Wednesday, December 10, 2014

December 10, 2014 (WICHITA) – The annual [America’s Health Rankings](http://www.americashealthrankings.org/) report today ranked Kansas the 27th healthiest state in the nation, falling from our peak at 8th healthiest in 1991. Kansas’ ranking dropped in 19 of the total 30 measures in the report and experienced a double-digit drop in rankings (falling behind 10+ states) in measures such as cancer deaths, children living in poverty, cardiovascular deaths and more.

"These aren't just numbers. The decline in rankings represents real Kansans – children, parents and grandparents – who are sick and dying prematurely from preventable diseases," said Dr. Jeff Willett, vice president for programs at the [Kansas Health Foundation](http://www.kansashealth.org/). "We can and we must reverse this downward trend, because all Kansans deserve the opportunity to live a full, healthy life."

The report found:

* Since 1991, 45 states achieved greater progress in reducing adult smoking. In general, those states have made greater investments in comprehensive tobacco control programs and have higher taxes on tobacco products.
* Kansas dropped substantially in rankings of adult smoking (from 8th to 31st), cancer deaths (from 9th to 25th), cardiovascular deaths (from 15th to 27th) and premature deaths (from 12th to 27th).
* While many states have reduced the rate of children living in poverty, the childhood poverty rate in Kansas has actually increased. Since 1991, Kansas is among the worst states in addressing childhood poverty. Our ranking on this critical measure dropped from 11th to 27th.

"To get back on track, I would recommend that Kansas dive into the data to really understand what is driving a trend and then make an action plan to address it from different angles,” said Dr. Rhonda Randall, Senior Health Advisor of the [United Health Foundation](http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/). "You need to take a look at partnerships between public health and healthcare delivery, partnerships between individuals and their communities – there is no silver bullet."

Health and civic leaders from around the state are raising their voices that the consistent decline is a wake up call to get Kansas back on track.

"We believe that all children and youth should have the opportunity to grow up safe and strong, with faith in the future and in themselves. We must work together to ensure all Kansas children have the opportunity to live a healthy life,” said Chris Steege, executive director, [Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.kansasaap.org/wordpress/).

"The health of a child has far-ranging implications, including his or her ability to learn and prospects for the future,” said Shannon Cotsoradis, president and CEO of [Kansas Action for Children](http://kac.org/). "Reducing childhood poverty, increasing enrollment of children in Medicaid, restoring our commitment to early childhood programs – all of these are vital to improving the health of Kansas children.”

“We’re disappointed to see that our children in Kansas are not as healthy as they could be. The purpose of the PTA is to make every child’s potential a reality, and it’s a challenge to achieve their potential when too many children are living in poverty, and their health needs are not being fully met,” said Tammy Bartels, president of the [Kansas Parent Teacher Association](http://www.kansas-pta.org/).

“We know exactly what to do to win the fight against tobacco. States have made great progress when they’ve done three things: fund tobacco prevention programs, increase tobacco taxes and implement laws requiring smoke-free workplaces and public places,” said Reagan Cussimanio, Kansas government relations director for the [American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)](http://www.acscan.org/). “This new report shows that Kansas is falling short in the fight against tobacco, and we must do more to protect our children and save lives.”

"We know increasing tobacco taxes has proven to cut smoking rates among teens. The American Lung Association believes we can, and must increase the tobacco tax in Kansas, as well as increase the amount of funding for tobacco prevention and control. We will work with our partners to help Kansas legislators recognize the financial advantages of both a tobacco tax increase and cost effectiveness of increased prevention funding," said Beth Marolf, Tobacco Control and Lung Health Manager of the [American Lung Association](http://www.lung.org/associations/states/kansas/) of the Upper Midwest.

"In the area of tobacco use, Kansas' ranking of 31 translates into 4,400 adults whose lives are lost every year and 2,900 minors having their first cigarette. It is time to attack the most preventable cause of death by investing in comprehensive tobacco prevention in Kansas,” said Tracy Russell, Tobacco Prevention Manager, [American Heart Association](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/).

**About Kansas Health Foundation**

The Kansas Health Foundation is a private philanthropy based in Wichita, but statewide in its focus. Its mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. To achieve this, we promote health and wellness in our schools, neighborhoods and workplaces. Grow leaders in our communities. Inspire decision makers. Act as a voice for healthy public policy. And start and foster community philanthropy that will see our mission thrive for generations. Together with our grantees and partners, we want Kansas to be the healthiest, most productive, most livable state in the nation. To learn more about the Foundation, please visit [www.kansashealth.org](http://www.kansashealth.org/), follow us on Twitter @KansasHealthOrg or like us on Facebook.

**About America's Health Rankings**

America’s Health Rankings® is the longest running annual assessment of the nation’s health on a state-by-state basis. For the past 25 years, America’s Health Rankings® has analyzed a comprehensive set of behaviors, public and health policies, community and environmental conditions, and clinical care data to provide a holistic view of the health of the nation. The 2014 report was released today.

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