

HEALTHIER ENDEAVORS

Entities Focus on Improving Hoosier Lives

By Matt Ottinger

Pick a health metric, and there's a hefty chance Indiana's national ranking is far from impressive.

There are legislative efforts, such as raising the state's smoking tax from \$1 to \$3 on July 1, that intend to impact results. But it's a situation that will have markedly unhealthy results on the state's workforce prospects if not corrected.

A new strategy in economic development in recent years centers on regional partnerships. It's been determined, broadly, that when entities work together – outcomes improve. One could argue that same strategy has been applied to improving health outcomes in Indiana. Namely, health providers, municipalities and employers are now partnering for the betterment of Hoosiers.

Healthy communities

One example of such efforts is the Indiana Healthy Communities (IHC) initiative. Launched by the Wellness Council of Indiana, a subsidiary of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, IHC is

an evidence-based collaboration process designed to help communities focus on implementing and sustaining a culture of well-being to spur economic vitality.

The program takes a workforce development and economic improvement approach by focusing heavily on employer participation within the communities served.

One enthusiastic participant in the program is Noblesville-based Riverview Health. Riverview Health is an independent, community-based health system composed of a full-service, 156-bed hospital in Noblesville as well as a hospital in Westfield, ER/urgent care facilities and specialty care facilities across Hamilton County.

Dustin Mikesell, Riverview Health's associate vice president of employer partnerships, calls the IHC process "an insightful and impactful experience."

"We have been intentional about the process, engaging first with program domain leads and other key stakeholders that provide a county-wide reach," he shares, noting Hamilton County is one of Indiana's largest and burgeoning counties (it ranks fourth in population).

"These contacts will continue to serve as steering members of sub-domain groups, comprised of a cross-industry consortium of community and employer partners, with communication flow to support collaboration

between domains."

Although Hamilton County consistently ranks as the healthiest county in Indiana, Mikesell relays that local non-profit leaders and public servants still hear about ongoing needs.

"While there are many efforts happening at local levels, we knew this program was needed to provide our community with a special opportunity to work collaboratively as we codify our incredible efforts in a county-wide approach," Mikesell says.

Lisa Day, health and wellness program manager at Jasper-based omnichannel commercial furnishings company Kimball International, concurs on the importance of IHC initiatives. She notes she's not only involved in Dubois County's efforts, but with those in Spencer County and IHC initiatives that are just beginning in Perry County.

"It brings together all those people doing all those good things in that area, and collectively in Spencer County as an example, (we've) been able to create a great health coalition that didn't exist until (IHC) came about . . .," she relays. "Then everybody's collaborating and working together or spreading the word; that is really that sense of community truly coming out."

Engaged employers

Warsaw-based Bowen Health started as a community mental health center in 1961. Now it has locations and programs in more than two dozen northern Indiana counties and video online services offered throughout the state.

Dr. Rob Ryan, it's president and CEO, recently spoke on a panel at the Indiana Chamber's Healthcare Transformation Summit in June about improving health outcomes. He points to a new initiative, Health First Indiana, as exemplifying collaboration between hospitals, the state and employers to combat health challenges.

"Health First Indiana challenged all of the health systems to sign a collaborative agreement that we would make the three main focuses of Indiana health to be obesity, tobacco use and infant mortality. That type of bold leadership is the only way we'd improve these rankings."

Ryan points to tobacco cessation, noting statistics suggest a quarter of Bowen's patients are tobacco users. To begin combating challenges, he advises employers, "Go review



Riverview Health has built a major footprint in Hamilton County and is engaged with residents via the Indiana Healthy Communities program in an effort to keep Hamilton County among the healthiest counties in the nation.

your county data ... learn what you're facing. Reach out to your county health department; they are the keepers of information, handouts and (partnership information)."

On the employer side, Kimball International also is a leader in this area. The company opened its own employer-sponsored health center in 2019, which is open 40 hours per week. Day shares that the company has since expanded to also include sites at four of the company's manufacturing locations, and it includes nurse practitioners, medical assistants, physical and occupational therapy, a health coach, licensed social worker and registered dietitian.

Day asserts that making such investments lends itself to building trust with staff.

"That rapport and that trust has been developed, so a lot of times when we're bringing any major investments in health and wellness, we will leverage our health center solution because that trust and those relationships are there," she relays. "It's part of the culture."

Ryan agrees on the importance, stating, "As leaders, you need to convince people that you're collaborating with them for better health for themselves and their families and that you're in this together. Your success in your health is a contributing factor to cost, but I'm not trying to do it simply for that. You are a happier employee and more productive if you're healthy."

Fort Wayne-based 3Rivers Federal Credit Union, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, also has a free, shared medical clinic.

"We partnered with Parkview Employer Clinics, and so they offer free doctor's visits," shares Carolyn Lane, 3Rivers' director of total rewards. "Some labs are free of charge, some medications are free of charge. They have a free dietitian, body scans – all sorts of things."

Certain 3Rivers employees also qualify for glucose monitors.

"It's a program whereby monitoring, it helps them understand what they can and can't eat and how that food affects their bodies and helps them hopefully make better choices," Lane explains. "Behavior modification tends to be the best way to change behaviors, so we're finding a lot of success with that program."

3Rivers also offers a full wellness program from Complete Wellness Solutions.

"It provides education quarterly challenges, they do biannual screenings and then we fund (Health Savings Accounts) by hitting points for the year," Lane notes. "We have an onsite fitness center here at our Northland location in Fort Wayne, but then we also have partnerships with the YWCA or the YMCA, excuse for discounted rates – and we actually even do payroll deductions for the fees."

Emerging funders

Day is also on the board of directors for the newly created Being for Others Health and Wellness Foundation. Established through a \$20 million endowment made possible by the affiliation between Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center and Deaconess Health System, the group recently donated \$25,000 to WCI to help with its IHC initiative.

Overall, the group's inaugural grant cycle just awarded more than \$172,000 to 11 organizations whose work will directly benefit communities across all eight counties in the foundation's service area: Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Martin, Orange, Perry, Pike and Spencer.

"It really brings to light where a lot of needs are in that community where we can serve," Day says of the new organization. "We want to be able to serve all these counties in different ways and really be able to create some impact and tell some great stories."

Lane adds that challenges can arise for employers, like credit unions, that have multiple locations, noting some locations may have only five or six staffers.

"Way back in the day, we used to have the philosophy that if not everybody can do it, then we're not going to do it," she reflects. "Well, I



Fort Wayne-based 3Rivers Federal Credit Union consistently strives to support its staff via wellness and volunteer opportunities of many kinds. Jasper's Kimball International also takes a direct approach to supporting its team with its own health centers to keep workers healthy.



have almost 200 people in Fort Wayne or close enough, so there are going to be programs that we're going to be able to do here that we can't do someplace else, and it's not fair to those team members not to do them."

Bigger picture

Day attests that improving the health and wellness of staff is critical but can be difficult for profit-oriented institutions to evaluate, conceding it's "not an easy ROI."

"It's usually a VOI – value on investment," she clarifies. "It is that investment in your employees. You can put some dollars obviously behind absenteeism and presenteeism – there's all kinds of calculators and theories around all of those things."

"But I think one of the largest challenges is truly putting a dollar savings on what you're doing from health and wellness – and that's evolved," Day adds. "It's getting better. We do have metrics through our health center solution where we do have some ROI numbers, which is nice. Typically rotates a little bit around a lot of our

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healthcare and our claims costs and that sort of thing.”

Initial returns will be hard to quantify. Ryan asserts that may not be the point.

“Today’s workforce is often younger and stays with us (a less amount of time),” he says. “When you’re trying to implement a wellness program that’s costly and your payoff is 20 years from now and your average length of stay is two-and-a-half years, you’re saying, ‘I’m paying all this money so some other employer can benefit from this investment.’”

However, he points to employers like Chick-fil-A and Disney that excel at teaching customer service to younger workers, knowing they likely won’t be there for years – a sentiment that can apply to investing in health.

“There’s a moral aspect to improving society, but the other aspect is that (former employees) talk to other people about Chick-fil-A in their 30s ... so you may not get a payoff immediately regarding obesity, but they will remember the investment you made in them,” Ryan posits. “Your future CEO may say, ‘(that company) really cared about me and I took from them how to treat myself well and put my needs first, and it would be a good place to work.’”

As far as actual returns, it’s not completely nebulous. Lane offers hope – pointing to 3Rivers’ Signos weight loss program implemented last fall as the “most eye-opening” and signifying a point of optimism for employers.

“As of the nine-month check, 48 participants have lost 562 pounds, and 17% of them had shifted to a lower (body mass index),” Lane concludes. “When you look at that from an overall health perspective, that’s mind blowing.”

RESOURCES: Lisa Day, Kimball International, at www.kimballinternational.com | Carolyn Lane, 3Rivers Federal Credit Union, at www.3riversfcu.org | Dustin Mikesell, Riverview Health, at www.riverview.org | Rob Ryan, Bowen Health, at www.bowenhealth.org