

CLEVELAND COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, March 23, 2016

Contact:

DeShay Oliver, PIO
Cleveland County Health Department
980-484-5199

Deshay.oliver@clevelandcounty.com

County Health Rankings Show Where We Live Matters to Our Health

(Shelby, NC)—Each year, the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation release the *County Health Rankings*. These rankings compare the overall health of nearly every county in the nation, with the goal of showing that where you live influences how well and how long you live. With a ranking of 1 indicating the healthiest county and a ranking of 100 indicating the least healthy county in North Carolina, Cleveland County received a ranking of 80 according to the 2016 annual *County Health Rankings*. This is an improvement from the 2015 county health ranking of 86.

This improvement in overall county health ranking appears to be primarily as a result of improvements in the measureable health outcome of morbidity/quality of life and the health factor of clinical care. In the category of morbidity/quality of life, we saw a decrease in reported poor physical health days from 2015 to 2016 as well as a decrease in reported poor mental health days. In the health factor of clinical care, the percentage of uninsured adults in Cleveland County decreased from 18% in 2015 to 16% in 2016. Furthermore, the rate of preventable hospital stays among our Medicare population decreased, and the percentage of Medicare recipients who participated in mammography screenings increased. Last, the ratio of both primary care physicians and mental health providers to the number of residents in Cleveland County improved from 2015 to 2016.

Despite Cleveland County's overall improvement in the County Health Rankings and notable improvements in the areas of morbidity/quality of life and clinical care, the rankings also help to identify areas that need improvement. Perhaps most noticeable is the regression in Cleveland County's health behaviors ranking from 55 in 2015 to 59 in 2016. This regression is marked by an increase in adult obesity from 29% in 2015 to 32% in 2016. Excessive drinking also increased from 2015 to 2016, rising from 10% to 14%. Despite these regressions, there were also some marked improvements in the category of health behaviors. Adult smoking decreased from 24% in 2015 to 20% in 2016. Also, while the reported percentage of excessive drinking increased, the percentage of alcohol-impaired driving deaths decreased from 27% in 2015 to

24% in 2016. Last, both the rate of sexually transmitted infections and rate of teen births in Cleveland County decreased significantly from 2015 to 2016.

As stated by DeShay Oliver, Public Information Officer for the Cleveland County Health Department, “The health factors category of Health Behaviors is an area that the health department continues to work diligently to improve. We provide numerous programs and information, run media campaigns, and even work to make individuals’ environments more conducive to making healthy choices. However, when it comes down to it, the behaviors in this category are individual choices. Even if armed with the right information, knowledge and resources, someone can still choose to participate in unhealthy behaviors such as excessive drinking, unhealthy eating or failure to exercise. We want to ensure individuals live in an environment that encourages healthy behaviors and individuals have the information and resources to do so. Then, it is up to them to do the right thing to take care of themselves.”

Social and economic factors is a category that is very difficult to change that can have a major impact on an individual’s overall health. This is another category in which Cleveland County saw a regression, going from a ranking of 59 in 2015 to 66 in 2016. This is marked by statistics such as 31% of our children living in poverty, 40% of our children living in single-parent households, and 7.1% of our employable population being unemployed.

“Social and economic factors can impact individuals’ ability to choose and practice healthy behaviors,” says Oliver. “For example, healthy foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables and meats are more expensive than processed foods. Individuals may lack transportation, making it more difficult to access grocery stores, healthcare, or physical activity opportunities. Individuals may live in an area where they feel it is unsafe to allow their children to play outside, especially in areas that are not well-lit or lack sidewalks, playgrounds, etc. There are numerous factors, many of which are environmental, that can impact health behaviors and overall health status. We must be mindful of this.”

Despite regressions in the category of social and economic factors, there are noteworthy improvements as well such as an increase in the high school graduation rate and a decrease in the rate of injury deaths. Furthermore, although our unemployment percentage is higher than we would like to see it at 7.1%, this is a great improvement when compared to the 2015 percentage of 8.9. Improvements in the social and economic factors category should be celebrated, as these indicators can be the most difficult to target and change.

This is the seventh year of the *County Health Rankings*, the most comprehensive report of its kind to rank the overall health of nearly every county in all 50 states by using a standard way to measure how healthy people are and how long they live. The *Rankings* help everyone see how where people live, learn, work and play influence their health and behaviors.

The *Rankings* are available online at www.countyhealthrankings.org. For additional information on Cleveland County's health ranking, or for assistance in interpreting the data available on the *County Health Rankings* website, you may contact the Cleveland County Health Department at 980-484-5199.

###