

Health and Well-Being in Central Iowa

Background

In 2009, United Way of Central Iowa (UWCI) made a strategic decision to move from an organization that has been a traditional funding agency to an organization centered on collective community impact and change. United Way took the bold move of establishing Goals for 2020 in education, income and health. The audacious goals were established to move the Central Iowa community forward by focusing efforts and funding on evidence-based initiatives that align with strategies and expected results.

The original Health Goal for 2020 used one data point from the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) asking people to rate their health from poor to excellent. In 2014, United Way decided to move away from this measure because it only highlighted one component of health and well-being, and because the responses were inconsistent with the outcomes demonstrated in the community. Over an eighteen month period, United Way of Central Iowa led an intensive study to identify a Health Goal for 2020 that catalyzes change and energizes the community toward progress while also ensuring the goal is realistic and achievable. United Way staff, in partnership with a community-driven health expert panel, researched various options to pinpoint a comprehensive tool that reflects a holistic picture of the health of our community. After reviewing information about the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and the data collected, United Way and its partners decided it was a highly reputable, comprehensive tool that aligns with community and United Way priorities.

Defining Health and Well-Being

Research increasingly supports the concept that improving health requires much more than improving health behaviors and clinical care. Solutions must extend beyond the health care sector and address underlying causes, also commonly called social determinants, of health.

Multiple factors drive health outcomes, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO):
“Factors such as where we live, the state of our environment, genetics, our income and education level, and our relationships with friends and family all have considerable impacts on health, whereas the more commonly considered factors such as access and use of health care services often have less of an impact.”¹

About the Well-Being Index

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (WBI) is based on the World Health Organization definition of health as “not only the absence of infirmity and disease, but also a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.”² This definition clearly reflects the impact that various factors have on an individual’s health. Consequently, the Index includes five elements based on research to track and understand the key factors that drive well-being:

1. **Purpose:** Liking what you do each day and being motivated to reach your goals.
2. **Social:** Having supportive relationships and love in your life.

3. **Financial:** Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security.
4. **Community:** Liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community.
5. **Physical:** Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily.

Each element also includes a general measure based on what percentage of respondents are thriving, struggling, or suffering in that area of well-being, which are defined as:

1. **Thriving:** Well-being that is strong, consistent, and progressing in a particular element.
2. **Struggling:** Well-being that is moderate or inconsistent in a particular element.
3. **Suffering:** Well-being that is very low and at high risk in a particular element.

In addition to these five elements of health, the WBI measures Life Evaluation. This aspect asks respondents to rank where they believe they stand on a scale of one to ten now, and where they think they will be in five years. Life evaluation includes factors such as experiencing happiness, sadness, stress, and other emotions.

Gallup interviews at least 500 U.S. adults daily. United Way of Central Iowa receives the data collected from residents of the Des Moines-West Des Moines Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes Polk, Dallas, Warren, Madison and Guthrie counties.

Snapshot: Central Iowa's Health and Well-Being

- The Central Iowa MSA score in 2014 was 61.5, ranking our community 51st out of the 100 largest MSAs in the country
- We ranked 9th in Community Well-Being, and we have the #1 ranking in the country for percentage of residents who report that they always feel safe and secure
- We ranked 97th in Purpose and 95th in Physical Well-Being, with only 54% of Central Iowa residents reporting they had 5+ servings of fruits and vegetables 4+ days in last week

Purpose of this Report

This report highlights data related to the five elements of well-being to provide a more detailed review of the factors of health and opportunities to address the elements in a comprehensive way. This document is intended to provide a framework for addressing the health and wellness needs of our community and to identify relevant solutions to achieve the Health Goal for 2020.

Life Evaluation

The life evaluation questions measure the following opinions:

- Step of the ladder you personally feel you stand at this time
- Step of the ladder you think you will stand about five years from now
- Smiled or laughed a lot
- Experienced enjoyment
- Experienced worry
- Experienced sadness
- Experienced stress
- Experienced happiness

Respondents in the Des Moines-West Des Moines area feel that they are, on average, close to the 7th step of the ten-rung ladder. They also report that in about five years, they expect to be closer to the 8th step, demonstrating a positive outlook. With 89% experiencing happiness, and only just under 15% with sadness, Des Moines does fairly well in this area.

Background

In 2014, Gallup reported that “Americans' outlook on life is the best it has been in at least seven years. More Americans were ‘thriving’ and fewer were ‘struggling’ in 2014 than has been the case since Gallup-Healthways began tracking Americans' life evaluations daily in 2008.”³ The rise in Americans' life ratings last year was driven by an improvement in how they evaluate their future lives, rather than their current situation. As is typical, Americans' future life ratings were higher than their current life ratings.

It is important to recognize that these improvements were not equal across the board. Broadly speaking, the life evaluation metric is most strongly linked to income, followed by age. Higher-income Americans and young adults have consistently been more likely to be classified as thriving than their lower-income and older counterparts, the latter group mainly because of their lower projections for their future lives. Importantly, the percentages of Blacks, Asians and young Americans who were thriving in 2014 are unchanged from 2013, showing that life ratings are not improving for everyone.

Previous Gallup research shows that Americans' life ratings tend to track closely with their standard of living perceptions and confidence in the national economy.⁴ Thus, if Americans' perceptions of the economy and their personal finances continue to climb in 2015, their life ratings likely will rise as well. This helps to explain why higher-income individuals score higher on life evaluation, while minorities and the elderly, groups who often experience more financial difficulty, score themselves lower.

The relatively high percentage of individuals with stress is perhaps the most concerning aspect of the life evaluation element; over thirty-eight percent of individuals reported experiencing stress. Stress has been repeatedly shown to negatively impact the health of an individual. Mayo Clinic

outlines various ways that stress affects your body, mood, and behavior. The list includes symptoms such as fatigue, headache, sleep problems, anxiety, lack of motivation, irritability, depression, over and undereating, social withdrawal, substance abuse, and many more.⁵

Physical

The physical well-being questions measure the following opinions, which have been divided into two categories for simplicity:

Chronic Disease and Obesity

- 2+ days of poor health keeping you from usual activities.
- Currently has physical pain.
- Has experienced high blood pressure during lifetime
- Has experienced high cholesterol during lifetime
- Has experienced diabetes during lifetime
- Has experienced depression during lifetime
- Has experienced heart attack during lifetime
- Has experienced asthma during lifetime
- Has experienced cancer during lifetime
- Obese, overweight, or normal weight

Behaviors and Attitudes

- Healthcare provider limits ability to exercise.
- Little interest or pleasure in doing things.
- Your physical health is near-perfect.
- In the last seven days, you have felt active and productive every day.
- A doctor would say that you do a great job of managing your health.
- You always feel good about your physical appearance.
- How many alcoholic drinks do you have in a typical week?
- Do you smoke?
- What type of tobacco product/s do you use?
- Ate healthy all day.
- Exercised for 30+ minutes 3+ days in last week.
- Had 5+ servings of fruits and vegetables 4+ days in last week.
- How often do you use drugs or medication (including prescription drugs) which affect your mood or help you relax?

The Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA ranks 95th for physical well-being among the 108 MSAs in the Gallup-Healthways survey. There are a few aspects of physical health that Central Iowa that are especially concerning. For example, 23% smoke, at least 16% consume seven or more drinks in a week, and nearly 30% are obese. Lack of behaviors such as exercising three or more days per week for at least 30 minutes (52%) and eating 5 servings of produce four or more days per week (53%) are contributing to low physical health as well. These statistics demonstrate that Central Iowa needs to focus on both categories of physical well-being shown above.

Background

Chronic Disease and Obesity

Chronic diseases and conditions—such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and arthritis—are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems. As of 2012, about half of all adults—117 million people—have one or more chronic health conditions. One of four adults has two or more chronic health conditions.⁶ Unfortunately, research has shown that as people become "overweight" and "obese," their risk for developing multiple chronic diseases and conditions increases.⁷ In turn, these chronic diseases often make managing obesity more difficult, creating a vicious cycle. For example, one study, using NCI Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) data, estimated that in 2007 in the United States, about 34,000 new cases of cancer in men (4 percent) and 50,500 in women (7 percent) were due to obesity.

Another important consideration of physical well-being is oral health because complications are often caused by or lead to other conditions. The working relationship between diabetes and periodontitis may be the strongest of all the connections between the mouth and body. Inflammation that starts in the mouth seems to weaken the body's ability to control blood sugar. In turn, high blood sugar provides ideal conditions for infection to grow. Gum disease and heart disease often go hand in hand as well. Up to 91% of patients with heart disease have periodontitis, compared to 66% of people with no heart disease. The two conditions have several risk factors in common, such as smoking, unhealthy diet, and excess weight.

Behaviors and Attitudes

Health risk behaviors are unhealthy behaviors you can change. Four of these health risk behaviors—lack of exercise or physical activity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and drinking too much alcohol—cause much of the illness, suffering, and early death related to chronic diseases and conditions.

Tobacco and substance abuse are important behavioral factors that influence multiple other aspects of health. Tobacco use in any form—even occasional smoking and non-cigarette tobacco—causes serious diseases and health problems, including several forms of cancer, heart disease and stroke, lung diseases, pregnancy complications (including preterm birth, low birth weight, and birth defects), gum disease, periodontal disease, tooth loss, and vision problems. Secondhand smoke can also be detrimental, especially to babies and children. Similarly, substance abuse contributes to a number of negative health outcomes and public health problems, including cardiovascular conditions, pregnancy complications, teenage pregnancy, transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, domestic violence, child abuse, motor vehicle crashes, homicide, and suicide. Alcohol consumption often has similar effects on health, as well as complicating the functioning of multiple organs. Unfortunately, both tobacco and substance abuse are difficult behaviors to change, and require a serious level of dedication on the part of the addicted individual to alter.

The other major area of behavioral factors affecting health includes lack of exercise and poor nutrition. Central Iowa has a definitive problem in both of these factors, as mentioned above. In 2011, more than half (52%) of adults aged 18 years or older did not meet recommendations for aerobic exercise or physical activity.⁸ In addition, ninety percent of Americans consume too

much sodium, increasing their risk of high blood pressure.⁹ Many individuals also lack fruit and vegetable intake on a daily basis, only reinforcing the negative effects of other behaviors. Again, these behaviors are often difficult to change for many reasons and are typically affected by many social determinants of health, including each of the other well-being categories identified by the Gallup-Healthways survey.

Two initiatives in Iowa, the Healthiest State Initiative and Healthy Polk 2020, address the physical health of Central Iowans. Three of the ten priorities for Healthy Polk 2020 are related to physical health, including: provide youth with more ways to be physically active every day in school so they learn to become active adults; make sure that all people living in Polk County have health care insurance coverage; and ensure equal access to health care for all.¹⁰ The Healthiest State Initiative, which aims to improve Iowa's well-being rank as a state, has identified five focus areas, including three that impact physical health. The initiative places an emphasis on reducing tobacco use, increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, and increasing dental visits.¹¹

Another great example of physical health with a focus on children's health is Let's Go! 5210. The program promotes certain daily behaviors that are beneficial for improved physical well-being, including: 5 fruits and veggies, 2 hours or less of screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity, and 0 sugary drinks.¹² This type of initiative is becoming increasingly important as the connection between healthy behaviors in childhood and adulthood becomes clearer and childhood obesity rates rise.

Opportunities for Improvement

Due to the complexity of the relationship between chronic disease, obesity, and unhealthy behaviors, physical well-being is difficult to measure and improve. It is clear that multiple aspects of physical health must be examined together, rather than treating them as separate issues. As has been shown in the other categories of well-being, improvements in all areas will positively affect overall health, including physical. That being said, clinical preventive services offer tremendous opportunity to save years of life and to help people live better during those years. Moreover, science-based prevention can save money—and provide high-quality care—by helping people avoid unnecessary tests and procedures. Preventative measures and health promotion and education can positively impact both chronic disease and obesity, and behaviors and attitudes toward physical health.

Social

The social well-being questions measure the following opinions:

- Your relationship with your spouse, partner, or closest friend is stronger than ever.
- Your friends and family give you positive energy every day.
- You always make time for regular trips or vacations with friends and family.
- Someone in your life always encourages you to be healthy.

Of the 100 most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the country, we rank in the bottom quartile – 81st – in Social Well-Being. Seventy-eight percent of respondents say friends and family give them positive energy every day, which is the highest performing item for Des Moines – West Des Moines.

Background

Social relationships and networks shape our lives in many ways. When relationships are positive, they provide encouragement, model behavior, and emotional support. When they are negative or absent, they can create unhealthy behaviors, isolation, and poor health outcomes. According to Gallup, close friendships are essential to health, happiness and workplace productivity. For example, “people with very few social ties have nearly twice the risk of dying from heart disease and are twice as likely to catch colds” as people with stronger social ties.¹⁴ Social engagement not only positively impacts physical health, but studies also show that social activity influences memory skills as we age. In one study, socially active adults over the age of 50 experienced memory decline at less than half the rate of less social adults.¹⁴

There is also a significant link between social activity and healthy behaviors. “Americans who are thriving in their social well-being are more likely to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables four or more days per week than are those who are suffering in social well-being (66.4% vs. 44.3%, respectively).”¹⁵ Social ties can also have a negative influence on behaviors. Studies show that social ties can influence health behaviors by instilling norms about acceptability of certain behaviors or outcomes. This may explain why friends and family members, even if they do not live geographically close to each other, often have similar habits and rates of obesity.¹⁶ Maybe it is not surprising that the Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA ranks low in both social well-being and physical health, further demonstrating the connection between social networks and health.

There are certain populations of people who are at a greater risk for illness due to their living situations, such as those who “are more likely to be socially isolated (e.g., the poor and the elderly), and some are more likely to be burdened by caring for others in their social networks (e.g., women, especially African American women).”¹⁶ Poverty is an ever-present barrier– it is “both a cause and a consequence of poor health.”¹⁷ Although the link between financial well-being and health is detailed in a different section, it is worth highlighting that the stress of living in poverty strains relationships, and vice versa. Central Iowans living in poverty are not likely to say that they make time for trips and vacations because of their often competing demands on

their time and lack of financial resources. This strain may cause a decrease in social support and interaction, which has been shown to negatively impact overall health.

Part of this discussion requires that we not only identify ways to improve social engagement among those who are socially isolated, but the role that social networks can play in preventing long-term health consequences. We know from the research about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction can significantly impact individuals' health and well-being well into adulthood.¹⁸ These experiences put an individual at a much higher risk for various illnesses, including alcoholism, obesity, heart disease, depression and suicide attempts, and many more.¹⁹ Research also demonstrates that prevention, trauma informed care, and resiliency are effective ways to counter-balance ACEs. Resiliency is the ability to cope with the stress caused by adversity. Families, caregivers, and communities can play a role in building resiliency in children, strengthening their ability to reconnect with individuals, including family, peers, and community members.¹⁸ Social support and interaction is crucial in the recovery of well-being and a healthy life.

Iowa ACEs 360 and Connections Matter have identified ways that supportive relationships early on in a child's life can impact brain development and resilience. The social aspect of resilience is clear when considering the fact that, "the most important factor necessary in building resilience and minimizing the effects of toxic stress for children is the presence of a caring adult."²⁰ Because 80% of brain growth occurs in the first three years of life, it is crucial that children have caring interactions with adults during this time and after.²⁰

In the Des Moines area, the Tomorrow Plan addresses the issue of social well-being: "Creating and enhancing a neighborhood's sense of place can strengthen social ties between residents and can help the neighborhood remain intact over time." In this way, social interactions not only improve the health of an individual, but also the overall well-being and sustainability of an entire community.

Opportunities for Improvement

There is potential to improve both the social and physical health of individuals if ties between the two can be used to our advantage. According to Gallup, "Social networks and weight are clearly related, but how to harness this relationship and use it to help combat the rising obesity rate requires further research."¹⁵ Because stress plays such a central role in health outcomes, individuals who are in difficult financial situations often require more support but have less time for social interaction. Other groups who experience isolation, such as the elderly, should be offered more opportunities for social events within their communities and families. For children who have experienced neglect or abuse, social reintegration and support can help to normalize their lives and set them back on track for healthy lives. Clearly, social well-being has a strong impact on overall health of individuals of all ages in many different situations and should therefore be taken into consideration more often when considering the health of our residents.

Community

The community well-being questions measure the following opinions:

- You can't imagine living in a better community than the one you live in today.
- The city or area where you live is a perfect place for you.
- You are proud of your community (or the area where you live).
- You always feel safe and secure.
- The house or apartment that you live in is ideal for you and your family.
- In the last 12 months, you have received recognition for helping to improve the city or area where you live.
- Satisfied with the city or area where you live.

Central Iowans respond positively to questions related to community well-being. Central Iowa ranks 9th out of 100 communities in the U.S. for this category of well-being. The Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA ranks #1 in community pride and residents most likely to feel safe.

Background

It may come as no surprise that a person's community and neighborhood contribute to their overall health. Community factors, such as safety and housing, are part of many assessments of health. Because of the importance community plays on a person's health, tools have been developed to help communities assess whether plans, projects or policies positively impact people's health. For example, the CDC has developed toolkits for ensuring projects (trails, transportation, etc.) are evaluated for their potential effect on the health and mental health of individuals who will be impacted by the policy or using the resource.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Commission to Build a Healthier America released an issue brief titled "Neighborhoods and Health" that outlines the multitude of ways that where we live influence our health. Everything from air quality in the area we live to the availability of safe places to exercise has an impact on our lifestyle choices. Perhaps more interesting yet is the importance of connectedness to and trust in others in our neighborhoods. According to "Neighborhoods and Health," children who have multiple adults as role models due to living in close-knit communities are less likely to develop health-damaging behaviors. Finally, the issue brief explains that the availability and quality of services such as schools, transportation, and job opportunities influences an individual's ability to achieve and maintain a quality standard of living.²¹

One question that Central Iowa didn't score as well on in the community well-being category was: in the last 12 months, you have received recognition for helping to improve the city or area where you live. Only 18.6% of residents agreed with this statement, which is closely related to volunteer opportunities. The impact of volunteering and making a positive difference in one's community is outlined in a review by the Corporation for National and Community Service, which states that "those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer."²² Not only does volunteering

improve mental and social aspects of health, but many labor-intensive projects also support physical health.²²

Another concern for the Des Moines area that relates to community health is the lack of safe, affordable housing that meets the needs of residents. The Polk County Housing Trust Fund is collaborating with various stakeholders on a project entitled Housing Tomorrow. Housing Tomorrow focuses on encouraging affordable housing to be developed in strategic locations and ensuring the availability of housing options for a diverse range of individuals and families.²³

The Healthy Polk 2020 movement also recognizes the role that community plays in health. The 10 priorities identified in the Health Polk 2020 report are broken down into four larger categories: Supportive Environment, Access to Health Care, Lifestyles and Behavior, and Socioeconomic Factors. Each of these categories is related to how a community influences the health of its residents. For example, priority two acknowledges the necessity to provide more physical activity options for youth, and priority ten reinforces the importance of access to affordable, healthy foods.²⁴

One collaboration in Central Iowa that seeks to improve community health for homeless individuals is the Centralized Intake System, headed by Primary Health Care, Inc. The system allows for people in need to call a centralized number in order to check the availability of space at various homeless shelters in the area. By providing this service, the system creates a more manageable short-term solution that helps to protect an individual from various health risks, such as inclement weather and violence.²⁵ In this way, the Centralized Intake System has a positive impact on community well-being factors.

Opportunities for Improvement

Although the majority of Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA respondents are thriving in this category of WBI questions, it is important to continue to proactively address challenges in this category, particularly for the most vulnerable central Iowans who are least likely to have access to safe and affordable housing, convenient transportation routes, and community resources. As stated in the Tomorrow Plan: "One of Greater Des Moines' key competitive advantages is its high quality of life. The region is consistently recognized for its affordability, access to the outdoors, and family-friendly atmosphere. However, this way of life is being challenged by impediments to fair housing, the area's car-centered transportation system, and decreasing levels of physical activity."²⁶ This plan, the first regional long-term plan for housing for the Greater Des Moines area, outlines strategies to create resilient neighborhoods, enhance access to transportation, promote economic development, create more affordable housing options, and provide access to healthy food and healthy lifestyle choices, such as walking and biking.

Purpose

The purpose well-being questions measure the following opinions:

- There is a leader in your life who makes you enthusiastic about the future.
- You like what you do every day.
- In the past 12 months, you have reached most of your goals.
- You get to use your strengths to do what you do best every day.
- You learn or do something interesting every day.

The Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA ranked 97th overall for purpose well-being. While 75% of residents responded that they liked what they did every day, only 53% agreed that they met their goals in the past twelve months.

Background

A survey on global well-being conducted by Gallup in 2013 discovered that less than 2 in 10 adults worldwide and 4 in 10 in the Americas are thriving in what they call purpose well-being. They define purpose as “liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals.” One of the reasons that purpose well-being is so low is likely because we inhibit ourselves from fully living our purpose and expressing our potential. Almost 50 years ago, Dr. Abraham Maslow, a psychiatrist and leader of the human potential movement proposed our fear of greatness (and success) holds us back as much as our fear of failure. This is driven by five core concerns that keep us from becoming all that we are capable of becoming: fear of responsibility, fear of rejection, fear of becoming overwhelmed, fear of losing control, fear of being viewed as arrogant. These fears may hold us back from meeting our goals and defining our purpose in life, which may have negative effects on our health.²⁷

Clarifying your own strengths and talents deepens your sense of purpose and helps you contribute through work, relationships, and service to your community. People who have a strong sense of purpose may live up to seven years longer than people who do not. They have lower rates of heart disease, lower healthcare costs, weigh less, and even report higher levels of happiness.²⁸

MetLife conducted a study of purpose in 2009. Healthways references the MetLife study in order to form the basis for some of their materials. Some key findings include:

- Regardless of age, gender, financial status, or life stage, the majority of people assign the most importance to meaning-related activities and, above all else, spending time with friends and family.
- Having a sense of purpose relates to possessing both “focus” on essential things and “vision” of the future they want to enjoy.
- Richard Leider has done extensive work in helping people discover their unique purpose and meaning in their lives. Leider describes the achievement of a positive balance in life—where a person is, among other things, excited to get up every morning—summarily as achieving the Good Life. He makes it clear that living the Good Life is not just about

material wealth and physical comfort, but equally “living in the place you belong, with the people you love, while doing the right work on purpose.”

- The Good Life requires an integration of various components in a person’s life, in which each component enables the next. Leider defines living the Good Life using four components: Money, Medicine, Meaning, and Place.
- According to Leider, purpose enables people to maintain focus on where they want to go and to discover new roads to get there.
- People with a sense of purpose in their lives are more likely to report being happy and describe themselves as living the Good Life.²⁹

One example of how purpose has a positive connection to success in Central Iowa is the United Way of Central Iowa’s (UWCI) HOPE Initiative. HOPE, which stands for Health, Opportunity, Prosperity and Education, is a demonstration project designed to remove barriers for twenty-five single parent families with children with the goal of seeing families move out of poverty toward self-sufficiency. Before being considered a HOPE family, participants were required to set goals to have a purpose for their lives and the lives of their families, as well as set 3-5 additional goals. Evidence that purpose has had a positive impact includes examples of families becoming more comfortable asking for help proactively, a sign of changes in attitude that can improve a family’s chances for success. This program provides a great example of the positive impact that having a defined purpose can have.

Opportunities for Improvement

Purpose well-being is high when people like what they do each day and are motivated to achieve their goals. This is true whether they work for a company, are self-employed, care for family members, pursue education, work on a farm, or engage in charity work. Those with high well-being in this element also tend to be highly engaged in their work. They are emotionally invested in what they do and focus on creating value through their efforts. Peter Choueiri, President, Healthways International commented, “Our research shows that purpose well-being has a high correlation with social, financial, community, and physical well-being. In other words, investments in purpose well-being improvement will likely also lift the other elements of well-being resulting in lower medical costs and an improvement in productivity across whole populations.”³⁰ Based on this information, purpose well-being should be considered just as seriously as other aspects of health.

Financial

The financial well-being questions measure the following opinions:

- Not enough money to buy food.
- Not enough money for healthcare.
- You have enough money to do everything you want to do.
- In the last seven days, you have worried about money.
- Compared to the people you spend time with, you are satisfied with your standard of living.

The Des Moines-West Des Moines area scored 25th out of the 108 MSAs reported. Eighteen percent of residents report not having enough money to buy food, and 13% don't have enough for healthcare.

Background

Financial stability greatly impacts the overall health of an individual and their family. According to a study done by Gallup, half of all Americans experienced substantial financial anxiety in 2014. Specifically, worries about not having money to retire are a main concern for most adults.³¹ These financial concerns might account for low scores in other areas of health as well. People who are frequently anxious about their financial stability have time and budget restraints that impact their decisions and options related to health. A study done at the University of Puerto Rico showed that, "income is very important in the decision process of exercising" because individuals who make more money are more likely to have free time to exercise and be able to afford a membership to a gym to use during inclement weather.³²

Another important consideration for financial well-being relates to food acquisition. Although many people may have the money to buy food, this does not mean that they are able to buy food that will improve their health. A report release by the Harvard School of Public Health indicated that, "healthier diet patterns—for example, diets rich in fruits, vegetables, fish, and nuts—cost significantly more than unhealthy diets (for example, those rich in processed foods, meats, and refined grains)."³³ On average, a healthier diet costs \$1.50 a day more, per person, than an unhealthy one. These findings help us to understand how the financial situation of an individual can impact their health behaviors and options.

Multiple studies have shown a correlation between financial well-being and mental health as well. One notable example is the link between unemployment and depression rates. Gallup found that the more time an individual is unemployed, the more likely they are to experience depression and receive treatment. Among those who are unemployed, 12.4% are or have received treatment for depression. This statistic skyrockets to 18% when considering only long-term unemployed individuals – those who have been looking for a job for 27 weeks or longer. Unfortunately, depression can also make it more difficult for these individuals to find and maintain a steady job, only reinforcing the mutual impact.³⁴

Perhaps the most obvious way that income affects health is through access to healthcare goods and services. As would be expected, studies have found that access is an issue that more heavily impacts low-income individuals and families. The DHS reported that 68.5% of low-income adults in Iowa were unable to access recommended primary care, a rate about 35% higher than the overall state total.³⁵ Although the ACA has increased access to health insurance, some groups remain ineligible.³⁶

In Central Iowa, Healthy Polk 2020 has identified multiple gaps in services for the uninsured. Specifically, lack of access to:

- Culturally and linguistically competent services.
- Services for undocumented residents.
- Specialty services (surgical, mental health, dental, and pharmaceutical).
- Preventive services for underinsured residents.
- Transportation and other barriers in navigating a complicated and fragmented system.³⁷

Organizations such as Central Iowa Works, a local partnership that brings together employers and workers, are helping to make a positive impact on financial well-being. By giving individuals the skills necessary to find and maintain a job provide unemployed individuals with new hope. In addition, Central Iowa Works provides services such as case management, housing assistance, and food assistance to families in the program, allowing them to focus on other aspects of well-being. Educational programs on topics related to finances are also offered, giving individuals the resources they need to manage their money appropriately.

Opportunities for Improvement

The areas identified by Healthy Polk 2020 provide a clear direction for improving the health of uninsured or underinsured individuals in Central Iowa. Gallup released a report detailing the importance of financial security explaining that companies should be doing more than simply providing a salary. Educating employees about financial planning and budgeting allows employees to focus more on their job and less on concerns about income. When employees begin to see how they can budget their money to live within their means, they tend to be happier and more productive at work.³⁸ Changes such as this not only benefit the employer, but also improve the financial well-being of the employee. With more financial understanding, many employees may feel empowered to make other positive changes in their lifestyle that will have an impact on their overall health.

Conclusion

Under the new collective community impact model and with the data from Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, United Way of Central Iowa now has a better understanding of which areas of well-being require more attention. Focus areas for the well-being of Central Iowans include:

1. Produce consumption (54%; 92nd)
2. Eating healthy daily (55%; 96th)
3. Obesity (29.6%; 71st)
4. Smoking (23%; 79th)
5. Improve city or area where you live (19%; 40th)
6. Close relationships encouraging health (73%; 81st)
7. Learn or do something interesting every day (60%; 95th)
8. Daily alcohol consumption (17%; 92nd)

The United Way of Central Iowa Indicators and Strategies associated with each element provide further insight into the goals and measures that UWIC employs. Perhaps one of the most important takeaways from this report is that all five elements of well-being are *interrelated* and *interdependent*. Although strategies for improving each of the elements may vary, it is important to recognize that all five impact how we experience our lives.

References

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Appendix

The Health Goal for 2020 for United Way of Central Iowa is to increase the Well-Being Index Score for the Des Moines-West Des Moines MSA from 61.5 in 2014 to 64.5 by 2020. The 2016 UWCI Health Strategy Map focuses on improving three of the five aspects of well-being identified by Gallup-Healthways: physical, social and emotional, and community. UWCI believes that making improvements to these areas of well-being will positively impact the overall health and well-being of central Iowans. The rationale for selecting the three areas of physical, social and emotional, and community is provided in more detail below. United Way of Central Iowa did not select financial or purpose areas to focus on for strategic investments because financial strategies are included in the Income Strategy Map, and purpose activities either do not require investments or fall under UWCI's volunteer activities.

As stated in the full white paper, more than half of adults did not meet recommendations for aerobic exercise or physical activity in 2011.⁸ Additionally, ninety percent of Americans consume too much sodium and too few fruits and vegetables.⁹ The UWCI Health Strategy Map addresses these physical well-being issues, as well as prioritizing access to health prevention and treatment by addressing barriers and supporting individuals to navigate systems.

Social ties, or the lack thereof, can impact all aspects of health and well-being. It has been proven that social isolation and unhealthy relationships can negatively influence various health outcomes, such as memory, obesity and chronic disease, and mental illnesses.^{15,16,17} By encouraging central Iowans to have a positive outlook and engage in supportive relationships, UWCI hopes to improve the social well-being of individuals and communities. UWCI also recognizes the importance of improving access to behavioral health services and supporting health brain development. These factors are crucial to address because of the connections between ACEs and alcoholism, obesity, heart disease, depression and suicide attempts, and many other diseases.¹⁹

An issue brief released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation explains that an individual's ability to achieve a quality standard of living is largely dependent on various aspects of their community, including availability and quality of services such as schools, transportation, and job opportunities.²¹ When people have access to safe, affordable housing in areas that include a safe space for physical activity, access to fresh produce, and availability of community programming, their overall health can improve. UWCI's Strategy Map focus on community well-being facilitates access to and participation in civic and social activities at the neighborhood and/or community level for central Iowans.