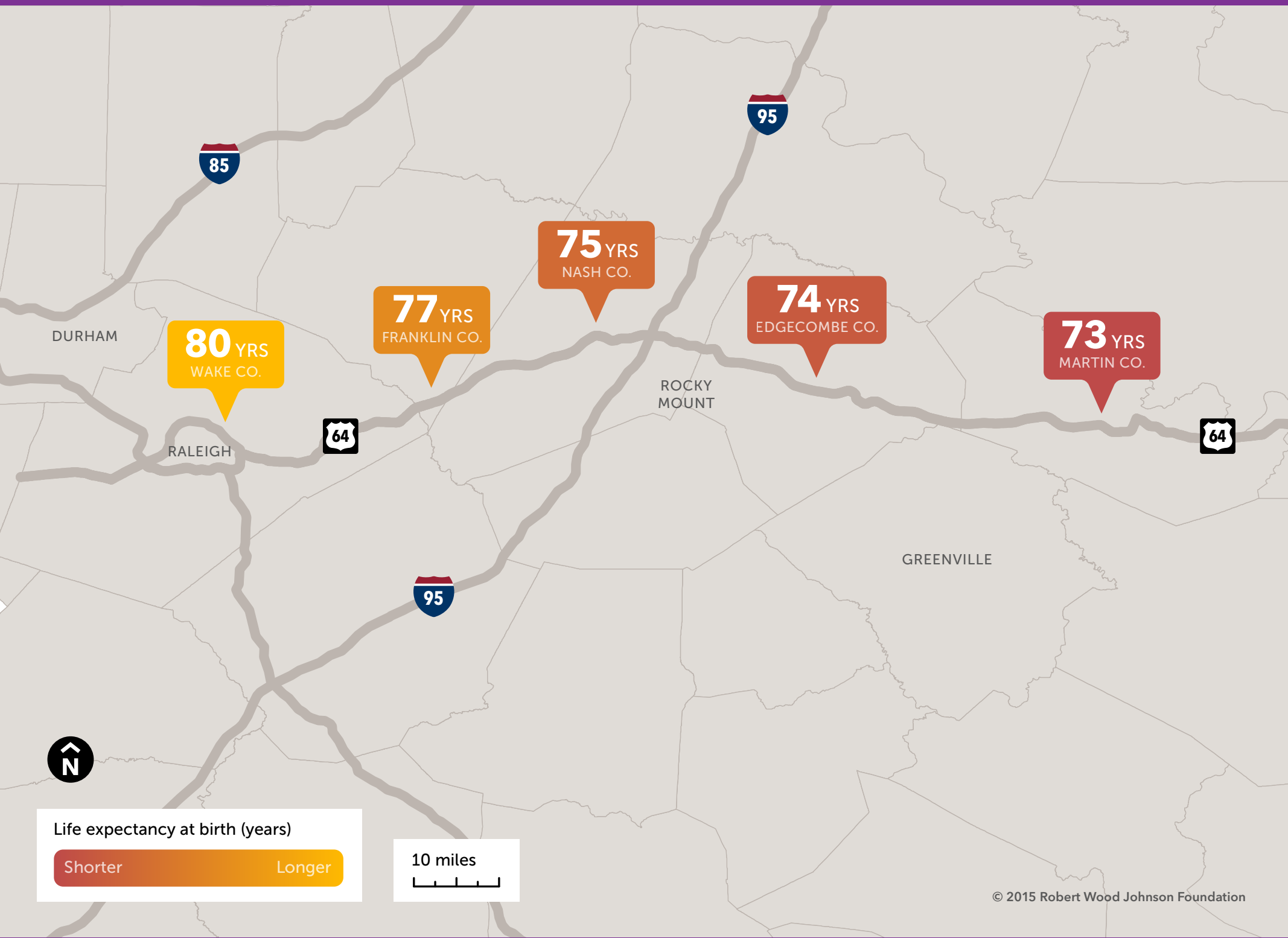


# 1 Highway, 5 Counties, 7 Years of Life



Life expectancy at birth (years)

Shorter

Longer

10 miles

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# Gaps in Health Across Counties Stem from Multiple Factors

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Babies born just a few counties apart can face vastly different chances of living a long and healthy life. This isn't a problem unique to rural America or small towns. It's also true in big cities, where even larger gaps in health are seen across neighborhoods. County averages hide bigger differences within counties. For example, the average life expectancy is 78 years in Durham County and 80 years in Wake County, but life expectancy in metro Raleigh-Durham ranges from 76 to 88 years just a few ZIP codes apart.

## What causes health to vary so dramatically across, and within, our counties?

- **Education and income** are directly linked to health: Communities with weak tax bases cannot support high-quality schools and jobs are often scarce in counties with struggling economies.
- **Unsafe or unhealthy housing** exposes residents to allergens and other hazards like overcrowding.
- **Restaurants and stores** that sell healthy food, such as fresh produce, may be difficult to reach.
- **Opportunities for residents to exercise, walk, or cycle** may be limited.
- **Proximity to highways, factories, farming, or other sources of toxic agents** may expose residents to pollutants.
- **Access to primary care doctors and good hospitals** may be limited.
- **Long distances can isolate residents** from good jobs, health and child care, and social services.
- **Stagnant economies** can perpetuate cycles of poverty.

To build a Culture of Health—where every person, no matter who they are or where they live, has the opportunity to be as healthy as they can be—we must improve people's opportunities to be healthy in the places where they live, learn, work and play.

This map was produced by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. It is among 20 maps developed under an initiative to raise public awareness about the importance of geographic disparities in health outcomes and the social and environmental factors that shape health. The 20 locations include large and smaller cities and rural areas across the United States. Please visit [societyhealth.vcu.edu/maps](https://societyhealth.vcu.edu/maps) to view the full collection of maps and to read more about the project and the methodology used to calculate the data.