

Testimony to the North Dakota Legislative Assembly's
Health Care Reform Review Interim Committee

Healthy North Dakota

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What is Healthy North Dakota?

Healthy North Dakota is a dynamic, statewide partnership that brings together partners and stakeholders to identify common strategies to address health issues. Healthy North Dakota's framework supports each of us in our efforts to make healthy choices by focusing on wellness and prevention – in schools, workplaces, senior centers, homes and anywhere we live, learn, work and play.

The vision of Healthy North Dakota speaks to the initiative's ultimate goal of "Healthy People, Healthy Communities." Healthy North Dakota's mission is to "inspire and support North Dakotans to improve physical, mental and emotional health for all by building innovative statewide partnerships." Focusing on prevention and wellness will make us a healthier population, lower our health care costs and improve our quality of life.

The "innovative statewide partnerships" piece is the unique part of the Healthy North Dakota initiative. We keep state agency, program, university and non-profit groups and coalitions connected and integrated, reducing duplication of effort and helping groups to work toward common goals when possible.

Governor John Hoeven launched the Healthy North Dakota initiative in his 2002 State of the State address. More than 130 people from more than 75 organizations met at an inaugural summit in August 2002 to define wellness and identify health priorities for the state. Healthy North Dakota priorities include the areas identified by stakeholders and participants at the first Healthy North Dakota Summit; other priority areas and workgroups have been brought on board since. Priority areas and workgroups include aging and early childhood; school health and worksite wellness; physical activity and healthy eating including breastfeeding; cancer, diabetes and heart disease; injury prevention, oral health, and working to reduce health disparities.

The Health North Dakota collaborative consists of two parts 1) the Health North Dakota workgroups referred to above and 2) the Statewide Vision and Strategy group (SVS). The SVS is composed of two parts 1) the SVS Planning Committee and 2) the SVS Steering Committee. . The SVS Planning Committee was organized in 2006 and initially comprised of 24 organizations and partners and developed the current State Health Improvement Plan and Strategic Map with a long-term vision for initiatives up to the year 2020. The SVS Steering Committee represents a key group of leaders headed by Andy

Peterson of the North Dakota Chamber of Commerce who have been assigned the task of implementation and interim adjustment of the State Health Improvement Plan. The SHIP is intended to give direction to overarching clinical, public health and integration goals and targets.. SVS connects private sector health care and public health prevention. Members of the SVS Steering Committee include the leadership of the North Dakota Chamber, the Department of Commerce, the Medical Association, the Hospital Association, Long Term Care Association, Blue Cross, Blue Shield of North Dakota, the UND School of Medicine, the NDSU Masters in Public Health Program, the Office of the Governor, the State Health Officer and the Healthy North Dakota Coordinator.

What does Healthy North Dakota do?

Over the past 12 years, activities Healthy North Dakota has supported include:

- Responding to businesses who want to improve their bottom line by supporting the health of their employees through worksite wellness;
- Coordinating development and implementation of a worksite wellness nutrition education and incentive program with North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System;
- Providing training and technical assistance and funding to 15 *Moving More, Eating Smarter* coalitions in local communities to focus on healthier eating and more physical activity;
- Assisting with development and implementation of the Statewide Vision and Strategy for a Healthier North Dakota group's strategic plan; coordinating bringing together leadership of this group of leaders in health care;
- Helping to obtain financial resources, including bringing groups together and assisting with writing a substantial Community Transformation Grant;
- Facilitating implementation of the *Creating a Hunger Free North Dakota* coalition's action plan and coordinating coalition partners;
- Tracking and communicating progress of bills relating to prevention;
- Engaging in the Legislators' Forum process with elected representatives from Minnesota, Manitoba and North and South Dakota in 2005 & 2008;
- Assisting South Dakota in development of the Healthy South Dakota initiative;
- Providing information about the benefits of prevention and collaboration to local, state, federal and non-profit leaders and to North Dakota citizens through the Healthy North Dakota website, at meetings and conferences.

In response to a need identified by North Dakota businesses in a 2001 statewide survey, worksite wellness is one of the areas on which Healthy North Dakota has focused. Healthy North Dakota was an incubator, bringing together the right partners and implementing a plan to launch a worksite wellness initiative in the state. For several years, the previous Healthy North Dakota Director, Melissa Olson, worked with groups in the state to identify a source of funding for providing assistance to businesses to carry out wellness programs at work. The Dakota Medical Foundation and Blue Cross, Blue

Shield of North Dakota stepped up with this needed funding, and now there is a full-time position housed at Blue Cross, Blue Shield to support worksites throughout the state.

The Healthy North Dakota Worksite Wellness Program's goal is to improve the health status of employees and employers in North Dakota by creating replicable, cost-effective programs at worksites that encourage and support healthy behaviors. The position serves as a resource to assist businesses, organizations and schools to implement worksite wellness programs and health promotion activities. To help businesses improve the health and productivity of their employees, there is a website, www.NDworksitewellness.org, a toolkit with "how-to" details, and training via an annual summit in Fargo and through regional workshops that have trained over 200 people from more than 100 different worksites.

Healthy North Dakota helps to identify and fill gaps in prevention efforts. Not all North Dakotans experience health and healthcare equally. With the growing Native American, immigrant, refugee and migrant populations, the state is enjoying an enrichment of our society by people with different backgrounds, cultures, education, economic situations and languages. Unfortunately these differences may make it more difficult for some to participate in the improvements of health enjoyed by many in the state. Working to decrease these disparities has been part of Healthy North Dakota since its launch, playing a role in forming a work group around addressing health disparities. There is now an Office of Health Equity to continue to work with this focus in the North Dakota Department of Health.

Another gap identified was for an entity to coordinate a new coalition effort around food insecurity. Groups came together in 2010 around a study that found gaps and challenges in connecting people with food. Not having regular access to enough nutritious food for a healthy life (food insecurity) has large and long-term influences on health. Children who do not have enough to eat are more likely to be hospitalized and face a greater risk for health problems like asthma and depression. Adults who do not have enough to eat are more likely to have heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Unfortunately, even right here in North Dakota there are about 56,000 people, including more than 9,200 of our children, who do not have enough food every day for a healthy and active lifestyle. Creating a Hunger Free North Dakota is a statewide network of organizations, agencies and individuals established in 2010 to collectively identify and address the unmet food and hunger needs and their underlying causes with the vision of a hunger-free North Dakota. The Healthy North Dakota Coordinator also coordinates that coalition's meetings, resource development and connections.

Looking toward the future, the North Dakota Department of Health has established a "dashboard" of health indicators. These web-based sets of visuals will allow tracking of

the health status of and quality of life indicators for North Dakotans as measured against national and state goals for improvement. Healthy North Dakota and SVS partners, along with any other interested parties in the state will be able to access this information to help make decisions about where action and resources are most needed.

Who is Healthy North Dakota?

Groups and organizations connected through Healthy North Dakota range from voluntary organizations such as the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and the Arthritis Foundation; state agencies including the North Dakota Departments of Health, Human Services, Public Instruction and Agriculture; the Center for Rural Health at UND and the Masters in Public Health Program at NDSU; Blue Cross, Blue Shield of North Dakota; the Dakota Medical Foundation; coalitions including the Healthy North Dakota Breastfeeding, Dakota Diabetes, Early Childhood, Injury Prevention, Newborn Screening, Oral Health and the Chronic Disease Prevention Coalitions; and local public health units and organizations.

Why do we need Healthy North Dakota?

Healthy North Dakota plays an important role in maintaining a network of health, healthcare and prevention partners. Large grant-makers and health organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Bush Foundation recognize that such infrastructure is necessary and important for working together to solve problems to reduce chronic diseases and other health challenges. In applying for grants and other sources of funding, it is most often required to demonstrate the connections and infrastructure that Healthy North Dakota holds in place.

How does Healthy North Dakota work?

The Healthy North Dakota full network meets every other month to bring together partners to hear from each other about the initiatives being worked on, problems being solved and challenges faced. Through these interactions and during the times in between them, Healthy North Dakota works to connect health partners, communicate amongst partners and engage others in the state, coordinate resources and services, share knowledge and skills amongst North Dakotans and from other states, activate organizations and people, suggest consistent messaging, facilitate collaborative planning and bring people together in strategic alliances to find innovative solutions. People and groups who do not usually even speak with one another have been brought together to work toward common goals.

The federal Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the CDC funds Healthy North Dakota. This is the one of few grants coming into the North Dakota Department of Health that provides leeway to select the health issues for which to dedicate the funding. The department has seen a reduction in this grant amount in each of the past four years; the status of this funding is uncertain. Prior to April, 2013, the grant

supported one full-time director and a part-time consultant. From that time until now, the funding supports one consultant at between one-fourth and one-half time each month.

The SVS Coordinating Team also meets monthly to connect the leaders of stakeholder groups representing areas of health care in all stages of life. The SVS Coordinating Team identifies opportunities for its member organizations to work toward the goals established in its strategic map to meet its vision that North Dakotans will be the healthiest Americans. SVS activities have been self-funded by its members.

Healthy North Dakota plays an important role in bringing people together to work toward the vision of Healthy People in Healthy Communities. The effort has touched many lives and advanced efforts of groups who are working toward the same goals. You hear in other messages today that we need to keep working to prevent disease and improve health, and that this takes the collective efforts of many people and groups working together. Thank you for your consideration of Healthy North Dakota's role in preserving and improving our quality of life in our next 125 years of statehood.