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# news release

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## **South Dakota State University receives Wellmark Foundation grant for health improvement program in Brookings County**

DES MOINES, IA (January 4, 2010) – The Wellmark Foundation has awarded a one-year, \$25,000 grant to South Dakota State University (SDSU) in Brookings to implement a community health planning program.

*Brookings County Strides to a Healthier Community* will implement a program developed in 2005 by the South Dakota Department of Health, which provides a framework for working with communities to positively impact health, says Ruth Schroeder, South Dakota State University Wellness Center director. “The first step in the program is a comprehensive and integrated approach that involves the community in planning and creating an environment that promotes healthy choices,” she says. “Strides to a Healthier Community will conduct a community-wide health assessment in Brookings County in order to increase health and wellness in the community.”

According to Schroeder, residents will help assess the community’s need relative to creating an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles and reduces chronic disease through physical activity and nutrition. The assessment will be conducted through implementation of two online surveys designed to study the community’s gaps, obstacles and weaknesses in achieving an environment that promotes healthy lifestyle changes. Residents will be asked to assess the community’s readiness to change in support of a healthier community, identify environmental barriers to change that exist in the community, and determine what type of change will be supported by residents in order to support healthy behaviors.

Survey results will be used to develop intervention strategies, design community wellness initiatives and gain community support for the implementation phase of the program. The

Strides to a Healthier Community workgroup, which includes professionals in various departments at South Dakota State University, the City of Brookings and Brookings County, is in the process of inviting numerous community organizations to participate in the group.

For more information on Strides to a Healthier Community, contact Schroeder at 605-688-6895 or [ruth.schroeder@sdstate.edu](mailto:ruth.schroeder@sdstate.edu).

The Wellmark Foundation has provided approximately \$17.43 million to fund 428 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$447,395 this *Healthy Communities: Supporting a Culture of Wellness & Prevention* funding cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation works to improve the health of Iowans and South Dakotans,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “Strides to a Healthier Community is a comprehensive program with proven results in other communities, which will help Brookings County positively impact the health of thousands of people who live in the community.”

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