

What county health rankings in Nevada tell us

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As a lifelong college football fan and graduate of the University of Oklahoma, I'm enamored with rankings. My beloved Sooners have ended the season ranked number 1 in the final Associated Press poll and crowned national champions seven times since World War II. But I digress.

In matters of health, international rankings point to progress (or lack of progress) made by nations in improving the health of their citizens as compared to other countries on common health measures such as infant mortality and life expectancy. Likewise, state rankings, such as the United Health Foundation's annual America's Health Rankings, allow health leaders to assess the health and well-being of the "average" resident on a state-by-state basis.

Both provide guides for policy makers on broad policy efforts needed to improve public health and access to health services. What national and state-level rankings both miss, however, is the considerable variation in health status within a state or region – startling differences that are illuminated in the recent release of the third annual "County Health Rankings & Roadmaps: A Healthier Nation, County by County" by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Last week, the Nevada Public Health Foundation convened a statewide meeting of public health and community leaders to assess the 2012 county rankings and, more importantly, to begin building a movement toward a healthier Nevada – a county by county effort that begins to focus on prevention and population-focused measures to improve health in our state, rather than only on sickness care.

The most significant finding of the new rankings is that the healthiest counties in Nevada – places such as Douglas and Washoe Counties in northern Nevada whose residents live the longest and healthiest lives – not only have better access to high-quality health care, but also possess healthier behaviors, sound educational and economic conditions, and environments that support healthy living as compared to the unhealthiest counties in the state.

Rankings on health factors and social determinants of health highlight the striking degree of variation across Nevada counties and thus the limited utility of one-size-fits-all approaches to improving health outcomes. The rankings also point to the need to move beyond our society's

fixation on clinical care, its delivery, and its financing. For example, Nye and Mineral Counties' low overall ranking on health outcomes has much more to do with the unhealthy behaviors of its residents and the poor socioeconomic environment of those communities than with access to quality clinical services for local residents.

The 2012 rankings allow the residents of every Nevada county to learn more about their communities' overall health and to establish local health priorities. The new rankings thus provide essential information needed to guide and target efforts to improve healthy behaviors, build appropriate clinical care resources in their community, and shape environments conducive to health.

The information contained in the "County Health Rankings" serves as both a call to action and an opportunity for the residents of Nevada and their community leaders to focus on the core of public health – assuring the conditions in which people can be healthy and live long, productive lives.

For more information on county health rankings in Nevada and the methodology used to derive these estimates, please visit www.countyhealthrankings.org.

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2012 County Health Rankings in Nevada*

Rank*	Health Outcomes	Health Factors
1	Douglas	Douglas
2	Elko	Lander
3	Lincoln	Eureka
4	Washoe	Storey
5	Lyon	Washoe
6	Pershing	White Pine
7	Churchill	Elko
8	Humboldt	Churchill
9	Storey	Carson City
10	Clark	Lincoln
11	Eureka	Humboldt
12	Carson City	Lyon
13	White Pine	Clark
14	Lander	Pershing
15	Nye	Nye
16	Mineral	Mineral

*County rankings on "Health Outcomes" are based on a composite measure of life expectancy and quality of life. Rankings on "Health Factors" are based on a composite measure of health behaviors, clinical care, socioeconomic factors, and physical environment. Due to insufficient data, Esmeralda County was not ranked. Source: "County Health Rankings," Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2012).