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CONTACT: Ian Clark
(608) 890-5641
iclark@uwhealth.org

**Wisconsin's health: significant gaps by race, income, and geography,
and in the middle of the pack nationally**

MADISON, Wis. — A new report by researchers at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute reveals that while some trends in the health of Wisconsin residents are positive, this progress is not shared by all residents of the state.

According to the report, *2014 Wisconsin Health Trends*, some 10-year trends in Wisconsin's health are encouraging. The rate of premature death (death before age 75) continues to decline for the state's population overall, as do rates of smoking, excessive drinking and teen births.

Other health indicators are continuing to head in the wrong direction, including adult obesity, low birth-weight infants and adults who report their health as being only fair or poor. The trends in socioeconomic factors which contribute to health are mixed. Child poverty continues to rise, while there is some evidence that the rates of teens dropping out of high school and of adult unemployment are beginning to improve. These trends are consistent with the findings of America's Health Rankings, which demonstrated that Wisconsin still has significant room for improvement compared to the nation in adult smoking, binge drinking, obesity, and self-reported fair or poor health.

Perhaps of greatest concern, the UW Population Health Institute's analysis reveals significant differences in health status between racial and ethnic groups, geographic regions (rural, suburban, urban) and educational level.

"We think of Wisconsin as a healthy place to live, work and raise a family, but these opportunities are not shared by all in our state," said Karen Timberlake, director of the UW Population Health Institute. "Improving opportunities for good health for everyone in Wisconsin means we have to understand where we are heading in the right direction, and where we are on the wrong track. We have a lot of work to do to ensure that everyone in Wisconsin has a chance to make healthy choices and lead a long and healthy life."

Examples of gaps in health outcomes among different groups in Wisconsin include:

- Smoking rates are staying relatively steady for African-Americans while declining for other racial and ethnic groups. Wisconsin adults with a high-school diploma are more than twice as likely to smoke as are adults who have completed college.
- Rates of excessive drinking are declining more than twice as fast for members of other racial and ethnic groups (Hispanics, Asians and American Indians) as compared to whites or blacks.
- Adults with less than a high school education are five to six times more likely to report being in fair or poor health as adults with a college degree.

America's Health Rankings also noted the problem of health disparities in Wisconsin. The state ranks just 37th out of the 50 states for differences in health status by education level. Efforts to improve health in Wisconsin must consider the full array of factors that influence how long and how well we live, and must begin by examining the circumstances that produce longer, healthier lives for some of the state's residents but not others.

The UW Population Health Institute produces the *Wisconsin Health Trends* report to track opportunities to improve Wisconsin's health and make progress towards the goal of becoming the healthiest state with the least disparity. The health outcomes and contributing factors presented in the report can serve as a guide for public-health professionals, policymakers, business and civic leaders, health care providers and concerned citizens to build support for targeted interventions supporting improvements among these health indicators. Wisconsin's greatest opportunities for health improvement may be recognized through targeted interventions that are likely to decrease health disparities.

To read the full report including a complete analysis of disparities by important population subgroups, visit the UW Population Health Institute website at <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu>.

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.

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