

IOWA

College of Public Health

Business Leadership Network

Improving Employee and Family Health

Community Forum Summary

November 20, 2024

Marshalltown



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 Marshalltown 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 mental health and physical activity.

The forum was jointly sponsored by the UI College of Public Health's Business Leadership Network, Marshall County Public Health, Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, and Marshalltown YMCA-YWCA.

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

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



Sydney Grewell is Director of Marshall County Public Health.
<https://www.marshallcountytia.gov/451/Public-Health>

Marshall County Public Health works to encourage healthy activities and prevent illness. We are here to serve people every day, not just in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. We work with several community organizations to help residents of Marshall County and beyond. If someone contacts us and we cannot assist them, we will find someone who can.

We provide:

- Immunizations to children and adults who meet certain criteria such as being uninsured or underinsured. The COVID-19 pandemic and the spread of inaccurate information has led to fewer people getting vaccinations which has led to an increase in diseases like measles and pertussis.
- Education to community members on the importance of vaccines, mental health, physical health, and encouraging regular checkups with your doctor. We talk to families and children about making healthy choices like not smoking or vaping, having healthy relationships and friendships, taking time to yourself, and separating work and home life.
- Training for staff for future pandemics, and how to respond to natural disasters.

We work closely with the Marshalltown School District, and populations new to our community.

Kim Jass-Ramirez is CEO of Marshalltown YMCA-YWCA. She is also a certified personal trainer.
<https://www.ymca-ywca.org/>

How can businesses encourage our employees to be more physically active? Experts stress that people should move more, sit less. Any physical activity counts, even just a few minutes throughout your day. Every active minute adds up to better health. The recommendation is 30 minutes a day but it does not have to be consecutive.

Short wellness activities could be incorporated into the workday, but many people may prefer to be

active outside of work. We want to lower the barrier for people to get started. Exercise should be enjoyable, and there's so many ways that you can move your body and be active.

A handout (see end of this document) from the American College of Sports Medicine provides:

- Tips for getting started. Joining an exercise class is a great way to help keep yourself going. Exercising with a friend can help keep you accountable and is good for social connection as well. The surgeon general stated that suffering from social isolation is as hazardous to your health as smoking or not being physically active.
- Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity, 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity or a combination of both to improve stamina and heart health.
- Strength/Resistance Training – Could be weightlifting or just using your body weight, or swimming. Also stretching your muscles is something that could be done during the workday.

Natoshia Askelson is Deputy Director of the Prevention Research Center for Rural Health, and Associate Professor at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

She researches how to make the healthy choice the easy and fun choice for people. One project she is working on is called Active Iowa. We have put together a toolkit that can easily be implemented in Iowa micropolitan communities (a city between 10,000 and 50,000 people that serves as a hub for rural surrounding areas) like Marshalltown. It can also be used in workplaces.

The percentage of Marshalltown County residents who report zero leisure time activity is 26%. These are the hardest people to reach; how do you motivate them to start doing light activity? Marshall County is fortunate to have a lot of resources that make it easier for people to be physically active: the YMCA/YWCA, trails, great parks and a pool.

Active Iowa was created from a partnership with the city of Ottumwa, another micropolitan community, where they were interested in improving community mental health and physical activity. If you're physically active, your mental health is also better. We worked with Ottumwa to promote healthy lifestyles while partnering with the community to make things free and available to people. We developed a model in which natural community leaders were trained to lead very simple activities such as meeting at a trailhead after work and walk or bike with your families and dog or having tai chi in the park on Saturday morning.

We were able to do a study on this project with funding from the CDC. We found that people who were previously sedentary, were after project implementation, doing physical activity in a way that was measurable and significant and continued to do so 2 years later.

In the workplace there's ways to encourage people to be physically active during the day:

- Have walking meetings or stretching breaks.
- Encourage your workplace units to participate in activities together as team building events.
- Incentivize employees to be physically active in some way, whether monetarily or with prizes.
- Map out safe routes for people to walk during their breaks or lunch hours that are nearby.
- Repurpose spaces. The hospital in Ottumwa had a board room that was only used for board meetings. When not in use they were able to push the tables back and once a day they can do tai

chi in the board room. Think about how your workplace might have something available that could be used for the community or for your employees.

All of the Active Iowa materials are available for free on the website:

- A manual of implementation that tells you exactly what you need to do and how.
- Training videos on how to adapt to your community.
- Templates such as for newsletters and agreements to make with a church to use their space.
- Social media toolkit.
- Information about how to run the program safely in a group setting during a pandemic.

<https://prc.public-health.uiowa.edu/active-iowa-manual-implementation-and-supplemental-resources>

Paul Daniel is Executive Director of Center Associates.

<https://www.centerassoc.com/>

Center associates has been in the community for 32 years, providing mental health services to the community, businesses, and schools. One out of five people struggle with mental health, but only a few are able to get services.

Part of mental health is how you think, plus how you feel, equals the way you act. If people are not active and feeling depressed or anxious, they may have a hard time managing their feelings and thoughts. Mental health is also a chemical imbalance. Working with patients is a journey to figure out what is happening. Take for an example a growing tree. What you see above ground is a beautiful tree growing up. Below ground the tree grows deeper and takes root. In mental health, people may appear to be fine, but what we don't see, the growth underground, might hold someone's painful experiences. Until that is addressed people get stuck there and are not able to grow.

One of the biggest issues in mental health is the wait times, weeks or months, for someone to get the care they need. With the support of our community, we built an urgent care for mental health. Previously people with emergent mental health needs went to the ER and had long waits. Now they can be seen immediately at the urgent care. Since opening in April of 2023, the urgent care has had 1,700 visits.

Unfortunately, like most places across the state, we don't have enough providers. We do however have a great community network where the ER sends us people that can be addressed in the urgent care and vice versa. We also refer people to the Y because we want them to be active to get their dopamine going so they feel better.

Part of what we in the community and as employers can do, is to let people know that mental health is okay to discuss. The good news is that people are starting to talk about mental health, in the way that they do physical health and that it is nothing to be ashamed about. We need to make it normal to allow people to say that they need to get help. Part of our job is to help transform illness to wellness.

Diane Rohlman is Director of the Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest, and Associate Dean at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

<https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/>

One of our center's initiatives is improving workplace mental health. In public health we are focused on prevention. In the workplace, how can we prevent death by suicide, just as we work to prevent falls or injuries? We are focused on understanding what in the workplace can contribute to mental health.



We often think about physical hazards in the workplace. For example, hazards construction workers might face could be falls, chemical exposures, noisy environments, breathing in things that are not healthy. What are some of those stressors that may impact our mental health? It could be a tight deadline, or you are short of staff and do the same work with less people. You might not be trained to do the position, or were promoted and do not have all the resources you need.

Just like the physical hazards, we need to think about reducing the psychosocial hazards. Our center has formed a partnership with Iowa OSHA and Federal Region 7 to [address workplace mental health](#). OSHA is designed to go into companies and look for workplace hazards. The fact that they're thinking about mental health is a big deal because they are recognizing that plays a role.

In looking at the workplace, do employees have benefits available so they can go and seek mental health treatment? In some case they may have a situational issue and getting care immediately can help head off a more severe situation down the road.

Make talking about mental health normal. Having your boss share they are not doing okay and are going to counseling or seeking treatment or they have a family member struggling can make the employee feel it is okay to say they also have an issue.

We also need to train our supervisors and our frontline leaders to recognize the signs and symptoms of someone struggling. A performance evaluation might show someone who has always done a great job, has been sliding, is now coming in late, looking out of sorts. Those are warning signs that you can talk to them about.

See a handout on mental health workplace programs, practices and policies:

<https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Mental-Health-Policy-Brief-2022.10.pdf>

We have these medallions that you can give to someone who you think might be in crisis. You can just hand it to them, and it doesn't have to be a big deal. It's just a way to check in with them. If you would like some, contact: tara-mckee@uiowa.edu.



GROUP DISCUSSIONS



What are some of the most helpful employee resources while people are at work? It can be hard to be physically active when everyone is dressed nicely.

- Even taking a walk around the office building is beneficial. It doesn't have to be a high impact walk where you get sweaty. Walking meetings with your staff or allowing them to meet this way with each other is another option.
- For those with office jobs, moveable sit/stand up desks, treadmills or pedal stations under their desk could help people move more.
- Offering your employees the benefit of a pass to the Y that they could use at their lunch break or outside of work.
- Encourage your employees to take their breaks rather than just working through them. Taking that time to separate yourself from work and go outside and get some fresh air when it's nice or go get lunch with a friend.
- Consider your workplace's physical work environment. Are there areas to walk nearby outside? Can you repurpose a room to be used for physical activity?
 - Measure out a route – example: four laps around the courthouse equals a mile.
 - The treasurer's office set up a space in the backroom for their employees to work out.
- You can use incentives and reward employees.
 - If you have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) partner with them.
 - Ask for the data, not names just numbers. How many people are using the EAP? Doing this evaluation will help you know where to spend your money.

It is important for supervisors to help facilitate a positive culture and support and model behavior.

- If a boss sends emails late at night or on weekends, people feel they need to reply. Those emails could be scheduled to send during work hours.
- There was a manufacturing company where they marked off a safe route on the plant floor. At 3:15 p.m. every day the whistle would sound, and the CEO and all the senior leadership came out and would do a 15-minute walk and then would go back to work.

Do you have more info on the Iowa OSHA work on lowering mental health risk in the workplace? We think of risk management in the workplace, but never thought about mental health as part of this.

- See this handout for addressing mental health in the workplace:
https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Mental-Health_2024.10.08.pdf

Some people might not seek help in a clinic and would just go to their minister or religious institutions. Do Center Associates ever work with the clergy in town?

- Yes, we have worked with the ministerial alliance that connects us with some of the main clergy in the area. We give them information and promote the idea that getting help with your mental health is okay.

Other ways to bring in wellness into your community or workplace is fostering connection with people. Having these social activities allows you to see if somebody is in distress. Some ideas:

- One company organized a fun committee that planned one 10-minute fun activity per month and divided people into teams to do the activity. People connect with each other as they are working together as a team while also connecting with the full group. It gives employees a chance to see others they don't usually interact with at work.
- Have a coffee or hot chocolate social.
- Play a board game or do a craft activity.
- Do a service project together.
- Do a chili or a dip cookoff.
- Hold a pumpkin carving contest.

Questions? Contact: Tara McKee tara-mckee@uiowa.edu.

Marshalltown Community Forum Co-sponsored by:



Being Active for a Better Life

Exercise
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of SPORTS MEDICINE®

Inactive people who start moving get the biggest bang for their buck. Experts now say that any physical activity counts – even just a few minutes! Fit in 2, 5, 10 or 20 minutes throughout your day. Every active minute adds up to better health.

Did you know that not getting enough physical activity can result in the same kinds of health problems caused by smoking and being overweight? Moving more often:

- Improves your mood and sleep;
- Slows the effects of aging;
- Lowers your risk of heart problems, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and many kinds of cancer;
- Helps maintain your immune system, which may help to lower risk of infection, lessen symptoms and speed recovery from various illnesses;
- Helps keep your mind sharp as you get older and lowers your risk of dementia and Alzheimer's;
- Increases your energy and simply makes life better!

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Getting Started

Start Simple

Simply sit less and move around more. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance at your desk. Take the stairs. Find opportunities to move throughout the day.



Be Active with a Friend

Do activities you enjoy and find a buddy at home or work. Those who exercise with a friend tend to stick with it longer than those who go it alone.



Check Your Health

If you have health worries, talk with your health care provider before you start exercising. Muscle or joint problems? Ask about doing physical therapy before beginning an exercise program.



Motivation

Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Count your steps daily for the first week or two. Gradually build up to 7,000-9,000 steps each day.



To stay safe and injury free:

- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!
- Start with light to medium effort.
- Warm up and cool down (easy pace) before and after exercise.

Aerobic Activity



Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity, 75 minutes/week of vigorous activity or a combination of both. You'll improve your stamina and heart health.

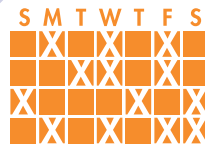
What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity!



How often?

3-5 Days/week



How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard



How much?

Start w/a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 minutes over the day.



Remember: Walking, biking, dancing, swimming and water exercise are great. Be active however and wherever you can – every minute counts. To lose weight, do twice as much activity.

Strength Training



Strength training, for example working with weights or resistance bands, makes you stronger and helps your overall health. Plus, strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

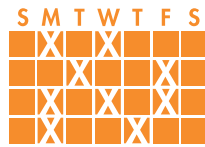
What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines, or your own body (for example, kitchen counter pushups or chair squats)



How often?

2-3 Days/week
*Rest day in between!



How hard?

Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.



How much?

10-15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group) Build up to 8-12 reps of challenging effort. Repeat 2-4 times.



Remember: Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting. If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly.

Other Types of Physical Activity

- Yoga, Tai Chi and Pilates help with balance, flexibility and strength, and are relaxing too!
- Flexibility: Stretch your muscles 2-7 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults). For example, stretch your calves or the back of your thighs.
- Balance: Exercises may include standing on one foot, walking on a line, or using a balance board. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support if needed.

How will I get started **this week?** _____