

Carroll County Times

Carroll near top of report's state health rankings

By Erica Kritt, Times Staff Writer

Carroll is among the healthiest jurisdictions in Maryland, according to a recent report that ranked the state's 23 counties and Baltimore City.

The report ranked Carroll fifth in the state in health outcomes and third in the state in health factors.

Both Barbara Rodgers, director of health planning and community improvement for the Carroll County Health Department and Tricia Supik, executive director of the Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County, said they were pleased at where Carroll ranked.

"I'm not surprised that our county scored in the top five," Supik said. "As a community, we have worked hard in many sectors."

The project was a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Bridget Booske, a senior scientist with the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute, said the school had been doing county rankings within Wisconsin since 2003 and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation heard about their work at a seminar and has funded the university to evaluate all the counties in all 50 states.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is based in New Jersey and was founded by its namesake, who is also the founder of Johnson & Johnson. The foundation's mission is to improve the health and health care of all Americans.

Booske said that this report will be conducted again in 2011 and 2012, but beyond that funding is uncertain.

She said the purpose of the rankings is to show all the details that go into overall health and promote awareness.

"Health is everyone's responsibility," she said.

She said by making these rankings and information available online to everyone, instead of making it a report for health officials, it might encourage collaboration and lead to communities trying programs or creating new legislation regarding health.

Rodgers said while she hasn't had time to completely comprehend the report, nothing in it surprised her and she thinks the rankings are strong because the same criteria were used in each county.

The study used the same reports and measurements for each county. It took information from the Behavioral Risk Surveillance System, National Center for Health Statistics and the Census, among many other sources.

"A report like this really only helps you compare yourself to other places," she said.

Supik said that it is often hard to get comparative information on counties with small populations, so this is a helpful report.

Howard County ranked No. 1 in Maryland for both health outcomes and health factors.

Baltimore City ranked last behind the 23 counties for both health outcomes and health factors.

Supik said it's possible that Carroll can look at some of the strengths taking place in Howard County and Montgomery County, which ranked No. 2 in both health factors and outcomes, and see if any of its programs or policies could be applied here.

"I want Carroll to be No. 1 or No. 2," Supik said.

ABOUT THE RANKINGS

The report, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, used a mathematical equation giving specific weights to specific data to come up with a ranking for health outcomes and health factors.

Health outcomes were judged by two statistics: mortality and morbidity, which is how long people live and how they feel when alive, according to the report.

Quality of life is measured by outcomes from various reports by the surveyed people who reported poor health, physically unhealthy days and mentally unhealthy days. Morbidity also took into consideration low birth weight.

Health factors took several statistics into account: Health behaviors, which included data on smoking, drinking and the death rate from motor vehicle crashes; clinical care such as the percentage of people under 65 without health insurance, the primary care provider rate and hospice use; social and economic factors including the percentage of people 16 and older who were unemployed, percentage of children under age 18 in poverty and the violent crime rate; and physical environment, including unhealthy air quality days, access to healthy foods and the number of liquor stores per 10,000 people, were among the statistics used.

Reach staff writer Erica Kritt at 410-857-7876 or erica.kritt@carrollcountytimes.com.

February 20, 2010

http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/articles/2010/02/20/news/local_news/04_carroll_health_rankings.prt