

NEWS RELEASE
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Douglas County moves up one spot to No. 8 in health rankings, but room for improvement remains

(Lawrence, KS) – Douglas County is the eighth healthiest county in Kansas, up one spot from last year, according to the County Health Rankings report released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. When it comes to health outcomes — length and quality of life — Douglas County has ranked among the state’s Top 10 counties since the report was first published in 2010.

The report also gives counties a ranking based on the factors that influence health outcomes: behavior, clinical care, physical environment, and social and economic status. Douglas County ranked No. 6, also up one spot from last year. Still, there are areas of concern:

- **No. 35 for social and economic status.** Douglas County has higher rates of violent crime and a higher percentage of children living in single-parent households compared to state averages. “Not surprisingly, on complex issues like poverty and housing, our community is not yet seeing the progress we’ve hoped for,” said Erika Dvorske, executive director of United Way of Douglas County.
- **No. 56 for physical environment.** Douglas County scores low on this measure because of a new indicator “severe housing problems.” More Douglas County residents spend over half of their income on housing costs compared to the average Kansan, especially those who rent housing. The low ranking doesn’t surprise Lawrence City Commissioner Jeremy Farmer, CEO of Douglas County’s food bank Just Food. “I am concerned that far too many people in Lawrence and Douglas County struggle to keep a roof over their head and food on the table,” he said.

Dan Partridge, Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department director, said the County Health Rankings confirm what was learned during the development of Douglas County’s first community health plan, which was published nearly one year ago. “Our work consistently points to the fact that the primary drivers of health in this community are economic and environmental factors,” he said. “Good jobs, adequate housing, access to healthy food, safe parks and trails — these are things people need to live healthy, productive lives.”

Partridge said improving the health of a Douglas County is not something that one agency can do alone. “The responsibility for health lies with all of us — not just health care providers — but with schools, businesses, churches, government and individuals.”

Douglas County Commissioner Nancy Thellman agrees. “Leaders in both the public and private sector need to consider health in all policy decisions. Promotion of health goes hand-in-hand with improving education, advancing sustainability, and creating jobs and growing the economy.” Thellman said development of the community health plan in 2013 was a great first step, but the community needs to continue to work together to advance system, policy and environmental changes that promote a healthier Douglas County.

To learn about the Douglas County community health plan, “Roadmap to a Healthier Douglas County,” visit healthydouglascounty.org.

Results of this year’s County Health Rankings are available online at countyhealthrankings.org. According to the report, the state’s five healthiest counties are: Johnson, Riley, Pottawatomie, Wabaunsee and Stevens. The least healthy are: Woodson, Elk, Wyandotte, Chautauqua and Decatur.

About the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department

The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department has served the Lawrence and Douglas County community for more than 120 years. Its mission is to advance policies, practices and programs that promote health for all, prevent disease and protect the environment.

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