

Assessment of Community Support for Minnesota's Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP)

PREPARED FOR THE MEEKER-MCLEOD-SIBLEY COMMUNITY HEALTH BOARD



In the spring of 2010, the Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Board (MMS CHB) contracted with the Minnesota Institute of Public Health (MIPH) to collect information from community residents to better understand their perspectives on key concepts regarding policy, environmental, and systems improvements to promote health.

The purpose of this survey was to gather community feedback on levels of support of positive and proactive ways to reduce the likelihood of chronic diseases and promote healthy lifestyles. The survey combined questions on access to health care and healthy behaviors with specific SHIP interventions regarding active communities, nutrition policies in schools, health care referrals, and employee wellness programs.

The goal of the survey was to determine support for various SHIP interventions and their likely impact by asking about the level of community support for the active living and better nutrition. Overall, the survey found widespread and similar levels of support across the three counties for policy and systems changes aimed at improving or creating healthy environments for people.

Surveys were mailed to a random sample of addresses in the three-county area and resulted in a response rate of 34% (N=813). The random sample of Sibley County households was selected by zip codes, with oversampling in Gaylord and Arlington. A total of 264 responses were received, for a response rate of 32 percent. The margin of error is plus or minus 1.7% for MMS as a whole, 2.8%, for Sibley County, 4.6 % for Arlington and 4.7% for Gaylord. Although the higher response rate from women and older residents should be kept in mind, this reflects the willingness to respond to a county public health survey.

This summary focuses on Sibley County results and highlights comparisons to MMS as a whole. Results from Arlington and Gaylord are highlighted only when they are statistically different.

What are current indicators of health status and frequency of activity?

- Sibley County respondents (87%) described their health as generally good to excellent. This was slightly less, but not significantly different than MMS as a whole (89%).
- Nearly three quarters (72%) of MMS and Sibley respondents agreed that obesity contributes to increased health problems and health care costs.
- Fifty-eight percent of Sibley respondents reported that their community currently creates an environment that supports healthy food

choices for residents which compared to 56 percent for MMS. However, respondents from both Arlington (47%) and Gaylord (68%) were significantly different, but in opposite directions, than the county and the region.

- In Sibley County nearly 60 percent of respondents reported they walk or bike 20-30 minutes, either on three or more days per week (37%), or once or twice a week (21%). Over a quarter (28%) reported walking or biking frequency as never or rarely, while another 5 percent reported that a disability or health issue prevents them from walking or biking.



Walking and biking more frequently depends on which environmental changes could be made in the community.

- Sibley County respondents (88%) believed their community creates an environment that includes parks, sidewalks, walking and/or biking trails and playgrounds, similar to MMS respondents as a whole (87%).
- Over half of Sibley respondents (55%) agreed that their community had safe and well-maintained sidewalk, paths and trails available for people to walk or bike on. This was a significantly lower positive response than MMS (68%). The percentage of positive responses from both Gaylord (74%) and Arlington (39%) were significantly different than the county and the region.
- The top three environmental changes that respondents reported would be likely to get them to walk or bike more were ranked in the same order for MMS, Sibley County and Arlington. The percentages for the top three for Sibley County include:
 1. Build trails and paths for walking and biking (76%),
 2. Create safe and convenient road crossings for walkers and bikers (72%), and
 3. Develop more sidewalks to accommodate walkers and bikers (68%).
 4. Respondents from Arlington were more likely to report that repair or widening of existing sidewalk would be very likely or likely to increase their walking or biking frequency.

Widespread community support exists in Sibley County for school policies regarding healthy school nutrition and fundraising, as well as farm to school initiatives providing healthy locally grown food to the schools.

- The majority of respondents who had previously purchased food at various school venues or events reported they would buy more or the same amount if healthy foods and beverages were

offered in school stores (95%); for fundraising campaigns (96%); and at concession stand (93%).

- Farm to school programs had very high or high levels of support from 76 percent of respondents, 16% neutral, and 7% low or very low. Arlington (81%) support was significantly higher than the MMS region (74%), and Gaylord (74%).

Strong levels of support exist for leveraging community partnerships such as shared facilities, cooperation among organizations and educational programs.

- Public support in Sibley County was high to very high for schools and parks sharing facilities such as gyms, pools or fields to increase opportunities for physical activity (78%), civic organizations providing play equipment (78%), and schools or fitness centers offering education and training (70%).

Support for, and access to, worksite wellness programs differ.

- While 59 percent of Sibley County respondents supported worksite wellness programs, 32% were neutral, and 9% reported low or very low levels of support. Only 44 percent of Sibley County respondents who worked outside the home reported having an employer with a wellness program. Both Arlington respondents (52%) and Gaylord respondents (38%) were significantly different than Sibley and MMS, but in opposite directions.

Respondents are likely to be referred by health care providers to resources.

- Seventy percent of Sibley County respondents reported that health care providers were likely to offer referrals to resources for weight loss, physical activity, and other health promotion services when appropriate. While this represents nearly three quarters of the respondents, referral for these types of services is less likely to occur compared to specialty care referrals, such as an internist, psychiatrist, or surgeon (90%) or physical therapy and chiropractic care (74%).