WHAT IS SOCIETAL DISTRESS?
Societal distress describes living conditions that do not satisfy basic human needs, such as food, shelter, health, income, and education. Visit www.humanneeds.vcu.edu for more details.

In 2009, one out of eight persons in the United States described their health as fair or poor.

What is health?
Health is defined by the World Health Organization as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Health distress is measured here in terms of shorter life expectancy, premature mortality (e.g., deaths before age 65), chronic illnesses, serious psychological distress, hospitalizations, and inadequate access to health care (being uninsured, lacking a usual source of care, or having to defer care due to costs).

How many Americans are affected?
• In 2007, 27.6% of all deaths in the United States occurred prematurely (before age 65).

As of 2009, the most current year for which statistics are available:
• 43.4% of adults age 18 or older suffered from at least one of the following six chronic diseases: diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, cancer, or arthritis.
• 7.3% of the population had been hospitalized in the preceding year.
• 3.2% of adults reported serious psychological distress.
• 17.5% of the adult population under 65 (46.2 million Americans) reported being uninsured and 18.0% of adults age 18 or older reported having no usual source of health care.
What are the trends?
Since the 1990s, the proportion of the population without health insurance has decreased among children and adolescents (under age 18) but has increased among adults, especially adults under age 45.

Who is affected?
Children: In 2009, more than 6 million children and adolescents, nearly one in every 12 (8.2%), were uninsured.

Seniors: In 2009, three out of four seniors (age 65 and older) suffered from at least one of six chronic diseases.

Minorities: In 2007, black infants were more than twice as likely as whites to die before their first birthday. In 2009, among adults age 18 and older, the prevalence of diabetes was 13.1% among blacks and 13.8% among Mexican Americans—more than 1.5 times the diabetes prevalence in whites.

The Poor: In 2009, families living in poverty were 3.5 times more likely to report fair or poor health status, and 4.8 times more likely to report serious adult psychological distress, than families with incomes at least twice the poverty threshold. Nearly one-third of the poor were uninsured.

Households with Less Education: In 2009, adults age 25 and older with less than a high school diploma were 4.8 times as likely to report fair or poor health as were those with a bachelor’s degree or higher.

SOURCES AND METHODS
The statistics reported here were obtained from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report, Health, United States, 2010 and from the National Health Interview Survey (2009). The data underwent statistical analysis by the research staff of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. Analytic methods are detailed at www.humanneeds.vcu.edu.