

2023-2027

Iowa's State Health Improvement Plan

A Focus On

- Access to Care: Behavioral Health
- Healthy Eating & Active Living



Health and
Human Services

Healthy Iowans

Revised May 2024

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Message from the Director of Iowa HHS



Dear fellow Iowans,

Building pathways for Iowans to thrive is the driving force behind our agency and guides the work we do everyday. It's what feeds our passion and pursuit to inspire every Iowan to lead healthy and independent lives. Our renewed commitment to building a healthier Iowa begins now and with your partnership.

For over 30 years, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has coordinated the state's health assessment and health improvement planning process, known as Healthy Iowans. Today, I share with you the 2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan.

Members of the Healthy Iowans Partnership worked together to identify goals, objectives and strategies to help address the state's top health issues. This plan builds on the data highlighted in the [2021-2022 State Health Assessment](#).

Grounded in data, collaboration and health equity, the 2023-2027 State Health Improvement Plan upholds the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) guiding principles. In addition, the State Health Assessment and State Health Improvement Plan are informing our [systems alignment](#) work.

We encourage you to use this plan to further collaborate and strengthen our collective work toward a simple goal: better health for everyone in Iowa. Thank you for joining us in this important work!

All my best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly Garcia

Director, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services



Acknowledgments

Healthy Iowans is made possible through the Healthy Iowans Partnership and the support of organizations and community members across Iowa. Thank you for your dedication to health improvement among all who live, learn, work and play in Iowa.

**The 2023-2027 SHIP is a living document.
This means that changes may occur throughout
the course of the five year period.**

Suggested Citation

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History of Healthy Iowans

For more than 30 years, Iowans have worked to advance health equity and achieve healthy living through a series of Healthy Iowans state plans - known as the State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

Plan contributors draw on their own life experiences and personal commitment to identify health challenges and seek solutions.

While challenges continue to evolve, the approach has been steady: collaboration with public and private groups together to assess health status in Iowa using innovative ideas, resources, statistical information, research and direct input from Iowans.

Ensuring leaders from the community and Iowans from many walks of life are involved in the development of the plans is key. The plans have measurable objectives that are monitored and can be revised to align with changing circumstances.

Similar processes occur at both the local and national levels. Using input from thousands of Iowans, all 99 counties have developed [community health improvement plans](#). Many of these local processes preceded Healthy Iowans in the late 1980s and are considered to be the first organized community planning efforts in the country. Iowa also leverages [Healthy People 2030](#), a national plan, to guide and align objectives in both the state and local health improvement plans. As a designated Healthy People Champion, Iowa has a direct line of communications with national experts.

Standards of Excellence

As SHA and SHIP processes became more established across the nation, the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) recognized their role as a fundamental public health practice. In response, PHAB added completion of a SHA and SHIP to their list of required elements to achieve accreditation, the process verifying health departments meet national quality standards. [These standards](#) inform continuous improvements in Healthy Iowans. Iowa HHS received initial accreditation from PHAB in November 2018.

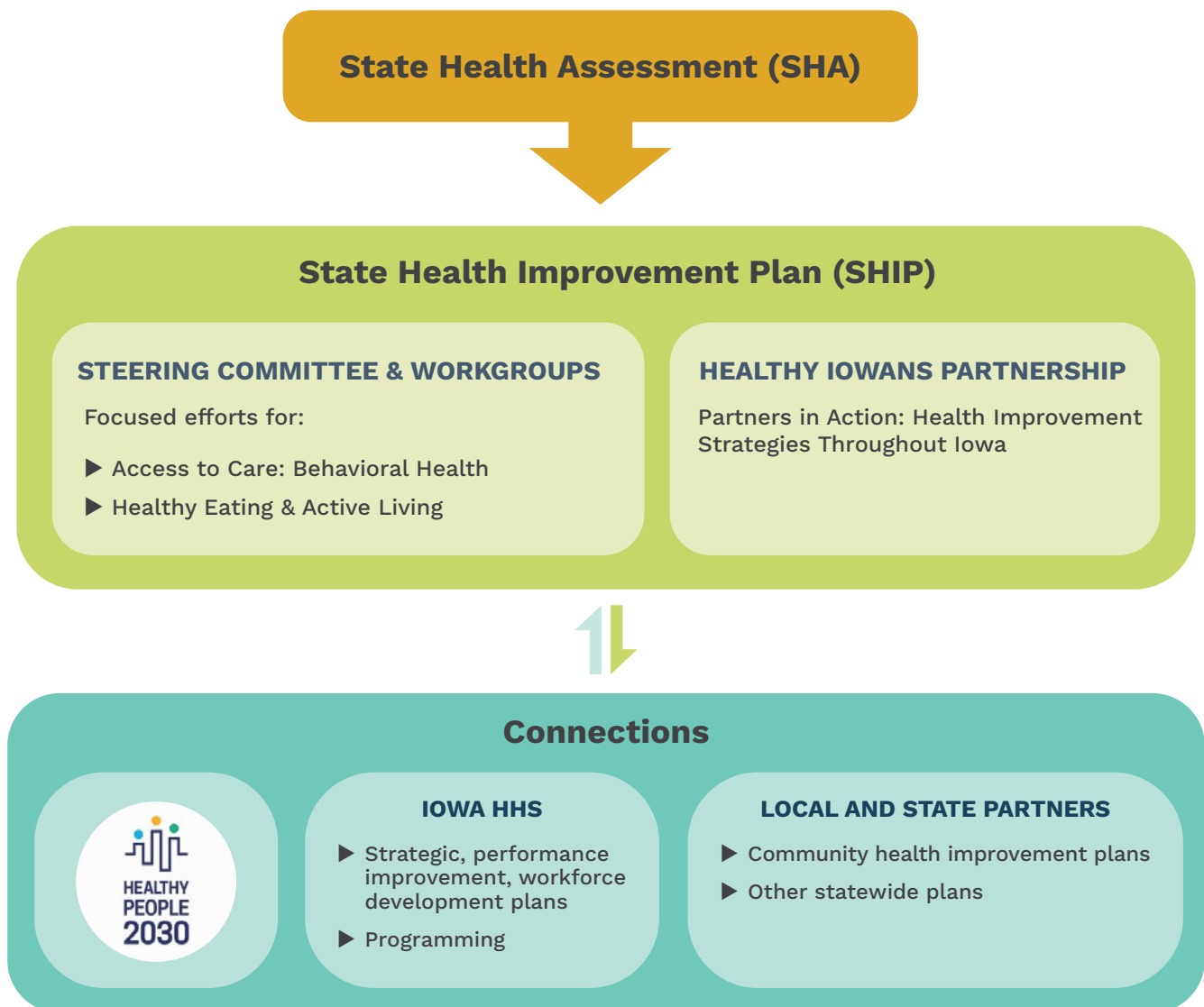


Healthy Iowans Today

Today, the Healthy Iowans process brings together partners from across the state in a unified effort to improve the health of Iowans.

The state health assessment and the components of the state health improvement plan fit together to inform collaborative action on Iowa's health challenges through connecting the local, state and national health improvement plans. The following sections describe the Healthy Iowans Partnership as well as the results from the state health assessment and the state health improvement plan.

Healthy Iowans: Collaborating on Action, Making Connections for Health Improvement



What Is the Healthy Iowans Partnership?

The Healthy Iowans Partnership is coordinated by Iowa HHS and consists of a steering committee, local organizations and individuals throughout Iowa.

Together, the Partnership works to address the priorities outlined in the state health assessment (SHA) and state health improvement plan (SHIP). The Partnership plans to include more direct service providers and community decision makers such as private businesses, infrastructure-based organizations, healthcare providers, elected officials, faith-based organizations and other community leaders.

To join the Healthy Iowans Partnership, please email the Iowa HHS Healthy Iowans team at healthyiowans@idph.iowa.gov or complete the [Healthy Iowans Partnership Strategies Survey](#).

Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee

The Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee guides a strong coalition of partners and works to inspire structured, collective action aimed at improving the health of all who live, learn, work and play in Iowa.

Members were selected for their state or regional focus, their commitment to improving health and their experience with health equity initiatives.

The following organizations are represented:

Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation

Food Bank of Iowa

Great Plains Action Society

Healthiest State Initiative

Iowa ACEs 360

Iowa Behavioral Health Association

Iowa Department of Education

Iowa HHS Bureau of Human Rights and Equity

Iowa HHS Division of Aging and Disability Services

Iowa International Center

Iowa Medicaid

Iowa Primary Care Association

Iowa Public Health Association

Iowa Rural Health Association

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

NAACP - Iowa Nebraska Chapter

NAMI Iowa

One Iowa

The Wellmark Foundation

United Way of Central Iowa

University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development

Healthy Iowans Partnership Workgroups

The primary function of the Healthy Iowans Partnership Workgroups is to develop data-driven objectives and strategies for implementing integrated efforts that improve the health of all people in Iowa.

The workgroups connect the priority areas to work being done across the state in an effort to break down silos and build connections between community partners.

These workgroups are critical to the implementation of the SHIP. Workgroups include individuals from the Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee and representatives from health care systems, academic institutions, private and non-profit organizations and advocacy organizations representing such groups as older adults, persons with disabilities and Iowans in diverse racial and ethnic communities.

Workgroup members were selected by the Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee based on shared priorities, commitment to equity, subject matter expertise and capacity to participate.



Workgroup Members

Access to Care: Behavioral Health

- ▶ Iowa CareGivers
- ▶ Iowa HHS Division of Behavioral Health
- ▶ Iowa Hospital Association
- ▶ Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
- ▶ Orchard Place
- ▶ Prevent Child Abuse Iowa
- ▶ UnityPoint Health - Eyerly Ball
- ▶ University of Northern Iowa Counseling Center
- ▶ Wellmark Foundation
- ▶ Wellpoint

Healthy Eating and Active Living

- ▶ Des Moines Area Religious Council
- ▶ Grace Fitness
- ▶ Heritage Area Agency on Aging
- ▶ Iowa Food System Coalition
- ▶ Iowa Hospital Association
- ▶ Iowa HHS Bureau of Nutrition and Physical Activity
- ▶ Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
- ▶ UnityPoint Health - Eyerly Ball
- ▶ University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development
- ▶ Wellmark Foundation

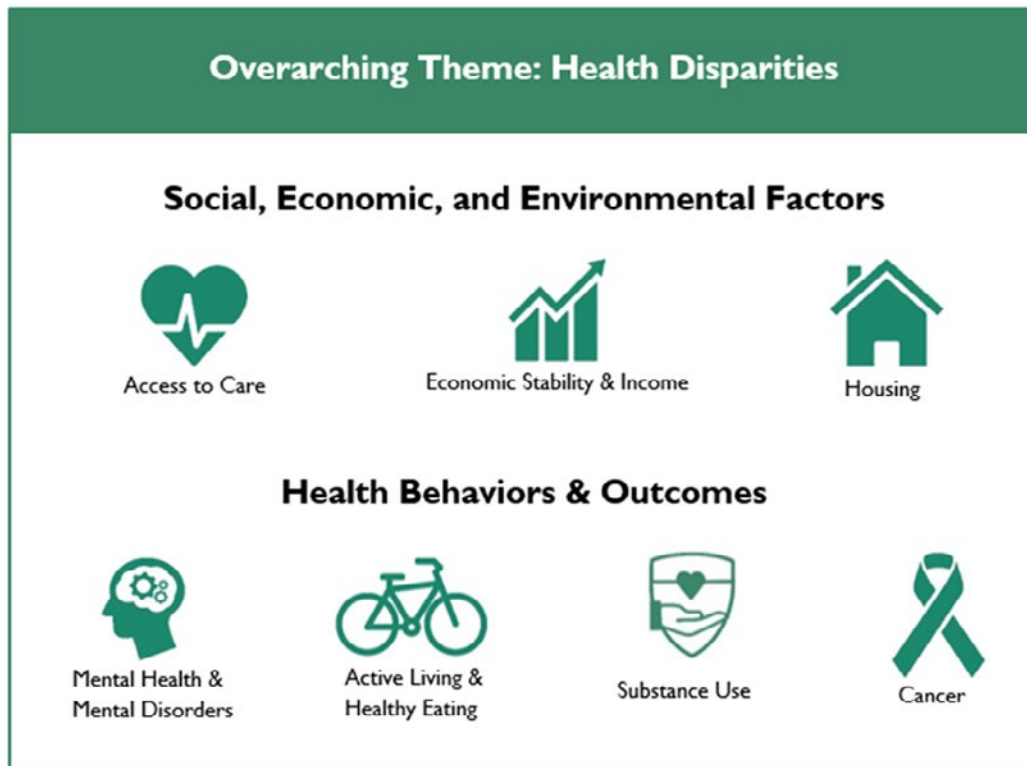


State Health Assessment (SHA) Overview

In June 2021, Iowa HHS solicited feedback from people in Iowa and community organizations using the Iowa State Health Assessment Survey.

In total, more than 2,700 people in Iowa responded to the survey. Based on their responses, the final list of priorities identifies seven different issues. This list was further supported by multiple data sources, including Healthy People 2030, America's Health Rankings and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The [2021-2022 SHA](#) highlights seven priority areas that impact health for all who live, learn, work and play in Iowa. Iowa's current health priorities include:



For further descriptions of these priority areas, please reference the [2021-2022 SHA](#).

State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) Overview

The Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee used the seven priorities identified in the 2021-2022 SHA to begin developing the SHIP.

Based on feasibility and potential impact, the Steering Committee chose to begin with Access to Care: Behavioral Health and Healthy Eating & Active Living as their two main priorities for the 2023-2027 SHIP. Then, the Steering Committee set goals for both priority areas. The resulting goals were chosen after careful consideration and serve as the broad, overarching targets for the 2023-2027 SHIP. Using this information, the Healthy Iowans Partnership Workgroups created objectives and strategies, which will guide their concentrated efforts. Each objective (Is Anyone Better Off?) has a 2027 target for improvement set using the [Healthy People 2030 Target-Setting Methods](#) of percent improvement for rates/ratios and percentage point improvement for percentages.

While this SHIP document only outlines two of the seven priority areas, work will continue in the other five categories. There are numerous organizations throughout the state that will continue to address these important issues. These strategies are compiled in the second part of the 2023-2027 SHIP: [Partners in Action: Health Improvement Strategies Throughout Iowa](#).

Health Equity: The Anchor of the SHIP

Many groups of people in Iowa experience health disparities, which are preventable differences in health outcomes. Health disparities most commonly affect people of color (such as African American and Indigenous people), people with disabilities, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, older individuals and people who live in rural areas. These disparities stem from broad, systemic inequities that have created deep-rooted barriers to good health.¹

As an integral part of improving statewide outcomes, health equity serves as the anchor of the 2023-2027 SHIP. The Healthy Iowans Partnership is dedicated to using data, community voices, and evidence-based strategies to create meaningful solutions for health inequities. As a result, the 2023-2027 SHIP uses a health equity lens that focuses on ending long-standing disparities.

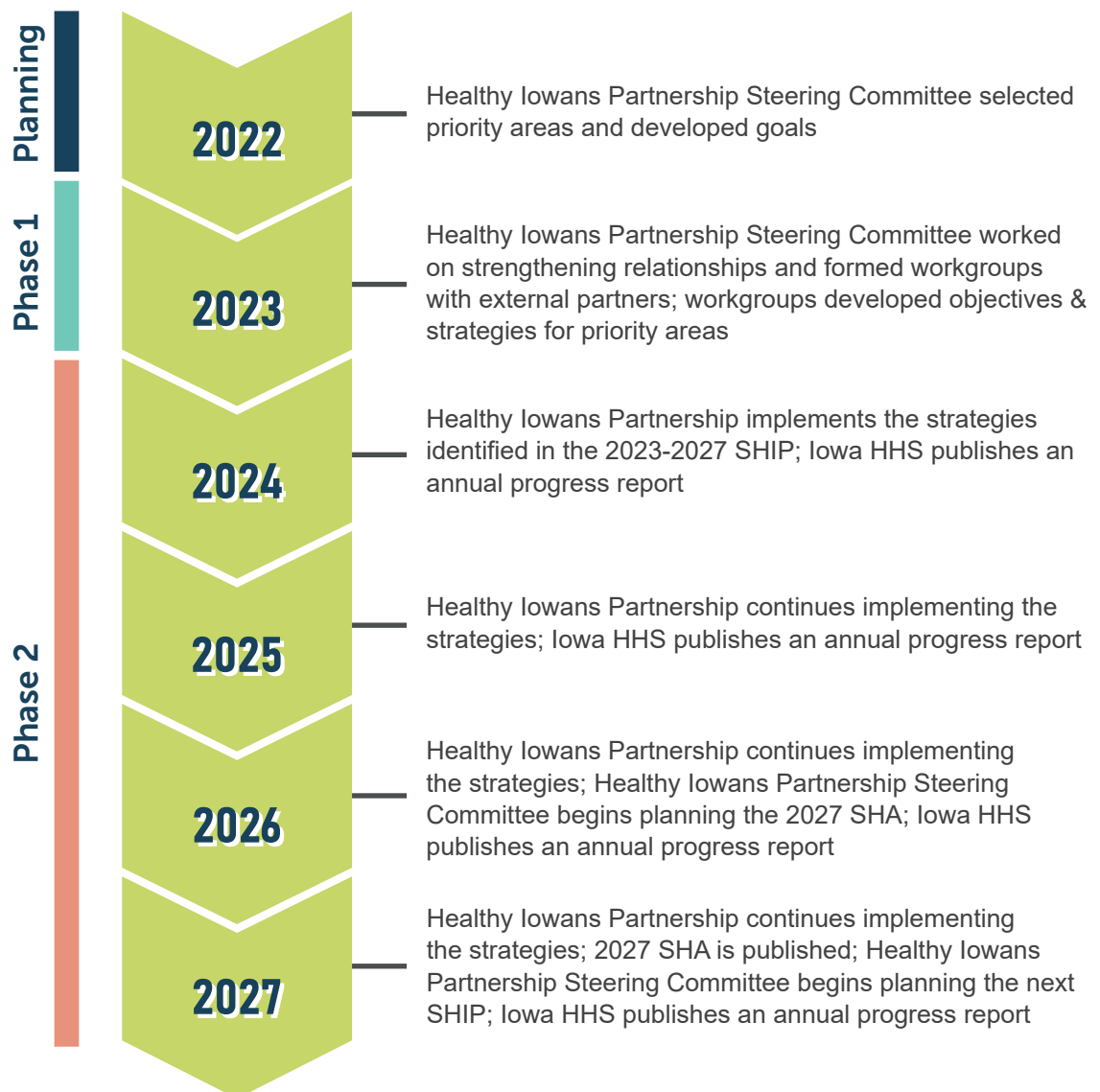
Timeline

Implementation of the 2023-2027 SHIP will occur in two phases.

In Phase One (2023), the Healthy Iowans Partnership focused on strengthening relationships. As part of this phase, workgroups were developed for the two priority areas. Together, the workgroups created objectives and strategies and planned to carry them out in phase two of this plan from 2024-2027.

Phase Two will require the Partnership to actively address the objectives and strategies for Access to Care: Behavioral Health and Healthy Eating & Active Living.

The success of the SHIP will depend on contributions from the Healthy Iowans Partnership and community members across the state. Iowa HHS will monitor the implementation of the SHIP to ensure accountability from all contributing parties.

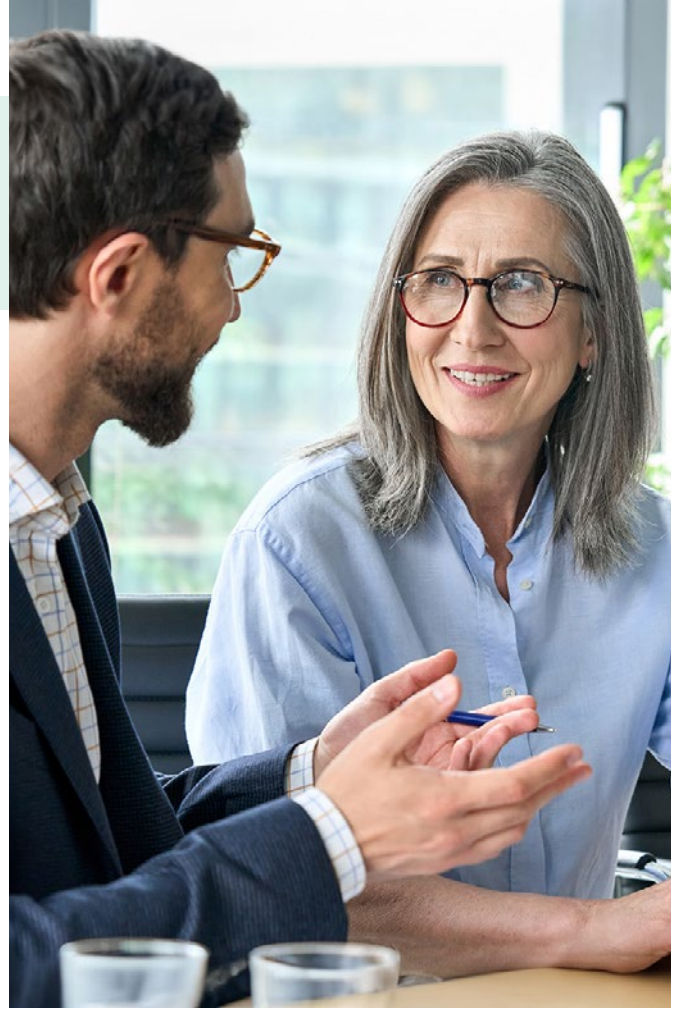


Phase One 2023

Strengthening Relationships

To maximize impact in the 2023-2027 SHIP priority areas, organizations throughout the state must work together. Partnerships can avoid duplication of effort, ensure synergy of resources and enhance overall leadership within the state.²

To help foster the success of these relationships, it is important to have a shared directional framework. This was the main focus of the Healthy Iowans Partnership's work in 2023.



Goal 1

Build a strong Healthy Iowans Partnership

By the end of 2023, the Healthy Iowans Partnership will have an operating framework.

By the end of 2023, the Healthy Iowans Partnership will be prepared to address each priority area of the 2023-2027 SHIP.



Overview of Work

In 2023, members of the Healthy Iowans Partnership strengthened relationships and expanded collaboration with community organizations to advance progress in the priority areas:

- ▶ Access to Care: Behavioral Health
- ▶ Healthy Eating and Active Living

These partners participated in workshops to develop, refine and prioritize goals and strategies for the 2023-2027 SHIP.

The Healthy Iowans Partnership will begin implementing the plan in 2024 with action steps for the recommended strategies, engaging additional partners and creating accountability around the priority areas.

What Partners Are Saying

Members of the Healthy Iowans Partnership have found immense value in convening organizations statewide and are excited to see the result of everyone working towards common goals. Here is some of their feedback:

“ This process has convened many experienced leaders from across Iowa to arrive at tangible actions for health improvement. ”

“ The 2023-2027 SHIP dovetails perfectly with The Iowa Food System Plan, representing a strong, united front to address the complex problems Iowans face. ”

“ These efforts are in alignment with organizational strategic planning and it has helped get people focused. ”

Access to Care: Behavioral Health

In 2021, nearly two out of five high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks that year, while 26% have seriously considered suicide.³

In 2022, 13% of adults in Iowa reported frequent mental distress.⁴ This percentage increased significantly since 2018.⁵ Frequent mental distress was notably higher for adults with lower household incomes, LGBT+ communities and adults with disabilities.⁷

Another important aspect of behavioral health is substance use. Alcohol is the most common misused substance in Iowa with 22.6% of adults reporting excessive drinking in 2022.^{6,7}

Iowa's alcohol use rates are among the highest in the nation for almost every demographic.⁷

This being said, the behavioral health system is hard to navigate for many Iowans. In fact, 18.9% of adults who needed mental health services reported not knowing where to go in 2018-2019.⁸



Goal 1

Improve access to inclusive behavioral health services in Iowa



Focus Area 1.1: Awareness of Resources

- ▶ Promote culturally appropriate behavioral health services
- ▶ Promote formal and informal peer based support and interventions*
- ▶ Encourage employers to adopt behavioral health policies and practices for employees
- ▶ Collaborate with employers to raise awareness of behavioral health services in the community



Focus Area 1.2: Factors Influencing the System

- ▶ Share the total costs of behavioral health care in Iowa with policymakers
- ▶ Support the use of therapists in schools
- ▶ Investigate barriers to accessing behavioral health services**



Focus Area 1.3: Non-Traditional Delivery of Services

- ▶ Expand existing behavioral health programming in rural areas through innovative partnerships
- ▶ Explore how community health workers could be used in behavioral health***

* Examples of peer-based support include: Peer Support Specialists, Peer Recovery Coach, Family Peer Support Specialists and NAMI Peer-to-Peer.

** Examples of possible barriers include: wait times to access services in a rural area vs a urban area and negative perception surrounding mental health and help-seeking.

*** Community Health Worker is defined as a "frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served." Source: <https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>

Access to Care: Behavioral Health

Is Anyone
Better Off?

Goal 1

Improve access to inclusive behavioral health services in Iowa

	Baseline	2027 Target
Decrease the percent of adults reporting unmet need for mental health treatment due to "did not know where to go for services" ⁹	18.9%	15.1%
Decrease the percent of adults reporting unmet need for mental health treatment ⁹	7.6%	5.2%
Decrease the percent of people age 12 and older reporting unmet need for treatment at a facility for substance use in the past year ⁹	15.6%	12.1%
Decrease the suicide rate per 100,000 population ¹⁰	17.5	15.7



Goal 2

Strengthen Iowa's behavioral health system by increasing available resources and capacity



Focus Area 2.1: Children and Youth

- ▶ Increase prevention programming for youth ages 0-18
- ▶ Support collection and use of adolescent health data
- ▶ Promote mental health plans in schools
- ▶ Amplify existing behavioral health programming for children ages 0-5



Focus Area 2.2: Training and Support Services

- ▶ Increase access to training and continuing education on behavioral health issues*
- ▶ Encourage behavioral health screening at primary care level
- ▶ Promote behavioral health profession apprenticeship programs
- ▶ Encourage the use of many types of behavioral health professionals in different sectors**
- ▶ Investigate different licensure models for behavioral health professions



Focus Area 2.3: Collaboration

- ▶ Develop connections among behavioral health initiatives
- ▶ Promote the inclusion of people with lived experience in decision making and in the development of programming and policies

* Examples of training and continuing education include: [Behavioral Health ECHO](#), [Scanlan Center for School Mental Health professional trainings](#), [Mental Health First Aid](#), [Relationships Can Heal: Knowing the Farmer Client](#), [Question. Persuade. Refer.](#)

** Types of behavioral health professionals may include: *Psychologists, Counselors, Clinicians, Therapists, Clinical Social Workers, Psychiatrists, Mental Health Nurse Practitioners, Primary Care Physicians, Family Nurse Practitioners, Psychiatric Pharmacists, Certified Peer Specialists, Social Workers and Pastoral Counselors.*

Access to Care: Behavioral Health

Is Anyone
Better Off?

Goal 2

Strengthen Iowa's behavioral health system by increasing available resources and capacity

	Baseline	2027 Target
Decrease the suicide rate per 100,000 population - Ages 15-19 ¹¹	13.6	12.2
Increase the percent of schools with universal mental health promotion programs (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) ¹¹		
↳ All schools	89.2%	92.1%
↳ High schools	84.0%	87.5%
↳ Middle schools	91.9%	94.4%
↳ Junior/Senior high schools	91.1%	95.4%



Healthy Eating and Active Living

Proper nutrition and regular physical activity are key to one's overall health.¹² Many people in Iowa lack consistent access to healthy foods, healthy beverages and safe recreational areas.

A lack of consistent access to healthy food can lead to chronic diseases, obesity or developmental problems.¹³ In Iowa, 89 out of 99 counties have areas identified as having low food access and approximately 238,290 Iowans are food insecure.¹⁴ Diets high in fruits and vegetables also reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

According to data from the [Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\)](#)⁶, 41.5% of adult Iowans consumed fruit less than one time per day and 23% consumed vegetables less than one time per day in 2021.

In 2022, an estimated 74.1% of adult Iowans reported any leisure-time physical activity in the last month.⁵ In the [2021 Iowa Youth Survey \(IYS\) State Report](#)¹⁵, between 25% and 29% of youth in grades 6, 8 and 11 reported being physically active for at least 60 minutes on all seven days in the past week.

The Healthy Iowans Partnership hopes to make Healthy Eating & Active Living more attainable for all people in Iowa.



Food Security: Having enough food for an active, healthy life at all times. At a minimum, food security includes 1) readily available nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and 2) the ability to acquire those foods in socially acceptable ways. Source: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-actions-nutrition-security.pdf>

Nutrition Security: Having consistent access to the safe, healthy and affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being. Nutrition security builds on food security by focusing on how the quality of our diets can help reduce diet-related diseases and disparities. Source: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-actions-nutrition-security.pdf>

Rural: An area of open countryside with population densities less than 500 people per square mile and places with fewer than 2,500 people. Source: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural/>

Processing: Operations that alter the general state of the commodity, such as canning, cooking, freezing, dehydration, milling, grinding, pasteurization or homogenization. Source: <https://www.fda.gov/media/168142/download>

Small Food Producer: An operation with gross cash farm income under \$250,000. Source: <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2010/05/18/small-farms-big-differences>

Goal 1

Reduce barriers to affordable, nutritious foods for all people in Iowa



Focus Area 1.1: Food Insecurity

- ▶ Promote innovative food access initiatives
- ▶ Support participation in nutrition programs*
- ▶ Explore policy changes to expand the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program**
- ▶ Increase the number of school-based food pantries
- ▶ Identify gaps in access to culturally preferred foods



Focus Area 1.2: Locally Sourced Food

- ▶ Increase training opportunities for small food producers and processors***
- ▶ Support policies to increase the amount of locally sourced food available through community food nutrition programs
- ▶ Increase the number of small food producers and processors in rural areas



Focus Area 1.3: Collaboration

- ▶ Raise awareness of the Iowa Food Systems Plan
- ▶ Use a unified approach to educate various sectors on the difference between food and nutrition security
- ▶ Investigate food rescue practices in Iowa****

* "Nutrition programs" includes: the Iowa Cafe, Iowa Farm to School, WIC, SNAP, Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Double Up Food Bucks, Produce Prescription Program, and community garden programs.

** This includes the Iowa WIC [Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#) and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

*** Examples of possible trainings include: [Home-Based Kitchen Operations](#), [MarketReady](#), and [Small Farm Sustainability](#).

**** Food Rescue, food recovery, food surplus, and food waste or loss prevention are many terms used to describe similar practices. Food rescue is the practice of collecting unsellable or unharvested food - but edible food that would have otherwise gone to waste - from restaurants, grocers, farmers and other food establishments and distributing to help feed people.

Healthy Eating and Active Living

Is Anyone Better Off?

Goal 1

Reduce barriers to affordable, nutritious foods for all people in Iowa

	Baseline	2027 Target
Decrease the percent of people who are food insecure ¹⁶	7.5%	5.1%



Goal 2

Increase engagement in active living among all people in Iowa



Focus Area 2.1: Inclusive Physical Activity

- ▶ Educate people on the variety of ways one can meet activity recommendations*
- ▶ Promote inclusive physical activity initiatives
- ▶ Engage with community partners to identify best practices in providing physical activity services to Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as refugee populations and those living with disabilities



Focus Area 2.2: Collaboration

- ▶ Collaborate with a variety of partners to cross-promote existing programs and expand their reach
- ▶ Improve the evaluation of active living programming**

* Activity recommendations: U.S Department of Health and Human Services [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#)

** Examples of ways to evaluate may include: utilization of programming and process and outcome measures.

Healthy Eating and Active Living

Is Anyone Better Off?

Goal 2

Increase engagement in active living among all people in Iowa

	Baseline	2027 Target
Increase the percent of adult Iowans who report engaging in physical activity ⁵	74.1%	78.4%



Tracking Progress

The Healthy Iowans Partnership Steering Committee and Workgroups meet regularly throughout the year to collaborate and share updates on implementation.

Meanwhile, the Iowa HHS Healthy Iowans Team monitors statewide data indicators to determine if Healthy Iowans' efforts are moving the needle in each priority area.

The 2023-2027 SHIP is designed to be flexible and reflect changes in Iowa's health issues and in health improvement work. This means that each year, progress is tracked and reported, and revisions made as needed. With assistance from the Healthy Iowans Partnership, goals, objectives and strategies are updated annually to reflect the most current efforts to improve health for all people in Iowa.

Furthermore, the Healthy Iowans Partnership Workgroups continually evaluate assets and resources for addressing the identified priorities and assist in recruiting additional members from throughout the state.

These processes help ensure the 2023-2027 SHIP is an impactful statewide plan created in the best interest of all people in Iowa.



How to Use the SHIP

The information in the SHIP is intended to be useful, actionable and valuable in driving health improvement. Here are some ideas of how you can help bring the SHIP to life:

- ▶ Start a conversation with family, friends, co-workers and officials about your experiences and what your priorities are and what you see as important for your community
- ▶ Get involved - volunteer your time or expertise in an activity related to a health issue that is important to you

For Organizations and Partners:

- ▶ Understand the priority health issues in the SHIP
- ▶ Align your work with SHIP priorities and identify ways you can support or contribute to SHIP strategies
- ▶ Share the SHIP with your partners and networks
- ▶ Encourage community leaders to invest in programs and policy changes that give Iowans the tools and opportunities to achieve optimal health
- ▶ Use the SHIP to connect your work to the needs in the state when thinking about programming, services, grant funding, etc.
- ▶ Share data that relates to the priority health issues



Stay Connected

The 2023-2027 SHIP is a living document.

This means that changes may occur throughout the course of the five year period. To stay up to date with these changes, and the Healthy Iowans process, please use the following resources:

Healthy Iowans Newsletter

A monthly publication, the Healthy Iowans Newsletter provides updates on the Healthy Iowans process, and also includes links to pertinent public health trainings, events, news and resources.

To [subscribe](#), scan this QR code with your phone's camera:



Healthy Iowans Website

<https://hhs.iowa.gov/about/performance-and-reports/healthy-iowans>

Social Media

Find Iowa HHS on these social media platforms:



Sources

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