



# SHIP is Making Healthier Minnesota Communities

By Kari Oldfield, LPHA Director

In the most recent biennium, the state of Minnesota invested \$35 million to help all Minnesotans live healthier, longer lives and continue to drive down state health care costs through the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). Since 2008, SHIP has provided dedicated funding to prevent and reduce the leading causes of chronic disease: commercial tobacco use and obesity. More recently, SHIP funds communities to serve the elderly by helping delay the onset or slow the progression of dementia.

SHIP, an effort currently funded by the Health Care Access Fund, supports local community partners in all 87 counties and 10 tribal nations. More than 4,000 partner sites are engaged across schools, worksites, businesses, the agricultural community, health care clinics and more.

Chronic disease costs Minnesota an estimated \$22 billion annually, and health care spending for insured residents with at least one chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease, is nearly 8 times higher than for those without one. Based on evidence and best practices, investment in prevention of chronic diseases is critical to reducing long-term costs to state and local governments.

Communities throughout the state use SHIP dollars to implement proven strategies to make their communities healthier. For instance, in Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties, SHIP grantees created a program to ensure homebound seniors were able to access fresh produce. In St. Cloud, SHIP has helped expand a mobile food shelf to provide access to healthy food to more community members. SHIP helped to increase access to healthy, local foods for nearly 720,000 Minnesotans from 2015-2017 through food retail activities.

In Battle Lake, SHIP staff and community partners worked to implement pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streets through Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School efforts. Since the projects were finished, 18 new businesses opened in Battle Lake. Efforts to calm traffic and widen sidewalks made the city safer for pedestrians and easier for tourists to stop. SHIP is informing comprehensive planning efforts to create safer, more accessible roadways for more than 2 million Minnesotans to walk and bike.

A partnership of Brown, Nicollet, Le Sueur and Waseca counties supported older adults by hosting fall prevention classes. SHIP efforts in Rochester is helping make the city a dementia friendly community. From 2015-2017, SHIP helped to establish fall prevention programs in 60 communities, reaching more than 270,000 elderly Minnesotans.

In one effort in northeastern Minnesota, Healthy Northland SHIP worked with community partners and landlords across the region to implement smoke-free housing in 3,000+ units. Smoke-free living environments help smokers quit and reduces health complications due to secondhand smoke exposure. From 2015-2017, SHIP worked with over 900 partner sites throughout the state to decrease tobacco use. In the past two years, SHIP grantees helped 278 properties implement smoke-free housing policies, protecting over 24,000 Minnesotans from secondhand smoke in their homes.

SHIP is contributing to better health outcomes in Minnesota. Minnesota's adult obesity rate is 28.4% and adult smoking rate is at 14.5%, rates that are firmly below our neighboring states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Iowa.

The state legislature is at a critical juncture on deciding future funding for SHIP. The provider tax, the largest source of revenue to the Health Care Access Fund, is scheduled to sunset in December 2019. That puts funding for SHIP at risk. Allowing the provider tax to expire without identifying an alternative funding source would threaten a prevention program needed to curb rising health care costs. Counties and cities may see cost shifts to try to fill the gap. Statewide, stable funding for SHIP needs to be maintained at \$35 million per biennium to help all Minnesotans live healthier, longer lives and continue to drive down state health care costs. ■

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