

## **Grays Harbor County Among the Least Healthy in Washington**

### **Local News**

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A national health report released today carried sober news for Grays Harbor County: Comparing Washington's 39 counties on various measures of health, the county ranked near the bottom for every category, never scoring higher than 31st.

"This new study confirms much of what we already know about our health challenges," said county Public Health Director Joan Brewster. "Our community is faced with serious and costly health problems. We hope the new data will help focus attention on areas where we can make solid improvements. It will take community-wide investments to change these rankings, but it is worth it: If we invest in our health today, we'll be providing better lives for ourselves and our children tomorrow."

The *County Health Rankings* report, produced by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Wisconsin Population Health Institute, is the first of its kind to compare all 3,100 counties in 50 states. The report is available online at: [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org). "This report shows us there are big differences in overall health across counties, due to many factors, ranging from individual behavior to quality of health care, education and jobs, access to healthy foods and quality of the air," says Patrick Remington, MD, MPH, with the University of Wisconsin School of Public Health.

For Health Factors, which combines 13 specific measures, the Harbor scored 38th overall. One portion of that is for Health Behaviors, where Grays Harbor scored 39th, lower than any other county. The county's low ranking was driven by rates of adult smoking, adult obesity, teen births. Other Health Factor measures include Clinical Care (access to health care, quality of care), Socioeconomic Factors (education, income, social support), and Physical Environment (air quality and the built environment.)

It is clear that the impact of those factors shows up in actual health experience of Grays Harbor residents. For Health Outcomes, Grays Harbor scored 33rd, a measure that combines mortality (premature deaths) and morbidity (levels of illness.)

"Increasingly, we are seeing that how healthy we are depends on many factors," says John Bausher, MD, PhD, County Health Officer. "In order to improve, we have to look at what is contributing to poor health. Access to good medical care is critical, but that alone will not make us healthy. We also have to change our behaviors and make our environment healthy."

The report's authors hope their work will inspire communities to do just that. As Remington points out, "It's easier for people to lead a healthy lifestyle when they live in a healthy community—such as one that has expanded early childhood education, enacted smoke-free laws, increased access to healthier food, or created more opportunities for physical activity." The health department is initiating work supported by a Healthy Communities grant, designed to help communities address many risk factors that lead to chronic disease. "It is a small grant, but we plan to use it over the next three years to involve many people in Grays Harbor County. We have found helpful examples from other communities where local efforts led to bike trails, streets that are safe for walking, easier access to fresh foods for all neighborhoods, and education programs that help reduce the impact of diabetes, heart disease and asthma. We welcome everyone to help us put

these programs in place on the Harbor.&rdquo; The health department can be contacted at [health@co.gray-sharbor.wa.us](mailto:health@co.gray-sharbor.wa.us)