



2003-2008

“Heart Healthy Waukesha County is a coalition of organizations, community groups and individuals committed to supporting and initiating health improvement activities that address the ‘big three’ lifestyle behaviors that impact cardiovascular health: tobacco use, exercise and nutrition.”

—Heart Healthy Waukesha County Website, 2008

State of the project, February 2008

In December 2007, Heart Healthy Waukesha County (HHWC) and the Wellness Council of Wisconsin reached an agreement under which the Wellness Council gradually will assume administration of the Learning Circle on Workplace Wellness and the related workshops that, together, comprised the HHWC worksite initiative. The Wellness Council currently is in the process of taking over leadership of these programs and, in cooperation with the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Program (WI PAN), will use them as a template for expansion beyond Waukesha County to the state of Wisconsin.

Mission and method

Beginning in 2003, the overarching mission of Heart Healthy Waukesha County has been to improve the cardiovascular health of people in Waukesha County. To do so, HHWC chose to focus on strengthening the leadership skills of the people responsible for leading health improvement activities in their communities and their workplaces. Both the HHWC Collaborative and the HHWC Learning Circle provided training in how to use quality improvement methods and systems thinking to successfully implement evidence-based wellness strategies. HHWC programs emphasize four critical competencies — health promotion, quality improvement tools, team leadership, and systems thinking — and seven system components that comprise the HHWC [Vision of a Healthy Community](#).

Community Collaborative

From September 2003 – June 2004, HHWC conducted a pilot collaborative that provided leadership training to nine community action teams representing more than 20 county organizations. Each team completed a yearlong health improvement project. Together, the teams affected the daily health decisions of more than 7,000 people by changing menus, distributing health information, conducting health assessments, and developing and/or conducting employee fitness programs and smoking cessation programs. Their work was featured in a July 2004 article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and in the “2003-04 Report to Supporters” and “Pilot Collaborative Video” posted at www.healthywaukesha.com.

Redesign

In 2005 HHWC attempted to replicate the pilot collaborative, this time focusing specifically on workplace wellness. However, not enough teams signed up to make the effort worthwhile, and the planned collaborative was cancelled. The major stumbling block was the extensive time commitment required of collaborative action teams. In response, HHWC leaders redesigned the collaborative to make it more user-friendly. They eliminated the required team membership in favor of individual membership. They eliminated monthly team reports in favor of periodic presentations and the sharing of information via an electronic discussion group. They also dropped the name “breakthrough collaborative” in favor of the more inviting “learning circle.”

Learning Circle

The resulting HHWC Learning Circle (2006-2008) is less prescriptive and more democratic than the collaborative. Members have a bigger voice in shaping the agenda. The agenda is also shaped by an Advisory Council of wellness experts from Aurora Health Care, Community Memorial Hospital, Healthiest Wisconsin Leadership Institute, ProHealth Care, Wellness Council and Wheaton-Franciscan Healthcare. The program, however, retains the collaborative's characteristic emphasis on data, team leadership and systemic approaches (e.g., policy change and environmental interventions).

In 2006-07, the first HHWC Learning Circle cohort drew 22 members from 20 organizations. Their organizations ranged in size from nine employees to more than 5100 employees. In total they represented approximately 17,000 employees. More than half of the original cohort rejoined at the end of the first cycle in the fall of 2007. Post-tests at the time revealed significant increases in their knowledge and skills relative to leading a wellness initiative. The most dramatic improvements were in the areas of:

- assessing priorities and deciding where to focus resources
- locating and using data to understand target populations and develop programming
- identifying starting points and developing action plans
- leading effective wellness teams.

Enrollment for the 2008 slate of programs is ongoing. The [2008 schedule](#) includes four quarterly Learning Circle meetings and a series of foundational workshops focused on the critical leadership competencies identified by members of the original Learning Circle as vital to successful wellness programs.

Outlook

On several counts, the programs HHWC developed are a natural fit with the mission and services of the Wellness Council. As a coalition of subject matter experts, HHWC's strength has been its capacity as a process expert and content provider. If that capacity can be coupled successfully with the Wellness Council's ties to the business community and its statewide presence, it will be a win-win partnership for state employers as well as for all Wisconsin residents. The Wellness Council plans to complete the current slate of HHWC programs as scheduled for 2008 and foresees the addition of two learning circles elsewhere in the state in 2009. In addition, WI PAN is "setting the table" for future expansion of the learning circle with a series of regional workshops in 2008 that include an introduction on how to set up a learning circle for wellness coordinators. The introduction will spotlight the HHWC Learning Circle and feature processes and tools developed by Heart Healthy Waukesha County.

Collaborative Coalition

From 2003-2008, Heart Healthy Waukesha County worked with more than 70 organizations, primarily in southeast Wisconsin, and received financial, in-kind and volunteer support from more than 50. HHWC has been funded by the generous contributions from the following supporters:

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