



Comparing health in Washington's counties: New data for 2014

A lot of data are available for us to try to understand how to live healthier lives, and how to protect the health and well-being of our communities. One of the best data sources, complete with ideas of how to use the data for positive change, is from the Wisconsin Population Health Institute, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It's just released its [2014 county health rankings](#), where each county can compare itself to others in the state and the nation on health outcomes and health factors. Health outcome measures include premature death, low birth weight, and physical and mental health. Health factor measures include smoking status, diet and exercise, alcohol use, access to health care, poverty levels, and many other aspects of life that determine how healthy we are.

[How would you use this information?](#) While it helps to know where each county stands, it's also very helpful to have some ideas about how different communities use this information. Some counties use it to apply for funding, while others use it to help determine health policy and program goals.

To take it a step further, the website has a [database you can search to find examples of successful programs and policies](#) that have improved health in different communities. I typed in the word "rural" and found four organizations I didn't know existed for supporting rural health initiatives, and links to 42 different examples of evidence supporting programs in rural communities. To try another example, I also typed in "teen pregnancy," and it provided a link to a webinar with examples of reducing teen pregnancy. It also gave links to 17 different ways to reduce teen pregnancy, depending on different risks for each community.

Having a snapshot of each county's health is one more way for all of us to consider the work we do in relation to others around us. It's one more data point to help us reach out to our neighboring communities on how we might jointly look at how our policies and programs affect each other, and how to move together to improve rural health in Washington!