

Cook County Family Connection: Powering Healthy Lives

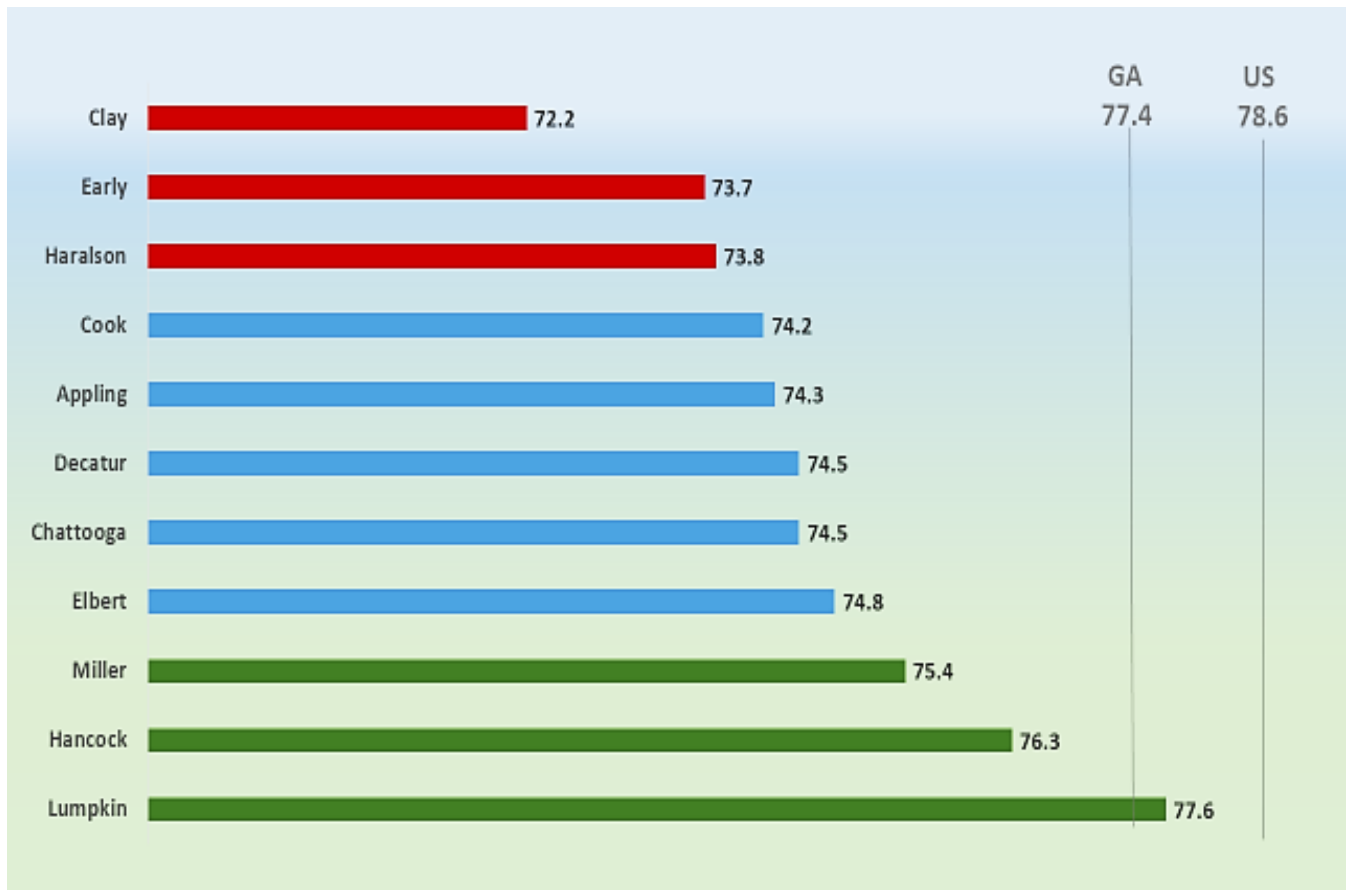
FINAL AGGREGATE REPORT

MAY 2020

During the period from June to November 2019, the research team of Cook County Family Connection utilized USALEEP data to create detailed health data reports, infographics, and slide presentations for the eleven rural community partnerships included in The Two Georgias Initiative network. These eleven counties, scattered across the state, included: Cook, Appling, Chattooga, Clay, Decatur, Early, Elbert, Hancock, Haralson, Lumpkin, and Miller. In late 2017, these eleven rural counties were strategically selected by Healthcare Georgia Foundation to pilot a five-year Two Georgias Initiative focused on creating community partnerships to identify and address the root causes of local health inequities. Chosen because of their disproportionate health disparities, each of these eleven counties have created a local collaborative partnership comprised of diverse partners who represent a cross-section of the community.

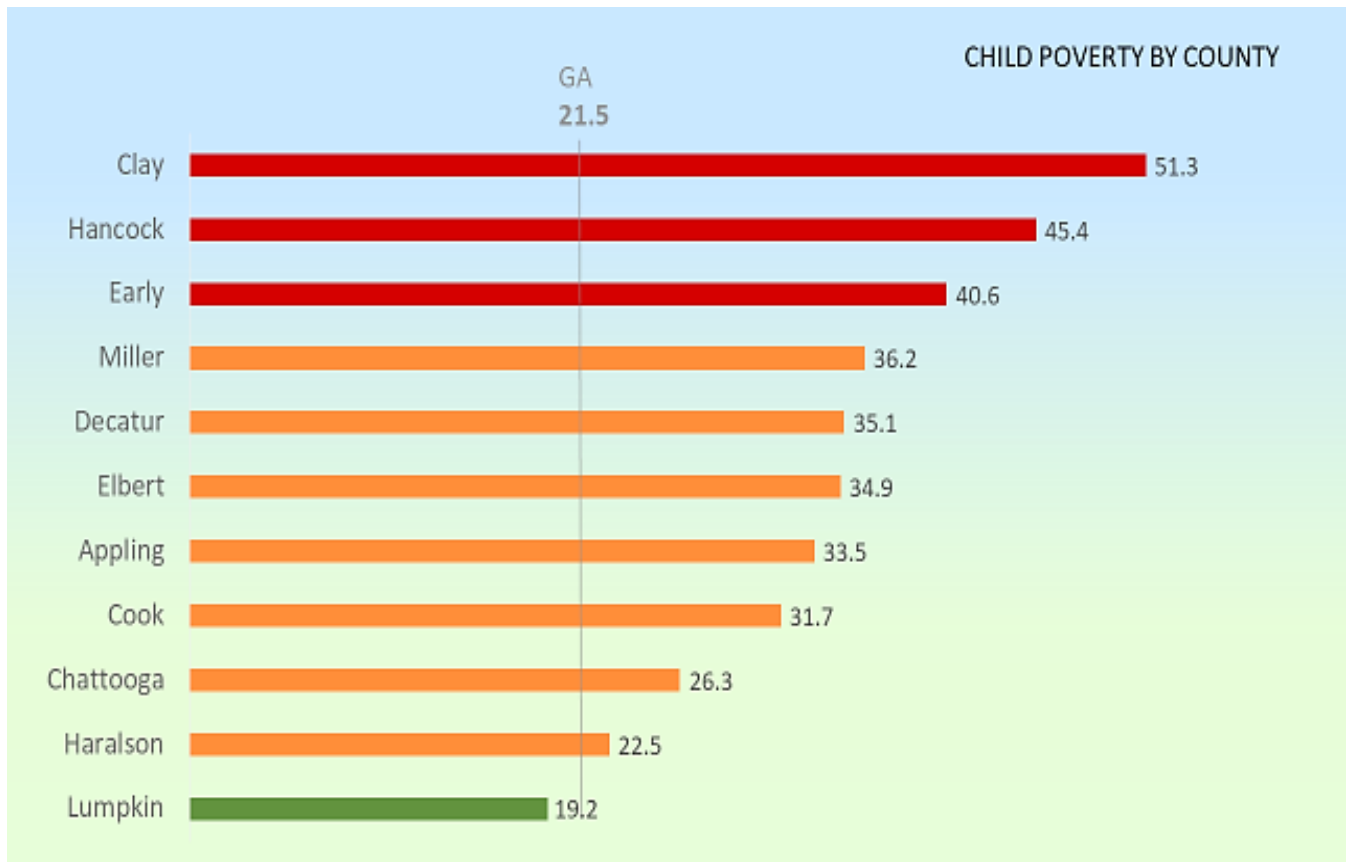
For each of those individual counties, the research team of Cook County Family Connection compiled and mapped USALEEP life expectancy data from the various census tracts and zip codes. Using life expectancy data as the primary data point, they then collected and compiled secondary data to examine the socioeconomic, behavioral, environmental, and healthcare access correlations for each locale. Secondary data sources included The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings, The Annie Casey Foundation Kids Count Database, The Georgia Family Connection Partnership Census Tract Database, The Georgia Department of Public Health OASIS (Online Analytical Statistical Information System), The Georgia Bureau of Investigation Crime Report Database, and others. These secondary data sources, combined with results of locally-administered health assessments and windshield surveys, allowed the research team to provide each of the eleven communities with detailed data reports that help to explain the specific disparities and inequities that lead to lower life expectancy in certain geographic areas of their county.

In addition to those eleven county-specific data reports, the Cook County Family Connection research team sought to compare and contrast life expectancy and health data among these eleven communities. Although the communities are scattered across the state and vary in terms of demographics, culture, and resources, the expectation was to find commonalities across the eleven counties because of rurality, poverty, and similar health inequities. This final aggregate report will allow leaders in all eleven communities, and state-level leaders with Healthcare Georgia Foundation, to identify similarities and common denominators of health inequity that are occurring across the rural cohort.



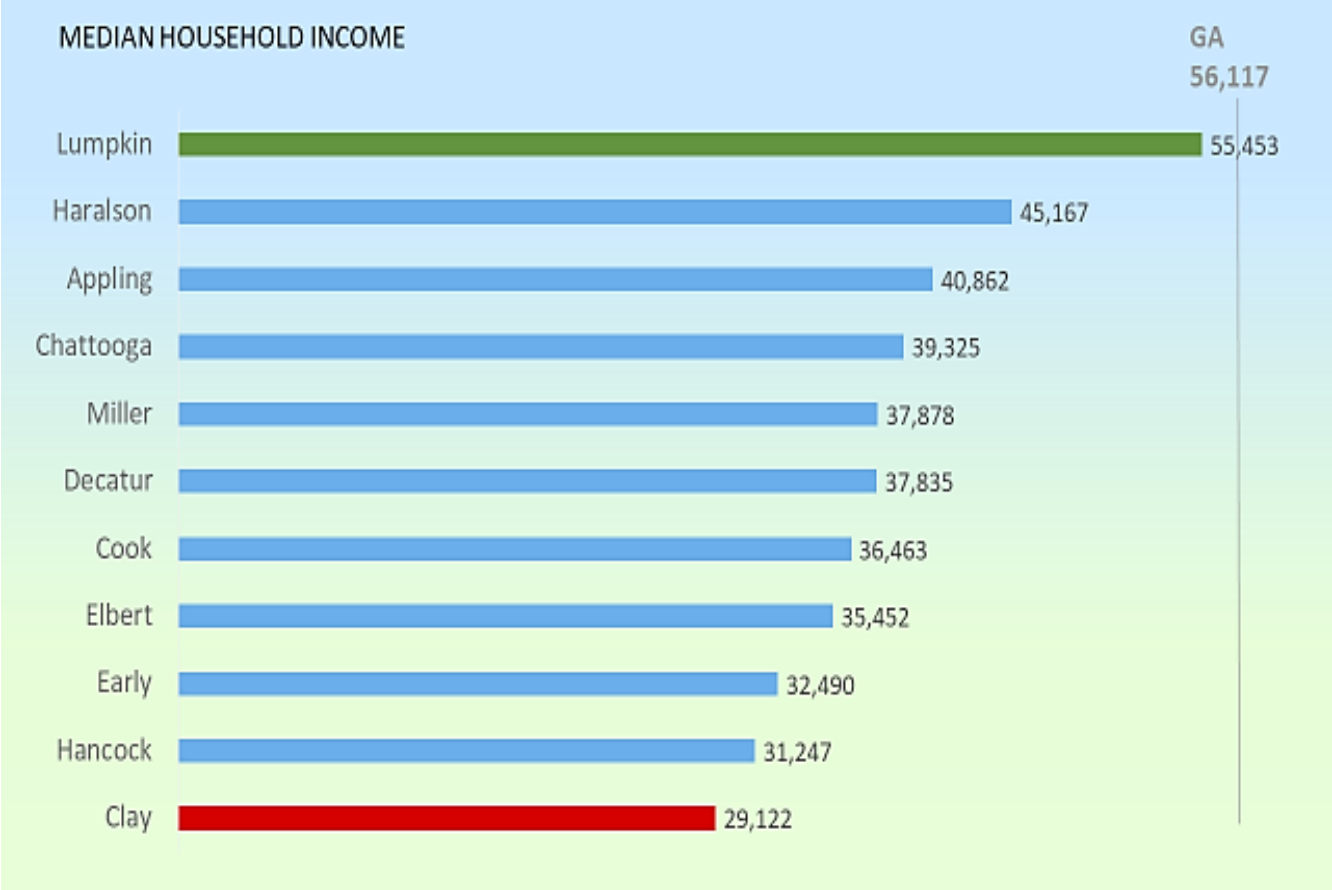
Life Expectancy Averages

While there was a total spread of 5.4 years in life expectancy among the eleven cohort counties, the overall average life expectancy for the rural cohort was 74.66 years—four years less than the U.S. average. The lowest life expectancy average (72.2 years) was found in Clay County, a rural county located in southwest Georgia along the Chattahoochee River near the Alabama border. This low life expectancy was not surprising considering the fact that Clay County has the highest child poverty rate in the state of Georgia, and an individual poverty rate that is more than double the state average. In contrast, the highest life expectancy average (77.6 years) was found in Lumpkin County, a rural county located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Again, the higher life expectancy rates may be attributable to the fact that individual and child poverty rates in that county are notably lower than the Georgia averages. It is also noteworthy that the two counties with the lowest life expectancy averages—Clay and Early—are situated in southwest Georgia, while the two counties with the highest life expectancy averages—Lumpkin and Hancock—are situated in the northern part of the state. When we examined life expectancy by individual census tracts, the lowest life expectancy rate (71.4 years) was found in central Decatur County, located in deep southwest Georgia. The highest life expectancy rate by census tract (80.8 years) was discovered in western Miller County, which interestingly adjoins Decatur County.



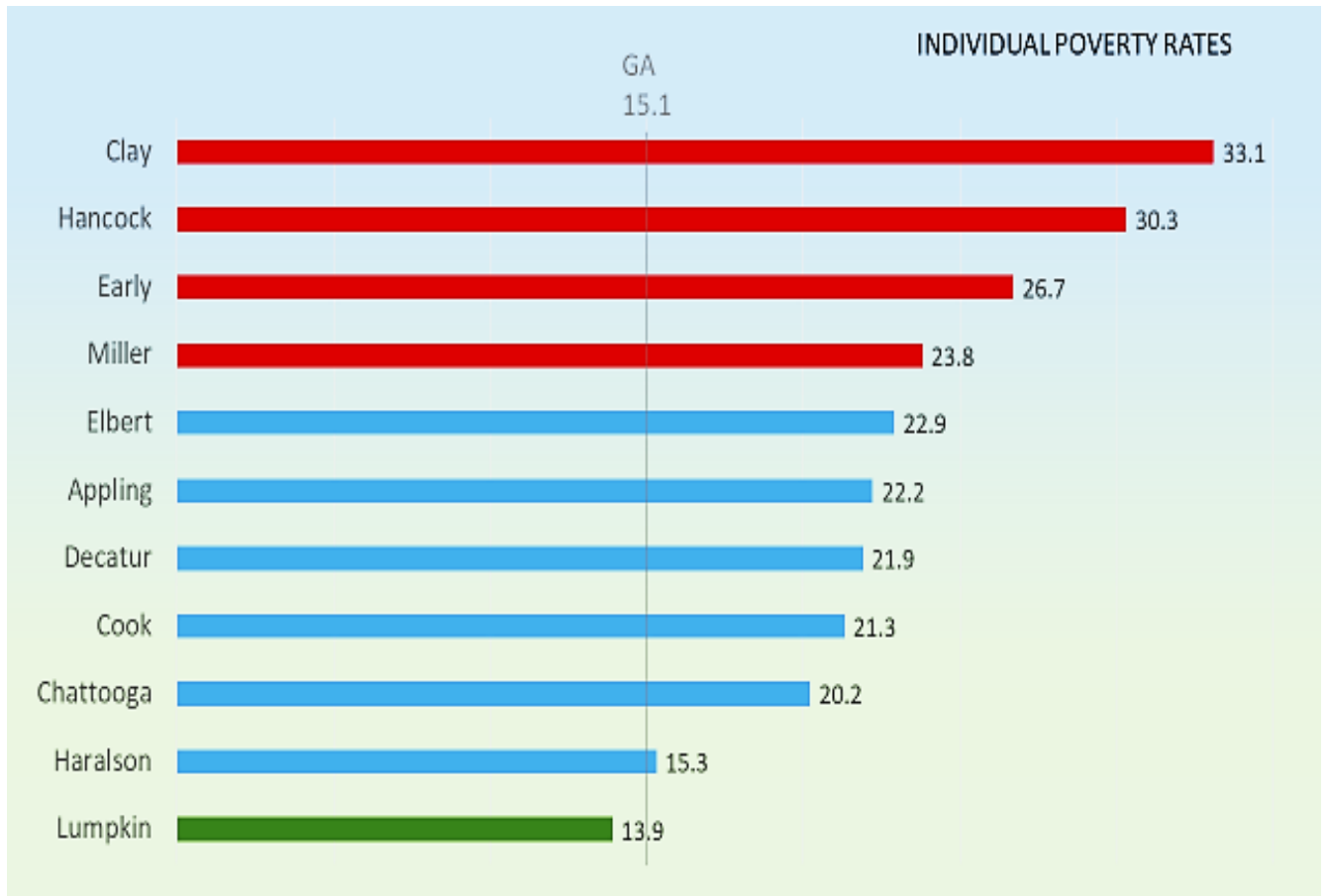
Child Poverty Comparisons

While child poverty rates varied widely among census tracts, the overall county average reveals significant differences among the eleven counties. Lumpkin County—the county with the highest life expectancy average—had the lowest rate of child poverty, while Clay County—the county with the lowest life expectancy average—had the highest rate of child poverty in the entire state of Georgia. It is also interesting to note that the three counties with the lowest rates of child poverty (Lumpkin, Haralson, and Chattooga) are situated north of Metro Atlanta, while the three counties with the highest child poverty rates (Clay, Hancock, and Early) are situated south of Metro Atlanta. When we examined child poverty by individual census tracts across the eleven-county cohort, the highest rate (61.7 percent) was found in the northern tract of Miller County located in deep southwest Georgia. Compared to the rest of Miller County, that tract had the worst socioeconomic indicators and life expectancy rates were three years lower than the county average. In contrast, the lowest child poverty rate (1.2 percent) was found in the central tract of Decatur County which adjoins Miller County. That tract had extremely good socioeconomic indicators and a life expectancy rate four years higher than the county average.



Median Household Income Comparisons

While median household income varied widely across census tracts, the county averages reveal that Clay County in southwest Georgia had the lowest median income at \$29,122—almost half of the Georgia state average income of \$56,117. This is the same county that had the lowest life expectancy average among the eleven-county cohort at 72.2 years. In contrast, Lumpkin County in northern Georgia had the highest median household income at \$55,453 and is the same county that had the highest life expectancy average at 77.6 years. While all eleven rural counties fall below the Georgia average in median income, it is interesting to note that the two counties with the highest incomes (Lumpkin and Haralson) are located in the northern part of the state. When we examined median household income by individual census tracts, we found the lowest median income (\$23,068) in the eastern tract of Early County in southwest Georgia where life expectancy was 76.7 years. The highest median income (\$58,077) was found in the northeastern tract of Lumpkin County in north Georgia where life expectancy was two years longer.



Individual Poverty Comparisons

While individual poverty rates varied widely among census tracts, the overall county average reveals significant differences among the eleven counties. Lumpkin County—the county with the highest life expectancy average—had the lowest rate of individual poverty, while Clay County—the county with the lowest life expectancy average—had the highest rate of individual poverty at more than double the state average. It is noteworthy that the four counties with the highest rates of individual poverty (Clay, Hancock, Early, and Miller) are situated south of Metro Atlanta, while the three counties with the lowest rates of individual poverty (Lumpkin, Haralson, and Chattooga) are situated north of Metro Atlanta. When we examined individual poverty by census tracts across the eleven-county cohort, it was interesting to find both the highest and the lowest rates within the same county. Early County in southwest Georgia had the highest individual poverty rate (41.3 percent) in their northern census tract, while their adjoining western census tract had the lowest individual poverty rate among the cohort (5.8 percent). Stark differences in socioeconomic indicators appear to create this tremendous variance in poverty rates between neighborhoods that are just a few miles apart.

Research Observations

Using aggregate data from the eleven-county research process, the research team of Cook County Family Connection compiled the following list of observations that may be noteworthy:

- Mapping life expectancy estimates by census tract revealed stark differences among various tracts within the same county. For example, researchers found a nine-year difference in life expectancy between adjoining tracts in Miller County, and in Decatur County there was a seven year difference within neighborhoods that were just a few miles apart. These contrasts were more extreme among the South Georgia counties, while the most significant differences found among the tracts in the North Georgia counties were around three years.
- The county with the lowest life expectancy average was Clay County situated in southwest Georgia. That county had extremely high poverty rates, a median household income of less than \$30,000, poor educational outcomes, and a majority black population. In contrast, the county with the highest life expectancy average was Lumpkin County situated in North Georgia. That county had poverty rates below the state average, a median household income of over \$55,000, good educational outcomes, and a majority white population.
- The individual census tract with the lowest life expectancy (71 years) was found in the central tract of Decatur County in extreme southwest Georgia. That tract had a median income of less than \$27,000; thirty percent of residents living in poverty; and 29 percent of parents lacking secure employment. In terms of demographics, black and white residents were equally represented within that tract. In contrast, the individual census tract with the highest life expectancy (81 years) was found in the western tract of Miller County adjacent to Decatur County. That tract had a median income of almost \$42,000; fourteen percent of residents living in poverty; and less than six percent of parents lacking secure employment. In terms of demographics, three of every four residents in that tract were white.
- Overall, poverty rates were higher in the South Georgia counties than in the North Georgia counties. Variance ranged from 13.9 percent individual poverty in Lumpkin County in the northern part of the state, to over 33 percent poverty in Clay County in southwest Georgia. Nine of the eleven rural counties had poverty rates that exceeded the state average by at least five percentage points, and two of those had poverty rates more than double the Georgia average.
- Examining poverty by race and ethnicity, researchers found that Lumpkin, Haralson, and Chattooga Counties (all situated in North Georgia) had the highest rates of white poverty, but also the largest white populations. Clay, Hancock, and Early Counties (all located south of Atlanta) had the highest rates of black poverty, but also majority black populations. Researchers found a couple of exceptions to this dynamic such as in Elbert County in northeast Georgia where black residents comprise only thirty percent of the

total population, but fifty percent of those living in poverty are black. Appling County located in South Georgia had the highest rate of Hispanic poverty among the cohort (over 13 percent) and yet Hispanics account for less than ten percent of the total population.

- Examining population demographics by census tract provided a new snapshot of where diverse populations are located within each county. For example, county-level data for Decatur County showed Hispanic residents accounting for only six percent of the total population. Delving deeper into census tract data, researchers found that Hispanics actually represented 27 percent of the population in the southwestern tract and 18 percent in the southeastern tract.
- Third-grade reading proficiency levels were examined as part of the social determinants of health because children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of school. Lumpkin County in north Georgia was the only one within the eleven-county cohort that had a proficiency score (43 percent) above the Georgia average of 37 percent. The four counties with the lowest reading proficiency rates (Clay, Cook, Early, and Hancock) are all situated south of Metro Atlanta.
- Six of the eleven rural counties had crime rates that were significantly higher than the Georgia state average of 33 crimes per 1,000 residents. There did not appear to be any geographic distinctions among counties and crime rates. The highest crime rate (64.2) was found in Cook County in deep South Georgia with rates almost double the state average. It may be significant to note that Cook County is the only one of the eleven rural counties that is intersected by a major interstate highway (I-75) which has some impact on crime rates.
- Lack of health insurance is a consistent risk factor across the eleven counties with rates of uninsured residents ranging from 14 to 22 percent. Only two of the counties (Hancock and Haralson) were in alignment with the Georgia state average of 15 percent; while the remaining nine counties had rates of uninsured residents that exceeded the state average. The five counties with the highest rates (18 to 22 percent) were found among the counties across South Georgia. The highest rates of uninsured children were found in Cook County (13.2 percent) and Clay County (12.4 percent), both of which are situated in deep South Georgia.
- Examining opioid use by county, the researchers gathered data on the number of opioid prescriptions written per 100 residents. Nine of the eleven counties exceeded the U.S. average (58.7) and the Georgia state average (70.9). The North Georgia counties of Haralson, Elbert, and Chattooga had the highest rates of opioid prescriptions written, ranging from 120 to 180 prescriptions written per 100 residents.