

Equity Project Summary

This report identifies groups experiencing various functional and access needs who may be at higher risk of threats and hazards, as well as specific circumstances that might impact an individual's ability to respond quickly and appropriately before, during, and after an emergency. The data are not exhaustive, are points in time, fluctuate, and have large margins of error in small towns. [Census Bureau Data](#) The aim of this report is to begin identifying trends, vulnerabilities, and strategies that are likely to increase equity in access and outcomes for emergency response information and resources as well as to provide data that can be used to plan for emergencies. Full reports available at [Equity in Emergency Management | WRHSAC](#)

Franklin County Specific Equity Concerns

Franklin County is the most rural county in Massachusetts and has a Council of Governments. This region is comprised of 26 towns, with populations ranging from the Town of Monroe (118 people) to the City of Greenfield (17,768 people) and is Massachusetts' only entirely rural county. According to the Robert Wood Johnson's County Health Rankings, Franklin residents, as compared to the rest of Massachusetts, are more likely to die prematurely, die from suicide, smoke, drink excessively, be food insecure, have a lower household income, have a teen birth, have children in poverty, have a child die, experience more deaths due to injuries, be a single parent, and have more children living in poverty. Rural Franklin County towns are likely to have fewer resources and a significant number of individuals likely to need additional or different assistance in emergencies. In Franklin County about 6,700 people live in poverty, 990 don't have a vehicle, 4,300 age 65+ live alone, and over 10,000 have one or more disabilities that significantly impact daily living. By 2100, Franklin temperatures are expected to raise 5.6F, the highest increase for a Massachusetts county, raising the number of expected heat emergencies, heart attacks, ER visits, etc. and creating another emergency within every emergency response. (U.S. Census Fact Finder n.d.; Massachusetts Environmental Public Health Tracking.). Note that data from small towns have very large margins of error which the sources provide. [Census Bureau Data](#)

Western Mass Hazard Vulnerability Assessments

In the past, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalitions, and the Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition have conducted Hazard Vulnerability and Threat and Hazard Identification Risk Assessments to identify the most likely threats and how likely they are to occur. The State 2013 & 2018 State Hazard Mitigation Plans also list threats and vulnerabilities to consider. [ocn921510011.pdf](#). ([Massachusetts Integrated State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan | Mass.gov](#)).

Franklin County Specific Hazards, Threats, Concerns, and Vulnerabilities

1. **Flooding:** Many towns in Franklin border water and over 3300 homes are subject to frequent, catastrophic flooding, exacerbating food insecurity, transportation, other equity concerns and threatening drinking water supplies for millions in the East.
2. **Population:** 24% of the population is over 65 with a median age of 46.7 years, one of the oldest in Massachusetts. Older adults often live alone, are living with disabilities, have fewer support networks, and need additional assistance in emergencies.
3. **Entirely Rural:** Rural areas have fewer resources, less infrastructure, and higher costs per capita, making emergency response more difficult.
4. **Broadband and Cell Service Gaps:** Many towns are finally getting access to broadband, but affordability as well as digital literacy are significant issues. Cell service remains spotty in the hilly valleys, making communications difficult in emergencies.
5. **Electricity Dependent:** Over 6400 individuals are medically dependent on equipment powered by electricity. The elderly and very young also depend on electricity to maintain a safe temperature range and keep medicines refrigerated, making power outages a real concern.

Town of Heath: Selected Population Characteristics Contributing to Inequities in Emergencies

Summary: Heath's population is older, substantially wealthier, and more rural than the rest of Franklin County with a median age of 58 vs. 47.5 and only 28.9 people per square mile. About 300 people are aged 60 and older, 38 children ages 9 and under, 110 living with one or more disabilities, 8.8% of those 65 and older and 13% of children are living in poverty, and about 11 people depend on electricity for medical equipment and may need alternative power sources or be evacuated along with their medical supplies to shelters during power outages. Older adults, young children, and those living with a disability are at greater risk during emergencies and will need additional assistance.

	Total Population			Land Area		Children 9 and Under		People 60 – 69 Years Old		People 70+ Years Old		Medicare Electrically Dependent	
	Number of People	Median Age	Median Household Income	Sq. Miles	People Per Sq. Mile	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People.	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	# of Medicare Beneficiaries	# Electrically Dependent
Heath	719	58	\$95,125	24.9	28.9	38	5.3	149	20.7	178	24.8	117	11
Franklin Co.	70,894	47.5	\$70,306	699.2	101.4	5,655	8.0	11,471	16.2	12,179	17.2	20,174	674
Massachusetts	6,981,974	40.3	\$94,488	7,800.9	895.0	702,092	10.1	885,484	12.7	853,387	12.2	1,423,062	40,208

N/A – Not Available or Unknown

Source: US Census [Franklin County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#), [Heath town, Franklin County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#)

Source: Electrically Dependent [HHS emPOWER Map](#)

Source: WMHMCC 2019/2020, [Western MA HMCC Franklin County Vulnerable Population Data \(region1hmcc.org\)](#); [Emergency Preparedness Planning Tool \(region1hmcc.org\)](#)

	No Vehicle		Below Poverty Level		Less than 9th-Grade Education		Over 65 who live alone		No English Spoken		One Disability		Two Disabilities	
	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population
Heath	0	0.0	114	15.9	14	1.9	36	13.7	0	0.0	72	10.0	46	6.4
Franklin Co.	990	1.4	6,730	9.5	1,012	1.4	4,358	24.5	150	0.2	6,435	9.1	4,457	6.3

	Vision Difficulty		Self-Care Difficulty		Independent Living Difficulty		Cognitive Difficulty		Hearing Difficulty		Ambulatory Difficulty	
	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population	Number of People	% of Population
Heath	9	1.3	22	3.1	50	7.0	55	7.6	31	4.3	43	6.0
Franklin Co.	1,241	1.8	1,975	2.8	3,488	4.9	4,490	6.3	3,176	4.5	4,807	6.8

Environmental Justice Areas Source 2020: [Environmental Justice Populations in Massachusetts | Mass.gov](#)

Risk Factors [Franklin County, MA - Profile data - Census Reporter](#)

Geographic Area	Environmental Justice Area	% Minority Population Other than White Alone	Median Household Income as % of MA Inc.	% Children under 18 Living in Poverty	% Seniors 65+ Living in Poverty
Heath	N/A	8.5%	100.7%	13.2%	8.8%
Franklin Co.	9/26 Towns	11.3%	74.4%	20.1%	10.3%