



## **The Census is a Healthcare Issue**

By **Jeffrey A. Flaks**

*President and Chief Executive Officer*

and **Sarah S. Lewis**

*Vice President, Health Equity*

*Hartford HealthCare*

Among the New Year's resolutions that you've made (or maybe already broken), here's one that should be easy to keep: Complete your U.S. Census form, and encourage everyone you know to do the same.

The Census, conducted once every 10 years, is many things: a count of the population, a way to measure demographic changes over time — and, yes, the means to determine how many U.S. Representatives each state should have. But people who work to improve the quality of others' lives should see the census not as a political requirement, but as a tool for improving healthcare and health equity.

Completing a census form is one important and easy way every adult can help make her or his community a healthier place to live and work.

You've heard it said that your family's health status is determined more by your ZIP code than your genetic code. Several studies have proven this, and it's hardly surprising. Where you live determines your access to quality healthcare, a clean environment, decent food and housing, recreation resources and good schools.

All of these are factors in what's become known as the "social determinants of health." Improving these factors improves health overall. But unlike quitting smoking or eating better, making these changes is outside our individual control. It requires resources — planning, programs and funding.

Census data is absolutely essential in demonstrating the need for these resources. The findings in the census drive funding levels to cities, counties and states — amounting to more than \$700 billion a year nationally for education, Medicaid and Community Development Block Grants.



These programs are especially important for the very cities where most hospitals are located (for Hartford HealthCare: Hartford, Bridgeport, Meriden, New Britain, Norwich, Torrington and Willimantic). Enhancing access to social and economic opportunities there and elsewhere boosts the quality of life — and that improves health.

You'll soon have the chance to take part in the 2020 Census. It will take you only a few minutes to fill out the form. Please take the time, and ask those you care about to do so, as well.

Being counted means standing up for better health in your community.