

IOWA

College of Public Health

Business Leadership Network

Improving Employee and Family Health

Community Forum Summary
December 6, 2023

Fort Madison



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 for 2023 with projects in the cities of Creston, Davenport, Manning, Tipton, and in rural Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Poweshiek, and Tama Counties.

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 Fort Madison community forum provided opportunities for area business, community, healthcare, and public health leaders to discuss resources for employers on how to improve employee and family health and wellness in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, mental health, and substance use.

The forum was jointly sponsored by the UI College of Public Health's Business Leadership Network, Lee County Health Department, Fort Madison Chamber of Commerce, Great River Health, The Best You Coalition, and Van Buren County SAFE Coalition.

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



Breanna Kramer is community outreach and development project coordinator at Lee County Health Department. <https://leecountyhd.org/>

- A grant received from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) enabled them to use assessment tools for communities in Lee County to understand what is going well and what needs to be improved.
- They realized that improving economic supports for families would have the greatest impact as poverty is the underlying issue for many struggles families face including nutrition, mental health, and substance use. Helping to uplift parents out of poverty will help their children.
- There are jobs available, but people are not taking them. They have several projects to tackle this:
 - Childcare – Improve and expand childcare workforce to provide more options for families, including ones that work 12-hour shifts. Help childcare companies increase wages for their staff.
 - Mobile Connection Center – provides access to resources. Allows for anyone to call and be connected to resources (health, childcare, housing, food pantries, help with applications for SNAP or WIC, job placement programs) for themselves, their family, or friends. This is free and open to anyone in Southeast Iowa. Call or text 319-470-5045.
 - Family friendly workplace policies. To better understand how they can help, they would like to hear from businesses on their workplace policies.

Debra Payne is manager of employee Health at Great River Health. <https://www.greatriverhealth.org/>

- She has worked in nursing for most of her career and more recently in employee health. Great River is one of the largest employers in SE Iowa.
- Mental health is a top concern for their employees, particularly how to help keep their job as they or a family member are struggling. Employees with PTSD are sometimes triggered by their job.

- Resources they offer:
 - Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services.
 - County directory of services (Henry, Lee, Des Moines) which are free and include food assistance, mental health, and emergency childcare.
 - Leaves of absence – Have a leave of absence policy in place. See if they are eligible for FMLA. Encourage employees to talk to their supervisor. ADA accommodation is a last resort as sometimes what the medical employer puts on the form may limit what the employee is allowed to do.
- Provide support and listen to build trust with the employee. Do they need flexible hours? Do they have the tools to do their job? Do they feel supported and are they engaged in their job? Check in with them and pay attention to what is going on in their lives.

Kris Rankin is coalition director at Lee County The Best You Coalition and Van Buren County SAFE Coalition and is a certified prevention specialist.

- In Lee County she worked with the child abuse prevention council to start the substance use prevention council and they received a grant to start the Best You Coalition. They support a lot of different agencies and groups and focus on substance use prevention and provide tools to have a drug free workplace. Contact Kris at kris.rankin@vbcwarriors.org.
- Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services of SE Iowa (ADDs) can help companies develop drug free policies and programs for the workplace. <https://addsiowa.org/>. These policies protect both the business and the employees from being harmed accidentally by someone who is using.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) can help support employees who have a substance use problem. It's important to gather qualitative and quantitative data and assessments (conversations with employees and leadership, focus groups, surveys, testing, etc). Michelle Dunn is the prevention supervisor for Lee County: <https://addsiowa.org/leadership/>.

Diane Rohlman is Associate Dean for Research and Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. She also directs the Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest which is a federally funded center focused on small employers with limited budgets to help create safer healthier lives for their employees.

There are many free resources available that can be used and shared within your organizations:

- Videos where experts, small business and industry leaders share knowledge and tips on a range of topics related to worker well-being (ex: workplace nutrition, violence, stress, substance use, designing and evaluating programs): <https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/multimedia/videos/>
- *Workplace Matters* podcast series – quick (under 10 min) episodes on cost-effective approaches to impact well-being of employees: <https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/workplace-matters/>
- Mental health – workplace programs, practices and policies: https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Mental-Health-Policy-Brief_2022.09.pdf
- Substance use – a guide for employers on how to create a recovery friendly workplace: <https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/wp-content/uploads/RFW-Policy-Brief.pdf>

The center staff could come to your workplace and give a presentation. More at: <https://hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/>.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants divided into groups to further discuss nutrition/physical activity, and substance use/mental health.



Mental health and Substance Use

Family Supports

- Schools have a lack of resources for children and families who are struggling. They partner with numerous organizations and are always looking for new partners. Finding providers is difficult, especially for residential placements for children. It is becoming more problematic as one child can disrupt an entire school building.
 - Also impacts health and wellness of school staff trying to care for the kids.
- Are there programs for families, assistance to provide kids ahead of time before they get into school and start having issues?
 - HOPES home visiting program offers support for at-risk parents.
 - How are parents identified for this program? – Lee County Health Department partners with hospital and birthing centers and uses a universal screening tool from the Healthy Families America model during pregnancy or shortly after birth. Every parent could benefit, but the program is offered only to those most in need (can accommodate up to 100 families per year). It is a voluntary program.
 - Head Start program – has been underutilized because funding for the transportation piece was removed which made it hard for families to participate. They may not have gas money or a car, and so kids miss out on enrichment activities and early intervention.
 - The Area Education Agency has a family advocate for special education.
- Fort Madison Schools added a community support specialist to help families navigate available resources. There are more families in need however than the specialist has capacity to assist.
- A Parent Café will be starting in February with Fort Madison Schools where parents can get together and have conversations on what healthy families look like.
- It is a struggle to help families break the cycle. Creating a marketing campaign on what healthy families look like, and destigmatizing mental health could be useful.

- Lee County Health Department's Empowering Families Initiative can do a media campaign. The challenge is determining the message, so parents find it helpful and do not feel attacked for parenting incorrectly.
- A podcast could be useful.
- Include people who have experienced living in poverty or having a substance use issue.
- ADDS can come into the school district and do a free curriculum-based support group that is a 12-week program for students in grades 7-12 on how to manage emotions, deal with anger, set goals, resist peer pressure for substance use. Contact: Michelle Dunn at mdunn@addsiowa.org.
- Understanding implicit bias – professionals working on all these issues should be aware of their own biases and how they speak in public to ensure they are providing positive supports and reducing stigma for those struggling with their mental health.

Workplace – Trainings and Supports for Employers

- Trainings for employers and assistance with creating workplace policies:
 - Leadership needs to make sure employees know about the EAP programs or other workplace supports and how to use them.
 - Make employees feel supported at work before an issue happens. When there is an issue walk the employee through options and make sure they have help with FMLA paperwork.
 - ISU Extension offers the Question Persuade Prefer (QPR) program and will talk to businesses on mental health, suicide prevention, and how to recognize if a person is struggling. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/QPR>
 - Iowa City VA works with community partners to build coalitions on suicide prevention for service members, veterans and their families. A lot of trainings and resources that employers might want already exist and are free. They have a team that can go to businesses and provide suicide training for employers (signs to look for, how to have the conversation with an at-risk employee and getting them help). Contact: Deb Moeller at deborah.moeller@va.gov.
 - ADDS can provide supervisor training on stigma and substance use and help develop workplace policies. Stigma is a huge issue. Leadership needs to talk about it and share their experiences. Training should be provided for all front-line supervisors so they can recognize signs and symptoms of an employee struggling and how they can help. They can also provide training on Naloxone and how to identify an overdose. Contact: Shelly Strawhacker at sstrawhacker@addsiowa.org.
- How should an employer or supervisor start a conversation with a struggling employee?
 - Ask to meet with the employee and show them that you care and see how you might be able to accommodate them.
 - Try to reduce stigma and let employees know it is okay to talk about these issues.



- Is there a resource for employers to find sample family-friendly workplace policies?
 - SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) has employer resources such as the Drug-Free Workplace Toolkit, Employee Assistance Programs, and info on legal requirements: <https://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/employer-resources>.
 - AssuredPartners is an employee benefit firm that offers HR resources for their clients: <https://www.assuredpartners.com/fortmadison/>. They have workplace policies and forms and can provide advice to have difficult conversations with employees.
- What are programs or activities employers can provide to encourage health and well-being in their workplace?
 - Promote a fun positive healthy work environment (ex: Wellness Wednesdays).
 - ADDS promotes work life balance – tries to get employees to do a social event together outside of work each quarter (bowling, scavenger hunts).
 - Provide flexibility for employees to take care of themselves or their family members – allow time off for appointments, and a private space to make phone calls to schedule an appointment.



Workplace – Helping Employers realize benefits of flexible workplace policies

- Manufacturing companies, due to the nature of the work, seem to have a more difficult time providing family friendly policies. The message to them could be the future workforce is struggling. Getting children help will benefit everyone with healthier future workers.
- ADDS also serves children for mental health and substance use and have found companies often do not accommodate workers when they need to take time to get their children in for treatment or evaluation. For children under 18, parents can try to sign up for intermittent or reduced schedule FMLA: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/28-fmla>.
- It is important to show employers that there are benefits to offering more flexibility which reduces turnover. There is a cost savings for retaining employees rather than having to onboard new employees.
 - The UI Healthier Workforce Center has researched recruitment and retention to understand why people are not applying, taking, or keeping jobs. One business realized that providing new workers with a money stipend upfront allowed employees to cover basic needs (buy food, work clothes, gas to get to work) and help them get by until they received their first paycheck.
 - When employees first start a job, there is a probationary period. If a child gets sick the parent might quit because they don't yet have paid time off accrued. Removing probationary periods or offering more flexibility could improve retention.
- How do we talk to employers? Have a forum like this or one on one meetings?
 - Invite them to a forum and have a smaller company who has implemented something successfully share about it. Working with the University of Iowa and Iowa State University can help open access to more senior leadership in a company.

- Deb Moeller with the IA City VA did this as part of an Iowa Department of Health and Human Services grant. As part of a pilot project, they met with a few employers, provided training and materials to post in the break room with the 988 hotline and local resources, not just behavioral health. This enables employees to access help if they do not want to talk to their company's HR. Positive evaluations from this project were used as an entry point to working with more companies.
- ADDS partnered with Lee County Health Department to hold a drug free workplace lunch and learn with local manufacturing company leadership.
- It is also important to discuss mental health with legislators and stress the benefits of workplace family friendly leave policies.



Nutrition and Physical Activity

- What employee wellness resources on nutrition and physical activity are available?
 - Iowa State Extension "Spend Smart Eat Smart" <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu> can be used to eat healthy while sticking to a tight budget, learn how to cook fresh produce, and get recipe ideas. ISU Extension also offers programs on how to can and preserve foods. Jessica Ellison is the food and family educator for Lee County: ellison1@iastate.edu.
 - Live Healthy Lee County: <https://www.facebook.com/livehealthyleecounty>
 - Live Healthy Iowa: <https://livehealthyiowa.org/>
 - Wellmark Healthy Hometown: <https://www.wellmark.com/about/community/community-health-improvement/iowa>
 - Healthiest State Initiative has food resources and also a mental health program to reduce stigma "Make It Okay" which features real people sharing their stories: www.iowahealthieststate.com/.
 - Hy-Vee dietician services: kschaeffer@hy-vee.com. They also have great recipes for kids.
 - American Diabetes Association website has a diabetes food hub which talks about healthy living and has a lot of fun easy recipes: <https://www.diabetesfoodhub.org/>.

- Employers can help promote healthy eating and an active lifestyle. What is the low-hanging fruit that can be changed easily right away? The first step can lead to additional steps. Some ideas:
 - Breakroom and vending machines:
 - Add 1-2 healthy items to a vending machine
 - Have fresh fruit and vegetables instead of or in addition to vending machines.
 - Make sure employees have access to water and not just sugary drinks.
 - Have a sharing garden.
 - Share nutrition info and tips with employees or benefit info employees can utilize on posters, in newsletters, or on digital signage in the workplace.
 - Ensure employees have breaks where they could exercise if they choose and that there is an area to do so.
 - Schedule walking meetings.
 - Examples from businesses:
 - A company used a grant to improve healthy options in workplace vending machines. Food items had color-coded green, yellow, and red dots indicating most to least healthy items. Goal was to have at least 25% of items be healthy options.
 - At Cryotech they did a survey on employee morale. Employees responded that they wanted more wellness activities as the office jobs are very sedentary. They are working on ways to get people moving, improving walking areas, but sometimes it takes a competitive program to get people moving.
 - The health department in Sioux City encourages physical activity every morning and afternoon for their staff. At 10am and 2pm for 5 minutes, they play music and that is the signal for the staff to get up and move around. It is built into the culture, so people participate.
- Food pantries in Fort Madison and Keokuk
 - Lee County Conservation donates produce to the food pantries. People with an overabundance of garden produce can contact the pantry.
 - They are working to make the healthy choice the easiest choice. For people with restrictive diets, they are looking for donations of low-sodium foods, kosher foods, gluten-free items.
- Is anyone working on helping people on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) who use EBT cards to purchase healthy foods?
 - Fareway used to offer double up bucks during summer produce purchases. Des Moines County farmer's market is doing this with \$1 spent leads to \$2 to spend.
 - A previous issue with using EBT for local farmer's markets is that vendors are not set-up to take this payment system.
 - Christine O'Brien at Community Action of Southeast Iowa oversees the WIC program. Now they have an app that people on SNAP with EBT cards can use. When they are at the store they can scan the item to see if it counts towards the program and how to utilize. They can also use their cards to buy vegetable plants to start their own container garden.
<https://caofseia.org/>.

- Do any physicians in the area give patients prescriptions for fresh produce? -- No, though they have tried to do prescriptions for increasing physical activity.
- Some businesses and/or insurance covers benefits to get employees active. Could cover a registration fee if the employee signs up for a community 5K race or pay a portion of a Y or gym membership.
- ISU Extension has short physical activity videos you can watch (low impact cardio routine, strength training, stretching, chair workouts): <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/videos/>.
- Healthy LifeStars program is offered through the UI College of Public Health. There are videos available for families to watch at home. The program discusses what to eat and how much, the importance of physical activity, and uses goal setting to build skills to maintain healthy habits for life. Based on concept of teaching tiny habits. More at: <https://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/healthy-lifestars/>.
- Getting kids on board with healthy eating and trying new produce can help influence the food that parents buy. And telling them what part of the grocery store they can find the food is helpful too. It would be good to use "The pick a better snack" program which is meant for kids and modify it for adults to bring to worksites (<https://hhs.iowa.gov/pick-better-snack>).
- Could try offering some taste testing of more unusual produce in the breakroom (ex: jicama).
- The chamber could put in their newsletter, try a new food of the month.



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

Fort Madison Community Forum Co-sponsored by:

