



Creating Healthy Homes & Communities Throughout Minnesota

EMPLOYERS

Profitable Businesses Rely on Healthy Workers

The health of employees is rooted in the homes and communities where they live and work. Good health is not just a benefit for children, adults, and our elders. When workers feel well, businesses have the person-power they need to prosper.

Illnesses like asthma, diabetes, and obesity cause missed work and lower productivity. These illnesses are also associated with housing and neighborhood quality. The impact of this lost productivity and absenteeism is staggering for businesses.¹

- Asthma is responsible for 14 million missed work days each year for adults. This includes work missed by parents when their children are sick with asthma. The result is \$5.1 billion in lost productivity and \$15.6 billion in direct medical expenses.^{2,3}
- Each year, obesity costs employers \$73 billion—between \$1,000 and \$6,000 per obese worker—due to medical expenses, sick days, and lost productivity.⁴

As damaging as illness is for business, unhealthy homes also threaten the future of the workforce. Children who are sick, hungry, or under stress due to unaffordable housing or unhealthy homes face greater challenges learning in school. Frequent moves or housing crowding is associated with poorer health, more developmental delays, and lower weights for children.⁵

Long Commutes Take a Toll on Employees

In a recent survey, 48 percent of commuting workers reported that their commute has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Fifteen percent said they would change jobs to shorten their commute, and four percent reported that they had called in sick to work because they could not face their commute.⁶ When communities are designed and businesses located so that workers live near where they work, the stress of commuting decreases.



A healthier workforce results in lower health insurance premiums.

Health insurance is typically the most expensive benefit provided by employers—and premiums rose 138% between 1999 and 2010. Supporting the health of workers can be an important cost-containment strategy.⁷



Healthy neighborhoods and housing choices help employees feel their best.

Allina Talks Wellness

Allina is one of many employers making a difference in the health of communities. Allina Buffalo Hospital's Let's Talk Wellness initiative in Buffalo, Minnesota meets people in the community where they live to make staying healthy more convenient. The program uses interactive discussions to encourage people to use resources right in the neighborhood to be healthy. In a series of classes presented at businesses, community centers, or schools, community members learn tips on topics such as stress management, exercise, and healthy eating.



Healthy Neighborhoods and Safe, Affordable Housing Choices Help Employees Thrive where they Live and Work

Affordable housing and healthy, safe communities make it easier for workers to achieve the best possible health.

Bicycle paths, parks, walkways, local shopping facilities, and a variety of businesses mixed in with housing all have been shown to increase people's physical activity and nutrition. When people get good food to eat and adequate exercise, performance in the workplace can improve, too.

- In one study of ten U.S. cities, having four or more different types of businesses in a neighborhood significantly increased walking trips by area residents.⁸ Feeling unsafe in a neighborhood has also been found to contribute to obesity, possibly because people are less likely to walk outside.⁹
- People with better access to supermarkets have healthier diets and lower levels of obesity.¹⁰ Yet 21 percent of Minnesota's census tracts have low access to supermarkets that sell a variety of foods and are low-income tracts. Just over half are in rural areas.¹¹

Safe, affordable housing choices make it easier for families to take care of their health—and focus on their work. People living in unaffordable housing are more likely to forego health care or needed medications.¹² Children can experience developmental delays and behavior problems when housing is unaffordable to their families.¹³⁻¹⁵ When employees or their children are sick, people miss work or are distracted on the job. Employers in many communities have found that addressing housing affordability is good for their bottom line.





Employers play a key role in promoting health for employees.

Employers Have Options for Contributing to Healthier Housing and Communities

Employers can:

- Educate employees about healthy housing and how to identify housing problems that may affect health.
- Provide employee benefits for healthy home improvements.
- Invest in employer-assisted housing programs.
- Provide bike racks, transit passes, or other benefits to promote alternatives to driving alone.
- Enhance pedestrian access to your business and to outside employee break areas.
- Hold a “Walk, Bike, or Bus to Work” week.
- Work with insurance carriers and medical providers to implement preventive health care strategies.
- Advocate at the city, regional, state, and federal levels for better neighborhood planning and housing policies. Policy examples include: sufficient funding for housing, Safe Routes to School programs, Complete Streets policies, and walkable neighborhoods.
- Become a business leader for community improvement projects. Improve sidewalks or paths that connect community to commercial areas, plant trees or native plants or sponsor planting efforts, sponsor community health fairs, donate land for a park, etc.

Minnesota is poised to be a national leader as business, government, and the nonprofit sectors come together to promote healthy homes and communities. Employers are important assets to local communities, and have much to contribute. The backing of business helps ensure that today’s workers, retirees, and the workers of the future can thrive with the best possible health.



First Homes—Rochester

First Homes in Rochester, Minnesota was initiated with seed contributions from the Rochester Area Foundation and Mayo Clinic to alleviate a severe housing shortage for working families. Community residents, businesses, and organizations have invested more than \$14 million and have created over 875 homes for working families within 30 miles of Rochester.



References

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The Alliance for Healthy Homes and Communities is a partnership of Sustainable Resources Center, Minnesota Housing Partnership, Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, and the Minnesota Green Communities initiative of the Family Housing Fund and Greater Minnesota Housing Fund with the goal of creating a statewide alliance to promote healthy homes and communities in Minnesota. The Alliance was formed through a planning grant from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation. www.alliancehhc.org