

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Building a Culture of Health, County by County

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Children Living in Poverty Even in Healthiest, Wealthiest Counties

Black, Hispanic, Native American children make up disproportionate number

Madison, Wis. — More than 1 in 10 children are living in poverty even in the nation’s healthiest counties and children of color — particularly Black, Hispanic, and Native American children — are disproportionately burdened, according to [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#) (CHR&R).

Centuries of structural racism and ongoing discrimination lie at the root of these avoidable conditions, which can be found in healthy and often wealthy areas across the country, according to CHR&R Co-Director Marjory Givens. CHR&R scientists found a pattern of stark differences across racial and ethnic groups in the healthiest county in each of the 50 states, even though the overall portion living in poverty is lower than the national average in all but three of these counties.

Poverty is often missed in healthy counties where higher averages can hide those who are being left out of opportunities to thrive. In Fairfield County in Connecticut, the healthiest county in the country’s healthiest state, the percentage of children in poverty is 5% lower than the 17% national average. Yet Hispanic and Black children exceed the national average and are overrepresented among those living in poverty. In the county, 1 in 4 Hispanic children and 1 in 5 Black children are living in poverty. Fewer than 1 in 10 white or Asian children are living in poverty.

“When you dig deep into the data by race, you can see that not everyone is realizing the opportunities in the healthiest counties,” Givens said. She added that income inequality contributes to the inequity where local economies and housing markets cater to wealthier households, effectively pricing out lower-wage earners.

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Substandard housing, unsafe neighborhoods and scarcity of quality education are often associated with poverty. The federal poverty threshold is \$26,500 for a family of four. It is calculated based on a family's essential needs including housing and food.

CHR&R ranks counties to determine how healthy they are based on the length and quality of life in the community. It often follows that counties with higher percentages of high-income households have more opportunities to live long, healthy lives. In contrast, children experiencing poverty lack opportunities to live in safe homes and in well-resourced neighborhoods, and to receive quality education.

These children may experience lasting effects into adulthood on academic achievement, health, and income. They are also at increased risk for injuries and are more susceptible to chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

These avoidable inequities stem from discriminatory practices and policies embedded in education, employment, housing, transportation, and urban and regional planning. For many communities of color, institutional practices can influence living conditions and opportunities to thrive for generations. Structural forms of racism are impacting opportunity across the country, said CHR&R co-director Sheri Johnson.

“We all want our children to live long, healthy lives, but children of color are often facing unfair obstacles.,” Johnson said. “We see this across the country including in wealthy communities that have an abundance of resources and advantages.”

Racial inequities persist across the country in most U.S. counties. Where data is available, poverty rates are higher for American Indian and Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic children, according to the 2020 [County Health Rankings Key Findings Report](#).

Released every year by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Rankings offer a snapshot that compares the health of all counties. In addition to the county-level data, the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program also features [What Works for Health](#), a database of more than 400 evidence-informed strategies communities can use to take action. Each strategy is rated for its evidence of effectiveness and likely impact on health disparities. The [Action Center](#) also provides guidance for communities.

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About the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps is a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI) supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Rankings, available at www.countyhealthrankings.org, compares counties within each state on more than 30 health-influencing factors such as housing, education, jobs, and access to quality health care.

About the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

The [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#) 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 the RWJF Culture of Health Prize. For more information, visit <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu>