

We need everyone to create healthy community

By Melissa Henderson

Public Health professionals at RiverStone Health work to improve life, health and safety in our communities. We design health education campaigns and creative ways to engage youth. We provide health education and inspections for restaurants, pools, body art studios and daycare centers. We offer school nursing services and home visiting. We offer routine and travel vaccinations. We plan for emergencies such as floods and tornadoes, hoping they never become a reality. We build coalitions to promote quality of life, safer routes to schools and a world without suicide.

We do what we can because we care, but we need your help. Community leaders, employers, schools, faith groups and neighbors – people like you – can help create a healthy, safe and strong community culture. During National Public Health Week, April 3-9, public health workers are celebrating healthy culture. How does that involve you? Here are some ideas:

- Community leaders can require new development to include safe walking paths, sidewalks and clear signage that encourages physical activity and safety. They can prioritize projects that will reduce the gaps in access to healthy foods, mental healthcare or free recreation that ensures everyone in our community has the same opportunity to thrive.
- Employers can offer opportunities for a better work-life balance, such as paid sick leave, flexible work schedules and connection to health screenings, flu shots and gym discounts.
- Businesses can offer discounts for customers who commute by bike or foot, and keep walkways clear and accessible all seasons of the year. Stores that offer candy, alcohol, and tobacco products can adopt healthier advertising practices. That means keeping alcohol and tobacco products in a separate drawer or area of the store and stocking candy away from the register.
- Schools can promote healthy food choices during school hours. They can encourage students to walk and bike to school by offering chaperoned walking school buses. Schools can support teacher well-being with policies that support resilience, nutrition and activity.
- Faith groups can offer flu shot clinics and blood pressure screenings after services. They can reach out to homebound members and encourage physically active service projects.
- Neighbors can improve health just by being neighborly. Saying hello, learn your neighbors' names and offer to lend a hand when needed. Studies show that when people feel they belong, their mental health improves. Offering a helping hand also benefits the giver's mental health, stress levels and well-being. Neighborhoods that are more socially connected tend to see fewer crimes.

I challenge everyone to make a habit of reaching out to support others in need and asking for help when you are in need. We all have opportunities to create a culture of health and well-being where we live, work, play, pray and learn.

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