

Newton community Health Partnership Progress & Plans



Students, faculty, and staff from University of Iowa and Grinnell College—in collaboration with former Iowa governor and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation—are working closely with members of Newton through the Newton Community Health Partnership to introduce sustainable community health programs in Newton, Iowa.

Guided by research as well as stakeholder input, the University of Iowa and Grinnell College teams chose two main focus areas: promoting physical activity and community connections through the built environment and promoting healthy eating through local and national food partnerships and educational programming. Together, these focus areas allow the teams to unite research on physical activity, healthy eating, and community infrastructure and take a holistic approach to tackle obesity and promote overall health and wellness.

In the coming months, students and faculty will work with the Newton community to assess Newton's available resources and programs already in place to determine which needs must still be met. In order to introduce sustainable programs, the teams will take the critical steps of assessing the feasibility of implementing the projects and ensure each will be supported by and beneficial to the community. A vibrant and committed community, Newton has the assets and opportunities to position it as an example for surrounding communities, enabling the partnership to not only help achieve a healthier Newton, but also a healthier Iowa.



Active Living Corridor Study

Thanks to Newton's leadership, the community has already made significant efforts to plan specific projects promoting biking, walking, and general active living in the community.

In response to this previous planning and community stakeholder input that Newton needs greater network connectivity and active recreation attractions, the Built Environment Team seeks to make maximum

planning impact on Newton's community health and well-being by identifying, assessing, and prioritizing specific corridors and areas for projects and enhancements. They will address network connectivity and support for active transportation between key points of interest, including Legacy Plaza and the DMACC campus, downtown, schools, and recreational spaces. In addition, they'll consider the recreational physical activities within each of the key points of interest.

The Built Environment Team, collaborating with key stakeholders in Newton, will prioritize projects for future implementation based on public input and existing research that indicates the type of projects that have the greatest effects on community health and well-being. The final deliverable will be a corridor study that identifies and assesses project sites and proposes corridor-specific enhancements, including enhancing sidewalk accessibility and connectivity, streetscape improvements, and aesthetic enhancements that can be submitted to funding agencies for future implementation.

Enhanced Summer Programming through Newton Community Schools

The Food and Nutrition Team is partnering with Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and the Newton Community School District to enhance summer programming for kids around healthy eating.

Research indicates that before/after school and summer programming are effective intervention strategies for promoting healthy behaviors in children and combating childhood obesity. Newton already has a summer program in place supporting healthy eating, so the goal of this project is to



increase participation and to develop additional activities and opportunities for this program starting during the summer of 2019.

One such opportunity is to bring more educational activities to the summer program. Potential programming includes food tastings and cooking demonstrations, workshops on food composting and food waste, seed-saving workshops, and procuring local food in the summer.

The partnership with both Iowa Valley RC&D and the Newton schools will enable opening the lines of communication between the school district and local farmers, with the goals of sourcing local foods for the summer meal program, bringing in local farmers, and coordinating field trips to visit local farms, as well as implementing additional local, healthy food programming in the community.

Beyond creating and promoting educational opportunities around food, the Food and Nutrition Team also strives to understand the barriers children and families face to access summer programming. They will work in collaboration with the Built Environment Team to consider transportation and accessibility concerns within the Newton Community, then propose solutions addressing these barriers.

Healthy Meal Delivery and Meal Planning through Hy-Vee

The Food and Nutrition Team will also work with Dr. David Katz from Yale University. He has recently developed an app that is quick and easy to use as a method of self-monitoring eating habits. It includes goal setting and easy-to-monitor pictures of dietary food patterns. This app will be provided free of charge to a group of Newton families, which will not only help them track their eating patterns and make healthy choices, but also give researchers feedback on the app's ease of use, as well as how it contributes to food selection and health indicators.

In addition to the app, the team will work with a meal delivery company that is currently developing a new line of healthy and low-cost meals. As part of this project, the company will provide meal delivery to a small number of families in the Newton community, free of charge, in order to begin testing the feasibility and effects on health.

To determine the effect of these two innovative, potentially health-changing concepts, the team will collect data using the nursing and registered dietitian services of the Newton Hy-Vee grocery store. Over a six-month period, they will assess body mass index, waist circumference, and several biological health markers. If these efforts prove successful, the project may expand into a larger study to include more Iowa communities.