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Numerous factors impact health, such as access to care, diet and exercise, environmental influences and social and economic factors. These factors can present complex challenges for county officials seeking to implement initiatives to promote health.

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), NACo is providing counties with information and insights into how they can develop effective local programs and policies to create healthy counties.

The project, Elected County Officials’ Guide to County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, serves as a hub of information and resources for counties about community health improvement, and is designed to facilitate peer-to-peer learning among counties about ways to create healthier communities. Counties have the opportunity to utilize information from the annual County Health Rankings to learn how to address local health needs and to work toward improving health outcomes.

For more information, visit www.naco.org/improvingcountyhealth

For more information about the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program, visit www.countyhealthrankings.org

For more information about the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, visit www.rwjf.org/

For more information about the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, visit http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/

2014 Rankings Webinar and Release Webcast

The 2014 County Health Rankings were released Wednesday, March 26, marking the fifth year the program has inspired counties across the country to take action to improve their health. Do you know where your county ranked? Prior to the release, NACo hosted a webinar featuring leadership from RWJF and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI) with discussion about the rationale behind the Rankings model and new measures and action tools for 2014. A recording of the webinar and PowerPoint slides are available.

As part of the release of the 2014 County Health Rankings, leadership and researchers from RWJF and UWPHI discussed new data, trends, and highlighted communities that are using the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps to build a culture of health county by county. A recording of the webcast is available at www.countyhealthrankings.org and www.rwjf.org.
2014 County Health Rankings Release
On March 26th, with support from RWJF, UWPHI released the 2014 County Health Rankings. The County Health Rankings measure the health of nearly every county in the nation. The Rankings help counties understand what influences how healthy their residents are and how long they will live. The Rankings look at a variety of measures that affect health, such as high school graduation rates, access to healthy foods, rates of smoking, obesity, and teen births. The Rankings are unique in their ability to measure the overall health of each county in all 50 states. They have been used to garner support for local health improvement initiatives among government agencies, healthcare providers, community organizations, business leaders, policymakers, and the public. This year’s Rankings include new factors, such as housing and transportation, to paint an even more comprehensive picture of what impacts a community’s health.

NACo released a County Solutions and Innovation (CSI) Blog post highlighting the release of the 2014 County Health Rankings, featuring three counties that utilize the Rankings to help improve health in their communities. The CSI blog contains posts from NACo’s subject matter experts in the areas of community and economic development, health, human services, justice and public safety and resilience. Read more

How are counties measured?
The County Health Rankings utilize measures that reflect aspects of population health that can be improved, are valid and recognized by others, are available at the county level, and are publicly available for little or no cost. The measures are broken down into either health outcomes or health factors. Health outcomes include data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) that measure premature death or years of potential life lost and quality of life measures that include low birth weight, and self-reported measures of poor or fair health, poor physical health days, and poor mental health days taken from the NCHS and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Health factors are broken down into four sub-categories, including health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. Below is a list of measures that counties are ranked on for health factors (new measures are in italics):

County Health Roadmaps Action Center
The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program brings groundbreaking tools and resources to communities across the country through the County Health Roadmaps Action Center. Once you have reviewed the Rankings data for your county, you can use the “snapshot” of your county’s overall health (e.g., health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, physical environment) to investigate and discuss ways to improve the health of your community and to develop a strategic action plan. The Action Center provides a step-by-step approach through the Roadmaps Action Cycle to find ways to take action and implement locally-driven change in your community. Check out the newsletter archive for resource spotlights.

The County Health Roadmaps Action Center features the What Works for Health resource. This resource provides counties with information to help select and guidance to implement evidence-based policies, programs, and system changes that improve factors that affect health that are measured in the County Health Rankings. This resource is updated as new scientifically informed policies and programs are tested. Recent additions include policies that enhance enforcement of distracted driving laws, interventions to implement multi-component groundwater management programs, and guidance on implementing multi-component workplace supports for active commuting.
• Health Behaviors.
  o Tobacco use
    ▪ Adult smoking (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)
  o Diet and exercise
    ▪ Adult obesity (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)
    ▪ Food environment index (USDA and Feeding America)
    ▪ Access to exercise opportunities (OneSource and Delorme/ESRI)
    ▪ Physical inactivity (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion)
  o Alcohol use
    ▪ Excessive drinking (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)
    ▪ Alcohol-impaired driving deaths (National Center for Health Statistics)
  o Sexual activity
    ▪ Teen births (National Center for Health Statistics)
    ▪ Sexually transmitted infections (National Center for Hepatitis, HIV, STD, and TB Prevention)
• Clinical Care
  o Access to Care
    ▪ Uninsured (Small Area Health Insurance Estimates)
    ▪ Primary care physicians (Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
    ▪ Dentists (HRSA)
    ▪ Mental health providers (CMS, National Provider Identifier File)
  o Quality of Care
    ▪ Preventable hospital stays (Dartmouth Institute: Dartmouth Atlas Project, Medicare Claims Data)
    ▪ Diabetic screening (Dartmouth Institute: Dartmouth Atlas Project, Medicare Claims Data)
    ▪ Mammography screening (Dartmouth Institute: Dartmouth Atlas Project, Medicare Claims Data)
• Social and Economic Factors
  o Education
    ▪ High school graduation (National Center for Education Statistics)
    ▪ Some college (American Community Survey)
  o Employment
    ▪ Unemployment (US Bureau of Labor Statistics)
  o Income
    ▪ Children in poverty (Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates)
  o Family and Social Support
    ▪ Inadequate social support (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System)
    ▪ Single-parent households (American Community Survey)
  o Community Safety
    ▪ Violent Crime (Uniform Crime Reporting, Federal Bureau of Investigation)
    ▪ Injury Deaths (CDC Wonder)
• Physical Environment
  o Air and Water Quality
NACo Announces Six Community Dialogue Session to Improve County Health

The National Association of Counties (NACo) will conduct a Community Dialogue to Improve County Health session in six counties—Leon County, Fla., Bullitt County, Ky., Salt Lake County, Utah, Wayne County, N.C., Washington County, N.C., and Fulton County, Georgia—in 2014. Through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and in collaboration with RWJF and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, NACo will assist these six counties in conducting a one-day community dialogue in their county. These sessions will convene officials and community stakeholders from the selected counties to assess, plan and strategize efforts toward coordinating health initiatives to improve the overall health of residents in the participating counties.
Stakeholders will seek to include representatives from the local health, transportation, parks and recreation and business sectors, as well as schools, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, health mobilization groups, United Way chapters and other community partners.

“NACo is excited about the county health project and our partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation which makes it possible,” said NACo President Linda Langston, supervisor, Linn County, Iowa. “The community health dialogues will encourage communities to synergize efforts, build and strengthen coalitions and leverage local efforts already in place.”

Through planned activities and discussion, each group will share insights on the challenges and opportunities facing the local government in addressing community health.

“Our goal for each participating county is to develop a concrete strategic plan and action steps that the county government and community partners can use to improve the overall health of the county,” Langston said. “The participating counties have already demonstrated commitment to improving county health. These dialogue sessions take it to the next level and will serve as a roadmap for other counties to follow to achieve better county health.”

The six counties were selected after NACo solicited applications throughout September and October 2013. Check future newsletters and other NACo resources to hear about the community dialogues.

**April 3**th Community Dialogue in Leon County, Fla.
On April 3rd, the Florida Department of Health-Leon County held the first Community Dialogue to Improve County Health. County officials and Health Department staff engaged in a day long conversation on access to care that included the County Commission Chairwoman and other members of the County Commission, the County Administrator, leadership from the largest local hospital, the United Way, Dean of the Florida State University (FSU) Medical College, Dean of the Florida A&M College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and leadership from other medical providers in the county. Discussion focused on identifying strengths and assets to enhance parts of the system that are already working, highlighting gaps and current barriers to collaboration to improve services in the county, and figuring out how to remove the barriers to collaboration. The dialogue featured ideas on what the role of the county, as well as participants and other community partners should play in improving access to care in Leon County.

**National News**
Gaston County Agencies Implement Healthy Gaston Initiative to Improve State of Health
Following the release of the 2012 County Health Rankings, the directors of the Gaston County Health Department, CaroMont Health, the Gaston Family Health Services, and the Gaston Community Healthcare Commission decided to pull their resources together to address the county’s poor health ranking. The Gaston Community Healthcare Commission has taken the lead on implementing the agreed upon priorities of the joint leadership team, focusing programming that prevents and treats obesity. The Healthcare Commission is still implementing the first stages of the Health Gaston Initiative and working to plan the next stages to reduce obesity across the county. [Read more](#)
Citrus County Health Department Uses Mobile Medical Units to Target Underserved Areas
In Citrus County, Fla. the County Health Department is utilizing mobile medical units to fight poor health in underserved communities in the county. These mobile units provide primary care, preventatives screenings, blood work, and include a dental unit. In order to spread information about the locations of the mobile units, the County Health Department partners with other community organizations that service underserved populations, like the We Care Food Pantry. Read More

Shawnee County Health Agency Uses Community Collaboration to Address Low Health Rankings
The Shawnee County Health Agency in Shawnee County, Kansas is partnering with two local hospital systems, and a number of other community groups and individuals to work on short and long-term strategies to address specific health needs. Despite consistently high rankings in the state on clinical care, the county has been in the bottom half of the state in the County Health Rankings since 2010. A coalition consisting of 80 community groups, the Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods, will meet to discuss shorter term ways to address four areas, including healthy eating and exercise, infant mortality, access to health care and knowledge of resources, and the physical environment. Read more

Volunteer Collaboration in Tarrant County Helps Drive Community Health Priorities
The Tarrant County Voices for Health, a volunteer collaboration of more than 100 experts representing social services, health care organizations, neighborhoods, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations and local government, helps set community priorities on health issues in the county. On March 6th the collaboration released the 2014 Tarrant County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), which includes a number of proposals to make changes, including adding more pedestrian and bike accessibility and access to healthy, affordable foods. Read more

Share Your Story
NACo would like to hear about your county’s efforts to promote overall resident and community health. Share your county’s story so that it can be included in NACo's Healthy Counties Database or highlighted in our bi-monthly newsletter. Email Andrew Whitacre at awhitacre@naco.org or click here to complete a county profile form.

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