

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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### 2016 County Health Rankings Released!

**Coldwater, MI.**—The 2016 *County Health Rankings* were released on March 16th. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency has published the newly released data on their website for those interested in learning more about the community's overall health status. According to Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the tri-county health department, "The County Health Rankings provides all those working for the good of the public's health a model of population health that emphasizes the many factors that, if improved, can help make communities healthier places to live, learn, work and play." The rankings are divided into two sections: Health Outcomes and Health Factors. Health Outcomes measure how healthy a county is. Health Factors represent those indicators that influence the county's health and contains 30 different indicators which are then organized under four separate headings: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment health factors. When weighted, these factors provide the framework for identifying areas for future improvement efforts.

**A year in review.** Branch County has shown improvement in the Health Outcomes area, moving from a ranking of 55th in 2015 to 51st in 2016. Health Outcomes looks at both the length and quality of life as measured by the number of premature deaths, and self-reports of poor or fair health, poor physical health days and poor mental health days. Branch County did report poorer ranking scores in the area of Health Factors, moving from 41st to 64th, primarily due to increases in behavioral risk factors related to smoking and excessive drinking.

Hillsdale County, like Branch County, has shown improvement in the Health Outcomes area, moving from 30th to 27th. In the area of Health Factors, Hillsdale reported a slight improvement, moving from 65th in 2015 to 63rd in 2016, but the improvements were mixed. The health risk behaviors' score was higher primarily due to

an increase in alcohol impaired driving deaths. Physical Environment scores were also higher due to housing issues and worker commutes.

St. Joseph County experienced poorer rankings for 2016 than in 2015. Health Outcomes rankings moved from 49th in 2015 to 59th in 2016 because of increases in self-reported poor physical and mental health days. It dropped 20 spots in the area of Health Factors, moving from 49th in 2015 to 69th in 2016 due to slower rates of improvements or reversals in gains previously experienced within the categories of health behaviors, clinical care and social and economic factors.

**Why it is important.** The *County Health Rankings*, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), provides a mechanism for counties to make comparisons between themselves and other counties within each state on 35 factors that impact health, including such social determinants as education, jobs, housing, exercise, commuting times, and more. Over the past seven years the *Rankings*, available at [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org), have become an important tool for local communities working to build a Culture of Health.

“The county health rankings underscore the scope of the challenges that face this local, rural health jurisdiction,” adds Rebecca Burns. “From a public health perspective we are fully devoted to advancing our community’s health. Our communities are making many needed improvements, but we still have a ways to go in fulfilling our mission of promoting optimal health to prolong life, by preventing disease and assuring the protection of the public’s health in our community and environment. We are confident, that by working collaboratively with our partners and our communities, we will realize these improvements for the future.”

To learn more about the County Health Rankings and to review other health data sources, visit our webpage at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on the Health Data button located on the side bar.

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