

THE Value Initiative

Members in Action: Managing Risk & New Payment Models

New Ulm Medical Center – New Ulm, Minn. *The Hearts Beat Back®: Heart of New Ulm Project*

The AHA's Members in Action series highlights how hospitals and health systems are implementing new value-based strategies to improve health care affordability. This includes work to redesign the delivery system, manage risk and new payment models, improve quality and outcomes, and implement operational solutions.

Overview

Through community partnerships and research, New Ulm Medical Center (NUMC) is collaborating to prevent cardiovascular disease and improve the health status of local residents. This critical access hospital is part of Allina Health.

The Hearts Beat Back: Heart of New Ulm (HONU) aims to improve the health, well-being and quality of life of all 14,000 New Ulm-area residents through education, policy changes, available resources, initiatives and partnerships that empower people of all ages to take responsibility for their own health in a supportive environment.

The effort began in 2009 by the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation® (MHIF) and NUMC as a 10-year research project designed to reduce heart attacks. The project continues today as a community-owned health initiative focused on three areas: healthy lifestyles across the lifespan, behavioral health and substance use disorders.



Bike racks were installed across the city to encourage healthy lifestyles.

Impact

Data from the first six years of HONU show the number of individuals with a blood pressure at goal increased by 8 percent among New Ulm adult residents ages 40 to 79 years. Furthermore, when the results of New Ulm were analyzed against an age and gender matched Minnesota comparison community, total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein-cholesterol, triglycerides and blood pressure all showed better management in New Ulm compared to the other community.

There was a nearly an 8 percentage point increase in those getting 150 minutes or more of moderate intensity activity and a near doubling of those meeting the goal to eat five or more fruits and vegetables per day with an 11 percent increase.

In addition, membership in the city-owned recreation center increased 60 percent, businesses and individuals relocated to New Ulm because of the community's commitment to healthy lifestyles, and city leaders use health data when developing policies pertaining to recreation, transportation and education.

HONU is guided by a 12-member community leadership team, along with more than 80 community volunteers representing 35 organizations on 11 action teams. Volunteers represent the hospital, city government, schools, public health, the chamber of commerce and local businesses. Work plans use as a framework for interventions the social ecological model, a prevention design that considers the complex environmental influences on health.

Among other initiatives, the group highlights healthier menu options at restaurants and community events, promotes the use of fitness equipment in parks and exercise facilities, implements city transportation policies so more kids walk or ride bikes to school, and develops worksite wellness policies that foster physical activity on the job.

HONU also works with service clubs to improve nutritional offerings at fundraising events, and increases awareness and understanding of behavioral health issues and substance use disorders through community forums by distributing educational information.

Because 90 percent of New Ulm residents are connected to NUMC's electronic medical records system, a platform existed for tracking key health indicators and progress over time.



Heart of New Ulm promotes healthier menu options at restaurants and community events.

Lessons Learned

HONU organizers recommend taking small steps, getting the right influencers at the table, listening to community partners, being patient and doing pilot projects as keys to success. They also advise having a comprehensive communications strategy with a unified message, speaking the language of the audience.

“We really wanted to make it easier for people to make the healthy choice where they live, where they work, where they play, where they socialize,” said Rebecca Lindberg, senior director of population health, education and communication at MHIF. “That became our framework for the project.”

Future Goals

MHIF plans to continue publishing data from the research to help inform and support the work of other communities interested in such an initiative. The foundation also launched the Rural Health Transformation Center to provide services to communities facing challenges designing and implementing community health improvement projects.

Organizers have secured three years of funding to sustain the community health improvement work in New Ulm, including from the New Ulm Medical Center Foundation.

“This is not the time to stop the momentum and the efforts that are showing these great outcomes and that are improving lives here in our community,” said Carisa Buegler, director of operations at NUMC. “This helps us stand apart as a community and we can be a hotbed of innovation. We’re excited for the future. We think we have a great plan that we’re working on developing over the next three years that really creates a more sustainable model.”

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