

HEALTHY KC INNOVATORS

Behavioral Health

Behavioral Health is a critical part of an individual's overall health. A healthy mind paves the way for a healthy body.

"For many years, behavioral health has not been thought of as a critical part of overall health, but if we truly want to have a healthy Kansas City, then behavioral health needs to be a part of that discussion," said Carla Gibson, chair of the Behavioral Health Action Team.

Gibson and a team of behavioral health experts worked together to create recommendations to improve behavioral health in the Kansas City community. Their suggestions are evidence based, detailed, and goal oriented. They are based on approaches that have been proven to change outcomes and improve the care coordination of behavioral health in a multifaceted way, while incorporating multiple sectors of the medical community.

Gibson is not alone. Truman Medical Centers' Behavioral Health Department is providing innovative behavioral health strategies to the community. The Healthy KC Behavioral Health Action Team recommended three main strategies: coordinated care, trauma-informed care, and integrated care - Truman Medical Centers (TMC) does work in all three.

Their integrated care strategies are one example. TMC has embedded psychologists into their clinics, health homes, and primary care settings. By combining behavioral health and primary care, TMC hopes to improve behavior change for their patients - specifically those living with chronic illnesses. Patients living with diabetes can now go to their primary care doctor and not only learn how to use their new medicine, but also discuss strategies of how to live with their illness including how to eat, exercise, and understand their reactions to medications. TMC's strategies focus on people's abilities to manage, control, understand, and live with their illnesses rather than just try to survive between multiple doctors' appointments.

New Directions, an organization that provides Employee Assistance Programs and mental health services, is another key player in the behavioral health world. They

help employees find support for a variety of concerns - substance use disorders, depression, anxiety, and stress management. The organization believes that a healthy person consists of a healthy mind and body. Like TMC, they hope to integrate medical and mental health care. New Directions' goal is that mental health services will be provided in all primary care settings allowing a person to get healthy sooner and have access and support for all medical needs at their fingertips.

"My hope is that the recommendations will be implemented in a meaningful, productive, and value-added way. We have a road map, but now we need to make sure that we move forward and never get stalled," Gibson said.

With the help of the public and private sector, Gibson hopes to inform the community about the importance of behavioral health awareness. Without a healthy mind, it is hard to achieve a healthy body.

Healthy Eating

Promoting and providing options for healthy eating are critical in creating a culture of health and wellness. Healthy KC's Healthy Eating Action Team recommends efforts that supply, create, and educate the community about the importance and availability of healthy eating options. To live a healthy life at all ages, it is imperative that one eats nutrient-dense rather than calorie-dense food.

"Everyone eats; it's one of the only health factors which absolutely everyone participates in. But widespread food insecurity and poor availability of healthy food mean that many Kansas Citians don't have opportunities to experience a healthy diet, and their health suffers as a result," said Healthy Eating Action Team Chair, Beth Low-Smith.

Low-Smith and her team of healthy eating and food access experts worked together to create a list of recommendations based on the idea of healthy food access in the Kansas City community. They hope that engaging with civic and business leaders will help them create a strong effort to increase healthy food access, educate the community on the importance of healthy eating, and

reduce overall food insecurity in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Their hope is to be able to provide healthy food access to all community members.

Many organizations and businesses have taken on this challenge. They try to incorporate healthy food options for their employees. After all, most employees eat at least one meal a day in the office. As such, businesses can really affect employee eating behaviors.

The City of Kansas City, MO took this to heart when they developed their “KCMO Healthier Vending Machine Initiative” in 2013. This policy established new standards of healthier products in vending machines that are available to City employees. By eliminating unhealthy options like sugary beverages and supplying healthier choices like 100% fruit juice, the City hopes to encourage employees to start making better choices about what they eat during the workday.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City (Blue KC) took a similar approach. In May 2014, they opened their Live Blue Kitchen and Café - a state-of-the-art cafeteria. Led by Chef Kyle Williams, a nutrition expert, and Good

Food Good Futures, a company that helps large employers provide healthy food options to their employees, the Live Blue Kitchen and Café is an amazing example of how to influence employees to make healthy eating decisions and support local agriculture at the same time.

Before the Café opened, Blue KC had a typical corporate office cafeteria - frozen prepared hot meals, with very little healthy and fresh food options. That all changed when the Live Blue Kitchen and Café opened its doors. This innovative cafeteria offers fresh-food options at subsidized prices to employees, helping them make healthy eating decisions every day.

Supporting local agriculture is another inventive component of the café. By buying up to 10 percent of their ingredients from local farms, they hope to support community farms and their overall sustainability. The company also offers Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) options to their employees. By offering healthy fresh, delicious and local food options to employees, Blue KC and their Live Blue Kitchen and Café hope to help their employees thrive in a culture of health and wellness.

