

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

New Rankings Show Improvement in Macon County Health Indicators

Decatur, IL – Macon County has shown improvement in several areas compared to last year, according to the ninth annual County Health Rankings, released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI). The Rankings are available at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

An easy-to-use snapshot that compares counties within states, the Rankings show that where you live influences how well and how long you live. The local-level data make it clear that good health is influenced by many factors beyond medical care including housing, education, and jobs. This year's new Rankings State Reports show meaningful gaps in health persist not only by place, but also by race and ethnicity. Looking at differences by place and race offers a more complete picture of health. This year's analyses show that lack of opportunity, such as education, jobs, and affordable housing, disproportionately affects people of color across the nation and within Illinois.

The new Rankings State Reports call attention to key drivers of health such as children in poverty. Poverty limits opportunity and increases the chance of poor health. Children in poverty are less likely to have access to well-resourced and quality schools, and have fewer chances to be prepared for living wage jobs. In Macon County, 28 percent of children live in poverty, compared to the Illinois rate of 18 percent and U.S. rate of 20 percent.

The most notable statistics in Macon County highlighted some improvements and some declines in statuses in Macon County. The teen birth rate in Macon County reflected in the 2018 rankings is 43 per 1,000 compared to the rate of 49 per 1,000 shown in the 2017 rankings. The Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) rate decreased from 760.4 in 2017 to 705.1 in 2018. While this is attributed to many factors, the move is encouraging to the Macon County Health Department, which implements a successful teen pregnancy and STI prevention program. Another positive move was the number of smokers and obese adults in Macon County. In 2017, the rankings showed that 30% of adults were obese and in 2018, that number is 26%. The Macon County Health Department and many other local organizations continue to provide programs, services, and referrals to address these and many other health issues in the community.

A decline in ranking was reflected in physical environment, as Macon County was ranked 35 in 2017 and 79 in 2018. The factors affecting this ranking include water violations, air pollution – particulate matter, severe housing problems, long commute, and number of people driving alone to work. Another decline in ranking was the length of life. The premature deaths in Macon County increased from 7,500 reflected in the 2017 rankings to 8,000 in the 2018 rankings. This indicator also includes years of potential life lost.

While it is important to reflect on local statistics and their improvement and decline, the main idea remains that health affects the community as a whole. If Macon County residents are sick or

experiencing poor quality of life, then businesses, the economy, and the future of the community suffer. The Macon County Health Department is committed to providing the programs and services necessary to help residents live their healthiest lives possible.

Our children will become more resilient, and grow into stronger, healthier adults with greater economic opportunities if we build communities with quality education, emotional and social support, access to quality health care, and safe, affordable, and stable housing.

“We can’t be a healthy, thriving nation if we continue to leave entire communities and populations behind,” said Richard Besser, MD, RWJF president and CEO. “Every community should use their County Health Rankings data, work together, and find solutions so that all babies, kids, and adults – regardless of their race or ethnicity – have the same opportunities to be healthy.”

“The time is now to address long-standing challenges like child poverty,” said Julie Willems Van Dijk, PhD, RN, director of County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. “This year’s Rankings are a call to action to see how these persistent health gaps play out locally, take an honest look at their root causes, and work together to give everyone a fair shot at a healthier life.”

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About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working with others to build a national Culture of Health enabling everyone in America to live longer, healthier lives. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

About the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

The [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](http://www.uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu) 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>.