



news release

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The Wellmark Foundation Announces 2008 Funding Opportunities

(Des Moines, Iowa) –The Wellmark Foundation board of directors recently announced childhood obesity prevention and community-based wellness and prevention as the funding focus areas for its philanthropy. This marks a departure from the Foundation’s previously established disease-based grant funding priorities and seeks to encourage a greater emphasis on primary prevention activities that communities can advance. Applicants may request project funding from The Wellmark Foundation during its two annual grant cycles in 2008.

According to Dana McNeill, executive director of The Wellmark Foundation, childhood obesity is a complex topic involving genetic, behavioral and environmental factors. Prevention and mitigation efforts may be incorporated into home, health care, child care, school, and community settings.

“Together we can change childhood obesity in our communities,” says McNeill. “Individuals, families, communities, schools, youth service organizations, public health, media and government all need to determine their role and take action to prevent and decrease childhood overweight and obesity.”

Examples of project ideas communities may undertake with Foundation support include:

- Efforts to ensure daily, quality physical education in all school grades.
- Initiatives to reduce time spent watching television, playing video games and participating in other similar sedentary activities.
- Projects that build physical activity and playtimes into regular routines for children and families striving to achieve recommended levels of physical activity each day.
- Efforts to make community infrastructure (built environment) more available and accessible for physical activity for all people.
- Initiatives to promote healthy food choices, such as consuming recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables.
- Projects to ensure schools provide healthy foods and beverages on campus and at school events.

- Efforts to promote culturally appropriate interventions to address disparities in the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity among various racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic and age groups.
- Initiatives to educate expectant parents about the benefits of breastfeeding, including lower likelihood of infants becoming overweight as they grow older.
- Projects designed to educate health care providers and health professional students in the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity.
- Efforts that emphasize the consumer's role in making wise food and physical activity choices by providing age appropriate education through schools, youth service organizations, and family and community settings.
- Initiatives that address issues of healthy food access, dietary choices and health by improving food production and distribution networks.

“The Foundation is equally interested in funding community-based wellness and prevention projects,” says McNeill. “We’ll seek to support communities as they develop, implement, and enhance a broad spectrum of local level wellness and prevention programs. Such programs will focus on prevention rather than treatment and reflect the priority health needs of the community.”

Examples of project ideas communities may undertake with Foundation support include:

- Support of various cancer screenings, especially efforts to promote the use of or access to cancer screenings.
- Maternal and child health initiatives, especially programs that encourage participation of high-risk mothers in prenatal care.
- Community-based initiatives to promote wellness in the elderly population, including exercise, diet, and regular medical visits.
- Injury prevention.
- Community-based initiatives to encourage establishment of a medical home for children.
- Social marketing programs that encourage healthy behaviors or address specific risk behaviors (substance abuse, youth risk behaviors).

Letters of Interest requesting project funding are due to The Wellmark Foundation on April 2, 2008, for Grant Cycle 1, and August 21, 2008, for Grant Cycle 2. Visit The Wellmark Foundation’s Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation for complete instructions on how to apply for a grant.

“The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to build healthier communities. We are pleased our funding can support community-based projects that address childhood obesity prevention and wellness initiatives, and we are excited to see how communities across our two states propose to utilize this philanthropic support,” says McNeill.

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