

PATH TO WELL-BEING

Healthy Community Designation Available

By Charlee Beasor

Sometimes a simple inventory is all that's needed to understand the scope of one's efforts.

It sounds easy. But when considering all that a city or county offers its citizens in terms of health, environment, community and economy, that makes the process a little more complex – and a lot more important.

That's where a coalition in one southern Indiana county is currently focusing its energies: analyzing what it offers to citizens, getting the necessary players in place for a full view of strengths and weaknesses, and drilling down to find out what else the community can do to improve the health and well-being of its residents.

Nancy Wilson, who is helping lead the charge for Dubois County to attain the Indiana Healthy Community designation from the Wellness Council of Indiana (WCI), says that first step shows the community how much it already has to offer.

"Until you put all of this down on paper, you don't realize what you're doing as a community. We do it because it's the right thing to do. Now we're putting that pen to paper and writing down the things that we are doing that are good. We're realizing we do a lot of good things!" Wilson exclaims.

The Indiana Healthy Community process is driven by community leaders and supported by the WCI, a program managed by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.

What does it take for a community to start on the designation process? A phone call to Indiana Healthy Communities Program Coordinator Madie Newman and getting stakeholders together.

Newman came on board in May 2018 as the first Indiana Healthy Communities program coordinator ([see online Q&A for her perspective: www.bizvoicemagazine.com/madienewman](http://www.bizvoicemagazine.com/madienewman)).

Once initial interest is expressed, Newman gives communities preliminary data



A coalition from Muncie-Delaware County is the first to go through the Indiana Healthy Community re-designation process. Attaining the recognition is part of a quality of life goal for the local economic development alliance's long-term plan.

and an information packet outlining a six-step process. The designation procedure includes convening partners, gathering data, submitting assessments and developing an action plan.

Key stakeholders must include local employers. Each designation requires a certain number of employers be AchieveWELL-designated companies. AchieveWELL is a certification of workplace wellness from the WCI and offers three levels of participation: three-star, four-star and five-star rankings.

"Having Madie on board has allowed us to change from being reactive to being more proactive," offers WCI Executive Director Jennifer Pferrer. "We can target communities that are impacted by poor health metrics. We can move to a proactive state to help guide the conversation. We can say, 'Here's the process,' hold people accountable and get the groups convened."

In the pipeline

Ten communities, in various stages, are actively pursuing the Indiana Healthy Community designation. Dubois County is leading the way.

"Who wouldn't want to come work in a healthy community? Who wouldn't want to bring in a new business to a healthy community? It makes so much sense all the

way around," Wilson asserts.

The Muncie-Delaware County coalition, on the other hand, will be the first to go through the re-designation process. It was one of the first communities to attain the designation, in 2016. Communities retain the label for two calendar years.

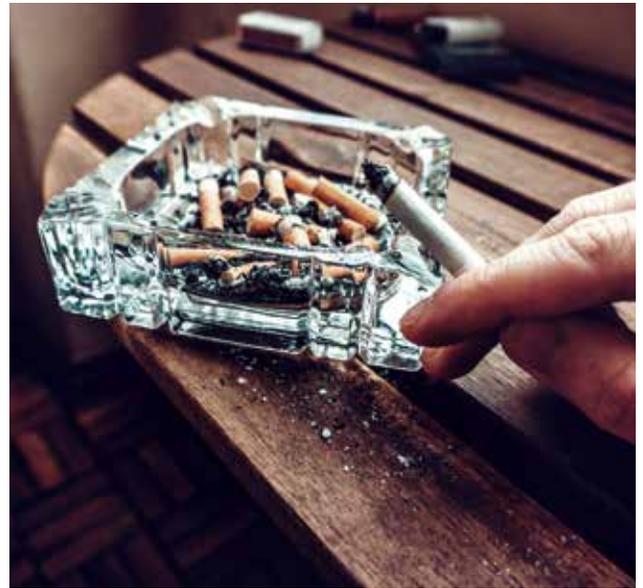
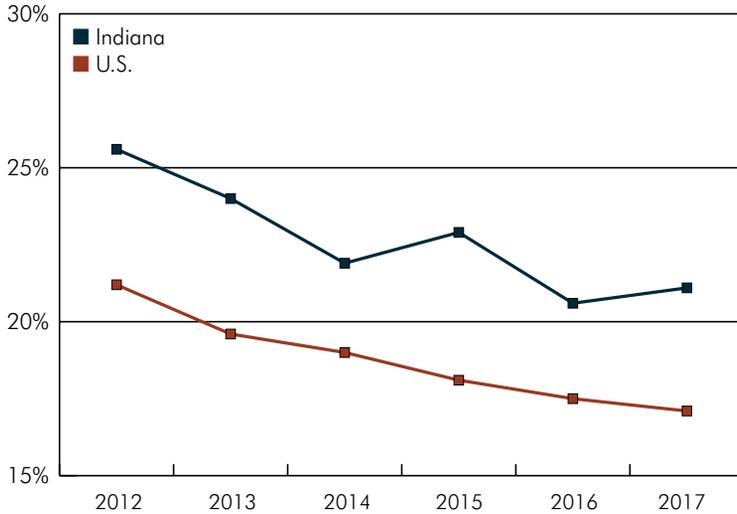
Nathan Taylor, wellness coordinator for the Youth Opportunity Center in Muncie, has been part of the initiative since the beginning. Now, Taylor and others are working to convene more people and employers.

"We started the process from a workplace wellness standpoint and seeing workplaces as a driving point for community health and well-being. We had 15 employers that received the (AchieveWELL) designation and it was really our emphasis and our starting point," Taylor offers.

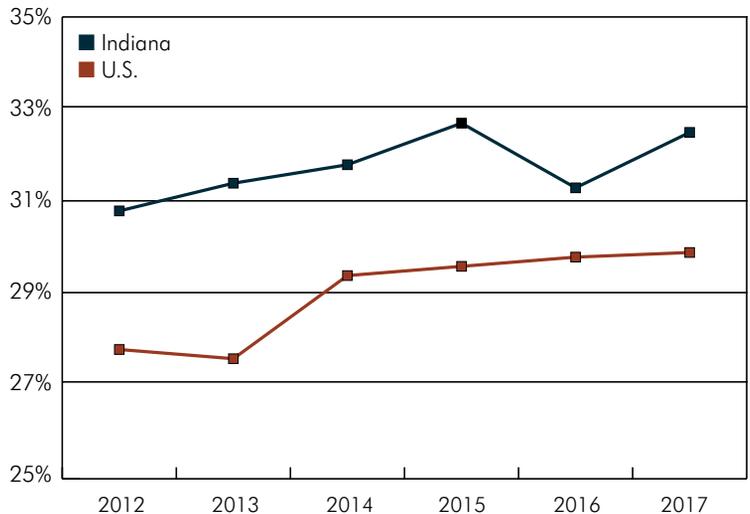
"As far as the broader community, we're bringing more people to the table to make sure that conversation isn't siloed into workplace wellness."

Taylor notes the initial designation has made a tangible impact on economic development planning efforts. Being in an Indiana Healthy Community is one of the objectives within a quality of life goal for the local economic development alliance's Vision 2021 plan.

Smoking (percent of adults who smoke)



Obesity (percent of adults with a body mass index of 30.0 or higher)



Source: United Health Foundation, America's Health Rankings

"We saw the business community and economic development folks see the value of that and buy into that. It's not just the 'It's a nice designation to get;' it's an understanding that it impacts the community in more ways than one," Taylor declares.

Process and progress

Before communities dig into the Indiana Healthy Community designation, there are pre-assessment questions to consider and data to gather.

Wilson acknowledges the first steps were daunting.

"It was overwhelming at first until you just sit down and take it question by question.

We had such a fantastic group that worked on this," she recalls, mentioning an idiom that explains the slow, but steady process. "How do you eat an elephant? A bite at a time."

Now that the county's group has submitted its assessment for analysis, the WCI will review the documentation and release back to the community a summary of findings and a scorecard.

"I am looking forward to getting the analysis back from the Wellness Council," Wilson offers. "There is always room for improvement and these are things we need to put in place. And we can put those in place. We've got something in a document saying this is what we need to do and let's find a

way to do it."

Once the Wellness Council and the community meet and begin a Healthy Community Action Plan, the community group has two months to develop the action plan for final approval. The community then achieves the designation.

"I think it's a no-brainer. It's challenging. It's not easy and if it were easy, everybody would do it. You have to put yourself out there and give yourself that challenge; it's not just your county that can be healthier, but if we all work together Indiana is going to be healthier. Ultimately, that's what we want," Wilson declares.

Joint efforts

Some topics, such as the ongoing opioid crisis, reach beyond one program. The Indiana Healthy Community initiative and Indiana Workforce Recovery – a joint effort by the WCI, the Indiana Chamber, the Indiana Chamber Foundation and Gov. Eric Holcomb’s administration to combat the opioid crisis – are intertwined.

(Read more about Indiana Workforce Recovery on Page 58.)

“I was at the Conference of Mayors and the mayor of Huntingburg spoke about opioids and is interested in the Indiana Healthy Community initiative because of that issue,” Pferrer shares. “They’re beginning to connect the two (substance use disorder and community health and environment).”

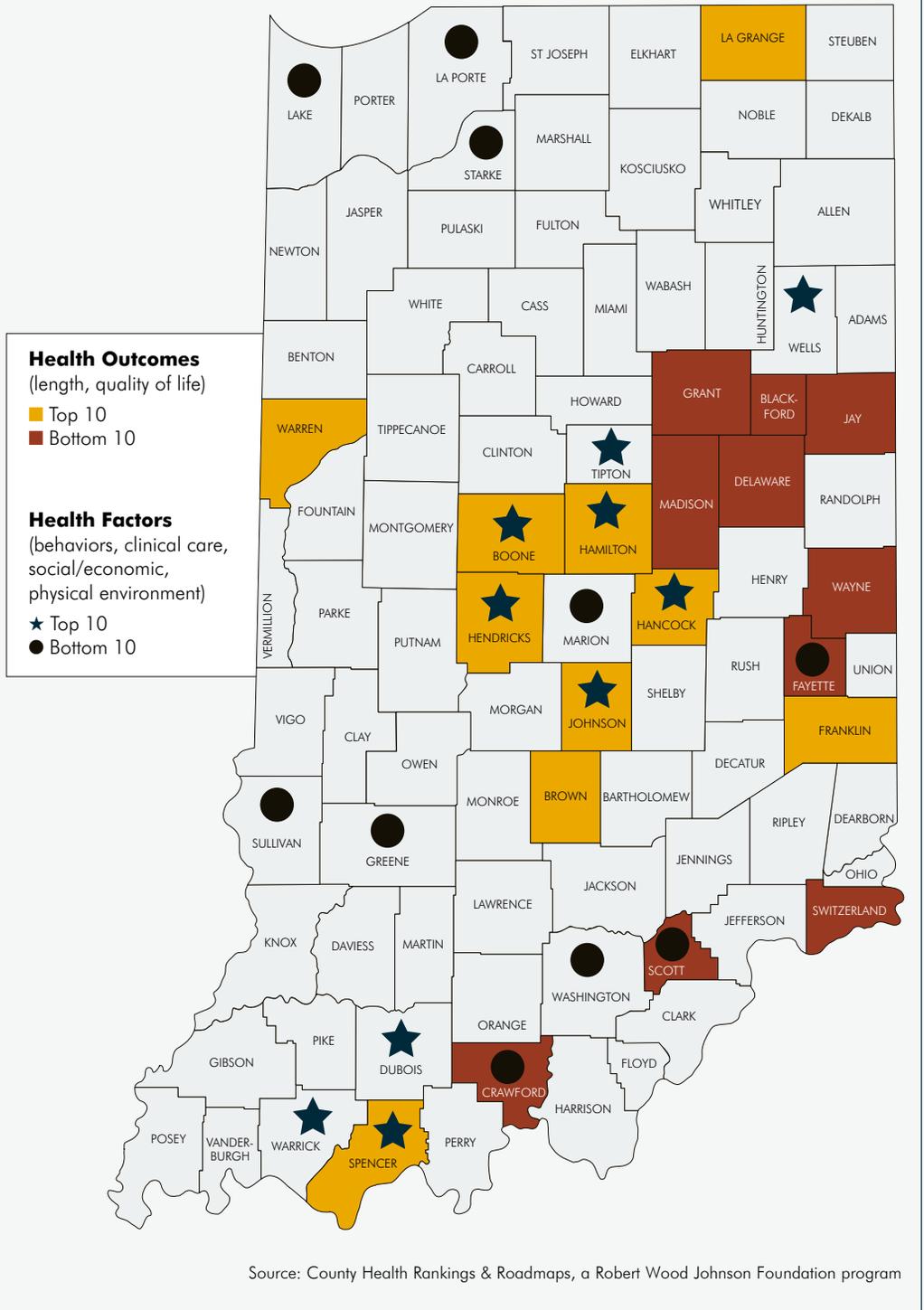
Newman adds, “We now have mental health and substance abuse in a new section of the Indiana Healthy Community initiative because of Indiana Workforce Recovery.”

Pferrer also recalls the Indiana Chamber’s board of directors meeting earlier this year and how opioids and other substance abuse issues are hampering Indiana’s business growth.

“What was evident at the Chamber’s spring board meeting is that health is a key driver for workforce. It’s not just about physical health. The four domains included in the healthy community designation process (health, environment, community and economy) are driving conversations.

“Indiana’s state of health continues to evolve, and we need to evolve with it. We can replicate this, scale this and ensure a consistent approach,” Pferrer maintains.

Healthy Locations: County Comparisons



RESOURCES: Madie Newman and Jennifer Pferrer, Wellness Council of Indiana, at www.wellnessindiana.org | Nancy Wilson, Cairnstone Benefits Group, at cairnstonefinancial.com | Nathan Taylor, Delaware County Wellness Professionals, at www.facebook.com/DCWellnessPross