

## **Our unhealthy state of affairs**

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According to data contained in the CQ Press's recently released "Health Care State Rankings 2010," Nevada now ranks 48<sup>th</sup> among all US states in overall health and well-being. The healthiest or number 1 ranked state is Vermont, the least healthiest or 50<sup>th</sup> ranked state is Mississippi.

The CQ Press's "Health Care State Rankings" are one of a handful of reputable national rankings that are annually updated to reflect ongoing change in the health of each state. A state's composite score and rank are based on 21 factors chose from several hundred indicators, also contained in the volume, and are not biased toward population size or other demographic shifts such as the aging of a state's population.

Nevada fares worse than the average for all US states on a majority of indicators (14 of 21) included in the composite index. The new rankings show Nevada actually dropping one spot from last year's ranking of 47<sup>th</sup>. We are now only nominally healthier than two states from the deep South, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Our state's poor population health is a product of factors such as perennially poor levels of adults who smoke (22 percent of adults smoke or the 9<sup>th</sup> highest rate in the US), adults who are binge drinkers (7<sup>th</sup> highest), children aged 19 to 35 months who are fully immunized (46<sup>th</sup> lowest), and the highest percent of women receiving late or no prenatal care.

These drivers of poor population health are compounded by significant access barriers faced by sizable, growing numbers of Nevadans. Currently, 12.6 percent of the state lacks access to primary medical care and 18.5 percent of the adult population lacks health insurance coverage. Worse, Nevada now possesses the highest percent of children not covered by health insurance

As the Governor and other public officials in Nevada grandstand and are poised to obstruct the implementation of recently national health reforms, our unhealthy state and our sorry ranking among US states only worsens.

The CQ Press report also provides current information on the leading causes of mortality in Nevada. Four factors account for nearly 60 percent of all deaths in Nevada: heart disease, cancer, accidents such as motor vehicle crashes, and chronic lower respiratory disease.

## Ten leading causes of death in Nevada

Cause of death	Number of deaths	Percent of total deaths	Age-adjusted number of deaths per 100,000 population		
			NV	US	NV rank
Total from all causes	18,872	100.0	843.7	776.5	13 <sup>th</sup>
1 Heart disease	5,013	26.6	226.7	200.2	11 <sup>th</sup>
2 Cancer	4,226	22.4	183.2	180.7	22 <sup>nd</sup>
3 Accidents	1,091	5.8	44.5	39.8	21 <sup>st</sup>
4 Chronic lower respiratory diseases	1,066	5.7	49.0	40.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
5 Stroke	847	4.5	14.7	22.6	48 <sup>th</sup>
6 Suicide	486	2.6	19.5	10.9	4 <sup>th</sup>
7 Kidney disease	475	2.5	22.0	14.5	4 <sup>th</sup>
8 Influenza & pneumonia	426	2.3	19.8	17.8	13 <sup>th</sup>
9 Diabetes mellitus	294	1.6	12.8	23.3	50 <sup>th</sup>
10 Chronic liver disease & cirrhosis	291	1.5	11.4	8.8	5 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Health Care State Rankings 2010 (Washington DC: CQ Press). Mortality data is the most current available (2006) and is “age adjusted” to eliminate the distorting effects of the aging of the population.

In each case, the state’s age-adjusted death rate – a measure that eliminates the distorting effects of the aging of the population – is higher than the national rate. Moreover, across wide-ranging causes of death such as cancer, suicide, and influenza and pneumonia, Nevada possesses higher levels of death and disability than the national average and most other US states.

There thus remains a good deal of work to be done to improve the public’s health in Nevada. Some of this unhealthy state of affairs will be remedied by improved access to primary medical care and preventive services. Much more, however, will require attention to factors further upstream having little or anything to do with health care or having an insurance product in one’s wallet.

A detailed description of Nevada’s composite score in the current CQ Press’s 2010 State Health Rankings can be found on the “Nevada Health Matters” section of the Nevada Public Health Association website [www.nphaonline.org](http://www.nphaonline.org).

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