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and Research, Office of Planning

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Office of Planning

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Fellow residents and friends of Brooklyn:

Cardiovascular disease—heart disease and stroke—is the leading cause of death for all Americans, regardless of gender, race, or ethnic ancestry. In 1997, heart disease and stroke killed 9,010 residents of Brooklyn alone, accounting for nearly half of all deaths in the borough.

Many such deaths can be prevented. Numerous studies have documented that good nutrition, exercise, and smoking cessation can substantially reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. High cholesterol, hypertension, and diabetes—three health-risk factors that affect Brooklynites in disproportionately higher numbers than people living elsewhere—also contribute heavily to death from heart disease and stroke.

Heart disease and stroke have a significant impact on quality of life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in four Americans is debilitated by these diseases. Each year, approximately 6 million Americans—nearly 50,000 of them Brooklynites—are hospitalized for cardiovascular disease. Many are permanently disabled.

This report highlights some of the issues surrounding heart disease and stroke in Brooklyn and documents the important health problems they raise. Understanding these issues is the first step in designing the programs necessary to deal with them.

With your help we can greatly reduce the burden that cardiovascular disease places on the borough and its people.

John C. LaRosa, M.D.
President
Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death throughout the country. In Brooklyn, however, heart disease and stroke take an even greater toll than elsewhere in the state or nation.

**Top Five Causes of Death**

**Brooklyn**
- Heart Disease
- Malignant Neoplasm (Cancer)
- HIV Infection/AIDS
- Pneumonia & Influenza
- Cerebrovascular Disease

**New York State (excluding NYC)**
- Heart Disease
- Malignant Neoplasm (Cancer)
- Cerebrovascular Disease
- COPD*
- Pneumonia & Influenza

**United States**
- Heart Disease
- Malignant Neoplasm (Cancer)
- Cerebrovascular Disease
- COPD*
- Pneumonia & Influenza

* Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Sources: 1997 Vital Statistics Report, NYSDOH; Deaths: Final Data for 1997; CDC
In 1997, 47.4 percent of all deaths in the borough was attributable to heart disease and stroke, compared to 41.9 percent in the state and 38.3 percent in the nation.
Death rates from heart disease vary among the different racial and ethnic groups living in Brooklyn. Whites have the highest rate. Hispanics living in Brooklyn also have a higher death rate from the disease than those living elsewhere in the state and country. Black residents of Brooklyn and the state have virtually identical death rates from heart disease, but both groups are at greater risk than blacks living elsewhere in the country. Many factors may account for these differences, including diet, lifestyle, and access to health care.

Despite these differences, heart disease is the number one killer for all racial groups in Brooklyn, the state, and the nation.

1997 Deaths from Heart Disease


* US data is calculated to different base years and is only roughly comparable to Brooklyn and New York State.
Brooklyn’s ethnic and cultural diversity is enriched by waves of immigration. From 1982 to 1996, immigration to the borough totaled more than 480,000 people. In the 80s, these immigrants came primarily from the Caribbean; in the 90s, from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

These immigration patterns can affect rates of heart disease and death in the borough. For example, Caribbean-born blacks have a lower chance of dying from heart disease than black or white native-born Americans.* Recent immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, have higher rates of heart disease than many other white ethnic groups. These differences may be due, in part, to diet and lifestyle.

Health-care professionals must consider these differences in designing effective prevention and treatment programs.

DEATH RATES FROM CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES BY RACE, GENDER AND BIRTHPLACE FOR NYC, 1988-1992

Men

![Bar chart showing death rates from cardiovascular diseases by race, gender, and birthplace for men in NYC, 1988-1992. The rates are presented per 100,000 population. The chart includes data for blacks born in the South, blacks born in the Northeast, blacks born in the Caribbean, and whites born in the Northeast.]

Women

![Bar chart showing death rates from cardiovascular diseases by race, gender, and birthplace for women in NYC, 1988-1992. The rates are presented per 100,000 population. The chart includes data for blacks born in the South, blacks born in the Northeast, blacks born in the Caribbean, and whites born in the Northeast.]

For people of all ages, the rate of heart disease deaths is greater in Brooklyn than it is throughout New York State, excluding New York City. For both the borough and the state, the rates for women are less than men. Ultimately, however, more women than men will die of heart disease because women on average live longer. In 1997, for example, 4,645 women died of heart disease in Brooklyn, compared to 3,701 men.

1997 Heart Disease Deaths by Age and Gender

Source: Population estimates from Bureau of Biometrics, New York State Department of Health. Death Data from InfoShare, City College of New York.
Disparities exist among Brooklyn neighborhoods in the rates of death from heart
disease. The highest rates are generally in those neighborhoods with substantial white
populations. In 1997, Sunset Park had particularly high rates among residents over the
age of 55. The data also show that blacks are more likely to die earlier deaths from heart
disease. For example, among 55- to 64-year-old residents living in Bedford-Stuyvesant/
Crown Heights and East New York, death rates are higher than those in other areas.

**1997 Heart Disease Deaths by Brooklyn Neighborhoods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>35-44 years</th>
<th>45-54 years</th>
<th>55-64 years</th>
<th>65-74 years</th>
<th>75-84 years</th>
<th>84+ years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenpoint-Williamsburg</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Downtown-Heights-Park Slope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunset Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borough Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canarsie-Flatlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bensonhurst-Bay Ridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coney Island-Sheepshead Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Flatbush-Flatbush</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bedford Stuyvesant-Crown Heights</td>
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<tr>
<td>East New York</td>
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</table>
In 1997, 656 Brooklynites died of stroke. Overall, Brooklyn residents' death rate from stroke is somewhat higher than the national average but lower than the state's average. As shown on the next graph (see page 10), however, it is clear that stroke deaths in Brooklyn occur at an earlier age than elsewhere in the state. Only among Hispanics is the rate higher in Brooklyn than it is elsewhere in the state.


* US data is calculated to different base years and is only roughly comparable to Brooklyn and New York State.
Brooklynnites are at greater risk of dying at an earlier age from stroke than other New York State residents. In Brooklyn, men between the ages of 35 and 74 and women between the ages of 35 and 64 are more likely to die from stroke than men and women living elsewhere in the state.
Large disparities exist among Brooklyn neighborhoods in the rates of death from stroke. Adults of every age group living in Bedford-Stuyvesant/Crown Heights appear to be at much greater risk of stroke than those living in other Brooklyn neighborhoods. Among those 55- to 64-years old, residents of Greenpoint-Williamsburg and East New York also are at greater risk than residents of other neighborhoods.

### 1997 Stroke Deaths by Brooklyn Neighborhoods

- **Greenpoint-Williamsburg**: 894
- **Downtown-Heights-Park Slope**: 355
- **Sunset Park**: 1017
- **Borough Park**: 308
- **Canarsie-Flatlands**: 541
- **Bensonhurst-Bay Ridge**: 380
- **Coney Island-Sheepshead Bay**: 477
- **East Flatbush-Flatbush**: 374
- **Bedford Stuyvesant-Crown Heights**: 648
- **East New York**: 900

Rate per 100,000
Early admission to a hospital—ideally, within an hour—greatly improves the chances of surviving a heart attack. Yet, wide disparities exist between men and women and between racial groups in the length of time it takes to seek treatment for a heart attack. A study of patients admitted to Kings County Hospital found that the widest disparity existed between white and black patients.* Whites on average arrived at the hospital in 3.3 hours after the onset of symptoms, blacks in 13.1 hours. The most important factor in determining how quickly patients got to the hospital was the patient's belief that the symptoms he or she was experiencing might represent a heart attack.


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**DELAY IN BEING HOSPITALIZED AMONG PATIENTS SUFFERING A HEART ATTACK**

| Average Time of Arrival at Hospital after Onset of Heart Attack Symptoms (in number of hours) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Race |
| Men | Women | Whites | Hispanics | Blacks |
| 10.9 | 12.7 | 3.3 | 12.4 | 13.1 |
Despite the fact that Brooklyn has higher rates of heart disease, the borough is underrepresented in both the number of heart specialists and heart surgeons. It has 6.7 cardiologists per 100,000 residents compared to a statewide average of 10.5, and only .8 heart surgeons compared to the statewide average of 2.1. Within the city, Brooklyn has dramatically fewer heart specialists than Manhattan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brooklyn</th>
<th>Manhattan</th>
<th>New York State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiologists (Per 100,000 Residents)</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiothoracic surgeons</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Medical Society of the State of New York and New York State Department of Health.

Brooklyn is also underrepresented in the number of cardiac care beds, having fewer beds per 100,000 residents than the state and Manhattan. Because heart disease often requires emergency care, the distance to critical care facilities may be an important factor in obtaining the best medical results.

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<tr>
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<th>Brooklyn</th>
<th>Manhattan</th>
<th>New York State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCU Beds per resident population Per 100,000 Residents</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NYS Dept of Health
Heart disease and stroke place a terrible burden on our community and our country. Not only is heart disease the leading cause of death, it is the leading cause of permanent disability among working adults. Stroke, alone, disables more than a million Americans.

It does not have to be this way. Heart disease and stroke are largely preventable diseases. That message needs to reach more residents of Brooklyn, where these two diseases account for a greater percentage of deaths than they do in New York State and the country.

We also need to formulate a public health research agenda. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Brooklynxites die from heart attacks at a far greater rate than those living elsewhere in the country. We need research to understand why. We also need increased education about disease prevention. And we need to develop policies to increase our citizens’ access to specialized cardiovascular services by increasing the number of heart specialists in the borough and increasing our investment in the latest technologies to reduce death from stroke and heart disease.

To successfully address this issue, we need your support and advice. If you have information or suggestions, please contact John C. LaRosa, M.D., President, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, 450 Clarkson Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11203.