

## USERS' GUIDE ... HOW TO READ THE COMMUNITY PROFILE.

"Community" is a term that means different things, depending on one's purposes. Here, our "working definition" of community is the area served by a school supervisory union. This is a unit meaningful to children and families; small enough to be considered truly "local"; and usually large enough to avoid some of the problematic issues associated with very small populations. Where supervisory union data are unreliable or not available, we present data at the state and county levels only. For supervisory unions that cross county boundaries, assignment was made to the county containing the majority of the population.

Generally, the most meaningful and useful comparisons for a community are with itself, over time. However, for each indicator, we also present data for the state as a whole, and for the county, to provide additional context for comparisons. For some indicators, statewide goals, set out in Healthy Vermonters 2010, are also identified.

Wherever practical, we present rates as well as counts for each indicator. Rates (for example, percents, or rates per 1000 population) adjust for the varying size of populations. Population figures used in calculating rates are estimates, not exact counts; therefore, the rates shown here are also estimates. Because numbers (or counts) at a community level (and sometimes even at a county or state level) are likely to be small, even small year-to-year changes can have dramatic effects on rates. In order to provide a more reliable basis for planning, therefore, we calculate some community-level numbers and rates using rolling 3-year averages. In such cases, the label "1995," for example, refers to the average of the years 1993 to 1995; "1996" refers to the average of 1994 to 1996.

In the back of the report we provide detailed notes and statistics on the indicators, including (where appropriate) the actual numerators and denominators used to calculate the rates, and "95% confidence ranges." The confidence range, similar to a "margin of error," represents the range of values within which the "true," or underlying, rate is likely (with no more than a 5 percent rate of chance) to fall. If the confidence ranges for any two rates for a given indicator (e.g., state and county, county and community) overlap (share values in common), they are not significantly different, statistically speaking. However, statistical significance is only one factor communities may want to consider as part of their assessment and planning.

This project reflects the cooperation of many people in the Agency of Human Services, and partners elsewhere in state government. We are grateful for all their efforts in providing this information; original data sources are noted in the back of the report. However, responsibility for the accuracy of the data here rests with the Agency of Human Services, Planning Division.

The Profile is a "work-in-progress." As communities consider and use the data, you will tell us how to make it better, more useful. We welcome your comments and suggestions.