

# VITAL-SIGNS 16

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### **Vital Signs Report:**

Census Demographics  
Housing and Community Development  
Children and Family Health  
Crime and Safety  
Workforce and Economic Development  
Education and Youth  
Arts and Culture  
Sustainability





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# Introduction

## About the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance

In 1998, the Annie E. Casey Foundation approached the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers (ABAG) to explore the interest in Baltimore for developing a neighborhood indicators initiative. The two-year long planning process that followed brought together several citywide nonprofit organizations, city government, neighborhoods, and foundations, and led to the creation of the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA)—which would be dedicated to developing and maintaining a community-based data system open and accessible to all neighborhoods. In 2000, BNIA became an early partner in the Urban Institute’s National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership<sup>1</sup> (NNIP), which today is a network of organizations with similar missions in more than 36 cities across the United States. In 2006, BNIA moved to the University of Baltimore’s Jacob France Institute in an effort to expand on the capabilities of BNIA and was renamed the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance – Jacob France Institute (BNIA-JFI).

Since 2002, BNIA-JFI has been producing the Vital Signs report annually to provide outcome indicators that “take the pulse” of Baltimore neighborhoods progress towards a better quality of life in every neighborhood. The goal of this effort is for neighborhood residents, organizations, and other stakeholders to use data and the Vital Signs report to strategically and effectively foster new ways of thinking about improving our City, neighborhoods, and government over time. In 2012, Baltimore City Council passed a resolution that endorsed the use of Vital Signs in local policy-making to “reflect the diverse conditions of neighborhoods and provide the basis for a system of tracking progress toward a shared vision” for Baltimore.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the Vital Signs report and the resulting knowledge that is mutually gained by analyzing community-based data have served to support Baltimore City and neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup>

## The Purpose of Vital Signs

Neighborhoods, as a growing body of research shows,<sup>4</sup> have extremely durable properties based on the social, cultural, and physical realities that define places. Although

people and individuals help shape neighborhoods, their actions occur within the structural construct of history, planning, and geography. To better understand the context in which programs and actions take place, tracking the “ecometrics” of neighborhoods is necessary to assess the situation in which interventions and solutions are trying to take hold. This is precisely the purpose of tracking key quality of life measures for neighborhoods that has been the mission of BNIA-JFI for more than a decade. The community-based indicators available in Vital Signs are bits of information that generate a picture of a place and provide insight for all stakeholders, both inside and outside a neighborhood, about the overall direction of the community.

## Consequences of Neighborhood Inequality

Income inequality between the wealthiest and poorest households in the United States has been growing since the 1970’s. Public outcry over the destabilizing consequences of income disparities grew after the great recession that began in 2007, with movements such as Occupy Wall Street<sup>5</sup> that demonstrated against wealth and power

1. For more information about the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership at the Urban Institute, visit [www.neighborhoodindicators.org](http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org)
2. Baltimore City Council Resolution 12-0059R “Vital Signs: Measuring Progress Towards a Better Quality of Life in Every Neighborhood” [www.baltimorecitycouncil.com](http://www.baltimorecitycouncil.com)
3. Kathryn L.S. Pettit (2018) “Improving Public Decision-making: Local Governments and Data Intermediaries” <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/collaborating-expand-city-capacity-baltimore>
4. See, for example, Robert Sampson (2012) *Great American City* and Patrick Sharkey (2013) *Stuck in Place*.
5. New York Times (2011). “Who is Occupy Wall Street?” <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/13/opinion/sunday/who-is-occupy-wall-street.html>

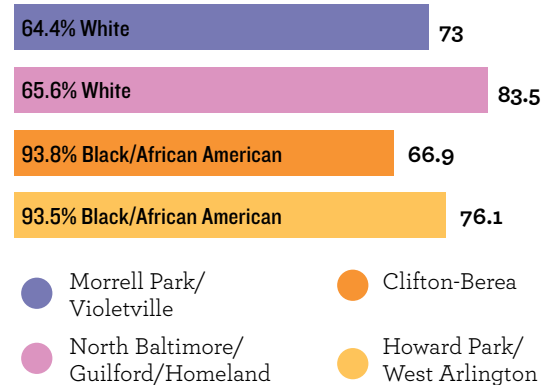
accumulating in the hands of the top 1%. What is perhaps lesser known is that household “sorting” by income has actually contributed to an even faster-paced growth in neighborhood inequality<sup>6</sup> in almost all metropolitan areas of the country. The Baltimore metropolitan region is unfortunately no exception; between 1970 and 2008-2012, while household inequality grew by 13%, neighborhood inequality grew by 24.8%.

The causes of neighborhood inequality are varied but primarily include the rapid depopulation from Baltimore City to the surrounding counties, the coupling of educational spending on local jurisdictional revenues, and the construction and spatial distribution of housing. A 2015 study by Harvard economists<sup>7</sup> also found that long commuting times to work within neighborhoods contributed to neighborhood inequality, and in fact, was the single strongest factor affecting the odds of escaping poverty.

Differences by neighborhood are most dramatically evident in the ultimate quality of life indicator: life expectancy. Unfortunately, racial disparities in life expectancy exist. In 2016, there was a 5-year gap in life expectancy between white (76.6) and black (71.6) Baltimoreans.<sup>8</sup> While race accounts for much of this difference, the spatial disparities among neighborhoods with similar racial make-up are even more stark. Take for example two sets of neighborhoods that are about the same percentage white and black, respectively. There can be as much as a 10-year difference among neighborhoods in different parts of Baltimore that are similar in one indicator such as race.

Based on more than a decade of research<sup>9</sup> on Baltimore’s neighborhoods, the work of BNIA-JFI has shown that to achieve a more equitable and just city overall, disparities among neighborhoods themselves must be addressed and eliminated. In the wake of the civil unrest that occurred in Baltimore in 2015, there is a critical urgency to ensure that all of Baltimore’s policies and programs not only remove barriers for people, but also promote equity across all neighborhoods by focusing on 3 outcomes: 1) housing diversity and affordability; 2) building occupancy and

## Life Expectancy in Select Baltimore CSAs, 2016



SOURCE: BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

vacancy; and 3) neighborhood accessibility and mobility. To aid in the local discourse on the conditions of Baltimore’s neighborhoods, BNIA-JFI has identified the key indicators that all communities should track to help achieve these three goals.

### I. Increase housing diversity and affordability in every neighborhood

The most stable housing markets the Baltimore region are characterized by housing diversity and have moderate use of housing choice vouchers. However, only 1 in 4 households who are income-eligible for a housing voucher receive one; in Baltimore, while more than 15,000 households have access to a housing voucher, more than 25,000 households are on a waiting list. Providing more realistic housing options for a range of household incomes in Baltimore’s most stressed communities as well as its strongest markets will increase housing diversity in every neighborhood. Ultimately, housing diversity matters because the strength of the housing market is correlated with better educational outcomes for children.

- Paul A. Jargowsky (2017) “Economic Segregation in US Metropolitan Areas, 1970-2010” <http://www.21stcenturyneighborhoods.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/jargowsky.pdf>
- “Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty,” New York Times (May 7, 2015) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html>
- Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Vital Statistics Annual Report (2016) <http://dohm.maryland.gov/vsa/Pages/reports.aspx>.
- For more information on research by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, visit [https://bniajfi.org/bnia\\_projects/](https://bniajfi.org/bnia_projects/)
- Baltimore Sun (2014) “Nearly 74,000 sign up for Baltimore’s Section 8 wait list” <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-section-8-20141031-story.html>

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Key Indicators to Track Goal	Baltimore City in Vital Signs 16
Percent of Housing Units that are Owner Occupied	54.9%
Affordability Index – Spending more than 30% of Income on Rent	50.2%
Rate of Housing Vouchers per 1,000 Rental Units	124.6

### 2. Reduce or maintain vacant and abandoned housing below 4% in every neighborhood

When a community loses population, the most evident result is the increase in vacant and abandoned housing. These buildings represent the physical vestiges of population decline, and their negative consequences rest on the shoulders of the people who currently deal with that loss every single day. Based on the experience in Baltimore neighborhoods, nearly all communities that grew between 2000 and 2010 had vacancy rates at or below 4%. Homes that are habitable but still do not have anyone living in them are less obvious from appearance alone, but are a growing concern for many neighborhoods.

Key Indicators to Track Goal	Baltimore City in Vital Signs 16
Percentage of Residential Properties that are Vacant and Abandoned	8.0%
Percent of Residential Properties that Do Not Receive Mail	8.2%

### 3. Reduce the percentage of households traveling more than 45 minutes to get to work

The impact of long commute times on urban neighborhoods is highly detrimental to population growth. A successfully employed resident is either more likely to move out of the neighborhood to be closer to a job or will not be able keep a job, remaining in the neighborhood unemployed. Neither outcome contributes to the quality of life in the neighborhood itself.

Key Indicators to Track Goal	Baltimore City in Vital Signs 16
Percent of Employed Population with Travel Time to Work of 45 Minutes and Over	20.5%

### What's New in Vital Signs 16?

Beyond the key indicators identified above, this edition of Vital Signs tracks over 100 indicators on the quality of life in Baltimore's neighborhoods. These indicators, when combined into each community's profile, generate a picture of what is happening in each neighborhood. From home prices to crime rates to clogged storm drains, the indicators in Vital Signs corroborate (or dispel) perceptions of residents, business and other stakeholders about the quality of life in Baltimore's neighborhoods. As communities continue to plan ahead over the next decade, these indicators can now be used as inputs into strategic planning processes as well as tracking and monitoring the effectiveness of neighborhood-based activities.

### Baltimore's Housing Market

In a city that appears to have an oversupply of building stock, that fact that many households struggle to find secure, stable housing in Baltimore may seem surprising. Part of the problem is the result of several years of discriminatory housing policies that led to the deferred maintenance of housing in many neighborhoods and today has resulted in significant number of properties that are vacant, abandoned and uninhabitable.<sup>11</sup> For the remaining housing units, both the for-sale and rental housing markets present barriers to residents. On the one hand, Baltimore has the lowest for-sale housing prices in the metropolitan region; however, even though home prices in many neighborhoods are modest, access to capital is difficult as banks find it less profitable to lend in these markets.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Baltimore has some of the highest housing rental rates among comparable cities. For Baltimore's approximately 50% of renter households, more than half are paying in excess of 30% of their income on rent. Vital Signs 16 does provide some positive news about increases to the habitable supply of housing in Baltimore.

11. Richard Rothstein (2017). *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*

12. "Middle Neighborhoods: Action Agenda for a National Movement" Summary Report Prepared by Paul C. Brophy, Pamela Puchalski, and Stephanie Sung (2017). <http://middleneighborhoods.org/summary-report/>

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- Between 2015 and 2016, the percentage of homes receiving a vacant house notice in Baltimore City decreased from 8.2% to 8.0%. The CSAs with the largest decreases in vacant and abandoned housing were Oldtown/Middle East (-8.5%) and Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park (-5.5%). The decrease in vacancy in Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park marks the first reduction for the community since Vital Signs began tracking this indicator in 2000.
- Between 2015 and 2016, the percentage of residential properties with rehabilitation permits in excess of \$5,000 in Baltimore increased from 2.9% to 3.2%. The CSAs that experienced the largest increases in the rate of rehabilitation permits were Highlandtown (+2.1%) and Forest Park/Walbrook (+2.0%).

### Neighborhood-Focused Economic Development

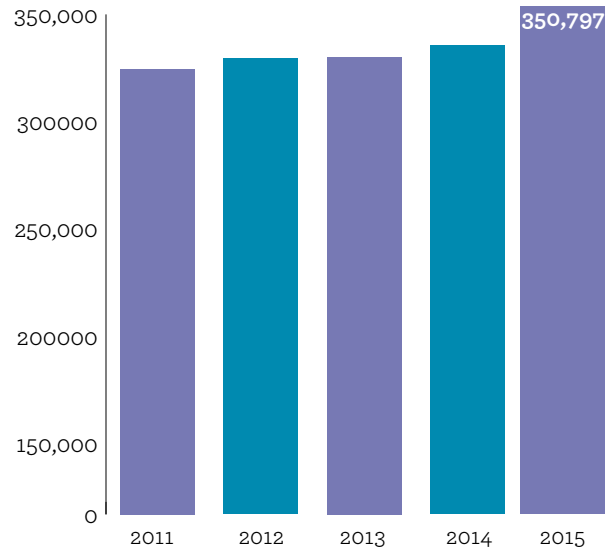
In 2016, newly-elected Mayor Catherine Pugh identified workforce development and business expansion as one of five key focus areas for her administration. Neighborhood employment data from the Vital Signs report served as a catalyst for Mayor Pugh's initiative to create the Baltimore Mobile Job units to travel to communities with high rates of unemployment and offer assistance to residents seeking work. Early indications exist of the effectiveness of this neighborhood-focused effort as unemployment rate in Baltimore City dropped from 7% in January of 2016 to 5.8% in December 2016.

- The total number of jobs in Baltimore City increased from 344,588 to 350,797 between 2014 and 2015 (the latest year available). In 2015, the communities with the highest number of jobs were Downtown/Seton Hill (78,158), Oldtown/ Middle East (27,354), and Orangeville/East Highlandtown (15,235).

### Tracking Violence Reduction Using Open Data

As in other cities around the country that experienced significant civil unrest in protest to concerns over police misconduct in communities, a U.S. Department of Justice investigation concluded in August 2016 that Baltimore City had violated federal anti-discrimination laws as well as multiple Constitutional Amendments by conducting unlawful searches, arrests, unreasonable force, and racial targeting. A consent decree was issued for Baltimore City, laying out reforms for the department, ending "zero toler-

### Total Number of Jobs in Baltimore City 2011-2015



SOURCE: LONGITUDINAL EMPLOYER-HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS (LEHD)

ance" policing strategies in favor of a more community-oriented approach with greater accountability and oversight.

Now more than ever, having access to reliable, consistent data is crucial for accountability, community goalsetting, and measuring progress towards a city that is safe and just.

- Baltimore City experienced 318 homicides in 2016, a decrease from the 342 reported in 2015. In 2016, over 86% of the deaths were a result of a shooting. In 2016, there were 1,916 calls for shootings in Baltimore City for a rate of 1.9 reports per 1,000 residents. This is a decrease from 3.2 per 1,000 in 2015.
- The overall Part I crime rate in Baltimore City decreased between 2015 and 2016, from 65.1 offenses per 1,000 residents to 63.0 offenses per 1,000 residents.

### New indicator in Crime and Safety:

Examining communities that have high, persistent rates of 311-calls for street light outages is crucial, as these areas may have increased levels of victimization, as darkness can provide a cover for a variety of both property and violent offenses. In 2016, Baltimore City's rate of street light outages was 21.4 reports per 1,000 residents. The communities with the highest rates of reports calls per 1,000 residents include Washington Village/Pigtown (45.4), Downtown/Seton Hill (41.7), Poppleton/The Terraces/Hollins Market (35.8), and The Waverlies (35.3).



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### A New Sustainability Plan for Baltimore

Baltimore launched a process to update the City's Sustainability Plan between 2016 and 2018 that broadens the definition of what sustainability means by focusing greater attention to issues of equity and inclusion. Baltimore's new plan acknowledges that "We all benefit from robust neighborhoods and thriving societies. The more equitable our city, the more sustainable we all are." At the center of all aspects of sustainability lies the various mobility choices that exist in Baltimore that provide the means for everyone to have access to different parts of the city and region. Although Baltimore has made great strides in expanding mobility choices such as the Charm City Circulator, and car- and bike-sharing opportunities, according to the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance, the region received a "D" in the latest Transportation Report Card.<sup>13</sup> One of the worst-graded indicators in the report card was regarding "disconnected communities" – neighborhoods with high rates of households with long commute times to work.

Based on data from the 2012 - 2016 American Community Survey, a significant percentage of Baltimore commuters use alternative modes of transportation to get to work; however, travel times to work have increased between 2006-2010 and 2012-2016.

- Based on the 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 18.4% of Baltimore City residents used public transportation to commute to work, 6.7% of Baltimore City residents walked to work, and 59.8% of Baltimore City residents drove alone to work.
- From 2006-2010 to 2012-2016, the percentage of city residents commuting to work with a commute greater than 45 minutes increased slightly from 20.4% to 20.5%. During 2012-2016, the percentage of residents with a commute greater than 45 minutes ranged from a high of 33.9% in Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park to a low of 11.3% in Inner Harbor/Federal Hill.

### Data Stories

Every data point in Vital Signs represents a human story—of why the data exists in the first place and how people and organizations are working to move the needle on any one of the indicators. Several Baltimore community and non-profit groups, research organizations, and local government agencies provided data stories to take a deeper look at an indicator and help frame the context for

why specific indicators matter for quality of life in neighborhoods. Vital Signs 15 includes the following stories:

- Deconstruction of Vacant Properties (Housing and Community Development). Deconstruction is a labor intensive method for building removal which emphasizes the salvaging of materials which can be sold. In 2016, Details, Inc. worked with the City of Baltimore for the deconstruction of 98 buildings. Story written by Details, Inc., a Social Enterprise of Humanim.
- Preventing Teen Pregnancy (Children and Family Health). In 2010, B'more for Healthy Babies established the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (known as U Choose), a multi-agency task force committed to reducing unintended teen pregnancies. U Choose's work for the last eight years to improve outcomes for young people resulted in a 49% reduction of teen births. Story written by the Baltimore City Health Department.
- Small Business Access to Capital (Workforce and Economic Development). Cultivation of a vibrant and growing startup and small business scene is a top priority for a range of public and private stakeholders in Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins 21st Century Cities Initiative researched the flows of various types of investment into Baltimore City's small businesses and revealed some expected and unexpected patterns of small business investment across the city's communities. Story written by the Johns Hopkins 21st Century Cities Initiative.
- Ensuring Kindergarten Readiness (Education and Youth). The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is administered to students early in their kindergarten year. The KRA assesses children's readiness for kindergarten in the areas of language and literacy, mathematics, social foundations, and physical development. Story written by the Baltimore City Public School System.
- Safe Streets Baltimore (Crime and Safety). Safe Streets Baltimore is an interdisciplinary program with a primary focus on reducing gun homicides. Its data-driven model allows staff to focus resources into violence interventions on the street as well and emphasizes the need to view and treat violence through a public health lens. Story by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice.
- Planning for a More Sustainable, Equitable Baltimore (Sustainability). In 2018, Baltimore City released a new, updated Sustainability Plan which significantly broadens the meaning of sustainability in two ways. First, it

13. For more information on the Transportation Report Card, visit <http://www.cmtalliance.org/reportcard/>

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more intentionally integrates an equity lens—to incorporate a vision that is meaningful for ALL residents in the city. Second, the Plan expands the boundaries of sustainability to include strategies connected to good-paying local jobs, health and well-being. Story written by the Baltimore City Office of Sustainability.

Also in the past year, BNIA-JFI's primary research has produces information actionable at the neighborhood level. The following Data Stories by our staff helps coordinate the incorporation of the research results along with other indicators in Vital Signs:

- **Mapping Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture).** The GEOLOOM co>map is an online, interactive map that displays a broad range of arts and culture collected from crowdsourcing, neighborhood groups, arts and culture organizations, foundations, and city government data sets. The map demonstrates how arts and culture is an intrinsic part of every community as well as identifies disparities in support for arts and culture. Story written by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance.
- **Population Change by Neighborhood (Census Demographics):** By segmenting neighborhoods by population change first (growing, stable/stagnant, declining), communities can work together to better sequence how strategies can be implemented to address the root causes of many other community-based issues. Story written by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance.

### How to Use Vital Signs Data

The indicators available in Vital Signs have been chosen based on national trends, academic research on community-based indicators, local planning processes, and ongoing community engagement to ensure that the overall set of indicators is relevant to Baltimore's communities.

- **National best practices:** Through the NNIP network, BNIA-JFI is connected to 36 other cities for learning and staying ahead of the curve regarding research and development of neighborhood based data-driven initiatives. BNIA-JFI is committed to transforming data for policy-relevance and enhancing access to the data through technical assistance and online functionality.<sup>14</sup>
- **Local planning processes:** Several local and regional plans over the past decade have included specific indicators to monitor the effectiveness of plan implementation, such as the City's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Sustainability Plan, and the regional Opportunity Collaborative Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. The Vital Signs indicators are intended to serve as a means of tracking and evaluating the relevant neighborhood impacts of these city and regional plans.
- **Grant-writing resources:** Community-based organizations and non-profits rely on Vital Signs data to help make a data-driven case for leveraging resources into their neighborhoods. Analysis of grant applications for programs such as Community Development Block Grant, Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers Common Grant, and Maryland Sustainable Communities Grant identified several indicators that organizations require for satisfying basic data requirements for community-based funding.

14. For more information on transforming data into useful information, see "What Counts: Harnessing Data for America's Communities" edited by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Urban Institute (2014).



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Every attempt is made to ensure that the indicators in Vital Signs are both available from the public agency that might be supplying the data and consistent<sup>15</sup> from one time period to the next. Continuous monitoring of quality of life for Baltimore's neighborhoods provides communities the chance to take immediate, hopefully preventative, measures to address issues that arise in their neighborhood.

The *Vital Signs* report and the compendium of data available longitudinally for Baltimore's neighborhoods is more than just a once-a-year presentation of information.<sup>16</sup> The release of *Vital Signs 16* marks the beginning or continuation of diverse, cross-sector conversations throughout Baltimore on how to transform these data into the means for improving the quality of life in every neighborhood. The indicators and data in Vital Signs are organized into eight sections each of which describes an issue or area that is central to quality of life in Baltimore City. The data within each of the following sections provide a picture of the conditions within Baltimore City's neighborhoods and their progress over time:

- Census Demographics;
- Housing and Community Development;
- Children and Family Health;
- Crime and Safety;
- Workforce and Economic Development;
- Education and Youth;
- Arts and Culture; and
- Sustainability;

Data within each of these sections are divided into additional subsections that allow for indicators to be clustered together around specific topics, such as housing conditions or safe neighborhoods, educational attainment, or student performance.

Vital Signs is a compilation of a large amount of data from a wide range of sources. There are over 150 indicators for each of Baltimore City's 55 community statistical areas (CSA), which means that there are over 8,000 data points in Vital Signs 16. Interesting facts and trends, graphics and community rankings are all included in the sections. Positive, neutral or negative changes over time are highlighted in green, blue or red respectively throughout the

sections for easy interpretation of the data. Each chapter in Vital Signs also includes a Rankings & Definitions section, which lists the five highest and lowest communities by their value for each indicator. With so much information in this report, it has been produced in a way that should serve as a reference guide to communities throughout the year.

Vital Signs is also 'open data'<sup>17</sup>. All of the indicators from previous Vital Signs are online<sup>18</sup> for everyone to see and download for use in a variety of innovative ways. Policy makers use the data to provide context and neighborhood interdependences across indicators. The data are used by neighborhood groups as well through Community Profiles for each of the City's 55 Communities which are available online for quick access to data specific to each neighborhood's needs.

### Take Action

1. **Download Your Profile: BNIA-JFI produces 55 Community Profiles, one for each CSA in Baltimore**
2. **Put it on Your Agenda: Encourage your community association (formal or informal!) to discuss the indicators in the community profile at their next meeting agenda**
3. **What's in Your Profile? Join the conversation across the City to reflect on what you see. Any interesting trends? Any surprises? Let BNIA-JFI know on Facebook or Twitter @bniajfi #VitalSigns16**

15. For specific changes to indicator definitions and calculations, see Changes & Explanations section of *Vital Signs 16*

16 See how "data intermediaries" around the country help communities access and use neighborhood data in "Strengthening Communities with Neighborhood Data" by G. Thomas Kingsley, Claudia J. Coulton, and Kathryn L.S. Pettit (2014). Urban Institute.

17. See Eric Burnstein and Seema Iyer (2014) "NNIP and Open Data in Baltimore" <http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/activities/projects/nnip-and-open-data>

18. Visit [www.bnaijfi.org](http://www.bnaijfi.org) to access the Vital Signs open data portal, interactive graphics, and report archives online

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### Geography and Data

The geographic level at which data is provided is important to understand. Wherever possible, Vital Signs uses Community Statistical Areas (CSAs) as the geographic level for which data is provided. CSAs are clusters of Census Tracts that correspond to Baltimore's neighborhoods boundaries and are consistent statistical boundaries

for which data can be acquired. Neighborhood lines often do not fall along CSA boundaries, but CSAs are representations of the conditions occurring within those particular neighborhoods. The CSAs were originally created in 2002 and were revised for Vital Signs 10 using new 2010 Census Tract boundaries.

### Community Statistical Areas (CSAs)

