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# news release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The Wellmark Foundation Funds 12 Health Improvement Projects in Iowa**

**(Des Moines, Iowa)** – The Wellmark Foundation funded 12 health improvement grants in Iowa and South Dakota totaling \$1,327,917 at its recent board of directors meeting. In 2008, The Wellmark Foundation’s funding efforts will seek to facilitate programs targeting childhood obesity prevention, and community-based wellness and prevention. Organizations receiving grants in these designated health priority areas are listed below. All awards are two-year grants unless otherwise noted.

### **Childhood Obesity Prevention**

- Des Moines Public Schools will use a \$46,991 one-year grant to prevent childhood obesity by creating a fitness arcade designed to increase physical activity of students at Merrill Middle School. The fitness arcade will use technology-driven games that require students to be physically active in order to play. Although the arcade will be available to all students, the program will target high-risk students and their families.
- Healthy Henry County Communities in Mt. Pleasant received a \$135,500 grant to enhance a childhood obesity prevention program targeting children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The program continues an ongoing wellness initiative to improve childhood weight issues in the county, which has been supported by previous Wellmark Foundation grants and a Harkin Wellness grant. New programming will include innovative outreach and services to engage Hispanic children.
- A \$64,428 grant will allow the Iowa Department of Public Health to develop a new body mass index (BMI) surveillance system for elementary students across the state. The system will provide consistent and standardized data on children’s weight status so that effective strategies to improve overweight in children can be implemented and monitored.
- A \$105,000 grant will allow the Iowa Health Foundation in Des Moines to pilot a national childhood obesity prevention program in after-school programs in the West Des Moines and Perry Community School Districts. The grant will implement work planned through a previous Wellmark Foundation capacity-building grant received in 2007.

- Iowa State University in Ames will use a \$148,909 grant to impact healthy food choices in schools. A nutrition program designed to identify best practice nutrition guidelines for foods sold outside of school meals will be piloted in six communities. Based on these findings, a model will be developed to assist schools when implementing these nutrition guidelines.
- The Trinity Health Foundation in Fort Dodge received a \$145,500 grant to develop a school-based wellness and obesity prevention program targeting students in kindergarten through eighth grade. This multi-faceted program will include curriculum enhancements, daily physical education classes, a walking initiative and an after-school swimming program provided in collaboration with the local YMCA.
- The University of Iowa Foundation received a \$87,278 grant to implement a school-based nutrition improvement project designed to prevent childhood obesity through improved concessions stand offerings at sporting events. The 18-month project will evaluate current food offerings, identify barriers to healthy options, implement new offerings, and evaluate the sales and profitability of new offerings. A how-to guide based on findings will be created and distributed to other community groups.

#### **Community-based Wellness and Prevention**

- Communities in Schools of Cedar Valley, Inc. in Waterloo received an \$88,974 grant to enhance a successful school-based health education program designed to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and to increase self esteem among youth ages 12-19 years. Identified disparities in African American girls will be addressed by creating a Youth of Color coalition and offering a culturally appropriate summer health education program.
- A \$149,833 grant was awarded to the Elderbridge Agency on Aging in Mason City to expand a wellness program for older adults to 24 congregate meal sites. The program incorporates balance, flexibility and strength training, as well as nutrition and health education segments to promote healthy aging. The project replicates an initiative originally launched at one congregate meal site in 2007 through support of a Wellmark Foundation mini-grant.
- A \$150,000 grant to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in Des Moines will support construction of a 25-mile paved trail in central Iowa. This funding intends to promote community wellness by increasing options for exercise and healthy lifestyle choices. Efforts to encourage use of the trail for health improvement will also be implemented.
- Mercy Medical Center Foundation in Sioux City received a \$100,504 grant to implement an awareness program focused on improving access to colorectal cancer screenings. Strategies include working with physician clinics to identify and contact persons who have not undergone recommended colorectal cancer screenings, a community-wide social marketing campaign, and an educational exhibit including a 40-foot long fiberglass colon display.
- A \$105,000 grant will allow the Polk County Agricultural Extension District in Des Moines to improve community wellness through a nutrition improvement project focused on vending machines. A nationally recognized survey instrument will be modified to examine the nutritional value of offerings in vending environments. After piloting in six

communities, a community report card process and online reporting system will be created.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$14.7 million to fund 406 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$1,739,233 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to positively impact the health outcomes of individuals and communities in our states,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “We had an excellent group of applications in this first round of grants under our new funding priority areas of childhood obesity prevention, and community-based wellness and prevention. We are confident that collectively, this group of projects will make great strides in improving the health of individuals and communities across Iowa,” explains McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Due to the Foundation’s recent significant support toward disaster relief efforts, the timeline for the second 2008 community responsive grant cycle has been modified. Letters of Interest (LOIs) are now due on September 23, 2008. Learn more about this funding opportunity during a grant applicant teleconference on July 21, 2008. For teleconference and LOI details, visit the Foundation’s Web site at [www.wellmark.com/foundation](http://www.wellmark.com/foundation). Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.