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Eau Claire among Healthier Counties in Wisconsin's Health Rankings

Annual rankings show where Wisconsin counties do well or can improve

PRINCETON, N.J. and MADISON, Wis. — Eau Claire County ranks among the healthier counties in the state, according to the annual *County Health Rankings* released today by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The *Rankings* are available at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

“The data from the 2015 rankings reinforces the need for Eau Claire County to address the health priorities of mental health, alcohol misuse, and obesity, which were recently determined through our community health assessment. Our community is engaged and committed to taking action around these health priorities. By working together, we can maintain a healthy Eau Claire County.” says Lieske Giese, Director/Health Officer of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

The *Rankings* are an easy-to-use snapshot comparing the health of nearly every county in the nation. The local-level data allows each state to see how its counties compare on 30 factors that influence health, including education, housing, violent crime, jobs, diet, and exercise.

According to the 2015 *Rankings*, the five healthiest counties in Wisconsin, starting with the most healthy, are Ozaukee, followed by Pepin, Calumet, Florence, and Kewaunee. The five counties in the poorest health, starting with the least healthy, are Menominee, Milwaukee, Forest, Washburn, and Rusk.

“Since the *County Health Rankings* began in Wisconsin more than a decade ago, we’ve seen them serve as a rallying point for change,” said Karen Timberlake, director of UWPHI in the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. “Communities are using the *Rankings* to inform their priorities as they work to improve health for all their residents.”

Eau Claire County ranks in the top quarter for health outcomes (13) and health factors (12). Eau Claire ranks in the top quarter of Wisconsin counties for clinical care (5). Eau Claire County ranks in the top half for health behaviors (31) and social and economic factors (19), and physical environment (34).

Nationally, this year's *Rankings* show that the healthiest counties in each state have higher college attendance, fewer preventable hospital stays, and better access to parks and gyms than the least healthy counties. The least healthy counties in each state have more smokers, more teen births, and more alcohol-related car crash deaths. This year's *Rankings* also look at the links between income levels, income distribution, and health.

The *Rankings* also reveal the following:

- Premature death rates are dropping, with 60 percent of the nation's counties seeing declines. But for many counties, these rates are not improving – 40 percent of counties are not making progress in reducing premature death.
- One out of four children in the U.S. lives in poverty. Child poverty rates are more than twice as high in the least healthy counties in each state than in the healthiest counties.
- Violent crime rates are highest in the South. Violent crime rates, which affect health, well-being, and stress levels, are particularly high 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 than in the healthiest counties. During the recession, counties in the West, Southeast, and Rust Belt regions 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.

“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 who are engaging business, public health, education, parents, and young people to build a culture of health.”

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.

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