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WASHTENAW RANKS AMONG THE HEALTHIEST MICHIGAN COUNTIES FOR THE FOURTH YEAR IN A ROW

National report shows us that where we live matters to our health

YPSILANTI, Mich., March 20, 2013 – Washtenaw County ranks first among Michigan counties in "health factors" according to the 2013 *County Health Rankings* released today. This is the fourth consecutive year that Washtenaw County has received the top ranking for health factors.

The *County Health Rankings* are based on the idea no single thing makes us healthy or unhealthy – rather it is a variety of factors such as physical activity, access to healthy food, education and family and community support combined. There are two rankings for each county, one for health factors and one for health outcomes. Health factors include our health behaviors, access to clinical care, social and environmental factors and our physical environments. Health outcomes include how long people live (mortality) and to what degree they report feeling healthy (morbidity). Washtenaw ranks fifth among Michigan counties for health outcomes.

"These results are testament to some of the excellent work happening in our community – thanks to our community partners and our staff," says Richard Fleece, Health Officer for Washtenaw County Public Health. But, the *Rankings* also help us understand where we can work together for greater improvements: "We know there are areas within our community where it's much harder to live a healthy life. We can't rely solely on our health care systems and providers to support our health – it takes all of us," says Fleece. No single sector alone can tackle the health challenges in a community.

Washtenaw's overall high rankings provide good information about how we are doing locally compared to other counties and states. Within the county, there are significant health differences when we look at outcomes according to where people live, how much money they earn, their

level of formal education or their race/ethnicity. For example, Washtenaw County has a higher number of dentists relative to its population than other areas in Michigan. Yet, an estimated 40,000 Washtenaw residents have no dental insurance and an additional 35,000 residents with Medicaid are unable to access services because so few providers accept it.

Washtenaw's own source of county health data called the Health Improvement Plan (HIP) helps us understand some of these within county disparities in health. For example, black infants are three times more likely to die than white infants before their first birthday in Washtenaw County. Similarly, how long you live may depend on where exactly you live within the county: The average age of death in Sylvan, York and Ypsilanti Townships starts at 64 years. In contrast, it is over 76 years in Bridgewater Township, Saline and Ann Arbor.

Taken together, the *Rankings* and HIP can help our community develop innovative approaches to support health – across our community and, often, outside the doctor's office. It is not just our doctors or hospitals that can help us all live healthier – it's the people that build roads or start businesses, those that make laws as well as the teachers, institutions and community members that surround us. Examples of local initiatives developed using this kind of data include local farmers' market partnerships, expanded community recreation opportunities for low-income residents and community collaborations working to eliminate health disparities.

About the County Health Rankings

The *County Health Rankings* are published online at www.countyhealthrankings.org. The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation publish them annually.

The health factors represent what influences the overall health of a county. These go beyond looking at access to medical care and include measurements of the following:

- **Health behaviors** tobacco use, diet and exercise, alcohol use and sexual activity
- Clinical care access to care and quality of care
- **Social and environmental factors** education, employment, income, family and social support and community safety
- **Physical environment** environmental quality and built environment

The health outcomes include mortality and morbidity.

Washtenaw County Public Health

Washtenaw County Public Health promotes health and works to prevent disease or injury in our community. Visit us online at http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org.

More on local HIP data, including maps, tables and presentations is available at http://hip.ewashtenaw.org. HIP includes a 2000 household survey conducted every five years since 1995. It has focused resources, partnerships and health improvement strategies where they can be most effective.

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