



## WILLIAMSON COUNTY AND CITIES HEALTH DISTRICT

### NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Rankings place Williamson County among Texas' Healthiest Communities**

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The County Health Rankings—the first set of reports to rank the overall health of every county in all 50 states—were released today by the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation at a briefing in Washington, D.C. Williamson County ranked first among Texas Counties in the health outcomes category (how healthy people are and how long they live) and fifth overall in health factors (how healthy they can be) with regards to key factors that affect health such as smoking, obesity, binge drinking, access to primary care providers, rates of high school graduation, rates of violent crime, air pollution levels, access to healthy foods, unemployment rates and number of children living in poverty.

Dr. Chip Riggins, Executive Director and Health Authority for the Williamson Cities and County Health District (WCCHD), admits the rankings show that people who live in healthier counties tend to have higher education levels, are more likely to be employed, have access to more health care providers, and have more access to healthier foods, parks and recreational facilities. “But we also know that health doesn't happen by accident. It's not just the resources your community has, but how they are used that make the difference. Good policy decisions by elected officials, good governance by a board of health and productive public-private collaborations over the years have undoubtedly contributed to this ranking.”

One example is Williamson County's designation as an ACHIEVE (Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and Environmental change) community by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) in 2009. As a result, the Healthy Hearts Coalition was formed and its mission is to empower the people of Williamson County to lead healthy lifestyles by promoting a safe environment through public and private initiatives. Members of the Coalition represent 18 different organizations and include elected officials; local directors of public health boards; business leaders from various industries; and leaders of local schools, parks and recreation departments, physicians, hospitals, and other community and service organizations. “Achieving a healthy community is a journey, not a destination. Formal and informal leaders from across this community are committed to an ongoing process that has great potential to make and keep our cities and county as healthy as they can be,” said Dr. Riggins.

Researchers used five measures to assess the level of overall health or “health outcomes” by county: the rate of people dying before age 75; the percentage of people who reported being in fair or poor health; the number of days people reported being in poor physical

health; number of days in poor mental health; and the rate of low-birth weight infants. Researchers then looked at factors that affect people's health within four categories: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment.

The online Rankings, available at [www.countyhealthrankings.org/texas/williamson](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/texas/williamson), include snapshots of U.S. counties with a color-coded map that compares each county's overall health with other counties in each of the 50 states.

The County Health Rankings is a good tool to start discussions about the health of a community and how to maximize strengths and address challenges. However, the WCCHD also maintains its own community health statistics which are much more local and specific for use with community health improvement efforts.

For more information about Williamson County health statistics, the Williamson County Board of Health or WCCHD services, visit your public health department website at <http://www.wcchd.org/Services.htm>