

NEWS RELEASE

APRIL 10, 2012

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

**411 NORTH 5TH ST
SHELTON, WA 98584**

TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: National County Health Rankings

Last week the University of Wisconsin, in Partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, released the third annual County Health Rankings Report. The County Health Rankings continue to show us that where we live matters to our health. The Rankings help us see where we live, learn, work and play influences how healthy we are and how long we live. Having health insurance is important – but much of what affects our health occurs outside of the doctor's office. It's hard to live a healthy life if you live in an unhealthy place.

The Rankings help us see how we compare to our neighbors and help us identify where we are doing well and where we need to improve. The work underway by a Mason County health coalition whose membership includes representatives from many different sectors (public health, health care, education, business, etc.) in Mason County will help us see what barriers to good health exist in our community and what steps are needed to remove them.

While Mason County may rank 35th in health outcomes (mortality or length of life and morbidity or quality of life), the national study shows that, overall, Washington State Counties are healthier than many other places in the nation. However, we still have room for improvement. Mason County ranks 29th in Mortality, but 36th in Morbidity (looking at people experiencing poor or fair health, poor physical health days, poor mental health days and low birthweight).

Mason County's Health Factors ranking is better at 29th. Health Factors include health behaviors (tobacco use, diet and exercise, alcohol use, and sexual activity), clinical care (access to care and quality of care), Social and Economic Factors (education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety), and physical environment (environmental quality and built environment). While health outcomes represent our overall health today, health factors today represent our health tomorrow. In other words, since our health factors today are better than our health outcomes today, we should see improvements in our health outcomes in the future. Of course at 29th in health factors, we have a ways to go to reach our goal of being the healthiest county in the State.

Of the health factors influencing health, on average, 70% of our health is determined by health behaviors (30%) and social and economic factors (40%), while clinical care contributes 20% and the physical environment contributes 10%.

The Rankings are an annual check-up of the health of each county and are a tool to help us create a healthier county. The data shine a light on the things that influence how healthy we are and how long we live.

We all have a stake in creating a healthier community. It takes a long time for County health to improve, and it usually happens incrementally. A healthier workforce, for example, starts in the community. If an employee lives in an unhealthy community that lacks options for healthy foods or physical activity or fosters unhealthy behaviors such as smoking or drinking, then an employer suffers: health cost go up, productivity goes down, and businesses will have a harder time competing in the market and communities will have a harder time attracting new businesses.

Two-thirds of the \$2.7 trillion the nation spends on health care in is tied to preventable diseases. Nevertheless, the United States invests less than 5 percent of the health care dollar on efforts to prevent illness or help people lead healthier lives. The Rankings show us how an investment in prevention can pay off both in terms of improved health and lower costs. Improving health is everyone's business.

For more information, contact Vicki Kirkpatrick at 360-427-9670, Ext. 260, 360-275-4467, Ext. 260 from Belfair, or 360-482-5269, Ext. 260 from Elma. Or visit the County Health Rankings website at www.countyhealthrankings.org to learn more about the Rankings.

Lynda Ring Erickson
Chair

Steve Bloomfield
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