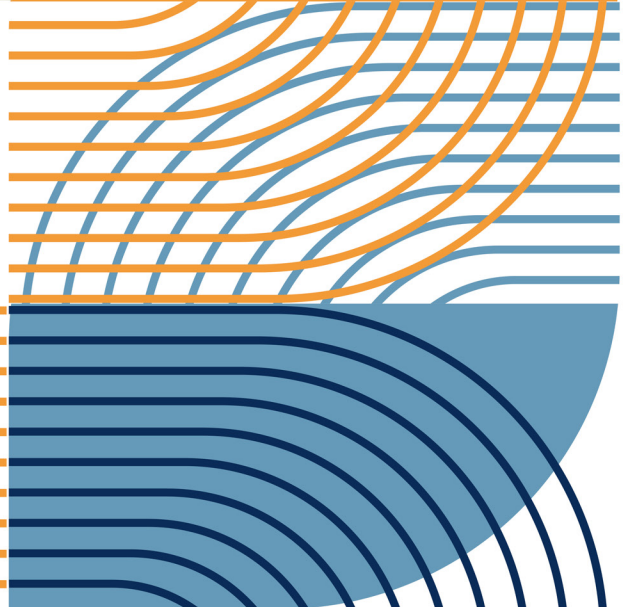




Dakota County
Public Health



Community Health
Improvement Plan

2025 ANNUAL HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The full CHA, CHIP, and additional data profiles can be found here:

[Community Health Improvement Plan | Dakota County](#)

Mental Health and Substance Use Pathway

Result We're Working Toward

People who live, work, learn, and gather in Dakota County experience mental well-being, connection, and reduced substance misuse.

About the Pathway

Mental health and substance misuse affect individuals, families, and communities across Dakota County. The Mental Health and Substance Misuse Pathway brings together community organizations, healthcare providers, schools, local government, and residents **to strengthen prevention, early intervention, crisis response, and recovery supports while improving access to care and reducing stigma**. Together, partners are working to build a more coordinated, equitable, and responsive behavioral health system.

This CHIP pathway is supported and implemented through Dakota County Public Health's Opioid Response, Youth Well-being Network, Cannabis and Substance Use Prevention Grant, and mental health programming within the SHIP and Health Promotion Team.

2025 Highlights

Youth Well-being Network Launched

Dakota County launched the Youth Well-being Network in January 2025 to bring together organizations working to support the mental health and well-being of young people. The Youth Well-Being Network addresses risk factors contributing to adverse childhood experiences, substance misuse and overdoses, and suicidality in Dakota County's youth and young adults ages 10–24. The goal is to ensure that protective factors are in place, so this target group can thrive.

Membership includes organizations, institutions, youth and adult community members from Dakota County. Individuals with lived experience are encouraged to participate to provide insight. People with lived experience are those who have gained knowledge of the subject matter through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events. To get involved with the network:

Email eric.gipson@co.dakota.mn.us to receive meeting details.



CredibleMind Expanded Access to Mental Health Resources

Dakota County launched CredibleMind, a free online mental health and well-being resource available to all Dakota County residents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. CredibleMind is a nationally recognized platform that partners with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to help local health departments expand access to mental health support through prevention and early intervention.

Residents can explore trusted articles, videos, podcasts, self-assessments, and tools while also connecting with local mental health services and community resources. Organizations that serve Dakota County residents are encouraged to submit their programs through the website, helping keep the local resource directory current and comprehensive. By making trusted information and local services easier to find, CredibleMind supports the pathway's goal of improving mental well-being, reducing stigma, and helping people connect to care before a crisis occurs.

In the first eight months after launching in May 2025, **1,388 unique users** visited CredibleMind, generating **nearly 2,000 sessions**.

Learn more: [CredibleMind](#) | [Dakota County](#)



Young Adult Health Survey Established a Baseline for Future Action

Dakota County Public Health partnered with NAMI Minnesota to conduct the inaugural Young Adult Health Survey, gathering feedback from Dakota County residents ages 18–25 about their mental health, substance use, access to healthcare, and overall well-being. The survey was developed to better understand the unique experiences of young adults, an age group for which very limited local data exists.

A total of 61 young adults participated in the survey. While the results are not representative of all young adults in Dakota County, they provide valuable insight into the experiences of those who participated. Many respondents reported strong support systems and openness to talking about mental health, while others described challenges related to stress, mental health, and accessing care.

The findings will help guide future public health planning, strengthen community partnerships, and inform strategies that support the health and well-being of young adults across Dakota County.

Access to Care Crisis Continuum Workgroup Launched

People experiencing a mental health crisis often receive care from many different organizations. To better understand how these organizations can work together to improve patient care and staff experience, Dakota County Public Health and Social Services launched the Access to Care Crisis Continuum Workgroup.

The workgroup brought together representatives from **seven sectors across the behavioral health crisis continuum, including healthcare, public safety, social services, behavioral**

health providers, residential services, crisis response, and community organizations. Over five collaborative meetings, participants explored how each sector could use its unique role and expertise to strengthen the crisis system. Together, they identified shared challenges—including workforce shortages, rising client needs, and barriers to navigating services—and began developing recommendations to improve communication, coordination, and access to care.

The workgroup's recommendations will help guide future efforts to strengthen Dakota County's behavioral health crisis continuum and improve the experience of both residents and the professionals who support them.

Statewide Health Improvement Partnership Pathway

Result We're Working Toward

People who live, work, learn, and gather in Dakota County experience community conditions that promote healthy eating, active living, mental well-being, and tobacco-free living.

About the Pathway

The Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) has been a cornerstone of Dakota County's community health improvement efforts for more than a decade. Through partnerships with schools, workplaces, local governments, healthcare providers, and community organizations, SHIP advances policy, systems, and environmental changes that make it easier for people to eat healthy, be physically active, support mental well-being, and live tobacco-free. The SHIP Pathway builds on this strong foundation to **strengthen community conditions that support healthy eating, active living, mental well-being, and tobacco-free living.**

This CHIP pathway is supported and implemented through the Dakota County Health Promotion Team, the South of the River Collaborative, and local SHIP partners.

2025 Highlights

Completing One SHIP Cycle and Launching the Next

Dakota County successfully completed the SHIP 5 grant cycle while working with schools, local governments, healthcare providers, community organizations, and other partners to develop the SHIP 6 Workplan. Lessons learned, community partnerships, local data, and input from CHIP partners helped shape priorities for the next phase of SHIP. The new workplan will continue advancing community-driven strategies that support healthy eating, active living, mental well-being, and tobacco-free living.



Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative Expanded Community-Led Solutions

Through the Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative, Dakota County SHIP awarded funding to **10 community-led projects** selected from **17 applications** to improve access to healthy food, increase opportunities for physical activity, and support community mental well-being. The initiative expanded partnerships with food shelves, nonprofit organizations, culturally focused organizations, sustainable agriculture partners, and faith communities.

As part of the initiative, SHIP provided **three capacity-building opportunities** focused on community engagement, evaluation, and strategic communications to help funded partners strengthen and sustain their work. As a result, **100% of funded partners** met at least **six of seven sustainability criteria**, demonstrating strong potential for lasting community impact.

Rapid Response Mini-Grants Strengthened Local Hunger Relief

When local hunger relief organizations faced growing demand and uncertainty around potential reductions to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funding, Dakota County Public Health responded quickly through a new Rapid Response Mini-Grant Initiative. **Using SHIP funds and CHIP partner guidance, nearly \$40,000 were distributed to 10 local hunger relief organizations within a two-month period.**

The mini-grants helped organizations purchase equipment to safely store, transport, and distribute food more efficiently, strengthening their ability to serve residents experiencing food insecurity. By investing in the capacity of local food shelves and hunger relief programs, Dakota County helped ensure community partners could continue providing reliable access to healthy food during a time of increased need.

"Thanks to this partnership and investment, we can now accept and preserve more nutritious options for our community, expanding access and reducing waste."

— Neighbors, Inc.

Supporting Healthier Learning Environments

Dakota County Public Health partners with all 10 school districts to support healthy school environments through SHIP. While each district's priorities are unique, SHIP provides funding, technical assistance, and partnership opportunities to help schools implement strategies that support student health and well-being. South St. Paul Middle School's schoolwide cell phone policy is one example of this work.

Supported through a SHIP School Wellness Community Partner Award, South St. Paul Middle School implemented a coordinated approach that included planning, policy development, communication with families and staff, implementation, and evaluation. Compared to the previous school year, the school reported a **19% reduction in suspensions**, a **22% decrease in fights and assaults**, and an **11% reduction in tardiness**. Staff also reported greater student engagement and improved classroom focus, demonstrating how school wellness policies can create healthier learning environments.

Access to Care for Children Pathway

Result We're Working Toward

Children in Dakota County experience healthy development supported by timely, preventive, and coordinated healthcare and dental care.

About the Pathway

The Access to Care for Children Pathway brings together healthcare providers, schools, community organizations, and public health partners to expand opportunities for children to receive timely, coordinated healthcare and dental care. Through collaboration, partners work **to strengthen preventive services, reduce barriers to care, and ensure children and families have the resources they need to support lifelong health.**

This CHIP pathway is supported and implemented through the School-Based Health Center Capital (SBHCC) Program, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Dakota County Oral Health Task Force.

2025 Highlights

Expanding School-Based Healthcare

Pathway partners continued working to expand access to healthcare for children by strengthening partnerships with school districts and healthcare organizations. Dakota County also secured leveraged funding to support school healthcare initiatives, helping create more opportunities for students to receive care where they learn.

A significant milestone was the opening of the Warrior Care School-Based Health Center, which began serving students in fall 2025. During their first few months of being open the health center provided care to **149 students**.

Increasing Access to Preventive Care

Partners continued working together to increase access to routine vaccinations through school-located clinics. **Homeland Health** hosted **15 clinics**, while Dakota County Public Health's Disease Prevention and Control team held **10 additional clinics**. Together, these efforts helped **3,229 children** receive recommended immunizations.



Strengthening Children's Oral Health

The Dakota County Oral Health Task Force completed its 2025–2026 Strategic Plan, establishing shared priorities to improve children's oral health and expand access to dental care. The plan will help guide future collaboration and efforts to reduce barriers to preventive dental services across the county.

Participation in the Smiles at School program also continued to grow. **Fifty-six Dakota County schools** enrolled in the 2026 program, up **from 51 schools the previous year**, including **six schools participating for the first time**. Through this expansion, more than **3,861 first-grade students** will receive oral health education, helping establish healthy habits early in life.

Innovations Pathway

Result We're Working Toward

Adults in Dakota County experience stable housing and timely access to care.

About the Pathway

The Innovations Pathway focuses on **exploring and advancing innovative approaches that support housing stability and access to healthcare for adults**. Because these issues are complex and interconnected, the pathway brings together partners to better understand community needs, identify barriers, strengthen partnerships, and lay the groundwork for future action.

This CHIP pathway is supported and guided by the CHIP Internal Steering Committee and the CHIP Advisory Committee. As the pathway continues to develop, efforts are focused on building partnerships, identifying opportunities, and establishing the foundation needed to support future implementation.

2025 Highlights

Deep Dive Assessment on Access to Care

Dakota County completed a focused assessment to better understand barriers to healthcare access for adults. Through data analysis and community partner engagement, the assessment identified health literacy and limited access to primary care, and transportation as key factors affecting residents' ability to access healthcare. These findings will help guide future priorities and strategies to improve access to care across Dakota County.

Strengthening Partnerships to Improve Housing and Access to Care

The Internal Steering Committee expanded collaboration with housing and healthcare partners to better understand the relationship between housing stability and health. By strengthening cross-sector partnerships and exploring opportunities for collaboration, the pathway is building a foundation for innovative approaches that address the interconnected needs of Dakota County residents.

Creating a More Welcoming Public Health Presence

Dakota County redesigned its Public Health outreach trailer with a more welcoming, eye-catching, and approachable look to better engage residents at community events. Serving as a mobile Public Health hub, the trailer will help increase awareness of Public Health programs and create an inviting space for residents to access health information, resources, and services where they live, work, and gather.



Looking Ahead

The accomplishments highlighted in this report represent the first year of implementing Dakota County's 2025–2029 Community Health Improvement Plan. Over the coming years, pathway partners will continue building on this momentum by strengthening partnerships, advancing community-driven strategies, and monitoring progress toward shared goals. Together, these ongoing efforts will help create healthier communities where all Dakota County residents can thrive.