

It hit 79 years in 2024, which is a record and regains pandemic losses.

A U.S. Life Expectancy Milestone

Amid the lamentations about America's healthcare system, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week reported some good news you might have missed. Lo, life expectancy in the U.S. hit a record in 2024 as death rates for heart disease, cancer, Covid and drug overdoses fell.

U.S. life expectancy at birth increased to 79 years in 2024, up 0.6 years from 2023 and 0.2 years higher than in 2019. The statistic reflects the average number of years newborns are expected to live if mortality trends stay constant over their lifespans. Life expectancy shifts when death rates change.

In the decade before the pandemic, life expectancy stalled at about 78.5 years amid an increase in drug overdose deaths. Then Covid, alongside a surge in drug overdoses and homicide, caused life expectancy to fall to 76.4 years in 2021. In 2024 America fully recovered from the pandemic decline, and death rates decreased from the top causes of death.

Age-adjusted mortality fell in 2024 for unintentional injuries including overdoses (14.4% lower), as well as for kidney disease (3.8%), diabetes (3.1%), chronic lower respiratory diseases (3%), heart disease (2.8%), suicide (2.8%), chronic liver disease (2.3%), Alzheimer's disease (2.2%), cancer (1.7%) and stroke (1%). Death rates fell for all age groups and fell the most among those ages 15 to 44. Covid deaths notably fell to 31,426 in 2024 from 49,932 in 2023. They were as high as 460,513 in 2021. Recent data indicate Covid deaths fell to less than 20,000 in 2025, which would be similar to mortality from the flu.

The increase in life expectancy compared to before the pandemic owes largely to lower death rates for chronic lower respiratory diseases (15.2% decline), cancer (4.7%) and heart disease (2.4%). Much of this progress stems from better treatments, including such GLP-1 drugs as Ozempic and expanded access to them across income groups.

The liberal clerisy likes to bemoan that the U.S. spends more on healthcare than other countries with government-run systems. But Americans have superior medical access than people in countries with nationalized systems, which ration care and have long wait times to see specialists.

America's private health system isn't without flaws—which largely stem from market distortions caused by government—but it's better than the alternatives.

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