



***Improving Health in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties***

April 7, 2017

For Immediate Release

For more information contact: Michele Bever, PhD, MPH, Executive Director  
South Heartland District Health Department  
402-462-6211 / 1-877-238-7595

---

**South Heartland Challenge: Building Healthier Counties**

In a national health study called the County Health Rankings, Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties ranged widely in their standing among Nebraska counties for the overall quality and length of residents' lives, the executive director of the South Heartland District Health Department said Friday.

Dr. Michele Bever said these county results, which for Nebraska are ranked from 1 (healthiest) to 78 (least healthy, with 15 counties not ranked), were mostly declining for the four counties they serve. "Three counties lost ground in this year's rankings for overall health," she said, "and, although Webster County moved up two spots, it is still in the bottom 10%."

Dr. Bever also said that in the health factors category, which looks at health behaviors, environment, clinical care and socio-economic factors, all four counties were ranked lower than last year.

"These results don't necessarily mean that our counties are less healthy than previous years," she said, "because we can also move down in the rankings if other counties in Nebraska are making improvements faster than our counties are."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's annual County Health Rankings report provides counties with information for taking action, the health director said. "It helps counties know what areas they are doing well in and what areas have the most opportunity for improvement."

"All four South Heartland counties could improve their rankings by focusing on reducing adult smoking rates and adult obesity, since these lead to chronic disease, shorter lives, and higher healthcare costs," said Dr. Bever. "In addition, our counties have opportunities to improve in the areas of excessive drinking and alcohol-impaired driving deaths," she said.

Most of the South Heartland counties are "up there with the top U.S. counties when we look at availability of primary care physicians," said Dr. Bever. "Our low unemployment rates, especially in Clay and Nuckolls counties, are also strengths in this report."

"There are a couple of other bright spots to notice," she said. "Webster County is better than many in the nation when comparing severe housing issues and Nuckolls County scored very high on social support."

Because the report indicates plenty of room for improvement in the four counties, the health director said she was glad that there is a strong local system of partners and policymakers already committed to

working on many of these health issues. “Brodstone Memorial, Webster County Community Hospital and Mary Lanning Healthcare are important collaborators, as are the many community organizations we work with in all four counties” she said.

“We also appreciate the recent proclamations by Adams County Board of Supervisors, Webster County Board of Commissioners and the Mayor of Hastings, encouraging local actions to improve health and calling on residents to work to make their communities healthier places to live, while striving to be the “Healthiest County” or “Healthiest City” in Nebraska,” she said.

“Residents can also help by encouraging their local and state decision-makers to ‘make health a priority’ by adopting policies that will support prevention and public health programs that are proven to improve our health and reduce health care costs,” Dr. Bever said. “Together, we can help build safer, healthier communities.”

##