

# WEEKEND READER

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR ■ SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2010 ■ THESPEC.COM

## Worlds apart

Glaring disparities in wealth and health have taken a shocking toll on a huge number of Hamilton's people.

BY STEVE BUIST

**T**wo neighbourhoods, separated by just five kilometres as the crow flies. They might as well be worlds apart.

Between these Hamilton neighbourhoods, representing two ends of the spectrum, there's a difference of 21 years in average age at death.

Basically, it's a crude measure of life expectancy across this city, which is important because there's no clearer measure of health than whether you're dead or alive.

Of all the glaring disparities between Hamilton's neighbourhoods uncovered in this groundbreaking health mapping project, the gap in life expectancy is the most disturbing. That 21-year difference represents an entire generation lost between those neighbourhoods at the top and bottom.

At one extreme is the west Mountain neighbourhood bounded by Upper Paradise Road, the Mountain brow, Rice

## CODE RED

WHERE YOU LIVE AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Avenue and Mohawk Road West, where the average age at death was 86.3 years, based on death statistics collected from 2006 to 2008. That's five years better than Canada's average life expectancy.

At the other extreme is the neighbourhood tucked between Wellington Street North, the harbourfront, Sherman Avenue North and the railway tracks near Barton Street, where the average age at death for the same period was 65.5 years.

Put another way, that same North End neighbourhood would rank 165th in the world for life expectancy, tied with Nepal, just ahead of Pakistan and worse than India, Mongolia and Turkmenistan.

"There's your story right there," said Neil Johnston, a Hamilton health researcher who has collaborated on this project for

three years and acted as the chief data analyst.

The huge gap in life expectancies across the city is one important piece of a much larger story concerning the health of Hamilton's neighbourhoods.

The Spectator's comprehensive analysis of more than 400,000 pieces of hospital and death data for Hamilton residents shows staggering disparities between the best and poorest-performing neighbourhoods.

In parts of the lower-central portion of Hamilton, where poverty is deeply entrenched, some neighbourhoods live with Third World health outcomes and Third World lifespans — all the more shocking in a city with a major medical school and top teaching hospitals, in a country with universal, publicly funded health care.

"It's absolutely appalling," said Johnston, an expert in analyzing and mapping health data.

"In the current circumstances, it may not be avoidable and that's the tragedy."

CODE RED continued: WR2



GARY YOKOYAMA, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Paramedic Jessica Bartley covers the lower-central city, from Kenilworth to Dundurn, water's edge to the Mountain. 'I can see all the need in this city. These people, they're so vulnerable.'