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Wisconsin Receives Mixed Grades in First Health Report Card

MADISON -- Wisconsin received mixed grades in the first-of-its-kind Health of Wisconsin Report Card. While taking home a B- in overall health, Wisconsin received a D in the area of health disparities.

These findings indicate that while Wisconsin receives nearly straight A's for some groups, for others, such as less educated people, rural residents, Native Americans, and African Americans, the state gets Fs and is doing relatively less well in achieving health for all.

The report evaluates Wisconsin's overall health, not access to or quality of health care. Dean Robert Golden of the School of Medicine and Public Health noted, "While access to high quality health care is a key to improving health, health care alone is not sufficient for obtaining optimal improvements in everyone's health."

The measure of health – measured as "the sum" of mortality rate and the number of unhealthy days in the past month – varied widely between groups. For example, the mortality rate for college graduates in Wisconsin is better than the state with the best mortality rate (Minnesota) but the mortality rate for African Americans is substantially worse than the state with the worst rate (Mississippi).

One of the study's authors, Patrick Remington, MD noted, "In every age group that we examined, the differences in health between sub-groups, defined by race or education, are very large. In fact, the differences within Wisconsin are greater than the differences between the very best and very worst states." Each major age group was analyzed by four key characteristics: gender, rural/urban/suburban residence, educational attainment and race/ethnicity.

Dr. Remington continued, "We know from this study, and similar work in other states, that good health is the result of many factors, only one of which is good health care. Other factors such as diet and exercise, cigarette smoking, and income and education are important contributors to the health of individuals and the population as a whole."

The report was developed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, an arm of the School of Medicine and Public Health dedicated to translating health research into policy and practice. The Institute annually publishes the County Health Rankings. The Institute team is now reviewing the programs and policies in states with the best grades that are most likely to improve health -- such as a good diet and regular exercise, reducing smoking and a healthy environment. The resulting report, Improving Wisconsin's Health, will be released in 2008.

For a complete copy of the report and supporting documents such as FAQs, go online to <http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/UWPHI/>