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## LINCOLN TOP 10 IN HEALTH

in

Hanes: Wisconsin study confirms earlier findings

**Elizabeth DeGrie**

Lincoln Parish is ranked in the top ten in Louisiana for health outcomes and factors, according to a study released recently by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Out of the 12 Northeast Louisiana parishes, Lincoln Parish came in the top place above parishes such as Jackson, Union and Ouachita.

Norman Hanes, director of the nonprofit Lincoln Health Foundation, said the study shows similar results to the Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by his organization in 2008.

The findings in the University of Wisconsin study focused on such factors as mortality, morbidity, health factors, clinical care, social and economic factors and physical environment.

Lincoln Parish ranked high in duration of life and overall healthiness, but ranked lower on things such as clinical care and physical environment.

The study cited access to healthy foods, recreational facilities and primary care providers as particular trouble areas.

According to the study, Lincoln Parish has an average of one primary care physician for every 1,044 people, which is much lower than the national average of one physician for every 631 people.

Hanes said the foundation has already set up programs to attack issues listed in the study such as nutrition and lack of recreation because of the Community Health Needs Assessment conducted several years ago.

Hanes said the assessment was done by an organization that focuses on such studies on a full-time basis, which is why even in light of studies such as the most recent one the foundation continues to base their funding plans on that Community Health Needs Assessment.

"Every health foundation in Louisiana uses Professional Research Consultants," Hanes said. "It is much more detailed, with telephone interviews, focus groups and input from leaders of community."

But, Hanes said the organization does not disregard reports such as the one by the University of Wisconsin.

"When I look at the University of Wisconsin study, it's good information," Hanes said. "They used some of the same sources, and it really confirms what the Community Health Needs Assessment found. It is helpful in a sense that it does help us determine what our rank is, and it does point out that the foundation is headed in the right directions with its strategic plan initiatives."

Hanes said thus far, the foundation has focused more on treating the issues pointed out than attempting to do intensive research into why they exist.

"I don't know if there are reasons unique to Lincoln Parish," Hanes said. "We have a very high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in this parish, and I think that's because of the two universities we have here. We haven't done a lot of detailed study as to why. We have been primarily focused on addressing our strategic plan initiatives."

Hanes said the organization hopes to commission another Community Health Needs Assessment in approximately five years.

"We hope to see some significant improvement primarily involving access to health care," Hanes said. "We are going to be funding a mobile clinic project that we hope to see in operation by September of this year."

Hanes said many of the programs they have been funding in the past few years should help raise the health standards in the area, because there is still much work to do since Louisiana is ranked 49th in the country.

"We were high in the health factors (in the Wisconsin study)," Hanes said. "We hope to see improvement in that area with the dental services we have been funding the last three years with the Lincoln Parish School Board and with the mobile clinic."

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Wisconsin study can see the results at [www.countryhealthrankings.org](http://www.countryhealthrankings.org) (<http://www.countryhealthrankings.org>).

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