

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Contact:**

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New national data highlights health strengths and opportunities for Eau Claire County

Eau Claire, March 20, 2024 – The national County Health Rankings, a set of health data released each spring, shows how Eau Claire County compares to the state, nation, and peer counties on many health issues. The 2024 data, released today, indicates Eau Claire County’s recent areas of strength, as well as opportunities to improve – including factors like alcohol and drug misuse, premature deaths, access to health care, civic engagement, and more.

County Health Rankings data are released each year by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The data measure many things that shape how long and well people live. Having access to health care and eating healthy foods plays a role, but so do income, education, reliable employment, transportation, safe housing, childcare, clean air, and more. These are called the “social determinants of health.”

You can find the 2024 County Health Rankings data at www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data.

Key findings from the 2024 County Health Rankings:

Areas of Strength:

- **Civic health:** Eau Claire County in 2020 ranked high in census participation (79%) compared to the national average (65%). Our voter turnout in 2020 (71%) was higher than the national average, but lower than the state average.
- **Internet access:** 90% of households in Eau Claire County have a broadband internet connection, higher than the state and national averages (both 88%). In 2022, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley [launched an initiative](#), along with many local partners, to work toward equal access to the internet for all people in our region.

Areas for Improvement:

- **Misuse of alcohol and other substances:** Alcohol and drug misuse continues to be a challenge. Eau Claire County’s percentage of alcohol-impaired driving deaths dipped this year (47% to 36%), but we are still far higher than the national average (26%). Excessive drinking increases the risk of vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence, hypertension, and more. Our county’s rate of drug overdose deaths (16 deaths per 100,000 people) is lower than both the state and national rates, but any number of overdose deaths is too high. Educating the public about alcohol misuse and safe opioid storage, collecting unused medication, and distributing tools like Narcan and fentanyl test strips are critically important. Ending overdose deaths will require people and organizations across our county to continue working together on new strategies.

- **Access to health care:** Eau Claire County's ratio of primary care and mental health care providers to residents improved, according to this annual report, but these numbers don't tell the whole story; national data sources are not reflecting our region's current situation. Due to pending hospital and clinic closures, local healthcare systems are facing strain and higher demand in Eau Claire County and surrounding communities. Certain services are of particular concern, including healthcare for people who use medical assistance programs and/or need alcohol or drug treatment.
- **Premature deaths and life expectancy:** Premature deaths increased, and life expectancy slightly decreased in Eau Claire County. Preventing early death is critically important for individuals and families, but also to our community at large.

People across our county are working on these issues – get involved! Civic engagement is linked to thriving communities. Here's how you can get started:

- Volunteering directly contributes to the health of a community. Check out the Chippewa Valley Volunteer Guide to find an opportunity near you: www.visiteauclaire.com/volunteer.
- The Eau Claire Health Alliance is a large group of volunteers who work in our area to improve chronic disease, mental health, substance misuse and more. Anyone is encouraged to join. Visit www.ehealthalliance.org/get-involved to learn more.
- The Eau Claire County Medical Reserve Corps is a group of volunteers who undergo training to help the community before, during, and after emergencies. [Click here](#) to learn more.
- Make a plan to vote in local, state, and national elections. Learn more at myvote.wi.gov.

Note: The County Health Rankings look slightly different this year. In previous years, counties were assigned numerical rankings across several areas of health, compared to all other counties in a state. In 2024, counties are not being ranked numerically, but data is still provided to compare different counties to each other and to state and national averages.

For more information, please see the attached press release on the 2024 County Health Rankings.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Access to spaces that enrich civic life tied to greater participation, better health

Opportunities to access information, participate in civic life, vary across country

Madison, Wis. — New data show counties that make it easier for residents to participate in civic activities and provide ample information sources – such as broadband or public libraries – are often healthier. These counties are often located in the Northeast and Western regions of the country and tend to also experience more social and economic opportunities and longer life expectancy, according to County Health Rankings & Roadmaps’ National Findings Report released today.

The places where communities connect and share information – the civic infrastructure of a community – make participation possible. Counties with more access to public libraries, broadband and local news sources also have higher voter participation and greater union membership. The research also found that counties with well-resourced civic infrastructure had lower rates of children in poverty, uninsured adults, less income inequality and higher rates of high school completion. Exclusionary policies and practices can create obstacles to participation in decisions that affect health. The research found that in counties with more obstacles, such as laws that make it harder to vote, average life expectancy is more than three years shorter compared to counties with fewer obstacles (74.1 years v 77.6 years, respectively).

“Assuring everyone has a say in shaping these conditions is key,” said Sheri Johnson, CHR&R principal investigator and director of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. “History shows that when historically excluded groups build power, meaningful changes can happen that benefit the health and well-being of all.”

Civic health varies across the country. Among the 2024 report’s key findings:



- Counties in the South have fewer news sources and libraries and less access to broadband. Voter turnout and union membership rates are lower as well.
- Regions with long-standing discrimination and disinvestment, such as counties along the U.S.-Mexico border, within the Black Belt, Appalachia and surrounding American Indian/Alaska Native tribal areas, have less access to libraries, broadband and local news than counties outside of these regions.
- Discrimination and disinvestment have left residents in these regions with fewer opportunities to mobilize around common challenges that affect everyone's health.

“Improving civic health requires action,” said Bethany Rogerson, CHR&R co-director. “We can invest in ways for people to connect, value their participation, and, ultimately, influence how and whether we thrive. We can and should all have a say in our communities’ futures.”

Data-informed solutions to build civic health for everyone's health include strategies that:

- Fund broadband initiatives to improve access to and affordability of high-speed internet. This also promotes greater access to jobs and health care;
- Invest in public libraries that provide education and civic and social programs to communities;
- Encourage facilitated conversations among people with different viewpoints; and
- Expand automatic voter registration to increase voter turnout and simplify the voting process.

In addition to these solutions, the program's [What Works for Health](#) database offers more than 400 evidence-informed strategies to help communities improve health. Our latest *In Solidarity* podcast series also examines what's needed to engage young people. Experts offer insights on what has worked in civics education. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/findings-and-insights/podcasts>

Visit [countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org) to learn more.

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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 with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The program provides local communities with data on more than 80 health-related measures such as housing, education, jobs and access to quality health care. The program draws attention to what impacts health and highlights how the power to make change can ensure community conditions where everyone thrives. Find out more at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

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 spectrum of factors that contribute to health and equity. The Institute leads the work on the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. For more information, visit <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu>.