

# HEALTHY

## POLK 2020

A SHARED VISION

**10 PRIORITIES** to build a healthy community,  
inspired by those who live, work, and play in Polk County



When the Healthy Polk implementation team first considered how to develop the Healthy Polk 2020 plan, we thought it would be beneficial to begin with the end in mind.

W

**WHAT EXACTLY WOULD BE OUR ULTIMATE GOAL?**

That was easy: To make sure all people in Polk County are healthy. Although that may seem like a pie-in-the-sky ideal, that is, indeed, our objective.

That leads to the next question: How will we achieve that goal? To learn the answer for that, we asked the community. People who live and work in Polk County are more than qualified to identify the priorities and needs of the community. They live here. They work here. They play here. They know which changes are needed to improve their own well being and that of their families, neighbors, workplace—community.

We hosted a series of meetings—community conversations—throughout the county to gather input. We also conducted an online survey. Finally, using the information and priorities suggested by thousands of people during the community conversations and from the survey, we gathered at a Community Health Caucus to establish the current 10 priorities. These priorities will be the focus for the next 10 years as we strive to reach the goal of health and well being for everyone in Polk County.

What excites me most is that these priorities, identified by community members, represent what they feel is important as well as priorities that they are willing to work on.

The issues and barriers facing health are many. Accomplishing our goals will take the diverse skills and resources of our entire community—residents, businesses, organizations, and government offices—working collectively to make positive changes.

The good news is that our community possesses the resources to make a positive impact. I'm excited because I know those who work, live, and play in Polk County have the ability to

- move toward a more healthful place to live.
- share the responsibility and collaboration.
- accomplish creative solutions to complex issues.

The next 10 years will be exciting and challenging times, and our efforts will make a difference in all of our lives.



**Chris McCarthy**

Chair, Healthy Polk 2020  
Project Manager, The Center for Healthy Communities,  
Iowa Health-Des Moines

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Join the movement.  
Visit [www.healthypolk.org](http://www.healthypolk.org)



DART image: Courtesy of the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority. VEER images, this page (doctor), and page 9.

**HEALTHY POLK 2020**

**MISSION**

To improve the overall health and well being of everyone in Polk County.

# LOOKING TOWARD A HEALTHY FUTURE

Healthy Polk is a movement of individuals, businesses, and community organizations focused on improving the quality of life and health status of people in the community.

**T**HE RESULTS ARE IN. Thousands of people in Polk County shared their vision of priorities that will improve the health and well being of Polk County's diverse population. Those priorities—chosen for their emphasis on leading the community in a more healthful direction—are the focus of the Healthy Polk 2020 plan.

"All of us tend to think about health as a personal issue," says Rick Kozin, Program Manager for Health Planning and Education, Polk County Health Department. "For instance, we think: I'm sick. I need to see a doctor. Or: What will I do without health insurance? Or: I should eat more fruits and vegetables."

## A Community in Action

Health also is an important community issue. "What do we do as a community to allow people to live healthy lives?" Kozin says. "Do we make it easier for people to get health insurance? Do we create the kind of environment that allows people to take a walk after dinner?"

"Building community health is not easy," says Angela Connolly, Chair, Polk County Board of Supervisors. "It involves making hard choices and allocating, or re-allocating, resources. It means engaging the community. Since 1992 our community, through Healthy Polk, has been willing to get engaged."

For Healthy Polk 2020, more than 2,000 people provided input during community conversations,

phone and online surveys, and a community caucus. Representatives of private, public, and non-profit organizations were involved. As a result, 200 potential priorities were identified that were eventually narrowed down to a list of 10 priorities.

## Moving Forward

"The setting of priorities for Healthy Polk 2020 was a demonstration that each one of us who lives, works, and plays in Polk County can have a voice in defining what a healthy community looks like and influence the actions that make the process successful," says Terri Henkels, director of the Polk County Health Department.

"Healthy Polk 2020 sets a direction that collectively focuses our resources on what we, as a community, say is most important to us. Working together on the same priorities will bear out great results and it will ensure that we create a healthier community."

Because of that collaborative effort, Healthy Polk 2020 took the form of a movement, rather than an organization. Movements have less structure, are less formal, more inclusive, and are built around common goals. Movements also share a common vision.

The strength of the process is tied to the inclusive collaboration with everyone—from neighbors in Sherman Hill to families in Des Moines suburbs. It involves business leaders and professionals from area medical centers as well as residents who are unable to afford health care.

"We know that communities grow and thrive when they are strong in economic capital, political capital, and social capital," says Martha Willits, president and CEO of Greater Des Moines Partnership. "Our community has always worked to bring balance to its strength, and we know that a major component of social capital is a healthy community. People work more effectively when they are healthy; children learn in more constructive ways when they are healthy; thus, our community is stronger when all are healthy."

"The business community as represented by the Partnership is committed to growing the economy of this region," Willits says. "We know that economic growth takes strong businesses with a dependable and skilled workforce. Community health is an important factor in ensuring that we have a good workforce and thriving businesses."

## Heading for Health

Many area organizations have stepped forward to sponsor Healthy Polk 2020. Broadlawns Medical Center, Des Moines Area Religious Council, Grandview University, Iowa Health-Des Moines, Mercy Medical Center, Southeast Polk School District, United Way of Central Iowa, and the YMCA of Greater Des Moines are some of the sponsoring organizations. (For a complete list of organizations, see page 11.) All of these organizations have worked to develop the health priorities that will ultimately guide community investments and the use of community resources among program providers.

Those 10 priorities (see page 7) are the foundation for Healthy Polk 2020.

"Through Healthy Polk 2000, Healthy Polk 2010, and again with Healthy Polk 2020, our community group has been willing to make the choices necessary to choose priorities," says Kozin. "As a result, our community is healthier now than we were in 2000 and we will be healthier in 2020 than we are today."



## GET INVOLVED

All those interested in improving their health or that of their family or community members are part of the Healthy Polk 2020 movement, according to Rick Kozin, Program Manager for Health Planning and Education, Polk County Health Department. "As long as you commit to make an impact on the well being of someone in the community, you are a member of Healthy Polk."

Healthy Polk 2020 provides the framework to address the priorities important to the health of this community. **Get involved. Get connected. Get healthy.**

Get involved at  
[www.healthypolk.org](http://www.healthypolk.org)

"We spent a year designing the planning process to ensure it would be community-owned and we could build on our assets."

—CHRIS McCARTHY, Chairman, Healthy Polk 2020

"Health is a complex issue. Efforts to educate and assist people in achieving good health pay off in dividends to community well being."

—MARTHA WILLITS, President/CEO, Greater Des Moines Partnership

# A COMMUNITY AGENDA

10 priorities were chosen that will help everyone in Polk County achieve better health, longevity, and quality of life.

**W** “WE STRONGLY BELIEVE that a community-owned agenda is the only real way to create a change in the health status of our community,” says Terri Henkels, director of Polk County Health Department. “Despite the statistics, if the people who live and work here do not believe that something like lack of physical activity is a problem, then we can’t expect them to change their behavior.”

That’s why Healthy Polk 2020 is centered around community involvement. The process began with 54 community conversations during which 750 people voiced their opinion about what a healthy Polk County might look like. In addition, 1,200 people completed an online survey and 399 people were interviewed over the phone.

From those conversations, a list of more than 900 priorities was developed. The Healthy Polk 2020 Data Team narrowed that list down to 190 measurable priorities. The 274 individuals who registered for the Community Caucus voted the list down to 27. Then, in early 2009, a traditional Iowa caucus took place during which participants chose the final list of 10 priorities. (See page 7.)

Those priorities represent the most important conditions to be addressed. “In Polk County, the Health Department has a long history of mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems and develop policies and plans that support individuals and community health efforts,” says Henkels. “Throughout the years, we have and will continue to provide maximum leadership and support to this initiative.”

### Steps Toward Change

Five strategic steps have been identified to improve the community’s ability to address these priorities.

- Develop a community health profile
- Access current technology to manage, display, analyze and communicate population health data
- Review community partnerships and strategic alliances
- Identify personal health services needs of populations
- Recruit and retain new and diverse leaders

These steps, combined with the 10 priorities will ensure the success of Healthy Polk 2020.

## HEALTHY POLK 2020 PRIORITIES

Each of the 10 priorities (at right) falls within one of the four categories known to influence health status: Supportive Environment, Access to Health Care, Lifestyles and Behavior, and Socioeconomic Factors.

- Supportive Environment: Priorities 1-3
- Access to Health Care: Priorities 4-7
- Lifestyles and Behavior: Priority 8
- Socioeconomic Factors: Priorities 9, 10

Devote additional resources to prevention and wellness.

1

Provide youth with more ways to be physically active every day in school so they learn to become active adults.

2

Increase the availability of accessible, affordable public transportation.

3

Make sure that all people living in Polk County have health care insurance coverage.

4

Expand health coverage and services for families who can’t afford private insurance but don’t qualify for public programs.

5

Encourage more medical providers to focus on prevention, education, and wellness.

7

Ensure equal access to health care for all.

6

Empower more people to take responsibility for maintaining their health.

8

Advocate for affordable, quality, and safe housing.

9

Ensure access to affordable, healthy food for everyone.

10

“I think all of us at some point in our lives have been affected by the lack of these services.”

—CARLOS ALARCON, M.D., Medical Director, Polk County Health Department

# BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Town hall meetings will continue to play an important role in providing a community forum.

**H** **HEALTHY POLK IS A CATALYST** for change. It serves as a driving force—a movement—behind efforts to pool resources that assess health and lifestyle needs and that create a healthier community.

Tremendous progress has been made since the local plan began with the launch of Healthy Polk 2000—when such issues as alcohol, drugs, environmental health, family planning and maternal infant health, food safety, and mental health were tackled. Those inaugural efforts resulted in life-enhancing successes in Polk County. Positive changes continued to be made with Healthy Polk 2010.

During the Healthy Polk 2010 planning process, a number of “Trend Benders” were identified as areas that would impact health and quality of life in Polk County. The community came together to address those issues. Several of the “Trend Benders” led to successful

implementation of projects that made a difference in improving lives in Polk County.

## 1. Focus on Weight Issues

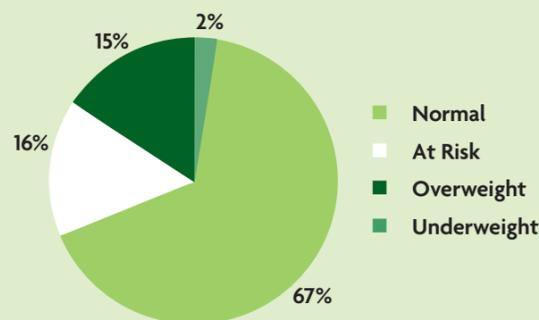
Healthy Polk, in the 2010 plan, determined there was a need for a study of childhood overweight in the county. The Polk County Board of Supervisors stepped up to provide funding to Healthy Polk for making the community healthier. One of the projects that was funded was the Body Mass Index Project to establish statistical evidence on weight issues among children (see charts, below).

“There was no official data until many cooperating groups set up a school-based system to find the baseline answer,” says Susan B. Klein, Nutrition/Health Field Specialist for Iowa State University Extension. Results of that research produced detailed information which is used to find the best way to address obesity issues. The full report can be found at <http://www.healthypolk.org/PDFs/BMIBaselineStudy.pdf>

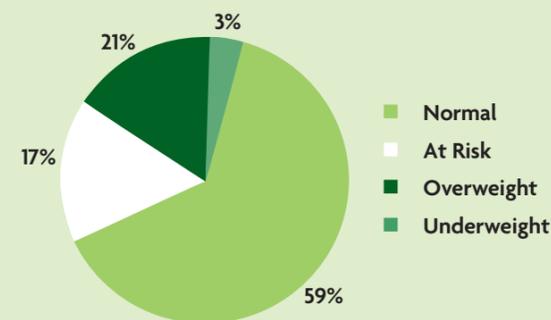
### OBESITY AMONG POLK COUNTY STUDENTS

Body Mass Index (BMI) data was collected from four Polk County school districts in 2008. The results: 15% of first-grade students and 21% of fifth graders were classified as *overweight*; 16% of 1st graders and 17% of 5th graders were *at risk for overweight*.

FIRST GRADE BMI CLASSIFICATION



FIFTH GRADE BMI CLASSIFICATION



Source: Body Mass Index Baseline Study, Polk County, Iowa

## 2. Checkup on Lead Poisoning

Healthy Polk, in the 2010 plan, identified “lead poisoning” as an important community issue. The Polk County Lead Poisoning Prevention Coalition coordinated community outreach efforts that resulted in an increase in the number of annual blood lead level tests from less than 4,000 to nearly 20,000. The Polk County Board of Supervisors has committed more than \$1 million to fixing homes with lead hazards.

## 3. Make the Most of Meetings

Twice a year, Healthy Polk convenes town hall meetings to draw attention to particular issues. One of the issues centered around a concern that too few dentists saw children at a very early age. In 2007 Healthy Polk hosted a town hall meeting on oral health for children. Visiting Nurse Services initiated a campaign to increase the number of dentists willing to see children at an early age. Thirty-nine of the 49 dentists who responded to a survey indicated they would change their practice by providing dental care services at an earlier age.

## 4. Increase Coverage for Kids

Healthy Polk, in the 2010 plan, identified “increased enrollment in Hawk-I” as an indicator for success. The Healthcare Coverage for Kids Coalition was organized and provided community leadership to expand enrollment of eligible children from 21 percent to more than 97 percent.

## 5. Development of Health Access Partnership

Healthy Polk, in the 2010 plan, identified access to quality health services as one of the Trend Benders. Health Access Partnership was organized as a collaborative effort to address the barriers to health access. As a result, the following initiatives were kicked off with the help of HAP:

- Community Access Pharmacy, a non-profit pharmacy
- specialty referral system for donated care for uninsured persons
- expanded access to obstetrical care for uninsured women

The need is still great, however. “Healthy Polk 2020 demonstrated that access to health care continues to be a pressing issue in our community,” says Laura Sands, Executive Director of the Health Access Partnership. “We expect that many of the people who participated in Healthy Polk 2010 will remain involved in finding solutions to the health care gap.”



“The setting of priorities for Healthy Polk 2020 demonstrates that each one of us who lives, works, and plays in Polk County can have a voice and a role in defining what a healthy community looks like.”

—TERRI HENKELS, Director, Polk County Health Department

Join the movement.  
Visit [www.healthypolk.org](http://www.healthypolk.org)

# HEALTHY POLK 2020: MOVING FORWARD

**Collaboration—with individuals and organizations in the community—is vital to the success of the plan.**

**M**ANY WILL BENEFIT FROM Healthy Polk 2020, believes Carlos Alarcon, M.D., Medical Director, Polk County Health Department. The monumental

plan engages the community to identify health-needs and set targets to measure progress.

“We will work together on devoting resources to promote wellness, increase public transportation, help families who can’t afford private insurance but don’t qualify for public programs for uninsured children, assure affordable and safe housing, access healthy food and educate the public to be responsible for their own health and wellness,” Alarcon says.

### The Need is Great

Healthy Polk 2020 priorities demonstrate that access to health care is still a pressing issue in our community, acknowledges Laura Sands, Executive Director, Health Access Partnership.

Focus group and surveys conducted with people in Polk who are uninsured and underinsured reveal that lack of money, lack of transportation, and costs of prescription drugs are the top three barriers to healthcare services. People surveyed said that unpaid debt and medical bills keep them from getting the health care they need because they postpone seeking health care; don’t fill prescriptions, or take less than the prescribed amount of medication; or are afraid or embarrassed to go to a doctor.

Even those who have health insurance report that preventive services, such as childhood immunizations, routine check-ups, and prenatal care visits, are not covered.

### Working Together

The city of Des Moines is going beyond the focus of affordable housing by making efforts to build

homes that use green building techniques,” says Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie.

“This feeds into the efforts of Healthy Polk,” says Cownie. “As we think about our communities in the future, we realize how important healthy lifestyles are.”

Those lifestyles include living in homes that are not only safe and affordable but also more healthy, sustainable, and efficient, and less costly. “We need to think about new ways of life and how to build cities where we work together to have a healthy sustainable future for our kids,” he says. “Through working together with the city of Des Moines, Polk County, and the State of Iowa—the public and private sector and the residents—we will achieve success.”

### Beyond Physical Education

Southeast Polk Community School District is an active partner with Healthy Polk and has partnered with Polk County on a number of initiatives, according to Thomas J. Downs, Superintendent of Schools.

“We are glad to have some of our suggestions in Healthy Polk 2020. It is vital for schools to be an integral part of the planning and implementation of this important work,” Downs says.

“With a staff of 1,000 and an enrollment of nearly 6,000 students, we recognize the value of keeping our staff and students and their families healthy, both mentally and physically. Health and wellness are at the forefront of everyone’s consciousness. We understand that proper nutrition and physical activity help optimize academic and physical performances and contribute to improved attendance.

“We all have a vested interest in supporting Healthy 2020, as we envision that ideal community where all people are healthy and live to their fullest potential.”

## HEALTHY POLK 2020 SPONSORS

AIDS Project of Central Iowa  
Broadlawns Medical Center

Central Iowa Dental Hygienists’  
Association

Community Health Charities - Iowa

Des Moines Area Religious Council

Des Moines University

Elite Spinal Rehab

Grand View University

Iowa Acupuncture Clinic

Iowa Chronic Care Consortium

Iowa Health - Des Moines

Iowa Medical Society

Iowa Nurses Association

Iowa Nurses Foundation

Iowa Osteopathic Medical  
Association

Iowa State University Extension -  
Polk County

Johnston Partnership for a  
Healthy Community

MECCA

Mercy Medical Center

Mid-Iowa Health Foundation

Primary Health Care, Inc.

Polk County Board of Health  
Advisory Committee

Polk County Board of Supervisors

Polk County Medical Society

Southeast Polk School District

The Iowa Initiative

United Way of Central Iowa

Visiting Nurse Services

Wellness Council of Iowa

YMCA of Greater Des Moines

## PICK THREE PRIORITIES

Join the movement.  
Choose three priorities and  
share your strengths.

1

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2

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3

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Stay informed about Healthy Polk 2020. Go to [www.healthypolk.org](http://www.healthypolk.org)



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