

RESOURCE SHEET:

PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOODS

To study health outcomes and exposures where people live, work, and play, it is useful to identify neighborhoods that are meaningful to residents which can be linked to accurate population estimates and health outcomes. It is also important that the neighborhoods have large enough populations to conduct statistical analyses that provide reliable results. Unfortunately, most cities, including Philadelphia, do not have official neighborhood definitions that meet these criteria. In its mission to conduct research to improve health in cities and reduce health inequities, the Urban Health Collaborative (UHC) at Dornsife School of Public Health (DSPH) created a set of Philadelphia neighborhood boundaries and made them available at data.uhcdata.org/. These neighborhoods are based on those used by the Southeast Pennsylvania Household Health Survey and are aligned with 2010 census tract boundaries.

Alternative definitions of neighborhoods have been used by the city of Philadelphia and other groups. In this Resource Sheet, we describe the neighborhood boundaries created by UHC and planning districts used by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. We also provide brief information about other definitions.

The boundaries chosen for health research can have important implications for interpreting research results and communicating with community organizations. Careful consideration should be given to the choice of neighborhood definition for your purposes.

46 NEIGHBORHOODS - DSPH

The 46 neighborhoods in Figure 1 can be linked to 2010 census tract boundaries and American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, as well as health outcomes and behaviors from the Southeast Pennsylvania Household Health Survey administered by Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC). These neighborhood definitions are the same as the neighborhoods defined by PHMC with one modification. The UHC split the Center City neighborhood from the Household Health Survey in two in order to have neighborhoods with similar populations. The average neighborhood population is 33,808 (min 19,008 max 54,106 ACS 2012 - 2016). The UHC, working with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, used these neighborhoods in a [report on the health of Philadelphia neighborhoods](#). (Philadelphia Dept of Public Health, 2019).

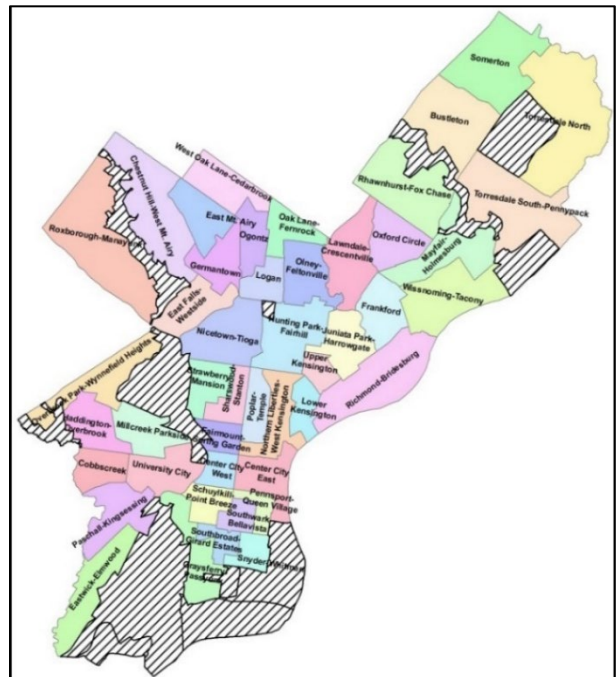


Figure 1. The 46 Philadelphia Neighborhoods

These neighborhood boundaries are available on the UHC Data Portal. The Census Tracts 2010 Philadelphia Reading Camden CSA spatial boundaries and associated CSV and SAS files on the UHC Data Portal include neighborhood and planning district IDs for Philadelphia that can be used to link census tract data to these neighborhood boundaries.

18 PLANNING DISTRICTS

The 18 Planning Districts in Figure 2 are used by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission as part of the planning processes outlined by the City of Philadelphia Comprehensive Plan, Philadelphia2035. Researchers interested in the relationship between land use and zoning policies and health outcomes may want to use these larger areas. Philadelphia Department of Public Health uses planning districts and ZIP Codes in their [Health of the City](#) reports (Philadelphia Dept of Public Health, 2021).

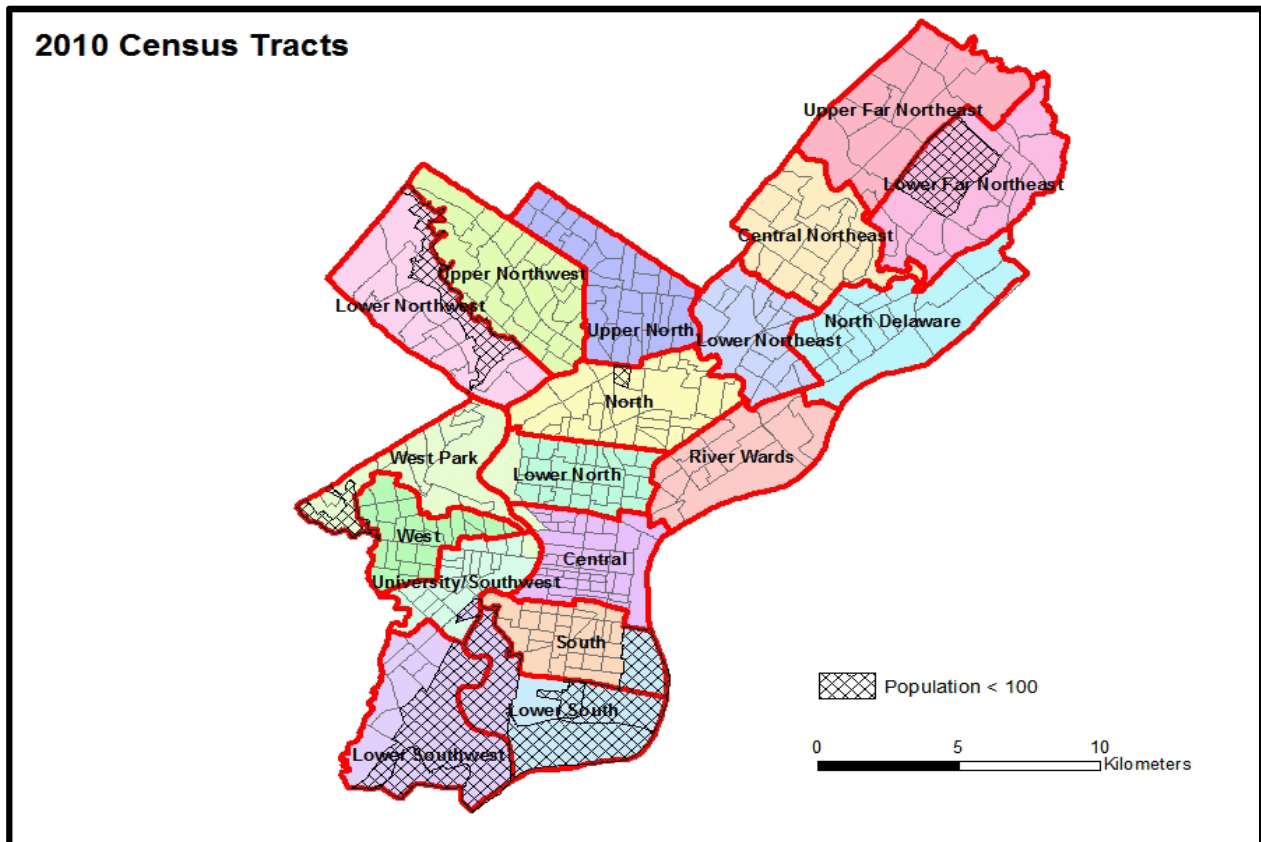


Figure 2. 18 Planning Districts

157 NEIGHBORHOODS - OPEN DATA PHILLY

The [157 neighborhoods](#) available from OpenDataPhilly.org may be a better representation of Philadelphia residents' view of their neighborhoods. To our knowledge these small neighborhoods have not been used in health studies. UHC has not linked these boundaries to census tract, ZCTA, or any other boundaries available for the city of Philadelphia.

OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS

The Philadelphia Inquirer published a good overview of the challenges in defining Philadelphia neighborhoods (behind a paywall [here](#), but related [online map from Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission](#) is freely available)(Boren & Whalen, 2018).

In addition to the neighborhood boundaries described in sections above, other academic groups have developed their own definitions for research. For example, in the early 2000s, the Cartographic Modeling Laboratory at University of Pennsylvania developed a Neighborhood Information System for 67 neighborhoods (Tannen, 2016c)

Additional information about Philadelphia neighborhoods is available from [University of Pennsylvania Library](#).

Many researchers rely on using Zip Code Tabulation Areas or census tracts as defined by the US Census Bureau as proxies for "neighborhoods" for analyses. Krieger et al. discuss the limitations of using ZIP Code data (ZIP Code Tabulation Areas ZCTAs from US Census), but in some cases health outcomes are only available by ZIP Code (Krieger et al., 2002).

CHANGES OVER TIME

The UHC has focused on boundaries that can be linked to 2010 census tracts to leverage a decade of ACS estimates, as well as exposures and health outcomes that have been linked to those boundaries. Official boundaries can change over time: census tracts are updated every decennial census, ZIP Codes can be changed by the US Postal Service at any time, metropolitan statistical areas are changed by the Office of Management and Budget independently from the Census, and local or state authorities can change municipal boundaries (fortunately Philadelphia boundaries have not changed since 1854). Linkages between the 46 DSPH neighborhoods and 2020 or 2000 tract boundaries are available by request to uhcdata@drexel.edu

Unofficial neighborhood boundaries also change over time. Tannen discusses the [implication of boundary change on gentrification](#)(Tannen, 2016a, 2016b)

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about neighborhood boundaries, other data from the UHC, or would like to discuss your needs, please contact the Urban Health Collaborative data team at uhcdata@drexel.edu.

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