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HAWAII RANKS FIRST FOR HEALTH IN THE NATION BUT STATE DATA SHOWS AREAS OF CONCERN

HONOLULU – Hawaii is ranked as the healthiest state according to the United Health Foundation’s 2016 America’s Health Rankings®: A Call to Action for Individuals & Their Communities released today. This year is the 27th anniversary of the rankings, which provide a state-by-state analysis of available health data to determine national benchmarks and state rankings. During the 27 years in which the rankings were conducted, Hawaii’s rank has varied from first to sixth place.

“The department is pleased with Hawaii’s top ranking which reflects our state’s focus on maintaining healthy lifestyles and protecting our environment,” said Health Director Dr. Virginia Pressler. “However, while our state scored well among most of the report’s measures, we must remember that some health areas and population groups are not always captured in the data. We need to pay attention to groups that aren’t enjoying good health status so that everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy and full life.”

Recent health improvements in Hawaii described in the report include a 4 percent decrease in drug-related deaths over the last two years, and a 38 percent increase in vaccination against human papilloma virus (HPV) among girls 13 to 17 years old in the last year. Hawaii also has low percentage of population without insurance with only 5 percent (or about 1 in 20 people) lacking health insurance, compared with over 10 percent nationally.

While Hawaii has fared well compared to other states, the report is limited by available data, such as low screening rates for some health conditions. According to the report, diabetes is said to have decreased by 13 percent over the last year, however the data reflects only diagnosed cases of diabetes. When including undiagnosed diabetes and prediabetes, it is estimated that more than half (54 percent) of Hawaii’s population has type 2 diabetes or prediabetes.

“We are only now beginning to understand the pervasiveness of type 2 diabetes in our state,” said Lola Irvin, Administrator for the Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division. “As we improve screening rates, we expect to see a sharp increase in the number of people living with diabetes and prediabetes.”

Highlights of Hawaii’s health ranking include a low prevalence of obesity at 23 percent compared with 30 percent nationally. However, when including those who are overweight, more than half of Hawaii’s adult population (57 percent) is overweight or obese. Obesity is associated with a higher risk of preventable chronic disease, including type 2 diabetes. Among some population groups, Hawaii data shows a high correlation between obesity rates and diagnosed diabetes and prediabetes rates, with Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) and Filipinos having the highest rates. More than 61% of Hawaii adults—or 3 in 5—are living with at least one chronic disease or condition such as diabetes, heart disease or cancer.

The report shows that other areas where Hawaii can improve include higher-than-average rates of excessive drinking, a recent increase in violent crimes, and high rates of Salmonella infection. Details of the determinants and outcomes that make up Hawaii’s top ranking are available at www.americashealthrankings.org.

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