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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Healthiest and Least Healthy Counties Ranked in Every State
2012 County Health Rankings Show What Influences How Healthy Residents Are, How Long They Live

Madison, WI and Princeton, NJ (April 3, 2012) – More than 3,000 counties and the District of Columbia can compare how healthy their residents are and how long they live with the 2012 *County Health Rankings*, released today. The *Rankings* are an annual check-up that highlights the healthiest and least healthy counties in every state, as well as those factors that influence health, outside of the doctor’s office. The *Rankings* highlight the importance of critical factors such as education rates, income levels, and access to healthy foods, as well as access to medical care, in influencing how long and how well people live. Now in their third year, the *Rankings* are increasingly being used by community leaders to help them identify challenges and take action in a variety of ways to improve residents’ health.

Published on-line at www.countyhealthrankings.org by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the *Rankings* assess the overall health of nearly every county in all 50 states, using a standard way to measure how healthy people are and how long they live. The *Rankings* consider factors that affect people’s health within four categories: health behavior, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. This year’s *Rankings* include several new measures, such as how many fast food restaurants are in a county and levels of physical inactivity among residents. Graphs illustrating premature death trends over 10 years are new as well.

“The *County Health Rankings* show us that much of what influences our health happens outside of the doctor’s office. In fact, where we live, learn, work and play has a big role in determining how healthy we are and how long we live,” said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and CEO of RWJF. “The good news is that businesses, health care providers, government, consumers and community leaders are already joining forces in communities across the nation to change some of the gaps that the *Rankings* highlight.”

The *Rankings* show that, within states and across the nation, there are big differences in health and the factors that influence health.

Within each state, even the healthiest counties have areas where they can improve. Healthier counties (those where people live longer and have a better quality of life) have lower rates of smoking, physical inactivity, teen births, preventable hospital stays, unemployment, children in poverty, and violent crime and higher levels of education, social support, and access to primary care physicians. But healthier counties are no more likely than unhealthy counties to have lower rates of excessive drinking or better access to healthy food options.

Across the nation, some factors that influence health, such as smoking, availability of primary care physicians, and social support, show highs and lows across all regions. Meanwhile other factors reflect some distinct regional patterns, such as:

- Excessive drinking rates are highest in the northern states.
- Rates of teen births, sexually transmitted infections, and children in poverty are highest across the southern states.
- Unemployment rates are lowest in the northeastern, Midwest, and central plains states.
- Motor vehicle crash deaths are lowest in the northeastern and upper Midwest states.

The *Rankings* are based on the latest publicly-available data for each county and are unique local tools that every county can use to measure where its residents stand on multiple factors that influence health compared to other counties in their state. Residents also can see how their county measures up on indicators like diabetes screening by comparing their county's rank against a national benchmark reflecting the top performing counties in the United States. This year, the *Rankings* are easier to use than ever, with a new interactive mapping feature available at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

Since the first launch of the *Rankings* in 2010, a number of communities including Wyandotte, Kan.; Hernando, Miss., and the Joy-Southfield neighborhood in Detroit, have taken steps to address some of the health gaps identified by the *Rankings*.

"After three years, we've learned that people across the entire nation want to know how the health of their county compares to others in their state. This annual check-up helps bring county leaders together to see where they need to improve," said Patrick Remington, M.D., M.P.H., professor and associate dean at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. "It's really exciting to see that the *Rankings* continue to serve as a call to action to take steps to improve the health of communities."

The *County Health Rankings* can help us learn more about what's making people sick or healthy. New this year, the *County Health Roadmaps* will help counties to mobilize and take action to create healthier places. To learn what other communities are doing to improve the health of their residents and how your county can develop plans to address health challenges, visit <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps>.

Today also marks the release of the call for applications for the *Roadmaps to Health Prize*, another component of the *County Health Roadmaps* project that recognizes and honors the efforts and accomplishments of communities in the U.S. working at the forefront of better health for all residents. Up to six *Roadmaps to Health Prize* winning communities will be honored in early 2013 and each will receive a no-strings-attached \$25,000 cash prize. Find out more and apply at www.countyhealthroadmaps.org/prize.

To further illustrate the connection between social factors and health, RWJF along with the Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Human Needs today unveiled a new *County Health Calculator* (www.countyhealthcalculator.org). The *Calculator* is an interactive online app that shows people how much education and income influence rates of diabetes and spending on diabetes care county-by-county.

For more information, visit www.countyhealthrankings.org. Since the site's launch in 2010, more than 1 million advocates, policymakers and concerned citizens have visited to learn where their county ranks and how they can take action to improve health.

Follow the *County Health Rankings* on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/CHRankings) (@CHRankings) or [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CHRankings), and join the conversation by using #healthrankings.

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About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

About the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute is the focal point within the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health for translating public health and health policy research into practice. The Institute strives to:

- Address a broad range of real-world problems of topical importance to government, business, providers and the public;
- Promote partnerships of inquiry between researchers and users of research, breaking down barriers between the academic community and public and private sector policy makers; and
- Make useful contributions to public health and health policy decisions that improve the health of the public.

For more information, visit, <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/> .