

# **UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health: New rankings show healthiest and least healthy counties in Wisconsin**

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MADISON, Wis. – Ozaukee County ranks the healthiest in Wisconsin and Menominee County is the least healthy county in the state, according to new County Health Rankings data from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI).

The Rankings are available at [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org).

For more than a decade Rankings' data, evidence, guidance and stories have broadened the nation's understanding about the multiple factors that shape health. This year, the Rankings introduce seven new actionable measures that local communities can consider, as they work toward improving health for everyone. As the nation recovers from a generation-defining crisis, this year's Rankings explore what it takes to rebuild in ways that ensure economic security and health for everyone.

“Working together, we can transform public goods such as affordable and accessible childcare, quality public schools and jobs that treat people with the dignity they deserve and the wages that will support their families,” said Marjory Givens, co-director of the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. “This would not only ensure a just recovery from the pandemic for families and communities today but greater economic security, better health and well-being for generations to come.”

Economic security allows for families to do things like pay rent, access education

and obtain childcare which all contribute to their health and well-being. The pandemic exacerbated the economic struggles of families with children and finding affordable childcare was particularly difficult.

The Wisconsin report reveals that for a family with two children, on average, 26% of household income goes to childcare. When a single expense consumes the majority of a paycheck – especially one as essential as childcare – families are unable to afford other necessities. The impact of childcare cost burden is even more stark when exploring differences in household income by race and ethnicity. When looking at median household income by race, a Black family in Wisconsin has a median household income of \$32,857, while an Asian family's median household income is \$72,870. These income disparities demonstrate how economic security is not equally accessible to all people living in Wisconsin.

“These rankings emphasize what we have known before: being healthy is about more than just eating right, exercising and going to the doctor. Being healthy – both as individuals and as a state – requires affordable childcare, quality education, economic security, stable housing and a host of other societal conditions that this report lifts up. That’s what we mean when we say that public health, fundamentally, is ‘what we do, collectively, to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy,’” said Dr. Geoffrey Swain, president, Wisconsin Public Health Association.

The pandemic was hard on working families, revealing gaps across the nation in childcare affordability. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services benchmark suggests that childcare is no longer affordable if it exceeds 7% of a household's income. As it stands, there is not a single county in the country where childcare costs for two children are at or below the affordability benchmark.

Affordable, high-quality childcare is vital to building healthy communities. It lays a solid foundation for academic achievement for children, allows parents and caregivers to more fully participate in the workforce, and puts the nation on a path to a fair and just recovery.

This year's [What Works for Health](#) includes a curated list with actionable strategies related to family and social supports, income and education that can support local changemakers as they work to expand economic opportunity. Each strategy is rated for its evidence of effectiveness and likely impact on health disparities. The [Take Action Center](#) also provides valuable guidance for communities who want to move with data to action.