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County Health Rankings & Roadmaps: Building a Culture of Health, County by County

The fifth annual *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* released earlier today, allows counties to see how well they are doing on 29 factors that influence health including smoking, high school graduation rates, employment, physical inactivity, and access to healthy foods. This year's report features even more new factors that influence health, such as housing, transportation, access to mental health providers, access to exercise opportunities, injury deaths, and food insecurity.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation collaborated with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute to develop these Rankings for each state's counties. The Rankings help counties see how they compare to their neighbors so they can identify where they are doing well and where they need to improve, and the Roadmaps help counties see what steps they need to take to remove barriers to good health.

Forsyth County ranked **26th** among the 100 counties of N.C. with regard to **Health Outcome** status (length and quality of life) compared to **28th** last year; the **5th** among the top five urban counties. **Forsyth County** ranked **29th** among the 100 NC counties with regard to **Health Factors** (*health behaviors, clinical care, social & economic factors, and the physical environment*) compared to **24th** last year; the **5th** among the top five urban counties.

Forsyth County rankings in the following indicators:

- Health Behavior: 26th compared to 15th last year
- Clinical Care: 18th compared to 11th last year
- Socioeconomic Factors (SEF): 36th compared to 44th last year and
- Physical Environment: 64th compared to 44th last year.

While it is important to get updated information each year, a county's rank cannot be used to evaluate progress over time but trend graphs (see below) showing change in measures over past five years. The updated *Rankings* can be used to raise awareness about multiple factors that affect health and target action in areas where there are the greatest opportunities.

The graphs below show that there is a stronger correlation between health outcomes and SEF ranks, which indicates that the strongest predictors of better or poorer health status are better or poorer socioeconomic conditions respectively. The weaker correlation between health outcome and clinical care ranks indicates that the presence of quality care services in the community does not necessarily result in better health for the whole community.

"The goal of the Health Department is to improve health in Forsyth County; however no single person or group can tackle this problem alone. It will take leaders from business and government, educators, employers, citizens, and organizations representing many interests working together to create opportunities to live a healthy life and improving the health of Forsyth County residents," said Marlon B. Hunter, Health Director

The *Rankings* confirm the results of Forsyth County's 2011 Community Health Assessment (CHA) top priority focus areas which are physical activity & nutrition, chronic disease prevention, maternal & infant health and social



determinants of health. This report also reminds our community partners that health is everyone's business and need to be involved in the ongoing 2014 CHA process to develop a community-wide comprehensive health improvement plan.

While results can take years to achieve, Forsyth County can be on the road to better health. Helping people stay healthy can take a variety of forms – from opening supermarkets that sell healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods, to designing safe and accessible streets, to expanding early education opportunities, to encouraging more physical activity, and much more. Report is available: <http://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/PublicHealth/Documents/CHR2014FC.pdf>

