



Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation

The *Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation* is a new program offered by the MATCH (Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health) Group of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), in collaboration with diverse statewide groups. The program is designed to recognize and encourage achievements in health improvement in Wisconsin communities, and to promote cooperation across economic development and health improvement initiatives.

Why Should Communities Apply?

Ensuring that everyone in our communities lives long takes efforts that reach well beyond the traditional work of health care providers and public health departments. When communities invest time, effort, and other resources into community conditions that support health, they are also investing in their economic vitality. Research points to a strong link between unhealthy communities and an unhealthy workforce. Even when employers implement health-promoting strategies at the worksite, if employees then go home to unhealthy neighborhoods, the workplace progress is compromised. Improved community conditions for health—such as an abundance of healthy food options, opportunities for exercise and physical activity, and clean and safe neighborhoods—can positively influence health behaviors and lead to a more productive workforce.

But being a healthy community—and a healthy workforce—means more than healthy eating and active living. It also means having high quality education and jobs that provide adequate income, affordable and safe housing and transit options, and clean air and water. Communities that pay attention to the many factors that influence health will find their residents living longer and better, and will increase their economic competitiveness.

Communities that apply for and receive the Healthy Communities Designation will have a way to demonstrate the quality of life in their community. The application process is designed to boost existing health improvement efforts by providing guidance on the types of strategies and initiatives that have been shown to work, as well as by encouraging applicants to increase the degree of collaboration among diverse stakeholder groups in their communities.

What Makes a Community *Healthy*?

While there is no simple equation that can differentiate a healthy community from an unhealthy one, a **healthy community is one that broadly assesses its needs and subsequently examines and addresses the *multiple factors* that determine health:**

- *Health Behaviors* – including diet and exercise, alcohol and drug use, tobacco use, and sexual activity;
- *Clinical Care* – including access to care and quality of care;
- *Social & Economic Factors* – including education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety; and
- *Physical Environment* – including air and water quality, housing, and transit.

The Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation recognizes and encourages local efforts to improve the overall health of the community. Designation-worthy efforts are those that display the community's broad vision of health and that are *sustainable* in nature. In other words, the changes that result from community efforts aren't one-time occurrences; instead, effects are likely ongoing because efforts target policy, systems, or environmental changes.

Each community is its own "expert," knowing more about its strengths, weaknesses, resources, and needs than anyone else. With that in mind, there isn't a cut-and-dried recipe for community health. The Designation is designed to recognize local community success and to serve as a *guide* that communities can use to expand and enhance their health improvement efforts. The Designation's carefully developed "checklist" provides communities with a list of evidence-based initiatives for local health improvement. As part of the application process, communities can use this list to flag work already underway. They are also encouraged to use it as part of their ongoing community health improvement processes to identify fitting new initiatives based on their assessed needs and resources. Through an optional "wild card" submission in the application process, communities can also highlight innovative approaches they have employed that are not included on the "checklist".

Doesn't a Program Like This Already Exist?

There are several programs that recognize and encourage community health, but they each tend to focus on a limited area of well-being. What sets the *Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation* apart is its decision to incentivize and recognize communities that are working to advance a broad view of health. This broader perspective acknowledges the reality that factors such as individual behavior, education and employment opportunities, transportation, and air and water quality all influence health as much or more than more traditional areas of focus (such as access to health care and improved health behaviors). ***Recognizing this broader picture of health is what sets us apart.***

How Many Communities Can "Win"?

This is a *designation* program rather than a prize program, which means each applicant that meets the program's criteria will earn a healthy community designation. **There is no maximum number of communities that can earn this designation.**

We're Interested. Who Can Apply?

Any self-defined, local, place-based community in Wisconsin is eligible to apply.

- Applications may not be submitted by single individuals or single organizations.
- Applications must be submitted on behalf of the entire community by a governing organization (such as a town board, neighborhood association, or Chamber of Commerce) or a community coalition.
- If a community coalition applies, they must have a co-applicant that is a governing organization with a permanent mailing address (such as a non-profit organization or a government entity).

We Have Existing Information About Our Work. Is it OK to Attach These Materials to the Application?

Communities are encouraged to upload existing documents and insert website links that they believe are relevant and useful for their application's review. For example, communities may upload their community health needs assessment and/or community health improvement plan to support their written narrative for *Question No. 3* on the application ("Community Needs and Resources"). Communities may also submit material relevant for each initiative they include. *However, the written application must be able to stand alone and provide the review committee with a thorough description*

of the initiative. Additional documents and links are intended only for supplemental and validation purposes.

Who Will Review Applications?

Applicant reviewers are a diverse group, reflecting the cross-collaborative nature of the community work the program encourages and recognizes. Reviewers represent a variety of disciplines including (*but not limited to*): education, public health, hospitals, businesses, faith-based institutions, non-profit organizations, chambers of commerce, community and economic development, county planning departments, and local leadership.

What Are the Reviewers Looking For?

The Healthy Communities Designation reviewers will determine whether your community earns designation and, if so, whether you meet criteria for the Bronze, Silver, or Gold level (each tier of designation has different minimum requirements). This tiered approach allows the acknowledgement of communities' early, limited efforts (Bronze status) while providing more distinguished recognition for more comprehensive, long-lasting efforts (Silver or Gold status).

In order to earn a designation, communities must demonstrate that they are following the **guiding principles** below. The guiding principles reflect the criteria from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Prize and have been modified for this designation program. While the two programs are unrelated, it is our hope that the *Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation* offers an additional way for communities to be recognized for progress on their local efforts.

1. Using a broad definition of health to engage in efforts to address locally identified health needs (ideally those identified in community health needs assessments conducted by the local health department and/or local hospitals). This includes the following:
 - a. Identifying needs/initiatives in more than one of the following health categories: *health behaviors, clinical care, social & economic factors, and physical environment*.
 - b. Considering the potential reach and impact of initiatives (e.g., initiatives can be either targeted to specific subgroups or the entire population). More targeted initiatives should be expected to achieve greater health improvements).
2. Committing to sustainable and comprehensive long-term solutions. This includes implementing initiatives from the program's curated checklist of evidence-based approaches to enhancing health that works towards sustainable and long-term solutions.
3. Increasing the commitment to and actions that demonstrate the importance of equal and fair opportunity for health.
4. Including and harnessing the power of multiple sectors and voices in identifying and implementing initiatives. Applicants should be able to demonstrate how residents, government, business, and non-profit organizations are working together to improve health.
5. Maximizing resources including dollars, people power, etc.
6. Measuring and sharing progress and results.

Each tier of designation has different requirements in terms of what communities must demonstrate about the quantity and quality of an initiative's *results* (in other words, the change produced because of the effort). Communities striving to earn the highest level of designation will need to demonstrate more robust, substantial health effects resulting from their implemented initiatives. They will also need to provide the data they gathered to support the claim that their initiatives had such an effect.

The program's application process is designed to be a beneficial experience for all communities, regardless of the designation status obtained. Filling out the application requires community members—from prominent local figures, to community organizers, to other passionate residents—to join together to identify and review the health improvement initiatives implemented that address the community's identified health needs. Ideally, this process will prompt investigation by these invested community members into: the degree of change resulting from their implemented initiatives; potential avenues for further growth; and new opportunities for targeted efforts.

What Does My Community Need to Do?

Communities interested in applying for a Wisconsin Healthy Community Designation are first required to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI). The Letter of Interest period will be open from December 11, 2017 - January 31, 2018. Based on the Letters of Interest, the Wisconsin Healthy Communities Designation team will follow-up with communities individually with an invitation to apply in spring 2018. Communities should visit the program website (www.wihealthycommunities.org) to learn more about the application process, including the Letters of Intent. There is no fee to apply.

What Happens if My Community Earns Designation?

Communities that earn Healthy Communities Designation Status (at any tier) will receive:

- A graphic/logo with the year of the community's receipt, to be used on community produced materials;
- A communication toolkit with sample press releases and other material to share your community's news;
- An invitation to attend a recognition event, at which community members will be honored for their health efforts alongside other communities earning designation; and
- Access to and participation in a network of other Healthy Community designees, through which communities can collaborate, encourage one other, and share successes (and stumbling blocks) experienced during their health improvement efforts.

Each community's Healthy Designation status will be valid for three years. Communities that seek a higher designation status may choose to re-apply before the end of their designation period.

For additional information, please contact:

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