

Turning Strategies into Impact: Updates from our Partners in Action

Across Iowa, more than 100 organizations are implementing targeted strategies to improve health outcomes in 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 progress to enhance the well-being of Iowans and improve health outcomes.

This document highlights the Partners' in Action successes and challenges throughout 2025, 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.

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



 Access to Care**Successes**

- **Alzheimer's Association – Iowa Chapter** - Reached over 4,392 Iowans in a six-month period, a 9% increase, who are receiving services from the Association including support groups, care consultation and a 24/7 helpline, supported by expanded conference outreach.
- **Black Hawk County Health Department** - Helped roughly 3,400 families across four counties understand their health care benefits and find community resources through the Care for Kids program.
- **Dallas County Health Department** - Health Navigation program served 529 individuals and addressed 1,547 identified needs by helping make connections with community resources and navigate the healthcare system including medical paperwork.
- **Floyd Valley Community Health** - Completed 49 resource navigation home visits, connecting patients to food, equipment, higher levels of care, disease and medication education, and insurance/navigation resources.
- **HUB Navigation Program** - Over 600 healthcare referral sources made at least one patient referral to the HUB for community health promotion programs addressing nutrition, physical activity, fall prevention, and more. The HUB Navigation Program earned CDC recognition as an emerging best practice model.
- **Iowa HHS Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) Program** - Hosted statewide summit for 130+ providers. The ADRD Program highlighted the Wellness Visit and the importance of talking to one's doctor by running print ads to over 123,000 households in central Iowa.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Chronic, Congenital & Inherited Conditions** - A total of 4,002 participants completed screenings through the Care for Yourself: Breast & Cervical Cancer Program including mammograms, clinical breast exams and Pap/HPV tests. Of those served, 33 breast cancers and 35 cervical cancers and precancers were diagnosed.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Rural and Community Health** - Trained hundreds of Community Health Workers through apprenticeship, skills, and public health training programs, increasing statewide capacity, workforce diversity, and access to preventive and support services, especially in rural and high-need areas.

- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Rural and Community Health, Iowa Rural Hospital Flex Program** - A Flex Population Health Needs Assessment of Iowa Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) was completed on 11/30/2025 in which 47/81 (58%) hospital population health staff completed a survey used to inform future education, training and technical assistance the Flex program plans to provide.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Wellness and Preventive Health** - Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa (Hawki) program enrollment grew to 64,854 covered children in FY25.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Wellness & Preventive Health/Oral Health** -
 - **Community Water Fluoridation** program helped six communities maintain fluoridation, preserving access for approximately 31,410 residents through expanded education and statewide outreach.
 - **I-Smile Initiative** had 13% of Medicaid-enrolled children ages 0–2, nearly 500 more than last year, receive dental services from I-Smile.
 - **I-SMILE Silver** program increased care coordination services by 62%, from 318 to 518 individuals, and provided oral health instruction to 230 adults.
- **Iowa HHS Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology** - With the challenging Legionella Outbreak, the State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) was able to run 200 tests on environmental water samples. The SHL tested over 317 specimens for measles, identifying 8 cases which helped the epi team appropriately investigate and identify 1,305 contacts and provide post-exposure care for around 45 identified contacts.
- **Iowa HHS Title X Family Planning Program** - A total of 11,100 encounters were provided across the Iowa HHS title X clinics offering a broad range of family planning and preventive health services. Piloted and expanded an oral health education initiative for clients planning pregnancy.
- **Iowa KidSight at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children’s Hospital** - FY25 vision screenings increased 6.3% year-over-year with 48,985 screened with expanded rural reach and strong follow-up tracking.
- **One Iowa** - The LGBTQ Iowan Health Needs Assessment was completed by approximately 400 community members. One Iowa completed 40 statewide trainings while expanding affirming provider listings.

Challenges

- While growth in Community Health Worker and public health workforce programs has improved access to services and support, expiring grants and funding cuts are making it hard to sustain and grow these efforts.
- Programs connecting individuals to medical services, such as Care for Kids and the I-Smile Silver Project, continue to face challenges reaching and keeping participants due to a variety of issues including disconnected phone numbers, transportation problems, language and cultural barriers and limited resources in rural areas.
- Limited participation from large healthcare systems posed a challenge for the Dallas County Health Department's pilot project to increase transportation access to medical appointments.
- Programs face challenges with limited data, tracking that often stops after first visits, drops in preventive-service billing, and the need for more targeted and culturally appropriate outreach.



Successes

- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Chronic, Congenital & Inherited Conditions** - The Iowa Comprehensive Cancer Control Program has been partnering with Iowa Cancer Registry, the Consortium and other organizations on the 99 Counties Project, providing county-specific cancer data to each of Iowa's 99 counties including the incidence of new cancers, cancer deaths, and top cancer types.
- **Polk County Health Department** - Since July 2025, the Ribbon of Hope team of three professionals successfully coordinated care for 1,198 patients across Polk County and surrounding areas, including: 1,163 Care for Yourself screenings, 28 Colorectal FIT tests, and 7 colorectal scopes.
- **University of Northern Iowa** - In 2025, over 16,000 people were given information about the harmful health impacts of pesticides through Good Neighbor Iowa. The program has pledges from people making the commitment to refrain from using pesticides for lawn care in 85 of the 99 counties.

Challenges

- Public health challenges are growing, including rising cancer rates in Iowa and declining vaccination rates, while outreach efforts are limited by increasing costs to conduct outreach.
- Service delivery is being affected by limited provider availability, high insurance premiums and deductibles, and missed appointments, all of which create barriers to timely and consistent care.
- Building relationships with partner organizations to increase impact is always a priority but can be challenging.



Economic Stability & Income

Successes

- **Iowa CareGivers** - Partnered with Iowa Workforce Development to repeat a 2019 Direct Care Worker Wage and Benefit survey. The survey of direct care workers provided a unique perspective of their use of state programs such as SNAP benefits, childcare subsidies, Hawki, and the Iowa Health and Wellness Plan. Decision makers are encouraged to use the Iowa and survey data to inform their decisions on how to enhance wages for the workforce.
- **Iowa HHS Division of Family Well-being and Protection, Early Intervention and Support** - In FY25, 1,981 families were served including 4,581 children. Services include child care, child protective services and home visitation programs. Of those families served, 35% experienced improved housing, 42% had an improved support network and 36% had improved transportation.
- **Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC)** - NEICAC's Family Development and Self Sufficiency program supported 57 families with 14 families successfully exiting the program. At program exit, 79% of adults were employed (up from 57% at entry), and employed families saw an average monthly wage increase of \$1,263. Sixty-four percent of families exited with increased income, outperforming both the statewide target and average. Families experiencing barriers received support: 100% of adults with substantiated mental health, substance use, or domestic violence concerns accessed treatment or assistance.

Challenges

- The Iowa Caregivers program reports limited awareness among decision-makers about the challenges facing the direct care workforce, with many unfamiliar with who direct care workers are and the critical role they play in supporting health and long-term care services.
- The FaDSS program cannot serve all eligible families due to budget limits and growing demand, so some families are placed on waiting lists and referred to other community services.
- Food programs are facing rising need, limited funding for pantry operations, and space constraints, leading organizations to plan partnerships and local provider alliances to better deliver wraparound services.



Healthy Eating & Active Living

Successes

- **Catholic Charities Diocese of Des Moines** - The food pantry had an increase in need over the previous year and provided food to over 15,500 individuals in 2025.
- **Des Moines Area Religious Council Food Pantry Network** - Assisted a record 80,000 individuals in greater Des Moines. Partnered with United Way of Central Iowa and Project Iowa, community navigators are now at several food pantry sites to help visitors get food and connect with job support and other services.
- **Food Bank of Iowa** - Has 183 school pantries across 45 counties, including 51 in Des Moines schools, and gave out over 3 million pounds of food in 2025.
- **Food Bank of Siouxland** - Distributed nearly 4 million pounds of food, served 373,000 people through pantries and meal sites—a growth of 11%—and successfully piloted a new summer feeding program with HHS.
- **Iowa Community HUB** - The Walk With Ease program had over 200 enrolled in 2025, a 10.4% year over year growth.
- **Iowa Department of Education** - The Summer Food Service Program provided over 3.1 million meals/snacks, an increase of 4% from federal fiscal year 2024.
- **Iowa Healthiest State Initiative** - Double Up Food Bucks created \$866,250 in economic impact, enrolled 15,000 new participants with an 86% redemption rate, launched online registration, introduced awareness buses in Waterloo and Des Moines, and expanded to all 76 Fareway stores in Iowa.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Nutrition & Physical Activity** -
 - **5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count** - In 2025, 13 Iowa communities used funding to run 44 nutrition and physical activity projects in schools, parks, and community centers, reaching over 84,000 people, including more than 40,000 kids, with 76 partnerships involved.
 - **Pick a Better Snack** - Partnered with 22 local agencies to implement this program that taught over 15,000 elementary students about healthy snacks.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Chronic, Congenital & Inherited Conditions** - Participation in diabetes prevention programming continued to grow, with 575 enrollments in 2025.
- **Iowa State University Extension and Outreach** - Food pantries in 27 counties partnered with Master Gardeners to provide over 110,000 pounds of produce, helping more than 87,000 Iowans.

- **Mary Greeley Story County Public Health** - Offered 7 sessions of the KEYS to Dementia Prevention class with an average of 13-15 participants for each class.
- **Scott County Health Department** - Launched a series of bicycle and pedestrian safety messages via a social media campaign to decrease the number of bicycle and pedestrian accidents.
- **University of Northern Iowa** - The Garden in Every Lot program installed 55 residential gardens and 40 community plots in Black Hawk County in 2025.

Challenges

- Many programs, like Healthy Kids Iowa and school pantries, face challenges with funding, staff burnout, and recruiting participants, even as demand for food and support continues to grow.
- Federal funding changes, government shutdowns, and rising food costs have made it harder to provide enough food and nutrition education to meet community needs.
- Partnerships with schools, community organizations, and volunteers help expand programs, but turnover, differing priorities, and limited resources slow progress.
- Nutrition, physical activity, and health programs face barriers such as transportation, scheduling, accessibility, and reaching underrepresented populations.

Housing

Successes

- **Iowa HHS Smoke Free Homes** - The Smoke Free Homes registry database has 1,789 total properties, which is up 500 new properties over the past five years. Continued collaboration with the State Fire Marshal Division allowed the ability to provide education and training to their contractors, fire department staff, and other stakeholders.
- **Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation** - Of their 10 properties consisting of 56 units across 6 counties, they served 67 households with a total of 108 household members via the affordable housing program that provides safe and affordable housing to seniors, individuals with disabilities and individuals and families with limited resources.

Challenges

- Rising living costs, delayed SNAP funding due to government shutdowns, and limited Housing Choice Voucher support are straining already limited household resources, making it harder for tenants to keep up with rent even in affordable housing.
- Rental income alone is insufficient to support ongoing property maintenance, and available grant funding is often prioritized for new construction and expanding housing stock rather than preserving existing properties.



Mental Health & Mental Disorders

Successes

- **Community Health Partners** - In 2025 the home visitation staff completed 809 home visits to families in Lyon and Sioux Counties. Staff hosted quarterly parent meetings that provided valuable opportunities for both health education teaching and social connectedness with other families.
- **Creative Counseling Group, PLC** - In 2025, 4 full-time counselors completed 4,262 counseling sessions which exceeded goal of 3,520. Added one full-time counselor and provided learning opportunities for 3 interns, with one intending to stay on as a full-time counselor after graduation, thus allowing the ability to serve more members of the community.
- **Early Childhood Iowa** - Hosted 8 professional development events, 53 hours of training, and 131 completion certificates awarded. There were 11 Reflective Consultation (RC) groups which provides early childhood professionals with a supportive space to process their experiences, deepen their understanding of infant and early childhood mental health, and enhance their capacity to respond thoughtfully to the needs of children and families.
- **Iowa Healthiest State Initiative** - The Make It OK program continued to expand workplace and ambassador networks and welcomed new partnerships. There were 15 Ambassadors trained, 28 Make It OK Presentations, 67 workplaces registered, and 240 pledges signed.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Refugee Services** - In FY25, 29 refugee peers were trained as helpers to support fellow refugees and have served over 500 refugees. Iowa currently has two programs addressing refugee mental health needs, 1) Problem Management Plus (PM+) – a program focused on stress, depression, and cultural adjustment and 2) Support for Trauma-Affected Refugees (STAR) providing health, psychological, and social services to refugees and newcomers who have experienced significant trauma.
- **Iowa HHS Division of Behavioral Health** - In SFY25, Iowa's 988 centers received 55,123 contacts and had an answer rate of 89%, up from 48,260 contacts and a 72% answer rate in SFY24. The majority of these contacts were calls (57%) followed by texts (24%) and chats (19%).
- **Iowa Primary Care Association** (PCA) - Iowa PCA continued to host the Behavioral Health Project ECHO, delivering 11 sessions with a total of 202 participants. Sessions addressed a wide range of timely, practice-relevant topics that reflect real-world challenges faced by frontline providers, supporting sustained engagement across roles and care settings.

Challenges

- Expanding awareness and participation in mental health competency endorsements and reflective consultation remains difficult, and key refugee mental health programs face major funding losses and stigma-related fears that keep families from seeking help.
- Financial and insurance barriers, including credentialing delays, variable fee schedules, and high co-pays and deductibles, limit how many clients programs can serve and reduce attendance at needed appointments.
- Workforce shortages continue to affect behavioral health services, including Iowa's 988 centers, and also impact participation and growth in programs such as Project ECHO.
- Maintaining engagement remains a challenge for the Cerro Gordo County Public Health Workplace Mental Health Coalition, with low newsletter open and click rates, efforts underway to expand the contact list beyond Cerro Gordo County, and inconsistent participation from coalition members.



Substance Use

Successes

- **Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau** (GTSB) - In 2025, GTSB expanded its traffic safety reach through strategic partnerships: MADD funding facilitated a second program manager to amplify outreach to parents, caregivers, and youth. The Iowa Restaurant Association expanded responsible beverage server training across the state, including Spanish language options. The Iowa Department of Revenue initiated alcohol compliance checks in targeted areas where underage drivers are involved in alcohol-related crashes. A successful media campaign, "No One is a Good Drunk Driver," was used heavily on billboards, radio, television, and media platforms statewide.
- **Iowa Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy** - The number of permanent, year-round, authorized "Take Back" collection sites at Iowa law enforcement centers and community pharmacies have increased to nearly 400 in all 99 counties.
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Substance Abuse** - Supported the distribution of over 46,000 naloxone kits in 2025 (31,000 kits distributed in 2024).
- **Iowa HHS Bureau of Emergency Medical and Trauma Services** - 383 EMS agencies to date have completed First Responder Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Program (FR-CARP) training. Shipped 1,444 doses of IV naloxone and 826 two-dose Narcan kits to the program's participating EMS agencies.
- **The Best You Coalition** - The Keokuk Police Department completed an alcohol compliance check on 36 businesses and a nicotine compliance check on 14 businesses. Although more businesses failed alcohol compliance checks, more businesses passed nicotine compliance checks than in the previous year. Three community members working in the alcohol, nicotine, and/or tobacco industry attended Merchant Training.
- **The Best You Coalition (City of Keokuk and Lee County)** - FY25 saw 128 community members attend coalition meetings and 131 community members attend the presentations.
- **The Best You Coalition (City of Keokuk)** - In 2025, 366 youth attended Youth Leadership Group meetings, activities, and events. In September 2025, the Youth Leadership Group successfully held their first youth-led, adult facilitated group meeting.
- **Wright County Public Health** - Trained approximately 100 individuals, including first responders, in overdose recognition and response. Distributed 19 Narcan and now have Narcan in 2 of the 3 schools in Wright County.

Challenges

- Efforts to reduce underage drinking face ongoing challenges, including community norms that minimize youth alcohol use, limited participation from merchants in compliance and training efforts, and difficulty recruiting young adults to assist with compliance checks.
- Coalitions and youth groups struggle with member engagement, student turnover, and getting schools and partners to allow meeting time and active participation.
- Staffing shortages, funding delays, and program uncertainty have slowed or paused some projects and limited the ability to expand services to new communities.
- Coordination is difficult because it is hard to get partners and stakeholders to attend meetings regularly, and police department staffing shortages add to these challenges.
- Public awareness gaps remain around safety issues such as impaired driving, medication disposal, and overdose risks, and some people misunderstand the role of tools like Naloxone.