

Creating Healthy Communities Summit: Four Health Priorities

In April of 2014, St. Luke's Children's and High Five Children's Health Collaborative powered by the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation partnered together with other organizations throughout the state to present the Creating Healthy Communities Summit. Representatives from education, healthcare, business development, civil engineering, transportation, land use and health policy sectors discussed the current state of health among communities in Idaho and how to develop a healthier infrastructure for families.

At the conclusion of the summit, attendees had established eight big ideas to drive positive change state-wide. In addition, each individual identified how they could promote change individually, as an organization and as part of a system or community.

After the summit, in order to galvanize ideas and efforts, the steering committee narrowed down the eight ideas to four common themes. These are now known as the **Four Health Priorities**.

1. Access to Healthy Foods
2. Access to Care
3. Active and Public Transportation
4. Healthy, Active Kids

After solidifying a shared vision for Health Priority, each respective backbone group will carry out the following:

- Prioritize areas of focus for action steps
- Identify resources and champions (companies, leaders, organizations, grants) to support stated initiatives
- Collaborate to implement change
- Measure outcomes

It is our sincere intention to utilize readily available resources to implement positive change in Idaho, creating awareness for innovative programs and manpower that already exist.

Success measures are:

- Engage dialog among citizens, government officials and corporate/nonprofit leaders
- Develop cohesive efforts that improve health education and motivate change

Health Priority #1 – Access to Healthy Foods

Problem

Currently, Idaho’s rural populations are faced with “food deserts,” where healthy, fresh foods are in limited supply or and difficult to obtain. When this happens, individuals are more likely to eat inexpensive, highly-processed foods low in nutrients.

Goal

The Health Priority for Access to Healthy Foods is to collaborate with existing partnerships and leverage assets to provide healthy, fresh foods to community members statewide with the mission of promoting health and nutrition education.

Existing Assets and Partnerships

- Idaho Food Bank Food (Pantry Program, Cooking Matters)
- Hunger Coalition
- BUGS (Boise Urban Garden School)
- Faith-based Organizations

Suggestions for Improvement

- Implement a soda tax
- Conduct a public health campaign around healthy eating and fitness
- Develop a mobile educational program to teach community members how to prepare healthy foods
- Scale or model new programs off of the Idaho Food Bank Cooking Matters program, which teaches individuals to budget, buy and prepare healthy meals
- Provide informational materials such as cookbooks to food pantries to inform patrons on how to prepare meals with fresh ingredients
- Strengthen wellness policies in schools through home economics programs and nutrition classes, involving students in food preparation
- Promote nutrition and health education programs for students in afterschool programs
- Utilize restaurants to educate patrons, reduce portion sizes, share nutrition information and provide healthier food options
- Invest time and resources into new and existing grassroots food banks and community gardens

Barriers to Progress

Obstacles that would hinder the aforementioned suggestions include a lack of sustainable funding, leadership and understanding of healthy practices (health literacy).

Strategy for Moving Forward

To overcome barriers, steps would include researching successful initiatives carried out by states and other entities, collaborating across like-minded organizations, raising funds and creating a shared message to deliver via various media outlets. As the process evolves, partnership opportunities could lead to a true collective effort, pooling resources to deliver upon a shared vision.

Health Priority #2 – Access to Care

Problem

Many Idaho residents are not able to receive adequate primary care or understand preventative wellness practices that will keep them out of the emergency room. This results in higher health care costs for the entire population and a weakened economy.

Goal

The Health Priority for Access to Care is to define new models of care so all members of the Idaho community will be able to connect with the right caregiver for the right reason. The goal is a team-based, multi-disciplinary approach to healthcare.

Existing Assets and Partnerships

- Innovative State Healthcare Innovation Plan (SHIP) currently in progress to evolve our current healthcare structure into one of population health via a medical home and payment model aligned to incentivize keeping people healthy
- Health Care Reform: Ability of individuals to access more affordable coverage, access to essential health benefits, coverage of young adults up to age 26 on parents' policies, etc.
- Expanded Adoption of Electronic Medical Records
- Availability of data from Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs)
- High quality health systems throughout state
- School-based clinic pilot
- Head Start for prevention in families/children
- Small population that allows Idaho to be nimble and innovative

Suggestions for Improvement

The general model to improve access to care is PILOT-SCALE-SUSTAIN. Tools to achieve success include:

- Obtaining third party pay for wellness and prevention services
- Define provider roles in the new medical home and team-based care environment
- Implement patient accountability measurement tool(s), self-care (e.g., PAM by Insignia Health)
- Enhance advocacy to address Medicaid coverage gap
- Create a shared database with information from providers and payers

- Standardize and certify medical homes per established process through Idaho Medical Home Collaborative
- Provide enrollment and safety net resources for uninsured

Barriers to Progress

- Lack adequate supply of primary care physicians
- Little sense of urgency to address mental health issues, as exemplified by the lack of mental health care providers and lowest ranking mental health spending per capita
- Access to transportation to/from services
- Health literacy, lack of education
- Poor provider access in rural areas
- Complexity and ambiguity of medical insurance and service reimbursements
- Lack of political will to expand Medicaid
- Poor Medicare/Medicaid access tied to reimbursement
- ACA misinformation and political controversy
- Language barriers

Strategies for Moving Forward

Bottom Up – Engage population in what population health means and how they need to play a part. This can be accomplished by a statewide marketing campaign of “What Idaho Could Be.”

Top Down – There are three basic strategies today: 1) State Healthcare Innovation Plan being led by high level decision makers in Idaho Healthcare Coalition appointed by Governor Otter, 2) Coverage gap – different groups tackling this issue, and 3) Prevention

Health Priority #3 – Increased Public and Active Transportation Options

Problem

Currently, many of Idaho’s communities are designed in ways that encourage and support a culture of driving. Roadways are built for cars, and other modes of transportation are often forgotten. Community members who are unable to drive are left with few options. Walking and biking can be unsafe and undesirable without proper infrastructure.

Goal

The Health Priority for Increased Public and Active Transportation Options is to make active transportation the easy choice by building and supporting balanced multimodal transportation systems within local communities. This includes options that encourage physical activity by providing safe walking and biking routes and expand access to key community destinations.

Existing Assets and Partnerships

- Existing leaders with knowledge of transportation needs within local communities
- Existing institutions that support multimodal infrastructure and active transportation
- Increased focus on data collection and improved local practices and planning tools that highlight public and active transportation (bike/pedestrian counts, walk score, complete streets)
- Business community that understands the importance of improving transportation infrastructure
- Willingness to support making improvements that benefit children

Suggestions for Improvement

- Develop additional funding options to pay for public/active transportation investments in local communities
- Change zoning and development practices to encourage the use of public/active transportation
- Fill gaps and create better connections between activity centers and homes
- Educate community leaders and state and local decision-makers about the health and economic benefits of a balanced transportation system
- Look for efficiencies in community investments in transportation
- Engage the health sector more actively in the transportation and land-use planning process
- Encourage local governments to adopt practices that support multimodal transportation

Barriers to Progress

- Policy-makers have traditionally addressed growth demands through a mindset focused on efficiently moving cars, not people
- Land use development patterns frequently discourage public and active transportation options and limit people's transportation choices
- A lack of objective data that would support decisions favoring public/active transportation options leads to a more subjective basis for decisions
- Decision-makers lack data relating transportation to positive health outcomes
- Decision-makers lack an understanding of the social and financial costs to communities and individuals due to underfunded public transportation services
- Citizens lack an understanding on transportation issues and the relationship between transportation, land use and health
- Current pressures on local governments to increase tax base encourages sprawl
- Property rights debates often lead to short-term decisions that don't consider long-term consequences on broader community transportation and health goals
- Funding "silos" create challenges to fund a balanced transportation system

Strategies for Moving Forward

Three strategies for moving forward are:

- Support local option sales tax authority legislation to provide communities with a tool to fund infrastructure projects, including active/public transportation projects, upon local voter approval
- Create opportunities for cross collaboration between leaders in the healthcare and transportation/land use sectors
- Educate and increase awareness of community leaders on the connection between active/public transportation and health

Health Priority #4 – Promoting Healthy, Active Kids

Problem

One in every three Idaho children is currently overweight or obese. This diagnosis at such a young age can lead to more serious health problems later in life, while also affecting academic and social performances at a younger age. Children are the next generation of workforce, military, strategic thinkers and planners—we need them to be healthy to promote a thriving state and economy.

Goal

The Health Priority for Promoting Healthy, Active Kids is to leverage existing resources and develop educational opportunities to teach families, care givers, childcare providers and policy makers about the importance of health. We want to improve the health of overweight and obese children and prevent others from wavering into this category.

Existing Assets and Partnerships

- Healthier meal and snack standards implemented by USDA
- School wellness policies (launching in 2014/2015)
- Physical activity is a required component of wellness policies in all schools
- PE is a graduation requirement in 80 percent of Idaho schools
- Joint use agreements
- Free and low-priced programs offered by Idaho Parks and Recreation
- PTA, PTO
- Idaho Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (IAHPERD)
- Let’s Move! Child care and IdahoSTARS trainings for child care providers
- Mobile recreation programs
- Summer food programs, like Oasis

Suggestions for Improvement

- Develop activity options during the summer months and outside school hours
- Develop activity options during volatile weather conditions

- Offer low-cost fitness programs and classes to engage students with limited athletic abilities or no interest in physical activity, such as archery and yoga
- Promote regulations for childcare that limit screen time and offer nutritional standards
- Utilize school grounds and facilities for public use outside of school hours
- Focus on the connection between physical and emotional health
- Provide nutrition education for both students and families
- Continue to promote at least 60 minutes of play during and outside the school day

Barriers to Progress

- Funding and cost to families
- Transportation, especially among low income families
- Use of school facilities during non-school hours, leadership not supportive of joint use because of liability concerns
- Increased focus on academic performance or testing and perception that activity distracts from learning
- Family needs, i.e. working parents
- Youth sports are too competitive
- Perception of safety
- Lack of community connectivity
- Bussing: Safety bussing (less than ½ mile because of lack of safe routes), elective bussing (parents don't have time/desire and opt to bus short distances), too much time on buses in rural communities
- No fitness or nutrition standards in childcare setting
- Not enough scholarships, those that exist aren't well known, sometimes have stigma attached to scholarships

Strategies for Moving Forward

Strategies for moving forward include:

- Develop resources for teachers and families to be distributed through school nurses and counselors with best practices and grant opportunities
- Aid families with programs in their communities (e.g. trail maps, signage) and improve communication about programs that already exist
- Engage schools in making community connections to show what they are already doing, hold community forums, engage local businesses and volunteers, and bring in other community groups to disseminate information
- Connect with school principals with thank you notes for PE time and offer feedback to keep physical activity time in schools