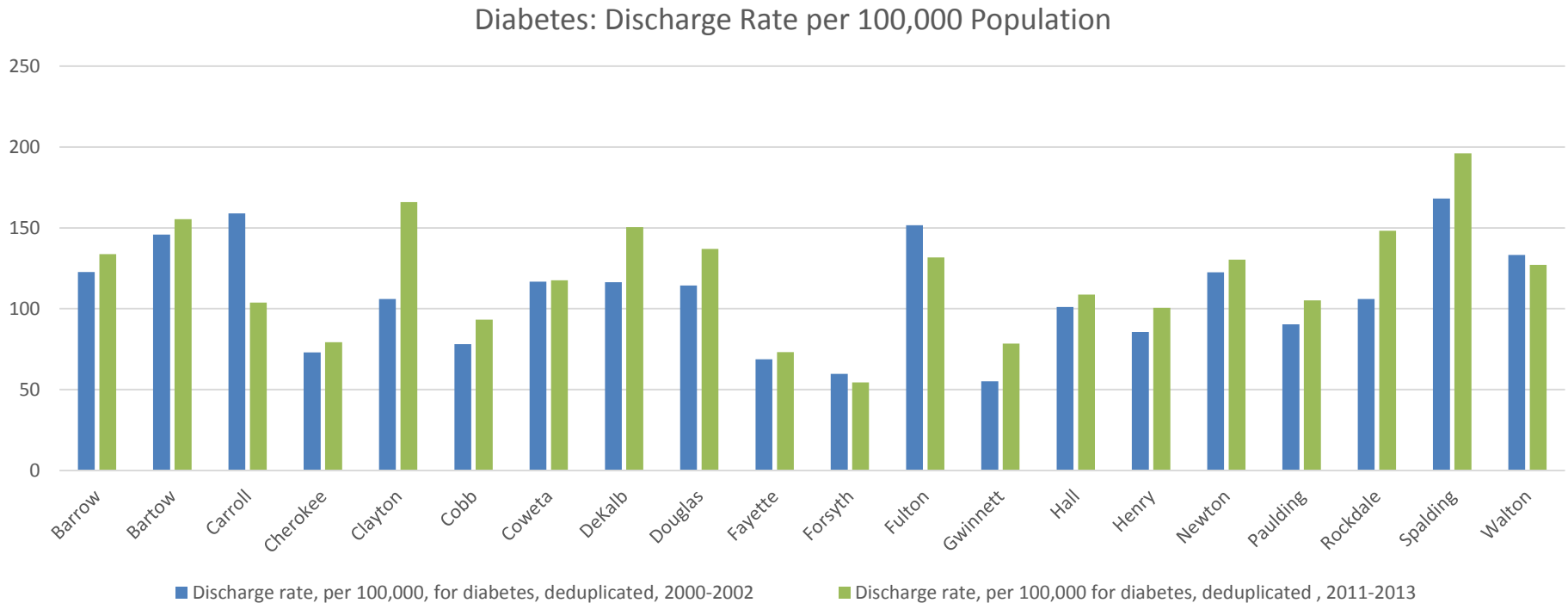
Cardiovascular Disease Over the Years...

Cardiovascular Disease Discharge Rates, Deduplicated, per 100,000 people



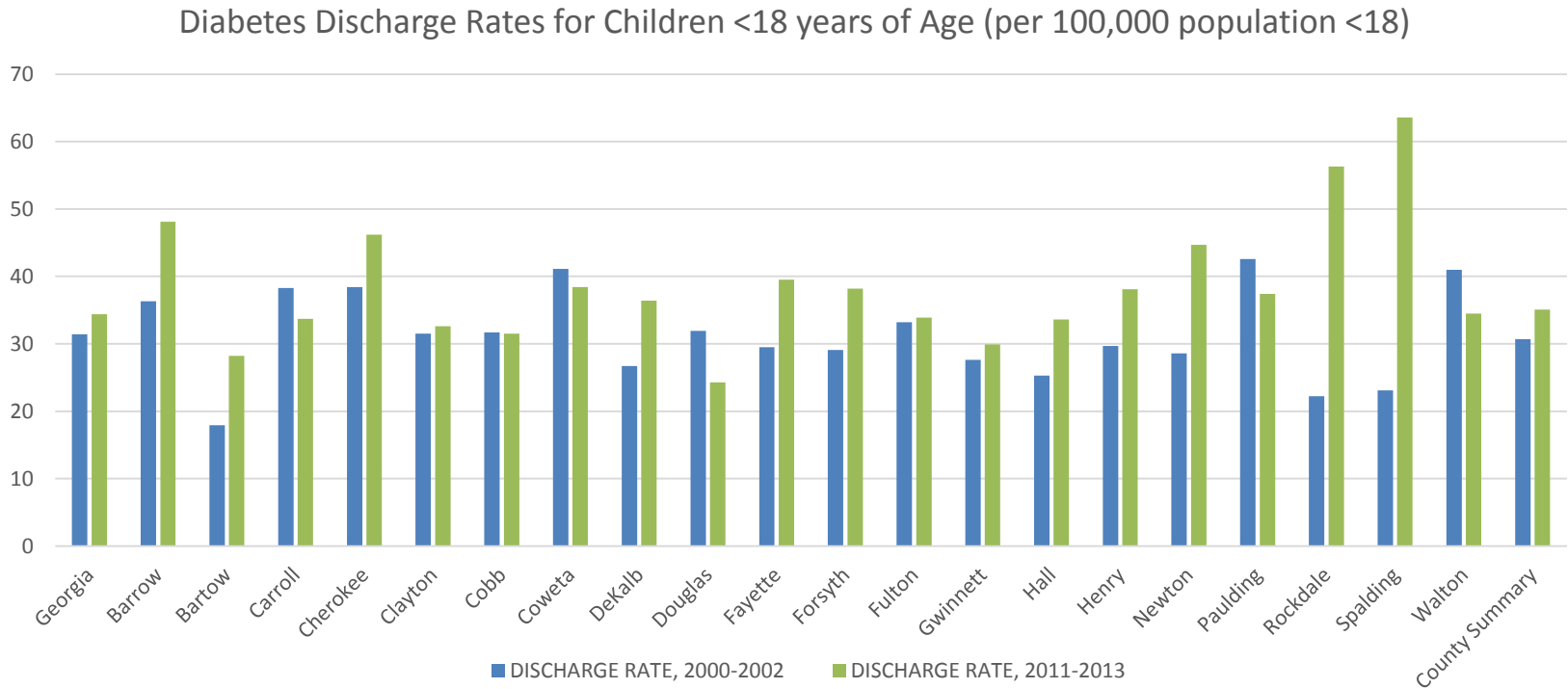
Within metro Atlanta, the hospital discharge rate for cardiovascular diseases has declined in every county between the 2000-2002 and 2011-2013 periods. On average, the cardiovascular discharge rate has **decreased** from **1,203.8** per 100,000 people during the 2000-2002 period, to **1,017.8** between 2011-2013. Even though in decline, it is still important to pay close attention to counties that still have high Cardiovascular Disease rates like Spalding, Carroll, Bartow, and Barrow.

Overall Health Improving, Except for...



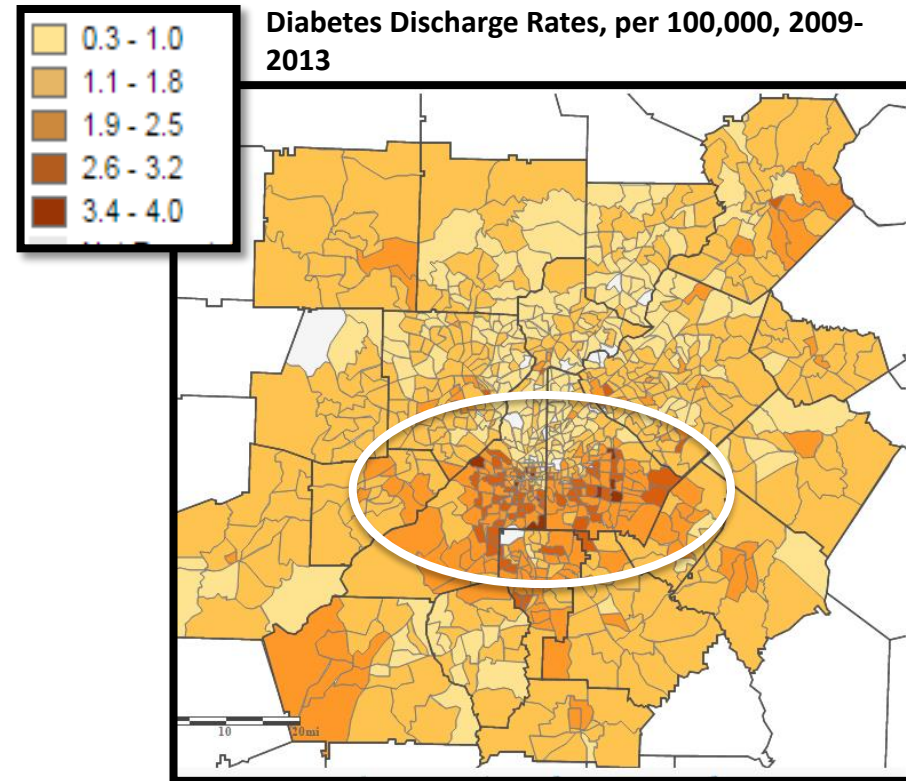
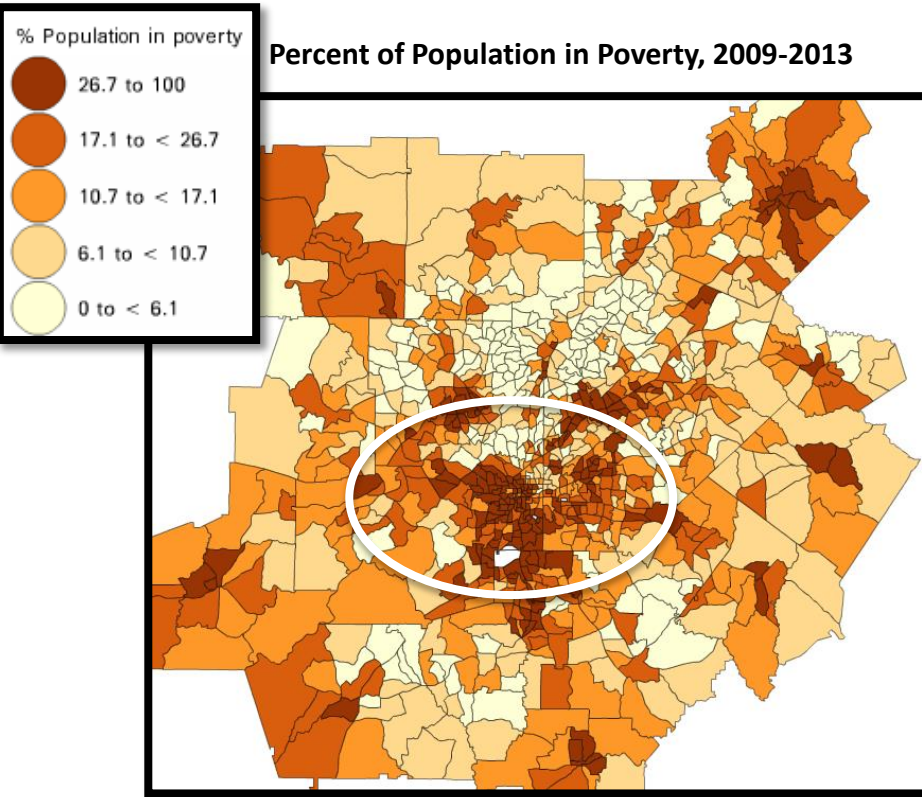
As previously discussed, overall health is improving in metro Atlanta. However, unlike the cardiovascular-related diseases, hospital discharges for diabetes are increasing in many counties. Fifteen out of the 20 counties have higher discharge rates for diabetes today (2011-2013) than in the 2000-2002 period. As a whole, metro Atlanta has gone from an average discharge rate of **108.7** per 100,000 people from 2000-2002 to **119.54** from 2011-2013. Clayton has seen an **increase of 59.9 discharges** per 100,000, the highest increase in metro Atlanta. Diabetes is related to nutrition, so this increase could be due to less-healthy diets or increasingly limited access to healthy foods.

Diabetes doesn't just affect adults...



Adults are not the only people who fall victim to Diabetes. Diabetes among children has increased in many counties particularly in Spalding and Rockdale. Rockdale has increased by **34.1** and Spalding has increase by **40.5** children per 100,000 people. Overall, the average county in the region has only increased by **4.4 cases per 100,000**.

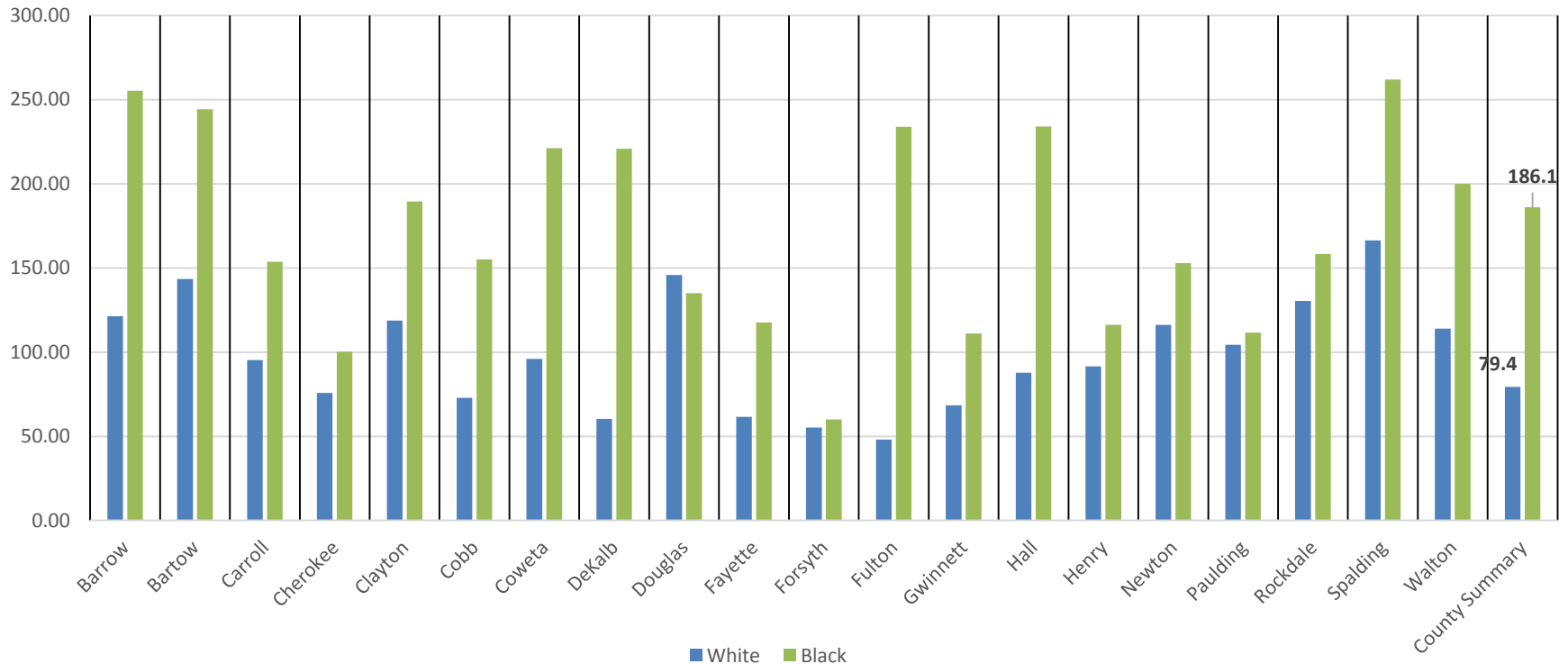
Diabetes is Also Related to Income...



Like YPLL, these maps explore the relationship between diabetes and poverty. The distribution of diabetes (discharge rate) between 2009-2013 looks similar to the distribution of poverty in metro Atlanta. The highest rate of diabetes discharge rates are found in southern DeKalb and Fulton and most of Clayton county. These rates reflect the highest rates of poverty in the core of Metro Atlanta.

And Diabetes is Related to Race...

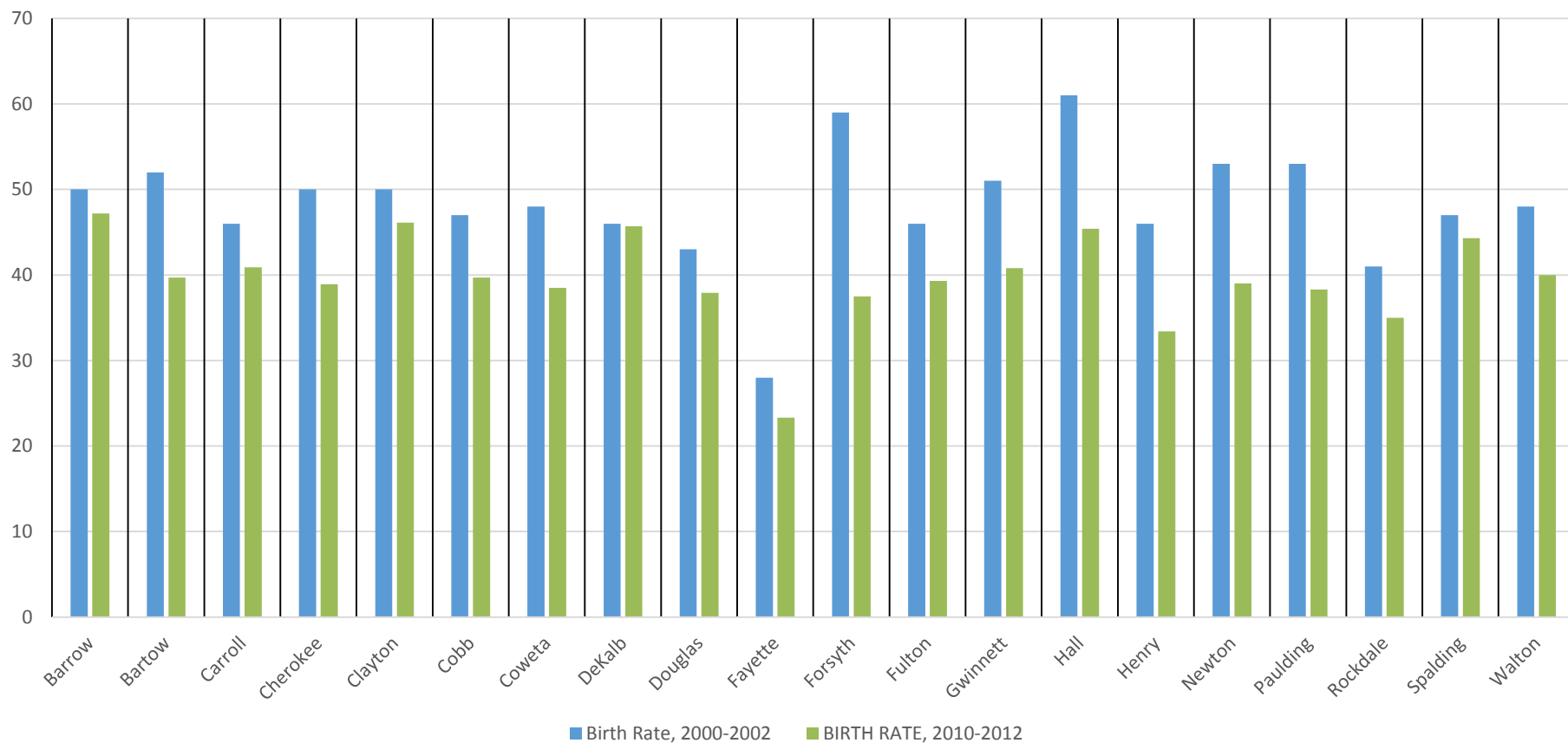
Diabetes Discharge Rates, per 1000,000, by Race, 2011-2013



Along with poverty, race also seems to have a strong relationship to public health issues in Metro Atlanta. This chart indicates that African Americans are disproportionately affected by diabetes, as their discharge rate per county is significantly higher for EVERY county, with the exception of Douglas.

Overall Birth Rates are on the Decline...

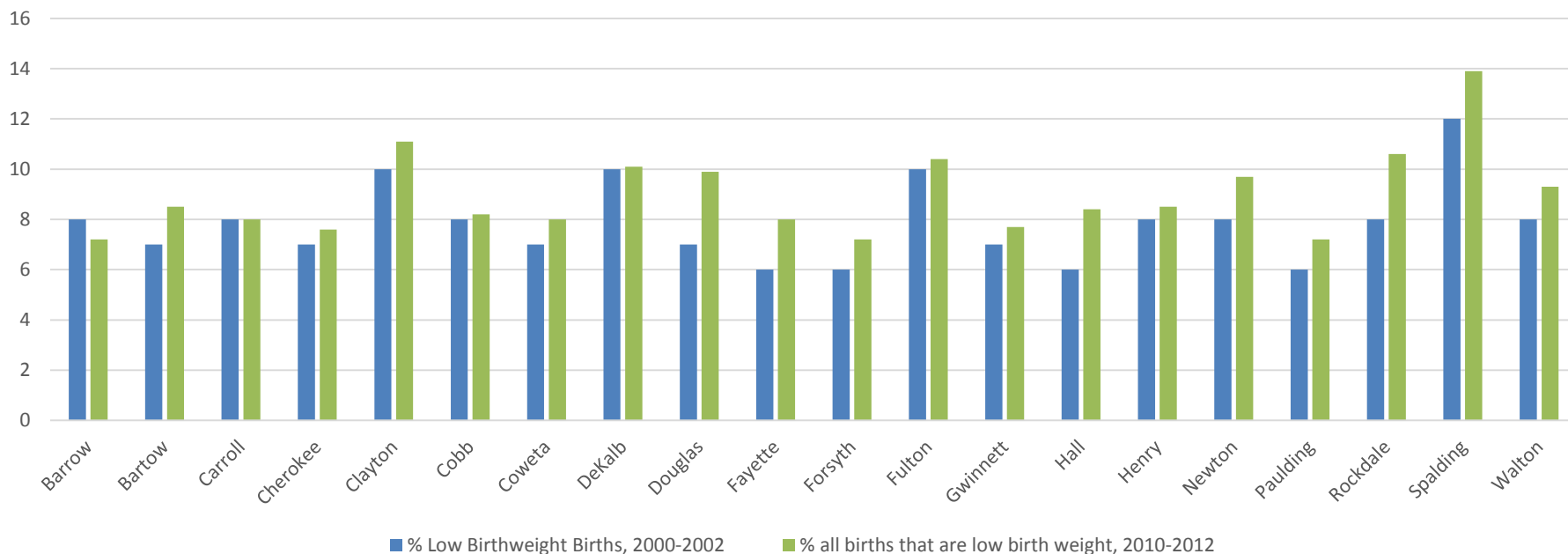
Births per 1,000
women age 10-55



Changing course a bit, here we explore maternal health and find that, overall, birth rates are declining in every county in the Atlanta region.

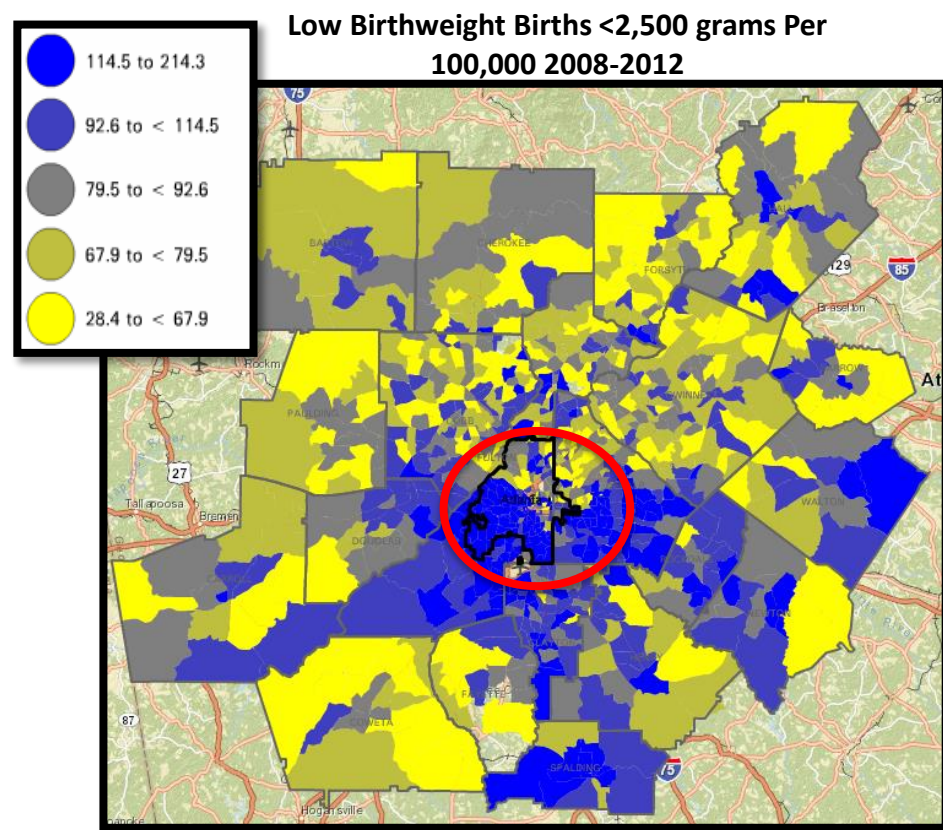
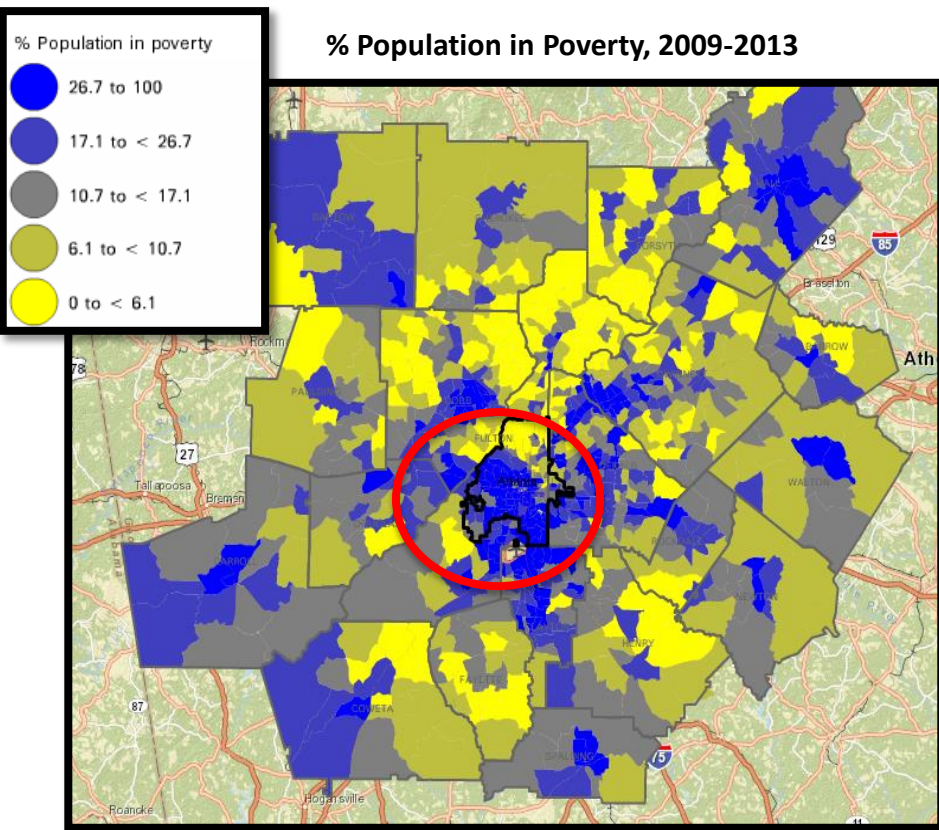
...but Low Birthweight Births are Increasing

% of births that were
Low Birthweight



Birthweight is an good indicator of overall public health in an area. A low birthweight birth can be representative of the child and mother's health and even of the overall health system in an area. It can also have everlasting behavioral and physical health effects on a child, particularly for educational achievement.

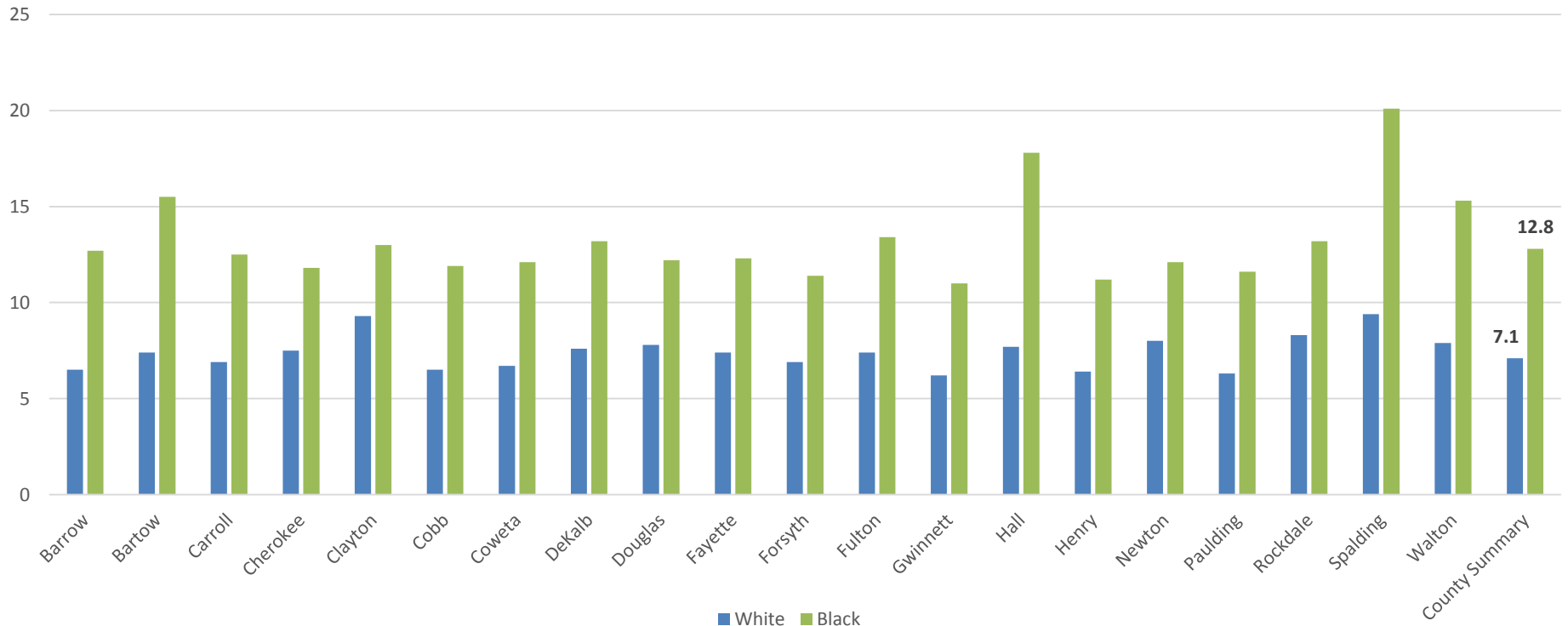
As we can see, low birth weight is increasing in every county with the exception of Barrow and Carroll and are the highest in Clayton, Fulton, and Spalding counties. Douglas has seen **29% increase** in the low birthweight rate from 2000-2002 to 2010-2012. Metro Atlanta as a whole has seen the average low birthweight rate increase from **7.9%** between the 2000-2002 period to **9.0%** during 2010-2012 period.



On a neighborhood level, Low Birthweight Births are primarily concentrated in lower income areas, such as south Atlanta, South Fulton, South DeKalb, and other southern counties like Rockdale, Clayton, Spalding, and Newton counties. The City of Atlanta is almost identical in terms of poverty rate and low birthweight birth rates.

And Low Birthweight Births are also Related to Race...

Low Birthweight Birth Rates According to Race, 2010-2012



Low Birthweight Birth rates tell a similar story. As the chart indicates, the disparity between black and white low birthweight babies is significant in EVERY county. Overall, there is about a 5.7 percentage point difference in the Atlanta region between White births and Black births.