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**SEND A LETTER TO
THE EDITOR**

The Platte Institute strongly believes in the importance of citizens participating in the public dialogue on issues important to Nebraska. Writing a letter to the editor is an outstanding way to partake in the discussion and have your voice

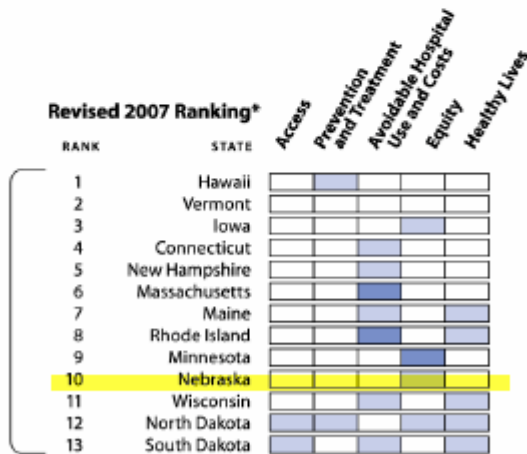
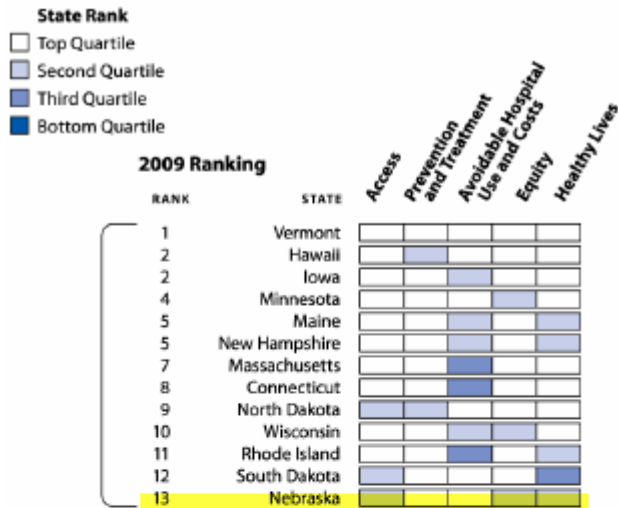
PLATTE CHAT

THE GOOD, BAD AND UGLY OF NEBRASKA HEALTH CARE

To put it in medical terminology, Nebraska's health care quality is in stable condition but has somewhat deteriorated. That's the diagnosis from the Commonwealth Fund's 2009 State Scorecard on Health System Performance.

Overall, the 2009 State Scorecard paints a picture of health care systems under stress. The measurements provide a framework for state and federal action to address common concerns as well as specific areas of need. It assesses benchmarks for 38 indicators of access, quality, costs and health outcomes. To view the complete report, please [CLICK HERE](#).

heard by thousands of people. To make the process easier, the Platte Institute has assembled a list of links which allow you to submit a letter to the editor to nearly all Nebraska newspapers. Simply [CLICK HERE](#) for a listing of the newspapers and follow the appropriate link to submit your letter.



The Good

Nebraska’s overall health care ranks 13th in the nation and in the areas of prevention and treatment, the Cornhusker state ranks 9th. Certainly there are many things to like about health care in Nebraska. The report found that Nebraska had the lowest percent of long-stay nursing home residents who were being physically restrained in the nation at a rate of 1.5 percent. The national median was four percent.

When it comes to children having a medical home in the state, the report says 69.1 percent of Nebraska children do, which is the second-highest rate in the country and well above the national median rate of 60.7 percent. Nebraskans can also take pride in the fact that 95.1 percent of hospitalized patients received recommended care for heart attack, heart failure and pneumonia. Nebraska's percentage ranked it third in the nation.

The Bad

While ranking 13th overall in the nation is good, unfortunately Nebraska is trending in the wrong direction. In the 2007 State Scorecard, Nebraska ranked 10th and over the past two years, Nebraska either dropped in the rankings or showed no improvement 22 of the 34 indicators with trends.

As an example, in the 2007 rankings, Nebraska had a 94.4 percent rate of children between the ages of 0-17 being insured, which was the seventh-best rate in the nation. That percentage dropped to just 90 percent in the 2009 rankings, plummeting Nebraska to 34th. As a state which prides itself on quality of life and education, being near the bottom in health care for minors is a severe black eye.

When looking at health care access as a whole, Nebraska slipped from a ranking of 13th to 25th in just two years. In health care, everything starts with access and it is unlikely that Nebraska citizens are comfortable sitting that close to the bottom half of states in the country in this area.

The Ugly

As was just pointed out, minors in Nebraska are getting less health care access than in the past. That problem is compounded when you take the following into account:

- Nebraska ranks 31st in percent of children ages 10-17 who are overweight or obese
- Nebraska ranks 34th in children who have visited a doctor and dentist in past year

The study found that 31.4 percent of children between the ages of 10-17 are overweight or obese. Comparatively, the top five states in the country had an average rate of 24.7 percent. When you combine this with the fact that 31.3 percent of Nebraska children did not have any medical or dental care in the past year and Nebraska's poor access to health care for children, the state is creating a ticking time bomb in regard to future health issues for those not getting the service they need now. As for Nebraska's Medicare patients, the report says only 72.7 percent have a provider who takes the time to explain options, listen and show respect – which ranks the state 37th. Other areas of bad news for Nebraskans include the state ranking:

- 35th in percent of long-stay nursing home residents with severe pain
- 31st in colorectal cancer deaths
- 30th in breast cancer deaths

Conclusion

While it is easy to feel good about Nebraska's overall health care ranking of 13th, now is not the time to celebrate. In fact, the report indicates that now is the time to push hard for improvements where our states' comparative rankings are dropping. Quality health care is a vital component of "Nebraska the Good Life" and it is incumbent on policy makers and health care providers to maintain and improve health care in the Cornhusker state.

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