Report: Wisconsin outperforms nation on two-thirds of health measures, but trails in remainder

MADISON, Wis. — A new report from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute shows that Wisconsin’s quest to become the healthiest state in the nation is in very good — but not perfect — shape.

While Wisconsin outperforms the national average in 36 of the 54 measures studied, the state continues to lag behind the national average on 18 measures. The “Opportunities to Make Wisconsin the Healthiest State” report compares Wisconsin’s health against the U.S. on a variety of indicators that have been shown to influence individual and community health. These indicators include physical-activity levels, healthy eating, tobacco use, housing, transportation, education and community safety.

“The health of people in Wisconsin, and in every state, is influenced by more than how much we exercise or what we eat. While these are important drivers of health and disease, our health also depends on how our communities and our state address issues like high-school graduation, household income, and environmental factors such as access to clean water and safe housing,” said Karen Timberlake, director of the UW Population Health Institute. “This report challenges us to understand how Wisconsin compares to other states on these important indicators, and to create plans for change where we are falling short. There’s room to improve, for every state, on every measure.”

Wisconsin performed below the U.S. average on 18 health indicators, including:

- Percent of adults who are obese or overweight
- Percent of adults who are excessive drinkers
- Percent of children ages 3 and 4 enrolled in preschool
- Deaths from falls (per 100,000 population)
- Percent of total population that uses seatbelts
- Water quality
- State level public-health spending per person.
The state performs above the U.S. average in 36 health measures and outperforms both the U.S. average and Minnesota in 10 measures. The report specifically compares Wisconsin to Minnesota because of the states’ close proximity, similar demographics, and comparable size.

The 10 health indicators in which Wisconsin was rated “healthier” than both Minnesota and the U.S. average include:

- Percent of adults meeting recommended levels of physical activity
- Percent of population with limited access to healthy foods
- Percent of children (0-17) without health insurance
- Overall quality of health care
- Percent of total population living in overcrowded housing.

The UW Population Health Institute, part of the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, produced this report to pinpoint specific areas in which Wisconsin can steer its improvement efforts and move toward the goal of becoming the healthiest state. This analysis supports those working to improve health across Wisconsin, including state and local policymakers. Wisconsin’s greatest opportunities can be found where its current performance falls below the U.S. average, or where it outperforms the U.S. average but not Minnesota.

For a complete listing of the 54 indicators and to read the full report, visit the UW Population Health Institute website:

Presentation-ready slides that correspond to the full report can be accessed at:

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The UW Population Health Institute advances health and well-being for all by developing and promoting evidence-based approaches to health improvement through policy and practice at the local, state and national levels.