

Advancing Health Together: Strategy Insights from our Partners in Action

Over 100 organizations across Iowa have implemented targeted strategies to improve health outcomes that support the seven priority areas identified in the [2021-22 State Health Assessment](#). Collectively known as [Healthy Iowans: Partners in Action](#), these organizations are driving meaningful change to advance the well-being of Iowans and improve health outcomes. While focused initiatives continue under the [2023–2028 State Health Improvement Plan](#), the combined efforts of the Partners in Action remain central to progress across all seven priority areas.

This document highlights the successes and challenges throughout 2024 reported by Partners in Action, organized by each of the seven priorities areas. Click on the organization's name to learn more about their specific strategy, desired outcome and contact information.

To explore all current strategies and discover opportunities for collaboration or implementation in your own community or organization, visit the [Healthy Iowans: Partners in Action website](#).





SUCSESSES

- **Iowa Community HUB** navigators enrolled over 900 individuals in health programs and delivered produce to over 250 homes.
- **Iowa Department of Transportation** provided more than 17.3 million rides via 35 transit agencies, an increase of 2 million from the previous year.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Rural and Community Health** trained 256 Community Health Workers who helped bridge the gap between communities and access to public health services, healthcare and social services.
- **Iowa HHS Title X** introduced the nation's first reproductive health home visit model, integrated with comprehensive health services.
- **Iowa KidSight at the University of Iowa Children's Hospital** reached a milestone, screening its 750,000th child, with 46,000+ screened in FY24.
- **I-Smile Silver Coordinators** provided care coordination to over 730 adults, allowing them to receive dental services.

CHALLENGES

- Partners reported consistent themes when trying to address access to care including barriers like language, immigration status, transportation and stigma which hinder access to healthcare, education and social services.
- Iowa faces shortages in trained healthcare professionals, especially psychologists and direct care workers, intensified by limited training infrastructure, low internship availability and difficulty retaining trainees in-state.
- Many critical programs, from reproductive health to dental care and public transit, struggle with inadequate funding, limiting their reach, scalability and ability to respond to increasing community needs.



SUCCESSIONS

- **Good Neighbor Iowa** had 96 residents, 5 childcare centers, 5 institutions and 1 city parks department pledge to be pesticide-free in 2024, benefiting over 2,000 Good Neighbors, protecting 20,000 children and managing 12,000 acres without pesticides.
- **Henry County Public Health** sent four HPV adolescent immunization reminders, and all staff were trained and implemented the announcement approach. Baseline data was collected so it can be tracked in the future.
- **Iowa Comprehensive Cancer Control Program** continued to collaborate with the Iowa Cancer Consortium and other partners to promote awareness and use of the Iowa Cancer Plan. The Consortium had 658 members as of July 2024, a record high. The annual Iowa Cancer Summit in October 2024 had the highest attendance yet with nearly 300 participants.
- **Iowa HSS Care for Yourself: Breast & Cervical Cancer Program** partnered with local organizations (e.g., North Iowa Community Action, Crescent Community Health Center) to enroll 3,652 participants. Over 90% received breast cancer screenings and 41% received cervical cancer screenings.

CHALLENGES

- Iowa continues to have the second highest and fastest growing rate of new cancers in the U.S., highlighting the urgent need for intensified cancer prevention efforts and disparity reduction.
- Most people receiving recommended breast and cervical cancer screenings were from metropolitan areas, showing that targeted outreach is needed to overcome barriers faced in rural areas.
- Clearer HPV vaccine guidance for ages 9–11 is desired amongst medical staff.
- Finding local champions across the state to help advocate for pesticide-free management of turf areas in their own communities continues to be a challenge.



ECONOMIC STABILITY & INCOME

SUCSESSES

- **Amani Community Services' Step-Up Program** provided rent assistance for 15 of Iowa's Latino families, coordinated support groups and worked with Iowa Workforce Development programs.
- **Iowa CareGivers** updated the Direct Care Worker Wage Brief, which highlighted stagnant wages since 2019 and growing nursing home staff turnover. The brief was distributed to over 30,000 stakeholders and will inform policy decisions.
- **Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporations' Family Development and Self Sufficiency (FaDSS) Program** had 66 families receive services. Twenty-one families completed or exited the program, including 47 children under the age of 18.

CHALLENGES

- There lacks a coordinated effort to explore various strategies to enhance wages for all direct care workers that steps outside the traditional strategies of raising the minimum wage or increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates to employers.
- Budget constraints limit participation in programs like FaDSS.
- Limited resources for language access for non-English speakers continues to be a barrier.



HEALTHY EATING & ACTIVE LIVING

SUCSESSES

- **Catholic Charities Diocese of Des Moines** rescued and distributed over 615,000 pounds of food. A new collaboration with a healthcare system will aid in the distribution of educational materials to pantry guests.
- **Des Moines Area Religious Council** helped a record 70,727 people via the 14 food pantry locations, mobile food pantry and delivery service.
- **Dickinson County Hunger Coalition** opened a new mobile food pantry for an underserved area of the county.
- **Food Bank of Iowa** had 163 school pantries established in 44 of the 55 counties they serve. Of those pantries, 56 were within Des Moines Public Schools. In 2024, they distributed more than 3 million pounds of food through their school pantry program.
- **Food Bank of Siouxland** distributed over 4 million pounds of food to network partners, including 679,000 pounds of produce, to meet increasing community needs.
- **Iowa Community HUB** enrolled 193 people in the Walk With Ease Program (WWE). This was the result of training 19 new WWE instructors and supporting 16 WWE workshops across the state.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Nutrition & Physical Activity: 5-2-1-0¹ Healthy Choices Count!** funded 42 projects in 14 Iowa communities to use evidence-based strategies around 5-2-1-0. Using various settings, including schools, libraries, parks, food pantries and trails, the projects reached 70,000 community members, 30,000 of whom were youth. The communities also built over 55 partnerships and secured more than \$300,000 in other funding to support their projects.
- **Iowa HHS Chronic Disease Self-Management Program** held six workshops in Iowa attended by over 65 individuals.
- **Iowa HHS Congregate and Home Delivered Meals** had Iowa's six Area Agencies on Aging and Local Service Providers provide 1,889,342 meals to 23,994 older Iowans.
- **SNAP—Ed and EFNEP Programs** provided food pantry coaching to 68 food pantries in 21 counties.

¹ Refers to the daily recommendations of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 hours or less of recreational screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity and 0 sugary drinks.

CHALLENGES

- Many programs face ongoing challenges securing stable funding, especially for prevention initiatives like 5-2-1-0, nutrition sites, and food pantries, which are seeing record demand while costs rise, and donations fluctuate.
- Programs report difficulty attracting and retaining participants due to long-time commitments, scheduling conflicts, physical limitations, competing responsibilities and lack of program awareness.
- Variability in community capacity and program designs complicates consistent outcome tracking, making it hard to demonstrate long-term impact versus short-term outputs.
- Common obstacles include weather disruptions, limited staff time and resistance from local entities.
- Reaching rural, low-income, and diverse populations remains difficult due to geographic isolation, limited provider availability and barriers like lack of reimbursement, language access and technology adoption.



SUCSESSES

- **Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Authority** was awarded a Lead Risk Assessment Demonstration Grant to conduct certified lead hazard inspections in voucher-assisted homes across a 7-county region, enhancing safety in low-income housing.
- **Iowa HHS Smoke Free Homes** program expanded to over 1,700 registered properties, aided by strong partnerships like the one with the State Fire Marshal Division, boosting outreach and statewide impact.
- **Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation**'s housing programs served 64 households with a total of 104 household members. The program strengthened partnerships, notably with the State Fire Marshal Division and State Fire Marshal, enhancing outreach and statewide impact.

CHALLENGES

- Recruiting landlords and contractors into voluntary housing programs remains difficult, requiring ongoing education, outreach and technical support.
- Affordable housing operators struggle to fund essential repairs due to limited rental income, prompting reliance on grants to cover large maintenance costs.



HEALTHY EATING & ACTIVE LIVING

SUCCESSSES

- **Iowa Department of Corrections** enhanced mental health services, increased staff training to identify and respond to signs of distress and implemented suicide prevention programs for those incarcerated. The department also strengthened communication and support networks within correctional facilities to ensure individuals in crisis receive timely and appropriate interventions.
- **Iowa HHS Zero Suicide Iowa Initiative** had 48,260 contacts from Iowans to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Iowa's 988 Centers were able to help the individual without needing additional interventions at the time of contact for 89% of contacts answered.
- **Make It OK** reached over 426,000 Iowans, including launching the "Back the Black" campaign, a sister campaign of Make It Ok focused on reducing the stigma of mental illness in the Black Iowa community.
- **Prevent Child Abuse Iowa** had 494 Connections Matter participants, which included 122 early childhood professionals, thus increasing the awareness of adverse childhood experiences.

CHALLENGES

- Mental health struggles, often tied to isolation and worsened by events like flooding, have been a major challenge, highlighting the need for greater awareness, education and partnership-led initiatives, especially in early childhood mental health.
- Keeping up with evolving healthcare laws and insurance policies consumes significant time for private providers and creates additional strain, along with ethical dilemmas related to confidentiality and legal information requests.
- In correctional settings, implementing mental health measures is complicated by limited resources, staffing challenges and balancing care with security protocols.
- Recruiting and retaining staff across mental health services, including 988 Centers and walk-in clinics, remains difficult due to unpredictable client loads, training time demands, and low wages tied to grant funding.



SUBSTANCE USE

SUCCESSES

- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Substance Abuse** created two naloxone (the opioid overdose reversal medication) distribution initiatives to make naloxone more readily available in communities across the state. As of November 2024, HHS filled requests for over 13,000 naloxone kits from around Iowa.
- **Iowa HHS First Responder Addiction and Recovery Program (FR-CARP)** had 26 EMS agencies complete FR-CARP training, bringing the total of participating EMS agencies to 363. From September 30th, 2023, to September 29th, 2024, 753 two-dose intranasal Narcan kits and 1,235 intravenous naloxone doses were sent to participating agencies.
- **Iowa HHS Iowa Students for Tobacco Education and Prevention (ISTEP)** program had ten newly established ISTEP chapters. Approximately 1,100 students make up the total 59 chapters.
- **Iowa HHS Tobacco Use Prevention and Control** had successes in several parts of the state. The City of Eldridge adopted a zoning ordinance limiting tobacco and vape shops to industrial areas of the community and is now working on adopting a tobacco and nicotine free policy for their city grounds and facilities. Central High School in Davenport is working on creating an ISTEP chapter for their school. Community and Family Resources East included education on tobacco/nicotine and cessation services as part of their drug free workplace training with Riverside Casino staff. Community Health Partners of Sioux County staff were invited to be part of the Clay County Opioid Task Force which will allow for collaboration between behavioral health professionals and other key stakeholders in the county.

CHALLENGES

- Community partnership agencies are facing staffing shortages due to low wages tied to limited grant funding, concerns about job security and insufficient resources for data analysis and program evaluation, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Rising use of vaping and nicotine products among youth is being reported alongside limited school capacity for prevention curricula which is compounded by legal and/or logistical constraints (e.g., new parental consent laws).
- Community misconceptions about substance misuse being limited to urban areas and confusion around overlapping state initiatives further hinder implementation and evaluation of tobacco and opioid prevention efforts.