

CASE STUDY

December 2018

Obesity causes or exacerbates numerous chronic diseases and conditions that can lead to death, including diabetes and hypertension. In an effort to address the obesity epidemic in Arkansas — which affects more than one-third of adults in our state — the governor-led Healthy Active Arkansas (HAA) initiative provides a 10-year framework with phased goals to increase the percentage of Arkansans who are at a healthy weight. The HAA plan is comprised of nine priority areas in which individuals and communities can take action to encourage and enable healthier lifestyles. Supported by funding from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement convened 10 statewide learning network meetings beginning in 2017 to engage, recruit, and activate a network of local champions to assist in meeting these goals. This study is part of a series of case studies highlighting success stories from the HAA Statewide Learning Network. Visit achi.net for more resources, including additional case studies and a template for creating your own action plan for your community.

HEALTHY ACTIVE ARKANSAS STATEWIDE LEARNING NETWORK

During the first year of the learning network, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) hosted meetings in Jonesboro, McGehee, Little Rock, Clarksville, and Magnolia. In an effort to reach other areas of the state and expand the learning network, five additional meetings were held in Springdale, Mountain Home, Hot Springs, El Dorado, and Helena-West Helena in 2018. In total, over 460 city and county officials, hospital executives, superintendents, college administrators, community advocates, and others joined the HAA Statewide Learning Network to make their communities healthier and more active places to live, work, and play. Network members developed more than 175 action plans to create change in at least one of the nine priority areas. Each action plan identified strategies and key partners necessary to reach the desired outcome, as well as potential barriers.

At the learning network meeting in Mountain Home, Dr. Julia Gist, Dean of the School of Health Sciences at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home (ASUMH), highlighted health initiatives implemented by the university to improve the health of faculty, staff, and students. The HAA priority areas addressed by these health initiatives include:

- Priority 3: Nutritional standards in schools — early child care through college;
- Priority 4: Physical education and activity in schools — early child care through college;
- Priority 5: Healthy worksites; and
- Priority 8: Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction.

ASUMH HEALTH INITIATIVES

In developing and implementing health initiatives, ASUMH sought to ensure opportunities for a healthier lifestyle were available in both the academic and human resources areas. In 2017, the ASUMH Wellness Champions group was formed for faculty and staff interested in participating in wellness or wellness planning. In the same year, the ASUMH School of Health Sciences was awarded a grant from the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP) for employee wellness.

The Arkansas State University System includes a fitness policy allowing faculty and staff to release up to three hours a week for physical fitness as part of their employee benefit package. Faculty and staff have access to a fitness center on the ASUMH campus 24 hours a day and can reserve canoes, kayaks, and bicycles



ASUMH students practice yoga.

ACHI is a nonpartisan, independent, health policy center that serves as a catalyst to improve the health of Arkansans.

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for use on the local rivers, lakes, and trails. The fitness center and equipment are also available to students. During the Spring 2018 semester, a free 12-week program, Living Fit: Your Guide to Success, was offered to faculty and staff to focus on the critical elements of creating a lifestyle full of health and purpose. Several faculty and staff participated and benefited from this program.

ASUMH encourages all students to be active and make healthy food and drink choices. Recently, ASUMH added hiking and kayaking to its curriculum and created a student hiking organization. In the ASUMH Gotaas Health Sciences Building, a student lounge with a refrigerator and microwave is available to encourage students to eat healthy and cost-effective meals. The ASUMH Gotaas Health Science Building is the only academic building on campus with vending machines. Discussions are underway with vending machine suppliers to improve food choices and display nutritional information.

ASUMH promotes a common thread among all programs at its School of Health Sciences: Healthcare providers need to be healthy. In addition, ASUMH nursing programs are part of the American Nurses Association's Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation campaign to encourage nurses to take positive action to improve health.

NEXT STEPS

The ASUMH campus continues to look for opportunities to improve health, wellness, and the quality of life. Development of a disc golf course was approved, and construction will occur during the 2018-2019 school year. This will offer students, faculty, and staff a new option for recreation and exercise. To encourage drinking water instead of sugary or caffeinated beverages, a pilot water bottle filling station will be installed in the ASUMH Gotaas Health Sciences Building. ASUMH is also continuing discussions on improving vending machine food options in its Gotaas Health Sciences Building. An potential option is for ASUMH to stock and maintain the vending machine on its own to allow more control over food and drink choices.

Additionally, the ASUMH Wellness Champions and the chancellor are developing plans for a one-mile walking trail on campus. The plans include a paved trail with lighting and fitness stations. This project will be dependent upon available funding.

ASUMH

Established in 1995, ASUMH's mission is to "LEAD" through educational opportunities utilizing "Lifelong learning, Enhanced quality of life, Academic accessibility, and Diverse experiences." The administration, faculty, and staff strongly believe that encompassed within this mission is the importance of healthy habits and lifestyles. Consistent with this core belief, ASUMH is committed to and continuously seeks opportunities to encourage students, faculty, and staff in their quest for health improvement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Healthy Active Arkansas: <https://healthyactive.org/>
- Arkansas State University-Mountain Home: <https://www.asumh.edu/>

NOTE: This case study includes information provided by Dr. Julia Gist, Dean of the School of Health Sciences, at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home. ACHI received written permission to use this information. Additional information was gathered from the Arkansas State University-Mountain Home website.