



public health



The *County Health Rankings*—a collaboration between RWJF and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute—allow more than 3,000 counties in all 50 states to see what makes their community healthy or unhealthy, how well they're doing in relation to one another, and pinpoint where to take action to improve health. View your county report and learn more at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

April 2012 | www.rwjf.org

For the most current version of our strategy, please visit our website at www.rwjf.org/publichealth.

Our health is largely influenced by the choices we make for ourselves and our families. But the communities where we live, learn, work, and play also play an important role in our ability to make those healthy choices. Research shows that communities that have smoke-free air laws, access to healthy foods, good schools, and safe places to play are healthier than neighborhoods that don't. In fact, the qualities of our neighborhoods can have a much greater impact on our health than how often we go to the doctor's office.

That's why the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to identifying new ways to prevent disease and health crises where they begin—in our homes and neighborhoods. A stronger and more effective public health system is the cornerstone of that commitment. Many people already know that public health constantly forecasts, prepares for, prevents, and responds to potential threats. But public health also does a lot to make our day-to-day lives healthier—from working with community planners to balance industrial parks with green space, to ensuring that kids have access to healthy foods at school. We can create a healthier future for ourselves and our children, and it starts with public health.

THE PROBLEM

America spends more money on health care than any other nation on earth: \$2 trillion annually. Yet, more than 95 percent of spending goes to “sick care”—medical interventions and health care services.

For all these investments, we are not as healthy a nation as we could be. Tens of millions of Americans suffer every day from preventable illnesses and chronic diseases. Public health epidemics such as obesity and tobacco use and exposure put adults and children at risk for unprecedented levels of major diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. And our nation isn't optimally prepared to protect people from disease outbreaks, natural disasters, or acts of bioterrorism—crises that can significantly impact Americans' health and well-being.

Access to quality health care is essential. But an integrated approach to improving our public health system



is critical as well—protecting all communities from health threats, making staying healthy less costly, and improving the quality of life for all Americans.

OUR APPROACH

The Foundation works with its grantees and collaborates with a range of partners—policy-makers, business, education, health care, and community organizations—to help create a stronger public health system that builds evidence for what works, and then puts ideas into action.

The Foundation's targeted strategy in public health focuses on three interconnected areas:

- *Discovering what works for improving health.* The right data can help communities improve health in tangible, measurable ways, and make the most of limited resources.
- *Advancing smarter laws and policies.* This is one of the most effective ways to dramatically improve the health of thousands of people in a relatively short amount of time.

- *Strengthening the public health departments that make healthy communities possible.* Because a stronger public health system can bring solutions to communities and directly improve people's health.

Discovering What Works. The right data can help communities improve health in tangible, measurable ways, and make the most of limited resources. That's why RWJF teamed with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute to develop the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* program. Ranking the health of nearly every county in the nation, the *County Health Rankings* illustrate what we know when it comes to what's making people sick or healthy. *County Health Roadmaps* shows what we can do to create healthier places to live, learn, work and play.

Policy and law are one of the most effective ways to improve health. For instance, New York City passed a comprehensive law that convinced 140,000 people to give up smoking—and protects millions of others from

deadly secondhand smoke. That's why we established the *Public Health Law Research* program at the Temple University Beasley School of Law. Its ultimate goal is to enable public health officials and policy-makers to make informed decisions on laws and legal issues, and better protect the health of their communities.

Employing best practices is the best way to leverage shrinking budgets. The National Coordinating Center for Public Health Systems and Services Research at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health is finding the smartest ways to structure, staff, finance, and manage state and local public health departments—data that practitioners and policy-makers need for informed resource and policy decisions.

We want to make staying healthy less costly and improve the quality of life for all Americans.

Advancing Smarter Laws and Policies.

In 2010, RWJF helped launch the Network for Public Health Law (the Network), a nationwide network with five regional centers and a national coordinating center located at the Public Health Law Center at William Mitchell College of Law. The Network provides fast, reliable legal assistance to public health officials, attorneys, and advocates. With better answers to their legal questions, those committed to protecting people's health can focus their time and energy on what's most important.

Many of the decisions that have the biggest impact on our health happen outside the health sector, in areas such as education, public transit, and agriculture. The Foundation, in collaboration with Pew Charitable Trusts, established the *Health Impact Project*, a nationwide initiative to promote the use of a health impact assessment (HIA) as a decision-making tool. HIAs provide community leaders and policy-makers in different sectors with sound, objective data and practical health recommendations to improve

quality of life in their communities and address some of the most pressing health problems facing our country.

We also support state and local advocacy campaigns for policies that improve health like smoke-free-air laws. We use strategies such as media outreach paid and earned media, polling and reports on the health and economic benefits of smoke-free-air laws, and tobacco tax increases—proven ways to reduce smoking, improve health and save lives.

Strengthening Public Health

Departments. Public health departments are the front line of defense against many of our nation's most pressing health challenges—from chronic illness to disaster preparedness and response. To fulfill their mission of protecting and promoting health in their communities, they need to use their limited resources as wisely as possible—particularly in tough economic times. To help in this effort, the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) began accrediting state, local, and tribal health departments in fall

2011. Establishing consistent standards and motivating quality improvement through accreditation ensures that every community—from Maine to Alaska—has access to the best safeguards and smart and efficient programs and services that can make a real difference in people's health. Pilot programs to help health departments prepare for accreditation have already begun to demonstrate some of the positive results it can have—from improving immunization rates for low-income children to increasing the number of kids snacking on fruits and vegetables in schools.

WHAT WE DON'T FUND

The Public Health team does not accept unsolicited proposals. We expect to issue special solicitations for proposals and ideas periodically. If you are registered to receive notices through the Foundation's website, at www.rwjf.org, you will receive notices of funding opportunities through these alerts.



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