

WHATCOM COUNTY Health Department

*Leading the community in promoting
health and preventing disease.*



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS PROVIDE CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

BELLINGHAM—On March 16, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) released county health rankings for Whatcom and all other counties in the United States. Amongst Washington State counties, Whatcom ranked 5th in Health Outcomes (today's health) and 9th in Health Factors (tomorrow's health). Detailed information for Whatcom County can be found on the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps site at: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>

The Rankings are an easy-to-use snapshot comparing the health of nearly every county in the nation. The local-level data allows Whatcom County to see how it ranks on more than 30 factors that influence health including education, housing, jobs, smoking, access to healthy food, and more.

While Whatcom County has consistently ranked among the healthiest counties in our state, overall results sometimes conceal the fact that we have vulnerable populations who are at increased risk for poor health outcomes. Because many are doing well does not mean that all are doing well.

“The Rankings provide the opportunity for the community to review where we are on important health measures and discuss where we need to be,” said Regina Delahunt, Director of the Whatcom County Health Department. “We continue to use the Rankings as a starting point to delve more deeply into data that may highlight disparities within the county. The value of the Rankings is as a catalyst for partnerships and action to improve health outcomes for all.”

Several important changes to the 2016 County Health Rankings have created a more precise and timely measure of population health, according to RWJF. Changes include:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed their method for conducting a survey called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) which may lead to substantial changes in the rankings as compared to previous years.
- New in measures 2016 are: frequent physical distress, frequent mental distress, drug overdose deaths (modeled estimate), insufficient sleep, and residential segregation. Although these measures aren't included in the rankings, they provide important additional data to help guide community action.
- Each county profile has a section called “Areas of strength” so that communities can quickly identify what they are doing well as well as where improvement may be needed.

Key partners in providing data and analysis for the County Health Rankings each year include RWJF, the Wisconsin *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* team, Burness, National Network of Public Health Institutes), Dartmouth Institute, CDC, and National Center for Health Statistics.

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