Gratiot shows significant increase in county health rankings

by Greg Nelson
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A recent report shows Gratiot County ranks in the top third of Michigan’s most healthiest counties.

The County Health Rankings is compiled annually by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

They look at a variety of measures that affect health such as the rate of people dying before the age of 75, high school graduation rates, access to healthy foods, air pollution levels, income, the number of uninsured adults, physical activity, and rates of smoking, obesity and teen births, among several others.

Gratiot was ranked 25th out of the state’s 83 counties in “health outcomes,” a significant improvement over the past two years when it was 48th.

“The County Health Rankings show how important it is to examine all the conditions that impact well-being and can help families thrive,” said Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Communities around the nation are using the County Health Rankings to drive improvements in education housing, job training, health food options, and more, as they work to build a culture of health.”

The rankings, now in their seventh year, can be put to use right away by leaders in government, business, health care, and every citizen motivated to work together to create a healthier community, the report states.

According to the report, which ranks every county in the country, the healthiest counties in each state have higher college attendance, fewer preventable hospital stays, and better access to parks and gyms.

The least healthiest have more smokers, more teen births and more alcohol related car crashes.

 Officials for the Mid-Michigan District Heath Department, which serves Gratiot, Montcalm and Clinton counties, called the rankings the “most comprehensive report of its kind to rank overall health.”

The top three healthiest counties in Michigan were: Ottawa, Leelanau and Livingston.

The bottom three were: Iosco, Genesee and Wayne.

The rankings of nearby counties were: Clinton, fourth (up from sixth):
Midland, eighth, (up from 11th): Montcalm, 43rd (down from 28th); and Isabella, 65th (down from 33rd).

Gratiot County was 28th, up from 63rd, in “length of life” with a total of 6,600 premature deaths, compared to the state average of 7,200.

It received low marks in “health behaviors,” ranking 65th.

Those included adult smoking and obesity, physical inactivity, excessive drinking, teen birth rate, motor vehicle crash deaths and sexually transmitted infections.

According to the report, 36 percent of the county adult population is obese, compared to the state average of 31 percent.

The adult smoking rate of 18 percent, however, was lower than the state average of 20 percent.
About 21 percent of the county’s population is rated as “excessive drinkers,” compared to the state average of 20 percent.
The teen birth rate of 28 is lower than the state average of 29.
The report also looked at “clinical care,” where Gratiot was ranked 40th in the state, down from 37th last year.
It ranked low in the number of primary care physicians with a ratio of one doctor for every 1,610 residents. The state average is one to 1,240.
The ratio of dentists is even worse with one per 2,600 residents, while the state average is one per 1,450.
The ratio of mental health providers was one per 730 residents, compared to the state average of one per 450.
Gratiot was ranked 45th in “social and economic factors, up from 51st last year, and 38th in “physical environment compared to 41st in 2014.
There were 23 percent of the county’s children living in poverty, the same as the state average.
Gratiot’s high school graduation rate of 70 percent, down from 73 percent, was higher than the state average of 78 percent, and the number of people with “some college” was also higher at 54 percent compared to 66 percent.
The number of children living in single-parent households was 35 percent in the county, just slightly higher than the state average of 34 percent.
The county ranked significantly lower than the state average in the number of violent crimes (138 to 464) and injury deaths (46 to 61), but higher in physical activity, 31 percent to 23 percent.
The MMDHD and community leaders will use the rankings to help measure where local residents stand on factors that influence health compared to other counties, and to identify challenges and take action to improve residents’ health.
To access the entire report go online to www.countyhealthrankings.org.