



Meeker, McLeod, Sibley  
*Healthy Communities*

Home to healthier communities, schools, workplaces, childcare and health care organizations

**Collective action used to address community priorities**

Multiple agencies and organizations all play a role to improve the health of the community they serve and constitute a public health system. By working together, these agencies and organizations maximize their efforts and can demonstrate a positive impact in health. There are also challenges such as duplication, missed opportunities and communication issues. Working together has been a standard approach for the Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Leadership Team (CLT), but in 2016, they also decided to further address the challenges. Collective Action is a tool that has been successful for partner-



Above: A photo from the Community Input Session that the CLT hosted in June of 2016 to help guide the Community Health Assessment priorities.

ships that allow individual agencies to maintain internal priorities while contributing to the overarching goal to improve the health of the communities. After completing a joint Community Health Assessment in 2016, the CLT partners developed a collective action framework in which each participating agency

internally identifies objectives and strategies for the identified priority areas from the CHA. This work will contribute to the overarching goal collaboratively decided on by the CLT. Data from the hospitals and community will be used to measure impact and will be monitored on a consistent basis.

**Leveraging partnerships to support dementia-friendly communities**

One of the strongest functions of SHIP and the CLT is bringing partners together to support local initiatives. A great example of this is ACT on Alzheimer's grants to support communities in becoming dementia-friendly. Through partnerships, the Meeker Memorial Foundation was able to

successfully receive funding for this project in the Litchfield area. In addition, SHIP was able to support a successful application to become dementia-friendly by the City of Arlington, which also eventually led to a successful application by Sibley County. By bridging these projects, we can

have a regional impact in supporting our residents with dementia and their families. This initiative also aligns with the priority area of improving senior health, identified through the joint Community Health Assessment. By leveraging partnerships, we can maximize impact.

**SHIP FY 2015—16  
Meeker-McLeod-Sibley  
Profile**

**OUR RESOURCES**

- Population: 74,263
- Rural setting
- Square miles: 1,688
- FY 2015—16 Award: \$222,749
- Years as SHIP grantee: 7
- # of Strategies implemented: 6
- # of Partner sites: 24
- Schools: 4
- Healthy Eating: 3
- Tobacco: 10
- Active Living: 2
- Worksite Wellness: 1
- Health Care: 4



Above: A photo from a recent Community Leadership Team meeting consisting of numerous partners throughout Meeker, McLeod and Sibley Counties.



## Taking the long-term perspective of SHIP



Because the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) focuses on sustainable, systemic changes, it will take time and long-term investment to effect widespread, lasting results.

Through SHIP, communities are tackling health risk factors – obesity and commercial tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure – which are responsible for illness and early death due to chronic diseases. SHIP uses research-based strategies to make real, sustainable improvement in creating opportunities for everyone to achieve health.

While changes won't happen overnight, we are already showing positive results across Minnesota. The state's efforts to attack the obesity epidemic and reduce commercial tobacco use are showing positive results. Adult obesity rates are down, and youth and adult smoking rates have fallen off dramatically.

Despite those declines, not everyone has the same opportunity to be healthy. SHIP grantees are working with populations that are experiencing

health inequities so everyone can be on the path to a healthy future.

We have more work to do locally, too. Results from the 2014 MMS Healthy Communities Survey show three out of four adult residents in the tri-county region are overweight or obese, which is higher than the overall prevalence for the state of Minnesota (64.1%). Furthermore, the prevalence of heart trouble or angina and diabetes, chronic disease outcomes connected to these risk factors, is higher in MMS than the overall 2014 Minnesota prevalence\* (heart trouble or angina 7.3% vs 5.5%, diabetes 15.3% vs 8.3%).

While there is much work to be done, we believe we are on course using the right tools through SHIP. Through the collective efforts of SHIP grantees across Minnesota, we can create communities that make healthy choices possible and show improvement in both the human and economic costs of chronic disease.

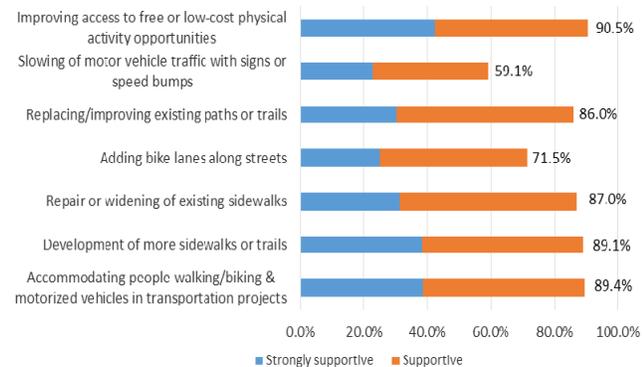
\*Source: Centers for Disease Control 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Prevalence & Trends Data

## Resident support for active living is strong

In the 2014 Meeker-McLeod-Sibley (MMS) Community Opinion Survey, three out of four respondents indicated they believe lack of physical activity is a moderate or major concern in their county. This is supported by rates of physical activity reported in the survey: less than half (45.4%) of residents meet CDC's aerobic physical activity recommendation to participate in 150 minutes or more of aerobic physical activity per week. Additionally, 21.6% of residents did not participate in any leisure time physical activity in the previous 30 days. Nonetheless, respondents are overwhelmingly supportive of changes that have been shown to support ac-

tive living in communities (see chart on right). For example, 89% of respondents are supportive of the development of more sidewalks and trails. Furthermore, about four out of ten respondents said they and/or members of their household are **very likely to exercise more** if these changes were implemented, which could then lead to improved rates of physical activity in the tri-county region. Locally in 2016, active living in communities SHIP work potentially benefited over 26,000 residents.

Support for actions that can improve walking and biking in communities



Source: 2015 Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Opinion Survey

## Pilot program strengthens local partnerships

*Rx for Health* is a local pilot project led by the Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Healthy Communities Leadership Team (CLT) with the goal of health care providers connecting patients to local healthy eating and active living resources through partnerships and referrals to local community education programs. The ultimate goal of this program is to help community members engage in long-term strategies for healthy living. Obesity was identified

as a priority area in both the 2013 and 2016 Community Health Assessments (CHA), done collaboratively between local public health and the health care organizations within Meeker, McLeod and Sibley Counties and organized through the CLT. The CHA is a requirement for Community Health Boards under MN Statute 145A, as well as an IRS requirement for local non-profit hospitals that meet certain criteria. As a result of the 2013 CHA, the Obesity Prevention Subcommittee was formed to identify and implement solutions locally to impact obesity, thus developing the *Rx for Health* pilot program.

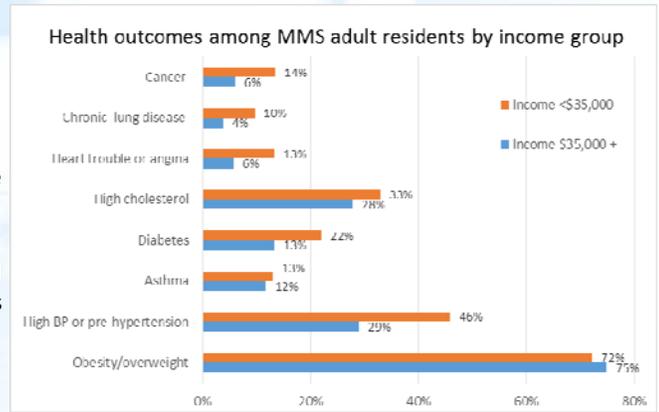


Above: A photo from one of the initial Obesity Prevention Subcommittee meetings in which the meeting participants completed a strategic planning exercise.

## Low-income residents affected by health inequities

This summer, MMS Healthy Communities staff began a health equity data analysis to begin identifying and documenting health inequities and their root causes within the region. This multi-step process included identifying and analyzing existing data and collecting new qualitative data from community members. The analysis of existing data shows inequities among income groups in most of the chronic diseases and associated risk factors included in the 2014 community health survey; adult residents with a household income of less than \$35,000 are disproportionately affected compared to adult residents with an income greater than \$35,000 (see chart on right). To help identify factors related to these differences, staff spoke to community members

with lower incomes and professionals who work with them. Early conversations indicate barriers to health for low income populations include lack of access to health care and routine medical care, but also go beyond health and include limited access to transportation and decent/affordable housing. These barriers make it challenging for people with low income to focus on health. In one conversation, participants discussed that for low income populations, it is not an option for health to be a priority because they face other issues that are more complex. The perspective that health can't be



Source: 2014 MMS Healthy Communities Survey

a priority in these communities demonstrates how important SHIP efforts are to make healthier choices possible for everyone.

## Students at local schools learning through physical activity

Children spend a significant amount of time at school, making it a key setting for physical activity opportunities. In addition to the health benefits of physical activity, it has also shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement. Through SHIP, MMS partnered with schools in our community to help them provide opportunities for their students to be more active and eat healthier, reaching approximately 569 students in 2016.

To help support these efforts, over 50 staff members from schools in MMS and the surrounding area participated in local trainings in

which they were able to learn new ways to incorporate additional physical activity into the school day. This extra movement can come from short activity breaks in the classroom, incorporating movement into lessons like math and science, or creating opportunities for the children to be more active during recess time, whether outdoors, or indoors during unfavorable weather.

By providing these opportunities, not only are the children healthier and more focused in the classroom, but develop life-long habits that lead to better health outcomes.



Above: A photo from a local school training held in the summer of 2016.

## Town hall meetings launch new workplace wellness collaborative

MMS SHIP, the Litchfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Meeker Memorial Hospital, and Hutchinson Health have teamed up to host two community-wide town hall meetings on the value of worksite wellness. Local businesses were on hand to share their experiences through a panel discussion facilitated by Tom Mason with the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota.

The events are part of a series of town meetings in high achieving communities to showcase best practices for wellness that can be used by other Minnesota communities. The series is sponsored by The Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota® and Minnesota Department of Health's network of SHIP grantees to help build and sustain productive relationships with em-

ployers statewide regarding worksite and community wellness.

The town hall meetings also marked the launch of a local worksite wellness collaborative that will kick off in January 2017. The collaborative will bring together new and existing area employers engaged in workplace wellness.

"In wellness circles, Litchfield has always identified as top-tier," according to Tom Mason, president of the Twin Cities-based Alliance. "It has deep capabilities as a high functioning health community that emphasizes collaboration. Essential to that success has been the willingness of the Chamber to serve as a catalyst," Mason added. "Worksite wellness doesn't work without significant buy-in from employers."

These events recognize that employers all across Minnesota, particularly smaller employers, are beginning to recognize the value of worksite wellness. They are looking for community allies to help identify effective ways to conceive programs/policies, to engage employees, to sustain effectiveness, and to measure results. These events and others across the state will identify a variety of best practices that can be adapted by these employers and assembled into a toolkit of relevant success narratives that show employers how to achieve success in conceiving, managing and assessing long-term success in worksite wellness – from *their* perspective.

## Meeker-McLeod-Sibley COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

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**Meeker-McLeod-Sibley (MMS) Community Health Services (CHS) provides a wide variety of public health services, including SHIP.**

For more information or to partner on SHIP initiatives, you can contact:

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### OUR MISSION

To lead efforts to protect and promote the health of the people in Meeker-McLeod-Sibley counties through education, empowerment and provisions of essential public health services.

## Residents and vendors benefit from new Arlington farmers market

In summer of 2016, MMS SHIP supported a new farmers market in Arlington. To gather feedback on the market, MMS SHIP surveyed both customers and vendors this past fall. Early results show Arlington customers, their families and vendors are benefit from the new market:

- ◆ Well over half (56%) of respondents said the number of fruits and vegetables they regularly eat has **increased** since they started shopping at the farmers market. Over half also reported the number of fruits and vegetables other members of their household eat has increased.
- ◆ Three out of four respondents tried and liked new fruits or vegetables they purchased at the market.
- ◆ Almost all said they would shop again at the farmers market.
- ◆ Nine out of ten respondents believe the quality of fruits and vegetables is better at the farmers market compared to other venues.
- ◆ Four of five vendors reported their overall sales have increased since they started selling at the Arlington market. Two of these vendors also said they have increased the size of their garden or production acreage.
- ◆ Four vendors indicated they have new and more repeat customers.

Many customers included positive comments and would like to see the market continue and hope it expands to include more vendors. For example, one respondent wrote "I'm really glad Arlington has a farmers market as it's a chance to get fresh, good quality vegetables. I hope it continues."

With the farmers markets SHIP supported in 2016, MMS SHIP potentially reached 31,163 residents. Customers from Litchfield and Hutchinson markets were also surveyed as a part of this process. Those results will be shared in an upcoming report. Collectively, this data provides a snapshot of the impact SHIP is having locally and provides targeted opportunities to further enhance these local initiatives.



Above: A photo from the brand new Arlington Farmers Market that SHIP supported.