

# STATE & LOCAL

Issues at the state and community levels

## South Dakota health workers put the squeeze on high blood pressure

**H**IGH BLOOD pressure may be known as a silent killer, but public health workers in Sioux Falls, S.D., are working hard to make its dangers known loud and clear.

In April, nearly 8,000 Sioux Falls residents had their blood pressures measured, thanks to a community-wide effort known as the Big Squeeze. The annual month-long event, which began in 2011 and is led by the Sioux Falls Health Department and its community partners, offers free blood pressure screenings and education in a variety of settings, from retail businesses to churches to the local newspaper. The event has become so popular that the number of residents screened has more than tripled since 2011. About 72 million Americans and one in three adults have high blood pressure.

"It's been a huge success," said Jen Johnson, public health project lead at the Sioux Falls Health Department. "We've really been able to grow the program because of our partnerships."

The effort grew out of a conversation physician Paul Amundson, MD, had about five years ago with three fellow health professionals. They were discussing ways to enhance public education surrounding a key chronic disease and eventually decided to focus on high blood pressure, a common condition that could easily be prevented and controlled before causing serious damage or death. The first step was to partner with key stakeholders in the community, such as hospitals, community health

centers and the local health department. That first year in 2011, they met their goal of screening 2,500 residents for high blood pressure.

"This is an easy way to save someone's life," said Amundson, chief medical officer at Dakotacare, the health care plan of the South Dakota Medical Association. "It's one of those arrows in your quiver that you want to talk about when you talk about healthy lifestyles."

For 2012, organizers set a goal of 5,000 screenings and surpassed that number by more than 300. The

event was starting to catch on, and organizers wanted to keep the momentum going, said Mary Michaels, healthy community specialist at the Sioux Falls Health Department. Fortunately, at the same time planning for 2013 was underway, the health department received Community Transformation Grant funding. The new funding created the perfect opportunity to give the Big Squeeze a permanent home within the health department.

In 2013, more than 70 sites throughout Sioux Falls held Big Squeeze blood pressure screenings, Michaels said. The health department also used Community Transformation Grant funds to develop a toolkit to help local employers and health professionals interested in hosting their own Big

Squeeze events. Last year was also the first year that the screening event took place under the auspices of the city's new Live Well Sioux Falls effort, which is supported via grant dollars. Among the specific strategic priorities of Live Well is to increase control of high blood pressure.

To expand the event's reach, organizers recruit local public health and nursing students to help conduct screenings and offer trainings to workplace wellness staff on how to properly take a person's blood pressure. A grant from a local medical association even allowed organizers to purchase stethoscopes and blood pressure cuffs that they can loan out.



Photo courtesy Sioux Falls Health Department

*A blood pressure screening is conducted at Falls Community Health in Sioux Falls, S.D., during the 2013 Big Squeeze.*

In 2013, 41 percent of participants had blood pressure readings in the normal range, while another 41 percent were considered at-risk, 17 percent

were in the high-risk category and 1 percent were critically high risk. Michaels said data shows that the at-risk numbers are starting to grow among men and women and at younger ages. People with worrisome readings are encouraged to follow up with their doctors.

In 2014, Big Squeeze organizers hope to screen at least 10,000 residents. And by 2016, which is the end of the Community Transformation Grant period, Michaels said the goal is to reach 15,000.

"Eventually, we want to be able to measure our outcomes to see if rates of stroke or average blood pressure are changing — to see if we've been able to flatten those trends or even reduce them," Amundson said. "That's really the underlying motivation that keeps us going."

To learn more about the Big Squeeze, visit [www.heart.org/thebigsqueeze](http://www.heart.org/thebigsqueeze). ■

— Kim Krisberg

*Have a community health program you think we should highlight? Email us at [nations.health@apha.org](mailto:nations.health@apha.org).*

# STATES IN BRIEF

## Cities take action to regulate e-cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes are increasingly coming under the purview of smoke-free laws, with U.S. cities moving to regulate their use in public spaces.

In December, the New York City Council voted to include e-cigarettes in the city's Smoke-Free Act. The law, which will take effect in June, will ban the use of e-cigarettes in bars, restaurants, offices, parks, beaches and any other setting where smoking is prohibited. E-cigarette sales will also be limited to people ages 21 and older in accordance with the city's historic move to prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone younger than 21.

Chicago is also moving to restrict e-cigarette use. In November, Mayor Rahm Emanuel joined a coalition of community groups and local leaders to support a proposed ordinance to regulate e-cigarettes as tobacco products and restrict their use anywhere smoking is prohibited. The ordinance would also require sellers to treat e-cigarettes the same as other tobacco products, including moving them behind the counter.

Also in Illinois, the Evanston City Council voted in October to include e-cigarettes in the Evanston Clean Air Act. The ordinance, which went into effect Oct. 30, prohibits the use of e-cigarettes in all areas where smoking is banned and within 25 feet of building entrances.

## Three more agencies earn accreditation

Three more health departments have joined the movement toward public health quality improvement via accreditation.

In November, the Public Health Accreditation Board awarded five-year accreditation status to the Kane County Health Department in Aurora, Ill.; the Kenosha County Division of Health in Kenosha, Wis.; and the Licking County Health Department in Newark, Ohio. The accreditation program provides a set of standards against which health

departments can measure quality improvement and performance. To date, 22 health departments from around the nation have been awarded accreditation status.

In related news, the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* recently marked its 20th anniversary with a special issue dedicated to public health accreditation. The journal issue highlights the evidence base around accreditation and offers 40 articles on a variety of accreditation topics. For more information, visit [www.jphmp.com](http://www.jphmp.com).

## Groups fight Missouri anti-navigator law

In December, a group of consumer organizations filed the first legal challenge against a Missouri law that prevents them from helping residents navigate the new Health Insurance Marketplace.

In the case, *St. Louis Effort for AIDS v. Huff*, the plaintiffs contend that the Missouri statute prevents them from providing the kind of consumer assistance called for in the Affordable Care Act and violates the Constitution. Among other rules, the statute requires private individuals and organizations that offer any service as a consumer assister, including talking about health insurance options, to be licensed by the state. Plaintiffs argue that the requirement is a violation of the First Amendment.

"Missouri has placed groups like St. Louis Effort for AIDS in an untenable situation," said plaintiff's counsel Jay Angoff. "If they comply with the Missouri statutes, they can't perform the duties the Affordable Care Act requires them to perform, but if they comply with the ACA and do perform those duties, they violate Missouri law and are subject to thousands of dollars in penalties for doing so."

Among the plaintiffs are Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri, Consumers Council of Missouri and Missouri Jobs with Justice. ■

— Kim Krisberg

