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Winnebago County Faces Health Challenges

2011 County Health Rankings give Wisconsin counties a roadmap to improve health

Madison, Wis., and Princeton, N.J. – Winnebago County ranks 13th in Wisconsin for the length and quality of life of its residents and 28th for the factors that contribute to community health, according to the *2011 County Health Rankings* released today by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Looking more closely at the health factors, Winnebago County ranks 9th for clinical care, 15th for health behaviors, 34th for physical environment and 21st for social and economic factors.

The *County Health Rankings* are the most comprehensive report of its kind to rank the overall health of nearly every county in all 50 states by using a standard way to measure how healthy people are and how long they live. The *Rankings* illustrate that where we live, learn work and play influences our health.

Wisconsin's five healthiest counties are Ozaukee, St. Croix, Washington, Waukesha, and Taylor. The five counties in the poorest health are Menominee, Adams, Marquette, Milwaukee, and Jackson. The healthiest of Wisconsin's 72 counties are largely suburban counties near the city of Milwaukee and on the border with the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, with the exception of Taylor County; the least healthy counties are primarily located in rural areas of central and northern Wisconsin with the exception of Milwaukee County, the state's most urban county in the southeast.

“The *Rankings* help county leaders see what is affecting the health of local residents,” says Dr. Patrick Remington, associate dean for public health at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. “Leading a healthy lifestyle is much easier if you live in a healthy community – such as

one that has access to quality early childhood education programs, access to healthier foods or has created more opportunities for physical activity.”

Winnebago County Executive Mark Harris says his county is already using the rankings to improve public health.

“In Winnebago County our health departments have worked with the community to develop health improvement plans to address some of the barriers to health highlighted in our county health ranking,” Harris says.

“For example, through our countywide healthy living coalition, re:TH!NK, we are addressing excessive alcohol consumption by monitoring alcohol sales to minors, smoking rates by ensuring compliance with Wisconsin’s smoke-free air law and obesity rates by promoting use of new and existing local active recreational opportunities.”

The online *Rankings* report, available at www.countyhealthrankings.org, includes a snapshot of each county in Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute researchers used five measures to assess the level of overall health for each county: premature death, the percent of people who report being in fair or poor health, the numbers of days people report being in poor physical and poor mental health, and the rate of low-birthweight infants.

The *Rankings* also outline the factors that contribute to a community’s health within four categories: health behavior, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. The health factors the researchers looked at include rates of adult smoking, adult obesity, excessive drinking among adults, teenage births, the number of uninsured adults, availability of primary care providers, preventable hospital stays, high school graduation rates, adults who attended college, children in poverty, community safety, access to healthy foods, and air pollution.

“These *Rankings* help everyone see how much of what influences our health happens outside of the doctor’s office and where we live matters to our health,” says Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

To help counties translate the *Rankings* into action, Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey announced today the foundation was launching a new program to help communities improve the health of their residents. Under this new program — part of an initiative called *Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health* — RWJF will provide grants to strengthen broad-based community efforts to improve health.

For more information, please visit www.countyhealthrankings.org

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