United Health Foundation’s America’s Health Rankings Finds Americans Are Making Considerable Progress in Key Health Measures

- *Hawaii is the healthiest state*
- *Nationwide, Americans improved in the majority of the measures captured by the Rankings*
- *Improvements span key behavioral measures including smoking and physical inactivity*
- *2013 marks the first time since 1998 that America’s obesity crisis did not worsen*
- *Serious challenges remain; maintaining momentum is key*

MINNETONKA, Minn. (Dec. 11, 2013) – Americans are making considerable progress in their overall health, according to United Health Foundation’s 2013 America’s Health Rankings®: A Call to Action for Individuals & Their Communities.

Nationwide, Americans improved in the majority of the measures captured by the Rankings. The most notable gains came in key behavioral measures, including smoking, which dropped from 21.2 percent of the adult population to 19.6 percent. Seventeen states had significant drops in smoking, with the largest seen in Nevada, Maryland, Oklahoma, Kansas and Vermont.

Physical inactivity dropped from 26.2 percent of the adult population to 22.9 percent, and America’s obesity rate remained approximately the same as reported in 2012 (27.6 percent of the adult population in 2013 compared with 27.8 percent in 2012). This marks the first time since 1998 that obesity rates have not worsened.

**State rankings**

Hawaii has taken the title of healthiest state. Vermont, last year’s reported No. 1 state, is ranked second this year and has ranked among the top five states for the last decade. Minnesota is third, followed by
Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Mississippi ranks 50th this year, and Arkansas (49), Louisiana (48), Alabama (47) and West Virginia (46) complete the list of the five least healthy states.

Top-seated Hawaii scored well along most measures particularly for having low rates of uninsured individuals, high rates of childhood immunization, and low rates of obesity, smoking and preventable hospitalizations. Like all states, Hawaii also has areas where it can improve: it has higher-than-average rates of binge drinking and occupational fatalities, and lower-than-average rates of high school graduation.

To see the Rankings in full, visit: www.americashealthrankings.org.

**Despite progress, significant challenges remain**
When it comes to improving the nation’s health, there is still much to be done. Obesity has leveled off; however, it must remain a top priority, as 27.6 percent of adults nationwide report being obese. With rates of physical inactivity, smoking and diabetes at 22.9 percent, 19.6 percent and 9.7 percent, respectively, there is still considerable room for improvement in key health measures.

“I am encouraged by the progress we’ve made this year and am hopeful that the leveling off we see in America’s obesity is a sign of further improvement to come,” said Reed Tuckson, M.D., external senior medical adviser to United Health Foundation. “We should certainly celebrate these gains. They encourage us to continue to identify and effectively implement best practices in these areas and in addressing diabetes, heart disease and other chronic health conditions that compromise Americans’ health and vitality.”

Georges Benjamin, M.D., executive director of the American Public Health Association, said: “Every year, the America’s Health Rankings report details the nation’s health successes and challenges on a state-by-state level, providing specific areas where citizens and states alike can focus to continue to improve the health of our nation. I am pleased to see the progress we’ve made and hope we can keep up the good work.”

**United Health Foundation calls for sustained momentum**

“United Health Foundation is committed to continuing to identify ways to improve state health in measurable, meaningful ways,” said Rhonda Randall, D.O., senior adviser to United Health Foundation and chief medical officer of UnitedHealthcare Retiree Solutions. “I hope we soon see the day when we are cheering year-over-year improvements in obesity, and I look forward to seeing our nation’s percentage of smokers continue to decline.”

“Those of us who dedicate our careers to public health know we can’t improve what we don’t measure,” said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., chairman, Partnership for Prevention. “The America’s Health Rankings report and the online tools show us where we’ve made strides in promoting better health and, importantly, where we still have work to do.”

The America’s Health Rankings report and its tools – including analysis not only of state populations but also subpopulations within states – are designed to identify health opportunities in communities as well as
multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary approaches to address those opportunities. Through its programs and grants, United Health Foundation shines a spotlight on the health of America while promoting evidence-based solutions. As part of this commitment, United Health Foundation has partnered with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the National Business Coalition on Health to create learning laboratories that identify and promote best practices and innovations in public health. To learn more about America’s Health Rankings – and to get information on how to help improve community health – visit www.americashealthrankings.org.

About America’s Health Rankings®

America’s Health Rankings is an annual comprehensive assessment of the nation’s health on a state-by-state basis. It is published jointly by United Health Foundation, American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention.

The data in the report come from well-recognized outside sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Medical Association, FBI, Dartmouth Atlas Project, U.S. Department of Education and Census Bureau. The report is reviewed and overseen by a Scientific Advisory Committee, with members from leading academic institutions, government agencies and the private sector.

America’s Health Rankings is the longest-running report of its kind. For 24 years, the Rankings has provided an analysis of national health on a state-by-state basis by evaluating a historical and comprehensive set of health, environmental and socioeconomic data to determine national health benchmarks and state rankings. The Rankings employs a unique methodology, developed and annually reviewed by a Scientific Advisory Committee of leading public health scholars. For more information, visit www.americashealthrankings.org.

About United Health Foundation

Guided by a passion to help people live healthier lives, United Health Foundation provides helpful information to support decisions that lead to better health outcomes and healthier communities. The Foundation also supports activities that expand access to quality health care services for those in challenging circumstances and partners with others to improve the well-being of communities. After its establishment by UnitedHealth Group [NYSE: UNH] in 1999 as a not-for-profit, private foundation, the Foundation has committed more than $210 million to improve health and health care. For additional information, please visit www.unitedhealthfoundation.org.

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