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**Florida department of health in**

**GULF COunty Addresses County**

**health rankings**

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**Port Saint Joe, Fla.** — The Florida Department of Health in Gulf County recognizes the value in measuring health outcomes and acknowledges the 2017 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps tool released by the University of Wisconsin and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This study highlights the many community factors that influence health and uses established data, much of which is available from the department at [www.FLHealthCHARTS.com](http://www.flhealthcharts.com/).

These rankings are a snapshot of the health of counties across the country and they emphasize that health is not a singular effort but a combined work in progress across all community partners. The department works in collaboration with local governments, non-profit organizations, health care facilities, business groups, schools, faith-based organizations and many other stakeholders to improve the health of all people in Gulf County. These rankings use data related to physical environments, social and economic factors, health behaviors and clinical care.

In Gulf County, the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is designed to address specific opportunities for improved health that have been identified by the community. The current plan, published in August 2016, addresses many of the public health issues associated with county health ranking measures. The department has partnered with local stakeholders to implement the CHIP and collaborates regularly to track progress. CHIP partners utilize health outcome data as well as community health surveys collected from Gulf County citizens to select goals.

“As we closely monitor the county’s positive health trends, we are also looking into those opportunities identified in the data with our Community Health Improvement Partnership, said MaryJim Montgomery, Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf - Vice President of Patient Care. “These include access to health care services, healthy weight community-based projects, and awareness of mental health and substance abuse support services. CHIP partners are currently working on evidence-based strategies to address these top health concerns.”

With less than one year since the start of a new CHIP, successful strides have been made in both project implementation and partnership growth. An early initiative was the creation of a Gulf/Franklin Mental Health and Substance Abuse Resource Guide. This guide was intended to connect residents in need and continues to be utilized in our communities.

Health care partners are also working closely with local coalitions to offer more health screenings in neighborhood settings. Recently, free health screenings were provided in partnership with faith-based organizations New Bethel A.M.E and Long Avenue Baptist Church. These events have helped to link residents to local health care providers.

Another ongoing project involves collaborating with local Early Childhood Education Centers (ECEs) to enhance healthy eating and physical activity standards within their organizations. To date, three ECEs have incorporated goals from the Let’s Move! ChildCare Campaign, which focuses five healthy areas: nurturing healthy eaters, providing healthy beverages, increasing physical activity, limiting screen time and supporting breastfeeding.

“As a CHIP partner, it is my role to ensure the plan stays off the shelf and into community hands. Each CHIP meeting brings new faces to the table and new ideas to enhance priority areas. You know there is true potential in what you are doing when citizens are interested in CHIP projects in their neighborhood”, said Minnie Likely, community advocate.

“We all have a role to play in improving the health of our communities”, said Marsha Lindeman, Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Gulf and Franklin Counties. “In public health, our role is to orchestrate the collaboration among community partners to improve health outcomes. I encourage you all to join the next CHIP workshop as we strive to make Gulf County a healthier place for our citizens and for generations to come.”

The next CHIP workshop is scheduled for April 19, 2017 from 10:30 am – 12:00 pm EST at Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf.

Last week the Florida Department of Health celebrated a one year milestone as the first integrated department of health in the nation to achieve national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board. Public health departments play a critical role in protecting and improving the health of people and communities. The seal of accreditation signifies that the Florida Department of Health has been rigorously examined and meets or exceeds national standards that promote continuous quality improvement for public health.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](http://www.phaboard.org/), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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