



The Desert Sun

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SERVING THE COACHELLA VALLEY SINCE 1927



BIG DAY FOR PREP SQUADS
Palm Desert boys finish perfect DVL hoops season as drama plays out on soccer fields

COMPLETE COVERAGE IN SPORTS

'RoboCop' remake better-acted, but scrubbed of satire

REVIEW IN WEEKEND

USA TODAY \$45B COMCAST DEAL FOR TIME WARNER CABLE WAS MONTHS IN MAKING **PAGE 5B**

RENEWABLE ENERGY: SOLAR

Ivanpah has its day in the sun

Officials fete fully operational plant, but future of such large sites unclear

By K Kaufmann
The Desert Sun

IVANPAH — Rolling down Interstate 15 in San Bernardino County, there is no mistaking BrightSource Energy's Ivanpah project. Three soaring towers topped with white hot, glaringly bright boilers rise off the valley floor, each surrounded by what looks like a sea of reflecting mirrors, a futuristic, otherworldly installation that dominates the otherwise rugged mountains and desert landscape spreading out as far as the eye can see.

The official opening of the 392-megawatt solar thermal project on Thursday marked a critical turning point for solar development in the Southern California desert. Located off I-15 a few miles west of the Nevada border, Ivanpah is being billed as the first to prove the value of large-scale solar tower projects on public lands, which could provide momentum for more projects and jobs in the desert east of the Coachella Valley.

Putting its first power on the grid in September, all three of the towers are now online, with Pacific Gas & Elec-

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MORE ONLINE

Visit this story at mydesert.com/energy to view a video and photo



...turn a maintenance road Thursday with Towers 2 and 3 in the background at

HEALTH CARE

Survey: Valley's health declines

Broad range of markers got much worse in 2013

By Victoria Pelham
The Desert Sun

Despite a heavy focus on health in the Coachella Valley in recent years, several major diseases increased and health coverage among adults dropped in the desert in 2013, according to new data from the Health Assessment Resource Center.

"Despite our best efforts to make things better, things have been going south in a number of different ways," said Glen Grayman, board president of HARC, a Palm Desert research organization that conducts the survey every three years. "That is disappointing, but hopefully in a broader view, it will help inspire those of us who are really working in these areas and concerned about these issues to pull together to work

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Maria Cruz of Indio has her teeth cleaned by registered dental hygienist Joan Abittan

*Health

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even harder to turn these trends around.”

The percentage of adults ages 18-64 without health insurance jumped from 22.5 percent in 2007 to 28.6 percent in 2010 and 33.6 percent in 2013. Although the Great Recession was over, about 74,656 adult valley residents had no coverage, just as the Affordable Care Act was preparing to launch.

The controversial law, the largest health care overhaul in decades, aims to provide an estimated 5.3 million eligible Californians with insurance in an effort to promote preventive care and prevent emergency room visits. About 90,000 people in the valley qualify for coverage under the ACA, but the changes didn't take ef-

California was ranked 44th in the country for lack of health insurance in 2013, continuing a downward trend of people forgoing coverage that was mirrored in the Coachella Valley. Experts hope the ACA will reverse that trend as the state has embraced the law, becoming the first to create its own insurance exchange, expanding Medi-Cal and opting out of postponing cancellations of non-ACA-compliant plans. Its enrollment numbers have consistently topped other ACA exchanges and brought in more than 728,000 people to coverage to date, according to the federal Health and Human Services agency.

HARC, created in 2007 to perform a community survey measuring hard-to-come-by details on valley health, conducted its third survey in 2013 looking at a broad range of markers, including medical access and insurance,

nutrition, physical activity, sexual health, prevention, chronic diseases, alcohol and tobacco use, and disability, among others.

“It provides relative clarity, definition and perspective to say with confidence ‘Why this, why here, why now, why us?’” said Pam Gabourie, director of institutional giving for Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, addressing a roomful of valley health experts during the data release Thursday.

Initiatives such as the Coachella Valley Health Collaborative and the nationally prominent Clinton Foundation producing multimillion-dollar health commitments have highlighted wellness in the valley, spurring health campaigns and some significant improvement in areas such as child mental health treatment and cancer screenings. But the most up-to-date data in three years shows several

health outcomes actually grew worse from 2007 to 2013.

The percentage of valley adults faced with a cancer diagnosis has seen a significant jump from 9.6 percent in 2007 to 13.8 percent, or 49,041 people, in 2013. The majority of cases in the desert, 32.7 percent or more than 16,000 people, were skin cancer, followed by prostate and breast cancer and other more rare forms.

In a region in which high gusts of wind kick up desert dust and bring in air pollution from the west, respiratory disease has become a hot-button topic. Environmental health forums in poverty-stricken sections of the east valley have called attention to pollution-related health disparities, focusing on asthmatic children, management of toxic-waste dumps, agricultural practices and a solution to the dilemma facing California's largest

inland body of water — the drying up of the Salton Sea.

Meanwhile, respiratory problems such as asthma, COPD and obstructive sleep apnea have become markedly worse over the past six years, HARC 2013 statistics show. About 10.1 percent, or 35,793 people, are asthmatic in the valley. Another 9.2 percent, or 32,634 people, have other breathing issues. That number was a major spike from the 3.6 percent measured in the valley in 2007.

HARC researchers speculate that the increase, a departure from the stable national trend, could be caused by local allergens and air pollutants dug up from the Salton Sea. The increase in sleep apneas could be influenced by obesity rates and increased study, awareness and diagnosis of the condition in hospitals and medical labs.

“The reasons for (an in-

crease in respiratory problems) have not been fully explored, but it is clear that we need to do more to further drive into

hadn't had the ability to see a health care professional.” The report notes that access to medical services has improved and is likely to continue due to the ACA and local efforts that could lead to more diagnoses of conditions.

Other conditions also worsen in the desert

Across the board, other health issues spiked as well, with increases in binge drinking, elder abuse, adults with mental health concerns — especially phobias — and children living in poverty.

The number of seniors being mistreated or neglected more than doubled from 2010 to 2013, rising from 1.7 percent to 4 percent or about 6,954 people.

“That is extremely distressing to me and, I expect, many others, and something needs to be done to further drive into

Company	Change
Estimote	+2.80
Fedexcp	+8.40
Hyatt	+0.05
Jackbox	+5.76
Kroger	+37.74
respiratory	+133.07
in uc of	+90.61
50.76	+104.80
144.39	+62.61
109.96	+50.19
44.26	

problems) are not entirely clear," Grayman said.

But California was ranked the worst in the nation for air pollution in the United Health Foundation's 2013 America's Health Rankings.

As more disease awareness spreads and people become screened for conditions earlier and more frequently, the trend could also contribute to higher prevalence rates, Grayman pointed out.

"It's always hard to know whether prevalence of a particular disease state is naturally increasing in the Coachella Valley or elsewhere or whether prevalence just appears to be increasing because more people seeing doctors or more diagnoses are being made," he said. "It may instead mean that they had them all along but they were not diagnosed because they

the reasons why that increase might be occurring so that we know or have a better sense of how we can reverse that trend," Grayman said.

Binge drinking — consumption of alcohol that raises the blood-alcohol level to .08 — skyrocketed in the desert over the past six years. About 30 percent, or 73,600 adults, reported in engaging in the practice, which takes about five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women in a two-hour window. In 2007, that figure was about 23.3 percent of the valley adult population.

The valley's rates were extremely high, almost double both the state and national average of 16.9 percent of the population.

Among the youngest residents of the Coachella Valley, poverty took root, moving from 28.2 percent in 2007 of the population under age 17 to 48.7 percent in 2013. Valley health professionals have been focusing on socioeconomic determinants of well-

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**Traditional
Passover
Dinner**
"Home

*Health

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ness like this and the influence of ZIP codes on a person's health in their recent efforts — a model they say has taken some getting used to but has begun to move the needle over the long term toward a healthier community.

"I was truly surprised with many of these results; in fact, I was stunned with some of the results that we're reporting," Grayman said.

About 59.5 percent of valley adults are overweight or obese — more than 201,000 adults, according to the latest 2013 numbers. About 21.3 percent were obese, a condition linked to type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and a range of health problems and was recognized by the American Medical Association as a disease last July. About 56.6 percent were overweight or obese in the 2010 figures.

Another 39.8 percent, or about 15,867 kids, are overweight or obese in the valley. About 53.4 percent were in the 2010 numbers, with 37 percent or more than 16,000 kids alone being considered obese.

Childhood obesity, a problem that has worsened for decades, has been highlighted in recent years as a national concern that has been the focus of Clinton Health Matters goals and First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign. It also has spurred efforts to ban sugary drinks in schools across the country.

For the first time since 1998, there was no rise in the obesity rate nationally in 2013, but California saw a small jump from 23.8 percent to 25 percent of adults, more than 7.3 million people.

Some lagging health disparities also persisted in the Coachella Valley in the 2013 report. Just miles from pristine golf courses, former Rat Pack homes, and music and film festivals that draw celebrities and tourists from around the world, migrant farmworkers live in dilapidated trailers and wait overnight at annual clinics for the chance to have free medical care.

KEY 2013 HARC DATA

Read the entire HARC 2013 report at mydesert.com.

Below are some of the survey's highlights.

» Percentage of adults ages 18-64 without health insurance rose from 22.5 percent in 2007 to 33.6 percent, or about 74,656 people, in 2013.

» Cancer rates went up from 9.6 percent in 2007 to 13.8 percent in 2013, or about 49,041 people. Of those, the most were skin cancer cases at 32.7 percent, or 16,048 people.

» Respiratory disease such as COPD jumped from 3.6 percent in 2007 to 9.2 percent, or 32,634 people.

» About 10.1 percent of valley residents, or 35,793 people, have asthma.

» Binge drinking grew from 23.3 percent in 2007 to 30 percent, or 73,600 adults, in 2013. Statewide and nationally the figure is 16.9 percent, much less than the valley.

» Elder abuse more than doubled from 2010 to 2013, rising from 1.7 percent to 4 percent, or about 6,954 people.

» About 59.5 percent of valley adults are overweight or obese — more than 201,000 adults. About 21.3 percent were obese.

» Mental health concerns (anxiety, stress, behavioral problems) grew from 18.2 percent in 2010 to 25.3 percent in 2013, or about 89,791 people.

» More than half of those with mental health concerns, 55.9 percent, felt their problem was severe enough to require professional help.

» Adults with phobias grew from 3.3 percent in 2007 to 4.7 percent in 2013. Latino adults were less likely than white adults to receive medication for their concerns.

» About 28.1 percent of adults age 50 and older have never had a colorectal cancer screening, the second-most deadly cancer after lung cancer. This is lower than the statewide average of 34.1 percent and national average of 32.7 percent.

» Financial stability grew for seniors, as the percentage who made greater than 300 percent of federal poverty guidelines jumped from 74.9 percent in 2007 to 81.7 percent in 2013.

» Nearly all children, 92.1 percent, have visited a health provider within the past year.

» Number of children with mental health problems who had seen a family doctor for treatment jumped from 4 percent in 2010 to 12.3 percent in 2013.

» About half of parents are "not at all concerned" about potential risks of vaccinations, up from 36.2 percent in 2010.

» 8.3 percent of valley residents use medical marijuana, about 29,342 people.

Source: Health Assessment Resource Center

For example, Hispanic/Latino adults were less likely than white adults to receive medication for mental health concerns, and Latino children were less likely to have been to the dentist or have a vision exam.

But there were other bright spots for health and wellness in the area, a place that former President Bill Clinton in January called a microcosm of diversity that also could enable the kind of decision-making process and collaboration that would allow the U.S. to deal with its health challenges.

Valley residents were much more likely to have colorectal cancer screenings than others in the state. Just 28.1 percent of adults over 50 had never had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy, compared with 34.1 percent statewide and 32.7 percent na-

tionally.

Although more children were living in poverty, valley seniors were more financially stable than in past years, and fewer parents were worried about risks of vaccinating their children after awareness campaigns spread its importance.

Children identified by parents as having mental health issues or problems are also getting treated at a rate three times higher than they were in 2010, from 4 percent to 12.3 percent.

Grayman attributed the work of the Coachella Valley Health Collaborative, a group that convened three mental health summits over the past two years that focused on reducing stigma and improving care for mental health issues faced by valley Latinos, LGBTQ, seniors and youth, among others.

A follow-up report in 2016 depends on the agency getting enough funding, Grayman said. The survey, conducted by phone and looking at the health and wellness of roughly 350,000 people, costs about \$1.5 million, which mostly comes from grants.

"It's very, very hard to get adequate funding for this kind of research ... and yet without us knowing these kinds of things

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