

For Immediate Release

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County Health Rankings: Washtenaw County is Healthy. But Not for All.

YPSILANTI, Mich., March 19, 2019 – Washtenaw County ranks as the fourth healthiest county in Michigan – and first in factors related to health behaviors and clinical care. But the [2019 County Health Rankings](#), released today, also show that while there are a lot of opportunities for health in Washtenaw, not everyone benefits.

For example, Washtenaw ranked fourth best in preventing premature death. However, when you look at the years of potential life lost per 100,000 people under age 75 for white residents (4,800 years) and black residents (9,300 years), the difference is staggering – and is one of the largest gaps in the state. Similarly, the rate of preventable hospital stays for black residents is nearly two times higher than the rate for white residents.

These differences in health outcomes mirror systemic social and economic differences. Washtenaw County comes in 81st out of 83 counties in terms of income inequality. Washtenaw also has some of the worst housing conditions. Seventeen percent of households had at least one of four housing problems: overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities.

Taking Action to Address Unjust Differences in Health

“We know that these unjust differences in health outcomes and factors need to be addressed in order to make the County truly healthy for all,” says Ellen Rabinowitz, health officer for the Washtenaw County Health Department.

Over the past few years, the Health Department has identified priority areas that face some of the greatest health inequities in the county.

One of these areas is the Macarthur Boulevard neighborhood in Superior Township. The neighborhood includes Sycamore Meadows, a 262-unit privately owned low-income apartment complex, which is home to many families with young children. Issues related to housing conditions, neighborhood safety, discrimination, hunger, and access to services in the neighborhood have come up in data and conversations with residents. As a result of residents, the Health Department, and other allies sharing these concerns, Superior Township inspected all units in the apartment complex. Ninety-five percent failed.

This past year, the Health Department has supported the formation of the Sycamore Meadows Tenants Association and a partnership of organizational allies, who together have successfully advocated for better housing conditions, improvements to food access and nearby parks, and support for residents dealing with mental health issues and trauma.

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“The Sycamore Meadows tenants Association has been very beneficial to residents and the surrounding community because it has given the tenants a common ground where every and all concerns can be heard and handled in an appropriate way,” says Marcy Schwab, Sycamore Meadows resident and community organizer. “My hope is that Sycamore Meadows continues to grow strong together as a community and a neighborhood. The most important thing that I would like for the Sycamore Meadows community is for the people and the children to be able to *live* in the community and not just try to *survive*.”



MacArthur Boulevard Community Fun Day, August 2018. [Download photo here.](#)

You can read more about these partnerships in Sycamore Meadows in the Health Department’s recently released [annual report](#).

The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

The *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps*, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, are available online at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

Washtenaw County Health Department

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs.

The Washtenaw County Health Department has achieved national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board. Visit us at washtenaw.org/health or call 734-544-6700.

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