

2023

HEALTH POWER: INVESTING IN COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

A summative report of Health POWER – a 4-year funding initiative of the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® of Minnesota

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota launched Health POWER (People Organizing and Working for Equitable Results). The initiative’s goal was to invest in community-led solutions to advance health equity through policy, systems, and environmental changes. Community health can be shaped by social norms, the physical landscape, availability of resources, and economic vitality of neighborhoods. Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes help to create sustainable conditions that allow people to make healthier choices.

This report summarizes the four year initiative by uplifting the people, approach, work, and impact of Health POWER.

“We have people saying ‘thank you’ for this food. So they don’t have to spend money on food and then they can make rent. We planted 20 fruit trees in Harrison Park. We have a medicine garden, a pollinator garden, and six container gardens on site.”

– Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative

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PEOPLE

The organizations and Native Nations funded through Health POWER

The Center for Prevention funded 13 community-based organizations and two Native Nations through Health POWER. Transformation occurred because of the people involved in each Health POWER project and the community members who led, participated, and inspired change. Read more about several of these projects in the Work section.

The Alliance

Equitable Development Principles and Scorecard – Livability and Physical Activity

American Lung Association in Minnesota

The Lung Mind Alliance: Forward with Policy Systems Environment (PSE) Change

Appetite For Change

YTOP (Youth Training and Opportunity Program) Fresh

Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota

Don't Discount My Life: Point of Sale Tobacco Prevention Strategies in Saint Paul and Ramsey County

Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)

CLUES Healthy Eating Community Garden and Action Cohort



FamilyWise

Tribal NEAR Science and Community Wisdom Project: Improving the Health of Tribal Communities Through Community-Led Actions Promoting Holistic Wellness

The Food Group

Food Shelves as Change Agents: Bringing Food Justice Values to the Charitable Food System in Minnesota

Hmong American Farmers Association

Addressing Health Disparities and Food Access for Low-Income, Refugee, and Immigrant Children in Ethnic Daycare Centers

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Leech Lake Family Spirit EmPOWERment

Lower Sioux Indian Community

Lower Sioux Healthy Generations Initiative

Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative

Supporting a PSE Coalition in the Lincoln Park Neighborhood

NorthPoint Health and Wellness

Anti-Tobacco Policy Advocacy at NorthPoint

Our Streets Minneapolis

Community-Led Systems Change for Equitable Active Transportation

Sharing Our Roots

From Food Insecurity to Food Sovereignty: Community Connections for Health Equity in Northfield

The Trust for Public Land

Healthy Community Schoolyards in the Twin Cities

APPROACH

How the Center for Prevention and funded projects approached their work

Health POWER centered relationships, community-driven solutions, and a sustained financial commitment to funded projects. This approach fortified the staff, volunteers, organizations, and Nations who led and engaged in the day-to-day work and gave projects the freedom to respond to emerging community needs during the 4-year initiative. This flexibility also provided opportunities for projects and community members to develop innovative community-centered program activities focused on health equity. Ultimately, the approach of Health POWER deepened each projects' impact in community.

RELATIONSHIPS FIRST

Building relationships that are rooted in trust, equity, and authentic partnership.

What this looked like in Health POWER:

- Supporting initiatives that reflect the communities they serve.
- Shifting how and what we evaluate – especially in the early years as project staff build relationships and capacity; understanding change takes time and impacts are deeper and sustainable when built on a firm foundation of relationships.
- Adjusting the format and frequency of meetings with Center for Prevention staff based on the needs of funded project staff.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

Supporting initiatives that uplift community-led solutions to racial and health inequities.

What this looked like in Health POWER:

- Giving funded projects the freedom to build and adapt their workplans.

- Uplifting the experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian and Pacific Islanders, people of color, LGBTQ+, and other communities most impacted by health inequities.
- Centering the voices, needs, and lived experiences of community members.

CHANGE TAKES TIME AND A STEADY COMMITMENT

Recognizing that transformational change requires steadfast support and multi-year investment.

What this looked like in Health POWER:

- Supporting funded projects to lead the work and then getting out of the way; creating mutual trust between the project and the funder staff.
- Adding an extra year of funding to make Health POWER a four-year initiative.
- Providing ongoing communications, evaluation, and networking support to funded projects.



WORK

Highlights from four Health POWER projects

Over the four-year period, the staff of Health POWER funded projects used creativity and innovation to address community needs amidst the COVID pandemic and other challenges. Below are four examples of PSE in action that demonstrate the power of investing in community-based solutions.

HMONG AMERICAN FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Providing healthy, culturally appropriate food to children in daycare

The Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) works to advance the prosperity of Hmong American farmers through cooperative endeavors, capacity building, and advocacy. HAFA's Health POWER project began as a pilot to provide healthy and culturally appropriate food to children in daycare. Due to COVID, many daycare centers closed or lost enrollment, so HAFA adapted to provide training and technical assistance to daycare providers, to help providers enroll in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and to deliver 4,570 weekly boxes of fresh, culturally appropriate produce to daycares. HAFA also expanded partnerships with other early care organizations such as Hmong Early Childhood Coalition, Urban Village, and Somali American Farmers Association. As a result of the project, more than 38 daycare providers are teaching children about the importance of healthy food and how to prepare it.

HAFA is also working to change systems and policies around agriculture and food access for Hmong farmers, providers, and families. For example, HAFA conducted a USDA certified produce safety training for Hmong farmers, a first in the United States. Staff are also presenting project results to decision-makers such as the Minnesota Department of Education, highlighting barriers to accessing the CACFP program and daycare providers' recommendations for improvement.



WORK

Highlights from four Health POWER projects

THE ASSOCIATION FOR NONSMOKERS-MINNESOTA

Building community capacity and power for commercial tobacco prevention advocacy

The Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR) is a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the human and economic costs of commercial tobacco use in Minnesota. For Health POWER, ANSR worked to pass policies in Ramsey County to regulate the sale of flavored tobacco and how commercial tobacco prices are discounted. The project serves people and communities targeted by the tobacco industry and who suffer the greatest from commercial tobacco-related illnesses. Through Health POWER, ANSR developed relationships with elected officials, partners, community members, city staff, and other organizations. They also connected with more than 3,500 people through a community outreach and education campaign that contributed to policy wins.

ANSR's impact on commercial tobacco policy includes the passage of several tobacco policies across Minnesota, including changes to the tobacco ordinance in St. Paul that sets a \$10 minimum price for cigarette packs and prohibits coupons for all tobacco and vaping product sales. ANSR is now focusing on implementation and enforcement of these policies and ordinances, working with city staff in several municipalities to continue education and outreach on complying with the new policies.



WORK

Highlights from four Health POWER projects

LINCOLN PARK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COLLABORATIVE

Building a coalition to identify and address issues important to Lincoln Park residents

The Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative (LPCFC) supports children and families by connecting them to resources and opportunities, embracing cultures, and building community and well-being through strong and equitable leadership. As a part of Health POWER, LPCFC recruited and trained a coalition of community members to identify issues important to neighborhood residents. Through conversations and surveys, the coalition identified that access to food and hygiene products were pressing issues for Lincoln Park community members. During the onset of the pandemic, staff recognized that community members were even more food insecure than usual. LPCFC expanded its programming to organize grocery and hygiene supply giveaways, deliver food to apartment residents, host community meals, and work towards longer-term solutions to food security.

Milestone achievements of LPCFC included: Developing an 8-week community organizer training; engaging Essentia Health to examine how they can achieve more diverse participation in their Bridging Health Duluth assessment; implementing 23 “Unwind Your Mind” sessions where participants engage in mindfulness exercises, stretching, and other centering activities; distributing over 360,000 pounds of food and hygiene products to Lincoln Park community members; and securing over \$170,000 in grants for their program.



WORK

Highlights from four Health POWER projects

LEECH LAKE FAMILY SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Reducing health inequities among the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

The EmPOWERment program, an expansion of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Family Spirit program, works with Indigenous families to promote physically active lifestyles, encourage healthy eating habits for families and young children, promote breastfeeding, and reduce commercial tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure. Due to COVID, staff expanded and modified the project to meet immediate community needs. This included delivering meals, making and delivering masks, purchasing and delivering car seats, and educating community members about COVID-19. It also required a shift from home visits to safe, outdoor activities such as gardening and beekeeping, a fatherhood program, and cultural ceremonies.

Milestone achievements of the program include: acquiring and renovating a new building for the Family Spirit program, which includes a greenhouse, gardens, sweat lodge, and gathering space; creating home gardens with elders and young families; planting native wildflower gardens; creating and harvesting bee hives; hosting and creating lesson plans for 68+ cultural ceremonies and life teachings, including welcoming baby ceremonies, sweats, and trips to gather swamp tea; and initiating new tribal policies around breastfeeding, sacred tobacco, and Rights of Nature.



IMPACT

Capturing Health POWER community change through numbers, stories, and ripple effects

Impact can best be understood by a mix of numbers and stories that highlight the milestones, strengths, challenges, histories, and changes in each community.

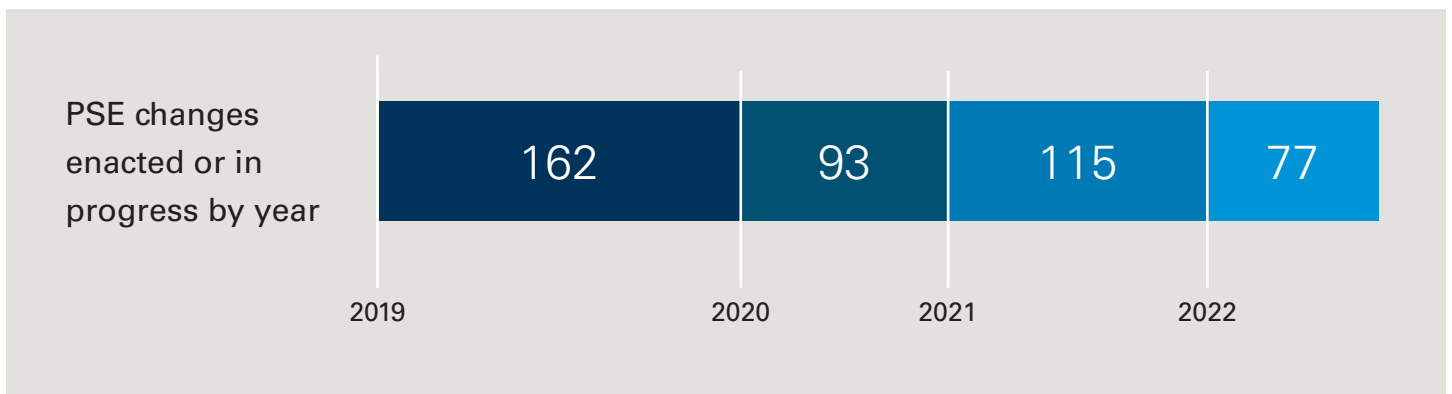
To capture the impact of Health POWER, Wilder Research and the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota partnered to create a community-centered evaluation. The evaluation was designed around the ways that funded project staff define success for their communities and included participatory, flexible methods that evolved with their projects. Overall, the evaluation captured the milestones and accomplishments of the 15 Health POWER projects, and how their projects contributed to policy, systems, and environmental changes.

447 POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL (PSE) CHANGES

were advanced by Health POWER projects
in four years

We build power by bringing healing to the community. We noticed that men are becoming more involved in programs. Before COVID-19, it was all about women. It was all about our babies and the families itself. The men felt left out. Now they are figuring out who they are, taking their place, and starting to notice themselves.

– Leech Lake Family Spirit Program



IMPACT

Capturing Health POWER community change through numbers, stories, and ripple effects



124 POLICY CHANGES

Policies such as laws, ordinances, regulations, or rules influence the choices that people make in their daily lives. Health POWER-funded projects:

- Passed city-wide commercial tobacco restrictions
- Worked with Hmong farmers to adopt food safety plans
- Improved decision-making processes to include more community voices in the redesign of traffic corridors



165 SYSTEMS CHANGES

Systems changes impact health behavior by shifting culture and norms and affect all elements of an organization, institution, Nation, or system. Health POWER-funded projects:

- Worked with food shelves to develop healthy eating and culturally relevant food policies
- Created a coalition of community members that work on community-identified priority issues around accessing food and hygiene products
- Engaged community organizations and larger scale development projects to incorporate an Equitable Development Scorecard for healthier community outcomes

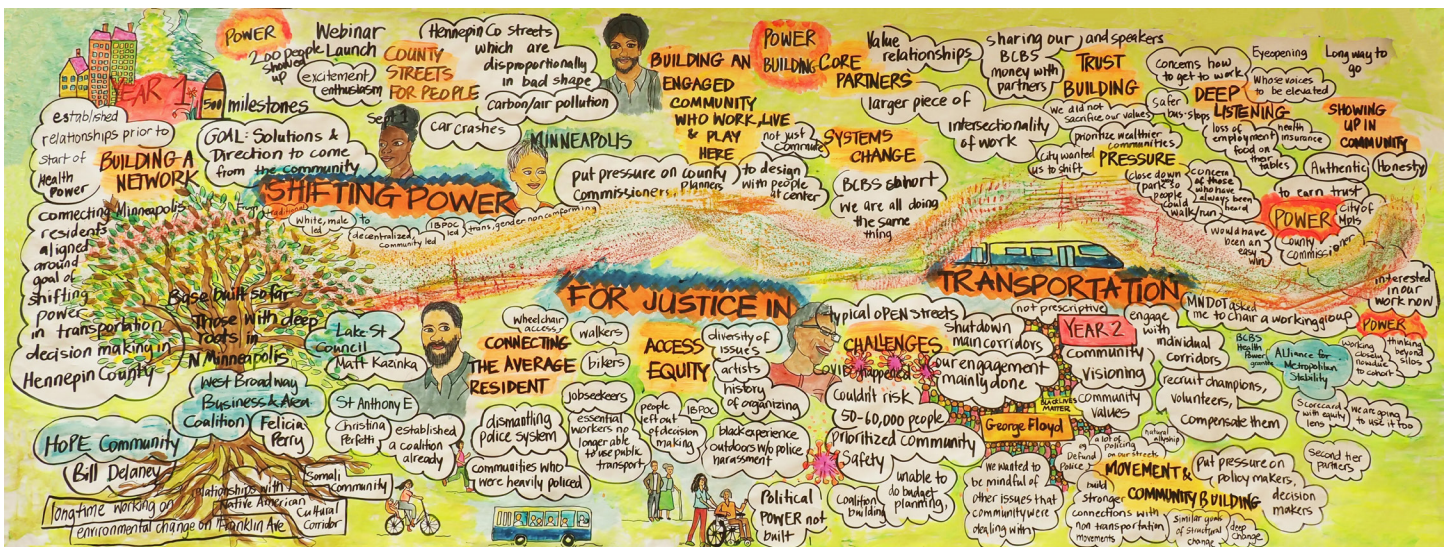


143 ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Environmental changes are changes to the physical, economic, or social environment.

Health POWER-funded projects:

- Created and expanded community gardens to engage families in culturally responsive gardening
- Engaged elementary school students and staff in community-powered design processes to reimagine their schoolyards
- Promoted the collective understanding of the roots and impacts of historical trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), epigenetics, and resilience across Indigenous communities in Minnesota



IMPACT

Capturing Health POWER community change through numbers, stories, and ripple effects

FUNDING LEVERAGED



\$3,871,000

of state, philanthropic, and other grant funds were secured to support Health POWER projects

FOOD GROWN AND DISTRIBUTED

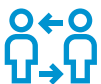


38,095 pounds of food were produced in community gardens, farms, and urban agriculture



408,668 pounds of food and hygiene products were distributed or donated

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT



At least **12,292 community members** were engaged in formal activities like gardening programs, classes and trainings, and community forums



At least **2,253 community members** were engaged through outreach, such as community festivals, plant giveaways, food distribution events, or surveys



351 adults and 350 youth were engaged as leaders in their communities through Health POWER, as funded projects engaged individuals in planning and design processes, learning cohorts, community coalitions, and action teams

We scored a major victory as a direct result of our organizing on Lyndale Ave South. Under pressure from us, Hennepin County will carry out a major safety treatment known as a 4:3 conversion on the corridor in spring 2022. This is a result of the organizing we did in years one and two of Health POWER.

– Our Streets staff member

COMMUNICATIONS

71,173

people were reached through social media or e-newsletters

194,812

people were reached through door knocking, flyers, and postcards

IMPACT

Ripple effects of Health POWER

What are the ripple effects of Health POWER? Wilder Research asked 38 program staff, participants, and Center for Prevention staff to identify how their communities have changed as a result of the work. The following visual captures impacts across the 15 Health POWER projects, collected through three Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) sessions in spring 2023.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Connecting with community on a deeper level and providing the space, resources, and support for community members to reclaim their agency

DEEPENED RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Strengthening existing relationships and collaborating with new organizations, community members, policymakers, and coalitions

IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Capitalizing on opportunities to grow, learn, and stabilize Health POWER-funded projects and partner organizations

Healing and embracing culture

Celebrating cultural practices and community wisdom in the process of healing historical and social wounds

Expanded food justice

Destigmatizing food support, increasing access to nutritious and culturally relevant foods, growing community gardens, and emphasizing cultural connections to food

Advocacy and policy change

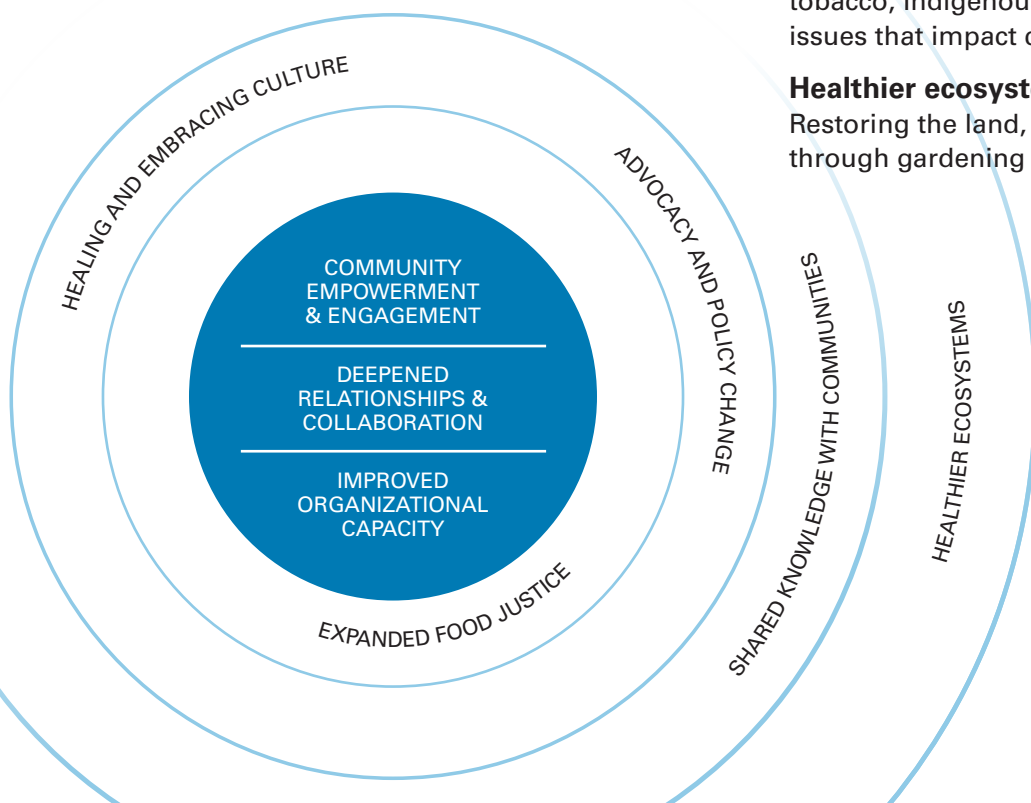
Leveraging community knowledge, experiences, relationships, and stories to pass legislation and make progress towards achieving long-term policy goals

Shared knowledge with communities

Building awareness of food sovereignty, commercial tobacco, Indigenous histories and traditions, and other issues that impact communities

Healthier ecosystems

Restoring the land, air, habitats, and neighborhoods through gardening and community-driven initiatives



LOOKING AHEAD

Future community-based investment and deep appreciation

The Health POWER initiative happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, where flexibility and adaptability were essential to meeting the evolving needs of community members and supporting the success of community partners. The Center for Prevention pivoted the work to prioritize project staff's health and wellbeing and to shift project priorities on an ongoing basis. As a result of listening and responding to the needs of funded community partners, the work was able to move forward in a sustainable and high impact manner.

Moving forward, the Center for Prevention will work to fulfill our mission to advance racial and health equity to transform communities for a healthier Minnesota. Funding initiatives will focus on advancing food justice and food sovereignty, and eliminating the use of commercial tobacco—especially in communities most impacted by commercial tobacco-related health inequities.

As a result of the Health POWER funding initiative, the Center for Prevention will continue to:

- Center the needs of communities most impacted by racial and health inequities first
- Invest in community-led solutions
- Intentionally work to build trust with funded partners and cultivate authentic relationships
- Uplift community members as leaders and experts
- Explore non-traditional evaluation methods to highlight the impact of funded projects

GRATITUDE

Wilder would like to thank the committed, creative, and reflective staff of the Center for Prevention. Your thought partnership, camaraderie, and support have made this a meaningful and enjoyable project. Thanks for helping us to learn and grow.

We would also like to thank the program staff at each of the 13 organizations and two Tribal Nations funded by Health POWER. We thank you for sharing your stories, your measures of impact, and your work with us. You inspire us to continue working to better capture the cultures, contexts, histories, and essence of community-based work.

Finally, thanks to the 30+ Wilder Research staff members and independent contractors that contributed to the Health POWER evaluation, journey map visuals, and reports.