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**Policy Changes Needed in 13 Areas to Help Close N.J.'s Health Gaps,
Says Report From State's Largest Philanthropy**

Princeton, N.J.—New Jersey leaders should pursue a broad range of policy options to expand opportunity so that everyone in New Jersey—no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they make—can live the healthiest life possible, says a report released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The Foundation developed the report, [*Building a Culture of Health: A Policy Roadmap to Help All New Jerseyans Live Their Healthiest Lives*](#) with analysts at the [Center for State Health Policy](#) and the [John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development](#), both at Rutgers University.

Informed by extensive research and months of conversations with nearly 300 community residents, nonprofit and business leaders, and others from across the state, the report identifies 13 priorities for building a Culture of Health in New Jersey in three areas:

- Healthy children and families
- Healthy communities
- High-quality, equitable health and social service systems

The recommendations span many sectors, including education, housing, nutrition, income, and health care, with a particular focus on health equity, or the principle that everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible, regardless of race, place, gender, income or any other factor. Recommendations include providing high-quality early education for all 3- and 4-year-olds; helping everyone fully benefit from the recently expanded paid family leave benefit; creating and preserving affordable homes; and integrating mental health, addiction, and physical health services for Medicaid enrollees. Each recommendation addresses pressing needs, advances health equity and is supported by evidence.

“The report is very clear: If we truly want to improve health and well-being in our state, we must make sure that opportunity is there for everyone. This is what we mean by health equity,” said Richard Besser, MD, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “Everyone should have access to the building blocks of good health and well-being: from good jobs with fair pay; to safe, affordable housing; a good education; and a high-quality health care system that meets its patients’ needs and is invested in keeping people healthy. Every sector has a role to play in this work, including policymakers, business and education leaders, public health officials, and all of us who make this great state our home. The Foundation is exploring ways to work to help make these recommendations a reality.”

“The priorities in this report were identified as the real challenges to being healthy that New Jerseyans face each day, and the policies are supported by the best available evidence,” said Joel Cantor, director

of the Rutgers Center for State Health Policy. “These are not just pie-in-the-sky ideas—they have been vetted to ensure there are ways to build support for and implement them.”

The report notes that nearly 6,400 deaths a year in New Jersey could be avoided if every resident has “a fair and just opportunity to live our healthiest life.” Among examples of the wide and, in some cases, growing health gaps New Jersey faces:

- In Cumberland County, 44 percent of premature deaths could be avoided if residents had the same opportunities as those in healthier counties.
- Average life expectancy in Trenton is 73 years, but is 87 only 13 miles away in Princeton.
- Statewide, babies born into black families are twice as likely to die before his or her first birthday than those born into white families.
- The policy options outlined in the report are aimed at eliminating inequitable gaps like these by addressing the factors that shape health.

The full report is available [here](#).

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About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: For more than 45 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working alongside others to build a national Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. RWJF has invested more than \$1.2 billion in New Jersey since 1972. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org/nj. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [rwjf.org/twitter](https://twitter.com/rwjf) or on Facebook at [rwjf.org/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/rwjf).

About the Center for State Health Policy: Rutgers Center for State Health Policy informs, supports, and stimulates sound and creative state health policy in New Jersey and around the nation. The Center provides impartial policy analysis, research, training, facilitation, and consultation on important state health policy issues. Established in 1999, the Center combines Rutgers University's traditional academic strengths in public health, health services research, and social science with applied research and policy analysis initiatives. For more information, visit <http://www.cshp.rutgers.edu>. Follow the Center on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/rutgerscshp>.

About the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development: Founded in 1997, the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development is dedicated to raising the effectiveness of the American workplace by strengthening workforce education, placement and training programs, and policies and has earned a reputation as one of the nation's leading research centers for workforce development. The Center's efforts concentrate on both nurturing concrete innovations in workforce practices, as well as addressing broad-scale economic policy changes that ensure Americans receive the education and training they need to be productive and prosperous in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. For more information, visit <https://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/>. Follow the Heldrich Center on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/heldrichcenter>.