

UW-Madison: Report card on health of people in Wisconsin identifies opportunities for improvement

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MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin received a C grade for overall health of people living in the state, according to a recent report by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

The state's overall population health grade is assessed by two categories, length and quality of life. Wisconsin's scored a grade of C in both in the 2021 [Wisconsin Population Health and Equity Report Card](#), which was released in March 2022.

The institute has issued the Report Card every three years since 2007, with a pause after 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other graded metrics assess health disparities among populations across geographic regions, racial or ethnic groups and levels of educational attainment. In Wisconsin, most of these areas received grades of D or F.

The grades reflect a wide variation in who is, or is not, living long and well in Wisconsin, according to Sheri Johnson, Ph.D., director, UW Population Health Institute in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

“The Report Card is intended to spark curiosity and commitment to explore new ways of understanding the health of the people of Wisconsin,” she said. “We believe it is possible to use data, evidence and stories to find common ground, cultivate social solidarity and build the power needed to ensure everyone in Wisconsin has an opportunity to thrive.”

The Report Card provides recommendations in addition to grades. It focuses on five

priority areas for policies and practices that can be implemented at state and local levels to advance equity, including ensuring access to quality health care, expanding safe and affordable housing, increasing economic resources for children and families, expanding broadband infrastructure and increasing civic engagement.

“The Report Card highlights actionable data and strategies for policy and practice change to address some of Wisconsin’s most persistent and pervasive problems,” Johnson said.

As families have struggled to make ends meet, recent data show that 13.5% of Wisconsin’s children live in poverty, with the highest child poverty rates in Milwaukee and rural areas, 24% and 15%, respectively, according to the Report Card.

Barriers to economic opportunity that impact health, such as availability of living-wage jobs, safe and affordable housing and access to services and medical care, exist in both rural and urban areas of Wisconsin.

The Report Card describes a variety of evidence-informed policy approaches, including expanding affordable health care coverage through BadgerCare Plus, the 2021 Child Tax Credit or Earned Income Tax Credit.

The focus of the Report Card’s priority areas emerged from the statewide outreach and engagement of the Population Health Institute’s Mobilizing Action Towards Community Health (MATCH) group, which aims to change practice, focus priorities and shift power to support shared action on root causes of health and equity.

The Report Card also describes Wisconsin communities awarded Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designations by the MATCH group that highlight real-time action to improve health and equity.

The 2021 Report Card was made possible by funding from the Wisconsin Partnership Program and furthers the far-reaching commitment by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Wisconsin now and for years to come.

Johnson and Paula Tran, senior health equity advisor, UW Population Health Institute, are available for interviews today, and a recorded interview with Johnson is also available.