



November 11, 2010

W.Va. ranks dead last in well-being, study says

by **Veronica Nett**
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CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- West Virginia ranks last in the nation for the well-being of its residents, and near the bottom in education, health and income, according to a new report from the [American Human Development Project](#).

The national index ranks West Virginia 3.85 out of 10 for overall well-being -- the same average ranking the nation as a whole averaged two decades ago, said Sarah Burd-Sharps, the group's co-director. That shows the well-being of many Americans has risen, she said -- but not all of them.

"What we found is that some groups are enjoying the highest well-being in the world, and other groups have fallen really badly behind," Burd-Sharps said.

The Measure of America 2010-2011: Mapping Risks and Resilience released Wednesday, measures health, education and income by state, congressional district, gender and race to determine well-being outcomes.

West Virginia ranks 49th nationally for life expectancy, 49th in education and 48th in income earnings, according to data from the report, which is released every two years.

Connecticut ranks first in the nation for well-being, with a 6.3 index ranking, followed by Massachusetts, at 6.24.

The national average is 5.17.

"What is very clear is that while states at the top, like Connecticut and Massachusetts, have invested heavily in their people, West Virginia has to a lesser degree," Burd-Sharps said.

The state has the nation's highest smoking rate -- about one in four people smoke -- and the highest diabetes rate -- about 12 in every 100 people, she said.

"Today, a baby born in West Virginia can expect to live to about 75," Burd-Sharps said. "In the U.S. as a whole, that is almost three years less than the national average, and compared to Connecticut, [residents] live to about 80."

Access to education, socio-economic conditions and standards of health and life expectancy are all tied together and contribute to the overall well-being of the average American, Burd-Sharps said.

States that "invest" in these three areas are better prepared to stay afloat during hard economic times, such as the current recession, Burd-Sharps said. The states that don't, "don't bounce back afterward," she said.

Among the report's other findings:

| About 82 percent of West Virginia residents have a high school diploma, compared to 85 percent nationally.

| About 17 percent of state residents have at least a college bachelor's degree, compared to 27.7 percent nationally.

| About 6.7 percent have a graduate or professional degree, compared to 10.2 percent nationally

| About 83.7 percent of school-age children are enrolled in school; compared to 87.3 percent nationally.

| West Virginia's median income is \$24,404, compared to \$29,755 nationally.

The Human Development Index's top five are Connecticut, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, New Jersey and Maryland. The bottom five states are Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and West Virginia.

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