EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL
Wednesday, March 25, 2015 at 12:01am ET

*County Health Rankings Show Declines in Premature Death Rates
But Where You Live Matters to Your Health*

**Princeton, N.J. and Madison, Wis.**—The 2015 *County Health Rankings* released today, show that premature deaths are dropping, with 60 percent of the nation’s counties seeing declines. For instance, in the District of Columbia premature death rates have plummeted by nearly one-third based on data from 2004-2006 and 2010-2012. This marks the highest drop in the country for counties with populations of 65,000 or more. But for many counties these rates are not improving—forty percent of counties are not making progress in reducing premature deaths.

A rich resource of local-level data, the *Rankings* are an easy-to-use snapshot comparing the health of nearly every county in the nation. A collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, the *Rankings* allow each state to see how its counties compare on 30 factors that impact health, including education, transportation, housing, violent crime, jobs, diet and exercise. The *Rankings* are available at [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org).

This year’s *Rankings* show that almost one out of four children in the U.S. lives in poverty. Child poverty rates are more than twice as high in the unhealthiest counties in each state than in the healthiest counties. The report also looks at distribution in income and the links between income levels and health.

“The *County Health Rankings* have helped galvanize communities across the nation to improve health,” said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD, RWJF president and CEO. “Solutions and innovation are coming from places as diverse as rural Williamson, West Virginia in the heart of Appalachia to urban New Orleans;
they are engaging business, public health, education, parents, and young people to build a Culture of Health.”

Beyond poverty and income, the 2015 County Health Rankings Key Findings Report highlights two other key social and economic factors that drive health: violent crime and employment. These findings show that:

- **Violent Crime Rates are Highest in the South:** Violent crime rates, which affect health, well-being, and stress levels, are highest in the Southwest, Southeast, and Mississippi Delta regions.

- **Having a Job Influences Health:** Unemployment rates are 1.5 times higher in the least healthy counties in each state as they are in the healthiest counties. During the recession, counties in the West, Southeast, and rust belt region of the U.S. were hit hardest by growing unemployment. Many, but not all, of these counties have seen their unemployment rates drop since the recession ended in 2010.

This year’s Rankings data also shines a light on the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy counties. The healthiest counties in each state have higher college attendance, fewer preventable hospital stays, and better access to parks and gyms. The least healthy counties in each state have more smokers, more teen births, and more alcohol related car crashes.

“In the six years since the County Health Rankings began, we’ve seen them serve as a rallying point for change. Communities are using the Rankings to inform their priorities as they work to build a Culture of Health,” said Bridget Catlin, PhD, MHSA, co-director of the County Health Rankings.

The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program offers data, tools, and resources to help communities throughout their journey to build a Culture of Health. Also part of the program is the RWJF Culture of Health Prize which honors communities that are working together to build a healthier, more vibrant community.

###

**About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**
For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve the health and health care of all Americans. We are striving to build a national Culture of Health that will enable all to live longer, healthier lives now and for generations to come. For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org). Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [www.rwjf.org/twitter](http://www.rwjf.org/twitter) or on Facebook at [www.rwjf.org/facebook](http://www.rwjf.org/facebook).

**About the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute**
The [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](http://www.rwjf.org) advances health and well-being for all by developing and evaluating interventions and promoting evidence-based approaches to policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels. The Institute works across the full spectrum of factors that contribute to health. A focal point for health and health care dialogue within the University of
Wisconsin-Madison and beyond, and a convener of stakeholders, the Institute promotes an exchange of expertise between those in academia and those in the policy and practice arena. The Institute leads the work on the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* and manages the *RWJF Culture of Health Prize*. For more information, visit [http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu](http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu).