

# IOWA

College of Public Health

Business Leadership Network

## Improving Employee and Family Health

### Community Forum Summary

### May 21, 2024

### Council Bluffs



# BUSINESS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

The Business Leadership Network comprises Iowans who are leaders in business, educators, public health professionals, health care professionals, and community leaders who are interested in improving the health and well-being of their community through a mutually beneficial relationship with the University of Iowa College of Public Health. The Network is guided by a Business Leadership Network Steering Committee which serves in a primary advisory role.

One way the UI College of Public Health collaborates with Iowa communities is through the Business Leadership Network Community Grant Project. Grants are awarded annually on a competitive basis to community nonprofit organizations or local government agencies to foster collaboration to begin or strengthen partnerships among businesses and industry to address an identified public health issue. Five grants were awarded in 2024 to organizations in Bedford, Decorah, Estherville, Fairfield, and Spencer.

Support for the grant program is provided by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation. More information on the grant program: <https://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/bln-community-grant-program/>.

The Council Bluffs community forum provided opportunities for area business, community, and public health leaders to discuss resources for employers on how to improve employee and family health and wellness in the areas of nutrition and physical activity.

The forum was jointly sponsored by the UI College of Public Health's Business Leadership Network, Pottawattamie County Public Health, and Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce.

## WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

Public Health is the science and art of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and research for disease and injury prevention. Public health helps improve the health and wellbeing of people in local communities and often, while operating in the background, helps meet the public expectation for ensuring a quality of life – safe water, clean air, and protection from injury. The dramatic achievements of public health in the 20th and 21st centuries have improved our quality of life: an increase in life expectancy, safer workplaces, worldwide reduction in infant and child mortality, and the elimination or reduction of many communicable diseases.

[WWW.PUBLIC-HEALTH.UIOWA.EDU/BLN](http://WWW.PUBLIC-HEALTH.UIOWA.EDU/BLN)

**The Mission of the University of Iowa College of Public Health is to promote health and prevent injury and illness through commitment to education and training, excellence in research, innovation in policy development, and devotion to public health practice.**

# Panel Presentations

**Maria Sieck** is administrator of Pottawattamie County Public Health.

They are conducting a 2024 community health needs assessment and encourage people to fill out the survey: [https://publichealth.pottcounty-ia.gov/news/community\\_health\\_needs\\_assessment\\_survey/](https://publichealth.pottcounty-ia.gov/news/community_health_needs_assessment_survey/)

They have an outreach campaign “Let your wellness soar in 2024” featured throughout Council Bluffs on billboards, bus benches and social media with targeted messaging depending on events and time of year. The campaign is focused on healthy habits and wellness checks:

- Hygiene messaging – handwashing for kids.
- Healthy food, staying hydrated, annual safe water testing for private wells.
- Safe environments – training and education for daycares, swimming safety and pool inspections checking, and sun safety.
- Exercise – getting people out and active in nature. Even 10 minutes can be beneficial.
- Mental and social well-being. Decrease mental health stigma and raise awareness of resources available. Maintain social connections – positivity is contagious.
- Promote whole person health including brain, dental, and vision health and staying current on routine physical exams. They have a state grant for immunizations for uninsured and underinsured children.



**Jana Lemrick** is human resources director at Pottawattamie County.

Employee wellness programs

- Businesses with an employee wellness program see a return of \$1.50 for every \$1.00 spent on the program. This return is seen through employees getting preventative care through wellness exams and finding diseases early to start treatment early. Businesses can look at insurance claims data to see the highest paid claims and possibly create a wellness program focusing on those areas. Healthy employees have less sick days and are more productive at work.
- Pottawattamie County’s program includes an annual health risk assessment test which gives a score based on items like how much sleep you get and vegetables consumed per day. Based on score the assessment will provide some suggestions to improve your health. They have an annual blood draw to test for things like cholesterol. When employees do the risk assessment and the blood draw they receive a health insurance discount of \$15 off per paycheck. Hy-Vee has mobile units that will go to businesses to do blood draws for employees.
- It is important to have senior level staff in an organization participate and be advocates for encouraging employees to take advantage of this resource. If the wellness program is encouraging taking a walk during lunch, people are more likely to participate when the messaging is coming from leadership.

## Wellness Activities

- Walking and weight loss challenges.
- Lunch and learns which are recorded for employees who can't attend or work off-site.
- Health fairs that cover physical and mental health and social wellbeing.
- Have a social gathering to help facilitate connectedness and then encourage employees to take a walk afterwards.

**Geré Stevens** is west Pottawattamie County educator at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

She focuses on programing: 4H and youth development, agriculture and natural resources, community and economic development, and human sciences. They have afterschool and summer activities, parenting education, mental health resources (Question Persuade Refer, mental health first aid for youth and adults). Youth development programs help grow the next generation of workers and help parents stay productive at work.

Pottawattamie is one of six counties in Iowa which received a grant from the CDC called Leveraging Activities and Partnerships to Address Obesity in Iowa (LEAP). In Pottawattamie County 41% of adults have obesity compared to the state average of 36%. A coalition formed for the LEAP project will work to make healthy eating and active living more affordable and accessible. They will focus on improving food service and nutrition guidelines and creating infrastructure changes that connect transportation networks to everyday destinations. Pottawattamie Iowa LEAP site for coalition activities:

<https://padlet.com/IALEAP/leap-west-pottawattamie-county-6vo6jvpooqgxwqj>.

Employers can connect with the coalition to learn about resources for improving workplace policies/systems/environments that support healthy eating and increasing physical activity and connect employees to additional resources. Some examples include:

- Making it easier for employees to commute by biking or walking.
- Adopt healthy food guidelines for workplace meetings and gatherings.
- How to communicate healthy eating and physical activity messages to employees. They have a monthly newsletter that you can subscribe to and a quarterly Spanish version:

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/wellness>



Additional resources:

- Nutrition resources (meal planning, accessing healthy food, recipes): <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/nutrition>
- Social media: West Pottawattamie County [Facebook](#) and LEAP [Facebook](#).
- Money Smart: Prioritizing Bills, Credit, and Debt: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/money-smart>
- Homebuyer Education: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/homebuyer>

**Natoshia Askelson** is deputy director of the Prevention Research Center for Rural Health, and associate professor of community and behavioral health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

Her work involves thinking about how to get people to eat their fruit and vegetables, get cancer screenings and vaccinations. Making the healthy choice the easy choice. Iowans are not great at consuming the recommended 1.5 - 2.5 fruit and 2 - 4 cups of vegetables per day (10.7% meet fruit, 7% meet vegetable consumption guidelines). There are many barriers: food insecurity, costs, and access.

CDC recommendations for physical activity are 150 minutes moderate to intense activity per week. Any amount of physical activity helps. About 50% of lowans meet this measurement. Barriers include safety, weather, roads, costs, time, and stigma.

Strategies to address, or evidence-based interventions can be supported by employers, schools, and communities.

- In schools:
  - The farm to school program, free meals, summer meal program work well.
  - We have used behavioral economics in school lunchrooms. For example, in Muscatine we moved the cookies from right next to the cash register to a shelf under the cash register so kids had to bend down to get them. This little change resulted in significant reduction in cookie sales. This type of strategy could also be used in a workplace with making healthy items more available than less healthy items.
  - Physical activity – have recess before lunch.
- At home: meal delivery programs like meals on wheels, social support groups like dancing or bowling, activities that exist through employers or faith-based organizations.
- In workplaces: have healthy items in vending machines, healthy options in workplace events/meetings, have community supported agriculture (CSAs) come to your workplace so people can pick up their produce box, have a farmer's market on site.
- Ensuring people have access to healthy foods – famer's markets, double up food bucks.



## GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants divided into groups to further discuss nutrition and physical activity.

### Nutrition

The LEAP grant coalition is working on fruit and vegetable incentives such as produce prescription programs. They are also looking at food procurement and working with food pantries to ensure the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Pottawattamie County Public health is partnering with Douglas, Sarpy, and Cass health departments in Nebraska to do a nutrition study. They will be going out to stores to survey the offerings and survey the public on how they perceive nutrition is available to them.

What can we do to lower the cost of healthy food? It's a lot cheaper to buy unhealthy food which lasts longer than fresh produce.

- Barriers – knowing how and having the time to prepare the fresh fruits and vegetables. (Ex: Someone may not like brussels sprouts steamed but do when they are roasted).
- Encourage gardening. Community gardens are located at schools with staff to oversee them throughout the summer.
- People are busy and do not, or perceive they do not, have time to cook a meal at home. When they do cook, should make enough to have leftovers to last for another meal or two.

- Get kids involved in cooking early so as adults they know how to cook a healthy meal. Targeting kids with eating healthy helps improve healthy eating of their adult caregivers.
  - Fort Madison has an afterschool program with a former restaurant owner and chef who received local funding to teach kids how to cook healthy meals and provides homework help. The program is managed by the YMCA: <https://www.tkef.org/>.
- Farmers market has incentives for vouchers that can be redeemed at participating vendors.
  - An incentive of \$50 voucher dollars for those 55 and older at a certain income level to spend at the market for a season.
  - Incentives with All Care Health Center for kids and adults.
  - Double up food bucks which allow people using SNAP to double their money when buying fruits and vegetables is now available to use at the farmer's market.
  - Getting the application to qualify for the incentives is a challenging process for low-income or non-English speaking residents. One group within the LEAP grant project is trying to make the application process easier.
- A refillable water bottle station is being added in Bayliss Park.

Additional ways to increase fruit and vegetable consumption:

- Put fresh fruit that isn't going to be used up in time in the freezer to add to a smoothie later.
- Add vegetables to a marina pasta sauce or add pureed vegetables to other sauces.
- Add a handful of spinach to a fruit smoothie as the taste is hidden.
- Frozen and canned foods are convenient and are just as nutrient rich as fresh. Look for no salt added vegetables and fruit canned in its own juice without added sugar.
- Offer healthy snacks such as fruit in the workplace breakroom.

ISU Extension and Outreach has an app "Spend Smart Eat Smart." Free to download on Apple and Android or can use the website: <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu>.

- Recipes – includes options for crockpot and freezer meals that are nutrient dense lower in salt, lower in sugar, higher in vegetables, higher in grains.
- Produce basics – how to select the best fruit (ex: watermelon) and cut it up.
- Unit calculator – when in the grocery store, you can enter the units and costs to see which sized item is the better value.
- Videos on exercise, food shopping, and preparing food.



## Physical Activity

### Current physical activity initiatives in Council Bluffs

- Alzheimer's Association Iowa chapter has a healthy living for your brain group that meets twice per week to do exercises that encourage cognitive health followed by an emotional support group. Done in partnership with the YMCA. Contact: Jessica Duncan [jsduncan@alz.org](mailto:jsduncan@alz.org).
- The LEAP grant project will be doing a walk audit to ensure equitable access for residents. Groups will be assigned a limited area within a two-to-three-mile zone in the west end of Council Bluffs to look at trails, crosswalks, sidewalks, lights, signage and record areas of disrepair or anything that may limit access (including for strollers/wheelchair users).
  - Will use this data to apply for funding to fix areas of disrepair and alter structures if needed (ex: street narrowing).
  - This info could also be helpful to businesses if you are looking to find areas for employees to commute by walking/biking.
  - The walk audit will take place in June or July. If you would like to participate contact Geré Stevens [gere@iastate.edu](mailto:gere@iastate.edu).
- Representative Brent Siegrist mentioned that the Iowa legislature has been focusing more on accessibility. Another Council Bluffs area Representative Josh Turek uses a wheelchair and his advocacy for people with disabilities has led to recent state funding for increasing accessible access in Iowa state parks.
- An [Alzheimer's walk](#) will take place in Council Bluffs on September 28, 2024 at 8:00 a.m.
- The 712 initiative holds an annual Shamrock Shuffle 5K run and is partnering with Pottawattamie County Trails Association in highlighting bike trails and bike rides.
- Lunch trail walks called "Walk the Bluffs" are organized by First Row Fitness. Anyone is welcome to join. View the schedule on facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/939272544118921>.
- To address employee turnover of retail staff and address employee health, Sam's Club has:
  - Set block schedules so workers have a set schedule every single week, which allows employees to have more family time and accommodate appointments.
  - Revamped break rooms with healthy food options with fruits and vegetables. Employees have welcomed the healthier foods.
  - Have created quiet rooms for employees to use during their breaks.
  - Through insurance, offers 24 free mental health sessions and \$10 memberships at gyms.
- Council Bluffs has numerous unique parks and trails, pickleball courts, and soccer fields and needs to increase community awareness on what's available and ensure equitable access to those activities. Many people are new to pickleball and aren't sure how to get started. Could provide some opportunities for youth and adults to get involved.
  - The YMCA has a weekly pickleball tournament at the Healthy Living Center.
  - YMCA also has a childcare area, free for parents who are members to drop off their kids while they are working out.
  - Having active living amenities and childcare benefits is a quality-of-life issue that can help maintain and attract new workers to the area.



- Funding opportunities:
  - The Iowa West Foundation offers many grants for smaller activities and larger grants for annual programs that people might want start. They offer \$15-17 million a year that comes from the gaming revenue in Council Bluffs.
  - Each Sam's Club has \$10,000 in grant money that can be applied for by the community.
- Alzheimer's Association is working with Iowa Department of Health and Human Services on a BOLD grant to reach Latino communities that are impacted by dementia. Last month held an exercise educational event in Spanish for caregivers of people with dementia.
- Centro Latino of Iowa is working to develop mental health services. One barrier is a lack of bilingual practitioners, councilors, psychologists. People trained in these areas in other countries have trouble being able to use those degrees to practice in the US. They currently have one bilingual person who received psychology, domestic violence and counseling degrees in Guatemala who is offering group mental health sessions once a week. <https://sucentrolatino.org>
- The fire department on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the summer will go around to different neighborhoods in the city and have hydrant parties for the kids. It's a good way to get kids active playing in the sprinklers. Public health provides sunscreen and sunglasses. Schedule: <https://www.councilbluffs-ia.gov/2263/Hydrant-Parties>.
- The 21st Century Community Learning Center offers after school programs for every Council Bluffs elementary school. They do some STEM programming, healthy cooking and activities that get kids active. They are always looking for volunteers to lead after school programming. If your workforce is looking to get more involved contact [cbafterschool@cbscd.org](mailto:cbafterschool@cbscd.org), more info at: <https://www.cb-schools.org/Page/95>.
- Central Latino is hosting a Latino festival on September 28 at 11:00 a.m. at Bayliss Park that is open to the public. With this event they want to also welcome new neighbors from central and south American countries and also from Afghanistan and Syria. They want to provide a welcoming environment so that people will choose to stay and build a life here.
- Iowa Western Community College has a highly rated 18-hole disc golf course on their campus that is open to the public.
- During the summer, there are free yoga classes the last Wednesday of every month from 6:00-6:45 p.m. at Half Moon. <https://halfmoonyogacb.com/>

#### Future possibilities and ideas for getting people physically active

- An indoor park for kids – hard to find inexpensive indoor activities for kids to stay active in winter.



- When people's basic needs are met, they can focus more on improving mental and physical health. Evaluating the data collected thus far through the LEAP grant has shown that affordable housing and transportation issues are huge barriers in our community to being physically active and accessing food. In Council Bluffs a high percentage of residents rent rather than own homes and are subject to rent increases.
- Having set work schedules can help employees participate in English as a second language classes (ESL) which can help improve many areas of health.
- In large cities, residents are able to walk or take public transportation to grocery stores and many of the services that they need. This is not an option in Council Bluffs for many people. How can we create more opportunities for people to access the places they need without needing to drive?
- The Iowa Western Community College created a Wellness Center with gyms, courts and exercise equipment. Students have mentioned the importance of the center for their mental health.
- Financial literacy is important and lacking knowledge of the financial system can keep underprivileged individuals from improving their health.



- Central Latino has a welcoming class for new residents that discusses finances. They partner with banks and have speakers come and discuss basics (how to open a bank account and budgeting).
- TS Bank has a financial literacy program in the middle schools to teach students how to bank, save, spend, and budget. They also have an adult program that you can sign up over a lunch hour to learn about investment and may come into businesses and do a special session for your employees.
- ISU Extension has an online money smart program and has a bilingual specialist. They also have a home buying/home ownership class.

- It would be nice to have transportation for people without cars to grocery shop. A store in another state was mentioned that has a van for those individuals to take them and their groceries home. A future First Avenue streetcar may help with this.
- Council Bluffs is bikeable with a lot of trails, but they don't always connect to each other. Connecting the trails would be a great way to get people more regularly active.
- Has there been a transportation audit to look at where public transportation goes (to the food pantry? Between neighborhoods?)
  - The Metropolitan Area Planning Agency might have. Plans are looking at a light rail above ground trolley system like Omaha has in place. They are looking at adding a bridge across the river to connect with Council Bluffs.
- Some sectors of the community, immigrants new to the community or even long-time residents, often do not know about the services and amenities in the city that are open to the public and available to them. There is a need to make sure that these opportunities and activities are publicized more widely.
- Ensure that your group or organization is welcoming to new people. Trying a new physical activity like pickleball or going to the YMCA can be intimidating if you don't feel welcome.

- Develop free activities that are accessible to people’s everyday lives. Walking groups that meet on regular schedules is a great way to build social support and increase physical activity. The challenge could be finding a leader to volunteer to keep these groups going.
- To start free exercise classes like yoga, you could have someone set up a projector in a meeting or break room and do yoga together via YouTube.
- Start a regular group wellbeing activity at your workplace (ex: last Friday of every month, take a break and do a group walk).
- Mental health issues can be a barrier to getting active. Accessing care for both adults and kids is important to be able to focus on physical health.

**Questions?** Contact: Tara McKee [tara-mckee@uiowa.edu](mailto:tara-mckee@uiowa.edu).

---

## Council Bluffs Community Forum Co-sponsored by:

