

How simple acts of kindness can improve neighborhood safety

By Amanda Zimmerman

As winter approaches, keeping sidewalks clear of snow and ice helps with mobility by making sidewalks and pathways safer and easier to navigate. It prevents slips and falls, especially for older adults, children or those who depend on walking or a wheelchair to get around.

A “good neighbor” activity during the winter months can include shoveling a neighbor’s sidewalk or removing icy patches. This simple act of kindness improves both individual safety and the overall well-being of the neighborhood.

Clearing sidewalks addresses health needs identified in the 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment. The assessment revealed that half of older adults experience activity limitations. It also indicated that community members are looking for more social and neighborhood connections.

Due to the cold weather and the shorter days, it can be harder in the winter to get out and interact with others. This can lead to feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Keeping sidewalks clear of snow and icy obstructions can help address the health needs of community members feeling isolated by making sure sidewalks are safer for people to get out and walk or connect with others. It helps ensure safety for everyone by preventing slips and falls.

Shoveling a neighbor’s sidewalk during the winter is a kind and considerate gesture. This can foster a sense of community, showing that you care about your neighbors and their well-being. If your neighbor is an older adult or experiences mobility issues, the help can be especially appreciated. Helping to clear snow and ice for our neighbors makes Billings a safer, more connected place to live.

Other ways you can be a good neighbor in the fall and winter months can include helping with winter preparations. This can include helping neighbors put in storm windows or clearing out gutters of leaves from the fall season.

It can also be a great help to check in on neighbors occasionally. It can be difficult for older adults to get out in the winter months, so checking in or offering to help with groceries, transportation to medical rides or other errands can help people ensure their basic needs are met during the cold months.

The Healthy By Design Coalition of Billings Clinic, RiverStone Health and Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital, encourages these efforts to promote physical, mental, and social well-being. Healthy By Design encourages community members to help clear snow and ice from the sidewalks to help ensure everyone can move freely and safely in the community.

Amanda Zimmerman is the program coordinator on behalf of the Healthy By Design Coalition. To learn more, call 406-247-3223 or visit Healthy By Design’s website at hbdc.org.